



We champion the wider family who care for children

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## **Under 55, poor and balancing work and caring: the invisible 'Gran-carer' generation**

***New generation of grandparent carers locked in dangerous cycle of poverty, warns new report***

A new invisible generation of 'gran-carers' is caught in a cycle of deprivation and facing financial hardship, according to a new report from charity Grandparents Plus launched today.

Young and surviving on a low income, this group finds itself providing regular childcare to their grandchildren as well as looking after their own parents – as the population ages and 4 and even 5 generation families become increasingly common.

Funded by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the report, **'The Poor Relation? Grandparental care: where older people's poverty and child poverty meet'** reveals that:

- **1 in 3** (33%) grandparents aged under 55 say they are finding it very difficult to cope financially
- The number of **single grandparents** has doubled in the last decade (from 8% to 15%)
- There are now **a third more** grandparents on **low incomes**, with grandchildren under 16 - 26% in 2007 up from 18% in 1998

**The Poor Relation?** identifies 'gran-carers' who are facing financial hardship under the pressure of balancing work and care – often supporting families who are themselves at greater risk of poverty. The research finds that these grandparents are more likely to have given up work or reduced their hours in order to provide childcare. As a result the report warns of a 'cycle of deprivation' that sees poverty passed from one generation to another.

Grandparents Plus is calling for working grandparents looking after children to have access to flexible working in the same way parents do and for grandparents who provide childcare to be eligible for payments through the tax credit system.

Sam Smethers, Chief Executive of Grandparents Plus said:

“This report challenges the cosy image we have of the retired grandparent with time to spare. For many, particularly the ‘Gran-carers’ who are of working age, on low incomes and who provide most of the childcare, it’s a real struggle.

“Although overall the grandparent generation is getting older, it is younger, working-class grandparents who are more likely to suffer financial hardship. We want this reality to be recognised by paying grandparents through the tax credit system for the childcare they provide.

“And they get no help with the challenge of combining work and care. As a result we see them taking low paid part-time work or dropping out of the labour market altogether. Extending the right to request flexible working would be a very welcome step.”

New evidence cited in the report from the 1998-2007 British Social Attitudes Survey also says that:

- **1.5 million** grandparents are under the age of 50
- **7 million** are aged under 65
- Lone grandmothers are **3 times more likely** to be managing on a very low income than grandparents with a partner
- Working class women are **four times more likely** to become grandparents before their 50<sup>th</sup> birthday than middle class women
- Working class grandparents are more likely than middle class grandparents to belong to **four-generation families**
- Adult working class women are **twice as likely** to be grandmothers than middle class women

Grandparents Plus is calling for:

- Grandparents to have access to **flexible working**
- Grandparent to be eligible for payment for childcare through **tax credits** if they enable parents to return to work

- Working grandparents able to take **two weeks 'granny leave'** in a baby's first year – which would work in the same way paternity leave does now

## Ends.

For more information, a copy of the report, information on potential case studies or to speak to Sam Smethers, please contact Melissa Milner

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## Notes to editors:

### 1. Key stats: grandparental childcare

- 1 in 3 families rely on grandparents for childcare<sup>1</sup>
- Half of single parents depend on grandparents for childcare<sup>2</sup>
- The Grandparental childcare contribution has been valued at £3.9 Billion<sup>3</sup>
- 4 out of 10 parents that Grandparents Plus surveyed in February 2009 said they were more likely to turn to grandparents for extra help with childcare during the recession<sup>4</sup>

### 2. Grandparents Plus

Grandparents Plus is the national charity (England and Wales) which champions the vital role of grandparents and the wider family in caring for children.

It has been funded by the EHRC to carry out a study of how older people's poverty and child poverty intersect around grandparental care for children. *The Poor Relation? Grandparental care: where older people's poverty and child poverty meet* is an interim report with a final report due in September 09.

The final report will focus on groups particularly at risk of poverty: single parent families, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean families, families with disabled children and/or disabled parents, families where a grandparents or other family member cares for a child/children in the absence of parents and those on low incomes.

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<sup>1</sup> ONS Social Trends, Apr 2009

<sup>2</sup> Dex, S and Ward K. Parental Care and Employment in Early Childhood. Analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) Sweeps 1 and 2. EOC 2007

<sup>3</sup> The Economy and Older People, Age Concern 2004

<sup>4</sup> Grandparents Plus/YouGov Feb 2009

### **3. Methodology**

A major survey of grandparenting activity in Britain was included in the 1998 British Social Attitudes (BSA) Survey. We have explored this data further in this study by looking at the links between grandparenting and the respondent's economic condition which were not examined in the original analysis. BSA surveys since 1998 have not included questions on grandparents' behaviour. But they have collected information about their demographic and economic characteristics which we have analysed up to 2007.

### **4. In addition to the measures called for here the charity also wants to see:**

- The informal care that grandparents and others provide during their working lives to 'count' towards the cost of care they may need themselves later in life. The charity wants this to be considered as part of the ongoing debate about social care reform.
- Children's Centres proactively target grandparents and other informal childcare providers to ensure that the children they care for can benefit from services in their area.
- Grandparents and other family members who provide full-time care for children who cannot live with their parents to be entitled to a national allowance, regardless of where they live. At the moment any support depends on the local authority's policy and practice. Many grandparents get nothing.
- Greater access to relationship support for families who experience parental separation or divorce.
- A review of the requirement that grandparents have to apply for leave for a residence order or a contact order.
- Grandparents to be notified of any care or adoption proceedings unless it can be demonstrated that this would not be in the interests of the child or the welfare of the parent with care

### **5. Rethinking Family Life: exploring the role of grandparents and the wider family**

In March 2009 Grandparents Plus published *Rethinking Family Life: exploring the role of grandparents and the wider family* in which the charity called for grandparents to be paid for childcare through the tax credit system.

The report also called for the introduction of the Grandparent National Insurance Credit to tackle the pensions penalty for working age grandparents who provide

substantial periods of childcare. In April 2009 the Chancellor announced the introduction of the Grandparent NI Credit in his Budget speech.

- 6. Copies of both of these reports together with copies of the February 2009 YouGov Survey findings are available at [www.grandparentsplus.org.uk](http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk).**