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Grandparent Care in the African-American Population

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Grandparent Care in the African-American Population[1]

The purpose of this report is to provide information on African-American grandparent caregivers in the United States. Many grandparents are responsible for grandchildren who live with them in the same household. The 1996 Welfare Reform Act mandates that statistics be collected on grandparents who serve as caregivers to a grandchild. In response to this requirement, questions were developed for the 2000 Census of Population asking each adult about care for grandchildren living in the same household.[2] We use the census information to identify grandparents who are caring for grandchildren in two different types of households: skipped-generation households, in which a grandparent and grandchild live together but no parent is present, and three-generation shared care households, in which the grandparent claims responsibility for the grandchild but one or more of the child's parents are also present.[3] Data from the 2000 Census 5% Public Use Microdata Sample are used in our calculations.

Grandparent care in African-American families

According to the 2000 Census of Population, 1.3 million African-American[4] adults live in the same household as one or more of their grandchildren who are under the age of 18. Included in this figure are nearly 700,000 individuals who report being "responsible" for one or more of those grandchildren.

As shown in Figure 1, the highest prevalence of living with and caring for a grandchild occurs among adults between the ages of 50 and 70. This chart shows the percentage of African-American individuals at each age who report "living with a grandchild" (top line) and being "responsible for" grandchildren with whom they live (bottom line). More than 10% of African-American individuals aged 47 to 77 live with a grandchild; for those aged 54 to 68 the prevalence is above 15%. The prevalence of being responsible for a grandchild approaches 10% of the population between age 55 and 64. The ratio of these figures—the number responsible for a grandchild as a proportion of the number living with a grandchild—shows that a large majority of the younger co-resident grandparents is responsible for the grandchildren with whom they live (see Figure 2). For all ages under 65, at least half of the African American individuals who report living with a grandchild also report being responsible for them. Even among co-resident grandparents in their 70s, more than one-third are responsible for the grandchildren with whom they live.

FIGURE 1. Percent Living with and Caring for Grandchildren, by Age, African Americans, 2000

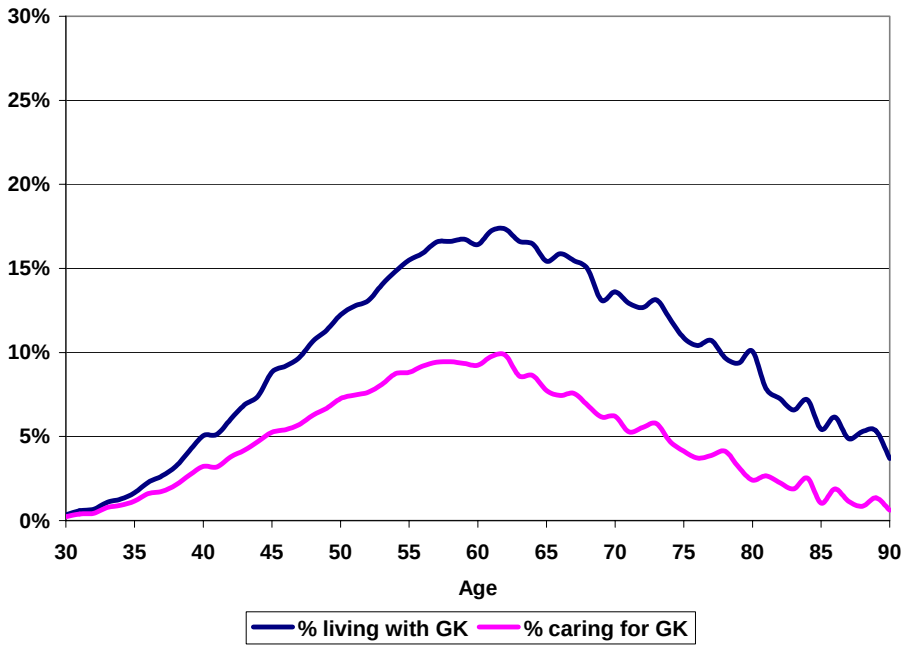
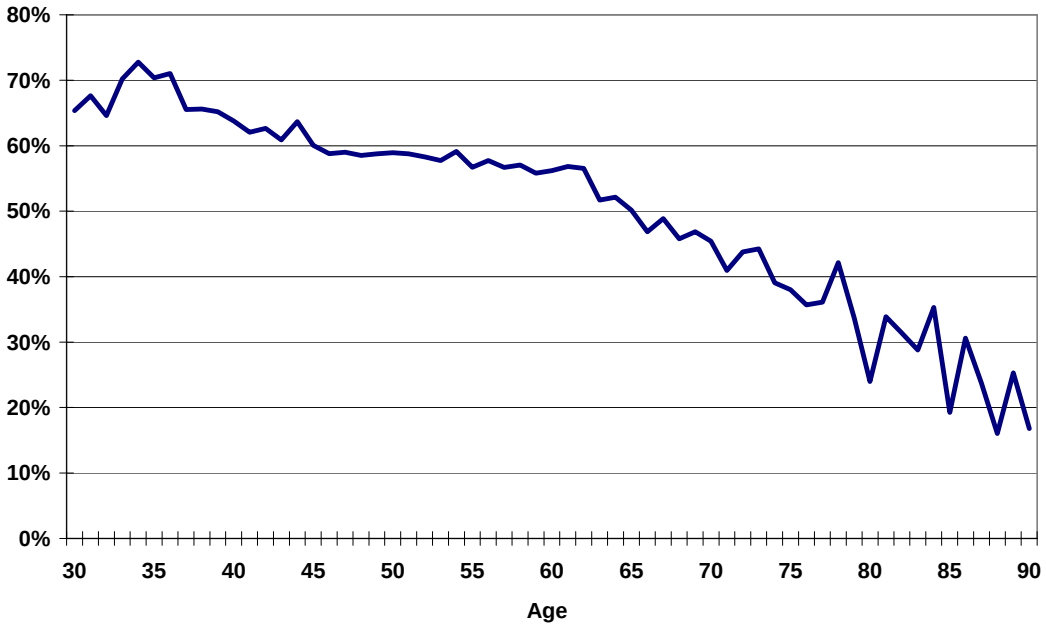


FIGURE 2. Percent Caring for Grandchildren, by Age African Americans Living with a Grandchild, 2000



The remainder of this report focuses only on those grandparents who state that they are *responsible for* a grandchild living in the same household. Figures in this section are reported for caregiving units rather than for individual grandparent caregivers. Because grandparents who are married or cohabiting are likely to share caregiving responsibilities, we count these individuals as a single grandparent unit rather than "double count" them by treating them singly.[5] We also present information separately for grandparent units in "skipped-generation" households (that is, in households including a grandparent and a grandchild but no "middle" or parent generation), and for "three-generation" households (households in which parents of the grandchildren also reside). Although the information is presented separately for these two fundamentally different types of households, we comment only on differences between the two that are substantial or particularly important.

Figure 3 shows that more than half of the grandparent caregiving units are in skipped-generation households among African Americans. However, 43% who claim responsibility are in three-generation households; these households include someone who is most likely the child's parent.

FIGURE 3. Grandparent Care Units by Generational Status, of Household, African Americans, 2000

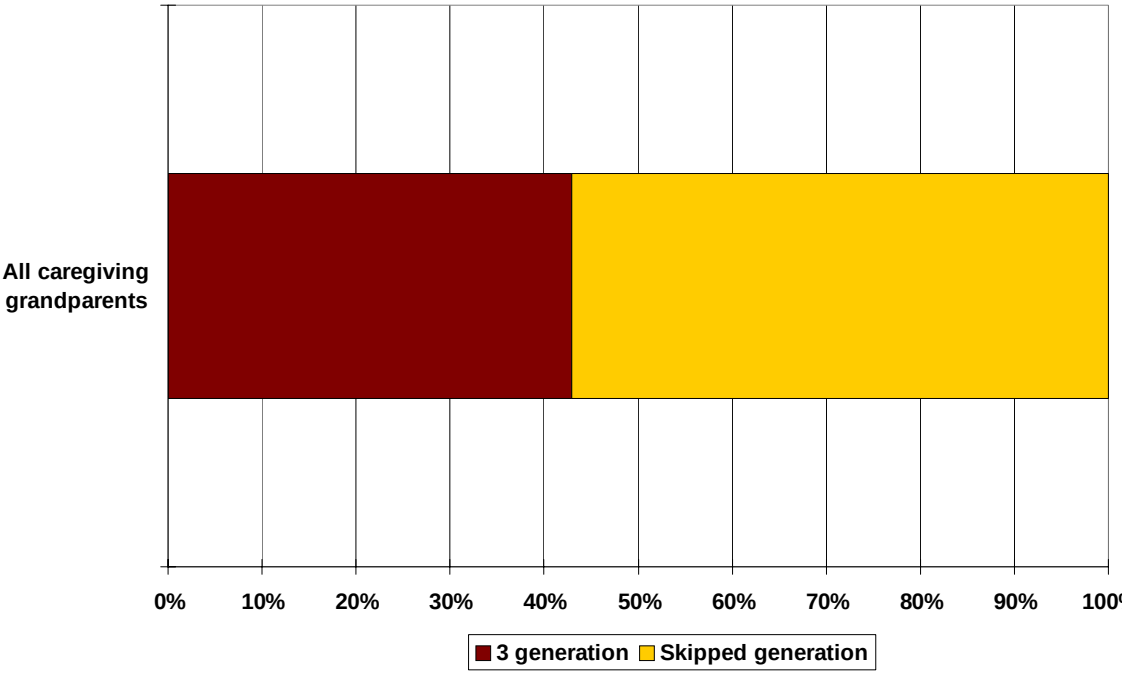


Figure 4 shows that a large share of the grandparent caregiver units is composed of single females (57%). Nearly 40% are married or cohabiting couples; fewer than 5% are single men. These figures highlight the significance of grandmothers in grandparent caregiving families.

