



Credits to Feeding America



Credits to Feeding America

# Family Stability in Hard Economic Times

Mai Choua Vang and Phoua Chang,

Advisor: Dr. Susan Wolfgram, Ph. D., University of Wisconsin-Stout

## Research Problem

In a recent study, there is a growing number of low income families who are becoming socially isolated and have no one to rely on when the family is in need. Many low income families turn to outside resources as part of their survival strategy (Offer, 2010).

## Research Question & Hypothesis

- What do families who access a local food pantry need to provide stability in their family?
- It was hypothesized that those low income families who seek resources to provide stability in their family will access support readily when the family is in economic hardship

## Literature Review

**Heflin, C., London, A. S., and Scott, E. K. (2011)** focused on the material hardships that low income single mothers struggle with and the strategies they used to fulfill their needs as a provider. An important factor the study mentioned was the individual's effort and willingness to seek multiple resources.

**Kalil, A., and Ryan, R. M. (2010)** found that single mothers sometimes turn to other people or private sources such as friends, family, and might even seek resources from their mother's boyfriend.

**Offer, S. (2010)** examined how dominant agency-based support are for low income families and whether it established alternative sources for families who have either limited help or no help at all. The agency-based support is defined as material assistance from charities and private social services.

**Bloom, L. R. (2009)** found that a support system made a positive influence in the single mothers' lives and it encouraged them to keep moving forward. Bloom stated that having a post-secondary education is still a "pathway" out of poverty.

**Sousa, L., and Rodrigues, S. (2009)** investigated the power of informal and formal resources along with how families coordinated multiple resources. When families only seek certain resources available they tend to stay away from the rest.

## Methods

### Participants:

- 51 participants from a local western Wisconsin food pantry
- 37 females, 13 males, and 1 "self-identify"

### Research Design:

- Non-random pilot study; Cross-sectional; Purposive design

### Data Collection Instrument:

- IRB approved
- Seven demographics questions and 10 closed ended questions based on a 1-5 Likert Scale

### Procedure:

- Questionnaires were administered to low income families
- Implied consent and confidentiality were explained

### Data Analysis Plan:

- Cleaned and coded surveys
- Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)
- Frequencies, mean comparisons, correlations and a Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis

### Demographic Variables:

- Gender (GEN)
- Age (AGE)
- Are you the head of household? (HHH)
- Are you currently employed? (CUE)
- Is any member of the family currently out of work? (FCW)
- Have you been unemployed within the past two years? (UNP)
- Do you have difficulty in meeting minimal monthly financial obligations? (DFO)

### Dependent Variables:

- Assistance in furthering my education (AFE)
- Assistance in job training (AJT)
- Housing assistance (HOS)
- Reliable transportation (RTP)
- Additional food assistance (AFA)
- Energy assistance (ENA)
- Health insurance (HEI)
- Dental insurance (DEI)
- Child care assistance (CCA)
- I use outside resources as a last resort (ORL)

## Results Summary.

We did not find support for this hypothesis with 70% of our participants having agreed/strongly agreed that they would use outside resources only as a last resort (ORL). Except for CCA (Childcare), the majority of our participants agreed that they needed the resources to stabilize their families.

## Correlations Table

*Pearson Correlation Matrix*

	AFE	AJT	HOS	RTP	AFA	ENA	HEI	DEI	CCA	ORL
AFE		.845**					.510**	.445**	.363**	
AJT			.488**	.346*			.571**	.490**	.504**	
HOS				.498**	.287*	.499**	.472**	.527**	.277*	.311*
RTP					.474**	.438**	.292*		.309*	
AFA						.611**	.434**			.350*
ENA							.387**	.515**		.443**
HEI								.854**	.292*	

~N=28; \*Correlation is significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level (two-tailed)

\*\*Correlation is significant at the  $p < 0.01$  (two-tailed)

## Implications

### Practitioners:

- We would hope that directors of food pantries would increase their awareness of what resources or information about resources food pantries could offer for low income families to provide stability to their families
- Other researchers, professionals, and practitioners could use these findings to help them increase this same awareness about the range of resources that low income families are in need of

### Future Research:

- Include a large random sample
- Include whether the participant is in a single parent household or two parent household, what their socioeconomic status is as well as their ethnicity
- It would also be important to research through qualitative interviews why most families would not access outside resources except as a last resort

## Conclusion

This study has illustrated that in these difficult economic times with chronic unemployment, multiple resources are needed to provide stability in low income families. In spite of these needs, many families responded that they would only use outside resources as a last resort. Resources are needed to stabilize a family in order to gradually be able to depend less on these resources. If a family cannot stabilize, they can enter a never-ending cycle of poverty that can last for generations.