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The relationship between the farm crisis and rural youth achievement

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FARM CRISIS
AND RURAL YOUTH ACHIEVEMENT

Presented to the
Graduate Faculty
University of Nebraska
at Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Specialist in Education

by
John W. Brooke, Jr.

August 1988

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FIELD PROJECT ACCEPTANCE

Accepted for the Graduate Faculty, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Specialist in Education, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Many Americans look at farm life with nostalgia and believe that farmers enjoy uncomplicated, secure and safe lives, that life is full of optimism and fun. However, in many time periods, the farmer has been forced to ride out economic crises. American History illustrates not only crisis, but also rebellions brought on primarily because of falling food prices. The first rebellion occurred in 1776 after the Revolutionary War. The second historical rebellion occurred between 1929 and 1932 when crop prices fell drastically and thousands of farms went bankrupt and were foreclosed on (Ross, 1986).

The current farm crisis, according to Christopher (1986), became very serious from 1982 through 1986. The most recent step of the farm crisis has put the final squeeze on farmers. The banks have seized the farms of those who could not repay loans or even the interest on those loans. An estimated 400,000 farmers left the farming business in 1985.

The farm crisis brings with it farmers' doubts, fears and anger. This brings depression, suicide,

alcoholism and family problems in rural America.

Farm children are feeling pain and stress too (Bosc, 1986).

Social workers in Iowa warn that the farm crisis does not stop at the schoolhouse door. Instead, they see it taking its toll through declining grades, poor attendance, more use of alcohol by students and more violence (Ricchiardi, 1986).

This research is concerned with the effects of the economy on the achievements of the farm and non-farm rural students. Specifically, how will male and female members of farm families do on grade point averages and Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED) Comprehensive scores compared to non-farm males and females?

Statement of the Problem

Is there a significant difference in the academic achievement of farm family students in rural areas as opposed to the non-farm family students living in rural areas?

Hypothesis to be Tested

1.) There is no significant difference in the grade point averages (GPA) between farm males (FM) and non-farm males (NFM). Also, there is no significant difference in the grade point averages between farm

females (FF) and non-farm females (NFF).

2.) There is no significant difference in Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED) Comprehensive scores between farm and non-farm males. Also, there is no significant difference in the Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED) Comprehensive scores between farm and non-farm females.

Significance of the Study

The results of the study will determine if the farm crisis and stress have affected the GPA and Comprehensive ITED scores in Southwest Iowa farm youth. Since most educators and farm people are possibly in the denial stage, perhaps statistics on scholastic achievement will awaken people to a very real problem. School systems and university officials can benefit from research done locally by comparing students of the same circumstances. Too often, research has attempted to compare rural students to metropolitan students.

Assumptions

Assumption 1. That there is no inherent difference in the intellectual capabilities between farm youth and non-farm youth.

Assumption 2. There are no inherent differences in the amount of study time between farm and non-farm youth.

Assumption 3. There is no significant difference in the achievement of students in medium-sized rural schools as compared to students in the smallest rural schools.

Assumption 4. There is no significant difference in the quality of instruction of students in large or small schools.

Limitations

Limitation 1. Only rural youth in communities or school centers of 2500 population or less were selected for this study.

Limitation 2. Only 1982 and 1986 graduated senior year students were used in this study.

Limitation 3. Achievement was measured by grade point average (GPA) and Comprehensive scores on the Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED).

Definitions

Farm Youth. Those who live on a farm and whose family is engaged in farming fifty per cent of the time or more.

Farm Crisis Years. This study designated the years 1982 and 1986 as acute farm crisis years.

Non-farm Youth. Rural youth whose families do not depend on farm income for their main support.

CHAPTER TWO

Related Literature

Like rural America and its people, the rural schools and local education authorities are quite diverse. They range from the jointures of Pennsylvania, with up to 2000 young people in a high school setting, to one room schoolhouses still found in Nebraska. Rural patrons often resist efforts to initiate curriculum innovation and new teaching techniques (Fratoe, 1979). He further stresses that an impediment of rural education is that local communities are reluctant to turn their schools over to professional educators.

