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**Grandparents Raising Grandchildren in Canada:
A Profile of Skipped Generation Families**

Esme Fuller-Thomson

SEDAP Research Paper No. 132

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Grandparents Raising Grandchildren in Canada:
A Profile of Skipped Generation Families

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Abstract:

Only recently has the topic of Canadian grandparents raising grandchildren begun to receive attention from the media, politicians and researchers. Between 1991 and 2001 there was a 20% increase in the number of Canadian children under 18 who were living with grandparents with no parent present in the home. Using custom tabulation data from the 1996 Canadian Census, this paper presents a profile of grandparents raising grandchildren in skipped generation households (households which only include grandparents and grandchildren) and their household characteristics. There were almost 27,000 Canadian grandparents raising grandchildren in skipped generation families in 1996. These grandparents were disproportionately female (59%), of First Nations Heritage (17%) and out of the labour force (57%). One in three households of grandparent caregivers included a grandparent with a disability and a similar proportion had a household income less than \$15,000 per annum. Marked differences were apparent when grandmothers and grandfathers in skipped generation households were compared. Grandmother caregivers were poorer, less likely to be married, more likely to be out of the labour force and more than twice as likely to provide 60 or more hours per week of unpaid childcare than were grandfathers. Implications for further research, policy and practice are discussed.

Key words: Grandparents raising grandchildren, Skipped generation families, Canadian grandparents, First Nations grandparents, Kinship foster care policies, Later-life families

JEL Classification: J12

Résumé:

Ce n'est que tout récemment que la question des grand-parents canadiens élevant leurs petits-enfants a reçu l'attention des médias, des politiciens et des chercheurs. Entre 1991 et 2001, le nombre d'enfants canadiens de moins de 18 ans vivant chez leurs grands-parents sans la présence des parents dans le foyer a augmenté de 20%. En utilisant les données des tableaux du Recensement canadien de 1996, cet article trace le portrait des grands-parents élevant leurs petits-enfants dans un ménage à génération manquante (c.-à-d. incluant les grands-parents et les petits-enfants seulement) et leurs caractéristiques. En 1997, on comptait au total presque 27,000 grands-parents élevant leurs petits-enfants dans une famille à génération manquante. Ces familles étaient composées majoritairement de femmes (59%), d'autochtones des Premières nations (17%), et d'inactifs (57%). Un ménage sur trois incluait un grand parent souffrant d'une invalidité et une proportion semblable de ménages avait un revenu de moins de 15,000\$ par année. Une comparaison de la situation des grands-mères et grands-pères dans les ménages à génération manquante, laisse apparaître des différences marquantes. Les grand-mères tutrices étaient, en moyenne, plus pauvres, avaient une plus faible probabilité d'être mariées, une plus forte probabilité d'être inactives et avaient une probabilité deux fois plus importante de s'occuper d'enfants à titre gracieux pendant 60 heures ou plus par semaine, que les grands-pères. A la lumière de ces chiffres, les orientations de la recherche, des politiques et des pratiques futures sont discutées.

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Grandparents Raising Grandchildren in Canada:

A Profile of Skipped Generation Families

Increasing numbers of children in Canada are being raised by their grandparents. Statistics Canada (2003a) data indicate that between 1991 and 2001 there was a 20% increase in the number of children under 18 years old who were living with their grandparents with no parents present in the household. This household structure is defined as a “skipped generation” household. The increase in these households parallels the 31% increase in such households in the United States between 1990 and 1997 (Casper & Bryson, 1998).

Concomitant with this increase in grandparent caregiving has been a growing national interest in the issue. Canadian newspapers, magazines and television shows have produced features on grandparent caregiving (c.f. Growe, 1999; 2003; Waytiuk, 2001). Elected officials have recently raised concerns in provincial legislatures about adequate compensation for grandparent caregivers (c.f. Kormos, 2002; Kwan, 2002). Grandparent caregivers have organized support groups in many localities across the country. Social workers have been encouraged to give preference to grandparents and other relatives in the placement of neglected or abused children. There was even a novel for children on the topic published by an award winning Canadian author (Little, 2000).

Although grandparent caregiving has been the focus of more than 100 studies of studies and several edited books by academic researchers in the United States, it has not yet received much attention from researchers in Canada. This paper will summarize what is known about grandparent caregivers, discuss the demographic trends that may be contributing to the recent increase in Canadian skipped generation households and outline the potential for role theory to improve the theoretical understanding of the phenomenon. Using custom tabulations of the 1996

Census of Canada, the purpose of this paper is to provide nationally representative Canadian data on grandparent caregivers and their households. Particular attention will be paid to gender differences among grandparents in skipped generation families, a topic which has not been adequately studied in Canada or elsewhere (Spitz & Ward, 1998). Program and policy implications of the findings will be discussed.

There are many positive outcomes of grandparent caregiving. In a study using a large random sample, grandparent caregivers reported greater closeness to their grandchildren than did non-caregivers (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2001). Solomon and Marx (1995) concluded, using nationally representative American data, that children raised by grandparents were similar on health and behavior outcomes to children who lived with both their biological parents, despite considerably lower financial resources. Although qualitative studies are not representative and therefore cannot be generalized to the population of grandparent caregivers, several such studies have highlighted positive outcomes of grandparent caregiving. Minkler and Roe (1993) found grandparent caregivers were delighted with the love grandchildren provide and were relieved in knowing the children were safe and the family was kept together. Grandparents who had raised their grandchildren often reported later in life that, once grown, the adult grandchildren gave them extensive assistance (Weibel-Orlando, 1997).

