

“Who Cares Best for the Child?” Grandmothers’ Interactions with Mothers in Childcare

“Çocuğa En İyi Kim Bakar?” Çocuk Bakımında Büyükkannelerin Annelerle Etkileşimleri

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Highlights

- This qualitative study focuses on grandmothers’ experiences of their interactions with mothers regarding childcare responsibilities.
- Intergenerational differences in childrearing practices played a role in grandmothers’ experiences of grandchild care; yet there were three different scenarios within which these differences were dealt with.
- The findings of this study showed that intergenerational coparenting involves negotiations and conflicts regarding what is best for the child.

Abstract: Childcare is regarded as a family business in Turkey, especially due to the lack of public services and the political discourses around ‘familialism.’ Childcare responsibilities create a major obstacle for women, resulting in very low female economic participation in the country. In this context, grandmothers are usually asked to step into the role of caregiver for their grandchildren to support their daughters’ and daughters-in-law’s participation in the workforce. Yet, contemporary mothers have a drastically different approach to childrearing compared to their own mothers or mothers-in-law. This study explores how these intergenerational differences in childrearing ideals and practices play into the childcare experiences by examining qualitative data derived from in-depth semi-structured interviews with 20 older grandmothers who were caring for their grandchildren under the age of six. The findings revealed that the grandmother-mother interactions on childcare tasks and childrearing methods fall into three categories: mothers knowing best, complete trust in grandmothers, and conflictual relationships. This study shows how intergenerational differences regarding childrearing can create conflict between mothers and grandmothers and thus complicating childcare arrangements. Therefore, social policies should consider that childcare arrangements involve multiple actors with potentially different ideas about what is best for the child’s well-being.

Keywords: Grandchild Care, Intergenerational Coparenting, Grandmother-Mother Interactions, Childrearing.

Öne Çıkanlar

- Bu nitel çalışma, büyükkannenin çocuk bakımı sorumlulukları konusunda annelerle olan etkileşimlerine ilişkin deneyimlerine odaklanmaktadır.

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- Çocuk yetiştirme uygulamalarına ilişkin kuşaklararası farklılıklar, büyükannelerin torun bakımı deneyimlerinde rol oynamıştır; ancak bu farklılıkların ele alındığı üç farklı senaryo söz konusudur.
- Bu çalışmanın bulguları, kuşaklararası ortak ebeveynliğin çocuk için neyin en iyi olduğuna ilişkin müzakereleri ve çatışmaları içerdiğini göstermiştir.

Öz: Türkiye’de çocuk bakımı, özellikle kamu hizmetlerinin eksikliği ve “ailecilik” temelli siyasi söylemler sonucu bir aile işi olarak görülmektedir. Çocuk bakımı sorumlulukları kadınlar için büyük bir engel oluşturmakta ve ülkede kadınların ekonomiye katılımının çok düşük olmasına neden olmaktadır. Bu bağlamda kızlarının ve gelinlerinin iş gücüne katılımını desteklemek için genellikle büyükannelerden torunlarının bakımını üstlenmeleri beklenir. Ancak günümüz annelerinin çocuk yetiştirme konusunda kendi anneleri veya kayınvalidelerinden çok farklı bir yaklaşıma sahip olması söz konusudur. Bu çalışma, çocuk yetiştirme idealleri ve uygulamalarındaki kuşaklararası farklılıkların, Türkiye’deki çocuk bakımı deneyimlerini nasıl etkilediğini, altı yaşın altı torunlarına bakan 20 yaşlı büyükanneyle yapılan derinlemesine yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelerden elde edilen nitel veriler üzerinden araştırmaktadır. Çalışmanın bulguları, çocuk bakımı görevleri ve çocuk yetiştirme yöntemleri konusuna dair büyükanneler ve anneler arasındaki etkileşimlerin üç kategoriye ayrıldığını ortaya çıkarmıştır: annelerin en iyisini bilmesi, büyükannelere tam güven ve çatışmalı ilişkiler. Bu çalışma, çocuk yetiştirmeyle ilgili kuşaklararası farklılıkların anneler ve büyükanneler arasında nasıl çatışma yaratabileceğini ve dolayısıyla çocuk bakımı düzenlemelerini nasıl karmaşık hale getirebileceğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu nedenle sosyal politikalar, çocuk bakımının çocuğun refahı için neyin en iyi olduğu konusunda farklı fikirlere sahip birden fazla aktörü içerdiğini dikkate alınmalıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Torun Bakımı, Kuşaklararası Ebeveynlik, Büyükanne-Anne Etkileşimi, Çocuk Yetiştirme

Genişletilmiş Özet

COVID-19 pandemisi “kadınların görünmez ve karşılıksız bakım emeğinin” ekonomi için hayati önem taşıdığını daha da belirgin hale getirmiştir (Cantillon vd., 2019: 187). Bu bağlamda ebeveynlerinin çalışması gerektiğinde torunlarına bakmak için büyükanneler devreye girmişlerdir (Con Wright, 2022). Bu anlamda “cinsiyete dayalı bakım ekonomisinin” önemli bir oranda yükünü yaşlanan büyükanneler taşımıştır (Birchall ve Holt, 2023). Ancak torun bakımının sosyal politika bağlamıyla ilişkili olduğunu gösteren çalışmalar mevcuttur (Bordone vd., 2017; Di Gessa vd., 2016). Bordone vd. (2017), “varsayılan aileciliğin” (default familialism) kuvvetli olduğu ülkelerde büyük ebeveynlerin torun bakımını sürekli olarak üstlenme durumunun daha yaygın olduğunu göstermiştir.

