# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opsomming</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuscript for examination</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method of investigation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research method and design</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research context and participants</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed method of data analysis</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical issues</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges associated with caring for grandchildren</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping with challenges associated with caring for grandchildren</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intergenerational relationships</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications of the findings and recommendations</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitation of the study</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructions for authors</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**List of tables**

Table 1: The principles and strategies for enhancing the rigour of the data through crystallisation                           9

Table 2: Themes and subthemes                                          10

**List of figures**

Figure 1: Empty house without any grandchildren to care for        11
Figure 2: Empty house indicating lack of resources                  13
Figure 3: Cross that symbolises the burden that one of the grandmothers is bearing 15
Figure 4: Grandchild that causes grandmother much stress          20
Acknowledgements

To all the grandmothers who were willing to participate and share their experiences with me.

My wife, Mari, for supporting me on what seems to be a never-ending journey of exploration. Also for dividing her time between editing my article and caring for our new born baby.

My son, Arian, for being so patient with his dad who had to constantly work on a boring piece of work.

My study leader, Prof Vera Roos, for her dedication, quick responses and invaluable input. It is greatly appreciated.

The head of the Centre for Child, Youth and Family Studies, Prof Retha Bloem, for accommodating and supporting me to pursue this study.

Colleagues, family and friends for their support.

To God be the honour!
Preface

The candidate opted to write an article with the support of his supervisor, Prof Vera Roos.
Summary

An exploration of the psychosocial experiences of coloured grandmothers in Groenheuwel who are the primary care givers of their grandchildren

In various South African communities older people play a key role in looking after their children, grandchildren and unrelated children. For the purpose of this study, 50 years was considered the start of old age as motivated by the World Health Organization. However, most women who partook in the study were older than 60. The western family structure in communities has been transformed due to major social changes that include modifications to the structures of households and often lead to grandmothers taking over the role of primary caregivers of children. All the participants were grandmothers residing in Groenheuwel who were primarily responsible for their grandchildren. These grandmothers act as primary caregivers because the parents of their grandchildren are deceased, have abandoned their children or lack financial resources to care for their own children. This article focuses on the psychosocial experiences of these coloured grandmothers who care for their grandchildren. A qualitative research design was used together with a purposive and snowball sampling method whereby 12 coloured grandmothers in the Groenheuwel community in Paarl, South Africa were selected. A reflective group discussion was held during which the Mmogo-method™ was applied. The meanings of the visual representations were used as textual data. Both the textual and the visual data obtained by means of a video camera, were analyzed through thematic analysis. Data collection occurred at a community centre close to Groenheuwel. In this study crystallization enhanced trustworthiness by using multiple methods of data collection and analysis. The researcher constructed three main themes from the findings: challenges associated with caring for grandchildren, coping with challenges associated with caring for grandchildren and intergenerational relationships. The results showed that grandmothers experienced feelings of ambivalence regarding caring for their grandchildren. On the one hand they experience difficulty with disciplining their grandchildren, tiredness due to caring for their grandchildren and a lack of resources. On the other hand they find immense support in their existential relationship with God and their community. This ambivalence seems to be embedded in the nostalgia that dictates the nature of the intergenerational
relationships between themselves and their grandchildren. However, notwithstanding the ambivalence the
grandmothers strongly believe that caring for their grandchildren is a responsibility that has been given to
them by God and therefore He will provide in their needs.
Opsomming

‘n Onderzoek na die psigososiale ervarings van bruin oumas van Groenheuwel wat die primêre versorgers van hulle kleinkinders is

Ouer persone in verskeie Suid-Afrikaanse gemeenskappe speel ‘n sleutelrol in die versorging van hulle kinders, kleinkinders en nie-verwante kinders. Vir die doel van hierdie studie is 50 jaar oorweeg as die begin van bejaardheid soos gemotiveer deur die Wêreld Gesondheidsorganisasie (World Health Organization). Die meeste vroue wat egter aan die studie deelgeneem het, was ouer as 60. Die westerse gesininstruktuur in gemeenskappe is getransformeer as gevolg van groot sosiale veranderings wat modifikasies aan die strukture van huishoudings insluit en dikwels daartoe lei dat oumas die rol van primêre versorgers oorneem. Al die deelnemers was oumas wat in Groenheuwel woon en wat primêr verantwoordelik is vir hulle kleinkinders. Hierdie oumas tree as primêre versorgers op omdat hulle kleinkinders se ouers dood is, hulle ouers hul verstoot het of omdat die ouers nie die finansiële hulpbronne het om na hulle eie kinders om te sien nie. Hierdie artikel fokus op die psigososiale ervarings van hierdie bruin oumas wat hulle kleinkinders versorg. ‘n Kwalitatiewe navorsingsontwerp is gebruik, asook doelgerigte en sneeubal steekproeftrekking waartydens 12 bruin oumas wat in die Groenheuwel gemeenskap in Paarl, Suid-Afrika woon, gekies is. ‘n Reflektiewe groepsbespreking is gehou waartydens die Mmogo-methode™ toegepas is. Die betekenisse van die visuele projeksies is gebruik as teksuele data. Beide die tekstuele en visuele data, wat deur middel van ‘n video-opname verkry is, is geanaliseer deur middel van tematiese analise. Data-insameling het plaasgevind in ‘n gemeenskapsentrum naby Groenheuwel. In hierdie studie het kristallisasie vertrouenswaardigheid verhoog deur verskeie metodes van data-insameling en analise te gebruik. Die navorser het drie hoof temas vanuit die bevindings gekonstrueer: uitdagings wat geassosieer word met versorging van kleinkinders, hantering van uitdagings wat geassosieer word met versorging van kleinkinders en intergenerasionele verhoudings. Die resultate het getoon dat oumas ambivalente gevoelens ervaar rakende die versorging van hulle kleinkinders. Aan die een kant vind hulle dit moeilik om hulle kleinkinders te dissiplineer, hulle is moeg as gevolg van die versorging van hulle kleinkinders, en hulle het ‘n tekort aan finansiële hulpbronne. Hulle ervaar egter
groot ondersteuning vanuit hulle eksistensiële verhouding met God en hulle gemeenskap. Hierdie ambivalensie blyk gewortel te wees in die nostalgie wat die aard van hulle intergenerasionele verhoudings tussen hulself en hul kleinkinders bepaal. Nieteenstaande die ambivalensie glo die oumas met oortuiging dat die versorging van hulle kleinkinders ‘n verantwoordelikheid is wat deur God aan hulle gegee is en daarom sal Hy in hulle behoeftes voorsien.
An exploration of the psychosocial experiences of coloured grandmothers in Groenheuwel who are the primary care givers of their grandchildren

