

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY
OF LOW INCOME SINGLE MOTHERS
IN POST-SECONDARY
EDUCATION

By

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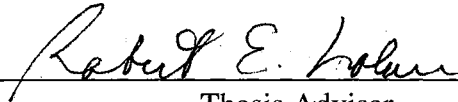
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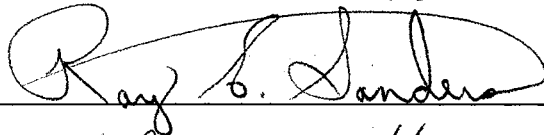
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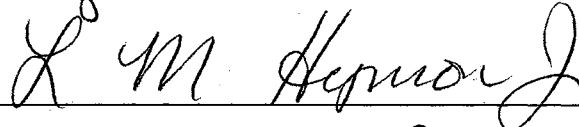
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

"The mother-only family has become a common phenomenon that promises to alter the social and economic context of family life for future generations of Americans" (McLanahan & Booth, 1989). Economic insecurity is high in mother-only families because of low earning capacity, lack of child support, and a necessity for dependence on meager public benefits such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (A.F.D.C.).

These factors have produced what some social psychologists label the "feminization of poverty" phenomenon, attributed to such problems as rising rates of marital separation or divorce, increased rates of childbearing outside of marriage, little or no child support from noncustodial fathers, low educational attainment and nearly insurmountable barriers encountered by single mothers attempting to break free from an intergenerational cycle of poverty (Danziger & Gottschalk, 1986; Pearce, 1978 and 1982).

A large body of evidence indicates that low maternal income makes a significant contribution to the intergenerational transmission of poverty in mother-only families. Two of the most significant factors related to low maternal income are educational attainment and occupational status. Research documents that a high correlation exists between low educational attainment and high levels of poverty over an extended time period and for

multiple generations for single mothers with dependent children (Danziger & Gottschalk, 1986; Garfinkel & McLanahan, 1986; Kamerman & Kahn, 1988; Five Million Children, 1990; National Center for Children in Poverty, 1995). Congressional passage of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act in 1984 (P.L. 98-524) and later federal legislative initiatives including The Displaced Homemakers Self-Sufficiency assistance Act (1990), reauthorization of The Displaced Homemaker and Single Parents Programs in the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act, and The Single Parents and Displaced Homemakers Homeowners Assistance Act (1990), collectively have provided the impetus to facilitate economic stability for scores of single women and their families (National Displaced Homemakers Network Annual Report, 1990).

Even as consideration is focused on how federal legislative initiatives have facilitated moving single mothers off welfare rolls into education and upgrading their skills for the work force, we are currently on the verge of unprecedented reforms in welfare policy. A shift in federal and state responsibilities is planned that will mean an end to some of the current welfare policies. Questions about the future of America's poor and provision for their needs are only beginning. President Clinton's decision to sign legislation that will dismantle the core of welfare, Aid to Families With Dependent Children, has caused much concern and confusion within social service agencies across the U.S.A. (Horn, 1996).

In this new phase of welfare reform, it is no longer considered good enough to provide assistance for moving single mothers out of welfare dependence into economic self-sufficiency. Rather, the new policies being heatedly debated include additional mandates targeted to reduce the number of children being born out-of-wedlock. Thus, the

rationale is provided for family caps and limitations on cash welfare, especially for single, teenage mothers. New limitations being proposed add additional perspective to the past "welfare to work" emphasis. The future outcomes of welfare reform presently hang in the balance, with many differences slated (Horn, 1996). Legislative welfare provisions have in the past, and hopefully will continue in the future, to make important contributions for single mothers that can affect systematic change in life-style, increase economic self-sufficiency, and provide a plan to interrupt the intergenerational cycle of poverty (Vocational Education Task Force of the National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, 1988).

However, in spite of increased legislative initiatives in past years and availability of financial assistance for single mothers in post-secondary education, studies continue to document the existence of barriers or perceived barriers to educational success. Studies indicate that these barriers deter many single mothers from taking advantage of educational opportunities to attain economic stability for themselves and their families (Cross, 1981; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985; Miller, 1967; Overview, 1992).

Statement of the Problem

It has been well documented that low levels of success and completion rates persist for low income single mothers in post-secondary education, in spite of a large number of federal and state initiatives that increase accessibility to education for this population group (Cross, 1981; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985/1990; Hays & Darkenwald, 1988; Scanlan & Darkenwald, 1984). Miller (1967) attributes decreased adult education participation within lower socio-economic groups to the operation of negative forces

within the culture that discourage continuation in a program. These negative forces deter lower-income students from successfully participating in adult education. This research study identifies conditions that increase and strengthen positive forces for low income single mothers, enabling them to overcome negative forces and achieve success in post-secondary education.

Significance of the Problem

Disagreement over current welfare policy measures and methods to evaluate the effects of welfare reform reflect the tension that exists between opposing values and perspectives concerning the purpose of welfare policy for various groups of people existing at poverty level incomes. Decisions and outcomes of welfare policy reform, such as planning utilization of block grants by states in future years, will ultimately affect participation of low income single mothers in post-secondary education and job training, availability of funding to successfully complete those programs, increase in workforce attachment and satisfaction, and ability to maintain long-term economic independence from government assistance (National Center for Children in Poverty, 1996).

Although state and federally-funded programs increased accessibility to education for low income single mothers in previous years, low participation and low success rates continued to be documented within this group (Cross, 1981; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985 and 1990; Hays & Darkenwald, 1988; Scanlan & Darkenwald, 1984). Participation research identified factors that represented "barriers" or "deterrents" that inhibit adult participation in post-secondary education (Scanlan & Darkenwald, 1984; Hayes & Darkenwald, 1988; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985).

However, a significant problem encountered with empirical analysis of deterrent factor studies is that they sometimes stop short at the point of identifying "broader dimensions of deterrence" within specific subpopulations, such as single mothers. Thus the practical import of such scholarly work is difficult to gauge, as they may leave critically important questions unanswered. Although identified empirical factors represent "basic forces" that inhibit adults from participating in education, they tell us little about the extent to which specific groups of learners experience these forces. Educators are then left with the task of relying on... "assumptions of homogeneity, assumptions of differences, or on suspect extrapolations based on non-systematic observation of individual differences" (Valentine & Darkenwald, 1990, p.2).

In relation to this problem, there is some indication to identify specific conditions perceived by low income single mothers as contributing to their success in post-secondary education. A need exists to examine more in depth the experiences of single mothers and their perception of conditions that enabled them to be successful in post-secondary education. Qualitative methodologies can contribute additional information to education research through in-depth study of specific sub-population groups and how they perceive successful education experiences.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to identify conditions that act as positive forces and contribute to success for low income single mothers in post-secondary education.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What conditions are identified by low-income single mothers that contribute to their success in post-secondary education programs?
2. Can recurring themes or patterns of success conditions be discovered in the participants' educational experiences?
3. In what ways are participants able to access and utilize positive conditions (or forces) in their life experience to enable them to be successful in education?

Assumptions

The study was based on the following assumptions:

1. Participants were providing accurate information for the in-depth interviews, rather than what they believed to be socially acceptable statements.
2. The qualitative technique of in-depth interviewing was an appropriate method to utilize for this study.
3. The success conditions related by participants in this study were reported according to their perceptions of the personal lived experiences.
4. Qualitative research acknowledges that all inquiry is "value-bound", and that no research can be entirely free of the values of the investigator or others.

Scope and Limitations of the Research

The following limitations apply to this study:

1. The study was limited to low income single mothers aged 19 years and above, living in non-metropolitan, rural communities in the mid-western United States.
2. No effort was made to find a representative sample of women for the study. A purposive sample of low income single mothers was identified by the fact that they were successful in their educational endeavors, and met low income guidelines.
3. The study was limited to in-depth interviews with voluntary participants reporting their perceptions of success in post-secondary education experiences. Additional information was provided by educational staff involved with the participants.
4. No effort was made in this study to arrive at generalizable circumstances, but rather to focus on the participants' own unique circumstances, telling their own unique stories. These circumstances were analyzed to discover what positive forces (conditions) helped them to be successful in education experiences.

Definition of Terms

Displaced homemaker refers to a woman whose principal job has been homemaking and who has lost her main source of income due to divorce, separation, widowhood, disability, long-term unemployment of a spouse, or loss of eligibility for federal assistance (The More Things Change: A Status Report on Displaced Homemakers and Single Parents, 1990).

Educational barriers/deterrents are basic forces, attitudes, or circumstances that impede or inhibit participation in organized programs of education (Scanlin & Darkenwald, 1984; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985; Valentine & Darkenwald, 1990).

Feminization of poverty phenomenon is specific terminology utilized by sociologists and other research scholars studying conditions of poverty throughout the U.S., and refers to a set of circumstances that has occurred over the last few decades. These circumstances have resulted in large proportions of female-headed families becoming dependent on excessively-low income, no child support for dependents, widespread reliance on federal assistance benefits, and causing over-all higher poverty rates within single-mother families (Pearce, 1978; Danziger & Gottschalk, 1986).

Federal Financial Assistance refers to any federal monies that participants received, such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (A.F.D.C.), Women, Infant and Children supplement (W.I.C.), Medicaid, foodstamps, housing or transportation assistance, Supplemental Security Income (S.S.I.), or other General Assistance (G.A.) programs funded by the Kansas Department of Human Services (Income, Poverty and Wealth in the U.S., 1992).

Female-householder family denotes a term used by sociologists and census publications, referring to a family maintained by a woman and consisting of two or more persons residing together, related by birth, marriage, or adoption; in whose name the home is owned, being bought, or rented (Facts on Working Women, 1993; Income, Poverty & Wealth in the U.S., 1992).

Financial Aid for this study refers to any personal loans or gifts, scholarships, federal loans, grants or work-study programs. A number of single mothers in this study

qualified for financial aid from Displaced Homemakers' assistance benefits available through community college and vocational/technical programs. Amount of financial aid is determined by the local higher education institution based on the cost of education minus the calculated family contribution to equal financial need. The educational financial cost (E.F.C.) is determined by a formula established by Congress, and determines how much of a student's family financial resources can be available to pay for school costs. Factors such as taxable and nontaxable income, assets (such as savings and checking accounts), and benefits (such as unemployment or Social Security) are considered in this calculation (U.S. Department of Education, Financial Aid publication, 1993).

Intergenerational cycle of poverty is terminology utilized by sociologists and other research scholars, referring to a number of repetitive circumstances that contribute to a continuation of poverty within families who subsist at or below poverty-level income for two or more generations. These circumstances result in a perpetuation of poverty to succeeding generations within these families (Hodgekinson, 1985; McLanahan & Garfinkel, 1989).

Low income refers to total income received by the family from wages, salaries, and self-employment earnings, which falls below or slightly above poverty level guidelines allotted for number of family members. Due to low income classification, families in this study qualified for one or more federal financial assistance benefits and/or financial aid available to low income women pursuing post-secondary education (Income, Poverty and Wealth in the U.S., 1992).

Post-secondary education refers to educational and/or vocational courses or programs of training that occur after completion of a secondary (high school) degree, or

after completion of requirements for a General Equivalency Diploma, or G.E.D.

(Vocational Education Task Force, 1988).

Poverty level equates with the poverty definition used in U. S. Census Bureau reports which is adopted for official government use by the Office of Management and Budget (in Statistical Directive No. 14); consisting of a set of money-income thresholds varying by family size, sex of family head, number of children under 18 years old, and whether household is "farm" or "non-farm" residence. At the core of the "poverty" definition is the Economy Food Plan, designed by the Department of Agriculture. Families or individuals with income below their appropriate poverty threshold are classified below poverty level (40 per cent of the median household income level). For example, a single person making less than \$3,492.00 per year (1993) or a family of four with income less than \$8,076.00 per year (1993) are classified at poverty level and qualify for federal financial assistance. Poverty thresholds rise each year by the same percentage rate as the annual average Consumer Price Index (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1993).

Single mother for purposes of this study, single mothers are defined as women who are unmarried or living without a spouse, with a child or children under 18 years of age living in her home and dependent on her income. They may have never married, are divorced, separated, widowed, or their spouse is absent from the home (The More Things Change: A Status Report on Displaced Homemakers and Single Parents in the 1980's).

Success conditions/strategies for purposes of this study, refers to specific conditions, contexts, provisions, and positive circumstances (forces) that assist or enable a

person to accomplish a desired goal or outcome (A Blueprint for Women's Economic Self-Sufficiency, 1995).

Organization of the Study

The dissertation contains five (5) chapters. Chapter I is the introductory chapter with nine (9) sections relating to the purpose of the research. This chapter includes the background of the problem, the statement of the problem, significance of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the assumptions, the scope and limitations of the research, definitions of terms used in the study and related literature, and the organization of the study.

Chapter II includes a discussion of phenomenology as a descriptive method for the study, the theoretical framework utilized for the study, a discussion of the characteristics of single mother households, the relationship between educational level and employability of low income single mothers, related literature on educational success of low income single mothers, strategies effecting successful participation of single mothers in post-secondary education, the importance of support systems as a positive force, and a summary of the literature review.

Chapter III describes the qualitative methodology and design of the study, assumptions guiding qualitative research and the phenomenological approach, selection of subjects and sampling procedures, the interview protocol, similar studies and previous experience cited, and the procedures used for analysis of data.

Chapter IV presents the findings of the research study in relation to the research questions, a demographic profile of the subjects, and a discussion of selected participants'

perceptions relating to their own unique experiences in post-secondary education.

Chapter V presents a summary and discussion of the results of the research study, conclusions based upon the research, implications of the study results, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter begins with a discussion of phenomenology as a descriptive framework utilized for the study and a description of the theoretical approach guiding the study. Next, a review of the literature documenting demographic information and characteristics of low income single mothers provides background information. Research documenting the relationship between educational attainment of single mothers and continuance in poverty will be examined. A sampling of successful education experiences of low income single mothers and an overview of strategies influencing successful participation of low income single mothers in post-secondary education is reviewed. Topics are organized under the following sub-headings:

1. Phenomenology: A Descriptive Methodology
2. Theoretical Framework: Force Field Analysis
- 3 Background of Feminization of Poverty
4. Characteristics of Single-Mother Households
5. Educational Level and Employability of Low Income Single Mothers
6. Related Literature on Educational Success of Low Income Single Mothers

7. Strategies Effecting Successful Participation
8. Support Systems as a Strong Positive Force
9. Summary of Literature Review

Phenomenology: A Descriptive Methodology

"The guiding theme of phenomenology is to go back to the things themselves" (Husserl, 1970/1900, p.252). An interpretation of this expression means "to go to the everyday world where people are living through various phenomena in actual situations" (Giorgi, 1985, p.8). In the context of this study, the researcher seeks to accurately describe the lived experiences of low income single mothers who were successful in post-secondary education, and who overcame many obstacles during the process.

The "meaning units" that emerge through use of this qualitative phenomenology approach are perceived within the participants' descriptions of their own unique experience, rather than through rigorous, precise analysis of the explanation for those experiences. Major scholars advancing the phenomenological approach have respected the "complexity and richness of human reality" and sought to develop categories describing that complexity in the most penetrating way. What this approach advocates is "an access to human phenomena that led to findings and discoveries not captured by other (quantitative) approaches" (Giorgi, 1985, p.viii).

For this study, the researcher sought to incorporate Husserl's dictum (1970/1900)... "back to the things themselves", in order to investigate and decipher the meaning and essence of the experiences of ordinary, and often disadvantaged women in particular segments of their everyday lives. The purpose for the phenomenological,

descriptive approach was to do justice to the "lived aspects of human phenomena, and to do so, one first has to know how someone actually experienced what has been lived" (Giorgi, 1985, p.1).

Therefore, a personal account becomes necessary to delve into those experiences. A qualitative, in-depth analysis of the described experiences contributes insight of value at least equivalent to what quantitative approaches yield, although different in character and style. In-depth interviews contribute information that is perceived and communicated by participants. Post-descriptive analysis of the interviews yields a qualitative perspective of the unique phenomena.

This is only one way, out of many possible ways, that qualitative analysis is done, depending on the type of phenomena being researched, and the investigator's preferred technique. The researcher chose this approach to utilize as a descriptive framework for the study. There are no universally accepted models for presentation of phenomenological criteria; thus some difficulties in communication of information are sometimes encountered (Giorgi, 1985). Assumptions regarding qualitative phenomenological techniques utilized for this study are described in Chapter III, Methodology.

Theoretical Framework: Force Field Analysis

As an adult educator, Miller (1967) sought to explain the relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and participation in adult education. Miller's (1967) Social Class Theory adapts and builds on Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs theory and Lewin's (1947) Force-Field Analysis theory. Miller's (1967) theory explains why certain

groups of people participate in adult education and why substantial differences exist between social classes in regard to what they hope to attain from participation.

By applying Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory (1954) to adult education, one can predict that members of the lower social classes (including low income single mothers) will be interested primarily in education oriented to meeting survival/safety needs, such as job training and adult basic education. In contrast, middle and upper social classes have fulfilled basic survival and safety needs, and are more inclined to pursue education that meets higher level esteem and self-actualization needs (Cross, 1981, p.112).

Adult education research documents educational preferences among differing socio-economic groups and supports Miller's (1967) utilization of Maslow's needs hierarchy in his Force-Field Analysis theory. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) and Cross (1981) suggest that adult socioeconomic status (SES) is the single most important determinant affecting successful participation in adult education. Their interpretation of adult SES encompasses education level, occupational status, and income level. Their findings support Miller's (1967) conclusions that individuals of lower socioeconomic levels who have lower levels of educational attainment, tend to have predominantly negative attitudes toward adult education, resulting in lower participation levels and completion rates.

Miller's (1967) basic strategy incorporated Lewin's (1947) concept of positive and negative forces that, when combined, result in a motivational force influencing success in learning. Miller's theory incorporates positive and negative forces, providing motivation and participation of lower socio-economic classes toward vocationally-

oriented education. Some of the positive motivational forces that exert more influence on lower level socio-economic groups include survival needs (for self and family), changing technology, societal expectations, safety needs of female culture (increasingly single females), dissatisfaction with present circumstances and government attempts to increase educational access. Negative forces that impede or counteract positive forces include low achievement in past educational experiences, low self-esteem, hostility to middle and upper-class groups, lack of knowledge regarding educational opportunities, limited access to organizational support, financial instability and weak family structure.

Figure 1 illustrates Miller's Force Field Analysis theory of positive and negative forces, effecting education for vocational competence, lower socio-economic levels. The position of the horizontal line indicates the resultant force established from strength of positive forces and negative forces interacting against each other. A lower horizontal line indicates stronger influence exerted by negative forces, resulting in decreased motivation, lower participation and success in post-secondary education. The width of the arrow symbolizes the strength of the force.

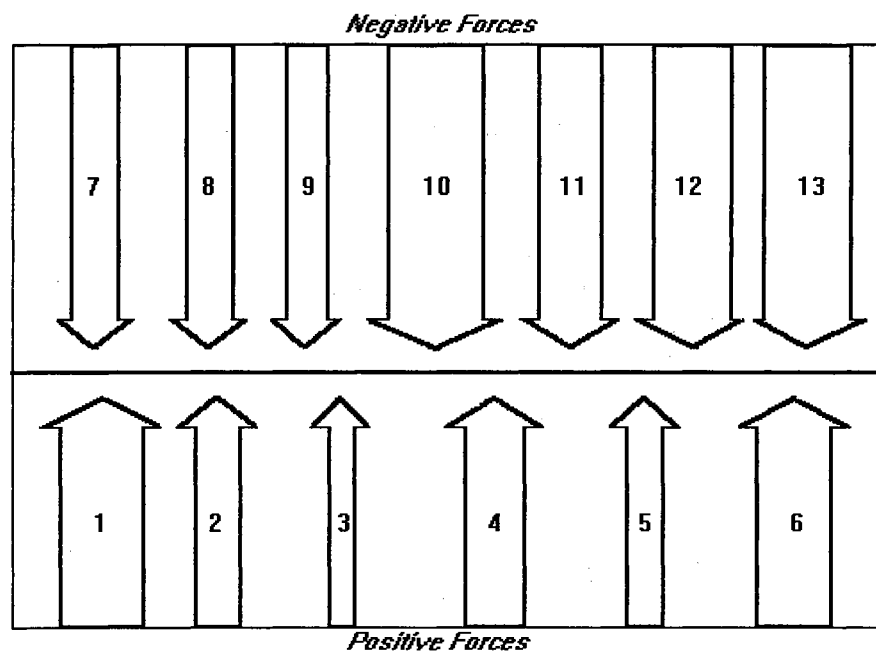
Figure 2 is a contrast of Miller's concept of stronger motivating and success forces operating in the lower-middle socio-economic levels, resulting in their preference for job-related education. As opposed to Figure 1 representing the lower level socio-economic

Positive Forces

1. Survival needs (for self and family)
2. Changing technology
3. Societal expectations
4. Safety needs of female culture (single female)
5. Dissatisfaction with present circumstances
6. Governmental attempts to increase educational access

Negative Forces

7. Low achievement in past education
8. Low self esteem
9. Hostility to middle and upper class
10. Lack of knowledge about opportunities
11. Limited access to organizational support
12. Financial instability
13. Weak family structure

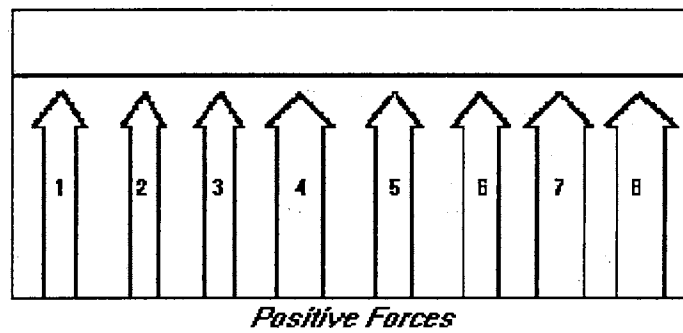


Source: Miller, 1967, p. 23 (adapted for study)

Figure 1. Education for Vocational Competence: Lower Socio-economic Levels

Positive Forces

1. Satisfied Survival Need
2. Satisfied Safety Need
3. Self-esteem high
4. Strong status need
5. Changing technology
6. Access through organizational ties
7. Acceptance of middle-class career drives
8. Familiarity with educational process and financial access



Source: Miller, 1967, p. 23 (adapted for study)

Figure 2. Education for Vocational Competence,
Lower-Middle Socio-economic Level

groups, the higher position of the horizontal line in Figure 2 indicates increased motivation and success for education in the upwardly striving lower-middle classes. Miller's (1967) findings agree with other related research addressing the relationship between participation and SES (Cross, 1981). According to Miller (1967), "The lower middle-class system, with its emphasis on mobility, status and a concentration on satisfying belonging needs within the nuclear family rather than in the adult peer group, makes it a prime consumer of continuing education" (p. 11).

Miller's (1967) Force-Field Analysis theory incorporates sociological research identifying positive and negative forces in life experiences that contribute to success or failure in adult education, and accommodates participation research findings as well. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate positive and negative forces that affect participation and probability for success with lower level socio-economic groups in post-secondary education. The theory supports trends of higher participation by lower-middle class groups from increased positive forces.

In order to make job-related, post-secondary education more attractive and accessible to lower socio-economic groups (including low income single mothers), Miller (1967) suggests that some modification of existing forces is needed. For example, it could be possible to modify Arrow 11 of Figure 1 by strengthening organizational ties and work through supportive membership groups (i.e., family community centers and school programs) to increase education opportunities for low income single mothers. Likewise, the negative force from lack of knowledge about opportunities for educational access (Arrow 10) could be reduced by increasing information to low income single mothers, such as opportunities for access to education through Displaced Homemaker

programs.

Miller (1967) proposed that any vocational, job-related education which is oriented to middle class values and accessibility will attract lower-middle classes in growing numbers. However, lower level socio-economic groups will continue to be excluded unless increased assistance and support is provided to overcome strong negative forces inherent in their life experiences. Miller's Force-Field Analysis theory suggests a need for further research in development of action strategies to reach lower-level income groups (Cross, 1981). Miller's findings can be adapted to develop plans to overcome negative forces and create successful strategies that target lower income groups, such as single mothers.

In seeking to discover success conditions for low income single mothers in post-secondary education within this study, the researcher adapted Miller's Force-Field Analysis theory from a qualitative perspective, to identify positive forces operating in the experiences of the participants. Through analyzing interview data, the researcher sought to discover ways that participants were able to access and build on positive forces (or conditions) in their life experience. It was discovered that the participants' ability to increase positive forces helped them to overcome obstacles, or negative forces operating in their lives. Similar kinds of negative influences (forces) inhibit other women of similar backgrounds from achieving success in job-related and education endeavors.

Background of Feminization of Poverty

Studies of impoverished single mothers and their families abound. Professionals from a wide spectrum of disciplines, including family and child development, psychology,

human service workers, education professionals, health care, and policy makers in business and government have focused attention on this special group to better understand their concerns and needs (Kamerman & Kahn, 1987).

According to 1992 census data, there are 12 million families maintained by women in the United States, a figure that has more than doubled over the last twenty years. This rise reflects an increased incidence of divorces, marital separations, and a growing number of women establishing families without marrying. By definition, a family maintained by a woman (female-headed family) consists of "two or more persons residing together who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption, where the householder (the person in whose name the home is owned, being bought, or rented) is a woman with no spouse present" (Facts on Working Women, 1993).

Over one-third of these households maintained by women (4.2 million) are below poverty level. Census data categorizes poverty level according to a definition established by the Office of Management and Budget. The definition incorporates a formula that varies according to geographic location, family size and composition (see p. 10). These formulaic levels are increased every year to reflect changes in the Consumer Price Index. According to federal guidelines, single-mother families (no husband present) with incomes below the appropriate poverty threshold (by family size) qualify for federal assistance or "welfare" benefits. These benefits may include Aid to Families with Dependent Children (A.F.D.C.), Supplemental Security Income (S.S.I.), and other General Assistance benefits that offer housing allowances, food stamps, health insurance and assistance for other family needs (see p. 8). Low income mothers with families may also qualify for financial assistance for education and job-training (see p. 8).

A gradual "feminization of poverty" has occurred over the two decades in the United States, caused by a number of contributing factors, including rising rates of separation and divorce, increase in teen pregnancies and increased numbers of out-of-wedlock births. These trends have resulted in a large proportion of female-headed households being dependent on poverty-level income, receiving minimal or no child support, facing a decrease in federal assistance benefits and an increase in poverty rates (Danziger & Gottschalk, 1986; Pearce, 1978 & 1982). Pearce (1978) was among the first to document this increasing percentage of poor families headed by women, termed the "feminization of poverty".

Subsequent studies have continued to focus attention on the impoverished status of single mothers in America (Women, Illiteracy and Poverty, 1984; Garfinkel & McLanahan, 1986; Pearce, 1989; and Polakow, 1993). Both the poverty rate and the number of poor families headed by single mothers increased in 1991, accounting for 64 per cent of the over-all net increase in poor families for 1990-91. By contrast, married-couple families continue to have the lowest poverty rate for families (6.0 per cent), followed by those with a male householder, no wife present (13.0 per cent). Female-headed households comprise 60 percent of all poor families with children (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993).

The single-mother family contributes significantly to the nation's high poverty rates and increased social spending. In addition, a high percentage of single-mother families experience serious economic and social problems over a long period of time. This continuing trend of increased poverty for single-mother family households serves to perpetuate the phenomenon termed the "feminization of poverty" prevalent within the

American culture (Pearce, 1989).

The number of family households maintained by women below the poverty level in 1991 (4.2 million) was in excess of ten times higher contrasted to number of households below poverty level maintained by men , 393,000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992). More recent figures document that 45.7 per cent of all female-headed families with children under age 18 are poor, contrasted to 17.7 per cent of total number of families with children being poor. "No matter how you examine the statistics, they say the same thing; to think single mother is to think poverty" (Schein, 1995).

Approximately one-half of all American children born within the last five years have spent at least part of their childhood in a family headed by a mother who is divorced, separated, unwed or widowed, and living at poverty level (Garfinkel & McLanahan, 1986; Five Million Children, 1990). Children who live in low income single-mother households for extended periods of time also tend to feed into another national social problem, the "intergenerational cycle of poverty", which has its own set of specifically defined characteristics (McLanahan, 1988; McLanahan & Booth, 1989).

Characteristics of Single-Mother Households

The problems faced by poor families are extensive, especially for those maintained by an unmarried young mother. Even if working full-time, she is unlikely to earn sufficient income to keep herself and her children out of poverty. In order to set up and maintain her own household, the single mother will most likely receive federal assistance benefits (welfare), often becoming dependent on these benefits for years. Statistics document that the majority of single mothers will continue to have more

children while remaining on welfare. In addition, a large number of the parents of single mothers on welfare were also recipients of those benefits at some time in their life (Levitan, Magnum & Pines, 1989).

Single mothers who maintain families, especially those with children under age 18, experience more serious socio-economic problems than other women in the population. Recurring problems document higher unemployment rates and lower over-all average educational attainment. A higher proportion of families maintained by women have children to rear (68.3 per cent) than married-couple families with children (48.3 per cent). Responsibilities for the care of children, especially very young children, restrict single mothers' employment opportunities and their ability to increase earning capacity (Facts on Working Women, 1993).

Financial assistance for child support from absent fathers has been a consistent problem addressed through state and federal legislative initiatives. In the late 1980's, from the total number of poor female householder families with children under age 18, 79 per cent received no child support from childrens' fathers, 37 per cent had their first child when a teen-ager, 34 per cent were unemployed, and nine per cent faced all three of these dilemmas (Sawhill, 1988). Mandatory child support legislation in the 1990's has resulted in an upward percentage curve in collection of child support monies for many more children in single mother households (U.S. Bureau of the Census: Poverty in the U.S., 1992).

In comparing racial/ethnic characteristics within the nearly eight million single-mother households with dependent children in the U.S., a large over-all percentage are headed by non-white minority groups existing below poverty level, predominantly Black

and Hispanic families. Female-householder families accounted for 78.3 per cent of all poor Black families, compared with 45.7 per cent of poor Hispanic-origin families. This difference in demographic composition comprises an over-all higher poverty rate for Afro-American female-householder families and individuals than for other racial groups. Single mothers in minority groups often face economic circumstances more desperate than White (Anglo) single mothers, including discrimination related to poverty, racism, and lower educational attainment. By comparison with non-white minority groups, out of 57 million White (Anglo) families in the U.S., 7.8 million, or 13.7 per cent, were maintained by women (Facts on Working Women, 1993).

Along with an epidemic increase in number of children born out-of-wedlock in the U.S., approximately 50 per cent of these children are born to teen-age mothers, with a higher percentage of the births occurring with single young Black or Hispanic women. Hodgekinson (1985) predicts that by the year 2020, the United States population will include 44 million Blacks and 47 million Hispanics; significantly higher than current figures of 26.5 million Blacks and 14.6 million Hispanics (U.S. census data, 1991). Due to a large increase in number of poor households headed by single Black or Hispanic mothers, current poverty statistics document that 90 per cent of the children born into poverty are from these households (National Center for Children in Poverty, 1995).

Educational Level and Employability of Low Income

Single Mothers

Education research documents that low educational levels of single mothers are closely associated with continuance in poverty and dependence on welfare assistance.

In fact, many single mothers who escape welfare dependency do not escape poverty, due to their low educational level and minimal job skills. Nearly 42 per cent of single mothers who head households are employed but still subsist at poverty level. A large percentage of these women are poorly-educated low-wage earners, with only about 10 per cent employed full-time, year-round. When employed, women in female-headed families follow similar employment patterns, whether they are widowed, never married, or married with an absent spouse. The majority of these women are working in technical, sales and administrative support occupations as secretaries, typists, retail and personal sales work and as financial records processors. A large number of single mothers work in service occupations such as food services, health services, cleaning and building service jobs, which tend to be lower wage jobs (Facts on Working Women, 1993).

Single mothers actually have a higher labor force participation rate than American women over-all; 67.8 per cent are in the paid labor force, compared to 61.4 per cent of all women. However, almost half of single mothers raising children without spouses have inadequate incomes, regardless of work force participation (A Status Report on Displaced Homemakers and Single Parents in the 1980's). An exception to this employment pattern for single mothers is with divorced female householders. At least one out of four (25 per cent) employed divorced female householders were working in managerial and professional specialty occupations in 1992. On the average, divorced women have completed more years of school than never-married single mothers; thus higher educational attainment is an important factor in their ability to secure managerial and professional jobs (Facts on Working Women, 1993).

Full-time employment is no guarantee that single-mother families will escape poverty. With the federal minimum wage at \$4.25 per hour (1994), a mother working 1,750 hours in a 35-hour week, full-time year-round job, will only have an income of \$7,438; which is only 66 per cent of the poverty income level for a family of three. Even with the forecast of a possible minimum wage increase, and claiming the maximum Earned Income Tax Credit (E.I.T.C.), these families are unable to lift themselves out of poverty (National Center for Children in Poverty, 1995).

Mothers not completing high school are less likely to be employed steadily, if at all, and tend to earn less when employed. The significantly lower wages of uneducated working single mothers and lack of child support are major contributing factors to high poverty rates among single-mother household families. The responsibility of raising young children often hinders or postpones educational opportunities for teenage mothers. Many in this age group have not completed high school, and some may never complete high school, with teenage pregnancy as one of the greatest contributing factors for young women dropping out of school. Teenage mothers with little career motivation are more likely to marry early, drop out of school, and have a larger number of children at an earlier age than other women. By contrast, single teenage mothers who are career-motivated tend to stay single longer, remain at home with parents longer, progress to a higher level of education, have fewer pregnancies, become more employable and less dependent on welfare benefits (Overview of Entitlement Programs, 1992).

Statistics documenting educational attainment and occupational status of single mothers indicate that educational level is the strongest determinant in gaining access to higher-paying jobs. Strong evidence supporting a direct relationship between

educational level of single mothers and ability to earn adequate family income makes poverty census data alarming. U.S. census data (1992) documented only 53.2 percent of poor family householders 25 years old and above were high school graduates in 1991, compared to 82.8 per cent of non-poor householders. Seventy-five per cent of single female householders with less than a high school diploma were living in poverty, compared to 34.0 per cent of single male householders (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1992).

Low educational level is increasingly linked to long-term welfare dependency, poverty and unemployment of single mothers. Three-fifths of all single mothers who are recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (A.F.D.C.) have not completed high school. In addition, research provides evidence that parental education has a direct relationship on children's educational development. Every year the day-to-day lives of millions of women and children are tragically affected by a cycle of poverty that continues through succeeding generations for a large number of them (National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, 1988; National Center for Children in Poverty, 1994).

"Education has always been the cornerstone of enhanced employment opportunities" (Schein, 1995). Poverty rates were shown to decrease dramatically as years of school completed by the householder increased and as number of workers in the family increased. This relationship existed regardless of race, ethnic origin, or marital status. However, poverty rates for families tended to increase as family size increased. The proportion of those living at poverty level who had not completed high school (48.3 per cent) was larger than the proportion of poor householders who completed high school with no college credit (34.3 per cent). The smallest proportion of poor

householders (17.4 per cent) were those who completed high school and one or more years of college (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992).

