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*Listening, learning, and living together: it's the science of life.*

## **Grandparent Distress<sup>1</sup>**

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Today, more grandparents are raising their grandchildren than at any other time in U.S. history. These grandparents face challenges in almost every part of their lives, such as strained relations with the child's parent, unexpectedly caring for a family on a limited income, and grandchildren's emotional and behavioral problems from a history of abuse, neglect, or abandonment. As a result, many grandparents experience psychological and emotional distress, and poor health.

A recent study conducted by sociologist Terry Mills and colleagues at University of Florida and published in the journal *Marriage and Family Review* found that younger grandmothers raising grandchildren were more likely to be depressed than their older counterparts. Using data from the National Survey of America's Families, the researchers found that the younger the grandmothers were, the more likely they were to experience depression. They reported that younger grandparents may be distressed because at middle age, they are trying to balance suddenly functioning as a parent again along with work responsibilities and personal interests. They may also feel that they failed as a parent. However, when younger grandmothers received support, such as social service help with

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child care and health care, they were no more likely to be distressed than older grandmothers (Mills, Gomez-Smith, & DeLeon, 2005).

The study's authors point out that because grandparents raising grandchildren are at risk of depression and isolation, it's important that they have access to psychological counseling. In addition, social services, child care, and easier access to health care are important in giving grandparents the support they need (Mills, Gomez-Smith, & DeLeon, 2005).

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### References

Keen, C. *UF study: Child raising toughest on young grandmothers* [Press release of Mills et al. *Skipped Generation Families study*]. Retrieved May 2007, from <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/tlmills/pub/Mills%20Publications/Mills%20Press%20Release%20Grandmother%20Depression.pdf>

Mills, T. L., Gomez-Smith, Z., & DeLeon, J. M. (2005). Skipped generation families: Sources of psychological distress among grandmothers of grandchildren who live in homes where neither parent is present. *Marriage and Family Review*, 37 (1/2), 191-212.