

Since the Start of the Great Recession, More Children Raised by Grandparents

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A Social & Demographic Trends Report

Since the Start of the Great Recession, More Children Raised by Grandparents

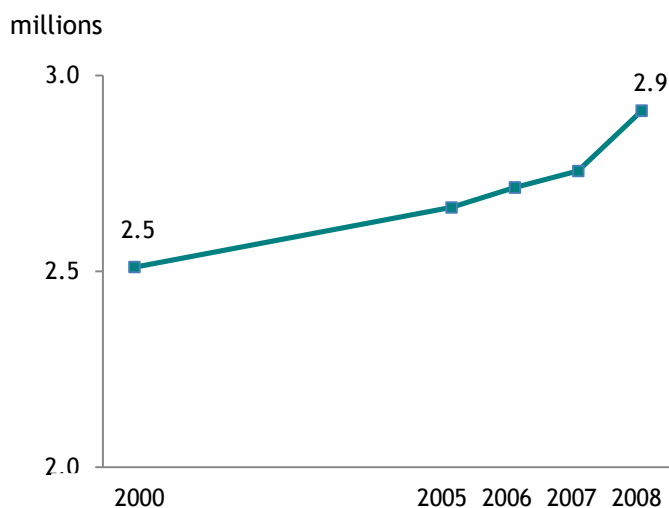
By Gretchen Livingston and Kim Parker

One child in ten in the United States lives with a grandparent, a share that increased slowly and steadily over the past decade before rising sharply from 2007 to 2008, the first year of the Great Recession, according to a new Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data.

About four-in-ten (41%) of those children who live with a grandparent (or grandparents) are also being raised primarily by that grandparent¹, according to the Census data. This figure—2.9 million children²—rose slowly throughout the decade and it, too, spiked from 2007 to 2008. In that single year, there was a 6% increase.

The phenomenon of grandparents serving as primary caregivers is more common among blacks³ and Hispanics than among whites⁴, but the sharpest rise since the recession began has been among whites. The number of white grandparents primarily responsible for their grandchildren rose by 9% from 2007 to 2008, compared with an increase of just 2% among black grandparents and no change among Hispanic grandparents.

Sharp Increase in Children with Grandparent Caregivers Since 2007



Note: Includes children who live with a grandparent responsible for most of their daily needs.

Source: Pew Research Center calculations of Decennial Census and American Community Survey Data

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¹ Anyone who reported that they live with and are “currently responsible for most of the basic needs of their grandchild(ren) under the age of 18” is considered to be a primary caregiver grandparent.

² This is a conservative estimate, since only those under age 18 who were the children or grandchildren of the household head could be easily linked to grandparent caregivers. They account for over 95% of minors living in a household with someone who claims to be a grandparent caregiver.

³ All references to whites, blacks, Asians and others are to the non-Hispanic components of those populations.

⁴ The share of all children under age 18 who are cared for primarily by a grandparent was 4% in 2008. Among white children, 3% were cared for primarily by a grandparent. This number is 8% among blacks, 4% among Hispanics, and 2% among Asians.

Almost half (49%) of children being raised by grandparents also live with a single parent. For about four-in-ten (43%) of these children, there is no parent in the household. About 8% have both parents in the household, in addition to the caregiver grandparent.

Whether or not they live with and raise their grandchildren, being a grandparent is central to the lives of most older Americans. According to a 2009 Pew Research Center survey, 80% of those 65 and older have grandchildren, as do 51% of those ages 50-64.⁵ The survey finds that grandparents place a premium on time spent with their grandchildren.

Just as the number of children being cared for by their grandparents has increased from 2000 to 2008, the corresponding number of grandparents serving as primary caregivers to their grandchildren increased 8%, from 2.4 million in 2000 to 2.6 million in 2008. Three percent of that increase occurred from 2000 to 2007, and five percent occurred from 2007 to 2008.

Among grandparents who serve as primary caregivers for grandchildren, there are notable differences by race, ethnicity and income. More than half of grandparent primary caregivers (53%) are white, while 24% are African American, 18% are Hispanic, and 3% are Asians. In comparison, in the population ages 50 and older, 78% are white, 10% are black, 8% are Hispanic, and 4% are Asian.

Grandparent Caregivers, 2000-2008

grandparents primarily responsible for most basic needs of a grandchild

	Total 2008	% Change 2007-08	% Change 2000-08
Total	2,636,728	+5	+8
Race and Ethnicity			
White	1,397,090	+9	+19
Black	621,887	+2	-12
Hispanic	483,182	0	+14
Asian	89,608	-3	+9
Poverty Level			
Below poverty level	468,059	+1	+2
1-3 times poverty level	1,251,111	+4	+12
3-5 times poverty level	595,608	+8	+6
5 times or higher than poverty level	303,488	+6	+4

Note: Whites, blacks, and Asians are non-Hispanic. Asians include Pacific Islanders.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of Decennial Census and American Community Survey data

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⁵ These percentages are based on non-institutionalized adults. Adults living in institutional settings such as nursing homes were not included in the survey (see Pew Social & Demographic Trends, "Growing Old in America: Expectations vs. Reality", June 29, 2009 <http://pewsocialtrends.org/pubs/736/getting-old-in-america>).

While grandparents who serve as primary caregivers for their grandchildren are disproportionately black and Hispanic, the increase in grandparent primary caregiving across the decade has been much more pronounced among whites. From 2000 to 2008, there was a 19% increase in the number of white grandparents caring for their grandkids. There has been a smaller, but still notable increase in Hispanic grandparents serving as primary caregivers since 2000, which may be linked to the increasing size of the older Hispanic population in the U.S. By contrast, the number of blacks serving as grandparents declined by 12%.⁶

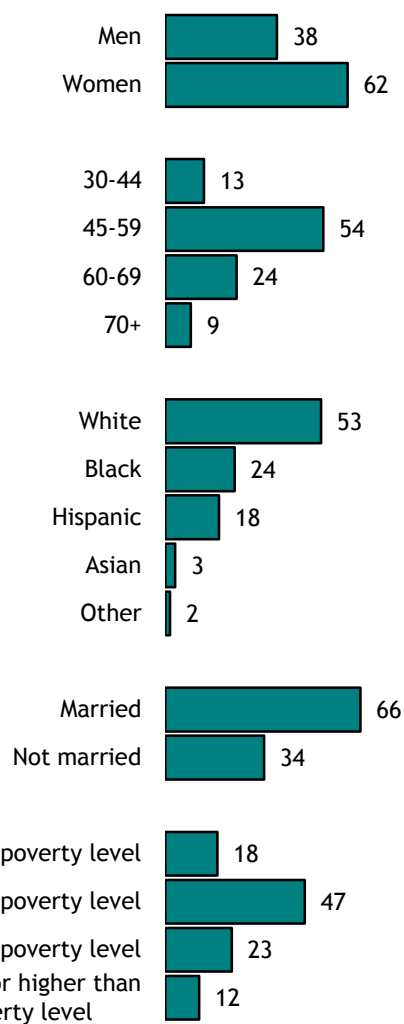
For the most part, grandparent caregivers have very limited financial resources. Nearly one-in-five (18%) are living below the poverty line⁷, while 47% have household incomes that fall between one- and three-times the poverty line. In comparison, among the population ages 50 and older, 8% are below the poverty line, and 32% are living on an income that is between one- and three-times the poverty rate.

From 2000 to 2008, grandparents with incomes between one- and three-times the poverty level have shown the largest increase (12%) in caregiving for their grandchildren. However, much of the increase in grandparent caregiving since the onset of the recession has occurred among grandparents who have incomes that are at least three times the poverty level.

Overall grandparent primary caregivers are relatively young—more than two-thirds (67%) are

Profile of Grandparent Caregivers, 2008

% of grandparents primarily responsible for most basic needs of a grandchild



Note: Whites, blacks, Asians, and others are non-Hispanic. Asian includes Pacific Islanders. Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of American Community Survey data

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⁶ From 2000 to 2008, the share of Hispanics ages 50 and older increased 2 percentage points, and the share of Asians increased by 1 percentage point. Whites showed a 3 percentage point decline, and blacks showed a decline of almost 1 percentage point. In 2008, whites comprised 78% of people over 50, blacks comprised 10%, Hispanics comprised 8% and Asians comprised 4%.

⁷ To put this in perspective, the poverty threshold for a family of two adults and two children in 2008 was \$21,834 (see <http://www.census.gov/prod/2009pubs/p60-236.pdf>).

younger than 60, with 13% younger than 45. This likely reflects the fact that younger grandparents are still physically able to take on the needs of grandchildren.

Some 62% of grandparent caregivers are female, and 38% are men. Two-thirds of grandparent caregivers are married, while 34% are not.

The plurality of grandparents who care for their grandchildren have been doing so for quite a long time. More than half (54%) report that they have been the primary caregiver to at least one grandchild for three years or more, and 23% have been the primary caregiver to a grandchild for between one and two years.

Grandparents Helping in Other Ways

Aside from the small but growing minority of grandparents who have primary responsibility for their grandchildren, how many grandparents help out at least occasionally with childcare? According to the 2009 Pew Research survey, among those ages 65 and older who have grandchildren, 39% say they have helped their adult children with childcare in the past 12 months. These grandparents are more likely to have given their adult children money over the past year (50%), and somewhat less likely to have helped their kids out with errands, housework or home repairs (31%).

