



September 1987

The Use of Survey Methods in Researching Parents of Adjudicated Teenage Prostitutes

John Longres
University of Wisconsin, Madison

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>

 Part of the [Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence Commons](#), [Social Control, Law, Crime, and Deviance Commons](#), and the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Longres, John (1987) "The Use of Survey Methods in Researching Parents of Adjudicated Teenage Prostitutes," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 14 : Iss. 3 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol14/iss3/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.



THE USE OF SURVEY METHODS IN RESEARCHING PARENTS OF ADJUDICATED TEENAGE PROSTITUTES*

JOHN LONGRES

University of Wisconsin-Madison

This paper is methodological in its orientation. It describes experiences in applying survey methods to a difficult and hard to reach population - parents of adjudicated teenage prostitutes.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, an interesting body of literature has been emerging on the psycho-social correlates of teenage prostitution (James and Meyerding, 1977; MacVicar and Dillon, 1980). As is frequently the case with juvenile deviant behavior, the role of family life has been a major theme. Contemporary theorists believe that family dynamics are an important factor in the drift into prostitution, and have begun to collect information on the family life background of young prostitutes. Almost all information, however, has come from interviews with prostitutes themselves. Only one study, a clinical case study of a notorious family, could be found where a family had been studied directly (Barclay and Gallemore, 1972).

The initial aim of our research project was to make a contribution to the practice literature by directly studying the parents of teenage prostitutes. Survey methods were chosen because

*The author would like to acknowledge the work of Paula Christianson, Marcia Esther, Laurie Heikkonen, Susan Iliinsky, Susan Kloepfer, Margaret Lehman, Frank Mondeaux and Carol Swanson. Without their help this research could not have been accomplished.

there was an available population through a local juvenile court. What started as an apparently straightforward application of survey methods soon became a difficult task. Early in the research project it was decided that, along with the interview schedule, it would be important to collect data on the experiences of the interviewers. Toward this end, two instruments were developed. The first was a "family contact" form on which interviewers documented their experiences in obtaining the interviews; guidelines for reaching out were developed and interviewers were trained in their use. The second was an "interviewer experience" form on which the reactions of the interviewers to the parents were recorded. This form, filled out at the completion of the interview, required interviewers to make judgments of the parents as people. As the interviews got under way it became apparent that a full response rate would not be obtained. Because of this, a third instrument was developed to be filled out by the court social worker, enabling comparisons between the families interviewed and those not interviewed.

This paper presents data obtained from the three instruments. Three kinds of data are presented: information on factors related to response rate, information comparing respondents and non-respondents, and data about the respondents as subjects of research. The primary purpose is therefore methodological; the paper describes experiences in applying survey methods to a difficult and hard-to-reach population. The paper is not intended to present data on family life dynamics, which will be the subject of subsequent reports. Nevertheless, describing our experiences in doing research might provide some insights on family life patterns and potential difficulties in delivering service.

SAMPLE AND RESPONSE RATE

The population used was the families of the 75 young women who had passed through a project for female prostitutes at a county juvenile court of a major metropolitan area. The young women had been taken into custody for streetwalking. The court program had been in operation for three years.

While parents were seen, especially during the petition and disposition phases, the program was designed for the young women, and stressed individual "empowerment" through economic independence.

Our aim was to interview as many of the families of the 75 court cases as possible. Early on, we became aware that this would be difficult. The court supplied us with the names of the young women and their addresses and telephone numbers at the time of adjudication (in some instances updated after disposition). Since it was believed that the vast majority of the young women were not living at home, we could not be sure that the address supplied by the court was in fact the parents' address. Many of the girls had left the program over a year before the interview. Our task was to locate the parents, whose names were not provided to us, starting with the addresses of the young women.

During a three-month period, usable interviews with the families of 33 young women were collected (see Table 1). This represented 35 actual families—in two cases foster parents as well as a guardian or parent were interviewed. The total number of individuals interviewed was 42, the majority being biological parents. There were also two stepmothers, three stepfathers and one adoptive mother interviewed. In three instances a female relative was interviewed; the remaining four women and two men were foster parents.

