

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Teaching Module

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Introduction

Gero Social Work Practice Competencies Addressed

Aging Competencies:

* Assess and address values and biases regarding aging
* Respect and promote older adult clients’ right to dignity and self-determination
* Apply ethical principles to decisions on behalf of all older clients with special attention to those who have limited decisional capacity
* Identify issues related to losses, changes, and transitions over the life cycle in designing interventions
* Identify the availability of resources and resource systems for older adults and their families
* Advocate with and for older adults and their families for building age-friendly community capacity and enhancing the contribution of older persons
* Promote use of research (including evidence-based practice) to evaluate and enhance the effectiveness of social work practice and aging-related services

Objectives

* Use a life course perspective to understand the experience of custodial grandparenting
* Identify the various pathways through which grandchildren enter into the care of their grandparents
* Identify evidence-based practices and resources that support grandparents within their caregiving role
* Analyze policies that promote or challenge effectiveness of care provision by custodial grandparents
* Assess sources of both stress and reward within this caregiving situation

Summary

While grandparents are involved in the lives of their grandchildren in a variety of ways, about 2.7 million of them are the primary care provider for their grandchildren (Ellis & Simmons, 2014). Grandparent caregiving is not a new phenomenon, as kincaring has historically been a part of family life. In her Pulitzer Prize winning book, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, Isabel Wilkerson (2010) documents the great migration of African Americans from the South to other regions of the U.S. Between WWI and the 1970s, over six million individuals and families left the South for other parts of the country to seek a better quality of life. During this time, grandparents and other relatives served as substitute caregivers as families resettled in other areas**.**

Since the mid-1990s, however, the reasons for custodial grandparenting have changed. The reasons for care provision started to reflect some of the challenging social conditions of this period. These included increased drug rates, especially for women, incarceration rates for women, and abuse and neglect.

Much of the research on grandparent caregiving has focused on the health and well-being of these care providers. Compared with non-caregiving peers, grandparents who are raising grandchildren experience greater health care problems and participate in lower health promoting activities (c.f., Kelley, Whitley, & Campos, 2013; Neely-Barnes, Graff, & Washington, 2010). In recent years, numerous support programs have been implemented to assist and empower these caregivers to be effective in their care provision role (Kolomer, 2009).

Resources include:

* Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Contemporary Life in Grandparent Headed Families Lecture: [http://www.cswe.org/File.aspx?id=83636](http://www.cswe.org/File.aspx?id=83636%20)
* Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Bibliography: [http://www.cswe.org/File.aspx?id=22868](http://www.cswe.org/File.aspx?id=22868%20)
* Web-based resource list of academic research centers focusing on grandparents raising grandchildren
* Web-based resource list of centers, organizations, advocacy groups, and general resources to support grandparents raising grandchildren and social workers working this population
* Three types of case studies to help students to individualize family situations, select appropriate intervention strategies, and identify associated policy issues related to grandparents raising grandchildren
* Multimedia Class Activities

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Bibliography

This bibliography is meant to serve as a resource to instructors who wish to add readings to their syllabi. The list is not exhaustive.

Backhouse, J., & Graham, A. (2012). Grandparents raising grandchildren: Negotiating the complexities of role-identity conflict. *Child & Family Social Work, 17*(3), 306-315.

This qualitative study sought to better understand the experiences of custodial grandparents in New South Wales, Australia. Researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 34 grandparents and used paradigmatic analysis to find emerging themes. The authors make use of identity theory in their discussion of the results. Paradoxes emerged in experiences: pain/pleasure, myth/reality, inclusion/exclusion, deserving/undeserving, voiced/silenced, and visible/invisible. The findings suggest a significant role-conflict among grandparents.

Bailey, S. J., Haynes, D. C., & Letiecq, B. L. (2013). How can you retire when you still got a kid in school?: Economics of raising grandchildren in rural areas. *Marriage & Family Review, 49*(8), 671-693.

This study used a framework of family financial well-being to assess the economic consequences of raising grandchildren in rural areas. Interviews were conducted with 26 grandfamilies in Montana. These interviews explored challenges of generating income, variability in income, and the expected and unexpected costs associated with raising grandchildren.

Bigbee, J. L., Musil, C., Kenski, D. (2011). The health of caregiving grandmothers: A rural-urban comparison. *The Journal of Rural Health, 27*(3), 289-296.

This study compared characteristics and physical and mental health among rural and urban caregiving grandmothers. Secondary data was used from the first wave of a longitudinal study of 485 grandmothers in Ohio (97 rural, 388 urban). Rural and urban grandmothers were similar in age, education level, and employment status, but more white grandmothers were rural (90%) than urban (60%). There were no significant differences in physical or mental health between rural and urban grandmothers. However, rural primary caregivers had lower levels of mental health compared to other groups.

Burnette, D. (1999). Custodial grandparents in Latino families: Patterns of service use and predictors of unmet needs. *Social Work, 44*(1), 22-34.

This study analyzed patterns of service use and predictors of need among Latino grandparent caregivers. Participants included 74 grandparents in New York City who were primarily unmarried, middle-aged, and older women who spoke Spanish and had low levels of education and income. Most participants were connected to social services, but reported high levels of unmet need. Barriers included lack of knowledge and predictors include low education, poor health, high levels of stress, and lack of assistance with child care. Authors explore implications for practice and policy.

Burnette, D. (1999). Physical and emotional well-being of custodial grandparents in Latino families. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 69*(3), 305-318.

