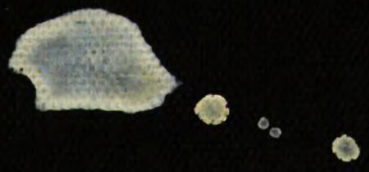


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BY MEXICAN-AMERICAN  
FEMALE FAMILY HEADS

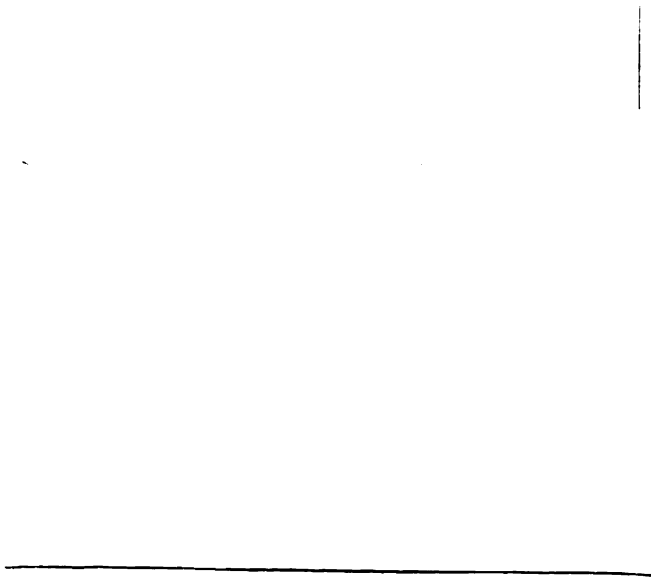
Thesis for the Degree of M. A.  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY  
HARRIET EVELYN TILLOCK  
1969



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ABSTRACT

WORK OR WELFARE ADAPTATIONS BY MEXICAN-AMERICAN  
FEMALE FAMILY HEADS

By

Harriet Evelyn Tillock

A Mexican-American female family head, in common with any woman who has no husband to provide economic support for the family, must make some adaptation to her economic situation. Most Mexican-American female heads adapt in one of two ways: by earning a regular wage, or by receiving aid from a welfare agency. This paper discusses some of the factors which may influence the female head in her choice of a wage or welfare adaptation.

The Mexican-American female heads studied here represent 10 per cent of a sample of Mexican-American families in Michigan. This group was studied relative to urbanization processes among former migrant agricultural laborers who have become employees in industry.

Mexican-American female family heads in general represent a family pattern in which the maternal dyad of mother and child is very strong. The family heads have a mean age of 45 years, and, on the average, have completed only five years of school. Sixty per cent of them grew up in Texas while the remainder are about equally divided between those spending their early years in either Mexico or Michigan. Sixteen per cent of the heads are single or married, 35 per cent are widowed, and the remainder

are equally divided between divorced and separated women. These females head households containing on the average more than four members of whom three are minor children. Median family incomes are between \$3,000 and \$4,000 per year.

Although about half of the female heads have various secondary sources of income such as Social Security, pensions, interest, or help from relatives; most of the heads' primary income source is either welfare or a regular wage. These two primary income sources were considered as alternative adaptations to the female heads' lack of a husband to support the family. It is suggested here that a Mexican-American female family head often chooses the welfare adaptation because, for various reasons, she is unable to earn a regular wage. Factors which affect the ability to earn a wage are age, educational achievement, marital status, and number of minor children in the household.

Data analysis revealed that having three or more minor children in the household was the factor which most often prevented the female head from earning a regular wage. Lack of child care facilities is suggested as the reason why so many heads with three or more children could not work outside the home. Marital status of widowed most often also indicated welfare recipients whereas most single or married heads were earning a wage. Age was not a decisive factor but a larger percentage of those over 50 years of age were receiving welfare, while more women under 50 were wage earners. Educational achievement seemed to have no relationship to welfare or wage, but the percentage distribution indicated that those heads earning a regular wage most often had at least seven years of school completed.

Results of the data analysis clearly indicate that Mexican-American female family heads with three or more minor children in their households were the heads most often unable to make any but the welfare adaptation to their economic situation.

WORK OR WELFARE ADAPTATIONS BY MEXICAN-AMERICAN  
FEMALE FAMILY HEADS

By

Harriet Evelyn Tillock

A THESIS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TABLE OF CONTENTS . . . . .	ii
LIST OF TABLES . . . . .	iii
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. CHARACTERISTICS OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN FEMALE HEADS AND THEIR HOUSEHOLDS . . . . .	4
Family Patterns . . . . .	4
Age of Female Heads of Households . . . . .	7
Marital Status . . . . .	7
Education . . . . .	10
Birthplace and Place Lived Longest Until 16 Years of Age . . . . .	12
Household Composition . . . . .	13
Income . . . . .	13
Summary . . . . .	16
III. SOURCES OF INCOME . . . . .	17
IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION . . . . .	22
Age . . . . .	24
Educational Achievement . . . . .	26
Number of Minor Children in the Household . . . . .	28
Marital Status . . . . .	31
V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS . . . . .	34
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	36



LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Age of Mexican-American Female Heads of Households . . . . .	8
2. Percentage of Heads of Households by Marital Status in Michigan for Total, Non-White, and Mexican-American Families . . . . .	9
3. Marital Status of Heads and Mean Age in Each Status . . . . .	10
4. Female Heads' Educational Achievement by Age . . . . .	11
5. Characteristics of Families Having Poverty Level Incomes . . .	14
6. Income Distribution of Mexican-American Female-Headed Families . . . . .	15
7. Primary and Secondary Sources of Income by Percentages . . .	19
8. Regular Wage and Welfare Adaptations . . . . .	21
9. Welfare or Regular Wage Adaptation by Age . . . . .	24
10. Welfare or Regular Wage Adaptation by Educational Attainment . . . . .	26
11. Welfare or Regular Wage Adaptation by Number of Household Minors . . . . .	28
12. Welfare or Wage Adaptation by Marital Status . . . . .	31

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Female-headed families are not rare, but actually represented 9 per cent of all households in the United States in 1965.<sup>1</sup> A sample of Mexican-American families in Michigan included 10 per cent in which the head was designated as a female. A female family head must make many adaptations in order to remain functional in a society where the normative household pattern is the nuclear family of husband, wife, and their unmarried children. To compound the problem, the Mexican-American cultural ideal reflects the Mexican tradition of the strong male as authoritarian head and principal breadwinner of the family.<sup>2</sup> Evidence indicates that both Mexican and Mexican-American females have functioned as heads when the husband was absent as a migrant laborer. However, the husband remained the family head in the economic sense.<sup>3</sup>

How does a female head adapt to the absence of a husband's economic support? Among 69 Mexican-American female family heads in the sample,

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<sup>1</sup>Donald J. Bogue, Principles of Demography (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1969), 373.

<sup>2</sup>Oscar Lewis, Life in a Mexican Village: Tepoztlan Restudied (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963), 319.

Arthur J. Rubel, Across the Tracks: Mexican-Americans in a Texas City (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966), 60-67.

<sup>3</sup>Lewis, Life in a Mexican Village, 321.

Myrtle R. Reul, Where Hannibal Led Us (New York: Vantage Press, 1967), 227-228.

52 per cent were earning a regular wage, whereas the remaining 48 per cent were not employed. Sixty-four per cent of the female-headed families were receiving some financial support from governmental sources such as welfare or Social Security. It would seem that some Mexican-American female heads adapt to the lack of a husband's financial support by working or receiving government aid, or both. This paper will discuss the financial adaptations made by Mexican-American female family heads in Michigan and attempt to describe those variables which may influence whether the female head makes a work or welfare adaptation to her economic situation.

The data used here are from the Mexican-American Research Project at Michigan State University.<sup>4</sup> The project was primarily concerned with the urbanization process of Mexican-Americans settling in Michigan, especially among those who have dropped out of migrant agricultural labor and entered industry. "Controlled selection sampling"<sup>5</sup> produced a self-weighting sample representative of the Mexican-American population of Michigan outside of the Detroit Metropolitan Area. The sample comprised a random probability selection of Mexican-American residents in Michigan. Successful interviews with 695 heads of households were conducted by bi-literate and bi-lingual Mexican-American interviewers between October, 1967, and March, 1968. While making a comparison between male and female household heads in the sample, attention was drawn to the wage-welfare dichotomy which is discussed in this paper.

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<sup>4</sup>The project was funded under the U. S. Department of Labor, Manpower Policy Evaluation and Research Contract No. 81246632; Harvey M. Choldin and Grafton D. Trout, Co-Directors.

<sup>5</sup>Roe Goodman and Leslie Kish, "Controlled Selection: A Technique in Probability Sampling," Journal of the American Statistical Association, XLV (September, 1950), 350-372.

The 69 female family heads who comprised 9.9 per cent of the total sample are as diverse as is any such group, but they can be described by certain demographic and social variables such as family pattern, age, marital status, education, income, and household composition. These characteristics will be outlined as background for the data analysis and discussion forming the substantive portion of the paper. The data analyzed are those which divide the group into sub-groups with certain characteristics in common such as age cohort, educational level attained, source of income, working for a regular wage, and others. Examination of the variables will suggest that certain personal or societal inadequacies may influence which economic adaptation will be made by the Mexican-American female family heads.

CHAPTER II  
CHARACTERISTICS OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN FEMALE HEADS  
AND THEIR HOUSEHOLDS

Family Patterns

Patterns of family structure have varied greatly over time and between societies. Murdock has suggested that the nuclear family form is universal because this is the only pattern which can provide for certain basic needs, and the father's participation in the nuclear family is based in part upon the need for economic support of the mother and small children.<sup>6</sup> Murdock further suggests that a society's rules of family residence, whether patrilocal or matrilocal, depend upon whether the male or the female controls the principal means of subsistence in that particular society.<sup>7</sup> Burgess and Locke trace the historical development of the family from extended-patriarchal to modern-democratic in terms of economic developments which made a different family form more functional in that particular society.<sup>8</sup> The common feature in both discussions is the economic function as it relates to the family.

The female head of the family is recognized by Burgess and Locke when they describe the "maternal family" in which the women hold all

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<sup>6</sup>George Peter Murdock, Social Structure (New York: The Free Press, 1965), 9-11.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 206.

