ABSTRACT

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF
RURAL – URBAN FAMILY SOLIDARITY

By Scott Andrew Tobias

The purpose of this study was to examine normative family solidarity as self-reported on a questionnaire in settings that were defined as either rural or urban in nature. Mainly Caucasian middle-class families who resided in either Hamilton County or Preble County in southwestern Ohio were sent the Normative Family Solidarity Index questionnaire. This instrument is designed to measure an individual family member’s feelings of responsibility and loyalty toward other members of the family unit. Generally, no statistical significance was found relating family solidarity with residence area, gender, or marital status. Limitations and implications of the research, as well as recommendations for future research were discussed.
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF
RURAL – URBAN FAMILY SOLIDARITY

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Faculty of Miami University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science
Department of Family Studies and Social Work
by
Scott Andrew Tobias
Miami University
Oxford, Ohio
2003

Advisor:_____________________________
       Dr. Charles Hennon

Reader:_____________________________
       Dr. Mary Link

Reader:_____________________________
       Dr. Diana Spillman
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Chapter One

Introduction

Determining what causes families to act and feel like a coherent unit is a source of much study. Generally, families can be studied by looking at various topics ranging from general solidarity to individual beliefs about what a family should consist of. Between these two extremes we have a wide range of topics that continually are the focus of today’s research. But what does it mean to be in a family? Every individual has his or her own definition of what family is, and because this intrinsic belief is almost second nature to each of us, it may seem odd to study a topic that we may feel we already know a great deal about.

However, once we begin to look at families in research-oriented ways, we see a great deal of variation in how a family works, how they play, and how they define themselves. Families today are expected to be more than just a bond between immediate blood relatives. Families are often seen including fictive kin and extended family members, for instance. These members of the family have been studied in some detail, and this research has shown that there is a large variation in what one individual or family considers normal compared to another.

Society’s current definition of family is much different that that of the past. Today we see the nuclear family as a novel situation that occurs with an ever decreasing frequency. Today’s norms include the single-parent household, the extended family household, and the blended family. Dealing with all of these new “types” of families brings about many interesting questions about how individuals within the family interact and feel about each other. An exploratory examination into what families feel toward family members could serve as a starting point for further research into an ever evolving family structure and the bonds within that structure.
Rationale for the Study

The structure of the family is constantly changing to include new individuals and concepts. Therefore, it is reasonable to suspect that there would be variations among families about how close the relationships are that make up each family. As a Family Life Educator, one must deal with families from different environments and who hold many diverse beliefs about their family structure. It was hoped that by examining the beliefs concerning normative family solidarity in families in rural and urban areas, a greater understanding of how families view their relationships would arise.

This study was designed to fill the need to explore areas of solidarity that, at most, have a limited amount of background research available. This body of existing research has looked at topics such as normative solidarity, but inconsistent results and the failure to address the issue of rural versus urban families has shown the need for more work in this area. As will be shown later in the study, researchers have found contradictory results about what urban and rural families perceive in terms of relations and support. The researcher sought to add to the general body of knowledge about normative family solidarity comparing those in an urban setting with those in a rural setting.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine normative family solidarity as self-reported on a questionnaire in settings that were classified as either rural or urban in nature. For the purposes of this study, urban settings were defined as households in Hamilton County, Ohio and rural settings were defined as households in Preble County, Ohio.
Chapter Two

Review of Literature

Similar attitudes and beliefs within a family would seemingly be an indicator of how close a family feels as a unit, and would also impact other areas of family life such as health behaviors and consensus about ideals and values. Definitions of familism as a concept have assumed that families and their activities and interactions could be treated as a set of activities and interactions confined within the household, and be defined as a unique form of interaction and organization (Coward & Smith, 1981). According to Coward and Smith (1981, p. 18), “the closed nature of family life (that is, familism), would be rooted in kinship proper.” Familism as a concept and as a definition can change from population to population and have different causal determinants. This would lead researchers to believe that familism is not a singular term, but rather a host of definitions based upon individual families (Coward & Smith, 1981). Heller and Quesada (1977, p. 221) defined familism as the, “maintenance of kin-group cohesiveness through the use of a set of rights and obligations pertaining to member of a given kin network.” They went even further to say that social organization of role rights and obligations linked kin to one another, behavior directly influenced the fulfillment of these roles and obligations, and that attitudes would influence perceived obligations between family members. This may include blood kin, fictive kin, husband and wife, and adopted family members. Individuals within a family that possessed these traits would see kinship and obligations as mandatory, rather than a choice. Heller (1976) forwarded the notion that there were five factors that ideally defined familism.
These five factors included:

1. The feeling on the part of all members that they belong preeminently to the family group and that all other persons are outsiders.
2. Complete integration of individual activities for the achievement of family activities.
3. The assumption that land, money, etc. are family property, involving the obligation to support individual family members and aid them in times of need.
4. Willingness of all other members to rally to the support of another member if attacked by outsiders.
5. Concern for perpetuation of the family.

This perceived closeness has impacts upon other areas of life, such as family solidarity and intergenerational bonds in later life (Bengston, 2001; Bond & Harvey, 1991; Mills, 1999) as well as parent’s relationships with their adult children (Kivett, 1998; White & Rogers, 1997). As an example, Mills (1999) looked at several studies that showed new family structures when grandparents were raising their grandchildren as surrogate parents.

Historically, the rural family was perceived to be upheld by factors such as kin relations, and that the rural family was grounded in the above mentioned definitions of familism (Heller & Quesada, 1977). Feelings of closeness and interaction within such a small group of individuals might have perpetuated themselves through interaction; that is, the more the individuals of a small group interact, the more positive the perceptions are of those individuals as well as the feelings of closeness for each other (Mills, 1999).
**Normative Family Solidarity**

Family solidarity has been defined in several ways relating to intergenerational association, similarity of ideas and values, and an overall feeling and common belief of closeness. Homans (1950) proposed in early work that family solidarity was a relationship between family members in which positive interactions reciprocated themselves within a family, thus creating positive perceptions of group members due to these positive interactions. Mills (1999, p. 219) defined family solidarity as, “intergenerational association, perceptions of closeness, and a similarity of ideas, values and opinions.” To pare the topic down even further, Bengtson and Roberts (1991) as well as Bond, Jr. and Harvey (1991) narrowed family solidarity into an intergenerational family solidarity model that contained six specific dimensions between parents and children.

These dimensions included:

1. *Associational solidarity* – patterns of interaction among family members, including frequency of contact.
2. *Affectual solidarity* – the degree of positive and negative sentiment about family members.
3. *Functional solidarity* – the amount of helping that occurs between family members.
4. *Consensual solidarity* – the level of agreement on values, attitudes, and beliefs among family members.
5. *Structural solidarity* – the structure and availability of family in terms of the number of family members, the type of family, and the health of the family members.
6. *Normative solidarity* – the strength of internalized commitment or obligation to family roles and family members.
According to Bengtson and Roberts (1991), “normative” solidarity deals with the strength of internalized commitment or obligation to family roles and family members. This covers areas such as family position on marriage, work, welfare of the family, and shared activities as a family. Measuring this variable would give a researcher an indication as to how cohesive and enmeshed a family unit appears to be and how strong that bond is, based on responses to a measurement that was given. A slightly different definition of normative solidarity was given by Bond, Jr. and Harvey (1991) in which similarity between generations as to what should be done with the family was measured. Studies reviewed by Roberts, Richards, and Bengston (1991) found that normative solidarity had been related to things such as family ethnicity, characteristics of the parents, and early family experiences with children. It was also stated that those who were widowed, in poor health, or those with low income often had higher levels of normative solidarity. Bond and Harvey (1991) found that generational differences exist in the perception of family solidarity. This would lead one to believe that ties that are sentimental in nature, contain closeness as an attitude, and that are role obligated will be strong where primary-kin-orientation is the main form of family structure utilized (Heller & Quesada, 1977). Thus, based upon the previous literature’s findings, one would be able to see whether there was a difference between families within neighborhoods and regions, among others, in terms of how “committed” to the family individuals are, based on normative family solidarity.

Rural as a Concept

An inherent problem when researching “rural” families is finding an accepted definition of what exactly “rural” is. Bosak and Perlman (1982) looked at rural / urban studies in an effort to determine how “rural” was being defined in studies over the course of the Twentieth Century.
Bosak and Perlman found that there were four general definitions of rural used in studying rural families: “not stated”-- in which the author does not give a definition of rural, “verbal”-- in which a qualitative criteria was used such as predominant occupation or value system, “homemade quantitative”-- in which numbers were used to describe a rural population that was not based on previously published work, and “external quantitative”-- using such things as census data. Forty-eight percent of the studies reviewed were based on “not stated” definitions of rural. Additionally, findings from previous studies had some definition of rural applied to any town or city from 2,500 residents up to 40,000 residents, depending on the study.

Review of previous studies found that rural was almost always based on population criteria, and that compared to studies undertaken prior to 1978, those after had not changed, modified, or refined the definition of rural. Bosak and Perlman (1982, p. 25) then went on to state that most of these studies, “omit such important considerations as sociocultural or value factors. They also may mask changing lifestyles and migrations trends.” The author concluded that a succinct definition of “rural” was not needed per se, but rather a focus on the conceptualization of rural to better define a study.

A more comprehensive view of the conceptualization of rural was presented by Hennon and Brubaker (1988). This concept aimed to shift the concept of rural from a static ideology to a domain based continuum. This continuum included such components as the physical and socioeconomic context of a family, the use of technology, and how the family defined itself in terms of meaning. The combination of these three areas would then present a three dimensional view of where a family fell in terms of urbanity or rurality. Utilizing this approach to defining a family in terms of location would provide more insight into the family as well as a way to parse apart those families from the same geographic regions.
Changes in Family Structure

Family structure and living arrangements have been undergoing unprecedented change, and as a result, social science has been investigating changes and the consequences of those changes (Beggs, Haines, & Hulbert, 1996). In American society, the general impact of urban and industrial trends have been an increase in the prominence of nuclear units, lessen ties to extended family, lessen kinship solidarity, living further apart or being isolated from aged children, and expecting less from extended family and kinship groups in terms of functions (Bultena, 1969). Because of the well documented urban phenomenon, “the number of studies that include rural / urban comparisons has waned in recent decades, largely because, since about the middle of the twentieth century, many of the historic distinctions between urban and rural society in the United States have greatly diminished” (Albrecht & Albrecht, 1996, p. 447).

