

Family and Friends Care

Recognition

Respect

Reward

A large, stylized number '14' followed by a lowercase 'm', rendered in a white, hand-drawn or sketch-like font. The '1' and '4' are tall and thin, while the 'm' is shorter and wider. The entire graphic is set against a dark background.

grandparents in Britain

There are 14 million grandparents in Britain, with an estimated 200,000 taking on the role as full-time carer for their grandchildren. Since 1989 the Children Act has directed that if a child cannot live with their parents the option of placing them with their wider family or close friends should be considered before taking them into care. This was reasserted by the Children and Young Person's Act 2008. Despite this there is no official data collected on the number of children in family and friends care and only 16% of local authority foster placements are with family and friends carers¹. Little is known about their experiences and the lives of the children they care for. They are the forgotten families of family policy. We want to change that.

Between July and September 2009 Grandparents Plus conducted a survey² of 100 family and friends carers who are members of our Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Network³ to establish the financial, emotional and practical challenges that these carers and the children they care for face.

¹ Children Looked After in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31st March 2008. DCSF 2008.

² We conducted 85 telephone interviews. The remaining responses were completed online or by postal questionnaire. Note we have not included responses to all the survey questions as some responses were discounted because of inconsistencies. As the total sample size is 100 all percentages quoted equal the number of responses given unless otherwise stated.

³ Funded by the Big Lottery Fund we have over 500 members in our Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Network. Membership is free and is open to any full-time grandparent carer or other family and friends carers. Organisations or individuals working with family and friends carers are also welcome to join. For the purposes of this survey only family and friends carers were interviewed. Interviewees were randomly selected.

Key findings

4 out of 5

family and friends carers are under 65

3 out of 5

gave up work or reduced their paid working hours when they became the main carer

1 in 3

family and friends carers are not claiming child benefit

The findings shine some light on an under-recognised group who are struggling financially and emotionally, with a majority living at or below the poverty line.

The results suggest the following:

- 4 out of 5 family and friends carers are under 65 with 1 in 3 (34%) under 55.
- over one third (35%) are living without a partner.
- 3 out of 5 either gave up work or reduced their paid working hours when they became the main carer for their grandchildren. Most are living on low incomes. Two thirds have a net annual income of under £15K. 4 in 10 are living on less than £10K per year.
- grandparents and carers are not receiving the support and help they need to cope with complex and difficult circumstances. This is leaving them feeling isolated and many struggling to cope.
- 1 in 3 family and friends carers are not claiming child benefit. Only 4% had received help with the cost of essential one-off items such as school uniforms or beds.
- almost 4 in 10 (37%) children in family and friends care have Special Educational Needs (SEN). Half have serious emotional or behavioural problems.

Family and friends carers



also care for an older or disabled relative

they tend to be younger and more likely to live without a partner

Almost 9 in 10 (87%) of those we surveyed are women and 4 out of 5 are under 65 with 1 in 3 (34%) aged 50-55. None are under 50 or over 75.

A disproportionately high number are living alone (35%). Research published by Grandparents Plus earlier this year⁴ showed that the number of single parent grandparents in the wider population has doubled between 1998 and 2007 from 8% to 15%. But grandparents who are family and friends carers are substantially more likely than other grandparents to be living without a partner.

The sample is ethnically diverse and broadly reflects the ethnic breakdown of the wider UK population⁵ although the sample was not selected to be a representative sample. 8 in 10 describe their ethnicity as white British, 6% as white Irish, 4% as black Caribbean. However comprising just 2% of the sample Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi families are under-represented in the survey.

a substantial proportion are also caring for an older or disabled relative

1 in 4 (27%) of the family and friends carers we surveyed also care for an older or disabled relative and over half of them (54% or 14 people) spend over 20 hours per week doing so. 96% (22) of those they care for are adults.

Over half (56% or 15) of the people they care for live with their carer, with only 1 in 3 (33% or 9 people) living alone.

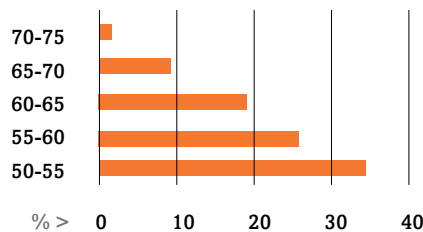
We found that two thirds (67% or 16) of those they care for do not have their home adapted to meet their care needs.

they are likely to have either given up work or reduced their hours to care

3 out of 10 (29%) grandparents and carers said they had given up work and a further 3 in 10 (30%) had reduced their paid working hours when they became the main carer for the children.

