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Teenage grandchildren and their grandparents in urban Switzerland **Main results of an empirical research study among 12-16-years old grandchildren and their grandparents in urban regions of Switzerland**

Research design

Children aged 12-16 years who live in three urban regions of Switzerland (french-speaking Geneva and urban Valais, german-speaking Zurich) were interviewed about their relationship with grandparents. The sample was based on a random selection of school-classes within the regions selected, and within the selected school-classes all children 12-16 years of age were interviewed, using a standardized questionnaire. Between January and October 2004 685 children were first asked about their family-tree to clarify the number of grandparents still alive. Only 4% of the children had no longer any living grandparent. Most of the children had two or more grandparents alive (and some children had – as result of divorce and remarriage – more than four grandparents (stepgrandparents included). The 658 children with living grandparents were asked to fill a separate questionnaire for each grandparent alive. We have therefore information about the relationship with specific grandparents (grandmothers and grandfathers from both sides, stepgrandparents).

Totally, we collected information about 1'759 intergenerational relationships, from the perspective of adolescent grandchildren. The total response rate of the survey of grandchildren was 74%. All in all, this survey is one of the few European survey on grandparenthood that a) takes into account the perspective of the youngest generation, and b) looks at specific intergenerational relationships, including all living grandparents (and not only selected grandparents).

In a second step, we tried to locate the grandparents, often through telephonic contacts with the parents of the grandchildren. For practical and financial reasons we had to confine this part of the survey on grandparents living within Switzerland. All grandparents located within Switzerland received a written questionnaire, asking about their relationship with the specific grandchild interviewed earlier. This research design allows for a pairwise comparison of answers, regarding the same intergenerational relationship from both side of the generational cleavage. Totally we received 591 grandparent-questionnaires, including 82 questionnaires filled out by the parent generation in cases of ill-health of a grandparent (proxy-interviews). The response rate of the grandparent survey was 75%, and taking into account that in 20% of the cases the address of the grandparent was denied, we collected information on 55% of the grandparents of the grandchildren interviewed earlier on. The major limitation of the second part of the survey is the fact that grandparents living outside Switzerland were explicitly excluded (and due to high immigration rates 37% of all grandparents of 12-16-years olds live in foreign countries (most often: France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Bosnia, Albania, North Africa).

In addition to the standardized surveys narrative interviews were undertaken with around 20 generational pairs in Geneva (where grandchildren and grandparents described in more detail (and in their own words) major characteristics of the relationship (see Hummel et al. 2006).

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Socio-demographic background of intergenerational relationships in Switzerland

The intergenerational relationships in Switzerland are characterized by two major socio-demographic factors: a) a long common lifespan, and b) a low level of intergenerational co-residence.

The increased life expectancy of older men and women has resulted in an extension of the common lifespan of grandchildren and their grandparents, as illustrated by the data in Table 1. At the beginning of the 20th century nearly half of all grandparents of a given grandchild were already dead, and at age 15 nearly half of the grandchildren had no longer any surviving grandparents. At the beginning of the 21st century half of the grandparent generation is still living at age 20 of a grandchild, and the proportion of grandchildren without any living grandparents increases rapidly only after age 20. A similar trend to longer overlapping lifespans of generations has been observed in other European countries. In Switzerland, the trend to a longer common intergenerational lifespan has for some groups of the population been slowed down by the tendency of recent cohorts to delay family formation (and actually the mean age of Swiss women having their first birth is around 30 years of age). The tradition of late family formation in Switzerland results in relatively high age differences between grandchildren and grandparents (and most of the grandparents of the adolescents grandchildren interviewed are older than 70 years).

Table 1:
Estimated probability of having grandparents at different ages of grandchildren, Switzerland 1900 and 2000

	Mean number of grandparents still living		Proportion without any living grandparents	
	1900	2000	1900	2000
Grandchildren at age:				
- at birth	2.30	3.65	4%	0%
- 5 years	1.81	3.41	9%	0%
- 10 years	1.25	2.99	23%	1%
- 15 years	0.72	2.48	46%	2%
- 20 years	0.32	1.78	73%	8%
- 25 years	0.10	1.04	91%	27%
- 30 years	0.02	0.44	99%	61%
- 35 years	0.00	0.10	100%	90%
- 40 years	0.00	0.01	100%	99%
- 45 years	0.00	0.00	100%	100%

Source: Calculations based on demographic data about cohort-specific survival rates and mean age at birth in different birth cohorts.

A second specific characteristic of the situation in Switzerland is a traditionally low proportion of multigenerational households (related to the fact that Switzerland belongs to those countries that experienced the so-called 'European marriage pattern' of late marriage, high proportion of unmarried and tradition of segregated residence of young and old). Actually, the proportion of grandparents and grandchildren living in the same household in Switzerland is very low (and clearly lower than in the USA). According to our research data only 1.2% of all teenagers live with one of their grandparents in the same household. Corresponding low values are observed if we look at the living conditions of grandparents: Of all grandparents aged 65-79 years only 2% live with one or more grandchildren in the same household, and even für grandparents aged 80 years and more,

the proportion living in a three-generational-household is not higher than 3%. A long cultural tradition of separated housing of family generations and a high level of social welfare (reducing the poverty rates of the elderly) are the main factors explaining the low level of intergenerational co-residence in Switzerland.

Intergenerational relationships – the perspective of adolescent grandchildren

Intergenerational contacts

The grandchildren were asked about the frequency of personal contacts with each grandparent. In addition to, they were asked about telephonic and electronic contacts (E-mail) with those grandparents.

At this age of the grandchildren, personal contacts are dominant, followed by telephonic contacts from telephones at home (see Table 2). Intergenerational contacts by mobile phone, SMS or E-mail are less widespread, particularly as not all grandparents are versatile users of electronic forms of communication.