The decision to include foster parents was made because all but one had been responsible for the girl for a significant time during her childhood or early adolescence, including the period immediately prior to arrest and adjudication.

Two additional families were contacted but the interviews were subsequently discarded, one a natural and the other a foster mother.

In the instance of the natural mother, the adjudicated daughter had been found murdered after leaving the program. Upon receiving the letter from the researchers, the mother called the interviewer. She was very distraught and began to vent so much that the interviewer was able to conduct part of the interview on the phone. However, the mother did not want

TABLE 1
INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED:
RELATION TO CHILD

	N	%
Mother	21	50.0
Father	7	16.7
Other Parents:		
Mother Figures		21.4
Adopted	1	
Step	2	
Foster	3	
Relative	3	
Father Figures		11.9
Step	3	
Foster	2	
Total	42 ^a	

^aForty-four individuals were interviewed; however, interviews with one foster parent and one natural parent were unusable and therefore eliminated. See text for description of these two.

to have a more formal interview, and when the amount of usable information she gave us was analyzed it seemed too little to include.

The second was the situation of an elderly foster parent who indicated that she had been responsible for the girl for "a few years" but during subsequent attempts to locate the natural parents by working with agency personnel, it was discovered that the girl had not been with this foster mother for more than a couple of months. Further search determined that the biological mother was deceased and the whereabouts of the father were completely unknown. It became painfully apparent that this girl had been in one foster home after another, rarely for any length of time, for about as long as anyone could remember. In effect there was no natural or any other long-standing parent figure to locate. What made this case all the more

tragic was that the girl, who is still a minor, had not been seen nor heard of for over a year.

The interviewer garnered this information from the last foster parent to have cared for her:

V stands out because of the little we know about her. She is black and had been adopted. She was last seen at age 14. She dropped out of school and attended a special school, possibly for pregnant teenagers. There she was known for her fighting and conflict with other students. She didn't have a job because she wasn't old enough. She had a drug and alcohol problem. V seemed to get along with her three older foster sisters. She had asked her foster mother over and over again to adopt her, ". . . to be her mother. But I told her, 'Honey, I can't, someone else is your mother.'" She was removed from her foster home when she started beating her foster mother.

In the majority of families only one parent was interviewed, and this person was most often the mother figure. The large representation of mother figures reflects the reality of the families we came across: Many of the families ($n = 35$) were single parents living alone (20.0 percent), with adult children (8.6 percent), with relatives (11.4 percent), or with a same sex friend (2.9 percent). A significant number were also living in common-law relationships (22.9 percent). In these families, the parent figure seemed the logical one to interview, and no special effort was made to include other adults living in the home.

On the other hand, twelve of the families were dual, legally coupled families (34.3 percent) and in seven of these both parents were interviewed. It does appear that in some instances the parent interviewed was protecting or at least not willing to facilitate the involvement of the other parent. For instance, in writing up a case study, one of the interviewers reported:

This is the case of a Caucasian, remarried parent. The interviewer visited the home to set up a time for an interview with the parents. Mrs. H appeared to be somewhat ambivalent about taking part in the study during this initial visit, nevertheless a time was arranged for an interview. She

indicated that her husband would not be available as he was out of town "for a while." When the interview took place, however, the father apparently was at home in a back room. He appeared at the end of the interview and was introduced to me as I was leaving.

EXPERIENCES IN REACHING OUT

Knowing that the population would be hard to reach, the research was approached as a problem in providing outreach services. Guidelines were developed based on clinical experiences with resisting families (Stanton and Todd, 1981) in the hope of maximizing the return rate. The situation was different from the practice situations out of which the guidelines were developed, and so they were adapted to our needs; we were not offering a service and we could not enlist the aid of the adjudicated girl in involving the family since in most cases she was no longer receiving services.

