

THE RURAL FAMILY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR LIBRARIANS

Robert B. Girvan, Associate Professor
of Sociology
Clarion State College
Clarion, Pennsylvania

The dynamics of family, particularly rural and neo-rural families, are discussed by Dr. Girvan. As a sociologist, a rural resident and the father of seven children, Girvan authoritatively spoke to librarians on this topic during a Rural Libraries and the Humanities workshop on April 2, 1982.

This article will examine the family structure in rural America as part of a society that is experiencing rapid social change. Definitions of the term rural and of that basic social institution, the family, provide the foundation. On this basic contemporary rural family tendencies and general American family trends are discussed; implications for service and leadership will also be made. The data and perspectives on the rural American family are presented in order to enhance the library staffs' understanding of and effective relations with this aspect of non-urban society.

What rural means in an increasingly urban society (73 percent of the population lives in metropolitan areas) has become more difficult to define over the last several decades. The census distinguished two rurals. Rural-farm is defined as ownership of ten or more acres of land, or less than ten acres but the owner makes more than \$250.00 from that land. Less than five percent of the populations consists of rural-farm families according to the 1980 census.

Our rural non-farm population is said to live in villages and hamlets below 2,500 persons and in the open country, like Paint Township in Clarion

County. In 1980 rural so defined finds approximately sixty million people nationwide and about three million in Pennsylvania in this category.

NEO-RURAL FAMILIES

Demographers have begun to notice outmigration from cities to suburbs, smaller towns, villages and hamlets since 1970. For example, Pittsburgh lost nearly 100,000 persons while surrounding Allegheny County gained about 200,000 persons. Nonmetropolitan Clarion County grew by approximately 5,000 people and Clarion Township grew from 2,257 in 1970 to 3,321 in 1980. (Census, 1980) However, no family in Clarion Township now considers themselves to be urban dwellers.

Residents of smaller towns over 2,500 residents, like Brookville and Clarion Borough, consider themselves neither rural nor urban. Perhaps a range of rurality, from most rural to families residing in areas up to Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area of fifty thousand person, would better serve this analysis. Nonmetropolitan is one descriptor encompassing nearly half the U.S. population that fit into the range of rurality. For purposes this significant number of people can be defined as neo-rural because of the mixture of roots and confusion of geographical identity implied by such a term. Libraries must related to this neo-ruralness or neo-localness as a renewed challenge.

According to recent research assessing the quality of rural life, "...a strong case could be made that being rural means being inherently deprived." (Dillman and Tremblay, 1977) The authors point to objective indicators such as less formal education by about a year, nearly ten percent more rural res-

idents below poverty level, and only three-fourths of earning power despite cost of living differential compared to metropolitan dwellers. The lack of social justice endemic in rural areas and lack of support for cultural arts were also noted in support of the contention. These data can be confirmed locally in 1982.

However, such a negative evaluation may be countered by subjective indicators. Campbell (1976) found that "...people's sense of well-being increases consistently as one moves from larger cities to rural places even when controlled for income (more affluent people tend to be happier regardless of place of residence)." This positive perception of neo-rural life seems to come from a focus on social ills of urban life. Crime, noise, pollution and racial tensions are significantly less in Knox, PA than in Pittsburgh, PA even though citizens may complain about the paucity of holdings in the Knox Public Library.

In this geographic area of deprivations and advantages exists the social arrangement ninety-six percent of all Americans use--the family. This group of people, related to one another by marriage, ancestry, or adoption, functions as an economic unit that always consumes goods and services. Families produce things at a subsistence or affluent level increasingly less often than in the past. However, rural USA families have remained a social system that is monogamous, endogamous, nuclear, neolocal, and bilateral.

An important factor for the present analysis is that families are dynamic. Families undergo life cycles. There are differences in the consumption patterns of families during various stages of their life cycles. An individual experiences his/her first social system in a family of orientation.

When that person marries and/or has children he or she has begun a family of procreation. Each person generally experiences several stages both as a child and as a parent: (1) marriage; (2) time from birth of first child to birth of last child; (3) time from leaving home of first child to departure of last child; (4) death of spouse; (5) death of remaining spouse. It seems crucial for library staffs to know what percentage of their patrons are in which stage of the family cycle.

Neo-rural families vary in basis of residence, race, and social class. For example, these families include over six million non-white persons whose unit income is one half that of similar white families while having one third more members. Commercial farm families form the smallest neo-rural group. Subsistence farm families where a spouse works to supplement the income and village or town professional families constitute the next largest nonurban family categories. Commuter families where residence and work are widely separated has become the predominant type. (Copp, 1963)

In general rural families have been characterized by tendencies rather than distinct qualities when compared with their urban counterparts. Four areas of family living have been identified as non-metropolitan predispositions. First, neo-rural families are more patriarchal, husband-wife structured with status and role relatively fixed by age and sex. Therefore, the norms inculcated by the family are ends in and of themselves; the old ways are the right ways more than in urban families. (Glen & Hill, 1977) Second, a higher birth rate has left rural families somewhat larger than urban families. One-third of the USA's youth reside outside urban areas with approximately one-fourth of the nation's families. Yet there is a lower

number of young adults causing fewer families in the earlier stages of the family cycle. (Loomis and Beegle, 1975) Third, median income has declined nearly ten percent more than the urban median income. (Townsend, 1981) Because of somewhat larger family size, the smaller income must stretch even farther. Fourth, work and rural family residence are more likely than urban families to be the same place or very close; the home is not so much of a haven from the heartless world.

URBAN/RURAL SIMILARITIES

Neither rural nor urban families can be studied in a cultural vacuum. Despite the above neo-rural tendencies, all contemporary families have been subjected to pressures caused by the change from an industrial to a post-industrial, service-oriented and technology-based society. Surrendering to other institutions the functions once very much within family responsibilities has accelerated in the past decades.

ALTERNATIVES AND TRENDS

Children no longer are part of a producing family unit so they have become economic liabilities costing parents well over \$60,000 per youngster to raise. Family members increasingly value their emotional ties; home is not just a house. Partly because almost 50 percent of all adult women work outside the home now, contemporary families are more egalitarian. Young working adults are increasingly postponing marriage; newlyweds are 1.5 years older than in 1960. Couples who remain married can expect to spend an average of fourteen years longer in a childless home than their great grandparents. (Robertson, 1981).

The family has not been destroyed by increasing divorce rates because serial monogamy reconstitutes families, blending children of the new marriage partners. Serial monogamy is the most common alternative to the traditional nuclear family.

Remaining single is another alternative to beginning one's family of procreation; there has been a forty percent increase in the number of people living alone since 1970. At present one in five households consists of one person, which is a far cry from the extended family of the past and the nuclear family more recently. There has also been an increase in one-parent families, particularly those headed by women. Nearly half of all children born now will spend a significant portion of time in a single-parent family before turning eighteen.

The final trend is the cohabitation alternative to the traditional family. Over two million adults, three-fourths under 45 years of age, presently share a home in the USA. (Robertson, 1981).

Implications of the above tendencies and trends for library service can be summarized by stating that neo-rural families vary greatly among themselves and, therefore, each one does not respond equally due to varying needs. Service needs are related to the interactive combination of neo-rural tendencies, general trends, and stages of the family cycle. Formal and informal needs assessment strategies must be employed to explore the complexity of family structures in rural America. Results must then be creatively matched to library resources in order to effectively relate with the basic institution in non-urban society.

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