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Middle-Aged Women Returning to the Work Force

by

Connie I. Clark

THESIS

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

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Sociology

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GRADUATE DIVISION

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

San Francisco



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Degree Conferred:

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to two of my
dearest friends, E.B.C. and B.J.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my appreciation to the many individuals who shared their knowledge, enthusiasm, and interest in this research.

E. B. Clark

Savannah Smith

The women at "Options"

The women who participated in the study

Ruth Waxman

Milo Smith

My Advisors: Adele Clarke, Ph.D.

Virginia Olesen, Ph.D.

Leonard Schatzman, Ph.D.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Background and Need for Study

Background and Need for Study

The number of women in the paid work force has increased markedly since 1940. At that time, 27.4% of the women in the United States worked outside of the home. This figure grew to 50% in 1980, (Shortridge, 1986) and will continue to increase as women are expected to account for nearly two-thirds of the growth in the labor force through the 1990's (Pritchard, 1983).

The increase in the number of older women in the labor force is reflected in a 1983 statistic which states that nearly twelve million women or 10.7% of the total labor force were between the ages of 45-64 years of age (Pritchard, 1983).

Many of the middle-aged women who have joined the paid work force have experienced some type of change in their life-style which necessitated their becoming a wage earner. These women who are going through some life transition which affects their income and requires their employment outside of the home, have been referred to as "Displaced Homemakers." According to the most recent statistical report on California Displaced Homemakers, approximately 34,750 of these women reside in Alameda County, and 53% of them are thirty-five years of age and older (DPH, 1982).

The term "Displaced Homemakers" was coined by the feminist and advocate for older women, Tish Sommers. She defines displaced homemakers as:

"Persons caught in the middle--in the middle of changing family structure, in the middle of new divorce laws, and changing societal mores in the middle of life.

The women Sommers is referring to are those who provided unpaid service to their family, have been dependent on their spouse for income, but who lose that income through death, divorce, separation, desertion, or the disablement of a husband (Shields, 1981). These women may suddenly find themselves in a situation which demands their entering the paid work force in order to provide for themselves. If a woman is presently employed and her salary is insufficient to meet her needs, she will probably look for a different job that will pay a higher wage.

This study will focus on those women who are middle-aged; thirty-five years of age or older and who are preparing to re-enter the work force or to make a career change.

Women who have been wives and/or mothers for years may feel that they do not have any marketable skills, therefore a feeling of low self-esteem and even fear about entering the competitive work force is common. A major concern middle-aged women have when entering the work force is their fear of the unfamiliar (Gorney & Cox, 1973).

The lack of confidence and anxiety is reinforced by the negative view industry has of homemaking as a career. The value of women's labor in the home and in caring for the family is not acknowledged when they are either forced or choose to seek employment outside of the home (Estes, et. al., 1984). Along with employers not acknowledging women's unpaid labor, many women themselves devalue work in the home (Daniels, 1987).

In addition to not having their experiences as a homemaker highly valued, middle-aged women are sometimes discriminated against because of their age and sex (Sidel, 1986). A youth oriented society has made it more difficult for middle-aged women to re-enter the work force, and Butler's (1974) concept "ageism," the stereotyping and discrimination against people because they are old, can be applied to these women. Some middle-aged women are made to feel too old to enter the competitive labor force or to attempt a new career.

Importance of Work History

The importance of middle-aged women and employment is discussed in Estes, et al., 1984 & Stone, 1984. They point out that the economic security or insecurity women experience in later life will be mainly determined by their work history. The number of older women being poor is increasing as a result of inadequate lifetime earnings and insufficient retirement funds (Eisler, 1986).

According to a report published by the Villers Foundation in 1987, women constitute 58.7% of the total elderly population in the United States and they also account for 72.4% of the elderly poor. These statistics show that poverty is more prevalent among elderly women than among elderly men.

The issue of "Women and Poverty" is closely related to the middle-aged women's work history. There are many factors associated with women and employment which affect their financial security or insecurity when they are older; part-time employment, limited job market available to them, lower paying and less stable jobs, delayed and interrupted employment due to being a mother and caregiver, lack of retirement and health benefits, and low Social Security benefits (Sidel, 1986; Eisler, 1986; Estes, et. al., 1984; Stone, 1984; and Shortridge, 1984).

Upstream Approach to Older Women and Poverty

McKinlay, (1986) uses the term "Upstream Approach," which means to look at the cause(s) of a problem; to plan ahead in an effort to alleviate or eliminate the negative situation. One aspect of an upstream approach to older women and poverty, would be to acknowledge and investigate the issues related to their employment and employment benefits in their earlier years. Providing resources and increased opportunities for middle-aged women to acquire skills which create increased options for better employment

with benefits, is important to meet their present needs, as well as adding to their security in their later years.

Purpose of the Study

There is a need to obtain current information about middle-aged women who are re-entering the paid work force or seeking a career change. This particular group of women have different concerns and needs than women who are in their twenties. Middle-aged women often feel isolated and out of the mainstream when they have either never worked or have not worked for several years. They may have to deal with a stressful situation which precipitated the decision to work outside of the home such as being separated, divorced, widowed, or having a disabled spouse.

Being aware of the diversity among these women is important in planning and implementing resources for them. Identifying their major concerns and needs can provide important information for career counseling, educational programs, women's organizations, prospective employers, and others associated with providing assistance. In addition, current data can provide the impetus for improving or developing new programs to assist these women in attaining their goals of returning to work. Another important use of the information would be to bring attention for the need of policy changes in several areas related to women and employment; education, employment opportunities, and related benefits such as health care insurance and

retirement. In assisting these women to gain increased self-worth and independence, their present situation and life-style can be improved as well as increasing their chances for greater security in later life.

The major questions of the study were:

1. Reason(s) for either re-entering the work force or in preparing for a career change.
2. Current greatest concern(s) about returning to work or in preparing for a career change.
3. Greatest assistance to returning to work or in making a career change.
4. Current preparation(s) for returning to work or making a career change.
5. Current health concern(s).

Chapter II

RESEARCH DESIGN

Methods Used in Research

Participant Observation

Pilot Study

Discussions with Providers and Re-entry Women

Selection of Sites

Initial Contact

Implementation of Study Questionnaire

Methods Used in Research

Three methods were used to gather information about the needs of middle-aged women re-entering the work force or making a career change:

1. Participant observation at "Options--For Women Over 40," a non-profit organization located in San Francisco.
2. Questionnaires were completed by women who were thirty-five years of age or older. The women were asked to complete a questionnaire which elicited information about their major concerns and needs related to re-entering the paid work force or in making a career change. Sixty-five questionnaires were completed and analyzed.
3. Discussions with service providers and re-entry women.
 - a.) Coordinators or women's re-entry programs at community colleges.
 - b.) Vocational Counselor.
 - c.) Coordinators of women's organizations.
 - d.) Regional Representative of Displaced Homemakers Network.
 - e.) Instructors of women's classes at community colleges.
 - f.) Re-entry women.

Participant Observation

To become more aware of the issues relating to middle-aged women returning to the labor force or making a career change, the writer attended and participated in orientation meetings at a women's organization called "Options--For Women Over 40." This organization is located in San Francisco, and it offers the following services:

Drop-in center for information and referrals on medical or legal problems.

Housing advice

Support groups

Career counseling

Employment listings

Workshops on job search, resume writing, and interviewing techniques.

The organization also has a Latina Outreach Group. These women have a co-op work group and take English classes at the Center. (Refer to Appendix, Page 50 for dates of participant observation.)

I learned about "Options" from a colleague of mine who teaches a course in the "Women in Transition" program at a community college. When I called "Options" I was impressed by the friendly and enthusiastic voice of the person answering the telephone. I explained that I was doing research on middle-aged women returning to work, and asked if I could visit "Options." I was invited to attend a workshop that would be discussing job search techniques.

"Options" is located on the third floor of an older building in San Francisco. The atmosphere inside the large room, which houses the organization, is comfortable and the staff and the women who are volunteering are outgoing and friendly. Volunteers are an important part of this non-profit organization: they answer the telephones, perform a wide variety of clerical tasks, and also conduct the majority of the workshops.

Each Tuesday morning, "Options" hold orientation meetings and the primary objective of the meeting is to inform the women about the resources the organization has to offer in obtaining employment. Available community resources are also discussed. On Thursday mornings, workshops are held to discuss job search, interview techniques, and resume writing.

At my first meeting, I observed how the facilitator of the workshop, a volunteer, began the meeting by introducing herself and explained briefly about Options, and the resources the organization could provide. She asked the five women who participated in the workshop to complete a form which asked them what type of job they were looking for. The women appeared anxious at the beginning of the discussion, and hesitant about completing the form.

After the women had completed the form, the leader of the meeting asked them to tell their names and a little about themselves. The women shared information about their

backgrounds and what their present concerns and interests were. As each woman told her story, I observed how interested the other women were in hearing each other speak. The women appeared to be comfortable telling about themselves and their particular situation which had precipitated them to seek employment or to make a career change. A theme which emerged from the orientation meetings was that the women lacked self-confidence, and were concerned about being in their forties and fifties looking for employment. They shared that they felt "old" and "not valuable." They also asked many questions about where and how to look for employment.

The environment at "Options" provides a comfortable setting for the women to talk with each other about the concerns and needs they have. They appeared interested and supportive to each other, and a common statement made by the women was, "I am so glad I came today. I have felt so alone, and didn't know what to do first."

After the ninety-minute workshop was over, the women remained seated around the table and exchanged their telephone numbers. They stated that they enjoyed being able to talk with someone else their age who was looking for work, and experiencing similar feelings and situations.

It was apparent that the women involved with "Options" feel good about the resources and support their organization provides for women in transition.

In designing the questionnaire, the writer used the information gathered from the meetings held at Options, from discussions with Ruth Waxman, Coordinator of the Women in Transition Program at Chabot College, and from a discussion held with Judy Porta, Sociology Instructor at Chabot College. (Refer to Appendix, Page 51-53 for Questionnaire.)

Pilot Study

A pilot study of the questionnaire was done at Chabot College with women who were enrolled in a course, "Women in Transition." After the questionnaires were reviewed, they were revised to include women who were making a career change. Questions were added which asked about dental insurance, and additional resources the women had used in their preparation for re-entry to the work force.

Discussions with Providers and Re-entry Women

Janice Firth, (1984) describes how comfortable and eager the women she interviewed were. Firth describes the women she interviewed as being pleased to have someone to talk with about their experiences and feelings. She notes that women's experiences of motherhood and being responsible for home and household include questioning from a variety of different people such as doctors, health visitors, insurance agents, and social workers. These

experiences make it very natural and comfortable for women to be able to talk with other women about their concerns and feelings.

The writer observed how easily women talked with each other at the women's organization meetings, workshops or classes held at schools; the women the writer talked with individually were no exception. They appeared to be comfortable during the discussions and they shared a great deal of information. The objective of the discussions were to elicit additional information about the women's greatest concerns about re-entering the work force, ideas for increased community outreach, and effective ways of assisting women during their transition into the paid work force. The same questions were asked of the providers of services for re-entry women. (Refer to Appendix Page 54-55, for interview profile and Page 56 for list of providers interviewed.)

Selection of Sites

The women who participated in the study were either students enrolled in courses at a community college, or who were participating in classes or workshops sponsored by women's organizations. To attempt cultural and socioeconomic diversity in the study population, schools and organizations were selected from different locations in San Francisco and the Bay Area. (Refer to Appendix, Page 57 for list of participating sites.)

Initial Contact

Instructors of women's studies and coordinators of women's organizations were contacted initially by telephone. The objectives of the study were explained and they were told that if they agreed to participate, a summary of the findings of the study would be sent to them.

A letter stating the objectives of the study was mailed with the questionnaires. Follow-up telephone calls were made two and three weeks after the letters and questionnaires were mailed.

Implementation of Study Questionnaires

The instructors of the women's courses and the coordinators of women's organizations were asked to distribute the questionnaires to the women in their classes. It was explained to the women who were asked to complete the questionnaire that their participation was voluntary and would not affect their progress or grade. Because some of the instructors at the community colleges did not want to use class time for completing the questionnaire, the women were asked to take it home and return it the following week.

Chapter III

FINDINGS

Analysis of Questionnaires and Discussions

Profile of Women in Study

It is important to acknowledge the diversity among the women who are either re-entering the work force or making a career change. These women have different backgrounds and needs which makes it important to have a variety of programs, courses, and other resources available to them.

A portrait of the sixty-five women who completed the questionnaire shows that the majority of them were Caucasian, between thirty-five and forty-five years of age, married, have a high school education, have worked outside of the home between ten to twenty years, and are currently employed at a part-time job while attending school and workshops.

See the next pages for graphs. (Refer to Appendix, Page 60-62 for complete outline of findings from questionnaire.)

Major Reasons for Returning to Work

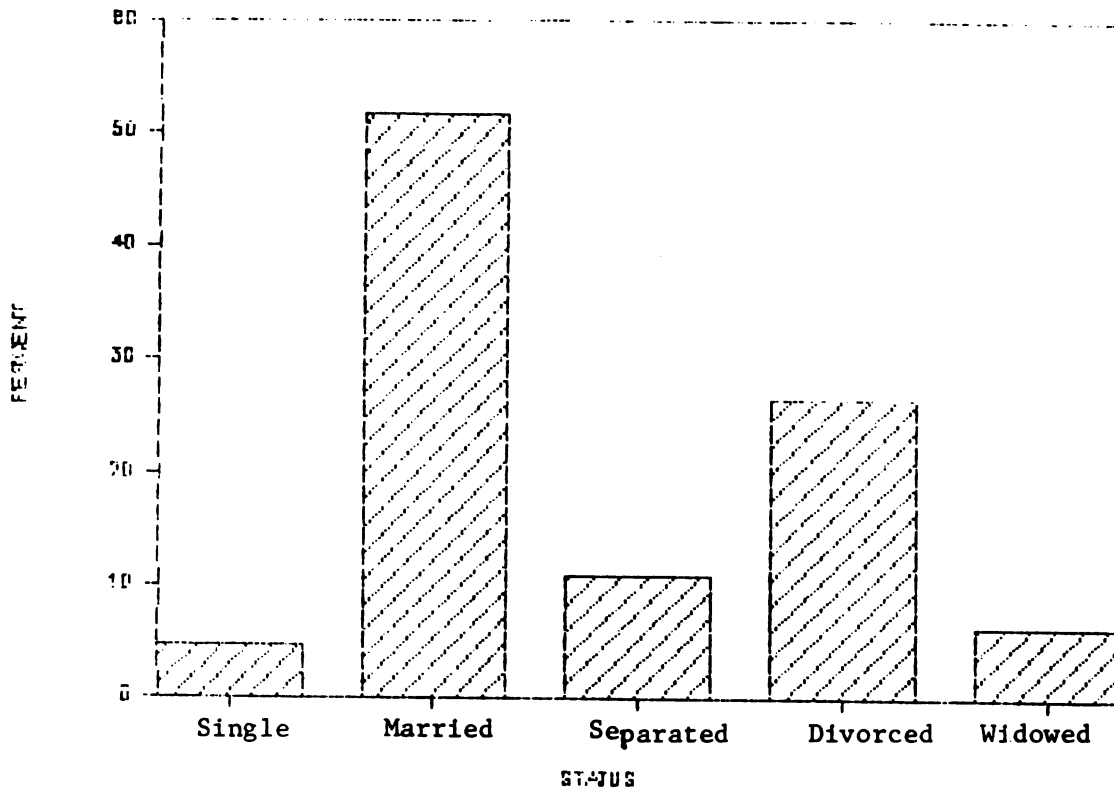
Re-entry women share many common concerns, but three major reasons for the women to re-enter the paid labor force were:

1.) financial, 2.) for personal interest and self-improvement, and 3.) to have access to health and dental insurance.

