A comparison of grandmothers' and grandfathers' stress in raising their grandchildren

Mia Lucero Attruia
Doris Lorraine. Morrow

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A COMPARISON OF GRANDMOTHERS’ AND GRANDFATHERS’
STRESS IN RAISING THEIR GRANDCHILDREN

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Mia Lucero Attruia
Doris Lorraine Morrow
June 2002
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ABSTRACT

The number of grandparents assuming the parental role to their grandchildren when the parent is deemed unfit has increased in recent years. Given that this family structure often emerges during times of crisis, there is great potential for grandparents to experience stress as they care for their grandchildren. The purpose of this study was to build upon previous research on the experience of stress among grandparents raising grandchildren. Given that previous research has not included a large number of grandfathers as respondents, the authors used nonprobability sampling techniques to recruit grandfathers as well as grandmothers for this study. The authors utilized a qualitative approach in an effort to understand the unique stress experiences of both grandmothers and grandfathers in raising their grandchildren. The data were analyzed and compared along gender lines, within a role-theory framework.

Findings of this study have yielded valuable information regarding the experience of stress in grandparents raising grandchildren. These findings have implications for the types of services social work agencies offer to various groups. They also have implications for the way social work practitioners
approach and relate to grandparents in their efforts to support the family structure.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to all the grandparents that participated and helped make this a successful project. The reception from the grandparents was simply amazing and very inspiring to us. The interviews proved to be emotional, rewarding, strengthening and very informative. We were especially touched by the unselfish manner in which the grandparents opened their homes and hearts to perfect strangers, revealing inner thoughts and feelings, all in the name of love for their grandchildren.

We extend our appreciation to Carol Voll, M. F. C. C., Coordinator of Lutheran Social Services of Hesperia, CA, and to Senior Pastor Wayne A. Stockstill and staff of First Baptist Church in Hesperia, CA, for allowing us to recruit their clients and members as interview subjects.

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expertise along with Doris' passion and ability to communicate, schedule and personalize each interview. Together we proved to be a great and successful team.

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Thank You,

Doris L. Morrow

Mia L. Attruia
DEDICATION

In loving memory of Mia’s grandparents, Antonio and Maria Lucero, who devoted their lives to ensuring that their children and grandchildren were showered with love, care, guidance and support. My deepest love, gratitude and respect to you both for all you have given to me. I always have been, and always will be, inspired by you both and determined to make you proud.

In loving memory of Doris’ grandmother, Ella Cartwright, and her maternal grandfather, Arch Fain, who were always there for her through sickness, health and adolescent problems. They not only lent a helping hand in raising me, but also helped guide me and instilled values, loyalty, hope and trust in me. I am proud and honored to be called your granddaughter. My only wish is that you were here to share in the glory.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

In contemporary society, many new family structures have emerged that differ from the nuclear family of procreation that includes mother, father and children. One such family structure, increasing in number in recent years, includes grandparents taking on the role of primary caregiver to their grandchildren, often without any assistance from the children's parents. Many studies have demonstrated that this family structure of grandparents raising grandchildren generally emerges during times of family crisis, prompted by contributing factors such as teenage pregnancy, child abuse or neglect, drug abuse, alcoholism, divorce, homelessness, incarceration, abandonment or separation, parental illness or death (Burton, 1992; Dressel & Barnhill, 1994; Fischer, 1983; Minkler & Roe, 1993; Raphael, 1988; Shore & Hayslip, 1994; Troll, 1983).

As grandparents are accepting the role of surrogate parent during times of crisis, there is little time for rational decision-making or to adjust to the new role, yielding a greater potential for the experience of stress.
Furthermore, there is little time to prepare for immediate and pressing needs of having children back in their lives, such as obtaining school and medical authorizations, legal issues surrounding custody and child protection, or additional financial assistance to provide for basic necessities such as clothing, diapers, or formula (Whitely, White, Kelley, & Yorke, 1999).

Many studies of grandparents raising their grandchildren have been framed in terms of “time disordered roles” (Burton & Bengston, 1985; Jendrek, 1993; Fuller-Thomson et al., 1997). According to developmental theories, older adulthood may be considered a time for reflection (Butler & Lewis, 1973; Neugarten, 1968), when a person relinquishes previous roles and strives to achieve integrity (Erikson, 1959). However, this is often not the case for grandparents who have been thrust into the parental role for the second-time around. Given that parental responsibilities by aging grandparents is considered “off-time” (Neugarten, 1979), research indicates that older adults may find the experience of full-time parenting quite stressful as they face numerous concerns involving the day to day care of their grandchildren.
Often of primary concern is the financial responsibility of providing for the children (Kelley, 1993; Emick & Hayslip, 1999), especially when the natural parents may not be providing any kind of financial assistance. At this stage in their life, grandparents would normally be enjoying freedom from a financial obligation to dependents. Furthermore, many may no longer be a part of the workforce, and as such may be on a fixed income. Once a custodial grandparenting relationship emerges, financial obligations of dependents return and may even increase. Therefore, some grandparents may have to come out of retirement and return to work, or reach into their savings to meet the costs of raising their grandchildren. This financial strain yields great potential for grandparents to experience stress that may negatively affect their ability to meet the children’s emotional, social and psychological needs (Jendrek, 1994).

