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Grandparents rearing grandchildren : a partial replication of Lenora M. Poe's 1991 dissertation, Black grandparents as parents

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Lenora M. Poe's 1991 dissertation, *Black Grandparents as Parents***

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San Jose State University, 1993

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GRANDPARENTS REARING GRANDCHILDREN: A PARTIAL REPLICATION OF
LENORA M. POE'S 1991 DISSERTATION, BLACK GRANDPARENTS AS PARENTS

A Thesis
Presented To
The Faculty of the School of Nursing
San Jose State University

in Partial Fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Science

By
Nancy J. Sorensen
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ABSTRACT

GRANDPARENTS REARING GRANDCHILDREN: A PARTIAL REPLICATION OF LENORA M. POE'S 1991 DISSERTATION, BLACK GRANDPARENTS AS PARENTS

by Nancy J. Sorensen

This thesis is an exploratory, descriptive study of the effects upon grandparents of rearing their grandchildren. The study applies Duvall's theory of the family life cycle. Data were collected from grandparents (N=11) attending a support group facilitating the sharing of experiences encountered in rearing grandchildren. The interview questionnaire included questions developed by Poe (1991) and the researcher.

The data revealed that the responsibilities undertaken by the grandparents led to personal problems including damage to health, loss of peer relationships, reduced or non-existent social activity, broken future plans, and loss of independence. Themes developed during thematic analysis include use of alcohol and other drugs by parents and grandparents, lack of parenting skills on the part of the children's parents, hyperactivity of the grandchildren, and grief and detachment among the grandparents. Recommendations are made for school nurses working with grandparents rearing grandchildren.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Background of the Problem	1
Problem	5
Research Question	5
Significance of the Study	5
Definition of Terms	6
Summary	6
2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW	8
Conceptual Framework	8
Review of the Literature	15
Summary	22
3. METHODOLOGY	23
Study Design	23
Sample	23
Human Subjects Approval	23
Instrument	24
Data Collection	26
Analysis Procedure	26
4. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION	28
Demographics of the Sample	28
Interview Responses by Order of Questions	29
Thematic Analysis	41

Chapter	Page
5. DISCUSSION	48
Summary of Study	48
Conclusions	49
Limitations	56
Recommendations	57
Implications for School Nursing	60
REFERENCES	62
APPENDIXES	
A. San Jose State University Institutional Review Board Approval	67
B. Monterey Peninsula Unified School District Approval	70
C. Permission to Replicate Study from Lenora M. Poe	72
D. Informed Participation Statement	74
E. Questionnaire for Study	76
F. Demographics for Study	78
G. Interview Sample Summary Sheet	80

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The role of grandparents as primary caregivers of grandchildren has surfaced as a major concern in our society. Grandparenting was thought to be the time to enjoy grandchildren--bake cookies, go shopping, or go to the park. Many grandparents are now assuming the responsibility for rearing grandchildren on a full-time basis. At elementary school sites grandparents are seen walking young children to elementary classes, attending parent teacher conferences, and participating in disciplinary meetings. The purpose of this study is to describe the impact rearing grandchildren has on these grandparents, and the role that support groups may play in reducing the negative aspects of that impact.

Background of the Problem

In many communities the elderly are often seen with children, but mistakenly are viewed as merely caretaking while parents are working or not at home. This scene has become familiar with the increasing number of chemically dependant parents and the rise in single parent and working parent families referred to by Kornhaber and Woodward (1985). The nurturing and care of children are delegated to babysitters, day care centers, relatives, other children, or, all too often, no one. In these circumstances grandparents have been forced to assume the responsibility of rearing their grandchildren to provide for their basic needs.

An estimated 3.2 million (5%) of grandchildren are living in homes with, and being reared by, grandparents (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991). This figure represents an increase of almost 40% in the past decade. Yet, it may represent only a fraction of the number of grandchildren living with grandparents. According to Creighton (1991) the

total could be 3 to 4 times the 5% figure. Children from all ethnic backgrounds are represented. Approximately 4% of white children and 12% of black children live with grandparents (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991). Half the families include both grandparents, while most of these children live with the grandmother only.

Many children living with grandparents are school-age and attending local elementary schools. Their grandparents by necessity assume parental responsibilities related to school such as monitoring attendance and homework as well as meeting with the teachers regarding the child's educational and social progress. Most people do not equate being a grandparent with attending parent teacher conferences. In the past grandparents did not see their role as dealing with elementary schools other than to attend an occasional holiday musical or performance.

Cherlin and Furstenberg (1986) studied the roles of grandparenthood during the 20th century, observing that, in 1900, there were few living grandparents. Thus, most grandchildren never knew their grandparents. Changing circumstances have had a major influence on the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. Increased human life span, improved travel and long distance communication, more leisure time, and Social Security have had an effect on intergenerational relations.

Current social changes including high divorce rates and single parent families as well as the crack cocaine involvement of many teenagers and young adults have contributed to the grandparents becoming full-time caretakers of the grandchildren (Poe, 1991). Of course, some grandparents did assume care of their grandchildren in the past; however, circumstances were different. Glick (1988) reported that the parents were completing high school or finding a job. Moreover, parents were often either living with the grandparents or the children would soon be reunited with the parents. In contrast, today many grandparents begin by perceiving their responsibilities as temporary; but, soon realize that caring for the children is a permanent responsibility.

For a variety of reasons, the children's parents may be unwilling or unable to care for their children. Many parents involved in the drug culture are now in prison or their whereabouts are unknown. Grandparents have found themselves in an unanticipated and often overwhelming situation without the necessary resources to care adequately for the children or themselves. Financial support received by relatives is less than 1/3 that available to foster families (B. Johnson, personal communication, December 3, 1991). Typically, grandparents do not receive any financial support, nor do they have custody, because the parents are usually unwilling to relinquish their custodial rights and the support payments associated with them.

Kennedy and Keeney (1987) found that many grandparents today have to deal with feelings of guilt about their own children's use of drugs. They resent their life circumstances and experience regret about failures in rearing their own children. This sense of past failures may partly account for the willingness of many grandparents to take on responsibility for rearing another set of children. According to Frazier (1966), having grandchildren provides some grandparents with an opportunity to parent a new set of children in the way they would have liked originally. In other words, at least some grandparents in Frazier's study were meeting their own needs and aspirations by taking on the responsibility of rearing their grandchildren.

Coman (1993) suggests that some grandparents find existential satisfaction through continuing in a parenting role. They postpone the potentially difficult psychological transition to a senior life-role and at the same time experience satisfaction and joy from a close relationship with their grandchildren. Thus, the motivations for assuming the parenting role for a second time are extremely complex as are the effects on grandparents themselves.

It is likely, however, that many grandparents in the permanent role of caretaker are asked to care for the grandchildren. However, some find their grandchildren

abandoned on the doorstep. Grandparents find themselves in a difficult situation. They have usually passed their parenting years and are looking forward to time for themselves. They may resent the intrusion of grandchildren into their homes. Because the alternative is a foster home, many nevertheless accept the task of caregiver and may find themselves in this position for many years.

Some local governments are currently considering enacting laws to increase the rights of grandparents in this unique role. Hospitals, schools, social service agencies, and other community resources have begun to recognize how many grandparents are now burdened with the responsibilities of child care when many neither want, nor are capable physically or financially, of undertaking the job of primary caregiver.

Public awareness of this situation will increase as information on the numbers of children being parented by grandparents is disseminated. A description of the problems grandparents experience in resumption of a parenting role will provide a basis for responding to this situation. A detailed assessment of the positive and negative experiences associated with parenting one's grandchildren should contribute to the capacity of the community to improve the conditions for the affected populations, both grandparents and their grandchildren.

Throughout the United States one response to this situation has been the formation of support groups to help grandparents deal with the specific problems they face while rearing their grandchildren. Such groups make it possible for grandparents to meet other people who share the same concerns and difficulties. Solutions for their common problems are explored in the group. At this time support groups may be the only available mechanism for providing relief to and socialization for many grandparents. How the support groups are structured and conducted to elicit maximum participation deserves attention. The visibility of such support groups also helps bring attention to this situation.

The Problem

The problems this population of grandparents rearing their grandchildren experience need to be explored. While financial resources are obviously a problem for grandparents, they also need to develop attitudes and skills which will enable them to cope more effectively with their responsibilities. An assessment of the needs of these grandparents is timely. Some progress in this endeavor has been made by Minkler and Roe (1993) and Poe (1991).

Research Questions

Specifically, this research will extend knowledge about grandparents rearing their grandchildren. This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What circumstances lead to placement of the children with their grandparents?
2. How does placement affect the lives of the grandparents?
3. How are relations between the grandparents and their own children affected?
4. What personal skills and social resources, if any, have been helpful to the grandparents?
5. What additional skills and resources would help the grandparents perform their responsibilities more effectively, while at the same time helping them cope physically and emotionally with the additional burdens they have been forced to assume?
6. How can support groups assist grandparents to cope with the problems they are experiencing?

Significance

The results of this study will describe the joys and hardships grandparents experience rearing grandchildren, contribute to an understanding of their problems, and assist them in their new parenting role. The need for support groups for grandparents will become more obvious by identifying the impact of rearing grandchildren. The short term contributions of this study include identifying tactics to reduce stress from day-to-day

care of children, and assessing the value of establishing a network with other grandparents. The major long term effect is to contribute to an understanding and acceptance of the needs of these grandparents by the neighborhood and community. This study will thus replicate and extend Poe's (1991) study, compare current findings with those she reported earlier, and help establish the value of support groups.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions apply:

1. Caregiver refers to the person(s) responsible for the well-being and parenting of the children.
2. Grandchildren refers to the children or stepchildren of the grandparent's son or daughter.
3. Grandparents refer to the grandmother and grandfather. The grandmother is the mother of the children's mother or father, and the grandfather is the father of the children's mother or father.
4. Support groups are voluntary small groups structured for mutual aid in the accomplishment of a specific purpose (Katz & Bender, 1976).

Summary

Grandparents rearing their own grandchildren is a relatively new area of study that has recently received attention from researchers. The information on the subject is limited and the main sources of information are the grandparents themselves. The study has been undertaken to gain a more thorough understanding of the joys and hardships experienced by grandparents in this situation, as well as to assess the role of support groups in providing assistance. Facts and information may result which will assist in the establishment of support groups to meet the needs of the grandparents.

Grandparents and grandchildren may be at risk as individuals and as families if their predicament is not recognized and the rights of this population are not protected.

The information contained in this study is necessary as public information in order that communities may become better informed, and, if necessary, increase available resources for grandparents rearing grandchildren. This information may be utilized by communities who wish to find ways to provide for this at risk population.

Chapter 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The realization that many grandparents are now primary caretakers for their grandchildren has prompted a number of researchers to study this phenomenon. In particular, the effects upon grandparents of having to rear their own grandchildren has been a primary focus of research during this past decade.

The concept of a family life cycle is particularly applicable to the study of grandparents as primary caretakers. Theorists in the field of adult development have described how individuals pass through various developmental stages, from infancy to adulthood. Families have also been viewed as progressing through stages, each marked by major transition points such as birth, marriage, and death. Together, these stages define the family life cycle.

Conceptual Framework

Family theorists such as Duvall (1977) and Carter and McGoldrick (1980) have proposed a number of distinct stages within the family life cycle. According to Duvall (1977) family developmental stages can be predicted and identified as a family proceeds through its particular life cycle. Families vary as to when and how they go through these stages; however, the theory assumes that families do not skip any stages.

Family Developmental Stages

Duvall (1977) maintains that the family is more clearly understood by examining the development of its individual members than by studying the family as a whole. In this approach, the success of the family is dependent on the individual successes within that unit. Individual progression through the developmental stages is also marked by critical transition points such as birth, death, or retirement of other family members.

