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Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Grandparents raising grandchildren: Towards recognition, respect and reward

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Social Policy Research Centre,
August 2013

SPRC Report No 14/13

SPRC
Social Policy Research Centre



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ISSN: 1446-4179

ISBN: 978-0-7334-3342-9

Published: August 2013

The views expressed in this publication are those of the individual authors and do not represent an official position on the part of the Social Policy Research Centre.

About the cover image

The drawing on the previous page represents plants that are native to Sydney and the land on which the University of New South Wales is located.

The grounds of UNSW have always been valuable to local people as a place to gather, share, learn, exchange and return to. UNSW recognises and acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation and the significance of the land that we all share.

This drawing represents some of the plants on the UNSW Bushtucker Trail. The trail and the drawing recognise that native plants have always been a part of life for the Indigenous people that live in or visit this land and are a mark of respect to those people.

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Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW

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Suggested Citation:

Brennan, D., Cass, B., Flaxman, S., Hill, T., Jenkins, B., McHugh, M., Purcal, C., & valentine, k. (2013), Grandparents raising grandchildren: Towards recognition, respect and reward (SPRC Report 14/13). SPRC, University of New South Wales.

This is a report of the findings from Australian Research Council Linkage Grant (LP0776662) ***Grandparents as Primary Carers of their Grandchildren: A National, State and Territory Analysis*** (HREC 07312).

The **Chief Investigators** were: Professor Bettina Cass, Professor Deborah Brennan, and Associate Professor Sue Green; **the Partner Investigator** was Anne Hampshire, the **research team members** were: Dr Trish Hill, Dr Kylie Valentine, Dr Marilyn McHugh, Dr Christiane Purcal, Dr Megan Blaxland, Saul Flaxman and Bridget Jenkins. Rochelle Coggan worked on this project while completing an internship at the SPRC.

Bridget Jenkins completed a PhD funded by an Australian Postgraduate Award (Industry) associated with this project. The title of Bridget's thesis is *Grandparent Care and Family Power in Australia: Incorporating the Complexities and Contradictions of Carework*.

The following **Partner Organisations supported this research**: Mission Australia, the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), Department of Children and Families (NT), Department for Families and Communities (SA), and Family and Community Services (formerly Department of Community Services) (NSW).

Anne Hampshire then from Mission Australia, was a Partner Investigator until January 2011. Following Anne's move to The Smith Family, Kathryn di Nicola assumed this role and later still, Dr Bronwen Dalton.

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the above agencies or Departments or the responsible Ministers.

Acknowledgements

The researchers would like to thank the participants in this research: the policy makers and service providers, and especially the grandparents who participated in our focus groups, survey and interviews. Without these voices this research could not have been carried out or this report written. The authors also wish to acknowledge the role of Colmar Brunton in organising the interviews with Indigenous grandparents.

Key Terms and Abbreviations

In this report, we use the following definitions:

- **Formal (statutory) grandparent carers** are those who are raising grandchildren as a result of orders from the Australian Family Court or Federal Magistrates court or a state or territory Children’s Court, Youth Court or Magistrate’s Court.
- **Informal grandparent carers** are those who do not have a federal, state or territory order in place. Typically, their arrangements have been made through private family negotiations. They may or may not be known to state or territory child protection authorities.

In this report the terms ‘formal’ and ‘statutory’ are used synonymously. The terms ‘relative’ and ‘kinship’ are also used synonymously.

We use the term ‘grandparent carer’ to describe those who are raising a child (or children) with or without a disability. We acknowledge that in some contexts the term ‘carer’ denotes only those who are caring for people with a disability or impairment due to frailty or illness.

Glossary

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ARC	Australian Research Council
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
Census	Census of Population and Housing
FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services & Indigenous Affairs
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NSW	New South Wales
QLD	Queensland
SA	South Australia
SPRC	Social Policy Research Centre
SDAC	Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
Tas	Tasmania
UNSW	University of New South Wales
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
Vic	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

Table of Contents

Key Terms and Abbreviations	iii
1 Executive Summary	1
1.1 Issues for policy debate, data collection and research	6
1.1.1 Payments, Services and Support.....	6
1.1.2 Access to Information	8
1.1.3 Data Collection.....	8
1.1.4 Research	9
2 Introduction	10
2.1 Background to the study and research objectives	10
2.2 Research design and structure of the report	12
3 We are the jewels of society, not the old stones: The circumstances of grandparent kinship carers in Australia	14
3.1 Introduction.....	14
3.2 Legal status	15
3.3 Characteristics of grandparent headed families	16
3.3.1 Gender.....	16
3.3.2 Age	17
3.3.3 Education.....	17
3.3.4 Location	17
3.4 Housing	18
3.4.1 Housing arrangements.....	18
3.4.2 Household composition.....	18
3.4.3 Changes to housing.....	19
3.5 Grandchildren and their parents	20
3.5.1 Grandchildren	20
3.5.2 Reasons for care.....	20
3.5.3 Contact arrangements with parents	21
3.6 Income, employment and financial stress.....	21
3.6.1 Household income	21
3.6.2 Income sources.....	22
3.6.3 Financial stress.....	22
3.6.4 Employment.....	23
3.6.5 Changes to employment	24
3.7 Access to supports and services	24
3.8 Health and wellbeing	26
3.8.1 Grandparents' health	26

3.8.2	Grandchildren’s health	26
3.9	Relationships and social life	27
3.9.1	Relationships	27
3.9.2	Social isolation.....	28
3.10	Indigenous grandparents	29
3.11	Strength, resilience and dedication	30
3.12	Conclusion	31
4	‘Families’ beyond categories: identifying grandparent and grandchild relationships	32
4.1	Background	32
4.2	Number of grandparent families in the Australian Census 2006.....	36
4.2.1	Data and Limitations	36
4.2.2	Number of grandparent families.....	37
4.3	Demographic characteristics of grandparents: Census	40
4.3.1	Gender.....	40
4.3.2	Age	41
4.3.3	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin	42
4.3.4	Language spoken at home	45
4.3.5	Education.....	45
4.4	Housing	46
4.4.1	Housing tenure.....	46
4.4.2	Region of residence	47
4.4.3	Geographical distribution of grandparent families	48
4.5	The grandchildren	56
4.5.1	Number and ages of grandchildren.....	56
4.5.2	Age of Grandchildren	58
4.6	Income and resources	58
4.6.1	Family Income.....	58
4.6.2	Transport	59
4.7	Employment	60
4.8	Need for assistance for grandparent and grandchild	62
4.8.1	Grandparents.....	62
4.8.2	Grandchildren	63
4.9	Summary of Census analysis	64
5	Setting the Scene: Focus groups with policy makers and service providers	66
5.1	Introduction.....	66
5.2	Method	66
5.3	Support needs for grandparents and children and young people	67
5.3.1	Parenting and relationship support	67

5.3.2	Respite and crisis support.....	68
5.3.3	Children’s health, education and wellbeing	68
5.3.4	Recommendations for change	68
5.4	Access to payments, services and support	69
5.4.1	Reluctance, shame, and fear	69
5.4.2	Middle generation receives payments.....	69
5.4.3	Recommendations for change	70
5.5	The status of grandparent care families	70
5.5.1	Comparisons with foster carers	70
5.5.2	Family norms, obligations, and values	71
5.6	Good practice	71
5.6.1	Building on strengths	71
5.6.2	Support groups	71
5.7	Costs of care	72
5.8	Improved access to payments, service and support.....	73
6	‘Run faster, Nana’: Grandparents survey report.....	74
6.1	Introduction.....	74
6.2	Methodology.....	74
6.2.1	Survey design	74
6.2.2	Implementation and recruitment.....	75
6.2.3	Survey responses and analysis	76
6.2.4	Limitations.....	77
6.3	Grandparent demographics.....	78
6.3.1	Gender.....	78
6.3.2	Age	79
6.3.3	Ethnic origin	80
6.3.4	Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin.....	80
6.3.5	Culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds	80
6.3.6	Education.....	81
6.4	Households and their composition	82
6.4.1	State/Territory	82
6.4.2	Location	83
6.4.3	Housing arrangements.....	83
6.4.4	Household composition.....	87
6.5	The grandchildren and their parents.....	88
6.5.1	Number and ages of grandchildren.....	88
6.5.2	Reasons for raising the grandchildren	90
6.5.3	Legal status	92
6.5.4	Contact arrangements with the parents	93
6.6	Income and financial support.....	96
6.6.1	Household income	96

6.6.2	Income sources.....	98
6.6.3	Financial assistance.....	101
6.7	Financial stress	104
6.8	Changes to grandparent employment	106
6.9	Health of grandparents and grandchildren	109
6.9.1	The grandparents' health	109
6.9.2	The grandchildren's health.....	111
6.10	Grandparents' relationships and social life.....	115
6.10.1	Relationships with partner and family	115
6.10.2	Social life	118
6.11	Access to support services and information	121
6.12	Grandparent commitment and resilience	127
6.13	Conclusion	128
7	'My Family is my Mansion': Qualitative Interviews with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander grandparents	132
7.1	Introduction.....	132
7.2	Methodology.....	133
7.2.1	Method and sample	134
7.2.2	Gender.....	136
7.2.3	Age	136
7.2.4	Language.....	136
7.2.5	Number and ages of grandchildren.....	136
7.3	Analysis.....	136
7.4	Limitations	137
7.5	Households and their composition	138
7.5.1	Housing arrangements.....	138
7.5.2	Household composition.....	140
7.6	The grandchildren and their parents.....	142
7.6.1	Reasons for raising the grandchildren	142
7.6.2	Legal status	143
7.6.3	Contact arrangements with the parents	145
7.7	Income and financial support.....	146
7.7.1	Financial assistance.....	146
7.7.2	Financial stress.....	148
7.8	Changes to grandparent employment	149
7.9	Health of grandparents and grandchildren	150
7.9.1	The grandparents' health	150
7.9.2	The grandchildren's health.....	151
7.10	Grandparent relationships and social life	152
7.10.1	Relationships with partner and family	152
7.10.2	Social life	153

7.11	Grandchildren’s education	153
7.12	Indigenous culture, identity and kinship	154
7.12.1	Indigenous culture and identity	154
7.12.2	Kinship system	156
7.13	Access to support services and information	157
7.14	Grandparent strength and resilience	158
7.15	Conclusion	159
	References	162

Tables

Table 4-1 Number of families with grandparent and grandchild relationships in the Census	39
Table 4-2 Age of grandparents by sex and by family type.....	42
Table 4-3 Families with Indigenous grandchildren by Indigenous status of grandparent/s and family type	44
Table 4-4 Highest educational attainment of grandparents by grandparent family type	46
Table 4-5 Number of grandchildren in grandparent families.....	57
Table 4-6 Age of youngest grandchildren in families.....	58
Table 4-7 Need for assistance with core activity for grandparents in grandparent families	63
Table 4-8 Need for assistance with core activity for grandchild in grandparent families	64
Table 5-1: Participants by Jurisdiction.....	66
Table 6-1: Gender of survey participants	79
Table 6-2: Age of survey participants	79
Table 6-3: Country of birth of survey participants	81
Table 6-4: Highest level of education of survey participants	82
Table 6-5: State or territory of residence	82
Table 6-6: Location.....	83
Table 6-7: Home ownership status.....	84
Table 6-8: Changes to housing	84
Table 6-9: Changes in housing across age groups	86
Table 6-10: Living with a partner/spouse.....	87
Table 6-11: Other household members.....	88
Table 6-12: Number of grandchildren raised	89
Table 6-13: Ages of the grandchildren	90
Table 6-14: Reasons for raising grandchildren.....	91
Table 6-15: Legal arrangement for at least one of the grandchildren	93
Table 6-16: Grandchildren's contact with birth parents	94
Table 6-17: Help in managing contact with parents	96
Table 6-18: Weekly household income after tax	97
Table 6-19: Main source of household income.....	99
Table 6-20: Sources of financial assistance for raising grandchildren.....	102
Table 6-21: Types of Centrelink financial assistance for raising grandchildren	102
Table 6-22: Difficulties accessing government financial assistance	104
Table 6-23: Financial wellbeing.....	105
Table 6-24: Financial impact of raising grandchildren	106
Table 6-25: Changes in employment due to raising grandchildren	107

Table 6-26: Grandparents' health.....	110
Table 6-27: Health impact of raising grandchildren	111
Table 6-28: Grandchildren's health	112
Table 6-29: Health problems of both grandparents and grandchildren	114
Table 6-30: Grandparent relationships	116
Table 6-31: Grandparent social life	119
Table 6-32: Support and information	122
Table 7-1: State or Territory of residence of Indigenous grandparents	135
Table 7-2: Legal arrangement for at least one of the grandchildren	144

Figures

Figure 4-1 Gender of grandparents.....	41
Figure 4-2 Main language spoke at home by family type	45
Figure 4-3 Housing tenure by family type.....	47
Figure 4-4 Grandparent families by remoteness	48
Figure 4-5 Number of grandparent families by Statistical Local Area (SLA), Australia	50
Figure 4-6 Number of grandparent families by SLA, New South Wales	51
Figure 4-7 Number of grandparent families by SLA, Sydney Region	52
Figure 4-8 Number of grandparent families by SLA, South Australia	53
Figure 4-9 Number of grandparent families by SLA, Adelaide region	54
Figure 4-10 Number of grandparent families by SLA, Northern Territory	55
Figure 4-11 Families with income of \$499 or less per week (2006 dollars) (not equivalised)	59
Figure 4-12 Families without a motor vehicle in the household.....	60
Figure 4-13 Employment status of grandparents by family type.....	61
Figure 4-14 Grandparents: Education qualifications by hours worked by family type	62
Figure 6-1: Household income across age groups.....	98
Figure 6-2: Income sources across age groups	101
Figure 6-3: Employment change across age groups.....	109
Figure 6-4: Unmet support and information needs	124

Appendices

Appendix A	Definitions of grandparent families in the Census	171
Appendix B	Indigenous grandparents interview schedule	173
Appendix C	Grandparent Survey	175
Appendix D	Recruitment Flyer	192

1 Executive Summary

Grandparents have long played a major role in the lives of their children and grandchildren, with some providing extensive emotional, material and practical support (Timonen and Arber, 2012; Grandparents Plus, 2010; Herlofson and Hagestad, 2012). Since the last quarter of the 20th century in Australia as in many other countries, grandparent carers—the focus of this study—have become both politically organised and a focus of policy attention. The growing public visibility of grandparent carers reflects not only their political mobilisation but also the increasing reliance of child protection authorities on kinship care (mainly grandparent care). In 2012, almost 41,000 children and young people across Australia were the subject of care and protection orders issued by child protection authorities (AIHW 2013) and more than half of those placed in home-based care are with relatives or kin—mainly grandparents—rather than with non-related foster carers (AIHW 2013, Table A15). Thousands more grandparents are raising their grandchildren as a result of private family arrangements that may or may not be known to child protection authorities. Still another group of grandparents assume responsibility for their grandchildren following orders of the Family Court or Federal Magistrates Court. Children are placed with grandparents because their parents are unwilling or unable to adequately care for their children. The reasons for placement include substantiated abuse or neglect, often associated with domestic violence and parental substance misuse and mental illness; and irretrievable breakdown in the relationship between children and parents.

This study of grandparents raising grandchildren draws on multiple sources of data. These include a literature review, analysis of ABS statistics including Census 2006, a survey of grandparent carers, interviews with Indigenous grandparents, and focus groups and interviews with policy makers and service providers. Grandparents from every Australian state and territory participated in the research: the 335 grandparents who participated in the survey were drawn from every state and the ACT; the twenty Indigenous grandparents who took part in interviews came from New South Wales, South Australia and the Northern Territory. The fifty-five policy makers (drawn from Commonwealth, state and territory agencies) and service providers who participated in focus groups were from New South Wales, South Australia, the ACT and the Northern Territory.

Identifying and enumerating grandparent carers is methodologically and conceptually complex, particularly because of the range of formal and informal arrangements that characterise grandparent care. Existing data on the number of grandparent carers, their characteristics and circumstances have resulted in divergent and fluctuating estimates. An important reason for these differences and fluctuations is that the surveys they are based upon are not actually designed to

capture grandparents' responsibility for grandchildren. In producing Census estimates of different family types, for example, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) categorises families on the basis of the relationship of each household member to the person designated as the 'household head', rather than identifying the actual relationships of care and responsibility. Similar limitations with Census data have been identified in the UK.

The analysis presented in this report shows that there were between 8,050 and 63,520 grandparent families at the 2006 Census. The narrow definition that results in 8,050 families refers to families in which there are one or more grandparents and one or more grandchildren under 15 years and no other family member is present. The broad definition resulting in 63,520 grandparent families includes families that have one or more grandparents, one or more grandchildren under 15 years, and other family member(s) are present. This very large range points to the inadequacy of existing data and statistical collections for policy and planning and the need for new conceptualisations of family relationships as well as new statistical and data collections.

The survey of grandparents raising grandchildren reported here is one of the largest surveys of its kind conducted in Australia. Drawing on responses from 335 grandparent carers from almost every state and territory, it provides insight into the demographic and social characteristics of grandparent carers and many aspects of their experiences. These include: the reasons for children coming into the care of grandparents; relationships with the middle generation (parents of the grandchildren); access to government income support at the Commonwealth level and other forms of financial support at state/territory level; changes in grandparents' employment, housing arrangements and residential location; the health of grandparents and grandchildren; and the impacts of raising grandchildren on family relationships and social life. Although many grandparents experience stress and hardship as a result of their care responsibilities, the survey provided powerful evidence of the joy and pride that many grandparents take in caring for their grandchildren. Key findings include:

Income and financial support: The economic circumstances of most grandparents in the survey fitted the pattern described in national and international research showing that grandparent-headed families are financially disadvantaged in comparison with other families raising children. This does not prove a causal connection between low-income and raising grandchildren; it could simply reflect the fact that grandparents are older and less likely to be engaged in waged work. However, many grandparents commented on the serious financial impacts of raising their grandchildren and the difficulties they experienced managing on a low income.

Accessing government financial assistance: The majority of grandparents in the survey had been able to access government financial assistance. This may reflect the fact that many respondents to the survey were recruited through grandparent support groups and thus might be expected to have more access to information and support than grandparent carers not linked in to support groups. Despite the overall positive picture, over one-third (37 per cent) reported difficulties in getting payments from Centrelink, from state/territory governments, or both. The process of applying for benefits was further complicated by the complexities of family relationships and by the informal care status of some grandparents.

Employment: Many grandparents changed their employment arrangements as a result of assuming the care of grandchildren. The most common change was for grandparents to reduce their work commitments or to cease work altogether. In these circumstances, the reduction in income added to household stress. In a few cases, grandparents increased their hours of employment or deferred or reversed plans to retire in order to earn sufficient income to meet the additional costs of raising grandchildren.

Housing: Grandparents frequently made changes to their housing arrangements as a result of assuming the care of grandchildren. Changes included: moving to a bigger house or building new bedrooms to accommodate grandchildren; erecting fences; modifying dwellings to accommodate children with disability; and moving suburb to enable children to stay at a familiar school or to avoid contact with other family members. Significant costs were often associated with these changes to housing arrangements.

Health: Health presented a significant problem for grandparent-headed families, with almost half of all grandparents reporting they had a long-term illness or disability. In addition, a high proportion (62 per cent) perceived that their health had deteriorated due to raising their grandchildren. Younger grandparents tended to be healthier than the middle and older age groups, although more than one-quarter of those aged under 55 years had a long-term illness or disability.

Health and wellbeing of grandchildren: More than 50 per cent of survey respondents reported that at least one of their grandchildren had physical problems, and more than 80 per cent had emotional or behavioural problems. Often there was clustering, where a grandchild had both physical and emotional/behavioural issues, or where multiple grandchildren in the family had health problems. Abuse and abandonment by the parents were described by the grandparents as the cause of many psychological symptoms and physical injuries.

Contact with the children's parents: The nature and extent of contact with birth parents varied widely among respondents. Most commonly, grandchildren had either infrequent or no contact with their birth parents.

Relationships and social life: Social isolation and disrupted friendships were one of the strongest themes to emerge from the survey. The extent to which grandparents' social life was impacted varied with age—the largest effects being felt by younger grandparents.

In addition to conducting a nation-wide survey in which approximately 5% of respondents identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, our study included twenty in-depth interviews with Indigenous grandparents. Although Indigenous children are significantly overrepresented in out-of-home care in Australia, concepts such as 'grandparent carers' or 'grandparent headed families' do not necessarily have cultural relevance for Indigenous communities; grandparents and other relatives are, and always have been, integrally involved in raising the coming generations. At the 2006 Census, families with at least one Indigenous grandparent comprised 15% of one grandparent families, 11% of couple grandparent families and 6% of one-parent families with grandchildren present. As with the national statistics of grandparent carers, caution needs to be exercised when estimating grandparent families in Indigenous communities.

The Indigenous grandparents interviewed for this study believed that continuity of cultural and kinship knowledge was of paramount importance for them and their grandchildren. They strongly valued the importance of Indigenous kinship systems and the opportunity to instil traditional Indigenous values. Many reported that they and their grandchildren took part in cultural and community activities together. Although several participants noted the importance of support from their extended family in raising their grandchildren, some reported that they had little support from family or friends.

Like the grandparents who took part in the survey, the Indigenous grandparent interviewees demonstrated high levels of resilience. They provided stability, love and care to their grandchildren, often in the face of considerable challenges. However, many noted the lack of support services and commented on perceived gaps in the information, support and services they received. Several who were not receiving any financial or other supports for which they might have been eligible were unaware of available services or sources of information. Others simply assumed that they would not qualify for services or respite care.

Focus groups with a total of fifty-five state/territory and Commonwealth policy makers, non-government services providers and community organisations including grandparent support groups provided additional valuable insights into the characteristics and needs of grandparent carers. There was a high level of

consistency in the issues raised in these discussions and no notable disparities in the perspectives of the various groups:

Relationship support: Grandparents need support in a number of areas including negotiating family relationships across generations and parenting after a break. Some are dealing with profound grief about their family's disruption and have deep concerns about maintaining relationships with their own children while caring for grandchildren. Others are in conflictual, sometimes potentially violent, relationships with their adult children and/or the (ex) partners of those adult children.

Parenting programs: Grandparents need information, support and programs to assist them to adapt to contemporary parenting practices ranging from infant sleeping and feeding routines to educational and homework practices. Approaches to education and schooling are likely to be very different from those experienced by grandparents when they were parents. Contemporary social and friendship norms, especially amongst upper primary school age children and teenagers, may be difficult for grandparents to navigate. New information and communication technologies (especially mobile phones and social media) and issues such as cyber-bullying pose additional challenges.

Children's health and education: Many children in the care of grandparents have suffered serious abuse, neglect and trauma and require specialist interventions. Support in gaining access to these is available to some but not all grandparents. Access to allied health services such as speech therapy is very difficult in many areas. Problems in accessing such services may be compounded if grandparents lack a means of officially establishing their authority with health providers.

Respite and crisis support: The need for respite was identified by policy makers and service providers as a pressing issue. The gap in entitlement to respite and crisis support between foster and informal kinship carers was seen as significant.

Access to payments, services and support: NGO service providers identified shame and fear of intervention as barriers to payments and services for some grandparents. Another strong theme was the reluctance of some grandparents to claim family payments such as Family Tax Benefit or Parenting Payment because they feared intimidation or violence from the middle generation if the latter cease to receive these payments. Although there are no data on how many grandparents are affected by these situations, the implications were thought to be significant both for the

wellbeing of grandparents and their grandchildren, and for the accuracy of Commonwealth payment data on the number of grandparent carers.

Case management and other individualised services: In keeping with broader trends towards individualisation and personalisation in social policy, consideration should be given to supportive case management services for grandparent families, enabling simpler sharing of information.

Building on strengths: Service providers emphasised the strengths and capabilities of grandparent carers and urged that these be built upon.

1.1 Issues for policy debate, data collection and research

This study has brought together the perspectives and insights of grandparents, service providers, policy makers and researchers from all parts of the country.¹

Grandparent carers, whether formal or informal, need to be recognised and respected and rewarded for the valuable and often demanding work they perform.

1.1.1 Payments, Services and Support

- The issue of greatest significance to grandparent carers in our study was access to payments, services and supports. These complex matters are not amenable to simple solutions. For example, some grandparents experience shame about their family situation, and this can be a barrier to approaching government agencies. Fear of intervention by child protection authorities and concern to maintain family privacy deter some grandparents from seeking support and assistance.
- There is a widely held perception (shared by many grandparents, service providers and policy makers) that significant numbers of grandparent carers do not claim, and are not supported to claim, payments and benefits to which they are entitled. Future research might examine access to Commonwealth government payments through Centrelink.
- Changes to, and simplification of, the application processes for a range of family-related payments are required.
- Application processes need to be structured in such a way that intra-family conflict is minimised or avoided and the special role of grandparents and other kin carers is recognised.

¹ Regrettably, due to resource constraints, children in grandparent care were not included in this study, although their participation had been part of the original research design.

- Services and supports need to be made more accessible through widespread availability of appropriate information, ensuring better knowledge and access to state/territory and Commonwealth sources of payment and support.
- The relative treatment of grandparents and foster carers was raised on numerous occasions during this study. Many grandparents perceive there are differences in the nature and level of support provided to foster and kinship carers, and this is often a source of deep resentment. Different practices are in force in different states and territories across Australia (McHugh and valentine 2011), but different practices are only part of the story.
- Developing structures, mechanisms, communication strategies and information services that maximise the opportunities for grandparents to receive the benefits, supports and financial assistance to which they are entitled.
- Reviewing policies that unduly or arbitrarily restrict access to benefits and services (e.g. distinctions between formal and informal grandparent carers).
- Ensuring that staff in government agencies are trained to recognise and understand the role of grandparent carers and to be aware of the sensitive intra-family issues that may surround grandparent care.
- Ensuring that education providers at all levels (preschool and child care, primary schools, secondary schools and further education) and government agencies are fully informed about the different circumstances of grandparents and grandchildren and the ways in which resource disadvantages and additional responsibilities may impact on children's health and wellbeing, and on educational progression and attainment.
- Resourcing grandparent support groups and community organisations to provide support, information, knowledge-sharing, and referrals to services.
- Establishing systemic ways in which grandparent carers and grandparent groups can liaise and consult with government agencies at state/territory and Commonwealth levels.
- Health and education providers need to recognise the consequences of low material resources and traumatic and disrupted family histories on the physical and mental health of grandparents and mental health and educational performance of grandchildren.

1.1.2 Access to Information

- Access to consistent, accurate and clear information from government agencies and non-government organisations is essential for grandparent caregivers.
- Governments need to provide consistent, clear and accurate information, acknowledging and respecting the diverse circumstances and needs of grandparents.
- Funding for information brokers needs to be considered to provide appropriate knowledge and support required for negotiations with government agencies.
- Information should be available in a range of languages and formats and be provided at crucial points in the lives of grandparents and their grandchildren.
- Written information may not be adequate for all situations or target groups. Information needs to be available at places where grandparents are likely to access it (not only on the internet).
- At times of major stress (e.g. when children first come into the care of grandparents) information may need to be complemented by personal support.
- Information specific to the needs of grandparent carers is needed when children are experiencing important transitions, such as moving from preschool to primary school or from primary to secondary school or from secondary school to the labour market or further education. Grandparents need information on schools and starting work, and the possible impact on their grandchildren of moving to live with their grandparents.
- Adequately resource community organisations to provide support, information, knowledge-sharing and referrals to services.

1.1.3 Data Collection

- Reliable and up-to-date data provide the foundation for sound policy and practice. New approaches to gathering data on the number of grandparents are needed. In the absence of such data, neither governments nor non-government organisations can develop appropriate policies or plan and deliver the necessary services.
- New conceptualisations of family and household types are needed in order to recognise the complexity of contemporary family relationships.

- Additional Census questions eliciting information about grandparent care responsibilities and/or dedicated surveys identifying grandparent carers are possible directions for reform.

1.1.4 Research

- Understanding the experiences, circumstances, perceptions and needs of children and young people in grandparent care is of the utmost priority. Research into these issues needs to consider the perspectives of children and young people in relation to both their grandparents, their families of origin (including parents and siblings) as well as their experiences at school, in their friendship groups and in the local neighbourhood.
- Given the challenging economic circumstances of many grandparent carers, research is required to explore the depletion of grandparents' savings and superannuation payments by the costs of raising grandchildren.
- In regard to future planning, issues for grandparents include what will happen to their grandchildren if grandparents become ill or develop a disability and what will happen when they die. Analysis is required on how grandparents plan for the future and what services and supports are available to assist with such planning.

2 Introduction

This report outlines the key findings of Grandparents as Primary Carers of their Grandchildren (LP0776662) a three-year study funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC). Ethics approval was provided by the University of NSW Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC 07312).

The Chief Investigators on the project were:

- Professor Bettina Cass
- Professor Deb Brennan
- Associate Professor Sue Green

The Partner Investigators were:

- Anne Hampshire (Mission Australia)
- Kathryn di Nicola (Mission Australia)
- Dr. Bronwen Dalton (Mission Australia)

The following SPRC researchers made substantial contributions to the study:

- Dr Trish Hill
- Dr Christiane Purcal
- Dr kylie valentine
- Dr Marilyn McHugh
- Dr Megan Blaxland
- Saul Flaxman
- Bridget Jenkins

2.1 Background to the study and research objectives

In 2005, Dr. Marie Leech and Anne Hampshire (both then employed at Mission Australia) approached Professors Bettina Cass and Deb Brennan to discuss the possibility of a joint research project on grandparents raising grandchildren. Mission Australia's field staff were increasingly aware of the practice implications of this issue and policy makers were aware that more grandparents were assuming primary responsibility for their grandchildren (Backhouse, 2003; Parliament of Tasmania, 2003; Fitzpatrick and Reeve, 2003; COTA, 2003; Ellison et al, 2004; ABS, 2005), but there was little research to shed light either on the prevalence of the trend or on the legal, financial and health circumstances of the grandparents.

The research project that emerged from these early discussions aimed to:

1. Contribute to the literature on 'social care' which is largely silent on grandparent care of grandchildren, exploring how this form of care is located at the intersections of state/family, public/private and formal/informal care provision.
2. Develop a deep understanding of the characteristics and processes of three modes of grandparent care relationships (a) formal care arrangements established as an out-of-home care placement by a state/territory child protection jurisdiction (b) a formal parenting order established under Commonwealth family law (c) informal care arrangements between grandparents and grandchildren.
3. Identify and analyse the associations between formal and informal grandparent care and socio-demographic variables: family composition and family history; the pathways into and out of informal and formal grandparent care and the duration of care; ages, labour force status, income level, and principal income sources for grandparents and parents; housing status and location of the grandparent's family residence and geographic distance from the parental residence; cultural and linguistic background of grandparent-headed families (i.e. CALD status); health and disability status of grandparents, parents and children; availability and strength of informal social networks supporting grandparent care; access to and usage of family and children's services; eligibility for receipt of the range of family payments and care allowances at Commonwealth and State/Territory levels.
4. Identify and analyse informal and formal grandparental care circumstances in Indigenous grandparent-headed families.
5. Identify policy and practice implications of the research findings in collaboration with government and non-government policymakers and service providers at State and Commonwealth levels.

Originally, we aimed to explore the circumstances and experiences of *children* in grandparent care and to develop a comprehensive audit of Commonwealth and state/territory policies impacting on the circumstances and wellbeing of grandparents and on the wellbeing of their grandchildren. However, as the grant received from the ARC was less than requested, we were unable to proceed with these elements of the project.

2.2 Research design and structure of the report

The project comprised five strands of research, as reflected in this report.

Strand 1: Literature review. In this phase of the project, national and international literature on grandparent care was analysed to identify the socio-demographic circumstances and policy settings relevant to grandparent care, the diverse experiences of grandparent carers, the associations between taking on their caring responsibilities and their employment, income, housing, relationships in their social and family networks, and their physical and mental health.

Strand 2: Analysis of statistical data. Understanding the incidence of grandparent care and the characteristics of households and families in which it takes place is essential for sound policy making in this field. Detailed analysis of ABS population and sample surveys was conducted in order to provide more robust assessments of the incidence and characteristics of grandparents raising grandchildren. In this draft report, preliminary findings based on analysis of Census 2006 are provided.

Strand 3: Focus groups. Early in the project, focus groups and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 55 policy makers, NGO service providers and community organisations, including grandparent groups. The aim of the focus groups was to gain an understanding of the policy and practice issues which service providers and policy makers saw as significant for grandparents, grandchildren, and parents. Interviews and focus group were held in Canberra and in metropolitan and rural areas of New South Wales, South Australia and the Northern Territory. The findings of the focus groups were used to inform the methodologies used and topics covered in the national survey and the semi-structured interviews with grandparents.

Strand 4: National survey of grandparents raising grandchildren. A survey of 335 grandparents raising their grandchildren formed a central element of this project. With respondents drawn from all States and Territories except the Northern Territory, this is the largest Australia-wide survey of grandparents raising their grandchildren, to date. The analysis presented in this section draws not only on quantitative information but on extensive comments generously provided by many grandparents. Together, the quantitative and qualitative findings provide comprehensive insights into grandparents' experiences in raising grandchildren.

Strand 5: Interviews with Indigenous grandparents. One-third of all children in grandparent care are Indigenous children. For this reason, as well as seeking to include Indigenous grandparents in the survey, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 Indigenous grandparents in six locations in NSW, South Australia and the Northern Territory. The data derived from interviews with grandparents living in the Northern Territory is particularly important as very little published research has

been conducted with grandparents raising their grandchildren in this jurisdiction and no-one from the Northern Territory participated in our survey.

Indigenous researchers and community workers were consulted when planning the interviews to ensure that the methods and interview questions were sensitive to the kinship and cultural practices and other circumstances of Indigenous participants. A semi-structured format was used to allow interviewers to follow the flow of conversations, while ensuring that all relevant topics were discussed.

3 We are the jewels of society, not the old stones: The circumstances of grandparent kinship carers in Australia

Bridget Jenkins

3.1 Introduction

In Australia and internationally grandparents play a very important role as relative/kinship carers for children who for a variety of reasons are not able to live with their birth parents. Grandparent carers are a sub-category of relative/kinship carers who are defined by the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2012: 131) as persons with responsibility for the care of children who are 'family members other than parents, or a person well known to the child and/or family (based on a pre-existing relationship)'. Kinship care is a growing trend in Australia. Looking only at formally recognised out-of-home care placements, in Australia in 2001, about 38 per cent ($n=6,940$) of Australian children in out-of-home care were placed with relatives or kin, while by 2011 this had risen to more than half, 55 per cent ($n=10,407$) of all out-of-home care placements (AIHW, 2012: 40). Much of this growth in kinship care represents an increase in the prevalence of *grandparent-headed families* (McHugh, 2004; Nandy and Selwyn, 2011; Smyth and Eardley, 2008; Worrall, 2009a). However, these figures are based on kinship care (and within that category grandparent care) relationships, which are formally recognised by a variety of statutory processes at Commonwealth and state/territory levels. There is an additional number of kinship care (including grandparent care) arrangements which are informal, i.e. based on inter-family or inter-kin arrangements, which to varying degrees do not enter the formal or statutory out-of-home-care systems in the state and territory child protection systems.

To begin with some definitions which are relevant to this study of grandparent carers:

Statutory or formal carers are carers who are raising children as a result of either care and protection orders from the Children's Court, Youth Court or Magistrate's Court (depending on the State or Territory the child or young person resides in). Statutory or formal carers may include relative or kinship carers (usually but not always grandparents) or 'stranger' foster carers.

Informal carers are usually but not always relative carers, and most relative carers are grandparents. 'Informal carers' refers to those carers who do not have a state or territory children's court order in place. These arrangements may or may not be known to state or territory child welfare agencies.

Other kinship carers (the majority of whom are grandparents) may have a parenting order or consent order from the Family Court of Australia or Federal Magistrates Court (definitions drawn from McHugh and valentine, 2011: 1).

There is a growing literature on policy analysis in Australia on out-of-home care and kinship care, including grandparent care (Cashmore and Ainsworth, 2004; Mason et al., 2002; McHugh, 2009; Yardley, Mason and Watson, 2009; McHugh and valentine, 2011), as well as much international research (e.g. Cuddeback, 2004; Wellard, 2010; Worrall, 2009; Kelley et al., 2000). In addition, there is some local research enabling the voices of grandparent caregivers to be heard. Much of this research is based on relatively small-scale studies (e.g. Backhouse, 2006; Baldock, 2007; COTA, 2010; Orb and Davey, 2005; Spence, 2004), and there are large-scale studies, notably the Council on the Ageing research into grandparent kinship carers (COTA, 2003) and the work of Yardley, Mason and Watson (2009) on kinship and foster carers in NSW.

This section of the report summarises the main findings of this literature, using themes and issues identified in the research on grandparent kinship care. The literature review drew upon academic databases such as Social Abstracts, with the aim of identifying relevant journal articles and research reports on grandparent kinship care. Most of research informing this review was Australian, but where there are gaps in the literature we have drawn on the findings from international studies, and particularly those conducted in the United States, the United Kingdom and New Zealand. This literature review is limited to English-language publications only.

3.2 Legal status

As noted above, kinship care is the fastest growing form of out-of-home care in all Australian jurisdictions (AIHW, 2012: 40). The increasing formalisation of kinship care as the 'first choice' for children within the out-of-home care system (Mason et al., 2002; Yardley et al., 2009) is indicative partly of increasing sensitivity to maintaining children's familial, ethnic and cultural ties (Ainsworth and Maluccio, 1998; Mason et al., 2002; Paxman, 2007). However, the increasing difficulty in recruiting and retaining foster carers cannot be ignored as a motivation for the increase in kinship care placements in Australia (McHugh, 2004), compounded by rising numbers of children entering the out-of-home care system over the last twenty years (Bath, 1997; Bromfield and Osborn, 2007; Horner et al., 2007; Paxman, 2007).

There are three major ways in which grandchildren may come to be in the care of their grandparents. The first is through state and territory child protection services making a statutory out-of-home care kinship care placement.

The second route is via Parenting Orders, which can be made by the Family Court of Australia or the Federal Magistrates Court. Backhouse (2008) has identified three reasons why Parenting Orders might be a 'last resort' for grandparent kinship carers. Firstly, taking out a Parenting Order may lead to significant family conflict—it is, after all, the initiation of legal proceedings against one's own child. Secondly, there are high costs involved in initiating such legal proceedings, particularly as research has shown that grandparents tend to have trouble meeting the income and assets eligibility criteria for legal aid (COTA, 2003). The third reason is that the outcome of legal proceedings is rarely guaranteed (Backhouse, 2008).

The third route by which grandparents come to exercise parental responsibility for a grandchild is informally; that is, as a result of familial discussion and decision making. Children may be placed with grandparents by parents, or grandparents may feel the need to step in and take parental responsibility in situations where they believe the child is being abused, neglected or mistreated. It has been estimated that the ratio of informal to formal kinship carers in Australia is roughly about three to one (Smyth and Eardley, 2008).

The distinction between statutory and non-statutory status is important in mediating grandparents' differential access to supports, services, payments and benefits. Grandparents who have assumed responsibility for children on a formal basis are more likely to be able to access appropriate supports and services to assist them in their caregiving responsibilities, whilst informal kinship carers are generally less likely to be able to access such supports and services (McHugh and valentine, 2011). Where grandparents fall on the statutory/non-statutory divide, therefore, may affect the resources for the day-to-day functioning of the family.

3.3 Characteristics of grandparent headed families

3.3.1 Gender

Paralleling many other forms of care, grandparent kinship care is highly gendered. A 2000 Victorian audit of 537 kinship carers, for example, found that the majority of carers were women, and many were single carers (Department of Human Services Victoria, 2000). More recently, Yardley, Mason and Watson (2009), in their study of out-of-home care in NSW, reported that both foster carers and kinship carers—most of whom were grandparents—were more likely to be female. These findings are consistent with the international literature, which has found that most kinship care is undertaken by women, whether partnered or single. For example, in a study of 102 grandparent kinship carers in the United States, some 95 per cent of respondents were women (Kelley et al., 2000). A more recent study of 32 grandparents aged over 65 in the UK found that 74 per cent were women (Wellard, 2010).