Table 2

Frequency of contacts with grandparents (2004)

Answers of 658 grandchildren aged 12-16 years, relating to ... grandparents.

	Frequency of contacts with specific grandparents				N:
	4	3	2	1	
Personal contacts	31%	23%	30%	16%	1712
Contacts by telephone at home	29%	32%	15%	24%	1687
Contacts by mobile phone	5%	9%	9%	77%	1554
Contacts through SMS	2%	4%	6%	88%	1542
Contacts through E-mail	1%	2%	4%	93%	1533
Written contacts (letters)	1%	5%	37%	57%	1600

4: Once a week or more, 3: at least once a month, 2: two to three times a year, 1: rarely/never

However, one can expect that electronic forms of intergenerational contacts become rapidly much more widespread, particularly when younger generations of women and men enter grandparenthood (see also Quadrello, Hurme et al. 2005). The different kinds of intergenerational contacts are positively intercorrelated, indicating that modern modes of communication are complementary to personal contacts.

As expected, one finds a very strong positive correlation between the frequency of personal contacts and the geographical proximity between grandchild and grandparent (see table 3); confirming earlier research on intergenerational contacts (see Attias-Donfut et al. 1998; Wieners 2005; Wilk 1999). About 50% of the grandparents live in the same region (canton), but 37% live outside Switzerland; the result of strong immigration in Switzerland in recent decade. About 21% of total population is of foreign nationality, and a large proportion of urban children are descendants of immigrants. The high proportion of grandparents outside of Switzerland is one factor resulting in a lower frequency of personal contacts than observed in the neighbour country of Austria (see Bundesministerium für Soziale Sicherheit, Generationen und Konsumentenschutz 2003).

Table 3:

Frequency of intergenerational contacts according to the geographical proximity of the grandparent

Answers of 658 grandchildren aged 12-16 years, relating to 1700 grandparents

	Geographical location of grandparent						
	A	B	C	D	E	F	
Frequency of contacts (means):							
Personal contacts	3.9	3.7	3.5	3.2	2.5	1.7	*
Contacts by telephone at home	2.4	2.5	2.8	2.8	2.5	2.6	*
Contacts by mobile phone	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.3	1.4	
Contacts through SMS	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.1	*
Contacts through E-mail	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.1	
Written contacts (letters)	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.6	1.7	1.5	*

Location of grandparent:

A: Same household/same house (3.6%), B: same neighbourhood, but different house (5.1%), C: same community, but different neighbourhood (16.8%), D: same canton, but different community (24.8%), E: different canton, but within Switzerland (12.5%), F: outside of Switzerland (37.3%).

* Differences between groups significant (1%, F-Test).

The telephonic or electronic contacts, however, are less strongly or even not significantly related to geographical proximity. No significant relationships with geographical proximity are for example observed for contacts by mobile phone and contacts through E-mails. Modern forms of communications facilitate intergenerational contacts over long distance. In addition to, modern forms of communications allow contacts between grandparents and adolescent grandchildren without interference from the parent generation, and the power of the middle generation can be undermined by new technologies.

In addition to the effect of geographical proximity on intergenerational contacts we analysed other factors:

- a) Gender of grandparents: The gender of the grandparent has – from the perspectives of young grandchildren – no significant effect on the frequency of contacts, and the thesis that grandmothers have generally more contacts than grandfathers is not supported, at least for grandchildren at this age. At the same time, the gender of the grandchild is directly and indirectly irrelevant. The thesis that grandmothers primarily communicate with granddaughters and grandfathers with grandsons is not supported.
- b) Lineage: As in other studies (Attias-Donfut et al. 1998: 295), we find more contacts with the parents of the mother than with parents of the father. Intergenerational relationships are biased toward the maternal family tree. In addition to, we find significant lower contacts with step-grandparents than with biological grandparents. This is particularly the case for personal and telephonic contacts.
- c) Age of grandparents: The frequency of intergenerational contacts is not related to the chronological age of the grandparent, with exception of electronic contacts. Younger grandparents use significantly more often E-mail or SMS than older grandparents, but this correlation reflects probably more cohort effects than age effects.
- d) Perceived health of grandparents: We find for all forms of contacts highly significant correlations between the perceived health of the grandparent and the frequency of contacts. Adolescent grandchildren have more contacts with healthy grandparents, and it seems that active inter-

generational contacts – particularly with adolescent girls and boys – are strongly related with active and healthy ageing. Extending healthy life expectancy can be an important factor improving intergenerational relationships, as a longitudinal Swiss study indicated (see Lalive d’Epinay et al. 2000).

When the grandchildren aged 12-16 are asked about the ideal frequency of intergenerational contacts, we found that in about 60% of the cases the actual situation is considered as optimal. Regarding more than a third (37%) of all grandparents the grandchild would prefer more contacts (see table 4). As expected, the wish for more contacts increases with the geographical distance between the two generations. Grandchildren with grandparents living outside Switzerland wish in 58% of the cases for more contacts. International migration reduces the frequency of intergenerational personal contacts even today.

Table 4:
Desiring more or less contacts with grandparents

N: 658 grandchildren reporting on their personal relationship with 1716 grandparents

A) Related to all grandparents considered:

- wish for less contacts	2.4%
- actual contacts are considered optimal	60.3%
- wish for more contacts	37.3%

B) %-grandchildren wishing more contacts to:

		N:
Paternal grandfather	39%	321
Paternal grandmother	41%	466
Maternal grandfather	38%	363
Maternal grandmother	34%	516
Stepgrandparents	28%	50

Perceived personal attributes of grandparents

An open question about the perceived positive or negative moral attributes of the grandparents indicates a more positive than negative evaluation of grandparents. The standardized question supports this observation (see table 5).

