

Grandparents Caring for Grandchildren

DEFINITION

Grandparents caring for grandchildren is the percentage of family households in which a grandparent is financially responsible for food, shelter, clothing, child care, etc. for any or all grandchildren under age 18 living in the household.

SIGNIFICANCE

Grandparents can provide continuity and family support for children in vulnerable families. Children may be in grandparent care because they have a parent who is unemployed, abusive, neglectful, incarcerated, ill, and/or has a substance abuse problem.¹

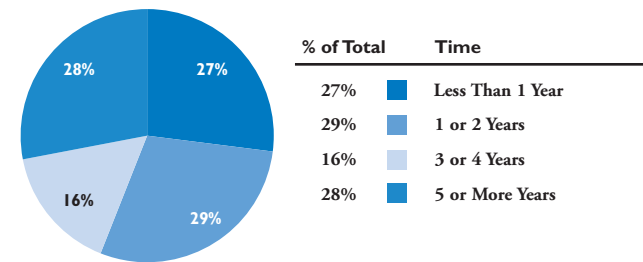
Grandparents living on a fixed income may be at greater risk of poverty after they become financially responsible for their grandchildren.² In fact, grandparent caregivers are more likely to live in poverty than other grandparents.³

Compared to non-relative foster parents, relative caregivers such as grandparents receive less monitoring and support from child welfare agencies. Relative caregivers are more likely to have lower incomes and have more children in the home.⁴ Grandparent caregivers in particular may have limited legal and economic resources, and most have informal custody arrangements and are not involved with a child welfare agency.⁵

Grandparent caregivers may not receive the support or services that they need and for which they are eligible. This may be because grandparents lack information about programs such as cash assistance and Medicaid or because grandparents may feel that there is stigma attached to receiving assistance.^{6,7} Nearly all children in kinship care are eligible for child-only Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) payments regardless of their household's income level, yet children in informal custody arrangements are much less likely to receive these payments.⁸ Nationally, 30% of relative caregivers receive TANF or other public financial assistance.⁹ Some grandparents and relative caregivers who apply for these funds may be mistakenly denied benefits.¹⁰

Grandparent caregivers are at risk for poor physical and mental health.¹¹ They may face legal barriers when enrolling children in school and/or when seeking health insurance or medical care for the children.¹² Many children in relative care do not obtain permanent status such as adoption or guardianship, often because their caregivers do not want to pursue the required legal process in order to avoid strain on family relationships.¹³ Grandparents make up the largest percentage of relative caregivers, but other relative caregivers (including aunts, uncles, cousins, and siblings) may face similar obstacles.¹⁴

Rhode Island Grandparents Financially Responsible for Their Grandchildren, by Length of Time Responsible, 2006-2008



n = 5,009

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2006-2008. Table B10050.

◆ Between 2006 and 2008, 44% of the 5,009 Rhode Island grandparents who were financially responsible for their grandchildren had been responsible for the children for three or more years.¹⁵ During this period, there were a total of 11,758 children living in households headed by grandparents, though not all grandparents were financially responsible for their grandchildren. An additional 4,716 children lived in households headed by other relatives. Over 7% of all children living in Rhode Island lived in a household headed by a relative other than a parent.¹⁶

◆ Children in private kinship care are twice as likely to live in poverty as children living with their parents. Nationally, nearly one-third (31%) of children in private kinship care live in poverty, and 17% have no health insurance. Many kinship families may not be aware of the services for which they are eligible.¹⁷

◆ Rhode Island regulations state that the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) must give priority to relatives when placing a child in out-of-home care. On December 1, 2009 in Rhode Island, there were 568 children in DCYF care who were in out-of-home placements with a grandparent or other relative. These children made up 25% of all children in out-of-home placements in Rhode Island.¹⁸

◆ The federal *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act*, which became law in 2008, helps children and youth in foster care establish permanent families through subsidized guardianship and adoption. Rhode Island was the first state to be granted approval for a new kinship-guardianship assistance program to enable children in the care of grandparents and other relatives to exit foster care into permanency.^{19,20}

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Table 3.