According to Fratoe (1979), rural youth are youth who live in places of less than 2500 people and include those up to age 25. In general, farm residents' and farm workers' educational backgrounds have a direct bearing on their capacity for securing adequate life changes. These may be divided into four types. First, are those living on the land who are engaged fulltime in the highly competitive and increasingly risky farm industry. Second are the

farm dwellers who work at agriculture parttime while commuting to off farm jobs. Third are farm family members who are not involved in agricultural activities and are solely employed in the non-farm sector. The fourth type included people who live in small towns or urban areas but perform farm work: approximately three-fourths of all wage earning agricultural laborers fall into this category.

There has been extensive research into occupational and educational aspirations of rural youth, particularly in the South. These studies reveal that the rural youth generally have lower expectations and aspirations than do urban youth. However, it is found that the expectations of rural children have risen, though they still lag far behind those of their urban counterparts (Edington, 1976).

In a more recent study, Abt, Brock, English and Mark (1977) found generally negligible differences among rural and small town high school seniors. However, they found a sizeable difference in one critical area: aspirations. Fewer rural than urban senior high students aspire to or actually do attend academic post-secondary education programs. The Abt study also found a similar disparity in post-graduate educational aspirations. The Wisconsin study, con-

ducted by Sewell (1963), confirmed previous educational planning studies and all indicated that the occupational choice of youth was related to place of residence. Factors cited for these differences include the socio-economic status and academic achievement of the home, school and community attitudes and measured intelligence.

Farm males not interested in college usually go directly to work on the farm. Haller (1957) in his study showed that the farm males in all ability categories who plan to farm are generally much less likely to attend college than are farm males who plan on a non-farm occupation.

Farm youth in general tend to fall behind their metropolitan counterparts from sixth grade on in school. Haller (1969) showed verbal ability of those attending metropolitan schools appeared to outperform those attending non-metropolitan schools at the upper grade levels tested. Haller (1969) also noted there is not much, if any, effect of metropolitan, non-metropolitan location of the child's school in reading comprehension grades three and six. In grades nine and twelve, however, the metropolitan students tend to score higher than the non-metropolitan students.

There was no discernable regional effect on the data of third graders. But, among 6, 9, and 12 graders,

those from the Northeast and Midwest outperformed those of the other regions, while those from the South (and, in the case of grade 12, the Southwest), tend to perform at a lower level than others (Haller, 1969).

Farm youth research by geographic area at first glance looks bad for the rural youth. In looking at geographical areas of the Midwest and Northeast, they tend to be better in educational advancement than many metropolitan areas. Haller (1969) stated that rural elements of the population have serious educational deficiencies, though in the North, the farm youth are perhaps better off than most others.

Despite increased college attendance nationally, farm related youth are not seeking post-secondary schooling at a level approaching that of metropolitan youth. Older farm related people are less inclined to pursue adult education opportunities. Thus, many members of the farm related population lack the higher levels of education needed to improve chances for success in an agricultural or nonagricultural career field. The educational needs of farm related people, whether they are engaged solely in agriculture or have other jobs, have not been adequately met (Fratoe, 1979).

In educational trends of the rural population of Georgia, Tarver and Stokes (1972) noted major trends

that included recent changes in enrollment of farm and non-farm youth. These recent studies were done for statewide, county and regional differences. Major conclusions by Tarver and Stokes (1972) have been the rapid strides in the increased school attendance of youth living on farms and the rapid disappearance of historic rural-urban enrollment differences.

According to Polish researcher Kozakrewiez (1972), the following conclusions were drawn: 1.) There is a close relationship between the level of school knowledge and (a) the parents' educational level; (b) their socioeconomic positions; (c) the economic situation; and (d) the family's education and place of residence. These factors mentioned have a greater effect in Polish sons rather than daughters of peasants. The boys preferred technical schools while the girls generally chose secondary schools. This makes it difficult to stop the feminization of higher education institutions in Poland.

