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Grandparent Care in the United States: Comparisons by Race and Ethnicity

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Grandparent Care in the United States: Comparisons by Race and Ethnicity¹

The purpose of this report is to compare information on grandparent caregivers in the United States among members of five different racial and ethnic groups. 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 Data from the 2000 Census 5% Public Use Microdata Sample are used in our calculations. The groups included are the following: Hispanic/Latino grandparents, and non-Hispanic White, African American, Native American and Asian grandparents³. For more detailed information on grandparent caregivers within each of these groups, see the race-specific reports at: <http://www.geront.umb.edu/inst/pubAndStudies.jsp>

According to the 2000 Census of Population, 5.8 million 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 over 2.4 million individuals who report being “responsible” for one or more of those grandchildren.

As shown in Figures 1 and 2, the highest prevalence of living with and caring for a grandchild occurs for most ethnic groups among adults between the ages of 50 and 75. Figure 1 shows the percentage of individuals at each age who report “living with a grandchild.” For all ages, non-Hispanic Whites are least likely to report living with a grandchild. Far higher percentages of African American, Native American, Asian, and Latino individuals live with a grandchild. The highest rate occurs among Asians who are in their late 60s to early 80s—more than one-quarter of these individuals lives with a grandchild. Figure 2 shows the share reporting that they are “responsible for” a grandchild with whom they live. Once again, non-Hispanic Whites are least likely to report being responsible for a grandchild. However, at younger ages, Asians are also relatively unlikely to be responsible for a grandchild. Those groups with the highest prevalence of having responsibility for a grandchild are Native Americans or African Americans, followed by Latinos.

FIGURE 1. Percent Living with Grandchildren by Age and Race/Ethnicity, 2000

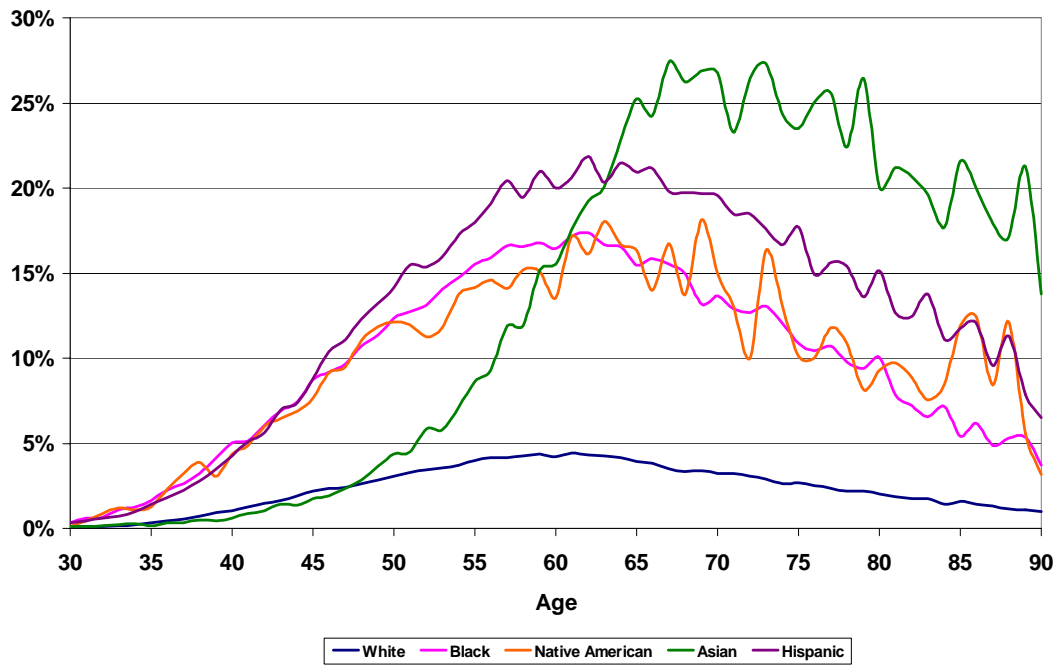
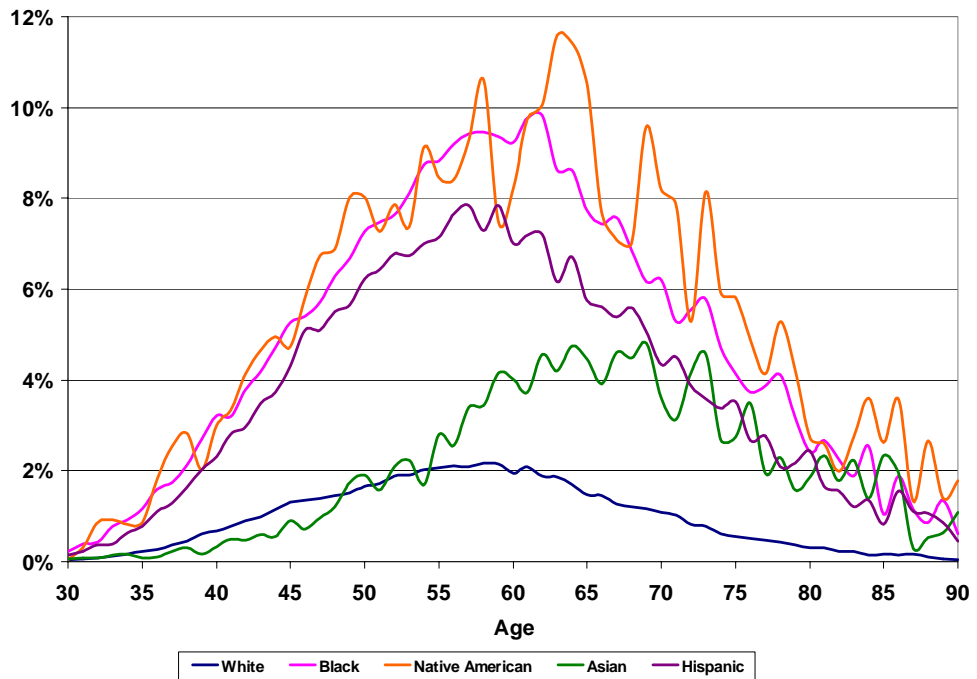


