

Extended Abstract

**Differences in Native–Born and Immigrant  
Co-resident Grandparent Households:  
Does Culture Matter?**

**Lynne M. Casper  
Sandra Florian  
Radheeka R. Jayasundera**

University of Southern California  
September 17, 2010

## **Abstract**

*We use data from the 2007 American Community Survey to investigate differences in co-resident grandparent family structure between the native born and the foreign born in the United States (N=40,652). Whereas nuclear families are the norm in Europe and thus in European-origin families in the U.S., other cultures stress the importance of the extended family, familism, and/or filial piety. Given socioeconomic and cultural differences in immigrant families, we hypothesize that 1) co-residential grandparent families will be more common among immigrants and among native-born racial and/ethnic minority groups; 2) immigrant grandparent co-resident families will be more likely to be maintained by parents (sandwich generation); 3) sandwich generation families will be more prevalent among immigrants of Asian origin than among other immigrants, and; 4) these differences will exist net of length of time in the U.S., citizenship status, English language proficiency, SES, and other factors. Our results confirm each of these hypotheses.*

## **Differences in Native–Born and Immigrant Co-resident Grandparent Households: Does Culture Matter?**

The last decades have witnessed significant changes in family forms in the U.S. (Casper and Bianchi 2002). In 1990, a report by the Census Bureau titled *Co-resident Grandparents and Their Grandchildren* revealed a dramatic increase in the number of children living in households supported by grandparents, from 2.3 million in 1980 to 3.9 million in 1997 (Bryson and Casper 1999). This report sparked the interest in research about grandparents as caregivers and the possible causes for the increase of households headed by grandparents (Chalfie 1994; Dowdell 1995; Jendrek 1994; Minkler and Roe 1996; Fuller-Thomson, Minkler, and Driver 1997; Rutrough and Ofstedal 1997). Other studies have focused on differences in the demographics and family structure of households that contain grandparents and how these differences are linked to socioeconomic outcomes (Mutchler and Baker 2004; Biblarz, Casper and Jayasundera 2009). Several studies have found that in the United States it is much more common for parents and their children to move into the grandparents' household (grandparent-maintained families) than it is for grandparents to move into their children's household (parent-maintained families) (Bryson and Casper 1999; Biblarz, Casper, and Jayasundera 2009). Thus, the flow of economic support in the form of providing shelter is more common from parent to adult child and grandchildren than from adult child to parent.

One of the great stratifiers of family structure in the United States is race and ethnicity. For example, never-married single parent families are more often found among African American and Hispanic families than among White and Asian families (Casper and Bianchi 2002). Racial differences in family formation are also evident in the living arrangements of children in multigenerational families. The majority of children in multigenerational families

lives in their grandparents' homes (72 percent), with black grandchildren (86 percent) more likely than white (72percent) or Hispanic (65 percent) grandchildren to be in grandparent-maintained rather than parent-maintained multigenerational home (Casper and Bianchi 2002). However, to our knowledge no nationally representative study has examined how the household structure of multigenerational families varies between the native born and the foreign born. In this paper, we use the *2007 American Community Survey* to examine how the structure of households containing grandparents and grandchildren differs by immigrant status, that is, by the place of birth of the householder.

## **BACKGROUND**

### ***The Role of Grandparents in Contemporary American Families***

Increased longevity means that adult children will have more time with their parents. According to demographic estimates by Watkins, Menken, & Bongaarts (1987), in the 1980s, nearly 60 percent of women had at least one surviving parent at age 55. Given continued improvements in life expectancy it is probable that this proportion has risen even more in recent years (Coal and Hertwig 2010). Not only do parents live longer; but they also have a better quality of life than the elderly in the past. Therefore, although adult children may provide assistance during the last years when the parents are very old and ill, most of them will receive assistance from their retired but able parents at times of distress and need (Cherlin 2005). However, assistance to adult children from parents is usually episodic rather than continual, meaning parents help their adult children when there is particular need or a crisis in their lives. For example, when grandchildren are too young to stay in day care during the work hours, able grandparents may offer to take care of the child on weekdays. Grandparents may also provide financial assistance, such as paying college tuition fees for a grandchild when parents cannot

afford to pay. But this type of assistance does not require for the grandchildren to co-reside with grandparents. Co-residential grandparenting therefore is an unusual circumstance in which nuclear family residential norms are violated.

There are two types of co-residential grandparent households: multigenerational (three generation) households and skipped-Generational Households. According to Deleire & Khalil (2002) multigenerational households usually occur as a result of two events. First, when unmarried, non-cohabiting parents give birth to a child while living in their family of origin – this involves young mothers. Second, when married parents separate after having children and move back in with their family of origin. Multigenerational households can be either grandparent maintained or parent maintained. Skipped-generation households usually occur when parents are unable to care for their children for various reasons. Parents may work urban areas where surroundings are not suitable for young children; therefore they opt to leave them with grandparents who live in rural areas. Other parents may have had their children removed from them and placed with a grandparent due to child abuse or neglect. Still others may have been incapacitated by drug abuse or illness such as HIV/AIDS. Finally, some parents may have been incarcerated.

### ***Kinship***

According to anthropologist Robin Fox (1967) kinship is a “weapon in the struggle for survival.” In tribal societies kinship ties provide the stability and structure that holds the tribe together. Members of the tribe work for the wellbeing of other members because they are related. In most non-western societies kinship groups include mothers, children, husbands and other household members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins (Cherlin 2005). By contrast,

in western societies extended kinship ties are weak, the traditional Euro-American family is centered around marriage, and children are overwhelmingly raised by biological parents (Isiugo-Abanihe 1985).

In the U.S. kinship among non-European origin families differs. Normative features in African cultures include separate residences for parents and children and the institution of fosterage (Morgan, McDaniel, Miller & Preston 1993). In sub-Saharan Africa children are transferred from biological homes to relatives' homes in which relatives have some responsibility for and control over these children; a high proportion of children do not live with parents. Recent studies in modern Africa and the Caribbean show the practice to be very prominent (Morgan, McDaniel, Miller & Preston 1993). In the U.S., scholars have noted that African-Americans have stronger extended kinship ties that rival conjugal ties. This could be attributed to the African heritage where extended kin play an important role in people's lives (Miller 1998). Therefore, at times of need or when the arrangements prove to be efficient, parents leave their children in the care of their grandparents and other related kin.

African-American, Hispanic and Native American women are more likely to have non-marital births than are White women (Casper and Bianchi 2002). They are also less likely to get married or remain married than Whites. Therefore, kinship in these groups plays a significant role in child rearing. The causes for these racial differences have been debated over five decades – some scholars believe it's purely the disadvantaged socio-economic factors that put these minority families in this position, others believe a cultural and historic differences influence these families to deviate from the Euro-American norm of nuclear family residence. In fact, Frazier (1939) and DuBois (1899) noted the tendency for urban blacks to leave young children with relatives in rural areas in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Kinship ties in Hispanic families are also strong and play an important role in their day-to-day lives. Hispanic households tend to have both horizontally and vertically extended kin living together. Sabogal et. al (1987) found similar attitudes toward the family for Hispanics of all origins (e.g., Mexican-, South- Central-, and Cuban- Americans) indicating that *familism* is a core characteristic in the Hispanic culture. In their study, three basic dimensions of *familism* were defined: (1) familial obligations, (2) perceived support from the family and (3) family as referents. Sabogal et. al (1987) concluded that a high level of perceived family support is invariable despite changes in acculturation, and is the most essential dimension of Hispanic *familism*.

Among Native Americans we see similar kinship ties. Although there is no monolithic “Native American” family structure (Gross 1995) there is a general consensus that to be Indian is to believe that all living things are related (Couture 1991). Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, kinship ties provided the basis for governing tribes. Extended family ties remain significant in Native American culture and these ties extend beyond the simple sharing of resources (Harjo 1993). Research on the contemporary Native American population indicates high rates of divorce, non-marital child bearing, and large numbers of female-headed households (Casper and Bianchi 2002). According to Cherlin (2005) it is likely that many of the unmarried mothers are enmeshed in kinship networks that provide assistance, therefore reducing the need for conjugal relationships.

