

Extended Abstract

**Why Don't Grandparents Claim Responsibility for Grandchildren in
Skipped Generation Households?**

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September 21, 2009

Abstract

Several studies using the American Community Survey have noted that the likelihood of grandparents claiming primary caregiving responsibility for their grandchildren varies by household type. In three-generation households with at least one parent present, it is unsurprising that grandparents do not claim responsibility “for most of the basic needs of one or more of these grandchildren.” But when no parents reside in the household and the grandparents do not claim responsibility, who is responsible for rearing these grandchildren? This study uses the 2007 American Community Survey to explore this question.

Researchers have suggested several answers to this question: 1) other members of the household such as aunts, uncles, older siblings or other relatives may be caring for the grandchildren; 2) although parents do not live in the same household, they may provide financial assistance and pay frequent visits, and thus may be thought of as primary care providers; 3) cultural differences in the understanding of what it is to provide “for most of the basic needs of the grandchildren” may vary, resulting in substantially higher responsibility claims among some subpopulations than others; 4) the grandparent-grandchild co-residential arrangement could be a temporary one in which parents are unable to care for their children for only a short period of time; and 5) the relative ambiguity of the question asked at the Census and ACS “...whether the respondent is currently responsible for most of the basic needs of any grandchild(ren) under the age of 18 living in the same house or apartment” may affect the accuracy of the findings. We use multivariate analyses and indirect methods to test these possible explanations.

Why Don't Grandparents Claim Responsibility for Grandchildren in Skipped Generation¹ Households?

INTRODUCTION

Since 1990s there has been a change in the role of grandparents in their grandchildren's lives. An increasing number of grandparents are now taking full or partial responsibility of their grandchildren. The Census Bureau's Current Population Report, *Co-resident Grandparents and Their Grandchildren* noted the substantial increase in the number of children living in households maintained by grandparents – 2.3 million in 1980 to 3.9 million in 1997 (Bryson and Casper 1999). As a result a dramatic increase in analytical research occurred in the early to mid- 1990s which focused on answering questions as to why this was happening and examining the nature of grandparent care-giving in general (Burton 1992; Chalfie 1994; Dowdell 1995; Dressel and Barnhill 1994; Jendrek 1994; Joslin and Brouard 1995; Minkler and Roe 1993; Fuller-Thomson, Minkler, and Driver 1997; Rutrough and Ofstedal 1997; Shor and Hayslip 1994). Several reasons were offered for the dramatic increases in grandparents raising and helping to raise their grandchildren. Increasing drug abuse among parents, teen pregnancy, divorce, the rapid rise of single parent households, mental and physical illnesses, AIDS, crime, child abuse and neglect, and incarceration are a few of the most common explanations offered. (For a more thorough discussion of these causes see Minkler 1998).

In a previous paper, Biblarz, Casper and Jayasundera (2009) examined the relationship between multi-generational households and socio-economic outcomes. They

¹ Households with co-resident grandparent(s) and grandchild(ren) without any parent(s) present.

showed that three generation² households fared better on economic indicators measured by poverty, food-stamp and welfare reciprocity compared with skipped generation households. They also investigated how the likelihood of grandparents claiming responsibility for their grandchild(ren) varied by type of household. Unsurprisingly, their results showed that in households with at least one parent (three-generation households) grandparents were less likely to claim that they provided for most of the basic needs of their grandchildren than grandparents in skipped generation households. Surprisingly, however, the researchers found that in twenty-two percent of skipped-generation households grandparents did not claim primary responsibility for their grandchild(ren). This result begs the question: if parents are not living in the household who is taking responsibility for these children? In this paper, we use the 2007 American Community Survey (ACS) data to investigate this issue.

