

Grandparents' Co-Parenting Styles in Chinese Cities: Living Styles and Mothers' Quality of Life

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Abstract: This study investigated grandparents' co-parenting styles in child-rearing and its association to the well-being of 525 mothers with children aged 12-24 months in a Chinese city, using a questionnaire survey method. It confirmed that more than 70% of grandparents are taking part in the early child-rearing at the present day. About 63% of young families with young children live together with grandparents, and about 14% of young families live near grandparents within 30 minutes walking distance. The results of this study identified that living distance is an important factor in mothers' quality of life (QOL). Those mothers who lived together with or near grandparents showed a higher QOL than those who live far from grandparents. However, further comparison analysis results indicate that those who live within walking distance but do not live together or very nearby had the highest scores in psychological/social/environment/total QOL. Meanwhile, those living together with grandparents reported more generational conflicts during daily life, which had a negative relationship with the mothers' QOL. No significant difference was found in mothers' QOL and generational conflicts between the mothers living together with paternal grandparents and those with maternal ones.

Keywords: *grandparents, co-parenting, mothers' QOL, childcare*

1. Introduction

Traditionally, co-parenting between parents and grandparents is common in Asian cultures. However, co-parenting can be both rewarding and challenging, because it involves multiple generations and complex relationships between family members (Hoang, Haslam, Sanders, 2020).

(1) Grandparents' Co-Parenting in China

In China, due to dual-career couples in most nuclear families (Tao, 2011) and the insufficient number of nursery schools for 0-3-year-old children (Xue & Wu, 2019; Yang, 2018), grandparents are playing a significant role in child-rearing as major caregivers.

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There are two kinds of grandparental support styles in China. In rural areas, most young parents choose to work in the cities and leave their children with grandparents living in rural until they enter school (i.e., grandparenting). On the other hand, in urban areas, young parents often invite grandparents to live together or live nearby to help them to take care of children (i.e., co-parenting). Especially when mothers return to work after maternal child-care leave (usually four months after childbirth, according to Chinese Labor Law and Special Rules on the Labor Protection of Female Employees), grandparents have to look after young children during the day (sometimes even at night) instead of their parents until the children enter kindergarten at the age of three. Grandparents are taking on critical co-parental responsibilities in contemporary China (Xiao, 2014; Li, 2013). In Shanghai (the second biggest city in China with 24,000,000 residents), more than 60% of families with a child under six-year-old rely on grandparents to look after their children (Wang & Cheng, 2014). As mentioned above, most women have to return to work as soon as possible after they finished the 98 days of legal maternity leave (Special Provisions on Labor Protection for Women Employees, 2012) to keep their former work before giving birth due to the competitive labor market. Now the employment of working-age women (15-50, or 15-55, according to whether she is a cadre or not) in China is about 65%. In contrast, the nursery admission rate for children under three years old is about 4.1% due to the lack of nursery schools for children aged 0-2 (Yang, 2018). For example, the number of nursery schools in Shanghai is only 450, while the number of 0-3 years children is 600,000 (Tong, 2020). Not only the quantity but also the quality of nursery schools is far from enough for the needs of dual-career couples. For this reason, co-parenting with grandparents is very popular in urban areas in China. However, according to the available literature in the Chinese academic database CNKI (using ‘grandparents/grandparents’ co-parenting’, ‘childcare’, ‘mothers’ QOL/mental health’ as key words), yet little quantitative research has addressed the details of co-parenting with grandparents and the influence of such kind of co-parenting style on mothers’ quality of life (QOL).

(2) Styles of Grandparents’ Co-Parenting in Urban Areas: Living Distance, Maternal/Paternal Grandparental Involvement

With rapid economic development in China, an increasing proportion of women enter into the labor market, even after childbirth (Xing, Zhou, Archer, Yue, Wang, 2016). In urban areas, after a child’s mother returns to work, usually grandparents become the main caregiver in the daytime until the young parents return home (Li, et al., 2015; Sun, et al., 2017). There are several styles of grandparents’ co-parenting. In terms of living distance, most young parents live together with grandparents, or living in very close proximity when the child is young, so that they can easily receive grandparents’ support. In this case, young parents might be able to receive the largest support from grandparents, not only in the daytime but also at night, and they have more contact with grandparents. Alternatively, if young parents live far from grandparents, they have to send the child to the grandparents’ house or ask the grandparents to stay in their house to look after the child during their work time. The grandparents hand over the child to the young parents when they return after work. In this situation, the contact between young parents and grandparents may be less than those living together or living nearby.

Basically, both maternal and paternal grandparents are potential support providers in childcare, because the ‘four grandparents - two parents - one child’ structure has been the main style in Chinese families, due to the one-child policy. However, given each grandparent’s physical health, living distance, time (retirement or not), relationship with young parents and other conditions, in some families, only maternal or only paternal grandmothers give support in child-raising. Another style is that the maternal grandparents and the paternal grandparents take care of their grandchildren in turn by days or by weeks. In some other families, when one of the young parents, usually the mother, is a homemaker, or they have a babysitter, the grandparents may be involved less in child-caring.

As mentioned above, the styles or conditions of grandparents' co-parenting are diverse, such as the living distance and the co-parenting styles. However, until now, little data is available about the details of grandparents' co-parenting in Chinese cities. For example, who is the main caregiver among the four grandparents, the maternal grandparents or the paternal ones, the grandmother or the grandfather? How long do they look after the children every day? What kind of support do they provide? Or, to what extent do they support the young parents in raising the child? It is necessary to figure out the conditions of grandparents' co-parenting in detail.

(3) Living Styles, Mothers' QOL, Generational Conflict

Another research question is about the influence of grandparents' co-parenting on young parents' well-being. According to the related survey (Li, Wang, Xhu, Wang, Pan, Liang, 2015) and the interview about grandparents' support in child-raising given to some of the participants in this study, it is known that one of the main purposes of grandparents' co-parenting is to support the young parents to relieve their pressure of child-caring. The literature also indicates that young parents may benefit a lot from grandparents' support, including physical, time, material, emotional, financial, informational support to parents and grandchildren (Yaegashi, et al., 2003; Li, Xie, Song, 2016; Wang, 2012; Barnett, Scaramella, Neppl, Ontai, & Conger, 2010). It is assumed that those mothers who co-raised their children with their grandparents have higher QOL. However, yet little empirical research has investigated the relationship between co-parenting styles and mothers' QOL. It is not clear which kind of co-parenting style is more beneficial to mothers, such as living together with grandparents or not, or living with paternal grandparents or maternal ones. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the association between living styles and mothers' QOL.

In addition to support, during co-parenting with grandparents, mothers may also suffer from interference by grandparents due to the generational gap in child-caring, which is assumed to undermine mothers' QOL. Especially in present-day China, with the rapid economic development and dramatic change in social culture, a great gap exists in childcare/education values between the young generation (young parents) and the old generation (grandparents) (Gao, 2015). Moreover, young parents tend to refer to science-based parenting books or search for related information from the internet rather than relying on learning the parenting experiences of their grandparents (BERD, 2019). This might enlarge the generational gap and cause more conflict during co-parenting. If the grandparents do not agree to the way of the young parents, and take an alternative or opposite way, young parents may feel dissatisfaction with grandparents' involvement. On the other hand, when grandparents are bound by a perceived obligation to help with caring for their grandchildren (Breheny, Stephens, & Spilsbury, 2013; Mason, May, & Clarke, 2007), young parents are more likely to feel they are being criticized, judged, and undermined by the grandparents (Barnett et al., 2011; Buckingham-Howes, Oberlander, Hurley, Fitzmaurice, & Black, 2011). However, as with the relationship between living styles and QOL, until now, little research has addressed the association of co-parenting styles and generational conflicts. Given that generational conflict has a negative impact on mothers' well-being, it is necessary to make clear which co-parenting styles make mothers perceive more generational conflicts. Given that a mother should share more common values and living habits with her own parents (i.e., maternal grandparents), it is assumed that the mothers' co-raising children with maternal grandparents have less generational conflicts and higher QOL than those co-raising with paternal grandparents. In terms of living distance, although living together could be the most convenient way to receive grandparents' help with child-caring, which is a benefit for mothers' QOL, meanwhile living together might lead to more generational friction, which is thought to undermine mothers' QOL.

