

## **Children's time with Mothers and Grandparents in Custodial Grandparent Households**

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In 2012, 2% of all U.S. children were raised by a grandparent with no parent in the household, in what are commonly called custodial grandparent families (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). The reasons for entering custodial grandparent arrangements include parental factors such as substance use, abuse and neglect, incarceration, mental health issues, death, and young age (Gleeson et al., 2009; Jendrick, 1994). Recent work shows that a previously unknown but common reason for children to move in with their grandparent is that the parent voluntarily gave up the child to the grandparent, oftentimes because the parent has partnered with a new person who does not get along with the child (Dunifon, Ziolo-Guest and Kopko, 2013). Furthermore, most children in custodial grandparent households are in an informal arrangement, with little or no social service involvement (Scaracella, Ehrle and Geen, 2003). Taken together, this evidence suggests that children in custodial grandparent households may maintain contact with their parents, and that parents may continue to play key roles in the lives of children in custodial grandparent families.

Indeed, despite the fact that children in custodial grandparent households are not living with their parents, new evidence suggests that such children often remain in close contact with one or more of their parents. Research by Dunifon, Ziolo-Guest and Kopko (2013) shows that, looking across two datasets, the vast majority (around 60%) of children in custodial grandparent households had regular contact with their mother. What is not known, however, is the nature of the interactions between mothers and children in custodial grandparent households.

The goal of this paper is to examine the time children in custodial grandparent households spend with their mothers and with their grandparents. Using a sample of 87 children from the 1997 and 2002 Panel Study of Income Dynamics Child Development Supplement (PSID-CDS), we examine both the extent of time spent with mothers and grandparents, as well as the nature of this time. In order to examine whether and how mothers and grandparents are working together in child-rearing, we separately measure children's solo time with a mother or grandparent, as well as time spent with a child, mother and grandparent together. We also examine the factors that are correlated with spending time with mothers. Doing so helps shed light on intergenerational relationships in a complex family type. Specifically, we ask, what is the nature of the time that children in custodial grandparent households spend with their mothers, with their grandparents, and with their mothers and grandparents at the same time? We also present results of preliminary analyses asking, what types of non-time contributions do mothers make to their children in custodial grandparent households?

### **Data**

Data are drawn from the 1997 and 2002 Panel Study of Income Dynamics Child Development Supplement (PSID-CDS) time diary of children's activities. As interviews were completed for the 1997 PSID main file survey, households with children under the age of 13 were identified for

inclusion in the Child Development Supplement. In 1997 information on up to two children (in the same household) ages 0-12 was obtained through extensive interviews with the child, their primary caregiver, secondary caregiver, absent parent, teacher, and school administrator. Information was collected again in 2002/2003 and 2007/2008 for children who remained under age 18 (see <http://psidonline.isr.umich.edu/> for detailed information). We use data from the 1997 and 2002/03 waves<sup>1</sup> of the PSID-CDS and the accompanying child time diary (the last national data on children's time use was collected in 1981 by the University of Michigan on a small sample of several hundred middle class families). At both of the assessments, the child time diary was administered (and completed by the primary caregiver, or the primary caregiver and child together when appropriate), capturing children's activities over a 24-hour period during a weekday and again on a weekend. The diary includes the type, number, and duration of all activities undertaken by the children, as well as information on who participated in the activity with them, and who was with them but not directly participating in the activity.

The 1997 data contains time diary information from 2,904 children, 2,569 of whom were interviewed again in 2002. Using the household roster, we identified children (n=111, representing 87 children, 63 of whom are in this arrangement in one year and 24 report for both years) living in custodial grandparent households; that is, living with a grandparent but with neither their mother nor their father.

