

## ABSTRACT

Previous research has demonstrated that grandparent caregivers experience high levels of physical, psychological, and relationship stress. However, few studies have examined how psychosocial stressors influence the quality of grandparents' family relationships. Guided by the ecological perspective, this exploratory study examined predictors of parenting satisfaction and family functioning among 40 grandmothers raising grandchildren. Parenting satisfaction was associated with lower levels of financial burden and better family functioning. More optimal family functioning was associated with higher parenting satisfaction, more social support, and grandmothers' mental health (i.e., less depression and anxiety). Unexpectedly, higher financial burden was also associated with better family functioning. Grandchild behavior problems were not significantly related to grandmothers' parenting satisfaction or perceptions of family functioning. Findings suggest that the quality of custodial grandmothers' family relationships is influenced by both individual and contextual factors. However, because social support and financial burden had the strongest influence, practitioners should pay particular attention to the impact of contextual factors on the quality of relationships within grandparent-headed families.

## METHOD

### Recruitment:

- Support Groups
- Agencies Serving Older Adults
- Agencies Serving Children & Families
- Word-of-Mouth

### Procedures:

- Questionnaire (Completed by Mail)

### Measures:

- Family Assessment Device, General Functioning Scale ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $SD = .56$ , 1 – 4)
- Child Behavior Checklist, Total Problem Scale ( $M = 33.03$ ,  $SD = 20.8$ , 0 – 118)
- SF-36 (Depression & Anxiety Items) ( $M = 2.33$ ,  $SD = .81$ , 0 – 5)
- Financial Burden Scale ( $M = 13.72$ ,  $SD = 4.45$ , 0 – 22)
- Social Support Scale of the Medical Outcome Study ( $M = 3.84$ ,  $SD = .72$ , 1 – 5)
- Parenting Satisfaction Scale ( $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = .55$ , 1 – 5)

## SAMPLE

### Grandparent Demographics:

- Average Age: 56 Years ( $SD = 7.77$ , 44 – 79)
- 55% Married ( $n = 22$ )
- 80% White, 15% African-American, 2% Native American, 2% Hispanic
- 93% Completed High School

### Grandchild Demographics:

- Average Age: 8 Years ( $SD = 2.95$ , 2 – 13)
- 60% Female ( $n = 24$ )
- 73% White, 15% African-American, 3% Native American, 3% Hispanic  
8% Mixed Race

### Household Characteristics:

- 70% Raising Daughter's Child ( $n = 28$ )
- Raising a Grandchild for 5 Years ( $M = 4.78$ ,  $SD = 3.52$ , 0 – 11)
- 2 Grandchildren ( $M = 1.95$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ , 1 – 5)
- 30% < \$15K/Year, 58% < \$25K/Year

## RESULTS

### Family Functioning:

Variables	B	SE B	$\beta$	$t$
Mental Health	.21	.11	.30~	1.84
Social Support	.35	.12	.45**	3.06
Financial Burden	.04	.02	.33*	2.13
GC Behavior Problems	.00	.00	-.004	-.03
Parenting Satisfaction	.27	.16	.27~	1.69
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.42			
F	6.13***			

N=40 ~p<.10 \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001

### Parenting Satisfaction:

Variables	B	SE B	$\beta$	$t$
Mental Health	.06	.13	.09	.45
Social Support	-.13	.14	-.17	-.91
Financial Burden	-.06	.02	-.49**	-3.11
GC Behavior Problems	-.004	.004	-.16	-1.00
Family Functioning	.32	.19	.33~	1.69
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.30			
F	3.9**			

N=40 ~p<.10 \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001

## PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Conduct a thorough assessment of individual, relational, and contextual strengths and stressors within grandparent-headed families.
- Routinely screen custodial grandparents for mental health issues, particularly depression.
- Provide treatment aimed at improving grandparent mental health.
- Assist grandparents in accessing financial resources such as TANF.
- Provide grandparents with training in financial planning and financial management (e.g., budgeting, saving, planning for emergencies).
- Explore the impact of financial stress on family relationships, particularly the grandparent-grandchild relationship.
- Assist grandparent caregivers in finding informal sources of support.
- Offer group therapy or multifamily group therapy as a formal means of building social support networks for grandparents and their grandchildren.
- Adopt treatment models that emphasize family relationships and families in context. Help grandparents identify and address contextual factors and family relationship issues that are sources of stress.
- Explore grandparents' feelings about parenting for a second time.
- Address parenting and provide suggestions for enhancing the quality of the grandparent-grandchild relationship.
- Include material focused on family relationships and parenting in grandparent support groups.
- Educate grandparents about their rights and help them access needed services.