Original Research Article

Church-Based Support Mechanisms for Grandparents Caring for Grandchildren in Matutu Station, Seventh Day Adventist Nyamira Conference, Kenya

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Abstract: Despite the growing involvement of grandparents in the care and religious upbringing of grandchildren in Matutu Station, Nyamira SDA Conference, their role in moral and spiritual formation remains largely unsupported and under-researched. Informed by this, the study endeavored to investigate church-based support systems for grandparents giving religious formation and care to grandchildren in Matutu Station. The study was guided by Westerhoff's Faith Development Theory (FDT) to examine church-based support systems for grandparents caring for grandchildren in Matutu Station, Nyamira SDA Conference. Employing a descriptive research design, the study explored the challenges and barriers grandparents face in fulfilling this role. The target population consisted of 1,066 respondents, from which a sample size of 396 was determined using Glenn's (1992) formula. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions, and analyzed using Likert scale techniques and verbatim thematic analysis. The study found that while some church initiatives offer limited support, 71.1% of respondents affirmed home visits by the Family Life Ministry and 68.1% reported that Sabbath School programs provide biblical instruction and spiritual nurture. Critical gaps exist, with 88.1% reporting no targeted pastoral counseling, 77.8% noting the absence of mentorship programs, 62.2% indicating no fellowship support groups, 76.3% reporting a lack of referral services, 94.8% citing no financial or material assistance, and 58.0% highlighting the absence of religious education materials for grandparents, underscoring the need for structured, intentional, and role-specific support mechanisms in Matutu Station.

Keywords: Church-Based Support, Grandparents' Care-Giving, Religious Formation, Pastoral and Educational Gaps, Faith Development, Moral and Spiritual Formation.

INTRODUCTION

Grandparents play a significant but under-researched role in the Christian moral and religious formation of their grandchildren (Frosh, 2004). Globally, many grandparents assume primary care-giving responsibilities due to factors such as parental employment, divorce, substance abuse, illness, incarceration, neglect, or death (Leinaweaver, 2014). Despite this growing responsibility, the religious and moral influence of grandparents is often overlooked, with practitioners assuming that children from Christian families will automatically develop faith and values without deliberate inter-generational guidance. This assumption risks depriving children of learning from the religious experiences and wisdom of their grandparents, who are uniquely positioned to model faith through lived example and nurture holistic moral development (Hank & Buber, 2009).

In contemporary society, technology increasingly replaces traditional care-giving roles. Children are often cared for by digital platforms, house helpers, or childcare centers, reducing the time grandparents spend transmitting religious knowledge and values. Yet, research indicates that grandchildren raised by grandparents benefit from consistent spiritual guidance, moral mentoring, and relational support,

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which promote prosocial behavior, religious engagement, and social competence (Bengtson *et al.*, 2013; King & Boyatzis, 2015). Inter-generational religious transmission is strengthened when grandparents model prayer, devotions, moral behavior, and biblical understanding, demonstrating their critical role as moral and spiritual educators.

Empirical studies in Europe, the United States, Australia, and Africa reveal that grandparents increasingly provide primary childcare due to rising single parenthood, parental absence, and social challenges such as HIV/AIDS, migration, and economic hardship (Hank & Buber, 2009; Harrison *et al.*, 2014; UNAIDS, 2016). Despite their central care-giving role, grandparents often lack structured church support, training, or programs to assist them in nurturing the faith and moral character of their grandchildren (Cassida Shane, 2020; Collins, 2011). In Kenya, research has predominantly focused on the physical and mental health of caregivers, with minimal attention to the spiritual and moral formation of grandchildren, particularly in rural areas (Chepngeno-Langat *et al.*, 2014).

