

Needs and Issues of Latino and Native American Nonparental Relative Caregivers: Strengths and Challenges Within a Cultural Context

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While custodial grand parenting historically has been more prevalent among African Americans, kinship care is increasing nationally among all culturally diverse groups. Custodial grand parenting and kinship care are becoming more common among Latino and Native American cultures. However, there are few studies examining needs and issues faced by these relative caregivers, particularly grandparents. In-depth interviews were conducted with Latino and Native American caregivers of one or more children. Interviews focused on the child's needs, caregiving issues, and the caregiver's impact on the children. Results indicate that both groups reported concerns involving finances and health of child; Native Americans noted legal custodial issues as critical. Latino caregivers reported having inadequate resources for the child's medical care; Native Americans reported legal aid as a significant need. Differential impact on children was reported: with Latinos, family and education, with Native Americans, cultural identity. The findings suggested differential needs, concerns, and impact among these diverse caregivers.

“Keeping the Family Tree Intact Through Kinship Care” article in Adoption.com

www.adoption.com

More often, grandparents step in to fill the shoes of a son or daughter too overwhelmed with problems to be a nurturing parent.

More than 1.3 million American children are being raised by relatives other than their parents. Even more startling, the number of grandparents raising their grandchildren soared more than 40 percent in the last decade.

Sometimes the arrangement is informal: family members decide that a child will live with a selected relative and no child welfare agency is involved. Or it may be formal: an agency retains legal custody of a child while he or she is raised by a relative. Sometimes an agency is involved initially, to plan the child's care, but does not assume legal custody.

Kinship Care: A Long Tradition

Although the number of kinship placements has climbed dramatically in recent years, the phenomenon has always been an integral part of the American fabric. In certain cultures, grandparents, other relatives, or neighbors traditionally have taken on the responsibility of raising children whose parents are unable or unwilling to care for them.

Ask any African American. Informal adoption is the norm, the traditional response of the community when a parent cannot take care of her child. It is common to see a grandmother caring for her grandson, an aunt caring for her niece, or a neighbor taking in a child from the community.

The same is true for Latinos. "In the South Texas community where I was raised, there was an informal system of intra-family adoptions that undoubtedly evolved in response to family and community needs," says Irma Herrera, Esq., director of Multicultural Education and Training Advocacy, Inc. in the San Francisco area. "Adoption was our way of distributing the burdens and benefits within a community."