Herman Grobler and *Vera Roos

Department of Psychology, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus.
Private Bag X 6001, Internal Box 206, Potchefstroom, 2520, South Africa

Herman.Grobler@nwu.ac.za
*Vera.Roos@nwu.ac.za

*Corresponding author
Abstract

This article focuses on the psychosocial experiences of coloured grandmothers who care for their grandchildren. A qualitative research design was used. Twelve participants from the Groenheuwel community in Paarl, South Africa, were selected. A reflective group discussion was held during which the Mmogo-method™ was applied. The meanings of the visual representations were used as textual data, and both the textual and the visual data were analyzed through thematic analysis. The results showed that grandmothers experienced feelings of ambivalence regarding caring for their grandchildren. Notwithstanding the ambivalence the grandmothers strongly believed that caring for their grandchildren was a responsibility that had been given to them by God and therefore He would provide in their needs.

Keywords: care giving, community psychology, communities, grandmothers, grandchildren, psychosocial experiences
Introduction

In various South African communities, older people play a key role in looking after their children, grandchildren and unrelated children (Ntshangase, Duncan & Roos, 2007). Older persons are defined differently in different cultures. According to the World Health Organization (2011), a realistic starting age for old age in Africa should be either 50 or 55. The lower life expectancy in Sub-Saharan Africa may make it more appropriate to consider 50 as the commencement of old age (Velkoff & Kowal, 2007). Although this could cause problems regarding the comparability of data across countries, it could nevertheless be a realistic working definition for Africa. For the purpose of this study, 50 was therefore considered the start of old age, although most women who partook in the study were older than 60.

The role of grandparents within the family has changed and has become more diverse due to societal and family changes (Bernal & de la Fuente Anuncibay, 2008; Winefield & Air, 2010). This is also true for the traditional family structures in South Africa, which can be largely ascribed to HIV/AIDS, violence, poverty and the displacement of people (Department of Social Development in Roux, Bungane & Strydom, 2010; Visser, 2007). Pregnant women who have AIDS, for example, and give birth may become too ill to look after their babies. Nattrass (2004) said that, on the basis of antenatal survey data, 24.5% of every 1 000 pregnant women who visited government clinics in 2004 were HIV-positive, which would obviously aggravate the situation of caring for their children. Furthermore, diseases such as tuberculosis and malaria, as well as divorce (Cleaver, Nicholson, Tarr & Cleaver, 2007; O’Loughlin & O’Loughlin, 2008), the increased employment of mothers (Coetzer, 2006; Cheal, 2008), imprisonment (Kivedo, 2008) and other risk factors (McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter & McWhirter, 2007) lead to changes in many family structures regarding the people who care for children. As a consequence of HIV/AIDS, parents are dying and children are being left in the care of other caregivers (Pequegnat & Szapocznik, 2000; Thebe, 2007). Frohlich (2005) states that grandparents often become the caregivers of children whose parents have died of AIDS. According to Thebe (2007), maternal grandparents generally become the primary caregivers of their grandchildren because of their concern for the children’s well-
According to Oppong (2006) this is especially true of mother’s mothers who need to take care of their babies due to being born out of wedlock or unplanned births.

According to HelpAgeInternational (2007), many older people have to look after 1.1 million AIDS orphans in South Africa with grandparents bearing the responsibility of caring for more than 60% of these orphans. Mudavanhu, Segalo and Fourie (2008) and Kuo and Operario (2010; 2011) refer to research on AIDS orphans that shows that elderly caregivers look after these children in most cases. Makiwane, Schneider and Gopane (in Ntshangase et al., 2007) state that older people are often integrated into the households of their children and are expected to assume the role of their grandchildren’s primary caregivers. Grandparents often also “inherit” their children’s children who may have been orphaned (Department of Social Development, 2011; Ntshangase et al., 2007). Such grandparents have to step into roles of primary caregivers once again. Park (2005) states that grandparent-headed households are fast growing and by 2000 about 2.4 million grandparents were the sole providers for their grandchildren. According to Winefield and Air (2010) it should not be ignored that these grandparents also have other relationships and responsibilities, which may cause strain but also personal growth and enrichment. However, caring for their grandchildren may have a negative effect on the well-being of the grandparents.

The important role of older women was also revealed by Ferreira et al. (2001) in longitudinal research conducted in 43 households in three historically disadvantaged townships of the Western Cape Metropole in South Africa. The research showed that in each household there was an older woman who looked after an adult child or children who were terminally ill with AIDS. Also, according to HelpAgeInternational (2007), 60% of households in South Africa are headed by older people. The older women in female-headed households may also have to look after orphans outside their own families who have been left homeless due to reality changes that are so common in the communities they live in. The older women often contribute substantially towards the teaching, guiding and supporting of younger generations and have to adapt their lifestyles radically at an age when they themselves should be looked after by others. They are frequently burdened with responsibilities that may take a physical, financial and/or emotional toll on them. Often there is no or only limited support within poor communities for
these older women, leaving them feeling overwhelmed and disempowered (Coleman & O’Hanlon, 2004). They also experience other challenges like health problems and authority problems in the sense that the grandchildren do not accept their authority.

