

# More grandparents fill caregiver role <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS:

Grandparents, an increasingly important source of child care in the United States, vary greatly in the kind of care they provide, depending on their age, resources, and the needs of their children, research at the University of Chicago shows. A new UChicago study, based on a National Institute on Aging survey, shows that 60 percent of grandparents provided some care for their grandchildren during a 10-year period, and 70 percent of those who did provided care for two years or more.

The results mirror recent U.S. Census data showing the importance of grandparents in child care. The 2010 Census reported that 8 percent of grandparents live with their grandchildren, and 2.7 million grandparents are responsible for most of their grandchildren's needs. In 2006, 2.4 million grandparents had that responsibility.

Additionally, grandparents are the primary source of child care for 30 percent of mothers who work and have children under the age of five, a Census survey showed. The UChicago study explores the diversity in the kinds of care provided by grandparents.

"Our findings show that different groups of grandparents are likely to provide different types of care. Importantly grandparents with less income and less education, or who are from minority groups, are more likely to take on care for their grandchildren," said Linda Waite, the Lucy Flower Professor in Sociology at UChicago and an expert on aging.

The study found that while minority, low-income grandparents were more likely to head households with grandchildren, most grandparents provided some kind of care for their grandchildren.

The research is based on one of the most comprehensive surveys done on grandparenting, the 1998-2008 Health and Retirement Study supported by the National Institute on Aging. The longitudinal study interviewed 13,614 grandparents, aged 50 and older, at two-year intervals over the period to determine their level of care-giving.

The results are published in the paper, "Grandparents Providing Care to Grandchildren: A Population-Based Study of Continuity and Change," published in the September issue of the *Journal of Family Issues*. Waite is an author of the paper.

## Care across households and generations

The paper looks at a variety of forms of grandparent care -- multi-generational households, in which a grandparent lives with a child and grandchildren; and skipped generation households, in which a grandparent heads the household caring for grandchildren without their parents being present.

Among the paper's findings are:

- African American and Hispanic grandparents are more likely than whites to begin and continue a multi-generation household or start a skipped generation household.
- Hispanic grandparents are more likely to start a multi-generational household.
- Grandparents with more education and better incomes were more likely to provide babysitting, Waite said.
- Grandmothers are more likely than grandfathers to provide babysitting. Grandparents who are married are more likely to begin and continue babysitting, however.
- Grandparents are less likely to provide care if they have minor children of their own at home.
- Grandparents least likely to provide care are older, unmarried and less likely to be working.

The findings have implications for public policy, Waite pointed out, as child welfare agencies are increasingly depending on family members, particularly grandparents, to provide care to children when parents cannot. The Census figures show that 60 percent of the grandparents caring for their grandchildren also are in the labor force.

"Day care assistance may be particularly needed by middle-aged grandparents who are juggling multiple role obligations -- as parent, a grandparent and a paid employee," Waite wrote.

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