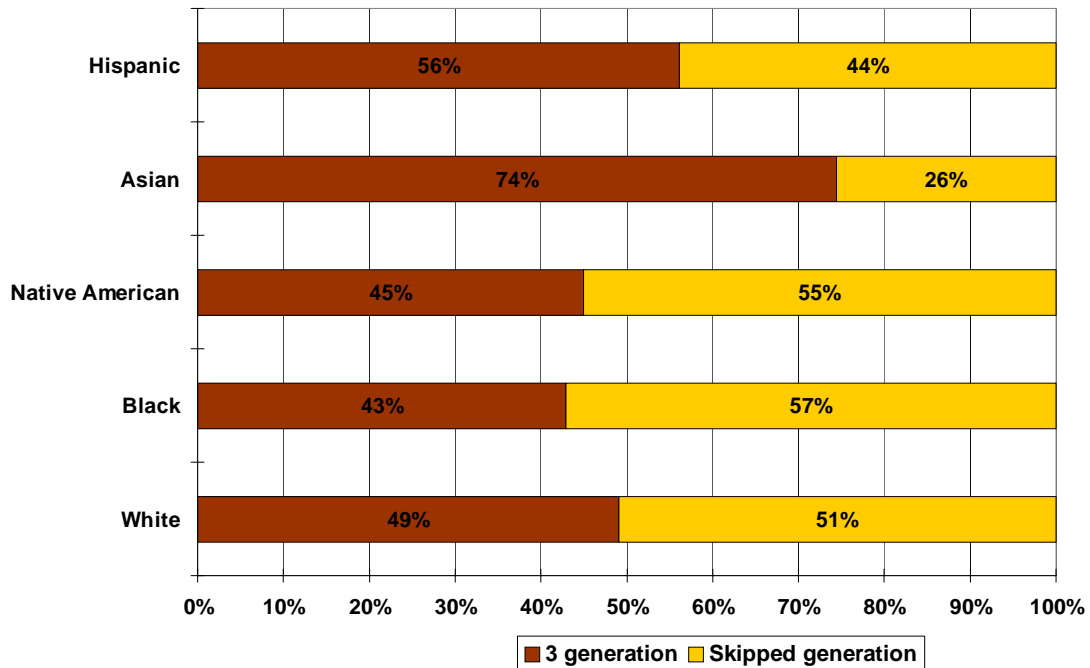
FIGURE 2. Percent Responsible for Grandchildren by Age and Race/Ethnicity, 2000



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.⁴

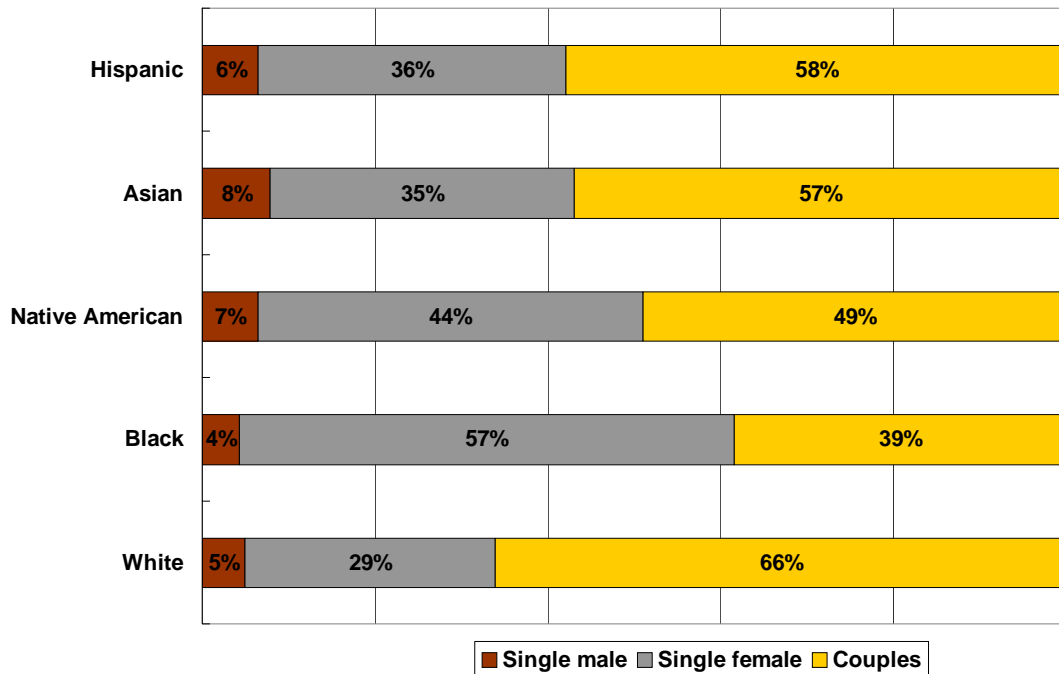
Figure 3 shows that members of these ethnic groups differ with respect to the generational structure of their households. We use the census information to identify grandparents who are caring for grandchildren in two different types of households: skipped-generation households, in which a grandparent 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.⁵ About half of the non-Hispanic White grandparent care units are three-generation households—the other half are skipped-generation households. Among Latino and Asian grandparent care families, three generations are more commonly living together. In contrast, more than half of the Native American and African American grandparent care families are skipped-generation. More detailed information on skipped-generation and three-generation households are presented in the group-specific reports referenced above.

