



Exploring the stress and coping strategies of grandparents caring for grandchildren of employed parents: A systematic review

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Abstract

Introduction: Grandparents, key unpaid childcare providers, play a vital yet distinct role in family life, offering relaxed, enjoyable relationships with grandchildren. As primary caregivers, they face significant stress and health issues, particularly when dealing with children from troubled backgrounds. This article explores the coping strategies and stress levels of grandparents raising grandchildren, emphasizing the need for support and understanding of their crucial role.

Methodology: This systematic review analyzes 10 comprehensive articles using a variety of research methodologies, including non-experimental descriptive design, cross-sectional descriptive design, qualitative design (specifically in-depth interviews), literature review, descriptive and correlational studies, and explanatory sequential mixed methods design. The review includes English-language scientific papers published in peer-reviewed journals, covering original research, systematic reviews, and governmental guidelines or protocols. From an initial 163 records identified through database searches, 145 remained after duplicates were removed. Of these, 133 records were screened, 12 were excluded, and 25 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Ultimately, 108 full-text articles were excluded for various reasons, leaving 10 articles included in the final review.

Results: The collective body of research reviewed provides a nuanced understanding of stress levels and coping strategies among grandparents raising grandchildren whose parents are employed. Studies highlight moderate to high stress levels, with demographic factors like age, gender, education, family structure, and caregiving duration influencing stress, particularly among female caregivers. Coping strategies include social support, problem-solving, religious or spiritual practices, and leisure activities. The importance of tailored interventions and support programs is emphasized, with religion and spirituality notably aiding rural caregivers. These findings advocate for holistic approaches to support grandparent caregivers, necessitating further research and targeted interventions to enhance their well-being and resilience.

Conclusion: The findings highlight the need for tailored interventions and support programs for stressed grandparent caregivers. Ongoing research and specific strategies are crucial to improving their well-being and resilience.

Keywords: Stress, coping strategies, grandparents, grandchildren, employed parents

Introduction

Grandparents play a vital role in family dynamics, often assuming unpaid childcare responsibilities and fostering close relationships through playful interactions with grandchildren. However, their perceptions and experiences in this caregiving role are often overlooked in research and policy. Exploring grandmothers' experiences can provide valuable insights into family and child policies. Today, grandparents increasingly serve as primary caregivers, a significant departure from past generations. This shift can lead to stress and health issues, particularly when caring for grandchildren from challenging backgrounds. This article examines coping strategies and stress levels among grandparents in this role, shedding light on societal changes impacting their well-being. In India, a substantial portion of grandparents are daily caregivers for grandchildren, with many responsible for one or two grandchildren. The complexities of caregiving-including emotional, physical,

financial, social, and legal challenges-can adversely affect grandmothers' health and quality of life.

Stress Levels of Grandparents

Balancing work and caregiving responsibilities places significant stress on grandparents, compounded by financial constraints and social isolation. These challenges contribute to heightened stress levels as they navigate daily complexities.

Coping Strategies of Grandparents

Grandparents have developed coping mechanisms such as seeking social support, prioritizing self-care, and finding fulfillment in caregiving duties. These strategies help alleviate stress, build resilience, and enhance overall well-being, enabling effective management of their responsibilities. This exploration underscores the

multifaceted challenges faced by grandparents in caregiving roles and emphasizes the importance of tailored support and policies to promote their health and resilience.

Rational for review

Understanding the specific stressors faced by grandparents in caregiving roles is crucial for guiding targeted support interventions. Yadav *et al.* (2021) [9] identified significant associations between stress levels and demographic variables such as age, marital status, and health issues among caregiving grandparents. Evaluating these stressors can inform tailored interventions. Moreover, examining coping strategies is vital; Roy *et al.* (2021) [8] found that most grandparents employed moderate coping strategies, indicating a need for customized programs to enhance these mechanisms. Assessing the impact of caregiving on the well-being of grandparents further aids in developing holistic support systems. Mendoza, Fruhauf, and MacPhee's research underscored the caregivers' vulnerability due to high stress levels and highlighted the mitigating role of support networks. Additionally, exploring cultural factors provides nuanced insights into coping strategies. Dunfee *et al.* (2021) [17] demonstrated the significant influence of religion and spirituality in facilitating coping among rural grandparent caregivers, suggesting the importance of cultural competence in support initiatives. Addressing policy and practice implications is equally essential. Ross and Aday (2006) [16] emphasized the need for evidence-based recommendations, such as counseling and specialized school programs, to alleviate stress among African American grandparents. Filling research gaps enhances our understanding and guides future directions. Pramanik *et al.* (2019) [13] conducted a qualitative study that provided deeper insights into the coping mechanisms of caregiving grandparents, addressing a significant gap in qualitative research. Lastly, identifying effective coping strategies can enhance support networks, improving resilience and the overall quality of life for grandparents. This is aligned with Mohanty *et al.* (2021) [15], who emphasized the crucial role of social support and community resources in caregiving contexts. These multifaceted approaches collectively contribute to a comprehensive understanding and support framework for grandparent caregivers.

Materials and Methods

This systematic review comprises the analysis of 10 comprehensive articles. The review protocol encompasses various types of research methodologies, including non-experimental descriptive design, cross-sectional descriptive design, qualitative design (Specifically in-depth interviews), literature review, descriptive and correlational studies, and explanatory sequential mixed methods design. The literature

sought includes English-language scientific papers published in peer-reviewed journals, encompassing original research, systematic reviews, as well as governmental guidelines or protocols.

Inclusion Criteria

This systematic review examines stress levels and coping strategies among grandparents as primary caregivers for their grandchildren, especially when parents are employed. It includes peer-reviewed studies from the last 20 years, utilizing quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods, such as cross-sectional, longitudinal, and case studies, from diverse geographical locations, employing validated measurement tools.

Exclusion Criteria

The review excludes studies on non-grandparent caregivers and those not addressing both stress and coping comprehensively. Non-empirical studies, non-peer-reviewed articles, and publications in languages other than English are excluded. Only studies from the last 20 years using validated stress measures and detailing grandparent coping strategies are included.

Prisma Flowchart

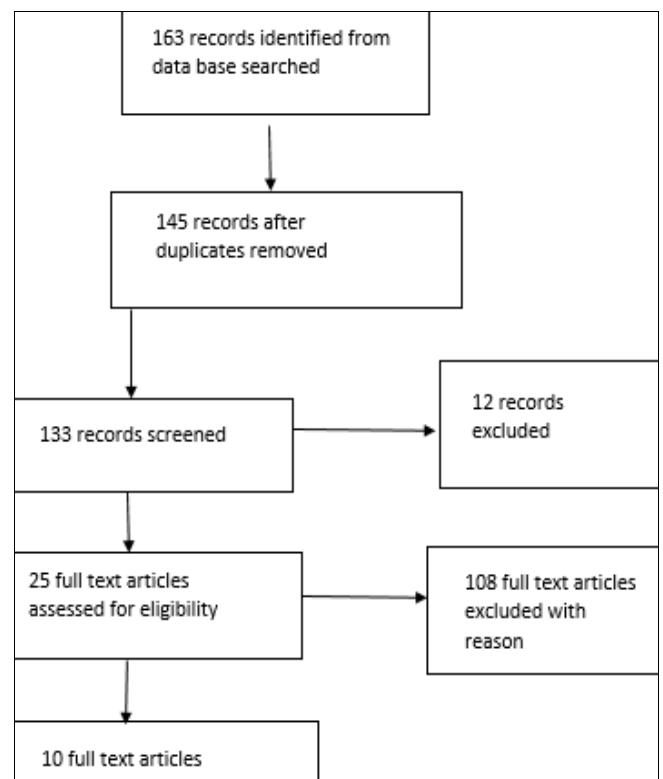


Fig 1: Conceptual framework and search strategy (PRISMA flow chart)

Table 1: Conceptual framework of the methodology.

Author/s Year	Sample/setting	Methodology and methods	Main findings
M <i>et al.</i> 2021	300 grandparents were selected using non-probability purposive sampling.	It was a non-experimental descriptive design, data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics.	74% of the grandparents experienced moderate stress, 23% experienced low stress, and 3% experienced high stress.
Yadav U <i>et al.</i> 2021 ^[9]	The study utilized a non-probability purposive sampling technique, targeting 100 grandparents in selected areas of Bangalore.	The research employed a cross-sectional descriptive design Data were collected using the Modified Parental Stress Scale (Berry and Jones, 1995)	The results revealed that 53% of the grandparents experienced moderate stress levels. The study also highlighted that female grandparents experienced higher stress levels compared to male grandparents.
Andal S, <i>et al.</i> 2020 ^[10]	40 grandparents were selected through non-probability convenient sampling	Using a quantitative, non-experimental descriptive research design, data were collected using a self-structured rating scale.	The findings revealed that out of 40 participants, 10% experienced mild stress, 77.5% had moderate stress, and 12.5% faced severe stress. The mean stress score was 68.5 with a standard deviation of 11.
D'Silva RM, <i>et al.</i> 2018 ^[11]	300 grandmothers were selected through purposive sampling technique	Using a descriptive study design, the participants were assessed using a structured questionnaire.	The results showed that 66% of the grandmothers had average knowledge of child-rearing practices, 71.3% experienced moderate stress, and 93% exhibited high coping abilities.
Ms. Pankaj Kumari <i>et al.</i> 2019 ^[19]	Convenient sampling technique was used to draw sample of 100 grandparents	A quantitative research approach was adopted for the study with descriptive research design. Self- Structured rating scale used to assess the level of stress among grandparents	majority of grandparents 82% had moderate level of stress, 18% had mild level of stress. None of them fall into severe category of stress depicts that there is significant association between level of stress with education, place of living, and monthly family income (in rupees) at $p < 0.05$.
A. Pramanik <i>et al.</i> (2019) ^[13]	The sample for this study consists of 20 grandparents selected through purposive sampling.	The research approach employed in the study is qualitative. The research design used in this study is a qualitative design, specifically in-depth interviews The primary data collection tool used in this study is in-depth interviews	Result showed that coping mechanisms included going for social support, taking part in leisure activities, including following a religious or spiritual path.
S. K. Mohanty <i>et al.</i> (2020) ^[14]	comprising a sample of 200 grandparents chosen through convenience sampling.	The research design used in this study is cross-sectional. The primary data collection tool used in this study is a survey questionnaire	Result found that the use of active coping strategies, such as seeking social support and problem-solving, was positively associated with life satisfaction.
P. R. Mohanty <i>et al.</i> (2021) ^[15]	the sample consists of previously published research articles, books, and other scholarly works.	The research design utilized in this study is a literature review	The authors concluded that grandparents experienced high levels of stress, but also reported using a variety of coping strategies, including seeking social support, engaging in leisure activities, and practicing religion/spirituality
	A purposive, convenience sample comprising 50 African American grandparents.	The research design used in this study is descriptive and correlational Data were collected via interviews conducted at senior centers and churches in Harris County	Coping strategies significantly correlated with less stress included accepting responsibility, confronted coping, self-control, positive reappraisal, planful problem solving, and distancing
Dunfee MN, <i>et al.</i> 2021 ^[17]	The sample consists of 26 rural grandparent caregivers who participated in the study.	The research design is explanatory sequential mixed methods design Quantitative data were collected through a survey, while qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews	Result: The study found that religion and spirituality play a significant role in coping among rural grandparent caregivers. Specifically, religion and spirituality facilitate coping by providing a sense of purpose and perspective, fostering peace and perseverance, and promoting stability and social cohesion.

Discussion

Roy *et al.* (2021) ^[8] found that among grandparents raising grandchildren of employed parents, 74% experienced moderate stress, 23% low stress, and 3% high stress. The majority (77.67%) employed moderate coping strategies, while 16.33% used high coping mechanisms and 6% utilized low coping methods. Mendoza, Fruhauf, and MacPhee's study highlighted that resilience among grandparent caregivers is shaped by stress, support, and coping mechanisms, influencing their life satisfaction. These caregivers face vulnerability due to high stress levels,

limited social support, and coping resources, emphasizing the need to enhance their support networks and coping strategies for improved well-being and life satisfaction. In a 2021 study by Yadav U *et al.*, stress levels among grandparents raising grandchildren of employed parents were examined. Findings revealed that 53% of grandparents experienced moderate stress. Significant associations were found between stress levels and demographic factors such as age, marital status, education, religion, family type, number of grandchildren, caregiving hours, and health issues. Female grandparents reported higher stress levels, indicating

a need for targeted support. Conversely, a study in Kalyanpur, Kanpur highlighted similar significant associations with educational status, family type, and health issues among grandparents. In contrast, a study in Mohali, Punjab found no significant associations between stress levels and age group, gender, marital status, or number of grandchildren.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the reviewed research provides a comprehensive understanding of stress levels and coping strategies among grandparents raising grandchildren of employed parents. Across various studies and methodologies, several key findings emerge: significant prevalence of stress among caregivers, particularly moderate to high levels; demographic factors such as age, gender, education, family structure, and caregiving duration impacting stress levels, with females disproportionately affected; diverse coping strategies including social support, problem-solving, and religious/spiritual practices; the need for tailored interventions and support programs; and the role of religion/spirituality as a significant coping facilitator, especially in rural settings. These insights underscore the complex challenges faced by grandparent caregivers and advocate for holistic approaches to support their well-being and resilience. Further research and targeted interventions are crucial to effectively assist this vulnerable population in managing their caregiving responsibilities.

Bias assessment

The systematic review on "Exploring the Stress and Coping Strategies of Grandparents Caring for Grandchildren of Employed Parents" must undergo a thorough bias assessment. Potential biases include selection bias, publication bias, language bias, reporting and outcome measurement biases, funding bias, and researcher bias. Transparent assessment and rigorous methodology are essential to ensure credible conclusions.

Limitations

The review faces potential publication and language biases by excluding unpublished and non-English studies. Heterogeneity in study designs and outcome measures complicates data synthesis and interpretation. Limited geographic scope and varying study quality impact generalizability and evidence strength, emphasizing the need for transparent decision-making.

Conflict of Interest

Not available.

Financial Support

Not available.

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