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Co-occupations of Supplementary Grandparents and their Grandchildren

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Under the direction of the research advisor:

Lucinda Dale, EdD, OTR, CHT, FAOTA

A Research Project Entitled

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Abstract

Objective: The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of supplementary grandparents with their grandchildren during co-occupations.

Methods: The researchers enrolled eight grandmothers and one grandfather, with grandchildren ages six months to 21 years. Using a phenomenological design, the researchers gathered data through surveys, individual semi-structured interviews, and a focus group interview. Researchers completed individual and collective coding to identify themes.

Results: Participants varied in age, employment status, marital status, and proximity to their grandchildren, extending from 10 minutes to more than two hours. Findings revealed that participation in co-occupations between grandparents and grandchildren enhanced their relationship and encouraged an active lifestyle of grandparents. Grandparents also experienced physical and cognitive demands during co-occupations, prompting modifications to preserve participation. Grandparents described the purpose of co-occupations as having fun, teaching, and learning from grandchildren. The results indicated that co-occupations were influenced by grandparents' employment status, the age of the grandchildren, the health of the grandparent, the relationships between parents and grandparents, and the proximity to grandchildren. As grandchildren aged, the grandparents' roles in co-occupations shifted from active participants to observers and supporters.

Conclusion: The findings of this study can help occupational therapy practitioners understand the benefits and challenges associated with co-occupations of grandparents and grandchildren.

Co-occupations of Supplementary Grandparents and their Grandchildren

With “increasing life expectancies and growing numbers of dual-worker households,” grandparents are playing a more prominent role in the lives of their grandchildren (Mansson, 2016, p. 136). Grandparents make up 18% of the world’s 7.6 billion people. Of these, 1.4 billion people, 58% of grandmothers and 49% of grandparents, provided grandchild care in the past year (Triado et al., 2014). Grandparents provide a range of assistance from visits, occasional care, and transportation, to full care (Ludwig et al., 2007). With a large population of grandparents’ occupations involving grandchildren, adequate research is necessary to understand these lived experiences. Occupations are defined in the OTPF as “daily life activities in which people engage” that are influenced by client factors and performance skills (American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), 2014, p. S1).

Throughout the literature, grandparents are defined by the amount of time they spend with their grandchildren or the responsibilities they have in their role. Roles are defined in the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework (OTPF) as “sets of behaviors expected by society and shaped by culture” that provide guidance in selecting activities (AOTA, 2014, p. S8). In their systematic review, Kinsner et al. (2017) categorized grandparent care as skipped generation, multigenerational, and babysitters. In the skipped generation arrangement, grandparents serve as the child’s primary caregiver because the parents are absent. In another systematic review, Kim et al. (2017) defined this arrangement as custodial grandparenting. Grandparents in the multigenerational arrangement share the household and caregiving responsibilities with the parents. Grandparents who do not live with the grandchild and provide sporadic care are considered to be a part of the babysitting arrangement (Kinsner et al., 2017). In comparison, Kim et al. (2017) defined a grandparent who provides care for children of parents who work or study

as supplemental. Similarly, Triado et al. (2014) labeled grandparents who help balance work and family for dual-earner couples as auxiliary grandparents. Supplementary, or auxiliary, grandchild care providers not only provide convenient caregiving but also relieve financial burdens (Villar et al., 2012). Chamie (2018) explained that grandparents in the United Kingdom save their children more than \$70 billion annually in childcare costs. In the current study, researchers focused on individuals who fulfilled the role of supplemental grandparents.

Not only do supplementary grandchild care providers benefit their families, but they also benefit their own health and life satisfaction. Moore and Rosenthal (2015) found that satisfaction with grandchild care positively correlated with grandmothers' life satisfaction. According to the Role Enhancement Theory, individuals with multiple roles may have better health compared to those with only a few roles to fulfill, providing those with additional roles a sense of usefulness, competency, and control in later life (Di Gesa et al., 2015). Triado et al. (2014) found that grandparents who provided auxiliary grandchild care identified their role as a "source of positive emotions and an opportunity to establish and reinforce affective links," as opposed to as a burden (p. 123).

Whereas additional responsibilities can be more rewarding, researchers suggested through the Socioemotional Selectivity Theory that as individuals age, they become more emotionally selective with their relationships (Mansson, 2016). Mansson (2016) proposed that grandparents chose to keep interactions they perceived as personal and meaningful, specifically the grandparent-grandchild relationship. By examining what grandparents perceived as the best part of their role, Mansson (2016) found that grandparents identified mutual grandparent-grandchild affection and shared activities as the most enjoyable. He defined these shared grandparent-grandchild activities, or co-occupations, as joint events in which the grandparent

and grandchild are actively engaging simultaneously, such as playing games and assembling puzzles (Mansson, 2016). Co-occupations are defined as occupations that are shared with others and involve active participation from both or all people (AOTA, 2014, p. S6). In the supplementary grandparent role, grandmothers reported that co-occupations with their grandchildren were meaningful and contributed to their well-being (Ludwig et al., 2007).

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of supplementary grandparents with their grandchildren during co-occupations. Using a phenomenological approach, the researchers answered the research question: How do supplementary grandparents experience co-occupations with their grandchildren?

Literature Review

Researchers conducted a narrative literature review, using the Johns Hopkins Nursing Evidence-Based Practice Research Evidence Appraisal Tool to determine the quality of the literature and chose only high or good quality articles for the literature review (Dang & Dearholt, 2017). To assess the quality of the literature review manuscript, the researchers used the Scale for the Assessment of Narrative Review Articles (Baethge et al., 2019). The researchers searched gray literature and used the Academic Search Complete, CINAHL, and MEDLINE databases to conduct single database searches to find full-text articles written in English. Researchers used the following keywords in conjunction with Boolean operators “and” and “or”: child care, grandparenting, supplementary care providers, grandparents, quality of life, supplemental grandchild care, psychological well-being, supplementary grandparents, well-being, occupation, interventions, occupational therapy, noncustodial grandparents, shared activities and co-occupations.