How Grandparents Help Their Adult Children

% of grandparents who have done this for their adult children in the past 12 months:



Note: Based on adults ages 65 and older who have at least one grandchild, n=1064.
Source: Pew Social & Demographic Trends Project, "Growing Old in America: Expectations vs. Reality," June 29, 2009

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Among grandparents ages 65 and older, the percentage helping out their adult children by providing childcare for the grandkids declines steeply with age. Fully half of those in their 60s and early 70s (51%) say they helped with childcare in the past year. Among those ages 75-84, 30% did so, and among those ages 85 and older, the share falls to 19%.

Interestingly, more grandfathers than grandmothers say they have helped out with childcare in the past year. Among grandfathers ages 65-74, 57% helped out with the grandkids. This compares with 47% of grandmothers in the same age group.

While many grandparents do lend a hand by providing childcare for their grandchildren, most Americans say this is not a grandparent's responsibility. In a 2005 Pew Research survey, 29% of adult respondents said that grandparents helping with childcare for their grandchildren is a responsibility, 68% said it is not. Roughly the same proportion (32%) said parents allowing an adult child to live with them is a responsibility. By comparison, 62% said parents paying for a child's college education is a responsibility.⁸

⁸ See Pew Social and Demographic Trends, "Baby Boomers: From the Age of Aquarius to the Age of Responsibility" Dec. 8, 2005 (<http://pewsocialtrends.org/pubs/306/baby-boomers-from-the-age-of-aquarius-to-the-age-of-responsibility>)

Older adults are more likely than their younger counterparts to say grandparents helping with child care is a responsibility. And among those with grandchildren, nearly four-in-ten (38%) feel this way.

The Benefits of Aging

Providing childcare for grandchildren is one thing, enjoying time with them is another. The 2009 Pew Research survey found that spending time with grandchildren is viewed as one of the greatest benefits of growing older. Respondents ages 65 and older were asked whether or not they were experiencing a series of “good things” that can come along with aging. The items ranged from traveling to being financially secure, to spending time with grandchildren. Overall, 64% said spending time with grandchildren was something they were experiencing as they got older.

When asked which of the various benefits of aging they valued most, time with grandchildren ranked very high. Among older adults who are grandparents, spending time with grandkids was on par with having more time with family—29% said this is what they value most about getting older. Other potential benefits of growing older, such as financial security, less stress and the ability to travel seem to pale in comparison to grandchildren.

Women ages 65-74 are among the most likely to say they value time with their grandkids above all else. Fully 31% say this is what they value most. This compares with 19% of men ages 65-74.

High Marks for Grandparents

Most grandparents give themselves high marks for the role they are playing in their grandchildren’s lives. Overall, 31% of grandparents say they are doing an excellent job, 29% say they are doing a very good job and 27% say they’re doing a good job. Fewer than one-in-ten rate themselves only fair (6%) or poor (3%).

What Older Americans Value Most

% of grandparents 65 and older who named each

More time with family	29
Time with grandchildren	29
More financial security	14
Less stress	8
More travel	7
More time for hobbies/interests	7
Not working	7
Volunteer work	6
More respect	4
Second career	1

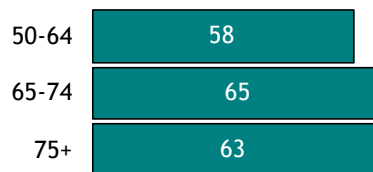
Note: Total exceeds 100% because multiple responses were allowed. “Don’t know/Refused” responses are not shown.

Source: Pew Social & Demographic Trends Project, “Growing Old in America: Expectations vs. Reality,” June 29, 2009

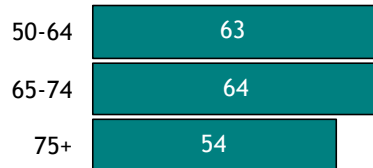
Parents and Grandparents Rate Themselves

% saying they have done an “excellent” or “very good job” as a parent/grandparent

Parents



Grandparents



Note: Based on those who have children and grandchildren, n=1,490.

Source: Pew Social & Demographic Trends Project, “Growing Old in America: Expectations vs. Reality,” June 29, 2009

Younger grandparents give themselves slightly higher ratings than their older counterparts. Among those ages 50-74, 63% say they are doing an excellent or good job as grandparents. This compares with 54% of grandparents 75 and older. Among grandparents who give themselves the highest marks for the job they're doing with their grandkids are women ages 65-74. Fully 66% of these women say they are doing an excellent or very good job with their grandkids. This compares with 55% of women 75 and older.

Those who have both children and grandchildren give themselves comparable ratings for their dual roles. Among all respondents who are both parents and grandparents, 62% give themselves an excellent or very good rating for their parenting skills and 60% say they've done an excellent or very good job as a grandparent. The ratings are fairly consistent across age groups, with one exception. Those 75 and older who have both children and grandchildren give themselves slightly better marks for the job they've done as parents (63% excellent or good) compared with how they've done as grandparents (54% excellent or good).