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## Grandfathers and Fathers in Ukraine and Across Cultures

David W. Shwalb  
*Southern Utah University*

Oleh Vasylenko  
*Danylo Halytsky Lviv National Medical University, ogardariker@gmail.com*

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# Grandfathers and Fathers in Ukraine and Across Cultures

## Abstract

This article begins with a review of international research on how cultures and contexts influence the roles of grandfathers and fathers (for book-length reviews, see Shwalb & Hossain, 2018; Shwalb, Shwalb, & Lamb, 2013). Subsequently, this article describes the historical and contemporary background of Ukrainian society, provides a review of the extremely limited existing literature on families in Ukraine, and describes the results of exploratory open-ended interviews with 20 fathers and 20 grandfathers in Lviv City and three nearby villages in western Ukraine. The main finding of the interviews was a confirmation of several contextual influences on grandfathers and fathers, each of which has often been previously cited in the international literature. There were also notable differences between the interview responses of fathers and grandfathers, as well as between subjects in urban vs. rural locations. The interview data serve as a compelling, albeit exploratory, case example of contextual influences on intergenerational relations, and the relationship between psychology and culture.

## Keywords

Fathers, Grandparents, Ukraine, Eastern Europe, Families, Intergenerational relations, Contextual influences, Men's roles

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## Cover Page Footnote

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### **Dedication**

We dedicate this article to the blessed memory of great-grandparents Moshe and Rebecca Shwalb of Berestechko (now Volyn Oblast, Ukraine, see Figure 8). It is also dedicated to Halyna and Maria Vasylenko, Petro Rudnyk, and to the blessed memory of Nadia Rudnyk.



Figure 1. Moshe and Rebecca Shwalb (seated). Photo courtesy of David W. Shwalb

## Introduction

This article describes exploratory interviews with 20 grandfathers and 20 fathers in Ukraine, which confirmed previous international findings (Shwalb & Hossain, 2018; Shwalb, Shwalb, & Lamb, 2013) about contextual influences on grandfathers and fathers. Several of the interviewees asked, “Why aren’t you studying grandmothers or mothers?” The main reason for this focus is that men are under-represented in research on parenting and highly under-represented in grandparental research. Reminiscent of Michael Lamb’s (1975) seminal article, “Fathers: The Forgotten Contributors to Child Development,” fathers had, prior to the present study, never participated in previous psychological research in Ukraine, and grandfathers are indeed *almost entirely* forgotten contributors to child development and families from the standpoint of researchers worldwide. While women occupy crucial roles in Eastern European families (Robila, 2005), the focus on men’s roles found in this article addresses serious voids in the literature.

Regarding previous publications in *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, very few previous *ORPC* articles have been relevant to fatherhood (e.g., Shwalb & Shwalb, 2014), no previous *ORPC* articles have centered on grandparents, and no *ORPC* articles report data of any kind from Ukraine. However, three previous *ORPC* articles were useful as background for a consideration of grandfathers in cultural and family contexts.

First, in their paper on social development across the lifespan, Albert and Trommsdorff (2014) made little mention of fathers and none of grandparents, but their findings of cultural and regional differences in the meaning of ‘old age’ were relevant here. For example, they reported that while some traditional cultures attribute natural wisdom and authority to the elderly, modern urbanized societies tend to view the elderly as relatively independent of younger generations. They also noted diversity in the meaning of ‘old age’ even among individualistic societies, in terms of cultural variations in life expectancy and in role expectations for the elderly population. Such descriptions might lead one to predict cultural diversity in grandparental roles.

Secondly, while Kağıtçıbaşı (2002) also did not discuss fathers or grandparents *per se*, she provided a thought-provoking discussion of intergenerational relations in her theoretical and empirical analyses. She wrote that in less affluent, more rural, and mostly ‘majority world’ societies (see also Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007), children tend to reciprocate for the care they receive from their parents by supporting their elderly parents later in life. In such cultures, this creates a social norm of intergenerational interdependence.

Thirdly, Georgas (2003) documented a wide variety of family structures, some of which included grandparents. His ground-breaking cross-cultural studies showed that communication and relationships with grandparents, across cultures, should vary according to family structure.

## Grandfathers Across Cultures: The International Literature

With the exceptions of Shwalb and Hossain (2018), and Buchanan and Rotkirch (2016), most publications on grandparenthood have said little specifically about grandfathers. Smith’s (1991) *The Psychology of Grandparenthood: An International Perspective* was the first book on grandparents to take a specific international perspective, but it only reported on societies in

Europe and North America. As in most books on grandparents, Smith's references to 'grandparents' usually meant 'grandmothers' more than 'grandfathers.'

Szinovacz's *Handbook on Grandparenthood* (1998) was a groundbreaking compendium of social scientific information on grandparents. Edited by a gerontologist, it included an incisive analysis of the methodological, theoretical, and conceptual issues in research on grandparents. Yet, its coverage of diverse populations was limited to chapters on American ethnic groups (African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and Asian-Americans) and a chapter based on data from the [Human Relations Area Files](#).

Arber and Timonen's *Contemporary Grandparenting: Changing Family Relationships in Global Contexts* (2012) updated Szinovacz's overview of research, with multi-disciplinary contributions from the fields of sociology, social work, and social policy. It emphasized cultural contexts and its geographical coverage included Europe, the U.S., China, Hong Kong, and Singapore. *Experiencing Grandparenthood: An Asian Perspective* (Mehta & Thang 2012), which was edited by a gerontologist and anthropologist, focused on grandparents in Japan, China, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and Hong Kong. As a cohesive anthology of empirical studies in a diverse and understudied region, it illuminated social policies and suggested possible future trends for Asian grandparenthood.