However, in representative U.S. national (Fuller-Thomson, Minkler, & Driver, 1997a; Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 1999; Minkler, Fuller-Thomson, Miller, & Driver, 1997; Solomon & Marx, 1995) and regional studies (Strawbridge, Wallhagen, Shema, & Kaplan, 1997), and in non-representative quantitative (Kelley, Whitley, Sipe, & Yorker, 2000; Shore & Hayslip, 1994) and qualitative studies (Burnette, 1999; Burton, 1992b; Minkler, Roe, & Price, 1992) many negative outcomes have also been documented. These American studies indicated that

grandparent caregivers are a particularly vulnerable population of middle aged and older adults. In comparison to non-caregiving grandparents, grandparents raising their grandchildren had higher levels of depressive symptoms (Burton, 1992a; Fuller-Thomson, Minkler, & Driver, 1997b; Kelley et al., 2000), limitations in their daily activities (Kelley et al., 2000; Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 1999), increased social isolation, and decreased life satisfaction (Shore & Hayslip, 1994). The extent to which Canadian grandparent caregivers experience these outcomes remains unknown. Inwood's (2002) qualitative study highlighted similar issues within the Canadian context and underlined the need for a nationally representative Canadian study of the phenomenon. It is the purpose of this study to address this gap in the literature.

As is the case with all forms of family caregiving, grandparent caregiving is disproportionately a women's issue (Bryson & Casper, 1999; Chalfie, 1994; Fuller-Thomson et al., 1997a; Szinovacz, 1998a). In American skipped generation families, grandmothers were much more likely to be providing solo care for grandchildren than were grandfathers (Chalfie, 1994). Spitz and Ward (1998, p. 114) hypothesized that gender differences in grandparenting result from "socially constructed gender differences in family roles" including a stronger orientation among women to family relationships, including the grandparental role. Further, the gendered division of labour tends to result in men being more involved in the paid employment and women having greater involvement in child care responsibilities.

The majority of grandparent caregiving studies to date have focused solely on women (c.f. Minkler & Roe, 1993; Pruchno, 1999; Sands & Goldberg-Glen, 2000; Solomon & Marx, 1999). Representative American studies indicated that, although the majority of grandmother caregivers were White and middle class, women who were African American, who were poor and who had not completed high school were disproportionately represented among caregivers (Fuller-

Thomson & Minkler, 2000; Solomon & Marx, 1999). Thus, caregiving grandmothers are more likely to come from an economically vulnerable sub-population of older women. The literature has yet to investigate, however, whether caregiving grandfathers are equally disadvantaged.

With few exceptions (c.f. Szinovacz, 1998a; M. Szinovacz, S. DeViney, & M. P. Atkinson, 1999b), the representative American studies that have included both men and women (c.f. Chalfie, 1994; Fuller-Thomson et al., 1997a) generally have not compared grandfather and grandmother caregivers. We, therefore, have little American literature on gender differences in demographic characteristics and time spent providing care, and no Canadian studies on this topic. With the use of a large, nationally representative sample of caregivers in skipped generation families, this paper seeks to answer the question, “How do caregiving grandmothers differ from caregiving grandfathers with respect to demographic characteristics, time spent on childrearing and other family roles.”

Demographic Trends in Canada Contributing to the Increase in Skipped Generation Households

It is still rare for grandparents to take over sole caregiving responsibility as is the case in skipped generation households in which they perform all the functions that were traditionally provided by the parent. Milan and Hamm (2003) reported that in 2001 there were 56,700 Canadian grandparents in skipped generation households. However, only 57% of these grandparents were living with only under-aged grandchildren (personal communication January 9, 2004 , Brian Hamm, Senior Technical Officer, Statistics Canada). The other grandparents had at least one grandchild aged 18 or older in the household and thus making it difficult to determine who was helping whom in the household.

Typically, grandparents only undertake full time care of a grandchild when the grandchildren's parents cannot or will not provide adequate care for the child. It is rarely a matter of choice (Connidis, 2001, p. 180). However, crises sometimes develop that compel grandparents to take on parenting responsibilities. Prominent reasons prompting grandparents to raise grandchildren include teen pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, female incarceration, the death of a custodial parent, mental illness, drug and alcohol problems among the parent generation, and intervention by child-welfare agencies (Harden, Clark, & Maguire, 1997; Pinson-Millburn, Fabian, Schlossberg, & Pyle, 1996). But the question remains, which of these factors has likely contributed to the marked increase over the past decade in children being raised in skipped generation homes in Canada?

Although we do not have longitudinal data with which to definitively answer this question, closer analysis of Canadian demographic trends provide some insight into this issue. It appears unlikely that the increase in the past decade in custodial grandparenting is largely due to changes in the rates of teen pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, parental mortality, or mental illness. The number of children born to teen parents has declined over the past two decades (Health Canada, 2003). While the age-specific death rate for women aged 25-44 with HIV/AIDS did increase substantially from 0.4/100,000 in 1987 to 1.9/100 000 in 1994 (Health Canada, 2000), the overall number of infected women remained relatively small. Of all the cases reported to the Bureau of HIV/AIDS, STD and TB up to the end of 1999 only 1,252 were among adult women (Health Canada, 2000). Changes in the rate of parental mortality is also unlikely to play a major factor in the increasing numbers of children in their grandparents care since mortality rates for both females and males did not increase during the 1990s (Statistics Canada, 2003b). The rates of

hospitalization for mental illness have also been declining steadily for the past fifteen years (Health Canada, 2002).