<sup>8</sup>Ernest W. Burgess and Harvey J. Locke, The Family: From Institution to Companionship (2d ed.; New York: American Book Company, 1960), 15-18.

positions of authority. They note that the female's power often depends upon some male's ability to enforce her directives. The authors also recognize that women may control the family by dominating the husband or succeeding him as head after his death.<sup>9</sup> However, "maternal families" are comparatively rare in the sense that there is no male authority present in some form. Widows inherit the control they hold from the male head. Female dominance of the male in any form is often hidden to protect the male's public image. Rodman suggests that certain adaptive family patterns exist which seem to be found more often among poor families. Included among the adaptive patterns is the female-headed family, often appearing because the husband is unable to perform his socially prescribed role of breadwinner.<sup>10</sup> Richard Adams agrees that the female-headed family pattern does exist as an alternate functional form adapting to different conditions in the social structure, especially where the husband is not important economically or socially to the family. Adams argues that the female-headed family is not a disorganization of the nuclear family form, but a distinct type of family based upon the maternal dyad. He conceives of the nuclear family as basically three dyads: conjugal or husband-wife, maternal or mother-child, and paternal or father-child. The maternal dyad in all cases is stronger than the other two. Regarding Murdock's theory of economic dependence upon the husband/father, Adams notes that this function can be performed by relatives, the mother herself, or some outside

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 12-18.

<sup>10</sup>Hyman Rodman, "Family Patterns of the Poor: Testimony Presented to The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders," Sociological Focus, II (Spring, 1969), 4-5.

social agency.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the female-headed family is a recognized pattern and is also often present because the husband is unable to perform his economic role.

Among both Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, the patriarchal family is considered the ideal pattern. The nuclear family usually has a separate residence although extended family relationships are very strong and include material aid as well as social interaction.<sup>12</sup> Ideally within the family, the husband is the authority figure and the wife is subservient. In actual fact the female has considerable power because she is the affective center and in charge of most household matters. Since the male spends much time away from home in occupational or social pursuits the wife is able to exert considerable control in his absence. The husband is expected to support the family; and if he is unable to do this properly, he is the recipient of negative sanctions from the community. Although the wife sometimes works or earns money in some way, it is not considered proper and is frowned upon as degrading to the husband and disruptive to family solidarity. However, women often control the family finances and are expected to handle them carefully.<sup>13</sup> Since the husband is often

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<sup>11</sup>Richard N. Adams, "An Inquiry into the Nature of the Family" in Essays in the Science of Culture, ed. by Gertrude E. Dole and Robert L. Carneiro (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1960), 30-49.

<sup>12</sup>William Madsen, The Mexican-Americans of South Texas (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 46-48.

<sup>13</sup>Lewis, Life in a Mexican Village, 319-343.  
Lewis, Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty (New York: The New American Library, 1959).

Barbara J. Macklin, Structural Stability and Culture Change, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1963), 157-166.

Rubel, Across the Tracks, 55-70.

Roland Thorpe, et al., "Changes in Marriage Roles Accompanying the Acculturation of the Mexican-American Wife," Journal of Marriage and the Family, XXX (August, 1968), 404-412.

absent and the wife runs the household as its affective center, the maternal dyad would appear to be strongest as suggested by Adams. If the male head were permanently absent, the strong maternal dyadic relationship would seem to lead naturally to a female-headed family pattern. Doubtless many women join another household when they have no husband but the concern here is those females who have maintained a separate household. So, in this paper the female-headed family will be considered an alternate familial pattern in which the economic needs are satisfied by the head receiving a regular wage or financial assistance from governmental agencies.

#### Age of Female Heads of Households

The female heads of households in the sample are from 20 to 82 years of age, with a mean age of 45 years. The largest percentage in one age group for the female heads is in the 40 to 49 age range, which includes 28 per cent (19) of all female heads. That many female heads are older is notable, since age affects many other variables such as marital status, educational attainment, and household composition. Therefore, age will be used as a control in describing many of the other characteristics of the female heads of families. Table 1 indicates the age distribution for these women.

#### Marital Status

The Mexican-American female-headed households represent a slightly larger proportion of total households in the sample than did their Michigan counterparts in general, but about half of the proportion represented by Non-white female heads according to the 1960 Census. Widows represent



TABLE 1  
AGE OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN FEMALE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS

Age in Years	%	N
20 - 34	21.7	15
35 - 49	42.0	29
50 and Over	36.2	25
Totals	99.9	69

the largest single group for both Mexican-Americans and total female heads, while the separated are the largest group among the Non-white female heads. The proportions in other statuses do not differ greatly. Table 2 presents these data.

Thirty-five per cent of the Mexican-American female family heads are widowed, 49 per cent are divorced or separated, and the remaining 16 per cent are married or single. The widowed range in age from 20 to 82 years of age, but their mean age is about 54. This group contributes to the high mean age of the total group as two-thirds of the widows are over 50, and all of the female heads over 60 years of age are widowed. Three widows live alone and all others have family members in their households. Minor children live in 75 per cent of widow's households including three widows with 9, 8, and 7 minor children respectively. Seventy-one per cent (17) of the widows rely on Social Security, and 42 per cent (10) on welfare or Aid to Dependent Children for some of their income.

Although as sub-groups, the divorced and separated heads comprise 23 and 26 per cent respectively, in aggregate they total half of the

TABLE 2

PERCENTAGE OF HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS BY MARITAL STATUS IN MICHIGAN  
FOR TOTAL, NON-WHITE, AND MEXICAN-AMERICAN FAMILIES

Marital Status	State of Michigan <sup>a</sup> (1960)		Mexican- American Sample (1967) %
	Total Families %	Non-White Families %	
<b>Female Heads</b>			
- Married/spouse absent			
- Separated	1.2	7.3	2.6
- Other	0.5	0.9	0.7
- Widowed	3.7	4.9	3.5
- Divorced	1.6	3.5	2.3
- Single	0.7	2.0	0.8
Total Female Heads	7.7	18.6	9.9
Married Male/ wife present	89.7	77.7	85.9
All Totals	97.4	96.3	95.8

<sup>a</sup>Compiled from U. S. Bureau of the Census, U. S. Census of Population: 1960, Detailed Characteristics, Michigan, Final Report PC (1)-24D (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Printing Office, 1962), 421.

female heads in the sample. Both groups' mean age is about 41 years, and both have minor children in their homes in most cases. Half of the 16 divorced and two-thirds of the 18 separated female heads need welfare aid, but no divorced and only one separated head receives Social Security.

