

INTRODUCTION

Recently, the federal government has attempted to support marriage by providing financial and political support for initiatives that reinforce stable marriages and relationships, particularly targeting poor and disadvantaged groups. At the same time sociological researchers have studied the marriage attitudes and views of low-income or poor populations (e.g. Edin and Kefalas 2005; Lichter ,Batson, Brown. 2004; Waller 2002), with special attention to single mothers. However, little work has focused on the views of men and women who are the targets of current policy efforts, the actual participants in marriage initiatives.

The aim of this paper is to understand the views about marriage, as well as the potential barriers to marriage among participants in a marriage initiative, specifically the lack of marriageable men. Also, while much existing research focuses on the marriageability of men, including the impact of incarceration, domestic abuse, substance abuse, and gender distrust on relationships, we introduce the notion that not all women are marriage material. We consider the qualities of men and women that make them less marriageable using respondents' own words to give depth to our understanding. In addition, we examine how the lack of possible partners, along with the cumulative effect of experiences with abuse, incarceration, and gender distrust impact respondents' views on marriage.

Existing research suggests that low income parents desire to get married however economic barriers prevent them from doing so (Gibson-Davis, Edin, and McLanahan 2005). Our work is important because it contributes to an understanding of the challenges that exist in the formation of marriages and relationships using respondents'

own words to describe their views on families and union formation. This qualitative approach allows us to realize the depths of these issues, capturing nuances that often go unnoticed in survey data, thus providing a more complete assessment of the complex and difficult life circumstances that our sample face on a daily basis.

BACKGROUND

A popular explanation for declines in marriage is the lack of marriageable men (Wilson 1987). The problems faced by young men in inner-city neighborhoods include a lack of employment opportunities, high rates of incarceration, substance abuse, and involvement in the criminal justice system. However, the lack of marriageable men alone does not explain changes in marriage patterns (McLaughlin and Lichter 1997), though it is certainly tied to lower marriage rates. Issues surrounding substance abuse may prevent men from engaging in more stable economic activities and potentially lead to problems with incarceration and domestic violence. Waller (2002) finds that single mothers are aware of these limitations and may avoid marriage to prevent interacting with men who may destabilize their families.

Economic Factors and the Marriage Ideal

Of particular interest for this targeted population are the substantial institutional economic constraints that prevent many individuals from developing healthy relationships. As Wilson (1987) notes, unemployment rates are high for many inner city men, and this may dramatically hinder their marriage prospects. Being a financial provider is the traditional, and perhaps most important role, for men in families (Nock 1998; Townsend 2002). Many women still desire the traditional male provider role as the

ideal (Raley and Bratter 2003). Providing financial security for a family can be exceptionally difficult for men in low-income communities because of poor economic structural constraints in their communities.

Economic hardship does not just occur on the larger institutional level. There are many micro-level economic influences that occur in peoples' everyday lives that can deter them from having healthy romantic relationships. As Edin and Kefalas (2005) state, "the bar for marriage is high" (p. 202). Women and men want to be economically set before they get married rather than establish themselves during the early years of marriage.

At the same time, women are increasingly self-sufficient and have become less dependent upon their spouses for economic support. In fact, women with greater economic resources are more likely to marry (Raley 1996; Sweeney 2002). Edin and Kefalas (2005) find that self-sufficiency is especially important because single mothers may not be able to rely on their partner's financial support to provide for a family. Being employed and having financial security also provides women with more power to negotiate in their relationships and challenge traditional gender roles. Female employment and economic stability is one component related to union formation and can make women more attractive marriage partners.

Incarceration

A history of incarceration has been found to adversely affect the economic condition of individuals once they have been released. Geller, Garfinkel, and Western (2006) analyze the impact of incarceration on employment and wages using data from the Fragile Families Survey. They find that men who have been incarcerated are less likely to be

employed than those who have never been in prison and, should they have a job, their wages are lower. However, for the most part, these differences are related to the dissimilarity in behavioral traits and human capital possessed by the ex-offenders compared to those who have never been in prison (Geller et al. 2006).

Using data on unmarried men from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Lopoo and Western (2005) analyze the impact of imprisonment on marriage rates. They find that men who are in prison are only one-fifth as likely to get married as men who have never been in prison. However, they note that the lower odds of marriage among these men are the result of characteristics that put them at risk for incarceration, such as lower levels of education and employment, or participation in criminal activity, and not their incarceration, per se (Lopoo and Western 2005).

Domestic Abuse

Physical abuse can adversely affect family relationships and forestall romantic relationships. Using data from the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study, Waller and Swisher (2006) find that fathers with risk factors, such as physical abuse, are less likely to be romantically involved with the mothers of their children. The mothers in their study are inclined to select out of relationships that may be harmful to themselves or their children. Furthermore, especially in cases with physical abuse, mothers are careful to monitor the access fathers have with their children.

Abuse that takes place during childhood can also have a long-term impact on relationships. Larson and LaMont (2005) analyze the relationship between childhood sexual abuse and marriage attitudes in adulthood. They find that sexual abuse during childhood is significantly related to negative attitudes and feelings about marriage, and

lower levels of readiness for marriage. They suggest that this traumatic experience changes women's perceptions about marriage, making them believe that marriages are difficult to maintain, and making them doubtful about their chances of being able to have a happy marriage.

Substance abuse

Substance abuse, including drugs or alcohol, can have detrimental effects on relationships. Research suggests that substance abuse can prevent union formation in that women do not want to form unions with men who abuse drugs or drink excessively (Carlson et al. 2004). Furthermore, substance abuse can disrupt existing unions.

Carlson and colleagues (2004) use data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study to examine union formation among unmarried parents who have recently had a child. They find that women who report that the child's father has problems with alcohol and drugs are less likely to form a cohabiting union with the father. Moreover, cohabiting relationships that involve drug and alcohol abuse are 39% more likely to end.

Substance abuse is also a problem for those who are already married. Amato and Rogers (1997) consider the extent to which marital problems, such as drinking or drug use, predict divorce. They find that substance use increases the odds of marital dissolution.

Gender Distrust

Gender distrust has been addressed as a possible explanation for the divergent marriage patterns of low-income families compared to their middle-class counterparts. The notion of gender distrust has been addressed in both qualitative (Waller 2001; Coley 2002) and

quantitative (Waller and McLanahan 2005; Carlson, McLanahan, England 2004) assessments of union formation among low-income populations. Relying on focus groups of low income mothers, Furstenberg (2001) argues that there is a culture of gender distrust that has an enduring effect on women's beliefs about marriage and romantic relationships in general. He notes that many women expect romantic relationships to fail, and will carefully monitor the behavior of men waiting for them to mess-up. Lichter, Batson, Brown (2004) find that the majority of disadvantaged women expect to marry even though there are obstacles, like gender distrust, that forestall their efforts.

Existing literature on low-income families suggests that gender distrust is associated with both marital behaviors and attitudes about marriage. Carlson et al. (2004) examine the marital status of unmarried parents one year after the birth of a child. They find that mothers with high gender distrust have lower odds of entering either a cohabiting or marriage union after the birth of the child. Interestingly, father's distrust of women does not have a significant effect on union transitions. Similarly, Waller and McLanahan (2001) find that mothers and fathers who report high gender distrust have lower expectations to marry.

Mental and Physical Health

Mental and physical health impairments may adversely affect potential romantic relationships, and may make individuals less than ideal partners. Research to-date focuses on whether those who are healthier and happier tend to marry more often than those who are not, or whether marriage makes individuals healthier and happier. Nock (2005) argues that if the former is true than the number of unmarried individuals who are also unhealthy and unhappy will be disproportionately high. Similarly, if the latter is true

than unmarried individuals will still be disproportionately more unhealthy and unhappy than married individuals. Arguments have been made in support of both theories.

Waldron, Hughes, and Brooks (1996) find that poor health does not affect entry into marriage, though it does increase the chances of divorce for those already married. This is not surprising given that the stress of poor health, financial and otherwise, is likely to adversely affect the quality of one's relationships. Good health appears to make unemployed women more likely to get married, but the same is not true for employed women (Nock 2005). Individuals who are healthy are likely to attract similar partners, while evidence suggests that most people adopt a healthier lifestyle once they are married, often at the behest of one's spouse (House, Landis, and Umberson 1988).

Presence of Children

The presence of children often acts as a deterrent to marriage among both men and women. Analyses using national data indicate that premarital births reduce the odds of marriage (Lichter and Graefe 2001; Upchurch, Lillard, and Panis 2001). Single mothers are less likely than childless single women to expect to marry and realize their marriage desires (Lichter et al. 2004). Children require economic resources and investments, and some men and women may not be interested in taking on additional responsibilities.

Even among disadvantaged subgroups of women who experience high levels of premarital childbearing, the effect of children on marriage is still negative (Lichter et al. 2003). Edin and Kefalas (2005) report that a strategy employed by some single mothers is to focus on their children and avoid potentially unstable relationships and marriage.

Father Involvement and Child Support

Following a nonmarital birth or divorce, children usually live with their mother, thus, the majority of nonresident parents tend to be fathers. Children with actively involved fathers, non-resident or otherwise, experience more positive outcomes (King and Sobolewski 2006; Parke and Buriel 1998; Barber 1994; Amato and Gilbreth 1999). Mott (1990) suggests that among African Americans, non-resident fathers still play a key role in the lives of their children. They are more likely to live near their children and to be a relatively common presence in their children's lives. However, these ties may be tenuous as Manning, Stewart, and Smock (2003) suggests that when non-resident fathers forge new romantic relationships and have more children, they are less likely to visit non-resident children and are less likely to contribute the allotted amount of child support.

Investment of money in non-resident children is a valuable transfer between father and child. Brooks-Gunn, Britto, and Brandy (1999) argue that children's economic hardship is associated with a greater risk of poor nutrition, health problems, poor school performance, dropping out of school, emotional distress, and behavior difficulties. Non-resident fathers' total income is less important than the amount transferred to children (Marsiglio, Amato, and Lamb 2000). Low-income single mothers who rely on child support payments from non-resident fathers are particularly vulnerable to the lifestyle choices that these men make and to the social environment that precludes consistent employment.

Marrying the Father

Marrying the child's father is often not a possibility for mothers as too much time may have passed since the initial relationship, and children may be in their teens. It is quite

unrealistic for some respondents to consider marriage, and many mothers do not discuss marriage as a possibility. Data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study indicate that the majority of extra-marital births to adult women occur within the context of a romantic relationship. When asked in the hours immediately following the birth of their child what their chances were of marrying their partner, 75% of mothers rate their chances as at least 50-50, and 60% indicate that their chances were good or almost certain (Carlson et al. 2004). These same couples remain optimistic about their marriage prospects even up to two months subsequent to the birth. Edin and Reed (2005) argue that many disadvantaged women have children in the context of romantic relationships that are relatively new and of low quality. In many cases, these births are unplanned and occur when the couple has been together for less than a year. Given their reverence for marriage, it is not surprising for disadvantaged mothers to postpone marriage to their children's father until they can ensure that he is a suitable partner. Some mothers avoid relationships with the biological fathers of their children due to problems with the law, drugs and alcohol abuse, or domestic abuse. In these cases it seems as if the mother is exercising good judgment by not marrying the biological father and choosing to focus on the relationship with their children.

Multiple Partner Fertility

Another issue facing this population involves multiple partner fertility- having children with more than one partner (Carlson and Furstenberg 2006). Single mothers may struggle to establish paternity and child support when there are multiple partners involved. Men also bring children to a new relationship and may be supporting children from multiple women. A man may not want to marry a woman with a child because he

may not want to care for and support another man's child. Similarly, a woman may not want to be romantically involved with a man who has to pay child support to someone else (Edin and Reed 2005). The emotional and financial strain that these different sets of children and their other parent have on a romantic relationship cannot be underestimated. Carlson and Furstenberg (2006) note that when individuals have children by multiple partners, parental resources must be spread across all relationships, and parenting quality may suffer compared to two-parent married couples with only biological children. Children from other partners may not receive the same quality of care as those children that the couple shares in common. Currently, only one study has considered the effect of children by multiple partners on marriage transitions. Using data from the Fragile Families Survey, Carlson, McLanahan, and England (2004) find that a father's children by other partners affect marriage transition, while a mother's children by other men do not.

CURRENT INVESTIGATION

This paper adopts a qualitative perspective to provide insight into the views of participants in a marriage initiative. We focus specifically on how the views of respondents align with current literature on the lack of marriageable men. Our analyses provide a more nuanced assessment of these factors from previous work. In addition, we extend the concept of marriageability by examining the limitations of women in the marriage market.

