

## The Role of Grandmother's Grandparenting on Family Harmony: a Phenomenological Analysis

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### Abstract

Grandparenting could have a positive and negative effect on family harmony. This study aims to better understand the influence of grandmother's grandparenting role towards family harmony. This phenomenological study used data derived from interviewing and observing five participants. The data were analyzed using interpretative phenomenology. The findings of this study found nine themes: the meaning of grandchildren for grandmother, the reason of grandmothers parenting, grandmothers way of parenting, the effect of family's social economics, the relationship of grandmothers with family members, grandmothers problem solving to overcome family conflict, grandmothers role in the family, the emotional bonding between grandmother and grandchildren, Grandmothers feelings while grandparenting. The grandmothers' parenting role could positively and negatively influence family harmony, depending on the meaning of grandchildren for the grandmothers. When the grandmother could accept the grandchildren, it will make the grandmother happy and affect family harmony.

**Keywords:** Grandmother's grandparenting, family harmony, phenomenological analysis

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### Introduction

Families are generally comprised of father, mother, and child. In Indonesia, however, it is common to have extended families such as grandmother and grandfather living in the same house (Lee in Lestari, 2012). In fact, in other cases, extended families could also consist of nieces, cousins, uncles, and aunts, and this extended family is one of the strong characteristics of Indonesian families, whereby blood ties unifies the relationships of all family members (Lestari, 2012).

Based on the relationship and interaction, it can be concluded that there is a strong connection among family members, to the point where even extended families can influence the nuclear family's decision making (Kertamuda, 2009). Based on statistical data, many divorce cases are influenced by

the extended family in the marriage or household, two thirds of divorces occur due to the influence of in-laws (Fimela, 2014).

Divorce is becoming a trend in Indonesia, with the number rising each year. In 2018, the number of divorce in Indonesia was recorded as 408.202 cases, rising 9% from the previous year. The biggest cause of divorce in 2018 is dissension and unsolved conflict (183.085 cases). The second rank reason is economy factors, which is recorded to be as many 110.909 cases (Jayani, 2020).

Marriage or household conflicts could result in various negative impacts, such as increased disagreement and family disharmony (Renanita, 2018). Similarly, parents' influence on their child's marriage life could also lead to dissension and disharmony in the family (Cahyanti, 2017). The type of influence varies from financial matters to the parenting style given for the grandchild. Couples who are unable to resolve issues caused by their parents' influence could experience an adverse impact on their family harmony (Jayani, 2020). However, another research highlighted that grandparenting could also have positive effects on the family. Explored the differences of influence in family across generation and found that grandmother nurture takes an important part in maintaining cultural values and social relation (conformity and security).

The research is based on Schwart and and Bilskys's (1987) perspective in educational psychology. There are ten primary human values in conducting and evaluating an event in this field, divided into four major groups: self-transcendence, conservation, openness to change, and self-enhancement. The ten aspects are benevolence (preserving and enhancing the welfare of persons with whom one is in direct contact, providing an internal motivational base to promote cooperative and supportive social relations) and universalism (appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of the others and of nature); security (safety, harmony, the stability of society, of relations, and Self), tradition (respect and acceptance of the customs or ideas which belong to the tradition), and conformity (inclination to follow social expectations or social norms); self-direction (independent thought and action, creativity), stimulation (novelty and challenge in life), and hedonism (pleasure and gratification for oneself); achievement (personal success through demonstrating one's competence) and power (social status and prestige, control of resources, dominance over people).

Kuftyak (2014) found that grandmothers and mothers are children's primary role models in forming emotional sensitivity. This statement is also supported by a recent study by Arini (2018), who investigated grandmothers' influence on their grandchild's personality and school performance. The study discovered that grandmothers positively impact the child's independence but do not influence the latter. This shows that there are two contradictions in the implications of grandmother's caregiver for grandchildren. Other studies mentioned that children could sometimes be confused when they experience different nurturing styles from their grandmother and mother (Latifah, 2016).

Another condition states that around 80% of elderly people say that they are happy with their relationship with their grandchildren (Wahyuni, 2015). Elderly people are the most appropriate figures to provide an ideal standard for family value because of their gained experience towards self-generativity over the years (Pujiatni & Kirana, 2013). Grandparents who are actively involved in grandparenting allows the grandchildren to: (1) have positive view on what a meaningful life looks like when one ages, (2) learn to achieve social roles. These positive impact of grandparenting causes some people to believe that it would be better for children to be cared for by their grandparents compared to external people (i.e., babysitter). This research added, that grandparents act as a role models who teaches positive values to their grandchildren. The role of a grandmother becomes increasingly important in the modern family whereby both parents are working (Pujiatni & Kirana, 2013).

