

Profile of Custodial Grandparent Families

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- In 1998, there were over 2.5 million grandparent-headed families with or without parents present. Together, these families cared for over 3.9 million children or 5.6% of all children (U.S. Census Bureau, 1998).
- The number of children living in grandparent headed households has increased 66% since 1990 (Children's Defense Fund, 1997).
- High rates of grandparent headed families are tied to the "Four D's": drugs, divorce, desertion, and death (Yorkey, 1993).
- Over 26% of children in grandparent-maintained households have clinically significant levels of emotional and behavioral problems, compared to 10% of children in the general population (Dubowitz, Feiblemon, Starr and Sawyer, 1994).
- Other contributing factors include high rates of adolescent pregnancies (Becklund, 1993), a prison population in which 80% of inmates are parents of dependent children (Barry, Fortier, Smith, & Archibald, 1993), mental illness (Jendrek, 1994), and the increased number of families affected by AIDS (Lee, 1994).
- Grandparents who are raising grandchildren span all ethnic groups and all social and economic levels. Grandparent headed families can be found in large cities, small towns, and rural areas.
- Children from custodial grandparent families are more likely to live in the south or in central cities and to be poor (Casper and Bryson, 1998).
- In 1998, 43.6% of all children living in grandparent-maintained families were white, not-Hispanic, 35.9% of all children living in grandparent-maintained families were black, (both Hispanic and not-Hispanic), and 18% of all children living in grandparent-maintained families were Hispanic (all races) (U.S. Census Bureau, 1998).
- Children in the care of grandparents are more likely to have a household head who is older or who is not employed (Casper and Bryson, 1998).
- The age of custodial grandparents varies greatly. The mean age is generally in the middle 50's (Minkler & Roe, 1993; Smith & Dannison, 2000), with a median age of 53.

- Nineteen percent of custodial grandmothers and 15 percent of custodial grandfathers are under the age of 45 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1997).
- Over half of custodial grandparents are caring for two or more young children, and approximately half are grandmothers without partners (Creighton, 1991).
- Grandparents who are raising their grandchildren rarely seek out their new role. They may experience deep feelings of guilt, failure, and embarrassment over their own adult child's inability to successfully assume the role of parent (Dannison, Smith, Dannison, & Nieuwenhuis, 1996).
- Children in the care of grandparents are more likely to exhibit learning disabilities (30%) and are at increased risk for school retention (60%) (Sawyer and Dubowitz, 1994).
- Many custodial grandparents, in addition to caring for one or more young children with physical and/or emotional needs, often find themselves in the position of having to provide physical care and emotional support to their own aging parents. The constant challenge associated with this bi-directional nurturance leaves many grandparents emotionally, physically, and financially drained (Smith, Dannison & Vacha-Haase, 1998).
- Children in the care of grandparents are often exceptionally needy, due to a combination of congenital and environmental factors. Many grandparented children have experienced abuse and neglect as a result of living with a drug-involved or otherwise ineffective parent (Churchville, 1984; Minkler & Roe, 1993).
- Grandparented children deal with many troubling emotions. Feelings common to grandparented children include grief and loss, guilt, fear, embarrassment, and anger (Smith, Dannison & Vacha-Haase, 1998).
- Custodial grandchildren often have difficulties in forming attachments, have low self esteem, poor socialization skills and may have physical, cognitive or emotional impairments (Smith, Dannison and Vacha-Haase, 1998).
- One-half of grandchildren living in a grandparent's home in 1997 were under the age of six (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Economic & Statistics Administration, 1997).
- 30% of children in grandparent headed homes were living with grandparents who had not received a high school diploma. Only 12% of children living with parents had parents without a high school diploma (Casper & Bryson, 1998).