

State *Of the* State Survey

Family Ties in Michigan

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OVERVIEW

Who do Michigan residents turn to in an emergency? Can they count on their family and friends to spend time helping them out? If they find themselves financially strapped, do they borrow large sums of money from friends or family? Similarly, if they have received emotional, physical or financial assistance, do Michigan residents feel obligated to help others in return? How many Michigan residents have close friends and family who live nearby and how often do they see them? These are all key questions linked to the nature, strength and degree of family ties and social capital.

Previous studies have shown that the amount of social capital available to an individual, family or community is linked to both family/community interactions and community stability. The greater the family and community ties, the higher the probability that individuals and families will have someone that they can turn to in an emergency. These informal social networks are crucial factors in both the smooth functioning of society and individuals' ability to ride out rough times and remain viable, contributing members of their community.

THE SURVEY

A telephone survey of 1,133 adult residents of the state of Michigan was conducted by Michigan State University's Institute for Public Policy and Social Research between April 30 and July 9, 1996. This was the seventh quarterly MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS). The main themes of this round of research were families, women and children. The response rate was 57.7% and the overall sampling error was $\pm 2.9\%$.

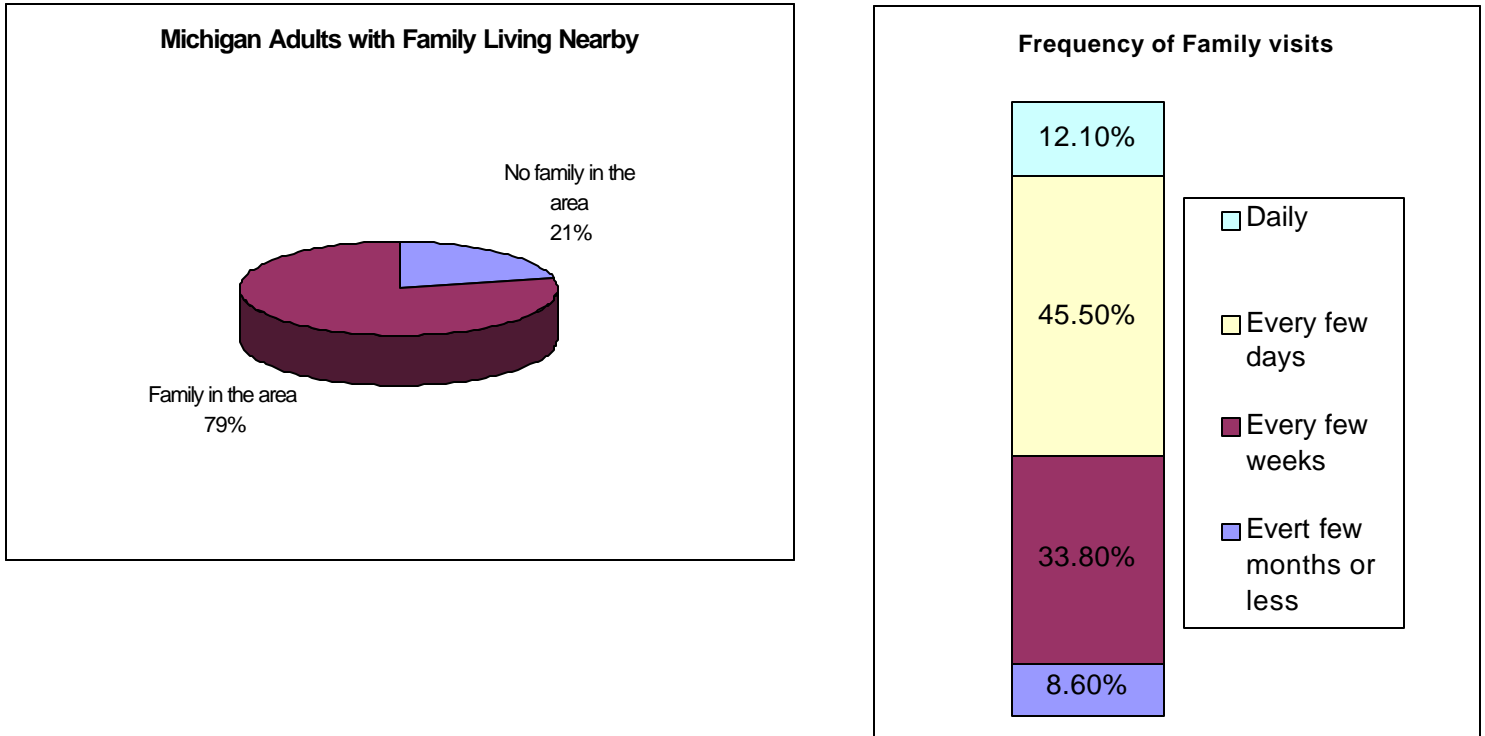
The sample design provides representative information for respondents from major regions of the state: Detroit City, Southeast Michigan (excluding Detroit), Southwest Michigan, East Central Michigan, West Central Michigan, Northern Lower Michigan, and the Upper Peninsula. (See attached information sheet 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