Grandmothers are generally considered as older adults or elderly. Grandmothers are generally considered as elderly people. Suardiman (2011) stated that with increasing age, people would experience reduced physical and non-physical conditions. In this case, older people might show decreased productivity or even be unable to fulfill their needs. Little (2012) showed that older people's development task is focused on adjusting to life after retirement by changing their way of life, accepting a spouse or friend's death, and preparing for death. Older people's activity revolves around maintaining intimacy with a spouse, taking care of each other, and finding meaning in their past experiences. Santrock (2011) stated that successful aging is indicated by one's ability to face the changes in their lives, partly shown in the capability to conduct daily activities.

Grandparents who nurture their grandchildren become a substitute parental figure of the child despite not being as physically strong as when they were younger. Surbakti (2013) explains that this

declining physical condition of the older people traditionally exempts them from doing heavy or high-risk tasks and responsibilities and requires them to rest more. However, an individual with a daughter who is a working mother often will be given the responsibility to nurture care for the grandchild (Surbakti, 2013). The grandmother's life experience will increase through grandparenting. Grandmothers who are in the stage of having great integrity (i.e., able to accept the reality in her life) would be able to understand the meaning of life, adjust to the environment, complete their developmental task well, and achieve life satisfaction (Kodaruddin, 2019).

DiGessa (2016) tried to examine the effect of nurturing grandchildren on grandmother's physical health. The investigation concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between the two. Grandparenting makes grandmothers feel more like a valued member of the family, consequently positively affecting their physiological health.

According to De Frain (1999), the distribution of roles (i.e., deciding on the substitute parental figure of the child) is one aspect that can form family harmony; A role that can be fulfilled by a grandmother. Family harmony is a positive subjective evaluation of one's family, whereby family members have a good relationship with one another. Nonetheless, despite the seemingly good influence that grandmothers could have on family harmony, some studies have also noted that grandmothers who are too dominant could introduce adverse effects. These contradictive findings highlight an exciting gap in exploring how a grandmother's role can influence family harmony.

Research on the role of grandmother's parenting needs to continue to be developed because of the current developmental phenomena, where many women work, but on the other hand, it is increasingly difficult to find trustworthy child caregivers, so grandmothers are the most appropriate and trustworthy choice to look after children, then research on grandmother care is important to be studied more deeply. Research on grandmother grandparenting at national and international mostly explores the impact of parenting itself on child development. These researchers are DiGessa (2016) examined the effect of parenting on grandchildren on grandmother's health. Smorti (2012) research on the relationship between grandmothers and grandchildren during grandmother's care for grandchildren and research in Indonesia, by Arini (2011) which looked at the impact of grandmother's care on children's achievement and characteristics, and Latifah (2016) examined the impact of parenting on independence and cognitive abilities of grandchildren). How the role of

grandmother's parenting in family harmony currently has not been published and explore. This study will examine this issue further on Indonesia culture.

## Method

This qualitative study collected data using in-depth interviews to explore grandparents' experiences when caring for grandchildren. The qualitative methodology allows researchers to analyze participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2012). It also provides insight into the meaning behind the life experience. Qualitative approaches can be described as approaches that are interpretive, artistic, systematic, and theory-driven. Phenomenology research explores people's experience that has meaning for them (Smith et al., 2009). IPA (*Interpretative Phenomenologies Analysis*) focuses on exploring how participants give meaning to their personal and social world. IPA tries to understand participants' perceptions by taking their perspective (Smith & Michael, 2009).

### *Participants*

Participants were selected through snowball sampling technique, whereby the focus were brought to grandmothers because they are often found to be involved in grandparenting. The inclusion criteria of participants in this study were as followed: (1) Grandmothers who lived with their child and grandchild, (2) Lives in Semarang city, Indonesia. In total, five grandmothers participated in this research. The recruitment of the participants was discontinued once the data saturation point was determined by the fifth participants. Tabel I summarizes the characteristics of the participants and their grandchildren.