Grandparents Caring for Grandchildren, Rhode Island, 2000

| CITY/TOWN | TOTAL FAMILY HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN UNDER AGE 18 | GRANDPARENTS IN HOUSEHOLDS WITH THEIR GRANDCHILDREN UNDER AGE 18 | | GRANDPARENTS FINANCIALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR GRANDCHILDREN UNDER AGE 18 | |
|--------------------|--|--|-----------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| | | NUMBER | % OF ALL HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN | NUMBER | % OF ALL HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN |
| Barrington | 2,421 | 176 | 7% | 59 | 2% |
| Bristol | 2,345 | 373 | 16% | 88 | 4% |
| Burrville | 2,037 | 175 | 9% | 53 | 3% |
| Central Falls | 2,607 | 313 | 12% | 81 | 3% |
| Charlestown | 899 | 126 | 14% | 49 | 5% |
| Coventry | 4,375 | 569 | 13% | 89 | 2% |
| Cranston | 8,873 | 1,283 | 14% | 386 | 4% |
| Cumberland | 4,049 | 614 | 15% | 149 | 4% |
| East Greenwich | 1,796 | 72 | 4% | 27 | 2% |
| East Providence | 5,562 | 839 | 15% | 189 | 3% |
| Exeter | 792 | 135 | 17% | 79 | 10% |
| Foster | 553 | 79 | 14% | 0 | 0% |
| Glocester | 1,351 | 115 | 9% | 20 | 1% |
| Hopkinton | 1,043 | 124 | 12% | 29 | 3% |
| Jamestown | 667 | 66 | 10% | 0 | 0% |
| Johnston | 3,113 | 491 | 16% | 165 | 5% |
| Lincoln | 2,691 | 333 | 12% | 71 | 3% |
| Little Compton | 409 | 29 | 7% | 0 | 0% |
| Middletown | 2,300 | 178 | 8% | 54 | 2% |
| Narregansett | 1,506 | 206 | 14% | 69 | 5% |
| New Shoreham | 101 | 7 | 7% | 2 | 2% |
| Newport | 2,643 | 309 | 12% | 137 | 5% |
| North Kingstown | 3,630 | 305 | 8% | 92 | 3% |
| North Providence | 3,214 | 796 | 25% | 195 | 6% |
| North Smithfield | 1,226 | 258 | 21% | 118 | 10% |
| Pawtucket | 9,179 | 1,264 | 14% | 317 | 3% |
| Portsmouth | 2,225 | 211 | 9% | 70 | 3% |
| Providence | 20,174 | 3,322 | 16% | 1,219 | 6% |
| Richmond | 1,019 | 117 | 11% | 44 | 4% |
| Scituate | 1,367 | 172 | 13% | 29 | 2% |
| Smithfield | 2,133 | 349 | 16% | 69 | 3% |
| South Kingstown | 3,155 | 320 | 10% | 95 | 3% |
| Tiverton | 1,797 | 290 | 16% | 109 | 6% |
| Warren | 1,290 | 204 | 16% | 75 | 6% |
| Warwick | 9,731 | 1,389 | 14% | 376 | 4% |
| West Greenwich | 746 | 56 | 8% | 0 | 0% |
| West Warwick | 3,496 | 344 | 10% | 71 | 2% |
| Westerly | 2,790 | 268 | 10% | 120 | 4% |
| Woonsocket | 5,532 | 680 | 12% | 265 | 5% |
| Core Cities | 43,631 | 6,232 | 14% | 2,090 | 5% |
| Remainder of State | 81,236 | 10,725 | 13% | 2,970 | 4% |
| Rhode Island | 124,867 | 16,957 | 14% | 5,060 | 4% |

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000.

Core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick and Woonsocket.

References

^{1,12,13} Children's Defense Fund. (n.d.). *Kinship care resource kit*. Retrieved December 8, 2009 from www.cdf.org

^{2,6} American Association of Retired Persons. (2007). *Public benefits programs*. Retrieved January 9, 2009 from www.aarp.org

³ Heller, T. & Ganguly, R. (n.d.). *Grandparents raising grandchildren with developmental disabilities*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Administration on Aging, National Family Caregiver Support Program.

^{4,5} Hinterlong, J. & Ryan, S. (2008). Creating grander families: Older adults adopting younger kin and nonkin. *The Gerontologist*, 48 (4), 527-536.

^{7, 8, 10, 17} Main, R., Macomber, J. & Geen, R. (2006). *Trends in service receipt: Children in kinship care gaining ground*. New Federalism: National Survey of American Families, Series B, No.B-68. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

⁹ Conway, T. & Hutson, R. (2007). *Is kinship care good for kids?* Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy.

¹¹ Hughes, M., Waite, L., LaPierre, T. & Luo, Y. (2007). All in the family: The impact of caring for grandchildren on grandparents' health. *Journal of Gerontology: SOCIAL SCIENCES*, 62B(2), S108-S119.

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2006-2008. Table B10050.

^{14,16} U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2006-2008. Table B09006.

¹⁸ Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST), December 2009.

¹⁹ Child Welfare League of America. (2009). Rhode Island approved for kinship guardianship option, more pending. *Children's Monitor Online: A public policy update from CWLA*. 22(29)

²⁰ Generations United. (2009). *GrandFacts: Data, interpretation, and implications for caregivers*. Washington, DC: Generations United.