Problems may surface when stress occurs in these transitions from one stage to another.

Duvall's model of family development incorporates eight stages of the development of individuals within their families. The theoretical framework serves as a reference and assists in the study of occurrences--problems and rewards--within the family.

An understanding of the developmental tasks of middle-aged and aging family members is especially pertinent in the study of the effect upon grandparents rearing grandchildren. Responsibility for rearing grandchildren intrudes on the completion of normal developmental tasks for the grandparent.

Duvall (1977) described the middle-aged or aging couple who has completed their progression through childbearing and rearing years and are now parents of grown children who may have children themselves. Frequently the aging couple maintains the home base and may provide a home for varying periods of time for family members. Such a couple still considers themselves to be part of a family and continues to function as such long after the children have departed.

The importance of being members of a family to both the older and younger generations becomes apparent as individuals turn to others for help when the need arises. With each birth, a major transition, the number within the family increases along with the number of personal interrelationships. A mutual interdependence exists in each family. Members of the family provide encouragement and assist individuals in achieving developmental tasks.

Duvall (1977) classified developmental tasks for the individual in 10 general categories of behavior, extending through the eight stages of individual growth. These tasks arise at certain times in the life of individuals and the outcome of success or failure depends on the achievement of the task. The two primary origins of developmental tasks are: (a) physical maturation, and (b) cultural pressures and privileges. Basically, a

specific task confronts individuals who need to attain a desired goal. Each task is equivalent to a responsibility for growth that individuals assume in their own development. The developmental tasks confronting middle-aged and aging persons are especially useful in a study of grandparents rearing grandchildren. Duvall referred to the middle-aged parents and the aging family members within the life cycle, with developmental tasks specific to each stage.

The middle years of the family life cycle as defined by Duvall (1977) begin with the departure of the last child from the home and continue until retirement or death of a spouse. The stages are not clearly delineated. The length of this stage varies with a child leaving the home later than anticipated or with an early retirement of the spouse. Briefly outlined, the developmental tasks of this stage of the family life cycle are:

1. Providing for healthy well-being.
2. Allocating resources for present and future needs.
3. Adapting to complimentary roles.
4. Undertaking appropriate social roles.
5. Assuring marital satisfaction.
6. Enlarging the family circle.
7. Participating in life outside the home.
8. Affirming central values of life.

Family development continues through the final stage of the family life cycle. Duvall referred to the aging family member stage which begins with retirement, includes loss of the first spouse, and ends with death of the last spouse. Most older couples continue during the last stage of the family life cycle and carry out the following developmental tasks:

1. Making appropriate living arrangements as couple ages.
 2. Living on retirement income.
-

3. Maintaining satisfactory daily routines.
4. Maintaining physical and mental health.
5. Continuing marital relationship.
6. Keeping in touch with family members.
7. Remaining involved and active.
8. Finding meanings and reasons for life.

Researchers in adult development agree that when grandparents assume the role of parenting their grandchildren, developmental tasks and activities are interrupted (Levinson, 1978; Neugarten, 1964). Adults in the grandparent years look forward to leisurely times as well as enjoying grandchildren (Levinson, 1978). Jackson (1980) found when adults are free from care of their own children, time is often spent sleeping, walking, or simply spending time with friends.

Duvall (1977) suggested that there are times when family members find it easy to support one another and other times when members may be in conflict. One basis for lack of support is that one or more members may be involved in their own critical developmental tasks and thus may be unable to provide additional support for another member. Individuals need to complete transitional periods in order to proceed to the next stage of life. Foundations must be laid if the next step is to be successful.

As individuals develop, demands may be placed on family members forcing changes in families. The pressures force families to pull together and meet the challenge. Duvall (1977) pointed out that each new crisis means new adaptations are required and new responsibilities acquired. New opportunities also emerge at each stage. The outcomes of this process, however, do not always have positive effects on family members, as the study of grandparents reveals.

Different cultures also make different demands on people. Society has expectations for its members to conform to certain behaviors. Developmental tasks may

or may not be achieved at times appropriate for that culture, but each culture defines its tasks.

Middle-aged parents may occupy several positions within a family. Both younger and older family members may look to them for support. At the same time, children move out of the home creating the “empty nest” stage of the life cycle (Duvall, 1977, p. 355). If this stage arrives at the expected time it poses little in the way of a crisis, since it is a predictable occurrence. If illness or death of a family member occurs and the stage ends early or the stage is prolonged, for example by a child who remains at home, a crisis may be precipitated.

While aging family members continue to be members of families, successful aging is dependent on continued activity and less responsibility, as the primary tasks become adjustment to the aging process and finding renewed meaning in life. For many of the aging, critical or chronic illness reduces physical strength and stretches finances. The realities of aging such as decreased vision, hearing, and strength often add to the anxiety of the elderly.

Duvall (1977) also proposed that there are critical periods in family development. Family crises are more apt to occur with the (a) loss of one or more family members, (b) the addition of one or more family members, (c) the loss of face or status of a member or the unit, or (d) a combination of any of the above. This insight seems particularly applicable to grandparents rearing grandchildren, since a combination of the above factors are at work. The crises are not isolated in individuals, but are felt throughout the family. Also, families with limited resources weather the crises less well than those with resources.

Poor Black Families

Different developmental tasks may exist for members within different subcultures. The tasks described by Duvall (1977) are most appropriate when used to

study the white, middle class family, but may be used as a general framework to study families from other sub-cultures. Hines (1980) emphasized the increasing number of elderly, middle-aged women responsible for children, many of them black. Given the high percentage of black grandchildren being reared by grandparents, the life cycle of the black family, particularly the poor black family, deserves additional consideration.

Poor black families have concerns different from white, middle class families. These families depend on various agencies for assistance with housing, food, family planning, and medical benefits. According to Hines (1980), their life cycle seems to be a series of crises. Often their ability to adapt is pushed to the limit, even though they are faced with problems similar to those faced by white families with limited resources. The success of these black families and their survival is often dependent upon the availability of assistance and resources from others in the community. Stress is high in poor black families and change is experienced frequently as a result of the multiple demands. Additionally, the effects of a lifetime of poverty may mean later life is reached with severe medical problems which further decrease the ability to meet daily tasks (Minkler & Roe, 1993).

Hines observed four characteristics in the life cycles of poor black families:

1. The life cycle is shortened with transitions less clearly defined, thus there is insufficient time to complete tasks of each stage before moving to the next stage.
2. Households are frequently headed by females and are of the extended type, creating additional economic problems.
3. Life cycles include many unpredictable life events including death of family members, imprisonment, and alcohol and drug addiction which, along with poverty, further disrupt normal development and increase conflict.
4. Since few resources are available, there is a greater need to rely on governmental agencies to meet basic needs.

In contrast to the middle-class families, senior status for poor black people does not mean fewer responsibilities and a shift to retirement issues. Instead, it is often necessary to continue working in order to make ends meet (Hines, 1980). There may not be time for grandparents to live alone because three or four generations often live together due to economic pressures. Often a daughter who has a baby may be unable to assume parenting responsibilities. Roles become reversed. The health of a grandmother caring for generations of children may fail; yet, that grandmother has a continued obligation to provide for family members. A woman in this situation desperately needs support with finances and from social networks.

The Support Group Concept

Support or self-help groups outside of the original 12-step programs of Alcoholics Anonymous and other addictions are a fairly new phenomenon. Members of support or self help groups discuss common concerns or problems and find strength through group cohesion and sharing of experiences. The acceptance within the group occurs during sharing when members discover others have the same problems, thus relieving the sense of personal isolation experienced by people facing seemingly overwhelming problems. Well-being and health promotion may be important benefits to participants of a support group. The relationship of mind to body and the psychological support received from the group may short circuit the development of physical illnesses (Jacobs & Goodman, 1989). For this reason, many health maintenance organizations (HMOs) have begun to establish support groups.

Support groups differ from therapy groups. They are traditionally self governing, with the participants controlling the group rather than investing control in an external professional, although some support groups established by HMOs or other organizations may provide professional facilitators. People may choose to attend a group meeting when their problems or concerns become too much to bear and additional help is

necessary. The person may decide to make changes or gather additional information to cope more effectively with daily living. People who might not consider professional guidance may be willing to participate for weeks or months in an ongoing support group (Jacobs & Goodman, 1989).

Review of the Literature

In the approximately 40 thousand years organized human culture has existed, children have typically been raised in tribes, clans, and networks of kin (Kornhaber & Woodward, 1985). Grandparenthood is not a new phenomenon. However, until the turn of the century shorter life spans meant that relatively few grandparents lived to know their grandchildren. Later in the 20th century, changes within the structure of the family such as more single parents and both parents working increased responsibilities for many grandparents. Sociologists and psychologists have begun to examine the changing roles of grandparents in relation to their families. While the emphasis in the past has been on children and parents in families, some research now is focusing on the often neglected and overlooked caretaker--the grandparent.

Role of Grandparents

The role of the grandparent does not have a clear definition for contemporary American families. Many more grandparents are present today than just a few decades ago because many people live longer. In the 1920s only one of four grandparents was likely to be alive by the time the grandchild was 15 years of age (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986). In contrast, most adults today are alive throughout their grandchildren's childhoods.

In some cultures grandparents have been important in the socialization of the children, and were either part-time or full-time caretakers. In the Mexican-American tradition, distinct patterns have evolved with more children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren having grandparents as a source of social support. Bengtson and

Robertson (1985) report that Mexican-Americans experienced greater satisfaction with contacts with grandchildren than black and white grandparents. In terms of possible intergenerational living arrangements, over 50% of Mexican-Americans reported they would like to live with a child, compared to only 10% of the blacks and 4% of the whites (Bengtson & Robertson, 1985).

Until recently grandparents were seldom mentioned in the literature on family life. Hagestad (1985) obtained information on grandparenthood in the past from Good Housekeeping magazines. In the 1880s grandmother was never pictured as dealing with basic tasks of everyday family life, and grandparents were assumed to be old and peripheral. In the 1940s and 1950s the focus was on the nuclear family and marital relationships, with grandparents often portrayed as engaging in meddlesome behavior that could harm both their own children and their grandchildren. Prior to the 1960s the research literature portrayed grandparents as either isolated or problematic to families. However, Cherlin and Furstenberg (1986) noted that increased divorce and remarriage rates in the early 1960s prompted scholars to study the role of grandparents who were now seen as maintaining kinship ties from generation to generation. With a variety of family styles being studied during these years, grandparents were now viewed as playing vital roles in enriching the lives of the grandchildren (Kornhaber & Woodward, 1985). Television series portrayed extended families with strong, loving grandparents. Grandparents' Day was acknowledged in 1976 as a national day of recognition, reflecting the growing number of older people, many of them grandparents.

Grandparenthood presumably has an ascribed status within the family system, but is not always accompanied by an expected role behavior (George, 1980). Researchers suggest role performance is often impeded by distance and economics (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Neugarten & Weinstein, 1964). Grandparents are seen as protectors of their grandchildren and as sources of support in reserve according to Cherlin and

Furstenberg (1986). In this sense, grandparents act as an insurance policy, a safeguard that may not have to be used.

Kornhaber and Woodward (1985) proposed the idea that grandparents help make parents more understandable for the children. Grandparents may think of themselves as an important form of protection for the young, acting as translators and arbitrators. Similarly, Bengtson and Robertson (1985) noted that grandparents act as family monitors, observing relationships and registering changes. This role might be overlooked, but when discussing grandparenthood as a primary intergenerational role its significance becomes more apparent (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986). Troll (1985) summarized the role of grandparents by suggesting they are often there if needed and serve a diversity of functions. Current social trends such as increased divorce and single adolescent parenthood have activated grandparents to be available or on call. Hagestad (1985) recognized the ambiguities grandparents face in a world so focused on *doing* when their the key function is to provide a comforting presence by simply *being there*. This elusive role of the grandparent is captured by Hagestad (1985). In this view grandparents function as:

symbols of connectedness within and across lives, people who can listen and have the time to do so, reserves of time, help, and attention, links to known and unknown pasts, and people who are sufficiently varied, flexible, and complex to defy easy categories and clear-cut roles. (p. 42)

Thus, grandparenthood is seen as an intergenerational phenomenon essential to family continuity and connectedness (Hagestad, 1985; Kornhaber & Woodward, 1985).

