

THE EFFECT OF NEED ON THE EXPECTATIONS AND ASPIRATIONS
OF THE POOR IN BRYAN, TEXAS

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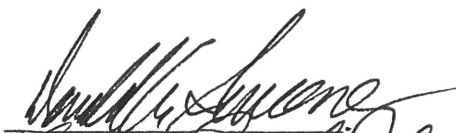
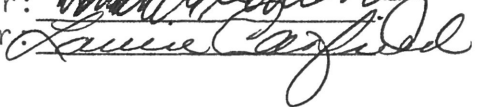



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ABSTRACT

A survey of twenty-two low income Bryan residents was conducted to determine the expectations and aspirations of this sample in regards to job opportunities, housing, and educational attainment. The culture of poverty perspective and the structural perspective are examined as ways to view the poverty problems. The research design examines four basic hypotheses to measure the relationships between structural barriers and the expectations and aspirations of the poor. The differences between expectations and aspirations are also measured. Results indicate that the need variable explains 35% of why a certain status job is expected. Expectations were greater for housing and educational attainment than for jobs. Aspirations for jobs was also lower than for housing and education. Age correlated negatively with aspirations, and education correlated positively with aspirations. No other variables affected aspirations.

Additional research calls for the examination of the job structure in regards to job availability and the degree of job mismatch.

THE EFFECT OF NEED ON THE EXPECTATIONS AND ASPIRATIONS OF THE POOR IN BRYAN, TEXAS

According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1985, p.4), in 1984, 33.7 million American citizens existed below the poverty level. This poverty rate of 14.4% was measured with the poverty threshold for a family of four being \$10,609. Of those poor, 58% are white, 28.2% are black, and 3.7% are of other races. Children make up 39.8% of the poor while adults (18-64) are 50.3% and the elderly (65 and over) are 9.9% of this population. Of families in poverty almost half--48.1% are female-headed households. Married couple families at 47.9% and male-headed households (no wife present) at 4% compose the remainder of families in poverty. By sex, 56.9% females and 43.1% males constitute the poor population.

This poor population is obviously not an homogeneous group. This group consist of people with unique problems that need unique solutions. Some of these people are experiencing a short bout with poverty while others are intergenerationally poor. Working class values are embraced by some while others share middle class values. Others are downwardly mobile and some are upwardly mobile (Wilson 1985). Within this heterogeneous group, definite barriers are realized in the fact that about 50% of the poverty population are in the midst of a poverty spell that will last eight years (Bane and Ellwood 1983).

Many of the policies and budget cuts of the Reagan administration aggravate the poor's situation. With Reagan's administration occurred a major force which has been described as a counterrevolution in social welfare policy. Waxman (1983 p.130) describes the administration's perception of the poor as morally responsible for their poverty and hence, the administration "persists in the application of the principle of less eligibility so as to make life on welfare so miserable that would-be clients will be discouraged from applying." The budget for the fiscal year 1983 included cuts of approximately \$17.4 billion for human services programs including programs such as AFDC, CETA, public housing, food stamps, and Medicaid which have either been eliminated or radically reduced. (Waxman 1983 p.129)

One of the programs significantly altered was Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). The former secretaries of Health, Education, and Welfare from Dwight D. Eisenhower in the 1950s through Jimmy Carter in the 1970s and 1980 "said that AFDC, with its new eligibility requirements, encouraged families to break up, encouraged teen-age pregnancies, provided a disincentive rather than an incentive to work, discouraged thrift and savings, and was too bureaucratic and too costly." (p.41) Also, AFDC regulatory changes affected the "tax" on earned income and imposed lower ceilings on the income criteria for AFDC eligibility. The immediate consequence of these changes was a punitive effect for working. (Wilson, 1985 p.253).

Other major changes included the administration's plans for revising the federal-state relationship through the use of block

grants. Block grants are funds given to the states with only brief, broad outlines of how they are to be used. They were designed to replace many of the individual social welfare programs that were organized, funded, and monitored by the federal government. Although these grants gave the state more freedom in deciding its priorities on funding different social service programs, the net effect of block grants has been reductions in aging programs, alcohol, drug abuse and mental health programs, primary care, preventive health services, and maternal and child health services (p.42).

These reductions in aid create an aggravated situation for the poor. President Reagan attempted to reduce welfare services except for those for the few "truly needy", because he believed that people were being provided with services they did not need. Yet the fact remains that 14.4 million Americans exist in poverty and 60% of the poverty population are in the midst of a poverty spell that will last at least eight years. Why does this substantial subpopulation of the poor remain in poverty for such a long time? Sociologists offer insight on the problems of poverty with two basic perspectives.

POVERTY THEORIES

The Cultural Perspective

Anthropologist, Oscar Lewis (1963) coined the term "culture of poverty". He defines it as "both an adaptational and a reaction of the poor to their marginal position in a class-stratified, highly individuated, capitalistic society." He

further states that traits of the culture of poverty represent "an effort to cope with feelings of hopelessness and despair that develop from the realization of the improbability of achieving success in terms of the values and goals of the larger society." He views the culture of poverty as local solutions or adaptations to a set of objective conditions of the larger society which are perpetuated intergenerationally. This perspective sees the lives of the urban poor as being different from the nonpoor not only economically, but in other regards as well. (Waxman 1983)

Because this view claims that the culture is not just adaptational but also transmitted to the children through socialization, this process is thought to be the subcultural determinants of the lower socioeconomic status of the poor. (Waxman, 1983). Implicit in this idea is the notion that the poor must be taught to change their behaviors and values to progress towards a higher socioeconomic status.

Several studies have attempted to define unique patterns of the poor (Waxman 1983). In general, criminologists agree that there is a difference in behavior of the classes in regards to crime as statistics on ordinary crime consistently show an overrepresentation of lower class persons. Also, much evidence concurs that a positive correlation exists between poverty and mental illness, specifically schizophrenia. Studies maintain that the children of the lower classes are socialized differently by their parents which affects their performance at school. Other patterns of the lower classes include highest birthrate, the

greatest number of children in the family, different overall pattern of parent-child relationship, and different patterns of socialization.

Critics of the culture of poverty claim that this perspective tends to blame the victim for his status, and thus this idea conceals other social causes of poverty as well as leads to social policies that focus on changing the attitudes and behavior of the poor rather than reforming the society (Valentine 1968, Steinberg 1981). Also, these critics believe that the poor hold the same aspirations and values of the larger society and that the "pathological" consequences of poverty will disappear once the poor are provided with decent jobs and other resources to facilitate social mobility. These critics point to the importance of examining the structure of society to determine reasons for poverty.

The Structural Perspective

The structuralist acknowledges that the poor do manifest statistically unique patterns of behaviors, but they claim that these behaviors are not derived internally or intergenerationally but rather, externally--as a consequence of occupying an unfavorable position in society. (Waxman 1983). Reisman (1969) explains that the poor do share in American values and mobility aspirations but they do not have the opportunity to realize their values and expectations through the normal societal channels. He confronts us with the distinct possibility that the mobility mechanisms are not working properly and thus that the

structure and not the individual is at fault.

Lodge and Glass (1982) discusses a "poverty of alienation". They state that "the social, economic, political, and spiritual ties between the underclass and the rest of society have weakened or severed. The combination of broken families, lack of skills, unemployment, and crime creates a nearly insurmountable barrier to entry into the mainstream of community." In addition to these alienating conditions, John Kassarda (1983) points to more direct structural problems by examining the transformation occurring in urban metropolises. Poor inner-city minorities have been vulnerable to the shifts in the urban job structure from centers of production and distribution of physical goods to centers of administration, information exchange, trade, finance, and government services. These transformations in the job structure resulted in economic and population changes such as deeper "ghettoization", solidification of high levels of poverty, mounting institutional problems in the inner city, and increases in social dislocations such as joblessness, crime, female-headed families, teenage pregnancies, and welfare dependency. Wilson (1985) extends the discussion of the problems associated with increasing joblessness to the particular problems of black men. Their unemployment is one of the major reasons poor black women tend not to be married. Wilson (1987 p.23) describes the problem of poor inner city blacks as one of social isolation. Their "lack of contact or substained interaction with individuals and institutions that represent mainstream society" makes it difficult for those who are looking for jobs to be tied into the

job network. The urban core has a sizeable and growing black underclass of marginally productive and unattached men and women and children in female-headed households.

The structuralists view the situation or structure of society as the cause of these problems discussed above. Changes are advocated for the restricted social structure to allow the mobility mechanisms to operate for all.

Although these theories seem to oppose each other, as with most seemingly opposing sociological theories, the truth probably lies somewhere between. Gans (1968 p.203) states that the argument of culture of poverty versus situational is really "an argument about social change, about the psychological readiness of people to respond to change and about the role of culture in change." Gans advocates a change in values and behaviors congruent with social change and resource availability.

RESEARCH DESIGN

My research examines relationships between the structural situations facing the poor and their expectations and aspirations regarding job, education, and residential achievement. My model measures the poor's economic situation and its effect on their expectations for achievement as well as the poor having significantly lower expectations in regards to their aspirations. I examine the relationship between structural barriers and the poor's expectations and the degree of discrepancy between their expectations and aspirations. From these relationships, the following hypotheses are derived.

1. The greater the structural barriers, the lower the expectations will be.
2. The less significant the structural barriers, the greater the expectations will be.
3. The greater the expectations, the smaller the gap will be between expectations and aspirations.
4. Aspirations will remain the same regardless of other factors.

The first two hypotheses measure the degree which the poor's unmet needs affects their expectations. The degree of need is the independent variable while expectations will vary according to need. The third hypothesis assumes that aspirations will remain constant regardless of other factors.

I measured these hypotheses with a survey in the form of an interview. This survey consists of questions concerning the poor's aspirations and expectations in regards to employment, housing, and education. Participants were asked what job they would desire most as a lifetime job if they were completely free to choose any job. They were also asked what job they expected to have most of their life. The educational questions concerned how much education they wished for their children and how much education they expect their children to obtain. Similarly, the respondents were asked what type of housing would they like to live in and where they expected to live. These aspiration and expectation questions were adapted from another ambition and status attainment study (Thomas 1979).

The survey also includes questions on basic needs and problems of the poor in regards to housing, transportation, and employment as well as questions on governmental benefits received

and other basic demographic questions. These type questions were modified from a needs assessment survey for the Brazos Valley (Texas A&M University 1984). The needs questions concerned the families ability to provide for basic needs including food, rent, utility bills, car repair, child care, school supplies, clothing, and medical care. The responses to these questions were averaged together to produce one variable to be called "need" throughout the remainder of the paper.

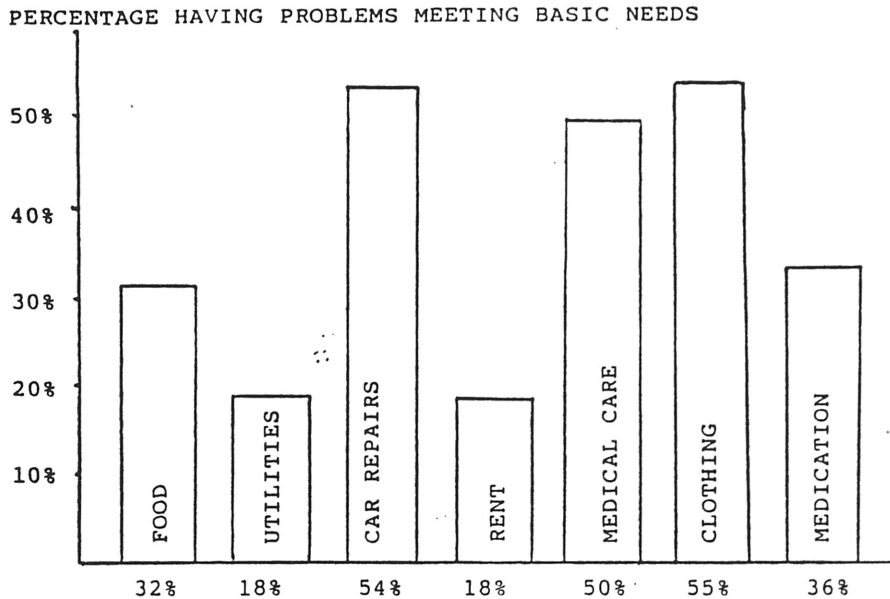
These surveys were administered to low income people of Bryan, Texas. Two subsidized housing areas and one low income neighborhood were interviewed for a total of twenty-two respondents. With the information from the survey, I hoped to measure the degree of need a person has and its effect on their expectations.

