

Joy or Sorrow? Grandchildren and Depressive Symptoms Among Filipino Women

Alan Feranil¹, Delia Carba¹, Sonny Agustin¹ and Feinian Chen²

¹ University of San Carlos Office of Population Studies Foundation, Inc., Cebu City Philippines.

²Department of Sociology, University of Maryland, College Park MD

Introduction

Several studies have indicated that giving care to grandchildren can have beneficial effects on the older adults. Among these are greater feelings of self-esteem (Pruchno 1999), increased purpose for living (Burton 1992; Jendrek 1993), less worry for grandchildren's safety (Haglund 2000), strong support by friends (Minkler, Roe & Robertson-Beckley, 1994) and the love and joy brought by grandchildren (Kelly & Damato 1995). Other studies, on the other hand, have shown that caregiving for grandchildren can have negative effects, because it can be psychologically and physically demanding for aging grandparents. A recent study in London revealed that grandparents caring for their grandchildren suffered in terms of health, sleep and finances (Broad, 2010). A longitudinal study in the US revealed that caring for a grandchild was associated with high depression levels (Minkler, et al, 1997). Another study in South Korea revealed that interacting with grandchildren could increase their well being up to a point where grandparenting already becomes a burden (Seojin, 2011). Similarly, a recent longitudinal study in China suggested that high intensity care for young grandchildren accelerated health decline while a lighter level of care had a protective effect on health (Chen and Liu 2012).

The Philippines is one of the countries in Southeast Asia experiencing a slow aging of the population (Cruz, 2007; Cruz and Laguna, 2009; Gultiano and Agustin, 2009). Thus, studies on aging in the Philippines have also been limited. The special needs and problems of the older adults have also just recently been recognized. Traditionally, the older adults in Philippine society is accorded with respect (Jocano 1988) and their care is considered to be the children's obligation. (Medina 2001). With social changes brought about by industrialization and urbanization, however, issues surrounding the older adults have emerged. While Cruz et al. (2009) recently noted improvements in the economic and health situations of the older adults, potential risks at old age among Filipinos include the lack of financial capacity (Cruz et al. 2009; Gultiano and Agustin 2009, limited state benefits (Domingo, Medina and Domingo, 1994), institutionalization (Medina, 2001), and deterioration of physical and emotional well-being (Natividad, 1999).

Philippine studies on aging have not explored the influence of grandchildren on the well-being of the older adults. Most of these aging studies have focused on their health, functional abilities and economic activities (e.g, Cruz, Saito and Natividad, 2007, Cruz et al., 2009, Cruz, 2007, Dela Vega, 2009, Gultiano and Agustin, 2009). Research, however, have shown that consistent with traditional roles, the Filipino older adults are active in taking care of their grandchildren (Cabigon, 1999). In 1999, Perez reported that older people spent at least 44 hours a week taking care of grandchildren. In 2009, Cruz et al. reported that about 1 in 5 older adults Filipinos take care of grandchildren, whether these were coresiding with them or not. With the increasing trend of single parents or absentee parents in the Philippines particularly with the dominance of overseas Filipino

workers, grandparents have taken a major role in childrearing (Cruz and Laguna, 2009; Cruz et al. 2009). Likewise, with predominance of extended household families which often include grandparents, the role of grandparents in society cannot be underestimated. Among the roles of grandparents in Philippine society are giving advice on family decisions, looking after their grandchildren in various capacities, and fostering the development of grandchildren, especially if they are in position of directly caring for them (Medina 2001)

This study seeks to provide additional evidence on the effect of living with grandchildren on the well being of their grandparents. Specifically, it looks on the effect of living with grandchildren on the older adults women's psychological well being as indicated by the presence of depressive symptoms. Due to the relatively high status and respect accorded to the older adults in the Philippines, the results may be different compared to previous studies conducted in predominantly Western countries like England and the United States. It is important to investigate how the number of grandchildren affects the psychological well being of the older adults in a developing country with traditionally non-Western values like the Philippines. The present study contributes to this research direction.

Major Objective

The major objective of this study was to examine the influence of the number of grandchildren on depressive symptoms of grandmothers in Metro Cebu, Philippines. Theoretically, both positive and negative effects are possible. If the grandparent role only involves occasional babysitting, then it may not be a source of stress. In contrast, for grandparents who coreside with grandchildren, particularly with more than one child, then they are likely to face an array of responsibilities, which may interfere with their work or relationship with other household members. At the same time, the role of grandparenthood provides sense of reward and pride, and thus could act as a buffer against negative psychological consequences of aging.

Data

This study focused on a sample of 1,977 mothers who were part of the mother and child cohort study of the Cebu Longitudinal Health and Nutrition Study (CLHNS). For this paper, we used the 2007 round of the CLHNS where majority of these mothers have already become grandmothers.

Variables

Outcome variables: In this paper, we used depression scales to measure the mother's well-being. A modified instrument patterned after the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) was used to detect depressive symptoms among the mothers. Mothers were asked to rate their experience with certain feelings or problems (e.g. sad, lonely, worthless, suicidal, happy) in the past four weeks and these were summed up to reflect the symptoms of depression.