Feller (1974) relates that the importance of the rural-urban variable, which once occupied such an essential place in sociological thought, has, in recent years, come increasingly into the question. While some writers still attribute differences in the patterning behavior to rural-urban background, others view such

interpretations as spacious and see them instead as by-products of stratification effects.

Today in Iowa there has been much talk about the farm crisis and its effects on the Midwest farm family. But, there has been little done in researching how the farm family students are doing in comparison to their non-farm counterparts. The turnabout in the farm economy has raised many alarms in rural Iowa. Vinton school social worker, Lloyd McCabe, noted, "It used to be I had a hard time getting referrals out of these rural schools because the kids were so stable. Problems were handled at home. If everything else was screwed up, they still had the family to turn to. Now, I see them becoming more hostile and volatile at a younger age." (Ricchiardi, 1986, P.1).

McCabe further stated that studies document increases in depression, teen-age sexual promiscuity, suicide, teen-age drinking, confusion and despair throughout rural America. There may be a problem in the farm family resulting in lower grade point averages, Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED) Comprehension and Reading scores. Virginia Molgaard, a family specialist, stated, "There's no problem out here. We don't have to spend time dealing with this in school. Some people are still in the denial stage. Any change

in these kids is like a flashing red light."

(Ricchiardi, 1986, P.1).

Social workers warn that the farm crisis does not stop at the schoolhouse door. Instead, they see it taking a toll through declining grades, poor attendance, more use of alcohol by students and more violence (Ricchiardi, 1986).

Social workers were not the first to warn about stress in people's lives. The body responds to stress, whether from physical or emotional sources, with certain physiological changes (Prest and Mansfield, 1984). This stress alarm system involves virtually every major organ system, creating body changes which have potentially adverse effects on an individual's health status (Selye, 1956).

Despite the relationship between stress and adverse body changes, the literature has been inconsistent in establishing a firm link in humans between stressful life events and illness (McFarlane, et. al., 1980).

Individuals and families respond differently to stressors. Some feel helpless, believing that means of dealing with a stressful event are out of their hands. Others take action, either by trying to eliminate the stressor or by coping with the resulting stress in the most effective way, (e.g., seeking support, denying the

problem or praying). The relationship between stress and illness is moderated by the way individuals cope with their stress. Effective coping styles, then, can be expected to mediate stress-illness relationships (McFarlene, et. al., 1980).

Kuebler-Ross (1969) identified five distinct stages confronting individuals facing death or other serious emotional traumas. This evolved from her many years of working with terminally ill patients. The five stages are: (a) denial and isolation, (b) anger, (c) bargaining, (d) depression and (e) acceptance.

The most shocking revelation to anyone who is unemployed is the fact that he or she is indispensable. Most people believe that they are indispensable - that the world cannot get along without them. This belief is often confirmed by friends, family and fellow employees who often comment on the excellence of our work. (Winegardner, Simonetti and Nykodym, 1984). How much more difficult it must be for the farm family to deal with the loss of job, the family farm, in some instances, and the prestige of being a farmer within the community.

The farmer and farm family identify closely with their jobs and the farm. In fact, when job loss occurs, it is generally associated with profound feelings of

inadequacy, strong questions about one's self-worth and even feelings of guilt. It is possible for an individual to feel responsible for his or her own job loss even when a large scale lay-off or farm loss associated with economic conditions beyond his or her control is responsible, rather than the individual's personal performance (Winegardner, Simonetti and Nykodym, 1984).

Since the farm economy in the Midwest has gone bad, how has this stress affected the children of the farm family? Hodges, Tierney and Buchsbaum (1984), in their study, stated that the farm wife and husband would have a great effect on the children in their home if they were under the stress of losing the family farm. The stressful life events within the family may cause poor child adjustment and problems within the school setting.

CHAPTER THREE

Design of the Study

This study was conducted to determine the effects of the farm crisis on farm youth. Farm and non-farm youth in this study resided in school districts with a population less than 2500. The pilot study was conducted in 1986 in the Tri-Center School District. It was expanded to a broader regional area of rural Southwest Iowa. This study compared the academic achievement of farm females to non-farm females and farm males to non-farm males.

