

Expressed Family Needs

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Many new problems Extension agents must deal with are, in general, results of changes in society. As an "educator in the field," the Extension worker must be aware of and able to anticipate the nature and direction of change in the American family. Data gathered in a survey of the expressed needs of Colorado housewives indicate that although Extension programming is meeting some of the educational needs of families, other needs are not being met. To decrease this "gap" in programming, the agent must be aware of the effect of social change on family life in his area and be creative in his programming efforts.

THE American family has undergone meaningful change in the past several decades, and the Extension worker has the good fortune to be on the "front line" with regard to this change. While it is an exciting place to be, it also presents him with a sometimes confusing and complex series of problems. As an "educator in the field," the Extension worker must not only be cognizant of the fact of change, he must be able to anticipate the nature and direction of change. Even if he is able to do this with some skill, he often discovers that people may resist his efforts as "new fangled" or "high falutin'," i.e., impractical. In other words, the people he attempts to serve understand the nature of the sweep of social change even less than he does.

As the American family undergoes fundamental change, there has been a relocation of functions historically centered in the family.¹ For example, no longer does the family produce the food it consumes, nor educate the young for a myriad of job opportunities. Concomitant with changes in family function there has been a

¹Talcott Parsons and Robert F. Bales, *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1955), p. 16. For a clearly-stated treatment of changing family function in the context of youth, see David Gottlieb and Charles E. Ramsey, *The American Adolescent* (Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1964), pp. 95-111.

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change in family structure, from larger, extended, traditional families, to smaller, less traditional ones. Given these changes in family structure and function, what are some implications for Extension workers who are attempting to provide information and advice to help family members adjust to the current, and often confusing,² situation in which they find themselves

In its most generic sense, the problem of the Extension agent is twofold. First, what are the nature, direction, and implications for his county of the social changes which are part of the contemporary milieu? Second, having determined these, how can the agent effectively reach the people with an educational program which will help meet their needs as they attempt to adjust to the warp and woof of macro social change?

In an attempt to provide answers to the above problem, the Colorado Cooperative Extension Service designed a study to investigate some of the consequences of the process of change. Main objectives of the study were:

1. To discover the educational needs of segments of the population of Colorado (family, youth, and community).
2. To design experimental educative programs for testing in the counties, using data gathered in meeting the first objective.
3. To explore alternative ways of organizing resources within the Colorado Extension Service, if necessary, so that it will be more effective in meeting needs at the county level.

This paper will report on the findings related to family needs, as stated in the first objective.

THE STUDY

Three Colorado counties were selected for study on the basis of representing the most easily discernible index of the change process, namely, migration patterns. One county is largely urban, experiencing rapid population growth. Another county is largely rural, with a population decline. The third county is marginal, both economically and on the rural-urban dimension, and is experiencing population decline.

Methods

Housewives were interviewed to obtain information on family

² "Confusion" could be viewed as manifested in family crisis. See Reuben Hill, "Social Stresses on the Family," in Marvin B. Sussman (ed.), *Sourcebook in Marriage and the Family* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1963), p. 303.

characteristics and "felt needs." The term "felt needs" as used here means an articulation of need by the individual respondents. In other words, a "felt need" is simply what a person says he needs. This need may refer to (1) an internal state of an individual; (2) goals (general and specific) beyond the individual, which he feels he should pursue or aim to attain; or (3) tasks or processes which would presumably help him attain a desired goal.³

The "felt needs" section of the questionnaire incorporated 11 broad areas: home and home surroundings, food and nutrition, physical and emotional health, clothing and appropriate dress, financial and legal matters, job and job opportunities, home management, older people, teenagers, desires or wants for children, and better life for self and family. Under each area were listed specific alternatives. For example, under "home and home surroundings" the alternatives included: lawn care and related forms of landscaping; remodeling for convenience or utility; decorating, beautifying the home; home furnishing, materials, and material buying; care and maintenance of the home and furnishings; and modern appliances. Each housewife was asked to rank, first and second, the two alternatives under each area on which she would be interested in receiving advice or information. Her interest was interpreted as a feeling of need.

FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the interest of housewives in each of the 11 areas of family needs. Amount of interest was in the following order:

1. *Home and home surroundings*: This area was of greatest interest to the women interviewed, indicating the importance of the physical appearance of the family home. A family's home not only provides the basic need of shelter, it also indicates a family's well-being for all the community to view.