Two of the single female heads live alone, the other four have family members living with them, but since the single women with one exception are working, they qualify as heads. These women range in age from 21 to

TABLE 3  
MARITAL STATUS OF HEADS AND MEAN AGE  
IN EACH STATUS

Marital Status	Per Cent and Number in Status		Mean Age of Heads in Status
	%	N	
Single	8.7	6	37.0 Years
Married	7.2	5	47.0 Years
Divorced	23.2	16	41.3 Years
Widowed	34.8	24	53.7 Years
Separated	26.1	18	41.1 Years
Totals	100.0	69	

58 years. Three of the five married women have husbands in a hospital, one's husband is in Mexico, and the other's spouse is in jail. The first three are in their late fifties, the fourth is 43, and the last is 25 years of age. The married women are all employed and have children living at home. No single and only one (20%) married head receives welfare aid, while no married women but two single women (40%) are Social Security recipients. Table 3 summarizes female household heads' marital status by per cent of subsample and mean age of the head.

#### Education

Mexican-American female family heads have a wide range of educational achievement. Twelve per cent (8) have no education, 7.2 per cent (5) have graduated from high school, and only one (1.4%) completed college. The

TABLE 4

## FEMALE HEADS' EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT BY AGE

School Years Completed	Totals		Per Cent in Age Group		
	N	%	20 - 34	35 - 49	50 and Over
None	8	11.6	0.0	6.9	24.0
1 - 4	20	29.0	6.7	31.0	40.0
5 - 8	23	33.3	40.0	31.0	32.0
9 - 11	12	17.4	33.3	24.1	0.0
12 or More	6	8.7	20.0	6.9	4.0
Totals	69	100.0	100.0	99.9	100.0

$$\chi^2 = 19.780$$

$$P < .02$$

mean educational achievement is about five years of school completed. This is considerably less than the number of years completed by other females in the eight counties used in the sample. According to the 1960 Census, the median number of school years completed was 11.4 years for all females and 9.1 years for all Non-white females.<sup>14</sup>

Hathaway, Beegle, and Bryant note that for both urban and rural residents, median years of school completed are inversely correlated with age, and that educational achievement levels were generally lowest in the Southern Region of the United States.<sup>15</sup> That age and educational achievement are apparently related is shown in Table 4.

<sup>14</sup>U. S. Bureau of the Census, U. S. Census of Population: 1960, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Michigan, Final Report PC(1)-24C (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Printing Office, 1962), 192.

<sup>15</sup>Dale E. Hathaway, J. Allan Beegle, and W. Keith Bryant, People of Rural America (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1968), 139.

Another factor which apparently influences the number of school years completed by the Mexican-American female heads is the place where education was received. For this sample the place where the respondent lived longest until she was sixteen was chosen as the variable. That this was the locality where the respondent received most of her education determined the variable choice. Michigan reared women have markedly higher levels of educational achievement than those from Mexico or Texas. Those reared in Mexico have a mean education of 4.5 years, those from Texas have 4.6 years, and those from Michigan have 9.6 years as their mean educational level. Only one head who grew up in Mexico had more than an eighth grade education, no Texans have proceeded beyond 11 years, but all Michigan residents have completed at least four years of school. The table from which this information was drawn has a Chi Square of 31.956 with six degrees of freedom and indicates a probability of less than .001.

#### Birthplace and Place Lived Longest Until 16 Years of Age

The life histories of female Mexican-American heads of households began in Texas or the Southwest for about 60 per cent of the heads. Twenty-nine per cent of the female heads were born in Mexico and about 12 per cent were born in Michigan, Minnesota, or Colorado. Nearly half of those born in Mexico moved when they were very young, as only 16 per cent (11) lived in Mexico until they were 16 years old. Sixty-one per cent (42) lived in Texas and 23 per cent (16) lived in Michigan. Age is related to the place lived until 16 in the sense that no female heads under 40 lived in Mexico and none over 50 lived in Michigan when they were young girls.

### Household Composition

The Mexican-American female-headed households often contain other kin than the head's children. Thirteen per cent (9) of the female-headed households include four generations. Twenty-three per cent (16) include other adults beside the head and her adult children. These other adults are kin in all cases and include head's mothers, sons- or daughters-in-law, and step-children.

The female-headed households have a mean of 4.4 members including on the average three minor children. The 1960 Census<sup>16</sup> reports that all female-headed households in Michigan had a population per household of 3.1 members, and all non-white female-headed households contained 4.1 members in general. Women over 50 head 74 per cent of the 19 households with one or two members. Females aged 35 to 49 head half of those 40 households with three to seven members, as well as heading 80 per cent of those homes with eight or more members. The divorced and separated heads have the largest households of all the marital statuses with a mean of 4.7 members. Less than 9 per cent (6) of the female heads live alone, and only 20 per cent (14) have no minor children in the household.

