



The Role of Grandparents in Divorced and Separated Families

Description of the study and the research centre:

Despite extensive changes in patterns of partnership formation and dissolution in Ireland, the effects of divorce and separation on nuclear and extended families have remained poorly understood. This is the first study conducted in Ireland aimed at understanding inter-generational relationships - the nature of contact and support between grandparents, grandchildren and the divorced or separated parents - in the aftermath of relationship breakdown in the 'middle' generation.

Drawing on interviews with grandparents whose son or daughter has experienced relationship breakdown, this study argues that the role of grandparents in divorced and separated families in Ireland is very significant. Grandparents play a role in supporting both their adult children and their grandchildren during and after the separation. Provision of this support led some grandparents to make considerable personal sacrifices. Many were too caught up in responding to the needs of their children and grandchildren to be able to focus on their own needs, highlighting the need for greater recognition of the role played by grandparents and provision of support to help them to help their families. An important group within the study sample were grandparents who had experienced loss of contact or reduced contact with their grandchildren: their views are also recorded in this book.

The Social Policy and Ageing Research Centre, in the School of Social Work and Social Policy in Trinity College Dublin, was established in 2005 with a view to analysing the social policy ramifications of population ageing in Ireland and in the comparative perspective. Fundamental to the Centre's work is the belief that research has a central role to play in making Ireland a better place to grow old in.