According to the social background and the related literature mentioned above, this study aimed to 1) investigate the detailed conditions and styles of grandparents' co-parenting in Chinese cities; 2) focus on the living styles of families who are co-raising children with grandparents and clarify the

association between living styles and mothers' well-being, by comparing mothers' QOL and perceived generational conflicts in different living styles.

2. Methodology

In order to clarify the relationship between grandparents' co-parenting styles and mothers' subjective well-being, we conducted a questionnaire survey for mothers. The following is a detailed description of this survey.

(1) Participants and Procedures

With the cooperation of a Maternal and Child Health Hospital in Shanghai, 600 mothers of young children aged 12-24 months were invited to participate in the investigation when they came to accept the periodic health checkup for all children living in the district. Totally 525 mothers effectively answered our questionnaire on a dedicated website on-site or at home during 2017-2018 with their consent.

(2) Measurements

Demographic variables included age/gender/received education of parents, length of maternity leave, age of grandparents, age/gender of children, parenting style (i.e., in daily life, childcare was provided by parents only, parents and grandparents, or grandparents only), living distance between young parents and grandparents, and detailed support from each grandparent.

(3) Mothers' QOL

Mothers' QOL was assessed by the Chinese version of WHOQOL-BREF. The WHOQOL-BREF is an abbreviated 26-item version of the WHOQOL-100 measure developed by the WHOQOL Group (WHO, 1998). The 26 items consist of two global items assessing overall QOL and general health, along with 24 items in four specific QOL domains: physical health (7 items, e.g., "Do you have enough energy for everyday life?"), psychological health (6 items, e.g., "How much do you enjoy life?"), social relationships (3 items, e.g., "How satisfied are you with your personal relationships?"), and environmental health (8 items, e.g., "How healthy is your physical environment?"). The 26 items of the WHOQOL-BREF were rated using a 5-point Likert interval response scale. A high score indicates better QOL. The WHOQOL-BREF is designed to be comparable across cultural settings.

3. Results

(1) Basic Information About Grandparents and Their Support in Child-caring

Table 1 shows each grandparent's age, work condition, living distance, contact frequency with the grandchild, and their help level appraised by the mother. Most of the grandparents were under 70 years old, and 28~39% were under 60 years old, which means they were relatively young. 33.2% of maternal grandfathers and 25.5% of paternal grandfathers were still working, while 82.6% of maternal grandmothers and 88.1% of paternal grandmothers were retired. Regarding their living conditions, 18.9% of maternal grandfathers and 28.6% of maternal grandmothers, and 23.6% of paternal grandfathers and 35.3% of paternal grandmothers live together with young families. Additionally, 5.2~9.3% of grandparents live near young families within 15-minutes walking distance. About the contact frequency between grandparents (each of the four) and grandchildren, 25.6~47.1% of the grandparents meet their grandchild every day. That means almost 50% of grandchildren meet at least one of their grandparents every day. As for the perceived helpful level by mothers, 37.2% of maternal grandmothers and 30.3% of paternal grandmothers were appraised as 'very helpful', while only 18.7% of maternal grandfathers and 13.8% of paternal grandfathers were appraised as 'very helpful'. It

indicates that grandmothers (both maternal and paternal) play a more important role in co-parenting. As for the detailed support contents by grandparents, most of the support contents involved 'child's daily life' (31~61%) and 'housework' (28~55%), which means at least half of the families were relying on one of the four grandparents in daily life.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of grandparents' age, work condition, living condition, contact frequency with grand-children and helpful level in child-caring

	Maternal				Paternal			
	grandfather		grandmother		grandfather		grandmother	
<i>Age(yrs)</i>	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<60	194	39	235	46.9	139	28.1	172	34.6
60-70	255	51.2	234	46.7	270	54.5	266	53.5
70-80	40	8	28	5.6	72	14.5	50	10.1
>80	9	1.8	4	0.8	14	2.8	9	1.8
<i>Work condition</i>								
Occupation	165	33.2	87	17.4	126	25.5	59	11.9
Retirement	332	66.8	414	82.6	369	74.5	438	88.1
<i>Living condition</i>								
living-together	94	18.9	143	28.6	117	23.6	175	35.3
< 15 minutes walking distance	26	5.2	30	6	42	8.5	46	9.3
15-30 minutes walking distance	12	2.4	11	2.2	22	4.4	21	4.2
< 10 minutes by transportation	4	0.8	7	1.4	4	0.8	6	1.2
10-30 minutes by transportation	44	8.9	37	7.4	34	6.9	32	6.5
30-60 minutes by transportation	59	11.9	59	11.8	50	10.1	50	10.1
> 60 minutes by transportation	70	14.1	59	11.8	55	11.1	39	7.9
Long distance by train or airplane	188	37.8	154	30.8	172	34.7	127	25.6
<i>Contact frequency</i>								
every day	120	25.6	182	37.4	143	31.8	225	47.1
every three days	49	10.4	50	10.3	40	8.9	44	9.2
every week	50	10.7	53	10.9	41	9.1	42	8.8
every two weeks	27	5.8	22	4.5	17	3.8	14	2.9
every month	38	8.1	29	6	27	6	20	4.2
special events (birthday or holidays)	120	25.6	104	21.4	104	23.2	74	15.5
almost no contact	52	11.1	39	8	58	12.9	46	9.6
totally no contact	13	2.8	8	1.6	19	4.2	13	2.7
<i>Perceived helpful level</i>								
not helpful	72	15.5	35	7.2	106	21.9	76	16
less helpful	216	46.5	150	31	180	37.2	135	28.4
more helpful	90	19.4	119	24.6	90	18.6	120	25.3

very helpful	87	18.7	180	37.2	67	13.8	144	30.3
Grandparents' support contents (multiple selection questions)								
child's daily life	167	32.8	277	54.4	139	27.3	261	51.3
housework	168	33	251	49.3	127	25	227	44.6
pick-up and drop-off from nurseries/early education institutions	39	7.7	52	10.2	24	4.7	34	6.7
take care of children when they are sick	80	15.7	166	32.6	59	11.6	110	21.6
play with children on holidays	178	35	195	38.3	110	21.6	126	24.8
provide parenting knowledge or experience	76	14.9	151	29.7	53	10.4	93	18.3
financial support	132	25.9	123	24.2	112	22	99	19.4
do not help	100	19.6	67	13.2	141	27.7	101	19.8
dead	41	8.1	19	3.7	63	12.4	25	4.9

From the detailed support reasons (multiple answer questions) reported by mothers (Table 2), 'liking children' is a very important reason. Another personal reason is that grandparents think it is too hard for young parents to rear children by themselves (most young parents were double career couples), whereas grandparents are relatively free after retirement. Meanwhile, 'distrust of the child-care service or nanny' is related to the immature early child-care service in China, such as lack of child-care service standards and lack of security management (Yang, 2018). In terms of conflict frequency between parents and grandparents in parenting values, 34.4% of respondents answered 'almost none', but more than 65% answered 'occurred' (56% 'sometimes occurred' + 9.6% 'always occurred'). As for the ideal child-care style, 38.2% of mothers selected 'only parents', 41.3% for 'parents + grandparents', 13.8% selected 'parents + child-care facility' or 'parents + nanny', and 6.3% for 'parents + grandparents + nanny', but no one selected 'only grandparents'.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of grandparents' help reasons, generational conflicts, and young parents' ideal child-care styles

Support reasons (multiple select question)	n	%
like children	372	73.1
child-caring too hard for young parents	307	60.3
distrust the child-care service or nanny	215	42.2
free after retirement	139	27.3
no suitable child-care facility	35	6.9
Ideal child-care style	n	%
only parents	188	38.2
parents+grandparents	203	41.3
parents+child-care facility	45	9.1
parents+nanny	23	4.7
parents+grandparents+nanny	31	6.3
others	2	0.4

Conflicts frequency between generations in parenting

<i>values</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
almost no	165	34.4
sometimes occurred	269	56.0
always occurred	46	9.6

(2) Living Styles of the Three Generations

Table 3a. Living distance of grandparents (category I-original category)

Category I	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
① living-together	285	63.6
② < 15 minutes walking distance	46	10.0
③ 15-30 minutes walking distance	17	3.8
④ < 10 minutes by transportation	7	1.6
⑤ 10-30 minutes by transportation	26	5.8
⑥ 30-60 minutes by transportation	14	3.1
⑦ > 60 minutes by transportation	12	2.7
⑧ long distance need train or airplane	42	9.4

