

Kids living with grandparents

Living in a grandparent's home varies by demographics and area

By **LIZ BROOKS**

Nearly 7 percent of Alaska children lived in a grandparent's home between 2011 and 2015. Most of the time, though, at least one of the child's parents was also living there. Only about 1 percent of all Alaska children were being raised by their grandparents without a parent present, known as a "skipped generation" household.

About 86 percent of children living in a grandparent's home in Alaska lived there with their parents. But whether a parent was present or not, a grandparent was the primary caregiver for about 55 percent.

Most Alaska children who live in a grandparent's home are younger, and 51 percent are under age 6.

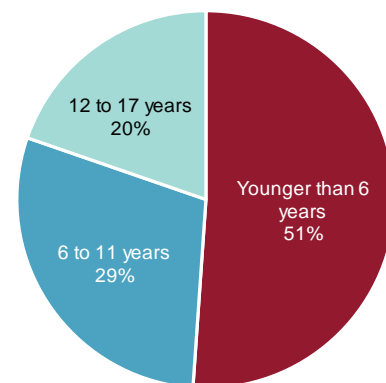
(See Exhibit 1.) Newborns are especially likely to live in a grandparent's home.

(For more on the growing trend of grandparents living with grandchildren nationwide, see the sidebar on page 10.)

About 12,800 children in Alaska live in a grandparent's home. But a parent typically lives there, too.

1 These Grandchildren Are Usually Younger

ALASKA, 2011 TO 2015



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

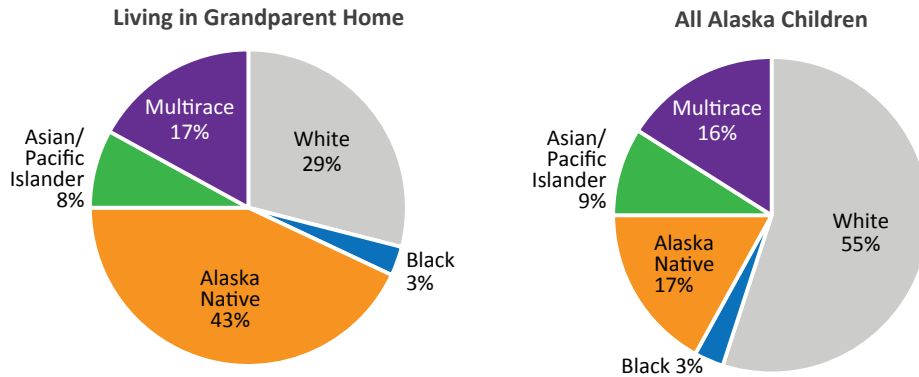
Common for Alaska Native homes

While some children live with grandparents because they need extra care, the reasons can also be economic, related to recent immigration, or cultural.

In Alaska, it's especially common for Alaska Native children to live with their grandparents. Native children make up 17 percent of all children in the state but represent 43 percent of those who live in a grandparent's home. (See Exhibit 2.)

2 Many Native Children Live in Grandparent's Home

ALASKA CHILDREN BY RACE, 2011 TO 2015



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

In some Native cultures, grandparents adopt their grandchildren — formally or informally — more frequently than the general population. In fact, Alaska leads the nation for its proportion of adopted children, at 4 percent versus 2 percent nationally.

This suggests the numbers of Alaska children living

with a grandparent may be even higher than shown here. A Census Bureau ethnographer found in 2000, for example, that Inupiaq respondents who had adopted one or more of their grandchildren tended to mark “adopted child” rather than “grandchild” when filling out census forms.

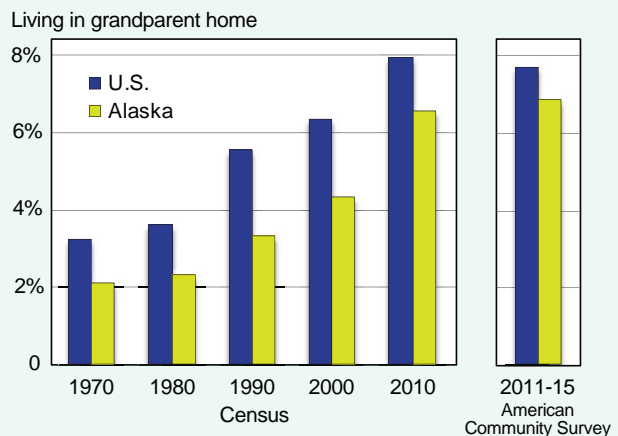
A growing trend nationwide

In Alaska and the nation as a whole, the percentage of children who live with grandparents has steadily increased for decades. The nearly 7 percent of Alaska children who lived in a grandparent's home between 2011 and 2015 was triple what it was in 1970. Nationally, 8 percent of children lived in a grandparent's home as of the most recent census, up from 3 percent in 1970.