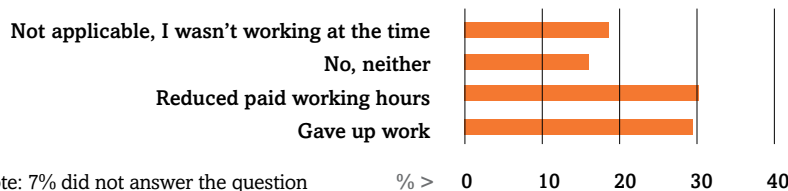
Over one third (36%) of the family and friends carers we surveyed are in paid work but almost two thirds (62%) are not. Of those who are working, 1 in 6 (6) of them are in full-time work, the rest (25 people) are working part-time. The majority of those in part-time work are working between 16-30 hours per week but 1 in 3 (29% or 8 people) are working less than 16 hours per week.

Age of family and friends carers



Note: 10% did not answer the question

Family and friends carers who have given up work or reduced their paid working hours to care for a child



Note: 7% did not answer the question

many are living in poverty

4 in 10 (38%) of those we surveyed said that they were struggling to cope, while just under half (46%) said they were 'coping'. 1 in 7 (14%) said they were 'comfortable'.

The survey reveals the overwhelming majority of families are likely to be experiencing financial hardship. 4 out of 10 (38%) families live on a net income of £10K per year or less (under £200 per week).

3 in 10 have an annual income between £10 - £15k per year (£200-£300 per week), living on or close to the poverty line. The poverty line is usually defined as 60% of median income or £12,480 per year (£240 per week). Median income is approximately £20K per year or £400 per week⁶.

It is particularly worrying that 1 in 5 (21%) told us that they do not receive benefits or allowances at all while only two thirds (64%) said they received Child Benefit. A very small minority (4%) said they received financial help with the cost of one-off items such as school uniforms or beds. None had financial help with the cost of parental visits, indeed one respondent said they were asked to meet this cost themselves.

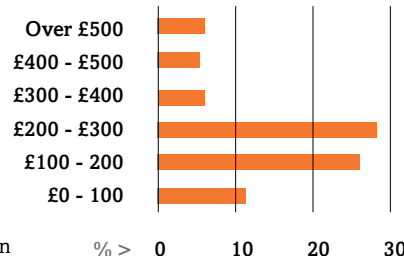
a significant proportion had incurred legal costs in taking on the care of the children

Over 1 in 3 (36%) of those we surveyed had fought legal battles to care for children and over half (56% or 20 people) subsequently incurred legal costs.

"I had to sell my house in order to pay for legal costs"

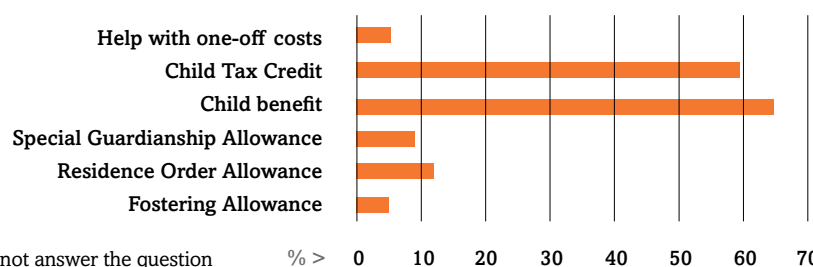
Seven carers had paid up to £5,000 with two people incurring costs of between £5,000 - £10,000 and three paying between £10,000 - £20,000. One person had even incurred a bill of over £30,000. For families on already low or modest incomes these costs are considerable. A further seven carers did manage to secure legal aid but three people represented themselves because they could not afford a solicitor.

Weekly net income



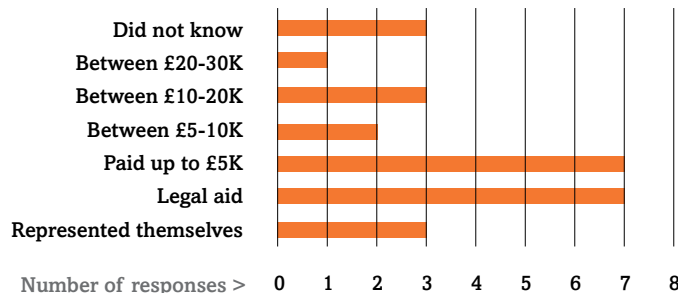
Note: 16% did not answer the question

Benefits and allowances received by family and friends carers



Note: 21% did not answer the question

Legal costs



Note: 10 people who said they had fought legal battles did not answer the question about legal costs

4 out of 10

families live on a net income of £10K or less

4 Griggs, J. The Poor Relation? Grandparental care: where older people's poverty and child poverty meet. Grandparents Plus, June 2009.

5 2001 Census analysis, Office for National Statistics Feb 2003.

6 Brewer, M et al. The living standards of families with children reporting low incomes. Research Report no 577, Department for Work and Pensions, February 2009.

The children

4 out of 10

children in family and friends care have Special Educational Needs

Grandparents and carers were asked the children's ages and how many children they care for. Two thirds (66%) are caring for one child but 1 in 3 (34%) are caring for two or more. One grandparent is caring for 5 grandchildren.

We know from existing evidence that many children in family and friends care have suffered multiple adversities prior to coming to live with their carers and that their prior experiences are very similar to those going into non-relative foster care. These include parental alcohol or substance misuse, physical or mental ill health or bereavement, parental imprisonment, domestic violence, abuse or neglect, divorce and separation. In our survey the most common reasons given for family and friends caring for children were abuse or neglect (42%) and parental drug and alcohol misuse (41%).

children in family and friends care are more likely⁷ than those in the wider population to have serious emotional or behavioural problems

Almost half (46%) of the children in our survey were reported to have serious emotional or behavioural problems but only 4 in 10 (39%) are receiving any counselling or other support, suggesting some of those with serious problems are being left unsupported.

One male respondent describes the problems his grandson has faced:

'He has seen so much and it has affected him greatly, he struggles in school and has had a lot of difficulty interacting with other kids and learning in general... It has been a tough few years for him and us.'

children in family and friends care are also more likely to have a disability and considerably more likely to have special educational needs than children in the wider population.

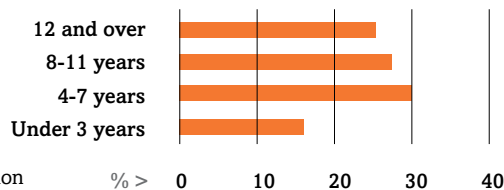
1 in 7 (14%) has a physical disability compared to 1 in 20 (5%)⁸ of the UK population.

4 out of 10 (37%) have Special Educational Needs compared to 21%⁹ of the wider population.

One respondent spoke of her 18 year old grandson who is autistic, and the physical and psychological challenges faced by a single grandparent raising an older teenager with a disability:

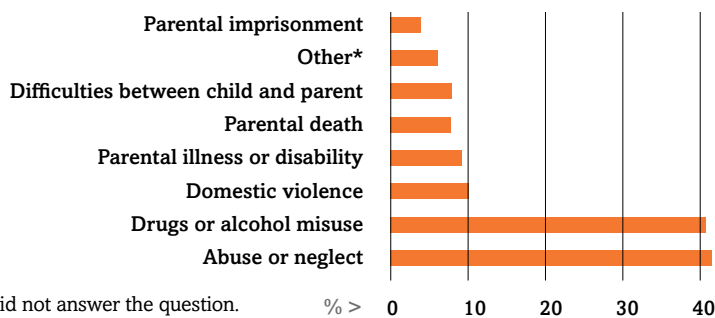
'I have not had respite for nearly ten years, I try my best, but I am on my own and it has been very hard. I do everything for him. His future is different to other 18 year old lads his age – he won't be employed or go onto to further education, and I worry about what will happen when I'm no longer here.'

Children's ages



Note: 1% did not answer the question

Reasons for children being in family and friends care



Note: 9% did not answer the question.

Respondents could give more than one reason

* We received five other responses.

Two grandparents said parental abandonment, one had a daughter with post-natal depression, another said the mother had moved away while another cited parental work commitments.

Care and support

most family and friends carers do not receive any financial support from their local authority, even if they have a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order.

While almost half (48%) of the family and friends carers have a Residence Order only 1 in 4 of them (ie.12% of the total sample) receive a Residence Order Allowance.

17% have a Special Guardianship Order but less than half of them (ie 8% of the total sample) receive a Special Guardianship Order Allowance.

7% said they are approved foster carers but only 4% said they receive fostering allowances.

Only 2% have adopted the child they care for.

most carers had had contact with children's services at some point but many were dissatisfied with their experience.

1 in 5 (20%) are currently in contact.

Over half (56%) said they previously had contact with children's services but were not currently in contact.

1 in 7 (14%) have had no contact at all with children's services.

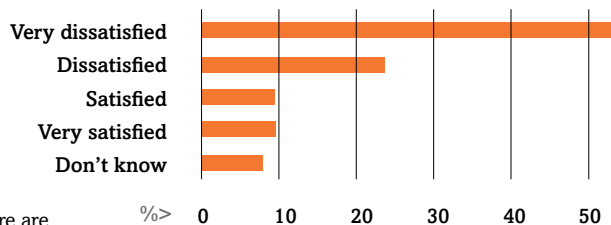
Two thirds (67% or 38) of those who said they had not received help from social workers said they had asked for help.

The survey reveals that, of the 77 people who had had contact with children's services 3 in 4 (75% or 58) were dissatisfied with their experience while just 18% (14) were satisfied. A further five said they did not know.' Several explained that once they had formally taken responsibility of the children 'we were dropped like a hot brick.'

'they were very unhelpful and unsympathetic to our situation'

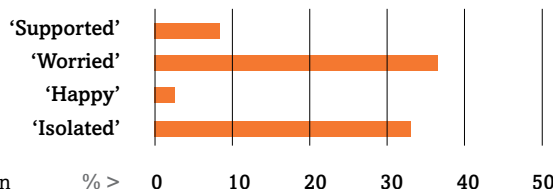
'I don't want them in my life any more'

Satisfaction with children's services and social workers



Note: The responses counted here are those of the 77 people who had had contact with children's services.

How family and friends carers describe how they feel



Note: 20% did not answer the question

But there were some positive experiences

'we received help with a bed, a stair gate and obtaining a passport'

and an acknowledgement that support can vary considerably, depending on the individual social worker 'it depends what social worker you get'.

family group conferencing was not used in a majority of cases

Only one third of carers (34%) reported having taken part in a family group conference. Over 4 in 10 (44%) said they had not while the rest either did not know or did not respond.

grandparents and carers feel isolated and unsupported

Over one third (37%) of the respondents described themselves as 'worried' while a further third (33%) said they were 'isolated'. Only 8% said they felt 'supported' and just 2% saying they were 'happy'.

but when they can access support grandparents and carers value the help they receive

6 in 10 said that being part of the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Network has helped them feel less isolated.

Of those who said they receive the newsletter from Grandparents Plus 98% said they found it helpful or very helpful. Several respondents referred positively to the true life articles in the newsletter.

'They are really helpful, it's nice to know there are others in a similar situation to us.'

Over half (56%) of our respondents said they did not attend support groups with two thirds (63%) of them saying that they would like to if they were made available and accessible. A further 13% said they would consider it. However some who have a disabled grandchild said it would not meet their particular needs.

7 ONS statistics show that in 2004, 1 in 10 children and young people (10%) aged 5–16 had a clinically diagnosed mental disorder: 4% had an emotional disorder (anxiety or depression), 6% had a conduct disorder. Mental Health of Children and Young People in Great Britain, ONS 2004.

8 Mooney, A. et al, Disabled Children: numbers, characteristics and local service provision, DCSF 2008

9 Children with special educational needs: an analysis. DCSF 2009.

What family and friends carers say they want from us:

- more financial support and advice
- information about support groups
- access to emotional support and respite care
- tailored help and support for families with disabled children.

Grandparents Plus is the national charity which champions the vital role of grandparents and the wider family in children's lives – especially when they take on the caring role in difficult family circumstances. We are campaigning for a better deal for family and friends carers because they deserve:

1. recognition for the vital role they play.
2. respect from service providers, including access to information and advice about the support available.
3. reward – improved access to benefits and a new national allowance if they care for a child for more than 28 days.
4. to be counted – we need official data on the number of families in this situation.
5. better services including access to family group conferencing, respite care and support groups.



We champion the wider family who care for children

Grandparents Plus
18 Victoria Park Square
Bethnal Green
London E2 9PF
Telephone: 020 8981 8001
Email: info@grandparentsplus.org.uk
www.grandparentsplus.org.uk

Survey findings report
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