

The Rich Ethnic and Racial Diversity of Grandparent Caregivers: Portraits in Resilience

Esme Fuller-Thomson, PhD

Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto

Esme.fuller.thomson@utoronto.ca

Plenary Session I

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Overview

1. Profile of grandparent caregivers
2. Outcomes of kinship care for children
3. Ethnic variations among caregivers
4. Historical & current context of caregiving
 - African American
 - Hispanic (Mexican American & Central American)
 - American Indian / Alaskan Native
5. Common issues & policy implications

How Many Grandparent Caregivers in the U.S.?

- 2.5 million Americans report they are “responsible for most of the basic needs” of co-resident grandchild(ren)
- 970,000 (37%) caregiving without the grandchild’s parent in the household

The majority of grandparent caregivers are from which racial/ethnic group?

Racial/Ethnic Distribution of Grandparent Caregivers

- 50% Non-Hispanic White
- 24% African American
- 3% Asian
- 2% American Indian

- 19% Hispanic (of any race)

Grandparent Caregivers in Georgia

- 100,000 Georgians raising grandchildren
- 38,000 caregiving without the grandchild's parent in the household.
 - 48% Non-Hispanic White
 - 46% African American
 - 3% Hispanic (any race)

U.S. Children in the Foster Care System

- 513,000 children in foster care
 - 58% children of color
- African American 3 times as likely as non-Hispanic Whites to be in the foster care system.
- One-quarter of children in foster care were living with relatives (i.e. kinship care)

Child Welfare League of America, 2009

Why are children being raised by grandparents?

Parental

- Mental Illness
- Drug or alcohol addiction
- Incarceration
- Teen-age pregnancies
- Neglect and Abuse
- Physical illness (cancer, HIV-AIDS)
- Death
- Other reasons

Why are Child Welfare Agencies Using Kinship Care?

- More children coming into care
- Shortage of traditional foster care homes
- Preference for culturally similar placements
- Policies encouraging kinship foster care placements

Policies influencing Kinship Care

- Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978
 - Preference given to kinship care arrangement
- 1979 ruling of Miller vs Youakim
 - Relatives who meet foster care licensing standards must be paid the same as non-relative foster parents
- Adoption & Safe Families Act (ASFA) 1997
 - Kinship care placements emphasized

Harris & Skyles, 2008

How do children raised by
grandparents compare to those
raised by two parents?

Comparable Health Outcomes to children in 2 parent families

- Asthma
- Headaches
- Accidents or Injuries

Solomon & Marx 1995

Behavioral Outcomes

- Comparable
 - % Obedient in school
 - % Behaved for teachers
 - % Never expelled

Solomon & Marx 1995

School Outcomes Compared to Two Parent Families

- Children raised by grandparents were
 - Less likely to be rated as above average students
 - More likely to have repeated a grade
- Comparable to children in single parent families on these outcomes.

How do children raised by
grandparents compare to children
in foster care?

Findings from the
Campbell Collaboration Systematic Review
M. Winokur, A. Holtran & D. Valentine

Mental Health

- Children in kinship care were
 - twice as likely to report positive emotional health
 - only half as likely as foster children to experience mental illness

Service Utilization

- Foster children more likely to receive mental health services than kinship care children
- Use of physicians comparable for foster and kinship children

Safety

- Kinship care children less likely to experience “a substantiated incident of abuse or neglect while in an out-of-home placement setting” than children in foster care
- But kinship families have lower levels of supervision

Behavioral Development

- Lower levels of internalizing behaviors
 - (e.g. withdrawn, passive behaviors)
- Lower levels of externalizing behaviors
 - (e.g. aggressive, delinquent behaviors)
- Higher levels of competence and adaptive behaviors

Placement Stability

- Children in foster care were three times as likely as kinship care children to experience 3 or more placements.

Winokur et al., 2009

- Why does placement stability matter?
 - Associated with school stability
 - Better education outcomes
 - Reduces behavior problems
 - Reduces emotional problems
 - Improves child's well being

Permanency

- Children in kinship care were more likely to remain in care than were children in foster care.
- No significant difference in reunification rates with parents.
- Children in foster care more than twice as likely to be adopted as those in kinship care.
 - Grandparents reluctant to terminate parental rights
- Relatives more likely to assume legal custody of the children who were in kinship care.

Educational Outcomes

- Tendency for foster care children to be more likely to have to repeat a grade than kinship care children ($p < .10$).

Winokur et al., 2009

Family Relations

- Attachment scores favored children in kinship care ($p < .10$)

Winokur et al., 2009

- Kinship care children retain connections with extended family.

Winokur et al., 2009

- Kinship care children more likely to report they “always felt loved” (94%)

Wilson & Conroy, 1999

Additional Benefits of Kinship Care

- Familiar environment & less traumatic transition
- Keeps sibling groups together
- Placements match child's culture and religion
- Less social stigma for the child living with a grandparent

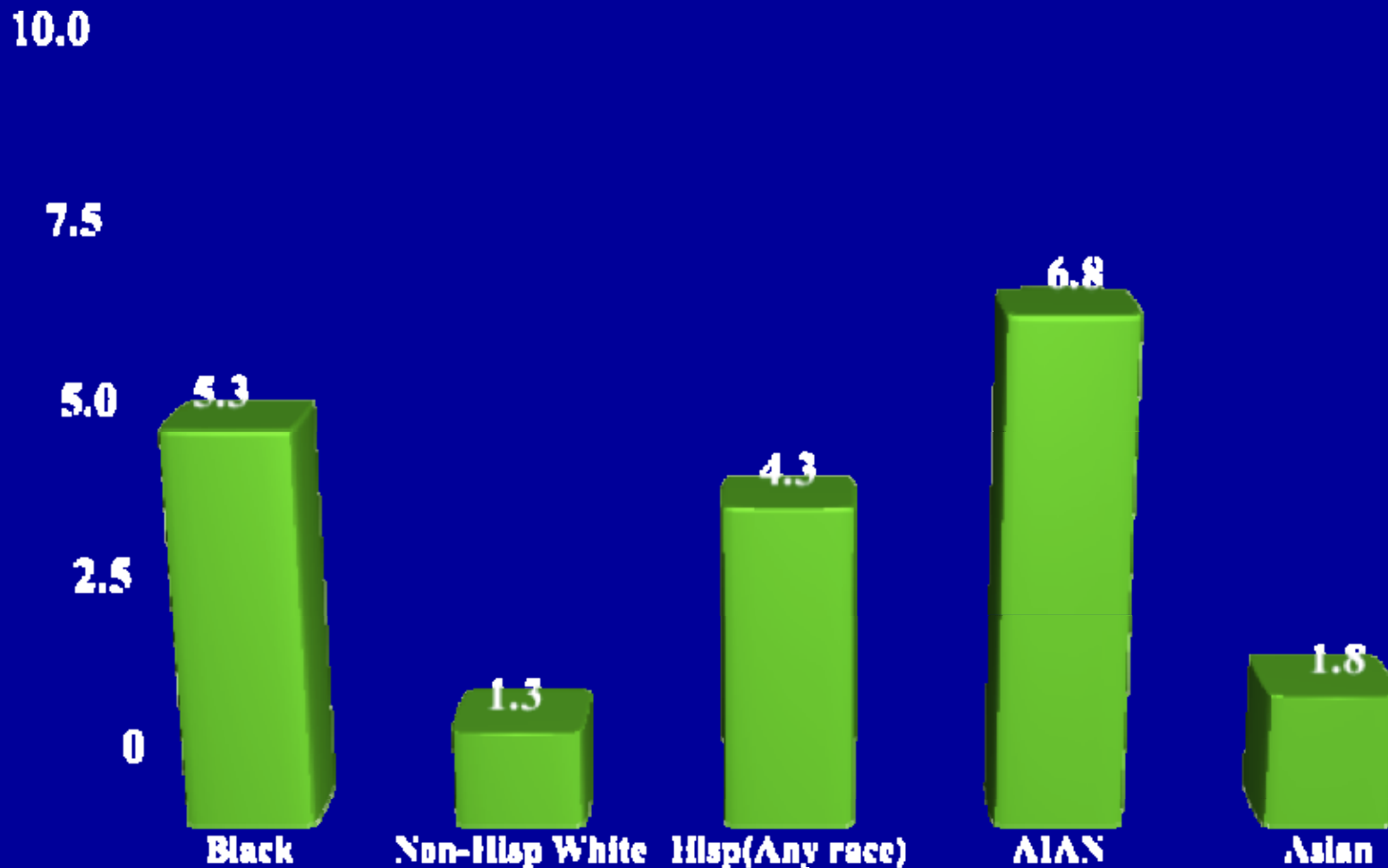
Disadvantages of Kinship Care

- Higher levels of parent-caregiver conflict
- Kinship caregivers are, on average, less educated and poorer than non-kin foster parents
- The kin caregivers neighborhoods are more likely to be violent and unhealthy
- Kinship caregivers get less training and support from the child welfare system

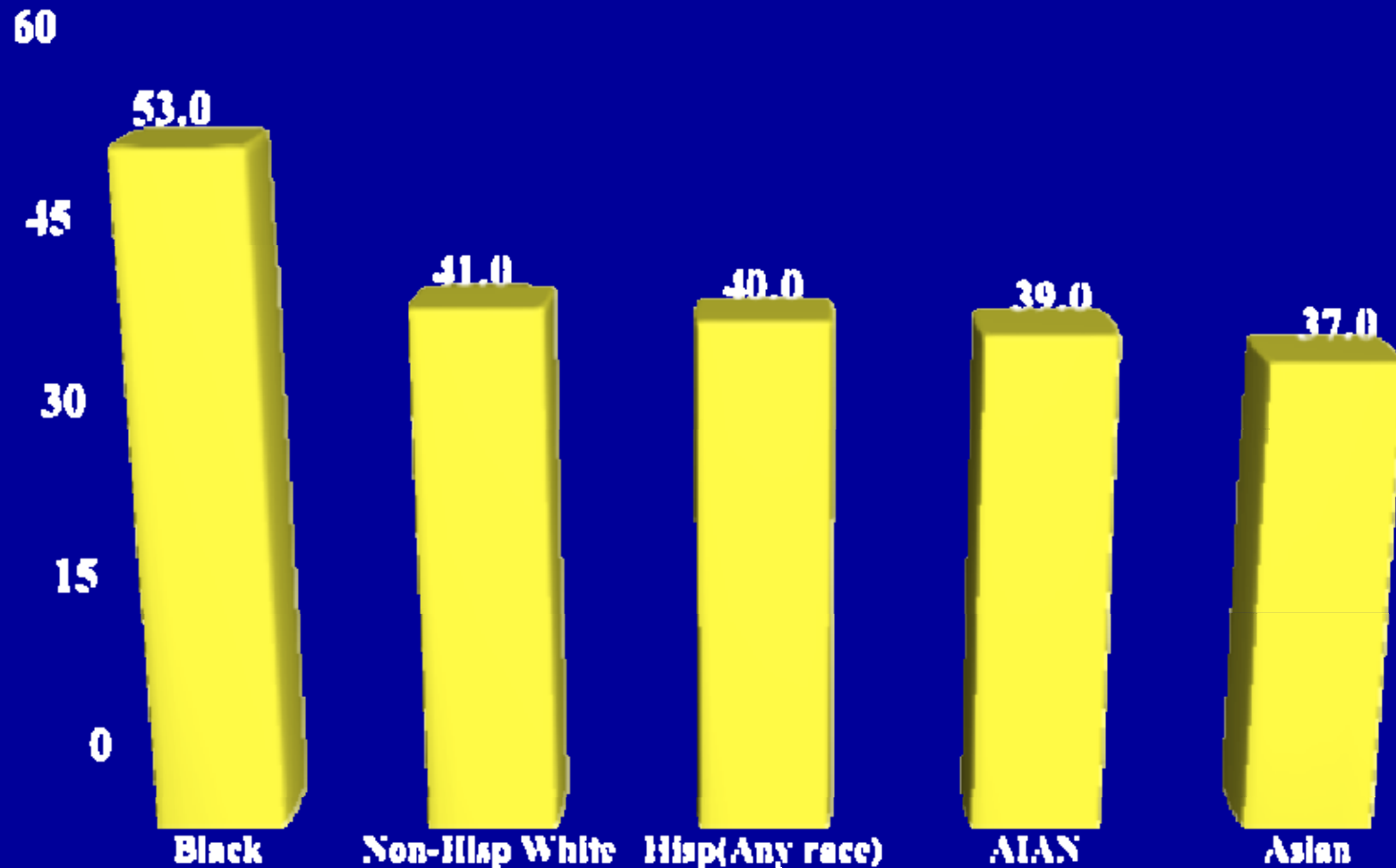
Cuddeback, 2004

What do we know about
ethnic and racial variation
in grandparent caregiving?

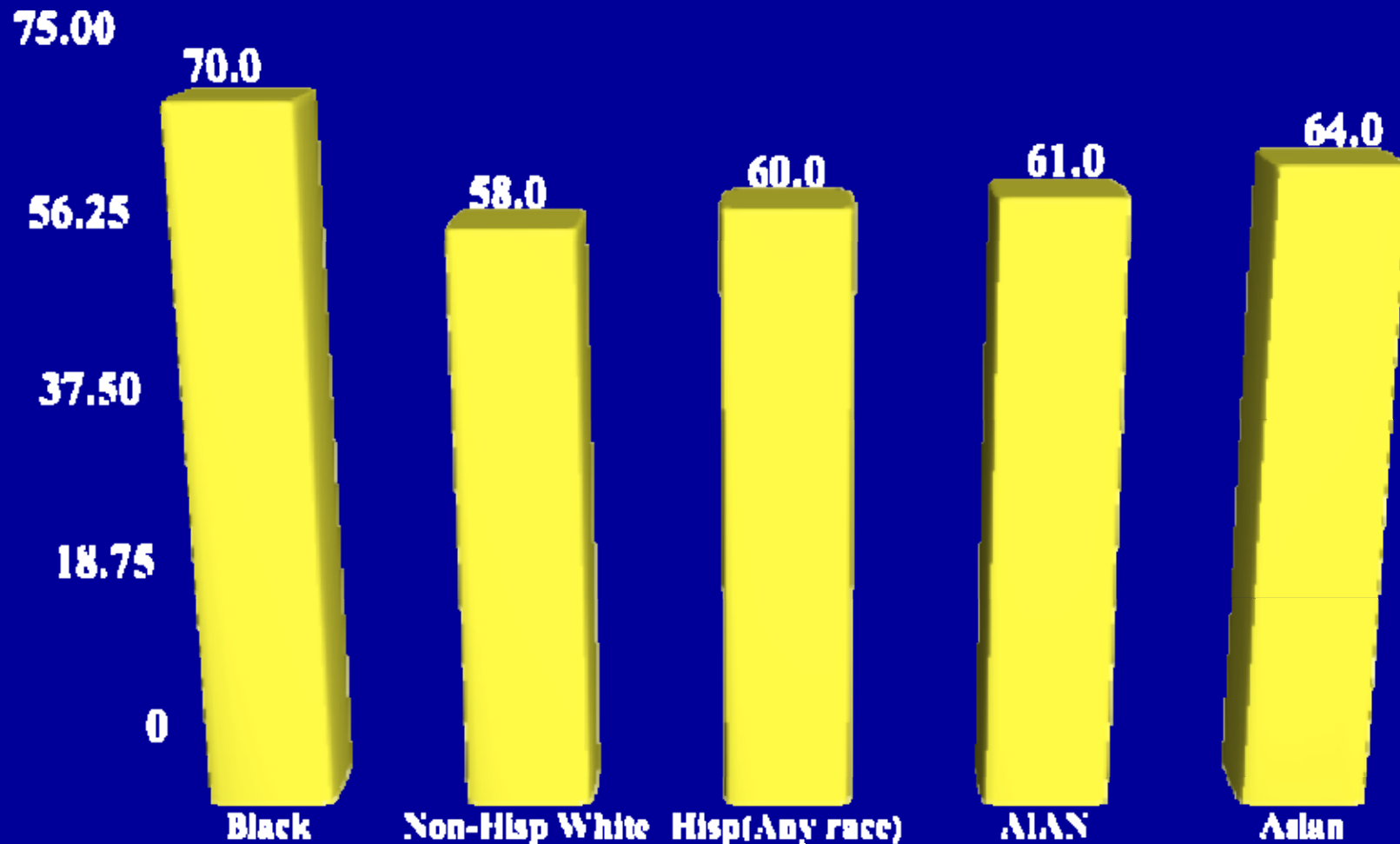
Racial/Ethnic Difference in % of Americans 45+ Raising Grandchildren American Community Survey 2003



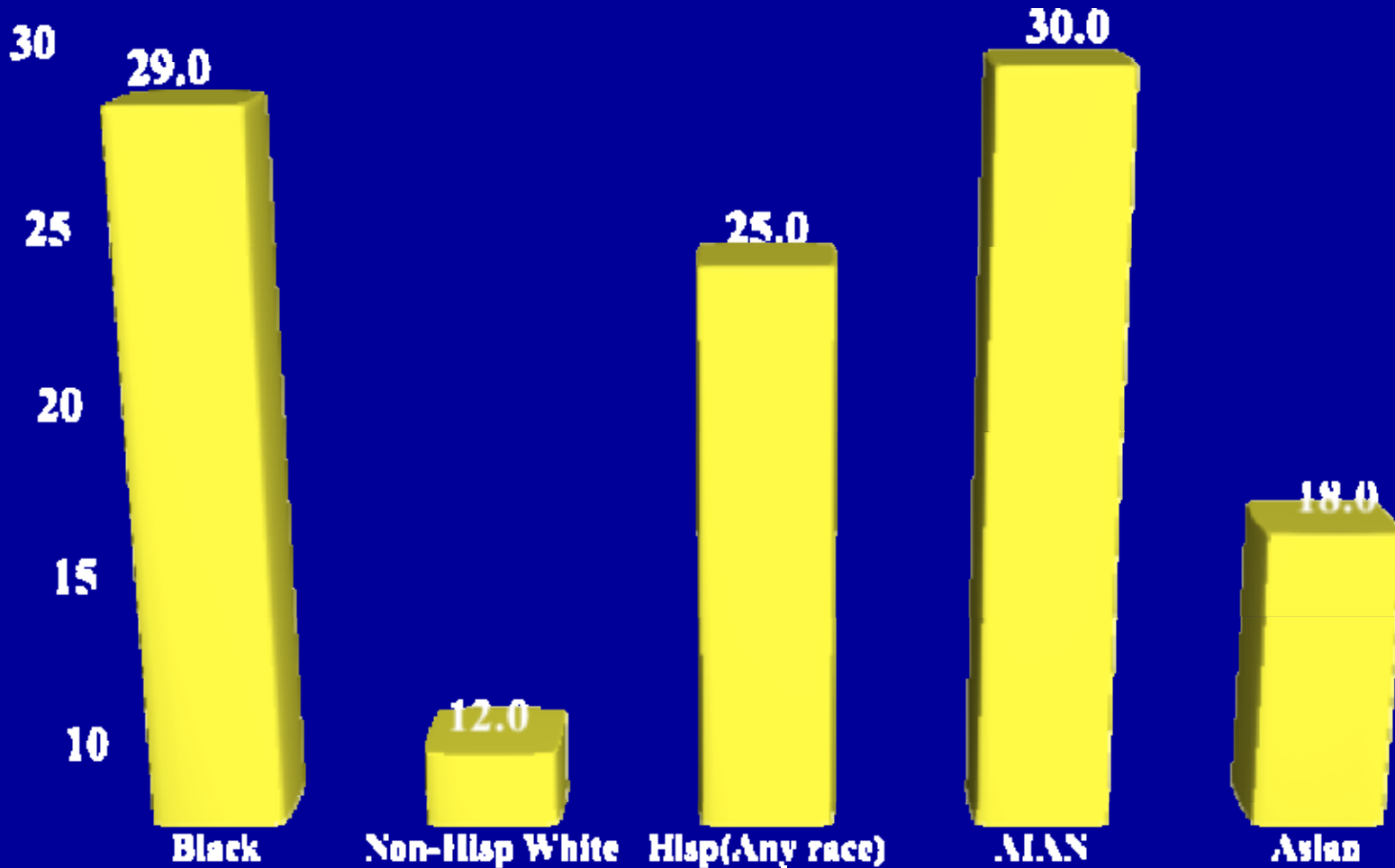
Among Caregivers Aged 45+
% Raising Grandchildren for 5 or More Years
American Community Survey 2003



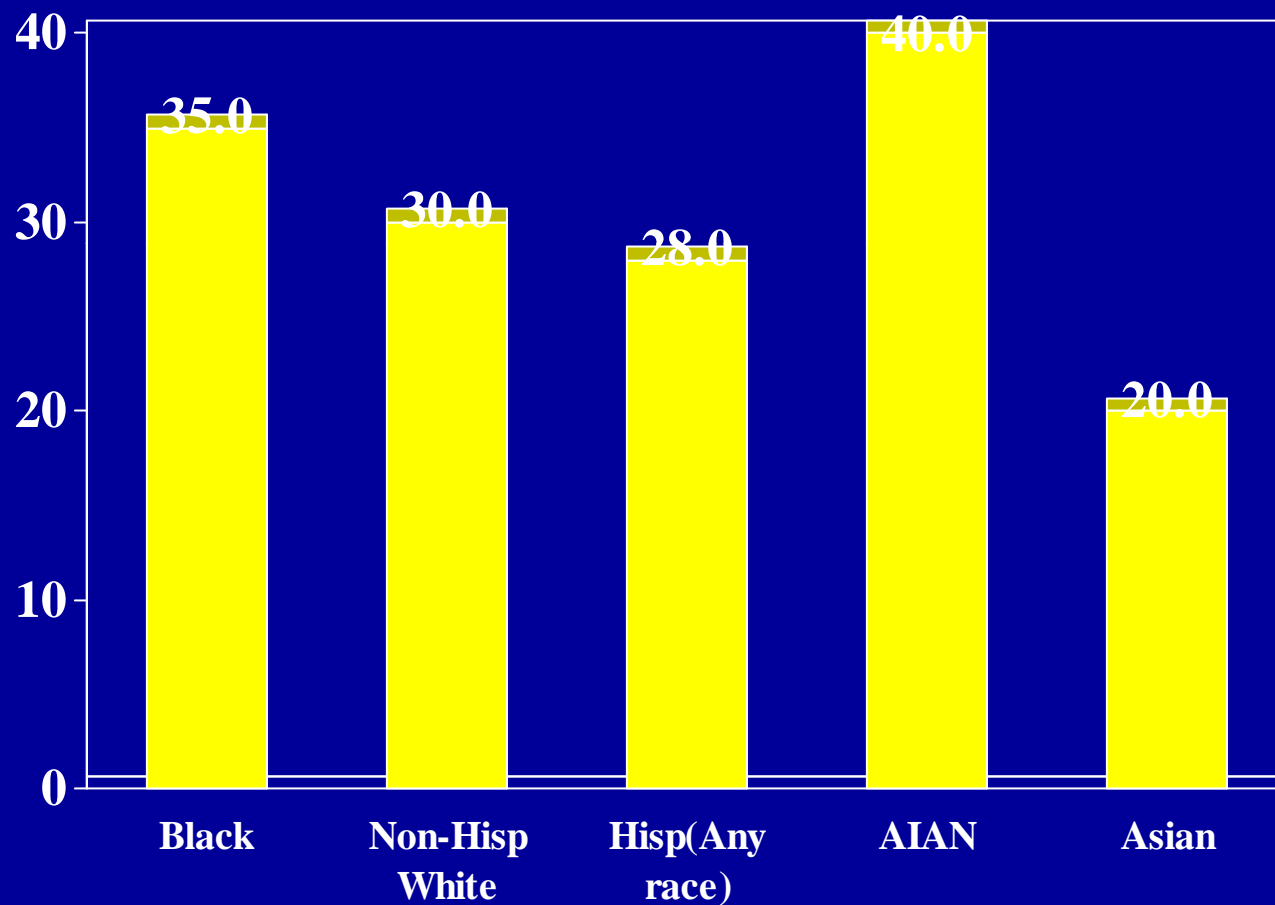
Among Caregivers Raising Grandchildren
% Female
American Community Survey 2003



Among Grandparents Aged 45+ Raising Grandchildren
% Living in Poverty
American Community Survey 2003



Among Grandparents Aged 45+ Raising Grandchildren
% with any Disability
American Community Survey 2003



Problems with the Literature

- Too much focus on negatives
- Most emphasis on differences between races
- Important to compare caregivers to their non-caregiving peers within each race
- Little research on interventions to improve outcomes

Theories of Intersectionality: Interlocking issues of race, class, & gender

Gendered nature of society

- Family caregiving is primarily a female activity
- Caregiving influences females labor force participation

Race influences life opportunities

- Inequalities in access to labor market and education
- White women earn more, on average, than African American men.

Class (e.g. education, income and wealth) influence opportunities.

- Access to the labor force and health insurance
- Neighborhoods with high crime, poor schools and few resources

Browne & Misra, 2003; Stroller & Gibson, 2000

Ageism also influences options

- Older grandparent caregivers have fewer employment options
- May experience ageism in interactions with school and health officials

African American Grandparents Raising Their Grandchildren

Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 2005

Grandparent Caregiving among African Americans

- 29% of African American grandmothers and 14% of African American grandfathers have had primary responsibility for caring for a grandchild for six months or more at some point in their lives.

- Current rates of children being raised by grandparents are NOT the highest recorded
- 1940 rates were higher!
- African Americans children 5 times as likely to be raised by grandparents as White children in 1940.

(Uhlenberg & Kirby, 1998)

Long tradition of grandparent involvement in childrearing

- Rooted in West African extended family traditions
- Protected children during the deliberate break-up of families during slavery
- Great migrations of African Americans from the South moving North to find work
- Extended family required to work together in context of poverty & unemployment

(Uhlenberg & Kirby, 1998; Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 2005)

Beliefs about Grandparents' Role

- African Americans at all ages perceive grandparents role as important and integrated in the family
- Major role for grandparents providing assistance, teaching values and religious faith
- Integrated role of fictive kin
- Burton's work suggests early non-normative aged grandparents (aged 25-38) have more role strain than on-time grandparents (aged 42-57).

(Burton, 1996; Hunter & Taylor, 1998)

Sources of Support for African American Grandparents

- Access to kin and fictive kin
- In some communities, many grandparent caregivers
 - Share support and resources
 - Less stigma in caregiving
- Prayer and religion are important (Brown & Mars, 2000)

Child Welfare System Excluded African Americans in 18th & Early 19th Century

- Early charity organizations were primarily focused on the needs of new immigrant White children.
- African American community
 - Emphasized self-reliance on relatives and fictive kin
 - Developed own philanthropic organizations

Smith & Devore, 2004

Profile of African American Caregivers

- 7% of African American women & 4% of men are raising a grandchild (2000 ACS data)
- Caregivers more likely than their African American peers to be
 - Female
 - Younger
 - Less educated
 - Living in poverty
 - Unmarried

Gendered Nature of Caregiving

- Predominantly women
- Men who caregive are much more likely to be married
- Grandmothers raising grandchildren leave work to caregive and therefore have much higher rates of poverty than their female peers
- Grandfather caregivers have comparable poverty levels to other males (and $\frac{1}{2}$ that of grandmother caregivers)

The link between poverty and caregiving

- One-quarter of all African Americans aged 45 and over on public assistance are raising their grandchildren
- High rates of over-crowding in grandparent headed households

Physical and mental health of older African American

- African Americans disadvantaged compared to older White Americans
 - shorter life-spans
 - more functional limitations and limitations in Activities of Daily Living (ADL)
 - higher rates of diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease

How is the health of African American grandparent caregivers compared to their non-caregiving African American peers?

Physical Health

- One-third of African American grandmother caregivers have functional limitations.
- This level of impairment is worse for African American caregivers than non-caregivers

Mental Health

- African American caregiving grandparents are more depressed than their non-caregiving peers
- 37% of caregivers are depressed compared to 21% of African American peers

Physical Limitations and Raising Young Children

- Three quarters (72%) of grandparents who take in grandchildren do so when the children are under age five.
- Substantial physical demands of caring for infants and pre-schoolers may pose special difficulties for older adults with limitations in functional abilities.

Hispanic Grandparent Caregivers: Mexican Americans & Central Americans

Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2007a, 2007b

Hispanics in the United States

- 44.3 million Hispanic Americans in 2006
- Doubled since 1990
- Comprise 15% of the population
- Hispanic American population projected to triple by 2050
- Only 2 countries in the world have a larger Hispanic population than the U.S. (Mexico & Colombia).

Latino Value of Familism

- “All members strongly identify with their respective family units and feel a deep sense of family loyalty”

Halgunseth, 2004, p. 39

- Strong emphasis on extended family & intergenerational ties.
 - High norms of family solidarity
 - Extensive exchanges of support
 - High rates of multigenerational co-residency
- Sense of moral obligation to help extended family members who are experiencing problems

Clutter & Nieto, 2005

Grandparent Role

- Historically, grandparents provided extensive assistance to adult children.

Cox et al, 2000; Toledo et al., 2000

- Important role in passing on traditions, culture & language.

Silverstein & Chen, 1999

- Hispanics highest rate of teen pregnancy
 - twice national average

Population Resource Center, 2004

Recent Research

- Hispanic grandmothers face high rates of
 - Poverty
 - Poor Health
 - Depression
 - Linguistic barriers to accessing services
 - 86% speak language other than English at home

Burnette, 1997; Cox, Brooks & Valcarcel, 2000

Caregiving due to economic necessity

- Finances play a role in caregiving decision
 - 70% of Latino co-parenting grandparents
 - 40% of skipped generation grandparents

Goodman & Silverstein, 2002

28 Million Mexican Americans

- The population of Mexican Americans increased by more than 50% since 1990.
- Mexican American comprise 9% of the US population.

Prevalence Rate of Grandparent Caregiving among Mexican Americans

- Estimated 177,000 Mexican American grandparent caregiver aged 45 and older in 2000 (=5.2%)
- Females (5.8%) had higher prevalence rates than males (4.6%)
- Prevalence rate was much higher among those living in poverty (9.7%) than those above the poverty line (4.3%)

The Context of Grandparent Caregiving

- 21% raising 2 grandchildren
- 13% raising 3+grandchildren
- One-third living in skipped generation households
- 23% of households included an underage son or daughter of the grandparent caregiver
- 41% of households contained at least one disabled member

How did Mexican American grandparent caregivers differ from their non-caregiving peers?

Grandparent caregivers were more likely than other Mexican Americans aged 45 and over to be

- Female
- Married
- Without a high school diploma
- Living below the poverty line
- Living in overcrowded conditions
- Living with a functional limitation

In sum

- Many Mexican Americans were raising their grandchildren over extended periods of time.
- Nine out of ten Mexican American grandparent caregivers living below the poverty line were not receiving Public Assistance.
- Grandparent caregivers were disproportionately living in poverty, ill-health and overcrowded households.
- Potential role overload for many grandparent caregivers who were also raising their own underage children and/or who were caregiving for disabled household members.

Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2007a

Central Americans in the United States

- 2.9 million Central Americans in U.S.A.
- 5% of Hispanic Americans are from Central American
 - 1.9% Hispanics from El Salvador
 - 1.1% from Honduras
- Population more than doubled since 1990
- U.S. population of immigrants equals 7% of the population in Central America

Reasons for Immigration

- Political repression
- Extreme poverty
- Violent Conflict
 - Resulting in high rates of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Context of Settlement in the U.S.A.

- High rates of undocumented immigrants
- Low rates of citizenship
 - Restricts eligibility to social and health care services
 - More than 50% are uninsured
- 18% living below the poverty line

Findings for Central Americans similar to Mexican American Results

- Except
 - Only 1% receiving public assistance
 - Central American grandfathers more likely to caregive than grandmothers
(6% vs 4%)
 - Possibly due to work place advantage for women with respect to service industry

Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2007b

- Half of the disabled Central Americans who had been in the U.S. more than a decade did not have citizenship
- With many uninsured, medical care may be neglected or postponed

American Indian / Alaskan Natives

Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2005

Residential schools' policy of forced acculturation

- Children taken from parents at aged 5+
- Relocated far from home with limited contact with parents and families
- Native language and cultures prohibited
- Abuse within the residential settings
- Parenting skills not modeled
 - Not sufficient access to own parents

1970s Child Welfare “Sweep”

- Estimated 25% of American Indian children removed from parents.
- Most children in care in 1970s placed with non-American Indians in
 - Foster homes
 - Adoptive homes
 - Institutions (Hogan & Siu, 1989; Matheson, 1996)
- Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 emphasizes importance of culturally similar placements
 - Preference for placements with extended family members

Social problems grew within these contexts

- Extreme poverty
- High teen birth rate
- Few jobs on reservations
- Chemical dependency
- Sexual & physical abuse
- High rates of ill-health across the life-span
- Under-served population

Community Responses

- Healing circles for victims of physical and sexual abuse
- Grandparents and other kin step in to care for children in need

American Indian/ Alaskan Native: Grandparent Role

- Traditionally
 - Elders held a revered role
 - Grandparents played key socialization & caregiving role while parents hunted/trapped
 - Taught traditional ways and languages
 - Great variation – 550+ tribes

Bahr, 1994; Weibel-Orlando, 1997

AIAN caregivers are more disadvantaged than their non-caregiving AIAN peers:

- Lower levels of education
- Lower family income
- More functional limitations
- More likely on reservation
- Less likely to speak English

(Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2005)

Issues facing American Indian and Alaskan Native grandparent caregivers

- Only 1 in 4 of those living in poverty receive public assistance
- 1 in 3 have functional limitations
- 1 in 5 suffer severe vision or hearing problems
- 1 in 3 caregivers are raising 2 or more grandchildren (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2005)

Qualitative Findings: AIAN

- Caregivers often raised by own grandparents
- Substantial grandparental involvement since grandchild's birth
- Don't see separate nuclear family as the norm.
 - Intergenerational caring is a cultural expectation
- Commitment to pass on customs & traditions
 - Many are relearning traditional ways and language
- Flow from co-parenting to solo parenting

Few North American Studies

- 84% of Asian American caregivers don't speak English at home.
 - Implications for service delivery
- Chinese-Canadian grandparents report
 - Caregiving a “welcome duty”
 - Cultural expectation & norm to caregive
 - Most caregiving while middle generation works long hours
 - Many immigrated to caregive
 - Desire to pass on heritage (language, traditions)
 - Elders highly respected

(Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2005)

What are the common themes across the cultures?

- High levels of multigenerational coresidence
- Pride in passing on traditions & culture
- Strong norms of caregiving
- Current reasons for caregiving (e.g. substance abuse, incarceration) more stigmatized

The Elephant in the Room

POVERTY!

Financial consequences of caregiving

- Leaving employment to caregive in late middle-age
 - Impact on pensions
 - Decrease years possible to save for retirement
 - Hard to locate new work when children start school
- Using up savings for childcare, food, clothing, larger accommodation, legal custody battles
- Living on fixed incomes

Who is falling through the social safety net?

- 70% of impoverished grandparent caregivers are visible minorities
- 75% are females
- 13% don't speak English

Prevalence of Social Service Use Among Impoverished Grandparent Caregivers

- 1 in 6 receive Public Assistance
- 1 in 2 receive Food Stamps
- 2 in 5 impoverished renters have subsidized housing
- 63% of grandchildren receive subsidized school meal programs

How can we improve program uptake rates?

- Kinship Navigator Programs hold promise
- Targeted outreach
 - Use multi-lingual staff & materials
 - Better linkages between programs
 - Liaise through schools, emergency food suppliers, faith-based organizations
 - Use respected leaders in ethnic communities
 - Streamline application program

Poor Health of Visible Minority Caregivers

- Need to increase availability of and access to
 - Assistive devices
 - Home modifications
 - In Home Support Services
 - Respite care
- Health promotion outreach efforts need to target grandparent caregivers of color and their families

Grandparents from all Cultures Emphasized the Rewards of Caregiving

- Pride
- Keeps Family Together
- Relieves Worry about Grandchild's Well-Being
- Pass on culture
- Sense of Purpose
- Feels More Youthful
- Grandchild Reduces Feelings of Loneliness
- Fun

I'd like to dance at his wedding

“Well, I'd like to dance at his wedding. I would really like to see him grown-up. I think, of course, that he's the smartest little kid in the world. And the same is true with my granddaughter I really, really hope that the creator touches me so I can live . . . (to) see them become the fine adults I know they are going to be... and so they will remember me.”

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