

Understanding the Relationship and Bond Between Grandparents and Grandchildren

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Abstract

- The connection between both grandparents and grandchildren is extremely crucial. In today's day and age however, there is a large gap between the two due to technology and distance. The present study aims to explore the presence of emotional attachment between grandparents and grandchildren in this era of technology. In order to do this, a survey was created using Google Forms. The data was collected from 14 grandchildren (age range <13 to 23+) and 14 grandparents (n grandmothers = 5, n grandfathers = 9). Statistical analysis such as t-test was carried out in the present study. Findings reveal that there is no significant difference across gender, age, family type among grandparents and their attachment to grandchildren. Furthermore, for grandchildren, findings showed that there is a significant difference in terms of attachment, with more grandchildren feeling closer to their grandfathers. There was no significant difference between medium of interaction (face to face / technology) and frequency of interaction (Daily / Weekly / Monthly / Yearly / None). When grandchildren were asked to share about their connection with their grandparents, a majority of them responded in a positive manner.
- **Keywords:** *Grandparents, Grandchildren, Attachment, Emotional Connection, Technology*

Rationale of the Study

- Recent studies applying attachment theory to grandparent-grandchild bonds have shown that emotional closeness can reflect secure attachment patterns. For instance, frequent, supportive interactions between grandparents and grandchildren foster emotional security and well-being. Research highlights that a strong emotional bond often mirrors the characteristics of secure attachment, where mutual support and regular communication play crucial roles.
- Maintaining these intergenerational bonds involves addressing challenges such as geographic distance, family conflicts, and health issues. Understanding these relationships through attachment theory underscores the importance of consistent, supportive interactions to sustain emotional closeness. Regular communication and expressions of affection help preserve these valuable connections, reinforcing the emotional security and well-being of both grandparents and grandchildren.

Introduction

- The bond between grandparents and grandchildren is shaped by the roles grandparents play, the emotional closeness they share, and their responsibilities in child-rearing, with notable differences between collectivistic and individualistic societies.
- In the family system, grandparents often provide essential practical and emotional support while in collectivistic societies, where family cohesion is highly valued, grandparents are actively involved in daily child-rearing, maintaining cultural traditions, and supporting family unity.
- In individualistic societies, where independence is emphasized, grandparents might play a more peripheral role, offering occasional support and engagement.

Introduction

- Attachment theory, developed by John Bowlby and expanded by Mary Ainsworth, provides a framework for understanding the emotional bonds between grandparents and grandchildren.
- Bowlby introduced the idea that early emotional bonds, especially between infants and their caregivers, form a secure base that influences later relationships.
- This theory initially focused on parent-child interactions but has been extended to include grandparent-grandchild relationships, emphasizing how early attachment experiences shape emotional connections throughout life.
- Technology helps in connecting both grandparents and grandchildren as a lot of the times, they are at a distance from one another

Methodology

Aim : The present study aims to understand the attachment and emotional bond between grandparents and grandchildren.

Objectives:

1. To investigate the role of family type on grandparent - grandchildren attachment
2. To investigate the role of gender
3. To investigate the role of Age
4. To investigate the role of Technology

Sample and sampling technique

In the present study the data was collected from grandparents($n = 14$) and grandchildren($n = 14$). The age range for the grandparents was 39 and below to 70+ and for the grandchildren it was 13 and below to 23+. Purposive sampling technique was used to procure data from the respondents.

Research design

A quantitative research design was employed wherein two google forms were created. The survey form for the grandparents consisted of 26 items. The survey form for the grandchildren consisted of 24 items.

Instrumentation

- a. Grandparents Survey - The survey contains 16 items measuring the attachment and bond perceived by grandchildren towards grandparents. The responses are on a scale ranging from Always to Never as well as Very Much to No.
- b. Grandchildren Survey - The survey contains 15 items measuring the attachment and bond perceived by grandchildren towards grandparents. The responses are on a scale ranging from Always to Never.

Results

Table 1 shows the *t*-test for gender and the total score of grandparents on emotional attachment

		t	df	p	Cohen's d
Total Score	Equal variances	-0.43	12	.677	0.24
	Unequal variances	-0.43	10.52	.652	0.26

The findings on *Table 1* show that there is no significant mean difference on the total score with $t = -0.43$ and $p = 0.677$ ($p > 0.05$). The Cohen's *d* value of 0.24 reveals a small effect size.

