

RESEARCH

Relationship between grandparenting stress and emotional well-being: The moderating role of benefit finding

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Abstract

Objective: To explore the moderating role of benefit-finding in the relationship between grandparenting stress and emotional well-being.

Background: Grandparents face multiple pressures in the process of assisting with childcare, which significantly affects their mental health. It is an important task for family researchers to develop effective strategies aimed at improving the mental health of grandparents involved in grandchild care.

Methods: A total of 244 grandparents completed the Grandparenting Stress Questionnaire, the Relatedness Benefit Finding Questionnaire in Grandparenting, the Reproduction-Immortality Benefit-Finding Questionnaire in Grandparenting, and the Emotional Experience of Well-Being Questionnaire.

Results: Grandparenting stress showed significant interaction effects with both relatedness benefit finding and reproduction-immortality benefit finding. The moderating effect size of reproduction-immortality benefit finding ($\Delta R^2 = 0.026$) was greater than that of relatedness benefit finding ($\Delta R^2 = 0.012$). Elevated levels of benefit finding contribute to enhancing grandparents' positive emotions and mitigating negative ones, thereby enabling their emotional well-being to sustain a relatively high level even in high-stress situations.

Conclusion: Both relatedness and reproduction-immortality benefits finding in grandparenting moderated the effect of grandparenting stress on emotional well-being.

Abbreviations: BF, benefit finding; EWB, emotional well-being; GS, grandparenting stress; Rel_BFiG, relatedness benefit finding in grandparenting; Rep-I_BFiG, reproduction-immortality benefit finding in grandparenting.

Author note: The data are available on request.

Implications: Grandparents can enhance their emotional well-being by finding the benefits of caring for their grandchildren.

KEYWORDS

benefit finding, emotional well-being, grandparenting stress, relatedness, reproduction-immortality

China is a collectivist culture that emphasizes mutual assistance and care among family members. Following the birth of grandchildren, many grandparents become involved in their care. The assistance of grandparents in childrearing plays a crucial role in ensuring children's development and family stability. This is particularly true in families where parental caregiving capacity is limited, such as dual-earner families, left-behind families (where one or both parents work away from home for an extended period, typically over 3 months), single-parent families, and families where the grandchildren face physical or mental health challenges. However, grandparents face multiple pressures in the process of assisting with childcare, which has a negative effect on their mental health. It is an important task for family researchers to develop effective strategies aimed at improving the mental health of grandparents involved in grandchild care.

According to the dual-factor model of mental health, mental health entails not only the absence of mental illness but also the presence of positive emotions and psychological functioning (Suldo & Shaffer, 2008). Emotional well-being (EWB) refers to the combination of positive and negative emotions experienced by an individual and represents the emotional component of subjective well-being (Larsen, 2009), serving as a key indicator of mental health (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Park et al., 2023). This study aimed to use emotional well-being as an indicator of mental health and explore the moderating role of benefit finding in the relationship between grandparenting stress and emotional well-being.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GRANDPARENTING STRESS AND EWB

Grandparenting stress (GS) refers to a negative psychological state experienced by grandparents when they perceive a disparity between their own resources and external demands during the process of caring for their grandchildren (Guo et al., 2024; S. Li et al., 2023; Pandialagappan & Ibrahim, 2018; Sprang et al., 2015). The sources of grandparenting stress are multifaceted (Lin et al., 2024; Mendoza et al., 2020; Pandialagappan & Ibrahim, 2018).

First, caring for grandchildren encroaches on grandparents' personal leisure time. Previous research has indicated that grandparents who bear the primary caregiving responsibility spend significantly more time on childcare than those who coparent with their adult children, and they also experience markedly higher levels of parenting stress (Musil et al., 2011).

Second, caring for grandchildren consumes grandparents' energy and exacerbates their pre-existing health issues. Previous studies have showed that, compared with grandparents caring for grandchildren without traumatic experiences, those caring for grandchildren with traumatic histories expend more energy, report higher levels of fatigue, exhibit poorer physical functioning, and endure greater parenting stress (Sprang et al., 2015).

Third, in the process of raising grandchildren, grandparents may experience direct conflicts with the grandchildren themselves, as well as disagreements with other family members—such as their adult children—over parenting styles and interaction patterns. A previous survey has indicated that, compared with grandparents caring for grandchildren without traumatic

experiences, those caring for grandchildren with traumatic histories experience more frequent interpersonal conflicts and higher levels of parenting stress (Sprang et al., 2015).

Last but not the least, in families with lower socioeconomic status, financial pressure also constitutes a major source of stress for grandparents. Grandparents in many underdeveloped regions, such as rural areas, report experiencing high levels of financial stress (Hansen et al., 2022; Keller et al., 2019; Matovu & Wallhagen, 2020).

Grandparenting stress has been linked to a range of adverse outcomes. It is associated with negative emotions such as anxiety and depression (Dunham & Flores-Yeffal, 2021; Q.-Y. Li et al., 2021; Xia et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021), diminished life satisfaction (Mendoza et al., 2020), and impaired emotional well-being (Guo et al., 2024; Sprang et al., 2015).

MODERATING ROLE OF BENEFIT FINDING

Benefit finding is defined as an individual's perceptions that they have derived some positive effects from challenging experiences (Antoni et al., 2001; Cassidy & Doyle, 2018; Cassidy et al., 2014; Lovell & Wetherell, 2020). As an important cognitive restructuring strategy, it prompts the question: What potential benefits might adversity actually bring? In a study of patients with early-stage breast cancer, Antoni et al. (2001) proposed that adversity could bring benefits such as enhanced personal competence, improved relationships, and greater acceptance of life's imperfections. Expanding on this, Cassidy et al. (2014) further elaborated that the benefits of adversity not only include increased competence, stronger interpersonal relationships and family bonds, and acceptance of life's imperfections, but also encompass a heightened ability to empathize with others and a shift in life priorities.

Previous research has demonstrated that benefit finding exerts a moderating effect on the relationship between various stressors and mental health. These stressors include a wide range of situations, such as caring for ill family members (Wepf et al., 2022), major illnesses such as AIDS (Siegel & Schrimshaw, 2007), testicular cancer (A. Wang & Hoyt, 2020), and problematic behaviors in children with autism spectrum disorder (Lovell & Wetherell, 2020). The assessment of mental health encompasses both positive and negative emotions. The specific moderating role of benefit finding is described as follows.

Wepf et al. (2022) investigated young adults with and without caregiving experiences for family members with health problems, assessing caregivers' mental health from the perspectives of positive emotions and psychological functioning. The results demonstrated that benefit finding moderated the relationship between caregiving experience and positive mental health. When the level of benefit finding was low, individuals' mental health was primarily influenced by caregiving stress, with those who had caregiving experience showing significantly lower positive mental health than those without such experience. In contrast, a high level of benefit finding can enhance the positive mental health of those with caregiving experiences, making it not significantly different from the positive mental health levels of those without caregiving experiences (Wepf et al., 2022).

A survey of 138 women living with HIV/AIDS revealed that benefit finding moderated the effect of the severity of AIDS-related physical symptoms on negative emotions (Siegel & Schrimshaw, 2007). When the level of benefit finding was low, patients with severe symptoms exhibited significantly higher negative emotions than those with mild symptoms. In contrast, when the level of benefit finding was high, there was no significant difference in negative emotions between patients with severe symptoms and those with mild symptoms. Another survey of 171 testicular cancer patients showed that benefit finding moderated the association between masculinity threat induced by testicular cancer and negative emotions (A. Wang & Hoyt, 2020). Its moderating effect is in line with the findings of Siegel and Schrimshaw (2007).

However, a survey of 152 parents of children with autism found that benefit finding did not significantly moderate the relationship between the severity of their children's problem behaviors and the parents' negative emotions (Lovell & Wetherell, 2020). This may be because different adversities harbor distinct benefits, requiring an exploration of their specific benefits rather than simply adopting a general benefit-finding scale (Lovell & Wetherell, 2020). Therefore, this study intended to conduct a detailed analysis of the benefits inherent in grandparental caregiving.

BENEFIT FINDING IN GRANDPARENTING

Most things have both advantages and disadvantages. Benefit finding can be widely applied to coping with various types of life stress (Cassidy et al., 2014), including grandparenting stress. What benefits can grandparental caregiving bring to grandparents? The first is to help meet grandparents' needs for relatedness. Self-determination theory holds that the need for relatedness is an inherent basic human need (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The need for relatedness refers to an individual's need to obtain companionship, understanding, acceptance, support, and care from others, as well as to establish emotional connections with others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Grandparental caregiving enables grandparents to fulfill the relatedness needs in two ways. On one hand, grandchildren can provide companionship for grandparents, reducing their sense of loneliness (Coall & Hertwig, 2010). On the other hand, according to the social exchange theory, when grandparents assist their adult children in taking care of grandchildren, they can obtain more rewards from their adult children and grandchildren in future (Coall & Hertwig, 2010; H. Wang et al., 2020). Grandparental caregiving enhances the closeness and intergenerational bonds between grandparents and grandchildren, as well as the sense of identity and closeness of the entire family (Arpino et al., 2018; Shen & Zhang, 2020; Xu et al., 2012). Therefore, grandparents are able to satisfy their relatedness needs with family members through this process.

The second benefit of grandparenting is that it facilitates the better development of the grandchildren, which in turn fulfills the grandparents' need for symbolic immortality through biosocial continuity. Terror management theory posits that humans are aware of the inevitability of their own death, and this awareness generates anxiety and fear of death (Greenberg et al., 1986). This constitutes the most profound form of human anxiety and fear. To mitigate this existential dread, individuals seek ways to transcend their finitude and attain a sense of immortality that transcends physical death (Florian & Mikulincer, 1998; Lifton, 1973). Lifton (1973) introduced the concept of "symbolic immortality," outlining five modes through which this sense of immortality is achieved. Among these, the biosocial mode refers to individuals perpetuating their existence through their descendants, thereby alleviating death anxiety and gaining a sense of eternal life. As grandparents experience declining physical capacities and a heightened awareness of their limited time, their need for this form of symbolic immortality becomes more acute. Caring for their grandchildren allows them to have a tangible experience of life's continuity, fulfilling this profound need for transcendence. We term this benefit the *reproduction-immortality benefit*.

HYPOTHESES

Similar to previous studies (Wepf et al., 2022), when the perceived benefits of grandparenting are low, grandparents' emotional well-being is predominantly shaped by the level of grandparenting stress. Under such conditions, grandparents with high levels of caregiving stress report significantly lower EWB than those with low stress. In contrast, when grandparents perceive their role as highly beneficial—particularly in terms of fulfilling the needs for relatedness

and symbolic immortality through reproduction—they report an increase in positive emotions (e.g., sense of warmth, belonging, meaning) and a decrease in negative emotions such as loneliness, anxiety and fear. As a result, differences in EWB between grandparents facing high versus low levels of grandparenting stress become minimal. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H1: The relatedness benefit finding in grandparenting moderates the relationship between grandparenting stress and emotional well-being, such that the relationship between grandparenting stress and emotional well-being will be weaker when grandparents perceive a higher level of relatedness benefit.

H2: The reproduction-immortality benefit finding in grandparenting moderates the relationship between grandparenting stress and emotional well-being, such that the relationship between grandparenting stress and emotional well-being will be weaker when grandparents perceive a higher level of reproduction-immortality benefit.

METHODS

Procedure

This survey was carried out in the following steps. First, ethical approval was obtained from the Academic Ethics Committee of the university affiliated with the first author before the survey was performed. Second, the questionnaire was uploaded to the Questionnaire Star website, which the most widely used survey website in China. The principles of voluntariness and confidentiality were underlined in the instruction section of the questionnaire. Participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they could discontinue it at any time. They were assured that their responses would be kept confidential. Then they were asked to give informed consent at the beginning of the questionnaire.

Third, undergraduate students enrolled in psychology courses were invited to participate in this survey. Using their personal social networks, they distributed the questionnaire to grandparents currently involved in caring for their grandchildren. This method leveraged the pre-existing acquaintance between distributors and respondents, achieving dual advantages in data quality and collection efficiency. Furthermore, in terms of sample representativeness, this method capitalized on the inherent diversity of college student sample to reach grandparents across different geographical regions and socioeconomic backgrounds more effectively.

Participants

The required sample size was determined using software G*Power 3.1.9.7. The test family was set to *F* tests, and the statistical test was selected as Linear multiple regression: Fixed model, R^2 increase. With an ΔR^2 of 0.02 for the interaction term and an assumed R^2 of 0.4 for all predictors, the effect size f^2 was calculated as $0.02/(1-0.4) = 0.0333$. Given a significance level (α) of .05, a statistical power ($1-\beta$) of 0.80, one tested predictor, and a total of three predictors (including the interaction term), the minimum sample size required for testing the moderating effect was determined to be 238. A total of 93 university students assisted in the survey, resulting in the collection of 244 valid questionnaires. The gender, education attainment, household location, and retirement status of the sample in this study are shown in Table 1, with an age range of 47 to 74 years ($M = 60.3$, $SD = 6.6$).

