

Disadvantage, discrimination, resilience:

the lives of kinship families

Contents

1. Key findings	2
2. Introduction	4
3. About the kinship carers	6
4. About the children	9
5. Stigma and discrimination	15
6. Conclusions	19
7. Policy recommendations	20
8. Notes and references	21

Graphs

Graph 1: Age of kinship carers	6
Graph 2: Were you able to take any leave when the children moved in?	7
Graph 3: Main sources of income of kinship carers	8
Graph 4: Average weekly net household income (including benefits and after tax)	8
Graph 5: Ages of children	9
Graph 6: Children with disabilities and special needs, as reported by carers	10
Graph 7: Reason(s) why the child came to live with the kinship carer	10
Graph 8: Words most commonly mentioned when asked why it is harder to raise kinship children	12
Graph 9: Biggest challenges in raising kinship children	13
Graph 10: Which professional support did you seek out?	14
Graph 11: By whom do you think you may have you been treated rudely, differently, stigmatised or discriminated against because you are a kinship carer?	17
Graph 12: In what way do you/ your family feel you are treated unfavourably or stigmatised?	18
Graph 13: Who do you turn to for advice and support to help you deal with your kinship children's emotional and behavioural needs?	18

1. Key findings

90%

of kinship carers who responded to our survey say bringing up a kinship child is more challenging than raising their own child

43%

of kinship carers who responded feel they have been treated rudely, differently, stigmatised or discriminated against because they are a kinship carer

- 90% of kinship carers who responded to our survey say bringing up a kinship child is more challenging than raising their own child.
- 77% of kinship carers have asked for professional support of whom only 33% received the help they needed. 30% say they didn't get any support, and although 37% got some support it didn't meet their needs. Many just get on with it on their own.
- 43% of kinship carers who responded feel they have been treated rudely, differently, stigmatised or discriminated against because they are a kinship carer. 28% report being treated badly by a social worker, 22% by parents at school and 16% by neighbours or friends.
- Six in ten (59%) of kinship carers who responded are bringing up a kinship child with a disability or special needs. 48% are bringing up a child with emotional or behavioural difficulties.
- Abuse and neglect (51%) and parental substance misuse (47%) are the most commonly cited reasons why children are in kinship care.
- Kinship carers say they most commonly turn to their partner, other kinship carers, another family member or Grandparents Plus for advice and support.

4 in 10

are living on £300 a week or less

42%

of respondents have a long term health condition or disability

3 in 10

are also providing care for an elderly or disabled relative or friend

- Nine in 10 of our survey respondents are grandparents, 92% are women and 87% are under 65.
- Four in 10 are living on £300 a week or less.
- 42% of respondents have a long term health condition or disability.
- Kinship carers experience significantly lower levels of personal wellbeing than population averages, scoring just 22.6 on the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale compared with the population average of 25.2. Those on the lowest incomes, raising children with learning disabilities or with other caring responsibilities experience particularly low levels of wellbeing.
- Three in 10 (31%) are also providing care for an elderly or disabled relative or friend.
- 42% of kinship carers stopped working to care for a kinship child and a further 23% reduced their hours. 46% of those who gave up work are now dependent on welfare benefits. 38% say a break from work might have enabled them to remain in work.
- Most of the survey respondents are raising primary school aged children.

2. Introduction

I am looked at as if I am to blame for the children's problems.

I was told that, as the children were placed in a stable environment, they weren't considered a 'top priority'. Apparently there is no crisis avoidance in place for these children, just crisis management.

People think it's easy, or that you should not let the family situation affect previous friendships. It's been hard to maintain some long term friendships. They have time, money and grown-up kids. I have no time no money and loads of kids.

Context

Kinship care in the UK

There are around 200,000 grandparents, older siblings, aunts, uncles and other relatives in the UK bringing up 200,000 - 300,000 children¹ because their parents are unable to. This is often due to serious difficulties such as death, drug or alcohol abuse, disability or serious illness, imprisonment, domestic violence, or abuse and neglect. These carers are known as 'kinship' or 'family and friends' carers. Many of the children they are raising would be in care if their relative had not stepped in. Research has indicated that 95% of these children are not 'looked after'².

Since the implementation of the Children Act 1989 local authorities have been required to arrange for looked after children to live with family and friends where that is consistent with their welfare, and the Children and Young People's Act 2008 states that family and friends care should be the first option when children cannot live with their parents. This principle was restated in Statutory Guidance to local authorities on Family and Friends Care, published in April 2011.

Research has shown that kinship families are at disproportionate risk of disadvantage compared with others in the population. Analysis of Census data indicates that 71% of kinship children experience multiple deprivation (two or more forms of deprivation), compared with 29% in the general population³. The analysis also showed that kinship carers, especially grandmothers, have high rates of long-term illness or disability.

Kinship families: challenges of bringing up children and discrimination

This is the first survey focussing on the challenges faced by kinship carers in bringing up children and their experience of discrimination and stigma. These are difficult areas to explore in an objective way, as they are inherently subjective. Nevertheless, many kinship carers say they or the children they are raising have experienced being treated rudely, differently, stigmatised or discriminated against because they are a kinship family. Almost all kinship carers find bringing up kinship children more difficult than bringing up their own children.

Previous reports and media coverage have focused on kinship carers who are discriminated against when compared to those placed with stranger foster carers. For example, in 2012 a petition was lodged with Glasgow Council by a group of kinship carers who claimed that the children in their care were victims of institutionalised discrimination by the City Council⁴, on the basis that families where children were placed in foster care received more practical and financial help than they did. In November 2013, the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) reported that kinship carers were receiving unfair treatment from their local authority. Stories cited include hundreds of kinship carers in a single council being denied the correct financial allowances and children being placed at increased risk because of failure to properly assess a suitable family placement⁵.

However, the issue of discrimination in a broader context has not yet been examined. This report aims to give an insight into how the lives of kinship families are affected by stigma and discrimination.

My children were invited to play dates that were cancelled after the other children's parents started discussing our family in the playground.

From Foundation Year my grandson has been bullied by the same three children, their parents voice their opinions on our situation, and the children repeat this to my grandson, he has been told he must have been bad, his parents don't want him, he is ugly, no one likes him.

Methodology

This report is based on a survey of the 2,500 members of the Grandparents Plus Support Network for kinship carers funded by the Big Lottery Fund. Membership of the Network is free and open to all kinship carers. Members are mostly recruited by word of mouth, online and also through contact with our Advice Service. Others are recruited via their membership of local support groups for kinship carers.

The survey was carried out in summer 2014, using both postal questionnaires and an online version on Survey Monkey. We received 354 valid responses, covering 529⁶ children, (a response rate of 14%). These were cleaned to remove obvious errors and inconsistencies and the paper responses were logged on Survey Monkey.

