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RURAL WOMEN: PERCEPTIONS OF ADULT LIFE

by

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B.A., Kansas State University, 1960

A MASTER'S THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of Family And Child Development

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Manhattan, Kansas

1980

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study (AES 00085) was supported by the Cooperative State Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture, Washington D.C.; The Kansas Agricultural Experiment Station, Manhattan, Kansas and the College of Home Economics, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas.

The writer wishes to express sincere appreciation to Dr. Ruth Hoeflin and Dr. Stephan R. Bollman for their assistance and helpful suggestions. A special expression of gratitude is extended to Dr. C.E. Kennedy for his guidance, support and encouragement throughout this research project.

The understanding, patience and encouragement of the writer's husband and family are most gratefully acknowledged; their support was essential.

Finally, a salute to the rural women who shared their time, experiences and perceptions in such a warm way.

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There has been a paucity of research with specific focus on rural women. Studies done by advocates of rural development, while focusing on rural, have generally included women only incidentally or have described them in terms of their status as "farm wives." This approach has resulted in little visibility for rural women not married to farmers and has also resulted in some stereotyping of all rural women as "farm wives" who raise a garden, do some chores, and act as helpmate on their husband's farm. The recent and growing body of literature which focuses on women has largely used urban women as the sampling base. (For example, see Huber, 1973, Lopata, 1971) This emphasis has also denied visibility to rural women. Thus there has been little effort to understand the relatedness of both sex and setting, to describe experiences and perceptions unique to the women who live in rural America.

There are two issues which may have indirectly contributed to lack of research focus on rural women. The first has to do with the diversity which is characteristic of rural Americans and the lack of agreement on how to define the term rural. The Bureau of the Census defines rural as farms, open country and places less than 2,500 located outside of urban areas. But various other "official" government definitions are also used by the Department of Commerce, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Labor. Non-metropolitan is commonly used and refers to all farms, open countryside and places of less than 50,000 residents outside

Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas. (Tweeten, 1978, Sher, 1977) While rural researchers are aware of this definition problem and usually make clear their usage of the term rural, there is some difficulty in compiling a body of literature which describes a common data base. This has been especially relevant with respect to rural women.

The second issue has to do with statistical reporting procedures which have traditionally aggregated data by county or state. Thus data on specific populations are obscured and irretrievably lost in large group totals. According to the Report on the First National Conference on Rural America, held in 1975, "the systematic denial of statistical identity of rural populations and/or rural minority groups is, in a modern, data based society, synonymous with the denial of said people's existence." (p. 52) This problem is readily apparent where women are concerned. No breakdowns by rural/urban residence were made in the statistical tables that appeared in the Statistical Portrait of Women in the United States published by the Bureau of the Census in 1976. Public statistics that include specific categories for rural women are virtually non-existant. (Clarenbach, 1977, Bird, 1979)

Increasing emphasis is being given to the lack of available data on rural women. In 1974 the President appointed a National Advisory Council on Women's Educational Programs. From the beginning, that Council has strongly emphasized as a major concern an inadequate understanding of the attitudes and experiences of

rural women. Pointing out that nearly one-third of our country's population are rural females, the Council reported that in hearings held around the country, they were consistently told "rural women want to speak for themselves and have their voices solicited and listened to..." (Clarenbach, 1977, p.12) Joyce and Leadley (1977) suggested that it is difficult to isolate those research problems that specifically affect rural-based women. Focus must not be restricted, as in the past, to certain spheres such as home, children, and help-mate on the farm. In addition, many issues and problems are the same for women regardless of their geographic location, yet the solutions are likely to be different in rural and urban settings. The National Women's Conference held in 1979, adopted a resolution on rural women as a part of their National Plan of Action. This statement called attention to the inequality of opportunities available to rural women and girls, called for economic and legal recognition of farm women and recognized the need for improved data gathering procedures. (Bird, 1979)

Given the limitations of previous research on rural women, the purpose of this study was to obtain and analyze perceptions of life experiences of all the women in one rural area. That is, rather than singling out a particular topic such as education or employment, a descriptive approach was taken which would allow women to express activites, interests, satisfactions and frustrations across a broad range of adult experiences. Specifically the objectives were:

_____To provide visibility and an opportunity for rural women to express themselves

_____To identify areas that are going well and those that are of concern to rural women

_____To identify satisfactions and frustrations of adult life experiences.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Given the lack of a systematic body of research on rural women, this review has focused on studies and statistics which provide background in four of the general areas addressed in this research project. In addition, isolated studies that have focused on more specific topics have been included in the body of this paper where applicable. As noted, research on rural women has generally equated 'farm wives' with 'rural women.'

Rural Women as Wives of Farmers

The role of the rural woman as wife and helpmate on the farm has been documented. As a part of a larger study that compared rural and urban families, Blood (1958) questioned farm wives and city wives on how labor was divided in their families. He found that farm wives performed a larger share of household tasks than city wives and that in addition a larger percentage of farm wives participated directly in their husband's work. Farm wives also engaged in more home production of consumer goods--such things as baked goods, canned and frozen foods. Importance was attached to the separation of place of work and place of residence for city families and the position was taken that both farm and city wives were making an appropriate adaptation to the circumstances under which they live.

The involvement of the farm wife in the farming operations has been found to be related to her participation in farm and

home decision-making. A study of five hundred Wisconsin farm husbands and wives investigated how decisions were made in relation to the aspirations or goals and work roles of each spouse. The actual task involvement or work role had more effect on decision making than did aspirations. Thus, a wife who participated in the labor of the farm was likely also to be involved in farm decision-making. Division of labor between farm and family tasks and division of labor between tasks within the family area seemed to follow the interest and availability of each spouse. Traditional role expectations that the woman ought to be responsible for all household tasks (and the husband for all farm tasks) did not seem to hold. Rather, the task and decision-making structure was found to be multidimensional. While there was some specialization in decision-making and task performance, there was also joint involvement in some areas. (Wilkening & Bharadwaj, 1967, 1968)

Sawer's (1973) study also documented the importance of the wifes involvement in the farming operation in relation to general management and adoption decisions. Again, the factor of the 'wife's business partner role' was found to be the most important predictor of her involvement in decisions of management.

Rural Women and Employment

Rural women have been entering the labor force in increasing numbers as have their urban counterparts. (Sweet, 1972, Brown, 1977) In 1974 more than half (53%) of all women 18 to 64 years of age in the

U.S. were employed. (U.S. Department of Labor, 1975) Rates of participation in the labor force are lower however for rural women than for urban women. In 1970 27.6% of farm wives were employed, compared to 40.8% of all wives. (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1976) Since median family income is lower in rural areas it is generally accepted that lower participation rates for rural women involve factors other than economic need. (Sweet, 1972, Tweeten, 1978)

Several factors have been suggested to account for lower participation rates of rural women. Rural areas have a narrow economic base in comparison to urban areas; fewer employment opportunities are available and wage levels are often low. (Tweeten, 1978) Since jobs may not be available in the local rural area, distance to a metropolitan center and city size are also important factors in employment patterns of rural women. Tarver, Kiser, Lee and Moran (1970) found that the more rural the area in terms of distance from large cities, the lower the percentage of employed women.

Lower educational levels and higher fertility rates for rural women nationwide have also been suggested as factors in lower participation rates. However, in a comparative study of employment of rural farm women using 1960 Census data, Sweet (1972) found that farm wives had lower employment rates even when educational levels were controlled--with one exception. College educated farm wives had employment rates considerably

higher than urban college educated women. He speculated on conditions of the rural setting that might be explanatory. For example, relatively fewer rural women are college educated and thus relatively fewer women are competing for employment opportunities, such as teaching, which require college educations. For women with lower educational levels, the rural area offers comparatively fewer employment opportunities in service or operative occupations. When a family status variable which included number of children and age of youngest child was compared, it was found that the number of children had no systematic effect on employment of rural farm wives. Increasing participation in the labor force with increasing age of youngest child was found among rural farm as well as urban women.

Clarenbach (1977) and Tweeten (1978) have strongly emphasized that lack of employment services in rural areas may be an additional factor in understanding lower participation rates. Services such as job training, job placement and counseling for career development are nonexistent in most rural areas. Tweeten suggests that federal underfunding in nonmetropolitan areas is largely a result of use of unemployment rather than underemployment rates and that underutilization of human resources in rural areas is underestimated.

Rural Women and Education

Rural residents nationwide are characterized as having less

formal education than urban residents (Clarenbach, 1977, Sher, 1977) In 1970 the average level of education for rural residents was 9.9 years compared to 12.2 years for metropolitan residents. (Dillman & Tremblay, 1975) Thirty-one percent of farm residents had completed high school, seven percent had one to three years of college and four percent had four or more years of college according to 1970 statistics. (Clarenbach, 1977)

Barriers to continued learning exist more often for rural women than for urban women. The most significant of these seem to be access (distance), lack of adequate finances and lack of educational advising and counseling. (McCannon, 1979, Westervelt, 1975) Participation in adult education is lower for rural women than for urban or suburban women (Ekstrom, 1972) However, women in rural areas participate more frequently than do men, while the opposite pattern is found in urban areas. Rural women rank personal development and self satisfaction rather than vocational advancement as the reasons for participation in continuing education. (McCannon, 1979, Scott, 1977)

Educational interests of rural women in central Kansas were surveyed and findings showed non-formal opportunities as holding more interest than further formal education. Interest was reported in educational opportunities in the areas of family concerns, arts and crafts and farm management. (Scott, 1977) Educational needs of rural women and girls were addressed by The National Advisory Council on Women's Educational Programs in a

series of four consultations held with rural women around the country. Educational needs were broadly defined in these hearings and many recommendations of the Council addressed needs of rural women in broad terms. One of the more specific recommendations addressed the need for an educational delivery system that would meet needs of rural women. Traditional delivery systems including late entry and continuing education programs were seen as either impractical or too costly in relation to the inherant isolation of most rural women. Therefore a formal recommendation was made that called for federal funding of innovative uses of broadcast (audio and video) as a delivery system of educational services to rural women.

Rural Women as Adults

In the literature cited above rural women have been described in relation to their place of residence; emphasis has been on rural. In this section of the review, the emphasis changes to women as adults since this study will focus on adult life of rural women.

Studies of adulthood have proceeded from the perspective that humans continue to experience growth and change across the life span. Focus has been on research concerned with age changes and age differences in activity and behavior across the years of adulthood. (Neugarten, 1977, Schaie, 1968) Two constructs from the literature on adult development have particular relevance for this study.

Periods of life, or life stages have been used as a convenient way of dividing the life span into smaller, more manageable bits. But in addition, life stages provide a way of delineating the

characteristic internal and external traits typical of periods of adult life. Young adulthood, middle adulthood, maturity and old age are stages of life commonly described in adult development literature and research has shown them to be commonly perceived periods of adult life. (Neugarten, 1968a)

As adults move through the periods of adult life, they are faced with developmental tasks which combine the age level needs of the individual with the demands of society for specific stages of development. Developmental tasks imply shared events common to all adults yet handled in individual ways with individual styles. For instance, young adulthood brings tasks of leaving home, choosing and entering a career or occupation, selecting a mate and marrying, and parenting. Middle adulthood tasks involve progressing in career and developing socioeconomic consolidation, adjusting to the changing nature of parenting and perhaps relating in a new way to aging parents or adjusting to their death. Maturity involves re-evaluating and enhancing the marital relationship, developing supportive relationships with grown children, adjusting to increased leisure time, planning and preparing for retirement and perhaps adjusting to health problems. Tasks of old age include adjusting to retirement, managing leisure time, adjusting to health problems, dealing with the loss of a mate and reconciling death. (McCoy, Ryan, Lichtenberg, 1978, Stevenson, 1977)

Adult development literature to date has most often described sex difference of adults in the periods of middle age and maturity

Women tend to define middle age in terms of events within the family cycle such as launching of children into the adult world. While health changes are more of an age marker for middle aged men, in women they take the form of "rehersal for widowhood" or concern for health changes of husbands. (Neugarten, 1968b) The importance of the "empty nest" or the stage of life when the youngest child is about to leave home was studied by Lowenthal, Thurnher & Chiriboga (1975) in interviews with middle and lower middle class family centered women. They found that women in this stage were the most poorly adapted and most unhappy of any of the four age periods they studied. In follow-up studies five years later, these same women were happier and had initiated expansive changes in their lives such as new training, new jobs, new houses, or trips abroad. (Lowenthal, 1975) Neugarten (1968b) found that women often feel that middle age brings a sense of increased freedom--that there is increased time and energy available then for the self and for use of talent in new directions. These studies would seem to indicate then that the empty nest period may be a critical period for family centered women but that it may lead to a period of further new growth.