The only anthology to date which had a central focus on grandfathers was Buchanan and Rotkirch's (2016) *Grandfathers: Global Perspectives*. It reported research on grandfathers in Europe and North America, and from New Zealand (including Maori), Singapore, Australia, South Africa, and Israel (both Jewish and Arab samples). Buchanan and Rotkirch (2016) began with a critique of a 'deficit model' conceptualization of grandfatherhood which defined grandfathers only in comparison to grandmothers and typically depicted grandfathers as deficient in relationships with grandchildren. Given the trend toward paternal involvement in recent generations across many societies (Lamb, 2010), Buchanan and Rotkirch anticipated that recent cohorts of involved fathers may become more involved grandfathers in later life. They also anticipated that fathers who lacked the opportunity for paternal involvement might find opportunities later on to become more active grandfathers. In addition, Buchanan and Rotkirch discussed the effects of immigrant populations on the diversification of Western societies, i.e., immigrants diversify the roles of grandfathers.

Most recently, Shwalb and Hossain (2018) drew six overall conclusions about international social science research on grandparents. First, they observed that international diversity in the meaning and roles of grandparents is the product of several contextual variables: historical background, urban vs. rural location, work policies and conditions, ethnicity, family characteristics, and migration patterns. Most of these influences were also the focus of Shwalb, Shwalb, and Lamb (2013) in their summation of international research on fathers (see below). Shwalb and Hossain also identified the age of the grandparent, age of grandchild, globalization, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, language, race, religion, technology, and war/internal conflicts, as sources of diversity among grandparents. Second, more so than in the fathering literature (see below), grandparental research has been concentrated mainly in developed societies, and empirical research is severely lacking from non-Western societies. Third, as also noted below for the literature on fathers, economic conditions and systems have a major effect on grandparents. Fourth, many grandparents serve as primary caregivers to their grandchildren, in a wide variety of developing

and developed societies. Fifth, and once again more so than in the case of fathers (see below), social policies and laws directly relevant to grandparents are uncommon in most societies. Finally, they concluded that contextual influences on grandparental roles are in transition everywhere, but the directions and types of changes vary widely by culture. With regard to grandfathers, chapter contributors from all 11 regions and countries represented in Shwalb and Hossain (2018) noted a severe lack of empirical data on grandfathers, and only two chapters (about grandparents in the U.K. and Germany) referred to the phenomenon of actively involved 'new grandfathers.'

Several demographic trends in family life have become notable across many societies: longer lifespans, declining fertility rates, later first marriages, higher divorce rates, and dual-income families (Buchanan & Rotkirch, 2017, Shwalb & Hossain, 2018). These trends have implications for today's grandfathers who, compared to their predecessors in many societies: (1) live longer, are healthier, and have more years of formal education, (2) have fewer grandchildren but maintain relations over their elongated adult years; and (3) support the families of their increasingly busy children. In general it may be said also that there has been very little theoretical work on grandfathers. For example, evolutionary psychologists have discussed a "grandmother hypothesis" (Hawkes, 2006) but there seems to be no corresponding 'grandfather hypothesis.'

### **Fathers Across Cultures: The International Literature**

Compared with research on grandfathers, scholarship on fathers nowadays is closer to the mainstream of psychological research. The fathering literature has expanded beyond Western Europe and North America for over 35 years, yet it is still reasonable to say that research on fathers in non-Western or Majority World countries remains uncommon.

#### **Anthropological Approaches**

Hewlett (2010) provided useful classifications of fathers in both industrialized and small-scale societies. He categorized fathers' behavior patterns as "intimate" (involving strong attachments and frequent caregiving for infants), "distant" (focused on disciplinary and provider roles), and "multiple" (whereby men, including biological and social fathers, share responsibility for children). Meanwhile, Gray and Anderson (2010) stated that fathers across many societies were consistently the most common source of non-maternal childcare within families, and concluded that non-maternal childcare is necessary in most cultures. Gray and Anderson also posited that fatherhood continues to evolve globally in the context of changes in education, employment, and urbanization, and that despite globalization fathers are diverse as ever. Lastly, Hrdy (2009, p. 161) summed up patterns of human and non-human primate fathering and characterized human fathering as "extremely facultative – that is, situation-dependent and expressed only under certain conditions." As in Hawkes' (2006) discussion of grandmothers, Hrdy (2009) paid more attention to women than men, as suggested by the title of her book: *Mothers and Others*.

## **Psychological Approaches**

Shwalb, Shwalb, and Lamb (2013) identified five major themes in the conclusions of their international compendium of research on fathers. First, they showed that cultural and historical backgrounds influence fatherhood. Because of numerous contextual factors, cultural diversity and changes in men's roles may be the two most notable characteristics of literature (e.g., Khaleque & Rohner, 2011). Second, they found that research on fathers varied in depth and breadth between different countries and that enthusiasm for an increase in paternal involvement (e.g., 'new involved fathers') is not universal. Third, they noted that sub-cultural variations in fathering exist everywhere, which suggests that fathers are a heterogeneous population even within a single society, culture, or nation. Fourth, in every society they considered, contemporary economic conditions affected fathers, especially in light of the widespread centrality of men's provider role. Fifth, they observed that social policies and laws designed to affect fathering were prominent in some cultures and non-existent elsewhere.

Finally, Roopnarine's (2015) and Cabrera and Tamis-LeMonda's (2014) multi-disciplinary anthologies reinforced and extended the conclusions of Shwalb et al. (2013). Roopnarine (2015) included chapters on U.S. ethnic minorities, Arab and Islamic societies, Brazil, Mexico, Sweden, Portugal, Eastern Europe, India, China, Japan, Turkey, Israel, Kenya, and South Africa. In his comments about Kravchenko and Robila's (2015) chapter on Eastern European fathers, Roopnarine mentioned that Soviet policies may have created a 'fatherless' society, and that there were different 'rates' of post-Soviet transformation between societies, with variability in paternal involvement and investment likely between different Eastern European countries.