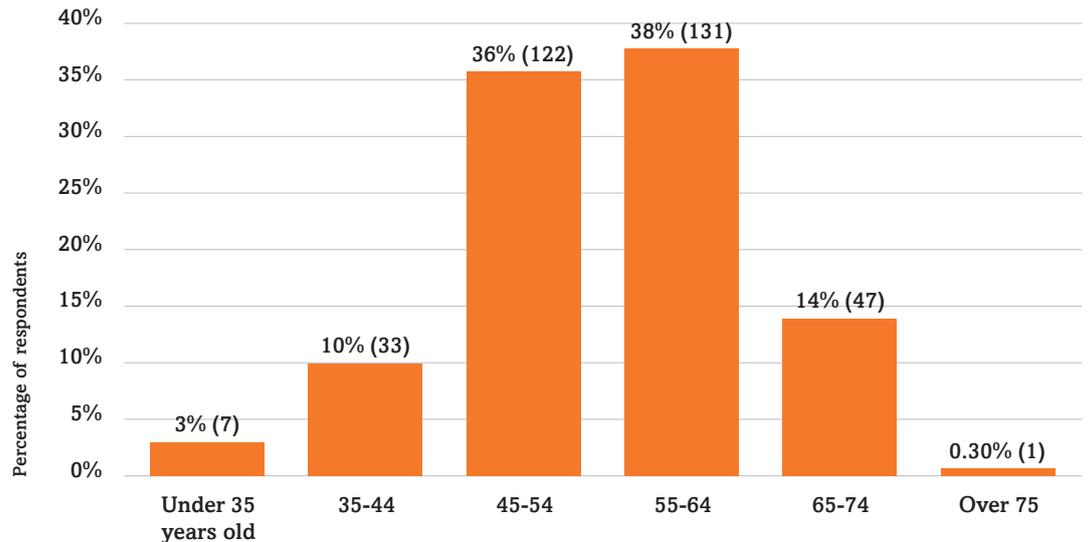
In comparison with data on kinship carers from the analysis of 2001 Census data⁷, it is clear that kinship carers who are not grandparents are heavily under-represented in our survey, as are men and people from ethnic minorities. It is also likely that kinship carers who have only been in a full-time caring role for a short period are also under-represented, along with kinship carers from the most marginalised and vulnerable social groups, for example those caring for the children of prisoners and people from traveller communities.

3. About the kinship carers

Demographic information

Over nine out of 10 kinship carers responding to the survey are grandparents. The majority are maternal grandparents (58%). 87% are of working age (under 65). Almost all (92%) are women. 96% of respondents are white.

Graph 1: Age of kinship carers



Response rate: 342 (97%).

42%

of respondents have a long term health condition or disability

The seven item Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) was used to assess respondents' wellbeing. Overall, kinship carers score significantly below average.

Disability, wellbeing and caring responsibilities

Four in ten (42%) kinship carers who responded have a disability or health condition. In England, long-term conditions are more prevalent in older people (58 % of people over 60 compared to 14 % under 40) and in more deprived groups (people in the poorest social class have a 60 per cent higher prevalence than those in the richest social class and 30 % more severity of disease)⁸.

I'm older, health issues...not as much energy or patience. Kinship carer

The seven item Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) was used to assess respondents' wellbeing. Overall, kinship carers score significantly below average with a mean score of 22.59 compared with a national average of 25.16 ($p < 0.001$). Respondents are particularly likely to say they rarely feel relaxed, or close to other people, and that they lack optimism about the future. However, they are more positive about their ability to make decisions. Kinship carers who have a health condition or disability have particularly low scores, with a mean of 21.84.

Three in 10 respondents (31%) also provide care for someone else (for example their partner, an older relative or a neighbour). In comparison, the 2011 Census shows just over one tenth of the population provide unpaid care for someone.⁹ Kinship carers who are also providing unpaid care for an adult have low wellbeing scores, with a mean of 22.01.

I have to care for my mother and disabled daughter alongside my disabled granddaughter. Being older, this puts immense pressure on me. Grandmother aged 45 to 54 raising granddaughter.

42%

of kinship carers say they have quit their job or stopped working to care for a kinship child

Work

42%¹⁰ of kinship carers say they have quit their job or stopped working to care for a kinship child. A further 23% reduced their hours. 20% of kinship carers felt they couldn't ask their employer for leave when the children moved in and 8% were turned down. 38% of kinship carers felt being entitled to take a break from work might have enabled them to remain in work. Of those who gave up work, 28% didn't feel they could ask for leave when children moved in and 15% asked for leave and were turned down.

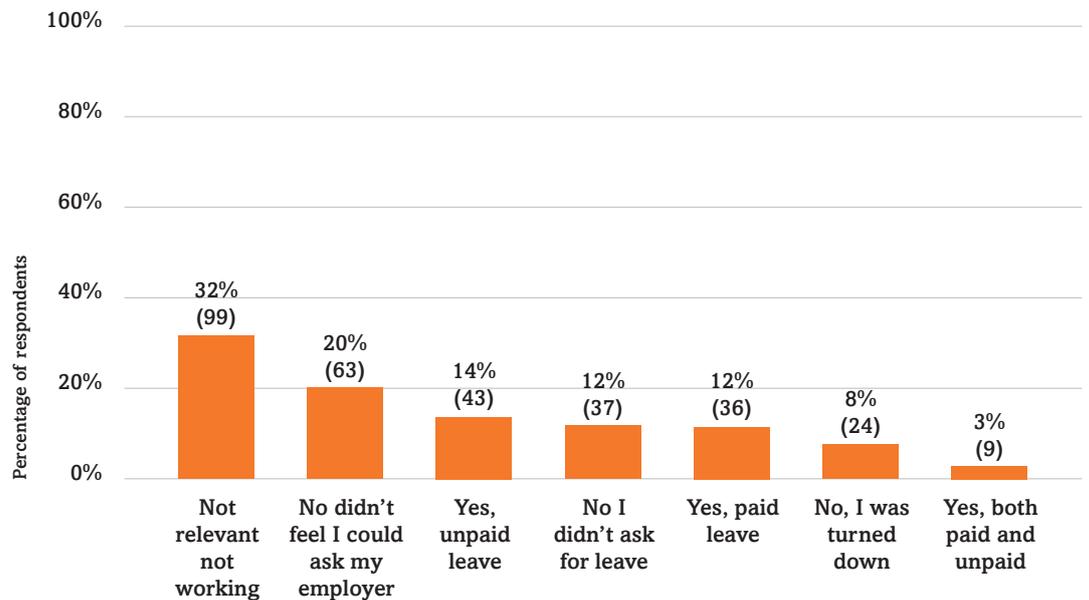
Due to having him I had to give up work and find it hard financially. He has ADHD, I am 55 and find it hard work. *Grandmother raising grandson.*

I was sacked from work as my commitment to my grandchild became my priority. My boss didn't want me to change how I worked. *Grandmother aged 45 to 54 raising grandchild.*

My employer thought I should go on benefits as she said I wouldn't be able to cope with a young baby and a job as I am sole carer for my grandson. *Grandmother aged 45 to 54 raising grandson.*

Not being able to access parental rights, e.g. extended leave at work, as being a grandparent the company did not feel I met the criteria to claim! *Grandmother aged 45 to 54 raising three grandchildren.*

Graph 2: Were you able to take any leave when the children moved in?



Response rate: 88% (312).

41%

say their main source of income is their own or their partner's job

Income

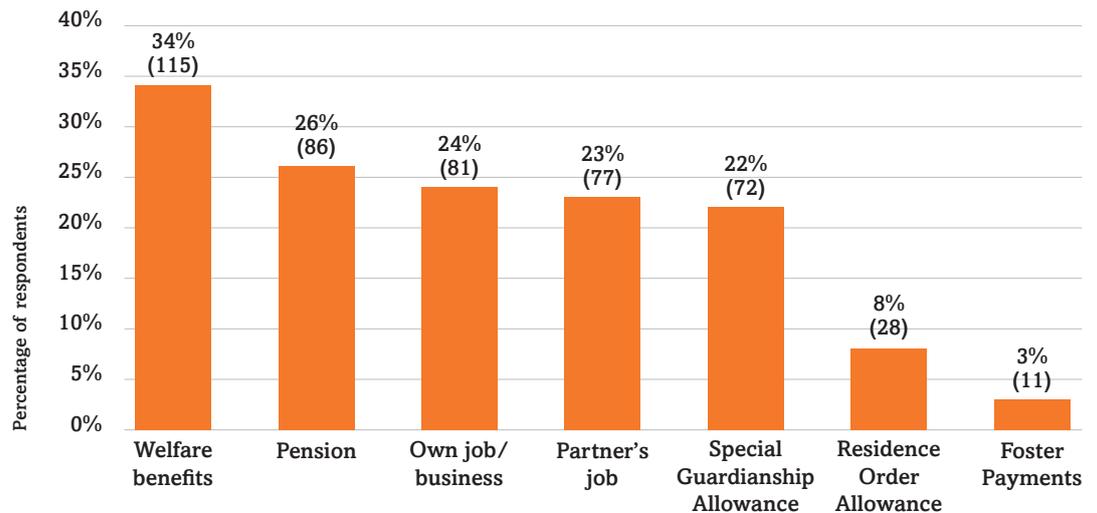
Four in 10 respondents (41%) say their main source of income is their own or their partner's job. Over three in 10 (34%) are dependent on welfare benefits and over a quarter (26%) rely on a pension for their main source of income. 46% of those who gave up work are now dependent on welfare benefits.

