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Institute for Public Policy & Social Research

STATE of the STATE Survey

State
Of the
State
Survey

*Children, Youth, and Families
in Michigan*

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Briefing Paper No. 97-26

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

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Children, Youth and Families in Michigan

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BACKGROUND

In recent years, land grant universities have been challenged to focus attention on the problems and expectations of their states. Political decision-makers are interested in and supportive of programs that can contribute to national and state priorities, and relevant economic and social issues for the citizenry. In addition, the changing political environment demands greater accountability of public institutions.

Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) strives to serve Michigan citizens. In 1992, MSUE initiated a process to determine current and emerging local, regional and statewide issues of greatest importance to Michigan citizens. Based on the results of this issue identification process, MSU Extension established 17 “Area of Expertise” teams to plan and deliver educational programs for and with Michigan citizens.

MSUE Children, Youth and Family Programs (CYF) mobilizes three Area of Expertise teams—Family Strengths; Food, Nutrition and Health; and Youth Development and 4-H—to deliver educational programs within communities. The CYF program helps Michigan residents develop life management skills; provides nutrition, food safety, health and wellness education; develops individual and family economic capacity; and addresses critical issues that place children, youth and families at risk. MSUE CYF has for years embraced the idea of community capacity building, and has invested in programs designed to develop human capital, most notably through leadership development programs.

As MSUE CYF began to move into the Area of Expertise team approach to deliver major educational programs, it became apparent that a statewide survey was needed to establish baseline data on citizens’ views of MSUE, assess the needs and problems facing children, youth and families, and find ways to address these needs and problems through MSUE CYF programs. Such a survey was undertaken as part of the quarterly MSU State of the State Survey. The objectives of the MSUE-related questions are:

1. To determine Michigan citizens’ awareness of MSUE.
2. To determine the types of Extension education programs used by citizens.
3. To identify the major areas of unmet educational need for Michigan residents.
4. To develop strategies that effectively utilize MSUE’s resources to serve the needs of children, youth and families in Michigan.

THE SURVEY

Between February 18 and April 7, 1997, Michigan State University’s Institute for Public Policy and Social Research (IPPSR) conducted a telephone survey of 975 adult residents of the state of Michigan drawn from the noninstitutionalized, English-speaking adult population age 18 and over with a residential telephone. A stratified random sample was taken using a random digit dialing procedure. The survey sample was designed to be representative of the state and all MSUE regions of the state: Southeast Michigan, Southwest Michigan, West Central Michigan, East Central Michigan, Northern Lower Michigan, and the Upper Peninsula. (See attached information sheet for a list of counties included in each region.) The overall sampling error was $\pm 3.1\%$. The average telephone interview lasted approximately 26 minutes; the median was 24 minutes and the standard deviation 7 minutes.

KEY FINDINGS

Some General Information on Michigan Households

- **The majority of Michigan adults own homes, live with family, and work full-time.** Many (53.4%) have no children under 18 in the household. About two-thirds are in the labor force, and 60% are working for an hourly wage. Over one-fourth (28%) of Michigan adults earn an annual household income of \$30,000 or less and about one-fifth are looking for work or a different job. Such socioeconomic scenarios indicate that a significant number of Michigan families are under stress and face economic challenges. (Q. 1-6 —*question wording is given below.*)
- **Almost half of Michigan's residents (49%) say they have heard of Michigan State University Extension.** Those who indicated awareness were asked more specific, close-ended questions about their participation in MSUE programs and services. Many residents or other members of their family have participated in the Extension programs and services by receiving newsletters or acquiring bulletins, attending a 4-H club event or meeting, contacting a local MSUE office with a question, or attending a meeting or workshop organized by MSUE. A majority of participants in Extension programs in each of the regions of Michigan rated the quality of these programs as either very good or excellent (Figure 1; Q. 7- 9).
- **Michigan residents have access to electronic technology.** Almost one-third (31%) own or regularly use a computer that has access to the Internet or World Wide Web. (Q. 10)

Problems Facing Communities, Families, and Young People

- **Residents mention unemployment, jobs and the economy; crime and street violence; drugs; and quality of education and financing of schools as the most important problems facing their community today** (Figure 2). More than half (52%) say these problems are currently not being addressed very well in their community, with one-third saying they are only partially addressed. (Q. 11-12)
- **The most important problems facing Michigan families are financial issues; schools; unemployment and economic issues; health care; and family time, family values and broken homes** (Figure 3). Almost half (48%) believe that the problems facing families are not very well addressed, while 36% say they are only partially addressed. (Q. 13-14)
- **Drugs, drug dealers, and youth and drugs; and schools and quality of education are perceived to be the major problems facing children and youth in Michigan communities** (Figure 4). These problems are seen as not being well addressed locally (43%) or only partially addressed (39%). (Q. 15-16)