Table I  
*Demographic Data of The Participants*

<b>Subject Initial</b>	<b>Current Age</b>	<b>Educational Level</b>	<b>Subject Occupation</b>
I	58 years old	Master	Lecturer
Pt	59 years old	Elementary School	Masseuse
S	58 years old	Elementary School	Masseuse
SA	55 years old	Middle School	Housewife
ST	72 years old	Bachelor	Housewife

The implementation of this research has been carried out by meeting the ethical requirements of the study. All of the participants were informed regarding the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks and benefits, voluntary participation, and protection of confidentiality and rights to

withdraw at any point in the study. Prior to signing the informed consent form, participants were assured of their confidentiality and anonymity and they were given enough time to ask questions about the study.

#### *Procedure*

The interviews were scheduled at the participants' homes at a convenient date and time. After a discussion regarding their approval and confidentiality, the participants were asked brief demographic questions about their grandchildren (e.g., gender and age). Next, an in-depth interview using six open-ended questions (with additional questions if necessary) was conducted to gain information about grandparents' experience while nurturing their grandchildren and how it could influence family harmony. The interview lasted for 15–45 minutes and was audio-recorded.

#### *Measures*

The interview guide consisted of a series of open-ended questions for the grandparents, designed to allow the participants to "tell their stories" about their grandparenting experience and their relationship with other family members. The interview questions were developed based on parenting research focused on grandparents (Clottey et al., 2015; Goodman & Rao, 2007; Kelch, 2011; Leung & Fung, 2014). Additionally, the authors created the interview questions. A demographic questionnaire was used to obtain the grandchildren and grandmother's basic demographic information (e.g., gender, race, age, education). Thema in interview questions were as followed: *how do you experience parenting your grandchildren? (your role, responses, reason for raising the grandchildren, strategies for overcoming responses)? How does it affect your relationship with the other family members?*

#### *Data analysis*

The data were analyzed and interpreted using a descriptive phenomenology method, which was deemed to be the most suitable compared to others. This method's advantage is that the data can be clarified with the participants (Lakahija, 2017). The data analysis process using the IPA method is highlighted. Step 1: describe the phenomenon. Step 2: read the transcript repeatedly. In this stage, the researchers will mark statements that are deemed meaningful, known as a unit of meaning. Step 3: Describe the unit of meaning. Researchers take transcripts that have meaningful units and describe them in a language that is as close as possible to the participant's way of talking (language).

Step 4: create a psychological description. The researchers provide a psychological description in IPA. Repeated and irrelevant units of meaning's descriptions can be deleted. It is possible to have fewer psychological descriptions than the unit description of meaning. Step 5: Create a structural description of the meaning description and psychological description into a textural description. Step 6: Exemplify the theme of the description results. These themes are also called the emergent theme, whereby researchers raise the themes that can be obtained from the structural description. Each subject has several themes. Researchers create tables that contain themes from all subjects. Step 7: Create a theme synthesis. The themes from all subjects are synthesized into a few essential themes found in all subjects. The process of creating these last themes requires the authors to repeatedly question which type of subject could connect all the themes. Once it is decided, the authors created a description that could be applied to all subjects. Step 8: Find the meaning of emergent themes (Smith, 2009).

## Results

There are nine superordinate topics found in this research in table 2 below.

### *The Meaning of Grandchildren for the grandmother*

Three themes emerged in terms of the meaning of grandchildren in grandmothers' perspective, as quoted down below:

*"You have two grandchildren, it's difficult but you have to be patient" (SA)*

*"Yeah, it is difficult, even I find it difficult to afford food, they left me with two grandchildren that do not give money" (Pt)*

*"Then it became my responsibilities because their mother passed away" (S)*

*"Then it became my responsibilities because their mother passed away" (S)*

*"I see my grandchild as my child" (I)*

Tabel 2  
*Superordinate and Emergent Themes*

Superordinate Themes	Emergent Themes
The meaning of grandchildren for the grandmother	Burden Responsibilities Own Child/Soul
The reason for grandparenting	economy/parents' occupation (S, SA, I) abandoned by parents (Pt) the death of parents (St) family status
The grandmother's grandparenting Strategies	Firm discipline, affectionate Angry Advice, loving Angry, spoiled
The effect of family's socioeconomic condition on family harmony	Middle class into high class Middle class into middle down
Grandmothers' relationship with other family members	No emotional attachment with husband, child and grandchildren Strong emotional attachment with grandchildren Very close with other family member Not very close with other family member
Grandmothers' problem-solving strategies to overcome family conflict	Direct communication Aggressiveness Looking for conflict resolution strategies by asking other people or the child
Grandmothers' role in family	The grandchildren's caregiver The breadwinner of family
Emotional bonding between grandmother and grandchildren	Caring and having fun together
Grandmothers feelings when parenting their grandchildren	Tired and require a lot of patience Stress and burdened Happy Valued

### *Reasons for Grandparenting*

There are four themes that emerged in terms of the underlying reasons for grandparenting.

*"The mother has to study in another city, i feel bad if the child leaves with their single mother, so I take care of the children and she gets remarried. After all they are my grandchildren, it's difficult but they have no one other than me" (I)*

*"Their father is busy working all day, so my grandchild stays with me because I have nothing to do.*

*The mother died when the child was one week old, the father work from day to night" (S)*

### *Grandparenting strategies*

There are three emergent themes in explaining grandmothers' various strategies for caring for their grandchildren: affectionate authoritative parenting, scolding, advising and caring, scolding, and pampering.

*"I have to be mad and threaten them if they don't obey my words" (Pt).*

*"Well I scold them and threaten to tell their father, but if they ask for anything, I will always provide for them, the last child" (I)*

*"If they want to go somewhere, they have to clean up their toys first" (S)*

*"But if they are going to sleep, I sing them a lullaby" (SA)*

*"Strict to the schedule I made" (ST)*

### **The effects of family socioeconomic condition on family harmony**

There are two themes in this category: Middle class to Higher class and Middle class to Lower class.

### *Grandmothers' Relationship with Other Family Members*

There are four emergent themes: There is no emotional closeness with husband, children, and grandchildren; Very emotionally close to grandchildren; Very close to other family members; Not close to other family members.

*"I feel lonely if he goes to school" (I)*

*"He never tells me about him, he doesn't obey me" (Pt)*

### **Family Conflict Resolution Strategies**

In terms of resolving conflict, grandmothers do this through three main strategies: Direct communication, Aggressiveness, Looking for a solution themselves by asking someone else or the child:

*"Because the children's school is far from home, so I ask my friends or find information myself" (I)*

*"Directly call the child or husband and communicate it" (S)*

*"I get mad at my husband, grandchild, child, about why they never listen to what I say" (Pt)*

### **Role sharing in Building Family Harmony**

Two themes emerged regarding grandmothers' role in building family harmony: (1) Grandmothers who solely takes care of their grandchild, and (2) Grandmothers who takes care of their grandchild while also acting as the breadwinner of the family.

*"I have nothing else to do so I take care of my grandchildren" (SA)*

*"I work at the market and I take my grandchildren with me" (S)*

*"I'm a masseuse, i don't get paid much and I have two grandchildren to take care of"(SA)*

### **Determinants of Emotional Attachment with Grandchildren**

Attention and time spent together

*"They have grown, it's kind of hard if I always have to look after them" (I)*

*"I'm not close with my grandchildren. I provide everything for them" (Pt)*

*"If they didn't sleep well and cry, they will look for me instead of their mother" (SA)*

*"They are with me daily, and meet their father once every two weeks" (S)*

### **The feeling/ psychological condition of the grandmother while parenting the grandchild**

Some of the feelings that grandmothers felt while grandparenting: overwhelmed, needing to be more patient, stressed, and burdened, happy, and valued. The way grandmothers' value their grandchild depends on how they feel during grandparenting.

*"Needed to be more patient when parenting my grandchildren. My child was really obedient to me when he/she was still a child, simple, it's different with this one (the grandchildren)" (ST)*

*"I should give them first so then they will listen to me, I should persuade my grandchildren first (for doing things), I should be more patient"(S)*

*"I feel happy, the house is empty without the grandchildren, even though they just playing with the tablet but the house still feel lively"(I)*

*"I have retired; my child studies and work so I take care of the grandchildren" (SA)*

*"It's stressful, it's hard to afford the food, the father doesn't want to understand, the mother rarely calls, in these past two years they don't even sent any money"(Pt).*

## Discussion

The meaning of grandchildren for grandmothers is an important key in how a grandmother takes care of her grandchild. Grandchildren can become a burden for grandmothers, when the meaning of grandchildren is a heavy burden that must be borne, which ultimately affects the relationship between grandmother and grandchildren, and affects the communication patterns of the grandmother with the parents of the grandchildren / children. This is in accordance with the results of research conducted by Buss (2000) and Dewaal (2008) which suggest the relationship between the care of grandchildren on grandmother's mental health. Grandma will be happier and lower the level of depression when giving positive emotions to grandchildren through parenting. This condition is related to altruistic behavior (unconditional love) given by grandmothers to grandchildren which will increase the subjective welfare of grandmothers. When grandchildren have meaning for grandparents, then grandparents feel joy. Raising children for a grandmother means everything and increases grandmother's happiness and a sense of meaning and role in the rest of her life.