Looking back at older studies that do compare rural and urban populations, we find general trends that seem to support continued differences between the two populations. Straus (1969) found that even if society seems to be “modern,” the family might still be a conservative force due to the fact that rapid social change produces age cohorts that will each have a different culture. Major value and attitude differences were found in many studies reviewed by Beggs, Haines, and Hulbert (1996). Generally these findings supported the fact that rural residents were more politically conservative than their urban counterparts, were more likely to endorse more traditional values, and were more conservative in terms of religious beliefs. These rural families were likely to have more children as well as more likely to be married. Beggs, Haines, and Hulbert (1996) also found that even in the 1970s, rural Americans seemed to be more traditional,
less accepting of minority rights, more ideologically religious, and more opposed to activities by
the federal government.

Rural vs. Urban Families

Studies abound that compare different aspects of rural and urban living. Many of these
studies have found differences between urban families and their rural counterparts. “Such
differences, we suggested, may remain, but these may have been overlooked in the typical
rural/urban comparison” (Beggs, et al., 1996). Coward and Smith, Jr. (1981, p. 310) found that
rural family systems are more likely to be organized around extended kin, view moving away
from the family an extreme circumstance, possess strong emotional attachments to secondary
kin, and manifest behaviors that reinforce interaction with extended kin and mutual aid as role
commitments. Coward and Smith, Jr. (1981, p. 73) then noted that in terms of these role
commitments, “Kinship obligations are perceived to be mandatory…” and that social
environments are divided into, “‘we’ (certain specified kin members) and ‘they’
(nonmembers).” In a study in 1996, Beggs, Haines, and Hulbert stated that there were six areas
in which rural families differed from their urban counterparts: they contain intense personal ties,
they contain multi-stranded ties to kin, personal networks are based on kinship, personal
networks are small, personal networks are dense, and personal networks are homogeneous.
Coward and Smith, Jr. (1981, p. 131) earlier stated that within a rural family setting, “loyalties,
duties and rights emerge on an informal basis through the process of living together and having
to get along.” The study indicated that one major aspect of the rural family is the subordination
of personal goals to those of the family. This in itself would seem to make an argument for
greater normative solidarity among rural families. Families in rural areas seem to have a greater sense of community due to smaller networks (Obst & Smith, 2002).

Kinship ties were found to be based mainly on early familial experiences, and led to higher normative obligations among kin (Roberts, Richards, & Bengston, 1991). It was also found that being raised in a broken home, a more prevalent urban phenomenon, was negatively associated with normative obligation. If rural families are based mostly on kinship ties, then we should also see ruralness associated with greater kinship interaction than in urban families (Straus, 1969). This assumption also provides the basis for predictions about personal networks in rural and urban settings. If rural families are based on kinship ties, then we should find that rural families have a greater number of cross-generational ties (Beggs, Haines, & Hulbert, 1996). If this assumption is correct, then the differences between rural and urban families should continue to exist to this day in American society.

Another possible difference between rural and urban families stems from the size of the family as well as the rural population itself. Coward and Smith, Jr. (1981) noted that rural families are more likely to be headed by a married couple, that fewer divorces are seen in rural areas, and that the greater number of interactions that result may be due strictly to this larger family size. “The implications of the larger size of the rural family are that there are more dyadic relationships, especially sibling relationships, to contend with.” (Coward & Smith, Jr. 1981, p. 76). Bultena (1969) agreed with this view, forwarding that personal contact with children is greatest for rural aged because of their larger family size. The average family size has been on the decline during the past decades, and some studies are finding mixed results regarding the differences between rural and urban families (Coward & Smith, Jr., 1981). “Perhaps the two most apparent common features of all of the dichotomies are population size and social
similarity” (Albrecht & Albrecht, 1996, p. 448). Rural populations still have a lower population density, communities of much smaller size, and communities that are relatively isolated from one another (Beggs, Haines, & Hulbert, 1996). Due to this isolation among rural communities, it was found that in rural areas the aged have a lower life satisfaction, and that urban elderly have significantly more interaction with their children than do rural elderly (Donnenwerth, Guy, & Norvell, 1978).

However, another study assumed that rural aged are more tightly integrated with cross-generational kin and would therefore have less isolation and loneliness than their urban counterparts. If the children left for other areas, rural families suffered the most from the separation (Bultena, 1969). Fewer services are available to the rural elderly (Krout, 1987), and may aid in the loneliness and isolation felt by the rural should their kin leave for another geographical area. “With geographic mobility, the kin are less readily accessible; numerous studies show that the geographically mobile have relatively low rates of interaction with their kin” (Straus, 1969, p. 478). “It is to be expected, therefore, that both rural and urban residents will acknowledge a general urban advantage in quality and quantity of such specific service offerings” (Johnson & Knop, 1970, p. 547). Certain domains of life are more rewarded in an urban setting, mainly those with economic bases (Miller & Crader, 1979). It was noted that the extent to which urban residents are disadvantaged in their family ties was still unclear, and that this belief was dependant on the fact that urban areas have, “a deleterious effect on family and kinship relations than is the case in smaller places” (Bultena, 1969, p. 6). The study concluded by stating that although there would seem to be more interaction for rural aged with their children, the data did not support the hypothesis. In conflicting views, Scott and Roberto (1987) found that rural elderly report greater contact with friends and families than urban elderly adults, but that
some studies have reported that urban rather than rural elderly have more frequent contact with their family. Scott and Roberto (1987) also reiterated the findings that rural families tend to be headed by a married couple, and that fewer rural elderly are divorced or widowed than the urban elderly.

