

# One-size-fits-all support services don't suit needs of younger grandmothers raising grandchildren

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Younger African-American grandmothers who are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren may have different needs than older grandmothers, possibly requiring different types of support to reduce depression and improve the quality of their mental health, according to researchers at Georgia State University and Emory University.

A new study published in *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development* is the first to explore the relationship between age and the success of social [support](#) services used to mediate depression and the mental health quality of life in custodial grandmothers.

Researchers from Georgia State and Emory universities studied 667 African-American custodial grandmothers who participated in a year of support interventions. Services included support groups, family case management, referrals to community agencies and navigator services that guide caregivers through the maze of large service agencies.

"Our data suggest that the needs, types of support required and how they are delivered may differ between younger and older grandparents," said lead author and Associate Professor Deborah Whitley of the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State. Whitley is associate director of Project Healthy Grandparents and the National Center on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren.

There are about 2.7 million grandparents raising grandchildren without either birth parent in the household, the majority being African-American custodial grandmothers, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. In one sample, about 40 percent of these caregivers scored in the clinically elevated range for depression.

Earlier works suggest that younger caregiving grandmothers tend to report higher levels of emotional distress, including depression, when compared with older caregivers. They may experience a sense of loss when personal and professional goals go unrealized. They may also find family caregiving less gratifying than do their older counterparts.

Understanding how variables such as age affect African-American custodial grandmothers could lead to beneficial changes in mental health practice strategies and the development of age-appropriate support interventions. Support services designed to target specific individual and family needs have been associated with reducing the negative effects produced by these stressors.

"The question becomes how to better serve young grandparents whose needs are probably different compared to older [grandparents](#)," Whitley said. "Family demands, if not reduced or mediated by these resources, may increase the likelihood of negative outcomes, including a compromised mental health quality of life."

Whitley stressed the results are preliminary and more research is needed.

"However," she said, "understanding these associations may help in the development and enhancement of [mental health](#) practice strategies for all African-American grandmothers who are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren."

Provided by Georgia State University

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