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## The rewards of caring for grandchildren: Black Canadian grandmothers who are custodial parents, co-parents, and extensive babysitters

### Cover Page Footnote

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*Research Article*

**The Rewards of Caring For Grandchildren: Black Canadian Grandmothers Who Are Custodial Parents, Co-parents, and Extensive Babysitters**

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**Abstract**

This grounded theory qualitative study of 16 Black Canadian grandmothers identified the rewards of caregiving. Variations in rewards emerged by caregiver type: custodial grandparent (n=7), co-parent grandparent (n=5) and extensive babysitter (n=4). Five major themes were identified: (1) grandmothers' responsibilities and pride of caregiving; (2) grandmothers keeping the family close together and safe; (3) mutual respect between grandmothers and grandchildren; (4) caregiving provides grandmothers with a sense of purpose; and (5) grandchildren are fun. Implications of these findings for practice and further research are discussed.

*Keywords:* African American, kinship care, grandmothers raising grandchildren, generativity, grandparenting, Caribbean Canadian

Grandparent caregiving is a growing phenomenon in both the United States (Livingston & Parker, 2010) and Canada (Fuller-Thomson, 2005). In the United States, there has been a 64% increase in children living with at least one grandparent since 1991 (US Census, 2011). There are 6.7 million grandparents who live with their grandchildren. Of these, 2.7 million co-resident grandparents were responsible “for the most basic needs (i.e., food, shelter, clothing)” of their grandchildren (US Census, 2011). Many grandparents who do not live with their grandchildren also provide substantial amounts of care. Approximately one-third of U.S. preschoolers whose mothers are employed outside the home were cared for by a grandparent while their mothers worked (Laughlin, 2010).

There are three types of grandparent caregivers: custodial grandparents, co-parents, and extensive babysitters. A *custodial grandparent* has the primary caregiver role with minimal assistance from the grandchild’s parents (Heywood, 1999; Jendrek, 1994); this mode of caregiving has also been termed “parental replacement” (Smith & Dannison, 2008). A *co-parent grandparent* is a grandparent that resides with their grandchild and their parents. The grandparent has assumed a primary or a secondary caregiver role (Jendrek, 1994). Grandparents who are *extensive babysitters* provide substantial amounts of childcare, often when the children’s parents are at work or school (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2001).

In the last two decades, grandparent caregivers have been a burgeoning research area. Most research has tended to focus on negative aspects of being a grandparent caregiver. These studies have included challenges related to poverty and/or financial instability, stress, increased physical health risk, increased mental health risks, and lack

of formal services (Miller, 1991; Davis, 1993). Qualitative studies of grandparent caregivers by Burton (1992), and Minkler and Roe, (1993), similarly have suggested an association between the assumption of caregiving for one's grandchildren and such adverse outcomes as self-rated declines in physical and emotional health problems, increased social isolation, and decreased life satisfaction. According to Fuller-Thomson, Minkler, and Driver's (1997) analyses of a nationally representative American dataset, custodial grandparents are almost twice as likely to be clinically depressed as are non-caregiving grandparents, even when accounting for pre-caregiving depression levels and other psycho-social characteristics. Similarly, they demonstrated that custodial grandparents also are more vulnerable to limitations in activities of daily living, including climbing stairs, walking six blocks and moving about inside the house (Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 1999).

Studies indicate that patterns in grandparent caregiving vary by ethnicity. African American grandparents are 80% more likely to become grandparent caregivers than non-African-Americans (Fuller-Thomson, Minkler, & Driver, 1997). Almost 30% of African American grandmothers, and about 14% of African American grandfathers, report having had primary responsibility for raising a grandchild for at least six months at some point in their lives (Szinovacz, 1998). As of June 2011, 17% of African American children live with at least one grandparent, compared to 9% of White children. One in eighteen African American children (5.5%) live in skipped generation households, compared to 1.8% of White children (Kreider & Ellis, 2011b).