Grandparents have also been reported to be distressed about their resentment of, and ambivalence toward, their grandchildren’s parents, as well as about the consequences to their grandchildren should they become incapacitated or die (Shore & Hayslip, 1994). Resentment may develop, in part, due to a loss of freedom grandparents hoped to enjoy as they experienced the “empty nest” stage (Kimmel, 1990;
Instead, the responsibility of raising a grandchild detracts from many of the grandparents' relationships, such as with their spouses, friends, the child's parents, as well as with other grandchildren.

Purpose of the Study

Many studies have been conducted to explore, describe, and explain the experience of stress in grandparents raising grandchildren using various theoretical frameworks. However, a consistent limitation of these studies is revealed in the sample, which generally includes a majority of Caucasian females and African-American females. As such, it is difficult to generalize the results to the heterogeneous group of grandparents raising grandchildren. Census data show that 40% of grandparents raising their grandchildren were male, and 76% of the female grandparents were married (Casper & Bryson, 1998). This demographic information confirms that males are also participants in the experience of grandparents raising grandchildren, and as such are vulnerable to the same stressors that the custodial relationship presents.

This study was designed to build upon previous studies that have examined the experience of stress by
grandparents raising grandchildren, yet with a primary focus of recruiting grandfathers as respondents. The authors hoped to discover the extent to which grandfathers experience stress in raising their grandchildren, so as to compare that experience with their female counterparts within a role theory framework.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

Findings of this study have yielded valuable information as to role perceptions and practices in the experience of grandparents raising grandchildren. Such information may affect the types of services social work agencies offer to various groups. Given that this family structure has been increasing in recent years, it was important to undertake this study now so that grandfathers' experiences of stress in raising their grandchildren are recognized and supported. The findings have implications for the way social work practitioners approach and relate to these individuals that will ultimately benefit the entire family structure.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Custodial Grandparenting: Prevalence and Profile

In the past quarter century, grandparent headed households have increased by more than 50%, from 2.2 million in 1970 to 3.9 million in 1997 (Lugalia, 1998). Skipped generation families of grandchildren living with grandparents, in the absence of the parents, became increasingly common during the 1990's (Casper & Bryson, 1998; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999). The trend for grandparents to assume a parental role to their grandchildren when the parent is deemed unfit (deToledo & Brown, 1995) has been associated with a number of precipitating factors. A study of grandparents raising grandchildren in Oakland, California, determined that the majority of these grandchildren were in the care of their grandparents due to neglect by their substance-abusing parents (Minkler & Roe, 1993). Other studies have also found that neglect related to substance abuse and addiction was the primary reason grandparents were raising their grandchildren (Burton, 1992; Kelley, 1993; Dowdell, 1995; Jendrek, 1994). Many other contributing factors to custodial grandparenting include mental illness and

Aside from determining the circumstances under which this family structure develops, many studies have produced a profile of custodial grandparents (Chalfie, 1994; Fuller-Thomson, Minkler, & Driver, 1997; Strawbridge, Wallhagen, Shema, & Kaplan, 1997). The mean age of the grandparents is between 57 and 61 years, with a median age of 57 years. Most custodial grandparents are Caucasian and 10-29% are African-American. However, it is interesting to note proportionately more African-Americans than Caucasians are custodial grandparents. Two studies found that 10% of the grandparents are of Hispanic origin and 1-2% represented other groups (Chalfie, 1994; Fuller, Thompson, Minkler, & Driver, 1997). In terms of gender, 60% of the surrogate parents are female but only 63% of those grandmothers were married as opposed to 96% of the
grandfathers being married. Substantial numbers have low income as indicated by an analysis of census data on grandparents heading skipped generation households that found 41% of them lived at or below the poverty line; 58% did not finish high school (Chalfie, 1994). A more recent study of census data found that grandchildren who lived in homes headed by their grandmother only were the most likely to be poor and receive public assistance, whereas those in skipped generation families headed by two grandparents were most likely to be uninsured (Casper & Bryson, 1998).

Impact on Grandparents Health and Lifestyle

Grandparents are providing a tremendous service in accepting the surrogate parent role, especially to their grandchildren, who might otherwise be placed in a foster home. However, there is a tremendous need to consider the condition of the grandparents, as older adults contending with various life tasks and roles, and the potential for a custodial grandparenting relationship to arouse stress in the lives of the grandparents. Research has shown that in taking on a surrogate parent role, these grandparents risk their own physical, psychological, social and financial health and lifestyle (Landry-Meyer, 1999; Jouslin &
Brouard, 1995; Minkler & Roe, 1993; Emick & Hayslip, 1999).

Some researchers have described the impact of a custodial relationship on the grandparents’ physical health. Grandparents are faced with the reality of their aging, which when combined with rearing a child leads to heightened concerns about health problems (Pinson-Millburn et al., 1996). In the late 1980’s, health care providers, social workers, and mental health workers reported an increase in health problems among their middle-aged clients and older female patients. Clients were missing appointments and suffering from stress related conditions. Previously controlled illnesses such as hypertension and diabetes began to flare up (Miller, 1991). Upon further investigation, it became apparent that their lifestyle had changed, having recently assumed custody of their grand or great grandchildren.

