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The Lived Experiences of Grandparents As Primary Caregivers for Children of Incarcerated Parents

Idonia Kaleena Barrett
Walden University

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Walden University

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Idonia K. Barrett

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

The Lived Experiences of Grandparents As Primary Caregivers for Children of
Incarcerated Parents

by

Idonia K. Barrett

MPhil, Walden University, 2019

MA, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2010

BA, Hampton University, 2009

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services: Criminal Justice Specialization

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Abstract

In the last decade, the number of grandparents in the United States acting as caregivers for children who have incarcerated parents has increased significantly. Incarceration separates individuals from their families and limits contact with the outside world. The imprisoned parent is dependent on the caregiver, who becomes the "gatekeeper" to maintain contact with their child. It can be challenging for the grandparent to maintain parent-child contact because of the hardships they endure as primary caregivers, which may cause them to experience strain. The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive phenomenological study was to determine the lived experiences of grandparents who serve as primary caregivers while attempting to maintain contact (i.e., visitation, phone calls, and written correspondence) between their grandchildren and the children's incarcerated parents. This research used the role strain theory to explore the grandparents' lived experiences as they attempt to maintain contact between the child and incarcerated parent. Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling were used to recruit 11 grandparents who were primary caregivers for children of incarcerated parents. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and analyzed using Colaizzi's method to determine emergent themes. The results revealed grandparent caregivers were adamant about maintaining contact between their grandchild and incarcerated parent, regardless of the parents' criminal behavior, and at times irrespective of the financial cost. Increased knowledge about grandparent caregivers' experiences can inform human service agencies to implement strategies to facilitate and sustain contact between families and their incarcerated family members.

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First, I thank God for this time in my life. He has given me the fortitude and the wherewithal to complete this dissertation process. He also has placed people in my life that have supported me with love and understanding throughout this journey. I'm thankful for my family and friends, who did not always understand what I was dealing with but was still a listening ear. I have learned so much about myself as a person and a scholar during this process.

For the first time in a long time, I was challenged. Not just academically but mentally and emotionally. At my first residency, I can recall Dr. Sandra Harris and Dr. Tracey Phillips spoke to my cohort about how this doctoral journey would challenge us in ways that we would not expect. I was only in my second term of coursework and was surprised to hear so much emphasis placed on the emotional and mental toll that accompanies completing this degree. Honestly, I didn't think that would happen to me. Boy, was I wrong. I didn't know then how much these women would later be vital in my doctoral journey. I am forever grateful to Dr. Phillips and Dr. Harris.

I am eager for what is next in my life.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of grandparent caregivers as they make attempts to maintain contact between the grandchild and the incarcerated parent. Grandparent caregivers are essential to study because they commonly assume the role of primary caregiver when the other parent cannot care for the child (Poehlman-Tynan, Cuthrell, Weymouth, & Burnson, 2019). There is a gap in the literature regarding the grandparents' lived experiences as they attempt to maintain contact between the incarcerated parents and the children for whom they provide care. This research can contribute to the existing literature related to grandparent caregivers who seek to co-parent with the incarcerated parent to maintain parent-child relationships for reunification.

In this chapter, I will include a background of the current literature. I will present the problem statement, the purpose of the study, and the research question. I will then describe the framework for this study. Finally, I will identify and define key terms, discuss assumptions and limitations of the study, and discuss the study's significance about social change.

Background of the Study

Mass incarceration in the United States has negatively impacted the structure of the family unit (Uggen & McElrath, 2014). The drastic increase of imprisonment began in the early 1970s because of get-tough-on-crime policies and budget cuts to rehabilitative services for inmates (Wildeman & Wakefield, 2014). Over half of prisoners of the inmate population have children under the age of 18 years, and approximately 45%

of those inmates were living with their children when they were sent to prison (Sykes & Pettit, 2014). A longitudinal study conducted in the United States between 2011 and 2012 revealed that 5.1 million people had a parent who had been jailed or imprisoned during their childhood (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). When parents are incarcerated, relatives often take on caregiver role to keep a child from going into foster care, known as kinship care (Crowther et al., 2014).

Caregivers for children of incarcerated parents are a unique and understudied population (McCarthy & Adams, 2018). Past studies have primarily focused on the impact of parental incarceration on children (e. g., Dallaire et al., 2015; Johnson & Easterling, 2015; Kautz, 2017; Luther, 2015; Miller & Barnes, 2015). Other research has focused on the experiences between the child and caregiver relationship during the parent's incarceration (Arditti & Salva, 2015; Chui, 2016; Turanovic et al., 2012). Recently, research has shifted toward caregivers' experiences for children of incarcerated parents because of the rise in the number of incarcerated parents with minor-aged children (McCarthy & Adams, 2018). In this study, I focused on the grandparent who assumes a primary caregiver's role due to the imprisoned parent.

This new-found role as a primary caregiver can change the grandparents' lifestyle, which can strain their finances; mental, emotional, and physical health; and their social interactions with others (Cramer et al., 2017). Strain can negatively impact the grandparents' physical health when the caregiver's role becomes burdensome (Xu et al., 2017). The increased responsibility of serving as a primary caregiver takes away from the needs of the grandparent. Some of those needs include failure to attend doctor appointments and take prescribed medications (Guastaferrero et al., 2015). Stress and self-

neglect can contribute to the deterioration of health issues that the grandparents may be facing due to growing older (i.e., arthritis, adult-onset diabetes, osteoporosis, depression, etc.; Whitley & Fuller-Thomson, 2018). Past research has found it is common for a grandparent to diminish the effects of stress and ignore the physical or emotional stress because the primary focus may be on the grandchild's well-being (Doley et al., 2015).

On the other hand, other researchers have found that grandparents could experience positive outcomes from caring for their grandchildren. For instance, Zhou et al. (2017) used role strain to examine how serving in the role of caregiver impacted grandparent caregivers' physical health. Findings from the study revealed that grandparents who were primary caregivers for their grandchildren experienced positive health benefits (Zhou et al., 2017). Caring for grandchildren had a positive effect on the grandparents' cognitive function and increased their physical activity. Results from the Zhou et al. (2017) study differed from the previously mentioned studies that found that fulfilling the role as primary caregiver negatively impacted the grandparent's physical health (e. g. Doley et al., 2015; Guastaferrero et al., 2015; Xu et al., 2017; Whitley & Fuller-Thomson, 2018).

When the grandparent assumes the role of the primary caregiver, they also become responsible for maintaining contact between the child and the incarcerated parent (Tasca, 2016). With managing their new roles as primary caregivers for grandchildren with imprisoned parents, many grandparents seek to maintain family continuity by sustaining contact between the child and incarcerated parent (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2019). Family continuity is essential for increasing the likelihood of reunification

between the incarcerated parents and their children post-incarceration (Robillard et al., 2016).

After a thorough literature review, I was not able to locate research that explores grandparent caregivers' experiences as they maintain contact between incarcerated parents and their children. The research about grandparent caregivers has been extensive on the topic of the physical, financial, and emotional strain experienced by grandparent caregivers for children of incarcerated parents (e.g., Kiraly & Humphreys, 2015; Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2015; Ruiz & Kopak, 2014). Much of the current research typically includes discussion of family members' experiences in general and in-person visitation with incarcerated individuals (e.g., Tasca, 2016; Tasca et al., 2016).

Problem Statement

For this study, I delved into the role of the grandparent caregiver and their lived experiences maintaining contact between the child and incarcerated parent. In the past decade, the number of grandparents in the United States acting as caregivers for children who have incarcerated parents has increased significantly (Choi et al., 2016). Nearly one million grandparents care for their grandchildren due to parental incarceration (Guastaferrero et al., 2015). The exact number of grandparents raising their grandchildren due to the imprisoned parent is difficult to determine because not all custodial arrangements are formal (i.e., through the courts; Choi et al., 2016). No government agency collects data on incarcerated individuals' parental status (Choi et al., 2016).

Incarceration separates individuals from their families and limits contact with the outside world (Folk et al., 2019). The imprisoned parent is dependent on the caregiver, who becomes the gatekeeper to maintain contact with their child (Tasca, 2016). It can be

challenging for the grandparent to maintain parent-child contact because of their hardships as primary caregivers (Cramer et al., 2017). For in-person visitation, it is costly in time and money to travel to the correctional facility (Cramer et al., 2017). Rubenstein et al. (2019) reported that 62% of state inmates were incarcerated in facilities more than 100 miles from their last place of residence. If the caregivers perceive visiting the incarcerated parent as an added strain to their role as caregiver, they are less likely to return to the correctional facility (Cramer et al., 2017).

In-person visitation is the optimum choice; however, written letters and phone calls are common forms of contact because of the lower financial cost (Robillard et al., 2016). Nevertheless, researchers have found that phone calls can be expensive, making this communication method difficult for families with limited financial resources (Shlafer et al., 2020). The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) capped the cost of out-of-state phone calls for both prisons and jails at 21 cents a minute, but county and city-run jails can cost families \$1 per minute or more (Wagner & Jones, 2019). As for letter writing, many facilities affix a stamp indicating that the letters' origin is from a correctional facility (Shlaer et al., 2020). The stamp on the letter may increase the caregivers' apprehension about giving the letters to their children (Shlaer et al., 2020). Emails may be cheaper, but not all correctional facilities have email capabilities (Shlaer et al., 2020).

Although the research regarding the interpersonal and economic consequences of grandparents raising children of incarcerated parents illuminates significant findings, I found no research that has examined the lived experiences associated with grandparent caregivers who attempt to maintain contact between the child and incarcerated parent.

There is a gap in the literature regarding grandparents' lived experiences and challenges while maintaining that contact between the grandchildren and imprisoned parents.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive phenomenological study was to determine the lived experiences of grandparents who serve as primary caregivers while attempting to maintain contact (i.e., visitation, phone calls, and written correspondence) between their grandchildren and the children's incarcerated parents. I intended to understand the perceived importance of maintaining contact between the grandchild and the incarcerated parent. In this study, I sought to uncover the positive experiences and challenges linked to contact maintenance, contributing to the existing literature regarding kinship caregiving and parental incarceration. Grandparents who have formal or informal custody of their grandchildren due to parental incarceration reported on their experience and described their experiences as facilitators for contact maintenance.

Research Question

In this study, I sought to answer the following research question:

What are grandparents who serve as primary caregivers lived experiences of attempting to maintain contact (i.e., visitation, phone calls, and written correspondence) between their grandchildren and the children's incarcerated parents?

Theoretical Framework

I chose the role strain theory developed by Goode in 1960 to guide this study. Role strain theory is built upon the premise that social institutions are composed of people who occupy roles and that there are relationships between the various roles (Goode, 1960). Role strain theory posits that members of society develop expectations of

an individual because the person holds a specific position role (Goode, 1960). If the person does not conform to the expectations or attempts to adapt but cannot fulfill the expectations, they could potentially experience role strain (Goode, 1960). As posited by Goode, individuals often conform to the expectations associated with the role(s); however, a person's situation (i.e., sufficient resources, physical and mental well-being) may impede a person's ability to conform to a specified role. I present a more detailed explanation of role strain theory in Chapter 2.

Grandparent caregivers of children with incarcerated parents may have little or no time to prepare for their new roles as caregivers, which may cause them to experience strain (Guastaferrero et al., 2015). Taking custody of a minor grandchild can strain the grandparents' finances as they have to provide necessities (i.e., clothing, food, and school activities; Guastaferrero et al., 2015). Guardianship can put a strain on their health (Hayslip et al., 2015) and put a strain on their emotions as they experience grief related to the loss of "grandparenthood" (Poehlmann et al., 2019; Sampson & Hertlein, 2015).

Several researchers have used role strain to investigate the lived experiences of grandparents who care for their grandchildren (e.g., Doley et al., 2015; Guastaferrero et al., 2015; Xu et al., 2017; Whitley & Fuller-Thomson, 2018; Zhou et al., 2017). Since I located other studies that used the role strain theory regarding grandparent caregivers' experiences for their grandchildren, I felt that the role strain theory was appropriate for my study. I used the role strain theory to explore the grandparents' lived experiences while caring for a child with an incarcerated parent and as they attempt to maintain contact between the child and incarcerated parent.

Nature of the Study

For this study, I used a descriptive phenomenological approach to examine the experiences of grandparent caregivers. Qualitative inquiry is used for understanding views and perceptions (Kahlke, 2014). It offers visions to different problems and helps in developing concepts or theories (Kahlke, 2014). Descriptive phenomenology does not require an interpretation of the data (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Descriptive phenomenology is an analysis of the participants' descriptions to construct the meaning of the studied phenomenon (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). I used the descriptive phenomenology method to discover "the rich and complex source of unspoken meaning" associated with the lived experiences encountered by grandparent caregivers to emerge (Christensen et al., 2017, p. 115).

For this study, I used purposive and snowball sampling methods to recruit participants. Purposive sampling is a widely used technique in qualitative research to recruit participants who are likely to give rich information regarding the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al. 2015). Purposive sampling is cost-effective, time-effective, and advantageous for targeting the intended population (Guest et al., 2017). Therefore, I used purposive sampling for this study. Snowball sampling, also referred to as chain-referral sampling, requires the initial participants to recruit another participant who meets the same population for the intended study (Palinkas et al., 2015). Snowball sampling depends on the social connections that potential participants possess to enlarge the number of targeted respondents for a study (Etikan et al., 2016). Because the targeted participants for this study were a challenge to locate, I used the snowball sampling

technique. This technique increases the researcher's access to the targeted population through "chain referrals" (Etikan et al., 2016; Palinkas et al., 2015).

This study's sample consisted of grandparents and great-grandparents who have or had formal or informal custody of their grandchild(ren) under 18 years for no less than one year due to parental incarceration. I recruited 11 participants for this study. I conducted an online search and located multiple agencies whose primary focus was grand families and other kinship care arrangements. I sent my recruitment flyer to agencies. The agencies that responded informed me that they would send my flyer to their clientele using an email blast.

I used Colaizzi's 7-step process to analyze the data collected. This method depends on rich first-person accounts of experiences collected from face-to-face interviews (Morrow, Rodriguez, & King, 2015). I transcribed the recorded interviews by hand onto a Word document. I hand-coded all of the interviews.

Definitions of Key Terms

Throughout the literature, grandparents as primary caregivers and contact were defined in different ways. The change in definition ranges from a legal description or discipline related. The following list represents the operational definitions of the terms that I used in this study.

Contact: The communication between the grandchild, grandparent, and the incarcerated parent. The different forms of contact include in-person visitation, telephone calls, FaceTime, and written correspondence (McKay et al., 2016).

Formal Kinship Care: Formal kinship care is when the relative attains legal guardianship of the child, which positions the guardian to receive assistance from the court that ranges from financial to social support services (Berrick & Hernandez, 2016).

Grandparent Caregiver: Grandparents who are responsible for the basic needs (food, clothing, shelter, etc.) for their grandchild (Choi et al., 2016).

Informal Kinship Care: Informal kinship care is when the relative takes custody of the child without formally notifying welfare agencies to avoid intrusion from the juvenile or probate courts (Berrick & Hernandez, 2016).

Assumptions

My aim in this descriptive phenomenological research study was to explore grandparent caregivers' lived experiences as they make attempts to maintain contact between the grandchild and the incarcerated parent. My first assumption about this study was that my participants were honest about their experiences with caring for their grandchildren. Second, I assumed that the participants recruited for this study recollected the particulars of their experiences. Third, I assumed that the participants were willing to discuss the details of their current relationships.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was the lived experiences of grandparent caregivers who maintain contact between their grandchild and the children's incarcerated parent. I only included grandparents who were raising grandchildren because of the parent's incarceration. Each participant was a grandparent who has or had formal or informal custody of their grandchild(ren) under 18 years due to parental incarceration for no less than one year. My decision to limit this study's focus on grandparents who were primary

caregivers for grandchildren with incarcerated parents was essential for a year or more. Grandparents who have had their grandchildren for at least a year have a higher likelihood of an established homelife routine.

Limitations

The first limitation of this study was the sample size of 11 participants. A small number of cases may limit the transferability of findings from this study (McGregor, 2018). However, the number of participants was adequate for a phenomenological study. The purpose of qualitative research is to obtain "depth and not breadth" (Basson & Mawson, 2011). Another limitation of this study was that the participants' narratives might have been prone to recall bias in which the respondent can potentially recall experiences incorrectly (Bell et al., 2019). Self-reported data is susceptible to selective memory, exaggeration, and telescoping (McGrefor, 2018).

Recall bias cannot be eliminated, but it is essential to acknowledge it as a limitation (Khare & Vedel, 2019). To reduce recall bias, I prioritized selecting grandparents who currently had custody of their grandchild. Their experiences with maintaining contact with the incarcerated parent are likely more recent than a grandparent who no longer had custody. Furthermore, I used questions that provided a causal sequence of events and follow-up questions. This line of questioning generates responses from most memorable events (Khare & Vedel, 2019).

Significance of the Study

As primary caregivers for children of incarcerated parents, grandparents are a unique and understudied population (McCarthy & Adams, 2018). Little is known about the lived experiences of grandparents who seek to maintain contact between their

grandchildren and the children's incarcerated parents. When a loved one is incarcerated, it is the family that takes on the costs associated with maintaining contact, which is referred to as family-borne costs (McKay et al., 2016). Family-borne costs include traveling to the prison facility for in-person visits, letter writing, video calls, and telephone calls (McKay et al., 2016). As stated by Mowen and Visher (as cited by McKay et al., 2016), it is critical for policies and programs to create intervention strategies that focus on positive family relationships to address the high family-borne costs of maintaining contact. The need to sustain contact supports the reunification process between the child and the incarcerated parent, which may relinquish the grandparent caregiver's responsibility upon the parent's reentry (McKay et al., 2016).

