

Child Series Volume IV:

Children Living With Grandparents in South Africa, 2023



IMPROVING LIVES THROUGH DATA ECOSYSTEMS



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Child Series Volume IV

Children living with grandparents in South Africa, 2023

Statistics South Africa

Risenga Maluleke
Statistician-General

Report No. 92-02-04

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Acronyms and abbreviations

CSG	Child Support Grant
ECD	Early Childhood Development
GHS	General Household Survey
MTSF	Medium-Term Strategic Framework
NDP	National Development Plan
NPAC	National Plan of Action for Children
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Program
SASA	South African Schools Act
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
Stats SA	Statistics South Africa
UIF	Unemployment Insurance Fund
BUF	Buffalo City
CPT	City of Cape Town
EKU	City of Ekurhuleni
ETH	City of eThekweni
JHB	City of Johannesburg
MAN	Mangaung City
NMB	Nelson Mandela Bay City
TSH	City of Tshwane
WC	Western Cape
EC	Eastern Cape
NC	Northern Cape
FS	Free State
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
NW	North West
GP	Gauteng
MP	Mpumalanga
LP	Limpopo
RSA	Republic of South Africa

Concepts and definitions

Term	Definition
Access to improved sanitation facilities	These facilities are defined as flush toilets connected to a public sewerage system or a septic tank, or a pit toilet with a ventilation pipe
Care dependency grant	A monthly grant from the government to the parent/guardian/foster parent of a child with a disability and in need of full-time special care. Children aged 0–17 qualify. Value: R1 980 per month.
Child support grant	Government grant received on behalf of a child of a specific age as determined by legislation, in underprivileged families. Currently given to children (0–17 years old) in underprivileged families. Value: R480 per month.
Complex households	Consist of a nuclear or extended household core and non-related individuals.
Disability grant	Government grant received by adults who are certified to have a mental or physical disability, which lasts six months or longer and renders them unfit to work. Age cut-offs are for men and women 18–59 years old. To qualify for this grant, a person must submit a medical or assessment report confirming disability. Note that even people with diseases such as AIDS, cancer, etc. who have been proven through a medical assessment as being unable to work for a certain period, qualify for a disability grant. Value: R1 980 per month.
Double generation households	Consist of family members from at least two generations, i.e. parents and children.
Double orphans	Children whose both biological parents have passed away
Extended households	Family that extends beyond the nuclear family and which consists of parents, their children, and other family members such as aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins, all living in the same household.
Foster child grant	A foster child is a child who has been placed in the custody of foster parents as a result of being: orphaned, abandoned, at risk, abused and neglected. The grant is given to someone who cares for a child who is not their own by birth. To become a legal foster parent, one can apply at a Children's Court. The application is done through a social worker from the Department of Social Development or a Child Welfare Society. Grant payments stop when the child reaches 18 years. If the child continues to stay with the foster parent and is, for example, studying, the grant can be paid out until the age of 21. Value: R1 070 per month.
Grant	A grant is financial assistance provided by the government or institution authorised to do so, a public fund or private institution to a person or organisation for a specific purpose. The money does not need to be paid back.

Term	Definition
Grant in aid	An additional grant awarded to persons who are in receipt of an old-age grant, disability grant or war veteran's grant, and who need full-time care from someone else. A grant in aid cannot stand alone. Value: R460 per month.
Head of household	Person recognised as such by the household. Usually the main decision-maker, or the person who owns or rents the dwelling, or the person who is the main breadwinner. The head can be either male or female.
Household	A person, or a group of persons who occupy a common dwelling unit (or part of it) and stayed for an average of four nights a week for the past four weeks.
Maternal orphans	Children whose biological mother have passed away, but whose fathers are still alive
Multigenerational households	Consist of family members from at least two generations, i.e. great-grandparents, grandparents, parents and children.
Nuclear households	Consist of spouses living alone, or with their children
Old-age grant	Financial assistance provided by the government to elderly people who comply with the means test. Currently a grant of R1 980 is paid to men and women aged 60–74, while R2 000 is paid to men and women aged 75 and older. These are revised at the end of each tax year and are therefore not fixed.
Paternal orphans	Children whose biological fathers have passed away, but whose mothers are still alive
Pension	A pension is a steady income received by a person, usually after retirement, from a former employer, designated pension fund or other retirement provider.
Special COVID-19 social relief of distress grant	A grant paid to individuals who were unemployed and did not receive any other form of social grant or UIF payment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Value: R350 per month.
Single generation households	Consist of family members from the same generation (i.e. siblings, parents) living together.
Skip generation households	Comprised of grandchildren living with one or more grandparents in the absence of any biological parents.
Triple generation households	Contains three generations of families (grandparents, parents and grandchildren) in the same household.

Foreword

Household structures in South Africa are shaped by socio-economic challenges like unemployment and poverty, which often require families to pool resources. Household structures are also significantly influenced by cultural norms that emphasize the importance of extended families. These norms encourage families to live together, fostering strong inter-generational bonds. This cultural preference for extended family living arrangements helps maintain family support systems and traditions across generations. According to the General Household Survey 2023, approximately 13,9% of South African households were multi-generational, with three generations living together, while 4,2% were skip-generation households, where grandparents lived with their grandchildren. Skip-generation and triple-generation households were predominantly found in rural areas (27,9%) while in urban areas such structures amounted to 13,7%.

Approximately 6,7 million grandparents stayed with 9,7 million children aged 0–17 in 2023. More than half (69,3%) were grandmothers. Furthermore, there were 3,4 million head of households' grandparents who lived with nearly 8 million children aged 0–17. Most of these were grandmothers (64,5%), while grandfathers made up 35,4%. This indicates that grandmothers play a crucial role in caregiving both at younger and older ages compared to grandfathers.

In grandparent headed households, 56,4% of children had their mothers present, while only 5,1% had their fathers. About 6,5% lived with both parents, and 32,1% with neither. KwaZulu-Natal had the highest percentages of children living with their fathers (34,3%), mothers (25,8%), and neither parent (27,9%). Western Cape had the highest percentage of children living with both parents (27,0%).

Furthermore, children in urban areas were more likely to live with both parents (65,1%) compared to rural areas (34,9%) in grandparents-headed households. Conversely, in rural areas, 64,1% of children lived with neither parent showing that grandparents often take on a caregiving role when parents are absent.

Grandparent headed households frequently encounter substantial economic challenges. A significant proportion of these families are economically disadvantaged, with many situated in the lowest household income quintile. In all provinces, except for Western Cape and Gauteng, over 75% of these households fall within the lower income quintiles (quintile 1 and 2). Notably, Eastern Cape (82,6%) and North West (81,5%) are the most impoverished regions. Nearly 48,4% of these households primarily relied on grants. The Eastern Cape had the highest percentage of households dependent on grants (64,2%), followed by the Northern Cape, Free State, and North West, each with approximately 57% relying on this source of income.

In 2023, 29,4% of children aged 0–4 in grandparent headed households were enrolled in ECD programs, while 70,6% were not. In urban areas, 33,1% of these children attended ECD programs, compared to 26,4% in rural areas. Gauteng and Limpopo exhibited the highest attendance rates at 38,9% and 38,3%, respectively, whereas KwaZulu-Natal had the lowest rate at 21,8%.

Nearly 85% of children aged 0–4 in grandparent headed households did not attend ECD programs because their grandparents preferred them to remain at home or with another caregiver. Additionally, 12% did not attend due to the cost of ECD programs, and 2,9% did not attend because there were no ECD facilities available in their areas. Nearly 87,2% of the children paid ECD tuition fees, while only 12,8% did not.

ECD programs are vital for early learning, helping children develop cognitive, social, and emotional skills. Without these programs, children may miss out on important foundational skills for their future education. However, children in grandparents-headed households frequently receive limited stimulation in reading. Nearly 40% of children aged 0–4 had never experienced reading or storytelling, and approximately one-third (32,5%) lack a consistent figure to read to them or tell them stories. Additionally, close to 70% of children either never engage in colouring or drawing or do so only occasionally. Conversely, nearly 39% of children have a household member who counts with them daily or as frequently as possible.

School attendance was almost universal as overall nearly 97,0% of children aged 5–17 attended educational institutions, with only 3,2% not attending. Among those attending, the highest percentages were found in Limpopo (98,5%), followed by Mpumalanga (98,1%) and North West (97,7%). The lowest attendance rate for children aged 5–17 who lived in grandparents-headed households was observed in Northern Cape, at 92,5%. Children in grandparents-headed households who lived in rural areas had a higher percentage of school attendance (97,8%) compared to those in urban areas (95,7%).

Most children aged 5–17 residing in grandparent headed households did not attend any educational institutions primarily due to insufficient funds for fees (34,7%). Other contributing factors included marriage (20,6%), violence in schools (18,1%), family obligations (11,0%), a belief that education was futile (10,3%), and an inability to perform academically (5,3%). Nearly 72,6% of the children paid school tuition fees, while the rest did not.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

The practice of grandparents staying with their grandchildren is not a new phenomenon, however, according to Sampson D and Hertlein K (2015), this practice is steadily increasing. In many cases, these children are not just temporarily visiting but are actually living permanently in households headed by grandparents. This arrangement can arise due to various reasons such as parental work commitments, financial challenges, health issues, or family breakdowns. One prevalent scenario is when grandparents take on the role of primary caregivers for their grandchildren. This could be due to the parents' inability to care for the children adequately, whether due to financial problems, incarceration, or other personal issues. In such cases, grandparents often step in to provide stability, love, and support to the grandchildren, ensuring they have a nurturing environment to grow up in.

Residing with grandchildren benefits grandparents in various ways, it provides them with a renewed opportunity to nurture children, perpetuate family legacies, having a purpose in their lives, strengthen family bonds, and enjoy affection and companionship from their grandchildren (Langosch D, 2012). Moreover, Xaba N (2021) stated that most grandmothers found joy in looking after their grandchildren as it provided them with companionship for conversation and assistance with household chores. However, this chance of being parents to grandchildren comes with its own set of challenges that are not easy to manage. Hayslip B and Kaminski P.L. (2005) mentioned challenges such as social isolation from peers of their own age, increased likelihood of experiencing both physical and mental health issues compared to non-caregivers, interference with grandparents' marriages, and giving up employment outside the home in order to care for their grandchildren. Grandmothers who were raising grandchildren also faced financial challenges, along with difficulties in disciplining misbehaving grandchildren who became defensive when punished (Xaba 2021).

Despite the benefits that children may receive when staying with their grandparents, they also encounter challenges that can significantly impact their lives. Motsa N.D. and Morojele P.J. (2022) found that grandparents in Eswatini lacked awareness regarding the significance of education, resulting in a lack of motivation or support for their grandchildren's educational activities. Furthermore, children raised by a grandparent had twice the likelihood of experiencing delayed development compared to those raised by their parents (Nanthamongkolchai S, Munsawaengsub C and Nanthamongkolchai C, 2009).

Children's well-being and proper development not only shape their future but also contribute to a better environment. Several factors influence this development, including quality education, adequate nutrition, emotional support, physical health, a safe environment, and access to resources. Therefore, it is essential for children to live in an environment that supports and enhances their well-being and development. For instance, quality education enhances their thinking abilities, improves understanding, and aids in better information processing, while proper nutrition is vital for physical health and overall development. However, Plaatjies P.M. (2013) stated that grandparent headed households often face poverty, which negatively impacts children's education, physical well-being, and overall health.

1.2 Legislation and acts in South Africa

Children's rights are an important topic in South Africa, given the country's complicated historical setting and ongoing socio-economic problems. These rights are used in a variety of ways to accomplish numerous important goals. They include assuring protection against child abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence, as well as providing access to critical services such as education, healthcare, nutrition, and social support, which are necessary for their overall growth and well-being. Furthermore, children's rights enable them to have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

Moreover, these rights seek to eliminate discrimination and promote equal opportunity and resource access for all children, regardless of their background.

1.2.1 South African Constitution (1996)

Section 28 of the Bill of Rights in Chapter 2 of the South African Constitution, includes a specific section dedicated to children's rights, guaranteeing basic rights such as the right to a name and nationality, the right to family care or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment, and the right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services, and social services. Additionally, it ensures protection from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. This section further states that a child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child.

1.2.2 The Children's Act (Act No. 38 of 2005)

The Children's Act (Act No. 38 of 2005) establishes a standard for determining the "best interests of a child". It enforces international rules and standards for child protection in South Africa and defines duties and powers of competent authorities. This act is crucial in all matters pertaining to the care, protection, and well-being of children in South Africa. Section 9 of the Children's Act provides a detailed list of factors for the best interests of the child standard. These includes:

- The nature of the personal relationship between the child and the parents, or any specific parent; the child and any other care-giver or person relevant in those circumstances
- The attitude of the parents, or any specific parents, towards the child and the exercise of parental responsibilities and rights in respect of the child
- The capacity of the parents, or any specific parent, or of any other care-giver or person, to provide for the needs of the child, including emotional and intellectual needs
- The likely effect on the child of any change in the child's circumstances, including the likely effect on the child or any separation from both or either of the parents or any brother or sister or other child, or any other care-giver or person, with whom the child has been living
- The practical difficulties and expense of a child having contact with the parents, or any specific parent, and whether that difficulty or expense will substantially affect the child's right to maintain personal relations and direct contact with the parents, or any specific parent, on a regular basis
- The need of the child to remain in the care of his or her parent, family and extended family and to maintain a connection with his or her family, extended family, culture or tradition;
- The child's age, maturity and stage of development, gender, background and any other relevant characteristics of the child
- The child's physical and emotional security and his or her intellectual, emotional, social and cultural development any disability that a child may have
- Any chronic illness from which a child may suffer
- The need for a child to be brought up within a stable family environment and, where this is not possible, in an environment resembling as closely as possible a caring family environment.

1.2.3 The Children's Amendment Act (No. 41 of 2007)

The Act amends the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 and provides factors such as:

- The partial care of children
- Early childhood development (ECD)
- Further protection of children
- Prevention and early intervention services
- Children in alternative care
- Foster care
- Child and youth care centres, shelters and drop in centres
- Certain new offences relating to children
- The plight of child-headed households
- Respect for parental rights by providing that no person may take or send a South African child out of the country without the consent of the parents or guardian
- The discipline of children

1.2.4 The South African Schools Act (Act No. 84 of 1996)

The South African Schools Act mandates compulsory school attendance, stipulating that every parent must ensure that every learner under their care attends school. This requirement begins from the first school day of the year in which the learner turns seven years old and continues until the last school day of the year in which the learner turns fifteen years old or completes the ninth grade, whichever comes first. The Basic Education Laws Amendment Act 32 of 2024 makes the attendance of Grade R compulsory for children aged five or six. The amendment also provides for fines or imprisonment of anyone who prevents a child from attending school between Grade R and Grade 12, without any justifiable reason.

1.2.5 The Social Assistance Act (Act No. 13 of 2004)

The Social Assistance Act in South Africa addresses various social and economic needs within the country. The primary objectives of the Act are rendering social assistance for those in need, alleviating poverty, supporting vulnerable groups, promoting social inclusion, and establishing mechanisms for assistance. Specifically, the Act outlines several grants relevant to children:

- Child Support Grant: It provides monthly payments to caregivers or parents of children under the age of 18.
- Care Dependency Grant: It provides monthly payments to caregivers or parents of children living with disabilities.
- Foster Child Grant: It provides assistance to caregivers looking after foster children by providing a monthly grant.

1.3 The National Plan for Action for Children

South Africa's fourth National Plan of Action for Children (NPAC 2019-2024) is set to conclude in 2024. This plan was established to create and implement a suitable, responsive, and effective framework for promoting children's rights. Its goal is to integrate children's rights across government sectors and foster collaboration with various stakeholders and civil society. Notably, the fourth NPAC is the first to align with the Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) of the democratic government, ensuring coherence with the National Development Plan (NDP), South Africa's key policy document.

The NDP broad vision for children is that by 2030:

- All children should enjoy services and benefits aimed at facilitating access to nutrition, health care, education, social care and safety;
- The elimination of problems such as hunger, malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies that affect physical growth and cognitive development, especially among children;
- Vulnerable groups such as children, orphans, the elderly, children living with HIV, patients with chronic illnesses and people with disabilities should enjoy the full protection provided for under the constitution;
- Cash grants should be used to ensure their income is above the poverty line;
- All South Africans should have access to basic services such as shelter, water, sanitation and energy;
- No one should suffer poverty induced hunger; thus no individual should live below the poverty line;
- There should be universal access to basic essential health care, with the state taking the responsibility for delivery and financing of health care;
- All working individuals should be making adequate provision for retirement through mandated savings. The state should provide measures to make pensions safe and sustainable;
- Social security mechanisms should be in place to cover risks associated with informal employment. There should be an effective social welfare system that delivers better results for vulnerable groups, with the state playing a larger role compared to now.

With few years remaining until the NDP period ends, several priorities outlined in the framework have yet to be achieved. Nonetheless, substantial progress has been made in child well-being, although the COVID-19 pandemic significantly offset some of these achievements. The year 2024 also marks 30 years of democracy in South Africa. Over these three decades, the country has made significant strides in improving child well-being, despite ongoing challenges.

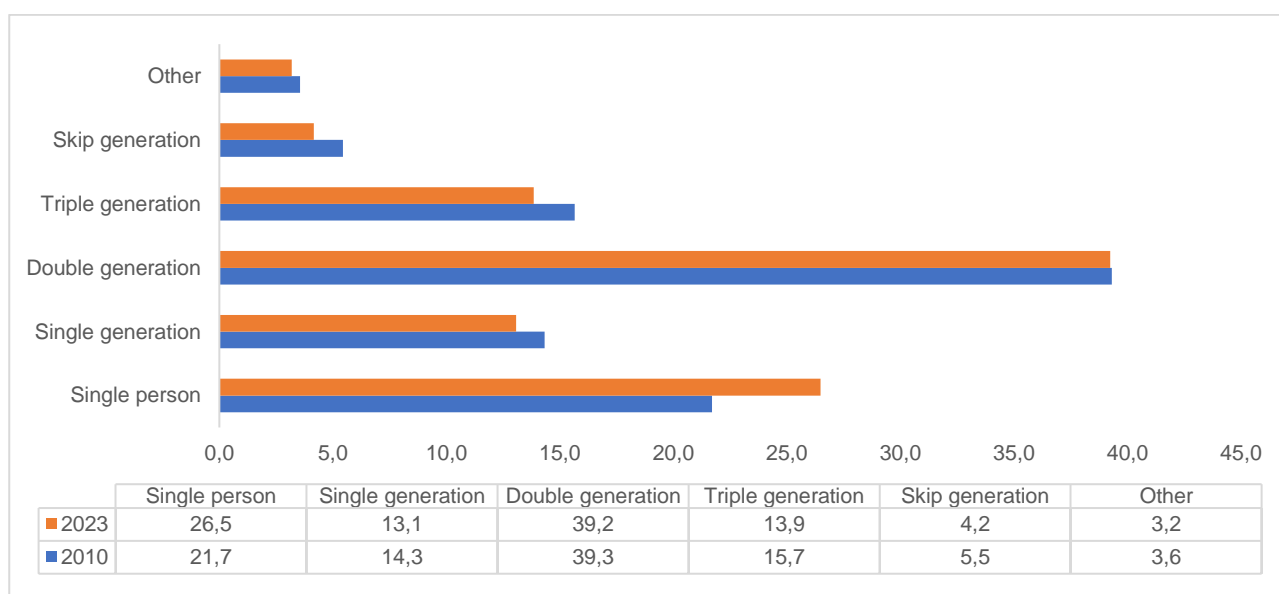
Access to education has improved markedly, thanks to the no-fee schools’ policy and the school nutrition program, which have also contributed to a notable decline in child mortality rates. However, challenges such as poverty, inequality, and violence against children persist. Despite legal prohibitions, corporal punishment is still reported in both schools and homes (Stats SA 2023). A significant number of crimes against children in South Africa involve sexual offenses, with girls being victimized more frequently than boys. Rape in Western Cape and Northern Cape, has consistently been the most prevalent crime against children (Stats SA 2024).

1.4 Household’s structures in South Africa

Household structures in South Africa are shaped by a variety of factors. Socio-economic challenges, like high unemployment and poverty, often necessitate families living together to pool resources. Cultural norms that emphasize the importance of extended families also significantly influence these structures. Furthermore, migration from rural to urban areas in search of employment leads to housing shortages in cities, resulting in extended family living arrangements. South African household can be categorised into single generation where individuals live without parents or grandparents; double generation where children live with their parents; triple generation where children live with their parents and grandparents; skip generation where children live with grandparents only.

Inter-generational households offer several benefits such as strong family support systems, fostering emotional well-being and resilience; shared household chores and caregiving duties. These arrangements help preserve cultural traditions and values, as older generations pass down their knowledge and customs to younger members. Pooling resources can lead to cost savings on housing, utilities, and other expenses, making it easier to manage financial challenges. Grandparents can assist with childcare, while younger family members can help care for elderly relatives, ensuring that both ends of the age spectrum receive the attention they need.

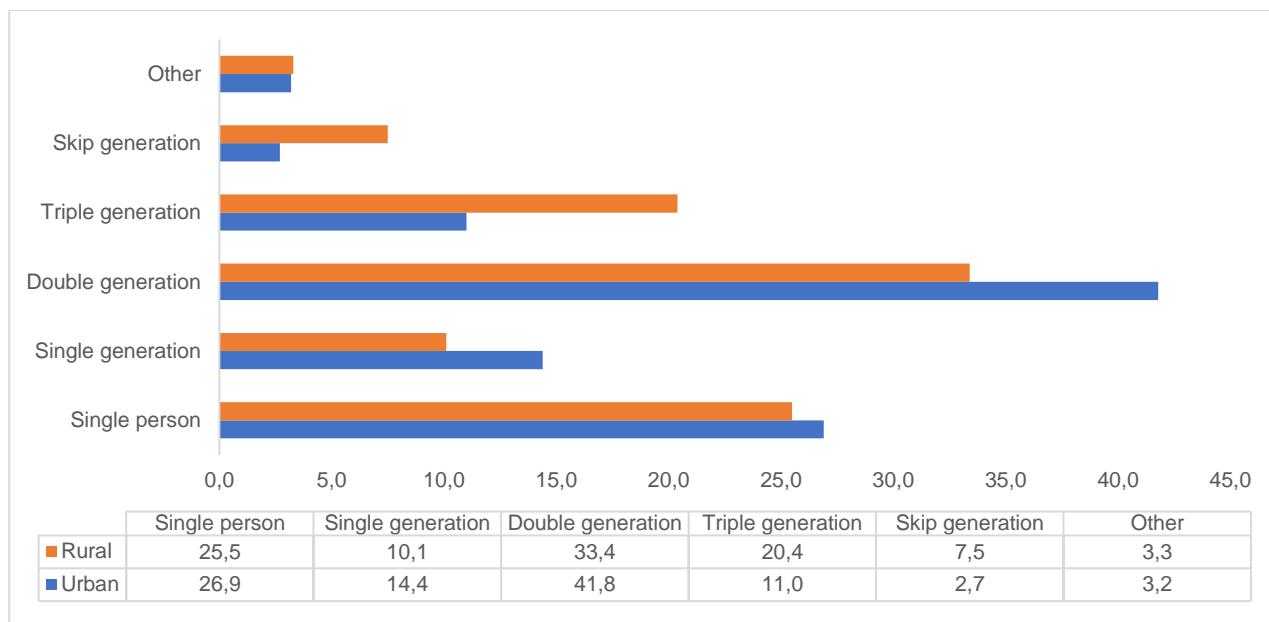
Figure 1.1: Percentage distribution of households in South Africa, 2010 and 2023



Source: GHS 2010 and 2023

In 2023, approximately 13,9% of households in South Africa were triple-generation households, where grandchildren lived with their parents and grandparents, as shown in Figure 1.1, above. This is a decrease from 15,7% in 2010. Skip-generation households, where grandparents lived with their grandchildren without the parents, also declined from 5,5% in 2010 to 4,2% in 2023. Meanwhile, double-generation households, where parents lived with their children, remained stable at around 39% throughout the decade.

Figure 1.2: Percentage distribution of households in South Africa by geographical area, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Skip-generation and triple-generation households were predominantly found in rural areas, with nearly 28% of households having such structures while one-third of households constitutes double generation households (33,4%). In contrast, urban areas were mainly characterized by double-generation households (41,8%). Additionally, one in five households (20%) in rural areas were triple-generation households, while in urban areas, this figure was one in ten households (11%).

Furthermore, in urban areas, close to 7,5% of households were skip-generation households, where grandparents are raising their grandchildren without the middle generation being present. By contrast, this percentage is halved to 2,7% in rural areas.

Table 1.1 - Relationship to the head of the household by children aged 0–17, 2002 and 2023

Relationship	2002	2023
Head	0,4	0,1
Husband/wife/partner	0,3	0,0
Son/daughter/stepchild/adopted child	58,1	51,5
Brother/sister/stepbrother/stepsister	2,1	1,0
Grandchild/great grandchild	32,3	38,1
Other relative (e.g. in-laws or aunt/uncle)	6,4	8,7
Non-related persons	0,5	0,5

Source: GHS 2002 and 2023

In 2002, South Africa witnessed a significant demographic trend with approximately 5,9 million children living in households headed by their grandparent. This statistic represents nearly one-third, or 32,3%, of all children under the age of 18 in the country during that period. Additionally, a substantial proportion, close to nine percent, of children found themselves residing with their siblings, other relatives, or non-related individuals.

In 2023, South Africa witnessed a notable increase in the number of children living in households headed by grandparents, with approximately 8 million children falling into this category. This represents a significant rise compared to previous years, constituting 38,1% of all children under the age of 18 in the country. Additionally, a substantial proportion, close to 10% of children found themselves residing with their siblings, other relatives, or non-related individuals during this period.

This upward trend in the number of children living with grandparents reflects ongoing societal shifts and challenges faced by families across South Africa. Economic pressures, health crises, and social factors contribute to the complex landscape of family dynamics in the country. Grandparents continue to play pivotal roles in providing care and support to their grandchildren, often stepping in to fill gaps left by absent or unable parents. Their presence in the lives of these children is essential for ensuring stability, nurturing, and guidance, contributing significantly to their overall well-being and development.

Similarly, the prevalence of children living with siblings, other relatives, or non-related individuals underscores the diverse ways in which families in South Africa adapt and support one another in times of need. Whether due to familial bonds, community ties, or formal arrangements, these alternative family structures play vital roles in providing safe and nurturing environments for children to grow and thrive.

Moreover, fostering a broader societal understanding and acceptance of diverse family structures is essential for building inclusive communities that value and support all families, regardless of their composition. By recognizing the contributions and resilience of caregivers and children in alternative family arrangements, South Africa can work towards creating a more equitable and supportive society for all its members.

This data highlights prevalence of alternative family arrangements within the South African society. Reasons behind such living arrangements are diverse and multifaceted, often reflecting socio-economic factors, cultural norms, and familial dynamics. Grandparents frequently assume caregiving responsibilities for their grandchildren due to various circumstances, including parental illness, death, or migration for work opportunities. In many instances, grandparents serve as pillars of strength, providing love, guidance, and stability to their grandchildren in the absence of their parents.

Similarly, siblings or other relatives may take on caregiving roles, stepping in to support younger family members when parents are unable to do so. Additionally, children may find themselves living with non-related individuals due to factors such as foster care placements or informal arrangements with family friends or community members.

1.5 Objectives of the report

The number of children residing in households headed by their grandparents is increasing in South Africa, reflecting a notable shift in family dynamics over the past two decades. The General Household Survey's (GHS) historical data on the relationship to the household head by residents provides valuable insights into the changing dynamics of family structures in South Africa. This report will focus on children aged 0–17 who are living in the same household as their grandparents, with the grandparents being the head of households. By analysing these specific demographic groups, the report aims to provide a detailed profile of the situation of such children within South African households. It will examine various aspects, including but not limited to the demographic profile of children living with their grandparents as household heads, including age, gender, and racial/ethnic background. It will also examine any notable socio-economic patterns by geographical location. The report utilizes GHS 2023, which is an annual survey conducted by Statistics South Africa.

1.6 Outline of the chapters

This report is structured into five chapters. The first chapter outlines the challenges and benefits that children and grandparents experience when living together, and also provides the legislation, acts, and policy framework related to children. The second chapter investigates the socio-economic status of grandparents residing with their grandchildren. The third chapter explores the demographic profile of grandparents who are household heads living with their grandchildren aged 0–17. Chapter four explores the living arrangements of children in these households and evaluates the level of parental involvement in their lives. The chapter also assesses the well-being and developmental outcomes of children within these family settings. Lastly, chapter five provides a summary of the report's findings and presents its conclusion.

Chapter 2: Socio-economic status of grandparents who lived with children aged 0–17

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the living arrangements of grandparents and their grandchildren, regardless of whether the grandparents are the heads of their households or not. It also delves into the socio-economic status of all grandparents and their access to services. By examining the socio-economic conditions of grandparents in South Africa, we gain valuable insights into various aspects such as education levels, income distribution, number of employed members of the household, housing conditions, and access to essential services. These factors help us better understand the country's social and economic landscape, highlighting differences and inequalities between households and generations.

2.2 Socio-economic conditions of grandparents staying in households with children aged 0–17

Many grandparents, especially those raising grandchildren, face financial challenges. This can be due to limited income from pensions or social security, increased living expenses, and the costs associated with raising children. Elderly people often experience higher rates of health issues and disabilities. This can be exacerbated by the physical and emotional demands of caregiving. Lower levels of education and lack of employment opportunities can impact the economic stability of grandparents. The high cost of housing can lead to multigenerational households, where grandparents live with their children and grandchildren. This arrangement can provide mutual support but also create financial and space constraints. Access to social support networks and community resources is crucial. Grandparents who lack these support structures may struggle more with the demands of caregiving and maintaining their own well-being.

Understanding these factors can help in providing better support and resources for grandparents, ensuring they can maintain their well-being while fulfilling their roles within the family.

Table 2.1 - Number and percentage distribution of grandparents who stayed with children aged 0–17 by province, 2023

Sex	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GP	MP	LP	RSA
Number (Thousands)										
Male	171	297	60	85	475	133	391	179	272	2 066
Female	266	649	90	237	1 144	327	867	516	571	4 671
Total	437	946	151	322	1 620	461	1 258	696	843	6 738
Percentage										
Male	39,2	31,4	39,9	26,5	29,4	28,9	31,1	25,8	32,3	30,7
Female	60,8	68,6	60,1	73,5	70,6	71,1	68,9	74,2	67,7	69,3
Total	6,5	14,0	2,2	4,8	24,1	6,8	18,7	10,3	12,5	100,0

Source: GHS 2023

Table 2.1 above, shows the number and percentage of grandparents living with their grandchildren aged 0–17, categorized by sex and province. In 2023, 6,7 million grandparents in South Africa resided with their grandchildren, regardless of whether they were household heads or not. The data reveals that KwaZulu-Natal had the highest proportion of grandparents living with their grandchildren (24,1%), followed by Gauteng (18,7%) and Eastern Cape (14,0%).

Additionally, grandmothers were much more likely to live with their grandchildren compared to grandfathers, with overall close to 69,0% of grandmothers doing so, while the figures for grandfathers remained below 40,0% across the provinces.

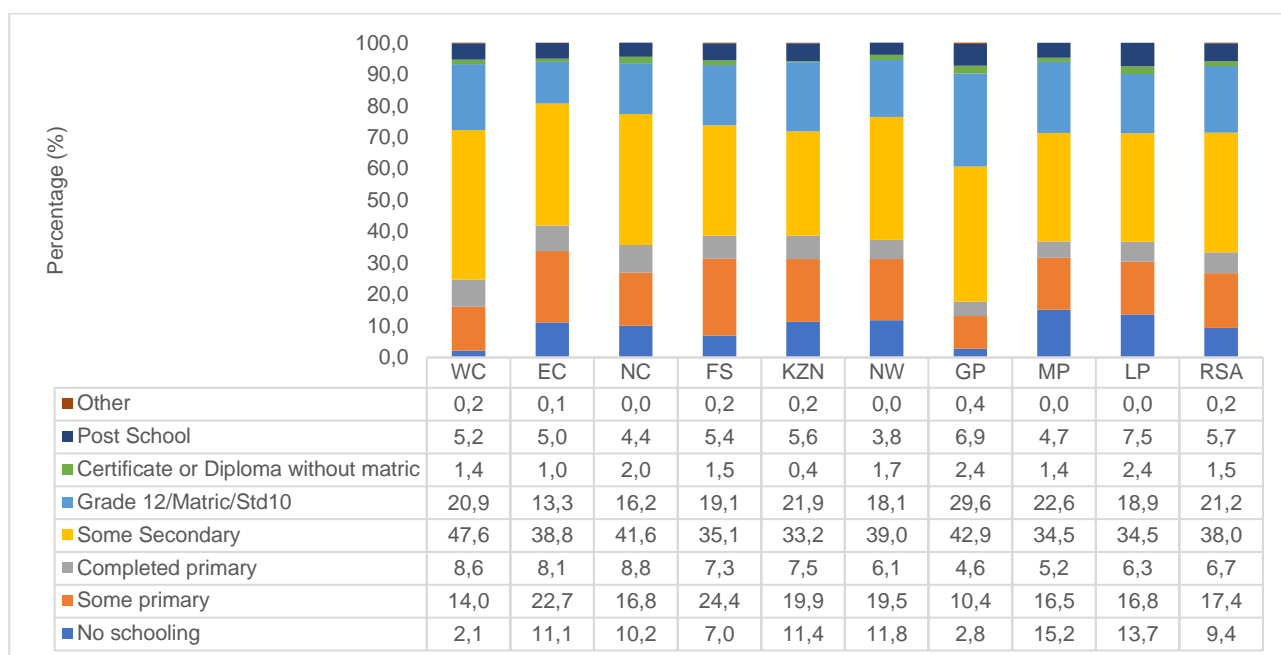
Table 2.2 - Number and percentage distribution of children aged 0–17 who stayed with grandparents by province, 2023

Sex	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GP	MP	LP	RSA
Number (Thousands)										
Male	352	669	86	217	1 370	312	900	462	596	4 970
Female	378	644	91	222	1 212	356	821	457	572	4 757
Total	731	1 314	178	439	2 583	668	1 722	920	1169	9 727
Percentage										
Male	7,1	13,5	1,7	4,4	27,6	6,3	18,1	9,3	12,0	51,1
Female	8,0	13,6	1,9	4,7	25,5	7,5	17,3	9,6	12,0	48,9
Total	7,5	13,5	1,8	4,5	26,6	6,9	17,7	9,5	12,0	100,0

Source: GHS 2023

Table 2.2 above, illustrates the number and percentage of children aged 0–17 residing in households with co-resident grandparents, categorized by sex and province. In 2023, 9,7 million children in South Africa were living with their grandparents. The data reveals that KwaZulu-Natal had the highest proportion of such children (26,6%), followed by Gauteng (17,7%) and Eastern Cape (13,5%).

Figure 2.1: Percentage distribution of grandparents who stayed with children aged 0–17 by highest level of education and province, 2023

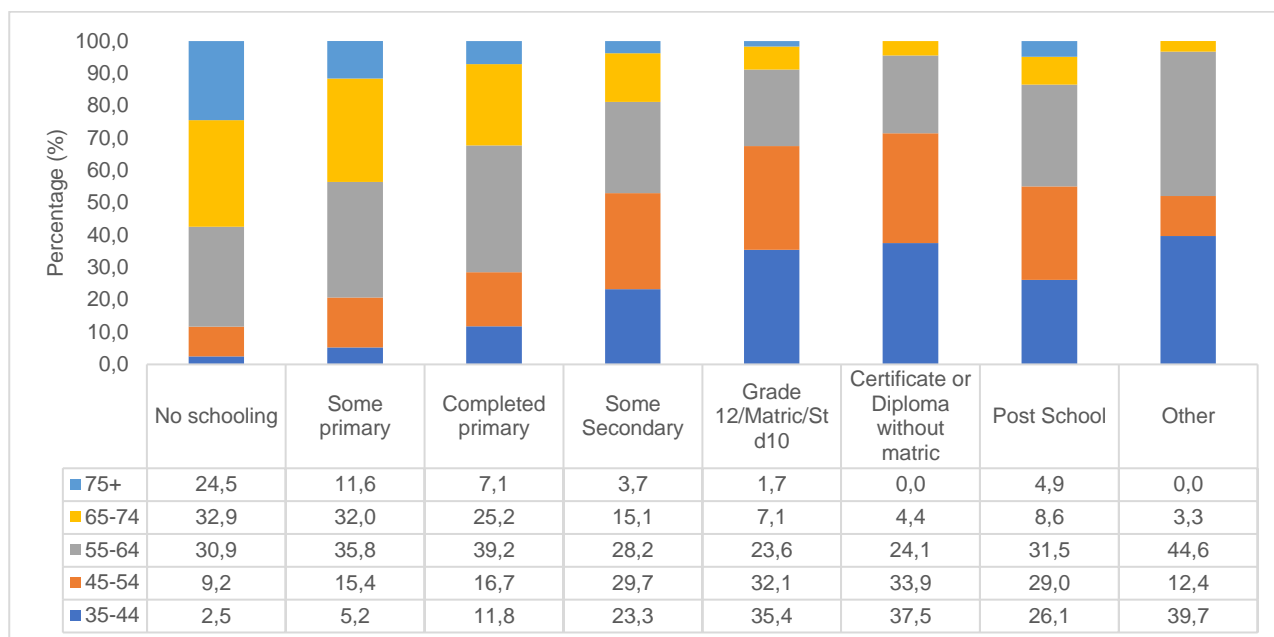


Source: GHS 2023

Educated grandparents can significantly influence their grandchildren’s educational journey. By helping with schoolwork, they can boost the children’s academic performance and overall success. Educated grandparents can provide invaluable support and guidance, enriching their grandchildren’s learning experiences. Their involvement not only helps with academic tasks but also fosters a love for learning and curiosity.

Figure 2.1 shows that a notable portion of grandparents in South Africa living with their grandchildren had some secondary education (38,0%), while around 21,2% had completed grade 12/ Matric/ Std10. Additionally, 17,4% of these grandparents had some primary education, and 9,4% had no formal schooling. Provincially, the data revealed that grandparents without formal schooling were most prevalent in Mpumalanga (15,2%), whereas those who had completed grade 12/ Matric/ Std10 were primarily in Gauteng (29,6%).

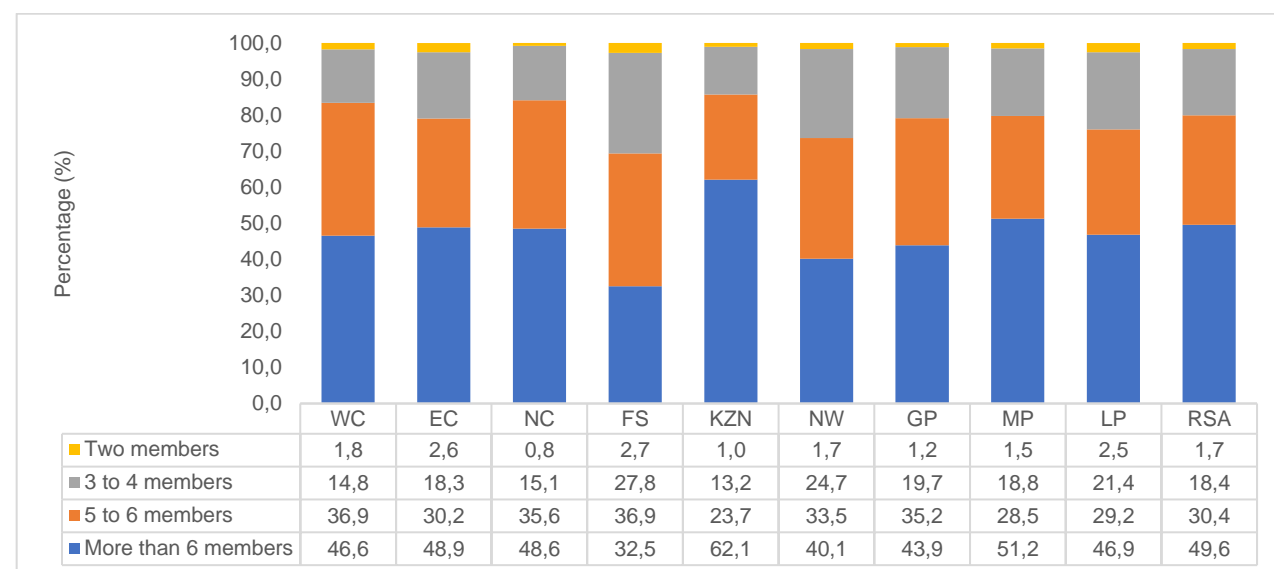
Figure 2.2: Percentage distribution of grandparents who stayed with children aged 0–17 by highest level of education and age, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 2.2 shows that a notable portion of grandparents in South Africa living with their grandchildren and had no education were 65 years or older (24,5%). Among those with post school education, more than half (55,1%) were less than 55 years old.

Figure 2.3: Percentage distribution of grandparents who stayed with children aged 0–17 by household size and province, 2023

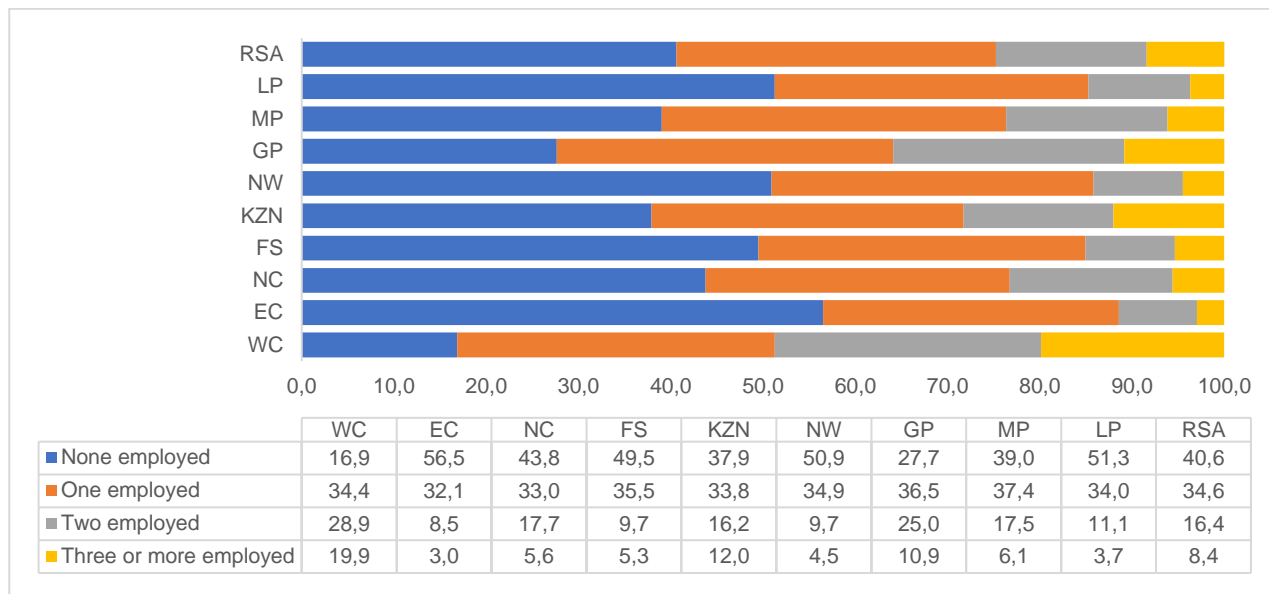


Source: GHS 2023

In 2023, nearly half (49,6%) of grandparent households with children in South Africa had more than six members. Furthermore, 30,4% of these households had five to six members, 18,4% had three to four members, and 1,7% had two members. Grandparent households with more than six members were most common in KwaZulu-Natal (62,1%), followed by Mpumalanga (51,2%). Conversely, households with five to six members were most prevalent in Free State and Western Cape (36,9% each).

Living in a large household can sometimes feel crowded, but it also allows for the sharing of chores and responsibilities among more people. Furthermore, having more family members increases the need for resources like food and space.

Figure 2.4: Percentage distribution of grandparents who stayed with children aged 0–17 years by number of employed members of the households and province, 2023

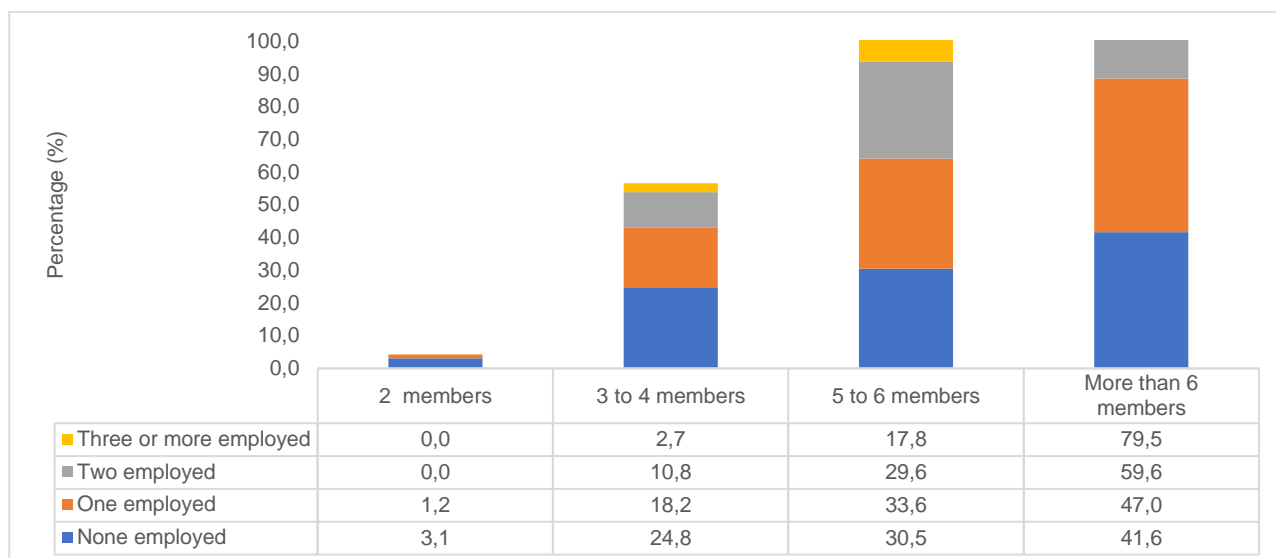


Source: GHS 2023

Figure 2.4 above, shows that in South Africa, the majority (40,6%) of grandparents' households with grandchildren aged 0–17 had no employed members. Among those with employed members, nearly 35,0% had only one employed member, 16,4% had two, and 8,4% had three or more. Data indicates that not only did Eastern Cape have the highest percentage (56,5%) of grandparent households without any employed members, but also had the lowest percentage of households with a single employed member. Households with grandparents in Limpopo and North West faced a similar challenge, with over half of these households lacking any employed members (51,3% and 50,9%, respectively). Conversely, Gauteng and Mpumalanga had the highest percentages of households with only one employed member, at 37,4% and 36,5% respectively. Additionally, Western Cape had the highest percentage of grandparents' households with at least two employed members (28,9%) followed by Gauteng (25,0%).

A workless household is one where no adults aged 16 or older are employed. This can include people who are unemployed and looking for work, as well as those who are not working due to family responsibilities, retirement, education, disability, or illness. Such households often face financial instability and a higher risk of poverty.

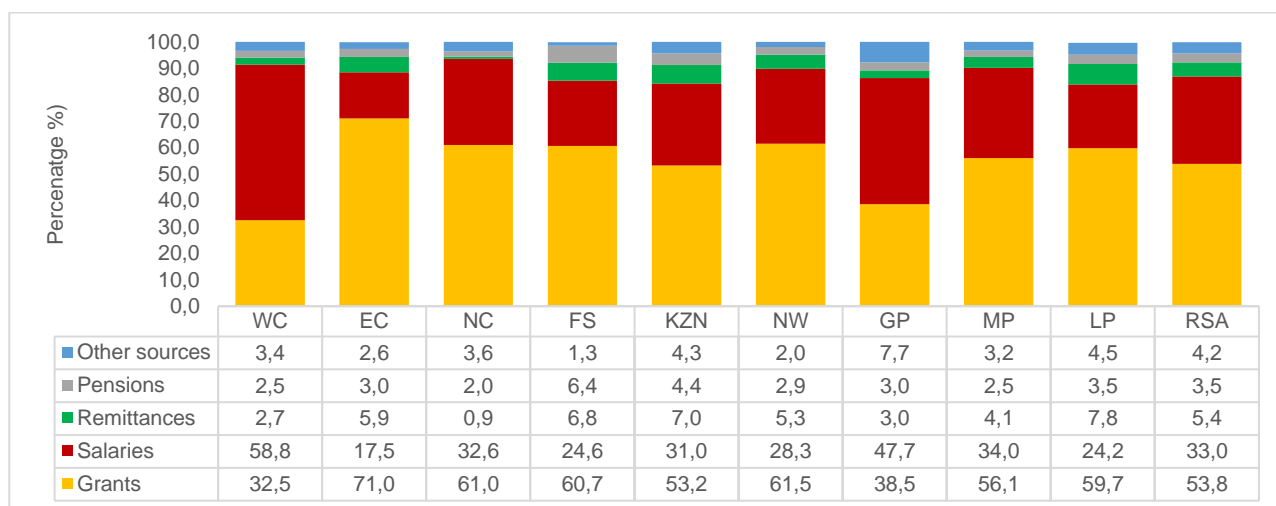
Figure 2.5: Percentage distribution of grandparents who stayed with children aged 0–17 by the number of employed household members and household size, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 2.5 above, illustrates the percentage of grandparents living with children aged 0–17, categorized by the number of employed members and household size. Generally, larger households with grandparents tend to have a higher percentage of employed members. Specifically, in households with more than six members, 79,5% had at least three employed members, and 59,6% had two employed members. In households with grandparents and only one employed member, nearly one-third (33,6%) had five to six residents, while 47% had more than five members.

Figure 2.6: Percentage distribution of grandparents staying with children aged 0–17 by source of household income and province, 2023

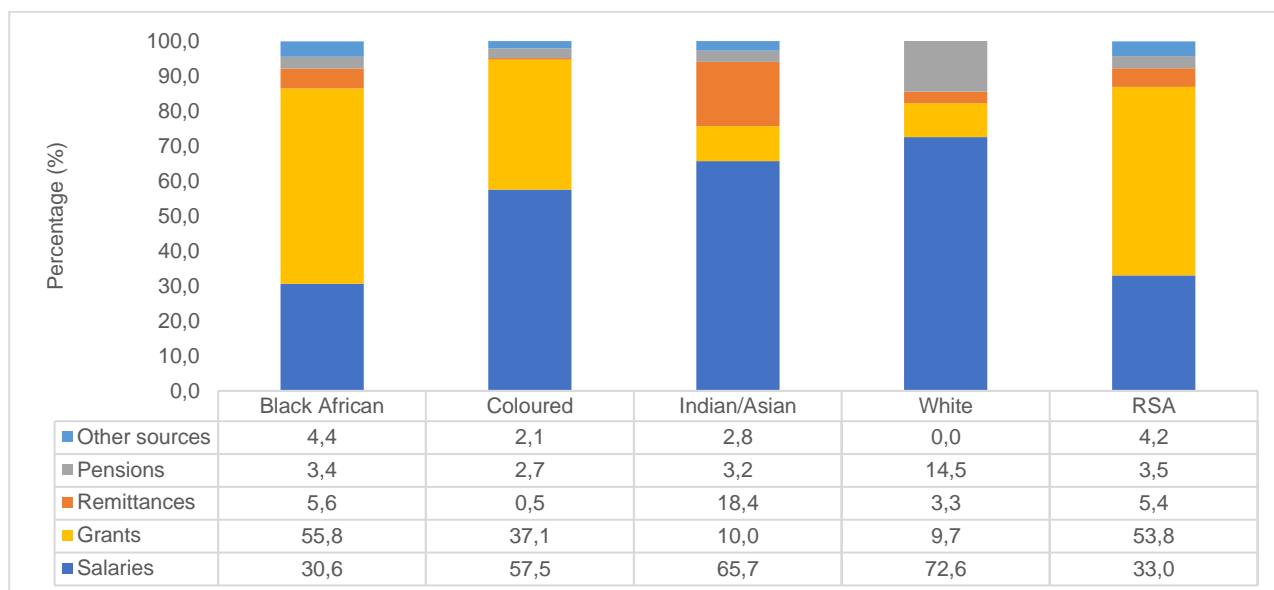


Source: GHS 2023

Figure 2.6 above, illustrates the percentage distribution of grandparents' households with children across different household income sources and province in South Africa. Over half (53,8%) of these households primarily relied on grants as their main source of income, while one-third (33,0%) depended on salaries. Eastern Cape had the highest proportion of households supported by grants (71,0%), whereas Western Cape had the lowest (32,5%).

In contrast, salaries were the main income source for the majority of households in Western Cape (58,8%) and were least common in Eastern Cape (17,5%).

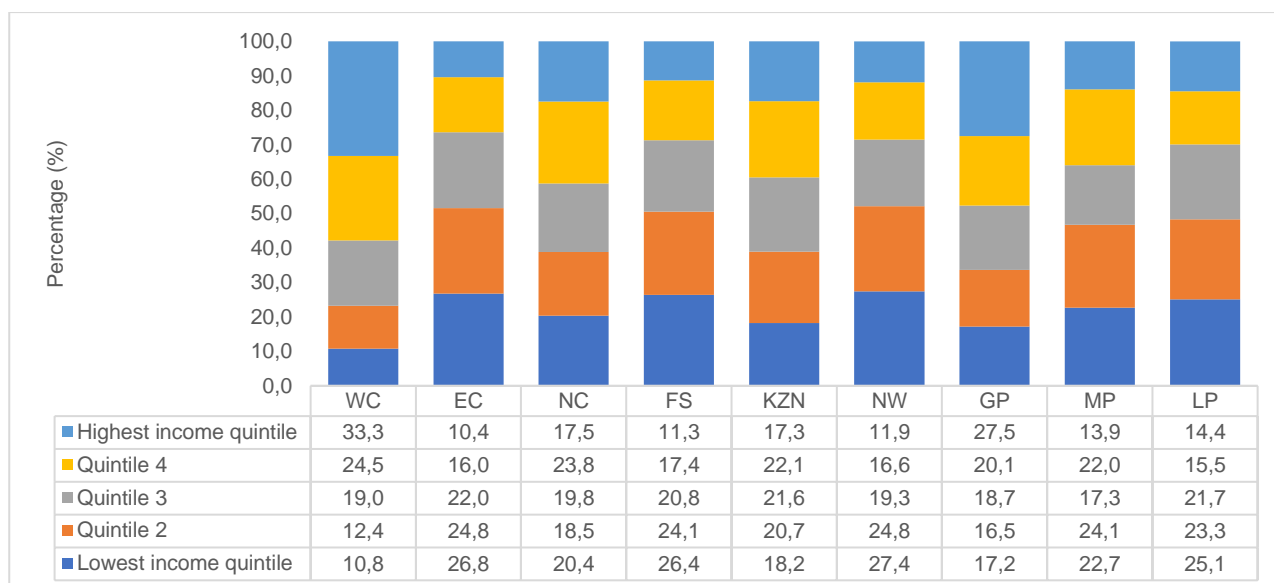
Figure 2.7: Percentage distribution of grandparent staying with children aged 0–17 by source of household income and population group, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

The graph above presents the distribution of grandparents living with children aged 0–17, categorized by household income source and population group. The primary source of income for these households varied across different population groups. For black African grandparents’ households, grants were the main source of income (55,8%). In contrast, salaries were the predominant income source for white, Indian/Asian, and coloured households (72,6%, 65,7%, and 57,5%, respectively). Overall, 5,4% of grandparents’ households depended on remittances, with Indian/Asian households being the most reliant on this income source (18,4%), followed by black African households (5,6%). Additionally, pensions accounted for 3,5% of the income for grandparents’ households overall, with 14,5% of white grandparents’ households relying on them.

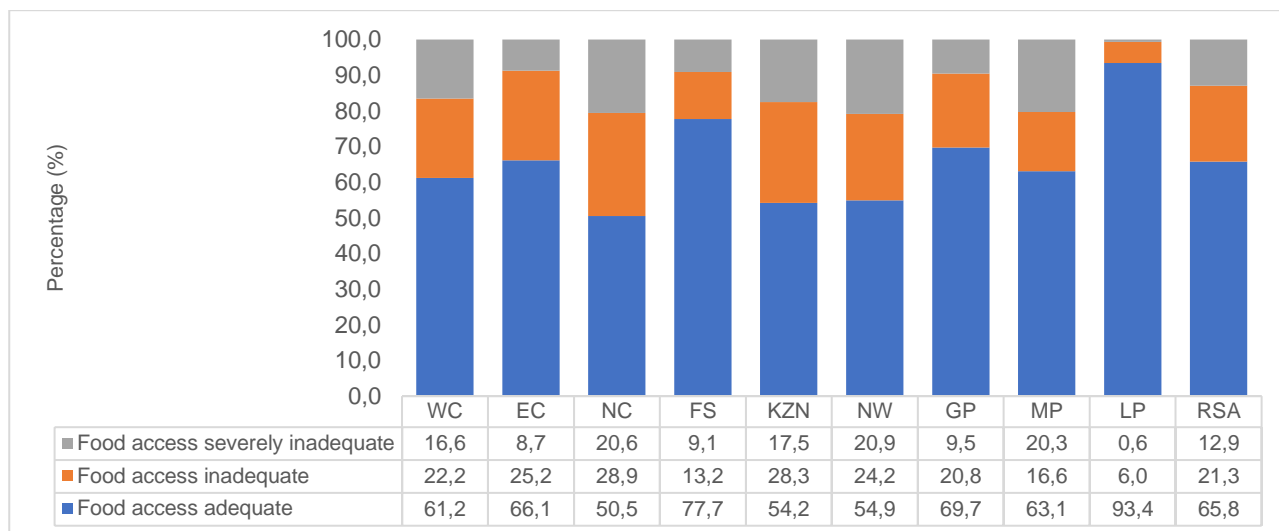
Figure 2.8: Percentage distribution of grandparent staying with children aged 0–17 by household income quintiles and province, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 2.8 illustrates the distribution of grandparents living with children aged 0–17, broken down by household income quintile and province. Data reveals that the highest percentages of the poorest grandparents living with children aged 0–17 were in North West and Eastern Cape, each accounting for nearly 27% of households, followed by Free State (26,4%) and Limpopo (25,1%). In Western Cape, over half of the grandparents (57,8%) resided in households within the richest income quintiles (Quintiles 4 and 5). Additionally, nearly one-third (33,3%) of households with grandparents living with children in Western Cape fell within the highest household income quintile. Gauteng had the second largest percentage of grandparents (47,6%) living in households within the richest income quintiles (Quintiles 4 and 5).

Figure 2.9: Percentage distribution of grandparent staying with children aged 0–17 years by experience of food adequacy and province, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

The graph above shows the distribution of grandparents living with children aged 0–17, categorized by their experience of food adequacy across different provinces. Overall, more than two-thirds (65,8%) of these households had access to adequate food, with Limpopo having the highest percentage (93,4%) and Northern Cape the lowest (50,5%). However, nearly one-third (34,2%) of households with grandparents and children aged 0–17 faced food insecurity, with Northern Cape, North West, and Mpumalanga being the most severely affected provinces (20,6%, 20,9%, and 20,3%, respectively).

2.3 Access to basic services and assets

The physical conditions of grandparent's homes include their access to essential services such as piped water, electricity, sanitation and health facility. Access to essential services is considered as a core function of government and correlates closely with the health and well-being of elderly and children.

Access to essential services like shelter, sanitation, water, and electricity is crucial for elderly people for several reasons. Access to an adequate dwelling protects elderly individuals from harsh weather conditions and provides a safe environment reducing the risk of accidents and crime and provides a sense of security. Access to clean water and proper sanitation reduces the risk of diseases and infections, which is particularly important for those with weakened immune systems. In particular, having reliable access to electricity, water and sanitation allows elderly people to maintain their independence and dignity. They can perform daily activities such as cooking, cleaning, and personal hygiene without relying heavily on others.

Ensuring that elderly people have access to these fundamental services is not just a matter of convenience but a critical aspect of their overall quality of life and well-being. Living in a clean, safe, and comfortable environment positively impacts the mental health of the elderly.

Furthermore, access to various assets increases the quality of life of the elderly as well as the children. TV sets and access to pay TV may not only be used as channels for caregivers to acquire more knowledge about children but could also be used to entertain and teach the children.

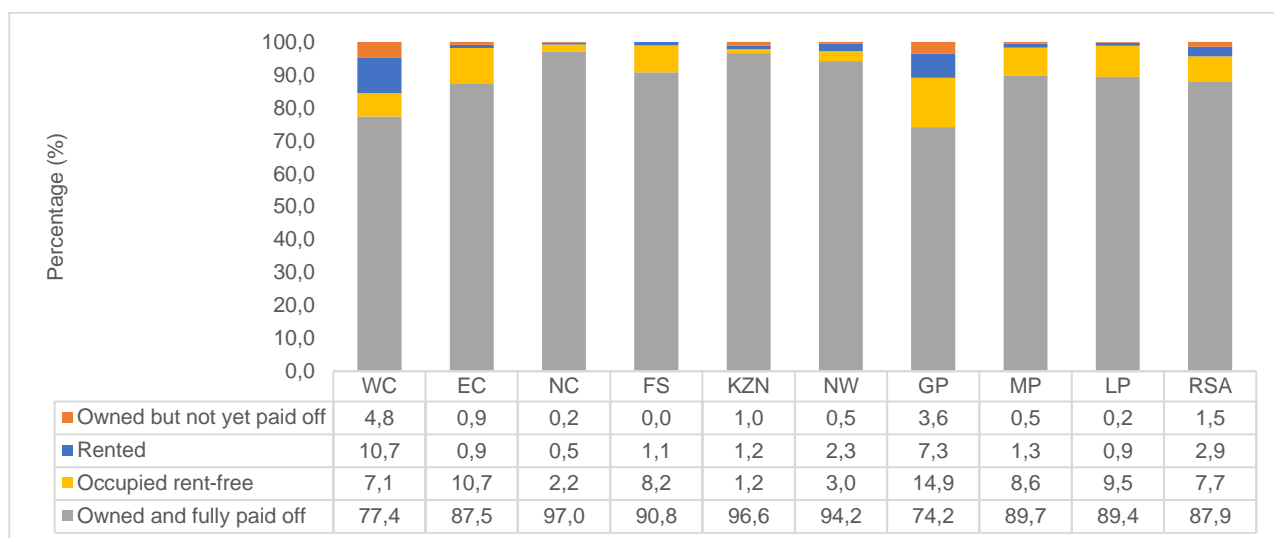
Figure 2.10: Percentage distribution of grandparents staying with children aged 0–17 by dwelling type and province, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 2.10 above, displays the percentage of grandparent’s households with children aged 0–17 by dwelling type and province. In 2023, the most common type of dwelling used by grandparents’ households in South Africa was a dwelling on a separate stand, yard, or farm (82,9%), with the highest prevalence in Limpopo at 96,1%. The second most common type was traditional dwellings (9,1%), primarily found in Eastern Cape, which accounted for 28,6%. Informal dwellings ranked third (3,9%), with the highest usage in Northern Cape 14,0%.

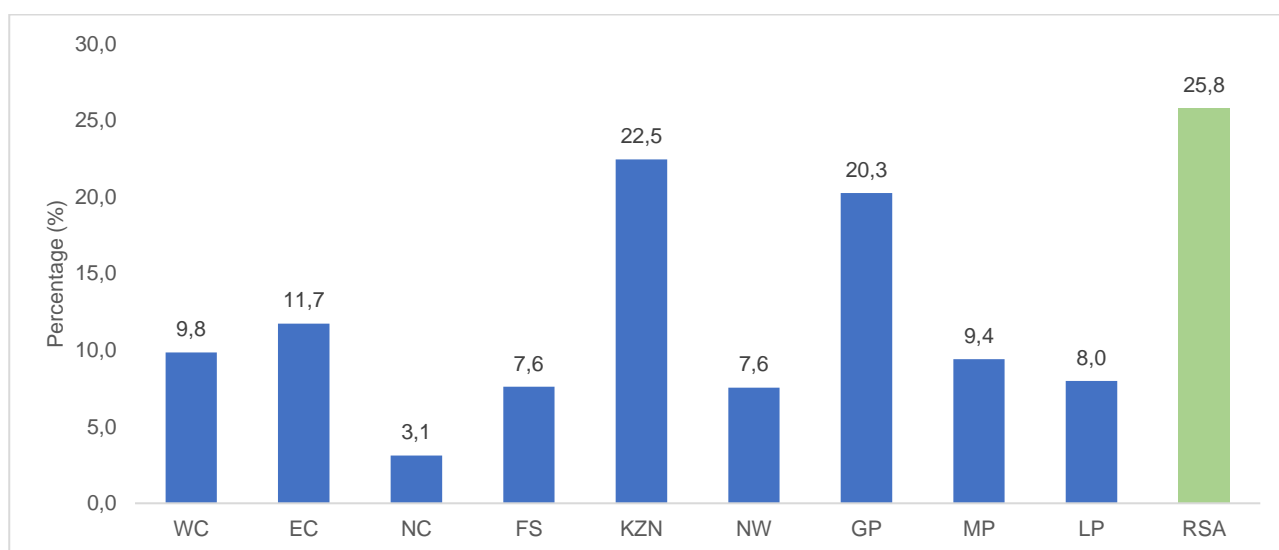
Figure 2.11: Percentage distribution of grandparents staying with children aged 0–17 by dwelling tenure status and province, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

The graph above shows the percentage distribution of grandparents' households with children aged 0–17 years by tenure status and province. Nationally, nearly 88,0% of grandparents' households stayed in dwellings that they owned and were fully paid off. However, close to 2,0% of these households resided in dwellings they owned but had not yet fully paid off. Furthermore, 7,7% of households were staying in dwellings where they did not have to pay, and only 2,9% were staying in dwellings for which they were paying rent. In addition, grandparent's households that lived in rented dwellings and dwellings they owned but had not yet fully paid off were predominantly found in Western Cape (10,7% and 4,8%, respectively). Households that lived in their own fully paid-off dwellings were mostly found in Northern Cape (97,0%) and KwaZulu-Natal (96,6%). Those who lived in dwellings where they did not have to pay rent were mostly prevalent in Gauteng (14,9%).

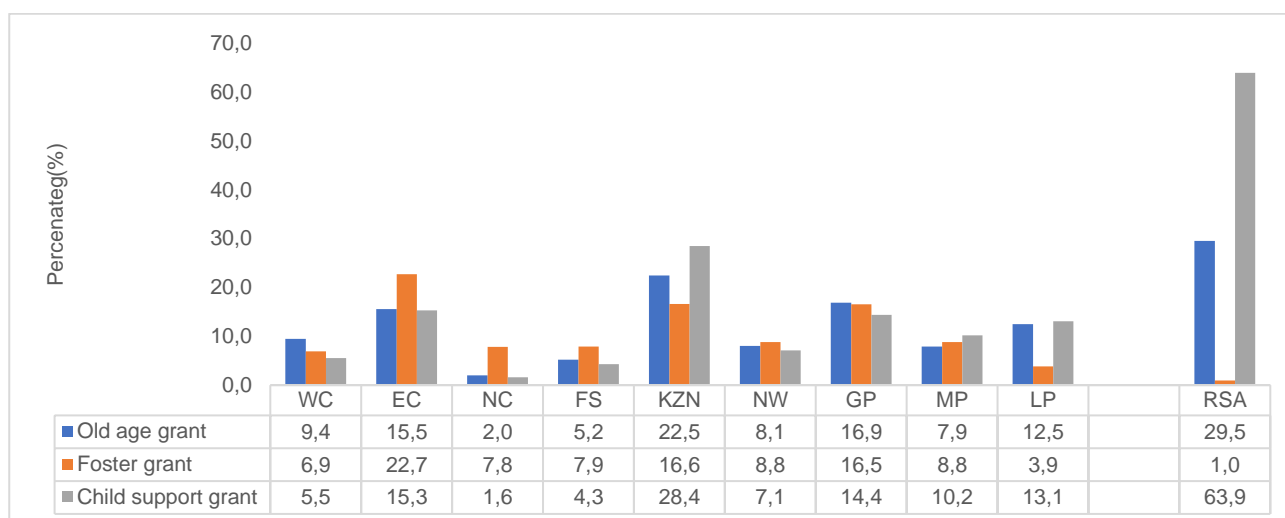
Figure 2.12: Percentage distribution of grandparents living with children aged 0–17 in households benefiting from RDP or state-subsidized dwellings by province, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

The graph above shows that nearly a quarter (25,8%) of grandparents' households with children lived in RDP or state-subsidised dwellings. Most of these households were in KwaZulu-Natal, accounting for 22,5%, followed by Gauteng at 20,3% and Eastern Cape at 11,7%. The province with the lowest percentage of grandparents' households living in RDP or subsidised dwellings was Northern Cape, at 3,1%.

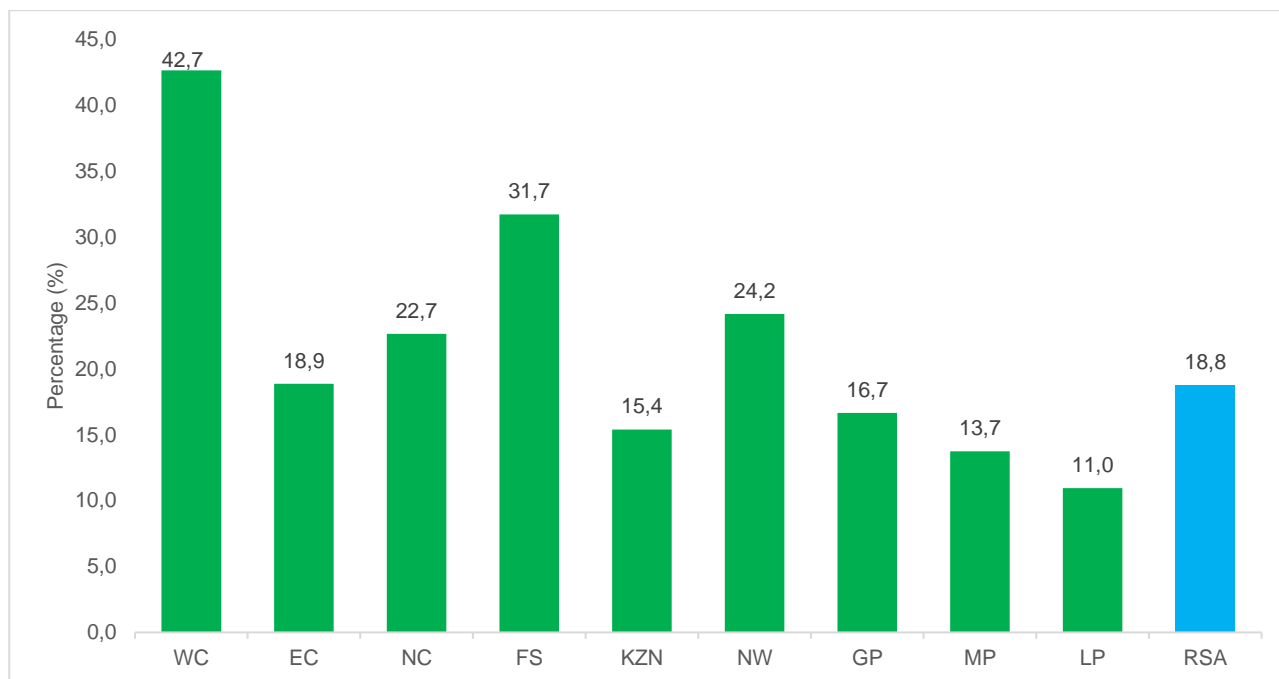
Figure 2.13: Percentage distribution of households of grandparents staying with children aged 0–17 benefiting from various grants by province, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

The figure above illustrates the distribution of various grants among households of grandparents living with children aged 0–17, broken down by province. The accessibility of these grants differs across provinces. Grandparents’ households in KwaZulu-Natal had the highest access to old age grants (22,5%), followed by Gauteng (16,9%) and Eastern Cape (15,5%). Foster grants were predominantly accessed by grandparents’ households in Eastern Cape (22,7%), with KwaZulu-Natal following at 16,6% and Gauteng at 16,5%. Conversely, child support grants (CSG) were most frequently accessed by children living in grandparents’ households in KwaZulu-Natal (28,4%).

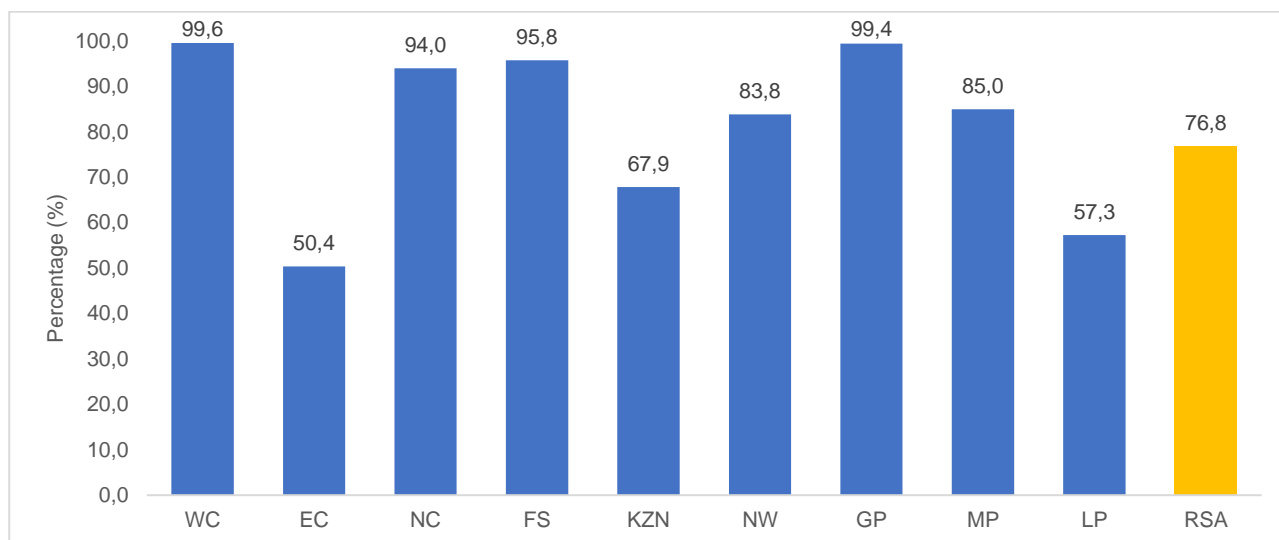
Figure 2.14: Percentage distribution of grandparents staying with children aged 0–17 residing in households subsidised by state or received assistance from government to obtain the dwelling by province, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 2.14 provides the percentage distribution of grandparents’ households residing in state-subsidised dwelling or housing obtained through government assistance by province. The results reveal that Western Cape (42,7%) had the highest percentage of grandparent’s households that resided in dwellings subsidised by the state or dwellings that they obtained through government assistance, while Limpopo had the lowest percentage of these grandparent’s households. Nationally, nearly 19,0% of grandparent’s households resided in dwellings subsidized by the state or received government assistance to obtain their dwelling.

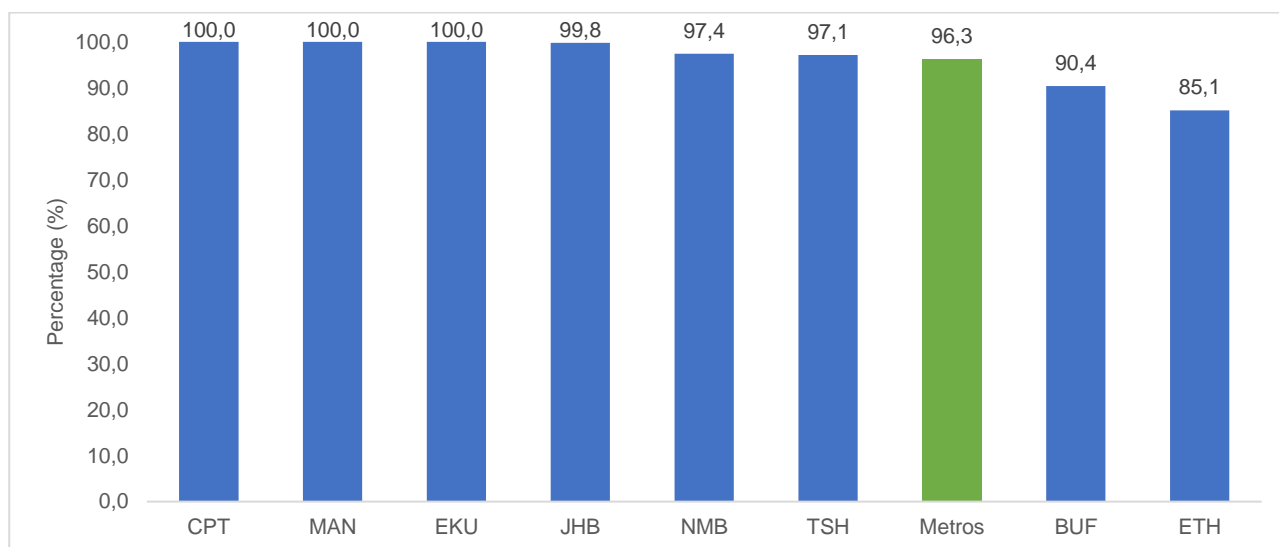
Figure 2.15: Percentage distribution of grandparents staying with children aged 0–17 with households’ access to piped or tap water by province, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

According to Figure 2.15 above, in 2023, approximately 77,0% of grandparents’ households in South Africa had access to piped or tap water in their dwelling, off-site or on-site. In most provinces, grandparents’ households had access to piped or tap water in their dwelling, off-site or on-site, with Western Cape and Gauteng having the highest percentages (99,6% and 99,4%, respectively), followed by Free State (95,8%) and Northern Cape (94,0%). In contrast, Limpopo and Eastern Cape had the lowest percentages of grandparents’ households with access to piped or tap water, at 57,3% and 50,4%, respectively.

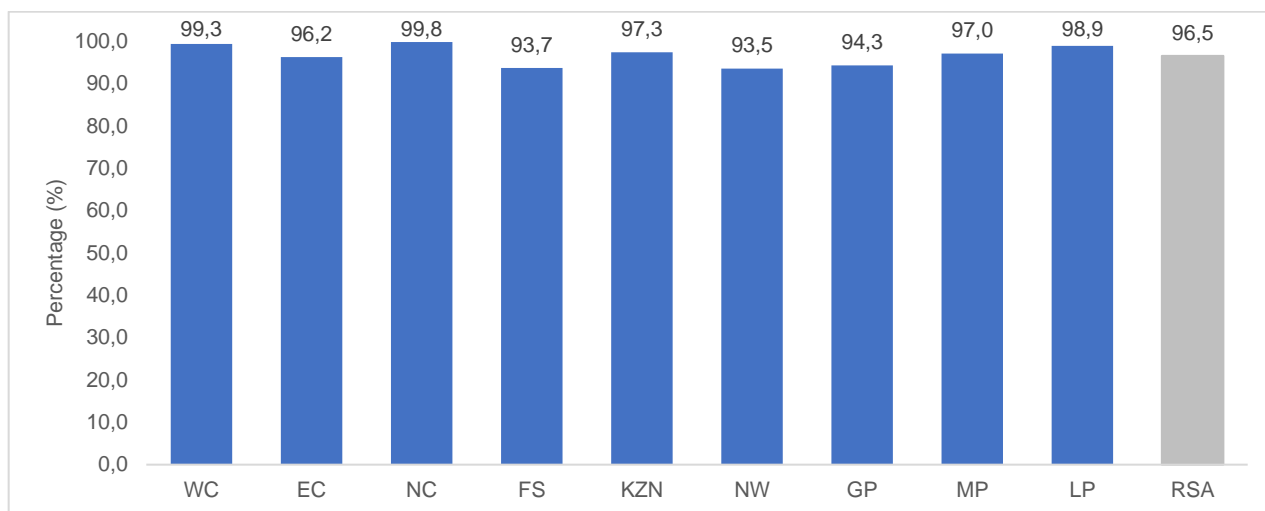
Figure 2.16: Percentage distribution of grandparents staying with children aged 0–17 with household access to piped or tap water by metropolitan area, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 2.16 above, presents the percentage of grandparents’ households with children aged 0–17 that had access to piped or tap water in their dwelling, off-site or on-site by metropolitan area. The results show that 96,3% of grandparents’ households with children in metropolitan areas had access to piped or tap water in their dwelling, off-site or on-site. Moreover, among metropolitan areas, all grandparents’ households with children in City of Cape Town, Mangaung, Ekurhuleni and Johannesburg had access to piped or tap water in their dwelling, off-site or on-site. However, eThekweni (85,1%) had the lowest percentage of households with access to piped or tap water in their dwelling, off-site or on-site.

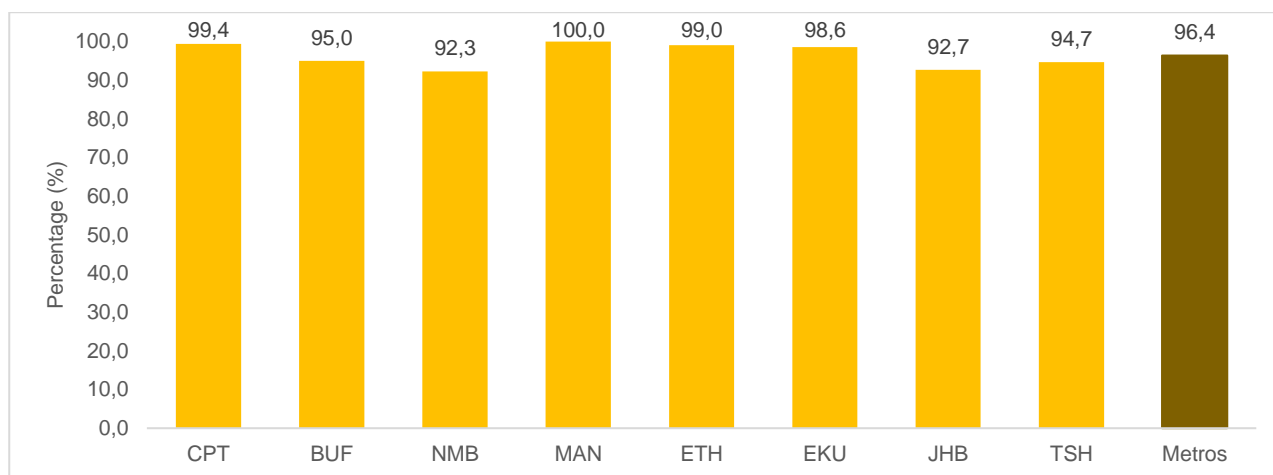
Figure 2.17: Percentage distribution of grandparents staying with children aged 0–17 by dwellings connected to the mains electricity supply by province, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 2.17 above shows that grandparent households with children aged 0–17 connected to the mains electricity supply were primarily located in Northern Cape (99,8%) and Western Cape (99,3%), followed by Limpopo (98,9%) and KwaZulu-Natal (97,3%). In contrast, grandparents’ households connected to the mains electricity supply were least prevalent in Free State (93,7%) and North West (93,5%). Nationally, 96,5% of grandparents’ households in South Africa were connected to the mains electricity supply.

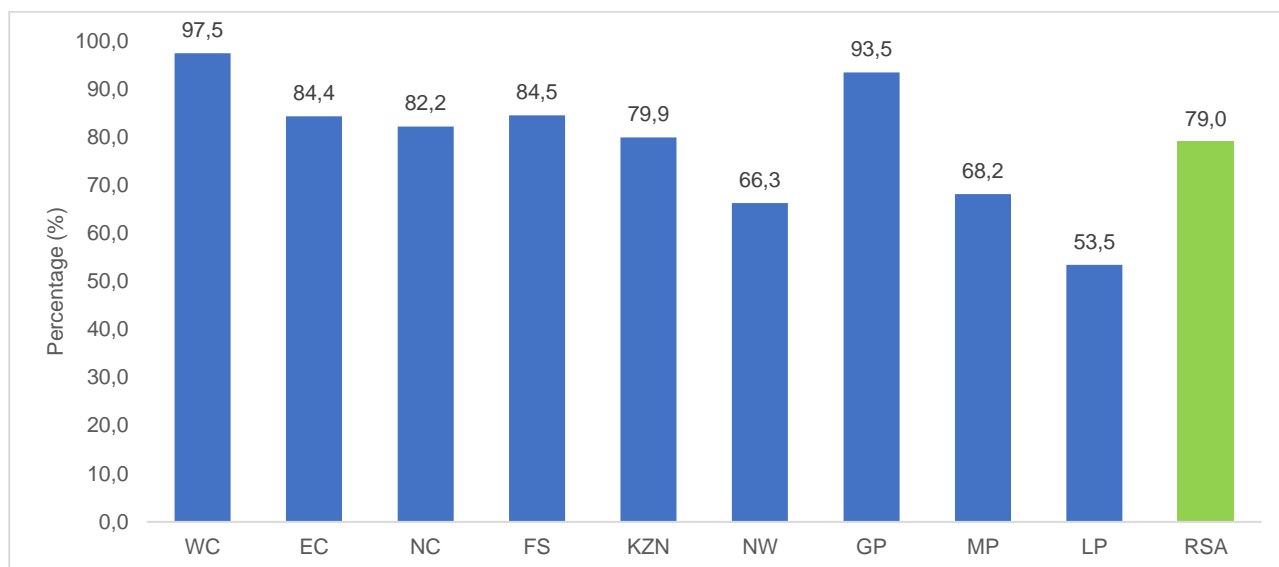
Figure 2.18: Percentage distribution of grandparents staying with children aged 0–17 by dwellings connected to the mains electricity supply by metropolitan area, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 2.18 above, displays the percentage distribution of grandparent’s households with grandchildren 0–17 years connected to the mains electricity supply by metropolitan area. Results show that 96,4% of households connected to the mains electricity supply were in metropolitan areas. Furthermore, all metropolitan areas had over 90,0% of grandparent’s households connected to the mains electricity supply, with Mangaung (100,0%) having the highest percentage, followed by City of Cape Town (99,4%) and eThekweni (99,0%). In addition, Johannesburg (92,7%) and Nelson Mandela Bay (92,3%) had the lowest percentages of households connected to the mains electricity supply.

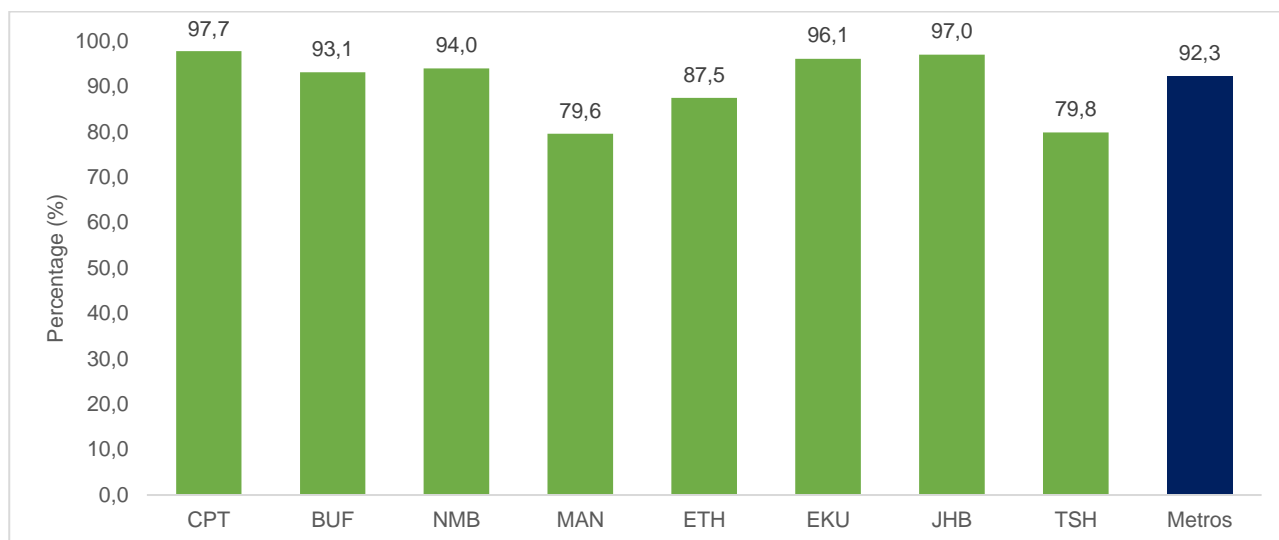
Figure 2.19: Percentage distribution of grandparents staying with children aged 0–17 by dwellings with access to improved sanitation by province, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

According to Figure 2.19 above, 79,0% of grandparents’ households with children aged 0–17 had access to improved sanitation facilities. These facilities are defined as flush toilets connected to a public sewerage system or a septic tank, or a pit toilet with a ventilation pipe. Provincially, households with access to improved sanitation were mostly found in Western Cape (97,5%), followed by Gauteng (93,5%) and Free State (84,5%). The results further show that Limpopo (53,5%) had the lowest percentage of households with access to improved sanitation.

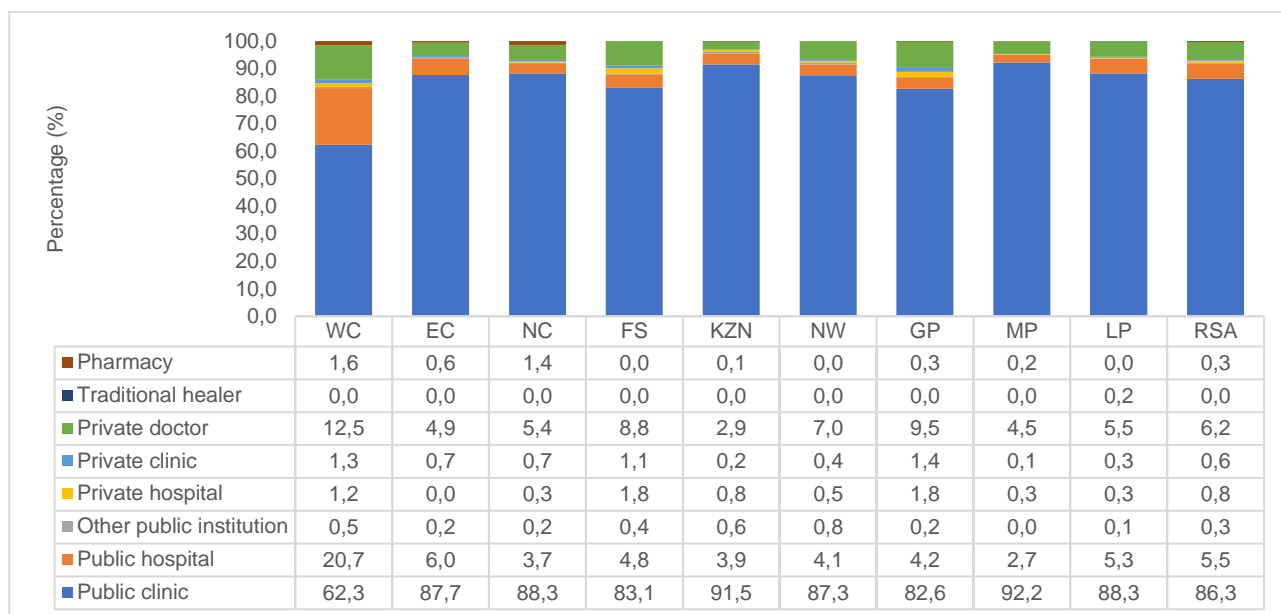
Figure 2.20: Percentage distribution of grandparents staying with children aged 0–17 by dwellings access to improved sanitation by metropolitan area, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 2.20 above, shows the percentage of grandparents’ households with children aged 0–17 that had access to improved sanitation by metropolitan areas. In 2023, 92,3% of these households in metropolitan areas had access to improved sanitation. The highest access rates were in City of Cape Town (97,7%) and City of Johannesburg (97,0%), while the lowest were in City of Tshwane (79,8%) and Mangaung (79,6%).

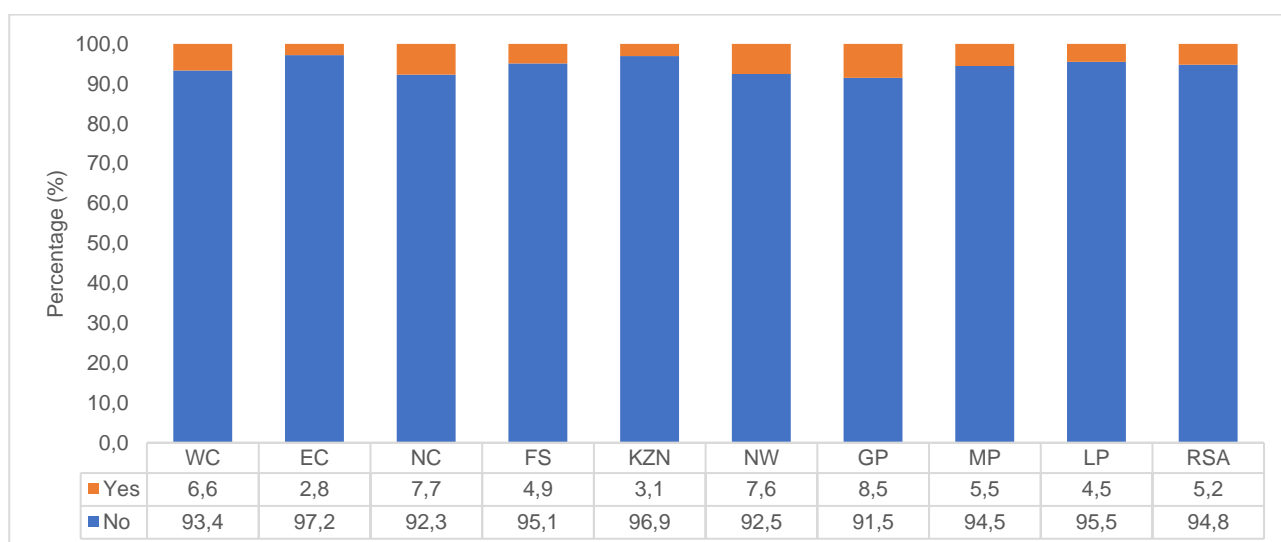
Figure 2.21: Percentage of the type of health-care facility consulted first by households with grandparents staying with children aged 0–17, when falling ill or getting injured by province, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

In South Africa, a high percentage (86,3%) of grandparents’ households with children aged 0–17 relied on public clinics as their primary healthcare facility when they fell ill or got injured. Private doctors were their second choice (6,2%), followed by public hospitals (5,5%). This pattern was similar among grandparents’ households in Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, Free State, North West, Gauteng, Mpumalanga, and Limpopo. However, in Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, the pattern shifted, with the majority of households first visiting public clinics, followed by public hospitals, and then private doctors.

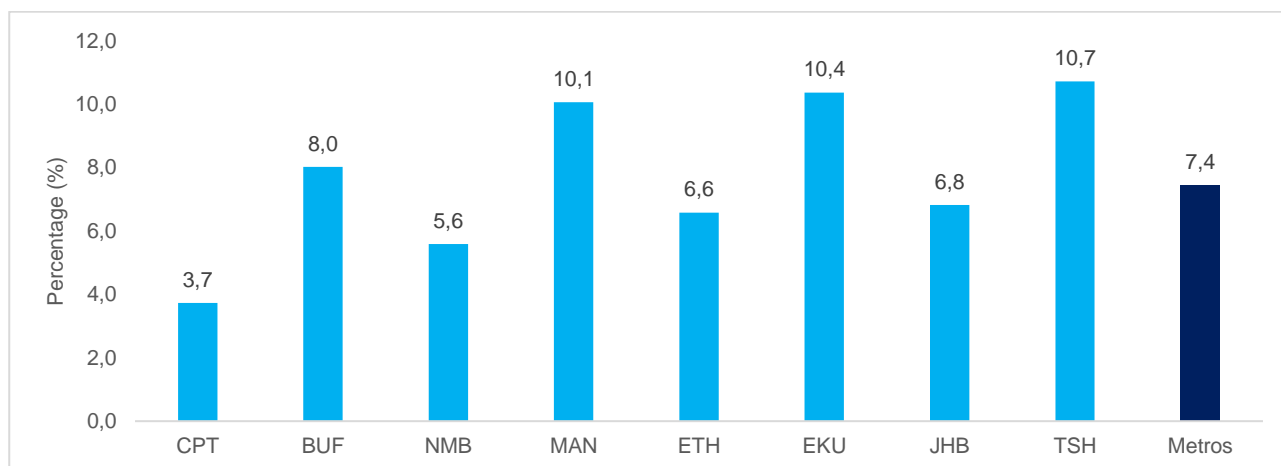
Figure 2.22: Percentage distribution of grandparents staying with children 0–17 by households with medical aid coverage by province, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

According to Figure 2.22, in 2023, only 5,2% of South African grandparents’ households with children were covered by medical aid, while nearly 95,0% were not covered. The results further indicate that grandparents’ households with medical aid coverage were most common in Gauteng (8,5%), followed by Northern Cape (7,7%) and North West (7,6%). The lowest percentage of such households was recorded in Eastern Cape (2,8%).

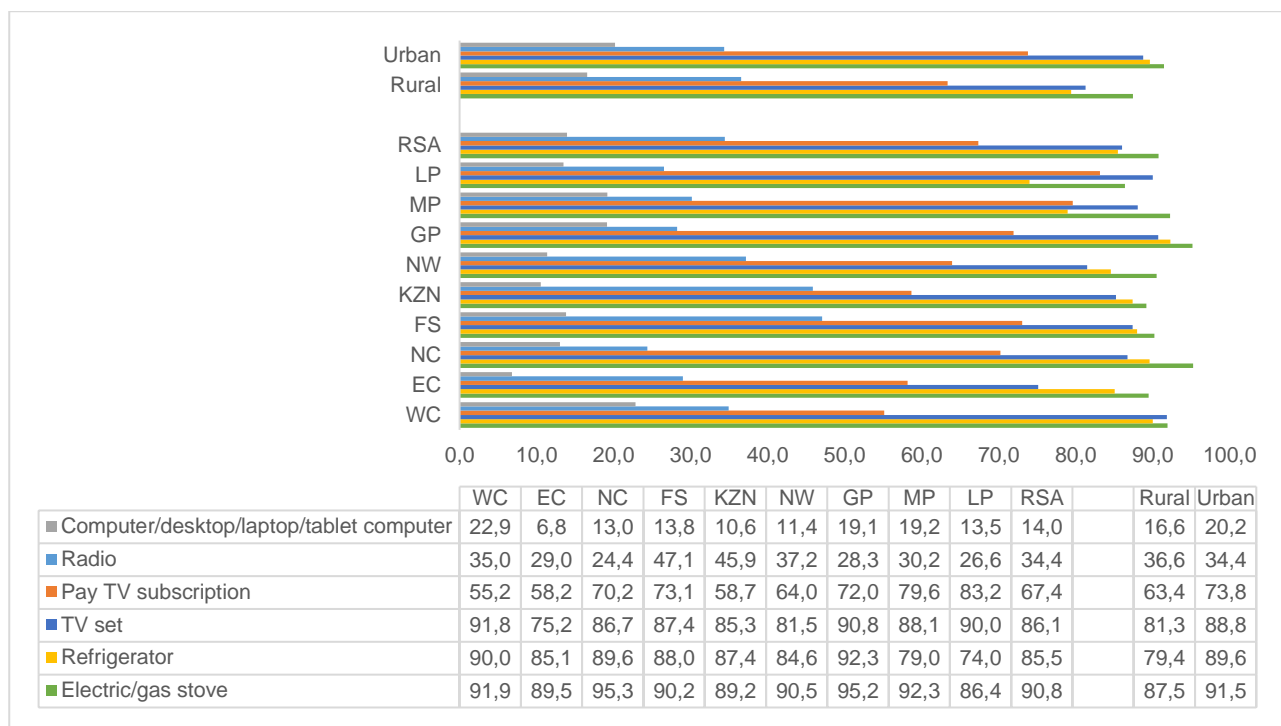
Figure 2.23: Percentage distribution of grandparents staying with children aged 0–17 with household medical aid coverage by geographical location, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

The graph above presents the percentage distribution of grandparents staying with children aged 0–17 by household medical aid coverage and metropolitan area. Approximately 7,4% of grandparents’ households with children aged 0–17 in metropolitan areas were covered by medical aid, whereas nearly 93,0% did not. City of Tshwane had the highest (10,7%) and City of Cape Town the lowest (3,7%) of households with medical aid coverage.

Figure 2.24: Percentage distribution of grandparents staying with children aged 0–17 by households’ ownership of assets and province, 2023

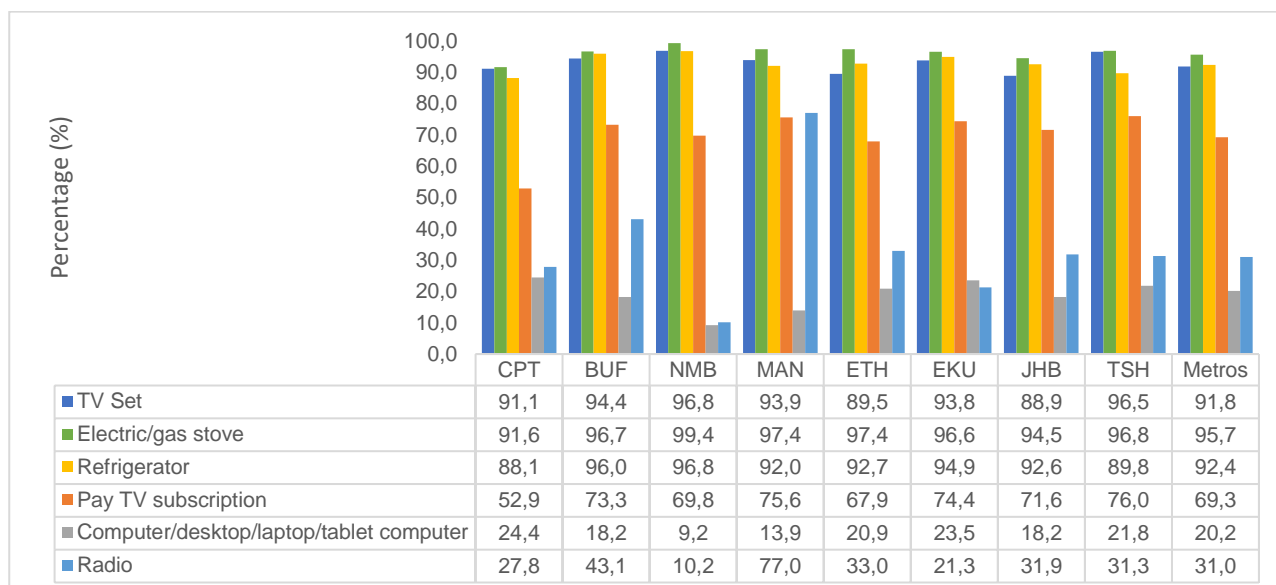


Source: GHS 2023

The above graph shows selected households’ assets ownership by grandparents’ households staying with children aged 0–17 by province. The figure reveals that, in South Africa in 2023, most grandparents’ households with children aged 0–17 possessed electric or gas stoves (90,8%), television sets (86,1%), refrigerators (85,5%), and pay TV subscriptions (67,4%). In contrast, radios (34,4%) and computers/desktops/laptops/tablets (14,0%) were the least commonly owned assets within these households.

Provincially, electric or gas stoves were predominantly owned by households in Northern Cape and Gauteng (95,3% and 95,2%, respectively). TV sets and computers had the highest ownership rates in Western Cape (91,8% and 22,9%, respectively) compared to other provinces. Refrigerators were most prevalent in Gauteng households (92,3%), while pay TV subscriptions were most common in Limpopo (83,2%). Households in Free State had the highest ownership of radios (47,1%). The data also revealed a significant urban/rural gap in the ownership of fridges, TV sets, and pay TV subscriptions.

Figure 2.25: Percentage distribution of grandparents staying with children aged 0–17 by households’ ownership of asset and metropolitan area,2023



Source: GHS 2023

The above graph presents households’ assets ownership by grandparents’ households staying with children aged 0–17 by metropolitan area. In metropolitan areas, households commonly owned electric stove/gas stove (95,7%), refrigerator (92,4%) and TV set (91,8%). Pay TV subscription was the highest in City of Tshwane (76%) followed by Mangaung City (75,6%). However, relatively fewer households in metropolitan owned computer/desktop/tablet computer and radio (20,2% and 31%) respectively.

2.4 Summary

Close to 6,7 million grandparents stayed with 9,7 million children aged 0–17 in 2023. More than half (69,3%) were women. While close to 13% of grandparents had no schooling while the majority, close to 30% had some secondary education. The most educated grandparents, with post-school education lived in Western Cape (12,2%) and Gauteng (11,4%). Grandparents residing in large households often have more employed people partly because larger households may include multiple adults who are working to support the family. However, 40,6% of grandparents staying with children aged 0–17 in South Africa had no employed members.

More than half (53,4%) of grandparents’ households primarily relied on grants as their main source of income, while one-third (33,0%) depended on salaries. Eastern Cape had the highest proportion of households supported by grants (71,0%), whereas Western Cape had the lowest (32,5%). In Western Cape, nearly one-third (33,3%) of households with grandparents living with children are in the highest income quintile. Gauteng follows closely, with 47,6% of such households falling within the richest income quintiles (Quintiles 4 and 5).

The chapter considers access to services like housing, electricity, water and sanitation. Approximately 77,0% of grandparents’ households in South Africa had access to piped or tap water in their dwelling, off-site or on-site. Grandparents staying with children aged 0–17 who resided in Cape Town and Gauteng had the highest access to improved sanitation while those in Limpopo had the lowest percentage of households with access to improved sanitation.

Chapter 3: Demographic characteristics of head of household grandparents living with children aged 0–17

3.1 Introduction

In South Africa, it is quite common for grandparents to take on the role of raising their grandchildren, often due to various issues affecting the children's biological parents. These situations can vary widely, but some common reasons include single parenthood, the death of parents, incarceration, and parents' work or school commitments.

Children raised by their grandparents face different challenges compared to those living in a three-generational household with both parents and grandparents. This chapter explores the demographic characteristics of grandparents who are the primary caregivers in households where they are the heads, regardless of whether the children's parents are also present in the household.

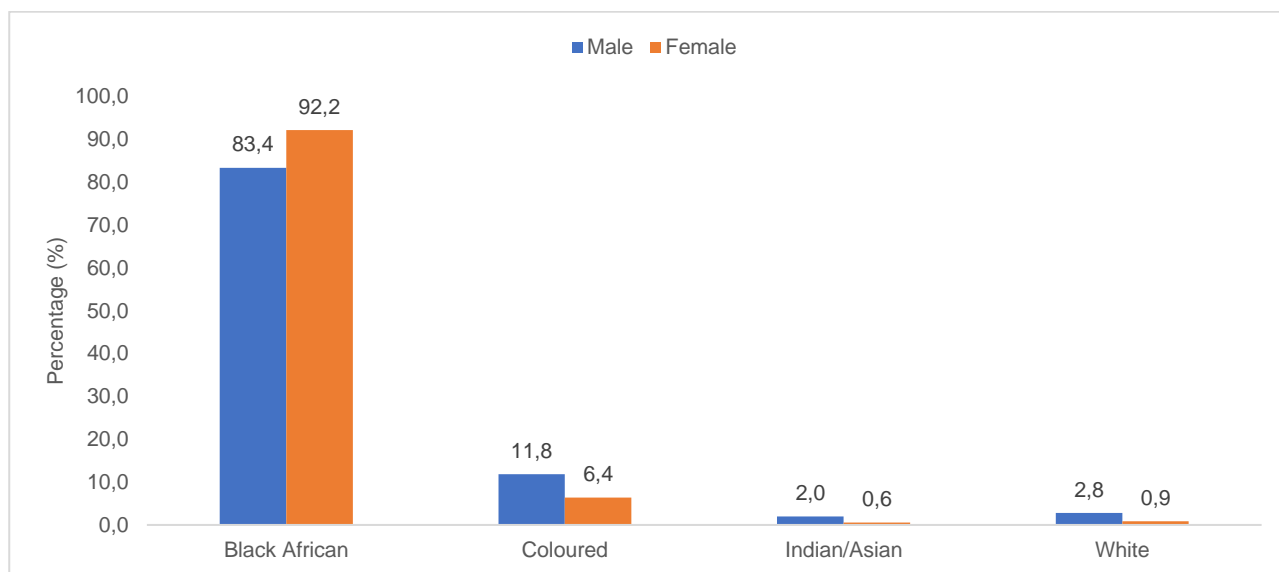
Table 3.1 - Number and percentage distribution of head of household grandparents staying with their grandchildren aged 0–17 by sex and province, 2023

Sex	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GP	MP	LP	RSA
Number (Thousand)										
Male	122	161	32	57	235	94	251	100	159	1 215
Female	162	298	33	119	528	174	413	215	268	2 213
Total	285	459	65	177	763	268	664	316	427	3 429
Percentage										
Male	10,0	13,3	2,6	4,7	19,3	7,7	20,7	8,2	13,1	35,4
Female	7,3	13,5	1,5	5,4	23,9	7,9	18,7	9,7	12,1	64,5
Total	8,3	13,4	1,9	5,2	22,3	7,8	19,4	9,2	12,5	100,0

Source: GHS 2023

Table 3.1 above, shows the number and percentage of grandparents who were heads of households and lived with their grandchildren aged 0–17. In 2023, there were 3,4 million such grandparents in South Africa. Most of these were grandmothers (64,5%), while grandfathers made up 35,4%. Overall, household heads grandparents were the highest in KwaZulu-Natal (22,3%) followed by Gauteng (19,4%). Furthermore, head of households' grandmothers living with grandchildren were mainly found in KwaZulu-Natal (23,9%), followed by Gauteng (18,7%) and Eastern Cape (13,5%). For grandfathers, the highest percentages were residents of Gauteng (20,7%), KwaZulu-Natal (19,3%), and Eastern Cape (13,3%). Northern Cape had the lowest percentages of grandparents living with their grandchildren (1,9%).

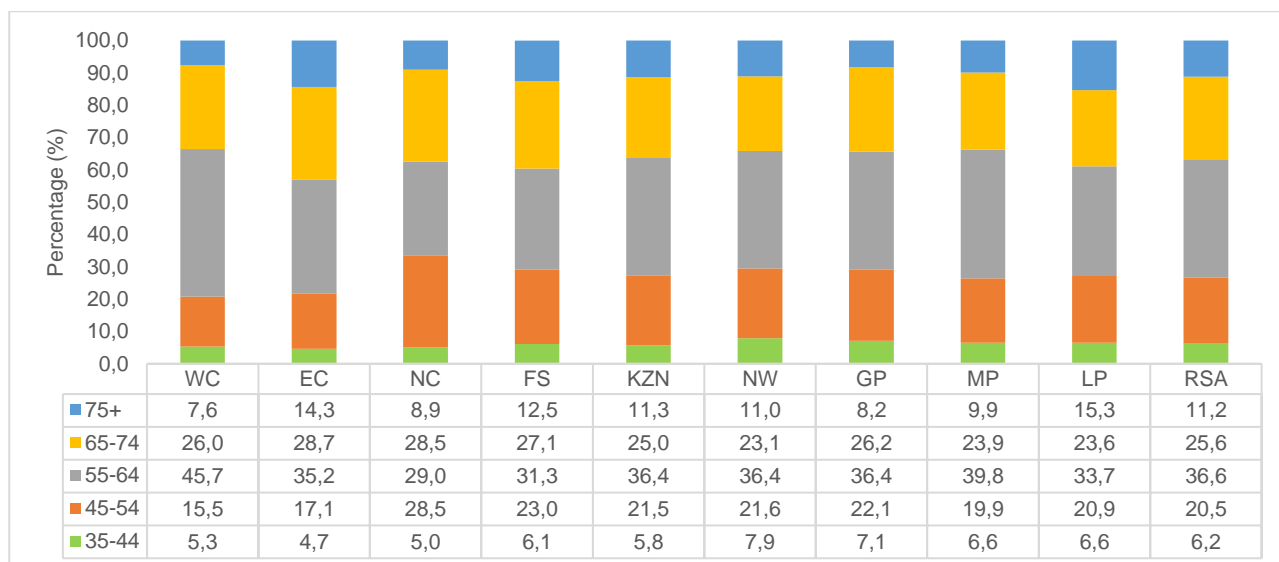
Figure 3.1: Percentage distribution of head of household grandparents staying with their grandchildren aged 0–17 by sex and population group, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 3.1 above, shows the distribution of grandparents who lived with their grandchildren by sex and population group. Overall, the majority of head of households’ grandparents living with their grandchildren were black African. Moreover, close to 92,2% were black African grandmothers while 83,4% were black African grandfathers. Conversely, within other population groups, most head of household grandparents were grandfathers: 11,8% among coloureds, 2,8% among whites, and 2,0% among Indian/Asians.

Figure 3.2: Percentage distribution of head of household grandparents staying with their grandchildren aged 0–17 by province and age, 2023

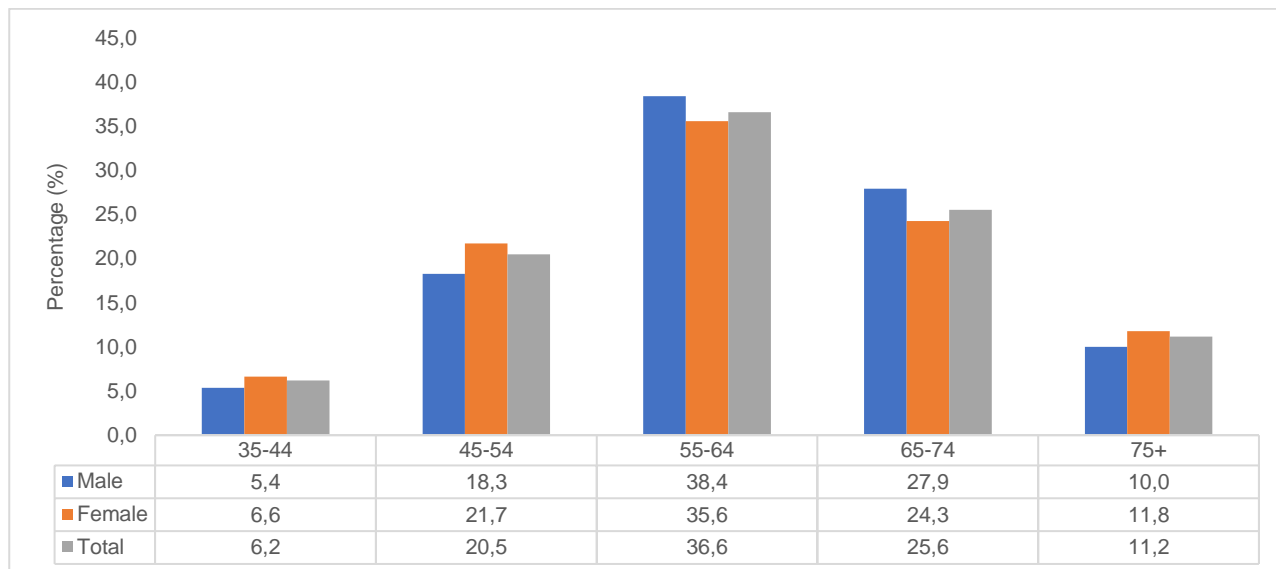


Source: GHS 2023

Figure 3.2 above, illustrates the percentage distribution of head of household grandparents who were staying with their grandchildren aged 0–17 by province and age. Nationally, over one-third (36,6%) of grandparents who served as household heads were aged 55–64, while more than a quarter (25,6%) were aged 65–74. Additionally, nearly 21,0% of grandparents who stayed with their grandchildren were between 45 and 54 years old, and 11,2% were 75 years or older. In Western Cape, 45,7% of head of household grandparents fall within the 55–64 age range.

Similarly, in Mpumalanga, 39,8% of grandparents heading households were in the 55–64 age group. On the other hand, Limpopo and Eastern Cape had the highest proportions of elderly head of households' grandparents (75 years and older), with 15,3% and 14,3% respectively.

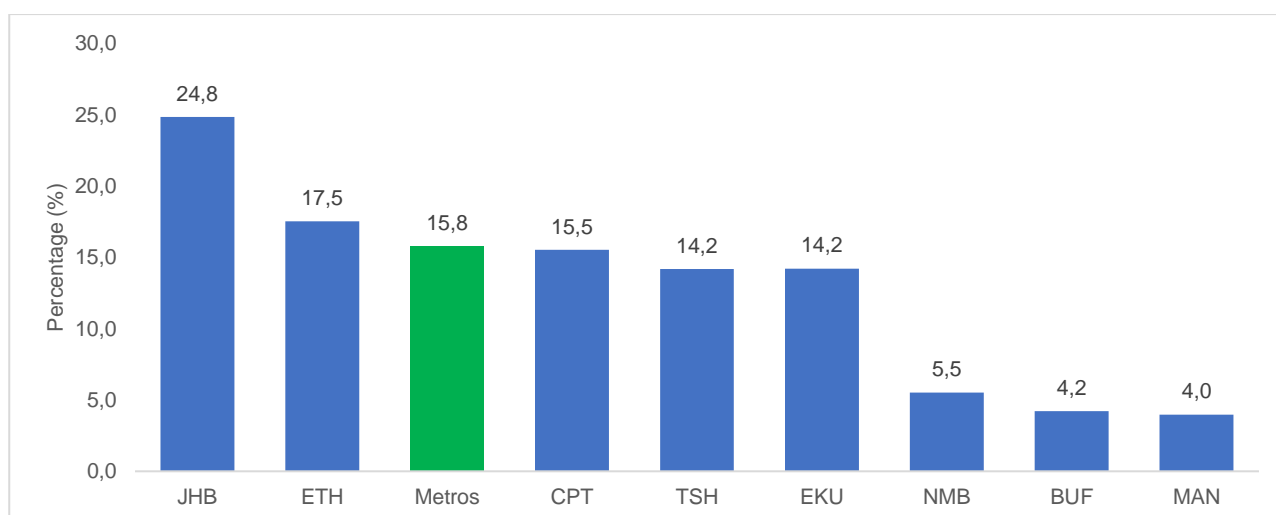
Figure 3.3: Percentage distribution of head of household grandparents staying with their grandchildren aged 0–17 by sex and age group, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 3.3 above, shows that grandmothers were more likely than grandfathers to be household heads living with their grandchildren at ages 35–54 and 75 and older. Conversely, grandfathers were more likely to be household heads living with their grandchildren at ages 55 to 74. This indicates that grandmothers play a crucial role in caregiving both at younger and older ages compared to grandfathers.

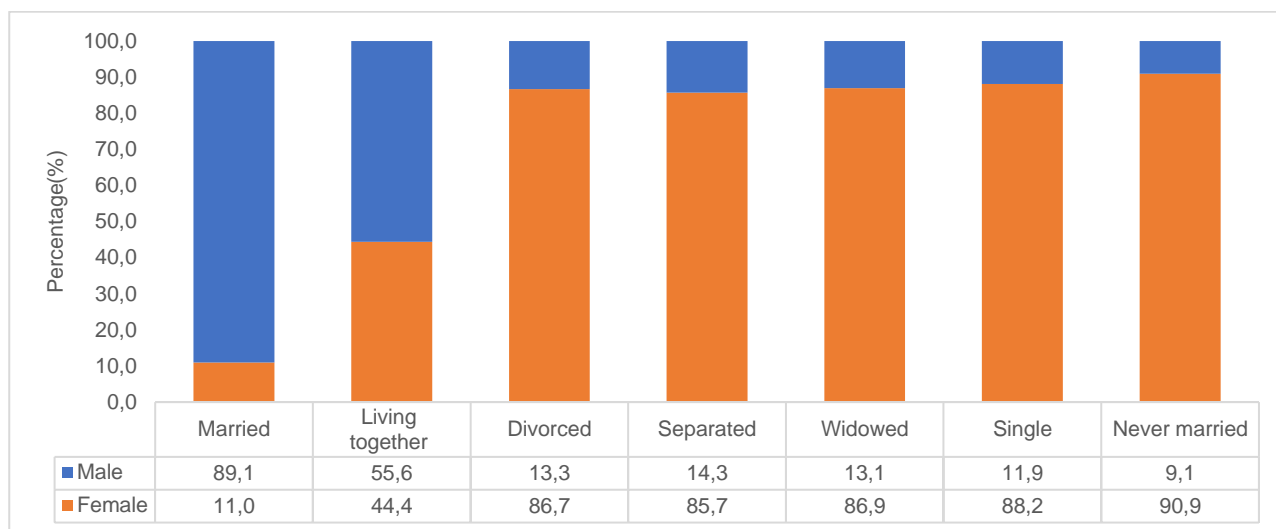
Figure 3.4: Percentage distribution of head of household grandparents staying with their grandchildren aged 0–17 by metropolitan area, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

According to Figure 3.4, close to 16,0% of grandparents who were household heads and lived with their grandchildren aged 0–17 were located in metropolitan areas. The City of Johannesburg having the highest percentage at 24,8% suggests a larger number of multigenerational households compared to Mangaung, which had the lowest at 4,0%.