Türkiye’de çocuk bakımı, özellikle uygun maliyetli ve erişilebilir kamu hizmetlerinin azlığı ve birçok farklı bakım sunumunda “ailecilik” ilkesinin baskınlığı sebebiyle aile sorumluluğunda görülmektedir (Akkan, 2018; Aybars vd., 2018; Özataş Gelmez, 2015). Türkiye Aile Yapısı

Araştırması'na (TÜİK, 2021) göre, çocuk bakımına dair sorumluluklar hanelerin çoğunda anne veya büyükanne tarafından yürütülmektedir. Aile ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı, 2017 yılında Türkiye'de büyükannelerin çocuk bakımı düzenlemelerinde oynadığı role daha fazla dikkat çekmek adına “Büyükanne Projesi”ni başlatmıştır (ASHB, 2017). Bu projeyle, anneleri özel sektörde çalışan üç yaş altı torunlarına bakan büyükannelere nakdi yardım imkânı sağlanmaya başlanmıştır.

Büyükannelerin çocuk bakımına katılımı, rol ve sorumlulukların dağılımı konusunda müzakereleri gerektirdiğinden çocuğun annesi ile büyükanne arasındaki ilişkiyi de etkiler (Tracy vd., 2022; Zegers ve Reynolds, 2022). Kuşaklararası ortak ebeveynlik, iş bölümünün yanı sıra güç ilişkilerini, müzakereleri ve çatışmaları da içermektedir (Akçay vd., 2024; Bai vd., 2023). Torun bakımında kuşaklararası ortak ebeveynlik daha yaygın hale geldikçe anne, baba ve büyükanne(ler) arasında rol ve sorumlulukların nasıl paylaştırılacağı konusunda daha fazla müzakereye ihtiyaç duyulmaktadır. Çocuk yetiştirme yöntemleri, tıp çevrelerinde ve medya platformlarında dolaşan yeni ve daha bilimsel yöntemler ile sürekli olarak değişmektedir. Bu yeni çocuk yetiştirme uygulamalarının geleneksel uygulamalarla çatışması muhtemeldir. Bu durum da büyükanneler ve anneler arasında çocuk için en iyisinin ne olduğu konusunda anlaşmazlıklara yol açmaktadır. Kimi araştırmalar, Türkiye'de kuşaklararası çocuk yetiştirme pratik ve yaklaşımlarında hem uyumun hem de farklılığın olduğunu göstermektedir (Akçay vd., 2024; Sengul vd., 2023).

Bu çalışma, büyükanneler ve anneler arasındaki kuşaklararası ortak ebeveynliğe odaklanmaktadır. Daha spesifik olarak kuşaklararası çocuk yetiştirme yaklaşımlarının ve uygulamalarının ne ölçüde farklılaştığını ve bunun büyükannelerin çocuk bakımı deneyimlerini nasıl etkilediğini incelemektedir. Bunun için, 60 yaş üstü 20 büyükanne ile gerçekleştirilen derinlemesine yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelerden nitel veriler elde edilmiştir. Bu çalışmada annesi çalışmakta olan 6 yaş altı torunlarından en az birinin bakımıyla aktif olarak ilgilenen büyükannelere odaklanılmaktadır.

Nitel analizler kuşaklararası ortak ebeveynliğin gerçekleştiği üç farklı senaryoyu ortaya çıkarmıştır. Birinci senaryoda büyükanneler, annelerinin çocuğun bakımına dair kararlarına saygı duymuştur, dolayısıyla kendilerinden istenilen her şeyi yapmıştır. İkincisi, bazı deneyimli büyükanneler daha önce başka torunlara bakmış olduğundan, anneler onların çocuk yetiştirme becerilerine tamamen güvenmiştir. Son olarak anneler ve büyükanneler arasında, ya annenin çocuğunun bakımı üzerinde tam kontrole sahip olması ya da büyükannelerin annelerin çocuk yetiştirme uygulamalarını eleştirmesi nedeniyle bazı çatışmalı ilişkiler söz konusudur. Bu çalışmanın bulguları, çocuk yetiştirmeyle ilgili kuşaklararası farklılıkların büyükanne ve anne

arasındaki iletişimi de etkilediğini göstermektedir. Dolayısıyla çocuk bakımına yönelik sosyal politikalar, çocuğun refahı için neyin iyi olduğu konusunda farklı fikir ve yaklaşımlara sahip olabilecek aktörlerin etkileşimlerini dikkate almalıdır.

Introduction

Despite the ageist depictions of later life as one of dependence and inactive lifestyle, many older women continue to contribute to their family and society, one example being their involvement in the care of their grandchildren. They act as the primary caretakers for younger children, either through custodial grandparenting or in assisting young parents in childcare. This becomes more prevalent as grandparents enjoy longer, healthier lives, which allows them to actively participate in the lives of their children and grandchildren (Margolis & Wright, 2017). Assistive regular childcare is also a type of parental support for adult children, which serves as a strong predictor of future care received from adult children (Bui et al., 2022), therefore, it is considered indicative of intergenerational solidarity.

