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## **Intersections of Poverty, Geography, and Custodial Grandparent Caregiving in Appalachia**

Deborah L. Phillips

*Appalachian State University, phillipsdl@appstate.edu*

Ben Alexander-Eitzman

*Appalachian State University, alexandereitzmanbe@appstate.edu*

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*Research Article***Intersections of Poverty, Geography, and Custodial Grandparent Caregiving in Appalachia**

Deborah L. Phillips  
Ben Alexander-Eitzman  
Appalachian State University  
Boone, NC

**Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to compare the incidence of custodial grandparenting in Central Appalachia to other areas in Appalachia and the rest of the U.S., to explore how recent economic changes have affected poverty rates of custodial grandparents in all of these areas, and to explore what influences the probability of custodial grandparenting. We hypothesize that the recent economic upheaval of the Great Recession has pressured many families to rely on grandparents to provide care for their grandchildren and that these trends are particularly evident in the Appalachian region due to longstanding historical trends and unique cultural factors. Three-year summary data from the American Community Survey (ACS) was used to compare rates of grandparent caregiving along with poverty, children living in grandparent only households, and other indicators of poverty and economic distress both between regions and across three different time periods (2005-07, 2008-10, and 2011-13). We then developed a logistic regression model using the ACS individual level data (Public Use MicroData) for 2009-13 to estimate the probability of caregiving status among grandparents living with grandchildren in each Appalachian region compared to the entire United States. Grandparents living with grandchildren in Central Appalachia had more than double

the odds of being the primary caregiver when compared to the rest of the U.S. when controlling for demographics, poverty, gender, race, age, and education. While grandparents can provide an important resource for these families, advocates and state level policy makers need to be aware of the potential downstream costs to children and older adults over time and consider how to better support these Appalachian grandfamilies.

*Keywords:* grandfamilies, Appalachia, caregivers

### **Overview of grandparent caregiving**

In the U.S., 2.73 million grandparents are responsible for the basic needs of grandchildren under the age of 18 who are living with them (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). This custodial grandparenting (Fuller-Thomson, Serbinski, & McCormack, 2014) where the grandparents have the primary caregiver role with minimal assistance from the grandchild's parents (Jendrek, 1994), occurs in the face of severe financial challenges for a significant number of these grandfamilies (Hayslip & Kaminski, 2005; Simmons & Dye, 2003). In 2009, 31% of households where a grandparent and grandchild were present without a parent experienced poverty, while 14% of households with biological parents and a child present experienced poverty (Kreider & Ellis, 2011). Appalachia, and particularly Central Appalachia, is historically and currently the site of persistent poverty (Appalachian Regional Commission [ARC], 2015), and yet scant attention has been paid to the topic of grandparents raising grandchildren in this region. A better understanding of the prevalence and factors associated with custodial grandparent caregiving in the Appalachian region will help guide the development of targeted policy interventions for this vulnerable population.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the number of grandparent caregiver families or skipped generation

families (Kropf & Wilks, 2003) increased greatly in the United States because of substance abuse (Minkler, Roe, & Price, 1992; Minkler & Roe, 1993). In other cases, children might be in the care of their grandparents because of teen pregnancy, divorce, incarceration, the death of a parent, or abuse and neglect (Hayslip & Kaminski, 2005). Custodial grandparents are likely to experience financial difficulties because they were not planning on being “second-time-around caregivers” (Bailey, Haynes, & Letiecq, 2013, p. 671) and therefore have trouble fitting in the high cost of child rearing into their budgets. Unfortunately, these grandfamilies often have less access to public assistance. For example, TANF, with its time limits and work requirements may not be of much help to grandparent caregivers, and Child-Only grants are used by only a small percentage of eligible children, and the amount of these grants is often very low (Bailey et al., 2013).