RESULTS

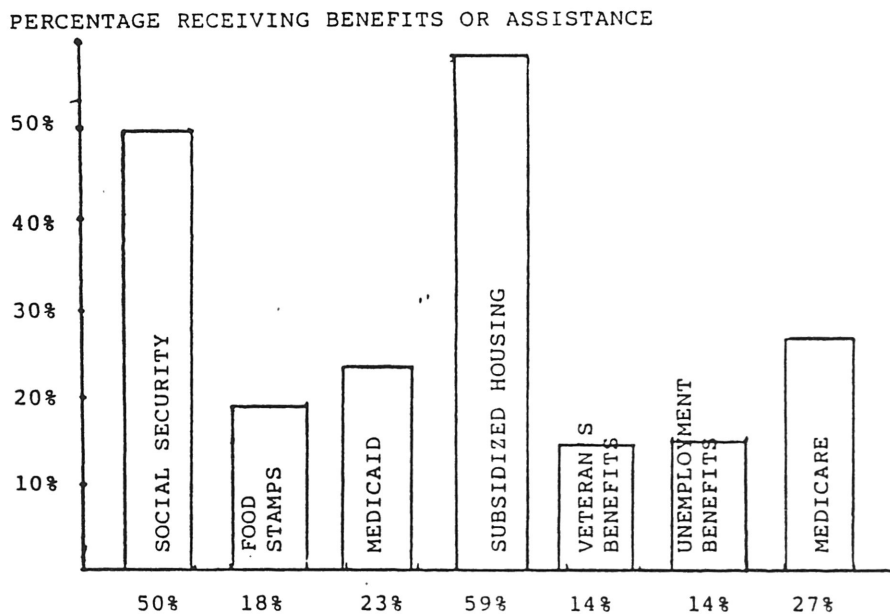
Characteristics of Respondents

This sample consists of 14 (64%) females and 8 (36%) males. Seventy-three percent of the respondents are black, eighteen percent are white, and four and one-half percent are Mexican-American, and four and one-half percent are of other races. The typical respondent was middle aged--between 36-50 years old. The employment status of the sample was fairly evenly distributed among the categories with 27% employed full-time, 18% employed part-time, 13% unemployed, 14% disabled, and 23% retired. Forty percent had received some sort of training and the average level of schooling reached was some high school education.

Participants were asked several questions regarding their ability to meet basic needs. The following bar graph shows the percentage of respondents who have problems meeting basic needs.



Respondents were also asked what types of governmental assistance they have received. These percentages are shown on the bar graph below.



These statistics discussed so far are the basic descriptive statistics of the population. Further analysis of the data is necessary to make conclusions regarding the hypotheses.

| <u>DEPENDENT VARIABLE</u> | <u>PROBABILITY</u> | <u>R-SQUARE</u> |
|---------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| EXPECTED EDUCATION | 0.3564 | 0.042566 |
| EXPECTED HOUSING | 0.0985 | 0.130560 |
| ASPIRED JOB | 0.3056 | 0.055132 |
| ASPIRED EDUCATION | 0.2563 | 0.061388 |
| ASPIRED HOUSING | 0.4045 | 0.035000 |

Table 1. Correlations of expectations and aspirations with measurement of need by the total sample.

| <u>DEPENDENT VARIABLE</u> | <u>PROBABILITY</u> | <u>R-SQUARE</u> |
|---------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| EXPECTED JOB | 0.0469 | 0.350058 |
| EXPECTED EDUCATION | 0.3925 | 0.149529 |
| EXPECTED HOUSING | 0.1187 | 0.271707 |
| ASPIRED JOB | 0.2325 | 0.217317 |
| ASPIRED EDUCATION | 0.6644 | 0.091929 |
| ASPIRED HOUSING | 0.5842 | 0.271707 |

Table 2. Correlations of expectations and aspirations with measurement of need by employment status.

The need variable was correlated with the six variables of expectations and aspirations for employment, education, and housing. Table 1 shows these results. No relationships exist. Because the sample has such a high percentage of retired and disabled people (37%), this variable was thought to make a difference in expectations. The figures in Table 2 are those obtained when the variable were correlated by class in regards to employment status; that is whether the participant worked full-time, part-time, or was retired or disabled. This procedure revealed some correlations by which to test my hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: The greater the structural barriers, the lower the expectations will be.

Need was a clear indicator of expectations in regard to jobs. Need explains 35% ,at a 5% probability error of why a certain job is expected. In other words, the greater the need of a participant the more likely, s/he expected to have a job of low status. Expected housing and education are not accurately predicted by need. Need explains only 15%, at a probability error level of 36% of why a level of education is expected, and explains only 27%, at a probability error level of 12%, of why a certain level of housing is expected. Neither of these explanations is statistically significant. Hence, hypothesis 1 is upheld for job expectations, but not for housing or educational expectations.

Hypothesis 2: The less significant, the structural barriers, the greater the expectations well be.

This hypothesis is the inverse of hypothesis one. Again, structural barriers, as measured by need, account only for job expectations and not for housing and employment expectations.

Hypothesis 3: The greater the expectations, the smaller the gap will be between expectations and aspirations.

By comparing means, the discrepancy between expectations and aspirations can be determined. Respondents, on the average, aspired to a job with a status 2.4 times higher status than their expected job. On a scale of one to one hundred, the average of the job aspired to was 47.8. This average indicates an aspiration for a job with medium status. A Duncan's means test also

indicates a significant difference in the means of aspirations and expectations for jobs.

As has been previously determined, need has little effect on housing and educational expectations. Hence, the discrepancy between expectations and aspirations for these variables is less significant than for job status. Desired housing was measured as 1.4 times greater than expected housing and aspired education was 1.5 times greater than expected education. Respondents expected to live somewhere better than a rented apartment, and expected to receive education past high school. These greater expectations account for the smaller gap between expectations and aspirations and, therefore, hypothesis 3 is supported.

Hypothesis 4: Aspirations will remain the same regardless of other factors.

This hypothesis is supported to a certain extent. As can be seen from Tables 1 and 2, need has no effect whatsoever in regard to aspirations even when employment status is considered. However, simple correlations between age of respondents and aspirations and between amount of schooling of respondents and aspirations reveal effects on aspirations. Age gives a -0.58819 correlation with aspirations. That is the older the respondent, the lower his/her expectations were. School has a 0.57471 correlation with aspirations. The more schooling a respondent received, the greater his/her expectations were. Thus, age and schooling of respondents has a moderate effect on their aspirations, but need does not.

CONCLUSIONS

Effects on Aspirations

My research model assumes that everyone holds the same basic aspirations for job status, educational achievement, and residential living. However, my study revealed that low income elderly people have lower aspirations. These lower aspirations probably result from the fact that these people have been poor for so long that they have adapted to their lifestyles. The majority of the elderly residing in subsidized housing have lived there for several years and report that they are happy with their living arrangements and have no desire to move. These elderly people also have little aspirations for a job as many are disabled or retired. Thus, my hypothesis should be revised to account for decreased aspirations of the poor with increased age.

Also, my results conclude that those who have received more schooling have higher aspirations. Many of the respondents during the interview stressed the importance of education as a mechanism for advancement. Hence, a high value was placed on education and those more highly educated hoped for higher educational attainment for their children more than those with less education. Therefore, my hypothesis should be modified to account for the factor of increasing educational attainment having a positive effect on aspirations.

Race, sex age, income, and marital status, were found to have no significant relationship to aspirations.