However, it is not clear what the lived experiences are of grandmothers who are taking care of their grandchildren. The researcher agrees with Devine and Earle (2011) that even though grandparents may be willing and able to look after grandchildren, insight into their specific experiences is needed in order to provide them with the necessary support to care for their grandchildren, but not to the cost of their own health. This is especially true for this study where grandmothers are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren. In the light of the high proportion of older women who live with young children (70%) in Sub-Saharan Africa, Oppong (2006) is of the opinion that there is a definite need to gain insight into their situation in order to provide in their needs.

Because of its aim to gain insight into the lived experiences of coloured grandmothers, the proposed study can best be placed within a theoretical phenomenological framework. According to Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005), a phenomenological study enables the participants to share information as experienced by them. The psychosocial life tasks (Erikson, 1963) of older persons include assessing their lives in order to gain closure and end their lives with either feelings of satisfaction or feelings of hopelessness. However, it is not clear what the experiences are of coloured grandmothers who have to care for grandchildren. The following research question therefore guided the investigation: What are the psychosocial experiences of coloured grandmothers in Groenheuwel who care for their grandchildren? Although previous research has been done on grandmothers caring for their grandchildren (Kelly, Whitley, & Campos, 2011), these studies did not specifically focus on coloured grandmothers caring for their grandchildren. Some studies focused on older women caring for non-biological children or grandmothers caring for grandchildren who have been orphaned due to AIDS (Mudavanhu et al., 2008). It is important to get a broader picture of the experiences of grandmothers in specific communities, as each community differs and generalizations cannot be made from one community to another. An
understanding of the grandmothers’ psychosocial experiences could indicate the needs and the strengths of this specific group of women and could be used to develop appropriate interventions in the future.

**Method of investigation**

**Research method and design.** A qualitative research approach (Welman et al., 2005) was appropriate for the study as it holds that a particular human experience can be described only by the individuals who experience it. In this study the psychosocial experiences of the grandmothers were explored from their own perspectives in the conviction that only they could describe and share their experiences of caring for their grandchildren.

The study followed a phenomenological research design. Fouché and Schurink (2011) state that a phenomenological approach allows participants to give meaning to their own experiences and that the researcher’s objective is to understand and interpret these meanings. This view is supported by Barber (2006) who says that “phenomenology keeps holistic inquiry mindful of the ways individuals uniquely construct their world” (p. 77). This description of phenomenological design fits in well with this study as the researcher hoped to gain access to the respondents’ unique experiences through reflective group discussions, observation, and projection techniques.

**Research context and participants.** The researcher is involved in a therapeutic program which is running in the Groenheuwel suburb of Paarl in the Western Cape Province, South Africa. He initially made contact with a community-based program called *Khula*. The vision of this program is to provide sustainable support to young people and their families by assisting them emotionally, socially, spiritually and educationally. The organizer of the Paarl branch gave the researcher permission to conduct research within the *Khula* project. The office is a short distance from the Groenheuwel suburb where the research was conducted. The organizer is a well-known and trusted woman in this specific community who has access to older women in the area. She arranged an initial meeting between the researcher and possible participants for the research. Other participants were then also identified. The sampling technique accordingly included both purposive sampling and snowball sampling (Henning, 2004).
The lack of financial resources in the households in the Groenheuwel community is evident. The financial burden is even greater in families where the grandmothers have to look after grandchildren. In many cases these grandmothers do not have sufficient income to run a household. The grants they receive for their grandchildren are often also the only income they receive, and these grants are often insufficient.

All the participants were grandmothers residing in Groenheuwel who are primarily responsible for their grandchildren. They act as primary caregivers because their grandchildren’s parents are deceased, have abandoned their children or lack financial resources to care for their own children. The specific focus was on coloured women 50 years of age and older and on their specific psychosocial experiences regarding the caretaking of grandchildren. To qualify the participants needed to be healthy and able to communicate clearly.

The research was conducted in a South African context, and the participants had to be able to understand either English or Afrikaans. Their participation was voluntary. The research was conducted with a group of 12 grandmothers.

Data collection

**The Mmogo-method™.** Data were collected by means of the Mmogo-method™ (Roos, 2008). According to Roos (2011), this is a visual, projective research data-gathering method that yields the symbolic meaning of lived experiences. The material used is visual material (Roos, 2008) that is familiar to the community concerned. In an African context media such as sticks, clay, cloths, pieces of wood, beads or colourful buttons often work well (Roos, 2008). The participants make visual representations using the material. These visual representations serve as visual data and are later photographed. The participants are given instructions after which discussions with the participants take place and are transcribed. For the purpose of this research project, the participants received the following instruction:

“Please use the material and make anything that will tell something of your experiences of being the primary caregiver of the grandchildren in your care.”

The meanings of the visual representations were used as textual data, and both the textual and the visual data were analyzed through thematic analysis. The contextual groundedness of the data was determined
(Roos, 2011) by relying fully on the data provided by the grandmothers in the context of their own community and life experience.

**Reflective group discussions.** After completion of their visual representations, the participants were asked to participate in reflective discussions on their representations in group settings. The request “tell me about your picture” was used to start the discussions. Follow-up questions were asked to gather detailed data. The group discussion was recorded with a digital voice recorder. It was also video-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

**Proposed Method of Data Analysis**

**Thematic analysis of textual data.** Thematic analysis was used as the method of data analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a specific method by which patterns in data can be identified, analyzed and reported. They suggest six phases that are of relevance to this study: In the first phase, the researcher has to familiarize himself with the data, and in the second phase, initial codes are generated. The third phase consists of a search for themes and is followed by a review of the themes (fourth phase). In the fifth phase, themes are defined and named, and, lastly, the researcher produces a report.