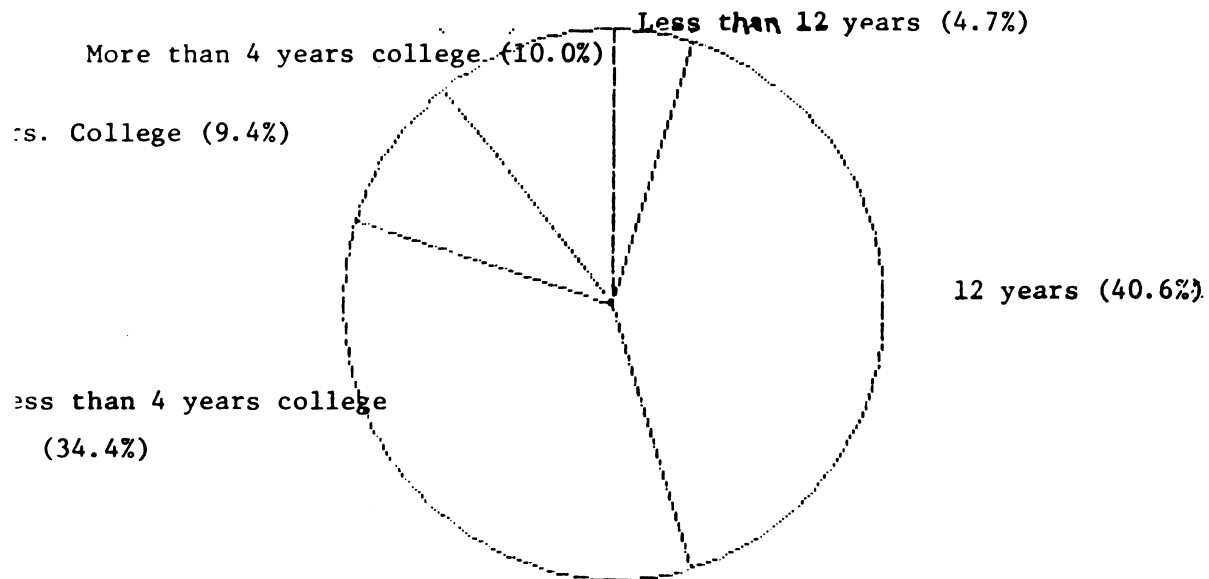
Reason for Re-entering Work Force:

| | |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------|
| Financial | 34.7% |
| Self-improvement | 22.9% |
| Health & Retirement Benefits | 16.9% |
| Social Contacts Benefits | 14.4% |
| Provide Extras for Family | 11.0% |

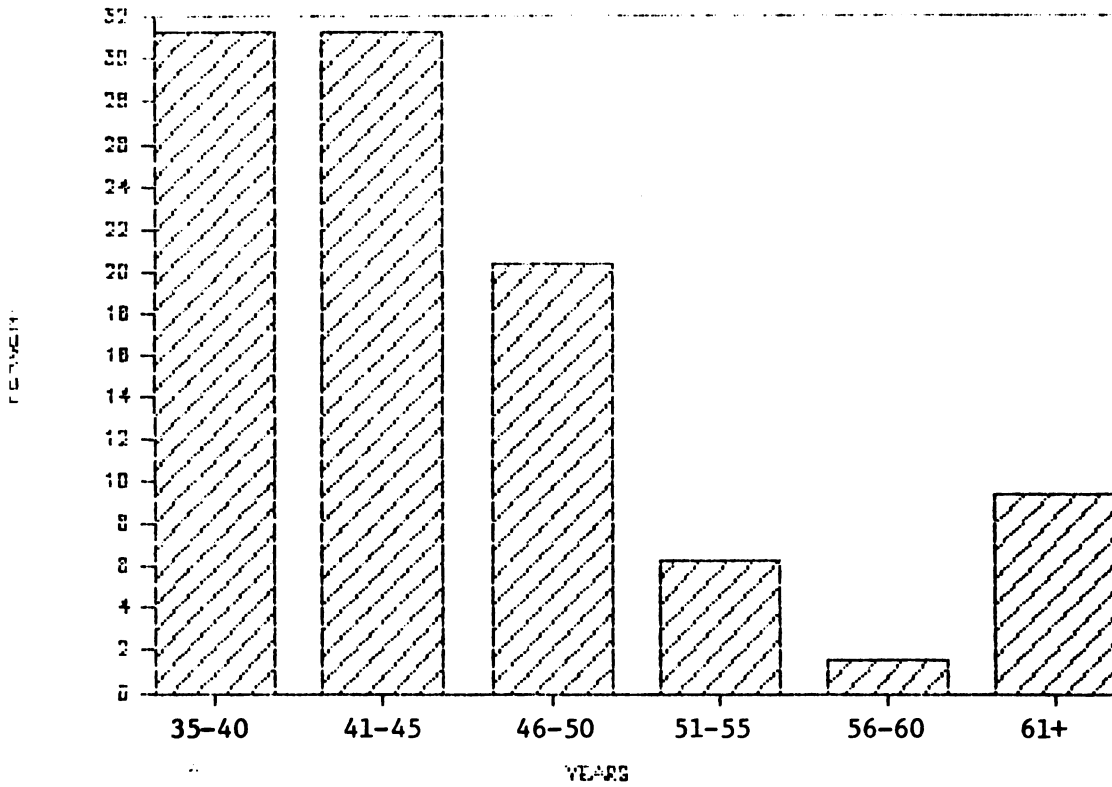
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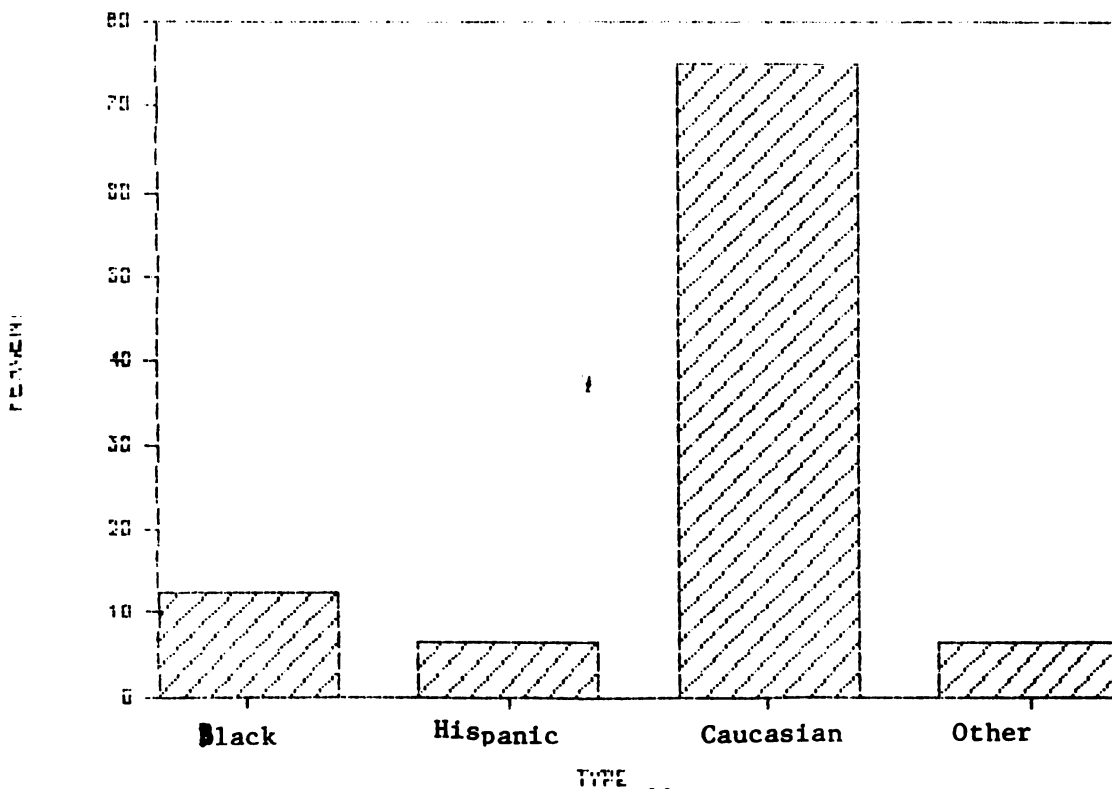
EDUCATION



