

Parental and Grandparental Labour in Russia: Gender Perspective

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Abstract: Similar to most of the advanced economies, Russia has seen a rapid change of social values, proactive engagement of women in the labour activity, the transition from the authoritarian to egalitarian model of family relationships. In a number of Russian regions, men and women increasingly believe that they have to take an equal part in housekeeping and childcare. We study parental responsibilities associated with raising, developing children and taking care of them as a particular type of labour—parental labour. Parents may delegate these functions to other actors—for example, to family members; therefore, we can look into not only parental, but also grandparental labour. The paper aims to analyse gender aspects of the parental and grandparental labour in Russia. We used a series of qualitative and quantitative research methods. To examine gender aspects of parental labour, we conducted in-depth interviews with 7 mothers employed (residents of the Sverdlovsk Region). To examine the nature of grandparental labour in 2021, we surveyed 500 parents – the residents of the Sverdlovsk Region; filter questions were to control that the respondents have both under-age children and their currently living parents and/or those of the spouse (i.e., grandparents). For the analysis, we selected questions aimed to study the content, forms, and the scope of grandparental labour. We processed and analysed data using IBM SPSS Statistics 23.0. For the analysis, we also used descriptive statistics, frequency analysis, and non-parametric statistics (Mann–Whitney U-test). According to the in-depth interviews, women are overstressed about their burden of parental responsibilities. With that, they still stereotypically believe that raising children is predominantly a woman's job. Parents argued that grandparental labour is also highly gendered; most often, it is exercised by grandmothers. In particular, maternal grandparents fulfil parental labour functions more frequently than paternal ones. Evaluations of help differ most prominently in those cases when parents estimated paternal grandparents' help. Our results may be of use when designing new mechanisms for the family and demographic policies in Russia, which aim to ensure gender equality and the proactive involvement of men in parental and grandparental labour.

Keywords: parental labour, grandparental labour, gender aspects, demographic policy

1. Introduction

A traditional understanding of family with a man being viewed as a provider and a woman as a home keeper is gradually disappearing (Aarntzen et al., 2021). Instead, it is replaced by an egalitarian model, which strives for reaching equality and closing a gender gap between spouses' roles. In the recent decade, women have more often and proactively engaged in labour and education, whereas men partly assume family and housekeeping responsibilities, including raising children (Cipollone et al., 2014; Janus, 2012; Tamm, 2019; Beham et al., 2019). Still, as many researchers report, gender-based roles remain in most of modern families. Traditionally, housekeeping and parental responsibilities are mostly shouldered by women rather than men (Craig and Mullan, 2010; Winefield et al., 2011; Lomazzi et al., 2019). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) claims that, in 2021, women from the OECD countries have spent on average 263.4 minutes daily on non-paid labour (housekeeping and raising children), whereas men devoted to it only half the figure (OECD, 2021). According to the International Labour Organisation, in Russia, this gap is even larger with women spending three times more on non-paid household work compared to their partners. Researchers claim that disparities in the distribution of domestic chores between spouses not only result in the intense physical and emotional pressure faced by many women, but also become one of the reasons behind a low birth rate, as it may negatively influence spouses' decision to have the first and subsequent child (Mills et al., 2008; Arpino and Luppi, 2020; McCanlies et al., 2019).

Researchers from different countries argue that the gender gap also occurs between grandparents. For example, according to the 2004 Survey of Health, Ageing, and Retirement in Europe based on data from 10 European countries, Hank and Buber concluded that grandmothers were more engaged in taking care of their grandchildren compared to grandfathers; in 2003, 58% of grandmothers and 49% of grandfathers provided some kind of care for a grandchild aged 15 or younger. The most prominent differences (more than 10 percentage points) in the shares of grandmothers and grandfathers involved in taking care of their grandchildren were observed in Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark, and France (Hank and Buber, 2009). Data from other sources yielded analogous results; for instance, in the Netherlands, the survey of childbearing-age citizens found the following gender-based aspects of grandparenting: maternal grandparents prevail over paternal ones;

grandmothers are more proactive in providing care for grandchildren than grandfathers (Thomese and Liefbroer, 2013). In China, the 1991-2004 longitudinal dataset (China Health and Nutrition Survey) demonstrated that even those grandmothers and grandfathers who lived with their grandchildren spent different amount of time to help them – on average, 21.1 hours per week by grandmothers and only 7 weekly hours by grandfathers (Chen et al., 2011).