The information collected from this study provides insight into the struggles and barriers experienced by grandparent caregivers who are caring for their grandchildren due to parental incarceration. Increased knowledge about these experiences of grandparent caregivers can inform human service agencies to implement intervention strategies and create adequate treatment provisions to supplement grandparent caregivers' needs. "Parent-child visiting programs are more effective when they support caregivers and reduce their barrier to visiting" (Cramer et al., 2017, p. 18). Positive social change implications include adding to the existing literature regarding grandparent caregivers for their grandchildren and maintaining contact with the grandchildren's incarcerated parent.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided the rationale for researching grandparent caregivers' lived experiences as they attempt to maintain contact between the incarcerated parent and the child for whom they provide care. Contact between the grandchild and incarcerated

parent is essential to increase the likelihood of reunification with the incarcerated parent and relieve the grandparent as the primary caregiver (McKay et al., 2016). I explained the theoretical framework and described the nature of the study. I provided a definition of discipline-specific terms and identified the assumptions inherent in the design. Chapter 1 also included a discussion of the scope and delimitations involved, the limitations, and the significance of conducting this study. There is a gap in the literature regarding the grandparents' lived experiences as they try to maintain contact between the incarcerated parent and the child for whom they care. Chapter 2 will include an in-depth synthesis of the literature related to grandparents' experiences as primary caregivers for children of incarcerated parents.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The grandparent-headed household is one of the fastest-growing family structures within the United States (Harrington Meyer & Kandic, 2017). According to the U. S. Census Bureau (2016), in 2016, over 2.5 million grandparents were primarily responsible for providing care to their grandchildren. Within this population of grandparent caregivers, there has been an increase in the number of “second-time parents” due to the rise in parental incarceration (Guastafarro et al., 2015). Conway et al. (2011) indicated that the new role as a primary caregiver could be challenging for grandparents due to their advancing age, deteriorating health issues, and limited/restricted income. The grandparents also take on the responsibility of maintaining contact between the grandchild and the incarcerated parent (Tasca, 2016). Contact between the grandchild and incarcerated parent is important to increase reunification with the incarcerated parent and relieve the grandparent as the primary caregiver. There is a gap in the literature regarding the grandparents' lived experiences as they attempt to maintain contact between the incarcerated parents and the children they provide care. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of grandparent caregivers as they attempt to maintain contact between the child and the incarcerated parent.

The following literature review covers current research and conceptualizations of the grandparent as the primary caregiver. I also discuss finances, health (mental, emotional, and physical), child-rearing, and contact between the child and the parent. The review begins with research regarding parental incarceration in the United States and its effect on the children of incarcerated parents. After that, I focus on the experiences of

grandparents as primary caregivers for children of incarcerated parents. My goal for this chapter was to provide a comprehensive review of current literature related to parental incarceration, kinship care, children's contact with incarcerated parents, and grandparent caregivers.

Literature Search Strategy

In my initial and subsequent search for literature, I used the Walden University library and these search engines: Thoreau, EBSCO, ProQuest, Criminal Justice Database, SocINDEX, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. I also used Academic Search Complete and ProQuest Central to locate exact articles that were not available through Google Scholar. I used these search engines to access and peruse professional journals, edited books, and other peer-reviewed sources to locate and present the research for Chapter 2. I retrieved statistical information from government websites such as the United States Census Bureau and the Bureau of Justice Statistics. I searched the databases to focus on recently published works by Joyce A. Arditti, Danielle H. Dallaire, Sara Wakefield, Bruce Western, and Christopher Wildeman as they are research experts on the topic of incarceration and the family. From there, I completed a reverse search on Google Scholar to find articles that have cited works published by Arditti, Dallaire, Wakefield, Western, and Wildeman. This reverse search expanded my scope of the relevant literature and enabled me to find related topics and experts with similar research.

To locate scholarly and peer-reviewed articles, I used different combinations of the following keywords: *caretaker, caregivers, kinship care, parental incarceration, grandparent caregivers, maternal incarceration, children of prisoners, grandparents raising grandchildren, role strain theory, paternal incarceration, parental imprisonment,*

prison, imprisonment, jail, primary caregivers, grandparent-headed household, custodial grandparent, children of inmates, visitation, contact, and incarcerated parents. The use of Boolean operators "AND," "OR," and "NOT" allowed me to include relevant literature to be discussed in this chapter. Because the topic of grandparent caregivers for children of incarcerated parents has been understudied, I took a two-step approach to explore the literature. First, I located literature related to the experiences of grandparents as primary caregivers for grandchildren. Then, I looked at caregivers for children of incarcerated parents. Additionally, this chapter includes a review of literature related to parental incarceration and its effect on grandparents who become caregivers of the children. Lastly, I examine the grandparent's attempt to sustain contact between the inmate and the child.

Theoretical Framework

I chose the role strain theory developed by Goode in 1960 as the theoretical framework for this study. Role strain theory is built upon the premise that social institutions are composed of people who occupy roles, and there are relationships between the various roles (Goode, 1960). Role strain theory posits that members of society develop expectations of an individual because the person holds a specific position role (Goode, 1960). If the person does not conform to the expectations or attempts to conform but cannot fulfill the expectations, they could potentially experience role strain (Goode, 1960). As posited by Goode, individuals often conform to the expectations associated with the role(s); however, a person's situation (i.e., sufficient resources or energy) may impede a person's ability to conform to a specified role.

Marks (1977) expounded upon Goode's role strain theory by explaining how a scarcity of resources and the expansion of roles creates strain for the individual.

According to Marks, *lack* leads to role strain because there are a limited number of individuals for needed family roles, hence requiring them to undertake multiple roles to fulfill the family's needs. Expansion dictates disregarding the obligatory societal expectations attached to the role to address the family's needs (Marks, 1977).

Conway et al. (2011) used role strain and socioemotional selectivity theory to compare the emotional strain experienced by older African American grandmothers and younger African American grandmothers who have assumed the caregiver role because of a family crisis. The researchers measured role strain by having the participants report the number of roles they fulfilled (i.e., married, caregiver of a minor/elderly parent/impaired person, employment, and community involvement). The researchers adopted the 5-point Likert scale conceptualized by Mui (1992), where 1 indicated little to no emotional strain, and 5 signified a great deal of emotional strain (Conway et al., 2011). The researchers found that older grandmothers 60 years and older experienced less strain and emotional stress because of their ability to reduce interpersonal conflict (Conway et al., 2011). Married grandmothers experienced less emotional strain and caregiving strain than single grandmothers because they had more physical and emotional support from a spouse (Conway et al., 2011). The findings from the study contributed to the literature regarding emotional experiences associated with caregiving for grandparents. The article did not explore the impact that the strain and stress could have on the grandparents' physical health.

Strain can negatively impact the grandparents' physical health when a caregiver's role becomes burdensome (Xu et al., 2017). The increased responsibility of serving as a primary caregiver takes away from the needs of the grandparent. Some of those needs include failure to maintain doctor appointments and take prescribed medications (Guastaferrero et al., 2015). When the role exceeds the grandparent's physical and psychological capabilities, the caregiving role becomes a "chronic stressor" that is detrimental to the grandparents' health (Xu et al., 2017). Stress and self-neglect can contribute to accelerating the grandparents' overall health deterioration that is often associated with growing older (i.e., arthritis, adult-onset diabetes, osteoporosis, depression, etc.; Whitley & Fuller-Thomson, 2018). Nevertheless, it is common for a grandparent to diminish the effects of stress and ignore the physical or emotional stress because the primary focus may be on the grandchild's well-being (Doley et al., 2015).

On the other hand, Zhou et al. (2017) used role strain in their study, and examined how serving in the role of caregiver impacted grandparent caregivers' physical health. Findings from the study revealed that grandparents who were primary caregivers for their grandchildren experienced positive health benefits (Zhou et al., 2017). Caring for grandchildren had a positive effect on the grandparents' cognitive function and increased their physical activity. Results from the Zhou et al. (2017) study differed from the previously mentioned studies (e. g. Doley et al., 2015; Guastaferrero et al., 2015; Xu et al., 2017; Whitley & Fuller-Thomson, 2018) that found that fulfilling the role as primary caregiver negatively impacted the grandparent's physical health.

Several researchers have used role strain to investigate the lived experiences of grandparents who care for their grandchildren (e. g., Doley, et al., 2015; Guastaferrero et

al., 2015; Xu et al., 2017; Whitley & Fuller-Thomson, 2018; Zhou et al., 2017).

Implementing role strain theory was appropriate for this research, which I explored the lived experiences of the grandparent caregivers while caring for a child with an incarcerated parent and as they attempt to maintain contact between the child and incarcerated parent. In the following literature, I investigated research about grandparent caregivers and the impact of incarceration on the grandparents and child in the United States.

Incarceration in the United States

The United States has the highest incarceration rate globally (Nichols, Loper, & Meyer, 2016). The rate of individuals incarcerated in the United States was 174 per 100,000 people in the 1970s and rose to 673 per 100,000 in 2015 (Roodman, 2017). The imprisoned population's drastic growth began in the early 1970s because of get-tough-on-crime policies and budget cuts to rehabilitative services for inmates (Wildeman & Wakefield, 2014). In the 1980s, the War on Drugs significantly increased the prison population from 40,900 to 450,345 in 2016 (The Sentencing Project, 2016). During that time, the rate of children with incarcerated mothers and fathers increased by 100% and more than 75%, respectively (Martin, 2017). The impact of parental incarceration is essential to explore to understand grandparents' rise in assuming the primary caregiver role.

Effects of Parental Incarceration on Family

Parental incarceration can have a profound impact on the family unit. Researchers have stated families reported an increase of financial burden, and experienced social stigma and isolation (Arditti & Salva, 2015; Cochran et al., 2018; Trotter et al., 2017). If

the incarcerated parent were the primary provider of household income, their absence would place a strain on the family resources (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). Monies would be shifted away from basic household needs toward legal and other court fees (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). What's more, the stigma associated with an incarcerated parent may be transferred to the spouse, caregiver, and the children (Burgess-Proctor et al., 2016), which could cause the family members to experience increased levels of depression and mental health issues (Mowen & Visher, 2016).

The profile of the incarcerated parents is disproportionately persons of color (Martin, 2017). To understand the imprisoned population's racial makeup, Wagner and Kopf (2015) analyzed U.S. Census data on the race and ethnicity of people incarcerated. The results showed that Blacks are incarcerated at a rate about five times that of Whites, and Hispanics are incarcerated at a rate two times that of whites (Wagner & Kopf, 2015). Martin (2017) found that Black children and Hispanic children are 7.5 times more likely and 2.3 times more likely than White children to have an incarcerated parent.

Today, more children are exposed to their parents being absent from the home due to incarceration. A survey conducted in the United States between 2011 and 2012 reported that 5.1 million people had a parent in jail or prison at some point during their childhood (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). Children of prisoners (COP) are at a higher risk of behavioral problems, cognitive delays, school difficulties, and home instability (Tasca et al., 2016). Additionally, homelessness, contact with the criminal justice system, and sexual exploitation are frequent events reported amongst children of prisoners (Wildeman & Waldfogel, 2014). Moreover, if the imprisoned parent was the primary caregiver of minor children, the child's whereabouts are endangered.

Child Custody and Parental Incarceration

In 2014, over half of the inmates in U.S. jails had children under 18 years, and approximately 45% of those inmates were living with their children when the parents were sent to prison (Sykes & Pettit, 2014). Shlafer et al. (2013) reported that 36% of incarcerated fathers lived with their minor children in the month before the arrest. In contrast, more than half of incarcerated mothers reported living with their minor children in the month prior to arrest (Shlafer et al., 2013). Statistics have revealed that 80% of women in the jails are mothers (Kajstura, 2017). Many female inmates were the primary caregivers of their children when they are arrested (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2013).

Some inmates have the other parent or a relative to take custody of their children after being arrested (Trotter et al., 2017). Maternal grandparents are commonly family members who assume the role of caregiver (Raikes, 2016). At the same time, their daughters are incarcerated because the biological fathers may be unable or unwilling to take the children (Raikes, 2016). When inmates do not have family or friends to take custody of their children, they are then placed into the foster care system (Trotter et al., 2017).

Statistics revealed that in 2016, 20,939 children were in foster care due to parental incarceration in the United States (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). Currently, the most common placement goal for children in foster care is to reunite them with their biological parents (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). Though reunification of the child and parent is ideal, it does not always occur. The alternative would be placing the child with a family member to increase stable

placement (Font, 2015). This is known as kinship care when a relative takes on the role of caregiver to avoid having the child placed into foster care (Crowther et al., 2014).

Kinship care can be formal or informal. Formal care is when the relative attains legal guardianship of the child, which positions the guardian to receive assistance from the court that ranges from financial to social support services (Berrick & Hernandez, 2016). On the other hand, informal care is when the relative takes custody of the child without formally notifying welfare agencies to avoid intrusion from the juvenile or probate courts (Berrick & Hernandez, 2016). Kinship care placement has proven to be more beneficial than nonrelative care placement because a child may experience a greater sense of belonging and adjustment to the new living arrangements (Gleeson et al., 2016). Nearly all 50 states require welfare agencies to seek out a relative for the placement of children of incarcerated parents (Gleeson et al., 2016). A typical caregiver that is sought out for taking custody of the minor child is the grandparent.

Experiences of the Grandparent as Primary Caregiver

The grandparent as primary caregiver is the fastest growing population (Carr et al., 2012; Chui, 2016; Harris, 2013; Fruhauf et al., 2015; & Raikes, 2016). This new-found role can change the grandparent's lifestyle, which affects the following areas: finances, health (mental, emotional, and physical), and social interactions with others. Grandparents are typically of an age where they have retired and living on a fixed income (Andersen & Fallesen, 2015). Moreover, they are also more likely to be single, less educated, and have poorer health (Lin, 2014).

Employed grandparents are just as likely as retired grandparents to take custody of their grandchild. Harrington Meyer and Kandic (2017) indicated that "one-half of

Americans are grandparents by the age of 50 and three-fourths of those in their early 50s are still employed" (p. 3). Many caregivers are regularly employed or irregularly working part-time in addition to fulfilling their caregiver responsibilities (Lee & Tang, 2015). The working grandparents will rearrange their work schedules, take on fewer hours, and even use their vacation time and sick leave to facilitate child care (Harrington Meyer & Kandic, 2017; Purcal et al., 2014). The exact number of grandparent caregivers for grandchildren still in the workforce is not well-known, as research often focuses on other types of caregivers. The specific strains that grandparents experience while providing care to their grandchildren will be presented in the following paragraphs.

Financial Strain

Grandparent caregivers of children with incarcerated parents may have little or no time to prepare for their new roles as caregivers, which may cause them to experience a strain on their finances (Guastaferrero et al., 2015). Taking custody of a minor grandchild can strain the grandparents' finances. They have to provide necessities (clothing, food, and school activities) for the grandchildren if their grandparents provide informal caregiving. The unexpected financial burden often forces the grandparent to spend their savings, take on a second job, delay their retirement, or seek financial assistance from outside sources (Sampson & Hertlein, 2015). Locating financial aid and other necessary services to supplement childcare also adds to the grandparent's strain (Sampson & Hertlein, 2015).

Research has found that custodial grandparent families are economically disadvantaged compared to other households raising children (Cox, 2014; Bailey, Haynes, & Letiecq, 2013; Dunifon et al., 2014; Pilkauskas & Dunifon, 2016). According

to the National Survey of America's Families, poverty is highest among single grandmother-headed households (Bailey et al., 2013). Furthermore, grandparent caregivers in rural areas are more economically vulnerable due to being geographically isolated and have fewer readily available services (Bailey et al., 2013). Grandparent caregivers in rural areas typically refuse to move to metropolitan areas where there are more employment and service opportunities because they are rooted in their communities (Bailey et al., 2013). Both rural and urban dwelling grandparent caregivers of minor children require the same needs and face the same barriers to obtaining services (Hayslip et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the amount of assistance available is limited compared to urban areas (Hayslip et al., 2018).

Clotney et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study to explore grandparent caregiving experiences in the rural, low-income American south. This particular location was of interest to the researchers because 52% of the residents had incomes below the poverty level. The unemployment rate was two percentage points above the national average (Clotney et al., 2015). From in-depth interviews with 12 grandparent caregivers, the participants reported inconsistent low wages. They were dependent upon social security income to supplement their finances (Clotney et al., 2015). Moreover, they struggled to pay for health care expenses and childcare services such as daycare and afterschool care (Clotney et al., 2015). These needs can often be supplemented if the grandparents sought out resources from their local human and social services agencies.

Barriers to Seeking Support Services

Grandparent caregivers tend to have fewer resources. They do not receive support services for the following reasons: (a) not being aware of available services, (b) not being

willing to accept help, and (c) being fearful of working with the child welfare system (Fruhauf et al., 2015). Grandparent caregivers have a more challenging time navigating the social service system than other caregivers who were a part of the child welfare system (Fruhauf et al., 2015). Caregivers who are involved in the child welfare system are often licensed, caregivers.

Licensed kinship caregivers have greater access to resources and programs to cover placement-related expenses (Beltran & Epstein, 2013). Programs such as the Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP), which assists children leaving foster care to live with relatives, are afforded to licensed kinship caregivers (Beltran & Epstein, 2013). Licensed caregivers approximately receive \$511 a month from the foster care system for each child; whereas, an unlicensed caregiver is only eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), averaging \$249 per month for each child (Beltran & Epstein, 2013). Nevertheless, licensing is not typical of the relative caregiver because they believe they will only have temporary custody of their grandchild and that the standards to obtain a license are taxing (Beltran & Epstein, 2013). But, becoming a licensed caregiver could potentially ease the financial strain for grandparent caregivers.

