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Activities between grandfathers and grandchildren before and during Covid-19. Analysis of the level of satisfaction and perception of the intergenerational role

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Abstract

Due to the important family role that grandmothers play in raising their grandchildren, this work studies the lesser-known role of grandfathers. For this, a group of 110 male participants (mean 73.6 years) was interviewed, for analysis of: a) their level of satisfaction in five types of active roles with their grandchildren, alone, and with their spouses, before and during the Covid-19 lockdown; and b) their general perception of the role of being a grandparent. The data obtained were analyzed with descriptive and non-parametric inferential methods (Mann-Whitney U test, Kruskal-Wallis test, chi square, and correlations). Data showed that participants, who were mostly married and retired, showed three satisfaction levels with their grandchildren: high for family celebrations, average for activities involving play and sociocultural transmission, and low for housework and academic/intellectual activities. Participants' age, marital status, health status, and education, as well as the age and number of grandchildren, were associated with these satisfaction levels. Most participants favored the formal grandparenting role, and marital status, health status, education, and grandchildren's age and sex were associated with their views of grandparenting roles. Physical contact during the Covid-19 lockdown dropped by 72.7%. We concluded that activities shared between grandfathers and grandchildren and views on the grandparenting role are influenced by the sociodemographic variables of both. More research is needed to expand this knowledge.

Keywords

Intergenerational relationships, role of grandfathers, shared activities, family context.

Activitats entre avis barons i nets abans i durant la covid-19. Anàlisi del nivell de satisfacció i percepció del rol intergeneracional

Resum

A causa de l'important paper familiar que exerceixen les àvies en la criança dels seus nets, en aquest treball s'estudia aquest rol menys conegut dels avis. Per a això s'ha entrevistat un grup de cent deu participants barons (amb una edat mitjana de 73,6 anys) i s'ha analitzat: *a*) el seu nivell de satisfacció en cinc tipus d'activitats del rol amb els seus nets, sols entre ells i amb els seus cònjuges, abans i durant el confinament per la covid-19; i *b*) la seva percepció general del rol d'avi. Les dades obtingudes es van analitzar amb proves descriptives i inferencials no paramètriques (U de Mann-Whitney, Kruskal-Wallis, khi quadrat i correlacions). Els resultats van mostrar tres nivells de satisfacció segons el tipus d'activitat de rol compartida amb els nets: alta en les celebracions en família, mitjana en les lúdiques i de transmissió sociocultural, i baixa en les de tipus domèstic instrumental i acadèmicointel·lectual. La seva edat, el seu estat civil, la seva salut, el seu nivell educatiu i el nombre i l'edat dels seus nets van aparèixer relacionades amb aquesta satisfacció. Sobre el rol d'avi, es van mostrar majoritàriament a favor del rol formal, i les variables estat civil, salut, nivell educatiu, edat i sexe dels seus nets van aparèixer relacionades amb aquest rol. El contacte físic durant la covid-19 va disminuir un 72,7 %. Es conclou que les activitats compartides pels avis barons amb els seus nets i l'opinió sobre aquest rol estan influïdes per les variables sociodemogràfiques d'ambdós. Es necessita fer més investigació per ampliar el seu coneixement.

Paraules clau

Relacions intergeneracional, rol d'avis barons, activitats compartides, context familiar.

Actividades entre abuelos varones y nietos antes y durante la Covid-19. Análisis del nivel de satisfacción y percepción del rol intergeneracional

Resumen

Debido al importante papel familiar que ejercen las abuelas en la crianza de sus nietos, en este trabajo se estudia ese rol menos conocido en los abuelos. Para ello se ha entrevistado a un grupo de 110 participantes varones (media 73,6 años) y se ha analizado: *a*) su nivel de satisfacción en cinco tipos de actividades del rol con sus nietos, solos entre ellos y con sus cónyuges, antes y durante el confinamiento por la COVID-19; y *b*) su percepción general sobre el rol de ser abuelo. Los datos obtenidos se analizaron con pruebas descriptivas e inferenciales no paramétricas (U de Mann-Whitney, Kruskal-Wallis, *chi* cuadrado, y correlaciones). Los resultados mostraron tres niveles de satisfacción según el tipo de actividades del rol compartidas con sus nietos: alta en las celebraciones en familia, media en lúdicas y de transmisión sociocultural, y baja en las de tipo doméstico instrumental y académico-intelectual. Su edad, estado civil, salud, nivel educativo y el número y edad de sus nietos aparecieron relacionadas con esa satisfacción. Sobre los roles de ser abuelo, se mostraron mayoritariamente a favor del rol formal, y las variables «estado civil», «salud», «nivel educativo», «edad» y «sexo» de sus nietos aparecieron relacionadas con esos roles. El contacto físico durante la COVID19- disminuyó un 72,7 %. Se concluye que las actividades compartidas por los abuelos varones con sus nietos y la opinión sobre este rol están influidas por las variables sociodemográficas de ambos. Se necesita más investigación para ampliar su conocimiento.

Palabras clave

Relaciones intergeneracionales, rol de abuelos varones, actividades compartidas, contexto familiar.