Four in 10 respondents (41%) say they are living on no more than £300 a week (including benefits and after tax), 15% say they are managing on less than £200 a week. Two thirds (66%) have an income of below £500 a week. Often, poverty is a result of kinship carers giving up work when children move in. In 2012/13, median household disposable income was £23,316 (£448 a week)¹¹. Kinship carers on a low income (less than £300 a week are particularly likely to score low on the WEMWBS scale, with an average score of 21.77.

Less energy, less income, worry about future, parental contact, child's mixed loyalties – the list goes on! Grandmother aged 65 to 74 raising grandson.

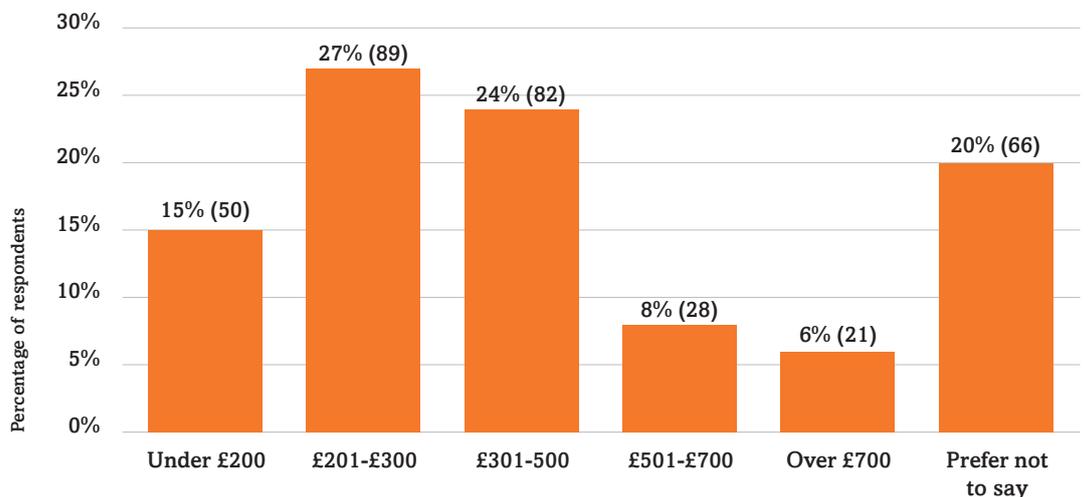
I only have my pension and only get £20 per week from the state as child benefit. Grandfather aged 65 to 74 raising grandson.

Graph 3: Main sources of income of kinship carers



Response rate: 94% (334).
Multiple answer question.

Graph 4: Average weekly net household income (including benefits and after tax)

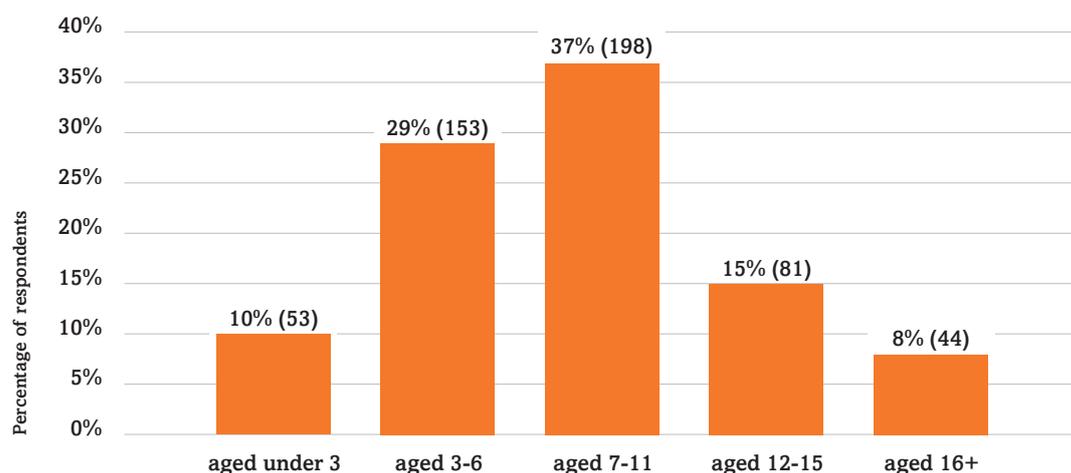


Response rate: 94% (336).

4. About the children

Most of the kinship carers who took part in the survey are raising primary school aged children, with the biggest group being aged between 7 and 11. Over half of respondents (53%) are looking after one child. 32% are raising two children and 16% are raising three or more children.

Graph 5: Ages of children



Total: 529 children

A high proportion of children in kinship care have special needs or a disability

48%

report emotional and behavioural problems in the children they are looking after

A high proportion of children in kinship care have special needs or a disability – 59% say they are bringing up a child with a disability or special needs. Almost half of carers (48%) report emotional and behavioural problems in the children they are looking after. Other research also indicates that a high proportion of children in kinship care have special needs or a disability of some kind¹². A minority of children in kinship care have serious emotional and behavioural difficulties and kinship children are more prone to anxiety and depression than children in the general population¹³.

However, the proportion of kinship children with behavioural and emotional difficulties is lower than that reported for children who are looked after by local authorities¹⁴. Overall kinship children are doing much better than those looked after in non-kinship foster care but, as we would expect given their previous adverse circumstances, are functioning less well than children in the general population.

