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Social Science Section

ETHNIC GROUPS IN RURAL MINNESOTA

DOUGLAS MARSHALL
University of Minnesota

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RECENT CHANGES IN FARM AND VILLAGE LIVING

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Are rural women getting a square deal? To help answer this question a sample of homemakers from Isanti County farms and from the village of Cambridge were interviewed. The results indicate that rural women today have considerably more of the conveniences of life than they did in 1940, just ten years ago (Table I). The improvement has been even greater for farm than for village women.

Whereas in 1940 only one-fifth of the farm women had electricity, today four-fifths of them have it. In 1940 less than one-third enjoyed running water; today over half have it in their homes. At the earlier date three-fourths of the farm women had radios; today almost one hundred per cent report a radio. A decade ago, considerably under two-thirds had telephones; today it is three-fourths.

In spite of the almost phenomenal increase in living conveniences, a considerably smaller proportion of the farm women today enjoy each of the conveniences than is true for their village sisters (Table I,

TABLE I.—PROPORTIONS POSSESSING SELECTED LEVEL OF LIVING ITEMS FOR ISANTI COUNTY FARM AND CAMBRIDGE VILLAGE RESIDENTS, 1940, '45 AND '50

	Farm			Village	Farm-Village Sample Difference (e)
	(a) 1940 (Census)	(b) (1945) (Census)	(c) 1950 (Sample)	(d) 1950 (Sample)	
Electricity	19%	27%	79%	100%	21*
Running Water	31	27	54	97	43*
Power Washer .....	..	..	91	100	9
Refrigeration .....	..	..	83	94	11
Radio	75	..	96	100	4
Telephone	61	65	75	85	10
Automobile	35	84	85	83	-2
Daily Paper .....	..	..	63	86	23*

* Statistically significant at the five percent level

c and d). It is particularly so for running water, with slightly over half of the farm women and almost one hundred per cent of the village women having running water in their homes.

Another answer to the question posed may be found in the scores from three scales used in this study: the Socio-Economic Status Scale, Social Participation Scale and the Dissatisfaction Scale. Each Scale consisted of a number of questions the answers to which could be scored and averaged. A comparison of the average scores of the farm and village women in Isanti County for 1940 and 1950 confirms that the lot of both groups of women has improved materially over the last decade (Table II).

TABLE II.—AVERAGE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS, SOCIAL PARTICIPATION, AND SATISFACTION SCORES FOR ISANTI FARM AND VILLAGE SAMPLE WOMEN, 1940 AND 1950

		1940 ¹	1950	Diff. '50-'40	C.R. ²
Socio-Economic Status Score	Farm	65.1	74.9	9.8	3.3
	Village	76.0	83.7	7.0	2.4
Social Participation Score	Farm	7.7	13.4	5.7	2.1
	Village	16.9	18.1	1.2	0.3
Satisfaction Score	Farm	21.1	28.6	7.5	9.5
	Village	27.0	30.9	3.9	5.7

¹ 1940 sample data from: Nelson, Lowry and Edgar McVoy, *Satisfactions in Living: Farm Versus Village*. Minn. Ag. Exp. Station Bulletin No. 370, June, 1943.

² A C.R. of 1.96 is statistically significant at the five percent level, one of 2.58 at the one percent level.

The Socio-Economic Status score represents the number of social status producing goods which the family owns, such as an automobile, a telephone, a good house and many other material possessions. A comparison of the farm and village scores for 1950 shows the village women are enjoying considerably higher socio-economic status than those on the farm, the scores being 65 and 76. By 1950 the farm women had improved their score greatly, scoring 75. The village women had raised their score to 84, so they were still well ahead of the farm women although the difference is not quite as great as it was in 1940.

The Social Participation Scale measures how active the women are in organized activities, such as church, community or club organization. The social participation scores again show that in 1940 village women were in a much better position than farm women, the scores being 8 and 17. By 1950 the farm women had raised their score of 8 to 13 and the village women their 17 to 18. Thus while the village women still lead the farm women by an appreciable margin in social participation, the difference is not nearly as great as in 1940.

The Satisfaction Scale reflects the degree of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with such things as opportunities for travel, the hours of work, play space, visiting, availability of sports, bathroom facilities, etc. The scores can range from zero to 50, with zero representing complete dissatisfaction and 50 representing complete satisfaction. In 1940 the farm women, with an average score of 21, were far below the village women, who scored 27, a difference of six points. By 1950 this difference had been reduced to only two points, the scores being 29 and 31. Thus, the farm women's satisfaction score improved far more than did that for the village women. In fact, only on the Satisfaction Scale did the farm women improve sufficiently during the ten years to exceed the position which the village women had already held in 1940. That is, farm women today rank lower in socio-economic status and in social participation than what the village women did back in 1940. At the same time, the farm women today rank well above the village women of 1940 in satisfaction scores. The logical conclusion is that farm women are today more satisfied than village women were in 1940 even though they today still have fewer of the social and economic advantages than the village women already had in 1940.

In another part of the interview the women were asked to indicate whether they would now choose to live on the farm, in the town or in the city if they had it to do all over again. The answers by the farm women show that out of every ten women seven would

TABLE III.—RESIDENCE PREFERENCES OF ISANTI FARM AND VILLAGE WOMEN, FOR SELF AND FOR CHILDREN

Own Residence Preferences:		1950
Farm women for:	(Farm	67%
	(Village	30
	(City	1
	(No. info	2
Village women for:	(Farm	6
	(Village	91
	(City	3
	(No. info.	0
Residence Preference for Their children:		
Farm women for:	(Farm	54
	(Village	25
	(City	13
	(No info.	8
Village women for:	(Farm	26
	(Village	60
	(City	6
	(No info.	8

choose the farm, three the village and less than one the city (Table III). Of every ten village women, less than one chose the farm, nine the village and far less than one the city. Apparently the village holds far more attraction for village women than does the farm, and very few of them think too well of the city as a place to live.

Similar results were obtained in response to the question, "If you could choose for your children, where would you prefer to have them live?" Half of the farm women and one-fourth of the village women said they would choose the farm for their children. One-fourth of the farm women and two-thirds of the village women indicated they would prefer the village for their children. Just over one out of ten of the farm women and considerably under one out of ten of the village women preferred the city for their children.

How satisfying is rural living? As far as Isanti County women are concerned, it ranks well above city living. At the same time, as a group they indicate a clear preference for the village over the farm. Thus they give first place to the village, second place to the farm and last place to the city.

Why should farm living be rated lower than village living? A

TABLE IV.—ITEMS WITH WHICH ISANTI FARM WOMEN REPORTED BEING MOST AND LEAST DISSATISFIED IN RANK ORDER FOR 1940 AND 1950

Rank Order	1940	1950
	Items with which most dissatisfied:	
1.	*Savings	Children's job prospects
2.	Bathroom	*Savings
3.	Vacations	Telephone
4.	*Sewage disposal system	Lawn
5.	*Living room furniture	*Sewage disposal system
6.	Travel	*Living room furniture
7.	*Hours of work	*Hours of work
8.	Old age care prospects	Recreation facilities
9.	Strenuousness of work	House
10.	Refrigerator	Public library books
	Items with which least dissatisfied:	
60.	Neighborhood	Hired help in home
61.	Friends	Hired help outside home
62.	*Play space in yard	Electricity
63.	Family physician	Refrigerator
64.	Community	*Play space in yard
65.	*Milk and cream	Maternity care
66.	*Insurance on house	*Insurance on house
67.	Visits from friends	Washing machine
68.	Newspapers	*Milk and cream
69.	Room in house	Vacuum cleaner
70.	Outdoor sports	Meats
71.	Sleep	Kitchen stove

* Items appear in both 1940 and 1950.

clue might be found in the complaints of the farm women. The one thing with which they were most often dissatisfied was their children's job opportunities (Table IV). The reason may well be that such a high proportion of farm boys and girls have to go to the village or city to find employment. There they often have to compete at a disadvantage with village and city young people because their rearing on the farm has not included some of the urban business experiences of the other youngsters. Other high ranking complaints were related to savings, telephone, lawn, sewage disposal, living room conditions, hours of work and recreation.

All-in-all, rural living today has far more to offer than it did ten years ago. The farm women's lot has improved even more than that of their village cousins and yet the farm women's lot shows up to a disadvantage when compared with that of the village. Also, it appears that in spite of the social and economic advantages often attributed to the city, the city holds very little appeal for rural women. This may well be true in spite of the fact that many rural girls are today moving to the city. Possibly the pressure of economic necessity pushes them toward city residence in spite of their greater appreciation for rural living.

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