The three remaining factors incarceration rates, chemical dependency and child welfare placements- are more likely to have contributed to the increase in grandparent caregiving. The number of incarcerated women has increased substantially. For example, between 1989 and 1995 the Federal penitentiary population grew by 22% and the provincial penitentiary population grew by 12% (Canada Solicitor General Canada, 1996). Seventy percent of women in prison have children (Shaw, 1994). Drug use and in particular, crack cocaine use has been identified in the United States as a key factor in the escalating rates of grandparent caregiving (c.f. Minkler, 1999). Throughout the 1990s, Canada also experienced an escalation in the use of illicit drugs including LSD, cocaine and crack, and in the incidence of binge drinking (Centre for Addictions and Mental Health, 2003).

In the United States, the number of children formally placed by child welfare workers into the care of grandparents and other relatives has surged in recent years. This rapid increase is a result of changes in state and federal level policies which gave preference to placing foster children with relatives (Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 2000). By 1997, publicly funded kinship foster care was provided to 200,000 children accounting for 29% of all children in the foster care system (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). As is the case in the United States, some of the grandchildren in skipped generation families in Canada were undoubtedly placed there by child welfare agencies. A national study of child maltreatment investigations concluded that one in three out-of-home placements of abused or neglected children made by Canadian child welfare agencies was to “informal placements” (Trocmé, MacLaurin, Fallon, & et al., 2001). Informal placements include placements with grandparents, other kinship caregivers and

with non-custodial parents. In 1998, there were almost 6000 such placements. Unfortunately, the data did not distinguish the number placed with grandparents from those placed with other relatives.

The Canadian policies around kinship care are still evolving and vary considerably among the provinces. The majority of provincial child welfare agencies in Canada recognize kinship care as an arrangement potentially eligible for financial support from the foster care system; “All jurisdictions recognize that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in the delivery of child and family services and that the least intrusive form of intervention is preferred” (Human Resources and Development Canada, 2002). The least intrusive form of intervention is increasingly seen to be the placement of at risk children in the care of capable extended family members - frequently grandparents. Several provinces include statements in their provincial child welfare acts, similar to that of Newfoundland and Labrador, which emphasizes that “first placement consideration of a child must be with a relative or a person with whom the child has a significant relationship” (Human Resources and Development Canada, 2002).

Kinship placements allow for children to be cared for by people they know without the level of disruption that placement in a non-kinship foster home entails. Kinship foster care also provides a culturally similar milieu and allows the children to retain contact with other kin. In addition to the benefits for the child, kinship care provides a source of much needed foster care homes to help deal with the dramatic increase in the number of children in care.

The First Nations’ population, in particular, may be contributing to an increase in children placed with grandparents. In the past decade, the First Nations Child and Family Services Program has promoted the extensive expansion and development of child and family services

agencies designed, managed and controlled by First Nations. Approximately 90% of on-reserve children of First Nations descent are currently receiving services from these agencies (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2001). These agencies are mandated to provide culturally appropriate care and rely heavily upon grandparents and other relatives for foster care placements. First Nations children are four to six times more likely than other Canadian children to come into the care of child welfare agencies and in addition, they are the fastest growing segment of the Canadian population (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2001).

Methods

Sample

Data presented in this article are based on custom tabulations of the 1996 Census of Canada. These tabulations were prepared by Statistics Canada for the author. The long form of the 1996 Census was given to a 20% sample of all Canadian households. The Census long form included questions on a wide range of demographic, economic and social characteristics of household members. Weighting the long-form sample to the national population generated national prevalence numbers. Please see Statistics Canada (1997) for a complete discussion of sample size and weighting.. Grandparent caregiving in the on-reserve Aboriginal community may be under-represented in the data presented here. During the 1996 Census, enumeration was not permitted or was interrupted before it could be completed on 77 Indian reserves and settlements representing an estimated 44,000 individuals or approximately 5% of the total First Nation's population (Statistics Canada, 1998). Thus, individuals in these areas are not included in these tabulations.

Measures

Skipped generation households were defined as households that contain only members of the grandparent and the grandchild generation, where no parents or aunts or uncles of the grandchildren are co-resident. Only households in which all the grandchildren were under 18 were included in the analysis. Although many grandparents may have been the primary caregivers to grandchildren in three-generation homes, the census data were not sufficiently detailed to clarify the respective caregiving roles in the household when the grandchildren's parents and/or aunts and uncles were present. One can assume with more certainty that grandparents are the care providers when they are the only adults in the household. Thus, the study was restricted to the smaller sample of skipped generation households. All grandparents in skipped generation households were defined as "*grandparent caregivers*". Unfortunately, there were no questions in the census asking whether individuals defined themselves as grandparent caregivers and thus, this definition was created from the family structure. This replicated the strategy adopted by Chalfie (1994) in her ground-breaking work on grandparent caregiving in the U.S..

Individual level variables.