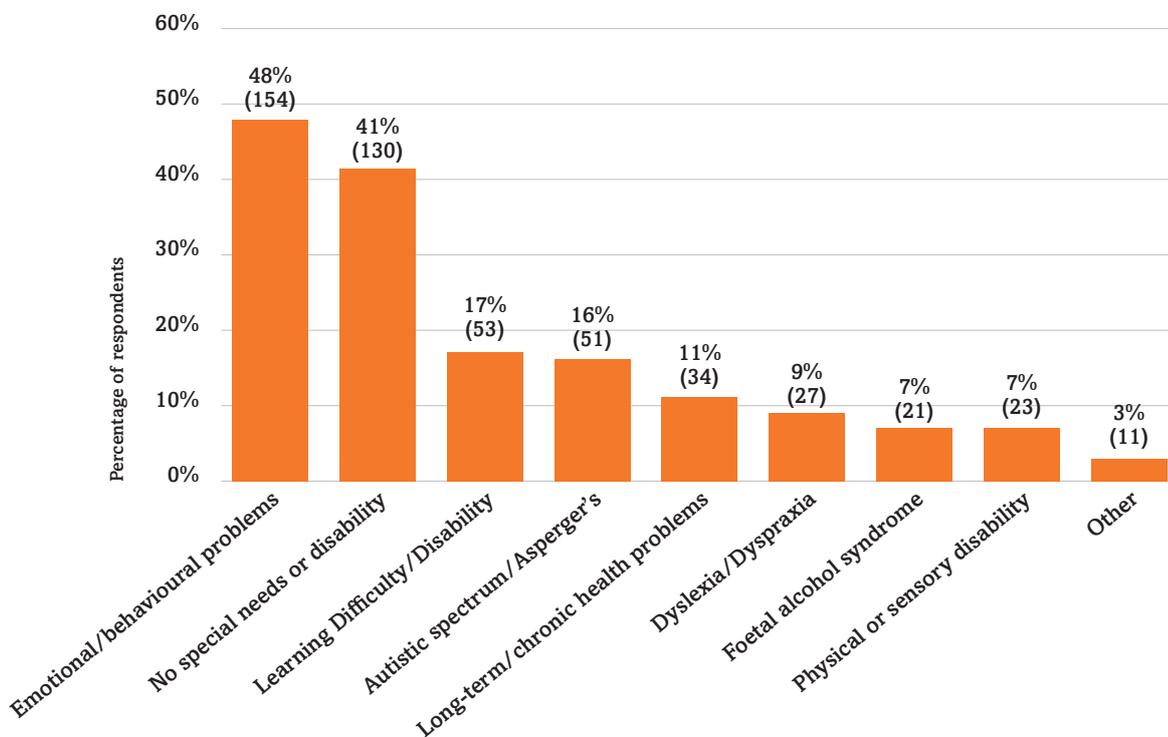
Kinship carers raising children with emotional or behavioural difficulties report low well being scores, with a mean of 21.35 compared with 22.59 for kinship carers not raising a child with emotional or behavioural difficulties. 55% of kinship carers raising a child with emotional or behavioural difficulties say they have been treated rudely, differently, stigmatised or discriminated against because they are a kinship carer. 39% feel they have been badly treated by a social worker, 33% by other parents at school and 25% by a teacher.

A high proportion of carers (16%) are raising children with Asperger's or autistic spectrum disorders. 11% say a child has a chronic health problem and 7% are bringing up a child with foetal alcohol syndrome.

Having my own child who is only two years older than my nephew, it's hard setting boundaries as my child has very different needs to my nephew. My nephew has special needs and emotional and cognitive development is delayed but my child still sees his chronological age and it starts all kind of arguments when I put in different boundaries. Aunt aged 35-44 raising nephew.

The child has disabilities – learning difficulties, hearing difficulties and Asperger's- and there has been a lack of support from social services and education authority. Great-grandmother aged 65 to 74.

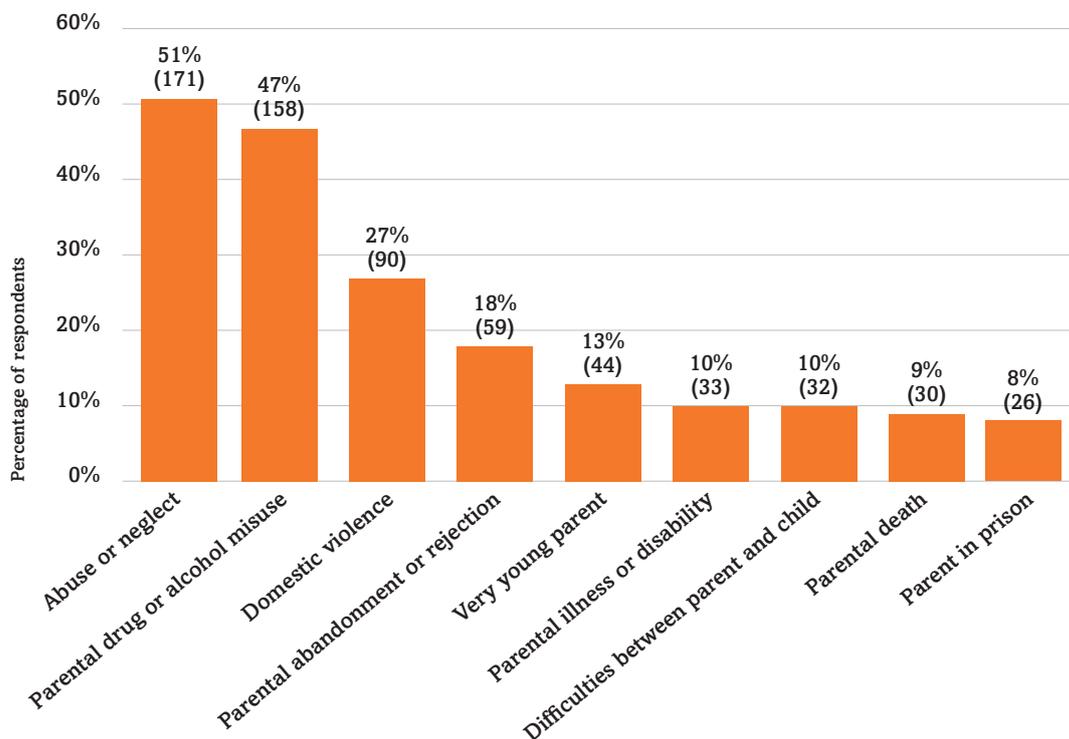
Graph 6: Children with disabilities and special needs, as reported by carers



Response rate: 90% (319).
Multiple answer question.

Kinship carers say that abuse and neglect and parental drug or alcohol misuse are the two most common reasons for children coming to live with them. Often kinship carers cite multiple reasons, for example abuse and neglect and domestic violence, or substance misuse and parental illness.

Graph 7: Reason(s) why the child came to live with the kinship carer



Response rate 97% (335).
Multiple answer question.

A large, hand-drawn style '90%' in red ink, with the numbers and percentage sign appearing slightly rough and textured.

of kinship carers who responded to our survey say bringing up a kinship child is more challenging than raising their own child

Challenges of raising kinship children

90% of kinship carers find raising kinship children more challenging than raising their own children, often because of children's emotional difficulties and the abuse and trauma they experienced before they went to live with their carers. Dealing with birth parents and children's services, being older and having less energy were also frequently mentioned as source of problems for 'second time parents':

It's harder because we are abandoned by the 'care' agencies, and left to deal with the damage that has been done emotionally to the children. Plus, as a grandparent I have less energy than when I was younger. *Grandmother aged 55 to 64 raising three grandchildren.*

Because I am that much older, schools, curriculum changes, energy levels needed, football and all the rest as well as trying to hold down a full time job. And on top of all that trying to deal with the children who often blame us because of their parents who they feel have abandoned them. *Grandmother aged 55 to 64 raising three teenaged grandchildren*

Because they can suffer with abandonment issues which makes bringing them up a lot harder. This is exacerbated when schools do not understand such issues. *Grandmother aged 45 to 54 raising grandson.*

It's more difficult because of the age difference; different world to the one we raised our own children in; you feel responsible to the mother; you have less energy; the heartache you will always carry about your family breakdown. *Grandmother aged 65 to 74.*

In my case because they were traumatised by losing their mum, huge shock, very hard to adjust, also I was grieving too (still am). *Grandmother aged 65 to 74 raising two granddaughters*

I am in my 50s, my social life is non-existent and my friends have discontinued. These children came to me with many complex behaviour problems. *Grandmother aged 45 to 54 raising two grandchildren.*

The biggest challenge is the weekends. Their mother rings to say she is coming, but then does not come. *Grandmother aged 55 to 64 raising 2 grandchildren.*

In my case his mother is always in the background, often undermining what I am trying to do, also making him feel guilty if she is not included in any activity. *Grandmother aged 65 to 74 raising grandson.*

Graph 8: Words most commonly mentioned when asked why it is harder to raise kinship carers



For

60%

of kinship carers, one of the biggest challenges is responding to children's anger and their emotional needs

Managing contact with parents is problematic for half of kinship carers

For 60% of kinship carers, one of the biggest challenges is responding to children's anger and their emotional needs.