Asian American cultures emphasize interdependence among kin rather than individualism (Goode 1963). They also emphasize *filial piety* - which is loyalty to one’s parents and kin. Asian grandparents are more likely to live with their adult children and they provide financial, physical and emotional support for their elderly parents. Another common

characteristic among Asian immigrants is the pooling of economic resources to start businesses. They also share residences and homeownership. Therefore, it is not uncommon in Asian-American societies to pool resources at a time of need and to take care of young children who do not have parents to care for them.

Kinship ties are also strong in lower-income classes. Young unmarried mothers receive assistance from their kinship networks (i.e. mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, friends and neighbors) in raising their children. They may also get financial assistance in addition to childcare assistance. According to Stack (1974) individuals in lower-income classes actively cultivate these kinship networks to ensure that they will get assistance in the future if they ever needed it. Therefore, apart from grandparents, other adults in the kinship network may take on the parental role in the absence of the biological parent as a gesture of mutual support.

## **HYPOTHESES**

Given that patterns of kinship ties differ based on economic conditions and culture, we expect different patterns of co-residence in grandparent households for foreign-born (immigrant families) compared with native-born families in the U.S. First, given the preference for extended families among non-European cultures, we predict that co-resident grandparent families will be more common among immigrants than among the native born. Many immigrants come to the United States to work. Thus, the vast majority of recent immigrants are of working age. When these immigrants get settled, they tend to bring over family members under reunification rules. Second, given the economic nature of immigration and the attendant age structure of the immigrant population, we hypothesize that compared with the native-born, more co-resident grandparent families will be sandwich families among the foreign born. Third, given the norm of filial piety among Asians we expect higher proportions sandwich generation families among

Asian immigrant, grandparent households than among immigrants from other regions. Finally, we expect cultural background to matter, even when we controlling to the socio-economic background of the household and length of time in the country.

## **DATA & METHODS**

Our analysis is based on the 2007 American Community Survey (ACS) accessed through the Integrated Public Use Micro Data Series website (Ruggles et al. 2008). ACS is a nationwide survey designed to provide communities a fresh look at how they are changing. It replaced the decennial long form in 2010 and was a critical element in the U.S. Census Bureau's reengineered 2010 Census (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2009). The ACS questionnaire is sent to approximately to 2.8 million households. The Census Bureau staff follows up with those who do not respond, first by telephone and then in person. The total number of housing units interviewed in 2007 was 1,937,659. The ACS provides information on demographic, housing, social, and economic characteristics every year for all states, as well as for all cities, counties, metropolitan areas, and population groups of 65,000 people or more.

After the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, the U.S. Census Bureau started to obtain information about grandparents who have primary responsibility for the care of their grandchildren. Therefore, the 2000 Census and the subsequent ACSs have included questions on grandparents as caregivers enabling researchers and policy planners to better understand the family structures and social and economic characteristics of grandparent families. The 2000 Census and subsequent ACS first ascertained whether the person is the grandparent of any grandchildren under 18 who are living in the same household. Those who answered “yes” were then asked if they were “currently responsible for most of the basic needs of one or more of these grandchildren.” Grandparents who answered “yes” were then

asked, “How long has this grandparent been responsible for the(se) grandchild(ren)?” (Dye and Simmons 2003).

The number of respondents in 2007 ACS sample is approximately 2.9 million. From this sample 40,652 co-residential grandparent households were identified<sup>1</sup>. We divide co-residential grandparent families into grandparent-maintained and parent-maintained. Grandparent-maintained families can be further divided into three-generation families and skipped generation families, where the parents of the grandchildren are not present. Of all co-residential grandparent households 30,586 are grandparent-maintained and 10,066 are parent-maintained. Of the grandparent-maintained households, 19,316 are three-generation, and 11,270 are skipped-generation (after eliminating group quarters).

For this study we include Puerto-Ricans with foreign-born families. Although, Puerto Ricans are officially U.S. citizens, they migrate back and forth from Puerto Rico to the mainland. And, similar to other immigrant grandparents, Puerto Ricans have varying length of time they have resided on the mainland.