FIGURE 3. Grandparent Care Units by Generational Status, by Race/Ethnicity, 2000



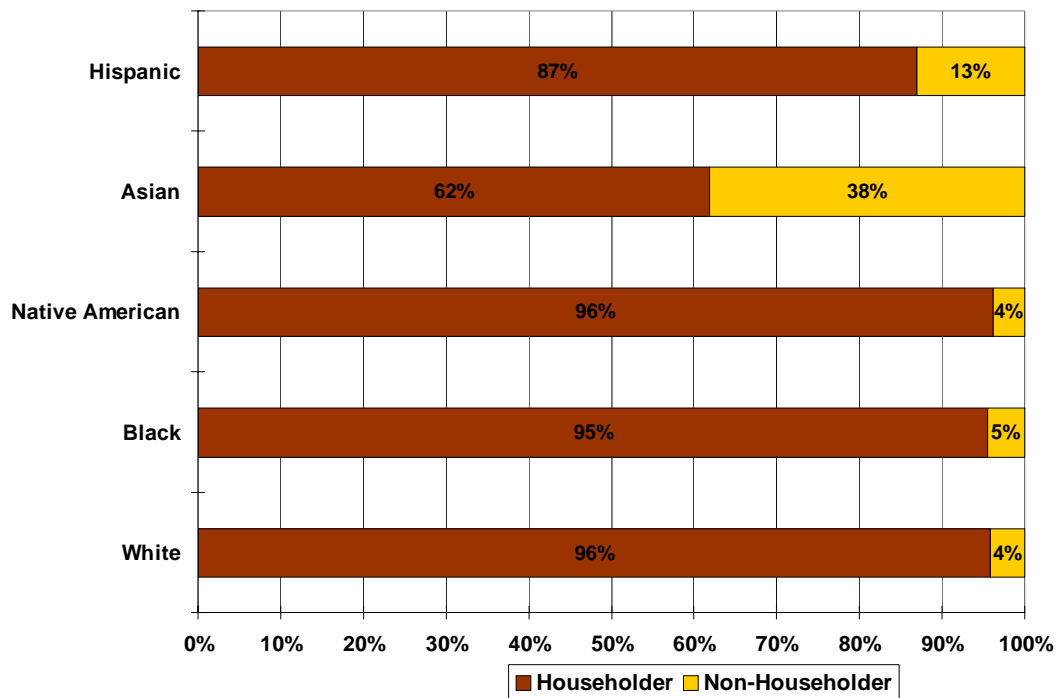
Grandparent care units are frequently composed of a married or cohabiting couple. More than half of the grandparent care units are composed of couples among Latinos, Asians, and non-Hispanic Whites (see Figure 4). About half of the Native American grandparent care units are composed of couples, compared to only 39% of African American care units. The most common caregiver within the African American population is a single female. Single males do not constitute more than 8% of the caregiving units for any of these ethnic groups. These figures highlight the significance of grandmothers in grandparent caregiving families, especially within the Native American and African American populations.

FIGURE 4. Marital Status of Grandparent Caregivers, by Race/Ethnicity, 2000



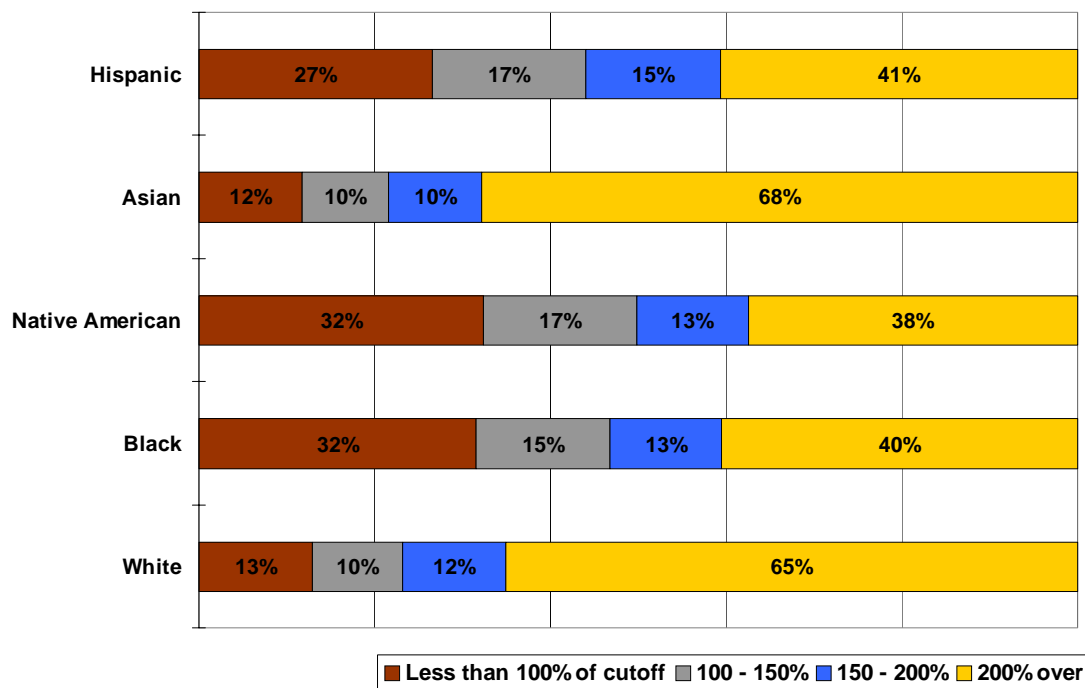
The vast majority of grandparents who claim responsibility for a grandchild are household heads. The designation of household headship is based on who owns or rents the home in which the family lives. Among Whites, African Americans, and Native Americans, almost all (95-96%) of the grandparent caregivers are also householders—very few grandparents claim responsibility when they are living in the home of someone else. Household headship is less strongly deterministic of caregiving claims among Latinos and Asians. Indeed, 38% of the Asians who claim responsibility are not householders. These two populations are composed of sizable numbers of immigrants (see Figure 8); we speculate that the different ways in which headship is associated with claims of responsibility may be shaped to some degree by immigrant status. Nonetheless, 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, by Race/Ethnicity, 2000



