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## Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

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There has been a growing number of children across the nation living with their grandparents. The Census Bureau reports that children living in their grandparents' homes increased from 2.2 million in 1970 to 3.9 million in 1998. That is an increase from 3.2 percent of all children under 18 in 1970 to 5.5 percent in 1998. During that period the greatest growth in number of grandchildren residing with their grandparents occurred in those homes occupied only by grandparents and/or those in which only the biological mother was present along with the grandparents (Casper and Bryson, 1998).

This trend is contributing to increased public policy attention devoted to the essential role of grandparents in the provision of care for children and youth. Included is growing policy concern about whether grandparent-led families face barriers to obtaining public assistance.

Most of Missouri children reported by the Census as living with

"other relatives" are living with grandparents (77,857) – see **Map 1**. That, as reported above, is 5.5 percent of all children and youth

under age 18. As indicated by **Graph 1**, black children are much more likely to live with a grandparent than children of other races. According to the 2000 Census black children comprise only 12 percent of Missouri's population under age 18, but 32 percent of those children are living with grandparents.

According to the 2000 Census of Population, there are 90,200 Missouri grandparents who have grandchildren under age 18 residing in their home. Half those grandparents (49%) report they are "responsible" for those grandchildren. In addition, nearly 40 percent (37%) have been responsible for the child for more than 5 years – see **Graph 2**. Nearly all those grandparents – 97 percent – report they are the head of the household.

Because of the dramatic increase over the past three decades in number of grandparent-headed households having responsibility for grandchildren age 18 and under, researchers, policy makers

and the media have directed considerable attention to this population. Accordingly there has been a proliferation of research regarding grandparent care-giving focused on a range of issues. Among the issues that have been researched include: consequences of care-giving and its effect on physical and mental health characteristics of both children and care-givers; psychological distress and the impact of role, resources, social supports and physical health on the grandparent-child relationship; the impact of the AIDS and crack-cocaine epidemics on grandparent care-giving; and the use of support groups for grandparent care-giving.

Data from the Missouri 2000 Census indicates that the phenomenon of grandparents raising grandchildren is not unique to urban communities. Grandparents having responsibility for care-giving and support for their grandchildren are found throughout the state including non-metropolitan and rural communities.

**Table 1** shows the geographic distribution of grandparent care-giving among the eight University of Missouri Extension regions of the state.

Among the regions the highest percentage of children living with their grandparents is found in the predominantly rural Southeast Region (3.2 percent of all children). However, the percentage of children living with grandparents is nearly as great in the East Central Region, which includes the St. Louis Metropolitan Area and the West Central Region that includes the Kansas City Metro area. In both those regions 3.1 percent of children

under age 18 were living with grandparents in 2000.

The lowest percentages among the regions were found in the Central and the Northeast Regions. ~~Due to the~~ dramatic increases 2.1 percent of children in each region were living with grandparents.

**Table 1** also reports that 47.9 percent of the 90,200 grandparent homes in which grandchildren are residing, claim primary responsibility for their grandchildren. However the Table shows that the percentage of grandparent homes claiming primary responsibility for the grandchildren is higher in rural and non-metropolitan regions.

For example, in the predominantly rural Northwest region, 57.6 percent of the grandparents claim primary responsibility for the grandchildren residing with them. That is followed by 55.2 percent in the Southeast Region and 53.6 percent in the Central Region. In contrast, the lowest percentage of grandparents claiming primarily responsibility is found in the East Central (St. Louis Metro) with 45.4 percent, followed by the West Central Region (Kansas City Metro) with 47.9 percent.

### **Status of Research**

Despite the increasing growth of grandparents assuming responsibility for their grandchildren in rural regions, relatively little research has been directed toward the needs and concerns of rural grandparents and their grandchildren (Pebley and Rudkin, 1999). Pebley and Rudkin examined the needs and concerns of rural community grandparent-maintained households who were rearing their grandchildren. Pebley and Rudkin concluded that many of the issues

experienced by grandparents in metropolitan areas are experienced by grandmothers in rural regions, but are further compounded by a lack of access to needed public, family and/or community resources. A few issues unique to rural communities include insufficient human services, problems with retaining qualified staff members; and the inaccessibility of services for community members (Van Hook & Ford, 1995). There continues to be a lack of research that explores issues related to the accessibility, availability and appropriateness of community resources targeted toward grandparents raising grandchildren in rural communities. There is a lack of research regarding best practices for grandparents raising grandchildren in rural communities. As supported by rural social work experts, professional models, curricula, and strategies developed for urban communities are often not appropriate for rural communities. They emphasize that more research is required to understand the unique needs of rural community members (Davenport and Davenport, 1995; Mermelstein and Sundet, 1986). More importantly, we lack empirical data examining kinship care policies and their interpretation and implementation among rural communities.

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