

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

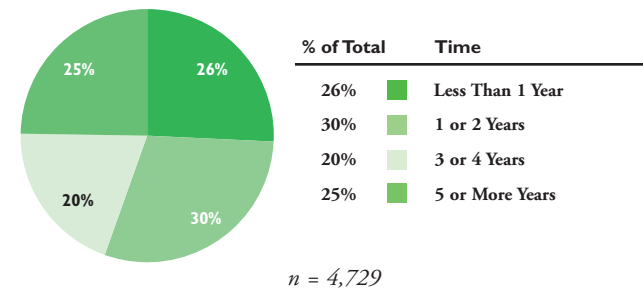
Grandparents living on a fixed income may be at greater risk of poverty after they become financially responsible for their grandchildren.² Eighteen percent of grandparent caregivers live below the poverty line compared to 8% of the population age 50 and over.³

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 (cash assistance) 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, 2007-2009



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2007-2009. Table B10050.

◆ Between 2007 and 2009, 45% of the 4,729 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 11,426 children living in households headed by grandparents, though not all grandparents were financially responsible for their grandchildren. An additional 3,734 children lived in households headed by other relatives. Approximately 7% of all children living in Rhode Island lived in a household headed by a relative other than a parent.¹⁶

◆ Children in informal kinship care (i.e., placed with relatives without the involvement of a child welfare agency) 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.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 31, 2010 in Rhode Island, there were 591 children under age 19 in DCYF care who were in out-of-home placements with a grandparent or other relative. These children made up 27% of all children in out-of-home placements in Rhode Island.¹⁸

◆ The federal *Fostering Connection 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 the 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%
Burrillville	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%
Narragansett	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%
<i>Core Cities</i>	<i>43,631</i>	<i>6,232</i>	<i>14%</i>	<i>2,090</i>	<i>5%</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>81,236</i>	<i>10,725</i>	<i>13%</i>	<i>2,970</i>	<i>4%</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>124,867</i>	<i>16,957</i>	<i>14%</i>	<i>5,060</i>	<i>4%</i>

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

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- ^{14,16} U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2007-2009. Table B09006.
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