

State *Of the* State Survey

*The State of Michigan Families:
The Status of Children*

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Briefing Paper No. 95-12

The State of Michigan Families: The Status of Children

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THE SURVEY

- Between May 10 and June 20, 1995, Michigan State University's Institute for Public Policy and Social Research conducted a telephone survey of 1,202 adult residents of the state of Michigan. This was the third quarterly MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS). The main themes of this round of research were the state of Michigan families, the role and status of women, and the status of children.
- The sample design provides representative information for respondents from major regions of the state: Detroit City, Southeast Michigan (excluding Detroit), Southwest Michigan, East Central Michigan, West Central Michigan, 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 Perception of Children's Issues

- **Over half (56%) of Michigan residents believe the well-being of children in their communities has worsened over the past five years.** Only 44% believe that it has remained the same or improved.

When asked if they believe children's well-being in the community has worsened over the past five years, 61% of African Americans said it has. Only 46% of whites agreed.

Forty-six percent of men versus 42% of women think the well-being of children has remained the same or improved over the past five years. As Figure 1 shows, Catholics are more likely to think the well-being of children in their community has remained the same or improved over the past year (50%) than Protestants (44%) or those without a religious affiliation (36%). (Q. 1 - *question wording is given below.*)

- **Overall, Michigan residents approve of mothers of small children working full-time (60%).** The strongest support comes from employed people (61%), women (64%), African Americans (70%), Catholics (64%), and Democrats (65%). A majority of every demographic group approves. (Q. 2; See Figure 2.)

- **More parents than people without children think children under the age of three are harmed by day care.** Forty-five percent of Michigan residents without children think it does not harm children under the age of three to go to full-time licensed day care, while fewer parents (40%) would agree with that scenario. (Q. 3)

Catholics are the most likely to disagree that children under the age of three are not harmed by full time day care (60%), while only 52% of Protestants think full-time day care is harmful. (See Figure 3.)

Fifty-five percent of Michigan residents believe that full time day care is harmful to children under the age of three.

- **Working parents are less likely to believe there is plenty of quality day care.** Thirty-six percent of employed Michigan residents and 29% of the unemployed do not think there is enough quality day care for children in their community.

More parents of 18 year olds and younger (36%) than non-parents (32%) believe there is not enough quality day care in their community.

Overall, 57% of Michigan residents do believe that there is plenty of quality day care in their community. (Q. 4; See Figure 4.)

DISCUSSION

More men than women and more whites than African Americans think the well-being of children has improved over the past five years. Disadvantaged groups have a more negative outlook on children's well-being in the community over the past five years. Perhaps the personal circumstances of the respondents influenced their perceptions of the well-being of the children in their community. Children in Michigan are more likely than any other age group to live in homes with incomes below the poverty level. Children of color and children living with single mothers have higher poverty rates than other children.

Again, personal circumstance seems to influence the attitudes toward working mothers. Approval of mothers with young children working full-time appears to coincide with the desire or need for both spouses to be employed. Women, non-whites, Democrats, those who are younger (ages 18 to 29), with more education, who are employed and have an employed partner or spouse, are more likely to believe that it is okay for mothers of young children to work full-time.

While Michigan adults generally accept mothers of young children working full time, they are concerned about full-time day care for small children. Slightly more people disagree than agree that small children are not harmed by full-time day care.

Perhaps this concern is related to Michigan adults' visions about the quality of day care in their communities. For families with children, the availability of quality day care can have a significant impact on family well-being. Having a quality licensed center care for their children allows parents to work more effectively and consistently. Although many Michigan residents indicate that there is plenty of quality day care for children in their communities, it is the parents and employed residents who are the least likely to agree.

The perception of the availability of child care depends on whether one has a need for child care, and on whether one is primarily responsible for child care provisions. Those who are married, in single income families, and do not have children or adolescents in the home are more likely to believe there is sufficient day care for children in their communities. Those groups more likely to need the services of day care workers or facilities (dual income families, those who are employed and have children age 18 or younger in the home), and those more likely to be responsible for child care accommodations (women) are more likely to indicate that there is not enough quality day care for children in their communities.

Figure 1. Children's Well-Being Is the Same or Better
Percent Who Think it has Improved or Stayed the Same
in the Last Five Years

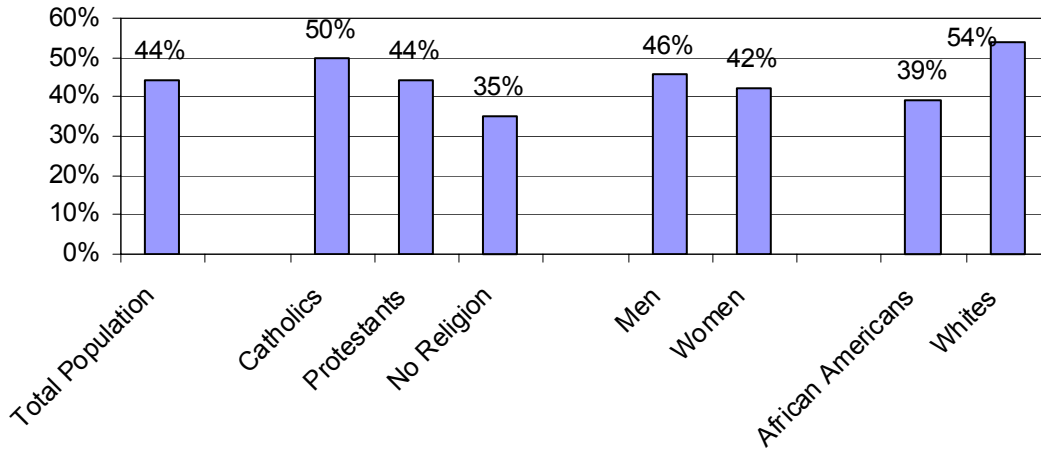


Figure 2. Approval of Working Mothers of Small Children
Percent Who Strongly Approve of Somewhat Approve

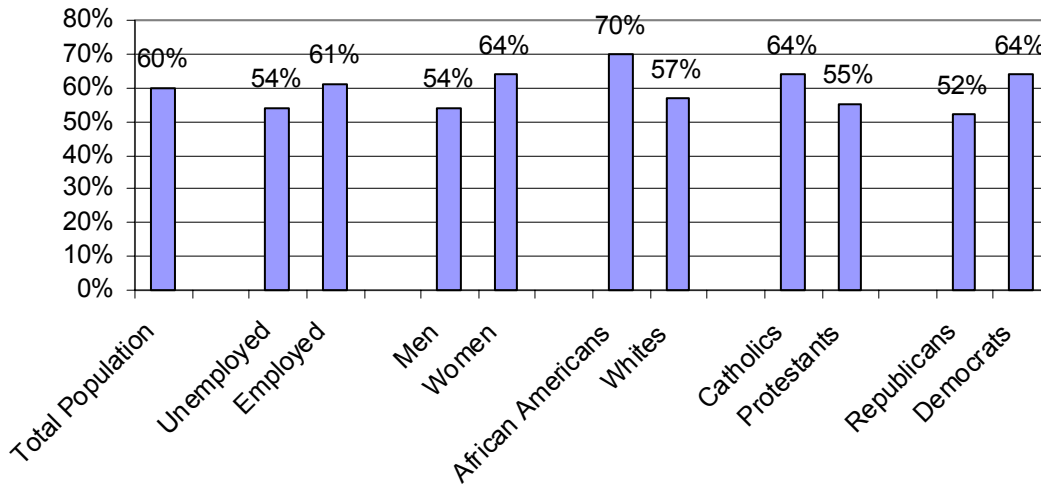


Figure 3. Percent Who Think Children under Three Are Harmed by Full-Time Daycare

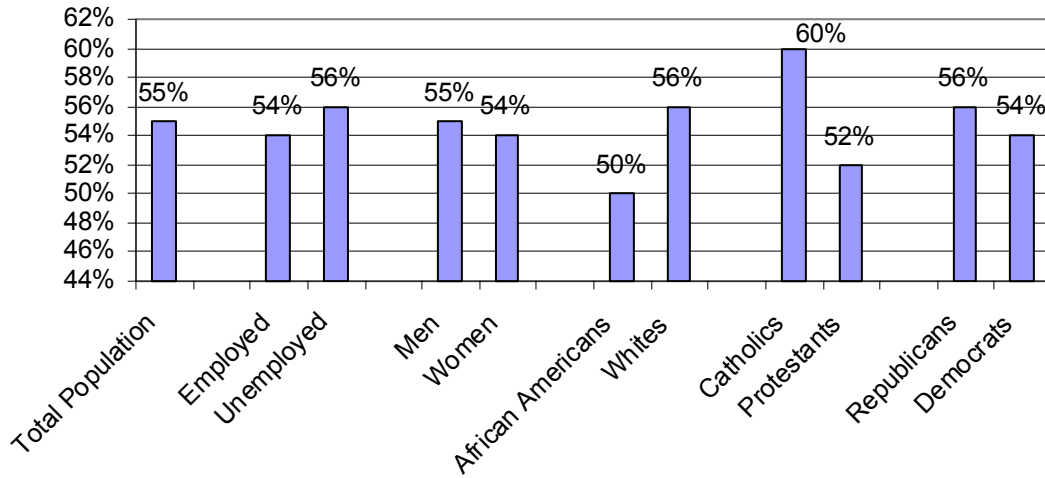
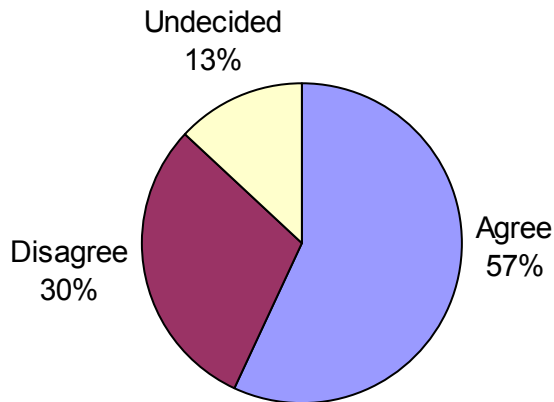


Figure 4. There is Sufficient Quality Daycare in Community



M.S.U. State of the State Survey (SOSS) May-June 1995, N=1202, Sampling Error=2.8%, Michigan State University IPPSR

SURVEY QUESTIONS

NOTE: The full wording of questions for the items discussed in this briefing paper is given below. Answer categories are shown if other than yes or no. The order in this list conforms with the order of the bulleted items above, not the order for the questions in the survey instrument. Overall, the interviews lasted an average of 23 minutes. The questions about well-being of children, working mothers, and day care consumed about one minute of that time.

Q. 1. Do you think the well-being of children in your community has improved or worsened over the past five years? Would you say it has improved, stayed the same, or worsened?

Q. 2. Is it okay for mothers to work full-time when their youngest child is under five? Would you say you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?

Q. 3. Children under three years old are not harmed by all-day child care in a licensed center. Would you say you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?

Q. 4. There is plenty of quality day care for children in my community. 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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