## **PRELIMINARY RESULTS**

Table 1 shows the number of co-residential grandparent households broken down by nativity. In 2007, there were slightly under 4 million of such households, of which 73 percent were native born (2.9 million) and 27 percent were foreign born (1.1 million). Although, only 13 percent of all households are maintained by immigrants; the foreign-born compose about twice as many co-residential grandparent-households as would be expected given their share of all U.S. households. This finding confirms our first hypothesis that extended families are more common

---

<sup>1</sup> The grandparents were identified such that they are either the householder or the householder’s spouse, or they are the parent or parent-in-law of their children who are householders. Grandparents who do not have a clear relationship to the householder such as other relative, friend, visitor and other non-relative are not included in the sample because we cannot identify the grandchild or other adults in those cases.

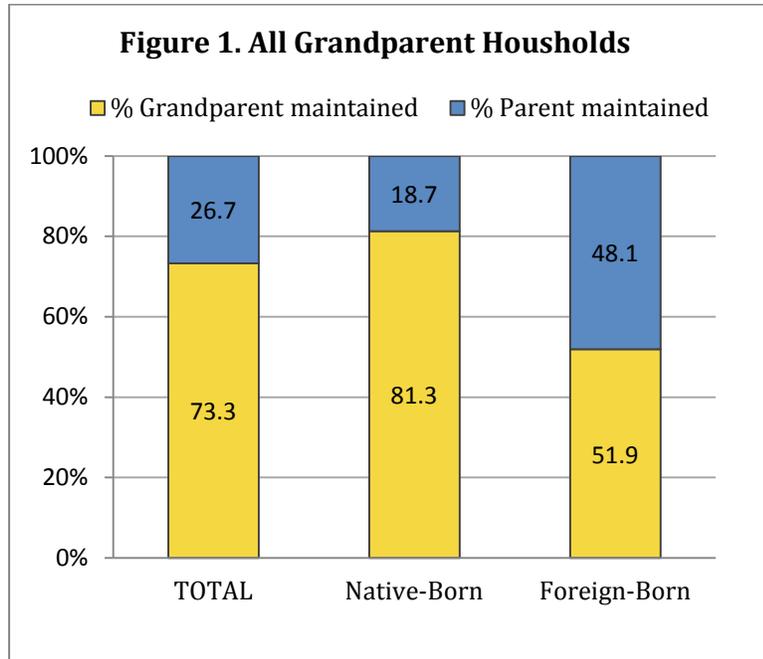
**Table 1. Coresident Grandparent Households by Nativity<sup>a</sup>, Race, and National Origin**

	Total <sup>b</sup> (in 1,000s)	% Grandparent Maintained			% Parent Maintained
		All	Three Generation	Skipped Generation	All
<b>All Coresident Households</b>	<b>3,971</b>	<b>73.3</b>	<b>46.4</b>	<b>26.9</b>	<b>26.7</b>
<b>All Native Born</b>	<b>2,892</b>	<b>81.3</b>	<b>50.4</b>	<b>30.9</b>	<b>18.7</b>
White Non Hispanic	1,784	78.6	52.0	26.6	21.4
Black Non Hispanic	784	86.8	45.6	41.2	13.2
Hispanic	241	83.4	55.5	27.9	16.6
Native American	55	86.9	43.3	43.6	13.1
Asian	26	70.9	51.7	19.3	29.1
Other <sup>c</sup>	3	85.7	36.9	48.7	14.3
<b>All Foreign-Born</b>	<b>1,079</b>	<b>51.9</b>	<b>35.8</b>	<b>16.1</b>	<b>48.1</b>
Puerto Rico <sup>d</sup>	56	71.7	40.9	30.8	28.3
Mexico	369	66.2	45.2	21.0	33.8
Central America	82	53.8	35.6	18.2	46.2
South America	61	44.0	33.6	10.4	56.0
Cuba	35	43.9	35.0	8.9	56.1
West Indies	93	59.1	37.0	22.1	40.9
Africa	19	41.4	21.8	19.6	58.6
Philippines	69	38.2	29.8	8.4	61.8
Vietnam	38	34.0	26.7	7.3	66.0
Korea/China	62	23.3	18.5	4.9	76.7
India	54	18.5	16.6	1.9	81.5