Table 3b. Living distance of grandparents (category II- living together or nearby)

Category II	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Living together or nearby (①+②)	330	73.66
walking distance ③	17	3.79
< 30 minutes by transportation (④+⑤)	33	7.37
30-60 minutes by transportation ⑥	14	3.13
Long distance (⑦+⑧)	54	12.05

Table 3c. Living distance of grandparents (category III- living within walking distance)

Category III	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Living together ①	285	63.6
nearby or walking distance(②+③)	62	13.8
< 30 minutes by transportation (④+⑤)	33	7.4
30-60 minutes by transportation ⑥	14	3.1
Long distance (⑦+⑧)	54	12.1

Table3 (a~c) shows the living conditions of the three generations according to the living distances of the four grandparents. Table 3a is the original category of living distance, counted by the

shortest ones among the four grandparents. Table 3b and Table 3c show the different categories of living conditions classified by different criteria. For example, combining the living-together and those living within 15 minutes walking distance, 73.66% of young families were living together with or very nearby grandparents (Table 3b). If we combine those living within 15 minutes and those within 15-30 minutes walking distance, it shows that 13.8% of young families were living near the house of grandparents but not living together.

Table 4a. Living styles (type I-living together/not)

Type I	<i>n</i>	%
not living with grandparents	163	36.4
living with grandparents	285	63.6

Table 4b. Living styles (type II- paternal/maternal)

Type II	<i>n</i>	%
not living together	163	36.4
living with paternal grandparents	155	34.6
living with maternal grandparents	130	29.0

Table 4c. Living styles (type III- paternal/maternal ×gender)

Type III	<i>n</i>	%
not living together	163	36.4
living with paternal grandparents	91	20.3
living with maternal grandparents	76	17.0
living with paternal grandmother	57	12.7
living with maternal grandmother	45	10.0
living with four grandparents	9	2.0
living with paternal grandfather	4	0.9
living with grandmothers (paternal + maternal)	2	0.4
living with maternal grandfather	1	0.2

63.6% of young families were living with at least one of the four grandparents (Table 4a). Among them, 45% lived with maternal grandparents, and 55% lived with paternal ones. Table 4b shows the living styles depending on the cohabitants are paternal grandparents or maternal ones. Table 4c shows the further detailed information about the cohabitants, given the gender of grandparents.

(3) Comparison of Mothers' QOL and Generational Conflicts in Different Living Styles

We compared the mean QOL scores by category of living distance. The result of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) shows that there was a significant difference in social/environment/total QOL among groups of Category II ($F(4,436) = 2.68, 2.80, 2.82, p < .05$, respectively). Table 5 is the results

of multiple comparisons between every two groups of Category II using Post Hoc Tests-LSD. It indicates that those who live within walking distance (group-b), but do not live together or very nearby (group-a), had the highest scores in psychological/social/environment/total QOL.

Table 5. The multiple comparison of QOL among groups of living distance category II.

Category II	Group-a	Group-b	Group-c	Group-d	Group-e	significant difference between groups
Physical	3.42	3.47	3.33	3.52	3.28	a > e
Psychological	3.80	3.99	3.66	3.85	3.67	b > a,c,d,e
Social	3.78	4.17	3.58	3.85	3.68	b > a,c,e
Environment	3.86	4.14	3.68	3.87	3.74	b > a,c,e
Total	3.70	3.88	3.54	3.75	3.57	b > c,e ; a > e

Group-a: live-together or nearby; Group-b: walking distance; Group-c: < 30 minutes by transportation; Group-d: 30-60 minutes by transportation; Group-e: Long distance

Similarly, we also compared the generational conflicts between each group of living distance. Considering those living far from grandparents should meet less and experience less conflicts during child-caring, we only compared the groups living within walking areas. Table 6 is the result of a mean comparison between the two groups (living together v.s. living nearby or within the walking area) in the frequency of generational conflicts. It confirmed that those young families living together with grandparents had more conflicts in child-parenting values.

