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EXPERIENCES OF GRANDMOTHERS LOOKING AFTER GRANDCHILDREN EXHIBITING DELINQUENT BEHAVIOURS IN HILL CREST LOCATION, ALICE TOWNSHIP, EASTERN CAPE: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

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ABSTRACT

Older persons face an array of challenges with regard to parenting a delinquent grandchild. The study adopted a qualitative approach with the use of an explorative and descriptive design, with data collected from in-depth interviews with grandparents, communities and probation officers. The study also adopted phenomenology as the specific research approach. Findings revealed that grandparents parenting their grandchildren face the pernicious experiences of grandchildren's delinquency; financial challenges and poverty; and deterioration of their health and social life. This paper recommends that the government prioritise the grandparents' vulnerability to address the delinquency of their grandchildren and ensure that they are freed from such a pernicious preoccupation. Policies should be developed to ensure that grandparents above the age of 60 years should not assume full custody of children, as they are also a vulnerable population.

Keywords: aging, child welfare system, delinquency, entropic disorder, moral decadence.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Aging is an entropic disorder that affects all people from all corners of the globe. It characteristically and detrimentally affects all the body's functionalities, be they social, physical, psychological or emotional (Kang'ethe, 2018). Regardless of the phenomenon of aging presenting such degeneration, many researchers value and underscore the older person's contribution to society, including caring of grandchildren, some of whom are delinquents

(Batlala, Gulwa, Gwebani & Rubushe, 2014). This has prompted some scholars to challenge the reluctance of the government and other concerned parties in addressing the burden of caring for vulnerable children imposed on the grandparents, some of whom may be struggling with their health in their sunset years. Despite the reality that older persons are counsellors and vanguards of morality and ethics, it is a pity that most African countries, as they embrace modernisation and globalisation, are turning a deaf ear to the wise counsel of the older persons. This suggests that African traditions are undergoing an acute transition (Bohman, van Wyk & Ekman, 2009). This perhaps partly explains the fact that societies are increasingly facing the challenges of moral decadence (Nomngcoyiya, 2018). However, some aspects of the policy environment have shown a commitment to the care of older persons and an understanding of their predicament. The South African White Paper of 1997, for example, recommends a social support system for the care of older people as a vulnerable group (Department of Social Development Report, 2016). This is premised on the fact that grandparents who raise their grandchildren are particularly vulnerable, as are the grandchildren in their care (Baker, Silverstein & Putney, 2008). Despite these concerns, it is ironic that grandparents have been identified as a preferable placement for children in the child welfare system, leading to a shift in the number of children placed in foster care compared to the number placed in kinship care (Baker *et al.*, 2008).

UNICEF (2007) indicated that fostered and orphaned young African children are overwhelmingly cared for in a household headed by a grandparent or a great-grandparent. UNICEF (2007) also noted that 38.2 percent of young children are living in households where a grandparent or a great-grandparent is the head of the household. Yet many grandparents or great-grandparents do not take on the task voluntarily. This is the basis of Kang'ethe's (2018) complaint that many younger parents use elderly women as maids to facilitate the upbringing of their children. The escalation of HIV/AIDS, which leaves a trail of orphans, has also exacerbated the phenomenon of the elderly being the only hope of caring for the orphans (Grapsa & Posel, 2016). The research emphasises the importance of grandmothers in providing nurturance support to co-resident young children, yet paradoxically the grandmothers are overburdened in terms of financial strain, with the phenomenon creating a fertile environment for grandchildren to engage in delinquent activities, such as child prostitution and pilferage, in a bid to meet their basic needs (Kavak, 2014). This has detrimental outcomes in that it prevents them from attending school and thereby jeopardises their opportunities to make a brighter future for themselves. Kavak (2014) further reveals that when children fall prey to human traffickers, organ and prostitution mafia, and begging gangs, it is very likely that they will be entirely lost to the society. Kavak (2014) further suggests that if children are afforded only meagre resources that do not support most of their basic needs, they will end up engaging in unorthodox ways of meeting these needs.