FIGURE 4. Marital Status of Grandparent Caregivers, African Americans, 2000

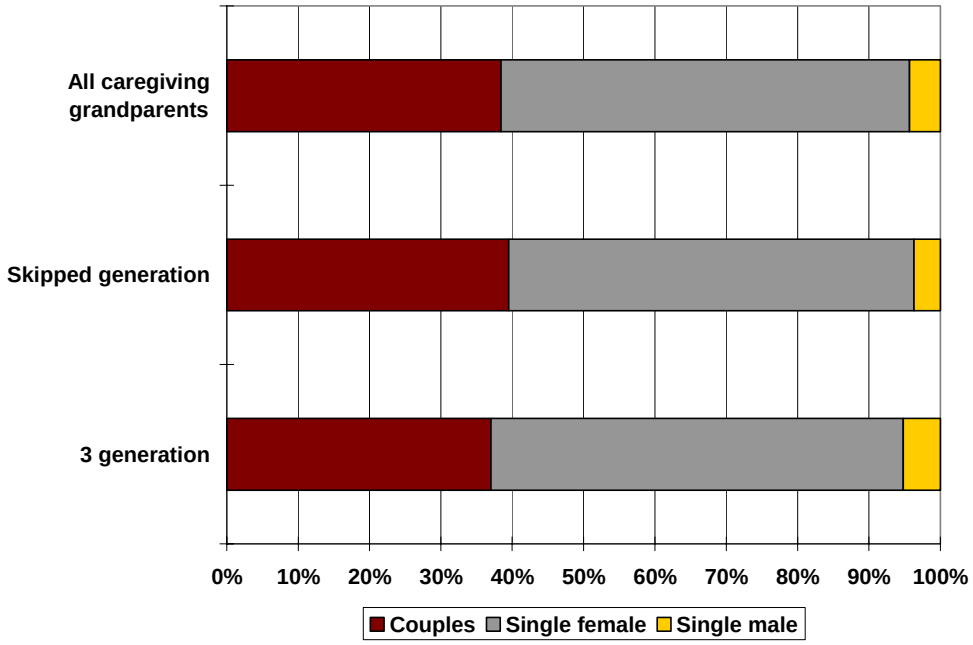
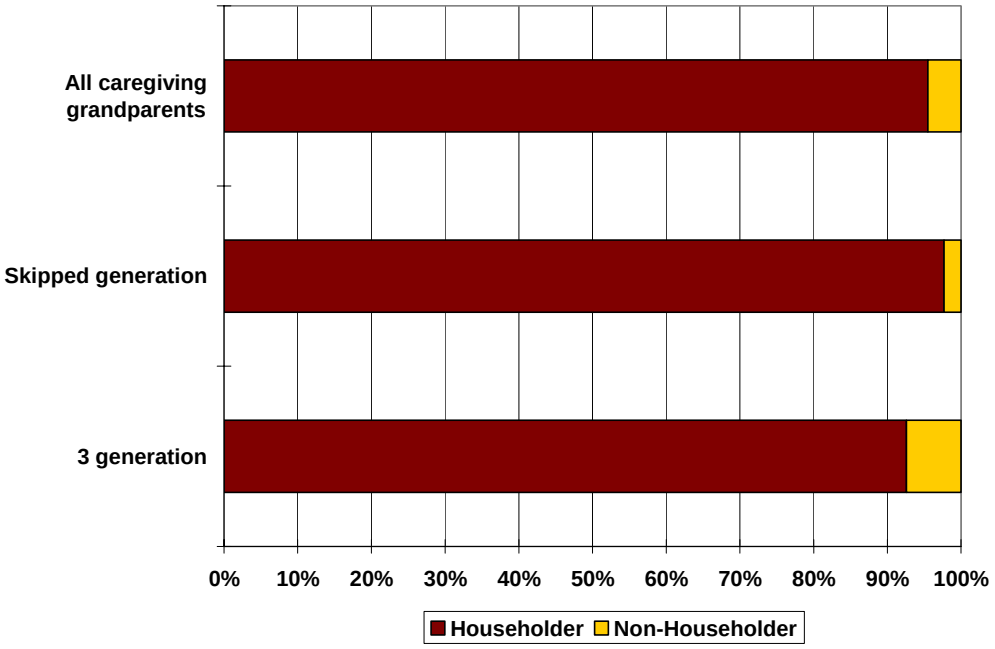


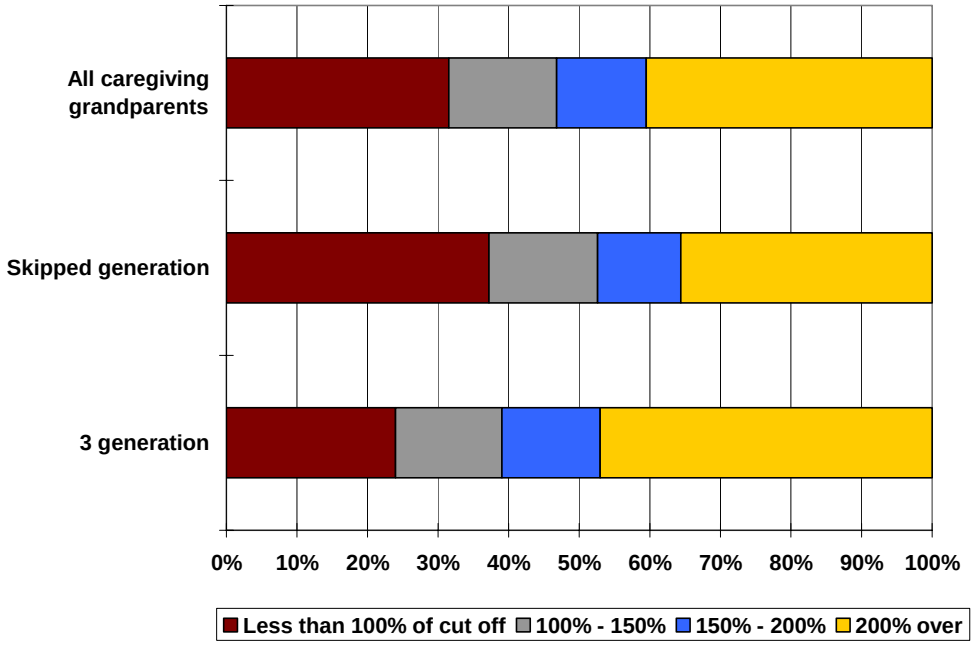
Figure 5 suggests that another significant factor related to grandparent caregiving is household headship. Overall, 96% of the grandparent caregiving units are also householders (that is, they own or rent the home in which the family lives). The fact that most grandparent caregivers are householders suggests that, when grandparents are asked about whether they are "responsible" for grandchildren with whom they live, they are very likely to be thinking about economic support and the provision of a home in choosing their response.

FIGURE 5. Householder Status of Grandparent Caregivers, African Americans, 2000



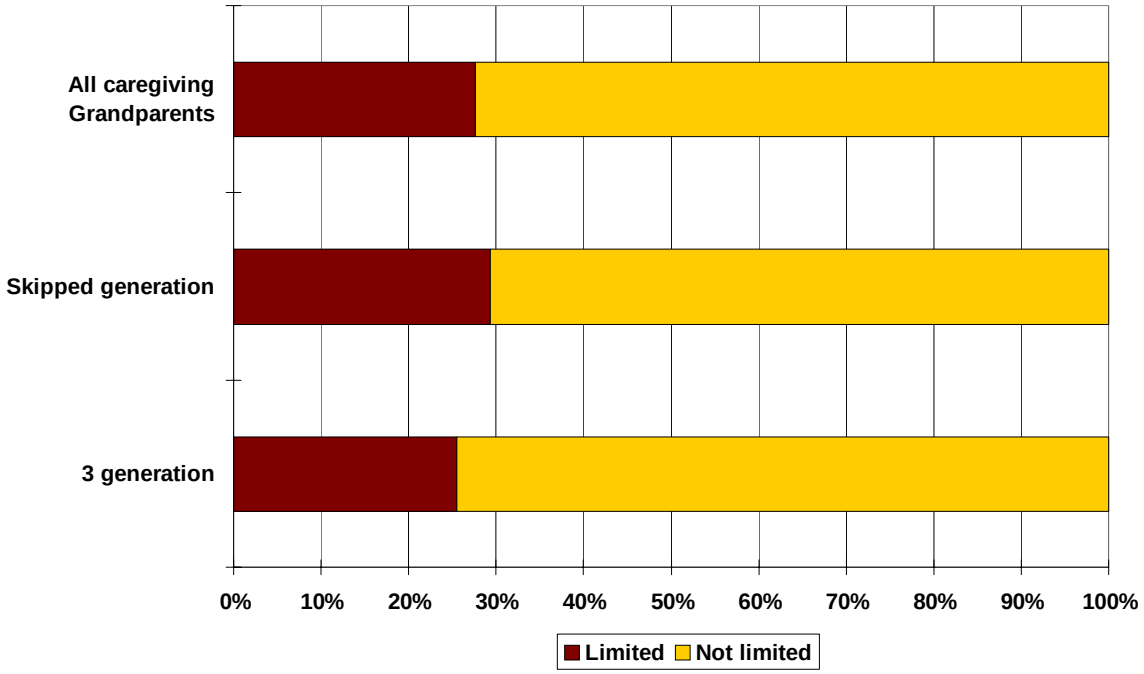
As a group, caregiving grandparents are often characterized as being a lower-income population. Our figures on poverty and economic status bear this out for the African-American caregiver population (see Figure 6). More than 30% of African-American grandparent caregivers are poor, with an additional 15% reporting household incomes below 150% of the poverty cutoff (this group is sometimes referred to as the "near poor"). (As a reference point, 12% of all individuals in the United States were poor in 2000, as were 25% of all African Americans.) Poverty is even more prevalent among skipped-generation grandparent care households, with over half of these grandparent caregiving units living with household incomes below 150% of the poverty cutoff. The extreme economic disadvantage experienced by children and adults living in these households is notable.

