ABSTRACT

THE RELATION BETWEEN SOCIAL SUPPORT AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY AMONG LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

by Victoria R. Ramey

This paper is a summary of a study that examined the relation between social support and self-sufficiency among those with little or no income. Using self-report questionnaires and narratives, this study attempted to delve into the relation between satisfaction with individuals’ support systems and self-sufficiency, as well as that between family support and reported self-sufficiency. The results were mixed. There was a trend toward significance in the relation between the satisfaction scores and total self-sufficiency, and a moderate correlation between the support of identified family members and total self-sufficiency. Narratives identified most commonly mentioned sources of stress and social support, pointing to the important role of family members as sources of support to cope with instrumental stressors. This work examines the limitations of the study, and suggests possible directions for future research.
THE RELATION BETWEEN SOCIAL SUPPORT AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY AMONG LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Faculty of Miami University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Social Psychology
Department of Psychology

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2010

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................................... 1
  Social support.............................................................................................................................. 1
  Self-sufficiency ........................................................................................................................ 5
  Stressors for low-income people............................................................................................... 6
  The importance of family............................................................................................................ 7
METHOD ....................................................................................................................................... 9
  Participants.................................................................................................................................. 9
  Measures ..................................................................................................................................... 9
    Economic Self-Sufficiency Scale ........................................................................................... 9
    Social Support Questionnaire ................................................................................................. 9
    Narrative ............................................................................................................................... 10
  How the measures are scored.................................................................................................... 10
    Economic Self-sufficiency Scale. ......................................................................................... 10
    Social Support Questionnaire. ............................................................................................... 11
    Narrative ................................................................................................................................ 11
  Procedure ................................................................................................................................... 11
RESULTS...................................................................................................................................... 13
  Descriptive statistics ................................................................................................................. 13
  Testing of the Hypotheses ......................................................................................................... 15
    Kappa ........................................................................................................................................ 16
  Narrative Themes ...................................................................................................................... 16
  Common Themes ....................................................................................................................... 18
DISCUSSION ............................................................................................................................... 18
  Major Findings.......................................................................................................................... 19
  Potential Problems .................................................................................................................... 20
    Kappa ........................................................................................................................................ 20
    Anthropomorphism .................................................................................................................. 21
    Implications for Practice .......................................................................................................... 22
  Further Research ....................................................................................................................... 22
CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................................. 23
REFERENCES ............................................................................................................................... 25
APPENDICES .............................................................................................................................. 28
TABLES

TABLE 1: Means for Factors on the Economic................................................................. 13
  Self-Sufficiency Scale

TABLE 2: Frequency of Agreements for Coders 1 and 2................................................. 14

TABLE 3: Frequency of Agreements for Coders 1 and 3................................................ 14
FIGURES

FIGURE 1: Scatter plot of ESS and SSQ Family Scores ................................................................. 15

FIGURE 2: Scatter plot of age and SSQ Family Scores ............................................................... 16
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am sincerely thankful to my advisor Ann Fuehrer, for all her guidance, support, and patience on this project and during my time in graduate school.
I would also like to thank my committee members, Amanda Diekman and Elise Radina, for their support.
I am grateful to my family, friends, and colleagues for their encouragement.
THE RELATION BETWEEN SOCIAL SUPPORT AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY AMONG LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

Social psychology at its most basic is interested in studying an individual’s role in relation to society or the surrounding environment. It looks at how we understand the world around us and our place in it. Though the current emphasis in social psychology is experimentation in a laboratory setting, I was interested in applied research areas, in what studying in the “real world” can tell us about particular phenomena and about how psychologists might enhance individuals’ well-being. In laboratory studies, there is a desire to control extraneous variables; however I recognized that these variables should be accepted, even embraced, since delving into them can give us a complex and very rich story of what is occurring. In designing the study described here, I wanted to allow individuals’ stories to be told in their own words in an attempt to give social psychologists good insight into concepts that are not cut-and-dry.

In this research, I was interested in how people from lower social class backgrounds experience the relation between family social support and self-sufficiency. I wanted to learn about how individuals in a low-income environment identified themselves in terms of self-sufficiency, and what role their family played in that identification. I had been a volunteer at the Family Resource Center in Oxford, Ohio for several years, and had observed individuals who faced tremendous challenges in coping with the stressors in their daily lives. Clients were surrounded by family members and friends who could potentially help them cope with life stressors, however, many clients found themselves struggling to meet basic daily needs. I wondered if, even for people who struggled to cope with life stressors, the presence of and satisfaction with instrumental and expressive resources from members of their social networks, especially family members, might provide assistance in individuals becoming more self-sufficient.

Social support

There is an extensive body of literature in psychology on social support. The majority of the work was performed in the 1970s and 1980s, although researchers continue to be interested in support because of its significance in facilitating well-being.

Social networks are social relations in which individuals are tied to others by some value or
feature in common. Each social network has unique and important features, including density, size, age of the members, network homogeneity, and degree of reciprocity (Miller, Ingham, & Davidson, 1976). It is from social networks and the individuals within them that people receive social support.

There are many different definitions of the concept of social support (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984; Lin, 1986; Cohen & Syme, 1985, among others). Caplan (1974) stated that support is “likely to consist of three elements: the significant others help the individual mobilize his psychological resources and master his emotional burdens; they share his tasks; and they provide him with extra supplies of money, materials, tools, skills and cognitive guidance to improve his handling of his situation” (p. 6). Social support has also been defined as a meta-construct, with the components of “(a) support network resources (i.e., the size, structure and relation characteristics of support networks), (b) specific support acts (e.g., listening, comforting, advising, loaning money, socializing, or assisting with tasks), and (c) subjective appraisals of support (perceptions/beliefs that one is involved, cared for, respected, and/or having one’s social needs met)” (Vaux, et al, 1986, p. 196, italics removed).

In an analysis of thirty articles that contain definitions of social support, Williams, Barclay, and Schmied (2004) attempted to decrease the confusion and develop a more encompassing and consistent definition using the numerous definitions from the literature. The definitions came from researchers who study social support, including Caplan (1974), Cobb (1976), Cohen and Syme (1985), and Lin (1986). According to Williams, Barclay, and Schmied (2004), “Social support requires the existence of social relations, with their structure, strength, and type determining the type of social support available. Whether social relations are supportive depends on certain conditions such as reciprocity, accessibility, and reliability and an individual’s use of the social relation. Such relations have potential to provide supportive resources which include emotional resources – these may take the form of emotional expression which may sustain an individual in the short or long term; instrumental emotional support which may help an individual master their emotional burdens; coherence support which may be overt or covert information resulting in confidence in an individual’s preparation for a life event or transition; validation which may
result in an individual feeling someone believes in them; and inclusion which may result in a sense of belonging” (p. 949, italics and bold removed).

In its most basic definition then, social support refers to the various types of resources that people receive from family, friends, co-workers, community members and others with whom they interact. It is this basic definition, developed from that of Williams, Barclay, and Schmied (2004), that will be used in this research.

Social support can be broken down into several categories. For example, House (1980) divided support into emotional, appraisal, informational, and instrumental categories, while Wills (1985) believed social support could be divided into instrumental, informational, motivational, esteem, and social comparison. Vaux and colleagues (1986) defined social support as categories of financial assistance, practical assistance, guidance, emotional support, and socializing. Social support consists of tangible assistance, advice, intangible support, and feedback, according to Tolsdorf (1976). The most basic distinction is between expressive and instrumental support (Lin, Dean, & Ensel, 1986).

Expressive support, often also known as emotional support, is what people think of most often when they think about social support. This type of support frequently takes the form of non-tangible types of assistance. According to Cobb (1976), this form of social support leads to the belief that a person is cared for, loved, and valued. For example, a friend calls when a person loses their job, just to let her know someone cares about her. The second major category of social support is instrumental support. This refers to tangible help that others may provide. This is the practical assistance that includes giving money, providing food, assisting with child care, housekeeping or cooking, and providing transportation.

Another way of classifying support is between perceived and actual support. Actual support is real and literal support received. The studies on actual support typically measure availability of social networks and the frequency of contacts (Vinokur, Schul, & Caplan, 1987; House, Robbins, & Metzner, 1982). Perceived support, on the other hand, is some resource believed to be received by a person. Perceived support is only slightly related to support actually received (Dunkel-Schetter & Bennett, 1990), but has been found to predict psychological well-being, including the effectiveness of coping and adjustment strategies (Hobfoll, Nadler & Leiberman, 1986).
While many studies have shown that the perceptions – of the giver and the recipient of support – have significance in predicting the effectiveness of support, the results of studies are mixed. Bolger and Amarel (2007), for example, found that when the provider identified the giving as support but the recipient did not, the support was most effective. However, when the recipients felt as though they were being given some assistance, the effectiveness was decreased. This may be due to feelings of embarrassment or shame (Nadler & Halabi, 2006).

There are many instruments used to assess social support, but no single measure looks at all defined aspects of support. For example, Seeman and Berkman’s (1988) measure looks at instrumental and expressive support, while others are more complex and look at multiple forms of support (Cohen et al, 1985). Other measurements that study the various aspects include Norbeck, Lindsey, and Carrieri’s (1981) Norbeck Social Support Questionnaire; Flaherty, Gaviria, and Pathak’s (1983) Social Support Network Inventory; Sarason, Levine, Basham, and Sarason’s (1983) Social Support Questionnaire; and Barrera, Sandler, and Ramsay’s (1981) Inventory of Socially Supportive Behavior.

The relation between social support and psychological well-being has been well established. In terms of psychological strain, greater social support is linked with lower risk for depression and psychological strain (Stansfeld et al, 1997). Much of this literature evaluated actual rather than perceived support, for example, the frequency of help seeking (Coyne, Aldwin, & Lazarus, 1981) and the frequency of receiving help (Barrera 1981).

Perhaps the greatest body of literature in this area focuses on social support as a stress buffer. The basic concept of social support as a buffer is that support protects people from the potentially harmful influence of stressful life events (Dalgard et al, 1995). Lepore and colleagues (1991) found that support is a coping resource that can lessen the psychological effects of environmental stressors.

Social support research, while generally finding that support is positively related to well-being, has had mixed results. Nezlek and Allen (2006), for example, found that people who perceive themselves as having social support find negative effects less aversive. However, they also found a stronger relation between negative events and well-being than between positive events and well-being for those who reported higher levels of support from their families. Sometimes the individuals who provide support may also be those causing the stress, and this may be true of clients at the Family Resource Center, who are participants in the current study.
Social support is an interesting aspect in the study of psychology and can tell much; however, social support does suffer from limitations (Williams, Barclay, & Schmied 2004). Arguably the most important one is the lack of consistency in definitions, as mentioned above. These various definitions lead to difficulty when thinking about social support, since it is often difficult to determine what is meant by social support, as sometimes categories are defined, while at other times there is no clear definition. Another problem is the lack of established standard measures of social support. The variety of different measures currently in use makes it difficult to draw conclusions based on comparisons of results across studies.

Self-sufficiency

Self-sufficiency is identified by providers as the most important outcome for clients of social service agencies, and is a major goal in reducing poverty (Hawkins, 2005). Often, self-sufficiency actually defines the outcomes of welfare policies. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), for example, which established the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, focuses on moving recipients from public assistance to work and self-sufficiency (Reauthorization of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program, 2008). According to Hawkins, in 2003, when reauthorizing welfare, President Bush described the goal of TANF as “helping ‘each family reach its highest degree of self-sufficiency’” (Office of the President, 2003, p. 13, quoted in Hawkins, 2005, p. 78).

However, as with social support, there is no single definition for self-sufficiency. Parker (1994) defined self-sufficiency in terms of holding a job and not relying heavily on welfare. Hardy and Shapiro and colleagues (1997) defined self-sufficiency as the presence of four domains: educational attainment, physical and mental health, a healthy lifestyle, and being financially independent of public assistance. According to Gardiner (2000), self-sufficiency is “interpreted as the ability of individuals to sustain a customary minimum standard of living, through a combination of waged work, family care, welfare transfers, and the public and private provision of goods and services, over the life course” (p. 671). Sometimes, the concept of being self-sufficient is also referred to as independence or self-reliance (Braun, Olson, & Bauer, 2002).

According to Hawkins (2005), the current definitions used in policy making are based almost exclusively on income. Daugherty and Barber (2001) argue that these current definitions are
overly simple and misrepresentative. In addition, each social welfare organization may have its own definitions and distinctions that may or may not match other agencies’ definitions. The Family Resource Center uses the terminology of “financial security and responsibility,” that is, that “people have adequate resources to meet their needs and use them effectively” (The Family Resource Center).

Many social science researchers also believe there are issues surrounding the idea that people are either self-sufficient or they are not, and these definitions are of a dichotomous nature that may lead to confusion on the part of service organizations attempting to assist clients toward becoming more self-sufficient, as well as the low-income clients themselves who are often unable to reconcile their opinions of sufficiency with commonly stated definitions or goals (Gowdy & Pearlmutter, 1993). Bratt and Keyes (1997) suggest that almost all Americans receive assistance from the government in some way, including tax deductions and Social Security; the assumption that self-sufficiency means no reliance on government assistance ignores this fact.

In the social science literature, the main method of measuring self-sufficiency is Gowdy and Pearlmutter’s (1993) Economic Self-Sufficiency Scale (ESS). This questionnaire focuses on a person’s economic situation, with questions about whether or not one’s financial situation enables one to meet obligations, afford housing, get by without needing to borrow from others, and maintain a budget (Gowdy and Pearlmutter, 1993, p 377). They identify four dimensions of self-sufficiency: personal freedom and self-determination, financial security and responsibility, family and self well-being, and basic assets for community living (Gowdy & Pearlmutter, 1993).

Stressors for low-income people

As previously stated, the target population of this research is those with lower income – and lower socioeconomic status (SES) – in the local community of Oxford, Ohio. It is necessary to briefly talk about the stressors they may face, which are likely to require social support to facilitate coping, and which may compromise individuals’ levels of self-sufficiency.

There are some health issues related to lower socioeconomic status. Winkleby, Ahn, and Cubbin (2006) found higher mortality in lower socioeconomic status neighborhoods, and low-income children have poorer-quality health (Currie & Wanchuan, 2007) than their higher-income counterparts. In addition, when health issues arise, these families do not have the ability or
money to get health issues taken care of (Belle, et al, 2000). Communities with high proportions of low-income housing are usually in more environmentally dangerous areas, with hazardous factories and landfills nearby (Lott, 2002).

Lower income people are more likely to have inadequate education (Lott, 2002), which leads to inadequate income for survival. This insufficient income leads to difficulties in paying bills, paying for child care, and having proper transportation to work.

The importance of family

Family is an important aspect of life for many individuals, and has been shown to be especially important in the working class. Wharton and Thorne (1997) demonstrated that working class families tend to place more emphasis on kin ties than do middle or upper class families. Family relations may help to create a sense of identity, and may be a valuable resource for exchanging services, material goods, and information. Many of the individuals who are clients of the Family Resource Center also have family members living in the area and using the resources of the Center as well.

