

**Cohort Differences in Grandparents' Caregiving for Grandchildren: The Mediating
Effects of Demands and Availability**

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PAA 2019 Extended Abstract

Providing care for grandchildren has become an increasingly salient part of grandparenthood for many grandparents. Although the literature on grandparents caring for grandchildren augmented in recent years, rarely has them empirically analyzed the evolution of this phenomenon over the history. Demographic and social changes have altered grandparents' involvement in grandchild care over time. There has been a changing figure of grandparents from "fun-loving" "peripheral companions" to "guardians of family stability", and to the rise of custodial grandparents or surrogate parents (see review by Silverstein, Lendon, & Giarrusso, 2012). Forces behind these changes are the rising family demands of grandparents' caregiving resulting from the prevalence of mothers' labor force participation and parental marital instability. At the same time, grandparents have become more available for grandchild care because they gain a prolonged active life expectancy, become more resourceful, and have fewer grandchildren to attend to. In this study, we take a cohort perspective by situating U.S. grandparents' caregiving in the temporal and historical contexts that each cohort lives through. We first compare grandparents' involvement in grandchild care by cohorts. Then we investigate

two underlying mechanisms, family demands and grandparents' availability, through which cohort differences in grandparents' caregiving could be explained. Finally, we examine whether cohort changes in grandparents' caregiving and its mechanisms differ by race/ethnicity. We address these questions by using eight waves of data from the Health and Retirement Study (HRS, 1998-2012), a nationally representative and longitudinal dataset containing respondents from different birth cohorts.

A birth cohort is formed by "all individuals born into a population during a specific time period" (Uhlenberg & Miner, 1996, p. 208). The cohort perspective emphasizes that historical events may have similar implications for individuals within a cohort, but exert different impacts on people across different cohorts. Each cohort over their life course has been uniquely affected by changing demographic, social, economic, cultural, and political contexts that its members live through. Therefore, the involvement in caregiving for grandchildren can differ by the birth cohort that grandparents belong to. Among the current grandparent population in the U.S., we identify three cohorts: *the swing generation* (born between 1900 and 1927), *the silent generation* (born between 1928 and 1945), and *the baby boomers* (born between 1946 and 1964) (Torres-Gil, 1992). By studying the similarity and differences in grandparent caregiving among three successive cohorts, we delineate historical changes in grandparenting, a realm deserving more attention. We will also be able to evaluate particular challenges and disadvantages faced by grandparent caregivers from a particular cohort, thus suggesting ways to address diverse needs from grandparents of different cohorts.

Another intriguing and particularly understudied area in the literature is mechanisms through which cohort changes in grandparent caregiving can be explained. We propose and examine two different mechanisms: family demands and grandparents' availability. For later

cohorts, there are rising family demands for childcare provided by grandparents. These demands arose because of the substantial increase in women's labor force participation since the middle of the 20th century. In countries where there is a lack of formal childcare services, grandparents play a role as "mother saver" (Timonen & Arber, 2012). The regular, extensive, or full-time childcare provided by grandparents to their young grandchildren enable mothers to continue working outside the home (Arpino, Pronzato, & Tavares, 2014; Compton & Pollak, 2014). In addition, marital instability substantially increases among parents' generation. During parental marital dissolution, grandparents often provide important assistance in caregiving. Moreover, later cohorts of grandparents have become increasingly diverse in race/ethnicity and nativity. Grandparents from minority and migrated families may face a higher level of demands for grandchild care. For instance, there are higher risks for African American families to have the middle parent generation absent or unable to fulfill parents' role due to drug abuse, alcohol addiction, incarceration, marital dissolution, and physical or mental health problems. In this situation, the custodial grandparents act as surrogate parents, becoming the "child saver" in the family (Timonen & Arber, 2012). Many Hispanic families have an immigration history. For them, coresidence among three generations is common and practical. The help from grandparents with childcare enables parents to work outside the home. Out of these various reasons, when family demands arose for alternative types of childcare, grandparents may response by devoting more time to caregiving and/or living together with grandchildren.

On the other hand, the availability of childcare from grandparents also differs by cohorts. As a consequence of the demographic transition, grandparents from later cohorts have fewer grandchildren competing for their time and resources (Uhlenberg, 2004). Therefore, each grandchild potentially receives more attention and care from their grandparents. Prolonged total

life expectancy and a greater proportion of life without disability allow a longer period of healthy grandparenthood (Margolis & Wright, 2017), therefore grandparents from later cohorts may be more able to provide care for grandchildren. The economic well-being of grandparents has also been improved immensely over time. Grandparents from younger cohorts, on average, receive longer years of education, earn higher incomes, and retire at an older age. Higher socioeconomic status is associated with the ability and willingness of grandparents to exercise their agency in grandparent-grandchild relationships (Timonen & Doyle, 2012). They are also capable to provide more and better care to their grandchildren compared to poorer grandparents whose provision of care for grandchildren could be hindered by financial problems. However, grandparents in later cohorts work longer over the life course. Although they are more resourceful, they could face competing demands from work and caregiving for grandchildren in old age. As people from later cohorts emphasize more on individualism and independence, they may also prefer personal leisure time to intensive caregiving for grandchildren. In addition, increasing marital instability and complex marriage history among grandparents from later cohorts could also have a negative impact on their involvement in grandparent caregiving.

