



Indiana Commission for Women

Moving Indiana Women Forward

The Mothers in Transition Project: A Community Needs Assessment

Family types are becoming increasingly varied; national trends have found that single-motherhood is now more prevalent than in previous years. In Indiana, single female householders comprise 17.3% of all family households as of 2008. As divorce numbers move from anomalous to a common feature in the modern family, more women are living the transition into single-motherhood. Mothers account for the primary custodial parents in 82.6% of divorce and separation cases. Although the majority of single mothers find themselves in their new household make-up as a result of divorce or separation, circumstances vary within and across transition events.

In 2007, 42.4% of births in Indiana were born to unmarried mothers. This number shows an increasing trend and is currently higher than the national average. From situations of adoption to domestic violence, many Hoosier women are raising a family without a partner. Yet, across diverse backgrounds and contexts, single mothers face many of the same risks and challenges.

The poverty rate of single parent families is disproportionate to that of the total population. Thirty percent of all single mother families are living in poverty. This is a stark contrast to the 3.8% of married couple families in poverty. Single mothers with younger children have a significantly greater risk of economic hardship. That nearly half of women who are head to a household of children five years or younger are

living below the poverty line warrants further investigation.

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While economic development is highlighted as a primary concern, it is only one facet of a complex web of issues that women must navigate to meet their basic needs. Not only must women attend to financial concerns, but also child care needs, health care access, adequate support systems, food and nutrition, and safety. The balance of multiple uncertain variables can be overwhelming. The *Mothers in Transition Project* seeks to identify the challenges and barriers that need to be removed in order to help single mothers acquire or maintain self-sufficiency.

Goals of this Research Project:

1. To provide a voice for and clear picture of the varied experiences of women in transition into single-motherhood.
2. To record and address needs and concerns that will inform programs yet to be implemented, and evaluate the effectiveness of existing resources.
3. Identify strengths within community resources and find ways to mobilize them or make them more readily accessible for all women.

(Data collected from U.S. Census, American Community Survey, and Current Population Reports)

In the form of interviews and focus groups, the focus of research will be to assess the impact of transitioning into single-motherhood on the following priorities:

- **Economic Development**
- **Physical Health**
- **Emotional Well-being**

Methods

Participant Requirements:

- Women transitioning into single-motherhood from divorce, separation, death of spouse, pregnancy, or any other circumstance
- Within 18-60 years of age
- Within 10 years of the transition event
- Custodial parent or primary caregiver of at least one child

Sampling Methods (i.e., How we will recruit participants):

This research relies largely on various partnerships and community networks to extend the diversity of participants across programs and client populations. We will gather participants by reaching out to the following:

- Women's resource providers
- Churches
- Schools
- Child care facilities
- Temporary housing facilities
- Women and family support groups
- Community networks
- Domestic violence shelters
- Family planning organizations
- Clinics and health providers

Data Collection Methods:

- Key informant interviews
- Telephone interviews
- Personal interviews
- Focus groups

Economic Development

Focus:

Public assistance, access to resources, knowledge of community resources, workplace

flexibility at place of employment, child support, and spousal maintenance.

Learning Goals (sample questions that may be asked):

1. What challenges and struggles did you face in adjusting to your new financial needs?
2. What kinds of child care services have been available to you, if any?
3. If you were employed, did your workplace demonstrate flexibility in your time of transition?
4. What kinds of public assistance programs are you currently using or have used in the past, if any (e.g., TANF, WIC, food stamps)?
5. What opportunities are available to you in terms of long term career goals or attaining a steady income?
6. What were the effective and ineffective resources you utilized?

Physical Health

Focus:

Access to health care, food and nutrition, lifestyle, preventative measures, reproductive health, and safety.

Learning Goals (sample questions that may be asked):

1. What kinds of preventative health care services (e.g., mammograms, pap smear tests) have you utilized?
2. How has the transition experience affected your state of health?
3. How do you incorporate self-care and health practices into your daily life, if applicable?
4. What are your primary health concerns?
5. Are you able to access reproductive services and information if needed?

Emotional Well-being

Focus:

Support networks, mental health services, survivors of assault and domestic violence, recovery from chemical and substance abuse, and stigma, raising children with disabilities.

Learning Goals (sample questions that may be asked):

1. What kinds of support systems are available to you?
2. Have you experienced any expressions of stigma related to being a single mother?
3. What means do you have to cope with emotional hardship?
4. How has your social and emotional well-being been affected by the transition?

Benefits of Research

Understanding the issues that women and their families face is within the mandate of the Indiana Commission for Women. A primary component of our mission is to ensure that women play a representative role in resolving the challenges they confront. The *Mothers in Transition Project* aims to listen to and assess those needs and challenges in the forms of narratives and lived experiences.

The results from this research will supplement existing literature on transition events and single mother families. These results will specifically address the voices and needs of Indiana residents to identify resources needed, existing resources that are effective, and inform policy that can promote positive outcomes. It is hoped that this project will open a continuous dialogue of ongoing research to develop better strategies to ensure quality of life in economic development, health, and emotional well-being.

Although the impact is anticipated to be on a larger community scale, individual participants may also benefit from contributing to the project. Participants will be invited to clarify and articulate for themselves the needs, concerns, as well as successes they are facing as women in transition. An open and non-judgmental atmosphere will be provided for them to share their thoughts and stories.

Confidentiality Agreement

The identities of all participants will be protected under a confidentiality agreement. Any information that is obtained in connection with this project and that can be identified with the participant will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with their written or witness verbal permission.

Get Involved!

If you or your organization would like to become a community partner in this project and help recruit participants, please contact Stella Tran at STran@dwd.in.gov or call (317) 234-3376. Here are some ways you can be involved:

- If you know someone who might be interested in sharing her story, tell them about this project.
- Reach out to your client populations to let them know about this project.
- Volunteer to be an interpreter to help encourage immigrant and minority populations to participate.
- If your organization has conducted a similar project before, share your input and best practices. We are always looking to improve our methods of research and outreach.

Together, we can move Indiana women forward.



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