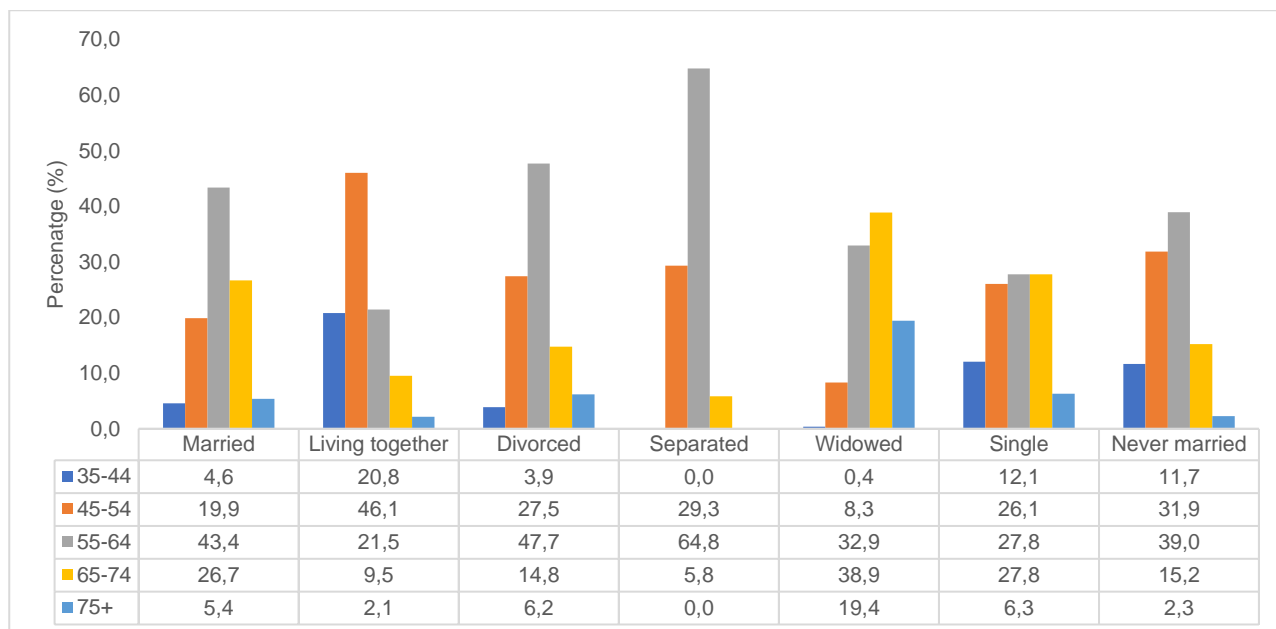
Figure 3.5: Percentage distribution of head of household grandparents staying with their grandchildren aged 0–17 by marital status and sex, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 3.5 above, illustrates the marital status distribution of grandparents who were household heads and lived with their grandchildren, categorized by marital status and sex. The data shows that head of households' grandfathers living with their grandchildren were predominantly legally married (89,1%) or cohabiting (55,6%). Conversely, grandmothers in similar situations were more often never married (90,9%). Additionally, more than 85% of grandmothers living with their grandchildren were single, widowed, divorced, or separated.

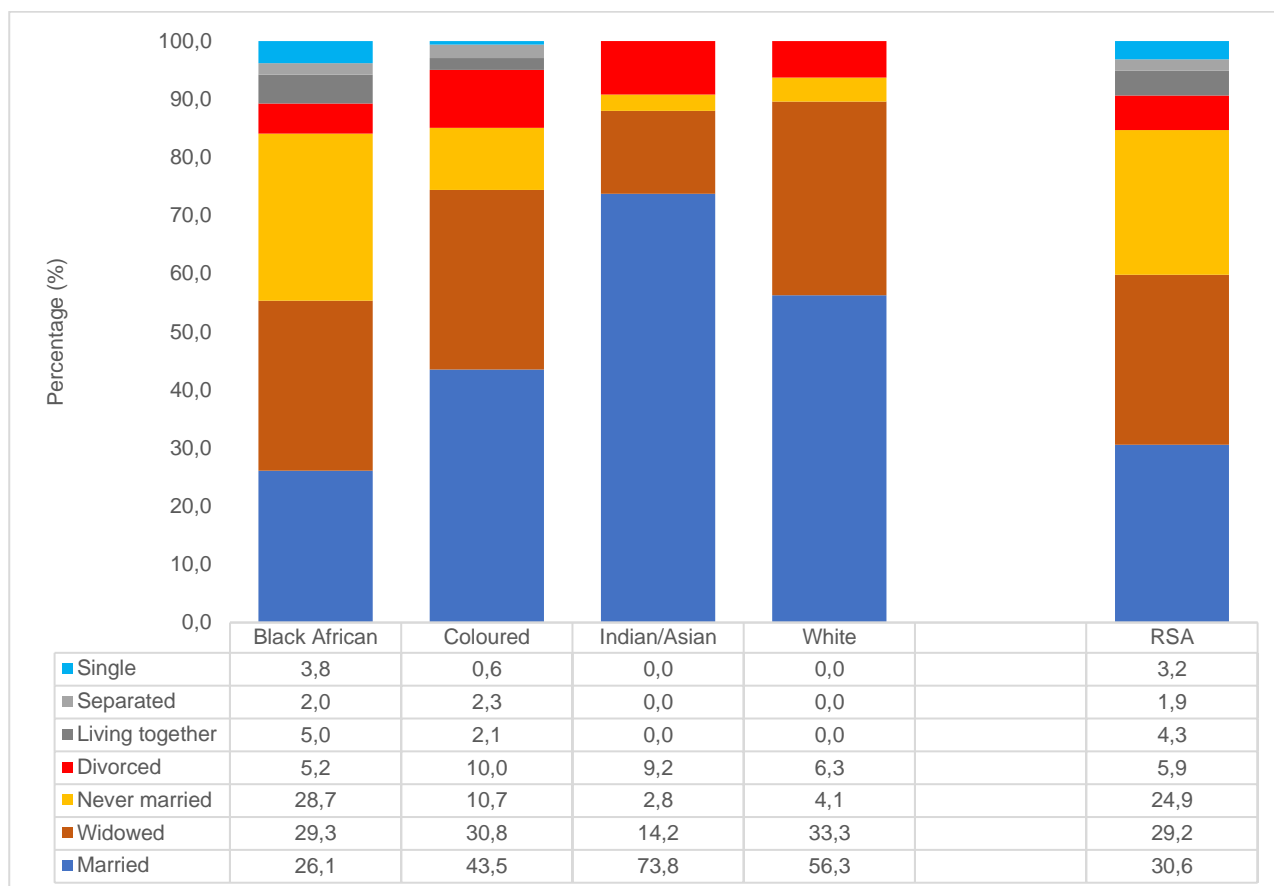
Figure 3.6: Percentage distribution of head of household grandparents staying with their grandchildren aged 0–17 by marital status and age, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 3.6 illustrates the marital status distribution of grandparents who were household heads and lived with their grandchildren, categorized by marital status and age. The data shows that grandfathers who were household heads and living with their grandchildren were predominantly living with a partner (66,9%) if they were under 55 years old. In contrast, elderly household head grandparents aged 65 years and older were mostly widowed (58,3%).

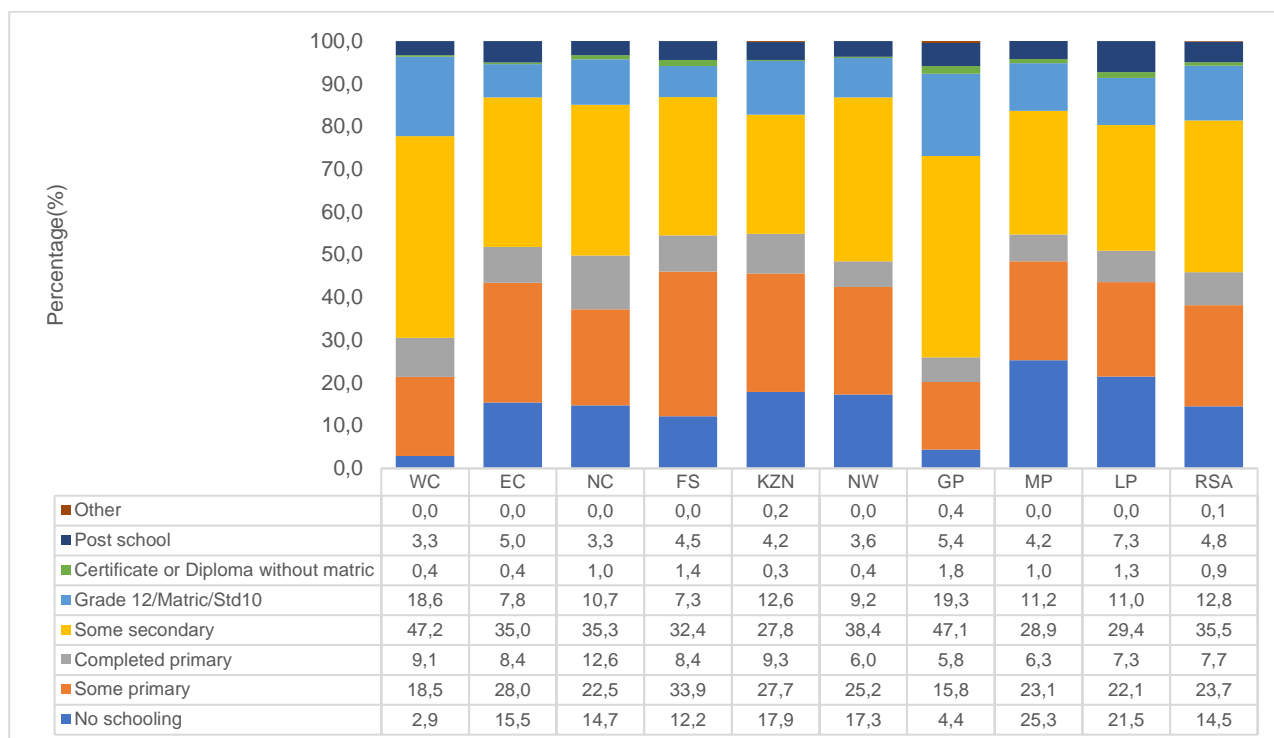
Figure 3.7: Percentage distribution of head of household grandparents staying with their grandchildren aged 0–17 by marital status and population group, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

The graph above presents the percentage of grandparents who were household heads and lived with their grandchildren, broken down by marital status and population group. The data shows that the majority of these grandparents, who lived with their grandchildren aged 0–17, were legally married (30,6%), followed by those who were widowed (29,2%). Additionally, about a quarter of these grandparents had never married (24,9%), and nearly six percent were divorced. Among Indian/Asian household heads grandparents, 73,8% were married, the highest percentage, followed by white grandparents at 56,3%. In contrast, black African grandparents had the lowest percentage of married household heads at 26,1%, with Coloured grandparents at 43,5%. Furthermore, approximately one-third (33,3%) of white household head grandparents were widowed.

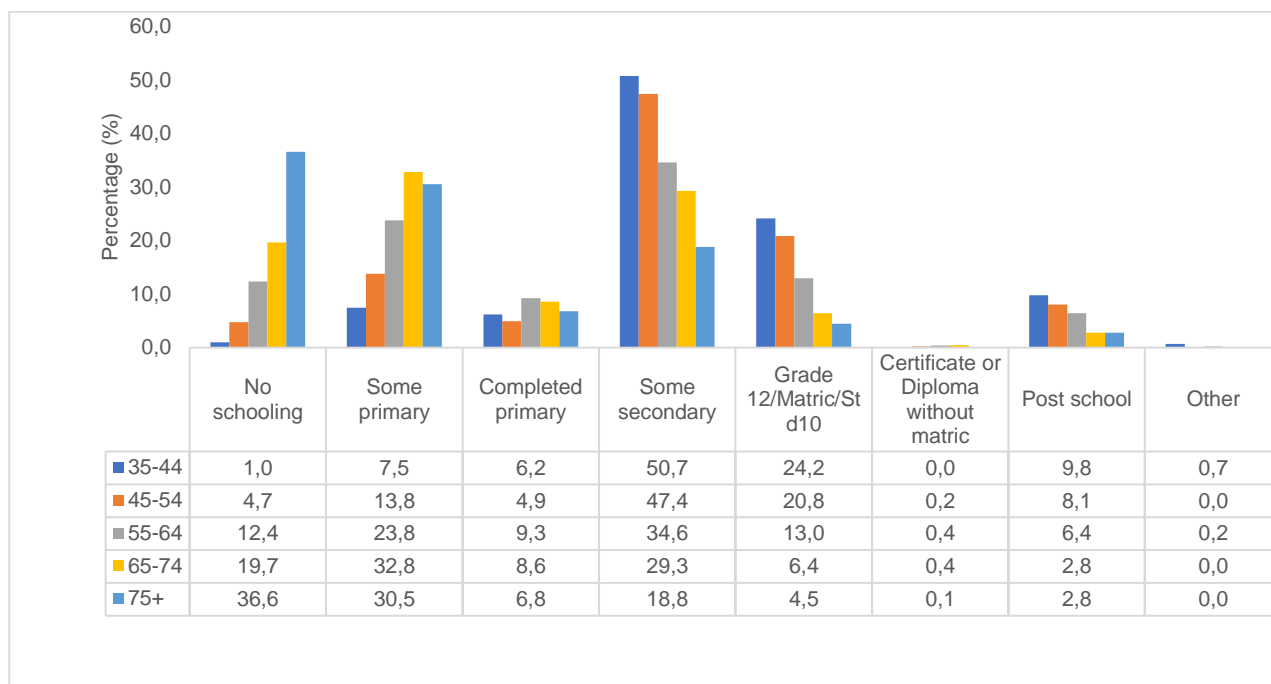
Figure 3.8: Percentage distribution of head of household grandparents staying with their grandchildren aged 0–17 by highest level of education and province, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

The graph above presents the percentage distribution of the highest level of education of grandparents who were household heads and lived with their grandchildren aged 0–17 broken down by province. Approximately 15% of these grandparents had no formal education, with the highest proportions residing in Mpumalanga (25,3%) and Limpopo (21,5%). In contrast, Western Cape and Gauteng had the lowest percentages of uneducated grandparents, at 2,9% and 4,4% respectively. About one-third (35,5%) of household head grandparents had some secondary education, with Western Cape and Gauteng having the highest shares, both close to 47%. Nearly 13% of household head grandparents had completed grade 12, with Western Cape and Gauteng each accounting for 19%. About five percent of grandparents as household heads had post-school qualifications, with the highest percentage of these grandparents found in Limpopo (7,3%).

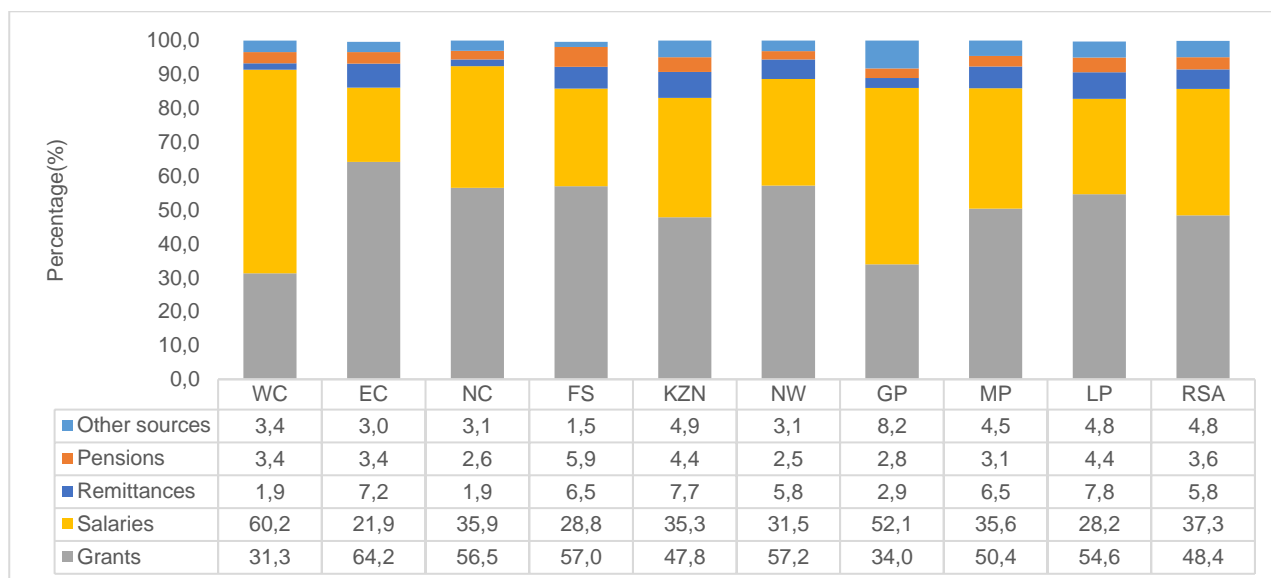
Figure 3.9: Percentage distribution of head of household grandparents staying with their grandchildren aged 0–17 by highest level of education and age, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

The graph above presents the percentage distribution of the highest level of education of grandparents who were household heads and lived with their grandchildren aged 0–17 broken down by age. Approximately 37% of grandparents aged 75 years and older had no formal education, while close to 31% in similar age groups had only some primary education. However, among those who completed secondary education, close to 45% were less than 55 years old.

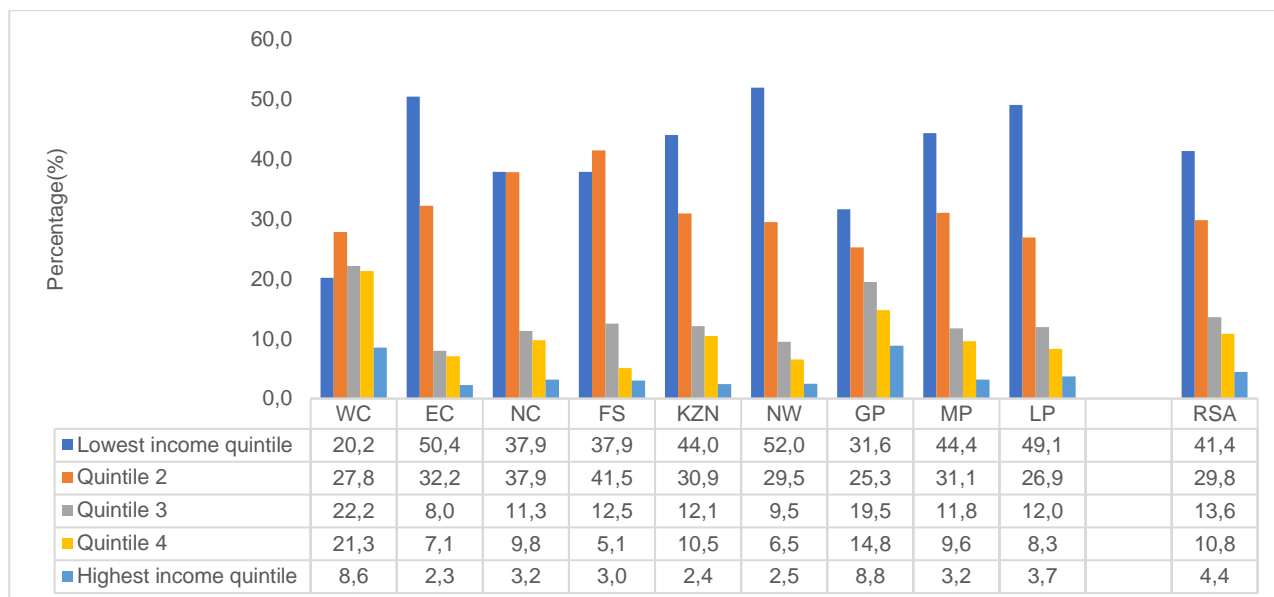
Figure 3.10: Percentage distribution of head of household grandparents staying with their grandchildren aged 0–17 by household source of income, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

The graph above illustrates the income sources for households headed by grandparents living with their grandchildren aged 0–17. Nearly 48,4% of these households primarily depended on grants. Eastern Cape had the highest percentage of households’ dependent on grants (64,2%), followed by Northern Cape, Free State, and North West, each with nearly 57% relying on this source of income. Over one-third (37,3%) of grandparent headed households relied on salaries, with 60,2% of these households located in Western Cape and 52,1% in Gauteng. In KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo, close to eight percent of these households depended on remittances. However, reliance on pensions was overall relatively low at 3,6%, with the Free State having the highest percentage at 5,9%.

Figure 3.11: Percentage distribution of head of household grandparents staying with their grandchildren aged 0–17 by monthly household income quintiles and province, 2023



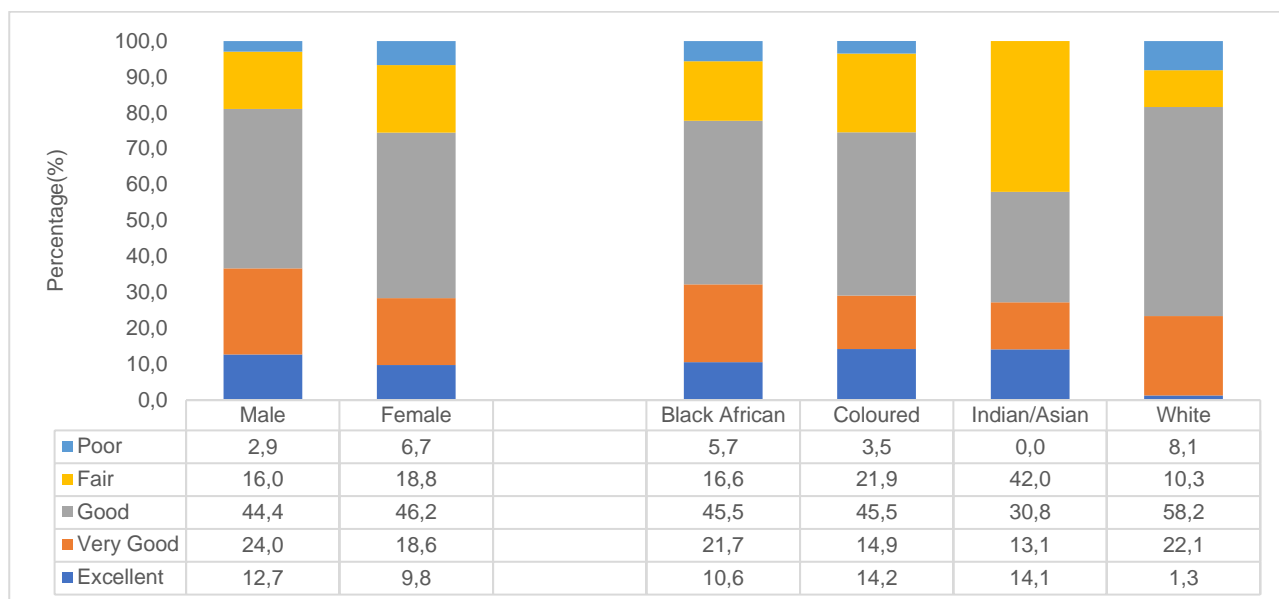
Source: GHS 2023

The graph above presents the monthly income quintiles of households headed by grandparents living with their grandchildren aged 0–17 by province. Overall, approximately 41% of households led by grandparent co-residents with children aged 0–17 were situated in the lowest income quintiles. Conversely, only about 15% of these households were found in the higher income quintiles (quintiles 4 and 5). Provinces such as Eastern Cape, North West, and Limpopo exhibit nearly half of these households in the poorest income quintiles (50,4%, 52,0%, and 49,1% respectively), whereas Western Cape (20,2%) had the lowest percentage in this category. Furthermore, with the exception of Western Cape and Gauteng, over 75% of grandparents-headed households in other provinces were in the lower income quintiles (quintiles 1 and 2), with Eastern Cape and North West being the most impoverished (82,6% and 81,5% respectively). In contrast, nearly 30% of such households in Western Cape and 24% in Gauteng belong to the higher income quintiles (quintiles 4 and 5).

3.2 Health characteristics of grandparents

The health and well-being of grandparents who live with their grandchildren are crucial. Their capacity to offer care, emotional support, and stability can greatly influence the children’s development and the overall family dynamics. Additionally, recognizing any disabilities they may have and ensuring they have access to necessary aids and facilities is essential for their ability to care for their grandchildren.

Figure 3.12: Percentage distribution of head of household grandparents staying with their grandchildren aged 0–17 by health status, sex and population group, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 3.12 above, shows the health status distribution of grandparents who were household heads and lived with their grandchildren, broken down by health status, sex and population group. A higher percentage of grandfathers (81,1%) compared to grandmothers (74,6%) rated their health as good, very good, or excellent. Additionally, nearly seven percent of head of household grandmothers classified their health as poor, compared to their grandfather counterparts.

Regarding population groups, a higher percentage of white household head grandparents rated their health as poor (8,1%), while Indian/Asian grandparents most commonly rated their health as fair (42,0%). Furthermore, white grandparents who were household heads and lived with their grandchildren were most likely to rate their health as good (58,2%) or very good (22,1%). Grandparents who were heads of Indian/Asian households also had high percentages rating their health as excellent.

Table 3.2 - Number and percentage distribution of head of household grandparents staying with their grandchildren aged 0–17 by disability status, 2023

Sex	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GP	MP	LP	RSA
Number (Thousands)										
Male	14	29	9	10	36	14	22	5	12	156
Female	24	58	10	29	154	28	56	35	25	423
Total	38	88	19	39	190	43	78	41	38	580
Percentage										
Male	9,2	19,1	6,0	6,8	23,4	9,5	14,4	3,7	7,9	12,9*
Female	5,7	13,9	2,5	6,9	36,4	6,8	13,3	8,4	6,1	19,1*
Total	6,7	15,3	3,4	6,9	32,9	7,5	13,6	7,1	6,6	16,9*

Source: GHS 2023 Note: * As a percentage of total head of households' grandparents

Table 3.2 above, presents the distribution of household head grandparents living with their grandchildren by disability status. Out of the 3,4 million such grandparents in South Africa with grandchildren aged 0–17, 580 000 were living with some disabilities. Grandparents with disabilities were most prevalent in KwaZulu-Natal (32,9%) and least prevalent in Northern Cape (3,4%). Additionally, the percentage of grandmothers with disabilities (19,1%) was higher compared to grandfathers (12,9%).

3.3 Summary

In South Africa, grandparents frequently step in to raise their grandchildren. This often happens because of challenges faced by the children's biological parents. These challenges can range from single parenthood, the death of parents, to incarceration and the demands of work or school commitments. In 2023, South Africa had 3,4 million head of households' grandparents caring for children aged 0–17 old. The majority were grandmothers, accounting for 64,5%, while grandfathers made up 35,4%. KwaZulu-Natal had the highest percentage of grandparent household heads at 22,3%, followed by Gauteng at 19,4%. Furthermore, close to 11% of head of households were elderly grandparents aged 75 years and over.

Data shows that the majority of grandparents living with their grandchildren aged 0–17 were legally married, accounting for 30,6%. This was closely followed by widowed grandparents at 29,2%. Households led by grandparents were predominantly dependent on grants as their main source of income (48,4%). Furthermore, except for those in Western Cape and Gauteng, all grandparent headed households primarily relied on grants for their monthly household income. Close to 17% of household head grandparents has some disability. The highest percentage of grandparents with disability were found in KwaZulu-Natal (32,9%) followed by Eastern Cape (15,3%).

Chapter 4: Living arrangements, well-being and development of children aged 0–17 staying in grandparent headed households

4.1 Introduction

Many children raised by their grandparents may have endured significant hardships, such as the loss of a parent, parental incarceration, or exposure to substance abuse. Grandparents often offer a unique sense of acceptance and emotional support, which is especially valuable during these family crises. They frequently serve as role models and mentors, imparting guidance and wisdom from their life experiences. For grandparents, maintaining a connection with their grandchildren can help keep them mentally sharp and socially engaged. They can share family stories and traditions, helping children understand their heritage and family values. These intergenerational bonds enrich the lives of both children and grandparents, fostering a supportive and loving family environment.

However, grandparents often face financial challenges, as they are mostly on fixed incomes and unprepared for the additional costs of raising children. This can limit the resources available for the child's education, extracurricular activities, and overall well-being. Additionally, grandparents may have physical limitations or chronic health issues that can affect their ability to care for young children, leading to additional stress and potential neglect of the child's needs. Despite these challenges, many grandparents provide a loving and stable environment for their grandchildren, which can be a significant positive factor in their development. This chapter explores the living arrangements, development and well-being of children residing in households led by their grandparents.

Table 4.1 - Number and percentage of children aged 0–17 staying in grandparents-headed households by sex of the children and province, 2023

Sex	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GP	MP	LP	RSA
Number (Thousands)										
Male	295	568	61	172	1 135	255	673	378	515	4 057
Female	311	554	76	182	977	298	643	382	489	3 917
Total	606	1 123	138	355	2 113	554	1 316	760	1 005	7 975
Percentage										
Male	7,3	14,0	1,5	4,3	28,0	6,3	16,6	9,3	12,7	50,9
Female	8,0	14,2	2,0	4,7	25,0	7,6	16,4	9,8	12,5	49,1
Total	7,6	14,1	1,7	4,5	26,5	6,9	16,5	9,5	12,6	100,0

Source: GHS 2023

Table 4.1 above, depicts the number and percentage of children who lived in households headed by their grandparents. In 2023, close to 8 million children aged 0–17 in South Africa were living in households headed by their grandparents. Although there was not much disparity between sexes, male children (50,9%) were more likely than female children (49,1%) to live in such households. Provincially, regardless of sex, KwaZulu-Natal (26,5%) had the highest percentage of children living in households headed by their grandparents, followed by Gauteng (16,5%) and Eastern Cape (14,1%). Northern Cape had the lowest percentage of children living in households headed by their grandparents (1,7%).