Finally, attention needs to be paid to racial/ethnic differences. The grandparent population has become increasingly diverse in race/ethnicity over the history. The proportion of minority grandparents is the smallest among *the swing generation* grandparents. This proportion has increased substantially among *the baby boomers*, resulting in white grandparents represent only half of all grandparents. Widely held by grandparents in minority families is the cultural tradition of familism that family members have to stay close and provide mutual support in times of need, and grandparents are usually the kin keepers who help to raise their grandchildren by disciplining and caregiving. Existing studies have documented that African American

grandparents are more likely to head skipped-generation households with their grandchildren, while Hispanic grandparents are more apt to coparent with parents in multigenerational households (Burton & Dilworth-Anderson, 1991; Chen, Mair, Bao, & Yang, 2015; Saluter, 1996). What drives minority grandparents to live with and care for their grandchildren are not only family demands, but more importantly, normative expectations and values. The effect of grandparents' availability could be relatively smaller. On the other hand, cohort differences in grandparents' caregiving could be most salient among non-Hispanic white grandparents and the explanatory power of family demands and grandparents' availability could be the strongest for them.

Method

Data

We use eight waves of the Health and Retirement Study (HRS 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012), a nationally representative large-scale longitudinal survey of older adults aged 50 and over in the United States (Servais, 2010). We restrict our sample to grandparents born between 1900 and 1964 who have been a respondent in at least one of the eight waves. This leads to a sample size of 21,991 grandparents, generating 84,820 person-period observations over eight waves. Table 1 presents the three birth cohorts that we identified among the current U.S. older population and their age in our HRS analytical sample.

Table 1. Respondents' Age at HRS Waves by Cohort, HRS 1998-2012

Birth Cohort	Birth Year	Age							
		1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012
The swing generation	1900-1927	71-98	73-99	75-101	77-103	79-105	81-107	83-109	85-103
The silent generation	1928-1945	53-70	55-72	57-74	59-76	61-78	63-80	65-82	67-84
The baby boomers	1946-1964	50-52	50-54	50-56	50-58	50-60	50-62	50-64	50-66

Measures

Dependent variables. We measure grandparents' caregiving by hours of care they provided to their grandchildren and grandparents' residence status. There are two typical arrangements for grandparents caring for grandchildren. One is custodial grandparents in skipped generation households and the other is coparenting grandparents in multigenerational households. Table 2 presents the distribution of these two variables by cohort, which descriptively shows cohort differences. Grandparents from later cohorts tend to provide more care to their grandchildren, as evidenced by longer hours of caregiving and a higher proportion of coresidence with grandchildren.

Table 2. Caregiving Hours and Household Residence Among Grandparents by Cohort, HRS 1998-2012

	The swing generation	The silent generation	The baby boomers
Grandparent caregiving			
% Caring 0-99 hr/2years	94.75	80.50	74.50
% Caring 100-499 hr/2years	3.11	10.78	13.63
% Caring 500+ hr/2years	2.14	8.72	11.87
Grandparent residence			
% No grandchild in household	96.79	94.06	90.32
% Multigenerational household	2.74	4.44	7.78
% Skipped generation household	0.47	1.49	1.91
N	18,935	48,582	17,303

Focal Independent variables. To explain cohort differences in grandparents' caregiving, we test two mediating effects respectively from family demands and grandparents' availability. Family demands are measured by parents' socioeconomic status and marital experiences. Grandparents' availability is measured by number of grandchildren, grandparents' economic resources, work status, health status, as well as current marital status and experiences. Table 3 presents descriptive statistics by cohort for focal independent and control variables. Family demands are higher for *the silent generation* grandparents because the proportion of their

children who experienced marital disruption is substantially higher than that for grandparents from other cohorts. *The baby boom* grandparents could be more available than grandparents from other cohorts because they have fewer children to attend to, receive higher incomes, and are healthy. Grandparents from younger cohorts could also be less available due to a higher percentage of still working and of having marital disruption.

