Does the State Help or Hurt African American Caregiving Grandmothers?
A Simple Question with No Easy Answer

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Overview

- Background
- Research Questions
- Theoretical Framework
- Argument Preview
- Data & Methods
- Findings
- Policy & Programmatic Implications
- Next Steps
GPHH in the U.S.

Sociodemographic Characteristics

- 2.7 million caregiving grandparents, 63% are female.
- 20% live below the FPL and 47% live 1-3 times FPL.
- 2/3 GMHH impoverished.
Evolution of Kinship Care

- Public policy supports use of kinship care.
- Children in foster care & kinship foster care are disproportionately Black.
GPHH & African Americans

- African Americans 24% of GPHH.
- African American grandmothers experience significant disadvantages.
- Contributing factors.
Research Questions

1. What pathways do grandmothers follow into child welfare system involvement?
2. Under what circumstances does state intervention support or undermine GPHH?
3. What strategies do grandmothers use to manage child welfare system involvement?
Theoretical Framework

• Feminist Theory
  – Institutional circuits
    Family-state-market-community (Ferree, 2010)
  – Intersectional inequality
    (Ferree, 2010)
  – Divergent & conflicting interest (Ferree, 1990)
Argument Preview

- Pathways and experiences of state involvement are intricately linked.
- Whether state intervention helps or hurts is contingent upon its impact on grandmothers family stability projects.
- Grandmothers do not passively or uniformly respond to the child welfare system, but actively generate, accommodate, maximize, and resist.
Ms. Sowell: So, I never got to go visit until it got so far gone, until they was situated in somebody’s home, and they was goin’ through adoption.
Ms. Terrance: When they took her out she was muddy... dripping with pee-pee and dirt. No shoes on... her hair was all over her head . . . She was unnourished, teeth was rotten.
Managing State Involvement

Ms. Coleman: They gonna bug me on giving them a budget. I say, when he start doing that they can take ‘em.
Conclusion

• Grandmothers pathways and experiences of state involvement are intricately linked.
  Initiation facilitates control over vital aspects of state intervention and influences degrees of state intervention.

• Whether state intervention helps or hurts is contingent upon its impact on grandmothers ability to protect their grandchildren, access resources and services, privacy and autonomy, and control parental responses and roles.

• Grandmothers do not passively or uniformly respond to the child welfare system, but actively generate, accommodate, maximize, and resist.
Programmatic & Policy Implications

• Discrepancy between relative and non-relative caregivers
  – Love penalty
• Permanency vs. stability
• Family mediation
• Eligibility criteria
Next Steps

• Additional policies & barriers to resources & services - subsidized child care
• Parent interviews
• Mixed methods, comparative research examining stress and health outcomes.