Two studies by Johnson examining the roles of grandparents are significant. In 1983 Johnson studied the chronological age of the grandmother and how age affected her relationship with her grandchildren. She found older grandmothers less family-oriented than younger grandmothers. Older grandmothers had significantly less contact with the grandchildren.

The second study by Johnson (1985) considered the role of grandparents when the parents divorce. With the frequency of divorce and remarriage, grandparents were being recognized as an increasingly important stabilizing force in the family. Cherlin and Furstenberg (1986) agreed the role assumed by the grandparent was likely to be based on personal qualities. Johnson (1985) identified factors influencing grandparents' actions such as their age, kinship relationships (maternal or paternal), as well other commitments or affiliations.

Role of Black Grandmothers

Cherlin and Furstenberg (1986) refer to the black grandmothers as those who do "kin keeping," whereas the black grandfathers were less involved with kin (p. 123). However, black grandparents were more likely to take on parent-like roles with the grandchildren. In fact, black grandparenting may represent the last holdout of a form of grandparenting in which companionship can sometimes take a back seat to authority (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986).

The role of the black grandmother as surrogate parent in African-American extended families has been recognized for a long time (Burton & Dilworth-Anderson, 1991). As far back as slavery and life on the plantations, grandmothers were seen as the dominant figures. This status reflected wisdom, strength, and leadership. Martin and Martin (1978) portrayed the extended black family in two categories: a "pathology-disorganization" perspective showing the family as unstable and deviant, and a "strength-resiliency" perspective emphasizing ability to adapt and do well in spite of adverse conditions (p. 103). These authors believed that too many studies of the black family have focused on its weaknesses or faults rather than on why it has survived through so many generations. A description of the extended family with its strengths and weaknesses might help correct the picture. The extended family is by no means exclusive to black culture, but it does appear the black family has shown strong kinship

bonds and adaptability of family roles, often as a result of the grandmother role. Franklin (1989) noted that the black grandmother has been considered the “guardian of the generation” who has not ceased to watch over the destiny of her family (p. 71). She has also been referred to as the one with domestic responsibility who often is the provider. Martin and Martin (1978) characterized the black grandmother as the organizer of the family.

Grandfathers

Why does one read and hear more about the grandmother than the grandfather? Grandfathers did have a different role; however, both were involved in the care of the family. Martin and Martin (1978) wrote about the black grandfather as the stabilizer who provided for the family and regulated moral behavior and discipline. He was closer to the outside world and the workplace, whereas the grandmother was in the home.

Cherlin and Furstenberg (1986) studied the role of grandparents in contemporary families and found grandfathers less willing to talk about the grandchildren, possibly confirming less involvement with the kin. The authors indicated grandfathers lacked emotional expression with regard to grandchildren; however, they were more apt to take part in activities, especially with the grandsons. Hagestad (1985) found an avoidance of topics more common in families where grandfathers were interviewed. Grandchild and grandfather seemed to be trying to avoid intergenerational conflict, and would admit to being careful about what was said. The author particularly noted this careful treatment of topics between grandfather and granddaughter. Grandfathers saw themselves as advisors to young men. Interpersonal issues were considered more the domain of the grandmother, whereas grandfathers were more an authority and spokesperson with regard to touchy subjects such as race relations, social policy, and sex roles.

Effect of a Parental Drug Problem on Grandparenthood

Most grandparents do not play a major role in rearing grandchildren. Ordinarily, grandparents attempt to balance a desire for an emotionally satisfactory relationship with

their grandchildren against a wish to lead more independent lives (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986). According to Poe (1991), children were placed with grandparents for the following reasons: parental neglect or abandonment of children, physical and/or sexual abuse of the children by the parent, death of parents by accident or illness, parental involvement with alcohol or other drugs, and incarceration of the parents.

Grandmothers who now assume the role of caregiver as a consequence of a daughter's teenage pregnancy or drug addiction may have different reactions than those who cared for grandchildren in order that the parents might finish school, get a job, or move to another area (Burton & Dilworth-Anderson, 1991). Grandmothers interviewed by Minkler and Roe (1993, p. 6) expressed anger, resentment, and depression over the prospect of "second-time-around" parenthood under these circumstances.

The cocaine epidemic which has spread from upper middle class to low-income communities has directly affected grandparents, particularly grandmothers, who now find themselves caring for their grandchildren. This "skipped generation" family is one in which the parents are absent and grandparents are rearing the children (Minkler & Roe, 1993, p. 3). These caregivers have been brought to the public's attention by human interest stories describing the difficulty and pain of this situation (Creighton, 1991; Monson, 1990).

Poe (1991) described the ways grandparents found themselves caring for the children who had been abused and neglected. Minkler and Roe (1993) interviewed 71 grandparents to find children that had been left with the grandparents for a few hours. In many cases these few hours turned into weeks and months. Occasionally grandmothers agreed to care for the children. Some grandmothers found children neglected or literally abandoned by parents. These children's parents were using money obtained by selling food stamps and diapers to spend days in a crack house. Child protective services were frequently involved in such cases, and grandmothers often would take the children to

avoid foster placement. Incarceration of a parent for drug related crimes remains a primary reason why grandparents are caring for children. Occasionally children were born while the mother was in prison. Such experiences are not pleasant for any of the parties involved.

A number of the children being reared by grandparents may have been prenatally exposed to drugs. As these children enter school the medical, behavioral, and learning disabilities become more apparent, and the problem is further complicated by the labeling of these children as “crack babies” or “drug babies” (Barth, 1991, p. 130; DeStephano Lewis, Bennett, & Hellinger Schmeder, 1989). Adding to the grandparents’ stress are the particular characteristics of babies exposed to cocaine in the uterus. Lewis (1992) reported that these often premature babies had low birth weights, frequent startle reactions and tremors, irritability, and poor eating and sleeping patterns. Meeting the needs of these special babies is exhausting, especially when considering the combination of the grandparents’ age and the additional demands placed upon them.

The physical and emotional health of grandparents providing care for their grandchildren within the crack epidemic was studied by Minkler, Roe, and Price (1992). The study included a wide range of health findings of the caregivers and raised important considerations for health care workers involved in care of the grandparents. The tendency was for grandmothers interviewed to generally rate health as good, but with more questioning, a high frequency of depression, exhaustion, and loneliness was revealed.

Hagestad (1985) and Burton and Bengtson (1985) proposed the concept of the role of grandparenthood being complicated by many responsibilities. Such overload occurs when the demands of parenting or grandparenting plus those of work or care of other family members become too great. Grandparenthood is considered a phenomenon of middle and old age since this period of time extends for many more years than at the

turn of the century (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986). Occasionally the grandmother overlaps parenting of her own offspring with grandparenting an older child's baby. Likewise, grandparents may be caring for their own parent in the same dwelling, sometimes with four generations living together. Today most parents are likely to have finished rearing their children before any grandchildren are born; thus, fewer family roles compete for time and attention. Grandparents usually find themselves dealing with those family members who cause stress for the family. With the possibility of more than one of the grandparent's children being involved in the drug epidemic, the social support system that should have been available to a caregiving grandmother may have been disrupted (Minkler & Roe, 1993).

Summary

Grandparents live longer and because of increased divorce and alcohol and drug use, grandparents more frequently have responsibility of rearing grandchildren. In addition to the stresses this produces, other conflicts are brought about by the interference of the developmental tasks people of grandparent age need to complete before moving to the next stage in the life cycle. In effect, grandparents responsible for rearing their grandchildren are unable to progress beyond earlier life roles or are forced to resume those life roles. In particular, the combination of additional factors affecting the poor black families such as limited resources and frequent reliance on agencies for food and shelter further increases responsibilities and stress for those rearing grandchildren. Support groups have begun to serve as an outlet and source of strength through the sharing of experiences for grandparents rearing grandchildren, thus allowing grandparents to care for themselves as well as their grandchildren.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The impact of rearing grandchildren as perceived by grandparents is examined in this exploratory descriptive pilot study. The grandparents who volunteered to participate in the interviews for this study were members of a school district sponsored grandparents-rearing-grandchildren support group.

The Sample

Participants included grandparents of pre-school, elementary, and high school age grandchildren in a Northern California community of 40,000 people. The support group in which these grandparents participated met twice a month at one of the local elementary schools. The majority of participants had attended meetings since October, 1991. The population from which this particular sample of grandparents was drawn cannot be specified. The number of eligible grandparents in the community remains a mystery. How many grandparents might have been available to participate and how many would actually agree to participate in an interview on such a delicate subject cannot be determined. Grandparents in the support group were informed about the study early in 1993. Because of the researcher's involvement with the grandparents as leader of the grandparents' support group, it was of great importance not to disrupt the atmosphere of trust that had been achieved by almost two years of group activity.

Human Subjects Approval

San Jose State University's Human Subjects Institutional Review Board gave approval for the progress and assessment procedures used in this study (see Appendix A). Because of the sensitive nature of the interviews, confidentiality of the subjects was

maintained and names were not used with any data. Permission and support for the current study were obtained from the public school district in a Northern California community (see Appendix B). Lenora M. Poe gave the researcher permission to replicate her study, Black Grandparents as Parents (see Appendix C). Consent for participation in the study was obtained through a consent letter which was read, discussed, and signed by the grandparent and the researcher at the time of the interview (see Appendix D).

Instrument

The general interview guidelines were developed by Poe (1991), whose dissertation is partially replicated in this study. In Poe's study the interview questions were used primarily as a guide (see Appendix E). Poe's grandparents were encouraged to discuss any issues which came to mind. The guidelines served as a basis for the interviews in Poe's study and for open-ended discussions within the support group meetings of Poe's study.

In this study the interview was conducted in two parts. During the first part basic demographic information was collected. During the second part content questions about grandparents rearing grandchildren were asked.

Demographic questions were asked of each of the participants at the beginning of the interviews (see Appendix F). This information included: age, sex, marital status, number of children, years of education, work status, occupation, number of grandchildren being parented, as well as the age(s) and living arrangements of the parent of the child. Additional questions asked about the number of people living in the household, and if anyone else had cared for the grandchildren when they were small.

The interview guidelines developed by Poe (1991) were the first 4 questions used in this study. After working with these first 4 questions and recognizing the difficulty of caring for grandchildren, the researcher added questions 5, 6, 7, and 8. The purpose of

these questions was to ascertain how life really was for each grandparent involved in the study. Thus, the current interview consisted of 8 open-ended questions (see Appendix E). Six of the 8 questions incorporated subquestions relating to the topic; the remaining two did not.

Question 1 asked about the circumstances leading to placement of the grandchild with the grandparents. The subquestion (1.1) asked the specific time or occasion the grandparent realized placement was permanent.

Question 2 asked about the impact of placement upon the grandparent's life and included specific probes concerning impact upon health, independence, future goals, social life, leisure time, and peer relationships of the grandparent. The first subquestion (2.1) asked grandparents to describe any major changes made since assuming the parental role for the grandchild. The second subquestion (2.2) asked about any sacrifices made since becoming the caretaker of the grandchild. The third subquestion (2.3) asked about the specific benefits gained by having grandchildren with the grandparent. The fourth subquestion (2.4) asked for the overall feelings about becoming primary caretaker, including what the grandparent liked most and least.

Question 3 asked about the relationships of the grandparents with their own children (the parents), distinguishing between before and after parenting the grandchildren. In the first subquestion (3.1) grandparents were asked about the parent's role in parenting. The second subquestion (3.2) asked if any financial support was provided by the parent. The third subquestion (3.3) asked about areas of conflict between grandparent and parent.

Question 4 asked what individuals, groups, or other resources had been most helpful and how such help, if any, had been provided. The subquestion (4.1) asked ways specific individuals or groups could be more helpful to the grandparents.

Question 5 asked the reason for attending support group. The first subquestion

(5.1) asked what the grandparent expected from the group. The second subquestion (5.2) asked what actual outcomes developed from attending group.

Question 6 asked the grandparents what it was that kept them going. Question 7 asked about emotional responses to the situation, and specifically, if they cried. Question 8 asked for any further comments or concerns that were important to share with the researcher.

Data Collection

The interviews were held in the participants' homes or at the school where the support group met. Interviews were kept separate from the support group meetings and members continued to attend meetings. During the data collection phase one grandparent returned the grandchild to the parent, but continued to participate in the support group. No one came forth to volunteer for the study as a result of the initial announcement. After speaking with grandparents individually, a number of grandparents agreed to participate. This agreement indicated a willingness to participate in the 2 to 3 hour individual interviews. The interview focused on experiences and responsibilities relating to the parental role grandparents had assumed with their grandchildren. At the completion of the interview, \$15 was given to each grandparent. The money was given in appreciation for the time these grandparents gave to the study.

Analysis Procedure

All information discussed in this study was provided during the interviews with the grandparents. This information revealed how these grandparents' lives were affected by assuming the parental role for their grandchildren. In this process grandparents shared personal information about their lives, relationships with their children and grandchildren, events that led to their taking primary responsibility for the grandchildren, and how their lives were impacted as a result. Qualitative assessment was most appropriate for analyzing this type of information. Open-ended, semi-structured

interviews permitted full expression by the grandparents.

Poe (1991) identified core themes using grounded theory analysis. The interview guidelines were not discussed individually; rather, themes were explored using the interview material throughout the process. The first theme identified by Poe was the grandparent's awareness of their child's use of drugs. The second theme centered on the burden of rearing grandchildren. The third theme concerned major losses experienced by the grandparents. These themes were used in the content analysis described below.

After an initial analysis of the interview material, the researcher realized that additional themes beyond those identified by Poe were contained in the responses. Thus the following themes were also used in the data analysis for this study. The fourth theme was the grandparents' use of drugs. The fifth theme was information about the parents of the children whom grandparents are now rearing. The sixth theme was the hyperactivity of the grandchildren. The seventh theme was the response of grief and detachment of the grandparents.

In order to analyze the qualitative content of the interview material an interview summary sheet was developed (see Appendix G). The headings for the vertical columns represented the 8 interview questions, numbers 1-4 as written by Poe and numbers 5-8 as derived by this researcher. The headings for the horizontal rows represent the 11 grandparents interviewed.

Participant's comments on the summary sheet were read and each discrete item of information was recorded (usually in brief, summary form) in the appropriate cell (respondent by theme). When this analytical process was completed it was possible to summarize (across participants) the responses to each question as well as the number of grandparents who had responded to each. The results of this content analysis are presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

Findings will be presented in the following three sections: (a) demographic characteristics of the sample, (b) interview responses by order of questions, and (c) thematic analysis. Thematic analysis includes first, themes identified by Poe (1991), and second, additional themes identified by the researcher.

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

The sample of eleven grandparents included 9 grandmothers and 2 grandfathers ($N=11$). Ages ranged from 47 to 67 years of age, with the average age of 58 years. Six of the 11 participants were black. Three were white, and one each was Hispanic and Pacific Islander.

Of the 11 participants, seven were married with the spouse living in the home, and one had a live-in partner. Two grandparents were divorced and one was separated. Although eight of the 11 grandparents had a spouse, only six spouses were involved in rearing the grandchildren.

The education level of the participants ranged from completion of the fifth grade to an earned Master's degree. One grandmother obtained her high school diploma four years ago in order to qualify for a job. Six of 11 grandparents were employed, one was retired, and four were homemakers. One grandparent lived in a rented apartment and the other ten were homeowners.

Five of the grandparents were rearing one grandchild. Three were caring for two grandchildren. One grandmother was rearing a grandson and a great-grandson. Two grandparents had three and four grandchildren respectively. While two of the 11 grandparents were rearing their sons' children, the majority were rearing their

daughters' children. None of the children's parents lived in the home with the grandparents, although three have lived in their homes for brief periods of time. Two grandmothers did not know the whereabouts of their daughters. Five of the parents have been in jail during the past year.

Interview Responses by Order of Questions

The presentation of the findings follows the interview questions beginning with question 1 and proceeding through the 8 questions (see Appendix E). Discussion of the themes identified by Poe and those identified by this researcher are presented following interview responses.

Question 1

The first interview question asked about circumstances leading to placement of the grandchild with the grandparent. Seven of 11 grandparents assumed care for grandchildren as a direct result of alcohol or other drug use by one or both parents. Of the remaining 4 grandparents, one was reluctant to state that alcohol or other drug use had been a factor contributing to the grandchildren living with grandparent. One stated "If I know everything I will panic." Another grandmother said, "Unless she tells me, I don't ask." The last grandparent did not refer to alcohol or other drugs in relation to placement of the grandchild.

With regard to placement, one grandparent commented, "I knew a long time ago if my daughter got pregnant I'd be taking care of them babies. She wasn't thinking about the kids, just the welfare check." Three grandparents knew prior to the birth of the baby that the baby would be living with the grandparent soon after being born. One grandmother said the mother did not want to take care of the baby. "She doesn't want her and she told her daughter this," referring to a recent unsuccessful visit the granddaughter made to the mother.

Subquestion 1.1

This subquestion asked when grandparents knew placement was permanent. Seven of 11 grandparents recognized the situation was permanent when their grandchildren were infants. One grandmother threw up her hands, saying she did not see any other arrangement was possible, "For my peace of mind I wanted to see how the baby was." Thus the grandmother visited the new grandchild and found that the same diapers had been worn all day and that the baby had a "raw rash." "I quit work." Three of 11 considered placement temporary even after the grandchildren had lived with the grandparents eight years. One grandparent summarized the topic of placement by saying "I'll do it until I can't do it no more."

Question 2

This question asked grandparents about the impact on their lives of taking responsibility for rearing grandchildren. Responses ranged from little impact to "turned my life inside out."

Eight of the 11 participants expressed great changes in their lives as a result of placement of the grandchildren. Two admitted "some changes" had occurred, and one said "not many changes" with the grandchildren living in the home. Conversely, one grandmother described a two week depression when mother and grandchild moved out of the home and into their own apartment. The grandmother worried the mother would "yell" at the boy and wondered if the mother was being good to him.

Question 2 assessed how the placement affected several specific aspects of the grandparents' lives. The areas covered were health, independence, future goals, social life, leisure time, and peer relationships.

This question asked grandparents about their health. Nine of 11 grandparents experienced health problems possibly caused or exacerbated by having to care for grandchildren. Two grandmothers denied any health problems associated with

responsibility for grandchildren. One grandfather did not report health problems. However, his wife, the actual caretaker of the children, did have problems with her health.

General health problems included hypertension, increased respiratory infections, weight gain (“got fat in the rocking chair”), increased stress, sleeping and eating difficulties, “squeezing” of the chest, arthritis, nervousness, depression, ulcers, and polyps. Some of the problems became more severe due to the grandparents’ inability to keep their own doctors’ appointments as a result of their grandchildren’s needs. One woman confessed to having chest pains and not seeing the doctor because she had no insurance. Every grandparent admitted being tired. One commented, “Somedays I feel so depressed and useless, like I want to explode. It’s not easy to have bad health. It works on you physically and mentally.” The one grandparent who denied health problems said she was “...always working and always busy and don’t sit still to think about it.”

This question asked grandparents about their independence. Six of the 11 participants expressed having no independence, while others either took the child with them wherever they went or made plans that would accommodate a child. One grandmother denied that her independence had been affected. Other grandparents talked about “rushing around” to be home for the children and available for calls from the school. One grandmother shared these feelings when asked about her independence: “I’ve never been left alone. How do I know what it is? I am afraid if I didn’t have the children what would I do? It is hard to talk about something you don’t know anything about.”

This question asked grandparents about future goals. Nine of 11 grandparents stated rearing grandchildren interrupted plans for the future. “You can forget the plans.” Plans to travel, retire early, or move to a new location were reduced to simple

“day to day” arrangements. “I’m so busy today to tomorrow...future goals are out of my hands...hard to determine.” Grandparents spoke of not knowing what was next or who might need help. Plans include continuing to be available for the family. “I thought things would be better. Whatever comes it comes.” One grandmother sighed and admitted she and her husband looked forward to time with just the two of them. The only way out, according to another grandmother, was to win the \$10 million lottery.

This question asked grandparents about their social lives. Seven of the 11 grandparents did not think their social life was affected by the presence of the grandchildren. A circle of friends helped one grandparent. Church provided child care allowing for socialization and respite for another grandparent. One grandmother made entertainment plans such as movies according to what was appropriate for the grandchildren. The grandmother of two children commented, “[I do] not like people around morning, noon, and night, rather, [I like] just sitting down, reading, and relaxing.” One grandmother said she could go out if she wanted, but she preferred being home with the grandchildren. The social life of the remaining four was “cut off right there [I] don’t have a social life.” One grandparent remembered all the activities she use to be involved in and said, “If I’d never done all those things I’d be unhappy. Now the four of us do things together.”

This question asked grandparents about leisure time. Three of the 11 grandparents continued to pursue hobbies such as workshops and ceramics, while one said, “We just go.” One grandmother said, “It’s hard to play. I’m old. Some nights I am even too tired to read.” Another grandmother spoke for many of the grandparents by saying:

Even when I go walking for an hour, I am still thinking about him [grandchild] at home. I don’t have to do what he wants to do, but he comes first. My

husband and I don't come first yet, except when he [grandchild] sleeps.

This question asked grandparents about peer relationships. All 11 grandparents experienced the loss of friends. Three of the 11 grandparents had close friends who had died. One grandmother recalled that she had a friend, now deceased, who had refused to care for her grandchildren. Two of the 11 grandparents do not see "old friends who have no kids left in the home." Two of 11 grandparents had no friends with whom to talk but the grandparents were from large families who spent time together. One grandparent commented, "You find out who your friends are when you are sick and busy and not able to get up and go like before having grandchildren."

Another grandmother said her lady friends were "on hold," and she would not take her grandchildren to their homes because their houses were "all fixed up." She referred to her home as "early Halloween" since the grandchildren lived there. Shaking her head she continued with an anecdote relating to the time before grandchildren lived with her. In restaurants, she and her friend would move to another table if there were children seated near their table. "I probably deserve what I am getting now. Did I ever eat crow."

Subquestion 2.1

This subquestion asked grandparents to describe any major changes made since assuming the parental role for the grandchild. One grandparent was living with four generations under one roof. Four of the 11 grandparents had to move to a larger home or build onto the existing home. One grandmother mentioned that having a baby in the home again was a tremendous change. Seven of the 11 participants contributed comments such as "everything stopped," and "we're all tied up now." One grandmother answered, "Nothing is like it use to be. There is no routine to my life. I can't get anything done. I have used up all my money and cannot think about the future."

Subquestion 2.2

This subquestion asked grandparents what, if any, sacrifices were made when assuming primary caretaking role for grandchildren. Eight of 11 grandparents sacrificed jobs, while one of the 11 referred to a “thirst for education” that has never been satisfied. Six of 11 participants missed time for themselves and for other grandchildren. One grandmother was “...stopped in my tracks. I want to be where I can be free.” Three of 11 grandparents referred to less time with the spouse. One husband thought, according to the grandmother, he had been “put on the back burner.” The grandmother admitted a strain on their relationship. In fact, her husband wanted their daughter to take their grandson out of the home to allow more time for grandparents to be together again. One grandmother expressed the sacrifices this way:

I was going to call it a day at 80 years old. What could I say if the kids were left to be damaged, injured, or hurt, and I did nothing. Could I meet my maker? Consider the quality of lives for little helpless human beings who did not ask for any of this. I used to say I would never raise my grandchildren.

Subquestion 2.3

This subquestion asked grandparents what the main benefits were, if any, of assuming care of the grandchildren. Seven of 11 grandparents stated the main benefit of the situation was being with the grandchildren. Three of 11 said it would have been much different for the grandchildren if other arrangements had been made. Two of 11 felt good about being there for their grandchildren. The grandchildren would know they had someone who cared about them. One grandmother mentioned the “hugs and squeezes” as the benefit derived from having her grandchildren living with her. Two of 11 grandparents liked having the company of the grandchildren.

Subquestion 2.4

This subquestion asked grandparents about their overall feelings--what they liked most and liked least about rearing grandchildren. Five of the 11 participants spoke positively about having grandchildren living with them. Typical comments were “feeling young, experiencing family closeness, working together, and enjoying doing things for the grandchildren.” One grandmother stated, “It’s fun together...tears and laughter, when the deal go down we’re all related,” indicating whatever happens, they are family. One grandmother recalled her own past saying “I am like my grandma—busy little black woman always doing something.”

Two of 11 grandparents were indifferent about the experience. One stated parenting skills had improved, “I did not have [skills] with my own kids.” This same grandparent said it was easier to say, “I’m sorry I hurt your feelings.” Improved communication with the grandchildren and the ability to express one’s self were benefits gained by the grandparent. Another grandmother stated the children were “probably better with me. You have pull and parts of a mom even if you are a gram.” This grandmother said she had authority similiar to the mother’s, even though she is the grandmother. Another grandparent stated time restrictions and loss of her grandchild’s dad (her son) were the hardest feelings about becoming the grandchild’s caretaker. One grandparent stated being primary caretaker “24 hours a day” was the least enjoyable part. She continued:

I am more drug out and tired and can’t meet demands and am not efficient on my job, in my home, or even cooking. I am not doing one thing well. I use to cross every T and dot every I. I can’t believe I am living like this.

Question 3

This question asked about relationships with their own children, both before and after they assumed care of the grandchildren. None of the 11 participants expressed a

strong relationship with their biological child. Six of 11 stated the relationship was about the same, before and after. One grandmother stated the relationship with her own daughter was closer before the birth of the grandchildren. The relationship improved again after mother and child moved from the home and into their own apartment. Three of 11 grandparents did admit a slight improvement in the relationship after the grandparent assumed care of the grandchildren. One grandparent thought the relationship was “O.K.” until “stealing, lying, and drugs came out.” The grandmother had the grandchild by this time. One grandparent referred to the relationship as “outrageous, even when the child was small. I still love my daughter, but she’s done bad things to me and the family. She done me wrong. My son is my right hand.”

One daughter use to tell her mother, “Send money, but stay home.” Since grandchildren, the relationship has improved slightly. The daughter is living in another state. This grandmother recalled the years she reared her own children and admitted she, “could have practiced ‘tough love’ but my daughter would have died.” One grandparent who did not express many feelings regarding the relationship between self and child did say “I feel as close as a person could with a grown child who is going to leave home anyway. She could have stayed at home. It would be O.K. with me.” Another grandparent asked the researcher, “When do you give up on your own children? You have to draw lines and set expectations, but you are still there.”

Subquestion 3.1

The subquestion asked if parents shared the parenting responsibility for their children. None of the 11 grandparents had assistance with parenting of the grandchildren from the parents. The daughter of one grandparent mentioned taking her child, and the grandmother reacted by saying, “You don’t have a pot to piss in, a

car to ride in. Where will you take your daughter? Some sleezebag hotel with your friends?” One grandparent stated the roles were reversed. The parent did things with the grandchild that the grandparent would like to be doing, such as going shopping and on pleasurable trips.

Subquestion 3.2

The subquestion asked if parents provided financial support for their children. One parent had purchased clothing and food one time. Other comments included: (a) they do the best they can, (b) she is saving money for the grandchild, and (c) she never had the where-with-all to do so. Another grandmother said her son was embarrassed he could not provide for his children. One grandparent stated if she got to her daughter at the right time the daughter would give her some money for the grandson. She continued by saying, “I need to get home before the mail. It’s the first of the month and the check is coming. If she gets there first, the money is gone.” Another grandparent answered, “The father is on the run and we are just happy if the mother can keep her life together.”

Subquestion 3.3

This subquestion asked what areas of conflict existed between grandparents and their own children. Four of the 11 participants responded their other children (who were rearing their own children) resented the time and attention (“spoiling”) given these grandchildren, as well as the time the son or daughter consumed. Three of the 11 grandparents asked the grandchild’s parent to “straighten up, for the child’s sake.” Another type of conflict occurred when the parent “gives in” to the wishes of the children and the grandparent “can’t” because she will be caring for the children when the mother or father leaves. Two of 11 grandparents asked who would take care of the grandchildren if anything happened to the them.

Question 4

The question asked grandparents to identify individuals, groups, or

organizations who have been most helpful as they have assumed responsibility for grandchildren. Five of 11 participants were unable to name any person or group. Two of 11 grandparents stated that their sons had been most helpful. One named the doctor and one named “friends” as most helpful and supportive. Another grandparent said social services had been helpful by providing financial support. One grandparent said, “I am the only person in the family structure who does anything.”

Subquestion 4.1

The question asked grandparents what individuals or groups could be more helpful and were there specific ways they could be supportive. Four of 11 grandparents asked that the Department of Social Services (DSS) “be friendly and helpful.” Two grandparents asked that DSS “have proper information and shorter forms available as grandparents’ incomes need to be supplemented.” One grandparent asked for guidance in disciplining grandchildren. Another grandmother asked lawyers to be more available, less difficult, and less expensive. A grandmother stated the following:

Society looks at my alcohol use, my habits, my environment. Children come in their own separate package. Collectively we can change the system, but not alone. Funding is imperative. We need to throw out rules and deal with each individual. Schools need to meet needs of these children.

Two of the 11 grandparents suggested alternative ways to deal with people in the criminal justice system, asking if “punishment or rehabilitation” was the goal. One grandmother wanted more outreach programs for substance abusers to “get them off of the street, help them get their lives together,” and thus enable them to have time with their children. She thought this county was a difficult place for rehabilitation. One grandfather asked that more support groups for grandparents be started. He said he was too tired to start a support group himself.

Question 5

This question asked grandparents why they attended the grandparent support group. Two of 11 attended because, "We are grandparents and we understand." Two of 11 grandparents attended because they were invited. One said, "Why am I lying and saying I'll go? So, I went." One was "curious...and my daughter and I were having a bad time." Five of 11 grandparents attended support group because they were "tired of trying to cope...needed to talk about what's upsetting me...for my morale and well-being." One grandparent admitted to attending support group because "[I have] no friends. Can't talk to my husband. I am scared and depressed."

Subquestion 5.1

This subquestion asked what grandparents expected from the support group. Five of 11 participants expected to learn something from someone else in the same situation, "...sit and talk about things." Three of the 11 grandparents said they would like to learn more about the ways and actions of children, declaring, "Today is different from my day, or is it they [grandchildren] are younger and I am older?" One grandparent expressed the need for parenting skills by saying, "Glean something from the 90's and mix it with the 20's." Two of the 11 grandparents readily admitted the need for socialization stating, "I never go out. Support group gets me out of the rut I've been in a long time." One of the two grandfathers stated he would like more men in the group.

Subquestion 5.2

The question asked grandparents about the outcomes of participation in the support group. Five of 11 participants were relieved to know they were not the only ones rearing grandchildren. They did not realize how many people were in this same situation. Three of the grandparents stated they "...had it great compared to others--life, health and strength, few aches and pains, and nothing to complain about." One

grandparent said support group gave her something to do and "...keeps me busy." Another grandparent liked topics that came up in group that helped her, for example, "I cannot say 'no,' but I regret when I say 'yes'."

Question 6

This question asked grandparents what kept them going. Seven of 11 participants stated the grandchildren are the reason they are able to continue "day to day." "Children have needs and I can't give up." One discussed her "attitude of gratitude--dry roof, food, and a home." Two of 11 grandparents received support from "friends, my mother, and husband." Two grandparents said God kept them going. One grandmother said rearing grandchildren was "a second chance" to rear children. Other responses included hormones, a cup of coffee, and "holding conversations with the grandchildren to ask what's bothering them, to talk about it, and then it's gone."

Question 7

The question asked grandparents if they cried. Nine of 11 caretakers of their grandchildren said they cry. Six of 11 grandparents cried during the interview, one admitting she would not cry at home. One said "if I didn't laugh, I'd cry." Another said she would cry "...at the drop of a hat when it concerns children and elderly people." One only cries at the doctor's office but did say "I need my own space and time at home to cry. Maybe I could go home tonight and try to cry." One grandmother cries when she thinks of her grandson "...leaving me and going to live with his mother." Two of the 11 grandparents denied crying. One said, "There's no reason to cry." The other grandmother said, "I get up and go for a drive."

Question 8

This question asked for any other concerns or comments not discussed that the participants wished to share with the researcher. A variety of responses included:

1. "I may soon have my son's two boys as well as my daughter's two children."
2. "With more support I could have qualified to do something [job]."
3. "Teach children to stay close to God and they'll make it."
4. "Who will take care of my grandchildren when I die?" Six of 11 grandparents said their grandchildren had expressed this concern.
5. "Men are important in rearing grandsons."
6. "I feel very guilty sharing this information. I have never told anyone these things. I had to ask my husband before I could finish the interview."
7. "I think the goal of the criminal justice system is to put people back in jail as soon as possible."

Additional responses to Question 8 expressed similar concerns of several grandparents. Three of the 11 grandparents interviewed expressed thoughts and feelings about the grandchildren growing up and leaving. "I know they will be gone and I will have to figure that out. Lots of kids are at my house all the time. They'll bring their kids to me to raise. Oh, yes, that's understood. I don't think that will ever stop." Four of 11 grandparents expected to be rearing more grandchildren in the future. Two of the 11 grandparents had firmly told their own children they were not caring for another child. Five of 11 grandparents had no comments about rearing additional children. One grandparent expressed her opinion by saying, "We've been doing this so long, we'd be lost without them."

Thematic Analysis

Each of the grandparents interviewed had a story to tell. Initially the eleven interviews were read to identify content themes identified by Poe (1991) and to classify specific statements by respondents under those themes. New themes were identified by the researcher when significant statements by the respondents could not

be classified under one of the former themes.

Responses to Poe's Themes

In addition to the above question-by-question analysis, the interviews were also analyzed using the three major themes developed by Poe from her interviews, observations, and a grandparent's support group. The following themes from Poe were used for content analysis in this study: (a) awareness of the child's drug use, (b) shouldering the burden, and (c) consequences. Each theme will be discussed using interview material from this study.

Awareness of Child's Drug Use

Eight of 11 grandparents recognized their children's substance abuse was a contributing factor in their being responsible for rearing their grandchildren (see discussion Question 1). Two of 11 grandparents stated their children used "no drugs." One described the condition of the daughter in reference to drug use by saying: "Unless she tells me, I don't ask. When I did ask, she never admitted it. I'd like to think [she is] not. [I] wasn't going to follow her to find out. Her older kids say they have seen mother smoking marijuana."

Although drug use was not identified as a specific factor when their children were in junior high school, 7 of 11 grandparents did recognize their children were in trouble when they were at this grade level. Grandparents made comments such as "[she was] out of control," "[I was] surprised she made it to grade 12," and "[she] ran away when 13 years old."

