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## Women as Care Managers: The Effect of Gender and Partnership Status on Grandparent Care for Grandchildren\*

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**Abstract:** Grandparental care of grandchildren is a highly gendered institution, with women being more likely to participate in it than men. This article studies whether and why care by grandmothers and grandfathers is influenced by their family arrangement. Following previous research, the authors focus on the mediating role of grandmothers in the involvement of men in caring for their grandchildren. We use a combination of quantitative and qualitative data about grandparents with small grandchildren (under ten years of age). The quantitative analysis is based on SHARE data and identifies whether the involvement in care depends on gender and the partnership arrangements of grandparents, controlling for a number of other characteristics of families. The analysis reveals a strong positive impact of the presence of a partner on the engagement of men (but not women) in grandparental care. This effect is present among both intact families and families with more complex arrangements. The qualitative analysis of 20 interviews with mothers and 20 interviews with grandmothers provides a deeper understanding of these results. It shows that the involvement of grandparents is shaped by the gender-specific notions of care competence and grandparental roles held by the participants and also by the kin-keeping activities of women. Grandmothers, compared to their male counterparts, are perceived as more capable of satisfying the needs of a small child. They also do more work on maintaining intergenerational family relationships and arranging care. They actively (sometimes in very sophisticated ways) involve their partners in the care of grandchildren.

**Keywords:** care, gender, grandparents, kin-keeping, partnership situation  
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As life expectancy rises, the period generations spend together is being prolonged and grandparenting is becoming a more important part of an individual's biography [cf. Bengtson 2001; Harper 2006]. At the same time, however, the precise definition of the content of this social role is becoming ever more problematic. As Sarkisian [2006: 806] notes, the role of the grandparent is characterised by a high degree of ambiguity. In the context of grandparenting there are no fixed standards defining the relationship between grandchildren and grandparents and the nature of their involvement. This is also reflected in the existence of different ways of fulfilling the role of grandparent, identified in previous empirical studies (e.g. Gauthier [2002]; Mueller, Wilhelm and Elder [2002]; and for background on the Czech situation, see Hasmanová Marhánková and Štípková [2014]). Fulfilling the grandparent role thus moves on a scale, from grandparents as distant family members who have no deeper relationship with grandchildren, to grandparents who act as the main caregivers for children. Yet many authors [e.g. Phillipson 2013; Timonen and Arber 2013] point out that the increasing heterogeneity of partner and family forms is one of the most essential challenges for the future (re) definition of the appearance of intergenerational relationships. The increase in 'incompletely institutionalised' forms of partnership and family life in the form of families where partners have gone through a divorce, another marriage, and the formation of new forms of complex families also leads to an increase in the number of situations where the guidelines for who constitutes a family and what should be the role of its individual members become the subject of continuous negotiation [Cherlin 1978; Sweeney 2010].

In previous research on the impact different family arrangements have on the level and character of the involvement of grandparents primary attention has been paid to the role of the partner arrangement in the middle generation. Rather consistent evidence has been found as to the negative impact of parental divorce on the involvement of paternal grandparents, who also report a subjective feeling of deterioration in the relationship with their grandchildren [Ahrons 2007; Timonen and Doyle 2012; Timonen et. al. 2009]. This is further strengthened in cases where former daughters-in-law enter into new partnerships [Sims and Rofail 2013]. At the same time, the need to reorganise the care of children after divorce strengthens the involvement of maternal grandparents, who intensify their contact with their daughters and grandchildren and the amount of financial and other resources provided [Uhlenberg 2005; Cherlin and Fustenberg 1991]. Rather broad-brush records have been found on the impact of other forms of family arrangement. Studies can be found demonstrating a lower intensity of contact with other family members, especially with partners' parents, within cohabiting couples compared to married couples [Hogerbrugge and Dykstra 2009]. A study by Allan, Hawker and Crow [2008] illustrates the ambivalence of the relationship between step-grandparents and step-grandchildren. Although these grandparents often talk about the fact that they actively try to treat all grandchildren equally, they admit that they perceive the bond with their biological grandchildren as stronger.

As the above studies show, we can find consistent evidence of the impact of the partnership arrangement of the parental generation on the involvement of grandparents. Less attention has, however, been paid to the effect of the partnership arrangement of the grandparents on their relationships with younger generations. Most of the research in this field focused on the effect of the marital status of grandparents on the form of intergenerational solidarity within families. Married grandparents show higher levels of involvement in caring for grandchildren and maintain more frequent contact with them [Silverstein and Marengo 2001; Uhlenberg and Hammill 1998; for the Czech context, see Hamplová 2014: 37]. King [2003] has noted that grandparents who have gone through a divorce also differ from those who are married in their attitudes towards the role of grandparenting itself. Divorced grandparents less frequently express support for statements that highlight the importance of grandchildren in their lives. They also display less contact with the adult grandchildren, engage in fewer joint activities, and evaluate the relationship with them as less close [ibid.]. In all of the above studies the grandparents' gender represented a crucial factor, which influenced the tangible impact of the various forms of partnerships on their involvement.

Partnership status is a significant predictor of frequency of contact with grandchildren in the case of men. Women are, in the case of involvement in grandparenting, generally less affected by their partnership situation than their former/current partners [Horsfall and Dempsey 2013; Knuden 2012; Uhlenberg and Hamill 1998]. Divorced grandfathers show a significantly lower level of contact with grandchildren, fewer shared activities, and a higher level of perceived conflicts with teenage grandchildren compared to grandfathers who are married or divorced grandmothers. One reason is the distance between grandchildren and grandfathers after divorce. On average, divorced grandfathers live twice as far from the residence of their grandchildren as divorced grandmothers [King 2003: 177]. Men are more active grandparents if they live with a partner. Grandfathers who live alone represent the least involved grandparents [Knuden 2012]. Looking at other socio-demographic characteristics, married grandfathers are also found to be twice as likely to see their grandchildren regularly, compared to widowed men. In the case of divorced and re-married grandfathers the probability of regular contact decreases even further. As Uhlenberg and Hammill write [1998: 283]: 'When grandfathers do not have a spouse to assist them in maintaining kinship ties, they are much less likely to experience high levels of interaction with their grandchildren.' A lesser effect of marital status is observed in grandmothers (there is about a 75% chance that divorced grandmothers will see their grandchildren as regularly as those who are married) [ibid.: 283].

The aforementioned studies consistently emphasise the partnership status of the older generation as an important factor affecting participation in grandparenting, especially in the case of men. However, they focus mainly on the contact with biological grandchildren (or do not distinguish between biological and step-grandchildren) and do not take into consideration the heterogeneity of fam-

ily arrangements (e.g. not only divorced or married grandparents but also those who have remarried and/or became step-grandparents). Whereas the effect of gender and the partnership situation on the involvement with grandchildren is relatively well mapped [e.g. King 2003; Knudsen 2012; Uhlenberg and Hammill 1998], a deeper understanding of the mechanisms that mediate this effect is still missing. Our understanding of the impact of the growing heterogeneity of family life on involvement in grandparenting and of the factors that shape individual involvement is therefore still limited.

