



# ScotCen

## Social Research that works for society

### FURTHER PARTICULARS

#### Maintaining and extending 'grandparent'-grandchild relationships

**Background:** This project aims to extend theoretical understanding and create links to policy and practice domains around the issue of maintaining and extending the involvement of 'grandparents' in children's lives. It potentially contributes to theoretical debate about social change in contemporary family life (Smart 2007, Jamieson et al 2006) as well as policy discussion around grandparents' role in support for parenting and children's development in the early years. In addition the studentship would combine experience of longitudinal and cross-sectional analysis of quantitative data with conducting and analysing qualitative research and the combined analysis of a mixed methods project.

The Growing Up in Scotland study (GUS) is a longitudinal survey aimed at tracking the lives of a cohort of Scottish children from early years, through childhood and beyond. The first sweep of field work with the birth cohort of 5,217 children aged 0 to 1 years began in April 2005. The seventh sweep was conducted in 2012. A second stage of the study was commissioned during 2008. This included funding to recruit a new Birth Cohort of 6,000 babies born during 2010/11 and to carry out interviews with the families when the child is 10 months old. A third stage was commissioned during 2012 to follow the original Birth Cohort (born 2004/05) until Primary 6 and to interview families in the second Birth Cohort (born 2010/11) when their children are aged just under 3 years and just under 5 years old.

Analysis of data from GUS about grandparents has been conducted for the first, third and sixth sweeps of the first cohort and published in a report *The involvement of grandparents in children's lives* (Jamieson et al 2010). This confirmed some findings of previous literature as well as suggesting questions that would benefit from additional research through secondary analysis and qualitative follow-up. The data confirmed: who is recognised as a grandparent is being extended by re-partnering of parent(s) and grandparents; grandparents who are geographically close are more likely to be emotionally close; types of grandparent involvement and support vary by social class; grandparents are often the first choice of informal childcare for parents; the engagement of grandparents with their grandchildren tends to be gendered - grandmothers are more likely than grandfathers to be informal childcarers; and that lineage - how grandparents are connected to the child, (whether maternal through the child's mother or paternal, through the child's father) is also important. For many children, the maternal grandmother remains the most significant grandparent (Dench and Ogg 2002, 1999; Koslowski 2009) and there was little evidence to support the suggestions of 'new' grandfathers in the literature, that is grandfathers who are more emotionally involved in grandchildren and more like grandmothers (Mann and Leeson 2010). At the same time there were exceptions of very involved grandparents who do not fit these patterns. For example: the family with the most

grandparents lists ten grandparents and in some cases meaningful grandparent-grandchild interactions are extended beyond conventional grandparents - repartnering increases children's pool of grandparents but only exceptionally the support available to children; solo-grandfathers are not typically as involved as solo-grandmothers or couple grandfathers but some are more engaged with their grandchildren; non-resident father's parents are typically the least involved grandparents but in some cases are highly involved; high income families seem able to draw on additional school holiday grandparent care even when they have no local grandparents.

**Research questions** (It is anticipated that the student may narrow the focus to a subset of these)

How are families successfully extending grandparenting beyond kinship?

What facilitates close relationships between grandparents and grandchildren being maintained over-time despite geographical distance?

What facilitates close grandparent relationships that do not fall within the most common pattern of close links between the 'maternal grandmother' and grandchildren? For example, in what circumstances do grandparents other than the maternal grandmother become both actively involved and emotionally close grandparents? In particular, how is it that a non-resident father's parents sometimes become actively involved and very close when they are more typically neither?

What inhibits lone grandfathers in comparison to lone grandmothers from maintaining close relationships with their grandchildren?

Has recession modified grandparents' levels of financial and material assistance to grandchildren in low income families and their parents?

How proactive are children in maintaining grandparent-grandchild relationships?

Do parents seek to maintain grandparent-grandchild relationships when grandparents have dementia?

**Method:** The methods combine secondary analysis, longitudinal analysis and qualitative interviews. The approach will be to develop the existing analysis of GUS data on grand parenting incorporating data from new sweeps. This will include adding analysis of grandparent data collected from the cohort born in 2010/11 and comparing this with the early years data of the original cohort born in 2004/5, as well as extending the longitudinal data as far as this is enabled by overlap between data being made available and the window of 'fieldwork' in the PhD. It is not yet certain how much detailed information about grandparents will be contained in sweeps that have not yet taken place but potentially there is the possibility of looking longitudinally within one cohort at change in grandparent grandchild relationships over a ten year period for cohort 1 and between 10 months and age three or five years, depending on whether the studentship is 1+3 or +3 and part-time or full-time, for cohort two.

Jamieson et al 2010 is based exclusively on GUS data in sweeps 1, 3, and 6 (situated in relevant literature). In these sweeps data are gathered from the main carer of the child, in the over-whelming majority of cases the mother. In subsequent sweeps, data are also gathered from children themselves and it is envisaged that the proposed qualitative component would include children and grandparents. GUS respondents are asked whether they are prepared to be contacted about further research and it is envisaged that the proposed study would involve seeking

permission from selected GUS respondents to make contact with the grandparent generation. Analysis will theoretically identify categories of respondents who will be invited to participate in further qualitative research. Permission will be sought to contact grandparents through parents. The potential for interviews with two or three generations as appropriate will be explored.

**Outputs, Knowledge Exchange and Dissemination:** In addition to the thesis itself the student will prepare at least one academic paper within the life of the project, a working paper on GUS analysis, a joint GUS/CRFR briefing (a short accessibly written briefing in a standard format beginning with main bullet points and ending with policy conclusions for policy, practitioner and academic audiences), a short report for ScotCen on the experience as a data user of GUS, and a presentation for Scottish Government on the data tailored to their interests. GUS has a knowledge exchange officer and an annual cycle of knowledge exchange events to which the student could contribute. He or she will work on a knowledge exchange plan seeking advice from the KE officer and CRFR KE staff. This plan will be reviewed on an annual basis with supervisors.

**Timetable:** This is advertised as a 1+3 or +3 in order to allow for somebody without MSc training to take up the post. This timetable is for a +3 student working full-time  
Year 1: Months 1-3 familiarisation with GUS data through exploratory analysis and preparation of detailed analysis plan, preparation of KE plan; months 4-9 further longitudinal and cross-sectional analysis, identification of samples for follow-up qualitative research, preliminary write up of this phase including report to ScotCen and a working paper.  
Year 2. Qualitative fieldwork: conducting, analysing and preliminary writing up all qualitative interviews  
Year 3. Additional GUS analysis as appropriate, integration of all material, production of thesis, CRFR briefing and preparation of journal article.

**Supervision Arrangements and Ethical Review:** The student will be supervised following the conventions of the School of Social and Political Studies, University of Edinburgh and subject to their ethical review procedures. It is anticipated that the first supervisor will be Professor Lynn Jamieson in Sociology and a second supervisor with statistical expertise (such as Pamela Warner, Population Health Sciences or Alison Koslowski, Social Policy) with Paul Bradshaw or another representative from ScotCen will act as a third supervisor and attend supervision meetings on a more occasional basis than the normal minimum of monthly meeting.

**Archiving and Intellectual property:** GUS data are routinely archived and available for secondary analysis. The student would be expected to archive qualitative data appropriately anonymised. Conventional University of Edinburgh arrangements about the intellectual property of the PhD would apply

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