Related Literature on Educational Success
of Low Income Single Mothers

The majority of low income single mothers must overcome enormous obstacles to achieve success in education and establish long-term financial stability. The commonality of family experiences for poor single mothers provides evidence that barriers exist which prohibit educational success, economic stability and financial independence. A large percentage of low income single mothers possess limited educational and life skills (Cooper, 1993).

Lack of sufficient income, even while receiving welfare benefits, is a major reason single mothers seek work outside the home. If they do secure a job, they often encounter discrimination in pay, minimal job opportunities, negative attitudes and devaluation of their abilities. Even with full-time employment, they are unlikely to earn a decent wage for their family, and risk losing badly needed benefits, such as health care (Medicaid) for their families (Amott, 1993; Amott & Matthaei, 1991).

Single mothers who seek to upgrade their meager financial circumstances and pursue post-secondary education often face extreme pressures from shortages of money, time and energy. They share a commonality of concerns about their children, their jobs, child care arrangements, fear of failure and the affects these choices have on their families. Those who pursue education and job training must cope with multiple pressures daily, often without benefit of consistent ongoing support and assistance. They

are often confronted with negative societal stereotypes, as well, but the voices of many of these women in poverty tell a story of hard work, perseverance, and success against all odds (Sanik & Mauldin, 1986; Weitzman, 1985). The particular focus of this section is to share some of the success stories of single mothers in post-secondary education, how they overcame obstacles and built a solid base of financial stability and independence for themselves and their families.

Schein (1995) conducted a qualitative research study which involved 30 impoverished single mothers sharing their life experiences. This project evolved out of her participation on the Job Training and Partnership Act's (J.T.P.A.) Private Industry Council (P.I.C.) and her service on the board of directors of Survivors, Inc., a battered women's shelter. Schein's study (1995) found that barriers to solid economic independence were enormous for impoverished single mothers, since these women usually possessed limited educational and life skills. She describes the research outcomes as "presented through the voices of the impoverished mothers...although the analysis focuses on category development, the voices used to determine and define these groupings are presented to the reader in full" (Schein, 1995, p. 13).

In her poverty study, Schein (1995) related personal stories of low income single mothers and their experiences of working and going to school. Their stories reflected complexity, pain and courage in trying to raise their children in impoverished circumstances. She documented a commonality of experience in their circumstances and attitudes that allowed general themes to emerge, and these contributed to development of the larger picture. A pattern of success was exhibited by the women in her study who were involved in education. Three of the women were high school graduates, had

graduated from community colleges, and were actively seeking employment. Four of the single mothers were high school dropouts who had completed their G.E.D.'s and later obtained associate degrees. The personal accounts of these women portrayed courage, perseverance, and a strong determination to provide better lives for their families. Through completing post-secondary programs, the single mothers expanded their job opportunities, long-term financial expectations, family benefits and opportunities for advancement. During interviews, the women shared that they initially had little confidence they could succeed in school, but were encouraged to investigate possible educational opportunities. They credited much of their success to the support and encouragement received from program counselors and teachers, as well as to the financial assistance that was available for them.

According to Schein (1995), a prior study by Henderson and Ottinger found that within two years following graduation, incomes of women college graduates surpassed average earnings of male college classmates. Their study and others document that post-secondary education provides access to a higher level and broader range of income opportunities, including professional, technical, managerial, and administrative positions not accessible to high school graduates. A high school degree or G.E.D. is a first step toward economic independence, but studies document that for single women trying to support families, further education is imperative. Statements taken from a study completed several years earlier forecasted the reality of today's job force: "Only twenty-seven per cent of all new jobs will fall into low skill categories. For the first time in American history, the majority of new jobs will require some kind of post-secondary education" (Women, Illiteracy and Poverty: Breaking the Cycle, 1988, p. 5).

Ann McLaughlin, prior U.S. Secretary of Labor, observed,

We are rapidly approaching a new century and a vastly different labor market from the one we know...A growing share of our new workers will come from groups where human resource investments have been historically deficient - minorities, women, and immigrants (Women, Illiteracy and Poverty, 1988, p.5).

Studies also emphasize a need to raise awareness of single mothers to nontraditional opportunities in post-secondary education for higher level, male-dominated skill and craft jobs which pay a great deal more than minimum-wage jobs. Vocational training which is accessible to both men and women includes carpentry, electronics, plumbing, construction, industrial maintenance, drafting and transportation jobs. For women supporting families who need to earn a sufficient income as soon as possible, these skilled, higher-wage "blue collar" jobs can be as appropriate and perhaps more accessible than a college degree (Schein, 1995).

Although there is sometimes resistance to women in "blue-collar" job occupations, as well as frequent changes due to technological advances and economic shifts, studies indicate that single mothers can be successful in non-traditional higher wage jobs. A shortage of workers is projected for some newly developing semiskilled and skilled occupations. Vocational technical programs and community college/business partnerships often provide classes for these new programs, along with specific job-skills training at the related business sites. Single mothers entering post-secondary education need to be alerted to opportunities that could be available in these skilled occupations (O'Farrell & Moore, 1993).

In a qualitative study involving 30 single employed mothers, Quinn and Allen (1989) found that participants repeatedly characterized their lives as "involving a paradoxical bind which emerges from their need to survive in the male-oriented work world and succeed in their roles as heads of households" (p. 390). Ten participants in this study had returned to school to pursue a degree or complete a vocational program, but all of the women in the study were employed. Some of those not attending school indicated they felt education was inaccessible, and were employed in typically "female" jobs. These women expressed that they felt caught in low-paying, inflexible, dead-end employment situations.

When asked to describe life from their own perspective, the women confirmed the predicted challenges of time, money, and energy prevalent in similar studies of single mothers (Sanik & Mauldin, 1986; Weitzman, 1985). Through in-depth interviews, they exposed a pattern of mutual feelings that certain behaviors were required of them as heads of households, and that these kinds of behaviors were diametrically opposed to actions which would enable them to find husbands and achieve the elusive ideal of a "normal family". The women also shared that family and close friends were a significant source of support and encouragement, and having someone to listen to their problems and understand what they were experiencing helped them cope with daily pressures. The authors commented on an unexpected finding from the study, that a high percentage of women reported utilizing the church as a place for socializing and friendship. They felt that it offered a "safe" environment, and they made contacts with people of similar values and interests. Twenty four women in the study had participated in some form of individual or group counseling, as well (Quinn & Allen, 1989).

Weitzman (1985) documented that there are severe limits on the time, money and energy that a single parent going to school has available. For single mothers trying to juggle motherhood, employment and school requirements, the chronic shortage of time can be seriously problematic. The resolution of this problem often results in the mother sacrificing critical personal needs, such as sleep and nutrition. Even when the mothers work out a system to manage time shortages, most of them expressed feelings of guilt for increased time they spent away from their children.

Baird (1991) conducted case studies of four African-American single mothers, aged 20 to 30 years, receiving A.F.D.C. benefits. The women participated in a vocational program in Pennsylvania named Potential Re-entry Opportunities in Business and Education (PROBE). This non-profit agency offered career counseling, computer and communications skills training, and job readiness classes to single parents and displaced homemakers at several sites in Pennsylvania. During interviews, the participants expressed feelings of frustration about previous learning experiences, but said they were motivated to start the program in order to get a better paying job and to be a good example for their children.

Participants' reasons given for pursuing education included poverty and degradation from their welfare dependence, increased responsibility as single parents, and realization that jobs for just survival were not going to solve their problems. Participants reported initial feelings of low self esteem and expectations of failure. However, they spoke of increased feelings of self-worth and hope, generated by staff support and a "sense of being valued as individuals". The PROBE communications class followed a philosophy "that we learn to cultivate talent and ability in whatever package it

appears" (p. 141). This approach proved appropriate for the culturally diverse group whose experiences fit "the presumption of inferiority as one of the most persistent barriers to minority achievement" (p. 133). The author emphasized that guidance and counseling are extremely important for low income single mothers entering post-secondary education. Specific guidance in exploring realistic opportunities, setting goals, and the role of education in achieving their goals is paramount. Support and counseling in their quest for self worth and in decision-making processes is essential to achieve success (Baird, 1991).

Strategies Effecting Successful Participation in Education

Strategies that encourage low-income single mothers to pursue post-secondary education have been an outgrowth from deterrent and participation research findings (Carp, Peterson, & Roelfs, 1974; Valentine & Darkenwald, 1990; Hays & Darkenwald, 1988; Mezirow, Darkenwald & Knox, 1975). Post-secondary programs have been initiated through legislation providing educational and financial provisions targeting this population group. A number of successful adult education programs are financed through government agency procurements, special incentive allowances, and vocational education grant monies earmarked for low income students.

These programs provide a wide range of needs assessment services, educational opportunities, skills training, job-search assistance, employment opportunities, child care and housing allowances for single mothers who qualify. Welfare legislation is considering removing the option of choosing to participate and requiring that single

mothers receiving federal assistance must obtain employment within a specified time period or participate in education/job training to obtain employment (Overview of Entitlement Programs, 1992).

Set time limits for discontinuing welfare payments have been incorporated as part of current welfare reform measures and participation in work or vocational training programs is required. The most recent comprehensive reform measures end long-standing federal guarantee of cash assistance for the nation's poorest families, and provide states with new responsibilities in running their own welfare and work programs with "block grants" (New York Times News Service, July 24, 1996).

A fairly recent legislative measure, The Non-traditional Employment Act for Women (1991), was an incentive to post-secondary training programs for low income women. This legislation encouraged the Job Training and Partnership Act (J.T.P.A.) Private Industry Councils (P.I.C.'s) to set goals for training women participants in non-traditional, high-paying jobs. Outcomes documented by such groups as Wider Opportunities for Women's non-traditional training programs within J.T.P.A. have published data documenting the value of such programs (Wider Opportunities for Women, Inc., 1993). Some of these training programs in different states offer a variety of non-traditional women's programs including transportation and forestry occupations, contracting, machinists, welders, carpenters, and printers. With support and counseling for these occupations, the women can be directed toward careers with annual salaries over \$30,000 dollars (Coleman, 1993).

A national group that has actively addressed education and employment needs of women, including single mothers, is the National Displaced Homemakers Network (NDHN). This organization recently succeeded in implementing the first federal job training program specifically designated for displaced homemakers. The impetus for this program began nearly fifteen years ago with a small committed group of displaced homemakers (see definition, p.12). Their activities have grown to include over one thousand local programs nationwide. Program data documents that efforts of this organizations have assisted thousands of women and families each year to become economically self-sufficient (National Displaced Homemakers Network, 1990 Annual Report, p.1).

According to their Mission Statement, National Displaced Homemakers Network is: 1) Dedicated to empowering displaced homemakers of all racial and ethnic backgrounds and assisting them to achieve economic self-sufficiency; 2) Effecting public policy by working with lawmakers and business leaders to create and strengthen programs that help displaced homemakers to achieve these goals; 3) Committed to ongoing, comprehensive public education that draws awareness to the needs of displaced homemakers; 4) Involved in ongoing collection of data, disseminating information, providing technical assistance, and acting as a communication link with more than 1,000 programs, agencies and educational institutions. These agencies provide job training and other vital services to America's 15.6 million displaced homemakers (National Displaced Homemakers Network, 1990 Annual Report).

The Network (NDHN) contributes significantly toward achieving federal legislative priorities that ensure successful education outcomes for displaced

homemakers. Important contributions of the Network in 1990 were helping to achieve Congressional passage of The Displaced Homemakers Self-Sufficiency Assistance Act of 1990, reauthorization of the Displaced Homemaker and Single Parent Programs in the Carl D.Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act of 1990, and the Single Parents and Displaced Homemakers Homeowners Assistance Act. All of these programs passed with strong bipartisan support (1990 Annual Report, p.2).

In 1989, NDHN implemented a state-wide project, the State Technical Assistance and Training Effort (STATE), funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau. This grant enabled the Network to provide intensive training and technical assistance to local programs in ten states each year. Training issues incorporate topics such as outreach and public education, serving women of color, and data collection. The National Network works with states to conduct workshops and conferences relating to topics of interest for displaced homemakers, produces publications, disseminates information and provides technical assistance to strengthen state programs (National Displaced Homemaker's Network, 1990 Annual Report).

Another program that receives federal grant monies to assist low income single mothers is The National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, a special task force comprised of more than 60 organizations dedicated to improving educational opportunities and equal access to employment for disadvantaged women. Some of the legislation the task force has initiated is the Civil Rights Restoration Act, Women's Educational Equity Act, and a variety of vocational programs designed to upgrade skills of single mothers within the population classified at poverty level (Overview of

Entitlement Programs, 1992; A Blueprint for Women's Economic Self-Sufficiency, 1995).

For the present time, a resurgence of interest in offering post-secondary education and vocational training to single mothers in poverty continues to result in an increase in educational programs across the country. As previously discussed, a number of federal legislative initiatives have provided educational opportunities and programs for large numbers of low income individuals to participate and be successful in post-secondary education. Specific strategies are incorporated to reduce educational barriers, provide specialized outreach, and establish support and counseling services needed by this population to achieve economic self-sufficiency (A Blueprint for Women's Economic Self-Sufficiency, 1995).

These "family empowerment programs" seek to prevent individuals from becoming dependent on long-term welfare and to enable them to move off of welfare by providing preparatory and vocational services necessary to gain substantial employment. Research documents that single women who have access to quality education and training which includes a broad range of support services to help ensure success, are able to acquire marketable skills and establish financial stability for themselves and their families (A Blueprint for Women's Economic Self-sufficiency, 1995).

Support Systems as a Strong Positive Force

A number of successful strategies and programs for low income single mothers have been discussed in this literature review. If attention could be focused on one specific strategy that was repeatedly identified as a strong positive condition for these

women, which would enable them to be successful in education, that strategy would be the role of social support. Social support was frequently indicated as a strong positive force that made a significant difference with the majority of the women who succeeded in overcoming negative conditions, or influences, in their lives. The forms of social support available to the women were often different. Social support came from family, friends, bosses, teachers, counselors, social service coordinators, and others. The women reporting strong social support were able to move forward toward success, due to steady and strong doses of positive and continued support they received. Often the women described how they were able to just keep going day by day with strong support from family and friends. Sometimes the support came through receiving direction to a job-training program, and receiving information and encouragement about financial resources and other opportunities. The women were greatly encouraged when someone showed genuine interest and took time to reach out and help them (Shein, 1995).

On the negative side, Schein (1995) found some women in her study who lived in almost total isolation, receiving almost no positive support, encouragement, or words of praise. These women seemed to be cut off from any knowledge of resources, opportunities, emotional support, and their lives were devoid of relationships, other than their children. These single mothers were singled out as having few options and opportunities for success. The most important positive strategy for them was to help them find a linkage to some kind of support services.

Though social support was certainly not the answer to all of the women's problems or negative circumstances, each form of support provided some bolstering to access various strategies for success. The women interviewed shared many different

paths to reach their goals. But the thread of social support, offered in many different ways and forms, permeated the stories of the women who successfully achieved their goals of becoming independent of welfare (Schein, 1995).

Summary of the Literature Review

The related literature review presents supportive documentation that post-secondary education, vocational skills training, personal improvement classes, and job-placement assistance for low income single mothers can make a significant contribution toward successful strategies to address long-term needs. A wide range of needs, a broad scope of related issues addressing single mother households, and studies documenting successful outcomes in post-secondary education have been discussed. The literature review documents that if women in poverty are to become empowered to break loose from an entangling web of poverty, a strong base must be built through education and training to access viable income opportunities. Social support, an overlapping community network system to provide assistance, and a long-term commitment of all these systems can help direct impoverished women to a brighter and more hopeful future.

Research scholars addressing this issue maintain that the key factor in assisting welfare mothers out of poverty is to forge a strong linkage between these women and the wide array of agencies operating to assist them in that search (Ganzglass & McCart, 1990). A number of the federal and state programs seeking to provide this link to low income single mothers have been discussed in the review. These programs

endeavor to provide a wide array of opportunities to assist low income single mothers to assume individual responsibility, take control of their lives, and achieve satisfying and financially stable family outcomes.

For this study, the participants were willing to share with the researcher a segment of their life experiences as single mothers, personal perspectives regarding how they were able to succeed in educational endeavors, and what kind of support services helped them to achieve success in those pursuits. Chapter III will address the procedures used in this research endeavor, and Chapter IV will describe the stories the participants shared of their experiences.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology and design of the study. The problem, purpose and research questions are restated. The design of the study includes assumptions guiding qualitative research and the phenomenological method, selection of the sample for the study, sampling procedures, interview protocol, explanation of pilot study, qualifications of the researcher, the procedures guiding collection and analysis of data, an outline of the steps utilized in the methodology, and the methodology schematic.

Problem Statement

It has been well documented that low levels of success and completion rates persist for low income single mothers in post-secondary education, in spite of a large number of federal and state initiatives that increase accessibility to education for this population group (Cross, 1981; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985/1990; Hays & Darkenwald, 1988; Scanlan & Darkenwald, 1984). Miller (1967) attributes decreased adult education participation within lower socio-economic groups to the operation of negative forces within the culture that discourage continuation in a program. These negative forces deter lower-income students from successful participation in adult

education. This research study identifies conditions that increase and strengthen positive forces for low income single mothers, enabling them to overcome negative forces and achieve success in post-secondary education.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the research was to identify conditions that act as positive forces and contribute to success for low income single mothers in post-secondary education.

Research Questions

Research questions guiding this study included:

1. What conditions are identified by low-income single mothers that contribute to their success in post-secondary education programs?
2. Can recurring themes or patterns of success conditions be discovered in the participants' educational experiences?
3. In what ways are participants able to access and utilize positive conditions (or forces) in their life experience to enable them to be successful in education?

Assumptions Guiding Qualitative

Methodologies

For purposes of this study, use of qualitative research methodology was appropriate, in order to gain the participants' perspectives of their lives and experiences in education. When asked to describe their experiences, low income single mothers have the opportunity to contribute ideas from their own perspectives, as well as to confirm or

deny shared information from experts in the area (Quinn and Allen, 1989; Eriksen, 1986).

Bogden and Biklen (1992) state,

Meaning is of essential concern to the qualitative approach. Researchers... are interested in the ways different people make sense out of their lives with what are called 'participant perspectives', and making sure they capture those perspectives accurately (p.32).

Assumptions guiding qualitative research methodologies are included in this study to clarify the research techniques, interview protocol, collection and analysis of data utilized in the study. In utilizing qualitative methodology, it is imperative that the researcher formulate no prior assumptions in regard to the participants and their personal experiences. This differs from "a priori" assumptions incorporated in empirical research methods, in which the researcher attempts to support or reject previous assumptions formulated (Connelly, 1993).

The following assumptions guiding qualitative methodologies were compiled by Connelly (1993), to assist in formulating strategies and utilizing qualitative procedures. These assumptions were utilized to assist the researcher in examining life experiences from the perspective of the participants:

- 1) Qualitative research studies primarily utilize narrative to report findings, rather than complex statistical procedures;
- 2) Qualitative research techniques were developed in various disciplines, resulting in a variety of methodologies;
- 3) Qualitative research is based on a philosophical belief that there are fundamental differences between natural (physical) sciences and the psychosocial sciences;

4) Research studies involving people must consider the historical and subjective aspects of human experience;

5) There is no one objective reality that can be measured, and reality is in a constant state of change;

6) Everyone forms their own unique perspective of reality, depending on their personal life experiences;

7) Qualitative research maintains there are no simple "cause and effect" processes, but we interact constantly to shape our own and each other's behavior to influence the world around us;

8) The goal of qualitative research is to study and interpret a particular phenomena as holistically as possible through talking to people, observing, and participating (when appropriate) to understand the phenomena;

9) Data collection does not preclude use of numbers, but generally involves qualitative data, or words, that are analyzed to interpret what has occurred;

10) Qualitative research acknowledges that all inquiry is "value-bound"; that no research can be entirely free of the values of the investigator or others. Therefore, the researcher tries to be clear about any values expressed in the study, either of the researcher or participants (Connelly, 1993).

The Research Method: Phenomenology

For purposes of this research study, the qualitative phenomenological technique was chosen to produce descriptive data. "Researchers in the phenomenological mode attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in

particular situations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The phenomenological research method is both inductive and descriptive. The essential task of the method centers in the investigation and description of phenomena as it appears in human experience. The rationale for this approach is to gain the individual perspective of the participants and their interpretation of personal experiences. In contrasting this method to more rigorous quantitative techniques, Schein (1995) observes, "It is the individual level of study...that can produce the differing attitudes and experiences of the women as they move toward economic independence" (p. 11).

The phenomenological method focuses on how reality is perceived by persons and how the world is experienced by them. This method was appropriate for data collection pertinent to the stated problem, purpose and research questions proposed in this study. In utilizing the phenomenological approach, the intent of the research is to describe experiential situations within the framework of participants, and to search for their meaning and understanding in those experiences (Giorgi, 1985; Parse, Coyne & Smith, 1985; Paterson & Zderad, 1976 and 1988; Spiegelberg, 1965; Valle & King, 1978; Van Kaam, 1959).

Within this study, phenomenological technique was utilized to explore participants' perspectives or perceptions of meaning in relation to their personal experience in post-secondary education, and the conditions, or positive forces, they believe were important to them in order to be successful in this experience. The qualitative phenomenological approach provided an opportunity to "see the world from another person's point of view" (Schein, 1995).

Selection of Subjects

Subjects for the study included 19 low income single mothers from a variety of family and educational backgrounds. Subjects had completed, or were in the process of completing post-secondary education programs when the interviews were conducted. In order to qualify for the study, participants met one or more of the following criteria:

1) Completion of one or more post-secondary education programs at the time of the interviews (13 women met this criteria). Some were currently in the process of pursuing additional post-secondary studies at the time of the interviews;

2) Earned a certificate of completion, a graduation diploma, or a degree from degree-granting programs.

Participants who had not met criteria 1 and 2 at the time of the interviews, met the following criteria:

3) Six (6) of the participants were enrolled in the last term of a post-secondary education program, when first interviewed. Last term referred to last semester, quarter, or last year of the program, depending on kind of program and length of time required in the program before completion (i.e., vocational program vs. two- or four-year college program);

4) Participants enrolled in the last term of a program (criteria 3) were currently meeting standards required for completion of the program. All of the women meeting this criteria had completed their programs by the time that the research results were reported. Seventeen out of nineteen participants completed their first programs between the years 1992-1996. Two participants had completed first programs prior to 1992, but

had pursued additional post-secondary studies after 1992.

5) Participants' success in post-secondary education was substantiated by faculty, staff, and other associates closely involved with the students during their education programs.

The purposive sample group of 19 single mothers resided in small, rural Midwestern communities (less than 15,000 population) in south central Kansas and northern Oklahoma. The age range of the subjects was 19 to 59 years, with an average age of 34.5 years. Participants had from one to five dependent children residing with them at the time they were enrolled in post-secondary education programs. The average number of children in these families was 2.5. One of the older mothers had grown children, but she had grandchildren living with her at the time she attended school. Meeting financial and day-to-day living needs was primarily the responsibility of the mother. A few of the participants received some financial and child care assistance from the children's fathers, their parents or in-laws, but clarified that this assistance was not received on a regular basis, or particularly helpful, as they could not always depend on it.

Generation of Data

According to Greene (1978), phenomenologists believe there are multiple ways of interpreting experiences through our interaction with others, and it is the personal meaning of those experiences that constitutes reality. For this study, in-depth interviews with each participant were utilized to ascertain the subjects' perspectives or perceptions of meaning relating to their lives and experiences in education. The researcher was able

to access names of potential subjects for the study by referrals from professional co-workers, teachers, education program directors, and former students. The researcher also serves as a volunteer counselor and consultant at a local crisis pregnancy center and had contact with single mothers at the agency and through a single mothers' support group. After collecting names of potential subjects for the study, the researcher personally contacted each by telephone or in person, talked with them about the study, and ascertained their willingness to be a participant in the study. If verbal consent was given, an appointment was made for the initial interview.

Demographic data for the study was generated through a printed questionnaire given to each respondent prior to the initial interview. The questionnaire addressed information and data useful for classification and comparison of participant characteristics (Appendix A). The purpose for this information was explained and potential participants were allowed opportunity during the informational session to ask additional questions. After preliminary discussions with possible participants for the study, the researcher selected names to include in the purposive sample. Each one was personally contacted by the researcher to inform them of their selection for the study, or were told why they could not be included. Potential participants could not be included for one or more of the following reasons: 1) income level was above poverty level for number of family members; 2) single mother lived with and received most of her financial support from parents; 3) they did not qualify for federal or state assistance due to higher income level; 4) children were not claimed as dependents by the mother; or 5) income level was too high to qualify for school funding available to low income students.

Participants were asked to sign a consent form granting permission to participate in the study, permission to be interviewed by the researcher, permission for the researcher to audio-tape the interviews, and permission to include information from the interviews in the research document, with omission of names or other identifying information (Appendix B). Before beginning the interviews, the researcher explained the purpose of the consent form and requested that it be signed by participants prior to the initial interview. During this time, the purpose of the research study was also explained and opportunity given for each participant to ask questions concerning the research study or process. Each participant was given a copy of their signed consent form, if requested.

In the event that a selected subject was unable to participate in the interview sessions, additional names were obtained from the potential list of participants selected, and contacts were made following the previous procedures. The researcher was unable to obtain interviews with four potential participants who were selected for the study. Two of the women had moved out of town, and were unable to arrange a time to meet. The other two women were contacted numerous times by telephone to arrange an interview, but were always too busy to schedule a meeting.

Interviews were taped, with participant's permission, and transcribed as soon as possible following each interview session. Interviews were transcribed, word for word, by a paid research assistant. Follow-up interview sessions or phone calls were made, when needed, to clarify participant's meaning and verify information as accurate according to participant's account. Length of time for first interviews varied from 30 minutes to 90 minutes, with most lasting approximately one hour. Length of follow-up

interviews was from 15 to 30 minutes, by phone call or personal contact.

Data Triangulation

Duffy (1986), refers to data triangulation as an attempt to gather observations through the use of a variety of sampling strategies, in order to ensure that a theory is tested in more than one way. Theoretical triangulation employs the use of several frames of reference or perspectives in the analysis of the same set of data. According to Mitchell (1986), the utilization of triangulation methodologies helps to maximize the validity of the research endeavor.

For this study, the researcher utilized triangulation methodology to gather observations from a variety of sources, in order to ensure accuracy of the data and lend validation to the qualitative methodology of in-depth interviews. The different methods utilized for data gathering included in-depth interviews with the participants (both initial and follow-up); validation of information with participants' employers, teachers, and other personnel associated with them in school or at work; information supplied by friends and co-workers; and the researcher's association with some of the participants through teaching, counseling, or job-related experience.

Data Collection Sites

The participants were interviewed at sites they chose so they might feel more comfortable and relaxed. Most of the interviews occurred in the womens' homes, workplaces, and schools during a break time. Two early interviews were conducted in restaurants, but background noise was distracting and disturbed audiotaping. The

researcher suggested a setting if the participant had no preference, or if their chosen setting was not conducive to audio-taping. The purpose for the informal settings was to allow the researcher to converse and interact with the participants in a natural and unobtrusive manner, and to ensure noise levels were appropriate for taping.

Data Collection: Interview Protocol

The researcher utilized a loosely structured protocol for the interviews, but all interviews started with the first question and were structured within a framework of the other questions. Questions were worded in an open format to allow participants freedom to share their own perspectives and perceptions of meaning, rather than leading them to give specific information desired for the study. Participants were encouraged to share whatever information they chose and move from one topic to another at their own pace. A copy of the interview questionnaire is provided in Appendix C. Prior to beginning the study, the interview questions (Appendix C) were juried by two college professors and two counselors who have been involved in programs focusing on needs of single mothers. Some revisions were made in the original questionnaire in accordance with suggestions offered.

Pilot Study

The research technique for utilizing an open-format questionnaire with in-depth interviews followed a similar qualitative protocol utilized in a pilot study conducted by the researcher in Fall, 1992, titled "Single Mothers in Poverty: A Qualitative Study of Parenting and Family Life Experiences". The study was a graduate research project that

was completed under the guidance of a sociology professor who specialized in qualitative research methodologies, and had published qualitative research. The study was a pilot project for the present research study undertaken to complete requirements for a Doctor of Education degree in Occupational and Adult Education. For both studies, the researcher utilized a similar sample group of low income single mothers. The major difference was in the discipline orientation of the studies. The 1992 study was sociologically oriented, while the 1995-96 study was educationally oriented, and participants were involved in post-secondary education.

The pilot study examined parenting practices and patterns of family life experiences of low income single mothers. In-depth interviews were conducted with twenty-three single mothers, and transcribed data was analyzed for themes and patterns of behavior relating to parenting and family life experiences. Findings of the research documented that a large percentage of the participants had experienced dysfunctional family life experiences as children (according to research definition), and related similar perceptions of dysfunctional parenting practices and family life (according to research definition).

Questionnaire protocol for the 1992 and 1995-96 study was similar, incorporating an open format to encourage more input from the participants. The data obtained for the studies had a different focus in the discipline areas, as mentioned previously. A copy of the pilot study questionnaire utilized for in-depth interviews with 23 single mothers for the 1992 study is included in Appendix D for comparison with the current study questionnaire in Appendix C. The interview questionnaire from the earlier (1992) study was pre-tested with graduate students in a qualitative research course

before beginning initial interviews with participants. The questionnaire for the current study was juried by a graduate sociology professor and two associate professors in Nursing Education, one of whom had completed a qualitative research study for her doctoral dissertation.

Interview questions for the study (Appendix C) also follow a similar format utilized in two qualitative studies describing life experiences of low income single mothers and their families (Quinn & Allen, 1989; Baird, 1991). Interview questions for the present study (1995-96) are similar to the unstructured format utilized by Quinn and Allen (1989) for a qualitative study entitled, "Facing Challenges and Making Compromises: How Single Mothers Endure". For this study, in-depth interviews were conducted, and sessions were tape recorded. An unstructured format was utilized for the interviews in order to capture the womens' perceptions of their circumstances as opposed to what they thought the researcher wanted them to say. Interview questions for the Quinn & Allen (1989) Study are included in Appendix E for comparison with a similar protocol for the researcher's interview questions in the present study. The questions for the Quinn & Allen Study were developed and pre-tested in a pilot study conducted by the authors prior to the research study.

Qualifications of the Researcher

In addition to completing the qualitative research pilot study in 1992, the researcher has the following research experience: 1) conducted an empirical research study with primiparous mothers as partial fulfillment of requirements for earning a Master of Nursing Degree with a specialty in Maternal Child Nursing at The Wichita

State University (W.S.U.), Wichita, Kansas, in December, 1978; 2) While a graduate student at W.S.U., completed a Master's Thesis entitled, "The Relationship of Psychoprophylaxis to the Use of Analgesia, Sedation, and Anesthesia in Labor and Delivery" (May, 1978). Experimental and control groups for this study included 49 primiparous (first pregnancy) mothers who completed Lamaze Childbirth Classes in Kansas (experimental), and 50 primiparous mothers who did not attend Lamaze Classes, in the same community (control group). Instrumentation was a sample questionnaire and labor/delivery room patient data obtained from medical histories. Data was analyzed using a t-test and chi-square; 3) Completed a comparative study addressing the relationship between obesity and hypertension for a graduate project in Health Administration at The Wichita State University; 4) Completed a qualitative research study at Oklahoma State University in 1992 with 23 single mothers, investigating parenting practices and family relationships (discussed previously).

Additional experience of the researcher includes:

- 1) seventeen years teaching experience in Licensed Practical Nursing, Licensed Mental Health Technician, Associate Degree and Baccalaureate Nursing programs in Kansas; 2) experience as a nurse and a nursing instructor, working with single mothers and families in a variety of health care settings over the past twenty-seven years;
- 3) experience in counseling single mothers at a Pregnancy Crisis Center in Kansas for four years; and 4) experience organizing and teaching counselor training sessions and parenting classes at a Pregnancy Crisis Center.

Through these experiences of working with low income single mothers in a variety of teaching, health care, and counseling roles, the researcher developed expertise in

conducting qualitative research within this population group.

Data Analysis Techniques

After each initial interview was completed, the researcher asked participants for permission to contact them again if needed to clarify words, phrases, or implied meanings from the conversation. As soon as possible following each interview, the taped conversations were transcribed into anecdotal notes, using interview questions to organize responses, ensuring organization and accuracy for future reference. Follow-up interviews or phone conversations were conducted with participants as needed, to clarify information and gain additional insight into the mothers' perceptions of experiences. Through interviews with the mothers, the researcher soon realized what Schein (1995) expressed in her studies; "the stories they told reflected complexity, pain, and courage in trying to raise children in impoverished circumstances...each woman was unique in the reasons for her difficulties and how she struggled to overcome them "(p. 17).

According to Spradley (1980), and Bogdan and Biklen (1992), the significant criteria guiding qualitative interviews is that information be correctly transcribed and interpreted by the researcher in accordance with the specific words and the intention of meanings conveyed by the participants. Typically, qualitative in-depth interviews are much more like conversations than formal, structured interviews. The interview questions are used to guide the discussion and help "uncover" the participant's "meaning perspective", but each participant is allowed to frame and structure the responses. Impressions are clarified with the participants to ensure accuracy of information (Marshall and Rossman, 1989). This protocol was followed with in-depth interviews

conducted for the study.

Following Spradley's (1980) recommendations, information transcribed from the interviews was later analyzed qualitatively to identify "domains of understanding" and for similar "patterns of responses". The interview data was examined for themes, patterns, and concepts which occurred repeatedly. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) describe qualitative interviews as being more humanistic than variables, assumptions and statistical equations utilized with quantitative techniques. In addition, the informal interview approach enables the participants' perceptions to be examined in a supportive, respectful, and constructive manner, recognizing that the personal experiences of each one has value; mindful that participants are the "experts" on their own lives.

Davis (1986) suggests that the interviewer must not assume an authoritative stance, but seek to share in the life experiences of the participants and become "partners" with them in the research process. This kind of approach facilitates accurate reporting of personal information and interpretation of that data. It is essential that information be clarified with the participants to assure accuracy in documentation of data. Schein (1995) found through her interviews with mothers in poverty that, "there was a commonality among their experiences, circumstances, and attitudes that allowed general themes to emerge. Looking at all the women was the only way to get the full picture of the life of the impoverished single mother" (p. 17).

Data Management Procedures

Analysis and management of the data was ongoing throughout the data collection phase of the study to ensure that important portions would not be omitted from the

research. According to guidelines given by Miles and Huberman (1984), data analysis can occur while other data is being collected, through immediate pattern search and coding. Using this method, data is kept manageable and the researcher is not overwhelmed by the task. The following steps of analysis, some of which occurred simultaneously, were followed for each interview:

- 1) Following each interview, the audio-tapes were listened to and then transcribed verbatim by a research assistant. This was completed as early as possible, to ensure anecdotal notes were accurate. Transcriptions were then read several times in order to arrive at a sense of the meaning.

- 2) Subsequent reading of transcribed interviews was done for "extracting significant statements" (Colaizzi, 1978). Key words, sentences and phrases referring to post-secondary education experiences were underlined and highlighted.

- 3) Concurrently, if an obvious pattern seemed evident at any point in the reading of the transcripts, notations were made in the margin of the transcript. These notations helped to identify "an emergent theme, pattern, or explanation that the site suggests to the analyst" (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

- 4) During this phase of data analysis, following the direction suggested by Colaizzi (1978), themes representing individual units of meaning were organized into "metathemes" or "essential structures". The "essential structures" could then be compared to the original description to assure the researcher did not add to or embellish this description, or omit any information from the description. Colaizzi (1978) stresses the importance of not ignoring what seems like discrepancies or contradictions between themes. In so doing, important findings may be overlooked.

