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The Intergenerational Transmission of Grandmother-Grandchild Co-Residency

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This study examined national data from two women's cohorts to determine the likelihood that Black grandmothers who resided with grandchildren were more likely than other grandmothers were to have daughters who resided with grandchildren. Of 1098 co-resident grandmothers, 390 (36%) were in the younger of the two cohorts, 603 (55%) were in the older, and 105 (9%) were in both, comprising the sub-sample of grandmother-grandchild mother-daughter pairs. A significantly higher proportion of mothers in the grandmother-grandchild mother-daughter pairs were Black (83%) compared to 37% of the mothers among the non-paired ever co-resident grandmothers. The study also found, by proxy, that the co-resident grandmother-grandchild mother-daughter pairs had lower socioeconomic standing than non-paired ever co-resident grandmothers.

The 1990s witnessed increasing scholarship and research in the area of grandparents raising grandchildren. Much of the related research has been based on small nonrandom samples in particular geographic areas (Fuller-Thompson, Minkler, & Driver, 1997) and an earlier national study of grandparents (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1992 [1986]) was based on a representative sample of children aged seven to eleven in 1976. More recent national studies (Chalfie, 1994; Fuller-Thompson, et al., 1997; Saluter, 1992) provided initial sociodemographic profiles of grandparents co-residing with grandchildren but had limited time frames and were confined to one cohort. The related research has been summarized and critiqued elsewhere (Caputo, 2000a & c; Caputo, 1999b; Pruchno, 1999). For the most part, the national level studies revealed that most co-resident households occurred across class

lines, but that they disproportionately occurred among Black grandmothers. Most co-residential households comprised three generations (i.e., with at least one of the child's parents also present) rather than skipped or two generations and although a disproportionate percentage of grandparent-grandchild households was poor, most were not.

This study extended recent research in this area, examining the likelihood of grandmother-grandchild co-residency across generations. That is, it sought to determine the extent to which grandmothers who lived with grandchildren in one generation were likely to have daughters who in turn lived with grandchildren in the next generation. In light of previous research, particular attention was given to the effects of race on intergenerational transmission of grandmother-grandchild co-residency. Specifically, this study addressed the following questions:

1. To what extent are grandmothers who live with grandchildren in one generation more likely to have daughters who in turn are more likely to live with grandchildren in the next generation?
2. To what extent are co-resident grandmother-grandchild mother-daughter pairs likely to be Black?

Answers to these questions can shed light on the extent to which the intergenerational family form is a function of culture as well as situation. Given previous research, it was hypothesized that grandmother-grandchild mother-daughter pairs would more likely be found among Black women. In light of the personal and social problems that often result in grandparents caring for grandchildren, at issue, as Rustin (2000) notes, is the extent to which the social welfare function of "the family," particularly in regard to its voluntary intergenerational aspects, can be nurtured and strengthened.

Method

Data

Study data came from the National Longitudinal Surveys of Labor Market Experience (NLS), Young and Mature Women's Cohorts. The Young Women's Cohort was a nationally representative sample of 5159 women who were ages 14-24 in 1968

when they were first interviewed and the Mature Women's Cohort comprised a comparable sample of 5083 women who were ages 30 to 44 in 1967 when they were first interviewed. In the original population samples of women, there were 1848 mother-daughter pairs, that is, mothers in the Mature Women's Cohort whose daughters were part of the population sample constituting the Young Women's Cohort. Respondents were interviewed on a continuing basis between their respective start dates and 1997, the most recent year of data available for this study, and they were asked a range of questions regarding labor market experiences, human capital and other demographic characteristics about themselves and their family circumstances. Documentation about the samples was found in the *NLS Handbook 1999* (Center for Human Resource Research, 1999) and the *NLS of Young Women's User's Guide 1997* (Center for Human Resource Research, 1997).

Measures & Procedures

Respondents who reported one or more grandchildren when asked about their relationship to other household members at the time of survey were classified as co-resident grandmothers. Those who reported that one or more grandchildren resided with them in at least one survey year in the study period were deemed as ever co-resident grandmothers. Ever co-resident grandmothers in each cohort of women comprised the population sample of co-resident grandmother-grandchild mother-daughter pairs. Race was classified as Black or other. For co-resident grandmother-grandchild mother-daughter pairs, race of mother was used. The highest grade of school completed by respondents' mothers in 1967 was used as a proxy for socioeconomic status in both cohorts. Mothers' educational level has been found to be a good predictor of, having a positive relationship with, socioeconomic status (Caputo, 1999a). T-test and Chi-square statistics were used to compare sociodemographic characteristics of grandmother-grandchild ever co-resident mother-daughter pairs with other, non-paired, ever co-resident grandmothers.

Limitations

Use of the NLS, Young and Mature Women's Cohorts, limited this study to two nationally representative samples of American

women between the ages of 14 and 24 in 1968 and between 30 and 44 in 1967 respectively. Since neither cohort, nor their combination, was representative of all adult women and since the NLS data files contained no information about respondents' grandchildren living outside the household, the study sample is not representative of all women or grandmothers and generalizability is compromised. Despite these limitations, the use of two cohorts of women provides an initial glimpse of intergenerational transmission of grandmother-grandchild co-residency and thereby adds to the growing body of knowledge about grandparents in general and grandmothers in particular co-residing with grandchildren.

Results

There were 1098 ever co-resident grandmothers in the population samples of both cohorts. Of these, 603 (55%) were in the Mature Women's Cohort, 390 (36%) were in the Young Women's Cohort, and 105 (9%) were in both, comprising the grandmother-grandchild mother-daughter pairs. As expected, a significantly higher proportion of mothers in the grandmother-grandchild mother-daughter pairs were Black (83%) compared to 37% of non-paired ever co-resident grandmothers (Chi-square = 80.4, $p = .001$).

In regard to socioeconomic status, for which the educational level of respondents' mothers served as a proxy, the paired co-resident grandmothers had lower socioeconomic standing than the non-paired ever co-resident grandmothers. Among ever co-resident grandmothers in the Mature Women's Cohort, the paired grandmothers reported that their mothers had completed 7.1 years of education by 1967 compared to 8.1 years for the non-paired grandmothers ($T = 3.9$, $p < .001$). These paired grandmothers in the Mature Women's Cohort themselves had completed 8.0 years of education compared to 10.2 years reported by the non-paired grandmothers ($T = 7.0$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

The finding regarding Black grandmother-grandchild mother-daughter pairs reflects those about co-resident grandmothers in

general found in previous research despite differences in size of samples and complexity of data analysis (Caputo, 1999b; Chalfie, 1994; Fuller-Thompson, et al., 1997; Pruchno, 1999; Saluter, 1992). Intergenerational transmission of grandmother-grandchild co-residency is far more common among Black women than it is among others. This finding suggests that culture may play an important role in a family's ability to adapt to changing circumstances to meet need. Black grandmothers who reside with grandchildren may serve as role models to their children, instilling in them that the right thing to do is to take in grandchildren in times of need. Black culture may nurture and sustain this particular form of intergenerational responsibility, grandmother-grandchild co-residency, more so than is the case for other racial/ethnic groups by passing down the expectation from one generation to the next. The finding highlights in a paradoxical way the contemporary concern for family values. While political pundits decry the demise of the traditional nuclear family, the finding of this study suggests that Black intergenerational families may be more suited to meet contingencies posed by social problems and sociodemographic shifts than are more nuclear families (e.g., see Burnette, 1997; Burton, 1992; Gibson, 1999).

The finding regarding socioeconomic status should be interpreted cautiously, in part because lower economic standing need not imply poverty and in part because the relationship found here may be spurious. Previous research indicates that most grandmother-grandchild co-resident households are affluent, although disproportionately poor, especially among skipped-generation households (e.g., see Caputo, 1999b; Fuller-Thompson, et al., 1997; Sands & Goldberg-Glen, 1998). This study provides indirect evidence that paired co-resident grandmothers were less affluent than the non-paired ever co-resident grandmothers, as determined by the lower level of education of the co-resident grandparents' mothers. What cannot be determined from the bivariate analysis used here are the effects of other factors like age at the time of mothers' first births on the intergenerational transmission of grandmother-grandchild co-residency, nor the causal relationship between co-residency and socioeconomic status. Further research is needed to learn if families lose economic standing by virtue of assuming responsibility for a grandchild

and how controlling for age at the time of one's first birth is likely to interact with race and class and thereby affect the likelihood of intergenerational transmission of grandparent-grandchild co-residency.

Grandmother-grandchild co-residency poses many challenges to mothers in general, but it presents more formidable ones to Black mothers to the extent they are more likely to become co-resident grandparents and to have daughters who in turn are likely to do so. One such challenge, though not measured in this study, has to do with work. It is commonplace that Black women have had historically higher labor force participation rates than White women, although the rates have become equalized since the late 1980s when large numbers of White mothers with young children entered the labor force (Caputo, 1997 & 1995). Working Black women, however, do not have access to jobs with the range of traditional and family-friendly benefits that would enable them to manage more easily than is currently the case grandmother-grandchild co-residency (Caputo, *in press* & 2000b). To the extent employee benefits become less available in general and affirmative action policies are further eroded, Black women will be more adversely affected and less capable than other women are to negotiate time sufficient to meet the demands of grandmother-grandchild co-residency.

Further, the intergenerational family form that has proved responsive in meeting needs arising amidst adverse social and demographic contingencies may be unintentionally eroded, and may be precluded as a more pervasive and acceptable adaptive form for other ethnic/racial groups, especially Whites. Such an outcome should be avoided particularly for younger co-resident grandmothers who are likely to be in the middle of careers. These women need to remain on their jobs to ensure continuation of their career objectives, while, when possible, retaining health benefits that cover their own children and taking advantage of family-friendly benefits such as family and medical leave with minimal loss of promotional opportunities or salary advances (Judiesch & Lyness, 1999). To the extent Black women occupy jobs without employee benefits, advocates should seek to ensure that affirmative action policies are strengthened, not disbanded, to increase the likelihood that Black working women get jobs with

such benefits and can use them without adverse consequences (Greenhouse & Parasuraman, 1999; Konrad & Linnehan, 1999).

Finally, to the extent intergenerational transmission of grandmother-grandchild co-residency disproportionately affects poor ever co-resident households, the effects of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 need to be monitored closely. This "welfare reform" law mandates co-residency with a responsible adult, many of whom are likely to be grandmothers, as a requisite for public benefits (CQ 1996 *Almanac*, 1997). Provisions should be made to ensure that otherwise affluent families are not pushed too close to or below the poverty line. Furthermore, the income and assets of more affluent families should not be counted in determining the amount of temporary assistance awarded to the teen mother and her child. In addition, measures should be sought to ensure access to publicly underwritten health care and insurance. Public policies should support these grandmothers, particularly as noted above, if they are working, to negotiate what for all practical purposes amounts to second-time-around parenthood.

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