In this study, 74 Latino grandparents in New York City, physical and emotional well-being measures were explored. Their poverty rate was found to be three times that of grandparents across the nation and the rates of depression and poor health were twice as high. Factors associated with depression included young age, life stress, lack of supports, and caring for children with special needs.

Burnette, D. (2000). Latino grandparents rearing grandchildren with special needs: Effects on depressive symptomatology. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work, 33*(3), 1-16.

This article explores depression among Latino grandparents in New York caring for children with special needs. Almost half of the participants reported depression levels above the clinical threshold on the Geriatric Depression Scale, and rates were significantly different from those among grandparents not caring for children with special needs. These differences remain when risk and protective factors are held constant.

Byers, L. (2010). Native American grandmothers: Cultural tradition and contemporary necessity. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work, 19*(4), 305–316.

The experiences of Native American grandmothers caring for younger children were the subject of this study. Native American grandmothers raise grandchildren at higher rates than any other ethnic minority. The authors focus on Oklahoma as a case study because of its high proportion of Native American families and high proportion of caregiving grandparents. This article focuses on the resilience and strength of multigenerational families with grandmother household heads.

Carr, G. F., Hayslip, B. Jr., & Gray, J. (2012). The role of caregiver burden in understanding African American custodial grandmothers. *Geriatric Nursing, 33*(4), 366-374.

African American grandmothers who raise their grandchildren often experience burden and health issues related to their caregiving duties. This study assessed burden among 93 African American grandmothers recruited from churches and community centers. Multiple regression analyses were used to examine associations among variables. Results indicated that burden predicts needs for information, services, and physical health outcomes, but not mental health.

Chen, F., & Liu, G. (2012). The health implications of grandparents caring for grandchildren in China. *Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences, 67B*(1), 99-112.

This study examined the influence of caring for grandchildren on grandparents’ health trajectories in China. Data is from the China Health and Nutrition Survey (waves from 1991, 1993, 1997, 2000, 2004, and 2006). Growth curve models were used to assess the effect of living arrangements and intensity of caregiving on grandparents’ health trajectories. Findings suggest that grandparents living in a skipped-generation house do not show deficits in self-reported health, particularly if they have a relatively high income. Those living in three-generation households show a slightly steeper decline in health than those who live independently. High intensity care accelerates decline for those co-residing with grandchildren.

Conway, F., Jones, S., & Speakes-Lewis, A. (2011). Emotional strain in caregiving among African American grandmothers raising their grandchildren. *Journal of Women & Aging, 23*(2), 113-128.

African Americans are disproportionately represented among grandparents raising grandchildren. In this study the researchers used Role Strain Theory and Socioemotional Selectivity Theory to examine how grandmothers experience strain and caregiving. The sample included 85 African American custodial grandmothers 33 to 88 years old who completed demographic questionnaires, and scales of Role Demand, Emotional Strain, Caregiving Strain Index, and Level of Care. Findings indicate that older grandmothers experience less emotional and caregiving strain than younger grandmothers do and that married grandmothers experience less strain than single grandmothers do.

Cox, C. B. (2002). Empowering African American custodial grandparents. *Social Work, 47*(1), 45-54.

Because of the increasing proportion of grandparents raising grandchildren, literature has focused on providing relevant services to these families without considering their strengths and resiliency. Empowerment training can build on a family’s existing strengths and enable them to produce their own problem-solving skills. These empowered families can also empower their own communities. The empowerment training described in this paper was designed for a group of African American grandparents and promotes developing participants into community peer educators.

Cross, S. L., Day, A. G., & Byers, L. G. (2010). American Indian grand families: A qualitative study conducted with grandmothers and grandfathers who provide sole care for their grandchildren. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology, 25*(4), 371-383.

This qualitative study explored the rationale for American Indian custodial grandparents, the impact of historical trauma, and the value of American Indian Child Welfare policies in addressing care concerns. Tribal community members assisted in recruiting participants. Thirty-one grandparents (29 grandmothers, 2 grandfathers) in Michigan participated in individual interviews. Findings revealed reasons for providing sole care of grandchildren, stressors and rewards of providing care, decisions affected by historical trauma, preference to seek assistance from Tribal Nations, and that most lacked legal custodial status.

Day, S. E., & Bazemore, G. (2011). Two generations at risk: Child welfare, institutional boundaries, and family violence in grandparent homes. *Child Welfare, 90*(4), 99-116.

For children in the welfare system or from abusive homes, the assistance of custodial grandparents often results in better outcomes. This study explored the risk of adolescent-perpetrated violence in the homes of custodial grandparents. Data is from the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice. Results suggested that living with a custodial grandparent has a significant but differential effect on rates of violent offending for chronic and serious offenders by race and gender.

Engstrom, M. (2008). Involving caregiving grandmothers in family interventions when mothers with substance use problems are incarcerated. *Family Process, 47,* 357-371.

The disproportionate incarceration of women of color often intersects with women’s substance abuse issues and results in grandmothers caring for the children of incarcerated mothers. This paper considers the potential for involving grandmothers more directly in service provision in the case of children with mothers in prison. This complicated circumstance includes increased stress due to the substance abuse issues of the mother, the complex needs of the children, relational dynamics, and issues related to poverty. All three generations must be considered when developing and offering services to families with incarcerated mothers.

