Informal Social Participation in Five Kentucky Counties

John R. Christiansen

HARRISON
POWELL
MAGOFFIN
GARRARD
TRIGG

Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station
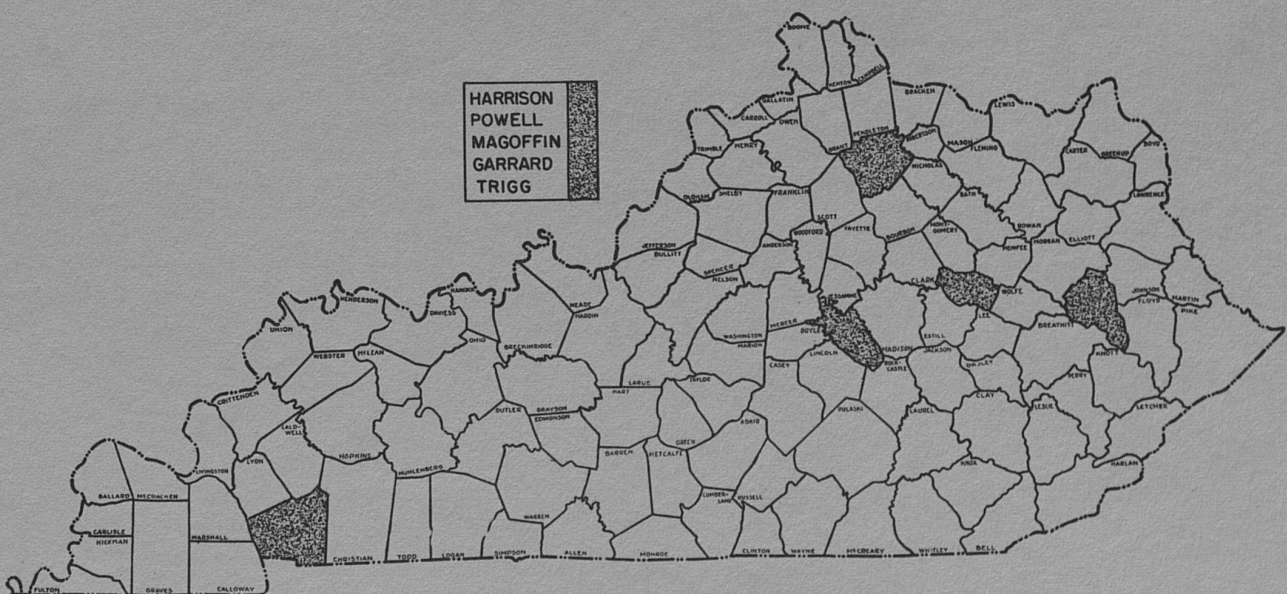University of Kentucky
Lexington

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By John R. Christiansen[1]

Purpose and Methodology

It is generally accepted that, granting biological limitations and prerequisites, persons develop into the kind of beings they are largely because of their experiences within their social and cultural environments. The kind of person an individual becomes, therefore, is in large measure the inevitable expression of the kind of world in which he lives and makes for himself.

Living in a modern society is a long series of tasks to learn, where learning well brings satisfaction and reward, while learning poorly brings unhappiness and social disapproval. One such task confronting all persons is learning to participate as socially responsible individuals in society.[2] This task relates to many and varied activities; for example, getting along with play-mates as a child, achieving a satisfactory marriage, and maintaining congenial relations with fellow workers. Such a task is obviously recurrent, and is fulfilled largely through learning the principles--mainly through social experience--that underly successful social participation.

In many parts of rural society today, an extensive knowledge of social participation principles and the antecedent social experience necessary to obtain such knowledge are not required for successful participation. This is because social contacts are not often so varied or complex as those occurring elsewhere. Rural residents who lack opportunities for social experience may not necessarily be handicapped in their native environment, but may face difficulties if they attempt to become assimilated into another society characterized by a wider range of social interaction.

In particular, it has been observed that some people living in rural areas lack the social poise and facility that is more characteristic of their city cousins. This difference sometimes makes their adjustment as employees and as members of communities less easy when they move into a more urban environment. This problem of underdevelopment in social skills is particularly important to Kentuckians because of the large migration from rural areas of the state to the industrial cities farther north and

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[1]Social Science Analyst, Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA; formerly Assistant Rural Sociologist, Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station.

