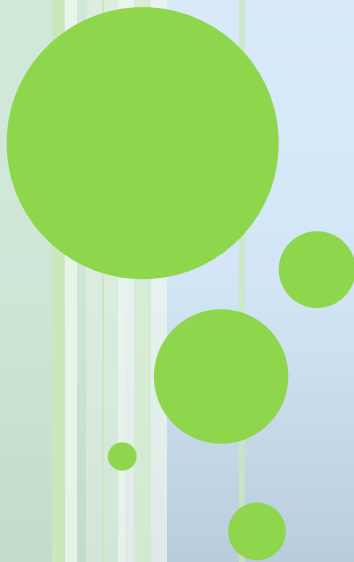


# **Grandparents doing gender: Experiences of grandmothers and grandfathers caring for grandchildren in Australia**

**Briony Horsfall & Deborah Dempsey**

**Swinburne University of Technology**



# THIS PRESENTATION WILL.....

- Setting the scene
- Key sociological concepts
- Methodology
- Population patterns
- Grandmothers who nurture & grandfathers being involved
- Gendered distribution of time & experience



# WHY GRANDPARENTS?

- Grandchildcare
- European research shows gendered distribution (Hank & Buber 2009)
- Previous Australian literature:
  - Asked parents not grandparents
  - Most comparable research was dated



# KEY SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

- Gender order
- Maternalist culture
- Involved fathering



# GENDER ORDER

- R.W. Connell (2002)
- Gender regimes
- Gendered division of labour
- Reproduced through ongoing accomplishment of doing gender in everyday life (Connell, 2002; West & Zimmerman, 1987)



# MATERNALIST CULTURE

- Essentialised gendered attributes
- Perpetuates gendered divisions of caregiving
- 'Proper mothers' (Pocock, 2003)
- Relic of the breadwinner/housewife nuclear family ideal (Craig, 2007)



# INVOLVED FATHERING

- Emotional engagement with children and capable of participating in care (Wall & Arnold, 2007)
- Increase in time spent with children but insufficient uptake of care labour and domestic labour (Bittman, 2004; Craig, 2007; Maher, Lindsay & Franzway, 2008)



# METHODOLOGY: PART A

- Mixed-methods design
- Quantitative: HILDA Survey 2008
  - National representative sample
  - 3,277 grandparents
    - 1,343 grandfathers & 1,934 grandmothers
  - Ever cared for grandchildren
  - Frequency of grandchildcare
    - Age, relationship status, retirement status
    - Leisure time and domestic labour



# METHODOLOGY: PART B

- Qualitative: In-depth interviews
  - 14 grandparents: 8 grandmothers & 6 grandfathers
  - All do grandchildcare on a regular basis
- Asked the same questions about:
  - What it means to be a grandparent who does grandchildcare
  - Joys and challenges of grandchildcare
  - What doing grandchildcare involves for them
  - If partnered, similarities & differences

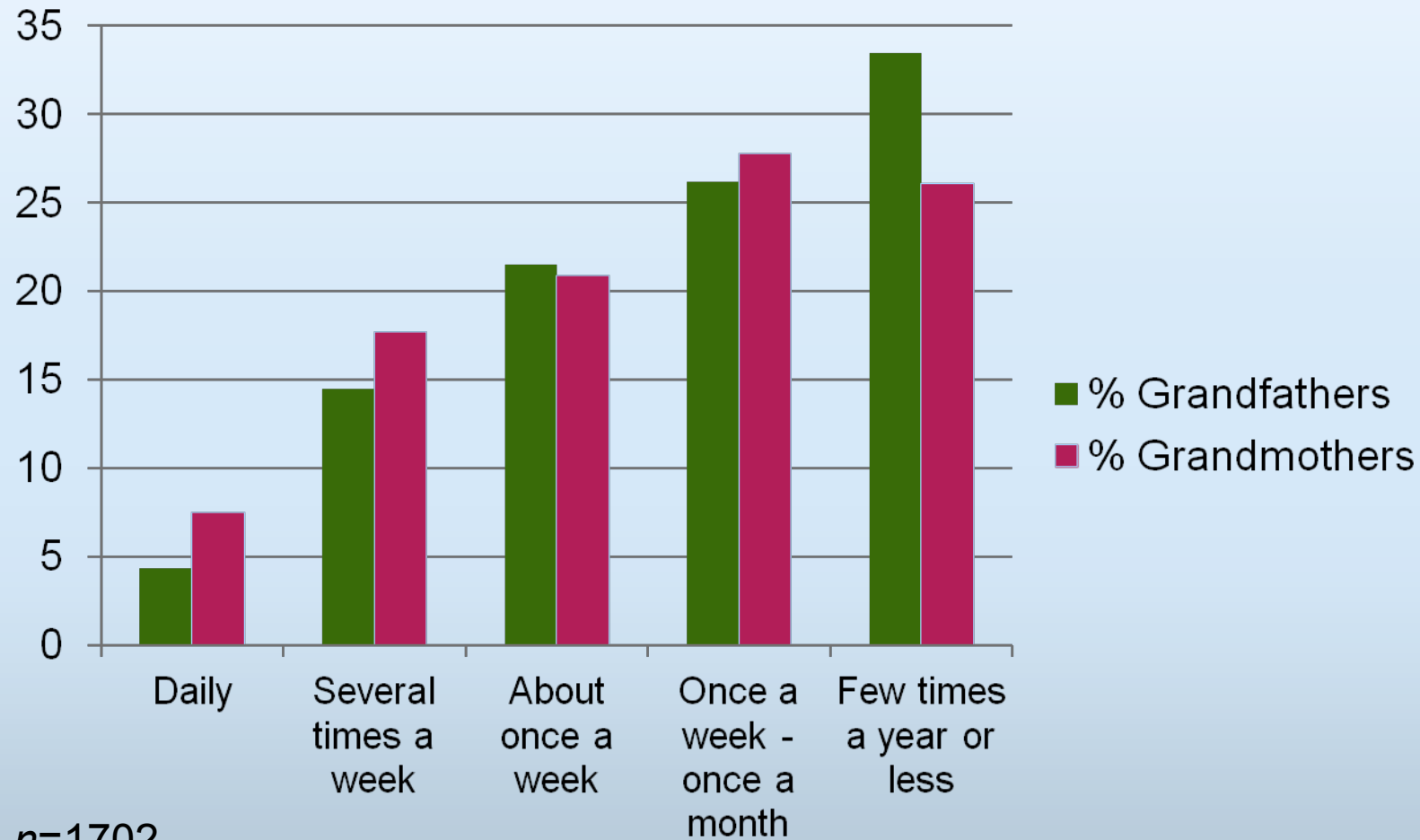


# POPULATION PATTERNS

- Significant differences between grandfathers and grandmothers
- Ever cared for grandchildren
  - 52% of grandmothers, 47% of grandfathers
- Frequency of looking after grandchildren
  - Weekly or more often
  - Grandmothers = 46% Grandfathers = 40%



# FREQUENCY OF CARING FOR GRANDCHILDREN



n=1702



# EUROPEAN COMPARISON

(HANK & BUBER, 2009)

- Smaller proportion do grandchildcare in Australia
  - Europe (in 12mths) 57%, Australia (ever) 51%
- Magnitude of gender difference in propensity to do care
  - Europe 7% difference, Australia 6% difference
- Weekly or more often:
  - Europe: grandfathers 25%, grandmothers 32%
  - Australia: grandfathers 40%, grandmothers 46%