## **Contextual Influences on Ukrainian Grandfathers and Fathers**

Before presentation of the new Ukrainian data, which are illustrative of several of the above-mentioned contextual influences on grandfathers and fathers, the following background information is provided to describe the regional and local setting of the study. Lviv City and three villages, where the interviews took place, may be understood as located within Eastern Europe, Ukraine, and the region of Lviv Oblast (Province).

## **Background of Eastern European Families**

Figure 1 shows the location of [Lviv](#) in western Ukraine, only 60 miles from the Polish border. The economic, political, and social transformations that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union over 25 years ago, and the legacy of the Soviet era, still weigh heavily on families throughout Eastern Europe. Robila (2005, p. 2) stated that during the Soviet era (1922–1991) dual income families became the norm, and that post-Soviet transitions toward democracy produced "a general state of confusion" for families. For example, poverty increased and living standards declined in the 1990s throughout the region.

Kravchenko and Robila (2015) observed two key trends relevant to the weakened roles of fathers in Eastern Europe. First, the official ideology of the state toward families under the Soviets had transitioned from patriarchy and toward equality of males and females as comrades. The



Soviet state further usurped men's authority by endowing itself with symbolic authority over the family, i.e., the state itself became a ubiquitous father figure. Meanwhile, Soviet ideological control over scholarly activity restricted all family research to that which served the state; in this climate there was no research on fathers or grandfathers whatsoever for several decades.



*Figure 1.* Location of Lviv relative to Ukraine and Central/Eastern European Countries. Figure adapted based on the map at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/up.html>.

Kravchenko and Robila (2015) found that in five countries (Bulgaria, Georgia, Lithuania, Romania, and Russia) fathers with more formal education were more involved with children, because these fathers had been exposed through their education to more information about the potential men have to positively influence their children. Meanwhile, Utrata, Ispa and Ispa-Landa (2013) described important patterns that distinguish East European families from those in Western Europe: emigration out of the region, earlier marriages, shorter lifespans, workplace policies that impede paternal involvement, and heavy involvement of grandmothers with childcare. Several of these patterns are described in the interviews reported here (see below).

To put family demographics in a regional perspective, Table 1 presents statistics for Ukraine and the seven countries that border Ukraine (taken from the [CIA World Factbook](#)). These data suggest more similarities than differences among these populations, although some data distinguish Ukraine from its neighbors.



Table 1.  
*Demographics of Families in Ukraine and Bordering Countries<sup>1</sup>*

Country	Total Population (Millions)	Pop. Density Sq. km	Median Age	% Pop. > 65	Age at 1st Marriage (Female)	Fertility Rate	Divorce Rate (% divorced from first marriage)	% Urban	Sex Ratio (25-54) (> 65) Male, Female	Life Expectancy (M) (F)	Annual Per Capita Income (US\$)
Ukraine	44.03	183.0	40.6	16.8	28.4	1.51	42	70.1	0.96, 0.50	66.3, 76.1	8700
Russia	142.3	8.4	39.6	14.3	24.9	1.75	52	74.2	0.96, 0.45	65.3, 77.1	22540
Poland	38.5	123.0	40.7	16.9	26.7	1.32	36	60.5	1.02, 0.64	73.9, 81.8	16820
Romania	21.5	85.6	41.1	16.4	26.7	1.52	25	54.9	1.02, 0.68	71.9, 79.0	22950
Hungary	9.9	108.0	42.3	19.0	29.3	1.44	45	72.1	1.01, 0.60	72.4, 80.0	25640
Belarus	9.6	45.6	40.0	15.0	24.5	1.72	45	77.4	0.97, 0.46	67.5, 78.8	17210
Slovakia	5.5	111.0	40.5	15.4	28.1	1.37	34	53.4	1.02, 0.62	73.7, 81.1	29910
Moldova	3.5	124.0	36.7	12.6	24	1.25	42	45.2	1.01, 0.62	67.1, 75.1	5670

1 - Adapted from *The World Fact Book* (retrieved from [https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/wfbExt/region\\_eur.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/wfbExt/region_eur.html)).

One example of how demographics may affect men's roles is the fact that Ukraine had the third highest life expectancy gap between men and women, exceeded only by Russia and Belarus. This probably relates to the prevalence of alcoholism in Russia and other former Soviet bloc countries (Utrata, 2018; Utrata, Ispa, & Ispa-Landa, 2013). In addition, many parents and grandparents (especially grandmothers) migrate out of Ukraine in search of income, which has often resulted in the phenomenon whereby older men dominate the populations of many villages.

### **Background of Ukrainian Families**

Zhurzhenko (2004) did not discuss grandparents or fathers, but showed that economic and social changes have strongly influenced Ukrainian families. Specifically, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a long-term economic crisis has been characterized by a lower standard of living, loss of guarantees of housing and employment (which had been guaranteed by the Soviet state), and chronically high unemployment (far higher than the current official 9% rate). In addition, marked weakness of the Ukrainian currency and high inflation (well over 10% in 2019, and having peaked at over 50% after the Russian incursions into Ukraine) have strained family finances, and forced millions to either seek low-wage employment or emigrate. Meanwhile, a growing awareness of Western standards of living has raised the material expectations of many families. In this context, even two incomes are often insufficient to support a family, and great numbers of Ukrainians are 'working poor.' A further economic stress on families which include elderly members is the fact that pensions the elderly receive are terribly meager. At the same time and in a more positive light, there is the possibility also that family solidarity and mutual reliance amongst generations could increase under such heavy chronic stress.

The nuclear family has long been the dominant family structure in Ukraine. Within this structure, women in Ukraine are typically responsible for education and childcare at home, and fathers reportedly are not as close as mothers are to their children. Specifically, Zhurzhenko (2004) cited a UISR (Ukrainian Institute of Social Research) survey, which found that fathers and mothers-in-law performed about equal amounts of housework, while grandfathers' domestic labor was found to be negligible. Under such conditions, and as noted earlier for Eastern Europe, Ukrainian men live in families under social and economic conditions that are not conducive to either their provider and domestic roles.

### **Background of Lviv Families**

Lviv City, where the present interview study took place, played a central role in the activity leading to the fall of communism in Ukraine. Indeed, observers (e.g., Czaplicka, 2005) stated that Lviv continues to be more culturally oriented toward Central and Western Europe than toward Russia. The multi-lingual abilities of the present sample (see Table 2) may reflect a withstanding effect of the Russification of Ukrainian society over many centuries. Under Soviet control, Russian was the primary language of the Soviet Union, and the use of written Ukrainian was illegal. In language and ethnicity, Lviv has only a very small proportion of Russified Ukrainians compared with the population of eastern Ukraine. As well, despite their proximity to the Polish border and the competence of many in the present sample with the Polish

language (see Table 2 below), it may also be said that Polish cultural influence is only minor in relation to the contemporary culture of Lviv and its nearby villages. Speaking to piety, religious influences may be stronger in western than in eastern Ukraine. During the Soviet era, organized religion faced brutal repression, but there was a resurgence of church influence and native beliefs in the post-Soviet era. A recent on-line article (Tvmisto.tv, 2018) presented survey data that indicated Lviv citizens' strongest identification to be "Ukrainians," whereas their identification as "citizens of Lviv" has declined, beginning during the national Orange Revolution protests of 2004-2005. Lviv has long been a multi-cultural and multi-religious city. It is indeed a complex city, where people identify as belonging to various districts, each associated with different cultural and religious traditions (Czaplicka, 2005).

## Methods

### Ukraine Interviews

Twenty grandfathers and twenty fathers participated in individual interviews (lasting about 40 minutes each) in the city of Lviv (population = 723,000), and three villages (Velyka Vil'shanytsya, Perehnoiv, and Mytulyn) each with a population under 1,000 which were about 90 minutes by car from central Lviv. Ten grandfathers and ten fathers lived in Lviv and ten of each lived in the villages. The researchers decided at the time of their application for research funding that convenience sampling and sub-sample sizes were reasonable for an exploratory qualitative study. Most of the men in the village sample have had to travel to Lviv or other cities for work due to job shortages in their villages. Grandfathers and fathers were not related to one another, and although participants were not asked about divorce experiences, divorce is rare in western Ukraine due to religious influences. As such, it was safely presumed that the participants were in their first marriages.

An economic "middle class" is almost non-existent in contemporary Ukraine, with estimates ranging from 10-15% of the population, despite relatively high educational attainments (see BBC, [2013](#)). Most Ukrainians nowadays are in a low-income stratum, while a very small number are in an ultra-high-income stratum. Thus, very few Ukrainians are considered middle-class. The participants in this survey were almost all of the low-income stratum despite the fact that many had college degrees.

All participants signed an informed consent form (in Ukrainian) that gave permission to record and transcribe their responses, and to make direct anonymous quotations from their responses in written reports of this research. The interview questions and the demographics questionnaire (the latter filled out by the interviewer while querying the interviewee before the start of the interview questions) are linked here [in Ukrainian](#) and [in English](#) translation. All grandfathers answered the same questions, all fathers answered the same questions, and several of the questions were posed to both grandfathers and fathers. Interviews were conducted by the second author of this article. Table 2 summarizes some of the demographics of the sample.

The age range of the children was 0-11 years. Although the ages of the grandchildren were not asked, anecdotal evidence suggests that this range was very similar to the age range of the children.

Table 2.

*Characteristics of Sample of Ukrainian Grandfathers and Fathers*

	<b>Grandfathers</b>	<b>Fathers</b>
Man's Age	58.4 (6.2)	34.1 (4.4)
Wife's Age	57.0 (6.3)	32.2 (4.1)
Years Married	35.5 (6.4)	8.3 (3.6)
Man's Years of Education	13.5 (3.1)	17.0 (3.5)
Wife's Years of Education	13.9 (2.3)	15.4 (1.9)
Number of Children	2.15 (0.9)	2.15 (0.9)
Number of Siblings as Child	2.0 (1.3)	1.4 (0.6)
Multigenerational Families	13/20	7/20
Fluency in Russian	17/20	17/20
Fluency in Polish	10/20	8/20
Fluency in English	1/20	15/20
Number of Grandchildren	3.2 (1.8)	

Note: Ns = 20 grandfathers and 20 fathers. Standard Deviations are in parentheses.