3.3.2 Age

Grandparents raising their grandchildren span a large age-range; some are aged in their 30s, others in their 80s and even 90s. For example, Kelley and colleagues' study of 102 grandparent and great-grandparent kinship carers in the United States found an age range of 40 years, with respondents ranging from 38 through to 78 (2000: 317; see also Yardley, Mason and Watson, 2009).

Despite this, the research shows that the majority of grandparents raising their grandchildren tend to be aged in their 50s and 60s. The ABS (2005) *Family Characteristics Survey* reported that in 2003, in 61 per cent of grandparent headed families, the youngest grandparent was aged 55 or over, though in 39 per cent of these families the youngest grandparent was aged 35–54 years. A 2000 Victorian audit of kinship carers found that half were aged 50 or more (Department of Human Services Victoria, 2000), while the Council on the Ageing (2003), in their study of 499 grandparent kinship carers, found that 68 per cent of grandparents were aged 55 or over.

3.3.3 Education

Some studies indicate that grandparents, when compared to foster carers, are less likely to have completed higher levels of education. Yardley, Mason and Ainsworth (2009), for example, in their sample of kinship carers and foster carers in NSW, found that while 59 per cent of foster carers reported having post-secondary qualifications, only 17 per cent of kinship carers, many of whom were grandparents, reported the same. Indeed, for those who had not completed year nine, the differences were even more pronounced: 42 per cent of kinship carers, compared to only 8 per cent of foster carers. Overall, the study by Yardley, Mason and Watson (2009) of both kinship carers and foster carers found that kinship carers were older than the foster carers, more likely to have lower incomes, and less likely than foster carers to be employed. These results are similar to those reported in the UK (Farmer and Moyers, 2008) and in many US studies, which have found that kinship carers are older, have completed less education, and have lower levels of income than non-kinship carers (Kelley et al. 2000).

3.3.4 Location

In 2003 the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that grandparent headed families were more prevalent in regional areas, compared with urban areas. Forty-eight per cent of grandparent families lived in major cities, compared with 65 per cent of other family types; and for regional areas the proportion was 45 per cent compared with 33 per cent for other family types (ABS, 2005). Similarly Yardley and colleagues (2009) found that 34 per cent of their kinship carer sample - the majority

of whom were grandparents - lived in major cities; 61 per cent lived in regional areas²; and 6 per cent in rural or remote locations.

3.4 Housing

3.4.1 Housing arrangements

Housing arrangements are a key element in kinship care, as issues like housing costs, including private rental or mortgage payments, and number of bedrooms can greatly affect the resources available for grandparent-headed families, in particular those where the grandparent/s are not in the labour force and reliant on government income support. The study by Yardley and colleagues (2009) of kinship carers and foster carers in NSW found that kinship carers were more likely than foster carers to own their own home—39 per cent ($n=28$) compared with 23 per cent ($n=11$) of foster carers, of whom 53 per cent ($n=26$), were paying off a mortgage. The higher rates of outright home ownership by kin carers (the majority of whom were grandparents) is related to their older age, since rates of home ownership tend to increase with age in Australia (Kendig and Bridge, 2007). Nevertheless, a significant minority of kinship carers, 42 per cent ($n=30$) lived in rental accommodation.

Despite findings that kinship carers were more likely to be caring for older children, and for significantly longer periods, kinship carers also lived in homes with fewer bedrooms on average than those of foster carers (Yardley, Mason and Watson, 2009: 33). Overcrowding has been reported in other studies also as a serious issue which affects the circumstances of grandparent-headed families and thus warrants further policy attention (COTA, 2003; Worrall, 2005).

3.4.2 Household composition

The rate of living without a partner (being single) is higher for grandparent carers than for adults in other household types. For instance, in 2003 the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that almost half (47 per cent) of grandparent families consisted of lone grandparents, predominantly grandmothers (ABS, 2005). Yardley and colleagues (2009) found that around 36 per cent of the kinship carers in their sample were single, and 59 per cent married or partnered. In contrast, 25 per cent of the foster carers included in their study were single, and some 74 per cent were married or partnered.

These findings are consistent with other surveys of grandparent carers. Kelley and colleagues' study of 102 U.S. grandparent families found that 82 per cent were not

² Regional includes: regional centres, small rural/regional towns, and large and small coastal towns

living with a partner—that is, they were ‘widowed’, ‘single, never married’ or ‘separated/divorced’—at the time of the interview (2000: 317). Worrall’s (2009) large-scale survey of grandparent caregivers in New Zealand also makes this finding. Worrall found that 37 per cent of the sample (n=73) grandparents were single, due to divorce (22 per cent), death of a partner (10 per cent) or separation (5 per cent).

Intergenerational co-residence is important for some grandparent carers. The ABS reported that in 2002-03, 33 per cent of lone grandparents shared their home with another adult who was usually related to the grandchild, as did one-quarter of couple grandparent families (ABS, 2005). Though three-generation households may exist where grandparents, parents and grandchildren co-reside, these families can be quite fluid: family members can move in and out of households, and parental responsibility can be shared between two or more family members. In addition, though parents may be present, grandparents may still effectively exercise full or partial parental responsibility and care for the grandchild or grandchildren (Hull, 1992; Smith, 2000).

Grandparent households may contain a number of co-residing family members. Yardley, Mason and Watson (2009: 91) note that beyond partners, grandparents could also reside with their sons (12 per cent, n=7) or daughters (3 per cent, n=2), their sisters (5 per cent, n=3) and, in a small minority of cases, their own mothers (3 per cent, n=2).

3.4.3 Changes to housing

A number of studies show that grandparent carers often have to bear the financial cost of establishing a suitable and stable care environment for the child. This can mean anything from furnishing a bedroom or buying the child suitable provisions, to renovating a room, or even having to move house (McHugh, 2009; Parliament of Tasmania, 2003; Yardley, Mason and Watson, 2009). As Yardley and colleagues, in their study of kinship carers, note:

Some carers reported needing to move out of homes they owned because they were too small and upsize into rental accommodation. Some carers who were already renting reported having to move to cheaper rental areas away from social networks in order to afford houses with more bedrooms (Yardley, Mason and Watson, 2009: 42).

Changes to housing may involve considerable lifestyle changes, and are therefore likely to entail not only substantial financial costs, but social costs for grandparents and grandchildren alike.

3.5 Grandchildren and their parents

3.5.1 Grandchildren

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that in 2003 15 per cent of grandchildren in grandparent-headed families were aged 0-4 years, 37 per cent 5-11 years, 36 per cent 12-14 years, and 12 per cent were aged 15-17 years. Compared to children in other family units, children in kinship care are more likely to be older (ABS, 2005; for an international comparison see also Nandy and Selwyn, 2011).

The ABS has also reported that grandparent families tend to have fewer children in their care than other family types in Australia. In 2003, 89 per cent of grandparent headed families had one or two children in care, and 11 per cent three or more. This compares with 81 per cent and 19 per cent respectively in other families with children in Australia (ABS, 2005). Whilst on average grandparents may be taking care of fewer children, it should be noted that some grandparents can be caring for large numbers of grandchildren. Australian research has found grandparents caring for up to six grandchildren at one time (COTA, 2003).

3.5.2 Reasons for care

There are no national data pertaining to the official reasons why children are placed in relative care, as distinguished from other forms of non-parental care. The official child protection statistics differentiate between physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and/or neglect of children with respect to substantiated reports of abuse or neglect which might lead to child protection placements. Nationally, the most common type of substantiated abuse is emotional (36 per cent) followed by neglect (29 per cent) while the proportion of substantiations that relate to sexual abuse is much smaller (14 per cent) nationally and in most jurisdictions (AIHW, 2012: 8). The Australian literature shows that grandparents may be motivated or required to provide kinship care for a variety of reasons, including substance abuse by parents, risk of child abuse or neglect, death of the parent(s), parental incarceration, parents' mental health problems, and disability of grandchildren (Backhouse, 2006; Families Australia, 2007; Kelley et al., 2000; Libesman, 2004; Spence, 2004). Whilst these and other issues may all be contributing factors, much of the local and international literature indicates that parental substance abuse underlies much of the growth in kinship care in recent years (Baldock, 2007; Families Australia, 2007; Pruchno, 1999; Wellard, 2011; Worrall, 2009; Selwyn et al., 2013).

Thus, while there are many reasons why grandparents might assume parental responsibility for a grandchild, the literature shows that these are often related to issues connected with the parents' capacity to provide suitable and adequate care for their children (Pruchno, 1999), highlighting the importance of intergenerational

relationships in understanding and analysing patterns of grandparent care. Additionally, many grandparents, acting under a strongly held view that the family provides the best quality care, cite keeping the children out of the foster care system as a major motivation (COTA, 2003; Elarde and Tilbury, 2007; Orb and Davey, 2005; Spence, 2004). It is also important to keep in mind that there may be significant overlap between the various issues affecting parents' capacity to care for their children, and thus grandparents' motivation for kinship care may not be solely attributable to one particular issue or source.

3.5.3 Contact arrangements with parents

The contact which children in grandparent families have with their birth parents varies considerably. The ABS 2003 study of grandparent headed families found that nearly three-quarters (74 per cent) of children living with a grandparent had face-to-face contact with a parent at least once a year. Of these children, over one-third (37 per cent) had face-to-face contact with a parent at least fortnightly, one-quarter monthly or quarterly, and some 12 per cent of children saw at least one of their parents every six months to once a year. However, a substantial proportion of children living with their grandparents, 26 per cent of children, did not have any contact with either birth parent in a typical year (ABS, 2005).

The variability in contact arrangements has also been reported in relatively small-scale studies. For example, Dolbin-MacNab and Keiley (2009) surveyed 41 North American grandchildren living with their grandparents regarding their family relationships. Contact with biological parents was found to vary considerably:

In total, 24 grandchildren described ongoing relationships with one or both of their parents. Contact with parents was highly variable and consisted of complex combinations of visits, telephone calls, prison visits, and overnights. Some grandchildren had regular daily or weekly contact, whereas others had regular monthly or annual contact. Still others had parental contact that was unpredictable or erratic. (Dolbin-MacNab and Keiley, 2009: 169; see also Selwyn et al., 2013; Kiraly, Humphreys and Hoadley, 2012)

3.6 Income, employment and financial stress

3.6.1 Household income

Compared to other family types in Australia, grandparent-headed families are significantly more likely to experience financial disadvantage. Brandon's 2004 analysis of the HILDA survey for families headed by grandparents shows that the average yearly income was \$20,752 (or \$399 per week). By comparison, the average annual income of married couples with children was three times that of grandparent-headed families, at \$61,833 (\$1189 per week) (Brandon, 2004). This

is indicative of relative financial disadvantage for a significant proportion of grandparent-headed families in Australia.

Yardley and colleagues' (2009) study showed similar results, with kinship carers reporting significantly lower average incomes than foster carers. For instance, while 35 per cent of kinship carers reported incomes of under \$500 a week, 18 per cent of foster carers did so. Some 39 per cent of kinship carers reported incomes of \$500 to \$999, compared to 27 per cent of foster carers. In the highest surveyed income bracket, a gross weekly household income of \$1000 or more, foster carers significantly outstripped kinship carers: 53 per cent of foster carers were in this category, compared with 17 per cent of kinship carers (Yardley, Mason and Watson, 2009: 33). These findings are consistent with the wide body of kinship care literature, which indicates that grandparent carers are relatively disadvantaged with respect to their financial circumstances (Dunne and Kettler, 2006; Higgins, Bromfield and Richardson, 2005).

3.6.2 Income sources

Part of grandparents' economic disadvantage stems from the fact that they are significantly less likely to be employed than either foster carers or the general population of parents with children. The Australian Bureau of Statistics data for 2003 show that a grandparent was employed in a little over one-third of grandparent-headed families. As a result, almost two-thirds of grandparent carers were identified as being in receipt of a government benefit, pension or allowance as their main source of income. In contrast, in the general population only 19 per cent of families were reliant on these sources for their primary source of income (ABS, 2005).

Grandparents may utilise a number of sources of income. Selling assets, notably the family home, is a common finding in the kinship care literature (Wellard, 2010). Another common finding is grandparents drawing from retirement savings and investments to pay for the grandchildren care needs. For example, McHugh's focus groups with 36 kinship carers—32 of whom were grandparents—found that retirement income was the main source of household income for half of the participants (McHugh, 2009).

3.6.3 Financial stress

In 2003 the Council on the Ageing (COTA) report on the situation of 499 grandparent carers in Australia showed that many grandparents lived in a precarious financial position, and provided insights into the experiences of grandparents who care for grandchildren in circumstances of financial difficulty:

Grandparents worry about the high cost of education—fees, uniforms, and books. They often find that their grandchildren are not eligible for State

education allowances or 'school cards' because a means test is applied to the grandparents' income and/or assets (2003: 30).

Similarly, Orb and Davey, in their interviews with 17 kinship care grandparents in Australia described some of the activities involved in living on a 'shoe string budget':

Grandparents reported that one of the major financial struggles was when things needed repair or they needed to change their car. A few of them indicated that they looked for opportunities in second-hand shops and cheap food shops...often, grandparents reported that they were 'with the hand in the pocket' all the time and could not afford simple pleasures such as going out for a cheap meal in a restaurant on the odd occasion. (Orb and Davey, 2005: 165).

A significant, consistently identified source of financial stress for grandparents is the legal costs involved in seeking custody of grandchildren. The COTA (2003) report found that legal costs were one of the most difficult issues for grandparents, especially as parents of grandchildren were often able to qualify for legal aid while grandparents—excluded by assets accumulated across the life course, particularly home ownership—were not.

Another common source of financial stress is the unexpected costs involved with establishing appropriate living environments for children. Bedding, furniture and clothing for grandchildren may need to be purchased quickly, especially if children arrive in unexpected or crises situations, such as in the middle of the night, and this can cause financial stress for grandparents (COTA, 2003; McHugh, 2009; Parliament of Tasmania, 2003; Worrall, 2009).

3.6.4 Employment

Generally, employment of any type is less likely for kinship carers than foster carers in Australia (McHugh and valentine, 2011). For example, comparing the employment status of foster carers and kinship carers in NSW, Yardley and colleagues found that grandparents were less likely to be working full time than foster carers (11 per cent compared with 18 per cent), and considerably less likely to be in casual or part-time employment (13 per cent compared with 29 per cent). Dunne and Kettler's (2007) comparison of 52 grandparents raising their grandchildren with 45 non-caregiving grandparents found that only 13 per cent of the grandparents caring for their grandchildren were in fulltime employment compared to 30 per cent of their non-caregiving peers. Beyond loss of wages, the financial circumstances of families may deteriorate further due to loss of superannuation and workplace entitlements, such as sick leave or long service leave.

3.6.5 Changes to employment

Caring for grandchildren can be a labour-intensive task. Although some grandparents may already be retired or in part-time work when their grandchildren arrive, the Australian literature indicates that many kinship carers leave work or significantly scale back employment commitments in order to care for their grandchildren. Yardley, Mason and Watson (2009) found that nearly half (46 per cent) of the kinship carers in their study rated their financial situation as having 'somewhat' or 'greatly' deteriorated since taking on care for grandchildren, suggesting that at least some of these carers had needed to leave employment. Similarly, Worrall (2009) notes that 57 per cent of her sample ($n=106$) of New Zealand grandparents indicated that they had to change employment commitments due to their caregiving responsibilities. Many grandparents in her sample scaled back work commitments: 25 per cent transitioned from full to part-time work, while another 21 per cent took early retirement. Others, however, had to assume additional work commitments: 9 per cent went from part to full-time work; 8 per cent from retirement to part-time employment; and 2 per cent from retirement to full-time employment. In sum, intergenerational caregiving can often have a major impact on the employment commitments of grandparents, though this can work in different directions depending on the circumstances of individual families (see also COTA, 2003; McHugh, 2009; Pruchno and McKenney, 2000).

3.7 Access to supports and services

Access to timely and appropriate supports and services for grandparents and grandchildren has been identified as a critical issue in the kinship care literature, both in Australia and overseas. Such supports and services include respite, childcare, formal and informal support groups, legal assistance, caseworkers, training and education for parenting again as a grandparent.

One of the most important issues for grandparents is access to appropriate and adequate financial support to help them meet the costs of raising their grandchildren. The research has found consistently that many grandparents remain unaware of their potential eligibility for support payments (COTA, 2003; McHugh, 2009). McHugh (2009) found that grandparents who are able to access support payments, such as the State/Territory Supported Care Allowance, are likely to report that these payments help them greatly in undertaking their care responsibilities. However there have also been reports that payments are insufficient to cover items such as children's extra-curricular activities, or household setting up costs (McHugh, 2009).

Grandparent carers also indicate that they need access to a range of non-financial supports: for instance, timely, appropriate, and up-to-date information, as a critical element in assisting them to access services and supports (Jenkins et al., 2010;

valentine et al., 2013). A study of 55 service providers and policy makers in New South Wales, South Australia and the Northern Territory found that grandparents face a number of challenges in accessing appropriate information suitable for their age and their particular circumstances (Jenkins et al., 2010).

Access to support groups is also a key concern of many grandparent carers, since taking on the care of grandchildren may lead to social isolation. Their peer groups may not be sympathetic to their circumstances of raising children in older age (Backhouse, 2008; COTA, 2003; Families Australia, 2008). Support groups have also been identified as a key information source for grandparent carers, allowing them to receive, share and understand information (Jenkins et al., 2010).

Access to respite is a third key concern for grandparent caregivers. Generally, respite services such as holiday camps can deliver significant social benefits for both grandparents and grandchildren - enabling grandparents to have a break whilst grandchildren develop relationships with children in similar circumstances. However, there is concern that grandparents may not be aware of their eligibility for respite, or may be otherwise prevented from utilising this support. For example, McHugh (2009) reported that access to respite was not only highly variable, but greatly influenced by familial factors such as other intergenerational caring obligations. In addition, studies report that grandparents are adamant that respite must be appropriate and preferably provided by someone known to the child so as to ensure that there is minimal distress (COTA, 2003; McHugh, 2009).

Informative, accessible and caring caseworkers are also an important component in supporting grandparents (Backhouse, 2008; Gibbons and Mason, 2003; Parliament of Tasmania, 2003; Yardley, Mason and Watson, 2009). In a survey of 50 statutory kinship carers undertaken by the Department of Victorian Services, it was found that carers desired maturity, experience, understanding and respect from caseworkers, as well as help in negotiating familial relationships and parents' drug/alcohol misuse (Department of Human Services Victoria, 2007).

Grandparent carers are a heterogeneous group; therefore, the available supports and services may not be appropriate for all. While some grandparents wish to have the same services and supports as foster carers, others may need supports and services tailored to their specific familial needs, and still others may view supports and services as intrusive and inappropriate (Jenkins et al., 2010; McHugh, 2009; Janicki et al., 2000). Much of the Australian and international literature has found that grandparents generally view training, such as the *Triple P Program*, quite favourably, particularly as such training allows them to 'update' parenting skills appropriately for the new generation (McHugh, 2009). However, some grandparents may be reluctant to ask for help, out of fear that child welfare/protection authorities will remove grandchildren on the assumption that the grandparents are unable to cope (COTA, 2003; Wellard, 2010).

3.8 Health and wellbeing

3.8.1 Grandparents' health

A wide range of research has shown that taking on the care of grandchildren is often deleterious to grandparents' physical health (Minkler and Roe, 1993; Orb and Davey, 2005). This should be understood in the context of grandparents' relatively older ages compared with others caring for children, such as foster carers and parents. Grandparents therefore are more likely than other carers to suffer from a long-term illness or disability (Nandy and Selwyn, 2011). Accordingly, grandparents tend to report age-related health issues such as high blood pressure, arthritis, physical exhaustion and stress (Wellard, 2010; Dunne and Kettler, 2006; Yardley et al., 2009).

Grandparents may also suffer from a decline in mental health and wellbeing as a result of their caregiving (Dunne and Kettler, 2008; Horner et al., 2007; Kelley et al., 2000; Parliament of Tasmania, 2003). In a pertinent finding, Kelley et al. (2000: 319) noted that 30 per cent of their sample of 102 grandparents in the USA experienced psychological distress requiring clinical services (see also Horner et al., 2007). Similarly, Dunne and Kettler (2007) comparing the mental health and wellbeing of caregiving and non-caregiving Australian grandparents, found a link between grandchild health and behaviour, and higher levels of psychological stress and anxiety for grandparent carers. Grandparents' mental health and wellbeing appear to be influenced by a number of factors, including family resources, social support, physical health, and grief over the actions of birth parents (Dunne and Kettler, 2007; Kelley et al., 2000; Wellard, 2010).

Some studies have shown that rather than addressing their health issues, grandparents may seek to downplay or ignore them. For some, this may be done in an attempt to maintain caring responsibilities or not to worry the grandchildren; other grandparents, however, have cited fear of child welfare authorities removing the grandchild as their reason for hiding or downplaying the nature of their physical and mental ill health (Minkler, Roe and Price, 1992; Wellard, 2010).

3.8.2 Grandchildren's health

Grandchildren in kinship care often have complex needs, which may include psychological issues, physical disabilities and challenging behaviours (Smyth and Eardley, 2008; Rubin et al., 2008). The complex needs of grandchildren in kinship care may be the result of a variety of factors, including parental substance abuse and family breakdown, among others (McHugh and valentine, 2011). Dunne and

Kettler's (2006) literature review of Australian and international literature³ on the physical and mental health of children in kinship care found that these children experience significant social and emotional issues, though this is attributed to 'early exposure to high risk backgrounds' rather than the kinship care placement *per se* (2006: 23). These factors encompass both mental health (e.g. depression, anxiety) and behavioural challenges which can affect children's peer relationships and schooling. Children in kinship care may also experience physical disabilities and ill health (COTA, 2003; Yardley, Mason and Watson, 2009; Backhouse, 2008; Wellard, 2010).

However, as Dunne and Kettler (2006) note, children in kinship care may have poor access to appropriate supports and services to assist with mental health and behavioural issues. The COTA study reinforced this finding: grandparents reported that speciality therapist services and supports were 'limited or non-existent'. This was a particularly important matter for grandparents living in rural and regional areas (COTA, 2003: 31).

3.9 Relationships and social life

3.9.1 Relationships

Relationship breakdown with children's parents may be an ongoing source of tension and stress (Wellard, 2010). Other studies report relationships between grandparents and birth parents characterised by the grandparents' fear that the parents would take grandchildren back (McHugh, 2009). Many grandparents also discuss the difficulties of mediating relationships between birth parents and grandchildren. Managing the expectations and emotions of children, guiding the middle generation in their parenting behaviour, supervising visits and contact and dealing with parent-child estrangement can take their toll on grandparents' wellbeing (McHugh, 2009; Spence, 2004; Wellard, 2010; Kiraly, Humphreys and Hoadley, 2012). The COTA study found that grandparents often feel torn between the generations: 'They do not want to alienate the parents, their own adult children, but they see the effects of the parents' behaviour on the grandchildren' (2003: 24; see also Spence, 2004; Kiraly, Humphreys and Hoadley, 2012).

It should be noted, however, that contact and relationships between grandparents and the middle generation are not always negative. McHugh (2009: 97) noted that proximity appeared to have a great influence, since 'when parents lived locally, contact was regular and the carers were satisfied with the arrangements'. Even when birth parents did not live nearby, however, some parents and grandparents travelled significant distances in order to keep up contact.

³ Restricted to English speaking countries

Although relationships with children's parents are often the main source of familial stress, relations with other family members may also shift and transform. Yardley, Mason and Watson (2009) found that in some cases carers can experience multiple sources of conflict and tension in their relations with other family members, such as parents, children and siblings, who may disapprove of the grandparent taking responsibility of a grandchild. There is however a variety of responses from other family members to a kinship care arrangement. Dunne and Kettler (2007), focusing on the reaction of other adult children, reported that some grandparents may experience tension and conflict with their children; whilst others may be emotionally and materially supported by them.

Marital relationships may also undergo strain following the arrival of grandchildren in the household. Marriage strain, breakdown and divorce have not attracted much scholarly attention, though some small-scale studies indicate that the arrival of grandchildren, often unexpectedly, can put a strain on grandparents' marriage (COTA, 2003; Worrall, 2009; Yardley, Mason and Watson, 2009). Overall, family dynamics and relationships in grandparenting arrangements can differ significantly. Some families may enjoy close relations and a high level of accord regarding care for grandchildren; others may be characterised by relatively high levels of tension and conflict over caregiving arrangements; and others may result in grandparents and other family members becoming estranged (Department of Human Services Victoria, 2000; Dunne and Kettler, 2008).

3.9.2 Social isolation

Social isolation from peers is a common finding in the grandparent care literature (Backhouse, 2006; COTA, 2003; Orb and Davey, 2005; Worrall, 2008). Grandparents who take parental responsibility of their grandchildren often find themselves 'out of step' with their peers who are free to pursue a social life free of child care responsibilities. Accordingly, they may be unable to attend those social activities, such as holidays or day trips, which do not take into account caring for grandchildren. In addition, they may be restricted in pursuing spontaneous recreational activities. Yardley and colleagues (2009) found that time for kinship carers' own interests had declined for over 60 per cent of their respondents since taking on care of children, whilst contact with friends had deteriorated for 45 per cent. The COTA report noted that:

Having the grandchildren living with them restricts the grandparents' social life and often they find they can no longer enjoy privacy and social outings with their partners...They often experience isolation from their peer group, perhaps arising from their shame at having a dysfunctional family but largely because their friends are no longer interested in having children present in their social activities. (COTA, 2003: 33-4)

3.10 Indigenous grandparents

Grandparent care of their grandchildren, as a major component of kinship care, is of vital significance in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities. In 2011 the rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in out-of-home care was 51.7 per 1,000 children, 10 times the rate for non-Indigenous children (AIHW, 2012: 35). Under the terms of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, which is included in legislation and policy in all Australian jurisdictions, an order of preference has been drawn up for the placement of Indigenous children who are moved from their family as protection from abuse or neglect. The order is that children should preferably be placed with their own extended family; and if this is not possible, within their own community; or in another Indigenous community (Lock, 1997: 50). Kinship care, such as grandparent care, is enshrined in legislation and policy to enable children to maintain links with their kin network, cultural heritage and communities. The purpose of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle is to enhance and preserve Indigenous children's sense of identity, by ensuring that Indigenous children and young people are maintained within their own extended family, local community, or wider community and their culture. This is endorsed in the context of the documented social problems in Indigenous communities, including intergenerational traumas and the lasting effect of a long policy history of child removal (Libesman, 2004).

Accordingly, kinship care is now the primary form of out-of-home placement for Indigenous children nationally (Smyth and Eardley, 2008). It is argued by some researchers that the history and experiences associated with past child welfare policies of child removal from their families influence Indigenous grandparents' decision to provide care to grandchildren, in order to keep them out of non-Indigenous care placements (Jenkins and Sieth, 2004; McHugh, 2003; Richardson et al., 2005). A number of scholars working in the area of Indigenous child protection observe that conventional models of child protection are inadequate for addressing the issues experienced by Indigenous carers. Libesman and Cunneen (2002) believe that individually-focused models of child placement fail to take into account differences in Indigenous communal and personal identities; in this light, a 'whole community' approach is most appropriate. Furthermore, the authors advocate that child welfare officials must take into account issues of history, citizenship, cultural identity and sovereignty when working with Indigenous families and kin networks.

In light of these issues, it is evident that Indigenous grandparents and other carers and the children in their care have a need for tailored, culturally sensitive supports and services. In this vein the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020* (COAG, 2009) puts forward a number of initiatives to support Indigenous families and communities. It has been stated that the implementation

and effectiveness of such initiatives depend on a mutually supportive partnership between Indigenous families and communities, and child welfare agencies, policy makers and service providers (McHugh and valentine, 2011).

3.11 Strength, resilience and dedication

Much of the literature surveyed has detailed the significant challenges and disadvantages grandparents face in caring for their grandchildren. Yet it is important to note that there are also great rewards associated with caring for grandchildren: the Australian and overseas literature is consistent in presenting evidence of grandparent carers who are steadfastly committed to the care and nurturance of their grandchildren (Dunne and Kettler, 2007; Minkler and Roe, 1993; Yardley, Mason and Watson, 2009; Selwyn et al., 2013). Grandparents stress their deep love for their grandchildren, and their strong sense of duty and responsibility in ensuring that their grandchildren are kept safe and well.

It ties you down a lot but when you think back [to] what it could have been if we didn't take them...you just think well, they might not be here now...It gives your life love. (quoted in COTA, 2010: 12).

...Besides the love, support and care of the children, it was the safety of them...(quoted in Yardley, Mason and Watson, 2009: 38)

Wouldn't be without her, would we? We often think when we said we'd take her for 12 months, how could we have ever done that and then handed her back. There's no way, there's no way. We love her to bits, don't we? (quoted in Backhouse, 2008: 135)

Love for their grandchildren and concern for their wellbeing are the pertinent factors in sustaining grandparents in their caregiving role (Jenkins, 2011).

Considering the voices of grandparents suggests adopting a nuanced approach in studying grandparent caregiving, as simultaneously a source of great strength as well as stress and challenges. The COTA report sums up this point:

Despite the hardships they face, they hastened to say that they love their grandchildren and would do anything to protect and nurture them. Their grandchildren bring them joy and keep them active. Grandparents' stories are about endurance, great hardship and great love. (COTA, 2003: 8)

It is important to emphasise that grandparents are motivated by the love of and dedication to grandchildren; and that despite the challenges of the caregiving role, there are also significant rewards for grandparent carers.

3.12 Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter has examined grandparent caregiver experiences and situations in Australia. It has demonstrated that grandparents face many challenges in providing care for their grandchildren: financial stress, challenges to their mental and physical health and wellbeing, and may have to bear negative impacts on familial and other social relationships. In the context of such challenges, grandparents often speak of their need for further supports and services from governments, both for themselves as carers and for the grandchildren for whom they care. They also remain steadfastly committed to supporting and caring for their grandchildren, often in situations of considerable hardship and adversity.

4 'Families' beyond categories: identifying grandparent and grandchild relationships

Trish Hill

4.1 Background

How many grandparents in Australia are raising grandchildren? This seemingly straightforward question is, in fact, complex both methodologically and conceptually. Throughout the period of this project there has been controversy about the numbers involved. Data on grandparents raising grandchildren in Australia were collected in the ABS *Family Characteristics Survey* (FCS) 2003 and the ABS *Family Characteristics and Transitions Survey* (FCTS) 2006-07 (ABS, 2008a). These surveys suggest that, in the first half of the decade, there were 22,500 (ABS, 2005: 44) or 23,000 (ABS, 2008a: 8) families with children aged 0-17 years headed by around 32 000 grandparents (ABS, 2004a). In 2006-07, by contrast, *the Family Characteristics and Transitions Survey* identified only 14,000 such families (ABS, 2008a: 8), headed by around 23,000 grandparents (ABS, 2008b).

How can this discrepancy be explained? There are a number of reasons why the estimates of the numbers of grandparents could have changed between these two surveys and caution must be used when interpreting the numbers in the data. First, these estimates are based on very small numbers (ABS 2004a, 2008b) thus the standard errors of the estimates are fairly large.⁴ Second, there were differences in survey sample size and survey methodology. The 2003 FCS was conducted as a supplement to the ABS Monthly Labour Force Survey (LFS) in June 2003, whereas the FCTS 2006-07 was conducted as part of the Multi-Purpose Household Survey (MPHS) in 2006-07 (ABS 2004b, 2008c). Both were surveys of usual residents in private dwelling in all areas of Australia, except for very remote areas. Data on all family members in each household were collected from one person per household via telephone or face to face interviews. The samples size for the FCS was 61,859 persons, whereas the sample size for the FCTS was 31,300 (ABS 2004b, 2008c).

In both surveys, grandparent families are defined as families in which the guardian(s) of the children aged 0-17 years is the grandparent or grandparents (ABS 2004b: 21). A guardian is defined as 'a person aged 15 years or over who is reported as being the guardian or main carer of any child(ren) aged 0–17 years, regardless of the existence of any legal arrangement' (ABS 2004b: 21). Children in

⁴ For example, tables provided by the ABS suggest that for an estimate of 20 000 families for Australia in the FCS 2003, the relative standard error was around 13 per cent.

these surveys may be natural, adopted, step or foster children and are family members who form a parent-child relationship with another member of the household (ABS, 2004b: 19). Thus, these surveys reflect the perspective of one person in the household about the nature of the relationship between the grandparent and grandchild. While in most cases where the grandparent/s are living only with the grandchildren, the view of the relationship may be the grandparent's perspective, it is possible that, in cases where the parent(s) are living with the grandparent and grandchild, the perspective is likely to be that of the parent only. Given the potentially shifting nature of family relationships and the resident status of all members within the household, such a snapshot perspective from one household member may fail to encompass the complex relationships of care and responsibility within families.

Despite the above caveats, FCS 2003 provided important insights into the characteristics of grandparent families. The analysis of the FCS 2003 data in ABS (2005) reports that:

- The majority (61 per cent) of families in which grandparents provided the main care to grandchildren aged 0-17 years were older (youngest grandparent aged 55 years and over) than other families.
- The children being cared for by grandparents also tended to be older and there were fewer of them in each grandparent family compared to other families.
- Around 47 per cent of grandparent families were lone grandparent families, mainly lone grandmother families.
- One third of grandparent families had a grandparent who was employed and two thirds relied on government benefits as their main source of financial support.
- Grandparent families were more likely than other families to live in regional Australia and less likely to live in major cities.
- Over one quarter (26 per cent) of the children in grandparent families had infrequent (less than yearly) or no contact with their parents, while 37 per cent had face-to-face contact with a parent at least fortnightly.

Surveys which gather information from more than one family member or which gather information about relationships between a range of household members provide more complex information about family arrangements and care of children. Longitudinal surveys may also provide data on transitions between family arrangements over time. In Australia, the HILDA Survey is one such survey. It contains a grid for each households that provides information on the relationships

between all members of the household. Thus it is possible to identify a grandparent-grandchild relationship within a household even when a parent is present on an annual basis. The survey also asks all respondents aged over 15 years if they have parental responsibility for children—thus potentially encompassing a care and responsibility relationship that may exist even in the presence of one or more parents or other adults. Such data enable researchers to move beyond simply understanding families as categories on the basis of relationships between all members of the family and one person designated as a family head (Brandon, 2004).

Analysing the circumstances of children aged under 15 years in the HILDA Survey, Brandon (2004) estimated that 27,718 children lived in households with grandparents only, representing 0.71 per cent of children (Brandon, 2004: 183). A further 60,017 children, or 1.55 per cent of children, lived with a parent and at least one grandparent (Brandon, 2004: 183). This research shed new light on the diversity of living arrangements of children in Australia, but is a little limited for the analysis of the circumstances of grandparent households as it focused on children as the unit of analysis, rather than grandparents themselves. In addition, the HILDA Survey also has some limitations due to sample size.

Population surveys, such as the Census, provide an opportunity to identify the number of particular family types (such as grandparent families) without the sampling error associated with smaller sample surveys.

In 2006, for the first time, the Census identified grandparent - grandchildren relationships for children aged under 15 years. Elliot (2007) found that there were:

- 8,050 families made up of grandparents plus grandchildren under 15 years (including 3,270 lone grandparent households and 4,780 couple grandparent households) but with no middle generation present
- 574 families with grandparents and grandchildren as well as other children under 15 years but with no middle generation present
- 995 households with grandchildren under 15 years *and* non-dependent grandchildren aged 15-24 years but with no middle generation present.

As Elliot (2007) points out, the Census captures statistical relationships but not care relationships. In the case of non-dependent children aged 15-24 years (who are defined as those not in full-time education and without a partner or child in the household (ABS, 2006a), the direction of care may flow either way. In other words, it could be that the grandchild is providing care for the grandparent, particularly if the grandparent has a core activity limitation and is in need of assistance, or the grandparent could be caring for the grandchildren.

In addition, various assumptions are used by the ABS to map the relationships between family members in the Census. These assumptions reflect notions about family structure and composition. Under the ABS coding system, for example, 'every child under 15 years must have a parent' (ABS, 2006b: 4). Thus, if siblings aged 14 years and 17 years live in a household without the presence of an adult, the 17 year old will be classified as parent to the 14 year old (ABS, 2006c: 4). Prior to 2006, such assumptions were extended to grandparents. Thus, if a grandparent were the primary carer of a child under 15 years, the relationship would have been coded as parent to child. Since 2006, if no parent is present, a grandparent– grandchild relationship would be recorded for this dyad.

Elliot (2007) also identified a number of household types where grandparents and grandchildren are present in addition to other relatives. In these cases no parent-child relationship would be established for the grandchild, but it would be unknown as to whether the grandparent had a primary carer role for the grandchild or whether that role is taken on by other relatives. These households included:

- 4,803 lone grandparent households with other relatives present.
- 12,600 couple grandparent households with other relatives present.

Analysis of the 2006 Census has focused on the circumstances of children rather than grandparents. The data suggest that around 24,000 children were living with grandparents only and that around 42 per cent of these children lived in one grandparent families (ABS 2006c: 75).

In the USA, grandparents with main responsibility for grandchildren are specifically identified in the Census 2000 'long form' (administered to one-sixth of households) and in the annual *American Community Survey*. Both ask whether there are any grandchildren of any person co-resident in the household, whether the grandparent is currently responsible for most of the basic needs of the grandchild/ren in the household and for how long the grandparent has had such responsibility (Simmons and Lawler Dye, 2003). In the US in 2000, 3.6 million people aged 30 years and over were found to be co-resident grandparents, of which 2.4 million (42 per cent) had primary responsibility for co-resident grandchildren under the age of 18 years (Simmons and Lawler Dye, 2003). Of the grandparents in the Census 2000 with parental responsibility for the grandchild, only 34 per cent did not live with a parent of the grandchild, or the middle generation (Simmons and Lawler Dye, 2003: 8). The American Community Survey of around 3 million households in the USA in

2009 estimated that there were 2.7 million grandparents who were primary caregivers, 1.7 million of whom were grandmothers (US Census Bureau, 2011)⁵.

These US findings suggest a number of important points to consider with respect to the gathering of Australian data. First, surveys that identify a single household 'head' and focus exclusively upon the relationships between that person and other members of the household may miss important grandparent care relationships. In order to identify grandparent families, it is important to ask direct questions about grandparent care of all persons within a household as happens in the US surveys discussed above. Second, many grandparents who have parental responsibility for grandchildren may also live with the middle generation. And third, grandparents with disability themselves may still have parental responsibility for grandchildren. They should not be *assumed* to be the objects of care. Many possibilities arise: grandparents with disability may both provide and receive care and support—this is a question for research, not a relationship to be assumed.

In the UK, re-analysis of the Census has been undertaken by Nandy and Selwyn (2011) in order to identify the number of children being brought up by relatives.

Bearing such issues in mind the following analysis explores the number and characteristics of grandparent families as they are able to be identified in the Australian Census 2006.

4.2 Number of grandparent families in the Australian Census 2006

4.2.1 Data and Limitations

The analysis below is based on data from the whole Census purchased from the ABS in the form of customised Supertables. The study considers the potential number of grandparent families based on the different classifications and then the characteristics of grandparent families. Data are analysed for grandparent families of different types when considering family characteristics and also for number of grandparents within grandparent families when considering individual characteristics. 'Not stated' responses have been excluded from calculations in this analysis. This approach assumes that the distribution of the not stated response is similar to the distribution of the stated response.

A number of important caveats about the data from the Census should be stated:

⁵ Of these grandparents, 8% lived in poverty, 1 million had cared for their grandchild/ren for more than 4 years, and 700,000 had a disability themselves (US Census Bureau, 2011).