Nuclear and Extended Families in Michigan

- ! **Four out of five adults in Michigan (79%) have close family or relatives who live nearby or in their same community.** (See Figure 1; Question 1 - exact wording is given below.)

FIGURE 1.



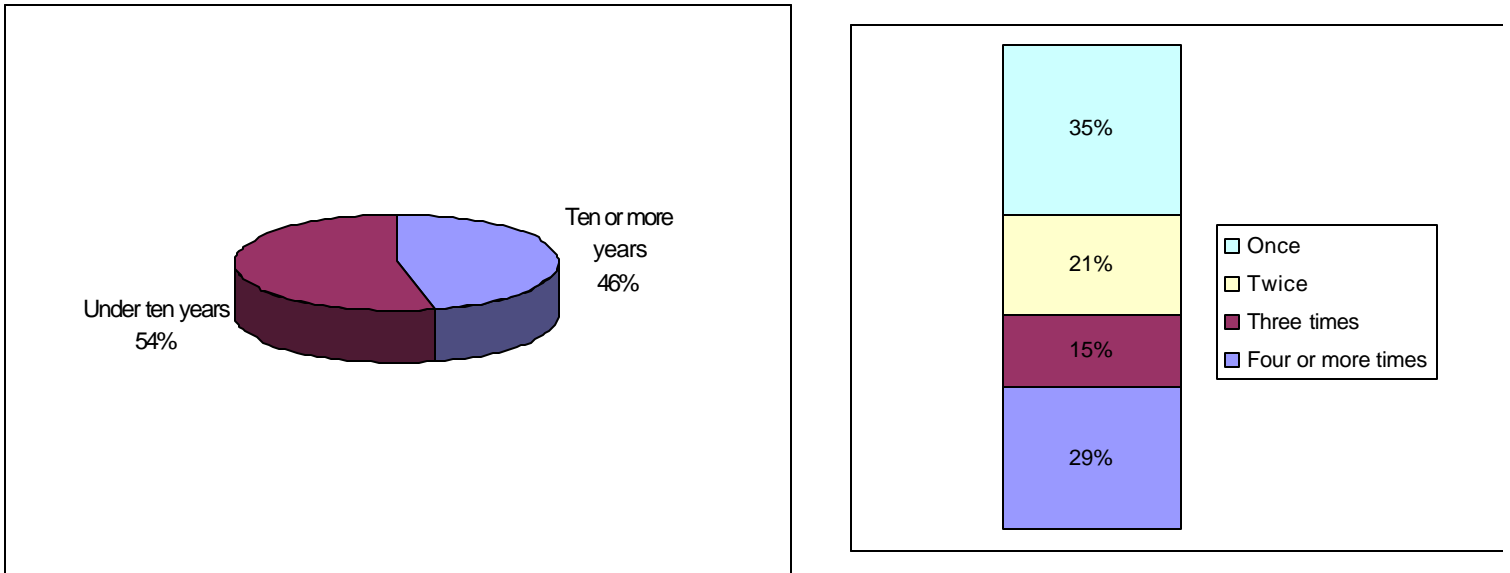
- ! **Individuals with family in the area tend to visit with them fairly frequently.** Almost all (91%) visit their family at least every few weeks. As shown in Figure 1, 12% visit daily, 45% every few days and 34% every few weeks. (Q. 2)

Community Stability

- ! **Three-fourths of Michigan families (77%) own their homes.** This does not necessarily mean that they make long term commitments to the community, as the next section shows. (Q.3)