### Income

Income is one of the most revealing of all variables as its size has such influence upon the life style of the family. Female-headed families in the sample have a mean income of \$3,100 per year, which, considering the household size, puts most into the poverty category. Bogue<sup>17</sup> lists

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<sup>16</sup>U. S. Bureau of the Census, U. S. Census of Population: 1960, General Population Characteristics, Michigan, Final Report PC(1)-24B (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Printing Office, 1962), 137.

<sup>17</sup>Bogue, Principles of Demography, 417.

eight characteristics often related to poverty. Female heads in the sample are represented in all but two of these categories; households where the male head is not married, and homes where the head is a Negro. Table 5 indicates the six characteristics exhibited by female heads in the sample and the percentage found in each group.

TABLE 5  
CHARACTERISTICS OF FAMILIES HAVING POVERTY LEVEL INCOMES

Characteristics	Mexican-American Female-Headed Families	
	%	N
Six or more household members	31.8	22
Older Heads of households		
- Over 60 years of age	12.9	9
- Over 50 years of age	36.1	25
Head having 8 or less years of education	73.9	51
Families having no persons earning a wage	33.3	23
Head working as laborer or service worker	18.8	13
Families where the head is a female	100.0	69

It is evident from the table that Mexican-American female-headed families have multiple characteristics of poverty level families. Cross classification reveals this clearly. For example, in families where no person is earning a wage, 26 per cent have 8 or more members, 35 per cent have heads over 50 years of age, and 70 per cent have heads with 8 or less years of education.

TABLE 6

## INCOME DISTRIBUTION OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN FEMALE-HEADED FAMILIES

Income Per Year	Percentage	Number
\$1,999 or less	11.6	8
\$2,000 to \$2,999	23.2	16
\$3,000 to \$3,999	18.8	13
\$4,000 to \$4,999	17.4	12
\$5,000 to \$6,999	13.0	9
\$7,000 or More	11.6	8
No Answer	4.3	3
Totals	99.9	69

After examining the above characteristics of families at the poverty level it is not surprising that the Mexican-American female-headed households have such a low median income. Miller<sup>18</sup> notes that in all states where they are categorized as such, Mexican-Americans have lower incomes than do whites but higher incomes than do Negroes or other non-whites except Orientals. Direct comparisons are impossible in Michigan, since the data for income is from the 1960 Census Report for Michigan, but even so, Mexican-American female heads earned slightly less in 1967 than did their white counterparts in 1959, but well above the Non-white female heads' median 1959 earnings. In the sample, 54 per cent of the female-headed

<sup>18</sup>Herman P. Miller, Rich Man, Poor Man, A Signet Book (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1964), 124-128.



families have incomes under \$4,000 per year and the modal group of 16 female heads (23%) report incomes between \$2,000 and \$2,999 per year. Table 6 presents the income distribution of the Mexican-American female-headed households.

### Summary

A composite of mean or modal characteristics would define a typical Mexican-American female family head as 45 years old, widowed, and having completed about five years of school. She would have been Texas born and have lived in that state most of the time until she was sixteen years old. She would head a family in which the pattern was represented by strong maternal dyadic relationships. Her household would consist of herself, three minor children, and perhaps an adult child or relative. If the household contained someone earning a wage, it would be one person with comparatively low pay, since the family income would be between \$3,000 and \$4,000 per year. This brief composite picture of the Mexican-American female family head will provide a background for the discussion of family income sources in the following section.

CHAPTER III  
SOURCES OF INCOME

The Mexican-American female has been characterized in the literature as subservient to the male head of the household, as focusing her attention upon household matters, and as the affective center of the family. She may control household expenditures, but should do so carefully with the money provided for this purpose by the male family head. The Mexican-American female family head in the sample presents a different picture. Maintaining a separate residence certainly indicates that the female heads are home and family centered and maternal dyadic relationships are strong. Data are not available to indicate how many women are family heads by necessity not by choice, nor how many would be submissive to a male head if they could. Many single women may have no male relative with whom they can make their home. The married are heading the home in the husband's absence as has been the accepted practice. Madsen notes that widows living in children's homes often create conflict, and Lewis reports that sons are expected to support a widowed mother in her own home when possible.<sup>19</sup> The separated and divorced may be in this status because they refused to be submissive to a husband, or because their husbands deserted them. Lewis suggests that in both rural and urban Mexico, a husband's desertion is an accepted fact and deserted women often maintain

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<sup>19</sup>Madsen, Mexican-Americans of South Texas, 47-48.  
Lewis, Life in a Mexican Village, 340-341.

their own homes.<sup>20</sup> In the United States almost a third of separated and divorced women preserve the family unit by becoming household heads according to Bogue.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, whether or not a male relative is available with whom they could live, many women without husbands do choose to act as family head in their own home. However, in the sample group few, if any, women receive any economic support from husbands. Data are lacking which would clearly indicate the amounts of money received from different sources of income. Among sources of income listed, only three cases (4.3%) had alimony or child support indicated and this was not the only source in any case. In the 38 per cent of the cases where pensions, Social Security, or Veterans' Benefits were received it was impossible to determine which were received in the name of a deceased husband, which from a son in the service, or which were due the respondent herself. In the absence of data clearly indicating otherwise, it will be assumed that most female heads do not rely on husbands for any financial aid.

From what source does the Mexican-American female head receive her income? All but one respondent indicate that the primary source of income is either a regular wage or an allowance from a government agency. The one exception lists her children as her source of income.<sup>22</sup> Half of the respondents note additional sources such as help from children, interest,

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<sup>20</sup> Lewis, Five Families, 26.  
Lewis, Life in a Mexican Village, 332.

<sup>21</sup> Donald J. Bogue, The Population of the United States (The Free Press of Glencoe, Illinois, 1959), 281.

<sup>22</sup> In further data presentation this respondent will be classed as "no regular wage" or "no welfare" as the case may be.

income from a business, rent, room and board from relatives in the home, and private pension plans or insurance. Table 7 presents primary and secondary sources of income.

TABLE 7  
PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES OF INCOME  
BY PERCENTAGES

Income Source	%	N
<b>Primary</b>		
- Regular Wage <sup>a</sup>	52.2	36
- Welfare/ADC <sup>b</sup>	44.9	31
- Social Security	29.0	20
- Children	1.4	1
<b>Secondary</b>		
- Help from children or other relatives <sup>c</sup>	33.3	23
- Rent, interest, insurance, etc.	17.4	12

<sup>a</sup>This includes those receiving income from personally owned and operated businesses.

<sup>b</sup>Welfare and/or Aid to Dependent Children were listed as one income source on the interview schedule.

<sup>c</sup>Includes room and board from relatives in the home.

An analysis of the respondents receiving income from secondary sources reveals that they are almost equally divided between those receiving a regular wage and those receiving welfare. Among the 20 Social Security recipients were found five supplementing regular wages

with this form of government allotment, six receiving both welfare and Social Security, and nine reporting both Social Security and some other income such as a private pension, interest, rent, or help from relatives. No respondents listed Social Security as their sole income source. This form of government aid has too small a number, and too much variety in combination with other factors, to be considered separately from welfare and regular wage as a primary source of income. Removing the Social Security recipients from the groups receiving welfare or regular wage would reduce an already small number of cases, and noting that almost equal numbers were found in both welfare and regular wage categories, it was decided to consider Social Security an income supplement. Since this report is concerned with factors differentiating wage and welfare adaptations, no further consideration will be given to secondary or supplementary sources of income.

In focusing our attention upon the wage and welfare variables, it is important to recognize that some women are supplementing their regular wage with welfare allotments. In seven cases both regular wage and welfare produced income. When both wage and welfare were used as controls upon each other in relationship to other variables, the controls produced no significant differences in most cases. However, in attempting to make these two variables as discrete as possible, the seven cases were deleted. The welfare or wage distribution is found in Table 8.

Eleven respondents reported receiving welfare only, and 12 reported just a regular wage as income. This means that 54 per cent of the welfare cases and 59 per cent of the regular wage cases used have an additional income source. In no case used are both welfare and regular wage

TABLE 8  
REGULAR WAGE AND WELFARE ADAPTATIONS

Regular Wage	N	%	Welfare			
			Yes		No	
			N	%	N	%
Yes	36	52.2	7	22.6	29	76.3
No	33	47.8	24	77.4	9	23.7
Totals	69	100.0	31	100.0	38	100.0
$\chi^2 = 19.7552$			$P < .001$		$C_{adj.} = 0.6673$	

found together. Welfare, then, will be defined as reception of welfare only, or welfare in combination with one or more of the following: Social Security, pension, rent, interest, or help from relatives. Regular wage will be defined as having this one source of income only, or wages in combination with one or more of the following: Social Security, pensions, rent, interest, room and board, or relatives' help.

## CHAPTER IV

### DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Why do some Mexican-American female family heads work while others choose the welfare adaptation? It is suggested here that certain inadequacies such as education or lack of child care facilities may influence the decision. Four variables will be tested on specific hypotheses defining the degree of inadequacy which is likely to indicate a welfare adaptation. All specific hypotheses are subsumed under the following working hypothesis:

*A MEXICAN-AMERICAN FEMALE FAMILY HEAD IS MORE LIKELY TO BE MAKING A WELFARE THAN A REGULAR WAGE ADAPTATION TO HER ECONOMIC SITUATION IF FOR ANY OF A NUMBER OF REASONS SHE IS UNABLE TO PROVIDE INCOME FROM OTHER CULTURALLY MORE DESIRABLE AND FINANCIALLY MORE ADEQUATE SOURCES.*<sup>23</sup>

The variables affecting ability to work for regular wages as an alternate to welfare which will be considered here are the following:

1. *Age*: Since employers often are reluctant to hire older workers, advancing age is sometimes accompanied by illness or other disabilities which preclude full time employment, and female participation in the labor force declines after 50 years of age.

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<sup>23</sup>Of the 23 female heads whose income is under \$3,000 per year, 61 per cent (14) receive welfare alone or as a wage supplement, 30 per cent (7) have a wage only, and 9 per cent (2) have other income sources.

2. *Educational Achievement:* Since number of school years completed is often cited as an influence upon both income received and occupations open to the individual.

3. *Number of Minor Children in the Household:* Since availability of child care facilities is influential in the decision to work outside the home.

4. *Marital Status:* Since single women generally work; married heads work when husbands are absent; divorced and separated may tend to work, since they have been deserted or have chosen to leave their husbands, and are often of an age when work is available to them; but widows are older and have low educational attainment, thus are more likely to be receiving welfare.