[2]See Robert J. Havighurst, Human Development and Education (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1953), passim, for a discussion of man's developmental tasks.

to rapidly developing urban areas of the state itself. Lacking adequate training, socially, educationally, and otherwise; rural-urban migrants have often been forced to accept relatively low status positions and low-grade employment in urban communities.

While this problem of adjustment is a complex one, it is a reasonable hypothesis that people living in more isolated rural areas lack the social experiences which would help prepare them to more easily move into the more sophisticated patterns of urban life. That Kentucky people living in the more rural areas have not participated as much in the more formal organizations such as: the Farm Bureau, P. T. A., Red Cross, churches, etc., as have those living in urban areas has already been demonstrated.[1] While recognizing this lack of formal social participation by rural residents, it has sometimes been assumed that they engage in informal participation[2] so frequently as to offset the possible loss of beneficial social experiences stemming from infrequent formal participation. Yet, it has not been determined that rural people actually do engage in more informal participation than others. In fact, evidence bearing on the proposition suggests the converse conclusion.[3] Owing to the

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[1]See Harold F. Kaufman, Rural Churches in Kentucky, 1947, Ky. Agr. Exp. Sta. Bul. 530 (Lexington, Kentucky: 1949), p. 6; James N. Young and Ward W. Bauder, Membership Characteristics of Special-Interest Organizations, Ky. Agr. Expt. Sta. Bul. 594 (Lexington, Kentucky: 1953), p. 6; and Ward W. Bauder, Objectives and Activities of Special-Interest Organizations in Kentucky, Ky. Agr. Expt. Sta. Bul. 639 (Lexington, Kentucky: 1956), p. 8.

[2]Informal participation is the social interaction which takes place in the family, neighborhood, recreation, business, and other primary groups. In contrast to formal participation, informal participation is subject to more covert convention, i.e., regulations governing group behavior in informal participation remain unwritten and understood, while formal participants' actions are frequently controlled by constitutions, laws, or other symbolic rules of order. In informal participation also, a broader range of sanctioned alternatives for interaction is available to participants. See C. H. Cooley et al., Introductory Sociology (New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1933), 55-60, 208, 210-215, for a discussion of primary groups.

[3]Kentucky studies have shown that an association exists between rurality of county and formal participation (n.l.,p.2); other researches have demonstrated an association between formal and informal participation. See W. A. Anderson, Rural Social Participation and the Family Life Cycle, Part II, Cornell Agr. Exp. Sta. Memoir 318 (Ithaca, N. Y.,: 1953); O. D. Duncan and J. W. Artis, Social Stratification in a Pennsylvania Rural Community, Pa. Agr. Exp. Sta. Bul. 543 (State College, Pa.,: 1951); and D. G. Hay, "The Social Participation of Households in Selected Rural Communities of the Northeast," Rural Sociology, XV (June, 1950), pp. 141-147.

importance of these considerations, the present study was undertaken.

The study was designed to determine whether rurality of residence and the following nine other social variables are associated with the incidence of informal participation:

1. Tenure situation of family
2. Income of family
3. Socio-economic status of family
4. Size of farm
5. Age of farm operator
6. Number of children in family under 18 years of age
7. Extent of husbands' formal participation
8. Extent of wives' formal participation
9. Educational attainment of husbands

An answer to this question will prove helpful in many ways. First, it will provide a possible explanation for the needs of rural people regarding the acquisition of social adeptness. Second, the derived information will possibly point out to action agencies where programs might best be used to meet the social developmental capabilities and needs of rural people. Further, it will provide data which might indicate reasons for participation or lack of participation in informal activities, and thus may serve to point the way for action designed to effect the incidence of social participation.

The population selected for the study consisted of all farm families[1] living in Trigg, Powell, Magoffin, Harrison, and Garrard counties, Kentucky, during 1949 and 1950 when the data were collected. These counties were selected from different social areas of the state, and in a broad way, typify four of the nine state economic areas of Kentucky. Viewed on a rural-urban continuum, the five counties, although all more rural than urban, can be ranked from less rural to more rural as follows: Harrison, Garrard, Trigg, Powell, and Magoffin.[2] When ranked according to the 1950 Farm-Operator Family Level-of-Living Index, the same order was observed.[3] In 1950, the counties ranked in the same order according to median family income, namely: Harrison, $1,918; Garrard, $1,860; Trigg, $1,075; Powell, $1,052; and Magoffin, $893.[4]

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[1]The definition for a "farm" was that used in the 1945 Census of Agriculture.

