

UTILIZING FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION AS A RESOURCE FOR GRANDPARENTS  
RAISING GRANDCHILDREN: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

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## **Abstract**

The number of grandparents who are taking over the responsibility of raising their grandchildren is increasing over time. Despite society's reliance on them, society is failing to meet the needs of these families. Grandparents consistently lack the necessary resources that could reduce and minimize their stress in what is usually an unexpected family situation. Family Life Education has failed to meet the needs of grandfamilies. Using Family Stress Theory as a theoretical framework, this study asked the question *How can Family Life Education be used as a resource for grandparents raising grandchildren to avoid crisis?* Focus groups and individual interviews were used to gather qualitative data from grandparents who are currently raising their grandchildren near a midwestern university. Findings suggest grandparents raising grandchildren could benefit from education regarding finding resources and answers to questions as they navigate the many systems they are involved with, communicating and guiding their grandchildren, balancing and maintaining the shifting family dynamics and changing family relationships, information regarding the growth and development of children across the lifespan, and education regarding content that is unique to their family situation. However there are multiple barriers that participants identified toward the utilization of FLE. Ultimately, there is a lack of collaboration among services for grandparents raising grandchildren and they lack support that could potentially come from support groups. Impact and implications for practice, research and policy were discussed. Strengths and limitations of the study were also presented.

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## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this piece to my grandma, Judy, and my little brother, Kasey. Grandma took on the task of raising us when no one else could or would. I owe everything I am, and everything I have become to her, her strength, and her love. Kasey is the only other person in this world that can remotely understand where we have been as a family. I love you little brother.



## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

Words cannot express the gratitude I have for my grandma for taking my brother and me into her home and life when my parents were not able to care for us. My parents were both addicted to drugs, and the child welfare system of Arizona did not feel their care was a good fit for us, so they placed us in a foster home. I was only five-years-old, but it was the scariest thing that had ever happened to me. I remember being so confused and sobbing, mostly at nights, because I missed my mom and dad. However, I remember just as vividly the day my grandma called the foster home and told me that we would be coming to live with her. She said it would only be a few more months and I would be there.

Growing up, I was always very proud of my family situation. I boasted to the other children that I got to see my grandma everyday whereas they only saw theirs a few times a month, at most. They would ask me if I missed my parents and I would tell them no because my grandma was both; she was my mom and my grandma. I am sure that I did this somewhat to cope with my feelings, and I am sure that it was difficult for me to adjust, but I do not remember struggling that much. Unfortunately, I do remember my grandma struggling in so many different ways. She had a hard time paying the bills, had to work so many jobs, was stressed because my brother constantly misbehaved, and she felt her family was falling apart when all she was trying to do was keep it together.

I never really took it to heart how much I hated seeing Grandma struggle until long after she had passed on. I got a job not too long after graduating with my undergraduate degree at a local child welfare agency. I worked as a family support worker, so my main focus was the children who had been removed from their parent's home and their well-being. I met monthly with children who had been brought into the child welfare system for at least 30 minutes

wherever they were placed in the state. I often spoke with foster parents, group home social workers, and grandparents about how their child was doing. What I noticed from these visits was that children who had been placed with their grandparents were not the ones that were struggling; it was the older adults. Their life had been drastically changed and they were struggling with understanding how to fill two roles. They were stressed about caring for children again on a limited income or having to work and care for children when they had been out of practice.

On one very memorable visit, I was outside playing ball with a 10-year-old boy who had been placed with his single grandma. He had been there for almost a year when I came into the picture as his worker, but there was no end in sight. The judge did not want to give up reintegration with his parents as an option, despite his parents' continuing drug problems. To make matters worse, the grandmother struggled financially and her grandson had multiple behavior issues. I remember her telling me how tired she was and how she felt she was at her wits end. It seemed to me she just wanted someone to listen. I told her I was raised by my grandma, so I understood her struggles and that I wanted to help. Because I was fairly new at the agency, I was not aware of what could be done for her, but I assumed something. So, I told her I would talk to my supervisor and get back with her.

The next day when I explained to my supervisor everything I had heard, her advice was grim. Other than to request a very small subsidy check for the grandmother that she would have to show financial hardship to receive, there was nothing we could do for the grandmother. She did have the case manager add more therapy to the child's case management tasks, though. I could not understand why when foster parents step up to care for children with no place to go we require their households to pass certain criteria, they must become certified, we offer monetary

help, and we hold their hands through any trouble they have. If they are struggling too much with a child, they have every right to ask for an emergency move. We did not do or require any of those things for children who were placed with their grandparents. And yet, when children came into custody, we were required by law to do a relative search. If relatives of the child were found, we were mandated to do a walkthrough of their home. However, the requirements for the household to pass for a relative were far more lax than what was required for a foster parent. I understand why we have the rules and regulations in place, what I do not understand is why grandparents get the short end of the stick. I felt then, and I still feel, that grandparents deserve just as much, or more help, and resources as foster parents due to their incredibly vulnerable state.

This firsthand experience gives me an insider's experience into what grandchildren being raised by their grandparents feel, but I want to learn more through research. I want to help grandparents who are raising their grandchildren because I truly believe that if we relieve some of their stress, they will have more energy and feel more in control of their situation. I want to see if utilizing family life education is a useful approach to help these grandparents because I do not feel that the majority of grandparents need intervention or therapy. Family life education takes the approach that families' lives can be improved by offering them tools to do so based on the strengths they already have (NCFR, 2014). My hope is that education will give them the knowledge, tools, and skills to cope with the stressors they will face in their experience raising their grandchildren. Furthermore, in family life education, the perspective is taken that the needs of families must first be identified by those families that live in the specific situation.

Professionals cannot assume that they know everything and I, just because I have lived it, cannot assume that I know everything (Baugh, Taylor, & Ballard, 2012). Grandfamilies are so

diverse and incorporate all kinds of different people. What is more, the number of grandfamilies is growing more and more everyday (Hayslip & Patrick, 2005). While some might say that makes getting resources to them more difficult, I whole-heartedly feel that family life education can be the right approach to tackle this problem and help these families avoid crisis and relieve stress, as long as the grandparents themselves can identify the education as useful in their context (Baugh et al., 2012).

The following paper will include a literature review, including the stressors grandparents raising grandchildren face and the current variety of resources available for them. Family Stress Theory is the theoretical perspective the research will be grounded in following the idea that more resources will equal less stress for families as long as they believe the resources are useful and accessible. I will outline my methodology for the research project, followed by a detailed description of my findings. Finally, I will end with a discussion that includes the strengths, limitations, and implications of the study for practice, research, and policy.

## **Chapter 2 - Literature Review**

### **Grandparents Raising Grandchildren**

According to the Census Bureau, 2.7 million grandparents in the United States are responsible for their grandchildren's basic needs. There are 5.4 million children under the age of 18 in the United States living with their grandparents, and one million children live in this situation where neither parent is present at all (U.S. Government, 2013). The circumstances of this caregiving situation differ from family to family. The reasons for grandparents taking this responsibility and the amount of involvement of the child's parents are different in each family. While there are many differences, one similarity is that each one of the large number of grandfamilies experiences stress and has special needs due to their situation. However, the types and degree of stress for each family is not uniform. The question left unanswered is how to help reduce their stress and address their broad range of needs.

#### ***Definitions and Types***

Because of the heterogeneity among the population, researchers have needed to clarify some of the types of grandparent caregiving situations to further understand the differences among the group. Grandparent caregiving can take on many different household forms (Hayslip & Patrick, 2005). The form focused on in this paper is "skipped-generation," where the grandparent takes responsibility of the child and the child's parent is not present or residing in the same household. There are also situations where many generations co-reside and the household is considered multigenerational. This type itself takes on many different forms (Luo, LaPierre, Hughes, & Waite, 2012). Caregiving can be either public (formal) or private (informal), depending on the involvement from the child welfare system and the legal rights of the

grandparent as the child's designated guardian (Goodman, Potts, & Pasztor, 2007). The child welfare system defines grandparents raising their grandchildren as “kinship care.” It is tradition in America to give precedence to familial placement when children are brought into custody (Luo et al., 2012). There is a perceived benefit in placing children with relatives so as to reduce trauma of separation and maintain continuity between cultural and community contexts. Approximately two-thirds of the children who are in the care of their grandparents are in a private situation where no involvement from the child welfare system is present (Goodman et al., 2007; Raphael, 2008). Furthermore, many children transition to and from various caregiving situations and in and out of their grandparents’ home multiple times (Luo et al., 2012).

### *Circumstances*

Traditionally, people have been expected to care for their elders as they age. With the growing aging population and the increasing number of children without adequate parental care, older adults are being left with the responsibility to care for children until the end of their lives (Conway, Boeckel, Shuster, & Wages, 2010). While grandparenting was once seen as pleasurable with a lack of responsibility, many in the United States are not able to experience it that way anymore (Curran, 2005). Relatives and grandparents are the people that state welfare agencies are relying on, and increasingly favoring, as an alternative to foster care due to the scarce number of foster homes available and professionals’ desires for children to maintain family ties (Goodman et al., 2007).

There are many complex reasons for the tremendous growth in the number of children being raised by grandparents and the number of grandparents who have sole responsibility over those children. The circumstances that give rise to grandparents raising their children differ greatly across the population (Hayslip & Patrick, 2005). They can include teen pregnancy,

parental illness, divorce, incarceration, and substance abuse (Hayslip & Patrick, 2003). Adult parent drug and alcohol abuse, and child abuse and neglect are the most common, but disability and death are also reasons for grandparents to take on the responsibility (Hayslip & Patrick, 2005). Additional reasons include mental illness or HIV/AIDS. Most grandparents do not expect that they will have to fill these “second parent” roles and are often thrown into it as a result of loss or the incapacity of their own child (Cox, 2000).

Most grandparents who take over the role of caring for their grandchild(ren) see it as rewarding and fulfilling. They are able to continue their family line by keeping the ties intact. They see it as an opportunity to help their grandchildren, ensure their healthy development, and get a sense of purpose from it all. Many feel it fosters the relationship between them and their grandchildren and say they would not hesitate in making the same decision twice. Also, many grandparents feel the circumstances allow for a second chance at parenting and to do things better this time as they have more experience (Hayslip & Patrick, 2005).

There are definite social and psychological benefits to placing children with grandparents and relatives, as not being with strangers makes the adjustment period shorter and smoother. There is also a tremendous decrease in cost for taxpayers as the annual cost for foster care for a child is \$22,000 and the annual cost for grandparent placement is \$4,000 (Strom & Strom, 2011). Despite the benefits grandparents and grandchildren might experience, these advantages are often outweighed by the stressors. In addition, agencies consistently offer more help, education and training, financial assistance, and support to those children in foster care than they do to those in kinship care. However, that is not due to the fact that the needs of children placed in a foster home are any greater than the needs of children placed in a grandparent's home (Thomas, Sperry, & Yarbrough, 2000).

## **Stressors for Grandparents**

### ***Financial and Housing***

Five hundred and eighty thousand grandfamilies live beneath the poverty level with a median income of \$45,000. For those grandparents who have sole responsibility for the children and the parents are completely absent, the median income is \$33,000. These income levels are consistently low despite 1.7 million grandparents raising their grandchildren working either part or full-time (U.S. Government, 2013). Not surprisingly then, financial assistance is one of the biggest reported needs of grandparents raising their grandchildren (Shakya, Usita, Eisenberg, Weston, & Liles, 2012). They report financial issues pertaining to income, work, and housing (Dolan, Casanueva, Smith, & Bradley, 2009; Hayslip & Patrick, 2006). Grandparents raising their grandchildren struggle with finding the time to spend and build relationships with their grandchildren and earning enough money to afford the family's necessities (Strom & Strom, 2011). Unfortunately, family leave employment policies fail to incorporate the needs of grandparent caregivers (Dellmann-Jenkins, Blankemeyer, & Olesh, 2002).

Even though child welfare gives preference to relative home placement for children who come into state custody, grandparents are not mandated to qualify for foster care rates. Some have termed this a "state-sanctioned poverty" (Smith, Beltran, Butts, & Kingson, 2000). After all, grandparent caregivers save the communities large amounts of money by taking responsibility, but they are being taken advantage of. Their feelings of obligation cause them to feel it is their responsibility, while the government does not assist them in this situation that they did not ask for (Dellmann-Jenkins et al., 2002).

An additional hardship for grandparents in this situation is that the government has placed lifetime limits on receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and public



assistance benefits. It only allows a person to receive benefits for a maximum of five years throughout one's life. This can hurt grandparents who have needed assistance while raising their own children and are now raising grandchildren, but have dried up their public resources (Thomas et al., 2000).

Additionally, policies governing social security fail to consider these situations despite the fact that more people receiving those benefits are grandparents raising their grandchildren. Social security benefits are placed under income caps, which do not allow grandparents to receive both public assistance and social security checks. However, one or the other is not enough to survive while raising children, which is not something that is considered under the current policies (Thomas et al., 2000). While so many grandparents struggle with making financial ends meet, most also struggle with coping with the less tangible stressors of raising their grandchildren. Not only is it difficult to budget for children again after expecting to be empty nesters, it is stressful just to be a parent again when many have not parented a child in some time.

### ***Generational Differences and Parenting***

A big concern for grandparents raising grandchildren are the generational differences in parenting expectations, environments, and perceived negative changes, such as what children are allowed to watch on television (Shakya et al., 2012). Grandparents struggle with establishing suitable priorities, recognizing necessary adjustments in their thinking and behavior, and discovering ways to gauge progress and achievements of grandchildren. Once they step foot into their new roles, grandparents must modify aspirations to fit their new life conditions, cooperate with a parent who might share responsibilities, monitor academic and social development of children, work with the child's school, become familiar with family rights and social services,

arrange relief from daily stress, and get to know grandchildren (Strom & Strom, 2011). Grandparents lack information about current parenting practices, child development, and childhood disorders. They struggle with redeveloping parenting skills they may not have used in years, with little or no preparation that they would be using them again. Some may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the issues of the times for children (Dolbin-MacNab, 2006). The time between when they last were parents causes stress for grandparents as they take on the responsibility of caring for their grandchildren, a whole new generation. However, often the grandchildren are also in a situation they were not expecting and, thus, are experiencing stress and sometimes behavior problems.

### ***Grandchildren***

Relatives and grandparents are the people that state welfare agencies are relying on, and increasingly favoring, as an alternative to foster care. Unfortunately, kids living in kinship care experience equivalent physical, mental, and behavioral problems to those living in foster care (Shakya et al., 2012). Children in these situations often experience many emotional traumas and many exhibit both internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Hayslip & Goldberg-Glen, 2000; Kelley, Whitley, & Campos, 2011). They may deal with mental health issues that impact behavior, depression, anxiety, asthma, and ADHD (Shakya et al., 2012). As Curran (2005) pointed out, parenting is difficult already, but when decreased energy, decreased physical agility, increased physical ailments, dwindling finances, and possible issues with emotionally unstable grandchildren are added in, stress for the grandparents is compounded and the task at hand becomes extremely difficult to deal with.

### ***Mental and Physical Health***

While fun may be brought into a household by having children in it, most often grandparents are assuming full-time parenting due to family crisis or trauma, and the process is a highly stressful one (Hayslip & Goldberg-Glen, 2000). Grandparents face a series of taxing issues to overcome and cope with (Hayslip & Patrick, 2003). They deal with physical and mental health issues that may lead to psychological distress (Hayslip & Kaminski, 2008; Kelley, Whitley, Sipe, & Yorker, 2000) and continual stress with role transitions, freedom restrictions, worry, and emotional stress (Williams, 2011). Grandparents report their health and state of aging as an issue of concern. They report lacking energy, patience, and motivation (Shakya et al., 2012).

### ***Isolation, Familial Issues, and Social Stigma***

All of the problems listed above are perpetuated by a lack of social and emotional support and dealing with grandchildren's health and behavior issues. Familial relationships with the child's parents, and often a lack of any positive support within the family, also make the situation very stressful (Shakya et al., 2012). Often their family situation is in turmoil due to the crisis or event that lead to the current caregiving situation and grandparents are left with dramatic relationships between family members, especially their own children (Hayslip & Patrick, 2005). Grandparents report, however, being very invested in their role as caregivers and deeply concerned with breaking the cycle of dysfunction. They want to be advocates for the grandchild, but face multiple obstacles such as interacting with the child's school and dealing with the legal issues involved (Shakya et al., 2012).

For many grandparents, the responsibility of raising their grandchildren comes about suddenly and unexpectedly. They often struggle with an incongruence between their role as

grandparent and their new role as caregiver. Furthermore, they experience ambiguous feelings toward their new role because it may feel “off-time” for their life course. While they expect to be finishing their jobs as parents and moving on toward an empty nest and retirement, they are thrust into a new circumstance of caregiving responsibility (Landry-Meyer & Newman, 2004). Their relationships with peers change due to their differing circumstances, which leave them feeling socially isolated and alienated (Hayslip & Goldberg-Glen, 2000). Currently, there are limited services for these families and many barriers to their involvement in the services that do exist. This leads to further isolation and marginalization of this family type (King, Kropf, Perkins, Sessley, Burt, & Lepore, 2009).

### **Current State of Assistance**

Families and grandparents are often considered the safety net for society (Luo et al., 2012). Thus, the last 30 years has seen a tremendous amount of growth in the area of study concerning grandparent caregivers (Hayslip & Goldberg-Glen, 2000). The phenomenon itself is a relatively new one as more parents become incapable of caring for their children and the older generation is living longer and, thus, taking on the responsibility (Cox, 2000). Researchers are realizing more and more how diverse the population of people and families in this unique and complex situation really are (Hayslip & Patrick, 2006). While much progress has been made in building a foundation to understanding the complexities of these family systems, much is still to be researched so that family practitioners, counselors, and other family professionals can better assist grandparent caregivers and those children in their care (Hayslip & Patrick, 2003). Policies, programs, and practices could be used to protect these individuals to enhance development, support functioning, and optimize outcomes (Thomas et al., 2000). Below is a summary of the multitude of existing resources and what seems to be lacking.

### *Existing Resources*

Resources for grandfamilies come in many different forms. The research on the resources these families need is extensive, particularly due to its relatively new emergence in family science (Raphel, 2008). Resources, support, and assistance for grandfamilies come in either formal or informal modalities (Goodman et al., 2007). The most obvious place that grandparents raising their grandchildren receive benefits from is the government, on community, state, and federal levels, which usually comes in two forms: income assistance or child welfare assistance (Williams, 2011). USA.gov, a government website, has a list of places where grandparents can go for assistance such as AARP, local Area Agencies on Aging, and The Grandparent Foundation (U.S. Government, 2013).

Raphel (2008) reviewed the resources that are available for grandfamilies. Fortunately, there are bills through government policy that establish guardianship assistance payments by expanding Title IV-E funding, but they are small. The Kinship Caregiver Support Act is a kinship navigator program that provides grants to state governments to assist development of information and referral systems for all kinship families, regardless of financial need. Unfortunately, grandparents are usually only entitled to this assistance when they are involved in the child welfare system and have public and formal caregiving responsibilities of their grandchildren. The Act also requires that states adhere to a notification process, in which grandparents are notified within an allotted time when their grandchildren are taken into custody. Additionally, at the community level there are multiple advocacy groups whose goal is to spread awareness on the importance of assisting this population of families. Generations United National Center on Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children (GU) works toward educating policy makers and raising awareness, while the AARP Grandparent Information

Center provides data with links to a wide range of benefits and services available. AARP helps in domains of policy and research by providing a knowledge connection between grandparents, government officials, and family scientists (Raphel, 2008).