Our analyses detail both structural and individual constraints to marriage. Structural constraints refer to more macro-level circumstances that impede individuals' ability to form and maintain healthy relationships. These circumstances reflect the

general socio-demographic characteristics of a given community (e.g. divorce and employment rates), and will variously affect individuals' dyadic experiences. Individual constraints refer to more micro-level circumstances that impede individuals' ability to form and maintain healthy relationships. These circumstances are unique to the individual (e.g. experience of childhood abuse), and reflect a particular family history and background, and set of life experiences.

This study contributes to existing literature in three key ways. First, we use a unique sample of participants in a marriage initiative program. Second, our work supplements current research by including respondents' own views on marriage and the marriage market. We provide a direct assessment of their attitudes and opinions rather than solely relying upon observed relationships from quantitative analyses. Third, our study moves beyond the scope of quantitative surveys to include a broader set of factors that are not always measured in large-scale surveys (e.g. gender distrust, ideal partner). Our work emphasizes the important life circumstances and marriage beliefs of a low-income population that is the target of federal policies concerning marriage promotion.

DATA and METHODS

The Marriage Initiative

From July through September 2006, 57 participants were interviewed shortly after completing a program at a large marriage initiative program in a medium-sized city in the Midwest. The marriage initiative draws on two specific programs – one based on the family in general and one specific to finding a good marriage partner. Our sample

mirrors the participants in the larger program in terms of age, presence of children, education, and marital status.

Qualitative Data and Methods

In order to be included in our study, individuals must have completed a certain number of classes offered in either one of the two primary programs. Interviews were conducted and tape-recorded in private at the program sites. The interviews were semi-structured and relied on open-ended replies thus allowing participants to use their own words to answer questions. The interviews on average 90 minutes long and include an average of 63 pages of single-spaced text. Following the interviews, we generated a code list that covered most of the themes or topics included in the interviews. We coded the interviews using Atlas/ti and analyzed our findings. This process involved considering how multiple themes intersect in an effort to adequately portray the complicated nature of respondents' lives

Quantitative Data and Methods

To supplement data garnered from interviews we also include results from a Marriage Attitude Survey which all program participants are required to complete. Three items on the survey measure attitudes towards marriage: "People should marry" "I am scared of marriage," and "Most marriages are unhappy." Participants who are not married are asked about their marriage expectations with the following question: "I expect to get married to someone during my lifetime." One question is used to gauge participants' views on divorce, "When people don't get along, I believe they should divorce." Another question asks participants to ponder the importance of marriage for children: "It is better for children if their parents are married." Gender distrust is measured by two items,

“Men cannot be trusted to be faithful” and “Women cannot be trusted to be faithful.”

Participants could respond in one of the following ways: (1) Strongly Agree, (2) Agree, (3) Disagree, and (4) Strongly Disagree. Responses from the quantitative attitudes survey are used to tie together the qualitative work that emphasizes the importance of respondents’ own words.

In addition to the Marriage Attitude Survey, we also developed a Cumulative Disadvantage Scale¹. This scale measures the interlinking aspects of people’s lives- such as unemployment, abuse, history of incarceration, and the presence of children- that make respondents’ lives more complicated. People accumulate points on the scale for each type of disadvantage they have experienced in their lives. This scale is used to illustrate how life’s complexities may make some individuals less ideal marriage partners.

Descriptive Results for Participants in the Program²

Table 1 shows the socioeconomic characteristics for our sample of 57 respondents. The majority (93%) is female. Forty-seven percent of our sample is African-American, 29% are white, 22% are Hispanic, and only 2% are Native American. The average age of respondents is 36-years-old and the sample participants range from 18- to 68-years-old. The majority of respondents (38%) are between 25- and 34-years old, 30% are 45-years and older, 18% are between 35- and 44-years old, 11% are between 20- and 24-years old, and only 3% of our sample is under age 20.

With respect to relationship status, 18% are married, 2% are engaged, 7% are cohabiting with a romantic partner, 30% are dating, and the majority of respondents,

¹ See Appendix for measurement instrument.

² It is important to note that results concerning abuse, incarceration, and religion are garnered from interview assessments because they are not specifically addressed on formal questionnaires. Given that we do not formally ask questions pertaining to these issues, it is possible that our numbers underestimate the level of abuse, incarceration, and religion in the study sample.

44%, are single. Twenty percent of our sample have divorced in the past or are in the process of divorcing their current partner (not shown).

The majority of our sample (75%) has at least one child present in their lives, either biological or otherwise. Of those with biological children, 19% have one child, 14% have two children, 25% have three children, and 18% have four or more. Twenty-five percent of respondents state that they have no children present in their lives. Among those with children, 44% have experienced multiple partner fertility. That is, for nearly half of our sample, there are children with the same mother but with different fathers, thus creating many half-siblings. Most of the parents in our sample are unmarried (81%). Among those who are not married, 38% are single, 32% are currently in a dating relationship, and 11% cohabit.

Nearly one quarter (23%) of our sample has less than a high school diploma. Forty percent of our sample has graduated from high school, 25% have some college experience, and approximately 12% are college graduates.

Participants originate from a relatively disadvantaged population. According to 2000 census data, 44% of our sample resides in census tracts where more than one quarter of the population lives below the poverty line. In other words, nearly half the respondents in our study live in areas characterized by high poverty. In our sample, 70% report annual household earnings of \$15,000 or less, with 14% without any income whatsoever. Approximately 40% percent of the sample earns less than \$5,000, and only 9% earn more than \$20,000 a year.

Seventy percent of our sample is unemployed and only 30% are employed full or part-time. Given the high poverty rates, the low incomes, and employment record, the

high use of benefit programs in participant households is not surprising. Seventy-seven percent of our sample currently receives public assistance in the form of Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), food stamps, cash assistance, Medicaid, and subsidized housing.

Sixty-eight percent of our sample state that they have faith in God³. Of this group, 39% actually attend church. Of those that have faith, but do not attend church (according to the interviews), some state that they believe in God, but have not found the right church, others consider churches too restrictive on their behavior, and yet others state that they do not need a church to speak to God. However, the extent of their faith or religiosity is not obvious from the interviews, as we did not directly ask about their religious beliefs.

Two-fifths (42%) of our respondents have experience with the criminal justice system. Seven percent have been incarcerated themselves, 28% have had a partner who spent time in prison or jail, and 7% have had a parent or child incarcerated. While the majority of respondents who have been incarcerated are the male partners of our respondents, one of our female respondents also spent time in prison⁴. Among our respondents, 33% have experienced some form of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse and 7% have been witness to abuse. Finally, 4% admit to having perpetrated abuse on their partner.

³ The information on religion, abuse, and incarceration are garnered from the interviews, but we did not specifically ask about these issues. Thus, these numbers may underestimate the actual counts.

⁴ Again, the data on incarceration and abuse is limited to only those respondents who mention these issues in their interviews. The actual number of cases may be higher.

Table 1. Socioeconomic Characteristics of Sample Participants

<i>Sex</i>		<i>Multiple Partner Fertility*</i>	
Female	93%	Multiple Partner Fertility	44%
Male	7%	Single Partner Fertility	56%
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>		<i>Educational Attainment</i>	
African American	47%	Less than or some High School	23%
White	29%	High School Graduate	40%
Hispanic	22%	Some College/Trade School	25%
Native American	2%	College Graduate	12%
<i>Age</i>		<i>Employment</i>	
Mean Age	36	Unemployed	70%
Age Range	18-68	Employed (Full- and Part-time)	30%
18-19 years old	3%	<i>Household Income</i>	
20-24 years old	11%	Zero dollars	14%
25-34 years old	38%	Between \$1,000 and \$5,000	26%
35- 44 years old	18%	Between \$5,001 and \$10,000	18%
45 and older	30%	Between \$10,001 and \$15,000	12%
<i>Relationship Status</i>		Between \$15,001 and \$20,000	11%
Single	44%	Between \$20,001 and \$30,000	5%
Dating	30%	More than \$40,000	4%
Married	18%	No Information Provided	10%
Cohabiting	7%	<i>Public Assistance</i>	
Engaged	2%	Receives Public Assistance	77%
<i>Presence of Children</i>		No Assistance	7%
Presence of At Least One Child	82%	No Information Provided	16%
Biological Children	75%	<i>Religion</i>	
One Biological Child	19%	Attend Church	39%
Two Biological Children	14%	Belief in God and/or Attend Church	68%
Three Biological Children	25%	<i>Incarceration</i>	
Four or More Biological Children	18%	Partner Incarcerated	28%
No Biological Children	25%	Respondent Incarcerated	7%
<i>Union Status of Parents*</i>		Other Incarcerated	7%
Single	38%	<i>Abuse</i>	
Dating	32%	Experienced Abuse	33%
Cohabiting	11%	Witnessed Abuse	7%
Married	19%	Perpetrated Abuse	4%

N= 57

*Among those who have children (N=43)

RESULTS

We examine the qualities of men and women that limit their marriageability. Female respondents often cite men's employment, incarceration history, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, and substance abuse as reasons for why they are not married. While most research on marriage has highlighted the inadequacies of men, claiming that women do not marry because they lack a pool of marriageable men, studies have neglected the characteristics of women that may make them less suitable for marriage. We find that there are some women who also have unattractive characteristics and show how these impact their relationships.

As to be expected, the lack of quality characteristics in potential mates influences respondents' views on marriage. We include the results of the Marriage Attitude Survey to illustrate what respondents think about marriage, divorce, and childbearing. In addition to this, we present a Cumulative Disadvantage Scale that measures the difficult and complex aspects of respondents' lives that impact marriage attitudes.

VIEWS ON MARRIAGE

We use the Marriage Attitude Survey to understand the attitudes of respondents towards marriage, divorce, and childbearing. The general assessment of respondents is that marriage is the ideal relationship status. We find that, on average, the majority (82%) of our respondents think people should marry, however, 42% are afraid to get married. In the interviews, respondents often note the supposed permanency of marriage, and similarly the marriage survey indicates that 75% of our sample does not agree that people should get divorced, even if they are unhappy. This finding may explain why

some respondents are afraid to get married. Forty-three percent of our sample agrees that most marriage are unhappy. If this is the case, and most respondents believe that marriages are supposed to be permanent, then it is understandable that almost half are afraid to get married. Nonetheless, among respondents who are not married, 83% do expect to get married at some point. Finally, more than half (57%) of respondents agree that it is better for children if their parents are married.

MARRIAGEABLE MEN AND WOMEN

Economic Factors and the Ideal of Marriage

Many individuals in our sample find it difficult to find stable employment due to factors such as low education, poor job opportunities, or lack of skills. Lack of employment is directly related to stress in current relationships, and negatively impacts the possibility of future relationships. Scott, 48-years-old and married, explains how unemployment impacts his relationship:

Ahh, right now, employment ... And it's not, she doesn't bring it up. But I'm constantly bringing it up, because I just don't feel right not working. You know what I'm saying? Ahh, I was working part time, ahh, at one of my brother's construction companies. But, ahh, that weaned off. So now I'm seeking employment.

Clearly, Scott perceives not having a job as a major source of stress in his marriage. As suggested in the literature employment and providing income is a priority for men. His lack of employment (complicated by having been imprisoned) inevitably spills over into Scott's married life.

Women in the sample also recognized the importance for a potential partner to have steady employment. Ida, a 33-year-old dating mother, describes how she made poor

decisions in past partners particularly involving their employment status, “I got to make better choices ... I just had a chance to go stay with Frank. But I know if I did get in another relationship how I would just make better choices. He would have a job.” Even though Ida had dated unemployed men in the past, she considers that a mistake and wants to change her dating patterns. As illustrated by this quote, unemployment directly prevented her from getting romantically re-involved in a relationship with a prior boyfriend.

Several respondents express concerns about losing their public assistance should they marry, and many feel that they cannot and should not marry while receiving assistance. For some, getting married means forgoing disability checks, housing support, and welfare checks. Janice, a 30-year-old dating mother of three, explains, “if I ain’t got nothing, my rent will get paid ... So if, if you can’t get your business together as far as getting us a home to live in, because once I do get married they gonna take it from me, I’m gonna have to give it up.” Respondents view financial stability not only as a prerequisite for marriage but also as a way to maintain a stable marriage. As 34-year-old single mother of six Tori explains, “a man, a woman shouldn’t be on welfare and married.”

Economic limitations play out in the lives of the respondents on the individual level as well. Some respondents’ desire for a lavish wedding celebration, but inability to afford one, negatively impacts their decision to marry. Lack of financial support from families and difficult life circumstances prohibit some respondents from having a “proper” wedding ceremony, and many forgo marriage rather than settle for a courthouse ceremony. Most people want to be financially stable before moving into a marriage

relationship, and one sign of being economically established is being able to afford a big wedding celebration. Twenty-six-year-old cohabitor Alan explains that he is,

Thinking about getting married ... I didn't have the money at the time, but I was thinking about getting married to [my girlfriend] and getting off of disability ... I needed \$4,000 ... It costs \$35 for the license. It's gonna cost me more pain in order to get a job to work to make the type of money to have a wedding and to support my fiancée. I'm on disability. I only bring \$600 a month. On that type of money budget, I don't have money left over at the end of the month to put aside to have a nice, beautiful wedding ... it's gonna cost me more than \$3,000.