[2]See Herbert A. Aurbach, "A Guttman Scale for Measuring Isolation," Rural Sociology, XX (June, 1955, pp. 142-145).

[3]Margaret J. Hagood, Farm-Operator Family Level-of-Living Indexes for Counties of The United States, 1930, 1940, 1945, and 1950. (Washington: U. S. Dept. of Agr., 1952), pp. 22-23.

[4]U. S. Bureau of the Census, U. S. Census of Population: 1950, Vol. II, Part 17, Kentucky, Chapter B. (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Govt. Printing Office, 1952), pp. 116-119.

Data were obtained from a proportional, stratified, random sample of farm families in each of the counties by using a schedule in personal interviews. The sample was distributed as follows: Harrison county, 120 families; Garrard, 100; Trigg, 54; Powell, 50; and Magoffin, 110. These figures represent 5 percent of the farm families in each county on the basis of 1945 census information.

Rurality of County and Informal Social Participation

People in the less rural counties generally participated in the follow-ing informal activities[1] more often than did those in the other counties:

> Husbands and Wives':
> 1. Movie attendance
> 2. Business trips to town
> 3. Nonbusiness trips to town
>
> Families':
> 1. Exchanging work with other families
> 2. Making social calls
> 3. Shopping
> 4. Observing holidays
> 5. Visiting
> 6. Having picnics
> 7. Having business discussions

This conclusion was reached on the basis of chi-square tests for the existence of association, and an analysis of the direction of association based on a comparison of the "average" participation rates of people in each county on the various informal participation items with the average participation rate of the entire sample (Tables 1 and 2).

Statistically significant associations ($P \gtrless .05$) were found to exist among counties and participation in each of the informal activities listed in Tables 1 and 2 excepting "Families having visitors all day or longer" (Item 12, Table 1), and "Picnics" (Item 6, Table 2).

This comparison of county participation rates to that of the total sample indicated that in six of the eight informal activities in which only husbands and wives engaged (Items 1-8, Table 1), participation was higher among those living in the less rural counties. In the other two instances, the direction of association was inconsistent with rurality of county.

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[1]The items of informal participation used in this study were arbitrari-ly selected because of their amenability to measurement and comparison with data from other researches. They are not thought to be a random sample of informal participation activities nor to be all of similar nature. Further-more, it is not maintained that such participation is necessarily beneficial to participants. Only in a general way is this hypothesized.

TABLE 1. RELATION OF COUNTY MEDIAN PARTICIPATION RATES ON SELECTED INFORMAL ACTIVITIES TO MEDIANS OF TOTAL SAMPLE, AND WHETHER ASSOCIATION WITH RURALITY OF COUNTY IS POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE *

Item	Characteristic Description	Measure	County Harrison (Least rural)	Garrard	Trigg	Powell	Magoffin (Most rural)	Total sample median	Direction of most frequent participation in relation to rurality of county
1.	Husbands' movie attendance	Monthly frequency	higher	higher	higher	lower	lower	.5	↓
2.	Wives' movie attendance ..	Monthly frequency	higher	higher	higher	lower	lower	.5	↓
3.	Husbands' business trips to town.............	Monthly frequency	higher	higher	higher	lower	lower	3.6	↓
4.	Wives' business trips to town.............	Monthly frequency	higher	higher	lower	lower	lower	2.0	↓
5.	Husbands' nonbusiness trips to town...........	Monthly frequency	higher	higher	higher	lower	lower	.3	↓
6.	Wives' nonbusiness trips to town...........	Monthly frequency	higher	higher	higher	lower	lower	.4	↓
7.	Husbands' social visits...	Monthly frequency	higher	higher	lower	higher	lower	2.3	↑↓ **
8.	Wives' social visits.....	Monthly frequency	higher	lower	higher	lower	lower	2.3	↑↓ **
9.	Families having visitors for meals.........	Monthly frequency	lower	lower	higher	higher	higher	4.5	↑
10.	Exchanging work with other families..........	Number of families	higher	higher	lower	lower	lower	.4	↓
11.	Families having evenings together..........	Weekly frequency	lower	lower	higher	higher	higher	6.6	↑
12.	Families having visitors all day or longer........	Monthly frequency	lower	lower	lower	higher	higher	2.3	↑

* The average county participation rates did not always increase (or decrease) consistently, even though consistency was revealed in relation to the total sample average

** Indicates an indeterminate direction, i.e., one or more directional changes involved

Data were obtained from a proportional, stratified, random sample of farm families in each of the counties by using a schedule in personal interviews. The sample was distributed as follows: Harrison county, 120 families; Garrard, 100; Trigg, 54; Powell, 50; and Magoffin, 110. These figures represent 5 percent of the farm families in each county on the basis of 1945 census information.