The Effect of Need on Job Aspirations

Relative to educational and housing expectations, job expectations are quite low. A standardized scale which ranked jobs according to their status was used to evaluate the job expectations and aspirations of my sample. On a scale of zero to one hundred the average expected job had a value of twenty. The scale gives examples of these low status jobs such as gas station attendants, tobacco manufacturers, repair servicemen, and janitors. Furthermore, job aspirations were also relatively low with the mean status value of 48 for the job most desired. According to the scale examples of these medium status jobs include bank tellers, stock clerks and storekeepers, sign painters, and manufacturing inspectors. These low expectations and aspirations seem to result from the problems the respondents have had with finding and maintaining a job. All of the respondents have a place to live and a school system for their childrens' education, but 71% of the able-bodied respondents reported that lack of jobs was a major problem.

Recent state cut-backs in higher education have had rippling effect on the Bryan community. Several of these people surveyed either knew of someone or themselves had been laid-off from their positions as janitors and maids at Texas A&M University. Others had been laid-off from jobs in the community such as one beauty operator who became unemployed when her place of employment went out of business. Another respondent with a college degree in computer science had settled for a job in data entry for which she was over qualified. She was laid off and did not anticipate

ever being employed as a computer programmer. Many women expected to always be employed as a housekeeper or maid because no other jobs were available.

That this many people were settling for jobs that they were dissatisfied with or were unemployed altogether seems to indicate the possibility that enough jobs do not exist. This lack of jobs is a structural situation. Job status and attainment is a mobility mechanism through which people can facilitate their movement towards their aspirations. Education and skill, while necessary, are not sufficient to achieve aspired status. Employment opportunities must exist in order for people to be able to move towards their goals. Further research should examine job structure, employment opportunities, and "job mismatch." If clear indication exists of problems with lack of jobs and job mismatch, policy needs to be directed towards these issues. Some states have recognized that jobs are needed for social mobility and have affirmed this fact with social programs (Church 1937). California requires AFDC applicants to sign contracts pledging to enroll in job training programs, return to school, or look for a job. Massachusetts has a similar "workfare" program which is voluntary. These programs seem like a step in the right direction, yet if jobs do not exist, than these programs are doomed to fail. Policy makers need to be aware of structural factors involved in poverty problems and address policy solutions from this perspective.

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EXPECTATIONS AND ASPIRATIONS STUDY

I am _____ and this is _____. We are students at Texas A&M studying how families in Bryan are making out in a time of high cost and unemployment. This information could help agencies and the community better plan to help us all. We would like your assistance in answering some questions.

I'm going to ask if you can get the things most families need. The first item is food.

usually sometimes rarely never

1. Can you buy enough food for the family?
2. Can you pay the utility bills each month?
3. Can you pay for car repairs?
4. Can you pay for child-care?
5. Can you pay for school supplies?
6. Can you pay the rent?
7. Can you buy enough clothing?

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Are there other items or services your family really needs, but can't get? (or, What expenses do you need help with the most?)

Does your family have a car or truck that runs okay?
Yes _____ No _____

Can you get around when you need to? For example, to see a doctor, shop, or just to visit? Please answer usually, sometimes, or never.

- 1 Usually
- 2 Sometimes
- 3 Never

Do you take part in any community activities such as church, clubs, or youth organizations?
Yes _____ No _____

If yes Which ones? _____

Do you work part-time or fulltime?

- 1 Yes, full-time
- 2 Yes, part-time
- 3 Sometimes
- 4 No, Don't work

Have you been unemployed within the last three years?

Yes _____ No _____ Retired or disabled _____

If yes for how long?

- 1 <3 months
- 2 3 months to 1 year
- 3 1 to 2 years
- 4 >2 to 3 yeras
- 5 >3 years
- 6 retired or disabled

What is the main job held by (you) the major money earner of your home? Give specific job such as plumber or sales clerk.

Have you received training such as vocational school or do you have a skill such as typing for any type of job?

Training _____
 Skill _____
 Job _____

Has anyone in this household had difficulties in finding a job?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes What type of difficulties?

(If unemployed) What problems or situation prevent you from having a job?

- 1 Children at home
- 2 Lack of jobs
- 3 Lack of skills
- 4 Transportation
- 5 Other (specify) _____

Is any adult member of your household, not including yourself, unable to work?

If yes, Why?