In a thematic synthesis, Van Leeuwen et al. (2019) examined the meaning of quality of life (QoL) to older adults and defined QoL as a dynamic relationship between objective and subjective, and positive and negative influences, with health as the most important element. In Bernardo et al. (2014), older adults described QoL as being healthy, keeping busy, feeling satisfied with life, preserving interpersonal relationships, and receiving support. In contrast, Fullen (2019) found older adults' well-being to be positively associated with giving support to others, rather than receiving social support. Llobet et al. (2011) found the main reasons for better QoL to be health, family, and social relationships, and the ability to adapt. Older adults adapted to bodily changes by "being more attentive to the task at hand, changing how the task was performed, using technology or adaptive equipment, obtaining help from other people, or eliminating the task" (Wright St. Clair et al., 2011, p. 89). As they aged, older adults redefined health "in terms of ability rather than the absence of illness" (Van Leeuwen et al., 2019, p. 21). Good health, the most important element of QoL, appeared to facilitate older adults' ability to participate in occupations, take care of themselves, perform household tasks, and communicate (Van Leeuwen et al., 2019). To understand occupations in the context of everyday living, Wright St. Clair et al. (2011) analyzed the routines and experiences of older adults. They found that when asked about aging, older adults preferred to talk about occupations they found purposeful, such as contributing to family members. Van Leeuwen et al. (2019) identified some of the meaningful occupations of older adults as caring for others and engaging in social activities.

Although Van Leeuwen et al. (2019) did not study relationships of grandparents with grandchildren, the authors found that older adults described caring for others as a meaningful occupation. Danielsbacka et al. (2019) used the Survey of Health, Ageing, and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) to investigate associations between grandparenting and subjective well-being.

SHARE contained five measurements of grandparents' health, including "self-rated health, life satisfaction, the meaning of life scores, depressive symptoms, and limitations with activities of daily living (ADL)" (Danielsbacka et al., 2019, p. 194). The only significant negative association found by the researchers was between the grandparents' subjective well-being and ADL limitations. These findings suggested that lower well-being is correlated with physical barriers and limitations to daily activities during grandchild care (Danielsbacka et al., 2019).

Grandparents who provided more than 30 hours of supplementary grandchild care weekly were inclined to suffer adverse health consequences that are similar to custodial grandparents (Triadó et al., 2014). In regard to the negative consequences of caregiving, Triado et al. (2014) found that the effects could be dependent on the types of care tasks and responsibilities the grandparent assumes. Instrumental care tasks, such as home maintenance and meal preparation, involved a large workload and were viewed as less enjoyable than other tasks. The perceived difficulty of the tasks, or even the problematic behavior of the grandchild, was associated with lower health and satisfaction (Triado et al., 2014). These consequences may be attributed to the commonality that grandparents providing intensive supplementary grandchild care participate in more instrumental tasks that require more work as opposed to less strenuous leisure activities (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2014). Triadó et al. (2014) concluded that only the intensity of care predicted poorer perceived health. However, Kim et al. (2017) also found that grandparents who care for grandchildren reported feeling younger. In addition, Kinsner et al. (2017) concluded that grandparents who babysit grandchildren "experience health benefits such as exercise and fewer functional limitations" (p. 7).

In contrast to physical health concerns, Chan et al. (2019) found that grandparents who serve as full-time caregivers encountered more psychosocial challenges despite the emotional

rewards of providing for their grandchildren. Grandparents' psychological stress was associated with additional caregiving responsibilities, insufficient social support, and relationship tensions with the grandchild's parents (Chan et al., 2019). Additionally, grandparents who provided high-intensity care experienced more negative effects on their psychological health than those who provided low-intensity care (Kim et al., 2017). In their systematic review, Kim et al. (2017) concluded that although some studies show statistically significant relationships between supplementary, or low-intensity, grandchild care, and psychological well-being, more research needed to be conducted to confirm the positive relationship. The researchers attributed the differences in findings to the complex attributes of each situation, such as length of time spent on childcare, financial outcomes, and the relationship with the parents of the grandchildren (Kim et al., 2017).

Focusing on psychological aspects, researchers examined how the loss of meaningful occupations due to caregiving impacted grandparents' well-being. Ludwig et al. (2007) found that full-time caregiver grandmothers experienced a loss of occupational balance, normal routine, and life satisfaction compared to less involved caregivers. As a time-consuming obligation, caring for a grandchild prevented grandparents from engaging in their preferred activities (Triado et al., 2014). In contrast, less-involved, supplementary grandmothers did not notice a loss in their everyday occupations, but rather a gain of a new role. Sixty-six percent of grandmothers reported that "being a grandmother was one of the top three roles in their life" (Ludwig et al., 2007, p. 48). In addition, Moore and Rosenthal (2015) found that the feeling of personal growth in the role of grandparent was associated with satisfaction and better psychological health.

The grandparent-grandchild relationship contributes positively to the grandparent's overall life satisfaction (Mansson, 2016). Co-occupations enhanced emotional closeness in the

grandparent-grandchild relationship (Mansson, 2016). Further illuminating the importance of co-occupations, Moore and Rosenthal (2015) found the frequency of activities with grandchildren was positively correlated with the life satisfaction of grandmothers rather than the number of hours spent with grandchildren. Researchers found that grandmothers and grandfathers prefer to engage in different grandparent-grandchild activities. Grandmothers reported cooking, shopping, and playing board games, whereas grandfathers reported engaging in outdoor activities, such as sports (Mansson, 2016). As opposed to co-occupations, Villar et al. (2012) focused on the experience of grandparents in their caregiver role and found that grandparents performed occupations for the purpose of assisting and filling a gap for the parents. Grandparents mainly described the circumstances of their role as providing help when maternity leave ended, for work-related tasks, leisure activities, and emergencies (Villar et al., 2012). Despite not acknowledging shared activities, all of the participants viewed their role as highly satisfactory and more relaxed than when they raised their own children (Villar et al., 2012).

A review of the literature shows that researchers have studied the effect of grandparenting on QoL and well-being of grandparents, the impact of caregiving for grandchildren on chronic health conditions of grandparents, occupations restricted by caregiving responsibilities of grandparents with grandchildren, and stressors related to caregiving by grandparents for grandchildren. Researchers have focused more on grandparents who fulfill a custodial role rather than a supplementary role with their grandchildren, and have also focused more on occupations of grandparents in contrast to co-occupations of grandparents with grandchildren. To address a gap in the literature, researchers in the current study focused on the experiences of supplemental grandparents during co-occupations with their grandchildren.

Methodology

Study Design

The researchers studied the lived experiences of supplementary grandparents with their grandchildren during co-occupations using a phenomenological design.

Participants

The participants met inclusion criteria if they identified as a grandparent of an adopted, biological, or step-grandchild, and were English speaking. Participants were excluded if they had legal guardianship of their grandchildren.

