Grandparents Living With Children:
State-Level Data From the American Community Survey

By David Murphey, Ph.D., Mae Cooper, Kristin A. Moore, Ph.D.

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Overview

In recent years, increasing numbers of grandparents in the U.S. are living with their grandchildren, and many grandparents are responsible for their care. These trends can be attributed to a number of factors, including increasing numbers of single-parent families, continued high rates of marriage dissolution, parents’ incarceration, parental substance abuse, and difficult economic circumstances. In addition, situations that have long accounted for some care by grandparents are parents’ death or serious disability, parental abuse or neglect, and family/cultural preference.

This brief examines recent trends, national and for each state, associated with grandparents who live with grandchildren, based on data from the American Community Survey.

Grandparent caregivers who have limited English proficiency. Children who are cared for by someone who has difficulty speaking English well may need appropriate accommodations in early education and school settings.

Trends

In 2005-2007, about six million grandparents shared residence with their minor grandchildren; of these, 2.5 million (41 percent) had primary responsibility for the care of one or more grandchildren. In contrast, the rate of poverty among all adults who were 35 or older was less than half as high: nine percent. About one in seven grandparents caring for children (14 percent) spoke English less than “very well,” compared with about eight percent of all adults ages 60 and older.

By 2008-2010, about 700,000 more grandparents resided with their grandchildren than did so during the previous period. Among these grandparents, about the same proportion as in the previous time period were primarily responsible for their grandchildren’s care (40 percent). Poverty among this group rose to 20 percent (while poverty among all adults ages 35 and older rose to 10 percent). Among all grandparent caregivers, there was a slightly higher percentage with limited English skills.

A companion brief, Children Living with and Cared For by Grandparents: State-Level Data From the American Community Survey, focuses on grandchildren living in households headed by their grandparents.

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Variation by state
As of 2008-2010, states varied considerably in the number and characteristics of grandparents with primary responsibility for their grandchildren.

- Across the states, as many as 59 percent of grandparents living with their grandchildren had primary responsibility for their care (in Mississippi), and that population was as low as 22 percent (in Hawaii).
- Rates of poverty among these grandparents ranged from a low of seven percent (Wyoming) to a high of 29 percent (Mississippi).
- With regard to language spoken at home, as many as 26 percent of responsible grandparents (in New York and Texas) spoke English less than “very well,” and as few as one percent did so (in Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, and West Virginia).

ABOUT THE DATA USED IN THIS BRIEF
We examined data from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS), which uses a continuous-sampling methodology to collect information from households on a number of demographic, social, economic, and housing indicators. We used the ACS three-year estimates for two periods: 2005-2007, and 2008-2010. Single-year data are also available for these years, but, particularly for smaller states, margins of error for these estimates are considerably larger when using data for single years.

The survey question asked, of household members ages 15 and older, “Does this person have any of his/her own grandchildren under the age of 18 living in this house or apartment?” Data were tabulated only for people 30 and over, due to low numbers of younger individuals living with their grandchildren.

An additional question determined whether the grandparent was financially responsible for food, shelter, clothing, day care, etc. for any or all grandchildren: “Is this grandparent currently responsible for most of the basic needs of any grandchild(ren) under the age of 18 who live(s) in this house or apartment?”

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## Grandparents Living with Grandchildren, Those Responsible for Care of Grandchildren

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<th>State</th>
<th>Of Co-Resident Grandparents, Those Responsible for Care of Grandchildren</th>
<th>Percentage of Co-Resident Grandparents who are Responsible for Grandchildren</th>
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*Responsible means the grandparent is financially responsible for the majority of the basic needs for one or more grandchildren living in the household.

Note: Count estimates are rounded to the nearest thousand. Children include ages birth through 17. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.
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<td>31.4</td>
<td>9.2</td>
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<td>4,000</td>
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<td>10.9</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Responsible means the grandparent is financially responsible for the majority of the basic needs for one or more grandchildren living in the household.  
Note: Count estimates are rounded to the nearest thousand.  Children include ages birth through 17.  Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.