In-depth qualitative studies with African American inner-city grandmothers (Burton, 1992; Minkler & Roe, 1993) documented the experience of caregiving from a

more personal perspective and also highlighted the important context of caregiving within a history of slavery and discrimination. These studies support the need for an ethno-specific approach using qualitative analysis to explore the meaning and individual context of caregiving.

Despite substantial attention to custodial caregiving among African-Americans, Black Caribbean immigrants are an understudied population. This is an important oversight because considerable heterogeneity exists in the North American Black population. The profile of foreign-born Blacks differs markedly from US-born African Americans with respect to household composition, socioeconomic status, health behaviors, and health status (Dey & Lucas, 2006; Fang, Madhavan, & Alderman 1996). Two-thirds of foreign born Black Americans are from the Caribbean and Latin America (Kent, 2007). With important implications for the context of grandparent caregiving, foreign-born Blacks are also more likely than U.S. born African Americans to be married (48.4% vs 37.1%) and to live in households of five or more persons (21.0% vs 14.0%). Comparable proportions of Black Caribbean-American and African American children live with grandparents in their home (13% vs 14%, respectively) (Hernandez, 2012). Children of Black Immigrants in the US are more likely to have a mother who works full-time than Whites (Hernandez, 2012). Foreign-born Blacks in the U.S. are more likely to be university educated (20.7% vs 13.2%), to have household incomes above \$75,000 (25.3% versus 17.0%), and less likely to be living in poverty (10.9% vs 16.3%) than native-born African Americans (Dey & Lucas, 2006). In a study of New York City residents, Blacks born in the Caribbean were more likely to have graduated from high school and to be employed than native born Blacks (Fang, Madhavan, & Alderman, 1996).

Caribbean-born Blacks in the New York City study had age-adjusted mortality rates much lower than that of African Americans and somewhat lower than that of native-born Whites (Fang, Madhavan, & Alderman, 1996). Some of this discrepancy may be due to health behaviors; Blacks born in the Caribbean are less likely to smoke than African Americans born in the U.S. (Taylor, Kerner, Gold, et al, 1997), with national figures suggesting a huge discrepancy in both current smoking (8.4% vs 23.8%) and obesity (18.5% vs 33.1%) (Dey & Lucas, 2006). After adjustments are made for age, Caribbean-born Blacks in the U.S. have a lower prevalence than native-born Blacks of serious psychological distress (1.9% vs 3.3%), of limitations in Activities of Daily Living such as eating and bathing (1.5% versus 3.0%), and of limitations in instrumental activities of daily living such as everyday household chores and shopping (3.0% vs 5.9%) (Dey & Lucas, 2006). These differences in economic situation, household composition, and health and disability status suggest that the context of grandparent caregiving in Caribbean immigrant households may be markedly different than in the more-widely studied U.S.-born African American community.

Although the Caribbean Canadian community is not as well studied as the Caribbean American community, many similarities between the two populations exist. In 2006, there were more than half a million Caribbean-Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2009). The vast majority of older Caribbean-Canadians immigrated during the 1960s or 1970s. Grandparent caregiving is a long-established tradition within the countries of origin, particularly as the parent generation moved to cities and/or abroad to work (Henry, 1998). Surprisingly little is known about grandparent caregiving within the Caribbean Canadian context.

A plethora of studies exists on the challenges and stressors when grandparents care for their grandchildren (e.g., Murphy, 2008; McGowen, Ladd, & Strom, 2006; Williamson, Softas-Nal, & Miller, 2003). Less attention has been paid to the rewards of caring for grandchildren. One of the earliest contributions to the literature on rewards was the analysis by Giarrusso, Feng, Wang, and Silverstein (1996) of predominately white grandparents. They reported that some grandparents experienced an improvement in psychological well-being related to their delight in caring for their new grandchildren and the meaningful role it gave them. Particularly important for good outcomes was the fact that grandparents had the autonomy to choose their level of caregiving involvement.