If you were completely free to choose any job, what would you desire most as a lifetime job?

Sometimes we are not able to do what we want most. What kind of job do you really expect to have most of your life? _____

Does your family receive: _____

| | Yes | When Start | Contin uous | No | Don't Know | Not Apply |
|-----------------------------|-----|------------|-------------|----|------------|-----------|
| Social Security of SSI | | | | | | |
| Food Stamps | | | | | | |
| Women/Children Benefits | | | | | | |
| Medicaid | | | | | | |
| AFDC | | | | | | |
| Subsidized or Gov't Housing | | | | | | |
| VA Benefits | | | | | | |
| Unemployment Benefits | | | | | | |
| Medicare | | | | | | |

Have you been denied any types of the aid just mentioned? _____

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, Why? _____

Is it difficult for you to obtain aid because of eligibility requirements? Yes _____ No _____

If you are on welfare, during the past year, have welfare benefits _____

- 1 improved
- 2 worsened
- 3 stayed the same
- 4 not applicable

Are the programs that are available to help families effective? _____

Yes _____ No _____

If no, Why? _____

Do you enjoy where you live? Yes _____ No _____ Indifferent _____

Do you find your home (or apartment) adequate? That is, do you have any problems with things such as plumbing or heating? _____

- 1 Yes (specify) _____
- 2 No
- 3 Don't know

Do you like your home or would you prefer to live in a different home? _____

- 1 I like where I live
- 2 I would prefer to move
- 3 Indifferent

If participant prefers to move, ask:

In what type of housing would you prefer to live? _____

- 1 Government subsidized
- 2 Apartment
- 3 Duplex
- 4 Townhouse
- 5 Condominium
- 5 House
- 7 Other _____

What type of housing do you expect to live in in the future? _____

- 1 Government subsidized
- 2 Apartment
- 3 Duplex
- 4 Townhouse
- 5 Condo
- 5 House
- 7 Other _____

Is your home heated? Yes _____ No _____

If yes How? _____

If no Why? _____

Do you use air conditioning? Yes _____ No _____

If no Why not? _____

Have you had to do without electricity in the past two years?
Yes _____ No _____

If yes Why? _____

What would you change about your home if you could? _____

If your children could have as much schooling as you would like them to, which of the following would they do? _____

- 1 Quit school right now
- 2 Complete high school
- 3 Complete a business, commercial, electronics, or some other technical program after finishing high school.
- 4 Graduate from a junior college (2 years)
- 5 Graduate from a college or university
- 6 Complete additional studies after graduating from a college or university
- 7 not applicable

How much education do you really expect them to receive? _____

- 1 Receive no more schooling
- 2 Complete high school
- 3 Complete a business, commercial, electronics, or some other technical program after finishing high school
- 4 Graduate from a junior college (2 years)
- 5 Graduate from a college or university
- 6 Complete additional studies after graduating from a college or university

What is the highest school grade that you have completed? _____

- 1 did not go to school
- 2 grade 1-7
- 3 eight grade
- 4 some high school but did not graduate
- 5 graduated from high school
- 6 went to vocational school after graduating from high school
- 7 some college but did not graduate
- 8 college graduate

How many people in your home provide \$50 or more per week to help support the family? Include yourself if you earn more than \$50. Don't include welfare or aid payments. _____

- 1
- 2
- 3 or more

Including yourself, how many people live in your home? _____

- Total
 Adults (18 or over)
 12 to 17 yrs old
 6 to 11 yrs old
 0 to 5 yrs old

How many children do you have? _____

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more

How many are under 18? _____

How many are 18 and over? _____

How long have you lived where you are presently living? _____

- <1 year
- 1 to 2 years
- 3 to 4 years
- >4 years

How much did you earn last year?(Have participant pick appropriate income category) _____

What is your sex? Male _____ Female _____

What is your race? _____

- 1 Black
- 2 White
- 3 Spanish/Mexican American
- 4 Other (specify) _____

What is your age? _____

- 1 12 to 17
- 2 18 to 35
- 3 36 to 60
- 4 61 or older

Are you: _____

- 1 married
- 2 single, never married
- 3 single, divorced or widowed