5) Following this verification process, the "metathemes" or "essential structures" were then organized into exhaustive descriptions of the participants and their personal experiences in post-secondary education. Colaizzi (1978) claimed that through "an exhaustive description of the investigated phenomenon", one comes very close to realizing the essence of a phenomenon (p. 61).

6) The descriptions were validated during a second interview or phone conversation, when clarification of meaning was needed. Participants were asked if the written anecdotal notes accurately described their experience, and the researcher revised descriptions as needed.

Methodology Summary

The subjects for this study included 19 low income single mothers from a variety of family and educational backgrounds. Criteria for selection included qualification of the women for federal assistance and/or financial assistance awarded to low income students in post-secondary education. Participants interviewed had successfully completed a post-secondary program, or had completed by the time findings of the study were reported. Qualitative research methodology was utilized and data was collected through in-depth interviews with the subjects.

Qualitative research methodology was utilized for the study and data was collected through in-depth interviews with each participant. Data triangulation was achieved through validation of information with participants' employers, teachers, other educational and work-related personnel, friends and co-workers. Prior experience of the researcher with some of the participants also contributed to verification of information

provided during interviews.

Figure 3 presents a Methodology Schematic of the basic steps utilized for the qualitative methodology, followed by an Outline of Steps in Methodology. Findings of the research are presented in Chapter IV.

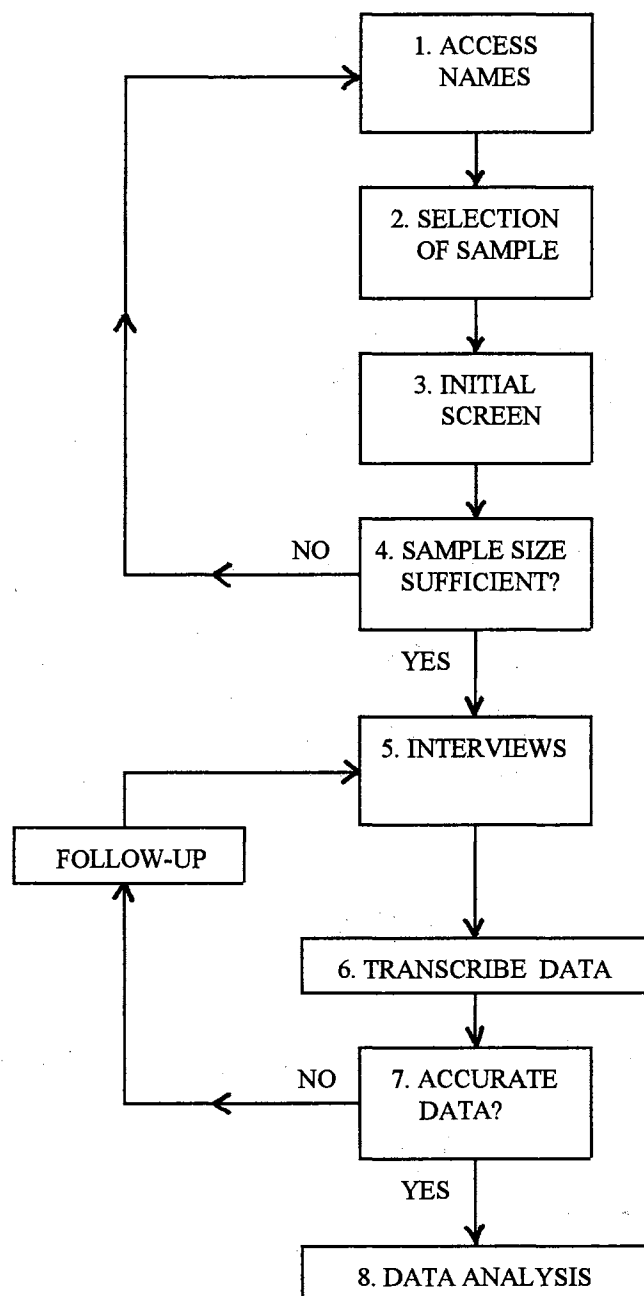


Figure 3. Methodology Schematic

Outline of Steps in Methodology

1. Access names of potential participants.
2. Selection of purposive sample group.
3. Initial screening of potential participants (by phone or personal contact.)
 - a) explain purpose of study
 - b) obtain permission for interview
4. {Sample size sufficient}?
NO: return to steps 1 - 3
YES: proceed to step 5
5. Initial interviews:
 - a) complete demographic data questionnaire (Appendix A)
 - b) obtain informed consent (Appendix B)
 - c) conduct in-depth interviews structured by interview questionnaire (Appendix C), and use of audiotapes
6. Transcribe interview data from audiotapes into anecdotal notes following taped interviews.
7. {Accurate data}?
Follow-up interviews by phone or personal contact when needed, to clarify data and ensure accuracy.
8. Data Analysis (ongoing throughout data collection):
 - a) interpretation of transcribed anecdotal notes
 - b) examine for themes, patterns, and concepts that occur repeatedly
 - c) coding of information for reference

- d) interpretative comparison of participants' perspectives and experiences
- e) exhaustive description of essential structures and inner dynamics of the experience

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify conditions that act as positive forces and contribute to success for low income single mothers in post-secondary education. To discover success conditions within the target group, the researcher conducted qualitative in-depth interviews with 19 participants for the study. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What conditions are identified by low-income single mothers that contribute to their success in post-secondary education programs?
2. Can recurring themes or patterns of success conditions be discovered in the participants' educational experiences?
3. In what ways are participants able to access and utilize positive conditions (or forces) in their life experience to enable them to be successful in education?

The demographic data questionnaire (Appendix A) provided general information about the participants being interviewed. This information included age, race, number and ages of children, marital status, level of education completed, major areas of study, financial aid and assistance received by the participants during their post-secondary

education experiences. A summary of this demographic data is presented in Tables 1 through 7.

Description of Participants

The researcher interviewed 19 low income single mothers with an age range of 19 through 59 years and a mean age of 34.5 years. Table 1 presents the age data of the 19 participants. The demographic data questionnaire asked the participants to identify their race. There were 15 (78.9%) Anglo-American and 4 (21%) African-American participants.

Participants were asked to identify number of children living with them and ages of children at the time they were involved in post-secondary education. Two of the participants had children older than 18 years of age. One participant had two children, aged 13 and 21 years. The other participant had three children older than 18 years, and three grandchildren living in her home. Tables 2 and 3 present demographic data concerning number and ages of children.

TABLE 1
AGE OF PARTICIPANTS

Age	Number	Percentage
19-29 Years	5	26.3
30-39 Years	10	52.6
40-49 Years	3	15.8
50+ Years	1	5.3

TABLE 2
NUMBER OF CHILDREN

Number	Mothers	Percentage
1	6	31.6
2	4	21.0
3	7	36.8
4	1	5.3
5	1	5.3

TABLE 3
AGES OF CHILDREN

Age	Number of Children	Percentage
Less than 1 Year	5	11.4
1-3 Years	8	18.2
4-6 Years	7	15.9
7-9 Years	4	9.1
10-12 Years	6	13.6
13-15 Years	7	15.9
16-18 Years	3	6.8
Above 18 Years	4	9.1

Participants were asked to indicate their marital status during their post-secondary education experience. Table 4 presents marital status data from the 19 participants. Three of the women were separated from their husbands when they began the post-secondary programs, then were divorced before completion of the programs. These women were listed as separated, then divorced.. One woman was separated before starting her program, and status remained unchanged. One participant, listed as divorced, was divorced during her first post-secondary experience, then widowed before completing four different vocational/technical programs (all nursing-related).

The participants were asked to identify kinds and number of post-secondary programs completed, or that would be completed by the end of the semester. Table 5 presents the information regarding kinds and number of programs completed. Six of the participants had completed more than one post-secondary program and were included in two categories, making the percentage value greater than 100.

Participants were asked to indicate their major area of study in the post-secondary education programs. Table 6 presents major area of study data from the 19 participants. Three of the women who completed more than one program had different major areas of study which are listed separately in the data. Four women completed more than one vocational or technical program, but continued in the same major area of study with each level building on the previous level.

TABLE 4
MARITAL STATUS OF PARTICIPANTS

Marital Status	Number	Percentage
Divorced	7	36.8
Separated	1	5.2
Separated, then divorced	3	15.7
Widowed	2	10.5
Never Married	6	31.5

TABLE 5
KINDS AND NUMBER OF POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS COMPLETED

*Educational Program	Number	Percentage
Vocational/Technical Program -(1 semester)	4	21.0
Vocational/Technical Program -(1 year)	5	26.3
Completed Two or More Programs	6	31.5
Associate/Two-Year College Degree	7	36.8
Bachelor's Degree	4	21.0
Master's Degree	1	5.2

*(some participants included in more than one program, N=19)

TABLE 6
MAJOR AREA OF STUDY

Area of Study*	Number	Percentage
Education	1	5.2
Psychology/Sociology	2	10.5
Business-related (computers, T.Q.M. accounting)	4	21.0
Pre-Engineering	1	5.2
Cosmetology	2	10.5
Health-related (pre-physical therapy, paramedic, nursing)	12	63.1

*(some participants included in more than one major, N=19)

The researcher questioned the participants concerning state or federal assistance benefits received while attending school. Participants were also questioned concerning financial aid and other sources of income they received while involved in post-secondary education. Table 7 presents financial aid and assistance data, and other income received by participants while involved in post-secondary education. The majority of the women received financial aid and assistance from two or more sources, totaling >100.

In summary, the demographic data results portray over one-half of the participants (52.6%) in their thirties with the next highest age group (26.3%) in their twenties. The majority of participants (78.9%) indicated their race as Anglo-American and the rest (21.0%) were African-American. Number of children reported by the participants was from one to five children, with the highest percentage (36.8%) reporting three children and the lowest percentage (5.3%) having four and five children each. Ages of children reported documented a wide age range, with children aged 1-3 years being in the highest percentage group (18.2%) and children aged 16-18 years in the lowest percentage group (6.8%).

For marital status, divorced women comprised the largest group (36.8%). Three of the four participants (15.7%) indicated both separated and divorced. The women explained they were separated at the beginning of school programs, but divorced before completing programs. One woman indicated "separated", and status was unchanged. The second largest group indicating marital status (31.5%) were those women who had never married.

TABLE 7
FINANCIAL AID/ASSISTANCE RECEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Aid/Assistance	Number	**Percentage (receiving assistance)
*A.F.D.C. Benefits (food stamps, Medicaid child care, housing)	10	52.6
Employer Contributions	5	26.3
Parental or Family Assistance	8	42.1
Child Support (ex-husband)	5	26.3
Displaced Homemaker's Assistance	5	26.3
Low-interest School Loans	9	47.3
Pell Grant (low-income)	9	47.3
Scholarship Awards	7	36.8

*A.F.D.C. = Aid to Families with Dependent Children

**percentages = >100 because some subjects received more than one kind of assistance.

Kinds of post-secondary education programs completed by the participants varied from one semester vocational/technical programs (21.0%) in the lowest educational program group to one person (5.2%) who completed a Master's degree, as the highest educational program. The highest percentage group of participants (36.8%) had completed an Associate's or two-year college degree. The next highest percentage group (26.3%) had completed one-year vocational-technical programs.

The largest group of participants (63.1%) listed health-related professions as their major area of study, with the second highest percentage group (21.0%) being business-related programs. Three of the women had completed more than one post-secondary program and listed two major areas of study.

One-half of the participants (52.6%) received A.F.D.C. benefits while going to school, which included food stamps, Medicaid, child care assistance and low income housing. The next two highest groups (each 47.3%), received low income grants and loans. The next highest (42.1%) reported receiving some financial assistance from parents or other family members such as siblings. Three groups, each 26.3%, indicated that they received some financial contributions from employers for school, some received child support payments, and the other, Displaced Homemaker's assistance. All participants indicated that they received a minimum of one or more kinds of financial assistance for school, which mainly was reserved for low income students.

The Interview Results

The in-depth interviews were loosely structured in order to allow the participants to describe their experiences in a non-threatening environment and share their perceptions of the lived experiences. The first interview question ... "tell me about what it was like being a single mom and going to school", helped them to begin sharing about themselves and their families, and encouraged participants to describe personal perceptions of those experiences. Responses of the single mothers provided a word-picture of their difficult lives, and the emotional and psychological stress that accompanies welfare dependency or low wage employment while trying to fill the role

of mother, provider, student, and other demands.

For these women, climbing out of poverty not only meant starting on the long road of education and training, but doing it as single mothers with little or no money and other resources. They described how they felt guilt when their childrens' needs had to be balanced against demands of school, work and other responsibilities. These problems and how they overcame them became more focused through succeeding interview questions that helped to direct their conversation toward goals they had for their lives (question 2), how they were able to succeed in spite of multiple demands and responsibilities (question 3), and what specific conditions contributed to that success (questions 4 and 5). At the conclusion of the interviews, participants were encouraged to share any additional information pertaining to their unique experiences (question 6).

Data was organized into groups of responses and analyzed for specific information relevant to the purpose of the research study, the problem, and the research questions. These similar patterns and themes from personal experiences shared by the participants are discussed as follows according to each research question posed. Names used in this chapter are fictitious to ensure confidentiality of the participants.

Research Questions

Research Question 1

What conditions are identified by low income single mothers that contribute to their success in post-secondary education programs?

Through analyzing interview data, four major phenomena of the lived experiences

emerged that were identified as success conditions for the single mothers. The phenomena were shared by a large number, and in some cases, all participants in the study. These phenomena will be discussed to gain the essence of "the things themselves" (Husserl, 1970/1900, p. 252): 1) Determination and commitment to succeed; 2) Vital family or other social support system; 3) Ability to access available financial resources; and 4) A strong faith commitment.

Success Conditions

1) Determination and commitment to succeed.

The participants in this study displayed an unfailing determination and commitment to accomplish the educational goals they had set, and would not give up until they did. For some, the determination was not as apparent as for others, but was still there to some degree. Only one of the participants said that her mother kept her going and wouldn't let her quit. But for the majority of them, once they were actually given the opportunity to go to school and have a chance to do better for themselves and their children, they set their course and stayed on it. This strong spirit of determination and commitment became apparent quite early in the interview process.

For Marty, a 30 year-old single mother with a young daughter, this determination was evident when she talked about the goals she had for her life, and for her daughter;

I've seen the statistics. The poverty level is single females, heads of households. I've seen it, and it's not a pretty sight. That's where the poverty level is in America today, and I could be one of those statistics. I want more for my daughter to go to school...I don't know what keeps me going—just maybe the fear of the \$5.00/hr. thing—fear of having nothing.

Virgie, aged 33, started her post-secondary program when her daughter was nine months old, and had recently completed a four-year business degree. She talked about her drive to escape from the “system”;

There is where the drive came from—I didn’t want to be sucked up into the system because of circumstances...and that’s what got me there in the first place. I’m glad I took the risk. I didn’t have to be on welfare growing up and I sure didn’t want that for her. I felt bad she had to be on it the first five years of her life—but that motivated me to finish school.

This determination and commitment to succeed often surfaced as an answer to the researcher's query, "what kept you going"? Joni, a 38 year-old single mother who completed her G.E.D. and was accepted into a vocational nursing program, phrased her response a little differently,

What kept me going was my daughter. I knew that no matter what happened, I was going to have to support her and myself, and I had to have a good job. I started out to be a nurse, and I couldn't quit. I'm not a quitter. So, I would say it was my daughter (that kept her going and determined not to quit).

Joni shared with me that she was pregnant at 17 years of age, dropped out of high school, and was trying to support her family as a sitter and aide with geriatric patients because her ex-husband wouldn't keep a job. A close friend encouraged her to get her G.E.D. and apply to a vocational nursing program, and they could go together. She finished the program a little over a year ago and has a supervisory position in a long-term care facility. Because of the determination and innovation that she displays in her job responsibilities, some of her recent supervisors have encouraged her to pursue further education and become a Registered Nurse. One of them told her that she is not only smart enough, but she has "a lot of practical sense and experience that helps her

figure out situations and people". How did she do it? "I started out to be a nurse, and I couldn't quit".

Nineteen single mothers in this study just couldn't quit. This commitment and determination kept them going in spite of the pressures and formidable responsibilities. The researcher found this condition to be a major contributor to success for the participants. Sometimes they phrased their responses differently, but the meaning was clear. They felt a drive to reach the goal and complete their program. They knew it had to be done to find a better life for themselves and their children. When they felt like giving in, someone else helped to bolster that determination.

2) Vital family or other support system.

Social support played an important role in the lives of the participants, and the kinds of social support varied greatly. Family and other source of social support were a significant resource for the women to help them cope with multiple responsibilities. Many of the women expressed that when their difficulties seemed overwhelming, they had to rely on family and friends, bosses, teachers, or even social service and job training counselors for different kinds of support needed. They discussed various kinds of support, including emotional support, financial help, child care, transportation, and other vital contributions that helped to keep them going when they felt like giving up. These kinds of support bolstered their flagging determination during the particularly difficult times.

The researcher found it notable that eight of the participants (42%) expressed that their children were their strongest support system (emotionally), while they were in

school. Mickey, a single mother with four children from grade school through high school age, said she wouldn't have been able to make it without the encouragement from her children; they were her "cheering section". She had quit a "fairly good" factory job against the advice of her parents and friends to return to school and pursue her degree in nursing. She said her parents were not supportive of this decision; they couldn't understand why she would quit a "good job" to go on welfare so she could go back to school. She felt that the factory job was..."a dead end...I had always wanted to go into nursing, but dropped out of school to get married. When the kids started coming along, my ex-husband wanted me home with them. Then he ran around and did whatever he wanted".

Another mother who credited her three children for providing her main source of encouragement and support, was Kari;

All along I think it was my kids that kept me going. I had friends and students that helped me. But, my kids were the best support that I could have. Especially my son, he really supported me. He would say, we'll make it, we may have to do without right now, but we will make it. He was a very understanding kid and still is. I really, really feel like my kids were my best support. They were very understanding and they liked the idea that Mom was going to school.

A number of the participants described a "network" of support systems that helped them to succeed. Victoria, aged 34 years, has completed three different technical nursing programs (1 semester), and has applied to get into a Licensed Practical nursing program. When asked about how she succeeded in completing school with three children and work responsibilities, she replied

My boyfriend. On the evenings I had class, he watched the kids. He was encouraging and supportive in it. He helped me take care of the kids. If it wasn't for him, I couldn't have gone, because I couldn't afford a baby sitter.

I was also receiving Federal assistance; food stamps, and a medical card. My mother also supported me. She has wanted me to become a nurse for years and she was really glad when I got into the classes.

Tonya, a 26 year-old Afro-American student had five young children, three of whom were triplets. She described a strong network of support within her extended family. Her reply to the question of how she succeeded was,

Family, family. Without my family I would have never made it through school. Between day care and trying to get things worked out. I have an awesome family. They work, we all work really good together. Every family has problems, but when there is a problem, we click in and everybody tries to make the best of the problem and help each other out. It just works. That is why I came back here to go to school because most of my family is here.

Five of the women interviewed (26.3%) received some kind of child care assistance (support) from ex-husbands. Most of this was for baby-sitting, but they reported "a small amount" of financial child support. Nona, aged 37, with two children, is one of the fortunate few in this study who was divorced and whose ex-husband was still supportive "at least where the kids were concerned". Nona also reported that she received some consideration and support from her employer and fellow employees in regard to scheduling work around her classes.

I am divorced, but my ex-husband still lives here (in town), and is very supportive where the kids are concerned. With his days off and if there were any special things that I needed, I could call him and ask if the kids could come over...The organization that I worked for was supportive of their people going to school and would let us work around our school schedules, for the most part.

Another source of support that some of the participants talked about was the help they received from educational staff, such as instructors and school counselors, and how that encouragement made a significant contribution that helped them to be

successful. One of the teachers referred to by the subjects was also a single mother and, consequently later became a participant in the study. Because of her own career development, the teacher served as an example to some of the participants;

I have found C.H. I have only had her for one class, my ----class, and she is a single mom. I have found that kind of encouraging that she has done all that. J.W. is my Aunt; she is single and she has children, and she is going for her doctorate. I think that it's a little harder when you can't give 100% of yourself. You just have to balance it out right (Janie, aged 21).

Lori, aged 49, works at the community college during the evenings, so she can take her classes there during the day. When asked what helped her to succeed, she replied,

The most important person is...not that my children haven't been supportive and loving, to a degree they have. I have a dear friend that I met here at the College, that told me 24/7...you can do this, you can do this. 24/7? That is a term. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Always, he said, no matter what it was, you can do this! This is a friend that I met while he was working here for the college writing their TQM book in the labs...I learned from him and he learned from me. That's the way life is. You have to put back when you take out. He is brilliant.

Patty, a 34 year-old divorced mother with three children, received a number of outstanding honors at the community college. She began with the following statement in an article that she wrote for the school newspaper, describing how being a student has changed her life and made her a better person; "Metastasio once said, 'In the dark a glimmering light often suffices for the pilot to find the pole star and set his course'. This quotation depicts the influence that (school name) has had on my life". In response to the researcher's query, "Tell me about how you succeeded in school...", she replied,

Determination. Ah...people at (school) have really helped me...if they hadn't challenged me right off from the start...I ran across a few students who don't think an older adult would compete with the same job, but my instructors and being involved in campus activities has really helped. I'd still have to go back to the supportive staff, the faculty here.

Every participant in the study reported some kind of support system to fall back on, albeit different kinds of support from a variety of sources. Without these networks of support, they expressed doubt that they would have been able to complete their education. In response to interview questions, each participant described her areas of support to be success conditions that contributed significantly to enable them to complete their education. Without strong positive social support or encouragement, the women could not have been able to manage the sometimes overwhelming responsibilities in their lives, and keep on track with their determination to succeed in school.

3. Ability to access available financial resources.

In order to be able to successfully participate in educational programs, participants were in need of guidance and counseling to discover specific ways for accessing those opportunities. Single mothers in post-secondary education need a broad scope of financial help for tuition, books and other supplies, transportation between home, school and job sites, day care for the children, medical expenses, and everyday living expenses. Yet they often possess a complete lack of experience and knowledge to find the resources to meet these needs. Their difficulties and need for assistance with seeking out and acquiring such necessities have been addressed in a number of studies documenting barriers to participation for lower income groups (Cross, 1981; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985; Hayes & Darkenwald, 1988; Miller, 1967).

The women in this study were fortunate enough to be directed to "guides" and "road maps" to help them through the maze of regulations for acquiring financial

assistance vitally needed for an education. Their ability to accomplish this task was a significant step to help accomplish the task of fulfilling educational goals. The avenues they utilized to access vital information concerning financial assistance were varied, and often involved the previously discussed "network" of support and advice to find which directions to take. Approximately two thirds of the participants specifically credited friends who helped them discover opportunities for assistance, and provided assistance in helping them find the right source of information to apply for financial help. Without this support and encouragement, they weren't at all sure if their courage and self-worth would have been sufficient to give them courage to accomplish this task.

Marty, a 30-year old single mother with a 9-month old baby, was encouraged by her friends to check out some possibilities for school assistance. Prior to starting school, she worked as a hairstylist "making decent money with absolutely no benefits". Her parents thought she should find a nice young man, get married, and stay home with her child. Her response to them was, "I don't want to settle into a relationship to get through life and pay the bills...that's not what it's all about". She shared that her customer friends would tell her, "you should go to school...So I took the aptitude tests (at the school) and that's how I got started". She completed her Associate's Degree and is now a senior at a liberal arts school with one semester left to complete a Bachelor's degree.

Dena had dropped out of school, married young, and had no idea of how to accomplish her unattainable dream of becoming a nurse. She received support and encouragement from her pastor's wife. The friend helped make her dream a reality because she took her to the school and led her through the process of applying to get her

GED, and then go on to college. Without the friend, she wouldn't have known how to even get started. Joni had never finished high school and was separated from her husband. She had a close friend who had already completed an application for financial aid and told her they could do Joni's (application) together. Joni told the interviewer that she was not sure if she could have found the courage, or even known how to start, without that assistance.

Six of the participants (31.5%) reported that their families (mainly parents and sisters) were instrumental in helping them find available assistance, as well as making up the difference in fees, when needed. With friends' and family's' encouragement, support, and sheer determination bolstering their confidence, the women were able to investigate possible opportunities, and acquire the necessary financial assistance. All of the resources functioning together helped them to realize success in their educational goals.

A significant number of the participants (13) reported receiving substantial guidance and counseling from educational staff in regard to financial assistance, including admission's counselors, advisors, and program directors. Five of the women specifically mentioned receiving help with applying for different kinds of aid, career counseling, and agency referrals from Displaced Homemaker's Program staff.

Some of the participants receiving A.F.D.C. assistance benefits while in school, voiced concerns over benefits being decreased or discontinued after they reported financial assistance received for school, such as loans, grants, and work study income. Dena, who was supporting her three children and going full-time to school, expressed disbelief when she "tried to follow the rules" and look for an "unavailable" job, as her

case worker recommended. The case worker wanted her to be able to stay in her school program, but had to document that her client was pursuing employment. Then her food stamp allotment was cut back to minimum because her grants and loans were considered income. Victoria's response to queries about what financial assistance might be available for furthering her education were,

See what grants I can get and student loans...if I get dropped from SRS, there is no way. It also depends on what grants I can get, because that would tide me over for the three months I am dropped off my food stamp case. Once you leave your job or are terminated, you are automatically disqualified because you are not out there making an attempt to work. I have to work at least 30 hours a week to qualify.

The participants in this study were cognizant of their need to obtain every available kind of financial assistance in order to pursue post-secondary education. Taking advantage of various resources, including guidance from friends and school counselors, they were able to acquire that assistance. In conjunction with determination, commitment and a vital support system, their ability to seek out help and access available financial resources became a strong success condition to help them attain their dreams for an education and a better level of living for their families.

4. A strong faith commitment.

Several of the participants specifically mentioned their strong faith and support from "church family" as a strong source of support that enabled them to keep going through the difficulties. Other participants alluded to having "faith", but were not as openly verbal about sharing their "faith" beliefs. Quinn and Allen (1989) reported from interviews that many women in their study discussed the importance of their faith in God and gave credit to that faith as making a significant positive contribution in their

lives. To them, their church was mainly a place to find solace and strength.

One of the older participant participants in the study, Kara, was in her forties and had a teen-age daughter. Her two older sons lived in another town "with their father", and she had no close family where she lived. Kara told the interviewer that the families in the church had "adopted me and my daughter", and it was largely through their encouragement that she gained enough confidence in herself to apply to a college. Kara had been married and divorced five times (twice to the same husband) and had tattoos visible on her arms. She relates how she and her daughter began going to a small church in town, "to help get my life back together". She discussed with the interviewer how she had "given my heart to the Lord", and the church people became like a family to them, encouraging her to try and go to school. She was able to finish her Bachelor's Degree, and credits most of her success to God and to her "church family".

Joni spoke freely about the role that God had in her life. When asked the question, "tell me about how you succeeded in school with other demands and responsibilities that you have", she replied,

Mmm...God. It had to be God's plan for me to be a nurse, and that ain't no joke. Otherwise I wouldn't of been one. Cause during my summer semester I probably spent about 85% of my clinical (time) closeted with my instructor, for one thing or another, because I'd break down. We've got brand new mom, brand new dad, all this love, and I was going through this broken family, broken marriage, I was really having a hard time with that...God was what got me through the program, I know He did.

Tonya, a 26-year old Afro-American single mother with five children, spoke of her future goals in conjunction with her faith and taking responsibility for her children;

I believe my kids (future goals)...I know at first, I thought God had cursed me with triplets and a bunch of kids. Why me? Why me? I know now that my purpose in life, that I would not be who I am without my kids and the

structure of having to be there for my kids...I would stand behind my kids 100% and be there for them. That's what God put me here for, that's why he gave me these kids and until I die they are my kids and I am going to be responsible for them.

Lori, a 49-year old Afro-American student with three grandchildren she has helped to raise, was very open about sharing what part her faith had in her accomplishments. In response to the question, "what keeps you going"? she answered,

I know that I had to go all of the way through, but I have faith in myself. ("Where does this come from?") My religion, I believe. I have this awesome faith in God first and foremost. Faith is this word that is not just applied to one area. You have faith in mankind, faith in your children. I had faith in myself because I know what faith means. Faith means whatever God promises, God will do. Faith in myself is my belief that whatever I choose to take on I'll finish.

Dena, aged 44, gave credit to God as her main support to get through school,

During my second year at school I got sick a lot and I know it was because I was run down and was working so much. I know that it was the grace of God that got me through school. God gave me the strength when I thought I couldn't go on any more. I didn't have any family support.

Mickey, aged 33, was one of the participants who did not verbalize her faith as readily, but alluded to it as a source of strength;

I was determined to get my degree, even if I had to go on welfare to support the kids for that time. I had the kids for support, and I had my faith to fall back on. My friends at school were a big help, too".

Janie, aged 21, referred to her daughter's grandparents (father's parents) as being good people and taking her to church with them. She mentioned the church people as befriending her. "People at----church were really nice and supportive to Katy and me; it didn't seem to matter to them that I wasn't married".

These participants indicated that their faith in God contributed significantly to their ability to be successful in their educational goals. Most openly expressed their

belief that this faith system gave them strength and kept them going because they knew they had to succeed, mainly for the sake of their children. This undergirding base of faith was identified as a strong positive condition at work in their lives, giving them a source of spiritual strength to realize success.

In summary, the four major phenomena of the single mothers' lived experiences that were identified as success conditions in post-secondary education included:

1. Determination and commitment to succeed;
2. Vital family or other social support system;
3. Ability to access available financial resources;
4. A strong faith commitment.

Examples supporting these phenomena were provided from transcribed interview data of the participants, relating the phenomena to the purpose of the study and the research question, to identify conditions that contribute to success in post-secondary education for low income single mothers.

Research Question 2

Can recurring themes or patterns of success conditions be discovered in the participants' educational experiences?

The four major phenomena from the participants' lived experiences, discussed in the preceding section, were also identified as recurring themes or patterns of success conditions in the participants' educational experiences. Through analysis of interview data, there also emerged what is referred to as a chain of events that was identified by the researcher in the participants' experiences. This chain of events evolved into a

pattern of behaviors that culminated in successful educational endeavors. This chain of events is illustrated as follows in Figure 4, Chain of Events.

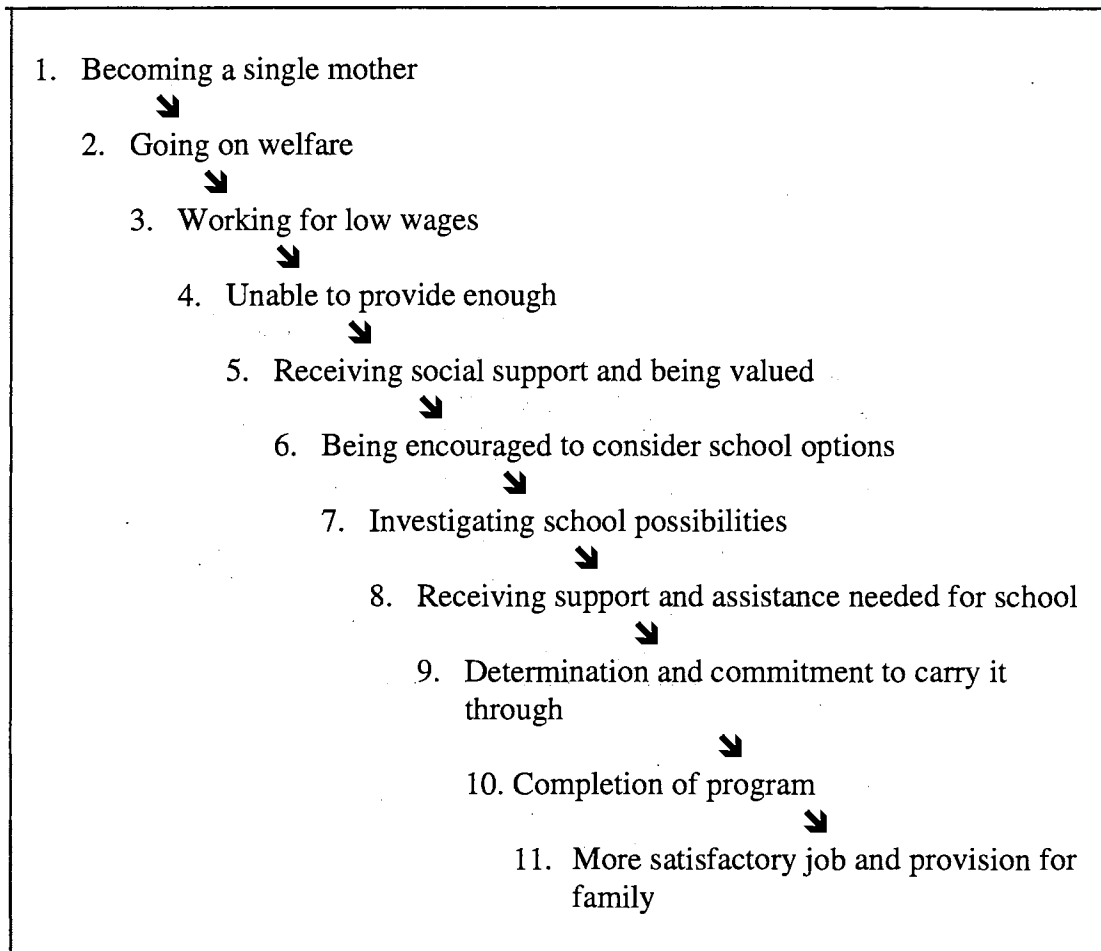


Figure 4. Chain of Events

These patterns of experience depicted in Figure 4 are discussed in this section of the study, though not always in the same order as portrayed in the figure.

Many of the women in the study said they did not feel they had a choice; they

had to be determined and committed to finishing their education because of their children. As one participant said, "My goal was to get through the program so I could support myself and my daughter. I couldn't quit, I was committed" (Joni, age 39). This deep caring and concern for their children was a recurring theme for all the participants interviewed. Their commitment to provide for their children was unwavering, and it helped to keep them going. In spite of the emotional conflict and pressures resulting from the mothers going to school, this recurring concern for the welfare of the children resulted in more determination and commitment to get an education and provide a better life for them. Because of the determination that resulted from the concern, it was identified as a recurring theme or pattern of success conditions in the participants' educational experiences.

The participants in this study had all experienced the insecurity of working either full or part-time for low wages "to make ends meet", another recurring theme that surfaced through the interviews. Virgie, aged 33, had dropped out of high school because;

I just wanted to get out there and work, so I wanted to make some money and have a nice living. In the 70's and early 80's there were plenty of jobs, you didn't have to have a college education to support your family. The breakup of the labor unions and the layoffs that started in the mid-80's really changed things, changed my thinking. Then when I had to go on welfare, that was the final blow...it's degrading.

Sissy, who now has an Associates' Degree, confided,

I'm kind of a work-a-holic. I was cleaning 21 homes and in the summer time I worked on six to eight yards, too. I'd get up at six in the morning, and my kids never saw me...I had cousins that needed baby-sitting money.