Researchers have suggested several explanations for this finding: 1) other members of the household such as aunts, uncles, older siblings or other relatives may be caring for the grandchildren; 2) although parents do not live in the same household, they may provide financial assistance and pay frequent visits, and thus may be thought of as primary care providers; 3) cultural differences in the understanding of what it is to “provide” for most of the basic needs of the grandchildren” may vary, resulting in substantially higher responsibility claims among some subpopulations than others; 4) the grandparent-grandchild co-residential arrangement could be a temporary one in which parents are unable to care for their children for only a short period of time; and 5) the relative ambiguity of the question asked at the Census and ACS “...whether the

² Households with grandparent(s), parent(s), and grandchild(ren).

respondent is currently responsible for most of the basic needs of any grandchild(ren) under the age of 18 living in the same house or apartment” may affect the accuracy of the findings. We use multivariate analyses and indirect methods to test these possible explanations.

Many multi-generation households contain other adults who could be responsible for the primary care of these children. Presence of another adult other than the grandparent might help to explain the apparent lack of a caregiver in many households. We use data on the presence and type of adults in the household to ascertain whether they could be taking responsibility for these children. Another explanation could be that parents of the grandchild might be employed away from the household. These parents might be financially supporting the grandparent and the grandchild although he/she is not residing in the same household. The ACS provides information on sources of income that can be used to investigate whether the household receives income from other non-public sources. Some evidence suggests that cultural differences in the formation of skipped generation households and in the meanings attached to taking primary responsibility for grandchildren may help to explain the lower likelihood of claiming responsibility among some sub groups of the population. We use data on region and division of residence as well as data on race, ethnicity and income to indirectly explore this possibility. The varying duration of care-giving may also explain why grandparents do not claim responsibility. If the skipped generation arrangement is temporary and the parents are away for a short period of time, grandparents might not see themselves as the primary caregiver. The ACS contains information about the length of the arrangement that can be

used to investigate whether grandparents who have been living in skipped generation households for shorter periods of time are less likely to claim responsibility.

Finally, the ambiguity of the question itself: “[are you] currently responsible for most of the basic needs of one or more of these grandchildren?” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009) may have led to an underreporting of the number of grandparents claiming responsibility for their grandchildren. Although the ACS does not contain information that would allow us to explore this possibility we plan to contact the Census Bureau to ascertain how and why the specific wording of this question was implemented.

Using various techniques and a wide range of data we hope to shed light on the puzzling question, “Why don’t grandparents claim responsibility for their grandchildren in skipped generation households?”

DATA

The analysis is based on the 2007 American Community Survey (ACS) accessed through the Integrated Public Use Micro data Series website (Ruggles et al, 2008). ACS is a nationwide survey designed to provide communities a fresh look at how they are changing. It will replace the decennial long form in future censuses and is a critical element in the U.S. Census Bureau's reengineered 2010 Census (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2009). The ACS questionnaire is sent to approximately three million households. The Census Bureau staff follows up with those who do not respond, first by telephone and then in person. The ACS provides information on demographic, housing, social, and economic characteristics every year for all states, as well as for all cities, counties, metropolitan areas, and population groups of 65,000 people or more. After the 1996

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, the U.S. Census Bureau started to obtain information about grandparents who have primary responsibility for the care of their grandchildren. Therefore, the 2000 Census and the subsequent ACSs have included the questions on grandparents as caregivers enabling researchers and policy planners to better understand the family structures and social and economic characteristics of grandparent families.

The number of all households including group quarters is 1,255,509. Our sample of co-resident grandparent households without parents totals 11,270 when we eliminate group quarters (e.g., prisons, nursing homes, dormitories, etc.). The multivariate analyses focus on the grandparent as the unit of analysis. The total number of grandparents in these households is 17,202. We removed 134 grandparents because we did not have information about their poverty status. Therefore, the total sample size that is used in the multivariate analyses is 17,068.

MEASURES & METHODS

The 2000 Census and subsequent ACS first ascertained whether the person is the grandparent of any grandchildren under 18 who are living in the same household. Those who answered “yes” were then asked if they were “currently responsible for most of the basic needs of one or more of these grandchildren.” Grandparents who answered “yes” were then asked, “How long has this grandparent been responsible for the(se) grandchild(ren)?” (Dye and Simmons, 2003). However, it should be noted that some ambiguity characterizes these questions; the second question refers to a grandparent being “responsible for most of the *basic needs* of any grandchild(ren)” living in the

household. What is meant by “basic needs” is not explicit, is open to respondent’s interpretation, and may lead to distorted levels of reporting responsibility (Mutchler and Baker 2004). Furthermore, we can not be sure on which grandchild or grandchildren the grandparents are reporting. Despite these limitations, the questions still gives us an excellent opportunity to gain a better understanding of grandparent caregivers.

