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Examining Psychological and Social Factors of Grandparent Kinship Providers

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Abstract

According to the 2003 U.S Census approximately 2.4 million children are being raised solely by their Grandparents(Bunch, Eastman, & Griffin, 2007). With this number steadily increasing it is imperative that a greater understanding be developed to understand the social and psychological factors that lead grandparents to become kinship providers. This study examined the psychological and social factors that grandparent kinship providers experience impacting their lives on multiple levels. The Adoptive Foster Families of Maine and the Kinship Program was contacted and allowed the researcher to reach out to grandparent kinship providers who were interested in the study to conduct semi-structured interviews and distribute surveys.

Introduction

Grandparents assume the role of caregiver for their grandchildren for various reasons. With the growing number of grandparents assuming the role of parent to their grandchild(ren), it is estimated that 1 in 10 grandparents will be the primary caregiver for at least 6 months before the child's eighteenth birthday (Williams, 2011). These rates are influenced through increased rates of divorce, prison, drug abuse, the decreased availability of parents for child care, and a greater demand of women in the workplace and in military deployments(Williams, 2011).

Purpose of the Study

The Intent of this study was to explore the psychological and social factors that grandparent kinship providers experience impacting their lives while they take care of there grandchildren in formal and informal kinship settings.

Methods

- Participants were selected using a purposive sampling method.
- Grandparents 30 years and older were eligible but were required to to be involved in the fulltime caregiving of their grandchildren.
- Adoptive Foster Families of Maine provided access to those participants in the this study.
- Participants were given a demographic survey along with a hybrid questionnaire that utilized 30 Likert-scale items related to perceived social support and adequacy of resources. Participants engaged in 20- 40 minute semi-structured interviews. Open ended questions were used to aid the participants in their reflection of their experience as kinship providers for the grandchildren.
- Thematic analysis was used to identify themes within the participants information rich narratives.
- SPSS software was utilized to analyze the data from the demographic survey along with the social support and adequacy of resources survey.

Caregiver Demographics		
Characteristics	Number	Percentages (%)
Age (years)		
Mean	53	
Range	51-54	
Gender		
Male	1	33.3%
Female	2	66.7%
Race/Ethnicity		
Caucasian	3	100%
Length of time caring for Children(yrs)		
Under ten years	1	33.3%
10 years or more	2	66.7%
Level of Education		
Some college	2	66.7%
High School Graduate	1	33.3%
Reasons for Caregiving		
Substance Abuse	3	100%

Figure 1. Demographics of Participation

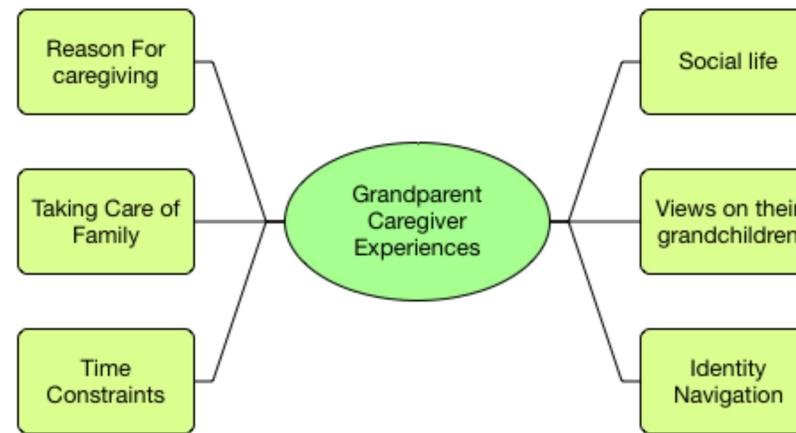


Figure 2. Identified themes from interviews

“You see it all. If they were with their parents growing up you'd only see them on weekends and stuff like nights or evenings or something like that you wouldn't have the full experience. Oh I love it just seeing them grow and learn, you can't replace that.”

“It's lot of different you know raising three kids at 51 than 21. You know part of it's sad but it's all worth it in the end”

“When you have children you never envision that their going to grow up and your going to have your grandchildren. You think your going to raise your children into adult hood and their going to go on. So I believe that with the right timing that I'm still going to be able to enjoy some of those things that I had hoped to enjoy. But in the meantime we find joy everyday. We have fun here we don't look at the bad with the kids being here we look at the good.”

Figure 3. Grandparents outlook on caregiving

Results

Figure 1 Highlights the Demographic information of the participants including: age, gender, ethnicity, level of education, reason for assuming the caregiver role, and length of time caring for their grandchild(ren)

Qualitative data analysis found 6 emerging themes (Figure 2.) that were discovered through the transcribed interviews with participants

- Reasons for Caregiving
- Impact on Social life
- Identity Navigation
- Views on their grandchildren
- Taking Care of Family
- Time Constraints

Despite the barriers and challenges that grandparent caregivers experience while assuming the role of a parent to their grandchild(ren), grandparents still expressed a positive outlook on the process as Figure 3 displays.

Next Steps

- Due to the limited number of participants in the study a more in depth look at the experience of grandparent caregivers is warranted utilizing a larger sample population. This will allow for a more comprehensive look at grandparent caregivers experiences.
- There are many similarities in this study and the current literature that is present around grandparent kinship providers caring for their grandchildren. These similarities include multiple factors such as incarceration and substance use. Negative impact on grandparents social life and time to provide self-care are also areas that were reverberated in this study.
- The purpose of this study was to examine a the challenges faced among grandparent caregivers and how that is reflective in grandparent caregivers experience. It is evident through this study that grandparents who find themselves parenting for a second time experience many challenges that can be due to age, financial status, and challenges in their life plan. This study although limited in sample size highlights the need for current and future social workers in the field to understand the barriers and complexities that grandparent caregivers experience.

Acknowledgements

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