Other studies have found other differences between the rural and urban family systems. Scott and Roberto (1987) found that rural families give more help with illness, males give more financial aid to children, rural families engage in more reunions and visits with kin, and that rural respondents engaged in less commercial recreation. Miller and Crader (1979) found that rural residents are not satisfied with the economic condition of their community, but are satisfied with their interpersonal relations within the community. Exactly the opposite was found for the urban residents. Coward and Smith, Jr. (1981) found that in three studies, rural families seemed to be better adjusted, two studies indicated no difference between urban and rural satisfaction in family life, and seven studies reported rural families less satisfied with family life. Coward and Smith Jr.’s (1981) article closed by stating that recent studies seem to point to the fact that there are only slight, if any, differences between rural and urban families.

A study focusing on urban and rural regions have found that elderly living in urban areas are less dependent on their children for support (Mercier, Paulson, & Morris, 1988). In addition to this, a study by Kivett (1988) found that only sons who remained in the same relative social class as the father maintained a high rate of contact with their fathers. This could be interpreted as closeness between father and son based upon shared life experiences, thus creating a multigenerational bond. In fact, Bengston (2001) hypothesized that multigenerational bonds are becoming more important than nuclear family ties for well-being and support. Finally, in a study undertaken by Robinson, Kropf, and Myers (2000), grandparents who lived in rural areas and
who also raised their grandchildren displayed lower levels of well being and functioning. In this study the stress felt by grandparents who were raising their grandchildren was comparable to what urban grandparents felt in relation to everyday stress. However, grandparents living in an urban setting have the opportunity for more support in terms of friends, neighbors, and services available to them merely by living in an urban area. This may account for a diminished need for filial support in older urban adults.

In the urban setting, it was hypothesized that with the higher concentration of people in an area, the more social diversification would take place. This, in turn, would lead to higher levels of nervous stimulation, psychological overload, and social isolation at the individual level (Miller & Crader, 1979). Because of the amount of unknown persons in the urban environment, society has created norms for how interactions should occur with those individual with whom someone is not familiar. This is not so in a rural environment, as individuals become more intimately acquainted with one another over repeated interactions (Beggs, Haines, & Hulbert, 1996). In a more terse finding Hutter (1970) stated that the modern family is an isolated unit that contains individuals that each pursue their own interests in vocation, education, religion, and politics. Urban dwellers are forced to take on and play more roles on a regular basis. As a result of the urban structure, residents become socially isolated, and low levels of normative cohesion result (Miller & Crader, 1979). The prediction based upon this is that as one ascends in urban society, a corresponding decline is experienced is kinship relations, neighborhood, and even informal relationships. Donnenwerth, Guy, and Norvell (1978) found that in metropolitan areas older persons may have less interaction with kin and friends, which would in turn lead to decreasing life satisfaction among urban dwellers. Research in other countries has supported this hypothesis, as Straus (1969) found that in Brazilian and Mexican families, the more urban the
residence, the less familistic the values. In other studies, urban residence has been associated
with depressing the amount of parent-child relationships and interactions stem not from a
normative obligation, but more from personal satisfaction that one takes from such interaction
(Bultena, 1969).

Research seems to support the notion that erosion of urban family relationships is not as
pronounced as once believed, and that it fails to portray the isolated nuclear unit that has been
previously portrayed. Instead, the urban are seen to be enmeshed in social networks that to some
extent include some of their children and siblings (Bultena, 1969). Single parent and dual worker
families also seem to be equalizing between rural and urban areas, and family structure seems to
be more similar (Beggs, Haines, & Hulbert, 1996). Albrecht and Albrecht (1996) noted that the
loss of social similarity in rural American is the drive behind the decline of differences between
urban and rural populations.

Much of the rural to urban migration occurred early in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Today several
generations of a family have lived within the urban setting making extended kinship networks
viable (Bultena, 1969). Hutter (1970, p. 134) supported these findings, adding, “extended kin
structure exists in modern urban society,” and that this, “‘modified extended’ structure consists
of a series of nuclear families joined together…for mutual aid.” Interaction between family and
friends seems to be based upon similarity in marital status, socioeconomic level, gender, and so
on (Scott & Roberto, 1987). Findings also indicated that urban families are not more isolated
than their rural counterparts, and that in one sample the urban population evidenced higher
frequency of interaction with kin (Straus, 1969). Other samples showed no difference as to the
frequency of interaction between rural and urban families, suggesting familistic values are
equally pervasive in rural and urban communities (Bultena, 1969; Coward & Smith, Jr., 1981).
Beggs, Haines, and Hulbert (1996) suggested that this may signal the decline of the differences as a result of rural change. These findings would lead one to believe that those in an urban setting are better off in terms of support and family contact.

However, the findings are contingent on the fact that many urban samples have been of convenience and that the results of these samples could be generalized to all rural / urban studies (Coward & Smith, Jr., 1981). The culmination of these findings leads the researcher to believe that measuring the normative solidarity within a family will provide results that show urban and rural families would score differently.
Chapter Three

Methodology

Included within this chapter is the methodology utilized within this research project. A discussion of the demographics from an urban center adjacent to a rural county in southwestern Ohio are included as well as data collection procedures, the index utilized as the questionnaire, a sample description, and finally data analysis.

This study used the score attained on the Normative Family Solidarity Index as the dependent variable and location of home (rural vs. urban), age of the respondent, number of family members, and socio-economic status (SES) as the independent variables.

Sampling Procedures

Population Characteristics

The study’s sample was drawn from Hamilton County in southwestern Ohio for the urban portion of the sample and from Preble County in southwestern Ohio for the rural sample. In 2000, Hamilton County had a total population of 845,303 residents, and Preble County’s population was 42,337 residents. This data was obtained from the United States Census Bureau web page (2002) based on the 2000 census. Utilizing modified definitions mentioned by Bosak and Perlman (1982), urban was defined as an area with over 45,000 residents, while rural was defined as an area with under 45,000 residents.
*Ethnicity.* Of the 845,303 residents of Hamilton County, 72 percent were Caucasian, 23 percent were African-American, 1.6 percent were Asian-American, 1.1 percent were Hispanic, and .001 percent were Native American or Native Alaskan in origin.

In Preble County, 98 percent of the population were Caucasian, .004 percent were Hispanic, .003 percent were African-American, .002 percent were Asian-American, and .002 percent were Native American or Native Alaskan in origin. Population data suggests that it is unlikely that any significant demographic shifts have occurred since 2000 to suggest that these percentages have changed dramatically.

*Income.* Hamilton County’s median income in 1989 was $29,498 and in Preble County was $27,582. This is based on the last available data, the Bureau of Census County and City Data Book (1994) based on the 1990 census.

*Educational attainment.* Of the residents of Hamilton County, 83% graduated high school, and 29% held a bachelor’s degree or higher level of education. Of the residents of Preble County, 82% graduated high school, and 10% held a bachelor’s degree or higher level of education. This data was obtained from the United States Bureau of Census web page (2002) utilizing the 2000 census.

**Data Collection**

Once the study proposal was reviewed and approved by the University Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research (IRB), possible respondents were chosen at random from the Hamilton County and Preble County phone books. A random numbers table was utilized in procuring each subject’s address from said phone books. Each prospective respondent was sent a letter of introduction containing full instructions and a survey, as well as a stamped return envelope (See Appendix A).
A total of 300 questionnaires were sent (150 to Hamilton County, 150 to Preble county). Each questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter containing full instructions and a self-addressed stamped envelope for return mail. Each questionnaire stated that it was to be completed by the head of the household, and that said person must be over the age of eighteen in order to complete the questionnaire. A total of 56 surveys were returned (26 from Hamilton County, and 30 from Preble county) for a total response rate of 19%. Upon receiving the surveys, the researcher checked each for completeness. One questionnaire was excluded from analysis because it was incomplete. The data obtained was then analyzed utilizing the Statview statistical package.

<table>
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* = significant, p<.05
Instrumentation

Normative Family Solidarity Index

One measure was used in this study. This instrument utilized is the Normative Family Solidarity Index (NFSI), a self-report questionnaire developed by Peter Heller (See Appendix B). The NFSI purports to measure familialistic attitudes and family cohesion among various populations, including those that are rural and urban in nature. Demographic questions were added to the beginning of the questionnaire for informative data about household, family, income, and other areas of interest.

The NFSI consists of 15 statements that address issues of possible importance to a family. Each item utilizes a Likert-type scale. According to the author, the scale had been used in previous research, but was revalidated and updated to eliminate any confusing or misleading statements. All items on the NFSI were created by the author. Table 3.1 displays the mean and standard deviation of each question on the NFSI obtained from this sample.

Sample

A random sample of 56 individuals was obtained. Of these, 26 lived in Hamilton County, and 30 lived in Preble County, both in southwestern Ohio. Subjects were selected using a random numbers table to select page numbers and names in a phone book for each area. The sample for the study were those who returned a completed questionnaire and demographics sheet. The following data describe the respondents (see Table 3.2).
Table 3.2
Sample Characteristics

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<td>2</td>
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Of the respondents who completed the survey, the majority were male (54%; 1 = male, 2 = female), married (57%; 1 = single, 2 = divorced, 3 = widowed, and 4 = married), and white (96%; 1 = black, 2 = white, 3 = Hispanic, 4 = Asian, 5 = Native American, 6 = Other) as shown by the nominal descriptive statistics. The current income level had four missing values. However, 45% reported incomes of $40,000 or less and 55% reported incomes of $40,000 to over $80,000. For all respondents, the mean age was 50.5 years, with a minimum of 19 years and a maximum of 82 years. The respondents had lived at their current address on average about 10 years.