### *Measures*

Children completed a diary for a weekday and a weekend day, and we use information from both to create an "average day" measure (following the method of Kalil, Ryan and Chor, 2013). We multiply the weekday time by five and the weekend day time by two, add these two measures together, and then divide by seven to represent an average day in the child's life. Children's time use was coded into the following categories (building off of similar categories used by Kalil, Ryan and Corey, 2012): personal care, play and leisure, screen time, learning activities, household activities, and social activities (see the Appendix for examples of each time use category). For each activity occurring in the time diary data, we code whether a grandparent also participated in the activity, whether a mother participated in the activity, and whether both a mother and grandparent participated in the activity at the same time. We then create measures of **solo time child spent with the mother** and without the grandparent, **solo time with the grandparent** and without the mother, and **shared time the child spent with both the grandparent and mother**. Solo and shared time do not include time when any others are present.

We also control for the following measures in all analyses: race and ethnicity, child age, child sex, number of children born to the child's mother, whether the child is the first born, whether the child's mother was married at the time of birth, the mother's age at birth, the education level of the household head (the grandparent), and the total number of children living in the household.

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<sup>1</sup> The variables that identify who the child was living with in the 2007/08 survey have not been publicly released.

Table 1 presents descriptive characteristics for our sample.

### *Method*

The goal of this project is to document children's time with their mothers and their grandparents in custodial grandparent households. Thus, the nature of the analysis is descriptive. Our first research question asks: what is the nature of the time that children in custodial grandparent households spend with their mothers, with their grandparents, and with their mothers and grandparents at the same time? To address this question we perform regressions of the type noted in Equation 1:

$$Time_i = a_i + b_i X + Year_j + e_i$$

where *Time* is either solo time with grandparent, solo time with mother, or shared time with grandparent and mother; *X* is the vector of control variables, *Year* is the survey year fixed effect (included to adjust for time trends in children's time use as this cohort ages). Regressions are weighted and the standard errors are adjusted for the presence of multiple observations per person.

### **Results**

Table 2 presents unadjusted raw tabulations of the percentage of children spending solo time with mothers, solo time with grandparents, and shared time with mothers and grandparents together. As shown in Table 2, over one-third of children in custodial grandparent households spend solo time with their mother, and almost one-fifth spend shared time with their mother and grandparent. Thus, over half of children in custodial grandparent households spend time with their mothers, and most of this is solo time.

Table 2 also shows the type of time children spend with mothers and grandparents. These categories are presented both for the entire sample and for those who are reported to have spent any time with the child. The most common activities for children to engage in with their grandparents alone are personal care, learning activities, and socializing. In terms of solo time with mothers, the most common activities are personal care, learning activities, and screen time. Finally, the most common shared time activities are personal care, learning activities, and screen time.

Figure 1 presents the results of regression analyses of the type shown in Equation 1. Here we see that children in custodial grandparent households are spending on average 153 minutes per day in solo grandparent time, and 34 minutes per day in solo mother time. The amount of shared time is quite small—around 14 minutes per day on average.

Figure 2a presents the regression-adjusted number of minutes children in custodial grandparent families spend in different types of activities with mothers, grandparents and in shared time. Results show that for both mothers and grandparents, the largest time investments come in the form of learning activities (72 minutes per day with grandparents and 27 minutes per day with mothers). For mothers, the next largest time expenditure is screen

time (15 minutes per day), while for grandparents it is personal care, followed by screen time and socializing. The most common shared activities in which the mother, child and grandparent are present are learning activities and personal care.

To complement the above analysis on the number of minutes spent in each type of care, Figure 2b presents information on the percent of the total time in each category that is spent with the mother solo, grandparent solo, and in shared time (computed from the results in Figure 2a). These results show that the largest categories represented in mother solo time are play and leisure and screen time; specifically, 29% of the time children spend in play and leisure is with mothers alone, and 30% of the time children spent on computers or watching TV is with mothers alone. Mother solo time is much less common in personal care and social activities. For grandparents, the most common activities are social activities (84% of the time children spend in social activities is with grandparents alone), household activities (78% of that time is spent with grandparents alone), and personal care (74%).

### **Future Work**

The PSID analysis above examines one input to children that mothers can provide, specifically that of time. Mothers can also invest money in children. To that end, our study will also include data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS), a longitudinal study of new parents. The FFCWS follows a cohort of 4,898 children born in 20 large U.S. cities between 1998 and 2000 (for information on sample and design of the study please see Reichman et al., 2001). Mothers and fathers were interviewed in the hospital after the birth of the child, and again when the child was one, three, five, and nine years. Our analysis uses data from the nine-year follow-up, specifically drawing from a special survey given when the child's primary caregiver was someone other than the mother or the father. We selected children whose primary caregiver is a grandparent (n=87; 71% are maternal grandparents and 27% are paternal grandparents; all but two grandparents are grandmothers). Almost all (96.55%) report that the child lives with them full-time, and the remaining report that child stays five nights per week with them.

Using this data, we examine contributions that non-residential mothers make to the custodial grandparent household. Preliminary findings suggest that mothers do not contribute financially to the custodial grandparent households in which their children reside. Of the custodial grandparent families in the FFCWS, only five percent of the custodial grandparents report receiving any cash payments from the child's mother (the same proportion of non-custodial fathers are reported to have contributed).

However, this pattern differs for in-kind contributions to the child. Focusing on the 51% of children reported to have regular contact with their mother, raw tabulations (presented in Figure 3) illustrate the types of contributions made by these mothers. These results suggest that non-resident mothers of children in custodial grandparent families are primarily contributing clothes, food, toys and entertainment. Such mothers are least likely to contribute to the child's tuition or medical needs.

## Discussion

The preliminary results presented here shed light on a previously unexamined relationship—that between children in custodial grandparent families and their mothers. Several takeaway messages derive from this work. First, despite not living with them, children in custodial grandparent households spend significant amounts of time with their mothers. Over half of such children spend time with their mothers on a typical day, and they spend about 50 minutes per day with their mothers on average.

Second, most of the time children spend with their mothers is in solo time, not shared with the grandparent. More work is needed to understand the implications of this. It may be the case that grandparents use time with the mother as a respite from providing care. The fact that mothers are most likely to spend solo time with children may also indicate a level of trust between the grandparent and mother, in that the grandparent does not feel a need to supervise the mother-child time together. On the other hand, the large fraction of mothers' solo time may indicate problems in the relationship between the mother and grandparent, to the point that they are not able to work together in parenting the child.

Third, this research suggests that mothers of children in custodial grandparent households play a role that is distinct from that of the grandparents themselves. Such mothers are typically not providing cash, tuition, or medical care to their children, and are not investing time in children's personal care or household activities. Instead, these non-resident mothers spend money on entertainment and clothing, and the time they spend with their children is weighted toward screen time, play, and learning activities. Thus a picture emerges of mothers serving in a role of someone who provides entertainment and fun, while the custodial grandparent does the more onerous work of child-rearing. Future work can investigate the implications of these patterns of maternal involvement for child well-being.

Taken together, then, the results of this study shed light on a complex relationship within a complex family type—that of nonresident mothers in complex families. This work can increase our understanding of nuanced family dynamics and their implications for investments in children.

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## Appendix

### *Examples of Activities with Children*

#### Personal Care

Waking up/Going to bed

Washing, showering, bathing

Dressing, getting ready

#### Play and Leisure

Active sports

Active leisure activities

Competitive sports

Walking

Hobbies

Out of doors (eg. Hunting, fishing)

Domestic crafts

Arts and literature

Music/Theatre/Dance

Playing/Games

Other active leisure

#### Screen Time

Computer use (non-educational)

TV

#### Learning Activities

Homework

Reading

Computer use for homework/learning

Classes/lessons

#### Household activities

Meal preparation

Doing dishes, meal cleanup

Laundry and clothes care

Indoor chores

Repairs or outdoor maintenance

Care of houseplants

#### Social Activities

Organization meetings and activities

Attending spectacles/events

Socializing (eg. Visiting, parties, etc.)