An important emerging literature explores elements of and outcomes associated with resiliency in grandparent caregivers (e.g. Hayslip & Smith, 2013a). Resilience is “best understood as an individual attribute and as an adaptive process growing out of one’s interactions with the environment and others in one’s life” (Hayslip & Smith, 2013b, p. 252). Individual characteristics highlighted as “resilient” include benefit finding (Castillo, Henderson, & North, 2013; Conway & Consedin, 2013) and positive appraisal (Smith & Dolbin-MacNab, 2013; Bailey, Letiecq, Erickson, & Koltz., 2013). These elements clearly encompass aspects of finding rewards in caregiving. A focus on benefit finding is associated with higher satisfaction with caregiving and better caregiver adjustment and quality of life (Castillo, Henderson, & North, 2013). Positive caregiving appraisal includes both perceived gain through the caregiving experience and self-assessed competence in caregiving (Smith & Dolbin-MacNab, 2013). Positive appraisal is associated with custodial grandmothers’ higher well-being and lower psychological

distress. It also had an indirect effect on grandchildren well-being (Smith & Dolbin-MacNab, 2013).

There is a need to explore the rewards of grandparent caring for their grandchildren. While there is diversity in grandparents' roles and styles (Silverstein & Marenco, 2001), we do not have a good understanding of the rewards to grandparent caregivers who are custodial parents, co-parents, or extensive babysitters. Consequently, this study adds to the grandparent literature by exploring the rewards of Black Caribbean-Canadian grandmothers in three different types of care provisions.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Drawing upon qualitative research techniques, participants were selected through purposeful sampling in Ontario, Canada. The targeted participants were Black Caribbean-Canadian grandmothers who provided care to their grandchildren as a custodial grandmother, co-parent, or extensive babysitter. This research is part of a larger study on grandparents raising grandchildren from a diverse array of self-identified ethnic backgrounds (including Caribbean, Chinese, First Nations, and White). To locate participants, members of grandparent support groups and women's church groups were provided with flyers asking them to voluntarily participate in the study and snowball sampling was used. This analysis was focused on the 16 Black Caribbean grandmothers who volunteered to be interviewed. The grandmothers were between 45 and 70 years of age. Seven of the grandmothers were custodial parents, five were co-parents and four provided extensive babysitting of their grandchildren. There were a total of 28 grandchildren being raised by their grandmothers. The age of the grandchildren ranged from less than one year to

twenty-years old. Out of the 28 grandchildren, 11 were cared for by custodial grandparents (39%), seven by co-parents (25%) and 10 were cared for by extensive babysitter grandmothers (36%). The average age of the children varied by caregiver modality: custodial grandmothers cared for slighter older children (mean age 10.4 years), followed by co-parent grandmothers (mean age of 8.1 years). Extensive babysitter grandmothers cared for younger children (mean age of 6.6 years).

### **Procedure**

Prior to conducting the research, the Research Ethics Board at the University of Toronto approved this study. Four graduate-level trained research assistants, who were of Caribbean descent, conducted the one-time, semi-structured interviews. Each interview was approximately one-hour long and was audio-taped with consent. Each participant was provided with printed information on the rationale, rewards, and risks associated with the study prior to obtaining informed consent. An honorarium of \$20 was provided to participants for their participation in the study. To ensure confidentiality of all participants, pseudonyms have been used.

Eleven standardized open-ended questions were asked of each participant to ensure consistency in the interview process. The traditional process of grounded theory was modified; We conducted all of our interviews before coding the data, in contrast to the usual strategy of *theoretical sampling* in which coding of data occurs after each interview and emerging findings guide selection of subsequent participants to be interviewed. The questions were designed to explore the scope of the grandmother's experiences by caregiver type, while also minimizing researcher bias. Of particular relevance to this article was

the question: *Please tell me about how caring for your grandchildren has impacted your daily life?* All interviews were transcribed onto a secure computer and verified for accuracy. We followed Charmaz's (2006) strategy for coding grounded theory using initial coding followed by focused coding. For the initial coding, transcripts were reviewed and coded line by line. These codes were reviewed through a second reading of the transcripts to ensure accuracy of the content. Since the sample was divided into three groups – custodial parent, co-parent, and extensive babysitter – this process assisted in the analytical direction of this article and guided the focused coding (Charmaz, 2006). The most frequent initial codes related to rewards were identified and compared across interviews. From this process, the focused coding emerged. The research team held several meetings to debrief and discuss the emerging themes within the transcripts. The second author kept written notes to document the themes as they emerged. The themes that emerged were presented to 12 members of a grandparent support group as a form of member checking (Charmaz, 2006).

## **Results**

### **Five Rewards of Being a Grandparent Caregiver**

The modified grounded theory data analysis process identified five key rewards of grandparent caregiving: (1) grandmothers' responsibilities and pride of caregiving; (2) grandmothers keeping the family close together and safe; (3) mutual respect between grandmothers and grandchildren; (4) caregiving provides grandmothers with a sense of purpose; and (5) grandchildren are fun. We have identified variations within the themes by caregiver type. An in-depth analysis of Table 1 is provided in the ensuing paragraphs.

**TABLE 1: Overview of Grandmother Themes by Type of Caregiver**

	Themes	Type of Grandmother Caregiver		
		Custodial	Co-parent	Extensive Babysitting
1	Grandmothers' pride of caregiving	Providing opportunities to their grandchildren that they weren't able to give their own children	Providing help to their daughter or son by co-parenting	Providing guidance and support to their grandchildren
2	Grandmothers keeping the family close together and safe	Keeping grandchildren from being placed in foster care or for adoption	Keeping grandchildren with them	Keeping the family together similar to their grandparents
3	Mutual respect between grandmothers and grandchildren	Feeling respected by grandchildren's actions	Feeling respected by grandchildren's actions	Feeling respected by grandchildren's actions
4	Caregiving provides grandmothers with a sense of purpose	Feeling like a protector, mentor and helper	Feeling like a caregiver	Feeling like a part of the family
5	Grandmothers say that grandchildren are FUN!	Wanting to spoil their grandchildren	Wanting to participate in activities	Wanting to participate in activities and self-reflecting on grandparent experience

## **The Responsibilities and Pride of Grandmother Caregivers**

Regardless of the type of caregiving provided, the grandmothers unanimously spoke about the “pride” of being a grandmother and the various responsibilities that came with it. The responsibilities and duties changed with being a custodial parent, co-parent, or extensive babysitter.

**1a. Custodial Grandmother: Providing opportunities to their grandchildren that they weren’t able to give to their own children (3 out of 7 participants).** Almost half of the custodial grandmother caregivers interviewed (n=3) took pride in being able to provide opportunities for their grandchildren that they weren’t able to provide for their own children. They also took pride in respecting the wishes of their own children (e.g., prior to passing away, the parent indicated that they wanted the grandmother to care for the grandchildren).

**1b. Co-Parent: Providing help to their daughter or son by co-parenting (4 out of 5 participants).** Co-parent grandmother caregivers often took pride in being able to “help” their daughter or son by caring for their grandchild. The pride of being able and ready to assist with the parenting and/or co-parenting responsibilities was seen as a way to decrease their adult children’s hardship. Lily<sup>1</sup> points out that “I wanted to help. I wanted to be there to help [her daughter] because I was also a single parent, so I didn’t want her to have to experience what I did, which was

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<sup>1</sup> All names of grandparent caregivers have been altered to protect anonymity of respondents

you know, hardship, frustration, that sort of thing, so I wanted to be there for her and that's pretty much it." While Alicia said, "My responsibility was to keep the house which again took the burden off [mother] because she had such very, very long days."

**1c. Extensive Babysitter: Providing guidance and support to their grandchildren (2 out of 4 participants).** Although extensive babysitter grandmother caregivers take pride in being able to spend time with their grandchildren, the motivation is based upon child factors and parent factors. Desiree reported that she took pride in teaching her grandchildren to be good. "I love children and I like to spend time with children. Teach them the right way to grow... And helped them also with their homework, schooling. Encourage them to read and write and to spell and so on. I love to bath them and dress them. Take them for walks." In addition to providing guidance, it was also noted as important for the grandmother who is unable to provide monetary assistance to her grandchildren or their parents, that she instead takes pride in being able to provide free babysitting. Rosie says, "I know babysitting is expensive and they, you know they got married and they were planning on buying a house... and so I figured, I'm retired."

