Kinship Caregivers and Social Workers: The Challenge of Collaboration

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Increases in Grandparent Caregiving

- Census 2000 says 4.5 million children (6.3% of all children) are raised in grandparent-headed families. The increase is over 100% since 1970.

- There were 1.5 million children in 1997 (1.8% of all children) living with grandparents with no parent at home, an increase of about 37% since 1970.

- There were 5.6 million grandparents living with grandchildren in 2000, and 42% say they are “responsible” for their grandchildren (2.4 million grandparents).

(Bryson, 2001)
Who Are Grandmother Caregivers Nationally?

- The average age of grandmothers is 57-59.
- Over half of grandmothers are married (55%).
- Employment rate varies: 50% for married grandmothers; 33% for unmarried grandmothers.
- Over half have at least a high school education (59% for married grandmothers; 54% for unmarried grandmothers).
- The poverty rate for married grandmothers is 14%; for unmarried grandmothers, it is 57%.

(Casper & Bryson, 1998)

Ethnic Differences in Grandparent-Headed Families

- Custodial or Skipped Generation Families
  - 5.6% of African American children,
  - 1.7% of Latino children,
  - 1.2% of White children.

- Based on 1994 census data.
Reasons to Assume Care: Custodial Grandmothers

The Major Reasons in Percents

- Drug Abuse
- Emotional
- Child Neglect
- Legal Trouble
- Teenager
- Alcohol Abuse

Reasons to Assume Care: Custodial Grandmothers (cont’d)

The Major Reasons in Percents

- Financial Help
- Avoid Foster
- Single Parent
- Better Schools
- Activity To Do
Reasons to Assume Care: Custodial Grandmothers (cont’d)

- The Major Reasons in Percents

Reasons to Assume Care: Custodial Grandmothers (cont’d)

- Reasons in Percents

(Goodman, 1997)
Benefits of Grandparent Caregivers

- More committed to the children than unrelated foster parents.
- More stable as a placement than unrelated foster care.
- Continuity of family and ethnic tradition.
- More frequent contact with parents.

(Berrick, Needell, Barth, & Jonson-Reid, 1998)

The Caller Asked by Duane J. Kriesel

- "The caller asked, ‘Will you provide a home for two twelve-year old girls?’…We both knew that the answer must be ‘YES,’ but that didn’t stop the floodgate of doubt from opening…So many reasons to say ‘NO.’"
- I didn’t ask ‘How long?’ Did she mean forever?
- I’m too old to raise a family.
- My life is settled: why does it have to be uprooted now?
- What about all the trips we have planned?
- Our house is always so clean; will it ever be clean again?
- I like my free time.
- Will their mother make life unbearable?

(Kriesel, 2001)
The Caller Asked by Duane J. Kriesel (cont’d)

- I didn’t know that God would send me two angels disguised as two little girls.
- I didn’t know that so many people were ready to help.
- I didn’t know that those girls would enjoy old-folks’ things like live theater, walks in the park, drives in the mountains.
- I didn’t know that those girls would say ‘thank you’ for the littlest things.
- I didn’t know that those girls would give so many hugs and kisses.
- I didn’t know that those girls would add more to my life than I could ever add to theirs.”

Well-Being of Caregiving Grandparents

- Greater depression than non-custodial grandparents.
- More activity limitations in Activities of Daily Living than non-custodial grandparents.
- Lower satisfaction with health than non-custodial grandparents.
- Greater distress among grandparents under financial stress.

(Kelley, Whitley, Sipe, & Yorker, 2000; Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 1999; Minkler, Fuller-Thomson, Miller, & Driver, 1997; Solomon & Marx, 1998)
Quotes About Grandmother-Parent Relationships

- “She had enough sense to hand over the kids.” SUPPORTIVE
- “She has a good husband, a little baby and is working hard to provide a good family environment. And within a year she might be able to get the boys back.” DOING WELL
- “She's immature-her lack of willingness to knuckle down and be a mother.” DOESN'T PARENT
- “She likes to go all the time, hang out in the streets.” DRUGS
- “I raised her and she hates me and she never says hello”
- “We don't really have a relationship to talk about.” NO RELATIONSHIP

(Quotes developed from data through Goodman, 1997)

My Sweet Juliette, The Sea Brings You Closer to Me by Lynn Evans

- “My beautiful daughter Juliette did not recover. She died in October of a drug overdose. She has lost her life, my sweet child, my Juliette, only twenty-nine years old...Hopes and dreams are gone, leaving me with responsibility for my granddaughter. I am Jordan’s mother on earth and Juliette can be her mother only in heaven. It is so huge and overwhelming for me. Jordan is only six.”

- “Summers at the beach with you are my most vivid memories...You in that cute little green checkered two-piece bathing suit, five years old. Suddenly in my memory you are a woman. We had collected sea glass and you and Jordan collected white stones...You are the sea to me now, Juliette...Now, no more pain for my baby.”

(Evans, 2001)
Quotes About Parent-Child Relationship

- “He’s just crazy about his mother.”  
  ATTACHMENT

- “Makes good decisions with her mother about school and different activities.”  
  INVOLVEMENT

- “Hard for her to understand why she’s living with me and not with her parents.”  
  LOSS

- “I think it must be hard for him to know that he has a father but that his father doesn’t love or want him.”  
  REJECTION

- “They can’t see their little brother and mom won’t move closer to us.”  
  FRAGMENTED FAMILY

Quotes developed from data through: Goodman, 1997)

Summary and Risk Factors: Custodial Grandmothers Raising Grandchildren

- Poverty: Financial stress is a problem for a significant number.

- Disrupted Families: Relationship with the parent continues to be important for grandmother and grandchild.

- Older and Ill Grandmothers: Grandmothers are sometimes the only family available in spite of poor health.

- Depression: Overload and social isolation are risk factors and grandmothers need someone to talk to and “respite.”

- Children with Special Needs: Abused and neglected children often have special mental health needs.
Conclusions

* Multidisciplinary Family Service Center: Medical, psychological, legal, and financial issues impact three generations. Family members could benefit from holistic service programs.

- Programs for the grandparent (support groups, parenting classes, respite care, legal consultation, medical care, financial assistance).

- Programs for the parent (substance abuse, programs for incarcerated mothers, parenting classes, vocational and employment programs, financial assistance).

- Programs for the children (counseling, tutoring, child care, after school activities, medical care).