The COVID-19 pandemic made it more evident that “the invisible and unpaid care labor of women” is crucial for the economy (Cantillon et al., 2019: 187). In this context, it was again grandmothers who stepped in to take care for their grandchildren when their parents had to work (Con Wright, 2022). As such, they bear the burden of the ‘gendered care economy’ (Birchall & Holt, 2023). Grandparental support in childcare can stem from a variety of factors, including strong family values, the needs and demands of the adult child who has just become a parent, or a lack of welfare policies on affordable and accessible childcare services (Bai et al., 2023). Grandmothers usually assume the role of caregiver for their grandchildren to support their daughters’ and daughters-in-law’s participation in the workforce (Kanji, 2018; Lee & Bauer, 2013; Qi, 2018). Yet, the need for grandparental support in childcare has been demonstrated to be linked to the policy context (Bordone et al., 2017; Di Gessa et al., 2016). Bordone et al. (2017) have shown that in countries close to the ‘default familialism,’ grandparents are more likely to provide daily childcare.

Childcare is seen as a family business in Turkey, particularly due to the lack of affordable and accessible public services, and the overarching principle of ‘familialism’ in many different forms of care provision (Akkan, 2018; Aybars et al., 2018; Özataş Gelmez, 2015). According to the Turkish Family Structure Survey (Turkstat, 2021), childcare tasks were carried out by a woman in the household, who could be a mother or a grandmother. The Ministry of Family and Social Services launched the “Grandmother Project” in 2017, which brought more attention to the role of grandmothers in childcare arrangements in Turkey (ASHB, 2017). The project introduced cash benefits to grandmothers caring for grandchildren under the age of three, whose mothers work in

the private sector. Studies in Turkey have focused on the reasons for grandmother's childcare assistance (Can, 2019; Con Wright, 2022; Demirkol, 2022) and the implications of becoming a grandmother for older women (Taşkın & Akçay, 2019; Tunca & Durmuş, 2019; Uğur, 2018a). Several other studies have examined how childrearing practices compare across generations, from the perspective of grandmothers (Uğur, 2018b), from the perspective of mothers (Akçay et al., 2024), or from both perspectives (Alabay & Ersan, 2022; Sengul et al., 2023).

Grandmothers' engagement in childcare influences the relationship between the adult child and their mother, as it necessitates negotiations over the allocation of roles and responsibilities (Tracy et al., 2022; Zegers & Reynolds, 2022). Intergenerational coparenting involves a division of labor as well as power relations, negotiations, and conflicts (Akçay et al., 2024; Bai et al., 2023). As intergenerational arrangements for childcare and intergenerational coparenting become much more common than before, there is a need for more negotiation about the division of roles and responsibilities among mother, father, and grandmother(s). Studies show that early parenting practices, such as feeding the child, were significantly influenced by grandmothers (Bektaş et al., 2022; Reid et al., 2020; Sengul et al., 2023). Childrearing methods are constantly changing, with new and more scientific ones circulating in medical circles and media platforms. These new childrearing practices are likely to clash with traditional ones, leading to disagreements between grandmothers and mothers about what is best for the child. Recent research indicates both alignment and divergence in intergenerational childrearing styles in Turkey (Akçay et al., 2024; Sengul et al., 2023).

This study focuses on intergenerational coparenting between grandmothers and mothers of young children. More specifically, it examines the extent to which intergenerational childrearing approaches and practices diverge or align, and how this influences grandmothers' childcare experiences. To address these questions, qualitative data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with 20 grandmothers over the age of 60 who were actively engaged in the care of at least one of their grandchildren. This study aims to provide a better understanding of how childcare arrangements include multiple actors, which may require constant negotiations and involve power dynamics.

Methods

In the original study, a qualitative method was employed to examine grandmothers' motivations and reasons for (or not) becoming involved in their grandchildren's care, their experiences related to caregiving, and their relationships with their adult children. Using in-depth semi-structured interviews allowed gathering more detailed and personal accounts of these

women's experiences from their own perspectives. Based on the principles of qualitative methods, this study was designed in a way to acknowledge the participants' subjective evaluation of their own experiences, to value their agency and strive for authenticity (Dallimore, 2004). To seek rigorous research, every step from designing the qualitative interview protocol to data analysis was handled in a systematic manner. The researcher acknowledged her active role in shaping each research process, yet also made effort to avoid introducing personal bias. There has been an understanding that qualitative research should not be judged by the principles of quantitative research. Yet, there is also an ongoing debate on how qualitative research should be evaluated. This study follows the five indicators of effective qualitative research – cognitive empathy, heterogeneity, palpability, follow-up, and self-awareness – as outlined by Small and Calarco (2022).

For this study, the respondents were selected on the basis of four criteria. First, grandmothers aged 60 and over were targeted as the original study aimed to explore older women's experiences of caring for their grandchildren. The experience of caring for grandchildren was expected to be different for women in earlier and later life. In addition, grandmothers with at least one grandchild under the age of 6 were targeted because it was determined that younger children would have greater care needs, which would shape grandmothers' decisions about whether or not to get involved. Second, it was necessary for the mother(s) of the grandchild(ren) to actively participate in the workforce, even if they were on maternal leave. This is a criterion indented to investigate the extent to which grandmothers might assist with childcare because of the mother's job. Third, the sample was limited to grandparents whose grandkids were living in Istanbul or Ankara. The purpose of limiting the study to these two major Turkish cities is to determine how much the expenses of daycare, crèches, pre-schools, and/or nannies affect grandparents' involvement in childcare. Both the grandmothers who provided actively care to their grandchildren and those who did not were included in this original sample.