### **Grandmothers Keeping the Family Together and Safe**

Grandmothers were providing care to their grandchildren for several reasons. Many grandmothers spoke about being able to be spend time together as a family and/or keeping the family together. The motivation was often safety for their grandchildren. The concept of "safe" was perceived many ways: to prevent child abuse and/or neglect, to help correct the mistakes of parents so

grandchildren have optimal opportunities for success, to bond with grandchildren after tragic events (e.g., death of a parent), to set their grandchildren's path and positively affect their future, and to simply have more time to just "be" with the grandchildren than they did with their own children (e.g., Musil, Warner, Zauzniewski, Wykle, & Standing, 2009). Keeping the family close and safe often required the grandmother to take on many different roles. Bryah, a custodial grandmother, exemplifies this by stating: "I am a mother. I am a father, a grandmother. I am a grandfather. I am a maid. I am a chauffeur. I am a psychologist. I am everything." Regardless of the efforts needed to keep the family together, it was apparent that grandmothers – custodial, co-parent and extensive babysitters – would do whatever it takes.

**2a. Custodial parent: Serving as family protector – avoiding out-of-family placement (4 out of 7 participants):** Echoing previous research, (e.g., Bailey, Letiecq, Erickson, & Koltz., 2013), the custodial grandmothers in our study were very concerned that if they had not agreed to raise their grandchildren, the children would have ended up in foster care or adopted by strangers. Chloe spoke passionately about preventing her grandchild from entering care: "I took her from the mother because the mother was going to take her to a foster home or have her adopted. She didn't even know whom she would give it to. I said no grandchild of mine should be adopted or go to foster home." In Jendrek's (1994) study, approximately half of the 36 custodial grandparents interviewed wanted to prevent their grandchildren from entering the child welfare system due to the parents' substance use and/or mental health issues. Interestingly, only two out of the seven custodial grandmothers in this study disclosed involvement

in child welfare services. It may be that the grandmothers stepped in before a pending crisis, thereby avoiding child welfare involvement. Bryah disclosed that, “The reason why I fought so hard for my grandchildren... to have my grandchildren growing up with strangers – That in itself would kill me. That is how we were brought up, we keep our family together.”

Only one out of five co-parents expressed sentiments which were similar to the custodial parents. This one co-parent was previously a custodial grandmother. Evie said, “I went to the social services and signed up some papers [to be a foster parent] and had them live with me. They lived with me for about six months.”

**2b. Extensive Babysitter: Keeping intergenerational bonds alive (3 out of 4 participants).** Keeping the family together and spending time with one another was also seen as a generational issue. Carsandra comments, “[Daughter] wanted us to [spend time together] because of how I raised them.” By spending together, not only was the grandmother able to keep the family together, they were also able to decrease expenses for her grandchildren’s parents (i.e., no childcare fees). This financial motivation was also found in Jendrek’s (1994) research on white families. This researcher found that almost two-thirds of the 52 extensive babysitter grandparents in their study wanted to help the working mother (70.6%).

### **Mutual Respect Between Grandmother Caregiver and Grandchild**

The theme of mutual respect is the only theme that emerged during the analysis that was consistently expressed across all caregiver types (4 out of 7 custodial

grandmothers, 1 out of 5 co-parents; 3 out of 4 extensive grand caregiving). All but one grandmother felt that their grandchildren respected them and appreciated them as a grandparent. Grandmothers were included in many elements of the grandchildren's lives (e.g., talking about school, friends, future; daily routines). Desiree proudly stated, "Well our relationship is very much solid. They listen to me. I don't have to yell at them. When I say no, they listen."

### **Caregiving Provides Grandmothers' with a Sense of Purpose**

Many of the grandmothers reported that providing care to their grandchildren, in whatever capacity, provided them with a sense of purpose. This was explained as providing a reason to get up in the mornings, being able to "be there" for their grandchildren in whatever capacity (e.g., take them to church, play together), and a way to correct parenting issues of the past (i.e., a "second chance").

**4a. Custodial Parent: Feeling like a protector, mentor and helper (4 out of 7 participants).** Despite their primary caregiving role, custodial grandmothers perceived their purpose to be multidimensional: protector, mentor, and helper. Isabella proudly stated, "Most importantly, I always take them to church too, always pray with them and am moral support for them. I feel I want them to be raised in the church, to have moral support."

**4b. Co-Parent: Feeling like a caregiver (3 out of 5 participants).** As secondary parents, or live-in caregivers, co-parent grandmother caregivers report that it is their duty to help out with the children while the parents

are away (e.g., work). Lily said, “I’m like a second mother to her I would say. You know, because I’m here if she needs comforting, if she needs clothes.” In addition to the caregiver role, two grandmothers indicated that their purpose is to also be a mentor and/or guide for their grandchildren in order for them to mature and take on age-appropriate responsibilities. This grandmother provides a summary of what it is like to be a caregiver. Evie stated, “I am just here to help with the children while [her daughter and son-in-law] go to work. And I’m enjoying doing that because my mum did that for me also.” Alicia stated, “I want to be around until she reaches that age of maturity and responsibility. That’s my chief function so that to be here as a guide and as a protector.”

**4c. Extensive Babysitter: Feeling like a part of the family (3 out of 4 participants).** Grandmothers who provide extensive babysitting for their grandchildren identified caregiving as an opportunity to interact with these children. Their purpose is to be a part of the family and contribute in whatever way they see appropriate (e.g., role model). Rosie said, “The role I have played is a role model. They enjoy being with me.”

### **Grandchildren are fun!**

Most grandmothers indicated that their grandchildren did provide them with a sense of youthfulness and fun. The grandchildren kept them moving/ working/ playing/ interacting throughout the day, sometimes leaving the grandparents “zonked” by nighttime. Despite grandmothers’ exhaustion, they said that their grandchildren re-energized them by being lively, happy, and filling the house with laughter and mischief.

**5a. Custodial Parent: Wanting to spoil their grandchildren (4 out of 7 participants).** Custodial grandmothers mourned the loss of the special grandparenting prerogative to spoil their grandchildren, joking they would love to have the option to give their grandchildren candy and then give them back to their parents. The responsibilities of caregiving made their role more like a parent than a doting grandparent. They did seek specific activities to do something special for their grandchildren such as taking them places and going out to dinner. Abigail remarked, “I take them places. I’m taking the big one to the Santa Claus parade, you know, things like that.”

**5b. Co-Parent: Wanting to participate in activities (3 out of 5 participants).** Grandmothers provided a list of activities that they did with the grandchildren that they thought were fun, including playing board games or playing on computers, talking, going to parks, cinemas, shopping, reading, and cooking and/or baking together. Phoebe emphasized, “All in all, it’s a lot of joy because you see them doing things and it just puts you back years ago when I had my children. It keeps me active. Although I try to be active apart from cooking and washing and baking, I do a lot of baking and a lot of entertaining but still it’s important to help out [grandchild] as much as I can.”

**5c. Extensive Babysitter: Participate in fun activities (3 out of 4 participants).** Desiree reported she enjoyed spending quality time with her grandchildren, “I love to spend time with them.” Over and over again respondents reported that grandchildren are fun for these reasons and simply because they “give you more life,” as Hollie stated.

### **Discussion**

Grandparent caregiving is a cultural custom within the Caribbean-Canadian culture. It provides many rewards. While there were minor differences between the caregiver types (i.e., custodial, co-parent, and extensive babysitter), there were five main themes that emerged within the research. First, grandmothers held a high sense of pride and responsibility regarding their caregiving role. Second, grandmothers held a strong desire to keep their family close together and safe. These findings are consistent with that of other research (e.g., Brown & DeRycke, 2010). Third, grandmothers valued respect from their grandchildren. Fourth, grandmothers felt that caregiving gave them a sense of purpose. Lastly, grandmothers held the belief that caring for grandchildren was fun.

Villar and his colleagues provide an important theoretical framework to understand grandparent caregiving (Villar, Celdrán, & Triadó, 2012). Based on their study of Spanish grandmothers who provide 12 or more hours per week of care for their grandchildren, they conclude that extensive babysitting grandparents experience generativity through their caregiving duties (Villar, Celdrán, & Triadó, 2012). Generativity is a concept introduced by Erikson (Erikson, 1982; Villar, 2012), originally as an issue in mid-life to “establish, guide and ensure the well-being of next generations” (Villar, Celdrán, & Triadó, 2012, p. 669). In Erikson’s later work, he highlighted the concept’s value for later life as well, with the term “grand-generativity” (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986; Villar, Celdrán, & Triadó, 2012). Villar and colleagues (2012) conclude that extensive caregiving fits this concept as it provides meaning and personal growth in the lives of the grandparents, promotes the well-being of the next generation, and helps the grandparents avoid

stagnation. Our results suggest that Villar's findings on generativity among extensive caregiving grandparents are equally relevant for co-parenting and custodial grandparents. The rewards the latter two groups of grandparents emphasized, such as their desire to ensure the safety and well-being of the grandchild, the sense of purpose caregiving gave them, and the positive sense of self that emerged from the appreciation and respect they received, are all important elements of generativity.

This small qualitative study has implications for further research into Caribbean Canadian grandmothers and their caregiving roles. When exploring these experiences, it is important to consider the rewards to grandparenting. Lily, a co-parent, stated that, "the bottom line is that I love them. I love my daughter. I love my granddaughter and I will do whatever I have to do to make them happy. There's no compromise." The rewards of grandparenting may act as a protective factor against some of the negative factors associated with grandparent caregivers in the literature (e.g., decline on the physical and mental health, finances). The field's traditional emphasis on negative outcomes of caregiving has led to a neglect of these important and highly motivating rewards.

With respect to rewards, much overlap exists among the types of grandparent caregivers. Castillo, Henderson, & North's conclusion (2013) that benefit finding is associated with better caregiver adjustment and quality of life underlines the promise of interventions that are strength-based and focus on enhancing grandparents' ability to perceive the rewards of caregiving (Conway & Consedin, 2013).

Further research is required to develop a better understanding of the continuum of grandparent caregiver type. However, more knowledge about the grandparent-

parent-grandchild relationship would be advantageous (e.g., Brown & DeRycke, 2010). As Smith and Dannison (2008) emphasized, social workers and other service professionals can provide better personalized assistance to grandparent caregivers if they are aware of the grandparents' location along the continuum of caregiving.

It would also be helpful to understand more about the influences of formal institutions (e.g., court system, child welfare, health system) on grandparent caregivers and the children in their care. Despite the positive aspects of caregiving they reported, many of the custodial grandparents were exhausted and faced barriers to accessing needed services. Dolbin-MacNab, Roberto & Finney (2013) have highlighted a number of promising strategies to improve custodial grandparents access to services including the following: improved flexibility in service delivery, child care provision, educating program staff about grandparents raising grandchildren, coordinating services, and developing services specifically designed for grandparent caregivers.

### **Conclusion**

All three types of grandmother caregivers shared a common sense of pride in their role, responsibility towards their grandchildren, and a delight in the respect they received from them. Differences by caregiver type were apparent in the remaining two themes identified. Both custodial and co-parents saw themselves as the child's parent, although the latter shared the parenting responsibility with the grandchild's parents. Extensive babysitters saw their role as contributing to family well-being but not as parents, per se. Although all three types of grandmother caregivers relished the fun and joy they shared with the grandchildren, only custodial grandmothers

mourned the loss of the traditional “right” of grandmothers to spoil their grandchildren without the need to also provide discipline and daily structure. Overall, grandparenting offered many rewards. Each group indicated elements of generativity through their caregiving responsibilities. As Evie summarized, “I can look back and say at least I had a good time with them, so yes, it will be a great impact in my life.”

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