Although these resources are available, most grandfamilies do not qualify for government financial assistance because of the steep standards for qualifying for financial need or their private status as caregivers and lack of involvement with the child welfare system that usually leaves them powerless in the eyes of the law (Goodman et al., 2007; Hayslip & Patrick, 2006). However, some of those that are involved in child welfare systems are provided with child management, financial assistance, and emotional support services. Unfortunately, grandparents still complain that things such as social worker's age, lack of trust, and agency policy discourage the utilization of these resources (Gladstone, Brown, & Fitzgerald, 2009).

Many states offer what is called family preservation where the goal is to provide case management services characterized by short-term, intensive, family-focused, in-home services to strengthen and support the functioning of the family. Family preservation helps these family systems where financial assistance cannot by enhancing family development and functioning through existing emotional and supportive ties. This ideology focuses on mobilizing strengths and resources and on developing solutions within the family by emphasizing individuals and families to think and act in ways that promote growth and well-being. The practice of family preservation insists that each member and the entire family's biopsychosocial needs are met (Hayslip & Goldberg-Glen, 2000).

Another form of assistance for grandfamilies comes through the realms of counseling and therapy. Counseling is sometimes needed for the children as they are often victims of tragic abuse, trauma, and crisis. They can experience extreme grief and loss with the changes in family

dynamics. Grandparents often feel ill-equipped with helping their grandchildren through these issues because they themselves are attempting to cope with the changes and are unsure how to communicate with their grandchildren concerning the issues. It becomes very advantageous for families to participate in some form of counseling to help them reduce conflict and promote well-being and life satisfaction (Hayslip & Kaminski, 2008).

Many grandparents find it extremely beneficial to participate in support groups where they can discuss their life situation with other like-minded people in similar situations. Because of the social isolation that occurs for these grandparents raising their grandchildren, support groups give them a place to feel welcome. KinNet (est. 2000) is a national established network of support groups that allows grandparent caregivers to vent, work through feelings, and get support. These opportunities have shown to decrease negative affect in grandparents, support parental self-efficacy, and help psychosocial adjustment (Hayslip & Patrick, 2005). Cox (2000) created the training manual for group leaders called “Empowering Grandparents Raising Grandchildren” with 14 sessions. The goal of the workshop is to give grandparents in this situation more tools to assume the new parenting role and raise a happy and healthy child. “Empowerment is a sense of personal power for the grandparents where they are more aware of connections to resources, have developed helping skills and may work collaboratively” (Cox, 2000, p. 1).

Workshops like this one help grandparents by giving them tools to cope with the situation they are in. They are provided other resources so that they may find the answers to any other issues they are having. Additionally, it provides grandparents an opportunity to connect with other people who are in similar situations. Social support for these grandparents leads to overall better self-rated health, less role strain and satisfaction, less depression, better well-being, and

better parental coping (Hayslip & Patrick, 2005). Research has shown that for the most part, participation in some sort of informal or formal support system has a beneficial influence on stress outcomes for grandparent caregivers and the children they are raising (Williams, 2011).

The field of family life education also has programs and resources to offer grandfamilies with their multiple areas of concern. One of the biggest concerns for grandparents raising their grandchildren is their new and unexpected parent role. While all have parented before, most feel they have lost touch with those skills and need assistance, especially with dealing with a younger generation (Hayslip & Kaminski, 2008). Topics for programs and educational seminars could include mental health issues, STDs and sexual health, drug and alcohol use, school violence, peer influences for their grandchildren, discipline styles, setting limits, consequences and punishment, communication skills, advocacy issues, grief and/or loss, child behavior difficulties and child development, and psychoemotional needs, just to name a few (Hayslip & Patrick, 2005). Many of the available programs show promise, but the evaluation data is limited (Baugh et al., 2012).

Jurkowski (2008) discussed model programs and approaches to addressing the needs of grandparents raising grandchildren. Among them were strengths-based case management, a satellite video program, a tape series program, and a cooperative extension program. Each approach discussed had important pieces to consider when implementing family life education with grandfamilies. Case management strives to take a strengths-based approach, which facilitates the building of resilience and resolution to current problems. It uses the resources that families or individuals already have and feeds a sense of empowerment and control. The satellite video program was useful in that it extended services for these families to distance education. Using this form enabled the information, skills, resources and supports to be tailored specifically by local needs and concerns. Let's Talk was a tape series program that consisted of different



topics being discussed on each tape. The intent was to minimize potential crisis that one may experience as a grandparent by enhancing coping strategies, reducing grandchild behavioral issues, and averting negative situations. The cooperative extension program utilized a network of resources under the Relatives as Parents Program to create programs and resources for grandparents. This helped them learn about other resources in their area and take advantage of local opportunities (Jurkowski, 2008).

Brintnall-Peterson, Poehlmann, Morgan, and Schlafer (2009) assessed a particular type of family life education material available for grandfamilies. The web-based fact sheets are modeled after newsletters and are a way to reach grandparents and professionals working with them. They address issues pertaining to attachment relationships, communication, children's emotional reactions, and behavioral adjustment. Many grandfamilies lack support, especially regarding information about child development or importance of family relationships. These sheets were a great and easy way to get this type of information to grandparents. They were also needs-focused in that multiple drafts were sent out to ensure that the information within them was useful and helpful. They were very easily adapted to what the individuals in the situation said they needed and were grounded in research and theoretical concepts (Brintnall-Peterson et al., 2009).

### ***What is Lacking?***

Currently, there is a shortage of empirically tested programs, treatment interventions, educational opportunities, and adequate policies for helping grandfamilies (Hayslip & Goldberg-Glen, 2000). Grandparents with sole responsibility for caring for their grandchildren frequently report difficulty in accessing public services, having sufficient financial resources, lacking social support, experiencing personal health problems, and balancing work and employment obligations

with childcare. Additionally, they often experience familial chaos due to the circumstances under which they have sole responsibility for their grandchildren and legal issues because of the court and welfare agencies' involvement, both of which cause further stress for the grandparent and grandchild (Shakya et al., 2012). Improving these families' access to resources could reduce stress and provide them with the capability of providing a supportive and stable home for themselves and their grandchildren (Kelley et al., 2011).

Welfare agencies are currently favoring the more affordable route for taxpayers by placing children that are brought into this system with their grandparent or another relative. Unfortunately, the health and well-being of two of society's two most vulnerable populations, older adults and children, are also being sacrificed. Parity lacks between foster care and kinship care (Thomas et al., 2000). Grandparents do not receive the assistance and services they need to cope with and effectively function in their situation (Dellmann-Jenkins et al., 2002). When children come into foster care, foster parents have received education and training to become a foster parent, money to care for the child, and assistance and support throughout the child's stay with the family. Grandparents do not receive these things when they take on the responsibility of caring for their grandchildren and enter into their unique situation.

The population of grandparents raising grandchildren is a very diverse and heterogeneous one (Shakya et al., 2012). Each grandparent has a role to fill that is influenced by the context of the situation (Williams, 2000). There are vast ethnic and cultural differences with the circumstances of the situation differing in each family also. Furthermore, this leads to differing results and effects of programs on these families (Hayslip & Patrick, 2005). When policymakers, professionals, and researchers are sensitive to the diversity and variation of needs in this population of families, there is a higher chance that programs will be utilized and achieve

worthwhile outcomes for families. Currently there is high need, but very low use of the small amount of available resources (Carr, Gray, & Hayslip, 2012).

One of the biggest barriers to usage of available programs is the fact that these programs very often fail to meet the unique and diverse set of needs. This goes for both formal and informal supports. Furthermore, these supports are not fully integrated to form a complete support network and safety net (Goodman et al., 2007). As an example of failing to meet needs, little research has been done with rural grandfamilies to assess their access to resources. In fact, 25% of all grandfamilies live in a rural area, and often are below poverty levels, have less education, are older and have poorer health, have limited resources, experience geographic isolation, and are dealing with addiction (King et al., 2009).

Currently, grandparents are ill-informed about parenting goals and child-rearing practices of the times. Interventions and efforts to optimize outcomes for custodial grandparenting are failing to strengthen skills in managing grandchildren's behavior or to provide emotional support. Furthermore, grandparents are not motivated to enroll in classes or educational opportunities. There is a lack of available education for grandparents and they are not being encouraged to continue learning (Strom, Beckert, & Strom, 2000). Family interaction and fun are not enough of a part of current family life education programs (Dolbin-MacNab, 2006). Family members are not being involved in the development of services and, therefore, are ill-informed of the programs' existence (Strom & Strom, 2011).

To my knowledge, a very broad family life education course that encompasses all of grandfamilies' various needs does not exist. While this might be a difficult thing to do as well as meet the individualized needs of the adults and children, there are common issues that families experience that are not being addressed, such as issues concerning finances, generational

differences, mental and physical health, grandchildren's behavior and health, family dynamics, isolation and social stigma. Furthermore, the children's needs are being neglected in the field of Family Life Education. Marketing and recruitment of participants, as well as barriers to participation, are incredibly important pieces of the puzzle that are currently missing or broken. Additionally, existing programs are not being linked to a strong and understandable theoretical base (Baugh et al., 2012).

Current successful programs lack the breadth that is needed to serve a large number of families (Kropf & Wilks, 2003). Community social service programs are not providing the support they could because they lack consistency and reliability. Additionally, there lacks an implementation of support groups for grandparents, as well as the grandchildren they are raising (Dellmann-Jenkins et al., 2002). Currently, awareness is a big issue for whether or not grandparents receive the services that are available to them. Grandparents do not know that support groups are available for them or that financial assistance is something they could seek out (Shakya et al., 2012). Furthermore, they often do not take aid due to the increased involvement of the government in the process of raising their grandchild and the feeling that their competence in parenting is being attacked (Dolbin-MacNab, 2006; Strom & Strom, 2011). These instrumental types of support fail to consider each family's unique situation and needs (Dellmann-Jenkins et al., 2002).

It is a goal of the field of family life education to expand programs to audiences currently neglected or underserved and to expand delivery systems to reach those that are not being reached (Arcus, 1995). Family Life Education could address the common needs of grandparents raising grandchildren as well as the individualized needs of these adults and children, if done correctly (Baugh et al., 2012).

## **Family Life Education**

### ***Definition and Purpose***

The National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) was founded in 1938 by Paul Sayre, Ernest Burgess, and Rabbi Sidney E. Goldstein, and is the only professional organization focused solely on family research, policy, and practice (NCFR, 2014). NCFR defines Family Life Education as,

Family life education focuses on healthy family functioning within a family systems perspective and provides a primarily preventive approach. The skills and knowledge needed for healthy functioning are widely known: strong communication skills, knowledge of typical human development, good decision-making skills, positive self-esteem, and healthy interpersonal relationships. The goal of family life education is to teach and foster this knowledge and these skills to enable individuals and families to function optimally (NCFR, 2014).

The NCFR website explains further the issues that Family Life Educators deal with,

Family life education professionals consider societal issues including economics, education, work-family issues, parenting, sexuality, gender and more within the context of the family. They believe that societal problems such as substance abuse, domestic violence, unemployment, debt, and child abuse can be more effectively addressed from a perspective that considers the individual and family as part of larger systems. Knowledge about healthy family functioning can be applied to prevent or minimize many of these problems. Family life education provides this information through an educational approach, often in a classroom-type setting or through educational materials (NCFR, 2014).

Family Life Education can take the form of many different educational opportunities. As stated above, it can be given in a classroom-type setting where the Family Life Educator is the instructor or facilitator for group learning and discussion. It can also take the form of a book, website, online course, fact sheet, or newsletter. FLE has the main goal of assisting families and individual members with their roles and tasks by building on their already existing strengths. This is done using an educational model where the belief is that when families and individuals are given the appropriate tools through sound programs, their lives will be improved and their problems will be reduced (Arcus, 1995). Family Life Education is preventative in nature and hopes to reduce undesirable developmental outcomes for families and individuals (Dumka, Roosa, Michaels, & Suh, 1995). Family Life Education hopes to guide families and individuals in improving relationships and maximizing healthy development throughout the lifespan (NCFR, 1970).

Myers-Walls, Ballard, Darling, and Myers-Bowman (2011) separated Family Life Education from family therapy and family case management. Often the lines between these professions are blurred due to the main goal of each profession being to help families. Family Life Education is prevention and education for individuals and families as it relates to the 10 content areas. It concentrates on increasing knowledge and skills through information, tools, and strategies. The desired outcome is a motivated family who has the equipment to improve their life and functioning. Ultimately, Family Life Education deals with the present, but these desired outcomes extend into the future. It is often useful during times of family transition. Furthermore, the needs of the family are highly valued and its strengths are focused on in Family Life Education (Myers-Walls, et al., 2011). Separating these domains will be particularly important when exploring how Family Life Education can help these families.

### ***Content Areas***

Currently, the Family Life Education content areas are as follows: (a) Families and Individuals in Societal Contexts, (b) Internal Dynamics of Families, (c) Human Growth and Development Across the Lifespan, (d) Human Sexuality, (e) Interpersonal Relationships, (f) Family Resource Management, (g) Parent Education and Guidance, (h) Family Law and Public Policy, (i) Professional Ethics and Practice, and (j) Family Life Education Methodology (NCFR, 2011). Each of these areas is pertinent to grandparents raising grandchildren.

While I have not seen this done explicitly in the literature, each content area is easily connected to prior research on the needs of these families. (a) Families and Individuals in Societal Contexts: Grandparents raising grandchildren deal with a multitude of different institutions within their particular context. For instance, school systems, the legal systems and child welfare, churches, and work. (b) Internal Dynamics of Families: An intimate understanding of a family's strengths and weaknesses and how family members relate is extremely important when working with grandfamilies because of their inherent imbalance. The family has gone through some sort of shift in balance, boundaries, and roles to get to the new living situation that they are in. Following these structure changes, the internal dynamics of the family will inevitably change. (c) Human Growth and Development Across the Lifespan: Grandparents raising grandchildren would benefit from information regarding human growth and development in two realms of their life: caring for their grandchildren and caring for their aging selves. (d) Human Sexuality: Sexual development is also crucial to grandparents' understanding as parents to their grandchildren, especially those dealing with children going through puberty or who may have been sexually abused. Grandparents might also benefit from understanding their own sexual development as parenting a second time around might disrupt their lives in this area as well. (3)

Interpersonal Relationships: Interpersonal relationships within these family types are quite possibly in turmoil due to the situation they are in. Learning to maintain and develop those relationships can help family members work through things in a healthy manner. (f) Family Resource Management: Financial hardships for these families have been shown over and over in the research. Family resource management is one area that Family Life Education can help grandparents raising grandchildren to help meet their goals as a family. (g) Parent Education and Guidance: Parent education and guidance for grandfamilies is obviously important as grandparents assume a parenting role for the second time around, and often suddenly or unexpectedly. It might also help them deal with their grandchild's parents as parent/child relationships occur across the lifespan. (h) Family Law and Public Policy: Family law and public policy are useful as a vast amount of grandparents are legal guardians of their grandchildren. For those who are not, challenges regarding parental rights, both medically and legally, are faced often. Helping grandparents learn more information and obtain access to more resources outside the realm of Family Life Education can only help these families. (i) Professional Ethics and Practice and (j) Family Life Education Methodology: It is the job of the educator to consider ethical practice and using proper methodology with these families and individual family members (Bredehoft, 1997).

### ***Connecting Family Life Education to Grandfamilies***

The number of grandfamilies in America is very large and each of those families are involved with a multitude of different service networks (Kropf & Wilks, 2003). However, partly because of the broad range of issues and partly because of barriers to participation, the agencies involved are not adequately providing opportunities for education and services to grandfamilies (Jurkowski, 2008). The topic has received attention from academic sources and a variety of



disciplines such as therapy, social work, and Family Life Education (Dolbin-MacNab & Targ, 2003). Despite the prevalence of research, resources and services are seriously lacking. Grandparents are falling through the cracks (Yancura, 2013). A set of guidelines for best practice do not exist for grandparents raising their grandchildren. Often interventions merely tailor existing education or practice strategies to grandfamilies, but fail to recognize the uniqueness of their situation (Dolbin-MacNab & Targ, 2003).

Currently, the leader in programs for grandparents raising grandchildren is through Cooperative Extension Services and is aimed at parenting issues, which is only one of the many issues these families experience. Agents provide community programs that use theory and evidence-based curricula, in addition to fact sheets and web materials. However, there lacks a comprehensive evaluation of resources or an extensive look at program effectiveness (Baugh et al., 2012). Grandparent education is often overlooked as help and support for grandparents. With the current approaches of focusing on parenting and using existing parent education strategies, grandparents are left with needs that are not met and efforts fall short (Chenoweth, 2000). While progress has been made in implementation and delivery of Family Life Education programs to grandfamilies, they are still consistently reporting a lack of availability or frustration. There is an obvious disconnect in knowledge, access, and interest for this population (Baugh et al., 2012).

Dolbin-MacNab & Targ (2003) suggested the following as necessary for using Family Life Education with grandfamilies: (a) consider the multiple issues, (b) network with other professionals, (c) remove barriers to participation, (d) create a respectful and helping environment, (e) use a collaborative style with other professionals and the families themselves, (f) provide a context for safety, (g) facilitate group interaction, (h) recognize the broader family context, (i) remain cognizant of cultural differences, and (j) consider family interaction patterns.

Various groups such as social service agencies, hospitals, churches, or extension services can begin efforts to educate grandparents and grandchildren and help them cope with the many stressors they face (Glass & Huneycutt, 2002). The bottom line is Family Life Education is not considering grandfamilies as the field should. I believe that because of the transition these families are experiencing, education in each of the content areas could provide a resource that will help them avoid crisis. It fits nicely with family stress theory also in that it focuses on family strengths, diversity, and understanding needs.

### **Family Stress Theory**

Hill (1949) introduced Family Stress Theory with his work on the crises of war separation and reunion. According to Waller and Hill (1951), crisis is defined as “situations which create a sense of sharpened insecurity or which block the usual patterns of action and call for new one” (p. 457). These events put strains upon the available resources that the family possesses and requires that family create new operations to overcome the situation. As a result, the family often experiences a sudden change in status, conflict concerning their individual roles, and sometimes a loss of family members (Waller & Hill).

Family stress theory can be used to help one understand the importance of the situation grandfamilies are in and why resources that they will find useful are vitally important to them. Family stress theory has the following assumptions: (a) even strong families can be stressed to the point of crisis and become immobilized; (b) there are differing values and beliefs that influence how a particular family defines what is distressing and how they derive meaning from what is happening; (c) the meaning people construct about an event or situation is often influenced by their gender, age, race, ethnicity, and class; (d) the mind and the body are connected as psychological stress can make people physically sick, and this process can affect

the whole family system; (e) some family members are constitutionally stronger or more resilient in withstanding stress than others; and (f) it is not always bad for families to fall into crisis because some have to hit bottom to move on to a full recovery and possibly be stronger than they were initially (Boss, 2002).

Family stress is defined as a “pressure or tension in the family system or a disturbance to the steady state of the family” (Boss, 2002, p. 16). This pressure or tension disrupts the boundaries and balance that keep the family system in a state of homeostasis. By seeing the family as a system, we are able to understand that there exists both internal and external contexts over which the family have and do not have control. Understanding a family's context is vital to understanding their situation and their perception of the situation. Family crisis occurs when the disturbance in equilibrium is absolutely overwhelming and the family becomes immobilized or unable to function (Boss, 2002).

Certain factors make some families more prone to experiencing crisis following stress. Those include the hardships of the situation, the family’s resources, and the families’ definition of the situation. How the family organizes the resources they have available, the family’s flexibility and adaptability, and the family’s previous experience with similar stress all affect how the family will ultimately react to a situation (Waller & Hill, 1951). Families may experience strain during the continuous stress where it is still possible to function, but minimally. In this situation, supports often exist for families but they are not where they are needed. This causes a mismatch between stressors and supports. It is more important to avoid placing supports where they are not necessary than to avoid stressors because mismatches cause vulnerability in the family's structure (Boss, 2002).