METHODS

Selection of the Area Sample

A rural township in a northeast Kansas county was selected as the study site using the 1978 County Enumeration and List of Residents. Criteria for Township selection were:

1. Absence of cities
2. Place of residence for a minimum of twenty women between the ages of 30 and 65.
3. Considerations related to available funds and university sphere of influence.

Since more than one township met criteria 1 and 2, the township was selected which involved the least travel time but was still remote from the university. The township selected using these criteria was the place of residence for twenty-four rural adult women.

Initial contact was made with a letter (Appendix, p. 72) explaining the project and inviting participation. The letter was followed by a telephone call; when participation was granted, a convenient time for an interview was arranged.

Of the sample of twenty-four women, six women refused participation and five had moved from the township during the last year. Since the number of women who had moved was higher than expected, the decision was made to include women ages 21 to 29 in the sample. Again using the 1978 County Enumeration

and List of Residents for the township selected, seven younger women were added to the sample. Of these women, only one had moved from the township and none of the six remaining refused participation.

This area sample then included all of the adult women, defined as age 21-65, who resided in a Kansas township defined rural by the absence of cities. Participation was granted by nineteen women who agreed to personal interviews conducted mainly in their homes during the months of February, March, and April.

At the time of the interview, oral assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were given and participants were asked for permission for the interview to be tape recorded to expedite the completion of open-ended responses. Eighteen of the nineteen women granted taping permission. A written document of informed consent (Appendix, p.73) which met the requirements of the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects was presented for signature.

The Instrument

Data were collected using an interview schedule with inverted funnel sequence and predominantly open-ended questions. The schedule (Appendix, p.74) was formulated on the basis of a literature review and in consultation with research faculty. A pretest of the instrument was made with rural women in another township. Questions were designed to focus on the following:

1. Demographic information including age, marital and family status, employment, educational level, and length of rural residence.
2. Perceptions of women on:
    a. Roles of responsibility and satisfaction
    b. Educational interests and opportunities
    c. Leisure time use and organizational involvement
    d. Family
    e. Differences between rural and urban women
    f. Adult life satisfactions and frustrations
    g. Things to make life better

Care was given in question design to assure that interview language was non-threatening and individually appropriate. Parenthesized word choices (Q. 12, 15, 17, 18, 21, 30, 31) allowed the interviewer to fit interview language to the specific situation. This limited flexibility was not felt to affect instrument reliability or validity since flexibility was used in a consistent manner and only as specified by a single interviewer.

Analysis

Data were classified and tallied according to response frequency. Similarities and differences in perceptions were drawn from data sorts by lifestyle of respondent (as defined by respondent) and by age of respondent. While other types of data sort were possible these two were chosen as appropriate to the

content and helpful in describing data.

Limitations of the Study

Since this was a descriptive study of nineteen women in one rural area, there are limits to the generability of the data. In addition, the subjective approach must allow that differences may exist between what is perceived to be true and objective reality.

Follow-Up of Subjects

At the conclusion of the study a letter of thanks and a brief summary of data (Appendix, p. 80,81) were sent to each participant who had requested a copy of results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Rural Women

Since there has been some tendency to view rural women stereotypically, description of this sample will first focus on characteristics which express the diversity found. Not all rural women were married to farmers...some were married to men with non-farm occupations. Not all rural women were raising families and "helping out" on the farm...some were not mothers and others were full or part-time employees. Not all rural women had lived in this area or "on this place" all of their married lives...some were newcomers to the area. Newcomers were not only younger women...some women had moved to this rural area in mid-life.

Demographic characteristics of this sample are found in Table 1 (Appendix p.83) and support the following general description of these nineteen women. All of these rural women were married[1] and about half of them had lived in this rural area ten years or longer. Age characteristics of the sample were important in that there were few women age 30 to 49. About half of the sample were 50 and older and about one-third were women in their 20's. The majority of these women were mothers but only about one-third of them had

[1]It was noted that one single woman and several widows also resided in this township. Although these women refused participation, it is not suggested that 'married' will be descriptive of all rural women.

children 18 or younger and living at home. Most of these women were married to full-time farmers who owned their acreages.

The Rural Setting

Since all the women in this study responded from the context of a common locale, a brief description of that rural setting should provide background for specific data which follow. The selected township, by definition a thirty-six square mile area, was located in northeastern Kansas and was an open country rural area. The nearest small town was located in the township directly north and provided businesses and services such as fire protection, medical care and elementary education for these rural families. Secondary education was providied at a consolidated school located about half-way between this town and a neighboring small town to the northwest. A larger town was located approximately twelve miles to the north-east and a moderately sized city was located forty-five miles southwest.

There was one six-mile stretch of paved road on the western edge of the township which served to connect this area to its neighbors to the north and south. Two additional one-mile paved sections served as links to the township directly west and to the nearest small town from the northeast. Rolling hills were wooded near the river on the east, but gave way to cultivated fields and pastures. Crop-livestock operations dotted the countryside and here and there an abandoned house attested to a larger population in the past.

Lifestyles

Four distinctive lifestyles differentiated these nineteen women. One group of women was not married to farmers; they were non-farm rural women whose daily activities and interests differed in some ways from the others. Three groups of women were married to farmers but were differentiated by the extent to which they identified themselves with the farming operation and by the amount and kind of labor they performed on the farm.

Differences in lifestyles were reflected in womens' responses to a composite of four questions--occupation of husband, employment of wife, roles of responsibility and satisfaction, and involvement (labor) in the farming operation. Responses to these questions and labels given each lifestyle are shown in Table 2 (Appendix p. 84) Thus, of these nineteen women, six were farm-career wives, six were farm wives, three were employed farm wives and four were non-farm wives. The following descriptions of each lifestyle group will help clarify similarities and differences in the way women perceived themselves and their daily activities.

Farm-career Wives (FCW)

Of the fifteen women married to farmers, six were contributing to the labor and management of the farm on a routine daily basis. All of these women perceived their role of responsbility to be farm partner and also perceived farm partner to be their role of satisfaction. (Reasons for labeling them farm-career rather than farm partner are elaborated in the discussion.) These women then were the most involved

with the farming operation and identified themselves primarily in terms of this involvement.

> I ride that tractor..do the field work.. stay right out there with him. I'm also a handyman. I'm an outdoor person and enjoy being partner..housework will wait.

> We both do everything. My responsibility now is checking the calving...in the summer it is the fat hogs. I drive the tractor, haul grain, help with all the stock and do all the books and records and part of the banking.

> We divide the responsibilities. I'm in charge of the farrowing operation..breeding, all sow records, health problems, farrowing of pigs and their care until weaned. I do the farm records with his help. I do all the livestock work when he's in the field and am his main assistant and right hand help all the time.

Farm-career wives ranged in age from 21 to 60; half of them were over 45. Most of them were mothers and although older women had grown children, one younger woman was involved with mothering a small child and her farm career. No farm-career wives were employed off the farm.[2]

Farm Wives (FW)

These six women were involved with the farming operation on an occasional rather than routine basis. All of them perceived their responsibility to be homemaker, wife or mother. Half of them

[2]One woman was paid for a one hour, once a week lecture. This job was the result of this respondent's participation in a weight loss organization, and was not considered employment as the word is used elsewhere in this study.

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also perceived these roles as the source of most satisfaction. The other half perceived their farm involvement as most satisfying. None of these women used the words farm partner to describe themselves; their identity was with home and farm. Although their labor contribution was occasional it did often involve out-of-doors work and some degree of participation in farm decision-making. Farm wives were available when needed for "part-time" farm labor and reported involvement in the following tasks.

Tractor work
Haying
Grain hauling
Livestock feeding, chasing
Fixing fence
Farm records--general accounts, insurance, taxes, acreage allotment records
Banking and household accounts
Keeping up with market prices
Radio communications
Errands for repair parts
Catered field meals
Raising poultry
Gardening

Degree of involvement on an individual basis was varied. One farm wife reported her involvement as limited to answering the telephone and keeping farm records; another listed six separate tasks. Four of the six farm wives were in their 50's; the other two were 35 and 62.

Employed Farm Wives (EFW)

Three wives of farmers were part-time employes off the farm. Lifestyles of these women were similar to farm wives in the respect that they also perceived role of responsibility to be homemaker,

wife and mother. Differences were apparent however in role of satisfaction and in degree of farm involvement. Two employed farm wives perceived a combination of wife-mother and employee as roles of most satisfaction; the third perceived no satisfaction from her employee role. Employed farm wives were involved to a less degree than farm wives in daily farm labor. Two employed farm wives were involved in keeping farm records and raising a garden and poultry and the third woman reported no involvement in the farming operation. All employed farm wives were mothers; the older women, 53 and 58, had grown children and the third woman was 29 and the mother of three youngsters under ten.

Non-farm Wives (NFW)

Four women in this study were rural residents married to men employed in area businesses and schools. Three non-farm wives perceived their role of responsibility and their role of satisfaction to be homemaker, wife and mother. The fourth woman was the mother of a young child but was also a full-time student. She perceived motherhood as her role of responsibility but her student role provided most satisfaction. One non-farm wife was a full-time employee.

Differences in lifestyles of non-farm women and farm women were a function of farm residence and involvement in the farming operation. Daily activities of non-farm wives were not related to their husband's business lives to the extent that farm-career wives and farm wives were. However, another less obvious difference

had to do with choice of rural residence. For non-farm women and their families, rural residence was a result of choice not directly linked to husbands's occupation. All non-farm wives expressed satisfaction with this choice and one woman who had moved to this home and small acreage from town expressed:

> We've chosen this way of life...we really wanted to live in the country and spent time looking for a place we'd like. The children enjoy animals and hunting. In some ways it's a return to the basics... we burn wood, grow our own vegetables, emphasize natural foods like whole wheat flour and raw milk. I love to bake and enjoy canning and freezing our garden produce.

Three non-farm wives, ages 22, 24, and 35, were relative newcomers to rural residence, having lived on this place less than four years. One non-farm wife, age 52, had lived on this place since she was a bride twenty-nine years ago. Her husband owned a sizeable acreage and had farmed this land the first few years of their married life but had been employed in an area business for twenty-five years, renting the land to area farmers. For this family change in husband's occupation had not meant leaving rural residence.

Discussion of Lifestyles

The semantic questions surrounding the labels given to lifestyles of rural women were a problem for this writer as they have been for other rural researchers and popular writers as well. What do we call rural women who are very involved in running and managing a farm and who derive some sense of identity

from that involvement. In much of the literature they have been referred to as farm wives, as indeed they are in a broad general sense. In the popular press these women have been referred to as women farmers or female farmers. (Freeman, 1976, Newsweek, Nov. 8, 1976) Perhaps these terms are most descriptive but there are different kinds of implications inherent in them as evidenced by the following quote.

> When people ask me, "What do you do?" I say, "I'm a farmer." They immediately assume that I have no husband, and they say, "It's too bad that you're alone." Then I tell them that my husband is a farmer also. It's a matter of images. I consider myself a farmer, but for so long the woman on a family farm has always been called a farmers' wife, or a farm woman. (Personal statement of Marianne Bruesehoff, p. 19 Bird, 1979)

In this study the term farm-career wives was selected to describe these women since career suggests some sense of committment and occupational identity. But it is not suggested that this is necessarily the best or only choice. The point is that these women suffer from some lack of visibility partly as a result of semantics.

The words farm wives, used to describe one particular group of rural women in this study, were also part of the semantic problem and chosen with some misgivings. Yet these women did identify themselves in relation to farm and family. The words farm wife were not used in the interview language since it was felt they might be emotion-ladden for rural women. Some women in this study did

volunteer that "farm wife is too narrowly defined" and "some people don't think a farm wife does anything at all." Other women readily identified themselves as farm wives. It is possible that many of the women who object to being labeled a farm wife are in fact farm-career wives or employed farm wives.

The four lifestyles highlighted differences between farm women rather than differences between non-farm women. Further distinctions could have been drawn among non-farm wives, for instance between career women, employed women and women whose identity was with home and family. These kind of distinctions were not highlighted because of the relatively small number (4) of non-farm women in this sample which would have necessitated cases of N=1. Differences in lifestyles between farm and non-farm women centered around involvement in husbands' business lives and choice of rural residence. In addition, some attitudes were volunteered which indicated that there may have been differences in feelings of acceptance. One farm woman, for instance, volunteered a statement of differences between farm and non-farm families; children (non-farm) without chores was one example she gave. In her view rural meant farm and non-farm was different and to some degree suspect. A non-farm wife spoke of the differing attitudes between some farm women and herself concerning the role of mother. She expressed some feeling of non-acceptance in the rural community because she employed a regular sitter for her child while she was a full-time student.

The question of acceptance or integration of non-farm families into open country rural communities may be of some importance since there has been some evidence that rural America is becoming increasingly diverse. Statistics on distribution of U.S. population for the first half of the 1970's showed a flow reversal for the first time in our nation's history. Notable growth occurred in nonmetropolitan counties and in open country areas as well as along highway corridors. Rural America is experiencing some internal redistribution even in counties with no total population growth. (Beale, 1975, Tweeten, 1978) One study focused on characteristics of people who move to non-metropolitan areas compared to those who move to metropolitan areas. Non-metropolitan movers had higher average incomes and occupations with higher socio-economic status; they were younger, had higher educational levels and their average household size was smaller. The conclusion was that rural migrants are characterized by willingness and apparently a better ability to give up urban-based conveniences to live in non-metropolitan areas. (DeJong & Sell, 1977) Whether population redistribution is really a trend and whether characteristics of most non-farm families differ substantially from those of farm families are still open questions. However, it seems likely that quality of life for all rural families may depend on a better understanding of these issues.

Employment

Four women in this sample were employed in area businesses and health care systems. (See Table 3, Appendix p. 85) Three were part-time employees who worked from 24 to 32 hours per week; one was employed fulltime. Length of present employment ranged from eight months to twelve years. All employed women reported satisfaction with their jobs. Reasons given for job satisfaction were varied, however personal satisfaction and proximity were most frequently mentioned.

Although only four were presently employed, eighteen women had had some employment history since high school graduation. Occupations had ranged from service worker in private households to the teaching profession. The most frequently reported past occupations were in service, sales and clerical categories.

All of the women presently employed were anticipating continued employment in the future. In addition three women not presently working were considering future employment. While present employment was largely part-time, most of these women were considering full-time employment in the future. Anticipated benefits of future employment were largely expected to be financial although personal satisfaction and "something to do" were also mentioned.

Lifestyles of rural women were related to interest in future employment. Farm-career wives were routinely contributing to farm labor and not employed off the farm nor were they considering

employment in the future. Two farm-career wives acknowledged that attitudes toward employment were linked to continued farm residence. For each of these women a move from the farm was a future possibility and their decision on future employment would be based on a differing set of circumstances, that is urban residence.

Farm wives were currently providing part-time labor on the farm and the majority of them were not interested in future employment. Some farm wives qualified lack of interest with "not at my age"; average age of this group of women was 52. One of the younger (age 35) farm wives was considering full-time employment for the future both for economic reasons and to "keep busy."

Employed farm wives were all anticipating continued employment in the future. The following vignettes (names are fictitious) give some idea of the present employment of these women and their plans for the future.

> Joan had been a nurse's aid in a nursing home located in the nearest small town for over six years. During this time she had taken a 72 hour state-approved and tested course and was a "charge nurse". Joan was 53 and had grown, married children. She worked 32 hours a week but she anticipated working on a full-time basis the following summer and fall. She expressed satisfaction with this job since she "liked to have something to do" and she planned to continue working.
>
> Betty had been an LPN at a hospital in a town 20 miles distant for three years. She had three children under ten and took her LPN training when the children were small. Betty worked the 3:00-11:00 p.m. shift three days a week and expressed satisfaction with her job: the work itself and the people she worked with. She planned to continue this employment

> and perhaps consider becoming an R.N. and working full-time in the future when the children were older.
>
> Ellen was a reporter for a local newspaper located in the nearest small town. The newspaper office occupied the front portion of a building which also contained a variety store, so that Ellen also clerked as needed. She worked 20 hours a week at the present and had held this job nearly twelve years. She began by writing rural news of the area from her home and worked about 12 hours a week but her responsibilities and hours had increased over the years. Ellen reported several satisfactions with this employment; she worked with congenial people, liked meeting the public, felt that reporting business was "in my blood" and enjoyed the flexibility of her working hours. Ellen was 58 and planned to continue with this job as long as it was available to her and "health permitting." Last spring when she suffered a broken ankle she didn't miss a day of work and said she'd have "climbed the walls" if she'd been at home.

Non-farm wives as a group were the women interested in future employment. One non-farm wife was currently employed full-time as a grocery clerk and anticipated continued full-time employment. Two more non-farm wives were considering full-time employment for the future.

> Mary was 52 and her only child had just graduated from college. The health of Mary's husband was of some concern and she was considering the possibility of future employment both "for something to do" and in case of financial need. She was beginning to assess her skill levels and to consider alternative jobs for which she might qualify, although she had as yet taken no definite job-hunting action.

> Sally was at present a student in a nine-month course at a school of cosmetology located in a larger city 45 miles distant. She had a college degree and a secondary level teaching certificate and had done substitute teaching in the past which she described as a "road to nowhere." She had chosen to prepare for a "new career" since teaching opportunities in this rural area were limited and often required elementary as well as secondary certification. She expected benefits of future employment to be financial and personal satisfaction including the ability to have increased choices. Sally was actively preparing to work on a full-time basis.

Discussion of Employment

The experiences and perceptions of these rural women did seem to parallel the literature on rural employment in several ways. Labor force participation rates for this sample[3] were twenty-one percent. Although no wage level data were collected, many women volunteered that area jobs usually paid just minimum wage. None of the employed women in this study gave financial gain as a satisfaction of present employment. Perhaps they felt that was implied, but perhaps that was related to low earning power. Distance to work, or having a job in the nearest small town was given as one of the satisfactions of employment. Most women considering entering the labor market gave vague responses to probes about their plans to find jobs. One college graduate had sought advice from a school counselor in preparing to enter the

[3]Employed rural women were under-represented in this sample. Four women living in this rural township refused participation because of full-time jobs and lack of time for an interview. Labor force participation for women in this township was 32%.

labor market. More generally though, it was said that most knowledge of job opportunities came by word of mouth.

Any discussion about employment of and for rural women needs to deal with the status of farm-career wives. In this sample, these women seemed to eliminate themselves from potential involvement in the labor market. In essence they considered themselves already self-employed on a full-time basis. Current statistical gathering procedures used by the federal government make it impossible for farm-career wives to have visibility as self-employed farmers. According to Tweeten (1978) current use of the concept of farm operator requires that if there are partners, one person is counted as operator and the other is classified as an unpaid family member. Although there is widespread general recognition that a substantial portion of all farm labor is done by unpaid female family members, the opportunity for wives to identify themselves as farmers in their own right is not available.

One of the implications of the poor visibility of farm-career wives is in terms of employment rates of rural women. If, for example, farm-career wives in this sample were included as self-employed, the labor force participation rate would increase from twenty-one percent to fifty-three percent. To some extent, these same kinds of implications are relevant for farm wives. In this sample half of the farm wives identified themselves as receiving major satisfaction from their farm involvement. Perhaps these

women should be counted as part-time self-employed farm operators.

It is not suggested that concern for employment opportunities for rural women who want and need to work is misplaced. But any realistic view of the rural employment picture needs to take into account the presence of a number of women who identify themselves as full-time farm partners or who contribute labor on a part-time basis. More information is needed on the factors involved in the decisioning process of farm women concerning off-farm employment versus farm involvement.

Leisure Time Use and Organizational Involvement

How do rural women spend their free time--what do they do for fun when they have time for themselves? A wide variety of specific leisure time activities were given and are listed in Table 4 (Appendix p. 86) The most frequently mentioned activities were indoor hobbies, particularly reading and various kinds of hand work (sewing, knitting, crocheting, quilting). There were interesting differences in leisure time use by lifestyles.

Farm-career wives expressed a wide variety of leisure activities. Their range included indoor, outdoor, social, family and other activities. In comparison, activities of farm wives were predominantly reading and hand work and they did not list any leisure pursuits that could have been classified as social or involving other people. Employed farm wives also expressed a variety of activities and more frequently than any other lifestyle, listed

family type leisure activities such as vacations, visiting relatives or taking a ride together. Non-farm wives were the "out of-doors women" in comparison to the others. They considered gardening a leisure activity and also enjoyed swimming, biking and horseback riding.

Organizational involvement was addressed in terms of clubs or meetings attended on a fairly regular basis. These rural women attended an average of one organizational meeting. The range was from one woman who attended four meetings regularly to six women who attended no meetings regularly. (See Table 5, Appendix p. 87) Three non-attenders were farm-career wives and two were employed farm and non-farm wives. Farm wives were more frequently involved in organizations than women of other lifestyles.

Church organizations, neighborhood clubs and special interest clubs were the most frequently named organizations attended. (The term church organization indicated circle meetings for example rather than church attendance. Information on church attendance was not solicited). Extension clubs and patriotic organizations were least frequently attended. Church organization attenders were largely farm wives. Neighborhood club attenders were found among all lifestyles except farm wives.

Discussion of Leisure Time Use and Organizational Involvement

Rural women expressed varying attitudes on the availability of leisure time. Comments ranged from "what's that" and "I wish I had more" to the opposite position of "I need less free time

so I can enjoy it more." Some women mentioned "boredom in winter" when roads were bad and outdoor activity was curtailed.

Three considerations are relevant with regard to the high frequency of indoor leisure use. Since interviews were conducted during February and March, responses may reflect the season of the year. Also, leisure time may be seasonal for farm women, that is less daily farm labor is required during winter months. Third, farm women may perceive leisure as time spent indoors since they work outdoors. As one farm career woman said "my idea of leisure is time for a hot bath and doing my nails."

Average organizational involvement (1.0) of these women seemed low although few studies were found on which to base a comparison. Eitzen (1970) did include Kansas small town (population less than 350) rural women in a study on voluntary memberships. Conclusions were that residents of small rural towns had fewer (2.5) average memberships than residents of more urban towns and cities. If organizational involvement of women in this study was characterized as low, common organizational involvement was even lower. Tally of data revealed just two organizations which could positively be said to draw common involvement. Three of these nineteen women belonged to the same church organization and three women were members of the same neighborhood club. It is possible that there were other organizations in common--one woman's pitch club may have been anothers card club. Generally though, these women were

not spending time together in organizational meetings.

Organizational involvement for women in this study may have been higher in the past. Several women commented that they were less active now. Reasons given included health problems, employment, boredom with club activities and the merging of a local rural church with a larger congregation. Some women also talked about the decline of neighborhood clubs which were small, informal gatherings. It was said that younger women were not joining and that older women were dropping out.

When organizational involvement and leisure activity were considered together as ways women spent free time, a more balanced view of the lifestyle of farm wives emerged. For this group of women lack of social leisure activity was offset by high organizational involvement.

Given all these considerations, this group of rural women was characterized by essentially solitary use of leisure time and by low organizational involvement.

Rural Families

In the set of questions that focused on family, the nuclear family was defined during the interview as "you and your husband" or "you, your husband, and children" if there were children living at home. In this context women were asked about satisfactions and concerns of their families and about advantages and disadvantages

of rural residence in terms of the family. Formal and informal support systems available to rural families were likewise addressed in terms of the nuclear family. Extended family was also defined during the interview and women were asked to describe relationships within the larger family context.

The majority of the women in this sample were mothers and had two children on the average. There were two large families of six and eight children but five rural women had one child. About one-third of these mothers had children living at home (age 18 and younger). Another third of the farm women had grown sons who lived nearby and who were involved in the daily operation of the family farm. Other family relationships were noted among women in this sample. Two farm-career women were mother and daughter, two farm-career women were sisters-in-law, and one employed farm wife was the mother-in-law of one farm-career wife.

Satisfactions and Concerns

When women described ways in which things were going well for their families, they most frequently responded that satisfactions were: (1) close family relationships and (2) good health, rural residence or farm life, and general contentment. (See Table 6, Appendix p. 88)

Farm women, especially farm-career wives, described the satisfaction of close husband-wife relationships in terms of working together on the farm. Having the same goals and interests

and the enjoyment of doing things together were important to these women. Close parent-child relationships were described in much the same way by farm women. Working together and the enjoyment of family farm involvement was mentioned by women with children living at home and also by women whose grown children were involved in the farm operation.

Non-farm wives described close family relationships in slightly different terms, since neither husband and wife nor parents and children worked together in the sense that farm families did. Husband-wife relationships were described as close in terms of enjoying the same things and spending time together. "Lack of problems" with children was mentioned by non-farm women as a satisfaction of family life.

Women were also asked to describe what things were of most concern to their families. The major concerns of these rural families could be summed up in one word...economics. Inflation was of concern to both farm and non-farm families and was expressed as "tight budgets", "having enough money" and "a wife needing to work." Farm women expressed economic concerns in terms of prices received for crops and livestock compared to the cost of machinery parts and repairs. The insecurity which resulted from instability of farm prices was also mentioned. Thirteen of the fifteen farm wives expressed economics as the major concern of their family. Four women did not express economic concerns; two were non-farm women, one was a farm-career woman and one was a farm wife. For

these women major family concerns were health problems, impending retirement decisions, problems with a son and the daily inconvenience of living on a "bad road."

Advantages and Disadvantages of Rural Residence

Women were asked what advantages and satisfactions they perceived in being a rural family or in raising a family in a rural area. The most frequent responses were positives of the rural environment. (See Table 7, Appendix p. 89) Specifically the rural environment was seen as providing space, clean air, privacy, beauty and peacefulness, safety and freedom. Safety was mentioned in terms of raising children. Parents felt that there was less peer group influence and less concern over childrens' where-abouts and activities. Freedom was expressed as the variety of activities available for both children and adults, generally in terms of outdoor activity.

Rural residence was also perceived as providing the opportunity for teaching children the values of work and self-reliance and of allowing adults expression of these values. Farm women were strong advocates of the importance of chores in teaching children responsibility. The importance of "being your own boss" (farm women) and being self-reliant (non-farm women) was seen as an advantage allowed by rural residence. Many women summed up advantages by saying "this is the good life", it is "satisfying", "wholesome" and the "only" way to raise a family.

Problems and difficulties associated with rural residence were most frequently perceived to be effects of distance. Often this was expressed in terms of transportation for children's activities. "The car is always on the road." The time and expense of driving back and forth for school activities were mentioned by farm and non-farm women, but most frequently by employed farm wives and non-farm wives. In addition, farm women spoke of the problems of scheduling these activites around necessary chores. Bad roads in winter sometimes made transportation problems even more difficult and rural children occasionally missing school was also considered a problem

Less frequently, the rural area was perceived as providing limited shopping, cultural, employment and educational opportunities. One non-farm woman felt that the prevalence of a "narrow view" was a concern in raising a family in a rural area.

Four women expressed isolation and loneliness as a disadvantage of rural residence. One non-farm woman whose family had chosen to move to this area from town expressed the difficulty she had in adjusting to the "total aloneness." Farm women also expressed a lack of neighboring relationships and spoke of competetiveness among farmers. Two farm-career wives said they had no close women friends and one of these women said "maybe we (rural women) overdo our privacy."

Support Systems

When there was some kind of problem in the family, the majority

of these women received support from close family members. (See Table 8, Appendix p. 90) Most frequently women turned to husbands, but other relatives including sisters, brothers and parents were listed. Outside of the family, rural women relied on physicians, clergy and close friends when problems arose. Other professionals, including bankers, attorneys, school counselors and agricultural specialists were consulted with specific farm and family problems. Two rural women said they didn't talk to anyone when there was a problem.

Farm-career wives discussed family problems with their husbands most frequently and more frequently than women of other lifestyles received support from other close relatives. These women did not mention friends as sources of support. Farm wives most frequently turned to physicians and clergy although friends were less frequently mentioned. Employed farm wives most frequently mentioned friends as sources of support and non-farm wives relied on friends and physicians.

Women were asked about formal community and area support systems, such as fire and police protection, health and child care facilities. Seven women perceived these systems as "generally adequate for a rural area" and two women perceived formal support systems as inadequate. The majority of these rural women responded in terms of specific services as shown in Table 8, Appendix p. 90) Specifically, health care services were perceived as adequate. The nearest com-

munity provided an "excellant but overworked" physician, a nursing home, a well-equipped van-ambulance, and visits from a public health nurse. The hospital, another nursing home and additional physicians were located in a community twelve miles distant. Perceptions of the adequacy of fire protection were almost evenly split between adequate and inadequate. Women who perceived this service as inadequate mentioned distance and time involved in response of volunteer firemen. One respondent and her family had lost all of their belongings when the rural home they were renting burned to the ground.

> We were not home when the fire started--neighbors turned in the alarm. I know there were two other fires that evening, but it was 45 minutes before they came.

A portion of this township had inadequate water supply so that inadequate fire protection was perceived by some women as being more a matter of lack of water.

Police protection was specifically perceived as inadequate. Protection was provided by the county sheriff's office and the general attitude was that the distance involved precluded patrolling or preventative protection and that help was available mostly after the fact. There was a police officer hired by the nearest small town but problems of low salary and high turnover were mentioned as well as the fact that "he is responsible for the town and not the rural area." Child care facilities were also seen as inadequate or non-existant.

Extended Family Relationships

The majority of these women described "good" and "close" relationships with extended family members which were defined as parents, grown children, brothers, sisters. (Table 9, App. p.91) Visiting was frequently reported when family members lived nearby and telphone contact or holiday and vacation visits were frequent when family members lived at a distance. Some "very close" relationships were described between young adults and their parents and between sisters who were "best friends."

Four rural women perceived close relationships with most family members but also mentioned one family relationship which had some problems. Three farm-career wives described family relationships with other women in this sample as less than good and close, and one non-farm wife perceived a problem in relationship with her mother who lived some distance away. One rural woman did not have extended family members alive and one said her family was not really "close knit."

Discussion of Rural Families

The strength of American families has been documented in studies of national scope which point to the high percentage of persons reporting things going well in their families. (Yankelovich, Skelly, White, 1972) Family life is often seen as the major source of life satisfaction. (Campbell, Converse, Rodgers, 1976) There is evidence to support the general assumption that strong families are rural residents as well as urban residents. Qualities of family

strength and correlates of marital satisfaction have not been found to differ by place of residence. (Burchinal, 1961, Stinnett & Sauer, 1977)

A sense of strong family relationships was expressed by rural women in this study. Relational satisfactions were perceived as the major component in sense of family well-being. Close nuclear and extended family relationships were seen as the major source of support when there were problems. Women of all lifestyles reported satisfying husband-wife and parent-child relationships.

Rural residence was perceived as having more advantages than disadvantages for family life. The rural environment itself was seen as an important positive. While formal community and area support systems were not widely perceived as adequate, neither were they perceived as a disadvantage of rural living. A high degree of satisfaction with rural residence was expressed.

In addition to perceptions of strong family relationships and satisfaction with rural residence, two interesting paradoxes were expressed by these rural women.

1) Inadequate support systems and self-reliance

Health services were the only formal support system perceived adequate by a majority of these women. Perceptions of other formal support systems were mixed to inadequate. The value of self-reliance was expressed as an advantage allowed by rural residence and again when women were evaluating adequacy of support

systems. For example, one respondent said "we have piped water around all our buildings for fire protection but would call for help if we needed it." Other women perceived support systems as "adequate for a rural area" since "farmers learn to take care of themselves and each other." There was evidence of an informal rural community support system which operated in times of crises. A community soup supper was held to help raise money for a family who had lost everything in a fire was described by the recepient as "marvelous...clothing, household goods, money, and a place to stay temporarily." Whether support systems that were inadequate contributed to the necessity of being self-reliant or whether the value of self-reliance contributed to less demand for adequate support systems is an interesting question which these data cannot address. It is likely that for open country rural families, adequacy of some services was not considered essential to the quality of family life and was part of the trade-off accepted as a necessary condition of rural residence.

2) Intimacy and loneliness

A sense of isolation and loneliness was expressed by these rural women despite the reported frequency of close family relationships. Four women expressed loneliness openly and eloquently and they perceived it to be a disadvantage of rural residence. It was my impression that many more women expressed isolation and loneliness in a less direct way throughout the entire interview.

Indications of this more pervasive sense of loneliness did not surface in any one particular response category but may be partially revealed in low organizational involvement, solitary use of leisure time, low degree of common organizational involvement, and the low number of women who expressed support of close friends in time of trouble.

To what extent do conditions of the rural environment and rural lifestyles account for some degree of loneliness in lives of rural women. Perceptions of these women and my impressions suggest the following considerations. Low population density and age characteristics of the population may mean that a particular rural area offers less friendship potential. Lifestyles of farm-career women in particular and to some extent lifestyles of all farm wives may leave little time for nurturing friendships in that farming is often a dawn to dusk labor. Most free time for farm women occurs in the winter when weather and driving conditions conspire to keep women indoors. While actual distance may not be an unsurmountable factor, the time, expense and effort required to maintain social contact may be of importance. Non-farm wives may be viewed by farm women as a "different breed". This may result in deprivation of friendships for both farm and non-farm wives. Historically, movement has been away from rather than to rural areas and farm families may need some time to accept increased in-migration. While there seemed to be some degree of loneliness expressed directly and indirectly, most rural women seemed to live well with the paradox of privacy and isolation, intimacy and loneliness.

Education

The majority of these rural women had a high school education and eight of the nineteen had had additional occupational education or college training. There were two women who had not completed high school and one who had graduated from college. These women were better educated than either their husbands or their children over eighteen in the respect that a larger percentage of them had had education past high school. (See Table 10, Appendix p. 91)

Educational Interests

Women were questioned on new skills and increased knowledge they would like to have in four areas; the farming operation, family life, leisure time activities, and employment--obtaining or advancing on a job. Frequent interest was expressed in having new skills and knowledge for the farming operation. About half of the women were interested in new skills for leisure use. The majority of these women did not express interest in knowing more about family life or skills for employment.

Interest in new skills and knowledge about the farming operation was expressed by most women married to farmers. Specific responses ranged from skills needed for livestock management to knowledge of new hybrids and new chemicals, to broader concerns such as soil and water conservation or government farm programs. (See Table 11, Appendix p. 92) Rural farm women of all lifestyles were interested in learning more about the farming operation.

Ten women perceived no interest in new skills or knowledge of

leisure activities but many of them qualified this by expressing satisfaction with learning opportunities presently available in the community. Nine women did express interest in new skills for leisure use and most frequently these women were farm-career wives and non-farm wives.

Interest in knowing more about family life was expressed by only seven of the nineteen women. Specifically, interest was perceived in the areas of parenting, family health, understanding problems of others and trying out new products. Women expressing no interest seemed to think in terms of "nothing now that the children are raised."

Of those seven women either presently employed or considering employment for the future, only two listed interest in new knowledge or skills to facilitate getting a job or advancing on the job they had. Women who were presently employed either perceived no need for additional skills or were already receiving some training.

> There's not much to this job. The boss can answer any questions I have.
>
> I've gone as far as I can as a nurse's aid. I'm not really interested in becoming an LPN. I think there will be too many of them soon and I'd have to drive 45 miles and back for the training.
>
> LPN's are required to take hours of additional training in order to be licensed each year. Our nursing director keeps us informed of seminars available and we often car pool to make it easier.

The two women who were interested in new skills were considering

employment in the future and expressed interest in having a refresher typing course and business machines or LPN training.

Educational Opportunities Available

All of these women listed opportunities to obtain new skills and information, with the majority of them naming two to four separate sources. (See Table 12, Appendix p. 93) The four respondents who had completed one or more years of college listed four or five opportunities for obtaining new skills and information. Two respondents who had not completed high school listed simply friends and magazines and the county agent as sources of information.

The Extension Service was most frequently mentioned as a source of new information and skills. It was perceived as providing workshops, homemaker clubs, specific information in pamphlet form, and agents who were a source of specific answers to specific problems of home and farm. Other informal opportunities perceived included farm magazines, libraries, a local craft shop and a new free university. Persons were also listed as sources of new information and skills; an employer, the local veterinarian, the high school counselor, a congressman, and friends were named.

Community college courses were the second most frequently named source of new skills and information. University classes and adult education courses offered at the local high school were also given as sources of more formal learning opportunity. While educational level did seem to effect awareness of opportunities,

in general these women seemed aware of a variety of formal and informal learning opportunities available to them.

Improving Educational Opportunities

What would help rural women more easily get information and skills they desired? The most frequently expressed need was for courses relevant to rural farm women. Other improvements suggested were a wider variety of offerings, better advertising and course descriptions, and scheduling of classes during the day so night driving was not necessary. (See Table 13, Appendix p. 94)

> I would like to be able to attend a hog clinic and learn how to vaccinate and castrate baby pigs. My husband occassionally is invited to hog clinics--they are planned for men--but on our farm I'm the one responsible for the farrowing operation.

> A lot of rural women would be interested in agriculture and livestock classes through colleges or junior colleges if they could be offered without prerequisites and without the need to be full-time students.

> Classes need to be more widely advertised instead of information going by word of mouth. More women might be interested in these classes if they knew about them.

Some women expressed the attitude that educational opportunities were adequate but that the problem was in the distance necessary to drive and the time and expense involved in taking advantage of opportunities.

Discussion of Education

Rural women in this study were perhaps comparatively above

average in educational attainment since almost ninety percent of them had high school educations and many had had some educational opportunities past high school. They also likely had greater than average access to educational opportunities since they resided about twelve miles from a town where community college courses were available and about fifty miles from a university community. This undoubtedly contributed to the fairly high degree of awareness they had of opportunities available to them.

Interests in continuing education for the women in this sample were somewhat similar to those found by Scott (1977) in a study of rural women in another area of Kansas. Both groups expressed interest in knowing more about the farm operation and leisure time activities. However, the Scott study also found interest in nonformal educational opportunity in the area of family concerns. Given the strength of family life noted in the previous section, it was somewhat surprising that women in this study did not express more interest in family life education. It is possible that the open-ended question style employed in these interviews simply did not call specifics to mind as did the Scott structured questionnaire.

It should be noted that women were questioned in terms of educational interests and not in terms of educational participation. That is, there was no assurance that these women would participate in continuing education if suggested improvements were made. However, it is interesting that the problems they perceived with present opportunities were more frequently related to course offerings

rather than to distance, time and expense. Farm women were interested in knowing more about the farming operation generally and farm-career wives were specifically interested in the opportunity to improve skill levels in courses with a practical "how to" approach. Rural women of all lifestyles were interested in a wider variety of courses, scheduled at a time that fit their lifestyles, which were advertised and described in a manner so that they could make intelligent decisions as to the benefit versus the cost in time, money and distance. Improving educational opportunities for rural women may be a matter of improving offerings as well as improving delivery systems.

Differences In Rural and Urban Women

Rural women were asked in what ways concerns and opportunities of rural women were different from those of urban women. The majority of these women did perceive differences between rural and urban women and these are summarized in Tables 14 and 15, Appendix p.95).

Comparing Concerns

The most frequently perceived difference in concerns was that rural farm women were more involved in their husbands business lives. The importance of this difference was illustrated by the following composite of responses.

> In town, a man leaves to go to work and usually husband and wife don't see much

> of each other. We're on the farm working together. City women have more time to themselves but spend less time with their husbands. Our activities, interests and daily responsibilities are different. Our concerns are with farm economics, crops and livestock and we are involved in the business. Lack of rain is a different concern if your interest is crops rather than a flower garden. Budgeting is different--we budget on a long term basis.

Differences in concerns were also frequently perceived to be a function of rural residence and this difference was expressed by all non-farm women and some farm women.

> Concerns in raising children are different--urban women have to worry a lot more about drugs and crime and safety of children. We are closer to nature and perhaps a little more down to earth. Urban women don't have to worry about having enough water. Retirement for us means moving from the farm and changing all our patterns of living. Rural women need to drive to be involved and not isolated--that is time consuming and expensive. Sometimes it's necessary for a rural woman to be at home and most rural women understand that.

As the above composite shows, differences in concerns due to place of residence had both positive and negative aspects and sometimes reflected specific individual concerns.

Comparing Opportunities

Differences in opportunities of rural and urban women were perceived by sixteen of the nineteen women. Two women felt that there were no differences and one said she didn't know. Responses of the majority indicated that women perceived rural residence as having both positive and negative aspects in terms of opportunities.

Rural women perceived the opportunity to enjoy nature, fresh air, open spaces and privacy. The variety of outdoor activities were perceived as important--the opportunity for gardening, working with husband and "not being cooped up in the house". The opportunity to have better control of children and more free time were also mentioned.

Rural women perceived not having some opportunities available to urban women. The most frequent response of this type was that urban women had easier access to activities and interests outside of the home.

> With higher gas prices and a distance to drive, rural women are more likely to stay home. You can't just pick up and go on the spur of the moment. It's easier for urban women to get out of the home and find interests. When a rural women is involved with her family and the farm and then has distance to contend with, she just isn't as free as a homemaker in town for volunteer activities.

Urban women were also perceived as having more employment opportunities and access to employment agencies.

Discussion of Differences in Rural and Urban Women

The Clarenbach (1977) report, based on conferences with rural women around the country, found that rural women agreed that non-rural people needed better information about rural life so that sterotypes could be changed and rural life circumstances and values could be understood. In Kansas, the Scott (1977) study also found that rural women felt their needs were different from urban

women and perceived a need for better understanding between rural and urban people.

Women in this study detailed some of the ways these rural-urban differences were important in daily lives. Degree of involvement in husbands' lives and business was perceived as important. The enjoyment of all the positives of the rural environment was perceived as providing opportunities urban women did not have. Rural women pointed to the combination of circumstances which keep them more tied to home and family and explained that urban women do have fewer constraints in access to interests outside of the home.

Lifestyle differences in perceptions of concerns and opportunities were interesting. Farm-career women most frequently perceived lack of employment opportunities suggesting again that perhaps some of them were the most career oriented of these women. Employed farm wives did not perceive employment opportunities as different for rural and urban women but more frequently perceived other opportunities as favoring urban women. Farm wives and non-farm wives more frequently perceived positives of rural residence and perhaps were more content with the necessary tradeoffs in opportunities.

Adult Life

Women were questioned on the most satisfying and frustrating aspects of adulthood which was defined as the years from age thirty

to seventy and older. Perceptions of adult life were obtained by ten year periods, that is women were asked for perceptions of the years when they were 30 to 39, 40-49, and so on.

Since these women ranged in age from 21 to 62, perceived satisfactions and frustrations for the years of adulthood from 30 to 69 reflected a combination of present experiences, memories of the past and expectations for the future. Perceptions of the period of older adulthood (70 and older) reflected expectations of the future for all women. Perceptions of the years of young adulthood (20-29) were obtained only from the younger (20-29) women in the sample, and reflected their experiences of the present decade.[4]

Satisfactions of Adult Life

Twelve satisfactions were perceived by these rural women as important to adult life. Some satisfactions, parenting for example, were seen as important to much of adulthood. Others were important only to particular decades of adult life. The relative importance of each satisfaction and the changing emphasis given to satisfactions across the years of adulthood are detailed in (Table 16, Appendix p. 96)

Parenting was perceived as the most important of all satisfactions. It was also the only satisfaction perceived important across all of adult life...from young adulthood to old age. The satisfactions of parenting were most frequently mentioned during the years when women were 30-39. However, the launching of children during the 40's and

[4]Since a sample of younger women were added (See Methods) they were asked for perceptions of the years 20-29 in order to have perceptions of the present decade for all women.

50's was also frequently seen as a satisfaction. Grandchildren, on the other hand, were mainly perceived as a satisfaction of the years when women were 50-59.

Financial security was perceived an important satisfaction of most of adulthood. While some women perceived it a satisfaction of their 30's, more frequently it was given as a satisfaction of the 40's and 50's. Financial security was expressed as being debt free, building a new home or improving an existing one, having funds to buy additional land, or simply better prices and good crops.

Increased leisure time was also perceived as a satisfaction wherever it occurred in adulthood. Most frequently it was mentioned as a satisfaction of the 50's and 60's and was expressed as "time for my own interests" and "being free to take off and go." The opportunity to travel, a special use of increased leisure, was seen almost entirely as a satisfaction of the 60's.

As might be expected, retirement was a more narrowly perceived satisfaction, most frequently described as a part of the 50's and 60's. The emphasis during these years was on the satisfaction of retirement planning or semi-retirement. The latter was described as slowing down some, letting sons take over more, or continuing to farm but hiring help.

Some additional satisfactions were perceived as important to one or two specific decades of life. Career and employment satisfaction was important mainly in the 20's and 30's. Enjoying friends was also a satisfaction mostly of young and middle adulthood. Good

health, while expressed by some as a satisfaction of the 30's was not mentioned frequently until the 60's and 70's when it was considered as the most important satisfaction of old age.

Attitudes toward age were expressed by these women as they considered satisfactions of a particular age span. That is, rather than perceiving specific satisfactions, some women responded with an attitude toward age itself. While both positive and negative attitudes were expressed, negative attitudes were much more frequent. Nearly one-fourth of these respondents perceived no satisfactions in being 60-69 and almost one-half of them saw no satisfactions in being 70 and older.

It is interesting to note (from total response frequency) that the relative importance of life satisfactions perceived by these women reflected themes seen throughout this study. Thus parenting and financial security were perceived as very important satisfactions for these women. Friends and organizational involvement were relatively less frequently seen as satisfactions of adult life.

Lifestyle differences in adult life satisfactions were apparent from data presented in (Table 17, Appendix p. 97) Parenting was perceived as a satisfaction most frequently by farm wives. Non-farm wives more frequently than other lifestyles perceived financial security and leisure and travel as satisfactions. Retirement was perceived an important life satisfaction for farm-career wives.

Negative attitudes toward age seemed to the interviewer to be

expressed more frequently by younger rather than older women during these interviews. Therefore data on life satisfactions were sorted by age of respondent[5] in order to assess age differences in perceptions of satisfactions and attitudes. These data are also presented in (Table 17, Appendix p. 97) and do support the impression that younger women were most negative in attitudes toward old age. Other differences were that older women more frequently perceived parenting as a satisfaction and the youngest women most frequently perceived retirement as a life satisfaction.

Frustrations of Adult Life

Many of the tasks or events of adult life which were sources of satisfaction for these rural women were also sources of frustration. (See Table 18, Appendix p. 98) Some frustrations were perceived important across the decades of adult life and others were specific to particular age periods.

Financial struggle was the most important of all frustrations and was a frustration of all of adult life. In young adulthood this was expressed as indebtedness necessary to get started or as buying a home and a farm. Financial struggle was the most frequent frustration of middle adulthood. During these years the emphasis was on the finanical insecurity that resulted from crop losses due to floods, hailstorms and droughts. During maturity and old age

[5]Respondents were sorted as nearly as possible into groups of women born during the same 5 to 7 year period. This resulted in four cohorts, women 21-27, 29-35, 48-53 and 55-62.

the emphasis on financial struggle was linked to sufficient means for comfortable retirement and the cost of serious illness of old age.

Ill-health was a frustration whenever it occurred during adulthood. Serious illnesses, accidents and operations accounted for most of the frustrations of health expressed during the 30's, 40's and 50's. The decades of the 60's and 70's however were the years when ill-health was most frequently perceived as a frustration. "So much depends on your health--transportation, whether you need care, whether your money holds out." Dependence, which was a separate frustration, was however perceived as linked to ill-health and was of concern during old age.

Parenting was perceived as frustrating almost exclusively during the 40's and 50's when children were near adulthood. In a few cases frustration arose because of sons away at war or from the "quiet and dullness" of the empty nest. More frequently however, frustrations of launching children were expressed by farm women in terms of changes necessary when sons wanted to farm. For instance, one respondent expressed her perceptions of frustrations of age 50-59; "If the kids wanted in, that's the time you'd need to expand rather than lay back." Helping "set up" children in farming was some source of frustration but conversely the frustration was also expressed "that the kids may not want to be a part of the family farm."

All other frustrations of adult life were perceived as relatively less important than those above and also were specific only to certain

decades. Widowhood was a frustration perceived in the 60's and 70's. Retirement, physical aging and use of leisure time were frustrations of the 50's and 60's. Negative attitudes toward age were again expressed and were most frequently given for the period of old age.

Since just three frustrations were perceived of major importance (as determined by total response frequency) data sort by age of women and lifestyle were limited to those three frustrations. (See Table 19, Appendix p. 99) Financial struggle was a frustration for employed farm wives more frequently than for women of other lifestyles. Non farm women most frequently perceived health problems as a frustration of adulthood. Parenting was perceived as a frustration most frequently by farm career wives.

Differences in frustration of adult life by age of women were interesting in that health concerns were most frequently perceived by women 48-53. Financial struggle was more frequently a concern for the two cohorts in the middle years of life (29-35 and 48-53) rather than younger or older women. Parenting was most frequently a frustration of older women.

The Best Years of Life

In addition to specific satisfactions and frustrations of adulthood, women were asked "If you had to pick the best years of your life what would they be and why?" Varying types of responses were given. Some women were present-oriented and responded "now"; other

women named specific years in the past or responded that they had no favorites and that all years were good in some ways. Responses were sorted by age of respondent and are summarized in Table 20, Appendix p. 100.

All of the younger women, those in their 20's and 30's, perceived the present or very recent past to be the best years. Women 48 and older, who had more years from which to choose, often agreed however with the younger women. Of those older women who gave specific responses, more than half perceived the 20's and 30's as the best years of life. Three older women chose other years; one perceived her 40's to be the best years and two women, 53 and 58, perceived "now" as the best years. In addition two older women responded that they had no favorites. As a group then, these rural women perceived the 20's and 30's to be the best years of life.

Reasons given for the designation of the 20's and 30's as the best years were most frequently related to the joys of marriage, parenting and career or employment. The following composite illustrates these satisfactions.

> I really liked what I was doing--raising a child and being farm partner were important. I felt like I was doing something with my life. The children were growing up--each day was different. We had been married long enough to know each other well--things went smoothly. We started out from scratch and enjoyed working together.

Discussion of Adult Life

The lists of satisfactions and frustrations perceived by these

women suggested some comparisons of note. First, total response frequency indicated that while parenting was both a frustration and satisfaction, overall it was positively perceived as a satisfaction of adult life. Economic concerns on the other hand, were perceived more frequently as a negative; financial struggle was more of a frustration than financial security was a satisfaction. Second, taken as a whole these satisfactions and frustrations provided some index of the salient issues of adulthood for these rural women. Not surprisingly these issues paralleled developmental tasks described in adult development literature. In many respects then, these women were concerned with issues common to all adults across the life cycle irrespective of place of residence.

Yet rural residence, specifically farm residence, did seem to lend a special flavor to one specific task of parenting in mid-life. Most of the frustrations and many of the satisfactions perceived in mid-life parenting by these women were related to the launching of near adult sons and centered around the question of a son choosing a farm career. The implications of this choice seemed to have effects on the farm family which were different from a son's choice of other occupations. First, there were satisfactions expressed concerning the continuance of the "family farm" and the affirmation of "farm life as a good way of life." Satisfactions were also expressed in terms of the ability of the parents to "help the son get set-up in farming." Frustrations seemed to be more

complex and related to such factors as the age of the parents, the size of the present farm operation, the availability and location of land for purchase, the marital status of the son, and the degree of financial security of the parents.

When a son made the choice to farm, it was often necessary to expand the parent operation--buy additional land, larger equipment and so forth. Depending on the individual life cycle, this need to expand sometimes came at a time when the parents were planning and looking forward to retirement. Expansion involved an economic committment and sometimes a committment to continued physical labor. Some farm residents chose not to expand and instead retired and moved off the farm, turning the operation over to the son. Whatever the individual solution, it seemed probable that launching sons into a farming career was a task which involved decisions and potential frustrations for the farm family different from those faced by non-farm or urban families.

Things That Would Make Life Better

If rural women could choose two or three things to make their lives better, what would they choose? Responses listed in Table 21, Appendix p.100 reflected themes often expressed in this study. Perceptions were that improved finances, good health, retirement and the opportunity to travel, more friends and less competetiveness would improve life for these women. Some women expressed

satisfaction with life as it is; others expressed more general choices such as happiness and contentment, improved world conditions and improvements in the lives of their grown children and grandchildren.

Money and good health were the most frequent choices. The need for improved financial condition was expressed both in terms of more money and security or stability of income. Women who perceived financial improvement as a need for a better life were not only in the starting-out period of young adulthood; almost an equal number were older women. Both farm and non-farm women expressed this choice.

Continued good health or improved health was most frequently a concern of mid-life farm wives. The emphasis placed on health here and in the earlier section on satisfactions and frustrations of adulthood may partly be explained by age characteristics of this sample. Eleven of the nineteen women were over 45. It may also be that health emphasis is related to the farming occupation and the physical demands of farm labor.

Choices for a better life reflected wishes of individuals in this study. There was not a high degree of consensus in response.

SUMMARY

Perceptions of activities, interests, satisfactions and frustrations of adult life were studied through interviews with nineteen rural women. The area sample included all women ages 21 to 65 who resided in an open country rural township in Kansas. Since there has been little research with specific focus on rural women, the purposes of this study were to provide visibility and opportunity for rural women to express themselves and to describe their perceptions of adult life.

Results described four lifestyles expressed by farm and non-farm rural women. Farm-career wives were contributing on a daily basis to the labor and management of the farming operation. These women identified farm involvement as role of major responsibility and major satisfaction. Nearly one-third of the women in this sample were farm-career wives. Farm-wives contributed a variety of labor to the farming operation on an occasional basis and identified roles of responsibility and satisfaction in terms of home and farm. Employed farm wives held part time jobs away from home and were less involved with the farming operation. These women identified satisfaction with home and employment. Non-farm wives were married to men employed in area businesses and schools. Most of these women identified responsibility and satisfaction as related to homemaker-wife-mother roles. Non-farm families had chosen open country rural residence and non-farm wives expressed

satisfaction with that choice.

Lifestyles differentiated women's interest in employment and continuing education and their activity in use of leisure time and organizational involvement. Satisfactions of rural women were close family relationships and rural residence. Parenting was perceived as the major satisfaction of all adult life. Concerns of rural women were economic; financial struggle was the major frustration of all adult life. Some degree of frustration was expressed with isolation and loneliness. Urban women's ease of access to employment and out of home activities was perceived as the major difference in opportunities of rural and urban women.

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APPENDIX

KSU
KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Home Economics

Office of the Dean
Justin Hall
Manhattan, Kansas 66506
913-532-5500

January 31, 1979

Dear Mrs.

Rural women have experiences, activities and interests which make them unique. The College of Home Economics is interested in better understanding these aspects of rural womens' lives. We are asking your help in a project that we will explain to you in a telephone call in a few days. This letter is to alert you to our interest.

When we telephone you, we will be glad to answer any questions you may have and will explain exactly how you can help us. If you are willing to participate, we want to assure you that all information will be strictly confidential.

We hope you will be willing to help us and look forward to talking with you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Ruth Hoeflin
Dean

Mrs. Kay Johnson
Graduate Assistant

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KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Home Economics

Office of the Dean
Justin Hall
Manhattan, Kansas 66506
913-532-5500

February 1, 1979

The purpose of this interview is to find out about your experiences, activities and interests as a rural woman--how things are going well for you and things which you might like to see changed.

We hope that you will benefit from this opportunity to express the satisfactions of being a rural woman and that the information you give will help us to strengthen the quality of rural life.

Since the questions that will be asked often need more than one or two word answers, it would be helpful if you would consent to this interview being tape recorded. The tapes will be handled in a confidential manner, transcribed information will be coded to protect your identity, and tapes will be destroyed after transcribing. Do you have any questions concerning this interview?

I have read the above description and agree to participate in this study. I understand that my responses to all questions will remain completely confidential and that my identity will remain anonymous. I understand that I may choose not to respond to any question which is offensive to me or which I feel invades my privacy. At any time during the interview, I am free to withdraw my consent and participation.

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

_____ Permission given to tape interview.

Interview# _____

1. Are you currently single, married, divorced, separated or widowed? _____

2. (If married) What is your husbands occupation? _____

3. Do you have children? Yes _____ No _____

   If yes, How many? _____

   Their ages? _____

   Years of education completed by each child? _____

   _____

4. How many years of education has your husband completed? _____

5. How many years of education have you completed? _____

6. What is your age? _____

7. How many years have you lived on this farm? _____

8. Are you presently employed outside the home? Yes _____

   No _____

   If yes, What is your occupation? _____

   Is this a full or part-time job? _____

   If part-time, How many hours a day do you work? _____

   How long have you had this job? _____

   Are you satisfied with this job? _____

   Why or why not? _____

   _____

   _____

9. Can you tell me about any employment you've had in the past,

full or part-time jobs you've held since high school graduation? _____

_____

_____

10. Are you considering employment outside the home in the future? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, Full time employment or part-time employment?_____

If you were to decide that you would like to be employed in the future, what are some of the benefits you anticipate? _____

_____

_____

11. Can you tell me about all the ways that you are involved in the operation and management of this farm? _____

_____

_____

_____

12. Of all the jobs you hold (homemaker, wife, mother, partner in the farming operation, employee) which do you consider to be your major area of responsibility? _____

_____

Which gives you the most satisfaction? _____

_____

_____

13. What clubs or organizational meetings do you attend fairly regularly? _____

_____

14. What are some of the ways you spend your free time, that is what do you do just for fun or when you have time to yourself? _____

_____

15. Can you tell me about the ways in which things are going well for your family--by family I mean (you, your husband and children) _____

_____

16. What things are of most concern to your family right now?

_____

_____

17. What advantages and satisfactions do you see to (being, raising) a family in a rural area? _____

_____

18. What are some problems and difficulties with (being, raising) a family in a rural area? _____

_____

19. What do you do, who do you talk to, how do you get more information, when there is some kind of problem in your family? (no names) _____

_____

20. Think now about community or area support systems, such as health services and facilities, police and fire protection, child care services and others. How adequate are these kind of help for rural families in your area? _____

_____

21. Now I'd like you to think about other family members (your parents, grown children, brothers, sisters)--how would you describe your relationship with them? _____

_____

22. What new skills or areas of increased knowledge would you like to have concerning the farming operation? _____

_____

23. What new skills or areas of increased knowledge would you like to have concerning family life? _____

_____

24. What new skills or areas of increased knowledge would make your leisure time more enjoyable? _____

_____

25. (If applicable) What new skills or areas of increased knowledge would make it easier for you to get a job or advance on the one you have? _____

_____

26. What opportunities do you have now to obtain new skills or new information? _____

_____

27. What methods could you suggest that would help rural women more easily get new information and skills they desired? _____

_____

28. In what ways are concerns of rural women different from those of urban women? _____

_____

29. In what ways are opportunities of rural women different from those of urban women? _____

_____

30. What (are, were, will be) the most satisfying aspects about the years when you (are, were, will be):

30-39 _____

_____

40-49 _____

_____

50-59 _____

_____

60-69 _____

_____

70 and older _____

_____

31. What (are, were, will be) the most frustrating aspects about the years when you (are, were, will be):

30-39 _____

_____

40-49 _____

_____

50-59 _____

_____

60-69 _____

_____

70 and older _____

_____

32. If you had to pick the best years of your life so far, what would they be? _____

_____

Why? _____

_____

33. If you could choose two or three things which would make your life better, what would they be? _____

_____

34. Would like copy of printed results? Yes_____ No____

KSU
KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Home Economics

Office of the Dean
Justin Hall
Manhattan, Kansas 66506
913-532-5500

April 10, 1980

Dear

Thank you for your participation in our study of rural women. We appreciated your granting time for an interview so that we might better understand the experiences, activities and interests unique to rural women.