The aim of this text is to map, through a combination of quantitative and qualitative data analysis, the impact of gender and the partnership situation of Czech grandparents on their involvement in caring for their grandchildren under the age of ten. The quantitative analysis is based on SHARE data and focuses on identifying whether involvement in care differs depending on gender and partnership arrangements in the family of grandparents. We specifically pay attention to the complex family arrangements—i.e. the situation where all or some of the grandparents' grandchildren are not the biological children of both partners. With regard to previous research, the main focus is on the possible evidence that women are the key mediators of care between grandchildren and grandparents. We test whether the involvement in care is primarily influenced by the presence or absence of women in grandparental households and whether the mediating effect of female partners varies by family arrangement and for biological versus step-grandchildren.

The qualitative part of the analysis is based on 20 interviews with mothers and 20 interviews with grandmothers of children under the age of ten. This part of the analysis focuses more broadly on the role of women in the organisation of care in the families. We try to understand how grandparents are involved in care and what kind of role gender plays in this process. Through the analysis of the gendered meanings of care and its organisation in the (intergenerational) family we strive to understand how gender and the presence of the partner can influence the involvement of men in grandparenting. This text aims to introduce grandparenting not only as an individual role, but also as a process, being the result of the continual efforts of various family members. We believe that grandparenting needs to be seen as a 'shared process of doing', influenced by gendered conceptions of care in which other family members also participate and not only the grandparents and grandchildren themselves. Such a view of grandparenting can help us to understand the importance of grandparents' partnership status and gender in the process of their involvement in caring for grandchildren.

### **(Doing) Grandparenting as a collective and gendered process**

Ways of fulfilling the grandparent role should not be perceived as solely the result of the individual characteristics of a specific grandparent. The manner and amount of a grandparent's involvement in care, and the character of their rela-

tionship with their grandchildren, is influenced by the wider family relationships and the context of the particular family [Timonen and Arber 2013]. As Elder [1994] has argued, the principle of the interconnectedness of lives represents a fundamental pillar of the paradigm of the sociology of the course of life. Human lives are anchored in the system of social relationships with family and other loved ones. The timing of life transitions, fulfilment of social roles, and the difficulties and opportunities we meet in life are, to a significant extent, the product of this interconnection with the lives of others, especially in the context of intergenerational relationships within the family [ibid.]. In this context, a number of authors label the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren as mediated. Empirical studies in this context focus their attention mainly on the influence of the middle generation. As shown, for example, by Whitbeck, Hoyt and Huck [1993], the quality of the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren and the amount of contact between them is significantly influenced by the character of the relationship between the parents and the grandparents. Similarly, we find, for example, consistent evidence of the existence of a matrilineal advantage in grandchild-grandparent relations, referring to the fact that family lineage (mediated mainly by the relationships between female family members) significantly influences the formation of bonds between grandchildren and grandparents [e.g. Chan and Elder 2000; Sims and Rofail 2013; Uhlenberg and Hamill 1998]. At the same time, we find studies which highlight the ability of grandparents to assert their authority and to maintain contact with grandchildren even in cases when their relationship with the parents is disrupted. The mediatory influence of the middle generation is thus to be seen as significant, but not determinative [Timonen and Doyle 2013: 177].

As shown in the above studies, the involvement of grandparents is a process which is co-created by several family members. In that respect attention has been paid especially to the mediating role of the middle generation. However, a study into the impact of the partnership arrangement of the grandparents on the form of involvement of grandfathers in caring for grandchildren suggests that other family members can also function as care mediators. The effect of the impact of the presence of a partner on the increased involvement of men in grandparenting and the simultaneous, significantly smaller impact of the presence of a partner in the case of women, as evidenced by previous studies [Knudsen 2012; Uhlenberg and Hamill 1998], suggests that grandmothers work as a significant mediator of the relationship between grandfathers and grandchildren. The reason may be the gender division of labour, including the different expectations associated with the character and intensity of the involvement of grandmothers and grandfathers in caring for grandchildren. Another possible factor may be the specific kin-keeping activities, the aim of which is to maintain contact between individual family members, and which are traditionally seen as part of a woman's role in the family. As we will try to outline below, in both cases the presence of a female member in the household plays an important role in the organisation of intergenerational solidarity and also affects the involvement of other members, especially a partner.

Statistically, women in European countries, including the Czech Republic, rank among the more active grandparents, who spend more time with their grandchildren than men do [Hank and Buber 2009; Hasmanová Marhánková and Štípková 2014]. One important reason for this may be the character of the gender division of labour. Responsibility for the care and organisation of the basic needs of small children is traditionally perceived as part of the female gender role, and in the course of gender socialisation women systematically acquire skills related to care. As Chambers notes [2012: 70]: 'The gendered character of childcare, domestic labour and other family practices results in grandmothers typically being more proficient, knowledgeable and trusted than grandfathers as regards caring for young grandchildren than grandfathers are.' Grandmothers are therefore more often actively involved in the routine care of grandchildren, even if the grandchild spends time with both grandparents. Consequently, grandfathers more often remain rather in the background, while their partner provides the routine care of the grandchildren [ibid.]. This fact is also illustrated by studies devoted to the tangible involvement of grandfathers in care, which indicate that men are not only less intensive caregivers, but also perform different types of activities with their grandchildren. Their involvement is often associated with the pursuit of outdoor activities and task-orientated involvement in spheres outside the family [Mann 2007; Tarrant 2012]. Although in recent decades we have been witnessing significant changes in the perception of the roles of men and women within the family, it is important to realise that today's grandparents mostly represent a generation that grew up largely in the context of traditional ideology of complementarity and diversity of gender roles. Within this ideology, men are, to a significant extent, excluded from the regular routine care of children, while in the case of grandmothers it is perceived as a continuous extension of their maternal role. Men living with a partner can therefore benefit from her caring role. Knudsen [2012: 243–244] in this context concludes: 'Older men can be relatively good grandfathers, as they frequently live within the context of a couple.'

A part of the gender division of labour within the family is the continuous 'work' on maintaining contacts with other family members. The kin-keeper role, in Western societies, conforms to traditional concepts of the roles of men and women, assigned mainly to female family members. Kin-keeping includes a series of smaller activities such as maintaining regular contact with various family members, the provision of gifts or the planning and organising of family gatherings, which help to maintain the continuity of relationships within the family. These activities are traditionally perceived as part of a woman's emotional work within the family [Hagestad 1985; Rosenthal 1985]. This also encompassed relationship management work, which includes any deliberate attempts to manage the emotional bonds and connections between various family members [Seery and Crowley 2000: 110]. Seery and Crowley in their study show how mothers deliberately create strategies aimed at bringing the individual family members closer together and create a sense of solidarity between them [ibid.]. Similarly, Timonen and Doyle [2013: 175] in their study of the means paternal grandparents

use to maintain contact with their grandchildren even after the parents' divorce show that this negotiation about the engagement of grandparents, involving emotional as well as practical work, is done mostly by grandmothers, while their partners 'exercise agency as part of a "joint strategy" that was led by grandmothers'. Women in this regard become real relationship managers and mediators between various family members. Knudsen [2012], therefore, identifies the kin-keeping activities of women and their more intensive involvement in care as the major causes of the more significant impact of the partnership situation on the grandparenting of males. In other words, men benefit more from the character of the institution of marriage and similar forms of partnerships, which then can also be projected into the larger difficulties they face while fulfilling their grandparental role in cases when they live without a partner.

## **Methodology**

To explore grandparents' care of grandchildren, we chose a mixed methodology. In this section, we first present the design of the research, including its goals (and the hypotheses for the quantitative part of the research). We then describe the quantitative data and methods of analysis and, finally, the course of the qualitative research.

### *The research design*

This analysis combines quantitative and qualitative methods in a 'sequential explanatory design' [see Creswell and Plano Clark 2004]. In this approach, the quantitative part of the research is performed first and its results are then further explored and interpreted in the qualitative part of the research.

In our case, the aim of the quantitative part of the research is to determine whether and how the gender and partnership situations of the grandparents affect the engagement of grandparents in caring for grandchildren. We explained above that women play a key role in maintaining family relationships and in the organisation of care. We therefore assume that for grandparents' engagement in caring for grandchildren the gender of the caregiver is not decisive, but the presence of women in the grandparents' household is. We assume that women actively create conditions for themselves and their partners to participate in caring for grandchildren. We expect that the presence of grandmothers affects whether grandparents engage in caring for grandchildren and also which children they help. We have three hypotheses.

H1: Grandfathers living with a partner engage in care more than those who do not have a partner. Regarding grandmothers, we do not expect partnership status to have any impact.

H2: In a complex family arrangement, i.e. in a situation where all or some of the grandparent's grandchildren are from children who are not the biological children of both partners, the positive effect of the partner on the engagement of grandfathers in caring for grandchildren will be weaker. We assume that it is more difficult for grandmothers to involve family members in joint activities in such complex arrangements.

H3: Grandfathers are more engaged than grandmothers in caring for grandchildren from their step-children. We assume that intergenerational help is predominantly matrilineal and that women do not direct their organisational role at all children of the couple, but predominantly at their biological children. Grandfathers who have biological children from a previous relationship are consequently drawn by their partners into caring for grandchildren from the partner's biological children and this can weaken their tendency to help their own biological children.

In the qualitative part of the research we then aim to understand the mechanisms that mediate the interaction of gender and partnership arrangement in the process of the engagement of the grandparents in caring for grandchildren.

In both parts of the research, we focused our attention on the parents and grandparents of children under the age of ten. This age limit was chosen because children at this age require adult care and, therefore, the parents usually ask for help in caring for them (whether from their own parents or from someone else). At the same time, in the case of small children, (grand)parents are the ones who to a significant extent determine how their (grand)children spend their time and with whom. We can therefore assume that the family situation of grandparents and their own effort to actively engage in grandparenting may play a more prominent role in relation to younger grandchildren.

### *Quantitative data, variables, and methods of analysis*

The quantitative part of the analysis is based on Czech data from the second wave of the international SHARE survey<sup>1</sup> (i.e. the first Czech wave). The file contains data on persons over 50 years of age and the partner they live with in the

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<sup>1</sup> We use data from SHARE wave 1 release 2.6.0, as of 29 November 2013. The SHARE data collection was primarily funded by the European Commission through the 5th Framework Programme (project QLK6-CT-2001-00360 in the thematic programme Quality of Life), through the 6th Framework Programme (projects SHARE-I3, RII-CT-2006-062193, COMPARE, CIT5-CT-2005-028857, and SHARELIFE, CIT4-CT-2006-028812), and through the 7th Framework Programme (SHARE-PREP, N° 211909, SHARE-LEAP, N° 227822 and SHARE M4, N° 261982). Additional funding from the US National Institute on Aging (U01 AG09740-13S2, P01 AG005842, P01 AG08291, P30 AG12815, R21 AG025169, Y1-AG-4553-01, IAG BSR06-11 and OGHA 04-064), from the German Ministry of Education and Research, and from various national sources is gratefully acknowledged (see [www.share-project.org](http://www.share-project.org) for a full list of funding institutions).

**Table 1. Description of the variables**

	Relative frequency
<b>Household level / Partnership arrangement</b>	
Couple, all children together	61
Couple, child/ren from previous relationships	10
Single	29
Total	100
N	657
<b>Grandparental level</b>	
Gender (male)	44
Age (less than 60)	55
Health difficulty (has difficulty)	45
Education (complete secondary or higher)	49
Work (works 20+ hours a week)	38
N	999
<b>Grandparents' children level</b>	
Receives grandparental care of grandchildren (yes)	50
Relationship to grandparent (step-child)	4
Gender (male)	50
Partnership situation (single)	6
Age of youngest child (0–2 years)	32
Education (complete secondary or higher)	62
Distance to grandparent (5 km or less)	49
N	1343

Note: For binary variables, the relative frequency of the category given in the parenthesis is reported.

same household (without an age limit). The data were collected in 2006–2007. The topics of the interview included, among other things, the family situation of the respondents and their children. Out of the 2830 respondents, 2104 are grandparents, 1083 of whom have grandchildren who are the age of a child (up to 10 years old). The resulting file, from which we removed observations missing the values of the variables used in the analysis, contains information on 657 households, 999 grandparents, and 1343 children (the grandchildren's parents). A summary of the variables used in the analysis is shown in Table 1.

The dependent variable is the care of grandchildren. Respondents were asked whether and how often they took care of grandchildren without the presence of their parents in the last 12 months. The response options were: almost every day, almost every week, almost every month, less often, never. Care is measured as a binary indicator. If the respondent ever babysat, we consider them a caregiver.<sup>2</sup> A total of 57% of respondents indicated they babysat their grandchildren at least sometimes. Table 1 shows that half of the respondents' children receive such care from grandparents.

There are three main explanatory variables. *Type of grandparents' household* has three categories: the couple in which both partners had children together; the couple in which at least one of them has a child/children from a previous relationship; the household of a single individual. *Gender of the grandparent* is a binary indicator denoting men (grandfathers). *Type of relationship between grandparent and child* is a binary variable indicating whether the child is the respondent's own (value 0) or the partner's child from a previous relationship (value 1).

Control variables include other characteristics of grandparents and their children which may affect the grandparents' care of the grandchildren. These are the age (measured in years) and the health of the grandparents. Health is measured dichotomously as any limitations in performing normal activities. Respondents pointed out whether they had difficulties in the performance of 23 activities in total. These included, for example, the ability to climb stairs, to perform personal hygiene, to prepare a hot meal, to go shopping for groceries, to make phone calls, etc. If the respondent indicated one or more options, their health condition was considered to be impaired. It is expected that older grandparents and grandparents with health restrictions would not independently take care of grandchildren as much.

We also included the education of grandparents and children measured in two categories: with and without secondary school graduation. With grandparents we also control whether they still work (at least 20 hours per week vs less intense or no job).<sup>3</sup> Among the other observed characteristics of children were: their gender (male vs female); partnership situation (single vs having a partner/spouse); age of the youngest child (0–2 years vs older); and distance of their residence from the residence of the grandparents (up to 5 km, including

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<sup>2</sup> We also performed a sensitivity analysis to find out whether other ways of measuring the care of grandchildren affected the results. We estimated all models for two alternative ways of measuring care: a metric variable indicating the intensity of care from 0 (never) to 4 (almost every day) and a binary variable 'frequent care of grandchildren' (care almost every week or more often). The change in measurement did not affect the conclusion of which models fit the data best. The estimated coefficient signs were also consistent.

