



GRANDPARENTS AND OTHER RELATIVES RAISING CHILDREN

Challenges of Caring for the Second Family

Background

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there are currently 6 million children in the United States who are living in grandparent- or other relative-maintained households, with or without parents present.¹ At the time of this printing, in January 2002, it has not yet been determined how many of those children are being cared for without parents present in the home. However, the March 2000 Current Population Survey revealed that of 5.5 million children living in grandparent- or other relative-maintained households, 2.1 million were being raised solely by their grandparents or other relatives with no parents present.²

These dedicated caregivers have stepped forward to care for children whose own parents are unable or unwilling to do so—often at tremendous personal sacrifice. Unlike the image of the “extended family” so firmly rooted in our American tradition, many grandparents and other relative caregivers are older individuals unexpectedly raising a second family without any extended family or community supports. Despite the stability and permanence grandparents and other relatives provide, children living in these families may be denied access to many of the services they need. These dedicated caregivers also face a range of difficulties. Tasks as simple as enrolling the children they raise in school can pose insurmountable obstacles.

Of the 2.1 million children living with grandparents or other relatives with no parent present, approximately 145,150 of them are in the foster care system. The 145,150 children make up almost a quarter of the entire foster care population of 588,000 children.³ The remaining 2 million are being cared for outside of the system and their caregivers often do not have access to any support services or financial assistance. If even half of these 2 million children were to enter the formal foster care system, it would cost taxpayers \$4.5 billion and completely overwhelm the system. (Calculated based on a \$373 monthly payment, which was the 1996 national average for basic maintenance payments to foster parents for a nine-year-old.)

Therefore, it is in society’s best interest to implement alternative services and financial supports for these families.

Grandparents and other relatives raising children on the rise

The phenomenon of grandparents and other relatives raising children is nothing new. Over the last 25 years, however, the number of children being raised by someone other than a parent has increased dramatically, with the vast majority of these children being raised by their grandparents. Since 1970 there has been an increase in all types of grandparent-maintained households.



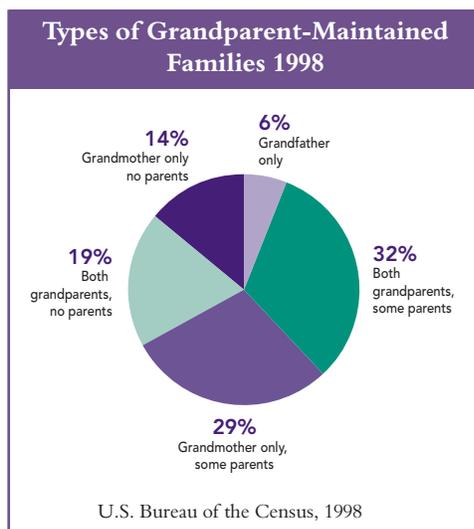
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For instance, the number of children in households maintained by grandparents with their mothers present increased 118 percent from 1970 to 1997.⁴ The number of grandparent-maintained households with fathers present increased 217 percent. However, since 1990, the greatest increase has been in those grandparent-maintained households without either parent present. Between 1990 and 1998, the number of these families increased by 53 percent.⁵

In 1998, there were over 2.5 million grandparent-maintained families with or without parents present. Together, these families cared for nearly 4 million children or 5.6 percent of all children under the age of 18. Of these grandparent-maintained families:

- 1.7 million had one or more parents present
- 888,000 were without parents present
- 32 percent contained both grandparents and some parents
- 29 percent contained grandmothers only and some parents
- 19 percent contained both grandparents and no parents
- 14 percent contained grandmothers only and no parents
- 6 percent contained grandfathers only⁵



Despite the common stereotype of the single, African American grandmother raising her grandchildren in the inner city, the phenomenon transcends all socioeconomic groups, geographic areas, and ethnicities, as the following statistics demonstrate:

- In 1997, 38.9 percent of all children living in grandparent-maintained families lived in central cities, 41.3 percent lived in the suburbs, and 19.8 percent lived in non-metropolitan areas.
- In 1997, 43.3 percent of all children living in grandparent-maintained families lived in the South, 18.7 percent lived in the Northeast, 16.9 percent lived in the Midwest, and 21.1 percent lived in the West.⁷
- In 1998, 1.7 million or 43.8 percent of all children living in grandparent-maintained families were white (not-Hispanic), 1.4 million or 34.5 percent were black (both Hispanic and not-Hispanic), and 701,000 or 17.6 percent were Hispanic (all races).²

Both the grandparent caregivers and the children in these households are young, as these 1997 statistics demonstrate:

- 65.2 percent of the grandparents in grandparent-maintained families were between the ages of 45 and 64, 17.7 percent were under 45, and 17.1 percent were over age 65.
- 50.8 percent of children residing in grandparent-maintained households were under 6 years old, 28.8 percent were between the ages of 6 and 11, and 20.4 percent were ages 12 to 17.⁶

Factors that account for the increase in grandparents and other relatives raising children

- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Unemployment
- Child abuse and/or neglect
- Incarceration
- Abandonment
- Divorce
- Teenage pregnancy
- Mental health problems
- Death of a parent
- Family violence
- HIV/AIDS
- Poverty

Grandparent-maintained families are more likely to live in poverty and to be uninsured than parent-maintained families.

Nearly one in five children (19 percent) living in households maintained by their parents lived in poverty in 1997. In contrast, more than one in four children (27 percent) living in grandparent-maintained households were impoverished.

About one in eight children (13 percent) in homes maintained by parents had no health insurance in 1997, whereas one in three children (33 percent) living in grandparent-maintained homes had no health insurance.

The primary source of insurance coverage for children is through their parents' employers, thus making it more likely for children to be covered when one or more parents are living in the household than when they are not.⁴

Relative caregivers are often unable to include the children they raise on their private insurance unless they have chosen to adopt.

References

¹ U.S. Census SF1, table P28, Relationship by Household Type for Population Under 18 Years.

² Found at http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/p20-537_00.html. Current Population Survey, March 2000. "America's Families and Living Arrangements," (P20-537), Detailed tables for Current Population Report P20-537. Table C2. Household Relationship and Living Arrangements of Children Under 18 Years by Age, Sex, Race, Hispanic Origin, and Metropolitan Residence: March 2000.

³ Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). Preliminary estimates as of April 2001 (5).

⁴ Casper, L.M. & Bryson, K.R. (1998). Coresident Grandparents and Their Grandchildren: Grandparent Maintained Families. Population Division Working Series #26. Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census. Unpublished data from the 1998 Current Population Survey.

⁶ Bryson, K. & Casper, L.M. (1999). Coresident Grandparents and Grandchildren: Current Population Reports, Special Studies, P23-198. Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census.