GUIDELINES FOR ENGAGING FAMILIES

1. Mail letters when you are ready to interview the family. The sooner the family is contacted after the letter is sent, the more likely they are to become engaged.
2. Make heavy use of the telephone and, if necessary, pre-interview home visits. Be prepared to make as many phone calls as necessary. Make at least five home visits before giving up unless you are sure the family does not live at the address and you are unable to locate a new address.
3. In making contact you must be convinced of the value of the research, be flexible and willing to meet at their convenience.
4. Resistance on the part of the family must be seen as fear of criticism, not non-cooperation. Reassure parents that our objective is not to evaluate but to understand their family from their point of view.
5. Be persistent and try to assuage their doubts. If a parent gives a definite "no", however, do not persist any longer.
6. Attempt to interview all parents individually, mother figures and father figures, without allowing self-selection to

take place. Fathers are the most difficult to engage. Non-insistence on their participation confirms their self-view as useless. Reassure fathers of their importance.

7. Establish rapport with the parent. If we ally with the child, we may be finding ourselves in conflict with the parent. Be willing to ally with the parents for this short period in time. Be willing to see things their way, understand their frustrations, etc. Never engage in a struggle with the parent over whether he/she is the problem or not. Parents ought to be treated as healthy people, who are themselves without problems.

There was concern that in reaching out to families the interviewers might discover a crisis in need of attention. The interviewers, all second-year graduate social work students, were prepared in these cases to support the parent through any crisis and refer them to the court counselors. This was never necessary.

All the families were sent a letter to the address given us, on court stationery, inviting them to participate in a study being completed in conjunction with the local school of social work. The letters were addressed "To the Parents of . . ." saying the study would survey families of girls who had received court services to determine their needs and thereby contribute to improved family services. Since the court social worker indicated that many parents deny the prostitution activities of their daughters, the subject of prostitution was never mentioned in the letter nor indeed was it mentioned directly in the interviews. The parents were told they were not required to participate in the study but that their participation would benefit other families who might require court services. It was also stressed that the researchers were not evaluating them but were interested in understanding family life and family difficulties from the point of view of adults. The families were not offered money for their participation.

Each of eight social work interviewers was then randomly assigned a "caseload." They were to work with these families at their own pace and letters were to be sent only when they were ready to make an appointment. Following our guidelines,

it was believed that the sooner the family was contacted after the letter was sent, the more likely they were to become engaged in the study.

To minimize interviewer bias, the interviewers learned as little as possible about the families. However, since the interviews were to be held in the home at odd hours of the day and night, the court social worker was called in to flag cases that he thought might prove dangerous and thus require two interviewers. In all, eight of the seventy-five cases were so flagged. These were families where murders and other forms of physical and sexual violence had been committed, or where the court workers had met with threats of physical violence. The experience of identifying potentially dangerous families led to anxiety among the interviewers, who began to realize the unusualness of their project. Strong efforts had to be made to get the interviewers over this period of insecurity.

In the end, when all the interviews were finished, it became apparent that none of the eight families so identified had been contacted. In six instances a sincere attempt was made to contact these families, but in two instances the interviewers "forgot" to make contact. It is significant that the families perceived by the social worker to be the most dangerous were not included in the study.

In about 65 percent of the sample a telephone number was made available through the court. When a number was available, the interviewers were prepared to make as many calls as they needed to make contact with the family. However, sometimes it turned out the number had been changed or was wrong, or the phone had been disconnected. Thus in many instances, the families could only be reached by showing up at their door in person, often at night. When no number was available, the interviewers were prepared to make at least five personal visits before giving up.

With 12 of the 35 families interviewed, obtaining an interview proved easy, either a first phone call or a lucky home visit produced an immediate interview. In at least one case, the parent, a great-aunt, was actually waiting expectantly for the interviewer to show up. The interviewer reported:

Since the W family had no phone they were contacted in person at their home. An interview was obtained on the first visit. Mrs. W had been waiting for the researchers to contact her—she was quite excited to participate.

The average number of visits/phone calls that had to be made before an interview was obtained was three. In nine cases, interviews were not obtained until after at least five visits or phone calls. Thus a number of families were quite reluctant and it was only the outreach skills of the interviewers that eventually brought success. After speaking to this family four times on the telephone and making a home visit, one interviewer described the following:

Dad and stepmom were interviewed. Dad was very negative about the court system. Says I will be the last person they will talk to about their daughter. He didn't think the study could do much good. When it was over, however, he said he was glad to have talked. They both seemed glad to ventilate.

Following the guidelines, the interviewers tried to present themselves as enthusiastic, tolerant of rebuke, flexible and utterly convinced of the value of the study. Resistance on the part of families was to be handled as fear of criticism, as protection, and not as non-cooperation. Most of the interviewers in fact

TABLE 2

RESPONSE RATE (n=75 adjudicated females)

	N	%
Cases Interviewed	33 ^a	44.0
Refusals	10	13.3
Resisted	5	6.7
Whereabouts Unknown	25 ^b	33.3
Not Contacted	2	2.7

^aThis represents 35 different families since in two cases two families were interviewed per case

^bThis includes one case where the mother was deceased and no lead could be obtained on other family members.

were able to do this, and did it well, but in at least two instances, this proved very difficult. Two interviewers felt especially awkward in their attempts to make contact and wavered in their conviction about the value of the study. In one instance this led to doing fewer interviews than expected. The motivation and enthusiasm of the interviewers cannot be overlooked in doing this kind of project.

In making contact, the interviewers allowed themselves to be persistent but were instructed not to persist once a definite "no" was given. In ten cases, including that of the partial interview with the distraught mother, a definite "no" was in fact given. These negative replies were in two instances hostile; the interviewer withdrew immediately to ward off any trouble. It appeared unlikely that any amount of reaching out could persuade; providing services would probably be impossible. One interviewer reported:

The grandfather answered door. He appeared to have had a stroke. All I could get out of him was that no one else was home—except a variety of loud, large, barking dogs. I went away and came back and spoke to the father. The father was very aggressive. He confused me with a court official. He was blunt and inhospitable. He essentially told me to go to hell, that he did not wish to participate.

Another wrote:

At 8 p.m. I phoned and spoke to the stepfather. He told me the mother wasn't home. He said she probably wouldn't be interested. I said I'd call back later. At 9 p.m. I called again and spoke to the mother. She said she didn't receive our letter as they had moved. She gave me information on the daughter. The daughter is now in college in another state—a 3.0 grade-point average. She said the only reason her daughter was involved in court services was because she was a runaway. She asked how she could check my credibility. I said she could call the court counselor. She recognized his name. The conversation ended with her saying she'd wait for the letter to be forwarded, then would call me if she was interested. If she didn't call I could assume it's a no. She seemed very angry that someone could get her phone num-

ber through the court. She never called me after that and I dropped the case.

However, hostility was not the most common reason for rejecting the invitation to participate; most of the time it had to do with personal and emotional reasons. In these cases, had we actually been doing outreach services rather than research we might have ultimately been successful. An instance of this is seen in the following:

After the third phone call I reached the mother. She had questions about what would be done with the information. She was somewhat resistant. Wants me to call back after the first of the year. I called her after the first of the year and she said there were too many emergencies now. She was getting ready to go to court tomorrow. Something about parole. I said I would call her in three weeks. Three weeks and three phone calls later I reached her. The mother said she is under stress, under doctor's care. She said her daughter is in hiding, that her pimp is out on the street looking for her. She refused the interview.

In five additional cases we seemed to be given the runaround so much that there was no alternative but to give up. After five phone calls and three home visits, this interviewer wrote:

Either I'm getting no one at home or leaving a message with a daughter. I got the distinct impression that sometimes when I called folks were home but daughter lied to me and would tell me to call back later. I finally did contact Mr. B and he agreed to make an appointment if I would call back the evening of the 23rd. When I called on the evening of the 23rd, no one was home and I have been unable to reach them since.

Another account is given in the family of a young woman who had been adjudicated for prostitution and was later found murdered in a shallow pond some two years before we contacted her family. (As noted, one other girl had been a murder victim.) The court counselor had had contact with the mother after the murder and believed she would participate. A series of phone calls uncovered:

I spoke to a middle-aged sounding woman who said she didn't know the mother's phone number. She said the mother works but that she would try to get in touch with the mother. This woman said the mother was crippled and was resistant. First she said Mrs. H had no phone and then later she contradicted this and said Mrs. H had been receiving some irritating phone calls. She told me to call back after 6 but not too late. I called seven times after that and always spoke to the same female. She kept saying Mrs. H was not there. Finally she said that Mrs. H does not live there nor does she know how to reach her. Said if she ever sees her she'd give her my message and number. The court counselor said he's pretty sure Mrs. H does live there and that I probably was talking with her.

The most common reason for failing to interview a family, however, was not rejection nor resistance. In 25 instances, including the girl with no apparent family, the families simply could not be located. Sometimes the addresses and telephone numbers proved wrong and an effort had to be made to update them by contacting the court and following other leads. On occasion, the corrected addresses and numbers led to interviews. More usually, no new address could be obtained either through the court or through neighbors, and the attempt to interview was abandoned. This interviewer reported:

No one was home. I spoke to a neighbor and he said no one has lived there for a long time. I talked to the court counselor and he suggested that I let this one go. He said family has disbanded as a result of an abuse charge.

Another wrote:

Several families lived at this address, including the B's, but two to two-and-a-half years ago they all split and left no forwarding address. Current resident still gets mail for them but sends it all back to PO. Says lots of people have been looking for this family. I called the court counselor and he had no further information. This is a dead end.

As is evident, when families could not be located the logical place to turn for help was the juvenile court. In doing so,

informal comments made to the court workers by the girls about their families would be repeated. In at least ten of the cases where the families were unlocatable, comments were recorded indicating that the family had disbanded or in some other way broken apart, that the girls did not know where their parents and other family members were. The problem of unlocatable families was also corroborated by service personnel in another program for teenage prostitutes; these talked of "throw-away kids" and would indicate that efforts by the youths and by themselves to locate families often failed.

While our return rate in terms of the 75 cases was only 44 percent, a percentage more associated with mailed questionnaires than with face-to-face interviews, if the unlocatable families are subtracted, the return rate rises to a respectable 68.6 percent. This is comparable to that obtained in the study on resisting families which was used as a guideline (Stanton and Todd, 1981). In that study where a service was offered to 92 families, a 71 percent overall response rate was obtained. The problem, it would appear, with surveying this kind of family is not the likelihood of refusal but the likelihood that a large number will not be located. This in turn would appear to be a function of the dynamics of families of female teenage prostitutes.

COMPARISONS BETWEEN INTERVIEWED AND NON-INTERVIEWED FAMILIES

Since a high percentage of families did not participate, it is important to determine if the 33 cases interviewed are representative of the 75 cases that passed through the court program. In more general terms, in researching a difficult-to-reach population, can it be expected that those reached will be similar to those not reached?

To help answer this the court social worker, without knowledge of who was and was not interviewed, filled out a form on each of the families involved. The interviewed and non-interviewed families were compared with respect to place of residence, place of residence of the child, race, age of the child at the time of adjudication, family composition, number

of children in the home and involvement of the family in the court program.

In general the results suggest that the families may not be very different; however, on some variables doubt exists.

On a number of demographic measures there is little evidence of difference. Over 90 percent of each group lived in the same county as the court. Over 90 percent of each group lived in the major city of the county with the largest percentage of these being from inner-city, lower working-class areas. Approximately 38 percent of the girls in each group were black, one hispanic appeared in each group, and the remaining were white. The average age of the girl at the time of adjudication was just under 16 years in both groups. Finally, the mean number of siblings in both groups, not including the girl herself, was around 3.4, an indication that the families were quite large.