Shouldering the Burden

According to Poe (1991) shouldering the burden includes the components of (a) feelings of obligation, (b) ambivalence, (c) adjustments within the family, and (d) coping. Each component is discussed in this section. Eight of 11 grandparents had a sense of obligation. Grandparents stated they were sorry for the grandchildren. "We

[grandparents] know we are a help to the children and someone who cares about them.” Six of 11 grandparents expressed concern about alternative foster placement. “What am I suppose to do when my daughter brings her baby to me? These are my grandchildren.”

Five of 11 grandparents expressed feelings of ambivalence. One grandmother expressed “improved preparedness” to care for a grandson having reared her own son. At the same time this grandmother admitted that time was needed for herself and she was “not a built-in babysitter.” Another grandmother has tried to forget about the possibility of the granddaughter returning to her son and daughter-in-law because visits are unsuccessful and disruptive. She began by stating “[the granddaughter] was made for me,” and continued by saying, “Now I am stuck with her.” Two grandparents stated they could care for the grandchild better than the parent but wanted the parent to stay home and not be away from the child.

Poe’s theme of shouldering the burden included adjustments which were made to accomodate grandchildren. Seven of 11 grandparents acknowledged changes as a result of assuming a parental role for the grandchildren. Subquestion 2.1 specifically asked grandparents about major changes that had been made. Discussion of the findings varied from “everything changed” to having an “extra person” in the home requiring more room and more money.

The question of how these grandparents coped with all their concerns is the last component discussed under this theme. Similiar questions were added to the main interview by the researcher asking grandparents what kept them going (see discussion Question 6), and if they cried (see discussion Question 7). Four of 11 grandparents made references to God. “It’s a spiritual thing. I share with God and ask Him if I am doing the right thing.” Two of the grandparents referred to their confidence in God saying, “He is holding me up.” According to one grandparent,

God kept grandparents alive because if they were to die, no one was there to care for the grandchildren. These references to God are in addition to those discussed in the findings for Questions 6 and 7.

Consequences

The third theme described by Poe (1991) is consequences which includes both losses and gains. The consequence of losses is the subject of Question 2, also including Question 2.2, sacrifices made by grandparents. Question 2 includes health, independence, future goals, social life, leisure time, and peer relationships, primarily showing losses. The consequence of gains or benefits is the subject of Question 2.3. Discussion of these findings was presented earlier in this chapter under Question 2. Question 2.1 is found under Poe's second theme, shouldering the burden, which included adjustments made by grandparents.

Additional Themes Identified by the Researcher

After working with the responses to interview questions and with Poe's three themes, the researcher realized information gleaned from the responses in this study suggested additional themes. Rearing grandchildren has positive and negative effects on the grandparents who assume the role of caretaker. While many grandparents were happy to have time with their grandchildren, they also acknowledged that rearing their grandchildren was difficult. Poe's themes included: first, awareness of the child's drug use; second, the burdens of parenting; and third, the gains and losses involved in the arrangement. Additional themes deduced from the contents of the current interviews included: fourth, grandparents' use of alcohol; fifth, lack of motivation or parenting ability of the children's parents; sixth, hyperactive grandchildren; and seventh, the responses of grief and detachment of grandparents.

Grandparents' Use of Alcohol

The fourth theme developed by this researcher was that of alcohol use by

grandparents. Eight of 11 grandparents referred to their own drinking or that of their spouse. One grandparent said, "Got to keep a clear mind. Going to a bar, drinkin' and whoopin' and hollerin' isn't good. I don't drink and don't smoke now. Gave it up." One grandfather continued to go out "with the party people" when grandmother, his wife, wanted his support with the grandchildren so that she could get a job.

Another grandmother believed her husband and daughter had many of the same "weaknesses." Therefore, grandmother wanted her husband to "overcome" those weaknesses, including smoking and drinking, then "she'll [daughter] emulate him. [The daughter] is manipulative and [my husband] likes to be manipulated so I [grandmother] work with both. I like to be in control." Another family, grandmother and grandfather, drank heavily according to grandmother who has been in recovery 15 years. "He [grandfather] was a heavy drinker but not a drunk. He was out until 4 a.m. every day." Another grandmother stated she was unable to talk with her husband (grandfather) who "...used to just drink."

Lack of Motivation or Parenting Ability by Children's Parent

The fifth theme was developed as a result of all 11 grandparents stating the parents were not capable of parenting the grandchildren. Reasons cited were immaturity, impatience, in serious trouble with the law since they were very young, and could not hold a job. Grandparents also described characteristics of one or both parents as "young, confused parents [who] do not have the personality, skills, or tolerance to parent. [They] never had parenting skills, and never baby-sat." Another grandmother lamented, "She [daughter] never worked, had outrageous behavior, and my grandson can't live with a mother without roots, support, or a place to live." One grandmother commented when her daughter was in the home to care for her own child, she would hear the phone ring in the night, but not her son's cries. Another grandparent was afraid for the granddaughter and herself, stating her daughter was

always “grouchy.” One grandmother described the change in the daughter’s attitude toward the grandson after the granddaughter was born. Her daughter never again hugged her son, but held and cuddled her daughter. The grandmother described the daughter as being so much more loving to her own daughter. She gave food to her daughter and not to her son, though both children sat at the same table.

Hyperactivity of Grandchildren.

Poe referred to the problems associated with drug-exposed babies, one of which was hyperactivity of these children. In this research, five of 11 grandparents, involving six grandchildren, said their grandchildren were hyperactive. Three of 11 grandparents were rearing grandchildren diagnosed as hyperactive with attention deficit disorder. Four of the grandchildren were being followed by their pediatricians and were taking daily medication for hyperactivity.

Responses of Grief and Detachment

The seventh and final theme developed by the researcher involved two categories of responses: (a) grief, and (b) detachment and denial. Grief was a main response of grandparents finding themselves as primary caretaker for their grandchildren. Findings associated with this area were included in the previous discussion for Question 7. Other behavior demonstrating grief included five of 11 grandparents who wept openly when discussing the intergenerational relationships between two, three, and occasionally four generations. Grandparents in six of the 11 interviews exhibited behavior characteristics of detachment and denial. Behavior observed included answering questions with short statements, assuming formal postures, and lacking outward emotional involvement. For example, in response to the interview question about grandparents’ relationships with their own children since assuming responsibility for the grandchild, one grandparent said, “[relationship] about the same, no change.” (see discussion Question 3) In contrast, another

grandparent said, "When do you give up on your own child? You have to draw lines and set expectations, but you are still there."

To summarize, Poe (1991) proposed the following themes: (a) awareness of the child's drug use, (b) shouldering the burden, and (c) consequences. This researcher proposed these additional themes: (d) grandparents' use of alcohol, (e) lack of motivation or parenting ability of the children's parents, (f) hyperactive grandchildren, and (g) the responses of grief and detachment of grandparents.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Summary of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the effects upon grandparents of assuming the parental role for their grandchildren. The study represents a partial replication of Poe's research (1991) titled Black Grandparents as Parents. This chapter contains the conclusions, limitations, and recommendations for this study. Implications for school nursing are also discussed.

Duvall (1977) identified family developmental stages throughout the life cycle. The theory assumes families do not skip any stages and each stage is important for the next developmental phase. Having the responsibility of rearing grandchildren arrests or delays normal development. Grandparents may never recover that period of time. Their lives are on hold as the focus is on grandchildren or the parent who is unable to fulfill the role of mother or father. The effects of this arrangement upon grandparents have been ignored until the past decade when the growing number of children being reared by grandparents finally has become another statistic computed on a nationwide basis.

Eleven grandparents, including grandmothers and grandfathers, rearing grandchildren participated in the study. Their ages ranged from 47 to 67 years. The instrument used to interview grandparents was the guideline developed by Poe (1991). Four questions were added to the outline by the researcher. The interview identified personal experiences and the interpersonal relationships of each participant. Results were analyzed by demographic information, responses to questions, and themes identified by Poe (1991) and this researcher.

The major findings focused on losses described by the grandparents. Decline in

health, financial status, social life, peer relationships, leisure time, future plans, and particularly loss of the biological child's ability to rear own offspring were a part of each personal story. None of the participants expressed positive outcomes other than being able to be with the grandchild and being able to provide a home and love.

One of the most significant findings was that substance abuse by the parents played a major role in their inability and unwillingness to care for their own children. When one or both parents were incarcerated for drug use or related crimes, the grandparents often found themselves providing care for grandchildren, regardless of plans they may have for themselves.

Conclusions

Grandparents participating in this study shared information that is seldom discussed, certainly not with strangers. In doing so, these grandparents found themselves revealing innermost thoughts and feelings from their own childhood life experiences to the present day. The emotional impact of telling the stories was evident. The grandparents discussed their fathers, mothers, and own grandparents, and then reviewed their lives and the paths they had walked. The stories need to be shared. They are stories that are hard to tell, for they suggest other than perfect families.

The stories also tell of the strength of women as they continue to carry on the role of mother and provider. The black grandmother has long been characterized as the dominant figure in the black family structure (Burton & Dilworth-Anderson, 1991). As evidenced in the study, she continues to watch over the destiny of her family and carry out domestic responsibilities (Franklin, 1989; Martin & Martin, 1978). Likewise, grandfathers who are rearing grandchildren or are supporting the grandmother also play a valuable role in the family. Such a role may be new for the grandfather who is currently employed or perhaps recently retired.

Poe (1991) discussed the grandparents' discovery of their childrens' drug use in

terms of feeling guilty or betrayed, depending on when the substance abuse was revealed. According to Poe, parents who felt guilty blamed themselves for their children's drug use and tended to continue rationalizing the behaviors and/or become overprotective toward their grandchildren. On the other hand, grandparents who felt betrayed had no prior knowledge about the drug activity of their adult children. Before learning about the drug problem they were more apt to return grandchildren to the parents in order to continue on with lives that had remained "on hold".

Discovery of the parent's drug use by the grandparents thus was important in the interviews. Frequently this awareness was the turning point after which grandparents assumed care of the grandchildren.

Feelings of guilt were not as evident in the current study as in the findings reported by Poe. Rather, in the current study, more grandparents expressed sadness and disbelief at the situation confronting them. Some of the parents were in prison. Others were in the area and saw families occasionally. The whereabouts of others were unknown. Grandparents interviewed were unable to say "no" to authorities or to their children when faced with the decision of caring for the children. The majority of grandparents were realistic about the likelihood that their biological children would never be able to parent the children. Returning children to the parent was a possibility "...if she [mother] can show she is capable for an extended period of time. Only then can they [mother and child] be together." Only one grandparent had returned the grandson to the mother, but with much anxiety about the boy's well-being.

In the original study, Poe described the "close supportive relationships" grandparents had with their children in an ideal family. This ideal was not the situation of families described in the current study. Grandparents' relationships with their biological children had not been ideal, nor did these relationships greatly improve when those grandparents assumed care of the grandchildren (see Chapter 4, question 3). One

grandparent described her son as her “right hand,” whereas her daughter had “done me wrong” (see Chapter 4, question 3). Conversely, another grandparent discussed how resentful her other two daughters were of the time and money spent on their nephew, the grandchild being reared by the grandparents (see Chapter 4, subquestion 3.3).

The parents of the children being reared by grandparents exhibited behaviors the grandparents described as “out of control,” or “always trouble.” According to Poe’s research, the children of the grandparents were frequently reared by single parents who had many problems with the children. Poe suggested grandparents in her study were trying to create a normal family life for the grandchildren. In contrast, grandparents in the current study did not appear to have fantasies about doing better than they had done in former years. Only two grandparents spoke of a “second chance” to rear the children. A few of the grandparents had anticipated that they would be taking care of the offspring before the latter were even conceived. Despite the relationships that existed, the fact remains that grandparents were devastated by confirmation of their childrens’ drug use.

