Perhaps I want that ideal situation where a child is yours for a couple of days and you adore them and they adore you and you do wonderful things together, and the grandma, as we know, gives, just gives the time, you know, which a mum doesn’t have. (Maternal grandmother)

You know, I’ll see her, I pick her up from school, bring her home, have a wee chat to her and I’ll say do you want me to hear your reader darling? Yes or no. Then I leave her because her mum hasn’t seen her for a while. You know, so it’s a fleeting loving of a child. (Maternal grandmother)

You know, I could see her a lot more than we do, my husband and I, but they say, “Oh no, we’ve only got her Friday night and Saturday night and Sunday of this weekend, and, you know, if you take her …”. So we rarely have her to sleep over. Rarely—and only in the school holidays now—would I have a day where I’m able to bring her to the city to see whatever it might be. (Maternal grandmother)

I … hid so that I could see [my granddaughter] when [my son] was finally allowed to see her on his own. Because [the child’s mother] has been hell that way. But I hid, so that when she … left the baby behind, I was allowed to appear and see the baby. So I saw her twice in two years. And how it affected me is, I don’t think I will ever, ever have that bond that I had when she was a baby. Because I don’t want to ever go through that hurt ever again. (Paternal grandmother)

I’ve had to fight to get to see my granddaughter on a Saturday. And it’s been made known by my son—not so much by his ex-partner—that if I wasn’t paying for her [extracurricular lessons], I wouldn’t be seeing my granddaughter at all. (Paternal grandfather)

We really never had much contact with the grandchild at all, even before the separation. So that’s pretty awkward. But it’s the distance thing. (Maternal grandfather)
Separation from an intimate partner is a life event experienced by large numbers of Australian parents and their children. Research into the effects of parental separation and divorce has focused mainly on its consequences for the parents and their children. But intimate partners who are responsible for the care of one or more children almost invariably also find that the break-up of their relationship has effects reaching beyond each of them and their children. Typically, the most immediate second-order effect will be on the family of origin and “in-law” relationships and, in particular, a key candidate for experiencing changed arrangements and changed relationships will be grandparents.

This article reports primarily on grandparents’ experiences of the effects of parental separation on relationships with their grandchildren. Often linked to these experiences, and also discussed where relevant to the grandparent-grandchild relationship, are grandparents’ perceived changes in relationships between them and their adult children, and between them and their adult children’s former partners.

The analysis presented here is based on comments provided by 50 grandparents who participated in one of a series of focus groups held in Melbourne as part of the Grandparents in Separated Families Study 2009 (GSFS 2009). All participants had at least one grandchild aged 2–10 years whose parents had separated between 1 January 2004 and 31 December 2008.

The analysis complements data reported in Chapter 12 of the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) Evaluation of the 2006 Family Law Reforms (Kaspiew et al., 2009) and in Qu et al. (2011). The data are drawn from a non-random sample and no claims are made regarding the generalisability of the findings. The findings do, however, both reinforce and add to our knowledge of the multiple effects on grandparents of the separation of their adult children.

The role of grandparents in children’s lives

The importance of the grandparent role in its various dimensions has been well demonstrated (e.g., see reviews by Bengston, 2001; Silverstein, Giarrusso & Bengston, 2003). In Australia, research by Gray, Misson, and Hayes (2005) suggested that over 97% of preschool children have face-to-face contact with at least one grandparent. More recently, Horsfall and Dempsey (2011) reported that around one-half of Australian grandparents spend time with their grandchildren at least once a week, and just under three-quarters spend time with them at least once a month.

