

Bridges for Kansas families: The role of social capital and hardiness in alleviating poverty

by

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## **Abstract**

For the past decade, family poverty has been growing steadily by 24.3% within the state of Kansas. The increase in poverty has inspired community-based efforts and volunteer-driven initiatives to grow to support families and to increase social connection and access to resources. Prior research has found that families in chronic poverty experience higher stress, higher conflict, and lower means of social connection. In the present study, a Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach was used to explore the "lived experiences" of parents and adolescents in poverty and the role of social capital and hardiness as a way to cope with the stresses associated with living in poverty. Separate semi-structured interviews were conducted with adolescents and their adult parents from three communities across Kansas. The research team transcribed the interview data. Qualitative data analysis through grounded theory was used to code the transcripts into separate themes. The results from the study reveal that a) building social capital (ie., bonding and bridging) is different between adolescents and parents and b) hardiness is developed through learned positive coping and the social connections with others. This research has future implications on policy development and strengths-based approaches to address the stress of living in poverty for individuals and families.

*Keywords:* family poverty, social capital, hardiness, adaptation, qualitative analysis

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Dedication.....	viii
Chapter 1 - Introduction.....	1
Family Poverty.....	2
Purpose of Study.....	3
Chapter 2 - Literature Review.....	5
Theoretical Framework.....	5
Family poverty.....	5
Cumulative theory of poverty.....	6
Chronic versus transient poverty.....	7
Stress of Poverty.....	7
Coping Mechanisms.....	9
Development of Resilience.....	11
Social Capital.....	12
Feature of Resilience - Hardiness.....	14
The Current Study.....	15
Research Questions.....	16
Chapter 3 - Method.....	17
Study Framework.....	17
Procedure.....	18
Adult Interviews.....	21
Adolescent Interviews.....	21
Data Analysis.....	22
Chapter 4 - Findings.....	25
Adolescent Social Capital.....	25
Adolescent Hardiness.....	26
Adult Social Capital.....	27
Adult Hardiness.....	30

Chapter 5 - Discussion .....	32
Social Capital Bonding and Bridging are Different Between Generations .....	32
Hardiness and Coping are Learned Across Generations.....	34
Limitations .....	36
Implications and Future Research and Practice .....	37
References.....	41
Appendix A - Study Overview .....	52
Appendix B - Consent form.....	53
Appendix C - Assent form .....	55
Appendix D - Interview Script.....	57
Appendix E - IRB Protocol.....	61

## List of Tables

Table 3.1 Participant Demographics.....	19
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## **Dedication**

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## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

Despite efforts at the local, state, and federal levels to combat all forms of economic inequality, poverty and in particular, family poverty has grown steadily across the United States within the past decade (Fox, Garfinkel, Kaushal, Waldfogel, & Wimer, 2014). Within the United States, the 2015 U.S. Census report shows the official poverty rate to be around 13.5%, where 10.4% of families live in poverty. In addition, 19.7% of children under age 18 lived in poverty (Proctor, Semega, & Kollar, 2016). Generally speaking, poverty is defined as the lack of economic or social resources caused by structural, societal, or community-based factors (Bradshaw, 2007; Rank, 2001). The concept and definition of poverty are relative based on how researchers, policymakers, and community members seek to address it within the context of the needs of individuals and families (Bradshaw, 2007). The inability of an individual to access the necessary resources to live in relative comfort and maintain a sense of well-being is a component of poverty. Prior research has shown that poverty has been increasingly related to higher crime rates (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997) and lower levels of social connection and social capital (Putnam, 2000). On a societal level these factors can have an adverse effect on later health outcomes among groups and neighborhoods (Rank, 2001). Within the context of a family, poverty is characterized by chronic stress experienced by family members (Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz, & Simons, 1994; Seccombe, 2002), child behavior problems (Brooks-Gunn, J., & Duncan, 1997; McLoyd, 1998) and adverse developmental outcomes in socioemotional functioning (McLoyd, 1998), and generalized anxiety (Spence, Najman, Bor, O'Callaghan, & Williams, 2002).

Poverty is as complex as it is contextual, in the sense that it impacts families and family members differently. For example, poverty is not necessarily a causal factor related to adverse

outcomes in children (Yoshikawa, Aber, & Beardslee, 2012). Instead, family poverty is represented through the processes and mechanisms within a family that positively or negatively affect the health and development of children. Mechanisms of socialization and social development within community, family, and individual contexts all impact a child's ability to cope and adapt to the adversity within a family context. Generally speaking, living in a family that lives in poverty may illicit overt reactions to the financial stress within the family which can lead to self-regulation and behavior problems in children (Yoshikawa, Weisner, & Lowe, 2006). The interaction of these factors, as revealed by previous research in this area, have far reaching implications on the parent-child transmission of stress and behaviors (Schleider, Patel, Krumholz, Chorpita, & Weisz, 2015). However, there is limited understanding of the positive outcomes related to the adversity of living in poverty within the family that can lead to greater coping and adaptation among family members. More importantly, more research is needed that examines the role of social connection and the resilience attribute of hardiness that help explain the underlying behaviors that lead to successful adaptation and coping within a family (Ganellen & Blaney, 1984; Kobasa, 1979). Numerous research studies have highlighted the role of resilience and the development of resilience, especially in children and adolescents (Boyden & Mann, 2005; Machell, Disabato, & Kashdan, 2016), as well as within single mothers (Taylor & Conger, 2017). However, research and inquiry is needed to understand the micro-level factors and mechanisms that influence social connection and hardiness in impoverished families. Ultimately, that improved understanding may inform the processes surrounding the development of programs, interventions, and policies that target poverty within families.

## **Family Poverty**

The family, like any social group, is made up of members related through a common bond or origin, such as marriage, birth, or adoption (United States Census, 2017). The family and its members can be impacted by a variety of factors that can add or detract to the strength and resiliency of its members and how they relate to each other. How family members address adversity can be an opportunity for growth as well as an opportunity to assess stressors as positive. The ability of a family to respond positively to stressors and handle adverse outcomes may depend on the strength of bonds between family members, especially between parents and children (Morris et al., 2017). Consequently, the strength of the connection between family members and how families respond to poverty is of interest to inform prevention and intervention efforts.

The context and issue of poverty is complex and multifaceted, and therefore requires systematic investigation and understanding. With this in mind, the focus of the present analysis is centered on the family member processes impacted by poverty. Family members are at the center of this discussion because it focuses on the experience of poverty through multiple generations. Consequently, examining the lived experiences of parents and adolescents in a family offers key insights into how poverty shapes the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that are passed down through the generations. In addition, as parents cope and adapt to the stressors of poverty they inherently transmit the same or shared behaviors, values, or beliefs that are reflective of living in poverty towards their own children through modeling and social learning (Conger, McCarty, Yang, Lahey, & Kropp, 1984; Murphey, 1992).

### **Purpose of Study**

The main purpose behind this examination of poverty among family members in Kansas is to improve understanding of family poverty by offering insights into the roles of hardiness and

social connection and their interactions. In addition, by providing, adolescents and their adult parents the opportunity to share their experiences of living in poverty. There will be greater awareness of the need for community action and initiatives that help to improve the lives of those in poverty. This study builds upon current social capital research as it applies to low-income families, while broadening the understanding of hardiness characteristics as it relates to individuals and families facing adversity. The framework of the research allows for parents and their adolescent children the opportunity to share their experiences as they relate to social connectedness and hardiness and the similarities, differences, and links between the two. As of yet, prior research has not studied the possible interactions between social connection and hardiness in parents and adolescent children in low-income families.

