

Exploring the Role of Grandparents in the Lives of Teenage Learners

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ABSTRACT Historically, grandparents have often served as an alternative when birth parents were unable to care for their children. The number of grandparents who are taking care of grandchildren, in this case teenage learners, in South Africa is an issue that is unlikely to go away. With the prevalence of diseases such as HIV/AIDS, unplanned/teenage pregnancies and parental negligence, it is likely that the trend seen in the past decade will continue, with an increasing number of grandparents parenting their grandchildren. It is often difficult for grandparents to take care of smaller grandchildren with basic needs. It is, however, even more difficult to parent teenage learners who require emotional guidance during this transitional stage in their lives. Their demands are often overwhelming, as they need support with school work, coping with life challenges and finding direction. A study was undertaken to determine the challenges faced by grandparents who take on the surrogate parental role for teenage learners. A small-scale survey consisted of ten grandparents was conducted in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. The findings show that the participants were often stressed by the school demands, lack of support from the government agencies, and severe limitations on their bodies due to health and age. These challenges impact on their parenting role as they are progressively unable to adequately provide for the teenage learners in their care. Therefore, this study aims at exploring these challenges with a view to making recommendation on intervention strategies. These intervention strategies are essential and may help to reduce negative effects, provide information and coping skills not only to grandparents but also to teenage learners and school personnel.