Poe referred to the weakened authority in the structures of the families she studied. Even though the children may have been with grandparents for a number of years, they continued to anticipate a possible return to or visit by their biological parents. Grandparents commented on the discipline difficulties with grandchildren after they had spent time with their parents.

In the current study one grandparent resented the “role reversal.” The mother was able to act like a grandparent, while the grandparent was the disciplinarian, the parental figure. More problematic were the many unfulfilled promises parents made to their children. In one example, the table was set for Christmas dinner, but mother never arrived. On separate occasions a granddaughter eagerly waited by the front door two hours for mom to arrive to take her shopping for clothes. Sometimes mom

arrived. These unfulfilled promises are big disappointments for grandparents and grandchildren. They are permanent markers. They do not wash out.

Poe referred to attention being diverted to the biological parents, thus taking time from the grandchildren. Both studies noted how much time grandparents spent thinking and worrying about their own or “biological” children. Poe commented that grandparents were often relieved when sons and daughters were imprisoned, because they now knew where they were and that they would be fed. These lives are often tragic. Grandparents have visited their children in jail too many times, and each phone call could be another crisis--an all too familiar ring. One grandparent said, “I don’t know if my daughter is dead or alive.” Grandparents’ lives are consumed with these thoughts, detracting from time with grandchildren. Also, grandchildren hear grandparents lamenting for their own children, and confusion exists for all involved.

Poe discussed blame for absence of the child’s parent being put upon the grandparents rather than the parent, or even on the children themselves. Blaming may occur when the parent disappears and grandparents and grandchildren try to understand why. In the current study four of the participants were unsure of the parents’ whereabouts, but they clearly stated the absence was not the fault of the grandchildren and that they must not suffer from the errors of their parents. Also, contrary to Poe, grandparents did not blame grandchildren for the parent’s absence, and only two of four grandparents blamed parents for the situation.

The extreme losses experienced by grandparents are the heart of the stories, even though, for a few, the situation appeared acceptable on the surface. Chapter 4, question 2 describes the losses, many common to all grandparents. Most were quick to discuss the losses brought about by permanent responsibility for their grandchildren. In addition to the loss of a normal developmental phase of their own lives, relationships with sons and daughters have been forfeited. Loss of the freedom to plan for the future

was noted frequently because plans could not be made for more than a day at a time. Prospects for travel and leisure were destroyed except for a very few who included the grandchildren. The loss of sleep, common to every grandparent in the study, could never be compensated. Some grandparents even lost their beds. One grandmother indicated some nights she sleeps in a chair or across the foot of a bed.

The financial burden was a delicate subject because the welfare money for child support was mailed to the parent rather than the grandparent. Parents continued to receive the checks in spite of the fact the grandparents were caring for the grandchildren. Grandparents seldom reported misdirected checks to avoid conflicts with parents who frequently used the checks to support drug habits. Grandparents were afraid the grandchildren would be taken back by their parents in order to assure continued control of the check. Had the parents taken the grandchildren from the grandparents, many grandchildren would not have had a home.

Many grandparents were forced to relinquish rights to public support funds in order to assure the safety and care of their grandchildren. One grandmother in the study was responsible for three grandchildren over a period of five years with no financial support other than the husband's retirement income. Other grandparents did not have retirement income and relied solely on social security to rear grandchildren. Both this study and Poe's study revealed that the grandparents' changed lives meant a loss of future plans in middle and later stages of life.

Poe reported that some grandparents thought of illness and death as an escape from the hardships of rearing the grandchildren. In contrast, participants in the current study spoke in positive terms regarding life, in spite of the difficulties inherent in the job. Grandparents fully intended to see grandchildren grow to adulthood. Grandparents believed they were still alive because God was "holding them up" in order to parent "grandbabies."

How do the grandparents cope with these overwhelming circumstances? Poe and the current researcher arrived at similar conclusions. Crying and attending support groups were two coping techniques used by grandparents in each study. Poe mentioned the reminiscing which grandparents engaged in during the interview as another coping strategy. Poe also referred to a "strong alliance with the church." For some grandparents in the current study, findings indicated a lack of support from the church. One grandparent was very disillusioned and disappointed the church did not support her when she was in need. Since she was not able to go to church every week as in previous years, she had anticipated the minister would call or visit the house. Other grandparents also criticized the lack of support from churches. Only a few grandparents in this recent study acknowledged that the church was the one organization providing socialization as well as child care for the grandchildren.

Additional themes beyond the three discussed by Poe were derived from open-ended interviews by the researcher. The information provides the reader with more understanding of issues surrounding the grandparents' lives and possibly their effect on the grandparents as parents of grandchildren. These themes include: fourth, grandparents' use of alcohol; fifth, lack of motivation or parenting ability of the children's parents; sixth, the number of hyperactive grandchildren; and seventh, the responses of grief and detachment of grandparents.

This fourth theme did not surface in Poe's study related to the prevalence of alcohol use among the grandparents. The majority of grandparents (one or both) in the current study admitted to excessive use of alcohol. The importance of this finding cannot be underestimated as grandparents and grandchildren strive for a successful future.

The fifth theme was the lack of motivation or parenting ability of the children's parents. Information on the characteristics of the absent parents as reported by

grandparents may explain why the role of primary parent is now assumed by grandparents. Grandparents verbalized the parents' lack of parenting skills and each of personality traits important in rearing children

The sixth theme, hyperactivity of grandchildren, was briefly mentioned in Poe's study. Hyperactivity is frequently observed in drug-exposed children and rearing these children is often difficult. Hyperactive behavior was diagnosed in one-third of the grandchildren in the current study.

The seventh theme discussed was the reaction of grandparents to the situation of rearing grandchildren. Primarily grandparents reacted in two ways: (a) grief, and (b) detachment and denial. The grandparents' grief was powerful and unforgettable. Some of the grandparents wept openly when sharing incidents that had occurred in their families. Many said they cried easily and often, while others admitted being sad but unable to shed tears. Besides the physical separation of parents and children, an emotional detachment existed from the deep issues surfacing in the interviews regarding the failures and disappointments experienced by grandparents as parents. Shortened answers to questions and comments like, "O.K. with me," or "about the same," typified responses to questions about relationships with children or circumstances surrounding placement of grandchildren with the grandparents. One grandparent who seemed determined to give minimal responses answered the question about relationships between parent and biological child saying, "They always have a home." With regards to sharing the parenting the grandparent continued, "The girls [mothers] are doing the best they can." Whether this response is a form of detachment and denial, or of protecting the family, was not determined. The detachment from the biological child also seemed apparent in comparison to other reactions to questions posed. Still others told the story and seemed uninvolved, as if a neighbor recounting an incident. This response could be defense mechanisms at work, sparing

additional grief and pain beyond that already experienced day after day, year after year.

Limitations

This study was designed as a replication and extension of Poe's research. The in-depth interviews afford sufficient material to contribute some new information. The group selected itself on a voluntary basis and is not a random sample from any known population.

Time spent in the grandparents' support group varied for each participant. The amount of trust achieved between grandparent and researcher may be related to the involvement in the support group. It is unlikely that the information could have been collected without the researcher's investment in the grandparents' situation and the support group process.

The interviews were not recorded. The researcher relied on hand-written notes taken at the time of the interview. Accuracy of transcription of notes was essential. The time and place of each interview was determined by the participant. Interruptions due to the setting were unavoidable, such as phones, doorbells, appointments, children, spouses, pets, and one grandmother's conscience.

One of the limitations of Poe's study was the small sample size. The present study also deals with only a small group of grandparents. However, even though the demographic characteristics of this group are different, the findings parallel Poe's findings. The present study included grandfathers as well as grandmothers. Poe's research included grandmothers only. Also, this group was composed of people from various races and cultures while Poe's original study focused on black grandmothers.

Research on grandparents rearing grandchildren is beginning to accumulate. New studies on the role of grandparents are in process. However, the literature review for this research was limited to the specific issue of grandparents as primary caregivers of grandchildren.

Analysis of the interviews using Poe's guidelines generated much material that was difficult to categorize according to Poe's themes. Generally the information fit into the cells pertaining to the 8 questions. Information occasionally could be placed in two or even three of the question headings. Questions pertaining to sacrifices, benefits, and major changes were often reviewed together. Because this qualitative study was formatted with open-ended questions, the topics elicited useful information.

Recommendations

Months ago the researcher began by asking grandparents how individuals, agencies, and communities could better serve their needs and the needs of other grandparents rearing grandchildren. Three answers given without hesitation were financial assistance, a more user-friendly social service office, and affordable legal services.

Financial assistance was generally the first suggestion offered by grandparents as a way of improving their ability to provide for the grandchildren. Most grandparents exist on lean budgets and would benefit from increased incomes.

Improved social services may mean social service workers are specifically trained to work with grandparents. Specialized training would streamline the social services process by having a more informed person helping grandparents. Grandparents would in turn be working with a person who had a sense of the specific needs of grandparents rearing grandchildren such as increased accessibility for elderly people with grandchildren in tow. The third suggestion pertained to legal services which are costly. Services are available at minimum cost to clients for some kinds of problems. Cases involving custody and guardianship often need assistance costing hundreds of dollars--money grandparents are using for bread and milk. Funding availability is essential to increase financial aid to grandparents rearing their grandchildren, to improve the social services process, and to make legal services affordable.

A major conclusion emerging from this study is the likelihood that ineffective parenting skills will continue in a cyclic manner to another generation if no interventions are provided to grandparents rearing their grandchildren. Lack of parenting skills of grandparents will contribute to dysfunction a second time with grandchildren. It is possible grandchildren will repeat and have the same outcomes as seen with the children of grandparents rearing grandchildren.

Also contributing to the ineffective parenting skills is the prevalence of substance abuse in these families, the transmission of alcoholism from one generation to the next involves the "...sum total of interactions, attitudes, and beliefs that define the family" (Steinglass, 1987, p. 304). Intervention in the family system should include urging family members who are not themselves involved with alcohol or other drugs to make use of assistance provided by Alanon. Those who are abusing substances should be encouraged to go to Alcoholics Anonymous or one of the other 12-Step Programs. Participation of grandparents in local school and agency parenting programs is highly recommended.

The hyperactive behavior of grandchildren was mentioned by Poe (1991) and is a significant finding of the current study. Additional studies on this finding as it relates to school-age children is recommended.

Support Groups

Support groups for grandparents are being organized across the United States. Approximately 250 such groups have been established according to the Brookdale Grandparent Caregiver Information Project (1992). School sites and churches appear to be feasible locations for establishing local support groups. Experience has shown that people are more prone to attend meetings and activities in their own neighborhoods. Because of this fact, grandparents may be less apt to attend a meeting held in a church they do not attend or in a school their grandchildren do not attend. Thus, the initial

series of meetings may be better attended if held in the grandparents' churches or the grandchildren's schools. As groups continue to meet and share common experiences the location may become less important.

Another form of support for the grandparents is available from the use of telephone calls. In Oakland, California a "warm line" has been established for the purpose of providing immediate care for the grandparent who may be in need. The "warm line" is similar to hot lines and crisis lines existing throughout the United States to assist people needing help or support with a problem. The "warm line" is a means of adult communication for grandparents who are with children day and night. Telephone calls also have been extremely useful in providing information regarding grandparent support group meetings. Grandparents have volunteered to call four or five other grandparents to remind them of the next support group meeting. These telephone calls serve to connect the grandparents to one another and to empower grandparents to keep support groups functioning.

While writing this theses, the need for groups for the grandchildren being reared by grandparents became clear. Grandchildren are often embarrassed to admit living with grandparents and are uncomfortable with the arrangement. Poe indicated many of the grandchildren have been abused, and suffer abandonment by parents. Poe also reported the physical and emotional problems of many grandchildren. The establishment of support groups for grandchildren could be explored with participants of the grandparents groups.