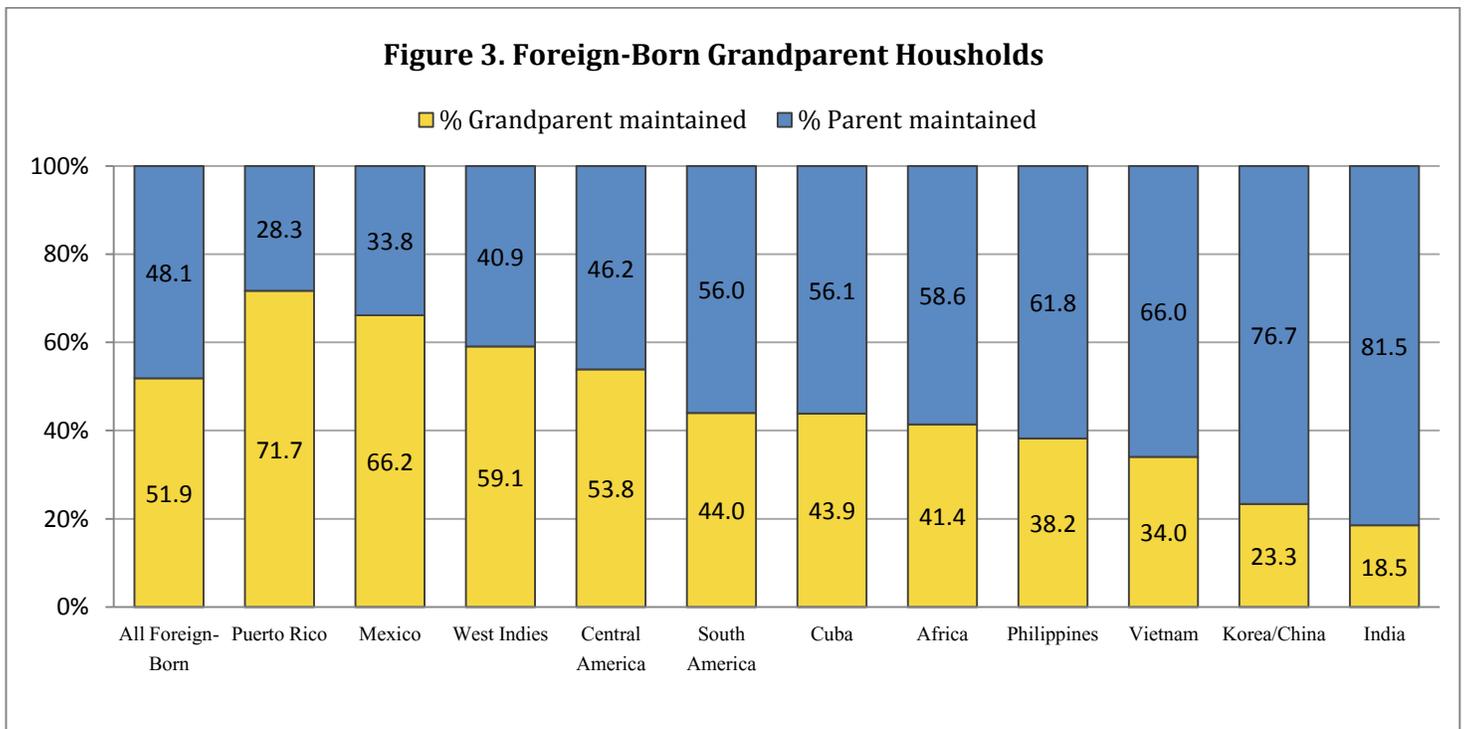
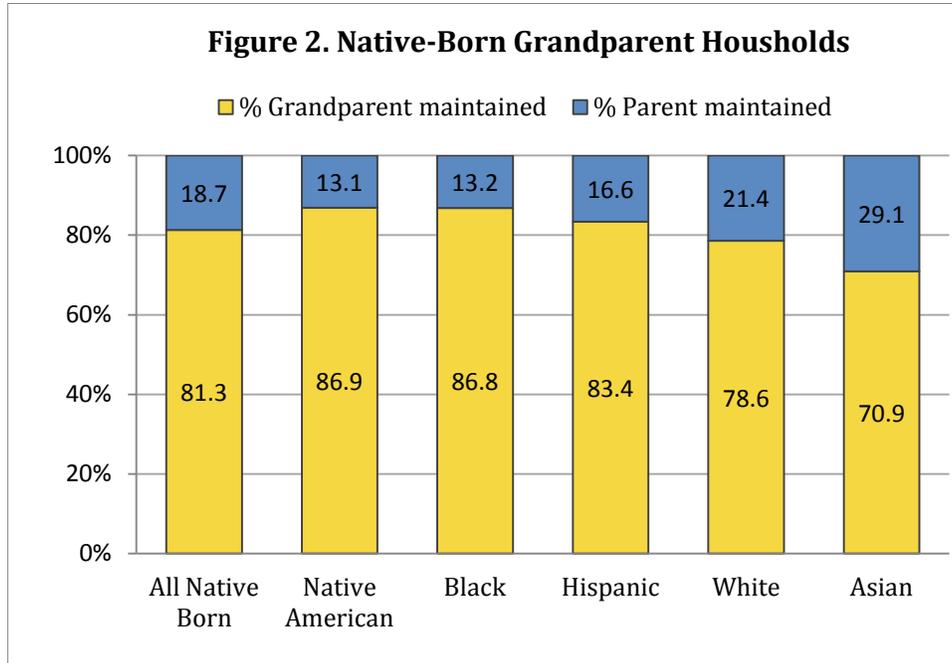
Source: American Community Survey, 2007