<sup>3</sup> We did not take the work activity of the children into account, because they are at an age when employment is a norm. The exception is maternity/parental leave, but this is correlated with the age of the youngest child, which we measured separately.

within the same household, vs greater distance). We assume that grandparents help daughters more than sons, children who do not have a partner (and, therefore, probably require more help with childcare), and those who live near them. If the child has offspring younger than 3 years, it is likely that most of the care for them will be provided by the parent who is on maternity/parental leave, while in older children the demand for the grandparents' help is probably higher.

The data file has a three-level structure. The macro-level is represented by the grandparents' households; the meso-level consists of individual grandparents (i.e. respondents); and the micro-level of their children, from whom they have grandchildren. Observations associated with the same contexts (i.e. grandparents living in the same household, and various children of the same respondents) are more similar to each other than randomly selected observations. We used multi-level models with random intercepts for binary outcome which take this fact into consideration [see, e.g., Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2008]. The estimated models were compared using the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC). The lower the AIC value, the better the model fits the data. When comparing models we considered one which has a criterion value at least 2 points lower to be the better. The greater the difference, the stronger the evidence in favour of the model with the lower AIC value [Burnham and Anderson 2004].

#### *The course of the qualitative research*

In the qualitative research 20 in-depth interviews were conducted with grandmothers and 20 in-depth interviews with mothers of grandchildren/children up to the age of ten. The interviewed women were selected so as to represent different partnership and life situations. Our goal was to capture first of all the heterogeneity of the patterns of engagement of grandmothers and various factors which may enter into this process. A more detailed representation of the characteristics of the individual participants is quoted in the table at the end of the text (see Tables A1 and A2 in the appendix). The aim of the qualitative research was to map whether/how the gender of the grandparents is reflected in the negotiation of their engagement and what role it plays in the participants' conceptualisations of the role of grandparent. We sought to provide insight into the gender dimension of the negotiation concerning the involvement of grandparents (and especially grandfathers). The design of the qualitative part of the analysis followed the argument outlined by previous studies that have pointed out the matrilineal nature of intergenerational solidarity [e.g. Chan and Elder 2000; Uhlenberg and Hamill 1998; Možný, Přidalová and Bánovcová 2003 for the Czech context] and the possible role of women as mediators of care between various family members [e.g. Knuden 2012; Seery and Crowley 2000]. Therefore, we decided to interview mothers and grandmothers. Nonetheless, the absence of the perspective of men has to be considered as one of the main limitations of this research.

The interviews focused mainly on the organisation of care for small children within the family, the context of negotiations about the engagement of grandparents, and the form of engagement of individual grandparents. The interviews lasted 40 minutes on average and were, with the participants' approval, recorded and transcribed verbatim. The analysis was guided by the principles of thematic analysis [Ezzy 2002]. In the analysis we concentrated mainly on the ways in which gender is reflected in the conceptualisation of care and on the expectations associated with the role of grandparent. The second part of the analysis focused on the process of negotiating about the engagement of grandparents in care and on maintaining intergenerational bonds and potential differences between the engagement of grandfathers and grandmothers.

## **Results**

The research results are presented in three sections. First, we present statistical evidence showing that the partnership situation has varying impact on the care provided by grandmothers and grandfathers. The next two sections then explain what mechanisms generate these differences. We first look into participants' ideas of the roles of grandmothers and grandfathers, and then into the kin-keeping activities of women.

### *The impact of the partnership situation and gender of grandparents on the engagement in caring for grandchildren*

We estimated three pairs of models, which we compare to test the validity of our hypotheses. Each pair estimated the same effect first without control variables (letter A) and then with them (letter B). The estimated odds ratios and goodness of fit statistics are presented in Table 2. The first two models are baseline models. They describe the main effects of our three explanatory variables: gender of the grandparent, type of partnership situation, and whether the child is their own child or a step-child. Model M1A contains only these three variables. Model M1B adds the whole set of control variables. The results confirm the strong gender dimension in the care of grandchildren. Compared to grandmothers, grandfathers have less than one-third odds of being involved in care (the odds ratio is 0.30 in M1A and 0.32 in M1B). A grandparent's relationship with the child, from whom they have grandchildren, also substantially influences the engagement of the grandparent. Grandparents help step-children significantly less than their own children. The odds of grandparental involvement are roughly a quarter for step-children compared to own children in both models. On the other hand, partnership situation has no statistically significant impact on caring for grandchildren when the interaction with their gender is not considered.

Among the control characteristics of the respondents, their age has a significant impact on the care of grandchildren. With each additional year, the odds

of participation are reduced by 7% (the odds ratio is 0.93 in M1B). The negative effect of work activity is marginally significant at the 0.1 level; however, the size of its effect is quite large. The odds ratio for working grandparents is 0.65. Grandparental care is also affected by all of the above-mentioned characteristics of their children. Grandparents more often help children without a partner (odds ratio 2.56), those that live close to them (odds ratio 2.18), daughters over sons (odds ratio 0.49 for sons), children with a higher education (odds ratio for higher education is 1.58), and those with older children (the odds ratio for the age of the youngest grandchild up to 2 years is 0.59).

The next two models extend the baseline models and allow the effect of gender to differ by partnership situation. Therefore, they make it possible to test the first two hypotheses about the gender-specific influence of a grandparent's partnership arrangement. Model M2A follows the simple model M1A and does not include control variables. Model M2B is an extension of the model M1B (i.e. that with all control variables). Both models with interactions have a better goodness of fit than the baseline.<sup>4</sup>

This means that the influence of gender on caring for grandchildren varies by partnership arrangement. The estimated odds ratios indicate that for grandmothers what partnership situation they live in is not significant. The odds ratios are relatively close to one and statistically insignificant. Model M2B with control variables suggests that grandmothers without a partner could be more intensive caregivers (odds ratio 1.40), but this effect is not statistically significant. The situation is different for grandfathers. If they do not have a partner, their chance of engagement in caring for grandchildren decreases significantly. The interaction effect is very strong (0.18 in model M2B) and statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Compared with grandfathers living in a couple, they have almost six times<sup>5</sup> lower odds of engagement in caring for grandchildren. However, whether the partner situation is complex (with children from previous relationships) or not does not have a statistically significant impact (although the estimated effect is quite large; the odds ratio is 0.60). The results of both models (M2A and M2B) are consistent. The crude effect is therefore not significantly distorted by the control variables.

These results support Hypothesis 1, which assumes that the presence of a partner leads to a greater engagement of grandfathers while there is no such effect for grandmothers. This conforms the findings from previous research [Hank and Buber 2009; Knudsen 2012]. By contrast, Hypothesis 2 is not supported by our data. It expects that the 'pull-in' role of grandmothers would be weakened by a complex arrangement of relationships within the family. There was no confir-

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<sup>4</sup> The introduction of interaction leads to a decrease of the AIC value by 3–4 units (from 1703 to 1700 when models M1A and M2A are compared and from 1659 to 1655 for models M1B and M2B).