## Chapter 2 - Literature Review

### Theoretical Framework

**Family poverty.** Although there are many angles and perspectives to take that bring focus and clarity to understanding poverty on a variety of levels, this research focuses on the impacts of poverty on family member social capital and resilience. Specifically, there is research that focuses on poverty through a systemic, macro-level lens where sociopolitical and social stratification factors occur that produce the income disparities that our society has seen. As important as this perspective is in understanding the overarching factors associated with poverty, this research will be concerned with the micro-level associations between the prevalence of chronic, family poverty within the context of communities within Kansas. Instead, the impact of poverty on dynamics between a parent and their adolescent child social capital and resilience will be explored. Poverty is viewed through the multigenerational conceptual lens where the attitudes, behaviors, and values of a family are passed down. Understanding family member perceptions of social capital and resilience buffers is foundational to understanding the impact of poverty. Low-income families, like most income groups, have a set of risk and resiliency processes related to coping behaviors, parenting styles, and general patterns of behavior that are typically transmitted across generations (Serbin & Karp, 2004). Due to the high stress and strain from the perceived lack of economic and social resources associated with many low-income families, there are certain characteristics that may shape how a family in poverty adapts. As families face lower incomes there is a greater increase in long-term, health-related issues across parents and children (Wadsworth, Raviv, Santiago, & Etter, 2011). The influence of poverty on a family and its members is complex. Prior research has outlined how the stress of poverty forms the type of environment that children grow up in which can influence later developmental outcomes (Evans,

2004). Over time, the repeated exposure to the stress of poverty can have long-term consequences on the development of children (Evans & English, 2002; Evans & Kim, 2012). There is evidence that suggests that the quality of the relationship between parent and child are affected from the cumulative stress of living in poverty (Conger et al., 1994). The family and its members as the context of this study provides a framework towards understanding the deeper, more intimate level processes of how a family functions with stress and adversity.

**Cumulative theory of poverty.** Poverty itself is considered a complex and multifaceted issue, not necessarily because of its causes and characteristics across a variety of situations, but also because of the complex beliefs and attitudes it instills and harbors within a society (Bradshaw, 2007). Therefore, the challenge in defining and explaining an issue such as poverty lies in the sociopolitical context, as well as the attempts to address poverty on a community-level. From this standpoint, the ability to enact policies and social programs to alleviate poverty stems from the theory of poverty that policy-makers and community organizers utilize to address the needs within a community (Bradshaw, 2007). Contemporary theories of poverty revolve around individual deficiencies, cultural and structural. The framework that is utilized for this study draws upon a theory and explanation of poverty that is centered on a cumulative and cyclical approach, which builds off the other theories of poverty (Bradshaw, 2007). This approach to poverty is chiefly informed by families and family members. More specifically, the ability of a family to maintain a standard of living is partly dependent upon the stability of the social network in which they are embedded (Bradshaw, 2007). The cumulative theory of poverty identifies the stressors associated with living in poverty, relating to limited access to resources, low-income work, and the perceived lack of opportunities that combine to produce unequal outcomes for a family and its members (Bradshaw, 2007). Not only does the cumulative

cycle of poverty, but the cumulative risks associated with that cycle that can have adverse consequences on children's ability to respond to stress (Evans & Kim, 2012).

**Chronic versus transient poverty.** This study not only addresses the complex factors associated with living in poverty, but also the chronic aspects that extends across generations. The difference between chronic and transient poverty lies in its duration. Transient poverty is centered on the short-term consequences of living in poverty, through a single event (loss of job, relocation of a family) (Kimberlin, 2013). However, chronic poverty deals with the cumulative processes associated with living below the necessary means to survive and it involves the generational transfer of attitudes, beliefs, and coping behaviors common with living in poverty (Kimberlin, 2013). Chronic poverty can produce high levels of stress associated with living with fewer resources and social connections with others. In addition, the process of delineating chronic from transient poverty in families is challenging due to how it is measured. Poverty is typically measured through a variety of measures based on the disparity between economic resources and the basic needs of a family (Roosa, Deng, Nair, & Lockhart Burrell, 2005). However, the identification and measurement of poverty from the perspective of those family members living in poverty are often under-represented or are not acknowledged. Prior studies have focused on processes, mechanisms, and consequences underlying living in poverty, but few studies have given attention to real-life experiences of those living in poverty. This study seeks to illuminate the nature of poverty through the perspectives of parents and adolescents, and to give voice to those perspectives.

### **Stress of Poverty**

The concept of stress is the result of the relationship between the environment, unexpected and/or adverse situations and the individual. However, it is an individual's

perception of those events, situations, or circumstance that can ultimately lead to distress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Furthermore, the meaning that an individual assigns to stress depends largely on how well an individual can cognitively appraise, or assess the potential stress and to identify the means to respond and cope in a positive or negative way (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It is this dynamic relationship that marks the foundation for this study. Living in poverty is a complicated type of stress that is based on economics, finances, and social relationships, and bias towards those in poverty. This type of stress is not normal stress that comes and goes, but is exemplified through persistent stress that impacts behaviors, attitudes, physical and mental health (Power, 2004; Santiago, Wadsworth, & Stump, 2011). Within this study, the stress of living in poverty and the hardiness (ie., resilience) that may moderate that stress are examined across generations, where different positive or negative coping mechanisms are transmitted and adopted to help family members survive daily pressures. Typically, living in poverty perpetuates other deficiencies, which further compromise other aspects of an individual's life, especially regarding the ability of an individual to adequately cope with stress or to establish positive social connections.

The stressors faced by families in poverty are unique depending on their access to resources and the social connection with others. Stress within a low-income family can manifest itself in a variety of ways, and is usually more chronic and cumulative over time (Evans & English, 2002), which can lead to a variety of impacts on child and adolescent health and well-being (Wadsworth et al., 2008). Children and adolescents in low-income environments typically experience a range of behavior and emotional outcomes related to stress, anxiety, depression, and violence (Evans & English, 2002; Hammack, Robinson, Crawford, & Li, 2004). Brain function and development may also be affected (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012). In addition, low-income



parents may experience greater anxiety and stress towards the threats and hassles of parenting (Finegood, Raver, DeJoseph, & Blair, 2017). The connection is clear from previous research that having a lower socioeconomic status can have long-term consequences both on an individual's mental and physical health (Evans & Kim, 2010; Santiago et al., 2011). It is clear that chronic poverty impacts the physical and mental health of those living in poverty. Poverty also impacts the social connectedness of poor families leading to social isolation. A reason behind this lies in where low-income individuals and families typically live. Low-income neighborhoods are associated with higher levels of crime, lack of social cohesion, and are more crowded and chaotic (Evans, 2004). In addition, low-quality housing may create further stress on the parent, limiting their ability regulate stress which can impact the socioemotional development of children and adolescents (Coley, Leventhal, Lynch, & Kull, 2013). Commonly, the level of one's income tends to be an indicator of where an individual lives and works. Meaning that the income disparities experienced in the United States tend to isolate groups of people and communities by the similarity of their backgrounds (Krivo et al., 2013; Tigges, Browne, & Green, 1998). Increasing segregation across all aspects of our society has resulted in concentrations in low-income neighborhoods that are comprised of similar groups of people along racial, ethnic, and income-based indicators (Small & Newman, 2001; Tigges et al., 1998). This in turn can influence access to necessary resources (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997), parenting practices (Pinderhughes, Nix, Foster, & Jones, 2001), and result in the the possible lack of social support and connection (Stewart, et al., 2008).

### **Coping Mechanisms**

Within the family, the stress of living in poverty has many consequences that can shape an individual's development and ability to cope with adversity. The stress experienced by a

parent living in poverty can be transmitted to children through discipline, parenting styles, and coping mechanisms (Power, 2004). Coping mechanisms within a family are learned and are often transmitted from parent to child. Children observe and model the behaviors and responses of parents to environmental stimuli and learn to respond and behave in a similar way (Power, 2004). The coping mechanisms of a parent, either positive or negative, influence how a child copes with stress and likewise, a child's coping mechanisms can also influence how a parent copes with the stress (Power, 2004; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2016). In addition, how a child responds and copes with the stress of poverty can also be influenced by their peer groups and quality of neighborhoods (Day, Ji, DuBois, Silverthorn, & Flay, 2016). Living in poverty and the stress that it produces can limit the ability of a parent to teach and model positive coping mechanisms for their children. In addition, parents can learn to control or buffer the potential stressful circumstances that may limit a child's ability to effectively cope (Finegood et al., 2017; Power, 2004). From the perspective of a family member living in poverty, a general lack of resources or community support can lead to ineffective coping mechanisms that may temporarily buffer the chronic stress associated with poverty. For example, a parent living under the chronic stress of poverty may turn to maladaptive coping behaviors, such as drug use or violence, because they lack the resources and social connections within the community to form effective and adaptive coping behaviors (Walsh, Senn, & Carey, 2013). In addition, children may exhibit the same coping behaviors and responses to stress as their own parents. Instilling positive coping mechanisms and behaviors within children can lead to greater emotional self-regulation and self-esteem (Buckner, Mezzacappa, & Beardslee, 2003). On the other hand, negative coping mechanisms can be exposed through internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Evans & English, 2002). Due to the stress of poverty, ineffective coping mechanisms that are learned within the

family can produce non-normative developmental and behavioral outcomes for children (Evans et al., 2015). As an alternative, this study examines the positive and adaptive coping behaviors in response to the stress of poverty from the perspectives of adolescents and their parents.