Table 5
Perceived personal attributes grandparents

Grandparent is:

	very true	rather true	rather not true	clearly not true	N:
generous	57%	31%	8%	4%	1706
kind/loving	50%	33%	11%	6%	1702
sociable/hospitable	50%	33%	11%	6%	1675
humorous	38%	35%	18%	9%	1700
tolerant	30%	39%	21%	10%	1665
dynamic	24%	34%	27%	15%	1668
severe/strict	11%	23%	35%	27%	1687
impatient	7%	16%	40%	37%	1863
old-fashioned	6%	14%	31%	49%	1681
stingy/tight-fisted	4%	5%	18%	73%	1678

The 12-16-years old grandchildren perceive the large majority of their grandparents as being generous, loving, sociable, humorous and tolerant. Only a minority is seen as severe, impatient or stingy. Even the attribute 'old-fashioned' seems to be true only for a minority of modern grandparents. A polarisation of perception is observed regarding the attribute 'dynamic': 58% of grandparents are perceived as dynamic older people, while 42% seem to be less dynamic. All in all, the interviewed grandchildren have a positive image of a large majority of their grandparents.

Grandmothers are more often seen as kind/loving and generous than grandfathers (kind/loving: 86% of grandmothers, 77% of grandfathers). On the other side, grandfathers are significantly more often perceived as severe/strict and impatient than grandmothers. Both these differences reflect traditional gender-differences in the image of grandmothers and grandfathers. Looking at the gender of the grandchild, we find that girls evaluate their grandparents significantly more often as old-fashioned and tolerant, while boys view their grandparents significantly more often as strict and severe. Regarding all other attributes, no differences are found.

The frequency of contacts and a positive image of the grandparent are strongly interrelated. Particularly high intercorrelations with the frequency of contacts are observed with attributes like 'humorous' (.35), 'kind/loving' (.31) and 'generous' (.28). At the same time, grandchildren have more contact with dynamic grandparents than with old-fashioned grandparents. The contacts with grandparents defined as stingy are significantly lower, while being impatient or strict seems to have no effect on the frequency of contacts. The causality of the relationship goes probably in both directions: A positive image results in more contacts, and more contacts result in a more positive image.

All in all, the perceived characteristics of the grandparents are independent of the geographical proximity of grandparents and grandparents living outside of Switzerland are not evaluated differently from grandparents living nearby.

Age of the grandparents and their attributes – as perceived by the youngest generation – are also only weakly interrelated. Older grandparents are perceived as less dynamic and more often as old-fashioned, but after controlling for other variables (gender, health status) the age effects disappear. Much more important than age is the perceived health status of the grandparent: Healthy grandparents are regarded significantly more often as kind, generous, sociable, humorous, tolerant and dynamic than unhealthy or disabled grandparents (who are more often seen as impatient, stingy and old-fashioned). Only the attribute 'strict' is not related to the health status.

Generally, active grandparenthood seems to be associated with healthy ageing, and this seems to be particularly true for intergenerational relationships with adolescent grandchildren. In any cases, adolescent grandchildren seem to have a less positive image of less healthy grandparents than of healthy grandparents (as only healthy grandparents seem able to bridge the generational cleavage and to maintain an active engagement with their adolescent grandchild).

Intergenerational activities

The grandchildren were asked about the activities undertaken with their grandparents, based on a list of 14 different kind of possible intergenerational activities. The data in table 6 present the distribution of responses. While in other studies only the activities with selected grandparents were measured, our data present the activities with all grandparents still living (and many intergenerational activities are undertaken only with selected grandparents).

Table 6:

Activities with grandparents – perspective of grandchildren

Answers of 658 grandchildren regarding 1700 specific grandparents

	Once a week (4)	Once a month (3)	2-3 times a year (2)	seldom/ never (1)	Mean
Discussions	21%	18%	29%	32%	2.3
watching television	15%	15%	28%	42%	2.0
playing games	7%	9%	19%	65%	1.6
making things ,cooking	6%	10%	26%	58%	1.6
visiting a restaurant	4%	12%	31%	53%	1.7
shopping	4%	8%	24%	64%	1.5
Religious activities	4%	6%	21%	69%	1.5
reading	4%	5%	13%	78%	1.3
help at homework	3%	4%	8%	85%	1.3
visisting a party, festival	2%	6%	29%	63%	1.5
go on a walk, Sport	2%	5%	19%	74%	1.4
Travelling	1%	6%	27%	66%	1.4
Visiting an exhibition	1%	3%	20%	76%	1.3
going to the cinema, theatre	0%	2%	12%	85%	1.2

The activity most often mentioned is just discussing with grandparents. Talking and discussing things seem to be particularly important for adolescent grandchildren, as earlier studies indicated (see Wilk 1999). A further intergenerational activity often mentioned is watching television, often also a cause for discussions. Making things, cooking and playing games are further activities relatively often mentioned (see also Winters 2005). According to the German Panorama-Study cooking remains relevant at higher ages of grandchildren, while playing games becomes less important for adolescent children (see Zinnecker et al. 2003: 3).

The intergenerational activities most often undertaken are activities made at home, while external activities – like visiting a restaurant, travelling etc. – are undertaken only with selected grandparents. Many external intergenerational activities refer only to a minority of grandchild-grandparent-relationships. For example: Intergenerational trips or travels are organised by a third of all grandparents (mostly two to three times a year), but with two thirds of grandparents such trips are rare.

A more detailed analysis indicates that active grandparents are often engaged with traditional and modern activities at the same time (grandmother cooking traditional meals with grandchild while at the same time discussing the latest fashion). In many cases the cohort differences are explicitly used to reinforce the intergenerational relationship, as young children and their grandparents can compare old and new values or habits (see Brosziewski 2001: 71).

