

Taking care of the grandchildren? No, thanks: 'I love my obligation-free life'^[1]

The belief that mothers should focus solely on their children is no longer the default. But with grandmothers, traditional ideas still hold sway

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AVAILABILITY

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Excerpts

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The expectation that childcare should define an older woman's life is politically convenient. In the US, childcare programs have been underfunded for decades, leaving many families, particularly those from marginalized communities or raising children with disabilities, without accessible, reliable support. This means parents have real childcare needs that are hard to meet. But grandparents "are expected to just be sort of doing nothing in the background", ready to spring into action as an unpaid social safety net, observes Vanessa May, a professor of sociology and co-director of the Morgan Centre for Research into Everyday Lives at the University of Manchester.

In a 2020 podcast conversation, JD Vance agreed with host Eric Weinstein that the "whole purpose of the postmenopausal female" is to provide grandchild care, citing his own mother-in-law taking a sabbatical from her role as a biology professor at the University of California, San Diego, to help raise his kids.

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This unpaid labor isn't just a family matter; it's an invisible pillar of modern economies. In the UK, for example, grandparents save parents more than \$70bn annually in unpaid, sometimes physically demanding childcare – work that supports the country's economic stability while remaining largely unrecognized.

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