

Grandparents risk hardship by taking on childcare ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Grandparents in some of the UK's most vulnerable families are risking hardship by taking time out of work to provide free childcare, a report claimed today.

Research commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the charity Grandparents Plus found that working-class grandmothers of working age on low incomes were more likely to have given up work or reduced their hours to care for grandchildren than those in wealthier families.

Working-class women were more likely to be young grandmothers, defined as under 50-years-old, than middle-class women, while their younger relatives were less likely to be able to afford formal childcare arrangements.

Giving up their own jobs to plug the childcare gap had a big impact on grandmothers' income -- nearly two-thirds of grandmothers who had given up work or reduced their hours to care for their grandchildren were managing on a very low household income.

The report showed that while across demographic groups, one in three families rely on grandparents to provide some kind of childcare on a weekly basis, among single-parent families that figure rises to between half and two-thirds. Children of these families are nearly twice as likely to experience economic hardship than the wider population.

It said more than half of families with a disabled child live in poverty or are in danger of sinking into it, and that grandparents in these families play a considerable role in providing emotional, practical and financial support, particularly during times of crisis.

It also found that ethnic minority households are most likely to have a grandparent, child and grandchild all living under the same roof, which it said often led to the expectation that grandparents would take on high levels of childcare.

The report, *Protect, Support, Provide*, was based on new data from the British Social Attitudes survey, together with a review of literature on the role of grandparents role in society.

The researchers said historically the contribution grandparents made to their grandchildren's lives had been "underestimated and under-recorded", but it was known that it varied widely from occasional childcare support through to substantial periods of regular childcare to enable parents to return to work.

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- reprinted from the Guardian

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