

Caregiver Grandparents: Parenting, The Second Time

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ABSTRACT

The trend in grandparent caregiving is growing. Majority of grandparents who find themselves in this position do not know how to get proper resources. They are not even aware of how prevalent this phenomenon is becoming. This literature review provides information to caregiving grandparents and professionals. It address problems these grandparents encounter and also provides available resources.

Grandparents have been known to act as an emotional sanctuary in times of trouble, a family historian who helps make the past real, a teacher of life's lessons, a confidante, and a role model. The role of grandparents has broadened. Today, many grandparents find themselves parenting. Instead of retiring and pursuing leisurely activities they find themselves waking up children in the morning, preparing meals, sending children off to school, attending PTA meetings, and paying doctor bills. Grandparents are now raising their grandchildren in the absence of the grandchildren's biological parents. This is a growing phenomenon that needs to be addressed. The following books and journals provide information for caregiver grandparents and professionals.

Heywood does an excellent job of providing demographic information. Five percent of all school-aged children do not visit in the home of grandparents; rather they wake up there, leave for school from there, and return at the end of their day (Heywood, 1999). Caregiving grandparents are responsible for the emotional, social, and financial well-being of 1.35 million children (Heywood, 1999).

Heywood also addresses the reason for this phenomenon. Heywood (1999) stated that the crack epidemic is one of the central forces driving the dramatic increase in the prevalence of grandparent caregiving since 1980's. This is because infants who are born to a crack addicted mother may be reared by the grandparents. In most cases, grandparents assume caregiving for the children after a parents life ends by drug addiction. Other factors attributed to this trend are incarceration, divorce, teen pregnancy, and the rapid growth in single parent households. Children born out of wedlock are likely to become a part of these households.

Another factor increasing the prevalence of grandparent caregiving is AIDS. The majority of children orphaned by AIDS are taken care of by a grandparent (Heywood, 1999). The orphan project of New York City estimates that by the year 2000, over 100,000 adolescents' and children's mothers will die from AIDS (Heywood, 1999). This means that there will be an increase in grandparent caregivers.

In *Generations*, Roe and Minkler (1999) discuss the profile of grandparent caregivers. They address the fact that grandparenting cuts across gender, ethnic background and class. They examine the reasons for kinship care. Although the media accounts have tended to focus on single, low income African American women raising their grandchildren, recent studies suggest that the typical grandparent raising a grandchild is a white married woman living in poverty line (Roe & Minkler, 1999). However, being single, living in poverty, and being an African American do substantially increase the odds of becoming a caregiver for one's grandchildren (Roe & Minkler, 1999). Duration of intergenerational residence varies by race, class, region, and other factors, almost three quarters of children who come into the care of a grandparent do so when they are infants or preschooler, with over 40 percent remaining for a period of five or more years (Roe & Minkler, 1998).

Minkler and Roe also address special challenges such as health and access to health care, social isolation, and financial difficulties. Many grandparents, although, happy and willing to assume the responsibility of caring for their grandchildren face many challenges. Grandparents face problems with their health. According to Roe and Minkler (1993) caregiving grandparents have high rates of depression, poor health, frequent presence of multiple chronic health problems which have been reported in both

national and smaller scale studies of grandparents rearing grandchildren. Minkler, Roe, and Price (1992) found observable declines in physical health in one third of the population of grandparents they studied, after caregiving began. They found that more than 51 percent of their sample complained of joint swelling and stiffness, 41 percent reported severe back problems, and 25 percent cited heart trouble. In later findings, Minkler (1994), found that grandparents downplayed the severity of their health problems so that they would appear more competent. Minkler (1994) found that they exhibited moderate to severe health problems, but had not time to visit the doctor.

Minkler and Roe (1993) address other challenges such as social isolation and alienation. Grandparent caregivers report a decreased socialization with friends and family as a consequence of caregiving responsibilities especially in intergenerational households formed as a result of parental AIDS or drug addiction (Minkler & Roe, 1993).

They include supportive interventions such as support groups and programs. The last ten years witnessed the growth of a wide range of supportive interventions for grandparents (Minkler & Roe, 1998). These programs provide short-term emotional, information, and material support. Minkler and Roe address the future directions for supportive programming.

Kornhaber (1995) devotes a chapter of *Contemporary parenting* to raising grandchildren. Kornhaber (1995) discusses issues such as legal considerations, lifestyle changes, and benefits experienced by caregiving grand parents. According to Kornhaber (1995) many grandparents despite the negative emotions and various problems that may arise, feel useful and derive satisfaction from the knowledge that they are rescuing their grandchildren. In the Grandparent Study, more than 90 percent of grandparents raising

grandchildren stated that doing so has given new meaning to their lives (Kornhaber, 1995). Nevertheless, most acknowledged having mixed feelings (Kornhaber, 1995). A study was conducted by the Survey Research Laboratory at Virginia Commonwealth University to explore the differences between grandmothers who provide levels of caregiving responsibility for a grandchild. The results showed that the grandchild's behavior made the highest impact on the grandmother, increasing her feelings of burden and parenting stress and decreasing her grandparenting satisfaction. Full time grandmothers experienced more burden and parenting stress and less satisfaction than other grandmothers in the study. Pinson-Millburn and Fabian also address the challenges grandparent caregivers face.