Table 1  
*Weighted Descriptive Statistics by Year*

	1997	2002
	<u>Mean or % (SD)</u>	<u>Mean or % (SD)</u>
White	33.31%	57.48%
Black	45.26%	22.90%
Hispanic	21.42%	18.37%
Other	0.00%	1.26%
Child age	7.85 (3.16)	11.94 (2.87)
Male	48.33%	67.59%
Number of siblings	2.50 (2.34)	2.18(2.01)
First born	64.15%	73.35%
Mother married at time of birth	28.53%	34.20%
Mother age at birth	21.13 (6.37)	22.18 (5.97)
Head education	9.31 (4.32)	10.72 (3.75)
Number of children living in household	2.62 (1.64)	2.09 (.91)
Unweighted n	50	61

Table 2  
*Whether Child Spends Time with Grandmother, Mother, and Shared (Raw tabulations)*

	Solo Time with Grandparent	Solo Time with Mother	Shared Time
Any time	86.49%	34.23%	18.92%
<u>Overall sample</u>			
Personal care	79.28%	20.72%	16.22%
Play and Leisure	24.32%	7.21%	0.00%
Screen	45.05%	13.51%	7.21%
Learning	56.76%	20.72%	12.61%
HH Activities	25.23%	7.21%	0.00%
Social Activities	52.25%	9.91%	2.70%
<u>Any time sample</u>			
Personal care	91.25%	63.03%	86.59%
Play and Leisure	33.94%	18.33%	0.00%
Screen	58.31%	59.06%	34.21%
Learning	64.25%	68.84%	61.11%
HH Activities	33.48%	30.56%	0.00%
Social Activities	60.76%	21.07%	20.56%

Overall sample tabulations are conducted on the entire sample; any time sample tabulations are conducted only on those who spent any time with the child.



Figure 1

Regression Adjusted Total Time with Children

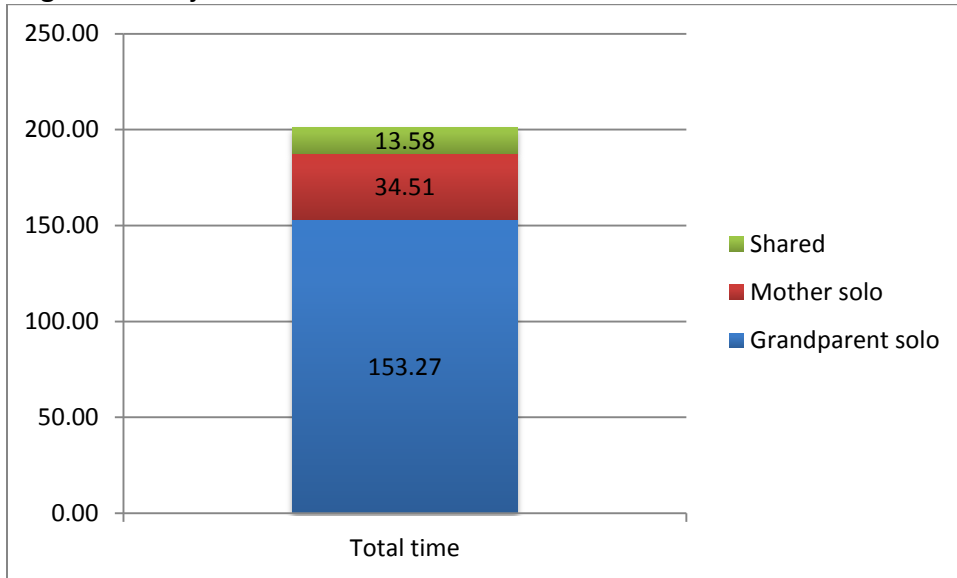


Figure 2a

Regression Adjusted Time with Children by Category (Minutes)