Table 6. Mean comparison in generational conflicts between two groups by living distances

Living distance (Category III)	Generational Conflicts					
	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
living together	280	1.80	.623	2.06	339	0.04
nearby or walking distance	61	1.62	.610			

Furthermore, the association between perceived generational conflict and QOL was examined. The correlation analysis results show that there were significant negative correlations between generational conflicts and QOL ($r_{\text{physical}} = -.1, p < .05$; $r_{\text{psychological}} = -.20, r_{\text{social}} = -.21, r_{\text{environment}} = -.21, r_{\text{total QOL}} = -.23, p < .01$). It indicates that those mothers who perceived more generational conflict had lower QOL.

Regarding the influence of paternal grandparents and maternal grandparents, we compared the mean scores of QOL and generational conflicts by living styles (type II), but no significant difference was found between the mothers living together with paternal grandparents and those with maternal grandparents.

4. Discussion

(1) Gender Differences and Paternal/Maternal Differences in Grandparents' Participation in Child-caring

This study has investigated the present condition of grandparents' child-care participation in Shanghai, the second biggest city in China. The results confirmed the grandparents' high participation

child-care rate in Chinese cities, which is consistent with the previous reports (Xiao, 2014; Li, 2013). Further, the present study clarified the differences between the four grandparents, from the gender roles and the paternal/maternal perspective. According to the results of this study, more than 55% of the mothers thought grandmothers (both maternal and paternal) were ‘very helpful’ or ‘more helpful’ in child-rearing, while less than 40% of mothers thought grandfathers (maternal or paternal) were helpful. This implies that the gender roles in child-caring remain in the grandparents’ generation. Perhaps it is also related to grandparents’ working conditions. In contrast to a more than 80% retirement rate among grandmothers, the retirement rate among grandfathers was about 70%. In China, the statutory retirement age is lower for women than for men. Given the traditional gender roles and social system, grandmothers take part in child-rearing more than grandfathers. In some cases, if grandparents live very far from young families (e.g., living in another city), it is more probable for grandmothers to leave their own house to live together with young families to help to raise young children for several months or years. This study shows that about 30% of grandmothers live together with young families, whereas the ratio of grandfathers who live together was about 20%. From the grandparents’ support contents, we can also find that the grandmothers participated much more than grandfathers in ‘children’s daily lives’, ‘housework’, and ‘taking care of children when they are sick’, as well as ‘providing parenting knowledge or experience’.

Interestingly, although the living together ratio and contact frequency (every day) with children was 35.3% and 47.1% for paternal grandmothers, higher than maternal ones’ 28.6% and 37.4%, the perceived helpful level from paternal grandmothers was lower than the maternal ones. 37% of mothers appraised the maternal grandmother as ‘very helpful’, while only 30% appraised the same for paternal grandmothers. It implies the different sensitivity of mothers to the help from maternal grandmothers and paternal grandmothers. The same trend was found for grandfathers.

(2) Parenting Value and Generational Gap Between Two Generations

From the support reasons, we can see that ‘liking children’, ‘thinking young parents are working too hard for child-caring’, and ‘being free after retirement’ were the main personal factors. On the other hand, lacking a reliable child-care service or nanny/babysitter, and less suitable child-care facilities are the social factors that cause young parents to have to rely on grandparents. When being asked the ideal child-care style, about 47.6% of mothers selected ‘parents + grandparents’ or ‘parents + grandparents + nanny’. It means about half of the mothers preferred to co-parent with grandparents. Meanwhile, 38.2% of the mothers selected ‘only parents’ and 13.8% selected ‘parents + child-care facility’ or ‘parents + nanny’. That means about 52% of mothers preferred to take care of children by themselves but not rely on grandparents. Perhaps the different lifestyles/habits and different child-care values between two generations might be a potential disadvantage during co-parenting. These might increase generational conflicts and make more mothers prefer to raise children by themselves. Regarding the conflicts frequency between generations in parenting values, 65.6% of the mothers reported they had experienced generational conflicts. Among them, 9.6% reported ‘conflicts always occurred’. The conflicts are thought to decrease the QOL of all family members, and the result of this study has identified the negative association between generational conflicts and mothers’ QOL in all dimensions. But further longitudinal study is necessary to confirm the causal relationship.