We consider parental responsibilities in taking care of children, raising and developing them as a specific type of labour — parental labour. Therefore, shifting a part of parental functions to grandparents inevitably results in the activation of grandparental labour. Parental and grandparental types of labour differ not only in their actors; they can also vary by a set of responsibilities, attitudes to the type of labour (by actors themselves, children this type of labour is aimed at, and society in general), regularity, intensity, factors to determine its necessity, and the like. What they share, though, is the labour-oriented nature of childcare activities, which involves time and energy costs; it is goal-oriented and in-demand in society.

The paper aims to analyse gender aspects of parental and grandparental labour in Russia. It is the first study in Russia which explores gender aspects of two types of labour—parental and grandparental—simultaneously.

2. Data and methods

To analyse gender aspects of parental and grandparental labour, we used a set of qualitative and quantitative research methods and designed a methodology consisting of two types of empirical research (Figure 1).

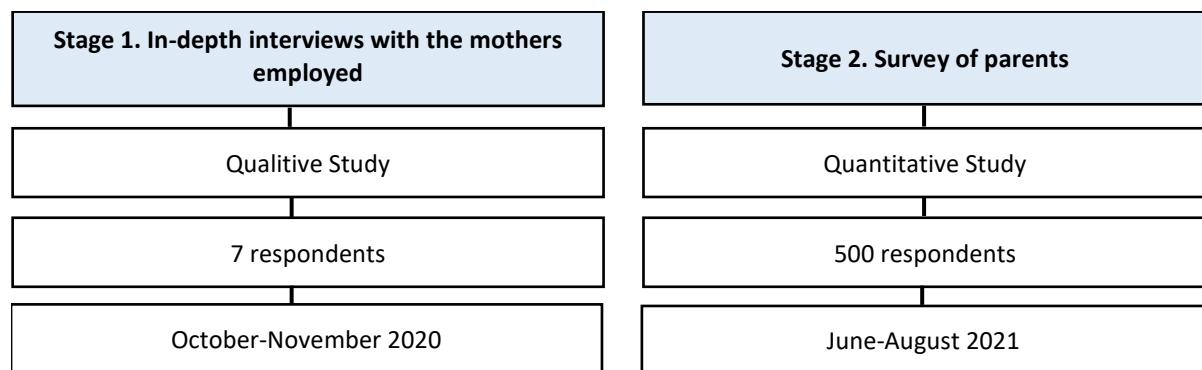


Figure 1: Logical structure of studying gender aspects of parental and grandparental labour in Russia

To clarify, we would describe each stage in more detail.

Stage 1. In-depth semi-formal interviews with Sverdlovsk Region's mothers employed (aged 18-45, N=7). We surveyed women with two children (N = 4) and with one child (N = 3) aged 0 to 10; we argue that parental labour is the most intense at this very stage of children's development. The interview guide included 4 major points for discussion:

- professional and parental responsibilities of the respondent;
- difficulties in balancing professional and parental labour;
- additional measures to support employees with children on the labour market;
- how reproductive intentions of the respondents are influenced by the demographic policy.

Stage 2. To examine the nature of grandparental labour in 2021, we surveyed 500 parents – the residents of the Sverdlovsk Region; filter questions controlled that respondents had both under-age children and their currently living parents and/or those of the spouse (i.e., grandparents). We applied river sample and posted the questionnaire on various websites (regional mass media and communities on social media) to ensure the maximum coverage of the target population. To distribute the questionnaire, we involved public organisations that deal with families, parents, and children. In total, the survey collected data from 563 respondents. Then, 500 responses were selected randomly, which increased a random selection of the population units collected with river sample. For the analysis, we selected questions aimed to study the content, forms, and scope of grandparental labour. We used the following variables:

- regularity of providing help to children by different actors of grandparental labour (maternal and paternal grandparents). It was estimated with a 7-point scale, where 1 – “he/she does not provide any help”, 7 – “he/she helps a lot”;
- responsibilities taken by grandparents (a list of 18 types of help grouped in the following functions of grandparental labour: communicative, labour-related, accompanying (taking children to various establishments), cultural, housekeeping, educational, medical preventive).

Using respondents' answers on how much help they receive from different actors of grandparental labour, we calculated the average amount of help provided by each group. After that, we identified 2 groups of the parents surveyed: 1) those who receive more help from grandmothers; 2) those who receive more help from grandfathers. Then, we determined gender-based functions of grandparental labour.

For the analysis, we used descriptive statistics and frequency analysis.

3. Results

We obtained the following qualitative results:

1. Childcare responsibilities are mostly shouldered by women. Interestingly, a gap in parental functions between the partners does not depend on their marital status (married or divorced). In both cases, mothers are more engaged in raising children compared to fathers (Table 1). Some married women attribute it to a demanding job of their spouses.

Table 1: Distribution of parental responsibilities in family

Married women	Single mothers
“I certainly take on more childcare responsibilities” (Ekaterina, 29, a five-year-old child)	“He kind of takes part and shows up once a week or a fortnight to, say, have a walk with the child. Actually, that’s it. All the rest is on me” (Vera, 36, a three-year-old child).
“Well, I do more, I guess... 70/30. But the only reason is that he always gets work calls, and a lack of time, I think. Technically, it’s 50/50” (Marina, 35, nine- and four-year-old children)	“It’s such a challenge to be left alone and raise my child by myself. Now things are different because the father started to support us financially a little bit, but when he hadn’t, it had been very difficult” (Marina, 34, a ten-year-old child).
“It feels like my husband has an assumption that it’s a woman’s job. I think he does less. Yeah, he buys groceries, something else, but all the stuff like taking and picking up children, arranging things—it’s all on me” (Olga, 35, seven- and ten-year-old children)	“I don’t have a husband; we got divorced. So, I actually raise them alone. I don’t hear from him” (Julia, 35, nine- and six-year-old children).
“It’s me, obviously. My husband is working; he leaves at 7:30 and comes back at 8:30 or 9, 5 days a week. So, naturally, everything’s on me” (Tatyana, 33, six- and two-year-old children).	

2. The women regrettably claimed that their spouses barely contribute to the childcare process. However, divorced mothers take it more seriously (Table 2). Other women – despite the great load – accept the gap in the distribution of parental responsibilities as normal.

Table 2: Women’s opinions on men’s engagement in parental labour

Married women	Single mothers
“It’s so hard for us, mothers. But now fathers also take on these responsibilities” (Ekaterina, 29, a five-year-old child).	“He said the problem was that he was not interested in children below the age of 3. Until that age, he said, only mothers should take care of them. That’s totally not okay with me...” (Vera, 36, a three-year-old child).
“We’re not in the US. My husband has assumptions and stereotypes; that’s just who he is. In America, everything is possible. Here, in Russia, it’s all different” (Olga, 35, seven- and ten-year-old children).	“I think it’s unfair that a woman handles everything herself while a man is having fun somewhere. There should be some kind of propaganda, I guess” (Marina, 34, a ten-year-old child).
“Fathers definitely should help take care of children. But the government doesn’t give them a parental leave. So, that’s the way it is. Anyways, mothers spend more time with children. Fathers are breadwinners; they can get more money” (Tatyana, 33, six- and two-year-old children).	

3. According to the parents surveyed, grandparental labour is more often exercised by grandmothers. Figure 2 presents parents' estimations of how much help they receive from different actors of grandparental labour. Mostly, help comes from maternal grandmothers followed by maternal grandfathers, paternal grandmothers, and paternal grandfathers (in the decreasing order). Therefore, maternal grandparents assume grandparental labour functions more often compared to paternal ones, whereas grandmothers, the respondents claim, provide more help than grandfathers.

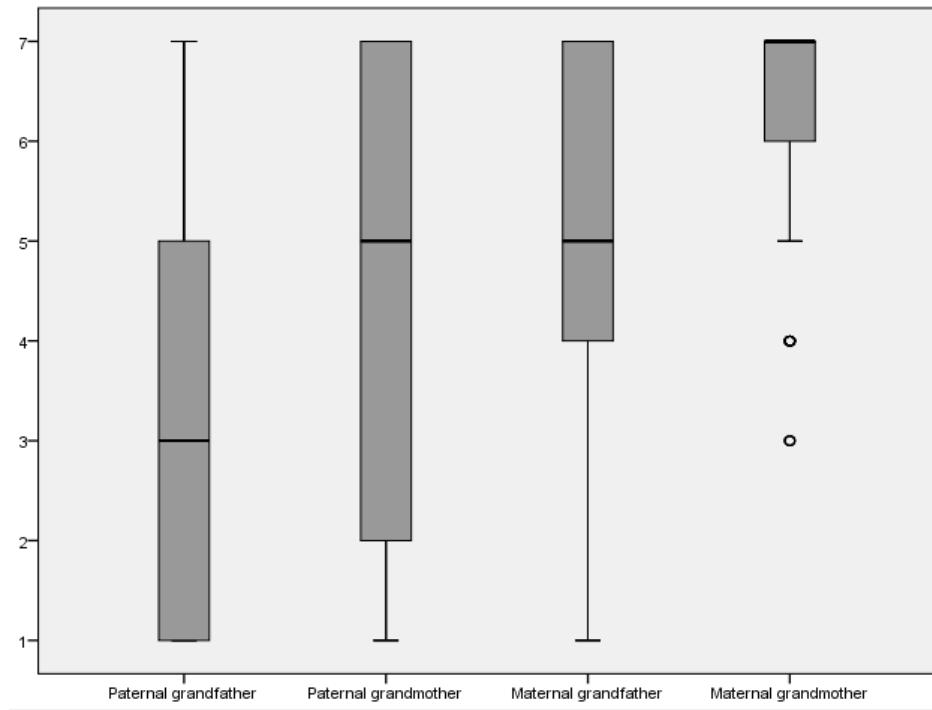


Figure 2: Estimations of help by different actors of grandparental labour

4. Figure 3 demonstrates coefficients of variation in parents' estimations of help with grandchildren provided by different grandparents. The most prominent differences are revealed between estimations of help by paternal grandfathers; as for paternal grandmothers, evaluations of their help also vary greatly. In the case of maternal grandmothers, variations between estimations of their contributions are the lowest. When parents evaluate help by the father's parents, their opinions vary more substantially.

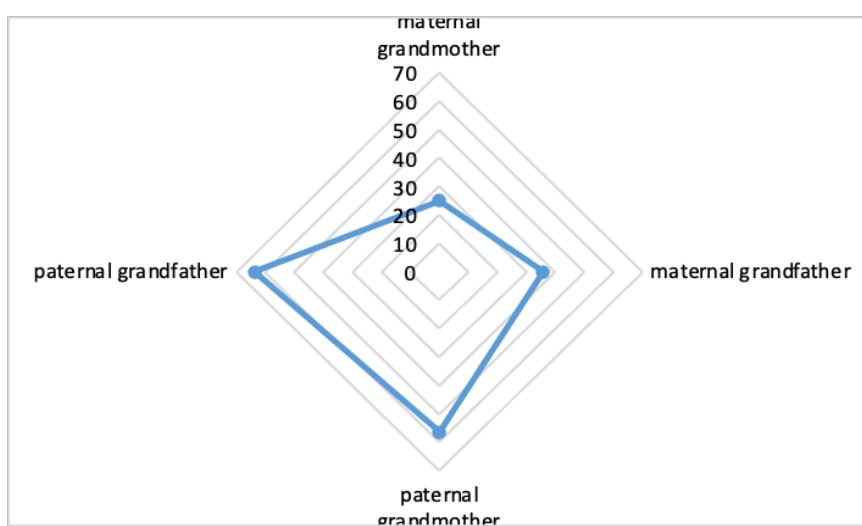


Figure 3: Coefficients of variation in estimations of grandparental labour exercised by different actors

5. Table 3 presents groups of the parents surveyed based on the gender aspect of grandparental help. It demonstrates that the number of parents who receive help predominately from grandmothers rather than

grandfathers accounts for 35.2%, whereas the inverse case (when grandfathers help more) is much less common (19.7%).

Table 3: Groups of parents surveyed based on gender aspect of grandparental help

Groups of parents surveyed based on gender aspect of grandparental help	Regularity, %
Grandmothers and grandfathers help equally	45.1
Grandmothers help more often	35.2
Grandfathers help more often	19.7
Total	100

6. Table 4 illustrates types of grandparents' help in the gender-based perspective. As compared to grandfathers, grandmothers much more often take grandchildren to kindergartens, schools, extracurricular and sport classes, fulfil the medical function of parental labour, cook for grandchildren, and attend cultural events with them. In turn, grandfathers more often involve grandchildren into labour activities than grandmothers.

Table 4: Regularity of grandparental labour activities in gender perspective

Activities	All parents surveyed, %	Groups of parents receiving more help from		
		grandmothers	grandfathers	equally
Communicating on various topics	57.4	56.1	55.0	57.7
Involving into labour activities	40.9	42.1	46.7	38.7
Accompanying to educational establishments	29.4	38.3	26.7	28.5
Arranging leisure time	23.6	25.2	26.7	24.1
Supporting financially	20.1	21.5	21.7	21.2
Cooking	18.0	15.9	11.7	13.1
Attending cultural establishments	16.2	16.8	11.7	18.2
Helping with school tasks	16.0	17.8	16.7	16.1
Giving medical treatment	10.4	19.6	3.3	10.2
Doing laundry	3.0	4.7	3.3	1.5

4. Discussion

Our results show a gender gap in distributing childcare responsibilities within the family; it is relevant both for parents and grandparents, who are often delegated a part of these responsibilities.

