With nearly 40% (39.7) of single mothers living in poverty, social support through nonprofit agencies often fill the gap left by governmental support services. Kissane focuses her research on interviews with poor women in an impoverished subsection of Philadelphia of whom nearly all had received assistance from 6 nonprofit services within the past 5 years, on average.

As the government continues to reduce resources for social support, local nonprofit agencies are overburdened with people in need. Kissane finds that many of her subjects are hesitant to use services through the more than 80 nonprofits in their area due to the assumption that there were others in greater need. The women also felt that government support provides benefits based on individual behavior, but without the concerns of depleting resources for others.

Also notable was the consensus to consider themselves resourceful and resilient, thereby less ‘needy’ than others. The author attributes this to the acceptance of neoliberal ideals of personal responsibility. She places great emphasis on the many difficulties endured by these women for the sake of invisible others at the expense of themselves and their children. But she also notes the feelings of empowerment and self-worth created by such sacrifice.

While the women reported concern for needier ‘others,’ they also showed contempt for those whom they believed ‘abused’ the resources. This feeling was much greater for abuses rendered at the local nonprofit level than the government level. While the stories of abuse were many, the subjects were most often unable to name someone they knew who committed such abuses. Kissane argues that the stories were likely stereotypical and racially-motivated. When subjects reported actually knowing someone who abused resources, they generally detached themselves from the other users.

Another concern for this population was the lack of respect and assistance often received from nonprofit agencies. Some subjects reported refusal to seek assistance from particular agencies due to perceived mistreatment and lack of support throughout the process, which the author argues makes them even more invisible. Interestingly, none of those surveyed expressed any disdain towards the social structures responsible for reducing available resources, if they even realized there were <greater> reasons for lack of assistance.

The author suggests that even though these women reported tremendous need of assistance with food and utilities, they also likely underrated their need for assistance in all areas. She also notes that women completing this survey are probably much more likely to participate in social support programs than the general public would be, and also more positive about these programs in general.

Kissane recommends more research in this area, to include men and other ethnicities (this population was mostly white or Hispanic), as well as social support agencies and those who run them. She suggests that due to lack of research in these areas, society as a whole is not aware of the full scope of issues related to social support. She fears this could lead to a further breakdown in resources available to and used by this population which could become a greater burden for this already disadvantaged population.

*National Women’s Law Center. 2015. “Women and Poverty, State by State.” Retrieved August 2, 2015 (http://www.nwlc.org/resource/women-and-poverty-state-state).*

*Kissane, Rebecca Joyce. 2012. “Poor Women’s Moral Economies of Nonprofit Social Service Use: Conspicuous Constraint and Empowerment in the Hollow State.” Sociological Perspectives 55(1): 189-211.*