Fruhauf, C., & Hayslip, B. J. (2013). Understanding collaborative efforts to assist grandparent caregivers: A multileveled perspective. *Journal of Family Social Work*, *16*(5), 382-391

Grandparent caregivers often experience increased stress and strain as a result of raising grandchildren. Although specific interventions involving support groups, mental health counseling, educational programming, and respite care can be useful in supporting grandparents, collaborative efforts toward building partnerships among the community, service providers and grandparents have even greater potential to assist grandparent caregivers in meeting their needs. Using the ecological perspective as a guiding framework, the authors discuss contemporary programs while highlighting strategies to support grandparents raising grandchildren.

Fruhauf, C. A., Pevney, B., & Bundy-Fazioli, K. (2015). The needs and use of programs by service providers working with grandparents raising grandchildren. *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, *34*(2), 138-157.

Grandparents who raise grandchildren often need support services. Yet, little is known about what service providers need in order to better serve grandparents. In this study, qualitative methods were used to understand service providers’ (N=16) views about programs and services they use when assisting grandparents raising grandchildren. Participants fully supported funding for the Kinship Care System Navigator position and discussed the importance of community providers sharing a common voice and working together. It is important that professionals who serve grandparent caregivers are knowledgeable and willing to collaborate with other providers to meet grandparents’ needs.

Fuller-Thomson, E., Serbinski, S., & McCormack, L. (2014). The rewards of caring for grandchildren: Black Canadian grandmothers who are custodial parents, co-parents, and extensive babysitters. *GrandFamilies: The Contemporary Journal of Research, Practice and Policy*, *1*(1), 2.

This grounded theory qualitative study of 16 Black Caribbean Canadian grandmothers sought to address the rewards and challenges of raising grandchildren. The authorities examined three types of grandparent caregivers: custodial grandparents (n=7), co-parent grandparents (n=5), and extensive babysitters (n=4). The three types of caregiving grandparents reported substantial similarities in their perceptions of the rewards of caregiving. Results reveal five main themes: (1) Grandmothers’ responsibilities and pride of care giving; (2) Grandmothers keeping the family close together and safe; (3) Mutual respect between grandmothers and grandchildren; (4) Caregiving provides grandmothers with a sense of purpose; and (5) Grandchildren are fun! Implications of these findings in light of Erikson’s concept of generativity are discussed.

Goodman, C. C., Potts, M., Pasztor, E. M., & Scorzo, D. (2004). Grandmothers as kinship caregivers: Private arrangements compared to public child welfare oversight. *Children & Youth Services Review*, *26*, 287–305.

This study surveyed 373 grandmothers providing full-time care for their grandchildren and 208 grandmothers who had been awarded custody of their grandchildren by the child welfare system. Publicly sponsored kinship caregivers were much more likely to provide care due to a parental drug abuse issue or child neglect. However, private caregivers had provided care for a longer period and were more likely to share decision-making responsibilities with the children’s parents. These findings imply that the child welfare system primarily serves children where parental drug abuse is a concern.

Greene, R. R., & Kropf, N.P. (2014). *Caregiving and caresharing: A life course perspective.* Silver Spring, MD: NASW Press.

This book offers a model for assessment and intervention for various caregiving situations using a life course perspective. In the chapter on custodial grandparents, the model is used to explore the stresses, challenges, and rewards of care provision. Through a case example, the model is used to examine the lived experience of a grandparent caregiver.

Hadfield, J. C. (2014). The health of grandparents raising grandchildren. *Journal of Gerontological Nursing*, *40*(4), 32-42.

This article summarizes the literature as related to the psychological and/or physical health of grandparents raising grandchildren. A review of 19 articles from the past 10 years showed that the literature consistently verifies the health risks, especially depression, for grandparents raising grandchildren.

Hayslip, B., Herrington, R. S., Glover, R. J., & Pollard, S. E. (2013). Assessing attitudes toward grandparents raising their grandchildren. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, *11*(4), 356-379.

This article describes the assessment of attitudes toward grandparent caregivers held by noncaregiving grandparents. Six hundred two grandparents not currently caring for grandchildren completed an 18-item measure of such attitudes. Attitudes were more positive for grandparents reporting previous experience caring for a grandchild, and such attitudes were in part predicted by one's attitudes toward the current grandparent role. Being able to assess and understand attitudes toward custodial grandparents can contribute to the reduction of biases about them and may influence grandparents' future willingness to assume the caregiving role.

Hayslip, B., & Kaminski, P. (2005). Grandparents raising their grandchildren. In R. K. Caputo (Ed.), *Challenges of aging in U.S. families: Policy and practice implications* (pp. 147-169).. Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Press.

Intergenerational families living together have become more common. This article explores the existing knowledge about grandparents raising grandchildren, including the diversity of caregivers, the importance of social support, theoretical perspectives, and interventions with grandparent caregivers. The authors explore the implications of this knowledge for future service provision and caregiving practices.

Henderson, T. L., Dinh, M., Morgan, K., & Lewis, J. (2015). Alaska Native grandparents rearing grandchildren a rural community story. *Journal of Family Issues*, Published online before print, July 26, 2015.

This community-based participatory research study with four tiers of governance and grounded theory methods examined the lives of Alaska Native grandparents rearing grandchildren in a rural community. Culture, values, and traditions inspire the unique reasons grandparents cared for their grandchildren. Values and common concerns of all grandparents help shape the challenges of grandparenthood. Pride and joy, the value of love, and traditional ways of living underpin the joys of Alaska Native grandparents rearing their grandchildren.

