

## Counting on Grandmothers: Black Mothers' and Fathers' Reliance on Grandmothers for Parenting Support

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### **Abstract:**

This article examines Black young adult parents' reliance on grandmothers for parenting support. The sample of 487 parents, 18 to 34 years old, was drawn from the National Survey of Black Americans. Parents most often nominated grandmothers as the person they could count on for child care assistance and parental guidance. Mothers and fathers did not differ in their overall nominations of grandmothers. However, mothers were more likely than fathers to rely on grandmothers for both child care assistance and parenting advice. Fathers were more likely than mothers to rely on grandmothers for child care assistance only. Factors affecting parents' reliance on grandmothers for parenting support varied by gender. For mothers, family closeness, the number of generations in multigeneration family lineages, residence in the rural South, and family proximity were related to increased reliance on grandmothers for parenting support. Among fathers, being employed and family proximity increased their reliance on grandmothers.

**Keywords:** Parenting | African Americans | Grandmothers | Intergenerational Relations

### **Article:**

Black grandmothers frequently play critical roles in child rearing and parenting support (Burton & Dilworth-Anderson, 1991). Grandmother involvement as a response to nonnormative family transitions (Burton & Merriwether-deVries, 1992; Colletta & Lee, 1983; Stevens, 1984), single parenthood and poverty (Chase-Lansdale, Brooks-Gunn, & Zamsky, 1994; Hofferth, 1985; Hogan, Hao, & Parish, 1990), and family crisis (Burton, 1992; Minkler & Roe, 1993) has dominated the empirical literature on Black grandparenthood. However, investigations of the underlying intergenerational family processes that support grandmother involvement has not kept pace with the interest in problem-based antecedents. This is in sharp contrast to the literature on grandparenthood in White families that focuses primarily on noncrisis contexts, the meaning of grandparenthood (C. Johnson, 1983; Robertson, 1977) and the quality of intergenerational

relationships (Bengston & Roberts, 1991; King & Elder, 1995; Roberto & Stroes, 1992; Thompson & Walker, 1987).

Black grandmothers' involvement in child care is related to parents' need for help (Burton & Dilworth-Anderson, 1991; Pearson, Hunter, Ensminger, & Kellam, 1990; Wilson, 1984). In addition, the mobilization of grandmothers likely depends on culturally based family norms and their integration into parenting support networks. Race-comparative national studies of grandmother involvement, from child care to coresidence, typically examine economic and demographic indicators but do not assess family-based processes or sociocultural influences that may drive intergenerational parenting strategies (Hogan et al., 1990; Soloman & Marx, 1995). Intensive small-scale studies of families in crisis do investigate intergenerational family relationships and their role in adaptation (e.g., Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, & Morgan, 1989; Minkler & Roe, 1993). However, to what extent observed patterns are grounded in precrisis family organization or mirror normative patterns among Black families is typically not assessed. Community-based studies of Black extended families (Dressler, 1985; Wilson, 1984; Wilson, Tolson, Hinton, & Kiernan, 1990) and grandparenting (Kivett, 1991, 1993) in noncrisis contexts bridge these approaches. These studies suggest that intergenerational family relationships and the extended kin group are an important part of Black families and are likely the basis for intergenerational parenting. However, like intensive studies of Black families in crisis, community-based studies are limited in their generalizability.

Based on a national survey of Black Americans, this article examines parents' perceptions that they count on grandmothers for parenting support. This investigation focuses on three major areas. The first is the role of grandmothers in the parenting support networks of young adult (18 to 34 years old) parents. Second, the effects of (a) demographic and economic indicators of parental needs and (b) kinship ties and intergenerational family relationships on parents' nomination of grandmothers are examined. Third, gender differences in parents' reliance on grandmothers are explored. Gender and kinship is a focal point because little is known about how Black mothers and fathers are differently (or similarly) situated in kin networks with respect to parenting. The primary aim of this study is to focus attention on aspects of family organization and intergenerational family relationships that may influence the integration of grandmothers into the parenting networks of Black Americans.