A handbook for grandparents rearing grandchildren would provide caretakers with resources and services. Existing vehicles for immediate support for grandparents are (a) the telephone book community resources section, and (b) the handbook for seniors published in some communities. Supplemental listings or additional chapters offering specific resources for grandparents rearing grandchildren are needed.

Perhaps the greatest immediate need for each of the grandparents rearing grandchildren, participants in this study and others, is to provide respite care or make respite care available. Grandparents need time for themselves, whether to shop, to go for a walk, to go to lunch with a friend, or to sleep. Providing safe care for the grandchildren in the home or in local neighborhood sites such as churches and community centers would help to relieve grandparents of the stresses related to constant child care.

Implications for School Nursing

Grandparents are the parents of many of our school children. Just how many is unknown. Recommendations previously suggested in the current study are relevant for school nurses at the school site. An assessment of families to determine those children being reared by grandparents is appropriate. School nurses can support a celebration for grandparents held in conjunction with the National Grandparent Day in September. This observance encourages grandparents to join grandchildren at the school for an assembly, lunch, and classroom time. Speakers from the school and community can acknowledge grandparents and encourage participation in their grandchildren's education. Inservice for teachers informing them that many grandparents are assuming the parental role would increase communication and cooperation between home and school. School staff may not be aware of the difficulties of grandparents rearing their grandchildren, nor the significant role grandparents play in their grandchildren's education. Including grandparents as well as parents in letters home and in school events may increase the grandparents' involvement as well as improve the grandchildren's performance at school.

A strong recommendation for school nurses is the establishment of support groups at schools to allow grandparents rearing grandchildren to meet with one another and share experiences. Nurses are in a prime position to arrange and facilitate

meetings, as well as to serve as a resource for the grandparents. Community guests representing local agencies offering services to grandparents and grandchildren might be invited to attend a meeting. In addition to the support groups, parenting classes need to be made available to grandparents at schools, with child care provided to permit participation. Other recommendations in the study are appropriate for school nurses, particularly with the understanding and support of school health services and administration.

Families are changing. Communities as well as state and federal governments are learning about the experiences and needs of grandparents faced with years of rearing abandoned grandchildren. The needs are new and not clearly defined. Research on the issues surrounding this segment of our population will hopefully bring about positive, constructive changes to accomodate a rapidly growing body of individuals who may be a dying breed of caregivers. Replacements may not be available in the next generation. Without them, who will provide for the children?

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APPENDIX A
San Jose State University Institutional Review Board Approval
and Title Change

A campus of The California State University

Office of the Academic Vice President • Associate Academic Vice President • Graduate Studies and Research
One Washington Square • San Jose, California 95192-0025 • 408/924-2480

To: Nancy Sorensen
22662 Torero Drive
Salinas, Ca 93908

From: Serena W. Stanford *Serena W. Stanford*
AAVP, Graduate Studies and Research

Date: March 18, 1993

The Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board has approved your request to use human subjects in the study entitled:

"Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: A Partial
Replication of Lenora Madison Poe's 1991
Dissertation, Black Grandparents as Parents"

This approval is contingent upon the subjects participating in your research project being appropriately protected from risk. This includes the protection of the anonymity of the subjects' identity when they participate in your research project, and with regard to any and all data that may be collected from the subjects. The Board's approval includes continued monitoring of your research by the Board to assure that the subjects are being adequately and properly protected from such risks. If at any time a subject becomes injured or complains of injury, you must notify Dr. Serena Stanford immediately. Injury includes but is not limited to bodily harm, psychological trauma and release of potentially damaging personal information.

Please also be advised that each subject needs to be fully informed and aware that their participation in your research project is voluntary, and that he or she may withdraw from the project at any time. Further, a subject's participation, refusal to participate or withdrawal will not affect any services the subject is receiving or will receive at the institution in which the research is being conducted.

If you have questions, please contact me at 408-924-2480.

CC: Virginia Young

A campus of The California State University

Office of the Academic Vice President • Associate Academic Vice President • Graduate Studies and Research
One Washington Square • San Jose, California 95192-0025 • 408/924-2480

To: Nancy Sorensen
22662 Torero Dr.
Salinas, CA 93908

From: Serena W. Stanford *Serena W. Stanford*
AAVP, Graduate Studies & Research

Date: May 25, 1993

This letter acknowledges that the Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board has received and approved the following changes to your proposed study entitled:

"Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: A Partial
Replication of Lenora Madison Poe's 1991
Dissertation, Black Grandparents as Parents"

1. That the title of the research projects be changed
to the following:

"Grandparents Rearing Grandchildren: A Partial
Replication of Lenora Madison Poe's 1991
Dissertation, Black Grandparents as Parents"

If you have any questions, please contact me at 408-924-2480.

APPENDIX B

Monterey Peninsula Unified School District Approval

Monterey Peninsula Unified School District
700 Pacific Street P.O. Box 1031 Monterey, CA 93942-1031 (408) 649-1562

January 12, 1993

Dr. Virginia Young
Department of Nursing
San Jose State University
1 Washington Square
San Jose, CA 95192-0057

Dear Dr. Young:

As the Health Services Consultant for the Monterey Peninsula Unified School District (MPUSD), I support Nancy Sorensen in her work with Grandparents Raising Grandchildren. I understand as part of her Master's Degree requirements she will be doing verbal interviews with participants of the MPUSD Grandparents Support Group. This information will be used to determine the role the support group plays in participating grandparents' lives, and will also be useful for our local program and statewide programs.

Nancy Sorensen has been employed by Monterey Peninsula Unified School District as a school nurse since 1986.

I look forward to the completion of the research and will assist Nancy in her goal to support grandparents raising their grandchildren. If you need additional information, I can be reached at (408) 649-3745.

Sincerely,

Ann Priebe, MA, RN
Health Services Consultant

AP:cz

cc: Billy DeBerry
Nancy Sorensen

APPENDIX C

Permission To Replicate Study From Lenora M. Poe

Lenora M. Poe, Ph.D., M.F.C.C.

2034 BLAKE STREET, SUITE 1
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94704

TELEPHONE: (510) 845-7189

December 15, 1992

Ms. Nancy Sorensen
22662 Torero Drive
Salinas, Ca 93908

Dear Ms. Sorensen,

As per our earlier telephone conversation regarding your research for the Master's Degree, and the use of my study for your research, I hereby give you permission to replicate my study, "Black Grandparents as Parents", with clear reference to the original study where applicable.

Much success as you complete your study. Please feel free to contact me at (510) 845-7189, should you have any questions, or if I may be of any additional help to you.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lenora M. Poe".

Lenora M. Poe, Ph.D.

APPENDIX D
Informed Participation Statement

A campus of The California State University

College of Applied Sciences and Arts • Department of Nursing
One Washington Square • San José, California 95192-0057 • 408/924-3130 • FAX 408/924-3135

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Nancy Sorensen

TITLE OF PROTOCOL: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: A Partial Replication of Lenora Madison Poe's 1991 Dissertation, Black Grandparents as Parents

I have been asked to participate in a research study investigating the impact upon grandparents of the experience of raising their grandchildren. The results of this study should further our understanding of the demands and responsibilities posed by this situation and expand the community's potential to improve the condition of this growing population.

I understand the following:

- 1) I will be asked to participate in an interview about my experiences as the primary caregiver of my grandchildren, including the circumstances which led to the children living with me and relationships with my grandchildren as well as my own children. The interview will take place in the home of the grandparent or a place otherwise designated by the grandparent.
- 2) The possible risks of this study are the inconveniences which may occur in scheduling and conducting the interview and due to personal experiences the subject may be psychologically upsetting.
- 3) The possible benefits of this study to me are being able to share valued and rare information which will aid in the understanding of the joys and hardships of raising grandchildren. I will also receive a \$15 honorarium at the completion of the interview.
- 4) The results of this study may be published, but any information that can be identified with me will remain confidential. Names will not be identified with any interview data. Each participant will be identified by a number and interviewed by the same researcher.
- 5) Any questions about my participation in this study will be answered by Nancy Sorensen, phone 408-484-1801. Complaints about the procedures may be presented to Virginia Young, thesis advisor, phone 408-924-3130. For questions or complaints about research subjects' rights, or in the event of research-related injury, contact Serena Stanford, Ph.D. (Associate Academic Vice President for Graduate Studies & Research) at 408-924-2480.
- 6) My consent is given voluntarily without being coerced; I may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study, and I may withdraw at any time, without prejudice to my relations with my local school district or with SJSU.
- 7) The refusal to participate will in no way affect my right to receive services.
- 8) I have received a copy of this consent form for my file.

I have made a decision whether or not to participate. My signature indicates that I have read the information provided above and that I have decided to participate.

Date _____ Subject's Signature _____ Investigator _____

APPENDIX E
Questionnaire for Study

GENERAL INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

Researcher: Nancy Sorensen

1. What were the circumstances leading to placement?
 - 1.1 When did you become aware placement not temporary?
 2. What was the impact of placement on grandparent's life with respect top health, independence, future goals, social life, leisure time, and peer relationships?
 - 2.1 What were the major changes you had to make when you took responsibility for parenting grandchildren?
 - 2.2 What sacrifices have you made to care for grandchildren?
 - 2.3 What are specific benefits you have gained by having grandchildren with you?
 - 2.4 Overall how do you feel about becoming primary caretaker of grandchildren-- like most? like least?
 3. Describe the relationship between you and your children before and after taking care of your grandchildren?
 - 3.1 Does your daughter (son) share parenting responsibility?
 - 3.2 Does your daughter (son) provide financial support?
 - 3.3 What are the areas of conflict between you and your child?
 4. What individuals, groups, other resources have been most helpful? How?
 - 4.1 What specific individuals or groups could be more helpful? How?
 5. Why did you attend support group?
 - 5.1 What was expected from support group?
 - 5.2 What were the outcomes, if any, from attending group?
 6. What keeps you going?
 7. Do you cry?
 8. Additional comments or concerns to share with researcher:
-

APPENDIX F
Demographics for Study

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Grandparent Marital Status

Married ____ # of times ____

Divorced ____ # of times ____

Widowed ____

Single ____

Living with partner ____

Number of years of education ____

Number of other adults living in household ____

Work Status

Full-time employed ____

Part-time employed ____

Retired ____

Disability ____

Unemployed ____

Occupation _____

Living Arrangement

House ____ Own ____ Rent ____

Apartment ____

Condo ____

Other ____

Number of grandchildren are you parenting ____ M ____ F ____

Grandchildren you are parenting Age ____ Gender ____

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Are you parenting your daughter's child(ren) Yes ____ No ____

Are you parenting your son's child(ren)? Yes ____ No ____

The age of your grandchild(ren)'s mother (your daughter)? ____

or

The age of your grandchild(ren)'s father (your son)? ____

Does your grandchild(ren)'s parent (your son or daughter) live with you in the home?

Yes ____ No ____

Did anyone else take care of your children when they were small?

Yes ____ No ____

APPENDIX G
Interview Sample Summary Sheet

INTERVIEW SAMPLE SUMMARY SHEET

	1.0 Circumstances leading to place- ment	2.0 Impact on life	2.1 Main changes	2.2 Sacrifices	2.3 Benefits	2.4 Feelings as caretaker like most/least
Case 1						
Case 2						
Case 3						
Case 4						
Case 5						
Case 6						

INTERVIEW SAMPLE SUMMARY SHEET (continued)

	3.0 Relationships with daughter/ son after grand- children	3.1 Parents share parenting responsi- bility?	3.2 Financial support from parent?	3.3 Areas of conflict	4.0 Helpful other or resources? How?	4.1 What group/ resources needed? How helpful?
Case 1						
Case 2						
Case 3						
Case 4						
Case 5						
Case 6						