Physiological, Psychosocial and Financial Strain Associated with Primary Caregiving Among Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: An Integrated Literature Review

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BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

- The traditional role of grandparents in Western society is to serve as a support to their children and grandchildren (Backhouse & Graham, 2012).
- The primary caregiving role of grandparents to grandchildren has become more prevalent (Leder, Nicholson-Grinstead & Torres, 2007).
- The change in role and adapting to primary caregiving may add burden and pose many challenges (Burgess-Dowdell, 2005).
- Difficulties experienced by grandchildren could exacerbate the adjustment associated with middle age and older grandparents assuming parental roles (Hayeslip, Shore, Henderson, & Lambert, 1998).

PURPOSE

The purpose of this integrated literature review is to answer the following questions:
1. What are the effects on grandparents’ role identity while adapting to a new role as a primary caregiver to their grandchildren?
2. What are the effects on the physical, psychosocial and financial health of grandparents who are adapting to the new role of primary caregivers of their grandchildren?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Roy’s Adaptation Model (2009) postulates an interchange between the adaptive system (individual) and various stimuli (input) from the environment.
- Adaptation level represents the condition of the life process.
- Grandparents must go through an adaptation process when transitioning from traditional grandparent roles to primary caregiving grandparents.

METHODOLOGY


Inclusion Criteria:
- Published, peer reviewed research
- Printed in English
- Research subjects were grandparents in the primary caregiver role to grandchildren

Exclusion Criteria:
- Previously published literature reviews
- Research not available in print
- Research subjects were grandparents in a secondary caregiver role to grandchildren, or in multigenerational homes

26 out of 35 studies met the inclusion criteria.

FINDINGS

Impact on Role Identity

6 out of 26 studies found an impact on role identity
- Role identity conflict leading to state of mental conflict
- Feelings of being unrecognized, disadvantaged, and misunderstood

Impact on Physical Health

12 Out of 26 studies found an impact on physical health
- Exacerbations of chronic conditions
- Worsened self-reported health
- Two studies found there was no change in self-reported physical health

Impact on Psychosocial Health

24 Out of 26 studies found an impact on psychosocial health
- Diminished self-reported psychological health
- Negative effects on social life
- Overall increased level of perceived stress with increased emotional stress

Impact on Financial Health

9 Out of 26 studies found impact on financial health
- Experienced financial hardships
- Problems accessing services

IMPLICATIONS TO PRACTICE

Clinicians should:
- Be aware of the increasing trend of grandparents raising their grandchildren
- Ask patients if they have had major life changes
- Be aware of the impact of primary caregiving on their physical and mental wellbeing
- Screen and adapt the plan for the following:
  - Depression and anxiety
  - Substance abuse
  - Exacerbation of chronic health diseases
- Involve social services to identify community resources such as:
  - Support groups
  - Assistance in medical and financial programs

IMPLICATIONS TO EDUCATION

Nursing educators should:
- Facilitate discussion about the trend, and influences on health of grandparents as primary caregivers

REFERENCES


Additional references include articles and studies on the role of grandparents, caregiving, and the impact on physical, psychosocial, and financial health.

IMPLICATIONS TO RESEARCH

Future research should focus on:
- Conducting interventions that would facilitate the coping process
- Investigate the impact on grandfamilies adapting to primary caregiving
- Cross cultural variations of grandparents in primary caregiving role and family relationships

RESEARCHERS

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