Drawing together the results of several datasets employed in the AIFS evaluation of the 2006 family law reforms, Qu et al. (2011) concluded that:

- attitudes of Australian parents, including those who have separated, are very consistent with the objective of the reforms: to facilitate the continued involvement of grandparents in the lives of their grandchildren after parental separation. (p. 44)

Such involvement, however, tends to be unevenly spread. In “intact” families, it has been noted by a number of researchers (e.g., Weston & Qu, 2009) that maternal grandparents tend to have a closer, more involved relationship with their grandchildren than do paternal grandparents. After separation, levels of grandparental closeness and involvement are generally linked with the care-time arrangements negotiated or ordered with respect to the adult children. In the majority of separated families in Australia, one parent, usually the mother, spends more time looking after the children, usually reflecting the pre-separation pattern of care-time responsibility between the two parents (Weston et al., 2011).

Not surprisingly, therefore, grandparents whose adult child spends more time with the children after separation generally have a closer and more involved relationship than grandparents whose adult child has less of the care time (Centre for Community Child Health, 2010). Most separated parents report that the level of involvement or closeness between the children and their grandparents has not changed. Nonetheless, parents who spend less time with their children after separation are more likely than other parents to say that involvement or closeness with grandparents on their side has decreased (Kaspiew et al., 2009; Qu & Weston, 2008).

The present study: Some broad responses to the data

The data in the present study suggest that underlying these broad findings is a large number of quite individual narratives. For some grandparents, for example, the separation was associated with feelings of relief that a daughter-in-law or son-in-law was no longer part of their lives. For some paternal grandparents, Australia’s post-2006 legislative emphasis on shared parental responsibility after separation appears to have been associated with increased involvement with their grandchildren. On the other hand, some paternal grandparents whose grandchildren spent more time with their
mothers after separation, reported decreased levels of involvement with their grandchildren, as did some (but by no means all) maternal grandparents who indicated that their grandchild was spending a similar number of nights with each parent.

The data also contain descriptions of how the quality of grandparents’ pre-separation relationships with their adult children and with their adult children’s partners spills over into the post-separation arrangements, a pattern that had been previously noted by de Vaus (1994). In these data we also find other previously noted patterns, such as paternal grandparents feeling more vulnerable than their maternal counterparts about the prospect of an ongoing relationship with their grandchildren. But data of this nature also demonstrate the risks associated with focusing only on broad-based analyses. For example, one paternal grandmother’s strong positive relationship with her daughter-in-law appears to have been further strengthened by her judgement that it was her son who was primarily responsible for the parental break-up.

Indeed, just as in Christos Tsiolkas’ (2008) novel, The Slap, which sets out to examine some of the multiple systemic effects of a single event (an adult slapping his friend’s child at a suburban barbeque), these data suggest that dealing with the ripple effects of a parental separation is only partly within the predictive capabilities and the power of any researcher or family member.

Stories of joy, hope, exploitation, vulnerability, persistence and despair

In these focus groups, most grandparents spoke primarily of the factors that facilitated or constrained the amount of time that they were able to spend with their grandchildren. It has been previously noted that time is an essential ingredient in both the establishment and maintenance of relationships, but disputes over post-separation care arrangements, while frequently couched in terms of time, are usually driven by more fundamental disagreements and disappointments (Moloney, 2003, 2008; Smyth, 2005). This observation is clearly evident in many of the comments made by the grandparents in this sample.

Often, though not always, it was possible to gauge the extent to which the time spoken of by the grandparents in this sample represented an increase or decrease (or neither) in the pre-separation time that they had spent with their grandchildren:

His parents separated when he was [a few] months old. Because he was a baby, I suppose I saw him a lot then. Since they’ve separated, I see him every day. (Maternal grandmother)

I am fortunate, I know I am … in terms of seeing my grandchildren all the time. (Maternal grandmother)

A considerable number of grandparents reported an ongoing sense of uncertainty with regard to their future roles.