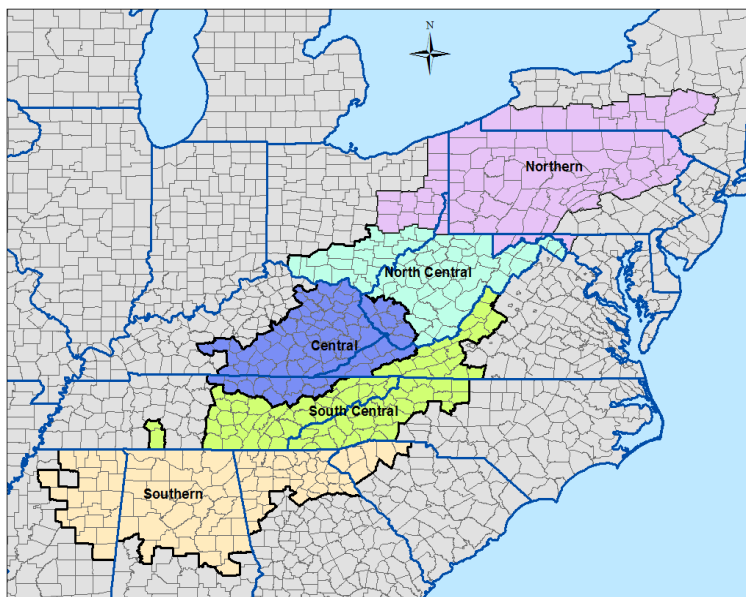
There are benefits to individuals in grandfamilies (Hayslip & Kaminski, 2005); for example, grandparents can enjoy a very close relationship with their custodial grand(ren) (Ehrle & Day, 1994), and they can experience an enhanced sense of purpose in life from maintaining the family’s well-being (Giarrusso, Silverstein, & Feng, 2000). There are also stressors associated with this caregiving role for the grandparents (Fuller-Thomson et al., 2014; Waldrop & Weber, 2001). In addition to the financial stresses mentioned above, grandparent caregivers have reported physical and emotional health problems along with feelings of social isolation and decreased life satisfaction (Minkler & Roe, 1993). Additionally, custodial grandparents are more likely to experience depression than non-caregiving grandparents (Fuller-Thomson, Minkler, & Driver, 1997).

One way to understand changes in rates of custodial grandparent caregiving and factors associated with this changing family dynamic is through the lens of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979) where

families are seen as adapting to challenging conditions, that is, where parents are unable to care for their children. These caregiving families are then nested within and affected by the local availability or lack of resources, and then the larger societal and economic context. This perspective suggests that while custodial grandparents are connected with a broad array of systems, they are also isolated because, in part, their particular life situation is substantially different from their peers (Choi, Sprang, & Eslinger, 2016). These unique and often hidden families can therefore be vulnerable and in need of supports from the community and local, state, and federal governments. However, as suggested by Myers, Kropf, and Robinson (2002), the majority of research on grandparent caregiving has been conducted in urban areas, and rural grandparent caregivers are particularly subject to having few resources, limited community support and transportation, and geographic isolation.

### **Grandparent caregiving in Appalachia**

The strains and challenges of the last decade on grandfamilies in the United States are compounded in the Appalachian Southeast. Appalachia comprises a 205,000 square-mile region that is located along the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from northern Mississippi to southern New York, and includes approximately 25 million people (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2015); this is further divided into 5 sub-regions which cover parts of 12 states and include the entire state of West Virginia (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* Appalachian area and sub-regions.

Overall, Appalachia has seen a great decrease in poverty since the 1960s; however, the three Central Appalachian regions still have areas of persistent economic distress (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2015). This area, like much of Appalachia, had an economic history based in farming and agriculture. After the Civil War, Central Appalachia rapidly became the site of coal mining and timber production (Bradshaw, 1992). Recently there has been a sharp decline in both the coal mining and timber industries in Central Appalachia. While the demand for coal grew from 1985 to 1990 and then again from 1993 to 1997, there was a sharp decrease in coal mining jobs (McIlmoil, Hansen, Askins, & Betcher, 2013). This decline in employment in the coal mining industry occurred because of increased mechanization and the resultant increase in labor productivity, and also because surface mining, which requires less labor, was becoming more

common. The decline of coal mining and timber production are some of the major contributors to Central Appalachia having the highest unemployment rate in all of Appalachia (Pollard & Jacobson, 2015). The loss of jobs may result in grandchildren being in the care of their grandparents.

For decades there has been much debate over the presence of a distinct culture of Appalachia, with some arguing that there is as much diversity in Appalachia as in the rest of the U.S. (Denham, 2016). Still others, in trying to explain poverty, state that it is not related to a distinct Appalachian culture but rather is the result of the history and economy of this region (Lewis & Billings, 1997). Nevertheless, many still conclude that the following characteristics are common to Appalachian culture as originally determined by Ford (1962): familism, or the commitment to and reliance upon the family of origin, individualism, traditionalism, and fundamental fatalism. These cultural features may influence how Appalachian families have responded to the economic and environmental stressors of the Great Recession. The emphasis on family may also be a reason for the high incidence of grandparent caregiving in this region as is discussed later in this paper.

Because of the unique familial culture and history of the Appalachian region, the economic changes in the regional industrial base, the rural nature of many Appalachian communities, and the persistent poverty that exists in some areas, it is important that we understand the unique dynamics of grandparent caregiving in Appalachia, and particularly Central Appalachia. It is also important to note that the Appalachian region has a high incidence of substance abuse and disparities in access to, and utilization of, treatment, which further increases the likelihood of grandparent caregiving (ARC, 2008). In light of the Great Recession of 2008, where an increase in grandparent caregiving was observed across the United States, it would

also seem logical to ask about what happened in Appalachia as a result of this economic slowdown. The questions that guided this study include the following:

- 1) What is the prevalence of grandparent caregiving status in different regions of Appalachia, and how does this compare to the greater United States?
- 2) How has the financial status of these grandfamilies changed before and during the Great Recession?
- 3) What influences the probability of grandparent caregiving status among grandparents living with grandchildren in Appalachia when compared to the entire United States?

### **Methods**

This study uses data from multiple sources including the American Community Survey (ACS) and the Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS). The American Community Survey (ACS) is an ongoing survey of the American population with the primary purpose of providing accurate estimates of important demographic and housing statistics (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). To examine the first two research questions, we used the three-year summary data estimates for the non-overlapping time periods covering 2005-2007 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008), 2008-2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), and 2011-2013 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014b). These three time periods cover the span prior to the Great Recession of 2008 as well as the early and later years of the recession. The three-year summary files provide estimates for areas with 20,000 or more residents and are publically available from the United States Census Bureau. The estimates for all the measures in these comparisons are linked to county of residence so that it is possible to examine differences in estimates based on



residence in specific sub-regions of Appalachia compared to non-Appalachian United States.

The third research question was addressed using logistic regression analysis of the most recently available five-year data from the Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014a). This data is also part of the American Community Survey described above, but instead of reporting the summaries of variables for a county or block, the PUMS data reports individual responses to the census questions. The PUMS dataset contains samples from every region in the United States and is linked to large geographic areas known as Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) which often include several counties and can cross state lines. This is done to protect respondent confidentiality.

Because there was not a direct correspondence between the Appalachian regions of interest and the US Census PUMAs, the ArcGIS mapping software was used to determine the best matches to use for estimating regional differences in the outcome and covariates included in the regression (Environmental Systems Research Institute, 2013). Initially, all the PUMAs that crossed the Appalachian region were included in the dataset in ArcGIS. This inclusive map was then used to identify and exclude any PUMA that had more than 50% of the total area outside of the Appalachian region. It was decided that the exclusion of a small number of border counties from the logistic regression analysis was the more conservative approach.

## Measures

**Grandparent Status.** To determine the grandparent status, the ACS asked the question “Does this person have any of his/her own grandchildren under the age of 18 living in this house or apartment?” Data for these estimates are only tabulated for adults 30 years of age and older.

**Custodial Status.** To determine custodial status, respondents were asked if they were financially responsible for the basic needs (food, shelter, clothing, etc.) of the grandchild. A subsample of all custodial grandparents who have at least one grandchild living with them was used for the logistic regression analysis.

**Geographic Location.** Geographic location was a six-category nominal variable indicating which sub-region of Appalachia (North, North Central, Central, South Central, or South) as defined by the ARC. The last category or reference level was designated as “Non-Appalachian United States.”

**Poverty.** The standard census definition of poverty was used in this study which compares each family or individual income to poverty thresholds designated by the US Office of Management and Budget (US Census Bureau, 2015). This study used a broader definition of 150% of the poverty threshold.

**HS Education.** Respondents were asked “What is the highest degree or level of school this person has completed?” Those who said that they have a high school diploma, GED, or have education beyond this level were indicated by this variable.

**Food Stamp Recipient.** This was determined by a positive response to the question “In the past 12 months, did you or any member of this household receive benefits from the Food Stamp Program or SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)?”

**Analytic Strategy**

To explore the prevalence of grandparent caregiving in Appalachia and the poverty status of these families, three-year estimates for summary data variables were compared using the Z-test for significant differences in mean values. County level summary values for each sub-region in Appalachia were aggregated and corrections were made for standard errors based on methods outlined by the Census Bureau (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Predictably, smaller populations result in higher standard errors. At the same time standard errors may increase significantly when large numbers of individual estimates are aggregated as when all the counties in a large sub-region are added together. Estimates were calculated for each region (US, Appalachia, and Appalachian Sub-region), and each of these were compared between each time point (i.e. 2005-07 compared to 2008-10 and 2011-13, and so on). All the summary data was downloaded from the Census Bureau website and imported into the R Statistical Software for data management, analysis, and graphical comparisons (R Core Team, 2013).

The last research question addressed in this study examines the probability that a grandparent that lives with a grandchild is a custodial grandparent. This probability was estimated using a logistic regression approach. The probability of being the custodial grandparent (versus just living with the grandchild) was regressed on three blocks of variables that were added sequentially in separate models. Model 1 estimated only the influence of geographic region on the probability of custodial grandparent status. Model 2 added poverty status and food stamp enrollment. Model 3 added demographics (age, gender, high school education, married status). This stepwise approach was used to determine if geographic location had a unique impact on the probability of custodial grandparent status when controlling for both poverty variables and demographics.

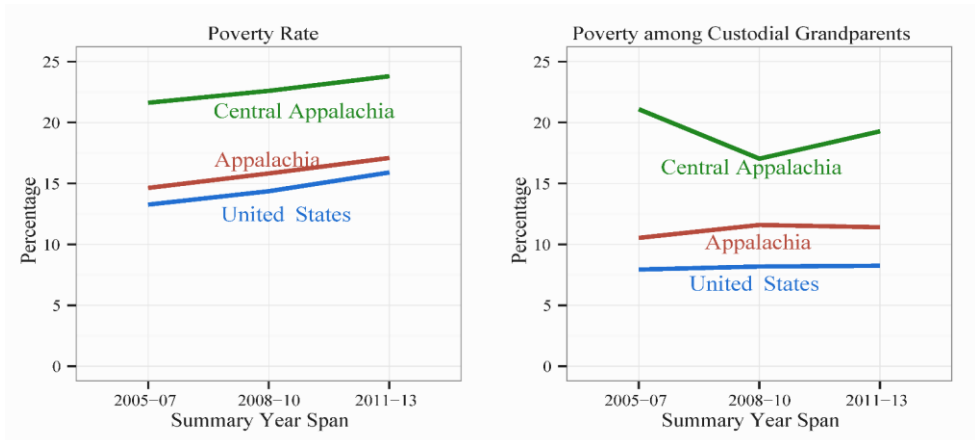
The person level weights published by the ACS were included via the SURVEYLOGISTIC procedure included in the SAS statistical software, version 9.3 (SAS Institute, 2013). These weights are used to accurately estimate standard errors for each analysis and account for the fact that the PUMS is a sample and not a full population (US Census Bureau, 2009).

## **Results**

### **Longitudinal Comparisons of Three-Year ACS Summary Data**

As a baseline, we first explored changes in poverty rates for all adults in the US, Appalachia, and within Appalachian sub-regions. The steady increase in poverty rates for all adults in the US (from 13.3% in the 2005-07 data to 15.9% in the 2011-13 data) is reflected in the entire Appalachian region and in every sub-region (see Figure 2). The percentile increases over time are similar for each region of Appalachia when compared to the overall US trend but Appalachia, and in particular the Central Appalachian region starts at a much higher poverty rate compared to the entire US sample. Central Appalachia, for example, had a poverty rate of 21.6% in in the 2007 sample, 22.6% in 2010, and 23.8% by 2013. These changes in poverty rates between the three-year US Census datasets for the US, Appalachia, and in each region of Appalachia were all statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). A different pattern was seen in poverty rates for Custodial Grandparents. While rates of poverty were relatively steady across the US for Custodial Grandparents, ranging from 7.9% to 8.2%, poverty rates started very high in Central Appalachia in 2007 (21%), then went down in the initial years of the recession to 17%, and then rebounded to 19.3% by 2013. Appalachia as a whole saw little change over time in poverty rates. The changes in poverty among custodial grandparents were not significant when comparing each

three-year dataset for Appalachia and for the sub-regions indicating that there was no detectable significant change (see Figure 2).



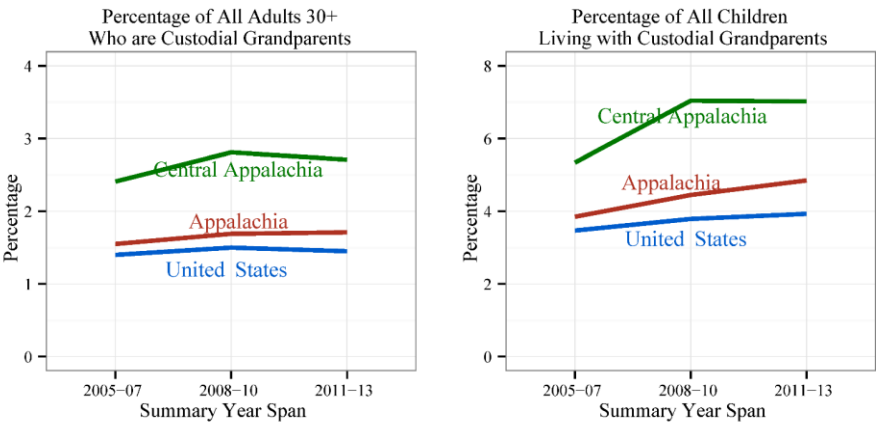
*Figure 2. Comparisons of longitudinal three-year estimates of poverty.*

### **Status by Region for All Adults and Custodial Grandparents.**

When examining the percentage of all adults aged 30 and older who are Custodial Grandparents, we found that Central Appalachia again had much higher rates when compared to the entire Appalachian region or the entire US (see Figure 3). Rates of custodial grandparent status in Appalachia show significant increases when comparing pre-Recession (1.5%) to early Recession periods (1.7%), but the rates in Central Appalachia, though much higher in 2007 (2.4%) did not change statistically. Rates remained high or continued to rise into the 2011-13 time period in all the regions examined.

A more pronounced increasing pattern was noted in rates of all children living with custodial grandparents, where rates jumped almost 30% from pre-Recession to early Recession periods (5.5% to 7.0%) and then remained

high throughout the recession period (see Figure 3). Increases in the proportions of children living with a custodial grandparent were statistically significant for the US as a whole and for all regions of Appalachia when comparing the pre-Recession to early-Recession periods. As in all of these comparisons, the Central Appalachian region (7.0% in 2010) had by far the highest rates when compared to all of Appalachia (4.5% in 2010) or the United States (3.8%).



*Figure 3.* Comparison of longitudinal 3-year estimates of rates of custodial grandparents status among all adults and rates of all children living with a custodial grandparent

### Logistic Regression

The logistic regression analysis used a subset of data from the ACS five-year Public Use Microdata file (PUMS) which included only grandparents living with one or more of their grandchildren from the entire United States census data record. The outcome variable is whether the grandparent living with their own grandchild is in fact a custodial grandparent. A description of demographics is provided in Table 1. Generally custodial grandparents were

slightly younger, had higher rates of being married, and had higher rates of both poverty and using food stamps.

**Table 1**  
*Characteristics of Grandparents Living with Grandchildren by Custodial Status: 2009-2013 Public Use Microdata Sample*

| Variable             | Non-Custodial Grandparents |        | Custodial Grandparents |        |
|----------------------|----------------------------|--------|------------------------|--------|
| Male                 | 35.10                      | %      | 37.27                  | %      |
| Age                  | 61.00                      | (0.03) | 55.89                  | (0.04) |
| Married              | 54.36                      | %      | 66.05                  | %      |
| HS Education         | 82.15                      | %      | 90.01                  | %      |
| Below 150% Poverty   | 25.59                      | %      | 36.35                  | %      |
| Food Stamp Recipient | 31.06                      | %      | 36.76                  | %      |

SE=Standard Error

Model 1 (chi square = 15906,  $p<0.0001$  with  $df = 5$ ), Model 2 (chi square = 107335,  $p<0.0001$  with  $df = 7$ ), and Model 3 (chi square = 371482,  $p<0.0001$  with  $df = 11$ ) all had significant chi-square values, and the odds ratio estimates for each parameter included were all significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 2 includes the results for each model. Since the odds ratio estimates were relatively stable when including poverty and demographic variables, the parameter estimates from the full model (model 3) will be reported below. Living in any of the Appalachian regions increased the odds of grandparent caregiver status, but this was most striking in the Central and surrounding regions when compared to non-Appalachian United States.

**Table 2.**

*Odds Ratio Estimates of Covariates Associated with the Probability that Grandparents Living with Grandchildren Are Custodial Grandparents: 2009-2013 Public Use Microdata Sample*

| Variable                        | Model 1 |           | Model 2 |           | Model 3 |           |
|---------------------------------|---------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|-----------|
|                                 | OR      | 95% CI    | OR      | 95% CI    | OR      | 95% CI    |
| Appalachian Region <sup>a</sup> |         |           |         |           |         |           |
| North                           | 1.18*   | 1.07-1.32 | 1.22*   | 1.10-1.35 | 1.20*   | 1.05-1.38 |
| North Central                   | 1.65*   | 1.38-1.99 | 1.63*   | 1.36-1.97 | 1.58*   | 1.26-2.00 |
| Central                         | 2.46*   | 2.11-2.90 | 2.30*   | 1.96-2.70 | 2.47*   | 2.01-3.04 |
| South Central                   | 1.54*   | 1.35-1.78 | 1.49*   | 1.30-1.71 | 1.47*   | 1.22-1.78 |
| South                           | 1.88*   | 1.73-2.06 | 1.79*   | 1.63-1.95 | 1.69*   | 1.49-1.92 |
| Below 150% Poverty              | -       | -         | 1.60*   | 1.56-1.64 | 1.84*   | 1.77-1.91 |
| Food Stamp Recipient            | -       | -         | 1.10*   | 1.07-1.12 | 1.07*   | 1.04-1.10 |
| Male                            | -       | -         | -       | -         | 1.04*   | 1.02-1.07 |
| Age (per Decade)                | -       | -         | -       | -         | 0.96*   | 0.96-0.97 |
| Married                         | -       | -         | -       | -         | 1.73*   | 1.68-1.77 |
| HS Education                    | -       | -         | -       | -         | 1.84*   | 1.77-1.92 |
| Model chi-square                | 15906*  |           | 107335* |           | 371482* |           |

OR=Odds Ratio Estimate; CI=Upper and Lower Confidence Intervals

\*p<0.01

<sup>a</sup>Reference is "All Non-Appalachian Public Use Microdata Sample Areas"

This effect remained higher when both poverty and demographics were included in the model. Grandparents in Central Appalachia had almost 2.5 times the odds of being custodial grandparents for their grandchildren. These odds ratios were lower for North Central (1.58), South Central (1.47), and the Southern (1.69) Appalachian regions, but were still significant. Poverty status, having a high school education, and being married all increased the probability of grandparent caregiving status.



### **Discussion**

The results of this study highlight the importance of focusing on the Appalachian family system and how it has adapted and changed in response to financial and social stressors. We found that grandparents living with grandchildren in Central Appalachia are almost two and a half times as likely to be custodial grandparents (versus non-custodial) when compared to the rest of the United States. Other parts of Appalachia also have higher probabilities of custodial grandparenting, but Central Appalachia stands out. These effects are stable and consistent even when controlling for such factors as gender, race, age, and education, and most especially when poverty is taken into account. Poverty has long been associated with grandparent caregiving, but these findings suggest that there is something else going on in Appalachia, whether it is cultural or some other aspect of life that leads to high rates of custodial grandfamilies. Two possible factors that stand out are the high rates of substance abuse with difficulty in accessing treatment in Appalachia (ARC, 2008), and the flight of parents because of job losses in the timber and coal mining industries (Pollard & Jacobson, 2015). The authors of this paper are actively conducting research to better understand the specific causes of grandparent caregiving in Appalachia.

A second important finding from this study relates to the relative lack of changes in poverty status among custodial grandparents in Appalachia in the early stages of the Great Recession of 2008. While the rest of the country saw noticeable increases in poverty overall and poverty among grandparent caregivers, Central Appalachian custodial grandparents actually had lower rates of poverty in the early-Recession period compared to pre-Recession figures. One possible explanation lies in the fact that there is a higher rate of home ownership in Central Appalachia than in other parts of the country (Housing Assistance

Council, 2013), perhaps making these families more resistant to the effects of the Recession. It is important to note that while home ownership is higher in Appalachia, the value of the homes is often reduced because of isolation and limited economic resources (Housing Assistance Council, 2013). Thus there is perhaps more permanency for families in this region, albeit permanency in dwellings that are substandard. Additionally, it may be that the rate of grandparent caregiving was very high before the recession hit because of the economic circumstances found in Central Appalachia. Finally, it is important to note that rates of grandparent caregiving status among all adults and rates of all children living with grandparent caregivers both went up sharply from early in the recession period and remained high in even the most recent data periods.

These results should be interpreted within the context of the limitations of the census data and available analytic tools. To compare three different time frames, it was necessary to use the three-year summary datasets which do not include population areas that have less than 20,000 residents. This may omit certain rural areas in Appalachia from the analysis and therefore bias the results. While important, we believe that the three-year datasets do give us a broad overview of trends for a majority of the area in question. Also, there is not a direct correspondence between the ARC-defined sub-regions and the US Census Bureau-defined PUMA regions as indicated in the methods section. Great care was taken to ensure as much overlap as possible in this analysis. It should be recognized that the ARC-defined sub-regions do not necessarily reflect separate or distinct differences in culture or population, and it has been argued that much of the region defined in 1965 as Appalachia really does not constitute a truly singular culture or region (Williams, 2002). Lastly, as with any quantitative analysis of this sort, we can only point to trends and overall probabilities as summaries of multiple

factors. We can determine nothing about the real stories of why and how these grandfamilies may have formed and how they have responded to the economic hardships of the last decade. Clearly, more research is needed in this area using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

These findings paint a picture of Appalachian grandfamilies that have struggled to adapt to both the longstanding and more recent financial strains in the region and may have many unmet needs. Numerous states have addressed many of these needs through consent laws that permit relative caregivers to access educational and health care services for their relative children even when they do not have legal custody or guardianship (Choi et al., 2016; Beltran, 2014). However, while very important, these laws do nothing to assist these families financially, and many of these families lack adequate housing, food, or child care. Benefits such as SNAP can provide food and nutritional assistance, which is critically important, and yet they do not provide the cash assistance that is so necessary for many other necessities of life (Generations United, 2014). The work requirements of TANF can limit the number of grandparent caregiver families that can utilize this benefit (Bailey et al., 2013). Unless the caregivers are foster parents, which is a minority of such families (Beltran, 2014), the only kind of assistance available might be child-only TANF. Child-only TANF provides approximately half of the financial support as foster care, and some states are moving to further limit the availability of child-only grants by including caregiver income in child-only TANF eligibility, as well as imposing time limits for child-only grants.

In light of the fact that a majority of children are being raised in informal situations, it is imperative that the federal government and the states do more to support grandfamilies outside of the foster care system. Since many states in the Appalachian region are still struggling with the

after-effects of the Recession, perhaps it is time for the federal government to provide this resource.

Beltran (2014) indicates that there are several bills pending in the U.S. Congress to assist grandfamilies, but none address assistance to grandparents raising grandchildren outside of the foster care system. This is a glaring oversight since these families are saving U.S. taxpayers an estimated \$4 billion through the care they provide, which keeps children out of foster care (Generations United, 2014). Since a majority of children are raised in grandparent caregiver situations outside of the foster care system (Beltran, 2014) and since this family constellation is apparently growing (Livingston & Parker, 2010), the federal government should adopt a preventive subsidized guardianship program such as Louisiana's Kinship Care Subsidy Program (State of Louisiana Department of Children & Family Services, n.d.). Grandparent caregiver families, where the children have never been in foster care and who meet certain income eligibility criteria, would be eligible to receive a monthly stipend to assist with the expenses of raising their grandchildren. The costs associated with this practice could be greatly offset by later savings in welfare payments, for example, because the children would grow up in healthy and secure conditions.

In conclusion, the current research highlights the need to focus more attention on grandfamilies in Appalachia, as well as the need to enhance financial assistance to grandparent caregiver families, particularly in the financially distressed Central Appalachian regions. These grandparents are stepping in and providing parenting when it is needed, but in order to maintain their health and well-being, and that of their grandchildren, it is imperative that they receive more financial support. Providing such support can only serve to enhance the development of the children into productive members of society who could, in

turn, contribute to the revitalization of Central Appalachia. Future research should include qualitative approaches to better understand the unique histories and longitudinal course of how Appalachian grandfamilies have adapted to large scale demographic and environmental changes in the recent past and how they will continue to provide care for their grandchildren in the future.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Deborah L. Phillips, PhD Department of Social Work, Duncan Hall 202F, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28608-2155.

E-mail: [phillipsdl@appstate.edu](mailto:phillipsdl@appstate.edu)

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