INTRODUCTION

The essential role played by the generation of grandparents in today's families is unquestionable. The relationship between grandparents and grandchildren produces a mostly positive effect on its members (Grundy *et al.*, 2012; Timberlake, 1981), even in the middle generation of adult children, facilitating women's participation in the workforce (Kanji, 2018). In the research and study of family relationships, the role of grandmothers and the related benefits is well known, but that of grandfathers has largely been ignored (Jensen *et al.*, 2018). The current Covid-19 pandemic is prompting new and urgent research on its consequences on these intergenerational relationships (Cantillon *et al.*, 2021; Lyu *et al.*, 2020; MacDarby *et al.*, 2020), with the cen-

tral question of how this contact between them is already changing.

Studies of this unknown and invisible figure of grandfathers (Hank *et al.*, 2018) have been conditioned by the fact that the grandparent role is more associated with women and their implicit care functions (Hasmanová Marhánková, 2020) than with men, who were more associated until recently with an identity based on work (Leidner, 2006), and who enjoy a peripheral status in family contexts best described as 'being there and not interfering'. All of this has led to more research being done with grandmothers, as they are *de facto* the most involved in the relationship and care of their grandchildren (Mansilla, 2017). One wonders if it is because grandparents do not enjoy their relationship with grandchildren and because they have a special conception of that role.

Those two central aspects in this unequal knowledge of this intergenerational relationship are what we want to explore in this study, through satisfaction in different types of role activities shared with their grandchildren and if those activities are independent or together, with respect to grandmothers. And also through their general perception of the role of being a grandparent.

In relation to the first one, satisfaction linked to grandparenthood, some studies have found that grandmothers are more satisfied than grandfathers (Somary & Strieker, 1998; Thomas, 1986; 1989). Although there are studies that have found that satisfaction is equal (Neugarten & Weinstein, 1964; Peterson, 1999; Reitzes & Mutran, 2004; Thiele & Whelan, 2008). Some factors could predict or influence those levels of satisfaction. Condon *et al.* (2020) found that grandparent-grandchild attachment (bonding) was the most powerful predictor of role satisfaction. Another important factor found by Reitzes and Mutran (2004) was the valuation of that role, in which 66% of the women ranked the grandparent role as one of their three most important roles, compared with only 42% of the men. Also that satisfaction increases more with the first grandchild in grandmothers than in grandparents, and more improves their depressive symptoms, comparatively (Di Gessa *et al.*, 2020). Another important factor for the role satisfaction is contact frequency (Bates & Taylor, 2013), but if it is too much it becomes negative for grandfathers, in a kind of U-shaped relationship (Bates & Taylor, 2016). In relation to gender of grandparents, Smorti *et al.* (2012) found that grandmothers shared more symbolic activities based on language (telling fairy tales or stories about their own family) while the grandfathers more sport and physical ones (walking and outdoor games). Also they found that all grandparents showed positive emotions to their grandchildren.

Triadó *et al.* (2009) studied, among others factors, satisfaction levels with the grandparenthood role. They analyzed two types: emotional satisfaction (happiness, enjoyment, intimacy and joy), and cognitive satisfaction (positive effect on themselves, feeling active, and security of taking good care of the grandchildren). The results showed high levels of satisfaction in both types, but indicating that it could be related to their type of auxiliary or supporting role (22 hours a week) and not a burden or a stressing responsibility. Also García Díaz *et al.* (2020) have found that the greatest satisfaction in caring for grandchildren was associated with the following sociodemographic factors: being relatively young, not working outside the home, not having health problems that impede daily activity, and having time for themselves and taking advantage of it.

Although some studies have compiled some role activities or their typologies (household, childcare, eating meals, achievement and learning activities, social or entertainment activities, play, and media use) that grandparents share with their grandchildren (Carlson & Berg-

er, 2013; Rico *et al.*, 2001), no research is found where satisfaction levels are analyzed with each of those role activities (Dunifon *et al.*, 2018), while it is so important to know the nature and preferences in this interaction, and to detect imbalances in which to intervene and improve.

In relation to the other central aspect in this work, contact between grandparents and grandchildren and the proposals of roles and associated activities regarding this intergenerational relationship, in the first half of the twentieth century, two simple and consecutive roles were conceptualized: first, a normative, strict and authoritarian role; then, the opposite, the permissive role, until in 1964 new typologies appeared (*Formal, Fun Seeker, Subrogate Parent, Reservoir of Family Wisdom, and Distant Figure*) with Neugarten and Weinstein's pioneer and referential work. This was followed by more classifications through decades in accordance with changing family contexts. Making a selection among so many authors, in the seventies Robertson (1977) considered four types: *Appointed, Remote, Symbolic, and Individualized*; in the eighties Kivnick (1983) proposed five dimensions of grandparenthood: *Centrality, Valued Elder, Immortality through Clan, Reinvolverment with Personal Past, and Indulgence*; also in the eighties, Cherlin and Furstenberg (1986) considered three types: *Remote, Companionate, and Involved*; in the nineties Roberto and Stroes (1992) considered five styles: *Formal, Fun Seeker, Subrogate Parent, Distant Figure, and Reservoir of Wisdom*. Already in the twenty-first century, Roa Venegas and Vacas Díaz (2001), apart from introducing in Spanish language the most appropriate noun for the Anglo-Saxon concept of grandparenthood (*abuelidad*), found different types of grandparenthood depending on family lineage, including a specific profile for the two grandfathers (39.1% of the sample): maternal grandpa (*Distant, Close, Substitute, Model*), maternal grandpa (*Formal, Close, Social, Model*), paternal grandpa (*Formal, Close, Model, Social*), and paternal grandpa (*Formal, Close, Substitute, Model*). Recently, Bordone *et al.*, (2017) proposed three types of grandparenthood depending on the level of childcare: *Daily, Marginal, and Intermediate*.

