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Grandmother Kinship Care Providers: Predictors of Elevated Psychological Distress

Deborah M. Whitley

Georgia State University, dwhitley@gsu.edu

Grandmother Kinship Care Providers: Predictors of Elevated Psychological Distress

Susan J. Kelley, RN, PhD and Deborah M. Whitley, MSW, PhD
Georgia State University

Introduction

- Most children in kinship care with grandmothers in the U.S. have been abandoned or maltreated

- The challenges these caregivers encounter often include poverty, social isolation, and diminished health

- These factors may hinder the grandmother's ability to provide a supportive family environment

Purpose and Hypothesis

The purpose of the present study was to:

- Determine levels of psychological distress in African American caregiving grandmothers

- Identify predictors of increased distress in African American custodial grandmothers

We hypothesized that:

- Diminished grandmother health, family resources and support, as well as increased child behavior problems, will predict psychological distress

Methods

Participants

- 516 African American grandmothers raising one or more grandchildren

- Mean age: 56.5 years (range 35 to 83)

- Less than high school education: 41.7%

- Currently married: 19.7%

- Raising an average of 2.4 children

Measures

- Brief Symptom Index

- Child Behavior Checklist

- Family Resource Scale

- Family Support Scale

- Short Form General Health Survey

Analyses

- Descriptive statistics

- Hierarchical multiple regression

Results

Psychological Distress Scores

- 26% scored in clinical range ($T \geq 63$) based on General Severity Index (GSI)

- 38.8% scored in clinical range based on two or more subscales ($T \geq 63$)

Predictors of Psychological Distress

- Externalizing child behaviors

- Internalizing child behaviors

- Physical health

- Family resources

Nonpredictors

- Family social support

Regression Summary Statistics:

- Model predicted 33% of total variance

- $R^2 = .33$, $F(11,503) = 22.46$, $p < .001$

Discussion

Summary and Implications

- Almost 40% of kinship caregivers scored in clinical range for psychological distress

- Child behavior problems, diminished health, and lack of family resources were strongest predictors of caregiver distress

- Behavioral interventions are needed for both the grandchildren and grandmothers

- Caregivers need strategies for coping with traumatized children

- Physical health problems of kinship care providers need to be addressed

- Public policy should address the myriad needs of kinship care providers

Limitations

- Heterogeneity of sample in regard to race-ethnicity and urban setting

- Lack of comparison group

- Reliance on a single informant