

Granny's getting exploited

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Danish parents expect grandmothers to turn out and look after their grandchildren. But when they've done that, they are expected to keep their traps shut and not to interfere in the kids' upbringing.

To Danish parents it is only natural for Granny to be at their disposal whenever the children are ill or Mum and Dad want a break from their offspring.

According to a PhD dissertation by Anne Leonora Blaakilde at Copenhagen University's Saxo Institute, parents also expect Granny to keep quiet and not meddle in their children's upbringing.

In fact, the parents want all the decision-making to rest with them. They do not want old, experienced women to have any say when it comes to their grandchildren.

"Caring, elderly mothers are expected on the one hand to provide copious practical help while on the other hand keeping their opinions to themselves. And on top of that, they are too old-fashioned," says Anne Leonora Blaakilde in a press release.

Granny should mind her own business

Danish grannies are not even allowed to give their daughters good advice.

"These days, mothers must never give their daughters good advice but let young mothers 'learn the hard way', with the help of official literature and self-help books," says Blaakilde.

Her survey is based on new analyses of qualitative interviews with 21 grandmothers, historic literature, media material and policy papers.

The 21 elderly women in the survey have life histories which tell us a lot about developments in Danish family culture in the 20th century. It transpires from the interviews, for example, that women's attitudes to grandmothers gradually changed during the 20th century. The attitudes have gradually become more negative.

Grandmothers have been passed the buck

Today's grandmothers really have been left holding the baby - they have lots of responsibilities in relation to their grandchildren, but no influence whatsoever.

"Today's grandparents have no rights as far as their grandchildren are concerned, although paradoxically enough, nuclear families expect grandparents to invest huge efforts, especially as far as their grandchildren are concerned.

The public sector also exploits Granny

The survey also shows, surprisingly enough, that families are not alone in expecting elderly women to fulfil practical purposes.

According to Blaakilde, the welfare state is arranged in such a way that elderly women are encouraged to take on voluntary, unpaid work.

"The welfare state urges the elderly to contribute by doing voluntary work through municipal voluntary schemes with names such as 'granny schemes'.

"Unpaid family-oriented work by women continues today, and not just as lower-paid care work in the labour market. Granny-like women are also expected to work for nothing or as extremely low-paid labour," says Blaakilde.

Blaakilde presented her dissertation "Granny talk" on 25 August at the Faculty of Humanities of Copenhagen University.

[Read the article in Danish at videnskab.dk](#) [9]

 [Both family and the welfare society expect older women to be available for child care - free of charge. \(Photo: Colourbox\)](#) [10]

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Fact box

The 21 women interviewed by Anne Leonora Blaakilde were all born between 1903-1952. The women hail from a little island referred to in the dissertation as "Gammelø" (old island) and from Copenhagen.

The majority come from farming or working class backgrounds, a few of them with a medium length education and one with a university degree.

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