<sup>a</sup> Nativity of the household based on the householder's place of birth.<sup>b</sup> Weighted by household weight. Numbers rounded to the nearest 1,000.<sup>c</sup> Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, other race, and two or more races.<sup>d</sup> Puerto Ricans are officially native-born U.S. citizens. However, given their distinctive migration patterns to and from the U.S. mainland, we classify them as foreign born.

among immigrants. The table and Figure 1 confirm our second hypothesis: parent maintained sandwich generation families are much more common among immigrant families than among native-born families—almost half of immigrant co-residential grandparent families are maintained by parents compared with only 27 percent among native-born co-residential families.



Figures 2 and 3 show differences in the types of co-residential grandparent households by race/ ethnicity for the native born, and by country of birth for the foreign born and Puerto Rican families. Consistent with the literature, we find a higher proportion of grandparent-maintained families among Blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans than among Whites and Asians. This pattern also varies for immigrant families by country of origin; percentages parent-maintained families are the highest among immigrants from Asian countries with the greatest proportion found among East Indians-- 82 percent of co-residential grandparent families of Indian immigrants are sandwich generation families. Also note that a higher proportion of grandparent-maintained families occurs among immigrant groups who have a longer history in the U.S. (e.g. Puerto Ricans 72% and Mexicans 66%). These findings suggest that native and longer-settled grandparents are in a better economic position to provide some type of support to their adult children and grandchildren; whereas among more recent immigrant households, the support is more likely to flow from adult children to their older parents.



**NEXT STEPS**

We use the 2007 American Community Survey (ACS) for our preliminary analysis; however we plan to use the 2009 ACS for our PAA paper. We plan to extend our analysis in a variety of directions:

1) We will provide a table that examines the difference between the native born and foreign born in the likelihood of residing in a co-resident grandparent family versus some other family form.

2) We plan to refine some of our measures and run multivariate analyses to investigate which factors are related to the type of co-residential family adopted (e.g., SES, citizenship, length of time in the U.S., English language proficiency of parent and grandparent) and whether these factors vary by immigration status, by the race/ethnicity of native-born families, and by country of origin for immigrants. Thus, if a predilection for a certain household type holds net of these factors, we come closer to a conclusion that cultural preferences may be driving these differences.

3) If the data permit, we plan to use a probit model to investigate the probability of residing in a specific type of co-residential grandparent family taking given the likelihood of living in a co-residential grandparent family versus some other family type.

The in-depth study of co-resident grandparents and their grandchildren is a relatively new area of research. With the advent of new ACS questions we are able to study a relatively uncommon household type in the U.S.: co-residential grandparent families. Furthermore the sheer size of the ACS permits us to look at the differences in these multigenerational families by nativity status.

## References

- Biblarz, T.J., Casper L.M. and R.R. Jayasundera, (2009). Co-Resident Grandparents and Their Grandchildren: Family Structure Matters. *Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America*. Detroit, MI, May 2009.
- Bryson, K. & L. Casper. (1998). Co-resident grandparents and their grandchildren: Grandparent maintained families (Current Population Reports, Report No. P-23). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce.
- Burnette, D. (1997). Grandparents raising grandchildren in the inner city. *Families in Society*, 78, 489-499
- Casper, L. M., Bianchi, S. M. (2002). *Continuity and Change in the American Family*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Chalfie, D. (1994). *Going It Alone: A Closer Look at Grandparents Rearing Grandchildren*. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Retired Persons.
- Coal, D. and Hertwig, R. (2010). Grandparental investment: Past, present, and future. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* (2010) 33, 1–59.
- Dowdell, E. B. (1995). 'Caregiver burden: grandparents raising their high risk children.' *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing*, 33 (3), 27-30. Dressel, P. and S. Barnhill. 1994. 'Reframing gerontological thought and practice: the case of grandmothers with daughters in prison.' *The Gerontologist*, 34, 685-690. 1
- Dye, J.L. and Tavia Simmons. (2003). Grandparents living with Grandchildren: Census 2000 Brief. U.S. Department of Commerce and U.S. Census Bureau.
- Fuller-Thomson, E., M. Minkler, and D. Driver. (1997). A profile of grandparents raising grandchildren in the United States. *The Gerontologist*, 37 (3), 406-411.
- Harden, A.W., R. L. Clark, and K. Maguire. (1997). Informal and Formal Kinship Care. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In Pittsburgh Newsweekly. 1996. Kathy Jo Kramer, 'To grandmother's house they go.' December 19-25, 1996, 12-13
- Hilton, J.M., & Kopera-Frye, K. (2007). Differences in resources provided by grandparents in single and married parent families. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 47, 33-54.
- Isiugo-Abanihe, U. (1985). Child Fosterage in West Africa. *Population and Development Review*, 11 (1), 53-73

Jayasundera, R. (2009). Why Don't Grandparents Claim Responsibility for Grandchildren in Skipped Generation Households? *Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America*. Detroit, MI, May 2009.

Jendrek, M. P. (1994). 'Grandparents who parent their grandchildren: circumstances and decisions.' *The Gerontologist*, 34, 206-216.

Minkler, M. and K. M. Roe (1996). Grandparents as surrogate parents. *Generations*, 20, 34-38.

Minkler, M. (1998). Intergenerational households headed by grandparents: demographic and sociological contexts. In *Generations United, Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children: Background Papers from Generations United's Expert Symposium*. Washington, D.C.: Generations United, 3-18

Morgan, S. P., McDaniel, A., Miller, A., & Preston, S. (1993). Racial Differences in Household and Family Structure at the Turn of the Century. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 98, (4), 799-828.

Mutchler, J. E. and L. A. Baker (2004). A Demographic Examination of Grandparent Caregivers in the Census 2000 Supplementary Survey. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 23, 359-377

Rutrough, T.S. and M. B. Ofstedal. (1997). Grandparents living with grandchildren: a metropolitan-nonmetropolitan comparison. 1997 Population Association of America Annual Meeting.

Shor, R. J. and B. Haslip. (1994). 'Custodial grandparenting: implications for children's development.' In Godfried, A. and A. Godfried (eds.), *Redefining Families: Implications for Children's Development*. New York: Plenum, 171-218.

Steven Ruggles, Matthew Sobek, Trent Alexander, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, Patricia Kelly Hall, Miriam King, and Chad Ronnander. *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 4.0* [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], (2008). Accessed at <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/>.

U.S. Census Bureau (2009) American Community Survey. Accessed online at <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>.

Watkins, S., Menken, J. and Bongaarts, J. (1987). Demographic Foundations of Family Change. *American Sociological Review*. Vol. 52, No. 3, 346-358.