Educational and Information Needs

- **Of the twelve areas of children, youth and family related issues and/or educational services offered by the MSUE CYF program, a majority of Michigan adults rate eleven of them as very important.** Further, about one-fourth indicate that many of these issues and/or service needs are not currently being addressed very well in their communities (Figure 5). These findings are consistent across all regions of the state.

- **More than nine out of ten Michiganians (92%) indicate a need for information on how to keep children safe from abuse and violence.** Four out of five (82%) feel the need to provide out-of-school activities for young people such as 4-H clubs and other after-school programs in their communities. Similarly, providing parenting information for families, and life skills training for young people, are described as very important by 81% and 83% of Michigan adults, respectively. (Q. 17-20)
- **Over two-thirds of Michigan residents see a need for disease prevention information (72%), and for food and nutrition education to families with limited incomes or adults with limited reading skills (68%).** Other important educational needs identified by more than three in five Michiganians concern opportunities for young people to volunteer, information on food safety, information about access to food, and opportunities for adult volunteer services (Figure 5; Q. 21- 26).
- **Two-thirds of Michigan adults believe that providing information to help families succeed is very important.** Two-fifths feel that this need is not very well addressed in their communities. This ranks it as the second least well addressed need that we asked about (Figure 5; Q. 27).
- **Educational programming to meet the need for money management information is important to 47% of Michigan adults.** It is also the need most frequently perceived to be not very well addressed in their communities at present (45%). (Figure 5; Q. 28)

DISCUSSION

Michigan State University Extension is committed to serving the people of Michigan. Its resources are mobilized in addressing the challenges that confront people in both rural and urban areas. The talents of its research faculty and county staff are used to address and respond to the most pressing and emerging issues. This survey is an example of the process of continuous monitoring of statewide issues facing Michigan. MSUE's Children, Youth and Family Programs are aimed at meeting the needs of families across the life cycle. The lives of people of all ages are intertwined with those with whom they live and interact. People are deeply affected by the environment in which they grow and learn, by their significant others and by the communities in which they live.

MSU Extension, its programs and services are familiar to half of Michigan residents. However, the other half have yet to benefit from the educational programs and services of MSU Extension. A significant proportion of Michigan adults indicated that they did not know where to go for assistance with the problems facing their community, family and youth. Efforts should be made to identify which segments of the population are not benefitting from Extension and to develop strategies to better inform and serve these segments. One way this could be accomplished is through electronic technology, as growing number of citizens have access to the Internet. Another option is a targeted marketing plan strategy.

Drugs, drug dealers, and youth and drugs are clearly the most important issues facing the children, youth and families of Michigan. There is also a great concern over gang violence, broken homes and child abuse. In addition to these grave family issues, citizens do not feel comfortable with the quality of education offered to their children. They are worried about family values eroding and they share a concern that families are not spending enough time together.

Michigan families tend to struggle with financial issues: many mentioned unemployment and jobs as the most important issue facing their communities and families. In this context, the role of MSUE's

Children, Youth and Family program becomes very instrumental. It needs to work in collaboration with other agencies and organizations to develop more and more varied programs to address these important societal issues. The programs and services should focus around the provision of out-of-school activities for young people, parenting education for young people, skills training for youth, and educational help to families to succeed economically.

