

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## A Profile of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren as a Result of Parental Military Deployment

Bunch, S. G., Eastman, B. J., & Moore, R. R. (2007). A profile of grandparents raising grandchildren as a result of parental military deployment. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 15(4), 12-Jan. doi:10.1300/j137v15n04\_01

**SUMMARY:** This descriptive study examines how military deployments affect custodial grandparents who are appointed to care for grandchildren during this parental absence. Participants were recruited through pre-existing support groups in community agencies located near military installations. Results suggest that grandparents' overall satisfaction with life is impacted by marital status, custody status of the grandchildren, and health status.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- All participants with a partner reported that caregiving impacted their relationship with their partner and 91% reported an impact on their greater social network.
- These grandparents did not seem to be less satisfied with life when compared to norms for elderly individuals.
- There was some evidence that the grandparents experienced higher levels of stress and parenting stress compared to general norms.
- One of custodial grandparents' primary concerns was a lack of access to military services on behalf of their grandchildren.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Create workshops for grandparents to learn about military resources available to them when the custodial parents are deployed
- Educate community providers about unique issues faced by custodial grandparents of military families
- Offer trainings for professionals who work with military families about keeping custodial grandparents and their grandchildren engaged during the parents' deployment

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend the development of programs that provide support for alternative caregivers while military parents are deployed
- Encourage access to services and programs for children with a deployed parent who are cared for by custodial grandparents
- Develop awareness initiatives that inform professionals who work with military families about the unique stressors associated with custodial grandparents of military children

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## METHODS

- Organizations hosting support groups for grandparents raising grandchildren near military installations in North Carolina and Virginia were contacted and potential participants were recruited for interviews.
- Grandparents completed questionnaires about life satisfaction, personal stress, and satisfaction with parenting.
- Descriptive statistics were calculated and compared to norms and associations between life satisfaction, personal stress, and parenting satisfaction were examined.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were custodial grandparents (N = 23) in North Carolina and Virginia whose adult children were on military deployment.
- The sample was 65% Black and 35% White; average age was 60.5 years old; and, among them, 61% were married, 26% were divorced, 9% were never married, and 4% were widowed.
- Among the grandparents, 56% worked full-time and 30% were retired; 48% had guardianship or temporary custody, 35% had legal custody, and 18% had no custody changes.

## LIMITATIONS

- The participants were members of support groups and these individuals may differ from grandparent caregivers in general.
- Researchers constructed part of the survey without examining reliability and validity, so it is unclear how well it measures the constructs.
- Comparison groups for stress and parenting satisfaction were general samples and therefore it is difficult to conclude whether or not the differences are based on being a custodial grandparent or other characteristics that vary between the groups.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine how children are impacted by having grandparents as primary care givers while a parent is deployed
- Improve generalizability by using larger samples (including military families across all branches)
- Evaluate effectiveness of programs that aim to support military children who are cared for by alternative caregivers (e.g., grandparents, aunts, uncles)

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>