Instruments

Online Survey- Google Forms

The researchers developed an online survey to collect demographic information about the grandparents and their grandchildren. According to Portney and Watkins (2009), surveys can be a valuable source of data for identifying participant characteristics. Researchers solicited expert feedback from 13 faculty, with more than 100 years of combined experience in direct client care or teaching in occupational therapy, to ensure validity and feasibility of the survey questions; experts did not recommend changes to the survey (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). The survey included age and gender of the participants, their partners, their children, their grandchildren, level of education, marital status, proximity to their grandchildren, and frequency of time spent with grandchildren (See Appendix A).

Individual Interviews

The researchers developed 10 interview questions to be asked during individual semi-structured virtual interviews. Researchers solicited expert feedback from the same faculty panel that reviewed the online demographics survey to ensure validity with the interview and focus group questions (See Appendix C). Based on the feedback, researchers added questions to collect

data related to expectations of the grandparenting role. Additional questions were added to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the co-occupations of grandparents and their grandchildren.

Focus Group Interview

The researchers developed 13 questions to guide the focus group, combining descriptive questions along with grand tour questions to understand the lived experience of supplementary grandparents and their grandchildren during co-occupations (See Appendix C). According to Spradley (1979), a grand tour question is a type of descriptive question that simulates an experience and encourages participants to talk about a specific scene.

Procedures

Institutional Review Board

The Institutional Review Board granted approval for the study conducted at a university in the Midwest.

Training

Researchers trained for data collection by reviewing procedures for conducting a focus group and individual interviews using the recommendations of Liamputtong (2011).

Recruitment and Enrollment

Using purposeful sampling, the researchers recruited nine supplementary grandparents to participate in the study through the use of email announcements and recruitment flyers. Palinkas et al. (2015) described purposeful sampling as the identification and selection of groups or individuals who are “especially knowledgeable or experienced with a phenomenon of interest” (p. 2). Prospective participants contacted the principal investigator (PI) with their interest through phone or email communication. The PI sent each participant a digital informed consent

outlining the purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and rights involved with participating in the study. All participants provided verbal consent to the study and were given a copy of the informed consent for their records. All participants understood that their participation was voluntary and could choose to stop at any point of the research.

Data Collection

Researchers prioritized the health and safety of all individuals throughout the duration of the study. Due to COVID-19, researchers conducted virtual interviews instead of planned face-to-face interviews to be in compliance with university policies and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations.

Participants completed an online survey through Google Forms about demographics and time spent with grandchildren. Researchers then conducted individual semi-structured interviews lasting about an hour on a virtual platform (phone call or Zoom). Two researchers were present during interviews and additional questions were asked based upon feedback from participants. Upon review of the initial interview, researchers developed individualized follow-up questions to ask during a second virtual semi-structured interview. Participants were encouraged to virtually share and explain photographs or videos of their grandchildren or activities with grandchildren during individual interviews.

Seven of the participants answered questions about grandparenting during a focus group with other grandparents using Zoom. Hollis et al. (2002) recommended that researchers limit focus groups to six to 10 participants in order for interactions and conversations to be managed effectively. The focus group lasted an hour and fifteen minutes and took place after the completion of individual interviews. Liamputtong (2011) suggested conducting a focus group

within one and a half hours to prevent a decrease in participants' attention while allowing enough time for participants to warm up to the conversation and to encourage discussion.

Otter.ai- Audio recording and transcription service

The researchers utilized Otter.ai, a smart note-taking application, to record and transcribe interviews. Otter.ai identified speakers and highlighted key phrases used within the interviews. The researchers kept audio recordings of the interviews in a protected and shared folder in the Otter.ai app to easily access and review when needed.

Virtual Meeting Platforms

The researchers conducted the interviews through Zoom or phone calls depending on participants' preferences. The focus group was completed through Zoom, an online video conference software that allowed the participants to share video and audio feedback with all researchers and other focus group participants.

All data and analyses were stored in a password-protected Google folder for data storage. The researchers downloaded each participant-verified transcription from individual interviews and the focus group. The researchers added numbered lines to the individual and focus group transcripts for increased readability and consistency across the research team.

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis occurred concurrently during a 12-week academic semester (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). Data were collected until saturation was achieved (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researchers scheduled interviews with time in between to allow for member checking and analysis of data (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). Cresswell and Poth (2018) explain that data analysis in qualitative research “involves organizing the data, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them” (p.181). The researchers began

analysis of the data individually by reading all transcripts to familiarize themselves with the content as a whole. Cresswell and Poth (2018) suggest that scanning the data as a whole prior to coding allows the researcher to gain an understanding of the content without the increased complexities of coding (p. 187). Researchers completed individual coding of the interviews and focus group to identify themes and patterns within the data. Memos, and individual and collective codes were maintained by researchers to form an audit trail to enhance validity (Cresswell & Poth, 2018; Portney & Watkins, 2009). Cresswell and Poth (2018) explain how writing memos and taking notes throughout data analysis helps track the development of ideas and, in turn, increases the credibility of the data analysis process (p.189). The researchers combined all independent codes in a protected master codebook using Google Sheets to have a central, all-inclusive location to track the emergence of themes and patterns within the data. Cresswell and Poth (2018) endorse the value of a codebook stating “the codebook articulates the distinctive boundaries for each code and plays an important role in assessing inter-rater reliability among multiple coders” (p. 190).

Researchers ensured triangulation through multiple researchers, multiple data collection methods, and multiple sources of data to enhance internal validity and credibility of data interpretation (Kolb, 2012; Portney & Watkins, 2009). The researchers met weekly to collectively analyze, condense, and organize the codes into well-defined and distinct themes. The researchers used MindNode (2021) to create a visual mind map of the major themes and sub-themes found during data analysis to represent and display findings in a more organized manner. The researchers continued the interpretation of their findings through ongoing discussions involving comparisons to the literature.

Results

Eight grandmothers and one grandfather ranging from 53 to 78 years of age participated in the study. Seven of the original nine participants attended the focus group. Participants had a differing number of grandchildren, ages of grandchildren, and driving distance from their grandchildren (See Appendix A). Common themes that emerged from the data among all of the participants included: co-occupations for the purpose of fun and teaching, impact of grandchild demographics on co-occupations, occupations of grandparents, demands of role, and role and relationships with parents and grandparents. The researchers condensed the major themes that emerged from coding into a visual representation (See Appendix B) using the application, Mind Node.

Co-occupations

Grandparents described fun and teaching as the two main purposes of co-occupations with their grandchildren. Fun co-occupations included riding bikes, visiting parks, coloring, playing ball, and looking for animals or bugs. Some co-occupations spanned several days and required advanced planning. For example, Participant 9 shared that she and her husband have a “Gram pops” camp in the summer when the grandchildren come “for as long as they can . . . to do all kinds of stuff.” In contrast, grandparents also described participating in co-occupations with a single grandchild. Participant 9 elaborated on celebrating birthdays by “taking each of [the grandchildren] for a birthday date” and having time with each by herself to hear about events “happening at school and with their friends.”

