

public clinics. Table 2 below indicates the needs that the respondents had to cater for that put a strain on their finances.

**TABLE 2
NEEDS THAT THE RESPONDENTS HAD TO CATER FOR WHICH CAUSED
FINANCIAL STRAIN ON THEM**

Need	Number of respondents
Food, including milk formula	9
Grandchild's education	8
Grandchild's health care needs	5
Own health care needs	3
Child care	2

The following statements indicate the financial strains that were experienced by respondents: "I never had dogs in the house as I could not afford feeding them, but now I have had to acquire one for the sake of my grandson. I also would not have employed a full-time domestic worker, but because of the children I had to. I am unable to attend certain occasions because I have to cater for the needs of my grandchildren." The respondents had to cater for themselves and for grandchildren on a reduced income, especially since they all depended on social grants and pensions. The social grants are supposed to cater for an individual and, when these are shared with others, the individual will invariably experience financial strain (Department of Welfare and Population Development, 1997:72).

**TABLE 3
SOURCE OF INCOME**

Source of income	Number of respondents
Pension	4
Old-age pension	3
Old-age pension and child-support grant	3
Old-age pension and hawking	2

The investigation revealed that the majority of the respondents were relying on government old-age grants. These respondents were experiencing more financial constraints than those who had made provision for their retirement. Some of the respondents were selling fruit and vegetables to supplement their income, while others were receiving child-support grants. However, some of the respondents had tried unsuccessfully to apply for a child-support grant. One respondent indicated that she had told her daughter to apply for a child-support grant. She, however, indicated that she was not sure if her daughter had applied for the grant, or if she was receiving it and using it for her own needs. "I have been to the government offices to seek help and they told me my grandchildren were too old to receive a child-support grant. I struggle to feed them and they need stuff for school. It is tough." An insignificant number of respondents indicated that their other adult children were providing them with financial

support, although this was not regular and the amounts varied. These respondents indicated appreciation for any assistance they were receiving, particularly from their other adult children who had their own families to provide for.

Only one respondent did not have financial problems, as her children's estate was adequate to cater for the family needs. This was despite the fact that she had worked as a domestic worker and was receiving a pension grant. In addition, one grandchild was working, while only one was attending school.

Social problems

The grandparents who were able to employ a domestic worker indicated that they were able to interact with their peers as they were members of the Prayer Women's League in their churches or members of a luncheon club. The respondents who were involved in small businesses indicated that they were not involved in community activities as they did not have time to do so. Except for the respondent whose children had died, the respondents in general blamed themselves for the daughters and sons who were not maintaining their own children. They mentioned the stigma associated with having raised irresponsible children.

Furthermore, the respondents felt that they were alone in their situation and that they lacked support from other family members and the community at large. Some of the respondents indicated that their other adult children were providing limited financial support but very little emotional support. The sentiment expressed was captured in the following statement: *"My other children feel that I should teach my daughter to be responsible and they blame me for spoiling her. I am not doing this for her, but I'm doing it for my grandchildren."* All the respondents indicated that they had never discussed the problems they were experiencing with other people, because they felt that they had to provide care for their grandchildren who were their own flesh and blood and, as the following statement indicates: *"I do not discuss my problems with other people as they will only gossip about me. It is a family matter and I should be able to deal with it."* The respondents do not discuss their family matters with others either because they do not want people gossiping about them or out of a sense of responsibility.

Meaning of the parenting role

The respondents expressed both positive and negative feelings about raising their grandchildren. Some respondents welcomed the responsibility and felt that their grandchildren were a blessing as they kept them company. They expressed sentiments such as:

"Raising my grandchildren has been a continuation of my adult responsibility. The first grandchild that I raised is married and has her family. Although I did not plan raising my grandchildren, it has been a wonderful experience. I am able to do things with my grandchildren that I did not do for and with my children. I am not as strict as I was with my children and am able to discuss issues with my grandchildren. You see, when you are younger you have to go to work, attend to community matters as well as do household chores. These leave you exhausted and you are too tired to chat with your children."

"I started living with my son's family in 1979 because he was concerned that he could not let any of his children come and live with me. You see, I had two

sons. The youngest was supposed to live with me, but he passed away. Shortly after I had moved to live with my son's family, they had their second child. When she was a month old, I shared a bed with her. My grandchildren have always been closer to me than their parents. I took them to school and carried them on my back when I attended women's prayer meetings."

All the respondents indicated that they would have been lonely if they did not have their grandchildren in their lives. Some of the respondents regarded the situation as a second chance at parenting. The parenting responsibilities were thus welcomed by some respondents and accepted as necessary by others.

Some of the respondents whose children were alive indicated that their adult children were not involved in their children's upbringing as they came and went as they pleased, with little consideration for their children. Some indicated that their daughters left home under the pretence that they were going to look for jobs in Johannesburg and never came back. These respondents expressed frustration with their adult children and indicated that they would not want their grandchildren to feel different from other children, hence their willingness to assume a parenting role to their grandchildren: "*You have to be there for the children as they are innocent.*"

Parenting as doing one's duty

Some of the respondents indicated ambivalence regarding having had to assume a parenting role to their grandchildren. Some reflected resentment at their children for being unable to provide for their children. The following sentiments were expressed: "*When my daughter had the first child I was upset but I forgave her, because she said it was a mistake. When she had another child I was heartbroken; however, I cannot ignore these children as they did not choose to be born. I must provide for them and make sure they have a future.*" All the respondents seemed to have accepted the role of being a primary care-giver. However, they complained about the behaviour of the children as expressed in the following sentiment: "*Today's children are lazy and disrespectful as they do not want to help out with household chores*". The respondents in general felt that they had to provide for their grandchildren to ensure that they had a brighter future than their parents. Some of the respondents felt that they would probably have been lonely if they were not raising their grandchildren, as all their children were adults. They also focused on the positive side of parenting their grandchildren as a chance to contribute towards a better future for the grandchildren.

Lifestyle changes

The majority of the respondents mentioned that they had raised grandchildren even at the time their own children were growing up and they indicated that they did not experience any lifestyle changes. These respondents, however, complained about their diminished strength, which was affecting their ability to enjoy raising their grandchildren. Generally the respondents were content with their care-giving role. This is contradictory to Glass and Huneycutt's (2002:146) assertion that, because of their advanced age, grandparents may be at an age where their bodies betray them and their health is questionable. Furthermore, grandparents' routine, finances, social life and emotional state will be radically affected. All the respondents expressed concern about providing for their grandchildren and making sure that their needs were met adequately and that the grandchildren did not feel that they were different from other children. The respondents expressed anger, frustration and disappointment toward their children who

were not involved with their own children. However, the respondent who was caring for her deceased child's children indicated that she had been involved with her grandchildren even when their parents were alive; thus she had not experienced any lifestyle changes since becoming the primary caregiver.

Support systems

In this study the respondents who had more sources of support presented fewer concerns and challenges than those who had fewer sources of support. The following categories of support systems were identified:

- **Financial and material support:** Some of the respondents were receiving financial or material support from their other children, who were not necessarily the biological parents of the grandchildren who were being cared for. One respondent indicated that her adult child who was living with them had been very supportive: *"I don't know how we could have managed without her; she is like a second mother to them. I would have been lost without her. She helps us pay their school fees and buy clothes for them. She really provides for them like they were her own and we have to help because their mother is not earning much."*
- **Physical assistance:** Three respondents who have employed domestic workers mentioned the workers were their support system as the latter were providing respite for them. Domestic workers were mentioned as a support system, despite the fact that employing them caused financial strain to the respondents. They were viewed as a resource, as they lightened the burden of caring and providing for younger children, especially in helping with household chores.
- **Clubs for the elderly:** Two of the respondents who were members of a club for the elderly indicated that, although they never talked about their problems with members of the clubs, being able to get out of the house and do fun things such as exercising and singing gave them time to forget about their troubles.
- **Spirituality:** The majority of the respondents intuitively referred to God as their life line. Reference was made to the power of God several times during the interviews. For them faith provided inner strength and direction in times of trouble. Phrases such as *"These children are a gift from God"* and *"God has helped me raise them"* were mentioned repeatedly in some interviews.

Advice that the respondents could give to other grandparents raising grandchildren

Most of the respondents hesitated to respond to this question and the researcher had to probe in order to get some responses. The respondents felt that they were not in a position to advise others, when they could not solve their own problems. The responses given did not address relationships with their adult children or what others could do to help their adult children become involved in their children's lives. The advice given seemed to suggest that it is acceptable for grandparents to raise their grandchildren. For example, some of the respondents suggested that:

- "Grandparents must save money and make provision for themselves and family members in case they have to step in and raise grandchildren";
- "Grandparents should step in and raise grandchildren so that they can have a better future";

- “Grandparents must attend workshops, participate in group discussions, and listen to the radio and TV in order to be knowledgeable and able to help the younger generations”;
- “Income-generating projects must be established for young adults who are unemployed.”

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that grandparents derived high levels of satisfaction from their parenting role. The respondents felt that raising their grandchildren gave them a second chance, as they were more involved in the lives of their grandchildren than they had been in the case of their own children. Grandparent-grandchild relationships were thus regarded as being more positive than parent-child relationships. In addition, the life-span perspective provided a promising framework in research in later life, particularly its emphasis on the importance of late-life social relationships in the maintenance of a strong sense of self. Regardless of the financial hardships that most of the respondents were experiencing as a result of raising their grandchildren, all the respondents appreciated having their grandchildren in their lives. Despite the fact that almost all of the respondents were experiencing financial burdens, low-income families were more affected than high-income families. The findings in the SA research were similar to earlier findings by Waldrop and Weber (2001:467) in the US.

Grandparents also have to deal with social and health problems that affect them and their grandchildren. This necessitated a review of the access to resources for older persons caring for their grandchildren.

Grandparents are the first to step in when parents are unable or unwilling to care for their children. This important resource should be assisted and supported to assume care-giving responsibility to minimise the impact of children growing up without parents. However, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to a larger population because of the size of the sample. Further research is needed to determine the challenges and problems that grandparents experience, especially in this era of HIV/AIDS and the high unemployment rate of young parents. Given the positive responses from this study, it would be necessary to test strength-based interventions. Rather than trying to discourage grandparents from becoming surrogate parents, efforts should be made to support and enable grandparents to raise their grandchildren. By reducing the stress related to the parenting role, grandparents will be able to continue making a contribution in life. This will also minimise abuse and neglect of older persons by promoting healthy intergenerational relations.

The Department of Social Development recognizes older persons' role in lending a hand in the fight against HIV/AIDS (*The Department of Social Development brochure*). While it is encouraging to see government acknowledging the contribution of older persons, services and programmes need to be developed to strengthen kinship foster care. Janicki *et al.* (2000:61) suggest that services geared towards promoting kinship foster care must be grandparent-sensitive.

CONCLUSION

Despite the limitations of this study, namely that the findings cannot be generalised to a larger population because of the small size of the sample, the use of a non-probability sampling method and the lack of a control group which would be essential to determine problems associated with being a surrogate parent, valuable insights were developed. Although almost all the respondents in this study indicated that they were experiencing

financial strain, which was aggravated by the responsibility of raising grandchildren, the respondents also expressed satisfaction at being able to provide for their grandchildren. The involvement of grandparents as surrogate parents can be beneficial to both the caregiver and the child. Grandparents are offered an opportunity to make a contribution as well as having companionship, while the grandchildren are raised by their families instead of ending up in foster homes or institutions.

Although the respondents in this study did not assume the responsibility of raising their grandchildren because they were orphaned, this would suggest that older persons could be a resource in addressing the problem of child-headed families as a result of HIV/AIDS. Further research on a larger population should thus be conducted to help understand the challenges experienced by grandparents raising grandchildren. It is essential too to understand the role of grandparents as caregivers, because from the life-span perspective care giving, especially in a parenting role, is not an anticipated role for older persons. Research on the role of grandparents would invariably influence the kinds of programmes that are developed to support this population group to continue to make a positive contribution to their families and society. Instead of having mothers who draw child-support grants that are often not used for the benefit of the child, grandmothers may be provided financial and other essential resources that would minimise the strains of "parenting" their grandchildren. For instance, if the mother's whereabouts are unknown, grandparents could be assisted to access child-support grants on behalf of the children they are raising. This will ensure that appropriate interventions and programmes will be developed.

REFERENCES

- ARMOUR, M.A. 1995. Family life cycle stages: A context for individual life stages. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 1(2):27-42.
- BABBIE, E. 1998. *The practice of social research* (8th ed). California: Wadsworth.
- BABBIE, E. & MOUTON, J. 2001. *The practice of social research*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa.
- CARTER, E. & MCGOLDRICK, M. 1989. *The changing family life cycle: A framework for family therapy*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- CRESWELL, J.W. 1994. *Research design. Qualitative & quantitative approaches*. London: Sage.
- DEPARTMENT OF WELFARE AND POPULATION DEVELOPMENT. 1997. *White Paper for Social Welfare*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- DE VOS, A.S.; STRYDOM, H.; FOUCHÉ, C.B. & DELPORT, C.S.L. 2002. *Research at grass roots: for the social sciences and human professions* (2nd ed). Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik.
- GLASS, J.C. (Jr) & HUNEYCUTT, T.L. 2002. Grandparents parenting grandchildren: Extent of situation, issues involved, and educational implications. *Educational Gerontology*, 28:139-161.
- INGSTAD, B., BRUUN, F., SANDBURG, E. & TLOU, S. 1992. Care for the elderly, care by the elderly: The role of elderly women in a changing Tswana society. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*, 7:379-398.

JANICKI, M.P., McCALLION, P.; GRANT-GRIFFIN, L. & KOLOMER, S. 2000. Grandparent carers: Characteristics of the grandparents and the children with disabilities for whom they care. **Journal of Gerontological Social Work**, 33(3):35-55.

KELLY, S.J., YONKER, B.C., WHITLEY, D.M. & SIPE, T.A. 2001. A multimodal intervention for grandparents raising grandchildren: results of an exploratory study. **Child Welfare**, LXXX (1):27-50.

LOUW, D.A. 1991. **Human development**. Pretoria: Kagiso Tertiary.

MAKOFANE, M.D.M. 1999. The dynamics of wife abuse in the Northern Province: A social work perspective. Pretoria: University of Pretoria. (DPhil thesis)

POPENOE, D., CUNNINGHAM, P. & BOULT, B. 1998. **Sociology first South African edition**. South Africa: Prentice Hall.

WALDROP, D.P. & WEBER, J.A. 2001. From grandparents to caregivers: The stress and satisfaction of raising grandchildren. **Families in Society: Journal of Contemporary Human Services**, 82(5):461-472.

WALLACE, G. 2001. Grandparent caregivers: emerging issues in elder law and social work practice. **Journal of Gerontological Social Work**, 34(3):127-136.

WEBER, J.A. & WALDROP, D.P. 2000. Grandparents raising grandchildren: Families in transition. **Journal of Gerontological Social Work**, 33(2):27-46.

Mrs JM Mokone, Department of Social Work, University of Limpopo, Sovenga, South Africa.