In a study of caregiver burden, Dowdell (1995) found 45% of grandmothers identified themselves as having a physical problem or illness that seriously affected their health. Burton (1992) found that custodial grandparents are at greater risk for various metabolic, degenerative, and cardiovascular disorders, with 35% of the respondents complaining of problems with arthritis and diabetes. The
majority of respondents in a study conducted by Minkler, Roe, and Price (1992) reported good or excellent physical and mental health, yet they acknowledged a variety of health problems, some quite debilitating. The authors believed that the grandparents seemed to downplay their own health issues, so as not to let them get in the way of caregiving activities. Such neglect of physical health may lead to a more serious and debilitating condition in the long run, which may threaten the grandparents' ability to maintain the custodial relationship.

Research has demonstrated that custodial grandparents are at high risk for psychological symptoms of stress. In comparing grandparent, spouse, and adult child caregivers to non-caregivers, Strawbridge et al. (1997) found that the grandparents fared more poorly in relation to non-caregivers in depressive symptoms, happiness, health, and activity limitations, and worse than spouse and adult child caregivers with respect to prior stressful events. Another study showed that those grandparent caregivers who started raising a grandchild in a previous five-year period had significantly higher symptoms of depression than those who never raised a grandchild (Minkler et al., 1997). Similarly, Burton (1992) found that 86% of the respondents reported experiencing anxiety or depression
most of the time, and many reported increased tobacco use and alcoholism. Often these symptoms of depression, anxiety, and substance use develop due to the difficulty of balancing the added pressures of work, family and social responsibilities at a time when many grandparents hoped to enjoy fewer pressures and have more time for themselves.

Grandparents raising grandchildren have also been found to experience social isolation at a time in their lives when they would otherwise have few childcare responsibilities. They no longer enjoy the ability to socialize and recreate without the constraints of childcare. Jendrek (1994) found that some grandparents experience a failure in their support networks because their friends no longer share the role of parent. Many friends may not wish to engage in activities that involve children, and there is often little opportunity for activities with age cohorts that would welcome children. Grandparents were also found to experience declines in time with their spouse and other family members, thereby detracting from those relationships (Jendrek, 1993). This may contribute to feelings of guilt or resentment for not being able to invest time and energy to other relationships and activities (Shore & Hayslip, 1994).
Custodial grandparents are often responsible for meeting all of the expenses that come with raising their grandchildren, as natural parents may not pay child support. Furthermore, grandparents may be unaware of or ineligible for other means of financial assistance based upon their status as a relative caregiver. Relative caregivers are typically relegated to secondary status and are not routinely provided adequate financial and social service supports, according to a 1992 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Report (Crumbley & Little, 1997).

Parenting a child is a stressful job in itself, but also holding a full-time job in order to meet the financial demands may create additional stress. Employed custodial grandparents report having less energy to devote to childcare and therefore may find it increasingly difficult to meet the emotional needs of the grandchild (Jendrek, 1994). Historically, American society has assumed that families have a moral obligation to care for their family members. However, such bias toward custodial grandparents fails to recognize the delicate financial situation they may be in, given their life stage. Research has demonstrated that grandparent-grandchild families are the poorest of the poor (Chalfie, 1994), and a failure to
provide adequate financial assistance only serves to increase the experience of stress upon the grandparents who must scramble to make ends meet.

Despite the many difficulties that custodial grandparents may face as cited above, many have reported very positive gains and outlooks from the caregiving situation. Many have reported feeling fortunate to be given the chance to parent again and hopefully do a better job the second time around than they have perceived themselves doing the first time with their own children. Others report relishing the opportunity to carry on the legacy of the family, taking satisfaction in parenting their grandchildren, and being able to enjoy the love and companionship of their grandchildren, which may for some grandparents mitigate the stresses of caring for their grandchildren (Burton & deVries, 1993; Chase-Lansdale, Brooks-Gunn, & Zamsky, 1994; Dressel & Barnhill, 1994; Minkler & Roe, 1993).

Theoretical Frameworks

Much of the research on grandparents raising grandchildren has been descriptive in nature, providing a general picture of the population, the circumstances under which the caregiving relationship comes about, and the
stresses and experiences that grandparents may potentially experience as a result. This information has further been analyzed employing a variety of theoretical frameworks. One such analysis conducted by Sands and Goldberg-Glen (2000) utilizes stress theory. In applying stress theory to grandparents, the authors explored the relationship of variables particular to their caregiving situation as stressors, including grandchildren’s problems and conflict with the parent of the grandchildren among others. The authors concluded that when grandparents lack supports, their level of stress is relatively high. These findings have implications for the need of clinical services for grandparent-headed families, such as family therapy that can improve the quality of family relationships and hopefully decrease stress.

Another analysis of grandparents raising grandchildren utilized a multigenerational family systems perspective framework. As noted by Goldberg-Glen, et al. (1998), by focusing on multigenerational interrelations and patterns, one can identify how different types of family patterns operate and how some skipped generation families function (p. 479). The multigenerational family systems perspective also encompasses changes that occur over the life cycle. As families evolve over time, their
structure and roles change. The authors concluded that the grandparents' acquiescence to the role of surrogate parent demonstrates the fluidity of roles and the flexibility of these families in response to family challenges. They also recognized that grandparent-headed families were vulnerable to a number of difficulties. Not only are the grandparents aging, with increased risk of illness, disability, or death, but placing children with grandparents whose families have a history of dysfunctional intergenerational patterns also poses a risk of repeating those patterns. The authors further point out that these findings demand that professionals who deal with this family structure need to be cognizant that the caregiving grandparents have developmental needs, caregiving issues, and potential health and mental health problems that need to be understood and addressed.