There was a tendency for the families who were interviewed to have been more motivated to participate in court services than those not interviewed. The court worker rated each family in terms of the extent to which the parents demonstrated a willingness to be involved in the court services provided the girl. While 40.4 percent of the non-interviewed compared to 54.1 percent of the interviewed cases were rated as "very involved" or "fairly involved," this difference did not reach statistical significance (Chi Square @ 3df = 3.08; $p = .1067$).

Two other areas where court data indicated no difference between the two sets of families were family structure and place of residence of the child. However, corroborative data collected from the parents surveyed suggests that court data are not reliable.

According to court records, 92.9 percent of the girls from families not interviewed and 84.8 percent of the girls from those interviewed were raised in single-parent families. This difference does not reach statistical significance. Yet, information obtained directly from interviewed parents uncovered that only 68.8 percent were being raised in single-parent families at the time of adjudication. Furthermore, the court counselor in-

TABLE 3
FAMILY STRUCTURE

	Interview Finding	Court Data	
		Interviewed	Not Interviewed
Single Parent	15	28 (84.8%)	39 (92.9%)
Cohabiting Couple	8	0	0
Married Couple	10	5 (15.2%)	5 (7.1%)
Total	33	33	42

dicated that none of the girls was living in a family composed of a cohabiting couple. This research, however, uncovered that fully eight of the 33 cases interviewed involved biological parents in common-law type arrangements, many of whom had been together for a number of years. These discrepancies make it impossible to place much reliance on court statistics.

Similarly, according to court statistics, 87.9 percent of the interviewed and 88.1 percent of the not-interviewed cases were not presently living at home. However, in 42.4 percent of the families ($n = 33$ cases) the parents claimed their daughter was in fact living at home while another 9.1 percent claimed their daughter lived with them off and on. In addition, it was found that there is a lot more contact between the girls not living at

TABLE 4
PLACE OF RESIDENCE OF ADJUDICATED GIRL

	Interview Finding	Court Data	
		Interviewed	Not Interviewed
With Parents	14 (42.4%)	4 (12.1%)	5 (11.9%)
Off and On	3 (9.1%)		
Not With Parents	16 (48.5%)	29 (87.9%)	37 (88.1%)
Total	33	33	42

home and their parents than might be imagined: 49.3 percent of the parents of girls not living at home ($n = 18$) claimed to have seen them within the two weeks prior to the interview. Again, discrepancies between court statistics and the research findings make it impossible to compare the interviewed and non-interviewed cases on place of residence of the child.

In part the discrepancy between court records and the data collected is understandable. The court recognizes that children and parents do not always tell the truth. It is also true that time had passed and circumstances might have changed, especially with regard to whether the young woman was still living at home. Similarly, the court counselors when thinking of single parents may be making clinical assessments reflecting divorce and separation in a girl's background rather than a factual description of family structure. On the other hand the discrepancies suggest the inherent unreliability of data collected in a program where the young woman, not the family, is the client.

Finally data, mixed with impressions gained from trying to contact the families, suggest that those not interviewed may be more transient and unstable than those interviewed. The most obvious indication of this is the already noted 25 cases that could not be located even though the interviewers made every effort to do so. Additionally, the informal descriptions of a number of the unlocatable families suggested profound disruption. This perception may be contrasted with the hard data collected on the addresses of the families interviewed. Twenty-one of the 33 families interviewed (63.6 percent) had been at the same address for six years or more, and only three of them (9.1 percent) had been at the address one year or less.

In summary, it appears that the cases interviewed have a number of attributes in common with those not interviewed. Unfortunately, on the issues of family structure and place of residence of the child, discrepancies between the research finding and court supplied data prohibit comparison. On the other hand, it may be hypothesized that likely differences will be found in the residential and personal stability of the family; those participating in the study being more stable than those not entering. This could be an important difference in that the

families likely to be interviewed in this and similar research endeavors may under-represent the environmental and personal stresses evident in families of adjudicated young prostitutes.