TABLE 1 Characteristics of the sample.

Variables	<i>N</i>	%
Gender		
Male	88	36.1
Female	156	63.9
Educational attainment		
Primary school education	69	28.3
Junior high school education	68	27.9
Senior high school or secondary technical school education	59	24.2
Associate or bachelor's degree	42	17.2
Master's degree	5	2.0
Doctoral degree	1	0.4
Household location		
Rural areas	71	29.1
Towns	28	11.5
Counties	60	24.6
Urban districts	85	24.8
Retirement status		
Retired	179	73.4
Still employed	65	26.6

Measures

Grandparenting Stress Questionnaire

The 19-item Grandparenting Stress Questionnaire includes four dimensions (Lin et al., 2024): physical health stress (e.g., “Caring for my grandchildren makes me feel physically exhausted”), financial and time strain (e.g., “Raising grandchildren is also a financial burden,” “Caring for my grandchildren leaves me with little time for other activities”), parenting conflicts (e.g., “I experience conflicts with my adult children over the way of raising grandchildren”), and lack of parenting knowledge (e.g., “I worry that my traditional caregiving approaches may not meet my grandchildren’s developmental needs”). Responses are made on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1 point) to *strongly agree* (5 points). A higher score indicates a higher level of stress. The questionnaire demonstrated good internal consistency in this study, with a Cronbach’s α coefficient of 0.911.

Relatedness Benefit Finding Questionnaire in Grandparenting

The Relatedness Benefit Finding Questionnaire in Grandparenting is unidimensional with five items (e.g., “I feel close to my grandchildren”; Lin et al., 2024; Appendix A). Participants were instructed to rate the intensity of the benefits they perceive during the process of raising their grandchildren, with the scoring ranging from *none* (1 point) to *very strongly* (5 points). A higher score indicates a higher level of relatedness benefit finding. Confirmatory factor analysis yielded the following results: $\chi^2/df = 2.19 \leq 5.0$, comparative fit index (CFI) = $0.963 \geq 0.90$, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = $0.958 \geq 0.90$, root mean square error of approximation

(RMSEA) = $0.035 \leq 0.08$, indicating good construct validity. The reliability of the questionnaire in this study was Cronbach's α of 0.844.

Reproduction-Immortality Benefit Finding Questionnaire in Grandparenting

The Reproduction-Immortality Benefit Finding Questionnaire in Grandparenting was adapted from the Biological Mode Subscale of the Symbolic Immortality Questionnaire (Mathews & Mister, 1987), with the term *children* in the original scale replaced by *grandchildren*. It consists of four items, such as "I regard my grandchildren as a continuation of my own life" and "I perceive my grandchildren as a continuation of our family's bloodline" (Appendix B). Participants were instructed to rate the intensity of the benefits they perceive during the process of raising their grandchildren, with the scoring ranging from *none* (1 point) to *very strongly* (5 points). A higher score indicates a higher level of reproduction-immortality benefit finding. Confirmatory factor analysis yielded the following results: $\chi^2/df = 1.26 \leq 5.0$, CFI = $0.979 \geq 0.90$, TLI = $0.973 \geq 0.90$, RMSEA = $0.032 \leq 0.08$, indicating good construct validity. The reliability of the questionnaire in this study was Cronbach's α of 0.855.

Emotional Experience of Well-Being Questionnaire

The 27-item Emotional Experience of Well-Being Questionnaire assesses 14 positive emotions (e.g., sense of meaning, direction, interest, hope, love, warmth, gratitude, satisfaction, belonging, relaxation) and 13 negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, depression, sadness, anger, fear, loneliness) (Chen et al., 2017). Participants rated the frequency of experiencing each emotion over the past year on a 5-point scale ranging from *never* (1 point) to *frequently* (5 point). The questionnaire demonstrated excellent internal consistency in this study, with a Cronbach's α of 0.937. The emotional well-being composite score is calculated by first reverse-scoring the negative emotion items, then summing them with the positive emotion items.

Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlation analyses were conducted using software SPSS 26.0. Hierarchical regression was employed to examine the significance of the moderating effect and the change in coefficient of determination (ΔR^2). Where a significant moderating effect was found, the PROCESS macro 3.4 (Model 1) was applied to determine the range of significance using the Johnson–Neyman technique at a significance level of $\alpha = .05$, and to calculate simple slopes at different values of the moderator (Hayes, 2015). Finally, a simple slope plot was generated to illustrate the interaction effect.

