Australian Bureau of Statistics figures suggest that a substantial number of grandparents are providing care to young grandchildren, and especially preschool grandchildren (those under five years of age).

It is estimated that in Australia approximately 49% of all children under 12 years use some type of childcare (i.e. aside from school or kindergartens) in a given week and that grandparents provide 19% of this care. (ABS, 2002).

This is equivalent to approximately 55% of all informal care provided for children (with other informal care providers being siblings, other relatives and other unrelated people).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics also estimates that informal care of children was highest for children under 12 months and that about 37% of children under five used informal care (ABS, 2002).

Flinders University psychology student Christine Materne is seeking volunteers for a research project seeking to identify factors that influence the relationship between childcare provision and the wellbeing of grandparents providing childcare for preschool grandchildren. Participants would be mailed a questionnaire which takes about 30 - 45 minutes to complete (depending on the number of grandchildren) which can be mailed back to the university’s psychology department at no cost to participants.

Caring for grandchildren can be regular (every week) or irregular (occasionally), it can be for long periods of time (8 hours at one time) or for a short period of time (1/2 an hour). Providing care is different from visiting because the child’s parents are not present and grandparents have total responsibility for the grandchild in their care. While providing childcare to young children can be rewarding, fun and mutually beneficial, it can also potentially be physically demanding, stressful and time consuming.

Christine says studies have found a relationship between varying amounts of childcare and aspects of wellbeing in grandparents. This does not necessarily mean that grandparents providing more childcare are more likely to have poorer wellbeing than those providing less childcare. We expect that time per se is not the issue. Rather we predict that other personal characteristics of grandparents and aspects of their lifestyle and that of their children and grandchildren have an influence on the impact of providing grandchild care.

If you are interested in participating in this research, please contact Christine Materne on 8381 3107 or by email at mate0016@flinders.edu.au.