Keene, J. R., Prokos, A. H., & Held, B. (2012). Grandfather caregivers: Race and ethnic differences in poverty. *Sociological Inquiry, 82*(1), 49-77.

This study used data from the 2006 American Community Survey to examine differences by race and ethnicity in effects of marital status and co-residence of the parent generation on the likelihood of poverty among grandfathers caring for their co-resident grandchildren (n=3,379). Results suggest that race/ethnicity and household composition are predictors of poverty for grandfathers. Non-Hispanic white grandfathers, those who are married, and those who co-reside with the parent generation are the least likely to experience poverty. However, the effects of race/ethnicity, marital status, and the co-residence of parents interact with each other.

Kelch-Oliver, K. (2008). African American grandparent caregivers: Stresses and implications for counselors. *Family Journal*, *16*(1), 43–50.

The prevalence of grandparents providing full-time care to their grandchildren is increasing. However, single African American grandparents living in urban, low-income areas are overrepresented in intergenerational households. This article explores the experiences and stressors facing African American grandparents caring for grandchildren, including a general description of this group, how these families are formed, and a review of the current relevant literature.

Kelley, S. J., Whitley, D. M., & Campos, P. E. (2010). Grandmothers raising grandchildren: Results of an intervention to improve health outcomes. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship, 42*(4), 379-386.

This longitudinal study used a pretest-posttest design to evaluate the effectiveness of an intervention to improve the health of grandmothers raising grandchildren. The sample included 529 female caregivers aged 38 to 83, with a mean age of 56.7 years, who were predominantly low-income African Americans women. Data were collected before the intervention and 12 months after the intervention was completed. Researchers assessed physical and mental health outcomes. Findings suggest that grandmothers raising grandchildren may benefit from a home-based intervention to improve health outcomes. Implications for policy and practice are discussed.

Kelley, S. J., Whitley, D. M., & Campos, P. E. (2013). Psychological distress in African American grandmothers raising grandchildren: The contribution of child behavior problems, physical health, and family resources. *Research in Nursing & Health, 36*(40), 373-385.

This study examined psychological distress levels and their predictors among 480 African American grandmothers caring for their grandchildren. Nearly 40% of participants had clinically elevated scores for psychological distress. Internalizing and externalizing child behavior problems, poor grandmother physical health, younger grandmother, and lack of resources were factors that predicted psychological distress.

Kolomer, S. R., McCallion, P., & Janicki, M. P. (2002). African-American grandmother carers of children with disabilities: Predictors of depressive symptoms. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work, 37*(3/4),45-63.

It is estimated that one in ten grandparents will assume primary responsibility of raising a grandchild for at least six months before the child turns 18. This article reviews literature discussing African American grandparents providing kinship care, including elevated stressors and depressive symptoms, particularly among those caring for children with disabilities. This study also assessed predictors of depression among 145 African American grandmothers of children with developmental disabilities. Predictors of elevated depressive symptoms included being younger than 60, not working outside the home, not being married, and having no education beyond secondary school.

Kropf, N. P., & Robinson, M. M. (2004). Pathways into caregiving for rural custodial grandparents. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships, 2*(1), 63-77.

It is estimated that approximately 25% of custodial grandparents live in rural areas. However, little research has focused on rural areas. This qualitative study explored the pathways into custodial care among grandparents living in rural areas. Three major pathways were defined: *co-residential,* where parents and grandparents lived together and raised children together; *incremental,* where grandparents gradually attempted to take custody of grandchildren; and *immediate care,* where custodial caregiving arose out of a crisis situation.

Ku, L. E., Stearns, S. C., Van Houtven, C. H., Lee, S. D., Dilworth-Anderson P., & Konrad, T. R. (2013). Impact of caring for grandchildren on the health of grandparents in Taiwan. *Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences, 68*(6), 1009-1021.

This study explored the effect of caring for grandchildren on the physical and mental health of grandparents in Taiwan. Data included four waves of the Taiwan Longitudinal Study on Aging (1993-2003, n=3,711). Participants were grandparents aged 50 and older who were categorized according to living arrangement and caregiving history. Outcomes in four areas were assessed: self-rated physical health, mobility limitation, life satisfaction, and depressive symptoms. Long-term multigenerational caregivers were more likely than other groups to report better health, higher life satisfaction, and fewer depressive symptoms. These associations were also present in short-term caregivers, but less pronounced. Findings suggest that caregiving for grandchildren can be beneficial to the health of grandparents in Taiwan and that benefits depend on the living arrangement and duration of caregiving duties.

Letiecz, B. L, Bailey, S., & Porterfield, F. (2008). “We have no rights, we get no help”: The legal and policy dilemmas facing grandparent caregivers. *Journal of Family Issues*, *29*(8), 995-1012.

This qualitative study, based on an ecological perspective of family policy, used life history interviews to document policy dilemmas faced by custodial grandparents in Montana. Twenty-six grandparents were included in the study, most of whom were providing care in informal arrangements. Four legal contexts were found to hinder informal caregiving arrangements: lack of legal rights, lack of a kinship care navigation system, fear of the child welfare system, and disparities between informal and formal kinship care policies.

Longoria, R. A. (2010). Grandparents raising grandchildren: The association of grandparents’ self-reported use of alcohol and drugs and their emotional well-being. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 80*(3), 401-411.