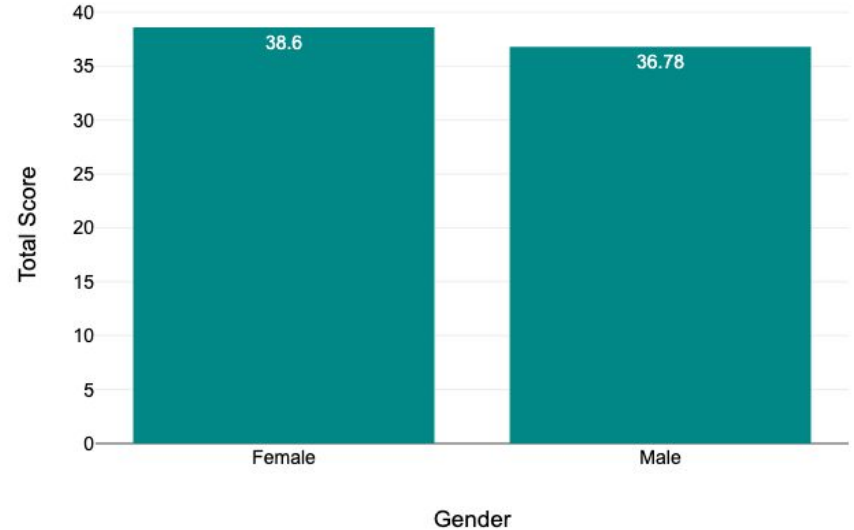


Figure 1 shows the mean total score across gender for grandparents (M Female = 38.6, M Male = 36.78)

Results

Table 2 shows the *t*-test for family type and the total score of grandparents on emotional attachment

		t	df	p	Cohen's d
Total Score	Equal variances	1.07	12	.306	0.58
	Unequal variances	0.95	5.98	.38	0.51

The findings on *Table 2* show that there is no significant mean difference on the total score of grandparents across family-type with $t = 1.07$ and $p = 0.306$ ($p > 0.05$). The Cohen's *d* value of 0.58 reveals a moderate effect size.

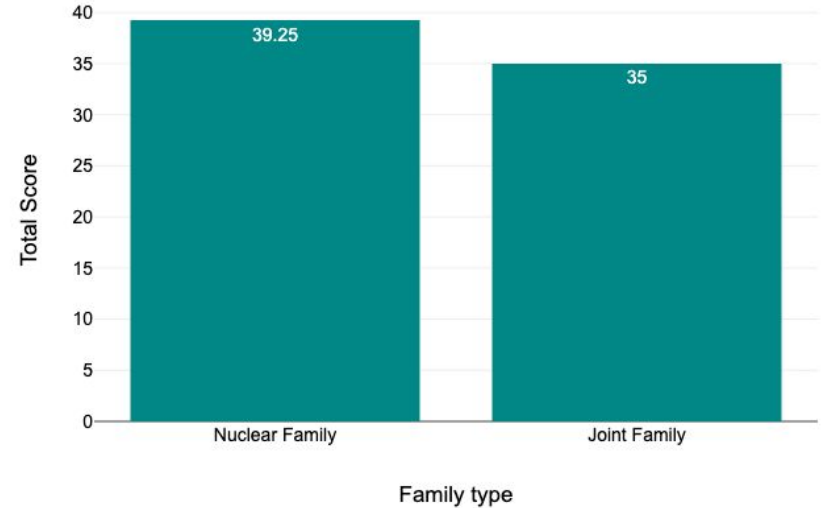


Figure 2 shows the mean total score across family types for grandparents (M Nuclear = 39.25, M Joint = 35)

Results

Table 3 shows the *t*-test for age of grandparenthood and total score on emotional attachment

		t	df	p	Cohen's d
Total Score	Equal variances	-1.94	11	.079	1.16
	Unequal variances	-1.4	3.43	.245	0.84

The findings on *Table 3* reveal that there is no significant mean difference on the total score of grandparents on emotional attachment and the age of grandparenthood, with $t = -1.94$ and $p = 0.079$ ($p > 0.05$). The Cohen's *d* value of 1.16 represents a large effect size.