Figure 1. Rating of MSU Extension by Region

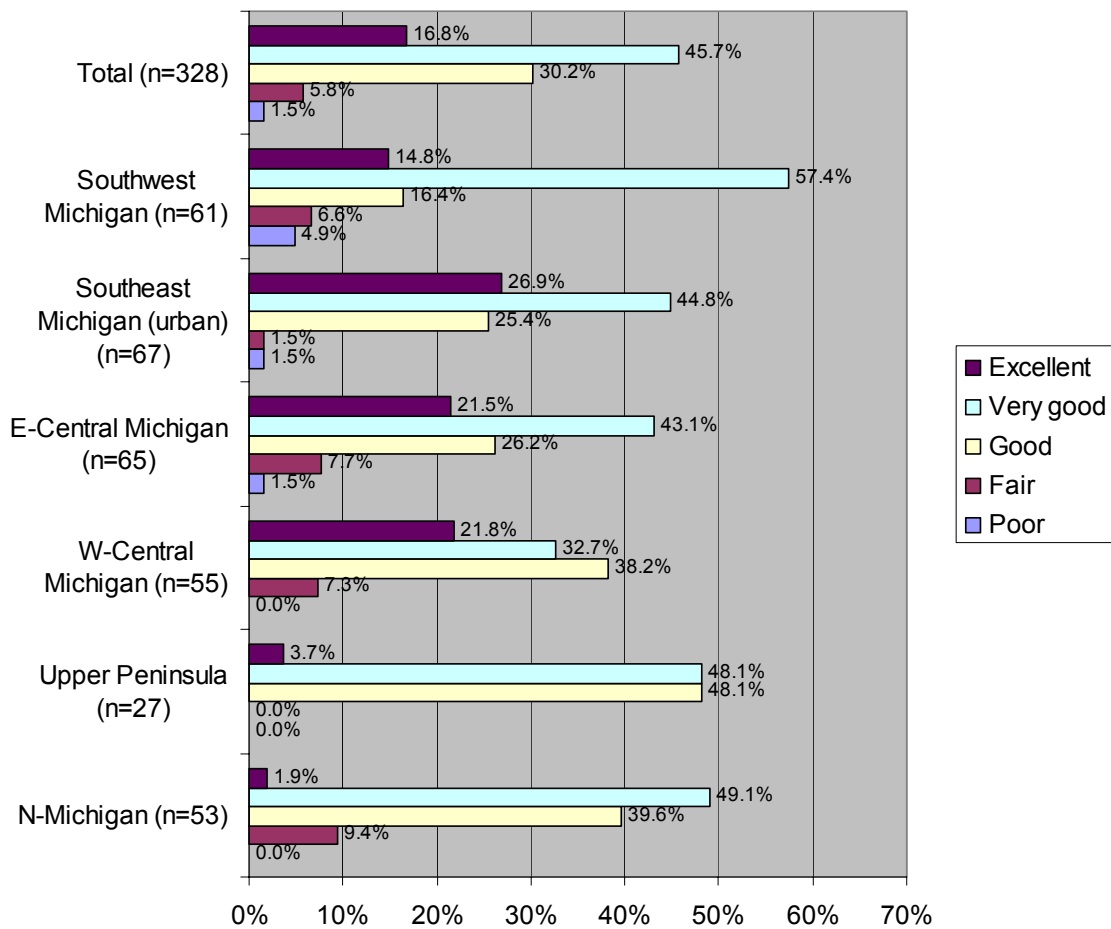


Figure 2. Most Important Problem Facing Your Community

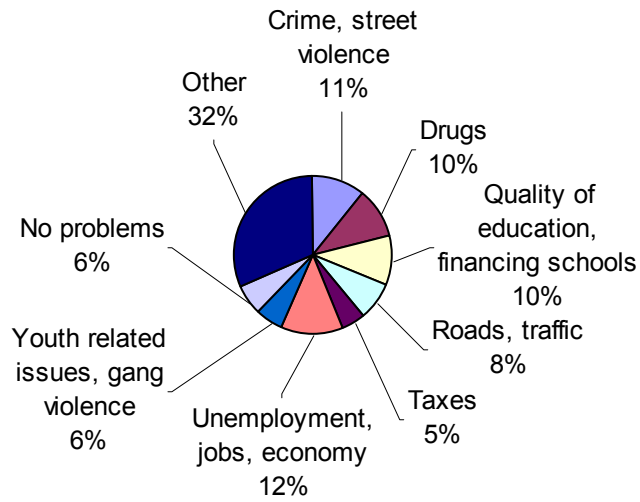


Figure 3. Most Important Problem Facing Your Family

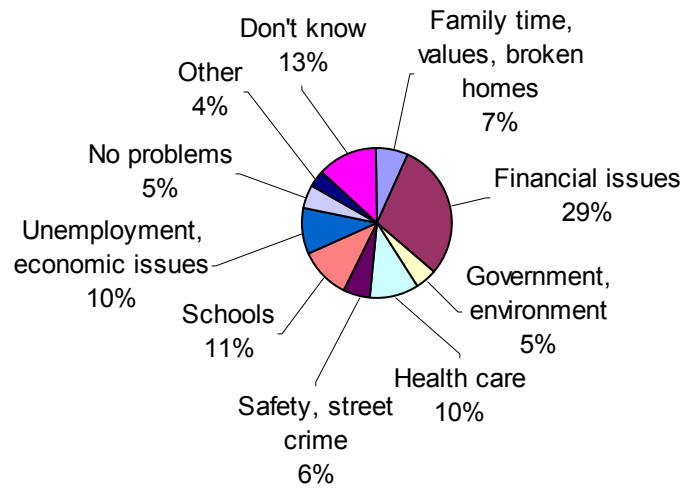


Figure 4. Most Important Problem Facing Children and Youth in Michigan Communities

