

Children Raised by Grandparents: Enhancing Trauma Resiliency



Susan J. Kelley, RN, PhD

Founder and Director, Project
Healthy Grandparents

Chief Academic Officer and
Director, School of Nursing

Professor, School of Nursing

Georgia State University

Atlanta, Georgia

January 30, 2017

AVA Preconference

A Global Phenomenon

- Africa
- Caribbean
- Western Europe
- Asia
- United States



AVA Regional Academy in Kunming, China

“Left Behind Children”



- 33 million children raised by grandparents due to internal labor migration
- Children often see parents only one time a year.



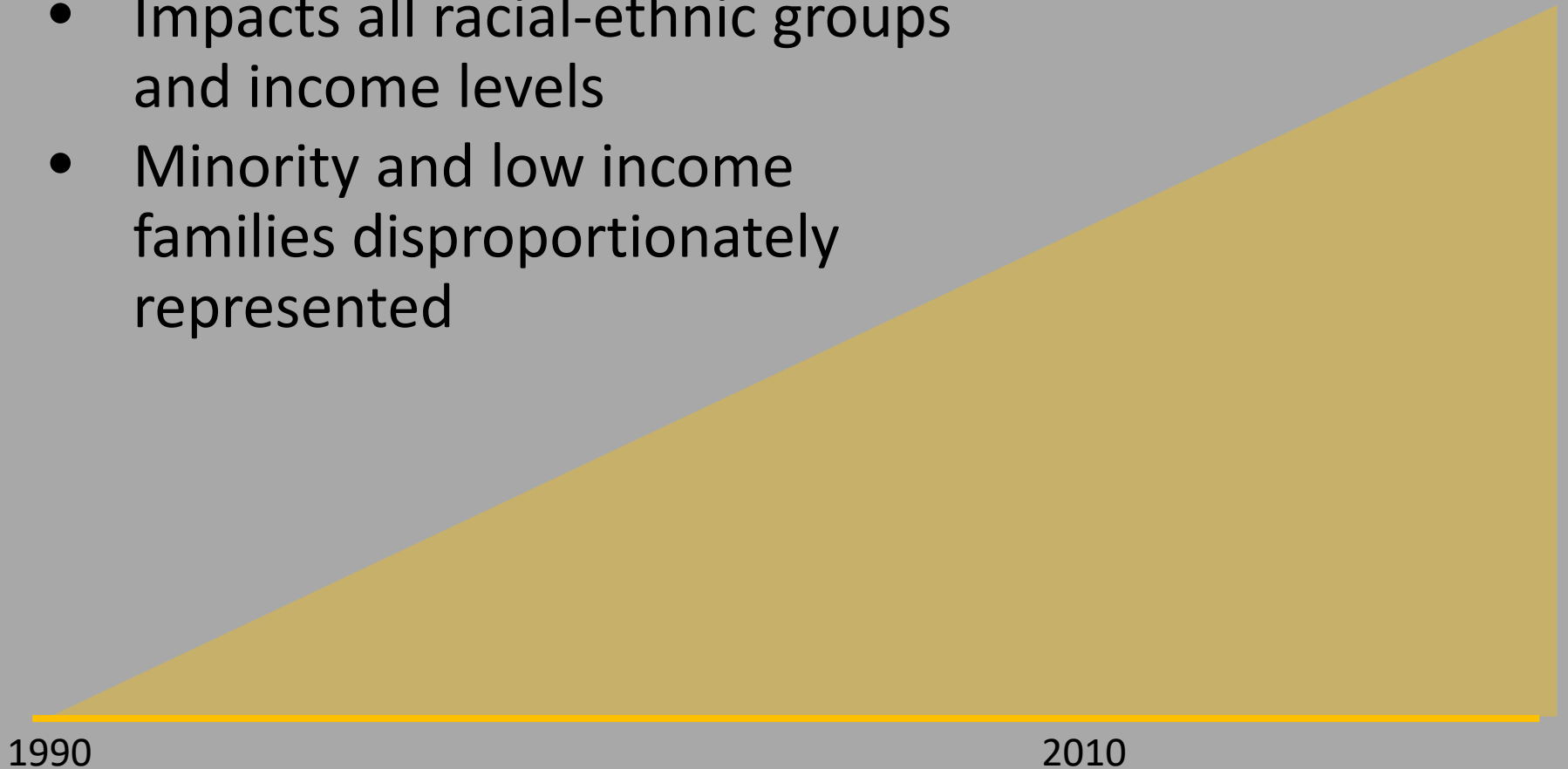
United States

- 10% children live with grandparent(s)
- 8.3% children raised by grandparents
- 2.7 million children raised by grandparents (GP)
- More children in “informal” care with grandparents than in state foster care (500,000)
- Custodial grandparent average age: 57 years
 - Range late 30s to early 80's



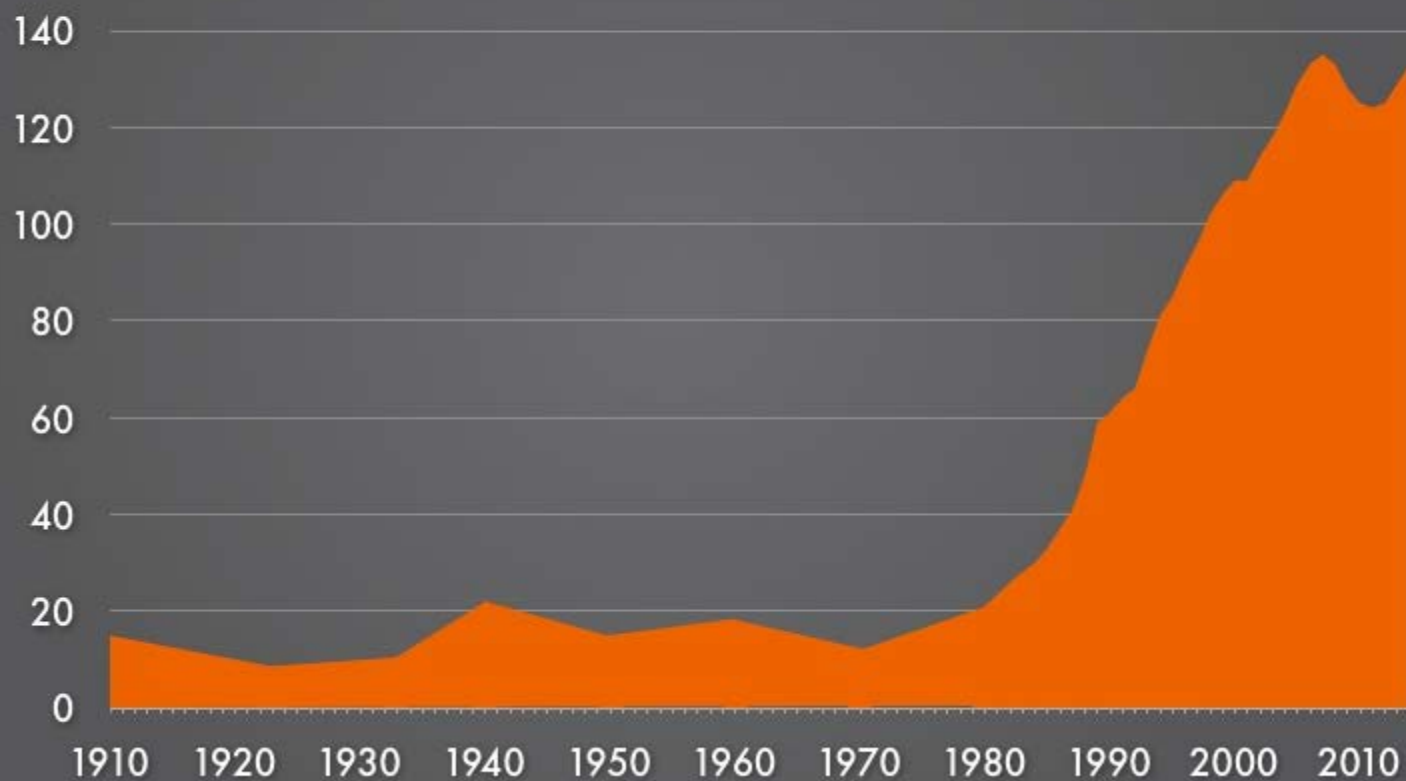
United States

- 78% increase since 1990
- Impacts all racial-ethnic groups and income levels
- Minority and low income families disproportionately represented



WOMEN'S INCARCERATION RATE UNITED STATES 1910-2014

(Number of women incarcerated per 100,000 women, 1910- 2014)



Compiled by the Prison Policy Initiative. For detailed sourcing see <http://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/women/>

U.S. Custodial Grandparents

- 60% in the workforce
- 25% live in poverty
- 50% live in poverty if grandmother is sole caregiver
- 36% have provided care more than 5 years
- Grandparents/other relatives save tax payers more than 6 billion dollars annually

Source: Generations United



Major Reasons Children in Grandparent Care in U.S.

- Abandonment
- Abuse/neglect
- Substance abuse
- Behavioral/mental health issues
- Incarceration
- HIV/AIDS or other illness/injury
- Intimate partner violence/homicide



Challenges for Grandparents

- Social isolation
- Psychological distress
 - Parenting stress
 - Depression/anxiety
- Child behavior problems
- Health issues
 - Diabetes
 - Hypertension
 - Obesity/overweight



Challenges (cont.)

- Loss and grief issues
 - Loss to drugs, incarceration
 - Grieving over adult child's problems, death
- Financial challenges
 - Food, clothing, housing, transportation
- Parenting later in life
 - "The world is a different place than when I raised my children"
 - Homework a challenge

Challenges with Birth Parents

- Substance abuse
 - Illegal activity to support addiction
 - Sexual exploitation and trafficking
 - Incarceration
 - Multiple rehabilitation attempts
- Mental/Behavioral health issues
- Sporadic or no contact

Challenges for Grandchildren

- Emotional and behavioral problems
- Sporadic or no involvement with parent(s)
- Stigma and social isolation
- Developmental delays related to prenatal substance exposure and past neglect
- Abandonment issues



Project Healthy Grandparents

- Founded in 1995
- Goal to enhance well-being of grandparent-headed families in order to optimize child resiliency
- Social-ecological approach that addresses individual and family resources in order to enhance resiliency
- On-going research and community outreach model
- Interdisciplinary, strengths-based approach
- Intensive services are one year in duration

Families Served

- Predominantly low income and African American
- Atlanta, Georgia
- Majority informal kinship care
- Age grandparents
 - mean = 56 years, range 34-82 years
 - 30% > age 60



PHG Intervention Model

Social worker home visitation

- Monthly
- Address basic needs (financial, housing, food, clothing, housing, etc.)
- Legal referrals
- Parenting education/supports
- Navigate complex systems
- Quality child care referrals

PHG Intervention Model

Registered nurse home visitation

- Monthly visits
- Health screenings and assessments
- Referrals to primary health care
- Health promotion, preventive care
- Management of chronic disease, i.e. obesity, hypertension, diabetes

PHG Intervention Model

Early intervention (birth to 5 years)

- Screenings (ASQ)
- Developmental evaluations
- Early intervention case management





Intervention Cont.

- Support groups
 - Peer empowerment
- Parenting classes
 - Safe Care
 - Triple P
- Transportation
- Tutoring

Behavioral Problems in Children Raised by Grandparents: The Role of Caregiver Distress, Family Resources and the Home Environment*

- Purpose:
 - Examine prevalence of elevated behavior problems in children and youth raised by grandmother in parent-absent household
 - Determine predictors of behavior problems
- N= 230 children-grandmother dyads

*Kelley, Whitley & Campos, *Children and Youth Services Review*, 2011.

Measures

- Child Behavior Checklist
- Brief Symptom Inventory
- Family Resource Scale
- Family Support Scale
- Home Observation Measurement of Environment (HOME)

Sample

- N= 230 child-grandmother dyads selected from 511
- 98% African American
- Grandchildren
 - Mean age 8.2 years, range=2-16,
- Grandmothers
 - Mean age 56.1 years, range 37-80; 33% > 60 years
 - Less than half HS education;
 - 81% currently single
 - Raising average of 2.5 grandchildren

Primary Reasons in Care with Grandmothers*

- Child maltreatment, 78%
- Substance abuse, 67%
- Abandonment, 37%
- CPS removal, 18%
- One or both parents deceased, 17%
- One or both parents incarcerated, 16%

*Factors often interrelated and exceed 100%

Findings

- 31.3% children elevated child behavior problems
 - Externalizing: 32.6%
 - Internalizing: 21.3%
- Predictors of increased behavior problems:
 - Elevated psychological distress (BSI) in grandmothers
 - Less supportive home environment (HOME)
 - Fewer family resources (FRS)

Examination of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in Children Raised by Grandparents*

Sample*

- 1146 African American children
- Grandchild mean age= 9.0 years, range = 2-17
- Mean length of time with GP 4.2 years
- Male, 51.6%; female, 48.4%
- Grandmother mean age= 56.2 years (35-85)
- Less than high school graduation: 39.7%

* Unpublished data

Measures

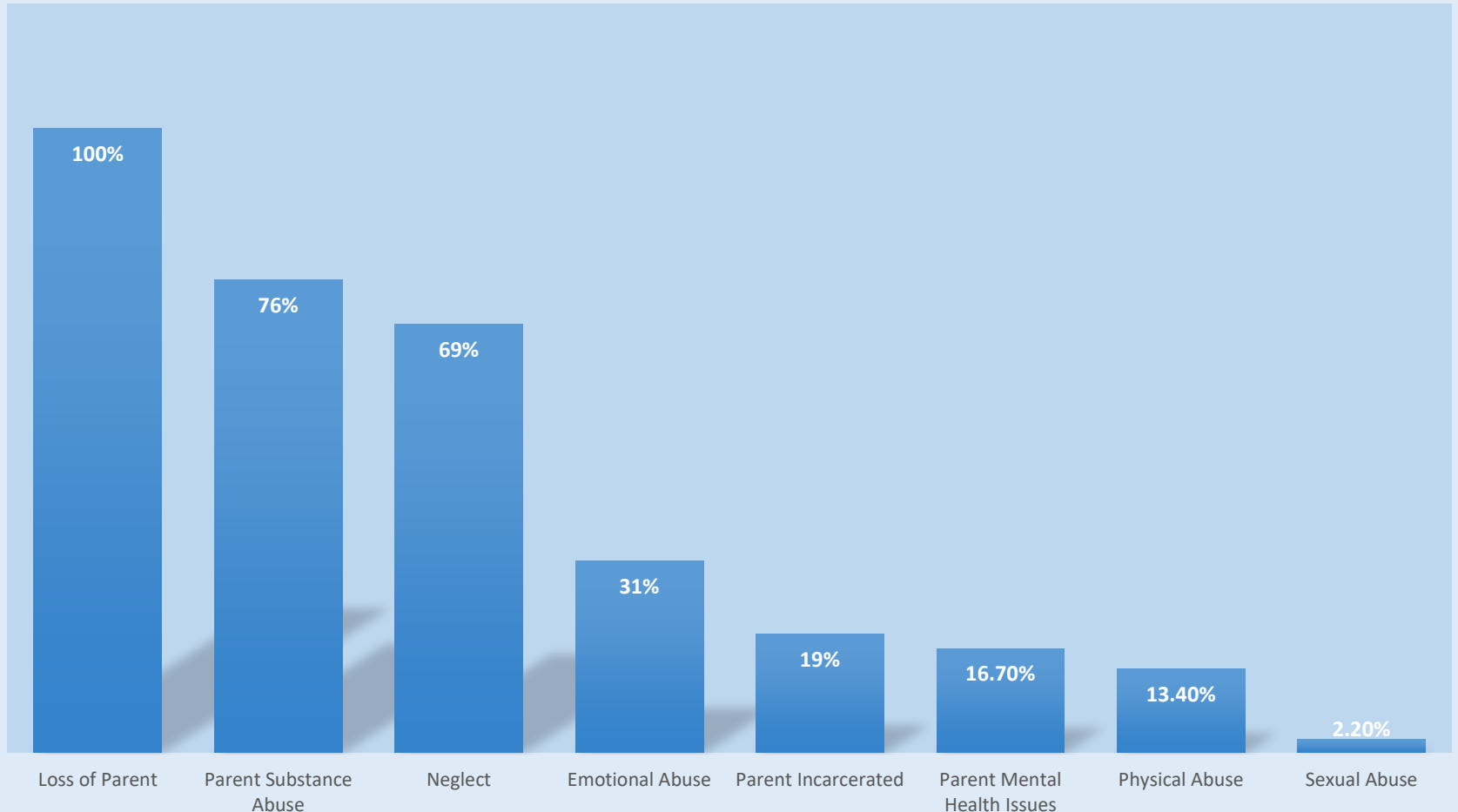
Adaptation of *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Scale* (Dube, et al., 2003)

- Usually self-reported by those at least 18 years old
- These data provided by grandparents
- 8 out of 10 ACE items available current study
- Items not available:
 - Witnessing intimate partner violence
 - “Not feeling loved”

Measures (cont.)

- Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach, 2001)
 - 18 months to 4 year old parent-report (100 items)
 - 4 to 18 year old parent-report (113 items)
- Modified CBCL PTSD subscales (Dehon & Scheeringa, 2006)
 - Preschool version, 15 items
 - School-age version, 20 items

Findings: Adverse Childhood Experiences Before Average Age of 9 Years



ACEs (cont.)

- Mean # adverse childhood experiences per child= 3.3, range 1-8 (out of 8 possible items)
- ACEs underestimated given average age was 9 years at time of study and scale measures ACEs up to 18 years

Published Program Outcomes

- Decreased psychological distress¹
- Improved family resources¹
- Improved social support¹
- Improved family coping¹
- Improved physical and mental health attributes²
- Improved health indicators and health promotion behaviors³

Select Program Outcomes Publications

¹Kelley, S.J., Whitley, D., & Sipe, T. (2007). Results of an interdisciplinary intervention to improve the well-being and physical functioning of African American grandmothers raising grandchildren. *Journal of Intergenerational Relations*, 5(3), 45-64.

²Kelley, S.J., Whitley, D.M., & Campos, P.E. (2010) Grandmothers raising grandchildren: Results of an intervention to improve health outcomes. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 42, 379-386.

³Kelley, S.J., Whitley, D.M. & Campos, P.E. (2013). African American caregiving grandmothers: Results of an intervention to improve health indicators and health promotion behaviors. *Journal of Family Nursing*, 19, 53-73.

Additional Publications

Kelley, S.J., Whitley, D.M. & Campos, P.E. (2013). Psychological distress in African American grandmothers raising grandchildren: The contribution of child behavior problems, physical health, and family resources. *Research in Nursing & Health* 36, 373-385.

Kelley, S.J., Whitley, D.M. & Campos, P.E. (2011). Behavior problems in children raised by grandmothers: The role of caregiver distress, family resources, and the home environment. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33, 2138-2145.

Whitley, D.M., Lamis, D. & Kelley, S.J. (2016). Mental health stress, family resources and psychological distress: A longitudinal mediation analysis in African American Grandmothers Raising Grandchildren. *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 72, 563–579

Whitley, D.M., Kelley, S.J., & Lamis, D. (2016). Depression, social support, and mental health: A longitudinal mediation analysis in younger vs. older African American custodial grandmothers. *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development* 83, 166-187.

Thank you!

Questions?

PHG Website

<http://phg.snhp.gsu.edu/>

Clinically Elevated Child Behavior Problems and ACEs Data

- Total behavior problems, 27.7%
- Externalizing problems, 33.4%
- Internalizing problems, 19.6%