



# One in three Aussie grandparents regularly babysit their grandkids but care is mostly falling on women

By Zena Chamas Wed 13 Nov [abc.net.au/news/one-in-three-grandparents-are-regularly-babysitting-in-aus](https://www.abc.net.au/news/one-in-three-grandparents-are-regularly-babysitting-in-aus)

## Australian grandparents babysit their grandkids to fill in gaps in childcare more than other countries, study found.

The saying “it takes a village to raise a child” rings true for most families with children.

Research has found that one in three Australian grandparents babysit their grandkids to fill in gaps in childcare, becoming a support “village” for working parents.

A 2024 peer-reviewed paper published in the Australian Journal of Social Issues surveyed 4,266 grandparents and 9,822 parents in Australia and found 32.5 per cent of Australian grandparents reported regularly caring for their grandchildren. The number was a lot higher than in many countries, according to researchers from the University of Melbourne, the University of New South Wales, and the University of Sydney.

They found that grandparents can often take on the role of “mother savers” and “system savers”, suggesting a need for more public policy support for childcare accessibility and affordability.

An Australian family on average wages with two kids spends 16 per cent of their total budget on childcare while the OECD average is 9 per cent, according to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC).

### AUSTRALIA'S GENDERED CARE PROBLEM

Australia has a gendered care problem with intergenerational impacts, the study found.

One of the researchers of the paper, professor of sociology and social policy at the University



of Melbourne Lyn Craig, said grandmothers generally do the bulk of support work.

Professor Craig said the research suggested that grandfathers who were not partnered were much less likely to be involved in providing care. “This implies that without a partner to facilitate that contact, it’s harder for [grandfathers] to [provide care],” Professor Craig told the ABC.

**“Grandmothers will do it whether or not they have a partner.”**

The data found a higher proportion of grandmothers than grandfathers provided regular care.

Australian fathers mostly relied on their partners to provide care so they could work, but mothers turned to grandparents when they help with care more so than their male counterparts.

But not all Australians can lean on grandparents for support with care. Professor Craig said that for those families care can get a lot trickier when childcare isn’t affordable.



## WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU DON'T HAVE A 'VILLAGE'?

For 36-year-old Caroline Zielinski from Melbourne, being a first-time mum meant navigating a new world for her and partner Liam.

Caroline and Liam both work five days a week and rely heavily on childcare for their three-year-old daughter Evie's essential care.

Caroline and Liam heavily rely on childcare for support, not having regular care from grandparents.

*"We could not cope without it – mentally and financially. We often look at other families with kids and see grandparents take the grandchild for a day or two a week, or for a sleepover to give the parents a break and feel a bit sad," Ms Zielinski said.*

Having access to grandparents for care has not always been an option for them.

"A village to me means grandparents, siblings, etc. Because my parents live overseas, Liam's in Adelaide, and I'm a single child, we have no one from that perspective," she said.

When Evie was born, they had some support from Liam's father, who came from Adelaide for a month and looked after their cat and house while they were in hospital following a difficult birth.

Caroline said the support of her friends and childcare has become her village. (Supplied)

In the early stages of Evie's life, the couple saved for a doula to come once a week for almost two months to help with cooking and caring for Evie.

"[We] then hired some sitters so I could work a bit, which helped with my mental health, four months after birth," she said.

"But that's it."

She said her "village" has been with friends and childcare which for their family had been "God sent".

*"Our friends are our village. We have a few who have their own kids but we will swap babysitting shifts if we really need a night off. It's very rare, but it's amazing to be able to be able to have them to count on," she said.*

## STUDY HIGHLIGHTS CHILDCARE ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES

The findings of the paper showed that grandparent care in Australia was more relied on than in other countries where childcare was more accessible and affordable.

"Research suggests that in the Nordic countries, where there is more of that care and support, grandparents don't do care as regularly while children work as that they do in Australia and in comparable countries like the UK, because the parents are able to get that practical support," Professor Craig said.

Use of grandparent care for single parents was much higher, especially for single women and some men, she said.

While their friends caravan around Australia, these retirees are doing school drop-offs and it's not what they had planned for their golden years.

In the absence of an affordable, accessible, good-quality formal childcare system, two generations of women were stitching together intra-family arrangements to cover the gaps.

"A lot of men, and especially in the period where they've got young children, work quite long hours, and women in Australia work, typically, work part-time, [but] if there's support that is easily accessible, and their time demands on the family are not so high, then managing is easier than then in the situation where it's all a very high wire for juggle," Professor Craig said.

The researchers highlighted the need for policy change and an urgent need for new integrated approaches to childcare and support of working mothers and grandmothers.