The majority of the clients at the Family Resource Center are women, and many of the women coming in for assistance are mothers. Mothers are an important part of the family structure, as good relations with mothers can affect flexibility, interdependence, and psychological health (Cochran, 1985), teach children self-regulatory skills (Grolnick, Kurowski, & Gurland, 1999) and can act as a buffer for children who are at risk for school difficulties (Morrison et al., 2003). Mothers, in turn, are supported by grandparents, siblings and others in the kin networks, older children who help take care of the younger ones, and sometimes even adult daughters (Barnett, Kibria, Baruch, & Pleck, 1991).

Of particular interest here is whether and how poor people perceive receiving social support from their families, and whether support leads to greater self-sufficiency. Hansen (2005) suggests that individuals rely heavily on their social networks, especially in the face of emergencies, and kin ties may be stronger among the poor, perhaps due to economic necessity (Hofferth, 1984).

It is important to study the family as a source of support, but the family can also be a source of conflict and stress. In the support literature, family members are often identified as sources of
assistance and support. However it may be that among the lower class and working poor, family are responsible for the stressors participants face, such as teen pregnancies, substance abuse, domestic violence, unemployment, and taking care of elderly or unemployed relatives. Interactions with clients at the Family Resource Center have led to the acknowledgement of the fluidity of households and the changing nature of the family (Ramey, Fuehrer, & Bernstein, 2006). Thus it seems important to ask participants who they identify as family members. The possibilities of family members being sources of stress were explored when looking at the narratives to see whether family members were identified as the cause of the problem as well as the solution.

Though the concept of self-sufficiency is used extensively in social agency settings as well as government agendas, the goal of individual self-sufficiency may be simplistic and unrealistic. Hawkins (2005) suggests that since self-sufficiency as a goal has not been met with great results, perhaps the focus should shift to family sufficiency and family sustainability. This makes sense, since individuals do not live in exclusion, and individual self-sufficiency may not be helpful to a family or people living together. Gowdy and Pearlmutter (1993) recognized the importance of family in terms of sufficiency, as their Economic Self Sufficiency Scale includes questions that ask about family.

**Hypotheses**

Based on a review of the literature, I developed two hypotheses for this study. Hypothesis one was that there would be a positive relation between the satisfaction scores on the Social Support Questionnaire and the total Economic Self-Sufficiency Questionnaire score. Hypothesis two was that there would be a positive relation between the family count on the Social Support Questionnaire and the overall Economic Self-Sufficiency Questionnaire score, since greater family support and greater self-sufficiency are believed to be related. In addition to testing these hypotheses, I collected narratives from participants so that they would have the opportunity to describe stressors, sources of social support, and outcomes in their own words. These qualitative data were thought to have the potential to illuminate potentially complex social dynamics.
Method

Participants

The sample for the current study included 61 participants, 54 females and 7 males. Participants were clients of the Oxford, Ohio Family Resource Center who requested financial assistance from the Center between June 1 and August 22, 2008.

Measures

Economic Self-Sufficiency Scale (ESS, Gowdy & Pearlmutter, 1993). (See Appendix A)

This measure was developed as an attempt to show that traditional ideas of self-sufficiency, that is, as something that is purely monetary, were incomplete. The questionnaire consists of 15 items that can be divided into four dimensions, or factors. The first factor, autonomy and self determination, refers to “a woman’s sense of control over the direction of her life” (Gowdy & Pearlmutter, 1993, p. 379). The second factor, financial security and responsibility, is self explanatory in that it measures the participant’s economic security. The third factor is family and self well-being. This refers to the “ability to provide basic child and health care needs, including food in adequate amounts and quality” (Gowdy & Pearlmutter, 1993, p. 381). Finally, the last factor, basic assets for community living, measures whether the participant has the resources necessary to survive in today’s society. This measure is dependent upon the participant’s subjective perceptions.

Social Support Questionnaire (adapted from Sarason, Sarason, Shearin, & Pierce’s short form, 1987). (See Appendix B)

The original social support questionnaire that provides some of the questions for the questionnaire being used in this study was developed by Sarason, Levine, Basham, and Sarason (1983). It consists of 27 questions, designed to “investigate two aspects of social support: (a) the
number of perceived social supports in a person’s life, and (b) the degree to which they are personally satisfying” (Sarason, Levine, Basham, & Sarason, 1983, p. 137).

In 1987, a shortened form of the original Social Support Questionnaire was developed by Sarason, Sarason, Shearin, & Pierce (1987). The authors recognized that a 27 question measure was often too lengthy, especially for use in clinical settings. Their twelve question form involves six questions regarding the number of supports and six opportunities to show satisfaction with those support persons. The questions deal only with emotional support.

The social support questionnaire being used in this study is slightly modified from the 1987 Social Support Questionnaire, short form (Sarason, Sarason, Shearin, & Pierce). In addition to the six emotional support questions, two questions relating to instrumental support were added. They dealt with individuals the participants could rely on for 1) money and 2) car rides, child care, or help with housework.

Narrative. (See Appendix C)

This portion of the study was a single prompt on a separate piece of paper that read the following: Please answer the following prompt. Think about a time in your life when somebody helped you out. What was the situation, and how did they help you? This narrative allowed participants to talk about stressors and social support in their own words.

How the measures are scored

Economic Self-Sufficiency Scale.

The Economic Self-Sufficiency Scale is scored by adding the circled answers for each of the fifteen questions. Each question’s individual mean can be computed. Results can also be found for the scores on the four factors listed by Gowdy and Pearlmutter (1993): autonomy and self determination; financial security and responsibility; family and self well-being; and basic assets for community living.
Social Support Questionnaire.

This measure provides several different scores relating to perceptions of social support. The first score, the number score, comes from adding up all listed individuals from whom the participant receives support and dividing by the number of questions answered. The second score, the family score, is found by adding up only listed individuals who are perceived as family by the participant, and dividing by the number of questions answered. Finally, the satisfaction score is simply the total satisfaction from the answered questions divided by the number of questions answered.

Narrative.

To provide quantitative indicators of the frequency of themes for the narrative portion of this study, a codebook was devised following the template analysis strategy of Crabtree and Miller (1999) (see Appendix D).

Three undergraduate psychology students were recruited to assist with the coding of the narrative. Six narratives were randomly selected to use as training examples, leaving 55 narratives to be coded for this study. The students were trained one-on-one with the primary investigator, but also given written instructions to reference. For the written instructions the undergraduates were given, see Appendix E.

Cohen’s kappa, K, was computed to assess the amount of agreement among the undergraduates who coded the narratives. The formula \( k = \frac{p_o - p_e}{1 - p_e} \) was used. One student coded all the narratives, while a second coded the first half and the third looked at the second half of the narratives. Therefore, two kappa scores were calculated.

Procedure

Approval was obtained from the Department Review Board in Miami University’s Psychology Department, as well as from the Administrator of the Oxford Family Resource Center, giving permission to conduct research on-site. As a requirement to request financial
assistance for rent, utilities and water, prescriptions, and gasoline, clients were required by the Family Resource Center to fill out Gowdy and Pearlmutter’s (1993) Economic Self-Sufficiency Scale. Once clients had completed the request, they were approached by the researcher to ascertain if they were willing to participate in the study (see Appendix F).

Clients who agreed were led to a quiet room, where they were asked to read and sign a consent form (see Appendix G) which indicated their agreement to use the results of the Economic Self-Sufficiency Scale they had just completed, as well as the additional information garnered from the Social Support Questionnaire and the narrative.

Participants were made aware that their results would be kept confidential and were assured that their answers to the Social Support Questionnaire and the narrative would not be made available to the staff of the Family Resource Center to ensure confidentiality. In addition, participants were informed that their involvement was completely separate from the status of their request for assistance, and did not affect their chances of receiving financial assistance from the Family Resource Center. In thanks for their participation and time, participants were offered soda and cookies while they completed the experiment.

Demographic information of gender, age, and number of adults, children, and seniors among household relations was collected. The participants completed the Social Support Questionnaire, and wrote a short narrative in response to the prompt. After they had completed the narrative and the SSQ, participants were asked to identify which of the persons they listed on the SSQ they perceived as family.

After asking if participants had any questions, they were thanked for their assistance and participation, and given the contact information to the Oxford Community Crisis and Counseling Center in case they experienced any distress as a result of participating in the study (see Appendix H).

After the participants exited the room, their Economic Self-Sufficiency Scale form was obtained, and a copy was made while blanking out the name and any other identifying information. All of the pages of the study were numbered with an identifying code for each individual. The participants’ names were entered in a database which only the primary researcher had access to, to ensure clients didn’t participate multiple times.
Results

Descriptive statistics

Participant ages ranged from 22 years to 69 years, with the mean age for the participants at 39.4 years, SD = 13.028.

For the Economic Self-Sufficiency Scale, the mean score was 32.951, SD = 11.424. Participants in this sample scored below the middle point of 45, if participants had children, or 42 if they did not. Table 1 shows the means for the items on each dimension, as well as for individual questions. Remember that the midpoint for each question is 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1: Means for Factors on the Economic Self-Sufficiency Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 1: Autonomy and self determination</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afford to take trips (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put money into a savings account (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy ‘extras’ for family and myself (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do what I want to, when I want to do it (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursue my own interests and goals (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 2: Financial security and responsibility</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay on budget (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make payment on my debts (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet my financial obligations (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay my way without borrowing from family or friends (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 3: Family and self well-being</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get health care for self and family (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afford decent child care (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy the kind and amount of food I like (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 4: Basic assets for community living</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afford to have a reliable car (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afford to have decent housing (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be free from government programs like AFDC, food stamps, general assistance, etc. (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13
The mean satisfaction score on the Social Support Questionnaire was 5.020, SD = 1.094. The mean number of supports listed was 2.141, SD = 1.456. The mean number of computed family member supports was 1.456, SD = 1.118.

The frequencies of coder agreement for the narratives are shown in tables two and three. Table 2 contains the number of agreements between Coders 1 and 2. These coders looked at the responses of the first 27 participants, minus the ones that were removed for training purposes (n=25). Table 3 contains the number of agreements between Coders 1 and 3. These coders looked at the responses of the remaining 34 participants, minus the ones that were removed for training purposes (n=30).

It is clear to see the frequencies of the categories mentioned in the narratives. Individuals described instrumental stressors much more often than expressive or unclear ones (18 out of 25 narratives for coders 1 and 2; 18 out of 30 narratives for coders 1 and 3). They also show that
instrumental types of support were more common (17 out of 25 narratives for coders 1 and 2; 20 out of 30 narratives for coders 1 and 3). From these tables, the reader can get a sense of how common certain themes were in the narratives.

Testing of the Hypotheses

Correlational analyses were used to investigate the relations between the variables examined in this study. Recall that the two predicted hypotheses were, one, that a positive relation between the satisfaction scores on the Social Support Questionnaire and the total Economic Self-Sufficiency Scale score would exist; and two, that since greater family support and greater self-sufficiency are believed to be related, there would be a positive relation between the family count on the Social Support Questionnaire and the overall Economic Self-Sufficiency Scale score. Hypothesis one was not significant at the $\alpha=.05$ level but seems to be trending toward significance ($R = .233, p = .084$). Hypothesis two showed a moderate correlation, $R = .299, p = .019$. Figure one illustrates the correlational relation between family scores on the Social Support Questionnaire and Economic Self-Sufficiency Scale scores.

Post hoc regression analysis was used to determine if a relation existed between the age of the participants and their overall self-sufficiency scores. This was suggested by conversations with the Support Services Coordinator at the Family Resource Center as well as the visual, but
not computed, trend that appeared to exist in all Economic Self-Sufficiency Scale data from the Family Resource Center that had been collected since January 2008 which seemed to suggest that as participant age increased, Economic Self-Sufficiency Scale scores decreased. Analysis found that there is a marginal relation, $t = -1.961$, $p = .055$, indicating that as age increased, self-sufficiency scores decreased. Figure 2 shows this relationship.

![FIGURE 2: Scatter plot of age and ESS scores](image)

**Kappa**

The kappa coefficient between Coders 1 and 2 was 0.69423; $p_o$ was 0.71675 and $p_c$ was 0.07364. The kappa coefficient between Coders 1 and 3 was 0.68795; $p_o$ was 0.69375 and $p_c$ was 0.08160. Based on the magnitude of these Kappa scores, the narrative themes seem to have been reliably identified.

**Narrative Themes**

Sixty-one individuals participated in this study. Only one participant declined to tell their story in the narrative, and all the rest of the participants seemed eager to not only write down their situation, but discuss it with me. This raised two questions in my mind: who listens, and who do they feel cares about their stories? Others in a similar situation or close to the individuals may already have heard the stories, or are living a version themselves.

Prior to the data collection phase of the study, I had a very simplistic idea of the results that I
would find. I expected clear articulation in the narratives. There were two types of stories that I foresaw. One, there would be a problem, some sort of mediator, and a positive outcome; or two, there would be a problem, no mediator, and a negative outcome.

The narratives, however, surprised me in their variety. There were in fact many that were clear cut. A problem was mentioned, the assistance was clear, and there was some sort of identifiable outcome. The following are a few of the narratives for which the two coders were in agreement. Each narrative provides an example of a situation in which a participant faced a specific stressor, and also received support from another in order to solve a problem.

“I was pregnant with my son and we didn’t have a vehicle at the time. My friend Rob would pick me up for doctor’s appointments and to go grocery shopping. He helped me out a lot.”

“Today I got help from the Family Resource Center. My water has been off for 1 week and I have 2 kids. They helped me have my water turned back on.”

“Jan and Roger gave me a place to live.”

“In 2002 I began smoking crack and in 2007 my nephew helped convince me it was taking my life and assisted me in receiving treatment.”

“Well, I just had my son and I had no money and Christmas was a week away. The United Way had adopted my family and gave my kids a really nice Christmas. They gave me food, new clothes for my kids.”

The examples in the codebook (Appendix D) were created prior to the study of the participants’ narratives, using previous literature and researcher expectations of the results to guide the undergraduate coders. Many narratives contained a clear identification of one of the categories in the codebook. Specific statements in the narratives that fit into each category, as determined by the undergraduate coders, can be found in Appendix I.

Although there were many examples of the codes in the narratives, there were also narratives that were more complex than I was expecting. There may have been some clear articulation of one part of the question, for example, a specific problem or a specific person was mentioned, while other parts were unclear. Likewise, the whole of the narrative was sometimes hard to classify at all. These statements were the most problematic for the coders.

“God has been my mainstay. So many times I have pictured his hands and put my problems in them. So now, things have worked out.”

“When I was in trouble my girlfriend has always been there for me.”
“My family gives me support daily. They are very kind and caring people. They are there to hold me when something bad happens, they are there for the laughter and the tears.”

It was sometimes difficult to separate the narrative into separate categories without losing the meaning of them. In more than one narrative, for example, it was difficult for the coders to determine if the statement was the stressor or the situation (“we didn’t have no where to go”). One statement, like “we lost our house” could be doubly counted as a crisis situation and an instrumental stressor. Another, “we had an argument and I could no longer stay with her” is both an expressive and instrumental stressor, but the separation of them lessens the meaning of the story.