THE EXPERIENCE OF INTERVIEWERS

The typical interview lasted about an hour and a quarter and explored both the interpersonal relations among family members, including relatives, and less personal relations such as those with schools, health and welfare institutions, economic institutions, friends, neighbors, and the like. Many hours of role playing enabled the interviewers to complete the interviews in a naturalistic but somewhat clinical way.

After the interviews were completed, each interviewer was asked to rate the parental figure along a number of dimensions. The purpose of the ratings was to assess the likely difficulties researchers and practitioners would have in working with parental figures. The concepts used in the ratings were discussed and clarified by the interviewers. Two dimensions will be discussed here. The first has to do with issues related to the interview itself, while the second has to do with perceptions about the parental figures as people. Each of the items was rated on a six-point scale using a semantic differential type instrument.

The interviews and the ratings were completed by second-year graduate clinical social work students. While the interviewers were experienced in clinical matters, it was nevertheless usual for them to express hesitation. One interviewer wrote: "I don't feel there was adequate communication for me to make several of these judgments." Thus, the ratings are to be understood as first clinical impressions.

The first series of ratings (Table 5) concerned the parents as interviewees. This consideration is important because it helps give some idea about the reliability of the responses obtained in the interviews. The first item asked the interviewers to indicate whether the person was easy to interview or challenged their interviewing skills—that is, whether they had to work hard to get the information, relax the parent and the like. Although parents were rated all along the six-point scale, the median

TABLE 5
INTERVIEWER RATINGS OF RESPONDENT AS
INTERVIEWEE (N = 42)

Rating Item ^a	Median	Mode	% in Mode
Difficult/Easy	5.42	6	47.6
Open/Defended	2.13	2	38.1
Insincere/Sincere	5.55	6	52.4

^aOn all items the adjective given first represents the low end of the scale.

rating on this item was 5.42, indicating that as a group the people were not difficult to talk to.

The second item asked the interviewers to rate the parent as "open or defended" in the interview situation. This item was intended to measure the degree to which the respondent appeared to trust or distrust the interviewer. On this item the range of ratings did not cover the entire scale; no one rated the person as completely defended. The median rating was 2.13, indicating that while there was a certain amount of distrust, the bulk of the parents were relatively open.

The third rating was "insincere/sincere" and was intended to measure the degree to which the interviewers believed the persons had told them the truth. Here the interviewers believed overwhelmingly that the respondents were sincere and truthful. The median rating is a very high 5.55 (out of a possible six) and while the range of ratings covered most of the scale only four of the respondents were rated on the insincere side of the continuum.

The second dimension, involving five items, asked the interviewers to make clinical judgments about the people they were interviewing.

On the first of these, the interviewers assessed the intelligence or intellectual capacity of the parent. The interviewers tended to see the parents as relatively intelligent; the median rating was 2.24, with the majority of respondents receiving a

rating of two or three and very few being rated on the low-intelligence end of the continuum.

On the second, the interviewers rated the emotional strength of the respondent giving their impression of how the respondents had handled their lives and of their capacity for survival and adaptation. Most of the respondents were seen as exceedingly strong; 16 were rated a one and 12 a two, with the median 1.92. Eight of the respondents were rated on the not-strong end of the continuum.

On the third item, the interviewers rated the mental and emotional health of the person—in particular, whether the person appeared disturbed or not. The median rating is 4.86, indicating most were assessed to be healthy, eight were rated on the disturbed side of the continuum and nine others were rated as barely non-disturbed.

The fourth item asked the interviewers to rate the respondents as parents—whether they appeared to be warm parents or hostile parents. This is a particularly important rating in that much of the literature suggests that poor parent/child relations are pivotal in the drift into prostitution. The median rating was 2.27, indicating that most of the parents showed themselves to have warm feelings toward the adjudicated daughter. However, there was some important variation in these ratings, with 12 of the respondents expressing at least a fair amount of hostility.

