

GRANDPARENTS RAISING THEIR GRANDCHILDREN

Issue Brief #9

September 8, 2006

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Today nearly 5.7 million grandparents only have to walk downstairs or down the hall to celebrate Grandparents Day with their grandchildren. They are part of a growing segment of the American population that is living in multigenerational households.

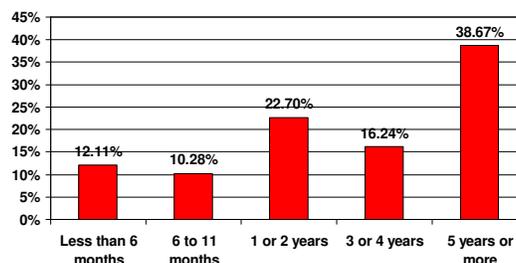
With the increasing demands of a global society, Americans are looking outside the nuclear family and using extended family members to assist with household responsibilities. Grandparents are helping their children manage their hectic lives and alleviate some of the parenting burden.

Reminiscing about his childhood, Mike Chittenden, 28, said, "My grandmother provided an important source of financial support for my family growing up. She also provided a close confidant and someone who we could go get ice cream with or who could watch us when my parents would go out together."

According to analysis from the 2004 American Community Survey (ACS), of those grandparents living with their grandchildren, almost 42 percent are grandparents raising their grandchildren. That translates into approximately 2.4 million grandparents who are the heading these multigenerational households, and have assumed primary caretaking responsibility for their grandchildren under the age of 18. Grandparents are assuming parental responsibility for both the short- and long-term.

The 2004 ACS illustrates that grandparents are not temporarily assuming the role as primary caregiver. Almost 55 percent of grandparents have been their grandchildren's primary caretaker for three or more years. Close to 39 percent of grandparents rearing grandchildren have assumed this enormous responsibility for five or more years. A majority of grandparents are assuming guardianship responsibility for their grandchildren for significant periods of time and may need some extra assistance since it has been a long time since they raised their children.

Duration Grandparent Has Been Responsible for Grandchild(ren)



Source: Tabulation of 2004 American Community Survey data.

The number of grandparent-headed households increased so significantly during the 1990s that Congress required the U.S. Census Bureau to begin tracking this growing population. Even the AARP is assisting these grandparents in their second phase of childrearing. A section of their website, entitled "Help for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren," offers information ranging from tax tips, housing, to public benefits. It also provides the Grandparent Support Database, which is a clearinghouse for grandparent support groups and resources.

Grandparent-maintained households are present throughout the country. Over a third of households with grandparents raising grandchildren are located in Texas, California, Florida, New York and Illinois. The rest of the top ten include: Georgia, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Michigan. These states have begun providing resources for grandparents raising grandchildren constituents, as well as passing legislation to assist with the fiscal burdens.

For example, this year Kansas enacted a bill that provides \$200 per grandchild per month (not exceeding \$600 per month) for grandparents who are 50 years or older, have custody of their grandchild, and have a household income of less than 130 percent of the federal poverty level.

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Will Shields, a labor economist, notes “the data show that families headed by grandparents, particularly those headed by only a grandmother, are far more likely to be poor and receiving public assistance. While many different programs already help these families, households where the primary caregiver is already past retirement age may need additional assistance.”

As a group, the 2004 ACS shows that grandparents rearing grandchildren have similar education patterns to the general American population. Over half of grandparents raising grandchildren have a high school diploma or one or more years of college, without a degree. Meanwhile, slightly more than one third of the general United States population has the same level of education attainment.

Grandparents who raise their grandchildren are a racially diverse group. Nearly 40 percent of grandparents raising

their grandchildren have identified themselves as a minority race. African-American grandparents represent the largest minority race at over 25 percent. Over 15 percent identify themselves as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino descent.

The study also illustrates that more than 67 percent of grandparents who are in their second phase of childrearing are doing it with their spouse. Not surprisingly, nearly 10 percent are widowed grandparents. Some grandparent caregivers are doing the work solo. Nearly 14 percent of those who have decided to take on this responsibility are divorced and over 5 percent have never been married.

This Grandparents Day, September 10, take a moment to thank grandparents that are postponing their lazy retirement days to raise their grandchildren.