Additionally, for most of the narratives, there was no clear statement of long-term self-sufficiency as an outcome. Participants wrote conclusions such as “my water was turned back on” or “I had presents for my children,” but these are one-time statements of outcome. There is no indication of whether this situation would reoccur in the future or if it was an event that happened only once. It is also unclear what the assistance of family, neighbors, or friends did to make participants feel more self-sufficient. What all these narratives demonstrate is how real life situations are more complex than initially anticipated.

**Common Themes**

There were some common themes that arose when looking at the narratives of the participants in this study. Twenty-two participants identified family members as the ones giving support in the narratives. Family was identified as both the stressor and the ones giving support seven times, while only one narrative showed a family member as the cause of the problem, without also being a source of support. Participants mentioned their mothers 10 times in the narratives, and wrote about being the mother in the situation 9 times. Two talked about God in their narratives.

**Discussion**

The findings of this study did not fully support the hypotheses put forth above. While it seems there may be a relation between the satisfaction scores on the Social Support
Questionnaire and the total Economic Self-Sufficiency Scale scores, the relation was not statistically significant. The lack of significant relation may be a result of the relative lack of variability in self-sufficiency scores; in a sample which shows relatively uniform and low levels of self-sufficiency, it may be difficult to identify significant predictors of self-sufficiency scores. A significant correlation, though moderate, was found between the Social Support Questionnaire’s family score and the total Economic Self-Sufficiency Scale scores. Since family well-being is a component of Economic Self-Sufficiency, family support seems to be more clearly conceptually and numerically related to Economic Self-Sufficiency.

**Major Findings**

The major finding of this study is that the more family support that is identified, the higher the scores on the Economic Self-Sufficiency Scale. For participants, this means that the more they feel they can draw on their family for support, the more autonomous they feel. The findings of this study prompt the question: how do these stories fit into the accepted notions of self-sufficiency? These findings seem to contradict traditional definitions of self-sufficiency, since those revolve around the financial situation of individuals alone. For participants in this study, to the extent that they are not stressed by family members, or they can rely on family members to provide instrumental support which will help them cope one time with stressors, specific problems may be solved.

The participants of this study are not a population that is ‘self-sufficient’ according to the definition of Gowdy and Perlmutter (1993). They are unable to meet financial obligations, have reliable transportation or decent housing. For these individuals in these circumstances, there is no way they can ever be self-sufficient on a long-term basis, without significant changes in their life circumstances. Though society would not define them as such, the participants in this study do identify, though, as being resourceful, able to meet their needs, and able to find sources of assistance in solving specific problems. The findings suggest that self-sufficiency is a long-term goal which might be more likely to be achieved if family and social network stressors are reduced and sources of support are increased.

The overall results of this study put to the test one of the basic American myths: if you work hard, you will succeed, or the idea that you can “pull yourself up by your bootstraps,” that hard
work alone is sufficient to advance. For the participants in this study, this is simply not true. All
the support they received was not nearly enough to bring them close to approaching self-
sufficiency.

The correlation shows only the basic relation, but study of the narratives fleshes out this
picture. The narratives are filled with examples of family members assisting the participants in
various ways (see Appendix I).

Potential Problems

The goal was to have 100 clients from the Family Resource Center participate in this study.
However, the total number of participants numbered only 61. This was not a problem in terms of
power, as the number was enough to find significance. However, an additional 39 narratives
would have been nice to have to allow more variety and depth of the narrative analysis.

There was a great deal of confusion among some of the participants regarding the questions
on the questionnaires. One question that popped up was what to do when the question did not
apply to them. Question 2 on the Social Support Questionnaire asks who can be relied on when
a person is tense or under pressure. Some respondents replied they do not get tense.

Additionally, there were questions where the wording was confusing. For example, on the
Social Support Questionnaire, question number 6 is “Who can you really count on to help you
feel better when you are feeling down-in-the-dumps?” The idea of being ‘down-in-the-dumps’
was not clearly understood by some, and asked what was meant by that, although careful, I was
putting my own interpretation onto the phrase.

Finally, twelve of the participants asked the experimenter what Question 3, “Who accepts you
totally, including both your worst and best points?” meant. It is unclear if it was the wording of
the question that led to confusion.

Kappa

Two Cohen’s kappa scores were computed in this study. The first score looked at the scores
from undergraduate coders 1 and 2, and the second score was between coders 1 and 3. These
kappa scores were 0.69423 and 0.68795, respectively.
Generally speaking, the higher a kappa score the more agreement between two observers. There is really no single standard on what certain scores mean, though some suggest that Kappa scores falling between 0.60 and 0.74 indicate good agreement (Orwin, 1994). Going by this, the two scores above seem to indicate good levels of agreement among the three undergraduate coders in this study.

What this indicates is that, although other parts of the study didn’t show strong results, the students agreed upon what the participants were trying to convey. The narratives tell us something about situations where assistance was needed, and give us a story we wouldn’t have gotten from a quantitative study.

Age

Post-hoc regression analysis did find that as age increased, self-sufficiency scores decreased for the participants in this study. While there is a significant t, the scatterplot shows that the relation is not easily described. At this point, the results are not really interpretable, but this concept may warrant further research in the future.

Anthropomorphism

As expected, many participants turned to family as support when facing difficult times. What was unforeseen, however, is that some participants reported that they relied on something other than a person when going through difficulties. While not a great number of participants, a few responded that they turn to their pets or God as support. One participant, who had lived through several tornados, wrote that one thing that made her feel better was having her weather radio with her.

This concept, known as anthropomorphism, occurs when human beings attribute human characteristics or behaviors to animals, inanimate objects, or God. Epley, Waytz, Akalis, and Cacioppo (2008) suggest that anthropomorphism “requires going beyond what is directly observable to make inferences about unobservable humanlike characteristics” (p. 144). For the current participants it may mean that, though they cannot see God’s hand in their lives or that the cat cannot soothe them with words, they still feel that their pets or God accept and care about
them. According to Epley, et al (2008), “non human agents, from dogs to gods, serve as a source of social connection” (p. 152). This may be especially true when individuals do not have sources of social support on whom to rely, or close others to be confidants. It may also be the case that individuals have less ambivalent feelings toward animals and God, as they are most likely not the ones causing the stressor.

**Implications for Practice**

This study has implications for practical application at the Family Resource Center and other social service agencies. As Hawkins (2005) notes, current definitions of self-sufficiency for agencies revolve around the individual and his or her ability to meet financial goals. The research here indicates that sufficiency is more complicated, and involves the family and surrounding social networks of neighbors and friends.

One thing that the Family Resource Center could do is to support projects that would allow clients to pool their resources, like planting community gardens or enacting a “bartering” system for the clients. These resources may already be available to clients (ie exchanging babysitting between single mothers), but giving the FRC a role provides more consistency in potential clients’ resources, and may make families more comfortable to approach the Center for assistance.

Agencies could also work with local schools to encourage support networks, both between parents and including school administrators and counselors. Additionally, agencies could support and provide family counseling, as well as household skills training like budgeting and shopping for multiple people.

Self-sufficiency as a goal in social service agencies has not been met with great results; perhaps the focus should shift to family sufficiency and family sustainability, as individuals do not live in exclusion, and family sufficiency may be more helpful to a family or people living together.