Several demographic variables were included in these analyses including the following: *age, marital status, immigrant status, mother tongue, education level, employment status and annual individual income*. *Aboriginal status*, as defined by Statistics Canada, referred to those persons who reported identifying with at least one Aboriginal group, i.e. North American Indian, Métis or Inuit (Eskimo) and/or those who reported being a Treaty Indian or a Registered Indian as defined by the Indian Act of Canada and/or who were members of an Indian Band or First Nation (Statistics Canada, 1997). *Knowledge of official languages* was defined by the question,

“Can this person speak English or French well enough to conduct a conversation? (possible answers were English only, French only, Both English and French, Neither English nor French).

The *hours spent doing household activities* were obtained through the following three-part question. Last week how many hours did this person spend doing the following activities (a) doing unpaid housework, yardwork or home maintenance for members of this household, or others (some examples include: preparing meals, doing laundry, household planning, shopping and cutting the grass), (b) looking after one or more of this person’s own children, or the children of others, without pay (some examples include: bathing or playing with young children, driving children to sports activities or helping them with homework, and talking with teens about their problems), and (c) providing unpaid care or assistance to one or more seniors (some examples include: providing personal care to a senior family member, visiting seniors, talking with them on the telephone and helping them with shopping, banking or with taking medication)? Six possible response categories were provided for each question. Where activities overlapped, respondents were instructed to report the same hours in more than one part. Therefore, the reader should view the hours spent on household activities with caution due to potential overcounting. (Statistics Canada, 1997).

Household level variables.

Through simultaneous consideration of each household member, the Census generated several household level variables: 1) *Number of grandchildren* in household, 2) *Age of grandchildren* in household (at least one under 6 years of age, at least one 6-14 years of age with none under 6 years of age where one or more may be 15-17, and all grandchildren 15-17), 3) *Living on a reserve* (whether household was on an Indian reservation or not), 4) *Grandchildren reporting a disability*, defined as a limitation in the kind or amount of a person's activity because

of a long-term physical condition, mental condition or health problem (at least one grandchild reporting a disability, none), 5) *Grandparents reporting a disability* (at least one grandparent reporting a disability, none), and 6) *Household income* (based on a summation of the individual income of all household members).

Analysis Plan

All analyses were commissioned from the Canadian Census. Data was generated on the characteristics of Canada's 26,970 individual grandparent caregivers (e.g. sex, age, marital status, and hours spent providing childcare). Gender differences between male and female grandparent caregivers for categorical variables (e.g. marital status) were determined with simple cross-tabs and Chi-square tests. Where ratio level data was available (e.g. income), means and standard deviations and independent t-tests were calculated. The racial/ethnic distribution of grandparent caregivers was compared with that of the Canadian population using data from the 1996 Census. It would have been preferable to compare caregiving grandparents with grandparents who did not provide care, however this was not possible because there was no question in the Census that asked if individuals had grandchildren outside the household.

In order to investigate the characteristics of the 16,590 Canadian skipped level households (e.g. number of grandchildren in household, whether the household was on an Indian Reservation, presence in the household of a grandchild with a disability, household income), simple frequencies were generated.

In the cases where cell numbers fell below a set level, data in the cell were suppressed in the custom tabulation and were subsequently presented in the table as a dash. Custom tabulations

round cell numbers to the nearest 5 except in the case of cells with a count less than 10, which are rounded to the nearest 10.

Results

In 1996, there were 26,970 custodial grandparent caregivers in skipped generation families in Canada (See Table 1). Three in five grandparent caregivers were female. The majority of grandparent caregivers were in mid-life; Almost two-thirds of the grandparents were between 45 and 64 years old. However, there were more than 1300 grandparent caregivers 75 years old or older. Most of the grandparents were married (70%). One in six of the grandparents was an immigrant. Although one in five of the grandparents did not speak English or French as their mother tongue, only 4% of grandparent caregivers could not currently communicate in either of Canada's official languages. More than three in five grandparent caregivers had not completed high school. More than half of the grandparents were outside the labour force (57%). Approximately one-fifth of grandparent caregivers spent fewer than 5 hours per week on unpaid housework and one-third spent 30 or more hours per week on this task. Approximately two-fifth of grandparent caregivers spent fewer than five hours per week on unpaid childcare caregiving, while one-third of the caregivers provided more than 30 hours per week of such care. Nineteen percent of the grandparents provided some unpaid care to seniors each week, although only 9% of grandparent caregivers were involved in providing 5 or more hours per week.

-PLACE TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE-

Grandmother caregivers were significantly younger than grandfathers raising grandchildren. Twenty-one percent of caregiving grandmothers were 65 years old or older in contrast to twenty-eight percent of grandfathers. Grandmothers were more likely to be raising grandchildren without the aid of a spouse - only 16% of grandfathers were not married in comparison to 41% of

grandmothers. Women raising grandchildren were more likely to be of Aboriginal descent than were men (19% versus 15%). A higher percentage of women than men caregivers could not speak either of Canada's official languages (4.2% versus 2.8%).

Female caregivers were much more likely to be out of the labour force than were their male counterparts (64% versus 46%). Grandfathers earned considerably more than grandmothers in both average income (\$25,799 versus \$14,131) and median income (\$20,341 versus \$11,026). Hours spent on housework were skewed with 46% of the grandmothers spending 30 or more hours per week on these tasks in contrast to 19% of the men. Similarly, caregiving grandmothers were much more likely to spend 30 or more hours a week on unpaid childcare tasks than were caregiving grandfathers (41% versus 22%). One-half of the men spent less than five hours per week on unpaid childcare in contrast to 32% of the women. Twenty percent of women and sixteen percent of men provided some unpaid care to seniors.