**Scoring**

To complete the questionnaire, respondents were asked to first fill in their year of birth. They were then asked to circle their gender, marital status, ethnic background, and current income level. Next, respondents were asked how long they had lived at their current address, where they had lived at their previous address, and how long they lived at their previous address. Each respondent was then asked to read and respond to 15 statements using a Likert-type scale ranging from one to four, with 1 representing “I agree” and 4 representing “I do not agree.” Responses were scored and stored by the researcher. The coding was conducted by entering all scores into a statistical software program for analysis (See Table 3.3).

The calculated total mean scores for both rural and urban were 2.48 and 2.50, respectively, showing similarity in both residence populations for normative solidarity overall. These results fall in the lower half of the solidarity scores scale.
Reliability

Heller, (1976) reported that responses from 334 individuals as well as test-retest procedures were performed to validate the revised NFSI scale. A gamma (G), which measures the strength of the association between the variables, was found to be .86 for the revised scale. In this study, a Cronback’s alpha was performed to measure internal validity. A score of .80 was attained, suggesting that the NFSI was able to measure family solidarity accurately.

Data Analysis

Multivariate analysis of variance was utilized to determine if any significant difference existed between normative family solidarity scores and the environment in which the respondent lived (urban vs. rural). Statistical significance was determined at the p = <.05 level.

The following null hypothesis was tested: No statistically significant difference between those living in areas that were urban in nature versus those living in areas that were rural in nature would exist when utilizing Heller’s Normative Family Solidarity.
Chapter Four

Findings

This chapter presents the results of the statistical analysis of data regarding perceptions of family solidarity from those subjects who completed and returned their surveys. The null hypothesis will be presented along with the findings. Also included in Chapter Four is a discussion of the present findings as they relate to the literature concerning this topic.

Findings

Null Hypothesis: No statistically significant difference between those living in areas that were urban in nature versus those living in areas that were rural in nature would exist when utilizing Heller’s Normative Family Solidarity Index.

A multivariate analysis of variance was conducted to determine if there was a significant relationship between residence area (urban vs. rural) and normative family solidarity scores \[F(15,40) = 2.545, p > .05\]. These findings suggest that there is no significant relationship between area of residency and beliefs concerning family solidarity. These finding suggest that regardless of whether someone lives in an urban or rural area, feelings of normative family solidarity seem to be the same.

Multivariate analyses of variance were also conducted utilizing both marital status and gender with normative family solidarity scores. This analysis found no significant difference between normative family solidarity scores and marital status \[F(15,40) = 1.174, p > .05\]. This would lead one to believe that normative family solidarity scores do not differ depending on marital status.
A third multivariate analysis of variance found no significant difference between gender and normative family solidarity scores \[F(15,40) = 0.564, p > .05\]. This result would lead one to believe that scores of normative family solidarity do not differ between males and females.

**Discussion of the Present Study Related to Existing Literature**

The purpose of this thesis was to explore whether a difference in normative family solidarity scores existed between families in an urban and rural environment. After statistical analysis was completed, the null hypothesis was not rejected. The findings suggest that although the perception might be that more services are available in urban settings, this does not seem to influence normative solidarity scores in families. In fact, due to the lack of significance of the analysis, it may be speculated that normative family solidarity is not affected by such outside factors.

The results of the study do not support the findings of Bultena (1969), Straus (1969), or Beggs, Haines, and Hulbert (1996) who all forwarded the notion that rural areas would have more conservative viewpoints and as a result, a closer knit kin relationship leading to higher feelings of family solidarity. Roberts, Richards, and Bengston (1991) argued that early experience would lead to greater familial obligations among kin in rural areas. This stance was not supported by the present study’s findings. Similarly, Coward and Smith, Jr. (1981) found that rural family systems would most likely be organized around extended kin which would reinforce family role commitments. Scott and Roberto (1987) also argued that rural elderly would have greater contact with families and therefore higher levels of familial obligation. Neither of the two stances are supported by the results of the present study. Donnenwerth, Guy, and Norvell (1978) and Miller and Crader (1979) argued that urban dwellers experience a decline in kin relationships and thus familial obligations. The present study did not support these findings. In fact, present
results seem to show no significant difference between rural and urban feelings of family solidarity. This leads one to believe that differences between the two groups may be based on a confounding factor not included in the present study.

**Conclusion**

Since the number of respondents from both the urban and rural areas was small, as well as the exploratory nature of the study, any results drawn must be considered tenuous at best. The data used in the present study revealed no significant relationship between normative solidarity scores and rural or urban residency. Due to the high alpha of .80 for the scale as well as previous findings from other researchers, it is likely that there are other extraneous factors that do show differences between normative solidarity, but which were not focused on in the present study.
Chapter Five

Limitations, Implications, and Recommendations

This chapter contains a brief summary of the study followed by implications of the study. Recommendations for future research in the area of normative solidarity and residency are also discussed, followed by limitations of the study in terms of research design, instrumentation, sample, and results.

Summary of the Study

This study was designed to examine the attitudes of individuals in rural and urban settings on the variable of normative family solidarity. The demographic characteristics used to observe for associations were the following: place of residence, marital status, and gender. The subjects were 60 individuals residing in either Hamilton County, Ohio classified as urban, and individuals in Preble County, Ohio who were classified as rural. A familism scale measuring normative family solidarity was used as the instrument. This scale was created by Heller in 1970, then revised and revalidated by Heller in 1976. Each respondent answered demographic characteristics and responded to statements designed to assess normative family solidarity. The total mean score for rural and urban populations were similar, and for the majority of the individual question data analysis, there were no statistically significant findings at the .05 level. However, two of the fifteen questions, numbers three and six, revealed a statistically significant
difference between those in an urban versus rural setting. These findings did not, however, indicate major differences in normative solidarity between rural and urban populations.