There is also evidence in South Africa of an array of abuses directed towards older persons by their grandchildren. Apparently, modernisation, Westernisation, eurocentrism and globalisation have led to a huge onslaught on cultures that ensured respect for the elderly, and especially on those values that ensure respect of elders by the youth (Arowolo, 2010). As a result, there is a need to explore the kinds of abuses and their impact on the wellbeing of the

elderly. A study conducted by Kasiram and Holscher (2015) in KwaZulu-Natal revealed that grandparents were reported to be victims of crimes committed by their grandchildren who stole their pension money and house appliances in order to obtain money to buy drugs to satisfy their drug-taking habit and other illicit behaviours (Samkelo, 2017). Another atrocious crime committed on the elderly in South Africa includes the molestation by their sons and grandsons in order to extort their social grants (Kempen, 2018). This has left the elderly caregivers desperate and succumbing to social, emotional and psychological traumas.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Many older persons who are usually caregivers of their grandchildren suffer an array of socio-emotional and psychological challenges at the hands of their delinquent grandchildren. They become the subjects of emotional abuse and molestation, and face poverty, as children steal and vandalise their assets. In addition, as they struggle to meet the needs of their grandchildren, they have their peace of mind destroyed as their grandchildren disrespect and emotionally abuse them, and they face the prospect of seeing some of their grandchildren engaging in substance abuse, or becoming juvenile delinquents such as prostitutes, bunking school and engaging in various kinds of illicit behaviour such as theft. These are acts that do not foreshadow a brighter future for these grandchildren as well as a source of shame and despondency to the grandparents (Hlabyago & Ogunbanjo, 2009). This environment needs government intervention as it can drive the older grandparents to their deaths before their time.

STUDY AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The study aimed at exploring the experiences of grandmothers looking after grandchildren exhibiting delinquent behaviours in Hill Crest location, Alice Township, Eastern Cape, South Africa. This is to provide an understanding of the different dynamics and perceptions of the grandparents through caring for grandchildren. The results could be important for policy makers who are inclined to think that grandparents are part of the best alternatives to look after vulnerable children.

Study objectives

- To ascertain the experiences of grandparents dealing with the delinquency of their grandchildren; and
- To determine the relevance of social work practice in grandparent's households that are experiencing juvenile delinquency.

STUDY CONTEXTUALISATION

The study, a descriptive and an explorative one, was undertaken at the Hill Crest area of Alice Township. The study was motivated by the principal researcher's prior experience in 2013-2014 during his tenure at the Department of Child Welfare. His duties then, involved conducting home visits and assessing the conditions of the grandparents' lives. This experience informed the conceptualisation of the current study drawing on insights of various stakeholders involved with experiences of grandparents taking care of their grandchildren who manifest delinquent behaviour.

METHODS AND STUDY SETTINGS

Creswell (2009) defines research methodology as an organised set of specific processes, namely, the research design, methods of data collection, and data analysis, which are the conventional scientific methods that are followed by researchers. The study adopted a qualitative approach. However, the specific approach used was phenomenology, where a few samples are interrogated for their lived experiences in order to gain more detail on the subjects' opinions, thinking, perceptions and insights pertaining to the phenomenon under study. The primary objective of a phenomenological study is to explicate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of a person, or a group of people, around a specific phenomenon (Simon & Goes, 2011). In this case, the researcher assessed the lived experience of grandparents who were taking care of grandchildren exhibiting delinquent behaviour.

The study used an explorative and a descriptive research design to identify and try to solve a problem and recommend a future research direction (Khan, 2014). Therefore, this study can be a foundation for additional research, either of a quantitative or a mixed nature. The principal researcher complied with the ethics and principles of a qualitative approach, both in data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2014).

The study used an interview guide as a research instrument with open-ended questions that facilitated eleven in-depth interviews with eight grandparents, one community committee member and two probation officers. The researcher exhaustively questioned the participants to ensure that he obtained relevant data to support the analysis. The principle of saturation meant that he would stop asking a particular question to subsequent samples when the previous responses had yielded the same response.

To collect data, this study employed a non-probability purposive sampling methodology. This sampling technique is based on the judgement of the researcher to choose samples that contain the most relevant characteristics or typical attributes of the population (Flick, 2009). Although the initial intention of the researcher was to disregard gender, the researcher realised that in effect, most grandparents who were looking after grandchildren were women, hence, a majority of the participants interviewed were grandmothers. In terms of age, the researcher focused on grandparents who were 50 years and older. Du Preez, Richmond and Marquis (2017) suggest that grandparents raising grandchildren are generally old, with over 70% of them being 50 years and above. Furthermore, the principal researcher targeted the grandparents who were available and healthy enough to understand the questions regarding the different experiences encountered by grandparents at the hands of delinquent grandchildren.

