

State *Of the* State Survey

*Juvenile Crime in Michigan:
Evidence and Public Perceptions*

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Briefing Paper No. 97-24

Juvenile Crime in Michigan: Evidence and Public Perceptions

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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 1,133 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 survey was designed to provide information on families, women, and children in Michigan, including perceptions of the causes and amount of juvenile delinquency. (In this paper, "juvenile" means under age 18.) The overall sampling error is $\pm 2.9\%$. For questions discussed in this paper which were asked of only a portion of respondents, the sampling error is slightly larger; how much larger depends on the number of people who were asked a question and on how their answers are distributed.

The sample was 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 list of counties included in each region.) The data reported here are weighted to make the results representative of the adult population of Michigan.

KEY FINDINGS

Perceived Causes of Juvenile Delinquency

- **Most Michigan residents believe that juvenile delinquency is caused by irresponsible parents and gangs.** As Figure 1 shows, 79% of residents feel irresponsible parents are a primary cause of delinquency and 70% think gangs are a cause. (That is, they contribute "a great deal" or "quite a bit.") Other perceived influences on juvenile delinquency include: lack of strict training school or punk prison (63%), criminal parents (60%), ineffective criminal justice system (53%), poor schools (53%), lack of jobs for youth (38%), and single parents (28%). (Q.1 -- *exact question wording is given below.*)
- **People with less education tend to think there is juvenile crime because the criminal justice system lets teenagers get away with crime.** In Michigan 41% of people without a high school education believe that a lax juvenile justice system contributes a great deal to juvenile delinquency and 30% believe the system contributes quite a bit. (See Figure 2.)

In contrast, residents with a high school education or some college or technical school less often think the criminal justice system lets teenagers get away with crime. Thirty-five percent of respondents with a high school education think the system lets teenagers get away with crime a great deal, and 21% think the system lets them get away with crime quite a bit. Close to 33% of those with some college or technical school believe the system lets teenagers get away with a great deal and 23% say quite a bit.

Those who have completed four years of college or graduate school least often report that the criminal justice system lets juveniles get away with crime. Twenty-eight percent feel the criminal justice system contributes a great deal, and 14% quite a bit. (Q.1)

- **Men more often than women (44% compared to 35%) say that lack of punk prisons or strict training schools influences juvenile delinquency a great deal.** Men more often than women also think that criminal parents (6.4%), gangs (5.5%), and a single parent

upbringing (5.5%) contribute a great deal to juvenile delinquency. The numbers in parentheses represent the amount by which men exceed women in these beliefs. (Q.1)

Perceptions and Experiences of Juvenile Crime

- **Nearly nine out of ten Michiganians believe juvenile crime is increasing.** This is true for people both with and without children living in the home.
- **Almost 13% of Michigan residents say they or someone in their family has been a victim of a juvenile crime in the past five years.** Figure 3 shows the percentage of residents who have experienced violent and non-violent juvenile crime. Victims and their families differ from non-victims in their perceptions of the importance of only two of the eight possible contributing factors to juvenile delinquency about which we asked them. *Lower* proportions of victims than non-victims believe that criminal parents contribute to delinquency “a great deal” or “quite a bit” (52.1% vs. 62.8%), or that juveniles’ knowledge that they will not be harshly punished contributes “a great deal” or “quite a bit” (53.3% of victims vs. 64.5% of non-victims). (Q.3, Q.4)
- **Women more often than men believe juvenile drug use has increased over the past five years.** (See Figure 4.) Close to 84% of Michigan residents who have a serious fear of crime believe juvenile drug use has increased. Fifty-five percent of residents with only some fear or no fear of crime believe juvenile drug use has stayed the same. (Q.6)
- **Eighty-seven percent of Michigan residents believe that juvenile crime is on the increase, while 2% feel it has decreased over the past five years.** (See Figure 5; Q.2)

Other Research Evidence on Trends in Juvenile Crime

- **From 1990 to 1994 juvenile arrests in Michigan increased just under 8%.** Of those arrests, roughly 47% represented index crimes (murder, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, larceny, auto theft and arson). In 1995 arrests for all juvenile crimes decreased by 5%¹.