Participants also preferred their home environment for co-occupations with their grandchildren as it eliminated distractions and focused attention on their time together. Participant 6 described their preference of environment:

I think I just love having them into our house because we're kind of on our turf and they're more likely to be focused on exactly what we're doing. I mean that's sort of a selfish thing because, for instance, if we're at the lake, there are all kinds of kids to play with and they're swimming so I'm sort of interacting with them but it's a big group thing so I don't have them one-on-one. So I would say we always cherish those moments when we kind of just have them to ourselves.

Family events were also mentioned as fun co-occupations that included spending holidays together, going on vacation or traveling with grandchildren, and having dinner at each other's house frequently. Participant 6 described "concentrated togetherness" during long weekend getaways to the lake house.

During co-occupations, grandparents and grandchildren each fulfilled the role of teacher. When grandparents were teachers, grandchildren learned about family history, character development, life skills, and formal education. Grandparents told stories about relatives and growing up. Participants commonly described the desire to leave a legacy with their grandchildren. Participant 5 shared using ancestry.com to understand her family history, prior to taking her grandson to the cemetery:

Our favorite thing to do is go to the cemetery . . . I don't get to do it very often with my [grandson] because it's too far away . . . but that's an example of storytelling in a place that means something to you.

Participant 5 also elaborated on teaching about family through story-telling: "I grew up on all of those stories from grandparents and talking about our relatives and that's just what we do. And, I'm excited about sharing that history with the grandkids, and my son loves it."

Additionally, participants used co-occupations for teaching character building in their grandchildren through reading books about faith or going to church, discussing how to treat others, teaching manners, and being aware of others' feelings. Participant 6 shared, "We have actually had a lot of conversations about social justice and politics." Other recurring methods of character building used by grandparents included playtime and intentionally watching movies with characters who demonstrated qualities viewed positively by grandparents. Participant 2 described using playtime as an opportunity to talk about "being kind and sharing those kinds of character qualities that we would like to see in her."

Grandparents additionally taught their grandchildren how to perform instrumental activities of daily living and leisure activities such as doing laundry, unloading the dishwasher, playing in the ceramic studio, visiting a museum, teaching tasks around the house (e.g., cleaning, dusting, vacuuming), fishing, teaching about and playing musical instruments, taking care of animals, and building a birdhouse. Participant 1 shared that her grandson liked to cook and bake with her and she "[taught him] how to measure and all of those things." Throughout the participants' reports, co-occupations with the purpose of teaching centered around home maintenance and hobbies.

Grandparents engaged in co-occupations for the purpose of teaching through formal education and helping their grandchildren with homework. Participant 6 shared that she was "helping with e-learning one day a week and fills in if other peoples' days don't work out." Participants also engaged in co-occupations for the purpose of teaching through informal education by taking their grandchildren to the library, assisting with getting to and from school, teaching how to do sudoku, and reading books with their grandchildren.

It was evident that co-occupations also involved grandchildren teaching grandparents. Grandparents reported learning how to use social media applications (TikTok) and online computer software. Additionally, grandparents learned how to take selfies, perform new dance trends, and participate in geocaching. Beyond learning skills, the participants described how their grandchildren taught the value of “life moments.” Participant 9 stated, “Our grandchildren teach us and remind us [of] just the innocence, and the joy that they see in little things, and just remind us about what's important in life.”

Impact of Grandchild Demographics on Co-Occupations

Participants commonly noted that the demographics of their grandchildren impacted the relationship and time spent with them during co-occupations (See Appendix A). When grandchildren were younger, grandparents noted there was more of a focus on developmental activities like vocabulary, communication, and tummy time. Participants also noted that co-occupations were easier when younger grandchildren no longer needed to be carried. Participants 7 and 8 described purposefully seeking out frequent co-occupations with their younger grandchildren, stating “we’ve done grandparents' day at school with them . . . when they were younger, we took every opportunity and we were there.” Additionally, Participant 9 intentionally attended activities with young grandchildren, anticipating the impact of grandchildren aging, stating “Well, they're young enough that they, I mean, basically, they just love everything we do with them. And I'm sure that's going to stop when they get older. So we're taking full advantage of it while we can.”

As they aged, grandchildren’s interests changed, making it more challenging for grandparents to find mutually enjoyable co-occupations. Participants described that older grandchildren engaged in less play with the grandparents and were less interactive; more thought

was required to choose co-occupations with the older grandchildren. A recurring response from grandparents was that their role in co-occupations shifted from active participants to more observers and supporters as grandchildren aged. Participants 7 and 8 shared examples of grandchildren attending college and job interviews, as contrasted by sporting events that grandparents could watch. Participant 5 shared, “I’m mostly an observer now cause they’re in sports and things like that and swimming and, you know, dancing and all that kind of stuff so I’m usually just watching.” Participant 2 elaborated on the reduced availability of grandchildren for co-occupations due to involvement in sports or other activities, stating:

They’re doing baseball or basketball, they’re practicing piano and, you know, all kinds of stuff that they do though in golf. And then when they’re done with it, they’re still playing it. So, there’s you know a lot of time that they spend doing extra things which is good, but doesn’t leave a lot of extra time.

Participants explained how co-occupations with grandchildren differed based on the gender of the grandchild. Granddaughters were more interested in less physically demanding activities such as playing dress-up, making jewelry, and styling each others’ hair. In contrast, grandsons had more physical energy and wanted to play sports, run around, and wrestle. Grandsons were also interested in toys such as transformers, cars, and video games, more so than granddaughters. Participant 9 summarized the difference between granddaughters and grandsons, sharing:

We have four granddaughters, and two grandsons, and they are very different. The granddaughters like to play dress up, play with each other’s hair, have me play with their hair, braid it and do all kinds of things and make jewelry, just a lot of girly things, paint

each other's nails. The boys, on the other hand, are wrestling on the floor, about five minutes after they get here running around like crazy children.

Proximity had an impact on co-occupations and time spent with grandchildren. Being close to grandchildren allowed for “random visits” and more time with them. Participant 6 described the effects of living closer to grandchildren, stating, “We can buzz over there at a moment's notice. It's helpful to be close.” In contrast, she explained that with the grandchild who lived further away she has to “just spend the whole day” as opposed to spending a few hours each time. Participant 2 shared that proximity “makes it easy” and on a nice day she can “just pick [the grandchildren] up and do a walk.”