Due to the great number of typologies of the grandparenthood role, some authors, like Rico *et al.* (2001), proposed to study those roles from the perspective of the grandchildren in one as more relevant (*Favourite Grandparent*); more recently, other studies have tried to synthesize those common implicit activities in three main but different types of roles: 1) *Formal*, where the function of grandfathers is to be able to see and visit their grandchildren when possible, to give them support when they need it, and to transmit values and advice; 2) *Informal*, where the function of grandfathers would be to not apply any rules to their grandchildren, to spoil them, and to enjoy time together, and 3) *Substitute-Surrogate*, which states that their role with their grandchildren should be the same as the one they had as parents of their children

(Castañeda-García *et al.*, 2021; Castañeda-García *et al.*, 2017).

Given this gender bias around the role of grandparenthood (Sorensen & Cooper, 2010), many factors must be considered and analyzed when attempting to explain the differences in intergenerational relationships between grandparents and grandchildren (Patschová, 2014), including differential life expectancies, the theory of matrilineal advantage, family types and geographical distance, as well as factors related to one's children and grandchildren and possible cultural differences. Certain authors, have proposed a new conceptual framework, known as generative grandfathering (Bates & Taylor, 2013).

Life expectancy has been increasing in recent decades for both sexes, and this would appear to especially favor grandfathers who, in addition, would be more available due to a longer retirement period, meaning they could spend time caring for grandchildren (Buchanan & Rotkirch, 2016; Roberto *et al.*, 2001). The idea that grandmothers have proven throughout history to be the most efficient, knowledgeable, and involved helpers for raising women, instilling in them the proper mothering role (Hawkes *et al.*, 1997), is often used to explain why female life expectancy extends beyond menopause, and why women live longer in general.

Another aspect that might explain gender inequality in the role of grandparent is the theory of *matrilineal advantage* (Chan & Elder, 2000), which posits a family pattern in which maternal grandmothers invest most in their grandchildren, followed by maternal grandfathers, then paternal grandmothers, and finally paternal grandfathers. This is corroborated by the Survey of Health, Ageing, and Retirement in Europe (Danielsbacka *et al.*, 2011).

Regarding family types and cultural differences. In families where both parents work outside the home (León *et al.*, 2016), grandfathers tend to perform more caregiving functions, while grandmothers perform any function and at any time. In families in England and Wales, Buchanan and Flouri (2008) found that although grandmothers are more involved with grandchildren, grandfathers play an important role in mentoring, physical activities, and educational and life counseling.

When examining factors related to children's and grandchildren's sociodemographic profile, such as age, it has been found that for grandparent-grandchild gender patterns, relationships can depend on the grandchildren's age (Mann *et al.*, 2013). Grandmothers seem to be more involved than grandfathers when grandchildren are young, while grandfathers become more involved with older grandchildren, offering guidance in their transition to adulthood (Mann *et al.*, 2013).

Despite the growing body of research into these intergenerational relationships, several authors highlight the lack of information on basic aspects thereof, such as

the satisfaction in daily activities that grandfathers share with their grandchildren, the frequency of contact, and the time they spend with them (Bates & Taylor, 2013; Dunifon *et al.*, 2018; Hank *et al.*, 2018). In the light of these limitations, and others determined by the current context, we present the following four aims:

First aim

A) To determine the frequency of contact daily and weekly; B) To compare satisfaction levels with certain role activities shared with grandchildren, and C) To identify any differences between those frequencies, satisfaction levels and activities associated with the sociodemographic variables.

Second aim

To compare satisfaction levels and role activities associated with grandchildren both individually and in the company of a spouse. This can show if the satisfaction of the grandfathers is independent or not of grandmothers and see to what extent they are also collaborating and supporting the family burden with the raising of their grandchildren.

Third aim

A) To determine grandfathers' degree of agreement with the grandparenthood role if it has to do with the grandparent sex or each grandparent is different and unique, and with the grandchildren's sex; B) As well their degree of agreement in relation to three general types of grandparenting role (*Formal*, *Informal*, and *Substitute-Surrogate*), and whether it coincides with the activities of the role most satisfactory according to the above objectives, and C) To identify any differences with respect to the sociodemographic variables.

Fourth aim

A) To determine and compare the frequency of contact, both in person and otherwise, between grandfathers and their grandchildren before and during the Covid-19 lockdown, both on their own and with their spouses, and B) Forms of the communication between them during the Covid-19 lockdown.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were a group of 110 Spanish men, all grandfathers who agreed to answer the interview voluntarily, with a mean age of 73.68, recruited through the available social circles of a group of volunteer undergraduate students in the second year of Psychology at the University of La Laguna. **Table 1** contains the full description and sociodemographic variables.

Table 1. Sociodemographic profile of the sample of grandfathers and their grandchildren

		N (110)	% (100)
Age	Under 75	54	49.1
	75 and older	56	50.9
Marital status	Married	83	75.5
	Widower	15	13.6
	Divorced	9	8.2
	Common law	3	2.7
Employment status	self-employed	4	3.6
	Employed	8	7.3
	Retired	96	87.3
	Other	2	1.8
Health status	Poor	6	5.5
	Average	45	40.9
	Good	59	53.6
Illness present	Yes	22	20.0
	No	41	37.3
	No response	47	52.7
Education	Primary	60	54.6
	Secondary/university	46	41.8
	Other	4	3.6
Nº children	1-3	N=78	70.9
	4-7	N=32	29.1
Nº grandchildren	1-3	N=69	62.7
	4-6	N=30	27.4
	7-13	N=11	9.9
Grandchildren's age	Child (0-11=)	N=53	48.2
	Adolescent/Adult (12+)	N=57	51.8
Grandchildren's sex	Granddaughters	N=66	60.0
	Grandsons	N=44	40.0
Grandchildren's through	Daughters	N=66	60.0
	Sons	N=44	40.0
Grandchildren's sex through daughters	Male	N=21	30.5
	Female	N=48	69.5
Grandchildren's sex through sons	Male	N=23	56.1
	Femal	N=48	43.9
Distance from grandchildren	0-30 minutes	N=85	85.0
	>30 minutes	N=14	14.1
	No response	N=11	0.9

Instruments

An interview with four related sections with closed-answer items was developed for this study. The first section recorded the participants' sociodemographic characteristics: sex, age, marital status, employment status, health status,

illnesses, education, number of children, number, age and sex of grandchildren, grandchildren through daughters and sons, grandchildren's sex through daughters and sons, and geographical distance from their grandchildren.

The second section measured their degree of satisfaction with a number of role activities shared between the grandfathers and the grandson or granddaughter with whom they spend the most time (Castañeda-García *et al.*, 2017; Prato *et al.*, 2012). A selection was made of the most frequent activities relating to different types of intergenerational relationships: Play (*playing with the grandson or granddaughter, watching television together, going for a walk*), Housework (*gardening, cooking together*), Sociocultural transmission (*teaching traditional songs, telling fairy tales, telling stories from the past*), Academic/intellectual (*helping with schoolwork, reading together, going to school together*), and Family celebrations (*going to all their birthdays, spending Christmas and holidays together, their grandson or granddaughter goes to their birthdays*). First, the participants indicated whether these activities took place or not before Covid-19 lockdown, and then they indicated their degree of satisfaction with it on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from "very satisfied" (4), "satisfied" (3), "little satisfied" (2), and "not at all satisfied" (1). The grandfathers then were asked to respond to the same set of questions referring to those occasions when they shared these activities with their grandchildren in the company of their spouses before Covid-19.

The third section of the interview elicited participants' views of the general role of a grandfather, through four questions. The first asked about the performance of this role as related to the grandparent's and the grandchild's sex: "What do you think a grandfather's role should be with his grandchildren?", with four possible responses: a) *It should be the same as for grandmothers*; b) *It is different from the grandmother's role*; c) *It depends on each individual grandfather and grandmother*, and d) *It depends on whether it is a grandson or a granddaughter*. The remaining three questions each represent a different form of grandparenthood, summing up and synthesizing the contributions of various authors over the years (Castañeda-García *et al.*, 2021; Castañeda-García *et al.*, 2017; Gauthier, 2002; Hunt, 2017; Kivnick, 1983): the *Formal* role, the *Informal* role, and the *Substitute-Surrogate* role. The item on the Formal role asked: "Do you think that the function of a grandfather is to see and visit his grandchildren when possible, give them support when necessary, and transmit values and advice?"; for the Informal role, they were asked: "Do you think that the function of a grandfather is to deal with his grandchildren without applying any rules, spoil them a bit, and enjoy spending time together?"; and for the Substitute-Surrogate role, the question was: "Do you think the function of a grandfather with his grandchildren should be the same as the one he had as a parent to his own children?" Responses were provided on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from "do not agree at all (1)", do not

agree (2), slightly agree (3), agree (4), “strongly agree” (5), which were later transformed into percentages.

Given that this study was carried out during the first two months of the Spanish lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic (late March and the entire month of April 2020), the last section of the interview questionnaire included the following yes/no question: “*Has the Coronavirus crisis affected how often you have seen your grandchild in person?*”. Two additional questions followed: “*How many times have you seen your grandchild in person during the Coronavirus lockdown?*”, and “*How many times have you seen your grandchild in person, together with your spouse, during the Coronavirus lockdown?*”, with responses on a Likert scale (from six times a week to none). These were followed by two final questions: “*What kind of contact have you had with him/her?*”, and “*Have you made any other type of contact with him/her with your spouse present?*”, with the response options: Telephone call, WhatsApp, Video call, Skype, other. For each, participants were to indicate the frequency, ranging from more than once a day to once a week. Also, respondents were asked to reply as honestly as possible, given that there were no right answers.

Procedure

First, the participating sample was selected by researchers from among the grandfathers of students at the Faculty of Psychology, in Tenerife, who met the criteria of spending time with grandchildren under the age of 18 and being sufficiently physically and cognitively fit. The grandfathers were asked by their grandchildren if they wanted to participate in this anonymous study by telephone on the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. Once they had agreed to be interviewed, the students contacted the researchers, who proceeded to fill out the telephone interview with their participating grandfather. Before administering the questionnaire by telephone to each grandfather, it was confirmed by the researchers that they met the criteria for inclusion that had been applied in their initial selection: they agreed to participate (saying “yes” to the question: “*Do you agree to participate in this interview on your relationships with your grandchildren?*”), they had grandchildren, and they had a level of physical and cognitive health that would not prevent them from spending time with their grandchildren – in other words, they had no mobility, memory, or cognitive problems (“*Have you had or do you have any memory problems or reduced mobility that restricted your ability to visit your grandchildren before the Coronavirus lockdown?*”).

Data analysis

The data were compiled and analyzed with the help of the IBM SPSS package, version 20. For the descriptive

analysis, frequency tables with percentages were used for the categorical variables, including the mean and standard deviation in some cases. Non-parametric tests such as the Mann-Whitney U test, the Kruskal-Wallis test, chi square, and correlations were used for the inferential analysis of the remaining variables. In addition, two new quantitative variables were created to compare the degree of satisfaction with activities while alone or with the spouse. Cronbach’s alpha was also calculated to check the internal consistency of the part of the questionnaire listing the activities shared with the grandson or granddaughter that the participants see most frequently, alone and with their spouses, resulting in an index of 0.877, showing good reliability.

RESULTS

First aim

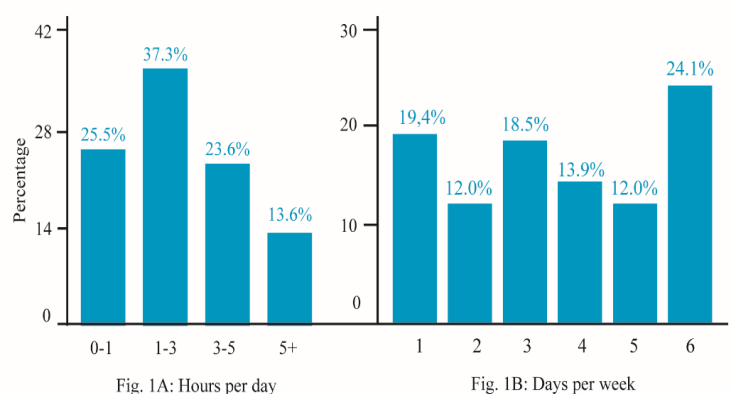
A) Frequency of contact between grandfathers and grandchildren, and relations with sociodemographic variables.

The data shows a relevant percentage of grandparents (62.8%) who spend up to three hours with their grandchildren together a day, leaving the remaining 37.2% of them with more than 3 hours a day together. With respect to the days of the week on which they see each other, higher percentages appear on successive discontinuous days (1, 3 and 6), although the figure of up to almost 1/4 of the grandparents seeing their grandchildren six days a week stands out (see [figure 1A & 1B](#)).

Grandchildren through daughters. Grandfathers more closely relate to grandchildren who are on the daughter’s side ($M = 59.7$) than those who are on the son’s side ($M = 46.5$) when they answer about how many days they see them a week ($U = 1057.000$; $p = .30$, $r = .38$).

B) Satisfaction levels of grandfathers with certain activities shared with their grandchildren.

Figures 1A & 1B. Percentages of hours per day (Fig. 1A) and Days per week (Fig. 1B) that grandfathers meet and see their grandchild whom they spend the most time



The grandfathers indicated that they were most satisfied with activities involving *Family celebrations*, with a mean score of 3.86; in second place was *Play* at 3.62; third were the activities related to *Sociocultural transmission*, with a score of 3.60; this was followed by *Housework* at 3.30 and, last, *Academic/intellectual* activities with a mean score of 3.20.

The relation between the five groups of activities were not statistically significant ($p = .189$). As we can see in **Table 2**, some activities, although in average frequency by type of activities they occupy a higher place, in their individual average they would be below the average of other types of activities; for example, *Watching television together*, 0.12 less than *Sociocultural transmission*. The opposite occurs for the activity *Going to school together*, 0.15 higher than the above type *Housework*, that individual frequency modifying its position in the order of the fourteen activities (*Watching television together*, from 6th to 9th, and *Going to school together*, from 12th to 10th), without considering its grouping by type of activity.

Table 2. Means (X) and standard deviations (SD) for the satisfaction levels with five types of activities shared by grandfathers (n) with their grandchildren

Type	Shared activity	N	X(+/-)*	SD
Family celebrations	Spending Christmas/holidays together	87	3.88(+0.1)	.36
	Going to all their birthdays	75	3.85(-0.1)	.43
	Grandchild going to their birthdays	84	3.89(+0.3)	.35
Play	Playing together	55	3.71(+0.1)	.63
	Going for a walk	67	3.68(-0.1)	.58
	Watching television together	70	3.53(+0.5)	.63
Sociocultural transmission	Telling stories from the past	50	3.66(-0.2)	.56
	Telling fairy tales	19	3.63(+0.1)	.59
	Teaching traditional songs	32	3.66(+0.14)	.48
Housework	Gardening	25	3.52(+0.9)	.82
	Cooking together	32	3.37(+0.20)	.66
Academic/intellectual	Going to school together	16	3.69(+0.24)	.60
	Reading together	26	3.23(+0.7)	.90
	Helping with schoolwork	11	3.00(=)	1.09

*Note. Decimal variations (+ - =) in the X (grandfathers, grandmothers and grandchildren) with respect to the X between only grandfathers and grandchildren (table 2).

C) Satisfaction levels with certain activities and relations with sociodemographic variables of grandfathers and grandchildren.

The results were significant for the following variables: the grandfathers' age and educational level and the number and age of the grandchildren.

Age. The two most satisfying activities for grandfathers under 75 were: *teaching traditional songs* ($U = 119.500, p = .042, r = .14$) and *gardening* ($U = 105.000; p = .026, r = .12$).

Education. The activity *reading together* was rated as more satisfactory for grandfathers with a better educational level ($U = 12.313, p = .034, r = .31$).

Number of grandchildren. An inverse correlation was found for the following activities: *playing together* ($r(65) = -.375; p = .047$), *gardening* ($r(35) = -.397; p = .029$), *cooking together* ($r(39) = -.380; p = .008$) and *reading together* ($r(30) = -.345; p = .011$).

Grandchildren's age. The activity *playing together* was cited more frequently by grandfathers with grandchildren under 12 ($U = 334.000; p = .05, r = .39$) than by those with adolescent or adult grandchildren. Also, *gardening* was more frequent for the group of grandchildren under 12 ($U = 105.500; p = .027, r = .12$).

Second aim

Comparing satisfaction with activities between grandfathers and grandchildren when they are on their own or with their spouses.

When they are on their own or with their spouses, the variables were added by grouping together all 28 activities. The subsequent comparison showed that similar satisfaction levels were reported, with no significant differences detected (see **Table 3**), although the greatest decimal differences were in "*Going to school together*" and "*Cooking together*".

Table 3. Degree of satisfaction with shared activities between grandfathers and grandchildren, on their own and with their spouses

Type	Shared activity	N	X	SD
Family celebrations	Spending Christmas/holidays together	108	3.87	.33
	Going to all their birthdays	90	3.86	.41
	Grandchild going to their birthdays	103	3.86	.44
Play	Playing together	67	3.70	.52
	Going for a walk	86	3.69	.59
	Watching television together	84	3.48	.59
Sociocultural transmission	Telling stories from the past	64	3.68	.46
	Telling fairy tales	24	3.62	.49
	Teaching traditional songs	38	3.52	.55
Housework	Gardening	37	3.43	.83
	Cooking together	41	3.17	.73
Academic/intellectual	Going to school together	22	3.45	.73
	Reading together	32	3.16	.99
	Helping with schoolwork	11	3.00	1.09

Third aim

A) To determine grandfathers' degree of agreement with the grandparenthood role if it has to do with the grandparent's sex or each grandparent is different and unique, and with the grandchildren's sex.

Figure 2. Level of agreement of grandfathers with the three types of grandparenting roles

GRANDPARENTING ROLE	
Strongly agree %	
Formal	67.3 %
Informal	10 %
Substitute/Surrogate	5.5%

Regarding the results there were no notable or significant differences in the responses to the first question (related to the grandparents' and grandchildren's sex).

B) To determine grandfathers' degree of agreement in relation to three general types of grandparenting role (*Formal, Informal, and Substitute-Surrogate*).

Most participants strongly agreed with the *Formal* role. There was much less support for the *Informal* role, and even less support for the *Substitute-Surrogate* role (see [Figure 2](#)).

C) To identify any differences in relation with the sociodemographic variables.