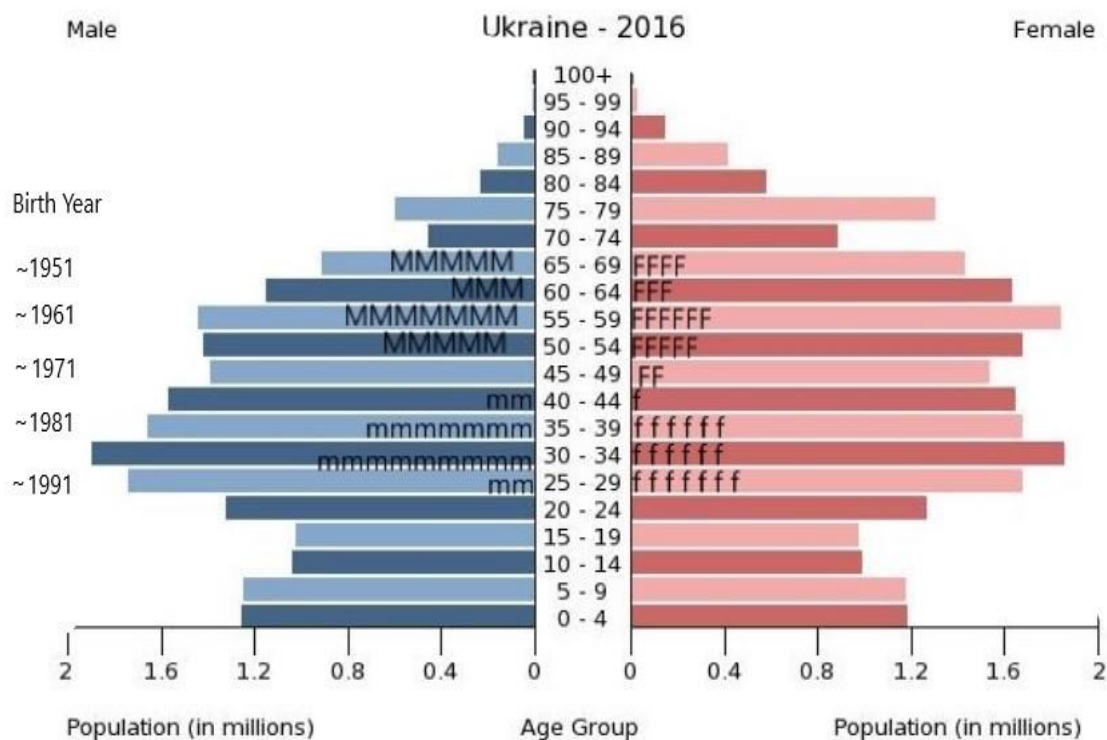


Figure 2. Ages of Lviv/Village participants and their wives within Ukrainian population pyramid. Figure adapted from the image posted at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/up.html>. "M" = grandfather, "m" father, "F" = grandmother, "f" = mother (each letter = one individual).

Figure 2 shows where each of the interviewees and their wives fit within the 2016 population pyramid of Ukraine. The approximate birth years suggest the cohort membership of the interviewees.

The American cohort counterparts of the fathers in the sample would belong to the “millennial” or “later-Generation X” generations, and the American counterparts of the grandfathers here would be from the “baby boomer” or “early-Generation X” cohorts. However, these generational labels do not apply well in Ukrainian society. For Ukrainians, “Soviet” vs. “post-Soviet” eras are more relevant, and almost all the grandfathers and fathers in the sample were born during the Soviet era. In addition, based on Miroshkina’s (2017) delineation of Ukrainian generations, most grandfathers in the sample were born and grew up during the ‘Cold War’ era, whereas most in the sample of fathers were born and raised just before or during the ‘*Perestroika* era,’ i.e., just before the fall of Communism. More specifically, the interviewee fathers were born before Ukrainian independence of the Soviet Union, and the children mentioned in the interviews belong to the “Digital Generation” (Miroshkina, 2017). All of the interviewees’ families had a PC, laptop, tablet, and either a mobile or smart phone; the Ukrainian government heavily subsidizes connectivity fees so that Ukrainians are generally quite “wired.”

Table 3 is a list of the frequencies of occupations for both fathers and grandfathers. Fathers’ occupations were widely distributed while half of the grandfathers only described themselves as “retired.”

Table 3.  
*Participants’ Occupations*

Fathers	<i>n</i>	Grandfathers	<i>n</i>
Builder	2	Bricklayer	1
Carpenter	1	Choirmaster	1
Civil engineer	1	Disabled	1
Engineer	1	Disabled veteran	1
Furniture production	1	Entrepreneur	1
House repairman	1	Teacher	1
Manager	1	Unemployed	1
Neurosurgeon	1	Village chief	1
Testing inspector	1	Warehouse manager	1
Priest	3	Retired	10
Priest/teacher	1	None	1
Project manager	1		
Salesman	1		
Scientist	1		
Shop manager	1		
Singer	1		
Water industry	1		

## Research Questions

The goal of the study was to collect exploratory information that would describe the characteristics of grandfathers and fathers, their roles in relation to their grandchildren/children, and their activities in their family relationships. In particular, contextual influences were a main focus of the interviews. Based on reviews of the international literature on grandfathers and fathers, the goals were related to the following general research questions.

1. How do grandfathers and fathers perceive their roles and activities in comparison to those of grandmothers and mothers?
2. How do the roles and activities of grandfathers and fathers compare between men living in urban vs. rural settings?
3. How do men compare their roles and activities with those of men in their fathers' generation?
4. What are men's sources of satisfaction or dissatisfaction in their roles as grandfathers and fathers?
5. What problems do men perceive as facing grandfathers and fathers, specific to Ukrainian society?
6. What activities do grandfathers and fathers take part in with their grandchildren and children?
7. What are some meaningful aspects of men's roles as grandfathers and fathers?
8. In what ways do men perceive their roles as grandfathers or fathers as affected by the child's gender and age, or by their employment situation?

Based on our own assessment of the participants' responses, the results were organized in relation to several contextual factors.

## Results

The choices of themes for the following section were based on the independent (and almost entirely overlapping) estimations of key themes in the findings by the authors. Specifically, the two authors independently read through the answers of interviewees with the goal of listing the "top ten" key themes in the results. One author generated eight themes and the second author generated six themes. Their lists were identical for six themes, and only the first author suggested the themes of "sources of satisfaction/pleasure" and "role as old-school communicator." Three of the themes were about contextual influences (history, geography, work/economics), and the remaining themes focused on the roles and viewpoints of grandfathers. Table 4 presents the number of men of the four groups (Lviv grandfathers, village grandfathers, Lviv fathers, village fathers) who addressed each of these themes. Discussions between the two authors led to the decision to include all eight of the themes (found in Table 4) in the Results section below. Rather than a formal or software-based content analysis of the interview responses, the numbers in Table 4 reflect a careful combing of every interview response made by every participant based on multiple readings of all the results by both authors. Further, the selection of case examples of each theme were based on the subjective interpretations of both authors and their close familiarity with fatherhood and grandfatherhood in Ukrainian and international contexts.

Table 4.