<sup>5</sup>  $1/0.18 = 5.55$ .

**Table 2. Results of multilevel models with random intercepts of care for grandchildren (odds ratios). N(households) = 657, N(grandparents) = 999, N(grandparent's children) = 1343—first part**

	M1A	M1B	M2A	M2B	M3A	M3B
<i>Fixed effects</i>						
Partnership arrangement (ref. = couple, all children together )						
Couple, child/ren from previous relationships	0.79	0.70	0.99	0.89	0.77	0.70
Single	0.92	0.98	1.27	1.40	0.90	0.95
R's male gender	0.30***	0.32***	0.35***	0.39***	0.27***	0.30***
R's age		0.93***		0.93***		0.93***
R has health difficulty		0.72		0.73		0.73
R's higher education		1.25		1.30		1.23
R works 20+ hours a week		0.65*		0.67		0.66*
Child is a step-child	0.26***	0.25**	0.27**	0.26**	0.09***	0.10***
Child is male		0.49***		0.49***		0.49***
Child is single		2.56**		2.53**		2.53**
Child's youngest child's age is 0–2 years		0.59**		0.59**		0.59**
Child's higher education		1.58**		1.58**		1.60**
Child lives 5 km or closer to the grandparent		2.18***		2.18***		2.16***
Type of R's family x R's gender						
Couple, child/ren from previous relationships x Male			0.60	0.60		
Single x Male			0.22**	0.18**		
Child is a step-child x R's male gender					6.18*	5.05

**Table 2. Results of multilevel models with random intercepts of care for grandchildren (odds ratios). N(households) = 657, N(grandparents) = 999, N(grandparent's children) = 1343—second part**

	M1A	M1B	M2A	M2B	M3A	M3B
Intercept	1.97***	105.64***	1.82***	106.70***	2.08***	104.58***
<i>Random effects</i>						
Var(Intercept for households)	3.22***	3.82***	3.29***	3.86***	3.25***	3.77***
Var(Intercept for respondents)	0.00	0.23	0.00	0.19	0.14	0.27
Log-likelihood	-844	-813	-841	-810	-843	-812
df	7	16	9	18	8	17
AIC	1703	1659	1700	1655	1701	1658

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1.

mation of this at a statistically significant level. We did not find that complex family relationships limit the ability of women to involve their partners into grandparental care.

In the last pair of models we extended the baseline models with the interaction between gender and the relationship to the child in order to test Hypothesis 3, which expects that grandfathers (compared to grandmothers) are more willing to help with childcare for their step-descendants. Again, we followed the same logic: model M3A follows baseline model M1A and model M3B is based on model M1B. The evidence for models with interaction is not clear-cut. When comparing the models without control variables, model M3A comes out better,<sup>6</sup> but the models with control variables are, in terms of goodness of fit, basically the same.<sup>7</sup> The gender difference in willingness to also provide childcare to step-descendants, which we can observe in model M3A, is insignificant when other variables are controlled for.

The value of the interaction effect in model M3A is very high (odds ratio 6.18), but in terms of classical statistical inference is only marginally significant (at the level of 0.1). This is not surprising considering the fact that there are not many respondents with step-children in the sample (only 4% of children are step-children; see Table 1). Moreover, the heterogeneity of the quality of the relationship within these complex families is probably high, which extends the confidence

<sup>6</sup> The AIC value is 1701 in model M3A, compared to 1703 in model M1A.

<sup>7</sup> The AIC in models M3B and M1B differ by only one.

interval around the estimated odds ratio. However, considering the size of the effect and model comparison based on AIC, we believe this result provides some evidence, albeit, for Hypothesis 3. Grandfathers are engaged in caring for grandchildren who are the children of their step-descendants more than grandmothers. The odds that the grandmother will take care of children from a step-child are 11 times ( $1/0.09=11.11$ ) lower than the odds that she will help her own children. With grandfathers the odds are reduced 'only' 1.8 times ( $1/[0.09*6.18]=1.80$ ). Nevertheless, grandfathers also prefer to help their own children. However, their partners effectively draw them into relationships with their biological children, but this does not apply the other way around.

As mentioned above, when other characteristics of the respondents and their children are controlled for in model M3B, the interaction becomes statistically insignificant (although the effect remains large). With the step-wise addition of the control variables we discovered that this is mainly due to the variable of distance of residence. Grandparents tend to live closer to the children of the female partner, including those from her previous relationship(s). This facilitates the grandfathers' engagement in caring for their step-grandchildren.

The quantitative results support the argument that women organise inter-generational family relationships and childcare, in which they also engage their partners. If there is no woman in the grandparent's household, grandparental care of grandchildren is less likely. In the next section of the paper we will offer an explanation for these results with a more detailed analysis of the gender dimension of the processes of grandparents' engagement in care based on qualitative data. Our analysis will focus primarily on concepts of the gender-specific roles of grandparents and kin-keeping activities, which are carried out mainly by women. We also assume that an understanding of the gender aspects of these concepts and processes will allow us to understand the fundamental impact of the presence of a female partner on the engagement of men in grandparenting that was identified in the previous section of the analysis.

#### *The gender dimension of care and the different expectations associated with the role of a grandparent*

Grandmothers and grandfathers always appeared in the interviews as an important part of family relationships. Interviews with women confirm the important role the older generation plays in the harmonisation of childcare in Czech families [cf., e.g., Hasmanová Marhánková and Štípková 2014; Höhne et al. 2010]. In all of the respondents' families the grandparents were actively involved in caring for their grandchildren and in many cases played a key role in the organisation of everyday care of the children. However, in descriptions of the engagement of grandparents the care appeared to be clearly gendered. Grandparents were, depending on their gender, described as different caregivers, with different respon-

sibilities and roles. Care in terms of emotional help and ensuring the everyday needs of the child is not described as part of the role of grandfathers. Particularly in the case of small children, grandfathers were described as clueless compared to grandmothers and as basically unable to provide routine care.