In this paper we examine characteristics of grandparents who are living with at least one grandchild without parents of the grandchild present. Using several variables, we categorized these households into three family types (Table 1). Each type contains information on the number, relationship, and gender of the adults in the households. To see in which family structures grandparents are more prone to claim responsibility for their grandchildren, we use the second question in the grandparent section of the ACS (described above) as a dichotomous dependent variable while controlling for demographic and economic variables (Table 2, discussed below).

All models control for race, region of residence and urban/rural location. The models also take into account grandparent’s age, education, employment and disability status and grandchild’s age. The disability status variable derives from six questions in the ACS regarding: (1) work disability; (2) personal care disability; (3) disability limiting mobility; (4) physical disability; (5) difficulty remembering and (6) vision and hearing disability. If at least one of these disabilities were present; the variable was coded 1, else 0. We also used poverty, food-stamp recipiency and welfare recipiency as independent variables. Except for poverty, the other variables were coded as dichotomous variables. The poverty scale that ranges from 1-501 was divided into five categories: (1)1-49%; (2)50-99%; (3)100-149%; (4)150-199%; and (5)200-501%.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Seventy one percent of Grandparents who live in three generation households did not claim responsibility for their grandchildren (Table 1). This was expected as three generation households include a parent who is most likely to take care of the child. In skipped-generation households 78 percent claimed responsibility for the grandchild, but since there is no parent in the household we would expect this number to be 100 percent. To analyze this further we categorize these skipped generation households by gender and number of grandparents (see Table 1). In households with both grandparents and no parents only twenty percent did not claim responsibility compared to 34 percent of Grandfather only households and 25 percent of Grandmother only households.

We conducted a multivariate analysis to test the first hypothesis; whether the presence of an adult in the household affects the likelihood of grandparents claiming responsibility for their grandchildren. Without controlling for other factors, in households where other adult(s) are present, 38 percent of grandparents said no to the responsibility question compared with only 13 percent in households without another adult present; indicating that there could be a correlation between the two variables. We conducted two logistic regression models to test whether this relationship holds when controlling for other variables (Table 2). The first model includes the family type (household type) and other controls that were discussed in the Measures section. In the second model we included a dichotomous variable that indicates the presence of an adult(s) other than the grandparent.

In model 1, we controlled for characteristics of the grandparent and demographics. Grandmother only households (B= -0.48) and grandfather only households (B= -0.63) have lesser odds of claiming responsibility for their grandchild(ren) than the households with both grandparents. In addition, table 2 shows that grandparental responsibility is significantly associated with a number of socioeconomic and demographic correlates. Independent of family type and other factors, younger, more educated, and employed grandparents have greater odds of claiming primary responsibility for grandchildren; as well as when the grandparents who are non-hispanic white. Net of other factors, the odds of grandparent responsibility are especially high in poor households (e.g. in poverty and welfare recipients).

In model 2 (Table 2), we add the dichotomous variable that indicates the presence of an adult in the household. Controlling for all other factors, presence of an adult lessens the odds of grandparent's responsibility. By including this variable, the affect of family type has reduced by 25-35 percent. Moreover, the affect of grandparent's education, poverty status and race on responsibility have also reduced by more than 10 percent. This analysis helps us to explain 63 percent of cases where grandparents do not claim responsibility.

NEXT STEPS

The in-depth study of co-resident grandparents and their grandchildren is a relatively new area of research. With the advent of new ACS questions we are able to disaggregate family/household types and analyze them individually. The idea for this paper emerged from a 2009 paper (Biblarz, Casper and Jayasundera) in which we

identified certain unusual findings regarding the relatively high occurrence of grandparents not claiming responsibility for the care of their grandchildren in skipped generation households. As next steps, we will explore the role that specific other adults (e.g., aunts, uncles, older siblings) play in reducing the likelihood that grandparents claim responsibility for caring for their grandchildren. Our next steps also include evaluating whether and how much the other alternative explanations can help us in figuring out why grandparents in skipped generation households do not claim responsibility for rearing their grandchildren.

Table 1. Co-resident Grandparent Households by Grandparent's Responsibility for the Grandchild

Family Structure / Household Type	N	Responsible for the Grandchild?	
		Yes %	No%
Three generational Households ¹	41,167	29	71
Skipped Generational Household ²	17,068	78	22
Both Grandparents	11,596	80	20
Grandmother only	4,678	75	25
Grandfather only	794	66	34
Total	58,235	43	57

Notes: ¹Households with grandparent(s), parent(s) and grandchild(ren).

²Households with co-resident grandparent(s) and grandchild(ren) without any parent(s) present.

Table 2: Logistic Regression Models of the Effects of Family Structure on Grandparent's Responsibility for Grandchild: Grandparents Living in Co-resident Households with No Parents.

Independent Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Percentage Change
	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	
Family Structure					
Both grandparents and no parents (reference)					
Grandmother and no parents	-0.484 ***	0.62	-0.359 ***	0.7	-25.83
Grandfather and no parents	-0.629 ***	0.53	-0.403 ***	0.67	-35.93
Grandparent's Characteristics					
Sex (Female)	0.122 *	1.13	0.123 *	1.13	0.82
Age	-0.007 **	0.99	-0.012 ***	0.99	71.43
Less than high school (reference)					
High school diploma	0.220 ***	1.25	0.189 ***	1.21	-14.09
Some college	0.393 ***	1.48	0.323 ***	1.38	-17.81
College degree	0.299 **	1.35	0.186 **	1.2	-37.79
Graduate degree	0.317 **	1.37	0.162	1.18	-48.90
Employed (reference)					
Unemployed	-0.201	0.82	-0.214	0.81	6.47
Not in the labor force	-0.329 ***	0.72	-0.348 ***	0.71	5.78
Disability status	0.116 *	1.12	0.112 *	1.12	-3.45
Poverty Status					
200-501% (reference)					
1-49%	0.799 ***	2.22	0.561 ***	1.75	-29.79
50-99%	0.510 ***	1.67	0.317 ***	1.37	-37.84
100-149%	0.250 ***	1.28	0.193 **	1.21	-22.80
150-199%	0.115	1.12	0.102	1.11	-11.30
Food stamp recipient	-0.272 ***	0.76	-0.072	0.93	-73.53
Welfare recipient^a	1.487 ***	4.42	1.271 ***	3.56	-14.53
Race / Ethnicity^b					
White (reference)					
Black	-0.247 ***	0.78	-0.109 *	0.9	-55.87
Hispanic	-0.514 ***	0.60	-0.3 ***	0.74	-41.63
Native American	-0.251 *	0.78	-0.006	0.99	-97.61
Asian	-0.581 ***	0.56	-0.372 **	0.69	-35.97
Other	-0.064	0.94	0.078	1.08	†
Residence					
East (reference)					
Mid-west	0.266 ***	1.31	0.231 **	1.26	-13.16
South	0.407 ***	1.50	0.356 ***	1.43	-12.53
West	0.089	1.09	0.091	1.1	2.25
Rural (reference)					
Urban	-0.187 ***	0.83	-0.144 **	0.87	-22.99
Unidentifiable	-0.005	1.00	0.029	1.03	†
Age of the grandchild	0.087 ***	1.09	0.062 ***	1.06	-28.74
Presence of an adult other than grandparent			-1.148 ***	0.32	
Constant	0.888 ***	2.43	1.79 ***	5.99	
N	17,068		17,068		
Chi Square	1,296		2,019		
Degrees of Freedom	28		29		
BIC	-1,023		-1,736		

Source: American Community Survey, 2007

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Notes: ^aGrandparents receives welfare. ^bWhite indicates non-Hispanic whites and black indicates non-hispanic blacks.

† The sign of beta changed from negative to positive

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