## AGE

H-1: *Female heads over 50 years of age are more likely to be receiving welfare than to have a regular wage.*

TABLE 9  
WELFARE OR REGULAR WAGE ADAPTATION BY AGE

Welfare or Regular Wage	Age in Years			
	20 - 49		50 and Over	
	N	%	N	%
Welfare Recipient	16	42.1	8	53.3
Regular Wage Recipient	22	57.9	7	46.7
Totals	38	100.0	15	100.0
$\chi^2 = 0.5470$ $P < .50$ $C_{adj.} = 0.1429$				

The hypothesis cannot be accepted even though the percentage distribution is in the predicted direction. Apparently age is not a discriminating factor in the ability to find or hold a job for Mexican-American female heads. To check this, the test group was divided into above and below 40, as well as above and below 45 years of age. In neither case did the results differ appreciably from those in Table 9.

Miller<sup>24</sup> has noted that older women are often physically incapable of work, or unable to find jobs. This may be the case for 64 per cent of the 25 Mexican-American female heads over fifty years of age who do not have jobs. However, 36 per cent (9) of the heads over 50 are earning a

<sup>24</sup>Miller, Rich Man, Poor Man, 82.

regular wage. Bogue<sup>25</sup> notes that, in the United States, labor participation rates for women drop after marriage age, rise in the middle years of 35 to 50, and then decline. However, the decline is not complete as, in 1955, 10.6 per cent of the women 65 years of age or older were in the labor force. Those Mexican-American female heads who are working may well fit this pattern followed by working women in general. The data show that of those Mexican-American female heads aged 20 to 34, 53 per cent are working; of those heads aged 35 to 49, 66 per cent have a regular wage; and of those heads over 50 years old, 36 per cent are in the labor force.

The hypothesis that female heads over 50 years of age are more likely to be receiving welfare than a regular wage must be rejected although the percentages are in the predicted direction.

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<sup>25</sup>Bogue, The Population of the United States, 424-427, and Principles of Demography, 477.

## EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

H-2: *Female heads who have completed less than seven years of school are more likely to receive welfare than to have a regular wage.*

TABLE 10

WELFARE OR REGULAR WAGE ADAPTATION  
BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Welfare or Regular Wage	Number of School Years Completed			
	0 - 6		7 or More	
	N	%	N	%
Welfare Recipients	15	53.6	9	36.0
Regular Wage Recipients	13	46.4	16	64.0
Totals	28	100.0	25	100.0
	$\chi^2 = 1.6454$	$P < .20$	$C_{adj.} = 0.2454$	

Clearly the hypothesis would have to be rejected in this instance, although the percentage distribution is again in the predicted direction. When Mexican-American female heads' income and education were compared, these two variables also indicated little statistical relationship. A possible explanation is suggested by Bogue, who notes that educational attainment of not more than grammar school usually restricts persons to occupations where the pay is low. However, within certain occupational classifications such as clerical worker, operative, and service worker, additional education beyond a certain (unstated) minimum does not necessarily add to income.<sup>26</sup> Since 75 per cent (27) of those in the sample

<sup>26</sup>Bogue, Principles of Demography, 421.

having a regular wage are in these occupational groups, then the income-education relationship may not be strong for them. Apparently the female heads in this sample, for the most part, are representatives of a class of workers where education is not related strongly to ability to obtain a job, nor, to the income received from that occupation. Therefore, the hypothesis will be rejected that female heads with less than seven years of school completed are more likely to be on welfare and have no regular wage.

## NUMBER OF MINOR CHILDREN IN THE HOUSEHOLD

H-3: *Female heads having three or more minor children in their households are more likely to receive welfare than to have a regular wage.*

TABLE 11  
WELFARE OR REGULAR WAGE ADAPTATION BY NUMBER  
OF HOUSEHOLD MINORS

Welfare or Regular Wage	Number of Household Minors			
	0 - 2		3 or More	
	N	%	N	%
Welfare Recipients	7	25.9	17	65.4
Regular Wage Recipients	20	74.1	9	34.6
Totals	27	100.0	26	100.0
	$\chi^2 = 8.3229$	$P < .01$	$C_{adj.} = 0.5217$	

This hypothesis will be considered confirmed. Of the 31 heads having three or more minor children, 68 per cent (21) have no regular wage, one receives welfare to supplement her wage, and 29 per cent (9) earn a regular wage. Only two of the nine earning a wage do not have some income supplement, whereas nine of the 17 receiving welfare have no other source of income. It would appear that those heads having three or more minor children in their homes do more often make the welfare adaptation, especially when there is no supplementary source of income.

The explanation for this adaptation is very simple. As Glick<sup>27</sup> points out, child care must be provided for the small children in the

<sup>27</sup> Paul C. Glick, *American Families*, Census Monograph Series (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1957), 91.

household when the mother is working. Perhaps one or two children could be cared for by a relative or baby sitter, but three or more children create a different situation. Relatives such as the head's mother might be too old to care for more than three children, and those baby sitters contacted by this writer are reluctant to accept more than two children from one family. In the Lansing area day nurseries charge \$20 to \$25 per week per child. None had ever had more than two children from one family, and the rate quoted at this nursery was \$20 for one child and \$30 for two children from the same family. There is one community-supported day nursery in Lansing but it only accepts a maximum of 40 children from three to five years of age. Since 77 per cent of the heads with three or more children have less than nine years of education completed, they would probably be able to obtain only the lower paying jobs. Unless a female head had an income which could allow over \$30 per week for child care, or had children only between the ages of three and five, she would be unable to choose any but the welfare adaptation if she lived in Lansing.