Research among grandparents raising grandchildren has identified several factors related to psychological distress among grandparents. However, little research has considered drug and alcohol use among custodial grandparents. Using a probability sample of grandparents, this study examined drug and alcohol use among grandparents and its effect on their emotional well-being. Results indicate that grandparents who misused a drug and those who used alcohol had lower levels of emotional well-being. Clinical implications are discussed.

Musil, C. M., Warner, C., Zauszniewski, J., Jeanblanc, A., & Kercher, K. (2006). Grandmothers, caregiving, and family functioning. *Journals of Gerontology*, *61B*, S89–S98.

This study, based on McCubbin’s Resiliency Model of Family Stress, Adjustment, and Adaptation (McCubbin, Thompson, & McCubbin, 2001), examined how demographic factors, stress, resourcefulness, support, and role reward affect family functioning among grandmothers raising grandchildren, grandmothers living with grandchildren, and grandmothers not raising grandchildren. A mailed questionnaire was completed by 486 grandmothers and structural equation modeling was used to assess the effects of demographic factors, stress, support, and role reward on perceived family functioning. Models did not differ significantly between groups of grandmothers, but showed support for the resiliency model. Less support, resourcefulness, and reward were associated with perceptions of worse family functioning.

Neely-Barnes, S. L., Graff, J. C., & Washington, G. (2010). The health-related quality of life of custodial grandparents. *Health & Social Work, 35*(2), 87-97.

This study explored the health-related quality of life (HRQOL) of 119 custodial grandparents. Using a latent profile analysis, researchers identified three groups of grandparents along the HRQOL continuum. Most grandparents scored significantly below the U.S. population mean on the Short Form-12 Health Survey (version 2). Grandchild health problems, number of grandchildren in custody, grandparent education, and grandparent depression contributed to lower HRQOL. Differences in depression were reported across groups of grandparents. In qualitative analysis, grandparents discussed how they conceptualize their health and health maintenance. Qualitative data indicate the importance of spirituality and religion to grandparents, their economic concerns, and a need for transdisciplinary services.

Park, H-O. (2006). The economic well-being of households headed by a grandmother as caregiver. *Social Services Review*, *80*(2), 264-295.

This study used data from the National Survey of America’s Families to study the economic well-being of grandparent-headed households and to what extent targeted income assistance alleviates poverty among these families. Findings indicate that poverty and extreme poverty are greatest among families headed by a single grandmother in which parents are not living in the household. Fifteen percent of impoverished families are raised out of poverty due to transfers (case welfare, food stamps, Supplemental Security Income, and foster care payments).

Rhynes, L., Hayslip, B., Caballero, D., & Ingman, S. (2013). The beneficial effects of senior center attendance on grandparents raising grandchildren. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, *11*(2), 162-175.

The study explored the effects of attendance at a senior center on the well-being and quality of life of grandparents raising grandchildren. Grandparents (N = 130) who were raising grandchildren completed a self-administered demographic data survey, an attendance at a senior center questionnaire, and measures of quality of life, well-being, loneliness, caregiver burden, and satisfaction. Senior center attendance positively impacted grandparent caregivers' quality of life, caregiver burden, well-being, and role satisfaction. The findings indicated that grandparents who are raising minor grandchildren can benefit from services offered through senior centers.

Ruiz, D. S., Zhu, C. W., & Crowther, M. R. (2003). Not on their own again: Psychological, social, and health characteristics of custodial African American grandmothers. *Journal of Women and Aging, 15*(2-3),167-184.

This article examines the social and health factors associated with depression among custodial African American grandmothers. The sample included 99 custodial African American grandmothers caring for one or more children. Findings indicate that approximately 20% of grandmothers were depressed. These grandmothers were more likely than other groups to report all ten chronic health conditions included in the study. Predictors of low depression levels included old age, more social support, and caring for older children.

Shakya, H. B., Usita, P. M., Eisenberg, C., Weston, J., & Liles, S. (2012). Family well-being concerns of grandparents in skipped generation families. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work, 55*(1), 39-54.

This study explored the family well-being concerns of grandparents caring for grandchildren. Co-resident grandparents with primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren completed surveys, focus groups, or individual interviews. Service providers also participated in individual interviews to provide an additional perspective. Results produced five levels of concern: intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational or institutional, policy, and societal. The different levels were interrelated, suggesting the need for multilevel interventions to support these families.

Smith, G. C. & Hancock, G. R. (2010). Custodial grandmother-grandfather dyads: Pathways among marital distress, grandparent dysphoria, parenting practice, and grandchild adjustment. *Family Relations, 59*(1), 45-59.

Using the Family Stress Model, this study used structural equation modeling with data from 193 custodial grandmother-grandfather dyads. The measurement and structural components of the model were mostly invariant by gender of the grandparent. Effects of psychological and marital distress on children’s adjustment difficulties were mediated by dysfunctional parenting.

Thompson, G. E., Cameron, R. E., & Fuller-Thomson, E. (2013). Walking the red road: The role of First Nations grandparents in promoting cultural well-being. *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, *76*(1), 55-78.

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to provide a framework for understanding the contemporary experience of First Nations grandparents. Fifteen respondents (*N* = 15) were selected from two demographically different Canadian cities. Seven of the grandparents lived with their child and a grandchild or grandchildren at the time of the interview; an additional four had lived with their grandchildren at some point prior to this investigation. Results revealed that First Nations grandparents had leveraged their own experiences of cultural disruption to reinvest in the cultural health and well-being of their grandchildren. One grandfather described this role as “walking the red road,” which entailed a responsibility “to provide wisdom and…protection.” Identified benefits of rejuvenating traditions and grandparent involvement included cultural healing and joy.