As shown in Table 2, 17% of custodial grandparent caregivers were of First Nations descent. In contrast, less than 3% of the Canadian population was Aboriginal. Black Canadians were also over-represented among grandparent caregivers (4.2% of caregivers as opposed to 2% of the Canadian population).

-PLACE TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE-

Analyses of the household level data (See Table 3) revealed that in one of every five skipped generation families, grandparents were raising two or more grandchildren. Over 800 of the households included three or more grandchildren. In one quarter of the households, grandparents were raising at least one preschooler. In another quarter of the households, grandparents were raising only older teenagers (aged 15-17). Nine percent of skipped generation households were on First Nations reserves. Seven percent of the households included at least one

grandchild with a disability. One in three of the households had at least one grandparent who was living with a disability. Thirty percent of skipped generation households had less than \$15,000 in annual income. The median grandparent led household income was \$23,297 and the average household income was \$31,433.

-PLACE TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE-

Discussion

These data revealed some surprising findings. Although some caregivers did spend a great deal of their week on child-care tasks (discussed more fully below), 40% of grandparents in skipped generation households provided less than five hours per week of child-care. When this figure was analyzed by gender, one-half of the grandfathers spent less than 5 hours per week on child care, in contrast to slightly less than one-third of the women. One possible explanation for this low intensity of care provision among so many of the grandparent caregivers is the age of the grandchildren. Childcare responsibilities are typically much more time consuming when children are under age 6, yet only one-quarter of the households contained a pre-school aged child. An additional quarter of the households contained only grandchildren aged 15-17. Although the examples given for the Census' child care question included activities relevant to older children (e.g. driving children to sports activities or helping them with homework, and talking with teens about their problems), it is possible that many of the teens are relatively independent. Caregiving duties such as washing the teen's clothes, cleaning their room and preparing food would have been listed as "unpaid housework" category not as "childcare".

The majority of the literature to date has primarily discussed grandparent caregiving in the context of younger children and outreach from grandparenting support groups tend to be focused

on this population. However, it appears that at least in Canada, a significant number of grandparent caregivers are raising teen-agers with the concomitant issues that this may raise.

Economic and Health Factors

Grandparent caregivers reflected the heterogeneity of Canada's population. Canadian grandparent caregivers came from every race, class and adult age group. However, in keeping with the American literature (Chalfie, 1994; Fuller-Thomson et al., 1997a; Kelley et al., 2000; Minkler et al., 1997) the preponderance of these grandparents were female, were in mid-life and were married.

Slightly more than a quarter of skipped generation households have comfortable middle class incomes of \$40,000 or higher and a similar proportion has a trade diploma, or a college or university degree. However, many Canadian grandparent caregivers in skipped generation families were raising grandchildren despite substantial economic problems. Particularly troubling was the high percentage of grandparent caregivers and the grandchildren they were raising who were living in extreme poverty. More than 30% of skipped generation families had household incomes under \$15,000 per annum. Potential policy solutions to alleviate these high levels of poverty must be investigated. Clearer policies, easier access to kinship care payments and reimbursement levels similar to those of non-familial foster care rates could alleviate some of the pressing economic hardship for poorer grandparent caregivers.

Part of the financial difficulties may be related to the fact that more than half of grandparent caregivers were not in the labour force. This was a surprisingly high proportion in light of the fact that three quarters of grandparent caregivers were under 65 years of age. Even when only male grandparent caregivers were considered, a similar ratio was apparent. Unfortunately, it is impossible with census data to determine if caretaking responsibilities

influenced grandparents' decisions to leave the labour force. However, a qualitative study in the United States found that one-third of the study participants had relinquished their jobs in order to care for a grandchild (Burnette, 1999). Further research is needed to determine how many grandparents would seek out and benefit from affordable and accessible child care and/or retraining opportunities.

Also of concern is the fact that at least one grandparent in every three Canadian skipped generation households had a disability. The physical challenges of caregiving are the most demanding for those who are raising a preschool child. If further research indicates program interventions in this area are warranted, one strategy may be to creatively design respite care to provide assistance with the physically demanding tasks of raising children such as bathing and going for walks (Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 1999).

Grandchildren in the care of their grandparents also had high rates of disabilities. Seven percent of skipped generation households included a grandchild with a disability. Possible program responses to special needs children raised by grandparents include "grand" parent-training programs and school based interventions (Silverthorn & Durrant, 2000). Wider availability of dynamic early childhood education such as HeadStart could be particularly beneficial.

In keeping with the American studies (c.f. Bryson & Casper, 1999; Chalfie, 1994; Fuller-Thomson et al., 1997a; Szinovacz, 1998a), women are overrepresented among grandparent caregivers. This study reports the first Canadian data indicating that grandmother caregivers were much more likely than grandfathers to be raising grandchildren on their own and to be investing long hours in childcare and housekeeping tasks. Women were also providing this care in the context of lower individual incomes than men. Grandmother caregivers are only slightly

more likely than grandfathers to be providing senior care but the vast majority of both genders are not providing such care. In keeping with the gendered division of labour, grandmother caregivers were more likely to be spending long hours on unpaid childcare and on housework and less likely to be in the paid labour market than were grandfathers.

One in five of skipped generation households contained two or more grandchildren. Qualitative studies have concluded that, not surprisingly, the emotional, physical and economic toll of raising multiple grandchildren appeared to be particularly acute (c.f. Minkler & Roe, 1993). An American study indicated that other relative caregivers (e.g. aunts, cousins) and unrelated foster care providers were less likely than custodial grandparent to be caring for more than one child (Joslin & Brouard, 1995). When siblings come into non-kinship foster care, it is often necessary to split the children up in order to find enough space for them (Shlonsky, Needell, & Webster, 2001). Grandparents may be particularly loath to allow the family to be split up and therefore are doubly motivated to provide care, whatever the cost. The availability of financial assistance and supportive services may be particularly beneficial for these resource-stretched families.

Grandparent caregiver support groups are developing in regions across Canada. These programs could be used as a forum to provide relevant information including parenting skills for special needs children, how to access daycare, and needed assessment and treatment services in addition to providing support and a chance to meet and socialize with other grandparent caregivers. An easily accessible and well-publicized Canadian central registry of grandparent caregiver support groups, similar to the one in the United States run by the American Association of Retired Persons (2003), would assist grandparents in locating support groups and accessing information on legal, custody, education and financial issues. Although grandfather caregivers

are a minority, there are a significant number providing care and thus support groups should be cognizant of the need to do outreach to grandfathers as well as grandmothers.

Ethnic and Racial Variation in Grandparent Caregiving

Two racial groups were substantially over-represented among Canadian grandparent caregivers: Black Canadians and First Nation Canadians. Despite their disproportionate representation in the caregiving population, Blacks comprised only one in twenty-five Canadian grandparent caregivers as compared to one in four of American custodial grandparents (Fuller-Thomson et al., 1997a). Interviews with Caribbean Canadian grandparents suggested strong cultural norms for extended family care. Many of the Caribbean Canadian grandparents interviewed in a small qualitative study indicated that they had been raised by their grandparents at some point during their youth (Fuller-Thomson, 2002). Economic necessity and high levels of migration from the Islands promoted such patterns of shared caregiving.

A key finding of this study was the extremely high prevalence of grandparent caregiving among First Nations Canadians. Persons of First Nations descent comprise only 2.8% of the total population and 1.4% of the Canadian population aged 45 and over (Statistics Canada, 1998). Thus, it is remarkable that more than 17% of caregiving grandparents were of Aboriginal descent. The willingness of First Nations grandparents to provide care may be influenced by traditional involvement of extended kin in childcare in Aboriginal communities (Bahr, 1994; Castellano, 2002; Human Resources and Development Canada, 2002; Shomaker, 1989). Furthermore, grandparents may be motivated to caregive in order to preserve the culture. This may be particularly true in communities where many children have been removed from parental homes and placed outside the community.

The high levels of teen pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, family dissolution and socioeconomic problems in First Nations families (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996) are all factors associated with elevated rates of grandparent caregiving. This departs from the general analysis on factors associated with elevated rates of grandparent caregiving. Many of these high levels of family dissolution are related to government interventions that resulted in many children being removed from the family home and placed in trans-racial/cultural foster care, adoptions and residential schools. Residential schools followed a policy of forced acculturation, prohibiting native language use and cultural practices, and minimizing contact with families of origin. Castellano (2002) discussed the multiple generational impact of removing children from the home and community. Upon return to their home community, these children had often lost their sense of identity, their ability to communicate in their mother tongue, and had been deprived of adequate parental role modeling. Although residential schools have been closed and trans-racial/cultural adoptions and foster care placements have declined, the effects of this level of intervention persist and will take a long time to heal. A prominent executive director of an urban Native Child and Family Service agency reported that 90% of the agency's single parent clients were foster care wards themselves and the majority of the grandparents had been in residential schools (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples).

It is likely that the numbers of children formally placed in First Nations skipped generation households will have risen considerably since the 1996 Census was conducted. As discussed above, the newly formed First Nations Child and Family Services Program relies heavily on grandparents and other kin to provide care. By 2001, six percent of registered Indians who were living on-reserve were in the care of child welfare agencies, a huge increase from the 3.9% of on-reserve children in care in 1996 (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2002).

Promising avenues of future research include quantitative research examining the socioeconomic, health and housing situation of First Nations grandparent caregivers, and qualitative research exploring the meaning of and reasons for caregiving in this population. Such studies would begin to address the lack of research on ethnic variation in grandparenting in Canada and help to investigate the relative contribution of cultural tradition, financial necessity and social inequality in the formation of grandparent caregiving households (Rosenthal & Gladstone, 2000).

The Potential for Role Overload

Another promising area of future research involves the use of role theory for understanding the outcomes of grandparent caregiving. The findings of this study indicated that in addition to raising grandchildren slightly less than one-half of grandparents are in the labour force and seven in ten are married. One-third are providing 30 or more hours of child care per week and a similar proportion are doing housework 30 or more hours per week. One in five grandparents provide some care to a senior, although it is unclear whether that senior is an aged parent, a spouse, sibling or friend. It is likely that many grandparents were balancing multiple concurrent roles and were experiencing interrole conflict and role overload (Davis, 1996). Unfortunately, the analysis provided by the Census did not provide sufficient detail to determine this.

Role overload is a function not just of role demands but also of the resources available to meet those demands (Biddle, 1986). As was discussed above, many grandparent caregivers had insufficient financial resources and/or had health problems that undoubtedly made it difficult to fulfill the expectations that come with the caregiving role. This fact was illustrated in qualitative studies which documented the added burden and time required to complete housework and childcare tasks for the many older grandparents living with disabilities (Fuller-Thomson, 2002;

Minkler & Roe, 1993). Further in-depth research on Canadian grandparent caregivers would benefit from the use of a role theory perspective in enhancing our theoretical understanding of the phenomenon (Burnette, 1999; Cox, 2000).

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. As was discussed above, grandparents in skipped generation households represented only a portion of grandparent caregivers. One American study found that more than half of grandparents who were raising their grandchildren had a coresident child (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2001). Thus, the profile presented here does not present the whole picture of custodial grandparenting in Canada. Findings should not be generalized to grandparent caregivers in three generation households because grandparents in skipped generation households are likely to be poorer and may differ in other systematic ways. Further research on caregiving in three generational households is warranted. Further, the undercounting of on-reserve First Nations populations means that Aboriginal households may comprise an even larger proportion of skipped generation families than shown here.

To understand grandparenting, one must include grandchildren and adult children in the analysis as Rosenthal and Gladstone (2000) have underlined. This study would have been greatly enriched if this had been possible. Key questions not included in the study that should be pursued in future research include the following: Why were the grandchildren being raised by the grandparent?, What is the meaning of this caregiving role for the grandparent, the grandchild and the non-resident parent of the grandchild?, How is the quality of all three relationships, as well as the relationship with other family members affected?, What factors are associated with role strain? Panel data would allow researchers to explore how caregiving changes over time as the grandparent and grandchild ages.

Despite their simplicity, these data provide evidence that a substantial number of Canadian middle aged and older adults are raising their grandchildren. Grandparent caregivers come from every race, income group and education level. First Nations grandparents, the poor and people living with disabilities are over-represented among these caregivers. Caregiving grandmothers are more likely than grandfathers to be providing long hours of direct care provision in skipped generation families but there is a significant minority of grandfathers providing almost full time care to their grandchildren. Further Canadian research is needed on these previously “invisible” caregivers.

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Table 1

Demographic Profile of Individual Caregiving Grandparents in Skipped Generation Economic Families by Gender (N=26,970)

Variable	Frequency (<u>N</u> =26,970)	Percentage	Percentage	Percentage	p ^b
		All Grandparents ^a (<u>N</u> =26,970) (100%)	within Male Grandparents ^a (<u>N</u> =11,115) (41.2%)	within Female Grandparents (<u>N</u> =15,855) (58.8%)	
Age					
15-34 years	1,050	3.9	4.1	3.9	p<.001
35-44 years	2,305	8.5	7.9	9.0	
45-54 years	7,525	27.9	23.8	30.8	
55-64 years	9,635	35.7	36.6	35.1	
65-74 years	5,105	18.9	22.1	16.7	
75 years and over	1,340	5.0	5.6	4.6	
Marital Status					
Legally married (not separated)	18,760	69.6	84.1	59.4	p<.001

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Separated or divorced	3,665	13.6	6.7	18.4	
Widowed	2,915	10.8	3.5	16.0	
Never married (single)	1,630	6.0	5.7	6.3	
Aboriginal Status					
Non-Aboriginal	22,275	82.6	85.0	80.9	p<.001
Aboriginal	4,695	17.4	15.0	19.1	
North American Indian single response	3,650	77.7	11.4	15.0	
Métis single response	775	16.5	2.7	3.0	
Inuit single response	160	3.4	0.6	0.6	
Multiple Aboriginal responses	30	0.6	0.1	0.1	
Other Aboriginal response	85	1.8	0.2	0.4	
Immigrant Status					
Non-immigrant	22,005	82.1	82.5	81.8	p<.10
Immigrant	4,810	17.9	17.5	18.2	
Arrived in Canada between 1991 - 1996	485	1.8	1.6	1.9	p<.001
Arrived in Canada between 1981 - 1990	915	3.4	3.1	3.7	

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Arrived in Canada between 1971 - 1980	1,165	4.3	3.7	4.8	
Arrived in Canada between 1961 - 1970	895	3.3	3.4	3.3	
Arrived in Canada before 1961	1,345	5.0	5.7	4.5	
Mother Tongue ^c					
English	16,270	62.2	62.0	62.4	p<.001
French	4,050	15.5	16.0	15.1	
Aboriginal language	2,005	7.7	6.7	8.2	
Other languages	3,850	14.7	15.3	14.3	
Knowledge of Official Languages					
English only	20,400	75.6	75.7	75.6	p<.001
French only	2,575	9.5	8.3	10.4	
Both English and French	3,010	11.2	13.2	9.7	
Neither English nor French	985	3.7	2.8	4.2	
Highest Level of Education					
Less than Grade 9	8,760	32.5	33.6	31.7	p<.001
Some high school	7,885	29.2	26.6	31.1	