RESULTS

Descriptive analyses

The means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables are presented in Table 2. As can be seen from the table, Chinese grandparents reported a relatively low mean level of grandparenting stress ($M = 2.07$), but with considerable variation (ranging from 1.00 to 4.88). In contrast, the mean scores for relatedness and reproduction-immortality benefit finding were notably high ($M = 3.73$ and 3.67 , respectively), also exhibiting substantial variability (ranging

TABLE 2 Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficient of variables.

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. GS	1			
2. Rel_BFiG	−0.111	1		
3. Rep-I_BFiG	−0.068	.648**	1	
4. EWB	−.415**	.588**	.526**	1
Min	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.15
Max	4.88	5.00	5.00	4.96
<i>M</i>	2.07	3.73	3.67	3.72
<i>SD</i>	0.67	0.99	1.01	0.65

Note: EWB = emotional well-being; GS = grandparenting stress; Rel_BFiG = relatedness benefit finding in grandparenting; Rep-I_BFiG = reproduction-immortality benefit finding in grandparenting.

** $p < .01$.

TABLE 3 Regression analysis of the moderated effect of Rel_BFiG.

Model	Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>F</i>	ΔR^2
Model 1	Constant	2.508	0.428		5.864***	6.458**	0.051
	Gender	−0.024	0.088	−0.018	−0.277		
	Age	0.020	0.006	0.221	3.412**		
Model 2	Constant	2.764	0.344		8.025***	54.353***	0.425
	Gender	−0.052	0.066	−0.038	−0.788		
	Age	0.007	0.005	0.072	1.451		
	GS	−0.334	0.047	−0.341	−7.158***		
	Rel_BFiG	0.356	0.032	0.538	11.180***		
Model 3	Constant	3.523	0.478		7.368***	45.264***	0.011
	Gender	−0.043	0.066	−0.031	−0.646		
	Age	0.007	0.005	0.073	1.482		
	GS	−0.744	0.187	−0.761	−3.981***		
	Rel_BFiG	0.141	0.100	0.213	1.406		
	GS $\times$ Rel_BFiG	0.114	0.050	0.512	2.267*		

Note: GS = grandparenting stress; Rel_BFiG = relatedness benefit finding in grandparenting.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

from 1.00 to 5.00). Additionally, grandparenting stress was not significantly correlated with either form of benefit finding, while all other variables showed significant intercorrelations.

Analysis of moderating effects

Moderating effect of relatedness benefit finding

A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted with grandparenting stress as the predictor, relatedness benefit finding as the moderator, and EWB as the outcome variable. As shown in Table 3, the interaction term between grandparenting stress and relatedness benefit finding was significant ($t = 2.267$, $p < 0.05$), indicating a significant moderating effect. The effect size of

ΔR^2 was 0.011. The Johnson–Neyman technique indicated that the moderating effect of relatedness benefit finding was statistically significant across its entire observed range [1.00, 5.00].

A simple slope analysis was conducted. When relatedness benefit finding was at a low level ($M - 1 SD$), grandparenting stress had a significant negative predictive effect on emotional well-being, with a larger effect size (simple slope = -0.431 , $p < .001$). In contrast, when relatedness benefit finding was at a high level ($M + 1 SD$), grandparenting stress still showed a significant negative predictive effect on emotional well-being, but with a smaller effect size (simple slope = -0.205 , $p < .01$). Finally, a moderating effect plot was generated based on values at $\pm 1 SD$ for both grandparenting stress and relatedness benefit finding (Figure 1).

Moderating effect of reproduction-immortality benefit finding

A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted with grandparenting stress as the predictor, reproduction-immortality benefit finding as the moderator, and emotional well-being as the outcome variable. As shown in Table 4, the interaction term between grandparenting stress and reproduction-immortality benefit finding was significant ($t = 3.353$, $p < .01$), indicating a significant moderating effect with an effect size of $\Delta R^2 = 0.026$. The Johnson–Neyman technique showed that the critical value for the moderator was 4.964. The moderating effect of reproduction-immortality benefit finding was statistically significant across the interval [1.00, 4.964] ($p < .05$).