Grandparents raising their grandchildren are faced with a role that society has not yet defined for them. Parenting is “off-time” for their development and their role as grandparent is not what society typically defines it as (Dellmann-Jenkins et al., 2002; Thomas et al., 2000). Family stress theory helps with understanding the importance of resources to families in this situation. The ABCX model, created by Hill (1949) and Waller and Hill (1951), assumes that “depending on the resources available to families and their definition of the situation, the demands arising from a stressor may or may not result in a family crisis” (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 209). The stressor event in the case of grandparents raising grandchildren is typically non-normative, or unexpected, as grandparents do not anticipate parenting again during the age of retirement and after their children are already fully grown. These events “create demands that induce changes in boundaries, roles, goals, or values, and patterns of family interaction” (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 209). Resources, whether material or nonmaterial, have the potential of stabilizing an otherwise upset family balance that is needed for effective functioning. “To the extent that policies and programs represent stressors, they diminish family well-being; to the extent they represent resources, they enhance well-being” (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 217).

Additionally, how the family defines the situation they are in is integral to the family stress theory, just as in symbolic interactionism. A family’s definition of the situation can be objective, subjective, or cultural depending on what influences the family to see that particular event in that way (Waller & Hill, 1951). Symbolic interactionism, helps us to understand the meanings family members place with their situations, the roles each member fills, and how the two interact. “Role is defined as a relatively integrated set of distinguishable norms and behavioral expectations” (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 201). Role behaviors and expectations are defined by society and culture. They are not concrete, however, and may change and evolve with

time and history. Personality also affects how a role may be taken on as each person makes and shapes his or her role to their unique situation. Definition of the situation “refers to the subjective meanings a situation has for families and their members” (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 203). Thus, from the perspective of symbolic interactionism and family stress theory a program or policy is only effective if the family perceives it as such (Zimmerman, 1995).

Bachay and Buzzi (2012) conducted a study with grandparents raising grandchildren in south Florida to assess the grandparents' health and stress levels. These participants showed strength, resiliency, and deep emotional connections with their grandchildren. They became the “in-spite of” population to the researchers because despite the physical, economic, and community limitations they faced, they reported good health and low stress (Bachay & Buzzi, 2012). This research shows just how strong family ties are and how important they are to family functioning and the importance of how the family defines their unique situation to what it is they need. Through this strong tie and the meaning the family’s placed with raising their grandchildren, these families were able to overcome obstacles that other families may not have been able to. For these other families who struggle with adapting and adjusting, policies and programs must identify and support positive resources for the families to cope with shifting roles, identities, relationships, and perceptions (Bailey, Letiecq, & Porterfield, 2009).

Bailey et al. (2009) used the double ABCX model of family adjustment and adaptation to explore coping strategies and adaptation processes employed by grandparent caregivers as they moved from initial crisis phase of taking in grandchildren to settling down and carrying out daily tasks. Normative and non-normative stressors occur that families must cope with, thus causing adaptive coping mechanisms and nonmaterial resources to emerge. The authors identified three types of resources: personal resources, internal resources of system, and social support. The

family's perception of the crisis provides situational definition and meaning. When the crisis demands change, effective coping requires redefining the situation by clarifying issues, hardships, and tasks in order to manage and control the crisis. This process also decreases intensity of emotional burdens and encourages families to carry on. Giving positive appraisals of the situation facilitates adaptation and provides an opportunity for growth, not merely a devastating crisis. Grandparents in the situation of raising their grandchildren are forced to deal with shifting roles, identities, relationships, and perceptions. These shifts are a key part in the adaptation processes that help the family cope with the family transitions and stressors. The model reiterates the importance of identifying and supporting positive adaptations within complex and unique family systems (Bailey et al., 2009).

It is partially the responsibility of public policy and programs to ease the strain and tensions of this role transition and to help the grandparents learn and be socialized to this new role. Furthermore, these programs and policies must be based on needs assessments done with this population to ensure that outcomes are congruent with what families expect (Dellmann-Jenkins et al., 2002; Zimmerman, 1995). Grandparents raising grandchildren need further resources to ensure the well-being of their families and ensure the situation does not become a crisis for the family. These resources must be identified by the families as being necessary and important before they will ever be useful. For most, the new opportunity to raise children was not one they anticipated and often causes significant upheaval in their lives. A compound amount of problems continually adds to the stress involved (Hayslip & Patrick, 2006). Empowerment for these families will come from helping them regain their self-esteem and pride in the family as a team. Once they have a sense of control over their situation and are able to make sense out of

what has happened to them they are able to form stronger boundaries, balance, and strength against future stressors (Boss, 2002).

It is the responsibility of policymakers, researchers, and family professionals to ensure that grandparents are supported in their expanded roles to effectively function. After all, they are saving the U.S. Government and society money in the long run; it is our duty to take care of these families (Dellmann-Jenkins et al., 2002). Additionally, due to their social and economic disadvantage that stems from the vulnerability of the generations involved, these families have a need for increased support (Dolan et al., 2009). A lack in available resources affects the ability of these families to care and provide for one another (Luo et al., 2012).

### **The Present Study**

The burden of caregiving, as in the case of grandparents raising grandchildren, is rarely given public policy attention because it is seen as “private” troubles, not social problems needing social interventions (Smith, et al., 2000). Grandparents are taking on a role lacking agreed-on behavior norms but assume this role with a host of preconceived attitudes and expectations (Thomas, et al., 2000).

Research on the topic of need for grandparents raising grandchildren is hardly new (Edwards, 2000). Unfortunately, however, little in the area of Family Life Education is being done for these families aside from parenting education, which is proving ineffective in assisting them with their multitude of other problems (Kropf & Wilks, 2003). The research question for this paper is *how can Family Life Education be used as a resource to help grandparents raising grandchildren avoid crisis?* The goal is to move past describing or explaining what grandparents raising their grandchildren need. Research has shown over and over again what these families need. Instead, I want to explore *how* we can get grandparents raising grandchildren the things

that they need. Using family stress theory, I will explore how Family Life Education can help these families, who are transitioning through an often unexpected situation in their lives, deal with the many stressors they are experiencing to avoid potential crisis.



## **Chapter 3 - Qualitative Methodology**

### **Overall Approach and Rationale**

According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), one of the main goals of qualitative research is to improve some social circumstance. It is done by the researcher who participates as a learner. This learner affects the questions that are pursued and the direction the study takes. The objective is to take the researcher's curiosity to a higher level of understanding and knowledge building. Fundamentally, qualitative research is interpretive; every piece of the process is interrelated. It takes a special focus on context by learning from the people who participate in some phenomenon in their everyday life (Rossman & Rallis).

Because my goal as a researcher is to learn about how Family Life Education can be used with grandparents raising grandchildren, and this subject is relatively new and needs broadened, qualitative data collection from the grandparents who are raising grandchildren currently will provide the most insight. After exploring the topic with the participants and gathering data, it is my hope that I will better be able to describe how the participants feel family life education could be used to decrease their stress and avoid crisis. Furthermore, using qualitative methods will give me more insight into the meaning behind these terms and their situation to the participants.

### ***Rationale for the Use of Focus Groups***

We, as researchers and practitioners cannot assume we have all the answers; the answers to the questions we have must come from the participants (Chenoweth, 2000). Focus groups are one method that allows for this to happen. A group depth interview (i.e., focus group) is a number of interacting individuals with certain characteristics or interests in common that are

working in a group with a moderator that facilitates information exchange on a limited number of issues, but that is more profound than is usually accessible (Stewart et al., 2007). They provide a way of listening and learning from people with unique lines of communication built within a group dynamic (Morgan & Krueger, 1998). Focus group participants were selected because they shared certain characteristics (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). In this research project, every participant was a grandparent raising a grandchild at the time of the study. Focus groups provided an open environment for open discussion. Questions focused closely on a topic to facilitate this open discussion and engaged participants to express their differing opinions and perspectives (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Focus groups are some of the most widely used qualitative data collection methods, but have only been in use somewhat recently. The theory behind focus groups is that qualitative data collection will yield better findings and improve the data so that it will be more interesting and useful and precisely about the topic of interest (Morgan, 1997; Stewart et al., 2007). There are a wide range of uses for focus groups, and whether or not they will be useful depends on the question that is being asked. Ultimately, their usefulness depends on whether or not they help us reach our research goals (Morgan, 1997). Focus groups rely on their inherent qualities of focused research, group interactions that facilitate such rich discussion, and in-depth data to support their use. Focus groups are particularly useful for exploratory research when little is known about the phenomenon. In this way it is useful to use focus group research for generating later hypotheses for further research. Focus groups are often done more quickly and can be done on a shorter notice, are less costly, provide direct interaction with participants and large and rich amounts of data, and are flexible. Furthermore, focus groups are user friendly and easy to understand so they can be advantageous when utilized by novice researchers (Stewart et al., 2007). Focus groups

have been called a method that allows for “learning by doing” because of their emergent and flexible nature (Morgan, 1997).

### **Possible Limitations**

Despite the advantages, possible limitations to the focus group method do exist. Focus groups are significantly limited in their ability to generalize (Stewart et al., 2007). Findings from a qualitative study are very specific to a particular population, therefore, it is very difficult to say that the findings are applicable to other populations (Shenton, 2004). However, while the findings may not be generalized to every person within the same population, the findings might still be transferrable, meaning the study could be conducted in other places to search for answers to the same question in a different region. Understanding of how Family Life Education can be used as a resource for grandparents raising grandchildren will not be gained through this one project alone, but through the replication of this project in several studies across the country. Transferability is the ability of findings to be justifiably applied to another setting that is similar to the environment in which the findings were gathered (Shenton, 2004). Focus group methodology may lack in generalizability, but makes up for it with transferability.

Diversity in groups or between groups can also be seen as a negative of focus groups (Morgan, 1997). The interactions between participants could also be seen as a negative because responses are not independent of one another. Sometimes social desirability, conformity, or polarization are issues that may taint findings. Also, issues of dominant or outspoken members or unconscious cues given by the moderator may be difficult obstacles of focus groups (Stewart et al., 2007). Privacy is another possible limitation to focus groups. Participants are not kept anonymous due to the researcher and other participants knowing who they are and which participant the data came from (Morgan & Krueger, 1998). The findings are often difficult to

summarize and interpret because of quantity (Stewart et al., 2007). However, the advantages and strengths to the use of focus groups in exploring my research question outweighed the limitations. Focus groups gave an insight into how grandparents raising grandchildren in this area felt family life education could benefit them and decrease their stress that other methods may not have been able to do.

### ***Personal Biography and Self-Reflection***

Systematic reflection plays a vital role in qualitative research. Extra sensitivity should be given to the researcher's personal biography. The self-reflection done by the researcher is very important to understanding how qualitative research is interpreted and how it might be useful (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). A researcher's subjective experiences should be acknowledged, confronted, and integrated into research. By being aware of one's "reflexive consciousness" when doing research, the field of family studies becomes more balanced (Allen, 2000). The experiences of the researcher affect the relationship between him or her and those being researched (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Our assumptions, values, feelings, and histories shape the research questions we form, the findings we generate through our research, the conclusions we draw, and the discussions we present. This approach allows for fuller understandings than what the existing theories and methods will (Allen, 2000).

As I mentioned in the Introduction, I was raised by my grandma from the age of five until she passed away from breast cancer when I was 18-years-old. Before she adopted me and my brother who is four years younger than me, we lived in a foster home for about a year. We were taken from our parents due to their drug addictions, family violence, and my truancy. My grandma was a single grandparent caregiver to us for most of my life. She was 53-years-old

when she adopted us and only 65 when she passed. She fought breast cancer and lymphedema for 7 years and went into remission twice before the disease took her.

I watched her struggle with many different issues growing up, that I am certain she would not have had to if our parents had been able to care for us. She struggled with money as she had only a cosmetology degree, but was not physically able to work as a cosmetologist with her health conditions and often worked two jobs to make ends meet. We had to move a couple of times to meet housing requirements and needs for us as a family of three and not just a single, older adult. She lost many of her friends after taking on the responsibility of raising us and felt isolated from her peers and siblings because they were doing very different things with their lives. Familial relationships were in turmoil because of our parents' resentment for my grandma and grandma's disappointment in her children and parenting. My brother's behavior caused a large amount of stress for my grandma and she found parenting him to be very taxing.

I remember her saying things like "I wish I knew where to turn" and "If I had more help, things would be easier." My grandma went through a few failed attempts at trying to ease her stress through service agencies and community organizations, but often they left her feeling dissatisfied and stigmatized. A few weeks before she died, we had a talk about everything and I will never forget what she said. She said "Jess, I'm so scared to die. I'm not ready because I haven't done the one thing the good Lord asked me to do and that's to finish raising your little brother." She had faith that since I was going to college that year, I would be fine, but my brother was only a freshman in high school at the time.

Over the course of my life, it has always been my tendency to try and fix things. I watched my grandma struggle so much just because she loved us so very much, but I would try and do everything I could to make things easier for her. My desires have not changed. I want to

help those families that are going through similar things that I did growing up. I want to give them services that they feel are useful and that they leave feeling they are empowered and uplifted. I want to ease the stress of those grandmas and grandpas who are trying so very hard to keep it together because they feel it is their duty and because they love their grandchildren so very much. I could not fix everything for my grandma, but maybe I will be able to help other families. Maybe my grandma did not fail as she thought, but instead she instilled in me exactly the tools that are needed to find the answers for what works for these families.

Many things have been implemented to help these families, but nothing is quite hitting the mark. In addition to a passion for helping these families, I have a passion for education and prevention. As I work towards my Masters' degree in Family Studies and Human Services, I have emphasized Family Life Education. Therefore, throughout my studies, I have been taught to consider how the FLE framework is useful and can be used to help families. This has also lead me to feel very passionate about its goals and objectives in order to do the best job for my future clients and families I will work with using this mindset. Growing up, I do not feel that my life ever needed an intervention, because we were always just on the brink of chaos and crisis, but never falling apart completely. Instead, I whole-heartedly feel that if my grandma had been given education, skills, and tools, she would have had everything she needed to maintain a healthy environment for my little brother and me. I believe family life education incorporates the right pieces to possibly reduce these tensions and provide the necessary education, skills, and tools to grandparents raising grandchildren by concentrating on their strengths and their specific needs. The only thing left to understand is *how*.

## **Participants**

My research was qualitative and explored the delivery and the use of family life education for these families using two focus groups consisting of four to eight older adults each who fit the following criteria: (a) resided in Riley, Pottawatomie, Geary, Clay, or Marshall counties, (b) were a grandparent of at least one third generation child who is 19-years-old or younger at the time of the study, (c) had primary responsibility for caring for said child(ren) and the child(ren) must have resided in the same household, and (d) the parent of the child did not live in the same household. Criteria for sampling were established to ensure that appropriate participants were recruited. It also ensured that some sort of homogeneity existed between the groups. The number of six to 10 participants in each group was chosen to facilitate the best balance of discussion and moderator control and structure. Unfortunately, a couple of participants for one focus group did not show up, leaving the total number for that group at four participants. After several failed attempts to hold a third focus group, I decided to conduct individual interviews with three additional grandparents who were interested in participating.

Participants were recruited using advertisement and marketing through K-State's Center on Aging, K-State's Research and Extension office, St. Francis Community Services (the local foster care agency), other human service agencies, local schools, churches, pharmacies, and e-mail listservs. I contacted agencies via telephone, e-mail, or letter (see Appendix A) for a list of potential participants that included their contact information or asked that the agency share the study information (i.e., a recruitment letter and/or flyer, see Appendices B and C) with those who met the criteria. During a telephone call with interested potential participants, I briefly explained who I am and what the project would entail. Then, I screened them to ensure they meet the above criteria. I did not offer a tangible incentive due to lack of funding, but the participation in a group

discussion that may benefit them in the long run seemed to be incentive enough. If they were still willing and able to participate I discussed timing and location so as to make it as convenient for them as possible. After the phone call I mailed them a confirmation letter (see Appendix D) that included session time, date, and location and a reiteration of what the study would be about (Morgan, 1997; Morgan & Krueger, 1998; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2007). Attached to the letter was a list of the 10 family life education content areas (NCFR, 2011; see Appendix E), a family life education fact sheet (Goddard, Gilliland, & Goddard, 2014; see Appendix F), and an explanation of what family life education is (NCFR, 2014; see Appendix G). The letter asked that they look over these materials to familiarize themselves with what family life education is to help facilitate useful discussion during the focus groups. I also gave them the opportunity to arrive 15 minutes early to review the materials. IRB approval was sought prior to any contact with potential participants or organizations. A reminder phone call was made to each participant 24 hours before each session to ensure the maximum number of participants would show up when they say they would (Morgan, 1997; Morgan & Krueger, 1998; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2007).

### ***Participant Demographics***

The sample of focus group participants was made up of six grandmothers and five grandfathers, who ranged in age from 45 to 76. Only one of the grandfathers was a widow; the other participants were all currently married. One grandmother's husband was disabled and required extra care. The length of time the grandparents had been raising their grandchildren ranged from one year to 15 years. The focus group participants' grandchildren for whom they provided care ranged in age from one year to 19-years-old. Grandchildren were not living with



their parents for a variety of reasons ranging from drug and alcohol abuse, physical abuse, parental and/or child mental health issues, or parental instability.

The sample of individual interview participants was made up of one grandfather and two grandmothers who ranged in age from 62 to 72. One set was a married couple and the other grandmother was divorced. The married couple was raising their three grandchildren aged six, eight, and 10, as well as their youngest teenage daughter. The divorced grandmother was caring for her 17-year-old granddaughter who had a one-year-old son at the time of the study. These grandchildren were both in the care of their grandparents due to parental instability and drug and alcohol abuse.

### **Procedure**

Each focus group lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Any shorter than 60 minutes would not have permitted discussion to be as thorough and in depth as was needed and any longer than 90 minutes would have exhausted the participants and harmed the data gathered from the last few questions. The sessions were conducted in locations that were comfortable for the participants, including the public library and a conference room on a university campus. Location was especially important due to the participants being older adults. Things like lighting, ventilation, heat and/or air, and outside noise for adequate hearing were all considered. Furthermore, psychological considerations were important. Due to their possible prior experiences with social services, the location needed to be in a neutral place where they felt welcomed. Refreshments or a light meal were provided as the sessions were held during the evening hours, near dinner time. The opportunity for childcare was also provided as I did not want their responsibility of caring for their grandchild to be a deterrent of them participating in the study, but none of the participants reported needing childcare. After all, the usefulness and

validity of focus group data are affected by how comfortable the participants feel (Morgan, 1997; Morgan & Krueger, 1998; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2007). Sessions were audio recorded, which facilitated later transcription.

Each focus group was organized using a drafted focus group guide (see Appendix H). A list of sample questions has been provided, however, it is important to remember that qualitative methodology is very emergent in nature (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The questions were only meant to lay a foundation upon which the actual experience of the focus groups was built on. Sessions began with a brief introduction where I, as the moderator, explained the purpose, goals, and rules of the focus group. I explained again what the research was attempting to understand and why focus groups were chosen as the medium. I also explained that I wanted everyone to have a chance to speak; that we should try and make sure only one person speaks at a time; and that there will be no judgment on what is said by me, other participants, or my assistant. I had an assistant, a fellow student, there to assist me with handing out informed consent forms that participants signed and returned following the introduction (see Appendix I). The assistant also took notes during the focus groups, but did not participate in any other way during the focus groups. I followed the drafted guide and added prompts or clarifying questions when needed. Following each session, I jotted down notes to improve retention of important details.

The individual interviews took place in the participants' homes, and lasted an average of 45 to 60 minutes. I met with participants for the interviews individually in a quiet place in their home where there were few distractions and so that the interviews could be audio recorded. I began the interviews with an introduction and some explanation of the research project. I explained that participation was voluntary and that they could end the interview whenever they wanted to. I also explained that anything we discussed would be kept confidential. Prior to

beginning the interviews, participants signed an informed consent form. During the interview, I followed an interview guide that was very similar to the one used for the focus groups (see Appendix J). Following the interview, I promised to send a summary of my results to them when completed.

## **Analysis**

Findings from the focus group sessions were first transcribed. This served as my initial read through of the sessions to get a broad idea of what was said and what occurred. I then read through the transcription again line by line, but this time looking for themes. Themes can be understood as categories under which codes or concepts will fall (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The themes and codes I found were driven by my research question. It is important to note that analysis began immediately following the first focus group session with transcription and the analysis of following focus groups served as comparisons. Therefore, analysis and implementation of focus groups happened simultaneously (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I incorporated various strategies for analysis and coding such as, making comparisons; drawing upon personal experience; looking at emotions, language, and context to understand meaning; and becoming very familiar with the data by going through it multiple times (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Unfortunately, only two focus groups did not give me the theoretical saturation I was looking for. Data from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed the same way that the focus group data was.

Following complete analysis of both the focus groups and personal interviews, I summarized my themes into findings. I used the summary to create a questionnaire (see Appendix K) to perform member checking with three participants from each of the focus groups. Member checking allowed me to further validate my conclusions with the people that the

original data came from. Lastly, I mailed out a summary of my findings to participants with a thank you note for their participation (see Appendix L) (Morgan, 1997; Morgan & Krueger, 1998; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2007).

## **Chapter 4 - Results**

This results chapter will address the research question: *How can Family Life Education be used as a resource for grandparents raising grandchildren to avoid crisis?* Overall, the findings suggest there were a number of areas in which the participants identified as being useful to receive education. Despite recognizing the potential benefits of education, many barriers were identified as inhibitors to utilizing Family Life Education. Additionally, the participants felt their adult children or growing grandchildren would benefit more from Family Life Education than they would themselves. Ultimately, participants reported a lack in collaboration between services and a tremendous need for support.

### **Education Identified by Participants as Potentially Useful**

The participants in this study suggested there were multiple areas in which they would like to receive more education. Often the lack of education or knowledge in a certain area had caused them stress. While there were many areas that could be included, the following areas to be discussed were the most prevalent within the data: finding resources and answers while navigating the different systems, parenting and guidance, family relationships and family dynamics, and growth and development across the lifespan. Many grandparents also suggested that each situation is unique and that this needed to be taken into consideration when providing Family Life Education for grandparents. Some also had previous experience with Family Life Education that influenced how they viewed FLE.

#### ***Finding Resources and Answers while Navigating the Different Systems***

Grandparents reported finding answers to their questions, identifying useful resources, and navigating the multiple social systems involved in their lives as being some of the most

difficult issues to cope with. Not all participants were involved with the same systems due to the heterogeneity between their situations. However, many of the families were forced to deal with the confusing and sometimes unfair child welfare system, with rules changing often between different states. Angela, a grandmother raising her 10-year-old grandson stated, “The government, the state leaves you no option because it comes down to the child, keeping the child protected. ... I mean, it just, the system makes no sense.” Her husband, Calvin, explained,

We're in [one state] and the child's in [another state] and [we] absolutely could not get any leverage with the child's system there. ... The child's services people that we're talking to in [the other state] were, I mean, their whole demeanor and objective in the whole thing was to try to maintain the relationship with the parents. That, “Oh, if you take him out of state, there's just so little chance that they're gonna be able to go back with the parents and the parents they have.” The parents have so many rights to be able to rehabilitate themselves and take care of their children.

Additionally, the grandparents complained that they had to deal with multiple social workers coming in and out of their life over a short period of time. They attributed this to high turnover rate and the naivety of the young women who often filled these roles. Cindy said,

One of the things I've been disappointed in, and it's just the world we live in is the turnover of the social workers. Cause what have we done, we've done this for 13, 14, 15 months and I think there's been four different social workers in that length of time. ... And I mean I understand it's a crazy job, but there's no continuity then. I think that's where the breakdown is. Everything we tell them, which is supposed to be reported to the court, maybe gets on paper somewhere and maybe gets to the court. ... I mean we just

feel like we start over every time this new social worker, telling them what our desire for the kids are and how things are going. ... I just don't know quite where the paperwork goes. And I'm sure when a new one starts they don't sit and read all the files from front to back. They probably don't begin to have the time, but in an ideal world, I wish they did.

Many of the grandparents expressed that their adult children were being catered to, while they were facing hurdle after hurdle to look out for the child's best interest. While their adult children were handed court-appointed attorneys to obtain custody of their children, the grandparents were forced to pay thousands of dollars to do the same thing. One grandfather, Paul, very adamantly explained how his daughter, the man that was claiming to be his granddaughter's father, and his granddaughter's biological father were handed court-appointed attorneys, but he was asked to pay a large sum of money for one:

I'm having a hard time with the system because, example, we're going to court once again. This will be a year and a half and my daughter walks through. "Court-appointed; free." Guy from Texas. "Court-appointed; free." Biological father.

"Court-appointed; free." That's where I walk through. "You put two grand on the table and two hundred bucks now." There's your resources. That's the reality.

Many of the grandparents felt their adult children had caused much of the grief and heartache their family was experiencing, but were given all the rights and resources.

When given the opportunity to take over raising their grandchildren, grandparents faced quite a few choices as to how they could do that. They could become guardians, or foster parents, or try to adopt their grandchildren. Regardless of their choice, finding answers to their questions was not an easy task, but neither was understanding what people were helping them with. Cindy, a grandmother newly involved in raising her grandchildren stated, "Just knowing where, I mean,

people don't think to explain words to you. Like, ours are wards of the state.” The people grandparents were relying on for answers are assuming that grandparents understand what they are saying instead of taking the time to make sure that they do understand completely.

In addition to having to pay large sums of money for a lawyer and having trouble interpreting the advice professionals give, the paperwork involved in completing any task related to the legalities of their situation or providing their family with more resources was often overwhelming. Alice, a grandmother raising a grandson with a mental illness said, “There are so many papers that we have to fill out. For this program and that program. You know, to get them help. I need a secretary.” Another grandfather, David, agreed,

Well the hardest was getting the social security. [My wife] had to go through all the paperwork and 'course everything's gotta be just perfect to get there. ... So she went through all the pulling her hair and the stressfulness and all that.

### ***Parenting and Guidance***

Sarah, a grandmother raising her adopted daughter's child, said, “Sometimes parents, we just don't know what to do with them, and especially if they're our grandchild or even as an adopted child, it's a different life. And anybody that hasn't gone through it, doesn't understand it.” Like her, many of the grandparents admitted that raising their grandchildren required different things from them as parents and as those providing that child with guidance. Multiple times they explained that a lot of stress came from explaining their current situation to their grandchild so that the child would still feel wanted, loved, and cherished. Ellen explained how her new role was sometimes a difficult one. “It's conveying to the kids that I think their parents still love them, know they do, but even though we're the disciplinarians, we love them as well, or as much.” Later she explained that it just was not fair that the grandchildren's other grandparents



got to do all of the fun things with them and openly spoil them as she felt grandparents should be able to.

Grandparents realized that guiding the children down a path to become healthy citizens was something they felt very responsible for. Angela stated,

That's really where the education comes in. It's just, how do we raise these kids to be healthy and whole and have... I don't want to screw him up. I mean, that's what I think every day, with every interaction I have with him, I do not want to screw this kid up.

Many struggled with being honest and communicating openly with their young grandchildren, but not causing them any harm. Paul said, "One thing I'm struggling with is wanting to be honest. But you can't be honest with a six-year-old. You just can't. You can cause more trouble for them down the road and that's tough." Later he explained further,

How do you tell a 6-year-old that you've called that guy daddy for three years and he's gonna beat your mom and blah blah blah, and he's really not your dad? Now that can be a crippling thing in a child's mind, you know. And someday, when she is 20-years-old, we're out in the garage drinking a beer, we'll get it square, but not now. That's our concern, the fragileness of the little people's mind, you know.

The grandparents with young grandchildren expressed confusion on handling the task of communicating with such a young person about their current situation in a way that the child could understand. The grandparents also wanted to make sure the children felt safe, like they had a stable home, and ensure the child had confidence in the fact that they had a family to support them, despite their parents being out of the picture.

### ***Family Relationships and Family Dynamics***

The grandparents' adult children, other children still at home, and other family members provided a multigenerational situation that was admittedly difficult to juggle. While discussing family dynamics as a very important thing to consider for Family Life Education, Bob said

And I think also one of the family dynamics, is this multigenerational dynamics, I don't see a whole lot on that. When we get these three generations together, I mean, how do you balance, I mean obviously there's these stressors in the process. How do you manage the dynamics of the family? I mean, if somebody could figure that out.

Ellen, a grandmother raising her three grandchildren with her youngest child in high school, said, "Probably the internal dynamics of families, understanding of family strengths and weaknesses and how family members relate to each other. I think that's the one thing that I have the hardest time getting a grip on."

Many of the grandparents agreed it would be almost easier to raise the grandchildren if they did not have to worry about the parents coming in and out of their lives and causing problems and turmoil for the family. Other non-supportive family members led the grandparents to feel much the same way. A few even expressed happiness when their adult children moved to a different state, while one great-grandfather raising two young children, James, even admitted to moving three hours away from all of his immediate family because they were only causing problems and were not being supportive.

Some of the grandparents were raising their grandchildren while one or two of their children were still in the home. They explained that the other children in the household were sometimes affected by their parents raising their nieces and/or nephews. Angela said,

We still had two sons at home when [our grandson] came to us. And [our son], who's a senior in high school now, who is technically our baby, joked recently that [our grandson] robbed him out of being the only one left at home, you know, when all the other kids left. So yeah, there's other children in the household sometimes that get affected by raising your grandchildren.

In addition to these multigenerational family types, many of the families were experiencing some form of a blended family where the adult children were step-children or the grandchildren were step-grandchildren, brought together by marriage. Sarah explained that sometimes grandparents raising their grandchildren need different things than parents raising their own children by saying,

I think grandparents versus parents kinda need something to go by sometimes. A little bit different than the regular born in child, and I think that a mixed family of not so much race, but that could be part of a blended family of two different families, that we need a lot for that.

### ***Growth and Development across the Lifespan***

Grandparents admitted that sometimes it had been awhile since they had been raising children and having a refresher course on child and human development would be helpful. A few of the grandparents raising really young grandchildren experienced the difficulties of potty training and explained that it was especially difficult because they had not been exposed to it in many years. Others felt it would just be nice to be reminded of how a child acts during each stage of his or her life. Laura stated,

Well, I will say that going through middle school it was nice being reminded of how middle schoolers behave so that kind of life stage stuff is a helpful reminder,

from time to time. ... Being told that and the way kids are these days is different than they were the last generation or certainly different than the way I was raised and just a reminder of how they are now was helpful.

Grandparents were interested in having a person to talk to and to demonstrate what proper development looks like to ease their mind. The grandparents that had been involved with that in some way or another expressed much gratitude toward that person or organization.

### ***Each Situation is Unique***

Each family's situation was different. Many expressed interest in receiving education or educational material regarding something that was unique to their situation. For example, grandparents from this study were coping with things like grandchildren with mental illnesses, adult children with drug addictions, spouses suffering from alcoholism, and teenage grandchildren being sexually active and becoming pregnant. When asked about educational opportunities she's been involved in, Alice explained that she found classes related to mental illness to be helpful.

Mental health has been a tremendous value and we've gone to a lot of classes that they've offered. And how to get a kid that's not gonna do what you want him to do, to do it kind of a thing. So, that's been very, very helpful and I think you could probably do that same type of thing.

When discussing the same question, Angela said,

Something else, even someone who's looking into taking on their grandchildren, that I've found helpful is through [the local child welfare agency]. They have classes and one of the classes that I took was on Meth. And I learned so much and

I thought if I had had this before, I woulda had the knowledge that I needed to report.

Angela's grandchildren were taken from the home due to her adult child being involved in drug abuse. She had attempted to report the drug abuse multiple times, but no one listened to her. Had she had the classes sooner, she felt she would have been able to make a better report and be taken seriously when trying to get help for her grandchildren and adult children.

Sarah admitted that her ex-husband had a drinking problem while they were raising their granddaughter together. She said,

It was stressful when [my husband] was drinking. ... His drinking wouldn't allow him to participate. ... It was hard. It grew from that into drinking and prescription pill abuse. [My granddaughter] saw him almost die and she kinda kept it to herself, but I know it was hard on her. She's seen some pretty bad stuff. She's seen him go off the deep end, threatened to shoot himself and stuff like that. ... She was 15, 16. Very hard on her. Woulda been much easier if I'd have [divorced him] when she was somewhat younger. But she'd seen too much. She had no faith in anybody at that point, you know. And it was just hard.

In addition, Sarah's granddaughter became pregnant when she was 17. When discussing this, Sarah said,

After [my granddaughter] had [her son], the doctor asked her if she wanted to go back on the pill and she said, "No, I think I need something else," because they don't want to have a baby right away. And I said, "How do you know, it's gonna work, if the pill didn't?"

Sarah said later that it would have been nice to receive education on alcoholism, family stress and crisis, and family inner dynamics. She said,

Well, I think personally, if I'd had more Family Life Education, someone to go to or to be able to call someone and say this is our situation at this point in time. If there was a way for a Family Life Educator to give me some leads on which way to turn. I can't see where it would be any harder than getting therapy. Because, maybe a Family Life Educationer could come into the home and say something different if they saw the home, whereas you go to an office. ... Oh, I could've used a lot of education. How to manage my stress, you know. I just think there should be some places out there where people can go to, either a classroom or for stress related families, or parents or children. Because stress brings on a lot of different things for every person. And I had a lot of stress trying to keep everything together.

### ***Previous Experience with FLE***

Many of the grandparents had prior experience with Family Life Education in one way or another, whether or not they were aware that it was such. Quite a few of the grandparents involved with the child welfare system had decided to take the foster parent classes to become licensed foster parents. They explained that the classes were a good thing to get involved in to get some sort of formal training on parenting. Others were involved with programs that were offered through their school systems that they identified as being useful. Ellen explained that through her youngest grandchild's early Head Start,

They had family nights where you not only learned about budgeting and child development and the kids' interaction with each other, you got to meet the other

families, too, and watch your kids play and grandchildren play and interact and find out what they're doing and what they're not.

Still others were given books, pamphlets, and various reading material from their local social service agencies. A few reported still utilizing those materials even after much time had passed. Sarah was involved with a Parents as Teachers parent educator from the community that came into her home. She said “I always appreciated whatever information she gave me. ... She would evaluate [my granddaughter] and she was very good at it. Do things with her. ... Talking with [my Parents as Teacher educator] sometimes helped me in some situations.”

### **Education is Great, but Not for Me**

Grandparents identified many areas of education as being relevant to their current situation. However, they also tended to believe that their adult children or grandchildren would be better suited for Family Life Education than they would be. Often their concern was not of themselves, but of the people they had raised or were now raising.

#### ***Adult Children***

Some of the education was seen as needed presently for their adult children. As Bob explained,

Talking about resources and needs these parents of the grandkids need, they need resources. I mean they're really, they're the ones who need. We could get resources particularly for our son to get some of the help he needs, and I think it would solve a lot of problems with raising the kids.

Although some of the grandparents felt their children could benefit from Family Life Education now, most of the grandparents felt the education was too little too late, that the adult

children needed Family Life Education before they had children or while they were having children. Some explained that they felt they had been exposed to all kinds of Family Life Education, but that it did not sink in, was ignored, or was not useful. Cindy stated,

You know these people could not become better parents unless it starts way younger. You know, why aren't they doing more in high school to teach people how to relate to each other and how to care for each other, even if it's not caring for children? I just think it all needs to go back a little farther, cause by the time it's in this situation, it's almost too messed up to fix.

She later went on to say, "I guess I'd just like to have all of these services for my adult children, not necessarily for myself. You know, 'cause that's the stuff, I don't know where they're supposed to get it." Many of the grandparents could not explain where the downfall was for their adult children and some even admitted to taking some of the blame.

### ***Grandchildren***

The grandparents were determined to make sure things turned out better for their grandchildren. They saw Family Life Education as a valuable tool to prevent their grandchildren from continuing down their parents' path. Bob said, "We keep talking about grandparents or even the parents, maybe the kids is where the education should be." The grandparents felt that Family Life Education could help both their grandchildren's current and future life. Many of the grandchildren were struggling with understanding why their situation was the way that it was. Ellen explained, "I guess if they had a sounding block to speak out to someone about their frustrations. Why is this going on, what's going on here, you know, that type of thing, that may be a good idea." The grandparents felt extra responsibility for the grandchildren because they felt it was not their fault and they did not ask for their life to be this way. Additionally, the



grandparents reported their grandchildren having ideas of their own about how their futures will play out. Many were adamant that their children will not have to experience what they have experienced.

## **Barriers**

Despite feeling that education could positively impact their families in many ways, the participants of the study also presented many barriers to the utilization of Family Life Education as a resource. The most common barriers included: FLE seemed to be misunderstood; the participants seemed to feel it was irrelevant to them; many had been raising grandchildren for a while and felt they had found what they needed; the education needed to be on things not considered common sense and that educators might not necessarily know; the education would be needed suddenly for emergency situations and would have to fit each unique situation; and finally, participants suggested multiple real-life and common barriers to FLE like time, health, and finding childcare.

### ***FLE is Misunderstood***

To help the participants understand better what Family Life Education is and what it does, I sent each participant three documents (see Appendix E, F, and G) with their confirmation letter to participate. Despite having this information ahead of time, the participants were still confused about Family Life Education and why it pertained to a focus group regarding grandparents raising grandchildren. Calvin said “I was actually kind of at a loss as to what it was, and why it was included in the context of what we thought we were gonna come here and talk about.”

Other grandparents seemed to feel that the idea of Family Life Education was a bit idealistic or unrealistic. Paul said,

I kinda took it as you're selling that one agency. And you know to educate everybody to be good parents. ... Get with those people and they'll give you all the information on how to be the perfect family. I've never seen one myself, but give it a shot.

Some of the other grandparents were worried about the accessibility of Family Life Education. Cindy said "I thought it all sounded wonderful. But, how accessible is it, and it's a great ideal, but I guess I can't quite see that a person or organization or whatever could get all that done." Other participants were turned off by the material because it was difficult for them to read and they felt it lacked substance.

### ***FLE is Irrelevant to Me Personally***

Related to Family Life Education and the materials provided to the participants being misunderstood, many of the participants felt that Family Life Education was not relevant to them. When asked how she felt about the information, Ellen stated, "I guess I'm not sure what kind of information you're wanting from this or from me on these." After more discussion she later said,

I don't know that it's relevant to us. There are parts of it that are okay. But not all of it. So, I think the family has to be strong in order to survive it. So, I don't know if there's a way you can teach that.

Others agreed that it was their responsibility to take care of their family and do the best with what they have, not necessarily rely on someone to teach them ways of improving their lives. Laura said,

I've worked with Family Life Educators and interns and so I know all of this stuff, but what it had to do with me, not much. Not much from a personal standpoint, in fact, in some ways when you look at the purpose of, how family's the foundation of everything, then you look at the social service system and that's what they're telling you. And what you're seeing is absolute disintegration and they're trying to keep this family together that shouldn't be together in any sense of the word. Um, then it kinda gets to me, to use polite words. 'Cause we can talk about how the family is the foundation of everything 'til the cows come home, but the family was certainly not a foundation for anything that I've saw in my daughter and it sounds like your daughter and your daughter [points around the table]. So you know we're here because something didn't take with the family and we are stepping up to take the responsibility for that, that they aren't, in spite of what the state says.