This grandparent described how her contact, which had included regular child-minding, changed abruptly when her son’s time with his child was reduced:

And then suddenly she decided that he wasn’t allowed to see his girl. She sort of said, “You can’t see her any more”. And that meant we couldn’t see her either; it was the same. (Paternal grandmother)

Another paternal grandparent put it this way:

When he asked if we could see her, she said, “Your parents are your problem, your family is your problem”. It was terrible really, because she was still little and we felt we’d formed some kind of bond with her, you know—the whole family had. (Paternal grandmother)

The vulnerability felt by some grandparents is also expressed very clearly in the following comments:

We do see a lot of the child. You see a lot of them and be there for them. But it worries me sometimes that you never know what the ex-wife is going to do. Now, she’s a volatile person and we all tread on eggshells and you can’t say a word to them. So that’s the part that really makes me nervous. You know, you’re just never sure what she’s going to do next or come up with. At the moment, whilst [my grandchild] is not at school, I’m needed. But you wonder when she is at school what’s going to happen then, even though [the father] still has that custody situation. It is interesting that you just don’t know … if laws change … this sort of thing, the custody thing. (Paternal grandmother)

So I see more of my grandchildren now, which I’m very grateful for, but who knows what’s going to happen tomorrow? It’s an ongoing thing and I don’t know what more to say to be honest. I just find it frustrating because I can’t even pick up the grandchildren without being abused, and I don’t know where you go. (Paternal grandmother)

Relationships between grandparents and their grandchildren can fall foul of an ongoing toxic relationship between the parents. Nor does the parent blocking the relationship have to be the “other” parent:

But I had him for a week during school holidays last year, and I had strict instructions [from my son that] I’m
not allowed to do this, I’m not allowed to do that, or the other one. And I broke one of those rules and I let him speak to his mother. And I didn’t see him for [some] months. Wouldn’t answer the phone, wouldn’t answer the door. I used to ring him every [weekend] without fail, every [weekend] without fail. But [it was some] months, because he spoke to his mum. (Paternal grandmother)

While court orders granting children the right to be cared for by a parent for specified times may be seen by some grandparents as a form of protection against feelings of vulnerability, this is not always the case:

He has her for the whole weekend, every second weekend. He tries to have her in the holidays, but although there was like a court order to say that he could have her for a week of the holidays, the mother isn’t always cooperative. So he does the best he can. Yeah, so I’m a little bit puzzled as to if there is a court order how the mother seems to be in control. (Paternal grandmother)

Some families and grandparents are able to move beyond the experience of litigation:

So we have a lovely relationship that was born out of something that wasn’t very lovely. It is friendlier now. It wasn’t for a long time, but now that the courts have said he must have her six days [a fortnight], … and [my son] has her and what have you, and the money has finally been organised, and that’s it. They’ve become courteous to each other and polite to each other, although they were never any … they weren’t any other way in front of [their daughter], but behind [her] back, there was a lot of nastiness. (Paternal grandfather)

A separation can have an unexpected positive outcome for a grandparent:

[Before the separation] I’d go to their house a couple of days a week and look after [my granddaughter], but I was never allowed to take her home. She was never allowed to stay overnight. Now, we’d always had a beautiful relationship with her before that, but from that night [of the separation] on, we’re peas in a pod, her and [my partner] and I. (Maternal grandmother)

Grandparents can also adopt heart-warmingly positive attitudes to shared parenting arrangements:

She obviously loves being with her dad and she loves being with her mum, and she loves being with us. And we have a lovely situation now where we swap her around. She goes here and there. Daddy takes her to school and picks her up and then he takes her [to an activity one day a week]. (Mum) does the Friday thing, when [my granddaughter] goes to [other activities]. (Maternal grandfather)

In addition, grandparents can also actively contribute to breaking past dysfunctional family patterns. In a case in which a father, whose own father had abandoned him after the separation of his own parents, refused to negotiate to see his child after separation, the grandmother took matters into her own hands:

After [some] months were up, I just said, “Well, if you’re not going to fight for him, I am”. So I went through all the court, did the whole lot. So she can’t stop me seeing him now. I mean I see him … I’ve asked her a couple of times if I can have him [one day in the weekend]. She’s allowed me to do that, so it’s getting better, but the whole thing should never have happened like it did. Her mother said to me that it shouldn’t have got this far. I said, “Well I tried not to, but there was nothing
All grandparents need to make judgement calls about the amount and type of help that they provide.

Early on, when he was very young, the mother experienced a lot of problems. I saw quite a bit of them then. When they were going through difficulties and the whole bit, we didn’t see much of them. But now that the separation is through, we see [our grandchildren] a lot and I have the [infant] every week for the day, and then pick up the other grandchild after school. Then I would do the whole thing. The after-school, the feeding. I cook the meal and do everything and the mother will come in later. (Maternal grandmother)

Multiple breakdowns in parental relationships can have complex consequences, some of which are likely to be significant for grandparents and for their grandchildren.

One grandparent reflected on their changing relationship with grandchildren who had previously lived with them and with whom they had had a close relationship pre-separation:

And now we just don’t see them as much as we would like. And she’s making it rather difficult for us—this is my daughter—in fact, she said to me not to speak to my son-in-law, not to ring the children when they’re with their father, and various other things. And so it’s quite restrictive really, and it’s quite upsetting because we—as I said—and every time the children see us they just absolutely smother us, you know. (Maternal grandmother)

For some grandparents, however, a separation can facilitate a renewed sense of engagement with their grandchildren:

Yes. And after the separation … my daughter rang up from the country and said help. So I’ve been up there more or less most of the time … I’ve had a closer relationship with the children because I’ve been helping them. It’s been quite challenging actually, but it’s been wonderful. (Maternal grandmother)

I’ve been up there [interstate]. Last year I spent the whole year up there, practically the whole year … They’re at school now. They don’t need me as much. But I suppose I spend about half my time with them. (Maternal grandmother)

Well, actually, I see more of my grandson now than I did before. But there was a peripheral reason for that [because] my husband was ill and my daughter-in-law didn’t really care to come and visit with her children. So of course we didn’t see the grandchildren very much. So now they’re separated, my husband has died, and now I see [my grandson] a lot more often. (Paternal grandmother)

Others made even stronger statements about parental separation being a catalyst for their involvement as a grandparent:

Yeah, yeah. I see much more of him now than before. It’s an awful thing to say, but that’s the only good thing coming out of the separation. I can see my grandchild. (Paternal grandmother)

I see more of my granddaughter since my son has become divorced than I did before. So before, my son wasn’t really allowed to bring the child or children to us. I don’t know why, but that was the way it was. But since separation and subsequent divorce, now I’m in great demand. (Paternal grandmother)

From the onset of the birth of that child, my ability to see the child was pretty severely curtailed. [My daughter-in-law] was never interested in visiting … I never ever got an acknowledgement of thank you or anything for anything that had been done. Yep. Where before it was very, very ad hoc and minimal, now we’re there all of the time and it’s just worked out well really. (Paternal grandfather)

Significant relationships can also develop between in-laws. As noted in the introductory remarks, in one case, the paternal grandmother not only remained good friends with her
daughter-in-law, but blamed her son for the separation:

It's my son that mucked up, and I have access to my granddaughter. Every two years I have her for a day while her mum works … I'm good friends with her mum. (Paternal grandmother)

The following account by a paternal grandmother provides an example of how critical a committed grandparent's input can be to maintain a reasonably stable post-separation environment. In this case, the arrangement involved the children being in the care of each parent for a similar number of nights:

I used to see the children before [the parents] separated, and I would make sure that I visited them every week … In that 12 months that [my son] stayed in the house I could see my grandchildren become more introverted … I could see where that was distressing for them, and very distressing for myself as well. I tried to maintain a civil relationship with their mother because I felt I am their grandparent and I will not be cut out of their lives, I just will not. [My son] went into depression, and when he had the children it was very difficult for him … I was trying to be of a help to him, not just myself but with the children. Twelve months later, I'd just left work and he had to sell the house, so I left work and we've moved in together and that way I see the children 24/7 for one week. And the week they're not there I don’t have anything to do with them. (Paternal grandmother)