In the *Journal of Counseling*, Pinson and Fabian (1996), address the impact of transferring child-rearing responsibilities from an absent or incapacitated parent to grandparent. The psychological consequences of rearing grandchildren are enormous. Often, grandparents are gaining a grandchild but losing their own child (Pinson-Millburn & Fabian, 1996). In addition caregiver grandparents question their sense of inadequacy (Pinson-Millburn & Fabian, 1996). They wonder what they did wrong in rearing their own children. Their emotional response is often grief (Pinson-Millburn & Fabian, 1996). They grieve the loss of their children as a result of child neglect, drug addiction, death, incarceration, and other psychological problems (Pinson-Millburn & Fabian, 1996). They discuss the reasons for increase in grandparents rearing children, the challenges grandparent caregivers encounter, the effect of caregiving on grandparents, and on grandchildren. They also discuss the implications for counselors, direct and indirect supportive intervention. They provide a list of counseling interventions for Grandparent

headed households. They detail the types of services counselors can provide to grandparents and encourage counselors to give adequate information in helping grandparents deal with the stress of the unexpected transition. They recommend that counselors provide extended help in helping caregiving grandparents access legal or financial resources denied to them, if they do not have custody.

Rothenburg, on an online publication, discusses the reasons behind the trend, the demographics of grandparents as parents, how schools can help by developing strategies to help grandchildren. Some of these strategies include examining school policies on enrollment, providing helpful information for grandparents acting as parents, preparing information on respite care: before and after school programs, Head Start or other preschool programs.

Barber and Kubin, on an online publication, provide information on facts about grandparents as parents. They discuss the effect of divorce and grandparents as parents and provide guidelines for dealing with children after divorce. They also address how grandparents can obtain health insurance for dependent grandchildren. They address resources and organizations that are available to grandchildren.

de Toledo and Brown (1995), address the issues grandparent caregivers face. They devote the first section to the social aspects of grandparenting. They first dispel the myths of parenting before addressing the issues. Some of the issues addressed in this section include financial problems, changes in routine, decline in social life, and emotions grandparents face. Some of the emotions are isolation, grief, anger and guilt, fear, and doubt. In this section, they address how grandparents should deal with troubled grandchildren, how they should deal the schools regarding their grandchildren, and

educating grandchildren about drugs. They help grandparents by explaining possible coping mechanisms. The second section of the book explains the issues and provides helpful hints on how to get pass the red tape. They also address legal issues regarding custody. They explain the rights of grandparents and grandchildren. They provide useful information on legal and physical custody. They also explain the financial consequences of each. de Toledo and Brown (1995) provide information on government assistance such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), foster care benefits, Supplemental security income for children (SSI), social security survivors benefits, medicaid, and food stamps. They explain eligibility, application process, and other needful information regarding government assistance. The third section of the book provides information on support groups and how to start one. This is an excellent book for professionals and caregiver grandparents. It provides insight for individuals who may work with grandparents: counselors, doctors, lawyers, and teachers including the general public. De Toledo and Brown (1995) give insight on practical things grandparents can do if they find themselves thrust in the position of parenting. They advise grandparents to ask for help from other adult children, keep records with dates and times, sort out the legal situation, look into financial aid, arrange for medical care, keep medical records, enroll grandchildren in school, consider counseling, and find emotional support.

As the trend in caregiver grandparenting continues to grow, grandparents and other professionals need to be educated as to ways they can make life more bearable. It is obvious that the stresses they face has a lot to do with not knowing the resources available and also not knowing how to get the resources. Counselors can help by compiling the information for these grandparents and by realizing that these grandparents

not only need financial help, but that psychological help may be needed as well. Some of these grandparents are grieving the loss of their children and having to deal with their own loss combined with their grandchildren's loss. Mental health professionals should be able to understand this phenomenon and be willing to help these grandparents by providing them with coping skills, crisis intervention, problem solving techniques, and information on support groups.

### References

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### Additional Resources

Woodworth, R.S. 1998. *Respite services to support grandparents raising grandchildren.*

<http://www. chtop.com/archfs45.htm>

\*Explains respite care and gives tips for seeking respite services within the community.

*Safety.* Consumer Information Center (item 606E).

<http://www.cpsc.gov/cpspula/pubs/grand/704.html>.

\*Provides tips for grandparents' involvement in children's lives and gives information on infant and child safety.

**AARP** (American Association for Retired Persons).

<http://www.org/getans/consumergrandparents.html>.

\*Provides tips for dealing with schools. Gives information on medical, legal, and financial issues.

**Grandparenting Again:** Resources, <http://www.grandparentagain.com>.

\*Provides information on legal, medical, and community support issues.

**National Parent Information Network:** [www.npin.orh](http://www.npin.orh).

\*Provides an extensive database of parenting information.

**Intergenerational Connections:** [www.nnfr.org/igen](http://www.nnfr.org/igen).

\*Provides information for professionals as well as grandparents. Lists resources for legal and financial issues, coping with stress, and more.