GRANDPARENTING CHILDREN WITH AND WITHOUT SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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There is a growing body of research on the role of grandparents (GPs) on their grandchildren’s upbringing. However, less research evidence is available on their involvement with their special needs grandchildren.

The aim of this study is to explore and compare GPs’ involvement in families with a typical developing (TDC), and with a special educational needs grandchild (SNC). More specifically, the study assessed: i) the extent and the kind of GPs’ involvement, ii) the quality of their relationship and their emotional closeness, and iii) the factors that may affect their involvement (e.g., geographical distance, health condition).

The participants were: a) 104 GPs of TDC and, b) 53 GPs of SNC. GPs were administered a structured questionnaire. The results revealed that GPs are an important source of support both for their TDC and SNC. Care was their prime responsibility, followed by indoor and outdoors activities. Being an important link with the past, they follow the family traditions alike for their TDC and SNC, but they narrate events from the past more frequently with their TDC. Similarly, GPs offer their advice alike to their TDC and SNC, but it was mainly the TDC that trusted their problems to them. Almost all GPs described the relationship with their grandchild in a positive light, but GPs of TDC enjoyed a higher quality of relation and felt emotionally closer to them compared to SNC. The age of the GPs was in inverse relation with their involvement. Geographic distance had a role to play only for TDC, while GPs health affected their involvement with their SNC.

The findings suggest that GPs are an important source of support for their families. Attention should be paid to their needs in order to maximize the support they can provide to their families.