The dissatisfaction with never being able to make enough to provide for their

families, no matter how hard they worked, and the drive to not stay on welfare the rest of their lives, "I didn't want to be sucked up into the system and stuck in that system" (Virgie), was a recurring theme that provided impetus to look at educational opportunities. Once the mothers were on-line for these opportunities, the desire and determination to find a better way of life evolved into a pattern of success conditions in their educational experiences.

Another recurring theme or pattern was the womens' ability to establish a social support system to help them deal with the difficulties of everyday life. This pattern of social support was identified as having a substantially important role in enabling the participants to cope with their difficulties and have some positive input of being valued. In order to manage the challenges they faced, they utilized a variety of resources for help. The different kinds of social support helped to establish a recurring pattern of success conditions for the participants, throughout their educational experiences.

Some of the women frequently mentioned family and friends they looked to for assistance and support, "My family has always been there for me. They help out if I need help with Casey. I had a lot of support from my family" (Janie, age 21). "Mom did help me some, but then they moved. My sister helped me financially, and I had a few close friends that helped on occasion" (Carol, age 26). "My parents help me be successful. They motivate me, saying, get in there--you can do it...they are my support group" (Betty, age 23). Some of the participants did not have close family members to provide social support, but they were able to establish other lines of support, including friends at work or church, teachers, social service counselors, or employers.

The ability to access available financial resources was discussed previously as a condition contributing to the success of the participants in their educational experiences, and was identified as a recurring pattern of behavior observed during all interviews. This ability was often closely linked to people who provided social support, as well. Those with whom participants were closely related by family ties or friendship, provided them with needed assistance and direction through the maze of educational requirements. See pages 84-85 for examples of this kind of support.

The last success condition discussed in the section with question number 1 referred to having a strong faith commitment. This success condition was not explicitly mentioned among all the participants, but was verbalized openly by a number of them. Other participants did imply that they found strength in their “faith”, but were less open in sharing their specific faith beliefs. Because of a strong verbalization of faith commitment with a number of the participants, and indirect referral to the role that “faith” exercised in their lives by others, a strong faith commitment was identified as a recurring theme or pattern for success. See pages 87-88 for examples of shared faith.

In summary, the recurring themes or patterns of success conditions identified in the participants' educational experiences included determination and commitment to succeed, founded on a strong, unwavering concern for the welfare of their children; vital family or other social support system; dissatisfaction with low-wage employment and welfare benefits, fueling their ability to access financial resources needed for school; and a strong faith commitment. Figure 4 illustrates a chain of events identified by the researcher through interviews with the participants. This chain of events portrayed an evolving pattern of behaviors that subsequently became a part of the four major

phenomena identified as foundational success conditions with all participants.

Research Question 3

In what ways are participants able to access and utilize positive conditions (or forces) in their life experience to enable them to be successful in education?

The participants in this study faced many difficult circumstances in their role as single mothers, but were able to overcome negative conditions and strengthen success conditions to secure a better life for themselves and their families. The conditions that helped to make this possible were identified by the women (Question 1), and recurring themes or patterns of success conditions in their educational experiences were examined and discussed (Question 2). Research question number 3 examines how participants were able to access positive conditions, or forces, in order to achieve success. The discussion is organized according to the four major phenomena of success conditions.

1. Determination and commitment to succeed. The determination to succeed in educational endeavors was clearly evident throughout interviews with the participants. This quality surfaced during conversations, and the interviewer pondered how the women were able to access this strong force to carry them through the persistently difficult times, when so many single mothers in similar circumstances had failed. Often a glimpse of understanding and clarity would surface in response to the leading questions, "What kept you going?", or "Where did you get this determination"?

The responses varied, but frequently the answers given made reference to a "set point" of recognition or determination. As one participant so aptly described, she found

the "pole star" and set her course. The women arrived at a decision that they had to get an education or vocational training to secure a better life for themselves and their children (refer to Figure 4. Chain of Events). They had already exhausted other alternatives that were not satisfactory, they received information from a variety of sources that increased their awareness of the opportunity, and they were able to access the kind of support and assistance needed to make this a reality.

A number of the women shared that they had not even considered an education might be attainable for them. But they arrived at a place of considering that possibility and exploring the opportunities because of encouragement received from family, friends, advisors, or through some public information source. When they began to realize that this hope could indeed become a reality, a determination and commitment to reach that goal began developing into a strong positive force to keep them on track.

2. Vital family or other support system. The single mothers in this study, as with other single mother families, expressed a strong need for and dependence on various kinds of support, including emotional, informational, assistance with family tasks, financial advice and assistance, and strong, frequent doses of positive reinforcement. This kind of social support is interpreted as "help that is available in difficult or stress-arousing situations; feeling valued, and belonging to a group" (Sarason & Sarason, 1982.) A strong, common theme that repeatedly emerged in the interviews was the amount of social support the women received and their ability to seek out that support when it was needed. This ability to access needed support became a strong positive force or condition in their life experiences.

3. Ability to access available financial resources. In a number of situations, participants were directed to sources of financial assistance through friends and family that were aware of possibilities, or knew how to get information about possibilities. Through this support and encouragement, the women were able to bolster their own lack of confidence and knowledge to go to the schools and request information to open the door on education. For some, friends or family went with them to help them through the process. Whether it was through their own efforts, or from someone else providing direction and support, the ability to access the financial resources for school became a strong positive force throughout their education experiences.

4. A strong faith commitment. As discussed previously, many of the participants verbalized a strong reliance on their faith beliefs to help them through the problems, and these women explicitly shared that faith commitment during interviews. Others referred indirectly to having "faith". The ways in which participants were able to access and utilize their faith as a strong positive force were through activities such as personal and corporate prayer, sharing of their faith beliefs with others, meeting with other friends of like faith in church gatherings, or individually for prayer or Bible study. The women credited their faith as making a significant contribution to their success in education, as to any endeavors they felt their God was leading them to undertake. Their faith was accessed as a strong positive force that brought them encouragement and fortitude to persevere until they accomplished their educational goals.

Summary

In summary, Chapter IV presented a description of the findings of the research pertinent to the purpose of the study and the research questions. Analysis of the interview data grouped responses according to success conditions, and identified ways that participants were enabled to access positive conditions (or forces) to help them experience success in post-secondary education. From the interview data, four major phenomena of the participants' lived experiences emerged that were identified as success conditions:

1. Determination and commitment to succeed;
2. Vital family or other support system;
3. Ability to access available financial resources; and
4. A strong faith commitment.

Examples supporting these phenomena from transcribed interview data provided evidence to relate phenomena to the purpose and research questions of the study. Similar patterns and themes emerged from the experiences of the participants in relation to the four major phenomena discussed. These patterns and themes were analyzed to discover possible causes for the development of the phenomena, and ways in which participants evidenced these in their personal experiences. Finally, the four phenomena were discussed in relation to ways that participants were able to access and utilize these conditions as positive forces in their experience, to enable them to be successful in their educational endeavors.

A summarization of the study results, conclusions, recommendations for future study, and practice implications are provided in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The problem that guided the research study was that low levels of success and completion rates persist for low income single mothers in post-secondary education, in spite of a large number of federal and state initiatives that increase accessibility to education for this population group (Cross, 1981; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1984/1990; Hays & Darkenwald, 1988; Scanlan & Darkenwald, 1984). Miller (1967) attributes decreased adult education participation within lower socio-economic groups to the operation of negative forces within the culture that discourage continuation in a program. These negative forces deter lower-income students from successfully participating in adult education. In relation to the purpose of the study, this research study identifies conditions that increase and strengthen positive forces for low income single mothers, enabling them to overcome negative forces and achieve success in post-secondary education.

The research questions for the study were:

1. What conditions are identified by low-income single mothers that contribute to their success in post-secondary education programs?

2. Can recurring themes or patterns of success conditions be discovered in the participants' educational experiences?

3. In what ways are participants able to access and utilize positive conditions (or forces) in their life experience to enable them to be successful in education?

Qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews with 19 low income single mothers who successfully completed one or more post-secondary programs. Audio-tapes of interview sessions were transcribed and analyzed using qualitative techniques, in order to grasp the participants' perspectives of the experiences and ensure accuracy in documentation. Phenomenology was utilized as a descriptive methodology for the study in order "to go to the everyday world where people are living through various phenomena in actual situations" (Giorgi, 1985, p. 8). The researcher sought to gain a window of understanding into the lived experiences of the low income single mothers who were successful in completing post-secondary education programs, when so many within the single mother population have encountered failure in completing programs.

The research findings are summarized as follows:

Through analysis of the transcribed interview data, four major phenomena from the lived experiences of the single mothers were identified as success conditions:

1. Determination and commitment to succeed;
2. Vital family or other social support system;
3. Ability to access available financial resources; and
4. A strong faith commitment.

The four phenomena interpreted as success conditions were a commonality of experience shared by the participants in the study. Examples supporting the development of the phenomena were included from transcribed interview data in Chapter IV, Findings of the Research. The examples and related discussion (Chapter IV) provided supportive evidence that identify the four major phenomena as success conditions for the participants, which were operating as strong positive forces throughout their educational experiences. Each of the participant perspectives shared with the interviewer was unique in regard to the difficulties and experiences they collectively encountered in being a mother, a provider and a student, as well. It was through this process of listening to the stories of the women, their struggles and failures to be good providers for their children, and their personal accounts of achieving success in spite of struggles and failures, that the researcher was able to discover intrinsic commonalities of success conditions in those experiences.

Through a process of repeated readings and analysis of transcriptions, it became evident that commonalities within the participants' experiences could be combined into the four major phenomena that were recognized as recurring themes or patterns of success conditions within their experience. There were other themes which emerged, such as a depth of caring and concern for their children's welfare, which were actually component parts of the four major phenomena identified as success conditions. For example, the genuine care and concern for the children's welfare and their future well-being communicated by each of the participants was a basic component of their determination and commitment to succeed in their programs, in order to become better providers. Some of the participants were able to focus on specific conditions and

circumstances in their lives that contributed to that determination and commitment, identified as one of the four major phenomena. These "meaning units" (Giorgi, 1985) emerged from analysis of the interview data, evolving into recurring themes or patterns that participants identified within their unique experiences, rather than through a process of rigorous, precise analysis of explanations and scientific rationale.

The recurring patterns of success conditions that were developed from analysis of the interview data, were translated into strong positive forces operating in the participants' experiences, enabling them to achieve success in their educational endeavors. Conclusions drawn from the research, with comparison to similar findings, and recommendations for future research and policy implications will be addressed in the concluding sections of this study.

Conclusions

The women in this study shared their perceptions about their lives in order to allow others to learn more about the experiences of low income single mothers who are trying to make a better life for themselves and their children. They were eager to tell their stories of success and how they escaped from the stereotypical mold of the poor single mother who has lots of kids and lives at the expense of everyone else in society. For the 19 women involved in this study, living as a single parent on the edge of poverty clearly was not easy. Finding the way out, setting their course and not giving up was even harder. But their stories related that the rewards reaped from the effort were worth every hardship and sacrifice.

Throughout the interview process for this study, the participants referred to their determination to be successful and complete their educational goals. They exhibited a strong drive to finish what they had started, and they would hardly entertain even a thought of quitting. The researcher felt compelled to conclude from the interview data that this success condition was a strong character trait imbedded within the women, becoming possibly the strongest positive force driving them to success. Underlying that drive was a conclusion voiced by Marano (1989), "What we have learned is that the greatest motivator for the women who come to employment and training programs is the future well-being of their children" (p. 5). Making an analogy to Miller's (1967) Force-Field Analysis theory, the participants' undaunted determination to succeed became a significantly strong positive force operating within their experience. The strength of this positive force enabled them to overcome a large number of negative forces working against their chances to succeed.

For the majority of the participants in the study, single parenting was a time-consuming, demanding physical and emotional drain. It often meant having full responsibility for the children, working odd hours, and seldom having any personal time. The strain of these multiple roles cannot be underestimated, and the real challenges faced by the women came alive through exploring the participants' own perceptions and descriptions of the circumstances in which they raised their children. Weitzman (1985) and Kamerman and Kahn (1988) reported severe limits on the time, money, and energy of single mothers in their studies, and the resolution to this problem often means that the women must sacrifice even critical personal needs. The researcher discovered that this sacrifice of personal time and needs for the sake of their families

was quite often a reality with the participants in this study.

Quinn and Allen (1989), identified lack of income to meet basic needs as a major reason that single mothers take a job outside the home, even when they desire to remain at home with young children. However, they are unable to financially support a family, as they are employed disproportionately in low-paid service sector jobs which negate earning a living wage, so they often must revert back to dependency on welfare assistance and benefits incorporated into this system. But despite the poverty and emotional drain of single parenting, the participants in this study felt they were beginning to glimpse a ray of hope at the end of the tunnel, as they had made a decision to embark on a journey out of poverty and desperation.

Schein (1995) reported from her interviews with impoverished single mothers, that the women who made a decision to pursue education were willing to work hard and persevere regardless of the difficulties, in order to finish their education and establish a better life, not just an existence, for their families. They became dissatisfied and desperate enough with their circumstances that they made a decision to somehow find a way to improve their circumstances and successfully manage their lives despite difficult circumstances. They learned that help and support can be found in many forms and places, but they had to put forth the effort in order to get the help and support. This pattern of behavior is illustrated in Figure 4, Chain of Response, in the preceding chapter.

The experiences of the women in this study offer conclusive evidence that it is possible to pursue post-secondary education successfully, even for those who have never completed high school, have the responsibility of raising a family without a

husband, and have to exist on public assistance benefits. This study dealt with the stories of these women, and how they were able to succeed in climbing out of poverty, when so many others have failed. The participants were some of those in the lower-level SES addressed by Miller (1967), who experienced a modification of their circumstances, and were able to increase positive forces enough to overcome negative forces so prevalent in their everyday lives.

This study is a portrayal of sheer determination, commitment, responsibility, and achievement. It is also about what can be accomplished when support, encouragement, guidance, and friendship are there when needed in order to succeed. These particular qualities permeated the lives of the participants, providing strong motivating forces to help them persist on their sojourn in education until they reached the goal. Many of the lessons learned by this group, and their unique stories of those lessons, are not supported by quantitative conclusions of research studies or by popular wisdom and rhetoric. As Ross (1989) asserts, "Adult education research continues to be largely restricted to convenient samples of white middle-class populations, and only more recently likely to deliberately include females" (p. 99). In this study, the findings and conclusions were based on client perceptions; thus the phenomenological analysis of transcribed client interviews was an appropriate methodology to utilize. The data pertaining to the questions posed in the study were derived from the stories shared by the women.

Each step of the qualitative methodology outline and schematic (Figure 3) was guided by two concerns: 1) To characterize the "essential meaning" of what the participant's description revealed about their unique experience, and 2) To remain as

faithful as possible to the participant's personal description of that experience. The researcher sought to understand the participant's way of "being-in-a-situation" as it was actually lived and experienced by them in their day to day lives. The essential structure of the womens' experience was allowed to speak for itself; it was not translated or defined by external criteria, as in quantitative interpretation (Munhall & Oiler, 1986).

Qualitative research, as used in this study, does not pretend to be replicable. The researcher avoids controlling the research conditions and concentrates on recording the complexity, as much as possible, of the situational contexts, and the interpretation of those contexts provided by the participant. "Moreover, the researcher's goal of discovering this complexity by altering research strategies within a flexible research design cannot be replicated by future researchers, nor should it be attempted" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Through utilizing qualitative methodology, the researcher was able to get to know the participants personally and experience (to a certain extent) what they experienced in their daily struggles and triumphs. She was able to learn from them the concepts of determination, commitment, genuine caring and concern, receiving and giving support, perseverance in attaining a goal, willingness to ask for help and directions, and finally, the reality of faith in everyday life. These were qualities and conditions identified through their separate stories, which enabled the women to realize success and access positive forces in their quest for education and financial independence. The researcher had the privilege of exploring the "inner life of the person, her moral struggles, her successes and failures in securing her destiny in a world too often at variance with her hopes and ideals" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

The interview data supported the conclusion that four major phenomena acted as success conditions for the participants: 1) Determination and commitment to succeed; 2) Vital family or other social support system; 3) Ability to access available financial resources; and 4) A strong faith commitment. These phenomena were also discovered as recurring themes or patterns throughout the participants' educational experiences. It was concluded from the research data that the four major phenomena operated as strong positive forces in the participants' life experiences, enabling them to overcome strong negative forces in order to achieve success in their educational pursuits.

Through the process of identifying success conditions for the participants involved in post-secondary education, The researcher conceptualized a construct that was an adaptation of Miller's (1967) Force Field Analysis theory. The construct portrays positive forces that were identified in the personal experiences of the study participants, and negative forces that were decreased as a result of strengthening the positive forces. Through examination of the interview data and clarification with the participants, there was strong indication that their ability to access and utilize positive forces (or conditions), helped them to overcome negative forces (or obstacles) present in their lives. The increase in these positive forces enabled them to take advantage of educational opportunities, to find their "pole star", regardless of existing barriers to participation that have been documented with lower-level income groups (Miller, 1967; Carp, Peterson, and Roelfs, 1974; Cross, 1981). Figure 5 illustrates forces leading to successful participation in post-secondary education among low income single mothers participating in this study. The construct incorporates positive forces versus negative forces. As a result of positive forces (conditions) becoming stronger in the experiences

POSITIVE FORCES		NEGATIVE FORCES	
1.	Dissatisfaction with Present Circumstances	8.	Inability to Provide a Living
2.	Determination and Commitment to Succeed	9.	Low Achievement in Past Education
3.	Network of Family and/or Other Social Support	10.	Weak Family Structure in Contemporary Society
4.	Encouragement to Explore Opportunities	11.	Lack of Knowledge About Educational Opportunities
5.	Access to Available Financial Resources for Education	12.	Financial Instability of Single Mothers
6.	Increased Organizational Support Through Friends and Relatives	13.	Limited Access to Organizational Support
7.	Strong Faith Commitment Resulting in Increased Self Worth	14.	Low-Self-Esteem

Figure 5. Forces Leading to Successful Participation in Post-Secondary Education Among Low Income Single Mothers Participating in this Study

of subjects interviewed, it is concluded that negative forces were decreased sufficiently enough to enable participants to access and utilize the positive forces to achieve success in their educational endeavors.

