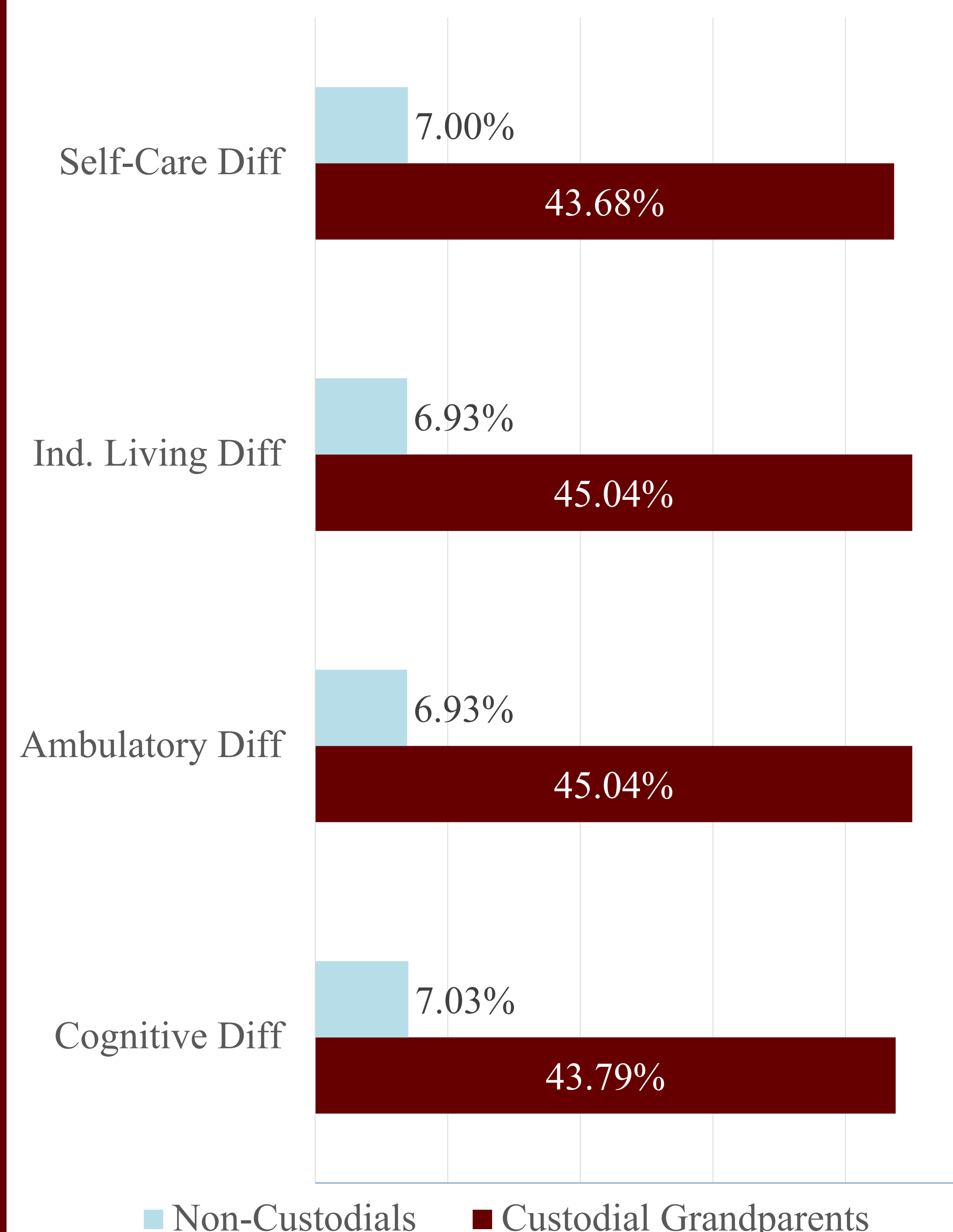


Introduction

There are approximately 7.2 million grandparents living with their grandchildren in the United States. Of these, roughly 2.5 million are skipped generation households in which grandparents are solely responsible for meeting the needs of their grandchildren (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). One study by Arpino and Bordone examined the effects of grandparent care on cognitive functioning, and they reported that the amount grandparents cared for their grandchildren was negatively associated with cognitive performance (Arpino & Bordone, 2014). Another study found that physical health was poorer than mental health in both caregiver and non-caregiver groups, but especially in the caregiver group (Lo & Liu, 2009). One final study worth mentioning involved Mehta, Yaffe, and Covinsky conducting a longitudinal study examining risk factors associated with physical impairment (in the form of functional decline) in a population of adults who were independent in their activities of daily living at baseline. They found that functional decline was predicted by both depressive symptoms and cognitive impairment (2002). This previous research has established that custodial grandparents suffer from added strain and burden compared to their peers, which may negatively impact their health. However, research needs to further examine how much older custodial grandparents are truly disadvantaged when it comes to physical and cognitive abilities in order to be able to provide these caregivers with the assistance they need.

The current study aims to examine the extent to which raising one's grandchildren is associated with four areas commonly subject to decline in older adulthood: cognitive performance, self-care ability, ambulatory difficulty, and independent skills performance. It is hypothesized that custodial grandparents will have a significantly higher frequency of self-reported cognitive difficulty, ambulatory difficulty, self-care difficulty, and independent living difficulty. Increasing prevalence is vital for the development of clinical interventions, as grandparents raising their grandchildren is such a quickly-growing family dynamic within the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

Percentages of Each Group Reporting Difficulty



Participants & Procedure

- Data for this study was taken from the 2016 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016) using participants aged 65+. There were 600,818 participants, M age = 74.53 years, 55.40% female, 84.90% Caucasian.
- Caregiver Status.** *Custodial Grandparents* ($n = 592,956$): those who both live with grandchildren and report being responsible for them. *Non-Custodials* ($n = 4,327$): those who neither live with grandchildren nor are responsible for their care.

Results

A hierarchical logistic regression was performed to ascertain the effect of custodial status on the likelihood of reporting cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, or independent living difficulties, above and beyond the covariates of age, sex, race, and income-to-poverty ratio.

Custodial Grandparents were 9.58 times more likely ($\beta = 2.26, p < .001$) to report cognitive difficulty, and the regression was statistically significant, $\chi^2(12) = 7750.87, p < .001$. Custodial Grandparents were 9.55 times more likely ($\beta = 2.26, p < .001$) to report ambulatory difficulty, and the regression was statistically significant, $\chi^2(12) = 7478.02, p < .001$. They were also 9.58 times more likely ($\beta = 2.26, p < .001$) to report self-care difficulty, and the regression was statistically significant, $\chi^2(12) = 7456.26, p < .001$. Finally, Custodial Grandparents were 10.20 times more likely ($\beta = 2.32, p < .001$) to report independent living difficulty, and this regression was also statistically significant, $\chi^2(12) = 8270.03, p < .001$.

Discussion

Custodial Grandparents were significantly more likely to report cognitive difficulty, ambulatory difficulty, self-care difficulty, and independent living difficulty than Non-Custodials. Limitations of this study include the single-item measures and that the data was self-reported. However, the large, diverse, nation-wide sample is a significant strength of the study.

The fact that Custodial Grandparents are reporting a much greater number of difficulties than Non-Custodials in all assessed areas is alarming. These findings show that more can be done to aid custodial grandparents in their daily lives, such as creating and funding more support groups in local communities.

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