A variety of social, economic, and demographic factors is likely driving the increase. A major factor is that more Americans are grandparents than ever before because of the large baby boomer generation, or those born between 1946 and 1964.

The youngest baby boomers turned 50 in 2014, creating what the *New York Times* called “an exceptionally large pool of potential grandparents.” That year, 60 percent of adults over 30 who had a child that was at least 15 were grandparents, and 10 percent had grandchildren living with them. In 2001, just 38 percent of women and 31 percent of men in that category were grandparents.

Some academic literature also point to a 1979 U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Miller v. Youakim*, which made grandparents eligible to receive payment for taking care of their grandchildren in lieu of other foster care, although the growth trend began before that decision and has continued at a steady rate since.



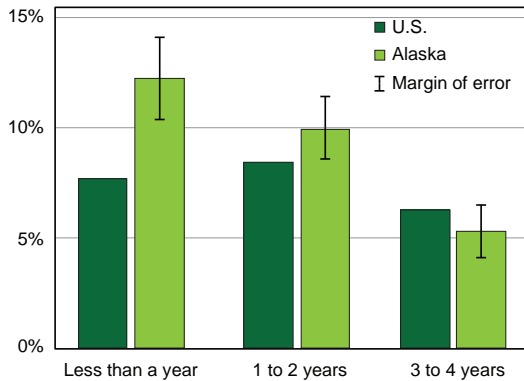
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The Alaska Office of Children's Services prioritizes placing children with a relative whenever possible. According to OCS, almost 500 of the 3,000 children in foster care in Alaska as of March 2017 were placed with a grandparent or great-grandparent, representing 16 percent of children in foster care and 4 percent of all children who live in their grandparent's home.

The percentage of Alaska children in foster care who are placed with a grandparent has remained fairly steady, fluctuating between 14 and 18 percent since 2008, the first year for which reliable data are available.

3 Average Time Responsible

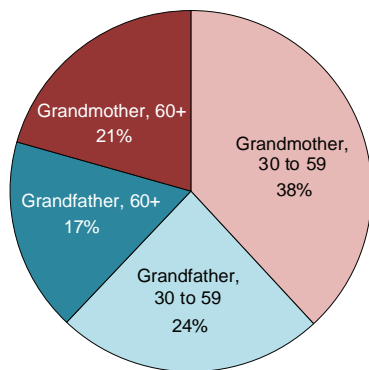
U.S., ALASKA GRANDPARENTS, 2011-15



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

4 Primary Caregivers Are Usually Grandmothers

ALASKA, AGE AND SEX, 2011-15



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

The same research also found that the composition of Inupiaq households is especially fluid, changing throughout the year to accommodate family members' seasonal activities, employment, schooling, and other needs. That fluidity fits with the overall finding that when grandparents in Alaska are responsible for their grandchildren, they tend to be responsible for shorter durations than the national averages, as shown in Exhibit 3.

More in Western and Northern Alaska

The percentages by region fit this pattern as well. Larger percentages of children live with their grand-

Which homes are included

Children and grandparents live together in a variety of family scenarios and for different reasons, but here we focus solely on children who live in a grandparent's home – that is, where the grandparent has been identified as the householder on census forms.

This encompasses the majority of children who live in the same home as a grandparent — 60 percent in 2016, according to the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. The other 40 percent lived in multigenerational households (at least three generations of a family living together) where one of the child's parents was the householder. Even though a grandparent may still be a child's primary caregiver in these homes, they are outside the scope of this article.

Most of this article's data come from the American Community Survey, an ongoing nationwide survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. Each year, the Census Bureau selects 12,000 Alaska households to respond to its survey, which includes the questions shown below.

According to the Census Bureau, "Older Americans are often in different financial, housing, and health circumstances than those in middle age. Estimates about these grandparents help many federal programs understand the needs of this group and design programs that assist both generations."

State and local agencies also use these statistics to plan programs and services, and advocacy groups use them to structure community support.

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a. Does this person have any of his/her own grandchildren under the age of 18 living in this house or apartment?

Yes
 No → SKIP to question 26

b. Is this grandparent currently responsible for most of the basic needs of any grandchildren under the age of 18 who live in this house or apartment?