Sure it's different, because it's understood that women are like that—they were mums and they're used to cherishing a child more, to caring more in a, how to put it, functional way. Granddads are more there to just play around, to entertain, to joke around and all that, but when the time comes to cook for the child, dress him if he's younger, so, for that, I think that's what grandmas are there for. It's understood as a woman's role. (Adéla, mother)<sup>8</sup>

*Is your husband also involved in care?*

No, not yet, he's looking forward to her being about three years old. He's already said this before, that he's almost afraid to touch her, in case anything happened to her. So, babies, like, not so much. But when I hold her like this and we talk to the little one, then he's happy and he chats with her, talks to her and that. But, like, to take her or to babysit her ... probably not yet. That'll be when she's older, more likely. He's already looking forward to that. (Stela, grandmother)

In relation to small children grandfathers were described by women as 'more reserved', 'more timid', and 'stressed out by small children'. Their distance from caring for small children that the women noted was interpreted in reference to the gendered character of care, which, within the traditional organisation of gender relationships, is perceived as a 'natural' part of a woman's role [cf., e.g., DeVault 1994]. Within these relationships grandmothers were presented as naturally more competent caregivers, whereas grandfathers were, to a significant extent, excused from the process of daily routine childcare. In the interviews, an opposition thus emerged between ensuring that the essential needs of a child are seen to, which was done almost exclusively by grandmothers, and entertainment, in which both grandparents were involved. As one of the interviewed mothers noted:

My mom sees to food and stuff like that, such as cleaning, so he [the grandson] can play in a clean environment, and our granddad is kind of more active. He plays with him and tries to entertain him in different ways. He [the grandfather] is for fun and grandma is more for the surrounding stuff. She is also able to play with him, but she is also doing all the stuff around the household. (Agnes, mother)

Grandmother Lyvie summed up this difference even more pragmatically with the words, 'He [meaning the husband] doesn't go wipe their bottom, I do;

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<sup>8</sup> Individual participants are referred to by fictional pseudonyms.

and other things, like playing with them, he plays just about as much as I do.' The expectations associated with the role of grandparent, as formulated in the interviews with mothers and grandmothers, to a considerable extent copied the gender dichotomy of private vs public. Similarly, Tarrant [2012], in her research on male grandparents, showed that men conceptualise grandparenting mainly through activities that reflect their male identity and refer to different ways of constructing masculinity, such as being active, doing sports, or arranging experiences in the public sphere [ibid.]. In our research grandmothers were described as the ones who provide personal care, while grandfathers were presented as offering entertainment, experiences, and life models. In this regard, their lesser involvement in everyday care, especially in the case of small grandchildren, was not perceived negatively (unlike grandmothers, where their lesser involvement in grandchild care was often noted begrudgingly by mothers). The role of grandfathers was actually not associated with the provision of care, their task was to lead or teach. First of all, their importance as role models of masculinity was highlighted, which within traditional gender relations is further distinguished from care, which was perceived as a woman's issue and thus essentially as something that implicitly contradicts the grandfather's function of representing a model of masculinity for grandchildren.

So, a granddad should also pass something on to the child. A kind of knowledge, like going into the forest, showing him something, I don't know, or maybe making something with him, and so on. ... These roles are probably made so that the granddad simply does something with the grandchild, like, I mean, he makes something, creatively, or maybe does some adventurous things with him, like going out somewhere with him. The grandma's the kind of person who instead cares for the child, I don't know, provides for him, gives him food. So, it's divided, and I think it maybe works, yeah. (Soňa, mother)

I think that granddads probably engage less in such basic help, but more in the kind of stuff that's important for life, when they direct or advise on key things, there they're dominant. So I'd say that it should be just as valuable as the grandmotherly role, but probably with a different focus. It won't be the I'll butter your bread, wash your feet, those kinds of details, but it'll be in the sense of a path in life, or that a granddad should maybe be able to, like, advise and impart something. (Alice, grandmother)

The gendered nature of care and the different expectations associated with the role of a grandparent depending on gender provide us with a possible understanding of the different impacts of the presence of a partner on the amount of involvement of grandmothers and grandfathers in the care of grandchildren. Grandfathers were, in most interviews, described as mostly unable to provide basic care, especially for small children (and this skill was not even expected from them). Gender expectations associated with the role of the grandparent at-

tributed different skills to them, focused mainly on serving as a role model or providing adventure and fun. For that reason grandfathers were not expected to be as intensely engaged as grandmothers (mothers and grandmothers identically pointed out that grandfathers are actively engaged in childcare or are likely to be engaged later, when the children are more independent). Simultaneously, the grandfathers in the interviews were not usually presented as people able to provide for all the common needs of a child without the assistance of another person. In particular, their ability to care for a young child without the assistance of a more competent person was questioned. Simply put, while grandmothers were mostly perceived as sufficiently competent caregivers that they could provide care for grandchildren themselves, men did not have such a position. This fact can also help us to explain the important impact of the absence of a female partner on the engagement of men in grandparenting, which we do not observe among women.

#### *Women as care mediators—the role of kin-keeping activities*

Family relationships are always characterised by the presence of intergenerational ambivalence. The need to negotiate between the different needs of individual family members, and their often diverse interests, inevitably creates conflict and solidarity at the same time [Lüscher and Pillmer 1998]. Naples [2001: 33] in this context notes that the family represents not only 'a natural constellation of individuals connected by biology and the state with a set of behaviours that everyone knows and willingly performs', but is more likely something that 'must be achieved and constructed on a daily basis'. The family is thus to be seen rather as a sphere of everyday work, which includes the work of maintaining family bonds [Nedbálková 2012]. At the same time the matrilineal character of intergenerational help identified in previous studies [Chan and Elder 2000; for the Czech context, see, e.g., Veselá 2002; Možný et al. 2003] suggests that this 'work' is often distributed unevenly amongst individual family members. Within traditional gender relationships women function as kin-keepers. This means that 'contact and exchange between generations are, to a large extent, facilitated and carried out by women' [Hagestad 1985: 41]. Mothers and grandmothers also reflected kin-keeping activities in the interviews. We identified two basic forms of kin-keeping related to grandparenting.

*Care management* represented the first form of kin-keeping activities identified in the interviews. Care management refers to activities associated with the harmonisation of care in the family, which includes maintaining contact between generations. In the interviews mothers and grandmothers coincidentally noted that negotiating the amount, time, and frequency of babysitting was mainly in the hands of women. Fathers and grandfathers in their descriptions of the everyday organisation of the care of (especially small) children in the family were presented more as invisible figures in the background. Grandmothers were thus, on the

one hand, the ones who seek to provide childcare and the ones who are asked for it, and, on the other, the person who defines the circumstances under which it takes place. Mothers also appeared as a significant mediator between grandchildren and grandparents.<sup>9</sup> The statements made by the mothers also indicated that there is a sense of intergenerational ambivalence to the process of deciding how the grandparents will be engaged in caring for grandchildren and mothers are often forced to balance the diverse needs of individual family members, which may vary. In the interviews the mothers, therefore, described how they consider who to contact when they need childcare so as not to disrupt the fragile balance between the autonomies of individual generations. At the same time, they consider it their 'job' to maintain contact with various grandparents in order to maintain the continuity of relationships within the family as a whole, as this statement from Ivona, for example, shows:

Many times I even have to choose, so that this time we just went to my husband's parents, and now we're going to my parents. So you have to make a decision so that neither the first nor the second grandma is upset. That's the dilemma. (Ivona, mother)

Ivona's statement shows that conscious decision strategies are also a part of maintaining intergenerational relationships within the family. In the words of Ivona, mothers 'choose' who to contact and work on balancing relationships between generations. However, when it comes to the involvement of grandfathers, who, as we tried to outline above, are not perceived as independent caregivers, this 'choosing' between caregivers may have a more problematic impact. In response to our question about whether they had ever thought about the grandfather babysitting their child himself, some of the mothers even reacted with loud laughter. As one of the mothers, Judith, said, 'Men usually get involved later. But I probably wouldn't give a small baby to a man, not an older one.'<sup>10</sup> Grandfathers may thus, in the case of the absence of a female partner (or the presence of a new partner with whom the mother has not developed a relationship), be excluded

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<sup>9</sup> At this point it is necessary to emphasise that our research focuses mainly on parents and grandparents of small children up to ten years of age. In the case of older grandchildren the dynamics of the relationship between grandparents, parents, and grandchildren would probably be different, with a lesser influence of the mediating role of the middle generation. But, as empirical research focusing on the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren in later years indicates, even here the quality of the relationship between parents and grandparents plays an important role in the prediction of the character of the relationship between grandchildren and grandparents [cf., e.g., Attar-Schwartz, Tan and Buchanan 2009].