The kind and frequency of intergenerational activities vary significantly according to different variables:

- a) Context: Shopping, visiting restaurants, traveling and particularly visiting a cinema occurs significantly more often in the large cities of Geneva and Zurich than in the smaller towns of the Valais.
- b) Gender: We find some classical gender-related differences, and grandmothers do more often cook than grandfathers (who more often are engaged in handicraft). Grandchildren go also more often shopping with their grandmothers than their grandfathers. And finally, grandmothers do more often discuss things while grandfathers make more sport. However, all these differences – though statistically significant – are less marked than one could expect, and the total degree of intergenerational activities seems not to be gender-biased. The gender of the grandchild itself has no large effect (with one exception: religious activities are more often mentioned by boys than girls). Interestingly, we do not find any clear-cut interactive gender effects, and we do not observe that grandfathers are significantly more engaged with grandsons or that grandmothers undertake generally more with granddaughters. The lack of a gender-bias in intergenerational activities is probably a new phenomenon of grandparenthood in modern, low-fertility countries (where increasing numbers of older people are just happy to have grandchildren at all).
- c) Lineage: More activities are undertaken by grandparents from mother's side, and at the same time step-grandparents are significantly less often mentioned.
- d) Geographical proximity: As expected one finds strong positive relationships between intergenerational activities and geographical proximity. The strongest relationships are observed with everyday activities – like discussing, watching television or playing games.
- e) Perceived health status: The intergenerational activities are strongly associated with the perceived health status of a grandparent: Healthy grandparents are more active, and this is particularly true for activities like walking, making things, visiting exhibitions etc.. But also discussing values or social trends with the young is positively related to healthy ageing. The only activities less strongly – but still significantly – associated with health status are reading and religious activities. All in all, intergenerational activities – like regular intergenerational contacts – depend on good health, and the development of active grandparenthood in modern society is clearly associated with an extended healthy life-expectancy of older people.
- f) Age of grandparents: High age seems to reduce the intensity of common activities, but a more detailed analysis indicates primarily cohort-effects (as the relationships with 'age' is strongest for cultural activities). Furthermore, after controlling for the health status of grandparents, the correlations with age of grandparents tend to become insignificant. Probably more important is the age of grandchildren (a variable that in our study - due to a limited age range of grandchildren – cannot be controlled for). The results of the German Panorama-Study indicate a reduced level of intergenerational activities as grandchildren grow older: The median number of activities with 'preferred grandfather/grandmother' is decreasing with age: from 8 activities among grandchildren aged 10-12 to 7 among grandchildren aged 13-15 and to 6 activities at age 16-18 (Zinnecker et al. 2003).

Grandparents als persons of reference

The intergenerational activity most often mentioned is discussing with grandparents. For this reason we also asked about which subjects are discussed with whom (grandparents, parents, friends or nobody). The children had the possibility to mention different combinations of settings (only parent, parent and grandparents etc.).

The data in table 7 show the total distribution of answers, regarding different topics of life:

Table 7:

Persons of reference for different topics

Question: „With whom do you discuss the following topics?

	Distribution of answers:							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
News/actualities	5%	23%	9%	13%	9%	1%	20%	19%
Social problems (AIDS, drugs, violence etc.)	1%	25%	20%	14%	4%	1%	26%	9%
Relations with parents	9%	20%	23%	14%	6%	5%	14%	10%
Relations with friends	2%	27%	24%	11%	6%	1%	21%	8%
Subject of love/love affairs	1%	9%	45%	26%	0%	1%	14%	4%
Questions of school life	3%	22%	13%	4%	8%	1%	24%	24%
Leisure (sport, musique etc)	2%	11%	30%	3%	3%	2%	29%	21%
Intimate things/sexuality	0%	15%	33%	33%	1	0	16%	2%
Personal conflicts	3%	18%	24%	17%	2%	1%	25%	10%
„Little secrets’ (smoking, alcohol consum etc.	1%	10%	43%	26%	1%	1%	15%	3%

Categories of answers: The topic is discussed:

A: only with grandparent, B: only with parents C: only with friend(s); D: with nobody, E: with grandparent and parents F: with grandparent and friends, G: with parents and friends H: with grandparent, parents and friends altogether

N: between 1670 and 1730 intergenerational relationships

As main result we can summarize:

- Only a minority of 12-16 years old have in their view nobody to discuss with or to confide in. This the case most often for subjects of love, intimacy or ‚little secrets’.
- Grandparents are only in relatively few cases exclusive persons of reference. They belong – if they are mentioned at all – to a set of confidentials. Often grandparents are mentioned together with other family members. Most often exclusively with grandparents discussed are relationships with parents and questions about earlier behaviour of mother or father (grandparents being the only trueful informants available on the behaviour of parents during adolescence).
- Intimate questions and love affairs are mostly discussed with friends, but very rarely with grandparents. Questions of growing and topics strongly related with puberty are in many cases excluded from grandchild-grandparent-relationship. Grandchildren discuss with their grandparent primarily family and school questions and actualities (were comparisons between today and earlier times seem to be of particular interests). Even then, only a minority of grandparents are perceived as persons of reference, and intensive intergenerational discussions are limited to selected grandparents.

As expected, the extent of intergenerational discussions is significantly associated with a high degree of intergenerational contacts (and therefore also correlates positively with geographical proximity). Intergenerational discussions are more intensive with grandparents who show an active interest in the life of their grandchild (and who take the opinion of the grandchild seriously). In addition to, grandmothers are more actively involved as confidentials of their grandchildren than grandfathers (while the gender of the grandchild seems to be without impact). As mentioned before, grandparents are often persons of reference in combination with other family members, reflecting the known fact that the relationship between grandparent and grandchild is often mediated by the parent generation (see Attias-Donfut, Segalen 1998, Krappmann 1997)

The subjective value of grandparents for adolescent grandchildren

When directly asked about the general value of the relationship with a given grandparent (How important is your relationship to (named) grandmother/grandfather?), the distribution of answers is clear-cut: In 49% of the cases the relationship is considered as very important, and in 38% of the cases it is evaluated as important. Only 13% of all named grandparents are seen as less important or even unimportant. A high general subjective value of grandparents – as additional family members - has also been observed in earlier studies (Wilk, Bacher 1994; Ross, Hill et al. 2005; Zinnecker et al. 2002). In many cases the grandparents are the only representatives of the elderly that adolescent have continuous social contacts at all.