Limitations of the Study

Research Design

When undertaking a cross-sectional study such as this, there are many factors that may lend themselves to biasing the data one way or another. Even though measurement of normative solidarity may be a relatively stable measure across time, one cannot conclude with certainty that this is, in fact, the case.

The use of surveys in the gathering of data lends itself to limitations on many fronts. Surveys are measures of individuals attitudes that are, in essence, self-reports. This may lead some respondents to answer the questionnaire in such a way as to cast themselves in a positive light that reflects the most socially acceptable belief. In addition, it is uncertain how the respondents interpreted the questions on the questionnaire. Similarly, a lack of responses that included current income level limited the analysis that could be attained from this data. Although past research has revealed a high validity for the questionnaire in a variety of social and economic groups, the survey researcher is unable to clarify questions that may arise on the part of the respondent, and therefore cannot assume that each respondent has interpreted the questions on the questionnaire in a similar way. In the questionnaire used, the respondents are asked to make moral judgments on the questions asked. If an individual feels that the response they would give to one of the questions would not be socially acceptable, they may choose to answer the question in a way that is conflicted with what they actually feel. This could lead the individual to
select a response that is considered more socially acceptable but skews what they experience in their own reality.

**Instrumentation**

The limitations of the instrument(s) used should be taken into consideration when assessing generalized findings of the study. For the purposes of the current project, a questionnaire was used that assessed normative family solidarity. Although this specifically addresses the area of interest in the project, a more recent scale or revalidating the scale used on the population would have been ideal.

A possible source of error in this survey may have been the wording of the questionnaire itself. Heller (1976) initially addressed this issue when revalidating the scale. He identified that, “…nine of the 15 scale items were … deemed to contain wording too difficult for respondents possessing an elementary level of education” (Heller, 1976 p. 428). This can lead one to believe that the revalidated scale adequately addressed these issues. However, one must then also take into account that the revalidation was 26 years ago, and that further changes could be needed for today’s population. Other areas addressed by Heller included the fact that the scale was originally based on college students as well as being validated on those same students. Although this was later addressed by cross-validating the study against diverse populations, the fact remains that the items are, at heart, based on college students.

Other limitations dealt with the demographic information on the survey. One problematic area dealt with ethnic background. Instructions asked the respondents to identify their ethnic background among the choices of: Black, White, Asian, Native American, and Other. The most noticeable problem arose when individuals circled more than one background, or added in
multiple categories in the “Other” space. For example, one individual listed ethnicity as White while at the same time adding Irish, Dutch, and German to the “Other” category. The design on this instrument did not adequately account for or allow multiple ethnic backgrounds.

Another limitation is the homogenous nature of the sample. Of the 60 respondents, 54 classified themselves as “White”, one was classified as “Black”, and one was classified as “Native American”. Hence, this sample did not allow for the effects of race and ethnicity to be adequately tested. This sample also had a rather homogenous nature in regard to marital status. Among the respondents 32 identified themselves as married, nine as single, six as divorced, and eight as widowed. The sample also had a rather high median income and an older median age.

Sample

The small sample size in this study is one of the major factors that may account for the non-significant results that were obtained. A larger and more diverse sample might have been able to detect a significant difference. For reasons which are unknown, this study had a low rate of return (20%) for completed questionnaires. Of the 300 questionnaires sent, only 60 were returned.

Reliability

When addressing the results of this study, one must keep in mind the age of the instrument used. Although Gamma (G) values for strength were used to measure the updated and revalidated scale in 1976, we must keep in mind that the instrument was validated over 20 years ago. While the strength of this instrument is purportedly between .71 to .98 (Heller, 1976), we
must keeping mind that this is occasionally below the recommended .80 for basic research as stated by Nunnally (1978).

Implications of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes of those living in rural and urban settings on their perceived normative family solidarity. The majority of the investigation found no statistically significant differences in perceived normative family solidarity in those living in rural versus urban areas. Empirical tests such as those presented here might be useful to educators, researchers, and those involved with the families of the general population in that the results aid in identifying characteristics of family solidarity within urban as well as rural groups. Once family solidarity has been further studied and categorized in these populations, assessment can be made to what modifies these attitudes where necessary. Ultimately it is hoped that the research knowledge gained can provide a more complete view of the family and lead to more complete understanding of family solidarity in urban and rural settings.

The results of this study seem to appear to show a global view of normative family solidarity within families. However, because of the limitations encountered within the study, it would not be prudent to assume that these beliefs are generalizable to the entire population. It may be the case, however, that other factors influence normative family solidarity and have not been addressed within the present study. Although assessment of family solidarity has been studied in detail, utilizing urban and rural areas as predictors of this solidarity suggest that additional research is needed.

