

# Voices of Grandparents: An Asian Perspective

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What is the visualization we have when we think of grandparents??





# Flow of presentation

- Share on the background of research on grandparents (GP)
- Impact of grandparenting functions on the physical, emotional and financial conditions of GP
- Determining factors of their quality of life
- Strategies used for stress management
- Recommendations for policy, programmes and further research
- Final remarks: What are the needs of grandparents in Singapore



# Research on Grandparents in Asian Context

- ▶ 6 Asian countries i.e. Japan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and China
- ▶ A survey was conducted in Singapore of 202 grandparents, followed by a qualitative research part in Stage 2.
- ▶ Structured in-depth interviews of three generations in 15 Singaporean families ie. A grandparent, a link parent and a grandchild in the same family were interviewed
- ▶ There were a total of 77 grandparents interviewed face to face across the 6 countries



# Interview guide for Grandparents consisted of:

- Section A : Perceptions of Relationship
- Section B : Closest Grandchild and relation with Link parent
- Section C : Meaning of Grandparenthood
- Section D : Roles and function



# Qualitative interviews threw more light into their experience

- ▶ “I: Have there been instances when you and your parents had differences in opinions with regards to childcare/discipline? How do you resolve it?”
- ▶ LP $\infty$ : Yes; when I scold or beat my son over their misbehaviour, my parent will step in, saying that they feel pain when their grandchildren feel pain. My parents sometimes love the grandchildren more than their own children. As a result, fighting and arguments can arise between grand parents and link parents. I feel that my parents are sensitive, and thus I am afraid to hurt them. Instead of fighting, I will go inside my room and cry or go out of the house to look at the sea to destress.”
- ▶  $\infty$ LP = Link Parent



# Positive and negative emotions

## Positive

- ▶ Happy and joyful e.g. at birth of first grandchild
- ▶ Feel satisfied with life
- ▶ Feel useful to family
- ▶ Gratitude
- ▶ Feel intergenerational connectedness

## Negative

- ▶ Tired and physically exhausted e.g. when grandchildren need physical care or discipline
- ▶ Feel unappreciated
- ▶ Arguments with LP over discipline/food/health-care needs create unhappiness



# Meaning of Grandparenting

“I want my grandchildren to remember me  
(legacy)

Grandchildren are important because they  
carry on the family line  
(heritage)

Steer clear of advising children about gr-  
children

Being a GP is more satisfying than other  
things in my life”





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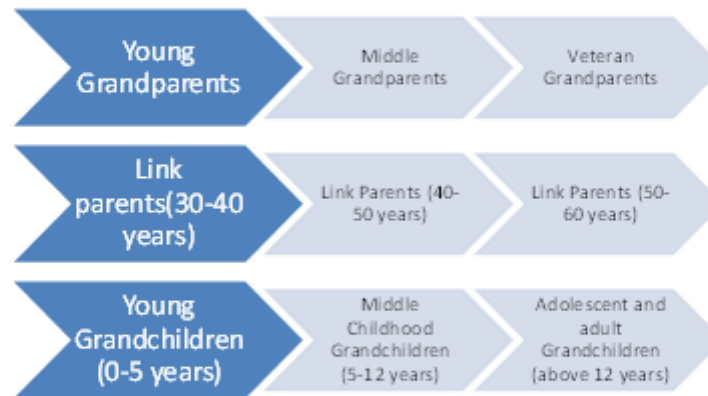


# Causes of Stress and family tension

- In Japan and Hong Kong the shortage of physical space was a factor
- In Thailand, China and Malaysia, finance was a critical factor causing stress to grandparents (especially of LK were not giving an allowance)
- In Singapore, different discipline philosophies and living arrangement concerns caused tension
- Multiple overlapping roles played by grandparents eg. A grandparent may be a spousal caregiver and minding grandchildren (all countries)

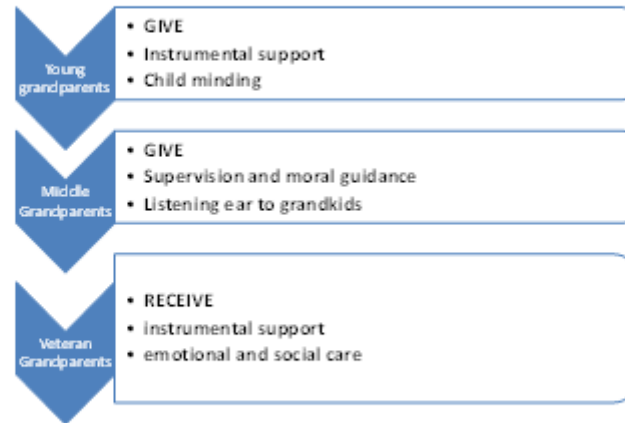
# Family life course and state of grandparents