In fact, when grandmothers feel heavy, grandchildren are a burden, conditions do not allow caring for grandchildren, not giving their best investment for grandchildren will make grandmother feel heavy. Its correspondence to research of Coall and Hertwig (2011); Glaser et al., (2010) that find that raising a grandchild is a tough. Other research says that when the grandparents' investment reaches the highest level, for example, there are too many expectations on grandchildren or have self-interest, it can be burden (Chen and Liu, 2012 and Taylor et al., 2016). Psychologically it will affect the emotional condition of the grandmother, conflict will arise, stress and is very influential on relationships with grandchildren and children, even relationships with other families that disturb family harmony.

Grandmother's care for their grandchildren has several patterns or types: some are indulgent, some are firm but still full of affection and some are authoritarian. This is the same when children are cared for by parents. Parents and grandparents tend to care for one of the three types above. According to Baumrind (1991), parenting styles consist of four categories, namely authoritarian, permissive, authoritative, and uninvolved. This is also in accordance with Periyani's (2013) research on grandparent care which states that there are three types of parenting provided by older siblings, namely democratic, authoritarian and permissive.

The parenting role played by the grandmother is closely related to the closeness of the grandchildren. Continuous togetherness between grandchildren will be able to affect the emotional closeness of grandchildren. Regarding the emotional closeness of grandmothers and grandchildren, it is not time spent together that affects the emotional closeness between grandmothers and grandchildren, but more on internal factors, namely that grandmother's acceptance of grandchildren. It will develop a positive attitude and not feel burdened by caring for grandchildren, instead it raises grandmother's happiness, so that the relationship of grandchildren that is built will be good. This is in accordance with Arismanto's (2008) statement which states that psychologically, grandmothers will provide good closeness to grandchildren because they feel that they are part of themselves. Acceptance of the condition of the grandchildren is an important aspect that determines the relationship between grandmother and grandchildren, even with other family's member (Woodbridge, 2009).

The concept of the influence of parenting and family harmony in the context of this study is strongly influenced by the acceptance of grandmothers to grandchildren, relationships will be built well between family members if grandmothers are able to accept and interpret grandchildren positively, so that all care is carried out with positive goals, does not feel burdened, and tired. conflicts will be resolved effectively which in turn will lead to positive relationships with grandchildren and other family members. This statement is in according to research by Sheridan, Haight & Cleeland (2011) when they emphasized that grandparents do not only provide their grandchildren with better shelter for good health, but they also promote their grandchildren's positive socialemotional development through supportive relationships.

The socio-economic effect of the family will greatly affect the care performed by the grandmother, which in turn affects the psychological condition of the grandmother and relationships with other families and family harmony. These results are reinforced by the article Ristia (2016) which found that socio-economic factors influence the parenting process carried out by grandmothers and affect relationships between other family members. Other research also shows the influence of socioeconomic aspects on grandparent's care, which found a positive relationship and longitudinal research between family socio-economics and grandparents' health in caring for grandchildren (DiGissa, 2016).

The existence of a sense of responsibility is the reason for old age to provide support as adult parents (Lee, 2013). The elderly continue to provide support for their children even though they are adults and married, so they feel that taking part in providing care for their grandchildren is one of their responsibilities unless they do have health problems or other jobs. Caring for grandchildren can provide psychological comfort for the elderly, but provide physical difficulties (Choi, 2016). However, it could be a conflict disturbance and disrupt family harmony when the family is experiencing economic problems. As proposed by Wahyuni (2012), there are also conflicts that support age, such as still having the responsibility to meet economic needs and finance the education costs of their own young children.

An interesting finding in this study is how the grandmother's perceptions of grandchildren (the meaning of grandchildren for grand parent) and the socio-economic conditions of the family can influence grandmothers' grandparenting style, consequently affecting family harmony. Although caregiving is considered an important role for grandmothers in this modern era, those who struggle to bond with their grandchild and receive minimal support from the parents (i.e., socioeconomic support) could still experience family disharmony.

### **Conclusion**

This study's findings highlight that, despite parents feeling the benefits of having their parents take part in grandparenting their child, it does not always lead to family harmony. Several factors influence the formation of family harmony within the context of grandparenting: the meaning of grandchildren, grandmother's acceptance of the grandchildren, and the socioeconomic condition of the family. This finding contradicts the existing theory that states that sharing the parenting role with grandparents is an aspect of family harmony.

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