

Grandfamilies: Research, Implications and Intervention

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Goal of Talk



- Describe our study on grandparents raising teenaged grandchildren in New York (grandfamilies)
- Present new results
- Discuss future research

Grandfamilies in the U.S.

- 2% of all U.S. children
 - 1.6 million kids
- Approximately 42,000 New York children (American Community Survey, 2005-2009)



Grandfamilies in the U.S.

- By providing care to children whose parents are not able to care for them, grandparents save the government an estimated \$6.5 million per year (Annie E. Casey Foundation)
- However, such families are often under the radar screen

Adolescents Raised by Grandparents

- Adolescents reside with their grandparents for a number of reasons, including parental:
 - Substance Abuse
 - Abuse/Neglect
 - Mental Illness
 - Incarceration
 - Death
 - Teen Parenthood



Why Conduct Research on Grandfamilies?

- Limited research on grandchild perspectives
- Limited research focused on teens
- No study has used video, survey and qualitative approaches
- Extension Educators indicated a need for resources and curricula for grandparents raising teens

Goal of Research

- To “get under the roof” of grandfamily households
 - What is life really like for such families?
 - Relationships
 - Communication
 - What do the grandchildren have to say?
- Ultimate goal—use research to inform policies and parenting programs

What Did We Do?

- In-person interviews with 59 grandparent/teen pairs from across New York state
- Worked with **Cornell Cooperative Extension** to recruit families (and develop surveys)
 - They recruited the families
 - We paid for food, educator time, and each participant
 - Interviews took place at agency