This study has been particularly guided by role theory as it relates to grandparents raising grandchildren. The grandparent caregiver role is considered a time-disordered role (Burton & Bengston, 1985; Fuller-Thomson et al., 1997; Jendrek, 1993) with a lack of structure concerning role expectations and low societal consensus about role norms. Adults between the ages of 50 and 70 years old are not normally expected to
be in the parental role, but rather experiencing various other stages and tasks, such as the empty nest, freedom from the costs of child rearing and even retirement. Given that this is an untimely role, it even has the potential to produce role conflict and negatively impact a grandparent caregiver's social support (Burton & Bengston, 1985; Jendrek, 1994; Minkler & Roe, 1993). Furthermore, research has shown that patterns of division of household work and childcare are largely traditional and gender-differentiated (Vinick & Ekerdt, 1993), whereby the female is primarily responsible for these activities while the male is expected to provide financially and be the disciplinarian with the children. This has great implications for grandparent caregivers' perceptions about social supports and their respective roles as grandparent caregivers. It also implies a need for information, services and support programs to mitigate the stresses involved in a custodial grandparent situation to ultimately provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for grandparent and grandchild alike.

As reviewed above, the literature reveals many studies have been conducted that provide a myriad of information on the phenomenon of grandparents raising grandchildren. However, as noted by Szinovacz (1998), much
of the research contains a gender and/or race bias whereby studies often neglect grandfathers and address only specific racial/ethnic groups. As a result the data are not generalizable to the larger population of custodial grandparents. This study aimed to address this limitation by focusing on grandfathers in an attempt to discover their experience of stress in raising their grandchildren. The data was then compared to the stress experience as reported by their female counterparts and analyzed within a framework of role theory. This theory was chosen not only for the benefit of analyzing custodial grandparenting as a time disordered role, but also in recognition of the fact that grandfathers are not generally responsible for the parenting process, even if they reside in the same home, and that may ultimately affect the type and degree of stress the grandfathers experience.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to build on previous descriptive research on grandparents’ experiences of stress in raising their grandchildren. The research method used was a qualitative approach. The goal in utilizing a qualitative approach lay in a desire to understand the unique stress experiences of grandfathers and grandmothers in raising their grandchildren, as they live it and feel it. Participants were allowed to use their own words to describe their situations in taking on the parenting role, their experiences in performing the role, and what it means to them. This approach yielded rich data with appreciation for the complexities of context and individual differences inherent in this population.

A practical limitation of this approach was found in the generalizability of the study’s findings, considering the participants were not randomly sampled, but selected on the basis of interest and availability. Though what was learned may be relevant to others in similar situations, this was not a primary concern in planning this study.
Sampling

Data were obtained from a sample of married couples, with no restriction on gender, that were at the time of data collection raising at least one grandchild, under the age of eighteen, in the absence of the biological parents. At least one of the grandparents had to be biologically related to the grandchild. The couples may or may not have had a legal, custodial relationship with the grandchild(ren). However, they must have held and exercised primary responsibility for the day to day care of the grandchild(ren) residing in the same household. There were no restrictions with regard to length of time in the caregiving relationship, nor with regard to the age of the grandparents, race or occupational status, however, both grandparents had to be willing to participate.

The sample was chosen to expand on previous research that did not include a large number of grandfathers as respondents, and as such could not be generalized to the greater population of grandparents raising grandchildren. Furthermore, the sample was chosen so as to yield data from both genders regarding their own unique experiences of stress that was analyzed and compared along gender lines.
The study used nonprobability sampling techniques to recruit participants from the general population. The snowball sampling technique was used in an effort to select participants based on the characteristics outlined above. The authors made inquiries of people in the community known to them to be married and raising one or more grandchildren, who were interested in participating in the study. Further referrals were obtained from participants who were aware of others with the same characteristics.

It was difficult to determine the sample size necessary to ensure representation of the larger population of grandparents raising their grandchildren. Considering this study was qualitative in nature, such representation was not critical to the main goal of the study in pursuing depth of experience on an individual level. The authors aspired to interview ten married couples and did so. This number was conceived of in recognition of time factors in the authors' conducting the interviews over the course of a ten-week quarter.