It is more difficult to raise kinship children, because of the emotional damage they have suffered. This has resulted in behavioural problems which my wife and I have to deal with. *Grandfather aged 65 to 74 raising two grandchildren.*

Almost half of kinship carers (48%) say that managing their own emotions is one of the three biggest challenges they experience.

It is harder because of the emotional challenge with who you are, nana, mummy, carer, and boss and if you're alone being dad too. *Grandmother aged 45 to 54 raising granddaughter.*

Having to explain in ways he can understand why he cannot live with birth parents or see birth father when his sisters can see their birth father. *Grandmother aged 55 to 64 raising grandson*

Managing contact with parents is problematic for half of kinship carers (52%).

I have the challenge of my argumentative daughter to contend with. The constant nasty text messages from her. The upset caused by things she says to my grandson on her weekly visit. *Grandmother aged 35 to 44 raising grandson.*

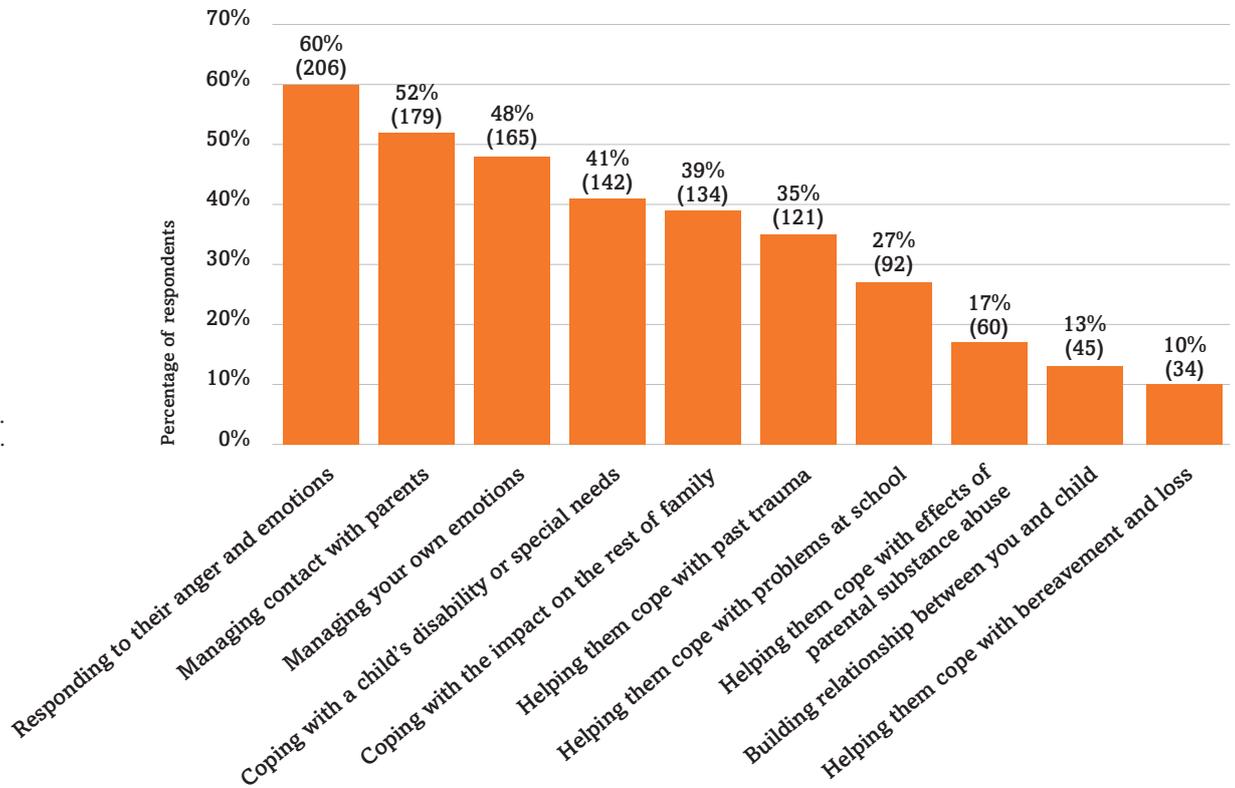
Coping with a child's disability or special educational needs is also a major challenge for 41% of kinship carers, and helping children cope with past trauma or abuse is a challenge for 35% of kinship carers.

Our youngest granddaughter is profoundly disabled and the oldest has Attention Deficit Disorder. We struggle to get help and support for them both. *Grandmother aged 55 to 64 raising three granddaughters.*

Coping with the impact on birth children and the rest of the family also figures high on the list of concern for 39% of kinship carers.

I have issues with my other grandchildren being jealous of the time I spend with the granddaughter I have custody of. *Grandmother aged 55 to 64 raising granddaughter.*

Graph 9: Biggest challenges in raising kinship children



Response rate: 98% (346).
Multiple answer question.

Two thirds of kinship carers (67%) feel they needed professional help to respond to these challenges, and indeed 77% of kinship carers have sought professional support to help them. However, only 33% of those who asked for support feel they got the support they needed. 30% say they didn't get any support, and 37% got some support but it didn't meet their needs or the needs of the child. When talking about the issues they face trying to get support, many kinship carers mention not getting support, feeling they had to fight to get help, having to wait a long time, and being offered support that they feel is not appropriate for them or the child.

It wasn't easy to get the support I needed and I had to keep pushing for it, I feel that had I been a mainstream foster carer my grandson would have had the help he needs much sooner instead of it taking over four years. Grandmother aged 45 to 54 raising two grandchildren.

Most commonly kinship carers turn to children's services for help:

Everyone said they would help, especially social services, but they never did. When I complained they never answered my complaint, and took me to court for two years to try and get custody. Grandmother aged 55 to 64 raising grandson.

I have been asking for support for both my grandchildren since 2008 from social services, in line with my SGO. They have always denied help for the children, yet they monitor our moves. Grandmother aged 45 to 54 raising two grandchildren.

I asked for meeting involving father as his contact was at best sporadic with long periods of absence... the LA had training courses around contact issues, how to explain certain situations to the children...I booked on and was then told I was not allowed to attend any training. Training is ONLY for foster carers, not kinship or special guardians so they removed my name! Grandmother aged 45 to 54 raising granddaughter

Just a handful of people mentioned finding children's services helpful:

Social services were very good and we did get the SGO [Special Guardianship Order] we have had him since birth.

52% of kinship carers who answered the question say they asked their child's school for help:

The only support I got was from the school and nursery. Grandmother aged 55 to 64 raising granddaughter

We have a child that has behavioural problems, development delay, and deaf in one ear, speech and language problems. I work in school and have had more support from colleagues than anyone. It is a consistent battle with the child's school as they find his behaviour challenging. Grandmother aged 55 to 64 raising grandson

40% asked for CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) and 38% turned to their GP. Some kinship carers say that CAMHS is helpful but it is hard to get a referral, waiting lists are long, and the help is sometimes taken away too soon.

