

CHAPTER III

EXTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 The Sociological Study of Stress (1989)

3.1.1 The Structural Context of The Stress Process

In many stressful situations, it is essential to acknowledge that they do not emerge in isolation but can usually be traced back to the surrounding social frameworks and individuals' positions within them (Pearlin, 1989:242). The most extensive of these frameworks are various stratification systems that permeate societies, including those based on social and economic status, race and ethnicity, gender, and age. To the degree that these systems reflect an unequal allocation of resources, opportunities, and self-esteem, occupying a lower status within them may contribute to stressful life circumstances. Consequently, the structural contexts of individuals' lives are essential to the stress process rather than being an afterthought. They represent sources of difficulty and advantage, danger and safety, discord and unity. The key aspect of sociological research on stress is the identification of similar types and levels of stress experienced by individuals who share comparable social and economic circumstances, occupy identical roles, and belong to similar groups associated with a role. Each role is influenced by its situational context. A distinguishing characteristic of sociological role sets is that they are generally lasting and stable, often holding great significance for those involved. Sociological research on stress focuses on the socially influenced

distribution of the elements involved in the stress process, such as stressors, mediators, and outcomes.

3.1.2 Social Stressors

3.1.2.1 Life Events as Stressors

The changes in social life and aging at all levels make sociologists find it challenging to accept the unavoidable aspects. Nevertheless, current evidence suggests that it is not the change itself that is problematic but rather the nature of that change that can be detrimental to individuals. Specifically, undesired, unanticipated, abnormal, and uncontrollable changes are the most harmful. The theoretical foundations, methodologies, and results that initially inspired life events research have each faced critical examination. It is promising that contemporary sociological research on stress is evolving away from some of the earlier assumptions and misunderstandings related to events and their stress-inducing effects.

From a sociological perspective (Pearlin, 1989), personal experiences related to events can frequently be neglected or seen as arbitrary. Nonetheless, incidents closely tied to social and economic contexts should not be regarded as separate happenings. A short analysis of events that demonstrate their connection to social categories, especially role and economic traits, can assist in comprehending their importance within societal frameworks.

3.1.2.2 Chronic Strains as Stressors

Employment, marriage, or parenting challenges significantly impact individuals since these roles are significant. Concentrating on the stresses associated with these roles can strengthen the connections between the environments that primarily shape people's actions, relationships, experiences, and overall well-being. Role overload happens when the expectations placed on a person exceed their physical and emotional limits, a situation often encountered in work, home, and caregiving responsibilities. Conflicts between interpersonal relationships, such as those between partners or parents and their children, frequently contribute to ongoing stress. Inter-role conflict arises when individuals are confronted with competing demands from various roles, especially between their work and family obligations, making it challenging to fulfill the expectations of one without sacrificing the other. Furthermore, role captivity refers to circumstances where individuals feel constrained in a role that they did not choose.

Significant stressors impacting individuals are not limited to prominent positions or duties. Circumstances like living in poverty, experiencing violence in one's neighborhood, and dealing with long-term health issues are widespread sources of stress that affect people beyond their specific roles. Even informal and voluntary roles, such as those in community service and personal relationships, can lead to ongoing stress. This is notably seen in marriage, where a perceived contribution imbalance can

cause tension. Assessing the duration of these chronic stressors is tricky, as problems often arise slowly, making it hard to determine their length accurately.

3.1.2.3 Primary and Secondary Stressors

Research on sociological stress emphasizes the necessity of considering a wide range of stressors in a person's life. When analyzing the relationship between particular stressors, like serious physical injuries and depression, it is essential to recognize that these injuries are not experienced in isolation. Ignoring the presence of overlapping economic, occupational, familial, and social stressors could result in misleading data interpretations. Fluctuations in depressive symptoms can be linked not only to the seriousness of the injury but also to the intricate combination of various stressors. Consequently, sociologists should prioritize understanding how life organization is influenced during the stress process, rather than just focusing on individual stress incidents. Primary stressors are the initial triggers of stress that can come from unforeseen events, such as the death of a loved one or the loss of a job, as well as ongoing difficulties like those found in relationships or the workplace. Conversely, secondary stressors arise in response to the primary stressors. Although termed "secondary" due to their occurrence after primary stressors, they can lead to even greater stress than the primary ones.

Their designation as secondary does not lessen their importance in the overall stress experience. Analyzing social stressors and their connection to individual stress is enhanced by recognizing the social values that shape perceptions of these stressors.

A sociological study of stressors uncovers how larger institutional forces, primary and secondary stressors, and community values affect well-being over time. Consequently, instead of viewing stress as stemming from separate incidents, examining it as a process shaped by interconnected factors is crucial. This research should emphasize understanding the mechanisms and reasons behind these influences, rather than merely concentrating on predictive models or compiling potential contributing factors.

3.2 The Sociological Imagination by C. Wright Mills

In his book titled *The Sociological Imagination*, C. Wright Mills also notably recognizes the parallels between the roles of social scientists and writers. He argues that both sociology and literary forms, whether they are fiction, history, drama, biography, or poetry, aim to comprehend and interpret the happenings in the world and within individuals in their societal contexts (Wright, 1959). However, while Mills concedes that literature may explore similar themes as sociology and can do so with dramatic sharpness, he believes it ultimately falls short of the intellectual precision found in thorough, systematic, and critical social examination.