When we ask in more detail where the grandparent plays a valued role, we observe a more differentiated image, and the specific role expectations of grandchildren indicate also the limits of this intergenerational relationship (see table 8).

Table 8:

Value of grandparent and expectations of grandchildren

	very important	rather important	less import..	of no importance
A) General value of grandparent	49%	38%	9%	4%
B) Value considering specific topics:				
- just being around when needed	43%	32%	12%	13%
- help for homework/schooling	27%	31%	22%	20%
- support/comfort when needed	26%	29%	24%	21%
- advice for dealing with parents	20%	25%	28%	27%
- advice on education/schooling	18%	29%	28%	25%
- financial help/solidarity	11%	16%	40%	33%
- advice for leisure activities	11%	19%	38%	32%
- advice regarding private life	7%	15%	34%	44%

N: 1719 intergenerational relationships, based on the answers of 658 grandchildren.

The first and main expectation of young grandchildren is the expectation that grandparents are just around when needed: Older persons you can visit and contact any time you wish, and family members who have always time for the grandchild. In three quarter of the relationships observed the role of grandparent as a general and unspecific person of reference is important. ‚Listening and having time’ is in this sense more important than ‚advising and acting’. The expectations of many grandchildren toward their grandparents do not conform to modern patterns of active ageing.

The second aspect often valued as important is help from grandparents with homework/schooling. In 58% of the intergenerational relationships this seems to be an important task of grandparents. However, earlier analysis show that only 7% of all grandparents are in fact actively engaged with school help. Reality and expectation differ strongly (and help regarding homework is more often expected than realised). Grandchildren expect from a majority of their grandparents also a psychological support. In 55% of the relationship this seems to be an important aspect. However, in 45% of the relationship the grandparent is not perceived as an important emotional support (due to emotional or geographical distance).

The other role expectations are less consensual, with higher proportions of grandchildren evaluating those aspects of grandparenthood as less or not important. The answers regarding the value of grandparents in mediating between grandchild and parents are polarized: 45% important versus 55% unimportant. Intergenerational mediation confirms to a classical role expectations of grandparenthood, but this role is based on an intensive personal relationship with both generations.

Concerning every-day interventions of grandparents – advice concerning education, leisure and private life – the grandchildren are also more reluctant: 78% do not expect advice from their grandparents regarding their private life (an observation that is confirmed by the earlier observation that grandchildren do not discuss private and intimate things with their grandparents). In the perspective of young grandchildren also intergenerational financial help does not (yet) seem to be an important aspect of grandparenthood.

All in all, teenage grandchildren value their grandparents primarily as ‚generalized family members‘, giving support when needed and being available, but not interfering in their private life. Every-day interventions of grandparents are most often rejected (at least among adolescent grandchildren). Adding all items to an (additive) scale, we arrive at a scale ‚subjective value of grandparent‘ that is characterized by a high construct-reliability (Cronbach’s Alpha: .85). This reinforces the observation of unspecific role expectations of young grandchildren regarding their grandparents.

As we will discuss later on, the role expectations of grandchildren and of grandparents do diverge significantly (see part on pairwise comparison of responses).

Looking at different independent variables, we observe the following differences in the value of given grandparents:

- a) Gender of grandparent and grandchild: The subjective importance of the intergenerational relationship varies not strongly by gender of grandparent or grandchild. One exception is that grandmothers are more often expected to be interested in private life of the grandchildren than grandfathers. Granddaughters expect psychological support more often than grandsons, but generally grandsons perceive the intergenerational relationship to be as important as granddaughters. As observed earlier on, grandchild-grandparent-relationships are today much less gendered than traditionally expected.
- b) Lineage: Importance and expectations are not significantly different for maternal and paternal grandparents. Stepgrandparents, however, are perceived and experienced as less important. The greatest difference between biological and non-biological grandparents concerns the role as mediator between grandchild and parent-generation.
- c) Geographical proximity: The general value of a grandparent is independent of the geographical location of grandparents, and we find no negative association between the general value of a given grandparent and its geographical proximity. Grandparents living outside Switzerland are generally valued the same as grandparents living nearby. Looking at more specific role expectations geographical proximity is, however, more significant, and help with homework – for example - is only expected from grandparents living in the same neighbourhood.

- d) Perceived health of grandparents: As for other indicators, we find a strong and statistically significant positive correlation between the subjective value of grandparents and their perceived health. Significant associations are also observed for the more specific role expectations. This observation supports the thesis that intensive and valued intergenerational relationships with adolescent grandchildren are positively associated with healthy ageing.
- e) Frequency of contacts: The value of the intergenerational relationship correlates positively with the frequency of contacts. Contacts initiated by the grandchild itself have the strongest impact on the value of grandparents (while contacts initiated by the parents are of less importance). This reflects the simple fact that adolescent girls and boys primarily initiate contacts with highly valued grandparents (and grandchildren with more than one grandparent can interact very selectively with different grandparents). We find a similar trend among grandparents themselves: Older persons with lot of grandchildren have – on average – a less intensive (and exclusive) relationship with the grandchild interviewed.
- f) Intergenerational activities: The value of the relationship is positively associated with the intensity of common intergenerational activities; the effect going in both direction: Higher value of the relationship through more common activities and more common activities with grandparents perceived as important family members.
- g) Personal characteristics of grandparents: The value of given grandparents is positively associated with perceived characteristics like kind/loving, generous, tolerant and humorous, and negatively related to characteristics like severe, old-fashioned or stingy.