Yes
 No → SKIP to question 26

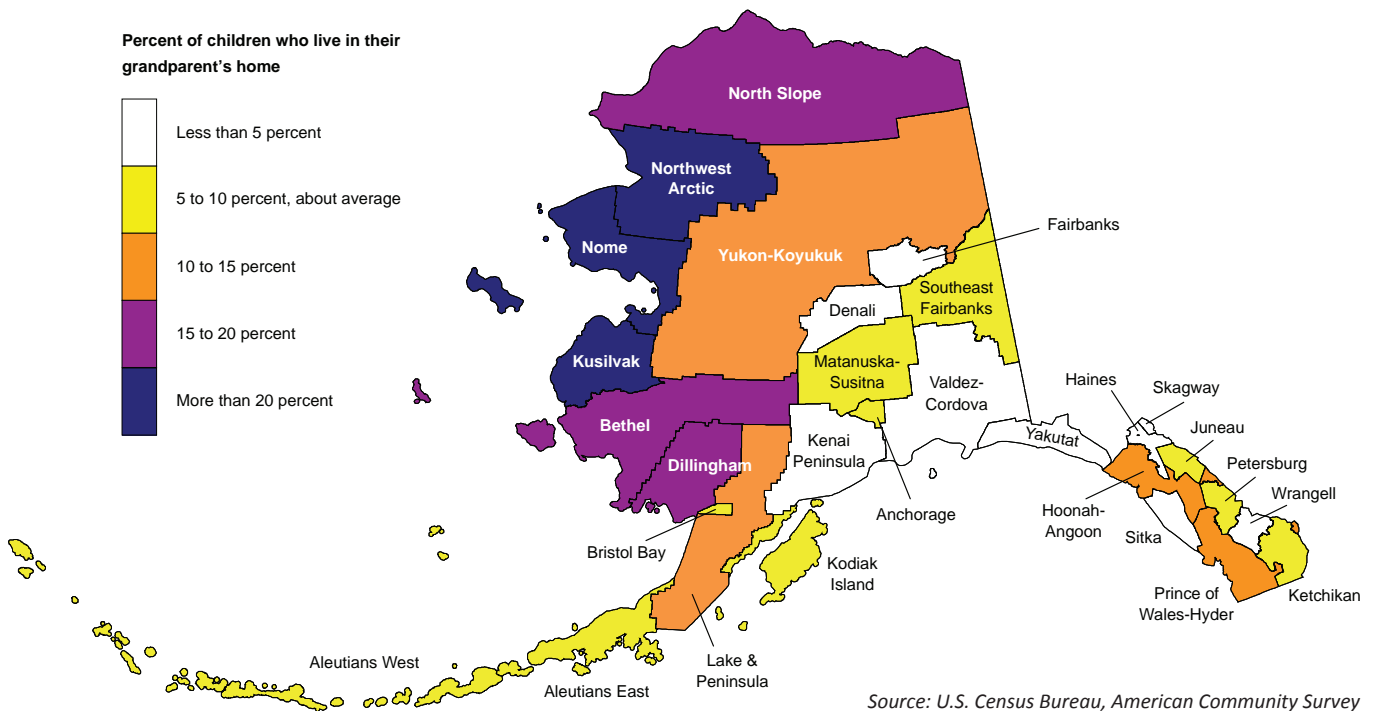
c. How long has this grandparent been responsible for these grandchildren?
If the grandparent is financially responsible for more than one grandchild, answer the question for the grandchild for whom the grandparent has been responsible for the longest period of time.

Less than 6 months
 6 to 11 months
 1 or 2 years
 3 or 4 years
 5 or more years

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

5 Percent of Children Living in a Grandparent's Home, by Area

ALASKA, 2011 TO 2015



Further reading

Complex Ethnic Households in America, edited by Laurel Schwede, Rae Lesser Blumberg, and Anna Y. Chan. Published in 2005 by Rowan & Littlefield.

Coresident Grandparents and Their Grandchildren: 2012, by Renee R. Ellis and Tavia Simmons. Published in 2014 by the U.S. Census Bureau and available online at www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2014/demo/p20-576.pdf.

Complex Households and Relationships in the Decennial Census and in Ethnographic Studies in Six Race/Ethnic Groups, by Laurie Schwede. Published in 2003 by the U.S. Census Bureau and available online at www.census.gov/pred/www/rpts/Complex%20Households%20Final%20Report.pdf.

More grandparent facts: <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2016/cb16-ff17.html>.

parents in Western and Northern Alaska, whose populations are largely Alaska Native. Over 20 percent of children in Northwest Arctic Borough, Kusilvak Census Area, and Nome Census Area, for example, live with a grandparent. (See Exhibit 5.)

At the opposite end, it's 1 percent or less in the Denali Borough, Skagway, and Wrangell. Southeast Alaska is largely white, and white children are considerably less likely to live with their grandparents, both in Alaska and nationwide. Southeast's population is also much older on average than the rest of the state, so while it's home to more potential grandparents, the region is also home to proportionally few grandchildren.

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