<sup>10</sup> Of course, even among our participants there were exceptions. The only mother who talked about the grandfather ever babysitting the children alone was Irma. Her father-in-law babysat the grandchildren at a time when the mother-in-law was in hospital. Irma

from the process of deciding on a suitable caregiver, and so their contact with grandchildren may be limited in this regard.

*Relationship management* represented the second type of kin-keeping activities that women reflected in the interviews. This kind of kin-keeping activities involved emotional work and various intentional activities aimed at stimulating relationships between individual family members—in this case especially between their partners and (grand)children. As Seery and Crowley [2000] showed in a study of the emotional work of mothers in families, women actively and consciously participate in the formation of the relationship between children and their fathers. They may work in a negative sense as gatekeepers, but more often they act as gate-openers. In their analysis, Seery and Crowley identified a number of strategies that women use to support and deepen the relationship between their partners and their children [ibid.]. Similar strategies were described by the mothers and grandmothers in the interviews. In fact, both groups identically referred to their role as the initiator of contacts between their men and small children, which in some cases needed to be spurred on, or the engagement had to be directly asked for.

My daughter is little, she's ten months old, and so it hasn't really happened yet [the engagement of the father in care]. But step by step my husband gets more involved. When I need him to, he babysits, when needed he even takes care of those practical things, but, like, he doesn't actively join in. Rather, I have to make the effort from my side, ask him, tell him what's needed. Sometimes I have to say what they, like, could do together and then they go and do it. (Linda, mother)

Even if he [her husband, i.e. the grandfather] is not in the mood [for childcare] and I say that it's needed, that we will do it, that they need us to help or something else, he will accommodate. He's kind of more cautious, but when the communication in the family is good we always come to an understanding. (Jolana, grandmother)

As we mentioned above, in the interviews the women identically noted that grandfathers started to become actively involved in caring for their grandchildren (or were expected to be involved) when the children were older. A similar situation was also reflected by the mothers in the interviews when describing the organisation of care between them and their partners. In the interviews they described how they had to work to draw their partners more into care and to create

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said that her father-in-law coped with the babysitting. But added with a smile, 'He had a terrible problem to do my daughter's pigtails and give her hairclips. Even though he's a respected engineer at the Škoda factory, this was a terrific problem for him. I had no idea. Because he himself had had two boys, he wasn't very good with little girls.' So even in her description the father-in-law appeared to be a rather clueless caregiver who took charge of care only at a time when there was no other solution.

space for them in the context of the routine of everyday care for a small child, which lay mainly on their shoulders.

Well, he [the father of the children] didn't get involved at all. And when the first one was a year and a quarter, or a year and a half, I was saying to myself that I'll have to do something dramatic so that he actually develops a relationship with them. So I said, 'Since you're out all day, I just think it would be better if you read them stories in the evening.' And he was like, no, or something like that ... But to me it just seemed important. After all, they just don't see each other, and I thought that during that time I could be out walking the dog. So I just left, and even though the kids' daddy was fidgety at the beginning, it was such a new thing for him, he got it in the end, and got used to it, and even liked the ritual. (Vanesa, mother)

Vanesa's story illustrates how women knowingly help to build relationships between children and their partners and develop strategies to draw them into the care. Grandmothers appeared in a similar role in the interviews as well. As we illustrated above, grandmothers function during the babysitting of small grandchildren as primary caregivers, who are trusted and who also provide routine care for children. Grandfathers, in the women's descriptions, appeared rather in the roles of helpers, who, likewise in the case of fathers, are integrated into the care more through tasks set by the grandmothers. The grandmothers described themselves as the ones who say what is needed, and in this way they draw their partners into the care of grandchildren:

Picking them up from school, he's willing to do that, take them to Boy Scouts, he's also willing to do that, and when we go, for example, on a long walk in the forest, so he goes with us, but, like, on his own, no. He couldn't cope with it, he's not used to it, he simply isn't good with kids. ... Like, when I prepare him and tell him what to do, he'll do it. But he's looking forward to having his own peace again. His television, his remote control. But give him a job to do, and yeah, he'll do it, what he's told to do. But to do it himself, say, 'give the child to me, I'll go somewhere with him', no, not that. (Jozefína, grandmother)

He doesn't take care of them, doesn't spend the time, but, for example, he drives them back, drives them out, goes somewhere with them. When I say take them for at least 15 minutes to walk the dog, of course, not normally, but when he's going to walk the dog anyway, so I'll shove a kid in there, so, grudgingly, with a lot of complaining, but he'll do it. (Květa, grandmother)

In these descriptions the women appeared as the real care managers, who give their partners assignments and initiate and also define the method of their engagement in care. They played a significant role as the mediators of the contact between the children and their partners. In this regard, they were assuming a significant part of the work of 'doing family' and maintaining bonds between its individual members. This emotional work that women perform within family re-

relationships can help us also to understand the different impacts a partnership has on the involvement of grandmothers and grandfathers in caring for grandchildren. It is a question how the engagement of grandfathers in care is established in the situation where the role of a grandmother-mediator is missing. In the case of grandfathers who live alone, the important initiator of contact with small grandchildren may be missing. At the same time, the kin-keeping activities of women may also provide an explanation for the dynamics of relationships within step-families, which we observed in the quantitative analysis. It was pointed out that grandfathers are, compared to grandmothers, much more involved in caring for grandchildren who are the children of their step-descendants, and that their engagement in the family relationships of their new partner is relatively 'problem-free' (in contrast to grandmothers, where similarly intense engagement is not seen). This fact can be interpreted with regard to the qualitative data analysed above as the product of the kin-keeping activities of women, who are able to successfully 'draw' their new partners into their family networks and initiate their contact with the children of their own children.

The situation of step-grandparents was, in our research, illustrated, for example, by the case of Simona, who remarried later in life. Her new husband had grandchildren similar in age to her own. But in the interview she complained about the fact that her husband relates to his own grandchildren only as 'acquaintances', while the son of her daughter 'is like his grandson', even though in both cases the children lived close to the grandparents. Simona explained that her husband's children have little interest in contacting him. She herself was in no way engaged in maintaining these bonds. As she noted, 'My husband, when he wants to see them [his own grandchildren], he arranges it with his daughter and goes to visit them. Only, maybe I'm a little bit stubborn, but she doesn't invite me, so, me, I don't go where I'm not invited, so I don't go there.' In the case of the husband's family, Simona waited for an invitation and expected the step-grandchildren to come to visit themselves. However, in the case of her own grandson, she was picking him up every day from school and the grandson stayed with them until his mother returned from work. Simona has, therefore, played a significant role as the mediator of contact between her own grandson and her new husband, who has accepted the boy 'as his own'. The absence of similar relationship-management activities from her husband's side led not only to the fact that his grandchildren have not been similarly integrated into Simona's family ties, but also to a gradual weakening of his ties to his own biological family.

## **Conclusion**

The relationship between grandchildren and grandparents is often described as mediated [cf., e.g., Timonen and Arber 2012]. This attribute refers primarily to the influence of the middle generation on the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren, where the quality of the relationship between parents and

grandparents is becoming an important factor affecting even the intergenerational relationships in the next generation. Our text points out, however, that the dynamics of the relationship between grandchildren and grandparents can also be influenced by other participants—in the case of grandfathers, mainly by their partners. While in the case of women the presence of a partner does not have a strong impact on their engagement in caring for young small grandchildren, in the case of men the presence of a partner intensifies the engagement of grandfathers. This effect applies both to families where both partners-grandparents only have grandchildren from their own mutual children and to more complex family arrangements where individual grandparents may be a step-grandmother/step-grandfather to another partner's grandchildren. However, such a finding of ours would deserve further attention and richer data, which would provide information from more respondents with complex family histories.

Our analysis showed that grandmothers are able to 'engage' their partners in care, even in the context of more complex family relationships that are not clearly defined by biological bonds. The presence of a female partner does not only affect the men's intensity of involvement in caring for grandchildren, but also to which children the care is provided to. Grandfathers are more involved in caring for step-grandchildren than grandmothers. This effect is mainly due to the distance of residence, as grandparents more often live near the grandmother's children. These findings suggest that women are more able to include their partners in caring for grandchildren who are not their own, while grandfathers do not have a similar effect on their partners. However, our evidence in this regard is not yet conclusive and should be further researched.

The mixed method design of our research has enabled us to not only quantify the impact of the partnership arrangement and gender of the grandparents on their engagement in caring for grandchildren, but also to understand the mechanisms which may mediate this effect. The statements of mothers and grandmothers point out that the care itself is gendered and associated with different expectations in relation to grandmothers and grandfathers. As pointed out by Seery and Crowley [2000: 188] with reference to the work of LaRossa and LaRossa, women are still considered by society to be experts in childcare, while men are left in the position of women's helpers. These common expectations are as a result creating a differentiation between helping and sharing [ibid.]. A similar situation can be seen in the case of grandparents as well. Grandfathers were described mainly as grandmothers' helpers, who are not expected to intensively engage in caring for young grandchildren. At the same time they were not seen as someone who would be able to provide for all the needs of the child without the assistance of another (female) family member. The different gender expectations associated with the role of the grandparent and the ability to provide care can be projected into the impact the presence or absence of the female partner has on grandfathers' engagement in caring for grandchildren. These expectations relieve men from caring for small children and shift a considerable portion of it

onto grandmothers' shoulders. Simply put, grandfathers often benefit from the care that grandmothers provide in their presence. We can find studies pointing out that women often experience a conflict between their role of grandparent and their other roles or interests [cf. Horsfall and Dempsey 2013; Meyer 2012]. But at the same time these gender expectations can lead to a disadvantage for grandfathers living without a partner, who may lose contact with their small grandchildren because they are not perceived as sufficiently competent caregivers.

The second part of our qualitative analysis highlights the importance of kin-keeping activities, which are, within traditional gender relationships, performed mainly by women. Care management activities included the organisation of contact with individual family members, which was often a part of the everyday harmonisation of care, where women were presented as the ones who sought or offered to help with caring for grandchildren. Relationship management activities included emotional work and stimulating relationships between individual family members. In fact, in the case of both of these types of activities, women played, in relation to their partners, the significant role of the mediators and organisers of the contact with children. These kin-keeping activities carried out mainly by women thus play an important role in maintaining intergenerational relationships, as well as in engaging grandfathers in caring for young grandchildren.

The conclusions from our research reveal the involvement of grandparents to be a dynamic process, which not only involves a particular grandparent and grandchild, but is also influenced by other members of the family and by the social expectations of care and gender roles. In the words of Carrington [1999: 6]: 'Any family is a social construction, or a set of relationships, recognized, edified, and sustained through human initiative. People "do" family.' This 'doing the family' refers to micro activities that give importance to and fulfil commitments to others. This is done through caring for others and caring for relationships between those whom we consider family. This research highlights the need to understand the family as a result of such everyday work, which, as our analysis points out, rests to a significant extent on the shoulders of women.

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## Appendix

**Table A1. Characteristics of the participants—grandmothers**

Pseudonym	Age	Education	Employed/ retired	Partnership status	Number of grand- children
Alice	62	Higher	Employed	Married	4
Darina	62	Secondary	Retired	Widowed	2
Hedviga	45	Elementary	Employed	Remarried	1
Ida	52	Higher	Employed	Married	1
Jolana	65	Secondary	Retired	Married	5
Josefina	69	Secondary	Retired	Remarried	9
Karla	55	Secondary	Employed	Married	1
Květa	57	Secondary	Retired	Married	2
Libuše	70	Secondary	Retired	Married	3
Lyvie	58	Secondary	Employed	Married	2
Magda	68	Secondary	Retired	Widowed	4
Marie	75	Secondary	Retired	Divorced	7
Marina	63	Secondary	Employed	Divorced	1
Miriam	50	Secondary	Employed	Remarried	1
Romana	64	Secondary	Employed	Widowed	3
Saskie	59	Higher	Employed	Married	2
Simona	70	Secondary	Retired	Remarried	3
Stela	61	Secondary	Retired	Married	1
Věra	71	Higher	Retired	Widowed	6
Vladěna	55	Secondary	Employed	Widowed	3

**Table A2. Characteristics of the participants—mothers**

Pseudonym	Age	Education	Partnership status	Number of children	Age of the children
Adéla	31	Secondary	Married	1	6 years
Agnes	33	Secondary	Cohabitation	1	4 years
Dagmar	25	Secondary	Cohabitation	1	2 years
Dominika	38	Higher	Married	2	8 years, 5 years
Irma	41	Secondary	Married	2	13 years, 10 years
Ivona	32	Secondary	Married	1	4 years
Judita	24	Higher	Cohabitation	1	2 months
Kamila	39	Secondary	Divorced	2	9 years, 6 years
Laura	36	Secondary	Divorced	1	9 years
Libuška	37	Higher	Married	1	9 months
Linda	30	Higher	Married	1	8 months
Milada	31	Secondary	Single mother	2	3 years
Mirka	39	Higher	Divorced, cohabiting with new partner	3	15 years, 9 years, 3 years
Nora	40	Secondary	Married	2	8 years, 5 years
Pavčina	27	Elementary	Single mother	2	6 years, 1 year
Petra	30	Higher	Cohabitation	1	6 months
Soňa	32	Higher	Cohabitation	1	6 months
Sylva	32	Higher	Divorced, cohabiting with new partner	1	7 years
Vanda	31	Secondary	Divorced	1	3 years
Vanessa	32	Higher	Divorced, cohabiting with new partner	2	7 years, 5 years