Van Etten, D., Lowell, M. A., & Gautam, R. (2012). Custodial grandparents raising grandchildren: Lack of legal relationship is a barrier for services. *Journal of Gerontological Nursing, 38*(6), 18-22.

Among grandparents raising grandchildren in the U.S., most do not have a formal, legal relationship. This creates a barrier to obtaining needed services and results in limited access to information and financial assistance, and difficulty proving medical and educational consent. This article explores the limitations of federal and state policy in supporting this population and suggests policy changes.

Winefield, H. (2010). Grandparenting: Diversity in grandparent experiences and needs for healthcare and support. *International Journal of Evidence-Based Healthcare, 8*(4), 277–283.

This article reports findings from a selective review of medical and social science literature regarding the role of grandparents in modern day families with special focus on the conjunction of healthcare, workforce engagement, and lifespan psychological development. Authors suggest that grandparents who care for grandchildren have the potential to strengthen their families and raise their own self-worth.

Yancura, L. A. (2013). Justifications for caregiving in White, Asian American, and Native Hawaiian grandparents raising grandchildren. *Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences, 68*(1), 139-144.

Among family members caring for older adults, race has been shown to predict justifications for caregiving. However, little research has explored whether race predicts justifications among Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRG). This study examined justifications for caregiving among 259 GRG registered as primary caregivers with the children’s schools. Justifications were measured using the 10-item Cultural Justifications for Caregiving (CJCG) scale. Two factors from the CJCG scale emerged: custom and responsibility. Race was predictive of custom, with Native Hawaiian GRG having higher scores than Whites or Asian Americans. Native Hawaiian GRG also scored higher than Asian Americans on responsibility. These findings support the hypothesis that justifications differ among racial identifications.

Yancura, L. A. (2013). Service use and unmet service needs in grandparents raising grandchildren. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, *56*(6), 473-486.

A sample of 200 grandparents registered with a public school district in Hawaii completed a survey on service use and unmet service needs. Of the 131 who did not use services, 82 reported unmet service needs, and 49 reported no needs. Those with unmet needs were younger, more likely to be Native Hawaiian, and less likely to receive public assistance. These findings indicate that some grandparents are falling through the cracks of the service provision network.

Web Resources

Academic research centers frequently update their lists of publications and are a good resource for information about current research. This list of resources is divided into two categories: University research centers and national centers. They are not exhaustive.

|  |
| --- |
| University Research Centers Focused on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren |
| **Department of Human Development & Family Studies, Colorado State University** | <http://grg.colostate.edu/> |
| **Health Grandparents Program, College of Nursing, Georgia Regents University** | <http://www.gru.edu/nursing/healthygrandparents/> |
| Kinship Care Resource Center, Michigan State University | <http://www.kinship.msu.edu/> |
| Kinship Support Center, University of South Florida | <http://www.cas.usf.edu/~krisman/> |
| **National Research Center on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren,** collaborative initiative between Georgia State and Western Michigan universities | <https://wmich.edu/grandparenting> |
| **Project Healthy Grandparents, Byrdine F. Lewis School of Nursing & Health Professions, Georgia State University.** | <http://phg.snhp.gsu.edu/> |

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| National Centers, Advocacy, Membership Organizations, and other Resources |
| Advocates for Families | [www.advocatesforfamiliesfirst.org](http://www.advocatesforfamiliesfirst.org) |
| American Grandparents Association | <https://aga.grandparents.com/> |
| Association of American Retired Persons (AARP): *Grand Families Guide* | <http://www.aarp.org/relationships/friends-family/info-08-2011/grandfamilies-guide-getting-started.html> |
| Brookdale Foundation Group: Relatives as Parents Program (RAPP) | <http://www.brookdalefoundation.org/> |
| Casey Family Programs | <http://www.casey.org/> |
| Children’s Defense Fund: *Kinship Care Resource Kit* | <http://www.childrensdefense.org/library/data/kinship-care-organization-resource-kit.pdf> |
| Child Welfare League of America: *Kinship Care: Traditions of Caring and Collaborating Model of Practice* | <http://www.cwla.org/kinship-care/> |
| Corporation for National & Community Service: *Foster Grandparents* | <http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/senior-corps/foster-grandparents> |
| Foundation for Grandparenting | <http://grandparenting.org/> |
| Generations United: Grandfamilies | <http://www.gu.org/OURWORK/Grandfamilies.aspx> |
| GRAND Magazine | <http://www.grandmagazine.com/news/> |
| Helpguide: Help for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren | <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/grandparenting/grandparents-legal-rights-and-custody-options.htm> |
| National Association of Area Agencies on Aging | <http://www.n4a.org/content.asp?contentid=436> |
| National Kinship Alliance for Children | <http://kinshipalliance.org/> |

Case Studies

This collection of case studies provides students with the opportunity to consider diversity within the grandparent population. Students can discuss the uniqueness of each situation, shared experiences, and implications for practice and policy. Through this activity, students will be able to individualize family situations, select appropriate intervention strategies, and identify associated policy issues related to grandparents raising grandchildren.

Many Faces of Grandparents Case Studies

Mrs. Gordon: An Incarcerated Daughter

Four years ago, Mrs. Gorden’s daughter, Lorita, was imprisoned for drug position and trafficking. Lorita’s son, Trammell, was five years old when she went to jail and moved in with Mrs. Gordon. Since then, Trammell has been going to see his mother monthly although he has become more resistant to these visits over the last few months.