The qualitative results prove that mothers are more proactively engaged in raising children than fathers. Some women argue that the reason behind it is a hard work their spouses have to do to provide for the family, which may testify to the fact that traditional ideas still prevail—men are responsible for financial well-being of the family, women for running a household and taking care of children. We concluded that, in Russia, childcare is a prerogative of mothers, which implicitly supports the fact that married women—even despite a heavy load—are ready to bear the most part of parental functions only because they are expected to do so by society.

The stronger involvement of grandmothers into grandparental labour may stem not only from gender-based stereotypes existing in Russia, but also from objective reasons—women's life expectancy in Russia is higher than that of men. Figure 4 demonstrates these indicators in the dynamic with the dashed line showing the number of years by which women's life expectancy increases men's one. For the previous 30 years, the difference in life expectancy has not fallen below 10 years, whereas from 2000 to 2005 it was more than 13 years. This disparity inevitably affects the scope of grandparental labour exercised by grandfathers compared to that of grandmothers.

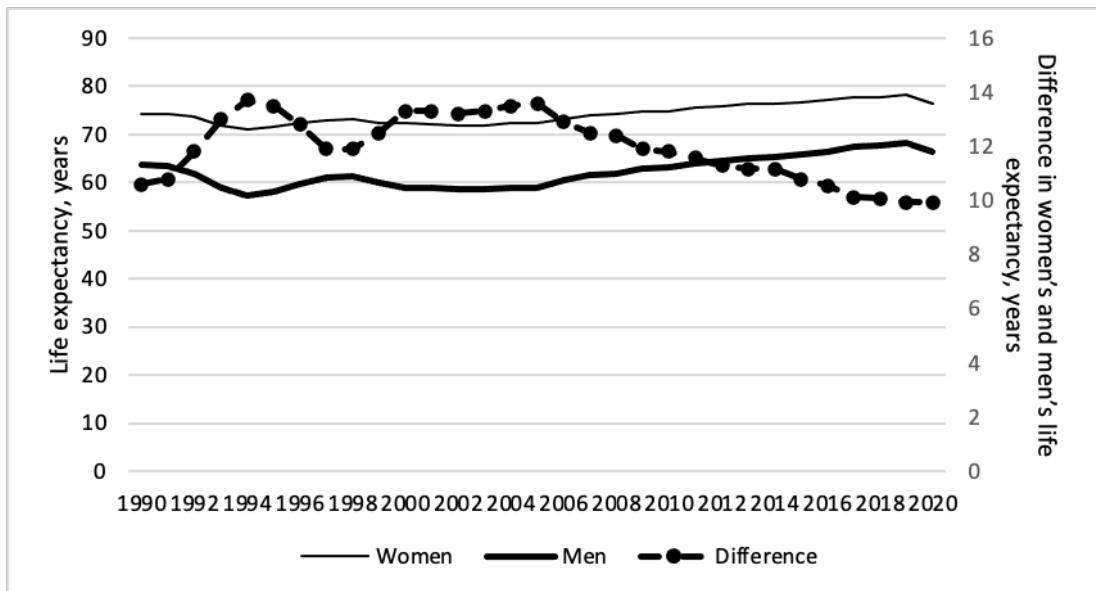


Figure 4: Dynamic of men's and women's life expectancy in Russia

5. Conclusions

Our analysis indicates that the gender inequality in Russia occurs both in parental and grandparental labour. More often, these two types of labour are exercised by women. Traditionally, they are more proactive in raising children than fathers notwithstanding the considerable stress induced by balancing family and career—two vitally important areas. The disparity in distributing household chores may result from gender-related stereotypes, which are strong in the Russian society. We established gender-coloured labour activities in grandparental labour, which include accompanying, medical, housekeeping, and cultural functions. Our results may be of use when designing new mechanisms for the family and demographic policies in Russia, which aim to ensure gender equality and the proactive involvement of men in the parental and grandparental labour. We see two directions for the further development of the study: 1) carrying out in-depth interviews with fathers to explore their vision of the problem; 2) carrying out in-depth interviews and determining focus groups with grandparents to find out subjective reasons behind the gender gap.

Acknowledgements

The reported study was funded by RFBR, project number 20-011-00280

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