COMUN. MÍDIA CONSUMO, SÃO PAULO, V. 23, E3212, JAN./DEC. 2026
https://doi.org/10.18568/cmc.2026.e3212

It's impossible to think about family and mothering without considering the role of grandparents: interview with Guita Grin Debert

Não dá para pensar na família e na maternagem sem levar em conta a posição dos avós: entrevista com Guita Grin Debert

Gisela Grangeiro da Silva Castro[1]

What has research revealed about grandparents in Brazil?

Debert: It is very important to mention the pioneering work of Myriam Lins de Barros (1987), her doctoral research, carried out at the National Museum of Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, which offers an anthropological perspective on grandparents. It is a groundbreaking work that has had very little continuity. In a way, grandparents are erased from reflections on the family and care[1]. When thinking about single-parent

1 It is worth mentioning the pioneering work of Cristina Maria de Souza Brito Dias, who has been studying the topic for decades in the field of Psychology in Brazil. In the collection *Avosidades: teoria, pesquisa e intervenção* (*Grandparenthood: theory, research and intervention*), the scholar emphasizes that "the neologism 'avosidade (grandparenthood)' is used to understand both the role of grandparents and the kinship ties that exist between them and their relatives" (DIAS, 2022, p. 23, free translation).

[1]Pontifícia Universidade Católica – São Paulo (SP), Brazil.
Professor Emeritus at UNICAMP and Full Professor in the Department of Anthropology, IFCH/UNICAMP, Guita Grin Debert is a researcher at PAGU-Center for Gender Studies at UNICAMP, FAPESP, and CNPq. She has given lectures and taught courses at several foreign universities, including Columbia University (USA), École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (France), and the University of Bologna (Italy). She is the author of numerous articles, chapters, and books on gender and aging, such as *A reinvenção da velhice: socialização e processos de reprivatização do envelhecimento* (*Reinventing old age: socialization and the process of privatizing aging*, 1999), *Políticas do corpo e o curso da vida* (*Politics of the body and the life course*, 2000, with co-author Donna M. Goldstein) and *Desafios do Cuidado: gênero, velhice e deficiência* (*Challenges in Care: gender, old age and disability*, 2019, ed.), among others.

families, for example, the role of grandparents is often forgotten, and they undoubtedly should be very present in the care and education of the child. The hidden role of grandparenthood in mothering is a type of concealment that we have to reveal in order to think properly about what family means today. In this sense, bringing the issue of grandparenthood into discussion about family and mothering is of fundamental importance. It is impossible to think about family and mothering without taking into account the position of grandparents.

What is it like to become a grandmother in a youth-centric culture?

Debert: A few decades ago, thinking about grandmothers meant thinking about old age, which was seen as a time of physical and social loss. This has been changing. Old age is now thought of as a time when life should be enjoyed after the obligations of middle age have ended. These are very different conceptions. Furthermore, considering the data on teenage pregnancy, today we have very young grandmothers, in their 30s and 40s. On the other hand, we have an increase in the age at which women begin motherhood, making first-time grandmothers women who are 60/70 years old or more. Another interesting aspect is related to the increase in life expectancy and the decrease in birth rates. Nowadays we have grandmothers, great-grandmothers, and sometimes great-great-grandmothers living in the same family. There are few grandchildren, and the relationship that develops with a child at this stage of life is usually very intense.

What are some of the ongoing transformations in the perception of old age and the role of grandmothers?

Debert: While dedicating themselves to their grandchildren, grandmothers are also encouraged to have an intense social life, with leisure and opportunities, travel, and new learning experiences. Today, these two dimensions coexist: a grandmother for whom mothering takes on a central role, and a grandmother who is living a privileged moment in life for leisure, satisfaction, and the realization of previously unfulfilled

dreams. Researching this topic requires a very attentive look at the diversity of situations involved in grandparenthood, in being a grandmother or grandfather. There is a diversity of situations, which is what we call intersectionality today. Thinking about grandmothers involves considering not only age differences but also differences in social class and employment situations, such as being employed or retired, among other factors. It is also quite important to consider that grandparents on the maternal side tend to be much closer to children than grandparents on the paternal side. Undoubtedly, research will reveal examples of a very wide diversity of situations experienced by grandparents nowadays.

And what about the so-called 'grandparental support,' an issue you worked on with one of your undergraduate research students?

Debert: Although research is showing that there is a huge diversity of family situations, one thing that is striking is how certain obligations and duties are legally imposed on grandparents. I wrote an article with Dominique Momma (MOMMA; DEBERT, 2018), who conducted extensive research on the law that can make grandparents responsible for paying support to their grandchildren. This legislation creates this duty for grandparents, which is established by law on the basis of consanguinity. Bloodlines create certain economic obligations, which are very characteristic of our society. It is about how, based on biology, a certain type of morality is created and defined. This legislation is shocking when you know of an elderly person sentenced to prison for not paying support to a grandchild. In general, we are very poorly informed about this. This case highlights the difficulty on the part of the State and the legal field in reconciling and balancing the demands of children and older people as subjects of rights.

Conflict of interest: none to declare.

Funding source: none.

Data availability statement: The entire dataset supporting the results of this study has been published within the article itself.

REFERENCES

BARROS, M. L. *Autoridade & afeto:* avós, filhos e netos na família brasileira. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1987.

DIAS, C. M. S. B. (ed.). *Avosidades:* teoria, pesquisa e intervenção. Campinas: Alínea, 2022.

MOMMA, D.; DEBERT, G. G. Avós e a pensão alimentar. *Revista dos Trabalhos de Iniciação Científica da Unicamp*, Campinas, n. 26, 2018. https://doi.org/10.20396/revpibic262018358

About the author

Gisela Grangeiro da Silva Castro: Psychologist and holds a PhD in Communication and Culture from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). She was a Visiting Fellow in Sociology (Goldsmiths, University of London) and is currently a Fellow at the Postgraduate Research Program in Philosophy, where she conducts research on intergenerational relationships and contemporary grandmothering. She leads Conex.lab - research group on communication, consumption, subjectivities and modes of sociability. She was a full professor at the Postgraduate Program in Communications and Consumer Practices at ESPM, São Paulo from September/2004 to June/2026. A leading scholar in communication, media, aging, and longevity studies, she has extensive experience mentoring academic researchers and has published several books, book chapters, and articles in national and international scholarly journals. Gisela has two daughters and a grandson. Email: castro.gisela@gmail.com

Received: March 31, 2026
Accepted: May 8, 2026