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2. Making social calls
3. Shopping
4. Observing holidays
5. Visiting
6. Having picnics
7. Having business discussions

This conclusion was reached on the basis of chi-square tests for the existence of association, and an analysis of the direction of association based on a comparison of the "average" participation rates of people in each county on the various informal participation items with the average participation rate of the entire sample (Tables 1 and 2).

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Item	Characteristic — Description	Measure	County — Harrison (Least rural)	Garrard	Trigg	Powell	Magoffin (Most rural)	Total sample median	Direction of most frequent participation in relation to rurality of county
1.	Husbands' movie attendance	Monthly frequency	higher	higher	higher	lower	lower	.5	↓
2.	Wives' movie attendance ..	Monthly frequency	higher	higher	higher	lower	lower	.5	↓
3.	Husbands' business trips to town	Monthly frequency	higher	higher	higher	lower	lower	3.6	↓
4.	Wives' business trips to town	Monthly frequency	higher	higher	higher	lower	lower	2.0	↓
5.	Husbands' nonbusiness trips to town	Monthly frequency	higher	higher	higher	lower	lower	.3	↓
6.	Wives' nonbusiness trips to town	Monthly frequency	higher	higher	higher	lower	lower	.4	↓
7.	Husbands' social visits...	Monthly frequency	higher	higher	lower	higher	higher	2.3	↑ **
8.	Wives' social visits	Monthly frequency	higher	lower	higher	lower	lower	2.3	↓ **
9.	Families having visitors for meals	Monthly frequency	lower	lower	lower	higher	higher	4.5	↑
10.	Exchanging work with other families	Number of families	higher	higher	higher	lower	lower	.4	↓
11.	Families having evenings together	Weekly frequency	lower	lower	lower	higher	higher	6.6	↑
12.	Families having visitors all day or longer	Monthly frequency	lower	lower	lower	lower	higher	2.3	↑

* The average county participation rates did not always increase (or decrease) consistently, even though consistency was revealed in relation to the total sample average

** Indicates an indeterminate direction, i.e., one or more directional changes involved

TABLE 2. RELATION OF COUNTY PERCENTAGES OF FAMILIES PARTICIPATING IN VARIOUS ACTIVITIES, TO PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL SAMPLE; AND WHETHER ASSOCIATION WITH RURALITY OF COUNTY IS POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE*

	Characteristic		County					Total sample percentage	Direction of most frequent participation in relation to rurality of county
			Least rural ←——— Rurality of county ———→ Most rural						
Item	Description	Measure	Harrison	Garrard	Trigg	Powell	Magoffin		
1.	Visiting Social calls	Occurence	higher	higher	higher	lower	lower	61 **	↓ **
2.	Chores	Occurence	lower	higher	lower	lower	higher	84	↑
3.	Shopping	Occurence	higher	higher	higher	lower	lower	37	↓
4.	Holiday observances	Occurence	higher	higher	higher	lower	lower	86	↓
5.	Visiting	Occurence	higher	higher	higher	lower	lower	77	↓
6.	Picnics	Occurence	higher	higher	higher	higher	lower	41	↑ **
7.	Birthday observances	Occurence	lower	higher	higher	higher	lower	66	↑
8.	Business discussions	Occurence	higher	higher	higher	higher	lower	81	↓

* The county percentages did not always increase (or decrease) even though consistency was revealed in relation to the total sample percentage

** Indicates an indeterminate direction, i.e., one or more directional changes involved

Seven of the 12 informal participation activities in which entire families participated (Items 9-12, Table 1; and Items 1-8, Table 2) occurred more often in the less rural counties. In three instances, the most participation occurred in the less urban counties, and in two instances the direction of association was indeterminate. The three items of family informal participation determined as occurring most often in the less urban counties seem to be of a more intimate, primary nature than most of the other items. This ascertainment suggests the possibility that future studies dealing with other activities of this type only, might find participation in them significantly associated with less urban counties.