Data collection was undertaken in Hill Crest location of Alice Township in the Eastern Cape Province. It was a cross-sectional study, meaning that the raw data was collected at a single point in time (Babbie, 2010). The researcher used the Hill Crest community chairlady as the connecting point to gain access to the community. With her assistance, the principal researcher made use of two participants who adhered to the inclusion criteria to test whether the questions were viable. This was done to ensure that the questions were unambiguous and understood by the participants. This was to ensure that the data gathered were valid and creditworthy. The Hill Crest community chairlady also helped the principal researcher to become familiar with the study domain. This helped the principal researcher to gather data with ease. This is because

he was no longer regarded as a stranger, as the community members had priorly built trust and confidence with him, the principal researcher.

To expedite the data-collection process, the researcher gathered the data in isiXhosa and Afrikaans as the majority of the research participants were comfortable in expressing themselves in their own languages. Furthermore, the principal researcher utilised a local person as a research assistant in order to translate both languages into English to accommodate the non-Xhosa and Afrikaans speakers. However, those who were proficient in English were interviewed in English. All the data were audio taped and transcribed before the data analysis. Observations and notes were used to complement the audio-taped information.

On the unit of analysis, only eleven participants were involved in in-depth interviews. The principal researcher considered the number to be sufficient because of the qualitative research approach that respects the significance of information gathered more than the number of the participants involved (Creswell, 2014). The number is also justified considering that the research domain was a small location; hence, the number of participants who met the attributes required by the researcher was limited.

DATA ANALYSIS

According to Flick (2013), a qualitative data analysis is the classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it. The study employed the thematic content analysis method. This means that the data were collected, refined and arranged into themes derived from the answers to the research questions. The thematic content analysis, informed by the steps developed by Creswell (2009), entails that the researcher firstly transcribes all interviews exhaustively and reads through all the transcripts several times along with the field notes in order to familiarise and immerse himself/herself in the data. To execute the data analysis, the researcher started with the shortest and most interesting transcripts, examining them, while reflecting on their underlying meaning, and making notes on any thoughts, views or opinions. Having carried out this process on most of the informants' data, the principal researcher made a list of all the noted topics and clustered them under similar topics. Eventually, the researcher, using a coding method, and summarised the topics into themes.

ETHICAL AND LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Ethical considerations are guidelines or specific precautionary measures undertaken by researchers before the commencement of a research study and also during the study (Babbie, 2010). To ensure that the study was administratively and legally correct, all communications and arrangements for interviews with the participants were made through the Raymond Mhlaba Municipality, with the principal researcher being given permission to start the study in Hill Crest location. The principal researcher also followed the appropriate application processes of obtaining an ethical clearance certificate from the University of Fort Hare Research Committee (UREC) and the Govan Mbeki Research and Development Centre (GMRDC), which he timeously obtained. Pseudonyms were used to refer to the participants in order to protect their anonymity and maintain confidentiality.

RESEARCH DOMAIN AND JUSTIFICATION

The study was carried out in Hill Crest location situated in Alice Township, Eastern Cape Province, an area that is dominated by coloured people. The area was chosen because it is in the province that has been acknowledged by Hall, Sambu, Berry, Giese and Almeleh (2017) to have high rates of child poverty as well as number of grandparents, especially grandmothers, taking care of children. Also, the area is situated in the province that has been rated second out of nine provinces in South Africa and it constitutes 29.09% nationally of children in remand detention, according to the Department of Correctional Services (2017) Annual Report. The area, therefore, presents many of the characteristics of the phenomenon of juvenile delinquency.

