GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN: SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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How Many Grandparent Caregivers are in the United States?

- They are the fastest growing segment of the population.

- 2.6 million Americans report they are responsible for most of the basic needs of co-resident grandchildren.
Grandparents primarily responsible for the basic needs of a grandchild:

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<th>Total in 2008</th>
<th>Percent change from 2000-2008</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,636,728</td>
<td>+8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>+19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td></td>
<td>-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td></td>
<td>+14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
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<td>+9</td>
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Racial/Ethnic Distribution of Grandparent Caregivers

- The Grandparents:
  - 40% are White
  - 33% are African American
  - 21% are Hispanic, and 5% are Asian
  - 60% are under the age of 60
  - 14% live in poverty
180,227 children in NJ live in a home where the householder is a grandparent or a relative.

This is 8.8% of all children under the age of 18.
Grandparents raise their grandchildren in response to their child’s:

- Mental Illness
- Drug or alcohol addiction
- Incarceration
- Teen-age pregnancies
- Neglect and Abuse
- Physical illness (cancer, HIV-AIDS)
- Death of a parent
- Other reasons, such as divorce, separation and abandonment
Kinship care is broadly defined as, “the full-time nurturing and protection of children who must be separated from their parents, by relatives, members of their tribes or clans, godparents, stepparents, or other adults who have a kinship bond with a child” (CWLA 1994, p. 2).

This is contrasted with traditional foster care or non-kinship foster care, which is the placement of children removed from the home with unrelated foster parents.
Why Child Welfare Agencies use Kinship Care?

- More children coming into care
- Shortage of traditional foster care homes
- Preference for culturally similar placements
- Policies encouraging kinship foster care placements
Cost Differentials

Average annual cost:
- Foster care placement is $22,000
- Grandparent placement is $4,000
Custodial Grandparenthood

The experience is often unanticipated, involuntary, and indefinite and is therefore a risk factor for psychological distress (Pearlin, 1993).

Several studies comparing grandparent caregivers to non-caregivers have identified greater depression and worse health (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2000; Solomon & Marx, 2000)
The one common experience that the grandchild and grandparent share is: LOSS
How do children raised by grandparents compare to children in foster care?

- **Mental health**
  - Children in kinship care were twice as likely to report positive emotional health
  - Only half as likely as foster children to experience mental illness

- **Service utilization**
  - Foster children more likely to receive mental health services than kinship care children

(Winokur, Holtran, & Valentine, 2009)
Comparisons (cont.)

- **Safety**
  - Kinship care children less likely to experience “a substantiated incident of abuse or neglect while in an out-of-home placement setting” than children in foster care

- **Behavioral Development**
  - Higher levels of competence and adaptive behaviors

- **Stability of Placement**
  - Children in foster care were three times as likely as kinship care children to experience 3 or more placements.
Additional Benefits of Kinship Care

- Familiar environment & less traumatic transition
- Keeps sibling groups together
- Placements match child’s culture and religion
- Less social stigma for the child living with a grandparent
Disadvantages of Kinship Care

- Higher levels of parent-caregiver conflict
- Kinship caregivers are, on average, less educated and poorer than non-kin foster parents
- The kin caregivers neighborhoods are more likely to be violent and unhealthy
- Kinship caregivers get less training and support from the child welfare system

(Cuddeback, 2004)
How is the health of grandparent caregivers compared to their non-caregiving peers?
In general....

- The health of the caregiving grandparent is worse than their non-caregiving counterparts.
  - Due to the circumstances, they experience more stress, increased illness, depression and anxiety than their counterparts.
  - If the grandchildren display serious behavioral problems, the health conditions of the grandparent may be exacerbated.
  - The health of the grandparent varies based on their age, economic circumstances and spousal support.
Poor Health of Visible Minority Caregivers

- Need to increase availability of and access to
  - Assistive devices
  - Home modifications
  - In Home Support Services
  - Respite care

- Health promotion outreach efforts need to target grandparent caregivers of color and their families
Ethnicity and Grandparent Caregiving

Caregiving roles are shaped by ethnicities, different family compositions, values, and role expectations. For example:

- African American grandparents have often served as kinkeepers, and have raised their grandchildren as a result of African tradition, family survival during slavery, and the parents’ search for economic opportunity in the North.
Ethnicity (cont.)

- Latino grandmothers are more likely to be involved with parents and provide day care in contrast to providing custodial care.
  - They often play support roles to the parent, to co-parent in intergenerational households.
  - Core value is familism
White grandmothers

- Their style of grandparenting is companionate
- They are less apt to discipline and correct their grandchildren than African American grandmothers.
- They are more burdened by the custodial role than their African American counterparts.
Cultural norms, ideals and traditions make a difference in the role assumed by the custodial grandparent.

Social workers and family advocates must understand the cultural context of the family, and propose culturally sensitive solutions.
The Elephant in the Room:

Poverty
Caregiving due to Economic Necessity

- Finances play a role in caregiving decisions
  - 70% of Latino co-parenting grandparents
  - 40% of skipped generation grandparents

Goodman & Silverstein, 2002
Financial Consequences of Care-Giving

- Leaving employment to provide care in late middle-age
- Impact on pensions
- Decrease in years to save for retirement
- Hard to locate new work when children start school
- Using savings for childcare, food, clothing, larger accommodations, legal custody battles
- Living on fixed incomes
Who is falling through the social safety net?

- 70% of impoverished grandparent caregivers are visible minorities
- 75% are females
- 13% don’t speak English
Role of Social Support

- Refers to emotional, instrumental, and informational assistance from others.
- Informal Social Network – elements in the individual’s environment
- Formal Social Network – use of community social services, professional services
- Example: Community Housing- the Bronx
  http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=7361719n
Examples of Social Support

- Support groups
- Counseling
- Case management
- Intergenerational programs
- Educational workshops and seminars
- Homework assistance
- Recreational activities
- After-school activities
- Legal services
- Summer day camp
- Job readiness and skill-building training
- Advocacy, referrals and assistance
Despite the odds......
The Strengths: The Rewards of Care-giving

- Pride
- Keeps Family Together
- Relieves Worry about Grandchild’s Well-Being
- Pass on culture
- Sense of Purpose
- Feels More Youthful
- Grandchild Reduces Feelings of Loneliness
- Fun


References (cont.)