Variables Associated with Informal Social Participation

The nine other variables besides rurality of residence county tested for association with the incidence of participation in informal activities by wives, husbands, and families were found to be associated.[1] These nine variables were:

1. Tenure situation of family
2. Income of family
3. Socio-economic status of family[2]
4. Size of farm (Productive Man Work Units)[3]
5. Age of farm operator
6. Number of children in family under 18 years of age
7. Formal partiticipation scores of husbands[4]
8. Formal participation scores of wives[4]
9. Educational attainment of husbands

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[1]Chi-square tests of association were made for the nine variables and the informal participation index scores of wives, husbands, and families. The method used in constructing the three indexes of informal participation was a modification of that used by John C. Belcher and Emmit F. Sharp in A Short Scale For Measuring Farm Family Level of Living, Okla. Agr. Expt. Sta. Bul. T-46 (Stillwater, Oklahoma: 1953) and that outlined by Margaret J. Hagood and Daniel O. Price in Statistics for Sociologists, (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1952), pp. 523-547. See Appendix Tables 1-3 for a list of items used in the indexes, the intercorrelations of the items, and their correlations with the first factors.

[2]Sewell's short socio-economic scale was used to measure this variable. See W. H. Sewell, "A Short Socio-economic Status Scale," Rural Sociology, VIII, (June, 1942), pp. 161-170.

[3]A Productive Man Work Unit is a measure of man hours required for various agricultural operations. Farms with more agricultural operations will be characterized by more Productive Man Work Units.

[4]This variable measures the number of memberships held and the extent of activity in established organizations. See F. S. Chapin, The Social Participation Scale, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1938).

Generally, it could be said that informal participation by wives, husbands, and families occurred most often under circumstances in which: (a) part of the farm was rented--in contrast to fully owned or rented farms, (b) incomes were "average," ranging from $1,500 to $4,000 yearly, (c) the socio-economic or level-of-living scores were "high", (d) the farm was of "average" size, ranging from 200 to 800 productive man work units, (e) farm operators were below 50 years of age, (f) only one or two children were in the family, (g) the formal participation scores of husbands and wives were "high", i.e. 7 or above, and (h) husbands had completed 8 or more grades of school.

When an attempt was made to determine what it was that the ten variables (including county) associated with participation in informal activities of husbands, wives, and families had in common which possibly accounted for or[1] summarized their mutual relationship with informal participation, two major factors emerged. (Appendix Tables 1 and 2). These two independent factors seemed to represent most clearly (1) socio-economic position, and (2) the family life cycle stage; and were so named. Summarily, therefore, it was found that husbands, wives, and families in relatively high socio-economic positions and early family life cycle stages (having one or two young children) were the most active informal participants. Future identification and prediction of informal participators might best utilize these two factors.

Conclusions

The results of this analysis indicate that wide differences exist among rural people with respect to the amount of informal participation in which they engage. Further, the analysis revealed that those people who are the most frequent formal participators are somewhat different, socially and economically, from those who are not. Finally the theory that optimum personality adjustment is hindered by lack of social participation is given some support, inasmuch as an a priori "effect" of certain social experiences (social facility of rural migrants) was found associated with a theoretically specified "cause" (extent of informal participation among rural residents).

Some conjectures might be made as to why those in higher socio-economic positions and early family life cycle stages should be the most frequent formal participators. First, people with greater economic resources are more able to travel and take time to participate in informal activities. Furthermore, while childbearing duties may prohibit frequent formal participation, informal activities can quite easily be scheduled to fit the family's routine. The rurality of the residence, an aspect of socio-economic position, also appears to help explain differential informal participation when ease of transportation and personal values are considered. Lacking finances necessary to purchase automobiles, and adequate roads on which to operate them, people in the most rural counties are curtailed in social activities that demand much travel. Consequently, when opportunities for informal participation are lacking, relatively little facility or liking for such participation is acquired.

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[1] Explaining at least 10 percent of the variance among the 10 variables.

Theoretically, informal participation provides a means of enhancing social skills and forming attitudes and opinions. The development of these and other qualities which are acceptable to a greater proportion of people will facilitate personal and societal progress. The individual then will not be restricted to a limited locality and means of earning a living, but can move easily into a larger societal unit and find social and economic acceptance. Where needs exist for developing the qualities thought to result from informal participation, these needs might be met not only through the actions of individuals in fostering greater social participation, but also by institutions.

Insofar as socio-economic position is causally related to informal participation, social engineering on a broader scale to promote increased participation would be concerned with various attempts to raise the socio-economic position. Insofar as informal participation is causally related to socio-economic position, an awareness of the situation and promotion of such participation would have beneficial economic results. The fact exists that filling social needs is one of the greatest and most efficient means of meeting other related needs.

Appendix Table 1.--Intercorrelations of Four Husbands' Informal Participation Items

Item number	Item number*			
	1	2	3	4
1	1.00			
2	.42	1.00		
3	.45	.24	1.00	
4	.50	.40	.30	1.00

*Identification of items and correlation with factor:
1. Frequency of movies attended (r = .83)
2. Frequency of business trips to town (r = .69)
3. Frequency of nonbusiness trips to town (r = .66)
4. Frequency of social visits (r = .76)

Appendix Table 2.--Intercorrelations of Four Wives' Informal Participation Items

Item number	Item number*			
	1	2	3	4
1	1.00			
2	.55	1.00		
3	.42	.31	1.00	
4	.28	.35	.32	1.00

*Identification of items and correlation with factor:
1. Frequency of movie attendance (r = .80)
2. Frequency of business trips to town (r = .78)
3. Frequency of nonbusiness trips to town (r = .69)
4. Frequency of visits (r = .64)

Appendix Table 3.--Intercorrelations of Individual Family Informal Participation Items

Item number	Item number*							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	1.00							
2	.60	1.00						
3	.50	.73	1.00					
4	.15	.13	.03	1.00				
5	.13	.04	.29	.16	1.00			
6	.31	.12	.19	.34	.13	1.00		
7	.14	.02	.28	.24	.23	.43	1.00	
8	.09	.00	.08	.25	.16	.34	.61	1.00

*Identification of items and correlation with factor:
1. Number of social calls per year (r = .65)
2. Number of times have visitors for meals (r = .64)
3. Number of times have all day visitors (r = .73)
4. Number of families with whom work is exchanged (r = .44)
5. Occurrence of family cooperation in chores (r = .31)
6. Occurrence of family picnics (r = .62)
7. Occurrence of family shopping (r = .63)
8. Occurrence of family visiting (r = .52)

Appendix Table 4.--Intercorrelation of Variables Associated with Informal Participation
Indexes of Wives, Husbands, and Families

Variable number*	Variable number*									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	(.56)									
2	-.11	(.68)								
3	.16	.53	(.69)							
4	-.20	.68	.69	(.72)						
5	-.33	.15	.60	.72	(.72)					
6	.56	-.22	.08	-.03	.00	(.81)				
7**	.47	-.18	.11	-.01	.10	.81	(.81)			
8	.11	.40	.63	.51	.50	.08	.10	(.87)		
9	-.02	.35	.64	.55	.63	.06	.09	.87	(.87)	
10	.28	.30	.52	.30	.11	-.12	-.08	.37	.29	(.52)

*For identification of variables see Appendix Table 5

**Reflected

Appendix Table 5.--Factor Loadings of Variables Associated With Informal Participation
Indexes of Wives, Husbands, and Families

Variables	Centroid Factor Loadings			Factors I and II Rotated			h^2
	I	II	III	I	II	III	
1. Tenure	.26	-.60	.38	.10	.65	.48	.57
2. Income	.46	.43	.30	.55	.30	.30	.48
3. Socio-economic status	.83	.29	.21	.87	.06	.21	.81
4. Size of farm (PMWU's)	.70	.48	-.07	.80	.28	-.07	.72
5. Urbanity of residence county	.57	.40	-.51	.65	.24	-.51	.74
6. Age of farm operator	.36	-.82	.29	.14	-.89	.29	.89
7. Number of children under 18 years of age	-.42	.70	.18	-.23	.78	.18	.70
8. Formal participation scores of husbands	.25	.25	-.09	.83	.04	-.09	.69
9. Formal participation scores of wives	.30	.30	-.24	.82	.10	-.24	.74
10. Education of husbands	.11	.11	.46	.48	.01	.46	.44
Proportion of variation in 12 variables explained by factor (percent)	35.2	23.4	9.3*	38.0	20.6	9.3*	

*Tucker's Phi indicated at this point that no additional significant factors remained, see Benjamin Fruchter, _Introduction to Factor Analysis_, (New York: D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., 1954), pp. 77-79.