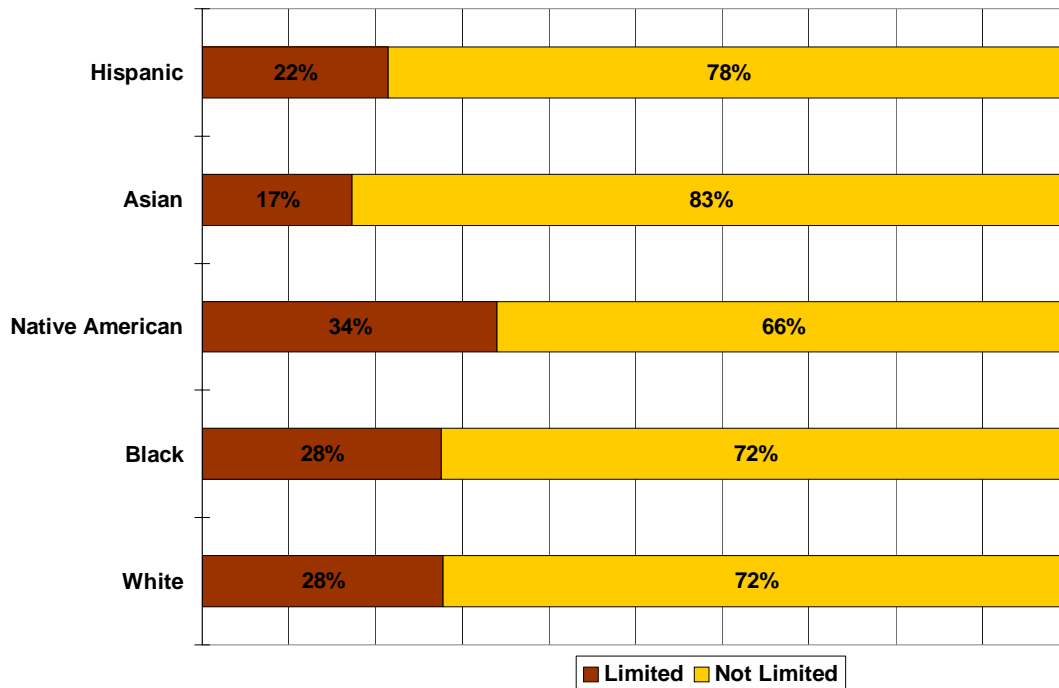
As a group, caregiving grandparents are often characterized as being a lower-income population. Our figures on poverty and economic status bear this out, especially for several of the non-White populations (see Figure 6). About 13% of White grandparent caregivers are poor, as are 12% of Asian grandparent caregivers. In contrast, poverty occurs among 27% of Latino grandparent caregivers, and nearly one-third of the Native American and African American grandparent caregivers. The extreme economic disadvantage experienced by children and adults living in these households, especially in minority populations, is notable.