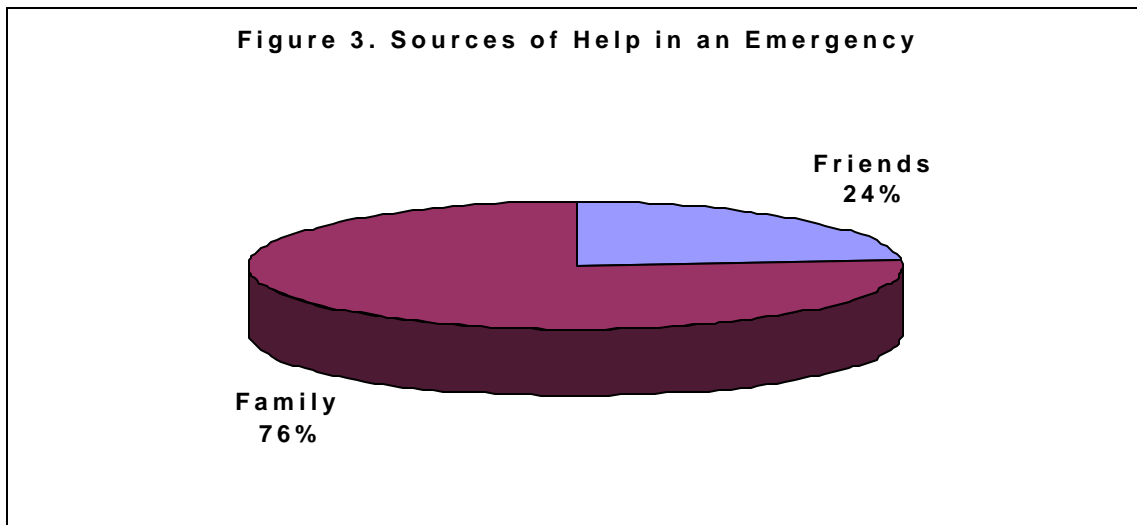
- ! **Over half of Michigan adults (54%) report having moved in the last 10 years.** They have lived in their current home for less than 10 years. (See Figure 2.) Of those adults who have moved, fewer than half (44%) have done so three or more times. (See Figure 2; Q.4, Q.5.)

Figure 2. Length of time in Current Home



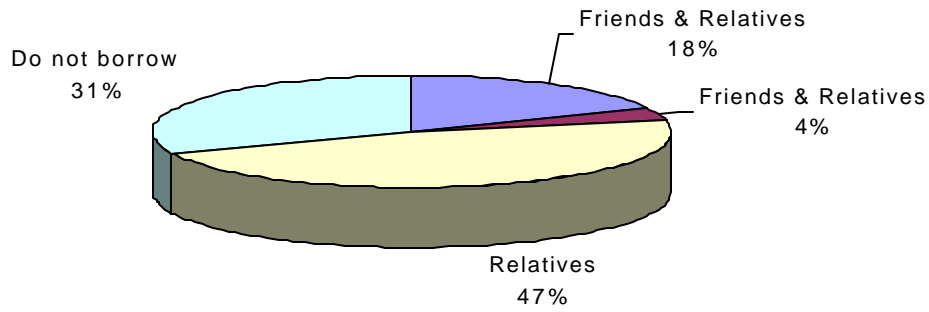
Ability to Rely on Friends and Family for Time or Money in an Emergency

- ! **Many Michigan residents (86%) report that they have relatives or friends on whom they can count to help out in time of need.** The majority of those who do have a support system (76%) rely on their family in an emergency. (See Figure 3; Q.6, Q.7.)



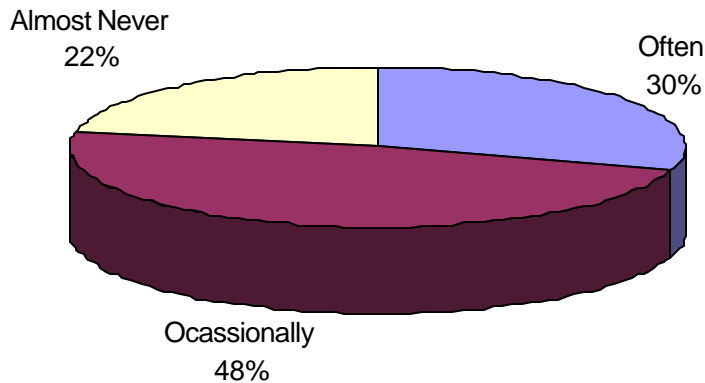
When it comes to borrowing money (several hundred dollars or more), most Michigan residents will either go to family (47%) or go without (31%). Few are likely to ask friends for financial assistance. (See Figure 4; Q.8.)

Figure 4. Borrowing Patterns for Michigan Adults



More than three out of four Michigan adults (78%) report that they are expected to help out if a friend or family member has a serious emergency. Forty-eight percent are occasionally expected to help friends and family in an emergency; while 30% are often expected to help others (Figure 5). Both women and African-Americans report a higher sense of obligation to help friends and family members in a time of need. (See Table 1; Q.9.)