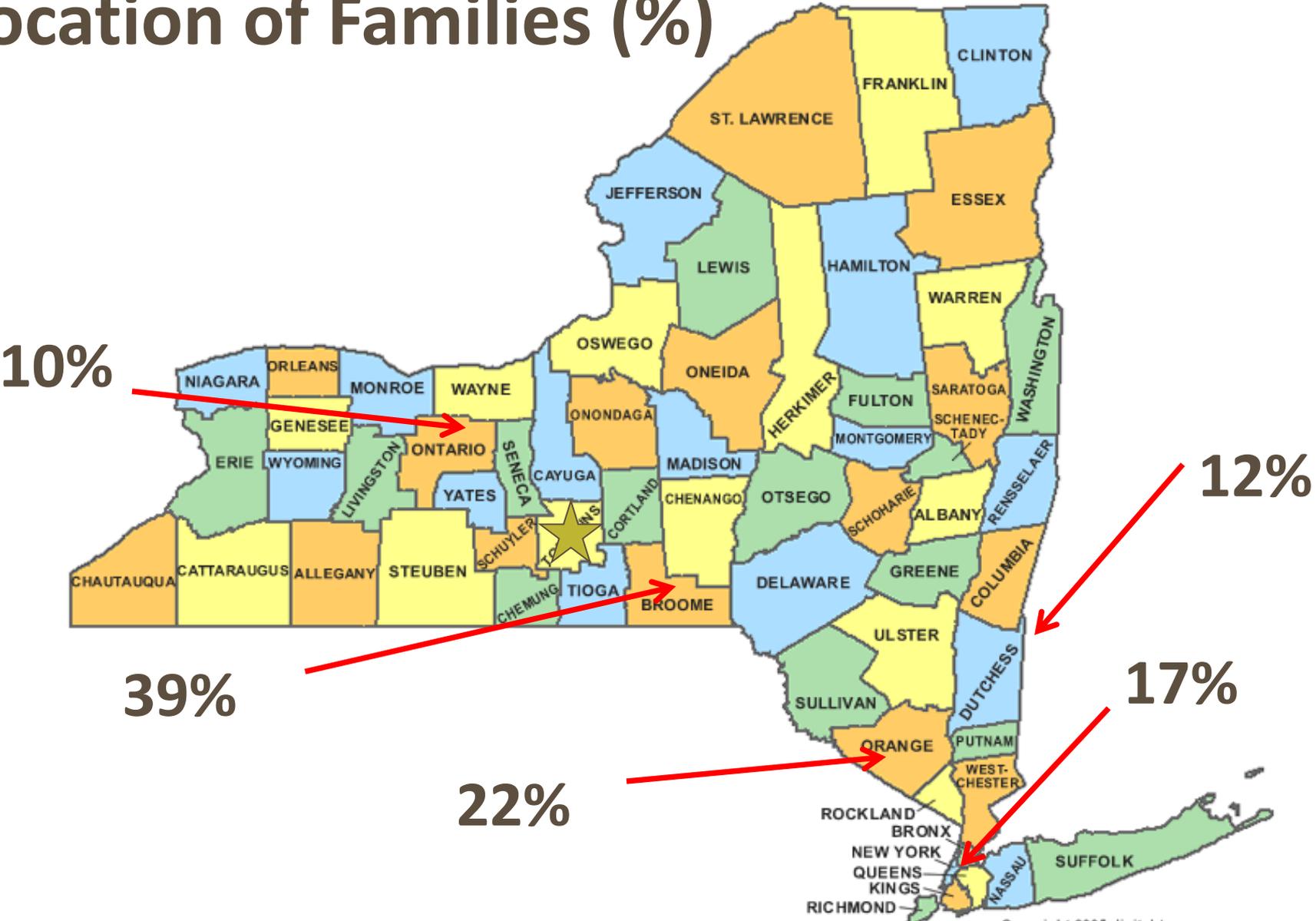


Three Components of Study

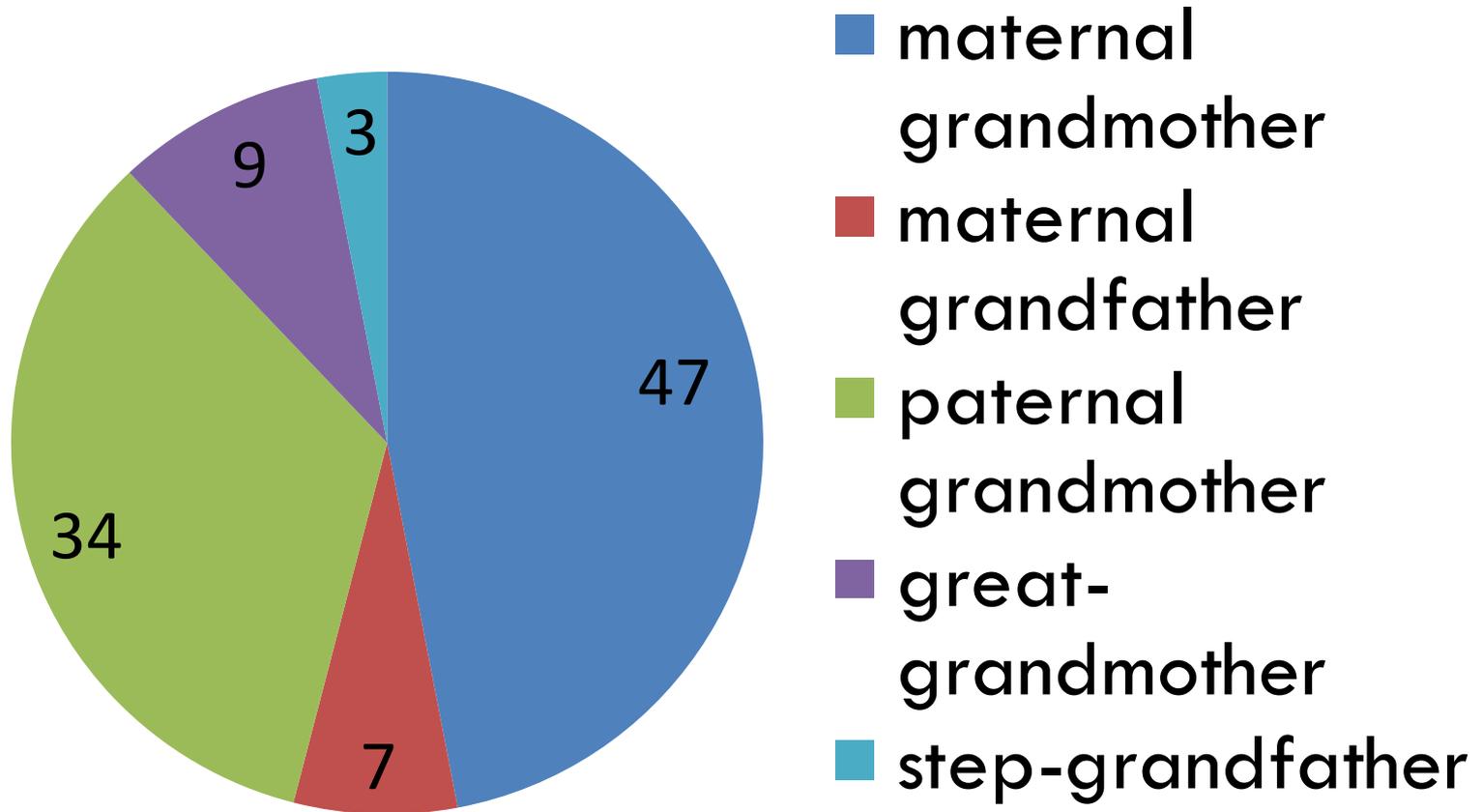
- Surveys
- Videotaped discussions developed to probe for for key issues
 - What is it like for families like ours...
 - A topic of disagreement
- Audio-taped interview of grandparents
 - How did youth come to live with you?
 - Contact with parents
 - Parenting