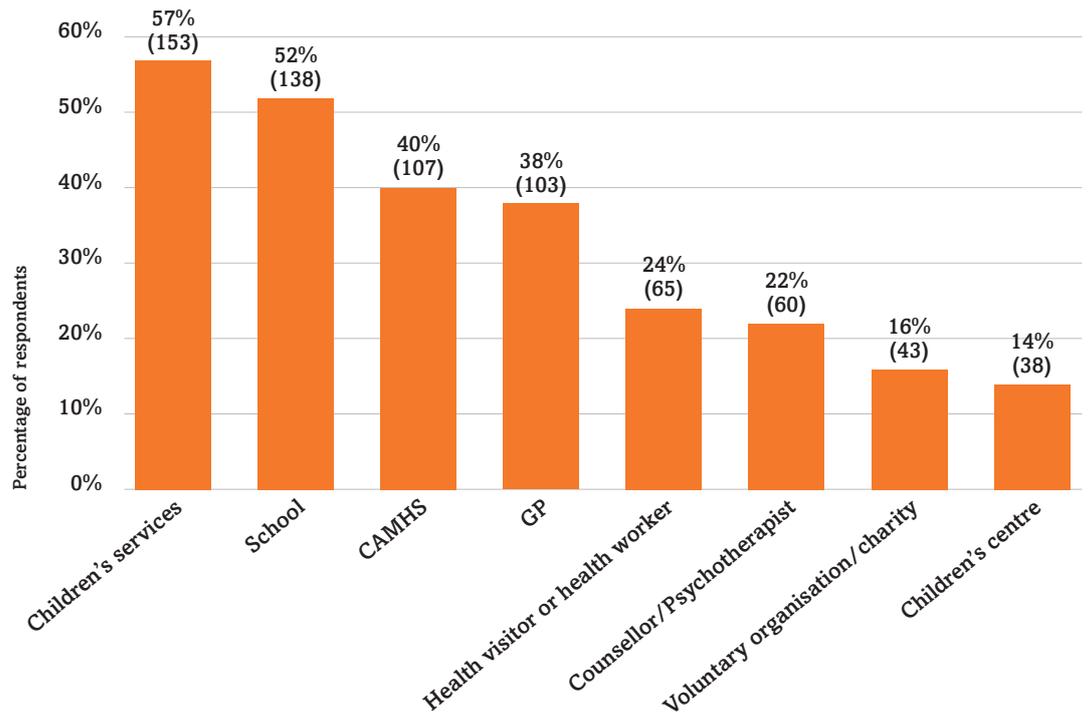
CAMHS was helpful but stopped when my child reached 16. Grandmother aged 55 to 64 raising two grandchildren.

Eventually got some support but had to battle with social services and long waiting lists with CAMHS in fact still waiting for one of the children. Grandmother aged 65 to 74 raising three grandchildren.

Many are just left to get on with it on their own.

Things go round and round in circles. Lots of meetings and talking, but no action. Grandmother aged 55-64 raising two grandchildren.

Graph 10: Which professional support did you seek out?



Response rate: 76% (268).
Multiple answer question.

5. Stigma and discrimination

43%

of kinship carers who responded feel they have been treated rudely, differently, stigmatised or discriminated against because they are a kinship carer

28%

of kinship carers report being treated badly by a social worker

Nearly half of kinship carers (43%) feel they have been treated rudely, differently, stigmatised or discriminated against because they are a kinship carer. A further 18% of kinship carers think they may have been mistreated in this way.

Discrimination by a social worker or local authority official

28% of kinship carers report being treated badly by a social worker and 12% by another local authority official.

Kinship carers often reflect in their comments relating to social workers that:

- Social workers are not helpful and ignore their needs, often because the child is placed with family
- Social workers decisions are based on budgets and legal entitlements rather than children's needs
- Social workers are judgemental towards the kinship carer and attribute part of the blame to the kinship carer for the child's situation.

I was told that, as the children were placed in a stable environment, they weren't considered a 'top priority'. Apparently there is no crisis avoidance in place for these children, just crisis management, which means I have to wait until they turn to drugs/ alcohol or suicide attempts before they will qualify for help. *Grandmother aged 55 to 64 raising three grandchildren.*

The social worker was judgemental during our fostering assessment and tried hard to make us fail. She thought the baby should go to a childless couple and implied we were greedy to want him as we already had five children of our own. *Grandmother aged 45 to 54 raising grandson.*

It's taken me five very long years of fighting for some help for my elder grandson. I finally have it but five years of my life wasted through struggling alone. *Grandmother aged 45-54 raising two grandsons*

When dealing with benefit housing, social services & benefit departments, they treat you as if you're making a big deal and that you should just get on with it. They lack understanding of the complexities of your situation and the stress and anxiety it causes. They fail to see that these children suffer the same anguishes as looked after children. This total disregard from these departments adds to your problems, as you are always in battle with them. The time and energy spent fighting with these departments would be better spent investing into the children. *Grandmother aged 45 to 54 raising granddaughter.*

Discrimination at school by parents, other children and teachers

22% of kinship carers feel they are stigmatised, or treated rudely, differently or discriminated against by parents at school.

Some kinship carers report being 'looked down' on by other parents. They feel that parents actively avoid socialising with them and prevent their children from doing so as well.

My children were invited to play dates that were cancelled after the other children's parents started discussing our family in the playground. We moved to be closer to family and found the new school a little better. *Grandmother aged 35-44 raising two kinship children.*

Many kinship carers say their child has been bullied by other children at school. Our kinship child is being bullied at school, with other children telling him they are going home to their mummy and daddy but he's going home with his aunt and uncle. *Aunt aged 25 to 34 raising nephew.*

From Foundation Year my grandson has been bullied by the same three children, their parents voice their opinions on our situation, and the children repeat this to my grandson, he has been told he must have been bad, his parents don't want him, he is ugly, no one likes him. It is heart-breaking.' *Grandmother aged 45 to 54 raising two grandchildren.*

People talk down to us as if there is something wrong with us all. Our kinship child is being bullied at school, with other children telling him they are going home to their mummy and daddy but he's going home with his aunt and uncle. *Aunt raising nephew.*

Although it was less of an issue than discrimination by parents or children at school, 16% of kinship carers felt discriminated against or treated badly by teachers. A common concern is that teachers do not attempt to understand the child's situation and just react to the child's bad behaviour.

Teachers don't attempt to understand the difficulties that the children, and myself, go through on a daily basis. *Grandmother aged 55 to 64 raising three grandchildren.*

Schools don't understand kids that have been fostered and any of the emotional things attached and see them as naughty kids and won't listen to them or provide help. *Grandmother aged 45 to 54 raising granddaughter*

16%

of kinship carers feel they have been stigmatised, discriminated against or treated rudely or differently because they are a kinship carer by a friend or neighbour

Discrimination by friends and neighbours

16% of kinship carers feel they have been stigmatised, discriminated against or treated rudely or differently because they are a kinship carer by a friend or neighbour. Some say that their friends don't understand the situation and cannot possibly relate to them. Others say that some people believe they are only bringing up the children to be able to claim more benefits.