In Nyamira Conference, Matutu Station alone, there are approximately 2,037 grandparents capable of providing inter-generational care (Nyamira Conference Report, 2021). However, the local Seventh-Day Adventist Church primarily relies on institutional childcare programs rather than empowering grandparents as primary agents of Christian formation. Consequently, grandchildren's faith development and moral growth may be compromised, and grandparents' potential influence remains underutilized. These gaps underscore the need to investigate church-based support mechanisms for grandparents caring for grandchildren, to strengthen their role in promoting spiritual, moral, and social development within the family and the broader faith community.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing involvement of grandparents in the care and religious upbringing of grandchildren in Matutu Station, Nyamira SDA Conference, their role in moral and spiritual formation remains largely unsupported and under-researched. While grandparents assume significant responsibilities due to parental absence, illness, or other social challenges, the local church has not established structured programs or training to equip them for nurturing faith, guiding moral behavior, and fostering social development in their grandchildren. Consequently, grandchildren may not fully benefit from the inter-generational transmission of Christian values, and grandparents' potential influence is underutilized. This gap raises critical questions about how church-based support mechanisms can enhance the effectiveness of grandparent-led religious formation and ensure consistent, sustainable spiritual and moral development among grandchildren in the community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Grandparents play a vital role in the care and Christian formation of their grandchildren, providing material, emotional, social, and spiritual support. Their involvement benefits both generations, offering children guidance and moral grounding while giving grandparents a sense of purpose, despite the physical and emotional demands of care-giving (Grandparents Plus, 2009). In Christian contexts, grandparents are central to transmitting faith and moral values, yet the church often prioritizes marriage and parental roles, overlooking the spiritual contribution of grandparents (Ayiro, 2011). This gap is particularly critical during adolescence when children are susceptible to peer influence and require consistent moral and spiritual guidance.

Empowerment and support for grandparents are crucial to effective caregiving. Studies emphasize the need for skills development, confidence-building, and targeted interventions tailored to grandparents' unique circumstances rather than generic parenting programs (Campbell *et al.*, 2016; Feiler, 2006; Kane, 2007; Statham, 2010). Churches can partner with grandparents and parents to establish youth ministries, support networks, and peer groups, enabling knowledge sharing, emotional support, and practical guidance (Brattston, 2010; Dunn & Wamsley, 2022). Material assistance, including food security and adequate housing, is also essential, particularly in low-income or rural settings, where grandparents face significant resource constraints (Macomber & Geen, 2002). Social support from family, neighbors, and church communities further reduces caregiver burden and fosters inter-generational solidarity (Mugisha *et al.*, 2015; Grobler & Roos, 2012).

Spiritual guidance reinforces grandparents' care-giving, equipping them with virtues such as patience, compassion, and moral authority that shape grandchildren's faith and behavior (Kamya & Poindexter, 2009; Shaibu, 2013). Grandparents influence grandchildren through direct instruction, modeling religious practices, and nurturing emotionally close relationships, promoting internalization of faith, moral development, and social responsibility (Bengtson *et al.*, 2013; King & Boyatzis, 2015). Even when grandchildren selectively adopt religious practices, grandparents remain influential in transmitting values such as honesty, empathy, and respect (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Silverstein *et al.*, 2006).

Despite their critical role, church-based support mechanisms for grandparents remain fragmented and underdeveloped. Structured programs that integrate spiritual, social, and material support are necessary to empower grandparents, enhance the Christian formation of grandchildren, and sustain inter-generational care-giving in faith-based communities.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study was guided by Westerhoff's Faith Development Theory (FDT) to examine church-based support systems for grandparents caring for grandchildren in Matutu Station, Nyamira SDA Conference. The theory addresses both faith development and relational bonding, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding how grandparents are supported in nurturing their grandchildren's Christian character. Employing a descriptive research design, the study explored the challenges and barriers grandparents face in fulfilling this role. The target population consisted of 1,066 respondents, from which a sample size of 396 was determined using Glenn's (1992) formula. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions, and analyzed using Likert scale techniques and verbatim thematic analysis.

Table 1: The Sample Size

Target group	Target Population	Sampling procedure	Sample size	Percentage
Pastors	6	Censors	6	1.5%
Grandparents	600	Simple Random	200	50.5%
Parents	300	Simple Random	100	25.3%
Grandchildren	60	Simple Random	40	10.1%
Children Ministry Leaders	100	Simple Random	50	12.6
Total	**1066**		**396**	**100%**

Source*: Researcher (2026)*

By including diverse clusters of respondents, the study captured authentic and varied perspectives on church-based support systems for grandparents providing religious formation and care to their grandchildren in Matutu Station. This diversity strengthens the reliability of the data and enhances the potential for generalizing the findings to similar contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following section presents the results and discussion of the study, highlighting the effectiveness, challenges, and impact of church-based support systems for grandparents providing religious formation and care to their grandchildren in Matutu Station. Quantitative field results are as illustrated in figure 1.
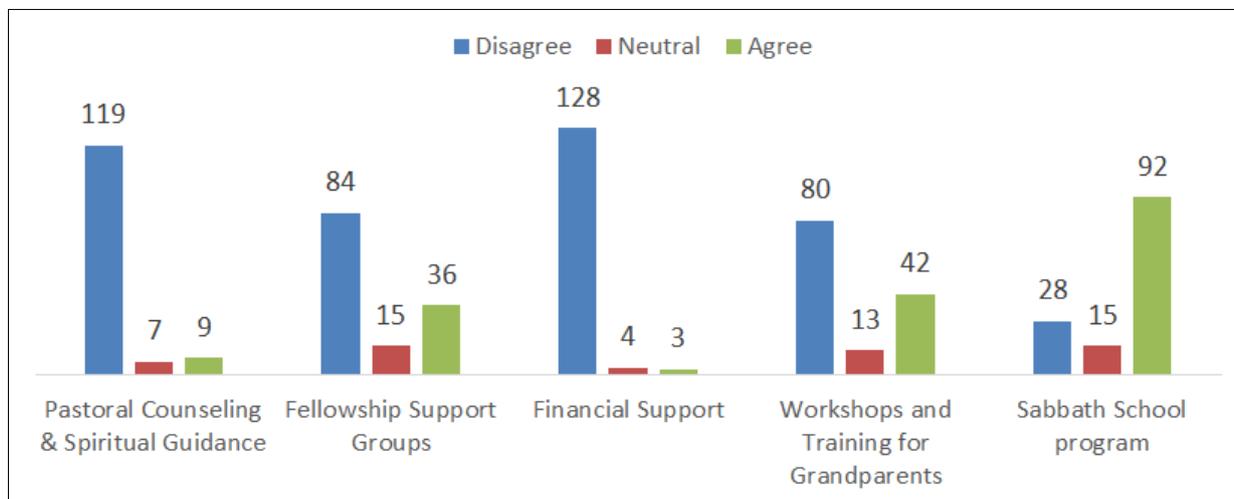

Fig. 1: SDA Church Grandparents Support Mechanisms
Source: Field Data (2026)

First, the study examined the availability of pastoral counseling and spiritual guidance mechanisms to support grandparents in their role of providing religious formation to their grandchildren. Questionnaire responses revealed that a significant majority, 119 (88.1%), indicated that the *Seventh-day Adventist Church* does not offer such support, while 7 (5.2%) were neutral and only 9 (6.7%) affirmed its existence. The view of the majority was reiterated in the interviews where a participant informed:

I am a church member throughout my life and I have never seen a specific program for specific roles grandparents assume in the important task of mentoring children in the faith. It is like the church does not see the role grandparents play in the formation young people who are the future of the church in Matutu Station (KINF 3).

These findings revealed a significant lack of pastoral counseling and spiritual guidance mechanisms specifically tailored to support grandparents in their role

of religious formation of grandchildren in Matutu Station. Guided by Faith Development Theory, which posits that faith matures through reflective engagement and meaningful relationships with significant adults, these gaps undermine the effectiveness of inter-generational faith transmission. Consistent with Fowler (2004) and King and Boyatzis (2015), grandparents often serve as trusted faith mentors during children's formative stages, yet for such mentorship to be impactful, older adults themselves require ongoing spiritual nurturing and pastoral support. The study shows that without these structures, grandparents may struggle to provide informed guidance, thereby limiting the depth and continuity of religious formation.

Further, the findings align with Allen and Ross (2020), who argue that churches neglecting adult faith formation inadvertently compromise the spiritual development of children and youth. Verbatim data from key informants emphasized that pastoral care must address the specific life roles and contextual realities of grandparents engaged in faith formation, echoing Louw (2016) and Swinton (2020), who stress that effective pastoral care equips believers for relational and mentoring responsibilities rather than only providing crisis intervention. The absence of structured, role-specific pastoral support places care-giving grandparents at a disadvantage, highlighting that the SDA Church in Matutu Station currently underestimates the complexity and demands of grandparent-led religious mentoring.

The study's findings on fellowship support groups for grandparents reveal that a majority of respondents, 84 (62.2%), disagreed that such groups exist, while 36 (26.7%) affirmed their presence and 15 (11.1%) were undecided. Quantitative data thus indicate that most participants perceive the SDA Church as lacking visible, structured spaces where grandparents can meet regularly, share experiences, receive encouragement, and reflect collectively on their role in the religious formation of grandchildren. This perception highlights a significant institutional gap in inter-generational and pastoral programming, especially given the growing responsibilities assumed by grandparents in nurturing faith among younger generations.

From a theological and pastoral perspective, fellowship support groups are a key expression of *koinonia*, the communal life of the church, which nurtures believers through shared faith and mutual care. This aligns with Allen and Ross (2020), Myers (2021), Louw (2016), and Doehring (2015), who assert that peer fellowship groups are essential for sustaining moral and spiritual mentoring roles, providing emotional support, shared learning, and reinforcement of values. Grandparents engaged in care-giving roles particularly benefit from peer groups that address age-specific challenges, inter-generational tensions, and the evolving moral contexts encountered by grandchildren.

The dominant perception of non-existence of such groups in Matutu Station suggests that current church fellowships are either generalized or oriented toward other demographic groups: youth, women, or parents unintentionally marginalizing grandparents as a distinct pastoral group. This leaves grandparents isolated in their mentoring and care-giving responsibilities, reducing opportunities for mutual learning, spiritual renewal, and observational learning that could enhance faith transmission and moral guidance.

Meanwhile, the minority who affirmed the existence of fellowship support groups (26.7%) likely refer to informal or semi-structured gatherings such as Sabbath School classes, elders' meetings, or extended family prayer groups. While these platforms provide some emotional, social, and spiritual support, their limited visibility and non-explicit focus on grandparents undermine intentional empowerment. The 11.1% of undecided respondents further reflect communication gaps within the church, irregular participation, or uncertainty regarding the purpose of existing groups. Collectively, these findings suggest that the lack of structured, grandparent-focused fellowship support diminishes the collective efficacy of grandparents in religious mentoring and care-giving.

On the postulate of financial or material support for care-giving grandparents quantitative data reveal an overwhelming majority of respondents, 128 (94.8%) strongly disagreeing, while only a very small minority, 3 (2.2%) affirming the existence of such support and 4 (3.0%) remained undecided. These results were strongly reinforced by qualitative interview data which indicated:

The most disadvantaged group in the church are grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren. There are many grandparents whose sons and daughters have died living them with grandchildren. Most of them have no means to enable them care for the children. The church does not support them materially. This is something that the SDA church should reconsider in its pastoral planning (KINF 27)

The verbatim data emphasize the socio-economic vulnerability of care-giving grandparents, particularly those who have assumed responsibility for orphaned grandchildren following the death of adult children. However, the field findings reveal a profound gap in the SDA church's practical pastoral response to one of the most vulnerable groups within the congregation. This finding resonates with the position of the studies by Kagema and Maina (2021), and also with Mbugua (2020) which sustains that grandparents caring for grandchildren frequently struggle to meet basic needs such as food, school fees, healthcare, and housing, yet receive limited structured assistance from faith institutions, despite their central role in sustaining family and moral life. The findings, therefore, point to a disconnect between theological ideals of compassionate

care and the lived experience of care-giving grandparents in Matutu Station.

The church's mission extends beyond spiritual nurture to include *diakonia*, which is a practical service that responds to material suffering and social injustice. But the absence of material support weakens the moral and spiritual modeling capacity of grandparents. When caregivers experience support and affirmation from their social environment. Chronic material deprivation, leads to stress, discouragement, and reduced capacity for consistent moral guidance, thereby indirectly affecting grandchildren's religious formation. This supports the study by King and Boyatzis (2015) which sustains that economic insecurity hinders participation in religious practices and weaken the inter-generational transmission of faith. Thus, when the SDA church fails to address the material realities of vulnerable members, spiritual formation efforts are undermined, as caregivers lack the resources and emotional capacity to effectively mentor children in faith and therefore jeopardizing the future of the church in the region.

The study acknowledged the minority view of 3 (2.2%) respondents who reported receiving material support. This likely reflects isolated or informal acts of assistance rather than formal church policy. Such support may include occasional food donations, benevolence offerings, or personal aid from church members, which beneficiaries perceive as church support despite lacking consistency or structure. The small size of this group indicates that material assistance for grandparents is neither widespread nor systematic.

Similarly, the views of the undecided respondents, 4 (3.0%) may indicate limited awareness of church welfare mechanisms or uncertainty about whether existing benevolence initiatives adequately address the specific needs of care-giving grandparents. Sometimes church welfare programs are poorly communicated, irregularly implemented, or targeted at general poverty rather than role-specific vulnerability, resulting in ambiguity among congregants about their availability and scope. This uncertainty further underscores the lack of clear, intentional pastoral planning focused on grandparents as caregivers.

On the theme of parenting workshops and training for grandparents, the results indicated that 80 (59.3%) respondents were in disagreement, 13 (9.6%) were undecided, and 42 (31.1%) supported. Participants in the interviews added:

The church does organize workshops and training on family life in general for all members. In such arrangement the issue of Christian parenting is key. However, we have never had specific workshops and training for grandparents to deal with issues specific to care-giving grandparents (KINF 36).

The findings reveal a partially developed but insufficiently targeted pastoral approach within the SDA church in Matutu Station. The displayed distribution of quantitative data suggests that although some form of family-oriented training is available within the church, it is largely generalized and not intentionally tailored to the unique needs of care-giving grandparents. This position is strongly illumined by the interview data, with participants acknowledging the existence of general family life seminars and Christian parenting workshops while emphasizing the absence of programs specifically designed to address grandparent-specific care-giving challenges.

This distinction is significant and is well supported by Bengtson, *et al*., (2013), and also King and Boyatzis (2015) who emphasize that grandparents who assume care-giving roles encounter challenges that differ substantially from those of biological parents, including generational gaps, declining health, limited financial resources, evolving cultural norms, and difficulties engaging children in contemporary moral and spiritual issues. Adults learn most effectively when content directly addresses their lived experiences and practical challenges.

Equipping grandparents for care-giving and faith mentorship requires intentional pedagogical approaches that acknowledge their accumulated life experience while addressing new and emerging parenting realities. Without such targeted training, grandparents may feel inadequately prepared to address contemporary moral, emotional, and spiritual issues faced by grandchildren. Generalized parenting programs often fail to equip grandparents with the skills required to address these complexities effectively, particularly in contexts where grandparents are acting as primary caregivers rather than secondary supporters. The perception of non-existence of relevant training by the majority of respondents in this study therefore reflects a real gap between program availability and program relevance.

In context, the minority view of 42 (31.1%) respondents who supported the existence of parenting workshops may reflect participation in broader family-life or Christian parenting seminars offered by the church, which they interpret as inclusive of grandparents. For these respondents, exposure to teachings on discipline, moral instruction, communication, and spiritual leadership within family seminars may have been perceived as sufficient preparation for their care-giving role. However, as highlighted in the interview data, such workshops typically do not address issues uniquely faced by care-giving grandparents, such as trauma among orphaned grandchildren, authority negotiation with adult children, or age-related limitations in care-giving.

The presence of undecided respondents, 13 (9.6%), points to ambiguity and limited awareness regarding the scope and intent of existing training initiatives. It suggests that even where family-life workshops exist, their objectives and intended beneficiaries may not be clearly articulated, leading to varied interpretations among congregants.

The notable fact in the data is that while the SDA Church in Matutu Station demonstrates some commitment to family life education, its current approach insufficiently recognizes grandparents as a distinct and critical care-giving group. The dominant perception of absence, combined with minority and neutral views, reflects a need for clearer differentiation between general parenting programs and grandparent-specific training. Structured parenting workshops tailored to care-giving grandparents in order to strengthen inter-generational faith formation, enhance care-giving competence, and affirm the vital role of grandparents within the church's pastoral mission.

On the postulate of Sabbath school programs inclusive of grandparents, the results indicated 28 (20.7%) respondents disagreeing, 15 (11.1%) neutral, and a majority 92 (68.1%) in support of Sabbath school programs as a mechanism to support grandparents in their care-giving role to grandchildren. A participant in the interviews informed:

Grandparents are involved in Sabbath school programs as teachers in he faith. Such programs also help them in their parenting role in their specific families. The only thing is that not all grandparents in Matutu Station are involved in Sabbath school programs (KINF 18).

The findings reveal a relatively strong and positive support of Sabbath school mechanism within the SDA Church in Matutu Station, while also exposing important limitations in participation and reach. These findings were reinforced by interview data, where participants noted that grandparents are actively involved in Sabbath School as teachers and faith mentors, and that such involvement enhances their parenting and spiritual guidance roles within their families. The findings are consistent with Knight (2016) and Dudley (2020) who affirm that Sabbath School is widely recognized as a central platform for biblical instruction, spiritual nurture, and lay participation across age groups, thereby functioning as a key inter-generational learning space.

Sabbath School programs offer structured, communal settings that nurture faith across the lifespan through scripture, dialogue, and mentoring. Participation equips grandparents with biblical knowledge, moral guidance, and confidence to effectively support their grandchildren's religious formation at home.

The view that study could not undermine is that the minority of respondents, 28 (20.7%), who disagreed that Sabbath School programs support grandparents may reflect experiences of exclusion, limited participation, or perceived inadequacy of the programs in addressing care-giving specific challenges. While for some grandparents, Sabbath School may therefore be experienced primarily as a teaching ministry rather than as a holistic support system for their care-giving role.

The neutral position of 15 (11.1%) respondents likely reflects limited awareness or inconsistent involvement in Sabbath School activities, suggesting that while these programs exist and are valued, their benefits are not uniformly experienced by all grandparents. Engagement in church programs is often influenced by factors such as health, mobility, household responsibilities, and perceived relevance, leaving some grandparents uncertain about the value of participation. Interview insights indicate that "not all grandparents in Matutu Station are involved in Sabbath School programs," highlighting a critical limitation of uneven participation. This aligns with Allen and Ross (2020), who emphasize that the effectiveness of faith-based educational programs depends not only on their existence but also on intentional inclusion, accessibility, and structural support to ensure that vulnerable groups are not marginalized.

The study continued to discuss the findings on the SDA church support mechanisms to grandparents in their role of forming grandchildren. Quantitative results are presented in table 2.

Table 2: SDA church support mechanisms for grandparents caring for grandchildren in Matutu Station

Item	D	SD	N	A	SA	Total
Mentorship programs linking grandparents with church leaders	R-88 %-65.2	17 12.6	9 6.7	14 10.4	7 5.2	135 100%
Referral services for family challenges	R-90 %66.7	13 9.6	10 7.4	20 14.8	2 1.5	135 100%
Home visitation and family ministry programs	R-21 %-15.6	4 3.0	14 10.4	88 65.2	8 5.9	135 100%
Religious education materials (Bibles, lesson guides, devotionals)	R-73 %-54.1	6 4.4	7 5.2	20 14.8	29 21.5	135 100%

Source: Field Data (2026).

On the theme of mentorship programs linking grandparents with church leaders, the findings in table 2 reveal an overwhelming majority 105 (77.8%) respondents is disagreement, 9 (6.7%) were undecided,

while a minority 21 (15.6%) supported. These findings reveal a substantial deficit in structured relational support within the SDA Church in Matutu Station. The dominant perception of absence, further suggests that although informal interactions between grandparents and church leaders may occur, there are no clearly defined or institutionalized mentorship structures designed to guide, accompany, and empower grandparents in their care-giving and religious formation roles. But such mentorship relationships, particularly in contexts where grandparents serve as primary moral and spiritual influencers of children. From a pastoral and theological perspective, mentorship is a critical mechanism through which church leaders transmit theological insight, pastoral wisdom, and practical guidance to lay members.

The findings and the discussion are in agreement with Louw (2016) and Swinton (2020) who posit that intentional mentoring relationships between clergy and lay caregivers enhance spiritual resilience, foster shared responsibility for faith formation, and strengthen congregational cohesion. But the absence of such mentorship programs, as indicated by the majority of respondents, tend to therefore limit grandparents' access to doctrinal clarification, pastoral counsel, and emotional support, especially when they face complex care-giving challenges such as disciplining traumatized grandchildren, addressing contemporary moral questions, or navigating authority boundaries within extended families.

The minority view of 21 (15.6%) respondents who supported the existence of mentorship programs likely reflects experiences of informal or individualized relationships with church leaders, such as pastoral visits, personal counseling, or leadership roles held by some grandparents within the church. For these respondents, regular interaction with pastors, elders, or Sabbath School leaders may function as *de facto* mentorship, leading them to perceive such relationships as supportive mechanisms. This view is supported by Bengtson and Silverstein (2020) who maintain that individuals who are already active in church leadership or ministry are more likely to experience close mentoring relationships, even in the absence of formal programs. However, the relatively small proportion of this group indicates that these experiences are neither widespread nor systematically available to all care-giving grandparents.

The undecided responses, 9 (6.7%), point to ambiguity or limited awareness regarding mentorship structures within the church. Even where informal mentoring occurs, it may lack clear identification, intentionality, and visibility as a pastoral strategy for supporting grandparents.

