

Grandparents Caring for Grandchildren

DEFINITION

Grandparents caring for grandchildren is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as a grandparent who is financially responsible for food, shelter, clothing, day care, etc. for any or all grandchildren under 18 years old 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

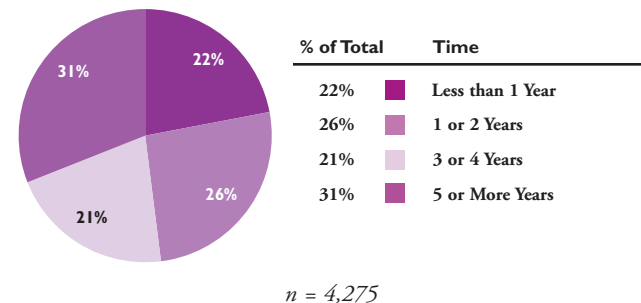
Grandparents living on a fixed income may be at greater risk of poverty after they become financially responsible for their grandchildren.² In fact, grandparent caregivers are more likely to live in poverty than other grandparents.³

Nationally, the majority of children in relative care (78%) are in private care, meaning that they have not been involved with a child welfare agency.⁴ Relative caregivers receive less training, information, support and supervision than licensed non-relative foster parents.⁵ Studies indicate that relative caregivers are more likely to be poor, older, isolated from their community, and have less education than non-relative foster parents.⁶

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 and understanding about programs such as cash assistance and Medicaid, or because grandparents may feel that there is a stigma attached to receiving this assistance.^{7,8} Nearly all grandparent caregivers are eligible for either foster care payments or child-only Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) payments regardless of their household's income level, but few receive this assistance. Nationally, an estimated one in five children in private relative care received any public monetary support, compared to two-thirds of children in relative care who were involved with a child welfare agency.⁹

Grandparent caregivers are at risk for poor physical and mental health.¹⁰ They may face legal barriers when enrolling children in school or when seeking health insurance or medical care for the children.¹¹ Many children in relative care are unable to obtain permanent status such as adoption or guardianship, often because their caregivers do not want to pursue a legal relationship in hopes of avoiding strain on family relationships.¹² Grandparents make up the largest percentage of relative caregivers, but other relative caregivers (including aunts, uncles, cousins, and siblings) may face similar obstacles.¹³

Rhode Island Grandparents Financially Responsible for Their Grandchildren, by Length of Time Responsible, 2007



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

◆ In 2007, more than one-half of the 4,275 Rhode Island grandparents who were financially responsible for their grandchildren had been responsible for the children for three or more years.¹⁴ There were a total of 10,565 children living in households headed by grandparents, though grandparents may not have been financially responsible for their grandchildren. An additional 4,202 children lived in households headed by other relatives. Six percent of all children living in Rhode Island lived in households headed by a relative other than a parent.¹⁵

◆ Children in private kinship care are almost twice as likely to live in poverty as children living with their parents. Nationally in 2002, nearly one-third (31%) of children in kinship care lived in poverty and one-sixth (17%) had no health insurance.¹⁶

◆ 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, 2008 in Rhode Island, there were 646 children in DCYF care who were in out-of-home placements with a grandparent or other relative. These children made up 24% of all children in out-of-home placements in Rhode Island.¹⁷

◆ The federal *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008* helps children and youth in foster care establish permanent families through relative guardianship and adoption. Provisions of the Act include increased notice to relatives when children enter care, federal funds for supporting improved subsidized guardianship payments for relatives, and clarified licensing standards for relative foster family homes.¹⁸

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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

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- ¹³ *Children in kinship care*. (2003). Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- ¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2007. Table B10050.
- ¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2007. Table B09006.
- ¹⁷ Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST), December 2008.
- ¹⁸ Generations United. (n.d.). *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act will improve outcomes for children and youth in foster care*. Retrieved December 1, 2008 from www.gu.org