FIGURE 6. Poverty Status of Grandparent Caregivers, African Americans, 2000



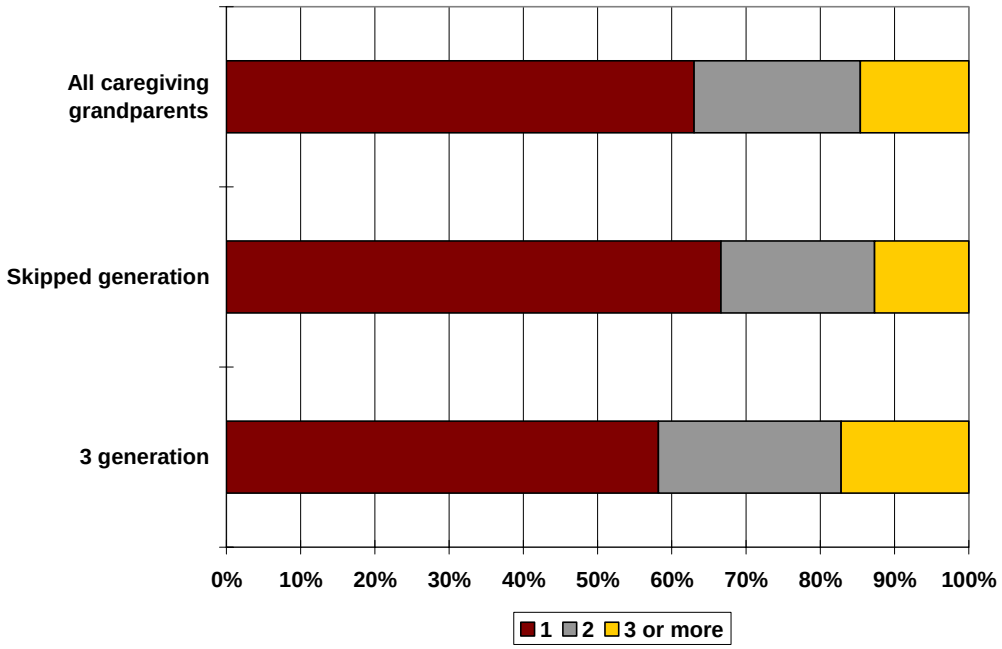
Disability is common among these caregiving families. Adults were asked if a long-lasting condition substantially limited their ability to perform “basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting, or carrying.” Grandparent caregiving units including at least one grandparent reporting a physical difficulty were classified as limited. Physical limitations were reported by more than one-quarter of the caregiving grandparents, and almost 30% of the skipped generation families. (See Figure 7).

FIGURE 7. Physical Limitation of Grandparent Caregivers, African Americans, 2000



Figures 8 through 10 display information about the grandchildren living in the grandparent care households.[6] A sizable majority of African-American grandparent caregivers lives with just one grandchild, but almost 40% live with two or more (see Figure 8). Multiple grandchildren are especially likely in three-generation households, where 42% of the grandparent units have two or more grandchildren.

FIGURE 8. Number of Grandchildren in Household, African American Grandparent Caregivers, 2000



We find no evidence that either boys or girls are more common in grandparent care families. Among African-American grandparent care families, 60% have at least one granddaughter, and 63% have at least one grandson (see Figure 9). More substantial differences are observed with respect to age of the grandchildren (Figure 10). Overall, half of all grandparent units include at least one grandchild under age 6, or of preschool age. This age group is most likely to require “hands-on” care and supervision. Forty percent include at least one school-age grandchild aged 6 to 11, and one third has at least one teenager. Differences in this pattern between skipped-generation and three-generation households are notable. Skipped-generation families are about equally likely to include children in each of the three age groups. In contrast, a sizable majority (64%) of three-generation families includes at least one pre-school aged child, suggesting that the need for supplemental childcare may play a role in forming these families.