Data Collection and Instruments

Data was collected through face-to-face, semistructured interviews of each individual spouse.
Initially, participants were asked a variety of closed-ended demographic questions, including how many grandchildren were currently being cared for, age of grandparent and grandchild(ren), race, gender, level of education, occupational status and level of income, how long the grandchild had been in the home, and whether the grandparents had full, partial, or legal custody of the grandchild(ren) and whether they received any financial support for the care of the grandchild(ren), and if so, from what source. Participants were also asked an open-ended question to explain how the caregiving situation came about. The interview then proceeded with open-ended questions to gather information regarding potential sources of stress and concern. General topics discussed included financial concerns, legal issues, behavioral problems with the child(ren), issues regarding the grandchild(ren)’s education and rearing, concerns with grandchildren’s biological parents, and issues regarding available time for oneself or for other meaningful relationships and pursuits. See Appendix A for complete interview schedule.
Procedures

Data were gathered through a semistructured interview schedule conducted by the authors of the study. Each grandparent was interviewed separately from his or her spouse, not necessarily at the same time. The authors conducted all interviews and the same author interviewed each couple. No further efforts were made to match interviewer with interviewee. Interviewers took written notes of the information provided by the participants that were coded and analyzed a priori. There was no time limit given on each particular interview. All of the interviews were conducted within a ten-week time period. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants from October 2001 through December 2001. All interviews took place at the private homes of the participants, in a separate room from anyone else who happened to be present in the home at that time.

Protection of Human Subjects

Each participant was asked to read and sign an informed consent before the interview was conducted. At no time was any respondent’s name reported along with his/her responses. All notes taken were guarded in a locked cabinet and were discarded upon completion of the project.
All data were reported in-group form only. All interviews were conducted in a private setting, not recorded in any way other than written notes taken by the interviewers during the interview process. Before each interview began, each participant was asked to read and sign a consent form (see Appendix B). At the conclusion of the interview, each participant was given a debriefing statement (see Appendix C), along with a list of resources to contact for information and assistance with issues that may have been discussed during the interview (see Appendix D.)

Data Analysis

Each data set of each individual participant was analyzed and coded a priori. Once each was analyzed individually, the data sets were then compared to its spousal counterpart. The data were then coded in two groups of male versus female participants and analyzed along gender lines. Given the nature of the interview questions, specific constructs regarding sources of stress emerged such as emotional, financial, behavioral and lifestyle issues. Other constructs such as legal, medical, physical, and mental health issues did not emerge as anticipated by the authors.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Nine heterosexual married couples and one lesbian, committed couple that were raising at least one grandchild under the age of eighteen, in the absence of the biological parents, were interviewed regarding their unique experiences of stress in the caregiving relationship. The length of time that the grandchildren had been in the home ranged from 5 months to 12 years, with five couples caring for 1 grandchild, four caring for 2 grandchildren, and one caring for 3 grandchildren. The grandchildren's ages ranged from 3 years to 16 years old. Six of the grandparents had legal custody while four did not. Seven of the ten couples received some kind of financial support either through TANF, Social Security, or court ordered payments from a parent to the district attorney. Only two of the married couples had another person residing in the same household aside from themselves and the grandchildren they were raising.

The couples were from the community at large with ages ranging from 46 to 71 years old. The majority of the couples were Caucasian, with the exception of one Hispanic couple and one African-American couple. Eight out of nine
males had at least some college education, with one having a technical school certificate, one having an undergraduate degree, and another having a graduate degree. Ten out of eleven females were high school graduates, with seven of those having some college education. Seven of nine males were full-time employed, with one on disability and another retired. Seven of eleven females were employed full-time outside the home, with three employed part-time outside the home and one a full-time homemaker. The household income ranged from $20,000 - $70,000+ per year, with a median income of $40 - $50,000 per year.

Twelve out of twenty grandparents interviewed used strong words to describe their emotional stress such as scared, angry, shocked, frustrated and overwhelmed, upon taking on the parenting role again. Four of the male respondents described emotional responses while eight of the female respondents did so. One grandfather stated, "It scared the heck out of me because all of mine were grown." Another grandfather stated, "I felt angry and scared because I didn’t know what we were getting into." One grandmother expressed anger over not wanting to do it and "give up the freedom that I love." Two other grandmothers
expressed their fear of the responsibility and of failing their grandchildren as they had failed their own children.

The eight who did not use emotional words to describe their feelings used cognitive statements. Five of these statements came from males and three from females. For example, one grandfather stated, “I was expecting it because their mother is irresponsible.” Another grandmother stated, “I wanted to get her out of the situation she was in so I felt good that she got here.”

These grandparents experienced stress over their decision to take on the parenting role again, however, most felt as if they had no choice and were willing to accept the challenge, albeit with trepidation, for the benefit of their grandchildren.

Eight out of nine males, ten out eleven females, and nine out of ten couples reported stress resulting from a change in lifestyle, such as a decrease in money, a decrease in social activities, decrease in privacy and time alone with spouse or other friends or family members, and a general sense of loss of freedom. For example, one grandfather exclaimed, “What life? We have no life! First it was the kids now it’s the grandkids.” Another grandfather stated, “They have separated us. We used to do everything together and now we can’t go to certain church
functions together." One grandmother reported, "It has turned my life upside down. I used to work evenings and now I can't do that anymore." Another grandmother stated she has less time to do her own activities and must make sure she includes her grandchild in her activities while also sharing her time with her husband. Clearly, these grandparents have experienced much stress as they have adjusted their lifestyles to the custodial grandparenting relationship and in the process have lost some of the outlets for stress relief that may have served as a buffer. The one couple who did not report any stress or change in lifestyle had two other adults in the home that provided a great deal of care for the grandchild and it was also anticipated that she would not be in the home for an extended period of time.

Four of eight males, six out of eleven females and four out of ten couples reported stress as a result of discipline, instilling values and morals, and/or fostering a sense of responsibility. One couple cited a lack of consensus on how to raise the children as the primary source of stress that becomes filtered down to the children who "feel guilty and responsible for their parents fights." Three grandparents expressed resentment over having to be the disciplinarian instead of the
grandparent. For example, grandmother stated, "I didn't want to be the bad parent, I wanted to be the good grandparent." Another grandmother stated, "I felt resentment until I decided to be the parent and not the grandparent." A grandfather stated a "freedom was taken away. Grandparents come for a week and then say goodbye. It's a different dynamic with parent versus grandparent. I feel child and grandparent alike have been cheated." In this situation, stress is aroused for both partners as they try to renegotiate their roles from grandparents to parents as they take on increasing responsibility for the rearing of the grandchildren.

Two males and four females identified both spouses as sharing equally in the caregiving responsibilities. Seven males and seven females identified the female as the primary caregiver. Not one male was identified as a primary caregiver and only two couples did not agree as to whether it was the female or an equal split.

Eight out of ten couples, including the lesbian couple, were in consensus with regard to the specific responsibilities of each grandparent that are traditionally identified as gender specific responsibilities. Males were responsible for financial support, discipline, some transportation, being a role
model/father figure and "helping" the spouse when willing or able. Females were responsible for providing nurture, affection, activities of daily living, following up with school and extracurricular activities, transporting as needed, and instilling values and social skills. The lesbian couple did not previously view one or the other as fulfilling male or female roles until they became parents. At that point, one partner became primarily responsible for discipline and financial support, the traditional male role, while the other partner became primarily responsible for nurture, affection and daily care, the traditional female role. Five of nine males stated this division just came naturally, while the other four stated it came about as a result of availability, time or energy. Nine of eleven females stated the division came naturally while the others identified availability as a deciding factor. Three of nine males reported they would not change the division of the responsibilities while seven of eleven females reported they would change the division. All changes cited by both genders involved either the grandfather taking on more caregiving responsibilities or the biological parents doing so.

The grandparents also reported a number of positive aspects to the custodial grandparenting relationship.
Three males reported appreciating a second chance at having a family and not making the same mistakes as the first time parenting. Five males and four females reported that the love they received from the children and watching them grow was the most positive aspect of caring for their grandchildren. One male and five females reported removing the child from a dangerous environment and providing a stable and safe place to live as the most positive aspects of caring for their grandchildren. Two females reported instilling values into their grandchildren as the most positive aspects of the relationship. Six of nine males and six of eleven females cite love and guidance as the most important things they provide to their grandchildren. Three of nine males and four of eleven females report security and stability as the most important things they provide for their grandchildren.
In this exploratory study, data were analyzed regarding the experiences of stress in grandparents raising their grandchildren. This increasing phenomenon should be of interest to social work practitioners as it yields great potential for various types of stress to be experienced by both grandfather and grandmother alike. Furthermore, various types of stress are likely to emerge at varying points of the caregiving relationship as each individual negotiates his/her own developmental stage in the context of other family members trying to face their own challenges at the same time.

Grandfathers and grandmothers alike experience a range of emotions when initially faced with becoming parents to their grandchildren. They may be in shock and overwhelmed at the thought of parenting again. They may be angry that the biological parents are abusive or not willing or able to provide appropriately for the children due to substance abuse, domestic violence or other reasons. They may also feel scared of the responsibility and afraid that they will repeat mistakes they made with their own children. However, given the nature of the
situations when grandparents are called upon to become parents again, there is little time to consider all of the factors and make an informed decision. Grandparents often feel as if they don't have a choice at all. At this difficult time, grandparents need support to work through the emotions and may need assistance in making an emotional, behavioral or cognitive shift to make sense of, accept and deal with this new responsibility.

Both grandfathers and grandmothers alike are faced with lifestyle changes and numerous losses as a result of a custodial grandparenting relationship. They no longer engage in many social activities, have a decrease in privacy and experience a separation from their spouse and other family members and friends as they devote all of their time outside of work to child rearing. These grandparents no longer have outlets for personal pursuits or stress relief and may greatly benefit from opportunities for recreation that include children, for respite time so the couple can have time alone to reconnect, and for private time so each has an opportunity to nurture their own needs and interests.

Grandparents are also faced with the stress of renegotiating their role from grandparent to parent. Grandparents are often free to be more lenient with their
grandchildren as opposed to being the strict
disciplinarian as a parent. Both men and women often look
forward to this time when they can spoil their
grandchildren and share special occasions and free time.
Yet, when it comes to custodial grandparenting, all of
that must change. Grandparents need guidance and support
as they try to adjust to their new responsibilities and
deal with the perceived loss of a relationship that was
more carefree.

