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Exploring Adversities of Custodial Grandparents Transitioning From the Grandparent to Parent Role

Carmelita Dockery
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Walden University

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Walden University
May 2020

Abstract

Exploring Adversities of Custodial Grandparents Transitioning From the Grandparent to

Parent Role

by

Carmelita Dockery

MA, Olivet Nazarene University, 2004

BS, St. Edward's University, 1994

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

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Abstract

There are many familial and social disparities, including drug addiction and use, incarceration, abandonment, and sometimes the death of a biological parent, that cause grandparents to acquire custody of their grandchildren. Current public welfare policies in some states, however, may not adequately address the needs of custodial grandparents caring for grandchildren and little academic literature exists that explores the unique experiences of custodial grandparents. Using role theory as a foundation, the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of custodial grandparents in a large midwestern city as their role transitions from grandparent to parent in order to inform public policy. Data were collected from a purposive sample of 20 custodial grandparents who participated in focus groups conducted at senior centers. These data were transcribed, and then subjected to inductive coding followed by a thematic analysis procedure. Key themes revealed the lack of public and social services for informal custodial grandparents were exacerbated by struggles with limited income, child custody, life changes and excessive stress. Another theme indicated a need for basic life assistance that included housing, psychotherapy and counseling to support custodial grandparents in their continuing efforts to care for grandchildren. Last, a key theme related to behavioral issues with grandchildren due to the absent parent presented a significant challenge for many participants. Implications for positive social change include recommendations to state policy makers to reform public policies for informal custodial grandparents to receive necessary public welfare assistance and social services to support their vulnerable families in order to improve their quality of life.

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Dedication

I am dedicating this achievement to my Heavenly Father, God, and Savior, who has been my strength in times of adversities, my guidance in times of tribulation, and my reason for continuing forward on this journey...holding my right hand every step of the way. To my dad and stepmother, Jimmy, and Mary, who were here with me, celebrating my master's degree, but...unfortunately, are not here to celebrate this enormous achievement with me. Both have gone home to be with the Lord. However, they are watching me every step of the way, cheering me on, "get er' done Carmelita, get er' done."

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Family classifications have changed significantly over the past 40 years with more grandparents becoming the primary caretaker of their grandchildren. This is not a new phenomenon, but a growing phenomenon. Historically, grandparents played a significant role in their grandchildren's lives, with the grandchild visiting and spending quality time with the grandparent but eventually leaving to go home with the parent. However, in the United States, researchers have recognized a role change in the grandparent-grandchild relationship with many grandchildren remaining in the grandparents' home indefinitely (Bailey, Hayes, & Letiecq, 2013; Baker, Silverstein, & Putney, 2008; Languish, 2012; Prokos & Keene, 2012). This change in the relationship role is due to a variety of unforeseen circumstances, such as a parent's incarceration, drug addiction, abandonment, and illness or death. Moreover, the role change relationship between grandparent and grandchild has become further complicated due to the unanticipated financial expenses and other difficulties for the grandparent (American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, 2017; Mammarella, Behnke, & Bearon, 2013).

Informal custodial grandparents are those grandparents who are raising their grandchildren without obtaining legal custody of the grandchildren. Informal custodial grandparents encounter various adversities that range from changing roles, a lack of funds to adequately support a grandchild, health and well-being issues for grandparent and grandchild, housing problems, legal issues, behavioral issues for the grandchild, and

periodic domestic violence in the grandparent's home (Mammarella et al., 2013). These families are vulnerable to living in poverty due to the lack of support from state social services and unchanging public policies that provide little to no assistance for these families (Bailey et al., 2013). It is important for these families to be recognized and provided the needed assistance from state social services, and public policies should be amended to include these families (Mammarella et al., 2013).

Custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren is a phenomenon that is constantly growing without public assistance, which is desperately needed to help these families thrive. Parenting can be a difficult job even in the best of circumstances, but it is more difficult when this responsibility is unexpected, and the grandparent has limited income to care for their grandchild on a daily basis. Custodial grandparents need monthly public assistance to provide for their grandchild's well-being and to ease the adversities of raising children for a second time (Bailey, Hayes, & Letiecq, 2013). This study may provide insight that eventually stimulates public policy changes for informal custodial grandparent families.

Background

Custodial grandparents are the fastest growing family phenomenon of the 21st century in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). The U.S. Census Bureau released information in 2014 concerning the percentage of grandparents in the United States who were caring for a grandchild; the number was estimated to be about 4.2 million households, or 3% of all households. Additionally, about 39% of these grandparent caregivers had cared for their grandchildren for 5 years or more (U.S. Census

Bureau, 2014). The number of grandparents raising their grandchildren grew dramatically to approximately seven million in 2016 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Grandparents parenting their grandchildren face a plethora of adversities, including that these families are invisible in the realm of state and public welfare systems (American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, 2017; Baker, Silverstein, & Putney, 2010; Mader, 2009; Mammarella et al., 2013; Van Etten & Gautam, 2012).

On October 22, 2014, the U.S. Census Newsroom Report indicated significant findings on custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren, stating that, most custodial grandparents are uneducated with typically low-income households, versus those grandparents who were not raising their grandchildren. Moreover, a small percentage of these custodial grandparents were under 50 years old, while a larger percent were over 50 years old an exceedingly small percentage were 80 and older. More importantly, over 50% of custodial grandparents households raising their grandchildren were grandmothers. Additionally, most grandchildren living with a grandparent had public welfare assistance for insurance coverage.

Furthermore, as reported by AARP, in Illinois more than 200,000 children were living with grandparents in 2017, which represented more than 7% of the children in the state (AARP, 2017). Gaille (2017) presented various statistics related to grandparents raising grandchildren under the age of 18, as well as the lack of support these caretakers desperately need. The statistics discussed that most custodial grandparents dropped out of high school, approximately 50% of custodial grandparents are unemployed and the number of grandparents raising their grandchildren has increased significantly in the last

four decades. Notably this increase is due to the recession, approximately 10 years ago, coupled with the drug epidemic in the 1980's. Additionally, custodial grandchildren experience more emotional and behavioral issues than most children in the United States population, with the male grandchildren actively demonstrating negative behavior and the female grandchildren internalizing their emotions. Finally, most custodial grandparents have extremely low incomes that are below the poverty levels.

This transformation in family dynamics in the United States has created several social conundrums for custodial grandparent-headed households (AARP, n.d.). The problems that these families face include low incomes, health care concerns, housing challenges, educational issues, and possible mental health and behavioral issues for grandchildren (Baker et al., 2008; Cox, 2010).

Custodial grandparents and their grandchildren are usually unrepresented or ignored by the social welfare systems, yet these families would benefit from informed advocates to address their plight (Baker et al., 2008; Cox, 2010; Langosch, 2012). It is essential as a society that policy makers and community leaders be made aware of the unmet needs of these families to assist custodial grandparents who are rearing these children. Despite many grandparents' willingness to accept the responsibility of raising their grandchildren, the challenges of this responsibility can be overwhelming. Most grandparent-headed households experience a sense of loss regarding their retirement years and plans for their future due to raising their grandchildren (Baker et al., 2008; Cox 2010; Generations United, 2015; Langosch, 2012). Figure 1 illustrates the complexity of households with grandparents raising grandchildren compared to grandparents who are

not raising their grandchildren. There are distinct differences in these two types of households regarding the role changes in one household and the non-role change in the other household, thus underscoring the need for policy considerations for grandparents raising their grandchildren (Ellis & Simmons, 2014). Of the 65 million grandparents in the United States in 2012, 7 million, or 10%, lived with at least one grandchild, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2014).

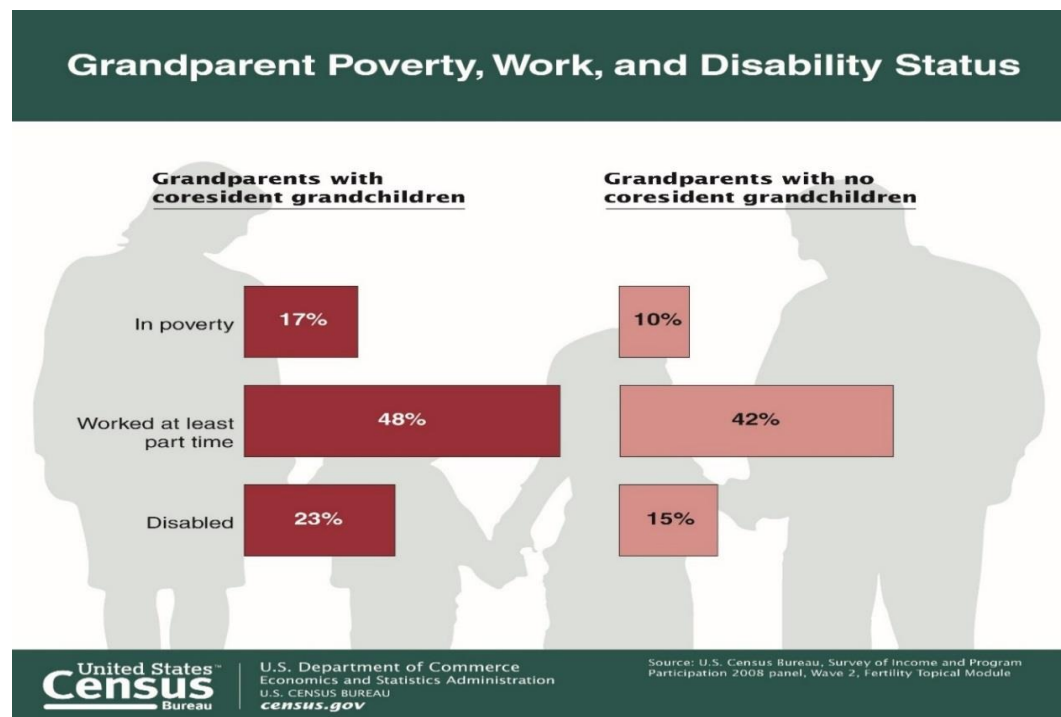


Figure 1. Poverty, work, and disability status of custodial and noncustodial grandparents.

From “10 Percent of Grandparents Live With a Grandchild, Census Bureau Reports”

(Release Number CB14-194), by U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

(<http://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2014/cb14-194.html>).

Grandparent Health and Well-Being

When grandparents decide to change roles and care for their grandchildren and raise a family for the second time, is a life changing experience. Research suggests that custodial grandparents are at elevated risk for physical health issues in that “many caregiving grandparents have reported the development or exacerbation of chronic diseases after accepting parental duties for their grandchildren” (Kelly et al., 2012, p. 54). If the grandparent has serious health issues before this transition, these issues are exacerbated due to the additional responsibilities (Neely-Barnes et al., 2010). According to Scommegna and Mossaad (2011), additional health concerns include depression, hypertension, obesity, asthma, and diabetes, particularly in older custodial grandparents. The stressors of caregiving are enormous regarding the grandparent's age and physical well-being, coupled with their emotional and psychological health when caring for their grandchildren (Kelly et al., 2012). In other words, the changing role from grandparent to parent, coupled with trying to cope with the new responsibility, and the lack of access to affordable health care creates more problematic issues for the custodial grandparent, who experience extended mental and physical health problems than non-custodial grandparents, as per (Carr, Hayslip, & Gray, 2012; Kelly et al., 2012; Neely-Barnes et al., 2010).

Grandchildren Issues

Grandchildren also experience a host of challenges when grandparents must change roles and become their parent. These grandchildren are usually prone to exhibit behavioral issues, academic learning issues, and social interaction issues due to

separation from their biological parent (Pinazo-Hernandis & Tompkins, 2009). Anft (2009) noted that grandchildren entering the homes of grandparents often suffer from abandonment issues, coupled with emotional and physical problems. These problems transfer to the custodial grandparent who internalizes the grandchild's issues, contributing to additional stressors for the grandparent (Anft, 2009).

Behavioral concerns often manifest towards juvenile delinquency. Fredrick (2010) noted that most grandchildren who live with grandparents were living in unfortunate environments before moving with the grandparent, such as high crime or violence and drugs in the home or community. The previous negativity experienced by the grandchildren could contribute towards the probability of these grandchildren becoming delinquent (Fredrick, 2010).

According to Cox (2009) children who separate from their parents and are living with grandparents or extended family members are also susceptible to various health problems. Cox (2009) stated, "being born addicted to drugs, having low birth weight, fetal alcohol syndrome, HIV/AIDS, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, adjustment and attachment disorders, learning disabilities and other mental problems" (p.184). These grandchildren usually lack the necessary health coverage to address their physical and psychological issues, despite the grandparent having Medicare or employment health coverage, their coverage does not cover their grandchild's health concerns (Cox, 2009; Cox, 2010).

Economics

Grandparent headed households usually experience economic hardships due to the added expense of caring for their grandchildren. Previous research notes that most grandparent headed households live at the poverty level and are not receiving the needed financial resources to provide the necessities for the grandchildren they are caring for (Carr, Hayslip, & Gray, 2012; Prokos & Keene, 2012). Most custodial grandparents are informal caregivers to their grandchildren, which means they are not involved in the state system of foster care and may not qualify for various resources that formal caregivers are eligible for and receive (Smith, Beltran, Butts, & Kingston, 2008). Smith et al. (2008) note that many custodial grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren “live in poverty, even though 48% work outside the home” (p. 87). Providing information to policymakers concerning the economic hardships that custodial families face raising their grandchildren may provide insight to amend policies and social programs to include these families (Carr et al., 2012; Prokos & Keene, 2012).

Housing Concerns

Housing issues are another concern for custodial grandparents. According to Goyer (2011), grandparents make significant changes in their housing arrangements to accommodate caring for their grandchildren. Most senior citizen housing often does not allow children to live with their grandparents. Therefore, custodial grandparents must find affordable housing that allows grandchildren to live with them (Copen, 2006; Cox, 2009; Generations United, 2016). Affordable housing is a continual struggle for custodial grandparent households. This challenge creates more expenses, further financial

burdens, and added stressors for grandparents (Generations United, 2016). Programs in various states were adopted in 1998 to address the challenges facing grandparents; several have been successful in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Grandparent's House and in South Bronx, New York, GrandParent Apartments (Generations United, 2016, p.1). In 2003, Generations United Petitioned Congress about the housing concerns of custodial grandparents, and the LEGACY Act of 2003 – Living Equitably: Grandparents Aiding Children and Youth was endorsed to assist these families with affordable housing. However, limited housing is only a portion of the problems for custodial grandparent headed households in Chicago, Illinois.

Legal Issues

Informal, custodial grandparents are often not aware of their legal rights or if they have legal rights to make decisions concerning the grandchild they are raising. Complex legal concerns about custody, medical, and educational issues are not easy to understand for custodial grandparents, and it is an added expense that is usually not available. Moreover, grandparents often do not easily understand the legal system, and they are apprehensive to ask for assistance in this area (Cox, 2010). According to Enerson (2014), in the state of Massachusetts a custodial grandparent household petitioned the probate courts to gain legal custody of their grandson. In this case, both grandparents were working and could afford to pay for legal support. However, most grandparents who live in the inner city of Massachusetts are not economically able to obtain legal support and therefore do not have the wherewithal to become involved in the complicated legal system.

Grandparents raising their grandchildren usually encounter several challenges when they are not the legal guardian to the grandchildren regarding school enrollment, medical signature if needed, and acquiring necessary benefits for the grandchild (Illinois Department on Aging, 2017, pp. 2-3). “Without legal custody, I can’t enroll my grandchild in school,” this is a quote from a custodial grandparent who has faced legal challenges due to legalities of being a custodial grandparent without legal custody of their grandchild (Generations United, 2016, p.1). Singh (2015) discussed the challenge of obtaining birth certificates and other legal documents for grandchildren is a time consuming, frustrating, and costly procedure which grandparents usually try to avoid. Moreover, the Illinois Department on Aging (2017) explained the expensive legal fees that grandparents must pay to pursue guardianship of their grandchildren. In addition to the expensive legal process, “many legal assistance agencies do not litigate family law cases” (Illinois Department on Aging, 2017, pp. 2-3).

Domestic Violence

Research suggests that custodial grandparents may be subjected to domestic violence from the grandchildren due to the grandchildren’s traumatic experiences with the biological parents. These children usually believe that they will be abused and possibly suffer from severe anxiety, which causes thoughts of the grandchild to have the mentality of “fight or flight,” creating aggression in the grandchildren (Day & Bazemore, 2011, p.106). Additionally, when children become separated from the biological parent, it creates “conduct disorder, social aggression, disruptive behavior, and problems in affect regulations and self-control” (Day & Bazemore, 2011, p.106).

Access to Social Services

Are custodial grandparents finding the support they need to raise their grandchildren? Custodial grandparents who assume parenting roles to their grandchildren have taken on this responsibility informally. In other words, the grandparents have not formally adopted their grandchildren. Therefore, the state will not assist with financial assistance for the grandparent, but only temporary assistance for the grandchild (Cox, 2010). According to Wright (2017), welfare services may be available for custodial grandparents on a case-by-case basis, and the grandparent must provide birth certificates for the grandchild and the child's parent for verification of relationship to receive services for the grandchild only. Moreover, welfare policies for informal, custodial grandparents are overlooked by the federal government due to the grandparent being an unlicensed caretaker. All state and federal benefits are allocated for adoptive and foster parents (Cox, 2010). In other words, the gap in federal welfare policy indicates that informal custodial grandparents are frequently left without financial assistance.

While children are being placed with their grandparents, they are not receiving continual welfare assistance. Temporary welfare services include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, Social Security Benefits, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Subsidized Guardianship (must be legal guardian of child), Kindship Foster Care (grandparent must be a licensed foster parent to receive financial assistance), daycare assistance, and local churches and organizations (Wright, 2017). However, most informal, custodial grandparents will not seek out the local welfare services in fear that their grandchildren may be taken away by the Department of Child and Family Services

(Cox, 2010; Wright, 2017). Day and Bazemore (2011) indicated that welfare policies do not assist custodial grandparent and most social services are “perceived as unsupportive of extended families...little is done within the current child welfare and justice system to support and protect grandparents who are caring for troubled and violent grandchildren” (p. 104-105). Additionally, the gap in literature indicates that lawmakers are not addressing the issues of custodial grandparents and current public welfare policies. This study was needed to provide vital information to policy makers to consider including informal, custodial grandparents in welfare policies to receive the same, continual assistance as informal caretakers of their grandchildren.

Problem Statement

The number of custodial grandparents who are assuming the responsibility of raising their grandchildren in Chicago, Illinois, is increasing. This role change is made more taxing for grandparents because of the lack of public welfare services available to assist informal custodial grandparents with this challenge (Cancino, 2016). First, services do not extend to custodial grandparents who are not licensed foster parents but informally take over the responsibility of caring for their grandchildren (Enos, 2018; Kropf & Kelly, 2015). The result is that a significant number of custodial grandparent’s face adversities after assuming primary responsibility for their grandchildren. The adversities include financial and housing issues, school for the grandchildren, inadequate or no health insurance, lack of access to legal services, and juvenile delinquency (Rasmussen, 2014; Steinisch, 2015). Many custodial grandparents live on a fixed income and attempt to manage the responsibility on their own. In this study, I used role theory ((Biddle, 1986),

to examine the study problem. This theory was appropriate given the stress of assuming a parent role to their grandchildren, coupled with the challenges of inadequate public assistance for this caregiving population in Chicago (Cancino, 2016; Hunter, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the adversities that informal custodial grandparents in Chicago, Illinois, face when their role is changed from grandparent to parent. I also explored the lack of public policies and welfare services available for informal custodial grandparents. Information gleaned from this study may provide insight to policy makers to revise eligibility policies for caregivers who are struggling to raise their grandchildren. Custodial grandparents face many challenges and hardships related to financial strains when they assume the parental responsibility of raising their grandchildren. Most custodial grandparents try to maintain their household on a fixed income such as social security, pensions, or retirement income, yet the monetary demands of raising grandchildren are taxing (Bernstein & Fuller-Thomas, 2014; Cox, 2010). Expanding public policies to include custodial grandparents will be a major step towards social change by providing economic relief as well as other supportive services for informal custodial grandparents (Baker et al., 2008, p. 9).