Finally, establishing personal independence prior to marriage is important for some respondents. Even though marriage is desirable, some women delay marriage until their lives are in order. Jill, a 21-year-old dating black mother explains:

I'm just not ready to get married. I want my career ... I want my house. I want my children to be stable. And from there, I can think about me. But right now, I'm on the grind and I'm trying to get myself together. I just honestly I just really want to get what I need to get out of the way before I look at the whole thing of marriage.

Some women view marriage as problematic in terms of gender roles. They fear having to relinquish their independence to do the "housewife thing." Twenty-five-year-old Ramona, a single mother of one, explains,

And, my, my fear of getting married is I just, you know, I don't want to be tied down. That's the thing. I've always been able to go as I want, do as I want. If I bring a husband in there, I know I'm gonna have to stay at home, you know, and do the family thing and the housewife thing. And that's not something that I want right now. With my work schedule and my son, you know, I'm at the point where right now I want to be free.

Incarceration

The nearly half (42%) of our sample that has experience with the criminal justice system illustrates the relevance of incarceration in the lives of our respondents and similar people in their communities. Incarceration of one's current partner serves as a deterrent to

marriage for obvious reasons. Mae, 36-years-old, single, and a foster-care parent is reluctant to become involved with an incarcerated man. She explains that her partner “wanted ... to get married while he was locked up ... And I told him I didn’t want my first marriage to be, you know, in no prison system.” It also appears that the return home from incarceration creates extra tension. There may be unrealistic expectations and difficulty coping with newly found freedom. Debby, 56-years-old, married and a mother of four admits that her recently released husband had to “learn how to be husband and father.” Scott, 48-years-old and married also details the stress his imprisonment caused in his relationship, “I just came home from prison, ahh, not quite a year ago. And, ahh, we’re having a lot of issues readjusting back to each other due to the fact of the amount of time that I was away.” The experience of incarceration may add additional stress on an already fragile relationship, and may ultimately result in the termination of a relationship.

Incarceration also has a negative impact on employment opportunities. Similar to other studies, we find that our respondents struggle to maintain reliable employment once they have been involved in the criminal justice system. Scott explains the difficulty of finding employment post-incarceration, “so now I’m seeking employment. And with this ... felony now on my record, it’s like my chances went from up here to down there of finding employment.” Many of our respondents come from disadvantaged backgrounds that impede their employment opportunities, and incarceration only lessens their ability to support themselves, romantic partners, and children.

Substance Abuse

Respondents cite their partners' drug and alcohol abuse as a key factor that creates instability and stress in their relationships. Finding a partner who is clean and sober is a prerequisite for many women in this study. Jackie, a 30-year-old single mother of three, says of her ideal partner, "I will not accept any one of those guys with alcohol and drug problems."

Some of the issues surrounding drugs and alcohol are tied to money and employment. For many, addressing these problems is a step toward marriage, but they may underlie partners' unwillingness to settle down. Twenty-five-year-old Latisha, a single mother of four explains:

Mainly if he stops the drinking I would marry him. I wouldn't care about him smoking weed. He was drinking, partying. He'd get off work and he'd go straight to his friend's house and start getting drunk. He'd come home late. I'd have to force him to get up and go to work.

Drugs often become the unwelcome third wheel in respondents' relationships. Couples struggle to maintain normalcy while denying the impact that drugs and alcohol have on their relationships. Forty-eight-year-old Scott admits that he "would say [our relationship] probably got crowded ... And, I mean it was evident in certain areas of our relationship. In other areas it was just ignored. I think my wife at that particular time, I think she loved me so deeply that she overlooked or looked the other way when it came to certain things and situations."

Female participants are particularly sensitive about exposing children to their partners' alcohol and drug use. Behavior that may be tolerated when it impacts a couple becomes exceedingly troublesome when children are involved. Twenty-five-year old Latisha explains how she:

Came home one time early, and I caught him just as he had injected. And I just

about killed him ... Because our son was in the home ... When I saw him and that look on his face, like, 'what?' I just, I just lost it ... I just hit him on the side of the head, and he fell down ... I said ...you just get away from me and this child ... In fact, you are never coming in this home again. And I would slam the door, and he looked like such a little puppy. But I thought ... you compromised my son.

Domestic Abuse

One third of our sample (33%) has experienced physical, sexual, or emotional abuse and 7% have witnessed abuse between family members. Four percent of our sample admits to having perpetrated abuse upon their partner. Of that 4 percent, half of the cases were women. This suggests that women are also capable of abuse, thus making them less than suitable partners.

Many respondents experienced childhood abuse at the hands of parents, or witnessed violence between their parents and/or their partners. Mary, a 31-year-old single mother of two, explains how experiencing childhood abuse impacts her current relationships, "the reason why I think I probably acted like that towards ... I guess I was molested when I was younger. But I don't really know. Physically I don't want a man touching me. It is just weird sometimes."

Abuse affects more than the immediate romantic dyad. When children are present in the relationship, violence often spills over and adversely affects them as well. Ida, a 33-year-old dating mother of six explains how her partner's abuse affected the relationships her children had with their nonresident fathers, "so, and then he was aggressive when my other baby's daddies would come to pick up their children; and he didn't want them to come to the house." Women are often reluctant to bring men into their lives when they have young children (especially daughters) living in the house because they fear sexual abuse. After her partner raped her daughter, 39-year-old dating

mother of four Mimi demanded a divorce. Holly, a 53-year-old single mother of one daughter, explains that:

By having a teenager I got to be able to trust the guy that he's ... not gonna touch my child in an inappropriate manner ... like, putting his hand on her where he's not supposed to ... It's hard to trust a man ... And you hear so many times that a child is being molested by the stepfather, and I don't want that.

Violence is sometimes an indirect cause of some other issue in respondents' lives.

Laurie, a 31-year-old single mother of three explains how the father of her children erupts in anger at the prospect of providing child support:

A lot of the reasons why he got mad ... was because I'm getting child support. And he'd ... break my stuff so I'd have to pay all kinds of extra money ... he didn't like that I was getting money for them, even though he's supposed to pay child support. But, I mean to me it's easier not having to be in fear.

Respondents cite various ways of coping with violence in their relationships and the most common reaction is to end the relationship. Thirty-three-year-old dating mother of six Ida states, "Thomas was abusive. That's why we broke up." Other respondents, like Jill, a 21-year-old dating mother of two, stay in their abusive relationships in hopes that things will improve, "I stayed because I loved him, and I knew he loved me. He just had some issues ... that I thought I could help him with."

While some respondents leave at the first signs of abuse, others retaliate after being victims for too long. Twenty-one-year-old mother of two Jill explains that she, "quit because I got tired of him being abusive towards me. And I quit. And I threw the first lick and I threw a lot of things and I messed him up real bad." This quote illustrates that, while Jill was provoked, women are also capable of enacting violence, and are not always innocent victims in domestic strife.

Lastly, abuse perpetrated by men is the more traditional dynamic in romantic

relationships. Alan, a 26-year-old cohabiting father of two admits to abusing his partner repeatedly, “yeah, there’s times where I’ve beaten the living shit out of her, and I’ve been thrown in jail for six-and-a-half months.”

Gender Distrust

The marriage survey results indicate that 33% of our respondents agree that men cannot be trusted to be faithful, while 21% believe that women cannot be faithful. There are numerous complexities in the lives of the respondents that lead to a general distrust of others. Marie, a 39-year-old single mother of five explains how negative life experiences have led her to distrust others and be leary of new romantic partners, “I’m gonna have to at least date a person six months before I really can say, well okay, I can go to your house and sit and watch TV ... Because ... I don’t trust anyone ... and that comes from when I was robbed in the supermarket; I was robbed on the city bus.” Others, like Lydia, a 22-year-old dating mother of four, admit they are not sure they will ever trust another individual:

I: Does he trust you?

R: To a certain extent.

I: Why do you think he doesn’t trust you fully?

R: Just in life in general, who do you trust to the fullest?

Often, gender distrust stems from childhood experiences witnessing mothers and fathers cope with infidelity and lack of commitment. Vicky, a single 20-year-old with no children, explains how childhood abuse at the hands of her stepfather and abandonment by her biological father makes her distrustful of men in her own romantic relationships:

[My mother] got married. Um, and he started beating her or whatever, and he started beating us ... And now, well after that she started dating this other guy. And she’s still with him today ... He used to beat me. And my dad has never laid a hand on me, but he has totally not been there for me my whole life. And I just don’t trust men.

Infidelity is sometimes the cause of gender distrust. Twenty-eight-year-old dating mother of four Dahlia, explains that she was unaware that she had contracted chlamydia from her partner until a medical procedure revealed her illness:

Tom, obviously he wasn't honest either. He gave my chlamydia. And I found out after I ended up with my appendix almost bursting ... and the doctor said ... if you have it, he has it ... So I got really scared, 'cause that's why I'm always ... I'm going to protect myself. 'Cause guys will not be honest with you.

Men are also victims of unfaithful partners. Having acquired sexually transmitted illnesses from previous partners, one man mentions that he is hesitant or unwilling to enter into new sexual relationships for fear of being reinfected. Thirty-seven-year-old Jacob, a cohabiting father of two, explains how he contracted a sexually transmitted disease from a female partner, “she tells me she’s not fooling around because the man gave her a disease, and I got the disease twice ... I got the disease from her when she got the disease from him ... It’s gonorrhea and chlamydia.”

Mental and Physical Health

Many respondents admit to having physical and mental impairments (e.g. high blood pressure and bipolar disorder) that not only affect mobility and lifestyle, but also hinder employment. Furthermore, these disabilities sometimes affect their dating and marriage potential as they believe themselves to be less than ideal partners. For example, 31-year-old Mary, single with two children, says that being depressed makes it difficult to start a relationship because she has to take care of herself first, “it makes it hard to sustain a relationship, I believe. Because I’m moody. My mood swings ... I feel like if I’m gonna be in a relationship ... I should be able to be in that relationship and be focused on what I need to do, what’s going on in our lives.”

Others struggle with partners who suffer from mental impairments, like Shandra, a 48-year-old dating mother of three, who indicates that her boyfriend was often unreliable because of his condition, “And, umm, and then [my boyfriend] was having other problems. He was in and out of jail, and he was becoming sick ... And he would lots of times disappear on me. I didn’t know where he was. And come to find out, he’d be in [a mental health facility] on the psych ward.”

Physical impairments are also a concern for many respondents in our sample. Respondents with physical disabilities often feel isolated and guilty because of their condition, and they do not want to be a burden for potential partners. Fifty-nine-year-old Madeline, single with no children, explains how her smoking-related emphysema inhibits dating, “if I can get better in the next six to seven months and wean myself off of this ... oxygen ... and I could get back to where I can do my own walking without a wheelchair, without a walker, I might [date].” Others, like Tania, a 24-year-old cohabiting mother of three, have preexisting conditions that negatively impact fertility, and may make them unsuitable partners for someone who would like to have additional children. She explains how abusing diet pills when younger made it difficult to conceive children: “‘cause when I was young I ended up taking diet pills from my grandma ... so through all three pregnancies I was constantly going to the hospital ... It messed up my uterus ... So, ever since I had my daughter she messed me up even more. So now it’s really hard for me. If I wanted to have one right now it would be hard for me to have one.”

Others struggle with partners and children who have physical impairments. Ramona, a 25-year-old single mother of one, explains how her boyfriend’s cancer diagnosis adversely affected their relationship:

There was one guy that was there for [my son], like, the first five months of his life and everything ... he was diagnosed with cancer ... We started going out in October ... Maybe in the middle of March we split up ... it was just the fact that our schedules weren't meeting. Every time he had a doctor's appointment, I had work. And, and then he got to the point, you know, where he got real weak and everything. He couldn't take care of [my son] while I was at work ... he needed me to take him back and forth to his doctor's appointments, and I couldn't get the time off from work ... I still wonder, you know, how he's doing. And I see him every now and then ... And he was really there for my son a lot ... once he got sick I just, you know, with me working and having [my son], you know, we just, it was hard for me to balance them two.

Though their relationship was promising, Ramona's ex-boyfriend's cancer, and the demands of caring for her young son and career kept them from continuing to date. His medical condition ultimately impacted the quality of their relationship, and became too much of a burden for Ramona to handle.

MARRIAGEABLE MOTHERS and FATHERS

The Presence of Children

Only 19% of our sample who have children present in their lives are married. Among those parents who are not married, 38% are single, 32% are dating, and 11% are in cohabiting relationships. There are issues related to the presence of children that may make single parents less marriageable. Women are especially sensitive to the impact of children from prior relationships as they are most likely to get custody of the children. The presence of children can serve to make single parents less attractive because some men and women are not interested in assuming parental responsibility for others' children. Explains Marie, a 39-year-old single mother of five, "he pretending and saying that [he] really want this, but you really not ready for it ... He was like, well I don't want

to be, um, acting like I'm a father to somebody else's kids." Sasha, a 25-year-old married mother of six, explains her opinion about children and relationships:

So it's really hard to be in a relationship with a person who got children already ... I don't think I want to be with a man who already got kids. And a man probably don't want to be with me, because I already got a houseful too. So, I would think that's the most difficult relationship to be in.

Some respondents with children do not believe their partners are ready to settle down.

Dahlia, a 28-year-old Hispanic mother of four, says of her partner, "he wasn't the person to think about our relationship. He didn't want to be with his kids. He wanted to be out here and have fun, and he regretted every single minute that he had kids."

Multiple Partner Fertility

Forty-six percent of parents in our sample have children with multiple (at least two) partners. Multiple partner fertility maintains ties to former romantic partners and other parents. In these instances there is sometimes a problem with what respondents refer to as "baby mama drama"—the involvement of a former female partner in a current relationship. This is sometimes a deterrent to becoming involved with men that have children. Helen, a 36-year-old single mother of one, explains how three's a crowd in a new relationship:

That would be my problem in a relationship, dealing with baby mama drama. That would be one of my problems to go further in a relationship. 'Cause sometimes there's just ... ignorant women out here that need to grow up ... because some baby's mama don't know how to let go. I mean, being a mother to their kids, you know, a baby's mama and a baby's daddy do need to get along. But, they take it further, like, disrespecting others ... I've been having bad luck with that. Every time I met a guy, they have a baby's mama and she's ignorant. I don't have patience for that.

Women are not the only ones who pose a threat to new relationships; men can also provide an ample dose of “baby daddy drama.” Jackie, a 30-year-old mother of three, explains how her ex-partner intervenes in her new relationships:

[One of her children’s fathers] was always trying to intervene between me and [my new relationship] ... still trying to come back and be with me ... Yes, it gets complicated. Because they always try to come over and make it look like there’s something going on between me and them ... and it makes my partner start wondering, are you cheating on me?

Child support issues are an additional complication of multiple partner fertility.

Oftentimes men are forced to choose between supporting the children and partners with whom they currently reside, and those biological children living with their birth mothers. Resentment on the part of both women in these situations is not unusual. Patsy, a 32-year-old dater with no children explains how her relationship deteriorates when her boyfriend is given a child support order for his children with another woman:

Obviously money is our issue ... when our problems started as a couple, was when she started putting pressure on him ... they started coming after him for child support ... Before that we were just, we were fine as a couple ... he started becoming more verbally abusive. He started being more stressed out. You know, he started just all around becoming more angry and irritable, and he began doing things that were just completely out of his nature.

In addition to the presence of other mothers and fathers as a deterrent to marriage, economic factors again play a role. Men with already tenuous economic potential are often forced to address the financial needs of children from multiple women. Many of these men choose not to work altogether because so much of their paycheck would go toward child support, or they will “job hop” to avoid being held accountable for child support orders. As Janice, a 30-year-old mother of three explains:

He don’t have a job to pay child support ... if he do get a job and they take it, ‘cause they gonna take it out of his check ... I’m not gonna get it. Because I get welfare. As long as I’m getting aid, I ain’t gonna be entitled to it. They gonna

keep it and it goes towards whatever. Every time he always, every time he work, what am I working for? 'Cause I get my paycheck and they take my child support out.

Unmarriageable Fathers

Marrying the child's father is often not a possibility for the mothers in our sample.

Respondents may be protecting children from an abusive ex-partner, while others may be dealing with issues concerning child support payments and visitation rights. Some mothers avoid relationships with the biological fathers due to their problems with the law, drugs and alcohol abuse, or domestic abuse. Often some biological fathers create problems in the relationship that are too much to deal with, and women are forced to put their children first regardless of their desire to marry. In these cases it seems as if the mother is exercising good judgment by not marrying the biological father and choosing to focus on the relationship with their children.

For many women, having children is paramount to marriage because they are not able to find good fathers *and* partners. Marie, a 39-year-old single mother of five explains:

I just knew ... I wanted a lot of kids, and I wanted them all to have the same dad ... I asked the Lord for the kids, and I didn't ask him for a husband. 'Cause I knew that he wasn't the type of person that I wanted to be with. Relationships you lose. But my kids have always been there.

For women like Marie, it is less important to be with the father of their children than it is to have one man father all of their children.

CUMULATIVE DISADVANTAGE SCALE

Our respondents make life decisions amid a complex web of overlapping problems and insecurities that extend beyond their present lives to include many negative past

experiences. They may face special hurdles when seeking or maintaining healthy relationships. While, on average, our respondents do seem to favor marriage, it is possible that those respondents for whom life offers more challenges and negative experiences may have different views about marriage than those who have had a relatively happy and stable life. To grasp the complexities of respondents' lives, we created a Cumulative Disadvantage Scale. This instrument was designed to measure all factors that contribute to disadvantage, including level of education, marital status, number of children, number of other children present in the home, household income, government assistance, witnessing or being a victim of abuse, incarceration history (partner's and/or respondent's), and alcohol or drug use (partner's and/or respondent's). Higher scores are related to greater disadvantage. The scale provides a more quantitative sense of how issues our respondents face on a regular basis impact their marriage attitudes, and make them more or less marriageable.

We look at how these complexities influence the Marriage Attitudes Survey results as well as the marriageability of two respondents who scored high on the scale. A woman who scored very high on the scale is Latisha, a 25-year-old single-mother of four with a seventh-grade education. Her parents divorced when she was very young and she suffered abuse as a child due to mental illness. She is currently unemployed, and receives government assistance. She had her first child when she was 15-years-old. The father of her oldest child is in and out of prison and does not spend time with the children. Her other children see their father often, but she is not in a relationship with him because he has alcohol and drug problems.