Location of Families (%)

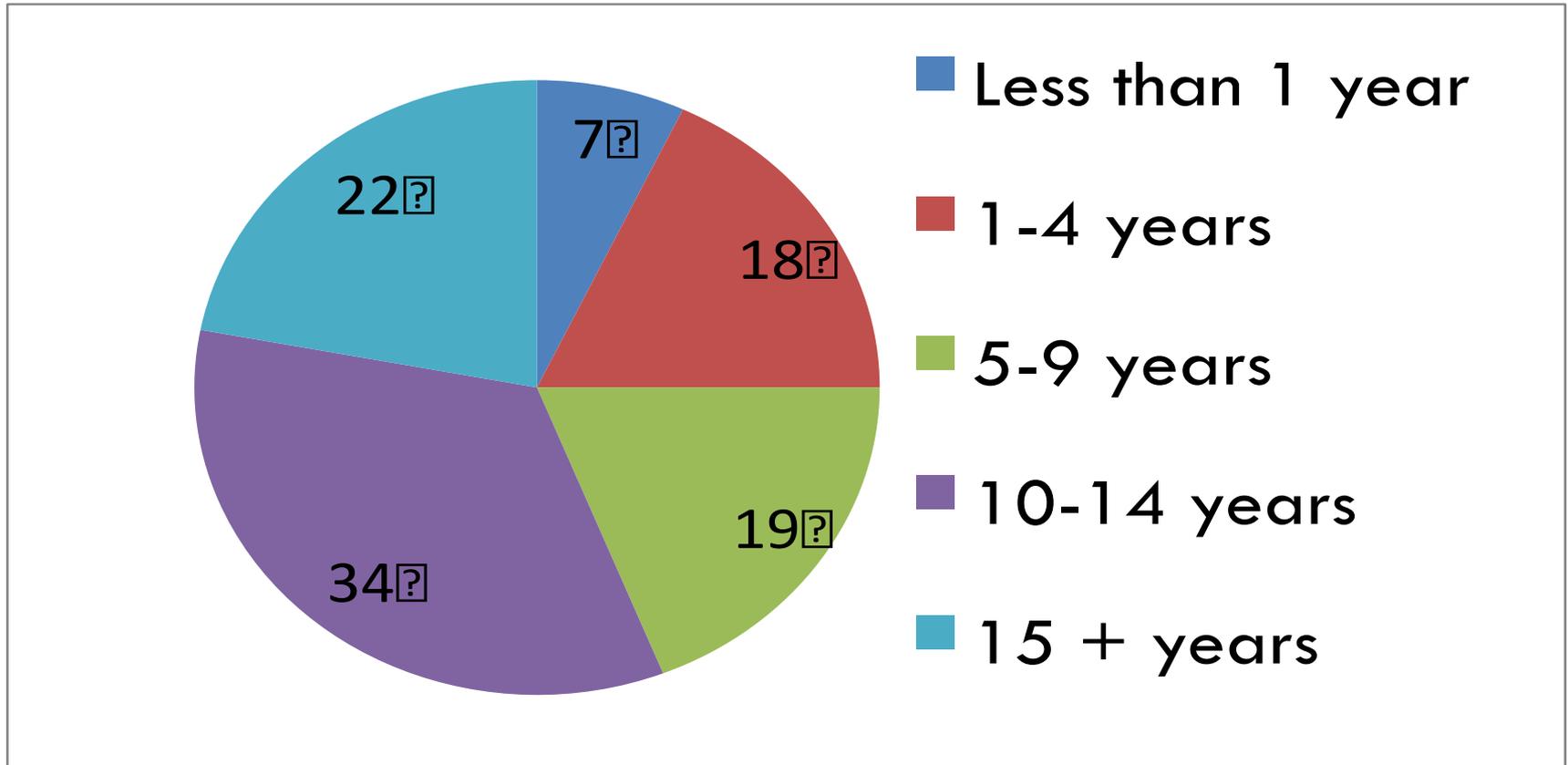


Relationship to Youth (percent)



SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS	AVERAGE
Grandparent Age	63 years
Youth Age	15 years
Percent African-American	29%
Percent Hispanic	7%
Percent White	68%
Length of time Youth has lived with grandparent	10 years
Youth has sibling(s) outside of household	80%
Youth has sibling(s) in household	35%
Grandparent married	47%
Grandparent years of education	12 years
Grandparent employed	24%
Grandparent has a disability	34%
Youth has a health condition	51%
Average income of Census tract	\$34,801.17

Length of time living with grandparent (percent)



New Findings

- Reasons children enter into grandfamily households
- Family narrative
- Role of the parent



Reasons for entering Grandfamily

	Reason not living with mother	Reason not living with father
Voluntarily gave up child	40%	34%
Substance abuse	26%	12%
Parent abused/neglected (GP report)	26%	10%
Partner issues with/abusive toward child	16%	3%
Deceased	10%	12%
Incarcerated	10%	21%
Too young	10%	2%
Mental health	9%	--
Child Protective Services involved	12%	
No information on father	28%	

Voluntarily giving up child

His birth mother really signed off on him when he was four... after she and my son divorced....He went with my son for eight years and that was just horrible. My son didn't take care of him... They had two more children.... And they were the precious little girls....And Max just got shoved by the wayside...And then when he was 13, they just called us one Saturday night and said Max's not going to live here anymore, come and get him, he's out.

Mom's Partner Issues

- Mom's boyfriend abusive
 - Mom may be complicit or choose to stay with boyfriend
- Mom's boyfriend doesn't get along with teen
- Often leads to situation in which child has half-siblings living with the mom

Family Narrative

- Awareness of family situation changes as child gets older

I remember when I was younger I used to call you my parent. And then when I got older, I'm thinking "This is not my mom." You know?...if you sit down and think about it, it's...so upsetting.

Family Narrative

When she was young it was ok, but then when she hit like 11, 12, it was a very rebellious stage because her mom was interfering so much...and finally I took the court papers out and...said 'read them'...it detailed the abuse...she ran off up to her room crying...and I went up there and said...'you needed to see those papers'...because naturally they want to believe their mom.