The final item had to do with whether the interviewers believed the respondents were ready for social service. The purpose of this measure was to determine if the respondent would be a good person to reach out to for service. While we have indicated that the interviewers saw the respondents as easy to interview, open and sincere, as relatively intelligent, strong, and not particularly disturbed, as generally warm and concerned about their daughters, nevertheless, there does not appear to be a correlation between these attributes and service readiness. Fully 12 of the parents were rated at the extreme negative end of the continuum. There was considerably more variation in the ratings however; 16 were rated ready for service and seven were rated just on the negative side of the continuum.

TABLE 6
 INTERVIEWER RATINGS OF RESPONDENT
 AS PERSON/PARENT (n = 42)

Rating Item ^a	Median	Mode	% in Mode
Intelligent/Not	2.24	2	40.5
Strong/Not	1.92	1	38.1
Disturbed/Not	4.86	6	33.3
Warm/Hostile Parent	2.27	2	31.0
Ready for Service/Not	4.00	6	28.6

^aOn all items the adjective given first represents the low end of the six-point scale.

DISCUSSION

Those interested in collecting data on parents of teenage prostitutes face a difficult task. One alternative is to use anthropological methods, gaining access to the parents through agreement with individual youths on the street. Although this method has the benefit of working with a non-labeled population, it would be extremely time-consuming and not likely to produce significant numbers of respondents.

A second alternative is to use survey methods, gaining access to parents through an existing program. That was the alternative chosen here. The experiences we had show that this use of survey methods is possible if certain precautions are taken. A 68 percent return rate was obtained by following guidelines suggested by clinicians involved in service outreach. However, only relative assurance can be given that those interviewed will be representative of the population.

A third alternative might be contemplated—collecting data at the time of arrest and adjudication. In retrospect, it would appear that this might be the most favorable alternative. Research on a population which has already completed a service does not allow the use of the client as a resource toward studying family life. Under such conditions, research will be ham-

pered not only by refusals and resistance but by the inability to locate the prospective respondents. One way around this would be to combine research and service by collecting systematic data as children and parents pass through a program. Service providers might think of using well thought-out, theoretically informed research instruments in assessing family history, present situation and needs. Social workers are ideally positioned for this kind of research and it would be in keeping with the role of an empirical practitioner (Reid and Smith, 1983).

One problem of accumulating data on families in programs where a child is the focus of intervention is that data obtained from children is likely to be unreliable. Moreover, with the focus on the child, social workers are likely to miss important aspects of family structure and circumstances. Discrepancies between data supplied by court social workers and data uncovered by research interviewers on family structure and place of residence are cases in point.

First impressions suggest that parents of adjudicated teenage prostitutes are likely to present themselves in a positive light; they will appear to be relatively open and truthful and to demonstrate concern for their daughters. Similarly, on the surface they will not appear to present any obvious psychopathology. On the other hand, these attributes should not make service providers believe that giving service will be easy. A large number of the parents were seen as not ready for service, and as some of the experiences described here indicate, the family problems are likely to be severe.

Finally, if we shift from thinking about doing research to thinking about delivering service, this study suggests that a family focused service is possible. Obviously there will be resistance and refusal to participate, and obviously the client population will not be easy to work with. Nevertheless, a significant percentage of the parents are likely to be genuinely concerned about their daughters and to be available—especially if service is provided at the time of adjudication. It will require effort and the redesigning of programs, but it is of enormous benefit for the young women and their families.

REFERENCES

- Barclay, K., and J.L. Gallemore. 1972. "The Family of the Prostitute." *Corrective Psychiatry and the Journal of Social Therapy* 18: 10-16.
- James, Jennifer, and Jane Meyerding. 1977. "Early Sexual Experience as a Factor in Prostitution." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 7: 31-42.
- MacVicar, Katherine, and Marcia Dillon. 1980. "Childhood and Adolescent Development of Ten Female Prostitutes." *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry* 19: 145-149.
- Reid, W.J., and A.D. Smith. 1981. *Research in Social Work*. N.Y.: Columbia University Press.
- Stanton, M. Duncan, and Thomas C. Todd. 1981. "Engaging 'Resistant' Families in Treatment." *Family Process* 20: 261-193.