The two smallest classes of schools, based upon the Iowa High School Athletic Association's (IHSAA) football classification system, are classified 1A and A. The data from the smallest class of schools (class A) were: Malvern, Oakland, Treynor, Shelby-Tennant and Logan-Magnolia. The larger 1A schools were: West Harrison, Woodbine, Griswold, Tri-Center and Underwood.

Each school was first made aware of this study at the 1987 Southwest Iowa Guidance counselors' meeting. This study was explained and what information was

needed from area guidance counselors (see appendix A). In four months only three schools had responded. Telephone calls and follow-up notes were used, but the requested information did not come. In late spring a personal visit was made to each school to gather the requested information. Two small schools refused access to the information. Consequently, they were not included in the study.

School counselors had compiled the information in several different ways, ranging from individual files on each student, lists of grade point averages and separate lists of ITED scores to a combination of permanent record files and listings of ITED scores. It was necessary to identify female and male students as well as whether they were to be classified as farm or non-farm.

The following information was gathered:

- 1.) Grade point averages (GPA) for the graduated classes of 1982 and 1986.
- 2.) Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED) Comprehensive scores for each student in the classes of 1982 and 1986.
- 3.) Identification of farm males and farm females for the classes of 1982 and 1986. The study used 50% or more income derived from farm income.

Counselors, principals, board secretaries and principals' secretaries were helpful in identifying farm youth.

Once the lists with designations were completed, the population of each school was broken down into four groups: farm females (FF), farm males (FM), non-farm females (NFF) and non-farm males (NFM). (See Table 1)

The years 1982 and 1986 were used in this study, as they have been identified as the peak years in a four year crisis for farmers that historically equals the Depression farm years of 1933 through 1937. (See Table 2)

The mean and standard deviation of each group were calculated to determine if any significant differences existed between each given category. A t-test between groups was also calculated.

Table 1

Number of students by school and by classification.

	FF		NFF		FM		NFM	
	1982	1986	1982	1986	1982	1986	1982	1986
1.	18	14	9	10	9	11	6	5
2.	10	4	18	14	9	10	12	14
3.	19	10	19	16	13	7	17	16
4.	6	6	14	20	7	6	21	21
5.	8	6	23	23	11	8	15	16
6.	8	5	4	5	6	4	6	7
7.	6	7	14	6	3	5	18	6
8.	8	2	12	11	6	2	18	13
9.	5	4	12	13	3	1	14	12
10.	9	4	10	11	7	5	15	10
	97	62	135	129	74	59	142	120
	loss							
	-35		-6		-15		-22	
	loss							

Table 2

Grade point averages and Iowa Test of Educational
Development Comprehensive averages by classification.

<u>classification</u>	<u>year</u>	<u>GPA</u>	<u>year</u>	<u>ITED</u>
farm females	1982	2.918	1982	45.70
	1986	2.985	1986	54.90
non-farm males	1982	2.73	1982	41.21
	1986	2.744	1986	43.31
farm males	1982	2.51	1982	42.31
	1986	2.532	1986	36.68
non-farm males	1982	2.381	1982	40.65
	1986	2.431	1986	38.96

CHAPTER FOUR

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The raw data from the schools was calculated and tabulated for each group. Four groups were established and, from the raw data, the means, standard deviations and t-tests were recorded. Four tables show the results of the male and female differences between farm family and non-farm family groupings.

The first sub-hypothesis for males stated that there would be no significant difference in the grade point average (GPA) between farm males and non-farm males. For both years of comparison (1982 and 1986) there was no significant difference in their grade point averages. (See Table 3)

The first sub-hypothesis for females stated that there would be no significant difference in the grade point averages (GPA) between farm females and non-farm females. Table 4 examines the significant differences between two groups of farm females and non-farm females. The t-test scores show a significant difference at a $P < .01$ for farm females and non-farm females' GPA in 1982, and a significant difference at a $P < .01$ for farm

Table 3

t-test significance of farm males and non-farm males on GPA.

Year	Classification	GPA			t-test
		Number	Mean	Std. Dev.	
1982	farm males	74	2.517	.6377	
1982	non-farm males	140	2.391	.8017	
1986	farm males	59	2.486	.756593	
1986	non-farm males	126	2.417	.580145	

Table 4

t-test significance of farm females and non-farm females on GPA.

Year	Classification	GPA			t-test
		Number	Mean	Std. Dev.	
1982	farm females	97	2.912	.674	P<.01
1982	non-farm females	135	2.618	.716	
1986	farm females	62	2.968	.627	P<.01
1986	non-farm females	129	2.668	.696	

females and non-farm females GPA again in 1986.

The second sub-hypothesis for males stated that there would be no significant differences in the Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED) Comprehensive scores between farm males and non-farm males. Table 5, which compared farm males and non-farm males for the years 1982 and 1986 for the ITED scores showed no significant difference.

The second sub-hypothesis for females stated that there would be no significant difference in the ITED Comprehensive scores between farm females and non-farm females. This was only true for farm females and non-farm females in 1982. The hypothesis did not hold true for 1986. Table 6 illustrates a significant difference $P < .05$ existed between farm females and non-farm females on their ITED scores for 1986.

Table 5

t-test significance of farm males and non-farm males
on ITED Comprehensive achievement tests.

ITED					
Year	Classification	Number	Mean	Std. Dev.	t-test
1982	farm males	74	41.26	28.07995	
1982	non-farm males	140	41.23	31.447	
1986	farm males	59	42.667	30.32341	
1986	non-farm males	126	40.65	29.9245	

Table 6

t-test significance of farm females and non-farm females
on ITED Comprehensive achievement tests.

ITED					
Year	Classification	Number	Mean	Std. Dev.	t-test
1982	farm females	97	46.85	28.028	
1982	non-farm females	135	44.39	27.893	
1986	farm females	62	54.19	26.316	
1986	non-farm females	129	44.94	29.170	P<.05

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary and Conclusion

Restatement of the Problem and Recommendations

The study was conducted to find out whether there was a significant difference between farm males' and farm females' GPA and ITED Comprehensive scores as compared to non-farm males and females. The importance of the study is to see the effects the farm crisis has had on medium and small rural schools and the students who attend them.

Two hypothesis were tested: There is no significant difference in the grade point averages (GPA) between farm males (FM) and non-farm males (NFM). Also, there is no significant difference in the grade point averages between farm females (FF) and non-farm females (NFF). The second hypothesis tested was; There is no significant difference in the Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED) Comprehensive scores between farm males and non-farm males. Also, there is no significant difference in the Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED) Comprehensive scores between farm and non-farm females.

Description of Procedures

Ten schools in populations of less than 2500 in Southwest Iowa were used to compare four classifications of students. The four groups were farm females (FF), non-farm females (NFF), farm males (FM) and non-farm males (NFM). The graduated classes of 1982 and 1986 were used for these ten schools.

The research was concerned with the effects of the economy on the achievements of farm and non-farm male and female rural students. How did farm females and males do compared with their non-farm counterparts? Grade point averages and Iowa Test of Educational Development scores were compared. Specifically, the farm females were compared to the non-farm females and the farm males were compared to the non-farm males.

Principal Findings and Conclusions

In three of the four comparisons of farm females and non-farm females significant differences were found. In 1982 the comparison of grade point averages (GPA) showed a significant difference of $P < .01$. That same $P < .01$ existed for the grade point averages (GPA) of 1986. On the Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED) Comprehensive scores of the 1986 females showed a level of $P < .05$. So, in three out of four comparisons of farm females to non-farm females there were signifi-

cant differences. The farm females were doing better both in the classroom and on standardized tests than their non-farm counterparts.

The farm females lost 35 members between 1982 and 1986, most of them going into the non-farm category. This shift may have caused a slight increase in the grade point averages and ITED test scores for the non-farm females from 41.21 to 43.31. The loss of less academic farm females may also account for the group of 1982 ITED average scores going from 45.20 to 54.90 in 1986 for farm females. Through the interviewing process it was repeatedly pointed out that the farm females' families stayed in the community even after losing the farm. The same was also acknowledged in interviews with administrators from the schools in this study concerning farm males.

The comparison of farm males to non-farm males showed no significant difference in any of the four areas of comparison for either grade point average or ITED scores. The farm males who moved to the non-farm category may have helped raise the grade point average from 2.381 to 2.431. However, the ITED scores went down from 40.65 in 1982 to 38.96 in 1986. The farm males kept their grade points at a higher level in both 1982 and 1986. The farm males were second

in ITED scores only to the farm females in 1982. In 1986 they fell to the lowest average score of 36.68 of any of the four overall categories. Achievement for both grade point average and ITED scores went down in three of four categories for farm males and non-farm males.

The research of Edington, Abt and Sewell is substantiated in this study. Achievement of the farm females both in GPA and ITED scores is significantly higher than for their non-farm counterparts. This is especially dramatic in that the 54.90 average score for farm females is 11.59 points higher than the non-farm females. The difference in achievement on the standardized ITED of farm males is also a dramatic change. In 1982 the farm males on the average scored 42.31 and the 1986 comparison shows farm males dropping to an average score of 36.68, an 18.22 average score drop in four years. It was almost as dramatic for non-farm males who dropped an average of 15.94 points.

Polish researcher, Kozaniewicz, noted four effects on farm students' achievement, two of which are the economic situation coupled with family education and place of residence. These seem to have a greater effect on sons rather than daughters. This research supports much of what has already been written. It

specifically shows the same trends in a 60 mile radius in Southwest Iowa. The farm males and non-farm males are more confused about their future and are not doing as well. Academically, the daughters of both farm and non-farm families are not as concerned about the family farm, but work more toward academic achievement in the classroom and on achievement tests. They are doing well because they see their future in areas unrelated to the farm.

The farm economy has affected the farm males and non-farm males negatively. The farm females and non-farm females have only their focus made clearer to achieve more in school and seek nonagricultural occupations after graduation.

Recommendations for Future Research

Suggestions for future findings in this study include:

1. Make a comparison between GPA and ITED scores of small and medium sized schools.
2. Did small or medium sized high schools have a larger percentage of college graduates?
3. Make a comparison of small and medium sized high school students to large school students' achievement in Iowa's three major universities.
4. Make a comparison of small and medium sized high school students to large school students' achievements in Iowa's small colleges.

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Appendix A

Purpose of the Study:

The results of the study will try to determine if the farm crisis and stress have affected the GPA and ITED Comprehensive scores in Southwest Iowa Youth.

Definition:

Farm youth: As identified in this study will be youth of the senior classes of 1982 and 1986 in towns of 2500 or less population. The study will define farm youth as: 1.) those who live on a farm whose family is engaged in full-time farming; 2.) those who live on a farm and work full-time at a job other than farming; 3.) farm family members who are not involved in farming and are employed at non-farming activities; 4.) those who live in a small town, but perform farm work for a living.

Please complete the attached survey sheets of farm and non-farm male and female students. This data is necessary for the work that I am currently doing for my Specialist Degree. Thank you in advance for taking the time to help me. If you would be interested in learning the results of my study, make a notation on your returned survey.

John Brooke
Tri-Center High School
Neola, Ia. 51559

name of school _____

total enrollment _____

1982 farm males GPA ITED Comp. ITED Reading

1986 farm males

name of school _____

total enrollment _____

<u>1982 non-farm males</u>	<u>GPA</u>	<u>ITED Comp.</u>	<u>ITED Reading</u>
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<u>1986 non-farm males</u>

name of school _____

total enrollment _____

<u>1982 farm females</u>	<u>GPA</u>	<u>ITED Comp.</u>	<u>ITED Reading</u>
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<u>1986 farm females</u>

name of school _____

total enrollment _____

1982 non-farm females. GPA. ITED Comp. ITED Reading

1986 non-farm females