Family Narrative

- Grandparents, kids, and parents need to be ready to revisit as the child ages
- Especially when reasons for arrangement are complicated
- Family Portraits Project

Role of the Parent

- Contact is frequent, many parents live nearby
- 63% had seen mom in past year, 35% saw dad
- Other U.S. data:
 - 41% live within two miles of mother
 - 75% see parent monthly
 - 16% daily

Role of the Parent

- Tameka: sees mother every day
- Tiffany: visits father regularly in prison
- Peter: spends weekends with mom, comes back moody
- Jeff: rides bike past fathers' home, but doesn't acknowledge
- Jessica: mother lives two doors down, comes over sporadically

Role of the Parent

- 7 themes
 - Parent is a friend
 - Parent unreliable
 - Longing for parent
 - Grandparent-bonded
 - Pointing out parental faults
 - Anger
 - Ambivalence

Parent is a Friend

- 11% of families
- *I'm not happy about it, but...it is her mother...her mom tells her to do things that we... don't allow her to do and Kate's come to the point where she knows...if I can't get it from grandma and grandpa, I'll go to my mother...mom will say yes.*
- “girl talk” or advice about technology
- These youth had higher than average anger, had been living with their grandparent longer

Parent is Unreliable

- 32% of families
- *I have a stronger bond with [grandmother] than my own mother. I don't even call my mother "mommy". She's [grandma] my mother, because she's been there for me my whole life...I can't call nobody "mommy" that wasn't there my whole life...*
- *My parents were horrible, so why care if they're not here?... That's the only difference between you [grandma] and them. You have your faults and all your problems and everything, but at least you know what you're doing. For the most part."*
- These youth have a better relationship with their grandparent and lower levels of anger

Longing for Parent

- 14% of families
- *What's the hardest thing? Just being without my mom. I love my mom. I miss my mom. Just thinking about her makes me want to cry!*
- Feeling that grandparent is not “real” parent
- Unfulfilled desire for greater parental role
- These youth had been living with grandparent for less time, report higher behavior problems

Grandparent-bonded

- 30% of families
- *She [youth] wasn't talking to her mother and the mother wasn't talking ...But I bond them back. It took twice, but I did it, I bonded them together.*
- *I tell [the grandkids] that the mother loves them but she doesn't know how to be a mom. I don't know whether she knows how to be a mother or if she doesn't know how to be a mother.*
- More likely to have been given to grandparent voluntarily
- Contrast to divorce situations

Pointing Out Parental Faults

- Only two families
- *I told her... go live with your father then. You know, call him up and see. He's always telling you how he's always there and all this good stuff. I feel that...he should answer for himself. Otherwise, she's just going to keep going on thinking he's Mr. Wonderful.*
- Occurred when child welfare involved
- Perceived threat youth would move back with parent

Anger toward Parent

- *I had books thrown at me, chairs. I broke the blood vessels in my arms, but through it all, he always cried and said, Nana, I didn't want to hurt you, I was so angry, I was so angry, I've been so hurt. I don't think I'll ever forgive mommy and daddy.*
- Youth more likely to have been given up voluntarily
- Not more angry during conversations with grandparent

Ambivalence

- 9% of families
- *She wants to be with her mother, but when her mother's there she doesn't interact with her....*
- Haven't written off parents, but not longing for them either
- Higher levels of anger and depression

Summary—Role of Parents

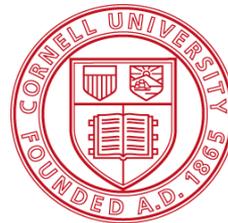
- Parents are still highly involved
- Youth relationship with them is complex and manifests itself in many ways
- Grandparents need assistance in managing that relationship
- Parents do as well!

New Research

- Interview parents
- Collaborative project with Virginia Tech
- Ultimate goal—develop an intervention

Translational Research

- Presented back to the community
 - CCE
 - Community agencies
- Produced numerous Research Briefs and Parent Pages
- PASTA curriculum enhancements on teens & PASTA training
 - PASTA RCT in NYC
- Very much ongoing...



Cornell University
Cooperative Extension



Academic Research

- Journal Publications
- Conference Presentations
- Book Chapters
- A new book!

To Learn More...

- Please visit the Parenting In Context website at:

www.human.cornell.edu/pam/outreach/parenting/



Thank you!