FIGURE 9. Presence of Granddaughters & Grandsons in Household, African American Grandparent Caregivers, 2000

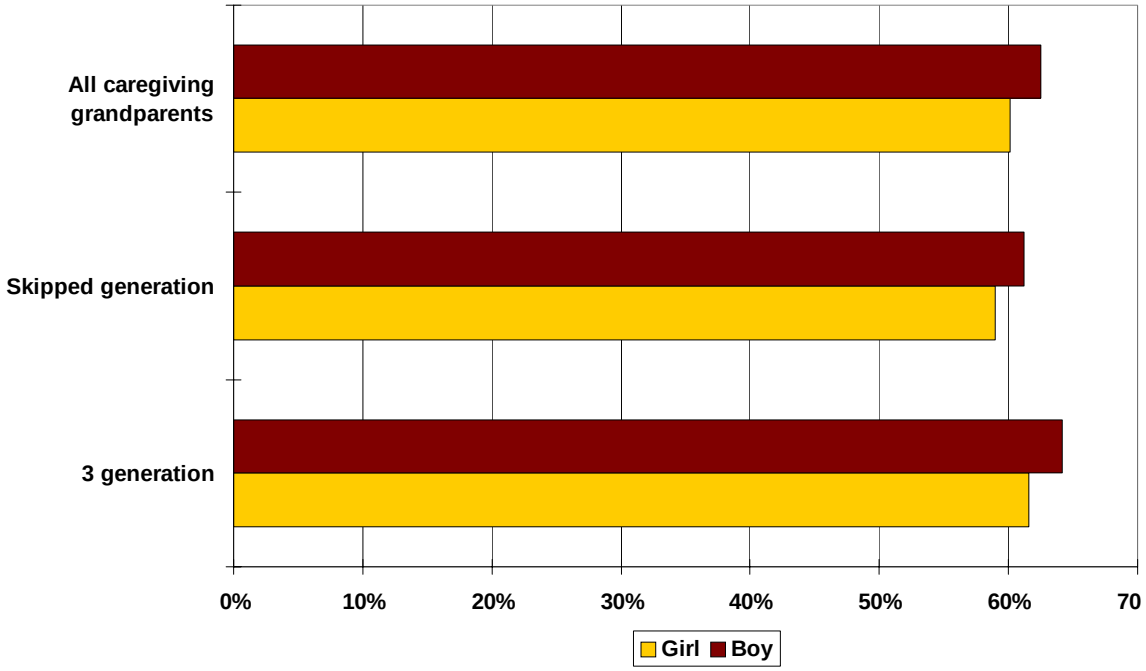
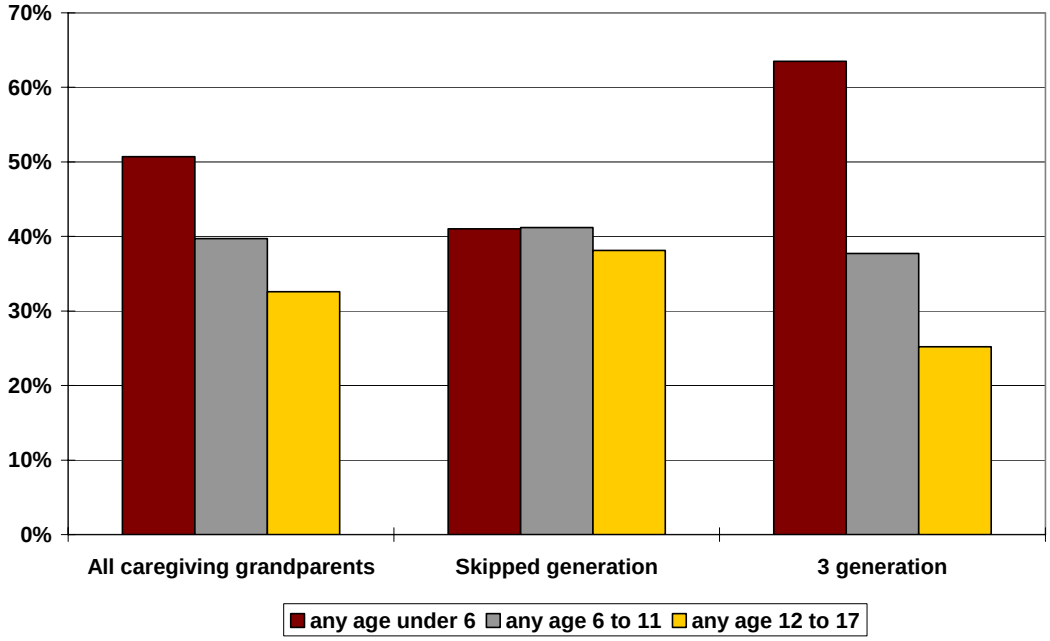