Lorita is slated to be released in about three months. She has started to talk about her desire to have Trammell move in with her right away and her hope to move back to her old neighborhood, which is in a different town than her mother’s. Trammell has done well living with Mrs. Gordon and has made friends in his school. He is very upset with the thought of leaving his school, friends, and basketball team.

Mrs. Gordon has volunteered to keep Trammell to help Lorita transition and become established. In addition, it would allow Trammell and Lorita to become reacquainted; he was very young when she went to prison. However, Lorita wants Trammell to move in with her right away and “start being a family.” Mrs. Gordon is very concerned about Trammell’s adjustment and he is becoming more distant and withdrawn from her and at school. Mrs. Gordon is also concerned about Lorita returning to the same environment where she was living when she was involved in drugs.

Mrs. Peyton: A Custodial Great Grandmother

Mrs. Peyton, age 79, is the great grandmother of Bennie (age 7) and Breyana (age 10). She assumed care when her daughter, the children’s grandmother who was raising them, died of cancer at 58 years of age. The children’s parents were never married — their mother is addicted to drugs and comes in and out of their lives. Their father has never been involved with them.

After the grandmother’s death, Mrs. Peyton started caring for the children in her two bedroom apartment. The lack of space means that she and Breyana share a room, and Bennie has his own room. There is limited space for the children to have toys, and their clothes are stacked in piles around the apartment.

Mrs. Peyton has a difficult time disciplining the children. Neither listen to Mrs. Peyton; they are disobedient and disrespectful. Although they had a good relation with their grandmother, neither has started to bond with Mrs. Peyton. Because of moving in with her, they had to transfer to a different school, and neither has adjusted well.

Periodically, their mother returns to visit and may even stay overnight. During these times, the children beg to go and live with her again, in spite of the very poor conditions in that living arrangement. Invariably, she leaves and the children are even more distant and disrespectful to their great grandmother. Although Mrs. Peyton used to enjoy attending church functions and socializing with her friends, she rarely does any of these activities anymore because she has such limited energy. She also states that her friends “don’t understand”; none of them are raising their grandchildren.

The Dylans: Newlywed Grandparents

Mr. and Mrs. Dylan are in their late sixties and got married about three years ago. Both had been married before — he is divorced and she is a widow. Mrs. Dylan’s daughter was murdered last year, probably in a drug-related crime. Her two children, Nia (5) and Malone (3), moved in with their grandmother. Their father lives out of state and has not been in contact with them.

The children have both been clingy since the death of their mother and do not like to be away from their grandmother. They have nightmares, and Mrs. Dylan often spends the night in their bedroom to comfort them. Although Mrs. Dylan tried to enroll them in daycare so they would be around other children, they were unable to tolerate being away from her for the day.

This transition has been a rough adjustment for the newlyweds. They are both retired, and their goal had been to travel and explore the globe. Mr. Dylan is very outdoorsy and enjoys hiking, hunting, fishing, and other activities. Although he has one son, they are not close. At one point before they married, he admitted that he was not a good father and never felt comfortable in that role. Over the last few months, the newlyweds have started to argue more and Mr. Dylan is wondering whether he can continue in this marriage.

The Chastains: Raising a Child with a Disability

Mr. and Mrs. Chastain are raising their grandchild, Adele, who has severe disabilities; she uses a wheelchair and has below average intelligence. They gained custody of Adele after the Department of Family & Children’s Services investigated Adele’s parents for abuse and maltreatment. Adele had been living in filth, was malnourished, and was physically abused. Adele, currently eleven years old, has resided with her grandparents for seven years. She is a happy child,.

The Chastains are in their sixties and are starting to experience health problems. Last year, Mr. Chastain suffered a stroke and has some paralysis. Since then, Mrs. Chastain has been struggling with Adele’s care because she is becoming more physically mature and her care is becoming more difficult for the couple.

As a result of this situation, Mrs. Chastain is becoming depressed. She feels helpless and worries about Adele’s care if something should happen to her. She also is taking on some care duties for her husband, such as helping him dress and assuming the driving for the family. Although she has reached out to her son for help, he has not been responsive. Although she has been feeling more run down lately, she refuses to see a doctor because she wonders what would happen if she was unable to continue to care for her husband and Adele.

Discussion questions

* For each of these case vignettes, discuss the major issues that the grandparents are facing. How do these impact the grandparents’ health and functioning?
* What is the experience of the grandchildren in these cases? What is their experience with their parents – and what is their experience with their grandparents?
* Compare and contrast the situations within each of these families. What are the similarities? The differences?
* From an intervention perspective, what are some ways that these families can benefit from social work support programs?
* How can social policy be more responsive to custodial grandparent families?

Life Transitions Case Study: Saying Goodbye and Saying Hello

Mrs. Estelle Benitez is a 63-year-old woman who is married to her second husband, Carlos. Estelle is a teacher who was planning to work two more years before retirement. Carlos has recently retired from his job as a fire fighter and is enjoying his time through volunteering and playing saxophone in a local jazz group.

The Benitez’s shared a happy and fulfilling relationship and were looking forward to the next chapter of their life together. However, tragedy touched this family and changed the course of their lives.