Some significant differences were found for the grandfathers' marital status, health, and educational level, and the grandchildren's age and sex:

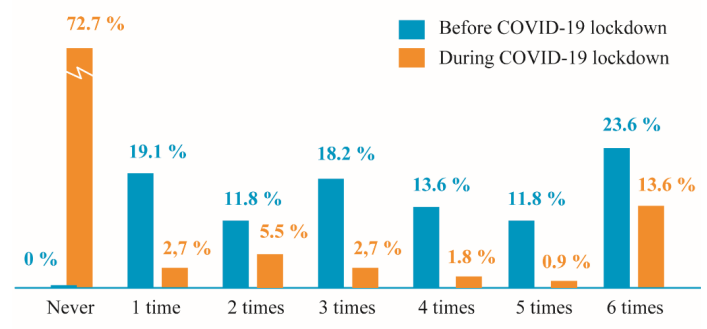
Marital status. Married participants scored significantly higher ($U = 218.500; p = .044, r = .25$) than divorced participants in the statement on the formal role: "Do you think that the function of a grandfather is to see and visit his grandchildren when possible, give them support when necessary, and transmit values and advice?"

Health status. Participants who reported no illnesses were more likely to select the item (*the grandparent's role depends on each individual grandfather and grandmother*) than the participants who reported an illness ($\chi^2(2, N = 110) = 6.161; p = .13$).

Education. The grandfathers with poor education were more likely than grandfathers with a better educational level to *strongly agree* that the grandparent's role is the same as the parent's role ($\chi^2(2, N = 110) = 20.766; p = .000$).

Grandchildren's age. The grandfathers agreed more with the *Substitute-Surrogate* role when their grandchildren

Figure 3. Frequency of physical contact between grandfathers and their grandchildren before and during the covid-19 lockdown



were adolescents/adults than when they were under 12: "Do you think the function of a grandfather with his grandchildren should be the same as the one he had as a parent to his own children?" ($U = 1179.000; p = .042, r = .22$).

Grandchildren's sex. The grandfathers agreed more with the *Formal* role with grandsons ($U = 1127.00; p = .031, r = .18$), and more with the *Informal* role with granddaughters ($U = 1085.000; p = .031, r = .18$).

Fourth aim

A) Frequency of contact before and during the Covid-19 lockdown.

Some differences were found in the frequency of physical contact, with 23.8% of grandfathers reporting six contacts per week before lockdown but only 13.6% reporting this same frequency of contact during the lockdown; this only included those participants who had continued to see their grandchildren, because the vast majority of grandfathers (72.7%) did not see their grandchildren *even once* during lockdown (see [Figure 3](#)).

B) Forms of communication used during the Covid-19 lockdown (Telephone calls, WhatsApp, Video calls, Skype).

Most continued to use telephone and video calls over WhatsApp or Skype contacts. No differences were found in the communications between grandfathers and grandchildren on their own or with their spouses present (see [Table 4](#)).

Table 4. Types and frequency of long-distance contact during Covid-19 lockdown between grandfathers and grandchildren, on their own and with their spouses

Form of contact	Grandfather		Grandmother		Grandchild	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Telephone call	10	12.28	9	8.90		
Whatsapp	4	4.32	4	4.00		
Video call	8	9.88	8	9.16		
Skype	1	0.72	2	1.92		

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

With the results obtained, we can deduce that the profile of most participants shows a family and work situation could allow them greater intergenerational relationships, which could increase their involvement with and commitment to their grandchildren (Roberto *et al.*, 2001). This hypothesis could go in parallel to some Spanish data: in 1993, 15% of grandfathers and 14% of grandmothers aged 65 and over cared for their grandchildren, while by 2006 the percentages had risen to 26% and 23%, respectively (Meil, 2011). Although with the concrete data of the numerous daily and weekly interactions of the grandfathers with their grandchildren we want to be cautious, since with the results of the second objective we can deduce that these interactions are not independent of when they are with their spouses (grandmothers). In some studies, it has been found that this dependence on grandmothers is made explicit by grandfathers (Leseberg & Manoogian, 2019). It would be necessary to explore in future studies what percentage of interactions they carry out alone with their grandchildren, as has been pointed out in another study with the same limitation (Meil & Rogero-García, 2014). Also, the fact that they interact more with grandchildren through a daughter confirms the hypothesis of the greater matrilineal bond (Chan & Elder, 2000).

Of the different types of activities evaluated, we have seen that the most satisfactory activities of all those shared between grandfathers and grandchildren are those involving family celebrations, with academic/intellectual activities at the opposite end of the scale. This is in part consistent with other studies (Castañeda-García *et al.*, 2017; León *et al.*, 2016) in which a preference for doing family leisure activities is observed, although with the majority of grandmothers. In the present study, some factors, such as age, influence grandfathers' satisfaction with some activities. Gardening, for example, probably entails less physical effort for younger grandfathers, leading to a greater interest in doing it with their younger grandchildren. Also, activities involving sociocultural transmission that require the use of long-term memory (*teaching traditional songs*) may prove more satisfactory for younger grandfathers. In addition, the better the educational level, the greater the satisfaction with academic/intellectual activities (*reading together*). This is in line with King and Elder (1998), who also found different activities in relation with grandparent's educational level. Paradoxically, participants reported that the greater the number of grandchildren, the lower their satisfaction with sharing activities with them (*playing together, gardening, cooking together and reading together*), even though in this study they were asked to focus only on the one grandson or granddaughter whom they see most frequently; this could be explained by grandfathers' greater

difficulty in providing their grandchildren with individual attention when they have many grandchildren with the same bonding rights.

In relation to the interaction of grandfathers with their grandchildren, on their own or with their spouses, similar satisfaction levels were observed when comparing the two situations. This can be related to marital status, since most are married so it is understood that they spend more time together and their satisfaction could be similar, notwithstanding social pressure towards providing strictly positive relational information (Leseberg & Manoogian, 2019). The fact that this sample of grandfathers enjoy family celebrations the most, play-related activities and activities involving sociocultural transmission somewhat less so, and housework and academic/intellectual activities the least can be linked to the results of the second aim, which showed participants' greater agreement with the Formal role of grandfather (more distributed with their spouses), as compared to the Informal role and the Substitute-Surrogate role, which perhaps demand more effort or more individual involvement with the grandchild. This could be confirmed by the significant relationship observed between preferring the Formal role and being married. Thus, married participants aligned themselves with this Formal role, which involves a relationship with their grandchildren that is based on their availability, which in any case will always be less than that of their female spouses (Mansilla, 2017), and that is played out especially at family celebrations, also taking advantage of those occasions to share play-related activities. This fact may be concealing the extent to which the role of grandparent continues to be a family burden for grandmothers and not so much for grandfathers.

Another interesting aspect of the grandparenting role and the findings by grandparent's sex is the relationship found here with the health variable. Specifically, the grandfathers who did not report any illnesses showed that they were more autonomous from their spouses in their intergenerational relationships. This can be deduced from their belief that *the grandparent's role depends on each individual grandfather and grandmother*. Grandfathers with a poor educational level differentiate family roles less, showing a preference for the Substitute-Surrogate grandparenting role, which considers grandparents to be indistinct from parents. We also find this undifferentiated grandparenting role more in grandfathers with adolescent grandchildren. This could be because grandfathers interact more with their grandchildren when they are older (Mann *et al.*, 2013) and also that, with only adolescent-adult grandchildren, the three types of grandparenting roles may be less clear for all grandfathers who chose the Formal role. The relation observed with the grandchildren's sex and the Formal role with grandsons and the Informal role with granddaughters could be showing a tendency toward a more rigid interaction with boys and more flexible interaction with girls.

Regarding the analysis of intergenerational contact under Covid-19, it was found that physical contact was much greater before the pandemic, in contrast to the situation under lockdown, although it should be noted that up to 27.3% of grandfathers continued with physical contact despite the lockdown. In addition, contact with grandchildren continued to be maintained through different audiovisual media. There were no differences between participants on their own or with their spouses. In other recent studies (MacDarby *et al.*, 2020), the results showed that distant communication with grandparents was significantly more frequent during the pandemic compared to before the pandemic (by telephone, video chatting, texting, email). Also, depending on the country, grandparents were able to physically separate from their grandchildren to protect their health, in the case of the UK, and quite the opposite in the case of South Africa (Cantillon *et al.*, 2021). In China, many grandparents increased the time spent with their grandchildren, and 33.2% of primary school children lived together with their grandparents during the pandemic (Lyu *et al.*, 2020), with both groups reported to have gained more health knowledge, life skills and values.

Study limitations include the scarcity of research on the role of the grandfather, especially in close contexts; also the lack of information all grandchildren, by asking them only about the grandchild they see most. Moreover, it was difficult to obtain a sample of grandfathers, perhaps because of a lower confidence in participating due to more limited experience with their grandchildren (Leseberg & Manoogian, 2019), which may have affected the homogeneity of some sociodemographic variables, such as marital status, geographical distance, grandchildren's age and, especially, education, grouped in a poor *versus* better educational level, given that this group of grandfathers belong mainly to cohorts after the Spanish Civil War, with very few university or high level studies (Carreras & Tafunell, 2005). Also, this research was conducted during the Covid-19 lockdown, which may have influenced the entire process.

In conclusion, this study has shown that satisfaction with some shared activities is related to different sociodemographic variables of participants and their grandchildren, as shown by a previous study (Patschová, 2014). In addition, most grandfathers strongly agree with the Formal grandparenting role, which is the role involving the least commitment to an intergenerational relationship, confirming to an extent the secondary role of grandfathers compared to grandmothers (Hank *et al.*, 2018). Also, the preferred grandparenting roles are related to both the participants' and their grandchildren's sociodemographic variables.

Given that the role of grandparenthood is a dynamic sociocultural construction, there are possibilities for learning and improvement through programs and courses for grandfathers (Szinovacz & Roberts, 1998)

that could change this difference according to gender and thus offer grandfathers benefit from the positive effects on their health (longevity) by taking more care of their grandchildren in a moderate way (Hilbrand *et al.*, 2017).

Future research should continue to study grandfathers, using larger samples and focusing on variables such as diet and shared dynamics or sedentary physical activities (Castañeda-García *et al.*, 2021). We should also focus more on widowed or separated grandfathers than married ones, to assess their emotional closeness with their grandchildren when on their own. Also to check if they feel more confident and satisfied in their role through activities with masculine norms (Lesperance, 2010). More knowledge is needed to better understand the benefits this role, alone and together, can bring to family relationships.

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