Findings of this study indicate that in the custodial
grandparenting relationship, the division of household
labor and child rearing responsibilities is largely based
upon traditional gender roles as it is in the primary
parenting relationship. Grandfathers are the providers and
disciplinarians and grandmothers are the nurturers and
daily caregivers. Though most males and females
acknowledged the disparity in caregiving responsibilities
and the levels and types of stress, few reported
willingness or even a desire to make a change. It would
appear that traditional gender roles have been accepted
and integrated into these grandparents ways of life and
will be passed on to the next generation as they observe
the roles and responsibilities that each grandparent takes
on in rearing them.
The custodial grandparenting relationship was not purely stressful as reported by the respondents in this study. Both men and women reported many satisfactions and rewards in raising their grandchildren that did not seem to fall along gender lines. Several grandparents stated they felt rewarded by the love and laughter they received from the grandchildren as well as the pride in seeing them grow and mature into healthy children, teens and young adults. They also expressed the importance of providing their grandchildren with love, structure, stability, guidance and a safe environment where all their basic needs are met.

The grandchildren came to their grandparents because they were not being provided with the most basic needs. These grandparents clearly felt a responsibility to take on the role of parent despite the many stresses and challenges they were bound to face throughout the caregiving relationship. As described by Erikson (1959), aging is a process of transitions and development over a series of stages whereby advancement to one stage is dependent upon successful negotiation of the previous stage. Developmentally, grandparents are at a stage in their lives when they relinquish previous roles and strive to achieve integrity (Erikson, 1959). However, findings of
this study indicate that these grandparents cannot continue on to higher stages of development themselves knowing their grandchildren have not even been able to establish a basic sense of trust given the abuse and neglect they have suffered at the hands of their own parents. This situation only serves to instill a deeper sense of responsibility on the part of the grandparents, knowing these grandchildren are their legacy and connection to the future.

Limitations

A practical limitation of this study is found in the method of participant recruitment. The authors used a snowball sampling technique, selecting participants on the basis of interest and availability. The sample size was also very small and was not demographically representative of this population as a whole. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized to the larger population of grandfathers and grandmothers raising their grandchildren.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

Findings of this study indicate that the experience of stress in grandparents raising their grandchildren may
be buffered through the presence of extensive support networks. This support network may take many forms, yet it begins within the marital relationship whereby each spouse supports the other in this mutual endeavor. Social workers have many opportunities to nurture this supportive partnership, such as through individual, marital and family counseling, parenting classes and support groups. Such social work interventions, hopefully beginning early in the caregiving relationship, may provide valuable information and support to the grandparents concerning numerous issues, including how to renegotiate their new roles and responsibilities as parents again, how to support each other in this process, and how to address developmental issues not only of the grandchildren but of themselves as well.

Another form of supportive network that social workers can provide to grandparents raising their grandchildren involves education about available resources in their communities. There are numerous agencies and organizations that offer various services and programs that can assist towards needs such as mental health, financial, medical problems, legal problems, and, educational and recreational opportunities. Surely the entire family system stands to gain from such services and
programs that can relieve the stress of grandparents struggling to provide for their grandchildren, and who may not have the financial means, emotional strength, time, or even the knowledge of how to pursue such resources.

Advocacy and social activism are also key opportunities for social workers to pursue for the benefit of grandparents raising grandchildren. Findings of this study indicate that finances are a primary stressor for these grandparents that are forced to continue working long hours in order to provide for their grandchildren, and may never have the luxury of retiring. Furthermore, some parents are even forced to take their grandchildren to work with them, as there is no affordable day care available. Social workers must lobby for changes in laws regarding tax breaks, for direct funding to these grandparents, as well as for increased funding of government and nonprofit agencies and organizations that serve this population. Such supportive services will go a long way toward mitigating the stresses of grandfathers and grandmothers alike as they raise their grandchildren. These grandparents are not only providing a valuable service to their grandchildren in taking on this responsibility, they are providing a valuable service to
society who would otherwise be forced to support these children whose parents are unable or unwilling to do so.

Further research is still needed on the growing population of grandparents raising grandchildren. Specific issues warranting further study include the role of grandfathers in the custodial grandparenting relationship, identifying and mitigating sources of stress for grandfathers and grandmothers alike, and redefining parental and marital roles and responsibilities for grandparents raising grandchildren. This study indicates that grandfathers are important participants in the custodial grandparenting relationship, and both genders need and deserve information, support and further research to explore how social workers can better serve and support them in their efforts to ensure the growth and development of their grandchildren.
APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE
QUESTIONNAIRE

How many grandchildren are you currently caring for? What are their ages?

What is your race or ethnicity?

What is your gender?

What is your age?

What is your level of education?

What is your occupational status? What is your current or last occupation?

Do you receive any financial support for the care of your grandchild(ren)? If so, from what source?

Which of the following income levels do you fall into, including total household income per year?

A. 00 - $10,000
B. $10,001 - $20,000
C. $20,001 - $30,000
D. $30,001 - $40,000
E. $40,001 - $50,000
F. $50,001 - $60,000
G. $60,001 - $70,000
H. Above $70,000

Do you have full, partial, or legal custody of the grandchildren?

How long ago did your grandchild(ren) come to live with you?

Are there other people residing in your household, aside from your spouse and the grandchild(ren)?

Please explain how you came to be responsible for the custody and care of your grandchild(ren).
How did you feel initially about the fact that you were going to take on the parenting role again?

Have your feelings about the parenting role changed since the children first came to live with you?

Do you anticipate this to be a permanent situation? Why or why not? How does that make you feel?

Do the biological parents of the child(ren) provide any kind of support for their care (e.g. emotional, financial, child care, recreation, medical, insurance, transportation, clothing, food)?