Success conditions portrayed in the construct as positive forces for participants in this study included the following:

1) Dissatisfaction with present circumstances, resulting in 2) Determination and commitment to succeed, strengthened by 3) Network of family and/or other social support, leading to 4) Encouragement to explore opportunities, and ability to 5) Access available financial resources for education, and find a way to 6) Increased organizational support through friends and teachers. In addition to these, many participants shared another strong positive force that contributed to their success, 7) Strong faith commitment (see Figure 5). When combined, the increased positive forces formed a resultant motivational force greater than the negative forces, enabling the participants to access educational opportunities and "build a bridge from despair and poverty to self-confidence and economic self-sufficiency" (National Displaced Homemakers' Network, 1990 Annual Report).

When one becomes closely involved with single mothers in poverty, the strain and demands of the multiple roles faced by these women every day can never be underestimated again. Their real day-to-day challenges came alive through exploring their perceptions and descriptions of the circumstances in which they raised their children, often ignoring their own personal needs. This kind of exchange... "adds considerably to our understanding of poverty among single mothers, especially the personal and family dimensions that are missing in quantitative studies" (Craypo, 1995).

Recommendations

A review of literature documenting the plethora of programs, legislation, and special groups targeting single mothers in poverty abounds. Some of these discussed in this study (see Chapter II) are financed through government agency procurements, entitlement programs, special incentive allowances and vocational education grant monies earmarked for low income students. In spite of significant efforts made by these groups, poverty continues to increase within the single mother population group, almost to the point of national crisis. Today we are at another crossroad of welfare reform in our nation, and states are being handed the "building blocks" of responsibility to recreate and administer welfare programs that will affect the lives, for better or worse, of countless numbers of single mothers and their children. "Consolidation", whether through vouchers or block grants, dominates the discussion. Absent from the current debate is a serious solution addressing how to provide services to low income women that culminates in long-term economic self-sufficiency. Those involved with this population group have come to understand that this kind of uncertainty builds quiet desperation in the lives of these mothers and children (A Blueprint for Women's Economic Self-sufficiency, 1995). The following recommendations speak to this issue:

As a result of this study, the researcher supports a strong recommendation to increase agency and institutional services that provide assistance and opportunities for women, including low income single mothers, to examine and reassess their skills and abilities in relation to education and labor force participation. Many of the women involved in this study shared that they had no idea where to start in the educational

process, and what kinds of programs would best prepare them for the workplace. A pre-screening process strategy allows opportunity for women and agency personnel to realistically deal with expectations, limitations, and resources available, along with changes in perception that occur through this process. Throughout this process, the participant can be involved in making decisions about her future and get assistance with designing a personal plan of action to attain her life goals. Some vocational-technical institutions, as well as private sector agencies can easily be equipped to administer such programs.

Lack of information about ways to gain access to adult education programs is a major barrier identified among women who are trying to break out of the poverty cycle. A number of the participants in this study were directed to agencies or institutions that helped them apply for financial assistance and other kinds of support needed for school. This was indicated as a strong positive force within the sample group, which was often associated with a social support network. There is a strong recommendation for schools, agencies and community service organizations to implement measures to increase awareness of staff in how to respond to needs of low income single mothers for information concerning qualification for financial assistance and steps that must be taken to access this critical assistance. There is an even greater need for the support, encouragement, and reassurance which many women in this group say is important to them, but which they are often reluctant to seek out and ask for. Counselors, agency staff and education personnel must become informed about the significance of this need with low income single mothers, and be cognizant of referral possibilities for additional assistance.

The researcher adds her voice to a strong recommendation documented in the literature, indicating an increasing economic trend for combining forces in the battle against poverty, rather than single agencies or educational institutions working alone, often short of funds to address the enormous array of problems. Many research analysts are encouraging partnerships between community-based organizations, churches, educational institutions, businesses, state and federal agencies, for the structuring and delivery of a vast array of services. The National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education is just one example of a multi-organizational group (60 organizations), that is dedicated to improving educational opportunities and equality for women (National Coalition for Girls and Women in Education, 1988).

The need for a strong, broad-based displaced homemaker and single parent movement has never been greater. Displaced Homemaker programs have grown in the last ten years to include over one thousand local programs nationwide. Guidance offered through these programs is available at most community college and vocational/technical programs, but lower-level income groups such as single mothers are often unaware or reluctant to seek out these and other student services, according to participation studies previously cited.

During the decade of the 1990's, demographic experts are promising that the workforce of the next century will increasingly include more "non-traditional" workers, including mid-life, older, and minority women, than any other American workforce in recent history. A large number of single mothers returning to post-secondary programs are included in these groups. National Displaced Homemakers' Network proposes that the "battle of the education barriers" will demand a concerted effort among many

groups, including advocates, policy-makers, program providers, employers, and the women themselves, to effect significant change for displaced homemakers, single mothers, and other economically vulnerable women. There is also an identified need and recommendation for further research and programs that effectively serve all groups in the diverse displaced homemaker population. Groups such as middle-aged women and women of color are disproportionately represented and face additional barriers to achieve economic self-sufficiency (National Displaced Homemakers' Network: Status Report, 1990).

It is strongly recommended for all those involved with single mothers in poverty to work cooperatively for enacting policies to strengthen our national, state, and local efforts to capture the broad perspective of addressing and implementing plans and carefully researched programs that require long-term comprehensive efforts. A narrow short-term focus, lacking an adequately researched base of information, will not improve the lives and circumstances of the single mother burgeoning population group. A short-term "fix-it" focus only provides a false sense of "doing something"; nothing really changes, nothing really lasts.

From an educational perspective, there needs to be an awareness on the part of professional advocates, that addressing serious solutions for women and poverty can threaten current institutions and ways of working, as the success of the rapidly expanding service sectors is dependent on low-wage labor of poor women. Without knowledge of and access to education and training, single mothers rely on these kinds of unskilled, low wage jobs for income. However, with these kinds of jobs, they are still in need of public assistance to make up the difference and receive benefits for their

children. Upgrading either the working conditions or the women's skills might threaten the workforce availability for some industry providers.

Another concern expressed by some of the participants in the study was the possibility of losing needed benefits when they receive financial assistance in a long-term educational program. Confronting such issues means getting involved and questioning poor practices and policies, but that kind of discomfort is a small price to pay compared to the toll of poverty on countless women and children (Schein, 1995). The present study and others (Franklin, 1984; Schein, 1995; Baird, 1991), identified a need to implement more strategies for assisting A.F.D.C. recipients to pursue post-secondary education. It is recommended that state policy personnel examine this problematic situation and implement improved strategies, through utilization of block grant monies, for assisting welfare recipients in negotiating job search, work, and policy requirements that conflict with long-term enrollment in postsecondary education programs. Education personnel must take responsibility to become knowledgeable about recommended strategies to assist recipients of public assistance benefits, and be equipped to work with students to increase understanding of financial aid and public assistance regulations that affect education and vocational training.

Additional research is recommended to include larger, more diverse populations of impoverished single mothers, such as mid-life women, minority groups, and women involved in more non-traditional, "blue-collar" occupations. Further studies could include a longitudinal study following women in this population who have completed post-secondary programs and worked for several years, to assess long-term success outcomes of the women and their families. Strategic planning and long-term goals of

educational programs should facilitate the women's efforts to secure long-term financial stability for themselves and their families, as they are an important investment in the future of our country, and will make a significant contribution to the workforce of the future.

A sound base of state policy research and evaluation data will be essential for documenting the effectiveness of a broad base of new state policy guidelines. This research could be strengthened by including the "voices" of a larger number of women, and allow for possible demographic differences within the common themes and categories to emerge. Studies utilizing various kinds of triangulation methodology would also contribute significantly to validation of research findings, and strengthen recommendations from qualitative studies. A compilation of such research data could provide a basis for action plans with a broad perspective of addressing poverty issues with single women. Qualitative research approaches provide a framework in which to listen to the voices of the women;

By doing so, we move beyond stereotypes to the women as individuals, with variations in strengths, abilities, and attitudes. The voices of the women reveal their strengths and allow us to embrace their heroic side. We can see them as women of commitment. Neither victims, nor scapegoats, they are women overcoming hardships to be mothers and heads of their families. Perseverance and willingness to work hard are among their strengths. They are caring and put their children first. These are valuable qualities (Schein, 1995, p. 155).

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA QUESTIONNAIRE

Demographic Data Questionnaire

NOTE: All information on this form will be confidential. The information is needed for defining characteristics of the study sample group such as age, race, number of children of single mother participants, income level, educational status, and other information pertinent to the research report. Names of participants will be kept in strictest confidence, and will not be used in the research report. Fictitious names will be used when giving examples of experiences in the research report.

CLASSIFICATION NUMBER: _____ AGE: _____

RACE (check): Anglo _____ Afro-American _____
Hispanic _____ Asian _____

NUMBER of CHILDREN: _____ AGES _____

OTHER ADULTS LIVING WITH YOU: _____

MARITAL STATUS (check): Divorced _____ Separated _____
Widowed _____ Never married _____

YEARS OF HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETED: _____ G.E.D.: _____

YEARS OF COLLEGE COMPLETED: _____ DEGREE: _____

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM: _____

MAJOR AREA OF STUDY: _____

PAST EMPLOYMENT: _____

PRESENT EMPLOYMENT: _____

AVERAGE YEARLY INCOME: _____

FEDERAL OR STATE ASSISTANCE: _____

APPENDIX B
CONSENT FORM

Consent to Participate in Research Study

I, _____, hereby give my consent for Lannie Buechner to perform the following procedures with me. I understand that the purpose of the procedures is to obtain information needed for a doctoral research study that is required for completion of a doctorate degree at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

I will be willing to:

- 1) be interviewed by the above named person for one or two interview sessions, for the amount of time that I choose to set aside for the interviews;
- 2) answer questions in regard to clarifying information shared in the interview sessions;
- 3) allow the information from the interviews to be included in a research study report, excluding my name or other identifying information within the report;
- 4) allow the researcher named above to audio-tape the interview sessions, for purposes of concise and accurate reporting of information in the study.

I understand that participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty or harrassment for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time without penalty.

I may contact the researcher's graduate advisor, Dr. Robert Nolan, at telephone number (405) 744-9190, for verification of the research study. I may also contact University Research Services, 001 Life Sciences East, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 74078; Telephone: (405) 744-5700, for further verification of this research study.

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: _____ Time: _____ (a.m./p.m.)

Signed: _____

Witnessed by: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Interview Questionnaire

Explanation of Study (will be read to each participant):

This research study is being conducted with low income single mothers who have completed or are close to completing a post-secondary education program. The questions are designed to identify what conditions you believe contributed to your success in the post-secondary education program. Each person will be asked the same questions during the interview sessions, but you will be able to discuss any information of your choosing, and include only information you wish to share with the researcher during the interview. Additional questions may be asked during the interviews in order to clarify the meaning of the information shared with the researcher.

A follow-up interview may be conducted by phone or in person to further clarify the information discussed, and to insure accuracy of reporting.

Questions:

1. Tell me about what it's like being a single Mom and going to school.
2. Tell me about the goals you have for your life.
3. Tell me about how you succeeded in school with other demands and responsibilities that you have.
4. Can you tell me about some specific things (conditions) that helped you succeed with your educational goals?
5. Of these things, which do you believe is the most important condition that helped you succeed in school?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about yourself?

{The following information will be shared with participants at the end of the interview sessions}:

Thank you for your participation in these interviews. May I have your permission to contact you again for clarification of information in the interviews? All information that you have shared with me is strictly confidential. Any information referred to within the body of the research report will have no names of participants used or references given to specific names of schools or programs.

APPENDIX D

PILOT PROJECT INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Pilot Project Interview Questionnaire (1992)

(participants were given an explanation about the purpose of the study and reason for background information prior to the interview. Verbal consent was given).

Background Information:

NAME: _____ AGE: _____ GR. _____ PARA _____

ADDRESS: _____ PHONE: _____

RACE: _____ NO.CHILDREN LIVING WITH MOTHER: _____

AGES OF CHILDREN: _____

OTHER ADULTS LIVING WITH MOTHER: _____

PRIOR MARITAL STATUS: _____
(no. previous marriages; divorced; widowed; etc.)

YEARS OF SCHOOL COMPLETED: _____ DEGREES: _____

KINDS OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE RECEIVED (food stamps; WIC; Medicaid): _____

EMPLOYMENT: _____

Interview Questions:

1. What is it like being a single mom?
2. Tell me about some ways you cope with parenting?
3. Who do you consider to be a part of your family?
What makes them family?
4. Tell me about your family when you were growing up.
5. What are your most concerning problems as a single mom?
6. What do you think your life will be like in 5 years?
In 10 years?
7. What hopes and dreams do you have for your child's
(children's) future?

APPENDIX E

QUINN AND ALLEN INTERVIEW

QUESTIONNAIRE

Quinn and Allen Interview Questionnaire (1989)

Explanation of Study: The following questions were used to interview participants for a qualitative research study entitled, "Facing Challenges and Making Compromises: How Single Mothers Endure" (October, 1989), by Peggy Quinn and Katherine R. Allen. The complete report of this study was presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council on Family Relations, November, 1987, Atlanta, Georgia. At the time this study was completed, Peggy Quinn was Assistant Professor, Social Work Program, Niagara University, New York, and Katherine R. Allen was Associate Professor, Family and Consumer Studies, Texas Woman's University, Denton, Texas.

In the report, the authors explain the rationale for including questions designed to encourage the women to discuss various aspects of their lives and to capture the women's perceptions of the circumstances they chose to discuss. They believe that the questions addressed in this study reflected the partnership of the researcher and the participant.

The first interview was done by telephone to establish eligibility for the study, explain the purpose of the study, and establish rapport. The second interview took approximately two hours and was tape recorded. The following questions were used in the second interview:

Questions:

- 1) Tell me about your life
- 2) Tell me about your family
- 3) Tell me about your concerns
- 4) Tell me about your strengths
- 5) Tell me about sources of help you would recommend.
- 6) How do you see yourself in ten years?

After the second interview interview, subjects were asked if the researcher could contact them in two weeks for a final telephone interview. During that conversation, the researcher clarified information in the taped interview.

APPENDIX F
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)
APPROVAL FORM

**OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW**

Date: 05-08-95

IRB#: ED-95-085

Proposal Title: CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY INVOLVING LOW INCOME SINGLE MHERS IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Principal Investigator(s): Robert Nolan, Frankie L. Buechner

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved with Provisions

APPROVAL STATUS SUBJECT TO REVIEW BY FULL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD AT NEXT MEETING.

APPROVAL STATUS PERIOD VALID FOR ONE CALENDAR YEAR AFTER WHICH A CONTINUATION OR RENEWAL REQUEST IS REQUIRED TO BE SUBMITTED FOR BOARD APPROVAL.

ANY MODIFICATIONS TO APPROVED PROJECT MUST ALSO BE SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL.

Comments, Modifications/Conditions for Approval or Reasons for Deferral or Disapproval are as follows:

PROVISIONS REQUESTED:

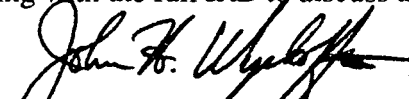
The informed consent form should be revised to contain the following: a short statement explaining the nature of the study; a statement that the subject acknowledges her participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time after notifying the investigator; the phone number of the investigator; and the following name and address: "Jennifer Moore, University Research Services, 001 LSE, Stillwater, OK, 74078; (405) 744-5700."

If you agree with these provisions, please submit a revised copy of the informed consent form to the IRB Office.

**DO NOT PROCEED WITH THIS STUDY PRIOR
TO RECEIVING FINAL APPROVAL.**

If you have any strong disagreements with the reviewer's recommendations, you may respond in writing to the executive secretary (Jennifer Moore, 005 LSE, 744-5700) or request a meeting with the full IRB to discuss the recommendations.

Signature:



Date: May 12, 1995

Chair of Institutional Review Board

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VITA

Frankie LaNell Mason Buechner

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF LOW INCOME SINGLE MOTHERS IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Major Field: Occupational and Adult Education

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, August 29, 1942, the daughter of Wylie Allen and Mary Belle Ayres Mason. Husband: Philip Elmer Buechner Jr., Arkansas City, Kansas.

Education: Graduated from Valley High School, Albuquerque, New Mexico in May, 1960; received Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing from Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas in May, 1965; received Master of Nursing degree from The Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas in December, 1978; completed requirements for Doctor of Education degree at Oklahoma State University in December, 1996.

Experience: Staff Nurse on Medical-Surgical, Surgery, Outpatient, Skilled and Obstetric Units, Forth Worth, Texas, Wichita Falls, Texas, Tallahassee, Florida, and Arkansas City, Kansas—30 years; Nursing instructor, St. John's College, Winfield, Kansas, 1975-84; Mental Health Technician Instructor, Winfield State Hospital and Training Center, Winfield, Kansas, 1978-1980; Assistant Professor of Nursing, Southwestern College, Winfield, Kansas, 1986-1994; Director of Home Health/Assisted Living Unit, Presbyterian Manor, Arkansas City, Kansas, 1995 to present.

Professional Memberships: Kansas State Nursing Association; Sigma Theta Tau Honorary Nursing Sorority, Epsilon Gamma Chapter; American College of Health Care Administrators.