Table 4.2 - Number and percentage of children aged 0–17 staying in grandparents headed households as a percentage of total children population by province, 2023

Sex	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GP	MP	LP	RSA
Number of children in grandparents-headed households (Thousands)										
Male	295	568	61	172	1135	255	673	378	515	4 057
Female	311	554	76	182	977	298	643	382	489	3 917
Total	606	1 123	138	355	2 113	554	1 316	760	1 005	7 975
Number of total population of children (Thousands)										
Male	1 052	1 247	210	506	2 236	697	2 424	883	1 261	10 519
Female	1 092	1 264	227	519	2 098	776	2 318	899	1 269	10 466
Total	2 144	2 511	438	1 025	4 334	1 474	4 742	1 783	2 531	20 986
Percentage	2,9	5,4	0,7	1,7	10,1	2,6	6,3	3,6	4,8	38,0

Source: GHS 2023

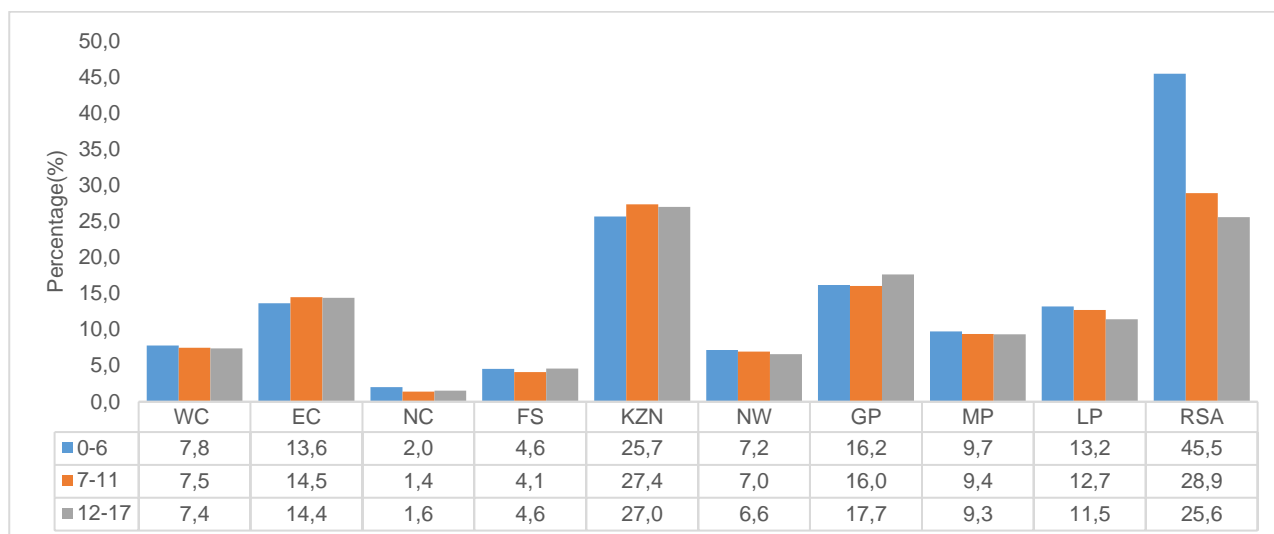
Table 4.2 above, depicts the number and percentage of children who lived in households headed by their grandparents as a percentage of the total child population. In 2023, close to 8 million children aged 0–17 out of the total 21 million children in South Africa were living in households headed by their grandparents. This amounts to 38% of the total children living in grandparent headed households. The highest percentage were residents of KwaZulu-Natal followed by Gauteng.

4.2 Living arrangements of children staying in grandparents headed households

Children living in households headed by grandparents experience diverse living arrangements depending on their geographical location. In some places, these children may also live with one or both parents, while in other regions, they might be without either parent. A notable number of children who live with relatives other than their parents would more likely fall under the care of their grandparents. This situation often arises due to various reasons, such as the parents' inability to care for their children. Moreover, such living arrangements are more common in areas facing significant socio-economic challenges, including poverty and inequality.

Children living with their grandparents can be of various ages, but it is more common for younger children and orphans to be in such arrangements. Grandparents often take on the caregiving role when parents are unable to, helping to keep children within the family. This support provides stability and continuity for the children, even amidst difficult circumstances.

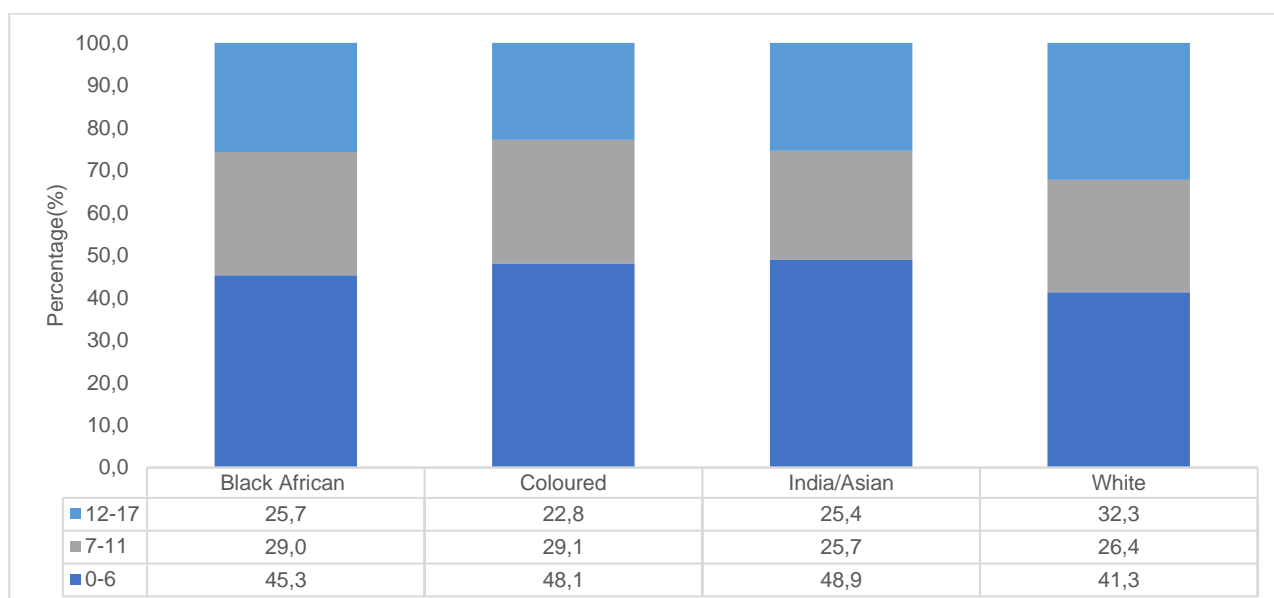
Figure 4.1: Percentage distribution of children aged 0–17 who stayed in grandparents-headed households by province and age group, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 4.1 presents the percentage of children who lived in households headed by their grandparents categorised by province and age group in 2023. Nationally, a significant proportion of children aged 0–6 (45,5%) lived in households headed by their grandparents. This was followed by children aged 7–11 (28,9%) and those aged 12–17 (25,6%). However, provincial data shows different trends. There were slightly more children aged 7–11 living in grandparents headed households in KwaZulu-Natal (27,4%) and Gauteng (16,0%). In Gauteng, a higher percentage of older children aged 12–17 (17,7%) lived in such households compared to other age groups.

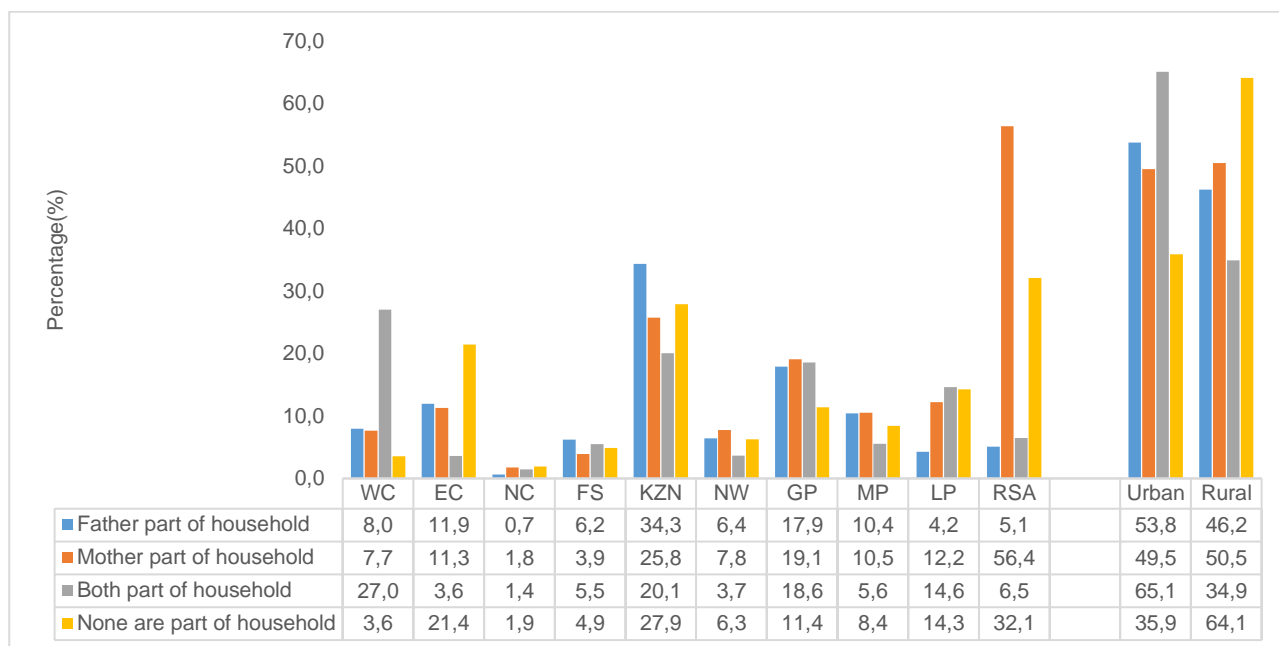
Figure 4.2: Percentage distribution of children aged 0–17 who stayed in grandparents headed households by age and population group, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 4.2 above, presents the percentage of children who lived in households headed by their grandparents by age and population group. Data indicates that children aged 0–6 were most likely to live in households headed by their grandparents across all population groups. Approximately 29% of children aged 7–11 among black African and coloured populations lived in grandparent headed households. In contrast, among white children, those aged 12–17 had the highest percentage (32,3%) of children living in households headed by their grandparents compared to the other population groups.

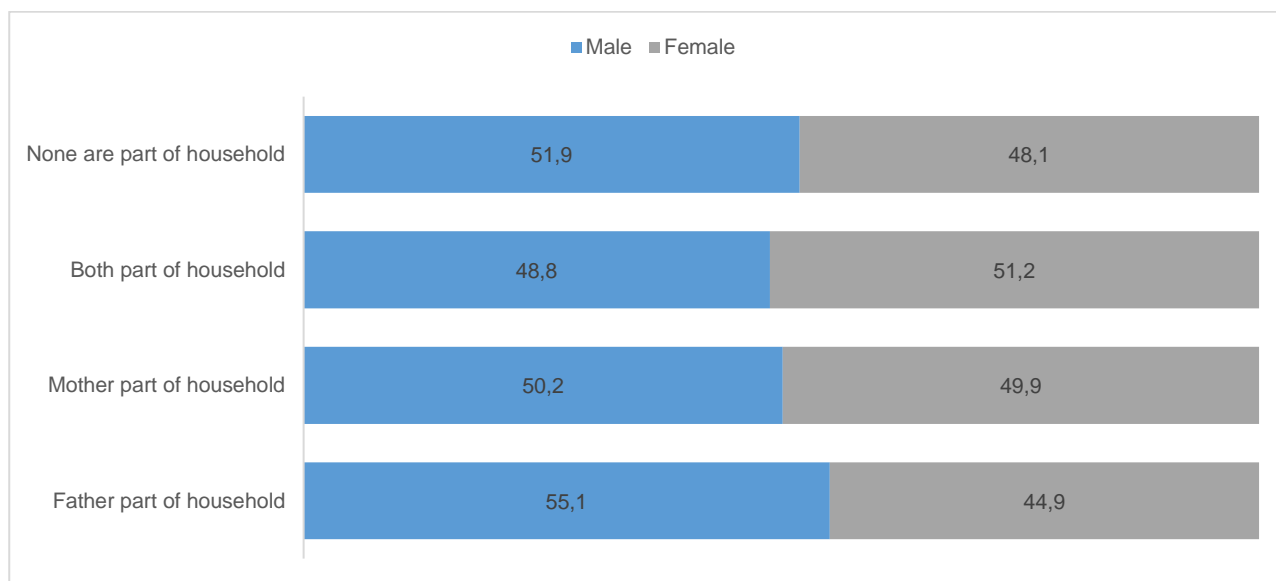
Figure 4.3: Percentage distribution of living arrangements for children aged 0–17 who stayed in grandparents headed households by province and geographical area, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 4.3 above, presents the percentage of children who lived in households headed by their grandparents by living arrangement, province and geographical area. Children benefit significantly from staying with their parents in the household, as it positively influences their well-being and development. Figure 4.3 shows that overall in South Africa, 56,4% of children in grandparent headed households had their mothers living with them, while only 5,1% had their fathers present. Additionally, 6,5% of children lived with both parents in such households, and 32,1% lived with neither parent. KwaZulu-Natal had the highest percentages of children living in grandparent headed households with their fathers (34,3%), with their mothers (25,8%), and with neither parent (27,9%). In contrast, Western Cape had the highest percentage of children living with both parents in grandparent headed households (27,0%). Data also indicates that children in urban areas were more likely to live in grandparent headed households with both parents present (65,1%) compared to only about one-third (34,9%) in rural areas. Conversely, in rural areas, children in grandparent headed households were more likely to have neither parent present (64,1%). When children stay with their grandparents without their parents, it often means that the grandparents are taking on a caregiving role.

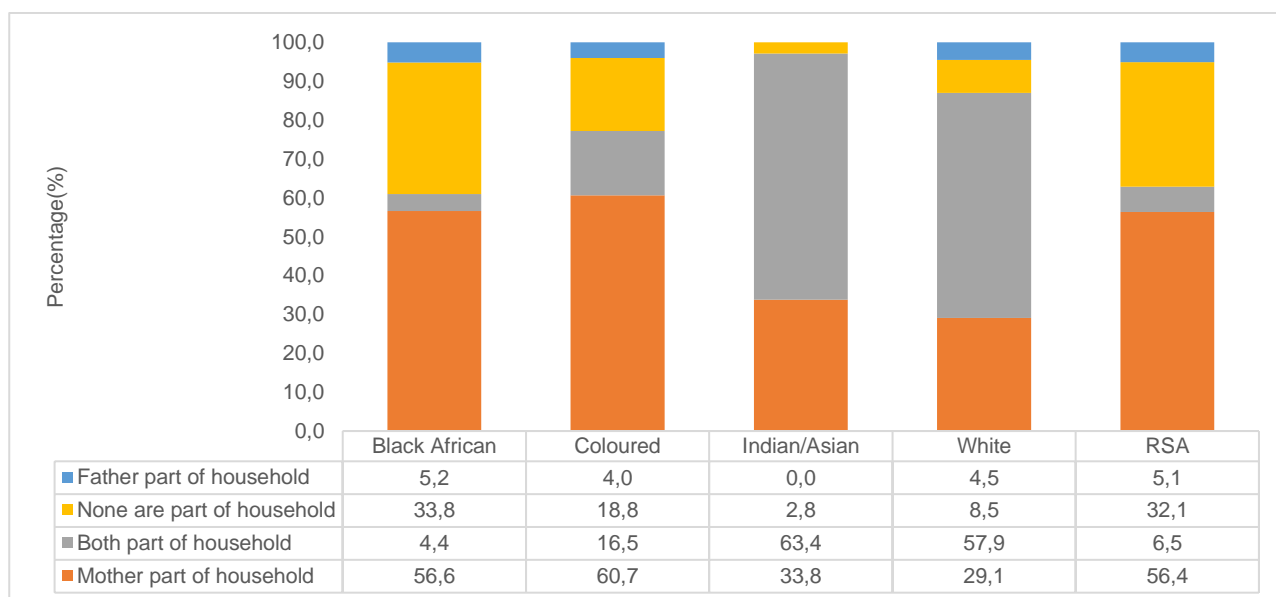
Figure 4.4: Percentage distribution of living arrangements for children aged 0–17 who stayed in grandparents headed households by sex, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 4.4 above, illustrates the percentage of living arrangements for children aged 0–17 residing in grandparent headed households, categorized by sex. While the differences are not substantial, there is a slight trend indicating that fathers were more frequently present in households with male children compared to those with female children.

Figure 4.5: Percentage distribution of living arrangements for children aged 0–17 who stayed in grandparents headed households by population group, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 4.5 illustrates the percentage of living arrangements for children aged 0–17 residing in grandparent headed households, categorized by population group. Coloured children had the highest percentage of children living with their mothers in grandparent headed households (60,7%), followed by black African children (56,6%) and Indian/Asian children (33,8%). Additionally, in grandparent headed households where both parents were present, Indian/Asian children and white children had the highest percentages (63,4% and 57,9% respectively).

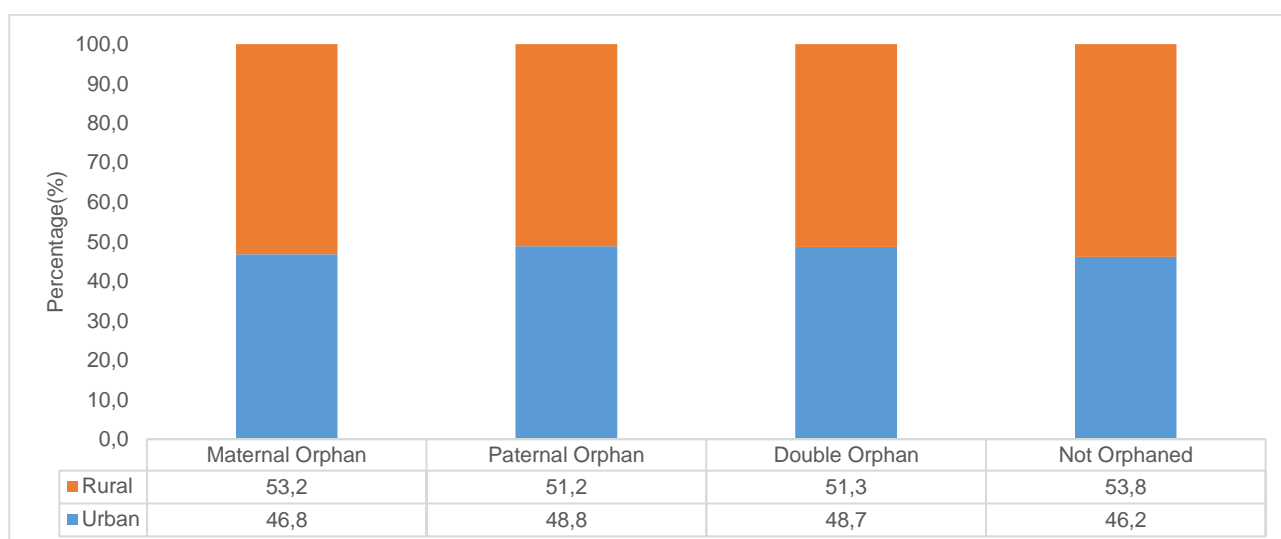
Figure 4.6: Percentage distribution of orphanhood status for children aged 0–17 who stayed in grandparents headed households by province, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 4.6 shows the percentage distribution of orphan hood status for children aged 0–17 who lived in grandparent headed households by province. The graph above shows that children living in grandparent headed households in Gauteng (21,6%) were more likely to be classified as maternal orphans compared to those in other provinces. Paternal and double orphanhood were most prevalent among children in grandparent headed households in KwaZulu-Natal, with rates of 32,0% and 27,0%, respectively. This province also had the highest percentage of non-orphaned children living in grandparent headed households, at 26,5%, followed by Gauteng at 16,3%.

Figure 4.7: Percentage distribution of orphan hood status for children aged 0–17 who stayed in grandparents-headed households by geographical area, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

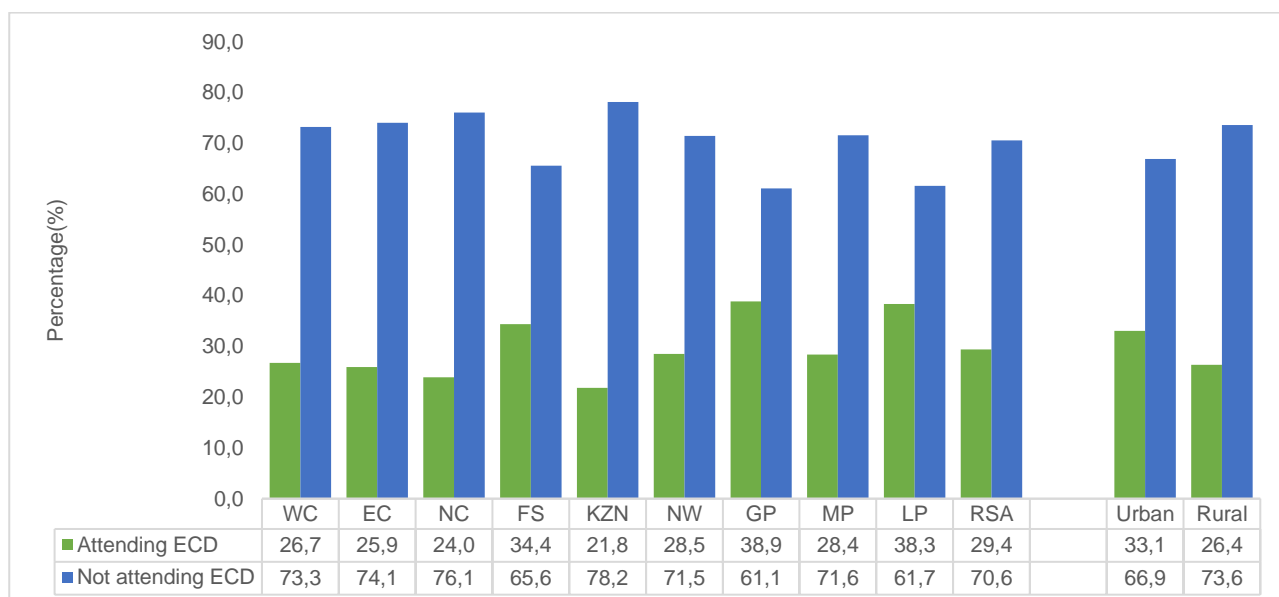
Figure 4.7 presents the percentage of orphan hood status for children aged 0–17 who stayed in grandparents-headed households by geographical area.

Children aged 0–17 living in grandparent headed households in rural areas were more likely to be orphans (maternal, paternal, and double) compared to those in urban areas, with maternal orphanhood being the highest at 53,2%.

4.3 Early childhood development

South Africa has introduced several policies and frameworks aimed at enhancing early childhood development. One key initiative is the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy, which spans from conception to the year before children start formal schooling. This section will explore the attendance of Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs among children aged 0–4 who reside in households led by their grandparents. ECD programs in South Africa often involve private institutions, which means there are costs associated with it. While the government does provide some funding, a significant portion of ECD services is funded privately. This includes support from corporates, foundations, and non-profit organizations. The costs can vary depending on the type of ECD service, such as attendance of crèches and pre-schools, or home visiting programs.

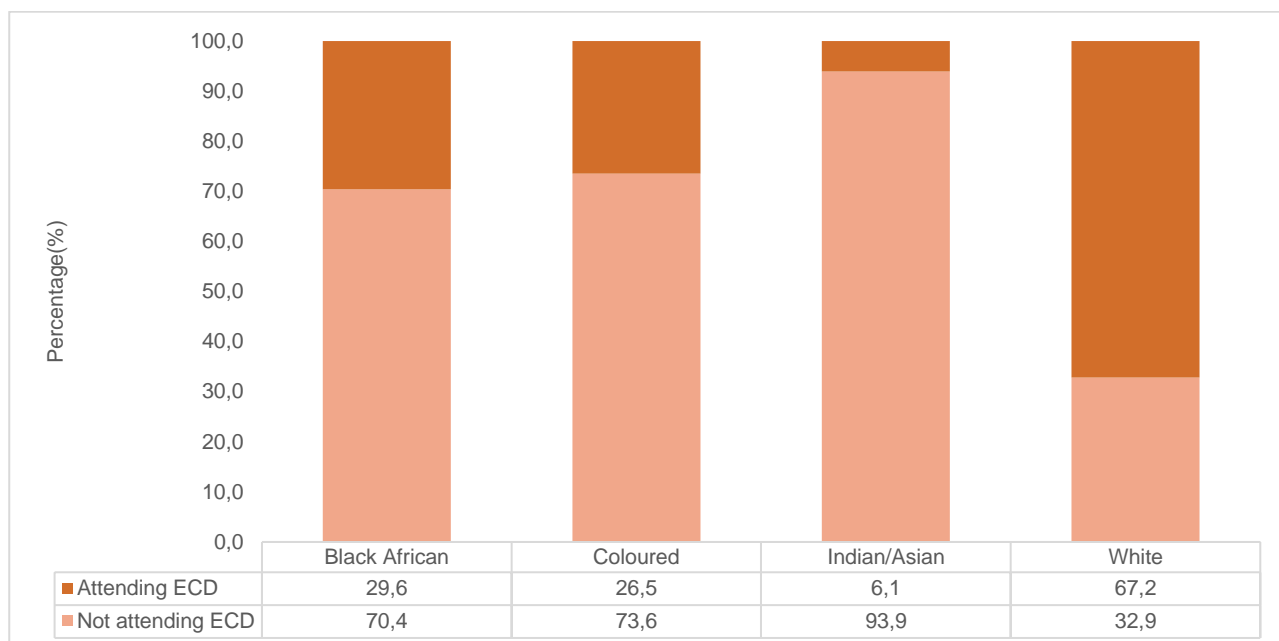
Figure 4.8: Percentage distribution of children aged 0–4 who stayed in grandparents headed households by attendance of ECD programs, province and geographical area, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

In 2023, 29,4% of children aged 0–4 in grandparent headed households were enrolled in ECD programs, while nearly 71,0% were not. Geographically, about one-third (33,1%) of these children in urban areas attended ECD programs, compared to 26,4% in rural areas. Gauteng and Limpopo had the highest attendance rates at 38,9% and 38,3%, respectively, while KwaZulu-Natal had the lowest at 21,8%. ECD programs provide crucial early learning experiences that help children develop cognitive, social, and emotional skills. Without these programs, children may miss out on foundational skills that are important for their future education.

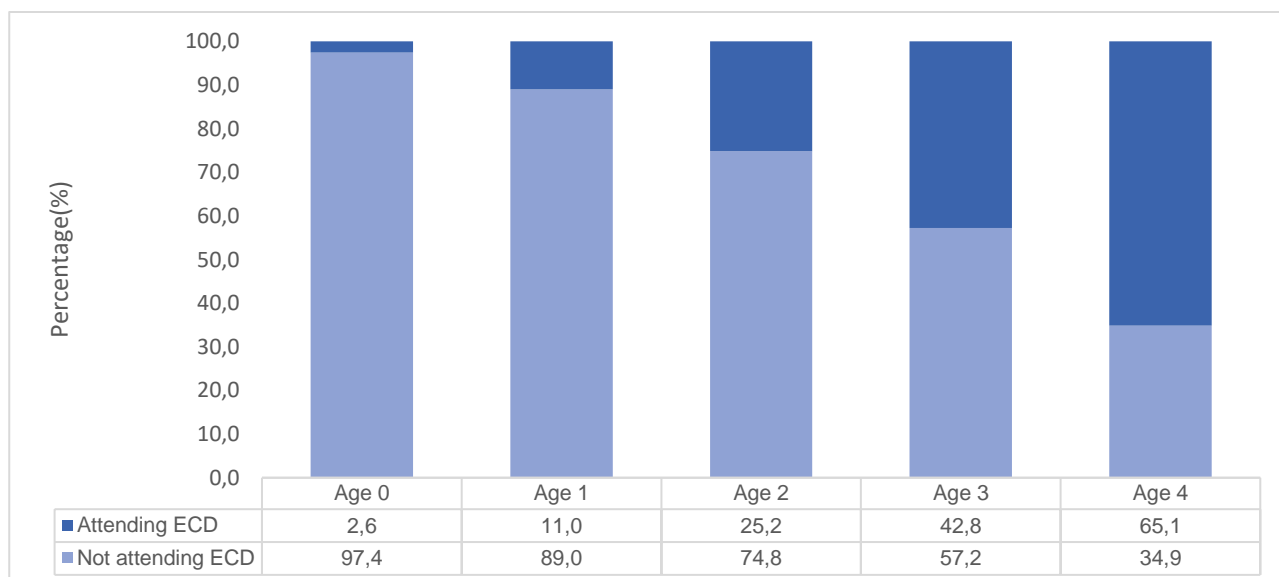
Figure 4.9: Percentage distribution of children aged 0–4 who stayed in grandparents headed households by attendance of ECD programs and population group, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

According to the graph above, white children aged 0–4 who were living in grandparent headed households had the highest ECD program attendance rate at 67,2%, followed by black African children at 29,6% and coloured children at 26,5%. However, nearly 94,0% of Indian/Asian children who were staying in grandparent headed households were not attending ECD program in 2023.

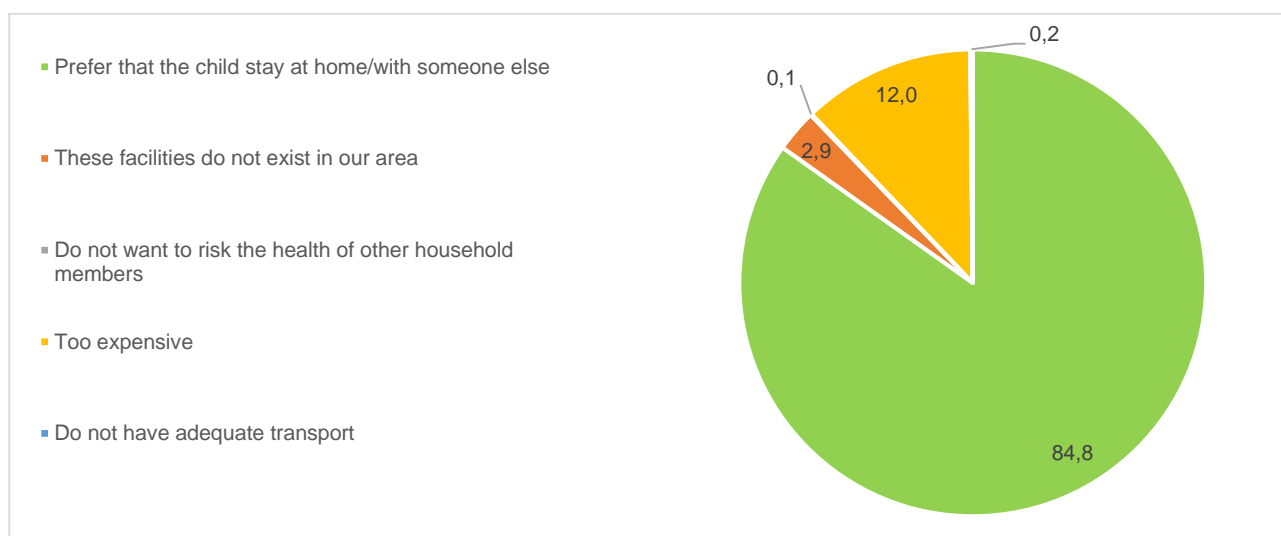
Figure 4.10: Percentage distribution of children aged 0–4 who stayed in grandparents headed households by attendance of ECD programs and age, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 4.10 shows that ECD program attendance increased with age. The results indicate that 97,4% of children under one year were not attending ECD programmes, with only 2,6% attending. However, this pattern shifts as children grow older, with 65,1% of 4-year-olds attending ECD programs, while 34,9% were not attending.

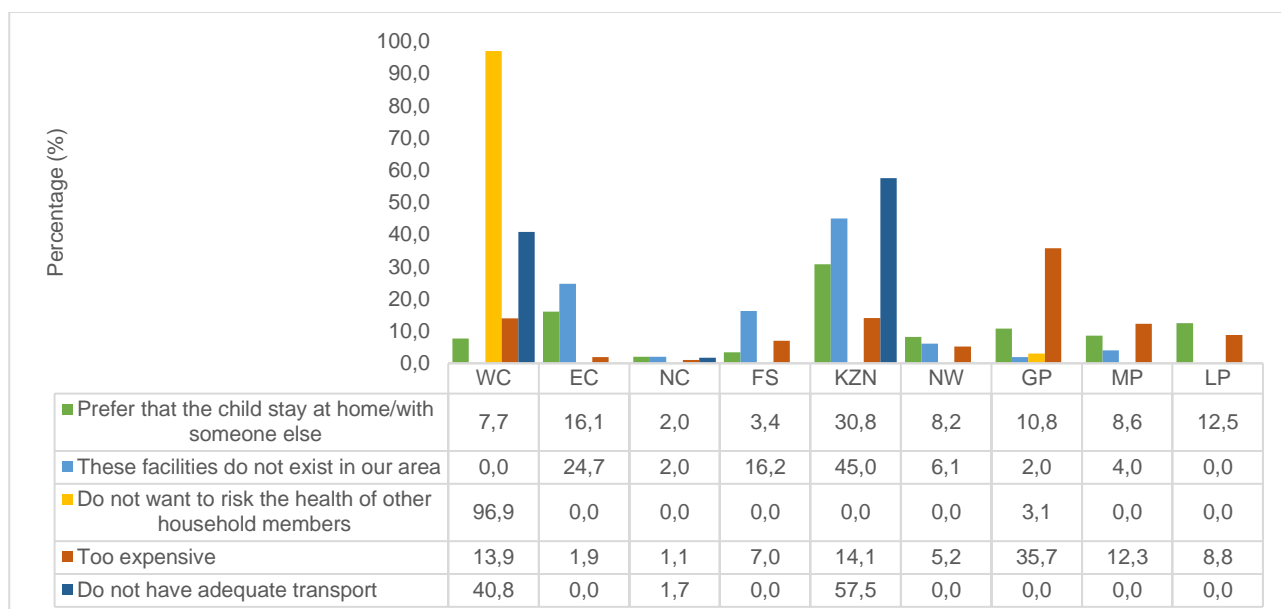
Figure 4.11: Percentage distribution of children aged 0–4 who stayed in grandparents headed households by reasons for not attending ECD programs, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

The graph shows that in South Africa, nearly 85% of children aged 0–4 living in grandparent headed households did not attend ECD programs because their grandparents preferred them to stay at home or with someone else. Additionally, 12% did not attend due to the cost of ECD programs, and 2,9% did not attend because there were no ECD facilities available in their areas.

Figure 4.12: Percentage distribution of children aged 0–4 who stayed in grandparents headed households by reasons for not attending ECD programs and province, 2023

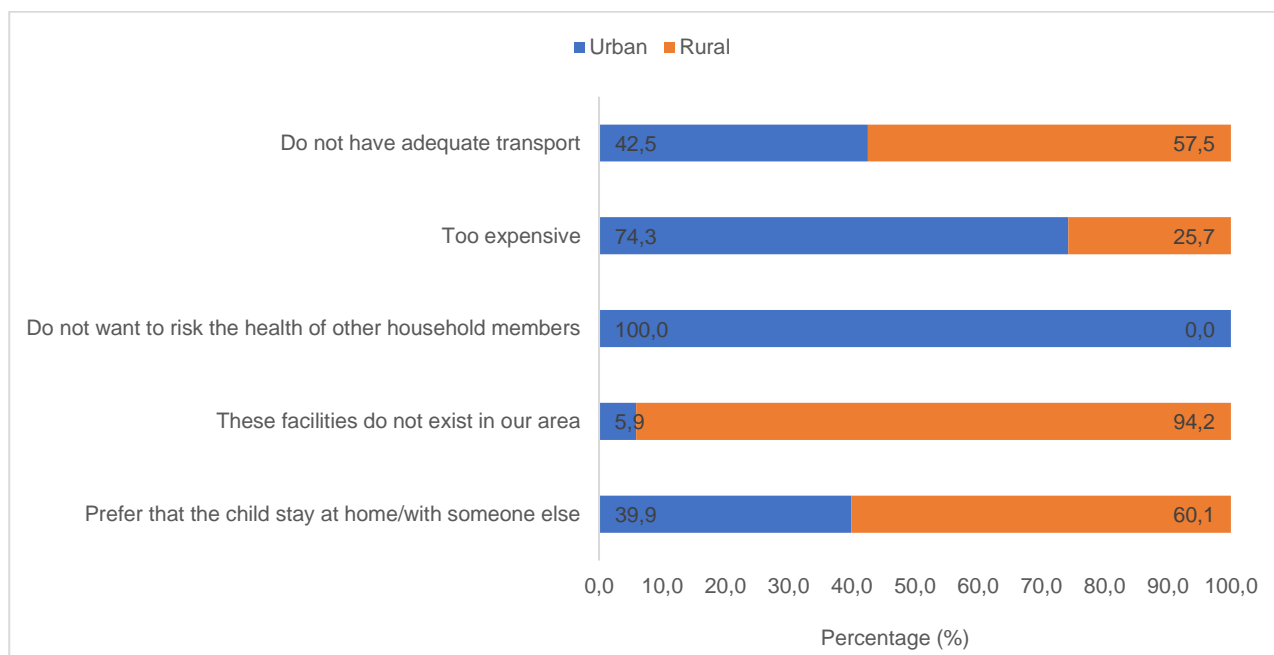


Source: GHS 2023

The reasons for children aged 0–4 not attending ECD programs vary significantly by province. As illustrated in the previous graph, most households prefer to keep their children at home. In KwaZulu-Natal, young children were kept at home because ECD facilities were either non-existent in their area (45%) or there was inadequate transport to reach the facilities or programs (57,5%).

In Gauteng, the primary reason for not attending ECD programs was their high cost (35,7%). Furthermore, a high percentage of children were kept home in Western Cape to minimise the health risk to households' members (96,9%) and due to lack of transport (40,8%).

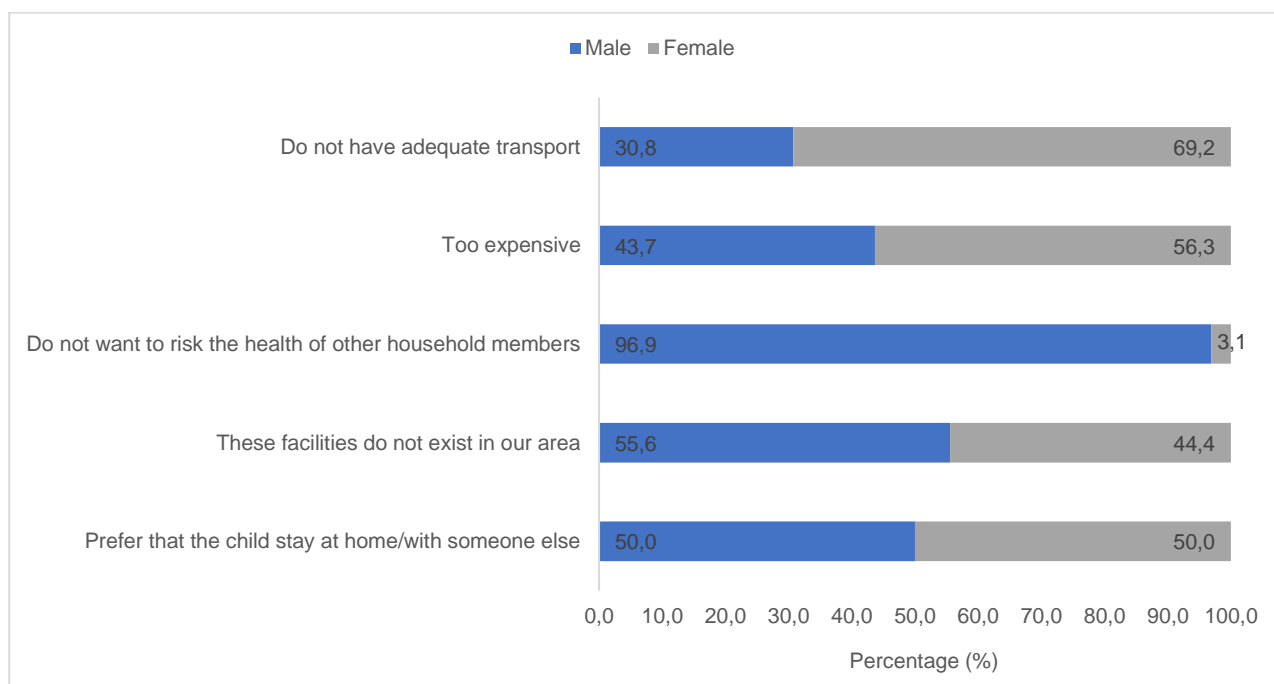
Figure 4.13: Percentage distribution of children aged 0–4 who stayed in grandparents headed households by reasons for not attending ECD programs and geographical area, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

According to Figure 4.13, children aged 0–4 living in grandparent headed households in rural areas were less likely to attend ECD programs due to several factors. These included the unavailability of facilities (94,2%), inadequate transport (57,5%), and grandparents’ preference for keeping the children at home or with someone else (60,1%). In contrast, children in urban areas were less likely to attend ECD programs due to concerns about health risks to other household members or the high cost of the programs compared to those in rural areas.

Figure 4.14: Percentage distribution of children aged 0–4 who stayed in grandparents-headed households by reasons for not attending ECD programs and sex, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

The graph above indicates that female children aged 0–4 residing in grandparent headed households were less likely to attend ECD programs due to inadequate transport (69,2%) and high costs (56,3%), compared to male children in similar households. Conversely, male children in grandparent headed households were less likely to attend ECD programs because of concerns about health risks to other household members (96,9%) and the lack of such programs in their areas (55,6%), relative to female children in similar households.

Table 4.3 - Percentage distribution of children aged 0–4 who stayed in grandparents headed households and attended ECD programs by monthly tuition fee paid by province, 2023

	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GP	MP	LP		RSA
No fees paid	3,3	31,3	0,5	4,4	29,8	4,9	4,4	10,2	11,2		12,8
R1–1 000	6,8	9,5	1,4	5,5	18,0	7,1	22,7	9,5	19,6		81,2
R1 001–4 000	21,1	9,1	5,7	2,4	9,4	8,9	31,7	6,3	5,4		5,4
R4 001–8 000	30,6	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	69,4	0,0	0,0		0,5
More than R8 000	0,0	0,0	30,2	0,0	0,0	0,0	69,8	0,0	0,0		0,1

Source: GHS 2023

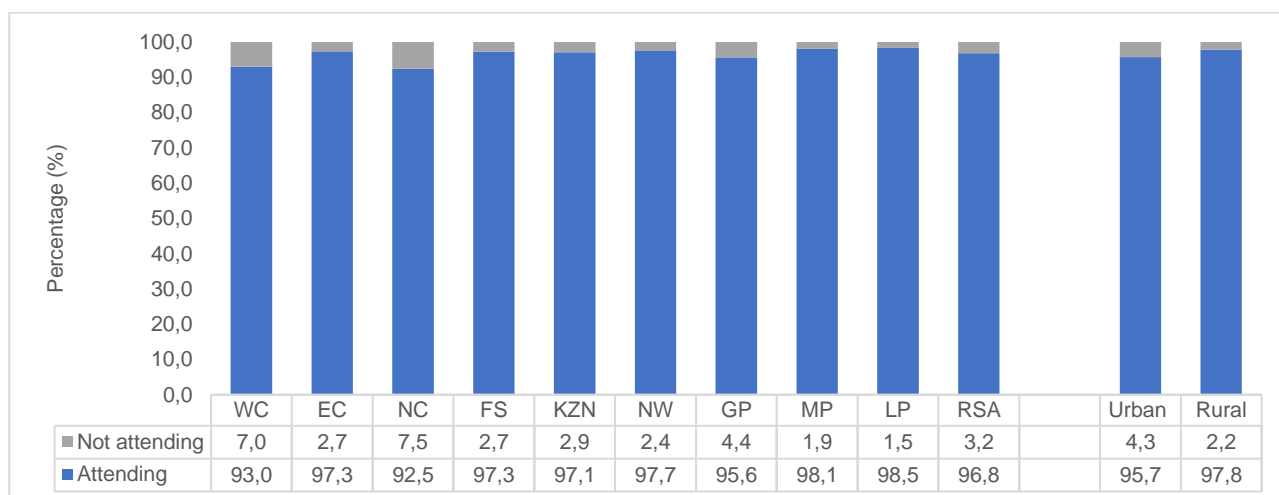
Table 4.3 shows that 87,2% of South African children aged 0–4 residing in grandparent headed households paid ECD tuition fees, while only 12,8% did not. The highest percentages of children who did not pay for ECD programs were in Eastern Cape (31,3%) and KwaZulu-Natal (29,8%). Among those who paid attendance fees, about 81,2% paid up to R1 000 monthly, and approximately 5,4% paid up to R4 000 monthly. Gauteng had the highest percentage of children aged 0–4 who paid more than R4 000 per month.

4.4 Attendance of educational institutions

School attendance in South Africa is compulsory for all children between the ages of 7 and 15, requiring parents or guardians to ensure that their children attend school regularly. In South Africa, Grade R attendance is becoming increasingly important. As of 2024, the new legislation has made Grade R compulsory for all children aged five.

This means that children must attend a Grade R program, which is a year of pre-primary schooling, before starting Grade 1. Previously, Grade R attendance was optional, but the new legislation aims to ensure that all children receive early childhood education, which is crucial for their development. This section will examine the attendance of educational institutions by children aged 5–17 who were living in households headed by grandparents.

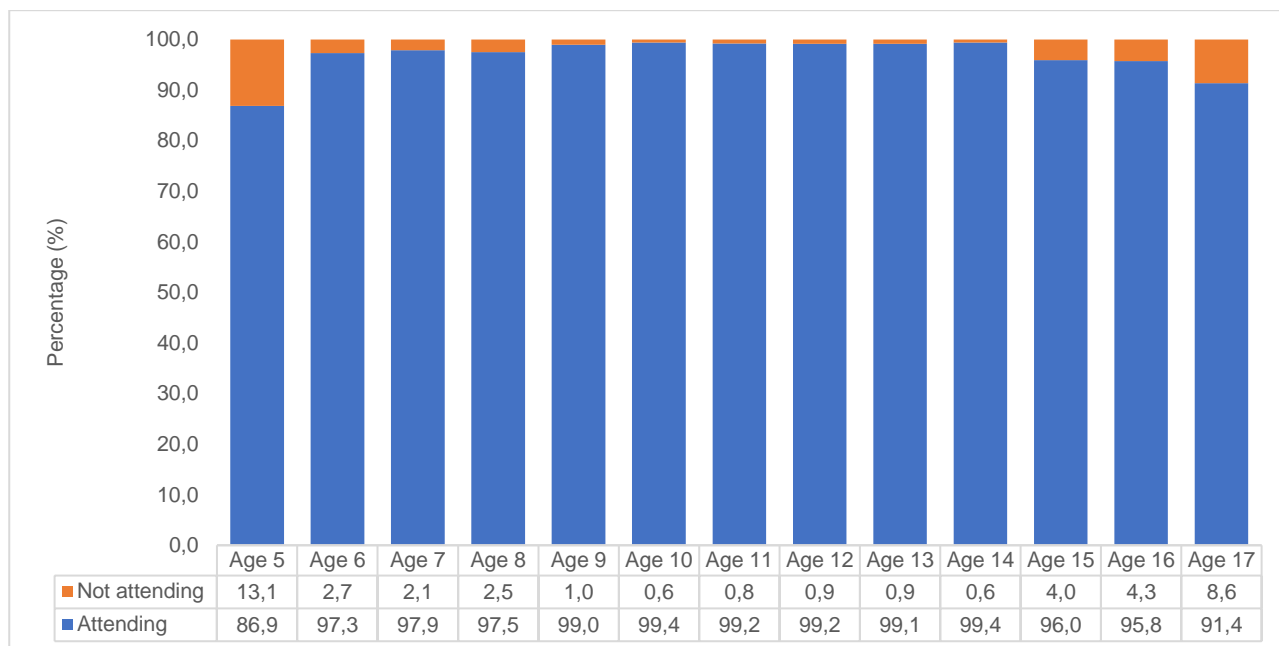
Figure 4.15: Percentage distribution of children aged 5–17 who stayed in grandparents headed households by attendance of educational institutions, province and geographical area, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 4.15 present the percentage of children aged 5–17 who stayed in households headed by their grandparents and attended educational institutions by province and geographical area. The graph indicates that overall nearly 97,0% of these children attended educational institutions, with only 3,2% not attending. Among those attending, the highest percentages were found in Limpopo (98,5%), followed by Mpumalanga (98,1%) and North West (97,7%). The lowest attendance rate for children aged 5–17 who lived in grandparents-headed households was observed in Northern Cape, at 92,5%. Children in grandparents-headed households who lived in rural areas had a higher percentage of school attendance (97,8%) compared to those in urban areas (95,7%).

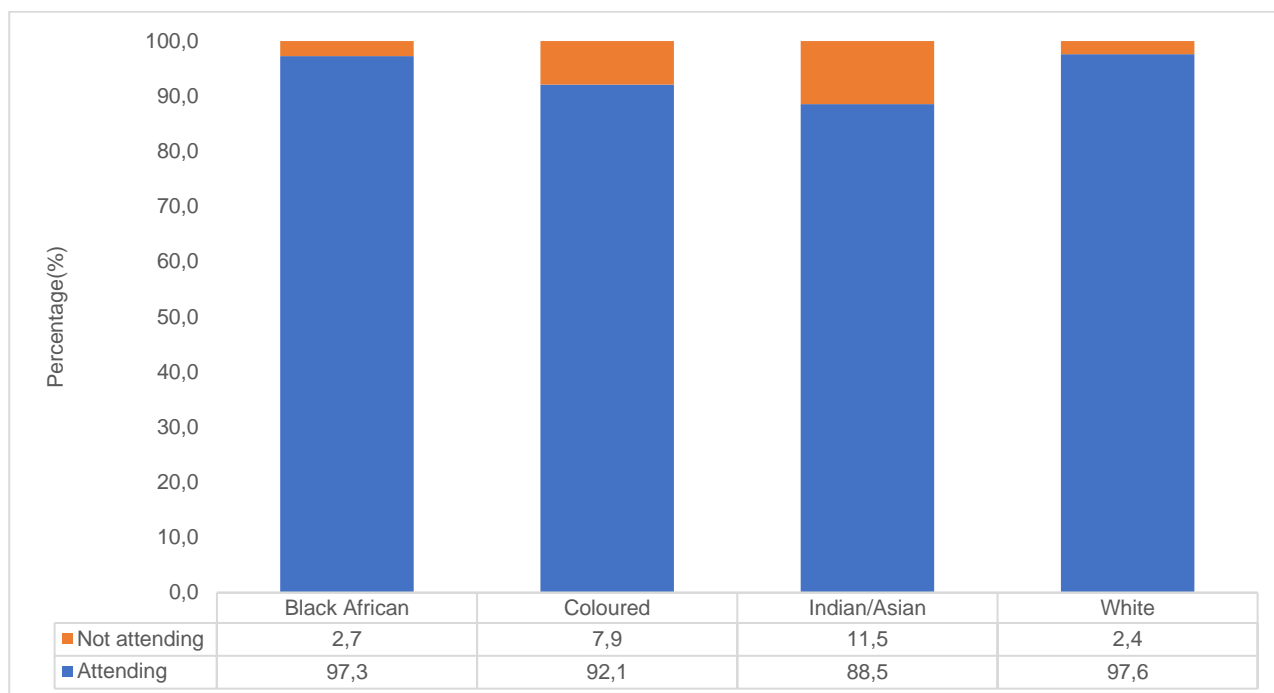
Figure 4.16: Percentage distribution of children aged 5–17 who stayed in grandparents headed households by attendance of educational institutions and age, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

The graph illustrates the percentage of children aged 5–17 living in grandparents headed households by attendance of educational institutions and age. The data reveals that there is nearly universal school attendance among 9- to 14-year-olds residing in households headed by grandparents. However, a decline of approximately three percentage points in attendance is observed among 15- to 16-year-olds. Nearly nine percent of 17-year-olds are not enrolled in any educational institutions. The highest rate of non-attendance is recorded among 5-year-olds.

Figure 4.17: Percentage distribution of children aged 5–17 who stayed in grandparents headed households by attendance of educational institutions and population group, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

The graph above presents the percentage of children aged 5–17 who stayed in households headed by their grandparents by attendance of educational institutions and population group. Children aged 5–17 living in grandparents-headed households showed varying school attendance rates. White children had the highest attendance at 97,6%, closely followed by black African children at 97,3%. Indian/Asian children had the lowest attendance (88,5%), while coloured children had a rate of 92,1%.

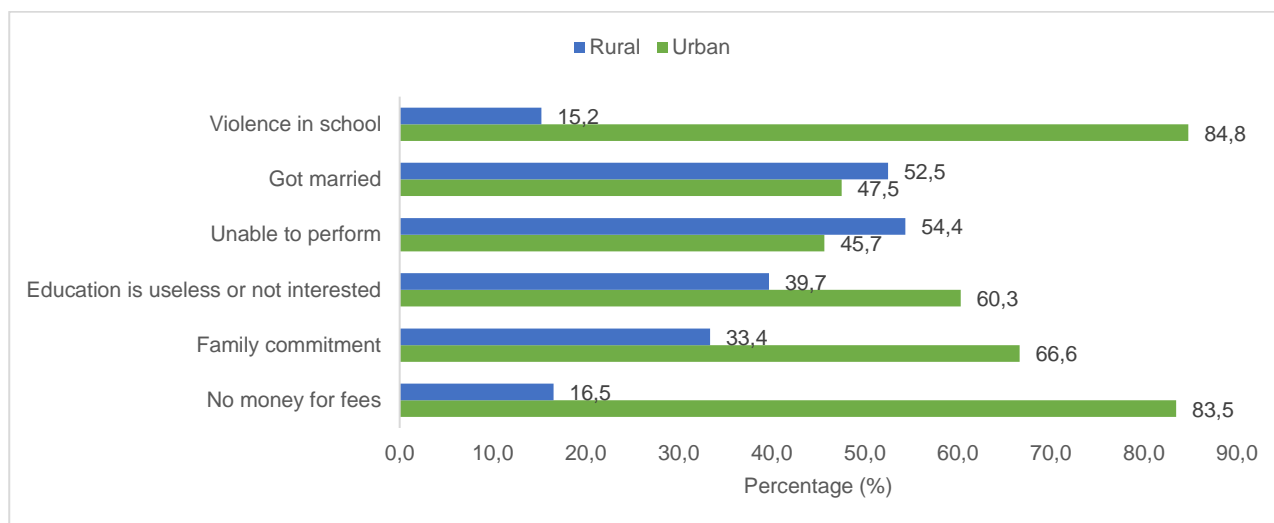
Table 4.4 - Percentage distribution of children aged 5–17 who stayed in grandparents headed households by reasons for not attending educational institutions and province, 2023

	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GP	MP	LP	RSA
No money for fees	16,0	2,8	1,9	0,0	22,6	5,1	51,7	0,0	0,0	34,7
Family commitment	49,4	10,1	14,0	0,0	2,9	20,4	3,3	0,0	0,0	11,0
Education is useless or not interested	0,0	18,8	12,8	16,7	8,1	11,9	12,4	19,3	0,0	10,3
Unable to perform	0,0	45,0	0,0	0,0	44,4	0,0	0,0	0,0	10,6	5,3
Got married	9,2	45,8	0,6	0,0	11,0	5,0	12,5	5,0	11,0	20,6
Violence in school	59,0	1,4	0,0	0,0	5,6	9,7	11,4	13,0	0,0	18,1

Source: GHS 2023

Children who lived with their grandparents had various reasons for not attending educational institutions. According to Table 4.3, in South Africa, the majority of children aged 5–17 who were living in households headed by grandparents did not attend any educational institutions due to a lack of money for fees (34,7%). Other reasons included marriage (20,6%), violence in schools (18,1%), family commitments (11,0%), a belief that education was useless (10,3%), and unable to perform at school (5,3%). The data also revealed that children who did not attend educational institutions due to a lack of money for fees were most commonly found in Gauteng (51,7%), while those who did not attend because they believed education was useless were most common in Mpumalanga (19,3%) and Eastern Cape (18,8%). Additionally, Western Cape had the highest percentages of children who did not attend due to family commitments and violence at school (49,4% and 59,0%, respectively). Meanwhile, Eastern Cape had the highest percentages of children who did not attend because they got married or were unable to perform academically (45,8% and 45,0%, respectively).

Figure 4.18: Percentage distribution of children aged 5–17 who stayed in grandparents headed households by reasons for not attending educational institutions and geographical area, 2023

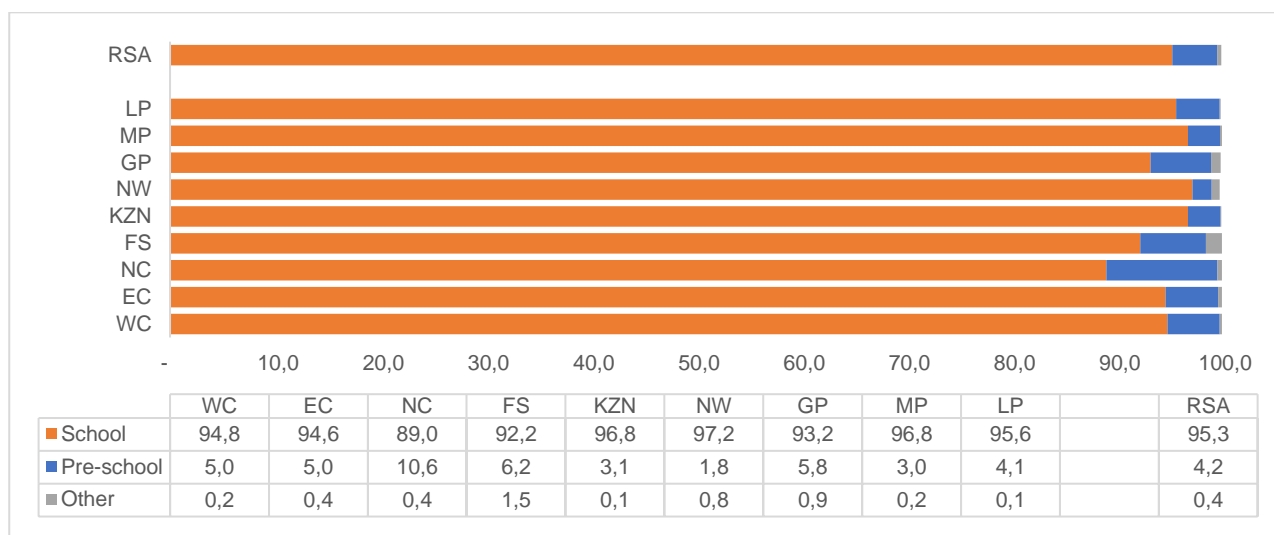


Source: GHS 2023

The graph above depicts the percentage of children aged 5–17 who stayed in households headed by their grandparents and reasons for not attending educational institutions by geographical area.

Results indicate that children in urban areas were less likely to attend educational institutions primarily due to school violence (84,8%) and financial constraints (83,5%). Additionally, two-thirds (66,6%) of children aged 5–17 who cited family commitments as reasons for not attending school lived in urban areas. Nearly 60,3% of children in urban areas did not participate in educational activities because they found education to be useless or uninteresting. Conversely, children in rural areas were less likely to attend school due to academic struggles (54,4%) or marriage (52,5%), compared to their urban counterparts.

Figure 4.19: Percentage distribution of children aged 5–17 who stayed in grandparents headed households by type of educational phase attended and province, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

The graph illustrates the percentage of children aged 5–17 living in grandparents-headed households by the type of educational phase attended and province. In South Africa, the majority of these children were attending school (95,3%), with 4,2% in pre-school and 0,4% attending other educational institutions. Notably, the Northern Cape had the highest percentage of children in pre-school (10,6%), followed by the Free State (6,2%) and Gauteng (5,8%).

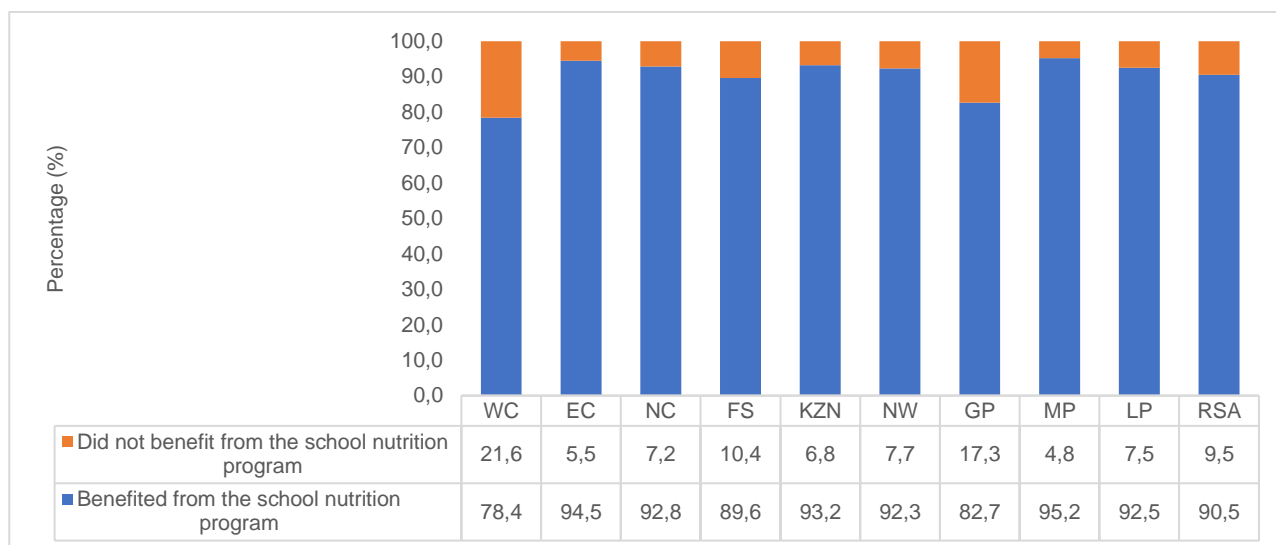
Table 4.5 - Percentage distribution of children aged 5–17 who stayed in grandparents headed households by monthly tuition fees paid to attend educational institutions, 2023

	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GP	MP	LP		RSA
No fees paid	5,9	14,0	1,4	4,5	27,2	7,4	15,4	8,9	15,3		72,6
R1–1 000	7,7	19,5	2,1	5,4	31,0	5,5	12,2	13,9	3,0		16,8
R1 001–8 000	16,1	8,4	2,2	3,3	21,8	5,1	27,4	6,6	9,1		7,4
R8 001–20 000	8,6	12,6	0,7	3,0	8,7	2,9	42,9	9,4	11,3		2,5
More than R20 000	2,9	16,4	4,3	0,0	25,5	7,0	31,4	8,6	4,0		0,6

Source: GHS 2023

The graph above illustrates that the majority of children attending school (from grade R to grade 12) did not incur tuition fees, with approximately 73% falling into this category. Around 17% of the children paid tuition fees of R1 000 or less, while a minority, constituting less than one percent, paid in excess of R20 000. Among children residing in grandparent headed households, 42,9% of those who paid monthly school fees ranging from R8 000 to R20 000 were located in Gauteng. Furthermore, a quarter of the children who paid monthly fees exceeding R20 000 were situated in KwaZulu-Natal (25,5%), with Gauteng accounting for 31,4% of this group.