Controls. We control for grandparents' age, gender, race/ethnicity, and foreign-born status.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics by Cohort for Independent and Control Variables, HRS 1998-2012

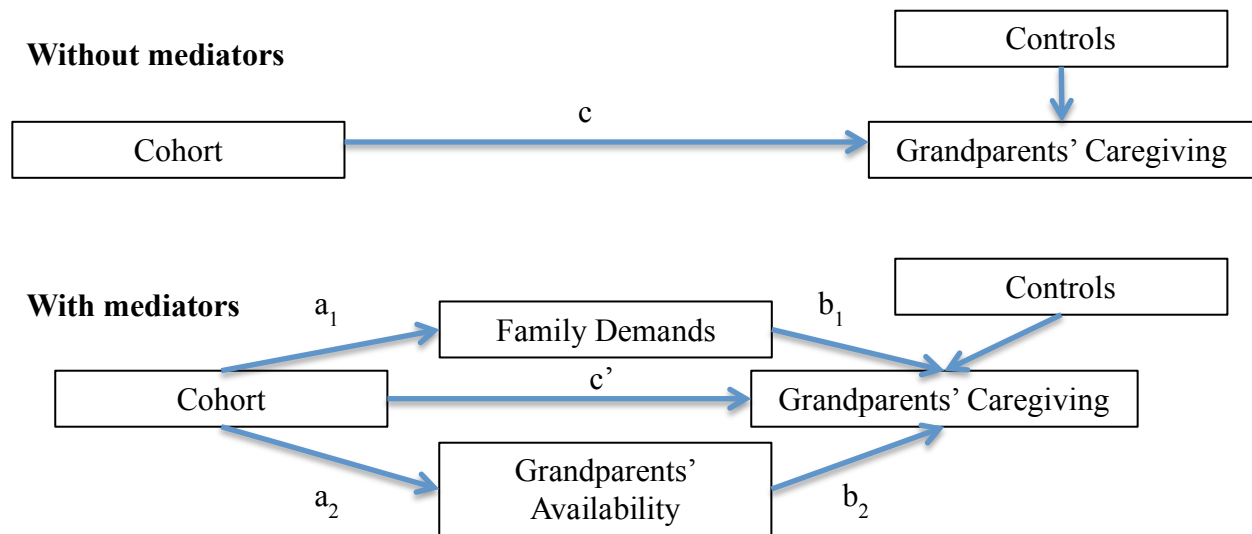
	The swing generation	The silent generation	The baby boomers
Family demands			
Middle-generation's average education (years)	13.94	13.94	13.43
% Middle-generation had marital disruption (yes = 1, no = 0)	22.61	32.13	14.85
Grandparents' availability			
Average number of grandchildren	7.14	6.62	4.93
Education (years)	11.33	12.15	12.46
Income (thousands)	32.37	55.04	72.37
Net wealth (thousands)	137.91	126.29	48.00
% Has long-term care insurance (yes = 1, no = 0)	99.41	90.59	66.03
% Currently receiving pension (yes = 1, no = 0)	39.67	30.58	7.12
% Currently working for pay (yes = 1, no = 0)	6.86	31.19	63.37
Self-reported health			
% Vary good	27.11	37.88	38.87
% Good	31.27	31.78	29.81
% Fair	26.97	20.37	21.97
% Poor	14.65	9.97	9.36
Current marital status			
% Married/partnered	48.31	71.40	72.26
% Divorced/separated	4.80	11.43	18.27
% Widowed	46.57	16.35	5.75
% Never married	0.33	0.82	3.71
% Have intact marriage (yes = 1, no = 0)	74.09	66.32	55.61
% Ever divorced (yes = 1, no = 0)	9.76	34.89	48.84
% Ever remarried (yes = 1, no = 0)	25.53	32.73	39.74
Controls			

Average age	82.42	68.44	56.75
% Female (yes = 1, no = 0)	58.24	55.19	58.55
Race/ethnicity			
% White (non-Hisp.)	82.13	73.83	50.82
% Black (non-Hisp.)	9.76	14.97	25.95
% Hispanic	6.54	9.20	19.73
% Other (non-Hisp.)	1.57	2.00	3.50
% Foreign-born (yes = 1, no = 0)	8.98	10.03	16.78
N	18,935	48,582	17,303

Analytic Strategy

In this study, we first analyze cohort differences in grandparents' caregiving and identify underlying mechanisms to explain these differences by testing the mediating effects. This involves several steps. First, we will examine the model without mediators to obtain the coefficient for cohort (c) (see Figure 1). Then, we will run the models with the mediators regressed on cohort to obtain the effect of cohort on family demands (a_1) and on grandparents' availability (a_2). Finally, we will test the model with grandparents' caregiving regressed on the mediators (demands and availability) and cohort to obtain the coefficient for family demands (b_1), grandparents' availability (b_2), and cohort (c'). We will compare c and c' to see whether the effect of cohort on grandparents' caregiving shrinks upon the addition of the mediators. We will further estimate the amount and significance of the mediating effects by using STATA command *sgmediation* to perform the Sobel-Goodman mediation test. We will use STATA command *nlcom* to compute the ratio of indirect effect (from the two mediators) to direct effect (from cohort). Then, we stratify the sample into non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic black, and Hispanic subsamples and examine whether cohort changes in grandparents' caregiving and the mediating effects of demands and availability differ by race/ethnicity.

Figure 1. Models for Mediating Effects through Family Demands and Grandparents' Availability



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