### ***Timing of Education is Everything***

Most of the grandparents had been raising their grandchild(ren) for a while before participating in the study. They felt they had to find the answers to their questions when they were first thrown into the situation of raising their grandchildren, and now they were settled with enough resources. Calvin said, "I think the resources that we've found, and we're satisfied, and we're 10 years into this now." Later when asked if he would find education as a useful tool for his family, he said, "Not anymore, maybe 10 years ago some of this would've been useful." Others agreed; when they were faced with the task of raising their grandchildren initially they had to do a lot of searching for resources and finding answers to the multiple questions they had. Sarah said,

Well if this had been when [my granddaughter] was little, smaller, a little bit younger, I think I would've got a lot of answers for myself on how to do things. I would've had a lot of questions, probably, and on how to handle with the things we've gone through, you know, because now [my granddaughter] is basically an adult.

### ***The Education We Need is Not Just Common Sense***

Some of the areas the grandparents identified as being areas they could use more education in, they also felt educators would not “know” because they were not common sense issues. For instance, Calvin expressed his concern about the validity of Family Life Education by saying,

We’re talking about an organization that is offering a sort of family counseling services, or educational services related to the family relationships. Rather than, the more tangible things that we’re all talking about, which is food, childcare, and you know, this kinda stuff, bills, and that kind of stuff. ... I don’t think we know these things so it’s hard to teach them, you know. How do we communicate to, you know, a five-year-old who his real dad is in these situations? Those are more difficult things, that I think that we, those are the questions I think we’re all still grasping with.

Other grandparents felt concerned that the education provided would not be accurate or would not get deep enough to move past general knowledge. Bob said “It’s one thing to say you need education, it’s another thing to have educational materials that are valid.” Ellen described a situation where her daughter, who had her children taken away, was participating in a parenting class. She said,

So again that was a thing I thought when [my daughter] was doing the family parenting class was that, it dealt with fairly general issues, but just did not get deep enough to where it was ever gonna do her any good.

***The Education Needs to be Available Quickly and Must Fit Our Unique Situation***

Family Life Education was felt to be an unrealistic answer to the participants' needs also because they felt it was needed suddenly, for emergencies, or for a unique situation. Many participants expressed concerns with how the information would get to them. They felt that in an emergency situation, it would be impossible to grab a book to read despite the legitimacy of the book being able to help them solve their problems, but they did admit with the internet that accessibility issues were changing. Cindy said,

I don't think it can keep up with whatever situation. I mean like all of a sudden they have an anger issue to deal with, but then where are you gonna get the resources at that minute that you need to deal with it, or realize one of them needs to be in special ed and if you don't have any experience in that, then that's a whole new experience. So I don't know that there could be enough education in place to cover anything and everything that's gonna happen. ... I just think things happen too fast.

In addition to being concerned about needing the information in a moment's notice, she was also concerned that it is not possible to foresee and have enough information available for every possible situation.

To make matters worse every family's situations and needs were different. Grandparents worried that the education would not be as useful because they needed it to fit their current needs and unique situation. Calvin said,

I think in terms of education, as I sit around and listen to this room, we still all have questions about all of these areas, but specifically dealing with our unique situation. So I'm less interested in Family Law or Human Growth and Development across the Lifespan.

While some grandparents were more interested in Family Law and Policy or Human Growth and Development, he had already gone through those things and felt he was more concerned with other things more closely related to his family's current life.

### ***Real-Life and Not Uncommon Barriers***

In addition to the barriers already listed, the participants also identified multiple barriers to utilizing Family Life Education opportunities that are fairly well-known. The most common issues were a lack of time and energy and difficulty with finding childcare. Laura said, "I don't have the energy I had 20 years ago." The participants' age, fatigue, and energy level came up as deterrents to participating in any form of Family Life Education multiple times. Ellen said, "Time management. Finding the actual time to commit to something else. Yeah, time management would probably be our biggest challenge." Participants felt time was something they had to make more of in order to fit anything else into their busy schedule. Unfortunately, time and energy level were intertwined because participants admitted even with time available, they did not have the energy.

Finding good and reliable childcare was a stressor that came up multiple times for the grandparents. Alice said, "And a support group, but you know, when you have somebody at home that you have to stay with all the time, you can't get out to a support group very easily." Grandparents struggled with finding open positions for their grandchildren in local childcare and

also struggled with putting them in a really good childcare that was extremely expensive or settling for a cheaper one that was at least meeting their basic needs.

### **Lack of Collaboration**

Ultimately, the participants expressed that there exists a lack of collaboration between the many services and systems they are involved with while caring for their grandchildren.

Additionally, one of the biggest pieces of the puzzle was support. Participants identified support, whether it be formal or informal, as being one of the most important things to coping with and managing stress. They also expressed a great desire for the implementation of support groups or some type of mentorship relationship in their area.

### ***No Magic Place***

When discussing the issues with finding resources and getting answers to her questions, Cindy said,

I kinda just hope there's this magic place where you can just go and find out all the information you want and it doesn't work that way. ... I guess all those experiences help me know how to fight for what you need to fight for and search until you find things, 'cause it's not easy. There's just not that little magic place to go to.

Grandparents were frustrated by the fact they had to visit multiple places to find the answers that they needed. No single place that specialized in their situation existed. They had to search far and wide for their answers in multiple places and from multiple people.

Other grandparents discussed their qualms with not being able to walk into a place and find all the answers that they needed. Instead they were forced to pay large amounts for lawyers

or go to multiple place to find what they needed. Derek, a grandfather raising two teenage grandsons, said “Because by and large, the folks that we've dealt with know a very teeny little area, and if it's outside that area, you know, forget it.”

Furthermore, grandparents involved with social service agencies were forced to deal with young and naïve social workers who came and went very quickly due to a very high turnover rate. Many of the grandparents expressed frustration with the high turnover rate as they felt their information was not kept consistent across the different social workers. They were concerned that their input was not getting relayed to the court and the judge as they felt it should be. Paul said,

Another thing too in this system is when you say social worker, why everybody's destined to work for nothing, be poor, well I'm gonna be a social worker. But you find a lot of young single woman, gonna educate on how to raise kids. Are you even old enough to have a kid? Well, maybe but you've got people with no real life experience, but gonna advise. And then when you have a social worker tell you that, “Well the reason I took this job, but I was really gonna do this, but this just come up.” Come on. You've really gotta have some heart and soul into these positions to truly do some good, I think. But you just don't say, oh yeah I'll fill out that application and now you're in the middle of these life crisis where you're supposed to do some good. But I give 'em an E for effort, nice folks, but there's, there's just a little lack. Not that I know everything, if I did, ya know, my kid wouldn't be screwed up and I wouldn't be sitting here.



## *Support*

When asked about what makes their family resilient, support from friends, family, their church, and the community came up as something that was very important. Grandparents identified with having support as a reason that they felt they were coping well. Ellen said,

Basically had it not been for friends and acquaintances, co-workers, that donated the food, not the food, but the clothing, oh my, we just, we got clothes from everybody, which was super big help because I couldn't go out and buy the clothes that they needed, you know. So the hand me down clothes was absolutely fantastic. We got into Head Start with [my grandson]. And through that program I suppose, that's where they came up with family support, like at Christmas time. They were chosen, the kids were chosen as a family that got like boxes of food. That helped a lot. So that made a difference, they also got the toys from toys for tots or whatever it was, they got on that program. So that helped a lot at Christmas time, getting the fun things that, again, our money was designed and needed to go to the bills to pay for the food, clothing, and shelter type stuff. So there wasn't the extra money, so that was kinda nice where that came from. Gosh, just moral support more than anything. ... The services through Head Start, they were a lot of moral support.

However, when the support was lacking, or they felt it was not adequate, the grandparents reported needing more. Ellen later said, "Friends can offer advice, but if they're not in the situation, they don't know." Almost all of the grandparents reported they would benefit from a support group made for grandparents raising grandchildren so that they could talk and discuss issues with other grandparents who were also raising their grandchildren to provide and

receive encouragement. Ultimately, the grandparents identified with support groups as being a useful thing due to their, as Calvin said, “slightly less academic and more experiential” nature. They wanted something that was more encouraging versus educational. It was very important to them that the information, education, and support came from those people who were experiencing or had experienced a similar situation.

The grandparents explained that a mentor relationship for not only them, but their grandchildren would be beneficial. They felt that timing in regards to when and how long you had been raising your grandchild were important things to consider when considering the usefulness of support groups. For instance, Laura said, “I think support groups can be very helpful and do that mentoring thing for grandparents that are just beginning to take it over.” The grandparents also felt it is important to consider the other participants of the support group. Cindy said,

I mean support groups ... there's just some common ground there that you get encouragement from or get ideas from that you might not otherwise get. I think a support group of people who are there, in the thick of it, or have been there. And maybe people who have been there but maybe aren't, I mean you know, like you have older ones, but like somebody who had little ones like we do now, but are out of that now.

The grandparents identified support groups as being especially important and useful due to their unique situation. Sarah said,

I think we need support groups for almost anything. I really do. I just believe in support groups. ... Grandparents that raise their grandchildren or older adoptive parents really need that support of the other older people because I found out that

most of my friends that I went to school with here in this little bitty burg, they either had jobs or they were retired and going on to different things and I had nobody. ... Older parents need to have groups that they can get into, you know, like even having card party groups or a game night with, or a socialization night with all the kids, you know, and all the grandparents showing up and I suppose that could be divided into age groups of the children, you know, but I really think that they could benefit a lot from that because they didn't wanna hang around with somebody that was raising a grandchild or an adopted child. I mean, they had other things going on, and it just kinda left me out in the cold.

Additionally, Linda said,

I think that kind of thing is probably the best that could happen is just having some support, somebody else to talk to about it because when I got my kid, I didn't know anybody else that was raising grandkids. It's become much more common in the last few years. And it woulda been nice to talk to somebody and say, "How do you cope with this now?" It was just at a point where I was going to be free. Yeah, and started parenting the next generation. So instead of being able to have those fun years with an empty nest, which I was looking forward to, and being able to travel and go places, well I'm raising another kid and all my resources are going there and so those kinds of things would be helpful to be able to share that honestly with other people in the same situation.

## Summary

Despite the many negative feelings toward Family Life Education and the barriers toward utilizing it, one participant, the same one who also had experience with a Family Life Educator coming into her home, did recognize its usefulness. Sarah said,

I think it's relevant now, it woulda been relevant in the past. 'Cause I was always welcome for any help I could get, for anyone of my family members to get. I just don't think they're facing reality if they can't find something that would help. ... I could've used a lot of education. How to manage my stress, you know, I just think there should be some places out there where people can go to, you know, either a classroom or for stress related families, or parents or children, or because stress brings on a lot of different things for every person. And I had a lot of stress trying to keep everything together.

When asked about participating in support groups, Ellen said,

It's kinda like a recipe. You put the seasonings in, but if it doesn't taste right to you, try a different seasoning, cut something out, change it, you know, but at least you have a basic recipe some place. With this you're kind of, here's your recipe and you're making it up as you go. And so it's like, again, that's where the support group would probably work better or work just in what does work for you, what doesn't work for you, you know, so yeah that would be nice.

The participants identified multiple areas in which education would be useful for their family. However, they did express multiple concerns and anticipated barriers toward utilizing education as a tool. They also expressed a belief that their adult children or grandchildren were better suited candidates for Family Life Education. Throughout their experiences, the

grandparents felt the services they participated in lacked a collaborative philosophy and the key to their success was support. Most, if not all, of the participants agreed that support groups for them and their grandchildren were a missing piece of their puzzle. The following chapter will discuss in detail these findings, but perhaps it is just as Ellen said, and the answer to *How can Family Life Education be used as a resource for grandparents raising grandchildren to avoid crisis?*, is it is a recipe and we have a solid base but we need to make sure it fits everyone's taste so that they might find it to be a useful tool for their family.

## Chapter 5 - Discussion

Baugh et al. (2012) presented a suggested list of best practices for Family Life Education with grandparents raising grandchildren. Among those were the need to address multiple issues through education unique to each family, remove barriers to participation and utilization, collaborate with other family professionals, include nuclear and extended family members into educational opportunities, and offer support groups (Baugh et al., 2012). The findings of this research project supports that Family Life Education can be a very useful resource for grandparents raising grandchildren. However, there are many barriers that must be overcome in order for grandparents to utilize the education and find it useful. Furthermore, FLE can also be used as a resource for the grandchildren who are being raised by grandparents and the adult children who, for some reason or another, are not caring for their children. In order to further validate Family Life Education as a resource for these family types, practitioners in all arenas of family science should collaborate to bring all pieces of the puzzle to the table. Ultimately, grandparents raising their grandchildren are in need of support that is well-rounded and integrated and that they identify as being helpful and useful.

The purpose of the following chapter is to discuss, evaluate, and interpret the findings of this study. Inferences and conclusions will be drawn based on the implications of the data. I will discuss each of the themes as they relate to my research question: *How can Family Life Education be used as a resource for grandparents raising grandchildren to avoid crisis?* I will also present my ideas for implications for practitioners, research, and policy. Finally, I will examine the strengths and limitations of the study before I end with concluding thoughts.

## **Education**

There are many Family Life Education content areas under which grandparents raising grandchildren could receive education that would be useful for them and assist them in avoiding potential crisis. Grandparents raising grandchildren crave the social connection that Family Life Education could bring them, and have an enjoyment for learning and a need for information. Family Life Education could and must meet the common needs of grandfamilies such as, overall well-being, policy and legal issues, generational issues, health and employment needs, parenting issues, financial issues, problems with communicating with adult children and extended family, social isolation, working with school and other service providers, and meeting the needs of their grandchildren. A variety of other content areas are relevant to each individual family and could add insight provided they are expressed as useful by that family (Baugh et al., 2012).

One of the biggest and most important areas for education is regarding finding resources and answers to their questions and navigating the different systems in which they are involved. Grandparents raising grandchildren identify issues of policy, reform, and education on navigating the systems as areas of need and stress. They still report a consistent lack of resources and frustration in dealing with service providers. Similar to the findings of Baugh et al. (2012), grandparents in this study find that there is a disconnect between knowledge, access, and interest. Just as the participants in this study struggle with understanding what policies, procedures, and expectations are established as well as where to find resources, Hayslip and Kaminiski (2008) also found that grandparents struggle with these same issues. The participants in this study battle with knowing where to go or whom to talk to when they have a problem or a question that involves caring for their grandchildren. Often, when they do find a place to go or someone to talk to, that person does not have the answers or access to the resources they need. Family Life

Education content areas of Family Law and Public Policy, Family Resource Management, and Families and Individuals in Societal Contexts can help grandparents who face these issues and who have these concerns find some relief.

Few studies have examined the actual relationships that grandparents raising grandchildren have with child welfare agencies (Gladstone & Brown, 2007). The participants of this study who are involved with the child welfare system are forced to cope with multiple social workers coming in and out of their home over a short period of time. They worry that what they tell their current social worker is not getting passed on to the new social worker or the courts. Similar to this finding, social worker's age, a lack of trust for the social workers and the agencies, and agency policy are all reasons grandparents report stress with utilizing services (Gladstone et al., 2009). Hayslip and Patrick (2005) concluded there is a lack of advocacy for grandparents raising grandchildren, which is experienced by the participants in this study. Grandparents are forced to struggle with finding a lawyer, while their adult children are handed one upon opening of the case. In order to obtain legal representation, they often have to pay large sums of money. Additionally, while foster parents are paid to take care of children in state custody, grandparents are only offered that money if they become licensed foster parents. As mere kinship providers, or relative placements that are not licensed foster parents, they receive a significantly smaller sum of money to care for their grandchildren. So, the child welfare system is giving preference to grandparents as placements, but grandparents are not mandated to qualify for the higher foster care rates (Smith et al., 2000). Grandparents are also faced with many decisions regarding their legal custody over the children. Unless they pay for a lawyer, there are very few people that will help them answer their questions both accurately and sufficiently.



Williams (2011) suggested agencies utilize grandparents as a resource, but fail to assist them with proper resources and information, which was supported by this study's findings.

As much of the current Family Life Education programs have strived to address parenting issues for grandparents raising grandchildren, grandparents identify parenting and guidance education as an area of interest. They admit that parenting has changed over time and that things are different than when they parented the first time around. As the participants in this study suggested, the demands of the parenting role provide a unique form of stress and they find their peers are not able to relate to the situation (Hayslip & Patrick, 2005). They also admit that parenting and guiding their grandchild is different than parenting and guiding their own child due to the changes in context. Hayslip and Patrick (2005) suggested developing psychoeducational programs for them to understand the changes in parenting practices and attitudes. As many of the participants in this study discussed, there are distinct characteristics of grandfamilies that separate them from their peers and other family types (Baugh et al., 2012). Family Life Education in the area of Parent Education and Guidance can be useful, as long as the education is not merely adapted from current parent education materials. Materials must be created and developed for the sole purpose of helping and assisting grandparents who are raising their grandchildren.

Dolbin-MacNab and Targ (2003) found many grandparents see the experience of raising grandchildren as a positive one because of a chance to parent the next generation differently and nurture family relationships. Similarly, the participants of this study want nothing more than to nurture their relationship with their grandchild(ren) and provide them with the proper guidance. Unfortunately, many of the children who are being raised by their grandparents struggle with adapting to their new situation. Often the situation arises suddenly and sometimes out of a

chaotic family environment. As participants of this study explain, raising children is off-time and unexpected and grandparents have lost touch with current parenting trends (Jurkowski, 2008). Grandparents worry that they will not properly guide their grandchildren down a healthy path. While grandparents in this study did not overtly state they need help identifying the life lessons they should be teaching at home, encouraging child self-evaluation, and supporting reliance on imagination and reflective thinking, Strom and Strom (2011) concluded such. Participants of this study feel a tremendous amount of responsibility over their grandchildren and they worry about their futures a great deal. Shakya et al. (2012) found grandparents feel distress and guilt over their perceived failure as a parent the first time around and are deeply invested in the role as caregiver for their grandchildren and with breaking the cycle of dysfunction, which is also experienced by the participants of this study. Providing grandparents with the tools and skills to communicate and guide their grandchildren, especially during their many transitions through life, will help relieve grandparents' stress a great deal.

Family Life Educators should identify and support positive adaptation within these complex and unique family systems. When educators and family professionals are positive towards the situation, adaptation is facilitated, and the family is given an opportunity for growth instead of devastating crisis (Bailey et al., 2009). Families in the situation where the grandparents are caring for the grandchildren have often gone through a traumatic or chaotic event. This event or events have left the internal dynamics of the family in turmoil. As Bailey et al. found, and participants in this study explain, grandparents experience multiple shifts and changes when raising their grandchildren. Roles have shifted and changed and the family members are responsible for making sense of it all. They experience a shift in their roles within the family, a shift in their identity and often some identity ambiguity where they feel caught

between multiple identities, a shift in relationships within and outside the family, a shift in perceptions, and a shift in resources. As this study's findings suggest, when grandparents initially take over the responsibility of caring for their grandchildren, they must seek new resources to meet the demands of their new life, which is similar to the conclusions of Bailey et al. Furthermore, finding adequate resources is complicated (Bailey et al., 2009).

Additionally, families struggle with coping with a number of generations involved in ways they might not have been before. Family Life Education has content areas specifically devoted to assisting families with these types of stressors. The Internal Dynamics of Families and Interpersonal Relationships content areas would help family members learn to relate to each other again following role shifts and changes. Baugh et al. (2012) suggested that incorporating and respecting family diversity and family dynamics into educational opportunities should be considered. This would also help with understanding how the family can operate with multiple generations involved in different and changing capacities.

Ultimately, it is very important that the education be identified as necessary and needed by the grandparents and family members in the situation. Many grandparents raising their grandchildren who have been involved in some sort of Family Life Education have identified it as being useful. Previous experience with, and participation in, educational opportunities are relevant to whether or not a family will utilize existing resources that are offered (Baugh et al., 2012). If the education they were involved with met their unique needs at the time, they report positive feelings toward it. Not all families will need the same type of education and not all education will be a useful resource for all families.

## **Adult Children and Grandchildren**

While most of the education content areas were supported by previous research, no study has yet found, as this one did, that grandparents feel they are not the best suited recipients of Family Life Education. Many feel their adult children or grandchildren would most benefit from the education Family Life Educators offer. Unfortunately, most of the grandparents feel this type of education was offered to their children, but that it was either ignored or it did not sink in. As grandparents in this study suggested, their adult children's negative behaviors are a primary source of stress for grandparents raising their grandchildren (Conway et al., 2010). Strom et al. (2000) suggested educating more than one generation at a time creates an interaction where each age group assimilates some aspects of change together and establishes mutual support. It should be considered that offering Family Life Education to parents who lose or give up custody of their children in conjunction with offering Family Life Education to grandparents raising their grandchildren could positively impact both generations and the family as a whole. While grandparents in this study suggested others were better suited for Family Life Education, Strom et al.'s findings suggest that both generations participating in educational opportunities would be best.

Parenting classes are often offered, but possibly a more comprehensive curriculum is needed to assist the parents with the many issues outside of parenting they will confront. For example, education regarding issues such as confusing family dynamics and conflictive interpersonal relationships may provide some relief for both parents and grandparents. Many participants in this study report adversarial relationships with their adult children, similar to the findings of Goodman et al., (2007). They complain that their children are the root of much of the stress they feel while raising their grandchildren, and at times relationships between other adult

children or other grandchildren can suffer (Goodman et al., 2007). Offering all generations education could help each understand the importance of relating to one another in a healthy manner. It could also provide more success for each of the families at attempts to maintain these relationships. Education regarding communicating with their adult children and vice versa could be beneficial for each generation as well (Baugh et al., 2012).

Grandparents often underestimate or underreport their own problems and needs because of an intense desire to protect and help their grandchildren (Dellmann-Jenkins et al., 2002). Most interventions are aimed toward the grandparent to strengthen skills in managing grandchildren's behavior or to provide emotional support (Thomas et al., 2000). However, grandparents suggest Family Life Education as a useful tool for their grandchildren. Following participation in Family Life Education opportunities, grandchildren experience increases in social skills, self-esteem, reading behaviors, and positively perceived relationships with grandparents (Baugh et al., 2012). As the grandparents in this study explain, grandchildren need assistance with acknowledging and working with their feeling about the absence of their parents and their grandparents as their caregiver (Dolbin-MacNab, 2006). To take it a step further, grandparents in this study also suggested their grandchildren needed to understand their family, in relation to their friends' families, to find some sort of normalcy.

In addition to helping them as they struggle and cope with their new and different situations, grandparents feel it would be a good way to prevent their grandchildren from going down destructive paths. Some grandchildren already have formed ideas as to how they can avoid the heartache and turmoil they have experienced in the future. FLE could help them build on those ideas and hone their skills to create a reality that is as free of family crisis as life will allow. Baugh et al. (2012) suggested that family professionals should focus on the physical and mental

well-being of grandchildren as a way to provide support for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. Similarly, as the participants in this study explain, grandparents' first priority is their grandchildren. Therefore, meeting their grandchildren's needs could ease much of the stress they feel while raising them.

## **Barriers**

Despite identifying many educational needs that could fall under most, if not all, of the Family Life Education content areas, grandparents express many concerns regarding utilizing educational materials. Other barriers to utilization and the validity of FLE being used as a resource are easily inferred. As previous research suggests, educating grandparents is very important, but greater attention needs to be paid to barriers to service use (Carr et al., 2012). Although it has been identified that barriers exist, a few of the barriers found through this study have not been explicitly stated in previous literature.

First of all, as the findings of this study suggest, grandparents do not understand what Family Life Education is and what its purpose is. Possibly, as Dolbin-MacNab and Targ (2003) found through their research, they are either unfamiliar or have a negative history with such services and that is why the confusion exists. Even after being offered very detailed explanations of FLE, it is difficult for grandparents to make the connection between its purpose and their lives. Dolbin-MacNab and Targ's finding of grandparents' lack of experience with human service agencies, particularly those offering Family Life Education materials, could be the culprit of misunderstanding. However, even for those grandparents in this study that have or are working with Family Life Educators, it is difficult for them to understand or believe there is a relevancy for FLE in their life. The findings of this study suggest that grandparents raising grandchildren experience a lack of awareness of the existence of programs, feel the programs

that do exist are irrelevant to their families, and feel services fail to meet the unique needs of their family just as Goodman and colleagues (2007) concluded.

Additionally, if they are able to see the connection, or if they do believe FLE is relevant and could be useful for their family, it is often too late. It is during the initial crisis phase of taking on caring for their grandchildren that grandparents experience so many changes and shifts in roles, perceptions, and resources (Bailey et al., 2009). Many of the grandparents in this study have been raising their grandchildren for quite some time now and they have found all of the resources and the education they feel they need. Many have exited that initial stress mode where there are so many unanswered questions and have found a system and resources that they feel work for their family at the time. Whether or not a grandparent identifies an opportunity as useful or helpful depends largely on their other life roles and sequencing of life transitions (Luo et al., 2012). In order for FLE to be deemed appropriate by grandparents who are raising their grandchildren, it must be offered and available at the appropriate time.

Other barriers are related to the validity of the education offered. Grandparents in this study question Family Life Educators' abilities to answer the not-so-common-sense questions. Participants in this study explained they feel the education that they would find most useful for them would be less academic and more experiential. Baugh et al. (2012) stated it must be paired with more experiential teaching methods that move beyond basic knowledge which would support the concerns of this study's participants. These grandparents have raised children before, so they know and understand the more general education, as experience is one of the best teachers. They feel their needs are too deep for current knowledge to understand and then teach. As many of the participants in this study complained, often they receive information they feel is incorrect or not useful (Baugh et al., 2012). To compound the problem, information and answers

to questions are often needed in the most stressful of moments. These moments often come without notice and in emergency situations. Hayslip and Kaminski's (2008) explanation that grandparents' situations often do not allow for any time to prepare or progress through steps to adapt as they are confronted with multiple stressors and problems at once further illustrates the barrier participants discussed. What is more, as participants stated, each family's experience of a similar situation will be different. Their discussion supports Goodman et al.'s (2007) finding that formal services often fail to meet the unique needs of these families. Therefore, the education must come quickly, fit the unique situation of that family, and still be valid and useful material.

To make matters even more challenging, grandparents are experiencing a great number of natural life barriers to participating in FLE. Even if they are able to move beyond all other barriers, these types of inevitable barriers may still mean they will not benefit from available programs (Kropf & Wilks, 2003). They are older adults who are often working and raising children which means they often have a short supply of time and energy due to their age. Baugh et al. (2012) found the cost of the program, driving at night, poor health or a lack of energy, transportation, location and level of accessibility or time of class are all barriers to utilization, some of which participants in this study brought up. The participants in this study also discuss experiencing difficulty in finding childcare which would likely not be an issue if they were not raising their grandchildren. Baugh et al. identified cultural issues, prior participation in and experience with education, and educational level as barriers to utilization of Family Life Education. There are a few older adults that come from a generation and period in time where education was not valued as much as it is today, as some of the participants in this study pointed out. Some did not learn to read very well and still lack those skills. It is also difficult to ask



someone to value Family Life Education when he or she was not brought up to value any sort of education.

## **Collaboration**

While many studies have suggested there are barriers, and have suggested collaboration is important, only this study has suggested that collaboration could be the way to reduce potential barriers and identifies how Family Life Education can be used as a resource for grandparents raising grandchildren. At the end of the day, Family Life Education cannot do it all, despite its usefulness for grandparents raising grandchildren. As Baugh et al. (2012) suggested, using a comprehensive Family Life Education program might not meet the individualized needs of these adults nor address the challenges they face adequately. Grandparents in this study worried that FLE could not meet all of their needs, as they felt it was trying to claim it could, nor could it go beyond general knowledge enough to adequately address all the issues. Collaboration and integration amongst the different services and agencies aimed to help grandparents with the responsibility of raising their grandchildren are vital. Many grandparents in this study go to social work and case management based services for answers to their questions because of the accessibility and knowledge of their existence. Baugh et al., however, found they report feeling powerless and underrated, not recognized as authority figures themselves, and a low level of trust for organizations and the social system, as some of the participants in this study would agree.

Because of the large number of families involved with the child welfare system, other fields must learn to collaborate with those professionals (Jurkowski, 2008). Family Life Education will not benefit grandparents raising grandchildren until educators properly collaborate with other family professionals and vice versa. It is extremely important that these organizations understand what the situation is for grandparents raising grandchildren and how

FLE can assist in a way that grandparents deem appropriate. Grandparents must play a part in establishing the services for their family so they will find them useful and to minimize barriers. Integration of FLE into the already existing services available would broaden their usefulness and provide more answers to grandparents' questions. Because of the preventative nature of FLE, utilizing it as a resource could be more useful in some instances than therapy or case management for grandparents raising grandchildren. As this study's findings suggest, support needs to be integrated into a network of established collaboration between professionals to provide the best resources for grandparents raising grandchildren (Goodman et al., 2007). Grandparents in this study complain that there is no "magic place" for them to go to get all of the answers they desire. Collaboration among the various services would provide the closest thing to a "magic place" or "one stop shop" for them that has yet to be implemented.

Support, in all forms, is one of the most important resources available to grandparents raising their grandchildren. Informal and formal support systems have a beneficial influence on stress outcomes (Williams, 2011). Those in this study who have informal support from many sources such as, family, friends, and church, identify it as a strength and addition to the family's resiliency. This finding coincides with Goodman et al.'s (2007) finding that those who report higher levels of informal support, report lower levels of burden regarding raising their grandchildren (Goodman et al., 2007). To those who lack informal support, they identify it as need or a source of stress. For instance, many families in this study who experience stress related to conflict between the multiple generations and chaotic internal dynamics suggest it is due to a lack of support from those family members. Strengthening these relationships might provide further support or repair a potential source of support that is damaged. Additionally, those who experience social isolation and inadequate social support experience significant problems,

depression, and lower self-esteem (Hayslip & Patrick, 2005). King et al. (2009) suggested providing ways to establish and maintain informal and formal supports provides a vital connection to the community and findings from this study support that grandparents raising grandchildren so desperately need this.

Providing and extending support programs for grandparents raising grandchildren is a need that is addressed over and over in the literature (King et al., 2009). Support groups are a more formal way to implement support resources for grandparents raising grandchildren. They offer a place to exchange information, a resource that so many grandparents raising grandchildren, like those in this study, lack and crave, while also providing for emotional support (King et al., 2009). As grandparents in this study discussed, support groups could provide both educational and psychological resources, combat feelings of isolation, provide a place to share ways of reducing stress, voice frustrations, and encourage optimism and productivity. Furthermore, Baugh et al. (2012) explained it could help participants learn and use group processing skills and make education a priority. The findings of this study suggest that grandparents raising grandchildren are not making education a priority for themselves. According to Baugh et al. support groups might help them do that more as they learn from one another.

Education alone will not assist grandparents raising grandchildren and provide the resources that they need adequately. However, just as FLE cannot stand alone, a support group cannot stand alone and answer all of the questions and address all of the problems these families face. As the findings of this study suggest, support groups in conjunction with educational opportunities would provide the most benefit for grandparents raising grandchildren (Baugh et al., 2012). Additionally, grandparents in this study desire the involvement of their grandchildren

in support groups to provide a sense of normalcy that the children lack. Dellmann-Jenkins et al. (2002) found support groups for grandchildren could facilitate coping with a different home life and feelings of social isolation, just as the grandparents in this study suggested. Therefore, findings of this study and previous research suggests support groups that involve both the grandparents and the grandchildren with an added Family Life Education component that are tailored to the needs of the participants could address the concerns of grandparents raising grandchildren, provide the support they desire, and prevent crisis for the family.

### **Family Stress Theory**

Just as Family Stress Theory helped formulate a research question regarding grandparents' resources while raising grandchildren and Family Life Education being used as a resource, it can also help explain the results of this study. Family Life Education will only be a useful tool and resource for grandparents raising grandchildren to avoid crisis if the grandparents identify it as such. In order for them to do so, they need to understand what it is, feel it is relevant to them and their family, feel they need it, and be offered the types of education that fit their current needs. Their values, beliefs and the meaning they attach to their situation will partially determine the effectiveness of services (Hayslip & Kaminski, 2008). Also, grandparents must identify with feelings of stress and believe that FLE as a resource can relieve those feelings of stress. Perception of the situation provides definition and meaning that is necessary for understanding the adaptation processes and coping strategies (Bailey et al., 2009). If any of these pieces of the puzzle do not fit, if grandparents do not understand FLE or feel it is relevant to them, feel they need it, if they do not have education that is relevant to their current needs accessible, or if they do not feel they are stressed or that FLE is the proper tool to assist with those feelings of stress, FLE will not be a useful tool for grandparents raising grandchildren to

avoid crisis. It does not matter how much a Family Life Educator, researcher, or policymaker feels that FLE is the best tool, those that utilize the education must feel that it is so. Established meanings must be reframed due to a desire on their part (Hayslip & Kaminski, 2008).

Fortunately, just because a grandparent raising a grandchild does not feel that FLE is the best thing for them, it does not mean they will ultimately experience crisis. However, for FLE to do the best job that it can to help grandfamilies manage stress and to prevent future crises, these things discussed must be true.

### **Impact and Implications**

The findings of this study hold many implications for the realm of family science in all different domains. I will discuss the implications for practice, research, and policy, however it is very important to realize one should never be exclusive from another. Just as the grandparents need collaboration between the agencies and professionals that provide them resources, so do the domains of practice, research, and policy.

#### ***Practice***

It is clear from this study and previous research, there is a gap that needs to be connected between Family Life Education and grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. Having the capacity to learn does not ensure that a person will pursue further education. They have to be convinced that classes will benefit them before they are motivated to enroll or to learn. Family development goals can be supported by making education available to grandparents and encouraging them to continue learning (Strom et al., 2000). Grandparents raising grandchildren know too little about what Family Life Education is and what it is for, to understand how it can help them. Family Life Educators must spread the word about what FLE is and how it as a field

of study can be used as a tool and resource for grandparents raising grandchildren. Knowledge is power and grandparents currently lack knowledge about even the existence of Family Life Education. Those that do know it exists do not see it as relevant. Therefore, Family Life Educators are failing at providing the understanding its recipients deserve.

As family professionals, it is our job to understand what grandparents need, what we and others can do to help them, and how to make sure those who need help are receiving it and it is ultimately useful (Hayslip & Patrick, 2006). There is education that grandparents identified as being useful for them as they take on the role of raising their grandchildren, including education regarding finding resources and answers to questions as they navigate the many systems they are involved with, communicating and guiding their grandchildren, balancing and maintaining the shifting family dynamics and changing family relationships, information regarding the growth and development of children across the lifespan, and education regarding content that is unique to their family situation. Practitioners are responsible for implementing this education in a way that is the most useful to its audience. They are also responsible for minimizing as many barriers as possible for their audience. Quite obviously there is a lack of education and resources for grandparents raising grandchildren; it is the responsibility of the educators to change that so that grandparents have the support they deserve. For example, based on the findings of this study, grandparents crave support from people that are in a similar situation. Therefore, grandparents might most benefit from a support group with other grandparents raising their grandchildren with an educational component, possibly a newsletter, group program, or movie, that addresses the questions and needs they have addressed. Allowing them to address the issues they want to learn about alleviates the barrier and trouble of finding the relevancy of the material to their own family.

In addition to a lack of Family Life Education for grandparents raising grandchildren, this study shows there is also a lack of FLE for the parents involved in these family situations, as well as the grandchildren. In order to prevent future chaos in families down the line, FLE needs to broaden its targets and reach the individuals that truly need the help, support, and assistance with improving their lives. Also, the education that is implemented must be comprehensive. It cannot focus solely on parenting any longer. If one piece of material does focus on parenting alone, other alternatives and options need to be available. For example, parents whose parents are raising their children might be dealing with grief, guilt, and other mental health issues. Educating them on coping mechanisms for these issues might help them learn more and do better with the parenting education they are offered.

People who are a part of grandfamilies are not experiencing life in a vacuum. Their experiences are very much influenced by their context. The needs and the stressors each individual experiences are the same way. No need is felt alone, they are felt in relation to one another and simultaneously. Therefore, the education they receive must be able to meet the various needs they face and in a way that is unique to their situation. Grandchildren and parents might both enjoy a family life education program that facilitates their relationship together so that parents are able to stay connected to their child and grandchildren are able to foster a relationship with their parent. This fostered relationship might help alleviate feelings of abandonment or lack of belonging for the grandchild, and parents might be able to apply the things they are learning through their other Family Life Education opportunities, such as parenting. Grandchildren might also benefit from education regarding diverse families so that they can understand there are many different kinds of families, none that are better than another,

therefore they should not have any ill-feelings toward their family configuration because it is a part of who they are.

Including family fun and interaction into family life education programs for these families will promote motivation to learn and decrease defensiveness while accounting for strengths and empowering participants (Dolbin-MacNab, 2006). Involving families in the development of services makes it easier to ensure they will be well-informed of programs and being well-informed takes down one barrier to participation in services that will promote family development. Letting potential participants be a part of program development allows for their needs to be met and allows for them to know of the programs existence. Additionally, involving the participation of all generations through an inclusive program further promotes adjustment (Strom & Strom, 2011). A lack of adjustment may add to the dysfunctional family relationships that exist and the confusing family dynamics. For example, to meet the needs this study suggests regarding education on family dynamics and relationships, a fun program that facilitates communication and interaction between the generations and pushes them to address problems or conflicts within that relationship could help the three generations learn to balance the changes in their family situation and maintain healthy relationships.

There are many issues these families have and this population often has multiple barriers to participation. Just as with any family life education program audience, environment, learning styles, and educator characteristics must be considered for effective programming. Furthermore, collaboration with the other agencies these families will likely be involved with and understanding when to make a referral are key (Baugh et al., 2012). Currently, human service providers are failing at collaborating to meet the needs of grandparents raising grandchildren. For example, when a Family Life Educator is working with a grandparent whose grandchild is not



adjusting well to the new situation, that educator must understand when he or she can no longer assist the family and therapy is needed. Or when a case manager is trying to address the needs of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren, he or she must be able to recognize and realize when their needs would be better met with education and not intervention. If all family professionals could work together, all needs of these dynamic and multigenerational families will be met better. It is imperative that all human service providers recognize the changing dynamics in families due to psychosocial and socioeconomic factors, like grandfamilies, so as to better understand each families' situation and how best to give them help (Bachay & Buzzi, 2012).

All fields related to family science need to understand their impact on grandparents raising grandchildren. They need to be aware of how unique their situation is, how the population is growing, and how they can help these families. Furthermore, grandparents are not experiencing the highest quality services they deserve. There is a need to examine use of power in human service agencies, and treat grandparents as consumers not clients to fully engage them in helping process and promote trust building (Gladstone et al., 2009). Grandparents are taking on the responsibility of raising their grandchildren for many reasons, but ultimately, they are doing something for the good of society and their family. Family professionals should work with them cooperatively as teammates. Educator characteristics are some of the most important factors regarding Family Life Education and grandparents' participation (Baugh et al., 2012). Grandparents in this study appreciated and were inspired by me, as the facilitator, being a person who was raised by her grandmother. They admitted that it provided them with hope that their grandchildren were going to work through the some of the troubles they are experiencing to become great citizens. This supports the idea that facilitators of Family Life Education programs for grandparents raising grandchildren need to be aware of how important it is to grandparents

that others understand the situation they are living in and how important their grandchildren and their grandchildren's futures are to them.

A comprehensive service system instead of various small programs across diverse locations would be ideal for these families. If nothing else, the current successful programs need to be expanded to better serve a greater number of families (Kropf & Wilks, 2003). These programs need to be non-generic and specially designed for this population (Chenoweth, 2000). Baugh et al. (2012) suggested coordinating community support groups with formal service systems. Community social service programs can provide the support these families need but they need to be consistent and reliable. Caregiver support groups can relieve a sense of isolation and provide a forum to vent and compare coping strategies. Support groups for the grandchildren can also help them cope with a differing home life and feeling isolated (Dellmann-Jenkins et al., 2002).

Practitioners need to examine ways of increasing participation in community programming (Baugh et al., 2012). Currently, awareness is a big issue for whether or not grandparents receive the services that are available to them (Shakya et al., 2012). Dolbin-MacNab (2006) suggested accounting for strengths and using an empowering atmosphere to decrease defensiveness, using a solution-focused approach, and including family fun and interaction. These types of support should consider each family's unique situation and needs (Dellmann-Jenkins et al., 2002). It is our job as family professionals and as a society to ensure that these families receive the help and assistance they need to ensure healthy outcomes for every member of the family.

Ultimately, it is possible that Family Life Education is not, in fact, the answer for these families. It is possible that the host of barriers they have presented are not possible to overcome

and that something else is the answer to alleviate their stress. Because I greatly value Family Life education and its objectives, it is more difficult for me to see this as a possibility. However, in order to be great practitioners, and to do the most for the families that we work with, family professionals must understand and must accept when what we think families need is not what they think they need. Therefore, the findings of this study provide a challenge to Family Life Educators to be creative. Be creative to design, develop, and implement programs that grandparents raising grandchildren do find useful and that are able to overcome the barriers they face. Perhaps, practitioners need to think outside of the already broad box that FLE lives in to create programs that will educate grandfamilies in a way that they appreciate and find helpful. I challenge practitioners to create a program that incorporates both formal and informal support that grandparents so desire with an educational component for all generations within the family in a way that meets their specific individual and unique needs.

### ***Research***

While this study provided more information regarding Family Life Education as a resource for grandparents raising grandchildren, more research needs to be done. It is so important that the gap in research and practice be filled. More research of practical importance is needed (Small, 2005). We must pursue research opportunities with these families to ensure we are helping them in the best possible way. This study needs to be replicated in other areas of Kansas and other states within America. Too little is known about how grandparents feel regarding FLE as a resource for their family. Too little is known about exactly how practitioners can overcome the barriers the participants present. Additionally, more research is needed to understand the modes through which grandparents would prefer education. Some of their preferences were discussed with the discussion of the barriers, but more needs done to

understand how a comprehensive education model for grandparents raising grandchildren can be designed and implemented. More research also needs to be done in regards to understanding how FLE can be used for the adult children and the grandchildren involved with grandfamilies.

The topic of grandparents raising grandchildren is an area where researchers are taking new appreciation recently. However, despite the new interest, there is still much work to be done. Researchers and practitioners are failing to take on a partnership where each side is mutually influential and informative. In order to adequately help those families in need there must be collaboration and integration between the professionals. This provides for a knowledge flow that is bidirectional and cyclical, which furthers opportunities for successful intervention and prevention (Hayslip & Kaminski, 2008). In order to do this to the best standard possible, it is vital that the importance of diversity be understood, and stereotyping or making assumptions be nonexistent so that the individuals and families are assisted appropriately and according to their personal and diverse needs. We need culturally competent and expanded service interventions addressing the complex realities of the individuals living in these situations and circumstances. Programs must be connected to a sound theoretical base to ensure consistency and reliability (Baugh et al., 2012). These things will not happen if we as a field of researchers, practitioners, and members of families do not pull together and work to reach this common goal.

### ***Policy***

The number of grandparents raising grandchildren is increasing steadily over time. More demands are being made to meet the needs of these families and more services are need to adequately address the stressors they face (Williams, 2011). As stated, the child welfare system relies on grandparents to take on the responsibility of caring for their grandchildren when the child's parents cannot. Preference is given to kinship placement over foster care placement for

children that are taken out of the care of their parents. But the older adults upon whom society is relying are already in a vulnerable state (Luo et al., 2012). It is vital that some sort of parity be established between foster care and kinship care (Thomas et al., 2000). It is not being argued that children should not be placed with relatives or grandparents when taken from the custody of their parents. Placement with family should definitely be favored over foster care, as it is. However, grandparents need to receive the assistance and services they deserve to cope with and effectively function in their situation. The services must be equal to what families in foster care receive; possibly greater if policies are going to prefer relative placements (Dellmann-Jenkins et al., 2002). The social and economic disadvantages grandparents raising grandchildren face suggest there is a need for increased support for these families (Dolan et al., 2009).

Grandparents are left with no answers to their questions about navigating the different systems, multiple needs and stressors, and a lack of available resources. If the resources do exist, they are forced to hunt for them causing them and their families further stress. Grandparents need and deserve an advocate and it is the job of family professionals and policymakers to do their part and assume this role (Dolbin-MacNab & Targ, 2003). Resources could mean the difference between dysfunctional family functioning as a reaction to stress and healthy family functioning (Thomas et al., 2000). However, if grandparents are not able to access them, find them, or know they exist, their chances of success are automatically limited. Furthermore, less psychological distress is seen with less perceived parenting burden (Dolbin-MacNab, 2006). If we are able to help grandparents manage their stress, they can concentrate on the one thing they worry most about, their grandchildren.

Practitioners and researchers are not the only people who should consider the barriers to utilization of Family Life Education as a resource by grandparents raising grandchildren. It is

very important for policymakers and those involved with policy implementation to consider as well. Grandparents complain that there is not enough time to consider reading a book or going to an educational class or support group. However, child access to parents' time is more influential than either household income or formal education of parents. Time is a fundamental ingredient because it influences all other characteristics of a healthy family (Strom & Strom, 2011). Therefore, family leave employment policies should incorporate the needs of grandparent caregivers due to their increasing prevalence (Dellmann-Jenkins et al., 2002).

Family Life Education should be designed and implemented for grandparents raising grandchildren everywhere regardless of their involvement with the child welfare system. FLE could potentially alleviate their stress as educators could answer their questions, provide a “magic place” for them to find resources and answers, and obtain support through an often chaotic and sudden life transition. Policymakers need to pay more attention to how their decisions are affecting grandparents raising grandchildren because the number of grandfamilies is growing all the time. It is the job of family service professionals to evaluate current policies and devise funds, services, and programs that will help this growing population successfully raise their grandchildren (Hayslip & Patrick, 2006).

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The findings of this study should not be taken lightly. The exploratory nature and questions laid a foundation upon which future research can build. The use of focus groups are an excellent way to reach the goals of the research, dig deeper into participants' thoughts, and understand more about the meaning they place with their experiences. Participants are able to relate to one another in an environment that is solely looking to answer questions concerning the stress they feel in their life. This atmosphere left people feeling inspired and hopeful.

Furthermore, it pushed them to share openly and honestly about the things they have experienced.

The participants also related well with a facilitator who was a grandchild raised by her grandmother. They found that to be helpful, relaxing, and reassuring and it provided a way to ensure that participants felt comfortable enough to be completely honest (Shenton, 2004). From the perspective of a researcher, being both a group insider and a group outsider had its advantages. Being so familiar with the participant culture helped clarify some of the feelings the participants were trying to explain that others who had not experienced it, may not have understood (Shenton, 2004). Additionally, conducting research that so closely related to my past left me feeling inspired and passionate about finding the answers to both my research questions and the participants desires. I was upfront about my investment in the research and I provided a thorough description of myself and my past to both the participants and the readers (Shenton, 2004).

The research project was a strong qualitative investigation for many reasons as well. The research methods, which incorporated both focus groups and individual interviews, were sound and beneficial because of the overlap and triangulation they provided. I incorporated an in-depth description of the methods to provide for replication and scrutiny. My literature review examined previous research and my discussion adequately uses previous research to frame findings. Member checking allowed for me to further validate my findings and also enhances the trustworthiness of the project. Including multiple appendices allows for an audit trail that would facilitate replication of the study as well (Shenton, 2004).

Unfortunately, there were also limitations to the study. Recruitment was difficult, and I made the decision to conduct individual interviews to complete the set of data, as two focus

groups was not enough to reach theoretical saturation. The information gleaned from the interviews complimented the focus group data, but the difference in group dynamics versus a solo interview may have affected the participants' responses. It would have been ideal, methodologically, to have a third focus group and then the individual interviews as well. Also, it would have helped to have gathered more demographic data to be able to use that information to possibly clarify and better understand the findings. Although the findings of this study did not differ based on the demographic data that were collected (i.e., age of participants, age of grandchildren, grandparents' sex, sex of grandchildren, grandparents' marital status, length of time raising grandchildren), additional demographic information should be collected in future studies including, but not limited to, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and race. Having additional information regarding who the participants are will be beneficial when considering their needs when developing programs.

Additionally, the participants' understanding of Family Life Education was difficult to accurately distinguish. Some very obviously had not read the materials that were sent to them prior to their meeting. This was particularly true for the individual interviews. Had the participants read the materials more thoroughly, they may have better understand what FLE is and therefore answered the questions differently. However, there were participants that had very obviously read the materials very thoroughly, and they still were not certain as to why they were being asked to read them or what the materials were for. Possibly a better explanation of the materials and purpose of the study were needed prior to the interviews. For instance, it is possible I should have connected the question of FLE as a resource to grandfamilies for them. It is hard to know if that would cause too much of a bias for them, and thus, automatically agree that FLE would be a good resource for grandparents raising grandchildren or vice versa.



However, it is also possible that my bias toward Family Life Education and its usefulness are to blame for my conclusions and inferences I made from the findings.

## **Conclusion**

Hill (1949) said, “We believe that it is high time national and local policy was shaped which places family life first, not only in the national scheme of values, but also in the investment of time, personnel, and programs devoted to the common wealth” (p. 337). Despite the 65 year difference, this statement is still incredibly accurate. Instead of being free of their parenting responsibilities and being able to enjoy their last years of life, grandparents are caring for their grandchildren more than ever. Grandparents are in a vulnerable state themselves yet state and local governments rely on them to take up the burden of caring for the nation’s most vulnerable population, their grandchildren.

The current state of resources available for grandparents raising their grandchildren lacks tremendously. What is more, the field of Family Life Education is failing to meet the needs of these families. More research is needed, but ultimately there is education that grandparents raising their grandchildren identify as being important and needed. Unfortunately, they also identified a laundry list of barriers to utilizing FLE. Ultimately, in order to best help these families, collaboration among family professionals is key. We must all work together, using our best tools and skills, to help and assist these families with coping with their stress so that they will not experience crisis. As Ellen, the participant, said, it is like a recipe. We know the many needs of grandparents raising grandchildren, which forms the foundation or basic recipe for us. The rest of the work includes perfecting it to each family’s taste buds so that they may find what we have to offer useful.

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## Appendix A - Letter to Agencies for Recruitment

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Agency Name  
Agency Address

Dear Agency:

This letter is to notify you of an available opportunity for some of the people or clients involved with your agency. I have received IRB approval for my Masters' thesis research proposal and am now in the process of recruiting participants. I am looking for older adults who are raising their grandchildren to be a part of focus groups. I hope to answer some questions the field still has unanswered regarding getting resources to these families in need.

I understand that due to confidentiality you may not be able to just give me the name and contact information for your clients who are grandparents raising their grandchildren. If you are, that is great. A name, telephone number, mailing address, and/or e-mail address will work and I can contact them as soon as I receive that information. If you are not able to do that, I have prepared another letter for the potential participants themselves that I hope someone at your agency will distribute for me. You may hand deliver it, e-mail it, mail it, or pass it on however would be easiest for you. If you need me to make copies of the letter, I am able to do that also. Please just let me know how many. If any potential participants have any questions for you regarding what the research is about, let them know that contacting me does not mean a commitment to participate. They are more than welcome to contact me with any questions before they agree to participate.

If you have any questions at all, don't hesitate to contact me. I appreciate your help and assistance in the recruitment process for my research. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Jessie Gardiner, B.S.  
Masters' Student  
Family Studies and Human Services  
College of Human Ecology  
Kansas State University

## **Appendix B - Letter to Potential Participants**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Potential Participant:

You are invited to participate in a focus group discussion regarding raising your grandchild and meeting the needs of your family. I am currently finishing my Masters' degree at Kansas State University in Family Studies and Human Services. The research is for my thesis and is something I am very passionate about. My intentions and aims are to answer some of the unanswered questions regarding how to get resources to grandparents, like you, who are raising their grandchildren.

The focus groups will be held on a date and at a time that is most convenient for the majority of potential participants. The sessions will include myself, a fellow student as my assistant, and other grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren. Childcare and a small meal or snack will be provided during these sessions, so please do not let these inconveniences deter you from contacting me. Although I truly hope you will join us, your participation is completely voluntary. Additionally, anything you say during the focus group will be kept as confidential as possible and information that could be linked to you as a participant will not be released by me or anyone on the research team.

During this meeting, you will have the opportunity to share your opinions regarding the needs of your family and how professionals can help meet those needs in an open, casual environment. Your views and experiences are extremely valuable in helping me answer my research question and your input will greatly help other professionals better serve grandparents raising their grandchildren.

Please contact me if you are interested in participating in this opportunity. You may do so by phone, e-mail or mail. We can then discuss criteria for participating, dates and times that work for you, and more about the process. I hope that you will be able to join us for this important discussion.

Sincerely,

Jessie Gardiner, B.S.  
Masters' Student  
Family Studies and Human Services  
College of Human Ecology  
Kansas State University  
jesslee@ksu.edu  
785.477.1834

# Grandparents, are you raising your grandchild?

**I'm looking for you to be a part of my research!**

I am doing focus group research for my Masters' thesis on grandparents raising grandchildren & I need participants! I am hoping to better understand how we can help these families by getting them more resources. If you are a grandparent raising a grandchild or you know of a person who is, please do not hesitate to contact me!

Participation is completely voluntary & information will be kept as confidential as possible.

## **Criteria for participation:**

- Live in Riley, Pottawatomie, Geary, Clay, or Marshall County.
- Raising at least one grandchild, 19 years or younger.
- Child must reside with you.
- Child's parents cannot be residing with you.

***Includes attendance at ONE 60-90 minute meeting.***

**Jessie Gardiner, B.S.**  
Masters' Student  
Family Studies and Human Services  
College of Human Ecology  
Kansas State University

Contact me today!  
**785.477.1834**  
[jesslee@ksu.edu](mailto:jesslee@ksu.edu)

## Appendix D - Confirmation Letter

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Name  
Participant Address

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

This letter is to confirm our discussion of your participation in a focus group [or individual interview] that will be held on \_\_\_\_\_(date)\_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_(time)\_\_\_\_\_. The focus group session will be located at \_\_\_\_\_(location)\_\_\_\_\_. [or The interview will take place at your home with the address of \_\_\_\_\_(participant's address)\_\_\_\_\_ Childcare will/*will not* be provided *as there was not a need for it. Should that change, please let me know as soon as possible.* If your availability has changed or you cannot attend this meeting time, date, or location please let me know that as soon as possible. I want to remind you again, that your participation in this discussion is voluntary and all information will be kept as confidential as possible.

Attached are the three documents I discussed. Please look them over prior to your arrival at the meeting [*or my arrival*]. There will also be refreshments offered 15 minutes prior to the start of your meeting if you wish to come early and look the documents over again [focus groups only]. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Jessie Gardiner, B.S.  
Masters' Student  
Family Studies and Human Services  
College of Human Ecology  
Kansas State University

## **Appendix E - Family Life Education 10 Content Areas**

### **FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION CONTENT AREAS**

**#1. Families and Individuals in Societal Contexts** - An understanding of families and their relationships to other institutions, such as the educational, governmental, religious, and occupational institutions in society.

e.g., Structures and Functions; Cultural Variations (family heritage, social class, geography, ethnicity, race & religion); Dating, Courtship, Marital Choice; Kinship; Cross-Cultural and Minority (understanding of lifestyles of minority families and the lifestyles of families in various societies around the world); Changing Gender Roles (role expectations & behaviors of courtship partners, marital partners, parents & children, siblings, and extended kin); Demographic Trends; Historical Issues; Work/Leisure & Family Relationships; Societal Relations (reciprocal influence of the major social institutions and families, i.e., governmental, religious, educational, and economic).

**#2. Internal Dynamics of Families** - An understanding of family strengths and weaknesses and how family members relate to each other.

e.g., Internal Social Processes (including cooperation & conflict); Communication (patterns & problems in husband-wife relationships and in parent-child relationships, including stress & conflict management); Conflict Management; Decision-making and Goal-setting; Normal Family Stresses (transition periods in the family life cycle, three-generation households, caring for the elderly, & dual careers); Family Stress & Crises (divorce, remarriage, death, economic uncertainty and hardship, violence, substance abuse); Special Needs in Families (including adoptive, foster, migrant, low income, military, and blended families as well as those with disabled members).

**#3. Human Growth and Development Across the Lifespan** - An understanding of the developmental changes of individuals in families throughout the lifespan. Based on knowledge of physical, emotional, cognitive, social, moral, and personality aspects.

e.g., Prenatal; Infancy; Early and Middle Childhood; Adolescence; Adulthood; Aging.

**#4. Human Sexuality** - An understanding of the physiological, psychological, & social aspects of sexual development throughout the lifespan, so as to achieve healthy sexual adjustment.

e.g., Reproductive Physiology; Biological Determinants; Emotional and Psychological Aspects of Sexual Involvement; Sexual Behaviors; Sexual Values and Decision-Making; Family Planning; Physiological and Psychological Aspects of Sexual Response; Influence of Sexual Involvement on Interpersonal Relationships.

**#5. Interpersonal Relationships** - An understanding of the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships.

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e.g., Self and Others; Communication Skills (listening, empathy, self-disclosure, decision-making, problem-solving, & conflict resolution); Intimacy, Love, Romance; Relating to Others with Respect, Sincerity, & Responsibility.

**#6. Family Resource Management** - An understanding of the decisions individuals and families make about developing and allocating resources including time, money, material assets, energy, friends, neighbors, and space, to meet their goals.

e.g., Goal Setting and Decision-Making; Development and Allocation of Resources; Social Environment Influences; Life Cycle and Family Structure Influences; Consumer Issues and Decisions.

**#7. Parent Education and Guidance** - An understanding of how parents teach, guide and influence children and adolescents as well as the changing nature, dynamics and needs of the parent/child relationship across the lifespan.

e.g., Parenting Rights and Responsibilities; Parenting Practices/Processes; Parent/Child Relationships; Variation in Parenting Solutions; Changing Parenting Roles across the Lifespan.

**#8. Family Law and Public Policy** - An understanding of the legal issues, policies, and law influencing the well-being of families.

e.g., Family and the Law (relating to marriage, divorce, family support, child custody, child protection & rights, & family planning); Family and Social Services; Family and Education; Family and the Economy; Family and Religion; Policy and the Family (public policy as it affects the family, including tax, civil rights, social security, economic support laws, & regulations.)

**#9. Professional Ethics and Practice** - An understanding of the character and quality of human social conduct, and the ability to critically examine ethical questions and issues as they relate to professional practice

e.g., Formation of Social Attitudes and Values; Recognizing and Respecting the Diversity of Values and the Complexity of Value Choice in a Pluralistic Society; Examining Value Systems and Ideologies systematically and objectively; Social Consequences of Value Choices; Recognizing the Ethical Implications of Social and Technological Changes, Ethics of Professional Practice.

**#10. Family Life Education Methodology** - An understanding of the general philosophy and broad principles of family life education in conjunction with the ability to plan, implement, and evaluate such educational programs.

e.g., Planning and Implementing; Evaluation (materials, student progress, & program effectiveness); Education Techniques; Sensitivity to Others (to enhance educational effectiveness); Sensitivity to Community Concerns and Values (understanding of the public relations process).

#### References

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## **Appendix F - Family Life Education Fact Sheet**

# **National Council on Family Relations NCFR FACT SHEET**

[www.ncfr.org](http://www.ncfr.org)

## **Assuring the Future: Family Life Education**

### **THE PROFESSION OF FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION**

Family life education (FLE) is any organized effort to provide people with information, skills, experiences or resources intended to strengthen, improve, or enrich their family experience. The objective of family life education is to enrich and improve the quality of individual and family life.

FLE does not impose any arbitrary definition of what constitutes a family. It emphasizes processes that help people develop into healthy adults and work together in close relationships, and processes that help people bring out the best in others.

### **THE WORK OF FAMILY LIFE EDUCATORS**

Family life educators use many methods and settings to provide training to people who want to be more effective family members. Here are a few examples of how family life educators work to strengthen diverse American families:

In Houston, Texas, local judges direct offenders and divorcing couples with minor children to attend Edward Stasney's anger management and co-parenting workshops.

In Chattanooga, Tennessee, Julie Baumgardner, CFLE, works with "First Things First" to promote family-friendly workplace policies and increase community awareness of the importance of strong marriages and families through public service campaigns.

In Columbia, Missouri, David Schramm, CFLE, is an Extension Family Life Specialist with the University of Missouri Cooperative Extension. He develops programs and trains regional extension specialists in the areas of parenting and couple and family relationships.

In Springboro, Ohio, Jody Johnston-Pawel, CFLE, hosts a Parents Tool Talk™ radio show providing family life information to listeners. She also develops written materials and teaches classes for parents.

### **THE NEED FOR FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION**

We can prepare our citizens for the challenges of family life or we can pay a large and enduring social cost. Families face substantial challenges. Stresses come from many directions and impose great burdens on families. There was a time when most young people got family life training in informal apprenticeships with their parents.

Today, with greater challenges than ever before, we provide less training and preparation for family roles than we have in the past. It is no wonder that families feel overwhelmed by the challenges they face.



Many people feel that they know a lot about families because they grew up in one. Yet there are recent discoveries in family process that may surprise many people. Many of the processes that people assume to be helpful in families are not. Research continues to show new and better ways to become vibrant individuals, strengthen couple relationships, and raise healthy, balanced children. Examples of a few of the intriguing discoveries people should know include the following . . .

## PURPOSE

### **Families are the foundation of our society.**

They protect, connect, and educate family members. There may be no arena of life in which education may be as valuable as in family life.

However, many of the great discoveries about family life are not getting to the people who need them. Only a small percentage of Americans are ever reached by family life education.

While there are various professions that help families in many ways such as clergy, social workers, and health care professionals, it is family life educators who incorporate a preventative and educational approach to individual and family issues. Family life educators provide the tools and experiences to enrich individual and family life.

### **When considering legislation to strengthen families, policymakers should support family life education and the families it serves. Strong families make for a strong society.**

- Over the years many family professionals assumed that there was one best kind of relationship. Contrary to expectation, research by John Gottman shows that it doesn't matter which of three primary kinds of couple relationship one has—volatile, avoidant or validating—all can be satisfying and enduring. But it does matter that we give five positives for each negative. Positivity is the key to closeness.
- Kindness may be more important in family relationships than communication skills.
- Children's character and moral development may depend more on the cultivation of empathy than anything else.
- One characteristic of resilient children—those who flourish in spite of challenges—is that they have someone in their lives who is crazy about them.
- Teens that focus on serving others are less likely to get in trouble or drop out of school.
- The healthiest people are not the most realistic. Research shows that the healthiest people tend to be unrealistically optimistic.
- Emphasis on self-esteem may have created more problems than it solved.
- New discoveries in positive psychology provide better ways to thrive.
- We instinctively hope to solve problems by studying them, yet those who focus on problems in their relationships may create greater problems. Those who focus on strengths tend to transcend many problems.
- Controlling stress is not done by avoiding it, as much as using the resources we have and managing the way we think about it.

## QUALIFICATIONS OF FAMILY LIFE EDUCATORS

Many groups have felt a pressing need to provide family life education for their members or patrons. Yet many of those groups were not clear who qualified to be a family life educator. Sometimes in the past they resorted to using physicians and nurses—people with professional training—but no specific training in family life education. Specific training and certification for family life educators was badly needed.

Since 1985, the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) has sponsored the only national program to certify family life educators. Certified Family Life Educators (CFLE) have training and experience in ten vital areas of family life education:

Families and Individuals in Societal Contexts  
Internal Dynamics of Families  
Human Growth and Lifespan Development across the Life Span Human Sexuality  
Interpersonal Relationships  
Family Resource Management  
Parent Education and Guidance  
Family Law and Public Policy  
Professional Ethics and Practice  
Family Life Education Methodology

## FAMILY POLICY

**Knowledge is power. If we hope for family members to have satisfying and growth-promoting relationships, they need the best knowledge and skills available.**

Working harder while using inaccurate information will not improve families. Research suggests several ways policymakers could strengthen families:

- Promote education regarding relationships, emotional intelligence, and problem solving at all levels of public education.
- Foster the development of research-based, family-strengthening programs that may be delivered by schools, agencies, businesses, and faith communities.
- Support web and media, radio, and television dissemination of current, high-quality information about families.
- Strengthen community mental health organizations.
- Encourage businesses to support family life education in the workplace.
- View policy decisions through a family impact lens and consult with family professionals on the impact of policies on families.
- Encourage all organizations to help prevent family problems through the teaching and support of relationship-strengthening programs.

There are now more than 1500 active CFLEs and more than 120 university programs approved by NCFR as providing coursework relevant to the CFLE standards. The Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE) has become a designation that is widely recognized and valued. CFLEs are prepared to teach and strengthen the next generation of families.

## AUTHORS

NCFR wishes to thank the following authors for the development of this fact sheet and for their commitment to family life education:

**H. Wallace Goddard, Ph.D., CFLE**, University of Arkansas, Cooperative Extension Service **Tamara Gilliland, CFLE**, Family Life Education Institute  
**Natalie C. Goddard, CFLE**, Family Life Education Institute

## ABOUT NCFR

The National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) is the only professional organization focused solely on family research, policy, and practice. NCFR provides a forum for family researchers, educators, and practitioners to share in the development and dissemination of knowledge about families and family relationships, establishes professional standards, and works to promote family well-being. It is the oldest multidisciplinary family organization in the United States and is highly regarded as an authority for information on a broad range of family concerns. To receive additional copies of this fact sheet, contact NCFR, 1201 West River Parkway, Suite 200, Minneapolis, MN 55454; 888-781-9331; [info@ncfr.org](mailto:info@ncfr.org); [www.ncfr.org](http://www.ncfr.org).

## **Appendix G - Explanation of FLE from NCFR**

# **What is Family Life Education?**

Family life education focuses on healthy family functioning within a family systems perspective and provides a primarily preventive approach. The skills and knowledge needed for healthy functioning are widely known: strong communication skills, knowledge of typical human development, good decision-making skills, positive self-esteem, and healthy interpersonal relationships. The goal of family life education is to teach and foster this knowledge and these skills to enable individuals and families to function optimally.

Family life education professionals consider societal issues including economics, education, work-family issues, parenting, sexuality, gender and more within the context of the family. They believe that societal problems such as substance abuse, domestic violence, unemployment, debt, and child abuse can be more effectively addressed from a perspective that considers the individual and family as part of larger systems. Knowledge about healthy family functioning can be applied to prevent or minimize many of these problems. Family life education provides this information through an educational approach, often in a classroom-type setting or through educational materials.

## **Appendix H - Focus Group Guide**

1. Introduction: Hi everyone. First off, I want to start by thank all of you for being here. I truly appreciate the time you are spending to help me and I hope that you find the time you spend here to be rewarding as well. It's good to finally meet all of you. My assistant has passed out an informed consent form for each of you. You need to read it and sign it, but it is basically saying that you have not been coerced or forced to participate in this study, that you are doing it voluntarily and that you are aware you may leave at any point if you feel uncomfortable. Once you have signed them, put your pen down so my assistant knows she can pick it up. Thank you. Now, I hope that you have had a little time to look over the papers I sent you, because they will be very helpful in our discussion today. I want to start out by again telling you what we are here for today. My hope is that your group discussion today will help me understand as a researcher how to better equip you as grandparents raising your grandchildren with more resources. Specifically, I am getting my Masters' degree in family life education, so I want to know how it as a practice could help you all. There are not a lot of rules today except that I do want a comfortable environment where everyone feels free to express their opinions. So, please try to have only one person speaking at a time and try to give everyone a chance to speak. I want to hear from everyone. There will be no judgments from my assistant, your neighbors, or me. We're all here to learn more about how to help each other. I also want to make it clear that this discussion is for you guys. While I will be the one facilitating and asking questions, it is your guys' job to come up with the answers, whatever you feel they might be. There are no right or wrong answers, we are just here to explore the topic.
2. Ice-breaker: Let's get started by going around the circle and stating your name and a brief reason for why or how we became a grandparent raising one or more of our grandchildren. I will start by saying I am Jessie and point to the person on my left to go.
3. Can you tell me some of the things that you feel make you and your family strong or able to spring back after experiencing tough conditions?
4. What are some of the needs or stressors you have experienced as a grandparent raising a grandchild(ren)?
5. What experiences so far have you had with any services aimed to help you with those needs? They may be good or bad I just want to hear about some of them.
6. How did you feel about the materials I sent you? (I have provided a second copy to refer to if they should need or want to.)
7. In what ways do you feel that education would be a useful tool to manage stress related to raising your grandchild(ren)?
8. Consider the content areas of family life education, are there any domains in which you would like to receive education should it be offered to you and your family?

9. To sum things up, in one or two sentences, in what ways do you think family life education could help you and your family, based on the materials I gave you and any experiences you have had so far?
10. What additional information did I not ask about that you think would be helpful for me to know?

# **Appendix I - Informed Consent Form**

## **Utilizing Family Life Education as a Resource for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: A Qualitative Study**

**Approval Date of Project: 08/21/2014      Expiration Date of Project: 08/21/2015**

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Melinda Markham

**Co-Investigator(s):** Jessie Gardiner

**Contact Information for any Problems/Questions:** Mindy Markham, [mmarkham@ksu.edu](mailto:mmarkham@ksu.edu)

### **IRB Chair Contact/Phone Information:**

- Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.
- Jerry Jaax, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance and University Veterinarian, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

**Purpose of the Research:** The research project is being done to explore how family life education could be used to help grandparents raising grandchild(ren) to decrease stress they might feel. It is only a project to explore options and does not guarantee that programs will be created or implemented.

**Procedures or Methods to be Used:** The study will utilize focus groups as its method for qualitative data collection. The moderator will facilitate discussion by asking questions that the group of participants will answer. Some of the questions will be based on materials that were mailed to the participant prior to the focus group. The participants will be asked to review the materials for their own information to facilitate a more fruitful discussion. The sessions will be audiotaped. Refreshments and/or a light meal will be provided to make participants more comfortable. Individual interviews will be utilized should participants for focus groups be difficult to recruit. Ideally six to 10 participants will be necessary to have a focus groups. Participants that were not able to attend a focus group will be contacted to be interviewed individually should they be interested. Participants in the focus groups may be contacted following data analysis for the purpose of member checking and to ensure the most accurate findings are reported.

**Length of Study:** Sessions will last for about 60 to 90 minutes and participants will only be asked to attend one session. Individual interviews will last approximately an hour and participants will only be interviewed once.

**Risk or Discomforts Anticipated:** Participants will be discussing possibly intimate details of their family life and the things that cause them stress. If they are feeling overwhelmed at the time, the discussion may bring up sensitive topics.

**Benefits Anticipated:** This family type is somewhat neglected in the resources they receive. This study could provide hope that researchers are trying to get them the things that they need. It might also provide a forum just to discuss what they need, which could provide some relief.

**Extent of Confidentiality:** Only the research team and one assistant will attend focus group sessions or view audiotapes or transcripts of the sessions. Names of participants will not be included in any reports. Interview audiofiles and transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet or on a computer with a locked login. Only the research team will have access to keys or passwords.

**Terms of Participation:**

I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

**Participant Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Witness Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_



## **Appendix J - Individual Interview Guide**

1. Hi, I'm Jessie, and I was adopted by my grandma when I was five years old with my younger brother who was two because my parents were addicted to drugs and couldn't care for us properly. Now to start off, can you please tell me your name and why or how you became a grandparent raising your grandchildren.
2. Can you tell me some of the things that you feel make you and your family strong or able to spring back after experiencing tough conditions?
3. Others have included things like love for one another, support from other family members, friends, church and the community, sense of humor, and a sense of responsibility. Would you agree with all of these?
4. What are some of the needs or stressors you have experienced as a grandparent raising a grandchild(ren)?
5. What experiences so far have you had with any services aimed to help you with those needs? They may be good or bad, I just want to hear about them.
6. Have you experienced difficulty in finding resources? If so, can you give me some examples.
7. What about navigating through the different systems you have had to deal with, has that been difficult for you?
8. How do you feel about the materials I sent you and the information they provided?
9. Others have felt that the information was unrealistic or a great idea, but too challenging to accomplish. Do you agree?
10. Others also felt the material and the information it provided was not relevant or applicable to them or their family for one reason or another. Would you agree and say that it isn't relevant to you and your family?
11. In what ways do you feel that education would be a useful tool to manage stress related to raising your grandchild(ren)?
12. Have you received any educational type resource or tool that you found to be helpful?
13. Consider the content areas of family life education, are there any domains in which you would like to receive education should it be offered to you and your family?
14. Other participants have felt that the area of family law and policy would be a very helpful area to receive education in, what do you think?

15. Some participants stated that education in parenting to provide proper guidance to their grandchildren, education on growth and development, and education regarding family relationships and dynamics might be helpful also. What are your thoughts?
16. In what ways do you think family life education could or could not help you and your family, based on the materials I gave you and any experiences you have had so far?
17. What barriers do you feel exist in utilizing family life education for grandparents raising grandchildren?
18. A majority of the participants suggested that a great resource for grandparents raising grandchildren would be support groups, what are your feelings?
19. What additional information did I not ask about that you think would be helpful for me to know?

## Appendix K - Member Checking Questionnaire

Okay, so I have called you to talk a little bit about my findings from the focus groups I had for grandparents raising grandchildren. I'm just going to work through a few questions to see if you agree with the conclusions I made. I want to make sure I only tell people the most accurate information, so the best way is to go straight to the source and ask.

1. First of all, I'm going to work through some topics that I feel the majority of grandparents identified as being an area they would like to or wouldn't mind receiving education on. Please tell me if you agree or disagree to each area.
  - Finding resources
  - Getting answers to questions
  - Navigating the systems involved in caring for your grandchildren
  - Learning how to better communicate with your grandchild so foster a healthy relationship and to provide the proper guidance for your grandchild
  - Coping with family relationships and dynamics
  - Growth and development
  - Foster care classes or formal parenting classes
  - Education regarding your special and unique family situation
2. Would you agree that family life education would be better suited for your adult children, but that perhaps they needed it earlier in their life?
3. Would you agree that family life education could be a useful tool to help your grandchildren with their lives in the future?
4. Many of the participants discussed family life education in a negative light. I am calling them barriers. I will list a few barriers and I want you to tell me if you agree with the statement or not.
  - Family life education is unrealistic, idealistic, or a delusional fairytale that is not a possible achievement
  - Family life education is irrelevant to you personally
  - You have been raising your grandchild(ren) for a while now and have found what you need as far as education goes
  - You feel you could use education, but its regarding things that aren't common sense and things educators don't "know"
  - Education is need suddenly, for emergencies, or needs to fit a unique situation
  - There isn't enough time to read a book or attend a class
  - Finding childcare has been a difficult obstacle when being interested in attending educational meetings
5. Do you feel that there needs to be some type of collaboration between the services you have received to ensure that no piece of the puzzle is left out?

6. Do you feel that the most useful tool for you would be to be able to attend a support group or be involved in some type of mentor relationship?

## Appendix L - Summary of Findings and Thank You Letter

### Kansas State University



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November 25, 2014

[Recipient]  
[Address 1]  
[Address 2]

Dear [Recipient]:

First of all, I would like to thank you so very much for participating in my research project. I hope it was as enjoyable and inspiring for you as it was for me. Below I have summarized my findings as I have presented them in my final report for my thesis. My hope is that I can use these findings to facilitate future research projects and begin to implement Family Life Education opportunities for you, your family, and other grandparents raising grandchildren.

I held focus groups and individual interviews to gather data to answer my research question of *How can Family Life Education be used a resource for grandparents raising grandchildren to avoid crisis?* The following themes emerged from the focus groups and interviews:

- Grandparents do identify some areas in which education would or could be useful for them while raising their grandchildren. Those areas could include, but are not limited to:
  - Finding resources and answers to questions regarding navigating the many systems they are potentially involved with (i.e., the child welfare system, the school system, or the court and legal system).
  - Communicating and guiding their grandchildren down a healthy path and helping them cope with the obstacles they face.
  - Information regarding balancing and maintaining the shifting family dynamics and changing family relationships.
  - Information regarding the growth and development of children across the lifespan.
  - Education regarding content that is unique to their family situation (i.e., mental health, substance abuse).

- Grandparents feel that Family Life Education would or could be better suited for their adult children or grandchildren.
  - It is possible that the adult children received the education they needed, but that it was ignored or did not do the trick.
  - Grandchildren could benefit as a way to prevent them from going down a dysfunctional path.
- There were many barriers reported to the utilization of Family Life Education by grandparents raising grandchildren.
  - The purpose and definition of Family Life Education was misunderstood or found to be irrelevant.
  - Many grandparents had been raising their grandchildren for quite some time and had found the education and resources they felt they needed.
  - The education grandparents need is not the common sense stuff that educators know; it is deeper than that.
  - The education grandparents often need the most needs to be available very quickly, often during an emergency, and needs to fit that family's unique situation.
  - Many real-life and not uncommon barriers were reported (i.e., lack of time and energy, finding childcare, physical health).
- Ultimately, grandparents identified a lack of collaboration among service providers, and desire a place where many of their questions could be answered.
- Grandparents find support to be the most useful and would really like to see support groups implemented in their area for both themselves and their grandchildren.

In summary, I found that there are in fact areas of Family Life Education that could benefit grandparents raising grandchildren. However, there are many barriers to their participation in those opportunities and many feel it is not just them that would benefit from the education, but their grandchildren and their adult children as well. Ultimately, the current resources lack in collaboration between agencies and grandparents would be interested in more experiential support, possibly from that of support groups.

Again, I truly appreciate your help with my research. Should you have any questions or comments please don't hesitate to contact me. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Jessie Gardiner  
 Masters' Student  
 Kansas State University  
 Family Studies and Human Services  
 College of Human Ecology