Data Collection

A mix of purposive and snowball sampling methods were employed for this study. Initially, close friends and family were enlisted to inform qualified participants about the study. Afterwards, each participant was asked to spread the word about the study, which led to the recruitment of more grandmothers. Depending on the respondents' preferences, in-depth interviews were conducted via phone or WhatsApp between June and September of 2021. Due to the continued risk of new coronavirus infections and still low levels of vaccination in Turkey during the study period, in-person interviews were not conducted. Participants were offered a choice for which

medium to use for the interview. Most chose WhatsApp for the interview because they were already using this app during the pandemic to interact with their family members and close circles. Therefore, they were familiar and comfortable with the platform. The rest chose a phone call. There were no problems during the interview process because all the participants' needs, such as scheduling the time of the interview and taking breaks, were carefully considered. The only technological problem encountered was with the recording which could not fully capture some of the participants' words because they talked softly.

My identity as a young woman researcher also made the interviewing process easier. Grandmothers felt comfortable in terms of sharing their experiences of caring for their grandchildren with me because they considered me as close to the same age as their own daughters or daughters-in-law. They were also more than happy to talk about their own grandchildren which, they said gave them great pleasure. They also expressed that the interviews provided them with a much-needed, albeit short-lived, opportunity to interact with someone outside of their close circle during the pandemic. Therefore, the whole interview experience was much smoother than expected, with no serious difficulties.

Ethical Considerations

Interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes, and with the respondents' consent, they were digitally recorded. Before the interview started, respondents were fully briefed about the study and provided their consent verbally. They were informed that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could stop or skip a question at any time without having to provide justification. They were also assured that the information they provided would be completely anonymous, and any quotation used from them would be assigned a pseudonym. Last, they were guaranteed that their data would be kept confidential and stored in a secure place only accessible to the researcher. Once transcribed, the original recordings would be deleted to ensure their data privacy. This study received approval from the ethical committee of TED University.

Analytical Sample

Data for this study was collected as part of the "Grandmotherhood and Grandchild Care Experiences in Later Life" project to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted experiences of grandmotherhood. For this project, in-depth interviews were conducted with grandmothers who were either actively providing grandchild care or not, a total of 35 grandmothers. The interview protocol was designed to include four subsections exploring a range of complementing but different mechanisms: (a) grandmothers' relationships with adult children and adult children-in law, (b) their perceptions of grandmotherhood, (c) their reasons for being

(un)involved in grandchild care, and (d) the dynamics of grandchild care involving grandmothers' interactions with adult children, adult children-in laws, in-laws, and grandchild(ren). In a previous publication, I analyzed data to examine the specific causes that lead to grandmothers being involved or not involved in grandchild care, which involved the complete sample of 35 grandmothers.

The current study focuses specifically on the dynamics of grandchild care, including the interactions between generations. To examine how intergenerational differences in childrearing ideals and practices play into the grandchild care experiences, I focused only on those grandmothers who were actively involved in the care of at least one of their grandchildren. These grandmothers provided grandchild care for their grandchildren because of the employment status of the child's mother. The mothers of grandchildren in this study were all in full time. employment, although some were more recently on a maternity leave or in transition due to the pandemic. They were in general either as educated as their mother or mother-in-law, and in most cases more educated than them. Given the length and breadth of detail provided in these interviews, the final sample was determined to be 20 grandmothers, at which point the main themes began to recur. The data were assessed to be rich enough, given the sufficient diversity of the respondents based on the inclusion criteria of the study, to meet the requirements of sufficient data saturation (Akçay & Koca, 2024; Saunders et al., 2018).

Six grandmothers in this study were living in Istanbul, thirteen were residing in Ankara, and one was going back and forth between Istanbul and Ankara. Grandmothers were between 60 and 73 years old. In general, they had two children, with a few exceptions of those who had one or three adult children. At the time of the interview, thirteen were married, five were widowed, and two were divorced. The educational level of the grandmothers varied greatly: Two of them had only primary school, two had a middle school education, eight had a high school degree, three had an associate degree, and five had a bachelor's degree. Fourteen grandmothers were retired and not working, one was retired but still working, one was a homemaker but paid for her retirement, and four were homemakers and never worked. The number of grandchildren each grandmother had varied, with most having one or two but some having up to five grandchildren. Table 1 shows the demographic information on the respondents.