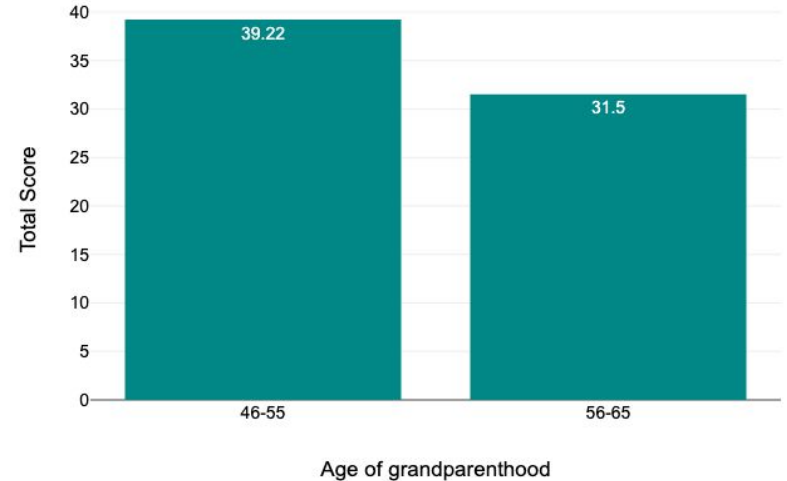


Figure 3 shows the mean total score of Age of grandparenthood (M 46-55= 39.22, M 56-65= 31.5)

Results

Table 4 shows the *t*-test for gender and the total score of grandchildren on emotional attachment

		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Cohen's d</i>
Total Score	Equal variances	-1.24	12	.24	0.67
	Unequal variances	-1.21	10.03	.254	0.65

The findings on *Table 4* show that there is a significant mean difference on the total score with $t = -1.24$ and $p = 0.24$ ($p > 0.05$). The Cohen's *d* value of 0.67 reveals a moderate effect size.

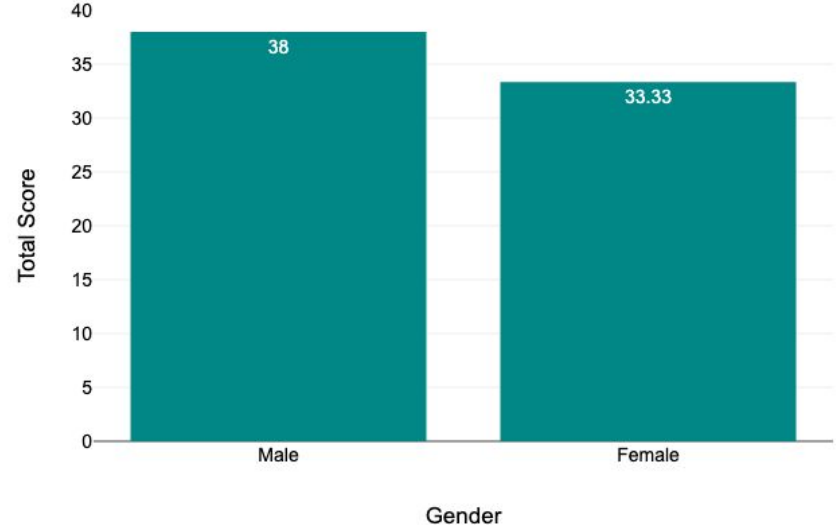


Figure 4 shows the mean total score across gender for grandchildren (M Female = 38, M Male = 33.33)

Results

Table 5 shows the Anova test for who grandchildren feel closer too and the total score for grandchildren on emotional attachment

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2
Closest Bond With	317.77	2	158.89	5.08	.027	0.48
Residual	344.23	11	31.29			
Total	662	13				

The findings on *Table 5* show that there is not a significant mean difference on the total score with $p = 0.027 (p < 0.05)$. The η^2 value of 0.48 reveals a small effect size.

