

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, child 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 or has a substance abuse problem.¹

Grandparent caregivers are at risk of living in poverty since many have fixed incomes.² In fact, grandparent caregivers are more likely to live in poverty than other grandparents.³

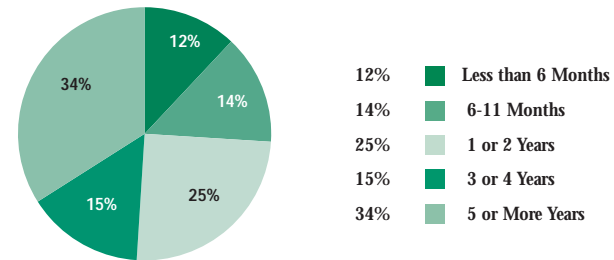
In the U.S. the majority of children in relative care (77%) are in private care, meaning that they have not been involved with a child welfare agency.⁴ For this reason, most relative caregivers receive less training, information, and supervision than licensed, non-relative foster parents.⁵ Studies indicate that relative caregivers are more likely to be poor, single, older and have less education than non-kin foster parents.⁶ As a result, relative caregivers may require more services than non-relative

foster parents. Children in relative care are less likely to obtain permanent status such as adoption or guardianship; many relatives do not receive guidance on these issues.⁷

Often, grandparent caregivers do 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 feel that there is a stigma attached to receiving this assistance.^{8,9} 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 income levels, but few receive this assistance. In 2002 in the U.S., only 1 out of 5 children in private, relative care received a TANF child-only payment, compared to nearly 1 out of 2 children in relative care who have been involved with a child welfare agency.¹⁰

Grandparent caregivers are at risk for poor physical and mental health.¹¹ They may face legal barriers when enrolling children in school, or when seeking health insurance or medical care for the children.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, 2000



n = 5,060

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 3.

- ◆ Nearly half (49%) of the 5,060 Rhode Island grandparents who are financially responsible for their grandchildren have been responsible for the children for three or more years.¹⁴
- ◆ In 2003, there were 10,134 children in Rhode Island living in households headed by grandparents, though not all grandparents were financially responsible for their grandchildren. This accounts for 4% of all children living in Rhode Island.¹⁵
- ◆ Demographic trends show an increase in grandparent-headed families across all socioeconomic and ethnic groups in the U.S.¹⁶ Though poverty rates are consistently higher for all grandparent-headed families, African American and Native Americans have the highest poverty rates among this group and are four times as likely to be responsible for their grandchildren as White Americans.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. As of December 2004 in Rhode Island, there were 674 children in DCYF care who were in out-of-home placements with a grandparent or other relative. These children make up 9% of all children in the care of DCYF in Rhode Island.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%
<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. Summary File 3.

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

References

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⁶ Geen, R. (2003). *Foster children placed with relatives often receive less government help*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

¹³ *Children in kinship care*. (2003). Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

¹⁴ *Grandparents and other relatives raising children*. (2002). Washington, DC: The Children's Defense Fund.

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2002 to 2004 three year average.

¹⁷ Brabazon, K. *Issue brief to Generations United: Grandparents living with grandchildren and grandparents responsible for grandchildren*. Retrieved October 6, 2003 from the Generations United website at www.gu.org.

¹⁸ Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST), January 2005.