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FP-14-13 Grandparenthood in the U.S.: Grandparents' Characteristics by Life Stage

Bart Stykes

Wendy D. Manning
Bowling Green State University, wmannin@bgsu.edu

Susan L. Brown
Bowling Green State University, brownsl@bgsu.edu

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The U.S. is an aging society. As a result, an increasing number of adults are now grandparents (FP-14-12). However, little is known about the composition of grandparents. This profile relies on national data to provide an assessment of the characteristics of midlife and older grandparents. This is the second* profile in the NCFMR series on grandparents in the U.S.

*Additional NCFMR resources on grandparents can be found at Resources by Topic -- the Grandparents link. The page includes two additional profiles on grandparents (FP-14-12, FP-14-14) and two other profiles on children’s co-residence with grandparents (FP-13-03, FP-12-18) in addition to other data resources.

Prevalence of Grandparenthood
In 1985, approximately 44 million adults aged 30+ were grandparents (Francese, 2009). Recent estimates (FP-14-12) indicate this figure has increased to 64 million. Forty-nine percent of grandparents are midlife, and 46% are older.

- Figure 1 shows that among midlife adults (aged 45-64), 4 in 10 or 32 million are grandparents.
- Almost 8 in 10 (78%) older adults or 29 million (aged 65+) are grandparents.

Race/Ethnicity of Midlife and Older Grandparents
Overall, larger shares of midlife grandparents belong to minority racial/ethnic groups compared to their older counterparts.

- Seven in 10 midlife grandparents are White, whereas 1 in 7 midlife grandparents is Black or Hispanic, and a mere 2% are Asian.
- Conversely, more than 8 in 10 (82%) older grandparents are White, approximately 1 in 12 older grandparents is Black or Hispanic (7% and 8%, respectively) with 3% being Asian.
Educational Attainment of Midlife and Older Grandparents

The education levels of midlife and older grandparents are largely comparable.

- Approximately 1 in 5 midlife and older grandparents is college educated (18% and 20%, respectively).
- Almost half of midlife (46%) and older (52%) grandparents do not have any college experience.
- Nearly 2 in 5 (37%) midlife grandparents had some college experience (but no degree) compared to less than 1 in 3 (29%) older grandparents.

![Figure 3. Educational Attainment of Grandparents in 2009, by Age](source: SIPP, 2008 Panel, Wave 2 Topical Module)

Relationship Status of Midlife and Older Grandparents

Although the majority of grandparents are married regardless of age, considerable variation exists between midlife and older grandparents’ relationships statuses.

- Approximately 7 in 10 (71%) midlife grandparents are married compared to 6 in 10 (59%) older grandparents.
- In contrast, 1 in 20 (5%) midlife grandparents is widowed compared to almost 3 in 10 (29%) older grandparents.
- Few grandparents are cohabiting or never married. Midlife grandparents more often are cohabiting (4% versus 1%) or never married (3% versus 1%) compared to older grandparents.

![Figure 4. Relationship Status of Grandparents, by Age](source: SIPP, 2008 Panel, Wave 2 Topical Module)

Reference: