

State *Of the* State Survey

*Michigan's Families Provide Care
for Elderly Relatives*

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Briefing Paper No. 95-07

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November 1995

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THE SURVEY

- A telephone survey of 1,202 adult residents of the state of Michigan was conducted by Michigan State University's Institute for Public Policy and Social Research between May 10 and June 20, 1995. This is the third quarterly MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS). It focused on issues related to families, women and children. The overall sampling error is $\pm 2.8\%$. This briefing paper reports views of the 292 Michigan residents in the sample who regularly provide assistance to an elderly relative. The sampling error for the caregivers is $\pm 5.7\%$.

The sample is designed to provide representative information for respondents from major regions of the state: Detroit City, Southeast Michigan (excluding Detroit), Southeast Michigan, Central Michigan (West and East), northern Lower Michigan, and the Upper Peninsula. (See attached information sheet for a list of the counties included in each region.) The data reported here are weighted to make the results representative of the adult population of Michigan.

KEY FINDINGS

Michigan's Caregiving Families

- **Almost a quarter of Michigan families assist elderly relatives.** When asked if they are currently providing regular assistance (such as physical care, transportation, home upkeep or car repair) to an older family member, 24% of Michigan residents say yes. As Figure 1 shows, 25% of residents age 18-24, 24% of those age 25-39, 28% of those ages 40-59, and 18% of those age 60 and older say they are providing care. (Q.1 -- *question wording is given below.*)

About half of those who say they are providing regular care for elderly relatives also have one or more children under the age of 18 in their household, and 42% of those residents with children under the age of five in the household say they are also helping an older family member.

Twenty-seven percent of women and 21% of men say they are assisting an elderly relative. As Figure 2 shows, African Americans are the racial group most likely to report providing assistance for an older relative (27%). (Q.1)

- **Over one-third of caregivers provide help more than once a week.** Asked how often they give help, 39% say more than once a week, 27% say about once a week, 23% say two or three times a month, and 12% say once a month. (See Figure 3; Q.2.)

Most caregivers are providing assistance for one older relative (63%), although 28% are caring for two, 6% for three, and 2% for four elderly family members. In 15% of the care giving situations, the elderly relative lives with the person providing the assistance. (Q.3, Q.4)

- **The majority of Michigan residents say adult children should let aging parents live with them.** As Figure 4 shows, in response to the statement "children ought to let aging parents live with them when the parents can no longer live by themselves," more than three quarters of Michigan residents agree, including 36% who strongly agree and 42% who somewhat agree. A minority disagrees, including 13% who somewhat disagree and 5% who strongly disagree. (Q.5)

Variations in responses to this statement by adult age groups reveal that nearly 85% of residents between the ages of 18 and 39, and nearly 80% of those age 40-59 agree that children should let aging parents live with them. Adults age 60 and over are somewhat less likely to agree (68%) and somewhat more likely to strongly disagree (10%).

DISCUSSION

It is a myth that American families neglect their older members. Recent studies have found that the majority of elders (80%) receive some kind of care from other family members. Although care can take many forms and require different levels of commitment, the most common form of help involves personal care for those older adults who have lost some of their ability to care for themselves. This care is increasingly provided by family members; at any given time only five percent of those adults over the age of 65 find themselves in care giving institutions, such as nursing homes.

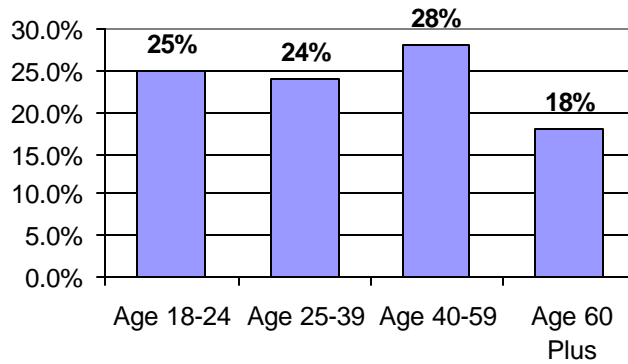
The Michigan State of the State Survey (SOSS) found that almost a quarter of the state's families are providing some kind of care to older family members, and more than a third of these caregivers provide assistance more than once a week. While 63% care for one elder, over a third of the caregivers are providing assistance to two or more older family members. The elderly relative lives with the care giver in 15% of the cases.

The multi-generational family with its caregiving demands is a relatively recent phenomenon; at the turn of the century life expectancy was less than 50 years. In 1935 when the Social Security Act became law, one could expect to live to about age 59; only five percent of the U.S. population was over 65. Today those 85 and older are the fastest-growing segment of the population, and more families are experiencing multi-generational relationships. Eighteen percent of the caregivers in the Michigan sample are age 60 or older themselves.

Today most middle-aged adults have at least one of their elderly parents alive. As a result, many --the so-called "sandwich generation"--are caring for *both* their children *and* their parents. About half of the state's caregivers report having one or more children under the age of eighteen in their households; 42% of those residents with children under the age of five say they are helping an older family member.

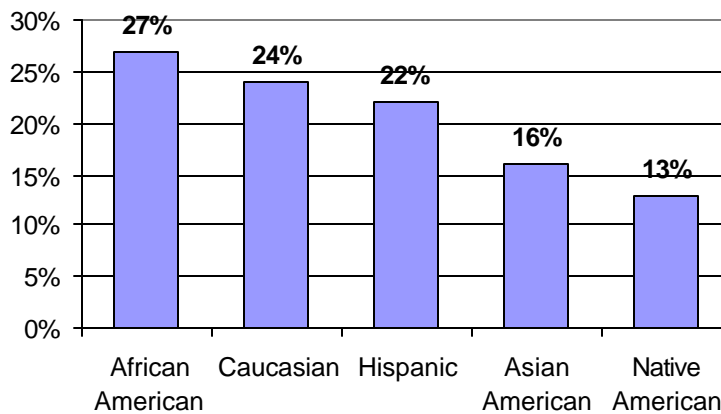
While the majority of the Michigan sample believe that adult children should allow older family members to live with them, older adults are somewhat more likely to disagree. This could be the result of the elder's desire to "age in place"--keeping one's own home for as long as possible, using a variety of outside sources to provide the support required to make this happen. Most older adults prefer an independent living situation; moving in with adult children represents an acknowledgment of one's dependency. Older adults' reluctance to move in with adult children may also reflect their desire not to burden their children with caregiving responsibilities.

**Figure 1. Michigan Residents
Currently Providing Care for at Least
One Older Family Member**



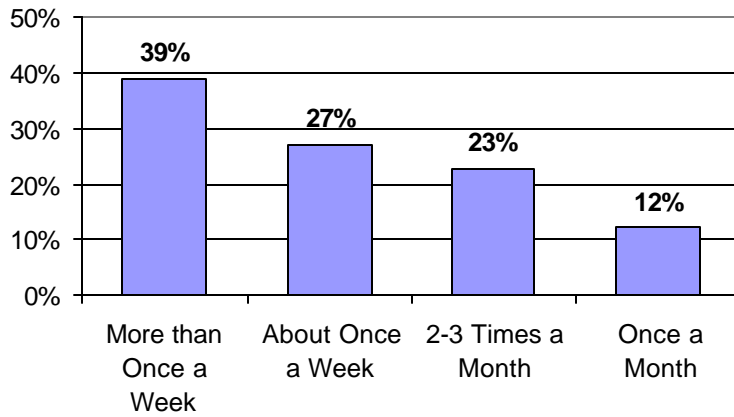
MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS) May-June 1995, N=292,
Sampling Error=5.7%, Michigan State University, IPPSR

**Figure 2. Rate of Caregiving in
Families by Race and Ethnic
Background**



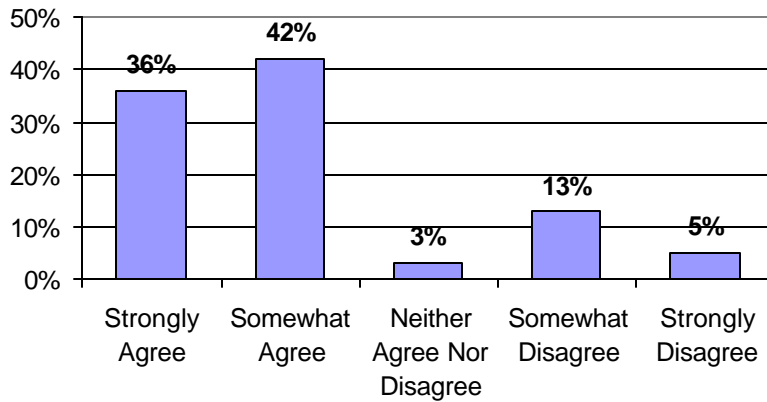
MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS) May-June 1995, N=1,202,
Sampling Error=2.8%, Michigan State University, IPPSR

Figure 3. How Often is Assistance to Older Relatives Provided?



MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS) May-June 1995, N=292, Sampling Error=5.7%, Michigan State University, IPPSR

Figure 4. Should Adult Children Let Aging Parents Live with Them?



MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS) May-June 1995, N=1,202, Sampling Error=2.8%, Michigan State University, IPPSR

SURVEY QUESTIONS

NOTE: The full wording of questions and answer categories for the items discussed in this briefing paper is given here. The order in this list conforms with the order of bulleted items in the “Key Findings” section above, not with the order of questions in the survey instrument. Overall, the interviews lasted an average of 23 minutes. The questions concerning caregiving for the elderly consumed about two minutes of that time.

Q.1 Are you currently providing regular assistance to an older family member such as providing physical care, transportation, home upkeep or car repairs?

Q.2 [Q.2-Q.4 were asked only of respondents who answered yes to Q.1] In the past month, how often did you provide this type of care? Was it more than once a week, about once a week, 2-3 times a month, or once?

Q.3 How many older relatives are you caring for in this way?

Q.4 Does this person (or persons) live with you?

Q.5 [Asked of everyone] Children ought to let aging parents live with them when the parents can no longer live by themselves. (Would you say you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?)

REGIONAL CATEGORIES

NOTE: These regions are the ones used by the Michigan State University Extension Service, except that we treat Detroit City as a separate region.

Detroit: City of Detroit

Southeast: Genesee, Lapeer, Lenawee, Livingston, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, St. Clair, Washtenaw, Wayne (excluding Detroit)

Southwest: Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Eaton, Hillsdale, Ingham, Jackson, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph, Van Buren

West Central: Allegan, Barry, Ionia, Kent, Lake, Manistee, Mason, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, Ottawa

East Central: Arenac, Bay, Clare, Clinton, Gladwin, Gratiot, Huron, Isabella, Midland, Saginaw, Sanilac, Shiawassee, Tuscola

Northern L.P.: Alcona, Alpena, Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Crawford, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Iosco, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Missaukee, Montmorency, Ogemaw, Otsego, Oscoda, Presque Isle, Roscommon, Wexford

U.P.: Alger, Baraga, Chippewa, Delta, Dickinson, Gogebic, Houghton, Iron, Keweenaw, Luce, Mackinac, Marquette, Menominee, Ontonagon, Schoolcraft

Background Information

Michigan State University State of the State Survey [MSU SOSS]

What Is MSU SOSS?

The MSU State of the State Survey is a quarterly statewide survey of a random sample of the residents of Michigan. Although dozens of surveys are conducted in Michigan every year, none is designed to provide a regular systematic monitoring of the public mood in major regions of the state. Through SOSS, MSU aims to fill this information gap. SOSS has five main purposes: (1) to provide timely information about citizen opinions on critical issues; (2) to provide data for scientific and policy research by MSU faculty; (3) to provide information for programs and offices at MSU; (4) to develop survey research methodology; and (5) to provide opportunities for student training and research.

Each quarterly round or “wave” of SOSS has a different main theme: (a) January–quality of life, governmental reform, higher education; (b) April–family, women, and children; (c) July–ethnic and racial groups, Michigan communities; (d) October (even numbered years)–politics, the election, and political issues; (odd-numbered years)–health and the environment;

Who Is Conducting SOSS?

The State of the State Survey is administered by the Survey Research Division (SRD) of the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research (IPPSR), using its computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) technology.

The design and overall planning of SOSS is the responsibility of a 17-person Steering Committee chaired by Dr. Brian D. Silver, Professor of Political Science. The Steering Committee consists of representatives from sponsoring units, which are primarily colleges and other administrative offices within MSU.

Subject to final approval by the Steering Committee, the questionnaire for each wave of SOSS is developed by a Working Group, most of whom also serve as analysts for that wave. The Working Group for the May 1995 wave includes Principal Investigators, a Research Team and an Advisory Council. Members are:

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