FINDINGS

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the study's participants, while Table 2 and Table 3 present the demographic profile of the key informants and the study themes respectively. Pseudonyms have been used to safeguard the participants' confidentiality and anonymity.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the grandmothers

No	Pseudonyms	Age	Gender	Number of grandchildren
1	A	57 yrs	Female	6
2	B	61 yrs	Female	2
3	C	61 yrs	Female	4
4	D	60 yrs	Female	3
5	E	55 yrs	Female	6
6	F	70 yrs	Female	4
7	G	54 yrs	Female	8
8	H	68 yrs	Female	4

On gender, the study findings indicated that all the participants who were interviewed were females. Such a situation, perhaps, mirrors a matrilineal feature of South African society, where children are more connected to their grandmothers than to their grandfathers. Study findings indicated that caregiving of grandchildren manifested a feminisation of caregiving. This is because care was predominantly in the hands of grandmothers. This is a characteristic of societies in many African countries, where the duty of care of the children is allocated to the women, while the men are allotted other chores that are more physically demanding (Chiastolite Professional Services, 2008). Similarly, a study in Swaziland established that grandmothers were overwhelmed by providing care to an increasing circle of dependants, including grandchildren (Chiastolite Professional Services, 2008). Therefore, it is apparent that grandparenting duties in South Africa, as in most other countries, seems to be left to the women.

On age, five of the eight participants, were above the age of 60 years. This could be due to the fact that many grandmothers had retired from work and their sons and daughters, as well as their close kins, had considered them as the most suitable choice to look after their children. It is worth noting that 60 years is the age that is recognised as old age in many countries, and in South Africa, it is the age which allows access to social grants (Kang'ethe, 2018). These participants were regarded as old in terms of the definition by the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2002), who both define an older

person as one aged 60 years and above. Research has also shown that 70% of grandparents raising grandchildren are generally old and the children in their care tend to be older too (Booys, Adendorff & Moodley, 2015). As much as care of children by the elderly is considered a panacea in many African settings, it is ironic that many youngsters use elderly women as maids to facilitate the upbringing of their children (Kang'ethe, 2018).

The findings indicated that on average, each grandparent was looking after at least four children. This high number of children in need of care and protection suggests a possibly overwhelming task placed on grandparents and could perhaps be attributed to the consequences of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa, which led to the deaths of many young parents, leaving behind a trail of orphans. Furthermore, Harris and Skyles (2008, cited in Misiewicz, 2012) point out that grandmothers' tasks are overwhelming as most typically care for groups of siblings rather than just a single child. This has strained and drained their physical and emotional capacities, and undermined their health and wellbeing. A study by Guastafarro, Guastafarro and Stuart (2015) noted that 27% of children growing up in households maintained by grandparents live in abject poverty. The effects of these poverty levels are exacerbated by the fact that grandparents usually look after many grandchildren.

Table 2: Demographic profile of the key informants

Participant	Gender	Occupation	Specialisation	Work experience
SW1	Male	Social Worker	Probation officer	4 years
SW2	Male	Social Worker	Probation officer	25 years
CD	Female	Former teacher	Community committee member	3 years

In terms of gender representation among the key informants, there were two men and one woman. The principal researcher adopted a strategic move in order to compensate for the lack of male representation during the data-gathering process, since grandparents were predominantly females. As indicated above, the participants interviewed in the study reported that their work experience was 3 years and above. This indicates that the key informants were adequately equipped with the requisite skills to deal with children in conflict with the law. Hence, they had exposure to the experiences of grandparents looking after their delinquent grandchildren. Study findings established that the key informants were experienced enough to handle challenges associated with children's level of delinquency and other challenges associated with caregiving. Mandisa (2007) indicated that when caregivers are in conflict with their children, they send them to social workers, who attempt to facilitate their behaviour modification process. In the same vein, Zastrow (2010) suggests that social workers are equipped with family therapeutic interventions aimed at helping families with interactional, behavioural and emotional problems.

Table 3: Table of emergent themes

No	Description of Themes
1	Grandchildren stealing from their grandparents
2	Grandchildren financially abusing their grandmothers
3	Grandmothers overwhelmed by dilemmas and role confusion
4	Caregiving by grandmothers denies them respite and peer socialisation
5	Health deficits associated with grandparents' state of caring

Grandchildren stealing from their grandparents

The majority of the participants indicated that the phenomenon of their grandchildren committing acts of delinquency, especially when they steal from them, drove them into a state of panic and despondency, sometimes leaving them engulfed in despondency and depression, especially when they have to come to terms with the loss of valuable items in their homes. Participants also stated that most of the children were into the habit of taking drugs. These findings are illustrated in the following comments:

I have suffered a lot from the actions of this child. He steals property from this house. Televisions, computers and even refrigerators have mysteriously gone missing in this house. (Participant H)

After taking these drugs, they definitely need money to quench their drug-taking habit. That's why they go and do these house breakings. First, they start stealing from their own houses only to sell these wares to other households. The habit then aggravates. This is why most of them have had cases with law enforcement agents. Who knows, they are likely to find themselves in jail. (Participant SW1)

These children collude with others to steal from their grandparents. It is indeed a huge shame. (Participant SW2)

The above finding correspond with those of Kasiram and Holscher (2015) in KwaZulu-Natal, where grandparents reported being victims of crime at the hands of their own grandchildren. The grandchildren stole household appliances to raise money to satisfy their drug-taking habit. In South Africa, older people are seen as soft targets by thieves who steal their meagre grant money. Grandchildren even invite their friends to break into their grandmothers' houses and then clandestinely share the loot (Kang'ethe, 2018; Peterson, 2017). This suggests that grandparents are a vulnerable group that social workers and other professionals need to attend to and ensure that their rights are protected.

Grandchildren financially abusing their grandmothers

Many participants from the in-depth interviews reflected the agony of grandparents who suffered from the financial abuse of their grandchildren, who force them to hand over their grants. This leaves the grandparents without money to take care of themselves and the grandchildren. This drives them into a state of despair and despondency. The following sentiments support these findings.

I am having serious problems with this child. Knowing that we are receiving a social grant under his name, he coerces me to give him that money. Knowing that I am also getting old age grant, he thinks I have a lot of money. He threatens me and for my security. Unfortunately, we are left with no food. (Participant H)

I think the challenge that grandparents face is that kids want their money; they know that they have the grant; they demand that money because some would want to satisfy their drug addiction behaviours. This makes the children in the process of coercing their grandparents for money, to abuse them. (Participant ST)

Similarly, Maseko (2017) reported that in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, senior citizens raised concerns over grandchildren who were increasingly coercing their grandparents to give them part of their pension grants. The findings reflect that grandchildren who are engaging in delinquent acts such as stealing from their grandmothers' houses are a problem for their grandparents and drive them into a state of mental agony and despondency, leading to psycho-emotional deficits. This drains their psychological and emotional energies and can easily make them seriously ill. They collude with other juvenile delinquents to steal from their grandparents. This is not only a shock for the grandparents, but also very demoralising. Many grandparents experience excruciating pain from the abuse from their grandchildren. The stealing leaves the grandparents without any resources to take care of themselves and even the grandchildren. This can lead to premature ageing (Shingirai & Kang'ethe, 2019).

Grandmothers overwhelmed by dilemmas and role confusion

Study findings revealed the dilemmas and sense of role confusion faced by some grandmothers in dealing with their grandchildren. The majority of the grandparents admitted at some point that they have faced the challenge of role confusion. The following are some of the responses from the participants:

It's actually difficult as a grandparent to shout at your grandchildren or being too hard on them. Remember as a grandmother, I must be their best friend as well. I have a responsibility to make them happy through telling them stories as well as teaching them basic skills Unfortunately, I have to act like a disciplinary parent again; that's why I end up involving my older sons to help me. (Participant G)

When I look around, I see some grandparents having fun with their grandchildren. I also do the same, but the challenge comes when they are misbehaving; I must be tough on them. And you can see that they are not happy at all with that. (Participant F)

As a grandparent, I need to be careful when addressing any dispute with my grandchildren. I need to be a friend to them as well as a responsible parent. (Participant A)

According to the findings, grandparents are indeed confused about their roles in the lives of their grandchildren, more particularly at the moment when their grandchildren manifest difficult behaviours. This leaves them in a state of dilemma, which is psychologically and emotionally draining. This is supported by McGowen, Ladd and Strom (2006), who established that many grandmothers were not comfortable with their role as carers of their grandchildren. This is because of having to deal with unruly children who prove difficult to be disciplined. Fuhri (2013) asserts that grandparents increasingly felt a dwindling motivation to care because of the challenges of disciplining their grandchildren. This bears out the assumption of role conflict theory, which suggests that, usually when there are not consensual expectations of behaviour, there is a possibility that the incompatibility leads to tensions (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Therefore, there is a need for grandparents to be capacitated in order to navigate from the role of being disciplinarians to grandparents who need to inculcate desirable social and cultural values in their grandchildren. This implies that social workers and other relevant

stakeholders have a significant role to play in equipping grandparents with appropriate parenting skills.