FIGURE 6. Poverty Status of Grandparent Caregivers, by Race/Ethnicity, 2000



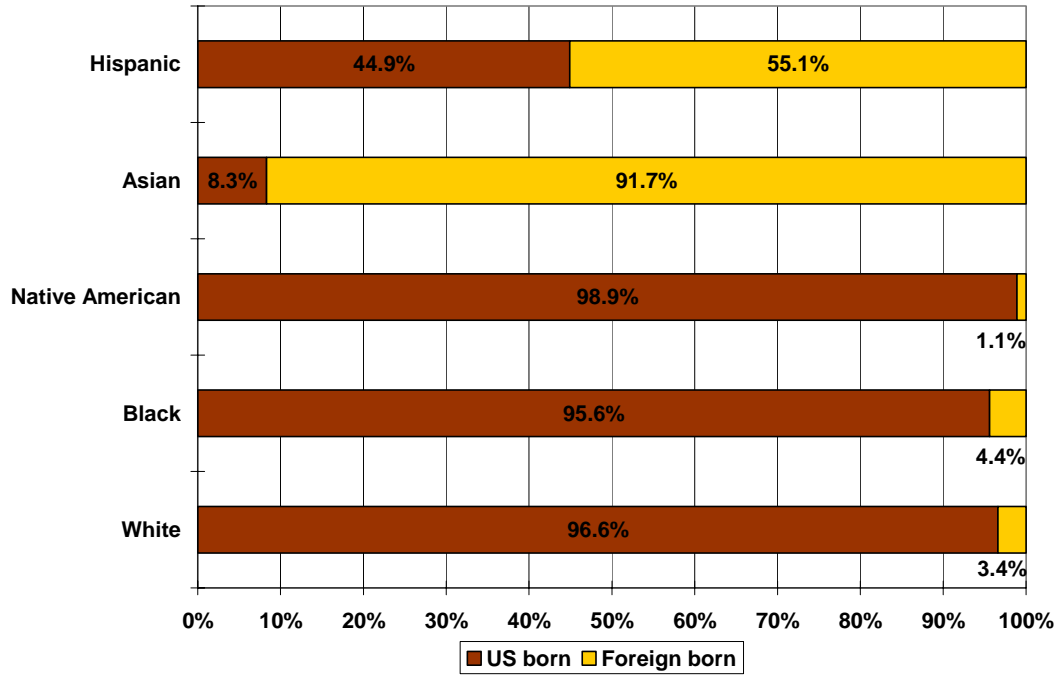
Disability is also common among these caregiving families. Adults were asked if a long-lasting condition substantially limited their ability to perform “basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting, or carrying.” Grandparent caregiving units including at least one grandparent reporting a physical difficulty were classified as limited. Physical limitations were reported by about 28% of the White and African American caregiving grandparents, as well as one-third of the Native American grandparents, 22% of the Latino, and 17% of the Asian grandparent caregivers. (See Figure 7).

FIGURE 7. Physical Limitation of Grandparent Caregivers, by Race/Ethnicity, 2000



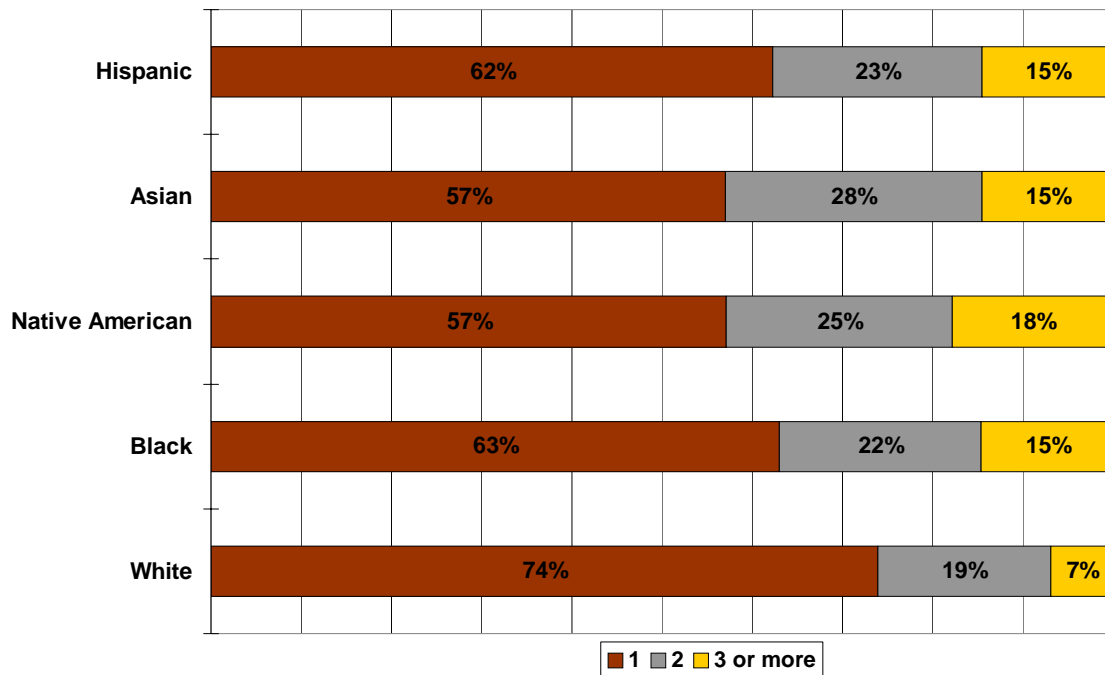
A large share of the Hispanic and Asian grandparent caregivers is foreign-born. As shown in Figure 8, 65% of the Hispanic/Latino caregiving units included a grandparent born outside of the United States⁶. This is slightly higher than the foreign-born share for the adult (age 18 and over) Latino population at large, 54% of whom is born outside of the U.S. Almost all (92%) of the Asian grandparent caregivers are foreign-born; this is also slightly higher than the foreign-born share for the adult Asian population at large (83%). Fewer than 5% of the grandparents in the other ethnic groups report foreign birth.

FIGURE 8. Immigrant Status of Grandparent Caregivers, by Race/Ethnicity, 2000



Figures 9 through 11 display information on the grandchildren living in the grandparent care households.⁷ A sizable majority of grandparent caregivers lives with just one grandchild, but many live with two or more (see Figure 9). Multiple grandchildren are especially likely among Asian and Native American families, where 43% of the grandparent units have two or more grandchildren.

FIGURE 9. Number of Grandchildren in Household, by Race/Ethnicity, Grandparent Caregivers, 2000



We find no evidence that either boys or girls are more common in grandparent care families. Across the ethnic groups, 56% to 63% have at least one granddaughter, and 59% to 65% have at least one grandson (see Figure 10). The likelihood of having a grandchild of any given sex is higher among the ethnic groups reporting more co-resident grandchildren, on average (that is, Asians and Native Americans).

Caregiving grandparents are especially likely to have at least one grandchild in the household who is under the age of six, or of preschool age (see Figure 11). Half or more of all grandparent units include at least one very young grandchild (ranging from 50% among Whites to 65% among Latinos). These are the children most likely to require “hands-on” care and supervision. Inasmuch as Latino and Asian grandparent care families are also most likely to include three generations, it may be that among these groups, claims of responsibility may be related to the provision of supplemental childcare on the part of many grandparents. Between 35% and 41% of the grandparent care families include at least one school-age grandchild aged 6 to 11. Teenage grandchildren are more common among African American families (33%) and least common among Asian and Latino grandparent families (23%).