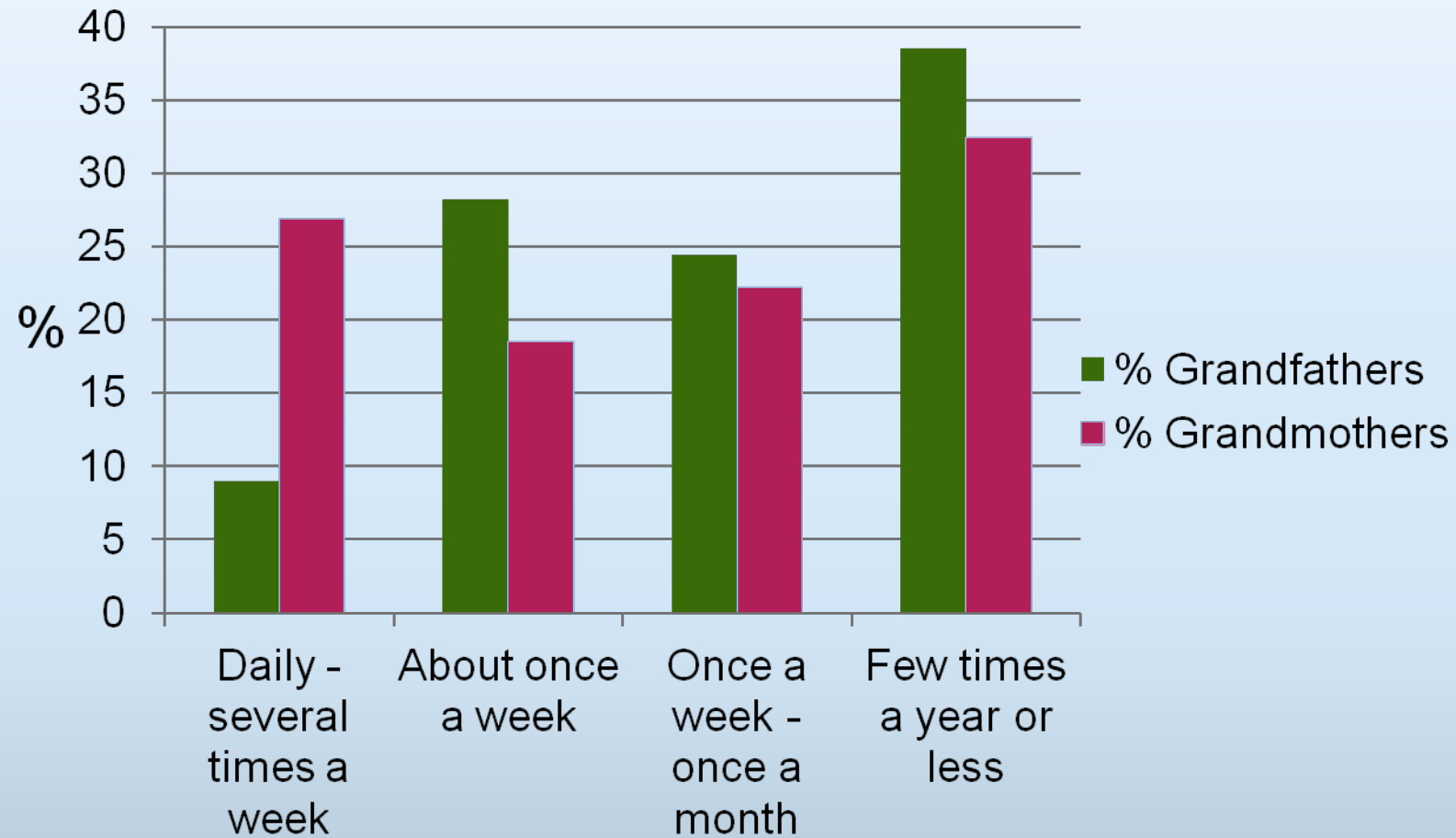


# POPULATION PATTERNS

- Grandparents' age
  - Consistent with European pattern
- Relationship status
  - Consistent with European pattern
- Retirement/employment status
  - Not consistent with European pattern



# PARTLY RETIRED GRANDPARENTS & FREQUENCY OF CARE



*n* = 186



# POPULATION PATTERNS 2

- Leisure time
- Care/work/life balance (Pocock, 2003)
- Grandmothers less satisfied with leisure time than grandfathers
  - 61% caring once a week or more often dissatisfied with amount of leisure



# DOMESTIC LABOUR & GRANDCHILDCARE

<b>Satisfaction with share of domestic labour</b>	<b>Grandfathers %</b>	<b>Grandmothers %</b>
<i>Have ever looked after grandchildren</i>		
I do more than my fair share	12	50
I do my fair share	65	45
I do less than my fair share	23	5
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>Have not ever looked after grandchildren</i>		
I do more than my fair share	18	40
I do my fair share	59	50
I do less than my fair share	24	10
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

# DOMESTIC LABOUR & GRANDCHILDCARE

- Grandmothers doing grandchildcare do substantially more hours of domestic labour than grandfathers
- Grandmothers mean hours domestic labour:
  - minimum = 14 hrs, maximum = 26 hrs
- Grandfathers mean hours domestic labour:
  - minimum = 4 hrs, maximum = 8 hrs
- Inverse to European pattern (Hank & Jürges, 2007)