Research Questions

The fundamental research question for this study was, what challenges have grandparents experienced from the role changes in assuming a parental role for their grandchildren? I further explored the central research question through the following sub research questions:

1. What, if any, public services have grandparents received for assistance as a custodial grandparent in Chicago, Illinois?
2. What are the major adversities grandparents encounter that have impacted their quality of life, after assuming responsibility of caring for their grandchildren in Chicago, Illinois?
3. How can state and local government programs change eligibility requirements for assistance that will include informal custodial grandparents?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical construct for this study was role theory. Concepts of role theory can be traced back to before 1900, however the use of the term 'role' became prevalent in the 1930s (Biddle, 1986). The central idea in role theory is that individuals play various roles (i.e., daughter, mother, grandmother, and so forth) in their lives, and these roles structure how people behave. These behaviors are guided by expectations held by the individuals themselves as well as the people around them. For example, the role of a grandmother is often an occasional, guiding and nurturing paradigm, not one that is a primary, day-to-day 'parent'. As such, a person generally behaves and is perceived in that capacity (Biddle, 1986).

When people change their roles, role theory can be used to frame how one adapts to the new role and how they may be viewed. Role theory focuses on expectations and adaptation as it relates to custodial grandparents adjusting from grandparent to parenting their grandchild. Role changes that are abrupt and unexpected can create stress in family dynamics, thereby creating negative environment for custodial grandparents and the

grandchildren they are raising (Fader, 2018). Several studies have effectively used role theory in examining the changing role of custodial grandparents from both the grown child's and custodial grandparent's perspective (Brunette, 1999; Bullock, 2007; Landry-Meyer & Newman, 2004). A more thorough explanation of the research paradigm, role theory, for this study is discussed in chapter two.

Nature of the Study

A general qualitative study was utilized for this dissertation. According to Yin (2016) and Moustakas (1994), qualitative methods are used to understand what participants think and know by observing, interviewing, and analyzing the responses. A qualitative design was appropriate when the researcher seeks to explore the lived experiences of participants while “shedding new light on the experiences and events that have been described” (Moustakas, 1994, p.11). Furthermore, Moustakas (1994) explained the examination of “really feeling understood” as the application of empirical qualitative research and “obtaining the descriptions of feelings” from participants (p.12). The qualitative research approach was used to engage research participants through discussions and open-ended questions that explore their lived experiences as custodial grandparents (Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2016). The research design for this study supported the exploration of a phenomena by those who have direct, subjective experiences (Yin, 2016).

Researcher-developed focus group questions were used to conduct several, small homogenous focus groups. The use of focus groups usually allows those who participate to feel comfortable discussing their experiences with others who have the same

experiences (Yin, 2016). Each focus group size ranged from 5 to 9 participants; this variation of focus group size occurred given meeting availability. A total of 7 focus groups were held. Focus groups were conducted at a local library and conference rooms in two Chicago, Illinois senior centers that were convenient for participants. Informal custodial grandparents were recruited from two of the 11 Chicago offices of the Illinois Department of Aging Senior Services (see Appendix D). Data were collected from 20 participants; additional focus group participants were not needed since data saturation was achieved with 20 participants.

A purposive sampling technique was utilized to recruit participants for this qualitative study. Purposive sampling was appropriate for this study according to Yin (2016) given that participants have shared experiences in this area. Data analysis consisted of the participant responses being grouped into themes of shared meanings (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Afterwards, themes were coded for patterns using NVivo12, a qualitative data analysis computer software package. NVivo12 software allows the researcher to input audio and video data as well as various codes for similar responses to the questionnaire to compare the results from research questions (Edhlund & McDougall, 2017).

Definitions

The following terms are used in this study:

Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP): A low-price health coverage service for children, parents, and pregnant women. If a family's income does not qualify them for Medicaid, CHIP may provide health care coverage (HealthCare.gov, 2017).

Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS): A state system to assist low-income families with several programs and services (DCFS, 2017).

Informal custodial grandparent: A grandparent who has assumed the caretaking role for one or more grandchildren (Whitsett, 2011).

Medicaid: A state and federal health care program that provides free or low-cost care for some eligible low-income adults, children, pregnant women, older adults, and people with disabilities (Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services, 2017).

Section 8 vouchers: A housing assistance program providing rental help for low-income families in Illinois (Housing and Urban Development, 2017).

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): A program within DCFS that is formally called the Food Stamp Assistance Program (DCFS, 2017).

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): A program that the Illinois Department of Human Services offers which provides temporary assistance to women who are pregnant, as well as those families with children who require monetary assistance (Illinois Department of Human Service, 2017).

Women, Infants, Children (WIC): A federally funded nutritional food assistance service for young children (until the age of 5 years old), infants, and new mothers (WIC, 2017).

Assumptions

Several assumptions underlied this qualitative study. The first assumption was that the interview participants answered interview questions voluntarily, genuinely, accurately, and to the best of their knowledge based on their individual experiences. The

researcher explained to all participants that there was no right or wrong answer, and anonymity and confidentiality were important and maintained. Participants were provided clear interview questions using terminology that the participants understood. Informed consent was also explained, coupled with the knowledge that the volunteers may end the interview at any time (Yin, 2016). Another assumption of epistemology relates to creating a relationship with the participants to establish trust as a student researcher (Yin, 2016). Every effort was made to maximize the comfort and environment to assure the most accurate answers possible. Another assumption was that this study provided an explicit understanding of additional adversities that informal custodial grandparents endure, while eliciting positive social change for policy makers to include these families to receive adequate assistance. These assumptions were appropriate for this study due to subjective evidence based on individual experiences of the phenomenon of informal custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren (Creswell, 2013).

Scope and Delimitations

This study was designed to explore the phenomenon of custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren, and the adversities they face while raising these children. The problem was that a significant number of custodial grandparent's face healthcare and wellbeing issues, possible delinquency issues with grandchildren, financial, housing, legal, domestic violence issues, and access to public services, after assuming primary responsibility of their grandchildren. Therefore, the intent of this study was to address the gap in public policies and social services in Chicago, Illinois that do not offer adequate services for informal custodial grandparents. The objective of this study was two-fold,

first, to give custodial grandparents a platform to voice their adversities and concerns, and second, to provide information to political leaders and policy makers be made aware of the problems these families face and adjust the current policies to include custodial grandparents and the grandchildren they are caring for the needed assistance to survive and flourish in their communities. The scope of this study was limited to custodial grandparents in the Chicago, Illinois area. This specific focus on custodial grandparents was chosen due to the extensive years of experience working with children in the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center in Chicago, Illinois.

Delimitations

The purpose of this research was to explore the adversities and lived experiences of informal custodial grandparents in Chicago, Illinois. Information gleaned from this study may provide insight to policymakers to revise the eligibility requirements for grandparent caregivers who are struggling to raise their grandchildren. Custodial grandparents who are currently raising their grandchildren were included in this study. The boundaries of this study did not cover interviewing grandchildren who are being raised by their grandparent. This was due to the ramifications surrounding children under age 18 years, who cannot give informed consent and their ability to understand the research study. Moreover, formal custodial grandparents who are licensed foster parents were not included in this study. These custodial grandparents receive an abundance of social services and therefore are not explored in this qualitative research study.

Limitations

Limitations related to the small number of participants involved in this study, which cannot be applied to a universal population of custodial grandparents. Qualitative studies are subjective and based on the opinions, information, and experiences of each individual. The findings cannot be generalized beyond the individuals who participated in the study. Reliability may present limitations in qualitative research. It is essential that the researcher document every aspect of the field work procedures to confirm the field work is reliable (Patton, 2002). Regarding validity issues, it is the strength of qualitative research, regarding trustworthiness, genuineness, and reliability (Yin, 2016). In other words, the researcher should document what the participant stated versus the researcher's interpretation, warranting the validity of the data collection.

When conducting research, there were also ethical issues to consider. There were numerous matters such as protection of the participants, creating a trusting relationship with participants, advocating the integrity of your research, avoiding any misconduct and improprieties that may reflect on your academic institution, coupled with adherence to anonymity during disclosure of personal information from participants (Yin, 2016). Therefore, creating informed consent documents stating all the issues mentioned above was imperative to this research study. The participants fully understood all statements in the consent form before signing. It was the researcher's responsibility to ensure that all participants in this study understand the ethical issues that may arise in the study.

Significance

The importance of this qualitative research relates to the role changes and the adversities surrounding the phenomenon of custodial grandparents becoming the primary caretaker to their grandchildren. This research attempted to explore the lived experiences of these surrogate parents in their own words, describing the adversities they encounter while raising their grandchildren. This study also attempted to fill a gap in the literature related to custodial grandparents not receiving any public assistance to help with raising their grandchildren. These custodial grandparents make sacrifices in their lives to care for their grandchildren. It is important that policy makers recognize and understand their daily struggles of caregiving and create assistance to help with their challenges. In addition, the knowledge gained from this study may assist with efforts to revise public policies and improve resources for these ignored families.

Providing insight in this phenomenon may also eventually result in allocation of needed resources and interventions that can increase the development of these children towards becoming healthy adults. This in turn may reduce the number of children who are at-risk to become school drop-outs or a statistic in the juvenile justice system. Thus, this study may be the impetus to create positive social change that will provide the necessary public and social services as well as improve the potential for development of healthy, responsible adults for our future generation.

Summary

When custodial grandparents take on parenting roles to their grandchildren, it creates life changes and challenges. Custodial grandparents could be considered a

voiceless population who are struggling care for their grandchildren and need supportive social services to assist them with their new responsibilities. The research problem addressed was that there is a lack of policies and services available for informal custodial grandparents and how to keep these non-traditional families stable. The purpose of the proposed study was to explore the policies and services available for informal custodial grandparents through the lived experiences of informal custodial grandparents in the Chicago, Illinois area. This study gained insight of the adversities of their life changes since becoming a parent to their grandchildren. This study also explored the changes for the grandchild regarding attachment and loss, which can lead to delinquent behavior, affecting the custodial grandparent as well.

This study provided rich data from the participants, thereby creating awareness for policymakers and community leaders to address and possibly change current policies and services to include custodial grandparent families. Most grandparent families are living below the poverty levels, which should be a prompting for policy changes for these families (Cox, 2010; Letiecq et al., 2008). The pragmatic contributions for this research study focused on the many grandchildren being raised by their grandparents while lacking adequate necessities to be successful. This study has important social implications for school officials, health care professionals, mental health professionals, social workers, juvenile justice professionals, child development professionals, as well as the communities where these families reside.

Chapter 2 will present literature on the phenomenon of custodial grandparents' adversities encountered over the years without adequate assistance to raise their

grandchildren. This chapter will also cover role theory, purposive sampling, and snowball sampling, coupled with the various problematic issues related to custodial grandparent families.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Many grandparents have changed their roles within the family regarding their grandchildren. The role changes usually result from teen pregnancy, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, illnesses such as HIV/AIDS, incarceration, death, or abandonment of parental responsibilities (Bailey et al., 2013; Fetsch & Jacobson, 2014). These grandparents have become the parent to their grandchildren, assuming the daily responsibility of raising their grandchildren for reasons beyond their control. They are considered custodial grandparents as they assume the daily care for their grandchildren. Although researchers continue to address some issues related to grandparents raising their grandchildren, there is a lack of information on how to keep these families stable (Cancino, 2016).

In addition, there is a lack of public and social services available for informal custodial grandparents who are not licensed foster parents but assume the responsibility of caring for their grandchildren. In discussing GrAND Voices, a program designed to provide opportunities for formal custodial grandparent advocates to speak for custodial grandparents who are involved in the child welfare systems and the foster care system, Beltran (2017) noted several pieces of legislation that cater to formal custodial grandparent families. Beltran observed that there was not yet a discussion of or attention focused on informal custodial grandparents who are not in the state system.

Additionally, grandparents are assuming the responsibility of raising their grandchildren after retirement and may need to go back into the work force to make ends meet. Litton (2018) pointed out that custodial grandparents' face challenges that include

financial problems such as buying food, paying for housing, and providing health care insurance for grandparent and grandchild as well as behavioral issues with their grandchild. Most informal custodial grandparents have an income that is below the poverty line; furthermore, because they are not licensed foster parents or adoptive parents, they do not qualify for the same continual public assistance (Wiltz, 2016, p. 3). In this research study, I was concerned with the role change and financial adversities encountered by grandparents after becoming the parent to their grandchildren.

The purpose of this study was to explore the adversities that custodial grandparents experience with their role change while raising their grandchildren, coupled with the lagging policies and services available for informal custodial grandparents in the Chicago, Illinois, area. Those adversities include economic concerns, housing issues, inadequate health insurance, legal issues, behavioral issues in the grandchild, and the lack of public services for these families. In this chapter, I provide detailed information concerning the problems that informal custodial grandparents face while caring for their grandchildren as full-time guardians. This chapter also includes suggestions for fundamental changes needed in social service policies and programs in Illinois regarding informal custodial grandparents and their grandchildren. I also provide insight into the gaps in welfare policies for needed assistance for these families (Baker et al., 2008; Rubin, 2013). The literature review in this chapter includes an overview of several topics as background for this research study. Topics covered include financial problems, health care concerns, housing issues, educational issues, behavior problems, juvenile delinquency, domestic violence, public policies related to these issues, and policy gaps. I

also discuss role theory (Biddle, 1986), which was the theoretical framework for this research study.

The study's implications for positive social change include clarifying the societal ramifications that affect informal custodial grandparents. This knowledge may promote social changes to ensure these families are eligible for receiving continual state welfare support. There are millions of grandchildren who are being raised by grandparents while these grandparents lack the adequate resources to successfully raise healthy, striving young people to become thriving citizens. A better understanding of the adversities that custodial grandparents encounter may compel lawmakers to implement meaningful changes in welfare policies to assist these families. This study has important implications for health care professionals, social workers, juvenile-justice professionals, and child-development professionals, as well as community support advocates. Providing needed resources and interventions for custodial grandparent families may decrease the challenges for custodial grandparents, while increasing the chances of these children becoming healthy adults. More importantly, the results from this study may help to reduce the number of children who are at risk of becoming school dropouts or involved in the juvenile justice system.

Literature Search Strategy

In the literature review, I consider prior research on informal custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren and the challenges encountered by those grandparents. The Walden University library databases utilized for the search included Thoreau Multi-Database Search, SocINDEX, Sage Publications, ProQuest, and Academic

Search Complete. I also searched Google Scholar. The search terms included the following key words and phrases:

- *informal custodial grandparents;*
- *grandchildren living with grandparents;*
- *custodial grandparents and health care;*
- *informal custodial grandparents and poverty;*
- *health concerns and well-being;*
- *health insurance and grandchildren;*
- *social services for custodial grandparents;*
- *public policies for custodial grandparents;*
- *custodial grandparents and housing;*
- *education issues for the grandchildren;*
- *role theory, role conflict, and cognitive role theory;*
- *custodial grandparents and guardianship;*
- *informal custodial grandparents' legal issues; and*
- *custodial grandchildren and juvenile delinquency.*

I used the combined terms in the listed databases to locate literature based on the topic of study. Regarding published dissertations on the subject, the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global searches yielded two dissertations that are specifically related to the topic of this study. My literature review was concluded when it appeared I exhausted new avenues and continued locating the studies I already included. I utilized over 37 resources in my research that spanned over two decades of work.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation for this study was role theory. Role theory was appropriate for this study because it not only accounts for traditional roles but also the diverse and changing roles individuals may face and the inherent challenges of those altered roles (Biddle, 1986) for example, the strain experienced by grandparents as they change their roles from grandparent to the parent for their grandchildren. Role theory relates to daily norms--“what we do and don’t do in everyday life” (Wright, 2007, para. 1). Early advocates of role theory (Georg Simmel, George Herbert Mead, Ralph Linton, and Jacob Moreno) related role theory to “scripts of social conduct” (Biddle, 1986, p. 68). However, role theory evolved to explain “expectations of behaviors and attitudes” (p. 69) associated with an individual’s position.

Biddle (1986) also explained how role theory relates to sociology of the daily activities of defined classifications, with each role having specific duties, expectations, and behaviors that one must fulfill. In other words, mother, aunt, sister, teacher, or supervisor have specific roles to fulfill with behaviors and attitudes. When roles change unexpectedly, it creates conflicting expectations; as applied to this study, when the grandparent must become the parent to their grandchildren, “role conflict or pressures” (p. 82) result, thereby creating inevitable stress due to disruption in roles (Biddle, 1986). A strength of role theory as stated by Biddle is that “its concept is easily studied” (p. 76). Role theory infers the expectations of a position that a person holds, as well as “provides a perspective for discussing or studying many social issues” (Biddle, 1986, p.68).

Several studies involving grandparents have effectively used role theory (Burnette, 1999; Bullock, 2004; Landry-Meyer & Newman, 2004). Burnette's (1999) qualitative research study using role theory involved 74 Latino grandparents raising their grandchildren in New York City. The grandparent participants were 60 years and older who also suffered from financial problems, stress, emotional discomfort, physical ailments, and the "demanding role tends to have multiple needs and limited resources" (Burnette, 1999, p.56). Bullock (2004) utilized role theory as a framework to qualitatively study 65 female grandparents as caregivers to their grandchildren. This research examined caregiver stress, due to the unexpected role change, lack of income, couples with other "social and emotional problems" (Bullock, 2004, p.47). Most participants in this study were "unprepared and uninformed" (p.49), and in need of social support, related to income, housing, health care, and other necessities for raising a family for a second time (Bullock, 2004).

A qualitative research study conducted by Landry-Meyer and Newman explored role theory and the grandparent caregiver. The researchers interviewed 26 female grandparents raising their grandchildren, who had legal custody of their grandchildren, using three premises for their research questions, "role timing, role ambiguity, and role conflict" utilized as "lens" (p. 1006) to explore how grandparents are faring raising their grandchildren. One participant in this study explained how she is not a grandmother to her grandchildren now, but she must be "mom, dad, disciplinarian, teacher, counselor" (Laundry-Meyer & Newman, 2004, p.1019). In other words, the role change from grandparent to parent creates role conflict, stress, and complexed role conflict. However,

the grandparents in these studies were formal grandparents and receiving public assistance to help with raising their grandchildren. My study examined informal grandparents and included the additional stressors that may weigh on them since they receive little or no financial assistance and related services. When custodial grandparents assume the role of parent to their grandchildren, they often do not realize the complications and hardships associated within this role change. Moreover, the research questions discussed in this study relate to the challenges that custodial grandparents face when they must change roles to care for and raise their grandchildren.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

In a qualitative study in rural, southwest Montana by Baily, Haynes, and Letiecq (2013), the authors conducted face-to-face interviews with 26 custodial grandparents who were currently raising their grandchildren. The researchers explored the adversities these grandparents faced regarding their lack of finances due to the unexpected expenses of raising grandchildren. The authors recognized the barriers to receiving government assistance and the requirements for such assistance, both of which apply to the current study. The study examined the financial difficulties of custodial grandparent families vulnerability to poverty, as well as the need for policy makers to redefine the requirements for custodial grandparents to qualify for financial assistance (Baily, Haynes, & Letiecq, 2013).

A qualitative study conducted Sampson and Hertlein (2015) examined the challenges faced by informal custodial grandparents and suggested interventions that may alleviate some of the challenges. Their study utilized phenomenology and snowball

sampling with in-person interviews of 14 custodial grandparents. The data analysis revealed at least five of the same themes of daily life patterns for the 14 participants. The outcome of this study suggested clinical therapists consider the challenges faced by grandparents versus serving only the grandchild.

From a clinical perspective, this study provided suggestions for clinical interventions for custodial grandparents and grandchildren with information for resiliency training, family therapy, and support groups for both grandparent and grandchild. However, the authors did not provide information on financial assistance for these families, which most participants stated was the most problematic issue for their families. On the other hand, this study had a small number of participants, which was a limitation of their study. Overall, per the authors, their study was consistent with previous, similar research on this topic (Sampson & Hertlein, 2015). Sampson and Hertlein (2015) reported that the participants in their qualitative study discussed their limited financial resources, and the absent parent creates huge financial problems, especially because the absent parent can lead to difficulties obtaining social service support.

