
Evaluation of Policy Change: Effect of the Grandparent Caretaker Law

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Background:

- In July 2004, Ohio enacted the Grandparent Caretaker Law, which allows grandparents to obtain authorization to enroll their dependent grandchildren in school and consent to medical care for them.
- Ohio Department of Job and Family Services commissioned an evaluation of the implementation of the law in fall of 2006.

Evaluation questions:

- What was the level of utilization of the law?
- What factors contributed to higher/lower utilization?
- What was the impact on the courts and schools, and on the grandparent's ability to obtain medical care and register children for school?
- What was the impact on child abuse and neglect?
- What was the renewal rate after 12 months?

Methods

- 12 Ohio counties were selected as the sample
 - Urban (2), suburban (2), rural (4), Appalachian (4)
 - geographic and population representation
 - Higher and lower rates of utilization
 - number of affidavits filed and estimated number of grandparents raising grandchildren
- Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval obtained

Methods continued

- Grandparents: self-administered mailed questionnaire and follow-up telephone interview
- Courts: self-administered mailed questionnaire
- Public Children Service Agencies (PCSA): telephone interview
- School Principals: E-mailed questionnaire

Response rates

Table 1. Data Collection Results				
Target Population	Data Collection Type	Number of Questionnaires Sent	Number of Completions	Response Rate
Grandparents	Self-Administered Questionnaires	237	30	13%
	Follow-up Telephone Interview	11	9	82%
Public Children Service Agencies	Telephone Interview of Staff	12	12	100%
Judges	Self-Administered Questionnaires	12	8	67%
School Principals	E-mail Questionnaires	435	33	8%

Results:

- Level of utilization by grandparents?
 - Varied widely by county (from 6.2/1000 to 90.0/1000)
 - Did not seem to be associated with type of county (rural, urban, suburban, Appalachian)

Results:

- Factors contributing to utilization?
 - Presence of public education about the law
 - Court's attitudes to the law
 - Presence of Kinship Navigators or other advocacy groups

- All appeared to play a role in increasing utilization, but there was not a clear one-to-one correlation in all cases.

Results:

- Impact on courts, schools, grandparents?
 - Courts:
 - No significant additional workload
 - Some concern with lack of judicial oversight
 - Schools:
 - No evidence that law being used solely to enroll children in a “better” school
 - No evidence that the number of children enrolled by grandparents is increasing

Results:

- Impact on courts, schools, grandparents?
 - Grandparents:
 - Report that the law has eased getting medical care and school enrollment for their grandchildren
 - Most common reservation was the 12 month limitation: felt this was too frequent

Results:

- Impact on child abuse/neglect?
 - Positive impact on safety to extent that children were with grandparent because of unsafe conditions with biological parent
 - Few specific incidents of risk of abuse and neglect to children, however, more exploration needed to definitively answer

Results:

- Extent of renewals and judicial oversight?
 - Few renewals reported
 - Public Children Services Agencies (PCSAs) rarely review or investigate
 - Judges remain uncomfortable with process, although problems and situations contrary to a child's interest were rarely reported by the courts

Selected Conclusions:

- Law was successful in supporting informal caregiving relationships by removing problems with school enrollment and obtaining medical care for grandchildren
- Using law to inappropriately enroll children in school not a widespread problem
- Law has not added substantial burden to courts

Selected conclusions:

- Courts and PCSAs reported no incidents of abuse or neglect
- Reaction to extending law to other relatives was mixed: PCSAs and grandparents in favor, almost half of judges and principals opposed
- Law not uniformly implemented or widely known – education and outreach needed

Limitations

- Sample limited
- Low response rate
- Unable to compare to prior research (no prior studies reported)

Conclusion: Findings suggestive but further research needed before able to apply to larger population

Full report available at:

<http://jfs.ohio.gov/factsheets/HB130Rpt.pdf>