Table 1.
Demographic Information on the Respondents

Pseudonyms	City	Age	Marital Status	Education Level	Working status	# of kids	# of grandkids
Emel*	İstanbul	67	Married	High school	Retired	2	4
Binnur	İstanbul	67	Widowed	High school dropout/Middle school	Retired	2	1
Sevgi	İstanbul	66	Married	Primary school	Retired	2	1
Zeynep	İstanbul -Ankara	65	Widowed	College	Retired	1	1
Bilgin	Ankara	65	Married	High school	Housemaker	3	5
Safiye	Ankara	69	Widowed	Associate degree	Retired	3	4
Nazile	Ankara	63	Widowed	Middle school	Retired	2	1
Nuray*	Ankara	62	Married	High school	Retired	2	1
Atiye	Ankara	73	Widowed	Middle school dropout/ Primary school	Housemaker	2	4
Aysima	Ankara	65	Married	Associate degree	Retired	2	3
Necla	Ankara	60	Married	High school	Housemaker / Never worked	2	2
Özlem	Ankara	63	Divorced	High school	Retired housemaker	2	4
Özden*	Ankara	61	Married	College dropout / High school	Housemaker / Never worked	2	3
Funda	Ankara	62	Married	High school	Retired	3	2
Mine	Ankara	65	Married	College	Retired	2	2
Perihan*	İstanbul	60	Married	College	Retired	2	1
Nurdan	Ankara	67	Married	College	Retired	2	2
Feyza	İstanbul	66	Married	College	Retired but still working	2	1
Ayşegül	Ankara	62	Married	Associate degree	Retired	2	1
Sibel	İstanbul	62	Divorced	High school	Retired	2	1

* Indicates grandmothers who took care of their sons' children, all others cared for their daughters' children.

Analysis

For this paper, a reflexive thematic analysis was manually conducted on the data of grandmothers' interactions with mothers regarding childcare roles and responsibilities (Braun & Clarke, 2021). To do so, first I thoroughly read all transcripts, then began with open coding and created a list of themes based on grandmothers' reports on childrearing practices and any directives they received from the mothers. The following themes emerged from this coding process: respect for mothers' authority, trust in grandmothers, negotiations and conflicts. Following the identification of themes, I created a typology of intergenerational co-parenting interactions by examining the similarities and dissimilarities between the cases. Creating typologies through the analysis of qualitative data is a common practice in both sociology and psychology (Stapley et al., 2022). In this sense, the interactions between grandmothers and mothers regarding childcare were presented in three categories: mothers knowing best, complete trust in grandmothers, and

conflictual relationships. These categories are by no means exclusive and serve as ideal types, and exemplary cases are presented to illustrate each category. All direct quotations were translated into English by the author, whose mother tongue is Turkish and who is fluent in English. Pseudonyms were used for quotations.

Findings

Analyses revealed a variety of care arrangements in which grandmothers had different roles. For instance, in some cases, the participant was the sole carer of her grandchildren. In other case, the participant, a nanny and the other grandmother were involved in childcare to varying degrees. The grandmothers also differed in their level of experience in grandchild care. Thirteen of them were new grandmothers, looking after their first grandchild, while seven were more experienced, having looked after previous grandchildren. There were sixteen maternal grandmothers, and only four paternal grandmothers. In three cases, grandmothers were caring for more than one grandchild simultaneously. The COVID-19 pandemic further complicated the situation, as several grandmothers felt compelled to step in since the adult children did not want a nanny in the house, or the daycare was closed.

Mothers know best

The first group was consisted of of seven grandmothers who expressed full respect for the agency of mothers to determine what is best for their children. These grandmothers were predominantly first-time grandmothers, and their daughters or daughters-in-law had advanced degrees, including PhDs.

Binnur (67, widowed), who was solely caring for her only grandchild, 3.5-year-old son of her daughter, indicated that she saw herself as a supportive figure because it was the parents' responsibility to make important decisions about the child. Similarly, another first-time grandmother Ayşegül (62, married), who was caring for her daughter's 3-year-old daughter, stated that she had high respect for her daughter's decision to raise her child the way she wished. She mentioned some intergenerational disparities in childrearing approaches, but added:

My daughter and I were in agreement. So, I was doing whatever my daughter said. If my daughter asked me to feed her this, I would feed it to her. I don't like saying, "No, I am older, why would this be needed, things were not like this in our time." Our time is our time, now is not our time. She raises her child the way she wants to raise her. Of course, she was telling me what to feed, what to do, and whatever she saw fit in a situation. Most of the time she was also telling me, "Mom, you raised two children, you know the best anyway." I was telling her, "Okay, baby, I raised them. But

I also wonder if your time and our time are the same. Everyone's opinion is different.” That's what I was telling my child. Mothers need to be respected. I cannot dictate what I know.

Grandmothers' recognition and acceptance of mothers knowing what is best for their own child was evident in Perihan's (60, married) account below as well. She was taking care of her son's 4-month-old son, her first and only grandchild. She stated that she was following her daughter-in-law's decisions even though she was herself a nurse with some expertise.

We haven't switched to a different food yet; we only give formula. That's why we don't have any negotiations [regarding food]. But I still always ask her mother what needs to be done. Because no matter that I am a nurse, mother is mother. The mother of every child, I think the mother should first decide on its upbringing. In everything, the mother's decision comes first. The mother is also a sensible person, so we want her to decide first, and we will follow her.

These grandmothers trusted the childrearing approach of their daughters and daughters-in-law, which resulted in following their decisions and instructions without dictating their own. In some other cases, grandmothers mentioned either negotiations with their daughters that resulted in a compromise or applying some of their own approach by prioritizing the mother's.

For instance, Zeynep (65, widowed), who was caring for her daughter's 9-month-old son, described numerous negotiations with her daughter about what was best for the child. As a first-time grandmother, she emphasized the importance of these conversations, which occasionally resulted in disagreements, but they always found a middle ground. She said:

Of course, everyone can make changes, let's do this, let's do that. We are talking about these. You know, it would be better if we did it like this, or what they asked me, what I asked them was how should we do it, how should we move, for example, should we put him in the stroller and take him that way, or how should we do it? There may be seating arrangements in the car, transportation arrangements, or other things where we support or disagree with each other. It doesn't happen in the form of a huge debate; we try to find the most logical way.