People think it's easy, or that you should not let the family situation affect previous friendships. It's been hard to maintain some long term friendships. They have time, money and grown-up kids. I have no time no money and loads of kids. *Grandmother aged 55 to 64 raising three grandchildren.*

Friends complain about people on benefits. Hearing people saying kinship carers only do it for the money. *Sibling carer aged under 25 raising two younger siblings.*

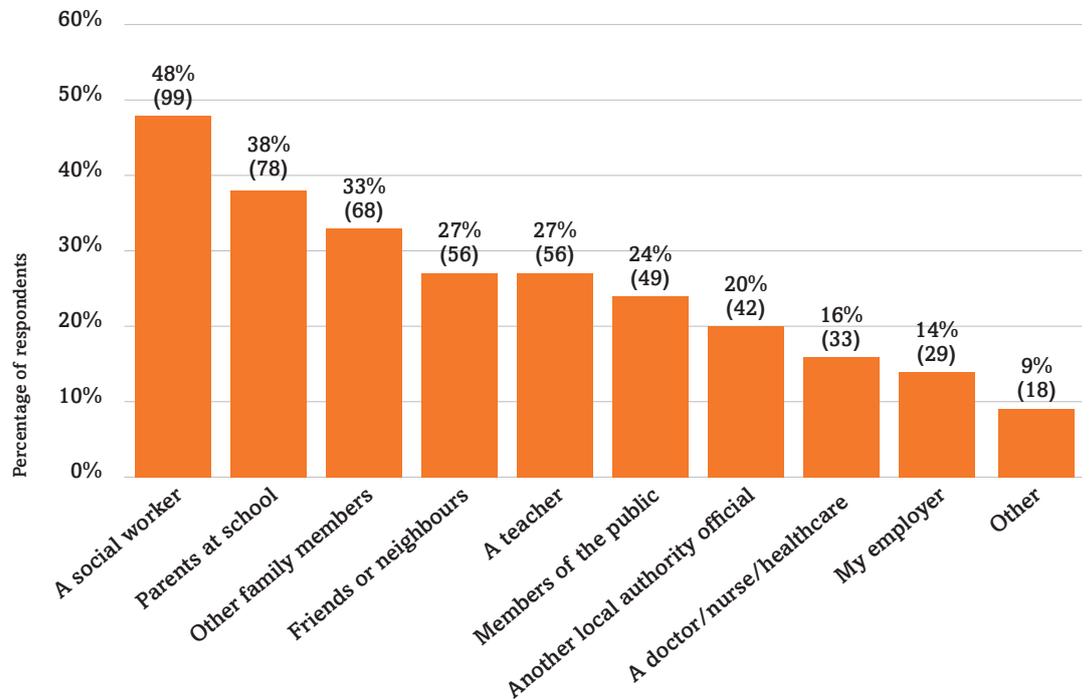
Some kinship carers say they have been bullied by neighbours.

I hate where we live as children are bullied by neighbours. We would love to move nearer my family as here we have no family support. However we cannot afford to move as we are private renters. *Grandmother aged 55 to 64 raising two grandchildren.*

Kinship carers also report experiencing negative treatment from Court staff and in one instance Job Centre Plus:

During a meeting at DWP I was informed we were stupid for taking on care of another child and we should have let him be adopted. *Kinship carer*

Graph 11: By whom do you think you may have been treated rudely, differently, stigmatised or discriminated against because you are a kinship carer?



Response rate: 58% (206) multiple answer question.

Note: Graph shows only those who have or may have experienced discrimination, and so ranks according to who is most commonly discriminating against them, so the percentages are different to those in the text which are based on all respondents, e.g. 28% of all respondents believe they have been discriminated against by a social worker, and 22% by parents at school.

80%

of kinship carers who are feeling stigmatised or discriminated against say it is because people don't understand their situation

Forms of discrimination

Most kinship carers (80%) who are feeling stigmatised or discriminated against say it is because people don't understand their situation. They often feel that they are blamed or judged because of what has happened.

I am looked at as if I am to blame for the children's problems. I was forced to go to parenting classes as I was accused of being the reason for my grandchild's autism.

Grandmother aged 45 to 54, raising two grandchildren.

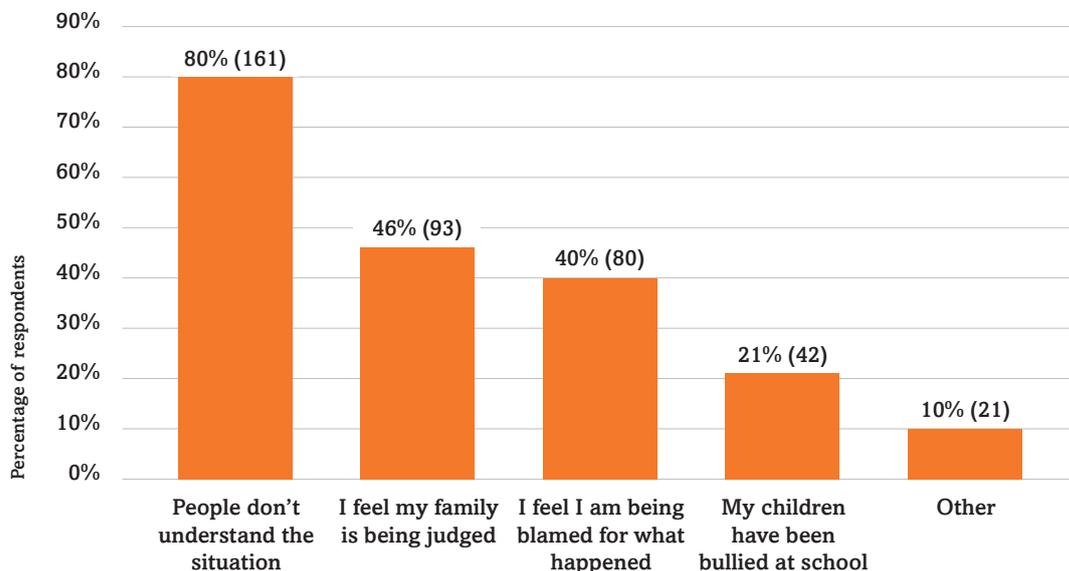
When your child is on drugs and you have your grandchild other people don't understand. You have to protect them and also try and support your own children. *Grandmother aged 55 to 64 raising four grandchildren.*

When it is mentioned to people, they say "the apple does not fall far from the tree", or if you tell them you care for your grandchildren they turn away or make an excuse, perhaps because they do not understand. *Grandmother aged 65 to 74 raising three grandchildren.*

I feel we are being punished for standing up to social workers, doctors, solicitors etc. who were all involved in the court case. They were all conspiring to have our children adopted rather than be placed back with family members. We have also had our SGO allowance cut again as punishment! *Grandmother aged 45 to 54 raising two grandchildren.*

I feel that people blame me for my child's difficult behaviour. Travelling on public transport is especially traumatic because he hates being in an enclosed situation and shouts at people and hits me. No-one offers a helping hand, they all sit in judgement or embarrassment. He wants his own way all the time and becomes aggressive when he can't have his own way. *Grandmother aged 55 to 64 raising grandson.*

Graph 12: In what way do you/ your family feel you are treated unfavourably or stigmatised?



Response rate: 57% (201).
Multiple answer question.