Drug arrests totaled nearly 4% of all juvenile arrests in Michigan from 1990 to 1994.²

- **In 1994, 19% of all persons entering the justice system were under the age of 18.** From 1975 to 1987, the number of juveniles arrested for violent crimes remained fairly constant. However, between 1987 and 1994 it increased from just over 300 juveniles arrested for every 100,000 youth between the ages of 10 and 17, to more than 500 juveniles arrested for every 100,000 in the 10 to 17 age group. The rate for adults age 18 and over arrested for violent crimes in 1994 was 713.6 per 100,000.³

¹The decrease in crime in 1995 from the previous years may be attributed to underreporting from state law enforcement agencies. In 1995 several agencies were in the process of converting to the Michigan Incident Crime Reporting System (MICR). These numbers reflect only those agencies who reported to the Central Records Division, Department of State Police.

²Data provided by Michigan Justice Statistics Center, Michigan State University.

³Data on juveniles provided by Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1996 Update on Violence, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice. Data on adults provided by FBI Uniform Crime Reports. Bureau of Justice Statistics via telephone call 9/11/97.

- **Illicit drug use has nearly doubled for both 8th and 10th grade students since 1990.** Use among 12th graders has risen by about 50% (from 27% to 40%). While use of illicit drugs other than marijuana has increased slightly, the change is much more gradual than the increase in marijuana use.⁴
- **One in 20 high school seniors uses marijuana on a daily basis.** In 1992, two percent used marijuana daily, while in 1996 five percent reported using marijuana on a daily basis. Although the use of marijuana among high school seniors has increased over the last four years, it still has not reached the peak levels found in the late 1970s among 12th graders.⁵
- **Reported marijuana use by juveniles not in school was higher than by those in school, although the rates rarely exceeded 50% higher than for those in school.** When compared with other drug use, marijuana use was most similar for juveniles attending and not attending school. The largest difference between the two groups was in use of cocaine.⁶

Who is Most Afraid?

- **People who are seriously afraid of crime more often believe that gangs and irresponsible parents contribute to juvenile delinquency a great deal.** Sixty-one percent of Michigianians who say fear of crime is a serious problem for them, compared to 43% who have no fear of crime, believe gangs contribute a great deal. Sixty-nine percent of residents who seriously fear crime compared to 54% of people with no fear of crime believe irresponsible parents are a cause of delinquency. (Q.1, Q.6)
- **Fear of crime is more often a “serious problem” for people in Detroit than those in other parts of the state.** Of Detroit residents, 25.6% say fear of crime is a serious problem, in contrast to just 6.3% of people from other parts of the state. (See Figure 6.) There is a parallel result when African American Michigianians are considered separately, with 26.4% of those in Detroit saying fear of crime is a serious problem, and 8% of African Americans outside of Detroit saying that this fear is a serious problem. (See Figure 6.)

Whites report that fear of crime is a serious problem at a much lower rate than do African Americans whether they do or do not live in Detroit, although their fear is a somewhat greater issue if they are in Detroit. Eighteen percent of whites in Detroit say fear of crime is a serious problem, and 5.7% of those outside Detroit see it as a serious problem. (See Figure 6.)

- **Only 6% of white Michigan residents seriously fear crime, while 22% of African Americans and other minorities have a serious fear of crime.** (See Figure 7; Q.6)

⁴Data provided by [Monitoring the Future Study](#), Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 1996

⁵Data provided by [Monitoring the Future Study](#), Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 1996

⁶ Data provided in the [1995 Drug Use Forecasting, Annual Report on Adult and Juvenile Arrestees](#), National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice

Figure 1. Perceived Causes of Delinquency

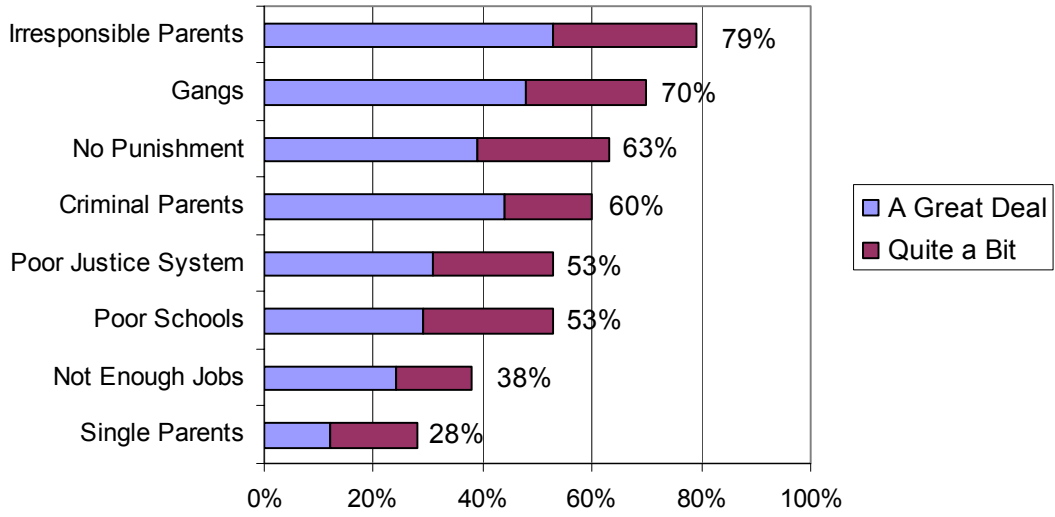


Figure 2. Michiganians Who Think the Criminal Justice System Lets Juveniles Get Away with Crime

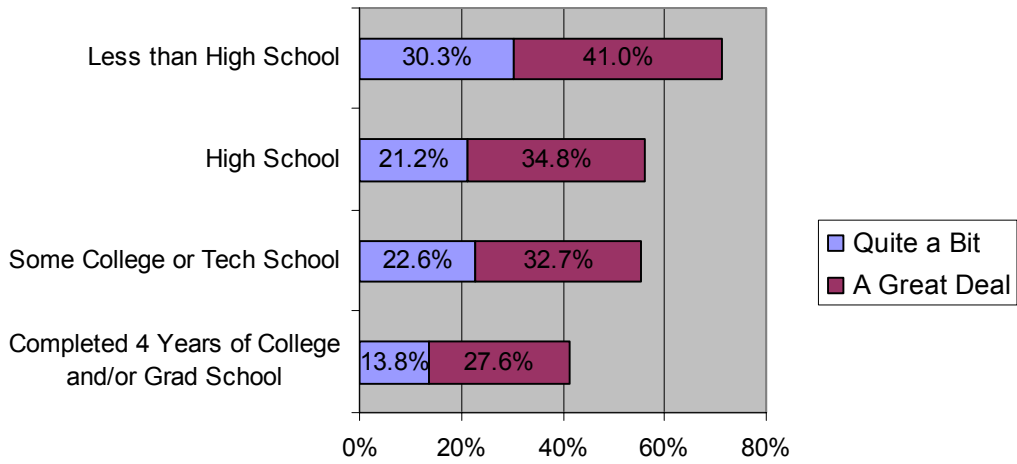


Figure 3. Immediate Family Includes a Victim of Juvenile Crime in Past Five Years

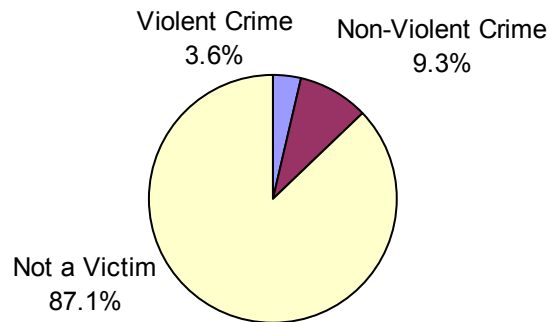


Figure 4. Perceptions of Juvenile Drug Use in Michigan Now vs. Five Years Ago by Gender