For Participant 9, demands of the parent role impacted co-occupations with grandchildren. She stated, “we have two special needs boys at home. And so that is the biggest thing that interrupts our time with our grandkids.” Numbers and ages of grandchildren also influenced how grandparents spent their time with grandchildren during co-occupations. For example, some grandparents reported having too many grandchildren to fit everyone in a single vehicle. Others reported that younger grandchildren needing car-seats posed a challenge when planning travel.

Occupations of Grandparents

The participants' employment status included two full-time workers, two part-time workers, one volunteer, two retired participants, and three with no history of employment. Participant 3, who worked part-time as a barista at Starbucks, indicated that her “wonky schedule” posed challenges to engaging in co-occupations with her grandchildren during her workweek. Participants who were retired had more time to dedicate to their grandchildren than they did when they were still working. Not only did participants have more time when they

retired, but they also had “more energy for the [grand]kids now.” More time and energy in retirement translated to Participant 6 helping with schoolwork during the COVID-19 pandemic as she stated, “there’s no way [she] could help with the grandchildren during e-learning if [she] was still working full-time.” Participant 1 described the mixed emotions of full-time work interfering with spending time with grandchildren: “[My job] makes [spending time with grandchildren] a little bit harder and maybe it's because of the impact psychologically . . . you're limited to doing something that takes away a little bit of your freedom, your ability to make your own decision.” Participant 2 described prioritizing co-occupations with grandchildren over personal occupations, saying, “We have put some of our extra activities on hold, things that aren’t essential.”

Many of the grandmother participants noted that their husbands still worked. As a result, the time and types of co-occupations the grandfathers shared with their grandchildren were different than those of the grandmothers. Participant 9 explained:

So now [my husband] doesn't get his own day [with the grandchildren]. But he's hopefully two years away from retirement. And that's a really big thing he's hoping, you know, to crash all of our Grammy days. And there have been occasions where if we can get him to come home for lunch, it just doesn't work out very well because he's got a really high-pressure job. So for Christmas, we do experiences instead of gifts. And so we have done some things where he took the grandsons to Home Depot to build a birdhouse. And then I did you know, on a different occasion, I did things with the girl. So occasionally he does, but it's not a weekly thing. Like I mean, I have Grammy day every week. He doesn't get to do that.

Demands of Role

Physical and Health Demands

The impact of physical health and abilities on participation in co-occupations with grandchildren was a recurring theme. A positive impact on participants' physical health included the exercise they experienced during many co-occupations shared with their grandchildren. Participant 1 shared, "I do a lot of running, and he's [five-year-old grandson] keeping me active in terms of my physical ability with doing that." Participant 4 described the importance of being proactive with physical health in order to participate in co-occupations with her grandchild, age two, by explaining, "I understand I have to do some work to keep going. But, yeah it's like if you don't then you can't do things with your grandchild."

Some grandparents described reduced physical abilities during co-occupations such as difficulty lifting or rocking young grandchildren. Participant 1 stated, "I'm older. It's hard to get up and down and all of that stuff but I do it." Other participants described fatigue and pain after co-occupations such as playing kickball and running around the yard with their grandchildren. Physically challenging aspects of the role were more pronounced for grandparents with chronic health conditions, as noted by Participant 9:

It has a pretty big impact on it because it's something I don't think about until there's a problem but a few weeks ago, I had plantar fasciitis . . . we were playing kickball and I could hardly run and chase the ball or the kids. And that's one of the first times that it struck me that [my health] definitely has a big impact. I also have polymyalgia, which is kind of like fibromyalgia, it comes and goes and I'm on medicine for so right now it's fine. It affects my shoulders a lot . . . Anyway, there were times when my shoulders and knees hurt so bad that I couldn't get down on their level or pick them up when they were

little. And thankfully, I don't deal with that right now. But yeah, it definitely has an impact.

Participants indicated several adaptations or modifications they made to preserve co-occupations with their grandchildren; these modifications were a direct result of grandparents' physical limitations and younger grandchildren's limited tolerance for prolonged activity. One grandfather bought memberships to the Children's Museum and Zoo to allow for more frequent visits of shorter durations at a reduced cost. Participant 6 described challenges with driving at night, resulting in modifications to spend time with grandchildren. Participant 1 shared, "If I'm babysitting at their house and then having to drive home. I would, I'd have to stay the night there. So, but we have lots of sleepovers."

Emotional and Cognitive Demands

Grandparents recognized that co-occupations were opportunities for creating memories with grandchildren, one aspect of the emotional experience of co-occupations with grandchildren. Participants wanted to be remembered by being faithful, a role model, and a strong, happy, and caring person. Many participants wanted to be remembered by how much they loved their grandchildren and the time they spent together, rather than by gifts or money. Participant 9 shared:

That is something I think about a lot. I hope they will remember the time that I spent with them not any money I spent on them or you know, I guess gifts you know, we just don't do that much that many gifts but, but that they will remember, you know, special times that we had all together and with each one by themselves too.

Additionally, participants described the emotional experience of co-occupations using words such as love, pure joy, appreciative, thankful, and really fun. By participating in co-

occupations, the participants believed they enhanced their relationships with their grandchildren and improved their emotional well-being. Participant 7 described the bond his grandson had with his grandmother [Participant 8] stating, “I have to tell you that he and his grandma have a bond that's unbelievable, he would do anything. He comes over, works on his computer, takes care of her in ways that even her own children didn’t.”

Although participants reported many positive emotional experiences of co-occupations, they also admitted to negative experiences associated with co-occupations. Some described grandparenting as stressful, overwhelming, or frustrating; paradoxically, they also indicated missing their grandchildren when away from them. Some grandparents also noted the lack of resources on grandparenting, unlike the resources available for parenting, as a source of frustration.

Additionally, feeling older resulted in unique emotional challenges as the participants found it harder to relate to their grandchildren. Grandparents found it emotionally challenging to hear a grandchild cry at doctor appointments or help a grandchild adjust to having a “bad day.” Participant 6 described the degree to which this can cause emotional challenges by saying “if they're not happy then we're not happy.”

In addition to emotional challenges, cognitively challenging aspects of co-occupations such as a lack of understanding or interest in technology and helping with homework or e-learning were described as most difficult. Participant 9 mentioned that participating in co-occupations in heavily trafficked areas with their grandchildren made it mentally challenging to “keep track of six little ones.” Participant 2 shared that being around water required extra vigilance because “[grandchildren] don’t understand the hazards and they want to just be in the middle of it.” Mentally challenging aspects of co-occupations included keeping the

grandchildren off their phones, not allowing them to play video games, and getting the younger grandchildren to take naps.