#### GRANDMOTHER PARENTING INVOLVEMENT IN BLACK FAMILIES: AN INTERGENERATIONAL FAMILY STRATEGY

Classic studies of Black families have argued that culturally based social norms and family organization not based on the marital dyad provide the foundation for the integrated role of grandparents in parenting, particularly grandmothers (Burton & Dilworth-Anderson, 1991; Frazier, 1939; Gutman, 1976; Jones, 1973; Martin & Martin, 1978). From this perspective, involved grandmothering is a well-worn family strategy with roots in Black cultural traditions and the economic and social realities of Black life. Viewing grandmother involvement as an

intergenerational family strategy provides a useful framework for exploring the diversity in Black grandmothering practices. The concept of family strategy assumes that individuals and families are proactive and make choices about how to respond to family circumstances given perceived options and constraints (Hareven, 1987; Hunter, 1993; Tilly & Scott, 1978). Also embedded in the concept of family strategy is an acknowledgment of the dialectical tension between the needs of the individual and the family as a collective, and the coexistence of mutual and competing needs within families.

This view of family strategies overlaps with the life-course perspective's focus on the interplay between individuals lives within families, specifically the interlocking life-course trajectories of family members across generations (Elder, 1978, 1985; Hareven, 1982). As Elder (1985, p. 42) suggests, "kinship distinctions broadens the life course perspective beyond the single life span, following the assumption of intergenerational dependence." Although social norms and expectations about parenting support from grandparents may be culturally based, grandparent parental involvement is shaped by the timing and sequencing of family events (Burton & Bengston, 1985; Elder, 1978), age-graded child-rearing tasks (Aldous, 1990; Hill & Rodgers, 1964), and the structure of multigenerational family systems (Burton, 1990; Burton & Dilworth-Anderson, 1991). Importantly, a life-course perspective and the view of grandmothering as an intergenerational family strategy draws attention to the linkages between successive generations and the effect of culture, kinship, and circumstance on the development of cross-generation parenting support networks.

#### VARIATIONS IN GRANDMOTHER PARENTING INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT

According to Cherlin & Furstenberg (1985), Black grandparents rarely demonstrate a passive style of grandparenthood. The majority of grandparents have either an "authoritative" or "influential" grandparenting style that involves high levels of support and/or parent-like influence. Similar patterns of grandmother involvement have been found in a number of studies (Burton, 1990; Hogan et al., 1990; Kivett, 1993; Pearson et al., 1990; Wilson, 1984; Wilson et al., 1990). These patterns of caregiving are matched by grandchildren's perception of grandparents' influence. Strom, Collinsworth, Strom, and Griswold (1992-1993) found that Black children viewed grandmothers as more influential in teaching lessons about morality, life, importance of learning, and religious faith than in White families. Despite demonstrated patterns of involvement and influence, the grandmother role in Black families is malleable and tenuous (Burton & Bengston, 1985; Robertson, 1985; Tinsley & Parke, 1984).

#### PARENT DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Demographic and economic characteristics of parents and households are predictors of intergenerational assistance and support across race and ethnicity (Aldous, 1995). In Black families, grandmothers frequently fill gaps due to parents' age, single parenthood, and physical or mental disability. Adolescent and unmarried mothers are more likely to rely on grandmothers

in key parenting domains (e.g., rule setting, discipline, and child care) than older and married mothers (Hogan et al., 1990; Pearson et al., 1990; Wilson, 1984). When parents are unable to parent due to drug addiction, incarceration, or mental or physical illness, grandparents, primarily grandmothers, step in as parenting surrogates (Burton, Dilworth-Anderson, & Merriwether-deVries, 1995). Whether Black grandmothers attempt to mitigate the normative pressures (e.g., balancing work and family demands) that parents face independently of marital status or family structure has not been a focal point of research in this area.

Economic resources do influence intergenerational exchanges among Black Americans (Hofferth, 1985; Hogan et al., 1990; Jackson, Jayakody, & Antonucci, 1996). Resource-poor multigeneration family lineages depend on kin networks based on reciprocal aid and obligation for support and economic survival (Jarrett, 1994; Martin & Martin, 1978; Stack, 1974). Women with inadequate resources are more likely to rely on unpaid child care provided by grandmothers and other relatives than are more affluent mothers (Hogan et al., 1990). However, there is no evidence to suggest that with increased income Black parents are less likely to view grandmothers as a primary source of parenting support.

Black mothers who are most needy and have fewer resources are more likely to receive aid from grandmothers. Although the need for child care assistance may be a catalyst for receiving help, demographic (e.g., marital status) and economic (e.g., income-to-needs ratio) indicators of parental needs may not significantly affect their perceptions of grandmothers as a parenting resource.

## CULTURE, KINSHIP TIES, AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Revisionist studies of Black families emphasize intergenerational family connections, malleable family roles and responsibilities, and family relationships not bounded by the nuclear family or household membership (see Billingsley, 1968; Gutman, 1976; Hill, 1972; Martin & Martin, 1978; Shimkin, Shimkin, & Frate, 1978; Stack, 1974). Within this framework, "grandmothering" is a cultural-based family strategy that reflects the central position of grandmothers in Black multigeneration family lineages. Whereas cultural background may produce organizing principles that shape the family relations of Black Americans, there is heterogeneity in community-based social ecologies (e.g., rural Southern, urban Northern), the structure and depth of multigenerational family lineages (e.g., age condensed, verticalization), and the centrality of intergenerational family ties that may influence the configuration of parenting support networks.

The community setting in which intergenerational relationships are negotiated and parents rear their children embodies social norms and role models that may be supportive of intergenerational parenting strategies. Ethnographies of Black families in rural southern communities (Shimkin et al., 1978; Stack & Burton, 1993) and urban poor communities (Aschenbrenner, 1975; Burton, 1990; Jarrett, 1994; Stack, 1974) suggest these environments, because of need, values, and experience, are particularly supportive of innovative child care strategies and parenting

arrangements. Ethnographies have also pointed to the importance of residence in kin-rich neighborhoods (i.e., several members of the kin group living in close proximity) for intergenerational caregiving (Aschenbrenner, 1975; Martin & Martin, 1978; Stack, 1974). Because Black American extended-kinship systems are grounded in the family traditions of the rural South, parents living in this part of the country may be more likely to turn to grandmothers for parenting support (Gutman, 1976; Martin & Martin, 1978; Shimkin et al., 1978; Stack & Burton, 1993).

Characteristics of the kin group (e.g., availability, proximity, closeness) influence the options for kin-based parenting support. Kin availability, as determined by survivorship across generations, creates the universe from which parents select sources of kin-based support. The structure of multigeneration family lineages, a function of mortality and fertility (i.e., timing, parity, and spacing), influences intergenerational family relationships, the likelihood of simultaneous role positions and transitions (e.g., mother, grandmother, great grandmother), and the needs for intergenerational care (Burton, 1990; Burton & Dilworth-Anderson, 1991). Kin proximity is related to contact, relationship quality, and emotional closeness in intergenerational relationships (Adams, 1968; Atkinson, Kivett, & Campbell, 1986; Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1985; King & Elder, 1995).

The relationship between proximity, contact and assistance, and closeness is reciprocal and unfolds over time (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Silverstein, Parrott, & Bengston, 1995). There are no known longitudinal studies that explore these processes among Black Americans. However, cross-sectional studies of family affect and kin-based social support find that feelings of closeness are predictive of intergenerational assistance in Black families (Chatters, Taylor, & Jackson, 1986; Jayakody, Chatters, & Taylor, 1993). Jayakody et al. (1993) found that adult mothers who felt close to their families were more likely to rely on them for financial and emotional assistance; however, closeness was not related to the receipt of child care assistance. Chatters et al. (1986) found that among the elderly, those who felt close to their families were more likely to select family over friends for informal assistance.

## GENDER AND GRANDMOTHER SUPPORT

Intergenerational relationships, living arrangements, and intergenerational exchanges vary by gender (Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1992; Jackson, 1971; Richards, White, & Tsui, 1987; Spitze & Logan, 1990; Umberson, 1992). Female kin networks are an important source of aid and support for Black women (Collins, 1990; Jarrett, 1994), and most investigations of parenting in Black multigeneration families focus on female lineages (i.e., grandmother-mother). In contrast, Black men, as fathers and members of multigeneration family lineages, have received little attention. Father presence in multigeneration households does affect the type and frequency of grandmother involvement in parenting (Pearson et al., 1990; Wilson, 1984); however, whether fathers are less likely than mothers to view grandmothers as a primary parenting resource has not been examined.

In ethnographies of poor communities, Black men are either absent, marginalized, or described as "satellites" to female-based networks (Anderson, 1990; Burton, 1990; Liebow, 1967; Stack, 1974). Martin and Martin's (1978) ethnographic study of age strata, gender, and family roles in working-class Black extended families describes both central, integrated, and satellite positions of men in families. Wherever men are situated, the "rules" of intergenerational care may be unaffected. That is, in a family context where the guidance of older female kin is valued, young adult mothers and fathers may both turn to grandmothers for parenting guidance and help. Alternatively, young adult married men and resident fathers may be more likely to turn to wives than grandmothers for parenting support and guidance. Antonucci and Akiyama (1987) found in their study of gender and social networks that older men are more likely than women to put spouses at the center of their social networks.

Little is known about how nonresidential and never-married adult fathers who occupy quasi-institutionalized roles parent or how they fit into multigeneration family lineages (Marsiglio, 1995). The ambiguity of paternal responsibilities and rights when there has been no marriage and the dampening effect of nonresidence on father involvement (Furstenberg & Harris, 1992; W. Johnson, 1995a; King, 1994; Marsiglio, 1995) may marginalize or alienate men from multigeneration family systems (e.g., Burton, 1990). Alternatively, fatherhood without marriage may heighten the importance of extended-family relationships for both maintaining parental ties and parenting support. For example, Miller (1994) found that Black adolescent fathers frequently report that their mothers played an important role in teaching them about fatherhood and helping them with child care.

Parental expectations about the role of grandmothers provide a window into social norms and ways of thinking about family relationships that may place grandmothers in a pivotal position in times of trouble and as a trustworthy safety net in better times (Bengston & Roberts, 1991; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). This study focuses on parents' perceptions that they can count on grandmothers for child care assistance and parenting advice. Three central questions are addressed: (a) Are grandmothers the primary source of parenting support for young adult parents? (b) Are there gender differences in parents' reliance on grandmothers as a source of parenting support? and (c) Do demographic and economic characteristics of parents and households, community context, and intergenerational family context affect parents' reliance on grandmothers for parenting support? Based on the literature on Black families, grandparenthood, and intergenerational family relationships, the following hypotheses are proposed. First, grandmothers will be the primary source of parenting support for both mothers and fathers. Second, parent characteristics (age, marital status, number of children) and economic status (employment, economic need) will not predict mothers' reliance on grandmothers for parenting support. These results are expected for fathers with the exception of marital status, where it is expected that being married will decrease fathers' reliance on grandmothers. Third, residence in rural southern communities, close kinship ties (proximity and emotional closeness), embeddedness in extended-kinship

systems, and greater depth in multigenerational family lineages will increase both mothers' and fathers' reliance on grandmothers for parenting support.

## METHODS

### SAMPLE

The data for this study was drawn from the National Survey of Black Americans (NSBA) (Jackson, Tucker, & Gurin, 1979-1980). The NSBA is a multistage area probability sample of noninstitutionalized Black adults (18 and over) living in the continental United States. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 2,107 individuals, with a response rate of 69% (see Jackson, 1991, for a detailed description of survey). This study is based on a subsample of 487 young adult parents, 18 to 34 years old, who lived in households with minor children. The NSBA sample is comparable to Census Population Survey data with the following exceptions: The NSBA sample is slightly older, and males and residents of western states are slightly underrepresented (Taylor, 1986).

Table 1 shows the sociodemographic characteristics of parents by gender. Seventy-four percent (74.1%) were mothers and 25.9% were fathers. The mean age of mothers was 27.5 (SD = 4.3) and the mean age of fathers was 28.4 (SD = 3.5,  $t = 2.22$ ,  $p$  [is less than] .05). Marital status also varied by gender, [ $\chi^2(2,487) = 74.52$ ,  $p$  [is less than] .01]. The majority of fathers were married (82.5%) or formerly married (5.6%) and about 1 out of 10 were never married. Divorced and unmarried fathers were underrepresented in this study because NSBA did not query fathers about parenting support unless they lived with children. Since 1980, the proportion of Black men who are never married and divorced has increased (USBOC, 1994). These changes in marital status coupled with the rise in nonmarital childbearing has increased the proportion of Black fathers who do not share residences with their children (Marsiglio, 1995; USBOC, 1994).

TABLE 1 Sociodemographic Characteristics of Mothers and Fathers

Sociodemographic Variables	Parent Gender	
	Mothers (n = 361)	Fathers (n = 126)
	%	n
Age (M, SD)	27.5 (4.3)	28.4 (3.5)
Marital status		
Never married	30.7 (111)	11.9 (15)
Divorced, separated, widowed	31 (112)	5.6 (7)
Married	38.2 (138)	82.5 (104)
Number of Children (M, SD)	2.3 (1.3)	2.1 (1.1)
Employed	51 (184)	78.6 (99)
Income-to-needs ratio (M, SD)	1.7 (1.2)	2.5 (1.2)

Lives with extended kin	19.1 (69)	8.7 (11)
Multigeneration family lineage		
Four to five generations	54.2 (196)	48.4 (61)
Three generations	41.3 (149)	47.6 (60)
Two generations	4.4 (16)	4.0 (5)

NOTE: Percentages and cell sizes are shown, unless otherwise noted.

The distribution of the marital status of mothers in this sample generally mirrors those of Black women in the general population since 1980. The modal marital status for mothers was married (38.2%); however, most women were not currently married. Thirty-one percent of mothers were formerly married and 30.7% were never married. The modal marital status for Black women in the general population was married in 1980 (48.7%) and in 1993 (41.1%). A substantial proportion of women were also never married, 27.4% in 1980 and 34.9% in 1993 (USBOC, 1994).

The shifts in marital status for both men and women since 1980 has led to a decline in the proportion of Black children living in two-parent households and an increase in single-parent households headed primarily by mothers. Looking at all family groups (i.e., householders and subfamilies), Black two-parent family groups have declined by 11% between 1980 (48%) and 1993 (37%) and there has been a parallel rise in one-parent family groups (USBOC, 1994).

Respondents, on average, had two children. Mothers had slightly more children than fathers ( $t = -1.43$ ,  $p$  [is less than] .05). Fathers (78.6%) were more likely to be employed than were mothers (51%, [ $\text{Chi.sup.2}$ ](1, 487) = 29.23,  $p$  [is less than] .01). Fathers' mean household income-to-needs ratio was also higher than mothers' ( $t = 5.9$ ,  $p$  [less than or equal to] .05), indicating higher levels of household economic well-being among fathers. Mothers were more likely to live in households with extended kin than were fathers, [ $\text{Chi.sup.2}$ ] (1,487) = 7.33,  $p$  [is less than] .01. About one out of five mothers and 8.7% of fathers lived in extended-family households. Parents were likely to be members of family lineages with several surviving generations. Fifty-four percent of mothers and 48.4% of fathers were a part of family lineages that included four to five generations. Relatively few parents, about 4%, were members of two-generation family lineages. There were no significant differences in these patterns by gender, [ $\text{Chi.sup.2}$ ](3,487) = 2.25,  $p$  [less than or equal to] .05.

## MEASURES

### DEPENDENT VARIABLE: GRANDMOTHER PARENTING SUPPORT

Parents' reliance on grandmothers for parenting support is measured by two items: (a) "Do you have anyone who gives you advice about child rearing or helps you with problems having to do with children? If yes, what is this advisor's relationship to you?" and (b) "Do you have someone to count on to take care of the children? If yes, what is this person's relationship to you?" Respondents received a score of 1 for each first mention of their offsprings' grandmother.



Respondents who had no one to provide support, felt they did not need support, or who selected someone other than grandmothers received a score of 0. Total scores ranged from 0 to 2.

## INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

### Parent Characteristics, Economic Status, and Community Context

Parent characteristics include age, marital status, and number of children currently living. Marital status is a dichotomous variable; married parents with spouses present (1) were compared to formerly married and never-married parents (0). Economic status was measured by a household income-to-needs ratio and employment. The income-to-needs ratio is an index measure that divides total family income (earnings, interest, dividends, government payments, etc.) by the total income needs of the household (adjusted for the age and sex of each member) (Morgan, 1983). Parents working full- and part-time (1) were contrasted with parents who were unemployed (0). Community context is measured by region and type of residence. Respondents living in the rural South (1) were contrasted with respondents living elsewhere (0).

### Intergenerational Family Context

Family context variables include (a) extended family household, (b) surviving generations in multigeneration family lineages, (c) neighborhood extended-kin networks, (d) family proximity, and (e) family closeness. Respondents sharing households with extended kin (1) were contrasted with those who did not live with nonnuclear family kin (0). The measure of multigeneration family lineages was based on the vertical extension of respondent families. Respondents were asked to indicate the number of their living relatives in the following categories: (a) great-grandparents, (b) grandparents, and (c) parents. Response categories ranged from 0 to 4. If at least one relative was surviving at a generational position, the respondent received a score of 1. Scores ranged from 0 to 3, which corresponded to family lineages ranging from two to five generations (including the respondent and his/her offspring). Neighborhood extended-kin networks was measured by the following item: "How many of your relatives, not in your immediate family, live in your neighborhood? Would you say many, some, a few, none?" Family closeness was measured by the following item: "Would you say your family members are very close in their feeling to each other, fairly close, not too close, or not close at all?" On both of these items the scores ranged from 1 to 4. Family proximity was measured by the following item: "Where do most, that is more than half, of your immediate family members live?" Responses ranged from same household to another state.

## FINDINGS

Grandmothers were more frequently nominated than any other source of parenting help including spouses (current or former partners), relatives, friends, and professionals. Table 2 shows the frequency of parents' nomination of grandmothers and the type of support parents received by gender. Despite gender differences in marital status and living arrangements, both mothers and

fathers most often cited grandmothers as the person they turn to for parenting support. Fifty-seven percent of mothers and 55% of fathers nominated grandmothers as a parenting resource. The type of support parents receive varied somewhat by gender. Fathers (30%) were more likely than mothers (21.2%) to rely on grandmothers for child care assistance only. Mothers (46.7%) were more likely than fathers (38%) to go to grandmothers for both child care assistance and advice. The percentage of mothers (32%) and fathers (31.4%) who indicated they count on grandmothers for parenting advice only did not vary.

TABLE 2 Parents' Reliance on Grandmothers for Parenting Support

	Parent Gender			
	Mothers (n = 361)		Fathers (n = 126)	
	%	n	%	n
Relies on grandmothers	57.2	(203)	55.6	(70)
Type of support from grandmothers				
Child care resource only	21.2	(43)	30	(21)
Parenting advice only	32	(65)	31.4	(22)
Child care resource and advice	46.7	(95)	38	(27)

Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the effects of demographic and economic characteristics of parents and households, community setting, and intergenerational family context on parents' reliance on grandmothers for parenting support (Table 3). The analysis was done separately for mothers and fathers. For mothers, feelings of family closeness, the number of surviving generations in multigeneration lineages, residence in the rural South, and family proximity were related to increased reliance on grandmothers for parenting support. Indexes of parental need, including marital status, number of children, employment status, and income-to-needs ratio, did not significantly affect mothers' nomination of grandmothers. Sharing a residence with extended kin and living in a neighborhood with members of the extended family were the only two measures of kinship ties that did not significantly affect mothers' reliance on grandmothers. In general, family ties largely drive mothers' reliance on grandmothers. For women rearing children in the rural South, reliance on grandmothers may have a particular cultural resonance.

TABLE 3 Regression Models for Parents' Reliance on Grandmothers for Parenting Support

Independent Variables	Mothers	
	B	SE
Parent characteristics		

Age	-.031	(.105)
Married	.071	(.092)
Number of children	-.016	(.036)
Economic status		
Employed	.053	(.092)
Household income-to-needs ratio	.021	(.042)
Community context		
Rural South	.287[**]	(.111)
Intergenerational family context		
Multigeneration family lineage	.179[***]	(.064)
Extended kin in neighborhood	.027	(.046)
Extended family household	-.071	(.111)
Family closeness	.182[***]	(.060)
Family proximity	.118[***]	(.030)
Constant	-.601	(.313)
[R.sup.2]	.136	
Adjusted [R.sup.2]	.107	
Overall F	4.80[***]	

#### Fathers

Independent Variables	B	SE
Parent characteristics		
Age	-.100	(.235)
Married	-.338	(.230)
Number of children	-.059	(.070)
Economic status		
Employed	.373[*]	(.187)
Household income-to-needs ratio	-.089	(.068)
Community context		
Rural South	.191	(.208)
Intergenerational family context		
Multigeneration family lineage	-.058	(.119)
Extended kin in neighborhood	-.025	(.088)
Extended family household	-.342	(.316)
Family closeness	-.044	(.120)

Family proximity	.113[*]	(.051)
Constant	.966	(.687)
[R.sup.2]	.177	
Adjusted [R.sup.2]	.028	
Overall F	1.31	

[\*] p is less than .05; [\*\*] p is less than .01; [\*\*\*] p is less than .001.

Among fathers, being employed and family proximity significantly increased reliance on grandmothers for parenting support. However, in general, family variables were largely irrelevant for fathers, even though they were as likely as mothers to nominate grandmothers as a primary source of parenting support. In addition, married fathers were no less likely than unmarried fathers to nominate grandmothers.

## SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This study examined Black parents' reliance on grandmothers for parenting support. The findings indicate that Black parents, regardless of gender, view grandmothers as a primary source of parenting support, relying on them more frequently than anyone else. Interest in problem-based antecedents of grandmother involvement in Black families has resulted in less attention to the intergenerational family processes that support grandmother integration in child rearing or as parenting surrogates. Parenting alone, being a young parent, and having fewer economic resources are factors associated with the receipt of parenting assistance from grandmothers. However, as hypothesized, these factors were unrelated to mothers' perceptions that they could count on grandmothers for parenting support. The same patterns were found for fathers, but, contrary to expectations, married fathers did not rely on grandmothers significantly less than unmarried fathers.

Although both mothers and fathers turned to grandmothers for parenting support, what predicted parents' reliance on this intergenerational parenting strategy varied by gender. For mothers, kinship ties, intergenerational family relationships, and residence in the rural South significantly affected their reliance on grandmothers. These findings are consistent with ethnographic research on Black multigeneration family systems (e.g., Martin & Martin, 1978; Shimkin et al., 1978). Because of the paucity of research on Black men and intergenerational relationships, the model tested was based on studies of grandchild-mother-grandmother triads; however, this model was less useful for explaining fathers' reliance on grandmothers. Employment status and family proximity were the only variables that significantly affected fathers' reliance on grandmothers for parenting support. The emergence of employment as a predictor for men suggests it may be important to consider other economic variables that may tie or distance men from parenting and extended-family ties. For example, provider role strain (Bowman, 1990) may affect men's willingness to go to relatives for parenting help. It is unclear why other indicators of family closeness and kinship ties were not related to fathers' reliance on grandmother support. Perhaps

fathers' wives and the mothers of their children mediate men's relationships with grandmothers. If so, measures of paternal extended-family relationships may be less predictive of fathers' reliance on grandmothers.

Few studies examine Black men's relationship to grandmothers or their position in multigeneration family lineages. This study demonstrates that grandmothers do play a central role in the parenting support networks of Black fathers. Surprisingly, although most men were married, they predominantly nominated grandmothers as their parenting resource. These patterns may be indicative of the effect of age stratification and gendered family roles in Black extended-family systems discussed by Martin and Martin (1978), where younger family members are more likely to seek advice and help from elders, particularly women, when the issue is parenting and child care. Because this study was limited to coresidential parents, it is not known whether these patterns will be similar for nonresidential fathers. However, studies of parental involvement of nonresidential fathers and male relatives do indicate that Black men are participants in multigeneration family systems in a variety of ways (Hawkins & Eggebeen, 1991; W. Johnson, 1995b; King, 1993). Clearly, more work that explores nonresidential Black fathers and the ways in which Black men are integrated into multigeneration family systems is needed.

The extent to which young adult parents were willing to depend on grandmothers speaks to the centrality of grandmothers in the child-rearing system of many Black families. This study suggests the prevalence of influential and authoritative grandparenting styles (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1985) in Black families is not only a response to family difficulties but may also reflect a way of thinking about and organizing family relationships that push grandmothers to the forefront of parenting support. However, Black families are not homogenous and variations in grandmothering practices should be expected. Drawing on the life-course perspective and an emphasis on family strategies, fruitful areas of future research on Black grandparenthood and intergenerational family relationships include (a) further exploration of social norms governing intergenerational parenting in Black families; (b) an examination of the negotiation and conflicts within multigeneration family systems about who receives support, when, and under what conditions; and (c) the use of developmental frameworks (e.g., intergenerational family life cycle, social convoy model) to explore the implementation of intergenerational parenting strategies, its relationship to the developmental tasks that families face, and the shifting role expectations and obligations across the life course and within family lineages. The role of gender in parenting and intergenerational family relationships in Black families also needs to be looked at more extensively.

Since 1980, there have been significant changes in the marital status of Black adults and shifts in family structure. These changes in family demography increase the likelihood that young adult parents will need the help of grandparents to provide parenting support, economic resources, and housing. Indeed, in 1990 over 12% of Black children lived in households with grandparents with and without parents (USBOC, 1991). In addition, several recent studies exploring grandmother-parenting involvement indicate grandmothers remain an important source of parenting support

(e.g., Burton, 1992; Kivett, 1993; Pearson, Hunter, Cook, Ialongo, & Kellam, 1996; Soloman & Marx, 1995; Wilson et al., 1990). However, it is also important to note, as Burton & Dilworth-Anderson (1991) persuasively argue, that Black grandparenthood is in transition. Changes in Black family demography and mortality have led to greater diversity in the structure and age composition of multigeneration-family lineages. These demographic shifts are likely to bring increased complexity to cross-generation relationships and variations in how multigeneration-family systems function. Further, increased opportunities for grandparent involvement and the need for help has its costs, a family burden that some grandmothers may be unable or unwilling to bear.

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