(3) The Living Styles of Grandparents and Its Association with Mothers’ QOL and Generational Conflicts

The results (Table 3a~c) show that 63.6% of young families were living with at least one of the four grandparents. Among them, the ratio (55%) of families living with paternal grandparents was somewhat higher than the (45%) of those living with maternal grandparents. This may be related to Chinese traditional patrilineal family values (i.e., a child belongs to the patrilineal family, so paternal grandparents should take care of the grandchild). If a son and a daughter need support, grandparents

usually will give priority to help their son in child-caring. However, with the 'one-child' policy from 1978, most of the present young parents were the only child in their original family. And with the popularization of gender equality, maternal grandparents also take part in grandchildren' caring positively. In some cases, paternal grandparents and maternal grandparents take turns to visit young families in shifts to help to take care of children.

If we include the 10% who are living very nearby grandparents (within 15 minutes walking distance), more than 70% of young families are living together with or very nearby grandparents. This is thought of as a typical co-parenting style in present-day China, especially during the first three years before the children enter kindergartens, because of the insufficient public/private early child-care services for 0-3 years old children. Additionally, the present generation of grandparents are relatively young and have free time after early retirement.

Although living together could be the most convenient way to receive grandparents' help for child-caring, the findings of this study suggest that the mothers living together with grandparents experienced more generational conflicts than those living within walking distance. Given that generational conflicts were negatively related to mothers' QOL, it might be difficult to say living together is best for mothers' QOL.

Furthermore, the results of multiple comparisons between every two groups of Category II (Table 5) show that those who live within thirty minutes walking distance, but do not live together or very nearby, had the highest scores in psychological/social/environment/total QOL. This indicates that living near but keeping a proper distance from grandparents is an optimal or balanced way to get help from grandparents and avoid generational conflicts during child-caring. As proposed in the literature of family relationships and aging studies (Hareven, 1982; Gratton & Haber, 1993), perhaps 'intimacy in a distance' (i.e., living near but not living together with grandparents) might also be optimal styles in co-parenting.

As for the paternal grandparents and maternal grandparents, the study did not find any differences in mothers' QOL and generational conflicts between the mothers who are living together with paternal grandparents and those with maternal ones. This implies that the mother could not benefit more from living with her own parent(s), though we assumed that a mother should share more common values and living habits with her own parents and have higher QOL than living with paternal grandparents.

(4) Implications of this Study

Based on the findings stated above, we suggest that families need to consider more about their living styles before starting to co-parent with grandparents. Given that living together with grandparents is the most popular way in Chinese cities during co-parenting, it would be more beneficial for mothers to anticipate and identify the positive factors and negative factors that will affect their well-being. For example, if they anticipate that generational conflicts might occur more while living with grandparents, then the mothers can prepare themselves psychologically in advance, adjust their own expectations for co-parenting, or learn proper coping strategies to avoid conflicts that could negatively affect their own QOL.

In the future, we need to clarify the factors of mothers' QOL from a more comprehensive and detailed perspective, such as involving mothers' working condition, fathers' support, children's characteristics and grandparents' individual factors. Additionally, a longitudinal study is necessary to explore the causal relationship between the factors and mothers' QOL.

5. Conclusion

This study has investigated grandparents' co-parenting styles in child-rearing in China and compared the QOLs of 525 mothers with children aged 12-24 months in different co-parenting styles

using a questionnaire survey. It has been confirmed that more than 70% of grandparents are taking part in early childcare in Chinese cities at the present time. About 63% of young families with young children live together with grandparents (among them, about 55% live with paternal grandparents and 45% live with maternal grandparents), and about 14% of young families live near grandparents within 30 minutes walking distance.

The results of this study suggest that the living distance between the two generations is an important factor in mothers' QOL. Generally speaking, those mothers who lived together with or near the grandparents showed a higher QOL than those who lived far from the grandparents. However, it indicates that those who lived within walking distance had higher scores in most dimensions of QOL than those who lived together or very nearby. Furthermore, it is found that living together with grandparents makes young parents more easily recognize the generational gap and inevitably brings more generational conflicts during daily life, which has a negative effect on mothers' QOL. Therefore, living near grandparents but not living together may be a more beneficial living style for young families when they need to co-raise children with their grandparents. Therefore, this study has provided empirical evidence for the advantages of 'intimacy at a distance'.

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