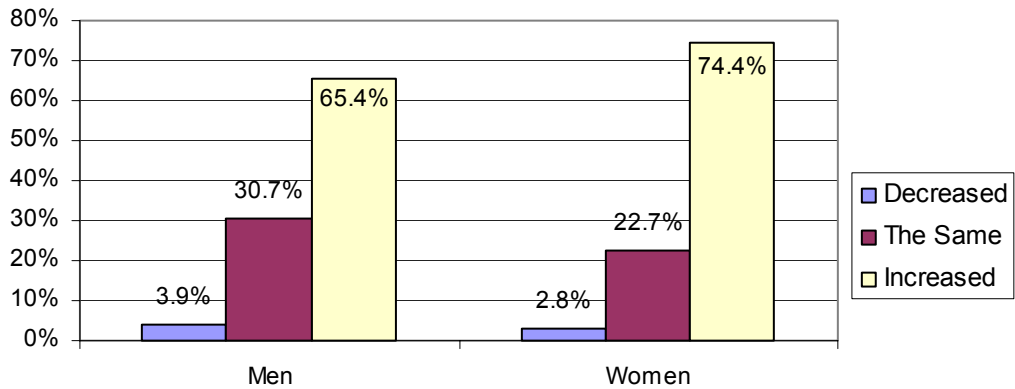


Figure 5. Perceptions of Juvenile Crime in Michigan Now vs. Five Years Ago

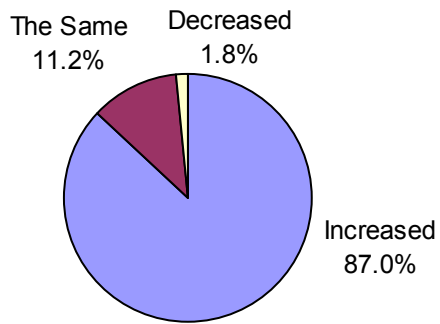
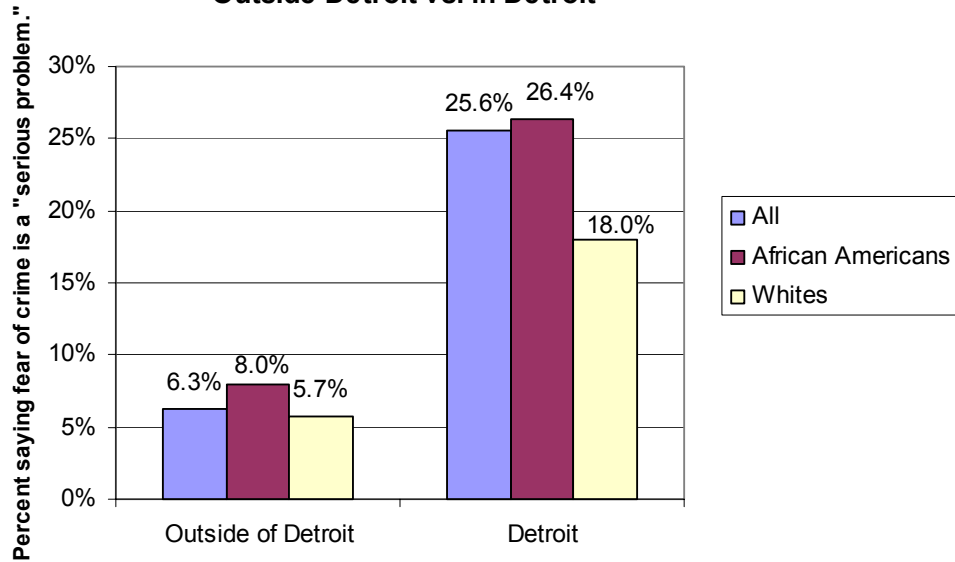
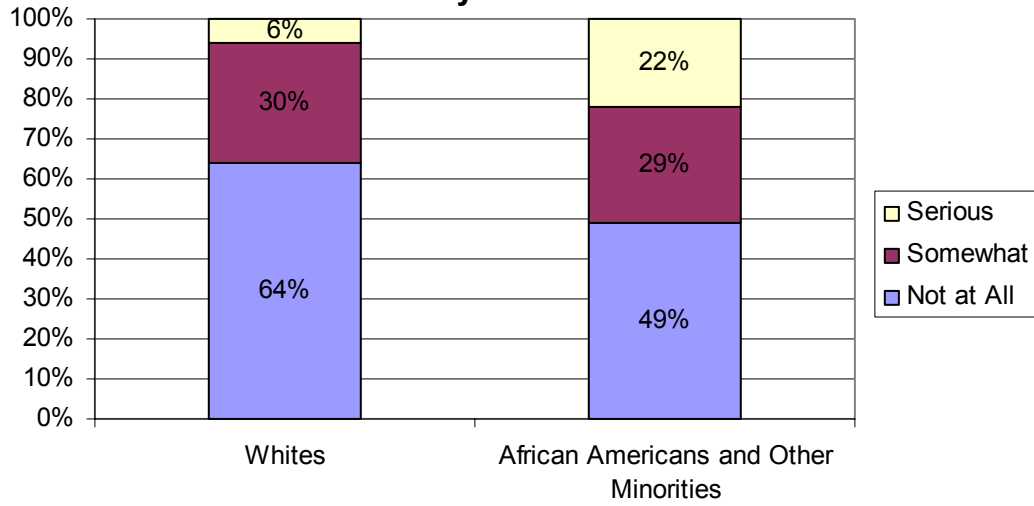