In some cases, the grandparent/parent roles become increasingly blurred after separation:

I'm the paternal grandmother of a [primary-school-aged] child. My [adult] son lives at home with us, and [my granddaughter] lives at home, basically giving me the job of being the mother figure at home five days a week. They separated when she was an infant, so that's sort of been going on for [most of her life], and pretty much making me her basic carer because dad's at work early morning till late at night … I've been the parent helper. I did all the kinder duty, but I was a parent helper last year and this year. (Paternal grandmother)

[My daughter] works [multiple] jobs, and it came to a stage where she didn't have any money so they lived with us … for [some] months, which was a very tight squeeze … I see my grandchildren] a lot. Yes, even right from birth, like, the father didn’t have a lot of input. We would go down [very early] in the morning because they hadn't had any sleep, and we had to go over and mind the kids for the day … I see them] a lot more [since the separation]. The other grandparents live [quite far away] and we never hear from them. (Maternal grandmother)

So I said I'd take the kids [twice during the week] and to sport on Saturdays. And I'm finding that the grandparent boundary is very blurred, because I'm becoming more a mum figure. I don’t want that. As I said, “I've got five grandchildren, three which I’ve got really good relationship with. They call me mama”. But with [these

other two] it's a little bit more than that. I'm finding I'll go and find clothes for them or take them to the doctor or teach them manners at the dinner table. But from my point of view, the children are important. As I was saying before, my line is very blurred between the grandmother and mother to those boys. I do have to pull myself up now and again because I'm not the mother; I'm the grandmother. (Paternal grandmother)

We've brought our children up and we've been through the parenting thing. Our youngest—the father of these boys—is [in his thirties]. [My partner] and I have been on our own for [many] years, and all of a sudden I'm thrust back into the chief carer role. It's a little bit of an issue because [my partner's in his 60s] and he wants to [pursue his hobby]. And every now and again I'm stuck at home with the kids. I shouldn’t be. But I do it because of the boys and because it's my son. (Paternal grandmother)

Some grandparents find they have little choice but to become de facto parents:

Yes, well the story was my daughter-in-law had some postnatal depression. And [soon] after her parents left she collapsed and she said that she did not want to have the children or my son and she wanted to be alone. So she asked if we could take care of the children. So that was all. And we are the legal guardians of the children now. And the agreement was that she will have the children [a few hours] every fortnight. That was her request. And we take the children to a shopping centre to meet her at a certain time … If she doesn’t feel like it, she won’t turn up. So at the moment it's between six to three months. The children will see their mother for one hour. It's very disturbing for the elder child. (Paternal grandmother)

or quasi de facto parents:

[So every second week] I get up at 5:30 and I'm up there by 6:30. Quarter to seven, she goes to work [and] she is not home until 5 o'clock. So I pick them up from school, virtually give them their snacks, do the reading, anything that needs to be done. I'm virtually organising. I get them ready for school. You know, I feel like I am

In some cases, the grandparent/parent roles become increasingly blurred after separation.
Equal time arrangements, where the children spend much the same amount of time with each parent, can have a significant effect on grandparents:

But we had a very close relationship. We still do to a certain degree, but I only see him because my daughter has him one week and her husband had him the other week. (Maternal grandmother)

Some grandparents clearly work hard to build up the value of the “other parent” in the eyes of the children:

The kids, as I said, go back every school holidays to [overseas country to spend time with their father], which is a bit of a drag on the home. But then kids are very resilient and they … that’s life … We build them up a bit, say aren’t you lucky going away for your holidays. (Maternal grandmother)

We go to all sporting activities, so if there’s anything on at the school, we go. We have always done that, and they play football and stuff at the weekend … Regardless of which parent has them we go, yes, we do. Because for the children we’re a stable influence in their lives and we don’t feel we should withdraw that from them. (Maternal grandmother)

And we try and say “her house”, not “mummy’s house” and “daddy’s house”. We say “your house with mummy” and “your house with daddy”. We’ve tried to say, “Aren’t you lucky: two households, two separate bedrooms, two beds, two lots of toys”. I mean, you try and make the best of it for the child. (Maternal grandmother)

However, some grandparents struggle to see the value of their grandchild spending significant amounts of time with each parent when they feel the arrangements are unsettling:

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However, some grandparents struggle to see the value of their grandchild spending significant amounts of time with each parent when they feel the arrangements are unsettling for their grandchildren:

But the thing is that because of these visiting rights and things, every time they go to stay with their father, they come back and the older one is very, very distressed every time. (Maternal grandmother)

It’s the most stupid thing ever in the government side of this. So this little boy thinks he has no home: he goes to mummy’s home and he goes to daddy’s home. [He] has no home and I find that very sad. He doesn’t want to go to daddy, but he does want to go to daddy. He just wants stability. He’s got no stability in his life. It’s not that he doesn’t want to see his father, he does. Then when he’s with his father, he doesn’t want to come home to his mother. So his father says, “He shouldn’t live with you; he should live with me”. But it’s not that; it’s just that he wants a home. (Maternal grandmother)

Grandparents may remain involved with their grandchildren at their considerable financial cost. In one case in which a maternal grandmother and grandfather were spending considerably more time with their grandchildren than they had before the separation, the grandmother observed that:

our generation have had to take over so much more responsibility because separation and divorce numbers, as we all know, are escalating so much … Financially, it costs us hundreds a week. (Maternal grandmother)

And another noted:

I see my grandkids all the time—both those two. And, you know, like the big difference is I had to give up work. My health is going. I could no longer work and mind the children … which has put us in a financial bind. (Maternal grandmother)

Distance can affect grandparental relationships in a variety of ways. Some may need to spend significant money and time on travel:

So since [the separation] we’ve had to fly back and forth for whatever the occasion to try to keep [our grandson] in our lives and to keep my daughter’s health up for the sake of our grandson. (Maternal grandmother)

For some grandparents, if their adult child lives in another country, relationships with their grandchildren may be confined to those times when the parent returns from overseas:

I’ve been trying to contact my grandchildren and she never picks up. I’ve done it through Skype, I’ve done it through [unclear] and I’ve tried it through the home phone and she never answers back. So that means unless [my son] comes back from [overseas country] for his holidays, we don’t have any access to the children … The children are always going to be otherwise engaged. I think a specific time should be set aside for the grandparents as well. (Paternal grandmother)

Or in other situations in which a parent lives overseas, grandparent visits might be barely tolerated:

[The mother] said, “Oh no, you should make the effort and come to my place”. Now, she also did “lovely things” like change houses, and [that] was always as far away from us as possible, to make it difficult. And she made no secret of that fact. But nevertheless we used to … every weekend, we’d go over and visit them. (Paternal grandmother)

Distance can also be associated with a profound sense of loss:

My husband and I had a very good relationship with the baby, and after they broke up, the mother and child disappeared. We finally found them [some] months later in [another state]. And this is where I feel the whole system lets us down and everybody else. They shouldn’t be allowed to take them out of the state. And by the time we found them and took it to the Family Court, the judge said, “Oh, but they’re residents of [another state] now”. That was all stacked against us. I had a good relationship with the mother. The child was [premature]
when she was born, very prem. So I did all the running around … And then just to disappear, not notify anybody … (Paternal grandmother)

Poignant stories of loss, however, may have no relationship to physical distance. One grandmother described how her relationship with her grandchildren:

sort of slid down the banner [to] when I don’t see them at all. I’d made birthday visits and it’s very cold. And I’m just at the crossroads—where do you go and how do you heal? (Maternal grandmother)

And for some grandparents, parental separation and geographical distance can transform their relationships with their grandchildren:

So we used to see them once or twice a year sort of thing, and that was about all that we got to see them. We were living in [one place] and they were living in [another], so there was the distance involved as well. Since [the separation], we have established a marvellous relationship with our grandchildren; we see them every week. We come down; he brings them up. He’s more than happy for them to be at home. He rang us up a couple of weeks ago and said he was having some trouble with the oldest one, would we take him for a few days, and things like that. So it’s turned around the other way completely … We have a wonderful relationship with our grandchildren that we didn’t have before. (Paternal grandfather)

For some grandparents, there can be sense of grandparenting time being in competition with parenting time:

They did both agree that if they were going to be away any longer than [a few] hours, they would, instead of ringing me and saying, “Mum, can you mind [grandchild]?”, they both agreed that my daughter would ring the husband and say, “Well, I have to go to a work meeting, I’ll be away [for this much time]”. In other words, give the other parent first preference over the grandparent. Which I think is fair enough. (Maternal grandmother)

In addition, ongoing competition for parenting time can bring grandparents somewhat unwittingly into the dispute:

They have ongoing custody battles too because the children are shared equally time-wise. And now there is another court case pending where she claims that she needs more custody of the children because she brings them to see us during her time. My son gets in touch with us and said, “I’ll bring the children instead”. It’s to do with his case … and so we don’t know what’s going to happen now. We haven’t seen the kids for 10 days. (Paternal grandmother)

Finally, competition can, of course, exist between the grandparents themselves. After the separation, one grandmother good-humouredly put her experience this way:

[My granddaughter’s] other grandmother and I tag-teamed. We fight over who is looking after [her] and that sort of thing, [but] I see [her] basically whenever I want to, as does her other grandmother. (Maternal grandmother)

Concluding statement

The Centre for Community Child Health (2010) pointed to several implications of research into
grandparents, including that “grandparents are important for grandchildren in difficult times” (p. 4). The present data provide examples of how difficult times can act as a catalyst for greater or lesser involvement of grandparents in the lives of their grandchildren.

Issues such as geographical distance, financial capacity, pre- and post-separation relationships, moral judgements of right and wrong, commitment to the role, judicious use of legal processes and a capacity to see the situation from the perspective of “the other”, all appear to contribute to the growth or decline of post-separation relationships generally, and post-separation relationships with their grandchildren in particular.

The data in this study reveal some of the antecedents and consequences of such issues and how they come together from the perspective of grandparents themselves. The richness contained in these statements points to the need for an appreciation of the complexity and subtlety of these dynamics by researchers, decision-makers, lawyers, family relationship practitioners, family mediators and all those who wish to limit the potential negative effects of separation as much as possible for children and their grandparents.

Endnotes
1 In all comments, names of individuals, places and other identifying information have been replaced with general phrases, without affecting the meaning of the quote.
2 For example, just over 1 million children aged under 18 years in 2009–10 had a natural parent living elsewhere, representing 21% of all children of this age (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2011).
3 The GSFS 2009 formed part of the Australian Institute of Family Studies evaluation of the 2006 family law reforms. These 50 grandparents who volunteered to attend a focus group had already participated in an online survey about post-separation grandparenting, along with 476 other grandparents.
4 One of the aims of the 2006 family law reforms was to lessen the potential for parental separation to diminish the relationship between children and their grandparents and other people who play a significant role in children’s lives. The Family Law Amendment (Shared Parental Responsibility) Act 2006 (Cth) recognises that “children have a right to spend time on a regular basis with, and communicate with, both their parents and other people significant to their care, welfare and development (such as grandparents and other relatives)” (s60B(2)(b)). See Kaspiew et al. (2009, pp. 9–10 and Chapter 12) for further information.

References


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