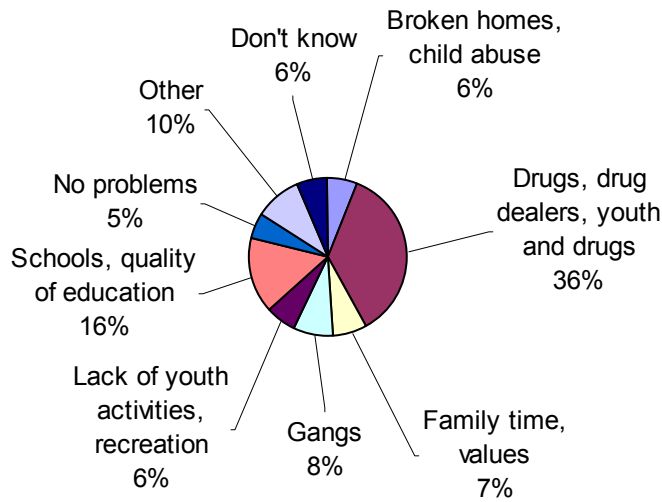
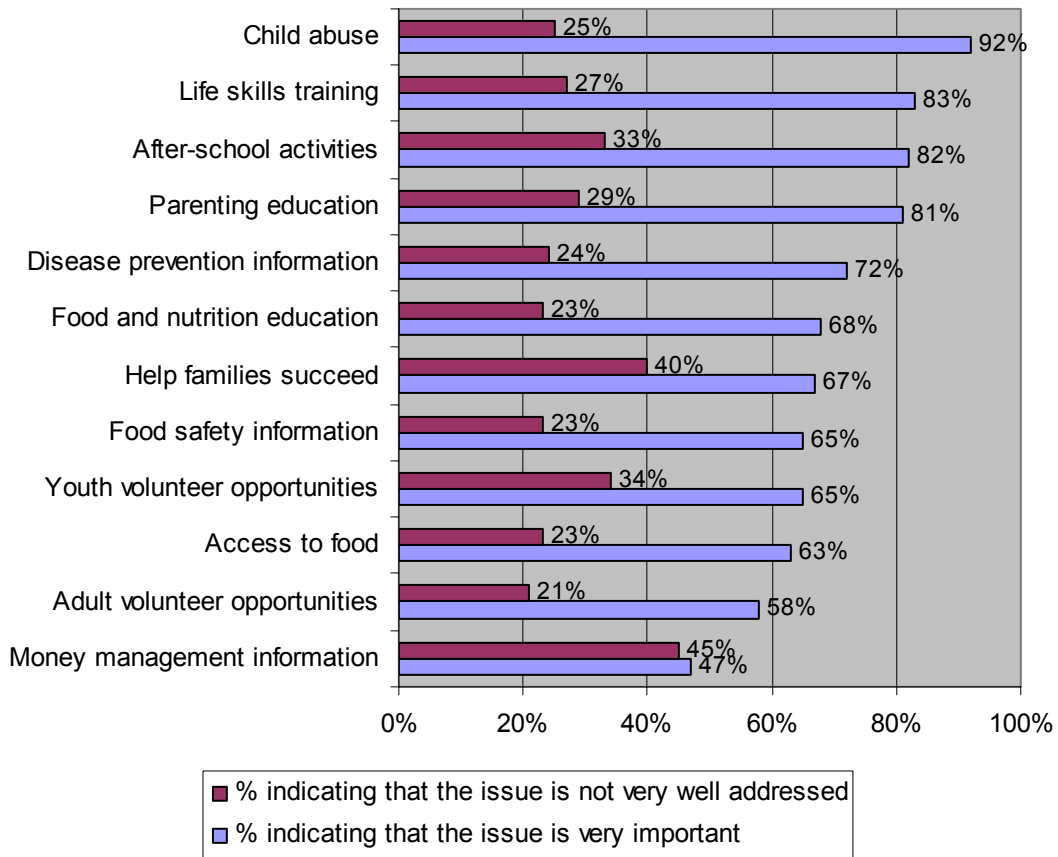