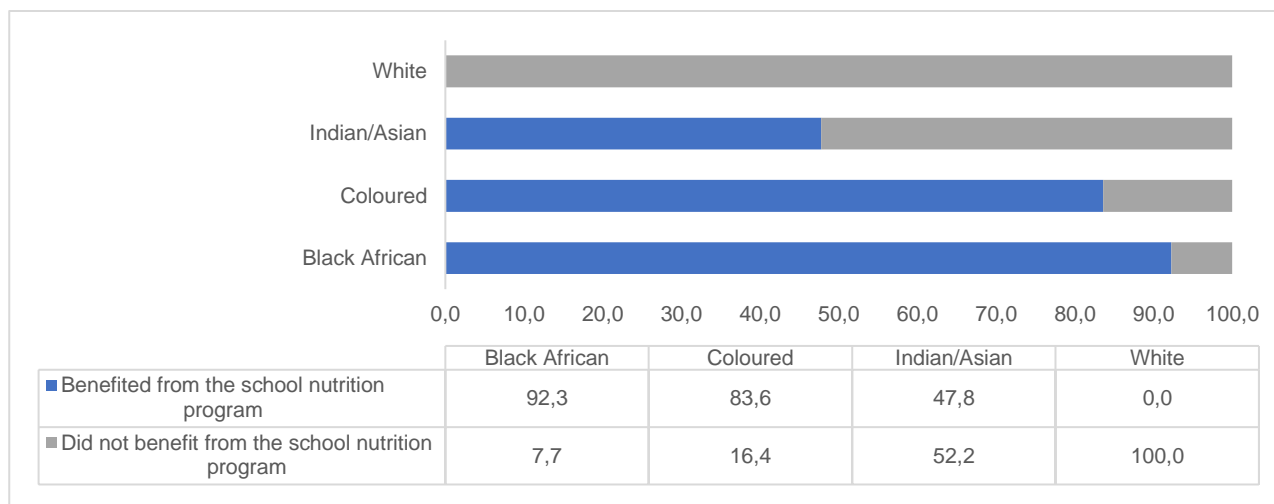
Figure 4.20: Percentage distribution of children aged 5–17 who stayed in grandparents headed households by attendance of public schools which benefitted from school nutrition programme and province, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Children come from various economic backgrounds, which means some cannot bring food to school daily. To tackle this issue, the South African government launched a school nutrition programme to provide nutritious meals during the school day, enhancing children’s health and learning abilities. Figure 4.20 shows that in 2023, over 90,5% of children aged 5–17 in South Africa, living in grandparent headed households and attending public schools, benefitted from this programme. The highest percentages of beneficiaries were in Mpumalanga and Eastern Cape, with 95,2% and 94,5%, respectively. Conversely, Western Cape had the lowest percentage of beneficiaries at 78,4%.

Figure 4.21: Percentage distribution of children aged 5–17 who stayed in grandparents headed households by attendance of public schools which benefited from the school nutrition programme and population group, 2023



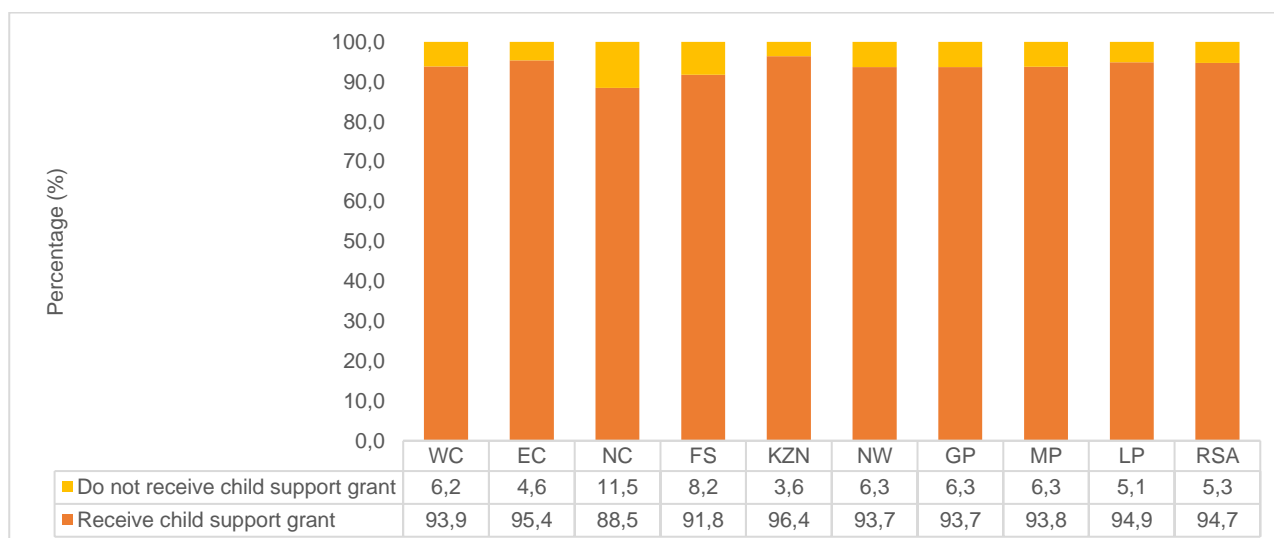
Source: GHS 2023

The graph above shows the percentage of children aged 5–17 who lived in grandparent headed households, attended public schools, and benefited from the school nutrition programme, categorized by population group. The results indicate that 92,3% of Black African children in such households benefited from the programme, compared to 83,6% of coloured children and 47,8% of Indian/Asian children. In contrast, the findings reveal that white children in grandparent headed households did not benefit from the programme.

4.5 Other outcomes

As discussed in earlier chapters, grants constitute a significant source of income for many households in South Africa. The child support grant (CSG) specifically targets children aged 0–17 and serves as a vital social protection measure for children from low-income families. This grant is means-tested, requiring single caregivers to earn less than R52 800 annually, while the combined income for married caregivers must not exceed R105 600 per year. This section explores access to grants for children and examines the socio-economic outcomes for children living in grandparent headed households

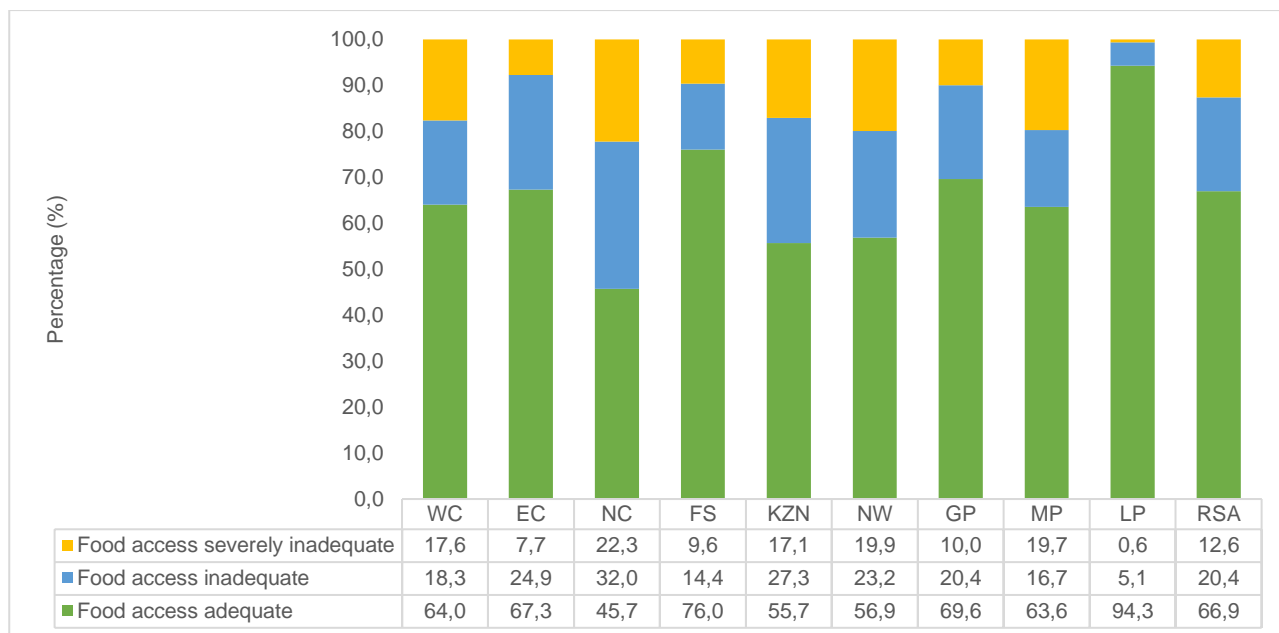
Figure 4.22: Percentage distribution of children aged 0–17 who stayed in grandparents headed households and received child support grants by province, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

The graph above indicates that nearly 95,0% of children aged 0–17 living in grandparent headed households in South Africa received the child support grant. The highest percentages of recipients were in KwaZulu-Natal (96,4%), followed by Eastern Cape (95,4%) and Limpopo (94,9%). Conversely, the Northern Cape had the lowest percentage of children receiving the grant at 88,5%.

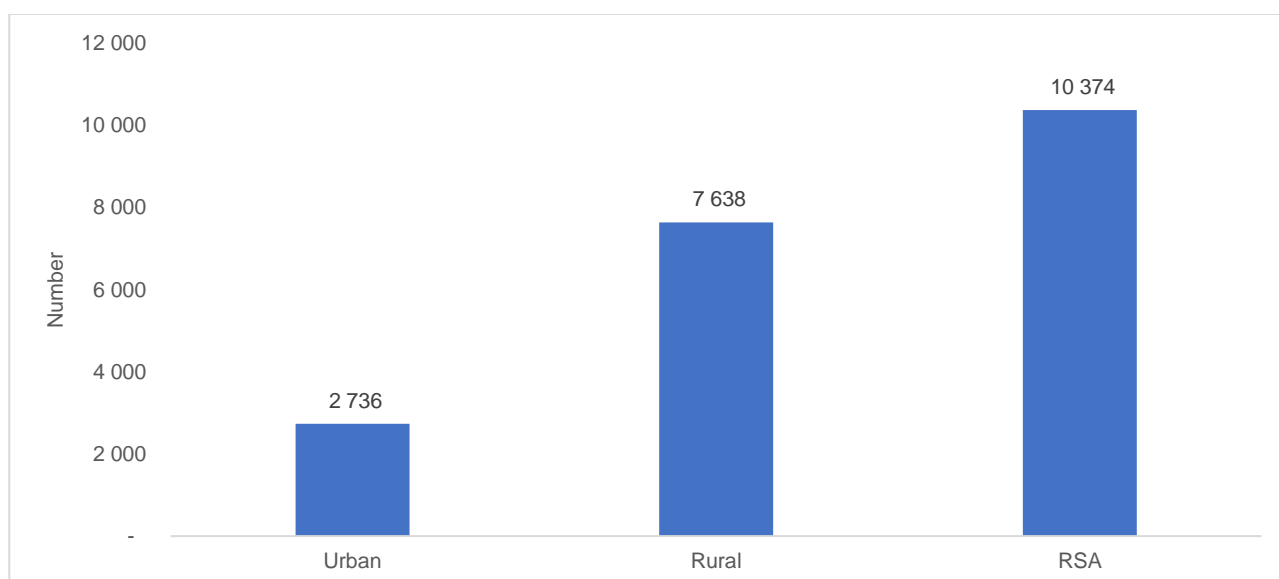
Figure 4.23: Percentage distribution of children aged 0–17 who stayed in grandparents headed households by experience of food adequacy and province, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

The graph above presents the percentage distribution of children aged 0–17 staying in households headed by grandparents by their experience of food adequacy by province. In 2023, nearly 67,0% of children in households headed by grandparents had adequate food access, while 20,4% experienced inadequate access, and 12,6% had severely inadequate access to food. Additionally, households with adequate food access were most prevalent in Limpopo (94,3%), while the majority of households that experienced inadequate and severely inadequate food access were most common in Northern Cape (32,0% and 22,3% respectively).

Figure 4.24: Number of female children aged 12–17 who stayed in grandparents headed households and were pregnant by province and geographical area, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

Figure 4.24 depicts the number of girls aged 12–17 who lived in households headed by grandparents and were pregnant by province and geographical area. In 2023, nearly 10 000 girls aged 12–17 living in grandparent headed households were pregnant. The majority of these girls, 7 638, were located in rural areas.

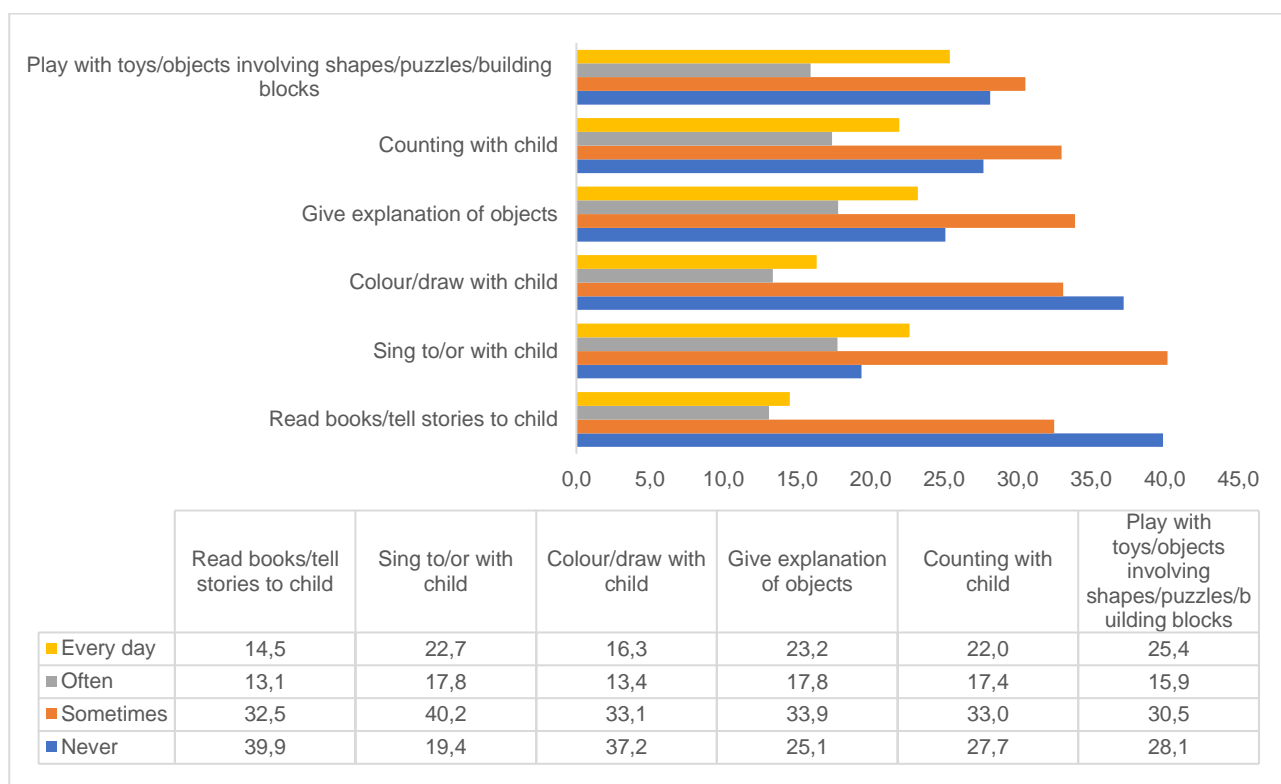
Table 4.6 - Number and percentage of children aged 5–17 with disabilities living in grandparent headed households by sex and province, 2023

Sex	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GP	MP	LP	RSA
Number (Thousands)										
Male	10	24	3	6	46	10	17	14	17	150
Female	5	24	4	6	36	10	19	10	14	133
Total	16	49	7	12	83	20	37	25	32	284
Percentage										
Male	3,4	4,3	4,9	3,7	4,1	4,0	2,6	3,9	3,4	3,7
Female	1,9	4,5	6,0	3,4	3,8	3,5	3,0	2,9	3,0	3,4
Total	2,6	4,4	5,5	3,5	3,9	3,7	2,8	3,4	3,2	3,6

Source: GHS 2023

Table 4.6 above, shows the number and percentage of children aged 5–17 with disabilities living in grandparent headed households, categorized by sex and province. In South Africa, approximately 4,0% of children in these households were disabled. Northern Cape had the highest percentage of children with disabilities at 5,5%, followed by Eastern Cape at 4,4%, and KwaZulu-Natal at 3,9%.

Figure 4.25: Percentage distribution of children aged 0–4 who stayed in grandparents headed households by types of stimulation received, 2023



Source: GHS 2023

The graph illustrates the distribution of children aged 0–4 residing in households headed by grandparents, categorized by the types of stimulation they receive.

Engaging children in stimulating play and activities is essential for their holistic development, encompassing cognitive, emotional, social, and physical growth. Activities such as puzzles, building blocks, and memory games enhance problem-solving skills and memory. Role-playing and storytelling facilitate emotional expression and understanding, while drawing, painting, and crafting promote creativity and fine motor skills. Educational games, including board games, educational applications, and interactive books, render learning both enjoyable and engaging.

However, children in grandparents-headed households frequently receive limited stimulation in reading. Nearly 40% of children aged 0–4 had never experienced reading or storytelling, and approximately one-third (32,5%) lack a consistent figure to read to them or tell them stories. Additionally, close to 70% of children either never engage in colouring or drawing or do so only occasionally. Conversely, nearly 39% of children have a household member who counts with them daily or as frequently as possible.

4.6 Summary

This section examines the living arrangements, well-being, and development of children aged 0–17 residing in grandparent headed households. In 2023, nearly 8 million children (38,0%) in South Africa lived in households led by their grandparents. KwaZulu-Natal had the highest percentage (10,1%) of such children. The living arrangements of these children varied by geographical location. Overall, about 32,1% of these children had neither of their biological parents living with them, with rural areas having the highest proportion (64,1%). Additionally, approximately 56,4% of these children had their mothers living in the grandparent headed household. Among children aged 0–4 in these households, nearly 71% did not attend any ECD programs, whereas about 97% of those aged 5–17 were attending educational institutions.

Nearly 85% of children aged 0–4 living in grandparent headed households did not attend ECD programs because their grandparents preferred them to stay at home or with someone else. Additionally, most children aged 5–17 in these households did not attend any educational institutions due to a lack of money for fees (34,5%).

The chapter also revealed that nearly 95,0% of children aged 0–17 living in grandparent headed households in South Africa benefit from the child support grant. This vital support is most prevalent in KwaZulu-Natal (96,4%), followed closely by Eastern Cape (95,4%) and Limpopo (94,9%). These high percentages underscore the critical role of the CSG in providing financial stability and essential resources to some of the most vulnerable children in the country.

Chapter 5: Summary and conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This report examines households with co-resident grandparents and children aged 0–17, noting that some grandparents are heads of their households. A significant proportion of children live with or are raised by their grandparents. Although the GHS does not delineate the caregiving roles of household members, household heads are generally regarded as playing a pivotal role in caregiving and decision-making processes, particularly concerning children.

5.2 Registered older caregivers

Grants can be a lifeline for caregivers, offering much-needed financial relief and support. The South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) offers caregiver grants that include various types of child grants, that can help caregivers manage their responsibilities more effectively. These grants provide direct financial assistance, helping caregivers cover essential expenses like food and daily living costs, ensuring comprehensive support for those in need ensuring that caregivers can focus on providing the best care without the constant worry of financial strain.

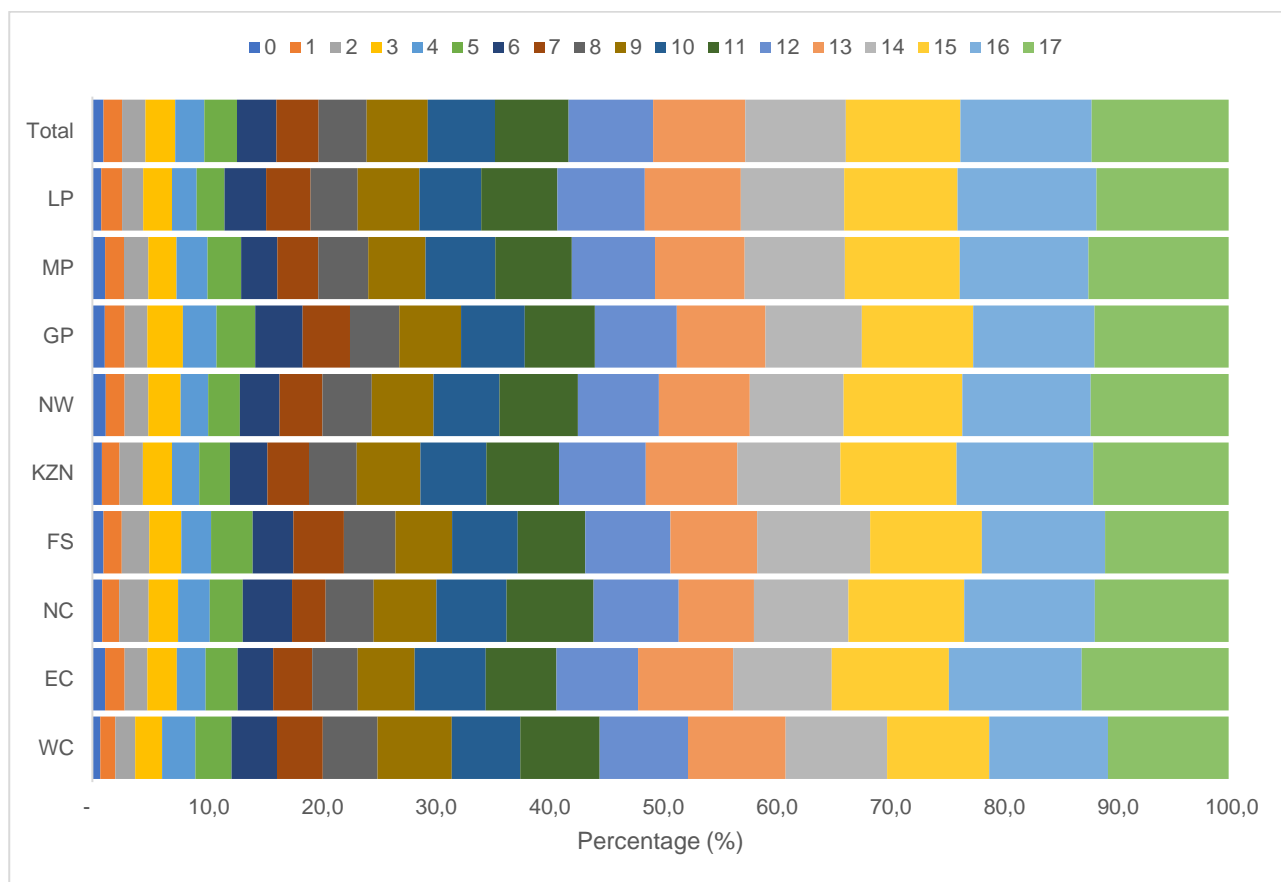
Table 5.1 - Number of caregivers for children aged 0–17 who were recipients of caregivers grants by age and province at end of October 2024

Age	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GP	MP	LP	Total
56–60	433	1 417	236	323	1 042	346	444	399	593	5 233
61–65	2 130	7 331	868	1 268	4 936	1 632	2 139	1 414	2 330	24 048
66–70	1 212	5 202	656	998	3 633	1 048	1 483	1 032	1 823	17 087
71–75	556	2 994	365	488	2 394	802	735	585	1 078	9 997
76–80	168	1 210	95	213	889	268	274	243	595	3 955
81–85	71	579	41	75	317	91	95	115	247	1 631
86–90	3	174	13	14	57	16	17	45	82	421
91–95	0	93	9	7	55	10	5	10	15	204
96–100	0	15	0	1	5	3	0	0	5	29
Over 101	0	4	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	6
Total	4 573	19 019	2 283	3 389	13 328	4 216	5 192	3 843	6 768	62 611

Source: SASSA 2024

The table above displays the number of caregivers, aged 56 and older, who are looking after children aged 0–17 and receiving caregiver grants, categorized by age and province. In 2024, SASSA reported a total of 62 611 caregivers in this age group. Eastern Cape had the highest number of caregivers (19 019), followed by KwaZulu-Natal (13 328). Northern Cape had the fewest caregivers (2 283).

Figure 5.1: Percentage of caregivers for children aged 0–17 who were recipients of caregivers grants by age of children and province at end of October 2024



Source: SASSA 2024

The figure above illustrates the percentage of caregivers, aged 56 and older, who are responsible for children aged 0–17 and are recipients of caregiver grants, categorized by the age of the children and province. According to the data, 70,5% of caregivers receiving these grants were likely to be looking after children aged 10 and older. Additionally, nearly one-third (33,7%) of caregivers were likely to be caring for children aged 15 and older. This trend is consistent across most provinces, with the exceptions of Western Cape (30,5%), Free State (31,5%), and Gauteng (32,3%). Conversely, the percentage of caregivers receiving grants to care for children under the age of five is approximately ten percent, with Gauteng having the highest percentage at 10,9%.

Table 5.2 - Number of caregivers for children aged 0–17 who were recipients of foster grants, 2023

Types of grants	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GP	MP	LP	RSA
Foster grant	4 535	14 882	5 133	5 195	10 908	5 763	10 835	5 792	2 532	65 575

Source: GHS 2023

The table above shows the number of caregiver grandparents responsible for children aged 0–17 who received caregiver grants, broken down by province. According to the GHS 2023, there were 65 575 such caregivers, which is slightly higher than the number registered by SASSA in 2024. Furthermore, the largest number of caregivers recipients of foster grants were found in Eastern Cape (14 882).

5.3 Grandparents headed households compared to households with co-resident grandparents

In 2002, South Africa experienced a notable demographic trend, with approximately 5,9 million children residing in households headed by their grandparents. This figure represented nearly one-third, or 32,3%, of all children under the age of 18 in the country at that time. By 2023, there was a significant increase in this demographic, with around 8 million children living in grandparent headed households, constituting 38,1% of all children under 18. This rise underscores a growing trend over the years of children being raised in households led by their grandparents.

In 2023, the number of grandparents heading households was estimated to be close to 3,4 million. Additionally, there were approximately 6,7 million co-resident grandparents living with children aged 0–17. Furthermore, nearly 9,7 million children resided in households with co-resident grandparents. The increasing number of children living with grandparents highlights significant societal shifts and challenges faced by families in South Africa. Economic pressures, health crises, and various social factors contribute to the evolving and complex landscape of family dynamics in the country.

This report indicates that there are numerous similarities between grandparent headed households and those with co-resident grandparents. Both types of households primarily rely on grants as their main source of income, followed by salaries and remittances. However, the extent to which each income type contributes varies to monthly household income by these household structures.

The data showed that nearly 95,0% of children aged 0–17 living in grandparent headed households in South Africa received the CSG. This essential support is particularly high in KwaZulu-Natal (96,4%), followed by Eastern Cape (95,4%) and Limpopo (94,9%). These figures highlight the significant reliance on the CSG to provide financial stability and essential resources for children in these households.

Grandparent headed households often face significant economic challenges. Many of these families are economically disadvantaged, with a notable percentage confined in the lowest household income quintile. Except for Western Cape and Gauteng, over 75% of such households in other provinces were in the lower income quintiles, with Eastern Cape (82,6%) and North West (81,5%) being the poorest.

A comparison between grandparent headed households and those with co-resident grandparents revealed that while co-resident grandparent households in Western Cape, Northern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Gauteng were relatively affluent, their grandparent headed counterparts fell into the lowest income quintile category. In the remaining provinces, both grandparent headed households and those with co-resident grandparents exhibited similarly low levels of income. Additionally, close to one-third of grandparents-headed households experienced food insecurity in 2023. This trend underscores the widespread economic challenges faced by these family structures across South Africa.

This situation is exacerbated by the fact that many grandparent caregivers were single black African women aged 55 and older. Raising grandchildren later in life can take a toll on grandparents' physical and mental health, further complicating their ability to provide financially.

5.4 Children residents of grandparents headed households

Of the nearly 8 million children living in grandparent headed households, approximately 45,5% were six years old or younger. While more than half (56,4%) had their mothers present in the household, close to one-third (32,1%) had neither parent living with them.

Access to ECD programs is often influenced by socio-economic status, with children from poorer families being less likely to attend. Nearly 12% of children aged 0–4 who stayed in grandparent headed households did not participate in ECD programs due to the cost, and 2,9% were unable to attend because such facilities were unavailable in their area.

Nearly 85% of children aged 0–4 living in grandparent headed households miss out on ECD programs because their grandparents prefer them to stay at home or with someone else. This decision, while well-intentioned, deprives these young children of crucial early learning opportunities that can significantly impact their future development and success.

ECD programs often include health and nutrition components that support children's overall well-being. Without these programs, children might not receive the same level of care and support. Nearly 40% of children aged 0–4 who stayed in grandparent headed households did not have anyone who can read to them and close to 37,2% did not have anyone that can draw or colour with them. Overall, not enrolling in ECD programs can limit a child's potential and have broader social and economic consequences.

Nearly 97% of children aged 5–17 living in grandparent headed households attended educational institutions. The data also indicates that there is an almost universal attendance rate among 9 to 14-year-olds residing in households headed by grandparents. However, a decline of approximately three percentage points is observed in the attendance of 15 to 16-year-olds, and nearly nine percent of 17-year-olds were not enrolled in any educational institutions. The highest incidence of non-attendance was recorded among 5-year-olds.

Furthermore, a staggering 34,5% of children aged 5–17 in these households were unable to attend educational institutions due to a lack of money for fees. This financial barrier not only hinders their immediate educational prospects but also limits their long-term potential, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and limited opportunities.

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