

GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN



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THE CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE FOR CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK

GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

**A dissertation submitted to the
California Institute for Clinical Social Work
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Clinical Social Work**

By

SANDRA STAPLES THOMAS

June 10, 2000

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An Abstract

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Abstract

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This study explores some of the factors that determine the choices grandmothers make with regard to permanent care of the grandchildren when the grandmother assumes the caretaker role for a grandchild because of the parent's alcohol or drug abuse. In particular, the study was designed to examine the grandmothers' thoughts and feelings about their relationship with the substance abusing adult child which might indicate why they take on the responsibility of caring for their grandchildren when their life plans may not have included this care-taking function.

The study also explores the mandate of the Federal law of 1/1/98 which requires subjects to choose only one permanent care-taking option, either legal guardianship or adoption. Qualitative methods were used with semi-structured interviews of six grandmothers. All of the grandmothers were of similar socio-economic status and ranged in age from 50-73 years. Five main themes came out of this study, each with one to three categories.

The study found that the law had no effect on their decision to choose one option over the other. The study found that the grandmothers felt that considering the thoughts and feelings of extended family and family traditions were more important than the

law in making their decisions. The study also found that it was far more important to the grandmothers to maintain a relationship with the adult child while trying to meet the needs of grandchildren than to adhere to timeframes established by the law.

Issues of adult attachment were proposed as one way of understanding this material.

DEDICATION

To my husband, Frederick, who believed in me and encouraged me to pursue any goals that would make me happy. To my son, Steven, who patiently endured emotional and physical separation from me during this endeavor. To my sister, Jean, who supported me as a second mother. To my aunts Bessie, Grace, Bernice and Mary, all of whose experiences and close family ties inspired this subject.

I also dedicate this effort to my deceased mother, Leola, whose support and guidance throughout the years instilled in me an attitude that I could attain the "impossible."

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Last, I would like to thank all of the grandmothers who participated in my research and whose concern for their grandchildren allowed me to have a deeper appreciation for their struggles in raising these grandchildren.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Given the continual rise in parental drug/alcohol use between 1992 and 1997, the U.S. Census Bureau Report (Co-resident Grandparents and Grandchildren, 1999) notes that many children who suffered neglect, lacked adequate supervision, and daily care while living with their parents were now living with grandparents. Their parents' neglect prompted some grandparents to step in and provide care to prevent their grandchildren from entering the out-of-home care system.

Also, "as mandatory drug sentencing laws cause the incarceration rate for females to rise, the need for placement has grown (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993). As mothers become unable to parent, children are being left with few resources" (McLean and Thomas, 1996, p. 492). However, in recent years social service professionals have focused on an untapped resource for children—grandparents.

There are recorded studies that explore the roles, responsibilities, and problems of grandparents who are performing the primary parenting function for their grandchildren (Graham, 1994). And, there is a growing consensus among social service professionals that never before in recent history have so many grandparents served as surrogate parents to their grandchildren (Poe, 1992, p. 1). However, little attention has been paid to how the grandparents serving as surrogate parents affects the relationship with their adult children.

Grandparents raising grandchildren are a population poorly recognized, poorly understood, and poorly served (Burton, 1992; Minkler & Roe, 1993; Graham, 1994; Doucette-Dudman, 1996). According to Lenora Poe (1992),

Grandparents take on the parenting responsibilities of their grandchildren as an alternative to foster placement with nonrelatives. These grandparents, in many instances, are the only persons standing between their grandchildren and foster placement. They are willing, at an age when they could normally expect to be 'phasing out' caretaking roles, to start parenting all over again by raising their grandchildren. (p. 2)

Changes in the Law

In December 1996, President Clinton directed the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), along with several other federal agencies, to prepare a plan outlining legislative and administrative recommendations that, if implemented, would double the number of children adopted or permanently placed by the year 2002. Implementation of the recommendations would move children more rapidly from foster care to permanent homes; and increase public awareness about children waiting for adoption and encourage Americans to consider adoption (Child Welfare League, 1997). The Health and Human Services Department requested and received input from 3,000 organizations nationwide in order to develop recommendations for the president's directive. The recommendations ultimately led to the president's signing into law the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, P.L. 105-89, on November 19, 1997.

A provision of the law authorizes adoption incentive payments for states which exceed the average number of adoptions the state completed during fiscal years 1995 through 1997, or in fiscal year 1999 and subsequent years in which adoptions of foster children are higher than in any previous fiscal year after 1996. States would be

eligible to receive bonuses of \$4000 in fiscal years 2001 or 2002 for each foster child adopted and \$6,000 for each adoption of a child with special needs previously in foster care.

Another provision of the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act, P.L. 105-89 (Child Welfare League, 1997) is that all children taken into protective custody must have a child welfare services case plan to simultaneously include services reunifying the family and a plan for legal permanence should reunification fail. The twofold plan, called concurrent planning, is a court/agency/family collaboration which includes probability of reunification, availability of extended family resources and identification of a family who will commit to legal permanency for the child. Legal permanence means that virtually all young children who do not reunify are adopted rather than placed with legal guardians.

Legal guardianship is a form of legal permanency, but can be reversed, unlike adoption. Agency statistics routinely reflect reversals of legal guardianships when children enter puberty. There are numerous reasons for judges granting reversals, according to agency administrators, but one most cited by legal guardians is the child's consistent disobedience. On the other hand, an adoption cannot be "set aside" or rescinded by judges unless the natural parents' rights were circumvented or the adoptive parents were not fully advised of the child's background in order to give their informed consent to the adoption. Therefore, more emphasis has been placed on the legal permanent option of adoption rather than on legal guardianship. Although adoption is the preferred plan for all children, as it provides the child with a sense of stability and permanence, directives from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), which

oversees the operations of local social service agencies, indicate that legal guardianship is an acceptable alternative to adoption (Adoption and Safe Families Act, 1997, Section 475).

The development and subsequent revision of the child's case plan must include assessment of the likelihood of reunification and the possibility of alternative forms of legal permanence (i.e., adoption, legal guardianship). If the probability of successful reunification is high, relatively little service activity will address legal permanence with a new parent. However, as the probability of reunification decreases, the amount of service activity focused on legal permanence with a new parent will increase. One basic premise of concurrent planning is the belief that the early development of a securely attached relationship between a child and an adult is crucial for normal child development.

With respect to legal permanence for the child, the Adoption and Safe Families Act, P.L. 105-89 (Child Welfare League, 1997) requires that kin be considered before non-kin. Placement of children with kin is believed to preserve the child's existing family relationships, including sibling relationships when possible. Doing so will cause the least amount of disruption and emotional distress to the child and the family (The Governor's Adoption Initiative, Progress Report II, 2/97 & 3/97, p. 25).

Roughly half of the foster children in long term foster care in California are placed with relatives (The Governor's Adoption Initiative, Progress Report II, 2/97 & 3/97). When parents will not relinquish the child voluntarily, relatives wishing to adopt a foster child placed in their care must go through court proceedings to have the parents declared unfit. This often has a negative impact on intra-family relationships. To avoid

this negative impact, relatives often spurn adoption. As a result, children who would otherwise benefit from adoption remain in long term foster care with relatives or have their ties to other family members severed unnecessarily when they are adopted by non-relatives (p. 24). The purpose of kinship adoption is to streamline the adoption process to make it less complicated and objectionable to relatives who are unwilling to adopt their relatives because of requirements of traditional adoption.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services was required to prepare and submit by June 1, 1999, a report for Congress on the extent of the placement of children in foster care with relatives and to convene an advisory panel on kinship care. The panel was to review and comment on the report before it was submitted (Washington Social Legislation Bulletin, 1997, p. 90). The Department of Health and Human Services' report was not published as of April, 2000.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act, P.L. 105-89 (Child Welfare League, 1997) considers adoption and legal guardianship as the only alternative permanent options for children and gives relatives (i.e., grandparents) first preference to select either option. I am interested in knowing what factors enter into the grandmothers' decision-making with respect to this choice.

Life Changes for Grandparents

Grandparents, who comprise the majority of kinship caregivers, are usually in the later stages of the life cycle. They may be couples with a lifelong commitment to each other, or widowed or single. They may be planning for retirement, or looking forward to a second career or relocation. Whether the postponement of their

plans and life stages is temporary or permanent will depend on the age of the children for whom they will care, their own age, and the permanency of the children's residency.

Elderly caregivers who state that, "We'll be raising children for the rest of our lives" may not be speaking figuratively (Crumbley & Little, 1997, p. 10).

The priorities of caregivers must shift as the needs of the grandchildren take precedence over those of the caregiver. With the change in priorities comes a change in and loss of relationships as well. For example, caregivers may experience the loss of their peer relationship with the grandchild's parent, as the grandparent now has more authority over the child than the parent. Consequently, the caregiver and parent are no longer peers with respect to their roles as parents in relation to the child, or to each other (Crumbley & Little, 1997, p. 10).

Although the pattern of caregivers being responsible for kin of substance abusing parents is frequently attributed to impoverished black families, it extends beyond urban ghettos. In suburban Orange County, California, for example, which is only 2% black, 8.2% of all children reside with relatives other than their own parents, most of these with grandparents, representing a 63% increase between 1980 and 1990 (Graham, 1994).

Introduction to the Theoretical Context

The two legal options for grandmothers to provide stability for the grandchildren in their care are adoption and legal guardianship. While adoption is a permanent option for children, legal guardianship—a less permanent option—offers only a semblance of permanence, as it can be reversed.

From the writer's experience in working with relatives who chose guardianship instead of adoption, the choice of guardianship often carries the hope of the children's natural parents some day being able to resume parenthood. Grandmothers in particular seem to struggle internally with making the "right" decision to care for their grandchildren while simultaneously hoping for a positive change in the lives of their adult children.

Because many grandmothers resist supervision by child welfare services, as they sometimes fear removal of their grandchildren from their care, the number of children in their homes is not included in official demographic studies reported by the U.S. Census Bureau (Doucette-Dudman, 1996). Many grandmothers willingly forfeit foster care payments rather than turn over to the state legal custody of their grandchildren (Testa, 1992, 1993). As a result, the figures cited in the census bureau study may be higher. In 1991, the U.S. Bureau of the Census estimated that nationally 3.2 million children lived with their grandparents. Approximately thirty percent of the grandchildren did not have either parent in the home; 38% of the children were black, 25% were white and 21% were Hispanic [Current Population Reports, U.S. Census Bureau, 1991] (Graham, 1994). The Current Population Reports (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999) reflects a similar trend.

Statement of the Problem

A census bureau study--the first-ever on the topic--(Current Population Reports, U.S. Census Bureau, 1999) mentions that more than one in 20 children in the United States lived in homes headed by their grandparents in 1997. The study found that

7.7% of American children—about 5.5 million—lived with a grandparent. For grandparents who were primary caretakers, there were 2.3 million grandmothers compared to 1.4 million grandfathers (Casper & Bryson, 1998, p. 10). According to their study, the increase in the number of children in grandparent-headed households, from 4.9% in 1992 to 5.5% in 1997, can be attributed to a range of factors from drug use and divorce to incarceration and AIDS-related deaths.

Grandmothers who are primary caretakers of their grandchildren also are concerned about the well being of their adult children. The grandmothers' concern about their children's involvement with drugs and alcohol sometimes lead to their questioning themselves as to whether they were "good enough" parents. Sometimes the grandmothers blame themselves for the choices their adult children have made. At other times the grandmothers believe that their adult children's choices of lifestyle is due to their children's inability to think for themselves or their preference to follow whatever is fashionable at the time.

Though concerned about their children, grandmothers are simultaneously angry with them for engaging in substances which can destroy their lives. The grandmothers are also angry with their children for subjecting their grandchildren to an abusive home environment. In addition they are angry with their children for casting them into a parenting role for which they are not prepared. Exploring the grandmothers' angry feelings and possible feelings of self-blame may help in better understanding the kind of relationship the grandmothers have with their adult children and the choice the grandmothers ultimately make in selecting one of two permanent legal options for the care of their grandchildren.

How the grandmothers feel about their adult children might indicate why they take on the responsibility of caring for their grandchildren when their life plans probably did not include this care-taking function. Better information about their relationships with their own children might also inform social service professionals why there appears to be reluctance on the part of some grandmothers to adopt their grandchildren.

The Study

This study will examine grandmothers' who are serving as caretakers for their grandchildren. The study will focus on the grandmothers' experiences and feelings about their grandchild's parent. In addition, the study will examine the grandmothers' struggle in making legal decisions for the permanent long term care of their grandchildren.

Internal struggles of the grandmothers' decision-making around choosing the legal options of adoption or guardianship will be understood against the background of attachment theory.

Assumptions

1. This study assumes that the relationship between the grandmothers and their adult child will affect the grandmothers' choice of permanent care-taking options for the grandchildren.

2. This study assumes that there are similarities and differences in the thoughts and feelings of grandmothers who adopt their grandchildren and those who choose to become legal guardians.

Theoretical Framework

John Bowlby's attachment theory (1969, 1973, 1980, 1982a) rests on the concept of an "attachment behavioral system"—a homeostatic process that regulates infant proximity-seeking and contact-maintaining behaviors with one or a few specific individuals who provide physical or psychological safety or security (Sperling & Berman, 1994, p. 5).

In the last decade, no single area of research in personality/social psychology has attracted more interest than the application of attachment theory to the study of adult relationships (Simpson & Rholes, 1998). Although Bowlby (1979) stated that attachment processes affect human beings "from the cradle to the grave" (p.129) and wrote extensively about attachment phenomena in adulthood, research on adult attachment did not flourish until the mid-1980's (Simpson & Rholes, 1998, p.3).