*Numbers of Fathers and Grandfathers Who Made Comments Relevant to Key Themes in Results*

Theme	City Grands	Village Grands	City Fathers	Village Fathers
Context of history	3	6	4	6
Context of geography	3	7	2	9
Context of work	8	9	10	10
Context of economics	3	5	5	5
Grandfather/father comparisons	6	2	N/A	N/A
Sources of satisfaction/pleasure	6	6	5	5
Role as transmitter of history	4	2	3	3
Role as old-school communicator	0	3	1	1

The main finding of the present study was the confirmation of the importance of several contextual influences on grandfathers and fathers, which had been previously emphasized in the international literature. There were also some interesting differences between the answers of fathers vs. grandfathers, and men in urban vs. rural locations. Rather than a data-oriented presentation, the following illustrates the main themes of the results with direct quotations from the interviewees.

### Contextual Influences

#### The Context of History: Life in the Soviet vs. Post-Soviet Eras

Grandfathers and fathers alike mentioned that the roles of Ukrainian men had changed in the transition from a Soviet to a post-Soviet society, due to social and economic reforms. For example, a 53-year-old village retiree told this story: “When I was young I wasn’t allowed to go to church or even celebrate holidays. On Easter, we were assembled at my school to collect garbage. Now I have a granddaughter and she goes to catechism. So things are completely different. We were like zombies back then. There was no spiritual education at all.” His story about religious freedom coincided well with the recollections of a 37-year old village priest who has three children: “Yesterday before church I talked with my parishioners about their upbringing. Some people said they were brought up by their grandmas, and that their parents didn’t take much time to raise them. I noticed a similarity among people who were raised by their grandmothers. Those people who were faithful to the church then are still faithful now...those people who were not raised this way still don’t come to church. There is freedom now and nobody is going to chase you down, but if it doesn’t run in your family and it’s not in your genes, a person is not going to attend.” A third village retiree, a 54 year-old grandfather,



emphasized the lack of government subsidies and guarantees: “Now we have an independent Ukraine but not much attention is paid to families, if we compare nowadays to life in the Soviet Union. We had a different kind of social security then.”

*Comments:* It was interesting that the priest suggested how grandmothers influence children’s religiosity (with no mention of grandfathers in this regard). One cost of post-Soviet freedom, according to the third quote, was that the state no longer provides basic sources of economic security to its citizens. Incidentally, fathers gave longer and more specific answers than did grandfathers, to questions about this and most other issues.

## **The Context of Geography: Urban/Rural Location**

### **Village religiosity**

Village fathers and grandfathers mentioned religion more often than did urban participants. For example, one retired 67-year-old village grandfather stated, “In the past it was forbidden to educate children about religion. When we went to school, the teacher told us that there was no God. But when we came home, our fathers said the opposite and taught us to pray. Children were puzzled because they didn’t know which was true. Finally, we decided that there is a God and we can’t do without God.” Meanwhile, another village 40-year-old father who works in the water industry put it this way about religion: “Parents should pray for their children that they will grow up to become good people and have God in their hearts. Not so many people go to church, fathers in particular.”

### **Types of shared activities**

Men’s activities with children were reportedly more physical (proximal) in the villages and more intellectual (distal) in the city. For example, one 36-year-old city father who works in furniture manufacturing told us: “I usually read books with our 3-year old girl. The older one goes to school, so we can play games on his level, and sometimes make up games. He likes to play cards like *Uno* or sometimes tablet games or ‘manager,’ which is similar to Monopoly.” In an example of activities in the rural context, a 31-year-old village carpenter said, “We take the horse to feed in the field, go for walks in the park, play on the swings near the school, or walk to church together.”

### **Effects of urban/rural environments on children’s behavior**

A few grandfathers, whose children raise their grandchildren in the city, mentioned that city grandchildren tended to be shy and did not know how to behave when in the countryside. A perfect example of this came from a 53-year-old village retiree: “When my grandson woke up in the morning and went out of the house, he stepped on the grass and looked back at his mother to await what she was going to say to him. This was of concern to him because in the city one is forbidden to walk on the lawn.”

*Comments:* There was no specific interview question about religion, but it was a frequent topic in men’s responses in the rural sub-sample. Next, activities with children/grandchildren in the countryside may be more physical and take place outdoors because their setting is closer to nature, whereas men’s labor is less physical and more indoors in the city, because they have much less green space.



*Figures 3 and 4:* Fathers, a mother (in their 30s), and preschool-age daughters at play in Lviv city park. Photos courtesy of Oleh Vasylenko (the adults in all photos by author Vasylenko gave verbal consent to include their photos in this article).

## **The Contexts of Work Conditions and Economics**

### **Local job scarcity**

As indicated by fathers in both Lviv and the villages, well-paying work is scarce. As a result, many men have to work multiple jobs to provide for their families, and (as Kravechecnko and Robila reported for five countries in Central/Eastern Europe) many Ukrainians have to travel or emigrate to support their families. A 43-year-old village shop manager put it this way: "...the worst thing is working somewhere abroad. More than half of the village went to work abroad. Some people went to Poland, others to Moscow. The same with women - a lot of them go to Poland to work. It's good when there is some work in the village. But mostly men have to go to Lviv or abroad to work. Some men go for a month or two and women stay alone." One would presume that such lifestyles would impinge on the intergenerational relationships of grandfathers and fathers alike.

### **Busy fathers**

In both urban and rural families, and regardless of their occupations, the wide majority of fathers replied that they lacked the time to spend with their children, because of long work hours and harsh economic conditions. For example, a 34-year-old city physician stated, "Because people don't have enough money they try to earn more to survive, to satisfy their needs and the needs of their families. Therefore, they don't have time for their children. So it's a huge problem." Meanwhile, a 37-year-old city scientist remarked that, "Many parents don't spend much time with kids because of work. I can see it myself as I go early and come late. So there is less contact. We try to catch up on the weekends." Likewise, a 36-year-old village civil engineer said, "Frankly speaking, I don't have much free time in the evenings because of my work. I would like to have more time. There is also always some other task to do, too, like at my parents' farm."

