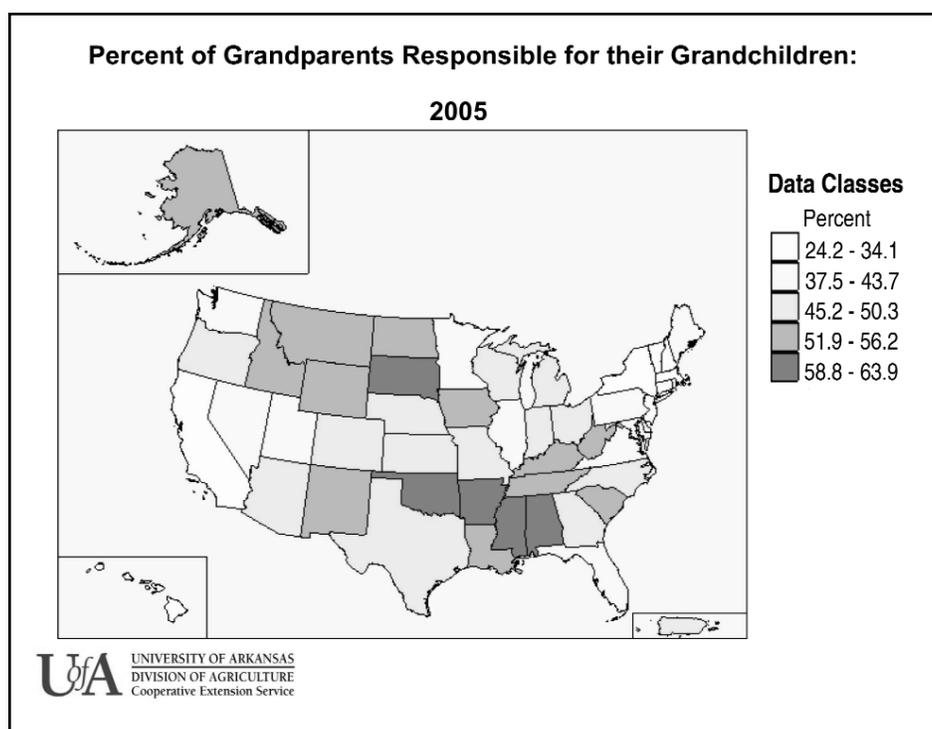


Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Overview

The joy of being a grandparent still exists when grandparents take the primary responsibility of raising their grandchildren; however, the context of the grandparent/grandchild relationship has changed. The environment, both physical and social, exerts a powerful influence on human development, both early and late. In intergenerational families, the environment simultaneously shapes the experiences of grandchildren growing up and grandparents growing older in a shared living space. Children require safe and nurturing environments to achieve developmental milestones, while grandparents require environmental design and supports to compensate for age-related declines. The grandparents' changing needs, along with the changing child-rearing recommendations, means that parenting the second time around will be different than the first; but, the increasing number of children under the age of eighteen being raised by grandparents means the custodial grandparents are not alone.

Statistics

According to the United States Census 2000, 5.8 million people over the age of 30 were co-resident grandparents. That means they were living with grandchildren younger than 18 years of age. Of the 5.8 million households where grandchildren and grandparents lived together, grandparents were caregivers – having primary responsibility for the grandchildren under the age of 18 in their households – in 2.4 million (42%) of these households. In Arkansas, 57, 895 grandparents were living with grandchildren in 2000, and 58.1% of those were responsible for most of the basic needs of the grandchildren under the age of 18 who lived in the house or apartment. In other words, these grandparents were raising their grandchildren.



To put the statistics in different terms, in the United States, approximately six million children – approximately 1 in 12 – are living in households headed by grandparents (4.5 million children) or other relatives (1.5 million children). In many of these homes, grandparents (approximately 2.4 million) and other relatives are taking on primary responsibility for the children's needs. Often they assume this responsibility without either of the child's parents present in the home. (Source: www.grandfacts.org)

Reasons for Grandparent Care

While taking over as primary caretaker is not easy, these grandparents are not alone. There are many reasons why grandparents raise their grandchildren. Among the reasons are teen pregnancy, military employment, poverty/financial difficulties of the parent, parental death, incarceration, substance abuse, neglect, family violence, mental health issues and/or other illnesses which hinder the parents' ability to provide for their children. Grandparents raising their grandchildren for these and other reasons can provide for their grandchildren a homelike experience, help shape the grandchild's personal and cultural experiences, prevent placement in a foster home and buffer the effects of divorce, single-parenthood or death.

What Are the Difficulties?

For some grandparents, health may be an issue. Older grandparents may be having serious and frequent health problems. There is also the issue of stamina. Many grandparents report that they are emotionally and physically drained.

Many grandparents have money problems. They may be living on a reduced income. They may have to use up all their savings.

The children may have come to the grandparent with lots of emotional problems.

Taking on a parental role has effects upon a grandparent's lifestyle. It affects the amount of time he/she can spend with friends. Many grandparents raising grandchildren report missing time for themselves.

Grandparents also become isolated from other members of the family, who may resent the role that they have taken on.

Other grandchildren may become jealous.

What are the Benefits?

Along with the many difficulties faced when raising grandchildren, there are also many rewards and positive aspects of the responsibility. For example, as primary caregiver, grandparents are able to have a closer relationship than they might have had if the children lived with their parents. Grandparents also have the opportunity to pass on their wisdom, stories, memories, traditions and family history directly to their grandchildren. Hopefully, the grandparents can work towards resolution of conflicts between parents and their children. But most importantly, grandparents experience the love, joy, satisfaction and accomplishment that come with seeing their grandchild grow and succeed.

Reference

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