

AGING & CARING

Rose Menzies

“RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GRANDPARENTS AND GRANDCHILDREN ARE OFTEN CHARACTERIZED BY RECIPROCITY, PROVIDING BOTH PARTIES WITH EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL BENEFITS.”

DOLBIN-MACNAB & YANCURA, 2018, P.4.

MY ABUELITA

Because my mom worked two jobs to support my brother and myself as a single parent, a lot of the child care in my home was provided by my abuelitos who lived with us, especially my abuelita. She would be the one to get me ready in the morning, make my lunch, and walk me to school. When my mom had to work one of her two jobs, my abuelita and abuelito would watch me. Now, my abuelita is a great grandmother who lost her husband of 60 plus years a year ago. With Latinos, it is pretty typical to have grandparents remaining in the home and not putting them in a home, as is quite common in Western society.

In speaking with my abuelita, she spoke about having a new role as a great grandparent that does not involve child care, even if she assists my mom in caring for my nephew on occasion. She said that now she feels she is able to move away from being a caregiver and enjoying her twilight years. She has the privilege of enjoying her family without having any of the responsibility. From her I continue to learn about how to make traditional Salvadorean meals, how to stitch up ripped jeans, and the calmness of gardening. A lot of the person I have grown into is largely influenced by both my abuelitos.

When asked how she views aging, she told me that she sees it as a natural progression, something that is unavoidable. Her only goal in aging and getting older is to continue to do the things that she enjoys, being able to laugh at least once a day, and seeing her grandchild become parents themselves.

MY MOM

My mom falls into the "sandwich" generation. Because my abuelitos lived with us, my mom was often responsible for making sure they attended their medical appointments and were well, while also taking care and ensuring the health of my brother and myself. My mom transitioned out of this role as my brother and I grew up and moved out, my mom continued to care for my abuelitos, but no longer was responsible in my brother and my daily care. Now, she is a grandparent who often provides childcare for my nephew and will soon be utilized as child care for my soon to be born child.

My mom acknowledges that she is now playing a different role than my abuelita played to us as my mom is playing to my nephew, especially since my brother nor I live in the same home as her, and we each have partners to help in the child care. As my mom has recently retired, she said that aging is now about watching her own children learning to be parents themselves. She is also learning what it means to be out of the workforce and what value her time now has.



MULTIGENERATIONAL CAREGIVERS

As we have learned in our course, families can be made up in many different ways. I grew up in a Latino household, and while my family immigrated to Canada in the 1970s to avoid a civil war in El Salvador, we were able to maintain a lot of the cultural perspectives around what it is to be a family. And a large part of this, which I have touched upon above, is living in this multigenerational household with grandparents, parents and children. We did not have a lot of money, and my mom had to work two jobs and my abuelito also worked, so it was also a financial necessity to live with my abuelitos. Leinaweaver (2014) spoke about the positives about having more than the two caregivers for children. They stated that "marginalized children with a stronger safety net and more perspectives" (p.132) have a wider set of perspectives to learn from. Additionally, that large families, like the one I was raised in, create a larger pool of resources and can provide the children with culturally relevant information to pass down.

PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

I currently work for the Ministry of Children and Family Development as a Social Work Assistant and I do plan on staying with MCFD and working as a Child Protection Social Worker after I have completed my BSW. A big part of this role is about keeping families together and in the rare cases of needing to remove a child, finding them an appropriate family member to go stay with. Péan (2021) spoke to the idea that "the formation of the community is the possibility of doing together what is impossible to do alone" (p.9). Family will not always necessarily consist of a mother and father, and that in times of stress looking at and assessing grandparents as caregivers may be valuable.

Another implication I would want to consider that Dolbin-MacNab and Yancura (2018) speak to are the consequences to the grandparents who have taken on the great responsibility of caring for their grandchildren. Their study showed that often grandparent caregivers face financial strain as there are not many supports available to grandparents. They also experience health conditions such as diabetes and arthritis. With MCFD grandparents can be signed into an Extended Family Program, which would help provide them with financial support that they could use to care for their grandchild. But this would not cover all the cost and grandparents would still need to have money of their own to support them. I would want to make sure that I am also providing them with sufficient emotional and mental support as they may have originally considered they would no longer be caring for children at this point in their life.



RESOURCES

Dolbin-MacNab, M. L., & Yancura, L. A. (2017). International Perspectives on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Contextual Considerations for Advancing Global Discourse. *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 86(1), 3–33. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091415016689565>

Leinaweaver, J. (2014). Informal Kinship-Based Fostering Around the World: Anthropological Findings. *Child Development Perspectives*, 8(3), 131–136. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12075>

Péan, R. (2021). Talks with My Ancestors. *Genealogy*, 5(1), 14. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy5010014>