AGES OF PARTICIPANTS



ETHNIC BACKGROUND



Major Concerns and Needs

The major concerns of the women in the study reflected the need for:

1. Personal counseling
2. Vocational counseling
3. Information about community resources related to preparing for employment and employment opportunities.

I. Personal Counseling

A major concern expressed by the women in the study was a lack of self-confidence. Many of the women are seeking employment because of some change in their personal lives. Common situations which precipitated their need to enter the paid labor market or to change careers were: separation, divorce, death of a spouse, or a spouse becoming disabled. The women expressed the fact that they felt insecure, inferior, and even frightened about having to enter the competitive work force.

The feeling of being "old" and "not very valuable" was expressed by many women. They were concerned about having to compete with younger and better educated women. Statements such as, "I am in competition with young, perky girls who wear flashy outfits." "I was told to dye my hair before I went to a job interview." "They want a snappy young thing out in the front office." "Our population is ignored. If you are over fifty, you're ignored." "I don't feel older, but the wrinkles say more. I feel like I am in

my thirties." "I feel out of the mainstream." A frequent comment counselors and instructors working with middle-aged women hear is "I am afraid of being poor and ending up as a bag lady."

An important observation made by a vocation/counselor was that a person needs to "focus outward" when looking for a job as it is important to project an enthusiastic and confident impression during an interview. Being aware of the importance of first impressions and interview technique needs to be discussed and emphasized with women who are seeking employment. Appearing interested and confident is often difficult for the woman who has just been through some situation which has affected her self-esteem and sense of confidence.

II. Vocational Counseling

The need to have assistance in assessing skills and to have counseling about career choices was an important concern to many women. Some women do not have the time to attend classes that will take several months or years to complete as many of them need to be employed as soon as possible. Others want to learn new skills, and they have arranged work schedules that allow them to attend school. Many of the women surveyed, work part-time jobs while they attend school.

Several of the women indicated that they would like to have instruction about preparing a resume. They felt at a loss because they didn't know how to begin to write a resume when they didn't have current work experience. Comments such as "I feel that I don't have any skills to offer because I haven't worked in ten years." "I haven't worked in so many years, who do I use as a reference?" "I have only been a housewife, what do I put down?"

Teaching them how to present themselves in a positive manner through an effective resume is important. Becoming aware of the different ways in which a resume can be written to reflect the many skills that they have used in maintaining a household or at a paid job can be a valuable tool in obtaining employment.

A major part of obtaining employment is projecting a positive impression through an effective interview. Many women talked about their fears of being interviewed, and they explained that they didn't know how to answer certain questions. As one woman stated, "I can't even get the words to come out right when I am on the telephone asking for an interview." How to be effective when being interviewed can be assisted through role-playing. Preparing for an interview by role-playing questions and answers about future employment and past experiences, can add to a person's self-confidence when they are being interviewed for employment.

III. Community Resources

Providing information about where and how to look for a job was something that the women felt was important. It was stated, "How do I find what is available and what I am able to do?" "I don't even understand the terms or words they use in the newspapers when they advertise for the jobs." They stated that they wanted to have information about the current job picture in the bay area.

It was observed at the women's organization meetings and class settings that women are valuable resources and important sources of support to each other. The women shared resources, names, telephone numbers, as well as their feelings about their situation. At several gatherings the writer attended, women stayed after the meeting or class and talked with each other. They shared that they enjoyed being able to talk with other women their age who were looking for work, experiencing some of the same situations and feelings.

By having the opportunity to begin to learn new skills and meet other women who are experiencing similar situations, a woman can begin to build on small successes which will enhance her self-image. Also by meeting and talking with other women her age, she has the opportunity to add to her social network and not feel isolated.

One woman at a meeting stated, "Before I came to this workshop, I felt so alone. I thought that I was the only one going through the thing of looking for a job and having to find a new place to live."

Health Issues

The majority of the women in the study were married and had health insurance through their husband's employer. However, the women who were separated or going through a divorce acknowledged the fact that they were concerned about having to obtain their own health and dental insurance.

There is a gap in health insurance and health care for this group of women. Middle-aged women are no longer served by programs related to reproduction, and they are too young to be eligible for Medicare. As Minkler and Estes (1984) have pointed out, limited resources and not having health insurance can be the reason for some women to postpone early and preventive medical care which may result in a decline in health and increase their risk of acute or chronic illness.

The information obtained from the study relating to the women's health concerns, provides a valuable guideline for developing a course on middle-aged women's health. The concerns middle-aged women have reflect a different focus than what is addressed in many women's health courses taught at the community college level. These women are not

necessarily interested in birth control, pregnancy, and other issues younger women find important. Middle-aged women have different needs and interests, and these should be the focus of a health course designed for their age group.

Summary

Summary of the women's health concerns as indicated on survey:

Aging

Poor self-image

Stress

Staying healthy

Menopause

Hormone replacement therapy

Osteoporosis

Weight control

Effects of smoking

Exercise

Depression

Back care

Oral hygiene (periodontal disease)

Nutrition

Having access to health and dental care insurance

Current Preparation(s) for Returning to Work

The question asking the women what they were currently doing to prepare to re-enter the work force or in making a career change showed that the majority of the women are:

1. Enrolled in some type of course(s) related to skills training.
2. Are attending classes or workshops on:
 - Improving self-image
 - Job search skills - interview techniques, resume writing
3. Obtaining career counseling.
4. Looking for job placement.
5. Working at part-time jobs.
6. Attempting to become aware of available resources in the community for career counseling, skills training, and job placement.

Limitations of Study

Women thirty-five years of age and older who have made contact with either a school, or a women's organization are reflected in the data obtained from the questionnaires. The needs of the women who are at home, and not aware of resources available to them in the community, or who are reluctant to seek out resources because they are not able to read or speak English are not addressed.

Greater participation from the sites that have women's centers was anticipated. Counselors at the women's centers

were asked to distribute the questionnaire to women who came into the center for assistance. The lack of participation can perhaps be attributed to:

1. Most centers have part-time staff and follow-through is difficult,
2. If the women took the questionnaire home to complete, they did not return the form to the center, and
3. The questionnaires had been set out on a table, and the women did not pick one up on their own.

Chapter IV

SUMMARY

Observations and Recommendations

Public Relations

The majority of the women in the study learned about the college courses and women's programs through a college schedule, a divorce, rehabilitation or college counselor, or a friend.

After learning about the courses or workshops, the first contact the re-entry woman makes is often made by telephoning the women's organization or school. For some middle-aged women who are displaced homemakers, it takes a great deal of courage to make the first telephone call to gather information about counseling, workshops, and course offerings. A woman may be timid, and perhaps even fearful about making the telephone call(s). The person who answers the telephone at either a woman's organization or school can facilitate the success of women entering programs, and registering for workshops or classes by responding to their questions in an informed and positive manner.

Several providers emphasized the importance of the "very first contact" with the re-entry woman. They argued that being more supportive to this group of women during the registering procedures and having increased contact with them about their progress would help alleviate their dropping out and not completing courses and programs.

The writer called several schools and inquired about women's re-entry programs and courses for women. On numerous occasions, the call resulted in being placed on

hold for several minutes, being transferred several times, and often the person who answered the telephone did not know to whom the call should be directed. Three schools the writer telephoned, stated that they didn't have any women's courses, and the operator didn't offer to transfer the call.

Perhaps one reason why women sometimes find it difficult to learn about resources for re-entry women from either the printed materials or by telephone, is how they phrase their questions and requests. The term "Displaced Homemaker," "Re-entry Woman," and "Women in Transition," are all used by women's organizations and schools. If the school or organization uses only one particular term in their publicity, they could be missing different groups of women who do not relate to the term or the label they have chosen to use in their printed materials.

Using the title "Displaced Homemaker" is not particularly preferred by some instructors and coordinators of women's programs, but it is used because of political affiliation and funding. One representative of the Displaced Homemakers Network stated that "minority" women, and especially black women, do not relate to the term "Displaced Homemaker." "They feel that they have always had to take care of themselves." "They don't relate to being displaced." The feeling about not relating to the term "Displaced Homemaker" was confirmed by the black women the writer interviewed.

Public relations are extremely important in setting the stage for success in reaching a target population. The woman who calls for information needs to have the first contact be a positive one which will encourage her to take advantage of the available resources and to register for a workshop or class.

Community Outreach

Some suggestions for community outreach to middle-aged women wanting to return to the paid work force or to gain new skills, were to publicize through housing developments for low-income families, church organizations, women's groups, Welfare Departments, Employment Development Departments, local community clubs and organizations, and professional counselors.

Having an orientation meeting about the available community resources at a time that is constant was suggested. For example, every Friday at 10:00 a.m., an orientation meeting could be held. This can be effective because the word gets out about the scheduled day and time, and as one woman pointed out, "When it comes to displaced homemakers who need to get into the work force, everyone knows one." Word-of-mouth about the orientation meetings would encourage women to investigate the resources available to them. Conducting the orientation meeting in a comfortable and non-threatening manner would be an impetus for the women to participate, and to feel involved right from the beginning.

Awareness of Resources

Many women are not aware of the available resources in the community or do not know how to take advantage of them for learning new skills or in obtaining employment. A coordinator of a women's re-entry program remarked, "It takes savvy to use the available resources." Providing women with information about the variety of resources available, and how to take advantage of them is important. She stated, "The different women's organizations, schools, counselors, Welfare Department, and the employment offices, could all benefit from increased communication and collaboration between their agencies.

One example of people not taking advantage of available services was discussed by a vocational counselor at an Employment Development Department. He explained that he conducts workshops on job search and interview techniques, but the attendance is always very low. He stated that people are not aware that anyone can participate in these free workshops, and they do not need to be receiving unemployment benefits to use the services available at the Employment Department.

Publicity about the available resources must be carried out in a variety of ways if a large number of women are to be reached. The more assertive woman who has social contacts and a broader social network, will have an advantage over someone who is less involved and not

self-assured. The woman who is more self-confident and assertive will probably be more successful in learning about resources that will assist her in improving her job skills and in obtaining employment.

Planning Courses and Workshops For The Re-entry Woman

Diversity within the group of women who are re-entering the work force must be acknowledged if courses and programs are to be effective in assisting these women. It is necessary to know what the woman's needs are, and to be aware of what time frame she is dealing with. For example, how soon must she return to full- or part-time employment? How much time during the day can she devote to workshops or classes? Does she need financial assistance before she can begin school?

The majority of the women surveyed were working part-time while they were attending school or workshops. One woman stated, "The programs at the colleges make it easy to enter the courses or programs, but it is for students who are interested in years of schooling and new careers. I don't have four years to go to school and also the students were so young."

Sometimes small steps or very simple accomplishments can pave the way for greater success. An example of this might be to teach a woman about the available resources in the community, and encourage her to gather further information from the different agencies.

Attending a non-threatening workshop or lecture class would be another example of helping these women discover what is available in the community, and also allow them to meet other women who are in similar situations.

Designing and implementing counseling and courses that will not push the women quickly into programs that require too much too soon is important. Some schools have designed programs of two-hour lecture/discussion classes, and when a woman has attended six of these classes, she receives one unit of college credit. The topics for these presentations focus on women's issues relating to the work force, community resources, college resources, self-image, health issues, resume writing, interviewing skills, and other areas of interest to middle-aged women.

Having open-ended classes that are more available is important in recruiting women into courses. Being able to offer a variety of classes which allows women to enroll more often than just the usual two or three times a year is needed. At some of the schools, typing and word processing labs are open-ended classes, but other than these courses, there are few other alternatives available after an official quarter or semester begins.

Some women's organizations and school programs use what they refer to as "Peer Advisors." These advisors are re-entry women who are volunteers and have had minimal

training in listening skills, interview, and communication skills, and who are aware of the resources available in the community. The peer advisors are expected to be responsible and disciplined as far as punctuality, scheduling, and keeping informed of community resources. Periodically, they are evaluated by the staff. Not only do the peer advisors work comfortably with the re-entry women, but they are able to use the volunteer work as a building block for future employment; they are given permission to list the volunteer experience on their resume when they seek employment.

Women who are more financially secure have more options available to them for assistance in re-entering the work force. They are able to pay private professional counselors or employment agencies. Women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and who perhaps cannot read or speak English, are in need of more help and reassurance.

Some women are not comfortable in the traditional educational setting. The woman who has not experienced or felt successful within an academic setting, such as high school, will be reluctant to approach courses and classes offered in a traditional setting. Offering workshops and courses at a more neutral location, such as out in the community, might encourage increased participation by these women.

One place where these women might be assisted is through the community colleges. A representative of the Displaced Homemakers Network stated, "Many middle-aged women who are planning to re-enter the work force need remedial reading, math, and English." The community colleges are geared to the adult student, and they have the resources for career counseling, skills testing, and instruction.

Summary

In conclusion, this chapter has shown the importance of:

1. Public Relations.
2. Community outreach (informing women of available resources).
3. The need for creative course and program planning.

Because the first contact the re-entry women makes with schools or organizations is so important, public relations needs to be more effective in assisting these women reach the proper person(s) involved with counseling and instruction.

Increased community outreach is needed to inform women of the available resources and to reach women who may feel alienated in the traditional school setting. Because the majority of the women surveyed feel insecure, college counselors and instructors need to recognize the importance

of building success through small steps. Planning courses and workshops to increase self-confidence must be a part of the re-entry woman's program from the very beginning.

Reaching out to the community and helping women of lower socioeconomic status who require remedial reading and English in order to be better qualified for employment, is an important issue that needs to be acknowledged.

Summary Statement

Up-to-date information about the major concerns and needs of middle-aged women preparing to re-enter the paid work force or seeking a career change is important in providing effective assistance to this group of women.

For mid-life women, employment brings current income, the opportunity to earn Social Security, and hopefully, increased self-confidence and higher self-esteem, as well as health insurance, and retirement benefits. These are not only private issues, but also public policy issues.

In conclusion, there are three major areas that need to be addressed which affect the resources available to middle-aged women who are learning new skills and seeking employment.

1. Funding for re-entry programs (Recruitment, follow-up, program planning).
2. The need of personal and vocational counseling of the middle-aged re-entry woman.
3. The importance of public agencies to collaborate.

Funding

The majority of the instructors at the community colleges stated that funds have been reduced and that their programs for re-entry women have either been reduced by the number of course offerings, or that they no longer had any type of re-entry program.

Due to the lack of funds, follow-up does not take place on the women who either attend workshops at the women's organizations or who are enrolled in college courses. One re-entry program was preparing to send out a questionnaire to women who had attended a one quarter course in the "Women in Transition" program to obtain information about their progress. Several of the counselors and coordinators of women's groups stated that follow-up information would be valuable in showing the need for increased course offerings and programs, as well as obtaining information for revising present classes. Increased funds would also aid in identifying more effective ways to recruit this population.

There is funding for Displaced Homemakers programs available through the Carl Perkins Act of 1984, which is for vocational education of displaced homemakers and single parents. Community colleges receive 40% of these funds and Regional Occupational Programs receive the remaining 60%. Non-profit women's organizations are not eligible for these funds because they do not offer formal vocational education. These funds are for vocational education of any aged person enrolled in the school programs, but it was pointed out that there is emphasis on the teenage single mothers, and that this is where the monies and attention are being placed. It was stated that "Middle-aged women do not have any political power, therefore, the attention is on younger women and their problems." Some program

instructors thought this was the reason that programs for the middle-aged women were receiving less attention and support.

Formal academic settings are just one resource available to re-entry women. Women's organizations also offer a variety of resources and support networks for middle-aged women.

Legislators need to acknowledge what non-profit women's organizations are doing to assist women re-entry the work force. An example of one women's organization that is assisting the middle-aged women to return to work is "Options for Women Over 40." They not only provide career counseling, job listings, and other resources which assist in obtaining employment, but they also have a Latina outreach program with approximately one hundred women participating in a cooperative work project, and taking English classes. Funding for this non-profit organization would be a valuable investment in assisting the re-entry women prepare for employment.

It was suggested by a representative of the Displaced Homemakers Network, that program coordinators of women's organizations and community colleges contact Nancy Davenport, Gender Equity Coordinator, Chancellor's Office, Sacramento, CA. She is the key person to discuss where the monies for the Displaced Homemakers Network programs are coming from and how they are allocated. Increased funding

for programs and women's organizations which assist middle-aged women to prepare to enter the paid work force is needed.

Personal and Vocational Counseling

The importance of recognizing the need to allow a woman to have time to become more stable prior to making a commitment to long-term goals is not reflected in programs that were designed to assist displaced homemakers. One of the most frequent statements made by the women surveyed, was that they felt a lack of self-confidence, and were insecure about seeking out resources for skills training or in obtaining employment.

Courses and programs at either women's organizations or schools need to be reminded of the importance of setting the women up for success by allowing time for personal and vocational counseling. Offering more short-term workshops or classes which build on small successes would be valuable in assisting these women.

An example of not recognizing the client's situation and needs is reflected in the guidelines for eligibility for a loan from the Displaced Homemakers Network. There is a pilot program for an emergency loan act of \$2,500, in three counties: Marin, San Francisco, and Alameda. To be eligible to apply for this loan, a woman must not have been widowed or divorced more than six months.

Someone who works with displaced homemakers stated "A woman who has gone through some type of crisis barely gets her head out of the house in six months. To expect a woman to become aware of the resources available to her, and take advantage of them in such a short period of time as six months is a little unrealistic."

A common statement made by providers and individual women was that many women take several months and perhaps a year or more before they feel ready to investigate resources beyond just finding a quick job. The rule of having to apply for the loan within six months of being widowed or divorced is an area which the individual women's organizations, and schools should bring attention to and work to have changed. Policy should reflect reality, and having to apply for the loan within six months after being widowed or divorced is not realistic. A recommendation to have this changed to two years has been submitted to the State Committee on displaced homemakers.

Public Agencies Need to Collaborate

There is a need for the different public agencies, such as the Employment Development offices, Welfare Departments, women's organizations, and schools to collaborate on how they can better assist re-entry women.

It is important for them to learn more about each others' services and to share ideas about reaching this target population. It was identified through interviews

that services for women are fragmented, and one woman referred to the "turf guarding attitudes" the public agencies have.

By being more aware of what each agency offers to re-entry women, services can be better planned and utilized. The diversity of the group of middle-aged women needs to be recognized. By increasing the liaison between agencies, more information and publicity can be generated in a broader variety of ways. This would result in reaching a larger number of women who are in need of assistance.

Davis (1987) asserts that research can influence public policy by identifying issues that require policy intervention or by identifying and analyzing appropriate solutions. Sommers points out that if the needs of middle-aged women continues to be neglected in public policy, e.g., employment, education, and health programs, the government will pay the costs of that neglect in increasing expenditures for aging women later (Shields, 1981).

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REFERENCES: ORGANIZATIONS

Displaced Homemakers Network, 1411 K Street, N.W. Suite
#930, Washington, D.C., 20005

National Action Forum for Midlife and Older Women, c/o Dr.
Jane Porcino, Box 816, Stony Brook, NY.

The OWL Observer, 1325 G Street, N.W., Lower Lobby B,
Washington, D.C. 20005

Women's Economic Agenda, 518 17th Street, Suite 200,
Oakland, CA 94612

Appendix

Dates of Participant observation at "Options for Women Over 40."

1988

| | |
|----------|----------------|
| November | 12, 17, 19, 24 |
| December | 10, 15 |
| January | 19 |
| March | 8 |
| April | 12 |
| May | 10 |

**QUESTIONNAIRE: Major Transitions and Health Concerns of
Women Re-entering The Work Force or Seeking
New Career Options.**

te: _____

te _____

General Instructions: Either a pen or pencil may be used to complete this questionnaire. Most of the questions may be answered by simply placing an X in the appropriate box; other questions ask for written-in answer. However, you may write in additional comments whenever you wish to do so. Please ignore the numbers beside the questions and answers; they are for machine tabulation only. Please feel free to disregard any question you choose not to answer.

1. What is your age? []

2. What is your ethnic or racial identification?

a. [] Black/Afro-American c. [] White

b. [] Hispanic d. [] Other (Please Specify.)

3. What is your marital status?

a. [] Single c. [] Separated

b. [] Married d. [] Divorced

e. [] Widow

4. What is the highest grade you have completed in school?
(Circle the correct number)

| | | | | | | | | | |
|------------|-------------|----|----|----|---------|----|----|----|-----|
| Elementary | High School | | | | College | | | | |
| Under 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17+ |

5. Of the years since High School, approximately how many of those years have you worked outside the home?
[]
Specify Number of Years

6. What is the year of your last paid employment? []

Please continue to next page.....

What job did you hold the longest? (Please give specific job description).

What is the most important reason(s) for your either re-entering the work force or in preparing for a career change?

Use a scale from 1 to 5 with: 1 meaning the MOST IMPORTANT and 5 meaning the LEAST IMPORTANT.

- To earn money for essentials such as rent, food, etc.
- To earn money for my or my family's wants and extras.
- For personal interest, and self-improvement.
- Social Contact.
- To obtain health and retirement benefits.
- Other(s) Please specify.

At the present time, what is your greatest concern(s) about returning to work or in making a career change?

What would be of the greatest assistance to you in your goal of returning to work or in making a career change?

What are you currently doing to prepare for returning to work or making a career change?

Please continue to next page.....

Which RESOURCES have you used in preparing to re-enter the work force or in making a career change?

- College Counselor
- Courses for Re-entry women
- Courses in job skill training
- Career Counselor (other than from College)
- Books: Please specify

Other: Please specify

Is it necessary for you to return to work as soon as possible?

Yes No

What type of employment are you seeking?

Full-Time Part-time Either

Do you have health insurance? Yes No

Do you have Dental Insurance? Yes No

What is your particular health concern(s)?

Have you put off seeing a physician within the last year because of either lack of financial resources or health insurance?

Yes No

How did you become aware of the course/workshop you are attending?

- Newspaper
- College Schedule
- College Counselor
- d. Friend
- e. Radio/TV
- f. Please Specify.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION.

INTERVIEW PROFILE

1. At the present time, what is your greatest concern(s) about returning to work or in making a career change?

2. What would be of the greatest assistance to you in your goal of returning to work or in making a career change?

3. What are you currently doing to prepare for returning to work or making a career change?

4. How did you become aware of the course/workshops you are attending?

5. How can information about workshops, courses, and other resources for women be better publicized?

6. Ideas about outreach.

Wording - Displaced Homemaker

Who isn't being reached?

INTERVIEW PROFILE (cont'd)

7. Ideas about courses, workshops, subjects.

Scheduling/Time/Site

8. Ideas about health course for middle-aged women.

9. Advice to other women re-entering the work force or making a career change.

Discussions with Providers:

Collin Alscher, Vocational Counselor
Employment Development Department
Hayward, California

Ruth Waxman, Instructor
Women in Transition Program
Chabot College
Hayward, California

Ruth Phillips, Program Coordinator
Displaced Homemakers Center
College of Alameda
Alameda, California

Carla Chambers, Coordinator
Women's Re-entry Program
Laney College
Oakley, California

Sharon Garcia, Instructor
Women's Health
Diablo Valley College
Pleasant Hill, California

Milo Smith
Regional Representative
Displaced Homemakers Network
El Sobrante, California

Savannah Smith, Coordinator
Options for Women Over Forty
San Francisco, California

Participating Sites in Study

Chabot College
25555 Hesperian Boulevard
Hayward, CA 94545

College of Alameda
555 Atlantic Avenue
Alameda, CA 94501

Diablo Valley College
321 Golf Club Road
Pleasant Hill, CA 94523

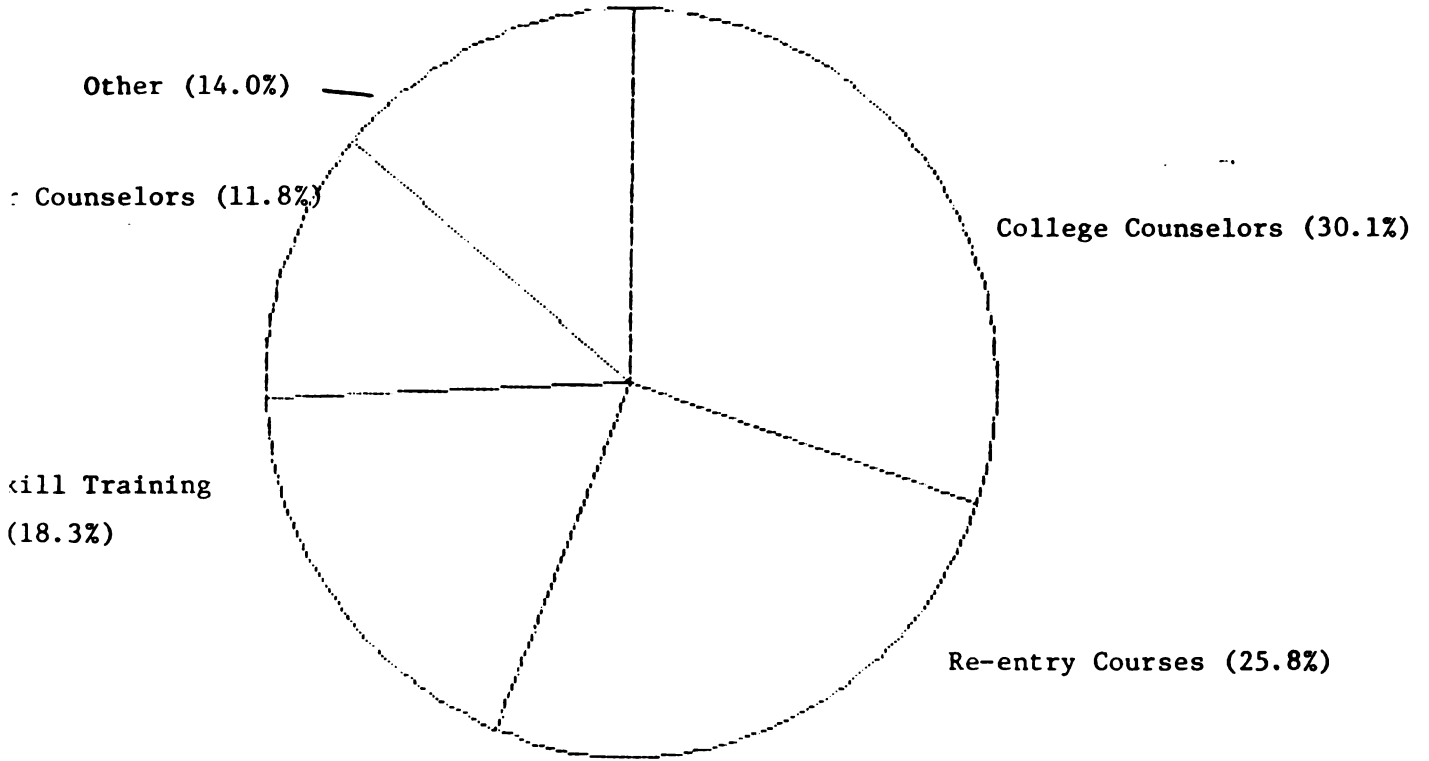
Laney College
900 Fallon Street
Oakland, CA 94607

Options for Women Over 40
Women's Building
3543 18th Street
San Francisco, CA 94110

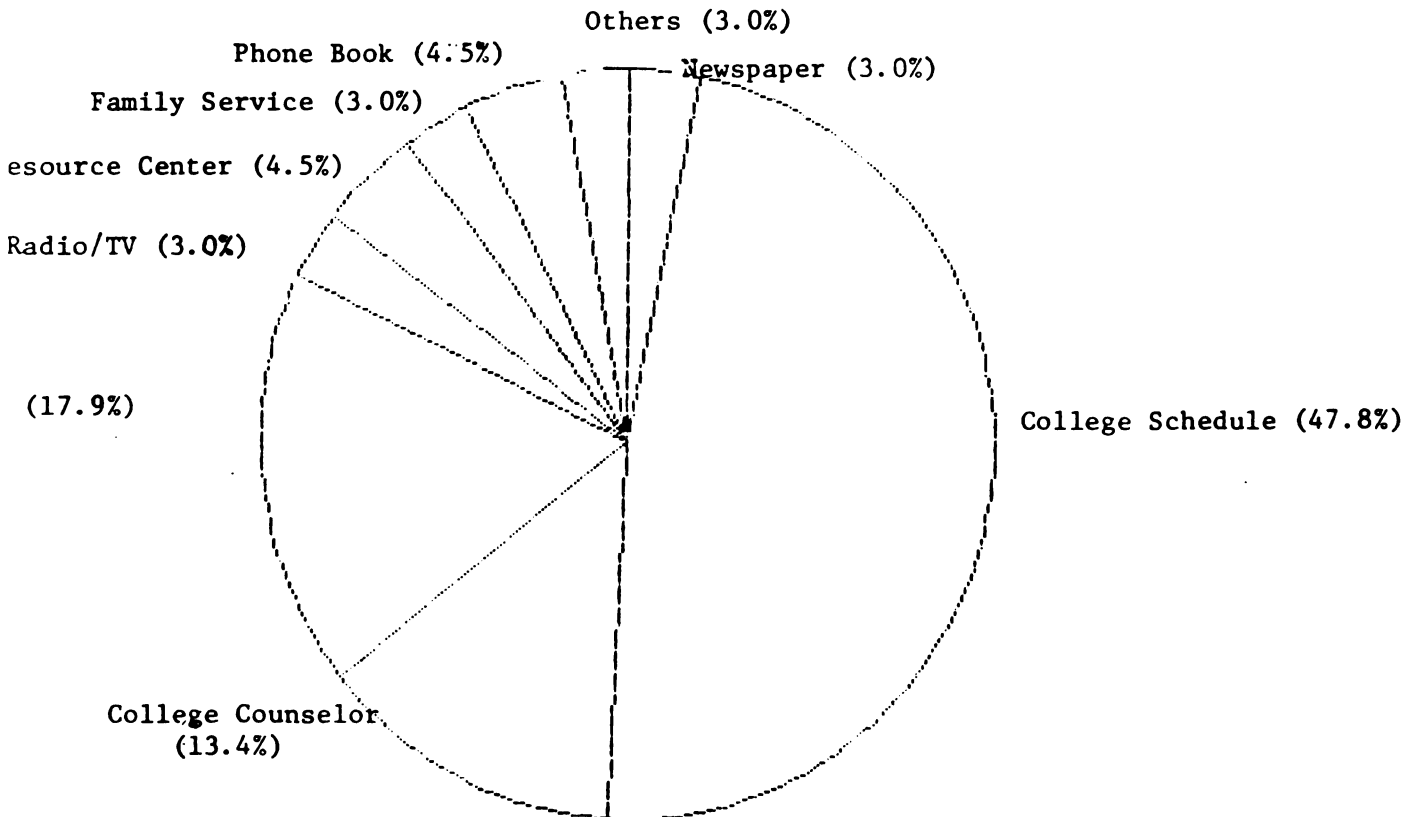
San Francisco Community College
31 Gough Street
San Francisco, CA 94103

San Jose City College
2100 Moorpark Road
San Jose, CA 95128-2799

CAREER CHANGE RESOURCES



COURSE/WORKSHOP AWARENESS



RE-ENTRY WOMEN, 1988: STATISTICAL ANALYSIS (N = 65)

| 1. Age | <u>Percent</u> |
|----------------------|----------------|
| A. 35-40 | 31.3 |
| B. 41-45 | 31.3 |
| C. 46-50 | 20.3 |
| D. 51-55 | 6.3 |
| E. 56-60 | 1.6 |
| F. 61+ | 9.4 |
| TOTAL | <u>100.0</u> |
| 2. Ethnic Background | |
| A. Black | 12.5 |
| B. Hispanic | 6.3 |
| C. Caucasian | 75.0 |
| D. Other | 6.3 |
| TOTAL | <u>100.0</u> |
| 3. Marital Status | |
| A. Single | 4.7 |
| B. Married | 51.6 |
| C. Separated | 10.9 |
| D. Divorced | 26.6 |
| E. Widow | 6.3 |
| TOTAL | <u>100.0</u> |
| 4. Education | |
| A. < High School | 4.7 |
| B. High School | 40.6 |
| C. < College Degree | 34.4 |
| D. College Degree | 9.4 |
| E. > College Degree | 10.9 |
| TOTAL | <u>100.0</u> |
| 5. Years Worked | |
| A. 0-4 yrs | 6.3 |
| B. 5-9 yrs | 15.6 |
| C. 10-15 yrs | 23.4 |
| D. 16-20 yrs | 28.1 |
| E. 21+ yrs | 26.6 |
| TOTAL | <u>100.0</u> |
| 6. Last Employed | |
| A. Current | 42.2 |
| B. < 1 yr | 29.7 |
| C. 1-5 yrs | 18.8 |
| D. 6-10 yrs | 3.1 |
| E. > 10 yrs | 6.3 |
| TOTAL | <u>100.0</u> |

RE-ENTRY WOMEN, 1988: STATISTICAL ANALYSIS (N = 65)
(cont'd)

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------|
| 7. Type Job Held Longest | |
| A. Professional | 11.1 |
| B. Clerical | 71.4 |
| C. Retail | 11.1 |
| D. Others | 6.3 |
| TOTAL | <u>100.0</u> |
| 8. Reason Career Change | |
| A. Financial | 34.7 |
| B. Extras | 11.0 |
| C. Improve Self | 22.9 |
| D. Social | 14.4 |
| E. Health & Retirement | 16.9 |
| TOTAL | <u>100.0</u> |
| 9. Career Change Resources | |
| A. College Counseling | 30.1 |
| B. Re-entry Courses | 25.8 |
| C. Job Skill Training | 18.3 |
| D. Career Counseling | 11.8 |
| E. Others | 14.0 |
| TOTAL | <u>100.0</u> |
| 10. Return to Work ASAP | |
| A. Yes | 63.0 |
| B. No | 37.0 |
| TOTAL | <u>100.0</u> |
| 11. Type of Employment | |
| A. Full-Time | 42.0 |
| B. Part-Time | 28.0 |
| C. Either | 30.0 |
| TOTAL | <u>100.0</u> |
| 12. Health Insurance Status | |
| A. Yes | 81.0 |
| B. No | 19.0 |
| TOTAL | <u>100.0</u> |
| 13. Dental Insurance Status | |
| A. Yes | 54.7 |
| B. No | 45.3 |
| TOTAL | <u>100.0</u> |
| 14. Financial Need Delaying Medical Attention | |
| A. Yes | 18.5 |
| B. No | 81.5 |
| TOTAL | <u>100.0</u> |

RE-ENTRY WOMEN, 1988: STATISTICAL ANALYSIS (N = 65)
(cont'd)

| | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| 15. Course/Workshop Awareness | |
| A. Newspaper | 3.0 |
| B. College Schedule | 47.8 |
| C. College Counselor | 13.4 |
| D. Friend | 17.9 |
| E. Radio/TV | 3.0 |
| F. Resource Center | 4.5 |
| G. Family Service | 3.0 |
| H. Phone Book | 4.5 |
| *I. Others | 3.0 |
| TOTAL | <u>100.0</u> |

*Included:

Divorce Counselor
Rehabilitation Counselor
Family Services
Women's Centers
Kaiser-Permanente Psychologist

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