A simple slope analysis was conducted. When reproduction-immortality benefit finding was at a low level ($M - 1 SD$), grandparenting stress demonstrated a significant negative predictive effect on emotional well-being (simple slope = -0.506 , $p < .001$). However, when reproduction-immortality benefit finding was at its maximum value (5.00), the predictive effect of grandparenting stress on emotional well-being was no longer significant (simple slope = -0.149 , $p = .051$).

Finally, a moderating effect plot was generated (Figure 2). grandparenting stress was set to values at $\pm 1 SD$ from the mean. The low level of reproduction-immortality benefit finding was set at $-1 SD$, and the high level was set at the observed maximum of 5.00. This maximum value was selected because it exceeded the point of $+1 SD$ and fell outside the statistically significant range. These values were then substituted into the regression equation to produce the moderating effect plot.

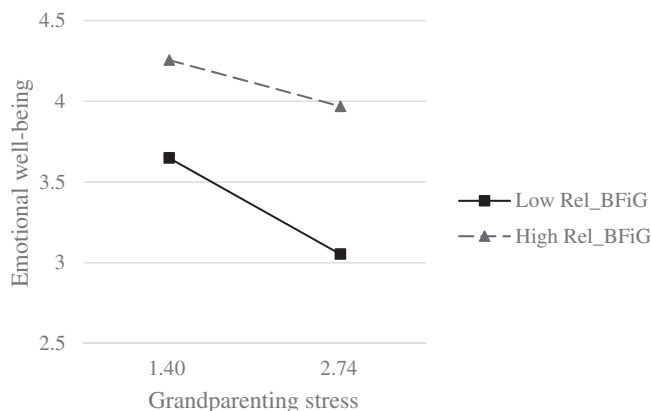


FIGURE 1 Interaction between GS and Rel_BFiG on EWB. EWB = emotional well-being; GS = grandparenting stress; Rel_BFiG = relatedness benefit finding in grandparenting. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

TABLE 4 Regression analysis of the moderated effect of Rep-I_BFiG.

Model	Variables	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>F</i>	ΔR^2
Model 1	Constant	2.508	0.428		5.864***	6.458**	0.051
	Gender	−0.024	0.088	−0.018	−0.277		
	Age	0.020	0.006	0.221	3.412**		
Model 2	Constant	2.951	0.359		8.226***	44.271***	0.375
	Gender	−0.010	0.069	−0.007	−0.147		
	Age	0.006	0.005	0.069	1.327		
	GS	−0.364	0.049	−0.372	−7.483***		
	Rep-I_BFiG	0.313	0.033	0.485	9.635***		
Model 3	Constant	3.988	0.468		8.52***	39.183***	0.026
	Gender	−0.002	0.068	−0.002	−0.033		
	Age	0.006	0.005	0.069	1.355		
	GS	−0.912	0.170	−0.932	−5.356***		
	Rep-I_BFiG	0.022	0.092	0.034	0.240		
	GS × Rep-I_BFiG	0.153	0.046	0.713	3.353**		

Note: GS = grandparenting stress; Rep-I_BFiG = reproduction-immortality benefit finding in grandparenting.

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .001$.

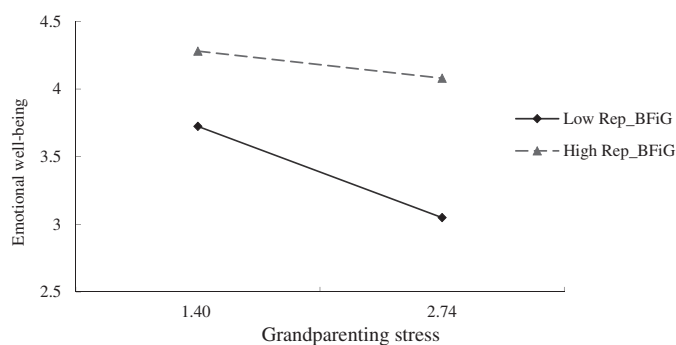


FIGURE 2 Interaction between GS and Rep-I_BFiG on EWB. EWB = emotional well-being; GS = grandparenting stress; Rep-I_BFiG = reproduction-immortality benefit finding in grandparenting. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

DISCUSSION

GS, benefit finding and EWB

The findings of this study indicated that Chinese grandparents report a relatively low mean level of grandparenting stress (Table 1), which was consistent with previous research (Guo et al., 2024; Y.-Q. Wang et al., 2025). This phenomenon can be interpreted from the following perspectives. First, since the implementation of China's family planning policy, the concept of "fewer but better births" has been widely embraced, contributing to a smaller number of grandchildren in the average family. Second, with China's economic development, many families have experienced improved financial conditions, thereby reducing the economic pressure perceived by grandparents in the process of caring for their grandchildren. Third, advancements in both the economy and the health care system have contributed to better physical health

among the population. As a result, many grandparents maintain good physical condition even at advanced ages, which helps minimize caregiving stress related to health concerns.

The overall level of grandparenting stress among Chinese grandparents is relatively low, yet it exhibits a wide range of variation (ranging from 1.00 to 4.88; Table 1). This may be related to substantial differences across different families. These differences include both the physical and mental health status of the grandchildren, as well as the grandparents' education level, age, and physical health, along with varying family economic conditions, family structures, and family relationships.

The findings of this study revealed a high mean level of relatedness benefit finding in Chinese grandparents (Table 1), which was in line with prior research (Lin et al., 2024). This result further validates that China, as a collectivist culture, places strong emphasis on mutual support and care among family members. Many grandparents diligently care for their grandchildren and, in the process, greatly enjoy the intimate relationships and familial harmony derived from these intergenerational interactions. Additionally, the mean score for reproduction-immortality benefit finding was also notably high. This suggests that although such existential motivations are seldom explicitly discussed in daily life, the pursuit of symbolic immortality through lineage represents a profound intrinsic need and serves as a significant internal driving force for grandparents.

There was a significant negative correlation between grandparenting stress and emotional well-being (Table 1). This is consistent with the findings of previous studies (Guo et al., 2024; Sprang et al., 2015). Grandparents face multiple stressors in the process of caring for their grandchildren, such as health-related stress, financial burdens, parenting conflicts, and reduced personal leisure time. These stressors weaken their positive emotional experiences, exacerbate negative emotions, and thus reduce their level of emotional well-being.

The main objective of this study was to examine the moderating role of benefit finding in grandparenting in the relationship between grandparenting stress and EWB. The moderating effect analysis showed that relatedness benefit finding significant the moderated effect of grandparenting stress on emotional well-being (Table 2), supporting H1. Similarly, a significant moderating effect was found for reproduction-immortality benefit finding (Table 3), confirming H2. The interaction way of the two moderation models (Figures 1 and 2) was similar to previous research (Wepf et al., 2022). Both models demonstrated that benefit finding—in both relatedness and reproduction-immortality forms—effectively buffered the negative association between grandparenting stress and emotional well-being. Under conditions of low benefit finding, high grandparenting stress was associated with a significant reduction in emotional well-being. In contrast, under conditions of high benefit finding, grandparents were able to maintain relatively high levels of emotional well-being even under considerable stress.

Furthermore, the moderating effect size of reproduction-immortality benefit finding was larger than that of relatedness benefit finding (Tables 3 and 4). This difference can be interpreted from two perspectives. On one hand, although caring for grandchildren can fulfill grandparents' relatedness needs (Shen & Zhang, 2020), it may also generate interpersonal conflicts that undermine the satisfaction of the very needs (Sprang et al., 2015). Consequently, relatedness need fulfillment represents a relatively unstable form of benefit for grandparents. In contrast, the sense of life continuation and fulfillment of immortality needs constitutes a more profound and stable form of benefit. Therefore, reproduction-immortality benefit finding serves as a more effective buffer in the relationship between grandparenting stress and emotional well-being. It is to satisfy this intrinsic need for intergenerational continuity that some grandparents choose to assist in caring for their grandchildren, even when facing personal health challenges or poor relationships with their adult children.

Highlights

This study yielded the following highlights. First, unlike previous benefit-finding research, which has largely relied on the general benefit finding scale designed for disease contexts and thus overlooked context-specific benefits, this study distinguishes between relatedness and reproduction-immortality benefits, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of the unique benefits of grandparenting. Second, our findings reveal that both relatedness and reproduction-immortality benefit finding serve as significant moderators in the relationship between grandparenting stress and emotional well-being, with the moderating effect of reproduction-immortality benefit finding being stronger than that of related benefit finding. These aspects represent novel contributions that have not been previously explored in the literature.

Practical implications

This study holds significant practical implications for improving the mental health of grandparents. While Chinese grandparents generally report low levels of grandparenting stress, substantial individual differences exist. For those experiencing elevated stress, the following strategies can be implemented to enhance their mental health.

First, a systematic assessment can be conducted to identify the sources of stress for grandparents, followed by targeted interventions accordingly. For example, grandparents under significant physical health pressure may be provided with rehabilitation support and health management guidance, while those experiencing conflicts in parenting beliefs or inter-generational communication issues could receive family communication counseling and conflict mediation. This problem-oriented strategy helps alleviate their stress from the root causes.

Second, grandparents should be guided to explore the positive meanings gained in the process of caring for their grandchildren. Existing intervention programs mostly adopt a nondirective approach (Cheng et al., 2014), allowing participants to freely list the benefits of caregiving. This method may result in insufficient awareness and expression of the benefits of grandparenting for some grandparents. Based on the findings of this study, practitioners can assist grandparents in more consciously identifying two types of benefits: the relatedness benefit, including deepened emotional bonds with grandchildren and enhanced family cohesion, and the reproduction-immortality benefit, involving the continuation of lineage and the transmission of values. This systematic and in-depth exploration of benefits enhances grandparents' sense of meaning and subjective well-being in the parenting process and more effectively mitigates the negative impact of stress on their mental health.

In summary, by combining the dual-path approach of "targeted stress source alleviation" and "structured benefit exploration," it is possible to establish a multilayered and actionable support framework for enhancing the emotional well-being of grandparents.

Limitations and future directions

Despite its contributions, some limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design employed here is inherently correlational in nature and cannot establish strict causal relationships. Future research could adopt longitudinal designs and utilize longitudinal moderation models to strengthen the validity of causal inferences. Second, the study sample was drawn exclusively from China. It is well established that China embodies a collectivist culture emphasizing mutual support and care among family members, whereas Western societies are predominantly characterized by individualistic cultures that prioritize personal

autonomy. Key questions remain regarding potential differences between Chinese and Western grandparents in levels of grandparenting stress, relatedness, and reproduction-immortality benefit finding and the moderating effects of such benefits findings. Future studies should address these questions through cross-cultural comparisons.

Conclusion

The benefits of grandparenting encompass both relatedness and reproduction-immortality aspects. Both benefits finding serve as moderators in the relationship between grandparenting stress and emotional well-being. High levels of benefit finding contribute to enhancing grandparents' positive emotions and alleviating negative emotions, thereby enabling them to maintain relatively high emotional well-being even under significant stress. The moderating effect size of reproduction-immortality benefit finding is larger than that of relatedness benefit finding. Grandparents can enhance their mental health by finding the benefits of caring for their grandchildren.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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APPENDIX A: The Relatedness Benefit Finding Questionnaire in Grandparenting

When you are raising your grandchildren, have you experienced any of the following benefits? If yes, please describe the intensity of such benefits.

1. I have a close bond with my grandchildren.

A. None	B. Somewhat	C. Neutral	D. Somewhat strongly	E. Very strongly
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2. My grandchildren make me feel loved.

A. None	B. Somewhat	C. Neutral	D. Somewhat strongly	E. Very strongly
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3. Since taking on the responsibility of raising grandchildren, the bonds within my family have grown more intimate.

A. None	B. Somewhat	C. Neutral	D. Somewhat strongly	E. Very strongly
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4 Caring for my grandchildren has reduced my sense of loneliness.

A. None	B. Somewhat	C. Neutral	D. Somewhat strongly	E. Very strongly
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5. Since raising my grandchildren, my relationship with my adult children has become more harmonious.

A. None	B. Somewhat	C. Neutral	D. Somewhat strongly	E. Very strongly
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APPENDIX B: The Reproduction-Immortality Benefit Finding Questionnaire in Grandparenting

When you are raising your grandchildren, have you experienced any of the following benefits? If yes, please describe the intensity of such benefits.

1. I regard my grandchildren as a continuation of my own life.

A. None	B. Somewhat	C. Neutral	D. Somewhat strongly	E. Very strongly
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2. My beliefs, values and attitudes can be passed on to my grandchildren.

A. None	B. Somewhat	C. Neutral	D. Somewhat strongly	E. Very strongly
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3. I perceive my grandchildren as a continuation of our family's bloodline.

A. None	B. Somewhat	C. Neutral	D. Somewhat strongly	E. Very strongly
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4. I believe that my grandchildren will still remember me even after I am gone.

A. None	B. Somewhat	C. Neutral	D. Somewhat strongly	E. Very strongly
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