Fig. 1.1 Life course and three generations on the "Go"



# Can we predict “high risk” and “low risk” stress points?

Fig. 1.2 Support and care between alternate generations over time





# Types of grandparents

- Young and “old” grandparents
- Distant (ie. In geographical space) and nearby grandparents
- Active and passive grandparents
- Skipped generation households where GP are like parents vs stem family households (where LP are present so GP are supplementary caregivers to the LP)
- Custodial vs non-custodial GP (eg. In divorced families, a GC may live with GP who has custody)



# Strategies of Stress Management

- ▶ While filial responsibility and filial piety are still generally practised, the ageing parents have less expectation of their children. However, if even their minimal expectation is unmet they feel very disappointed. E.g. when the 'old' grandparent is ill and needs care, he/she expects familial reciprocal care. When this is not forthcoming, there may be family strife and breakdown of relationships.  
Strategy: Negotiation, compromise e.g. adult child may pay partially the Nursing Home fees
- ▶ When there are arguments regarding discipline  
Strategy: Non-interference
- ▶ When there are Financial crises  
Strategy: downsizing, monetizing assets e.g. jewellery



# Strategies of Conflict Management

1. Avoidance and non-interference
2. Adaptability to circumstances
3. Flexible Boundaries
4. Philosophical Wisdom e.g. Japanese grandparents mentioned importance of “ikigai” or purpose of life. They viewed life as full of ‘highs’ and ‘lows’ which characterised LIFE.
5. Accept that there is no perfect solution – when there is ambivalence and differences in lifestyle between the three generations



# So what do GP expect and need?

- The different cohorts of baby boomers (early, middle or late baby-boomers) are a world apart from the seniors who are in their 80s and 90s today. They would like to live on their own terms and not be bound by a routine of daily full time grandparenting e.g. “I am a crisis grandparent” said a friend!
- Future grandparents vs older generations of GP
- Resourcefulness
- Educational levels
- Health and mobility





# Key Question

- ▶ When current cohorts of elderly (who do not have close ties with grandchildren) who have been independently living in their own homes, need care in their 80s or 90s who will do the caregiving?
- ▶ Previous cohorts may have “earned” their right to expect filial care from adult children and grandchildren
- ▶ Should a new social contract emerge in our society, Where community care/ ‘paid’ formal care replaces family care to some extent?



# Suggestions for policies, programmes and future research

- Policies:  
The “Active Ageing Hubs” in the heartlands could be multipurpose. They could provide resources, talks, and support for caregivers (spousal caregivers, grandparent caregivers, caregivers of people with disability/Persons with Dementia etc)
- The “Active Ageing Hubs” may be places where the caregivers can come for respite, and mutual support and guidance on solving problems. Other partners such as Caregivers Alliance, Silver Caregivers Co-operative, and Caregiver Welfare Association can be co-located for the caregivers convenience



## Suggestions for policies, programmes and future research cont'd

- ▶ Local research can be encouraged on issues of grandparents and their needs (these may be dynamic and fluid hence the need to do research at intervals)
- ▶ Develop an indigenous model of community support e.g. would telephone or online support be preferred by grandparents? Would a hotline meet their needs? Cyber counselling?
- ▶ Seniors may be abused by family members e.g. verbally or psychologically, when they are grandparenting so their rights should be made known to them



# Circle of care



- ▶ Recommendations:  
Ageing families should be counselled regarding family conflicts and stress management strategies

When professional/community/informal help is rendered in a timely way there can be prevention of family friction and breakdown

Baby boomer generation can be trained as **para counsellors** and it would be a role they can play as they are better educated. They should undergo training in this field so that their advice would be relevant and effective. Providing responsible roles to seniors who are capable is a way of harnessing their potential.

- ▶ Grandparents play a significant role as **preservers of tradition** and culture so they should be recognized by society

# Thank You for your attention!

Acknowledgement: I would like to acknowledge the contributions of my co-researcher A/P Thang Leng Leng in this project we did together.

Reminder: If a grandparent has played an important role in your life, go home and show your gratitude to him/her today!!

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