



The Grandmother Study

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CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

Thank You!!!

We begin this newsletter by thanking you for your support of The Grandmother Study over the past five years. Your commitment and participation truly have been extraordinary. Over 90% of grandmothers who began the study completed all three questionnaires, and this has provided us with much valuable information about the health and well-being of grandmothers across the state. We are currently analyzing the information you have provided over the past several years.

The Grandmother Study, supported by the National Institutes of Health, is the only study of its kind. We have followed you as a group of grandmothers for 4-5 years (depending on when you began the study), and have focused particular attention on your health and well-being, support from family and friends, and your caregiving role within your family.

As this phase draws to a close, you may wonder if the questionnaires that you filled out really make a difference. Research such as The Grandmother Study provides important information about the health of women and their families that would not otherwise be known. Professionals, including physicians, nurses, teachers, social workers, psychologists, and others, rely on these types of data to understand the complex relationships between health and family, and to gain insights into social issues and trends. Findings from studies such as this can and do influence health care practices for women and families, and influence policies for caregivers and others.

We appreciate all the notes, cards, and phone calls from you expressing support for this research. Special thanks to those of you who have remembered to update your address and phone information when there have been changes.

We are excited to announce the continuation of our study and hope that you will join us in this new and exciting phase! We have been funded by the National Institute of Nursing Research at the National Institutes of Health to continue with two more rounds of questionnaires from grandmothers.

We will continue to focus on your health and well being and plan to involve grandchildren in the new study, making this continuation a most unique and timely project. You will receive a letter in the mail in the upcoming months regarding the details of the new project and a follow-up telephone call from a member of our research team. You should be familiar with some of the voices of the staff members who will be contacting you. If you have any questions, comments or updates please contact us by telephone, e-mail or mail.

We look forward to continuing to work with you on this valuable research on grandmothers and their families and we will be contacting you soon!



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Painting by Zhang Guang

Since we are continuing the study, we must wait to share many of the emerging findings. However, here is some of what we can share at this time.

A total of 486 grandmothers participated in the study. Of these participants, 183 were grandmothers raising grandchildren, 136 were grandmothers living in multigenerational homes, and 167 were grandmothers who were not living with grandchildren but were involved in their lives. Grandmothers in each group spent time attending to family needs and reported concerns about their grandchildren and family safety. Most grandmothers provide some help to others, including parents, spouses, siblings and friends, in addition to grandchildren.

The grandmothers' average age at the start of the study was 57 years, with an age range of 31 to 87 years. Many grandmothers will now be about 62 years or older, an age when women may face a number of life changes. Some can expect new grandchildren or great-grandchildren, some will retire, and some will be managing new or chronic health problems. Many grandmothers have reported some physical health declines over the past several years, while reports about mental health are fairly stable.

Some of our work has looked at how grandmothers view the family as functioning. We have found that regardless of the type of family structure, being connected with family members improves the grandmother's view of her family.

Nearly 20% of the grandmothers experienced changes in living arrangements or caregiving. Many experienced changes in their households, with family members moving in and out of the home. These transitions may have changed household roles and responsibilities as a grandmother and relationships with family members. Despite changes in the household, the grandmothers have shown that they have a central role in providing an ongoing sense of family.

*All our best, Carol Musil,
Camille Warner &
The Grandmother
Study Team*