This study, in an attempt to identify differences in normative solidarity in a simple way has shown that much work needs to be done in order to effectively study this topic. Among this
future work is the need to match new realities of what solidarity means to today’s families, update, and again validate a normative solidarity scale. Improving and expanding the scale to more effectively assess normative solidarity within the family is also an improvement that will need to be made in future studies. The combination of these two factors will allow for a more precise measurement of this topic and will allow future researchers to perhaps identify normative solidarity differences among selected samples and populations.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The results of the present study appear to support the following recommendations for future research in the area of normative solidarity using rural and urban settings as variables. First, the study should be replicated utilizing a revised and revalidated instrument. Updating this instrument would allow for changes in family and society to be accounted for since the last validation. Due to the small sample size of this study, a larger and more diverse sample should also be included in future studies. Employment status and level should be taken into account on future studies in order to account for differences in income levels. In order to allow generalization of results, this study should be replicated in other geographically urban and rural areas to look for similarities and differences to this study. A more specific instrument on future studies would control for the gender of the respondent, the martial status of the respondent, as well as if there are children who live in the respondent’s household. All of these factors would need to be accounted for in order to eliminate variation due to their individual or combined effects. Cohort age differences need to be accounted for in future research in order to minimize possible differences between generations. Finally, future studies should incorporate other
subunits of family solidarity, such as those forwarded by Bengston and Roberts (1991) as well as Bond, Jr. and Harvey (1991).
References


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Sociology, 34*, 5-15.

Press.


Family, 38*(3), 423-429.


Appendices
Appendix A: Letter to Participants
Dear Sir or Madam:

I am writing you today to ask your help in a research study that I’m conducting. I am asking that you answer some general background questions and a short questionnaire. Participation in this study is voluntary and you can refuse to answer any question that you wish. In addition, you may stop at any point if you no longer wish to participate. Should you choose to participate, the return of the questionnaire to the researcher is your consent to the study. All information within the study will be anonymous – there will be no way to identify one questionnaire from another. No one will be contacting you personally, and there is no way to trace your questionnaire back to you.

This study concerns how families feel about themselves in terms of connectedness and beliefs. The answers to these surveys will be used to identify differences between rural and urban families. The questionnaire I’m asking you to fill out is 15 items. These items deal with your feelings about your family. For each of the items you will rate the written statement from one (1) to four (4). More detailed instructions are on the questionnaire itself. Upon completion of the questionnaire, please return it in the enclosed envelope that has been addressed to Miami University. Postage is already paid for the return. If the questionnaire has not been returned, you will receive a post-card reminder after one week. I will mail you a second questionnaire after two weeks if the original questionnaire has not been returned.

I thank you for your time and your participation! If you should have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact myself at (513) 529-2151 or Dr. Charles Hennon at (513) 529-2323. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Office for the Advancement of Scholarship and Teaching (513) 529-3734.

Sincerely,

Scott Tobias
Appendix B: Questionnaire
Please have the head of the household fill out this survey. This individual must be over the age of 18.

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability:

Year of birth: __________
Gender: M / F

Marital Status: Single / Divorced / Widowed / Married

Ethnic Background (please circle one): Black / White / Hispanic / Asian / Native American / Other: __________

Current Income Level (please circle one):
- $0-20,000
- $20,001-40,000
- $40,001-60,000
- $60,001-80,000
- $80,000+

How long have you lived at your current address? ________________________
Where did you live prior to moving to this address? _______________________
How long did you at this previous address? ________________________

In the next section, I would like you to respond to each statement using the following scale (there are 15 statements total):

1 = I agree
2 = I somewhat agree
3 = I somewhat do not agree
4 = I do not agree
Please put your answer on the line after each statement.

1 = I agree
2 = I somewhat agree
3 = I somewhat do not agree
4 = I do not agree

1.) A married person should be willing to share his/her home with brothers and sisters of his/her husband or wife. 

2.) Married children should live close to their parents so that they can help each other. 

3.) If a member of the family is insulted or injured, you should feel more strongly about it than if the injured person is not a member of the family. 

4.) It is the responsibility of married children to be with their parents in time of serious illness even if the children have moved some distance away from the parents. 

5.) Children owe it to their parents to put family interests above their own personal interests. 

6.) If a family group has strong common political and moral views, a member should not let himself be influenced by outsiders to change these views. 

7.) As many activities as possible should be shared by married children and their parents.
1 = I agree
2 = I somewhat agree
3 = I somewhat do not agree
4 = I do not agree

8.) If a person finds that his/her job runs so much against family values that severe conflict develops, they should find a new job.

_______

9.) Whenever possible to do so, a person should talk over his important life decisions (such as marriage, employment, and residence) with family members before taking action.

_______

10.) Marriage should be viewed as keeping families going rather than creating new families.

_______

11.) It is important that the family name be carried on.

_______

12.) Children of elderly parents have as much responsibility for the welfare of their parents as they have for the welfare of their own children.

_______

13.) Keeping the family going is a very important reason why sons and daughters should expect to marry and have children.

_______

14.) At a community or social affair, a family should participate pretty much as a group rather than allow members to go their own way with their personal friends.

_______
1 = I agree
2 = I somewhat agree
3 = I somewhat do not agree
4 = I do not agree

15.) If a person’s father has a medical bill of $1,500 which he cannot pay, the son is morally obligated to pay the debt.

Thank you! That is the end of the questions. Please place the survey in the enclosed postage-paid envelope and mail. Your time is valuable, and I thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!