Demands due to COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 had an impact on many aspects of co-occupations with grandchildren. Socially, COVID-19 resulted in fewer outings, no hugging grandchildren, distancing, limited location options for co-occupations, and straining the mental health of participants and families. The grandparents were more careful in their activities and in respecting the wishes of the parents. Participant 8 shared, “Right now, you know we can’t hug or touch, and that is a real problem for me as a grandmother.”

As a result of the pandemic, grandparents described more frequently spending time outside and finding new games, wearing a mask, and helping with e-learning were new aspects of co-occupations resulting from the pandemic. In contrast, traveling with grandchildren and participating in indoor activities decreased in frequency.

Authoritative Demands

A recurring aspect that participants identified as non-preferred was acting as a “nanny” or caregiver to their grandchildren during co-occupations. Participant 2 shared that as time spent with grandchildren increased, so did the non-preferred aspects of the grandparent role: “I don’t really want to be the parent, you know, I wanted to enjoy being a grandparent, but I just have them enough that we know that we will obviously be more involved in the structure and discipline.” Participant 6 shared, “the frustration is sometimes [the grandchildren] don’t always listen to us. And so we do spend some time reminding them that we’re their grandparents, and they need to listen and not always push back.” Whereas the participants did not prefer to take on

the authoritative role that accompanies caregiving, they acknowledged the responsibility that came with the supervisory role.

Role and Relationships with Parents and Grandparents

In regard to expectations of the grandparent role during co-occupations, Participant 9 shared, “I just didn't have any idea how much I was gonna love being with them, and they are pure joy. I loved them all instantly. And it's so much different than raising your own kids.” Participant 6 stated, “I honestly thought people really exaggerated about how wonderful it is to be a grandparent. But once I became a grandparent, I mean, it really is just the best thing ever . . . it really just exceeded my expectations.” In comparison to the parent role, the participants experienced less stress and worry in their supplemental grandparent role. Grandparents described themselves as more patient, more present, less distracted or stressed, and more purposeful during co-occupations with their grandchildren. Grandparents stated that the reduced responsibility in raising the grandchildren allowed them to be more easy-going relative to their experience in the parenting role. Participants 7 and 8 stressed that there were boundaries to their role as grandparents:

The one thing that's really important to remember. And we have tried to do this. And that is being involved with your grandchildren is a great thing. And we really enjoyed them. At the same time, we are not their parents, and some of the stuff, between parents and grandchildren, and their children is none of our damn business. and we need to try to walk away from those things and not interfere. Because we are not the children's parents. And that's important, I think. Yeah, they've got to do the parenting.

Grandparents described communication as an important aspect of their role and relationships with grandchildren during co-occupations. Grandparents communicated with their

grandchildren frequently and often daily, depending on the age of and distance from their grandchildren. The forms of communication included facetime, in person, phone calls, and through the grandchildren's parents. Living in close proximity also enabled Participants 7 and 8 to "walk over to their house and knock on the door, wave at the window, and leave." Participant 6 relied on facetime with her grandchildren due to distance and indicated she "would love to be texting them or emailing the two older ones, but their parents really don't encourage them." With younger grandchildren, the parents would "just face the phone to [the grandchild] so I [could] see what [they are] doing. I just kind of watched [them] play." Grandparents described age as a communication barrier; some grandchildren were too young to use a phone whereas others were too old and had "their own lives."

Although participants described many positive aspects of the grandparent role during co-occupations, some potentially negative or challenging aspects were related to discipline. Participants varied in their opinions on discipline, but some believed discipline was necessary if they wanted the grandchildren to try new foods, if they needed a reminder to listen, or if they needed to stop running. Grandparents also shared that the parents acted on their behalf. Participant 8 stated, "If they didn't respond how my daughter thought they should then she would take them aside and talk to them." When asked about the role of the grandparents in disciplining, Participant 1 reported she doesn't "sweat the small stuff" and is "a little bit more lackadaisical." Further, Participant 9 shared that when a person is in the parent role, they "have to worry about the rest of life." Participants 7 and 8 stated, "We are there to be grandparents. I have never, that I recall, ever said a harsh word of discipline to any of my grandchildren. That's their parents' job." Some indicated they felt comfortable disciplining their grandchildren; however, others expressed they didn't feel comfortable without the parents present or deferred to

parents to discipline. Participant 9 also indicated she “never gives advice without asking [the parents]” and respected the parents’ wishes in regard to disciplining the grandchildren.

In general, participants described that a good relationship with the parents made it easier for the family to participate in co-occupations. Grandparents used words such as easy, strong, blessed, trusting, appreciated, close, and proud to describe their relationship with the parents. Participant 2 stated, “[they] had a mutual respect and love for each other.” The positive relationship between the grandparents and parents allowed for more ease in regard to access to and frequency of co-occupations between grandparents and grandchildren. Participant 9 further elaborated on the importance of gaining parental approval for co-occupations:

We don't do anything that the parents don't want us to do. I think that is a really big factor because they wouldn't want us to have [the grandchildren] if we went behind their back, or we did things that they didn't want them doing.

Despite the positive aspects, the relationship between the grandparents and parents also presented some challenges that impacted the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. Participants agreed that they often resolved problems with the parents for the sake of the grandchildren. Participant 5 elaborated stating they “attempt to not hold grudges or bad mouth.” Other challenges in the relationship with the parents that impacted co-occupations were due to grandparents having a previous role of custodial grandparent, excessive work demands, absence of a parent due to the military, or parents having their own lives.

A recurring response about the relationship with the parents revolved around the importance of daughter/daughter-in-law relationships. Participants agreed that relationships with daughters-in-law had more of an impact because it could influence the number and duration of opportunities for co-occupations with their grandchildren. Participant 6 shared, “I feel really

grateful right now that I have two daughters because I think it's easier to be the grandparents of the daughters' children." The relationship with the daughter, in contrast to the relationship with the daughter-in-law, provided grandparents with increased comfort in reaching out to see the grandchildren. Participant 6 elaborated, "If you're a mother-in-law you don't want to step on your [daughter-in-law's] toes, where, you know, my daughters feel free to speak their mind."

Participants believed that daughter relationships positively influenced the frequency and ease of engagement in co-occupations with their grandkids, due to increased comfort with it being their own daughter. Many participants indicated needing to work harder at establishing a good relationship with their daughters-in-law, compared to their sons-in-law, to engage in co-occupations with their grandchildren.