### **Development of Resilience**

Prior research and inquiry into the stress experienced by family members living in poverty has resulted in an understanding of the individual-level processes and mechanisms that outline developmental and educational outcomes (Engle & Black, 2008). In addition, that research has focused on the deficits incurred by families living in poverty and the adverse outcomes that occur in the context of ineffective coping and adaptation. However, research has grown to discuss the efficacy and development of resilience in the context of adversity. Previous studies have discussed the role of resilience to produce effective coping mechanisms for those facing adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). The concept of resilience is a multidimensional concept and it generally refers to a dynamic process that allows an individual to successfully adapt to a stressor or adverse circumstance (Masten & Monn, 2015). The pathways of resilience and successful adaptation are seen through the processes and mechanisms within the family and its members. A family and its members coping with the stress of poverty rely on the strengths and resources available to them (Masten & Monn, 2015). In addition, a family living in poverty is embedded within and relies upon the social structure and community they live in to meet the needs of each member and this evokes a need for social connection. Furthermore, the connection between a family living in poverty and the resources within the wider community can contribute to the development of social capital and hardiness to positively cope and adapt to the stress of living in poverty.

## **Social Capital**

Due to the social and economic construction of our society individuals and families tend to be geographically distributed along socioeconomic status differences within inner-city neighborhoods (Massey, 1990; Reardon & Bischoff, 2011). In addition, poverty tends to isolate individuals due to the social stratification due to the post-industrial structure of society (Massey, 1996). The idea behind social connection stems from the concepts of social capital developed by Coleman (1988) which places value on social relations between people (Lewandowski, 2008). The strength of those relationships is predicated on the ability to develop trust and reciprocity over time (Fukuyama, 1995; Onyx & Bullen, 2000). Trust in this context develops over time through continual investment in the relationships and social support system in an individual's life. However, adversity can limit an individual's ability to maintain the positive and nurturing connections with others (Furstenberg, 1993; Sampson et al., 1997). The quality of social connections can have the effect of positive coping despite the stress of poverty. Scholarly literature on social connection and social capital examines the role of the social environment and social relationships that relates to an individual's opportunities, experiences, and decisions in their life (Coleman, 1988). The concept of social capital is defined by its different meanings and operations depending on the context in which it is used. From the work of Kawachi and Berkman (2000) and others (Lochner, Kawachi, & Kennedy, 1999), social capital refers to the macro-level associations that whole societies and economies are built upon. However, further discussion of the concept of social capital has led to a micro-level approach that centers on the relationships between individuals within the context of communities, especially within at-risk youth (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995) as well as its application within individual relationships (Portes, 1998). Essentially, social capital refers to the quality of relationship with other people based on

trust-building (Fukuyama, 1995), reciprocity (Onyx & Bullen, 2000), and social norms (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000).

The understanding of social capital can be applied to a variety of settings and contexts, suggesting at least in part a conceptual uniformity (Halpern, 2005). Social capital is an umbrella term to the multilayered interactions and associations that occurs between individuals, communities, and nations. Ultimately, these associations and interactions generate greater returns on social investment, which further builds the social capital, or social resources of a population. According to Putnam (2000) in order to build the social capital potential of a population, there needs to be micro-level interactions at play that encourage trust-building and reciprocity guided by the social norms in a society. Within this study which examines the characteristics of family members in poverty, building social capital refers to the micro-level interactions associated with social connections such as, bonding and bridging. From the work of Putnam (2000), bonding is distinguished by the connections formed between groups of similar people, with similar attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (i.e. families or close group of friends). The concept of bridging delineates from bonding in that it is related to the value placed on connections across different groups of people (i.e. social movements and community organizations) (Putnam, 2000). Within the context of this study, individuals living in poverty utilize bonding to survive (de Souza Briggs, 1998). However, as their connections grow they may be able to leverage more resources through the use of bridging, which allows them to thrive in a variety of situations (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Furthermore, the concepts of bonding and bridging are fundamental to the understanding that social capital is built upon the micro-level relationships between different individuals within a community setting. Through mutual interdependence and relationship-building, a family and its members living in poverty can begin to successfully cope and adapt to the stress of poverty

(Feeney & Collins, 2014). The social connection with others provides the conduit for greater reserves of social capital. This study examines the role of social connection to produce necessary levels of social capital that can aid a family living in poverty to develop resilience despite adversity.

### **Feature of Resilience - Hardiness**

Research into the concept of hardiness stems from the work of Kobasa (1979) and Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn (1982), which posits that hardiness develops within individuals faced with stress. More importantly, hardiness is defined by how an individual grows and develops meaning out of a potentially stressful event in one's life. Hardiness within the context of this study, is defined as a personality characteristic that enables an individual to adapt despite stressful circumstances or environments (Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn, 1982). In the face of adversity, hardiness is seen as a contributing factor found in individuals that leads to positive outcomes, coping abilities and, ultimately, resilience. Previous work by Maddi, Kobasa, and Hoover (1979) have outlined three main components of hardiness: commitment, control, and challenge that facilitate an individual's adaptation to life stressors in a different way that results in a different outcome. Commitment refers to the ability of an individual to remain steadfast to a task or responsibility (Kobasa et al., 1982). The idea of control is related to the ability of an individual to regulate their emotions and behaviors that may influence a particular outcome (Kobasa et al., 1982). Finally, challenge reflects an individual's attitude that life events or situations can be positive experiences (Kobasa et al., 1982). Chronic poverty that occurs within a family system poses a unique set of challenges and stressors that require adaptation on the part of the individuals in order to live healthy and fulfilling lives. Individuals who have hardy personality characteristics are more likely to have a more positive outlook on the stress of

poverty and are more adept at controlling their environment or circumstances to produce desired outcomes (Kobasa, 1979). Research into hardiness focuses on health outcomes, specifically how hardy characteristics influence an individual's ability to cope in a positive way leading to better health outcomes (Kobasa et al.,1982). In addition, studies have examined the connection between stress, hardiness, and levels of social support that allows an individual to foster adaptive coping within their lives (Ganellen & Blaney, 1984; Pengilly & Dowd, 2000). Along with nurturing levels of social support, the hardiness attribute can develop within families and its members to lead to better resiliency outcomes over time.

### **The Current Study**

Within the state of Kansas, family poverty has grown steadily, with 18.4% of children living in poverty, an increase of 24% in the last decade (Anderson, et al., 2015). Over the past decade due to lack of adequate safety nets (Kansas Action for Children, 2016b) and meaningful living wage work (Lerman & Skidmore, 1999) poverty has become an increasing problem for the state. There is evidence of increasing need for food assistance programs for children within schools (Kansas Action for Children, 2016a). Furthermore, these systemic impacts have perpetuated the experiences of poverty felt by many individuals, families, and communities. Previous research in this area have examined the impact of poverty on a family, specifically as it relates to developmental outcomes and responses to stress. However, what is not known is how adolescents and their adult parents differ in their abilities to successfully adapt to the stress of poverty within the concepts of social connection and hardiness. The transmission of those abilities along with perspectives of resilience are also elements of interest in the study. Consequently, this study, which uses a community-based participatory approach, examines the

experiences of adults and adolescents living in poverty as they relate to social connection and hardiness.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the differences and similarities in the experiences of parents and adolescents who live in poverty?
2. How do social connection and hardiness influence family member coping with the stress of poverty?