**Further Research**

There are several possible directions for further research. A first step would be to replicate
this study with a more equal sample of males and females to allow for gender analyses. Additionally, rewriting the questions in a way that they are less ambiguous may be a way to gather more helpful information. Another study of interest would be to compare the findings of the relations between social support and self-sufficiency in lower and middle socioeconomic status groups. It would be interesting to find out exactly what role poverty plays in the feelings of self-sufficiency or the amount of support.

One interesting area of research would be to delve more deeply into the role of age of the participants in the relation between life stage and self-sufficiency. This study found a marginal relation suggesting that as age increased self-sufficiency scores decreased. However it may be more complex than that. It is likely that a person’s feelings of self-sufficiency fluctuate over a lifetime, just as it is likely that there are periods of time where a person has more support than other times, and it may be that individuals of a younger age would be more dependent on others, and therefore feel less self-sufficient. Likewise, older individuals may also report feeling less self-sufficient because of a need to rely on others when health or finances decline.

Another direction for future research would be to investigate more thoroughly the concept of resourcefulness as it relates to self-sufficiency and living in poverty. Participants in this study were able to identify sources of support and assistance, even when it seemed as though there were few options.

Conclusion

This research tells us something above and beyond the scope of the individual narratives. In times when needs cannot be met, people find solutions to their problems in ways that may not be thought of when times are not tough. Individuals can be resourceful in generating solutions to problems. These fixes are generally temporary, however, and the “solutions” may turn around and become the cause of additional problems. Relying on others for social support may be risky if relationships are formed with people who may themselves, in the future, require assistance to cope with life problems.

This study also raises questions about how people understand the stressors they face in their lives when a person’s whole life, and the lives of the people around, is constantly in flux and full of problems. Are problems something to overcome or just an inevitable part of existence? When
facing problems, do individuals feel like they have choices in how to react and respond?

This study was designed to look at self-sufficiency and its relation to social support in individuals of a lower social class background. The hypotheses that there would be a positive relation between satisfaction with support and feelings of self-sufficiency and that there would be a positive relation between family support and self-sufficiency were not fully supported. However, the narratives of the participants were telling in the picture they painted about facing stressors and coming up with solutions to their problems. In this population, individuals’ lives are filled with overwhelming stress, yet they are able to find ways to piece together ways to cope.

Results from this study indicate that individuals feel more sufficient and autonomous when they identify support from family members. This may seem counterintuitive when looking at standard definitions of self and self-sufficiency, which may imply individual achievement. Traditional notions of self-sufficiency, especially in practice, need to be expanded to accept that individuals feel best about themselves and their situations when surrounded by their family and social network.
References


Reauthorization of the temporary assistance for needy families (TANF) program; Final rule. Federal Register, 73,24 (February 5, 2008).


Appendix A

Name: ___________________________________________ Date: ____________

Think about your personal economic situation over the past 3 months. For each of the following items, circle the number that most clearly indicates where you rate yourself, using this scale:

1 = No, not at all  
2 = Occasionally  
3 = Sometimes  
4 = Most of the time  
5 = Yes, all of the time

My current financial situation allows me to:                                  Self Rating

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meet my obligations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do what I want to do, when I want to do it</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be free from government programs like AFDC, foodstamps, general assistance, etc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pay my own way without borrowing from family or friends</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afford to have a reliable car</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afford to have decent housing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy the kind and amount of food I like</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afford to take trips</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy “extras” for family and myself</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursue my own interests and goals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get health care for myself and my family when needed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put money in a savings account</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay on budget</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make payments on my debts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afford decent child care (leave blank if you don’t have children)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Appendix B

Please fill in the following information:

Sex:  M ____    F ____    Age: ______
Number of people in household:  Adults ____      Children ____      Seniors ______
How many people in the household are family members?: ______

INSTRUCTIONS:

The following questions ask about people in your life who provide you with help or support. Each question has two parts. For the first part, list all the people you know, excluding yourself, who you can count on for help or support in the manner described. Write the person’s initials and their relation to you (see example). Do not list more than one person next to each of the numbers beneath the question.

For the second part, circle how satisfied you are with the overall support you have.

If you have no support for a question, circle the words “No one,” but still rate your level of satisfaction. Do not list more than nine people per question.

Please answer all the questions the best you can. All your responses will be kept confidential.

Example:

Who do you know who you can trust with information that can get you into trouble?
No one  1.) T.N. (brother)  4.) D.N. (father)  7.)
   2.) L.M. (friend)  5.) W.T. (employer)  8.)
   3.) R.S. (friend)  6.)  9.)

How satisfied?
6 - very satisfied  5 - fairly satisfied  4 - a little satisfied  3 - a little dissatisfied  2 - fairly dissatisfied  1 - very dissatisfied
1. Who can you really count on to be dependable when you need help?

No one   1.)   4.)   7.)
          2.)   5.)   8.)
          3.)   6.)   9.)

How satisfied?
6 - very satisfied  5 - fairly satisfied  4 - a little satisfied  3 - a little dissatisfied  2 - fairly dissatisfied  1 - very dissatisfied

2. Who can you really count on to help you feel more relaxed when you are under pressure or tense?

No one   1.)   4.)   7.)
          2.)   5.)   8.)
          3.)   6.)   9.)

How satisfied?
6 - very satisfied  5 - fairly satisfied  4 - a little satisfied  3 - a little dissatisfied  2 - fairly dissatisfied  1 - very dissatisfied

3. Who accepts you totally, including both your worst and best points?

No one   1.)   4.)   7.)
          2.)   5.)   8.)
          3.)   6.)   9.)

How satisfied?
6 - very satisfied  5 - fairly satisfied  4 - a little satisfied  3 - a little dissatisfied  2 - fairly dissatisfied  1 - very dissatisfied

4. Who can you really count on to care about you, regardless of what is happening to you?

No one   1.)   4.)   7.)
          2.)   5.)   8.)
          3.)   6.)   9.)

How satisfied?
6 - very satisfied  5 - fairly satisfied  4 - a little satisfied  3 - a little dissatisfied  2 - fairly dissatisfied  1 - very dissatisfied
5. Who can you rely on to help you with money when you need it?

No one 1.) 4.) 7.)
2.) 5.) 8.)
3.) 6.) 9.)

How satisfied?
6 - very satisfied 5 - fairly satisfied 4 - a little satisfied 3 - a little dissatisfied 2 - fairly dissatisfied 1 - very dissatisfied

6. Who can you really count on to help you feel better when you are feeling down-in-the-dumps?

No one 1.) 4.) 7.)
2.) 5.) 8.)
3.) 6.) 9.)

How satisfied?
6 - very satisfied 5 - fairly satisfied 4 - a little satisfied 3 - a little dissatisfied 2 - fairly dissatisfied 1 - very dissatisfied

7. Who can you count on to give you a ride, childcare, or help around the house if you need it?

No one 1.) 4.) 7.)
2.) 5.) 8.)
3.) 6.) 9.)

How satisfied?
6 - very satisfied 5 - fairly satisfied 4 - a little satisfied 3 - a little dissatisfied 2 - fairly dissatisfied 1 - very dissatisfied

8. Who can you count on to console you when you are very upset?

No one 1.) 4.) 7.)
2.) 5.) 8.)
3.) 6.) 9.)