Figure 5. Michigan Adults Expected to Help Family and Friends in an Emergency



DEMOGRAPHICS	OBLIGATED TO HELP	
	Yes	No
Race		
White	77.0	23.0
African-American	86.2	13.8
Other	75.8	24.2
Gender		
Male	75.0	25.0
Female	80.7	19.3

MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS)
 (April-July, 1996), N=1133, Sampling Error = +/- 2.9%
 Michigan State University, IPPSR

DISCUSSION

Ties to family and to friends represent a potential reservoir of social capital for individuals, families and communities. However, social capital is about more than receiving help; it also embodies the giving of help.

As most people know from experience, being the recipient of help and good will carries with it an inherent responsibility to return the favor. People often feel an obligation to help their family and friends in an emergency situation, especially if they themselves were once on the receiving end. This norm of reciprocity or the expectation of a return on a favor is another key component of social capital and a further indicator of family and community connectedness.

Informal social networks can be crucial support systems for people in time of need. This raises a key question: Are these social networks strengthened by the presence of family and family interactions? Our survey findings suggest that social networks, and by extension social capital, are fostered and strengthened when people have family and friends in close proximity and interact with them frequently.

Often the degree of community connections and family ties is linked to mobility or conversely stability. Family stability in terms of home ownership, length of time in the community and infrequent moves generally give families the opportunity and incentive to be committed to their

communities. They can then rely on these connections to friends and family for emotional, physical and financial support in times of need. Most of the survey respondents own their own homes and have lived in them for an average of eleven and a half years. This does not necessarily mean, however, that Michigan residents make long-term commitments to the community. Over half of the respondents reported moving in the last ten years; and about half of these people reported moving at least three times during that period. Given the high number of people reporting that they have family in the area, it is likely that people are moving relatively short distances and most likely within the state.

Despite mobility of families and individuals, nine out of ten Michiganians have family or friends whom they can count on for support and assistance in an emergency. The largest support system is through family connections. When it comes to borrowing money, most Michigan residents either ask family or go without. Few are willing to go to friends for large sums of money in an emergency. Again, family shows up as a key social network for people in their time of need. Seven out of ten Michigan residents feel that they are expected to provide assistance to their family or friends facing a crisis. Specifically, they are expected to lend a hand and spend time helping out in whatever way necessary.

A higher proportion of both African-Americans and women in Michigan reported that they felt an obligation to give assistance to family and friends. This was the only instance where there were statistically significant race or gender variations. Similarly, there was little or no regional variation in the existence of family in the area, the frequency of family visits or the amount of time and financial support available. It seems that there are strong family ties, as well as a useable bank of social capital, in the State of Michigan.

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 the list conforms with the order of bulleted items in the AKey Findings@ section above, not with the order of questions in the survey instrument. The actual question number for the instrument is presented in brackets after the question, for example [sc1]. These questions consumed about three minutes of the interview, which averaged 26 minutes.

- Q.1. Do you have close family or relatives who live near-by or in your community? [sc1]
- Q.2. *[Asked only of those respondents who answered in Q.1 that they had relatives living in the area.]* How often do you get together with other family members who do not live in the same home with you? [sc1a]
- every day
 - every few days
 - every few weeks
 - every few months
 - every year
 - less than once a year
- Q.3. Do you rent or do you own your own home? [D14a]
- rent
 - own
 - other
- Q.4. How long have you lived in your current home (or apartment)? [D16]
[Respondents gave a numerical answer, which was later coded into the following categories.]
- less than one year
 - 1-9 years
 - ten or more years
- Q.5. *[Asked only of those respondents who answered in Q.4 that they had lived in their current home less than ten years.]* How many times have you moved in the past ten years? [D16a]
[Respondents gave a numerical answer, which was later coded into the following categories.]
- once
 - twice
 - three times
 - four or more times
- Q.6. Suppose there were a serious emergency in your household. Is there a friend or relative living nearby whom you could call on to spend a lot of time helping out? [sc2]
- Q.7. *[Asked only of those respondents who answered yes to Q.6.]* Is that person a relative? [sc2a]
- Q.8. Suppose in an emergency you needed several hundred dollars, more than you had available or could borrow from a bank. Would you ask a friend for it, a relative for it, either a friend or a relative, or would you not ask for it? [sc3]
- Yes, friend only
 - Yes, relative only

- c. Yes, either or both
- d. Neither

- Q.9. How often are you expected to help friends and relatives in serious family emergencies? Would you say often, occasionally, or almost never? [sc2b]
- a. often
 - b. occasionally
 - c. almost never