## Chapter 3 - Method

### Study Framework

A qualitative approach was utilized for this study to examine the lived experiences of adolescents and their adult parents living in poverty. A qualitative methodology allows for a rich discussion to occur that gives participants the opportunity to express and discuss their experiences of living in poverty in a safe and supportive environment. In addition, the lead researcher determined that conducting interviews was the most appropriate option to maximize the exploratory nature of the study. The choice to conduct interviews also gave the participants the opportunity to articulate their experiences of living in poverty, relating to their attitudes, beliefs, social connections, and the role of hardiness. In effect, conducting interviews allowed for a unique, dynamic, and organic process to take place that gave context to our understanding of poverty in Kansas. The development of the interview questions and script stemmed from the concepts of grounded theory through the work of Corbin and Strauss (2015). Elements of grounded theory provided a conceptual foundation that allowed the lead researcher to develop questions around the constructs of social capital and hardiness. Lastly, grounded theory provided the framework for the organization of the data into codes and themes that could be analyzed by the research team.

The aforementioned items led to the decision to use a Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach to engage in the research. A CBPR approach engages stakeholders in the process of conducting, analyzing, and disseminating data (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998). Stakeholders at the community level have a unique understanding of the extent of poverty within their respective communities and therefore represent a transfer of knowledge, resources, and various perspectives that can aid in the poverty alleviation efforts (Israel et al., 1998). This

method focuses on the collaboration between researchers, community stakeholders, and participants to discuss the unique needs and experiences of families in poverty within each community setting. The CBPR framework was utilized for the purpose of this study because it emphasized a collaborative approach to learn about the experiences of family poverty and to involve participants from community-based programs in three Kansas communities. Because poverty is seen as a multifaceted and complex issue requiring multiple perspectives from community stakeholders and agencies, the CBPR method allowed for a multilayered view of what it means to be poor in Kansas. Also, the knowledge gained through the collaborative and relational aspects of the CBPR approach has far-reaching implications on the health and well-being of individual, families, and communities (Israel et al., 1998).

### **Procedure**

This study was supported and funded through a Kansas State University Community Engagement and Community Development (CECD) grant. The funding from the CECD grant supported the recruitment of community-based programs where participants were drawn. Participants in this study were adults and their adolescent children living in poverty. For this study, “poverty” was defined as living below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guideline (HHS, 2017). To account for potential bias within the study, the lead researcher initiated efforts to learn about the roles and outreach of community-based agencies and organizations to help alleviate and provide support against the stress for those living in poverty. This effort helped improve the lead researcher’s perspectives and awareness regarding the realities of living in poverty. In addition, these efforts provided context and understanding through which the lead researcher could facilitate effective analysis of the data with minimal bias. Using purposeful sampling, participants were recruited from three poverty alleviation programs from three different small or

mid-size cities in the state of Kansas. To identify potential participants, leaders from each of the non-profit poverty-reduction groups were contacted about the study. These points-of-contacts, who were program coordinators, were educated about the purpose and method of the study, their role in the study, and were given an informative study overview pamphlet (Appendix A). The lead researcher and research assistant met each program coordinator and the governing board for each program to discuss the purpose of the study and their role in it. The governing boards then voted to participate within the study. Once the program coordinators were informed of and accepted participation for the study, they completed human subjects training to be compliant with the university’s IRB requirements (Appendix E). These coordinators then identified and personally contacted potential participants which met the study’s inclusion criteria of: self-identified poor, participating in poverty alleviation programs, and includes parents and their adolescent children for the study. The coordinators at each participating site served as liaisons between the participants and the researchers and arranged times for semi-structured interviews to take place. The coordinators secured a private room to ensure that the interviews would occur in privacy and confidentiality. Prior to the start of the interviews, the lead researcher conducted a meeting with members of research team to discuss potential barriers to the interview and analysis process (ie., bias, perceptions, and attitudes of those living in poverty). The research team was asked to identify and become aware of their own biases and how that could potentially interfere with the analysis of the data collected from the interviews.

**Table 3.1 Participant Demographics**

Participant Demographics (N = 9; 5 adults and 4 adolescents)

<i>Participant #</i>	<i>Site</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>
1	Manhattan	47	F	White	Non-Hispanic

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2	Manhattan	60	F	Mixed	Non-Hispanic
3	Manhattan	15	F	White	Non-Hispanic
4	Ottawa	33	F	White	Non-Hispanic
5	Ottawa	13	F	White/Black	Non-Hispanic
6	McPherson	14	F	White	Non-Hispanic
7	McPherson	17	F	White	Non-Hispanic
8	McPherson	38	F	White	Non-Hispanic
9	McPherson	46	F	White	Non-Hispanic

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The sample for the study included five adults and four adolescents. The majority of the participants included in the study were composed of parent-adolescent dyads, the exception being the participants from the McPherson program. Participants were interviewed using open-ended questions which were developed by the researchers. Individual interviews were conducted for adult and adolescent participants; however, questions for both groups of interviews were developed to reflect the concepts of hardiness and social connection. The script for the hour-long interviews can be found in Appendix D. Before each interview began, participants were provided with and signed informed consent (Appendix B) assent forms (Appendix C) which gave information about the study and informed participants of their right to end the interview at any time. Informed consent for the parents and assent forms for adolescents were also explained verbally as outlined in the interview script, and participants were allowed to ask any questions of the researchers before the interview began. The research team that conducted the interviews included a male, lead researcher and a female, research assistant. The interviews were recorded using audio recorders, which captured the voices of both the participants and the researchers.

## **Adult Interviews**

Adult interviews began with the researchers asking questions about the participants' involvement in the poverty-reduction program as well as which other organizations they had been involved with that have been helpful to them in the past. Next, questions focused on the participants' experience of social connection in their lives. Questions included, *"Thinking about your circle of friends and family, how would you describe the relationship you have with those closest to you?"* and *"Besides your family and friends, how would you describe the relationship or connection you have with those people in the workplace or with other community members (neighbors)?"* In order to provide more depth of conversation, prompts or branching questions were developed.

Next, questions about hardiness were asked. Some specific questions included, *"How are you able to overcome any stressful situation and use it as an opportunity for growth?"* and *"How are you able to stay committed to a task or job to see it through to the end even if it is challenging or stressful?"* At the close of each adult interview, participants were asked whether there was anything they wanted to share that had not been asked by the researchers or any other information they felt was important to be included.

## **Adolescent Interviews**

Adolescent interviews, taking place at the same time as the adult interviews, were modeled after adult interviews; however, the wording of the questions was changed for developmental appropriateness. Before the main research questions were asked, adolescent participants were similarly asked how they got involved in the poverty-reduction group and what outside resources or organizations (if any) they found to have been helpful to them in their time of need. Then, adolescent participants were asked about their experiences of social connection.

Specific questions included “*Can you tell me about your group of friends?*” and “*Are there other people or mentors in your life that are important? If so, in what way?*” As with adult participants, prompts, or branching questions were also a part of the interview script in order to stimulate conversation if needed during the interview.

Next, adolescent participants were asked about hardiness. Specific questions included “*In what ways do you think you can change a stressful situation? What do you do to change a bad situation to make it better?*” and “*Do you think you have the ‘tools’ to face difficulties in your life in a positive way? If so, which tools do you have? Which tools do you think you still need?*” Similarly, as in the adult interviews, adolescent participants were also asked if there was any more information that they would like to share.

### **Data Analysis**

After each interview, audio data was stored securely on the researcher’s computer protected by several passwords. A team of five, supervised undergraduate students transcribed the interviews, following customary transcription format. Each student was trained to transcribe the interviews from transcription examples and guidance from the lead researcher. All undergraduate transcribers signed a nondisclosure agreement which outlined that transcribers would keep all interview data confidential and would not disclose anything learned from the interviews to those not working on the research team.

Once the transcriptions were completed, the analysis was conducted. Analysis took place over a two-week period. Before the initial coding meeting, the research team read through the transcripts to begin the process of conceptualizing the data into codes. Each meeting focused on either the adolescent or parent transcripts. For each transcript, there were at least two rounds of axial and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). During the analysis meetings, the lead

researcher intentionally limited verbalizing his perspectives and perceptions regarding the data so that his potential bias or preconceived notions had little impact on the interpretation of the results. The transcriptions for the adolescents and adult parents were coded separately as to not interject different meanings into the transcriptions and more generally, to not make any initial inferences with the data.