Enclosed is a short summary of the information we collected. Again, thank you for your interest and support of Home Economics Research.

Sincerely,

Ruth Hoeflin
Dean

Kay Johnson
Graduate Research Assistant

Enclosure

/gl

Summary of Results

The Rural Women

Nineteen women, ages 21-65, who were residents of an open country rural township in Kansas were interviewed. All of these rural women were married --some to farmers and some to men with non-farm occupations. The majority of these women were mothers and about one-third of them had children ages 1-18 living at home. Another third of the farm women had grown sons who lived nearby and were involved in the operation of the family farm.

Activities

Four women were employed out of the home on a part or full-time basis and one woman was preparing to enter the labor force. Many women married to farmers were involved in the labor and management of the farming operation and in a sense were full or part-time self-employed farmers.

The most frequently mentioned leisure activities were indoor hobbies such as reading, hand work, crafts, etc. Organizational involvement of these women ranged from one woman who regularly attended four meetings to six women who did not attend any. Church organizations and neighborhood clubs received the most frequent attendance.

Interests

Many women married to farmers were interested in knowing more about the farming operation and farm economy. Some women who considered themselves partners in the business and who worked full-time on the farm were interested in practical "how to" skills in livestock management. Farm and non-farm wives were more frequently interested in having information on leisure time activities and less frequently interested in information on family life.

Lifestyles of Rural Women

There was much diversity in the activities and interests of rural women and in the way they identified roles of responsibility and satisfaction. Four distinctive lifestyles were expressed.

"Farm-career wives" - these women identified themselves in terms of their responsibility and satisfaction with farm involvement. They were regularly contributing to the labor and management of the farm on a routine daily basis and considered themselves farm partners.

"Farm wives" - these women identified responsibility as homemaker-wife-mother and their satisfaction was with home <u>and</u> farm. Farm wives contributed a variety of labor to the farming operation on an occasional basis.

"Employed farm wives" - these women held part-time jobs away from home. They identified responsibility as homemaker-wife-mother and found satisfaction in home and employment.

"Non-farm wives" - these women are married to men employed in area schools and businesses. Most of these women identified responsibility and satisfaction as related to hamemaker-wife-mother roles. One non-farm wife was employed full-time and another was career-oriented and received most satisfaction from her preparation to enter the labor market.

Satisfactions

Close family relationships were a major satisfaction of these rural women. Husband-wife and parent-child relationships were perceived important to both farm and non-farm women. Parenting was the major satisfaction of all adult life.

Satisfaction with rural residence and the rural way of life was also frequently expressed. Positives of the rural environment, such as beauty, clean air and privacy contributed to the satisfaction of farm and non-farm families. Non-farm families had chosen rural residence and expressed satisfaction with that choice.

Frustrations

Economics were the most frequently perceived concern. Financial struggle was the major frustration of all adult life. Both farm and non-farm women expressed concern with such things as inflation and gasoline prices.

Some degree of isolation and loneliness was expressed as a frustration of rural residence. Competetiveness among farmers and the lack of close friends were mentioned by some women. The major difference perceived between urban and rural women was that urban women had easier access to out-of-home activities and employment opportunities. Most rural women seemed to accept some degree of isolation and loneliness as a necessary part of rural living.

Summary

Rural women expressed differing lifestyles, activities and interests. Similarities were perceived in satisfaction with close family relationships and with rural residence. Policy makers and program developers should base their services for rural women on an understanding of and appreciation for both the differences and similarities expressed by rural women.

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Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Nineteen Rural Women

Interview Questions 1,2,3,6,7,8	Response Frequency
Marital Status	
Married	19
Age of Women	
21-29	6
30-49	3
50-65	10
Employed Outside Home	
Yes	4
No	15
Occupation	
Grocery Clerk	1
Newspaper Reporter	1
L.P.N.	1
Nurses Aid	1
Occupation of Husband	
Farmer	15
Non-farm	4
Children	
Yes	15
No	4
Number of Children	
1	5
2	3
3	3
4	2
6	1
8	1
Ages of Children*	
0-18	6
19-38	10
Length of Rural Residence	
Less than 5 years	5
5-10 years	4
11-20 years	4
21-30 years	3
31-41 years	3

*One woman had children in both age categories.

Table 2. Lifestyles of Nineteen Rural Women

Interview Questions 2,8,11,12	Response Frequency Lifestyles: Farm-Career Wives N=6	Farm Wives N=6	Employed Farm Wives N=3	Non-Farm Wives N=4	Total Response Frequency
Husband's Occupation					
Farm	6	6	3	0	15
Non-farm	0	0	0	4	4
Women Employed	0	0	3	1	4
Role of Major Responsibility					
Homemaker-wife-mother	0	6	3	4	13
Farm Partner	6	0	0	0	6
Role of Major Satisfaction					
Homemaker-wife-mother	0	3	1	3	7
Farm Partner	6	0	0	0	6
Farm Helpmate	0	3	0	0	3
Wife-mother and employee	0	0	2	0	2
Student	0	0	0	1	1
Farm Involvement*					
Routine labor/ management of crops/livestock	6	0	0	0	6
Occasional labor crops/livestock, some management	0	5	0	0	5
Record keeping and/ or gardening and/ or raising poultry	0	1	2	0	3
Not involved	0	0	1	0	1

*Degrees of involvement were incremental, i.e. routine included occasional and record keeping.

Table 3. Employment of Rural Women

Interview Questions 8,9,10	Response Frequency Lifestyles FCW N=6	FW N=6	EFW N=3	NFW N=4	Total Response Frequency
Present Employment					
Full-time	0	0	0	1	1
Part-time	0	0	3	0	3
Occupation					
L.P.N.	0	0	1	0	1
Nurse's Aid	0	0	1	0	1
Newspaper Reporter	0	0	1	0	1
Clerk	0	0	0	1	1
Length of Present Employment					
8 months	0	0	0	1	1
3 years	0	0	1	0	1
6 years	0	0	1	0	1
12 years	0	0	1	0	1
Satisfied With Present Employment	0	0	3	1	4
Ever Employed*					
Yes	6	5	3	4	18
No	0	1	0	0	1
Considering Future Employment					
Yes, Full time	0	1	1	3	5
Yes, Part time	0	0	2	0	2
No	6	5	0	1	12
Anticipated Benefits Of Future Employment					
Financial	0	1	1	3	5
Something to do	0	1	1	1	3
Personal Satisfaction	0	0	2	1	3

*Since high school graduation

Table 4. Leisure Time Activities

Interview Question 14	Multiple Response Frequency Lifestyles FCW N=6	FW N=6	EFW N=3	NFW N=4	Total Response Frequency
Indoor	6	12	3	7	28
Reading	2	4	1	4	11
Hand Work	1	6	1	2	10
Crafts, ceramics	3	0	0	1	4
Cooking, baking	0	2	0	0	2
Write letters	0	0	1	0	1
Outdoor	1	1	1	6	9
Gardening	0	1	0	3	4
Hunting, fishing	1	0	1	0	2
Swimming	0	0	0	2	2
Riding bikes & horses	0	0	0	1	1
Family	2	1	3	0	6
Keeping grandchild, visiting relations	0	1	1	0	2
Vacations	1	0	1	0	2
Take a ride	1	0	1	0	2
Social	2	0	2	1	5
Visiting or going out with friends	1	0	1	1	3
Card parties	1	0	0	0	1
Dancing	0	0	1	0	1
Other	4	0	2	1	7
Eat out*	1	0	1	1	3
Shop*	1	0	1	0	2
Attend movies*	1	0	0	0	1
Hot bath & nails	1	0	0	0	1

*While these could be social or family activities, sufficient information was not given to place them categorically.

Table 5. Organizational Involvement

Interview Question 13	Response Frequency Lifestyles FCW N=6	FW N=6	EFW N=3	NFW N=4	Total Response Frequency
Number of Organizations Attended Regularly					
None	3	1	1	1	6
One	1	2	1	1	5
Two	0	2	1	2	5
Three	2	0	0	0	2
Four	0	1	0	0	1
	Multiple Response Frequency				
Type of Organization					
Church	0	5	0	2	7
Neighborhood clubs	2	0	1	1	4
Federated women's clubs	1	1	0	0	2
Civic	2	0	0	0	2
Fraternal	0	1	1	0	2
Agricultural	0	1	0	1	2
Extension	1	0	0	0	1
Patriotic	0	0	1	0	1
Special interest*	1	2	0	1	4

*Weight loss club, learning disabilities, card clubs

Table 6. Satisfactions And Concerns Of Rural Families

Interview Questions 15,16	Multiple Response Frequency Lifestyles FCW N=6	FW N=6	EFW N=3	NFW N=4	Total Response Frequency
Things Going Well Because Of:					
Close Relationships	6	3	1	3	13
Husband-Wife	3	1	0	1	5
Parent-Child	2	2	1	2	7
Friends	1	0	0	0	1
Good Health	1	3	0	1	5
Rural Residence/ Farm Life	2	0	1	2	5
General Contentment	2	0	1	2	5
Economics	3	0	0	1	4
Sufficient Income	2	0	0	1	3
Value of land/ livestock	1	0	0	0	1
Other*	2	0	0	0	2
Things Of Most Concern:					
Economics	6	6	6	2	20
Inflation	2	4	2	2	10
Farm Finances	4	1	3	0	8
Gasoline Prices	0	1	1	0	2
Weather	2	2	1	0	5
Health	0	1	0	2	3
Retirement	0	0	1	1	2
National-International Situation	0	1	1	0	2
Other**	1	1	0	1	3

*Can get good help, husband getting education
**Parent-child problems, bad roads, children's education

Table 7. Advantages And Disadvantages Of Rural Residence For Families

Interview Questions 17,18	Multiple Response Frequency Lifestyles FCW N=6	FW N=6	EFW N=3	NFW N=4	Total Response Frequency
Advantages					
Positives of Environment	12	6	6	7	31
Safety	2	2	2	2	8
Freedom - Variety Of Activities	1	3	3	1	8
Space - Clean Air	2	1	0	3	6
Privacy	3	0	1	1	5
Beauty - Peacefulness	4	0	0	0	4
Environment Allows Or Teaches Values	3	6	2	2	15
Work-Responsibility	1	4	2	0	7
Self Reliance	2	1	0	2	5
Time Together	0	0	1	1	2
Worth of Things	0	1	0	0	1
Good Way Of Life	0	4	2	2	8
Other	1	0	0	0	1
Disadvantages					
Effects of Distance	4	4	8	7	23
Driving: Children's Activities	1	2	3	3	9
Time	1	1	1	2	5
Expense	0	0	0	2	2
Scheduling Farm Chores	1	1	1	0	3
Roads In Winter	1	0	3	0	4
Limited	4	0	0	2	6
Cultural Activities	0	0	0	1	1
Employment Opport.	2	0	0	0	2
Educational Opport.	1	0	0	0	1
Availability of Goods	1	0	0	0	1
View of Life	0	0	0	1	1
Loneliness & Isolation	2	1	0	1	4
None of Consequence	0	2	0	0	2
Other	2	0	0	0	2

Table 8. Family Support Systems

Interview Questions 19,20	Multiple Response Frequency Lifestyles FCW N=6	FW N=6	EFW N=3	NFW N=4	Total Response Frequency
Informal Support Systems					
Close Relative	8	0	1	2	11
Husband	5	0	0	1	6
Brother, sister, parent	3	0	1	1	5
Physician	2	3	0	2	7
Friend	0	2	2	2	6
Clergy	0	4	1	1	6
All Other Professionals*	4	4	0	2	10
None	0	1	1	0	2
Formal Support Systems					
Specifically Adequate**	3	7	1	6	17
Health Services	2	4	1	3	10
Fire Protection	1	3	0	2	6
Police Protection	0	0	0	1	1
Specifically Inadequate**	7	3	1	5	16
Police Protection	3	1	0	3	7
Fire Protection	4	0	0	1	5
Child Care Services	0	2	1	0	3
Public Health	0	0	0	1	1

*Bankers, attorneys, school counselors, ag specialists, approximately one each.