FIGURE 10. Presence of Granddaughters & Grandsons in Household, by Race/Ethnicity, Grandparent Caregivers, 2000

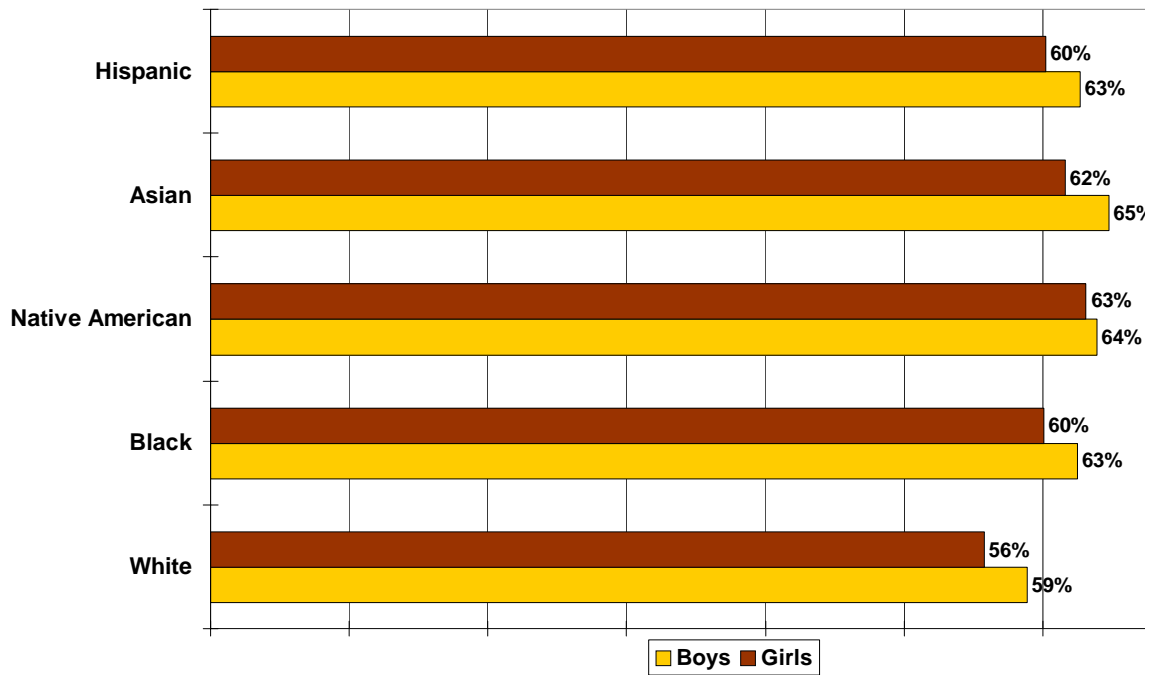


FIGURE 11. Age of Grandchildren in Household, by Race/Ethnicity, Grandparent Caregivers, 2000



Grandparents often play significant roles in the lives of their grandchildren. For some grandparents—numbering more than 2.4 million in 2000—traditional roles are extended to include supplemental or substitute caregiving for grandchildren with whom they live. This report suggests that wide variability across racial and ethnic groups occurs in grandparent care activities. Grandparent caregiving is far more common among African Americans and Native Americans than among other groups. Although patterns across the ethnic groups are similar in that most grandparent caregivers are householders, many are single women, and many are in a “skipped generation” household including the grandchild but not his or her parents, some significant differences across groups are noted. More than 40% of the Asian and Native American grandparent care families include more than one grandchild; in contrast, Latino, African American, and White grandparent care families are substantially more likely to include a single grandchild (62%, 63%, and 74%, respectively). Although grandparent care households are especially likely to include very young grandchildren who are under the age of six, suggesting that providing childcare is an important part of the caregiving grandparent’s role, this feature is especially true for Asian and Latino grandparents. In contrast, African American grandparent care families are most likely to include at least one teenager (33%), in contrast to Asian and Hispanic grandparent care households (23%). Although grandparent care households are frequently characterized by low income, extremely high rates of poverty occur among Latino, Native American, and African American grandparent care families. Inasmuch as these are the three groups with the highest prevalence of grandparent caregiving, the need for support and services in these populations may be especially critical.

For more information on grandparent caregiving 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 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., “White 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.

⁴ Our calculations suggest that among married or partnered grandparents who claim responsibility for a grandchild, 85% of their spouses or partners also claim responsibility.

⁵ 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.

⁶ Although individuals born in Puerto Rico are U.S. citizens, for our current purposes we classify those who self-identify as Puerto Rican and were born in Puerto Rico as “foreign born.”

⁷ 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.