Attachment theory has two principal components: 1) a normative component, which attempts to explain modal, species-typical patterns of behavior and stages of development through which nearly all humans pass, and 2) an individual difference component, which attempts to explain stable, systematic deviations from the modal behavioral patterns and stages (Simpson & Rholes, 1998).

Use of attachment theory will be helpful in describing and understanding the grandparents' feelings about their adult children and their struggle to make legal decisions for their grandchildren's long term care.

Purpose of the Study

Grandparents generally look forward to spending time with their grandchildren, as they are a great source of personal pleasure. As grandparents are freed from the responsibilities of parenthood, they can play different roles in the lives of their grandchildren. However, the role of parenting their grandchildren is an unexpected and often an unwanted one.

The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of those grandmothers who must choose a legal option for the permanent care of their grandchildren. The study is intended to describe how the grandmothers' relationship with their adult child, whose children they are caring for, helps determine the choices they ultimately make with regard to permanent care of the grandchildren. The study is also intended to expand our understanding of the kind of relationship the grandmothers have with their adult child after the grandchildren are placed with them. Of particular interest is the motivation or driving force behind the grandmothers' chosen option for the permanent care of their grandchildren when the grandchildren are not returned to the parents.

If the grandmothers have an adversarial relationship with the grandchildren's parents, the option they choose could continue the conflict between them or it could be seen as a means to dissipate conflict. The choice could also lead to the

adult children expressing appreciation for the grandmothers' help and their being relieved that the grandmothers were available and supportive in times of crises.

Grandmothers are required by law to choose one of two permanent options for their grandchildren's stability--adoption or guardianship. Should they choose neither option, the court can place the grandchildren in another permanent living arrangement. As legal guardianship is a less permanent option than adoption, the study will explore what factors enter into the decisions of those grandmothers who choose either legal guardianship or adoption and how their decisions were influenced by their relationship with their adult child. Research in this area would allow for a better understanding of the grandparents' internal struggles.

Research Design and Questions

The research design of this study will be qualitative. Qualitative research allows the researcher to understand how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world. Respondents will be audio taped at a one-time interview. The tapes will be transcribed and analyzed to describe the respondents' thoughts and feelings surrounding their relationship with their adult children and how these affect their decision to choose the legal options of adoption or guardianship.

Research questions the study seeks to answer follows:

1. What factors influence the grandmothers' decisions to choose the legal option of adoption or guardianship for their grandchildren for whom they are primary caregivers?
2. How does the relationship with the adult child enter into the grandmothers' decision to assume the role of primary caregiver of their grandchildren?
3. What was the relationship like between the grandmothers and their adult child before the grandchildren were in the grandmothers' care?
4. What was the relationship like between the grandmothers and their adult child after the grandchildren were in the grandmothers' care?
5. What effect did the Federal law have on the grandmothers' decision to choose the legal option of adoption or guardianship?
6. How did the grandmothers handle conflicts with the adult child in the past?
7. What feelings did the grandmothers have toward their adult child after having raised their children and are now having to raise their grandchildren?
8. In what ways was the relationship between the grandmothers and their adult child closer (more distant) now?

The grandmothers' feelings about their adult children and possible negative feelings about themselves as parents may affect how the grandmothers deal with family conflicts, especially conflicts with the parents of the grandchildren in their care.

family conflicts, especially conflicts with the parents of the grandchildren in their care. Their feelings may also enter into how cooperative they are with staff at social service agencies and with Juvenile court proceedings regarding permanent options for their grandchildren's care. The respondents' answers to how the relationship with their adult child influences their decision-making with respect to the permanent options they select for the care of their grandchildren will permit social workers and other helping professionals to better understand the possible dilemmas faced by these caregivers.

Summary

Recent data since the early 1990's have shown that the trend continues to grow for grandparents providing care for their grandchildren. There have been studies which explore the roles, responsibilities, and problems of grandparents who are performing the primary parenting function for their grandchildren. However, little attention has been paid to how the grandparents serving as surrogate parents affects the relationship with their adult children. This study will shed some light on the grandmothers' relationship with their adult children by exploring what factors enter into the grandmothers' choice of legal options for the permanent care of their grandchildren for whom they are primary caregivers.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Review of the literature will cover the growing trend of children being raised by grandparents due to their parents' incapacity to care for them because of drugs or alcohol abuse. The review will also cover the seminal research done in the field of grandparents/grandchildren relationships and foster home and relative placements. The review will then move to cover the grandparents' struggle with decision-making for the permanent care of their grandchildren for whom they are the primary caregivers. The chapter will include a brief review of adult attachment theory and research. The chapter will conclude with a brief review of the category of anxious-ambivalent attachment and the possible effects on the relationship between the grandparents and their adult child whose children they are raising.

Researchers, public policy makers, and the media first began to notice an increase in the number of grandchildren living in grandparent-maintained households in the early 1990s. The Census Bureau's Current Population Report, *Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1992*, noted that the number of children under 18 living in grandparent-maintained households increased from 2.2 million in 1970, to 2.3 million in 1980, to 3.3 million in 1992. In 1970, a little over 3 percent of all children under age 18 were living in a home maintained by their grandparents. By 1992, this percentage had increased to nearly 5 percent. More recent data show that this trend has continued. In 1997, 3.9 million children were living in homes maintained by their grandparents—5.5 percent of all children under 18.

Between 1992 and 1997, substantial increases have occurred in the number of children living in households maintained by grandparents. The increases, according to the report, have been attributed to the growth in drug use among parents, teen pregnancy, divorce, the rapid rise of single-parent households, mental and physical illness, AIDS, crime, child abuse and neglect, and incarceration of parents (Minkler, 1998).

An interesting statistic noted in the Current Population Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999) is that grandchildren in grandparent-maintained families are more likely to be Black, younger, and living in the South compared with grandchildren living with their parents. The report further states that the grandchildren in grandparent-maintained families are more likely to be poor than other children. Of all children under the age of 18, for example, 1 in 5 lives in a poor family compared with about 1 in 4 children who live with grandparents (Lamison-White, 1997).

Traditional Roles of Grandparents

The traditional grandparental role is one which is largely pleasurable because it is devoid of responsibility. The grandparental role is one in which the status is ascribed. Norms surrounding the role are ambiguous, and responsibility, which is often unrecognized, is increasing (Slorah, 1994).

The ascriptive status of grandparenthood can be problematic, particularly for those who have to assume surrogate parental responsibilities. Older adults with children have no choice in whether or not they will become grandparents, when they will

assume this role, or how many grandchildren they will eventually have (Burton & Bengtson, 1985; Slorah, 1994; De Toledo & Brown, 1995).

Status and Role in Grandparenthood

Rosow (1976), who notes that role and status are social phenomena that can occur either simultaneously or independently of each other, suggests four role types that are operative in the family (Burton and Bengtson, 1985, p. 65): the institutional, the tenuous, the informal, and the non-role. The first two are of particular interest to this study of grandparents raising grandchildren.

A grandmother who acts as a surrogate parent for her grandchild may represent the institutional or "traditional" dimension of the role. The author notes that the grandparent/surrogate parent role has distinct status within the family system accompanied by normatively expected behavior that fits the status. However, this type of grandmother role represents the exception rather than the rule. For example, it is only under conditions of family crisis or need that this role behavior is assumed (Neugarten & Weinstein, 1964; Johnson, 1983; Poe, 1992; Minkler & Roe, 1993; De Toledo & Brown, 1995;).

Manuel (1983) and Slorah (1994) speak of grandparents who are lobbying for the legislated right to visit their grandchildren of their divorced children. These grandparents are identifying grandparenthood as not only a significant status position in the family and society, but as one with specific functions.

The tenuous role consists of "definite social positions without roles or only vague, insubstantial ones" (Rosow, 1976, p. 463). Grandparenthood presumably has an

ascribed status within the family system. However, this status is not always accompanied by normative expected role behavior. George (1980, p. 88) mentions that normative guidelines for grandparents are so few and so vague that individuals pursue the style of relationship they find most comfortable.

Unlike the grandmothers in Slorah's (1994) study who fought through their legislators for the right to assume an active role in the lives of their grandchildren, those in Burton & Bengtson's (1985) study seem to prefer assuming the tenuous role of grandparenthood.

Burton and Bengtson's (1985) study focused on black grandmothers who were entering grandparenthood for the first time. All had unwed, teenage daughters who were first-time parents. The intent at the beginning of the study was to observe the nature of relationships between both mothers and daughters and grandmothers and granddaughters. The original focus of the study changed as the new grandmothers in these families began to react quite negatively to their new roles. These grandmothers were less concerned about their daughters being early unwed mothers, but rather that they were young grandmothers. Given their difficulty accepting their new role at an "early" age (27-39 years), many of these grandmothers chose not to play a significant role in the lives of their grandchildren. In essence, they chose to "relinquish" traditional maternal roles.

Although Burton & Bengtson's (1985) study of the difficulty young first-time grandmothers experience is interesting, it does not fit with this study of grandparents raising their grandchildren. Grandparents in this study put their needs second to assume the expected traditional care-taking role for their grandchildren when they are in crisis.

Most grandparents are only marginally involved in the rearing of their grandchildren. However, others whose children are addicted to drugs, are denied the traditional rewards of being grandparents (Poe, 1992). These grandparents are parenting their grandchildren, as they feel obligated to rear them. Minkler and Roe (1993) have documented the hardships that older black women face when their adult daughters who are crack addicts continue to have children these grandmothers feel obligated to raise.

According to De Toldeo & Brown (1995), grandparenting is color-blind and class-blind. The same can be said of the drug epidemic that drives it. The authors state that drugs and alcohol account for more than 80 percent of grandparent families. They appear combined with teen pregnancy, abuse, neglect, and abandonment. They appear in connection with incarceration and murder. Moreover, suburban, middle-class, and white families are not immune from addiction; they only hide it better (De Toldeo & Brown, 1995, p. 13).

Grandparents who assume the parenting role for their grandchildren experience a sense of powerlessness because they have found themselves in a situation, which they did not ask for and over which they have no control (Burton, 1992, Brookdale, 1992; Slorah, 1994; De Toldeo & Brown, 1995; Crumbley & Little, 1997). They experience a loss of vigor, which means that their pace of life must slow down (Minkler, Roe & Price, 1992; Poe, 1992; Slorah, 1994). Relationships with peers take on new meaning because of the shared process of change (Slorah, 1988, 1994; Poe, 1992; De Toldeo & Brown, 1995; Doucette-Dudman, 1996).

The norms surrounding the grandparenting role are ambiguous. Research has found that traditionally grandparents (in the latter half of the twentieth century in

white middle income families), have assumed one of several roles. Bengtson & Robertson (1985) and Hagestad (1985) found that they serve as "stress buffers," and Hagestad (1985) viewed them as "arbitrators" providing relief from difficulties associated with child rearing, and often serving as "sounding boards" for family conflicts. Troll (1983) found that they served as "watchdogs," ready to step in as they were needed by vulnerable family members. Similar to Troll's (1983) finding, Martin & Martin (1978) found that black grandmothers provide support for family members, especially when the adult children and their children live with them. Cherlin & Furstenberg (1986) also saw relatives as a source of support.

Grandchildren's Relationship to Grandparents

Cherlin & Furstenberg's (1986) study of 510 grandparents and grandchildren and Kornhaber & Woodward's (1981) study of 300 grandparents and grandchildren concluded that the attachment between grandparent and grandchild is natural and second in emotional power only to the primordial bond between parent and child. In short, grandparents and grandchildren do not have to do anything to make each other happy. Their happiness comes from being together.

However, with the growing trend of grandparents becoming surrogate parents to their grandchildren, their relationship is changing. The normal conflicts that occur between children and parents do not exist between grandchildren and grandparents. This is because grandparents, no matter what they are like as parents, are exempt from the emotional intensity that characterizes parent-child relationships. As a surrogate

parent, however, the grandparent is thrust into the role as decision maker, authority figure, and disciplinarian to which the child must adjust (Crumbley & Little, 1997).

Informal and Formal Kinship Care

Current national statistics indicate that approximately 5.5 million children live with grandparents and that the majority of these children are likely to be black. In *The Black Extended Family* (Martin & Martin, 1978), the authors state that children are absorbed into the homes of relatives when there is a need. Children living with "relatives" are considered to be living in an informal arrangement, as their care is not governed by child welfare services, which would be considered a formal childcare arrangement.

Informal or kinship care began to increase following the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act in 1978 which gave preference to placement of children with relatives. Further legal foundation was laid in 1979 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Miller v. Youakim* that kin must be given equal opportunity to qualify for foster parent status (McLean & Thomas, 1996, p. 490). As a result of this legislation, Gleeson, O'Donnell and Bonecutter (1997) state that the child welfare field has been caught off guard by the sharp increase in the use of kinship foster care since 1985.

As this placement category has expanded, studies have focused on those children and families who are a part of the public or "formal" kinship care system. However, a large population of kinship caregivers exists outside this formal system. In 1991, it was determined that three-quarters of a million children receiving Aid to

Families with Dependent Children lived in the homes of kin--10% of the total AFDC roll [National Commission on Family Foster Care 1991] (McLean & Thomas, 1996, p. 490).

Families outside the public child welfare system have dramatically less access to necessary resources, and most must rely on AFDC to support the children in their care. This disparity of both finances and resources was noted by Takas (1991), who observed the irony in the fact that relatively stable families are eligible for foster care payments and related services due to the need to meet foster care regulations, while impoverished families are left to fend for themselves without this support.

Kinship placements have been concentrated in large urban centers and have been used predominantly with economically disadvantaged children of color and their families (Berrick et al., 1994; Kusserow 1992a; Testa 1992, 1993; Wulczyn & Goerge, 1992). Placements with relatives have been less likely to disrupt and tend to last longer than non-relative placements. These placements have also resulted in lower rates of reunification and adoption (Gleeson, O'Donnell & Bonecutter, 1997).

Several studies have reported that children in kinship foster care have significant physical, mental health, behavioral, and educational problems, but receive fewer services than children placed in non-relative family foster care (Berrick et al., 1994; Dubowitz, et al., 1993; Dubowitz et al., 1994; Iglehart, 1994). Yet, service needs may be even greater for children in kinship care than for those in the care of non-relatives, since kinship caregivers tend to be older, have fewer financial resources, and have more health problems than non-relative foster parents (Berrick et al., 1994; Dubowitz et al., 1993; Dubowitz et al., 1994; LeProhn, 1994; Magruder, 1994; Thornton, 1991).

Grandparents Parenting Grandchildren

Grandparents, who have full-time responsibility for parenting their grandchildren due to their natural children's absence as a result of drug/alcohol abuse or incarceration, struggle with adjustments within the family structure, and coping with the challenge of re-parenting at a time in their lives when they had other expectations for themselves (Poe, 1992; Graham, 1994; Slorah, 1994; De Toledo & Brown, 1995; Doucette-Dudman, 1996; Okun, 1996; Crumbley & Little, 1997).

Some grandparents express adjustment difficulties in caring for their grandchildren due to bitterness they feel over being taken advantage of by their children. They express a loss of their family continuity and a loss of their positive self-image as good parents. Many grandparents feel obligated to care for their grandchildren, as social service agencies leave them with the impression that they have no choice in the circumstances.

Dr. Lenora Poe's study (1992), *Black Grandparents as Parents*, found that some grandparents were concerned that their children had turned them from being loving grandparents into "angry and resentful old women." (p. 48)

Assuming full-time responsibility for their grandchildren caused some grandparents to grapple with ambivalent feelings toward their children. In spite of the love that these grandparents have for their sons and daughters, for example, they have expressed feelings of ambivalence as they attempt to separate their love for their adult children from the latter's drug problems. To deal with these ambivalent feelings toward their adult children, many of the grandparents become overly attached to and/or overly protective of their grandchildren (Poe, 1992, De Toldeo, 1995).

Clinical Issues for Kinship Caregivers

Loss

Relatives who take on the care of their kinship children may experience multiple losses. The losses may take the form of interrupted life cycles (i.e., postponed plans for retirement, delayed goals, or second careers), intrusions on space and privacy, and changes in the caregiver's roles and relationships with the children and the children's parents (Poe, 1992; Graham, 1994; De Toldeo, 1995; Doucette-Dudman, 1996; Okun, 1996; Crumbley & Little, 1997; Houtman, 1999).

Many caregivers deny, minimize and repress their losses out of feelings of obligation, loyalty, and responsibility to the child or parent. Unfortunately, professionals may overlook or not adequately assess caregiver loss as they strive to achieve some semblance of family preservation.

Redefining Roles and Boundaries

Changes in the caregiver's roles and boundaries occur not only with respect to the child, but also with respect to the child's parents. Relationships with the parents are redefined as the kinship caregiver undergoes a transformation from supporter to primary caregiver, from advisor to decision maker, and from friend or peer to authority figure (Poe, 1992; Graham, 1994; Slorah, 1994; Crumbley & Little, 1997).

The relative caregiver may be perceived by the parent as a competitor for his or her authority and relationship with the child. The caregiver's and parent's relationship can become adversarial, especially if the caregiver's legal authority extends

not only to the child, but also to the biological parent (Graham, 1994; Slorah, 1994; De Toledo, 1995; Doucette-Dudman, 1996; Crumbley & Little, 1997).

Transference and Projection

Transference and projection arise when the kinship caregiver has unresolved issues with the parent that are then transferred or projected to the child (Poe, 1992; Doucette-Dudman, 1996; Crumbley & Little, 1997).

Several problems may result from the caregiver's transference and projection. The caregiver may have difficulty perceiving the child's personality as different from that of the parent, the caregiver may not appreciate his or her influence on the child's growth and development (as a role model and primary caregiver), and the caregiver may misinterpret the child's behavior as a personal attack (Crumbley & Little, 1997).

Morbidity and Mortality

As many kinship caregivers are grandparents, the potential physical and emotional effects and limitations of aging should not be overlooked. Conceivably, an elderly relative may not live long enough or be physically able to complete the raising of a child, especially a very young child (Crumbley & Little, 1997; Doucette-Dudman, 1996; De Toledo, 1995; Minkler & Roe, 1993). Thus, kinship caregivers need supportive services and systems in place to compensate for their physical or emotional limitations (i.e., family members, nursing or respite care, medications).

Overcompensation

Many kinship caregivers feel extreme empathy and sympathy for the child and parent, given their history (i.e., domestic violence, child neglect/abuse). Consequently, the caregiver may try to "make up" for the child's past losses or traumas, but in doing so, may overcompensate (Poe, 1992; Slorah, 1994; Doucette-Dudman, 1996; Crumbley & Little, 1997).

The task for the caregiver is to provide the child with balance. Part of the balancing process, is finding a middle ground between being flexible and being firm, between nurturing and disciplining. Caregivers who may have felt inadequate as parents may try to compensate for their past deficiencies by overindulging the children in their care. This overcompensation is frequently the result of feelings of guilt or responsibility for the parents' problems (Poe, 1992; De Toledo, 1996, Crumbley & Little, 1997).

Attachment Theory

Adult Attachment

Attachment theory in general is useful in explaining both children's and adults' reactions to separations, including the various patterns of anger, withdrawal, and reintegration found in bereavement (Parkes, 1972) and divorce (Weiss, 1975). In addition, research has supported Bowlby's early notion that the child's early experiences of the close bond to the mother (and father) have a significant long-term effect on development. Specifically, significant disruptions in the parent-child bond, as well as parenting characteristics that parallel separation (rejection, hostility, or inconsistent

responding), have been shown to have a detrimental impact on subsequent development [Rutter, 1985] (Sperling & Berman, 1994).

Adult attachment (Sperling & Berman, 1994) is the stable tendency of an individual to make substantial efforts to seek and maintain proximity to and contact with one or a few specific individuals who provide the subjective potential for physical and/or psychological safety and security (p. 8). Although adult attachment provides the potential for relationship security, it does not invariably provide felt security (Ainsworth, 1985, 1989). For example, many people have attachment relationships that provoke significant anxiety and anger. However, these relationships are maintained because people believe that their attachment figures have the potential to provide felt security.

As one considers adult relationships, consideration must be given to internal working models of attachment. Internal working models are based on a prior history of attachment relationships plus current interactions between the self and the attachment figure when the attachment behavioral system is activated. According to Sperling & Berman (1994), internal working models define the rules by which two individuals interact, including behaviors, feelings, and thoughts. These rules allow each individual to anticipate and plan (correctly or incorrectly) what the other person will do given a preceding set of actions, and may elicit reactions and behaviors that are not accurate in terms of the current situation (p. 8).

Assessment of Adult Attachment

In recent years, several streams of research have emerged from Bowlby's (1988) and Ainsworth's (1982) attachment theory. According to attachment theory, the long-term effects of early experiences with caregivers are due to the persistence of "internal working models"—cognitive/affective representations of the self in relation to close relationships with others (Bartholomew, 1990; Shaver, Collins, & Clark, 1996). Although the theory does not assume or require that internal working models persist without change across the life span, both theory and empirical evidence from longitudinal studies have led researchers to suspect that the effects of childhood attachment relationships extend into adulthood, where they can be seen in the domains of parenting and close peer relationships, including romantic relationships [e.g., Bartholomew, 1990, 1993; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988; Weiss, 1982] (Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998).

Anxious-Ambivalent Attachment

Bowlby's (1973) attachment theory mainly deals with developmental and interpersonal issues where the attachment system is activated when infants experience distress. The goal of attachment responses is to maintain proximity to a nurturing adult who is expected to help the infant to manage distress and to promote a sense of well-being and security.

In analyzing Bowlby's theory, the basic concept of security in attachment can be viewed as an "inner resource" that may help the individual to cope successfully with life adversities (Mikulincer & Florian, 1995). Security in attachment may evolve

into optimistic expectations, a strong sense of control and self-efficacy, and self-confidence in seeking outside help in times of need (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Shaver & Hazan, 1993).

In like manner, Bowlby's theory also implies that insecure attachment can be viewed as a risk factor that may detract from the individual's resilience in times of stress. The early attachment experience of insecure persons (both anxious-ambivalent and avoidant) is characterized by unstable and inadequate regulation of distress by the caretaker and a sense of personal inefficacy in relieving discomfort (Bowlby, 1973; Shaver and Hazan, 1993). These experiences may obstruct the development of the inner resources necessary for successful coping with, and adaptation to, life stressors (Simpson & Rholes, 1998, p. 144).

With respect to anxious-ambivalent people, the above-noted experiences may foster a generalized working model that exaggerates the appraisal of adversities as threatening, irreversible, and uncontrollable. When facing such situations, these people may react with strong emotional distress, continuing even after the actual threat has terminated.

Recent studies have provided support for this reasoning as they have examined the association between attachment style and cognitive and emotional aspects of maladjustment. Avoidant and anxious-ambivalent people seem to be more anxious and more hostile than secure people (Koback & Sceery, 1988), and to have more negative and mistrusting views of the social world and of human nature in general (Collins & Read, 1990). Anxious-ambivalent people were found to have more negative self views than secure people (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Mikulincer,

1995), and to show signs of distress related to disagreement and conflict with attachment figures (Feeney, 1994).

As compared to secure people, both types of insecure attachment have been found to be related to loneliness (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), physical symptoms (Hazan & Shaver, 1990), negative affect (Simpson, 1990), alcohol consumption, eating disorders (Brennan, Shaver, & Tobey, 1991), and shame, anger, fear of negative evaluation and pathological narcissism (Wagner & Tangney, 1991). Given the above studies, it seems that "insecure attachment at adulthood, as in infancy, places individuals at risk for a variety of problems with which they are poorly equipped to cope" (Shaver & Hazan, 1993).

Conclusion

Many of the studies cited on adult attachment speak of an "inner resource" that may help the individual cope successfully with life adversities. Having the unexpected responsibility of permanently providing for one's grandchildren, may be viewed by grandparents as an adversity. How well they cope with this responsibility, especially when they are legally mandated to choose a permanent care option of adoption or guardianship (another possible adversity), is worth examining through the lens of adult attachment theory. The choices the grandparents make may reflect the kind of relationship they have with their adult child.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the qualitative methodology of the study. There will be a description of the procedures used for selecting subjects, and a description of the process for the collection of data. The chapter will conclude with a description of the data analysis, human subjects protections and interview guide.

Introduction

A long-standing debate in science has centered around the relative value of two different and complementary inquiry paradigms—quantitative and qualitative (Patton, 1990, p. 37). A qualitative study, defined by Creswell (1994, p.2), is "an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting." In qualitative research, the researcher's task is to gather the data and present them in such a manner that "the informants speak for themselves" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 2). In a quantitative study, on the other hand, the social or human problem is understood by testing a theory composed of variables that are measured with numbers in order to determine whether the theory holds true.

In qualitative research the concerns of the researcher are more often on process than on outcomes or products (Merriam, 1988). The researcher is viewed as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. He is also interested in how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world. In addition,

qualitative research often involves fieldwork where the researcher physically goes to the people to observe or record behavior in its natural setting. The research is descriptive and inductive in that the researcher builds abstractions, concepts and theories from details in his or her observations.

In some instances the qualitative research may be conducted from a particular theoretical framework. This approach has been called orientational qualitative inquiry (Patton, 1990, p. 86).

Research Design

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews of participants drawn from a local support group of grandmothers who currently had primary care-taking responsibility for their grandchildren and had held this responsibility for a minimum of one year. The one year time frame was selected by the researcher because juvenile court proceedings to address permanent care options for children in out of home care generally occurred within twelve months of the child's removal from the parents.

The grandmothers were interviewed on one occasion during which they were asked to describe the kind of relationship they have with their adult children. They were asked what the relationship was like before the grandchildren were placed with them and what the relationship was like after the grandchildren's placement with them. The grandparents were also asked how their relationship with their adult child entered into their choice to select the permanent care option of adoption or guardianship.

Patton (1990) stated that, "Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made

explicit" (p. 278). The interactive nature of the interviews conducted in this study permitted this researcher to not only question the participants, but also to further draw out their answers in order to get a better understanding of their experiences. The interviews were conducted in settings that provided assurance of confidentiality and little to no distractions.

Data Collection

The raw data consisted of the audio taped, narrative descriptions of the participants' thoughts, feelings and experiences as communicated in their responses to open-ended questions asked during the interviews. Some of the questions respondents were asked included: 1) How does your relationship with your adult child enter into your decision to assume the role of primary caregiver of your grandchildren?; 2) How does your relationship with your adult child enter into your choice to select adoption or guardianship?; 3) What considerations did you have in making the choice of adoption or guardianship?; 4) How have conflicts with your adult child been handled in the past?; and 5) In what ways is your relationship with your adult child closer (more distant) now?

Data Analysis

This researcher listened to the audio-tapes of the interviews and read the transcriptions to analyze the data. Lines of the transcripts were separated into units of analysis that consisted of single ideas, thoughts and feelings expressed by the participants. Using the classification and coding techniques drawn from grounded theory methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Cresswell, 1994), the

participants' ideas, thoughts, and feelings were grouped together based on their similarity into categories and themes. An attachment theory orientation was used during this coding process.

The goal of the data analysis was to develop descriptive categories and themes from patterns of relationships observed in the data. In processing the data through this method, the categories and themes were first generated inductively and then refined through an interplay of inductive and deductive thinking.

The interviews were transcribed and analyzed in sequential order. This allowed information learned from a previous interview to be better understood and used in subsequent interviews with other respondents.

Procedures for the Selection of Subjects

This researcher was invited to give a presentation at a grandparents support group in Northern San Luis Obispo County. Prior to the presentation, I spoke of my interest in the subject of grandparents who were raising grandchildren whose parents were unable to parent due to their addiction to drugs and alcohol. As this area had been researched very little, I sought to explore the topic further in my doctoral dissertation. At the end of the presentation, several group members volunteered to share their stories.

The subjects of the research were either retired or employed grandmothers who were primary caregivers of their grandchildren. Of the grandmothers who volunteered to be part of the study, 8 were Caucasian, 3 were Black and 3 were Hispanic. All ranged in age from their mid-fifties to early seventies and lived in Northern San Luis Obispo County and Santa Barbara County. Each of the subjects was asked to complete a

brief demographic questionnaire which captured detailed information on their background.

Potential volunteers for the study were selected based on: a) their currently caring for grandchildren; b) the past or present involvement of Child Protective Services; c) the parent's addiction to drugs and/or alcohol; d) no adult children living in the home of the grandmother at the time of the study; and e) the grandmothers having chosen the legal option of adoption or guardianship or were still undecided on either option.

Six grandmothers who openly shared their situations at the group meeting, were contacted by telephone and later individually interviewed face to face at a site where each felt most comfortable. Three other grandmothers, who were referred by a social worker at Santa Barbara County Department of Social Services, were also contacted by telephone and interviewed individually. At initial contact all the participants were told about the purpose of the study and that the interview would last approximately 1 1/2 hours. They were also advised that their identity would not be disclosed in any report of the research and that they would need to sign a consent form volunteering to participate in the study. Each was advised that they could withdraw from the study at any point in the process.

The sampling procedure used to select grandmothers for this study was purposeful rather than random. In purposeful sampling, according to Patton (1990), the participants are chosen for their ability to provide information-rich data contributing to an in-depth study of the phenomena. All of the grandmothers were selected based on whether their specific situations met the criteria set by the researcher.

Human Subjects Protections

Although the grandmothers appeared eager to share their thoughts and feelings, this researcher recognized that the questions asked during the interview could result in the respondents' becoming very emotional, particularly when recalling painful memories in dealing with their adult children. It was possible that a respondent might prefer to change the subject, temporarily withdraw from the interview process, or terminate the interview. If necessary, this researcher was prepared to stop the interview, to provide whatever immediate counseling support might be needed, and to assist the respondents to seek other professional help, to deal with strong emotional reactions to the interview process.

A potential risk for the participants was that some questions were of a personal nature and were uncomfortable to talk about. Another risk was anxiety about their anonymity being revealed should the audio-tapes be heard by someone other than the researcher. One final risk was concerns that information shared might lead to further intervention by children services agency officials. These risks and concerns were addressed in the informed consent protocol.

This researcher honored the requests of all participants to be interviewed at times and sites most convenient and comfortable for them while maintaining confidentiality. The participants were advised that there would be no adverse actions or repercussions if they withdrew from the study or refused to answer questions. They were also advised that all their audio-taped responses would be disguised and would be destroyed when the research was completed. In addition, participants were advised that

their responses to the demographic questionnaire would also be disguised and destroyed after the data analysis was completed.

Interview Guide

An interview guide with specific topic areas and open-ended questions was developed for the interviewing. This guide was used primarily as a reminder that each interview should cover the same subject areas.

The questions in the interview guide, which established a starting point for the data collection, were developed from the researcher's experience, knowledge of the subject area and review of the literature. It was expected that the questions could change for subsequent interviews after responses to the first few interviews had been analyzed.

Some demographic information was collected from participants during the interview process. The demographic information included: age, ethnicity, marital status, education, employment status, number of grandchildren in the home and length of time living with grandparents, custody status of the grandchild, source of child support, and grandchild's relation (through son or daughter) to grandparents.

Copies of the full interview guide, demographic questionnaire and informed consent may be found in Appendices A, C and D.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the methodology used in the study, including the data collection and data analysis procedures. The demographic information about the subjects follows, along with the results of the data analysis. The chapter ends with a summary of the findings.

Overview of the Methodology

Nine subjects were initially selected for the study. The first three subjects' interviews were transcribed and coded sequentially. However, in the course of the interviews it was determined that they had no juvenile court experience or social services staff involved in the lives of their grandchildren because the subjects had obtained legal guardianship through private means. These respondents did not fit the criteria for inclusion in the study, and, consequently, their interviews were not included in the full data analysis. However, information obtained from these three individuals helped to refocus subsequent interviews with respondents who did meet the selection criteria.

This researcher used an interview guide (see Appendix A) to aid in eliciting specific information from the respondents. Coding of the responses to the interviews was done sequentially with the coding of one subject's entire interview being completed before coding the next subject's interview. For example, Mrs. "P's" data was coded, followed by Mrs. "Y's" then Mrs. "O's," etc. The subjects' responses to questions were sorted into logical categories based upon their similarity in content.

The categories were then examined to identify the themes which drew the categories together.

Each interview was tape-recorded and the tapes of the interviews were listened to twice—once straight through without reading the transcripts of the interviews. The tapes were then heard the second time while reading the transcripts to listen for initial provisional categories. In order to help focus the researcher, notes were taken of key words and phrases when the tapes were first heard without reading the transcripts. More notes were taken when simultaneously listening to the tapes and reading the transcripts. The notes were reviewed to identify similarities in which responses could be grouped together. Phrases of the transcripts were then cut up and divided into piles corresponding to the groupings, i.e., categories, identified for each question in the interview guide.

Each group of responses, now sorted into categories, was then carefully reviewed several times to identify themes. Themes reflected "outside the family" influences of agencies and their interpretation of laws and regulations. Influences "inside the family" reflected the subjects' interaction with family members and the family's belief system. Another theme also was identified that reflected the subjects' feelings around their renewed parental role.

Description of the Respondents

Six subjects who met the criteria for the study were interviewed. Three were members of a grandparents' support group in northern San Luis Obispo County and three were referred by a social worker from Santa Barbara County Department of

Social Services. All six subjects were given pseudonyms to protect their identity in the descriptions that follow.

The subjects ranged in age from 50 to 73. One was Caucasian, 2 were Black and 3 were Hispanic. The grandchildren ranged in age from 3 to 17. Three of the subjects were married and three were widowed. Three subjects were employed and three were retired. All of the subjects received some form of financial and medical assistance from social services for the care of their grandchildren.

Mrs. "P"

Mrs. "P" was a 53 year-old Caucasian grandmother who had legal guardianship of her 8 year-old granddaughter. The grandchild had been in her care 4 1/2 years, as Mrs. "P's" daughter was neglectful due to her drug addiction. Mrs. "P" was married, had two years of college and was self-employed. She had legal guardianship of another grandchild who was not part of this study.

Mrs. "Y"

Mrs. "Y" was a 73 year-old Hispanic grandmother, adopting her 3 year-old grandson who had been in her care since birth. She was given custody of her grandson directly from the hospital. Mrs. "Y" was a widow with a high school education. She was retired, but longed to return to the workforce.

Mrs. "O"

Mrs. "O" was a 57 year-old Hispanic grandmother who was adopting her 3 year-old grandson who had been in her care approximately one year. She was married, had one year of vocational school training and was self-employed.

Mrs. "E"

Mrs. "E" was a 68 year-old Hispanic grandmother who was adopting her adult daughter's 5 children, ages 17, 16, 13, 12, and 11, all of whom had been in her care for approximately 10 years. She was a widow who completed her junior year in high school. Mrs. "E" retired due to disability which did not impair her ability to care for her grandchildren. She was given custody of the grandchildren following her daughter's drug-induced psychosis, which endangered the welfare of the grandchildren.

Mrs. "R"

Mrs. "R" was a 50 year-old Black grandmother who was adopting her adult daughter's 3 sons, ages 12, 10, and 9. She was married, had a high school education and was employed full time. Two of the children had been in her care for 2 years and one had been with her for approximately 1 year and 10 months. All of the children were in foster care without the grandmother's knowledge prior to being placed with her. Mrs. "R" had also changed her work schedule to accommodate the needs of her grandchildren. The grandchildren were removed from Mrs. "R's" daughter because of neglect resulting from her daughter's drug abuse.

Mrs. "G"

Mrs. "G" was a 71 year-old Black grandmother who was raising her adult daughter's twin sons, age 15. She was a retired, high school graduate who was widowed. The children had been in her care for 4 1/2 years. Mrs. "G's" daughter's drug and alcohol abuse rendered her incapable of caring for the children. She was currently considering obtaining legal guardianship, but reported that could change to adoption at any time.

Findings**Theme 1: Doing What I've Got to Do--Family Influences on Decision-Making**

This theme was identified when respondents were asked what considerations they had in making the choice of adoption or legal guardianship. Five of the six respondents mentioned comments or input (solicited or not) from family members about their decision to provide for the grandchildren on a short-term or long-term basis. Some input was supportive of the grandmothers' taking on such a task while others were not as supportive.

Category 1: Butting In

Unsolicited comments from extended family seemed to reflect their having interfered with the subjects' decision to care for their grandchildren. Comments that seemed to influence the grandmothers' decision follow.

Mrs. "Y" reported wanting to be solely responsible for her 3 year-old grandson's future, as she had made mistakes raising her 13 children and wanted to do

things differently with her grandson. She said, "See, having 13 children there are some things that you accept that you really wanted to do, but I made mistakes. I wanted to be in charge of helping him as much as I can to grow up right." However, when she was contacted by hospital staff to assume responsibility for her grandson's care, friends and her older children kept telling her, "You're too old to take care of a baby. You're too old." When Mrs. "Y" questioned their reasons for not offering to care for the child since they were younger and were financially stable, her children gave excuses of having to work. Since her adult children offered no support for her or the infant, Mrs. "Y" became angry when her children stated their opinion about how she was parenting the child or how her age appeared to be an impediment to rearing a child who would not become a "juvenile delinquent." As a result, Mrs. "Y" appeared to be resentful when their comments were unsolicited. She said,

Oh no, they had nothing to do with my decision, no. I'm not influenced by what they say. They have minds of their own. They're all adults. I do what I think is right. They kept telling me that you're too old to take care of a baby. You're too old. I say, "Then why don't one of you step up?"

Other unsolicited comments by family members were noted in the following statement by Mrs. "O."

Certain members of my family have told me at the age that you are, why don't you put him up for adoption?

Mrs. "P" was the only subject who received no input from extended family, as there was no family other than her husband, her daughter and a developmentally delayed adult son.

Category 2: Family Belief Systems

All respondents spoke of a need to be supportive of and responsible for family members who are in need of help. Each spoke of their backgrounds which fostered the belief that family needs are to be a priority and one's conflict with a needy family member are considered secondary. This researcher will use the respondents' words and not interpret what was said in order to be perfectly fair and true to their expressions. Examples of their beliefs follow.

Mrs. "R" spoke at length about her relationship with her daughter between the ages of 9 and 16 when she consistently ran away from the home. She said that they "fussed and argued all the time." According to Mrs. "R," her daughter preferred listening to her friends who "talked back to their mothers." Mrs. "R" insisted that her daughter not disrespect her, as "I don't do it with my mother, you're not doing it with me." She said their relationship continued to deteriorate until her daughter left the home. Mrs. "R" reported that her daughter became pregnant at age 17 while homeless. The day after the baby's birth, Mrs. "R" said that she brought them to her home and "I took care of them, her and the baby. Bought everything, that's me. Buy everything the baby needs." When questioned about a facial expression she made while describing her actions, as it was clear that her daughter needed help, Mrs. "R" laughed briefly then said, "Well, I'm not going to let her stay out on the street with a kid when I'm able to help take care of her. I can't do that, you know, it's my grandchild. I'll help take care of it if I can."

Mrs. "R's" daughter lost custody of the child to the biological father due to her drug use which was unknown to Mrs. "R." She gave birth again and both were

cared for by Mrs. "R's" mother. Mrs. "R's" daughter left the baby with the maternal grandmother and returned twice more with two infants who were also cared for by Mrs. "R's" mother. Just prior to the death of Mrs. "R's" mother, Mrs. "R's" daughter had the children in her care. However, they were placed in foster care shortly after she began caring for them. Mrs. "R" learned of the children's out-of-home placement by accident and subsequently petitioned social services for placement of the children with her.

Despite their disagreements over the years and Mrs. "R's" belief that she now had a more distant relationship with her daughter, Mrs. "R" believed that their conflicts needed to be set aside to meet the need at hand. She said,

I guess I'm like my mother. She loved her kids, she loved her grandkids and she loved her great grandkids. So it seems I'm following in her footsteps, doing the same thing she was doing. Well, if they need it, she's going to do it. That's me, just like her. And that's what I'm doing... Forget self... it's always the kids.

Mrs. "G," like the other grandmothers, held a similar belief that conflicts with their adult child were to be put on a back burner if there was a need, especially where grandchildren were concerned. Her comments were shared by all of the respondents.

This sense of belonging to and being responsible for them. She [children's mother died one year ago] was a family member. We'll fill her duties. So we are doing that. That makes you decide. That makes your decision for you.

Category 3: Keep It in the Family

A commonality amongst all the respondents was the desire to have their grandchildren remain in the care of family. All expressed a preference that their

grandchildren be in their care in lieu of placement in foster care where they would have no connection to family. Mrs. "E," in particular, was adamant that her grandchildren never have to experience feeling alienated from family, as she did when she was placed with god parents as an infant. She felt strongly that she wanted to protect them from the loneliness and disconnection from their parents and siblings, as she had, should her grandchildren be placed with strangers in foster care. In addition, all respondents expressed a belief that should something happen to them before their grandchildren reached adulthood, another family member would take care of the grandchildren. A sampling of their responses follow.

1. There's nothing really happy about this situation except that you realize that your grandkids aren't going to be raised by strangers. They're still in the family. You still have contact with cousins and hopefully siblings.
2. And when I talked to my son about the kids going into foster care he said, 'We can't do that.' I said, Why can't we? He said, 'We've got this gigantic house here, and there's nobody in it. And they're ours, so we might as well go and get them'... And we did.

Theme 2: Maintaining Family Relationship

Despite conflicts with their adult children, all of the respondents desired to put their disagreements behind them in order to have a relationship with their adult children.

Category: Resistive to Change--Relationships with Adult Children

The respondents were asked what their relationship was like with their adult child before and after the grandchildren were in their care. All respondents spoke of a conflictful relationship with their adult child, as their child rarely took their advice. Each respondent gave heartfelt accounts of literally beating their heads against a wall

to get their adult child to change their lifestyle. All mentioned, in varying degrees, giving their adult child ultimatums, which at times were met with verbal abuse or physical attacks upon the respondents. For example, Mrs. "Y" reported that she told her daughter that she could no longer "associate" with her if the adult child continued her relationship with her "drug dealing" boyfriend when he was released from prison. Immediately upon the boyfriend's release, Mrs. "Y's" daughter moved in with him. Mrs. "Y's" daughter became angry with her mother and, following a shouting match, discontinued contact with Mrs. "Y".

Mrs. "R" gave her daughter a similar ultimatum when she tired of giving her money for non-existent crises. According to Mrs. "R," her daughter repeatedly asked for money to pay her rent or to buy food or clothing for the grandchildren. When her daughter was evicted, Mrs. "R" suggested that her daughter move away from her substance-abusing friends and move near her if she wanted her assistance. If Mrs. "R's" daughter chose not to live near her, Mrs. "R" would no longer give her money. Mrs. "R's" daughter chose not to live near her mother.

Like Mrs. "R," Mrs. "P's" ultimatum was that of "not lifting a finger" to help her daughter financially as long as she was addicted to methamphetamines and continued to associate with drug users and dealers. Mrs. "P" has had no contact with her daughter in the past two years.

Mrs. "G's" daughter became verbally abusive when she was not allowed to stay in Mrs. "G's" home while the grandchildren were living there. Her daughter was not allowed to telephone the grandchildren or visit them if she was under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Invariably, Mrs. "G's" daughter showed up on her

doorstep in a condition Mrs. "G" found intolerable. With each occurrence, Mrs. "G" called the police and had her daughter removed.

In similar fashion, the adult children of Mrs. "O" and Mrs. "E," respectively, were restricted from visiting their homes by social services as long as they had custody of the grandchildren. The restrictions, which both respondents were required to enforce, were imposed to prevent Mrs. "O's" son from absconding with her grandson and Mrs. "E's" daughter from physically abusing the grandchildren.

Theme 3: Walking a Tightrope

This theme was identified as the respondents had ambivalent feelings toward their adult children. At times, the respondents were frustrated and angry with their adult children while simultaneously feeling conflicted about not having any contact with them should they remain angry with their adult children.

Category 1: Sitting on a Time Bomb

The respondents were asked what feelings did they have toward their adult child after they had raised their children and now had to raise their grandchildren. Two of the six respondents seemed reluctant to express feelings about their adult child. Three others spoke openly about negative feelings toward their adult child while the last respondent seemed to deny having any feelings. A sampling of their responses follows.

Mrs. "P" spoke openly about resentful feelings toward her daughter who was unavailable to care for her child due to her preference for partying with friends and ultimately becoming addicted to methamphetamines. Mrs. "P" reported having had a

volatile relationship with her daughter from her teenage years through adulthood. When Mrs. "P" would urge her daughter to be more responsible in caring for her child, she reported that her already conflictful relationship with her daughter further deteriorated. Their relationship became more explosive when Mrs. "P" suggested that her daughter discuss giving her custody of the child. She stated,

... The school is on us about we don't have any legal right to sign the papers for her. Let's get together and talk about... You can't take care of her now, neither one of you have jobs or a decent place to live. Can we do a temporary guardianship?

Following this exchange, Mrs. "P" said that her daughter "went absolutely berserk," shouting that "She's my child, you tried to steal her from me. You're not going to get guardianship of her!"

Unlike Mrs. "P," Mrs. "G" did not experience any conflicts with her daughter around the care of her grandchildren, as her daughter was more subtle in her attempts to get Mrs. "G" to respond to her needs and those of the grandchildren. As a result, Mrs. "G" felt that her relationship with her daughter was in constant turmoil because of her daughter's manipulative behavior. Mrs. "G" stated,

She was very manipulative. She could put the children in a situation that you would say, my God these kids are in danger. The children had been dragged from pillar to post, and sometimes I think she did this in order for us to come and get them from her, because she would make it very unstable. And in order to protect the children, I would go and get them. As far as my relationship with her, it was turmoil a lot because I didn't feel that she should be able to do this.

Mrs. "Y" seemed to deny having any feelings about her daughter. She spoke openly about having conflicts with her other adult children because she would not alienate her grandson's mother. Mrs. "Y" reported that, as a battered wife, she learned to handle conflict by not displaying any angry feelings which would further annoy her

husband who would yell, "Nothing ever bothers you!" She said that her "insides" would be "turning upside down," but she never let others know that she was upset. In view of her comments, this researcher believed that Mrs. "Y" had strong feelings about her daughter and her chosen lifestyle.

Category 2: Connection to Adult Child

In the subjects' response to the question of what considerations they had in making the choice of adoption or legal guardianship, this theme was identified as the contents of the subjects' responses seemed to reflect an ongoing connection between the grandmothers and their adult child who was in need. The grandmothers seemed to have had difficulty with not being supportive of or having no contact with their adult child following a disagreement, argument or the adult child's refusal to accept the grandmothers' advice. In addition, the grandmothers seemed to have had a need to advise extended family of crises they experienced with their adult child, thus, receiving solicited and unsolicited comments about the grandmothers' decisions for the care of the grandchildren.

All respondents supported their adult child in a variety of ways. The most common support provided by five of the six respondents was that of finances. The comments of Mrs. "Y" and Mrs. "E" are noted, respectively.

1. I was kind of helping her out, financially, the little bit I could, because she was having problems. Twice she was homeless, so I let her stay with me.
2. She ended up in prison. I was writing to her, sending her money, sent her parole clothes and all that, you know. I had to pay \$1,500 for the window she broke at the house; two months rent that she was behind; put in food and clothing for the kids.

In lieu of giving her daughter money when she requested it for supposed crises, Mrs. "G" chose to purchase items for the grandchildren and delivered them to make sure their needs were met.

All respondents seemed to make themselves available to their adult child at the respondents' discretion, especially when there was no ongoing crisis. A representative sample of the respondents' support was noted in the respective comments of Mrs. "Y" and Mrs. "O."

1. She doesn't have a car, she doesn't have a phone. Sometimes they give me her mail. I'll go take her mail. And maybe about once a month she'll ask me for a ride to the clinic or she'll ask me to pick her up and take her to the grocery store.
2. Got a call, I got to go down to the jail to pick up his clothes. Every time I have to go down there and pick up his stuff it kills me, it just kills me. Why do I have to go through this again? Why? It doesn't just hurt himself. He hurts us too because we love him. Otherwise we could care less.

Theme 4: Unexpected Detour on the Road of Life

In response to the question of what feelings did they have toward their adult child after they had raised their children and now had to raise their grandchildren, the respondents' comments seemed to indicate a personal struggle around their new parenting role. The following categories were identified based on relevant comments made by the respondents.

Category 1: Feelings of Loss

Five of the six respondents expressed feelings of loss over control of their life and the freedom from parenting experienced prior to becoming responsible for their grandchildren. Only one of the respondents expressed feeling no loss as she had supportive family members who provide respite when needed. The following reflects the majority view of the grandmothers.

Mrs. "O" spoke of the freedom she and her husband enjoyed after her children were older. They enjoyed traveling, taking off for weekend stays in Mexico, eating out on a whim or just enjoyed each other's company in the quiet of their home. She said,

We had freedom at last. We'd raised our children, we could see our grandchildren when we wanted to. When we got tired, "Come pick them up." It was great, wonderful. She went on to say,

Then all of a sudden, I have a child that if I want to go anywhere, I need to get a baby-sitter. Even just to go to dinner, you know, we used to love to go to dinner on Saturdays... All that's changed. We're starting all over again, you know. Our time is not really our own.

In contrast to the other five grandmothers, Mrs. "G" reported that she did not experience any feelings of loss, as her extended family readily provided her with support when needed. She commented,

...If I decided, you know what, I'd like to go to Jamaica, my kids would see that I go. There would not be a problem. If I wanted to leave them [grandchildren] here for a while, that would be fine too. So I'm free to do the things that everybody else calls quote-unquote living. It's just that I choose to do... it's not pushed on me. I don't feel burdened by it. And that's why I don't have to sit in that meeting with a sad face going, what in the hell am I going to do. I don't feel like that. I feel... that's another thing that saddens me about some of the grandparents [in the support group]. I wonder, do you have the support at home that I have. You know, we are a support group here. We support each other, but the point is, I have so much support here

that I stand alone. I feel sad because it's obvious they can't have the support--I see it on their faces.

Category 2: Effective Parenting

Of the six respondents, three doubted their ability to effectively parent their grandchildren whom they perceived as being smarter and more active than they had experienced. Two respondents expressed some inadequacy to handle behavior problems of their grandchildren, as they did not have the skills or knowledge to help the grandchildren without professional help. Only one respondent expressed confidence in her ability to effectively parent her grandchildren. Mrs. "Y's" comments were worth noting regarding her dilemma in parenting her three year-old grandson.

Mrs. "Y" is the mother of 13 children who had raised two older siblings (ages 21 and 18) of the grandchild whom she was adopting. The grandchild's mother was the 10th child whom Mrs. "Y" described as an "irresponsible, happy-go-lucky" person. Mrs. "Y" reported having depended on her children to discipline each other given her need to work, as her husband's employment was sporadic. She reported having no knowledge of her daughter's drug involvement as a teenager, but was advised by her older children who assumed the role of parent in Mrs. "Y's" absence. In parenting the older grandchildren, Mrs. "Y" had the support of several of her older children who assisted in the care of the children. There was much less support in parenting her 3 year-old grandson. She reported that although the two older siblings still resided in the home, there was little interaction between them and the 3 year-old, nor did they provide her with respite when needed. Mrs. "Y" said that she had a difficult time

knowing the difference between spoiling and discipline. The following statement best captures Mrs. "Y's" struggle.

I don't know the difference between parenting and discipline. I can't take him serious. See, when I had my kids, they disciplined each other. To the best of my ability, I'm just alone with him, you know. But I have a tendency to spoil him. I want to make sure what's spoiling and what's discipline because I don't know. That's why I'm going to take parenting classes.

Mrs. "G," on the other hand, differed in her view of parenting her grandchildren. She expressed confidence in handling any behavior problems with her grandsons, as she not only had a set of rules that she expected the grandchildren to adhere to, but also had the support of her older sons to enforce the rules when necessary. Mrs. "G" gave the following example of how one behavior problem was handled.

[Name of child] has the tendency to feel, okay, everybody in here is dumb except me. He would go in the shower and just stand there. And [name of oldest son] told him, 'Okay, now you might think I'm dumb, but I'm not. And please don't think my mama is because she raised me. Now you went in my shower this time and did not bathe. Number one, I could tell by the way the water is falling, it's not hitting a body. So, I tell you what we're going to do. We're going to take this leather belt and I'm going to lay it across this bathroom door. If when you step over it, it means two things. You have either bathed or I'm going to whip your butt with this belt.' He straightened up right away. Now maybe that's unheard of from that group [grandparents' support group] over there, but we don't think anything about it.

Theme 5: What's the Law Got to Do With It?

Respondents needed information on a Federal law which required they select one permanent care-taking option for the grandchildren in their care. The following

categories reflect the information shared by agency officials on whom the subjects depended and whether the respondents found the information and the law useful.

Category 1: Agency Influences--How the Law Influences Decision-Making

The researcher hoped to answer a question as to what effect the Federal law had on the subjects' decision to choose one of two legal options to care for their grandchildren. All subjects were faced with making a decision to become their grandchildren's legal guardian or their adoptive parent. Each depended on the advice or direction of agency staff who were knowledgeable of the rules/regulations governing the options of legal guardianship or adoption. Their knowledge would enable the subjects to choose the option best suited to meet their needs and those of their grandchildren.

Misleading Information

Two of the respondents were given misleading information from agency staff about the options of legal guardianship and adoption.

One was told that legal guardianship would better meet the grandchildren's financial and medical needs. If she opted for adoption, there would be no financial or medical assistance for the grandchildren, as they would be viewed by the state as the respondent's biological children who were her sole responsibility. The respondent was not advised about her rights and responsibilities under the law and services that would be available to her and the grandchild. Another was given information about the adoptions program, but with no mention of the financial assistance available to the family in view of the child's adverse parental background. Given the child's adverse parental background (i.e., parent's drug and alcohol abuse), financial assistance was

available to meet the child's needs until age 18 or older if the child has a disability. Of these two respondents, one reported having been steered toward the option of legal guardianship, as agency staff recommended this option. The other felt led toward adoption, as agency staff provided information on one option only. One other respondent was given information on the adoptions program only. Only three respondents were given specific information about both. Despite the law which required agencies to advise caregivers of both options, in this study, all subjects were not apprised of the change in the law.

Full Information

Legal guardianship and adoption are permanent care-taking options for relatives. Adoption is a more permanent option, as it cannot be reversed as can legal guardianship. For respondents to make an informed decision, they needed accurate information about the options available to them. The case of Mrs. "O" is representative of the subjects who were advised of both options.

Mrs. "O" reported having been advised of both options by agency staff, but ultimately chose to adopt her three-year old grandson given the likelihood that the child's parents would not change their lifestyle. She reported that her son, the child's father, had a history of drug and alcohol abuse which rendered him incapable of adequately caring for the child. Mrs. "O" added that her son also had a long history of being in and out of prison for drug-related offenses which often prevented him from being available to protect his son from a neglectful living environment with his mother who abused alcohol. According to Mrs. "O," her then two-year old grandson was removed from his mother's care after he was found two blocks from home,

walking down a heavily trafficked alley late one evening. When the police located the child's residence, they discovered the mother "passed out" from alcohol and difficult to arouse. The child was initially placed by CPS with Mrs. "O's" niece who allowed the child's father to visit the child without agency permission. Mrs. "O's" son absconded with the child and returned him approximately five days later. The niece brought the child to Mrs. "O," as she believed that she would not be able to prevent the child's father from taking the child again. CPS ultimately left the child in Mrs. "O's" care, but issued a restraining order against her son which Mrs. "O" had to enforce.

When the child's parents made no progress to change their lifestyle in order to regain custody of the child, Mrs. "O" had to decide on a permanent care-taking option for him. She said,

As far as family is concerned, my husband and I spoke about it. The reason why we decided that we wanted to legally adopt him. In the first place, his name isn't going to change. He's got the same last name as we do because him being our son's son. Because at this point, if I don't legally adopt him and I stay guardianship, the mother still has rights to him as far as if she wants to visit him... And I feel she hasn't changed her ways either. She has three other children that have been taken away from her. She can't have anything to do with them at all legally. So if this is the fourth one... why do I think she's going to change now? This way neither one of them--just as much my son, not just her--just like my son. I can't see him change his ways...

Incomplete Information

Unlike the subjects who were fully advised of their options, subjects who were advised of only one option and were guided in a specific direction follow.

Mrs. "P" had been the primary caretaker of her granddaughter from six months of age until age 7 when she was granted legal guardianship. She and her

husband initially sought to help their adult daughter with childcare which ultimately led to their daughter taking less responsibility for the child. Following emergency treatment of the child at a local hospital for a high fever and strep throat, Mrs. "P" approached her daughter (after weeks of searching for her) to discuss making the care of the child more legal by the daughter awarding her legal guardianship. At that time the daughter resisted any attempts by Mrs. "P" to gain formal custody of the grandchild.

According to Mrs. "P," her daughter continued to be an "absent" parent whose drug use and choice of friends deteriorated. Mrs. "P" reported that on one occasion when her daughter had not been in contact with her or the child for several months, her daughter "kidnapped" the child under the guise of wanting to fit training wheels on a new bike for which the child had to be present. The whereabouts of the mother and child were unknown for several weeks while Mrs. "P" frantically searched for them. She ultimately contacted officials of the child's pre-school, law enforcement and Child Protective Services for assistance in locating the child, as Mrs. "P" strongly believed that her granddaughter was in danger. Following a drug raid, which was prompted by Mrs. "P," on the residence suspected to be her daughter's, the child was placed in protective custody and later returned to the care of Mrs. "P."

A three-year custody battle ensued where Mrs. "P's" daughter was granted every opportunity by the court to regain custody of the child to no avail. Uncertain how to proceed to continue to protect her grandchild and to remain responsible for her, Mrs. "P" sought guidance from Child Protective Services (CPS). When questioned about the effect of the Federal law on her decision to choose the option of

adoption or legal guardianship, Mrs. "P" said that adoption was not an option presented to her. She said,

CPS told me what to do, to fill out this paperwork for temporary guardianship. With these children as legal wards, we do qualify for welfare for them, not for ourselves. And that's why I did it.

Similar to Mrs. "P," who was advised of the option of legal guardianship only, Mrs. "Y" reported having been informed by social services staff of the option of adoption only. Her comments were indicative of her belief that she was steered toward adoption of her grandchild which she believed was the right choice for her. Mrs. "Y" asked,

What is legal guardianship? I don't know what... They didn't talk to me about that.

Category 2: Is This Really Necessary?

All respondents were involved with the juvenile court process which entailed supervision by agency social workers and attending court hearings every six months. Four of the six respondents were adopting their grandchildren. The following is typical of all four based on their view of the options and their experience.

Mrs. "E's" grandchildren were removed from her daughter's care following a drug-induced psychosis which rendered the children at risk in their mother's care. The children became court dependents and were subsequently placed in Mrs. "E's" care. The grandchildren and Mrs. "E" were subject to state regulations governing the care and protection of children. Mrs. "E" was required to cooperate with monthly contact from an assigned social worker who was responsible for supervising the children's care with their grandmother. Mrs. "E" was also required to attend juvenile

court hearings every six months for review of the grandchildren's progress. She experienced intervention by the court and supervision by social workers as restrictive and, at times, unnecessary. Mrs. "E's" view of the intrusions from the court and social workers follows.

I'd rather have them adopted because like that...it seems to me that I have the freedom that if I want to go to Montana to visit my son, I can go and pick up and just go. But, if I take them out of state when they're under foster care, I have to notify everybody (i.e., attorneys and judge for a court order), and then I have to get a social worker coming every six months and checking on them and everything else.

Mrs. "Y" held similar views as Mrs. "E." She said,

Instead of having them...having to have interference with the court...having to go to court every six months. Because it's kind of a nuisance, you know. And this way, by adopting, he's just my little boy.

Category 3: Indifference to Options

Legal guardianship and adoption are considered to be the only alternative permanent options for children as expressed in a Federal law, effective 1/1/98. The subjects' views of the Federal law on their decision to choose legal guardianship or adoption follow. Five of the six expressed similar views as held by Mrs. "G."

The law had nothing to do with our decision. We just feel that these are not foster children. They are family. It's almost like it doesn't need to be done legally. They're just our children. The rules and regulations and all that does not bother us.

Mrs. "E's" comments echoed those of Mrs. "G" and three other grandmothers.

I figured, what difference does it make. To me, it makes no difference, I mean, being the foster mother or being the grandmother and the adopted mother because this is where they belong, I guess. And this is where I belong until they either grow up or God takes me, because I love them.

The sixth grandmother, Mrs. "P," could not comment on the effect of the Federal law on her decision to choose legal guardianship or adoption for the permanent care of her granddaughter, as she reported that CPS did not discuss the law with her.

In view of all responses from the subjects, it appeared that they, for the most part, were unfamiliar with the law which seemed to have had little influence on their decision making.

Summary

In this study, I tried to find out what factors influenced the decision of grandmothers who were raising their grandchildren of substance-abusing parents to choose the legal option of adoption vs. guardianship. The respondents' answers to questions posed from an interview guide led me to identify specific themes and categories that described these influences.

One major question the study attempted to answer was how the Federal law affected the grandmothers' decision to choose the legal option of adoption or guardianship. For most respondents awareness of the law was minimal and did not directly enter into their decision making. However, information about the law was needed to know what options were available to provide for their grandchildren permanently. The grandmothers tended to rely upon people outside the family, in particular social service workers, for this information. In effect, the Federal law was interpreted for the grandmothers by the information, advice and recommendations provided by the social services workers attached to the custody case. In some cases

this information was accurate while in others it was incomplete, inaccurate or misleading.

Influences “inside the family” were identified when respondents discussed what considerations they had in making the choice of adoption or guardianship. The grandmothers indicated their need to consider the thoughts and feelings of extended family as well as family traditions in reaching their decision.

A theme, walking a tightrope, was identified as the respondents had ambivalent feelings toward their adult children. At times, the respondents were angry with their adult children while simultaneously feeling conflicted about not having any contact with them should they remain angry with their adult children. In the theme maintaining family relationship, it appeared from their responses that the respondents had difficulty having no contact with their adult child, especially after they had argued or the adult child refused the respondents’ offer of help.

The theme, unexpected detour on the road of life, was identified when respondents answered the question how they felt about their adult child after the respondents had raised their children and now had to raise their grandchildren. Their responses reflected feelings of loss in the form of postponed plans for retirement, delayed goals, intrusions on privacy and changes in their role as caregiver. The respondents’ feelings about parenting at a later stage in their life when they had other expectations for themselves reflected their having minimized the losses out of a sense of obligation and responsibility to their grandchildren.

Discussion of the findings will follow in Chapter 5, along with limitations of the study and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to examine some of the factors that determine the choices made by grandmothers with regard to permanent care of the grandchildren when the grandmother assumes the caretaker role for a grandchild because of the parent's alcohol or drug abuse. In particular, the study was designed to examine the grandmothers' thoughts and feelings about their relationship with the substance abusing adult child which might indicate why they take on the responsibility of caring for their grandchildren when their life plans may not include this care-taking function.

The mandate of the Federal law of 1/1/98 required subjects to choose only one permanent care-taking option, either legal guardianship or adoption. This researcher wanted to see how a close or distant relationship between the grandmother and her adult child affected the decision, and in what way the choice of an option would be based on the subjects' belief that her adult child would be capable of parenting the grandchild in the future. If the relationship with the adult child was distant, this researcher believed that the subjects would select adoption, as they believed that their adult child was incapable of parenting their children. By teasing out the subtle interplay in the relationship between the subjects and their adult children and the legal requirements, the study would provide a better understanding for people working in the field of adoption.

With these ideas in mind, this researcher conducted in-depth interviews with a small sample of grandmothers who were caring for a grandchild because of the

parent's substance abuse. The audio tapes of the interviews were analyzed using qualitative procedures.

Review of the Findings

Five major themes were identified in the analysis of the data. The first theme, "Doing What I've Got to Do--Family Influences on Decision-Making," was identified in response to the question, "What considerations did you have in making the choice of adoption or guardianship?" The second theme, "Maintaining Family Relationship," involved striking a balance between feelings of alienation toward the adult child and wanting to be a caring mother. This theme was identified when the subjects were asked, "What was your relationship like with your adult child before your grandchildren were in your care?" The third theme, "Walking A Tightrope," involved the frustrations experienced by the grandmothers as they attempted without success to help their own children change self-destructive behavior. This theme was developed when subjects were asked, "What feelings did you have toward your adult child after having raised your own children and are now having to raise your grandchildren?" The fourth theme was also related to the question, "What feelings did you have toward your adult child after having raised your own children and are now having to raise your grandchildren?" The grandmothers talked about changes in their own lives, as if they had taken "An Unexpected Detour on the Road of Life." The final theme, "What's the Law Got to Do With It?" was developed from the question, "What has been the effect of the Federal law on your decision to choose the legal option of adoption or guardianship?"

Theme 1: Doing What I've Got to Do—Family Influences on Decision-Making

This theme was identified when the respondents were asked what things they considered in making the choice of adoption or legal guardianship. This theme reflected the subjects' experiences and influences "inside the family," as five of the six grandmothers spoke of extended family members having made comments about their decision to provide for the grandchildren. According to the grandmothers, the comments from extended family were often unsolicited and questioned why they would take on the responsibility for the grandchild's care. Many of the comments were confusing to the subjects, as extended family preferred that the grandmothers have the grandchildren cared for by others in foster care. Although the grandmothers reported feeling hurt by the family members' comments, they listened to their comments then made their decision. One grandmother in particular seemed to be angry with extended family who were critical of her decision to parent a young grandchild in view of her elderly age. She reported having listened to them, but made up her own mind. She said,

Oh no, they had nothing to do with my decision, no. I'm not influenced by what they say. They have minds of their own. They're all adults. I do what I think is right.

Given the grandmothers' account of their experiences with extended family, it appeared to this researcher that despite the hurtful comments, the grandmothers needed to hear what other family members thought and felt about their decision to provide long-term care of the grandchildren. Otherwise, they would run the risk of

being alienated from family whose support they not only needed at the time but also in the future when they might no longer be able to act as care givers.

In addition to the subjects' need to consider the thoughts and feelings of extended family, they also talked about the importance of family traditions in their decision making. When the grandmothers discussed how they handled conflicts with their adult child in the past, all of the grandmothers reported having had conflicts with their adult child prior to the grandchildren being in their care. Of the six grandmothers, two reported having been physically abused by their adult children and all reported having been verbally abused by them. One grandmother spoke of her adult child having thrown a chair at her when she disapproved of the adult child's choice of friends. She recalled locking herself in her bedroom for several hours to escape the adult child's tirades. In spite of their disagreements, all of the grandmothers shared a belief that conflicts with their adult children were not as important as the need to help family in times of crises. Also, all expressed a sense of belonging to and being responsible for family in need. One grandmother, for example, described following in her mother's footsteps to care for her grandchildren in spite of her continued conflict and distant relationship with her daughter.

The subjects' description of their relationship with their adult child appears to this researcher to be one which would alienate the grandmothers from their children. However, the grandmothers' reported support for their adult children and grandchildren seemed to reflect a stronger bond than was visible on the surface. The grandmothers' seeming disregard for their adult children's treatment of them was reflective of the power that family tradition may play in this situation and how little it

is understood by the casual observer. For all intents and purposes, this researcher's view is that the grandmothers experience inner turmoil as a result of having to put aside their differences with their adult children for the sake of family tradition in order to assist family in crises. In light of the inner turmoil experienced by the grandmothers, others working with grandmothers like these would benefit from understanding that they are under stress even if they do not show any visible signs.

Theme 2: Maintaining Family Relationship

The grandmothers in this study described the responses of the adult children to their offers of advice and financial assistance in terms that resembled that of an insecure attachment (Bowlby, 1973). Each of the adult children was described as choosing to distance themselves from their mother during a stressful period by rejecting the mother's offer of help.

Bowlby's (1973) theory also implied that insecure attachment can be viewed as a risk factor that may detract from the individuals' resilience in times of stress. Early attachment experiences of insecure persons (both anxious-ambivalent and avoidant) are characterized by unstable and inadequate regulation of distress by the caretaker and a sense of personal inefficacy in relieving discomfort (Shaver & Hazan, 1993). These experiences may obstruct the development of the inner resources necessary for successful coping with, and adaptation to, life stressors. When facing such situations, for example, these persons may react with strong emotional distress long after the actual threat had ended.

All of the grandmothers reported giving their adult children ultimatums in hopes of getting them to change their destructive lifestyle. One grandmother threatened to have no contact with her daughter if she continued a destructive relationship with her boyfriend. Two others threatened to cut off financial help if their adult children continued friendships and/or associations with drug users. One other grandmother threatened to disallow contact between the grandchildren and her adult daughter if she was under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of contact with the grandchildren. Two other grandmothers threatened to enforce restraining orders against their adult children if necessary. In most cases the grandmothers reported their adult children having pulled away from them in response to these ultimatums.

In the contents of the subjects' responses to the question of what considerations they had in making the choice of adoption or legal guardianship, there seemed to be an ongoing connection between the grandmothers and their adult child who was in need. In this researcher's view, the grandmothers seemed to have had difficulty with not being supportive of or having no contact with their adult child following a disagreement, argument or the adult child's refusal to accept the grandmothers' advice. This finding is not completely understood and might be accounted for by how the grandmothers, perhaps feeling uncomfortable with having no contact with their adult children, made themselves available to their adult children when there was no ongoing crisis as a way to reconcile with their adult children. For example, one grandmother said that she transports her adult daughter to appointments or does other errands for her. She said,

She doesn't have a car, she doesn't have a phone. Sometimes they give me her mail. I'll go take her mail. And maybe about once a month she'll ask me for a ride to the clinic or she'll ask me to pick her up and take her to the grocery store.

In spite of anger towards their adult children for their behaviors and lifestyle choices, it appears that these grandmothers tried to reconcile their differences with their adult children so that the adult children would accept them and their decision for the permanent care of the grandchildren. It is this researcher's view that without the reparation of the relationship between the grandmothers and the grandchild's parent, the grandmother's job of raising her grandchild would be even more stressful than having to make lifestyle changes to accommodate the needs of the grandchild.

Theme 3: Walking A Tightrope

The grandmothers were asked what feelings they had toward their adult child after they had raised children and were now raising their grandchildren. Initially, two of the six respondents seemed reluctant to express feelings about their adult child in this context. Three others spoke of having negative feelings toward their adult child, while the last grandmother seemed to deny having any feelings one way or another towards her adult daughter. However, five of the six grandmothers eventually spoke of feeling frustrated and, at times, angry with their adult children. Simultaneously they felt conflicted about not having any contact with their adult child should they remain angry.

Each of the grandmothers described having an ongoing volatile relationship with her adult child. One grandmother described her daughter "crawling back" to her approximately one week after a physical altercation. She said that she did not want to talk to her daughter, but believed strongly that her daughter was not at fault because she had been drinking heavily at the time. In order to maintain some connection to their adult child, however, this researcher suspects that the grandmothers preferred to minimize any conflicts they were experiencing. The grandmothers' reluctance to express negative feelings toward their adult children appears to this researcher to be an effort to disavow anything that might be perceived as a stumbling block preventing them from maintaining a relationship with their adult children. This researcher holds a similar view with respect to the grandmother who seemed to deny having any feelings toward her adult daughter. Her response reminded this researcher of the old adage: Out of sight, out of mind—if she does not have to think about anything negative, it does not exist.

Those who work with grandmothers such as these need to consider the delicate emotional balance that these grandmothers are trying to maintain with respect to having a relationship with their adult children while at the same time trying to meet the needs of their grandchildren.

Theme 4: Unexpected Detour on the Road of Life

All respondents expressed feelings of loss over the unplanned course their lives were taking by assuming responsibility for a grandchild. Their feelings were expressed when asked how they felt towards their adult children after they had raised

their children and are now having to raise their grandchildren. One grandmother spoke of the freedom from parenting she had experienced prior to caring for her grandson, but came to accept that her time was no longer her own.

All of the grandmothers expressed their desire to have their adult children parent their own children instead of that role having been assumed by them. Because of the adult children's inability to adequately provide for the grandchildren, it appears to the researcher that the grandmothers assumed this responsibility out of a felt sense of obligation. All of the grandmothers expressed a preference that their grandchildren be in their care instead of being placed in foster care where they would have no connection to family. Each of the grandmothers expressed loss of not having an opportunity to experience the traditional grandparent role without having to be the responsible parent. This researcher's impression is that any feelings of loss by the grandmothers had to be shelved just as conflicts with family members were put aside to assist them during crises.

Despite their feeling obligated to provide for their grandchildren out of a sense of loyalty to their family belief, five of the six respondents felt confined by the loss of options. The respondents accepted the caretaker role with some skepticism about parenting their grandchildren whose behaviors, in some cases, they found to be challenging. In lieu of having enjoyed their retirement years with leisure activities which they felt they not only earned, but also deserved, the respondents spent their time learning new parenting techniques to help them raise their grandchildren.

One respondent expressed that she did not feel burdened by the care of her grandchildren, as she had extended family support when needed. The support was

provided to her in the form of respite, finances, and parenting. In view of the respondent having received support from extended family, it appeared to the researcher that the respondent may have had fewer losses. Unlike the five other grandmothers whose expressed feelings of loss were perceived by this researcher to be more intense, the support provided by extended family may be important in reducing the sense of loss of anticipated late life experiences for grandmothers caring for young grandchildren.

Theme 5: What's the Law Got to Do With It?

The grandmothers were asked what had been the effect of the Federal law on their decision to choose adoption or guardianship. All of the grandmothers reported having to contend with social services staff and juvenile court proceedings to make decisions regarding the permanent care of their grandchildren. Their comments reflected the desire to protect and care for their grandchildren, who were at risk of neglect or abuse, and the procedures they were required to follow to permanently provide for them.

Under the laws governing guardianship and adoption procedures, all of the respondents were to be advised of the permanent care-taking options for kin. Interpretation of the law is generally the responsibility of social services staff assigned to each juvenile court case. Aside from interpreting the law, assigned staff were to advise respondents about their rights and responsibilities under the law and services that would be available to them and the grandchildren. Then it was up to the grandparent to make a decision that was in the grandchildren's best interest.

According to the respondents in this study the information given was not always accurate or without bias.

One grandmother reported that she was instructed by social services staff to seek legal guardianship of her granddaughter and was not told about the option to adopt. By not having complete information, this grandmother was unable to take advantage of the myriad of services that were available through adoption for children with emotional and behavioral problems that her granddaughter had been experiencing prior to the court granting guardianship. Other grandmothers spoke of having received limited information regarding both legal options. One grandmother spoke of the uncertainty of being able to meet her grandson's medical needs or his psychological needs if he should exhibit out-of-control behaviors as a teenager that would warrant placement of the child in a residential treatment facility. She said that the adoption social worker rather cavalierly commented that she should begin setting aside funds now to meet her grandson's future needs. Given the child's adverse parental background (i.e., parent's drug and alcohol abuse), financial assistance is available to meet the child's needs until age 18 and even longer if the child has a disability. However, she reported that the social worker did not tell her about the state's Adoptions Assistance Program (AAP). Although this grandmother reported that she preferred to adopt her grandchild, she agonized over whether her meager income would be sufficient to meet their needs, especially if she were to become disabled and no longer able to work. As only the experiences of the grandmothers were the focus of the study, it is not clear why the social services workers acted in this way. Nevertheless, the grandmothers' decision making was made more

complicated by not having the information that they needed. Therefore, this researcher recommends that social workers working in the field of adoption exercise care to clearly advise grandparents about their choices and provide them with adequate opportunity to consider the implications.

For the respondents who were advised of both options of legal guardianship and adoption, all believed that the law did not affect their decision to choose one option over the other. Three of these respondents had decided on adoption, while one had yet to decide on either option, but was considering guardianship. Although the law established a limited timeframe for the respondents to make a decision regarding the permanent care of their grandchildren, the respondents reported that they were not fazed by the law's requirements, nor by timeframes they were expected to meet. Each of the respondents literally took their time to make a decision that permanently affected them and their grandchildren.

The "self-imposed" slower pace for decision making appeared to be due, in part, to the respondents' need to consider things more important to them than the law. In particular, these considerations included the thoughts and feelings of extended family and family traditions. This researcher does not know why the respondents could not make such a lifelong decision without considering such family matters. However, it appeared that they would run the risk of being alienated from family whose support they not only needed at the time, but also in the future when they might not be able to act as caregivers.

Implications for Social Work

The interactions between the grandmothers and their adult children as described by the respondents in this study reflected patterns of adult attachment. The adult children in this researcher's study exhibited distancing from the respondents which triggered attachment responses on the part of the subjects who moved closer to their adult children. Similar behavior was described in Feeney's (1998) study of Adult Attachment and Relationship. The movement, which the grandmothers perceived as not always welcomed by the adult children, seemed to indicate a relationship that resembled a tug of war at one extreme and at the other reflected a more subtle activity of fight or flight.

With respect to the tug of war, the respondents' ultimatums given to their adult children seemed similar to expressions of dysfunctional anger—anger that alienated their children though the respondents wanted them to be near or close to them (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). When there was little or no change in the lifestyle of their adult children, the respondents might be thought to have shifted to expressions of functional anger, (albeit, unconsciously). The functional anger served to draw their adult children near them in hopes that their adult children would allow them to help in times of crises. This researcher believes that the pulling/pushing relationship between the subjects and their adult children reflect both parties' efforts at trying to reconnect with each other. Despite long-standing conflict between them, the respondents appeared never to cease wanting to have a relationship with their adult children.

In dealing with social service agencies that have state mandates under which staff must operate to protect children, the respondents are required to adhere to those

mandates. The mandates often involve agency staff operating under strict legislative guidelines from which they could not deviate. Some respondents felt pressured by agency staff to make critical decisions permanently affecting their family. What this researcher found interesting in this study was that the respondents, in spite of being pressured, cared little about legislative mandates or timeframes. The subjects seemed not to allow outside influences or others to dictate how they should proceed regarding their families' future. The study found that the subjects were most interested in the thoughts and feelings of extended family and in family traditions when handling family crises. Children's services workers who might be frustrated in dealing with these grandparents, as they would appear to be unnecessarily delaying the inevitable of permanently caring for their kin, could benefit from understanding that the grandparents still have an emotional connection to the parents of the children in their care.

As mentioned in Chapter I, the Federal law of 1/1/98 was focused on ensuring that children in out of home placement are provided with a stable home environment, preferably through adoption. Social services agencies were to implement a twofold child welfare services case plan which would speed up a child's movement from foster care to an adoptive home if reunification with the parents failed. The Federal law also encouraged the placement of children with kin, as it would preserve the child's existing family relationships.

While social workers may be focused on regulations and procedures with which to process a case in order to result in the guardianship or adoption of children, relatives are dealing with the same criteria in addition to emotionally-laden issues

which may not be resolved within a legally defined timeframe. It is the researcher's view that the grandmothers' slower paced movement toward selecting either adoption or guardianship is affected by the grandmothers' efforts to maintain a relationship with the grandchildren's parents. It also appears to this researcher that by the grandmothers' focusing on their relationship with their adult children, the grandchildren's need for permanency is not as important as the grandmothers' needs to balance the needs of their adult children with the needs of the grandchildren.

The law had little impact on the subjects' decision making; factors other than the law were more important for them. At the same time, some of the subjects may have been given misleading or inaccurate information by agency staff regarding their options. As a result of agency staff having provided limited information to the subjects, this researcher raises the question of whether grandmothers would have chosen to adopt their grandchild rather than to become their legal guardian. For those grandmothers who chose to adopt, this researcher questions whether they would have chosen the option of legal guardianship.

To the extent that the experiences of this study's subjects may be shared by other grandparents considering permanent care options for their grandchildren, this researcher recommends that agencies implement strategies to ensure that the families have access to full disclosure of provisions in laws that affect them and relatives in their care. Consideration can be given to scheduling a series of forums at which the relatives would hear presentations on the intent of the law from experts in the field. These experts, along with the agency's county counsel, would clearly interpret any laws affecting the relatives and any decisions they would need to make regarding

permanent care options for their kin. After each forum, families could be given a form requiring their signature that they understand the legal options presented to them and the ramifications of each, especially for the option they select. The form would also require the signature of the social workers assigned to the juvenile court cases attesting that they fully understand the law and have clarified any information or questions the families have about the available options.

Limitations of the Study

This study focused only on the experiences of grandmothers who provided information about family relationships and their exchanges with social services staff. No other family members, nor social services staff were interviewed for the study. The sample size, though ethnically diverse, was small and non-random, therefore generalizations to the overall population of grandparents cannot be made.

It is possible that a similar study with a different group of respondents might identify different themes. For instance, there might be a theme of no efforts by grandmothers trying to maintain family relationships.

Recommendations for Further Research

As all of the subjects in this study spoke of the need to be supportive of and responsible for family members in need. This study should be replicated to see if there would be similar results obtained for grandmothers who were financially secure. As all of the grandmothers in the study were not financially secure, similar results

from a study of grandmothers whose financial security was not an issue would be interesting.

This research suggests that the respondents' relationship with their adult children may be described in terms of insecure attachment patterns exhibited by the respondents and their adult children. The respondents' need to reconnect with their adult children despite long-standing conflict was a noteworthy factor in their decision making around the permanent care of their grandchildren. The respondents' efforts at reconnecting with their adult children were viewed by this researcher as a pattern of anxious-ambivalent attachment. In each family studied the adult child's drug and alcohol abuse affected the relationships. It would be interesting to know if there would be similar relationship patterns and experiences for the grandmothers whose children are not abusing alcohol and other drugs.

Conclusion

In summary, this study hoped to answer how the relationship between the grandmothers and their adult children influenced the grandmothers' decision-making regarding the permanent care options for their grandchildren in their care. By examining the grandmothers' thoughts and feelings about their adult children, answers might be found to indicate why they take on the responsibility of caring for their grandchildren when their life plans may not have included this care-taking function. The study answered the question of the relationship impacting the decisions made by the grandmothers, as the grandmothers seemed to place primary emphasis on

maintaining a relationship with their adult children in hopes of striking a balance between the needs of their grandchildren with the needs of the adult children.

The study sought to find out if Federal legislation requiring relatives to choose one of two permanent options for the care of kin had any effect on their decision to choose legal guardianship or adoption. Also, the study sought to describe how the grandmothers' relationship with their adult child influenced their decision to choose either of the options. The study found that the Federal law had little to do with the grandmothers' decision making, nor did the grandmothers' relationship with the adult children influence their choice of options. The grandmothers appeared to be influenced by information they received from social services staff whom they relied on to interpret the law. In some instances the grandmothers received incomplete or inaccurate information which influenced their decision making. Others received complete information, but their decision making appeared to be influenced more by the thoughts and feelings of extended family and family traditions.

This study was undertaken, in part, to better understand what the relationship was like between grandmothers and their adult children when the grandmothers serve as surrogate parents to the grandchildren. In describing some of what goes on in the subtle interplay in the relationship between the grandmothers and their adult children and the legal requirements, areas for further research have been identified. It is this researcher's hope that others working with grandmothers similar to those in the study will better understand their internal struggle in trying to balance the needs of the grandchildren in their care with those of their own children.

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APPENDICES

GENERAL INTERVIEW GUIDELINES**APPENDIX A**

Grand Tour Question:

What are the factors that influence the decision of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren of substance-abusing parents to choose the legal option of adoption vs. guardianship?

General Interview Guidelines

(Points of interest to be used as prompts)

1. Relationship Between Grandparent and Their Own Child(ren).
 - a. How does your relationship with your adult child enter into your decision to assume the role of primary caregiver of your grandchildren?
 - b. What was your relationship like with your adult child before your grandchildren were in your care?
 - c. What has the relationship been like with your adult child since your grandchildren have been in your care?
 - d. In what ways is your relationship with your adult child closer (more distant) now?
 - e. How were conflicts handled in the past with your adult child?
 - f. What feelings did you have toward your adult child after having raised your own children and are now having to raise your grandchildren?
2. Legal Considerations.
 - a. What has been the effect of the Federal law on your decision to choose the legal option of adoption or guardianship?
 - b. What considerations did you have in making the choice of adoption or guardianship?
 - c. How does your relationship with your adult child enter into your choice to select adoption or guardianship?

HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH**APPENDIX B**

HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH APPLICATION

Sandra S. Thomas, LCSW

10/13/99

1. Human Subjects Research Application form signed by Dissertation Chair--attached.
2. Proposal:

A. Summary of rationale, research questions and design:

This study is intended to show how grandmothers' relationships with their adult children, whose children they are caring for, helps determine the choices they ultimately make with regard to permanent care of the grandchildren.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, P.L. 105-89 was signed into law by the president on November 19, 1997. The law requires that all children taken into protective custody must have a child welfare services case plan to simultaneously include services reunifying the family and a plan for legal permanence should reunification fail. Legal permanence means that virtually all young children who do not reunify are adopted rather than placed with legal guardians. The law also requires that kin be considered before non-kin for the placement of children, as placement with kin is believed to preserve the child's existing family relationships, including sibling relationships when possible. By doing so will cause the least amount of disruption and emotional distress to the child and the family. The basic premise of the law is the belief that the early development of a securely attached relationship between a child and an adult is crucial for normal child development.

As the Adoption and Safe Families Act, P.L. 105-89 considers adoption and legal guardianship as the only alternative permanent options for children and gives relatives (i.e., grandparents) first preference to select either option, I am interested in knowing what factors enter into the grandparents' decision-making with respect to this choice.

Because of this new law and grandparents being required to choose one of two legal options—adoption or guardianship—for the permanent care of their grandchildren, the study is intended to show how the grandmothers' relationship with their adult child helps determine the choices they ultimately make with regard to permanent care of the grandchildren. The study is also intended to expand our understanding of the kind of relationship the grandmothers have with their adult child after the grandchildren are placed with them. Of particular interest to the study is the motivation or driving force behind the grandmothers' chosen option for the permanent care of their grandchildren when the grandchildren are not returned to the parents. As legal guardianship is a less permanent option than adoption, the experiences of those grandmothers who choose this option may reflect differences in their relationship with their adult child than the grandmothers who choose adoption.

The research design of this study will be qualitative. The researcher will audio-tape respondents at a one-time interview and will analyze the tapes for

respondents' thoughts and feelings surrounding their relationship with their adult children.

Research questions the study seeks to answer follows:

1. What factors influence the grandmothers' decisions to choose the legal option of adoption or guardianship for their grandchildren for whom they are primary caregivers?
2. How does the relationship with the adult child enter into the grandmothers' decision to assume the role of primary caregiver of their grandchildren?
3. What was the relationship like between the grandmothers and their adult child before the grandchildren were in the grandmothers' care?
4. What was the relationship like between the grandmothers and their adult child after the grandchildren were in the grandmothers' care?

This researcher intends to use the grounded theory method of qualitative research in analyzing the data. As the author has no specific hypothesis, attachment theory will be used in the data analysis. To gather data, the researcher will make audio-tapes of semi-structured interviews with participants of the study who will be interviewed once.

B. Descriptions of Participants

Participants will be volunteers from a grandparents support group in Northern San Luis Obispo County. They will be primary caregivers of their grandchildren whose parents are addicted to drugs/alcohol.

C. Ways Subjects Will Participate

Participants will answer questions from a semi-structured interview guideline. Their responses will be audio-taped. The participants will also be asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire.

D. Potential Risks

A potential risk for the participants would be that some questions may be of a personal nature and may be uncomfortable to talk about. Another risk may be increased anxiety around their anonymity being revealed should the audio-tapes be heard by someone other than the researcher. One final risk may be concerns that information shared might lead to further intervention by agency officials.

E. Potential Benefits

There will be little to no direct benefit to the participants, except some satisfaction from contributing to our understanding about grandparents like themselves. However, potential benefits of the study will not only permit social workers and

other helping professionals to better understand the possible dilemmas faced by the respondents, but may also lead to additional supportive services for them.

F. Plans for Obtaining Authorization

This researcher will make a verbal appeal to the members of a local support group for volunteers to participate in the study. The researcher will self-select participants based on similar experiences.

G. Measures to Protect Rights and Welfare of Human Subjects

This researcher will honor the requests of all participants to be interviewed at times and sites most convenient and comfortable for them while maintaining confidentiality. The participants will be advised that there will be no adverse comments or repercussions should they withdraw from the study or refuse to answer questions regarding a personal nature. They will also be advised that all their audio-tape responses will be identified by assigned numbers only, and will be destroyed when the research is completed. In addition, participants will be advised that their responses to the demographic questionnaire will also be identified numerically.

H. Informed Consent Procedures

Participants will receive a copy of the informed consent form, which outlines all

procedures and information about their right to discontinue participation at any time. During their interview, the participants will have an opportunity to ask questions of the researcher about the procedure and/or the study. They will be advised that the human subjects committee at CICSW has approved the research procedures. Not only will participants receive a copy of the consent form, they will be advised that they may receive a copy of the results of the study at their request.

Please see attached items:

Human Subjects Research Application signed by Dissertation Chair

Informed Consent Form

Demographic Questionnaire

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Grandparent Research Project

Purpose

You are invited to participate in a study of grandparents raising grandchildren. If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed about your relationship with the parents of your grandchildren; what the relationship was like six months before the grandchildren were placed with you and what the relationship was like six months after the grandchildren began living with you. You will also be asked how the current federal law, which requires you to choose to be your grandchildren's adoptive parent or legal guardian, influenced your decision to select either option; and how your relationship with the parents of your grandchildren affected your decision to choose adoption or legal guardianship.

The purpose of the study is to find out how the grandparents' relationship with their adult child, whose children they are raising, influences their choices with regard to permanent care options for their grandchildren's stability.

Procedure

If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed face-to-face on one occasion for about 1 1/2 hours at a location most comfortable for you and at a time most convenient for you. The interview will be tape recorded. The focus will be on your experience and feelings as someone who is parenting a grandchild. In addition to the questions described above, you will also be asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire.

Benefits and Risks

There will be little or no direct benefit to you for your participation except, perhaps, some gratification from adding to our understanding about grandparents like yourself. The results may be helpful to counselors and programs serving grandparents like yourself who are raising grandchildren. A possible risk of participation in the study is that some questions may be of a personal nature and may be uncomfortable to talk about. You may refrain from answering any question you find distressing or uncomfortable.

Confidentiality

Some information that you provided for this study may be shared in research publications. However, your name will not be used nor will your identity be revealed. The information will be disguised to accomplish this. The only exception is that information leading to a reasonable suspicion that a child is being abused or neglected must be reported, as required by law. After analysis of the data, the audio-tapes and transcripts of the interview will be destroyed by the researcher.

Right to Refuse and Withdraw

You have the right to refuse to answer any question that is asked during the interview and to withdraw from the study at any time. You also have the right to request that this researcher not use the information that you have provided even after the interview is completed. If you decide to participate and begin the interview, you are still free to withdraw at anytime.

Offer to Answer Questions

If you have questions about the study, please ask at any time. For further information or if you wish information provided not be used, you may contact Sandra S. Thomas, LCSW at (805) 473-1543 or Judith R. Schore, Ph.D. at (818) 886-4368. You will be given a copy of this form.

YOUR SIGNATURE BELOW INDICATES YOU HAVE UNDERSTOOD THE ABOVE INFORMATION, THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY AND THAT YOU HAVE RECEIVED A COPY OF THIS FORM.

Signed Date

Witness Date

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

What is the month and year you were born? _____
month year

What is your ethnic background? 1) _____ Asian 2) _____ Black
3) _____ Latino 4) _____ White 5) _____ Other

What is your present marital status? (One reply only)

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| 1) _____ Never married | 4) _____ Divorced |
| 2) _____ Married | 5) _____ Widowed |
| 3) _____ Separated | 6) _____ Remarried |

How many years of education do you have? (Circle last year completed)

High School	College or Vocational School
8 or less 9 10 11 12	1 2 3 4 5 or more
	14 15 16 17

What is your present employment status? (Check one reply only)

- 1) _____ Employed full time
- 2) _____ Employed part-time
- 3) _____ Unemployed
- 4) _____ Retired
- 5) _____ Disabled

How many grandchildren are presently living with you? _____

Age at last Birthday	Sex (M or F)	Time living with you	Continuous Residence during this time?
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Grandchild 1 _____	_____	_____ years _____ months	_____ yes _____ no
Grandchild 2 _____	_____	_____ years _____ months	_____ yes _____ no
Grandchild 3 _____	_____	_____ years _____ months	_____ yes _____ no
Grandchild 4 _____	_____	_____ years _____ months	_____ yes _____ no

If residence not continuous, please explain dates and circumstances:

Which of the following best describes the custody status of each grandchild in your care?

_____ Grandchild 1	1) legal adoption
_____ Grandchild 2	2) legal guardianship
_____ Grandchild 3	3) placement by court order
_____ Grandchild 4	4) informal caretaker arrangements

How is your grandchild (or grandchildren) related to you?

- ☐ 1) Child of a son
- ☐ 2) Child of a daughter
- ☐ 3) Other (Specify) _____

Add info here if relationship differs for individual grandchildren

Are you presently receiving any support for your grandchild(ren), such as child support payments, Social Security, SSI or VA benefits for the grandchild(ren), or AFDC, AFDC-FC, or Food Stamps? ☐ yes ☐ no

If yes, please specify sources _____

Approximate monthly amount _____

Are the grandchildren covered under any medical insurance plan? 1) ☐ yes 2) ☐ no

If yes, please specify source of medical coverage _____

Explain if child support or medical insurance status differs for individual grandchildren