2. *Financial and legal matters*: As society becomes increasingly specialized, families must cope with problems of banking, credit, taxes, insurance, and other confusing legal matters. The need the women felt in this area may indicate that most families are inadequately trained to deal with these kinds of financial and legal matters.

³See Manuel Alers-Montalvo, Charles A. Ibsen, and Coleen Brown, "Educational Needs and Program Building in the Cooperative Extension Service: A Preliminary Report on a Survey of Three Counties in Colorado," Cooperative Extension Service, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado, 1965 (mimeographed), p. 132.

3. *Physical and emotional health:* Although families rely increasingly on the professional medical practitioner to administer to their health needs, the women indicated a high interest in physical and emotional health. The family is still the primary screening unit for health problems, but grandmother is no longer available for diagnoses and pertinent "home remedies." The housewives felt a need for practical skills and information which may be used to supplement the family doctor and which can no longer be provided by a more experienced member of the older generation.

Table 1. Interest expressed in areas of family need by housewives in three Colorado counties.

Area of family need	Urban county (%) [*]	Rural county (%)	Marginal county (%)	All counties (%)
Home and home surroundings	53	67	70	63
Financial and legal matters	56	64	54	58
Physical and emotional health	49	58	62	56
Food and nutrition	41	56	60	52
Desires and wants for children	58	47	51	52
Clothing and appropriate dress	39	59	49	49
Home management	41	53	52	49
Better life for self and family	41	45	45	44
Teenagers	41	44	34	40
Older people	31	31	54	39
Job and job opportunities	35	42	35	37

* Percentage indicates number of times specific items in the area were selected as first or second choice by the housewives.

4. *Food and nutrition:* In a diet- and nutrition-conscious age, it was not surprising that a good deal of interest was expressed in this area. The woman of today is faced with a bewildering series of problems. How can she get the best food for the least money? Which product should she buy? How can she prepare foods to retain their greatest nutritional value? How does she know if her family is getting a "balanced" diet? With advances in the science of food and nutrition and the use of mass media to communicate these findings, the housewife is daily reminded of the importance of her role in her family's well-being.

5. *Desires and wants for children:* Most American parents derive real pleasure from their children, but the frustrations of child rearing frequently cause parents to wonder how the child is "going to turn out." The goals of child rearing are often difficult for the parent to determine, when the nature of the society in which the

child will find himself as an adult is uncertain. Further, the American family increasingly delegates the responsibility of socialization to agencies and institutions outside the family, so the child is a product not merely of his family but also of his society.⁴ The housewives' interest in this area is primarily in terms of opportunities and achievements. Parents must increasingly rely upon outside agencies and institutions for information which will guide them in steering their children toward adulthood.⁵ This is especially true in the urban area.

Other areas: The remaining areas shown in Table 1 are those in which less than half the housewives in the total sample expressed an interest. However, their interest varied from location to location. For example, women in the rural county expressed high interest in "clothing and appropriate dress," while women in the marginal county expressed high interest in "older people." The Extension worker must have a basic understanding of why his county is different in its needs. For example, the marginal county in this study has a high proportion of older people in its population, and thus there is a high interest in needs related to older people.

Specific Items

When women listed the two specific items of greatest interest in each area, a striking feature was the similarity of interest expressed in all three counties. For example, in the area of "physical and emotional health," women in the three counties showed most interest in "first aid"; in the area of "better life for self and family," women were most interested in "ability to understand and guide children"; and in the area of "teenagers," women expressed most interest in "help in deciding on future career." These may be "problem areas" which the women feel are of special importance to their families. If this is the case,⁶ then the Extension agent can base a programming effort on these items, because interest in them traverses rural-urban and socioeconomic differences.

On the other hand, women in some counties showed greater interest in one item than did women in another county. For example, in the area of "home and home surroundings," women in the urban

⁴For an excellent treatment of the family's role in the socialization of the child, see William F. Kenkel, *The Family in Perspective* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966), pp. 265-68.

⁵For specific examples of the effect of social change on child rearing, see David Gottlieb and Charles E. Ramsey, *op. cit.*, ch. V.

⁶The reader should be aware that this is a hypothesis rather than a proposition supported by the research findings.

and rural counties were most interested in "lawn care and landscaping," while women in the marginal county were interested in "remodeling." In "financial and legal matters," women in the urban and rural counties showed most interest in "legal matters," while women in the marginal county were interested in "social security." In the area of "job and job opportunities," women in urban and rural counties expressed most interest in "how to discover available jobs," while housewives in the marginal county were interested in "training for new jobs." The Extension agent should be alert to differences between counties and to programming possibilities. For example, the fact that "training for new jobs" was of greatest interest in the marginal county may indicate that this county, as an economically depressed area, is "ripe" for a job retraining program.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

What does this mean to the Extension worker? How can the information be used in formulating programs and in increasing the effectiveness of Extension agents as educators in the field?