FIGURE 10. Age of Grandchildren in Household, African American Grandparent Caregivers, 2000



Grandparents often play significant roles in the lives of their grandchildren. For some grandparents—including nearly 700,000 African Americans—traditional roles are extended to include supplemental or substitute caregiving for grandchildren with whom they live. This report suggests that caregiving roles are not uncommon among African American grandparents, and that more than half of caregiving grandparents are responsible for grandchildren whose parents are not living in the household. The fact that many grandparent caregivers are single, low income, or disabled, suggests that the need for support and services in this population may be substantial.

For reports on grandparent caregiving among other racial and ethnic groups in the United States, see http://www.geront.umb.edu/inst/pubAndStudies.jsp

Notes:

[1] This report is based on a study funded by a research grant from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development ("Grandparent Families in the 2000 Census"; Grant #R03 HD045579-01).

[2] The Census questions are reproduced verbatim here, and asked for everyone aged 15 or over who lives in the household: (a) Does this person have any of his/her own grandchildren under the age of 18 living in this house or apartment? (If yes): (b) 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? (See http://www.census.gov/dmd/www/2000quest.html).

[3] The Census does not directly ask the identity of each child's parent. In cases where a child's parent is not the householder, we use subfamily information provided by the Census Bureau about family relationships within households to infer the presence of a child's parents. The presence or absence of a child's parent may have been erroneously inferred in some cases. That is, for an unknown number of cases, "three-generation" caregiving units may include the grandchild's aunt or uncle rather than the child's parent as the middle generation.

[4] The African American population included in this report includes individuals who report their race as African American only, and who report that they are not Hispanic/Latino. The 2000 Census allowed individuals to mark more than one race. As well, individuals are asked in a separate question whether they consider themselves Hispanic/Latino or not. Our statistics for each race group include those who mark a single race (e.g., "African American only") and exclude those marking more than one race (fewer than 3% of the total U.S. population marked more than one race). As well, individuals indicating that they are

Hispanic/Latino are excluded from the specified race categories. Individuals classified as Hispanic/Latino may be of any race.

[5] Our calculations suggest that among married or partnered grandparents who claim responsibility for a grandchild, 85% of their spouses or partners also claim responsibility.

[6] Grandparents are not asked which children in a household are their grandchildren. Among households in which the grandparent is the householder (the vast majority of grandparent care households, as seen in Figure 5), grandchildren can be easily defined because household relationship is defined with reference to the householder. In the remaining households, grandchildren are defined with reference to other relationships in the household (e.g., the sibling of the householder is inferred to be the grandchild of the householder's grandparent). Some error in our identification of grandchildren may have occurred among this relatively small number of households. Moreover, grandparents who claim they are responsible for a grandchild are not asked for which grandchild they are responsible. Our calculations are based on all grandchildren in the household, understanding that grandparents may be responsible for some grandchildren but not for others.