- Census data are not designed to capture relationships of responsibility and care for grandchildren, but rather to identify household and family composition and relationships based on statistical coding procedures. Thus we cannot assume that all families with grandparent-grandchild relationships are families in which grandparent(s) have full responsibility for the grandchildren. This point is further discussed in the description of the families below. A separate question such as that in the US Census would be required to explore this important issue.
- Census data from remote areas of Australia should be interpreted with particular caution for a number of reasons. These reasons include the challenges of the Census collection process in Indigenous communities and the limited relevance of the categories of “families” and “households” employed by the Census coding to the lived experience of Indigenous peoples. For discussions of the ABS Indigenous Enumeration Strategy and the Census data with respect to Indigenous communities (see for example: Morphy, 2007a; Morphy, 2007b; Morphy, Sanders and Taylor, 2007; Rowse, 2010). Given these cautions about interpretations of the statistical data, policy implications should be drawn from such analyses only after further qualitative research with Indigenous communities.

4.2.2 Number of grandparent families

Table 4-1 shows the number of families in the Census with identified grandparent and grandchild relationships by age of children and presence of other relatives. The definition of each of these families is provided in Appendix A. As noted by Elliot (2007)—at a minimum there would appear to be 8,050 grandparent families where grandparents are raising grandchildren under 15 years as there are no other family members aged 15 years and over present. (This represents 3,271 lone grandparents and 4,779 grandparent couples with grandchildren under 15 years only.) There are a further 35,926 families which include grandparents and grandchildren but in which no parent-child relationship was identified. These *could be* families where grandparents have responsibilities for grandchildren.

Of these 35,926 families, 8,903 are families with ‘non-dependent’ grandchildren—that is, young people aged 15-24 years who are not in full-time study and do not have a partner or child within the household. For this group, the care relationship may be reversed in that the grandchild is caring for a grandparent. However, overall, the rate of need for assistance with core activities among grandparents in lone grandparent families is relatively low, which suggests that in the majority of these families the relationship might be at least one of mutual support. Given also the extended dependency of children who might be attending higher education part-time or working part-time in casual or relatively precarious employment, it is

plausible that these families are ones in which grandparents play a parental role in supporting the grandchildren. Further analysis of the need for assistance, education, employment and individual income characteristics of the non-dependent children and the grandparents in these families might assist in understanding relationships of support within these families.

A further 27,594 families identified in the Census included a lone parent living with a grandparent of their child. We have not identified couple families with grandparents present as we consider that it is less likely, although not implausible, that with two parents present, the grandparent would have parental responsibility.

The following analysis considers the characteristics of these grandparent families, and the grandparents within these families, grouped according to whether they are lone grandparent families, couple grandparent families or lone parent with grandparent present families.

Table 4-1 Number of families with grandparent and grandchild relationships in the Census

Type of family	Number
Lone grandparent family with:	
grandchildren under 15 years only	3271
grandchildren and any children under 15 only	233
grandchildren under 15 and over 15 only	502
other relatives	4,801
non-dependent grandchildren	8,903
Total	17,710
Couple grandparent family with:	
grandchildren under 15 years only	4,779
grandchildren and other children under 15 only	339
grandchildren under 15 and over 15 only	495
other relatives	12,603
Total	18,216
Total grandparent families with no identified parent-child relationship for the grandchild	35,926
One parent families with grandparent/s present	27,594
Total (potential) grandparent families	63,520
Other one parent families	786,843
Other couple families with children	2,351,194
Other couple families without children	1,936,821
Other families	80,784
Total families	5,219,162

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, Customised Supertables, Author's calculations

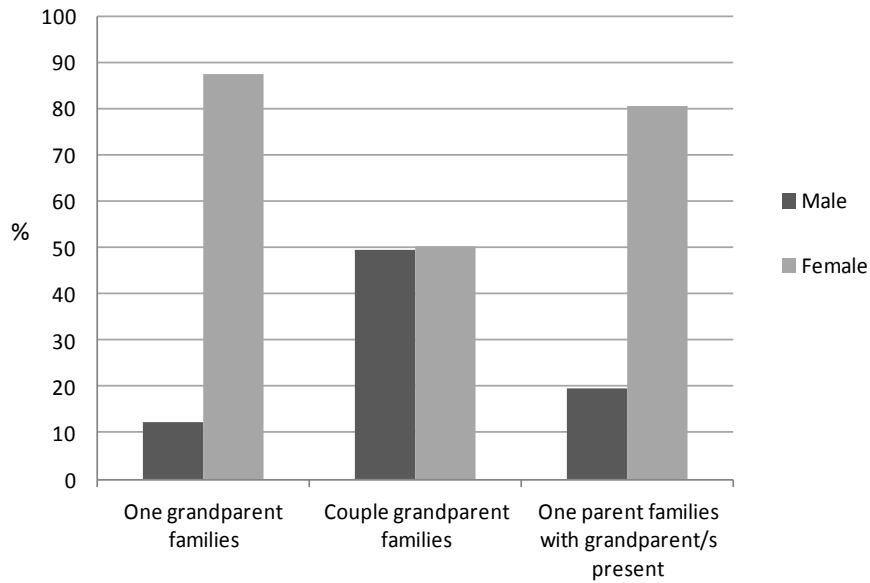
4.3 Demographic characteristics of grandparents: Census

This section considers the demographic characteristics of grandparents. Previous research using the Census 2006 has considered the characteristics of grandchildren. The Census data also showed that 80 per cent of these children lived in households with low or very low incomes (ABS 2006c: 76) and only 42 per cent lived with an employed grandparent (ABS 2006c: 79). Around two-thirds of the children living in lone grandparent households lived in rented dwellings (ABS 2006c: 77). Similar to the HILDA study noted above, the analysis of the Census also indicated that a relatively high proportion, or 32 per cent, of children living with their grandparents were Indigenous, a total of 7,300 Indigenous grandchildren (ABS 2006c: 78). Twenty-nine per cent of the grandchildren lived in outer regional, remote or very remote areas (ABS 2006c: 79).

4.3.1 Gender

The literature review indicated that in Australia, and internationally, taking on responsibility for grandchildren is most often done by grandmothers (see section 3.3). In the Census data, 88 per cent of one grandparent families were grandmother families. In families with one parent and a grandparent, 80 per cent of the grandparents were female. The couple grandparent families had around 50 per cent of male and female grandparents, but this statistic does not provide an indication of which grandparent in these families provided most of the care. As noted in the literature review, the international literature suggests that kinship care is most often undertaken by women, even if they have a partner.

Figure 4-1 Gender of grandparents



Source: *ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006*, Customised Supertables, Author's calculations

4.3.2 Age

Grandparents in the grandparent families identified in the Census were aged across a wide spectrum—from the 25-35 years age range up to over 75 years. Grandparents in one grandparent families and one parent families tended to be slightly older than grandparents in the couple grandparent families (Table 4-2) between 30-40 per cent of grandparents in the former families were aged 75 years and over compared with 8-15 per cent of grandparents in couple families. Around 45 per cent of grandparents in one grandparent and one parent families were of workforce age (under 65 years) compared with 54 per cent of male grandparents and 65 per cent of female grandparents in the couple grandparent families.

Table 4-2 Age of grandparents by sex and by family type

	One grandparent families		Couple grandparent families		One parent families with grandparent present	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
25 - 34 years	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.0
35 - 44 years	1.9	3.4	3.7	5.0	2.2	2.7
45 - 54 years	10.1	14.6	16.5	21.8	15.6	15.7
55 - 64 years	21.7	26.2	33.6	38.1	25.7	25.8
65 - 74 years	26.5	26.4	30.7	26.6	25.1	25.7
75 years and over	39.8	29.3	15.3	8.3	31.4	30.1
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	2,179	15,459	17,731	18,010	5,418	22,376

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, Customised Supertables, Author's calculations

4.3.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin

Child protection legislation in all Australian jurisdictions aims to ensure that Indigenous children are placed with members of their extended family or community. As noted before, estimates of the number of grandparent families in Indigenous communities, particularly in remote parts of Australia, need to be treated with care due to the nature of Census collection methods and uncertainty about the relevance of the Census categories to relationships in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (see Morphy, 2007a; Morphy, 2007b; Morphy, Sanders and Taylor, 2007; Rowse, 2010). Bearing these caveats in mind, the following data on grandparent families are provided in the Census.

Families with at least one grandparent who was of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin comprised 15 per cent of one grandparent families, 11 per cent of couple grandparent families and 6 per cent of one parent families with grandparents present. Overall, among one grandparent families, the proportion with Indigenous grandchildren was 19.0 per cent, 15.0 per cent for couple grandparent families and 9 per cent for the one parent families. Some grandparent families headed by non-Indigenous grandparents only also had Indigenous grandchildren

present - 6 per cent of one grandparent families and 4 per cent of couple grand parent families and one parent families with grandparents present. The experiences of Indigenous grandparents are explored in a later section of this report.

Table 4-3 Families with Indigenous grandchildren by Indigenous status of grandparent/s and family type

Family type	Number of Indigenous grandparents in family	Families with Indigenous grandchildren	Families with Indigenous grandchildren	Total families
		%	N	N
One grandparent families	0	5.7	867	15,118
		97.4	2491	2,557
Total one grandparent families	1	19.0	3358	17,675
Couple grandparent families	0	3.9	617	16,001
	1	87.2	573	657
	2	99.4	1543	1,553
Total couple grandparent families		15.0	2733	18,211
One parent families with grandparent present	0	3.8	993	25,958
	1	95.8	1517	1584
	2	100.0	56	56
Total one parent families		9.3	2566	27,598
Total families		13.6	8 657	63,484

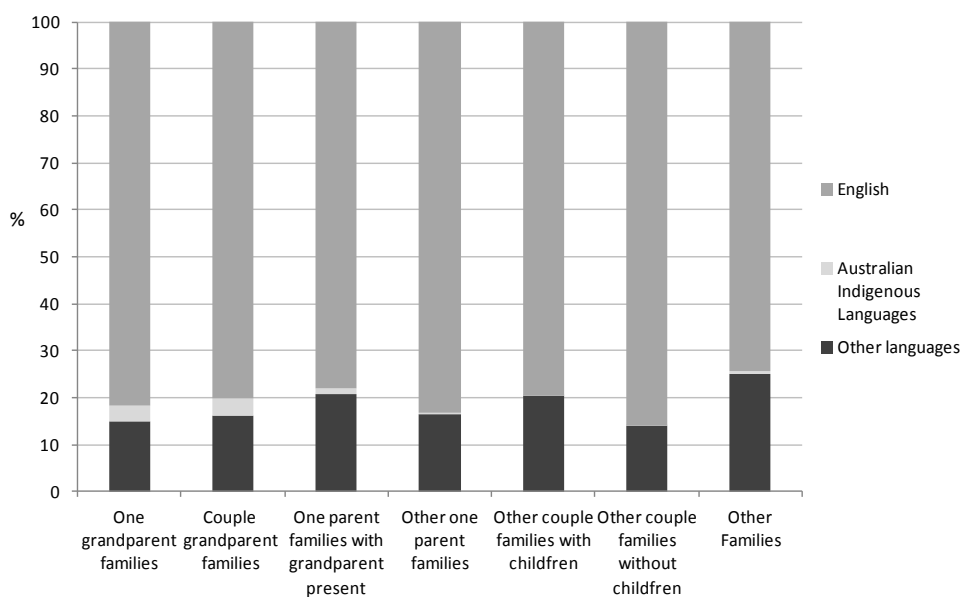
Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, Customised Supertables, Author's calculation

4.3.4 Language spoken at home

In around 80 per cent of all grandparent family types, English was the main language spoken at home (

Figure 4-2). An Australian Indigenous languages was the main language spoken at home in a small proportion of grandparent families (less than 4 per cent) but this was higher than other family types. Nearly 21 per cent of one parent families with grandparents present were families in which languages other than English were spoken at home compared with around 15-16 per cent of other grandparent families. These figures compared to 16 per cent of other one parent families and 20 per cent of other couple families with children who spoke languages other than English at home.

Figure 4-2 Main language spoke at home by family type



Source: *ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006*, Customised Supertables, Author's calculations

4.3.5 Education

The majority of grandparents in grandparent families had Year 10 or less as their level of highest educational attainment. Seventy-two per cent of grandparents in one grandparent families, 62 per cent of couple grandparent families and 69 per cent of grandparents in one parent families had either no educational attainment or had completed Year 10 or less. Fewer than 11 per cent of any group had obtained a Diploma or higher qualification.

Table 4-4 Highest educational attainment of grandparents by grandparent family type

	One grandparent families	Couple grandparent families	One parent families with grandparent present
No educational attainment	6.2	4.0	6.8
Year 10 or below	65.3	57.6	61.8
Year 11 or 12	12.3	13.0	12.1
Certificate	7.3	15.8	8.8
Diploma or above	8.9	9.7	10.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

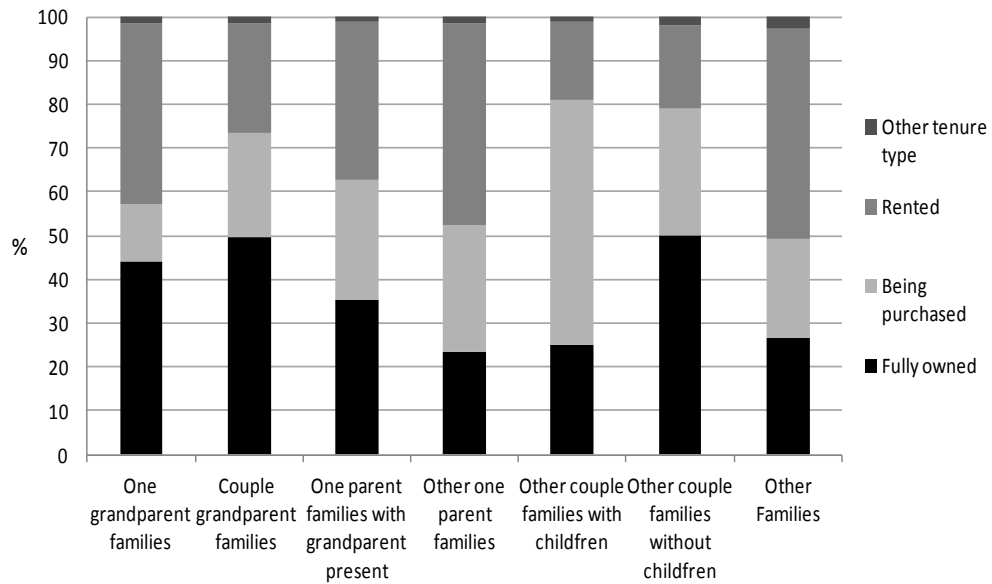
Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, Customised Supertables, Author's calculations

4.4 Housing

4.4.1 Housing tenure

Previous analysis of the Census data has shown that grandchildren (aged under 15 years) living with their grandparents had relatively high rates of living in a home that was owned without a mortgage, although grandchildren living in lone grandparent families had the highest rate of living in rented accommodation (ABS, 2006c). This analysis focuses on grandparent families rather than grandchildren. The data show that one grandparent families and couple grandparent families have relatively high rates of outright ownership compared with other families with children (44 per cent and 50 per cent respectively). As home ownership increases with age, this finding is likely to be due to the relatively older age of the grandparents. One grandparent families were more likely than couple grandparent or one parent with grandparent present families to be living in rental accommodation (41 per cent compared with 36 per cent of one parent with grandparent present families and 25 per cent of couple grandparent families).

Figure 4-3 Housing tenure by family type

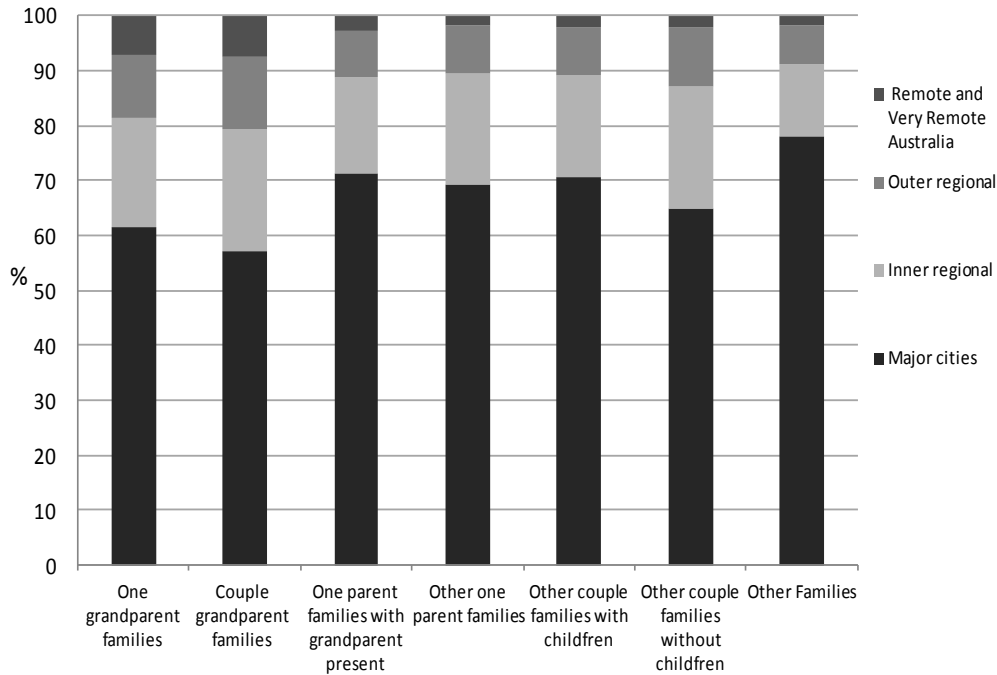


Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, Customised Supertables, Author's calculations

4.4.2 Region of residence

Like most Australian families, the majority of grandparent families lived in major cities. However, compared to other families, one grandparent families and couple grandparent families were less likely to live in major cities and more likely to live in remote or very remote areas (Figure 4-4).

Figure 4-4 Grandparent families by remoteness



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, Customised Supertables, Author's calculations

4.4.3 Geographical distribution of grandparent families

The Census data provide an opportunity to consider the geographical distribution of grandparent families across Australia by small areas. The geographical areas used in this analysis are Statistical Local Areas (SLAs). The Census data on the distribution of grandparent families should be interpreted with some caution for a number of reasons. First, as noted before, there are questions about Census data collection methods in remote areas of Australia and also about the appropriateness of Census family and household categories for specific parts of the Australian population, particularly Indigenous peoples. Second, due to the randomising undertaken by the ABS to ensure the confidentiality of the data, cells with small numbers are likely to be unreliable.

Figures 5.3 to 5.8 below provide an overview of the geographical distribution of grandparent families in Australia and more detailed images of New South Wales, South Australia and the Northern Territory—the key study sites for this research project. The families identified in this analysis are those where no parent-child

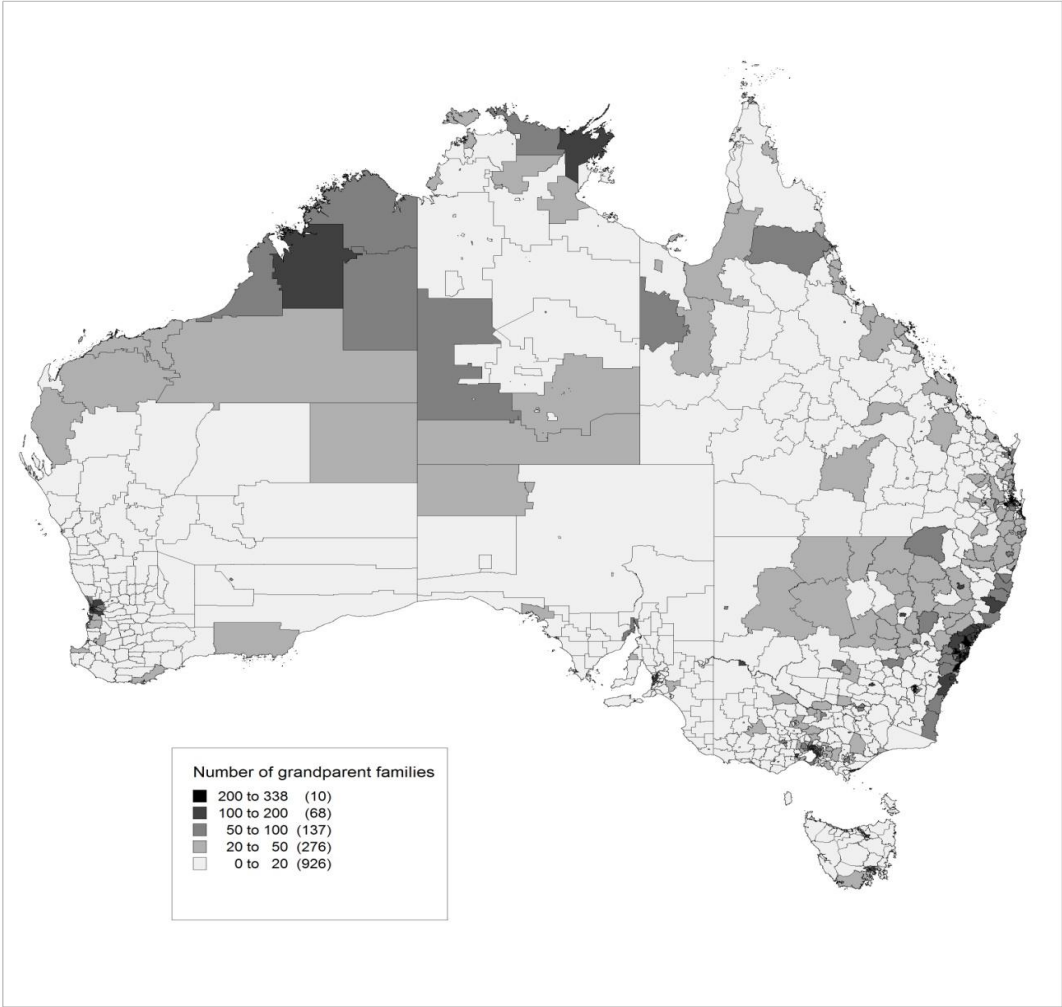
relationship was established in the Census 2006 data, so they exclude the one parent families with grandparent/s present.

SLA regions with the highest number of grandparent families (over 200) are predominantly found in NSW with one additional SLA in Queensland—Ipswich Central.

In NSW, regions with over 200 grandparent families in the SLA were Canterbury, Fairfield East, Liverpool East, Penrith East, Blacktown South-East, Blacktown South-West, Wollongong Inner and Wollongong Balance.

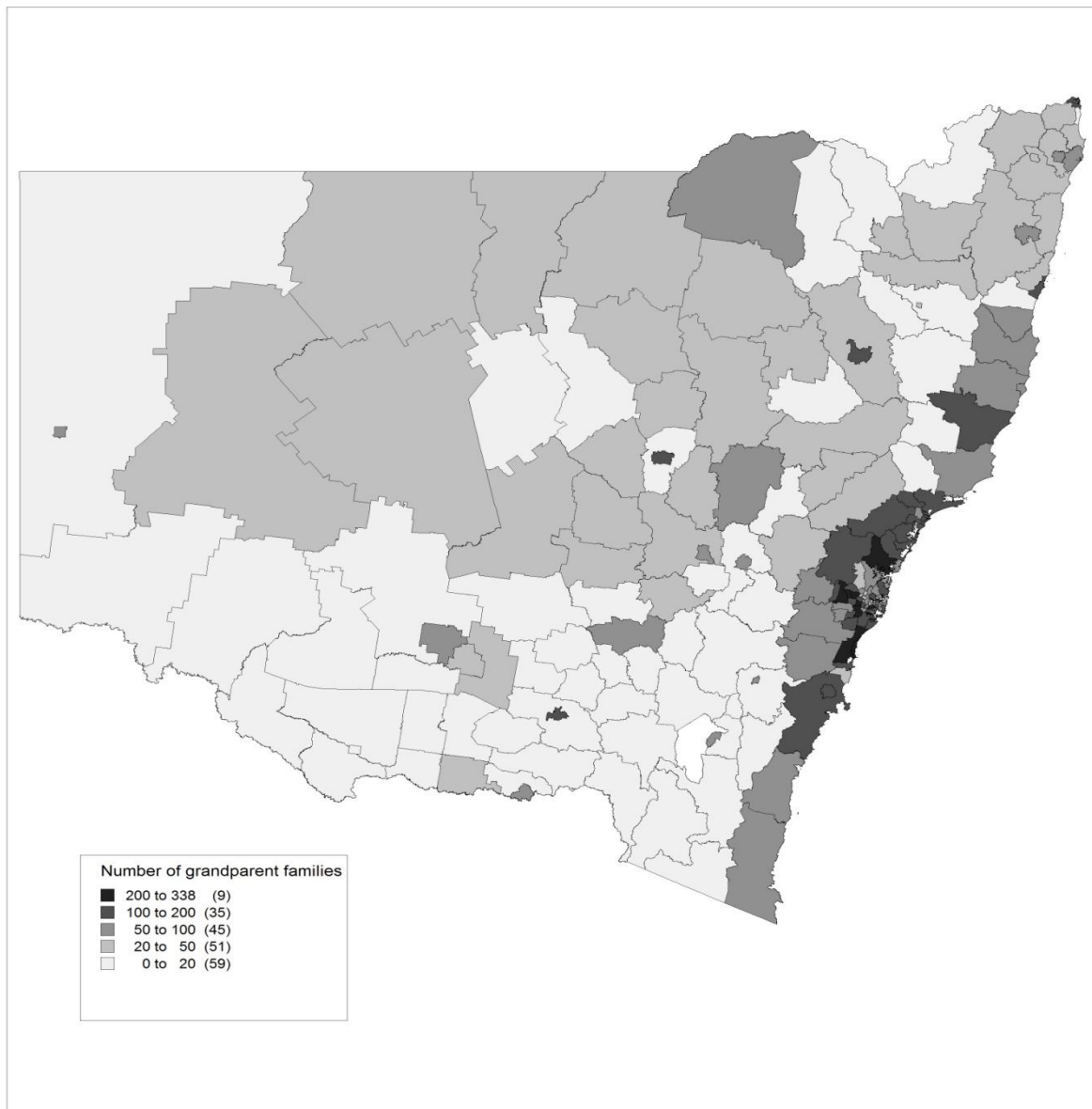
As noted above, Census data for remote and regional areas should be interpreted with great care. Based on the Census data for 2006, no SLAs in South Australia had more than 100 grandparent families, although 13 SLA's had between 50 and 100 grandparent families: Playford – Elizabeth, Playford - West Central, Port Adelaide Enfield – East, Salisbury – Central, Salisbury - Inner North, Salisbury - South-East, Charles Sturt - Inner West, Charles Sturt - North-East, Marion – Central, Onkaparinga – Morphett, Onkaparinga - South Coast, Whyalla and Port Augusta. In Northern Territory, SLAs with higher numbers of grandparent families were West Arnhem, East Arnhem balance and Tanami. Due to the concerns about the reliability of the census data for small areas, further qualitative research is required before any policy implications could be drawn from the regional Census data on grandparent families.

Figure 4-5 Number of grandparent families by Statistical Local Area (SLA), Australia



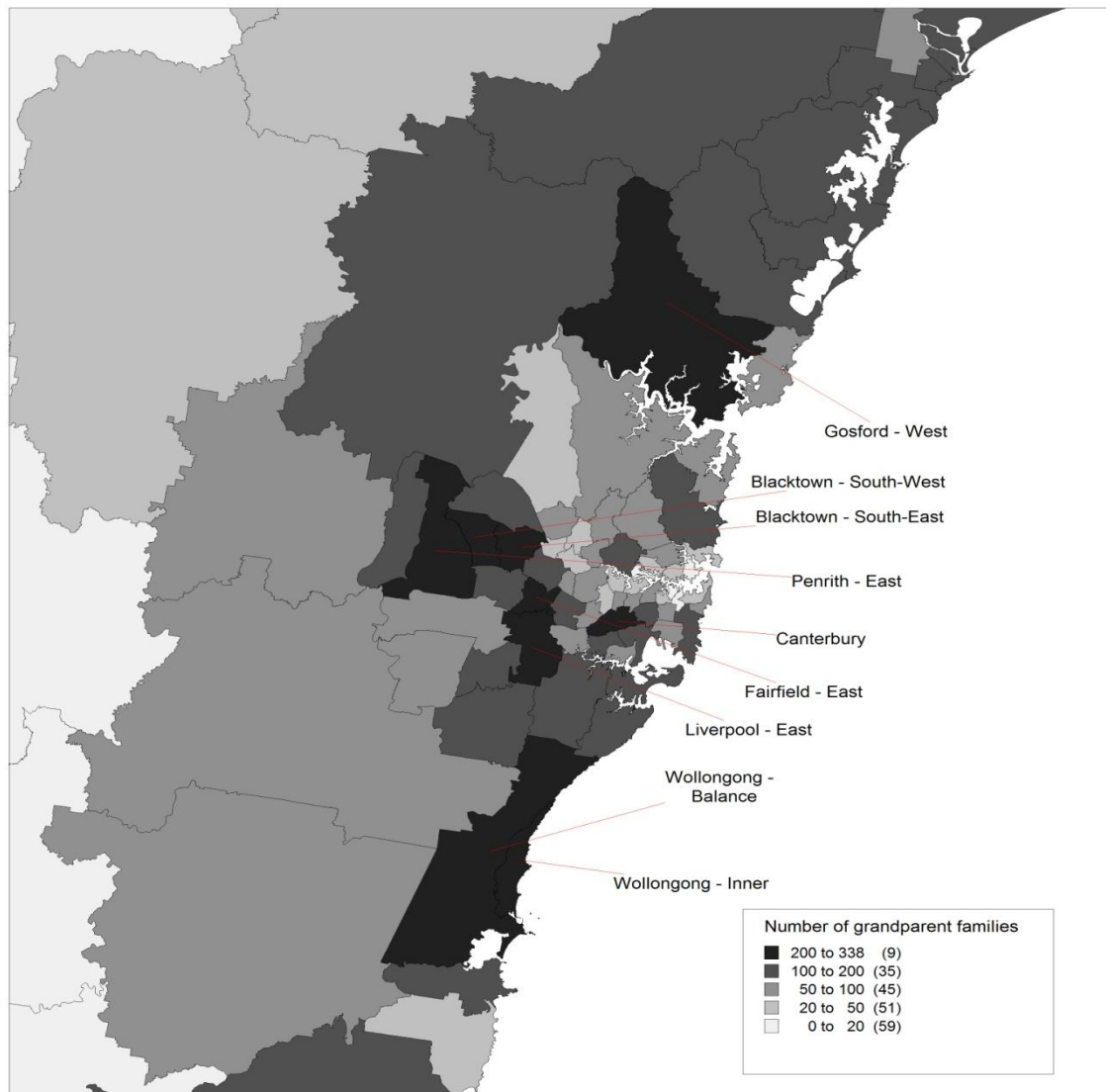
Source: *ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006*, Customised Supertables, Author's calculations

Figure 4-6 Number of grandparent families by SLA, New South Wales



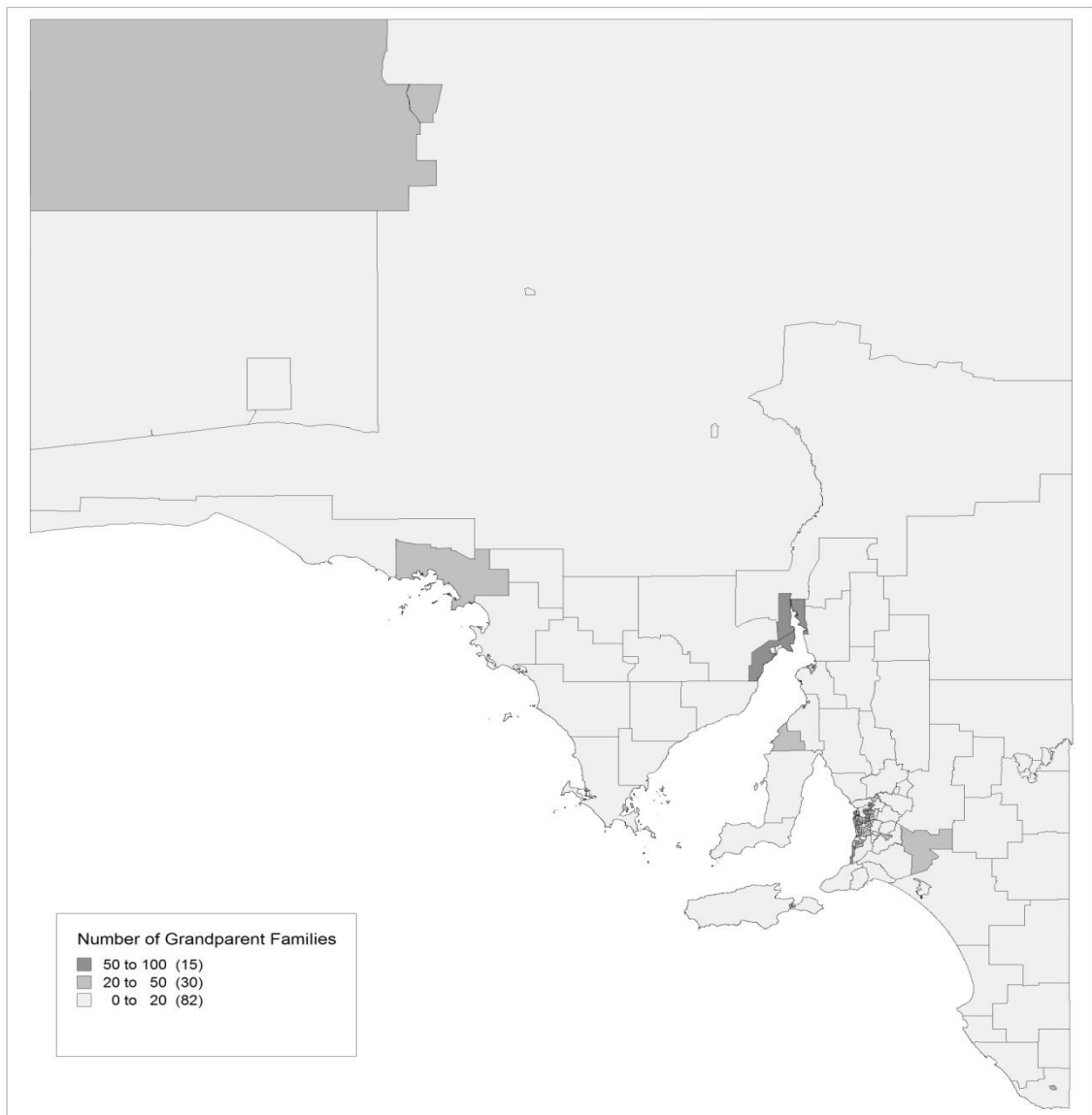
Source: *ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006*, Customised Supertables, Author's calculations

Figure 4-7 Number of grandparent families by SLA, Sydney Region



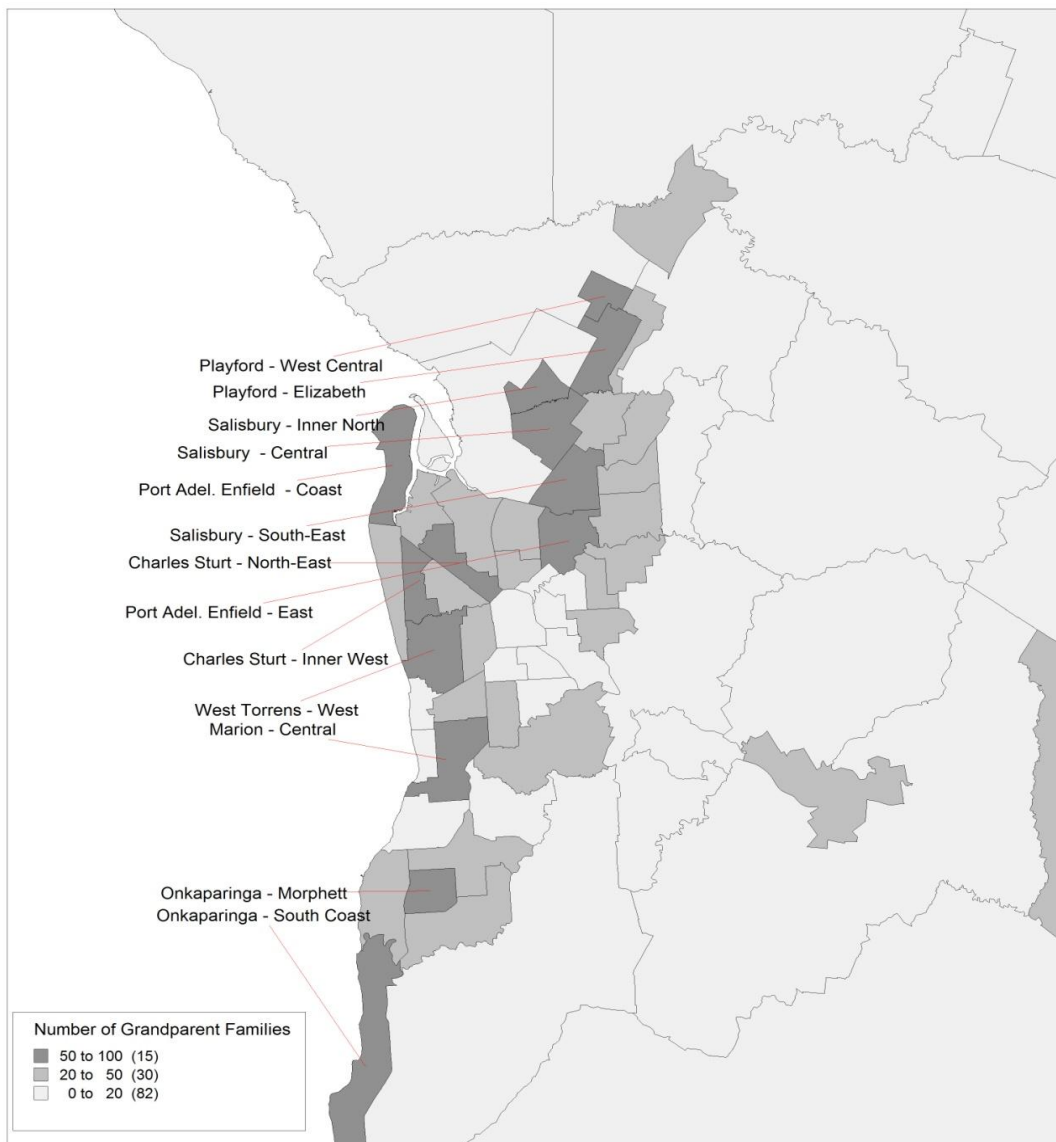
Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, Customised Supertables, Author's calculations

Figure 4-8 Number of grandparent families by SLA, South Australia



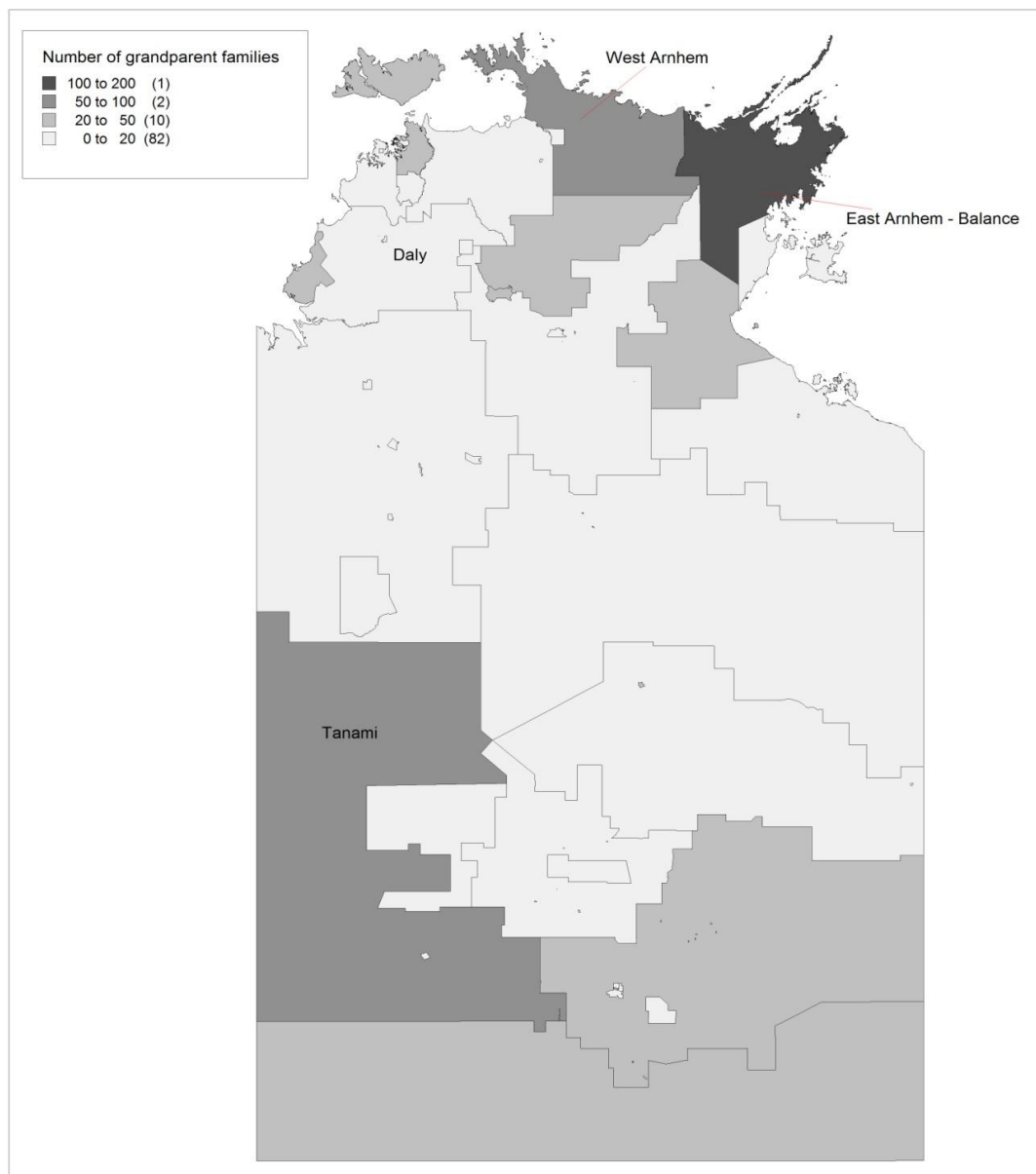
Source: *ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006*, Customised Supertables, Author's calculations

Figure 4-9 Number of grandparent families by SLA, Adelaide region



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, Customised Supertables, Author's calculations

Figure 4-10 Number of grandparent families by SLA, Northern Territory



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, Customised Supertables, Author's calculations

4.5 The grandchildren

4.5.1 Number and ages of grandchildren

Table 4-5 provides information on the number of grandchildren in these different types of families. Overall, for all lone parent grandparent families and couple grandparent families, the majority of families (nearly 80 per cent) had one grandchild only, with 14-15 per cent having 2 grandchildren and around 6 per cent having 3 or more grandchildren.