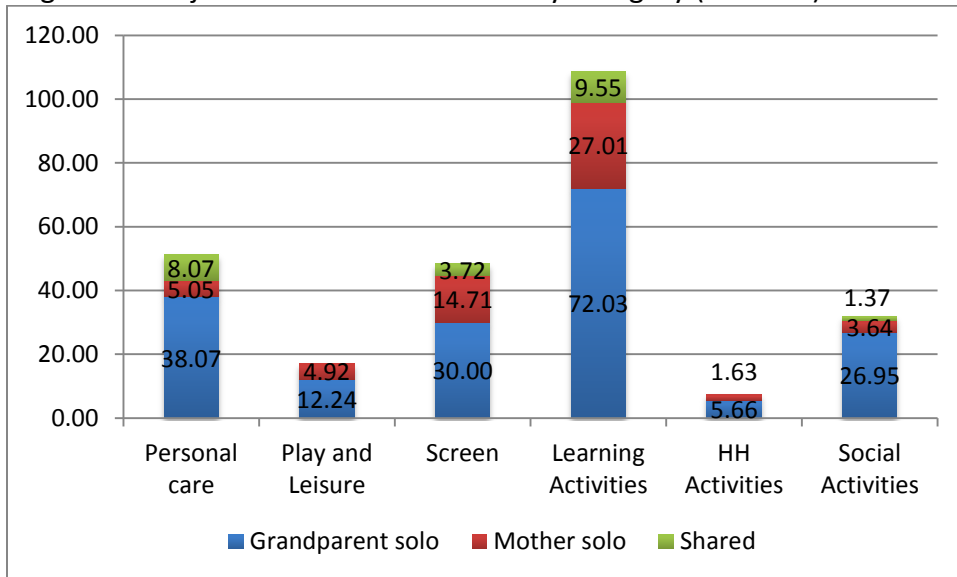


Figure 2b  
Regression Adjusted Time with Children by Category (Percent of Time)

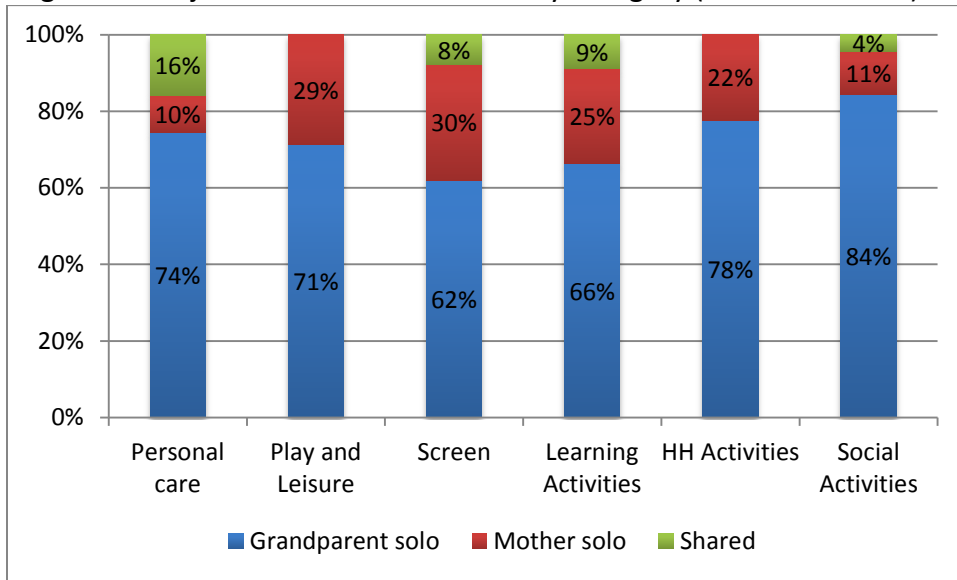


Figure 3  
How Often Mother Buys or Pays for Items for Child (FFCWS) Among Those Who See Her