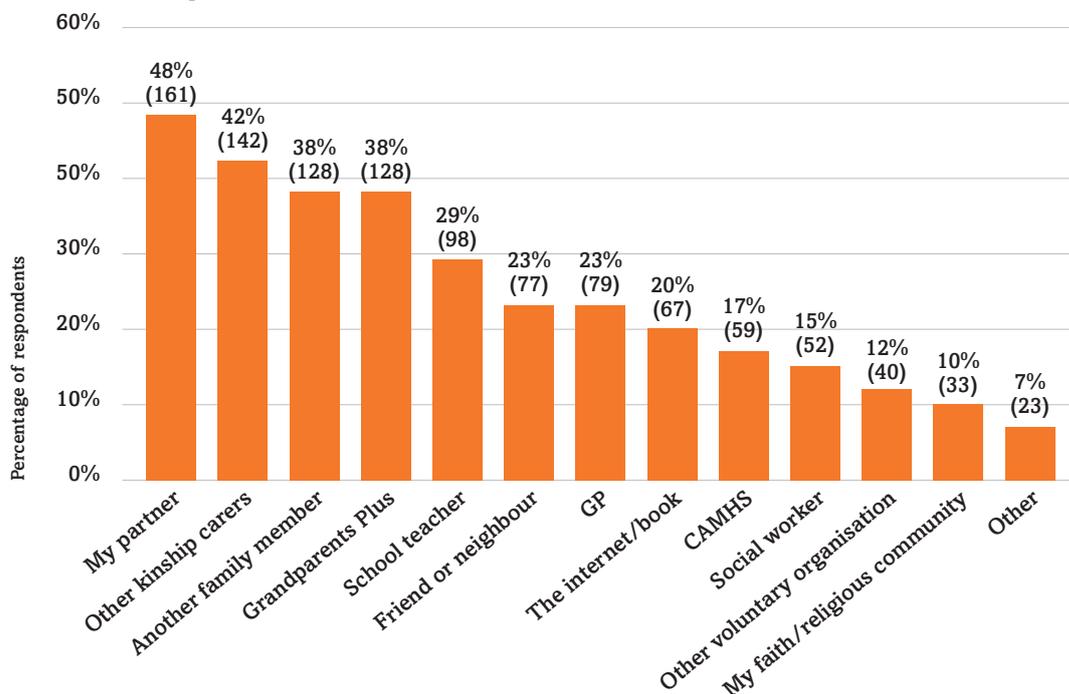
Help and support

The most common source of support for kinship carers with children's emotional and behavioural needs is their partner, cited by almost half of respondents (48%), followed by other kinship carers (42%), or another family member (38%) or Grandparents Plus (38%).

My wife got minimal support because she didn't know what else was available until I came along. I then began to apply 'pressure' to get the help we have now. Grandfather aged 55 to 64 raising grandson.

Grandparents Plus, the Family Rights Group, the Food Bank and the Kinship 'Foster' Carers network were all lifesavers. Grandmother aged 65 to 74 raising two granddaughters.

Graph 13: Who do you turn to for advice and support to help you deal with your kinship children's emotional and behavioural needs?



Response rate: 96% (339).
Multiple answer question.

6. Conclusions

Bringing up a kinship child has many challenges and 90% of kinship carers find raising kinship children more challenging than raising their own children, often because of the children's emotional and behavioural difficulties or other special needs, but also because of difficulties with the children's parents or simply because they are older and have less energy. Kinship carers often turn to children's services and health professionals for help, however often they do not get any help, have to wait a long time or find that the help offered does not meet their needs.

A high proportion of kinship carers (43%) feel they have been treated rudely, differently, stigmatised or discriminated against because they are a kinship families, most commonly by a social worker, parents at school or other family members. They also face systemic and institutional discrimination because they are not entitled to the same recognition and rights as others who take on the care of a child, for example foster carers or adoptive parents. Most kinship carers have no legal right to support from their local authority, nor do they have a right to take any leave from work when children move in to help them keep their jobs. This lack of legal entitlements contributes to the high rates of poverty and disadvantage among kinship families.

A worrying finding is that one in five kinship families feel they or their children are treated differently by parents and children at school. Parents at the school gates may turn their backs on kinship carers. Some kinship carers mention that the children they are raising are actively excluded by other children. It is easy to imagine what the impact of these behaviours would be on already vulnerable children.

Kinship carers may also find themselves isolated from or excluded by friends and neighbours. Their new life situation doesn't fit anymore with those of their friends, who may not understand their experience, and 'have time, money and grown-up kids', whilst kinship carers have 'no time, no money and loads of kids'.

There is a long way to go to for all kinship carers to feel recognised and appreciated for the contribution they are making rather judged because of parents' difficulties and failings. A good place to start would be for both central and local government to give better recognition and support to kinship carers, by improving the support to which they and the children they are raising are entitled, and making this based on children's needs rather than the legal status of their placement.

There are some hopeful findings amongst the survey results. Kinship carers turn to their partners, other kinship carers and Grandparents Plus for support. This highlights the need for the Grandparents Plus Support Network, which enables kinship carers to meet and talk to people who truly understand their situation and can empathise because they have been there themselves.

We are much older now and not so active. It does have its rewards though – love of children all over again. Grandmother aged 55 to 64 raising two grandchildren with learning difficulties and autism spectrum difficulties.

7. Policy recommendations

What we want to see happen:

- Children who cannot live with their parents are able to grow up within their wider family wherever possible, taking account of children's wishes and feelings.
- Children living in kinship care are not overlooked and have their needs met.
- Kinship carers have access to free legal advice and information service to protect the children.
- Kinship carers are enabled to stay in work and not forced to give up their jobs when taking on the care of the children.
- Kinship carers are not plunged into poverty or penalised by the benefits system.

Specific recommendations:

1. There should be a new legal duty on local authorities to ensure that potential placements with family and friends care are fully considered before a child becomes looked after unless there is an emergency.
2. There should be a legal duty on local authorities to offer all families a family group conference before a child is taken into care to enable the wider family themselves to be supported to make a safe plan for the child.
3. Every local authority should be required to publish a family and friends care policy and have a named designated senior council officer with responsibility for implementing the policy.
4. All children in kinship care should be assessed as children in need by the local authority. Kinship families should be entitled to receive support based on the child's needs rather than their legal status, including support with children's emotional and behavioural needs, help with contact with birth parents, peer support groups and family group conferencing.
5. Local authorities should collect and publish official data about kinship care arrangements to inform planning of local and national policies and support services for kinship carers.
6. The Government should introduce a national financial allowance for family and friends carers who are raising children who would otherwise be in the care system;
7. The Government should ensure free independent legal advice is available to family and friends considering taking on the care of a child.
8. The Government should support kinship carers to remain in the labour market by giving them a right to adjustment leave when a child initially moves in and the same rights to a period of paid employment leave and protection as adopters.
9. To help prevent kinship families ending up in poverty, the Government should recognise the specific circumstances of kinship carers within the benefits system, and ensure they are not adversely affected by the 'spare room subsidy', benefit cap and changes to pension credit and child tax credit.
10. Every school should identify a designated teacher responsible for ensuring that the needs of children in kinship care are properly recognised and supported, in the same way that looked after children have a designated teacher.

8. Notes and references

¹ Estimate from the Family Rights Group cited in Saunders, H. and Selwyn, J. 2008, *Evaluation of an informal kinship care team*, *Adoption and Fostering*, Summer, Volume 32:2, pp. 31-42

² S. Nandy, J. Selwyn et al, June 2011, *Spotlight on Kinship Care*, University of Bristol

³ S.Nandy, J.Selwyn et al, June 2011, *ibid*.

⁴ Glasgow Council's first ever petition claims discrimination against kinship care children
<http://scottishkinshipalliance.com/glasgow-councils-first-ever-petition-claims-discrimination-against-kinship-care-children/>

⁵ <http://www.lgo.org.uk/news/2013/nov/family-friends-foster-carers-being-treated-unfairly-says-ombudsman/>

⁶ In response to the question about age and gender of the kinship children you are looking after

⁷ S. Nandy, J. Selwyn et al, June 2011, *ibid*

⁸ Department of Health, 2012, Long-Term conditions compendium of information: 3rd edition

⁹ Office for National Statistics, 15 February 2013, 2011 Census Analysis: Unpaid care in England and Wales, 2011 and comparison with 2001

¹⁰ 147 out of a total of 354 respondents

¹¹ Unpublished data supplied by Department of Work and Pensions.

¹² Wellard and Wheatley, 2011, *What if we said no? Grandparents Plus*

¹³ Selwyn, J. & Farmer, E. et al, 2013, *The Poor Relations? Children and Informal Kinship Carers Speak Out* University of Bristol and Buttle UK

¹⁴ Selwyn, J. & Farmer, E. et al, *ibid*



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