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Silver sitters: grandparents clock up the hours to help plug summer holiday childcare gap

- **A fifth of UK's parents taking more than two weeks off work to cope with childcare**
- **Almost half of parents consider asking grandma and grandpa to move in**
- **One in 10 grandparents help with childcare on daily basis**
- **One in four (23%) of grandparents feel pressured to look after grandkids**

While the end of the school year can't come fast enough for some youngsters, a third of the UK's parents will be forced to take seven days or more off work this summer to take care of the kids, new research from Halifax has revealed.

A fifth (19%) of parents will need to take at least two weeks off work to cover childcare gaps, with many relying on grandparents to step in. Nearly half of children (44%) have even considered asking their parents to move in with them.

This may not come as such a surprise to some as just under a third (31%) of grandparents already look after their grandchildren every week and almost one in 10 (9%) on a daily basis.

Across the country, parents in Northern Ireland are the hardest hit during the holidays, having to take 12.1 days off over the summer break to look after their children, compared to the UK average of 5.6 days. Meanwhile when it comes to having grandparents as house guests to ease the pressure, two thirds of Londoners have considered sharing their home with their parents, compared to only in 20 Scots mums and dads (5%).

In reality though, only 2% of grandparents currently live with their children, although this doubles to 4% for Londoners.

Retirement commute

Grandmas and grandpas are also clocking up the miles to provide valuable childcare cover – commuting for an average on 2 hours 46 minutes each round trip, with those who provide weekly cover racking up nearly 143 hours a year.

The majority of grandparents (55%) live within 30 minutes of their children, while more than one in 10 (17%) are more than two hours away. Grandparents in Wales and Northern Ireland have the longest average travel times of 3 hours and 50 minutes and 3 hours 44 minutes respectively for each round trip, while those in London have the shortest journey, at just under two hours.

Andy Bickers, Mortgages Director, Halifax, said: “The school summer holidays mean parents often need extra childcare to cover the long break, and more than one in five parents will need to take at least two weeks off work due to a lack of childcare support.

“Grandparents are playing a vital role in supporting their own kids with childcare, and with many travelling nearly three hours a week to look after their grandchildren or moving house to be

closer, it's not surprising that many parents have considered asking grandma and grandpa to move in."

Making the move to be closer to family

Moving closer to their family is a priority for more than one in 10 (11%) grandparents, however this drops to 6% where a move is specifically to help with looking after grandchildren. Welsh grandparents are most likely to move to be closer to their offspring (20%), while more grandparents from the South East (13%) than any other region have already moved house to be nearer to their children and grandchildren.

On the other hand, more than one in 10 (17%) grandparents want to keep their current home so they have plenty of space for family visits.

Downsizing is still a popular trend among grandparents with an empty nest, with more than one in five (21%) having already downsized and a further fifth considering moving to a smaller property. These options appeal most to grandparents in the North East and Wales (both 55%).

The study revealed that pestering power isn't only for younger children – as two-thirds of parents (67%) admit to putting their parents under pressure to help look after their grandchildren.

Grandparents also feel some strain, as almost half (47%) admit their children take it for granted that they'll help out with childcare. Grandparents in London feel the most taken for granted (56%), followed by those in Scotland (54%) and Yorkshire (52%).

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Editors' Notes:

The research was conducted online by Research without Barriers (RWB), polling 1,009 grandparents of children aged 15 and under and 1,000 parents of children aged 15 and under between 22 and 26 June 2018.