The Speaker: Dr David Coall completed his PhD in the School of Anatomy and Human Biology at the University of Western Australia and his Postdoctoral Research Fellowship in the Centre for Cognitive and Decision Sciences at The University of Basel, Switzerland. After returning to UWA as a Research Fellow in the School of Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences, David moved to his current position of Senior Lecturer in The School of Medical Sciences at Edith Cowan University. He has authored 20 publications across the fields of evolutionary anthropology, paediatrics, cognitive science, mental health, and maternal and child health. He is especially interested in applying evolutionary theory to understand variation in human health and disease with a particular focus on intergenerational effects. The childhood psychosocial environment, intergenerational relationships and reproductive timing are central to his work examining the impact the early environment has on growth, development, reproduction and health and exploring the influence grandparents have in the lives of their grandchildren.

The Seminar: Across human societies, grandparents and elders more generally are respected and valued contributors to the health of their families and communities. Surprisingly, scientists have only recently begun to examine the influence grandparents have in the lives of grandchildren. The field is in its infancy; however, evidence is gathering that grandparents have a positive impact on the development of grandchildren in contemporary industrialised societies. Therefore, it makes sense that researchers from disciplines as diverse as sociology and evolutionary biology are attempting to answer the question: why do grandparents invest in their grandchildren? Currently, a strong influence on the answer is the discipline the study was conducted in. To try and integrate this work, this paper presents an interdisciplinary perspective on grandparental investment. Data from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe will be used to examine factors that predict whether grandparents do or do not help care for their grandchildren. At the population level it is not surprising that a myriad of factors including age of grandchildren, distance to grandchildren, biological relatedness, and the sex and lineage of the grandparents among other economic, sociological, and psychological factors, influenced grandparental investment. The practical application of this perspective shows that similar themes are emerging in a qualitative Western Australian study examining the complexities of everyday life for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren.