

ISU research team plans study of rural families ^{Tribune} 9-30-88

AMES -- Rural families and how they are affected by social and economic changes are the focus of the Iowa Youth and Families Project being conducted by a research team at Iowa State University.

Rand Conger, Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Programs in the ISU College of Family and Consumer Sciences, is principal investigator for the project, funded by two grants totaling \$2.5 million.

The project was started in October 1987, with a three-year, \$550,000 grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, and it is being expanded with a five-year, \$1.9 million grant received recently from the National Institute on Mental Health.

The purpose of the National Institute on Drug Abuse grant is to investigate the effects of rural change on adolescent drug and alcohol use, Conger says. Researchers will study family interactions that help families cope with changes and stresses and attempt to determine how characteris-

tics of individual family members influence substance use by adolescents.

The National Institute on Mental Health grant will fund research on rural families' resilience to the rapidly changing social and economic environment in rural Iowa, Conger says. "Stress and change bring some families closer together while others develop enduring problems," he explains. "We want to identify the characteristics that contribute to these differences.

"Results of the study will be valuable to schools, counselors, extension and human services professionals, and others who are involved in working with families and developing programs to help strengthen and improve family life," Conger says.

The research team will study a sample of 500 families from central Iowa. Each family will include two parents and two children with one child being in seventh grade. The families will be interviewed and asked to discuss with one another

their views of family life and the changes they see occurring in rural Iowa.

Conger sees the project as just the beginning of a long-term, multi-faceted study. "We have the resources to do a good job, and we have a large group of families to study. We have just tapped the surface. As we build expertise, the opportunities to expand the funding base will increase," he says. "Federal funding agencies are very interested in what's happening to families and the prevention of problems associated with significant socioeconomic change. There is recognition that most families will experience significant changes during their lifetimes and that we have to be able to help them cope with those changes."

In addition to Conger, the research team includes several ISU faculty members: Rosalie Norem, family environment; Paul Lasley, rural sociology; Fred Lorenz, Statistics and soci-

ology; Ron Simons, sociology; and Les Whitbeck, sociology. Research associates who conduct the day-to-day business of the project are Ruth Book and Jan Melby. Roy Hickman and Toni Genalo, from the survey section of the Statistical Laboratory, have primary responsibility for supervising and training project interviewers. The current project also will employ 13 graduate assistants who will work on various aspects of the project.

The project is administered through the newly created Social and Behavioral Research Center for Rural Health. The center is supported through several sources of funding including: The Family and Consumer Sciences Research Institute, the ISU President's Excellence Fund, the Iowa Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station, the Cooperative Extension Service and Iowa Methodist Health Systems, Des Moines.