The problem of child care is not exclusive to Lansing as Rossi points out when she proposes several extensive programs to provide care for children of all ages and economic levels. She believes that providing proper care for children is the central factor determining whether a woman will work outside the home.<sup>28</sup>

Probably much of the relationship between number of minor children in the home and welfare or regular wage can be explained by difficulties

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<sup>28</sup> Alice S. Rossi, "Equality Between the Sexes: An Immodest Proposal," from The Woman in America, ed. Robert Jay Lifton (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 119-125.

attendant upon procuring adequate child care for minor children. The hypothesis can be accepted that three or more minor children in the home makes the welfare adaptation most likely for a female head.

## MARITAL STATUS

H-4: *Widowed female heads are more likely to receive welfare than to have a regular wage.*

TABLE 12  
WELFARE OR WAGE ADAPTATION BY MARITAL STATUS

Welfare or Regular Wage	Marital Status			
	Widow		Other	
	N	%	N	%
Welfare Recipients	9	60.0	15	39.5
Regular Wage Recipients	6	40.0	23	60.5
Totals	15	100.0	38	100.0
$\chi^2 = 1.8287$		$P < .20$	$C_{adj.} = 0.2583$	

This hypothesis cannot be accepted although the percentage distribution is clearly in the indicated direction. However, another analysis revealed that 71 per cent (17) of the 24 widows have no regular wage. Only one of the seven wage earners does not supplement her income, and the secondary source is welfare or Social Security in four cases. Since widows' mean age is 54, it is not surprising that 71 per cent (17) of all widows receive Social Security, or that widows represent 85 per cent of all Social Security recipients. The large proportion of widows can be explained when it is noted that no married or divorced heads receive this benefit. Since widows are older or have minor children as the recipients of Survivors' Benefits, it is obvious why widows so seldom have a regular wage. The older widows receiving Social Security would be restrained because only a certain amount



of earned income is allowed before benefits are reduced or eliminated. The younger widows with minor children are restricted by lack of child care facilities. When Social Security and/or welfare are combined, 83 per cent (20) of all widows receive some sort of government aid.

One single head is retired and receiving Social Security. The remaining single and all the married heads are working. Thus, single and married heads seem to choose the regular wage adaptation most often.

The marital status of divorced and separated heads does not seem to be associated with receiving either welfare or wage. Forty-one per cent (14) of the 34 divorced or separated female heads have a regular wage, 44 per cent (15) receive welfare, and 15 per cent (5) receive both. Two explanations are possible. One is that these heads are in the age range when most of their children would be old enough so that the women could work. Glick<sup>29</sup> mentions that divorced women have the highest average income among all women in broken marriages. Second, many may be deserted wives receiving welfare. The latter seems likely as Rainwater<sup>30</sup> believes that a large proportion of broken marriages in the poverty group are the result of the husband's inability to provide economic support. Whether both factors are equally strong here, or whether other factors are operating cannot be determined from the available data.

Although the hypothesis is not statistically acceptable, percentage distribution is strong in the indicated direction. Therefore, it can be said that widows tend to choose the welfare adaptation, single and married

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<sup>29</sup>Glick, American Families, 157.

<sup>30</sup>Lee Rainwater, "Social and Cultural Problems of Migrants to Cities," from Rural Poverty in the United States, A Report by the President's National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, May, 1968), 250.

heads most often make a wage adaptation, while divorced and separated female heads are equally likely to choose either wage or welfare adaptation.

CHAPTER V  
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Mexican-American female family heads in general are older, have low educational achievement, and are likely to be widowed, divorced or separated. They have low incomes to support households larger than most in Michigan. The strength of the maternal-dyad family pattern is indicated by the comparatively large number of minor children in the home. Since these female heads have no husbands to provide for them, they must seek economic support from either government agencies or by earning a regular wage.

The choice of a welfare or wage adaptation to lack of support from a husband is influenced by many factors. Data analysis of the sample of Mexican-American female heads indicates:

1. The number of minor children in the home is the most important factor influencing the choice of welfare or wage.
2. The marital statuses of widowed, single, or married are apparently differentiating factors in the welfare-wage choice.
3. Age is not a decisive factor but does have considerable influence in the wage or welfare choice of women over 50 years of age.
4. The low educational achievement of the Mexican-American female heads shows no relationship which might indicate a decisive influence upon their choice of wage or welfare, but other factors may be operating which mask the effect.

The working hypothesis can now be accepted. A Mexican-American female family head is more likely to be making a welfare than a regular wage adaptation to her economic situation if for several reasons she is unable to earn a regular wage. Those female heads with three or more minor children at home, or those who are over 50 years of age, or those who are widowed, most often characterize the female head unable to choose the regular wage adaptation. The female head representing a regular wage adaptation is often one who has fewer than three minor children in her household, or is single or married, or is younger than 50 years old, or has seven or more years of school completed. These characteristics are not exclusive to the welfare or wage adaptation in any case, but merely indicate which adaptation the female head is most likely to make if she has one of the characteristics mentioned. So, various factors do influence whether a Mexican-American female family head is able to make a welfare or wage adaptation to her economic situation.

In conclusion, it would appear that the number of minor children in the home is the most influential factor operating to define the female head's choice of adaptation to her economic situation. Although other factors are important, they each allow the female head some small leeway in making the choice between welfare or wage. However, a female head with small children in her home, no economic support from a husband, and no persons or facilities to care for the children has absolutely no choice. She must seek economic support from some government agency because she cannot leave her children alone while she works.

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