Caregiving by grandmothers denies them respite and peer socialisation

Study findings revealed disenchantment among the grandparents as they are stuck with the responsibilities of taking care of their grandchildren at the expense of enjoying their own sunset years. Some hardly find for themselves any time for rest or socialising with their peers. They even miss out on social gatherings. This is supported by the following comments:

This boy has caused me to be stuck here at home. I know if I go out for long or spend much time away, I will find my things stolen here. (Participant H)

Knowing that my grandchildren can't handle quarrels properly, I have to spend much of my time with them. We are always indoors, and the gate is always locked. I care for my grandchildren. (Participant D)

After realising that my grandchildren have been associated with wrong people, this prompted me to change my 'modus operandi'. I had to be focused on my grandchildren. I spend much time socialising with them. (Participant G)

Grandparents suffer despondency in tandem with this socialisation deficit on account of providing of caregiving and nurturance. This means they miss out on opportunities to socialise with their peers and find time for recreation. This impacts negatively upon their socio-emotional health. This can drive them to age unsuccessfully and make them ill. This is confirmed by the findings by Nkosinathi and Mtshali (2015), who contend that grandparents are perpetually engaged in monitoring their grandchildren, enforcing rules and norms, providing support for academic achievement in the form of helping them with homework, encouraging intellectually oriented hobbies and activities, or serving as role models. Thus, grandparenting has led to some overlooked negative impacts on caregivers as they are denied a full and fulfilling social life. This occurs especially with grandparents looking after delinquent children as they have to spend much time monitoring the children's whereabouts. Failure to monitor a child's whereabouts, companions and activities can be a very strong predictor of behavioural problems, probably because it removes the opportunity for parents to teach children how to manage their own behaviour and to choose friends wisely (Akers & Jennings, 2009).

Health deficits associated with grandparents' caring

Study findings highlighted that delinquent acts by grandchildren drive their grandparents to succumb to undue stress, excruciating physical and mental pains, and ill physical health. Below are some of the statements that attest to the finding:

When they do something wrong, it stresses me up. I experience blood pressure. I hate that feeling. (Participant H)

Some grandchildren doing criminal activities have exposed their grandparents to stress and some are even experiencing strokes... (Participant CD)

Grandmothers in particular are faced with the challenges of discipline, adding to their confusion and distress. Correspondingly, literature indicates that the challenges faced by caregiving grandparents often affects their emotional and social health detrimentally. This is especially true in cases where grandmothers are living in abject poverty (Sampson & Hertlein, 2015). Some grandmothers admitted experiencing depression and pangs of stress, hallucination and other central nervous system complications. Further literature has also shown that behavioural and emotional problems among grandchildren trigger increased emotional distress among custodial grandparents. This suggests that grandparents may have difficulties coping with their grandchildren's behavioural concerns (Doley, Bell, Watt & Simpson, 2015).

Professionals such as social workers are mandated by the Old Persons Act 13 of 2006 (RSA, 2006) to address any circumstances harmful to the wellbeing of old people. According to the Act (RSA, 2006) Section 25(5) states that a vulnerable old person is someone who (a) suffers from economic abuse and who (f) lives in circumstances that are likely to cause or will be conducive to seduction, abduction or sexual exploitation.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL WORK

Some participants suggested that there is a need for the development of a multidisciplinary team to provide services to juvenile delinquents, involving the police, teachers, youth officers, probation officers and social workers. These professionals should meet on a regular basis and plan not only for services to juvenile delinquents and their families, but also do preventive work. Also, as the government and other relevant stakeholders develop programmes to assist children in conflict with the law, there is a need to pay attention specifically to grandparent-headed households with juvenile delinquents. These programmes should take into consideration the specific dynamics of a grandparent-headed household. If delinquent grandchildren are to be assisted fully, there is a need for the development of a mentoring programme for juvenile delinquents where they can receive positive guidance and support in a non-discriminative environment. Moreover, social workers have an important role to play in implementing such parental and family preservation programmes as part of the diversion process, with a specific focus on the grandparent-grandchildren relationship. These researchers believe that policies should be developed to ensure that grandparents above the age of 60 years should not assume full custody of children, as they are also a vulnerable population. To this end, social workers must be willing to assist grandparents to challenge the system if they believe that the rights of the elderly have been violated and should not contribute to their further disempowerment.

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