At work one morning, Estelle was called into the principal’s office and given the news that her daughter, Maria, was on life support at the hospital. Furthermore, she was eight months pregnant and there was concern about the baby. Although Estelle was not told initially, Maria had been brutally stabbed by her boyfriend who was a drug addict. In a drug-fueled rage, he had believed that the child was another man’s and became violent. He stabbed Maria multiple times and left her bleeding in their apartment. Maria was found by a neighbor who investigated after hearing loud noises within the apartment.

Upon arriving at the hospital, Estelle was told that her daughter remained on life support so the baby could be delivered. However, Maria was brain dead, and there was no hope for her to survive. In a matter of hours, Estelle essentially lost her only child and became the primary caregiver for her first grandchild, whom she named Mario after his mother.

Although the Benitez’s had been excited to greet a baby in the family, they had not planned to become the primary caregivers. Their condominium was arranged for a mid-life couple, and they were planning for their carefree retirement years. In addition, the combined event of losing a daughter and caring for a newborn was an overwhelming experience for the family.

Discussion: Consider the transitions that have taken place within the family:

* The combined experience of profound grief, shock, and second order change. How could these factors impact the individuals within the family, as well as the marital dyad?
* Raising a newborn is an unexpected experience for the family. What transitions might the family face with this experience?
* Estelle and Carlos are parents again, but are also parenting together for the first time. How might the couple experience this relationship?
* The child’s father is incarcerated. How might the events (murder, incarceration) factor into the life of this child and family?

Caregiving When Grandparents Raise Grandchildren Case Study

Ms. Alberts is a 68-year-old African American woman who lives in a small southern city with a major medical college and teaching hospital. About two years ago, her daughter Sabrina became incapacitated as a result HIV/AIDS. Sabrina has three children ages 3, 6, and 8. The two oldest children are HIV-, but the youngest is HIV-negative and HIV-positive. Sabrina had been living in the Northeast in a location where she had limited social supports. She is divorced from the father of the two older children (he is in jail), and has no contact with the father of the youngest child.

When Sabrina’s health started to fail, she and Ms. Alberts decided that she and the children should move in. Their logic was that the home was close to quality medical resources and Ms. Alberts could assist with child care. Over the ensuing two-year time period, Sabrina has had bouts of poor health and several hospitalizations.

Several issues have emerged for the family. One is the transition for Sabrina and the children from life in a large, metropolitan area in the northeast to the different social and political climate of their current community. Ms. Alberts is very active in her church, but is afraid to tell people in her life what she is facing. She struggles with the fear that people will avoid being around her, and is especially afraid of how families will treat her youngest granddaughter. For this reason, she has been less involved in church activities and feels the loss of this spiritual and social support.

There have also been other adjustments. The home is quite small, having only two bedrooms and bathrooms. While this was enough room when Ms. Alberts was living alone, there is barely enough room for everyone now. Ms. Alberts and two of her grandchildren stay in one bedroom, and Sabrina and her oldest daughter stay in the other bedroom. When Sabrina is sick, the living room is converted into a bedroom for her, which puts an even greater strain on space. The children have little room to play, and there are frequent fights and squabbles over toys, noise, etc.

Due to Sabrina’s health conditions, Ms. Alberts is intermittently the “grandmother” and the “mother.” When Sabrina is well, she takes an active role in the children’s lives, but when she is ill or feeling poorly, Ms. Alberts assumes a more active role in caregiving. The children, especially the oldest, have started to threaten Ms. Alberts’ authority, saying, “you’re not my mother” on the occasions when rules and discipline are established by Ms. Alberts.

In spite of all of these stresses, the family has many happy times. Overall, they are a loving family with many positive interactions and experiences. Although there has never been a family discussion, there are indications that all of them struggle with the thoughts about what life would be like if Sabrina were no longer around.

Discussion questions:

* Although Sabrina lives in the home, her illness is incapacitating, which sometimes disrupts her ability to provide care to her children. How would this fluctuating parent impact the relationship between the Mrs. Alberts and the grandchildren?
* Although Mrs. Alberts was very involved with her church, her perceived stigma about the medical diagnosis has created a sense of isolation from this support system. What interventions are appropriate for both the family and the larger community?
* Environmental issues are a large part of this family’s stress. What are some short- and long-term ways to deal with these issues?
* Grief and loss issues are pervasive in this case example. How does grief/loss enter into the family’s experience? What are some interventions for dealing with these issues for grandparent, parent, and grandchildren?

Multimedia Class Activities

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (Video)

Available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=viACpJLM_ts>

Discussion Questions:

1. The couple in the video are raising three grandchildren. What was the pathway into the role of custodial grandparents, and how did this transition impact their life?
2. The couple describes the complications of working across two state lines. How does geography and location add to the stressful nature of assuming care of grandchildren?
3. What types of services would be helpful for the grandparents in this video? How would these services reduce their stress and/or enhance their functioning?

Grandfamilies: When Grandparents Raise Grandchildren (Video)

Available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ryd2YUPCyZE>

Discussion Questions:

1. The video focuses on low-income families. What financial challenges are present in the grandparents’ stories?
2. What motivates these grandparents to assume care despite their economic situation?
3. The statistics presented in the video highlight how many grandparents are raising their grandchildren informally. What are some reasons that such a small percentage are in formal caregiving roles?

Time Out for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (Video)

Available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Baamky0FLIs>

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe the transitions the grandparents discuss as a result of raising their grandchildren.
2. What do the respite days that are described in the video offer the grandparents?
3. The respite program also has benefits for the grandchildren. What positive outcomes are gained for them from the respite program?

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