

As the coronavirus pandemic continues, older people and those with health problems are being warned to self-isolate to avoid catching the virus. Children, on the other hand, are believed to be less seriously affected but may play a major role in spreading the virus.

In these circumstances, many grandparents across the UK who are primary or critical caretakers for their grandchildren face a dilemma: caring for themselves is at odds with caring for the children in their care.

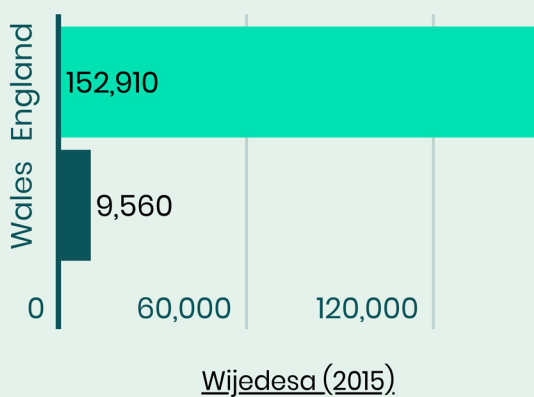
KINSHIP CARERS

WHO ARE KINSHIP CARERS?

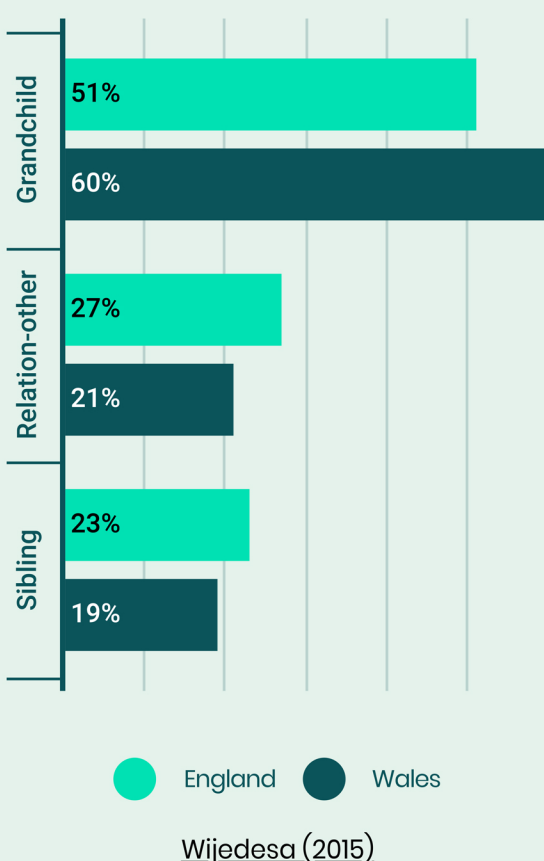
Kinship care relates to children whose parents are unable to look after them on a short or long-term basis. They are instead cared for by other relatives, such as grandparents, uncles, siblings, or by other adults who have a connection to the child, such as neighbours or a close friend of the family. Kinship placements can be either arranged formally through local authorities and courts, or informally between relatives and friends ([Coram, 2019](#)).

Analysis of 2011 census data by researchers at the University of Bristol found that 153,000 children were living with kinship carers in England and 9,560 children were living with kinship carers in Wales.

Number of children living with kinship carers, England and Wales, 2011



Estimates of children's relationship to their kin, England and Wales, 2011



WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES?

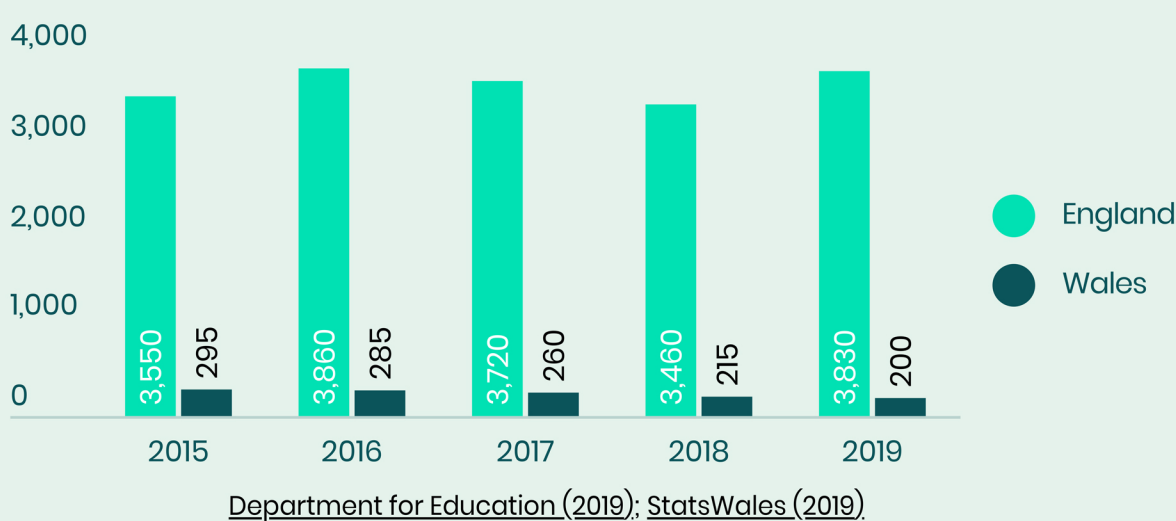
Our most recent population level estimates use data from the 2011 census. From this data we can estimate the proportion of kinship carers that are grandparents. In England, 51% of kinship carers were estimated to be grandparents, whereas in Wales grandparents made up 60% of kinship carers.

When compared with parents, relative carers are more likely to:

- Report **more health problems**
- Have **more caring responsibilities**
- Have **lower incomes**
- Be in **social grades D and E (semi-skilled & unskilled manual occupations, unemployed and lowest grade occupations)**
- Live in **social rented accommodation** ([Wijedasa, 2017](#)).

SPECIAL GUARDIANS

Children leaving local authority care through a special guardianship order, England and Wales, 2015-2019

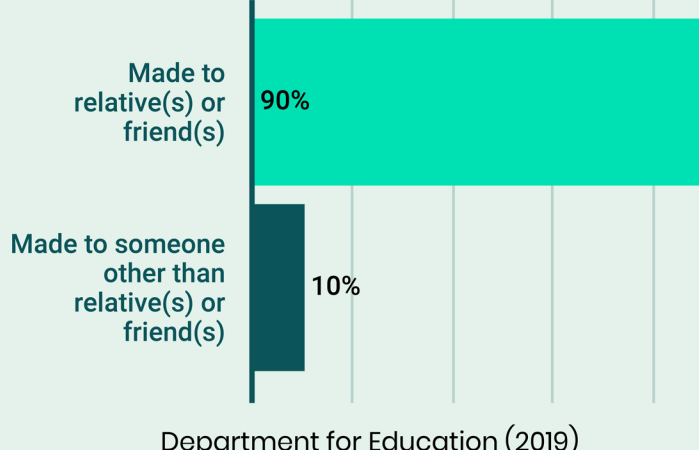


HOW MANY CHILDREN ARE LIVING WITH SPECIAL GUARDIANS?

A special guardianship order (SGO) is formal court order that gives one or more individuals, usually family members, parental responsibility for a child who cannot live with their birth parents ([Simmonds et al., 2019](#)). This could be a grandparent, close relative or a family friend. Special guardianship means that the child lives with carers who have parental responsibility for them until they reach 18.

In 2019, the number of children leaving local authority care through an SGO increased by 11% to 3,830 in England. In Wales the number of children leaving care through an SGO has steadily declined in recent years.

Status of special guardians, England and Wales, 2019



WHO ARE THE SPECIAL GUARDIANS?

In England and Wales we do not systematically collect or publish data on the characteristics of special guardians, aside from whether they are relatives, friends or former foster carers.