Nevertheless, according to the study, the absence of structured mentorship weakens the transmission of practical faith wisdom across generations. Learning is increased through guided interaction with knowledgeable and supportive mentors. Without intentional mentorship links to church leaders, grandparents eventually will struggle to integrate church teachings into daily care-giving practices or to address faith-related questions arising in their families. The findings underscored the need for deliberate mentorship frameworks that intentionally connect grandparents with church leaders, thereby enhancing theological support, pastoral care, and the effectiveness of grandparents in their role of religious formation of grandchildren.

About the postulate of grandparents referral services, quantitative data show that a large majority of respondents, 103 (76.3%), affirmed the non-existence of such referral services, while only 22 (16.3%) perceived that they exist and 10 (7.4%) remained neutral. The findings indicate a significant absence of structured mechanisms within the SDA Church in Matutu Station for directing care-giving grandparents to appropriate spiritual, psychosocial, or material support systems. This dominant perception suggests that the church lacks formalized pathways through which grandparents facing complex care-giving challenges can be guided to specialized assistance, whether within church structures or through external community and professional services. The findings are supported by Swinton (2020) and Doehring (2022) who maintain that many churches prioritize spiritual nurture while underdeveloping referral networks for congregants experiencing multifaceted social and psychological needs.

Referral services are an essential component of holistic care, enabling churches to respond responsibly to issues that exceed the capacity of clergy or lay leaders alone. This is because effective pastoral ministry requires collaboration with professionals in counseling, social work, education, and health, particularly when supporting vulnerable caregivers such as grandparents raising grandchildren. But the absence of such referral systems, as reflected in the findings, may leave grandparents without guidance when confronted with challenges such as trauma among orphaned grandchildren, chronic illness, poverty, or legal and educational concerns.

The minority view of 22 (16.3%) respondents who supported the existence of referral services may reflect informal or ad hoc practices rather than structured programs. Pastors or elders sometimes refer members informally to hospitals, counselors, or social welfare offices without clearly defined protocols, documentation, or follow-up. Respondents who have personally benefited from such informal referrals may perceive them as functional services, even though they are not consistently available to all grandparents. However, the limited proportion of respondents holding this view suggests that such practices are neither systematic nor widely recognized within the congregation.

The neutral stance of 10 (7.4%) respondents points to uncertainty or lack of awareness regarding referral mechanisms. This could be associated with limited engagement in pastoral care processes, infrequent interaction with church leadership, or ambiguity about the church's role in addressing non-spiritual needs. This uncertainty may also indicate that where referral services exist, they are poorly communicated or insufficiently institutionalized, resulting in uneven awareness among congregants.

The notable point is that the absence of referral services may negatively affect the effectiveness of grandparents' care-giving and faith formation roles. When caregivers lack access to professional and institutional support, stress and burnout increase, which can diminish their capacity to provide consistent moral and spiritual guidance to grandchildren. When the SDA church integrates referral systems into pastoral care it enhances the resilience of grandparents who are caregivers' and also indirectly strengthens inter-generational faith transmission in Matutu Station.

On the variable of home visits carried out by the Family Life Ministry, quantitative data show that an overwhelming majority of respondents, 96 (71.1%) affirmed such pastoral visits are conducted to support care-giving grandparents, while a minority of 25 (18.5%) disagreed and 4 (3.0%) were undecided. These findings highlight a relatively well-established mechanism of support for grandparents within the SDA Church in Matutu Station. The view of the majority was supported by a participant in the interviews who added:

Family life ministry is active in the church. Members do home visits to listen to members, pray with them, encourage them and give them advice. This is helpful to grandparents who bear the responsibility of caring for the grandchildren and sometimes may feel abandoned (KINF 6).

The qualitative data support the questionnaire findings, with participants noting that the Family Life Ministry actively conducts home visits to listen, pray, encourage, and provide guidance. These visits serve multiple functions, including offering spiritual encouragement, identifying unmet needs, reinforcing church teachings in the home, and strengthening relational bonds between clergy, lay leaders, and congregants. They are particularly valuable for grandparents who bear primary care-giving responsibilities and may otherwise experience isolation, as they allow pastoral care to be tailored to their lived realities. Thus, the positive perceptions reported by respondents indicate that home visits enhance grandparents' sense of inclusion, affirmation, and preparedness in fulfilling their moral and spiritual responsibilities, a finding supported by Swinton (2020) and Louw (2016).