A qualitative, phenomenological study conducted by Peterson (2018) recruited 15 grandparent participants age 40 and older from three different states. The researcher utilized purposive sampling for the study. The objective of this study was to explore plans that caregivers had if they were no longer able to raise their adolescent grandchildren. The data collection consisted of face-to-face interviews, with the participants receiving a \$10 gift card upon completion of the study. The results from this study demonstrated that most older grandparents are reluctant to become involved with

the social welfare system, and worried about the parent returning and taking the grandchild back to a negative environment. The author suggested that older grandparents become involved in the available social service system which may provide “promising approaches to future care planning” (Peterson, 2018, p. 74). Although these two qualitative studies by Sampson and Hertlein (2015) and Peterson (2018) had different objectives, both explored an aspect of the adversities faced by informal custodial grandparents and their need for assistance with raising their grandchildren.

Evolution of Family Structure

The phenomenon of grandparents raising their grandchildren is said to be the “fastest-growing segment of the population” (Van Etten & Gautam, 2012, p. 19). According to the 2011 Census Bureau Van Etten and Gautam (2012) asserted that children being raised by grandparents are isolated from the social welfare system. Moreover, the majority of public policies do not address the needs of these non-traditional families. Hence, most informal custodial grandparents struggle economically without social service assistance. In this literature review, I explored the challenges that most custodial grandparent’s face as they raise their grandchildren. I also discussed the need to include informal custodial grandparents in current public policies in order to assist informal custodial grandparents in their plight.

The manifestation of informal custodial grandparents has changed the dynamics of the family structure over the past five decades. In 1970, the U.S. Census Bureau reported more than two million children were living in grandparent-headed households. By 1997, the number of children living with a grandparent increased 33% from the 1970

numbers, bringing the number of non-traditional families to more than three million and rising (Sampson & Hertlein, 2015). Based on U.S. Census Bureau data (2014), and the work of Ellis and Simmons (2014), the projected number of custodial grandparent-headed households will reach more than seven million in 2020. Ellis and Simmons, and Sampson and Hertlein (2015) suggested that the number of informal custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren will increase substantially in the next decade. The following information from the 2014 U.S. Census Bureau depicts how the number of informal custodial grandparents is increasing; the figures doubled from 2008 to 2014 (U.S. Census Bureau, Newsroom Release, 2014).

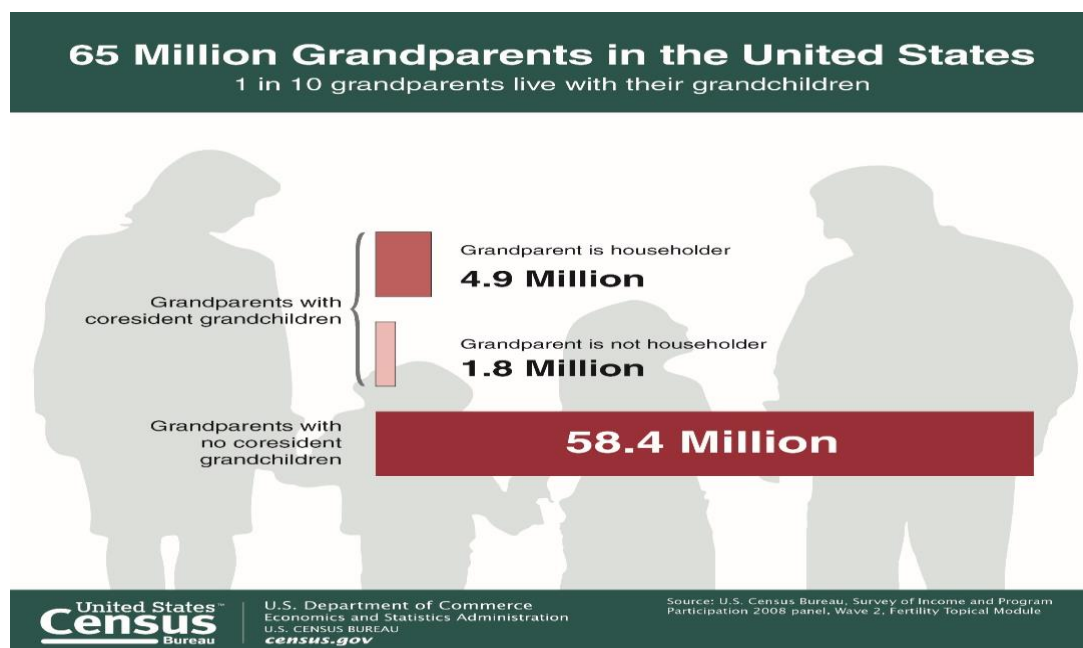


Figure 2. U.S. Census Bureau Picture Graph illustrates the number of grandparents raising their grandchildren as head of household, versus grandparents as non-head of household. The percentage of children who lived with a grandparent in 2012 was also 10 percent, up from 7 percent in 1992.

(Release Number CB14-194), by U.S. Census Bureau, 2014)
(<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2014/cb14-194.html>).

The U.S. Census Bureau stated the ages of informal custodial grandparents, and noted ages ranging from 30 to 80 years old. The same data showed female grandparents represent the highest percentage of informal custodial grandparents. Additionally, younger grandparents who are raising a grandchild tend to have less education and probably live in poverty, versus those who are not raising a grandchild (United States Census Bureau, 2014). As the number of informal custodial grandparents steadily increases, the challenges are daunting and the need for policy adjustments to include informal custodial grandparent families is fundamental for these families' survival, as well as social change.

Custodial Grandparents' Challenges

Non-traditional families are the label placed on informal custodial grandparent families. This label is due to grandparents raising their grandchildren, and they face many difficulties without public assistance and public service provisions. Most public and social services are designed for licensed foster parents. Many custodial grandparents are not financially independent and lack the extra funds needed to provide for their grandchildren (Van Etten & Gautam, 2012; Yancura, 2013). Additionally, grandchildren who are being raised by grandparents are isolated from the social welfare system. Most "federal and state policies were not designed for this population" (p. 18), and ultimately most of the custodial grandparents struggle financially without public service assistance for their grandchildren (Van Etten & Gautam, 2012).

Also, the lack of education for most inner-city grandparents usually leads to unemployment for those grandparents, which causes more financial strain and creates more stress among custodial grandparents (Gaille, 2014). Despite not receiving much (if any) public assistance in raising their grandchildren, informal custodial grandparents save taxpayers approximately six billion dollars a year as compared to the cost of placing those same children in state foster care (Generations United, 2012). Some grandchildren can receive medical and dental check-ups if their grandparents are employed with quality health insurance from their employer. However, most grandparents raising grandchildren do not fall into this category (Gaille, 2014).

In addition, custodial grandchildren usually have higher levels of emotional and behavioral problems. For example, boys usually have external behavioral issues, while girls often display internal emotional and behavioral issues. According to Gaille (2014), children usually exhibit behavioral issues when permanently moved into their grandparents' home. But grandparents can alleviate some of these problems if they have access to needed support. In other words, custodial grandparents may provide the same level of care to their grandchildren as the biological parent would. However, they are usually ineligible for most of the resources and services that parents are allowed.

Financial problems. Financial problems increase for informal custodial grandparents when costs of day care, legal fees, clothing, food, rent/mortgage, and other expenses needed for daily living begin adding up (Steinisch, 2015). According to Steinisch (2015), there are a variety of problematic issues that confront informal custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren, but the major issue is the financial

responsibilities. Those grandparents who are retired must use their pension or Social Security payments to provide for their grandchildren. Those grandparents who are not retired and working full-time may drop to part-time employment. They may also take funds from their retirement account to cover some expenses to accommodate caring for their grandchildren (Steinisch, 2015). Overall, the financial struggles are exacerbated when the grandparent or grandchild needs the care of a doctor or hospital visit. Financial insecurity and poverty are threats in most custodial grandparent households.

Myadze (2012) conducted a quantitative study on custodial grandparents who live in West Virginia. These custodial grandparents are among the most vulnerable due to “higher poverty rates” in this region of the country (p. 1). Myadze discussed the more than 4 million grandchildren residing with their grandparents and noted that most of these grandparents are female. These female grandparents provide financial support under economic disadvantages, “in the absence of government financial assistance” (p. 8). Myadze also noted the importance of expanding kinship care policies such as TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Children) to include custodial grandparents (Myadze, 2012).

In the state of Illinois, there was the infamous 1979 case of *Miller vs. Youakin*. Illinois law required relatives who cared for children who were removed from their parents’ homes to pass licensing exams to become certified foster parents to those children. However, the U.S. Supreme Court (1979) overturned the Illinois state law, ending Illinois’s ability to deny federal foster-care benefits to relatives caring for and raising these children. The Supreme Court stated, “The AFDC-FC program encompasses

foster children who, under a judicial determination of neglect, have been placed in related homes that meet a State's licensing requirements for unrelated foster homes.

Accordingly, Illinois may not exclude from its AFDC-FC program children who reside with relatives" (U. S. Supreme Court, 1979, p.133-146). Despite the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in the Illinois case, most states are not required to assist grandparents who are raising their grandchildren unless the grandparents are licensed foster parents (Myadze, 2012).

However, in 1996 the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), better known as the Welfare Reform Act, changed the views of policy makers toward low-income families (Burke, 2003). The PRWORA established that essential assistance programs for low-income families be terminated, including food stamp programs. The Act replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) that was created during the Depression era to assist those families who were destitute (Burke, 2003).

The 1996 PRWORA changed the way low-income families received welfare assistance by providing stipulations that the heads of these households find employment while being on TANF for a brief period, versus receiving support for an indeterminate amount of time (Burke, 2003). The question remains, does TANF impact custodial grandparent families? The answer should be unequivocally yes, considering the requirements to receive TANF benefits include the head of households find employment within a year of receiving assistance (Shiffman, Sims, & Tharp, 2002). The work

requirement to qualify for TANF could be an arduous task for an elderly custodial grandparent trying to raise more than one grandchild.

Many social service programs and policies have dissipated during the era of economic difficulties and custodial grandparents are usually living in poverty, without adequate medical treatment and other necessities for healthy living. Most of these families become exposed to the adverse aspects of inner city Chicago environments of guns, gangs, and drugs. It is important to redirect these children to become healthy, confident citizens and contribute to society versus becoming a statistic in the criminal justice system (Sampson & Hertlein, 2015). Most of these families have limited resources to provide adequately for the grandchildren and are surviving at the lowest socioeconomic status. Both grandchild and grandparent are being affected negatively by their social circumstances (Prokos & Keene, 2012).

Poverty appears to be the primary factor creating negative pathways for custodial grandparents, as discussed by Prokos and Keene (2012). The authors conducted a quantitative study on custodial grandmothers that focused on poverty, economic security, and child welfare. Their research study examined the predictions of poverty based on age and ethnicity utilizing the 2000 U.S. Census data to compare to 50 other states (Prokos & Keen, 2012). Prokos and Keene (2012) asserted that “formal and informal grandparent care for grandchildren is one of the core issues in social gerontology,” meaning that custodial grandparents are among the elderly who are not acknowledged as having challenges caring for their grandchildren (p. 593). In other words, problems of aging associated with health and wellbeing, coupled with economic security, are serious

problems for custodial grandparents. Prokos and Keene (2012) did not consider other aspects of being a custodial grandparent, such as the lack of health care, and stated “our understanding of these families’ economic situation is incomplete” (p. 593).

According to Cox (2010), the federal government would prefer blood relatives to take children who are abandoned by the parent. Families usually have first preference versus placing the child in state foster care. The government only requires the grandparent to be “fit and willing” to look after the children (p. 285). However, the same government rule that seeks family as a preference to receive the child is not necessarily providing financial assistance to that family. Nationwide, there are very few programs that aid custodial grandparents, and fewer than half of the states provide support programs to grandparents raising their grandchildren (Cox, 2010).

If custodial grandparents became involved in the state foster care system, they would be eligible for monetary payments to assist with caring for the children they are raising. These fees increase for the grandparent based on the number of grandchildren in the household. Unfortunately, most of the grandparents raising their grandchildren are not in the foster care system. According to Cox (2010) “the majority are raising the children informally...only one-fourth of the children being raised by grandparents are in formal foster families” (pp. 287-288). Hence, the gap in public policies to assist these families with the hardship and financial strain they experience daily. It is important that custodial-grandparent families be recognized and receive needed assistance.

According to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services [DCFS] (2017), there are thousands of custodial grandparents in the state who are raising their

grandchildren. The article discusses various programs that are available for grandparents, but the problem is navigating the system, which is overwhelming for most of these grandparents. For example, TANF will provide child-only grant monies and regular TANF monies to custodial grandparents. However, the child-only grant is approximately \$100.00 a month, and the qualifying child can receive that \$100.00 a month until they are 18 years old. The regular TANF grant is based on the grandparent's income, which must be incredibly low to receive the funds. The monthly TANF grant requires grandparents to look for work, and the funds expire in 5 years. In other words, if the grandparent is receiving a retirement pension, it is more than likely they will not qualify for a regular TANF. If the grandparent is living at poverty level, then they will be eligible, if they actively search for a job while receiving TANF assistance (DCFS, 2017).

Another resource for custodial grandparent families from DCFS is the SNAP program. This program was formally known the food stamp program, that assists with buying food for low-income families. The recipients are given Illinois Link cards which are comparable to a credit card. However, families cannot purchase any other household products such as soap powder, deodorant, and other necessities; they can only buy food. The lack of income may cause the recipients to sell the card for cash to supplement their income and buy other household items. Selling SNAP food cards is an ongoing issue in Illinois and not a solution for receiving monetary assistance for custodial grandparent families. The SNAP food card assists families on the one hand but, on the other hand, it causes difficulties with the lack of monetary assistance (DCFS, 2017).

Another resource from DCFS for custodial grandparents is the WIC Program. For low-income families with children under 5 years old who qualify, this program provides a check to buy healthy food such as, milk, juice, eggs, cheese, cereal, dry beans, peas, and peanut butter (DCFS, 2017). Does this mean when the grandchild turns 6 years old, the DCFS will stop providing support to purchase healthy food? The DCFS requires the grandparent to be subjected to a series of bureaucratic hurdles to qualify for limited services, which creates more challenges for the custodial grandparent (DCFS, 2017).

Custodial grandparents need less bureaucracy and more adhocacy regarding assistance. Sampson and Hertlein (2015) reported that participants in their qualitative study discussed their limited financial resources, and the absent parent creates huge financial problems, with difficulties locating social service support. One of the grandparent participants in Sampson and Hertlein's (2015) study discussed the lack of help to assist with raising the grandchild. This participant also shared how their pension money was depleting and there is not any monetary assistance available for the situation.

Health care and well-being. Research suggests custodial grandparents experience intensified health issues when they assume the responsibility of parenting their grandchildren (Neely-Barnes et al., 2010). Neely-Barnes et al. (2010) conducted a quantitative study of 119 custodial grandparents. The authors asked participants a series of questions about their health-related quality of life (HR QOL) before and after assuming the care of their grandchildren. These grandparents were from low- and medium-income households. The data collected related to the age of the grandparent, which ranged from 37 to 87 years, the number of grandchildren in the home, how long

they had been caring for grandchildren, the educational level of the grandparent, income levels, and spirituality of the grandparent. Additionally, many participants in the study were African American females, who cared for “one or two” (p. 89). grandchildren in their home (Neely-Barnes et al., 2010). The authors utilized various test measurement instruments for data analysis to measure custodial grandparent’s quality of life. The researchers determined that quality of life and healthcare issues are serious concerns for custodial grandparent households, stating “custodial grandparenting affects the quality of the older adult life in both positive and negative ways” (Neely-Barnes et al., 2010, p. 88). In other words, some elderly grandparents are raising their grandchildren who live healthy lives, as well as elderly grandparents who suffer from serious health issues.

This study suggested that most custodial grandparents related their health problems and quality of life to lack monetary support. However, this study lacked information regarding social support and public assistance for these custodial grandparents. Custodial grandparents are in need of economic support, healthcare support and other necessities to ensure an improved quality of life while raising their grandchildren. This study lacked a stated purpose and any theoretical concepts related to the grandparent’s health and quality of life. Implications of this study suggested that “grandparent caregivers should play a significant role in the design and implementation of their services and resources” (Neely-Barnes et al., 2010, p. 95).

In 2012, Carr, Hayslip, and Gray conducted a study on health-related concerns of custodial grandparents and how the burden of raising grandchildren contributed to their failing health. The researchers focused on 93 African American custodial grandmothers.

Again, several instruments were utilized for data analysis, consisted of the age of grandparent, the number of grandchildren in the home, how long caring for grandchildren, educational level of a grandparent, and income levels that were at or below the poverty line. The results of this study indicated that African American custodial grandparents are usually poor and experience a greater degree of stress compared to adults of other races who provide direct care of their grandchildren (Carr et al., 2012). Carr et al. (2012) also pointed out that understanding grandparents' difficulties in raising grandchildren may assist in helping those grandparents develop coping skills for improving their health.

Custodial grandparents also have difficulty accessing any available resources and have a "fear of the grandchildren being taken away from them," (p. 372) which creates havoc on the physical and mental health of custodial grandparents (Carr et al., 2012)

Kelly et al. (2012) interviewed 504 custodial grandmothers to determine what was needed to improve the health and quality of life for these grandmothers. They found that "research consistently demonstrates associations between the responsibility of raising one's grandchildren and an increased propensity for stress, depression, and poor physical health" (Kelly et al. 2012, p. 55). The purpose of this study was to examine the wellbeing of African American grandmothers. The theoretical concept for this study drew on resiliency adjustment, which is often used in nursing research. (Kelly et al., 2012). The authors suggested the need for support groups, mental health services, and community programs for these custodial caregivers (Kelly et al., 2012). Improving the health care of custodial grandparents "through a community-based intervention" (p. 65)

may assist in the health-related issues that the grandparents face, and the grandchildren could also benefit from this intervention (Kelly et al., 2012). Most social service providers have dwindled in the last few decades. Does this mean that these custodial grandparents will continue having healthcare issues and a negative quality of life? Can federal and state public policy officials create necessary changes to include the emerging phenomenon of custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren to allow them to receive the necessary assistance?

Housing concerns. Public assistance is not the only support needed by custodial grandparents. Housing issues are a huge concern as well. There are those grandparents who live in senior public housing. Senior public housing does not usually allow children to live in the apartment with the grandparent, and many custodial grandparents fear eviction if they take in their grandchild. The housing issue is a concerning challenge for grandparents (Goyer, 2011). A writer with the American Association of Retired Persons provided information on locating adequate housing for custodial grandparents. The local public housing authority provides information on Section 8 housing vouchers, where the grandparent can locate a place of residence, and the owner must accept the voucher (Goyer, 2011).

Additionally, in several cities across the country, including Chicago, there are specific apartment complexes especially for custodial grandparents. However, the waiting lists for these apartments are years long, and new complexes are not in the plans at this point, which indicates the exceptionally low availability of housing for custodial grandparents (Cox, 2009). Regarding housing issues for custodial grandparents' families,

the barriers are distinctive in that most custodial grandparents live in overcrowded apartments, and older grandparents who are living in “government subsidized housing or senior housing, may be evicted if the grandchildren move in with them” (Generations United, 2016, para. 1).

According to Generations United (2016), there are more than a quarter of a million custodial grandparents who are renting housing and are using almost half of their monthly income for rent payments while living in overcrowded conditions (Generations United, 2016; Wallace, 2016, p. 162). In 2003, Generations United submitted information to Congress concerning the need for new laws addressing housing issues for custodial grandparents. Dubbed LEGACY- (Living Equitably: Grandparents Aiding Children and Youth), the proposed law was the first “federal affordable housing program” (para. 1) created specifically for custodial grandparents (Generations United, 2016). The LEGACY Act generated 10 million dollars appropriated for affordable housing for custodial grandparents. In 2011, a housing development for custodial grandparents was completed in Chicago, Illinois.

The Roseland Village Intergenerational Apartments are located on the south side of the city. These 10 units with 3- and 4-bedroom apartments were designed for custodial grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. The largest apartment complex for custodial grandparents is in Phoenix Arizona, which is a 56-unit complex for grandparents raising their grandchildren. Custodial grandparents are raising 109,939 children in the state of Illinois. About 68% of the grandparents who are caring for these children are under 60 years old, and 20% live in poverty. In Chicago Illinois, 31,686

grandchildren are living with a grandparent (AARP, n.d.). More affordable housing is critically needed for these families to raise their grandchildren in a safe and comfortable environment that may produce favorable outcomes for these families.

Education concerns for grandchildren. School registration issues are another challenge for custodial grandparents who are not licensed foster parents. According to Generations United (2016) and Wallace (2016), barriers to enrolling the grandchild in school are due to the legalities involved in the custodial grandparent obtaining legal custody. Grandparents must present legal documentation stating that they are the legal guardian of the child. If they cannot, the school official will not allow the registration to take place. Registering the grandchild for school is another stressful barrier for most custodial grandparents. Regarding future generations, it is important for all children to attend school and receive a proper education. Fortunately, the laws in Illinois do not require the grandparent to have legal custody of the grandchild to register the child for school (Cox, 2009; Generations United, 2016; Wallace, 2016). According to the “Illinois School Code, 105 ILCS 5/10-20.12b, provided that the residence of a person who has legal custody of a pupil is deemed to be the residence of the pupil” (Kill & Kill, 2005, p. 2). Cox (2009) noted that only 21 states currently allow custodial grandparents to enroll their grandchildren in school when they do not have legal custody of their grandchildren. There are limited updates on the educational enrollment process of grandchildren living with grandparents without a parent present.

Grandchildren’s behavior problems. The foundation of the nuclear family is said to consist of a man, a woman, and their offspring. That family dynamic is idealistic

in the 21st century due to the constant disruption and detachment of the family structure. Campbell, Hu, and Oberle, (2008) argued that a broken family structure creates at-risk children who are being raised by their grandparent. This detachment of the biological family structure may ultimately lead to delinquency by these children. The risk factors for delinquency discussed in the study included the absence of involvement of the parent coupled with the lack of active communication between grandparent and grandchild, constant disagreements between grandparent and grandchild, and inadequate parental supervision (Campbell et al., 2008).

Custodial grandparents described a lack of adequate resources to successfully care for their grandchildren, especially children who demonstrate behavior issues. At the same time, social service programs are, for the most part, unresponsive to custodial grandparents' needs, thereby making it impossible for these families to receive the much-needed assistance (Campbell et al., 2008). The authors suggested that adequate support and services should be provided for custodial grandparents to adequately supervise their grandchildren to prevent future delinquent behavior, thereby reducing juvenile delinquency within these vulnerable families.

Leiber, Mack, and Featherstone (2009) argued that when family structures break, the probability of delinquency is prevalent in custodial grandparent households. Social control/attachment theory and economic strain/stress theory were the frameworks utilized in this study, which focused on secure attachment versus weak attachment in the parent/child relationship, as well as the economic status and ethnicity of the child. The researchers hypothesized that family settings with more insecure parent/child attachment

and less-supervised children are prone to producing delinquent behavior, coupled with economics and race (Leiber et al., 2009).

A quantitative study by Leiber et al. (2009) utilized data from 115 high schools and middle schools from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Leiber et al., 2009). They found that “the effects on family processes and economic factors on delinquency do not vary by household structure, race, and ethnicity” (Leiber et al., 2009, p. 92). In other words, the ethnicity of a child does not matter when attachments fracture in the parent/child relationship; the disruption itself increases the possibility the child may lean towards delinquent behavior to cope with the broken bond regardless of other factors.

Another research study on family detachments and juvenile delinquency also found that children who are in a stable home environment are less prone for delinquency versus children who reside in unstable environments (Schroeder, Osgood, & Oghia, 2010). Schroeder et al. (2010) used social control theory as a framework and hypothesized that “higher rates of offending among children and adolescents from broken homes...due to family separation...family dissolution will be associated with increases in juvenile offending” (Schroeder et al., 2010, p. 586). Also, Schroeder et al. (2010) noted that children residing in blended family homes are even more prone to delinquent behavior when coupled with the issues of detachment from the biological parent. When children are removed from a familiar environment and required to transition to an unfamiliar environment, it may produce resentment and anger, and these feelings may evolve towards juvenile delinquency.

Frederick (2010) argued that misconduct issues in custodial grandparent households are more prevalent versus traditional families. This study pointed out the discrepancies of research on delinquency in youth who are residing with their grandparent, reiterating that most grandchildren who were living with a grandparent “were exposed to poverty, crime, drug abuse, and violence before living with grandparents” (Frederick, 2010, para. 7). Frederick’s research paradigm focused on “life course development,” and utilized survey responses from the ADD Health database (a longitudinal research data base sample of school-age children in grades 7 thru 12) for in-school youth and the information concerning custodial grandparent’s information limits due to the lack of participants in that category (Fredrick, 2010, para 7). The ADD Health database was created to support studies related to exploring the influences on adolescent health and adolescent social life in a school environment. According to Harris (2005), “ADD Health research has exploited its unique design to explore the “role of social contexts in adolescent lives” (p. 2). The findings suggested that there was limited evidence that children raised by grandparents are more susceptible to delinquency versus children raised by biological parents. Hence the gap in research related to delinquency within custodial grandparent households (Frederick, 2010; Harris, 2005). There is limited research on grandchildren’s behavior problems when they move in with a grandparent.

Domestic violence from grandchildren. Most children who are living with grandparents are usually there due to parental neglect or abandonment (Van Etten & Gautam, 2012). These children are prone to emotional, psychological, and physical difficulties when they enter the grandparents’ home due to the trauma most have

experienced with their biological parent (Van Etten & Gautam, 2012). Domestic violence problems in grandparent homes is not addressed in most research studies. However, domestic violence in custodial grandparent's homes is a growing concern. Most of the grandchildren come from adverse environments of child abuse, neglect, and drug and alcohol abuse. The risk for becoming violent is extreme and should be addressed when discussing public policies for these families. Many children who survive their negative environment have the propensity to become violent when confronted with structure and discipline in the grandparent home (Cox, 2009; Day & Bazemore, 2011).

The most recent story of domestic violence in a grandparent's household was in Chicago, Illinois in 2011. A *Chicago Tribune* article discussed the tragic incident of a grandson who violently murdered his grandmother, who was raising him due to her daughter's drug addiction. The grandmother was a Chicago Police Officer, her grandson was a 15-year-old freshman in high school at the time of the brutal murder. The grandson murdered his 55-year-old grandmother because she caught him at home when he should have been in school that day. The grandson struck his grandmother repeatedly with a lamp while she slept in her bed, then stabbed her several times, before wrapping and throwing her body down a sewer trap in the back of the house (Hinkel & Shikerman, 2011). Most children who end up being raised by their grandparents come from troubled home environments. The grandparents try to instill discipline and provide a structured environment, but they are not aware of the psychological issues their grandchild might be dealing with. This is another reason why it is vital to provide health care assistance for

necessary clinical therapy sessions for the grandchildren (Cox, 2009; Day & Bazemore, 2011; Van Etten & Gautam, 2012).

According to Day and Bazemore (2011), these children experience an “attachment disruption” (p. 106) when separated from their biological parent. They are in a “fight or flight” (p. 106) style of behavior due to their inability to differentiate between discipline from the grandparent versus someone trying to harm them. Day and Bazemore (2011) suggested a restorative approach to dealing with domestic violence in grandparent households, focusing on the unique needs of these children. Restorative justice relates to several entities becoming involved with the grandchildren (e.g., the child welfare system, healthcare system, and other social service interventions), as well as the involvement of extended family members to assist custodial grandparents. There is limited research on the problem of domestic violence in grandparent-headed households, but domestic violence is a growing trend that will escalate as the phenomenon of custodial grandparent families continues to increase (Day & Bazemore, 2011).

Public Assistance for Low-Income Families

Generations United is a national organization dedicated to intergenerational policy, programs, and issues related to the needs of children, teens, and older adults. Generations United also works for supportive services for grandparents as well as the grandchildren they are raising (Generations United, 2016). According to 2016 statistics provided by Generations United, over 2 million custodial grandparents are caring for their grandchildren on a daily basis and most of these grandparents are working while parenting their grandchildren. Additionally, most of these custodial grandparents income

is extremely low and have been raising their grandchildren for over 5 years. More importantly, these custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren are keeping these children out of the state foster care system, thereby saving taxpayers billions each year (Generations United, 2016). The above statistics will increase as this phenomenon continues to grow. These statistics also show the financial savings for taxpayers with the informal caretaking, coupled with the needed assistance for many of these families in most areas of their lives. A program that assists children and families is the office of Administration for Children and Families (ACF). This organization was established in 1991, under the auspices of Section 6 of the Reorganization Plan No. 1 of 1953 (ACF, 2017, para. 1). The agency is connected to the Department of Health and Human Services and assists families and communities regarding foster parents and the children they are responsible for raising; as well as, those children legally adopted by a relative (ACF, 2017, para 2). Another program under the same administration is the Title IV-E Guardianship Assistance Program, which provides support for relative guardians or kinship caregivers who have obtained legal certification from the state they reside in (ACF, 2016, para 1).

Another program that helps children and families is The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA). The CWLA was developed in 1920 and is the oldest and largest non-governmental organization. Their purpose is to assist vulnerable families through a broad network of various agencies catering to families in need of assistance who do not have the necessary means to provide for their families. Their primary concern is to ensure that children and youth are safe and productive in their communities, and they focus on foster

homes and those families who are in the child welfare system (CWLA, 2016). The CWLA's Adoption and Guardianship Assistance Program helps guide grandparents who are prepared to adopt their grandchild. The program helps those grandparents get the assistance they need through established programs if the grandparents abide by the Social Security Laws.

According to the Social Security laws, states must assist parents who adopt special-needs children by providing the adoptive parents with monthly payments (determined by the state) via public agencies or private agencies in that state (Compilation of the Social Security Laws, 2014). In other words, unless custodial grandparents are preparing to legally adopt their grandchildren, they will not receive the needed assistance from the state. On the other hand, most custodial grandparents voluntarily take their grandchildren into their homes without hesitation and do not involve the state bureaucracy into their lives, hence informal guardianship of their grandchildren (CWLA, 2016). Informal custodial grandparents are the surrogate parents to their grandchildren, who do not qualify for state assistance to adequately care for their grandchildren (Cancino, 2016).

According to Maria Nanos, executive director of the Center for Law and Social Work in Chicago, most informal caregivers, such as custodial grandparents, do not ask her organization for assistance. They tackle guardianship alone and endure the challenges of raising their grandchildren (Cancino, 2016). Cancino (2016) further noted that the Center usually receives monies from Illinois Department of Aging to assist some of the grandparents who ask for legal assistance, but the Illinois budget has been inoperable for

approximately 6 months (para.10). Therefore, the struggles that custodial grandparents endure continue while they are “underserved or unserved by child welfare” (Wallace, 2016, p. 125).

Most custodial grandparent households live at the poverty level or below while caring for their grandchildren (Cox, 2010). The demands that custodial grandparents face raising grandchildren in the 21st century are problematic due to the unanticipated expenses (e.g., food, clothing, medical expenses, day care expenses, housing, etc.) and the lack of supportive resources from state and local government service providers (Sampson & Hertlein, 2015). In other words, custodial grandparents, and the children they are caring for, are often suffering financially, emotionally, physically, and psychologically due to the enormous responsibilities of becoming parents for their grandchildren. The phenomenon of grandparents raising their grandchildren is said to be the “fastest-growing segment of the population” (Van Etten & Gautam, 2012, p. 19). According to Generations United (2016), “about 19% of grandparents responsible for grandchildren live in poverty” (para. 1). Additionally, some of the younger grandparents may resign from their jobs or take part-time work just to care for their grandchildren, which adversely affects their already meager income. Older grandparents usually deplete their monthly income to care for their grandchildren (Generations United, 2016). A barrier to obtaining funding from state welfare agencies consists of limited payments of grants for only the children, which have limited funding. Another barrier in this area relates to the bureaucracy and its tedious applications, which usually discourages the custodial grandparents from applying. Many custodial grandparents are also discouraged

from applying for benefits because they think they may get denied and do not know how to manage the appeal process (Wallace, 2016).

Health and nutrition concerns are also challenging for the grandchild and the grandparent. Custodial grandparents experience an enormous amount of stress, physical disabilities, depression, isolation, and high blood pressure (Generations United, 2016, para.1). The grandchildren may experience “physical, behavioral, and emotional problems” (para. 2) due to the separation from the parent, coupled with the transition from their original home to the grandparents’ home (Generations United, 2016).

Although there are several public programs such as TANF, SNAP, CHIP, and WIC, these programs are usually temporary for these families. These are all state and federal programs that provide monetary assistance, access to nutritious food, and health coverage for the grandchildren. Nevertheless, obstacles exist to accessing these regular support services, including the fact that the grandparents need to provide proof they have legally adopted their grandchildren. When and if the custodial grandparents apply for any of these programs, many do not understand the application requirements. Most of these programs depend on the grandchild’s needs, not the custodial grandparents needs (Collins et al., 2016; Generations United, 2016; Wallace, 2016).

Regarding the custodial grandparent households in Illinois, the most current information on these families was discussed in the GrandFacts State Fact Sheets. GrandFacts is an informational resource funded by AARP for Illinois custodial grandparents and other care-giving relatives raising and caring for young children. The GrandFacts sheets also provide information on various agencies in Illinois that may

provide support services for custodial grandparents. However, the report is outdated in that it was created on a 5-year estimate, and this conveys the lack of updated services for custodial grandparents. The dated information currently on the GrandFacts website demonstrates the gap in services for custodial grandparents (AARP, n.d.). Harms (2012) conducted research at the University of Chicago on grandparents caring for their grandchildren and reported statistics from the 2014 U.S. Census Bureau that stated, “10 percent of grandparents live with their grandchildren, and 2.7 million grandparents are responsible for most of their grandchildren’s needs” (para. 5).

This information implies the numbers of custodial grandparents are presumably more than was reported in 2010. The 5-year gap without reporting on how custodial grandparents are surviving while raising their grandchildren indicates the need for policy changes for these families. Although dated, the public policy recommendations by Thomas, Sperry, and Yarbrough (2000) regarding custodial grandparents raising grandchildren consisted of “grandparent-friendly policies” that would provide more assistance than the standard 5-year limit on welfare benefits for biological parents (p. 15). Thomas et al. (2000) recommended a reasonable plan be created with the flexibility to accommodate middle-aged and older grandparents who are burdened with the economic responsibility of raising their grandchild. Providing these families with public assistance may make a world of difference regarding their economic challenges and provide more optimal functioning for these families.

Transforming public policies and social services to accommodate custodial grandparents will make a substantial difference in the lives of these children and their

caretakers. Social justice laws and how they provide for some families and yet place other families “in the margins of society” (p. 983) create a need re-examine these policies (Henderson, 2008). Custodial grandparents are considered informal caregivers, and many distrusts and fear the child welfare system due to the system’s failure to adequately assist those who are willing to care for their grandchildren and desperately need the monetary assistance (Henderson, 2008).

Ideally, both parents are responsible for raising their children, who nurture and care for them in a loving and stable environment. This relationship usually produces a unique attachment within a family unit. A family unit provides children with security, structure, consistency, discipline, encouragement, and guidance, all of which generate well-rounded adults (Rasmussen, 2014). When this attachment breaks due to unforeseen circumstances, it creates disadvantages for the child as well as for the custodial grandparents (Scommegna & Mossaad, 2011). The transitions that grandparents experience parenting their grandchildren are challenging. Becoming a custodial grandparent has created many problems for these caregivers, such as “deterioration of physical health, social isolation, financial burdens, and dealing with grandchildren’s behavioral problems and emotional disturbances” (Pinazo-Hernandis & Tompkins, 2009, p. 138). In other words, custodial grandparents encounter a plethora of challenges and need the support of state and local government to assist with those challenges.

Public Policies and Custodial Grandparents’ Families

Informal custodial grandparents constitute a vulnerable, voiceless group and deserve to receive support and assistance through adequate public policies. Although

some argue that kinship caregiving should not have access to funding, others argue that all children should receive government compensation since most grandparent families are living below the poverty level (Cox, 2010). Custodial grandparents experience a sense of humiliation connected to receiving public assistance and, therefore, avoid the bureaucracy entirely because of licensing procedures and other necessities that states require to receive support. Grandparents also fear that the children will be taken away and placed in the child welfare system (Van Etten & Gautam, 2012). There are numerous gaps in the federal and state policies that do not include custodial grandparents in the criteria for assistance. Custodial grandparents need sensitive advocates to crusade for policy changes to include these families in public policies and assistance programs (Van Etten & Gautam, 2012).

In other words, public policies should be created with the flexibility to accommodate grandparents burdened with the economic responsibility of raising their grandchildren. Providing these families with economic assistance may make a world of difference regarding financial challenges for this non-traditional family unit. Moreover, it appears that custodial grandparents are available in times of distress when their grandchildren need them the most. These voluntary caretakers need complete access to current resources and public services, so the application process and qualifying standards for these services should be streamlined, more flexible, and more accessible for custodial grandparent families to receive the necessary support (Collins et al., 2016).

Additionally, Whitley et al. (2011) discussed the social stigma regarding only African American custodial grandparents. The authors pointed out the difficulties

encountered by low-income, custodial grandparents of color, and the need for “knowledge, advocacy, and self-efficacy” (p. 383). The study suggested that empowerment practices will give custodial grandparents a sense of community regarding the age difference of the custodial grandparent. Whitley et al. (2011) posited empowerment practices may give the custodial grandparents strength to advocate for positive social change. The authors focused on African American custodial grandparents living in poverty who were excluded from receiving resources as compared to their “White counterparts” (p. 383). The study suggested that empowering practices for African American custodial grandparents may promote a sense of power for them to advocate for social change for this group. The need for policy examinations and social service changes is paramount to assist custodial grandparents in their plight, as they continue to fall into the peripheries of our society.

Gaps in the Literature on Programs and Policies Related to Custodial Grandparents

There are several gaps in the literature associated with grandparents raising their grandchildren. Previous research focused on the grandchildren’s issues, with a small portion of research discussing grandparents adjusting to the stress, role changing, and economic challenges (Sampson & Hertlein, 2015). Is custodial grandparenting a new phenomenon? No, but it is a growing phenomenon that is evolving continually. According to research by custodialgrandparents.org (2017), affordable housing and other resources are very limited for these families. Lack of affordable housing is currently “one of the most critical access issues for grandparents and the children they are raising” ([Custodial grandparents.org](http://Custodialgrandparents.org), 2017, para.1). The barriers to access to affordable housing

include a lack of time for grandparents to search for housing to accommodate grandchildren. Many grandparents are barely surviving on a fixed income without sufficient funds to care for several grandchildren. Also, the grandparents may be evicted from senior housing if the grandchildren moves in with them. Finally, custody issues arise when trying to acquire more spacious housing arrangements (Sampson & Hertlein, 2015). According to Custodial grandparents.org (2017), lacking legal custody of the grandchildren, the custodial grandparent may not qualify for affordable housing. Compounding this is the fact that many of these grandparents do not have the funds to pay for the legal help to gain legal custody of their grandchildren.

Several programs exist that assist custodial grandparents temporarily, including TANF and LEGACY. The drawback of these programs is the lack of literature on the progress of federal laws and developments. Noting that much remains to be done since 2011; where a 10 unit complex with 3-4 bedroom apartments, serving up to 34 residents housing project built in Chicago, Illinois for custodial grandparent families, and a 9 unit 2-bedroom housing project was constructed in Smithville, Tennessee (Custodial grandparents.org, 2017). Lack of housing assistance is an indication that more affordable housing is needed in Chicago, Illinois. Current research also suggests that positive social change regarding custodial grandparent's challenges should include monetary assistance for the informal care that grandparents provide for their grandchildren (Custodial grandparents.org, 2017).

Custodial grandparents should not have to become certified, licensed foster parents to receive monetary payments for becoming surrogate parents to their

grandchildren; hence, “the emphasis is on the perspective of caregivers and the obstacles they encounter” (Wallace, 2016, p. 124). Substantial disparities exist for custodial grandparent families regarding formal programming support and policy inclusion needed by these families. The current services, such as TANF and SNAP, provide minimal (at best) healthcare for grandchildren and the grandparents who are raising them. These services have extensive eligibility requirements, yet often fail in meeting all the needs of these families due to restrictions on informal caretaking (Collins et al., 2016 & Wallace, 2016). Qualifying for TANF requires that the grandparent must have a reduced income, be actively seeking employment if they are unemployed, and possibly attend school to further their education (Collins et al., 2016). In other words, if a 60-year-old grandparent decides to raise two grandchildren, that grandparent must look for employment and/or go to school to continue receiving monetary assistance from TANF (Collins et al., 2016).

Custodial grandparents also need support groups to address their feelings of isolation and possibly depression. Custodial grandparents already have various support groups, such as local churches, AARP, Catholic charities, and other community groups (Collins et al., 2016). However, these support services for the grandparent do not address the daily challenges of raising the grandchildren. While the number of custodial grandparent households is increasing, there is “a lag in developing resources that include grandparents who have primary responsibility for their grandchildren” (Collins et al., 2016, p. 2). According to Wallace (2016), most custodial grandparents are informal caretakers to their grandchildren; they are not “certified or approved as foster families and therefore do not receive foster parent payments” (p. 124).

The custodial grandparent population lacks services provided by the child welfare system. For example, according to Cancino (2016), a divorced grandmother who lived on the south side of Chicago, Illinois began caring for her grandson when he was an infant. The grandmother cared for her grandson for 11 years, and at the age of 62, she was struggling to adequately provide necessities for her grandson such as clothes, food, and housing. The family's income was below the poverty line due to the grandmother earning minimum wage and heading towards retirement age, and there was a strong possibility she would lose her grandchild to the city streets and their negative influences (Cancino, 2016). Without public welfare assistance, she sank deeper into poverty, and she did not have the wherewithal to keep him out of trouble in the neighborhood and continue to care for him (Cancino, 2016). This gap in supportive programs and public policies "exist in small pockets of the country" (p. 1) for these grandparents (Cancino, 2016). Most custodial grandparents are informal caregivers and do not qualify for the monetary assistance. The custodial grandparent mentioned above is the norm for most grandparent households who are living just below the poverty line, and many of these grandparents are apprehensive about asking for assistance (Cancino, 2016).

Furthermore, the current public welfare system was not designed to assist custodial grandparents, was originally intended to support those mothers who were young, single parents who were not able to provide for their new babies. The programs, currently structured do not apply to custodial grandparents since they are not the legal parent of the grandchild. It is imperative that the policies be inclusive for custodial grandparents to create financial assistance for these families (Van Etten & Guatam,

2012). Unless custodial grandparents gain legal custody of their grandchild, they encounter problems that create interference with legal and educational issues for the grandchild. Grandparents usually experience a convoluted system of social services and public policies that discourage them from being informal caregivers (Van Etten & Guatam, 2012).

It is critical that policy makers initiate innovative programs and policy changes to include informal caretakers to close the gap. Also, there are numerous deficiencies in most federal and state policies that do not include custodial grandparents in the criteria for assistance. Until this issue is addressed, these custodial grandparents need sensitive advocates to crusade for policy changes to include them (Van Etten & Gautam, 2012). In other words, public policies should be created with the flexibility to accommodate grandparents who become burdened with the responsibility of raising their grandchildren. Thus, providing these families with economic assistance may make a world of difference regarding the financial challenges facing this non-traditional family unit. Scommegna (2012) referenced Baker, Silverstein, and Putney (2008) regarding the gaps in a fragmented social service system, as well as the lack of public policies to assist these recycled parents. Van Etten and Gautam (2012) suggested that gerontological nurses can provide educational services to help custodial grandparents through the bureaucracy while advocating to change public policies as well. Regarding the services and assistance for the grandchildren, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, TANF applies to families who are legal guardians to the grandchildren.

The child-only grant system provides a small amount of financial support: for example, \$100.00 a month to eligible children until they are 18 years old. Children receiving child-only grants will also qualify for medical care, but the custodial grandparent will receive no additional assistance with his or her healthcare needs (Illinois DCFS, 2017). Additionally, when applying for the child-only grant, the grandparent is required to try to contact the child's biological parent for child support, a requirement for receiving the child-only funds (Van Etten & Gautam, 2012). The TANF grant requires grandparents to find employment before receiving the funds, which are only provided for five years (Illinois DCFS, 2017).

Creating kinship-care policies, as well as public support systems such as TANF to include custodial grandparents, will significantly address the needs of custodial grandparent households. In Illinois, the legal case of *Miller vs. Youakin*, established the requirement of custodial grandparents to take an exam and become licensed, certified foster parents to receive substantial financial assistance, which usually creates an invasion of privacy for the grandparent, and causes more adversities for the grandparent (Myadze, 2012). This research study provided insight into needed policies and programs to possibly fill the gaps in public services and provide necessary assistance for custodial grandparents. The financial gap in available services is a huge problem for hundreds of custodial grandparents in Chicago who are living in poverty and are not able to provide for their grandchildren as well as themselves.

Another program that would be beneficial to custodial grandparents is the LEGACY program. This program provides grandparents with affordable housing through

the government-associated Housing and Urban Development program. However, LEGACY ended after five years in 2008, leaving most custodial grandparents without affordable housing (Cox, 2009). Most of the available programs that were active eight years ago have disappeared, without being replaced by other programs for custodial grandparents. Reviving past policies or creating new policies and programs that were available for custodial grandparents will help to alleviate the struggles these families are currently experiencing. Most custodial grandparents do not have licenses to be a foster parent, and they are struggling and living in poverty, and until these informal custodial grandparents are included as formal custody caretakers to their grandchildren, just as foster parents are considered legal caregivers, they will continue to struggle.

The gap in services and policies for these families will continue to increase, thereby degrading the quality of life for the grandchildren and the grandparent. The phenomenon of grandparents raising their grandchildren is said to be the most rapidly growing segment of non-traditional families. Therefore, creating public policies and services to assist these families with caring for these children is critical for future generations, ensuring that these children are given to opportunity to thrive and become healthy citizens versus becoming emotionally unstable and lean towards negative associations, resulting in adverse outcomes. The adage that it takes a village to raise a child applies to custodial grandparents. As a society, addressing this public policy problem will create significant social changes in communities.

Summary of Literature

Most literature regarding informal custodial grandparents are informational and statistical concerning the challenges encountered while raising their grandchildren. However, there are a few qualitative studies conducted on informal custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren related to this study. In 2012 a qualitative research conducted by Kirby and Sanders explored the possibility of creating parenting programs for informal custodial grandparents. Kirby and Sanders (2012) used various methods to recruit participants for their focus groups, advertisement in “newspapers, magazines, radio, and letters sent to grandparent organizations,” (p. 5), which earned 14 voluntary participants for this study. The one-to-one focus group was video-taped and transcribed verbatim. The 14 participants received no compensation for participation in this study. The participants received a packet at the beginning of the focus group with the following:

1. information sheet,
2. consent form, and
3. demographics questionnaire

The knowledge gaps regarding this study is that it depicts the perspectives of 14 informal custodial grandparents, which is a small number to apply to the informal custodial grandparent population. Another gap is the “lack of ethnic or socioeconomic diversity” (Kirby & Sanders, 2012, p.10).

Baily, Haynes, & Letiecq (2013) conducted an exploratory study on the financial well-being of 26 informal custodial grandparents in face-to-face interviews. Recruitment

of participants consist of purposive and snowball sampling, ranging from ages 36 to 71 years old. Questions were presented to participants that asked about family life after becoming the caretaker of their grandchildren. However, the authors failed to report on how their participants are faring in their current and future situations without financial assistance. This study relates to this study in that it is exploratory in nature, the method of recruitment relates to this study and the face-to-face interview questions also compare to this study.

Sampson and Hertlein (2015) conducted a qualitative research study on understanding the experiences and challenges of custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren. The methods in this study were applied phenomenology with open-ended questions, involving one-on-one interviews. The participants in this study were recruited through snowball sampling, which lead to other voluntary participants. Volunteer participants agreed to participant in 45 to 60-minute interviews, which were recorded and transcribed, with a \$15.00 thank you compensation for each participant. This study consisted of 10 voluntary participants, four grandfathers and six grandmothers (Sampson & Hertlein, 2015). The age of the participants ranges from 48 to 86, while the grandchildren they are caring for range from 9 months to 11 years old (p.80). The gap in this study relates to the small number of participants and the lack of the effects on younger versus older informal custodial grandparents. This study is similar to the current research study in that the researchers provided a thank you compensation for the participants.

Collins, Fruhauf, and Bundy-Fazioli (2016) also conducted a qualitative exploratory study to determine if informal custodial grandparents that are already involved with formal social services were getting the services that they need. The method of recruitment used in this study involved participants from local grandparent support groups. The participants were given sealed packets, with a return envelope to return the questionnaire once completed. In addition, the authors also recruited participants from a formal workshop of “grandparents raising grandchildren” (p. 11) and spoke verbally to recruit participants (Collins, et al., 2016). The sample study consists of 16 participants who sent the questionnaires back to the researchers with information concerning, what if any formal services they were currently receiving. The gap in knowledge of this study relate to the small sample size that was studied was not for “inferential analysis, which makes the validity questionable” (Collins et al., 2016, p. 26). Most literature on qualitative research using exploratory method is dated pass the allocated 5-year period for informal custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren. However, the above studies sufficed for information related to my proposal.

Summary

This chapter discussed the evolution of family structure with the grandparents becoming the parents to their grandchildren. Additionally, custodial grandparents’ role change, the challenges encounter, emotionally, physically, and financially, coupled with the literature research strategy for this proposal are discussed. The theory related to custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren were also discussed, as well as welfare and social service policies, grandparent healthcare issues, housing concerns, education

concerns for grandchildren, grandchildren's behavioral problems, domestic violence in custodial grandparent households, and program and policy gaps for grandparents and the grandchildren they are raising. Custodial grandparents face multiple challenges in raising their grandchildren, which should be a societal issue regarding the grandchildren not being placed in state system, and the grandparent volunteering to become the caretaker. Addressing the problems and concerns of custodial grandparents will create social changes, thereby helping the grandchildren develop and obtain their full potential as healthy citizens.

Chapter 3 discusses the research method and design in detail. The chapter examines participant selection, and the data collection processes and procedures. Finally, issues of trustworthiness, limitations and, delimitations will be discussed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

In this study, I explored the policies and services available for informal custodial grandparents as well as the adversities encountered while raising their grandchildren in the Chicago, Illinois, area. In this chapter, I discuss the research design and methodology, my role as researcher, the sample selection, sample size, and the instrumentation for data collection and analysis. The chapter includes a discussion of issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations for the participants involved in this study. A detailed summary of the chapter is also provided.

Research Design and Rationale

The central research question for this research study was, What challenges have custodial grandparents experienced from the role change in assuming a parental role for their grandchildren? I further explored the central question through the following sub research questions:

1. What, if any, public services have grandparents received for assistance as a custodial grandparent in Chicago, Illinois?
2. What are the major adversities that custodial grandparents encounter that has impacted the quality of life after assuming responsibility of caring for their grandchildren in Chicago, Illinois?
3. How can state and local government programs change eligibility requirements for assistance that will include informal custodial grandparents?

Current policy and program limitations of DCFS, Section 8 vouchers for housing assistance, SNAP, TANF, CHIP, and WIC are difficult to obtain for custodial grandparents, and some of these programs are temporary for the grandchildren only (DCFS, 2017; HealthCare.gov, 2017; Housing and Urban Development, 2017; Illinois Department of Human Service, 2017). Researchers typically use a qualitative approach to gain an understanding of individuals' experiences about a specific phenomenon. The qualitative approach was suitable for this research study because a smaller number of participants were involved in this research study and because they shared their lived experiences (see Yin, 2016).

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I had a significant role in designing and conducting this study. It was imperative that I create trusting relationships with participants to access their thoughts and feelings related to their experiences as informal custodial grandparents (see Sutton & Austin, 2015). Yin (2016) noted that the researcher is the most important instrument during the study (p. 40). While conducting a qualitative research study, the researcher has a vital role in establishing a rapport with the participants, processing the data collection, and retaining an unbiased opinion during the field work process (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2016). It was imperative that I be aware of my own biases regarding the topic of study. Additionally, it was important as the researcher of this study to be considerate as well as flexible in terms of understanding the perspectives of the participants in this research study (see Patton, 2002).

As an observer it was important to remain focused on the participants' responses while observing behaviors which will create "thick descriptions" (p. 41) of the collected data during the field work process (Yin, 2016). According to Moustakas (1994, p. 33), it is vitally important for the researcher to remain *epoch*, which meant, in this study, staying nonjudgmental and keeping an open mind while listening to participants tell their lived experiences of becoming an informal custodial grandparent. Moreover, as a student researcher, it was imperative to remain open to suggestions from participants, which denotes creativity in terms of gathering rich data (Yin, 2016). As the leader of this research study, it was ethically required by Walden IRB, to provide information for volunteer participants related to my employment status, due to the potential conflict of interest of having a participant who was associated with my employment not participate in the study. In addition, I provided consent forms to participants with information on the study and the reason for conducting it. All participants were guaranteed that their personal names would not be used in the study. I used the identifier *CG* for custodial grandparent rather than names (i.e., CG1, CG2, CG3, CG4, through CG20). This strategy helped to ensure that the privacy of the participants was protected (see Patton, 2002). Participants also signed confidentiality forms (see Appendix B).

Methodology

Methodology in general qualitative research is different from the traditional quantitative method of mathematical research. The qualitative methodology offers a strategy geared towards a specific purpose that places emphasis on what the participants experience and how they interpret or describe those experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The

qualitative method provides natural and authentic results from participants who are gathered in small groups in a familiar environment (Yin, 2016). Qualitative research methods are also based on social science perspectives in that the researcher focuses on various inquiries into the lives of their participants. Moreover, qualitative strategies allow the researcher to adhere to new discoveries that require flexibility and adaptation while conducting observations during face-to-face group interactions (Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2016). Researchers use qualitative methods to investigate a phenomenon that is currently emerging while exploring the meanings of participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2016). In other words, qualitative methods acknowledge a holistic approach to research in terms of capturing the "views and perspectives of a study's participants" (Yin, 2016, p. 9). Yin (2016) explained several aspects of qualitative studies that include exploring, listening, accepting views, collecting, and explaining the phenomenon to all participants involved in the study. This approach has been effectively used in previous qualitative studies using different populations (Anderson, 2010).

In this study, I focused on the challenges that encompass custodial grandparents who are struggling to raise their grandchildren. The additional responsibilities of raising their children's children are debilitating to their physical and mental health (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). Also, this responsibility may create more exacerbation when grandchildren become involved in the juvenile justice system. Hence, the general qualitative design was appropriate for this study. This design allows the researcher to conduct the study naturally, in a comfortable environment for the participants to share experiences, thereby enhancing external validity (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias,

2008). The qualitative approach was best suited for this study due to the lived experiences and adversities that most informal custodial grandparents have in common.

Participant Selection Logic

I selected the participants for this study using purposive sampling (see Yin, 2016). Yin (2016) explained that purposive sampling “yields the most relevant and plentiful data” and “in essence [is] information rich” (p. 93). This sampling technique elicits information-rich participants who provide an abundance of firsthand information about their experiences of the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2002, p.230). Purposeful sampling for qualitative research also involves choosing specific participants based on their knowledge and quality of information needed for understanding participants in their natural environment. Purposeful sampling advanced the focus of this research due to the depth of information gathered from a smaller number of participants for the qualitative study (see Patton, 2002; Yin, 2016).

Twenty participants were selected based on previous research as well as the theory of saturation (Yin, 2016). Patton (2002) discussed a consistent sampling approach might be appropriate for a small number of participants “five to eight people” with similar experiences to “describe those issues that affect them” (p.236). Luborsky and Rubinstein (1995) noted 12 to 26 participants for a qualitative, phenomenon research study, while Yin (2016) noted a small sample size as two to three participants or a moderate sample size as 7 to 10 participants. However, participants in a study are not a “one-size-fit-all” regarding saturation of richness of information and quality of data collection verses numbers of participants (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p.1409). According to

Saunders et al. (2017), data collection continues until saturation is achieved and there are not any new themes or patterns of new information collected from participants.

Therefore, the relationship between saturation and sample size is that enough data has been collected for a detailed analysis to support this research study. Saturation occurs when the researcher continues to find the same themes throughout the data collection, that are essential to understanding the research topic.

Instrumentation

A set of open-ended questions was created based on the literature review describing the various problems that custodial grandparents face when raising their grandchildren and their role change (see Appendix C). After Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (no. 07-01-19-0225884), a mini-test was conducted on the research questions to a group of two or three custodial grandparents not part of my research, and the research questions may be amended if needed based upon their feedback. The same set of questions will be asked at all focus group meetings. In addition, an audio tape-recorder will be utilized to listen to responses from the discussions during the focus group sessions. It was not necessary to use any legal or historical documents during this study. Information was included on the participant consent form regarding audio taping and note taking to assure participants agree to this process prior to beginning the focus groups. Although the researcher was the primary instrument when conducting qualitative research, interview protocol established rapport and open the conversation initially when meeting with participants (Yin, 2016). Furthermore, focus group participants in familiar surroundings provided the opportunity

to observe up-close and personal reactions, while audio recorded responses are used as reference when documenting responses.

Qualitative research studies required the researcher to be the main instrument when conducting qualitative research studies with focus groups. Audio taping the information assured important details of information from participants were not overlooked.

Regarding credibility of participant responses to the research questions, content validity was established by the accurate results of participation responses, which reflected the dimension undergoing assessment. Content validity was strengthened when the researcher properly interpreted the data and that data represents “the real world that was studied” (Yin, 2016, p.88). Validity of this study was strengthened by being able to review the audio recordings and field notes for information accuracy, as the interview responses were transcribed manually. Moreover, the mini study served as a test to assure the research questions generated applicable answers.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment. Recruiting 20 participants for this research study involved 80 days and seven focus groups, conducted at two sites from the Illinois Department on Aging, Chicago Aging Senior Support Offices. The recruitment flyers contained a contact number for potential participants if there were questions concerning participation in this research study. The identified population for this study was custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren recruited from two senior support offices in the Chicago area: the Chicago Department on Aging Southeast (Atlas) Regional Office and the Central West

Regional Senior Center. Appendix E contains address and other information for these offices and others in the Chicago area.

Criteria for participant selection. Contact was initiated at two of the senior support regional offices mentioned above to obtain a letter of approval from the gatekeeper for recruitment of participants. Visitation was conducted at a senior meeting at both senior centers to introduce myself and explain the research study and disseminate recruitment flyers. The criterion for selecting the participants for this study included those custodial grandparents who: are currently raising their grandchildren for at least six months or more and are the only caretaker for the grandchildren. The questions are also located in the screener guide in Appendix A. If any of the custodial grandparents who volunteer for the focus group had grandchildren who are or have been in the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, they were excluded from the study due to a conflict of interest due to my employment as a case manager in the facility.

Data collection. During visits to the Senior Centers, recruitment flyers were posted with contact information at each senior center bulletin board and at the front desk of each center. The purpose of this research study was explained, as well as the qualifications for volunteer participants needed for this research study. The confidentiality and consent forms were discussed and those who qualified were asked to sign the consent form before they can participate with discussing and answering the research questions. Different dates and times were scheduled for the focus groups with the director of each facility. Emphasis was discussed concerning this study being

completely voluntary, and participants may drop out of the study at any time. Walmart gift cards were provided to those individuals who chose to participate.

Data collection occurred during several, small focus group settings. A total of seven focus groups were held that allowed for a total of 20 participants. Additional focus groups were not added since data saturation was reached. Each participant was assigned an anonymous identifier (CG1, CG2, CG3, etc.). These identifiers were assigned within the signed consent forms, and my focus group notes only included the above identifiers.

I ensured that all research questions were discussed by participants before leaving the focus group. Each participant was also asked if there were any questions before ending the group discussions. Additionally, volunteer participants were informed of the dissemination of results of this research study during a visit during a monthly meeting upon approval of this dissertation by IRB at Walden University. An appreciation letter will be provided to each site, thanking the director and the participants for allowing the data collection of this research study within their organization. Finally, all study-related data will be stored on flash-drives in a secured for a period of five years. After that time, all materials on the flash-drives will be destroyed in accordance with Walden University IRB procedures.

Data Analysis Plan

Analyzing data for the homogeneous focus groups consists of comparing the discussions of similar themes between participants for analyzing and coding of themes. NVivo12 Plus program was used to analyze transcribed data. According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), the essential strategy for data analysis is to code the

collected data for conceptualization of underlying patterns. Maxwell (2013) pointed out there are times when research questions and interview questions may not elicit the data needed for your study. Therefore, asking “less logical questions” such as what, how, where, and why will create more dialogue with your research participants (p.100). The research questions for this study on the adversities of custodial grandparents and their changing roles asked ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions. Moreover, the questions in the screener guide appeared logical in nature and provided information-rich data to answer the research questions. Patton (2002) noted inductive data analysis, which refers to “open coding” where the researcher discovers “patterns, themes, and categories” of responses from participants (p.453). This inductive analysis was appropriate for this research study. When all data had been organized and checked, the coding process began.

Coding procedures. Coding data relates to analysis of data and categorizing similar data chunks by focusing on the words from hand-written notes, as well as from the transcribed audio recording. In other words, remaining unbiased and pay close attention to relevant words, phrases, and sentences that relates to the research questions. Miles et al. (2014) described codes as “a word or short phrase” having descriptive meaning or significant information compiled during data collection. Subsequently, utilizing the research questions to group the collected data, while searching for similarities and differences, ensured that the connections of collected data related to the research questions in the screener guide (see Appendix A).

Coding this data can range from a single word to full paragraph while relating to a specific research question. This method of coding was appropriate and utilized for this

research study. Additionally, codes are classifications with figurative meanings of descriptive information collected during your study. The collected data were coded and checked for accuracy by identifying specific themes (Miles et al., 2014). Miles et al. (2014) explained how The NVivo12 software program is well-known for those who are inexperienced to coding procedures. Moreover, NVivo12 software program is useful for assisting qualitative researchers with organizing and managing collected data. NVivo12 program will assist the qualitative researcher with combining and storing the researcher's database and files, which include audio transcripts and word documents. NVivo12 can import and manipulate hand-coded data, spread sheets and databases, assisting the researcher with detecting various themes and patterns from collected data and transcribed onto spreadsheets (QSR International, 2018).

If the issue of discrepancy responses arose, the discrepant responses were not considered in data analysis. If a participant gave contradictory responses to a question from the screener guide or the research questions, this could mean this participant may be excluded from the data analysis. In other words, if a participant answers no, to a question concerning if they are receiving public assistance to help raising their grandchildren, then later states that they previously received monthly food stamp assistance, the answers from this participant may affect validity and reliability of the study. However, there were not any discrepancy issues during this research study. The 20 volunteer participants did not provide any inconsistent or discrepant responses to the discussions of research questions.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Creditability/Internal Validity

Establishing internal validity and dependability during qualitative research studies refers to bracketing, which means the researcher refrains from discussing any personal experiences while listening to participants tell their story of becoming a parent to their grandchildren. It is important for the researcher to establish a rapport and understanding of the participants position of sharing personal information with this researcher. Moreover, recruiting a variation of participants, such as age, gender, length of time raising the grandchild, how many grandchildren are in your home, the working or non-working custodial grandparents also produced triangulation and comparison of descriptions of collected data (Yin, 2016).

Additionally, recruiting volunteer participants from different areas in Chicago produced triangulation while “strengthening credibility” (Yin, 2016, p.87). Regarding extended contact with the voluntary participants was not necessary. The focus group discussions regarding the questions sufficed for the data collection, as well as the audio tape recording was used to listen to the discussions for clarity. This study was designed to conduct one focus group at each of the two senior support offices, thereby eliminating the need to re-engage the custodial grandparents, since there may be challenges for custodial grandparents to be available for another focus group session.

Validity also provides credibility of qualitative research through the collection and interpretation of data, methodical, long-term involvement with the group participants, accurately written transcripts from audiotapes, restating the responses from participants

for clarity and triangulation (Maxwell, 2013; Yin, 2016). As with trustworthiness, recording the focus group meetings and examining field notes enhanced validity since the recordings and notes can be reviewed repeatedly to assure information is accurately interpreted. *Member checks*: member checking refers to the genuineness and accuracy of participants responses. It also refers to the participants telling the truth and not influenced by the biases of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The custodial grandparents recruited for this study were screened via the screener questions, before the focus groups began emphasizing the importance of answering the questions honestly. Thereby, this eliminated the need for member checks. As the researcher, it was important to be thorough and patient with the participants during the data collection process. The recording of focus group meetings also enhanced trustworthiness of data as the opportunity exists to play and replay portions of the meeting as needed to accurately record data.

Saturation was established as numerous redundancies were discovered in the data analysis and new information was not discovered. In terms of *reflexivity* during the data collection process, the objective of this research study was to explore and understand the adversities of custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren. Remaining focused on the data collection and consciously refraining from preconceptions and assuming, what the responses meant versus asking the participant what their response meant. In other words, not offer personal understandings, values, or feelings of the study, but remained open to the participant responses and not to project personal interpretations on the participant answers. In addition, validity threats can stem from a conflict of interest if a

participant is recruited as a co-worker, friend, relative, or anyone who is an acquaintance (Maxwell, 2013). To minimize threats to validity, no one was included in this research study who was known to the researcher formally or informally prior to start of the study.

Transferability/External Validity

As discussed earlier in this chapter, strategies were employed to ensure information-rich data and variation in participation selection resulted from recruiting participants from a minimum of two senior support centers on the west and south side areas in Chicago Illinois, coupled with the custodial grandparents who were different ages, genders, and possibly different backgrounds. External validity of my research study was demonstrated from the transcriptions of the audio recordings and note-taking. In other words, if another researcher should replicate this study, the same results should be the outcome. Transferability or external validity of qualitative research has the propensity to transfer results to other context or research settings. The appropriate strategies taken for dependability of this study consisted of an audit trail that depicted each step in this research from start to finish. In other words, active documentation of all activities was adhered during this research study, a journal with notes from each focus group session, as well as all data collection, which was also recorded on the audio tape during each focus group session also determined trustworthiness and triangulation of participants responses. These notes and recordings will be kept in a safe place for five years, then all documents will be deleted/destroyed that were obtained during this research study.

The results of this research were based on the participants narratives hence, accurate note taking, and audio recording of each focus group session was key.

Confirmability allowed me, as the researcher, to document the results of the participants responses, refraining from extrapolating personal values into the data collection. It was necessary to maintain a certain level of self-awareness to remain focused on the participants response and not lead the participants towards personal thoughts and values. Retaining a conscious awareness as the researcher of this study to ask participants to explain something they said, versus interpreting their responses in my words.

Ethical Procedures

The agreement to gain access to the participants for this study was derived from the Deputy Director of all the senior support centers in the Chicago area. Explanation of my research study was provided to the Deputy Director, who provided a letter of permission to provide to the Walden IRB. Also, explanation was provided that all participants who volunteer would sign a consent form and through signing the consent form, the participants were reassured their participation was voluntary, and they could have withdrawn from the study for any reason, at any time. The focus group questions were also discussed and took approximately 45-60 minutes of their time, which at any point if they felt uncomfortable for any reason they could cease participation.

All volunteers who participated received the incentive \$20.00 Walmart gift card. Maxwell (2013) acknowledged the importance of the “ethical obligation” of understanding the participant’s perceptions of you while placing yourself in their position. It is essential when conducting fieldwork to “learn what your participants” perceptions and understanding are of you and your research to develop useful and ethically appropriate relationships” (pp. 92-93). The treatment of human participants is

extremely important; therefore, ensuring that participants are not inconvenienced or harmed in any way. Essential precautions were taken to ensure the safety and well-being of all research participants. Ethical obligations for this study include the signed, informed consent from all adult participants, approval from the Walden University IRB to conduct the study, establish trust and respect with participants.

Participants were reminded that this study was completely voluntary, and they have the right to decide not to participate. The small focus group of human participants required confidentiality in terms of protecting the participant's privacy. It was my ethical responsibility to protect the participant's confidentiality, while explaining the purpose of the study, ensuring that participants will not be inconvenienced in any way, and remaining a professional student researcher throughout. It was explained to participants that all data collected were confidential and will not be discussed with anyone except those at Walden University involved in my research study. Ethical concerns of the recruitment material were adhered to by the researchers respect for privacy of the participants, as well as consideration that participants are not pressured or influenced to participate in this study, it must be on a voluntary basis. There was not any follow-up focus groups, and the study presented absolute minimal risk to the participants as their identification will not be available to anyone during or after this study.

Finally, establishing a genuine relationship with participants by providing thorough information concerning the research study, answering participants questions, listening, and being flexible assisted with the researcher/participant relationship. Trustworthiness discussed by Yin (2016) referred to the creditability of the researcher. A

creditable researcher involves objective trustworthiness, expertise, and elements of the authenticity of the research study. Yin (2016) discussed steps to establish credibility through authenticity and validity. Authenticity is established through participants and researcher's "prolonged engagement" during the group process (p.86). In other words, the focus group meetings were not hurried or taken for granted, and the participants were treated with the utmost respect and confidentiality throughout the entire data collection process.

Summary

The phenomenon of custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren is not a new trend, but a growing, recognizable fact. Depicting a need for state and federal policies to develop all-inclusive assistance for informal custodial grandparents, just as provided for formal caretakers, for example, foster parents or licensed custodial grandparents (Wallace, 2016). Grandchildren being raised by their grandparent(s) should be acknowledged as a family in need of substantial public assistance not ignored because they are informal caretakers to their grandchildren. The custodial grandparent's phenomenon should be a concern for society due to the "incomplete" policies that do not address the assistance that is needed for these non-traditional families (Wallace, 2016, p. 124). This chapter described the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, the research methodology and design, trustworthiness of the study, and ethical procedures for this qualitative research study. The purpose of this research study was to explore the adversities of informal custodial grandparent's role change through their lived experiences of raising their grandchildren in Chicago, Illinois; coupled with the lack of

public policies and services available for these families. NVivo12 Plus software program was used to analyze the collected data regarding themes and related responses to the research questions from the participants. Issues of trustworthiness of data collection, validity, and ethical procedures have also been detailed. Chapter 4 will include the key results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore grandparents' role change from grandparent to parent. Custodial grandparents face many challenges with this role change, such as lack of income, housing problems, legal custody issues, behavioral problems with grandchildren, health care issues for grandparent and grandchild, and periodically domestic violence (Mammarella et al., 2013). Many grandparents in the United States are raising their grandchildren for reasons beyond their control. I also examined public policies and welfare services available for informal custodial grandparents and the adversities these grandparents encounter while raising their grandchildren. My focus was on grandparents residing in Chicago, Illinois.

Information gleaned from this study may provide insight to policy makers to revise eligibility policies for custodial grandparent caregivers who are struggling to raise their grandchildren. Conducting focus group interviews allowed for an exploration of participants' perceptions and experiences related to being grandparents. The comprehensive, open-ended interview questions for participants were as follows:

- Focus Group Question 1: What are the major adversities informal custodial grandparents encounter that impact their quality of life, after assuming the parent role and raising their grandchildren in Chicago, Illinois?
- Focus Group Question 2: What challenges have you encountered with your grandchildren from the role change?

- Focus Group Question 3: How can state and local government agency programs be improved to assist informal custodial grandparents?
- Focus Group Question 4: What public, financial support, if any, are you receiving (such as TANF, CHIP, LEGACY, SSI, SECTION 8 housing vouchers)?
- Focus Group Question 5: What, if any, behavior issues have you encountered since you assumed informal guardianship role for your grandchild?
- Focus Group Question 6: How can local and state agencies provide needed services for custodial grandparent-headed households (such as those offered by local politicians, state lawmakers, and congressional representatives)?
- Focus Group Question 7: How can Illinois public policies be amended to include informal custodial grandparents as parents to their grandchildren?

Mini Study

Before collecting data for this research study, I conducted a mini study that consisted of a small focus group of three participants for an assessment of the focus group questions. Data from these three participants were not included in the study results. However, the information from the three participants was helpful. Feedback from the mini study led me to make small changes to the font in the recruitment flyer (i.e., increasing the size to a larger font for enhanced readability), as well as slightly rewording one focus group question to improve clarity. All other feedback was positive and did not result in any further changes to the research questions.

Setting

Preparation for recruitment of volunteer participants consisted of creating recruitment flyers with pertinent information and a contact number to post at two IRB-approved City of Chicago Senior Citizen facilities. I provided a variety of dates during the week and the weekend on the recruitment flyers because I realized that the prospective participants would be caring for their grandchildren during the summer months when data were being collected. The organizations where recruitment flyers were posted did not exhibit any personal or organizational conditions that may have influenced volunteer participants or their experiences of becoming a custodial grandparent. Utilizing both City of Chicago Senior Citizen facilities proved adequate to fulfill recruitment needs for research study participants.

Demographics

Twenty volunteers participated in this research study, 18 female and two male custodial grandparents. The 20 volunteers recruited were African Americans. Most of the participants appeared to be over 50 years of age. However, I did not collect data on the ages of participants; my focus rather was on their status as a custodial grandparent. The 20 volunteers did not disclose their ages or their education level. Sixteen female participants disclosed that they were retired from their jobs, while two other female participants were currently working, and the remaining two male participants disclosed they were married and retired from their jobs. However, all 20 volunteers disclosed that their children were adults when they became custodial grandparents to their

grandchildren. Figure 1 provides an illustration of the gender and employment status of participants.

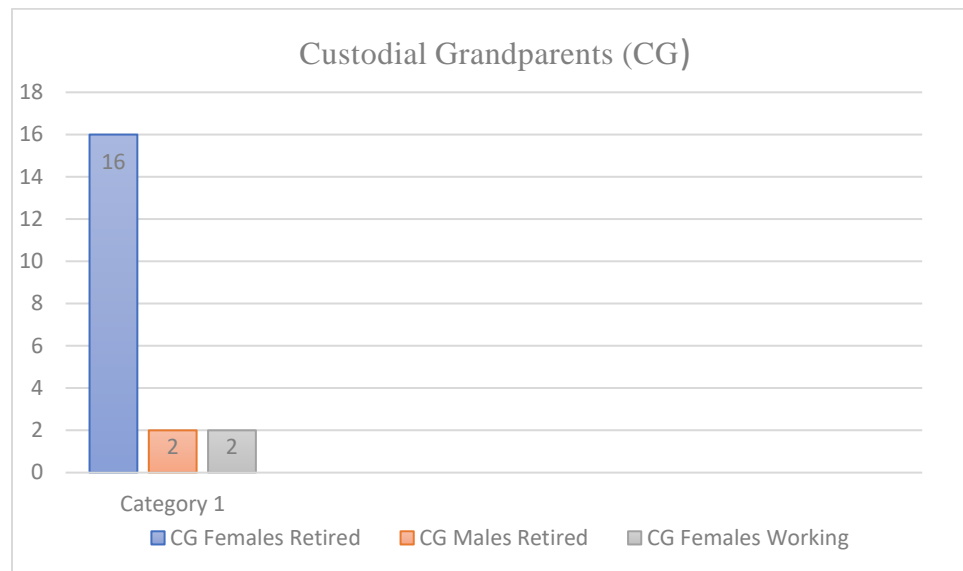


Figure 3. Gender and employment status of female and male participants.

Data Collection

I collected data from 20 volunteer participants from two City of Chicago Senior Centers: the Central West Regional Senior Center and Southeast Atlas Regional Center. Prior to collecting data for this study, I held a meeting with the regional director of each senior center to discuss the recruitment flyers, as well as the best days to recruit volunteers. The regional director of both senior centers suggested placement of recruitment flyers on the facility's bulletin board, at the front desk, and on a table in the lobby of each facility, in clear view for the facility's users to have easy access to the recruitment flyers. Volunteer sign-up sheets were also posted with the recruitment flyers. Volunteers were recruited from the Central West Regional Senior Center during the

months of July and August 2019 and from the Southeast Atlas Regional Senior Center in August and September 2019.

The first focus group of custodial grandparent volunteers was held at the Taylor Street Library in Chicago, Illinois. The focus group consisted of three volunteers who signed up at the Central West Regional Senior Center. The focus group lasted approximately one and a half hours for volunteer participants to discuss research questions. I read and explained the consent form to the focus group and emphasized the importance of confidentiality in regard to the focus group discussions. Participants were also asked if they had any questions before signing the forms and discussing the research questions. Afterwards, all participants were thanked and provided a \$20 stipend for their participation in the focus group.

The second and third focus groups were held at the Central West Regional Senior Center and consisted of three volunteer custodial grandparents and six volunteer custodial grandparents, respectively. The regional director suggested that it would not be advantageous to ask the seniors to go to the Taylor Street Library and suggested the focus group be held in one of their conference rooms. This location was convenient to all volunteer participants from the Central West senior center. The focus groups lasted approximately one and a half hours. Again, the exact same procedure was conducted at the end of the focus group, as with the first focus group.

The fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh focus groups were held at the Southeast Atlas Regional Senior Center and consisted of two, two, one and three volunteer custodial grandparents, respectively. The Regional Director of this Senior Center also allowed the

focus groups to be held in one of the center's conference rooms. Each focus group lasted approximately one hour for participants to discuss research questions. Again, the consent forms were read and explained, along with the importance of confidentiality to the entire group before each focus group began. Participants were asked if there were any questions before signing forms and discussing research questions. Afterwards, all participants were thanked and provided the \$20.00 stipend for their participation. Figure 4 provides an illustration of the number of focus groups and the number of volunteer participants.

Focus Groups	# of Participants = 20
FG #1	3 CGs
FG #2	3 CGs
FG #3	6 CGs
FG #4	2 CGs
FG #5	2 CGs
FG #6	1 CGs
FG #7	3CGs

Figure 4. Focus Groups and Participants

Data Analysis

All discussions from each focus group were transcribed into a word document and saved on a flash-drive. Afterwards, the transcribed data was uploaded in NVivo12 Plus, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis program. NVivo12 Plus allows the researcher to import and store files as well as create themes and sub-themes from the collected data (NVivo12 Plus, 2019). According to Yin (2016) researchers should read and reread transcripts to familiarize themselves with the collected data. Subsequently, the transcripts were extensively reviewed for relevant words or phrases from participants responses, line-by-line, highlighting words or phrases, that were pertinent, regarding research

questions. An extensive list was created of major themes and sub-themes. The initial assembly of themes and subthemes is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Themes and Subthemes

Overarching theme	Subthemes
1. Financial issues	Income, housing, food, clothing
2. Grandparent issues	Stress, life changes, health, work schedule
3. Grandchildren issues	Behavior, education, emotional, medical, gangs, court
4. Biological parent issues	Harassing threats, drugs, death.
5. Amend state policies	Supportive policies for CGs
6. Distrust in state systems	Do not trust state lawmakers
7. Educational issues	After school programs, tutoring with homework, counseling
8. Advocates for CGs	Speak on behalf of CGs
9. CG rights	Supportive resources, long-term public services, counseling services
10. Guardianship issues	Custody of grandchildren

Originally, 10 overarching themes were created with connecting sub-themes based on the data analysis from participant's discussion of research questions.

Subsequently, the 10 major themes were reevaluated and condensed into five overarching themes and sub-themes, which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Condensed Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subthemes
1. Finances	Income, housing, medical, public assistance
2. Education	Homework tutoring, after-school programs

3. Grandparents	Stress, health, welfare support, custody, biological parent
4. Grandchildren	Family therapy, behavior issues, life changes, court
5. Amend state policies	Advocates for CGs, distrust of state lawmakers

Evidence of Trustworthiness

As discussed in chapter 3, issues of trustworthiness regarding qualitative research relate to internal validity, dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability, are the principal criteria of trustworthiness, which researchers use to ensure the accuracy of qualitative findings (Yin, 2016). Internal validity refers to bracketing personal experiences, which was implemented by abstaining from sharing with volunteer participants any personal experiences relating to the research topic. Dependability refers to stability of data collected from participants, comparable to reliability of volunteer participants. This was established through interviewing volunteer participants beforehand, ensuring they were custodial grandparents before participation in focus groups, which was consistent throughout the data collection process.

Regarding credibility, Yin (2016) discussed a credible research study “provides assurance that you have properly collected and interpreted the data, so that the findings and conclusions accurately reflect and represent the world that was studied” (p.85). All volunteer participants who provided their names and contact numbers on the volunteer sign-up sheet were contacted and asked questions concerning their custodial grandparent status. Hence, all collected data represented custodial grandparents who were raising their grandchildren. Transferability or external validity was established by asking generalized open-ended research questions to volunteer participants. The research questions from this

research may be applicable to other qualitative researcher populations and/or situations (Yin, 2016).

Confirmability was established through each participant's descriptive words, which assisted in creating the predominant themes and sub-themes. The findings from participants answers to the open-ended questions were similar in nature, concerning finances, housing, medical, and how the state system should include custodial grandparents access to full services, as legal foster parents receive continual public assistance. The overarching themes emerged from similar responses during data collection from the west senior center and the south senior center in Chicago, Illinois. The volunteer participants did not have contact with each other from the two different recruitment centers during the focus group sessions. The overarching themes discussed in this research study are displayed in the chart below.

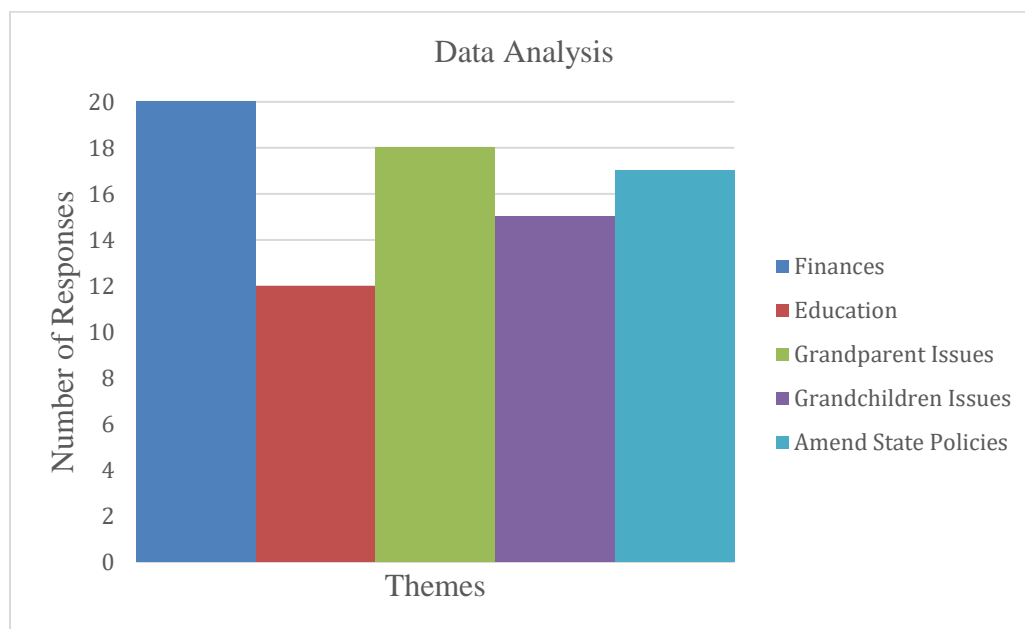


Figure 5. Chart of Data Analysis

Results

The key findings from data generated by the focus group discussions with volunteer participants are summarized below, based on the research questions, while addressing the 5 overarching themes. In addition, verbatim statements from several custodial grandparent participants are displayed utilizing their sequenced, assigned numbers. The 5 sub-themes related to financial difficulties experienced by custodial grandparents are, income, public assistance, medical assistance, food stamps, disability checks, and housing issues for custodial grandparents and their grandchildren.

Theme 1: Financial Issues

Twenty custodial grandparent participants (100%) indicated financial hardships as one of the most significant adversities faced when their roles changed to parenting their grandchildren. Several examples include the following:

- CG 2: “The financial strain on me, I had to rely on my friend to help me with my grandchildren, which are not his grandchildren, I got a small check from DCFS (Department of Child and Family Services) and was told I would not be able to receive TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) for granddaughter.”
- CG 3: “I received disability checks for myself and my grandson gets \$444.85 per month, not enough to survive on.”
- CG 13: “I have to use my funds for my grandchildren. I get VA benefits, and it is not enough to support my grandchild.”

- CG 14: “I receive a housing voucher, I had that before I got her. I don’t receive any money for her.”
- CG 15: Make it easier to apply for services such as housing, medical, and clothing money that is needed to raise a 15-year-old kid.”

The feedback from volunteer participants concerning lack of income to support their new responsibilities as parents to their grandchildren was discussed in length. All participants largely agreed that they were relying on their meager income to provide for themselves and their grandchildren, which was not enough to maintain their household and they were suffering financially. The custodial grandparents were adamant about their need for financial support from public assistance, which was and is difficult to obtain.

Theme 2: Educational Issues

The importance of education is an essential part of a child’s life. The educational issues that these children experienced created more complications for the custodial grandparent. The sub-themes for educational issues that were discussed during the focus groups were: need afterschool programs, tutoring programs, assistance with daily homework assignments. Discussions to these issues are as follows:

- CG 4: “My grandson could not concentrate in school and it was difficult to help him.”
- CG 9: “Daily homework was number 1 priority with the grandkids.”
- CG 10: “Kids needed clothes and school stuff, grandson not doing well in school, cussing at the teachers.”

- CG 15: “They should have after-school programs for low-income families for the kids to go to.”
- CG 20: “He was expelled from public school and had to go to alternative school.”

The discussions on education adversities and keeping the grandchildren in school and away from possible gang activity was a tremendous concern for custodial grandparents, as well as a unique challenge. As the primary caretaker of their grandchildren, informal custodial grandparents usually do not have legal entitlement to act on their grandchildren’s behalf at school or with other professionals. Therefore, as guardians to their grandchildren, custodial grandparents should receive tutoring assistance, behavior counseling, and other necessary programs that will help with the educational adversities they face regularly.

Theme 3: Grandparent Issues/Rights

Custodial grandparents’ rights are limited while raising their grandchildren, due to the legal custody issues that most of the volunteers in the focus groups discussed.

The sub-themes for grandparent issues/rights were stress, discipline, communication, adapting to change, family counseling, better programs, older grandmothers, emotional problems, medical issues, court, work schedule, accommodate grandchild, biological parent issues, guardianship and custody of grandchildren, and life changes. Regarding long-term support services. A few of the participants’ responses are listed below:

- CG 2: “Having to change my work schedule to accommodate the grandchild.”

I also had to lose parenting from my own small children and focus some of

that time on the grandchild. My personal relationship with my fiancé was also hindered.”

- CG 3: “My life changed, my last child out of 8 children was twenty-six years old when I got my first three grandkids, they age was like fourteen years, four years, two years, and then three more newborn babies later on. That’s when I went to group meeting to try to get ready for all of this. I had a lot of help from friends at my church group, most of all from God. I have one grandchild seventeen-years-old, still raising him. I got all of my grandchildren when I was sixty-years-old that’s when I first got my grandkids.”
- CG 9: “My life changed in ways that dinner had to be prepared, clothes washed, listen to daily complaints almost daily, homework was first priority, with the grandkids, my lifestyle of dating and hanging out with friends changed from weekly to probably once monthly, my whole lifestyle changed.”
- CG 12: “I could not do or find time for myself as much, I did not get much of any sleep. I found myself cooking more every day. I was trying to find time for me, but it was hard. Sometimes I would go to a room and find myself crying.”
- CG 19: “Raising three children, age eight, eleven, and fifteen years old and having this responsibility without any support is stressful and lonely for me.”

When the roles changed from grandparent to parent, most of the grandparents discussed they were not ready to take on this responsibility. However, they did not want their grandchildren to go into the state system and be raised by strangers. The custodial grandparents discussed obtaining legal custody is difficult as well and no one wanted

strangers in their personal lives. During the group discussions that fact of the new responsibility created physical exhaustion, coupled with emotional stress and financial demands, which were overwhelming for these grandparents. Most volunteers discussed the stress has taken a toll on them and long-term state support services are desperately needed to help these defenseless families raise the children of the future.

Theme 4: Grandchildren Issues

Custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren experience the difficulties of these children being separated from the biological parent. The custodial grandparents discussed the following sub-themes related to the grandchildren they are raising; needed family counseling/therapy, adapting to change of households, negative attitude toward grandparent, need community programs, grandchildren creating into juvenile delinquency problems, emotional/behavioral problems, court, medical issues, communication issues with grandchildren. Participants discussed the following issues concerning their grandchildren:

- CG 1 “Presently going thru family counseling due to the behavior of my 17-year-old granddaughter, her attitude is reflected negatively toward me due to poor communication, loss of her father due to death, and not seeing her mother on a regular basis.”
- CG 3 “Grandkids were bullying me to get their way with me, had to go to police as they got older due to taking advantage of me.”

- CG 9 “The children were angry most of the time, when real mother would come around and after she would leave, there is always a sense of confusion, why their mother was not doing the right thing for them.”
- CG 14 “She had a hard time transitioning and still know about her mother and father is not with her and why she is with me instead of them.”
- CG 18 “Maybe grandparents can complete training in the beginning stages of taking in the grandchildren, we need counseling services on a long-term basis for the grandchildren.”

The participants discussed the struggles they are going through with raising their grandchildren and the questions asked concerning the biological mother. The also discussed the grandchildren asking when the parent is coming back, which was difficult to answer. The participants discussed their grandchildren leaning towards delinquent activity due to parent leaving them, and not knowing why. Assistance with social services for the grandchildren and their grandparent in these households is vital for the well-being of both. Most participants agreed feeling overwhelmed while raising their grandchildren and need available help and support from state services notwithstanding having legal custody of their grandchildren. Informal custodial grandparents who volunteer to raise their grandchildren deserve the same assistance that is granted to legally obtained guardianship. This is a difficult transition for both parties and assistant to make the transition easier will benefit grandparents and their grandchildren.

Theme 5: State Policies

The Illinois state policies continuously adhere to grandparents who obtain legal custody of their grandchildren. However, most informal custodial grandparents do not have legal custody of their grandchildren. This is mostly due to finances and as stated by the several participants, the distrust of state lawmakers, coupled with unclear understanding of state policies. The participants discussed the following subthemes of issues on changing state policies related to raising their grandchildren: Advocates to speak on their behalf and the distrust of state lawmakers:

- CG 7 “I don’t trust state law makers, they don’t care about us raising our grandchildren.”
- CG 15 “I am 59 years old and my income is low, and the policies need to be amended to provide services for grandparents who do not have custody of their grandchildren.
- CG 16 “The Illinois policies should include all the services that you give foster parents and adoptive parents.”
- CG 18 “Amend all policies to include informal custodial grandparents to get access to many of the forms of support offered to formal grandparents.”
- CG 20 “Public policies should be amended to include informal custodial grandparents. I think that most grandparents have grandchildren without the state being involved.”

The volunteer participants were adamant about not understanding the Illinois state policies concerning guardianship of their grandchildren. Additionally, they voiced the

need for active Illinois support services for those who do not have legal custody of their grandchildren. It is important to provide these helpless families continual support services while raising their grandchildren on an incredibly low income. The participants discussed how they were reluctant to ask state agencies for assistance, fearful that the grandchildren might be removed from the grandparent's care due to lack of income to adequately care for them. Many participants stated that they prayed and asked family members for monetary help. It appears that informal custodial grandparents are deserving of state assistance as caretakers of their grandchildren without being fearful of repercussions for lack of income. The issue of grandparents volunteering to raise their grandchildren is constantly growing and the remedy to alleviate some of the burden is to amend the state policies to include informal custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren.

Summary

Chapter 4 discussed a mini study which was conducted before the actual recruitment of volunteer participants, as well as the setting of the senior centers where recruitment of volunteer participants was performed. Demographics and the number of participants in the study was discussed, coupled with the frequency and duration of data collection was explained. The data analysis process was conferred, and the table list of overarching themes and sub-themes were explained and subsequently condensed. The matter of trustworthiness related to the research questions was explained pertaining to the volunteer participants. Finally, the results of the data analysis from participant responses were examined.

The volunteer participants provided similar responses regarding lack of income to raise their grandchildren, housing issues, behavior issues with grandchildren, custodial grandparents' rights, guardianship and custody issues, as well as public policy issues for custodial grandparents. The participants agreed that changes in state public policies for custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren would alleviate most of the financial, and possibly other burdens on these families. Chapter 5 will discuss further the interpretation of the findings of this qualitative study, the limitations of this study, recommendations for further studies on this topic, and implications for positive social change for custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren in Chicago, Illinois.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the role change of being a grandparent to parenting their grandchildren, coupled with the adversities these grandparents experienced due to this role change. The 20 volunteer participants for this research study attended several focus groups conducted at a local public library and at local senior centers in Chicago, Illinois. We discussed the open-ended research questions related to their struggles, coupled with the lack of public services available to custodial grandparents. While each participant's experiences were unique, the major themes from the discussions were similar. This chapter includes a discussion of the major findings related to the literature on informal custodial grandparents who voluntarily accept the responsibility of raising their grandchildren for reasons beyond their control. This general qualitative research study was conducted using several focus groups of volunteer custodial grandparents in Chicago, Illinois.

I transcribed the focus group discussions and responses to the research questions into a Microsoft Word document and input the text into the NVivo12 Plus program for data analysis. NVivo12 Plus revealed 10 overarching themes with subthemes, which were subsequently condensed into 5 overarching themes and subthemes. The major overarching theme from the data analysis of custodial grandparents' discussions of raising their grandchildren was lack of income to provide for the grandchildren's needs. The participants in this study described lack of finances as a major hardship for providing the basic necessities to effectively raise their grandchildren.

The use of open-ended questions provided participants with the opportunity to share their experiences and challenges and discuss their role change from being a grandparent to parenting their grandchildren on a daily basis. Participants also discussed the lack of income, with all 20 participants in agreement that money is the largest problem for custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren. The remaining themes were educational issues with the grandchildren, grandparent issues/rights, grandchildren issues/behavior, and changing state policies to accommodate custodial grandparent families.

Interpretation of the Findings

The key findings in this general qualitative research study added to the existing literature regarding custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren and their struggles to survive on limited income and limited access to public and social welfare services in Chicago Illinois. Additionally, the findings of this research were consistent with past literature of Steinisch (2015), who discussed the difficulties of the lack of finances for custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren. Steinisch (2015) also discussed the financial challenges of custodial grandparents' role changes with becoming the parent to their grandchildren with limited income. The low income in these families are monthly social security income, retirement income, and low wages, a few grandparents had to find employment, full-time or part-time after the role change. The lack of income created additional poverty threats for most of these custodial grandparent families in Chicago, Illinois.

The findings during focus group discussions confirm and extend the struggles identified in the literature on grandparents' role change when they assume the caretaking of their grandchildren. The strong descriptions of the participants' main adversity, which was lack of income to raise their grandchildren, extended the knowledge of literature discussed in Chapter 2. Participants noted that public services were not readily available and were extremely challenging to obtain and stated that finances were top priority for their families. A general lack of funds to provide for their grandchildren's necessities continued to create major adversities for these custodial grandparent families. Moreover, participants discussed the limited support services offered, which was consistent with Sampson and Hertlein's (2015) research on the dissipating services for custodial grandparent families who are exposed to the urban city environment of guns, gangs, and drugs.

The findings from the data collection are congruent with the conceptual framework of role change (i.e., from grandparenting to parenting their grandchildren). Although custodial grandparents' experiences included many variations, everyone discussed the five common themes that were prominent factors throughout the data collection process. The findings from this study supported the 3 fundamental research questions concerning custodial grandparents struggles with money and the lack of public assistance, the custodial grandparents quality of life, and how state and local government should make changes to requirements to provide continual assistance for custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren. The data collection from volunteer participants discussions and responses to the seven focus group questions provided five emerging

themes. I discuss the responses to the focus group questions (see Appendix C) in this section.

Focus Group Question 1: Experience Major Adversities With Role Change That Affected Your Quality of Life?

Custodial grandparents do not have adequate income to provide the daily needs of their grandchildren. All of the participants in this study discussed the difficulties with lack of finances. Financial struggles for custodial grandparents include food and clothing costs, housing payments, day care fees, medical coverage, and fixed income for retired grandparents, coupled with daily necessities for raising grandchildren. Although there are numerous struggles that custodial grandparents face raising their grandchildren, the major struggle discussed was income. Researchers have conducted several studies on this topic. Steinisch (2015), for instance, concurred that financial uncertainty and poverty are perils in most custodial grandparent households. A custodial grandparent stated during a focus group session, “I don’t receive any money for her, without giving us the runaround and just because we are related, we should have equal rights so that we can better help our loved ones without the worries of how to go forward.”

Researchers have found that grandparents raising their grandchildren live at the lowest socioeconomic status and are negatively affected by their social condition along with the lack of income to adequately raise their grandchildren (Myadze, 2012; Prokos & Keen, 2012; Sampson & Hertlein, 2015; Steinisch, 2015). Furthermore, raising grandchildren can take a toll on grandparents’ health and well-being; as one participant stated, “The stress I encountered was, fighting for guardianship with my daughter,

changing my lifestyle to be available for his needs.” Custodial grandparents’ financial struggles, coupled with health concerns, was evident during the data collection and confirmed the literature discussed in Chapter 2. The majority of public policies and support services were not designed for informal custodial grandparents and a large number of these grandparents struggle financially, as well as experiencing health concerns (Van Etten & Gautam, 2012).

Focus Group Question 2: Any Educational Issues With Grandchildren?

Custodial grandparents are not licensed foster parents and therefore experience challenges when negotiating school registration and other educational concerns for their grandchildren. Generations United (2016) and Wallace (2016) discussed barriers associated with school registration for custodial grandparents. Obtaining legal documentation requires the grandparents to obtain legal assistance, which is a huge financial burden for these families. However, in Illinois it is not a condition of legal custody for the grandparent to register the child for school if the grandparent can provide residence verification of the grandchild living at the same address (Cox, 2009; Generations United, 2016; Wallace, 2016). There is limited current research on educational registration for grandchildren. Participants in this study discussed issues with the lack of after-school, tutoring, and sports programs for their grandchildren to keep them away from gangs and violence in the neighborhood.

Focus Group Question 3: Improve State Services to Assist Custodial Grandparents?

The majority of participants in this study discussed stress associated with adapting to raising grandchildren, lack of support of state public assistance, lifestyle changes for

both parties, lack of medical coverage, guardianship/custody issues, and challenges from biological parents. Coupled with family counseling, communication issues with teenage grandchildren, and adjusting work schedules if the grandparent is employed. The United States Census Bureau (2015) provided these statistics on grandparents who continue in the work force to provide care for the grandchildren they are raising. These issues confirmed findings by Cancino (2016), Cox (2010), Sampson and Hertlein, (2015), Van Etten and Gautam (2012), and Wallace (2016). The authors conferred that most custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren live at the poverty or below and usually do not qualify for state assistance and therefore neglected by the child welfare system.

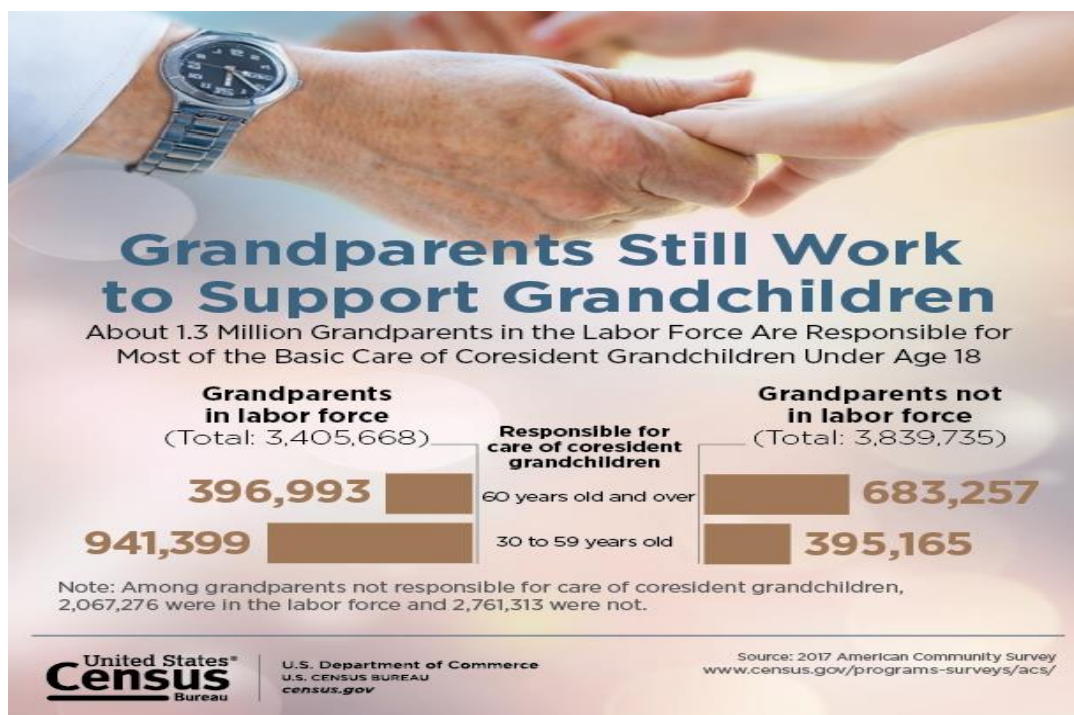


Figure 6. U.S. Census Bureau Survey of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren and continue employment to provide for their grandchildren. From “Grandparents Still Work to Support Grandchildren” (U. S. Census Bureau, 2017, Revised August 28, 2019).

(<https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2019/comm/grandparents-support-grandchildren.html>).

Additionally, the parenting demands on grandparents are arduous due to the numerous expenses required to raise children, paired with the lack of knowledge on how to navigate the application process after getting denied public assistance. Custodial grandparents endure the responsibilities of raising their grandchildren alone and struggle financially, emotionally, physically, and psychologically. Van Etten and Guatam (2012) stated that custodial grandparent raising their grandchildren are a population that is growing tremendously and need the help from state systems to assist with this enormous task of parenting and raising their grandchildren. Several participants in this study discussed how they had to step-up and save their grandchildren, but accepting this role changed their lives enormously. A participant in this study stated, “going in a room and crying due to stress and lack of money.” Overall, custodial grandparents endure many adversities as they continue the challenges of parenting and raising their grandchildren, public assistance is greatly needed to help these families survive and prosper.

Focus Group Question 4: Are You Receiving Public Support?

Sampson and Hertlein (2015) discussed the lack of help for custodial grandparents with raising grandchildren, a participant in their study shared how the monthly pension check was not enough to provide for their grandchild’s needs, and there is not any monetary assistance available (Sampson & Hertlein, 2015). Most volunteer participants in the focus groups discussed the difficulties applying for public assistance and the requirements to qualify are uncompromising. Therefore, these grandparents suffer

while raising their grandchildren. The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) (2017), discussed the overwhelming process for informal custodial grandparents who will only receive temporary assistance for the grandchild, while the grandparent is required to actively search for employment. Additionally, DCFS requires the grandparent to be subjected to a series of bureaucratic hurdles for limited assistance, creating additional challenges for custodial grandparents (DCFS, 2017). One participant stated, "I get VA benefits and it is not enough to support my grandchild." As the numbers increase for grandparents' role changes from grandparent to parenting their grandchildren, there is a necessity to provide these families with continued public assistance. However, the literature in this study revealed that custodial grandparents must prepare to legally adopt their grandchildren to qualify for receiving state assistance.

Focus Group Question 5: Grandchildren Behavior Issues?

Custodial grandparent participants discussed the problems encountered when the grandchildren changed households and are prone to have emotional, psychological, and behavioral problems, before moving with their grandparent. Researchers confirmed that adolescence who are exposed to negative influences before moving with the grandparent are more prone to juvenile delinquency (Campbell, Hu, & Oberle, 2008; Day & Bazemore, 2011; Frederick 2010; Van Etten & Gautam, 2012). One participant discussed the lack of substantial resources for counseling therapy and afterschool programs for their grandchildren, "They need programs for grandchildren to get therapy, I have to explain to him about life, school, health, and other basic general stuff, more programs to help me to guide my grandson on the right path as he enters his teens."

Regarding juvenile delinquency issues with grandchildren raised by their grandparents, the research is dated back to 2010 and is limited on statistics of delinquency in custodial grandparents' households (Frederick, 2010 & Harris, 2005). However, domestic violence appears to be prevalent in some households with participants stating, "Had to go to police as they got older due to taking advantage of me." "Had to deal with Chicago Police Department, but no arrest yet." Disrespectful, very smart mouth, don't listen to me." "Oldest grandson has serious anger problems." In 2011, in Chicago, Illinois a case of domestic violence resulted in the dreadful murder of a custodial grandparent by the 15-year-old grandson she was raising. This tragic incident happened due to the grandmother disciplining her grandson about not going to school on this particular day. There is limited research in this area related to grandchildren and domestic violence. Researchers Day and Bazemore (2011) discussed the importance of a restorative approach to addressing behavior issues and domestic violence in grandchildren being raised by grandparents.

Focus Group Question 6: How Can Local State Agencies Provide Needed Support Services?

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) provided information on the requirements for obtaining public services, such as TANF, SNAP, WIC, which is temporary assistance for the grandchildren (DCFS, 2017). There are not any direct resources or services for informal custodial grandparents who need assistance as parents to their grandchildren. Volunteer participants in this study responded to this question stating, "let grandparents voices be heard," "Programs are not open to grandparents with

guardianship, but are not foster parents,” “I don’t trust state lawmakers, they don’t care about us raising our grandchildren.” These statements by custodial grandparents mirrored Child Welfare League of America (2016) who discussed grandparents legally adopting their grandchildren to receive the necessary services that are offered by this organization. Additionally, Generations United (2016) discussed how custodial grandparents are saving taxpayers millions by raising their grandchildren versus placing them in the foster care system. Finally, ACF (Administration for Children and Families, 2017), discussed statistics on the vast numbers of grandparents raising their grandchildren and the need for assistance for these families.

Focus Group Question 7: How Can Illinois Amend State Policies to Include Custodial Grandparent Families?

Changing Illinois state policies is certainly needed for these susceptible families to be included in ongoing public and supportive services. The various services discussed in the literature chapter of this study stated how many services have dissipated due to funding and cuts in social services for low-income families. However, revitalizing supportive services or creating new policies and programs made available for custodial grandparent families would alleviate some of the adversities within these families.

Participants responses to this question included the following, “I think that most grandparents have grandchildren without the state being involved.” “Public policies should be amended to include custodial grandparents,” “Ask for more input from the grandparents and have informational meetings or programs to share the awareness of the importance of this matter.” “I am 59 years old and my income is low, and the policies

need to be amended to provide services for grandparents who do not have legal custody of their grandchildren, we need to be able to provide the needs of a growing child.”

Changing state policies to include informal custodial grandparents appears to be the answer to the problems of raising their grandchildren. Qualifying for state and public services is necessary to alleviate the adversities of custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren. Informal custodial grandparents do not have state licenses to raise their grandchildren and most custodial grandparent families are struggling and living in poverty and should be included to receive the same services rendered to legal caregivers, if not, they will continue to struggle with numerous adversities trying to raise their grandchildren.

The findings from the data collection in this study confirmed the research literature concerning, income and public assistance, guardianship, well-being for custodial grandparents and the grandchildren, educational and behavior issues with the grandchildren, long-term services, and changing state policies to include informal custodial grandparents. Informal custodial grandparenting will continue to be a growing concern in Chicago, Illinois and changes in state policies are needed to accommodate these families to ensure these children will grow and strive to become a vital part of society versus statistics in the criminal justice system.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation to this study was that the study represented a small sample size of 20 participants who provided information on their role change of becoming custodial grandparents to raise and care for their grandchildren. Another limitation of this study

was that all volunteers who signed-up and participated in the study were African Americans, male and female. Small focus groups were conducted with volunteer custodial grandparents. However, there was one of the focus group where only 1 volunteer attended. Therefore, I continued to collect data and it became similar to an individual interview versus of a focus group of two or more volunteers.

Although the sample size was small, the results could be applied to the larger population of custodial grandparents in the Chicago, Illinois area. Hence, the focus groups were conducted on the west and south side of Chicago, which provided two different geographical locations of custodial grandparents' experiences in Chicago. Although, the findings from 20 custodial grandparents may not be applied universally to all custodial grandparents, the majority of participants from the above two areas of Chicago agreed that lack of income was the major adversity raising their grandchildren. Therefore, honesty and trust were established with this researcher and participants during initial meetings and before signing consent form. As discussed in chapter 1 regarding trustworthiness of custodial grandparent participants, the groups appeared invested in this research study because they recognized it provided a voice for their adversities to be heard on a larger platform, and perhaps creating awareness of being included in public policies for the needed assistance for these families.

Recommendations

This study was designed as an exploratory, qualitative study of the changing roles of grandparents to parenting their grandchildren due to reasons beyond their control. The

findings of this study indicated the majority of informal custodial grandparents do not have the financial means to adequately care for the grandchildren they are raising. Participants in this study discussed the many hardships encountered after becoming the parent to their grandchildren without obtaining legal custody they are essentially exempt from qualifying to receive continual public assistance. The results from this study revealed that more research is needed to address the lack of public services for custodial grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. These families need public assistance to ease the adversities encountered due to the role change from being a grandparent to parenting their grandchildren. Participants in this study adamantly discussed the need for financial assistance, as well as public and social service assistance to help them with basic necessities while parenting their grandchildren. This qualitative research study will potentially be available in publication form to local policy makers and in an abbreviated format to local social services arenas to advocate for informal custodial grandparents. Thereby, understanding the dynamics of informal custodial grandparents' adversities is essential for creating policy changes that will improve the status of these families.

Recommendations for Practice

This study provided significant information regarding the lack of public welfare services of informal custodial grandparents' role changes while raising their grandchildren. Participants noted the need for public assistance without acquiring legal guardianship of their grandchildren. The majority of participants discussed their low-income was their major hardship raising their grandchildren. Providing the basic necessities to growing children was most important to the participants in this study. A

pragmatic recommendation for custodial grandparents' challenges would be closing the gap in public welfare services that are lacking for these families. Information gleaned from this study can provide insight into changing policies and programs to better address custodial grandparent needs.

Including custodial grandparent families in the realm of qualifying for continual public welfare services could relieve some of the adversities they encounter as they continue to be the parent to their grandchildren. Allowing informal custodial grandparents access to the same public welfare services that are provided to foster parents and adoptive parents will assist with providing necessities needed to raise the grandchildren in these families. Furthermore, custodial grandparents are filling the gap for the missing biological parent; therefore, changing social and public policies to include custodial grandparents will fill the current gap in supportive services for these families.

Recommendations for Research

Based on the results of this study, further research is needed to investigate the adversities of informal custodial grandparents in the Chicago area. Perhaps a quantitative research study utilizing personal interviews covering a larger area of Chicago, Illinois could provide statistical data on the hardships of custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren. A larger scale study may provide more statistical data related to the obstacles between the policy makers and the voiceless informal custodial grandparents who need their issues to be heard. Additionally, a larger scale quantitative or mixed methods research study would access more custodial grandparents in the Chicago area, thereby exploring the barriers between policy makers, who have the authority to amend

state welfare policies to include informal custodial grandparents to have access to the needed services that would benefit these families. It would be greatly beneficial to determine if the needs identified by custodial grandparents in the Chicago area are similar to other metropolitan (and rural) areas.

There is a need to reevaluate the role of informal custodial grandparents, while acknowledging the support they need, and incorporate custodial grandparent support into public policies. As a society, there is a need to provide necessary supportive services to custodial grandparents who represent an important role in raising the next generation of the future.

Implications

The results of this research study have substantial implications for positive social change within custodial grandparents' household, such as reducing poverty issues for these families. According to Generations United (2016), 21% of custodial grandparent families live below the poverty line. Therefore, policymakers, anti-poverty advocates, can provide permanent solutions by adjusting and/or upgrading current public policies to include custodial grandparents to receive monetary assistance on a continually basis while raising their grandchildren. The fact that informal custodial grandparents are not licensed foster parents or legally adopted their grandchildren should not be a prerequisite to receive assistance.

Another implication for positive social change relates to custodial grandparents receiving legal assistance to address custody issues. Cancino (2016) discussed how the Center for Law and Social Work received funds from the Illinois Department of Aging to

provide legal assistance for custodial grandparents who occasionally ask for legal assistance. However, the Illinois budget has been insufficient with providing monies to this organization to assist custodial grandparents with legal issues.

Therefore, restoring this program with funds for legal assistance for custodial grandparents will initiate positive social change with obtaining legal custody of their grandchildren. The role change that grandparents endured to become parents for a second time was beyond their control. Grandparents who are raising their grandchildren experienced an unplanned detour in their lives, they need help and adequate support with the concerns and experiences in their role as parent to their grandchildren. Grandparents who are raising grandchildren, regardless of age or ethnicity, need support to provide a caring and nurturing environment that children need. Additionally, informal custodial grandparents enter this role change with their own medical issues that may exacerbate with the new responsibilities.

Renovating public policies and social services to accommodate informal custodial grandparents can make a considerable difference in the lives of the grandchildren and their custodial grandparent caretakers. There is a desperate need to re-examine and reconsider, as a society of social justice, to create more awareness of the adversities of custodial grandparent families, make the necessary changes in public policies and social services in an effort to help these families survive and flourish in healthy environments, with the grandchildren becoming responsible adults.

Conclusion

This study's results support that public policy proposals are needed to redesign the qualifications for public assistance to include informal custodial grandparents in Chicago, Illinois. Considering the societal issues of children and grandparents living below poverty level, inadequate housing, lack of medical coverage, and other expenses that these grandparents endure, while under-served by state social services. According to previous research, grandparents changing roles to become parents to their grandchildren is consistently increasing, while public services are lacking for these vulnerable families. Custodial grandparents should not be discouraged but encouraged to apply for public assistance.

Given the 5.7 million children under the age of 18 living in grandparent-headed households, policies and laws covering these families must be amended to account for the basic needs of these children. The Illinois Department of Aging provided statistics on "Facts about children being raised by grandparents" in a 2020 article. However, the information provided was collected in 2010. This is an indication that public policy lawmakers with decision making powers have procrastinated in this area of societal needs. Therefore, this study suggests that public policy initiatives are required to include informal custodial grandparents to receive needed, continual assistance while raising their grandchildren. Therefore, reshaping of current public policies must be launched to provide for and support this voiceless population (Cox, 2010; Generations United, 2016; Van Etten & Gautam, 2012; Wallace, 2016).

The major themes resulting from the data collection in this research study consisted of financial issues, educational issues, grandparent rights/issues, grandchildren issues, and the need to amend state welfare policies in Chicago, Illinois. These themes gathered from the data collection during focus groups coincide with past research on this research topic. Financial problems are a major issue with custodial grandparent families. According to past research, these families experience a plethora of hardships, with finances being the major issues these families encounter.

Educational issues for the grandchildren include after-school tutoring, and other local programs that custodial grandparents believe will help keep their grandchildren out of trouble with guns, gangs, and drugs. Grandparent issues stemmed from legal guardianship, biological parent coming in and out of the grandchildren's lives, housing issues, health concerns for the grandparent including stress and possible going back to work to create more income. These issues are consistent with past research discussed in the literature review. Grandchildren issues included counseling therapy, negative behaviors at home and at school, and possible juvenile court issues. Past research discussed the fact that the detachment from the biological parent may create negative behaviors in children and possible delinquent behavior.

Finally, the theme of changing state policies as a positive instrument to assist informal custodial grandparents raising their grandchildren. Past research supported that custodial grandparents appear unnoticed by the child welfare system and are ineligible to receive long-term public assistance unless they legally adopt or become foster parents to their grandchildren. Informal custodial grandparents have a huge responsibility raising

their grandchildren without public welfare support. The participants from this research study were adamant about needing assistance with raising their grandchildren. The participants also voiced concerns about not having enough money to provide for their grandchildren, hence the need for public assistance for these families. Custodial grandparents cannot abdicate from raising their grandchildren. Custodial grandparents are courageous for assuming this responsibility and are basically isolated from public support systems, hence the need for public policy reforms. As this population continues to grow and grandparents continue to struggle with the responsibilities of parenting their grandchildren, public and supportive services are needed for this population to survive while raising the next generation of adults.

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Appendix A: Screener Guide

1. What has been your challenges with the role change of grandparent to the parent of your grandchild?
2. How long have you been the parent to your grandchildren?
3. What adversities have you experienced within the social welfare system in Chicago, IL?
4. Will you consider volunteering for a research study that discusses the problems you have encountered since becoming the primary caretaker for your grandchildren?

Appendix B: Confidentiality Agreement

Name of Participant: _____

During my activity in collecting data for this research: “Exploring Adversities of Custodial Grandparents Raising their Grandchildren from a Policy Perspective” I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Form, I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant’s name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I’m officially authorized to access, and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

By signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature:

Date:

Appendix C: Focus Group Questions

I will begin the focus group by introducing myself to the group and explain my position as a research student. I will discuss the purpose of my research study (in laymen's terms), explaining their position in the research study, the time frame of their participation. I will provide details on how to enroll in the study with my contact information and email address. I will provide specific requirements for participation in the research study, such as, have you been raising your grandchildren for at least six or more months, are you receiving any public services for assistance, and what services are you receiving? I will discuss how much I appreciate their time and patience of my research study. I will also explain to participants. Also, the consent form will ask the participants if I can use my audio tape-record the focus group. I will also ask if the participants have any questions before we begin and if they fully understand the research focus group.


Speaking to the entire focus group...Please answer these questions as openly and honestly as possible. Your answers will remain confidential and in a safe place on a flash drive for 5 years and then destroyed.

- Focus Group Question 1: What are the major adversities informal custodial grandparents encounter when that impact their quality of life, after assuming the parent role for raising their grandchildren in Chicago, Illinois?
- Focus Group Question 2: What have custodial grandparents encountered with their grandchildren from the role change?

- Probe: If not mentioned ask about: what things contribute to financial strain, loss of income, housing issues, medical expenses (insurance coverage for a non-legal dependent), issues with grandchildren)
- Focus Group Question 3: How can state and local government agency programs be improved to assist informal custodial grandparent?
- Focus Group Question 4: What public, financial support, if any, are you receiving? (such as TANF, CHIP, LEGACY, SSI, SECTION 8 housing vouchers)
 - Probe: What problems do informal custodial grandparents experience when trying to obtain assistance (listen for documentation, proof of need, legal representation, etc.
- Focus Group Question 5: What, if any, behavior issues, have resulted since you assumed informal guardianship role for your grandchild?
- Focus Group Question 6: How can local and state agencies provide needed services for custodial grandparent headed households (such as, local politicians, state law makers, congressman,)?
- Focus Group Question 7: How can Illinois public policies be amended to include informal custodial grandparents as parents to their grandchildren?

Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer

VOLUNTEERS ARE SPECIAL!!!



Volunteer Research Study

Are you currently raising your biological grandchildren?
What challenges have you experienced with your role change?
Have you been caring for your grandchildren at least 6 months?
What challenges have you experienced raising your grandchildren?
Have you applied for any type of public assistance for you and your grandchild?

Would you like to volunteer to participate in a qualitative research study about the challenges you encountered as a informal custodial grandparent?

[Date] [Time]
Custodial Grandparents Support Center
Address
Time allotted = 45 to 60 minutes
Please Call Ms. Dockery @
[redacted]

To Thank You for your complete participation, a \$20 Walmart gift card will be provided to participants upon completion.