The interest of housewives has been defined as "felt needs." The women felt that advice or information about an item would help them attain some end which they value. Unlike some educators, the Extension worker does not have a "captive" audience. His is a voluntary audience held together by whatever motivation is common to the group.⁷ Felt needs may be the common factor which brings people together to be "educated." Moreover, the more the Extension agent helps people in their area of interest, the more likely he is to gain their confidence. This in turn may enable him to promote programs which he recognizes as important, even though the people do not recognize it.

Many of the new problems that Extension workers must deal with are, in general, results of changes in American society. But the agent must deal with the realities of day-to-day human relations in his county, and often the general description of social change offered him by the social scientist may seem to have little application to these kinds of problems. As one county agent put it, "We have been surveyed and described to death—what we want are answers to our problems, not a description of what we already know are our problems." But before an Extension worker can undertake effective action, he must have a basic understanding and knowledge

⁷ For an interesting discussion of problems of participation, see W. Keith Warner, "Problems of Participation," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, III (Winter, 1965), 219-28.

of the situation. Trial and error may result in serious consequences both for the individual agent and for the Cooperative Extension Service.

From the data presented, it is evident that such traditional Extension program areas as home and home surroundings, food and nutrition, and clothing and appropriate dress are still of interest to housewives. In other words, the Extension Service *is* providing programming which is significant in meeting these needs of today's families. On the other hand, women also express a need for information in areas not "traditional" to Extension programming—physical and emotional health, financial and legal matters, desires and wants for children. This poses several dilemmas for agents.

Perhaps a most fundamental problem is the emphasis that should be given to "felt needs" as against "unfelt needs." Families may not desire information on certain items because they are not acquainted with such items. If the Extension worker concerns himself only with programs people *want*, he may miss an opportunity for educating in "new" areas. Moreover, families may be strongly interested in certain programs which the agent feels are of no consequence to their development or well-being. What should be his decision in such a case? Basic to this issue is the development of criteria—objective and subjective—which will provide the agent with guidelines for decision making.

Another issue may arise. The Extension worker may decide to stress a nontraditional program area, assuming that it will be of greater importance to the families than the traditional areas were. However, the resources he needs in order to develop the new program may not be located within the Extension Service. They may be available within the academic department of the University or at other institutions. How can the Extension worker mobilize such resources? What administrative arrangements should be made? The second phase of the Colorado study will attempt to answer these questions.

SUMMARY

Data gathered in this survey indicate that current programming at Extension is meeting some of the educational needs of the people. However, it also demonstrates that because of family change, there are educational needs not being met. This "gap" in programming results in various dilemmas for the county agent.

Research of the type reported here is only a "first-step" toward solving some of the problems common to county agents. Data, no

matter how valid, does not provide all the answers. The Extension worker who is able and willing to put data within the context of his ongoing program in terms of "what" and the hypothesis of "why" has moved a significant way toward solving his problems. The ultimate significance of these and other research findings thus rests with the agent.

IF MEN ACTUALLY DO influence events in their society, it is first of all in the way they perform their daily work. They need work and have an aversion to it, but they are reconciled to it because a system of incentives spurs them to the effort. If the facts should prove that men can no longer shape the circumstances of their lives, then the once-operative system of incentives must come to an end, or at the very least must alter its character. But even if men do have the capacity to influence events they may fail to do so because their system of incentives has broken down.

—AARON LEVENSTEIN

TO EMPLOYERS, let me say this: There have come to you in the last few weeks thousands of boys and girls who must earn their own living for the rest of their lives. They have had all the schooling they will ever get. Treat them as you would like to have another employer treat your boy or girl. Be patient with them. Most of them have healthy ambitions. They are out to make good. They will come to you in the rough—very rough. Yours will be the task of developing them, and their progress will depend as much on you as on themselves. There is no tail to the kite of their ambitions. You can stick them over in the corner of an office or let them watch a machine in the plant, and in the course of a few months they will come down to earth. If you forget them they will gradually move on. And if the next employer forgets them as you did, they will become soured, and will lose most of their value to themselves and to others. But remember this: The strong men in most businesses were not hired—they were developed. —WILLIAM FEATHER