**Perceptions of 10 women. In addition 7 women perceived formal support systems as generally adequate and two perceived them as generally inadequate.

Table 9. Extended Family Relationships

Interview Question 21	Response Frequency Lifestyles FCW N=6	FW N=6	EFW N=3	NFW N=4	Total Response Frequency
Relationships Are					
Good, Close	3	5	2	3	13
Good, Close To Most	3	0	0	1	4
Not Close, No Extended Relatives Alive	0	1	1	0	2

Table 10. Educational Levels Of Rural Family Members

Interview Questions 3,4,5	Response Frequency Rural Wives FCW N=6	FW N=6	EFW N=3	NFW N=4	ALL N=19	Husbands N=19	Children 18 & Over N=29
8 Years	0	1	0	0	1	4	1
9 + Years	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
12 Years	3	3	0	3	9	13	18
12 + Years	1	1	2	0	4	0	4
13 + Years	0	1	1	0	2	0	0
14 Years	1	0	0	0	1	1	2
16 Years	0	0	0	1	1	1	4

Table 11. Educational Interests Of Rural Women

Interview Questions 22,23,24,25	Response Frequency Lifestyles FCW N=6	FW N=6	EFW N=3	NFW N=4	Total Response Frequency
Farming Operation*	4	3	2	N.A.	9
Swine & Cattle	3	0	0		3
Farm Economy	1	0	1		1
Government Programs	0	1	0		1
Cinch bugs, water & soil conservation	0	1	0		1
Hybrids & Chemicals	0	0	1		1
Where to get advice	0	1	0		1
Leisure Time Activities	4	1	0	4	9
Knitting & Crocheting	1	1	0	0	2
Ceramics	1	0	0	0	1
Sewing, crafts, gardening	1	0	0	0	1
Tennis	1	0	0	0	1
Creative writing	0	0	0	1	1
Sewing, history,	0	0	0	1	1
Crafts	0	0	0	1	1
Crocheting, gardening	0	0	0	1	1
Family Life	2	1	2	2	7
Parenting	1	0	0	1	2
Health	1	0	1	1	3
Understanding problems of others	0	1	0	0	1
New products	0	0	1	0	1
Employment**	N.A.	1	0	1	2
Business machines, L.P.N.		0	0	1	1
Refresher typing		1	0	0	1

*Non-farm wives were not asked, Total N=15.
**Only employed women or those considering employment in future were asked, Total N=7.

Table 12. Present Opportunities for Obtaining New Skills or New Information

Interview Question 26	Multiple Response Frequency Lifestyles FCW N=6	FW N=6	EFW N=3	NFW N=4	Total Response Frequency
Informal	9	7	2	5	23
Extension	4	5	1	2	12
Farm Magazines	3	2	1	0	6
Library	0	0	0	2	2
Free University	1	0	0	1	2
Craft shop	1	0	0	0	1
Formal	5	3	4	7	19
Community college	2	1	2	3	8
University	3	2	1	1	7
High school adult education	0	0	0	2	2
Professional seminars	0	0	1	0	1
Vo-tech school	0	0	0	1	1
Other People	3	0	0	2	5
Veterinarian	1	0	0	0	1
Friends	1	0	0	0	1
Congressman	1	0	0	0	1
School counselor	0	0	0	1	1
Employer	0	0	0	1	1

Table 13. Improving Educational Opportunities For Rural Women

Interview Question 27	Response Frequency Lifestyles FCW N=6	FW N=6	EFW N=3	NFW N=4	Total Response Frequency
Opportunity Could Be Improved By:					
Courses relevant to rural farm women	5	1	0	0	6
Daytime classes	0	3	0	1	4
More variety	1	1	0	1	3
Better advertising & course descriptions	2	0	1	0	3
Opportunity Is Not The Problem:					
Problem is distance, time and expense	1	2	0	1	4
Problem is attitude	0	0	0	1	1
Adequate as is	1	0	2	0	3
Don't know	2	2	0	1	5

Table 14. Perceived Differences In Concerns Of Rural And Urban Women

Interview Question 28	Response Frequency Lifestyles FCW N=6	FW N=6	EFW N=3	NFW N=4	Total Response Frequency
Concerns of Rural Women:					
Involved In Husband's Business Lives	6	2	1	0	9
Rural Environment	0	2	2	4	8
Rural-Urban Concerns Basically The Same	0	1	0	0	1
No Answer	0	1	0	0	1

Table 15. Perceived Differences In Opportunities Of Rural And Urban Women

Interview Question 29	Response Frequency Lifestyles FCW N=6	FW N=6	EFW N=3	NFW N=4	Total Response Frequency
Opportunities Rural Women Have:	2	4	0	2	8
Enjoyment of environment, variety of outdoor activities					
Opportunities Rural Women Do No Have:	3	1	2	2	8
Ease of access to out of home interests & activities, employment opportunities, cultural opportunities					
No Difference In Opportunities	0	1	1	0	2
Don't Know	1	0	0	0	1

Table 16. Satisfactions of Adult Life By Ten Year Periods

Interview Question 30	Multiple Response Frequency						Total Response Frequency
	Young Adulthood*	Middle Adulthood		Maturity		Old Age	
	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70 Plus	
	N=6	N=19	N=19	N=19	N=19	N=19	
Satisfactions							
Parenting	3	17	9	4	2	3	38
Career/employment	4	4	1	0	0	0	9
Marriage	2	0	1	1	3	0	7
Move to Farm	2	0	1	0	0	0	3
Enjoying friends	2	1	1	1	0	0	5
Financial security	0	4	7	6	2	1	20
Good Health	0	3	0	0	4	5	12
Organizational involvement	0	2	0	1	0	0	3
Increased leisure	0	2	3	5	4	3	17
Travel	0	0	0	1	4	0	5
Grandchildren	0	0	1	6	1	2	10
Retirement	0	0	2	6	6	2	16
Unique satisfactions**	1	2	1	0	0	0	4
Attitude							
Nothing satisfying	0	0	1	2	5	8	16
Always something satisfying	0	0	0	2	1	3	6

**Unique satisfactions were those related to a particular event, eg. a daughters trip to Europe.

*Included perceptions of six young women only.

Table 17. Selected Satisfactions of Adult Life (30-70) By Lifestyle & Age Of Respondent

Selected Satisfactions*	Multiple Response Frequency								Total Response Frequency
	Lifestyles				Age of Respondent				
	FCW N=6	FW N=6	EFW N=3	NFW N=4	Women 21-29 N=5	Women 29-35 N=3	Women 48-53 N=6	Women 55-62 N=5	
Parenting	11[a]	12	5	7	6	2	14	13	35
Leisure & Travel	6	4	3	9	6	3	6	7	22
Financial Security	7	3	4	6	5	3	7	5	20
Retirement	7	4	1	4	7	1	3	5	16
Negative Attitude	4	7	3	2	6	5	3	2	16

*Satisfactions were selected that had high response frequency in Table 16.

[a]Women identified the same satisfaction for several life stages.

Table 18. Frustrations of Adult Life By Ten Year Periods

Interview Question 31	Multiple Response Frequency						Total Response Frequency
	Young Adulthood*	Middle Adulthood		Maturity		Old Age	
	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70 Plus	
	N=6	N=19	N=19	N=19	N=19	N=19	
Frustrations:							
Financial struggle	5	8	7	4	4	3	31
Ill-health	0	4	3	2	9	11	29
Parenting	0	2	6	6	0	0	14
Career/employment	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Use of leisure	0	0	1	1	3	0	5
Aging/death of parents	0	0	2	1	0	0	3
Retirement	0	0	0	1	3	0	4
Physically aging	0	0	0	3	1	0	4
Widowhood	0	0	0	0	1	4	5
Dependence	0	0	0	1	1	4	6
Unique frustrations**	1	4	0	0	2	0	6
Attitude							
Age is a frustration	0	0	2	3	3	6	14
Nothing frustrating	1	2	3	1	0	0	7

**Unique frustrations were those related to a particular individual, eg. inadequate education for a child with special needs.

*Included perceptions of six young women only.

Table 19. Selected Frustrations of Adult Life (30-70) By Lifestyle & Age of Respondent

Selected Frustrations*	Multiple Response Frequency								Total Response Fequency
	Lifestyles				Age of Respondent				
	FCW N=6	FW N=6	EFW N=3	NFW N=4	Women 21-29 N=5	Women 29-35 N=3	Women 48-53 N=6	Women 55-62 N=5	
Ill-health	6[a]	8	3	12	7	3	13	6	29
Financial struggle	7	4	7	8	6	5	10	5	26
Parenting	7	4	1	2	3	3	2	6	14
Negative attitude	2	8	2	2	4	3	3	4	14

*Frustrations were selected that had high response frequency in Table 18.

[a]Women identified the same satisfaction for several life stages.

Table 20. "Best Years" of Life By Age of Respondent

Interview Question 32	Response Frequency				Total Response Fequency
	Women 21-27 N=5	Women 29-35 N=3	Women 48-53 N=5	Women 55-62 N=6	
Best Years of Life					
20-29	5	2	2	1	10
30-39	0	1	2	0	3
40-49	0	0	0	1	1
50-59	0	0	1	1	2
Not specific	0	0	0	1	1
No favorites	0	0	0	2	2

Table 21. Things That Would Make Life Better By Lifestyle And Age Of Respondent

Interview Question 33	Response Frequency: Lifestyles				Response Frequency: Age of Respondent				Total Response Frequency
	FCW N=6	FW N=6	EFW N=3	NFW N=4	Women 21-29 N=5	Women 29-35 N=3	Women 48-53 N=6	Women 55-62 N=5	
Choice:									
Improved Finances	4	1	2	2	4	1	1	3	9
Good Health	1	5	0	1	0	1	4	2	7
Travel	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	2	3
Improved World Conditions	1	2	0	0	1	0	0	2	3
Improvements For Children & Grandchildren	1	2	0	0	0	0	2	1	3
Good Friends	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
More Time With Family	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	2
Retirement	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	2
General Contentment	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Nothing: Satisfield	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	3
Unique	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	2

RURAL WOMEN: PERCEPTIONS OF ADULT LIFE

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of Family And Child Development

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1980

Perceptions of activities, interests, satisfactions and frustrations of adult life were studied through interviews with nineteen rural women. The area sample included all women ages 21 to 65 who resided in an open country rural township in Kansas. Since there has been little research with specific focus on rural women, the purposes of this study were to provide visibility and opportunity for rural women to express themselves and to describe their perceptions of adult life.

Results described four lifestyles expressed by farm and non-farm rural women. Farm-career wives were contributing on a daily basis to the labor and management of the farming operation. These women identified farm involvement as role of major responsibility and major satisfaction. Nearly one-third of the women in this sample were farm-career wives. Farm-wives contributed a variety of labor to the farming operation on an occassional basis and identified roles of responsibility and satisfaction in terms of home and farm. Employed farm wives held part-time jobs away from home and were less involved with the farming operation. These women identified satisfaction with home and employment. Non-farm wives were married to men employed in area businesses and schools. Most of these women identified responsibility and satisfaction as related to homemaker-wife-mother roles. Non-farm families had chosen open country rural residence and non-farm wives expressed satisfaction with that choice.

Lifestyles differentiated women's interest in employment and

continuing education and their activity in use of leisure time and organizational involvement. Satisfactions of rural women were close family relationships and rural residence. Parenting was perceived as the major satisfaction of all adult life. Concerns of rural women were economic; financial struggle was the major frustration of all adult life. Some degree of frustration was expressed with isolation and loneliness. Urban women's ease of access to employment and out of home activities was perceived as the major difference in opportunities of rural and urban women.