Another first-time grandmother, Nurdan (67, married), who was caring for her daughter's 2-year-old twin boys, stated that her daughter had specific opinions and preferences as a result of a plethora of information on childrearing available through doctor recommendations and books. However, she also indicated that she used her experience of raising two children of her own to guide her grandchild care. Despite this, she typically accepted her daughter's requests because she was the mother.

She said that they talked to his doctor, about what she read, and that's how they wanted it to be done. But let me tell you, with the experience of raising two children, I also added some things

myself. The food issue was entirely my choice. But my daughter also made suggestions about some things such as food, which food to give, baby's bottle selection and even bottle brand. I did exactly what she suggested. In no way did I say, "let's do it this way or not like this." After all, she is the mother, they are her children. I always followed her wishes. But I did what I knew on the points that she did not say anything.

Mine (65, married) noted that because doctors now provide more detailed recommendations and there is so much information on the internet, therefore, she listened to her daughter but also did what she believed was correct on occasion. These reports suggested that these grandmothers respected the mothers' decisions, not just because they were mothers, but also because today's mothers were well-informed about better childrearing practices.

Complete trust in grandmother

The second group of seven grandmothers reported being in full command over the childrearing responsibilities because their children accepted their capabilities in childcare based on previous experiences or occupation. Therefore, they made no mention of receiving directives from their children or negotiations with them, but rather expressed children's complete trust in their caring.

Bilgin (65, married), who was caring for her youngest daughter's 1.5-year-old son, started with how her daughters trusted her. This trust stemmed from the fact that she was an experienced grandmother who took care of her previous grandchildren as well. She did, however, mention that she read books to stay up to date on current childrearing approaches.

They already trusted me a lot. They say, "Mom, you are experienced, you know everything, how many grandchildren have you raised?" Also, I like reading things like this, reading books about children. I'm reading those books too. I'm already trying to implement them, it's not possible to raise a child like in the books. Each child has their own book. (...) I mean, they don't interfere much, to be honest, it's good that they don't interfere. If they were constantly fussing over me, I would have a harder time. You know, "Don't do this, don't do that, you did wrong, you fed him wrong, why did you give him this?" I don't know, it would probably be very bad if they said that. That would be difficult.

Bilgin acknowledged how easy it was for her because her children did not interfere with her care, which signified that coparenting was a challenging task. Aysima (65, married), who was caring for her daughter's 2.5-year-old son, was similarly left completely in charge, receiving with no requests from her children because she was an experienced grandmother and retired teacher.

Her daughter and son-in-law were simply grateful because she stepped in during the pandemic when the nanny had to stop coming.

No, so far, they have not made any requests because they know that I take very good care of him. That's why they didn't do or say much. They always go home thanking me. So, of course, I do everything I can.

Another experienced grandmother, Necla (60, married) accepted entire responsibility for her daughter's 2.5-year-old son and reported that her daughter and son-in-law had complete trust in her caregiving; thus, they made no demands nor gave directives. Like Aysima, she said she had no alternative because the pandemic had prevented her daughter from hiring a nanny. These two examples indicate that, in addition to trusting experienced grandmothers, the lack of other options may have reduced daughters' ability to negotiate their mothers' tasks and childrearing approaches.

However, just because grandmothers had entire control over childcare responsibilities and received complete trust from their children did not mean that they were comfortable applying their own approaches to their grandchildren's upbringing. Funda (62, married) was a 'super carer' who was caring for older daughter's 3-year-old son, her younger daughter's 3-year-old daughter, and her own sick older father prior to his death all at the same time. She remarked that raising grandchildren was different than raising your own children since she could not do everything she did with her own children because she felt responsible to the child's parents.

If it were my own child, I would take the child by the hand and take him out. But when you become a grandmother, you say, "Oh, something might happen to you." It becomes a responsibility, I say, "What will I say to their parents?" For example, I couldn't do some of the things I had done with my children. The things I had neglected with them, I couldn't with my grandchildren. I had to be more meticulous.

When experienced grandmothers provided childcare support to their daughters and daughters-in-law, they expected their children to respect them for knowing what was best for the child based on their experience and expertise. In return, mothers did not question their childrearing practices or make additional demands; nonetheless, the mechanisms by which this occurred were more complex than first appeared. First, grandmothers sought to be particularly careful and up-to-date in their childrearing practices. Furthermore, certain circumstances, such as the lack of other childcare alternatives during the pandemic, made it necessary to not interfere with these grandmothers' childcare.

Controlling mothers, criticizing grandmothers

Not all cases of coparenting involved complete trust in either the mother's authority over the child or grandmother's experience in childrearing. The third group of six grandmothers reported varying degrees of tensions and sometimes conflicts due to either their perception of the mother's controlling behavior, or their criticisms of their children's parenting approach.

Safiye (69, widowed), who was caring for her younger daughter's 3-year-old son and older daughter's 1.5-year-old daughter, stated that she received too many directives, particularly from her younger daughter, despite having previously cared for another child of hers. These directives made her feel like a caregiver rather than a grandparent, implying that she did not fully appreciate her daughter's controlling behavior. Describing how her daughter made her feel, she said:

"I know how to raise a child, daughter." But, no, she would insist that it was different then and it's different now. Sometimes she tells me to do this, do that, do that. I say okay. For example, "He will be given medicine at this time. He will be fed food and fruit at this time, please pay attention to their timing. Take him outside at certain times." Okay, I was doing what she said, just like a babysitter. Not like a grandmother, but like a babysitter. I followed whatever she said. Because the child is theirs. After all, he will continue be with them after me.