Figure 6. Michigan Residents' Fear of Crime Outside Detroit vs. in Detroit



**Figure 7. Michigan Residents' Fear of Crime
by Race**



MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS), Spring 1996; N=1133; Sampling Error=2.9%, Michigan state University, IPPSR

SURVEY QUESTIONS

NOTE: The full wording of questions for items discussed in this briefing paper is given here. The order in this list confirms with the order of bulleted items in the “Key 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 [CB3]. Overall, the interviews lasted an average of 26 minutes. The questions about perceived causes and amounts of juvenile delinquency consumed about four minutes of that time.

Q.1 Now we want to know your opinion about why some teenagers are juvenile delinquents. For each of the possible reasons I read, please tell me how much you think each contributes to why some teenagers are juvenile delinquents. Would you say this contributes a great deal, quite a bit, somewhat, a little, or not at all to why some teenagers are juvenile delinquents?

- A. Growing up in a community where the schools are not good? [CB3]
- B. Parents have been irresponsible in bringing up their children? [CB3b]
- C. Only one parent lives in the home? [CB3c]
- D. Parents are themselves criminal? [CB3d]
- E. The criminal justice system lets teenagers get away with crimes? [CB3e]
- F. Juveniles know they will not be sent to a strict training school or punk prison that punishes them like a prison for adults? [CB3g]
- G. Not enough jobs for adolescents? [CB3h]
- H. Gang influences? [CB3i]

Q.2 Compared to five years ago, do you think violent crime by juveniles in Michigan has increased, decreased, or stayed about the same? [JD2]

Q.3 Over the past five years, has anyone in your immediate family been the victim of a juvenile crime? [JD4]

Q.4 *[Asked only of those respondents who answered yes to Q. 3.]* Was it a violent crime involving force or a weapon, or a non-violent crime? [JD5]

Q.5 Compared to five years ago, do you think illegal drug use by juveniles in Michigan has increased, stayed about the same, or decreased? [JD3]

Q.6 Now I am going to read you some problems that people have mentioned to us. For each, would you tell me if it is a serious problem, somewhat of a problem, or not a problem at all for you personally?

- A. Fear of crime [PR1d]

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, no other one 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) Winter–quality of life, governmental reform, higher education; (b) Spring–family, women, and children; (c) Summer–ethnic and racial groups, Michigan communities; (d) Fall (even numbered years)–politics, the election, and political issues; Fall (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 principal investigators or analysts for that wave. The Working Group for the Spring 1996 survey was comprised of:

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