Table 4-5 Number of grandchildren in grandparent families

Type of family	Number of grandchildren in family			Total %	Total families ^a
	1	2	3 or 3+		
Lone grandparent family with: grandchildren under 15 years only	73.0	18.1	8.9	100	3,271
grandchildren and any children under 15 only	75.1	17.6	7.3	100	233
grandchildren under 15 and over 15 only	0.0	54.8	45.2	100	502
other relatives (age of children)	69.2	19.5	11.4	100	4,801
non-dependent grandchildren (are these lone grandparent families)	92.8	6.4	0.8	100	8,903
Total lone grandparent families	79.8	13.6	6.5	100	17,710
Couple grandparent family with: grandchildren under 15 years only	75.3	17.8	6.9	100	4,779
grandchildren and other children under 15 only	73.2	18.9	8.0	100	339
grandchildren under 15 and over 15 only	0.0	61.2	38.8	100	492
other relatives (age of children)	84.0	11.8	4.2	100	12,600
Total couple grandparent families	79.2	14.8	5.9	100	18,210
Total grandparent families	79.5	14.2	6.2	100	35,920
One parent families with grandparent/s present*	60.6	27.5	12.0	100	26,894
Total (potential) grandparent families	71.4	19.9	8.7	100	62,814

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, Customised Supertables,

^a Author's calculations Note: total does not include 700 one parent families with grandparents present in which the grandchildren were temporarily absent on Census night.

4.5.2 Age of Grandchildren

The age of the youngest grandchild varied across the different family types with a higher proportion of the one grandparent families, as defined in this analysis, having grandchildren who were older. In the one grandparent families, 61 per cent had only grandchildren who were aged 15 years and over, while the comparable figures for couple grandparent families were 45 per cent and for one parent families with grandparents present they were 29 per cent (Table 4-6). Nearly 30 per cent of the one parent families had youngest grandchildren aged 0-4 years, compared with 17 per cent of couple grandparent families and 11 per cent of one grandparent families.

Table 4-6 Age of youngest grandchildren in families

	0 - 4 years	5-9 years	10-14 years	15 years and over	Total	N ^a
One grandparent families	10.7	13.4	15.3	60.5	100.0	17,696
Couple grandparent families	16.5	18.9	19.8	44.8	100.0	18,211
One parent families with grandparent present*	29.3	22.6	19.2	28.9	100.0	26,895

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, Customised Supertables, Author's calculations

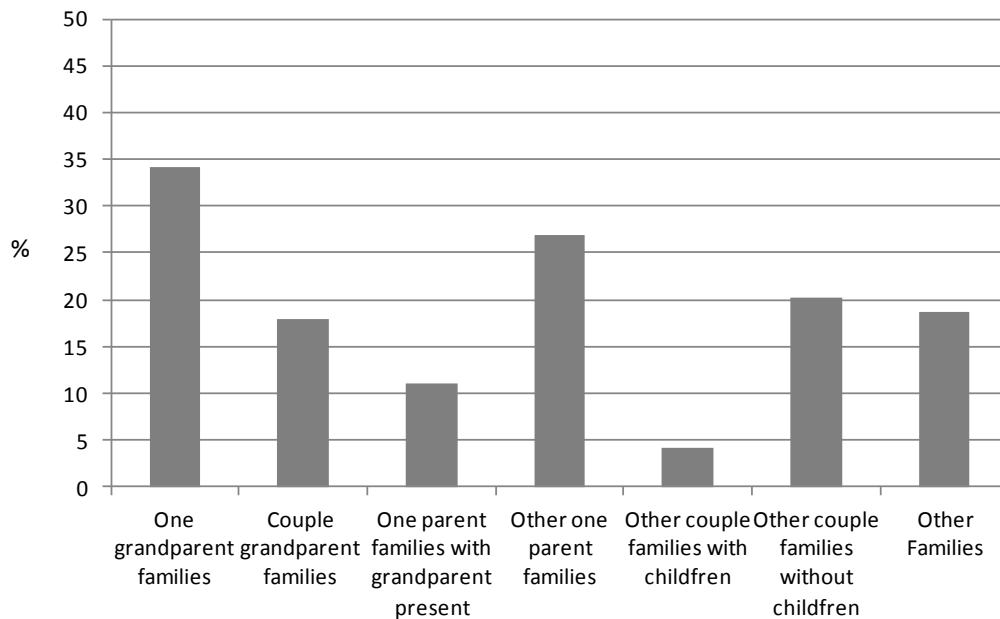
^a Total does not include 700 one parent families with grandparents present in which the grandchildren were temporarily absent on Census night.

4.6 Income and resources

4.6.1 Family Income

Previous analyses of the Census and HILDA have indicated that households which comprised grandchildren living with grandparents were much more likely than other households with children to be living in a low income household (ABS, 2006c; Brandon 2004). In the analysis of families below (Figure 4-11) around 35 per cent of one grandparent families had a family income of less than \$499 per week (in 2006 dollars), the highest rate of all family groups considered. Nearly 18 per cent of couple grandparent families and 11 per cent of one parent families with grandparent/s present also lived in families with this relatively low income.

Figure 4-11 Families with income of \$499 or less per week (2006 dollars) (not equivalised)

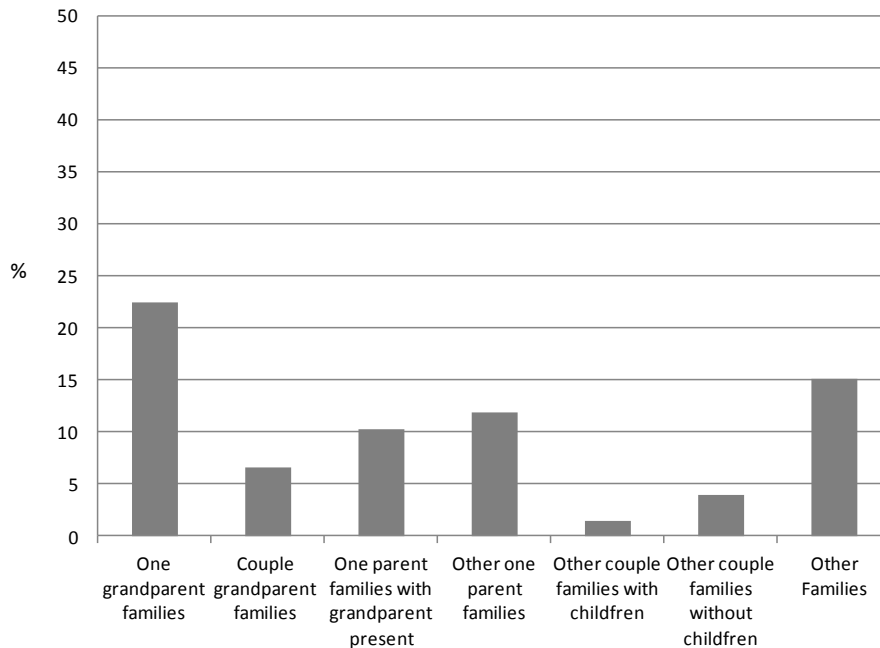


Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, Customised Supertables, Author's calculations

4.6.2 Transport

Access to transport may be very important in facilitating the care provided by grandparents to grandchildren and also in facilitating the social and economic participation of grandparents and grandchildren. Just over one-fifth (22 per cent) of one grandparent families did not have access to a motor vehicle in their household, a rate that was twice as high as the one parent families with grandparents present (10 per cent) and three times the rate of couple grandparent families (7 per cent).

Figure 4-12 Families without a motor vehicle in the household



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, Customised Supertables, Author's calculations

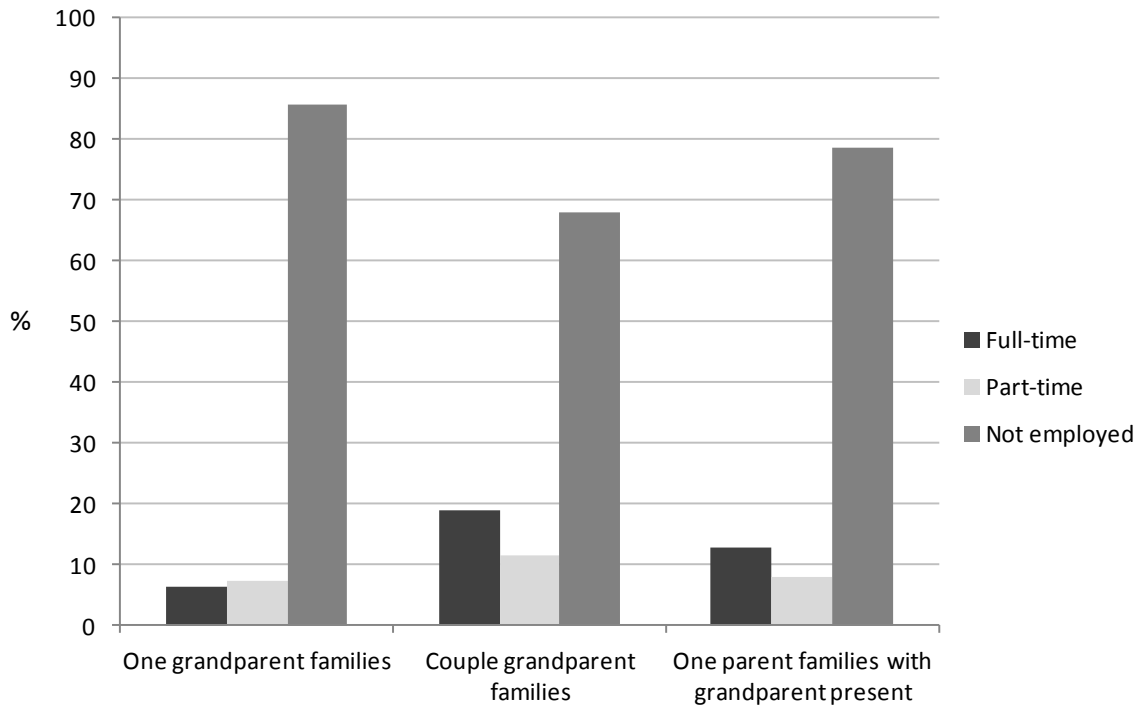
Note: analysis for primary families only.

4.7 Employment

Previous analysis of the Census found that less than half of the grandchildren (42 per cent) aged 15 years and under were living with at least one grandparent who was employed (ABS, 2006c). Analysis of the FCS 2003 showed that only one-third of grandparent families had an employed grandparent. The analysis below considers the employment status of grandparents who live with a grandchild in the Census 2006 (Figure 4-13). The majority of grandparents in these groups were not employed: 86 per cent of grandparents living in the one grandparent families, 68 per cent of grandparents in the couple grandparent families and 79 per cent of grandparents living in the one parent families with grandparent/s present. Grandparent living in couple grandparent families were most likely to work full-time (19 per cent of this group) compared with only 6 per cent of grandparents in the one grandparent families and 13 per cent of grandparents in one parent families with grandparents present.

The employment status of grandparents was associated with their educational qualifications (Figure 4-14) with grandparents with post-school qualifications in all family types being more likely to be employed.

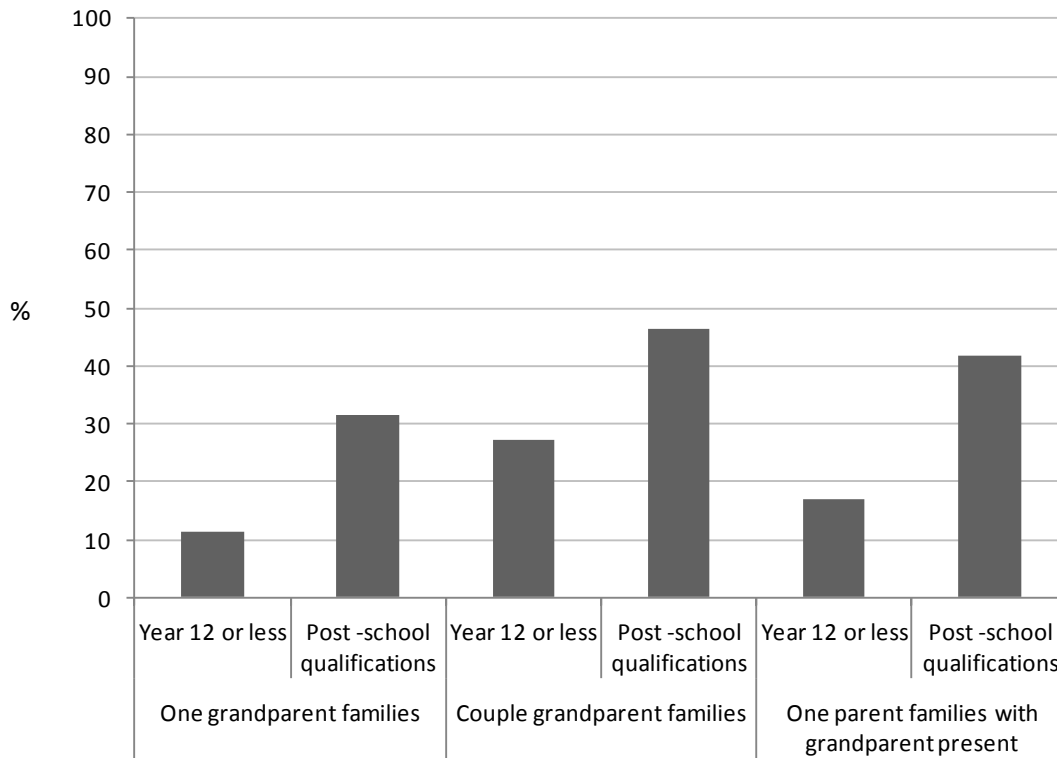
Figure 4-13 Employment status of grandparents by family type



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, Customised Supertables, Author's calculations

Note: Figure excludes the category of employed but worked zero hours last week. A category comprising less than 1.5 per cent of any of the grandparents in any of the families.

Figure 4-14 Grandparents: Education qualifications by hours worked by family type



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, Customised Supertables, Author's calculations

Note: Figure excludes the category of employed but worked zero hours last week - a category comprising less than 1.5 per cent of any of the grandparents in any of the families.

4.8 Need for assistance for grandparent and grandchild

4.8.1 Grandparents

Previous research has indicated that grandparents' physical and mental health may be affected by taking on the care of grandchildren and that, as a generally older group, they are more likely to have a long-term illness or disability than parents (see section 3.8). The Census data provide information on whether an individual has a need for assistance with one of the core activities of self-care, communication or mobility. The majority of grandparents in these families did not have a need for assistance with these activities. Where there is a need for assistance, it may be indicative of a reciprocal care relationship within a family where an older grandchild assists the grandparent in the one grandparent families. Sixteen per cent of grandparents in these families had a core activity need for assistance. One quarter of grandparents who lived in the one parent families had a

need for assistance suggesting that within these families care may be provided by the middle generation.

Table 4-7 Need for assistance with core activity for grandparents in grandparent families

Type of family	Per cent of grandparents with need for core activity assistance	Number of grandparents with need for core activity assistance
One grandparent family	16.3	2,766
Couple grandparent families	9.4	3,293
One parent families with grandparent/s present	25.1	6,766

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, Customised Supertables, Author's calculations

4.8.2 Grandchildren

Data in the Census are only able to provide indications of the need for assistance for core activities for grandchildren, not any indication of the range of health and behavioural issues indicated in the Literature Review. Based on the fairly wide ranging definition of grandparent families in this analysis, the Census data suggest that around 3-3.5 per cent of all these family types had grandchildren who experienced need for assistance with the activities of communication, mobility and self-care.

Table 4-8 Need for assistance with core activity for grandchild in grandparent families

Type of family	Per cent of families with one grandchild with need for core activity assistance	Per cent of families with two or more grandchildren with need for core activity assistance	Number of families with any grandchildren with need for core activity assistance
One grandparent family	3.1	0.3	599
Couple grandparent families	3.1	0.2	604
One parent families with grandparent/s present	3.2	0.3	957

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, Customised Supertables, Author's calculations

4.9 Summary of Census analysis

The existing national survey evidence on the number and characteristics of grandparent families in Australia is generally not designed to specifically identify situations where grandparents have responsibility for grandchildren within families. Where these families have been identified in survey data, such as the *ABS Family Characteristics Survey 2003* and *ABS Family Characteristics and Transitions Survey 2006-07*, the sample sizes sometimes have been too small to provide a reliable estimate, and changes to survey methodology may affect estimates of changes over time. Identification of these relationships is also difficult due to the tendency to categorise families into particular types based upon a designated household head and relationships to that person, rather than to identify relationships of care and responsibility that might exist within a household that might be beyond normative expectations.

In 2006, for the first time, the *ABS Census of Population and Housing* was able to identify grandparent - grandchildren relationships for children aged under 15 years. Data from the US Census 2000 and the American Community Survey, which ask direct questions about grandparental responsibility for grandchildren, suggest a number of important findings that may be relevant to the interpretation of the Australian Census data about the number of grandparent families. In particular:

- Data that only identify a household head and relationships between other members of the household and that person may miss some important grandparent care relationships.

- Of the grandparents in the US data with parental responsibility for the grandchild, only 34 per cent did not live with a parent of the grandchild, or the middle generation, indicating that the majority lived with parents also.
- And third, of the identified 2.7 million grandparents in the US who were primary caregivers, 700,000 had a disability themselves, indicating that even in these situations grandparents may have parental responsibility for grandchildren.

Bearing such findings in mind, the analysis in this section then considered the number of potential grandparent families in the Census by expanding the potential classification of grandparent families. The analysis suggests that a minimum of around 8,000 families but potentially up to 35,926 families are households where no parent is present and grandparents may have responsibility for the grandchildren. A further 27,594 families were identified in the Census where there was a lone parent who was living with a grandparent of their child.

The analysis found that the majority of grandparents caring for grandchildren, particularly in one grandparent families, were female. They encompass a wide age spectrum. The Census data also suggest that a significant number of grandparents were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin.

Grandparents living in families where they were the only grandparent were more disadvantaged with respect to housing, income, access to transport and participation in employment than couple grandparent families. Sixteen per cent of the grandparents in the one grandparent families also had a core activity need for assistance. Based on the evidence in this analysis, all grandparents, but particularly grandparents living in one grandparent families, with responsibility for their grandchildren should be a key policy concern.

This exploratory analysis of the Census data is only able to capture statistical relationships, not care relationships. A key gap in Australian data is the lack of robust information on the number of grandparents with parental responsibility for children. Given the relatively small proportion of families in Australia who are grandparent-headed families, one possible remedy for this data gap is to consider adding in additional questions to the Australian Census along the lines of the more direct questions in the US data sources.

5 Setting the Scene: Focus groups with policy makers and service providers

kylie valentine and Megan Blaxland

5.1 Introduction

This section of the report describes the findings from focus groups conducted with service providers and policy makers. The focus groups were designed to gain information on policy and practice issues from the perspective of state/territory and Commonwealth government policymakers, NGO service providers and community organisations, including grandparent groups. The findings of the focus groups informed the methodologies used and topics covered in other parts of the research, notably the survey and interviews with grandparents.

5.2 Method

We conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 55 service providers and policy makers in New South Wales, South Australia and the Northern Territory between November 2008 and July 2009 (Table 5-1).

Table 5-1: Participants by Jurisdiction

Category	NSW	NT	SA	Federal ^a	Total
Service providers	13	5	4	7	29
Policy-makers	1	7	11	7	26
	14	12	15	14	55

^a Includes Commonwealth government agencies and national service and peak organisations

Participants represented Commonwealth, State/Territory, and non-government agencies and organisations, including Centrelink, the NSW Department of Family and Community Services (DoCS)⁶, the Council on the Ageing (COTA), the Northern Territory Department of Health and Families, and a number of smaller grandparent and kinship care support agencies. These agencies were selected because they are responsible for allowances and payments to kinship carers, or provide services such as support groups and information services to grandparent carers, or represent the interests of grandparents and older people.

The purpose of the interviews and focus groups was to gather information on the perspectives of service and policy organisations regarding the characteristics and needs of grandparent carers, and to inform the design of the data collections

⁶ Now NSW Department of Family and Community Services

instruments for grandparent carers. The domains of interest included child protection, legal matters and legal support, family and children's services, family income support, care allowances, health services, education services for children and young people, and housing policies. Other topics for discussion included: challenges, benefits and costs of grandparent care; policies and services for grandparent carers (current and in development); gaps in services and policies; perceived examples of good practice; and recommendations for change.

Interviews were taped and transcribed. Transcripts were then coded using NVIVO coding software, using a framework that combined axial and open codes, in order to allow analysis of the project's research areas and the emergence of other themes.

5.3 Support needs for grandparents and children and young people

5.3.1 Parenting and relationship support

Grandparents need support in a number of areas, including the complex negotiations of family relationships across generations, and parenting again after a break. Some grandparents continue to provide intensive care for their adult children, and grandchildren, while others need to negotiate estrangement from the middle generation while caring for grandchildren. It was noted that parenting is difficult for many if not most parents, and these difficulties are heightened for grandparent carers. Changing parenting practices, and rapidly changing information and communication technologies, which are very important to young people, were singled out as presenting particular challenges.

Difficulties with parenting and relationships are heightened by the complex support needs of many children and young people being raised by their grandparents. The effects of grief, loss, abuse or neglect can include challenging behaviour and social difficulties. Grandparents often need support with their own grief and loss, and with that faced by their grandchildren, as well as assistance in managing the behaviours that are typical of traumatic responses to abuse and neglect.

Even in the absence of these complex needs, grandparents may need support with issues such as the 'typical' challenging behaviour of adolescents. A number of service providers noted the prevalence of challenging behaviour associated with abuse and neglect; others described the escalating relationship problems between grandparents and grandchildren in adolescence as a function of normal identity seeking and rebellion. Of course, these assessments of the origin and intensity of challenging behaviour are matters of interpretation. It is possible that what appears as normal adolescent rebellion to one observer would be assessed as an attachment disorder or traumatic response by another.

5.3.2 Respite and crisis support

As will be discussed in Section 5.5, grandparent carers have comparable responsibilities to foster carers, but if they are not statutory or registered kinship carers, do not receive the same support. Respite was also identified as a serious issue for grandparents. Vacation care for children, and regular respite services for grandparents to have a break, were both identified as difficult for grandparent carers to use. The gap in entitlements to respite and crisis support between foster and informal kinship carers is significant, and, from a service perspective, arbitrary.

We had a case recently where there's four children in a family. Two siblings went to a grandparent, the two older ones, and the two younger ones went to a foster carer. The foster carer got respite every second weekend. The grandparent in two years got one night of respite. So we're talking about the same family and two different ways of thinking about the people caring for them. [NGO]

5.3.3 Children's health, education and wellbeing

The consequences of abuse and neglect on children can include behavioural and developmental problems, which require specialist intervention. Support in gaining access to these services may be available to some grandparent carers, although access to allied health services such as speech therapy is very difficult in many areas. A few NGO and state/territory service agencies identified innovative practices in providing educational support to grandchildren, such as tutoring and teachers' aides.

5.3.4 Recommendations for change

The recommendations outlined in this section were put forward by focus group participants and are not necessarily endorsed by the researchers.

There were very few points of difference in the needs identified by our interview and focus group participants. It appears that there is broad agreement across the sectors and jurisdictions that grandparents and their grandchildren have a number of support needs that are often not being met. These relate to the support needs of all parents raising children, and to the particular needs of grandparents raising children with complex vulnerabilities.

There was also broad agreement about the changes that are needed to better support grandparent carers and their families. These are:

- Expansion of existing support services (notably those to which foster carers are entitled) to grandparent carers, regardless of whether their care is formalised or designated as a private family arrangement

- Case management and other individualised services
- Tailored delivery of universal and secondary services, such as parenting programs for grandparent carers, to ensure accessibility and appropriateness
- Support groups and peer support

5.4 Access to payments, services and support

5.4.1 Reluctance, shame, and fear

NGO service providers in particular identified barriers to payments and services stemming from shame and fear of intervention. Grandparents may be reluctant to use existing services or apply for payments to which they are entitled because they do not want to disclose their circumstances to state/territory or Commonwealth government agencies. They may blame themselves for the problematic alcohol and other drug (AOD) use or mental health problems faced by their children, and fear that if they ask for help their grandchildren will be removed.

This intense concern to maintain privacy can also result in a reluctance to use formal services, for example respite. NGOs reported that the emotional investment by grandparents in their grandchildren, combined with their knowledge of the damage done to children by abuse and neglect, can translate into a reluctance to trust formal services, a reluctance that is not usual with foster carers.

5.4.2 Middle generation receives payments

A very strong theme, identified by participants across jurisdictions and sectors, is that grandparent carers frequently do not claim family payments where eligibility is based on care of the children, and to which grandparents may be entitled. Grandparents attributed this, in almost all instances, to their fear of the potential or actual repercussions. Grandparents may experience, or fear, intimidation and violence from their children (the parents of the grandchildren) if the latter stop receiving family payments such as Family Tax Benefit, or Parenting Payment.

That's where there is family violence and there's intimidation and grandparents are quite often not even able to access, you know, the basic financial support because they're fearful that if they do, and the parent stops receiving that payment, then they'll remove the child. [NGO]

There are times when they had been brave enough to make the claim and get the payment, what they've told me is that the adult child comes to them on pension payday and gets them to go with them to the ATM, withdraw that money, they get the money and then they take off. [Commonwealth agency]

Although it is not known how many grandparents this situation affects, the implications were thought to be significant both for the wellbeing of grandparents and their grandchildren, and for the accuracy of Commonwealth payment data on the number of grandparent carers.

5.4.3 Recommendations for change

The fact that grandparents do not receive the support, particularly payments, to which they are entitled, was identified by a number of participants as a matter of concern, and a couple of participants identified it in emphatic terms as the most significant concern. Given that barriers to applying for payments are thought to come from complex family relationships, it was thought that solutions need to come from changing and simplifying the process of initial application for a range of family-related payments for grandparents caring for their grandchildren, so as to provide grandparents with payments in such a way that the conflict with their children is avoided. It was acknowledged that the complexity and fluidity of family relationships and the arrangements for family payments (which inhere essentially on who has the care of the child) make this a complex problem to resolve, although service-providers and policy-makers are aware of it and believe that it can be resolved.

5.5 The status of grandparent care families

5.5.1 Comparisons with foster carers

Interview participants from policy and service agencies described the differences in support received by foster and kinship carers as unfair and a source of resentment.

States and territories make a range of services available to foster carers and formal kinship carers, but grandparent carers who are classified as part of private family arrangements are not entitled to them. As grandparent carers have exactly the same day-to-day caring responsibilities as foster carers, this differential entitlement strikes many grandparent carers as extremely unjust, and one of the areas that have been placed on the policy agenda by grandparents' advocacy and peer support groups.

The lack of support to grandparent carers was acknowledged by state government agencies as an area brought about by resource constraints and in need of improvement. Even formal kinship carers are not allocated case workers in some jurisdictions.

I suppose one of our constraints that stops us thinking about changes to policy or improvements in policy is the pure fact that we don't have the staff to do anything more than we're doing at the minute [...] In a perfect world, or a more perfect world, I'd like to see our Department in a situation where we can have a lot more interaction with grandparent carers and provide a lot more support to them. [State/territory agency]

The parlous financial circumstances of some grandparent carers prior to assuming care responsibilities was also noted by a few participants, who pointed out the inequity of the state asking people living below the poverty line to take responsibility for a vulnerable child or children, while obliging them to continue living below the poverty line.

5.5.2 Family norms, obligations, and values

Although grandparent carers have the same responsibilities as foster carers, they see themselves as providing benefits to their grandchildren that foster carers do not, including emotional investment and family connections. The importance of family norms and values means that many grandparents do not see their apparent 'choice' to assume care or have the children enter foster care as a genuine choice at all.

Some of them are resentful at their lack of, you know, what they can do with their ... what they think should be their time now. But there's no question of them handing the child over. No, they're very, you know, stout, no, that's just what I have to do. [State/territory agency]

This value placed on familial connections also means that some grandparents do not think of themselves as entitled to specific services. Consequently, they do not seek out or receive these services. This makes it imperative to make services and support more accessible.

5.6 Good practice

5.6.1 Building on strengths

Service providers, especially NGO service providers, emphasised the strengths and capabilities of grandparent carers. They pointed out the public good and the benefits to grandchildren that result from grandparents' willingness to take on primary care responsibilities for their grandchildren. The strengths and resilience of grandparents should be built on: 'to be able to tap into that and grow those strengths for them, to be able to increase that strength would be very beneficial, not just for the grandparents but for the middle generation and also for the grandchildren' [NGO].

5.6.2 Support groups

A number of service providers mentioned particular support programs and policies for grandparents and grandchildren. Mentoring programs, holiday camps, and leisure activities were highly rated by many respondents. In some cases camps and weekend breaks are run for grandparents and grandchildren simultaneously. The camps for children functioned as peer support, and opportunities to provide specialist services such as counselling.

Support groups for grandchildren were organised in recognition of the challenges and experiences of adolescence, as well as identification of the inability of some grandparent carers to facilitate 'normal' teenage activities. For instance one NGO ran a program helping teenage grandchildren to get their driving licence, through funding lessons and the 120 hours of supervised driving required in NSW.

Support groups for grandparents were seen to have major benefits. Both facilitated and informal groups allowed grandparents to socialise, and share experiences and resources.

The support groups that we've got that are currently running, they run really well because it's time where the carers can come together and debrief with each other and, you know, just sit back and relax and everyone's kind of in the same boat with a lot of issues that are happening. [NGO]

They say in any of our focus groups or our evaluations of the support meetings, it always comes back with "This is my lifeline, this is the kind of support group that I will not miss". [NGO]

Support workers were also seen to be integral to grandparents' experiences as kinship care providers, providing support and helping grandparents to navigate the system.

There are social workers attached to Centrelink and things, but the grandparents say, "you try and make an appointment with a social worker because we've tried [and couldn't]." But a grandparent support worker can get them that appointment and go with them and things are so much easier. It's wrong. But that's how it is. [Advocacy group, NSW]

For facilitated support groups, however, securing ongoing funding was identified as a major issue. Funding is often a one-off grant, or for a defined period of time, rather than ongoing, as part of community development programs and block funding for neighbourhood centres.

5.7 Costs of care

A major problem identified by NGO service providers is the considerable costs incurred by some grandparents. These include the costs of adding bedrooms to the home, and the legal costs of trying to gain formal custody through the Family Court jurisdiction, which can lead to grandparents needing to spend their superannuation funds and sell assets.

Care has other costs. One of the most frequently mentioned is the difficulty of grandparent carers' participating in the social activities of their peers. As one participant from a Commonwealth agency described it, playing bridge and tennis is

impossible with young children around, and invitations to visit friends dry up ‘because there’s nowhere for children to go and their antique furniture is taboo.’

The physical and mental health of grandparent carers may also suffer when they take on full-time care of grandchildren. The physical and mental demands of care responsibilities are often exhausting, and may precipitate new health problems or exacerbate existing ones. At a time in life when they may need more rest than previously to maintain good health, grandparent carers often get far less.

5.8 Improved access to payments, service and support

Given the difficulties that grandparents have in negotiating service systems, and the complexity of these systems—with family payments from Commonwealth governments, kinship care payments from state/territory governments, and support groups and other services provided by state, local and NGO agencies—the importance of improving the accessibility of these systems was consistently identified.

6 'Run faster, Nana': Grandparents survey report

Christiane Purcal

6.1 Introduction

This report presents findings from our Australia-wide survey of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. With 335 participants, this is the largest national survey of grandparents raising their grandchildren conducted to date. The analysis is based on quantitative data as well as qualitative information provided generously by the grandparents through extensive comments. The report gives comprehensive insights into grandparents' experiences in raising grandchildren on several levels spanning personal lives, community experiences, service provision and government policy. This survey report should be read in conjunction with the other sections of the project report, which provide a comprehensive context for the findings reported here.

After describing the methodology of the survey and the demographic characteristics of survey respondents, the report presents findings on different aspects of grandparents' lives: household location and composition, details of the grandchildren and relationships with their parents, income and financial support, changes to grandparent employment, the health of grandparents and grandchildren, and the impacts of raising grandchildren on the survey participants' family relationships and social life. It then discusses access to support services and concludes with evidence of grandparents' strength and resilience.

6.2 Methodology

6.2.1 Survey design

The survey was one of four data collection tools about grandparents raising their grandchildren, along with quantitative analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data from Census 2006 (Section 4); focus groups with policymakers and service providers who work in this field of policy and practice (Section 5); and qualitative interviews with Indigenous grandparents (Section 7). The survey was entirely confidential and included questions on a number of domains, such as the demographics of the grandparents and grandchildren, household composition and income, reasons for grandparent care, government financial support, service use, and the impact of raising grandchildren on the grandparents' wellbeing. In selecting questions, we prioritised those that had previously been used in other surveys—the ABS Census, the HILDA Survey, and kinship studies from Australia, New Zealand and the USA—to enable comparison of our findings with other data sets. We did not conduct state-based analysis of the responses, due to the small numbers of participants in some states and the importance of respecting confidentiality.

The survey was mainly a quantitative instrument that required ticking boxes or writing short answers, but we also included comment boxes and open-ended questions in the hope of gaining some qualitative information from grandparents, which would complement and enrich our quantitative findings. The survey was available to grandparents in paper and online versions. Five hundred copies of the paper survey were printed and distributed together with reply paid envelopes.

A reference group consisting of experts and practitioners in the field commented on a draft of the survey, which was then piloted with six grandparent carers in New South Wales and Western Australia, including two Indigenous grandparents, and both grandmothers and grandfathers. A further two grandparents piloted the online version of the survey. Their feedback was much appreciated and improved the survey.

6.2.2 Implementation and recruitment

The survey was made available across the country, so we could gain as comprehensive a picture as possible of the experiences of grandparents who were raising their grandchildren. The area of Western Sydney was excluded from recruitment so as not to overlap with the research of the PhD student on this project.

The online survey went 'live' in July 2010 and closed at the end of November 2010. Grandparents could access the survey directly or through a link on the SPRC website. Printed copies of the survey were available in mid-August, 2010. We also produced a one-page recruitment flyer with brief information about the survey and how to access it (Appendix B). A variety of recruitment strategies were used:

- We published news articles in relevant nationwide media outlets, e.g. the magazines *The Senior* and *The Voice* as well as the parenting website *Web Child*.
- We placed articles in newsletters of grandparent support groups around the country.
- Our research partner organisations in New South Wales, South Australia and the Northern Territory, as well as many grandparent support organisations, placed information about the survey on their websites, and they distributed the information to their mailing lists of other support organisations and individual grandparents.
- Grandparent support group convenors distributed flyers and paper surveys among their group participants.
- Grandparent support workers handed out flyers and paper surveys.

- Members of our research team publicised the survey at conferences and other relevant meetings that they attended.
- We are very grateful to everyone who helped us by distributing survey information.

6.2.3 Survey responses and analysis

We analysed a total of 335 completed surveys. Of these, 188 were filled in online, and 147 were paper copies. The online survey closed on 30 November 2010, but we received a few paper copies afterwards. We decided to include these, as well as two surveys from respondents who raised their great-grandchild, or their great-niece and great-nephew, respectively, as previous research tells us that the experiences of these kin carers are similar to those of grandparent carers. Finally, the surveys from three grandparents who had raised grandchildren in the past were included in the analysis. We are deeply grateful to the 335 people who gave their valuable time to answer our survey, and who generously shared their stories with us.

There was no separate version of the survey for Indigenous grandparents, who were a special focus of the project and were approached through qualitative fieldwork (Section 7). However, we did try to make the survey appropriate and accessible for Indigenous grandparents, and 16 survey respondents (4.8 per cent of all respondents identified as Indigenous). This number was too small for statistical comparison with non-Indigenous respondents. A content analysis of the Indigenous grandparents' responses showed little difference to the full sample regarding demographics, socio-economic circumstances and experiences in raising their grandchildren. Also, the Indigenous grandparents' written comments did not reveal any differences related to their Indigeneity. For these reasons, a separate analysis of their survey responses was not included in this report.

The same applied to 12 respondents who were from a cultural and language background other than English or Indigenous. The number was too small for meaningful statistical analysis, and their comments did not reveal experiences in raising their grandchildren that were different to the other respondents or that were apparently related to their cultural background.

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the data. Grandparents generously provided extensive written comments in addition to ticking the answer boxes, and this qualitative information was analysed thematically. Many quotes from the survey responses are included throughout this report, illustrating the statistical data and giving voice to the day-to-day experiences of grandparent families. Where several paragraphs of quotes are provided, each paragraph contains a quote from a different respondent.

This was the first wide-ranging, national survey in Australia of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. With 335 respondents, the sample was sufficiently large to give a comprehensive picture of the situation and experiences of grandparent-headed families across the country—economically, socially, personally, and with regard to relevant government policies and services.