The two-generations in a pairwise comparison

The fact that we asked grandparents too about their relationship with a given grandchild (interviewed earlier on) allows a pairwise comparison of the the perspective of both generations. The main limitation of the survey of grandparents is the fact that we had to limit this survey to grandparents living in Switzerland (excluding grandparents living outside Switzerland). In addition to, some of the grandparents still living could not be interviewed as result of health problems (and information about functionally dependent grandparents were collected through ,proxy-interviews).

We expected the young generation to evaluate the health of the older generation more negatively than the older persons. However, this was not the case, and the pairwise comparison does not indicate a systematic intergenerational bias in the perception of health status of the grandparent (see table 9). Grandchildren seem to be rather good observants of grandparents' health status (and as we mentioned earlier on, good health and good intergenerational relationships are positively associated).

Table 9:

Health status of grandparents – own perception and perception of grandchildren

N: 545

Health status of grandparent according to grandchild:

very good rather good mediocre bad

Own evaluation of subjective healthy by grandparent:

very good	17%	9%	2%	0
rather good	17%	21%	7%	2%
mediocre	4%	7%	6%	2%
bad	0	2%	2%	2%

Regarding the frequency of personal contacts, in 73% of the cases both generations give corresponding answers. In 9% of the cases the grandparent mentions more contacts, in 16% of the cases this is true for the grandchild. Less intergenerational correspondence is observed for written contacts (49%) or telephonic contacts (58% for mobil phone, 34% for fixed line telephone). All in all, we do not find a systematic intergenerational bias, for example in the direction that grandparents tend to overrate the frequency of contacts with the younger generation. The same is true regarding a pairwise comparison of common activities. The main exception is watching television: Grandchildren mention this activity significantly more often than grandparents.

In 53% of the cases the actual frequency of intergenerational contacts is perceived as ‚good at it is’ by both generations (see table 10). In 9% of the cases both generations would like more contacts. In about a third of the cases the answers of the two generations do not correspond, and a paired samples T-test indicates a stronger tendency of grandparents to wish for more contacts.

Table 10:

Desired frequency of contacts and general value of the relationship – pairwise compared

A) Desired frequency of contacts between grandparent and grandchild

N: 455 Grandchild would like to have	Grandparent would like to have contacts:		
	less	‚good at it is’	more
less contacts	0	1%	1%
‚good at it is’	0	53%	22%
more contacts	0	13%	9%

B) Value of the relationship between grandparent and grandchild

N: 453	Answer of grandparent: Relationship is		
	very important	rather important	unimportant
Answer of grandchild: Relationship is			
very important	41%	19%	0
rather important	19%	11%	2%
unimportant	2%	4%	1%

According to 66% of the grandparents interviewed the frequency of contacts with the given grandchild did not change in the last few years. 23% of the grandparents mention a reduced frequency of contacts, and 11% perceive increasing contacts. The start of adolescence seems to result in a weakening of the intergenerational relationship only for a minority of grandparents. In most cases the perception of continuity is dominant.

Interviewing the grandparents makes it also clear that the frequency of personal contacts with a given grandchild is – as one would expect – significantly related to the quality of the relationship with the parent generation: 51% of the grandparents perceiving to have a very good relation with the parent generation have frequent personal contacts with the grandchild. If the relation with the parents is perceived as less positive, this is the case only for 32% of grandparents. However, the modern forms of intergenerational contacts (mobile phone, E-mail) are not associated with the quality of the relationship with the parent generation (reinforcing the observation that modern forms

of communication allow for intergenerational contacts between grandparents and adolescent grandchildren without the parent generation having any kind of control).

The general value of the intergenerational relationship is perceived by both generations consensually as important (see table 10). In more than ninety percent of the cases included both generations perceive the relationship as very or at least as rather important. However, the question used „How important is your relationship to (named) grandparent/grandchild?) measures only the general value of this relationship. Of much more interest is a intergenerational comparison of more specific values of grandparenthood, and in fact we find much clearer intergenerational differences when we ask for specific role expectations concerning the grandparents (see table 11).

Table 11:

Grandparental role expectations in a pairwise comparison

	Evaluation of the role of grandparent:				
	By grandparent: important	By grandparent: unimportant	By grandchild: important	By grandchild: unimportant	
- just being around when needed	78%	19%	1%	2%	*
- help for homework/schooling	51%	27%	6%	16%	*
- support/comfort when needed	56%	34%	5%	5%	*
- advice for dealing with parents	38%	47%	4%	11%	*
- advice on education/schooling	37%	30%	15%	18%	*
- financial help/solidarity	23%	55%	6%	16%	*
- advice for leisure activities	16%	25%	22%	37%	+
- advice regarding private life	10%	40%	11%	39%	*

*Differences in the answers of the two generations significant (1%, paired samples T-test)

+ Differences in the answers of the two generations significant (2%, paired samples T-test)

N: between 360 and 398

In many cases the grandparents have higher and more specific grandparental role expectations than the grandchildren. We find often the combination ‚important for grandparent, unimportant for grandchild’. The combination ‚important for grandparent, unimportant for grandchild’ corresponds to the ‚intergenerational stake’-thesis (see Giarrusso, Stallings, Bengston 1995), and in earlier research grandparents did value their influence on the younger generation as stronger than perceived by the younger generation (see Crosnoe, Elder 2002).

