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FP-13-03 Grandchildren: Living in a Grandparent-Headed Household

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Child outcomes are shaped in part by family structure and complexity. With decreasing marriage rates (FP-9-01), a decline in the proportion of people who ever marry (FP-10-01), rising cohabitation (FP-10-07), and a fragile economy (FP-11-01), children are living in diverse family structures and households. These family structures range from adoptive families (FP-11-03), to cohabiting families (FP-11-07), to multigenerational families. Using the 2010 American Community Survey and Integrated Public Use Microdata Series USA, this profile examines multiple characteristics of coresident grandchildren living in a grandparent-headed household and compares those who have a parent present in the household to those who do not¹.

¹Note: Generally, these household types are referred to as “three-generation households” and “skipped-generation households,” respectively. However, this profile aims to capture the perspective of individual children rather than households. Therefore, this profile does not include children living with a grandparent when the grandparent is not the householder.

Historical Trend
- From 1940 to 1950, the percentage of children living with a grandparent remained relatively stable. The percentage declined between 1950 and 1970 from 5.8% to 3.2%.
- The percentage of children living with a grandparent is currently at a 70-year high of 7.3%, having more than doubled since 1970 (3.2%).
- Among coresident grandchildren, nearly one-third (29%) are living in their grandparent’s household without their mother or father (not shown).

Age Distribution of Coresident Grandchildren by Presence of Parent
- On average, coresident grandchildren with a parent present in the household are 2 years younger than those without a parent present (6.2 years and 8.2 years, respectively) (not shown).
- There is little age variation between all children and coresident grandchildren without a parent present in the household.
- Coresident grandchildren with a parent in the household are relatively young. Nearly three-fifths (58%) of coresident grandchildren with a parent present in the household are age 6 or younger versus just 42% with no parent present.

Variation by Race, Ethnicity, and Nativity of Children Coresiding with a Grandparent

- Native born Black and Hispanic children are the most likely to live with a grandparent (12.2% and 8.8%, respectively).
- Only 5.5% of native-born Asian and White children live with a grandparent, less than half the proportion of Black children.
- Among all races, foreign-born children are less likely to coreside with a grandparent.

Race/Ethnic Variation in the Presence of a Parent Among Coresident Grandchildren

- Among White, Black, and Hispanic coresident grandchildren, foreign-born grandchildren are slightly more likely to have a parent present in the household than their native born counterparts. The reverse is true for Asian coresident grandchildren.
- Native-born Asian and foreign-born White coresident grandchildren are the most likely among all races to have a parent present (81% and 80%, respectively).
- Black coresident grandchildren, regardless of nativity, (62% native born, 64% foreign born) are the least likely to have a parent present in the household.

Poverty/Low Income Status of Coresident Grandchildren by Presence of Parent

- On average, coresident grandchildren are more likely to live in an economically disadvantaged household than all children.
- One-third of coresident grandchildren without a parent present live in poverty (33%), whereas less than one-fifth (18%) with a parent present are poor. There is no difference by presence of parent in the proportions of coresident grandchildren living in low income households (both about 30%).
- Coresident grandchildren with a parent present are slightly less likely to live in a poor household (18%) compared to all children (21%). However, they are more likely to live in a low income household (29% vs. 22%).

Sources: