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STATE of the STATE Survey

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Survey

*Crime, Victimization, and Family
Violence: Views of Michigan's
Older Adults*

*by Diane Levande
Margaret Nielsen
Sally Rypkema
Victor Whiteman*

Briefing Paper No. 95-08

MICHIGAN STATE
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Crime, Victimization, and Family Violence: Views of Michian's Older Adults

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The analyses and interpretations in SOSS Briefing Papers are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of IPPSR or of Michigan State University.

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 Michigan's senior citizens (age 60 and older) on several issues. The sampling error for seniors is $\pm 6.0\%$.

The sample is designed to provide representative information for respondents from major regions of the state: Detroit City, Southeast Michigan (excluding Detroit), Southwest 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.) Except for the regional analyses, the data reported here are weighted to make the results representative of the senior adult population.

Michigan's Older Adults

- **Compared to 1990 census data, seniors are over-represented in the sample.** According to 1990 census data, older adults, those individuals 60 years and older, make up 16.2% of the state's population. They are over-represented (21.9%, n=263) in our survey sample.
- **Women, whites, and married people predominate.** The sample of seniors is very similar to census data describing the racial and gender makeup of the state. Women make up 57.8% of the older adult respondents. Most are white (88.4%), while 8.7% are African American, .3% are Asian or Pacific Islander, and 2.3% are Native American. Most respondents (57.3%) are married, while 23% are widowed, 10.2% are divorced, 5.7% remarried, and 2.1% never married.
- **Most seniors are retired and have moderate household incomes.** The largest proportion of seniors (49.2%) are retired; 22.3% are homemakers, 15.4% work full-time outside the home, 7.7% hold part-time positions, 1.2% are unemployed and 1.5% identify themselves as students. When asked for their household income, 19.8% did not provide income information. Of those responding, 15.5% report incomes under \$15,000 per year, 25.5% report incomes of \$15,000 to \$29,999, 23.5% say their incomes are \$30,000 to \$59,999, and 16.7% indicate incomes of \$60,000 and above.

The following summary of findings is based on the responses of the 263 older adults described above. Occasional comparisons are made with responses of the total group of 1202 Michigan residents interviewed.

KEY FINDINGS

Threats to Family Safety

- **Robbery is the most feared threat to personal safety.** As Figure 1 shows, of three possible threats to their personal safety, Michigan seniors are most fearful of robbery: 6% say they are “very fearful” and 48% say they are “somewhat fearful” of household burglary. Five percent are “very fearful” and 15% “somewhat fearful” of being beaten, while 4% are “very fearful” and 12% “somewhat fearful” of sexual assault. The pattern is similar for all Michigan residents.

Older adults living in the Detroit and Southeast regions of Michigan express a somewhat greater fear of robbery. Older residents residing in the Detroit and Southwest regions of the state express a somewhat greater fear of being beaten. Those in the lower income categories (under \$30,000 per year) express greater levels of fear about being beaten and being sexually assaulted than older adults with yearly incomes over \$30,000.

When compared with other age groups, seniors (age 60 and older) and young adults (age 25-39) express similar and higher levels of fear about being robbed than middle-aged adults (age 40-59). Seniors and middle-aged adults express similar and lower levels of fear of being beaten or sexually assaulted than young adults. Older men are more likely than older women to fear robbery; older women are more likely to fear sexual assault. (Q.1, Q.2, Q.3 -- *question wording is given below.*)

- **Few seniors were victimized in the past year.** Five percent of Michigan seniors report they have been cheated or conned out of money or valuables in the last year; 4% say they have been beaten or robbed in the last year. Of those responding, no one reports having experienced sexual assault. (Q.4, Q.5, Q.6)

When compared with young adults (age 25-39) and middle-aged adults (age 40-59), older adults report being actual victims of crime somewhat less. This is consistent with crime statistics which indicate that fewer crimes are committed against elderly citizens than other adult age groups.

- **While seniors and all other age groups see sexual assault as the most serious crime, proportionally more seniors identify being beaten as the most serious.** The majority of seniors (54%) say sexual assault is the most serious crime; being beaten was rated as most serious by 27%, and being robbed as the most serious crime by 14%. (Figure 2; Q. 7)

When compared with young and middle-aged adults, a greater percentage of older adults say being beaten is the most serious crime, and a somewhat lesser percentage say sexual assault is the most serious crime. More older men than older women consider robbery the most serious crime, and somewhat more older women than older men consider sexual assault the most serious crime.

Perpetrators of Family Violence: What Should be Done?

- **Spouse abuse: 85% call for action.** When someone hits a spouse or partner so that it leaves a mark, should the family be left alone to deal with the situation or should something be done? 85% of older adults say something should be done. Of those who say some action should be

taken, 41% say the person causing the harm should be arrested, and the majority of this group (82%) say the abuser should receive a jail sentence. Twenty-six percent say social services should be provided, and almost everyone in this group (98%) says treatment for the abuser in the form of counseling or education should be “required.” Twenty percent say the abuser should be barred from contact with the victim. Twelve percent of seniors say the family should be left alone. (Figure 3; Q.8, Q.9, Q.10, Q.11)

- **Child abuse: 17 out of 20 say to do something.** What should be done when someone hits a child so that it leaves a mark? Something should be done, say 79% of Michigan’s older residents. Forty-three percent of this group believe social services should be provided, and 94% of those choosing this action say treatment should be “required” for the person who does harm. A third (33%) say the hitter should be arrested, and 84% of those who favor this action say the abuser should receive a jail sentence. Barring the hitter from contact with the child is favored by 14% of those who call for action; however, 18% of all seniors say the family should be left alone. (Figure 3; Q.12, Q.13, Q.14, Q.15)
- **Elder abuse: 83% believe action should be taken.** When a family member hits an elderly relative so that it leaves a mark, 83% of seniors say something should be done. One-third (33%) who call for action say the person doing the harm should be arrested, and 90% of those who favor this action say the abuser should receive a jail sentence. Another third (32%) believe social services should be provided; 90% of those who favor this action say treatment should be required for the hitter. A quarter (24%) say the hitter should be barred from contact with the elderly person. Of all seniors, 14% say the family should be left alone. (Figure 3; Q.16, Q.17, Q.18, Q.19)
- **The actions favored by older adults in domestic violence situations are similar to those of young and middle-aged adults.** A substantial majority of Michigan residents believe that “something should be done” in instances of spouse abuse, child abuse, and elder abuse. A somewhat higher percent of respondents say the perpetrator should be arrested in cases of spouse abuse than in cases of child abuse or elder abuse. In general, Michigan residents are somewhat more reluctant to recommend either arrest or barring the perpetrator from contact with the victim in cases of child abuse.

Community Help for Domestic Violence Victims

- **Two-thirds of Michigan’s seniors (68%) know where to find help in their community for a woman who is being emotionally or physically abused by husband or partner; 84% for a neglected or abused child; and 80% for a neglected or abused elderly person.** These findings are similar to those of other adult age groups, and suggest that most Michigan residents know about community resources for victims of domestic violence, especially child abuse and elder abuse victims. Somewhat fewer residents know where to find help for abused women. (Q.20, Q.21, Q.22)

Some interesting regional differences emerge on this set of questions. In general, the percentage of persons who answer “yes” on all three questions is higher for seniors residing in the Upper Peninsula and Northern Lower Peninsula and somewhat lower for residents of the Southeast and Detroit regions. (See Figure 4.)

80% of older adults have lived in their current residences for six years or more; 20% have moved within the last five years. A change of residence within the last five years had little

impact on older adults' knowledge of community resources that provide help for victims of domestic violence.

DISCUSSION

Age Differences

Beginning in the 1970's, a number of studies examined *age differences in fear of crime*, and the majority of these reports indicate that fear of crime is higher among older adults than among younger age groups. During the same time period, national surveys of crime victimization have found that older adults are least likely of all age groups to experience crime, and the rate of victimization against the elderly has been gradually declining over a twenty-year period. This has led some researchers to pose the "victimization/fear paradox," arguing that older adults have an irrational fear of crime that is even more of a problem than crime itself. As a result, it has been suggested that older adults may isolate themselves from the outside world, not daring to venture out of their homes because of their irrational fear of crime.

In contrast, some researchers have recently questioned the "victimization/fear paradox," indicating that there are several problems with the methods used to obtain and analyze fear of crime data that could account for the age differences and lead to a false notion that older adults are expected to be fearful of crime. It may also be that some social change has occurred over the last twenty years, and that older adults today are less fearful of crime than in the recent past.

The Michigan State of the State Survey (SOSS) did not find large differences among age groups regarding fear of crime. Consistent with findings from recent studies using national, regional and community samples, fear of victimization varies by type of crime within each age group. In general, women express more fear of crime than men in all age groups. This is particularly evident in fear expressed about sexual assault. Urban dwellers express a higher fear of crime than those who live in rural areas.

Possible Implications for Intervention

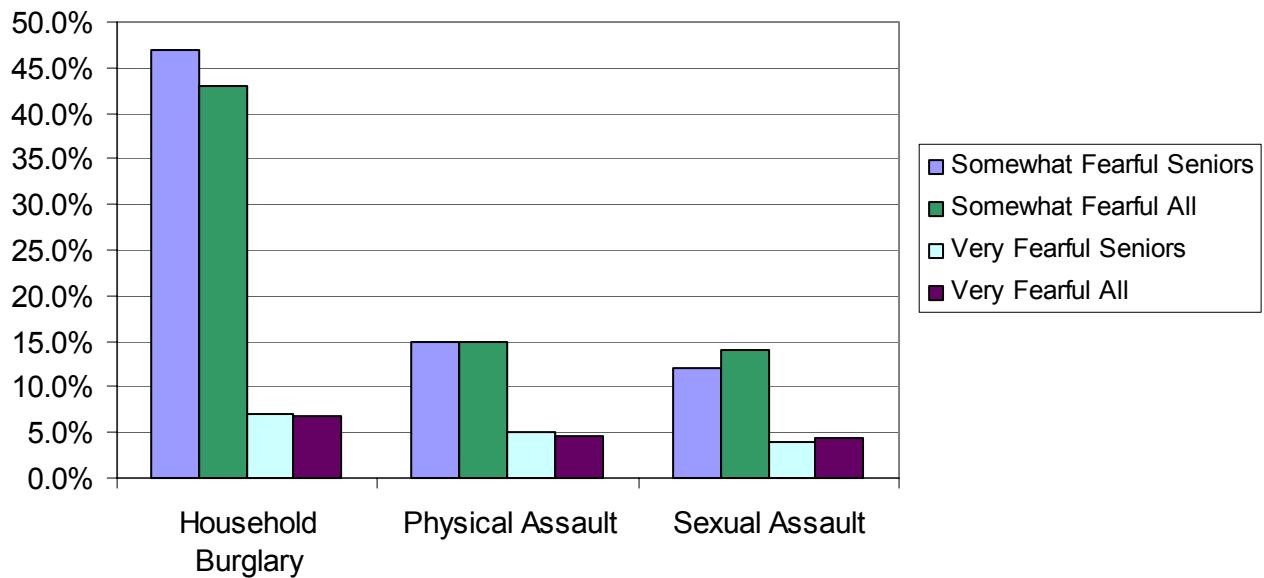
The vast majority of Michigan residents favor outside intervention in situations of family violence. In child abuse and elder abuse cases, Michigan residents are about equally split on whether intervention should be in the form of social services with treatment required for the perpetrator, or arrest and subsequent jail sentence. In cases of spouse abuse, a clear majority favor arrest with jail sentence. Older adults, consistent with other age groups, are somewhat less likely to favor intervention in child abuse situations. This may be a reflection of the belief in parental rights to discipline children, including the use of physical punishment.

Sources of Community Help

Michigan residents say they know where to find help in their communities for victims of family violence. Almost all older adult respondents living in the Upper Peninsula and Northern Lower Peninsula say they know where to find help for victims. The level of knowledge about community resources is reduced somewhat for those living in more densely populated locations, including the larger urban areas. This difference may reflect the greater number and complexity of services available in more populated areas, which residents might find confusing. It is also possible that the northern counties in Michigan do a better job of educating their citizens about community resources.

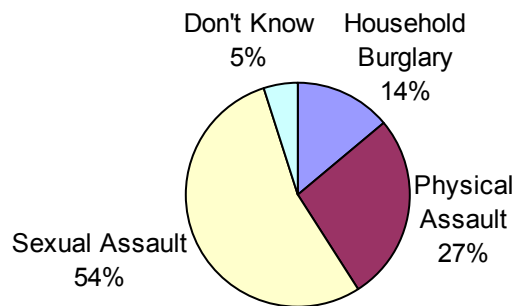
In view of the significant amount of media attention focused on spouse abuse over the last year, it is surprising that the percentage of older adults who know where to find community help for women who are being abused by their husbands is lower than the percentage of those who know where to find help for victims of child abuse or elder abuse. This finding is similar for all age groups and indicates a need for more information about services for victims of spouse abuse in all areas of the state.

Figure 1. Percent Who Fear Different Types of Victimization Seniors vs. All Residents



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

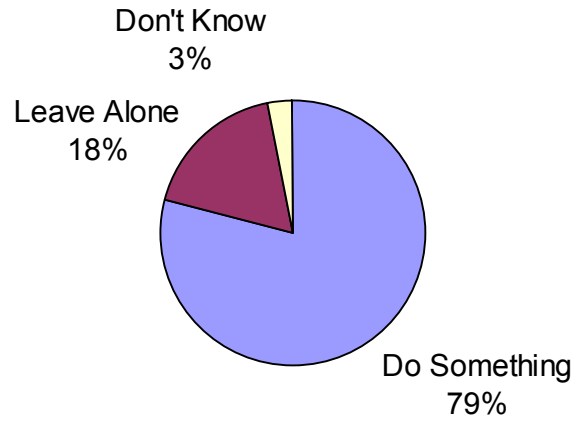
Figure 2. Crimes Felt To Be Most Serious by Michigan Seniors



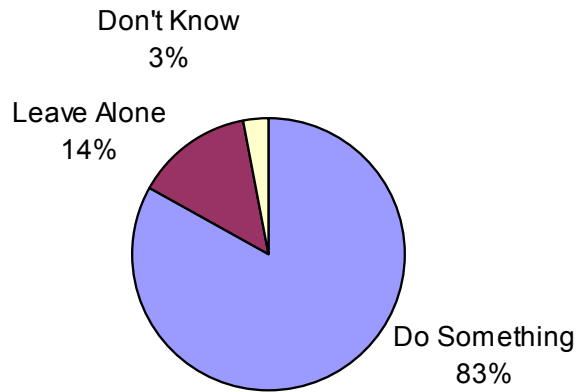
MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS), May-June 1995, N=263, Sampling Error=6.0%, Michigan State University, IPPSR

Figure 3. Michigan Seniors' Recommended Actions on Various Types of Abuse:

Child Abuse

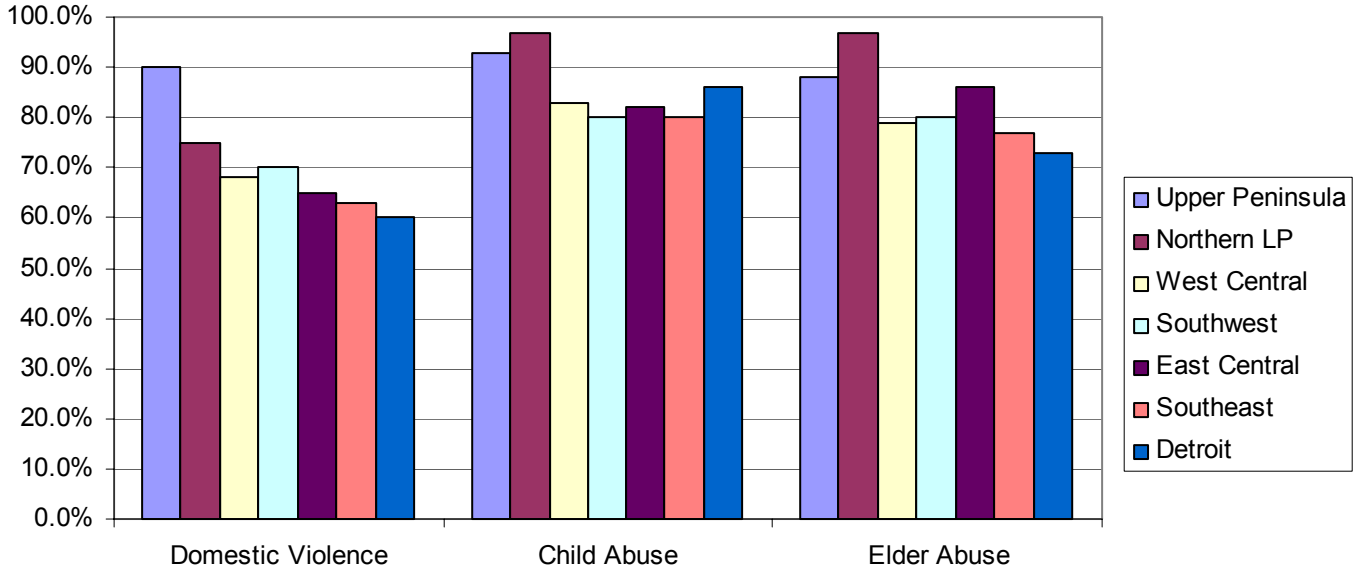


Elder Abuse



MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS), May-June 1995, N=263, Sampling Error=6.0%, Michigan State University, IPPSR

Figure 4. Percentage of Michigan Seniors Who Know Where to Find Community Help for Victims of Abuse by Region



MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS), May-June 1995, N=263, Sampling Error=6.0%, Michigan State University, IPPSR

SURVEY QUESTIONS

NOTE: The full wording of questions (and answer categories if other than yes or no) 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 reported on in this briefing paper consumed about seven minutes of that time.

- Q.1 Most of us worry from time to time about the threat that violence poses to our personal safety. How fearful are you that someone will break into your home while you are away? Would you say very fearful, somewhat fearful, or not fearful at all?
- Q.2 How fearful are you of being beaten, either by a stranger, a relative, or someone else you know? Would you say very fearful, somewhat fearful, or not fearful at all?
- Q.3 How fearful are you that someone will force sexual activity on you? Would you say very fearful, somewhat fearful, or not fearful at all?
- Q.4 In the past year, were you conned or cheated out of money or valuables?
- Q.5 In the past year, have you or anyone in your household been a victim of a personal physical attack or robbery?
- Q.6 In the past year, have you or anyone in your household been forced or coerced into sexual activity? (By that, we mean raped, sexually assaulted, or forced to have sex.)
- Q.7 Of these crimes (being robbed, being beaten, or being forced to have sexual activity) which crime do you personally feel is the most serious?
- Q.8 When someone hits a spouse or partner so that it leaves a mark, do you feel the family should be left alone to deal with the situation or should something be done about it?
- Q.9 [Asked only of respondents who said something should be done in Q.8] Which of the following do you feel would be the most appropriate action to take in this situation (hitting spouse or partner)? Should social services be provided to the family to reduce the chance of future harm, or should the person who causes the harm be barred from staying or having contact with the other person, or should the person who harmed the other be arrested?
- Q.10 [Asked only of those whose answer to Q.9 was that the person should be arrested] Should that person be given a jail or prison sentence?
- Q.11 [Asked of everyone who answered Q.9] Should that person be required to receive treatment?
- Q.12 When someone hits their child so that it leaves a mark, do you feel the family should be left alone to deal with the issue or should something be done about it?
- Q.13 [Asked only of respondents who said something should be done in Q.12] Which of the following do you feel would be the most appropriate action to take in this situation? Should social services be provided to the family to reduce the chance of future harm, or should the person who causes the harm be barred from staying or having contact with the child, or should the person who harmed the child be arrested?

Q.14 [Asked only of those whose answer to Q.13 was that the person should be arrested] Should that person be given a jail or prison sentence?

Q.15 [Asked of everyone who answered Q.13] Should that person be required to receive treatment?

Q.16 When someone hits an elderly relative so that it leaves a mark, do you feel the family should be left alone to deal with the issue or should something be done about it?

Q.17 [Asked only of respondents who said something should be done in Q.16] Which of the following do you feel would be the most appropriate action to take in this situation? Should social services be provided to the family to reduce the chance of future harm, or should the person who causes the harm be barred from staying or having contact with the elderly relative, or should the person who harmed the elderly relative be arrested?

Q.18 [Asked only of those whose answer to Q.17 was that the person should be arrested] Should that person be given a jail or prison sentence?

Q.19 [Asked of everyone who answered Q.17] Should that person be required to receive treatment?

Q.20 If you knew a woman who was being emotionally or physically abused by her husband, partner, ex-partner, or ex-spouse, would you know where to find help for her in your community?

Q.21 If you knew of children being neglected or abused by their parents would you know where to find help for them in your community?

Q.22 If you knew of elderly who were being neglected or abused by their relatives, would you know where to find help for them in your community?

REGIONAL CATEGORIES

NOTE: These regions are the ones used by 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, 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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