# GRANDMOTHERS WHO NURTURE

- Discourse of nurturing
- Expectations to do care
- 'Sometimes it gets a bit over the top. Last week I did five days with the grandchildren. I was tired by the end of the week and I was ready for a day off', *Denise, partly retired, cares two days a week.*



# GRANDMOTHERS WHO NURTURE

- 'We went up there for four days, mainly minded the children but I also helped out in other ways, like brought a stack of washing home, cleaned out fridges and things like that', *Emma, retired, five grandchildren, cares at least once a week.*
- 'You've sort of got to do it [play] between all the other things. Whereas with my husband, when he comes home he sort of relaxes and he just has that time with them. He just uses that time as leisure time. *Liz, partly retired, cares for grandchild daily*



# GRANDMOTHERS WHO NURTURE

- Physical & emotional care
- ‘Look, he’s around, especially because he’s home now, but in a sense I take responsibility for looking after [grandchild]. I say ‘come on Thursdays’ and I take the responsibility for it. So he’s here but I’m the basic caregiver’,  
*Fiona, part-time paid work, 5 grandchildren, cares at least several times a week.*



# GRANDMOTHERS WHO NURTURE

- Care/work/life balance
- 'It's been a challenge from the point of view that it's not easy. I get the benefits I think by managing time. I'm a time management freak I think, but I, we, get so much more quality from the visit or outing if I know that it has been time managed'. *Carol, retired, 8 grandchildren, cares several times a week.*
- Economy of time (Maher et al., 2008)



# GRANDFATHERS BEING INVOLVED

- Discourse of the male role model
- Assistant position
  - ‘She’ll do more of the work...she’ll be doing a lot of that when I’ll be playing with the kids. She’ll be cooking or getting something ready so she’ll be able to play with the kids too’,  
*Peter, partly retired, 4 grandchildren, cares several times a week.*
- Avoiding dirty work



# GRANDFATHERS BEING INVOLVED

- 'Totally different, she's wiping bums and taking kids off to the toilet and stuff like that, I don't want to know about. I don't mind but it's something I've chosen not to do. It all happens around me', *Chris, partly retired with 6 grandchildren, cares several times a week.*
- Flexible involvement in caregiving labour



# GRANDFATHERS BEING INVOLVED

- Emotional ties and embodied interactions
- ‘We’ve had a lot of stickers, all the favourite singers [pointing to Hannah Montana]. I bought a lot of those and a couple of books and the grandchildren will come in and say ‘I want to do stickers’ and we’ll get the box of stickers out, so I stick stickers with them’,  
*Mark, retired, 7 grandchildren, cares several times a week.*



# GENDER ORDER & GRANDCHILDCARE

- Unique gendered patterns of grandchildcare in Australia
- Reproduction of gender order
  - Maternalist culture across the lifecycle
  - Involved father ideal masks the gender order of caregiving
- Reforming maternalist culture?



# REFERENCES

- Bittman, M. & Wajcman, J. (2004). 'The rush hour: The quality of leisure time and gender equality', in N. Folbre & M. Bittman (Eds), *Family Time: The Social Organisation of Care*, Routledge, London.
- Connell, R.W. (2002). *Gender*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Hank, K. & Buber, I. (2009). 'Grandparents caring for grandchildren: Findings from the 2004 Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe', *Journal of Family Issues*, 30, 1, 53-73.
- Hank, K. & Jürges, H. (2007). 'Gender and the division of household labour in older couples: A European perspective', *Journal of Family Issues*, 28, 3, 399-421.
- Maher, J.M., Lindsay, J. & Franzway, S. (2008). 'Time, caring labour and social policy: understanding the family time economy in contemporary families', *Work Employment Society*, 22, 3, 547-558.
- Wall, G. & Arnold, S. (2007). 'How involved is involved fathering? An exploration of the contemporary culture of fatherhood', *Gender and Society*, 21, 4, 508-527.
- West, C. & Zimmerman, D. (1987). 'Doing gender', *Gender and Society*, 1, 2, 125-151.



Thank you!

Email:

[blhorsfall@swin.edu.au](mailto:blhorsfall@swin.edu.au)

