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Grandparents as Caregivers

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Grandparents as Caregivers



What is this indicator?

Grandparents as caregivers is defined as a grandparent(s) who have assumed full care of their grandchildren on a temporary or permanent live-in basis. This was a new question/data category for Census 2000. In 1900, most grandchildren never knew their grandparents; in 2000, "the likelihood that a 20 year old had at least one grandparent alive was over 96%" (Park, 2005, p. 19).

What are the key findings?

Nationally, the number of children under 18 living in grandparent-headed households has increased from 2.2 million (3.2%) in 1970 to over 4 million (5.5%) in 2000. The majority of grandparent-headed households have at least one of the child's parents in the home as well; however, the skipped-generation of a parent completely absent has been growing since 1990 (US Census Bureau 1990 and 2000; Park, 2005).

Oklahoma is number 2 in the US in grandparents raising their grandchildren (US Census Bureau,

2000). Grandparents become responsible for their grandchildren when parents are unwilling or unable to provide basic needs for the child (shelter, food, nurturing). There are many reasons attributed to lack of parental responsibility including: drug abuse, imprisonment, child abuse and neglect (Park, 2005, p.19; Uhlenberg & Kirby, 1998, p. 23). A growing trend is temporary responsibility affiliated with parental divorce, illness, death, and/or family economic instability (Uhlenberg & Kirby, 1998, p.23). The impact to the grandparent(s) can include their own financial instability, stress, and legal problems (Park, 2005)

In Oklahoma, 78,229 grandparents live with their own grandchildren who are less than 18 years old in households. Of these, 43,756 (55.9%) are responsible for their grandchildren. The average grandparent is 45 years old (US Census, 2000). The range of grandparent ages is from 30 to 85 years and over. More than 30% of grandparents will be responsible for their grandchildren for 5 years or more.

Table 1. Grandparents in Oklahoma Raising Grandchildren

	Total	Margin of Error
Number of grandparents living with own grandchildren under 18 years in households	78,229	+/-5,154
Responsible for grandchildren	43,756	+/-4,283
Years responsible for grandchildren		
Less than 1 year	10,182	+/-1,947
1 or 2 years	11,260	+/-2,012
3 or 4 years	8,789	+/-1,566
5 or more years	13,525	+/-1,950

A compilation of research cited by Parks, (2005) on grandparent-headed households indicates that poverty rates for children in grandparent-headed households were higher than those for all parent-headed households except single mothers (Brandon, 2000, p. 170); that children living with grandmothers only were less likely to enter welfare than those in other grandparent-headed families (Brandon, 2000, p. 170); children in skipped-generation grandparent-headed families were more likely to participate in welfare programs than children in parent-headed families (largely because of higher Medicaid coverage) (Cox & Pebley, 1999); single grandmothers in skipped-generation families were more likely to receive public assistance than three-generational families with both grandparents present (Casper & Bryson, 1998); more than two-thirds of the children living in their grandparent's home were in families with incomes below 200% of the poverty level, and over one-third were below the poverty level, but only 29% were reported to be receiving foster care or TANF payments (Scarcella Ehrle & Geen, 2003).

There is little federal or state support for grandparents raising their grandchildren. Formal income assistance through Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, Foster Care, Child Support Enforcement, and Child Care Subsidy has limitations and barriers. Assistance under Child Welfare (Foster Care) requires (1) the state to assume custody of the child(ren); (2) the home to meet state licensing standards for foster care, and (3) the child to have been removed from their parents' home by a court order and placed with the grandparents. Grandparents are frequently reluctant to expose their income, living arrangements, and condition of the home with state monitors. Temporary Assistance to Needy

Families requires grandparents providing care to their grandchildren in which the parent is still present to have the parent meet the work and training requirements stipulated in the program. If the grandparent is 30 to 64 years and the parent is absent, the work and education requirements must be met by the grandparent. If the grandchild is very young or has special needs, then the work requirement becomes a detriment to the needs of the child. These regulatory complications add to the financial burden and emotional stress of grandparents responsible for their grandchild(ren).

What are the implications?

The current recession is likely to increase the number of grandparents responsible for their grandchild(ren). Given the high poverty rates in Oklahoma of parents raising children, it is unlikely that grandparents are in better position to assume the additional requirements of one or more grandchildren. The inequity of financial assistance from federal or state programs for grandparent-headed households is greater than for parent-headed households. Policies that are in place were prepared for single-parent and both parent households; little is in place for grandparents assuming responsibility for their children. Additionally, many grandparents are still in the workforce, and need the same type of supports as a working parent including child care, flexible schedules, parental leave and health benefits. Employer's policies seldom extend these supports to grandparents responsible for their grandchildren. Therefore, it is important for policymakers to examine federal and state regulations to accommodate this growing phenomenon of grandparents caring for their grandchildren for financial assistance, and workplace policies.

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Census questions?

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