Looking in more detail at specific role expectations, we observe the following pattern:

- Financial help and support: Financial family solidarity is significantly more often mentioned by grandparents than by adolescent grandchildren. The older generation emphasizes much more clearly the aspect of intergenerational family solidarity than the youngest generation, at least in this stage of life.
- Psychological and moral support and comfort is valued in a majority of cases by both generations, but here too the value of intergenerational support is more strongly emphasized by the older generation.
- Help for homework/schooling is often valued and emphasized by the older generation, but also by many grandchildren. However, only few grandparents are actively involved in this activity. We find here a kind of general normative expectation (of the older generation helping to school the younger generation) that is in fact seldom realized.
- „Just being around when needed’: This general role expectation finds the strongest intergenerational consensus: 78% of both generations valuing this aspect of grandparenthood as

important. We observe here an important aspect of modern grandparenthood, particularly for adolescent grandchildren: Grandparents as general (and unspecific) persons of references or even confidants. „To be available and having time“ is for many young persons an important resource in a society otherwise characterized by stress and time pressure. To a certain degree this role expectations is in conflict with modern images of active ageing (but it corresponds to ideas that in later phases of life ‚being becomes more important than doing‘).

- c) Advice for leisure activities or schooling: Here we find a polarized picture: In 37% of the generational pairs both generations value advice concerning leisure activities highly. In 47% of the cases the answers of both generation differ. It seems that the leisure of teenage grandchildren belongs to the intergenerational topics that are not clearly regulated. The same seems to be true for questions of school. On the one side, non-intervention of grandparents in educational decisions is a traditional norm of grandparenthood. On the other side adolescent grandchildren are often grateful for information and orientation.
- d) Advice regarding private life: Many grandchildren do not wish any grandparental intervention regarding their private life (questions of friendships, love affairs etc). However, not few of the grandparents regard advising as part of their normative duty towards the younger generation (for example to avoid that the younger generation has to make the same mistakes again).
- e) Advice in dealing with parents: Nearly half of the grandparents interviewed perceive the mediation between the generations as an important part of their grandparental duty. However, the younger generation is much more sceptical and the cleavage between the two generations is for this item particularly wide (important for 85% of grandparents, but only for 42% of grandchildren). In many cases adolescent grandchildren prefer to have a relationship with grandparents that is clearly separated from parental control.

All in all, the young generation has much more generalized expectations (just being around, having time), while many grandparents orient themselves more on (traditional) norms of grandparental solidarity and support. Many grandparents perceive themselves as being part of the family support system, while adolescent children value their grandparents more as general persons of references, dissociated from the performance-orientate world of other adults (parents, teachers etc.).

The differences concerning the status of grandparents between younger and older generation become also visible when we look at the answers to questions of intergenerational discussions. We asked both generations about which topics they have discussions with a (given) grandparent respectively a (given) grandchild. The data in table 12 show the results of a pairwise comparison.

This pairwise comparison indicates too that the young and the older generation perceive their relationship in many cases differently. At the same time, for specific topics we find a clear intergenerational consensus not to discuss those topics.

Intimate things (sexuality), love affairs, but also ‚little secrets‘ of the young generation are consensually excluded from intergenerational discussions and talks. In fact, all questions of ‚adolescence‘ seem to be explicitly excluded from grandchild-grandparent-relationship; indicating a pattern of ‚distance to intimacy‘. Grandmothers and grandfathers are in many cases important for adolescent children, but this relationship is defined as being outside the problems of ‚adolescence‘ (which are most often discussed with friends or mentioned by parents or teachers).

Looking at other topics of life, we find, however, much less intergenerational consensus, and the answers of the two generations show more discrepancies. Except for the discussion of news and actualities, we always find the pattern that more grandparents than grandchildren mention to discuss the topic with the younger generation. The older generation seems to be in many cases more interested in intergenerational exchange of information and opinions than the younger generation. Example: The relationship of the grandchild to his parent: In 40% of the cases the grandparent

answers ,yes' when asked if this is a topic of discussion, while the grandchild answers with ,no'. This asymmetric response pattern supports the intergenerational stake-thesis mentioned earlier on.

Table 12:

Intergenerational discussions – pairwise compared

	Discussions between grandparent/grandchild			
	Answers grandchildren: Yes	Answers grandchildren: No	Answers grandparents: Yes	Answers grandparents: No
News/actualities	25%	34%	23%	18%
Social problems (AIDS, drugs, violence etc.)	14%	47%	10%	29%
Relations with parents	27%	24%	9%	40%
Relations with friends	15%	43%	8%	34%
Subject of love/love affairs	2%	84%	3%	11%
Questions of education/ school	37%	19%	10%	34%
Leisure (sport, musique etc)	29%	23%	6%	42%
Intimate things/sexuality	1%	91%	2%	6%
Personal conflicts	13%	54%	6%	27%
,Little secrets' (smoking, alcohol consum etc.	3%	73%	5%	19%

N: depending on item between 323 and 387 generational pairs

Generally, a strong interest of the grandparent for their grandchild is positively associated with a good intergenerational relationship (as long as this interest is not perceived as too intimate).

An important dimension of a positive intergenerational relationship – particularly if we look at adolescent children – is the perception of the younger generation that its opinions are taken seriously. In our survey, we asked the grandchildren how far a (given) grandparent take its own opinions seriously or not. The grandparents, on the other side, were asked how far the younger generation – the grandchild – is interested in the opinions of the older generation. We can therefore analyse how far intergenerational interest goes only from ,old to young', from ,young to old' or in both directions.

The pattern of answers goes in fact in all directions: In 35% of the generational pairs both generations are interested in the opinion of the other generation (indicating a symmetrical relationship). In 25% of the cases both generations are not interested in the other generation (reflecting a more distanced relationship). A more detailed analysis (cluster analysis) indicates too that about a fourth of all grandchild-grandparent-relationships studied can be classified as ,distanced intergenerational relationships) In 20% of the cases the grandparent is interested in the opinions of the grandchild, but not vice versa; and in 20% of the cases it is only the grandchild that shows an interest, but not the grandparent.