Latisha strongly disagrees with the statement “People should marry”. While her marriage survey results show that she is not afraid to get married, she states in her interview that the abuse she witnessed in the lives of her mother and sisters has made her doubtful of marriage, “My mom went through two different marriages. Both of them were abusive”. Her results from the survey corroborate this sentiment in that she strongly disagrees with the statement “I expect to get married to someone during my lifetime.” While her marriage survey results show that she is not afraid to get married, she explains, in her interview, that marriage and cohabitation are too permanent and not easy to get out of, should the relationship go wrong. Latisha also does not think that people should get a divorce, even if they are unhappy. While she does say that she would be in a relationship with the father of her youngest children should he get settled, stop using drugs, and buy them a house, she disagrees with the statement that it is better for children if their parents are married.

Latisha is currently seeking treatment for schizophrenia. In the past she has been hesitant to enter into relationships out of how her disease would affect a partner, “I was scared to where, like, if I had somebody else there with me or something that I may hurt them.” She discusses the decision not to live with her then-boyfriend:

Because right now I’m just now getting used to my voices in my head telling me, you know, stuff to where I know, like, look that’s not real. You know? I’m just now being able to decipher the truth. And at first I think it was a problem, like, that it would have been worse if I had him move in with me.

Lastly, she states that her first priority is her children, “I think I’m just better off right now by myself and with my kids than if I would get married...If I do decide to finally get married, all my kids would be to where they’re living on their own.”

Alan, a 26-year-old cohabiting father of two also scored high on the Cumulative Disadvantage Scale. Alan lived in foster care until he was adopted at age seven. He has an eleventh grade education, is unemployed, and on government assistance for his disabilities. He states that he is bipolar, has ADHD, and two herniated disks. He has two children, each from a different woman, and neither of his children lives with him. His youngest child was removed from the home due to neglect and drug use in the home, and he has no contact with his oldest child, nor does he pay child support.

Alan is currently in a dating/cohabiting relationship. He and his partner have had a rocky relationship – breaking up often and getting back together. She is also disabled and does not work. Alan admits that he used to beat her and after one incident he was arrested and spent time in prison, “Yeah, there’s times where I’ve beaten the living shit out of her and I’ve been thrown in jail for six and a half months.”

Alan does not have very traditional ideas about marriage and he strongly disagrees with the statement that people should get married. He is also afraid of marriage and does not expect to get married, primarily because he thinks that if he and his partner got married they would both lose their government assistance. He discusses this with the interviewer:

I: If you got married you would lose your checks?

R: I would lose my disabled checks.

I: The government would not consider you disabled anymore if you were married?

R: Correct. They would cut her check and our check.

Alan also thinks that most marriages are unhappy. While he does not have a positive attitude about marriage, he does not agree with divorce and thinks that children are better off if their parents are married. Both Latisha and Alan face many barriers to marriage

and both are not meeting the marriage ideal expressed by other respondents in the study. Certainly, they represent a minority of adults but demonstrate the wide range of issues confronting disadvantaged populations.

DISCUSSION

This study showcases the perspective of participants in a marriage initiative program. The in-depth interviews provide an opportunity to move beyond survey based approaches and determine how participants view marriage and their marriage prospects. Overall, respondents are quite positive about marriage with the overwhelming majority stating that people should get married and stay married. Also almost all of the unmarried respondents expected to get married someday. At the same time a substantial proportion (two-fifths) are afraid of getting married and a similar proportion believe that marriages are unhappy. There seems to be two streams of thought, marriage is valued but recognizing that marriage can be associated with more negative feelings and perceptions.

We draw on the literature on marriageable men and find our respondents echo many of the themes from the literature. Certainly, economic factors are an important issue in considerations of marriage and are expressed in terms of stable employment, public assistance, and weddings. Another way economic concerns are confronted is the independence of women. Even as women's employment becomes more important for maintaining a family living income, it seems there are some concerns about women having to give up their work lives when they marry. Respondents comment on how incarceration interferes with the development of long work histories and stable

employment. We find substance abuse influences employment but also contributes to poor marriage prospects and marital functioning. Another theme related to the marriage in a couple of ways. Prior experience with domestic abuse seems to act as a barrier to forming good relationship and concerns about bringing unrelated men into the household. At the same time domestic abuse is the cause of the break up of many relationships. An overall distrust of the opposite sex permeates many interviews. Trust issues are a theme in the marriage classes but seem difficult to overcome. Both men and women speak of infidelity in their relationships. A theme that has not been discussed extensively in the literature is the mental and physical health of men and women. Respondents in our study report that poor mental and/or physical health lead to less success in the marriage market and present challenges to the stability of relationships.

Prior work on marriage among disadvantaged populations, Edin and colleagues, has targeted single mothers. Parents face some specific concerns when it comes to marriage. Similar to Edin we find that mothers are protective of their children and may be avoiding marriage as a strategy to better parent their children, especially girls. At the same time both mothers and fathers with children from several partners makes getting married and staying married more difficult. The ties to former romantic partners (the child's other parent) and economic responsibilities create tensions in new relationships. Given that children fare better with two biological parents, there is an underlying goal of promoting marriage to the mother and father of children. However, multiple partner fertility presents a challenge because which mother and father should get married. Also biological fathers are not always the best marriage material and mothers may be avoiding potentially unstable marriages by not getting married.

This paper presents opportunities to consider not only the marriage qualifications of men but also women. We find that many respondents do not possess the ideal characteristics articulated by our sample or even come close to the standards that are expected in a wife or husband. Prior research has focused on the marriageability of men but has neglected to look at qualities and attitudes women possess that provide additional barriers to marriage.

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APPENDIX

Cumulative Disadvantage Scale

For each measure of disadvantage, respondents are given a score of 1. In the case of children, respondents get a point for each child. For example, a single woman with the maximum number of biological children (6 points), the maximum number of partner's or other's children in home (2 points), with less than a high school diploma (2), who is unemployed (2), on government aid (1), has been abused (2) and witnessed abuse (1), has been incarcerated (2) and had a partner/other incarcerated (1), who reports \$0 income (2), has alcohol abuse problems (1), has a partner with alcohol abuse problems (1), has drug abuse problems (1), and a partner with drug abuse problems (1) will receive a total of 25 points. If respondents both witness and experience abuse they receive 3 points.

Likewise, those who were incarcerated and/or have a partner who is/was incarcerated receive an additional point. Thus, some cases may have a total of 27 points. The points themselves are not important; rather, the relative ranking of individuals illustrates the range of disadvantage experienced by our study sample. Our lowest score on the scale is 2 and the average score is 9. However, these results may be incomplete as there was only partial data on abuse, incarceration, and alcohol or drug use for some respondents and for the total sample.