Safiye accepted her daughter's directives because the child was hers, but she was not as comfortable with this situation as the grandmothers in the first group. Similarly, receiving too many directives from her daughter-in-law, a doctor, Emel (67, married) was caring for her son's 3.5-year-old son, while the nanny cared for the 1.5-year-old granddaughter. She did not express how these directives made her feel, but she did make it clear that everything she did was with the mother's permission. She said:

No, I mean, if we had to go out from time to time, we would ask permission from his mother, we would ask over the phone if we could go out. She would say, "Okay, go, dress him warmly so that he doesn't get cold," or "Don't go because there is a pandemic, you know." If the mother didn't allow it, we wouldn't go. If the mother allowed it, we would go out. So, we asked for permission from the mother.

Sometimes the mother's overbearing control over the child caused concerns for the grandmothers. Nuray (62, married) was a first-time grandmother caring for her son's 5-year-old daughter. She stated that her daughter-in-law was very protective of her granddaughter. Eventually, her daughter-in-law problematized the grandparents' actions with the child without taking her input. She explained it as:

She wanted us to do everything with her permission. For example, when we would go to the park, we would call and ask if we could take [my grandchild] to the park. Once we went a short distance by car. We didn't say anything because it hadn't been such a problem before. There must have been some discussion at home afterwards. My son said, 'Mom, don't take her in the car again without permission.' We never took her again after that.

Nuray then added that this incident resulted in a complete change in care arrangements and grandparents were no longer involved in it. These two examples of portraying mothers as controlling came from a relationship between a paternal grandmother and a daughter-in-law, implying that trust was a more delicate issue in this type of care arrangement.

Tensions arose in mother-grandmother interactions concerning what was best for the child not only because of a controlling mother, but grandmothers were sometimes critical of their children's methods of childrearing. For instance, Feyza (66, married), who was caring for her daughter's 3.5-year-old son, thought that young parents, like her own daughter and son-in-law, were pampering their children by giving them whatever they wanted. She provided her opinion by saying:

Of course, my daughter's experience with being a mother, our behavior and their childrearing practices have differed. Now, young parents prefer not to say no to the child under any circumstances, but we think it is necessary to say no. We sometimes have conflicts on this issue. Sometimes we need to restrict some of my daughter's and son-in-law's attitudes towards the child. For example, most importantly, they buy every toy the child wants. The house is overflowing with toys.

Being critical of children's parenting behaviors also prompted grandmothers to resign from their caring roles. Nazile (63, widowed), who was caring for her daughter's 3-year-old son, relocated to another city to assist her daughter with childcare. Nonetheless, she stopped caregiving after numerous disagreements with her daughter and son-in-law. These tensions emerged primarily because the parents implemented strict standards for raising the child, yet later they did not follow these standards. Nazile explained it by giving an example:

I mean, they didn't let me turn on the television for 5-6 months, so I didn't turn it on. But now he [my grandson] can't take his eyes off the TV, he plays with it, he changes the channels. ... I said, "What happened? It was forbidden, we weren't turning on the television or anything." Now he doesn't eat anything without a laptop or tablet.

These cases showed that intergenerational coparenting sometimes involved a lack of trust between parties, resulting in disagreements and conflicts between grandmothers and mothers.

These conflicts could also become so intense that grandmothers resigned from their caring roles or were urged to do so.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined the intergenerational coparenting experiences from grandmothers' perspectives. Analyses revealed three different scenarios in which intergenerational coparenting took place. In the first scenario, grandmothers had complete respect for the mothers of their grandchildren, thus they did everything that was asked of them. Second, because some grandmothers were very experienced, having previously cared for other grandchildren, their children had complete trust in their childrearing skills. Finally, there were some conflictual relationships between mothers and grandmothers, either because the mother exercised full control over her child's care or because grandmothers were critical of their adult children's childrearing practices.

Findings also revealed that the first group of grandmothers were more likely to be first-time grandmothers caring for a grandchild whose mother had a higher education level. This shows that grandmothers' respect for the mother as knowing what is best for the child is related to their inexperience in caring for grandchildren and their trust in the mother's approach to childrearing. The second group of grandmothers, on the other hand, gained the mother's trust in their caring approach and skills due to their experience in childcare. However, there was also a suggestion that mothers were unable to interfere with grandmothers' caring approach and practices because there were no other childcare options available. Finally, the third group of grandmothers reported conflicts in their interactions with the mothers due to disagreements over childrearing approaches because of the divergence in childrearing styles between generations. The typology of grandmother-mother interactions regarding childcare showed variation due to generational differences in education, generational divergence and alignment in childrearing styles, and the diversity in the level of experience of grandmothers in grandchild care.

Whether there was complete trust in mother/grandmother, negotiations, or tensions, coparenting entailed continual exchanges about what was best for the child. As the analysis of the data showed, these exchanges took several forms. First, grandmothers were openly given directives by mothers, including what the child should do or eat and when. Although some grandmothers disagreed with mothers' choices, it did not cause high levels of tension for most of them. Second, grandmothers were warned by mothers about prioritizing the safety of the child, in and outside of the house. Since the pandemic regulations were very strict and the risk of infection was very high during this study, ensuring the safety of the child primarily meant staying at home

in this case. Last, several grandmothers expressed their criticisms of their children's parenting approach, particularly for indulging their children or setting unrealistic standards that even they, as parents, could not meet. These exchanges were all indicative of how complex intergenerational coparenting was and how open it was to negotiations, disagreements, and conflicts.

In Turkey, there is a strong incentive for keeping all care responsibilities within the family, putting the burden of the entire care economy on the shoulders of women (Akkan, 2018; Öztaş Gelmez, 2015). The Grandmother Project, launched by the Ministry of Family and Social Services in 2017, was another example of familializing and feminizing childcare to preclude any direct involvement of the state. However, these types of social policies are based on discourses which assume grandmothers' willingness to be involved in their grandchildren's care, therefore undermining their agency in deciding whether to be involved (Con Wright, 2022). Second, they utterly ignore the complexities of childcare arrangements. Childcare arrangements, in many cases, involve several actors including parents, grandparents, and sometimes a nanny. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how childcare tasks are divided between these parties and who oversees the setting of standards. Previous studies demonstrated that mothers had high expectations of nannies and exerted control over their childcare practices (Akalın, 2007; Çelik et al., 2023) but the type of expectations mothers have of grandmothers in childcare is rarely questioned.

As a result of urbanization, migration, and multiple economic crises, many aspects of family life in Turkey have been undergoing tremendous transformations with a greater adherence to individualization. Intergenerational solidarity is assumed to be robust in the country, yet there are no comprehensive studies with a nationally representative sample to support this notion. Grandmothers' decisions about whether to care for their grandchildren are part of this underexplored topic of inquiry, as most studies focus on grandmothers who were actively involved in childcare while disregarding those who would or could not. In line with previous studies (Can, 2019; Con Wright, 2022), grandmothers in the sample used in this study also continued to support their own daughters in childcare to ensure their employment because there are few accessible and affordable childcare options. However, how long and for how many grandchildren they could undertake this responsibility is debatable. Having to step in for grandchild care against their choice, or caring for too many grandchildren one after another, may further complicate the interactions between grandmothers and mothers and render them prone to conflicts.

Another noteworthy point from this study is that most mothers prefer their own mothers to assist with childcare. Mothers' higher education and working status enabled them to organize childcare arrangements according to their preferences, starting with the childbirth. The transitions

in Turkish family residential arrangements from patrilocal to neolocal also enabled this break from reliance on paternal grandmothers in grandchild care. This suggests that if mothers had to rely on their mothers-in-law for childcare, their caregiver preferences were not met, and their coparenting arrangement may be more prone to disagreements and conflicts as a result of the violation of mothers' preferences. In addition to intergenerational transmission of some traditional childrearing practices, there are also substantial disparities across generations in Turkey (Akçay et al., 2024; Alabay & Ersal, 2022; Sengul et al., 2023). Even though many grandmothers in this study also acknowledged these differences, not all perceived them as negative. Many grandmothers embraced or at least respected more contemporary childrearing approaches, while others saw them as wrong. The study has shown that intergenerational coparenting experiences are influenced by intergenerational differences in childrearing approaches, in line with previous research (Akçay et al., 2024; Sengul et al., 2023).

This study has several limitations. First, this study focused on grandmother-mother coparenting practices in the case of grandchild care due to mothers' working conditions. However, non-working mothers may benefit from grandmothers' involvement in childcare, and the dynamics may alter depending on the availability of mothers. Therefore, further studies could also include non-working mothers and provide a comparison to working mothers. Second, intergenerational coparenting arrangements involve fathers and grandfathers, but this study focused entirely on the interactions between grandmothers and mothers. Future studies could incorporate the perspectives and experiences of multiple parents and grandparents to thoroughly investigate intergenerational coparenting practices. Furthermore, in this study, only grandmothers' perspectives on intergenerational coparenting were considered. Future research should investigate this topic by gathering data from grandmother-mother dyads, as this study lacked the perspectives of mothers.

The study has important implications for social policy making and family practice. The findings show that intergenerational coparenting is not straightforward. It requires a division and sometimes negotiation of roles and responsibilities between mothers and grandmothers. In these interactions, not only intergenerational divergences of childbearing styles but also mothers' preferences play an essential role. Mothers may want to lead all actors involved in childcare, including grandmothers, based on their knowledge and preferences for what they believe is best for the child. Mothers may therefore regard their own mothers, rather than their mothers-in-law, as more accommodating in meeting their demands. Because of this, preferences as well as the needs of mothers, particularly working mothers, should be considered in any public or private provision of childcare. Additionally, intergenerational differences regarding childrearing are mostly acknowledged and sometimes can cause tension, complicating childcare arrangements.

Social policies should therefore take into account the fact that childcare arrangements involve multiple actors who may have differing ideas and approaches on what is best for the child's well-being. Akçay et al. (2024) recommended institutional trainings and social services to ensure greater advantages and fewer adverse outcomes from grandmothers' involvement in childcare. In line with Bai et al.'s (2023) integrated framework for intergenerational coparenting, I also propose that we must first acknowledge and address power relations, as well as understanding where conflicts originate, before involving third parties.

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