How satisfied?
6 - very satisfied 5 - fairly satisfied 4 - a little satisfied 3 - a little dissatisfied 2 - fairly dissatisfied 1 - very dissatisfied
Appendix C

Please answer the following prompt:

Think about a time in your life when somebody helped you out. What was the situation, and how did they help you?
Appendix D

A. Situation specificity: Information regarding the situation that has occurred

1. Label: Specific
   Definition: A situation that exhibits explicit information about what is going on
   Indicators of code: Statements that indicate that the situation is specific in nature
   Example: “I had support from my friends when my mother died.”

   a. Label: Chronic
      Definition: The problem is long term in nature
      Indicators of code: Statements that indicate the participant has been suffering from the
      situation for some time, more than just a one-time thing
      Examples: “I always have trouble paying my rent.”
      “I have been unemployed for a long time.”

   b. Label: Crisis
      Definition: The problem is acute and short term in nature
      Indicators of code: Statements that indicate the participant suffers from a short, one-
      time problem
      Example: “My car needed a new transmission last Wednesday.”

   Label: Unclear
   Definition: It is not clear if the specific situation listed is chronic or crisis
   Indicators of code: Statements that do not indicate the timeframe of problem or situation

2. Label: Nonspecific
   Definition: Situations do not exhibit explicit information about what is going on
   Indicators of code: Statements that indicate a situation is not specific in nature
   Example: “My sister helps me out all the time.”

3. Label: Unclear
   Definition: The nature of the problem is unclear
   Indicators of code: Statements that do not indicate either long-term (chronic) or short-term
   (crisis)
   Example: “Joe helped me with my problem.”

B. Stressor: Stress, difficulty, or problems defined by participant

1. Label: Who creates the stressor
   Definition: A person (or people) who are listed as the cause of the problem or situation
   Indicators of code: Statements that indicate which individual(s) create the problem in the
   narrative
   Example: “Helen was the reason I was upset.”
a. **Label**: Family  
*Definition*: The person (or people) who are listed as the cause of the problem are family members  
*Indicators of code*: Statements that indicate the individual(s) are related to the participant  
*Example*: “I had problems when my children were arrested.”

b. **Label**: Nonfamily  
*Definition*: The person (or people) who are listed as the cause are not family members  
*Indicators of code*: Statements that indicate the individual(s) are not related to the participant  
*Examples*: “My neighbor ran his car into my shed.”

c. **Label**: Unclear / No one  
*Definition*: The relation of the person (or people) who are listed as the cause are not identified as either family or not family or a person is not listed as a cause  
*Indicators of code*: Statements that do not indicate the relation of the individual to the participant or do not indicate a person being the cause  
*Examples*: “Fred hurt my feelings when he yelled at me.”  
“My car broke down yesterday.”

2. **Label**: What is the stressor  
*Definition*: The nature or type of problem or stressor listed  
*Indicators of code*: Statements that indicate the nature of the stressor

   a. **Label**: Instrumental  
   *Definition*: The stressor is something that is visible, tangible, or material in nature  
   *Indicators of code*: Statements that indicate the problem is based on some tangible stressor  
   *Examples*: “I don’t have money to pay my rent.”  
   “I didn’t have a ride to my court date.”

   b. **Label**: Expressive  
   *Definition*: The stressor is nonphysical or emotional in nature  
   *Indicators of code*: Statements that reflect an emotional stressor  
   *Examples*: “My husband is cheating on me.”  
   “I’m upset with my mother.”

   c. **Label**: Unclear/None  
   *Definition*: The nature of the stressor is unclear  
   *Indicators of code*: Statements that indicate the stressor is neither tangible or emotional in nature  
   *Examples*: “The problem was very great.”  
   “My car broke down.”
C. Support: Resources, actions, or people who offer help or assistance

1. **Label: Who provides supports**  
   **Definition:** A person (or people) who are listed as giving help or assistance  
   **Indicators of code:** Statements that indicate which individual(s) assisted the participant in the narrative

   a. **Label: Family**  
      **Definition:** The person (or people) who are listed as assistance are family members  
      **Indicators of code:** Statements that indicate the individual(s) are related to the participant  
      **Examples:** “My sister was there for me when I needed someone.”  
      “My brother-in-law gave me some money for groceries.”

   b. **Label: Nonfamily**  
      **Definition:** The person (or people) who are listed as assistance are not family members  
      **Indicators of code:** Statements that indicate the individual(s) are not related to the participant  
      **Examples:** “My neighbor helped me last weekend.”

   c. **Label: Nonperson**  
      **Definition:** What is providing support is not a living person  
      **Indicators of code:** Statements that indicate the provider of support is not a living individual  
      **Examples:** “My pets are there for me when things get rough.”  
      “God provides love and support.”  
      “I got help from the United Way organization.”

   d. **Label: Unclear**  
      **Definition:** The relation of the person (or people) who assisted are not identified as either family or not family  
      **Indicators of code:** Statements that do not indicate the relation of the individual to the participant  
      **Examples:** “John gave me money for my water bill.”

2. **What is the support**  
   **Definition:** The nature of the assistance listed  
   **Indicators of code:** Statements that indicate the nature of the assistance

   a. **Label: Instrumental**  
      **Definition:** Tangible or material help that others may provide  
      **Indicators of code:** Statements that indicate assistance is tangible  
      **Examples:** “She loaned me some money.”  
      “She let me sleep at her apartment.”
b. Label: Expressive
Definition: Emotional, non-tangible types of assistance
Indicators of code: Statements that reflect emotional support
Examples: “My brother told me he cares for me anyway.”

c. Label: Unclear
Definition: The type of assistance given is not clear
Indicators of code: Statements that do not indicate if the assistance is either tangible or emotional in nature
Example: “She was able to help me make it work.”

D. Outcome: The result of the situation

1. Label: Self-sufficiency
Definition: The ability to provide for or support oneself
Indicators of code: Statements that indicate that an individual now has the necessary resources

a. Label: Self-sufficient
Definition: The outcome promotes self-sufficiency and some level of independence
Indicators of code: Statements that indicate the outcome was successful in getting an individual back to some form of independence
Examples: “I was able to get my car fixed.”
“I have completed my community hours and I can get my kids back.”

b. Label: Not self-sufficient
Definition: The outcome does not promote self-sufficiency or some level of independence
Indicators of code: Statements that indicate the outcome was not successful in getting an individual back to some form of independence
Example: “I still had to figure out how to make my money last.”

c. Label: No clear outcome
Definition: It is unclear whether the outcome promotes self-sufficiency or not
Indicators of code: Statements which are unclear as to outcome effectiveness in promoting self-sufficiency
Example: “My problem was over.”
Appendix E

Instructions for Undergraduate Coders

*Use codebook for definitions and examples of each*

**Identify the situation.**
If the situation is specific, determine if the situation is chronic, crisis, or unclear and indicate in the appropriate column.
If it is not specific, indicate that in the nonspecific column.
If it is unclear, indicate that in the unclear column.

If there are multiple situations, give each situation its own line. Determine all the information (do all the coding) for the first situation. On the bottom of the sheet, write in the ID number with the situation number (e.g., 54(2) or 54#2) and code all of the data there.

**Identify the source of the stressor.**
If family, indicate in family column.
If not family, indicate in nonfamily column.
If unclear or there is no person as a source, indicate in unclear/no one column.

**Identify the type of stressor.**
If instrumental, indicate in instrumental column.
If expressive, indicate in expressive column.
If unclear, indicate in unclear column.

**Identify the source of support.**
If family, indicate in the family column.
If not family, indicate in the nonfamily column.
If not a person, indicate in the nonperson column.
If unclear, indicate in the unclear column.

*If family, attempt to indicate how many family members provide support (if listed; check back of narrative sheet to see if any additional information for narrative)*

**Identify type of support.**
If instrumental, indicate in instrumental column.
If expressive, indicate in expressive column.
If unclear, indicate in unclear column.

**Indicate outcome.**
If self-sufficient, indicate in self-sufficient column.
If not self-sufficient, indicate in not self-sufficient column.
If no clear outcome, indicate in no clear outcome column.
Appendix F

Recruitment script

My name is Victoria Ramey, and I am a graduate student at Miami. I am conducting research here at the Family Resource Center on social support.

I was wondering if you had about thirty extra minutes to participate in my project. Your participation is completely separate from your request for assistance, and will not at all affect your chances of receiving financial assistance from the Family Resource Center.

Would you be willing to participate?

(If they say yes)

You will complete one short question short questionnaire about who gives you support in different situations. Then you will write a short story about a time in your life you received support. Finally, I will ask you to identify who you consider family members. I will also ask for your permission to use the results from the purple sheet you just filled out.

Remember, your participation is completely up to you and you may stop at any time or say no to answering any questions that make you uncomfortable. Your name will not be associated with your responses in any way. The information will be kept completely confidential and, except for the self-sufficiency questionnaire you just filled out, nothing about you as an individual will be shared with the staff of the Family Resource Center.

You will not be asked to do anything that exposes you to risks. This study will help us understand more about how people view the support they receive.

Would you be willing to participate?
Appendix G

Informed Consent

Dear Participant:

My name is Victoria Ramey, and I am a graduate student in Miami University’s Psychology program. My advisor Ann Fuehrer and I are conducting research here at the Family Resource Center.

You are invited to participate in a study of people’s perception of social support. I will ask you to complete one short questionnaire about who gives you support in different situations. Then I will ask you to write a short narrative about a time in your life you received support. Finally, I will ask you to identify who you consider family members. I will also ask for your permission to use the results from the self-sufficiency measure you just filled out. Your name will not be associated with your responses in any way. This session should take approximately 30 minutes.

Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the session at any time or refuse to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. You will not be asked to do anything that exposes you to risks beyond those of everyday life. The benefit of the study is it will help us understand more about how people view the support they receive.

Participation in this project will not in any way affect your requests for financial assistance from the Family Resource Center.

If you have further questions about the study, please contact Victoria Ramey at 529-6368 or rameyvr@muohio.edu or the Family Resource Center. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please call the Office of Advancement of Research and Scholarship at 529-3600 or email: humansubjects@muohio.edu.

Thank you for your participation. We are very grateful for your help and hope that this will be an interesting session for you. You may keep this portion of the page.

************************************************************************

I agree to participate in the study of social support. I understand my participation is voluntary and that my name will not be associated with my responses. By signing below, I acknowledge that I am 18 years or older.

Participant’s signature _______________________________
Date ________________________________
Appendix H

Debriefing Form

Thank you for participating in this study. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

If you have any questions about the research I am doing here today or have any additional thoughts, please feel free to share them with me now.

Thinking about times you have received support in the past can be emotional. If you feel any discomfort, please feel free to contact the Community Crisis and Counseling Center. It is a 24-hour free and confidential service. Their phone number is (513) 523-4146.
Appendix I

‘Situation specificity’ means that a statement identifies a situation with information about what is going on. This statement can be specific, nonspecific, or unclear; if specific, it can be classified as chronic (long term), crisis (acute and short term), or unclear.

1. Specific
   “I found out I was pregnant”
   a. Chronic
      “My husband was diagnosed with cancer”
      “I had a 9 month complete break with reality due to my OCD”
      “My electric was getting ready to get cut off”
   b. Crisis
      “My spouse was in a car accident”
      “I had just had major back surgery”
      “My now ex-boyfriend bashed out my windshield”
      “I had no car and a new born baby”
   c. Unclear
      “I was having trouble at home”

2. Nonspecific
   “When I am down and out”
   “When I was in trouble”

3. Unclear
   “I lost my little girl 40 years ago”
   “Can’t remember past help”

‘Stressor’ refers to some difficulty or problem in the participants’ perceptions. The stressor category is broken down into ‘who creates the stressor’ and ‘what is the stressor.’ The who is the person or people who are the cause of the situation or problem. This can be family (as defined by the participants), nonfamily, or the cause is either unclear or not an individual. What is the stressor refers to the nature or type of problem or stressor. It can be instrumental (something that is visible, material, or tangible), expressive (emotional or nonphysical), or none/unclear.
1. Who creates the stressor?
   a. Family
      “I was living with my mother and we got into an argument”
      “My kids dad left us”
      “Me and my husband split up”
      “My 1st husband was killed”
   b. Nonfamily
      “It was stolen, right off my porch”
   c. Unclear/No one
      “My husband was in between jobs”
      “I had poor credit”

2. What is the stressor?
   a. Instrumental
      “We had a house fire and a mobile home fire”
      “I was without a vehicle for about 4 months”
      “We didn’t have a vehicle”
      “My water has been off for 1 week”
      “It was stolen”
      “Working on a house to rent for family, it was a money pit”
      “I had no money”
      “Needed medical help”
   b. Expressive
      “We got into an argument and I could no longer stay with her”
      “I was dying inside”
   c. Unclear/No one
      “I didn’t know how I could even buy diapers”
      “I was in trouble”

Support refers to resources, actions, or people who offer assistance. Support is broken down into ‘who provides the support’ and ‘what is the support.’ Who provides the support is the person who is listed as the giver of the assistance. This can be family, nonfamily, a nonperson
(an agency or a pet, for example), or the support is coming from an unclear source. ‘What is the support’ is the nature of the support. As with the nature of the stressor, the nature of the support can be categorized as instrumental, expressive, or unclear.

1. Who provides the support?
   a. Family
      “My mother, father, and sister helped a lot”
      “My sister in law and mother in law took us in”
      “My mom always takes care of my kids”
      “My grandmother took myself and my 14 yr old son in”
      “My grandma got me a used car to get me started”
      “Grandson took me to the hospital to have surgery”
   b. Nonfamily
      “My boyfriend, his mother and sister helped me out a lot”
      “My neighbor who I didn’t really know gave me $300”
      “I sat down with a friend and she talked to some of my other friends and on Christmas Eve they brought over a bunch of presents for my daughter”
      “The nurse came to his house”
   c. Nonperson
      “Lifespan helped me to get custody of my nephew”
      “I just talk to God”
      “God has been my mainstay”
   d. Unclear
      “They help me out a lot”
      “Brandy went to her mom and dad, got me an air conditioner and put it in my window”

2. What is the support?
   a. Instrumental
      “Cooked, shopped, offered rides, helped with small cash for funeral”
      “He let me stay until my husband got out of jail”
      “My mother paid $2000 for a van for me”
      “Went to court with me”
      “The nurse came to his house and gave him his shots”
“Gave us money when our electric was going to be turned off”
“She has helped us save our house and catch bills up, and just everything from clothes, to food to toys for our kids”

b. Expressive
“She was very talkative and talked with him”
“They were actually there to listen when I needed to talk. They took me in as one of their own.”
“They are there for the laughter and the tears”
“She is the only person I can talk to to relieve stress”

c. Unclear
“My girlfriend has always been there for me”
“My family give me support daily”
“Gave me a lot of support”
“They help me out a lot”

The final category in the codebook is ‘Outcome.’ Outcome refers to the result of the situation. It can turn out as self-sufficient (the person now has the ability to support him or herself), not self-sufficient (the person does not have some new level of independence), or there is no clear outcome.

1. Self-sufficient
“Family and friends helped me get another start”
“That one gesture has kept me going, helping me to keep my job which provides the rest”
“A lot of times I do things myself”
“Family and friends helped me to get another start”

2. Not self-sufficient
“Wish we could have kept it, it was a dream. Never happen again”
“Help me get on disability”
“In the future, I still would ask them”

3. No clear outcome
“I was very grateful to her”
“So now, someway things have worked out”