Grandparents experience several obstacles to obtaining a license. In a nationwide review of the standards to license kinship foster parents in the United States, Beltran and Epstein (2013) found that licensure requirements varied from state to state. For instance, some states rejected applicants who are 65 and older and lacking a high school degree/ GED equivalent (Beltran & Epstein, 2013). Age requirements can be an obstacle because kinship caregivers are commonly older relatives such as the grandparent (Beltran & Epstein, 2013). Also, some states may require applicants to own a vehicle, own a home, a

square footage requirement for the residence, and limitations on the number of hours working outside of the home, to name a few (Beltran & Epstein 2013). Obtaining a license would benefit the grandparent caregiver, but their efforts tend to focus on immediate assistance to care for the grandchild rather than long-term support (Whitely et al., 2016).

The caregivers' perception of accessing the necessary services can deter the grandparent from seeking out support services. Harris (2013) indicated that some grandparents might refrain from seeking formal services due to the "humiliation" of the filing process to receive support. Similarly, Fruhauf et al. (2015) stated grandparents felt that the caseworkers were "insensitive to the unique circumstances" and were judged for having to care for minor children. The grandparent participants were concerned that they were perceived as lazy and leaching off the system (Fruhauf et al., 2015). Both Harris (2013) and Crowther et al. (2014) stated that the paperwork involved in applying for social support services could be lengthy and confusing. Grandparents were uncertain of the eligibility requirements as they were not explicitly stated and frequently changed (Guastafarro et al., 2015). Coleman and Wu (2016) reported grandparent caregivers perceived their caseworker as "unapproachable" and that they were provided with incorrect information to obtain the intended support services. The perceived dehumanization of the filing process to receive services can be a deterrent for grandparent caregivers.

Emotional Strain

Grandparents who assume primary caregivers' roles have reported experiencing various negative emotions due to the role change (Sampson & Hertlein, 2015). In a

phenomenological study conducted by Sampson and Hertlein (2015), 10 grandparents stated that the new responsibilities as a primary caregiver were overwhelming. A common emotion echoed by the grandparents was resentment due to a "loss of freedom" (Sampson & Hertlein, 2015). The grandparent participants reported they had to alter their schedules frequently and could not participate in social activities with other retired people because of their new caregiver roles. The grandparents further indicated that they are exhausted from their daily routines or are shunned from attending social events because they had custody of their grandchildren (Sampson & Hertlein, 2015).

Depressive symptoms have frequently been identified as a mental health concern for grandparent caregivers of grandchildren (Musil et al., 2017). Whitley and Fuller-Thomson (2018) revealed that grandparents are at risk for mental health challenges such as mood disorders and depression due to their assuming the parenting role. Musil et al. (2017) found that one-third of grandparent participants in their study had been diagnosed with depression, and 82% of those diagnosed with depression were on medication to cope with their depression. Taking anti-depressants and participating in counseling services helped grandparents manage their emotions with the day-to-day demands of caregiving (Musil et al., 2017). The benefits of support services will be discussed later in the chapter.

Caregiver burden is another common occurrence experienced by grandparents who serve as primary caregivers to their grandchildren. Burden, as defined by Carr et al. (2012), refers to situations "when the responsibilities of being a caregiver exceed the information and resources available, [where] greater stress is experienced..." (p. 367). In Carr et al. study, participants' feelings of burden were measured by the Caregiver

Reaction Assessment (CRA) tool. The results suggested that grandmothers reported feeling burdened caring for their grandchildren due to strained finances, lack of family support, declining health, and a restricted social schedule.

Conversely, in other studies, grandparents have reported positive experiences raising their grandchild and were more active than before their custody (Marken & Howard, 2014; Mansson, 2016). In their phenomenological study, Marken and Howard interviewed 10 grandparents about their experiences assuming primary caregiver role for their grandchildren. The researchers found that the grandfather participants retained a higher activity than the grandmother participants because participating in shared activities with their grandchildren made them feel "in the know" about contemporary culture (Marken & Howard, 2014). Mansson (2016) reported similar findings to Marken and Howard's study and went further to ask the participants what was the best part of grandparenting. From the five themes generated from responses of 104 grandparent participants, Mansson (2016) found that the participants frequently reported experiencing a feeling of pride in caring for their grandchildren. The grandparents considered it a reward to witness their grandchild's achievements and know that they played a role in their grandchildren's success (Mansson, 2016). Nevertheless, reports on positive experiences as the primary caregiver are rare.

Health Strain

Grandparents who serve as primary caregivers for their grandchildren experience an increased number of health concerns because of the financial and emotional stresses and role strains the grandparents endure (Carr et al., 2012). Research by Carr et al. (2012) revealed that the grandparents' physical health decline was predicted by perceived

caregiver burden. Whitley et al. (2016) also found that increased depressive symptoms negatively impacted grandparents' overall wellness. Hayslip et al. (2015) found that poorer health was linked to less role satisfaction, less productive/satisfying relationships with the grandchild being cared for, and less positive grandparent effective functioning.

On the one hand, determining the impact caregiving has on the grandparents' physical health is challenging to verify because some health issues could have been preexisting. Grandparent caregivers tend to be older, and many have a higher prevalence of age-related physical health problems before becoming primary caregivers for their grandchildren (Whitley et al., 2015). Some common preexisting health issues reported by grandparents have included: hypertension, diabetes, asthma, heart disease, lupus, arthritis, and obstructive pulmonary disease, to name a few (Clottey et al., 2015). The stress experienced due to caregiving can exacerbate the grandparents' preexisting health status (Clottey et al., 2015).

Chen et al. (2014) conducted a curve analysis of longitudinal data to examine caregiving's effects on older adults' health. The sample consisted of grandparents over the age of 50 who participated in the Health and Retirement Study. The researchers selected participants that lived in multigenerational households (child, parent, and grandparent), nonresident co-parenting, and skipped households (child, grandparent, and absent parent). The data revealed that grandparents who were primary caregivers of grandchildren experienced higher stress levels, contributing to their overall health deterioration (Chen et al., 2014).

Whitley and Fuller-Thomson (2018) conducted a quantitative study where they compared the physical health of solo grandparent caregivers to the health of single

parents. The researchers conducted a secondary analysis of data collected from the 2012 Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). The BRFSS evaluated the estimated prevalence of risk for various health characteristics, including physical health. Single parents reported health issues, but the problems were not as severe as the health issues reported by solo grandparents who were typically older (Whitley & Fuller-Thomson, 2018). The researchers also found that the parenting role caused severe health challenges that could potentially lead to an early death for the solo grandparent (Whitley & Fuller-Thomson, 2018). The findings suggested that grandparent caregivers of grandchildren do encounter unique health experiences compared to the single parent.

The research presented in this section highlighted the common themes associated with the experiences of grandparent caregivers. However, the literature specific to grandparents assuming custody of their grandchild due to parental incarceration is limited. The following passage will discuss literature about caregivers for prisoners that included grandparents in the population but did not explicitly state their individual experience.

Experiences of Caregivers for Children of an Incarcerated Parent

Caregivers for children of incarcerated parents are a unique and understudied population. Though this study's focus is on the grandparent caregiver, the research is limited to grandparent caregivers for children of incarcerated parents. Past studies have primarily focused on parental incarceration's impact on the children (e. g., Dallaire, et al., 2015; Johnson & Easterling, 2015; Luther, 2015; Miller & Barnes, 2015). Other research has focused on the experiences between the child and caregiver relationship (Arditti & Salva, 2015; Chui, 2016; Turanovic et al., 2012). Recently, research has shifted toward

caregivers' experiences for children of incarcerated parents because of the rise in the number of individuals who have minor-aged children at the time of their incarceration (McCarthy & Adams, 2018).

In searching for literature related to caregivers of children whose parents are incarcerated, I came across the same themes found for grandparent caregivers for grandchildren. For example, Turanovic et al. conducted in-depth interviews with a diverse racial/ethnic group of 100 caregivers to determine their experiences with being the primary caregiver for children of an incarcerated parent. Caregivers reported that they experienced financial strain because of difficulty maintaining employment due to child care needs. The researchers also found that the caregivers experienced higher levels of strain due to weak relationships with the incarcerated parent and lack of family support (Turanovic et al., 2012).

Another similarity found with grandparent caregivers and caregivers for children of prisoners was experiencing emotional strain. The research has generally indicated that caregivers are vulnerable to psychological stress, impacting the child's well-being in their care (Chui, 2016). Chui conducted a study in Hong Kong that focused on how caregiver stress experienced due to paternal incarceration may be transferred to the child. Fifty-four (54) female caregivers for children with incarcerated fathers participated in the study. The caregivers consisted of mothers and grandmothers who cared for children between the ages of 6 and 18.

Results from the Chui (2016) study showed that more than half of the caregivers suffered from borderline depression that was transferred to the child. This transference of depression caused further behavioral problems in the children, which added strain to the

caregiver's role (Chui, 2016). With these findings, it was suggested that an increase in resources for the caregiver's mental health is needed to help combat caregiver stress (Chui, 2016). Moreover, joint caregiver-child interventions could minimize the transference of distressing behavior from caregivers to the child (Chui, 2016). The findings of the study shed light on the need for support services for caregivers.

Social support services for the caregiver could help combat the adverse effects of childcare, a concern for grandparent caregivers. Support services will be explored later in this chapter. But first, the literature will focus on the impact of parental incarceration on the grandparent caregiver.

Grandparent Caregivers and Parental Incarceration

As previously mentioned, most grandparent caregivers are the incarcerated parent's parent (Kajstura, 2017). The grandparent is coping with the ambiguous loss of their child to incarceration. The ambiguous loss refers to the incarcerated parent's physical and financial loss (Backhouse & Graham, 2013). Grandparents also reported feeling a sense of loss that essentially equates to the death of a loved one. There is a grieving process for which the grandparent experiences because of the absence of their imprisoned adult child (Raikes, 2016). The grandparent reflects on the many family functions, birthdays, holidays, and other critical developmental milestones that their imprisoned child will miss (Gueta, 2018). Moreover, the grandparent may experience shame because their child has been incarcerated and fear it is perceived as reflective of their parenting abilities (Raikes, 2016; Gueta, 2018).

In the study of grandmother caregivers for children with a parent in prison, Raikes (2016) reported grandmothers who assumed custody of their grandchildren saw it as an

opportunity to "get it right" (Raikes, 2016). In the role of primary caregiver, the grandmothers also reported that they could use different parenting strategies to prevent their grandchildren from possible future incarceration (Raikes, 2016). However, the grandparent may not have complete autonomy when it comes to parenting their grandchild because the incarcerated parent has not lost nor is forced to relinquish their parental rights (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015). For this reason, the next section will discuss parenting and co-parenting between the grandparent caregiver and the incarcerated parent.

Parenting and Co-Parenting

Assuming a primary caregiver's role for their grandchild can instill the pressure of making the best of a challenging time for the grandparent (Arditti, 2016). Some grandparents may welcome the idea of raising the grandchild because they may have a better sense of what parenting styles would be beneficial for the grandchild (Arditti, 2016). Also, grandparents may want to build a rapport with their grandchildren to ensure that they will not follow the same behaviors that led their parents to be incarcerated (Raikes, 2016). According to Arditti (2016), grandparent caregivers of grandchildren whose parents were incarcerated experienced parenting stress due to: (a) child behaviors that predated the parental incarceration, (b) vulnerabilities or characteristics in the caregiver themselves, or (c) stigma and isolation from family members who disapproved of the caregiver's continued involvement with the incarcerated parent. These experiences can also hinder the co-parenting abilities of both the grandparent caregiver and incarcerated parent.

Co-parenting alliances have proven to benefit the child's emotional, social, and academic development (Loper et al., 2014). To effectively co-parent a child, the caregiver and incarcerated parent require solidarity or an understanding. For instance, establishing solidarity creates effective communication, which allows the caregiver and incarcerated parent to develop an agreement on child-rearing strategies (Strozier et al., 2011). Once solidarity is achieved, parenting of the children is viewed as a shared responsibility, which minimizes incidences of strain (Strozier et al., 2011). Whereas the absence of solidarity among the grandparent caregiver and incarcerated parent could lead to power struggles, undermining of each another's authority, and disconnection of the incarcerated parent from the family (Strozier et al., 2011). For example, the incarcerated parent may undermine the grandparent caregiver by removing or dismissing the caregiver's punishments to win the child's affection and favor (Strozier et al., 2011). Undermining the caregiver could cause a breakdown in the co-parenting alliance.

Loper et al. (2014) examined the co-parenting alliance perception's strength between incarcerated parents and grandparent caregivers. Perceptions of the caregivers and the incarcerated parents' alliance were assessed by the 20-item self-report questionnaire, the Parenting Alliance Measure (PAM). Higher scores obtained by the instrument indicated a stronger parenting alliance. Results showed that the caregivers and the incarcerated parents had different perspectives on the alliance. Incarcerated parents reported higher levels of positive co-parenting alliance with caregivers (Loper et al., 2014). However, caregivers reported a lack of trust in the incarcerated parent's skills because their contact with the child is inconsistent (Loper et al., 2014).

Lee et al. (2016) conducted focus groups of grandparent caregivers to examine the primary sources of parenting stress. The grandparent caregiver experienced parenting stress because the incarcerated parent still had parental rights (Lee et al., 2016). No state recognizes parental incarceration as the sole purpose for terminating parental rights; however, states do include incarceration along with the level of criminality as a determining factor (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015). Grandparents would still have to consider the wishes of the incarcerated parent while considering the child's well-being (Lee et al., 2016). Bearing in mind the child-rearing wishes of the incarcerated parent, the grandparent also has to manage the child's behavioral changes.

Social Support for Grandparents as Primary Caregivers

Strozier (2012) indicated that access to social support reduced the amount of stress experienced by grandparents who served as primary caregivers for their grandchildren. It is important to note that this social support's emphasis is geared toward combating the stressors experienced by the grandparent as a primary caregiver. Social support is an instrumental aid to promote positive adaptation for the caregiver's life events (Strozier, 2012). The help a caregiver may receive consists of emotional and mental support, medical care, and financial assistance (Strozier, 2012). Grandparent caregivers can locate social support from formal (i.e., professionals, church, and agencies) or informal (i.e., family, relatives, co-workers, social groups, and friends) services (Strozier, 2012).

Grandparent participants who had informal kinship arrangements reported that they feared to ask for help because they thought the state would take the children to place them into foster care (Littlewood, 2015). The grandparents feared that support services

would perceive them unfit to care for the grandchildren (Berrick & Hernandez, 2016). As previously mentioned, informal kinship arrangements occur without the court's input and, in effect, lessens the caregiver's access to formal services (Berrick & Hernandez, 2016).

Examples of Formal Support Programs

The Kinship Services Network (KSN) was created in an urban southeastern county in Florida to help supplement caregivers' needs. KSN is a centralized network that connects caregivers with reputable community-based agencies that offer the desired services (Littlewood, 2015). In the study, Littlewood (2015) examined KSN over five years to gauge its effectiveness in providing social support and family resource needs. The Family Support Scale (FSS) and the Family Resource Scale (FRS) were used to measure the program's outcomes. The researcher also conducted qualitative interviews and used secondary data from the Florida Department of Children and Families Child Safety Office.

The study results found that the Kinship Services Network was a viable and cost-effective program that helped the caregivers support their families (Littlewood, 2015). Littlewood shared an interview conducted with participant Ella (pseudonym), a 72-year-old African American woman who had primary custody of her two grandchildren because of her daughter's incarceration (Littlewood, 2015). Ella reported that the KSN program "saved her life" (Littlewood, 2015). KSN improved her finances, housing, health, and transportation (Littlewood, 2015). Also, KSN provided Ella with weekly respite care to have a break and address her physical health needs, such as returning to physical therapy (Littlewood, 2015). Littlewood stated that programs like KSN would help caregivers who have informal care and would be the least expensive option for communities with limited

budgets because of the collaborative nature among community social programs (Littlewood, 2015).

Another social support program that was created to address grandparent caregivers' needs was We're GRAND, which is the Grandparents with Resources, Access, Nurturing, and Direction. Lee and Blitz (2016) launched the pilot program based on grandparents' common needs as the primary caregiver for grandchildren. The program focused on helping the grandparent caregivers develop skills to manage stress, build networks with other grandparent caregivers, and improve their school personnel connections (Lee & Blitz, 2016). The researchers found that the psychoeducational group improved networking relationships among grandparent caregivers within the community. Participants reported that meeting other grandparent caregivers going through similar experiences created a support system that lessened their caregiving strains (Lee & Blitz, 2016). We're GRAND and the Kinship Services Network are examples of programs that have been beneficial for grandparent caregivers.

Grandparent Caregivers Maintaining Contact During Parental Incarceration

Many grandparents seek to maintain family continuity via sustained contact between the child and incarcerated parent with managing their new roles as primary caregivers for grandchildren with incarcerated parents. Family continuity is essential for increasing the likelihood of reunification between the incarcerated parents and their child post-incarceration (Robillard et al., 2016). Tasca (2016) called caregivers “gatekeepers” for their roles in facilitating contact between incarcerated parents and their children.

As “gatekeepers,” grandparent caregivers try to remain neutral in the parent-child relationship (Kautz, 2017). Grandparent caregivers balance the interests of the parent and

what is best for the child. For instance, children may not want to be associated with their incarcerated parents, and they may desire to sever all associations (Johnson & Easterling, 2015). Success rates for maintaining contact between children and their incarcerated parents are higher among grandparent caregivers than other types of caregivers (Shlaler et al., 2020). Specifically, grandmother caregivers are more likely to take children to visit their incarcerated mothers regardless of the challenges they may experience (i.e., the distance of facility, health issues, and income) (Tasca, 2016). However, parents may desire to maintain relationships with their children (Harris, 2013). Conversely, the incarcerated parents may not be interested in maintaining relationships, and the children may want to maintain contact (Kautz, 2017). Situations such as these may place stress on the grandparents as they contemplate what actions to take to protect the children from further negative experiences due to the parents' incarceration (Harris, 2013).

In-person visitation depends on the cost of transportation, the caregiver's availability, and the quality of the relationship between the incarcerated parent and caregiver (Kautz, 2017). For instance, in-person visitations are infrequent because of the distance and cost associated with traveling to the prison (Robillard et al., 2016). Rubenstein et al. (2019) reported that 62% of state inmates are incarcerated in facilities more than 100 miles from their last place of residence. But studies (e.g., Clark & Duwe, 2017; Cochran et al., 2018; & Hickert et al., 2017) have reported that the distance between one's last residence and the prison facility can vary dramatically for inmates across the United States (Rubenstein et al., 2019). Inmates in Minnesota are imprisoned in a facility on average 129 miles away from their homes, inmates in Florida 205 miles, and 212 miles for inmates detained in New York (Rubenstein et al., 2019).

Visitation policies at local jails and state prisons vary (McLeod & Bonsu, 2018). Some prison facilities allow for in-person contact, video conferencing, or barrier visitation (McLeod & Bonsu, 2018). Visitors may encounter invasive visitor searches, long visitor processing times, dress code, and behavior expectations (McKay et al., 2016; McLeod & Bonsu, 2018). There are instances in which detention facilities are not child-friendly or do not allow minor visitors (Kautz, 2017). Nevertheless, written letters and phone calls are common forms of contact because of the low cost (Robillard et al., 2016).

Although the previously mentioned studies provide insight into the attempts to contact the incarcerated parent (Robillard et al., 2016; Tasca, 2016), I have not been able to locate specific studies that have examined grandparent caregivers' experiences to maintain contact between their grandchildren and the children's incarcerated parents. The research focuses on the perspectives of the incarcerated parents or that of an adult child's experiences as a minor with an incarcerated parent (Kautz, 2017; Raikes, 2016; Saunders, 2017; Tasca et al., 2016). If the research includes the grandparent as a primary caregiver, it is focused on the financial experiences and emotional and mental wellness. I have not found research that specifically discussed sustaining contact between children and incarcerated parents.

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of grandparent caregivers who maintain contact (i.e., in-person visitation, phone calls, and written correspondence) between their grandchildren and the children's incarcerated parents. Numerous researchers that have explored challenges encountered by grandparent caregivers of incarcerated parents found that assuming the

role of primary caregiver has brought about financial, physical, and mental health strain for the grandparent (Kiraly & Humphreys, 2015; Ruiz & Kopak, 2014; Tasca, 2016; Turanovic et al., 2012). It has also been found that though the grandparent experiences role strain, they also find the role rewarding to be present in their grandchild's life (Zhou et al., 2017).

During the literature review, I could not locate research that explored the experiences of the grandparent caregiver as they attempted to maintain contact between incarcerated parents and their children. Maintaining contact between incarcerated parents and their children during the parents' incarceration improves familial ties by maintaining continuity in parent/child relationships (Cochran & Mears, 2013), enabling the grandparents to more easily relinquish their roles as primary caregivers upon the parent's release from incarceration. This gap in the literature presented the opportunity to conduct a phenomenological study to gain insight from the grandparents' perspectives regarding their attempts to maintain contact between incarcerated parents and their children. Chapter 3 will discuss the research methodology for the study and the justification for the choice. The issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures related to the chosen method will also be addressed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of grandparent caregivers who must maintain contact (i.e., visitation, phone calls, and written correspondence) between the children and their incarcerated parents. The phenomenological approach seeks to uncover the collective meaning of what is experienced by individuals through interviews and extended conversations (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). My research will contribute to the existing body of literature surrounding the experiences of grandparent caregivers. In this study, I focused on the challenges grandparents face in fulfilling their roles of sustained contact between the children and incarcerated parents.

In this chapter, I will provide the rationale and justification for choosing the descriptive phenomenological research approach, describe the research design, and describe the researcher's role. I will also explain the data collection method, the sampling strategy, and the recommended sample size. I will conclude the chapter with a discussion on ensuring data trustworthiness, participants' protection, and ethical considerations.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question that guided this study was as follows:

What are grandparents who serve as primary caregivers lived experiences of attempting to maintain contact (i.e., visitation, phone calls, and written correspondence) between their grandchildren and the children's incarcerated parents?

The qualitative inquiry was appropriate for this study because it is designed to investigate conventional processes, shared experiences, and understandings or identify

shared cultural knowledge and norms (Guest et al., 2017). Unlike quantitative methods concerned with breadth, qualitative inquiry is primarily focused on the depth of knowledge or experiences (Malterud et al., 2016). To obtain that depth, the qualitative researcher relies on interviews and observations to collect data (Clark et al., 2013). Additionally, the qualitative method is useful for a small number of participants (Clark et al., 2013).

Descriptive Phenomenology

Phenomenology has evolved over the centuries, first as a philosophical discipline and then as a research method or approach (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Phenomenology was developed by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl. He believed that phenomenology was a way of reaching the true meaning through penetrating deeper and deeper into reality (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Husserl's phenomenological approach focuses on the detailed description of consciousness experienced from the first-person perspective (Howell, 2015). Husserl's method began as a transparent reporting process of people's experienced reality, referred to as descriptive phenomenology (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015).

The phenomenological method consists of inductive or deductive reasoning method for data analysis. The inductive reasoning method is used when the researcher does not have preconceived notions of categories or themes that may emerge from the data collection (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). In comparison, deductive reasoning is a method used to confirm an existing idea with data collected on the researcher's part (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Deductive reasoning was not appropriate for this study. Deductive reasoning is intended to verify, reuse, or modify a theory (Khan, 2014). The

focus of the research was on the participants' experiences of a specific phenomenon. I employed the inductive reasoning approach to identify themes based on the participants' responses to interview questions. The purpose was to draw attention to the significances of the answers provided by the participants (Khan, 2014). Inductive reasoning was appropriate for this study because I sought to understand and describe the experiences of grandparents serving as primary caregivers for children of incarcerated parents.

Researchers who use descriptive phenomenology do not intend to make interpretations, they focus on providing descriptions of the phenomenon as provided by the participants (Christensen et al., 2017). Husserl posited that a person's perception of reality motivates the person's actions (Usher & Jackson, 2017). These perceptions may not be a conscious thought to the person, but it is what I sought to uncover while interviewing grandparents that are primary caregivers. This phenomenology type was advantageous for this study because of the limited research on the proposed subject matter. Interpretation on the part of the researcher is not included (Usher & Jackson, 2017). For this reason, I used the descriptive phenomenological approach..

Other Qualitative Approaches

As previously mentioned, the qualitative method was the appropriate approach. The purpose of this study was to gain a profoundly intimate understanding of the lived experiences of grandparents as primary caregivers for their grandchildren of incarcerated parents. The following qualitative approaches were not suitable for this study.

Ethnographic Approach

Ethnography involves several detailed observations of a group of individuals who have a shared culture (Fusch & Ness, 2017). The culture-sharing group is a vital concept

within ethnographic research. The phrase culture-sharing group refers to a subset of individuals who possess and share patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and languages (Fusch & Ness, 2017). Ethnography was not appropriate for my research because my study was about the individual experiences, not the shared culture of a group.

Narrative Approach

The narrative approach analyzes specific experiences as they are expressed by the individual who lived through the said moment (Miller-Day & Hect, 2013). Examples of narrative research include biographies and autobiographies. They are "transmitters of reality" (Miller-Day & Hect, 2013). The data can come in the form of interviews of the participant(s) or family, a diary from the participant(s), letters, documents, and memos of official correspondence, photographs, and other personal social artifacts (Howell, 2015).

The researcher is a vital tool for collecting and interpreting the data because stories are co-constructed between the participant and the researcher to convey a message (Howell, 2015). For the researcher to employ the narrative approach can be challenging to attain a clear understanding of the individual's life and how it applies to the researcher's study (Guest et al., 2017). The researcher must actively collaborate with the participant(s) and be reflective of their background and how it may influence the framework of the study (Howell, 2015). This approach was not appropriate for my research because I did not intend to chronologize the grandparents' entire lived experience as primary caregivers, nor did I seek to collect and review tangible items related to the participants' knowledge.

Case Study Approach

An alternative plan to research the lived experiences of grandparents as primary caregivers is the case study method. The case study methodology is similar to the grounded theory approach. The researcher collects data focused on the experiences of the participant(s) within a real-life context over some time (Starman, 2013). Case studies present cases that are unique and detailed in an attempt to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Starman, 2013).

Case studies differ based upon the basis of unit. For instance, a basis of unit could be as small as one individual upwards of an entire program or an activity (Baskarada, 2014). The researcher must have identified cases suitable for this method (Baskarada, 2014). Though the case study approach would have been advantageous for this study, it was not used. The focus of my research was on the specific lived experiences of grandparent caregivers. I did not seek to conduct an in-depth understanding of the overall contextual experience.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is considered an instrument who may consciously, or subconsciously, include their predispositions that may align with or diverge from those of the participants (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). To elicit responses from participants about their experiences using study-specific sets of questions (Chenail, 2011), was my role as an instrument. Moreover, I was responsible for the flow of communication. According to Chenail (2011), the researcher must be cognizant of the participant's feelings to make any necessary adjustments throughout the interviewing process.

It is common for novice qualitative researchers to have an affinity for their participants. This affinity could potentially hinder their ability to accept new information about the phenomena of interest in a research study (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). It was imperative as my role as the observer to be descriptive and detailed oriented during the data collection and the data analysis. By doing so, it increased the validity of the results and reduced bias.

In qualitative research, researcher bias is considered a lack of subjectivity or a type of error that could occur at any point in the research process (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Such bias poses a threat to the study's validity and must be addressed throughout the research process (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). My own bias may stem from past exposure to a grandmother who fits this study's inclusion criteria. I no longer have contact with the grandmother, but I do recall instances when she discussed her experiences as a caregiver for her grandchildren. Confirmation bias can occur when only incorporating statements from the respondents' that confirm the beliefs of the researcher and ignoring those that do not support (Roulston & Shelton, 2015).

One process for controlling researcher bias is called bracketing. Bracketing is the process of evaluating oneself and reflecting on any personal biases that one may have regarding the phenomena of interest (Chan et al., 2013). Bracketing, also known as epoché, is a means for researchers to refrain from incorporating any prior knowledge about the phenomena from existing literature (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Bracketing is used for the researcher to observe the statements strictly from the perspective of the participants' (Tufford & Newman, 2012). I used a popular technique to employ bracketing during the data collection process called memoing. Memoing is the act of

recording reflective notes about what the researcher learns and experiences from the data (Goodell et al., 2016). Through the process of memoing, I gained insight through reviewing the notes. I used the method to uncover any existing thoughts or feelings experienced throughout the research process. The purpose of memoing is to understand the choices made throughout the research process.

I also used member checking to control. Known as a validation technique, member checking is used to enhance the results' credibility (Birt et al., 2016). As previously stated, qualitative researchers may impose their personal beliefs and biases, which could dominate the participants' perspective (Birt et al., 2016). Utilizing member checking reduces the influence of researcher bias and confirms the results by involving the participant to verify the accuracy of the statements reported (Birt et al., 2016). Member checking is a rigorous method to ensure that the researcher presents the participant's meanings and perspectives (Birt et al., 2016).

After I transcribed the interviews, I obtained participants' views on the study via phone call. To complete this step, I received approval from participants in advance during the first interviewing. All participants showed their satisfaction toward these results, which entirely reflect their feelings and experiences.

Methodology

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 11 grandparents who were or had been primary caregivers of their grandchildren due to the incarceration of the children's parent(s). Each participant was a grandparent or great-grandparent who had formal or informal custody of their minor grandchild(ren) under 18 years due to parental

incarceration for no less than one year. English was the primary language of all participants to enhance the likelihood that both the researcher and the participant comprehend all communication forms.

Sampling Strategy

For this study, I used purposive and snowball sampling methods to recruit participants. Purposive sampling is a widely used technique in qualitative research to recruit participants who are likely to give rich information regarding the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). It is a nonprobability sampling method used for both qualitative and quantitative research methods (Guest et al., 2017). Purposive sampling was appropriate for this study as it is cost-effective, time-effective, and advantageous for targeting the study's intended population (Guest et al., 2017). Snowball sampling, also referred to as chain-referral sampling, requires the initial participant to recruit another participant of the same criteria, and so on (Palinkas et al., 2015). Snowball sampling depends on the social connections that potential participants possess to enlarge the number of targeted respondents for the study (Etikan et al., 2016). Because the targeted participants for this study were challenging to locate, using the snowball sampling technique increased my access to the targeted population through “chain referrals” (Etikan et al., 2016; Palinkas et al., 2015). Employing both strategies may increase access to the targeted population within a reasonable time frame.

Sample Size

The targeted sample size for this study was 8–12 participants. Qualitative research has come under scrutiny because of its perceived lack of scientific rigor and little to no justification for given sample sizes (Boddy, 2016). The appropriate sample size is not

always easily determined because, in qualitative research, the sample size is often smaller than quantitative research (Dworkin, 2012). In qualitative studies like ethnography and grounded theory, Morse (1994) and Bernard (2000) suggested 25 to 30 participants (Gentles et al., 2015). However, the recommended sample size differs for phenomenological studies (Marshall et al., 2013). Colaizzi (1978) suggested around 12, and Creswell (1998) indicated a sample size of at least five (Gentles et al., 2015). Sim et al. (2018) suggested the sample size for phenomenological approaches should be in intervals of 10. However, the sample size alone does not guarantee to reach data saturation, which is the goal of phenomenological studies.

Data saturation is the shared focus for qualitative research as the purpose is to obtain "depth and not breadth" (Basson & Mawson, 2011). The term data saturation was initially developed for grounded theory studies by Glasser and Strauss (1999; Marshall et al., 2013). It was eventually applied to all qualitative research that uses interviews as the primary data source (Marshall et al., 2013). Saturation is believed to occur when no new information relevant to the research question emerges from the data collected or analyzed (Marshall et al., 2013). Some factors that can influence saturation are the quality of interviews, the number of interviews per participant, the sampling procedures, and the researcher's experience (Basson & Mawson, 2011).

Instead of solely focusing on saturation, Malterud et al. (2016) suggested that information power (IP) should be used to guide adequate sample sizes for qualitative research. Information power is related to the aim of the study, specificity of experiences, the level of the theoretical background of the study, the quality of the interview dialogue, and the strategy chosen for the analysis (Malterud et al., 2016). The more significant

information power the sample holds, the lower N is needed, and vice versa (Malterud et al., 2016). For this reason, and with my committee's recommendations, I recruited 11 participants for my study.

Procedures for Recruitment and Participation

Recruiting participants to discuss sensitive personal information can be challenging. Appropriately identifying the targeted population is essential for recruiting the intended sample (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). After receiving approval from Walden University's IRB (IRB approval number: 05-26-20-0494601), I emailed the directors and office support staff of social and human service agencies to ask for their assistance to share my digital flyer with their clientele (see Appendix A for the email). I contacted agencies that agencies provide services to grandparents, children of incarcerated parents, and other human service agencies that serviced kinship caregivers. Three agencies responded and agreed to send my flyer to their clientele using an email blast. Another agency printed copies of my flyer and shared them with their clientele during a scheduled event. I located the contact information for directors and office support staff, and I called each agency. I followed up with an email to ask for their assistance to share my digital flyer with their clientele (see Appendix B for the recruitment flyer). The flyers contained general information, the purpose of the study, inclusion criteria, and contact information for those interested in participating in the survey (see Appendix B for the recruitment flyer).

I shared my flyer on several social media platforms, such as LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook, using my personal accounts. Through Facebook, I located several online support groups for grandparents raising their grandchildren and another for parents of

incarcerated children. I private messaged the group administrators to ask their permission to share my flyer in the group forums. I also shared my flyer in Facebook support groups for people enrolled in doctoral programs. Additionally, I gained permission from the Center for Research Quality to create a bulletin post for my study on the Walden Participant Pool virtual board to recruit potential participants.

Data Collection

The phenomenological approach seeks to uncover the collective meaning of what is experienced by individuals through interviews and extended conversations (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). Interviews are a standard method of data collection in phenomenological studies (Howell, 2015). I used standardized semistructured interviews based on open-ended questions to collect information from the participants regarding their experiences of caring for their grandchildren during the children's parental incarceration (see Appendix C for Interview Questions).

Individuals interested in participating in this study contacted me by email with the flyer's information. Once I received an email from the interested participant, I responded in an email, thanking them for their interest and reiterating the study's purpose. Also, I emailed them a PDF attachment of the consent form that detailed the purpose of the research and their rights as a participant. They were asked to review the document and contact me or IRB, either by phone or email if they had any questions, comments, or concerns. Participants were asked to respond in an email, "I consent," once they agreed to participate in the study.

After receiving the participants' consent, I then scheduled the telephone interviews at the participants' earliest convenience. I used a phone application called

TapeACall to record all interviews. Before the interviews started, I reminded participants of the purpose of the study and the conversation procedures as outlined in the consent form. They were also informed that they could end the interview at any time. Similarly, if they were uncomfortable with answering a question, they did not have to answer. All participants agreed to proceed with the interview and consented to it being recorded.

Telephone interviews have a significant monetary cost advantage for both participant and researcher; they are less tedious and shorter than in-person interviews (Rahman, 2015). Though it is advantageous for cost and response rate, there are limitations to conducting telephone interviews. For instance, participants may be hesitant to discuss sensitive issues over the phone (Rahman, 2015). Also, it limits the researcher from observing any supplemental information about the participants' body language, and the call may be "broken-off," terminating the interview (Rahman, 2015). The interviews, on average, lasted 35 minutes. The objective was to discuss the participants' experiences as a primary caregiver and allow for the participant narrative.

At the end of the interviews, participants were debriefed to ask any questions concerning the research and the next steps (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Also, I needed to verify that the participants did not experience any distress or confusion at any point in the interview (Howell, 2015). None of the participants expressed any discomfort during the discussion. But if any did express discomfort, I would have provided them with a referral to a counseling professional for services at no cost or on a slide scale basis in their town/city.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the part of qualitative research that most distinctively differentiates from quantitative research methods. It is a dynamic, intuitive, and creative process of inductive reasoning, thinking, and theorizing (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Data analysis in qualitative research systematically searches and arranges the interview transcripts, observation notes, or other non-textual materials to increase the understanding of the phenomenon (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The process of analyzing qualitative data involves coding or categorizing the data. Mainly, it consists of making sense of vast amounts of data by reducing the volume of raw information (Gläser & Laudel, 2013). Then, identifying significant patterns, and finally drawing meaning from data and subsequently building a logical chain of evidence (Gläser & Laudel, 2013). For this study, used Colaizzi's 7-step process to analyze the data collected.

Colaizzi's (1978) method has seven specific steps that enhance the researcher's ability to stay close to the data (Morrow et al., 2015). Colaizzi's method for data analysis is appropriate for my study because it is for descriptive phenomenological studies. Colaizzi was influenced by Husserl's descriptive phenomenology and developed his seven-step method to discover the fundamental structures of phenomena (Wirihana et al., 2018). This method depends on rich first-person accounts of experiences collected from face-to-face interviews, written narratives, blogs, or other forms of detailed responses (Morrow et al., 2015). As previously stated, for this study, the responses from the participants were collected via telephone interviews.

Once my interviews were completed and transcribed, the first step of Colaizzi's method is familiarization (Morrow et al., 2015). I repeatedly listened to the audio

recordings to type the interview verbatim on a Word document. The second step requires that I identified significant statements, words, or key phrases across the multiple interviews (Wirihana et al., 2018). I identified the statements by hand, separating and grouping the interview questions by number. Also, labeled the responses by participant pseudonyms. Then, I organized those statements in a Word document.

For this study, I employed the thematic analysis. As the researcher, using the thematic analysis is advantageous for the semistructured interviews I have created for my targeted participants. Percy et al. (2015) stated that the thematic analysis allows the researcher to investigate subjective experiences of objective things. In other words, the thematic analysis allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2018). Using the thematic analysis allowed me, as the researcher, to organically create themes (Guest et al., 2017) associated with grandparent caregivers' experiences.

Step three of the seven-step process formulates meanings from significant statements (Wirihana et al., 2018). I went through the data by grouping statements and keywords that have similar content. The groupings were assigned labels to the collective meaning. This technique is known as open coding. Open coding is the initial data work that builds by identifying essential concepts and patterns from rigorous open reading and reflection of the raw data (Matthew & Price, 2012a). I conducted open coding because coding requires a constant process of questioning and comparing. By performing this method, it serves to limit researcher subjectivity (Matthew & Price, 2012a). This technique guided me in future coding and interpretation of the findings.

The fourth step of the process is clustering themes with common meanings according to the similarity of focus (Morrow et al., 2015). I, by hand, assigned codes to the themes using letters. Next, I went back through each of the interviews and coded the individual responses as those responses pertain to the previous steps' codes. This technique is known as axial coding. Axial coding is "the process of relating categories to their subcategories, the outcomes of open coding" (Wicks, 2012, p. 2). This form of coding, combined with open coding, forms a rigorous approach to qualitative data analysis that could reveal new concepts and relationships that allow for refinement (Wicks, 2012). It was necessary to conduct a second round of clustering the items to reduce the overall number of topics. This process is known as selective coding. Selective coding is the final stage of the data analysis process in which core concepts are identified and abstracted (Matthew & Price, 2012b). It is intended to discover and illuminate the phenomena, which can result in the theoretical generation of different levels of abstraction while being empirically grounded in the data (Matthew & Price, 2012b).

For steps five and six, I developed a detailed description of the themes generated and confirmed the exhaustive reports by re-examining transcripts, thematic clusters, and themes (Shosha, 2012). The goal of step six is to remove any redundant or misused descriptions. If the participant disclosed any type of sensitive or identifiable information (i.e., a participant referred to the name of their grandchildren or the name of the prison facility), I redacted the sensitive or identifiable information to protect the privacy of the participant as well as others directly or indirectly related to the study.

The Colaizzi process's final step is to verify the phenomenon's fundamental structure (Wirihana et al., 2018). At this step, I confirmed my findings by using member

checking by including the participants' input. Participants' views on the study results were obtained directly via phone calls. This step was done when I received approval from participants in advance during the first interviewing. All participants showed their satisfaction toward these results, which entirely reflected their feelings and experiences.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Historically, the qualitative approach was considered lacking scientific rigor, compared to the quantitative approach (Cope, 2014). Qualitative research has had the perception as anecdotal, subject to researcher bias, and lacking generalizability (Cope, 2014). To address these concerns, I will incorporate trustworthiness techniques to verify the study's findings (Anney, 2014). The criteria for establishing trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Connelly, 2016). It is my role as the researcher to add these criteria to ensure the quality of this study.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research focuses on how the findings from the data collected can be trusted or believed (Howell, 2015). Credibility establishes whether or not the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original statements (Anney, 2014). I achieved credibility in this study with triangulation, researcher reflexivity, and member checking. I triangulated multiple sources of information in Chapter 5. I compared and contrasted existing literature on the topic addressed in Chapter 2, the theoretical orientation of this study, and its findings.

I also engaged the participants during the interview and used open-ended questions, resulting in comprehensive, detailed answers. During the interviews, I asked participants to verify the provided responses. Also, I used the member checking process

to ensure the responses were captured accurately. Participants were emailed a PDF copy of the transcribed interview for review. They were given instructions on how to review the document and to provide any feedback concerning the transcription.

Transferability

Transferability refers to whether a study's findings can transfer to similar situations or other groups of individuals (Howell, 2015). For the readers of the study to "transfer" the results, the researcher must provide a highly detailed description of their research methods, known as a thick description (Connelly, 2016). Anney (2014) stated that the research should include rich and extensive details concerning methodology and context. The readers will have a detailed account of the procedures taken that have resulted in the study's findings (Anney, 2014). In doing so, this allows for other researchers to replicate this study with similar conditions in different settings.

I increased transferability by providing thick text descriptions to describe the study's findings so that readers can connect with the study (Connelly, 2016). I detailed how I recruited the participants and how data was analyzed, collected, and coded. Furthermore, I maintained an audit trail of the interview recordings, interview notes, and a reflexive journal containing my thoughts and feelings while conducting the research. In doing so, this allows for other researchers to replicate or contrast this study with similar conditions in different settings.

Dependability

Dependability refers to "the stability of findings over time" (Anney, 2014, p. 278). It is similar to reliability in quantitative research (Connelly, 2016). A study is dependable if the researcher's process and descriptions can replicate the findings with

similar participants in similar conditions (Cope, 2014). This technique is an audit trail. Researchers use an audit trail to enhance dependability for the reader to have a transparent report about all of the procedures completed during the research process (Howell, 2015).

In this study, I used an audit trail to provide information about the data collection approach that I used to recruit participants to enhance dependability for the reader to have a transparent report about all of the procedures completed during the research process (Howell, 2015). I organized audit trails of the interview notes, recordings, and memos about data management to ensure dependability. This technique enhances that the interpretation process is embedded in the analysis process (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I also used feedback from my dissertation methodologist as a dependability auditor to acknowledge any concerns in the study.

Confirmability

Finally, confirmability focuses on the degree to which the results of the study are confirmed by other researchers (Anney, 2014). The researcher must demonstrate neutrality in data analysis. A technique that can establish confirmability is a reflexive journal (Anney, 2014). Also referred to as a process log, my reflexive journal included a description of my reflections during the study (Anney, 2014). This technique enhanced confirmability because it informs the reader about my thought process and explains the decisions made during the research process (Cope, 2014). This technique enhances the credibility of the research because, as the researcher, it is important to acknowledge any implicit assumptions or preconceptions that may have influenced the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Ethical Procedures

The target population for this study is grandparents who act as primary caregivers for grandchildren of incarcerated parents. As previously stated, participants were asked to respond in an email, "I consent," once they read the consent form that was sent via email. I coded and cataloged the data throughout the project, as participants' identities were confidential, to use a pseudonym in the report. All information was completely de-identified, and data will be kept locked and secure upon completion for five years. After five years, the data will be destroyed by wiping the external hard drives clean, according to Walden University's research protocol (IRB approval number: 05-26-20-0494601).

Mistrust of the research process is another barrier that could impact the recruitment of potential participants. I did not use any identifying factors. No one but myself and my dissertation committee has access to data about my study. The participants' privacy was protected because they contacted me directly. Data, including the audio recordings, transcriptions, and data analysis, are stored on a password-protected external hard drive. Any paper files are stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office.

Participation in this research was entirely voluntary. I informed participants that they have the right to say no and may change their mind at any time during the interview and end the conversation. Participants had the opportunity not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time. There were no known risks to participation beyond those encountered in everyday life. However, if a participant experienced discomfort during any data collection phase, I would have discontinued the interview and provided a debriefing immediately. Also, I provided participants with resources and referrals for follow-up counseling if desired. Responses were kept confidential, and data

from this research was reported only as a collective combined total. No one other than the Researcher and dissertation committee knows the individual's answers from the interviews.

Summary

This chapter provided a detailed overview of descriptive phenomenology and the rationale for choosing this method to address the research question. A semistructured interview guide was described as a means to explore the lived experiences of grandparents as primary caregivers who attempt to maintain contact between their grandchild and the incarcerated parent. The plan for data analysis was outlined, and issues of trustworthiness of data were described. The safety, confidentiality, anonymity, and other ethical considerations were addressed. Chapter 4 further discusses the research setting, demographics of participants, data collection methods, trustworthiness of the study, and present an in-depth thematic analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive phenomenological study was to explore grandparent caregivers' lived experiences of maintaining contact (i.e., visitation, phone calls, and written correspondence) between grandchildren and their incarcerated parents. The research question that guided this study was as follows:

What are grandparents who serve as primary caregivers lived experiences of attempting to maintain contact (i.e., visitation, phone calls, and written correspondence) between their grandchildren and the children's incarcerated parents?

In Chapter 4, I provide data collection and analysis of information from the descriptive phenomenological study. I collected data for the research by interviewing participants, transcribing the data, and coding the transcripts to determine emergent themes. The thematic content analysis allowed me, as the researcher, to describe the collective experiences of the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2018). In this chapter, I describe the strategies employed to enhance trustworthiness of this research study. Lastly, I include a summary of significant findings related to the research question at the end of Chapter 4.

Research Setting

In February 2020, the world began to experience a pandemic known as COVID-19. Also known as the Coronavirus, the virus is an infectious disease that can cause mild to moderate respiratory illness, and in some people, even death (World Health Organization, 2020). The virus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes (World Health Organization,

2020). To slow transmission of this virus, various states throughout the United States imposed a lockdown or shelter in place, which started in March of 2020 and continued through May 2020 (Schumaker, 2020).

To prevent potential transmission of the Coronavirus, I conducted telephone interviews. All telephone interviews were conducted in my home office which is a designated workspace that is closed off from any external sounds that may disrupt the interview. To my understanding, there were no other individuals by the participant during each interview. Furthermore, to my knowledge there were no personal or professional conditions that influenced participants, their knowledge of the study, or my subsequent interpretations of the data.

Demographics

The recruitment efforts resulted in a sample of 11 women who were raising their grandchildren or great-grandchildren of an incarcerated or formerly incarcerated parent. Table 1 highlights the participants' demographic information, which includes ethnicity, age, relation to the minor child, the number of children in their care, and the caregiving arrangement. To protect their identities, I gave each participant a pseudonym. Six participants self-reported as Black and five as White. All participants self-reported as grandmothers of children with incarcerated parents. Their ages ranged between 46 and 74 years old. Each participant had between one to four minor grandchildren in their care. Four participants stated that they had informal custody of their grandchildren and 7 participants had formal custody. Three of the participants had paternal ties with the minor children, whereas the others had maternal ties.

Table 1*Detail of Participants Demographic Information*

| Participant Pseudonym | Age (years) | Ethnicity/Race | # of Children | Relation to the Minor Child | Type of Custody |
|-----------------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|------------------------------|-----------------|
| Lucy | 61 | Black | 2 | Grandmother (Paternal) | Formal |
| Terry | 46 | Black | 1 | Grandmother (Maternal) | Formal |
| Jasmine | 74 | Black | 2 | Great-Grandmother (Paternal) | Informal |
| Cindy | 51 | White | 3 | Grandmother (Maternal) | Informal |
| Dolly | 57 | White | 1 | Grandmother (Maternal) | Formal |
| Kelly | 73 | White | 2 | Grandmother (Maternal) | Informal |
| Rachel | 56 | White | 3 | Grandmother (Maternal) | Formal |
| Casey | 47 | Black | 4 | Grandmother (Paternal) | Informal |
| Lacey | 67 ½ | Black | 2 | Great-Grandmother (Maternal) | Formal |
| Mary | 53 | Black | 1 | Grandmother (Maternal) | Formal |
| Martha | 50 | White | 1 | Grandmother (Maternal) | Formal |

Participants

Lucy

Lucy, age 61 years, reported that she has legal, physical custody for two of her grandchildren, a 7-year-old boy, and a 10-year-old girl. Lucy reported having had her grandchildren in her care since their birth. The biological parents of the children lived in her household while raising the children. She received legal custody of the children after the mother was murdered in 2015. Lucy's son, the father of the children, was the incarcerated parent. The father's incarceration was unrelated to the mother's death. Lucy stated that phone calls and letters were the primary means of contact between the grandchildren and their incarcerated father. In-person visitation was not a consideration because of the financial cost and lack of personal transportation. The father had completed his prison sentence at the interview time and did not live with his mother and children.

Terry

Terry, age 46 years, has legal custody of her grandson, age 9-years-old. She has had custody of her grandson for approximately 5 years at the time of the interview. Her daughter, the mother of her grandson, was recently released after serving almost 4 years in prison. She stated that she used phone calls as the primary means of communication between her grandson and daughter. She did not want to expose her grandson to the prison environment. Terry still maintains custody of her grandson.

Jasmine

Jasmine, age 74 years, is the great-grandparent to an 11-year-old girl, the daughter of her grandson whom she also had raised. She has been raising her great-granddaughter

for 8 years and has an informal caregiving relationship with the biological parents. According to Jasmine, she is the only relative that has time to take care of the child. She reported that phone calls were the primary means of communication during the father's incarceration since the great-granddaughter was too young, according to jail policy, to have in-person visitation. At the time of the interview, the father had been released from jail.

Cindy

Cindy, age 51 years, has three of her grandchildren in her care. A 5-year-old boy, a 6-year-old girl, and another 7-year-old boy. She reported that she has informal custody of her grandchildren because it costs \$3,500 for each child to adopt formally, and she cannot afford the fees. Her daughter, the mother of the children, was previously incarcerated and is now homeless. At the time of the interview, she was uncertain of her daughter's whereabouts. Phone calls and in-person visitation were frequent forms of communication with the mother during her incarceration.

The father of the children has been incarcerated for 3 years and was due for release any day at the time of the interview. The children have minimal contact with their father because of the strained relationship between him and their grandmother. Cindy has had custody of her grandchildren since their birth and shares custody with the paternal grandmother.

Dolly

Dolly, age 57 years, reported that she has legal custody of her grandson, who is 10 years old. Her daughter, the mother, was previously incarcerated, and the father of her grandson is currently incarcerated on the other side of the country awaiting trial. Her

grandson speaks to his father on the telephone frequently. Dolly has had custody of her grandson since he was 11-months-old. Both biological parents have dealt with drug abuse and have been in and out of incarceration for several years.

Kelly

Kelly, age 73 years, has power of attorney for her two grandchildren, a girl, age 8, and a boy, age 5. She has been caring for her grandchildren since they were born. Kelly maintains communication through phone calls and has taken the children to see their mother at her work release (restaurant) to have physical contact. The children's mother has been incarcerated for approximately a year and was due for release any day.

Rachel

Rachel, age 56 years, has had custody of her three grandchildren for 7 and a half years. Two of her grandchildren are now of legal age; a girl, 19, and another girl a week from her 18th birthday when the interview was conducted. The third grandchild is a boy age 10. A fourth grandchild, a boy age 9, is a full sibling to the grandchildren in Rachel's care. He, however, was adopted by Rachel's brother as an infant. Rachel shared that she could not take on a fourth young child when she still had six of her biological children with three grandchildren to raise.

Her daughter, the children's mother, was a teen mom and has been in and out of incarceration throughout the children's lives. When the interview was conducted, the mother was released from prison the year before. She had served a little over a year. The children's primary form of communication with their incarcerated mother was through phone calls and one in-person visit when they were very young. Her current whereabouts were unknown.

Rachel and her husband are in the process of formally adopting their grandson. The state is officially terminating the biological parents' parental rights for failure to fulfill the requirements to reunite with their minor child over the past 2 years. Her daughter, the children's mother, is not contesting parental rights termination, though the father is contesting the termination. The father has not met the two youngest children. He was incarcerated during their births. The father of the children is currently incarcerated and has already served 4 years.

Casey

Casey, age 47 years, reported having informal caregiving arrangements for her four grandchildren, ranging in ages from 3 to 8 years old. Her son is currently awaiting sentencing. He has been incarcerated for over a year and is expected to serve under 6 years in prison. She and the children speak with him daily and occasionally conduct facetime videos. They have been able to see him a few times for in-person visitation.

Lacey

Lacy, age 67 and a half years, is raising two great-grandchildren. They are the children of her daughter's daughter, an 8-years-old boy, and a girl who is 7 years old, who have different fathers, but both men had recently been incarcerated. The children only spoke to their fathers on the phone while the fathers were incarcerated. Lacey made it a point not to share with the children where their fathers were. When the interview was conducted, Lacey had the children for approximately a year and anticipated a custody hearing to determine where the children would be placed permanently. She was hoping to maintain custody of her great-grandchildren.

Mary

Mary, age 53 years, has legal custody of her grandson, age 4, and has had him in her care since he was 7 months old. Phone calls are the primary form of communication between her grandson and daughter, though she has taken her grandson for in-person visitations before the COVID-19 pandemic. Her daughter has been incarcerated for the past 3 years and is expected to complete 2 more years. The biological father is deceased.

Martha

Martha, age 50 years, has legal custody of her grandson, age 9. He has been in her care for 2 and a half years. Her daughter has served 1 year in prison and has another year to go. Phone calls are the only form of communication between her grandson and daughter. Martha reported that her daughter has pending charges that will most certainly extend her stay in prison.

Data Collection

I conducted a descriptive phenomenological study with nine grandmothers and two great-grandmothers who raised their due to the incarceration of the children's parents. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, my recruitment procedure and data collection process were altered to protect the health of the participants and myself.

After receiving approval from Walden University's IRB (IRB approval number: 05-26-20-0494601), instead of physically placing my recruitment flyer in the pre-approved center due to COVID-19, I emailed my recruitment flyer to human and social service agencies that provides services to grandparents, children of incarcerated parents, and kinship caregivers. Once I located the contact information for directors and office support staff, I called each agency. I followed up with an email to ask for their assistance

to share my digital flyer with their clientele. The agencies that responded informed me that they would send my flyer to their clientele using an email blast. Another agency printed copies of my flyer and shared them with their clientele during a scheduled event.

I also posted the recruitment flyer on several social media platforms, such as LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook, using my personal accounts. Through Facebook, I located several online support groups for grandparents raising their grandchildren and another for parents of incarcerated children. I private messaged the group administrators to ask their permission to share my flyer in the group forums. I also shared my flyer in Facebook support groups for people enrolled in doctoral programs. Additionally, I gained permission from the Center for Research Quality to create a bulletin post for my study on the Walden Participant Pool virtual board to recruit potential participants.

Individuals interested in participating in this study contacted me by email with the flyer's information. Once I received an email from the interested participant, I responded in an email, thanking them for their interest and reiterating the study's purpose. Also, I emailed them a PDF attachment of the consent form. They were asked to review the document and contact me or IRB, either by phone or email if they had any questions, comments, or concerns. Participants were asked to respond in an email, "I consent," once they agreed to participate in the study.

After receiving the participants' consent, I then scheduled the telephone interviews at the participants' earliest convenience. Even though I am located in Virginia, the participants were located in California, Washington, Arkansas, Texas, Maryland, Virginia, Ohio, and Connecticut. During the call, I reminded the participants of their rights that were outlined in the consent form. They were reminded that they could end the

interview at any time, and if they were uncomfortable with answering a question, they did not have to answer. I used a phone application called TapeACall to record all interviews. All participants agreed to proceed with the interview and consented to it being recorded. All interviews were conducted from June 2020 to September 2020. The average length of the interviews was 35 minutes.

Data Analysis

My focus in the data analysis was to determine the lived experiences of grandparent caregivers who attempted to maintain contact (i.e., visitation, phone calls, and written correspondence) between their grandchildren and the children's incarcerated parents. I manually transcribed the interviews into a Microsoft Word document within days, sometimes within weeks of an interview. Each transcription and audio file was saved to a password-protected external hard drive. I conducted interviews with a sample size of 11 participants. I continued to analyze the data until the resulting themes and patterns were repetitive, with no new data emerging. Once saturation occurred, I discontinued the search for additional participants. I mailed participants a \$20 Visa gift for participating in my study.

I used Colaizzi's 7-step process to analyze the data collected for descriptive phenomenological studies (Morrow et al., 2015). As the first step of the analysis, I familiarized myself with the transcribed interviews by re-reading the transcriptions while listening to the audio. Second, I identified significant statements, words, and key phrases that appeared across multiple interviews. I used thematic content analysis to identify recurring themes across the participants' responses associated with grandparent caregivers' experiences. For the third step, I used the technique known as open coding. I

grouped statements and keywords of similar content, assigned and label them, and organized them on a Word document to formulate meaning.

In the fourth step of the process, I clustered together themes by clustering codes (Morrow et al., 2015). Then, I went through each of the interviews and coded the individual responses as they pertained to the codes developed in the previous steps. This technique is known as axial coding. From this process, the higher-order themes are developed.

For steps five and six, I developed a detailed description of the themes generated and confirmed the exhaustive descriptions by re-examining transcripts, thematic clusters, and themes (Shosha, 2012). The goal of step six is to remove any redundant or misused descriptions. If the participant disclosed any sensitive or identifiable information (i.e., a participant referred to the name of their grandchildren or the name of the prison facility), I redacted the sensitive or identifiable information to protect the privacy of the participant as well as others directly or indirectly related to the study.

The Colaizzi process's final step is to verify the phenomenon's fundamental structure (Wirihana et al., 2018). At this step, I confirmed my findings by using member checking by including the participants' input. Participants' views on the study results were obtained directly via phone calls. This step was done when I received approval from participants in advance during the first interviewing. All participants were satisfied with these results, which entirely reflect their feelings and experiences.

The following categories were used to group the themes generated from the participants' responses to the interview questions: (a) experiences with gaining custody, (b) experiences as a provider for a grandchild, (c) perceived importance of maintaining

contact, (d) experiences with contact maintenance, and (e) perceived status of the relationship with the incarcerated/previously incarcerated parents. I saved all interview notes and audio recordings to a password-protected external hard drive once the data collection was complete. The electronic data will be stored in a secure filing system, where it will remain for 5 years. After 5 years, the data will be destroyed by wiping the external hard drive clean.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, I used methods to establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Connelly, 2016). The findings of this study are truthful. Trustworthiness enhances the validity of results from a qualitative inquiry (Connelly, 2016). It was my role as the researcher to include these methods as it was established in Chapter 3.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research focuses on how the findings from the data collected can be trusted or believed (Howell, 2015). Credibility establishes whether or not the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original statements (Anney, 2014). I achieved credibility in this study with triangulation, researcher reflexivity, and member checking. I triangulated multiple sources of information in Chapter 5 to enhance the credibility of the findings from this study. I compared and contrasted existing literature on the topic addressed in Chapter 2, the theoretical orientation of this study, and its findings.

I used the member checking process to ensure the responses were captured accurately. Each of the participants was emailed a PDF copy of their transcribed

interview for their review. Each of the participants were asked to review and confirm the accuracy of their transcriptions; all participants responded by email confirming the transcriptions. However, one participant did share additional information about her experience with in-person visitation which was then coded within the data analysis.

Transferability

Transferability refers to whether a findings from a study could be transferred to similar situations or to other groups of individuals (Howell, 2015). I increased transferability by providing thick text descriptions about my experiences with their context, so that readers can connect with the steps taken to conduct the research (Connelly, 2016). For example, thick text descriptions were used to detail how I recruited the participants using purposive sampling, the research setting, and how the data was analyzed, collected, and coded. Furthermore, I maintained an audit trail from the start of the research project to the reporting of the findings. The audit trail included research materials about coding, interview notes, and a reflexive journal containing my thoughts and feelings while conducting the research. In doing so, this allows for other researchers to replicate or contrast this study with similar conditions in different settings..

Dependability

A study is considered dependable if subsequent researchers can replicate similar participants' findings in similar conditions (Cope, 2014). In this study, I used an audit trail to provide information about the data collection approach that I used to recruit participants to enhance dependability for the reader. The purpose is to have a transparent report about all of the procedures completed during the research process (Howell, 2015). In the audit trail, I organized my interview notes, interview questions, recordings of the

interviews, informed consent, and memos about data management to ensure dependability. In doing so, this allows for other researchers to replicate or contrast this study with similar conditions in different settings.

Confirmability

Finally, confirmability was enhanced with a reflexive journal (Anney, 2014). Also referred to as a process log, my reflexive journal included a description of my reflections during the study (Anney, 2014). This technique enhanced confirmability because it informs the reader about my thought process and explains the decisions made during the research process (Cope, 2014). In a secure manner, I maintained an audit trail of notes taken during the interviews, interview recordings, and participants' interview transcripts. To achieve triangulation, I merged multiple sources of information including literature on the topic addressed in Chapter 2, theoretical orientation, and the findings from this study. This technique enhances the of the research because, as the researcher, it is essential to acknowledge any implicit assumptions or preconceptions that may have influenced the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Data Analysis Findings

The research question which guided this study was as follows:

What are grandparent caregivers' lived experiences of attempting to maintain contact (i.e., visitation, phone calls, and written correspondence) between their grandchildren and the children's incarcerated parents?

I asked the participants 9 questions during the interview to gather information on their lived experiences of sustaining contact between their grandchildren and the

incarcerated parents. I grouped the questions into the following five categories: (a) events leading to obtaining custody, (b) experiences as a provider for grandchild, (c) importance of maintaining contact with incarcerated parent, (d) experiences/challenges with maintaining contact, and (e) perceived status of the relationship with the incarcerated/previously incarcerated parents. The themes and subthemes from the data analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Theme Identification

| Categories | Themes | Sub Themes |
|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Events Leading to Obtaining Custody | Compelled to Intervene | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disruptive environment • Lack of stability |
| | Actions Taken to obtain custody | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Petitioned the court • Quickly completed paperwork • Received license |
| Experiences as a Provider for Grandchild | Meaning of being a primary caregiver | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide stability/continuity of care • Keep them safe • Provide for basic and emotional needs |
| | Challenges as a primary caregiver | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra financial burden • Haphazard due to age • Starting over • Handful/hard to keep track |
| Importance of Maintaining Contact with Incarcerated Parent | Positive impact on child | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • brings a lot out of him • expression on his face |
| | Maintain bond/Don't Forget Parent | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • know his mother's love • Keep a connection • Have a parent in their life • Still apart of the child's life |
| Experiences/Challenges with Maintaining Contact | Difficulty associated with phone calls | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unpredictable time of calls • Expense of the calls • Stress related to the calls |
| | Difficulty with in-person visits | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • did not visit in person • couldn't afford to visit • stressful • chaotic environment • no contact allowed |

| Categories | Themes | Sub Themes |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Perceived Status of the Relationship with the Incarcerated/Previously Incarcerated Parents | Strained/Difficult relationship | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • verbally abusive • Rocky • Uncertain behavior |
| | Loving/Understanding relationship | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unwavering/Supportive/love • Improving/getting better • Not abusive |

Events Leading to Obtaining Custody

Participants were asked one question about the events that led to them obtaining custody of their grandchildren. This question addressed their experience with gaining custody for their grandchildren either through formal custody or legal custody. The two primary themes that emerged were that the participants felt compelled to intervene and they shared specific actions that they engaged in to obtain custody.

Compelled to Intervene. When the participants were asked to share the events that led to them gaining custody of their grandchildren, many shared that they were not asked to take their grandchildren but felt it was necessary to intervene. For example, Kelly stated that she took in her grandchildren "to make sure that they were safe and had stability." Dolly shared that her grandson's environment was disruptive. She took it upon herself to remove him from the home just before both parents were incarcerated.

According to Dolly:

It had gotten to be too much, and I went and removed him from home. There was a lot of fighting and drug use, and his care was not being met. I went to pick him up when they were having an argument one day. My daughter came back to pick him up from me, and I would not give him back.

Martha had a similar experience as she believed she was compelled to take custody of her grandson away from her daughter. She had witnessed her grandson being

left at different family members' homes for days and months on end without seeing his mother. Martha stated the following regarding her actions to gain custody of her grandson, "I felt that it was [what] I needed to do... Her getting in trouble just made it – I hate to say this, just made it that much easier for me to make my decision and to take it to court to get the paperwork."

Actions Taken to Obtain Custody. Several participants shared the steps taken to get their grandchildren through the use of the court system. Martha shared in her interview that the process of obtaining custody of her grandson was "not too bad" because she received help from the legal aid department. Martha stated the following regarding the process of gaining custody of her grandchild:

Mine didn't go too bad. It didn't go too bad because I went into the legal aid department at the courthouse. They had really helped me. [They] helped me fill out all the papers. I have a friend who is a lawyer, so they had helped too. I honestly would suggest people do it.

After removing her grandson from the home with his parents, Dolly shared what she had to do to get formal custody. She stated that, "There was a lot of paperwork. I had to write letters to every family member and make sure that no one objected to me getting custody of him".

Rachel also described the actions she took to gain formal custody of her grandchildren. She initially had informal caregiving arrangements for her grandchildren while her daughter and grandchildren lived in the home after a previous incarceration. Rachel explained the role dynamic between her and her daughter changed once she began using drugs again and state authorities intervened:

The state stepped in and removed the children and arrested [the parents]. The [grandchildren] went to state foster care, and then my husband and I had to do some quick paperwork, and it took us 28 days to get the kids out of foster care and then to our home... We went through the licensing process and became licensed foster care providers, and then that gave us the ability to have some benefits through the state for the children.

Terry explained that she sought custody of her grandson when she found out that her daughter was incarcerated. She gave details of that actions she took to get formal custody. The comments below reflect Terry's response:

When I found out that she was incarcerated, I petitioned the court for an emergency court order to gain custody. First time, they denied me. The second time, they gave it to me only because of I guess you have to learn the wording and things to say when it comes to court and petitioning for custody.

When asked did she seek legal counsel to help obtain custody after the first denial, Terry stated that she received informal advice from the court clerk. She stated the clerk said, "You may want to be a little bit more specific without really going into details." Sometimes people don't want to be liable for telling you the wrong things. Dolly stated she was initially granted temporary custody for a few months, and then she gained final custody.

Experiences as Provider for Grandchild

Participants were asked one question about their role as a primary caregiver for their grandchildren. The question addressed what does it mean to take on the role as primary caregiver for their grandchildren. Two themes emerged from the participants'

responses to the question. The first theme was that participants felt they were of protector and constant in the lives of the grandchildren. The second theme was related to the challenges that participants faced in caring for their grandchildren.

Meaning of Being Primary Caregiver. When asked what it was like to be a primary caregiver, Lucy declared the following: "I am their sole survivor, sole supporter. I am their mainstay. I am their consistence with no void because I've never not been there." Lacey shared:

You just try to do the best for them, and I just don't want to see them growing up in poverty... I'm just trying to keep them out of abuse and neglect. What it's like to have a stable home. I'm trying to keep them safe from that.

Rachel, who has been taking care of her three grandchildren for over 7 years, shared that her role is to provide for their basic needs and their emotional needs:

It's been really important to me to be able to care for the grandkids. Especially when they were younger to offer them stability and continuity of care...it was really important for me for their emotional well-being, as well as their physical well-being, to be able to step up and help them through that process.

Terry commented that being a caregiver for her grandchildren was essentially like starting over again after having already raised their own children. She described her role being as a protector. She stated that being a protector for her grandchildren was different from what it was with her own children. According to Terry, being a caregiver as a grandparent was like:

It's raising another child all over again because my children are grown. There's more of a protection that you have over your grandchildren because you don't

want to see them to be in harm's way. So it was more of if "He's in my care, I know he's going to be fine." I don't have to worry about him going from one person's home. I had to take a lot of my life to balance it out because now, I have another little one, you know, which is my grandson, and I love him to death, but you know it's still starting all over. Because you still want to make sure that he still has the same needs as you would do for your own.

Challenges as a primary caregiver. Several participants spoke of the challenges they experienced while providing care for their grandchildren. Age and financial expenses were frequently mentioned as being challenges for the grandparents. Martha expressed her frustration that her age and finances are a challenge with raising young children:

Older people, grandparents that have already raised their kids, and now they've got to raise their grandkids. I don't think people realize that it does take sometimes a lot. Especially if you have more than one child, you're raising more than one. I don't think that some people realize that it can be an extra financial burden. I hate to say that.

Lucy shared that her age is a challenge being a provider for her grandchildren. She stated that she is forced to do more than what she had to do with her own children due to her age. Lucy shared the following comments about the challenges she faces:

It becomes a haphazard sometimes because of my age. I don't have friends the age of their parents where there would be children their age to play with, play dates. My friends got grown kids and grandkids too! So I have a lot more. I do a lot

more now hands-on wise with them than I did with mine because I was younger, and my peers had children my age, so they grew together.

Cindy also shared how getting older and raising her grandchildren has been a challenge. Furthermore, she shared the physical challenges that she is experiencing due to the COVID pandemic and how those challenges impact her:

It's a handful. It's a lot to do. I'm older now, which I don't have the strength that I used to have. It's a lot, there's three of them, and it's very difficult to keep track of three of them, and work and COVID came along, so everybody's homeschooled... trying [to have] Zoom meetings for three different little people, at different times during the day, is a lot.

Rachel described her experience as a primary caregiver as emotionally challenging because of her role as a parent first, then as a grandmother:

The difficulty has been to split our time. You kind of have to slip a hat off and on. At one moment, I'm a parental figure, and in my heart, I really want to be grandma. I want to be able to say yes to everything. I just want to be that warm fuzzy grandma. But at times, I have to wear a different role, and sometimes it doesn't feel fair to them. I just try to wear the grandma hat. And when I need to flip over and be a parental figure, than I do.

All participants shared they have experienced challenges due to their age and financial status, but Mary provided a poignant statement about her experience as caregiver, "I will say it has been a challenge, but definitely an amazing experience. The baby keeps me on my toes, so I am happy. It was a good decision, and I don't regret it."

Importance of Maintaining Contact with Incarcerated Parent

Participants were asked why they believed maintaining contact between the grandchildren and incarcerated parents was important. The two themes that emerged from this question was that the contact had a positive impact on the children and the contact maintained the bond between the grandchild and incarcerated parent. Themes related to the interview question are presented in the paragraphs that follow.

Positive Impact on Child. A number of comments reflected that maintaining contact with the parents had a positive impact on the children. Dolly shared that she witnessed a positive change in her grandson's behaviors when he speaks to his father. She stated that he would "come out of his shell." Dolly's comments below describes how her grandson opened up when speaking with his father:

I think it's a very positive thing because I think [my grandson] needs to speak with his dad. [My grandson] enjoys it. I did ask him is it something that [he wants] to do, and he said yes. They talk maybe a couple of times a week for maybe 10, 15 minutes, and [my grandson] really opens up with [his father]. [My grandson]'s very shy, and his dad actually brings a lot out of him. So I think it's good for both of them.

Cindy, who frequented both in-person visitations and phone communications, stated that the contact had more of a positive effect on her grandchildren rather than their incarcerated mother:

I think [the visits] helped the kids quite a bit. I think it broke the monotony for [my daughter]. I don't think it did what I was hoping it was going to do for [my daughter], but it did help the kids...

Cindy went further to share the impact maintaining contact has had on her grandchildren:

I think that's a positive thing. It's fun to watch how excited they get; if she's in a good place when she comes here, they want to feed her everything under the sun. It's almost like a role reversal. It's kind of weird. Your parents are supposed to be doing that for you, and here they are doing it for her.

Terry was adamant about her grandson maintaining a relationship with his mother. She shared what she witnessed of her grandson during his calls with his mother:

It was always good that they kept the communication because you can see it in the child. You can see it in his expression on his face. It was good because I would think at the time that she would really sit and think about who else she was affecting and not just think about herself with the situation that was going on. I hope you are getting a reality check.

Maintain Bond/Don't Forget Parent. Other participants indicated that maintaining contact was important because it helped to maintain a bond between the parents and children. The participants shared that being able to share developmental milestones and special events with the incarcerated parent, helped maintain a relationship between parents in the children. Kelly described how maintain communication is important as she shared an account of a milestone that her grandson experienced:

It's been up to me to make the communications work to keep them together so that they don't forget about her, and vice versa. I guess one thing would be things that they've done that she needed to see. Like the first time that the younger one dived, jumped off the diving board...Stay in contact so they don't feel forgotten and they can stay connected. It's just really important.

Mary also shared she believed maintaining contact was important because she didn't want her grandson to forget about his mother. She had taken custody of him when he was under a year old and wanted to make sure that he would know who his mother was. Mary commented the following:

I consider it very important because it is important for her to know that she hasn't been forgotten... I want him to know that his mother is still there, and I want them to have that relationship to know that he has his mother's love, and I hope that she's going to change.

Terry believed it was important for her grandson to have contact with his mother during her incarceration. She did not want her daughter's incarceration to interrupt the relationship between her grandson and daughter. Terry stated:

It is always important for a child to still bond with their parent. No matter what the circumstances are. He needed to know that she was still there, involved, even though he wasn't able to physically see her.

Dolly shared that her hope for continuing the communication between her grandson and his father was to maintain a bond. However, Dolly was concerned about the possible impact of the father's potential lengthy sentence. She stated:

The only concern is that [my grandson] may lose interest in keeping the communication up because "out of sight, out of mind" kind of thing. That's why I do keep the phone going with them, in hopes that they can just keep that bond going. Then they could still have that relationship. So, it does worry me that if he gets a long time that [my grandson] may just lose interest. It's already been quite a while since he has seen [his father].

Martha shared that she only had her mother growing up and did not want her grandson to experience not having a relationship with both parents since his father was not involved. She shared how she wanted her grandson to have a parent in his life:

He's never met his dad, and I think he needs to, at least even if it's just this, kind of level to have her around. I grew up without my dad. He died when I was very young, and I only had my mom, and I know what it's like to grow up without a dad. I couldn't imagine, I can't imagine not having both of my parents, not having neither one of my parents there for me when I was his age.

Cindy had hoped that the communication would maintain a bond between her daughter and grandchildren, but felt there was never a bond. She stated how her daughter acted upon her release:

I really thought it would help her keep a connection to them. It did not. When she finally came out, after being with them for several weeks, she told me that they were not the same kids that they were when she went in. I'm like, 'No, now they're older. They've learned things, and they've grown.' So she used that as an excuse, as a trigger to start her behavior again.

Experiences/Challenges with Maintaining Contact

Participants were asked four questions about their experiences with maintaining contact between the grandchild and incarcerated parent. The questions addressed the methods of contact, recalling a specific attempt to maintain contact, the positive experiences with maintaining contact, and challenges associated with maintaining contact. Themes related to the interview question are presented in the paragraphs that follow.

Difficulty associated with Phone Calls. When I asked participants about what methods of communication they used and their experiences, all participants shared that phone calls were the common forms of contact. A challenge or concern of most of the participants was being available and not missing phone calls as the calls were not predetermined. Dolly stated, "I try to make it accessible, I mean. [But] sometimes I miss the calls and I try not to do that. I try and have the phone on and ready when I think he might call..." Kelly shared that she was always concerned about being available for phone calls. She also shared that the financial costs associated with this form of contact was a challenge:

It's always anxious if I miss her call or don't get to the phone in time, or we're not there when she calls. It's kind of complicated when we first started doing accepting the collect calls. You don't hit the right buttons; you'll lose them. It costs a lot of money. You spend a lot of money on phone calls because she mostly calls us.

Cindy also shared that the cost of phone calls was expensive. She further described that the expenses and being available to accept calls was stressful for her. that was stressful for her to consider. She recounted her experience with her daughter's multiple calls within one day:

It's ridiculously expensive, for one. The cost is atrocious for them to call you. [My daughter] would call incessantly. She would call five or six times a day. Most of the time, I could not pick up. It's like \$3 a minute; it's ridiculous. Just having her to be able to talk to the kids is expensive. They'd be excited to talk to her, but it'd be super stressful for me while they're all trying to talk at one time, at her.

Cindy continued to share her account of the financial cost of phone and how they are limited in the forms of communication that are available in her area:

Communication is extremely difficult. It's hard to maintain. We live in a rural area. I know in bigger areas they'll have video and see each other. They don't have that available here. There's a lot of barriers there and trying to keep an open communication between them and their kids. I mean I've probably spent in 20 months that she was incarcerated, well over \$1500 in phone calls. I only accepted a fraction of them. If I'd accepted all of them, I'd be bankrupt. It's always on my end to accept or decline.

Martha shared that she could not afford the cost to have phone calls, but due to COVID, the detention center where her daughter is incarcerated was providing free phone calls for the inmates:

The detention center is giving the inmates free phone calls. [My daughter will] call and I do answer in case [my grandson] wants to talk to his mom. But of course, he never wants to talk to her when she calls... This may sound terrible but once their free calls stop, I'm not putting money on an account for her to call here. One, I can't afford it. Two [my grandson] doesn't want to talk to his mom.

Difficulty with in-person visits. When I asked participants about their experiences with maintaining contact, only a few shared that they would go for in-person visits. Those who did not go in-person (Lucy, Martha, Terry, and Rachel) shared that it was too far away of a location and expensive to visit in-person, or they did not want their grandchildren exposed to that environment. Lucy's comments reflect the participants'

general thoughts regarding in-person visits. She stated the following regarding visiting the incarcerated parent:

I didn't give it any effort to appear for a visit. Perhaps if I had my own transportation at the time, or I had a way to get there, and he wasn't so far, I'm sure I would have visited...I couldn't do it so I didn't worry about it and I didn't try it.

Participants who went for in-person visits described the physical environment and what it was like for their grandchildren to visit their parents. To illustrate, Cindy provided a detailed account of her experiences with taking her grandchildren to see their mother. She shared the stress she encountered when she would take her grandchildren to visit their mother at the jail:

It's very stressful because they're all super excited, they want to talk to her all at one time, there's one phone. There's usually a bunch of other people in there, and I'm just trying to get them to not put their hands in their mouths or touch something and put their hands in their mouths. At one point, my granddaughter found drugs that were on the visitor side. I had to call the police and have them come pick it up because I'm like, 'look, we're not going to be here with this stuff in here.' You're literally packed in there. It's all concrete. You have a phone. You don't know who touched the phone, when it was clean, nothing. You only get an hour. And at times it's hard to compete with the people on your side that are basically screaming, yelling, laughing, carrying on. On our side in this little tiny concrete room, with the people that they're talking to on the phone, and it's hard to hear. The kids have a hard time hearing. They have a hard time being understood,

so their mom doesn't really understand them. But they seem to do really well with it.

Cindy continued with how she felt that she had to compete with other visitors and their conversations. She details the chaotic environment by recounting an incident when she had to de-escalate an argument with the man sitting next to her:

It's chaotic. It's just kind of stressful because you don't know who you're going to be sitting next to and how their attitude is going to be that day. There was a young man who would get, screaming violent, at [the girlfriend he was visiting]. [The girlfriend is] on the other side crying, he's screaming, the babies are crying and I'm like, 'look son, you need to sit down or ending your visit right now because I'm not gonna put up with this 2 feet from you. It's not gonna happen' [chuckles]. I actually physically took the baby from the young man one time and told him to sit down, stop.

Dolly detailed that she was hesitant to take her grandson for in-person visitation, but later focused on the positive impact the contact with the father was having on her grandson:

At first I was terrified because I didn't want him touching anything in there because it's not the cleanest environment. I was a little skeptical at first taking him there. There are a lot of people there that are not nice, and he was being exposed to things that I really didn't care for. But the visits with his father were always positive visits. His dad always looked forward to seeing him. [My grandson] always looked forward to seeing his dad. And they would always have a good visit.

Participants also shared what it was like witnessing their grandchildren not being able to physically touch their parents during the in-person visits. For example, Casey stated that visiting her son with her grandchildren was difficult because of the no contact policy. Casey shared the following regarding the no contact during the visits:

We went one time [in-person], and it was behind glass. We couldn't touch him or nothing because, he was behind glass. We just went through the metal detectors, then we went through these doors and sit there, and then he's behind the glass. He was there waiting when we got there. That was the first, and that's my one and only time that I've been to see him since he's been locked up. [My grandchildren] didn't really understand, and you can see the hurting [in their] faces [because] they just couldn't touch him. They wasn't really saying too much because I think they were still trying to grab hold that they couldn't touch him.

Jasmine shared that she only took her great-grandchild to see her father in prison once because it was emotionally overwhelming and stressful. She shared how they all reacted during that in-person visit:

One time we did [visit in-person] and they said I can bring her in as long as she was a certain age. He got to really see her. Then he lost it. Kind of lost it. He said, 'Mama I don't want her to see me, looking at me like this.' She just started crying because she wanted to get in there and he didn't want her there. He didn't want her to see him like that. I was upset but I had been asking and they said to maintain, the child going to start screaming and hollering and carrying on like that. It was rough, it was rough for me. It was hard, it was hard. It was very, hard, very hard. Very uncomfortable thing.

Kelly disclosed that her daughter had been in and out of incarceration in different states and counties. Regardless of her daughter's location, she would make it a point to take her grandchildren to visit their mother. Kelly shared an account of when her grandchildren could not have physical contact with their mother during a visit:

While she was in jail, we actually did go to visit her twice. We couldn't touch her, you know. We'd see her through the glass. Which was my past experience, like when [my granddaughter] was little. We would go to the jail and see her through the glass and talk to her on the telephone.

Perceived Status of the Relationship with the Incarcerated/Previously Incarcerated Parents

Participants were asked to describe their relationship with the incarcerated parents. The two themes that emerged were that the relationships were strained/difficult or loving/understanding. Themes related to the interview question are presented in the paragraphs that follow.

Strained/Difficult Relationship. When asked about their current relationship with the incarcerated/previously incarcerated parent, some participants shared that they had a strained or difficult relationship with the parent. Cindy described her relationship with her daughter, who had been recently released from incarceration. She was frustrated that her daughter was raised the same as her other children, but continues to make bad decisions. Cindy shared:

It's very strained. She has a mental illness. She self-medicates frequently. You don't know which [daughter] is knocking on the door. It could be "happy go lucky" one, who hasn't used in a while, whose in a good place in her head. Or it

could be the one that's going to tell you that she's going to burn your house down. So it's very strained. It's very difficult... It's hard. It makes you, it makes you angry. Makes you angry at them because they're grown-ups. I know how I raised my daughter, and she was not raised to act the way she's acting.

Lucy stated that her relationship with her son is strained at times because she finds herself having to mentor him on how to be a parent to his children. Lucy shared the following regarding her relationship with her son:

On the motherhood side, I have to come in. I'm still his mother, so I have to instruct him – no, that's not a good word. I have to suggestively share with him how to do certain things certain ways that would behoove them all. Because he is their parent, yes. I'm still his mother, and I take care of them [grandchildren].

In her description of her relationship with her daughter, Martha shared how rocky it has been and that her daughter has been verbally abusive towards her:

Very rocky. If I had it my way when she calls here, I wouldn't answer the phone. I never know from day to day with her what it's going to be like. Her language, her behavior, her attitude.

Martha continued to share that she seeks to eventually end communication with her daughter because of her limited finances and the uncertainty of the relationship with her daughter:

This may sound terrible but once their free calls stop, I'm not putting money on an account for her to call here. Because one I can't afford it, two [grandson] doesn't want to talk to his mom. I feel that I don't need to know -- not knowing from day

to day with what her mood is going to be like. I don't want to have to deal with that anymore.

Loving/Understanding Relationship. Another theme that emerged from participants related their current relationship with the incarcerated/previously incarcerated parent was that the relationship was loving/understanding. When asked about her relationship with her daughter, Kelly stated, "I love her. Even though what she's put me through. I still love her. And I just want her to be close to her kids." Lacey shared that she had a strained relationship with the mother of her grandchildren, who was never incarcerated, but had an amicable relationship with the fathers who were previously incarcerated:

...with the dads, that's a different situation. I'm not their grandmother, so they talk to me on a better level because there's no discipline with them. They talk to me on a different level than their mom. They're not abusive talking to me and threatening me. They know that I got the kids for their own good. They're not fighting or saying, 'well, we don't want you to have the kids we know [that] you know what's best for the kids.'

Other participants shared that their relationships were in a better place and that they still wanted to be there for their children. Rachel shared, "I still have a good relationship with my daughter, struggling through her addiction issues." Dolly stated that her relationship with her daughter is improving:

It has gotten much better. In the beginning, it was very, very difficult. Her drug use made it very, very hard. But she has stabled herself off to where she's finally

grown up, and she understands everything she's done, and she's trying to make things a little bit better and easier.

Composite Summary of Themes

In this chapter, the findings revealed that grandparent caregivers for children of incarcerated parents felt compelled to intervene and take custody of their grandchildren. Some participants believed that the child's living environment was disruptive and unsafe. Participants believed that they offered the child stability and safety by taking custody. In addition, participants shared that seeking formal custody required petitioning the court. Filing the paperwork for formal custody was lengthy but with the informal assistance from courthouse employees and family friends, expedited the process.

The findings also revealed that grandparent caregivers for children of incarcerated parents seek to maintain contact between their grandchild and the incarcerated parent regardless of their finances and relationship with the incarcerated parent. Grandparents believed that maintaining contact had a positive impact on the child. It was also believed that by maintaining contact that the child would not forget about their parent. Several grandparents feared that because the parent was not physically present, the children may forget about them. Maintaining a bond appeared to motivate many grandparents to continue contact even when their relationship with the incarcerated parent was described as strained.

The findings further revealed that grandparent caregivers experienced challenges associated with contact maintenance. The procedure to accept phone calls from incarcerated parents can be stressful and may lead to disconnection or missed calls. The financial cost associated with phone calls is burdensome. Some participants have had to

decline calls. However, due to COVID-19, some participants shared that the prisons/jails are providing free phone calls because in-person visitation has been suspended.

Moreover, conducting in-person visitation was common for most grandparents.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive phenomenological study was to explore the grandparent caregivers' lived experiences of maintaining contact (i.e., visitation, phone calls, and written correspondence) between their grandchildren and the children's incarcerated parents. I conducted semistructured interviews with eleven grandmothers and great-grandmothers, who had formal or informal custody of their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The grandparents felt compelled to intervene and take custody of their grandchildren so that they may be a protector and a provider. Regardless of the financial, physical, and emotional challenges of becoming a primary caregiver at an advanced age.

In this chapter, I discussed the data collection process and shared the results of the data analysis. All participants responded to the interview questions based on their primary caregiver experiences and maintained contact between the grandchild and incarcerated parent. In Chapter 5, the findings are related to the current body of literature and the conceptual framework used for this study. The limitations of the research are acknowledged. I offer suggestions for future research in addition to the implications for positive social change resulting from this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore grandparent caregivers' lived experiences of making attempts to maintain contact between their grandchildren and the children's incarcerated parents. The experiences of grandparent caregivers are important to study because grandparents commonly assume the role of primary caregiver when a parent cannot care for the child (Poehlman-Tynan et al., 2019). There is a gap in the literature regarding the grandparents' lived experiences as they attempt to maintain contact between the incarcerated parents and the children they provide care. Much of the current research discusses family members' experiences, in general, and the barriers of in-person visitation with incarcerated individuals (e.g., Tasca, 2016; Tasca et al., 2016). For this study, I specifically focused on the grandparents' role as the primary caregiver and their lived experiences maintaining contact between the child and incarcerated parent.

For this study, I developed a descriptive phenomenological study and used Goode's role strain theory as a framework. I asked the participants nine questions to determine their lived experiences as the primary caregivers for their grandchildren. The following categories emerged from the data collection process: (a) events leading to gaining custody, (b) meaning of being a provider for a grandchild, (c) importance of maintaining contact with incarcerated parents, (d) experiences with maintaining contact with incarcerated parents, and (e) perceived status of the relationship with the incarcerated/previously incarcerated parents.

Interpretation of Findings

The results of the literature review in Chapter 2 revealed that taking on the role as a primary caregiver for a minor grandchild can place a strain on the grandparents' finances as they have to provide necessities (i.e., clothing, food, and school activities; (Guastaferrero et al., 2015). Guardianship can put a strain on their health (Hayslip et al., 2015) and put a strain on their emotions as they experience grief related to the loss of "grandparenthood" (Poehlmann et al., 2019; Sampson & Hertlein, 2015). Maternal grandparents are commonly family members who assume the role of caregiver. At the same time, their daughters are incarcerated because the biological fathers may be unable or unwilling to take the children (Raikes, 2016). Grandparent caregivers of children with incarcerated parents may have little or no time to prepare for their new roles as caregivers, which may cause them to experience strain (Guastaferrero et al., 2015). In the next section, I will interpret the key findings of this study and discuss how the results relate to previous research findings.

Demographics of Participants

In the interviews, I collected demographic information from each participant. Obtaining details concerning the participants age, relation to the minor child, race, and the type of custody the participants held was important to the study. The participants of my study were grandmothers and great-grandmothers who ranged in ages 46 to 74 years old. The average age of my participants, 57 years, was just under the projected age stated by Wagstaff and Gale. In their report about grandparent caregivers for grandchildren, Wagstaff and Gale (2019) stated that the majority of grandparents taking on

responsibilities for grandchildren are women aged 60 years or older. The majority of participants in my study were maternally related to the minor grandchildren.

The participants of this study were more racially diverse than initially expected. According to the literature, Martin (2017) reported that the profile of the incarcerated parents is disproportionately persons of color. Wagner and Kopf (2015) analyzed U.S. Census data on the race and ethnicity of people incarcerated which showed that Blacks are incarcerated at a rate of about five times that of Whites. In my study, there were six Black participants and five White participants.

Lastly, in my study the majority of the participants had formal custody of their grandchildren. My initial search of the literature did not compare grandparent caregivers to those who had and did not have custody. However, I did discuss the benefits of formal custody granted through the courts. Lee and Blitz (2016) reported that to have formal custody allows for grandparent caregivers to have decision-making authoring with regards to their grandchildren.

Events Leading to Obtaining Custody

In the interviews, I asked participants to share the events that led to them gaining custody of their grandchildren. The data revealed that most participants felt compelled to intervene and take custody of their grandchildren. The participants believed that their grandchildren were living in a disruptive environment and lacked stability. I did not come across this information in the initial literature review. In a subsequent search of the literature, I came across research conducted by Gair et al. (2019) who found that grandparent caregivers wanted to help safeguard their grandchildren from entering the foster care system. Furthermore, according to Hayslip et al. (2020), more grandparents

reported feeling forced into taking custody of their grandchildren. This finding coincided with my study because participants shared a sense of urgency to intervene because of the lifestyle of their parents and impending jail time.

Another theme that emerged from the data analysis include the actions participants took to gain custody of their grandchildren. Participants detailed their experiences with obtaining legal custody and formal caregiving arrangements through the court system. The data revealed that the majority of the participants sought formal custody of their grandchildren which supports the research findings by Beltran and Epstein (2013), which stated that licensed kinship caregivers have greater access to resources and programs to cover placement-related expenses. A participant shared that before retrieving her grandchildren from foster care, she and her husband became licensed foster care parents to access resources. This theme is supported by the findings of Whitley et al. (2016) whom reported that licensed kinship caregivers have greater access to resources and programs to cover placement-related expenses. Moreover, participants who had formal custody arrangements of their grandchildren expressed how they had to navigate procedures of obtaining custody as it was happening. This finding supports the existing literature reported by Fruhauf et al. (2015), who reported grandparent caregivers have a more challenging time navigating the social service system than other caregivers.

Experiences as Provider for Grandchild

In the interviews, I asked participants to share what it meant to be a primary caregiver for their grandchildren and to share some of their experiences. I asked this question to extend the current literature which was about the duties performed by a

grandparent primary caregiver and the challenges they experience (e.g., Andersen & Fallesen, 2015; Carr et al., 2012; Sampson & Herltein, 2015). My thematic analysis revealed that participants identified being a primary caregiver as a protector, a constant, and provide the basic and emotional needs for their grandchildren. This finding was not in the initial search of the literature. I found in a subsequent search of the literature, that grandparent caregivers are devoted to the well-being of their grandchildren, especially when they are exposed to child maltreatment or their parents' absence (Rhyness et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2018).

Another theme that emerged were challenges that participants encountered as providers for their grandchildren. Participants in my study shared that they felt their age, limited income, and caregiving responsibilities was a challenge at times. Some reported that they attempted managing play dates with parents who were younger than themselves to have age appropriate playmates. These findings align with the findings from a study by Carr et al. (2012), who found that grandmothers felt burdened caring for their grandchildren due to strained finances, lack of family support, declining health, and a restricted social schedule. Moreover, Sampson and Herltein (2015) found that grandparents are exhausted from their daily routines or are shunned from attending social events because they had custody of their grandchildren.

Participants reported that taking care of their grandchild has been an extra financial burden. Some shared that they had limited finances because of the added responsibility for caring for their grandchildren. According to the research custodial grandparent families are economically disadvantaged compared to other households raising children (Cox, 2014; Bailey et al., 2013; Dunifon et al. 2014; Pilkauskas &

Dunifon, 2016). The data from this study further supports the literature as participants shared that they experienced financial burdens.

Importance of Maintaining Contact with Incarcerated Parent

In the interviews, I asked participants to what extent did they believe it was important to maintain contact between their grandchildren incarcerated parent. Participants revealed that they felt maintaining contact with the parent had a positive impact on their grandchildren. This findings aligns with the researched conducted by McCarthy and Adams (2019) who focused on the positive affect that maintaining contact with an incarcerated loved one has on the family. The researchers theorized allowing children to nurture and sustain a relationship with their incarcerated parents reduces recidivism in the parent and increases chances of reunification upon release.

Another theme from my study revealed participants believed that maintaining contact would maintain the bond between both parent and child so as not to forget about one another. Some participants shared that they feared that their grandchildren would forget about the parent and no longer love them or even not want to have a relationship with them in the future. According to literature, many grandparents seek to maintain family continuity via sustained contact between the child and incarcerated parents (Robillard et al., 2016; Tartaro & Levy, 2017; Tasca, 2016). Family continuity is essential for increasing the likelihood of reunification between the incarcerated parents and their child post-incarceration (Robillard et al., 2016).

Experiences/Challenges with Maintaining Contact

In the interviews, I asked participants to share their communication methods as well as the positives and challenges encountered with maintaining contact. When asked

about their experiences with maintaining contact, all participants indicated that telephone calls were a commonplace form of contact. The results from this study support the existing literature stated by Pierce (2015), which indicated that telephone communication is the popular form of contact. Some participants shared a barrier to phone contact was the cost of phone calls. According to Shlafer and colleagues (2020), phone calls can be expensive, making this method of communication difficult for families with limited financial resources. Some participants shared that they had to reject some calls because of the high cost.

Another theme that emerged from the data analysis was the difficulty participants experienced when conducting in-person visits at the jail/prison. Only a few stated that they would make it a point to visit the incarcerated parent in-person. The participants that did not go for in-person visitation shared that they lacked transportation and couldn't find someone to take them to the prison. The findings from my study is supported by the existing literature which found that the decision to conduct in-person visitation depends on the cost of transportation, the caregiver's availability, and the quality of the relationship between the incarcerated parent and caregiver (Folk et al., 2019; Johnson & Easterling, 2015; Kautz, 2017). Another participant shared that she did not want to expose her grandchild to the prison environment which aligns with results from Harris (2013) who found that grandparents seek to protect the children from further negative experiences due to the parents' incarceration and may choose not to take them for in-prison visitation.

Additionally, another theme that emerged was participants described that they experienced a chaotic environment during their in-person visits at the prison facility. This

finding aligned with the literature according to Kautz (2017), who reported detention facilities are not child-friendly or do not allow minor visitors. As one participant shared, she was initially unable to take her great-grandchild for an in-person visitation because she was under the age of 5 at the time of her father's incarceration. Visitation policies at local jails and state prisons vary and visitors may not learn of them until they arrive to the facility (McLeod & Bonsu, 2018).

Perceived Status of Relationship with the Incarcerated/Previously Incarcerated Parents

In the interviews, I asked participants to describe their current relationships with the incarcerated or previously incarcerated parents. Most participants shared that they had a strained or difficult relationship with the incarcerated parent. Some participants stated the relationship was strained because of the parents' choices that resulted in their incarceration. Other participants disclosed that the relationship was rocky and that they often experienced abusive language from the incarcerated parent. This finding extends the existing literature. I was unable to locate literature that focused primarily on the relationship between the grandparent caregiver and incarcerated parent. The current research is about the status of the relationship with an incarcerated individuals and caregivers whom are in amorous relationships with the incarcerated individual (e.g., Song et al., 2018; Tasca, 2018; Wallace et al., 2016). Moreover, I was not able to locate research that is about the relationship between the parent and imprisoned adult child. The literature is typically centered around parents and imprisoned minor children (e.g., Aldridge et al., 2011; McCarthy & Adams, 2019; Sturgis et al., 2011).

The second theme that emerged during this analysis was participants perceived their relationships with the incarcerated or previously incarcerated parent as loving and understanding. In my analysis of the interviews, I recognized that the most of the participants who expressed having a loving and understanding relationship were the parent or grandparent of the incarcerated parent. Participants had an unconditional love for their incarcerated child. This finding extends the research since the current literature is about the negatives feelings parents have towards there imprisoned adult child (e.g., Arditti, 2016; Raikes, 2016). Gueta (2018) reported parents of prisoners were optimistic that their child's incarceration would be a wake-up call for their child and that they would change for the better.

Interpretations of Findings and Theoretical Framework

Based on the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 2, related themes emerged from the interview responses. Role strain theory is built upon the premise that an individual occupying multiple responsibilities is more likely to experience an increase in perceived strain because of that person's need to perform in multiple social roles (Goode, 1960). Through the role strain theory, I examined the lived experiences of the grandparent caregivers while caring for a child with an incarcerated parent and as they attempt to maintain contact between the child and incarcerated parent.

In my research study, one of the themes were related to the challenges as a primary caregiver. Several participants shared how it felt like they were starting over with raising children after having raised their own. The findings also revealed that grandparents split their time as a full-time parent instead and organizing recreational activities and tending to schoolwork. The findings are in alignment with role strain theory

since participants revealed experiences of role relationship demand from several activities. The role demand produced strain from the expectations associated with being a primary caregiver.

One of the categories that emerged was the importance of maintaining contact with incarcerated parents. Several participants believed it was important to maintain contact to maintain a bond between the child and the incarcerated parent so as not to forget about one another. Participants revealed that the financial costs associated with maintaining phone calls and conducting in-person visitation were a burden. Nevertheless, the grandparents would continue the contact because of the perceived positive impact it was having. This finding is also in alignment with role strain theory because with limited resources, the grandparents made it a point to sustain communication.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of this study was the change in the data collection procedure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. My initial data collection method was to conduct in person interviews with the participants. In person interviews could have allowed me to observe nonverbal cues during the participants responses. In addition, conducting in-person interviews could potentially build rapport with the participants. Video conferencing technology such as Zoom or FaceTime were not used because it could potentially impose a technological barrier for participating in the study.

The other limitation of this study was relying on the participants' narratives, known as self-reported data. Self-reported data is susceptible to selective memory, exaggeration, and telescoping (McGregor, 2018). Self-reported data cannot be verified and must be taken at face value. In order to mitigate this limitation, I used clarification

and reframing questions as a means of gathering concrete details and feelings related to participant stories.

Recommendations

As primary caregivers for children of incarcerated parents, grandparents are a unique and understudied population (McCarthy & Adams, 2018). Little is known about the lived experiences of grandparents who seek to maintain contact between their grandchildren and the children's incarcerated parents. Based on the strengths and limitations of this study, some recommendations are proposed for further research.

First, I recommend that additional phenomenological studies should be conducted to examine the lived experiences of grandparent caregivers for children with incarcerated parents. In my study, I was able to recruit participants in different parts of the United States. Future research should include more participants located in multiple states to increase the generalizability of the study.

Second, though the study was open to all grandparent caregivers of incarcerated children, the participants of this study were grandmothers and great-grandmothers only. More studies are needed to include grandfathers who are primary caregivers for their grandchildren. There were participants in my study that mentioned being married, but I did not focus on the participants' marital status. Future studies should include grandparent caregivers who are in marriages or long-term relationships to explore the role dynamic between the couples and their lived experiences as primary caregivers for children of incarcerated parents.

Implications

The information collected from this study can provide insight into experiences of grandparent caregivers who provide care for their grandchildren due to parental incarceration. Increased knowledge about these experiences of grandparent caregivers can inform human service agencies to implement strategies to facilitate and sustain contact between families and their incarcerated family members. Positive social change is promoted by this study through the opportunity to learn about and understand the lives of grandparents who are primary caregivers.

My dissemination plan is to compile my study results into a 1 to 2-page document with visually appealing fonts and images. I plan to share my findings with my colleagues in academia and local human service professionals whose clientele consists of kinship caregivers for imprisoned parents. Some participants shared in their concluding statements that counselors and caseworkers do not stress the importance of maintaining contact with their loved ones. The participants in the study expressed experiencing difficulty with initial and continued contact with the incarcerated parent because they did not know the contact procedures. This study's findings can also contribute to the existing literature related to grandparent caregivers who seek to maintain contact with the incarcerated parent to preserve the parent-child relationship.

Conclusion

This study effectively provided first-hand accounts of the lived experiences of grandparents who are primary caregivers for their grandchildren with incarcerated parents. As previously stated, caregivers for children of incarcerated parents are a unique and understudied population. The results from this study supported the literature about

the struggles and barriers experienced by grandparent caregivers, but it also provided insight into the barriers associated with maintaining contact. The most significant insight from this study was that the grandparent caregivers were adamant about maintaining contact between their grandchild and incarcerated parent, regardless of the parents' criminal behavior, and at times regardless of the financial cost. The grandparents believed it was important for both the grandchild and parent to process the parents' absence.

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Appendix A: Permission Email for Participant Recruitment

Greetings _____,

My name is Idonia Barrett, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I came across your organization through the _____ website. My research is about The Lived Experiences of Grandparents as Primary Caregivers for Children of Incarcerated Parents. In this study, I seek to obtain information concerning the experiences of grandparent caregivers as they attempt to maintain contact between the grandchild(ren) and incarcerated parent. This research can contribute to the existing literature related to grandparent caregivers who seek to co-parent with the incarcerated parent to maintain parent-child relationships for reunification.

With your permission, I hope that you may share my advertisement flyer with your clientele. I live in Hampton, Virginia, but participants can be from anywhere in the United States. I will use telephone interviews and provide a small token of gratitude to my participants. This study is voluntary, and the individual's identity will be protected.

You can call the Research Participant Advocate at my university at (XXX) XXX-XXXX. Furthermore, my Walden University's approval number for this study is 05-26-20-0494601, and it expires on XXXX, 2021.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Idonia K. Barrett

Ph.D. Candidate, Human Services

Walden University

email: xxxxxxxxxxxx

phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer/Study Invitation E-Mail/Online Forum Post

**Seeking Grandparent Caregivers for 1 hour interview,
\$20 Visa Gift Card**
(Open for 2 weeks)

Are you or someone you know raising or have raised a grandchild due to the parent's incarceration?

Share your story in a doctoral research study on the experiences of grandparents as primary caregivers for children of incarcerated parents.

Criteria for participation:

- ✚ English as the primary language
- ✚ Primary caregiver for a grandchild, great-grandchild, or great-great-grandchild because of their parent's incarceration
- ✚ Have or had custody of your grandchild within the last 3 years and that they were in your care for no less than 1 year
- ✚ The incarcerated parent could be serving a jail or prison sentence, being held awaiting trial or sentencing

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact:

RESEARCHER
Idonia K. Barrett
Doctoral Student of Walden University
College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
XXX-XXX-XXXX
Email: xxxxxxxxxx

Your participation in the study is voluntary and your identity will be protected.

The stories and information you provide will be used for research purposes only.

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research,
or if
you feel you have been placed at risk; you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects
Institutional Review Board through Walden University IRB@mail.waldenu.edu. Walden University's
approval number for this study is XXXXXXXX and it expires on May 25th, 2021.

Appendix C: Interview Questionnaire

Lived Experiences of Grandparent as Primary Caregivers for Children of Incarcerated Parents

Interview Identifier/Code: _____ Date: _____

Age: _____ Gender: _____

What is your relation to the minor child(ren) in your care? Please choose one:

Grandparent Great-Grandparent Great-Great Grandparent

Race/Ethnicity: _____

Level of Education: _____

Occupation: _____

1. How many grandchildren are in your care?
2. Do you have a formal caregiving arrangement for the child/children?
3. How old is your grandchild/grandchildren?
4. How long have they been in your care?
5. What is your relation to the incarcerated parent?
6. How long will they be incarcerated?
7. Is this the first time you have cared for this child? If not, how many times before and for how long?

Interview Questions

1. Please share with me the events that led to you gaining custody of your grandchild/grandchildren.

2. What does taking on the role as primary caregiver for your grandchild(ren) mean to you?
3. Tell me about your relationship with your grandchild(ren)'s incarcerated parent.
4. To what extent do you consider maintaining communication between your grandchild(ren) and their parent important?
5. Can you share with me a time when your grandchild(ren) had communication with their parent during their incarceration?
6. Please tell me about the specific things you do to maintain communication between your grandchild(ren) and their incarcerated parent?
7. What has been your experience with maintaining communication your grandchild(ren) and their incarcerated parent?
8. What were some of the challenges that you found attempting to maintain communication?
9. Can you share with me some of the positive experiences in attempting to maintain communication between your grandchild and their incarcerated parent?