How has your life changed since you have taken on the responsibility of caring for your grandchild(ren)?

What have been the most stressful aspects for you in caring for your grandchild(ren)?

What has been most stressful for your spouse?

Between yourself and your spouse, who would you consider to be the primary caregiver of the children? Which aspects of caring for your grandchild(ren) would you consider your responsibility? Which would you consider to be the responsibility of your spouse?

How did those responsibilities come to be divided? (i.e. Were they discussed or agreed upon in another manner?)

If you could change the division of responsibilities with regard to the grandchild(ren), what would you change and why?

In your opinion, has this responsibility hindered your spouse in any way?

What have been the most positive aspects of caring for your grandchild(ren)?

What do you consider to be the most important things that you provide for your grandchild(ren)?

What do you consider to be the most important things your spouse provides for your grandchildren?
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT
INFORMED CONSENT

The study you are planning to participate in is designed to explore the experience of stress in grandparents raising their grandchild(ren). You will be interviewed one time, separately from your spouse, in a private setting, by one of the authors of the study, in an attempt to gain an understanding of your own unique experience of stress in raising your grandchild(ren). The interview will take approximately thirty to sixty minutes.

The study will be conducted by Doris L. Morrow and Mia L. Attruia from the fall of 2001 to the spring of 2002, under the supervision of the Social Work Department, California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Department of Social Work Sub-Committee of the CSUSB Institutional Review Board.

Please be assured that any information obtained by you or your spouse will be held in strictest confidence by the researchers. Interviews will not be recorded in any other form, aside from notes taken by the researchers during the interview process. The notes will be held in locked files, to be destroyed upon completion of the study. At no time will your name be recorded or reported in conjunction with your responses. All data will be reported in group form only. At the conclusion of the study, the results will be available to you in the library at California State University, San Bernardino. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, you may contact Dr. Rosemary McCaslin, Research Coordinator, at (909) 880-5507.

By marking this consent form, you acknowledge you have been informed of and understand the nature and purpose of this study, and freely consent to participation. You acknowledge that you are over the age of eighteen years. You understand that you may withdraw from this study at any time, for any reason, no questions asked, if you so desire.

Participant’s Signature __________________________ Date ______________
APPENDIX C

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Thank you for participating in this study of the experience of stress in grandparents raising their grandchildren. Previous research has focused primarily on grandmothers raising their grandchildren, thereby excluding the role of the grandfather in the home. This research is intended to understand the unique stress experience of both genders in raising their grandchildren.

If participating in this study raises issues that may require further discussion, a list of resources to contact for assistance will be made available to you and your spouse. If more information is needed regarding any aspect of the study, please contact Dr. Rosemary McCaslin at the Department of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino, at (909) 880-5507. If you would like to withdraw your interview from the study at any time, please call Dr. McCaslin and refer to the number noted on the lower right hand corner of this form.
APPENDIX D

RESOURCE LIST
RESOURCE LIST

Catholic Charities
Moreno Valley – Riverside
(909)485-2185
23700 Sunnymead Blvd.
Moreno Valley, CA 92557
Service Category: Financial Assistance; Food; Housing

Children’s Center of Riverside County
(909)784-0020
7177 Potomac St.
Riverside, CA 92504
Service Category: Disability services; Parent Education and Counseling; Child Care; Information and Referral

Family Resource Network
(800)974-5553
1020 Cooley Dr.
Colton, CA 92354
Service Category: Support and Information/Referral for Disability services

Family Service Association of Western Riverside County
(909)686-3706
3634 Elizabeth St.
Riverside, CA 92506
Service Category: Child Abuse Treatment and Prevention; Child Care Services; Counseling; Family Anger Management; Parenting Education Classes; Senior Services

Inland Counties Legal Services
(909)683-7742
1120 Palmyrita Ave. Suite 200
Riverside, CA 92507
Service Category: Free legal assistance with civil matters for low-income clients
APPENDIX E

AGENCY LETTERS
October 17, 2001

Dr. Rosemary McCaslin
California State University
San Bernardino

Dear Dr. McCaslin,

This letter is to confirm that our agency will allow Dris Moore to request our clients/participants to participate in an interview as part of a research project. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

[Title]

[Agency]
To Whom It May Concern:

Doris L. Morrow has been attending our church for some time. She is working on her Masters Degree. Her thesis is being written on the subject of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren.

I commend her to you as a trustworthy person. It would be very helpful to her if you will take time to answer a survey for her. I appreciate your help in this matter. Hopefully some good things can come from this that will help people who have to bring up their grandchildren.

May God bless you for your efforts to help Doris. Thanks again.

Sincerely,

Pastor Wayne
REFERENCES


ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:
   Assigned Leader: Doris L. Morrow
   Assisted By: Mia L. Attruia

2. Data Entry and Analysis:
   Assigned Leader: Mia L. Attruia
   Assisted By: Doris L. Morrow

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:
   a. Introduction and Literature
      Team Effort: Mia L. Attruia and Doris L. Morrow
   b. Methods
      Team Effort: Mia L. Attruia and Doris L. Morrow
   c. Results
      Team Effort: Mia L. Attruia and Doris L. Morrow
   d. Discussion
      Team Effort: Mia L. Attruia and Doris L. Morrow