Main exposure variable: We used the number of grandchildren living with their grandmothers as the main exposure variable.

Covariates

Individual, household and community characteristics that may influence the well being of grandmothers were included as covariates in the regression analysis. Grandmother's characteristics like age, working status, marital status, education, having difficulty in physical activities were included. Household variables like assets score, urbanicity and number of persons living in the same household were also considered.

Tools for Analysis

Several statistical techniques were used in the analysis. Initially, frequencies and cross tabulations were used to explore the background characteristics of the sample grandmothers. T-tests and analysis of variance were used to explore the difference in depression scores across types of depression and the number of grandchildren categories. Regression analysis was carried out to determine the effects of the exposure variable on the outcomes and the effects of the other covariates. STATA Statistical Software was used to carry out the statistical analysis.

Preliminary Results

Findings showed that the sample women on average where in their fifties and about eight of every ten were married or cohabitating. About six of every ten of these women were working and only a moderate proportion had experience some physical limitations. Many of the women had some elementary education while some had high school or college education. On average, many of the women were from urban areas. About eight of every ten of these women already had grandchildren and for those with grandchildren, about four children were living with them in the same household.

Although these women experienced some form of depression, only a few (22%) of these women were shown to have high depression (scores greater than the 75% percentile). As shown in Table 2., the depression scores increased with the number of grandchildren living with their grandmothers. There were also significant differences in the mean depression scores between those who were classified with low depression compared to those with high depression.

Regression results affirm the significance of the number of grandchildren living in the same household on the depression scores of their grandmothers. Unadjusted and adjusted beta coefficients (shown in Table 3) show that having more grandchildren living with their grandmothers is positively associated with high depression scores.

Results reveal that the Filipino belief that grandchildren are sources of joy among grandparents may not be necessarily true with a large number of grandchildren. In households where grandparents often serve as surrogate parents of their grandchildren, the number of grandchildren may have a negative effect on their well being.

In follow up analysis, we will also examine various moderating mechanisms. Initial results support the role strain theory in that more grandchildren exerts negative influence on grandparents'

psychological well-being. We hypothesize that conflict with other roles, for example, employment, could further exacerbate the situation. With many of the women in the study still actively working, role overload could intensify stress. For those who do not work, the psychological consequence could be a lot weaker. Similarly, economic resources could moderate the relationship between the number of grandchildren and grandparents. Further, the age of grandchildren could be another moderator. Care for younger children are much more physically demanding and could take a toll on their well-being, while interaction with school aged grandchildren could provide more emotional rewards.

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Table 1 Characteristics of sample mothers and their households

Characteristics of sample mothers and their household	N=1, 977
Age	
Mean, SD	50.95 ±6.01
Education	
Per cent with some elementary or none	58.67
Per cent with some high school education	28.33
Per cent with some college education	13.00
Working Status	
Per cent working	64.14
Marital Status	
Per cent married or cohabiting	83.21
Physical Limitation	
Per cent experiencing some physical limitations	36.72
Grandchildren	
Per cent with grandchildren living with grandmother	51.71
Number of grandchildren living with grandmother (Mean ±SD)	1.9±1.2
Mean Urbanicity index	40.29, ±13.69

Table 2. Mean depression score by number of grandchildren living with their grandmothers and depression category

Number of Grandchildren Living with Grandmother	Low Depression Score (<75% percentile)	High Depression Score (>75% percentile)	Total N=1,977
	Mean± SD	Mean,± SD	Mean ±SD
0 grandchild	18.48 ±2.02	25.02±2.14**	19.85±3.36 [⊕]
1 grandchild	18.64±2.02	24.69±1.87**	19.97±3.20 [⊕]
2+ grandchild	18.89±1.94	25.17±2.03**	20.56±3.41 [⊕]
Total	18.59±2.01	24.99±2.07**	20.02±3.35

** significantly different from mothers with low depression scores at p<0.01

[⊕]significantly different from each category of number of grandchild at p<0.01

Table 3. Unadjusted and adjusted beta coefficients showing the relationship between number of grandchildren living with grandmothers and depression symptoms of grandmothers

Variables	Unadjusted Model ¹				Adjusted Model ²			
	Beta	95% CI	P value	Beta	95% CI	p value		
Number of grandchildren	0.21	0.09	0.33	0.001	0.15	0.05	0.27	0.01
Age of grandmother					-0.04	-0.07	-0.15	0.00
Marital status								
Not married (reference)								
Married					-0.48	-0.87	-0.10	0.01
Working status								
Not working (reference)								
Working					0.07	-0.23	0.36	0.65
Education								
Some elementary or none (reference)								
Some high school					-0.61	-0.94	-0.28	0.00
Some college					-1.17	-1.62	-0.73	0.00
Urbanicity					0.01	-0.00	-0.02	0.11
Physical limitation								
No physical limitation (reference)								
With physical limitation					1.88	1.58	2.18	0.00

¹ Unadjusted model refers to a regression without the covariates

² Adjusted model refers to a regression controlling for age, marital status, working status, education and urbanicity.

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