Figure 5. Educational/Informational Needs of Children, Youth and Families in Michigan



SURVEY QUESTIONS

Note: The full wording of questions, including answer categories other than “yes/no” or open-ended questions, for the items discussed in this briefing paper is given below. The questions are listed in the order of the points in the briefing paper, not as presented in the survey. The actual question number for the survey instrument is shown in brackets after the question, for example [D14a]. These questions consumed about 16 minutes of the interviews, which averaged about 26 minutes.

- Q. 1. Do you rent or do you own your home? [D14a]
- Q. 2. Are you currently married, divorced, separated, widowed, member or an unmarried couple, or have you never been married? [CD8]
- Q. 3. Last week, were you working full-time, part-time, going to school, a home-maker or something else? [CD15]
- Q. 4. How many children younger than 18 live in your household? [CD12]
- Q. 5. Now, thinking about your household’s total annual income from all sources (including your job), did your household receive \$30,000 or more in 1996? [INC1]
- Q. 6. Have you been actively looking for work or a different job? [CD20]
- Q. 7. Are you aware of any cooperative extension programs through your county or Michigan State University Extension, such as 4-H, “Building Strong Families”, or food and nutrition programs? [X17]

Questions 8 and 9 were asked only of those responding “yes” to Question 7.

- Q. 8. In the past year, have you or some other member of your family:
- a) Received county Extension newsletters or mailers? [X20]
 - b) Attended a 4-H club or group meeting? [X22]
 - c) Contacted a local MSU Extension office with a question? [X25]
 - d) Attended MSU Extension organized educational workshops or meetings? [X18]
 - e) Acquired an MSU Extension bulletin or fact sheet? [X19]
 - f) Borrowed or purchased an MSU Extension-produced video tape? [X21]
 - g) Attended a 4-H club event? [X23]
 - h) Heard or read about MSU Extension activities on the radio, TV, or in the newspaper? [X24]
 - i) Visited the MSU campus for an Extension event such as Ag Expo, 44-H Exploration Days, the Michigan Families conference, or Animal Science Day? [X26]
 - j) Had an MSU Extension education visit at your home or business or school? [X27]
- Q. 9. Taking all types of contact you or members of your family have had with MSU Extension in the past 12 months into consideration, how would you rate the quality of educational program offered by MSU Extension? Would you say they were excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor? [X29]
- Q. 10. Do you own or regularly use a computer that has access to the Internet or World Wide Web? [X30]
- Q. 11. In your opinion, what is the most important problem facing your community today? [X2]
- Q. 12. How well do you think this problem is currently being addressed by your community? Would you say very well, somewhat well, or not very well? [X26]
- Q. 13. In your opinion, what is the most important problem facing your family today? [X3]

Q. 14. How well do you think this problem is currently being addressed in your community? Would you say very well, somewhat well, or not very well? [X3b]

Q. 15. In your opinion, what is the most important problem facing children and youth in your community today? [X4]

Q. 16. How well do you think this problem is currently being addressed in your community? Would you say very well, somewhat well, or not very well? [X4b]

Questions 17-28 were all similar: "How important is the need to provide X in your community? Would you say very important, somewhat important, or not very important?" Each of these questions was followed by a question (Questions 17a-28a) of the form: "How well do you think this is currently being addressed in your community? Would you say very well, somewhat well, or not very well?" Below is listed what X was for these twelve questions and their follow-up questions.

Q. 17. Information on how to keep children safe from abuse and violence? [X12]

Q. 18. Out of school activities for young people, (such as 4-H clubs, art programs)? [X14]

Q. 19. Parenting information for families and young people? [X10]

Q. 20. Life skills training for young people? [X13]

Q. 21. Disease prevention information? [X7]

Q. 22. Food and nutrition education to families with limited incomes or to adults with limited reading skills? [X6]

Q. 23. Young people with opportunities to do volunteer services? [X15]

Q. 24. Food safety information? [X5]

Q. 25. Information about access to food? [X8]

Q. 26. Adults with opportunities to do volunteer services? [X16]

Q. 27. Information to help families succeed? [X11]

Q. 28. Money management information? [X9]

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; (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 Winter 1997 survey was comprised of:

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