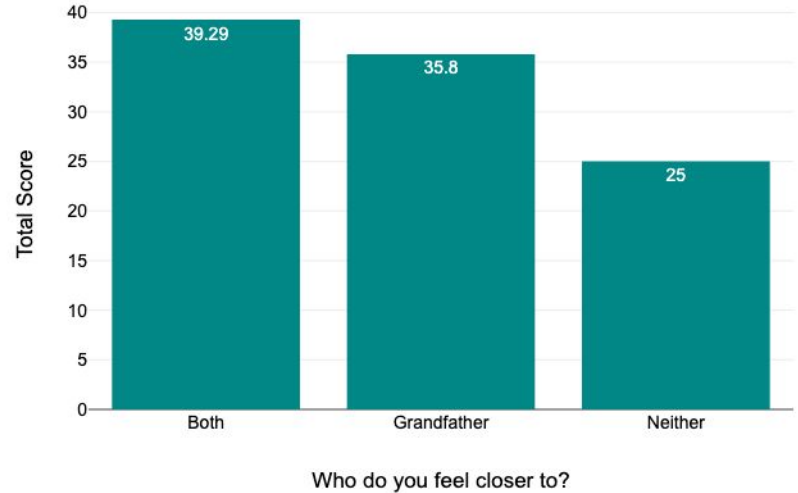


Figure 5 shows the mean total score across who grandchildren feel closer to (M Both = 39.29, M Grandfather = 35.8, M Neither = 25, M Grandmother = 0)

Results

Table 6 shows the Anova test across the frequency of interactions between grandchildren and grandparents and the total score for grandchildren on emotional attachment

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2
Frequency of interaction	195.87	3	65.29	2.07	.175	0.41
Residual	284.13	9	31.57			
Total	480	12				

The findings on *Table 6* show that there is no significant mean difference on the total score with $p = 0.175 (p > 0.05)$. The η^2 value of *0.41* reveals a small effect size. The frequencies of interaction taken into consideration were daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly. "Not at all" was removed due to less responses.

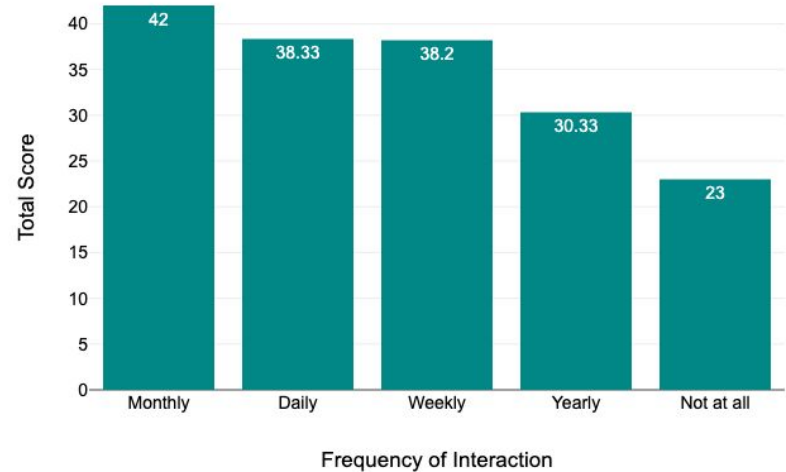


Figure 6 shows the mean total score across the frequency of interactions between grandchildren and grandparents (M Monthly = 42, M Daily = 38.33, M Weekly = 38.2, M Year = 30.33, M Not at all = 23)

Results

Table 7 shows the *t*-test for the medium of interaction and the total score of grandchildren on emotional attachment

		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Total Score	Equal variances	-0.61	11	.556	0.4
	Unequal variances	-0.87	7.42	.411	0.57

The findings on *Table 7* show that there is no significant mean difference on the total score with $t = -0.61$ and $p = 0.556$ ($p > 0.05$). The Cohen's *d* value of 0.4 reveals a small effect size.

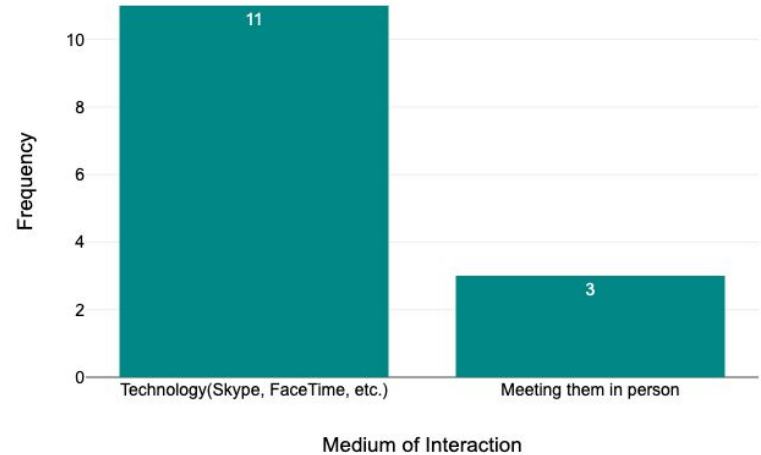


Figure 7 shows the mean total score across the medium of interaction (M Technology = 11, M Meeting them in person = 3)

Discussion

Findings in the present study reveal no significant difference between grandparents living in joint and nuclear family type with regards to their attachment with grandchildren. Previous research has commonly looked at family types' impact on grandchildren's attachment rather than that of grandparents. However, Ramchandra and Salunkhe (2014) found that for the elderly the family type significantly impacted their health. With growing age, more support is needed from family, old people fare better in joint families compared to nuclear families. Furthermore, research has suggested that nuclear families create loneliness among the elderly, particularly, females (K & S, 2018).

Furthermore, it is also found that there is a significant difference with different ages of grandparenthood with regards to their attachment with grandchildren. Older grandparents tend to be more affectionate but also tend to contact and spend time with grandchildren less than younger grandparents (Silverstein & Long, 1998). Additionally, younger grandparents tend to feel older than those who are around the same age but not grandparents. However, this can be reversed later on if they have to give grandchild care (Bordone & Arpino, 2016).

Discussion

When comparing the gender of grandparents and how it relates to their attachment with grandchildren, however, previous studies showed a multitude of answers. A study on 33 grandmothers and 33 grandfathers revealed the perception of grandparenthood for grandfathers is very different than that for grandmothers (Silverstein & Long, 1998). Some studies show that maternal grandmothers tend to be closer to grandchildren but this can change greatly as time goes on and the grandchildren get older. (Mann et al., 2013).

When looking at who grandchildren feel closer to, studies show that despite grandchildren being closer to grandmothers, this can vary from age and gender. In particular, older grandsons bond more with their grandfathers (Mann et al., 2013). Parental grandmothers, on the other hand, benefit from affection as they are more associated with affection and closeness (Bernhold & Giles, 2019). The data collected in the surveys showed no one being closer to just their grandmother, proving how there are many factors that can change how close one is with their grandparents.

Additionally, research indicates that there are many mediums of interactions between grandparents and grandchildren but the most common is face-to-face interactions despite other methods gaining popularity (Quadrello et al., 2005). In part, a difference between face-to-face interactions and technology could be immigration. On top of that, younger grandparents tend to meet with grandchildren more often while older grandparents tend to provide more financial support (Silverstein & Marenco, 2001).

Conclusion

To conclude, grandparents and grandchildren share an emotional bond that cannot be triumphed by any other. Grandparents care for grandchildren by providing them both emotional and physical support. Despite this, there is a large generational gap due to technology. In the present study findings had revealed the effect of family type, age, gender upon the attachment between grandparents and grandchildren. The role of technology was also researched upon.

This study is not devoid of its limitations. Firstly, the sample size under consideration is small , hence it is not a good representative of the population under study. Secondly, a more intergenerational approach within the family structure can provide better understanding of the attachment. Additionally, most of the people who filled out a survey were from the asian decent, which may not show the full few. Instead, getting a wide array of ethnicities and races would provide for a more holistic set of data.

Future implications:

It is crucial to study the bond between gc and gp as in the formative years the role played by gp particularly in the Indian social context is paramount.

The study can be done on a larger sample size, and can consider cross cultural comparisons when looking into gp and gc attachment. This will aid researchers and families in developing a better understanding of the emotional bond and it will provide them with recommendations to make the bond stronger as due to the geographical distance the attachment can eventually grow weaker.

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