The minority of respondents, 25 (18.5%), who disagreed with the effectiveness or existence of home visits may reflect variability in program implementation, limited outreach to certain households, or perceptions of insufficient frequency or impact. Some grandparents may not experience home visits as a regular or reliable support mechanism, contributing to disagreement in survey responses. The view resonates well with Allen and Ross (2020) who posit that even well-established pastoral practices may not uniformly reach all members due to factors such as logistical challenges, limited volunteer capacity, or selective visitation prioritization.

The 4 (3.0%) undecided respondents likely reflect limited awareness or inconsistent personal experience with home visitation. In studies of pastoral and congregational support, neutral responses often arise when participants recognize the existence of programs but are unsure of their applicability or effectiveness in addressing specific needs (Doehring, 2022). This ambiguity may indicate that while home visits occur, their purpose or frequency is not clearly communicated to all members, or that some grandparents do not actively participate in or benefit from these visits.

Thus, home visits play a critical role in reinforcing grandparents' care-giving and faith mentoring functions. Support and guidance from experienced and trusted church members can strengthen the modeling of moral and religious behavior, and also enhances the spiritual competence and confidence of grandparents as educators and mentors of children in the faith community. So, they not only provide immediate encouragement but also sustain grandparents' ability to transmit faith effectively within their families in Matutu Station.

Finally, on provision of religious education materials to grandparents by the SDA Church in Matutu Station, quantitative data show that a majority of respondents, 79 (58%), disagreed that the church provides materials such as Bibles, parenting guides, and devotionals specifically for grandparents, while 49 (36.3%) affirmed their availability and 7 (5.2%) were neutral. The findings reveal a notable gap in material support of grandparents for spiritual formation and care-giving roles. The view of the majority was affirmed by a participant in the interviews who asserted:

Grandparents sell educational and devotional books as a way of evangelism and bring funds to the church. But if they want those materials for themselves, they must buy. This means that those materials are not directly provided to enable them in their grand-parenting role (KINF 48).

The verbatim data reinforced the perception that, although grandparents often distribute educational and devotional materials through church fundraising or evangelism activities, these resources are not routinely

provided for their personal use or to support their care-giving and faith-mentoring roles. This indicates that while the church possesses relevant materials, they are not intentionally allocated to grandparents as spiritual guides. Without such structured resources, grandparents must rely on personal memory, experience, or informal practices, which, although valuable, may not fully address the evolving spiritual and moral challenges faced by grandchildren. Scholars such as King and Boyatzis (2015), Myers (2021), Allen and Ross (2020) emphasize that access to Bibles, devotionals, and structured teaching guides equips older caregivers with theological knowledge, moral frameworks, and practical strategies, enhancing confidence, consistency in instruction, and inter-generational faith transmission.

The lack of systematic provision of religious education materials, therefore, may limit grandparents' effectiveness in their faith-formation roles. Structured engagement with scripture, devotional practices, and pedagogical guides strengthens both the grandparents' spiritual maturity and their capacity to mentor grandchildren, reinforcing children's moral and spiritual development through guided interaction and observation. Material resources thus function as essential tools for knowledge acquisition, moral instruction, and family devotional practice. However, the minority view of 49 (36.3%) respondents who affirmed access to materials likely reflects selective or individual initiatives, such as purchasing books or accessing resources through informal networks, while the 7 (5.2%) neutral respondents reflect uncertainty or variability in awareness of available resources and their intended use for care-giving purposes.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the SDA Church in Matutu Station provides limited, uneven, and largely generalized support for grandparents caring for and spiritually guiding their grandchildren. While family life ministry home visits and Sabbath School programs offer some relational and educational support, critical gaps remain in targeted pastoral counseling, mentorship, peer fellowship, and material assistance, limiting grandparents' effectiveness and well-being. Overall, the findings highlight the need for more intentional, structured, and responsive church-based support mechanisms tailored to the unique challenges of grandparent caregivers.

Recommendation

The study recommends that the SDA Church in Matutu Station establish structured pastoral counseling, mentorship, and fellowship programs specifically for grandparents, providing spiritual guidance, peer support, and practical strategies for care-giving and faith formation. Additionally, the church should strengthen referral networks, mobilize material resources, and provide age-appropriate religious education materials to enhance grandparents' effectiveness as primary faith educators. Expanding Family Life Ministry home visits and integrating grandparents into Sabbath School programming would further sustain their spiritual engagement and inter-generational transmission of Christian values.

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