Following the completion of the interview transcriptions, the data from the interviews was coded for themes using coding methods for qualitative data within a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Specifically, the lead researcher and two research assistants were responsible for the coding of the data. The process for coding of data was outlined and was understood by members of the research team. Since the lead researcher already had a conceptual framework of the study, the analysis began through open coding (ie., labeling concepts, defining and developing categories) of the transcriptions. This helped to form a general conceptual framework from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Once the first round of open coding had been completed, the research team further analyzed the data searching for key words and phrases that denoted a possible connection to the constructs of social connection and hardiness. This process was outlined through axial coding (ie., process of relation codes, categories and concepts to each other, via a combination of inductive and deductive thinking) of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Finally, the selective coding (ie., core variable that includes all of the data for an overriding theme) process was utilized to develop concrete themes around social connection and hardiness from the data. Once the general themes were developed, the research team utilized consensus coding analysis to organize the various codes into their respective themes.





## Chapter 4 - Findings

From the coding analysis portion of the study, the data from the interviews were organized into separate themes that were associated with social capital and hardiness. Themes were grouped by parents and adolescents allowing for contrasting of results across generations. The results from the data analysis revealed the individual-level processes between a parent and child living in poverty. It also expanded upon the role of social capital and hardiness as possible coping mechanisms for adolescents and their adult parents.

### Adolescent Social Capital

Results from the adolescent data analysis revealed common themes related to their need for bonding social capital with: a) **peers**, and b) **family members**. Given the developmental stage of the participants it makes sense that they focused on their perceived lack of connection to peers citing a need for quality friendships. One participant revealed that *“The reason why I am very close with my friends [is] because I don’t have a lot of friends”* and they further discussed later on in the interview that *“I’m just always afraid of being alone is like one of my biggest fears. I just can’t stand being alone.”* Another participant discussed that, *“Well I don’t really have a lot of friends at school. I just try to stick to what I need to do. I don’t really go out for the day except for Circles [note: This is the name of the community-based program].”* During the interviews with the adolescents, the research team heard different accounts about strong social bonding within their families. One participant citing that,

*“When mom or dad gets like stressed out, I can tell, like as them what’s wrong and stuff. And usually they’re just tired, and I’ll be like “are you guys like tired” and dad will be like “yup”. And sometimes they’ll just talk to me and I’ll just talk to them and stuff. And to be honest I think I am the one they talk to when they are stressed.”*

Another participant revealed that, *I'd say we have a very open relationship, all of our friendships, and family relationships. Nobody hides anything in our family. Sometimes that's good, sometimes that's bad.*" Among some participants, perspectives revealed strained trust and emotion among family members that were barriers to the development of bonding social capital. One participant revealed that, *"Sometimes I show no emotion on the outside but on the inside I have so much."* With regards to bridging social capital, there were no obvious examples or communications revealed through the interviews.

### **Adolescent Hardiness**

The interviews with adolescents continued with a discussion of hardiness and the adolescents' perceptions of its development in their lives. Several participants mentioned and discussed at length their own ability to control their environment to produce a desired outcome. Three main themes emerged from the interviews: a) **sense of independence** (ie., control), b) **future—focused** (ie., commitment), and c) **coping behaviors** (ie., challenge). One participant described her own sense of being in control as a factor that helped her cope with adversity and stress saying, *"I like to try to figure it out by myself before I ask anyone for help. So I'd rather fail by myself than succeed with someone else."* She later mentioned that,

*"I think it is important for everybody to be independent enough and confident enough. So in the long run, it is going to be good for me cause I know that having that power, I guess, I don't know a better word for it, is important in a situation you could find yourself in. So being able to do something on your own is a great feeling."*

Other participants revealed the importance of focusing on having commitment to their future and orienting decisions towards the life they want in the future, with one participant revealing *"Like sometimes if I come to a stressful situation, like if I think I might come into the situation, I think*

*about what I should probably do. But stuff that I can't prepare for I don't know. Like I've never exactly run into that before.*" However, the same participant revealed that, *"Sometimes when people aren't being all that nice to me, I try to tough it out because I know the future will be worse. I've already gotten a good bite of the future."* Finally, the attempts to use coping behaviors to deal with challenges were revealed through the adolescent interviews. One participant stated, *"I usually listen to music or just talking about other stuff. Or slowly going into what I am stressing about and finding ways that are better ways to cope and get it out kind of thing."* The link between the development of hardiness and bonding social capital was revealed by another participant who stated that,

You have to know how to cope and learn to find what works and what doesn't work.

There is no sense in dwelling in the past, it happened and you got to get over it, you really do, or else you won't be able to move on and so it's like why waste your time on something when you could do something better for yourself and improve your life. I feel like if I needed to do anything I would have the help of my family or my friends, there is always something you could do to make it better.

### **Adult Social Capital**

The interviews with the adult parents resulted in rich discussions related to the construct of bonding and bridging social capital within their lives. Two main themes emerged from the data: a) **early life experiences with family** b) **sense of community**. For one participant, the sense of family bonding was strong throughout the interview, revealing, *"My family is the people who have always been there for me, "Hey I'm there and I'm here for you."* By contrast, another participant revealed that, *"Growing up my mom was really strict and controlling, so we never really had any type of a family atmosphere."* Another participant discussed the generational

poverty aspect of her family citing that, *“My parents didn’t know and us kids all learned like really late in life. But now with my kids and my grandkids, you know, we try to- its like it gets a little bit better with each generation.”* For another participant, the influence of past relationships helped to form perceptions of current social bonding and connections with others,

*“My- my relationship with my ex-husband made me really distrustful of people and then, you know, I kinda just looked at it and gotta be like... I made the choices that I made in my life and although sometimes I can’t help how the choices turned out, like it’s still my responsibility to deal with them.”*

The discussion of bridging social capital included negative as well as positive examples. One participant discussed barriers to social connection with others.

*“Being that I’ve been in an abusive relationship and the kind of relationship within my family and being taken out of my home when I was younger and being put in a foster home. I feel like that’s the kind of environment that my kids could be put in. That’s the kind of environment that I feel like...that’s why I don’t trust. It’s just too, I don’t know. People are too, they can screw things. That’s why I don’t trust people.”*

Other participants discussed the need for support and the willingness to ask for help. One participant revealed that, *“Oh yeah I think the hardest thing for me is still asking for help. Uhm and I think it’s that way for a lot of people. You just think you can do it yourself, but there’s a lot of people that are willing to help and sometimes just somebody listening. You know.”* The difficulty of asking for help was revealed through another participant, *“Cuz I am not the type of person to even wanna ask for help, I hate that I need as much help as I need, you know, I want to be very independent, so um seeking out Circles was a really difficult step for me.”*

Participants also discussed the importance of having trusted strong support systems among groups and in the community at-large. This aspect of social capital was most prevalent across all the interviews. One participant said, *“Trusting group. And we’re all like pretty like- we could kinda like coexist as friends, like we’re all- it’s not like “oh I have five separate friends” it’s like we’re all five like really good friends.”* Another participant discussed that, *“It’s really nice because I know like if I have a problem within, like, this town um I feel like there’s enough resources from the people that are here to help me kind of at least feel like I have some sort of option, you know?”* She further went on to discuss the role of networking and relationships in her life:

*“Right. Uhm I feel like it has really opened my eyes to like the power of networking and just making friendships and in different areas of your life and not necessarily networking just to be like I think I need to make friends with that person over there because it’s gonna benefit me.”*

However, the same participant further responded,

*“And I would rather just stay home and save my money and be with my kids than try to go out and develop relationships that I feel are shallow because like I don’t see a lot of authenticity from them.”*

In another community, a participant mentioned that *“Most social connections are Circles based, not a big social life, my social life consist of being a mom.”* Through relationship building and support from friends in the community, a participant revealed,

*“don’t sweat the small stuff. Uhm like if you come to a difficult point in your life you can always call someone to help you get through it. You can always look at it in a different*

*way, someone always has a different aspect of looking at it in a different way. Its just really I don't know, its just really, its nice looking at it through someone else's eye."*

### **Adult Hardiness**

The data from the adult parent interviews revealed experiences and stories related to hardiness within their lives. Two main themes emerged from the data: a) **the role of social connections**, and b) **positive growth**. Several participants discussed the role of social connections in the development of hardiness later in life. One participant discussed how,

*"You know, like when they are having a problem like- I don't always but I try to like talk with them through it instead of just giving them the solution. Just be like well how do you think we should handle this? Or how do you think you can handle this? Or what do you think is a good way to make this work?"*

Another participant revealed the role of different perspectives,

*"Like to have gone through all the different things that I've gone through, you know it's given- it's opened my eyes a little bit to a different world view and like a different like just acceptance of different situations in life and that you know like, everybody has a different path in life and a different story and just because, you know, they might not understand you"*

Regarding positive coping and growth, one participant revealed that, *"Challenge and stress is an opportunity for growth; I'm a slow learner but I'm still learning a lot about myself and I want my kids to succeed."* A participant also discussed growth, *"Uhm you know I- years and years ago it didn't matter how bad things were, I would say to my kids, 'I'm gonna figure this out, I'll work it out, we're gonna be okay'"*. Another participant went on to describe the role of joy in her life,

*“I’m surprised I haven’t said it yet tonight, but I feel like the experiences in my life that have been icky and not fun and caused stress have helped me really appreciate my life and like appreciate joy and like find joy when like there isn’t any. So, like where it doesn’t feel like there’s any. I feel like you can always- almost always (laughs) find joy.”*

In addition, personal awareness and self-reflection were prevalent among participants, with one participant reflecting that, *“The thing that people don’t get is its not resilience or hardiness, you don’t have a choice. You have to get back up.”* Another participant went on to say, *“And we admit it. And that’s the thing, we are screwed up. And I’m the first person to tell you that. But we know it, and we admit it, and we’re working on it. You know.”*

## **Chapter 5 - Discussion**

The current study incorporated elements of a grounded theory approach within community-based participatory research to enhance understanding the role of social capital and hardiness to adaptive coping for adolescents and their parents living in poverty. The sample included five adults and four adolescents. Separate interviews with the adolescents and the adult parents were conducted by the lead researcher and a research assistant with the interview questions developed around the constructs of social capital and hardiness. Utilizing a Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach, the parent and adolescent dyads were recruited through three community-based, poverty alleviation programs around the state of Kansas. The study was intended to provide responses to two research questions. Specifically: 1) the study was developed to understand the experiences of living in poverty of adolescents and their adult parents, while exploring the similarities and the differences between those experiences, and 2) the study examined the role of social capital and hardiness as possible coping mechanisms for adolescents and their adult parents living with the stress of poverty. Previous research has explored the developmental and behavioral outcomes of children living in poverty, as well as the possible coping mechanisms of adults, but few studies have incorporated the generational experiences of adolescents and their adult parents living in poverty in one inclusive study. The results of this study indicate several similarities and differences between adolescents and their adult parents, as well as providing an understanding of possible coping mechanisms against the stress of poverty.

### **Social Capital Bonding and Bridging are Different Between Generations**

For both adolescents and adults regarding experiences of social capital, this study found that there were strong close knit associations, friend groups, and social support networks in



place. Elements of social capital bonding were strongest among adolescents while bridging as well as bonding were revealed through the adult interviews. Specifically, there were strong indications that both adolescents and their parents felt connected with other people in their immediate social network, but both groups indicated that connections with others outside of their social network were less strong and positive. This could be reflected by and explained through the work of Tigges and colleagues, (1998), who observed that individuals and families are segregated by indicators of income, race, and class. The interviews revealed that segregation as the result of economic status and class was a factor that could limit family members from developing quality relationships with others from different economic strata. Furthermore, the results linked limited social capital to lack of social bridging. There were differences among the type of social connections – bonding versus bridging – found between adolescents and adults. Adolescent participants indicated that they had a small group of close friends that they could rely on for support (ie., bonding), while adult participants specifically mentioned the sense of community (ie., bridging) that they discovered through their involvement in the poverty alleviation program. This could be explained through the developmental differences between adolescents and their adult parents, where during adolescence the influence and connection with peer groups becomes more prevalent.

The study also revealed some differences between the experiences of adolescents and their adult parents regarding their perceptions of social capital. The adolescent participants experienced general positive feelings and connection towards their family, while the adult parent's experiences were split between positive and negative. The early family experiences of the adult participants formed their perceptions of how well they could trust or distrust the people around them. The adult parents discussed how their early experiences, whether positive or

negative, may have impacted how they view social relationships later in life. From a developmental standpoint, these adults could refer to their early life experiences to make decisions about their current relationships and social connections. For a few parents, it became harder to form trusting and supportive relationships with other people when that trust was damaged during childhood. This helps to explain why perceptions of family support and social connections were inconsistent between adult and adolescent family members. Another explanation for this difference could be within the unique parenting styles of the parents. Participants discussed how each generation transmits behaviors and attitudes related to living in poverty, however, as one participant stated, “it gets a little better with each generation.” The parents that were interviewed repeatedly referred to making a better life for their children than the life they may have experienced when they were growing up. These observations may be supported through the work of Finegood and colleagues, (2017), where parenting practices may be reflective of an attempt to act as a buffer against the stress and transmission of generational poverty from parent to child.

### **Hardiness and Coping are Learned Across Generations**

From a discussion on hardiness, the results of the study reveal some similarities and differences between adolescents and their adult parents. For adolescents and their parents, the ability to form positive coping behaviors was the most salient finding related to hardy characteristics. The adolescent participants identified unique patterns of behavior that have helped them cope with the stress of poverty, either through art, music, setting clear boundaries with other family members, or intentional focus on the future. On the other hand, the adult parents observed and reflected upon the desired goal of continued growth despite the adversity and stress of living in poverty. The findings from this section supports the work of Power (2004)

and Schleider et al., (2015) where children learn and model the positive and negative behaviors and coping mechanisms from their parents. The results, at least in some sense, suggest that the transmission of behaviors and attitudes from parents to children is quite clear. However, there are other factors that may also contribute to the development of coping mechanisms in an adolescent, namely through the influence of peer groups and neighborhood environments. In addition, effective coping behaviors may not manifest themselves immediately in the presence of adversity or stress, and in fact, may be developed over time through a variety of influences, such as social support and through an awareness of the *commitment*, *control*, and *challenge* aspects of hardiness. For example, the adult parents themselves may inevitably have to learn from and adapt to the stress of poverty in a different way than how they learned as children. Their ability to cope and adapt later in life may translate to how they model positive coping behaviors for their own children.

The results from the study also suggest unique differences in the experiences of hardiness between adolescents and their adult parents. For the adolescent participants, there was clear emphasis placed on making independent decisions, as well as focusing on the future. The results suggest that the adolescent participants were largely concerned with controlling the present situation to impact the future, or desired outcome (Kobasa, 1979). The connection could be made regarding the stress of poverty and how poverty may act as a motivator for someone to change their life. The results also suggest that for many adolescents, living in poverty can bring about insight, as one participant reflected, “you learn from what works and what doesn’t.”

Furthermore, the results suggest that along with the theme of independence there is the sense that the adolescents are focusing on those positive areas of their life that they can control and remain committed to, in order to produce a desired change that they would be satisfied with. In addition,

the adolescents may have already picked up on the positive coping behaviors of their parents and may be using those strengths to their advantage.

On the other hand, the adult parents identified the importance of quality social connections to build hardiness. In addition, participants were reflective citing the need to look to the past to learn from one's mistakes. The results suggest that the participants were making connections between the value of quality social relationships with their own development of hardiness, and by extension, resilience later in life. This was a key finding from the study because it highlights the impact of positive and nurturing people that influence how an individual adapts to the stress of living in poverty. In addition, the results indicate that the adult participants were able to reflect upon their past and learn from their mistakes. This self-awareness about the past experiences in one's life can help an individual identify and focus upon individual strengths to encourage growth. Through the formation of positive and supportive social connections adults in poverty are better able to cope and adapt to the stress of poverty, which also influences hardiness. The participants made mental connections between their past experiences (either positive or negative), social connections, and their continuous growth which presents a unique and dynamic transactional process that will influence future coping and adaptation.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations that exist within this study. One potential limitation of this study may be that in using the purposeful sampling method, participants may have been selected not at random and could have been selected because they were more willing to participate in the study than other potential participants in the poverty-reduction groups. Therefore, these results should be interpreted with caution. In addition, the program coordinators may have been biased as they recruited the participants, namely, they may have intentionally selected participants who

were more socially connected and already exhibiting hardy personalities. Along those same lines, despite efforts to control bias it is unavoidable to eliminate the bias of the researchers. The researchers will inevitably interpret concepts, codes, and themes to fit the conceptual framework developed at the beginning of the study.

Regarding the demographics of the sample, the participants were predominately White and all were female, which may not be reflective of the experiences of other minority groups or males living in poverty. The small sample size of the study could also be explained by the approach of the study. The CBPR approach has many strengths, namely, that it allows for research to take place through the collaborative effort of researchers, community coordinators, and the participants themselves. It is a fruitful and rewarding partnership that respects and values the work of community-based poverty alleviation efforts. However, the CBPR approach does offer some challenges. First, it takes time and effort to establish the relationship and rapport necessary to engage in a collaborative effort involving research. Along those same lines, it takes time and effort to work with program coordinators to recruit and retain participants for the study. The potential byproduct of this relationship and working with participants is that some participants are unable to participate due to time constraints and/or scheduling issues. This results in smaller sample size; however, the small sample sizes contribute to the richness and contextual detail of the interviews revealing the experiences of living in poverty.

### **Implications and Future Research and Practice**

The implications from this study can be applied to a variety of settings on a family and community level . First, the findings from this research offer insight into the similarities and differences in the experiences of adolescents and their adult parents in poverty. Specifically, the study explores possible coping mechanisms that may help predict positive outcomes and

resilience in families living in poverty. For families living in poverty, this study explores the underlying aspects and processes that encourage or limit an individual to adapt to the stress of poverty. This research highlights the importance of examining poverty at a family level as well as the impact that poverty has on parent-child relationships, transmission of ineffective behaviors, and the transmission of effective coping behaviors. Furthermore, this study helps to increase awareness of the strategies that family members may use to deal family with the stress of poverty. Parents and adolescents may be able to identify their own strengths and weaknesses and ways to address both areas that allow for growth. Future research in this area will continue to explore the developmental processes that limit and/or aid in effective coping behaviors between parents and adolescents.

At a community level, the implications from this research suggest that awareness of the role that social connection plays in the development of hardiness be generated through community-wide discussion of poverty within a community. This study gives insight into the positive consequences of having supportive and nurturing social relationships within a family, but more importantly, within a community with different groups of people. Organizing town hall meetings, poverty simulations, and hardiness trainings within a community are a few ways that encourage conversation, discussion, and participation that focuses on the strengths and awareness of individuals living in poverty within a community. On a community-level, implementing policies that focus on the needs and strengths of adolescents and parents can help to benefit and support the efforts of programs and agencies to alleviate poverty. In addition, community-level programs can work to incorporate those living in poverty into the social network of a community through active recruitment of low-income workers and volunteers for community-level positions, governing board positions, and through community engagement

settings. The benefits of this approach are that it respects and values the experiences of all individuals and families, regardless of income, ethnic, or racial identifiers, and the value they may bring to a community setting. This approach also encourages social connections which fosters community resilience. Future research and practice at a community-level will focus on the coping mechanism employed by those individuals living in poverty, who are not active participants in a poverty-alleviation program. For example, future research should incorporate a more diverse sample, with participants recruited from other community settings. Also, studies may explore the transmission of family behaviors, attitudes, and coping mechanism related to living in poverty from across three generations. This allows for greater investigation into the experiences of living in poverty and provides an understanding of other possible mechanisms of adaptation and coping among parents and adolescents.

On a state level, the results of this study can inform the development of policy initiatives by focusing on a strengths-based perspective of adolescents and adults living in poverty. Creating awareness of the positive experiences of adolescents and their parents living in poverty on a state-level fosters engagement and discussion that may lead to less social isolation and economic segregation throughout communities. Furthermore, policies and strengths-based programming efforts should be geared towards the developmental appropriateness of adolescents and adult parents. For adolescents, policies and programs should support the connection and engagement with positive and nurturing peer groups. This can be done through the support of mentorship programs that target vulnerable adolescent populations to support life goals and positive decision-making. For adults, policies and strengths-based programs can begin to target the interaction between positive social connections and hardiness to produce growth. The results from this study suggest that this can be done by supporting policies and programs that work to

incorporate adults living in poverty into the social fabric of their communities. In addition, programs should focus on adults as agents of their own change as to how they adapt and cope with living in poverty. Furthermore, policies and programs that support individuals and families in poverty should also work to strengthen relationships between parents and children. Programs are needed that bring adolescents and their parents together to learn effective strategies that reduce the stress of living in poverty. A positive outcome of these programs would be development of hardiness for whole families and for whole networks within communities.



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## Appendix A - Study Overview

### Bridges for Kansas Families Study Overview

- *Bridges for Kansas Families* is a year-long research project from Kansas State University that studies the social connections and hardiness (resilience) of families who are participating in relationship-based poverty reduction programs in Kansas.
- Staff with K-State University are interviewing adults and teens to comment on their experiences and opinions about how positive, hardy attitudes can influence interactions with family and friends.
- The on-site interviews will last around an hour during an evening of Thrive! programming.
- The results of this research will inform and improve community-based social service programs intended to build resilience and strengthen families.
- Participating programs (e.g., *Thrive! (formerly Circles Manhattan)*; *Wichita Circles Network*; *Ripples of Change, Ottawa, Ks*; *Circles McPherson*) will be compensated \$750 for their involvement in this study.

#### Program Partners are Asked to . .

- Designate a organizational point-of-contact (POC) for the study.
- The POC will complete an online Human Subjects Research training (6 modules) that is required by Kansas State University. Once completed, the person taking this free training will be authorized for participate in studies for up-to three years.
- Create a safe and supportive environment for the research participants and K-State staff.
- Provide a separate room for both the adult and the teen to conduct the interviews.
- Create list of potential participants for the research study, and assist in the recruitment of participants.
- Help to remind participants when their interview will be conducted.
- Referral questions about the study to:

Adam Cless, Project Manager – [acless@ksu.edu](mailto:acless@ksu.edu); 316) 722-8164

Dr. Elaine Johannes, Co-Principal Investigator – [ejohanne@ksu.edu](mailto:ejohanne@ksu.edu); 785-532-7720

Dr. Greg Paul, Co-Principal Investigator – [gregpaul@ksu.edu](mailto:gregpaul@ksu.edu); 785-532-6789

Kansas State University's Human Subjects Compliance Office has reviewed this study. For more information about the university's compliance requirements contact:

Dr. Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, or Dr. Cheryl Doerr, Assoc. Vice President for Research Compliance. Both are located at: 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, 785-532-3224

## Appendix B - Consent form

### Bridges for Kansas Families- Agreement to Participate

Bridges for Kansas Families is a year-long research project from Kansas State University that studies the social connections and hardiness (resilience) of families who are participating in economic self-sufficiency programs in Kansas.

Staff with K-State University are asking adults and teens to comment on their experiences and opinions about how positive, hardy attitudes can influence interactions with family and friends.

#### Important Points to Consider:

- **Participants within each program will be interviewed by a K-State staff member regarding their experiences related to social connection and hardiness. The interviews will take approximately an hour during one of the evening meetings. In addition, your name and some demographic information (age, race, ethnicity, gender, living situation?) will be collected and will not be kept with your answers to the interview questions.**
- **Other than sharing your experiences and opinions there is little risk to you if you choose to participate. The information you share will not be shared with anyone else other than the research team, and your name will not be linked to it. In addition, findings from this research will help improve social service agencies and programs around the state to improve the lives of Kansas families.**
- **The audio recording and typed notes of the interview will only be used by the research team and will not be shared with anyone else.**
- **You can choose not to participate in this interview and can withdraw at any time without any problem or penalty.**

For any questions regarding the project, you can contact:

- **Dr. Elaine Johannes; Principal Investigator, Kansas State University; [ejohanne@ksu.edu](mailto:ejohanne@ksu.edu); 785-532-7720**
- **Adam Cless; Bridges project manager, Kansas State University; [acless@ksu.edu](mailto:acless@ksu.edu)**

- **Dr. Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, or Dr. Cheryl Doerr, Assoc. Vice President for Research Compliance. Both are located at: 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, 785-532-3224**

**We request that you agree to participate in this interview. Please read the statement below to acknowledge your consent to participate:**

*By signing below, I agree to participate in this study. I understand that my consent to participate can be withdrawn at any time and that I am able to decline participation in any part of the interview, or to discontinue the interview if I so choose.*

---

Signature

---

Date

## Appendix C - Assent form

### Bridges for Kansas Families – Agreement to Participate

**Bridges for Kansas Families** is a research project from Kansas State University that studies the social connections and hardiness (resilience) of families who are participating in economic self-sufficiency programs in Kansas.