Discussion

Found throughout the data, participants indicated that co-occupations enhanced the relationship between the grandparent and grandchild and that co-occupations contributed to the grandparents' emotional well-being. Similar to the findings of Ludwig et al. (2007) and Mansson (2016), grandparents described co-occupations as being the most enjoyable aspect of the relationship and contributing to emotional closeness (Ludwig et al., 2007; Mansson, 2016). Moreover, the grandparents in the current study described their relationships with their grandchildren as meaningful, similar to the older adults in studies by Bernardo et al. (2014) and Llobet et al. (2011) whose QoL was linked to interpersonal relationships. Participants in the current study supported findings from Moore and Rosenthal (2015) that satisfaction with grandchild care and frequency of co-occupations positively impacted their life satisfaction. However, the researchers in the current study additionally found how grandparents have learned and continued developing through participation in co-occupations with their grandchildren,

acknowledging improvements in patience, joy and appreciation for the seemingly insignificant moments, and technology use.

Danielsbacka et al. (2011) utilized self-rated health, life satisfaction, the meaning of life scores, depressive symptoms, and limitation with activities of daily living (ADL) as measurements to explore the association between grandparenting and subjective well-being. Although the researchers did not focus on co-occupations of grandparents and grandchildren in their quantitative study, they found a correlation between physical limitations with ADLs and lower subjective well-being (Danielsbacka et al., 2011). The participants in this current study reported ADL limitations during co-occupations such as the inability to drive in the dark and reduced physical capacity when playing outside and carrying grandchildren. Likewise, the findings of the current study were consistent with Wright et al. (2011) in that grandparents focused on describing co-occupations they enjoyed, while focusing less on challenges or difficulties they experienced during co-occupations with their grandchildren. Fullen (2019) noted that older adults with positive outlooks on life were more likely to participate in preventative health behaviors. Similarly, in the current study, all participants had positive outlooks about their role as a grandparent, however, only a few mentioned that engagement in co-occupations increased their likelihood to participate in preventative health behaviors.

Partially consistent with findings from Kim et al. (2017) and Kinsner et al. (2017), grandparents reported that participation in co-occupations between grandparents and grandchildren encouraged an active lifestyle of grandparents, but the current study also indicated that co-occupations occasionally led to feelings of aging in grandparents due to inability to use technology or understand content to help teen-age grandchildren with homework. Physical barriers such as feeling exhausted when caring for their grandchildren, difficulty balancing

memory and physical demands, not being able to drive grandchildren at night due to aging, and decreased vision in the dark, made the participants feel older.

The participants in the current study recognized that they were providing assistance and understood the benefits of their role to the families of their grandchildren, but never identified it as the primary reason for providing care and engaging in co-occupations. This finding contrasts with those of Chamie (2018) and Villar et al. (2012), who reported grandparents tended to provide more financial and caregiving assistance to families, such as help when maternity leave ended, and for work-related tasks, leisure activities, and emergencies. Unlike Fullen (2019), grandparents in the current study did not describe receiving support from children or grandchildren as motivation for providing childcare. Instead, they focused on the enjoyment they received during co-occupations when they served as a resource to children and grandchildren, and in spending time with grandchildren.

In Triado et al. (2014), grandparents who provided high-intensity care experienced more negative effects on their psychological health than those who provided low-intensity care. On the contrary, participants in the current study talked primarily about physical stress related to the age of the child, not necessarily psychological stress. The psychological stress reported by grandparents in the current study was more related to concerns for safety, discipline, and missing the children's presence. Contradicting values between grandparents and parents also contributed to psychological stress during co-occupations such as eating meals together. In addition, in the current study, stress surrounding the impact of the relationship between grandparents and parents, specifically with daughters and daughters-in-law, on co-occupations and frequency of co-occupations was mentioned. The current study showed unique findings that participants believed a positive relationship with daughters and daughters-in-law increased their ability to

participate in co-occupations with their grandchildren more than the relationship with sons and sons-in-law.

Villar et al. (2012) found that all of the grandparents viewed their role as highly satisfactory and more relaxed than when they raised their own children in the role of a parent. Similarly, grandparents in the current study discussed feeling that their role as grandparents was more “lackadaisical” than when they were parents. Participants in the current study reported satisfaction in their role through the feelings of joy and pride during co-occupations with grandchildren. Although grandparents enjoyed their role, they reported having non-preferred roles as caregivers and disciplinarians when they spent an increased amount of time with their grandchildren. This finding is consistent with an observation by Chan et al. (2019) that psychological stress was associated with additional caregiving responsibilities. Grandparents in the current study reported that they did not always feel comfortable with disciplining their grandchildren without parents’ approval and identified that discipline presented differently as their grandchildren aged.

The researchers in the current study found that proximity to grandchildren influenced the co-occupations of the grandparent and grandchild. Grandparents who lived closer to their grandchildren reported more opportunities to participate in co-occupations, a finding consistent with Villar et al. (2012). Additionally, new findings included the impact of the age of grandchildren on co-occupations. As grandchildren aged, the grandparents’ roles in co-occupations shifted from active participants to observers and supporters. Some grandparents reported missing co-occupations they participated in when their grandchildren were younger, but also expressed excitement to watch their grandchildren age and experience life milestones such as weddings. Although the co-occupations changed, the grandparents in the current study never

indicated less satisfaction with the role, unlike Triado et al. (2014) who found providing care for older grandchildren was less rewarding for grandparents.

Conclusion

Researchers focused on understanding the lived experiences of supplemental grandparents with their grandchildren during co-occupations. They found that co-occupations enhanced the relationship between the grandparent and grandchild, contributed to the grandparents' emotional well-being, and encouraged an active lifestyle of grandparents. Grandparents also experienced physical and cognitive demands during co-occupations, prompting modifications to preserve participation. Age of and proximity to grandchildren impacted types of co-occupations performed. As grandchildren aged, the grandparents' roles in co-occupations shifted from active participants to observers and supporters.

The focus of this study may have limited the sample of participants to those who enjoyed and wanted to talk about their role as grandparents. Although the participants also discussed some negative aspects of co-occupations, they may have been more inclined to describe positive views. In addition, the study was designed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and data collection occurred concurrently with the pandemic, therefore the discussions were more shifted towards the effects of the pandemic. Due to the virtual environment of the focus group and individual interviews, participants may have not felt comfortable with sharing details relating to negative experiences, limiting a full understanding of the lived experiences of grandparents during co-occupations with grandchildren. Experiences during co-occupations of grandparents unable to use technology were not represented because of the exclusion criteria for the study. Lastly, all but one participant was a grandmother, therefore grandfathers were underrepresented.

Due to the preponderance of studies of parent-child co-occupations, researchers should focus investigations on grandparent-grandchild co-occupations. Additionally, researchers should emphasize in-person interviews and expand to include more grandfathers. Participants briefly discussed how the age of grandchildren impacted co-occupations, but the differences in the grandparenting role based on the age of grandchildren should be studied further. Researchers also did not ask grandparents if participating in co-occupations yielded health benefits, therefore, it could be that these benefits, or preventative health behaviors, were under-reported, warranting investigation. Conversely, research regarding the mental and physical challenges of grandparents as influenced by the age of grandchildren is recommended to fully understand the lived experiences of supplemental grandparents during co-occupations.

The findings of this study can help occupational therapy practitioners anticipate and understand the benefits and challenges associated with co-occupations of grandparents and grandchildren. Understanding the demands of co-occupations can lead to modifications to maintain co-occupations and the valued role of being a grandparent.

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Appendix A

Table 1

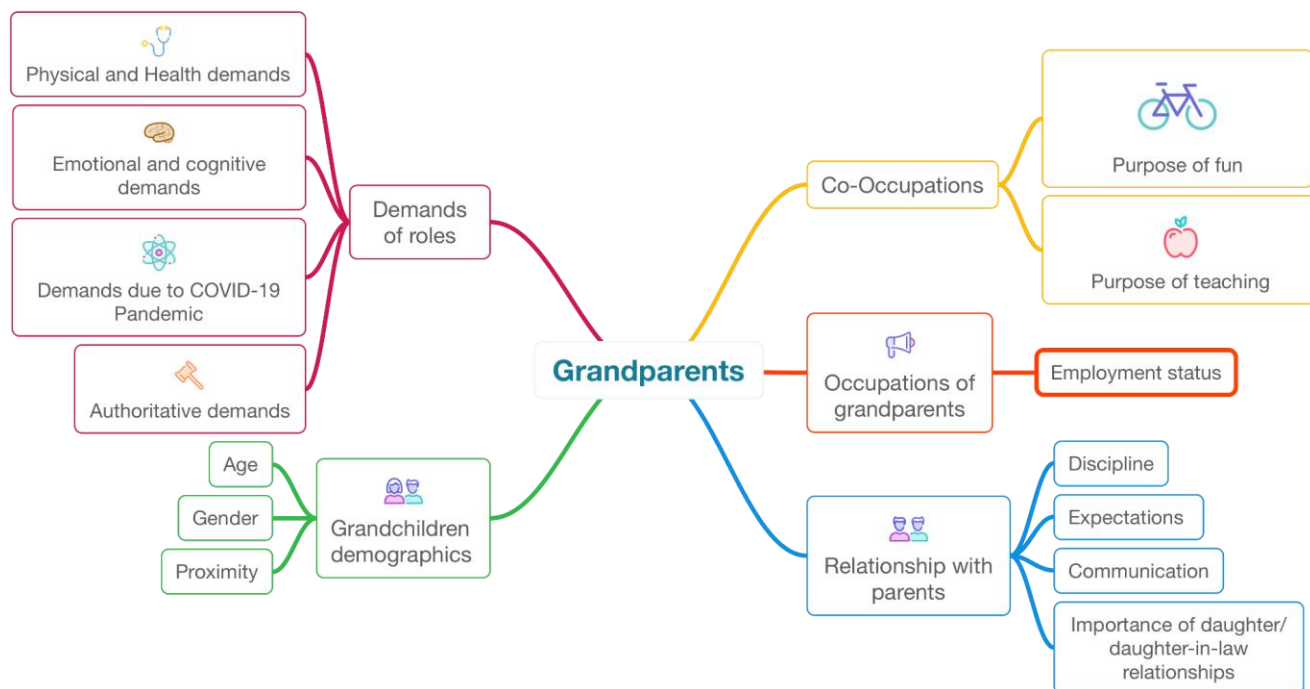
Grandchildren Demographics

Participant	Total Number of Grandchildren	Age Range of Grandchildren (years)	Proximity to Grandchildren
1	2	0.5 - 5	10- 30 min
2	2	0.5 - 2	<10 min
3	2	2 - 7	<10 min
4	1	2	2+ hours
5	8	5 - 14	<10 min; 60 min; 2+ hours
6	3	4 - 11	30 min; 75 min
7	5	17 - 21	<10 min
8			
9	5	5 - 10	30 min

Note. Participants 7 and 8 are married and share the same grandchildren.

Appendix B

Mind Mapping of Emerging Themes



Note. Visual representation of major themes and sub-themes found throughout data analysis.

Appendix C

Individual Interview Questions:

1. Describe a favorite or special activity with your grandchild (grandchildren).
2. Describe a least favorite activity with your grandchild (grandchildren).
3. (Before the coronavirus pandemic,) what activities do you wish you could do more with your grandchild (grandchildren)?
4. Does your relationship with your grandchild's (grandchildren's) parents make it easier or harder to spend time with your grandchild (grandchildren)? How so?
5. (Before the coronavirus pandemic,) how do you keep up communication with your grandchild (grandchildren)?
6. How does your employment status impact your relationship and the time you spend with your grandchild (grandchildren)?
7. How does the distance you live from your grandchild (grandchildren) impact the time you spend with your grandchild (grandchildren) and the activities you participate in together?
8. Tell us more about what your expectations of becoming a grandparent were? How did this differ from your current experience as a grandparent?
9. Describe how your experiences with your grandchild (grandchildren) have been the same or different as a result of the coronavirus.
10. If you are interested in sharing a picture, you can hold it up to the screen to show us. Can you tell us about the picture you shared? OR Can you describe a photo of you and your grandchild (grandchildren)?

Focus Group Interview Questions:

1. Share a story about a time you learned something as a result of spending time with your grandchild (grandchildren).
2. Tell us about a typical day with your grandchild (grandchildren) outside.
3. Tell us about a typical day with your grandchild (grandchildren) inside.
4. Tell us about a day that would not be so typical.
5. Describe the most physically challenging part about spending time with a grandchild (grandchildren). Contrast that with the most mentally challenging part about spending time with a grandchild (grandchildren).
6. How has your role as a grandparent changed as your grandchild (grandchildren) has aged?
7. Tell us about what interrupts time spent with your grandchild (grandchildren)?
8. Describe some of the conversations you have with your grandchild (grandchildren).
9. Describe some of the locations where you and your grandchild (grandchildren) spend time.
10. Describe a time when you wished the day would not end when you were with your grandchild (grandchildren). What about a time when it did not end soon enough?

Signature:

Email: