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Using an Occupational Therapy Lens to Explore the Role of Grandparenting:
A Thematic Synthesis

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A research project submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the Doctor of Occupational Therapy degree from the University of Indianapolis, School of Occupational Therapy.

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A Research Project Entitled

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Approximately 70 million grandparents constitute one-third of the U.S. adult population in 2017, marking a significant 24 percent increase since 2001 (Bulletin, 2017). Baime (2023) highlights a significant demographic trend in recent U.S. Census data revealing that approximately 7.1 million American grandparents cohabit with their grandchildren under 18, with 2.3 million actively assuming caregiver responsibilities. The growth of caregivers' role reflects the expanding influence that grandparents have on their families and communities (Bulletin, 2017). Across the lifespan, the bond between grandparents and grandchildren yielded a positive influence enhancing their engagement in meaningful occupations, diverse roles, and enriching relationships (Harmon et al., 2022). Grandparents play a significant role in upholding the emotional vitality of their relationships with grandchildren, as asserted by Bangerter and Waldron (2014). Their assumed responsibility in this regard stems from the unique insights they develop into family dynamics, which shape the grandparent-grandchild (GP-GC) relationship. Mansson (2016) emphasized the significance of exploring this dimension in academic literature, not solely for the welfare of grandparents benefiting from these relationships but also in light of the changing societal dynamics driven by factors like diverse family structures, increased life expectancies, a rise in dual-worker households, and elevated rates of family breakdown. The grandparents' role is exemplified by the growth of supplementary grandchild care in the United States in recent decades, as documented by Kim et al. (2017). The increased frequency of interaction between grandparents and their grandchildren was attributed to not only the considered role of grandparents but also the extended life expectancy of grandparents (Bengtson, 2001). In 2022, multigenerational households surged to 4.7 percent of all households in the United States, with nearly 35 percent of grandparents in such households taking on the primary caregiving role, particularly those aged 60 and over (Saxena & Brotherson, 2022). Consequently,

as Kim et al. (2017) pointed out, grandparents will likely face increasing demands for supplementary childcare in the future. The distinctive challenges faced by both grandparents and grandchildren offer occupational therapy (OT) practitioners the chance to develop and execute initiatives and services that cater to their occupational requirements enabling therapists to fill generational gaps in kinship families and empower them with resources for a successful transition into a multi-generational household (Romsdal & Wavra, 2021).

Baker and Silverstein's typology for grandparent care distinguishes between providing supplementary childcare for working parents and offering custodial care when adult children are unable to raise their own children (Baker et al., 2008). Chan (2023) expanded on this, illustrating the diverse caregiving roles of grandparents ranging from occasional caregivers in non-co-resident households to co-parenting supplementary caregivers in multigenerational households and even becoming custodial caregivers in skipped-generation households. Stephens (2020) noted that over 50 percent of caregivers in grandparent-headed households are aged 45 to 59, and fewer than 10 percent are those aged 70 or older. The roles undertaken by grandparents can evolve as they adapt to the evolving needs of their growing grandchildren and the shifting dynamics of family life, such as geographic proximity, age considerations, and the pursuit of personal development (Bangerter & Waldron, 2014; Stephens, 2019).

Chan (2023) defined supplementary caregivers as providing care between 10 and 29 hours weekly or staying overnight, often engaging in co-parenting or childcare within multigenerational households. Bangerter & Waldron (2014) highlighted variations in traditional family roles with some grandparents acting as enjoyable companions and others engaging in long-distance grandparenting. In comparison, the term “grandfamilies,” defined by Freeman et al. (2019), is a family structure where grandparents co-reside and undertake custodial caregiving.

As a result, fundamentally unique experiences included grandparents viewing their role as a second chance at parenting and actively engaging in family maintenance (Bangerter & Waldron, 2014). Fifty-five percent of grandparent caregivers have been the primary caretakers for three or more years, emphasizing the long-term nature of their responsibilities (Stephens, 2020). In a related context, Freeman et al. (2019) noted that in contrast to conventional families, grandparent caregivers often indicate diminished family cohesion and heightened intra-family strain, contributing to a more complex communicative environment. Many factors contributed to grandparents taking on such responsibilities including abandonment, incarceration, divorce, limited childcare options, unemployment, as well as health and mental health challenges (Tracy et al., 2022). Dennis and Brewer (2016) added that the custodial role extends into children's adulthood with grandparents continuing to provide financial and emotional support.

Chan (2023) described that the grandparent-grandchild (GP-GC) relationship could have a positive or negative impact on the grandparent, which aligns with the Role Enhance and Strain Theory; these theories combined can help explain the diverse roles of grandparents. Relationship enhancement or strain can influence the other roles grandparents play in their family and community (Luo et al., 2012). This concept of influence aligns well with the Life Course Theory, which acknowledges that one family member can be influenced over time by intrinsic and extrinsic factors such as society, culture, life events, phases of life, location, and passage of time (Jones et al., 2019; Lersch, 2023). Those factors interlock and cause changes in other family members' lives (Elder, 1998). Scholars historically have used Life Course Theory to understand the interconnectivity of family members as they progress through life (Bengtson & Allen, 1993). The relationships between family members across generations refer to the term intergenerational solidarity. The Family Systems Theory suggests that families consist of subsystems and

emphasizes interrelationships among family members within the family system (Bowen, 1966). The subsystems are contained in a broader social context, and these impact the functioning of the grandchildren (Crosnoe & Elder (2002).

According to Freeman et al. (2019), children in grandfamilies maintain important connections to family, community, and culture, recognizing their grandparents as sources of positive influence and contributors to an improved quality of life. Mansson (2016) suggested that encouraging children to spend time with their grandparents not only benefits the children but also provides parents with insights into ensuring their own parents' happiness and well-being. Consequently, it is common for parents to actively endorse and facilitate interactions between their children and grandparents recognizing the multifaceted benefits arising from these intergenerational relationships (D'Astous et al., 2013). According to Stephens (2019), grandchildren with college-educated grandparents exhibited higher levels of literacy and math skills upon entering formal schooling compared to those whose grandparents had attained a high school education or less.

In an attempt to identify reciprocal benefits, Mansson (2016) noted that grandparents felt a sense of fulfillment and connection within their role as a grandparent. The identified mutual investment towards the GP-GC relationship also significantly contributed to the overall beneficial experience for both populations. Bangerter and Waldron (2014) found that consistent communication between a grandparent and grandchild positively influenced maintaining their intimate relationship, specifically for long-distance GP-GC relationships. Additionally, Marcus (2017) identified the pertinent benefit of grandchildren developing a positive attachment relationship with multiple figures. Overall, the crucial role of a grandparent was noted through the positive benefits, including fostering relational closeness through shared activities, providing

social support, and family satisfaction throughout the relationship (Bangerter & Waldron, 2014). Grandparents' dedication provides children with valuable elements like time, love, compassion, and a sense of family, enriching the lives of those who might otherwise lack familial support (Dennis & Brewer, 2016).

Alongside the numerous beneficial outcomes for a GP-GC relationship, research also identified various negative outcomes and stressors for both the grandparent and grandchild. With a shift in the caregiving role, additional stressors brought onto grandparents may be exacerbated by the uncertainty of the duration of care, including financial strain, mental wellness, and physical well-being of the family, which may ultimately cause elevated stress and depressive symptoms for grandparents and behavioral-emotional distress for the grandchild (Tracy et al., 2022). According to Freeman et al. (2019), older caregivers, particularly grandparents in caregiving roles, often encounter financial challenges, with approximately 20 percent reporting income levels below the poverty line, further indicating a likelihood of living in financial hardship. Additional stressors as the grandparent engaged in a caregiver role included increased time demands, sleep deprivation, challenges associated with aging, a shift in previous parenting methods, and intergenerational issues related to technology use and assisting with homework (Wood et al., 2016). Overall, older adult caregivers, particularly grandparents, may face a higher vulnerability to psychological difficulties, including feelings of social isolation, depression, and stress (Freeman et al., 2019).

It is important to note that children raised in a custodial family with grandparents have increased rates of depression or anxiety when compared to grandchildren raised in parental family setups (Freeman et al., 2019). In specific scenarios where a grandchild is placed under the care of a grandparent due to parental neglect or abuse, the upheaval in conventional family roles

may cause distress among grandchildren and other family members, ultimately adding to the caregiving challenges faced by custodial grandmothers (Tracy et al., 2022). Throughout the intricacies involved in the establishment of grandfamilies, the research noted triggers for stress and trauma experienced by both grandparent caregivers and their grandchildren (Freeman et al., 2019). Overall, significant life events, school commitments, peer relationships, and geographic separation from a grandchild can result in relationship shifts, including the possibility of decreased emotional closeness between the grandparent and grandchild (Bangerter & Waldron, 2014).

Kim et al. (2017) found that Asian and European countries and the United States have observed an increase in supplementary care of grandchildren. In American Indian communities, the raising of grandchildren operates outside legal adoption or guardianship, with an estimated 100,000 grandparents raising grandchildren under the age of 18 (Dennis & Brewer, 2016). As American Indian grandparents balanced sole custody, they faced poverty, limited access to resources, and physical limitations (Dennis & Brewer, 2016). In research done by Stephens (2020), African-American grandparents were more likely to guide their grandchildren on topics of behavior, faith, and culture compared to their White and Mexican-American counterparts, which led to their grandchildren valuing their teachings throughout adolescence and adulthood. Compared to the African American community, the Latino culture, which is typically a close-knit family structure, grandparents are typically involved in the upbringing of grandchildren, with many grandparents residing nearby and providing part-time caregiving (Xie et al., 2018).

Occupational therapy, as a discipline, is grounded in the belief that meaningful engagement in various activities is pivotal for health and well-being (Harmon et al., 2022). OT

practitioners therapeutically employ everyday life activities with their clients to enhance or enable their participation by leveraging their understanding of the dynamic relationship between the client, their involvement in meaningful activities, and the surrounding context (Occupational Therapy Practice Framework, 2020). Understanding external factors, such as a client's role or family dynamic, allows an OT to create goals and interventions with a holistic approach that is client-centered and meaningful to the client (Gentry et al., 2018). We see this from a global perspective as the World Federation of Occupational Therapy (Sinclair, 2019) acknowledges that diversity and culture remain at the top of their agenda due to the undoubted impact that both have on the client. OT practitioners can leverage their expertise to address the unique challenges within kinship families, bridging generational gaps and facilitating a successful transition into multi-generational living (Romsdal & Wavra, 2021). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the literature to determine the benefits and challenges associated with grandparenting in various cultures and identify implications for occupational therapy practice.

Methodology

Considering the extensive range of OT practices, encompassing the delivery of personalized and excellent care for individuals potentially identifying as grandparents, the researchers sought a methodology that could offer comprehensive contextual insights into a diverse array of experiences highlighted in qualitative studies (Walker et al., 2016). A thematic synthesis is a qualitative method that seeks to derive conclusions by identifying common themes across diverse studies (Lucas et al., 2007). Thematic synthesis involves extracting data, coding themes line by line, creating descriptive codes, exploring similarities and differences among these codes to categorize them into descriptive themes, and generating analytical themes in alignment with the research question (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

Researchers initially conducted a systematic review of the literature available via the EBSCOhost database. Inclusion criteria included cohort studies of level III, qualitative studies of mixed methods or mixed quantitative meta-synthesis studies, and articles consisting of grandparent or grandchildren participants with no age limit. Exclusion criteria omitted level I systematic reviews and meta-analyses, level II quasi-experimental studies, practice guidelines, quality improvement, program evaluations, case reports, mixed-method studies, and articles written in non-English languages.

The researchers' search strategy was performed in a coordinated and collaborative manner as each researcher utilized specific key terms (Table 1) through a systematic approach of the following databases within EBSCOhost: CADTH, CINAHL, Cochrane Library, Ebsco eBooks, ERIC, Grey Literature, Google Scholar, PEDro, Prospero, PubMed, Medline, OTSeeker, System Review Data Repository. The researchers yielded a total of 3,259 articles.

Table 1

Key Search Terms Searched in Databases

Key search terms		
Shared experience and grandparents	Shared experience and grandparent	Multicultural and grandparent or grandchild
Activities and grandparents	Shared experience and grandchild	Multicultural and grandparents or grandchildren
Activities and grandchild	Interpersonal relation and grandparent or grandchild	Money and grandparents
Play and grandparents/grandchildren	Interpersonal relations and grandparents or grandchildren	Financial and grandparents
Quality time and grandparents/grandchildren	Social participation and grandparent and grandchild	Communicate and grandparent or grandchild

Interaction and grandparents/grandchildren	Social participation and grandparents and grandchildren	Communicate and grandparents or grandchildren
Co-occupation and grandparents/grandchildren	Play or games and grandparent or grandchild	Multilingual and grandparents or grandchild
Engagement and grandparents/grandchildren	Play or games and grandparents or grandchildren	Multilingualism and grandparents or grandchildren

The researchers exported the articles from the databases into Zotero, which allowed researchers to download, organize, annotate, cite, and share articles amongst the research team members (Zotero, n.d.). Of 3,259 articles, 46 were duplicates, resulting in a pool of 3,213 articles to be reviewed. Once all duplicates were deleted, the researchers exported articles into Rayyan, a free web tool that speeds the process of screening literature by allowing researchers to select studies and remove bias from the review through a blinding process to prevent viewing others' work (Rayyan, 2023). One researcher had control over this tool and was able to enable and disable blind viewing. The researchers enabled blind viewing while the titles and abstracts of the 3,213 articles were reviewed independently.

Once the researchers completed this process, the researchers disabled the blind viewing setting yielding 517 articles categorized as “in conflict.” To resolve disagreements about including or excluding articles, the research team discussed each article, and 46 articles were added based on majority agreement. At this stage, the exclusion criteria was updated by eliminating articles published before 2012, resulting in the exclusion of 98.6% (3,131) articles. Forty-six articles were appraised using the Johns Hopkins Evidence-Based Practice Model for Nursing and Healthcare Professionals (Dang et al., 2021). The researchers engaged in a peer-reviewing process after each researcher individually appraised their assigned articles. If the researchers experienced disagreements, the entire research team discussed the relevancy of the

article with advice provided by the principal investigator, who made the final decision to include or exclude the article. As a result of the appraisal process, nine articles were included in the analysis.

Data extraction

The researchers used the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) as guidance during the process of selecting and appraising studies for effectively synthesizing data (PRISMA, 2020). Data extracted included the demographics of the target population and the relationship between grandparent and grandchild, such as custodial versus supplemental. Findings related to the purpose of the study to identify the benefits and challenges associated with grandparenting and relevant implications for practice were extracted for further analysis.

Researchers utilized a constant comparative approach to analyze the texts of each article through which common themes and concepts were identified by simultaneously labeling, coding, and analyzing (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). First, the research team received training regarding thematic synthesis, analysis techniques, and constant comparison strategies. Articles were divided amongst the research team in preparation for synthesis to identify commonly shared themes and concepts. Initially, each researcher read the introduction of their respective article by free line-by-line coding. Afterward, the research team reviewed and organized the free codes into constructive themes according to relevance for the study. The codes and categories were continuously discussed amongst the researchers until a majority consensus was established to omit bias and decrease impulsive categorization. The themes revealed through this process included beneficial factors related to overall wellness, negative factors affecting wellness, grandparent-headed households, grandparents as caretakers, cultural relevance, types of roles,

educational and spiritual resources, increased engagement in grandparenting, and decreased engagement in grandparenting. Researchers also explored the relevancy of data to the profession of occupational therapy.

Next, the researchers read the results, findings, discussion, and conclusion section of their respective articles to identify relevant data related to the prior themes. Sentences relevant to the purpose of the study were extracted and categorized based on benefits, challenges, or implications for practice. Once compiled, extracted data was inputted into Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer (ChatGPT) to identify common themes. ChatGPT is a language model developed by OpenAI designed for conversational purposes (ChatGPT, 2023). Capable of generating replies varying from human-like responses to text prompts, the ChatGPT software was developed on massive amounts of data, which allows the responses to understand context, generate coherent text, and perform a variety of language-related tasks (ChatGPT, 2023). The themes constructed by ChatGPT were reviewed by the research team to confirm the accuracy and relevance of the study. A constant comparison approach was used across ChatGPT-generated data points in order to form categories and concepts.

Findings

Among the nine articles included in our study, researchers enrolled participants from populations that consisted of African American, Lakota Elders, Asian, White, Hispanic, Native, and Latino. The age range of grandparents across the nine studies was 36-98 years. Three studies provided evidence about grandmothers and their grandchildren; six studies provided evidence about grandmothers, grandfathers, and their grandchildren. Of the nine articles reviewed (Table 2), five researchers studied grandparents who fulfilled the supplemental role; five researchers studied grandparents who fulfilled the custodial role.

Table 2*Articles Included in Analysis*

Author (Date)	Purpose of Study	Research Design	Sample Demographics	Type of Grandparent
D'Astous, et al. (2013)	Discovering the range of engagement of intergenerational relationships in families with a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	Qualitative Semi-Structured interview	14 grandparents (8 grandmothers, 6 grandfathers) Age ranges between 56-81 years Caucasian descent in the United States	Supplementary
Freeman, et al. (2019)	How do grandparent caregivers describe their cognitions and behaviors in regards to communication with their grandchildren?	Qualitative Semi-structured interviews Braun and Clarkes 6-step process for thematic analysis	21 grandparents (17 female, 4 male) Age ranges between 40–74 years 51% Caucasian, 22% Black, 20% Hispanic, and 3% Asian United States	Custodial
Xie, et al. (2018)	What are Latino grandparents' perceptions of and attitudes toward the way children spend their leisure time, and in particular LTPA?	Qualitative Focus group interviews	53 grandparents of 40-70 years Grandchildren of 2 - 12 years old Latino descent Low income within Los Angeles County, United States	Supplementary
Tracy, et al. (2022)	Analyze online journals written over four weeks by grandmothers raising	Qualitative Journal prompts and online	129 grandmothers Ages ranging from 36-76 years 21.7% Black, 10.9%	Custodial

	grandchildren	questionnaires	Hispanic, 6.9% Bi/Multiracial 6.9% Asian 0.78% Native American 0.78% United States	
Stephens (2019)	Examined how African American grandmothers caring for their grandchildren promoted literacy for themselves and the children in their care.	Qualitative Semi-structured interviewing Criterion-based and snowball sampling Descriptive-phenomenology	8 grandmothers Age ranges between 46-70 years African American descent within the United States	Custodial
Bangerter & Waldron (2014)	In what ways does the closeness of GP-GC relationships change throughout the grandchild's adolescence?	Qualitative Semi-structured interviews with retrospective interview technique with constant comparative method	35 grandparents Age ranges between 60-82 years Majority caucasian descent in the United States	Supplementary
Mansson (2016)	What do grandparents perceive as the best part about being grandparents?	Qualitative Open-ended survey questions Six-step thematic analysis	104 grandparents (84 female, 20 male) Age ranges between 60-91 years Majority caucasian descent and married in the United States	Supplementary
Dennis & Brewer (2016)	The central focus of this research is to gain an understanding of the experience of Lakota elders raising	Qualitative Interviews	25 grandparents (20 female, 5 male) Age ranges between 55-98 years American Indian descent	Custodial

	grandchildren		Living in South Dakota	
Stephens (2020)	The purpose of this study was to understand the methods of informal learning for human capital used by Black grandmothers caring for their grandchildren in rural communities	Qualitative Basic interpretive inquiry Semi-instructed interview	10 grandparents Age ranges between 44-78 years African American women, in a rural community within the United States	Custodial

Benefits Associated with Grandparenting

Three qualitative themes of positive outcomes between GP-GC relationships can be identified from the provided excerpts across different studies: education for custodial grandparents, communication and pride, and physical and emotional support. These themes collectively highlight the multifaceted roles that grandparents play in the lives of their grandchildren, encompassing education, faith, communication, support, and the nurturing of positive relationships across generations.

Education for Custodial Grandparents

Within education for custodial grandparents, four subcategories emerged: attachment to social networks and educational development, intergenerational learning and reciprocity, custodial grandparent involvement in Parent-Teacher-Student Associations (PTSA) and educational engagement, and faith literacy development.

Custodial grandmothers became attached to social networks within and outside of school. The attachment to social networking systems contributed to resources for assisting

grandchildren in learning and development, reducing high school dropout rates, and providing support for their grandchildren when they were treated unfairly. A vested interest in the educational development of grandchildren was shown. Intergenerational learning and reciprocation of learning were evident between older and younger generations. Informal learning activities led to collaborative activities, group discussions, and expanded social relationships. Learning transferred between generations was found to strengthen the Black family.

Custodial grandparent involvement in PTSA and their grandchild's educational development was valued and contributed to intergenerational learning. Participation in PTSA activities provided resources to enable custodial grandmothers to gain skills to guide their grandchildren's learning. Custodial grandmothers were highly motivated to learn about their children's school experiences. Through participation in PTSA activities, the utilization of human capital in the context of informal learning was employed for intergenerational learning due to collaborative efforts between intergenerational learners (grandmothers and grandchildren), and members of a system working together to advance the well-being of the grandchildren. When individuals, like grandmothers taking care of their grandchildren, participate in opportunities to acquire human capital, particularly within a sociocultural setting, they establish connections with networking systems comprising other parents, students, educators, counselors, and principals. These connections facilitate the occurrence of more informal learning opportunities, fostering increased interactions and learning experiences for both the grandmothers and their grandchildren.

Black grandmothers were deeply rooted in their religious beliefs and served as guides in imparting spiritual direction to both their children and grandchildren. Faith literacy development of grandchildren was enhanced through participation in activities such as Sunday school,

Vacation Bible School, and Bible study. Grandmothers were found to use the Bible and other religious education materials to enhance their grandchildren's reading skills and contribute to their moral development. This resulted in these children acquiring improved capabilities to conduct themselves effectively when away from home.

Communication and Pride

Within communication and pride, four subcategories were identified: community leadership and support, communication practices, long-distance relationships and technology, and mutual affection and pride. Community leadership and support are evidenced by care and concern for the broader communities' children and elders providing leadership, guidance, and assistance with food in resource-limited environments. The living Lakota values, including generosity and commitment to family, also support the subcategory of community leadership and support.

Communication practices emphasized by grandparents include listening, dialogue, emotional discussions, openness, and allowing questioning. These practices are also supported by structured communication activities for stability and consistency in grandchild upbringing. Communication practices include improved resources, acquired wisdom, and increased emotional maturity, which contribute to refined communication. Long-distance relationships and technology are supported by grandparents who actively engage in relationship maintenance practices for long-distance relationships. Technology, such as texting and social media, helps sustain close relationships over time. Lastly, the subcategory of mutual affection and pride is evidenced by grandparents' enjoyment of mutual affection and shared activities with grandchildren. Pride in grandchildren, children, and their accomplishments is a fundamental aspect of the GP-GC relationship.

Physical and Emotional Support.

Latino grandparents who perceived the benefits of physical activity on a grandchild's physical and mental health supported leisure-time physical activity directly and indirectly. Grandparents overall were found to provide emotional support and nurturance for parents and grandchildren. Closeness and contact between parents and grandparents were found to enhance positive relationships.

Challenges Associated with Grandparenting

Four qualitative themes of challenges associated with GP-GC relationships were identified from the provided excerpts across different studies: challenges with custodial grandparenting, complex stress, struggles in promoting health habits, and decline in closeness during adolescence and long-distance relationships.

Challenges with Custodial Grandparenting

Custodial grandparents often rely on limited resources when raising their grandchildren. Despite grandparents' motivation to support their grandchildren due to the cultural values of family and caring for future generations, they continue to face many challenges due to the nature of their responsibilities. Grandparents take on the responsibility due to reasons such as substance abuse, neglect, parents seeking employment and educational opportunities, and accidental deaths.

Complex Stress

Some grandparents face complex, stressful situations related to child trauma, unstable conditions with biological parents, and emotional and behavioral issues in grandchildren. Legal custody conflicts with birth parents and navigating complex family dynamics create stress for grandparents. Behavioral and emotional problems in grandchildren, challenges with the grandchild's parents, financial strain, concerns for the grandchild's future health, worry about

adult children, social isolation, and navigating complex judicial systems are stressful and have a negative influence on the well-being of grandparents.

Struggles in Promoting Healthy Habits

The struggles in promoting healthy habits are evidenced by grandparents being the role models in promoting grandchildren's leisure-time physical activity. Some grandparents struggle to modify sedentary behaviors through verbal communication. Grandparents also use unhealthy foods as an incentive for physical activity, which may encourage unhealthy eating.

Decline in Closeness During Adolescence and Long-Distance Relationships

The decline in closeness during adolescence and long-distance relationships is evidenced by the decline attributed to growing independence and engagement with peers and adults. Relational closeness often declines due to life changes, moving away, or the grandparent's limited involvement in family life. Family disruptions, such as conflicts over financial support or drug abuse, were also found to contribute to estrangement. Grandparents described the relationship as "one-sided" with their grandchildren, with their efforts to communicate not being reciprocated, resulting in grandparents longing for deeper connections.

Implications for Occupational Therapy

Five qualitative themes of possible implications for practice were revealed from the analysis: faith literacy, culture, support, and outreach interventions, grandparents' roles and communication, and training and education.

Faith Literacy

Within the theme of faith literacy, two subcategories emerged: collaboration for faith literacy-based adult education and intergenerational learning through faith literacy. There is a need to facilitate collaboration among adult educators, researchers, and students of adult

education to establish best practices for grandmothers and older adult learners in informal education programs, using faith literacy as a foundation for diverse teaching and learning opportunities. Implementing faith literacy activities as a significant component in intergenerational learning would enable grandmothers and grandchildren to acquire skills that build on existing competencies, opening doors to further learning opportunities.

Culture

Within the theme of culture, three subcategories emerged: promoting Latino grandparents' involvement, cultural healing approaches, and addressing the unique needs of African-American Grandmothers. Designing interventions to empower Latino grandparents in supporting their grandchildren's leisure-time physical activity will promote Latino grandparents' involvement with their grandchildren. Additionally, providing information on the benefits of physical activity, local resources, and the development of intergenerational programs for physical activity will aid in involvement. In approach to cultural healing, recognition of the need for mental health services that incorporate cultural healing approaches will address the unresolved grief and loss within the community. Lastly, investigating and addressing the unique needs of African-American grandmothers caring for grandchildren in rural communities by engaging them in informal learning activities for knowledge development demonstrates the importance of education for both caregivers and children.

Support and Outreach Interventions

Within support and outreach interventions, three subcategories were identified: outreach of behavioral and mental health support, support services and interventions, and supporting grandparents of children with disabilities. It is important to implement outreach efforts by behavioral and mental health services to provide concrete support and tools for managing family

dynamics in grandfamilies. Grandparents would benefit from the necessary support to address emotional, behavioral, and developmental issues in children. Also, interventions to assess and alleviate stresses related to transitions and parental instability will support custodial grandparents in raising grandchildren, including navigating social and economic challenges. It is important to support grandparents of children with disabilities by providing accurate information to grandparents regarding their grandchild's disability, enhancing understanding and support. Lastly, fostering inclusion in family activities and expressing appreciation will strengthen intergenerational relationships within families with a child with a disability.

Grandparent's Roles and Communication

Within the theme of grandparent's roles and communication, three subcategories emerged: acknowledging grandparents' contribution, communication practices in grandfamilies, and recognizing grandparent caregivers' roles. The efforts of grandparents should be recognized as a vital service to the community. It is important to acknowledge grandparents' contribution to maintaining family stability and providing financial and emotional support to their grandchildren. By recognizing grandparent's roles, we gain insights into aging caregivers' reflections on overall family communication. This reflection will allow for a better understanding of grandparents' roles within grandfamilies, which is required to develop communication strategies and practices that align with the second-chance parenting phenomenon. Lastly, it is important to recognize grandparent caregivers' multifaceted role as parents, teachers, and heads of households. Overall, these efforts will support adult educators in understanding and addressing the responsibilities placed on grandparent caregivers while also incorporating culturally relevant instruction and scaffolding strategies.

Training and Education

Within the theme of training and education, four subcategories were identified: interprofessional education and collaboration, strengthening PTSA and collaborative approaches for custodial grandparents, family-centric approaches in health care, and behavioral parent training for grandfamilies. There is an increasing need for interprofessional education and collaboration, particularly as more grandmothers assume the role of primary caretakers, emphasizing the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to address complex family needs. For example, PTSA and collaborative approaches can be strengthened within schools by broadening the membership to include various professionals beyond parents and teachers. It is also necessary to promote collaborative approaches across professions to effectively meet the complex needs of families with custodial grandparents. Family-centric approaches in health care need to approach grandparents from a family context, providing population-specific training on conducting family assessments for grandmothers raising grandchildren. It is important to address various familial relationships and offer support for managing these relationships. This can be done by developing behavioral parent training for custodial grandfamilies and programs to teach grandparents and the grandchild's parents co-parenting skills. Interventions for grandparents and grandfamilies need to be tailored to the needs of different generations within grandfamilies, such as considering diverse age groups.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the literature to determine the benefits and challenges associated with grandparenting in various cultures and explore implications for the practice of occupational therapy. Researchers found that grandparents engaging in meaningful custodial or supplementary roles can lead to considerably beneficial outcomes for not only the grandparents but also the grandchildren.

Our findings show that custodial grandmothers are motivated to learn about their grandchildren's school experiences and education through their involvement in PTSA. This included actively participating in PTSA activities to acquire skills to guide their grandchildren's learning. Our research noted the value of PTSA and how its social aspects can promote intergenerational learning within GP-GC relationships. Intergenerational learning and reciprocity between older and younger generations also contribute to positive outcomes in our findings (Stephens, 2020). This encompasses informal learning activities, which lead to collaborative activities, group discussions, and expanded social relationships (Stephens, 2020). Alongside formal and informal learning, OT practitioners are equipped to provide educational programs necessary to facilitate interpersonal and social skills (Marton & Stewart, 2020). For instance, OT practitioners can provide supplementary services for grandchildren eligible for Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) developed by grandfamilies and professionals within the school services (Generations United, 2023). Furthermore, grandfamilies can seek out the assistance or skilled services of OT practitioners when needing extra classroom support necessary for optimal learning (Marton & Stewart, 2020). Specifically, school-based OT practitioners can prompt physical and mental wellness by addressing the physical, cognitive, psychosocial, and sensory components of the grandchild's performance (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2017). By doing so, OT practitioners will not only promote the overall well-being of the grandchild through client-centered care but will also provide the necessary educational concepts through grandfamily-centered care necessary for grandparents to maintain such support outside of the PTSA (Marton & Stewart, 2020).

In addition to providing support for grandchildren, our findings show that grandparents also provide emotional support and nurturance for parents (D'Astous et al., 2013). It is shown

that closeness and contact between parents and grandparents enhance positive relationships (D'Astous et al., 2013). Very few research studies have focused on the coping strategies necessary to address emotional barriers and support within the grandfamily dynamic. However, the few studies that have been conducted duly noted the very few resources available to support grandfamilies (Wood et al., 2016). A successfully effective OT practitioner should not only assess and identify the emotional and supportive needs of grandfamilies but also identify the appropriate resources the grandfamilies require for prolonged maintenance (Wood et al., 2016). For instance, intergenerational programming within the context of OT can effectively provide support through meaningful participation in co-occupations, including shared physical, emotional, and volitional engagement (Harmon et al., 2022). Whether through meaningful intergenerational interventions or educational programs, successful OT practitioners should assess, address, and provide grandfamilies with the appropriate tools and resources to facilitate or maintain support and nurturance (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2020).

We found that brimming with mutual affection and engaged in shared activities, grandparents revel in the pride derived from their grandchildren, children, and their own accomplishments, making it a fundamental and cherished aspect of the GP-GC relationship (Mansson, 2016). Moore and Miller (2007) paralleled these findings by suggesting that African American grandparents facing diverse challenges while raising their grandchildren gain a substantial amount of psychological rewards, which heightens their gratification, sense of usefulness, and growing pride. Henderson et al. (2017) revealed that among Native People residing in a rural Arctic climate, pride was a significant factor contributing to the joy experienced by grandparents in the upbringing of their grandchildren. Therefore, evidence supports that overcoming the challenges and having pride in their grandparenting role has the

potential to not only enrich the GP-GC relationship but also improve the overall well-being of the grandparent.

Recognizing the advantages of physical activity for the well-being of their grandchildren, Latino grandparents actively endorse and provide support for their leisure-time physical pursuits, fostering both physical and mental health benefits directly and indirectly (Xie et al., 2018). On the contrary to fostering healthy habits, Pankhurst et al. (2019) found in their survey of supplementary grandparents in Southern Australia that “discretionary treats” are a valuable part of the GP-GC relationship that is strategically used by grandparents to identify themselves as uniquely different from other family members. Williams et al. (2021) and Moestue & Huttly (2008) concluded that the grandparent’s level of education directly correlates to the level of the grandchild’s health. Although the physical activities and rewards that grandparents choose to share with their grandchildren have an impact on the grandchild’s health, ultimately, the higher the level of education of the grandparent, the higher the level of health the grandchild is likely to have.

Providing support and sharing time were important benefits to the role of grandparenting. Stephens (2019) described grandmothers' pivotal role in supporting grandchildren during challenging times through faith literacy development and attachment to social networks and educational development. Additionally, shared time in activities such as faith literacy, Sunday school, and Bible study, were found to also enhance reading skills and moral development in grandchildren (Stephens, 2020). Attachment to networking systems contributed to resources that assisted grandchildren learning in development reducing overall high school dropout rates (Stephens, 2019). Leitao et al. (2023) added that OT practitioners can facilitate grandparents engaging in custodial or supplemental roles by directly supporting the use of spirituality

necessary for further holistic support of either client-centered or grandfamily-centered care. Alongside values and beliefs, spirituality is listed as an important client factor in the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2020). Thus, OT practitioners should consider spirituality as an essential aspect of practice as it plays a significant role in influencing not only an individual's motivation, but also their overall well-being, health, and engagement in meaningful activities (Leitao et al., 2023).

An important and positive aspect of the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is communication. Communication practices emphasized by grandparents include listening, dialogue, emotional discussions, openness, and allowing questioning (Freeman et al., 2019). Structured communicated activities should be encouraged to provide stability and consistency in a grandchild's upbringing (Freeman et al., 2019). In addition, improved resources, acquired wisdom, and increased emotional maturity positively contribute to more refined communication between grandparents and grandchildren (Freeman et al., 2019). Examining communication practices among grandparent caregivers, Dennis and Brewer (2016) focused on elders, particularly women, showcasing their dedication to caring for the community's grandchildren. Despite resource limitations, these elders provide leadership, guidance, and assistance, embodying Lakota values within a challenging economic context. Freeman's (2019) study reinforced the importance of meaningful dialogue and structured communication within grandfamilies. Our study notes positive behavioral adjustments among grandchildren, attributing these improvements to enhanced resources and emotional maturity resulting from effective communication strategies. When considering OT practices and the facilitation of meaningful GP-GC communication, OT practitioners can be valuable agents of resources by providing tailored interventions, education, and support necessary to meet the needs of both the

grandparents and grandchildren (Romsdal & Wavra, 2021). An assessment of determining the exact need should be developed to provide the necessary resources needed to produce and maintain positive and meaningful communication. Specifically, OT practitioners are equipped to facilitate social skills training sessions for either grandparents or grandchildren (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2020).

Lakota elders epitomize significant leadership and dedication to the overall well-being of their community, especially the children, by providing guidance and crucial food support within environments with meager resources (Dennis & Brewer, 2016). Amidst limited resources, the elders embody the enduring values of the Lakota people, marked by generosity and an unwavering commitment to family, as highlighted by Dennis and Brewer in 2016. Similarly, Lazaro et al. (2023) uncovered that a significant number of grandfathers in Southern Malawi are integral in the support, development, and transmission of knowledge and values to their orphaned grandchildren whom they have adopted and unconventionally raised due to their parent's death. In their investigation of the social identity of grandparents within the United States, Neikrug (2000) proposed that grandparents who are deeply engaged and actively involved can exert a profound influence in mentoring younger individuals with disabilities. Taking on the roles within their families and community allows grandparents to have a continued influence on the culture and future of their community.

In the realm of intergenerational relationships, the role of grandparents in the upbringing and support of their grandchildren is a multifaceted and dynamic one. Our findings show that despite facing socio-economic challenges, elders are motivated by cultural values centered on family and their commitment to future generations, prompting them to take on the responsibility of raising their grandchildren (Dennis and Brewer, 2016). This altruistic commitment becomes

even more crucial in situations where substance abuse, neglect, parental pursuit of employment and education, or accidental deaths lead grandparents to assume caregiving roles (Dennis and Brewer, 2016). Peterson (2018) supports grandparents experiencing emotions of worry for several reasons, including lack of caregiver options, the possibility of a child being placed in government systems, or if the child has a sudden health crisis. Despite raising grandchildren in a context of limited resources, grandparents are motivated to support their grandchildren due to the cultural values of family and caring for future generations (Dennis & Brewer, 2016). Peterson (2018) adds that grandparents also choose themselves over other relatives due to age, familial and career responsibilities, and overall inability to provide care. As grandparents raise a grandchild, resilience and a positive perspective overcome the challenges and stressors they experience (Hayslip et al., 2019).

Expanding on this, the research completed by Freeman et al. (2019) looked into the intricate dynamics within grandfamilies, revealing a prevalence of child trauma stemming from unstable conditions during the time grandchildren spent with their birth parents. Families can often face significant stress due to common emotional and behavioral issues such as depression, anxiety, attachment disorders, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (Freeman et al., 2019; D'Astous et al., 2013; Tracy et al., 2022). In previous research done by Doley et al. (2015), it was found that 23 percent of custodial grandparents reported their grandchild having high levels of emotional problems and 29 percent with hyperactivity. Our findings show that stressors for grandparents include behavioral and emotional problems in grandchildren, challenges with the grandchild's parents, financial strain, concerns for the future health of the grandchild, social isolation, and navigating complex judicial systems (Freeman et al., 2019; D'Astous et al., 2013; Tracy et al., 2022). Outside research by Hayslip et al. (2019), similarly states that grandparents'

stressors such as being poor, minority status, or problematic family relationships also cause distress and disadvantages. Our study found that grandparents experience conflict when navigating family dynamics with the birth parents regarding the custody of the grandchild in relation. Other difficult family dynamics can include negotiating troubling parental behaviors that impact their relationships with both the parent and the grandchild, adding further layers to their caregiving responsibilities (Tracy et al., 2022).

Xie's et al. (2018) findings contribute to the narrative by exploring how grandparents, through role modeling, attempt to promote their grandchildren's leisure-time physical activity. Research by Bell et al. (2022) found that custodial grandmothers did so by limiting sedentary activity, including their grandchild in healthy lifestyle activities, and building a positive relationship with food. Our findings show that custodial grandparents face challenges in modifying sedentary behaviors through verbal communication, and some grandparents resort to using unhealthy food as incentives, raising concerns about potential impacts on children's eating habits. Bell et al. (2022) also note that despite the grandmother's motivation to promote healthy lifestyles, they could not role model engagement in physical activities.

Bangerter & Waldron's (2014) investigation shifts the focus to changes in relational closeness with grandparents and grandchildren, noting approximately one-third of long-distance grandparents experience this during adolescence. Within our study, factors such as the child's growing independence, engagement with a broader social network, and life changes experienced by both parties were found to contribute to this decline. Family disruptions, including conflicts over financial support or drug abuse, were found to further strain the relationship, leading to estrangement. According to Charenkova and Gevorgianiene (2018) relocated grandparents, such as when grandparents transition to a nursing home, led to significant deterioration in

relationships, emotional closeness, and overall satisfaction. At times, the relationship is described by grandparents as "one-sided," with efforts to communicate not reciprocated by adolescent grandchildren (Bangerter & Waldron, 2014). Duflos (2022) supports our findings by stating the key factors that predict the closeness of a GP-GC relationship include age, physical and mental health, frequency of contact, educational level, and overall encouragement from parents.

Implications for Practice

For best practice and client-centered care, OT practitioners need to acknowledge the diverse responsibilities of grandparent caregivers as potentially including the roles of parent, teacher, and household head because individuals who encompass these roles are more adept at providing support through both meaningful assistance (Tracy et al., 2022). Our study indicates such acknowledgment from facilitative agents including, but not limited to, OT practitioners who provide strategically meaningful approaches that can create an overall positively beneficial impact upon both the grandparents and grandchildren (Stephens, 2019). Hayslip et al. (2019) support how increased attention to the complexity of the family structure and stressors within a grandfamily will help practitioners understand the challenges of raising a grandchild and influence them to bring in resources to support them. Approaching grandparent caregivers from a family contextual viewpoint, OT practitioners should consider the relationships grandparents have within their family. By having a deeper understanding of such contextual factors, OT practitioners will have an opportunity to address any barriers or challenges with increased effectiveness (Generations United, 2023). With the consideration of meaningful interventions, OT practitioners are equipped to provide skilled services and resources for not only grandparents

but also grandchildren; thus, highlighting the importance of additional research to understand the diverse needs of grandfamilies across different generations (Tracy et al., 2022).

In addition, grandparents raising grandchildren necessitate mental health outreach, encompassing concrete support for managing family dynamics and access to essential respite care and support groups. Within recognition of their pivotal role in stabilizing families and communities, OT practitioners should address unresolved emotional issues through culturally appropriate interventions addressing unresolved grief and loss within the community and exploring traditional practices and innovative methods for community healing (Dennis & Brewer, 2016). Xu et al. (2022) note that custodial grandparents often face barriers when finding resources and services for their grandchildren, including mental health services. Lack of resources was found to reduce the overall quality of life in grandchildren, resulting in increased risk for future adversities (Xu et al., 2022). By understanding the caregiving roles of grandparents, OT practitioners can develop new resources to support the needs of clients, including older adults (grandparents) and children (grandchildren). Research done by Fox et al. (2022) supports that strength-based interventions will aid in grandparent self-efficacy and social support, ultimately increasing grandfamily resilience and outcomes. This can include implementing behavioral and mental health services outreach efforts to provide concrete support and tools for managing family dynamics within grandfamilies.

Hayslip et al. (2019) outlined the need to continue understanding the various cultural differences among grandfamilies as there is limited research and resources to support them. Cox (2018) specifically advocated for the role of policy as a support for grandparent-headed households, stating that policy plays a significant role in the types of support and resources provided, ultimately contributing to some grandparents' reluctance to find resources. OT

practitioners can use skills as advocates when recognizing and acknowledging diverse populations and their cultures. Specific cultural implications of recognizing Latino grandparents include designing interventions to empower in support their grandchildren's leisure-time physical activity (Xie et al., 2018). Also, providing current information on local resources and benefits for physical activity and developing new intergenerational programs to better support Latino grandparents' involvement (Xie et al., 2018). According to Shovali et al. (2019) within Latino culture, grandparents are highly respected and an integral part of the family system. As summarized by Cox (2018), culture guides family systems, relationships, and child-raising practices. As suggested by our findings, it is important to support cultural values when providing necessary resources and consider family contexts when advocating for the role of policy in custodial grandparents or understanding the impact within family dynamics (Stephens, 2020; Cox, 2018).

Our findings highlight the importance of faith literacy within intergenerational learning, collaboration, and learning opportunities for grandparents with their grandchildren. Specifically, we found that implementing faith literacy activities is a significant component in intergenerational learning, enabling grandmothers and children to acquire skills that build on existing competencies, which may open doors to further learning opportunities (Stephens, 2020). Allana et al. (2017) found that grandparents struggled to maintain their faith practices on top of their day-to-day responsibilities. Despite the noted difficulties, grandparents and educators note the need to introduce spirituality earlier in a grandchild's life (Allana et al., 2017).

A need is recognized to strengthen PTSA within schools by broadening the membership to include various professionals beyond parents and teachers. OT practitioners have the skills to provide diverse support, such as environmental modifications, behavioral strategies, and

educational guidance for teachers, grandparents, and grandchildren by advocating for necessary accommodations through IEPs (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2017). In addition, promoting collaborative approaches across professions to effectively meet the complex needs of families with grandmothers as primary caretakers (Stephens, 2020). Shovali et al. (2019) suggested that an increase in grandparent confidence through community resources aided in higher academic performance in their grandchildren. Xu et al. (2022) found insufficient school support and accessible resources for custodial grandchildren, overall impacting their academic success. School systems can aid in establishing supportive services, such as IEPs, to augment grandparents' efforts in raising grandchildren in order to promote increased educational engagement. OT practitioners can aid this process by developing interventions to assess and alleviate stresses related to transitions and parental instability. OT practitioners should engage in collaborative approaches alongside not only custodial grandparents and educators but also with additional facilitative agents involved in supportive services, such as behavioral therapists or speech-language pathologists. Additionally, IEPs developed through a collaborative approach by both involved family members and broader professionals have been noted to have increased effectiveness (Curro et al., 2022). By identifying, supporting, and advocating for the specific needs of the grandchild, both the grandparents and PTSA will have the effective ability to meet the complex needs of the collective family as a whole.

In conclusion, there are significant motivations, challenges, and varied dynamics within the GP-GC relationship, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of these relationships and the factors that shape them. Our findings highlight the complex dynamics and challenges faced by grandparents in various caregiving situations, shedding light on the motivations, stressors, and difficulties encountered in raising and maintaining relationships with their

grandchildren. Outside research aids in the understanding of continued research and implications for practice amongst OT practitioners, educators, and other healthcare professionals. This knowledge is invaluable for OT practitioners, offering insights that can inform evidence-based practices and enhance the effectiveness of interventions. By integrating our understandings into the framework of occupational therapy, practitioners are better equipped to navigate the intricacies of family dynamics, providing tailored and client-centered support that resonates with the unique experiences of grandparents (custodial and supplemental) and their grandchildren.

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