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High school graduate	2,250	8.3	6.7	9.5	
Trades certificate or diploma	1,315	4.9	7.2	3.2	
Other non-university education	4,760	17.7	17.8	17.5	
Some university	1,080	4.0	4.0	4.0	
University with bachelor degree or higher	915	3.4	4.1	2.9	
Employment Status					
Not in the labour force	15,250	56.5	45.8	64.1	p<.001
Unemployed	1,445	5.4	6.6	4.5	
Employed	10,275	38.1	47.6	31.4	
1995 Average employment income ^d			\$29,939	\$17,690	p<.001
			(SD=\$575)	(SD=\$482)	
1995 Annual Income					
Without income	2,040	7.6	1.0	12.1	p<.001
With income	24,930	92.4	99.0	87.9	
Income under \$1,000	1,790	7.2	4.2	8.3	p<.001
\$1000 - \$9, 999	6,870	27.6	17.9	30.8	

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\$10,000 - \$29,999	11,055	44.3	43.7	39.2	
\$30,000 - \$39,999	2,295	9.2	12.8	5.5	
\$40,000 - \$49,999	1,285	5.2	8.6	2.0	
\$50,000 and over	1630	6.5	11.8	2.0	
Average income			\$25,799	\$14,131	p<.001
			(SD=\$356)	(SD=\$214)	
Median income			\$20,341	\$11,026	
Hours of Unpaid Housework					
Less than 5 hours	5,830	21.6	34.0	13.0	p<.001
5 to 14 hours	6,110	22.7	29.0	18.3	
15 to 29 hours	5,510	20.4	17.6	22.5	
30 to 59 hours	5,665	21.0	12.8	26.7	
60 or more hours	3,835	14.2	6.6	19.5	
Hours of Unpaid Childcare					
Less than 5 hours	1,0575	39.2	50.0	31.6	p<.001
5 to 14 hours	4,210	15.6	17.5	14.3	

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15 to 29 hours	3,325	12.3	11.1	13.2	
30 to 59 hours	2,865	10.6	7.6	12.7	
60 or more hours	5,985	22.2	13.9	28.1	
Hours of Unpaid Care to Seniors					
None	21,980	81.5	84.3	79.6	p<.001
Less than 5 hours	2,450	9.1	8.8	9.3	
5 to 9 hours	1,145	4.2	3.3	4.9	
10 or more hours	1,380	5.1	3.6	6.2	

Note: Source: Custom Tabulations of the 1996 Census

^a Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding error.

^b Chi-square tests were used for nominal level variables and independent t-tests were used for ratio-level variables.

^c For individuals who indicated a single mother tongue (n=26,180).

Table 2

Demographic Profile of Individual Caregiving Grandparents in Skipped Generation EconomicFamilies (N=26,970) compared to the Canadian population

Aboriginal/Visible Minority Status	Frequency ^a (N=26,970)	Percentage of Grandparent Caregivers ^b	Percentage of Canadian Population ^c
Not Aboriginal, Not a Visible Minority	19,650	72.9	86.0
Aboriginal	4,695	17.4	2.8
North American Indian single response	3,650	13.5	1.9
Métis single response	775	2.9	0.7
Inuit single response	160	0.6	0.1
Multiple Aboriginal responses	30	0.1	0.0
Other Aboriginal response	85	0.3	0.1
Visible minority	2,625	9.7	11.2
Chinese	445	1.7	3.0
South Asian	240	0.9	2.4
Black	1,135	4.2	2.0
Arab/West Asian	115	0.4	0.9
Filipino	155	0.6	0.8
Southeast Asian	120	0.4	0.6
Latin American	245	0.9	0.6
Japanese	25	0.1	0.2
Korean	60	0.2	0.2

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Visible minority, not indicated elsewhere	60	0.2	0.2
Multiple visible minority	25	0.1	0.2

Note: From Custom Tabulations of the 1996 Census

^a Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding error.

^b Data for the Canadian population (n=28,528,125) from Statistics Canada (2003c) 1996 Census data - 20% sample

Table 3

Demographic Profile of Households with Skipped Generation Economic Families (N=16,590)

Variable	Frequency	
	(N=16,590)	Percentage ^a
Number of Grandchildren		
1 grandchild	13,195	79.5
2 grandchildren	2,560	15.4
3 or more grandchildren	835	5.0
Ages of Grandchildren (under 18 years)		
Under 6 years (some may be older)	4,065	24.5
6-14 years (none under 6, some may be 15-17)	8,510	51.3
15-17 years (all 15-17)	4,015	24.2
Living On/Off Reserve		
Living on reserve	1,500	9.0
Living off reserve	15,090	91.0
Grandchildren Reporting a Disability		
At least one grandchild reports a disability	1,125	6.8
No grandchildren report a disability	15,465	93.2
Grandparents Reporting a Disability		
At least one grandparent reports a disability	5,530	33.3
No grandparent reports a disability	11,060	66.7
1995 Household Income		
\$0 - \$4,999	1,440	8.7

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren 44

\$5,000 - \$9,999	1,105	6.7
\$10,000 - \$14,999	2,545	15.3
\$15,000 - \$19,999	2,025	12.2
\$20,000 - \$24,999	1,700	10.3
\$25,000 - \$29,999	1,180	7.1
\$30,000 - \$34,999	980	5.9
\$35,000 - \$39,999	935	5.6
\$40,000 - \$44,999	885	5.3
\$45,000 - \$49,999	770	4.6
\$50,000 and over	3,020	18.2
	\$ 31,433	
Average 1995 Household Income	(SE=413) ^b	
Median 1995 Household Income	\$ 23,297	

Note: From Custom Tabulations of the 1996 Census

^a Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding error.

^b Standard Error.

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