### **Neglectful fathers, in the view of grandfathers**

Most grandfathers enjoyed spending time with grandchildren, and some even observed that parents neglect their duties as primary caregivers for children. For example, a retired city grandfather, age 66, said, "I don't like when my children don't have time for their children. Sometimes I quarrel with them saying that they have to take care of them and teach them. Grandparents are grandparents, but children have to feel that they have parents, too. They leave the kids for us because they don't have time. I tell them they have to look after the children better, because children need to feel what it means to have parents. So I scold them."



*Figure 5.* Grandfather (73) with his son-in-law (36) and two grandchildren (ages 7 and 3), Lviv City, marking the [grand]son's first day of school in the first grade. Photo courtesy of Oleh Vasylenko.

*Comments:* Under current conditions, many men work excessive hours by necessity because well-paying jobs are unavailable. A very high proportion of family income in Ukraine goes to pay for food, and families typically struggle to meet monthly living expenses. Unable to afford quality day care, even well educated women have to stay home to run their household, while fathers seldom have adequate time to spend with their children. When grandparents (including grandfathers) retire, they reportedly help with grandchildren, but in this generation many Ukrainian children miss the guidance of a father.

## **The Roles and Viewpoints of Grandfathers**

### **Comparing oneself as a father vs. grandfather**

The following two intergenerational comparisons fit perfectly with Buchanan and Rotkirch's (2016) observation that uninvolved fathers may later become involved grandfathers. One 57-year-old Lviv retiree stated, "Grandparents always love their grandchildren more than their children. It's always this way." Another Lviv retiree, at age 54, put it this way: "I have to tell you that all the grandfathers I know love their grandchildren more than their own children. It has to do with the fact that when you are young you don't feel the same responsibility. You don't realize that depending on how you bring your children up when they are still young they will be able to fight for their place under the sun when they are older."

### **Grandfathers as transmitters of tradition and history**

Both city and village grandfathers spoke to us about the importance of preserving and passing on their memories to the younger generations. Perhaps this function would be expected almost anywhere in the world, and is reminiscent of Neugarten and Weinstein's (1964, pp. 201-202) description of grandfathers as a "reservoir of family wisdom." One city grandfather, a 53-year-old choirmaster, told us: "It's very important for me to spend time with grandchildren, because it's important to preserve the family and to keep these memories. Sometimes I'll tell them who my father and grandfather were. I didn't know them, but I was told about them, so I pass this on to my children and grandchildren. That way, when I am gone they can pass it to their children. It's become quite a different world now, so children should remember their ancestors." As the 37-year-old village priest put it: "I remember that my grandfather gave me a chess set as a present and played it with me. So I would like my children to remember such moments, and I want their grandfather to spend time with them, too."

### **Sources of grandfathers' satisfaction and pleasure**

Several grandfathers, urban and rural alike, expressed strong feelings about the pleasure, meaning, and satisfaction they derive from their relationships with their grandchildren. For example, one retired 66-year-old city grandfather stated: "When I come home and I don't see them if they go somewhere like to the village to my wife's parents, I just stay alone. But then I feel like I'm in a prison... there should be someone home! I like to spend time with them. When I can hear some noise and screaming that I feel like someone is home." A 57-year-old disabled city grandfather expressed similar sentiments: "The more I spend time with my grandson the more pleasure I get."

More often than fathers, grandfathers emphasized the pleasure they gain from being listened to and obeyed by their grandchildren. For instance, a retired 63-year-old Lviv grandfather said, "We can take as an example any society – young people listen to adults and obey. In different countries, for example in Georgia, there is a tradition to listen to parents and grandparents. Here in the Lviv region it is a little bit different –the mother takes the floor first, and the grandmother does the same. I think that men tend to express more of their life experiences to their grandchildren." Meanwhile, a 55-year-old disabled veteran grandfather in a village said, "The real pleasure is when they listen to me and obey, when they don't behave like naughty children or do anything bad. I don't like when they are naughty, but I don't punish them because a grandpa doesn't have any right to do that. They have parents to do that." In



relation to Cherlin and Furstenberg's (1986) grandparenting typology (involved, companionate, and remote), it seemed that most grandfathers here were "companionate," with relatively close geographical proximity to the grandchildren, and in that none were involved as primary caregivers to their grandchildren.



*Figure 6.* A 64-year-old maternal grandmother and 71-year-old grandfather with their 3-year-old granddaughter, at their village summer home. Photo courtesy of Oleh Vasylenko.

### **Grandfathers as old-school communicators**

A few grandfathers (but fewer fathers), mostly in the villages, expressed negative feelings about the impact of the internet on families. One 50-year-old unemployed village grandfather stated, "There is too much internet these days, so I try to make my grandchildren read more. I have a library that has about 2,000 books, so I want them to read more." Likewise, a 53-year-old retired village grandfather said, "Children need communication, you know. I think parents spend too little time with their children because of the Internet. It seems to me these children lack real communication."

*Comments:* Many of these comments by grandfathers, which differentiated their roles from those of fathers, were similar to those reported in many other countries (Shwalb & Hossain, 2018). For example, they spoke about their emotional attachment to grandchildren, their roles as family historian and source of wisdom, and about the reliance on devices of the grandchildren's 'digital' generation. Grandfathers may have more concern with internet use than do fathers because they grew up in a pre-internet age, whereas fathers grew up with the internet and may rely on digital devices just as much their own children. As such, many of the grandfathers seemed to represent within their families a somewhat more traditional way of communication, as may be found in various societies worldwide.



*Figure 7.* Maternal grandfather (age 73) in back yard of his village summer home, with the middle of his three grandchildren (age 3). Photo courtesy of Oleh Vasylenko.