In table 13 we look how far the pattern of intergenerational relationship is associated with differences in the value of grandparents for young grandchildren. We find, as expected, significant differences in the value of the grandparent depending on the type of intergenerational exchange:

A mutual interest in the opinion of the other generation is associated with a high value of grandparents, while a mutual disinterest results in significant lower figures. One-sided interest leads to intermediate figures, but at least in the perspective of adolescent grandchildren an one-

sided interest of the older generation for the young generation has a less negative impact than an one-sided interest of the young for the older generation. Or in other words: Adolescent grandchildren seem to be react negatively when grandparents do not take their views and opinions seriously.

Qualitative interviews undertaken with both grandchildren and grandparents in Geneva underscore this point: Adolescent grandchildren expect from their grandparents not longer to be treated as ,children', but to be taken seriously within intergenerational exchanges of opinions about life, moral questions etc. Grandparents in dealing with adolescent grandchildren have to change their grandparental behaviour, from emphasizing children games to a mutual exchange of views. The growing up of grandchildren requires the development of ,grandparental-maturity', accepting step by step that the grandchild becomes a mature adult. Those grandparents who are actively engaged in intergenerational exchanges –taking the grandchild and his opinion seriously without interfering to much - have the best relationship with teenage grandchildren.

Table 13:

Style of intergenerational interest and value of grandparent for grandchild

Dependent variable: Value of grandparents for grandchild' (means)

		Grandparent: Grandchild is interested in my opinions:		
		yes	no	
Grandchild: Grandparent is interested in my opinions:	always/often	25.6	24.6	
	seldom/never	21.3	19.7	*

* Differences between all four combinations significant (1%).

Value of grandparents for grandchild': additive scale of 9 items used in table 8 (Cronbach's Alpha: .85). N: 350 generational pairs

Abstract

Children aged 12-16 years who live in three urban regions of Switzerland (Geneva, Zurich, urban Valais) were interviewed on their relationships to all surviving grandparents. In a second step, the grandparents of the grandchildren interviewed had to fill a questionnaire regarding their views on this intergenerational relationship.

The main results of this study can be summarized as follow:

a) Intergenerational contacts: The grandchildren interviewed have a lower frequency of personal contacts with grandparents as observed in other comparable studies in France, Germany or Austria. One reason for reduced contacts in urban Switzerland is the high proportion (37%) of grandparents living outside Switzerland (a result of high immigration rates). Many interviewed grandchildren wish for more contacts, and this is particularly the case when grandparents are living outside Switzerland. Different kinds of contacts (by person, telefon, E-mail) are positively intercorrelated, and electronic contacts do not have negative effects on personal contacts. Modern form of contacts (mobile phone, E-mail, SMS) are correlated with geographical proximity, indicating the development of new forms of intergenerational contacts that have no geographical and social limits (allowing teenagers to communicate with foreign grandparents without parents having any knowledge or control). The frequency of contacts – and particularly the use of modern forms of communications – is positively associated with the (perceived) health of grandparents. Cohort effects are also significant, and grandparents from younger cohorts have more digital contacts)

b) Perceived characteristics of grandparents: The 12-16-years old describe most of their grandparents as kind, humorous, tolerant and generous. A more detailed analysis indicates three different kinds of grandparents (as perceived by the young): a) grandparents as family members positively valued, b) grandparents more negatively perceived who have no empathy for the young generation, and c) backward oriented grandparents who no longer seem able to deal with change. The perception of grandparents is not correlated with age or geographical proximity but strongly with their (perceived) health status. Active grandparenthood is clearly associated with active and healthy ageing (particularly regarding relationships with adolescent grandchildren).

c) Grandparents as persons of reference: In many cases the grandchildren interviewed value the relationship to their grandmothers or grandfathers as very important (49%) or rather important (38%). Only 13% of the grandparents seem to be less important. The value of grandparents as important family member is positively associated with geographical proximity, frequency of personal contacts, perceived health status and frequent intergenerational discussions (on politics, values, social aspects, questions of life etc). However, when asked about specific expectations, a more complex image emerges, indicating limits on the value of grandparents for teenagers: Nearly all interviewed grandchildren expect from their grandparents ‚just to be here‘, ‚to be available‘. Specific expectations are considerably less consensual, and everyday interventions of grandparents are mostly not expected or valued (this is particularly the case regarding private life or leisure activities). In other words: teenage grandchildren value their grandparents particularly as ‚generalized family members‘, giving support when needed and being available, but not interfering in their private life.

d) The relationship in pairwise comparison: Comparing the answers of grandparents and grandchildren pairwise indicates a high consensus on the general value of this intergenerational relationship. Stronger intergenerational discrepancies, however, are visible when specific role expectations are considered: Many grandparents have specific expectations on the role of grandparents (regarding financial support, mediating between parent- and grandchild-generations, helping their grandchildren to find a good profession etc.). Most grandchildren, on the other side, have less specific expectations („just being available“). Interestingly, there is a high intergenerational consensus to avoid ‚difficult topics‘: Questions of love, sexuality, ‚little secrets‘ (like smoking without parental knowledge etc) are topics both generations are consensually avoiding. Intergenerational discussions refer mostly to general social and moral questions but not to intimate aspects of the life of grandchildren. The often cited pattern of ‚intimacy by distance‘ is – at least regarding the relationship of grandparents with adolescent grandchildren – combined by the pattern of ‚distance from intimacy‘. Those grandparents who are actively engaged in intergenerational exchanges –taking the grandchildren and his opinion serious without interfering to much - have the best relationship with teenage grandchildren.

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