Analyzing the connection between sociology and artistic or fictional forms allows us to illuminate the current structure of disciplines. It aids in challenging the established ways of organizing knowledge and thought. Revealing the distinction between sociology and literature, as well as other types of art and fiction, enables us not only to recognize the closeness and interactions between these areas but also to better leverage the analytical possibilities presented by art and fiction. Wright propose

that it illustrated how Americans simultaneously seek to be independent individuals as required by the capitalist system while also belonging to society and conforming to its norms. In this sense, Wright views the classical Western as embodying the tension between institutional limitations and the cultural principles of a market-driven society.

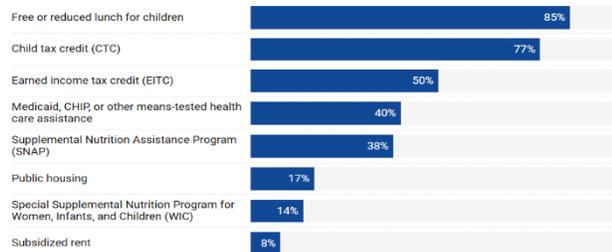
3.3 Single Mothers in the U.S. and The Data

In 2022, nearly 16 million children under 18 resided with single mothers, who often face low earnings and high poverty rates, leading to these children being at a greater risk of experiencing poverty than those in households with married parents. Studies show that these circumstances especially impact white children, Black children, and Latino children. Additionally, children living in single-parent households may face emotional and behavioral challenges due to the stress and instability associated with single motherhood. While child support can provide a crucial financial resource for single parents, the existing systems often fall short of adequately supporting these mothers, with only a small fraction receiving the child support they are owed. A reformed child support system that focuses on providing opportunities rather than imposing penalties could better address the needs of single mothers and their children. The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, which aims to assist low-income families, is not adequately supporting many single mothers by failing to provide sufficient economic stability through employment or essential cash aid. Consequently, many participants see decreased employment after completing the program, resulting in low wages and enduring poverty. Although TANF has helped

some single mothers, a large number remain “disconnected”, living in extreme poverty and confronting issues related to health, education, and food security.

Single mothers utilize a variety of social safety net programs, but more support is needed

Share of single mothers receiving selected government subsidies, 2022

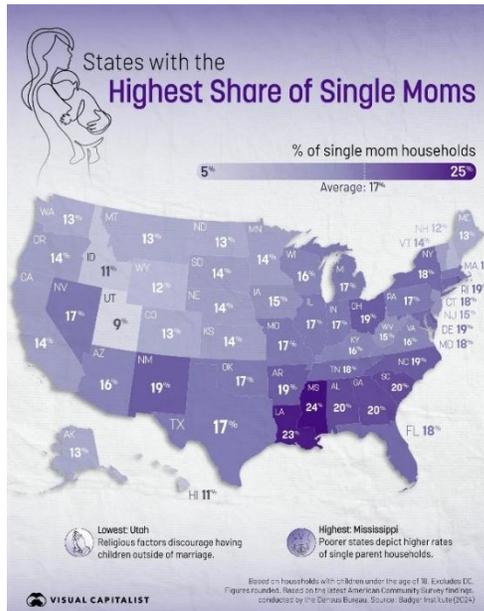


► Note

Source: Authors' analysis is based on Sarah Flood and others, "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey Data for Social, Economic, and Health Research: Version 11.0 (dataset): Annual Social and Economic Supplements" (Minneapolis:

Picture 5. The Data of Government Subsidies for Single Mothers in 2022

Various government programs, apart from TANF, significantly assist low-income single mothers. In 2022, around 38% participated in SNAP, 14% were involved in WIC, and 85% took advantage of free or reduced-price lunches for their kids. Moreover, 17% received public housing assistance while 8% benefited from rent subsidies. About 40% of single mothers were covered by Medicaid, CHIP, or other programs based on income eligibility. While spending cash on assistance has declined, eligibility criteria and outreach improvements have made these essential programs more accessible. Refundable tax credits such as the Child Tax Credit (CTC) and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) provide additional financial support, with 77% of single mothers receiving the CTC in 2022 and 50% receiving some form of EITC. Significantly, the ARPA temporarily increased these tax credits in 2021, leading to an estimated 97% of single mothers qualifying for the CTC before expansion ended without renewal from Congress at the year's close.



Picture 6. The data on the percentage of Single Mothers in the U.S.

According to the picture, about 17% of families in the U.S. with children under 18 are led by a single mother. This means there are more than 6 million single mothers across the country. Florida is in the 14th position of the single mothers' population in the U.S. It still has a high percentage of the population among the other states in the U.S., since the picture shows that the average rate of single-mom households is 17%. In contrast, they have 18% of single-mom households in Florida, one percent higher than the average rate. According to the United States Census Bureau (2023), The place is in Kissimmee, Florida, where the film takes place. Seventy-nine thousand two hundred twenty-six people live in Kissimmee City.