**Analysis of visual data.** According to Roos, Maine and Khumalo (2008), visual data can be analyzed by doing the following: The explicit and implicit meaning of each object in the representation is obtained from the participant. The researcher asks the participant to indicate the relationship between the different objects in the representation. The representations and their application to the specific research question then become the focus of attention. The cultural meanings in the symbolic use of objects are important because the data are not based on interpretation but on the lived experiences of the participants – in this case, coloured grandmothers.

**Trustworthiness**

The principles and strategies for enhancing the rigour of the data through crystallization (Ellingson, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) are outlined in table 1 below.
### Table 1: The principles and strategies for enhancing the rigour of the data through crystallization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principles</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Application in the research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deepened complex interpretations</td>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>The researcher used a variety of qualitative research methods including a reflective group, observation, co-facilitator, member checking and a visual, culturally sensitive method – the Mmogo-method™. The reflective group provided rich detailed descriptions as answers to open questions. Questions were explained when requested. The reflective group was recorded using a voice recorder, as well as a video camera. A co-facilitator assisted with note taking and observation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member checking and the Mmogo-method™</td>
<td>Member checking</td>
<td>During the reflective groups members were constantly asked to clarify their description. The interpretation that the researcher linked to discussions was also clarified with the members. The Mmogo-method™ allowed the researcher to use first hand information given by the participants, excluding opportunity for interpretation, relying on the participants to clarify information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyses</td>
<td>Multiple methods</td>
<td>A phenomenological study was conducted as described by Welman et al. (2005) and data were analyzed accordingly. Thematic analysis of contextual data (Braun &amp; Clarke, 2006) and analysis of visual data occurred as described by Roos et al. (2008).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genres of representation</td>
<td>Multiple texts</td>
<td>The researcher provided a rich, detailed description of the research findings. These descriptions allowed for the creation of a holistic picture of the findings in a multiple-integrated manner thus sketching the realities as experienced by the participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paradigms</td>
<td>Rich, detailed descriptions</td>
<td>Contrasting findings as constructed themes and patterns allow the researcher to interpret accounts to produce knowledge on multiple levels – mostly in line with constructivist and post-positivist perspectives. This does not exclude the concept of an objective reality but rather shows multiple ways of knowing about the phenomenon. This was supported by the phenomenological nature of the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher reflections</td>
<td>Reflexivity</td>
<td>The researcher and co-facilitator of the reflective group kept field notes in which they recorded their experience of the research process, their observations and their assumptions – forming an important part of being aware of their own ideas. Throughout the processes described, the researcher was encouraged to consider how his perceptions might influence the findings. By keeping track of emotions, observations and notes, the researcher could evaluate any possible bias he had towards a particular finding or response. This made him conscious of his role as a researcher and his responsibility to confirm the true meanings participants gave to their projections and not include his own interpretations thereof.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Ethical Issues

This research project was conducted under the title approved by the Ethics Committee of the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, namely: An exploration of enabling contexts. The ethical number is: NWU/0005/10/s1. Permission to conduct the study was also obtained from the individual
participants – their informed and written consent were a priority. Participation was voluntary, and all information was treated confidentially. The participants’ names were not made known in the final research report, and the data received from the participants were handled only by people (the researcher and his supervisor) who adhere to the ethical code of conduct. The participants were told they could withdraw at any stage during the research.

**Results**

Themes and subthemes that emerged during the thematic analysis are outlined in the table below and are subsequently discussed in detail.

**Table 2: Themes and subthemes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenges associated with caring for grandchildren</td>
<td>Difficulty to discipline grandchildren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tiredness due to caring for grandchildren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping with challenges associated with caring for grandchildren</td>
<td>Existential relationship with God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intergenerational relationships</td>
<td>Nostalgia about previous generational relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ambivalence in relation to grandchildren</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Challenges associated with caring for grandchildren.**

The challenges that grandmothers experience emerged on a physical and emotional level, as well as in the lack of resources.

**Difficulty to discipline grandchildren.** The physical disciplining of children is challenging for grandmothers due to their diminishing physical strength and mobility. The following two quotes support the physical difficulty that the grandmothers experience:
Then I think of the days when I could still give a hiding, now I cannot anymore because my arm hurts – now I keep my hands ready, I wring today, I pinch him today (P3). The one is too fast for me . . . then I waited for her, she has to come past me. If she goes out the door I can catch her, then she looks which way she can go to, then I throw her with the shoe (P4).

**Tiredness due to caring for grandchildren.** It is tiresome for grandmothers to take care of their grandchildren due to the physical demands that it requires. In the following quote, one of the grandmothers (P5) explicitly describes the overwhelming task of caring for a number of grandchildren and emphasizes that her tiredness is due to her age that limits her physical strength. She says: *I have eight grandchildren in the little house, they are 17, 15, 14, 11, 12 and it is difficult with them in my house. There is no lacking of love, but I am at that stage where I am tired.*

Another grandmother (P6) referred to her tiredness and made a picture of her house that is empty. According to her she just wants to be alone now without having to care for her grandchildren (figure 1).

![Figure 1: Empty house without any grandchildren to care for](image)

In a study conducted by Mudavanhu et al. (2008) grandmothers also indicated that they experienced difficulty due to the physicality of taking care for their grandchildren and that it led to tiredness. Winefield and Air (2010) confirm the effect of physical caring for grandchildren on grandparents as it lessens the available time to care for themselves and may contribute to their tiredness. The resulting tiredness was contradictory to findings of a study done by Kaufman and Elder (2003) where it was found that those grandparents who experienced grandparenting and enjoyed it, felt younger than those who did not. The sample, however, was grandparents with affluent backgrounds and who were not the primary caretakers of their grandchildren. The grandmothers from the Groenheuwel sample do not
have the luxury of only “enjoying” their grandchildren, but act as primary caretakers who experience this responsibility as tiresome at their old age.

The grandmothers feel that they have done enough by raising their own children. However, at their old age they now have to look after their grandchildren as well. It thus feels as if the process of caring for children does not end and is experienced as tiresome.

One of the grandmothers (P6) stated:

_I worked for eleven years and during those eleven years I raised three children from their mother’s womb . . . the problem that I have is that my grandchild is away in the evenings – he will sleep the whole afternoon and then he returns at ten in the evening and then he wants to do homework. That time is time to sleep because tomorrow I have to be ready._

This grandmother indicated that she had to sit up late with her grandchild to help him with his homework. This was tiresome for her to do, especially because she has to get up early every morning to get everything ready for her grandchild to go to school. She should have been retired after raising three children of her own, but now, at her age, she has to care for her grandchildren as well. Two other grandmothers also stated this ongoing process of caring for grandchildren under difficult circumstances and indicated that they are tired thereof: _Times are hard, it is not nice. It cannot go on like this_ (P8). _I am turning 61. I am tired_ (P5).

_Lack of resources._ Lack of resources refers to little financial support that grandmothers receive as a pension from the state, a lack in general material resources and the lack of food. Although some of the grandmothers are married, the majority are single and sometimes have to run a household for up to eight grandchildren. In some cases the grandmothers also need to care for their children who are unemployed and who do not contribute to the household or the caring of the grandchildren. One of the grandmothers cares for a disabled grandchild without the necessary financial support. The following direct quotes indicate the lack of financial resources that the grandmothers experience: _I have three bedrooms . . . I have eight grandchildren in the house . . . and it is difficult with them in my house_ (P5).
**It is difficult times, it is not nice. There are still four children in the house, sometimes there is nothing in the house, then I need to cook porridge because those children are hungry, it cannot go on like this. My money is not enough** (P8).

One of the grandmothers (P8) made her house as a projection, indicating the emptiness and lack of resources (figure 2)

![Figure 2: Empty house indicating lack of resources](image)

The challenges regarding financial difficulty for grandmothers who care for their grandchildren is confirmed by Mudavanhu, et al. (2008) who found that grandmothers who care for AIDS orphaned grandchildren experienced great financial difficulty. Economic disadvantages for grandparents who care for grandchildren are also highlighted as a reality by Park (2005) and Kelly, Whitley and Campos (2010).

In a study by Devine and Earle (2011) grandparents identified direct and indirect financial costs as the primary need for support in order to care for their grandchildren. In another study done by Kruger, Lekalakala-Mokgele and Wentzel-Viljoen (2011) – based on a sample of 134 urban and rural elderly men and 198 women who looked after children other than their own – only ten men and 13 women indicated that they received a child grant from the government to assist in caring for these children. In view of the current insufficient support for older people, the Department of Social Development (Provincial Government of the Western Cape, 2011) has set itself the goal of ensuring that by 2017 all older people will have access to information about their rights, the range of services available to them and how to access these services. According to Alpaslan and Mabutho (2005) elderly grandmothers of orphans also experience difficulty with government aid.
Some of the grandmothers indicated that the parents of their grandchildren do have money, but the contributions they make are not enough to care for the grandchildren. In some cases the children do not contribute at all to the household of the grandmothers that would enable them to care for their grandchildren. Three grandmothers stated:

*The children stay with me now. They pay R300 rent and they are supposed to pay R500* (P7).

*[My son] loans money and gives to other people, but he does not bring anything home. I struggle where I am now* (P11).

*The money that the grandchild’s father makes is not used for food. I am also disabled and it is not the only grandchild* (P12).

The lack of finances is also reflected in the absence of food. Findings by Clacherty (2008) show that elderly-headed households often lack money to provide in basic needs like food. Eke (2003) also states that situations where elderly people care for grandchildren may lead to financial stress and a lack of resources to provide in food.

**Coping with challenges associated with caring for grandchildren**

Even though the grandmothers indicated that it is extremely difficult for them to care for their grandchildren, the results show that all grandmothers coped due to their existential relationship with God and their relationships with supportive community members.

*Existential relationship with God.* All 12 grandmothers confirmed the importance of their relationship with God. They see their relationship with God as close and will obey Him, even in difficult circumstances. Two grandmothers responded as follows:

*I feel that the Lord does not want me to put down my cross nor chop it down and I will carry my cross until the Lord come to take me away* (P8).

*It is only the Lord that keeps me here, otherwise I would have gone long ago* (P11).

The grandmothers see their circumstances as their “crosses to bear” and that it is only God that enables them to do it. This empowerment by the Cross manifested strongly through the projection (figure
3) of one of the grandmothers (P12). According to her, her thoughts about God and the cross stimulated her to make the picture. She stated: *The cross will carry me through.*

![Cross symbolising burden](image)

Figure 3: Cross that symbolises the burden that one of the grandmothers is bearing

This awareness of God’s positive and strengthening role in their lives was a theme that was consistent throughout the whole of the reflective group discussion. It was evident that the grandmothers greatly relied on their spirituality to help them cope with their circumstances. This dependence on spirituality correlates with the study done by Mudavanhu, et al. (2008) where it was found that grandmothers depended on their spirituality in order to cope with their difficult circumstances in caring for grandchildren. Most grandmothers in their study mentioned the supportive role of prayer, song and faith. This supportive role was also evident in this study when the grandmothers sang a spiritual song, “We are going to Canaan”, while making the visual projections.

Part of the belief in God manifested as a collective belief. The grandmothers feel that it is especially their faith as coloured people that carry them through their hardship. They thus had a shared goal, which is to get through the hardship together. According to Wray (2001) a collective belief is adopted by a group of people who realize that they share a common goal. This feeling of collective belief was confirmed by the following response:

*We are coloured people with faith. . . the Lord takes care of us in our faith and because we believe* (P11).

*It is not easy, the Lord is good for us* (P5).
Then I know that God provided . . . but it is the Lord who makes them give, so that we in turn can provide for our grandchildren . . . the Lord made gave us strength, especially the mothers in their sixties (P11).

It is only the Lord that keep us strong (P10).

**Community support.** It was evident from the responses that the grandmothers emphasize and value support from the community. The grandmothers are certain that it will not be possible to care for their grandchildren if it is not for the goodwill and moral support of others, and especially the people in their community. Two of the grandmothers stated:

*It is only the prayers of friends that keep us strong (P10).*

*Other people open their hearts, many times when I have nothing, then somebody else gives something to me, even though they actually do not have anything themselves (P11).*

The grandmothers also receive physical support from the community in the form of food. They stated that even though they themselves could not provide food at times, there would always be food on the table because of the support from the community. They stated:

*He met my sister’s daughter there and she sends a box full of vegetables and a packet with meat. Now I have to give to others who do not have (P2).*

*But the grandmothers who know how to take care, provide food for the grandchildren (P11).*

The above responses indicate an involved community. Grandmothers do not only care for their grandchildren, but also provide for others from the little that they have. Thomas (2011) mentions the term "community mothering" where she refers to the community investing in the welfare of its children. In her research it was found that grandmothers constantly referred to community involvement and how they would care for each others’ children. In another study conducted by Muller and Litwin (2011) on grandparenting and psychological well-being, it was found that 34% of 62% of grandparents who engaged in social activities were involved in their community by providing help to family, friends or neighbors.
Intergenerational relationships

Nostalgia about previous generational relationships. The nostalgia about previous generational relationships was evident throughout the group discussion. One of the grandmothers’ nostalgia motivated her to make her visual representation. Even though the initial question by the researcher was to make a visual representation that indicates their experiences with caring for their grandchildren, this grandmother made a picture of her own childhood when she was brought up by her grandparents. She stated: ... and then my grandmother was there, my father’s mother – I remember she always brought us lots of fruit in a green basket and then she sits on a bench, it was her bench (P1). The grandmothers constantly refer back to their own upbringing, which they describe positively. Some of the examples are: As I grew up, and I sit with them, but the connection [between us and the young generation] is not the same. My parents were very strict. We got hidings those days - the children of today do not get hidings (P1). Another confirmed: My mother never needed to talk so much, we were not so disobedient (P3). We were obedient (P2).

It was obvious that the grandmothers experience their upbringing as positive even though it was associated with corporal punishment. The relationships with their grandparents and the way they have been brought up provide very specific guidelines according to which they feel they have to raise their grandchildren. Somehow their nostalgia of the way they have been brought up dictate the manner in which they raise their grandchildren. Even though this manner of raising grandchildren does not seem to be efficient and influence their relationships with their grandchildren negatively, they find it difficult to alter their methods.

Ambivalence in relation to grandchildren. Ambivalence can be defined as “an attempt to account for the simultaneous coexistence and opposition of harmony and conflict in intergenerational relations” (Lüscher, 2002, p. 591). According to Luescher and Pillemer (1998) ambivalence is an important aspect in understanding intergenerational relationships. Feelings of ambivalence were evident regarding the grandmothers’ relationships with their grandchildren. The grandmothers care for and love their grandchildren but did not know how to handle the difficult behaviour of their grandchildren. The relationships with their grandchildren are being woven like a tapestry with nuances of ambivalence made
up of positive experiences, conflicting experiences, concerns and experiencing their grandchildren as disobedient.

**Positive experiences.**

All 12 grandmothers are committed to care for their grandchildren and to find means that will enable them to do so. This unselfish love is described by Fromm (1985) where he says that love is primarily about giving and not receiving. It is about care and concern, taking responsibility, precisely what the grandmothers are doing.

One of the grandmothers (P1) voiced this love when she stated that . . . *a grandmother is like this* – you talk to your grandchildren, in a while it is forgotten and then you need to discipline, it is about love, that is how it is. *I am a grandmother now but I do not worry, I love my children and I love my grandchildren.* Another grandmother (P5) stated: . . . *my two daughters were married and the marriages did not work, they moved back into the house with all the children . . . I love them and care for them . . .*

Responses from three of the grandmothers emphasized their love and dedication to care for their grandchildren even though it was under difficult circumstances. One of them (P6) takes care of her disobedient grandchildren because according to her, irrespectively of their disobedience, it is a good sign that they still need attention and love, and that they are not running around in the streets. She stated that *I thank the Lord that the children want attention even though they are disobedient.* Another grandmother (P9) keeps on taking her grandchildren in, even though they have parents, because she knows that they will get love and care from her, something that is lacking from the parents. According to her: . . . *my grandchildren are also with me, but I sent them to the mother, but they ran back to me and I cannot chase them away.* She raised the concern that they also would get raped or murdered if she had to send them back to their parents at night. Her grandchildren feel safer with their grandmother even though they have a mother. This loving and caring manner of grandmothers towards their grandchildren was echoed in the words of a daughter-in-law who stated that her children are safe with their grandmother who loves and cares for them (Pratt, Norris, Cressman, Lawford & Hebblethwaite, 2008). The strong bond of love was also evident in the statement of another grandmother (P3) who mentioned that she was grateful to still be
alive to care for her grandchildren. She said: . . . but I thank the Lord that I am still alive and capable of looking after the grandchildren.

However, the positive experiences of love and care as described above found a polarity in ambivalent feelings of conflicting experiences and concerns.

Conflicting experiences

The grandmothers talked about their current experiences in the light of what they have experienced as grandchildren themselves. The contrast between their own upbringing and that of their grandchildren stood out. One of the grandmothers (P1) mentioned that the connection between her and her grandchildren is not the same as between her and her grandparents. It is difficult for her to understand the behaviour of her grandchildren, because she did not behave in the same way when she was a child. This difference between generations is highlighted in a study done by Alpaslan and Mabutho (2005) where they found that grandmothers experienced their grandchildren as disobedient and the grandchildren experienced their grandmothers as not being capable of providing in their basic needs. The grandmothers also had conflicting experiences regarding their grandchildren, because on the one hand they experienced their grandchildren as disobedient, but on the other hand the grandmothers were concerned about their grandchildren.

Concern for grandchildren. Some of the grandmothers mentioned that they experience stress due to their concern for the physical safety of their grandchildren. Typical responses of concern were:

He causes me to lie awake at night. He walks about and has been robbed five times (P11).

You never sleep, you worry constantly (P9).

Then he says he is coming. Then he is gone. Then I wonder where he is now? Then I send the children to look for him because I want to know where he is (P3).

The results of a study by Baldock (2007) support the above concerns that grandmothers have regarding the physical safety of their grandchildren when acting as primary caregivers. The study showed that grandparents found it strenuous to care for their grandchildren because of concerns for the
grandchildren’s safety, especially with regards to drug and alcohol abuse. The above concerns are also confirmed by Kelly et al. (2011) who state that results of their study show that support is needed to reduce stress of grandmothers regarding their grandchildren’s safety. Mason, May and Clarke (2007) and Devine and Earle (2011) state that grandparents worry over their grandchildren’s safety.

Disobedience of grandchildren. The majority of the grandmothers (nine) indicated that they had to reprimand constantly, but that the grandchildren did not listen. One grandmother stated that: *I talk and talk. All the time. It stresses me, all those sorts of things* (P1).

Two of the grandmothers specifically complained about their grandchildren’s bad habits, for example smoking: *... he is very disobedient, he smokes dagga and comes in late. You can give him work to do, but he does not listen to me... he is under my roof now, but he is very disobedient* (P2). *... he is twelve now, he smokes a lot... he has not even finished eating yet then he says he will be back now, but then he is gone... it gets late then he is not back yet... My mother never needed to talk so much, we were not so disobedient* (P3).

The disobedience of her grandchild was so much on the foreground of one of the grandmothers (P2) that she made a picture of him when asked to make a picture that will tell something of her experiences of being the primary caregiver of the grandchildren in her care (figure 4).

![Figure 4: Grandchild that causes grandmother much stress](image)

Grandparents who experience their grandchildren as disobedient is no uncommon occurrence. According to Bailey (2011) almost all grandparents may experience grandchildren as disobedient at some point in time, which may bring about frustration. Kelly et al. (2011) state that such behaviour of
grandchildren concern grandmothers and contribute to the challenges that grandmothers may experience in order to provide a safe and stable home for their grandchildren.

**Implications of the Findings and Recommendations**

All the grandmothers experienced a significant amount of stress, either emotionally or physically. This presence of distress with grandmothers raising grandchildren is confirmed by research conducted by Kelly et al. (2010). In a study done by Hoff (2007) it was found that when intergenerational relationships between grandparents and grandchildren are affected negatively it is usually to the grandparents’ expense. However, the grandmothers did not solely experience stress and negative emotions regarding caring for their grandchildren, but rather experienced feelings of ambivalence. This ambivalence was made up of positive experiences, conflicting experiences, concerns and experiencing their grandchildren as disobedient. Feelings of ambivalence within the intergenerational relationship between grandmother and grandchild are confirmed by research studies on grandparents as caregivers where grandparents may experience their roles as rewarding (Turvett, 2006; Thiele & Whelan, 2008), but also as having a negative impact on their lives (Gerard, Landry-Meyer, & Guzell Roe, 2006; King, Kropf, Perkins, Sessley, Bert, & Lepore, 2009).

Lüscher (2005) confirms that intergenerational relationships usually require dealing with ambivalences. The grandmothers of this study experience difficult times caring for their grandchildren even though they are willing to take responsibility for taking care of them.

The grandmothers’ ambivalence seems to be embedded in the nostalgia that dictates the nature of the intergenerational relationships between themselves and their grandchildren. It is this nostalgia with the way that they have been raised that limits the intergenerational relationships with their grandchildren. The grandmothers apply what they have learned and find it difficult to make changes that will be of benefit to their relationships with their grandchildren. This inability to change by implication makes it difficult for the grandmothers to persevere with taking care of their grandchildren.

One implication of the study could be that grandmothers in Groenheuwel need emotional and physical support in order to sufficiently care for their grandchildren. Needs have been voiced and follow-
up work is necessary to put support systems in place for these grandmothers. The grandmothers have been
given the opportunity to share their experiences, but could be left disempowered if there is no response
that will help them overcome their challenges.

The results of the study show that the grandmothers already receive support from each other and
the community. It is suggested that support groups are started within the community for grandmothers
who care for their grandchildren, focussing on empowerment strategies such as understanding the
developmental phase of your grandchild and to apply more appropriate disciplining styles. The strengths
and coping strategies of grandmothers should also be supported. The support of the community may also
be utilised to strengthen intergenerational relationships between grandmothers and the grandchildren in
their care. Meetings could be held where elders and other significant role players in the community could
provide a platform from which the voices of both older and younger generations could be heard. Such
meetings could not only strengthen the relationships between grandmothers and their grandchildren, but
also the solidarity of the community itself.

Emotional support should be made available in the form of individual and/or group counselling
sessions. In addition to support for the grandmothers, programs could be developed where the
grandchildren could be involved in order to make them aware of the valuable relationships they have with
their grandmothers and that these relationships should be cherished. According to Oppong (2006) there is
a widespread destabilization of customary relations and respect between generations. Biggs (2008) is of
opinion that an intergenerational space should be created, where two generations need to meet. This space
needs to be negotiated and the experiences of both generations direct the negotiations. If the
intergenerational relationship could be healed a better quality of life could be assured for both the
grandparents and their grandchildren (Lowenstein & Katz, 2010) and such relationships may influence
the quality of life of families. Intergenerational interactive groups could be held in order to support these
grandmothers and their grandchildren to experience love and caring more than just as functional
activities. According to Fromm (1985) love is active and not passive. However, all grandmothers
experienced their love as functional, in that they are caring for their grandchildren. This functional loving
role is emphasized by the results of a study done by Soliz (2008) where it was found that grandparents may not be automatically emotionally supportive by nature, but viewed their role as more supportive in nature, taking up responsibility. This awareness of love and caring being more than just functional could also escalate towards the greater community.

One aspect that stood out in this study is the grandmothers’ strong belief in God and that their willingness to care for their grandchildren under difficult circumstances greatly relies on their view of what God expects of them. The grandmothers strongly believe that caring for their grandchildren is a responsibility that has been given to them by God and therefore He will provide in their needs. Caring for their grandchildren are their crosses to bear and they will persist as long as they feel that God expects them to do so. Even though they are old and tired, constantly lack resources and would rather just be at home and enjoy their retirement, they will persist in this task that they believe is a God given one.

**Limitation of the study**

There is no doubt that the grandmothers who participated in the study undergo an extreme amount of stress due to the responsibility of caring for their grandchildren. They have all found empowerment to deal with these situations in knowing that they love their children and grandchildren, that they will be supported by their community and that God will give them the strength do go on caring for their grandchildren. Nevertheless, these grandmothers experience hardship and stress and should be empowered in any possible way in order to bring about balance in their lives and provide them with emotional, psychological and physical support. However, more research is needed in this specific community about the nature of the intergenerational relationships. The small sample of the study does not make it possible for results to be generalized to other communities.

**Conclusion**

Grandmothers find it difficult to care for their grandchildren, as it seems not to be possible to do it similarly to the way they have been brought up. This leads to ambivalence within the intergenerational relationship. Although there seems to be great challenges to overcome, these grandmothers have developed interpersonal and intrapersonal coping skills in order to stand strong against expectations that
might at times be overwhelming. This study showed that the grandmothers in the Groenheuwel community especially find support within the community and their relationship with God.
References


Instructions for authors

Aims and Scope: Through a variety of disciplines and a blend of scholarly and clinical articles, the Journal of Women & Aging provides practitioners, educators, researchers, and administrators with a comprehensive guide to the unique challenges facing women in their later years.

Submission of Manuscripts: Authors are requested to submit manuscripts, in triplicate, to the Editor-in-Chief of Journal of Women & Aging, Dianne Garner, at the following email address: diannegarner@verizon.net. Each manuscript must be accompanied by a statement that it has not been published elsewhere and that it has not been submitted simultaneously for publication elsewhere. Authors are responsible for obtaining permission to reproduce copyrighted material from other sources and are required to sign an agreement for the transfer of copyright to the publisher. All accepted manuscripts, artwork, and photographs become the property of the publisher. All parts of the manuscript should be typewritten, double-spaced, with margins of at least one inch on all sides. Number manuscript pages consecutively throughout the paper. Authors should also supply a shortened version of the title suitable for the running head, not exceeding 50 character spaces. Each article should be summarized in an abstract of not more than 100 words. Avoid abbreviations, diagrams, and reference to the text in the abstract.


Illustrations. Illustrations submitted (line drawings, halftones, photos, photomicrographs, etc.) should be clean originals or digital files. Digital files are recommended for highest quality reproduction and should follow these guidelines:

- 300 dpi or higher
- Sized to fit on journal page
- EPS, TIFF, or PSD format only
- Submitted as separate files, not embedded in text files

Color Illustrations. Color illustrations will be considered for publication; however, the author will be required to bear the full cost involved in color art reproduction. Color art can be purchased for online only reproduction or for print + online reproduction. Color reprints can only be ordered if print + online reproduction costs are paid. Rates for color art reproduction are: Online Only Reproduction: $225 for the first page of color; $100 per page for the next three pages of color. A maximum charge of $525 applies. Print + Online Reproduction: $900 for the first page of color; $450 per page for the next three pages of color. A custom quote will be provided for articles with more than four pages of color. Art not supplied at a minimum of 300 dpi will not be considered for print.

Tables and Figures. Tables and figures (illustrations) should not be embedded in the text, but should be included as separate sheets or files. A short descriptive title should appear above each table with a clear legend and any footnotes suitably identified below. All units must be included. Figures should be completely labeled, taking into account necessary size reduction. Captions should be typed, double-spaced, on a separate sheet.
**Proofs.** Page proofs are sent to the designated author using Taylor & Francis’ Central Article Tracking System (CATS). They must be carefully checked and returned within 48 hours of receipt.

**Reprints and Issues.** Reprints of individual articles are available for order at the time authors review page proofs. A discount on reprints is available to authors who order before print publication. Each corresponding author will receive 3 complete issues in which the article publishes and a complimentary PDF. This file is for personal use only and may not be copied and disseminated in any form without prior written permission from Taylor and Francis Group, LLC.