Staff with K-State University are asking adults and teens to comment on their experiences and opinions about how positive, hardy attitudes can influence interactions with family and friends.

#### What's Important:

- Other than sharing your time and comments, there is little risk to you if you choose to participate in this project by being interviewed by a K-State staff member who will ask you four-five questions about your experiences and opinions. Though your name and some demographic information (e.g., age, grade in school, race, ethnicity, residence, gender), this information will not be kept with your answers to the questions.
- The information you share during the interview will not be shared with anyone else other than the research team, and your name will not be linked to it.
- The audio recording and typed notes of the interview will only be used by the research team and will not be share with anyone else.
- You can choose not to participate in the interview and can withdraw at any time without any problem or penalty.
- If you have questions about the project, you can contact:
  - \* Dr. Elaine Johannes; Principal Investigator, Kansas State University;

[ejohanne@ksu.edu](mailto:ejohanne@ksu.edu); 785-532-7720

\* Adam Cless; Bridges project manager, Kansas State University; [acless@ksu.edu](mailto:acless@ksu.edu)

\* Dr. Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, or Dr. Cheryl Doerr, Assoc. Vice President for Research Compliance. Both are located at: 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224

We request that you agree to participate in this interview. If you can agree to participate by signing the appropriate blank below:

---

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Sign this line to agree to participate  
in the project.*

*Date*

***THANK YOU!***





## **Appendix D - Interview Script**

### **BRIDGES FOR KANSAS FAMILIES- INTERVIEW SCRIPT**

#### **Concepts**

Social Connectedness: A person's number of close friends, frequency of interactions with family and friends, trust in neighbors, and level of participation in volunteer activities or community events.

- 1) *Bonding social capital* is the intimate ties between family, close friends, and others who share very personal relationships. Bonding creates inward-looking, tightly-formed groups that support and nurture their own members.
- 2) *Bridging social capital* reflects more intermediate relationships, such as among co-workers or community residents. This type of social capital can result in like-minded people from different social networks working together to address common concerns or achieve shared goals.

Hardiness: The attitude that provides the courage and motivation to do the hard work of turning stressful circumstances from potential disasters into growth opportunities (Maddi, 2002).

Hardiness is a cognitive/emotional amalgam constituting a learned, growth-oriented, personality buffer (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

- 1) Commitment- thinks that stress is meaningful and interesting
- 2) Control- sees oneself as capable of changing event(s)
- 3) Challenge- sees change and stress as normal and as opportunities for growth

#### **Prep for the Interview**

Secure location, check for privacy, put privacy sign on door to room, silent cell-phones, prepare consent/assent forms, list of questions for interviewee, check audio recorder

#### **Cautions and Reminders**

Do not say that the individual is poor or living in poverty. Children may not understand and adults may take offense. Stress associated with living below the federal poverty level can be described as: limited resources, economically disadvantaged, not have enough money to stretch each month, "doing without things"

#### **Before the Interview**

Invite the interviewee to sign-in (include name, demographics), answer questions they may have. Invite the interviewee to sign the consent or assent (for adolescents) form prior to interview.

Introduce yourself as the interviewer and demonstrate the audio recorder and explain its use. Follow script to describe the project. Ask the interviewee has any questions.

### **Opening statement**

Thank you for taking the time out of your day to help me learn more about your experiences living with limited resources, especially related to your experiences and opinions about how hardiness can influence interactions with your family, friends, and those closest to you. I'm hoping that through our conversation today I will have a better understanding of the role of self-sufficiency programs, such as Thrive, as well as family and friends that impact your ability to achieve positive outcomes in your life.

This interview will last about an hour and will be recorded using a digital voice recorder so that I don't forget anything. Please remember that our conversation is strictly confidential only to be seen by myself and members of our research team and only for research purposes. Do you have any questions before we start?

### **Baseline Question (for adults and adolescents)**

First off, what were you expecting to gain from participating with the Thrive! program.

What was your motivation for enrolling in the program?

Prior to enrolling in the Thrive! program, can you tell me about the role of other organizations or people that may have helped you in a time of need?

### **Adult Interview Questions**

#### **Social Connection**

- 1) Thinking about your circle of friends and family, how would you describe the relationship you have with those closest to you?

Prompts:

- What makes this circle of friends and family unique?
- Is your circle of friends and family supportive or unsupportive?
- Are you confident that your friends and family would help you if you needed it?

- 2) Besides your family and friends, how would you describe the relationship or connection you have with those people in the workplace or with other community members (neighbors)?

Prompts:

- Do you feel you can share and discuss your concerns or shared goals and aspirations with those in the workplace or community?

- How does this impact your willingness to participate in community events or to give back through volunteering?
- What role does your community play that helps you to overcome any difficulties in your life?

## **Hardiness**

- 3) How are you able to overcome any stressful situation and use it as an opportunity for growth? Prompts:
  - What motivates you to make this change?
  - How do those stressful situations offer a chance for you to prove yourself? To become better?
- 4) In what ways are you capable of changing a stressful situation into a more positive one?
- 5) How are you able to stay committed to a task or job to see it through to the end even if it is challenging or stressful?
- 6) Finally, do you think your ability to face difficulties in your life is one of your strengths?

## **Adolescent Interview Questions**

### **Social Connection**

- 1) Can you tell me about your group of friends?  
Prompts:
  - What do you do with your friends in your free time?
  - Who do you “hang out” with on a regular basis?
  - Are your friends helpful and supportive?
- 2) Are there other people or mentors in your life that are important? If so, in what way?  
Prompts:
  - What is the impact of these people on your life?
  - Do you feel comfortable sharing your thoughts, feelings, and opinions with these people?

### **Hardiness**

- 3) When faced with stressful situations, do you think you are able to make the situation better? If so, how? (Do you think you are able to deal with stress in a positive way?)
- 4) In what ways do you think you can change a stressful situation? (What do you do to change a bad situation to make it better?)
- 5) Do you feel that you are able to move beyond a stressful or negative situation?
  - What allows you to do that?

- 6) Finally, do you think you have the “tools” to face difficulties in your life in a positive way? If so, which tools do you have? Which tools do you think you still need?

### **Post-Interview**

Ask the interviewee if they have questions. Remind them of the contact names and information should they have questions afterward.

Let them know that the information collected will be compiled with the interview information from others across the state and that their personal information will not be shared.

Provide them with the list of local resources. Thank the participant and let them know that their time is very much appreciated.


## Appendix E - IRB Protocol



University Research Compliance Office

TO: Elaine Johannes  
FSHS  
343M Justin

Proposal Number: 8426

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair   
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 09/19/2016

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "Bridges for Kansas Families: The role of social capital in Kansas families living in poverty."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for one year from the date of this correspondence, pending "continuing review."**

APPROVAL DATE: 9/19/2016

EXPIRATION DATE: 9/19/2017

Several months prior to the expiration date listed, the IRB will solicit information from you for federally mandated "**continuing review**" of the research. Based on the review, the IRB may approve the activity for another year. **If continuing IRB approval is not granted, or the IRB fails to perform the continuing review before the expiration date noted above, the project will expire and the activity involving human subjects must be terminated on that date. Consequently, it is critical that you are responsive to the IRB request for information for continuing review if you want your project to continue.**

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

- There is no more than minimal risk to the subjects.  
 There is greater than minimal risk to the subjects.

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review at least annually, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.