## General Discussion and Conclusions

Returning to the research questions posed at the onset of this study, the results of the interviews confirmed the importance of several contextual influences on grandfathers and fathers, especially the impact of historical (Soviet vs. Post-Soviet societies), geographical (urban vs. rural), economic (lack of government subsidies), and employment conditions (excessive work hours for low pay). Several questions differentiated the roles of grandfathers from those of fathers (e.g., lack of time available to children among their fathers), and of men in a major city vs. in small villages (e.g., influence of organized religion). However, few interview responses provided useful information with regard to the research questions concerning comparisons between men and women's roles in the family, diversity based on men's or [grand]children's age, or diversity based on [grand]children's gender. One might infer that the issues for which men provided compelling information were more salient to the participants than the issues they seldom brought up, but follow-up research with both more specificity and depth is necessary to fully address any of the research questions.

One of course must be extremely cautious about generalization of the interview results based on self-reports from a sample of only 40 men. As stated earlier, a search of the *ORPC* uncovered almost no articles on grandparents or on any Ukrainian populations. A search of the international and Ukrainian literatures indicated that ours was the first psychological study of either Ukrainian fathers or grandfathers, and that the cross-generational and urban/rural comparisons here were unique.

The review of international research literature on the roles of grandfathers and fathers indicated that men of both the older and middle generations in families are strongly influenced by contextual factors. As Hrdy (2005, 2009) has indicated, men's roles may be more facultative (i.e., situation-specific and variable) than women's roles in the family. The Ukrainian data collected in this study provided support for the general trends identified in the international literature (Shwalb, Shwalb, & Lamb, 2013; Shwalb & Hossain, 2018) and in no place did the new data contradict the general international literature. For example, both the Lviv and village participants alike recognized that they function as grandfathers and fathers in a unique and changing social, historical, and economic climate. At the same time, they reported many of the same sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their roles that have been reported all over the world. This leads one to conclude that there are both culture-specific and universal aspects of their roles.

The limitations of this pioneering investigation included first its small sample size, convenience sampling, and its location in one region of western Ukraine. In addition, self-report measures, while able to gain in-depth information from individual participants, were not objective measures of men's actual behavior and were not amenable to statistical analysis. Further, the choice of the interview questions by the two authors (albeit drawn from previous international findings that emphasized contextual influences) determined the topics men emphasized in their responses. Next, since no data were collected from women or children, the view of intergenerational relationships and of families in this report was skewed toward men's perspectives. Future research on the issues raised by this study should be built upon the descriptive data collected here, and improve from the standpoint of sampling, measurement, and theoretical conceptualization of men's roles. Lastly, if one is to illuminate the effects of contextual influences on fathers and grandfathers, an objective study of the contextual setting itself is necessary; men's perceptions of the contextual influences are insufficient to explain the effects of contexts.

In terms of Matsumoto and Yoo's (2006) delineation of "phases" of cross-cultural research, the present exploratory study of Ukrainian men was at best at the most basic and descriptive phase of research. The present Ukraine study was conducted with an awareness of cultural influences, but as a single-culture study, it was not comparative; and as a descriptive study, it was not a direct test of theory. These limitations (lack of comparative data, need for stronger theoretical grounding) have been typical of past international studies of grandparents (Shwalb & Hossain, 2018) and fathers (Shwalb, Shwalb & Lamb, 2013). It is our hope that the new data, albeit with many limitations, may be added to the growing international dataset on men's roles, and that the Lviv and village study will stimulate theoretically based research on grandfathers and fathers in Ukraine and throughout Eastern Europe.

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### Review Questions

1. In what ways do men's roles in Ukrainian villages seem to be similar to men's roles in Ukrainian cities like Lviv? In what ways do urban/rural fatherhood and grandfatherhood appear to be different?
2. If you yourself had conducted interviews with the sample, what research questions would you have added to the study, and what questions would you investigate if you were to conduct a follow-up of the present study?
3. In what ways do the contexts of Ukrainian fathering and intergenerational relations sound like the same contexts as in your own society, and in what ways do these contexts seem different from those experienced by families in your society?
4. This article provided historical information about the Soviet/post-Soviet era and about Eastern Europe, Ukraine, and Lviv. Looking over that information, how much do you think that comparisons between grandfathers and fathers in this article were due to generational differences (or similarities) in their environment and experiences?
5. Why is research on families, grandfathers, and fathers so rare in Ukraine? Are there other cultures where you can find a similar deficit of research? What can be done to promote more research on these topics in countries like Ukraine?
6. In what ways do you think Ukrainian grandfathers and fathers are like men in most places in the world? Is there anything completely unique about their situation or roles?
7. Compare the "generation gap" described between the generations in this article with the generation gap as you have experienced in your own country (or if you are Ukrainian, in

your own life). What is especially challenging about relationships between different generations in Ukraine?

### Author Biographies

**David W. Shwalb** is a Professor in the Psychology Department at Southern Utah University. He holds a B.A. degree from Oberlin College, and an M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Michigan. He was a Fulbright Dissertation Fellow at Tokyo University (1981) a Fulbright International Scholar in Lviv, Ukraine (2016), and a former president of the Society for Cross-Cultural Research. He is the co-author/editor of *Grandparents in Cultural Context* (2018, with Ziarat Hossain), *Fathers in Cultural Context* (2013, with Barbara J. Shwalb & Michael E. Lamb), *Applied Developmental Psychology: Theory, Practice and Research from Japan* (2005, with Barbara J. Shwalb & Jun Nakazawa), and *Japanese Childrearing: Two Generations of Scholarship* (1996, with Barbara J. Shwalb), and also 4 books published in Japanese. The Shwalbs have 5 children, 18 grandchildren, and 2 great-grandchildren.

**Oleh Vasylenko** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Latin and Foreign Languages at Danylo Halytsky Lviv National Medical University. He holds a B.A. and M.A. degree in Foreign Languages from Lviv Ivan Franko National University. Along with V. V. Olishchuk, and V. V. Ruden, he is the co-author and editor of *History of Medicine* (2011, in Ukrainian). The Vasylenkos have three children.