In addition, our survey provided evidence on how the grandparents' age and life-course stage shaped their experience of raising grandchildren. In previous surveys and in the literature, grandparents raising their grandchildren have generally been seen as a homogeneous group, and possible age-related diversity has not been investigated. However, grandparents may be of widely differing ages: from their 40s to their 80s and beyond, with varying circumstances and experiences related to their life-course stage.

We analysed our survey data to explore how taking on the primary care of grandchildren at different ages and life-course stages affected grandparents' experiences of grandchild care. The survey domains where age-related differences were most likely to manifest themselves were housing, income, employment, health, social relationships and service use. In analysing the related survey findings, we divided our sample into three age groups that roughly signify different life-course stages:

- Under 55 years: people at this life-course stage are of workforce age, they are generally established in their employment and workplaces, with children who are adults (or close to it) and may be leaving home.
- From 55 to 64 years: this is later middle age, where people are still likely to be employed, saving and preparing for their retirement, while children have often left home.
- Age 65 and above: in this life-course stage most people are retired from paid employment, often live on lower retirement incomes or the age pension, may have downsized their home and be dealing with age-related health problems.

People's lives are immensely varied, and while not all individuals fit into these categories, they provide a rough framework for exploring possible age-related differences in grandparents' circumstances and experiences.

6.2.4 Limitations

Our survey is not representative of all grandparents raising their grandchildren in Australia. The majority of grandparents in this study had a formal, legal arrangement for the care of at least one of their grandchildren. In some cases this was an order of a State child protection authority; in others it was an order from the

Family Court or the Federal Magistrate Court. Although there are no firm data on the proportion of grandparents who have legally sanctioned care of their grandchildren compared with those who have a private, family arrangement, it is generally acknowledged that informal care is far more common than formal arrangements. The fact that respondents to this survey are weighted more towards the 'formal' end of the spectrum makes them, in this respect, unrepresentative of the general population of grandparent carers. As well, because many were recruited through grandparent support organisations they may be more likely to be linked in to services and supports than are other grandparent carers. The demographic limitations of our sample, particularly regarding Indigenous and CALD background, are discussed in the relevant sections. Other than that, however, the grandparents who participated in our survey included people with a wide range of life circumstances and family experiences. Moreover, as the largest Australia-wide study of grandparents raising their grandchildren, with responses from all states and territories other than the Northern Territory, the survey findings, both quantitative and qualitative, provide a valuable account of raising grandchildren in contemporary Australia.

6.3 Grandparent demographics

6.3.1 Gender

Grandmothers are more likely than grandfathers to raise their grandchildren. Studies in Australia and other countries have consistently found that the majority of grandparent carers are women (e.g. Yardley, Mason and Watson, 2009; Kelley et al., 2000; Wellard, 2010). As noted in Section 4 of this Report, in the Census data, 88 per cent of one grandparent families were grandmother families. The couple grandparent families, by definition, had around 50 per cent of male and female grandparents, but this statistic does not provide an indication of which grandparent in these families may take on the majority of care. As noted in the literature review, the international literature has suggested that kinship care is most often undertaken by women, even if they have a partner. Consistent with the literature, most of the respondents in our survey were women. Of the 332 grandparents who answered the question about gender, 87 per cent were female and 13 per cent were male (Table 6-1).

Table 6-1: Gender of survey participants

Gender	N	%
Female	289	87.0
Male	43	13.0
Total	332	100.0

6.3.2 Age

Like all grandparents, those who raise their grandchildren fall within a wide range of ages. Some are in their 30s, while others are in their 80s or even older (e.g. Kelley et al., 2000; Worrall, 2005; Department of Human Services Victoria, 2000). Research and census data from Australia, and similarly from England, show that most grandparents are aged somewhere in-between, with the majority being 55 years and above (COTA, 2003; ABS, 2005; Nandy and Selwyn, 2011).

In our survey, almost 80 per cent of grandparents were 55 years or older (Table 6-2). More than half of all respondents fell into the 55 to 64 age group, and about one-quarter were 65 years and over. Only about 20 per were in the younger age groups, under 55 years.

Table 6-2: Age of survey participants

	N	%
Under 45 years	13	3.9
45–54	56	16.9
55–64	176	53.0
65 years and above	87	26.2
Total	332	100.0

Age is very important, as it influences many other aspects of the grandparents' lives, such as health, employment, leisure and social relationships. As explained in the methodology section above, we explored whether grandparents' experiences of raising their grandchildren were associated with their particular age group and life-course stage. This is discussed in later, relevant sections of this report. It is important to note here, though, that the large majority of all grandparents in our survey were at an age when people normally prepare for retirement or are already retired. This is a time when they may downsize their home and pursue new interests after raising their children, but also when age-related health problems may be experienced:

When our granddaughter first arrived on our doorstep at the age of seven, it was quite overwhelming as we had been living as 'empty nesters' for over ten years and living a full-on lifestyle, making the most of our new found

freedom, enjoying dining out, rock'n'roll dancing (which is our passion) and experiencing overseas travel etc.

I no longer have the young body I had when my kids were this age. I still sit on the carpet when we play cards together but have to crawl to the nearest piece of furniture to help me get to my feet again.

As much as you try not to, resentment raises its ugly head from time to time. Retirement years are meant to be for holidays and enjoying yourself with your friends, not parenting once again.

6.3.3 Ethnic origin

Ethnicity is important, since it may influence cultural norms within families and social integration of family members. In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are much more likely to be raised by their grandparents than are non-Indigenous children. Section 4 of this Report shows the following data on grandparent families, provided in Census 2006. Families with at least one grandparent who was of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin comprised 15 per cent of one-grandparent families, and 11 per cent of couple-grandparent families.

6.3.4 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin

In contrast to the relatively high prevalence of Indigenous families among Australian grandparent-headed households, only a relatively small percentage of our survey participants identified themselves as of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background. Sixteen respondents, or 4.8 per cent of our sample, identified as being of Aboriginal origin, and none as Torres Strait Islander.

6.3.5 Culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

We asked grandparents about their country of birth and the languages spoken at home, as indicators of their ethnic background. Over three-quarters of our survey respondents (82.2 per cent) were born in Australia and another 10 per cent in the UK (Table 6-3). Less than four per cent came from other European countries, specifically the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Malta and Yugoslavia. Even smaller percentages were born in New Zealand, Malaysia or China. Overall, 93 per cent of survey respondents were born in English-speaking countries - Australia, the UK and New Zealand.

Table 6-3: Country of birth of survey participants

	N	%
Australia	263	82.2
UK	33	10.3
Europe	12	3.8
New Zealand	9	2.8
Malaysia	2	0.6
China	1	0.3
Total	320	100.0

In line with the fact that English-speaking countries were the birthplace of the great majority of our survey participants, it is not surprising that most spoke only English at home. Just 13 respondents, around 4 per cent of all grandparents in our survey, said they spoke a language other than English at home. The languages mentioned were French—in three cases—and once each Aboriginal, African, Dutch, Hindu, Italian, Maltese, Russian and Serbian.

As mentioned, there is little literature about the ethnic composition of non-Indigenous grandparents in Australia who are raising their grandchildren. However, it is likely that our survey sample is not representative. Possible reasons for the predominance of English-speaking respondents are that the survey was not available in other languages or that it was not appropriate for other cultures. We did try to recruit grandparents from non-English speaking backgrounds for our survey, through the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia. Future studies may try to further explore this avenue of recruitment and others.

6.3.6 Education

There is some indication that grandparents raising their grandchildren are less likely than foster carers to have completed higher levels of education. In a study in NSW, 59 per cent of foster carers said they held post-school qualifications, compared to 17 per cent of kinship carers, many of whom were grandparents (Yardley, Mason and Watson, 2009).

Our survey participants had higher educational qualifications overall (Table 6-4). About 43 per cent had a post-school qualification; this includes university, college or vocational qualifications. Forty six per cent stated that the highest level of education they had completed was year 10 or below. Smaller percentages, about five per cent each, completed years 11 or 12.

Table 6-4: Highest level of education of survey participants

	N	%
Year 10 or below	153	45.9
Year 11	18	5.4
Year 12	17	5.1
Post-school qualification	143	42.9
Other	2	0.6
Total	333	100.0

6.4 Households and their composition

6.4.1 State/Territory

The grandparents in the survey came from all Australian states and the ACT. Although there were no participants from the Northern Territory in the survey, qualitative interviews were conducted with seven Indigenous grandparents from the Northern Territory as part of the Indigenous component of the study (Section 7).

Among the survey participants, over one-quarter came from NSW (Table 6-5) and close to 20 per cent lived in each of the three states of South Australia, Queensland and Victoria. Almost 10 per cent came from Western Australia and smaller proportions from Tasmania and the ACT.

This distribution of our sample is comparable with the population distribution across the states and territories. South Australia had a higher proportion of survey respondents and Victoria had a smaller proportion.

Table 6-5: State or territory of residence

	N	%	%
	Survey	Survey	Australian
	participants	participants	population*
New South Wales	92	27.6	32.4
South Australia	66	19.8	7.3
Queensland	61	18.3	20.2
Victoria	58	17.4	24.8
Western Australia	32	9.6	10.3
Tasmania	13	3.9	2.3
ACT	11	3.3	1.6
Northern Territory	0	0.0	1.0
Total	303	100	100

Source: (ABS, 2010)

6.4.2 Location

In addition to their state and territory of residence, we asked survey participants for their postcode, as an indication of the geographic location they lived in: a metropolitan centre, a regional area or a remote community. Type of location is associated with distance from public services and other supports that grandparents and grandchildren may need. ABS data show that grandparent-headed families are more likely to live in regional areas and less likely to live in major cities than other family types (ABS, 2005). Our survey participants had a similar distribution. More than 60 per cent of grandparents lived in a major city (Table 6-6). Just over one-quarter lived in inner regional areas, a further 12 per cent in outer regional Australia, and one survey participant (0.3 per cent) lived in a remote location. While these proportions aligned fairly well with the distribution of the Australian population in general, slightly more of our respondents resided in inner regional areas than did the wider population.

Table 6-6: Location

	N Survey participants	% Survey participants	% Australian population	Example
Major city	202	61.4	65.9	Sydney
Inner regional	87	26.4	20.6	Bendigo
Outer regional	39	11.9	10.5	Mackay
Remote	1	0.3	1.8	Alice Springs
Very remote	0	0.0	1.1	Tennant Creek
Total	329	100.0	100.0	

Source: (ABS, 2003)

6.4.3 Housing arrangements

Housing arrangements are a key factor in providing stable and suitable living environments for children. Previous studies have shown that grandparents may need to make changes to their housing as they take on the care of grandchildren, be it moving to a different home or area, or modifying existing accommodation (e.g. Worrall, 2009; Yardley, Mason and Watson, 2009).

Just over 40 per cent of grandparents in the survey owned the home that they were living in outright and a further 28 per cent were paying off their mortgage. Another quarter rented public or private housing. Among the seven who answered 'other' were grandparents who were house-sitting, waiting to move into allocated public housing, staying with extended family, or living in a caravan park (Table 6-7).

Table 6-7: Home ownership status

Do you currently...	N	%
Own the house or flat you are living in (it is paid off)	136	41.6
Have a mortgage on the house or flat (paying it off)	91	27.8
Rent (public housing)	49	15.0
Rent (private housing)	44	13.5
Other	7	2.1
Total	327	100.0

Most grandparents did not consider their accommodation to be suitable once the grandchildren arrived. More than half had modified their housing as a result of taking on care of their grandchildren (Table 6-8). For example, they furnished bedrooms, erected fences, modified the home for a grandchild using a wheelchair, or moved to cheaper country housing. Many families made multiple changes, such as moving to a larger home and to another suburb, or moving and renovating (Table 6-8). When grandparents made changes to their housing, this often incurred significant financial costs and upheaval, especially when they had to move:

I sold my house in Sydney and moved to the Central Coast just to give him a better lifestyle. I owned my house in Sydney and had to take a loan to buy this house, which makes me feel very insecure owing money.

I gave up my job and had to move to a bigger house with high rent to be able to give them a room each, as I lived in a two-bedroom unit.

Table 6-8: Changes to housing

	N	% of respondents N=332
None	132	39.8
Moved to a larger home	73	22.0
Moved to a smaller home	6	1.8
Moved to another suburb or town	43	13.0
Extended the home	29	8.7
Renovated	49	14.8
Other	35	10.5
Would like to change my housing but cannot do it	61	18.4
Total (Multiple responses)	428	100.0

In addition, 61 grandparents, or 18 per cent of the survey participants, would have liked to make changes to their housing, or make further changes in addition to the ones they had made, but could not do so (Table 6-8). Of those grandparents, a

large majority (74 per cent, or 45 out of 61 respondents) could not change their housing because of the cost involved. This meant that the family had to live in what they experienced as unsuitable housing, which was often cramped and lacked necessary furniture and private space for both grandparents and grandchildren:

We made a bedroom for number one by halving lounge room. We then added a room on to become a new lounge/dining, then two and three came and we had to make that their bedroom.

Housing changes were more frequent in families where the grandparents were younger, and less frequent where they were in the older age groups (Table 6-9). Almost two-thirds of under 55 year old grandparents made changes to their housing, but only 40 per cent of those aged 65 and older. This may reflect the higher likelihood of available finances in the younger age groups (see section 7.7) and better prospects of future income to pay off loans and mortgages. However, the proportion of grandparents who wanted to change their housing but could not do it was also higher among the under 55 year olds.

Table 6-9: Changes in housing across age groups

	All survey respondents		Under 55		55-64		65 plus	
	N	%	N	% of <55s	N	% of 55-64s	N	% of 65+
None	131	39.6	21	30.4	63	36.0	47	54.0
Made changes to housing	182	55.0	44	63.8	102	58.3	35	40.2
Would like to change my housing but cannot do it	61	18.4	14	20.3	34	19.4	13	14.9
Total of respondents^a	332		69		175		87	

^a Percentages do not add up to 100 due to multiple responses (made changes and would like to change housing).

The numbers in the age groups do not add up to the total, because one respondent who said they made changes to their housing did not indicate their age.

Altogether, 216 grandparents in the survey, 65 per cent of respondents, saw the need to modify their housing (that is, they made changes or wanted to make changes) due to taking over the care of their grandchildren.

6.4.4 Household composition

Research and Census data show that grandparents raising their grandchildren are more likely to be single than parents who raise their own children. In England, Nandy and Selwyn (2011) found that only 51 per cent of grandparent carers were married and living together, compared to 65 per cent of birth parents. Among grandparent-headed families in Australia, almost half (47 per cent) were single grandparents, mostly grandmothers (ABS, 2005).

Our survey findings are very similar to the ABS data. Among the 332 grandparents who answered the question, 149 (45 per cent) stated they did not live with a partner, while 55 per cent lived with a partner (Table 6-10). These proportions were fairly similar across age groups, with 54 per cent of under 55 year old respondents living with a spouse, 57 per cent of 55-64 year olds and 51 per cent of over 65 year olds. However, the distribution was uneven among men and women, as male respondents were much more likely to live with a partner than females: 86 per cent of the grandfathers lived with a partner, but only 51 per cent of the grandmothers.

Table 6-10: Living with a partner/spouse

	Survey participants					
	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Lives with a partner/spouse	37	86.0	146	50.5	183	55.1
Does not live with a partner/spouse	6	14.0	143	49.5	149	44.9
Total	43	100.0	289	100.0	332	100.0

In addition to grandparents and grandchildren, other family members may live in the household. Such intergenerational co-residence is not uncommon. Across Australia, about one-third of single grandparents caring for grandchildren shared their home with another adult, usually related to the grandchild; as did one-quarter of couple grandparents (ABS, 2005). Grandparent-headed households can therefore be quite complex (see also Shepley and Dann, 2006).

This is reflected in our survey findings. Almost one-quarter of the families said there were other people living in their household (Table 6-11). Most often these were the

middle generation—children of the grandparents—but also other relatives such as great-grandchildren, fathers, sisters, nephews, aunts and uncles. Several respondents said that they had foster children, or that their children’s partners or family friends lived with them.

Table 6-11: Other household members

	Survey participants		Number of other household members
	N	%	N
Child/ren of the grandparent or their partner	56	16.7	86
Other adults or children	35	10.4	53
Total (includes multiple responses)	80		139

The middle generation living in the household were in most cases not the parents of the grandchildren. Only 20 survey participants (6 per cent) said that the mother of at least one of the grandchildren lived with them regularly or sometimes, and 19 said that the father lived with them. These mothers and fathers were usually parents of different grandchildren, as in only three families did both parents of a grandchild live in the household. Some parents were deceased (29 mothers, 27 fathers). In the other 244 families in our survey (73 per cent), the parents of all the grandchildren in care lived elsewhere. This means that almost three-quarters of the families had to work out contact arrangements with the parents.

The survey captures one point in time, rather than changes over time, but indications are that grandparent families can be quite fluid. Family members may move in and out of households, as do some of the children’s parents in our survey families, who reside with the grandparents ‘sometimes’.

6.5 The grandchildren and their parents

6.5.1 Number and ages of grandchildren

Grandparent families in Australia tend to have somewhat fewer children in their care than other family types. In 2003, some 89 per cent of grandparent-headed families raised one or two children, compared with 81 per cent of other families with children (ABS, 2005). The average number of children in grandparent-headed families was 1.88, compared to 2.11 in couple families with their own children or 1.91 in single-parent families (ABS, 2005). In some cases, however, grandparents do take care of large numbers of children—six or more—at a time (COTA, 2003; Worrall, 2005).

The number of grandchildren raised in our survey families was similar to the ABS statistics reported above (Table 6-12). In the survey, 84 per cent of respondents raised one or two grandchildren, and 16 per cent raised three or more. The total

number of grandchildren was 576, which corresponds to an average of 1.7 children per grandparent family. Among the 576 grandchildren, 37 (6 per cent) were not the respondent's, but their partner's grandchildren.

Table 6-12: Number of grandchildren raised

	N^a	%
1	188	56.1
2	92	27.5
3	39	11.6
4	11	3.3
5 or more	5	1.5
Total	335	100.0

^aThese numbers were derived from our survey question 12, asking grandparents about the number of grandchildren living with them. The answers and comments to questions 13 to 20 suggest that they were also raising these grandchildren.

The ABS found that in 2003 more than one-third of children in grandparent-headed families were of primary school age, a similar proportion were young teenagers (12-14 years), while smaller percentages were young children below school age or 15-17 year olds (Table 6-13). Compared to children in other family structures, kinship care children were more likely to be older, with many aged in their early teens (ABS, 2005; see also Nandy et al., 2011).

The age distribution in our survey is younger (Table 6-13). Of the 517 children for whom ages were provided, more than 60 per cent were 11 years or under. Almost half of all survey children were of primary school age (5 to 11 years). A further one-third were of high school age, and around 16 per cent were babies, toddlers or preschoolers. While the ABS did not report data on adult grandchildren, a small percentage of our survey participants cared for grandchildren 18 years and above (5 per cent), the oldest being 29 years.

Table 6-13: Ages of the grandchildren

	Grandchildren in the survey		ABS 2003
	N	%	%
0-4 years	81	15.7	14.8
5-11 years	241	46.6	37.4
12-14 years	88	17.0	35.8
15-17 years	79	15.3	12.1
18 years and above	28	5.4	N/A
Total	517	100.0	100.0

The relatively young age distribution meant that many of the grandparents in our survey would possibly have parental responsibility for their grandchildren for at least another ten years. A return to the birth parents might be unlikely in the majority of the survey families, given the parents' personal problems (see below) and lack of psychological supports for the families (see section 7.11).

6.5.2 Reasons for raising the grandchildren

Grandparents assume responsibility for grandchildren because the parents are unable or unwilling to raise their children themselves. This may happen for a variety of reasons, including death of the parents, child abuse or neglect, or the parents' substance abuse, imprisonment, work commitments or disability. The national and international literature shows consistently that the main reason for grandparent care is drug or alcohol misuse by the parents, along with other socio-emotional, family disruption and violence, mental illness and financial problems resulting in child neglect, and less frequently child abuse (e.g. Baldock, 2007; Worrall, 2009; Wellard, 2010; Pruchno, 1999). Faced with parents' inability to raise their children, grandparents often take on responsibility out of love and a desire to keep the grandchildren out of the foster care system (COTA, 2003; Spence, 2004).

Similar to other studies, the grandparents in the survey named parent behaviour and emotional issues as the predominant reasons for taking on the care of their grandchildren. Survey respondents could tick up to three reasons per grandchild.

Table 6-14 lists the reasons given for the oldest grandchild in their care in order of frequency. Parents' drug or alcohol abuse was by far the most significant factor, with over two-thirds of grandparents citing it as a reason for taking care of their grandchild. This was followed by child neglect and parent's mental illness in one-third of the families, and domestic violence in almost one-quarter. The parents' physical or practical inability to care for the child—for example due to imprisonment, employment commitments or death—was far less prevalent. Many grandparents ticked more than one reason, showing that often a combination of factors existed:

Our story is like so many others we have met, having the grandkids as a result of drugs, alcohol and domestic violence.

My daughter relapsed with cancer while pregnant with her daughter. She passed away when my granddaughter was 2 years old. My daughter's partner couldn't handle her sickness and broke off the relationship.

All of the above except death.

Table 6-14: Reasons for raising grandchildren

	N (grandchild 1)^a	% of respondents^b
Parent's drug or alcohol problems	207	67.2
Child neglect	99	32.1
Parent's mental illness	96	31.2
Domestic violence	70	22.7
Other (<i>please describe</i>)	53	17.2
Child abandonment	31	10.1
Mother's death	29	9.4
Parent's imprisonment	19	6.2
Father's death	16	5.2
Parent's physical illness	13	4.2
Parent's employment commitments	8	2.6
Parent's unemployment	6	1.9
Total number of respondents	308	

^a Up to three responses per survey

^bAdds up to more than 100 per cent due to multiple responses.

It was also clear that grandparents found it very important to keep children out of the foster care system, in contact with siblings, and within the family:

Even though it's really hard at times I would not allow her to go into the welfare system.

Knowing that they now have a better life than what their parents gave them and that by being with us they were kept together and not divided up.

A significant number provided other reasons for raising their grandchildren. These grandparents often described the family's problems in more detail, for example: 'physical and emotional abuse', 'post partum psychosis, never proved, but also drugs involved' or 'father violent to child, mother deceased'. The written answers illustrate the complexities of many families and their relationships:

Mother had another child and father wanted access so had to move back to QLD. Did not want to expose other children to that man as he physically abused older child.

Mutual decision as child with disabilities at risk because mother unable to cope with stress of situation and father needs to work long hours to keep job.

Finally, several grandparents stated that the parents were too young, irresponsible or self-interested to raise the children themselves, and expressed grief and sadness about the parents' perceived lifestyle choices:

Apart from the experience of sharing my life with my grandchildren, there is the sadness that my own daughter chose to live the life she did.

Children and I live constantly with grief issues. Watching my child slowly kill herself through lifestyle choices—the pain never goes away.

6.5.3 Legal status

Care arrangements for the grandchildren may be formal or informal. Legal avenues exist at federal and state/territory levels. At the Australian Commonwealth level, the Family Court of Australia or the Federal Magistrates Court can issue Parenting Orders, although the legal process can be costly for the grandparents as many do not qualify for legal aid, or it can lead to significant family conflict, for it entails the initiation of legal proceedings against one's own child (Backhouse, 2008; COTA, 2003). At the state/territory level, child protection services may put the child into the grandparent's care, who may then apply for a protective order through the Children's Court; or child protection services may withdraw, and grandparents may not apply for formal custody of the child. Informal care may arise out of family decision-making. It has been estimated that the ratio of informal to formal kinship carers in Australia is about three to one (Smyth and Eardley, 2008). Grandparent-headed families may form quite quickly in a crisis situation, or very slowly, where grandparents gradually become more involved, sometimes over many years, with legal proceedings extending over long periods of time (e.g. Backhouse, 2006; Gordon et al., 2003; COTA, 2003; Messing, 2006).

In our survey, the majority of families had a formal arrangement for at least one of the grandchildren they were raising. About 42 per cent had obtained authority to raise the grandchild from the Family or Federal Magistrates Court, and more than a quarter from a state child protection agency. Only one-quarter of the survey families had informal arrangements.

Table 6-15: Legal arrangement for at least one of the grandchildren

	N	%
Family Court	147	42.5
Federal Magistrates Court	24	6.9
State child protection agency	92	26.6
Informal arrangement	83	24.0
Total^a	346	100.0

^a Multiple responses due to multiple arrangements in some households

Some of those who went through the legal system spoke of the emotional trauma and the high financial costs involved:

Mainly to state that it cost me \$30,000 through Family Court because I owned my home, even though I was on a disability pension.

We have had to battle every inch of the way, and it takes its toll emotionally.

The major problem for us is we cannot access legal aid. Both parents have access to legal aid, therefore they can tie up the courts as long as they like.

At this point in time we have spent nearly \$6000, it is so unfair, I would love to know why [the government department] or the girl's lawyer can't help us as long as we all agree with the same thing, which at this point we do.

6.5.4 Contact arrangements with the parents

Along with various custody arrangements, intra-familial relationships, and the reasons for grandparent care, contact with birth parents differs widely among families. Studies have shown that contact can be frequent or infrequent, predictable or erratic (e.g. Dolbin-MacNab and Keiley, 2009; Worrall, 2009). Regarding frequency of contact, national data indicate that 74 per cent of children living with a grandparent had face-to-face contact with a parent at least once a year, and of these children, over one-third (37 per cent) saw a parent at least fortnightly. However, some 26 per cent of children living with their grandparents did not have any contact with either birth parent in a typical year (ABS, 2005).

Our survey findings relate to the 244 grandparents who reported that the grandchildren's parents lived elsewhere. Consistent with the literature mentioned above, Table 6-16 shows that contact frequency varied considerably among the families. However, the proportion of children who had very infrequent or no contact with their parents was much higher than the national figures reported by the ABS. In our sample, slightly more than half the children saw their mothers less than once a month (57 per cent), and a higher proportion saw their fathers very rarely or not at

all (69 per cent). This means that for the majority of the grandchildren living with the grandparents in our survey, their parents were largely absent from their lives.

Table 6-16: Grandchildren’s contact with birth parents

How often does the grandchild see...	...his/her mother		...his/her father	
	N	%	N	%
At least once a week	85	19.9	66	15.3
Not weekly, but at least once a month	99	23.1	61	14.2
Not monthly, but at least once every 6 months	69	16.1	52	12.1
Less than every six months or never	175	40.9	252	58.5
Total	428^a	100.0	431	100.0

^a Total exceeds number of surveys since some grandparents raised multiple grandchildren.

The grandparents’ comments illustrate the variety of contact frequencies, complex combinations of contact arrangements and family relationships:

Grandchild 2 has contact with her mother every school holidays for 1 week in QLD.

Sees her twice a week.

Very Seldom. Not consistent, whenever.

His mother can only cope for max 4 hours care when child awake. So we have developed a flexible system where mother can opt in/out depending on wellbeing on week to week basis.

[father] rings the girls once or twice a week and we take the girls to [-] prison fortnightly.

The child has never seen her mother. We don’t know where she is.

My 4 grandchildren have 4 different fathers and only the second child has any contact with her father. When she turned 16 and I was no longer in fear of her mother's retribution, I contacted her father and put them in touch. We all have a good relationship with him.

Many comments reflect the dominant situation in the survey families that grandchildren had infrequent or no contact with their birth parents. Lack of contact seemed usually the parent’s choice, although sometimes the grandchild broke off contact. Communication with the fathers was, overall, even more sporadic than with the mothers. Reasons included that the identity of some fathers was unknown, they had never wanted to see their child, or contact was seen as unsafe by the

grandparents. In any case, grandparents and grandchildren were often left feeling disappointed or bereft:

They have not seen their father since they came to live with us in 16 years. We tried to find him but we had no luck. But he knows where we live.

I had several attempts at getting grandchild to meet with mother but mother did not keep five appointments. So now grandchild will not agree to meeting. Maybe later in time.

Mother refuses to let him see his younger siblings as she says it will "confuse" them.

Child wants no contact with parents. Mother tried through Facebook, child deleted her. [Child] wants to know why she wants to talk to him now and yet gave him away as a baby. Child talks to three older siblings on Facebook.

Even when there was contact with the birth parents, the time spent together was sometimes not pleasurable or sometimes upsetting for the grandchild, and for the grandparents as well:

Be better sometimes if she didn't contact. Mother is at times very abusive and swears and calls her daughter most horrible names etc., so then I have to calm her down.

Twice weekly access is quite traumatic for child—but ordered by court.

The mother uses the child as baby sitter during visitation instead of spending quality time with the child.

Given the complexities and conflict-laden nature of many families' contact situations, it is not surprising that many grandparents would appreciate help with managing contacts with the birth parents. Grandparents in the survey did receive help in managing contact for about 30 per cent of the grandchildren (Table 6-17). A further 29 per cent felt they did not need any help; while 41 per cent stated that they would like help but did not get any. It appears there is a widespread need for more support with managing contact arrangements with the children's birth parents.

Table 6-17: Help in managing contact with parents

In managing contact arrangements with the grandchildren's parents, do you get any help from other persons or organisations?	N	%
No, I don't get any help	198	41.3
No, I don't need any help	137	28.5
Yes, I get help	145	30.2
Total	480 ^a	100.0

^a Total exceeds number of surveys since some grandparents raised multiple grandchildren.

Where help was provided, it came in most cases from government agencies, normally those agencies that formalised the grandparent's parental care role. Often they arranged and supervised visits. Sometimes, the agencies' involvement was seen as an intrusion:

The Department of Child Services tells me when and what to do and expect me to do it. I don't want to feel pressured to obey.

DoCS are reputedly assisting with contact. But this arrangement is unsatisfactory at best, & fairly useless.

Some grandparents received help from non-government organisations, which were usually sub-contracted by the government, and others received help from family members.

6.6 Income and financial support

6.6.1 Household income

There is consistent evidence in national and international research that grandparent-headed families are financially disadvantaged compared to other families with children (e.g. Brandon, 2004; Nandy and Selwyn, 2011; Worrall, 2009; Yardley, Mason and Watson, 2009). As noted in Section 4 of this report, previous analyses of the Census and HILDA have indicated that households which comprised grandchildren living with grandparents were much more likely than other households with children to be living in a low income household. Moreover, relatively low income in these families coincides with additional financial costs of child raising, when grandchildren join the household and need to be fed, clothed and educated and if modifications need to be made to accommodation.

The grandparents in the survey confirmed these findings. About half had net incomes of below \$600 a week, or \$31,000 a year, and a further 19 per cent earned between \$600 and \$800 a week (Table 6-18). Many grandparents in the survey commented on the difficulties managing with a low income:

The major challenge is financial. It is a continual battle to make ends meet.

The cost is an issue as we have very little Super, I have not worked and my husband was self-employed for most of his working life, and we raised 5 children of our own.

I have 4 jobs at different times in one week to pay the mortgage and other bills.

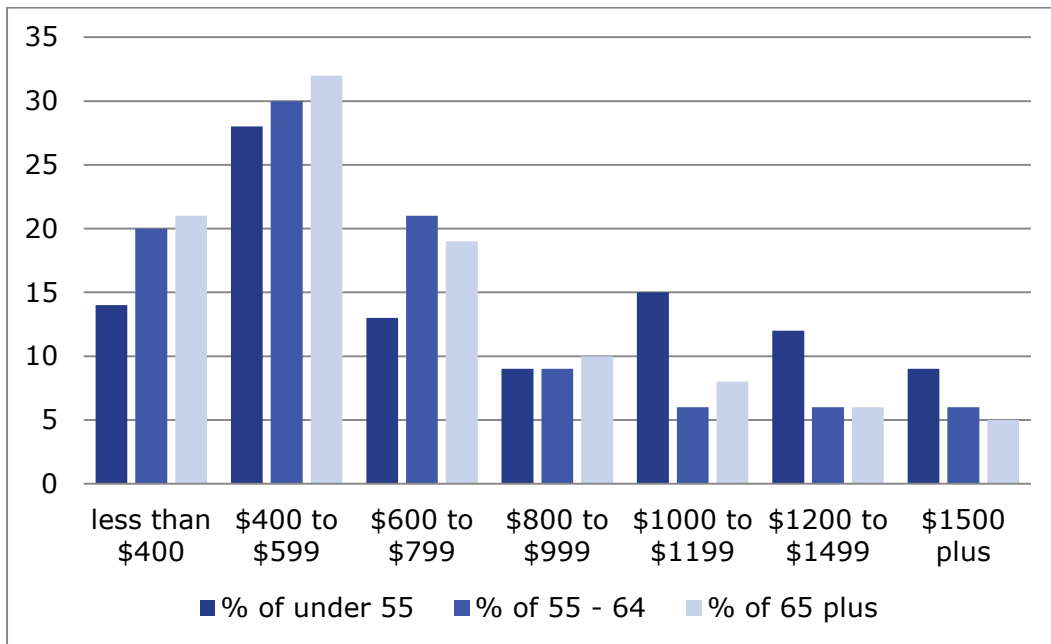
I have no other problems with my grandchildren, I love them dearly and they bring me so much joy, but I need money.

Table 6-18: Weekly household income after tax

	N	%
None or negative income	5	1.6
less than \$200	5	1.6
\$200 to \$399	54	17.0
\$400 to \$599	101	31.9
\$600 to \$799	59	18.6
\$800 to \$999	30	9.5
\$1000 to \$1199	26	8.2
\$1200 to \$1499	20	6.3
\$1500 to \$1799	10	3.2
\$1800 and above	7	2.2
Total	317	100.0

Comparing income distribution across age groups (Figure 6-1) the older grandparents (65 years plus) were more likely to have lower incomes than the youngest grandparent group (under 55 years). At the lower income end, 55 per cent of the under 55 year olds had incomes of below \$800, compared with 72 per cent of those 65 years plus. Incomes of above \$1000 were earned by 36 per cent of younger grandparents, but only 19 per cent of the older age group.

Figure 6-1: Household income across age groups



6.6.2 Income sources

The strained financial situation of grandparent-headed families is further illustrated when looking at their main source of household income. National data show that grandparent carers are less likely to be employed than either foster carers or families in general. In 2003, almost two-thirds (63 per cent) grandparents raising their grandchildren were dependent on a government benefit, pension or allowance as their main source of income, compared with 19 per cent of families in general (ABS, 2005). More than half of the families in the survey (56 per cent) relied on government income support allowances or pensions (Table 6-19).

A further two families named payments from the Department of Veterans' Affairs as their main income source. Only one-third of survey respondents (32 per cent) lived mainly on employment income. Ten per cent were self-funded retirees.

Table 6-19: Main source of household income

	N	%
Income from your full-time job	32	10.6
Income from your partner's full-time job	34	11.2
Income from your part-time or casual job	26	8.6
Income from your partner's part-time or casual job	6	2.0
Centrelink payment for you	166	54.8
Centrelink payment for your partner	3	1.0
Self-funded retiree	31	10.2
Other	5	1.7
Total	303	100.0

Given the frequent combination of low household income, reliance on government income support payments, and increased financial needs due to care for the grandchildren, many grandparents needed to find other income sources to get by. Selling off investment properties or even their home, drawing on retirement or other savings, and changing employment commitments were the most common strategies. The following stories were typical:

I realise that with our income we are deemed to be at the better end of income, however we have spent all our savings and our actual income has probably dropped by a third. We are selling an investment property as we are unable to continue to afford it. Our portfolio was going to fund our retirement, however I think we may be working for a little longer and perhaps be claiming some sort of Government entitlement in the future.

My wife receives the age pension, and I draw \$9,000 per annum income stream. We supplement our income by drawing from savings.

Why should it get to the point of a grandparent having to sell their home to raise their grandchildren?

He had to delay his retirement because of financial constraints.

I would prefer to work part-time, but with another child to put through school and hopefully university, this is not an option at the moment.

The age-related diversity among grandparents regarding household incomes (see Figure 6-1) is further observed when looking at the main income sources of grandparents (Figure 6-2). Younger respondents (those under 55) were much more likely to hold a full-time or part-time job than the oldest group of respondents (52 per cent compared with 9 per cent), while most of those 65 and over relied on Centrelink payments, usually the age pension (72 per cent). Among the oldest age group were also 21 per cent who were self-funded retirees. The latter might generally have more financial resources than age pensioners, however the

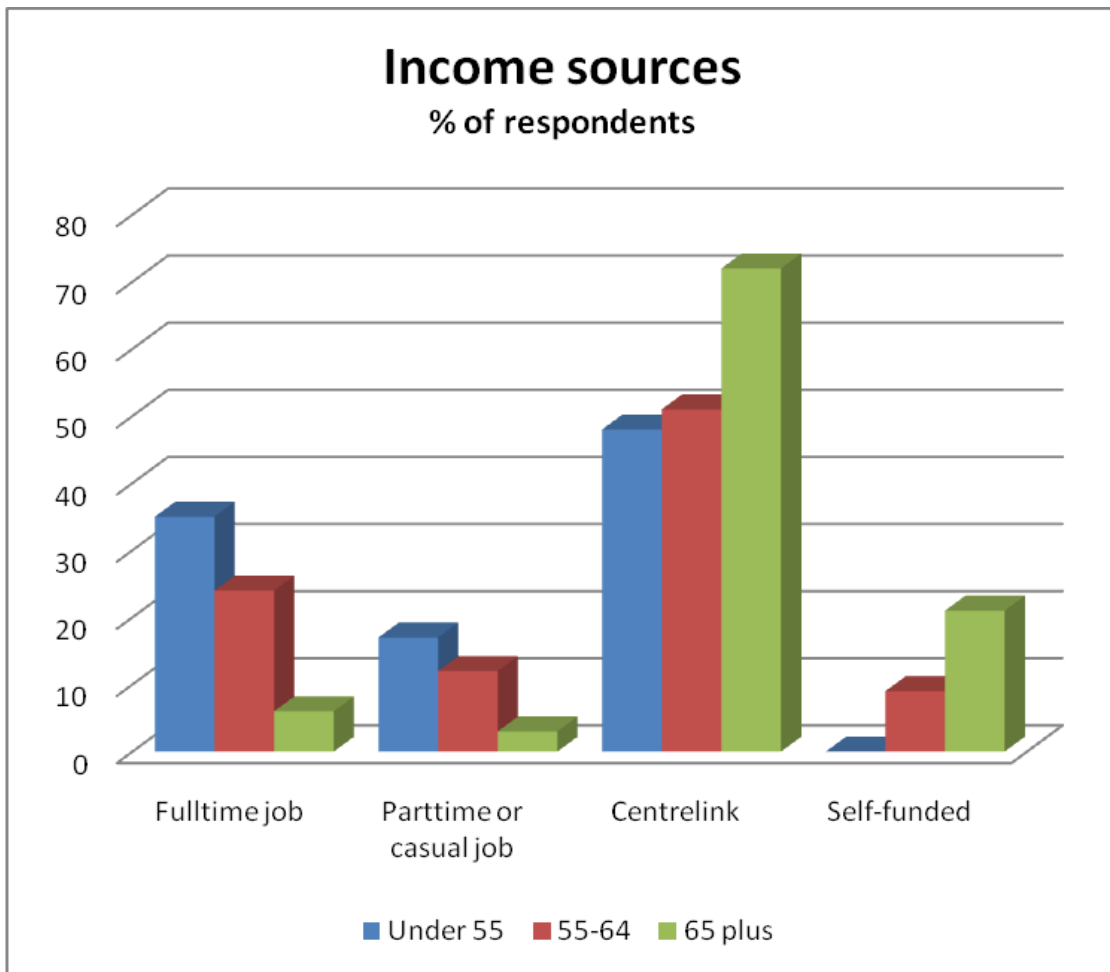
unexpected financial responsibility of raising grandchildren could be a problem for them also, as they had put money aside for their own retirement needs, and their funds could be reduced by an economic downturn.

[I wish we didn't have] to raise our grandchildren ... with our retirement fund.

It has been a struggle to find [services] and fight for him, particularly when we are self-funded retirees and the global financial crisis of late added some extra stress.

Differentiating income and income sources between age groups provides evidence that age is an important factor when considering the circumstances of grandparent-headed families. While many grandparents across age groups have to manage on low incomes, older grandparents are even more likely to be constrained financially, and have fewer opportunities to increase their income through employment.

Figure 6-2: Income sources across age groups



6.6.3 Financial assistance

The majority of the grandparents in our survey (92 per cent) received some financial assistance for raising their grandchildren (Table 6-20). Almost all of the grandparents received payments from Centrelink, most commonly Family Tax Benefit A or B (around 70 per cent each), Child Care Benefit (almost 25 per cent) or Child Care Tax Rebate (12.3 per cent) (Table 6-21). Often grandparents received a combination of these payments.

State and territory governments paid assistance to almost one-third of the survey families, usually a carer allowance, foster care or statutory care allowance. The grandchildren's parents helped financially in 16 per cent of families:

Son receives Centrelink, pays household food bills.

The father is arranging that Child Support will go to me instead of the mother so then I may be able to claim some family tax benefit.

Other relatives might also help:

My estranged husband helps out with medical needs of "Grandchild 1".

[I get] a small allowance from a family member, not from any of the parents.

Any financial assistance was very much appreciated by the grandparents:

Life has been so much easier since I got the kinship allowance—this allows my grandson to participate in sport, social outings, school excursions etc.

However, more than eight per cent of the grandparents received no financial support at all for raising their grandchildren.

Table 6-20: Sources of financial assistance for raising grandchildren

	N	% of respondents ^a
None	27	8.3
From the grandchild's parents	53	16.2
From Centrelink	285	87.2
From the state or territory government	99	30.3
From other sources	3	0.9
Total number of responses (multiple responses allowed) ^a	467	
Number of respondents	327	

^aTotal percentages exceed 100 due to multiple responses.

Table 6-21: Types of Centrelink financial assistance for raising grandchildren

	N	% of respondents ^a
Family Tax Benefit A	240	73.8
Family Tax Benefit B	225	69.2
Child Care Benefit	81	24.9
Child Care Tax Rebate	40	12.3
Carer Allowance/Carer Payment	15	4.6
Baby Bonus	3	0.9
Parenting Payment	2	0.6
Double Orphan Pension	2	0.6
Number of respondents	325	

^aTotal percentages exceed 100 due to multiple responses.

Of those grandparents who did receive financial support, many received it from just one source (55 per cent), which was usually Centrelink. A further one-third accessed payments from two sources, generally Centrelink and their state/territory government.

The majority of grandparents in our survey said they had no difficulty accessing government financial assistance (

Table 6-22). However, 37 per cent found it difficult to get payments from Centrelink, from their state or territory government, or from both. Typical problems mentioned were administrative delays, the paperwork required to get payments approved, and perceived disrespect from government agency staff:

I am still in the process of having to prove to the Family Tax Benefits people that I do have 100% care for the Poppit and have had since March 2007.

What I would like see happen is shake up the [...] office and set some guidelines out there so no one has to go through the terrible ordeal I was subjected to. We older generation do not need rude people to deal with our problems as it is stressful.

Respite payment takes up to 3 months to be paid by Department. Reimbursement for things like school camps [...] and other expensive activities are subject to discretion of team leader who is always uncontactable. Payment for ongoing counselling for eight year old has to be constantly applied for. Payments are deferred for months. We had to pay privately for weekly counselling (\$100 per session) (three years) for older children. I could go on.

Another common theme was lack of information. Grandparents had difficulties finding out which payments they were entitled to, and therefore missed out on financial support:

I was unaware that any support was available and bought everything for him when he was a baby, i.e. cot, pram, clothes, bottles, nappies, toys etc. etc., and then a friend told me about available financial support so I asked the case worker about it and started getting [it], but no reimbursement for set-up costs.

Centrelink will not tell you what benefits you are entitled to. You have to ask and find out from other people; and now with staff reductions they want you to do it on a computer, which is a bit hard if you don't own one or know how to operate one.

The process of applying for benefits was further complicated by the complexities of family relationships, and by informal care arrangements:

They initially refused to believe the child was in my care, her mother was receiving benefits and lied to them about child living with me. I had to appeal Centrelink's decision three times with hard evidence before they would give me payments.

Table 6-22: Difficulties accessing government financial assistance

	N	% of 335 respondents
From Centrelink	88	26.3
From the state or territory government	83	24.8
From both Centrelink and state/territory government	46	13.7
From either Centrelink, state/territory or both	124	37.0

Some grandparents pointed out the different financial supports that formal and informal grandparents raising their grandchildren and foster carers received:

It would be a great help if I who have custody of my grandchild got the same allowances as foster carers. I do the same work and still have to go to work because I get NO financial help.

I think we need enough money to raise our grandchildren without having to dip into our savings or super—a payment similar to the foster parent payment.

A carer is a carer, why is there so much less support for the informal who does the same job?

Get this – I am a registered foster carer – seems funny I get paid for that but nothing for full-time care of my grandson. Sickens me.

Grandchildren being raised by grandparents don't have the same opportunities as foster families even though they are in the same boat. ... They're the same with the exception to be lucky enough to be with family. Grandparent-raised children have the same needs as foster children and should be treated with the same services. Grandparents have a lot to contend with and should also have the same rights as foster parents.

6.7 Financial stress

In addition to the low income data reported above, studies have illustrated the impact of financial difficulties on the daily lives of grandparent families (e.g. COTA, 2003; Orb and Davey, 2005; Worrall, 2005). The cost of grandchildren's education, the legal expenses of custody procedures, essential household items such as furniture or a car, including treats like going to the movies or a restaurant, are often difficult to afford.

This is true for a majority of the grandparent families in our survey. Asked about their own sense of financial wellbeing, 56 per cent said they were just getting along, while 10 per cent indicated that they were poor or very poor. About one-third (32 per cent) felt reasonably comfortable, and only 2 per cent identified themselves as very comfortable or prosperous (Table 6-23).

There was very little difference in these proportions across grandparent age groups, indicating that grandparent carers of all ages, be they in their 40s or 80s, experience a similar sense of financial constraint.

Table 6-23: Financial wellbeing

Given your current needs and financial responsibilities, would you say that you and your family are:	N	%
Prosperous	1	0.3
Very comfortable	4	1.2
Reasonably comfortable	106	32.4
Just getting along	182	55.7
Poor	23	7.0
Very poor	11	3.4
Total	327	100.0

Many grandparents wrote about the financial responsibilities associated with the day-to-day expenses of raising children: buying school uniforms, saving up for school excursions, as well as essential costs such as increased food expenses and utilities. Grandparents also expressed significant financial stress from dealing with the legal system:

The major problem for us is we cannot access legal aid ... We have already spent over \$5,000 in lawyers and we are only half way. If it goes much longer we will have to get out a loan from the bank ... Now I am going through the Children's Court we may not be able to afford this. Been told it could cost up to \$50,000.

We sold our original home to pay for the court case to get custody of our grandchild.

These families experienced financial stress as a result of taking on care for their grandchildren, and they are illustrative of the concerns of many others in the survey. It is important to note that financial stress was often a direct result of grandchildren joining the household, rather than a feature of the grandparents' previous lives. Three out of four grandparents in our survey said that their financial situation had somewhat or greatly deteriorated since taking on care of their grandchildren (Table 6-24). A minority, 19 per cent, stated that their financial situation was not affected, while it improved for a small percentage.

Table 6-24: Financial impact of raising grandchildren

Because you started raising your grandchild/ren, have things financially:	N	%
Greatly improved	1	0.3
Somewhat improved	17	5.4
Stayed about the same	61	19.3
Somewhat deteriorated	128	40.5
Greatly deteriorated	109	34.5
Total	316	100.0

Within age groups, financial deterioration was much more pronounced among the youngest grandparents. Of those under 55 years, 83 per cent stated that their financial situation had somewhat or greatly deteriorated, compared to 75 per cent of the middle age group (55-64) and 67 per cent of grandparents aged 65 and above.

Some grandparents commented on how increased financial assistance for raising their grandchildren would go a long way towards making their lives easier:

Financial support would be greatly appreciated. I am dealing with 3 parents (1 mother, 2 fathers) and collectively they pay \$41 per month in support. Their lives have all moved on while we continue to struggle.

6.8 Changes to grandparent employment

Raising children requires significant time commitments. This was especially true of the grandchildren cared for by grandparents in the sample, many of whom were young and came into kinship care after experiencing trauma in their birth families. Studies have indicated that grandparents may change their employment situation after they take on care of grandchildren (Worrall, 2009; COTA, 2003; Pruchno and McKenney, 2000). Change can go either way: grandparents may scale back or leave work; or they may work more or even come out of retirement to earn the required income.

Our study shows changes in employment among grandparent carers in Australia. In addition, the numerous comments of survey participants illustrate that these changes impact heavily on their daily lives and future prospects. Among the survey participants, almost two out of three had to make changes to their employment due to raising their grandchildren (Table 6-25). Mostly they reduced work commitments rather than increasing them. More than one-third of all respondents (37 per cent) gave up work altogether:

Because of [grandson's] insecurities, I had to give up my job (he was 5 years old) and get him a lot of help.

One day I held down a responsible job which I loved, the next I was looking for cots and childcare and wondering if I would ever work again and how I could afford not to ... As they got a little older their needs grew and I gave up work to give them more of my time but fewer luxuries.

Among the survey respondents who worked less or gave up work, there were more women than men (working less: 15 per cent compared to 9 per cent; not working any more: 37 per cent compared to 30 per cent), whereas grandfathers who answered the survey were more likely not to change their employment than grandmothers (47 per cent compared to 33 per cent). This indicates that more of the reductions in work hours and income was borne by the grandmother.

For the families, loss of wages occurred at a time when expenses rose due to caring for the grandchildren. This added to financial stress in many of the grandparent-headed families, as documented above. There were long-term implications as well, notably loss of career prospects, superannuation and work entitlements such as sick leave or long service leave.

Table 6-25: Changes in employment due to raising grandchildren

	Grandparent ^a		Grandparent's partner	
	N	%	N	%
No changes or not applicable	111	34.5	143	59.3
Working less	53	16.5	15	6.2
Not working at all any more	118	36.6	29	12.0
Working more	13	4.0	21	8.7
Other	27	8.4	33	13.7
Total	322	100.0	241	100.0

^aThe person completing the survey (87 per cent women, 13 per cent men).

Of the respondents who lived with a partner, 54 (or 30 per cent) reported a change in both their and their partner's employment. Most commonly, both worked less or not at all any more, while in fewer cases one partner increased their working hours while the other reduced them. Among the grandparents who said there were 'other' changes in employment, 11 were retired, and a further 11 stated their partner was retired.

Eight grandparents described how their work had become more stressful, for example:

... my manager continues to point out to me that my work is suffering and I regularly appear stressed or disinterested. I honestly feel it is affecting my

career, which has become important to me since my children have all become adults.

I took 4 months leave without pay, had to resign as manager and go back to work part-time in the same place, as I could not cope with the stress of court or commit to management responsibility, as I was frequently absent.

There were considerable differences between age groups (Figure 6-3). The younger the grandparents, the more likely they were to change their employment due to raising grandchildren. Change occurred for 70 per cent of those under 55, 54 per cent of the middle age group (55-64), and 38 per cent of the older grandparents aged 65 years plus. The relatively low rate in the older age group could be explained by the fact that many were already retired. However, the proportion was still important, with more than one-third of those 65 and older working less or more, or coming out of retirement.

The impacts of employment change on grandparents and their families varied depending on the grandparents' age group. For younger grandparents, reduction or loss of employment reduced future job and career prospects, as well as retirement income:

I worry about loss of income, superannuation, losses from having children and not working. For example [if] children go back to mother when I am 60 or 65, am I going to be able to re-enter the workforce ... as I will not be able to pay mortgage etc. on Centrelink benefits ... This is my greatest worry.

For many grandparents in the middle age group, the only available option was delaying their retirement, or coming back out of early retirement, with possible negative impacts on physical and mental health:

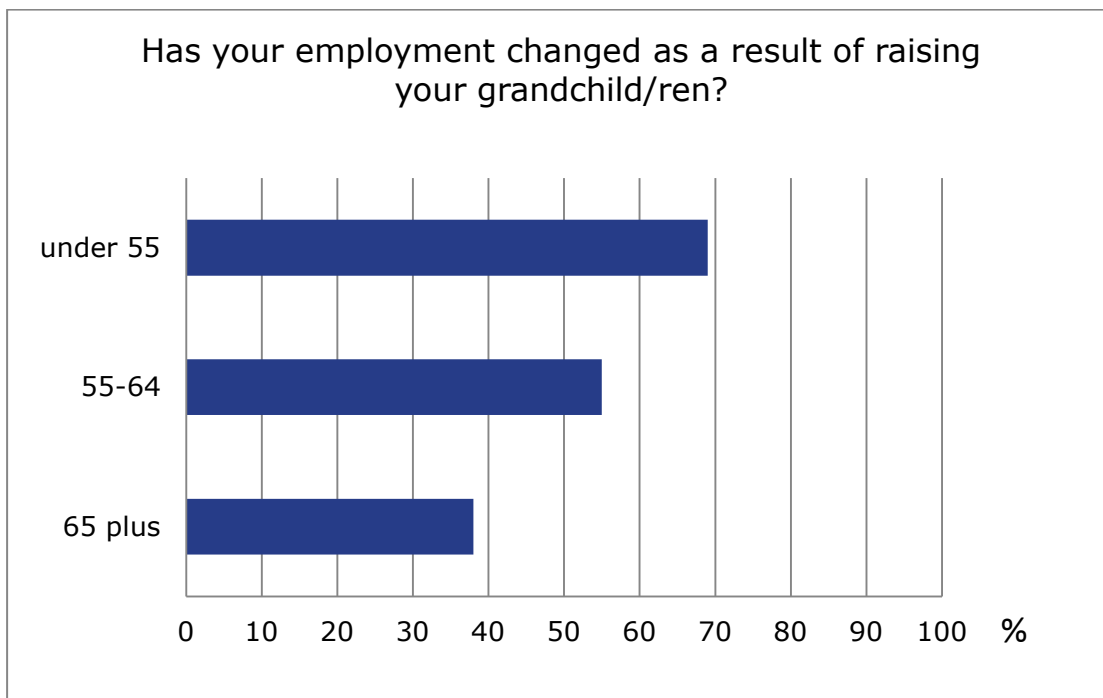
I no longer see retirement as close as it once was. I work in aged care, which is very physical. I work night shift to accommodate having the care of children, and I find this is wearing me down substantially. But ... what else does one do!!

Financially we have had to return to work to pay for school fees and out of hours activities.

Those in the older age group who had already retired in some cases felt compelled to re-enter the labour force, which was hard on body and mind:

My husband is nine years older than me and has had to return to work full-time, which has been difficult for him.

Figure 6-3: Employment change across age groups



6.9 Health of grandparents and grandchildren

6.9.1 The grandparents' health

Grandparents caring for their grandchildren are generally older than either birth parents or foster parents, and are therefore more likely to experience health problems (e.g. Nandy and Selwyn, 2011; Wellard, 2010). In addition to suffering from age-related illnesses, grandparents may find that their physical and emotional wellbeing is affected by taking on care of grandchildren (e.g. Minkler and Roe, 1993; Yardley, Mason and Watson, 2009; Kelley et al., 2000; Dunne and Kettler, 2007). This is due to increased stress and physical demands on the grandparents, as well as other factors such as financial worries, intra-familial conflict, unsuitable accommodation and grandchildren's behaviour.

The survey shows widespread health problems associated with the grandparents' age group and the demands of parenting. Almost half of the survey participants (45 per cent) reported that they had a long-term illness or disability (Table 6.26). Health problems occurred mostly among the older age groups (51 per cent of 55-64 year olds, and 48 per cent of those aged 65 and older), whereas the younger grandparents were markedly healthier, with 28 per cent of under 55 year old grandparents reporting health problems.

Table 6-26: Grandparents' health

Do you have any long-term illnesses or disabilities?	All survey respondents		Under 55		55-64		65 plus	
	N	%	N	% of <55s	N	% of 55-64s	N	% of 65+
Yes	149	45.0	19	27.5	89	50.6	41	47.7
Total	331		69		176		86	

Many grandparents felt that their health problems were not just age-related, but caused or exacerbated by taking on care of their grandchildren (Table 6-27). About 60 per cent of survey respondents stated that their health had somewhat or greatly deteriorated due to raising grandchildren.

Table 6-27: Health impact of raising grandchildren

Because you started raising your grandchild/ren, has your health:	N	%
Greatly improved	4	1.3
Somewhat improved	4	1.3
Stayed about the same	115	35.9
Somewhat deteriorated	162	50.6
Greatly deteriorated	35	10.9
Total	320	100.0

Regarding the types of health problems, age groups were similar. Frequently mentioned physical illnesses were arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, asthma, back problems and cancer. In addition, emotional health suffered:

Our health is our main concern. I had pinched a nerve on my spine after carrying the two grandkids. My wife has a thyroid problem and a consequent anxiety attack when the kids stress her out.

Both my wife and I came so close to physical and emotional breakdown.

Very tired, very emotional.

6.9.2 The grandchildren's health

Research indicates that a relatively high proportion of grandchildren in kinship care exhibit physical or emotional health problems (Smyth and Eardley, 2008), due to the possibility of trauma experienced in their birth families (valentine and McHugh, 2011; Dunne and Kettler, 2006). In Worrall's 2009 study in New Zealand, more than half of the sample of 173 grandchildren experienced health problems (Worrall, 2009).

There was a similar finding in our survey. More than 50 per cent of grandparents who answered the question reported that their grandchildren had a physical health problem, and over 80 per cent said the grandchildren had emotional or behavioural issues (Table 6-28). More than one out of three survey families had grandchildren with both physical and psychological problems.

Table 6-28: Grandchildren's health

Have any grandchildren in your care experienced long-term physical health, or emotional/behavioural problems?	Number of respondents	%		
		Minor problem	Severe problem	No problem
Physical health	264	33.3	20.1	46.6
Emotional/behavioural issues	311	40.5	41.2	18.3

Types of problems that were most frequently mentioned were ADHD, anger, anxiety, depression, Asperger's syndrome, asthma, attachment disorder, bedwetting, and drug and alcohol misuse in older grandchildren. A wide range of issues were described, from relatively mild concerns, to profound disabilities that need ongoing support:

She used to have nightmares, but it does not seem to be a problem now. She seems well balanced and happy.

He has a few minor issues with peer pressure, some unacceptable behaviour issues and some anger management issues, but we are working through these together and he seems to be improving.

My grandson has Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy and a severe developmental delay. He has only just started to speak. He needs a wheelchair for community access.

Grandparents linked many of the grandchildren's health problems to abuse and abandonment by the parents:

All suffer Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome and constant anxiety. The youngest has been hospitalised for malnutrition, pneumonia, head injury and concussion (the latter happened during access!).

The older children were traumatised when they first came to us. Much better now although the boy is still filled with anger.

Hyper-vigilance, lying, deceit, stealing, rudeness, back chat. All appear for about 7-12 days after parent contact.

It is apparent that emotional problems caused great tension and stress in these families, and that physical disabilities required additional time and care commitment. Many grandparents needed help to deal with their grandchildren's health problems. However, extensive comments in the survey show that many families could not access appropriate support, usually due to financial difficulties:

I feel my grandson has anger issues with not having his parents around ... and could do with regular counselling and advice for me how to deal with this, but it is too expensive.

Both are still a couple of years behind in their schooling and could do with tutoring, but we can't afford it.

He was under a physician, but the gap of \$45 was too hard to come up with every week.

As far as my grandson is concerned, equipment is very expensive, and as he is young he grows out of it often, e.g. wheelchairs, walkers, shower chairs, foot orthotics etc. The money available through the services for these is very limited.

Grandchildren’s health problems sometimes impacted on the grandparents’ ability to be in employment, which could exacerbate financial difficulties:

[I receive] flexible respite ..., \$90 per month. This payment has allowed me to continue in my current job, which includes rural travel. However I am just renegotiating my work contract to reduce my work hours (to 30 hours per week) as my grandson’s condition is degenerative and he now needs additional care.

Problems were compounded if both grandparents and grandchildren had health problems, that is, grandparents had a long-term illness or disability and at the same time the grandchildren had physical, emotional or behavioural problems (Table 6-29). This occurred in a significant number of survey families: 40 per cent of grandparents who had a long-term illness or disability said that a grandchild they were raising had physical health problems, and 76 per cent said a grandchild had emotional or behavioural problems. Fifty-two survey families, or 35 per cent of grandparents with a long-term illness or disability, raised a grandchild with both physical and emotional/behavioural problems.

Table 6-29: Health problems of both grandparents and grandchildren

Grandchild has:	Grandparent has a long-term illness or disability (N)	% of grandparents with a long-term illness or disability (N=149)
Physical health problems	60	40.3
Emotional/behavioural problems	113	75.8
Both physical health and emotional/behavioural problems	52	34.9

The health of grandchildren emerged as a serious issue for the grandparents who took part in the survey. One grandparent summed up feelings that many seem to have:

Governments, both federal and state, need to accept that these children may, and in most cases do, have a number of inabilities rather than disabilities. These children suffer in many ways, but not in ways that Centrelink recognises as disabilities. However, their inabilities are extremely hard to cope with, and grandparents are looking to ‘all of life’ outcomes for these children, not just to age eighteen.

6.10 Grandparents' relationships and social life

Positive relationships with friends and family, and engagement with one's community and interests, are protective factors that help people deal with difficult life situations. It is therefore important to find out how grandparents' relationships and social life are faring.

6.10.1 Relationships with partner and family

Previous qualitative studies, both in Australia and overseas, have found that taking on care for grandchildren may strain partnerships and extended family relationships (e.g. Wellard, 2010; COTA, 2003; Backhouse, 2008; Worrall, 2009; Department of Human Services Victoria, 2000; Dunne and Kettler, 2008). Custody arrangements for the grandchildren are a common cause of family conflict, as described above, and relationships with other family members – for example other children and grandchildren – may also suffer. The partner relationship (usually marriage) between grandparents appears to come under heavy strain following the arrival of grandchildren in the household. However, there seem to be large variations, with some families enjoying close, supportive relations.

Among the grandparents in our survey, about half majority stated that relationships with their family had stayed about the same (53 per cent) since taking on care for the grandchildren, and a small percentage said relationships had improved (Table 6-30). Some described amicable relationships:

Family...have been paramount in my being able to cope.

Friends and family help where possible.

Have a son and daughter who will at times babysit. But both work shifts and cannot always manage. Raising grandchildren is something that in reality is "your" job and yours alone.

Table 6-30: Grandparent relationships

Have things improved, deteriorated or stayed the same for you because you started raising your grandchild/ren?

... in the following areas:	% of survey respondents						N
	Greatly improved	Some-what improved	Stayed about the same	Somewhat deteriorated	Greatly deteriorated	Not applicable	
Relationship with your partner/spouse	1.7	3.4	30.3	22.6	11.1	31.0	296
Relationships with your family	1.2	3.1	52.6	28.7	12.8	1.6	320

However, just over 40 per cent said family relationships had somewhat or greatly deteriorated. The grandparents' comments focused on the negative repercussions of the care placement, by expressing pain and grief about lack of support as well as estrangement from other family members:

The failure of the family unit due to sibling jealousy and loss of access with those other grandchildren is very painful for us.

Custody of the children has caused major family conflict to what was a very close family.

Other grandparents talked about how they were unable to visit family members, particularly elderly relatives, due to care commitments to grandchildren.

The negative effect on marital and partner relationships was even more pronounced: 100 survey respondents, 49 per cent of those who answered the question as applicable to them, stated that the relationship with their partner or spouse had deteriorated. Smaller proportions said the relationship had stayed the same (44 per cent) or improved (7 per cent).

Several grandparents identified that they had become divorced or separated since taking care of grandchildren. Other grandparents reported serious ongoing strain on their marriages and partnerships, which could be exacerbated by conflict over care, lack of privacy, disappointment and tension upon giving up retirement plans, and the stress of increased employment commitments:

My husband and I have always worked together (20+ years) and now work opposite shifts. We travel more than 3 hours per day to our employment and at this stage cannot afford to move closer to work. It is starting to strain the relationship slightly; it is only the fact that we are best friends that we manage to work through these problems.

I don't have a relationship because of [grandson]. He was too much hard work and unstable.

Time alone with my husband never seems to happen now.

For some grandparents, particularly grandmothers, marital strain could be exacerbated by the fact that some partners were not biologically related to the grandchildren. One grandmother keenly felt the intrusion of grandchildren into the life of her new partner:

I had entered a new relationship and the kids came. Has all been a balancing act. He is very supportive and loves them as his own BUT it remains huge.

However, it is important to note that for some grandparent couples, taking on grandchildren had the opposite effect of bringing them closer together, united in tackling the challenges of the unexpected caring role:

Our marriage is stronger for this as we are a team.

6.10.2 Social life

A common finding in the grandparent care literature is social isolation from peers (COTA, 2003; Orb and Davey, 2005; Worrall, 2008), largely due to the fact that most grandparents who are not raising their grandchildren are able to pursue their own interests, whereas grandparents who raise their grandchildren are restricted by their child care responsibilities. The survey indicates how common this problem is, and how much it impacts on grandparents' lives. The majority of the survey participants stated that their relationships with their friends, participation in their community, and time for their own interests had deteriorated (Table 6-31). In combination, this marks a significant decline in social protective factors.

Table 6-31: Grandparent social life

Have things improved, deteriorated or stayed the same for you because you started raising your grandchild/ren?

... in the following areas:	% of survey respondents						
	Greatly improved	Some-what improved	Stayed about same	the	Some-what deteriorated	Greatly deteriorated	Not applicable
Relationships with your friends	1.2	1.5	38.1		36.8	21.1	1.2
Participation in your community	1.9	9.4	34.4		26.3	23.8	4.4
Time for your own interests	0.3	2.2	10.3		27.0	58.6	1.6
Your own wellbeing	0.9	2.5	26.5		42.9	25.9	1.3

Social isolation and disrupted friendships as a result of taking on care of grandchildren was one of the strongest themes to emerge from the comments and stories provided by the grandparents. Again and again, grandparents wrote of loneliness, misunderstanding, and having to give up former interests and activities. Much of this social isolation stemmed from the loss of old friendships and incompatibility with the social activities of peers:

Social isolation is my biggest issue. Because I am raising my grandchild I feel jealous of my peers when they get to dote on their grandchildren and hand them back. I wish I could feel as proud and detached as they do.

I don't see any of my friends, as they don't have grandchildren living with them and really don't want children around, so I live a very uneventful life, everything has been put on hold. The problem is I don't know for how long.

'Friends' no longer ... because they can't be bothered with small children. As a result I feel extremely alienated and hurt.

Being 'out of step' with peers did not just impact on grandparents; it could also have a negative effect on grandchildren. As one grandparent wrote:

None of my friends have young children at all, so if we get invited anywhere, she is the only child there, she is very lonely and she feels different.

After taking on care of grandchildren, many grandparents found themselves mixing with younger parents at school and child-related activities. The effect on the grandparents was mixed. Some grandparents adapted, even relished, the change of peer group:

I have met some wonderful people and made a lot of good friends at schools he has attended as well as a support group I am in. I mix with a lot of younger mums and I am accepted by them all and it keeps me young at heart, even though I am not physically capable of keeping up with them.

I also have had to place myself in situations that provide him with access to children his own age, so I joined mothers groups, toy libraries, sporting groups and made many new friends. I took my skills into these places and became co-ordinator of the local toy library, took CRE classes at his school and eventually returned to teaching at the school as an emergency teacher. I have been able to a certain degree to keep my identity whilst enjoying and participating in his life.

For other grandparents, however, mixing with younger parents increased their feelings of social isolation, as they were not accepted by the new peer group:

You have to work twice as hard to be accepted.

Being alone and raising a child again is hard as you are too old to be included in the child's parents' age group and ostracised from your own age group because of the child.

Grandparents' social life was affected differently depending on their age. Participation in the community reduced more for those aged under 55. Loss of time for their own interests was felt more keenly by the younger respondents: most ticked 'greatly deteriorated', rather than 'somewhat deteriorated', which many of the older grandparents did. Finally, relationships with friends deteriorated more among the youngest group than among the middle group. These findings might stem from the fact that younger grandparents were often still working, or able to go back to work. Employment combined with child-rearing responsibilities would have left little time to mix with community groups or pursue personal interests.

The oldest group of grandparents (65 years and over) were also more likely than the middle group to state that relationships with friends had suffered. Being out of step with their age group was most pronounced for the older grandparents:

Most of our friends have moved on.

Other people have been travelling, working in high profile jobs, going to clubs etc. etc., but I have been busy raising grandchildren and I don't have anything to share with others.

In addition, older grandparents' health had deteriorated more due to raising their grandchildren. Loss of wellbeing was felt across all age groups, but the older grandparents felt it more strongly, with many ticking 'greatly deteriorated'. This may be because the demands of child-rearing put greater strain on the older grandparents' bodies and minds than on those of the younger grandparents.

6.11 Access to support services and information

Access to support and information has been identified as a crucial issue for grandparent-headed families (e.g. COTA, 2003). However, little is known in Australia about grandparents' access to support and information, and about possible gaps in provision. Previous studies suggest that key support services for grandparent kinship carers are respite, formal and informal support groups, legal assistance, caseworkers, parent training and child care, among others. However, grandparent families have widely different support needs (Jenkins et al., 2010).

Table 6-32 shows the types of information and support services that grandparents in our survey received, needed or did not need, in order of support received. Almost two-thirds of grandparents belonged to a support group. Other prominent services were child care/out of school hours care, caseworker support and respite.

Table 6-32: Support and information

Types of support or information	I'm receiving it (%)	I don't receive it but it would be helpful (%)	I don't receive it and don't need it (%)	No. of respondents
Support groups (e.g. foster/kinship/grandparent support group)	63.2	23.7	13.2	304
Child care/Out of school hours care	38.5	17.6	44.0	273
Caseworker	37.0	28.6	34.4	276
Respite (e.g. camps)	29.7	44.1	26.2	279
Training (e.g. parenting program)	18.8	25.4	55.8	260
Resource guide	18.0	52.0	30.0	250
Assistance in dealing with the children's parents	13.6	33.7	52.7	264
Information on help with schoolwork	11.3	52.8	35.8	265
Legal assistance	7.6	47.3	45.0	262
Programs for teenagers	8.2	36.7	55.1	245

Many grandparents in the survey wrote of the importance of support groups in sustaining them in their caregiving role, providing practical support, friendship and social connections:

Going to grandparents' group has helped. Talking to others in the similar situation and making me understand that I'm quite lucky that I have only the one grandchild and have family support.

Support groups saved my life.

Did not even know about it [government financial support] until I began attending a grandparent group after my husband's passing. The leader then took me to DoCS and helped me with the DoCS person.

The other Grans and I have created a wonderful friendship, which I am thankful for every day. I think we have a great bond due to the fact that we are all in the same position and love our grandkids so much.

Grandparents also commented positively on other types of information and support services that they received:

We have had two brilliant relative care workers helping us out. If we didn't have them, it would be impossible to cope.

Have had access to counselling services through DVA but really feel for others who cannot access this service.

Am very lucky can use day care.

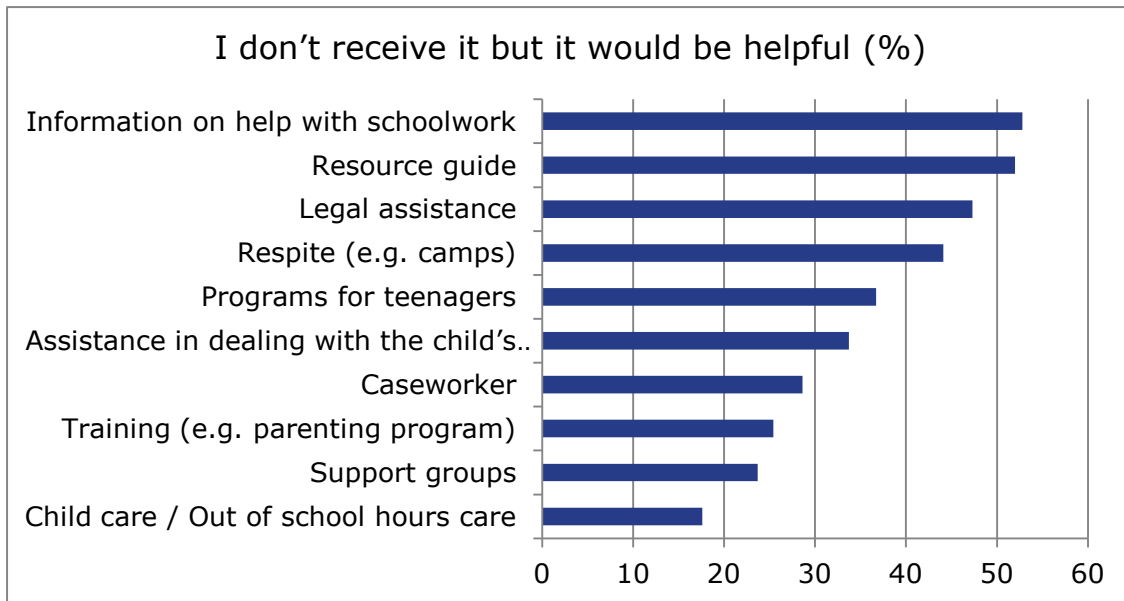
I am happy with the support we are receiving at this time – my concerns are for how she will manage through her teenage years – I have a feeling I may be screaming for support then.

I receive lots of support from the Mirabel Foundation.

I suppose I am lucky that I have a very good worker at DHS that works with me to help these children...my grandchildren get most of the services they need to treat their illnesses.

At the same time, there were considerable unmet support needs. Figure 6-4 shows that more than half of the grandparents in the survey would like information on help with schoolwork, as well as a resource guide with information on available services and how to access them. Legal assistance and respite were also needed by many, followed by programs for teenagers and assistance in dealing with the children's parents.

Figure 6-4: Unmet support and information needs



As the grandparents' comments indicate, a large part of the problem stems from insufficient information provision. Finding support could be a difficult, drawn-out process that required much effort and knowledge by the grandparent:

I have had to search out any help, any legal advice, any financial assistance and support myself. I have not had support offered, assistance of any sort offered ... I have had to find it myself.

It is such a minefield to get to the right organisation or person. I would encourage people to keep on changing a therapist to get the one the child can relate to. I work in allied health and I still found it difficult, often being passed to one organisation then to another until getting the right organisation, section, person etc.

I didn't know where to go for help. I didn't know what I was eligible for.

Grandparents also commented extensively on the lack of appropriate services. Insufficient access to respite, legal assistance, caseworkers and help with schooling were common themes:

[My grandson] is having a hard time at school. I believe he is about 1 year behind, but his school will not let him repeat as he is too old. I would like [him] to get more assistance with his schoolwork.

There is no relief from our 24/7 responsibility for our 2 grandkids unless we pay for a babysitter. It would be a big help!

Now that everything is finalised we have minimal contact with our caseworker, and while I understand that as a department they are overworked, it would be nice to hear from them occasionally. If we do ever ask a question, it takes them generally weeks/months to get back to us.

I am eligible for up to 30 days per year respite, but it is a huge battle when I even give 6 weeks' notice of intent for a weekend break for [the government department] to line someone up. Respite is always a muck-up and distressing for me and unsettling for the boys.

Many types of support needed by grandparent families were not provided in the community service system. There was unmet need for individualised, flexible support:

My boys are growing up with one elderly grandma. They need regular contact with good male role models and this isn't easily achieved. I expect I'd appreciate a lot of support when they are teenagers.

I have not answered "Respite" or "Programs for teenagers" questions as my grandson is autistic and I feel unable to partake as it would cause too much stress.

My greatest need is help in the house.

Analysis by age revealed some differences in service use and unmet needs between younger and older grandparents, particularly regarding support groups and programs for teenagers. The oldest group of grandparents in the survey (65 years and older) were much more likely to be part of support groups than younger grandparents, with 80 per cent of the older grandparents attending them, compared with 61 per cent of the middle age group (55-64) and 51 per cent of the youngest age group (under 55 years). Reasons were suggested in the grandparents' comments: younger grandparents could not attend support groups due to work commitments, and they were generally at a different life-course stage and thus felt different from their older peers:

As a 'young' grandparent I find it hard to relate to the older grandparents and find that although I can relate to their experiences in terms of grief and loss, frustration with our children, navigating the systems, frustration with having statutory agencies invading our lives ... that to sit with other grands does nothing but make me sit in my sorrow. I need to get on with my life.

Cannot attend support groups as I work full-time. Even if they were at nights, I would be too tired and also would have to pay for child care, which is already a burden. I cannot afford to take time off work to attend.

Carer support groups meet during working hours so are not accessible to me.

Another support service—programs for teenagers—was more relevant to the older grandparents than the younger ones. This may be due to the fact that older grandparents are more likely to have older grandchildren. Of the oldest age group (65 years plus), 43 per cent said they did not receive support programs for teenagers, but they would be helpful. Of the middle age group (55-64), 42 per cent agreed, but only 15 per cent of the youngest grandparents (aged under 55) agreed.

Insufficient or inappropriate service provision is a salient issue for grandparent-headed families.

I don't have the same energy levels as I used to have and facing constant challenges can be demanding physically, intellectually and emotionally. Sometimes you just want to call time out!

I love my grandson, but the system is absolutely terrible. I am always fighting to get any reimbursements, have not had respite for four and a half years.... I feel like a second-rate citizen, where once I was confident and happy.

In summary, among support and information services for grandparent-headed families, support groups were the most widely used by the survey sample. Almost two-thirds of grandparents belonged to support groups, and many commented on how valuable the groups had been in increasing their strength, wellbeing and social connections. The next most common support services, which were available to around 30 to 40 per cent of survey families, were child care/out of school hours care, caseworker support and respite.

At the same time, there were considerable unmet support needs. More than half of the grandparents in the survey would appreciate information on help with schoolwork and a resource guide. Legal assistance and respite were also needed by many, followed by programs for teenagers and assistance in dealing with the children's parents.

The grandparents' comments point to factors that are central to improving support for grandparents: easily accessible and accurate information on available services and entitlements; individualised and flexible supports; and more provision of certain types of support, especially legal assistance, help with schoolwork, caseworker support and respite.

The age of grandparents affected their particular support needs to some extent. Many younger grandparents found support groups unsuitable, as they met during working hours and most members were older and at a different life-course stage. Older grandparent expressed more need than younger respondents for support in dealing with teenagers. These findings indicate the importance of age-appropriate,

tailored services, available according to other demands, both employment and care, on grandparents' time and according to their child rearing circumstances.

6.12 Grandparent commitment and resilience

Much of this report has focussed on the challenges that grandparents face in raising their grandchildren. Many grandparents in the survey struggle in several domains to raise their grandchildren—finances, legal issues, health, family relationships and housing. It is clear that many grandparent-headed families need more support from friends, communities and authorities. However, they do not give up, even under extremely difficult circumstances: the grandparents in the survey, and many others, continue to raise their grandchildren and to provide them with a stable, loving home.

This is in large part due to their abundant resilience, humour and devotion to their grandchildren. Many grandparents commented on the joy that their grandchildren brought them, how they had enriched their lives, the rewards that came with care-giving and helping their grandchildren to become happy, responsible adults. Below are some quotes that reflect the rewards of grandparent care, and the commitment and positive spirit that grandparents bring to the task:

Every morning he comes out and says to me 'Good morning Nanny Girl, I love you'. That is my reward, what more could you want other than keep them safe!!

We are so happy and blessed in our role as grandparents and carers. This is a joy words cannot fully express, more heartfelt, to be doing good in their lives. We are much richer for having them in our lives, even with the challenges that come with it, I wouldn't change a thing.

Raising him has made us all reflect on our own lifestyles, choices and what we really value ... I love them, they love me.

We are not sorry we took them on, even though there have been many challenges. We are in fact fiercely protective of them. They bring us great joy and great exhaustion. We hope that by us being good role models they will grow up to make the right choices in life.

You do not get rich raising your grandchildren, you do not get fame ... I did not choose to do this, but I would never walk away from the grandchildren that I love, regardless of how many times I have to appear in court rooms and whatever is handed to me.

I love my granddaughter with a passion and I will defend her from irresponsible people, be they parent or whomever. I'm in this for as long as my old body and mind will allow, and I only hope that it will be long enough

for me to see her well into her teens, a responsible adult and positive member of the human race.

I go to the sports carnivals. I'm red faction one school, blue the other. So I tint my hair ½ red ½ blue and enter the grandparents' race. I don't win but it's wonderful when the kids yell from the sidelines 'Run faster, Nana.' Little did they know I was going the fastest I could go (wobbling bits everywhere). But I loved the look on their little faces.

Please excuse my change of pen! When re-checking the survey and adding to it I grabbed the wrong pen. You may smile at such a silly thing after reading this survey—it is smiles that keep me going.

Oops! I just fell of my soap box... [signed], SuperNan.

6.13 Conclusion

Within the limitations of the sample, this survey provides a comprehensive picture of the experiences and circumstances of grandparents raising their grandchildren in Australia. With 335 participating grandparents from around the country, it is the largest survey of its kind to date. Analysis of the rich data provided by the grandparents, both quantitative and qualitative, adds significantly to the evidence base. Previous, more limited studies have consistently described the social and economic disadvantage experienced by many grandparent-headed families. This study shows that such findings apply on a national scale and to grandparents from diverse backgrounds, providing evidence of considerable socio-economic disadvantage. For the purpose of policy development, the findings of this survey present important data on grandparents' income, housing and access to payments and services, changes to employment, health, and social/friendship networks. An age-specific analysis demonstrates that raising grandchildren presents different challenges and requires different types of support and services depending on the age group and life-course stage of the grandparent. Overall, this survey shows how strongly and in what ways raising grandchildren impact on grandparents' lives, and it emphasises where policy changes and improved service provision could make a difference to the lives of grandparents and the grandchildren for whom they care.

Demographically and with regard to life circumstances, the survey sample was diverse. Grandparents came from around the country and a range of geographic locations (major city, regional and remote), varied widely in age and educational background and in their socio-demographic circumstances, such as housing, employment, income, household size, family circumstances and relationships, health, and legal arrangements for raising grandchildren. The sample's limitations were twofold. Men were under-represented among the survey respondents, as were grandparents from Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The findings have to be read with these caveats in mind.

The survey provides evidence of how raising grandchildren impacts on grandparents' lives. Insufficient income to meet the additional needs of caring for their grandchildren was a major issue for many families and contributed to strain in other areas of life such as housing and health. The majority of participants relied on government payments such as income support allowances and age pension. The majority of grandparents stated that with respect to their financial circumstances, they were just getting by, while a further smaller proportion described themselves as poor or very poor. This was despite the fact that most (but not all) families received government assistance for raising their grandchildren, either from state/territory or Commonwealth governments (and in some cases from both). This suggests that support payments are by and large not perceived as adequate to help grandparents with the additional costs of raising their grandchildren. Also, more than one-third of respondents stated they had difficulty accessing government financial assistance, often due to administrative hurdles, perceived disrespect from staff, lack of information and complexity of intra-familial relationships.

Many families had to raise additional funds to pay for the grandchildren's needs, and also sometimes for costly legal battles to gain custody. Grandparents sold investments or even their own home, or they drew down their savings.

In addition, financial difficulties prompted many grandparents to increase their employment commitments—working more hours, taking on other jobs or coming out of retirement—with impacts on physical and mental wellbeing. Others had to reduce or give up employment due to childrearing responsibilities, which further compounded their financial difficulties, and which had long-term impacts on career and income prospects and on retirement savings. In total, almost two-thirds of grandparents in the survey had to make changes to their employment because they took on care for their grandchildren.

The age distribution of the grandchildren being cared for was relatively young. The majority were of primary school age or younger, which meant grandparents would possibly care for them for many years to come. This included providing appropriate accommodation for the grandchildren, often necessitating changes to housing. More than half of survey participants modified their existing housing or moved, often causing significant expense and upheaval. Close to 20 per cent of families wanted to change their housing but were not able to, usually due to financial constraints, and thus continued living in what they saw as unsuitable accommodation.

Health problems were widespread among the grandchildren of the survey respondents, but many respondents indicated that they were prevented by health care costs from accessing the health services for their grandchildren which were required. Almost half of the grandparents reported that they themselves had a long-term illness or disability, and over 60 per cent stated that their health had

deteriorated since taking on responsibility for raising their grandchildren. More than 50 per cent of survey respondents said that at least one of their grandchildren had physical problems, and more than 80 per cent said that their grandchildren had emotional or behavioural problems. Grandchildren's health problems were often described as the result of abuse and abandonment by the parents. Many grandparent-headed families experienced a clustering of health conditions, with a grandchild that had both physical and emotional/behavioural issues, or where several grandchildren in the family had health problems, or where both grandparent and grandchild had health problems.

The high care needs of many grandchildren, as well as general parenting responsibilities, had constraining effects on grandparents' social lives and relationships with other family members and friends. Social isolation was a strong theme. More than half of survey participants observed that their friendships and community participation had deteriorated, due to the time commitment required and the physical and emotional demands of raising their grandchildren.

Faced with difficulties in various aspects of their lives, many grandparents turned to support groups. Almost two-thirds of the sample belonged to support groups, and many commented on how valuable these groups had been in increasing their strength, wellbeing and social connections. Support types that grandparents needed but in many cases could not access were help with schoolwork, programs for teenagers, legal assistance, respite, and assistance in dealing with the children's parents. Generally, grandparents asked for easily accessible and accurate information on available services and entitlements; and for individualised and flexible supports.

Age-specific analysis of the survey data showed that raising grandchildren impacted differently on grandparents at different ages and life-course stages, and that they had different experiences and support needs. The youngest group of grandparents (under 55 years) were more likely to have higher incomes than the older grandparents, much more likely to hold a job, and more likely to be able to make changes to their housing arrangements when grandchildren arrived. However, they were also more likely to reduce their employment due to raising grandchildren, which made them concerned about loss of income, career prospects and superannuation. While the youngest grandparents were generally healthier than older groups, they also experienced more social isolation through a loss of friendships and community participation, largely because of their childrearing responsibilities and being out of step with their age peers. Grandparent support groups were unsuitable for younger grandparents, due to work commitments and differences in life-course stage.

In contrast, the oldest grandparent group in the survey (65 years plus) used support groups extensively and found them invaluable for increasing their social

connections and ability to cope. More often than younger grandparents, they lacked support in dealing with teenage grandchildren. Financially, older grandparents were significantly worse off than the younger groups. Generally they had lower incomes and often relied on government benefits, and self-funded retirees struggled to meet their financial obligations. Hence many older grandparents felt compelled to work longer or come out of retirement.

It appears from the survey findings that one of the most significant policy considerations to help grandparents raise their grandchildren would be better access to adequate financial support. Financial stress is a key issue that impacts on various areas of family life, particularly housing, health, employment and community participation. In addition, the survey findings indicate that many grandparents require better access to clear and comprehensive information about their entitlements and about available services, and that they be offered assistance with accessing them. Government agencies and support organisations in the non-government sector can play a key role.

7 'My Family is my Mansion': Qualitative Interviews with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander grandparents

Saul Flaxman

7.1 Introduction

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander⁷ children are over-represented in all areas of the child protection system, including the out-of-home care system. In 2011 the rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in out-of-home care was 51.7 per 1,000 children, 10 times the rate for non-Indigenous children (AIHW, 2012: 35). Even taking into account the higher proportion of children and young people in the Indigenous population (AIHW, 2009), Indigenous children are still significantly more likely to be in out-of-home care than non-Indigenous children (Higgins et al., 2005).⁸

As noted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2012: 14), the reasons for the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system are complex. They include: the legacy of past policies of forced removal; intergenerational effects of previous separations from family and culture; poor socioeconomic status and perceptions arising from cultural differences in child-rearing practices (AIHW, 2012: 14).

Grandparent care of grandchildren, as a major component of out-of-home kinship care, is of vital significance in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities. Estimates from the 2006 Census show that Indigenous children represent one-third (32 per cent) of all children living with grandparents (ABS, 2006c: 78). Estimates from the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australian survey are even higher, suggesting that 43 per cent of children living with grandparents are Indigenous (Brandon, 2004: 185).⁹

7 The authors acknowledge the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, who have different languages, cultures, histories and perspectives. For ease of reference, this report refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples collectively as Indigenous people except where specific people/organisations use the term 'Aboriginal'.

8 There are even higher ratios of Indigenous to non-Indigenous children in out-of-home care in four jurisdictions – South Australia, the ACT, NSW and Victoria (AIHW, 2011).

9 A number of academics and policy makers have suggested that the high proportion of Indigenous children in out-of-home care is linked to intergenerational cycles of poverty, violence and drug and alcohol misuse which increase the risk of child abuse and neglect (Berlyn & Bromfield 2009; VACCA, 2008). Bringing them Home (HREOC, 2007) noted past policies of forced removal of some Indigenous children from their families, and the intergenerational effects of these separations combined with poor socioeconomic status

The use of kinship care, such as grandparent care, has particular relevance for Indigenous children. The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle (ACPP) in place in all States and Territories, requires that all Indigenous children, where possible, be placed with members of the child's extended family or Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community (Libesman, 2004). Accordingly, kinship care is now the primary form of out-of-home placement for Indigenous children nationally, after having been adopted by all jurisdictions in either legislation or policy (Smyth and Eardley, 2008; also see Section 3.10 for further details).

Atkinson and Swain (1999) note that Indigenous Australians have a cultural commitment to community and there is some evidence that Indigenous people are also relatively more willing to care for children removed from their parents than other Australians (South Australian Department of Communities and Families, 2004, cited in Higgins, Bromfield and Richardson, 2005).

This Section of the Report summarises the findings from semi-structured, in-depth interviews with Indigenous grandparents who are raising their grandchildren in three jurisdictions: New South Wales, South Australia and the Northern Territory. The interviews provide an opportunity to hear the voices of this often silent group and explore a number of issues, including the pathways into and out of grandparent care; income; financial support; health; and access to support services and information. The interviews also explore Indigenous grandparents' care practices and the role of culture, identity and kinship in their lives.

7.2 Methodology

Given the high proportion of Indigenous grandparents who are raising their grandchildren (ABS, 2006c; Brandon, 2004) and the fact that Indigenous grandparent care is a significantly under-researched field (Cashmore and Ainsworth, 2004), the researchers considered it important to include in the study a focus on Indigenous grandparent carers to better understand their circumstances and needs, and to provide a framework for hearing the voices of this often silent group.

As discussed in Section 6, the researchers aimed to make the survey of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren as appropriate and accessible for Indigenous grandparents as possible. A number of Indigenous academics, practitioners and grandparents provided guidance about the survey and other aspects of the research—one of the Chief Investigators on the project, Associate Professor Sue Green, is a member of the Wiradjuri Nation and the survey reference group included two Indigenous grandparents.

and cultural differences in child-rearing practices are the primary reasons for the high rate of out-of-home care in Indigenous communities (AIHW, 2011).

Notwithstanding these measures, it was always intended that, in addition to encouraging the participation of Indigenous grandparents in the survey, semi-structured interviews would be the primary method of collecting data from Indigenous grandparents. This was done because some researchers have argued that qualitative methods may be more appropriate for conducting research with Indigenous participants and are likely to yield richer and more valid data compared with self-administered survey instruments (Parker and Lamont, 2010; Tchachos and Vallance, 2004).¹⁰

7.2.1 Method and sample

The SPRC research team contracted Colmar Brunton Research, an independent market research agency with experience and expertise in research with Indigenous communities, to carry out interviews with Indigenous grandparents in six locations in NSW, South Australia and the Northern Territory. In-depth interviews were chosen to allow the research team to engage with Indigenous grandparents and identify issues and insights that would not have been captured by the survey.

Participants were recruited with the assistance of government and non-government agencies, including the project's Partner Organisations, family support services and health services. Most of the interviewers were Indigenous, or had close links to Indigenous communities. Interviews were held in urban, regional and remote areas and included participants who were both formal and informal grandparent carers. Indigenous researchers and community workers were consulted when planning the interviews to ensure that the methods and interview questions were sensitive to the kinship and cultural practices and other circumstances of Indigenous participants. A semi-structured format was used to allow interviewers to follow the flow of conversations, while ensuring that all relevant topics were discussed.

Five interviewers conducted interviews in the three jurisdictions. The format and structure of the interviews varied depending on individual interviewers and participants. Interview topics included the formal or informal status of grandparent care arrangements; family composition and family history; the pathways into and out of grandparent care and the duration of care; grandparents' care practices and

¹⁰ As discussed in Section 6, 16 survey respondents (4.8 per cent of all respondents) identified as Aboriginal and no survey respondents identified as being of Torres Strait Islander origin or both. The number of Aboriginal survey respondents was too small for statistical comparison with non-Aboriginal respondents. As discussed, content analysis of the Aboriginal grandparents' responses showed little difference to the full sample regarding demographics, socio-economic circumstances and experiences in raising their grandchildren and Indigenous grandparents' written comments did not reveal any differences related to their indigeneity.

their views about the needs of their grandchildren; labour force and employment status, income level and principal income sources; housing status and location of the grandparent's family residence; cultural and linguistic background of grandparent-headed families; health, well-being and disability status of grandparents, parents and children; availability and strength of informal social networks; access to and usage of family and children's services; eligibility for receipt of family support payments and carer allowances; grandparents' views about the importance of kinship and cultural continuity for themselves and their grandchildren; and grandparents' perceptions about the circumstances in which their grandchildren might be able to return to live with their birth parents (Appendix B).

Twenty interviews were conducted with Indigenous grandparents in New South Wales, South Australia and the Northern Territory between November 2010 and January 2011 (Table 7.1). Audio recordings were made with the participants' permission to ensure the accuracy of information gathered and all interviews were then transcribed for analysis (Bryman, 2004). Qualitative data derived from interviews with grandparents living in the Northern Territory is particularly important as very little published research has been conducted with grandparents caring for their grandchildren in this jurisdiction and no-one from the Northern Territory participated in our survey.

Table 7-1: State or Territory of residence of Indigenous grandparents

	N
New South Wales	6
South Australia	7
Northern Territory	7
Total	20

7.2.2 Gender

Of the 20 grandparents who took part in interviews, 19 were female. Although grandfathers may have been slightly under-represented among the participants, the high proportion of grandmothers reflects the findings of the analysis of Census 2006 data in section 4, the gender composition of our own survey, and previous studies in Australia and overseas that have found that the majority of grandparent carers are women (e.g. Yardley, Mason and Watson, 2009; Kelley et al., 2000; Wellard, 2010).

7.2.3 Age

The majority of grandparents (n=11) did not disclose their age in the interviews. Of the nine grandparents who did supply their age, two were aged 45-54 years, four were aged 55-64 years, and three were aged 65 years and over.

7.2.4 Language

The majority of respondents reported speaking one or more Indigenous languages in addition to Aboriginal English and/or Standard Australian English. Traditional languages formed an important part of many Indigenous participants' cultural identities and many grandparents, particularly those living in South Australia and the Northern Territory, reported that their grandchildren spoke an Indigenous language as their first language and that they and their grandchildren spoke several Indigenous languages in addition to Aboriginal English and/or Standard Australian English.

7.2.5 Number and ages of grandchildren

Six of the grandparents who took part in interviews had one grandchild in their care, eight cared for two grandchildren, three for three grandchildren and two for four grandchildren. The ages of grandchildren being cared for varied considerably and ranged from infants aged 1-3 years to those aged 17 years and over.

7.3 Analysis

Two SPRC researchers thematically coded interview data using a pre-determined coding framework and analysed data using QSR NVivo qualitative analysis software (QSR International, 2008). A small number of additional codes were created after initial review of interview transcripts (Lewins and Silver, 2007). To ensure consistency, five of the interview transcripts were randomly selected to be double-coded (coded independently by two researchers). Subsequent analysis found a high degree of agreement between individual researcher's coding choices.

The results presented in this report represent the themes which occurred most commonly. In keeping with feminist and Indigenist methodologies (Battiste, 2000; Beverley, 2000; LeCompte, 1993; Smith, 1999, 2005; The Latina Feminist Group,

2001), the researchers have chosen to include only limited analysis and interpretation and, as far as possible, to let the Indigenous grandparents speak for themselves.¹¹

7.4 Limitations

The sample of grandparents who took part in interviews was necessarily small. We did not systematically collect data on the demographic characteristics of the grandparents participating in interviews or their grandchildren, as the risks to interview quality of asking direct questions in these areas were felt to outweigh any possible benefits. It is therefore not possible to generalise these findings to the broader population of Indigenous grandparents who are raising their grandchildren, and we do not know the extent to which the characteristics of the sample represent this broader population.

However, the grandparents who took part in interviews had a wide range of life circumstances and family experiences and illustrate a diversity of experiences of grandparent care by Indigenous Australians. This was the first Australian study that conducted in-depth interviews with Indigenous grandparent carers in more than one location and the findings give an important insight into the circumstances, needs and well-being of the grandparents and their grandchildren.¹²

Some fieldworkers noted inconsistencies in the grandparents' own understandings and explanations of their circumstances and the interviewers' observations and so some degree of caution should be used in interpreting these data. One fieldworker conducted interviews with two members of the same family and received conflicting accounts about the family's health and well-being. While one family member reported that one of their grandchildren had been seriously ill and was recovering from an operation at the time of interview, another grandparent in the same family stated emphatically that the children were healthy. As the interviewer notes, it is unlikely that the second respondent was intentionally withholding the truth but that their statements are likely to be a form of 'wishful thinking', and reflect a different

¹¹ Feminist and Indigenist scholars highlight the important role that research can have in providing a framework for listening to the voices of the silenced (LeCompte, 1993; Smith, 1999, 2005) and enabling individuals and communities to tell their stories and give *testimano* to their challenges and struggles (Battiste, 2000; Beverley, 2000; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

¹² Higgins, et al.'s (2005) investigation into the out-of-home care for Indigenous young people carers incorporated focus groups with Indigenous residential carers, foster carers and kinship carers, including grandparents in two Australian jurisdictions (Queensland and Western Australia).

worldview and way of dealing with and describing reality which may differ from typical Western approaches to health and wellbeing.

7.5 Households and their composition

7.5.1 Housing arrangements

As described in Section 6 of this report, housing arrangements are a key factor in providing a stable and suitable living environment for a child.

Indigenous grandparents reported a variety of housing and residential arrangements, reflecting the significant cultural, economic and social diversity within the Indigenous population. Indigenous households (that is households containing one or more Indigenous members) are often large, compositionally complex and have 'porous social boundaries' (Daly and Smith, 1999: v). Researchers have referred to the 'social fluidity' of many Indigenous households (Smith, 2000: 13) and a number of grandparents who participated in interviews reported living in 'fluid' households in which family members, including the grandchildren they cared for, moved between their own household and those of other family or community members:

Sometimes he [grandson] sleeps with us, sometimes we take him to [another town], or [another town] or [another town]... It's in and out, in and out... It doesn't matter for a grandmother, you know. Aboriginal, *yapa* grandmother isn't... [it] doesn't matter what months or year those kids, those grandchildren are staying with you.... They come and go. [Grandparent 16, NT]

We've got a lot of nieces and nephews that come and go... It just varies. We have a variable household. We say we aren't going to do it [raise more grandchildren and nieces and nephews], but we just get roped in. Those five kids, we were practically raising them for a good three years... If they weren't sleeping here, they were here on the weekends, [had] all their meals. Everything they did, they did it all here. They would drift between the two houses. [Grandparent 19, NSW]

I have extended children in my care, a family of four... I have one great-grandnephew who lives with me. No, make that two! Different mothers, but mothers and fathers that don't mind that they live with me... [They aren't biologically related to me but] they are related to my children [and my ex-husband]... I have been an aunty to them most of their lives. They know me as an aunty. [Grandparent 2, SA]

While six of the 20 participants cared for one grandchild and eight had two grandchildren in their care, several participants had large numbers of people living in their households and reported having previously raised other grandchildren or

relatives. A grandmother raising a granddaughter and a great-grandson at the time of interview reported that she had 'well over 100 grandchildren and great-grandchildren' and had been involved in raising many of them over the years.

Participants highlighted the importance of keeping children together and ensuring that siblings were not split up even if there were many of them:

When I took these children in, I took all four of them because if I didn't, they would be separated, split up and it has always been my thing—that if you take a child, you take the whole family in. Not one, you don't split them up. And that has happened a lot—the kids are split up because they just can't place them in one household. People are only prepared to take one or two, not four or five. When I was fostering, I always maintained if there was a group of children who came into care, I didn't want them separated; I wanted them all together... I think it is comfortable for all the children involved. If you don't split them up they are quite happy to settle in with you. [Grandparent 2, SA]

Another grandmother highlighted the importance of keeping sibling groups together and teaching children about their family and cultural history so as to avoid culturally unsafe relationships:

One of the grandchildren had seven children taken off her ... If those children weren't kept together by their mother, those children would be one over there, two over there, three over there, all cuddling and kissing behind the bushes. They won't know, they don't follow the things to keep them safe. When kids get introduced to us, we ask 'Who is your nanna?'. [Grandparent 6, SA]

Some Indigenous people, particularly those living in remote areas, have highly dynamic and mobile living arrangements (Morphy, 2007), and some Indigenous grandparents who took part in interviews described transitory residential patterns. One grandmother believed that these residential patterns had a positive impact on her grandchildren as they exposed them to new people and diverse experiences:

We've been moving back out bush and there's been a lot of stops along the way...I see it like it's a Gypsy life and it hasn't done [granddaughter] any harm so far... It makes her sociable and she speaks with confidence. She's used to meeting new people, yeah, and she's open to new things and new experiences. [Grandparent 10, NT]

However, the same grandmother was concerned that a lack of residential stability could be detrimental to her granddaughter in the long term:

[Moving has been] really positive but sometimes I worry, you know, I say, 'Oh, maybe I shouldn't be moving around too much and [should] stay in one

place'. But [now] I am going to stay at [area that currently living in], I promise. [Grandparent 10, NT]

In contrast to these transitory and 'fluid' residential patterns, some Indigenous grandparents, particularly those in urban areas, reported living in very stable arrangements. Some reported having long-term tenure in large homes with 'plenty of space for children to play' [Grandparent 18, NSW].

Several grandparents contrasted the consistency and stability of their own residences with the homes in which they grandchildren had previously lived with their parents. One grandmother highlighted the importance of stability in children's lives:

They are hungering for that [security and stability]. They are hungering to become normal, hungering to become normal. They don't know what normal is, you know... To me the idea [of normal] is stability, saying every day, 'stability, repetition, no upsets, routine'... The poor little fellas! When they come home or go to a place where there is stability, they want to stay because they like it there. They never had so much to eat. They want to eat everything at once. Fruit: they want it all. Bring out a lolly: they want the whole packet. They want to eat, eat, eat, and those are the ones you know wasn't looked after properly in their own homes. [Grandparent 4, SA]

7.5.2 Household composition

The composition of the households of grandparents who took part in interviews reflected the literature and our survey findings. Many grandparents reported that there were other people living in their households beside their grandchildren. Few of the Indigenous grandparents who took part in interviews reported living with the middle generation (children of the grandparents) and other household members more commonly included participants' partners or other relatives such as great-grandchildren, nieces, nephews, aunts and uncles.

Yeo (2003) argues that in Indigenous communities, children are frequently raised by women who are not their biological mothers (see also Ralph, 1998). In the Indigenous cultural definition, 'grandchildren' can include biological grandchildren as well as second or third cousins, nieces, nephews or great-nieces/nephews. For this reason, participants who were caring for nieces, nephews, great-nieces/nephews or great-grandchildren were not excluded in our sample, although it should be noted that all but one participant in our sample were caring for children who were their biological grandchildren. That said, a number of participants reported complex family relationships and caring for other children who they considered to be their grandchildren despite the fact that some were not their biological grandchildren in the strict Eurocentric genealogical sense. It should also be noted that in Aboriginal English, the terms 'granny' or 'grannies' refer to

grandchildren in contrast to Standard Australian English, where these terms generally refer to grandparents (Kaldor and Malcolm, 1991; Macquarie Dictionary Online, 2011).

As previously noted, Indigenous Australians have a strong cultural commitment to community (Atkinson and Swain, 1999) and may be relatively more willing to care for children removed from their parents than other Australians (South Australian Department of Communities and Families, 2004, cited in Higgins et al., 2005). Participants noted this strong commitment to family and community:

Even my cousins' and sisters' grandchildren, I love them. We all love our grandchildren. And when they get hurt – ah – we're always there running to them. [Grandparent 12, NT]

When asked why she was prepared to take on caring responsibilities for so many children in her extended family, one grandmother replied:

I dunno, you just do it. We [my partner and I] have been taking people in for 24 years. We even had our brother living with us. We had joint custody of his kids when he was in gaol. I dunno, we just do it. How can you not? Like when [relatives] passed off two girls to us [and said] 'they'll only be here for a couple of weeks'. Twelve months later... Like I needed another two! [Grandparent 19, NSW]

Similarly, another grandmother talked about caring for her grandchildren regardless of the financial implications:

The Welfare came along with this one kind piece of paper [and asked me to care for my grandchildren]... [I agreed] because I love my grandchildren. I'm not just having them for their money [welfare payments associated with caring for them]. No, I love my grannies! ... I just grow 'em up myself for me, not to help me. [Grandparent 11, NT]

Few participants reported living with the middle generation (children of the grandparents) and most reported that it was unlikely that grandchildren would return to their parents' care. The following comment was typical:

I have them [my grandchildren] until they are 18 now. I don't think they will want to move out then. I will have to kick them out the door. [They] love their Nanna too much! [Grandparent 20, NSW]

7.6 The grandchildren and their parents

7.6.1 Reasons for raising the grandchildren

As in the survey, the grandchildren of Indigenous grandparents who took part in interviews came to live with their grandparents for a variety of reasons. Consistent with local and international literature (e.g. Baldock, 2007; Worrall, 2009; Wellard, 2010; Pruchno, 1999) and with the findings of our survey, interview participants were most commonly caring for their grandchildren because of drug or alcohol misuse by the parents and other socio-emotional and financial problems.

A small number of participants reported assuming responsibility for their grandchildren because of sexual abuse and the parent's mental illness. One grandmother came to raise her granddaughter because she had a disability and her parents felt inadequately equipped to raise her themselves.

In another case, a grandmother reported that she was raising her grandchild because of child abandonment. When asked why her grandchildren had come into her care, she replied simply:

Because I wanted them. The mother... ran amok... you know, used to run away with all her friends. [Grandparent 11, NT]

Many Indigenous grandparents who took part in interviews were raising grandchildren because they had previously been abused, neglected or witness to family violence. Two participants reported that parents' were physically or practically unable to care for the child because of imprisonment. Two reported cases of physical of abuse of grandchildren and a number of grandparents reported removing children for their own protection:

There was too much drinking [in the household in which her grandchildren were living]. I don't want [them] to go to [place] – there's too much fighting there. I want to protect my grandkids. I don't want them to grow up with violence. [Grandson] don't like violence. He starts running off – that's what he does. He gets shaky and wants to take off. [Grandparent 16, NSW]

In some cases, grandparents reported multiple forms of abuse and neglect in the households in which their grandchildren previously were living:

The other children – there was sexual abuse happening with the older one at the time and the mother and [her] boyfriend were alcoholics. They were homeless – they were living from place to place, the parents, but the children were with them. They were dragged around all over the place. When they [the parents] found out about the sexual assault, they attacked the perpetrator, and the police stepped in, then the Welfare stepped in. When

they took the children from the mother and [her] boyfriend, we moved them.
[Grandparent 2, SA]

Several grandparents attributed the breakdown of Indigenous family structures to alcohol and drugs and highlighted the traumatic effect which experiencing neglect and abuse and witnessing family violence has had on their grandchildren:

Drugs is the problem, drugs and alcohol. The family structure is broken down because the borrowing of the money is because they are spending it on the wrong things. It becomes a vicious circle. [Grandparent 6, SA]

Imagine, here is a little girl of three who wakes up with her mummy and daddy and little sister there. At the end of the day, her little sister gets taken off in an ambulance and never comes back. Then, after a while, Mummy is out all the time and [she] is left with Nanna. He [her father] got charged with grievous bodily harm and sent to prison, so, at three years old, she lost her mummy, daddy and sister. So that trauma has affected her right badly and all her issues are around separations. I was only thinking about it this morning.

One grandmother, whose granddaughter had previously been placed with non-kin foster carers, only assumed care for her through a lucky coincidence:

I was at work one day and someone... asked for me and told me they have [granddaughter] and was I prepared to take her... It just happened. They were taking her from one foster place to another foster place and she happened to go past where I work and told the Welfare man, 'That's where my Nanna works', otherwise they wouldn't have known of me. [Grandparent 1, SA]

7.6.2 Legal status

In contrast to grandparents who participated in the survey, where the majority of grandparents reported having a formal arrangement for at least one of the grandchildren they were raising, Indigenous grandparents who took part in interviews were evenly divided between those who had formal kin care agreements in place and those who cared for their grandchildren under an informal, family arrangement. Eight grandparents identified as having formal kin care agreements, eight identified as caring for their grandchildren under informal arrangements, while the legal status of the grandparent care performed by four grandparents was unclear as this either could not be determined from the interview transcript or these grandparents had different arrangements for individual grandchildren (Table 7-2).

Table 7-2: Legal arrangement for at least one of the grandchildren

	N
Formal arrangement ^a	8
Informal arrangement	8
Unclear ^b	4
Total	20

^a Through the Family Court, Federal Magistrates Court or State child protection agency.

^b Could not be determined from interview transcript or different arrangements for individual grandchildren.

Like survey respondents, interview participants reported variations within their own families, with some having formal arrangements for some of their grandchildren and raising additional grandchildren under informal arrangements.

The circumstances leading up to informal care arrangements varied widely. Many grandparents preferred to raise grandchildren under informal arrangements because of the perceived difficulties of dealing with the social protection judicial system:

I haven't had anything to do with the court system. Some nieces have, and it is very stressful... I think the system does let them down because if they are allowed to get the core family back together it is less stressful for them and less stressful for them to relapse into what they were doing when they were in to get the kids taken. Maybe, I don't know but it seems feasible to me. [Grandparent 15, NSW]

Others began caring for their grandchildren at the parent's or grandchild's request:

They [the parents] brought [grandson] home and he stayed and I kept him, and didn't send him back, and I also went to court and have custody of that little boy because of the drug abuse that the mother and father were going through at the time, they were living here, there and everywhere. They had accommodation, but it was very unstable. [Grandparent 2, SA]

[It's] just [an informal] family [arrangement]. This one [grandchild] actually rang up and asked if she [could] come down and live with us. We said we would talk about it first, [that I was] not going to say yes until I find out why, so we sat down with the mum and told them we wanted total control about her when she was here, and so it's working out okay. [Grandparent 19, NSW]

Others caring for their grandchildren under informal arrangements reported removing them from circumstances of abuse and neglect:

I went down there [to where my grandson was living] and I took him. I never asked – I just walked in and grabbed his stuff and just took him. He was about seven. About seven, I think he was.

I dared her [his mother] to do anything about it because I was prepared to take it all the way to the courts if necessary because they know in the long run I would have him, have the custody, but didn't want to go through that rigmarole.

Poignantly, one grandfather in a remote area of the NT noted:

I just got him [my grandson] because I was worried about him. [Grandparent 8, NT]

Several grandparents reported being reluctant to contact child protection authorities and expressed strong reservations about child protection. This reflects previous research and policy literature which has found that Indigenous communities are often suspicious of child welfare authorities because of past policies of forced removal of some Indigenous children from their families, communities and country (HREOC, 1997; Jenkins and Seith, 2004). However, some Indigenous grandparents preferred the stability of formal legal custody in order to guarantee that their grandchildren would remain in their care or sought legal custody in order to move freely between States with their grandchildren:

No, I put both [grandchild] and [grandchild] under two orders – Ministerial orders... [There's been] a lot of nastiness and court cases, and the blame game, and [the mother] was always trying to kidnap [grandchild]. Yes, the Ministerial [order] is until they are 18 and you can't change it unless you go to court so that way I knew nobody would be able to take them. [Grandparent 6, SA]

The mother of the children wanted these kids to be educated down with us [in NSW] and they come from the NT down to NSW. And, um, because there was lots of issues regarding the children in terms of staying up in the NT, we couldn't do that so we took some of the family members to court. And we were able to get the children, parental responsibility, for the children which included grandparents' responsibility through the courts in the NT, that's the reason why. [Grandparent 17, NSW]

7.6.3 Contact arrangements with the parents

Many interview participants lamented the fact that their grandchildren had little or no contact with their parents, even if they were still alive:

For these kids to see more of their mother – that's the only thing I am concerned about. To talk to her on the phone is one thing, but they need to

see her especially if she is locked up [in prison]. She needs the bonding with the kids. It's too far to go [to the prison] – I can't do it. An hour on the train, and don't know how far from the station. I dunno – it's daunting! I don't know the area, and especially with these two [grandchildren]... [Grandparent 16, NSW]

Several participants attributed behavioural and learning difficulties in grandchildren to trauma and neglect they had experienced while under their parent's care and some believed that their grandchildren's behaviour deteriorated after contact with their parents:

When they stopped seeing their parents, their behaviour picked up. It was the visits with their parents which pulled their behaviour back down, but when they got back and were home all the time, their behaviour picked up. Their bad behaviour was only when they were with their parents. [Grandparent 2, SA]

However, some grandparents expressed guilt and regret at speaking negatively of the grandchildren's parents in their presence. One grandmother who noted that her four-year-old grandson was extremely traumatised because of his father's imprisonment reported the following:

[Picking up a possession that belonged to his father, my grandson] said, 'That was my daddy's. He's nasty, my daddy'. I didn't pursue the conversation, but I was thinking 'I don't want him to hear the s**t that comes out of my mouth because monkey, see monkey do', so I am trying to stop this stuff [bad-mouthing his father] so that he's not involved and doesn't end up like his daddy. [Grandparent 6, SA]

7.7 Income and financial support

7.7.1 Financial assistance

Although most interview participants were aware that they were entitled to income support and family payments associated with raising their grandchildren and many were receiving these payments, at least three participants were not receiving payments to which they may be entitled. One was unaware that financial assistance was available and the other two believed that the application process was too daunting and was not worth the hassle.

Other grandparents who had applied for financial assistance commented on the challenging nature of the application process and the inadequacy of payments to grandparents. Several struggled with what they believed were overly rigid eligibility criteria:

I'm always going to Centrelink asking for my payments. And they just tell me that I'm on carer's payment. And I'm looking after a lot of kids ... And they say, 'They're not your kids, they're not your kids... you're only caring for them'. [Grandparent 9, NT]

No, I think what [Centrelink] should be looking at is whether you have the kid there or not – you are still looking after that kid. Even if she is with Aunty So-and-So, they come back, 'Nanna, can you give me \$20 because I want to go out', and we do all that. With or without the pension, we do that. It's becoming a little bit too much nowadays because of the lifestyles they [the grandchildren] are living with their drugs and so on. [Grandparent 4, SA]

Others who tried to access Centrelink payments as a grandparent and were deemed ineligible complained that parents who had no caring responsibility were often able to access payments far more easily than informal grandparent carers. They complained that Centrelink workers do not always adequately explain eligibility criteria and some of the grandparents interviewed showed in their responses that they were unaware of existing payments to which they might be entitled, or felt that their claim had been rejected.

I went to Centrelink and said I knew welfare had a policy [for grandparents who care for their grandchildren] and thought I might be able to get some money to help to raise the child but, 'Sorry, you don't come under the category'. But daddy can come off the street and get the money straight away, but there is nothing for grandies to raise children. Nothing! [Grandparent 6, SA]

They don't explain it properly. They say, 'No, you're just the carer'. [Grandparent 9, NT]

Some grandparents felt that payment agencies lacked understanding of Aboriginal culture and kinship structures and failed to provide culturally appropriate services:

I guess Centrelink, the people down here, do not understand blackfella culture and the blackfella way and kinship and all that sort of stuff. They knew nothing, nothing about, you know, what was happening with the Federal Government's Intervention program up there [in the NT], they knew nothing. Down here [in NSW], if you're going to get Abstudy, anything to do with Aboriginal affairs, there's another place you have to ring and that can be quite daunting and it's very, very difficult and hard. But in terms of these little blokes that we have, these little grandchildren, Centrelink know stuff-all, nothing. So in terms of getting support they more or less may have been speaking to a white person, because that's all they get out, that's all they regurgitate – the same information they give everybody. But no, there's no extra support or anything from Centrelink. [Grandparent 17, NSW]

In contrast, a number of grandparents were positive about their interactions with Centrelink. One grandmother who was caring for her grandchildren under an informal family arrangement was able to access emergency funding from Centrelink and was happy with the service she received:

Yeah, I went into [Centrelink] and told them that I wasn't going to get paid for my grandkids because the other grandkid wasn't in the system, wasn't registered under my name and asked for emergency money. They gave me that too and they were helpful with that. [Grandparent 16, NSW]

Another grandparent found Centrelink staff to be extremely helpful, but had experienced difficulties about her eligibility for state care allowance payments:

No, no trouble with Centrelink at all. They have been really, really good actually. [State child welfare department], yes, that has been a bit of a challenge. I knew nothing about payments for two years, and I think when we worked out how much I had missed out on it was about \$35,000. They don't tell you about it, and yeah... I found out by this grandparents group that we have running here at [area] now... So... I found out [about care payments] from them [the grandparents group], but that was two years after [I started raising my grandchild]. [Grandparent 18, NSW]

7.7.2 Financial stress

While a small number of participants said that raising their grandchildren had little or no impact on their financial situation, most reported that it had caused them considerable financial stress and hardship, confirming evidence from our survey and previous research on the impact of financial difficulties on the daily lives of grandparent families (e.g. COTA, 2003; Orb and Davey, 2005; Worrall, 2005).

One grandmother on the Disability Support Pension [Grandparent 12, Northern Territory] reported that her financial situation varied but that it was generally challenging: 'Sometime it's easy, sometime it's hard,' she noted, 'but most of the time it's a bit hard'.

Similarly, another grandparent described the difficulties of raising several grandchildren on a pension without any additional financial support:

It's up and down. I try to save. We all like our food, so I always make sure we have plenty of food most of the time. My financial difficulties are when my [grand]kids are looking for money – you try to please them. Being on a pension, you get a bit short. I was working full-time [before I began raising my grandchildren]... but I finished up resigning to stay and look after the kids because it was too hard to manage. [Grandparent 2, SA]

Indigenous families frequently have different concepts of personal property and ownership to non-Indigenous Australians (Elkin, 1969) and it is common for family members to request financial support from one another and ask recipients of Family Payment or Parenting Payment for money (Finlayson and Auld, 1999; Smith, 2000). Many Indigenous grandparents reported family members asking them for money, but this unconditional family support could go both ways and some highlighted the importance of their family's assistance in raising their grandchildren.

7.8 Changes to grandparent employment

Consistent with our survey and previous research (COTA, 2003; Pruchno, 1999; Worrall, 2009), several interview participants reported changing their employment situation after they assumed care of grandchildren. Some reported changed employment arrangements and began working part-time while others gave up work altogether as a result of their care commitments:

I have to change my days so I am home every night so she [my granddaughter] isn't home alone. All that extra travel – I need to be home here with kids. [Grandparent 19, NSW]

I was working full-time [before I began raising my grandchildren]... It was too hard, I couldn't do 12-hour shifts and come home to the kids because they needed quality time with me. So I finished up resigning to stay and look after the kids because it was too hard to manage. [Grandparent 2, SA]

Yeah, I was working with [industry]. My daughter was having problem with the alcohol and was going to go into gaol, so I had to get my grandkids and look after them. I am good grandmother and look after them... so I had to stop work to look after my grandkids. [Grandparent 16, NSW]

When you are young you can work and rear kids, you don't find it difficult, but when you get older, it does become difficult, because you don't have the same strength, the same get up and go. It takes energy. [Grandparent 18, NSW]

Other grandparents reported that they gave up work for other reasons – because they wished to retire or because of health problems or being eligible for welfare or support benefits.

Some grandparents reported that the financial costs of raising their grandchildren made it necessary for them to continue working:

No, [my employment] hasn't changed... However with [name], my husband... he's had to leave [organisation] so that I have somebody at home looking after the children... And me? I haven't changed my work because we need my money, need my financial support so we can give these kids a better life,

better future and, you know, that includes trying to strengthen their literacy and English skills and numeracy skills by spending money... through tutors, you know, private tutors and people like that, specialists like speech pathologists. We don't get any money for that; we have to pay for out of our own money because we want these kids to have a better life... If you want to get these other things added, you've got to pay for that out of your own pocket and that becomes a real burden. [Grandparent 17, NSW]

I have to work one or two jobs to try and subsidise, you know, the difference [the shortfall that is not covered by Centrelink and state government support payments] and our other kids miss out on a lot. The [other] kids in the family, they miss out on quite a bit which... is a shame but we still try and we struggle through. We love them all and we like us to be together but there are things that our kids can't have. [Grandparent 17, NSW]

7.9 Health of grandparents and grandchildren

7.9.1 The grandparents' health

Indigenous grandparents who took part in interviews commonly reported physical health problems such as asthma and diabetes. A small number of respondents reported having heart disease and cancer.

Although the literature has found that grandparents' physical and emotional wellbeing is adversely affected by taking on care of grandchildren (e.g. Minkler and Roe, 1993; Yardley, Mason and Watson, 2009; Kelley et al., 2000; Dunne and Kettler, 2008), none of the Indigenous grandparents who took part in interviews attributed their health problems to their caring responsibilities and no participants reported that their physical health had deteriorated as a result of raising their grandchildren. One grandmother light-heartedly reported *improvements* in her physical health as a result of increased activity associated with raising her grandchildren:

I am a bit fitter, I think [*laughs*]. I do a lot more walking that I used to do [now that I'm raising my grandchildren]. I will slow down when they get older. They [my grandchildren] can feed themselves and clean up after themselves and I won't have to do all that. [Instead, I'll say,] 'please get me a cuppa!' [*laughs*]. [Grandparent 20, NSW]

Grandparents were more willing to attribute mental health problems to their caring responsibilities. Some grandparents reported frustration and stress associated with raising their grandchildren and concern about what would happen to their grandchildren if they died or became incapacitated due to poor health:

I do get a bit frustrated and stressed out about... not because I have her, but because I have to go through all this of bringing up a young child, school

age, and having to... to deal with the schools. I didn't think I would be having to do this at this age.

I had raised my own children. It was a bit of a shock! I think emotionally my health has changed. Sometimes I get a bit angry about it, more so about her mother, because I shouldn't have to be going through this at my age.

I don't mind that I have [granddaughter] to look after, but I do get depressed about it sometimes that I have to go all through this again, more so leading up to her teenage years. When she starts approaching womanhood I have to go through what to expect with her life, and just that I can't be free myself; I thought it was time to enjoy my life. Even though I do enjoy it, it's not what I would like to be able to be, not calling the shots.

I do worry because of my health, I worry, 'What is going to happen to [granddaughter]?', and I get a bit stressed out about it because of my age, and don't want her in that welfare system where she can be placed with just anybody sort of thing. [Grandparent 1, SA]

In contrast, some grandparents reported that raising grandchildren had a positive impact on their mental health and well-being:

[Granddaughter] is really good for me – she makes me be a child again. So that's the one, that's the big plus. The other big thing is my age catches up to me and quite regularly and sometimes I can't stand... [can't] put up with her, you know, with all that energy and so I can be a bit boring at times. But most of the time I'm quite, you know, out there. [Grandparent 10, NT]

7.9.2 The grandchildren's health

Many Indigenous grandparents reported that their grandchildren were in good physical health and reported only relatively common childhood illnesses such as coughs, colds and 'flu.¹³ However, some grandparents reported caring for grandchildren with asthma and other respiratory infections and one Indigenous grandparent was caring for a grandchild with cerebral palsy.

Grandparents frequently reported mental health and behavioural problems experienced by the grandchildren whom they raised. Like survey respondents, many Indigenous grandparents who took part in interviews attributed these

¹³ There were some discrepancies between grandparent's and grandchildren's reported health and fieldworker observations. One fieldworker conducted interviews with two members of the same family and received conflicting accounts about the family's health and well-being and some degree of caution should be used in interpreting these results.

problems to abuse or neglect their grandchildren experienced while under their parents' care or due to the trauma of being separated from their parents:

It's difficult sometimes looking after them, like when they miss their mother and want to go back, and I tell them, 'You can't go back – there's too much drinking. [It's] much more better here'. I worry sometimes, I don't want my grandkids growing up looking at their mother drinking. I want to make a better life for them here. I want them to grow up to go to school, get an education. [Grandparent 16, NSW]

I think it has a lot to do with the parents. It's hard for them [the grandchildren]. They are good about drinking and drugs and stuff, but you don't know when people are going to tempt them. We [my partner and I] don't drink or smoke or do drugs – we're just trying to help. They don't have a lot of positive influences in their life. [Grandparent 19, NSW]

Because the parents aren't out there all the time, you know, and sometimes they [the grandchildren] go quiet wondering where their parents are. [Grandparent 9, NT]

Some grandparents pointed out that their grandchildren's physical health had improved since they had begun living with them and many believed there was a need for more psychological support to deal with parental absences or death (see Section 7.13 for more information):

No, they're good since they [have been] living with me. Before, they were unwell, unfed. They look healthy now they are living with me. [Grandparent 16, NSW]

I think with [grandson] coming from that violent background, I would have liked [State child welfare department] to offer counselling for [grandson]. I think it is such a traumatic experience for a child as young as he was to carry something, and remember something like that and not have a professional person to talk to, so I guess that is where I really point my finger at. [Grandparent 5, SA]

7.10 Grandparent relationships and social life

7.10.1 Relationships with partner and family

As noted earlier, Indigenous Australians have a cultural commitment to family and community (Atkinson and Swain, 1999) and family and kinship connections play an important role in many Indigenous people's lives. Several grandparents noted the importance of support from their extended family in raising their grandchildren:

I think without the family backing all the way, there could have been stress or hardship [associated with raising my grandchildren]. Yes, I think [family

support and cultural continuity] is important, because it is not just monetary wise – if I couldn't do it, someone would fill the gap... [Grandparent 15, NSW]

If we need a break we more or less call upon support, support people – my husband's family or my family – but sometimes that can be really hard too, very difficult. [Grandparent 17, NSW]

Despite the importance that most Indigenous grandparents place on family connections, some reported that they had little support from family or friends. One grandmother believed that mandatory police checks required by welfare agencies as a hindrance to family involvement in the care of grandchildren:

[State child welfare department] says they are very family orientated, but it can be a bit of a turn off because not everybody wants to do a police check on themselves [to spend time with children]. [Grandparent 1, SA]

7.10.2 Social life

Many grandparents who took part in interviews reported participating in cultural and community activities including traditional dancing and Elders groups. Some were able to access respite care and use this time to take part in activities for their own enjoyment, while other reported including their grandchildren in these activities:

She [granddaughter] is part of that [my community activities]. We're both running around madly... being involved in social stuff. [Grandparent 10, NT]

Others reported that they spent little time with friends and noted that their care responsibilities impinged on the time available for their own interests:

You get a bit sick of it [caring] at times. It gets wearying. You know... doing what *you* want to do – it can't happen. [Grandparent 18, NSW]

Oh sometimes it does [limit my free time] but we have a really good support network down here that we call upon. But yeah, it's been hard. I mean during school term we [make sure] that the kids are looked after. They're the ones that are our first priority at the moment and then us [my partner and I] – second priority...Yeah it's hard; it's hard to have time for ourselves and our own interests. [Grandparent 17, NSW]

7.11 Grandchildren's education

While grandchildren's education was not specifically addressed in the survey, it emerged as a prominent theme in interviews with Indigenous grandparents. Most interview participants noted the importance of education and encouraged their grandchildren to finish school or undertake apprenticeships. A number saw

education as means for their grandchildren to create better lives for themselves and overcome challenges they may have faced in the past:

I want to make a better life for them here. I want them to grow up to go to school, get an education. [Grandparent 16, NSW]

Education has always been part of what is your job. It's your job to go to Year 12. Your job is to play if you are a kid, but if you are in secondary, you go to Year 12, then you go to university. [Grandparent 15, NSW]

The eldest [grandchild] is finishing Year 12. I pushed her and encouraged to stay at school. She's good at school too. She has a few behavioural problems and she's epileptic. Her self-confidence is very low. [Grandparent 2, SA]

Many of those living in remote communities reported that their grandchildren were receiving distance education through School of the Air. Many grandparents highlighted the importance of residential stability in their grandchildren's education and participants in all locations reported that their grandchildren were achieving good academic results:

She is happy here – she has said that. She has her own space here she can focus on what she wants to do with her education – that's the reason she is here. I said if you make friends along the way that is a bonus, but first and foremost: education. There will be no not going to school, no friends. [If she wasn't in school, I say to her,] 'You get yourself a job, you have no school now, get your life on track, because nobody else is [going to]. You are not going to abuse it.' [Grandparent 19, NSW]

So great was the value that grandparents placed on education that one grandmother in the Northern Territory reported that she believed it to be more important than the transmission of Indigenous cultural traditions:

I don't want culture to come first – I want education to come first [for my grandson]. I want to send him to [intestate school] next year. I want to send him somewhere south so he can get educated... I don't want culture. Culture can be later when he's educated. [Grandparent 8, NT]

7.12 Indigenous culture, identity and kinship

7.12.1 Indigenous culture and identity

Wilson (1997) argues that to have an Aboriginal identity, one has to be accepted and be spiritually connected to one's community and maintain traditional connections with this community. Maintaining links to their family and cultural group is clearly important for Indigenous children's identity, but also has important practical implications for issues such as land rights. In order to establish native title

claim, an Aboriginal person or group must 'substantially maintain' traditional connection with the land and Indigenous children who lose their links with their kinship group may lose claims and their traditional land (Yeo, 2003).

Many Indigenous grandparents reported that they and their grandchildren were connected to their communities and actively engaged in traditional Indigenous cultural activities such as gathering 'bush tucker' foods, hunting, fishing, dance and traditional healing. Almost universally, Indigenous grandparents believed that continuity of cultural and kinship knowledge was of paramount importance for them and their grandchildren:

Yeah, it is important to know about their family and culture. Too right!
[Grandparent 16, NSW]

It's really good that they still mix with Aboriginal people – I tell them to. Even when they go to school I tell them they are different, and there are lots of different nationalities... They have the Block [in Sydney's Redfern] and the Family Day Barbeque, whatever. Take the kids to the park there – it's better than nothing. It's nice. [Grandparent 16, NSW]

Knowing who they are where they are in their family and community too and just knowing where they stand, is a big confidence booster to them. If they know that, it's 'I'm OK'. It's like a passport to knowing that 'I'm OK, because I am related to that one and I'm related to that one, that one is from my town, so I will be looked after'. [Grandparent 15, NSW]

Traditional languages formed an important part of many Indigenous participants' cultural identities and many grandparents, particularly those living in South Australia and the Northern Territory, reported that their grandchildren spoke an Indigenous language as their first language and that they and their grandchildren spoke several Indigenous languages in addition to Aboriginal English and/or Standard Australian English.

Many grandparents noted the importance of their grandchildren speaking Indigenous languages but many also stressed the importance of speaking English. One grandmother reported that when her son entered prison, one of the main reasons that he asked her rather than other family member to care for his daughter was so that she would speak English fluently. Another noted the close relationship between Indigenous languages and cultural identity:

It's best that [children] go back to their [extended] families because if they speak an Aboriginal language or they've got their Aboriginal culture, it's essential for that child to learn that so that they can be grounded. When your identity is clear to you, you can be grounded and you can follow your life,

walk on that road of life knowing your background and knowing where you need to go.

I want her [granddaughter] to earn lots of money for me when she grows up so she can look after me [*laughs*]. That's one of the reasons. But it's also for [granddaughter] because, you know, in Australia the national language is English and it's crucial for her to have that English but it's also crucial for her to have [Indigenous languages]. [Grandparent 10, NT]

7.12.2 Kinship system

Yeo (2003) notes that Indigenous people have a strong collectivist identity and that Indigenous people are 'more likely to think of themselves in terms of their affiliation with other people and their community'. He argues that Indigenous children commonly grow up in a close relationship with their community and, in traditional communities, mothers will even breastfeed one another's infants. As Higgins, Bromfield and Richardson (2005) point out, many Indigenous carers provide care for multiple children and frequently have dual roles of kinship and foster carers, providing care for children to whom they are biologically related as well as to non-relations. The distinction between kinship and foster care is further blurred as the Indigenous cultural definition of kinship varies from conventional Western definitions (see Section 7.5).

Many grandparents highlighted the importance of Indigenous kinship systems and some relished the opportunity to spend time with grandchildren to instil traditional Indigenous values in them:

Some of the good things raising [grandson] was instilling good cultural values [in him]. First and foremost, he learnt who he was as a person, that he was to be a proud young Bungilung youth and go on towards being a man and the actual cultural aspects of that, that was through family kinship, the language that we taught him through that Bungilung connection through his mother... It was a very serious matter with me. I did instil good values with [grandson]. I think he would have been lost through the kinship [without that]. [Grandparent 5, SA]

Another grandmother argued that Indigenous kinship support systems are far more complex and sophisticated than non-Indigenous kinship systems:

Whitefellas have a lot to learn from us, you know. I can't imagine living in a home without my grandmother. It has been reported that grandparents often make better parents. Why wouldn't that be so? And you know what? ... I want my mother in my home! *My family is my mansion*. And that represents safety and security as a carer for my babies, my grannies and my grannies to come. [Grandparent 3, SA]

The same grandmother highlighted the importance of kin ties to identity and was concerned about the lack of weight Indigenous law was given in the mainstream Australian legal system:

If anything happened to my daughter who is in a relationship with a non-Aboriginal man, a white man, and something happened to my daughter, how would the system recognise my role in my granddaughter's and [my] daughter's life? How would the system recognise that my black granddaughter could be taken away and never know anything about her identity as an Aboriginal woman? That's not to say the fathers don't have rights. I want to know with a passion that white legal system would recognise me. I too have rights to my granddaughter, in the same way she has rights to her Aboriginality.

I do not need a white system to validate my Aboriginality, but I do need white systems to honour me and my grandmothers, grandfathers. This [traditional Indigenous law] is a system that has worked for us, is healthy for us, and something we should fight desperately to maintain. We are better parents by virtue of the fact that we share those roles. [Grandparent 3, SA]

7.13 Access to support services and information

A lack of support services was a common theme raised by many of the Indigenous grandparents who took part in interviews. Several grandparents were not receiving Parenting Payment and/or Family Tax Benefit and many were unaware of available services in their areas or believed that they did not qualify for services or respite care. Most grandparents said that they would like additional financial and practical support or respite if it were available:

[State child welfare department] never gave her [granddaughter] a counsellor, nothing. I would like to have Welfare assist in visiting their mother [in prison]. I get nothing from nobody but the pension and child allowance. Everything I do for these kids. That is what I am saying – you get nothing. They give you the kids, and then 'see you later'. My main concern is for Welfare to come and get these two [grandchildren] and take them to see their mother. They are supposed to be doing that once a month, but they don't. [Grandparent 20, NSW]

Several grandparents highlighted the need for respite care and better access to counselling to enable them to deal better with often traumatic past experiences:

We'd love more support, love more support. Some respite care, and you know some extra financial support so that these kids can have nice clothing and, you know, get nice things for school and that type of thing. But, yeah, respite's probably the biggest thing... some time. [Grandparent 17, NSW]

I would have liked [State child welfare department] to offer [grandchild] counselling [to deal with her past] traumatic experiences... There is no follow up. OK, you know, [my grandchildren have a] roof over their heads, clothes on their backs, food in their bellies, but there is none of that emotional and social well-being [support] that needs to happen with children in out-of-home care. [Grandparent 5, SA]

One grandmother noted that many older grandparents in particular know little about drugs and highlighted the need for more education for grandparents on this topic:

For poor old grandparents who don't know much about drugs. I would say people of our age group and a bit younger you don't know how to deal with it, don't know the signs and signals. You are a sitting duck [regarding grandchildren's potential drug use]. [Grandparent 4, SA]

Some grandparents noted that there was generally a lack of awareness about available services and State Government community service agencies often failed to advise grandparents about these services.

Yes, [State child welfare department]. There was no other family-based service around me... I wasn't given any direction by [State child welfare department] regarding case management support. I thought, looking back now, they should be advising families, that, 'Hey, listen, this is out there, there are other family [support] structures out there that people in your situation can tap in to'. I think all people who are carers... need to find that they have someone they can talk to, or generally have that yarn to... I think there is an obligation from [the department] to let people know, to say, 'Hey, there are these services out there'. [Grandparent 5, SA]

Some grandparents bemoaned the lack of 'mainstream' or culturally-appropriate grandparent or grandchild support services:

They never gave her [granddaughter] a counsellor, nothing. [They] never give one to a blackfella. If you do something wrong when you are looking after other people's kid, they don't give you counselling to help you out, and respite to help you deal with everything. When you have little kids at my age, especially with my kids grown up, you need counselling. You don't get support. [They need] to be able to have that understanding of Aboriginal families and how it works. [Grandparent 20, NSW]

7.14 Grandparent strength and resilience

Like the grandparents who took part in the survey, Indigenous grandparents demonstrated high levels of resilience and provided stability, love and care to their grandchildren, often in the face of considerable challenges. The following quotes

reflect the rewards of grandparent care, and the strength that grandparents bring to the task:

Being a grandmother and caring for someone that you love... that's the main thing what I see. No, it's not stressful, nothing. [Grandparent 14, NT]

Well, I'm a lucky sort of person. I despair at times, but I try not to despair, I try not to let things get me down. I can, I have the ability that I can turn off just like that, and I can pretend to be somebody else or be somewhere else, so it doesn't worry me, but some of the things that people say about you, I say, 'Well, they don't know me'. I don't mix in their circles, you know. Things can hurt me, but if they said that [negative things] about me, then I turn off. [Grandparent 4, SA]

I get tired sometimes. I get stressed, you know. But I'm trying not to get too much, you know, too stressed out. [Grandparent 9, NT]

They stress me [*laughs*]. No, it's good. Stress is a good thing. It's good to spend a lot of time with them. I don't get visitors – don't know what they look like. The kids keep me on my toes, otherwise I would be laying around. [Grandparent 20, NSW]

The hard times are still a good time... My grandchildren make me happy. I'm having a good time with my grandchildren and I love them and they love me back. [Grandparent 12, NT]

You know, you're sitting by yourself and they just come and hug you and make you laugh, make you talk, you know... [Grandparent 13, NT]

7.15 Conclusion

The Indigenous grandparents interviewed for this study were extremely diverse in terms of their demographic characteristics, housing and residential arrangements, income, employment status and access to financial support and services.

The number and ages of the grandchildren participants were raising ranged from infants aged 1-3 years to those aged 17 years and over. Participants were evenly divided between those who had formal kin care agreements in place and those who cared for their grandchildren under an informal, family arrangement. While many grandparents preferred to raise grandchildren under informal arrangements because of the perceived difficulties of dealing with the formal child protection judicial system or fear and reluctance to contact child protection authorities, some preferred the stability of formal legal custody.

The grandchildren of participants came to live with their grandparents for a variety of reasons, most commonly because of drug or alcohol misuse by the parents and other socio-emotional and financial problems, including mental illness and

imprisonment, and many had little or no contact with their parents, even if they were still alive.

While a small number of participants said that raising their grandchildren had little or no impact on their financial situation, many reported that it had caused them considerable financial stress and hardship and at least three of the 20 participants were not receiving government payments to which they may be entitled. Many participants also reported changing their employment situation after taking on care of grandchildren and many had begun working part-time or stopped working altogether as a result of their care commitments.

Participants commonly reported that both they and their grandchildren faced physical and mental health problems, although most were reluctant to attribute their own physical health problems to their care commitments. They more readily attributed mental health problems to their caring role and frequently reported frustration and stress associated with raising their grandchildren. Similarly, participants commonly attributed their grandchildren's mental health and behavioural problems to abuse or neglect they experienced while under their parents' care or due to the trauma of being separated from their parents.

Almost universally, Indigenous grandparents believed that continuity of cultural and kinship knowledge was of paramount importance for them and their grandchildren. Many highlighted the importance of Indigenous kinship systems and relished the opportunity to spend time with grandchildren to instil traditional Indigenous values. Many also reported that they and their grandchildren took part in cultural and community activities including traditional dancing and Elders groups. Although several participants noted the importance of support from their extended family in raising their grandchildren, some reported that they had little support from family or friends.

Like the grandparents who took part in the survey, Indigenous grandparents who took part in interviews demonstrated high levels of resilience and provided stability, love and care to their grandchildren often in the face of considerable challenges. However, a lack of support services was a common theme raised by many participants and indicated that there are gaps in the information, support and services provided to Indigenous grandparent carers. Several grandparents were not receiving parenting payment and/or family tax benefit for which they might be eligible and were unaware of services available in their areas or believed that they did not qualify for services or respite care. Most said that they would like additional financial and practical support or respite if it were available.

Some grandparents who took part in interviews expressed cynicism regarding the research and policy process and had little faith in the mainstream legal and political system. One participant was concerned that little would come of the research and

believed that the research may be of little benefit to her, but she participated because she did not want to lose hope that the kinship care support system for Indigenous families would be reformed and wanted her grandchildren to know that her voice had been heard:

It might just be catalogued away and amount to what? To... a white piece of paper to add to your credentials as a researcher... [But] I will participate because I think if we lose hope we have nothing to invest and I want to walk on the ground that says, 'this is the place they are investing in' and I want one day to have my grannies to hear this conversation and I want my grannies to be certain that this voice was heard and [for them to think] that, 'My Nanna added a volume to the voices before her'. I have much more faith for our [Indigenous] system than I do in the white system. [Grandparent 3, SA]

Having heard the powerful testaments of Indigenous grandparent carers, it is incumbent upon policy makers and practitioners to ensure that future policies and programs address the needs of Indigenous grandparents and their grandchildren so that this research does not simply amount to 'a white piece of paper'.

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Definitions of grandparent families in the Census

These definitions were provided by the ABS consultant on this project.

1. One grandparent family with grandchildren aged under 15 only.

Family is one parent family and contains at least one grandchild of family reference person aged under 15 years but does not contain any children of family reference person aged under 15 years and no member of family other than family reference person is aged 15 years and over.

2. One grandparent family with any children under 15 only.

Family is one parent family and contains at least one grandchild of family reference person aged under 15 years and at least one child of family reference person aged under 15 years but no member of family other than family reference person is aged 15 years and over.

3. One grandparent family with grandchild under and over 15 only.

Family is one parent family and contains at least one grandchild of family reference person aged under 15 years and at least one grandchild of family reference person but does not contain any children of family reference person aged under 15 years and no member of family other than family reference person is aged 15 years and over.

4. One grandparent family with other relatives.

Family is one parent family and contains at least one grandchild of family reference person and at least one relative other than grandchild of family reference person aged 15 years and over.

5. Grandparent and non-dependent grandchild family.

Family is family classified as other family and contains at least one grandchild of family reference person aged 15 years and over but does not contain any grandchildren of family reference person aged under 15 years.

6. Couple grandparent family with grandchildren aged under 15 only.

Family is couple family and contains at least one grandchild of family reference person aged under 15 years but does not contain any children of family reference person aged under 15 years and no member of family other than family reference person and partner is aged 15 years and over.

7. Couple grandparent family with any children under 15 only.

Family is couple family and contains at least one grandchild of family reference person aged under 15 years and at least one child of family reference person aged under 15 years but no member of family other than family reference person and partner is aged 15 years and over.

8. Couple grandparent family with grandchild under and over 15 only.

Family is couple family and contains at least one grandchild of family reference person aged under 15 years and at least one grandchild of family reference person but does not contain any children of family reference person aged under 15 years and no member of family other than family reference person and partner is aged 15 years and over.

9. Couple grandparent family with other relative

Family is couple family and contains at least one grandchild of family reference person and at least one relative other than grandchild or partner of family reference person aged 15 years and over.

10. One parent family with grandparent present.

Family is one parent family and contains one parent of family reference person. In these families there are three generations and therefore a grandparent/grandchild relationship between parent of family reference person and child of family reference person. In these families child of family reference person was classified as grandchild for these tables. If no children usually resident in this family were present on Census Night then number of grandchildren in this family would appear to be none.



**Grandparents Raising Grandchildren
Indigenous Grandparents | Interview Schedule**

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your family?
(prompts: age, age of grandchildren and children, who lives in household)
2. How long have you been raising your grandchild/ren?
3. What is the main reason or reasons why you are raising [name/s of grandchild/ren]?
4. Are you raising your grandchildren as an informal family arrangement, or were the grandchildren placed with you by welfare?
5. Where do [grandchild/ren]'s parents live? Do/es [grandchild/ren] have contact with [his/her/their] [mother/father] by phone, letters or email? How often do/does the child/ren have contact with their parent/s?
6. How do you find it raising [grandchild/ren]? What are the good things, and what are the difficult things?
7. Do you get any extra money from the government for raising [grandchild/ren]? Is it the State or Territory government which helps you? And/or the Commonwealth Government (in Canberra), eg through Centrelink?
8. Have you had any problems getting help from Centrelink for raising [grandchild/ren]?
9. Have you had any problems getting help from state or territory government (like the Care Allowance)?
10. Have you needed to change your work because you started looking after [grandchild/ren]?
11. Do you get any support from government agencies or welfare groups with raising [grandchildren]?
12. Do you get any support from your family and friends with raising [grandchild/ren]?
(prompts: from family, friends, support groups or case workers)
13. Would you like more support? What type of support is most helpful for you?
14. Is the place you live suitable for your added responsibilities to care for your grandchildren?
Large enough?

15. Have any grandchildren in your care experienced health problems, or emotional/behavioural problems?
16. Have things like your health or your finances changed since you started raising [grandchild/ren]?
17. Do you think that kinship and cultural continuity are important for your grandchildren and for you?
18. In what circumstances do you think that your grandchildren might be able to go back to live with their birth parents?

Thank you very much for speaking to us!



Grandparents Raising Grandchildren SURVEY

Instead of filling in this paper copy, you can complete the survey online.
To do so, please go to the SPRC website www.sprc.unsw.edu.au
and click on **Grandparents raising grandchildren survey** under 'News'.
Please also direct other grandparents who are raising their grandchildren
to the online survey. Thank you!

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

This survey is for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. It asks about your experiences in bringing up your grandchildren and the help and services you may receive.

The survey is part of an independent research project conducted by the Social Policy Research Centre. The project is funded by the Australian Research Council and has five government and community organisation partners. The information you provide will help us to better understand the experiences of grandparent families, and it will help governments and community organisations design appropriate services.

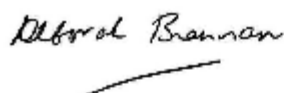
The survey should not take very long to complete. Most questions can be answered by ticking boxes or writing a short answer. We have also included questions that give you an opportunity to tell us your story, if you like. Anything you tell us will be very valuable for our research. Your answers will be completely confidential. Government agencies, including partners in this research, will have no access to personal information that you give us.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Christiane Purcal from the Social Policy Research Centre on (02) 9385 7830 or c.purcal@unsw.edu.au. If you have any concerns about the study, you can contact the Ethics Secretariat at the University of New South Wales, Sydney 2052, (02) 9385 4234, quoting reference number HREC 07312.

We would be very grateful if you completed the survey and posted it back to us in the reply-paid, addressed envelope as soon as you can.

Instead of filling in this paper survey and mailing it back to us, you may complete the survey online by going to the SPRC website www.sprc.unsw.edu.au and clicking on [Grandparents raising grandchildren survey](#) under 'News'.

Thank you very much for taking part in this important study.



Professor Deborah Brennan
Social Policy Research Centre,
University of New South Wales



If you would like to talk to someone about any problems, you can call:
Lifeline (a free 24 hour counselling service) on 13 11 14; or
Family Relationship Advice Line (a free service for guidance with parenting arrangements, available 8am-8pm, Mon-Fri; 10am-4pm, Sat) on 1800 050 321

1. Are you:

- Male
- Female

2. In which country were you born?

3. Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?

(tick one)

- No
- Yes, Aboriginal
- Yes, Torres Strait Islander
- Yes, both

4. Do you speak a language other than English at home?

- No
- Yes - Which language/s?

5. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

(tick one)

- Year 8 or below
- Year 9 or equivalent
- Year 10 or equivalent
- Year 11 or equivalent
- Year 12 or equivalent
- TAFE qualification
- University qualification
- Other *(please give details)*

6. How old are you?

(tick one)

- Under 45 years
- 45 - 54
- 55 - 64
- 65 plus

7. Do you have any long-term illnesses or disabilities?

- No
- Yes - Which one/s?

8. In which state or territory do you live?

(tick one)

- New South Wales
- South Australia
- Northern Territory
- Victoria
- Western Australia
- Queensland
- ACT
- Tasmania

9. What is your postcode?

10. Do you currently ...

(tick one)

- Own the house or flat you are living in (it is paid off)
- Have a mortgage on the house or flat (paying it off)
- Rent (public housing)
- Rent (private housing)
- Other *(please give details)*

11. Have you made any changes to your housing because you took on care for your grandchild/ren?

(tick all that apply)

- None
- Moved to a larger home
- Moved to a smaller home
- Moved to another suburb or town
- Extended the home
- Renovated
- Other *(please specify)*
- Would like to change my housing but cannot do it because:

12. Who lives with you?

(tick all that apply and provide numbers)

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Your partner/spouse | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Your grandchild/ren | <input type="checkbox"/> | How many? <input type="text"/> |
| Your partner's/spouse's grandchild or grandchildren | <input type="checkbox"/> | How many? <input type="text"/> |
| Your child or children | <input type="checkbox"/> | How many? <input type="text"/> |
| Your partner's/spouse's child or children | <input type="checkbox"/> | How many? <input type="text"/> |
| Other adults or children <i>(please specify)</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | How many? <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="text"/> | | |

The following questions are about the grandchild/ren you are currently raising.

(If you are raising more than 3 grandchildren, please answer the questions for the 3 oldest ones. If you would like to tell us about the others, please do so in the space provided below these questions.)

13. Gender	Grandchild 1	Grandchild 2	Grandchild 3
Male	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Female	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. Age	<input type="text"/> years	<input type="text"/> years	<input type="text"/> years
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15. How long have you been raising this grandchild?	<input type="text"/> years	<input type="text"/> years	<input type="text"/> years
	<input type="text"/> months	<input type="text"/> months	<input type="text"/> months

16. There are many different reasons why children are being raised by their grandparents rather than their parents. What is the main reason or reasons why you are raising your grandchild/ren?

(tick up to 3 boxes per grandchild)

	Grandchild 1	Grandchild 2	Grandchild 3
Parent's drug or alcohol problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parent's mental illness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parent's physical illness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parent's imprisonment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Domestic violence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mother's death	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Father's death	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child neglect	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child abandonment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parent's unemployment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parent's employment commitments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>(please describe)</i>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

17. Do you have authority from a government body for raising this grandchild?

(tick 1 per grandchild)

	Grandchild 1	Grandchild 2	Grandchild 3
Yes, through the Family Court	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Yes, through the Federal Magistrates Court	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Yes, through a state child protection agency	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No, this is an informal arrangement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Comments

18. Does this grandchild's mother live with you?
(tick 1 per grandchild)

	Grandchild 1	Grandchild 2	Grandchild 3
Yes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sometimes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No, mother is deceased	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No, mother lives elsewhere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If the mother lives elsewhere: How often does the mother see her child?

	Grandchild 1	Grandchild 2	Grandchild 3
At least once a week	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Not weekly, but at least once a month	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Not monthly, but at least once every 6 months	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Less than every 6 months/never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Does the grandchild have contact with his/her mother by phone, letters or email?

Yes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Comments:

19. Does this grandchild's father live with you?
(tick 1 per grandchild)

	Grandchild 1	Grandchild 2	Grandchild 3
Yes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sometimes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No, father is deceased	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No, father lives elsewhere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If the father lives elsewhere: How often does the father see his child?

	Grandchild 1	Grandchild 2	Grandchild 3
At least once a week	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Not weekly, but at least once a month	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Not monthly, but at least once every 6 months	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Less than every 6 months/never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Does the grandchild have contact with his/her father by phone, letters or email?

Yes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Comments:

20. In managing contact arrangements with the grandchild's parents, do you get any help from other persons or organisations?

	Grandchild 1	Grandchild 2	Grandchild 3
No, don't get any help	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No, don't need any help	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Yes, I get help	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If yes: please specify	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

If more than 3 grandchildren live with you, please add anything you would like to tell us about them:

21. What are the sources of income for your household?

	Main income source (tick one)	Additional income sources (tick up to 3)
Income from your full-time job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Income from your part-time or casual job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Income from your spouse/partner's full-time job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Income from your spouse/partner's part-time or casual job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Income from other adult/s in your household	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Centrelink payment for you (for example age pension, Newstart allowance, disability support pension, parenting payment, carer payment)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Centrelink payment for your spouse/partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Self-funded retiree	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

22. Do you receive any financial assistance for the grandchild/ren you are raising?
(tick all that apply)

- No
- Yes, from the child's parents (e.g. child support payments)
- Yes, from Centrelink *(please tick all relevant boxes)*
 - Family Tax Benefit A
 - Family Tax Benefit B
 - Child Care Benefit
 - Child Care Tax Rebate
 - Baby Bonus
 - Youth Allowance
- Other *(please specify)*
- Yes, from the state or territory government *(please specify type of financial assistance, e.g. Statutory Care Allowance, Special Needs Subsidy etc.)*

- Yes, from other sources *(please specify sources and types of financial assistance)*

23. Have you had any difficulties accessing Centrelink financial assistance for the grandchild/ren you are raising?

- No Yes

If you answered Yes: Could you please tell us briefly about the difficulties you had?

24. Have you had any difficulties accessing state or territory government financial support (e.g. Care Allowance)?

No

Yes

If you answered Yes: Could you please tell us briefly about the difficulties you had?

25. What would you estimate as the total income of your household from all sources after tax is taken out of it?

(tick one)

- No income or negative income
- Less than \$200 a week or less than \$10,400 a year
- \$200 to \$399 a week or \$10,400 to \$20,799 a year
- \$400 to \$599 a week or \$20,800 to \$31,199 a year
- \$600 to \$799 a week or \$31,200 to \$41,599 a year
- \$800 to \$999 a week or \$42,000 to \$51,999 a year
- \$1000 to \$1199 a week or \$52,000 to 61,399 a year
- \$1200 to \$1499 a week or \$62,400 to \$77,999 a year
- \$1500 to \$1799 a week or \$78,000 to \$93,599 a year
- \$1800 a week and above or \$93,600 and above

26. Given your current needs and financial responsibilities, would you say that you and your family are...

(tick one)

- Prosperous
- Very comfortable
- Reasonably comfortable
- Just getting along
- Poor
- Very poor

27. Has your employment changed as a result of raising your grandchild/ren?

(tick one)

- No
- Yes, working less
- Yes, not working at all any more
- Yes, working more
- Other (please specify)

28. If you have a partner or spouse: Has your partner's/spouse's employment changed as a result of raising your grandchild/ren?

(tick one)

- No
- Yes, working less
- Yes, not working at all any more
- Yes, working more
- Other (please specify)

29. Below are some types of support and information. Please tick on each line whether:

a) you receive this type of support or information for the grandchild/ren you are raising;

OR

b) if you are not receiving it, whether this type of support or information would be helpful to you;

OR

c) if you are not receiving it and don't need it.

Type of support or information	I'm receiving it	I don't receive it but it would be helpful	I don't receive it and don't need it
Support from your family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support from your friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support groups (e.g. foster/kinship/grand-parent support group)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Respite (e.g.camps)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Legal assistance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Caseworker	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Training (e.g. parenting program)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Resource guide	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Assistance in dealing with the child's/children's parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Child care / Out of school hours care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Programs for teenagers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information on help with schoolwork	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other information (please specify)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="text"/>			
Other support (please specify)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="text"/>			

Comments:

30. Have any grandchildren in your care experienced long-term physical health, or emotional/behavioural problems?
(tick 1 per line)

	No problem	Minor problem	Severe problem
Physical health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Emotional/behavioural issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If your grandchild/ren have had problems:

a) Could you please briefly describe them?

b) What help have you been able to access for these problems?

31. Please add anything else you would like to tell us about support services you receive or those you need:

32. Have things improved, deteriorated or stayed the same for you because you started raising your grandchild/ren?
(tick 1 per line)

.....in the following areas:	Greatly improved	Somewhat improved	Stayed about the same	Somewhat deteriorated	Greatly deteriorated	Not applicable
Your health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your financial situation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relationship with your partner/spouse	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relationships with your friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relationships with your family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participation in your community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Time for your own interests	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your own wellbeing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please describe)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

33. For you personally, what have been the main rewards of raising your grandchild/ren?

34. For you personally, what have been the main challenges of raising your grandchild/ren?

Thank you very much for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire.

We are very interested in anything else you would like to tell us about your experience of raising your grandchildren. This space has been included for you to tell us your story, if you would like to share it. What you write will be read carefully and thoughtfully.

(Please add extra pages if there is not enough space below.)

Thank you again for completing this survey.

**Would you please place the survey in the reply paid envelope
and post it back to us AS SOON AS YOU CAN.**

Return address:

**Christiane Purcal
Social Policy Research Centre
University of New South Wales NSW 2052**

Tel: (02) 9385-7830

E-mail: c.purcal@unsw.edu.au

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Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

PLEASE COMPLETE OUR SURVEY

We invite you to take part in a survey for all grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. We want to find out more about the experiences of grandparent families like yours so we can help government and community organisations to design good services for you.

The survey is part of an independent research project conducted by the Social Policy Research Centre. The project is funded by the Australian Research Council and has five government and community organisation partners.

The survey contains mostly tick-box and short-answer questions, which will take no more than 30 minutes to complete. In addition, we have included a few open-ended questions to give you an opportunity to tell us your story if you like. Anything you tell us will be very valuable for our research.

What you tell us will remain completely confidential. You won't be able to be identified by the survey. Government agencies, including partners in this research, will have no access to personal information collected in the survey, and publications about this research will be written in such a way that you cannot be identified.

Taking part in the survey is voluntary. After starting the survey, you can choose not to answer some questions and you are free to stop taking part in the survey at any time. **The survey is open until Tuesday, 30 November 2010.** Results of the survey will be available from early 2011 on a number of websites, including the Social Policy Research Centre (www.sprc.unsw.edu.au) and Mission Australia (www.missionaustralia.com.au).

You can complete the survey online. Please go to the SPRC website www.sprc.unsw.edu.au and click on **Grandparents raising grandchildren survey** under 'News' (on the right-hand side of the web page, below the photo); or copy this link into your internet browser: <http://www.e-valuate-it.com/survey/53069244/>.

If you would like more information, or if you would like to complete a paper copy of the survey, please contact

Christiane Purcal
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University of New South Wales NSW 2052
Tel: (02) 9385-7830
E-mail: c.purcal@unsw.edu.au

Thank you very much for your interest in this research!

Deborah Brennan

Professor Deborah Brennan, Social Policy Research Centre
