

Community Relations - Social Development Commission: Milwaukee County Resident Telephone Survey

Executive Summary

This executive summary presents results from a telephone survey of 420 Milwaukee County residents related to a general perception and overview of poverty and associated needs in the community. The survey was commissioned by the Community Relations - Social Development Commission (CR-SDC) and conducted by the Center for Urban Initiatives and Research at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in the fall of 2009. This survey is one of six research components of a comprehensive needs assessment for the CR-SDC. The needs assessment has four goals:

- (1) Identify and quantify the incidence or prevalence of individual need;
- (2) Identify gaps in human service provision;
- (3) Identify barriers to self-sufficiency; and
- (4) Identify strategies for overcoming barriers to self-sufficiency.

The results discussed below highlight the findings pertinent to each of these goals.

Incidence and Prevalence of Poverty

Ninety-three percent of respondents either agree or strongly agree that poverty is a serious problem in Milwaukee County. In addition, at least three-fourths of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that seven of the eight core areas related to poverty were serious problems in Milwaukee County. The level of agreement for each was:

- ◆ Employment (97%)
- ◆ Health and Healthcare (86%)
- ◆ Food and Nutrition (76%)
- ◆ Education (91%)
- ◆ Use of Available Income (86%)
- ◆ Transportation (64%)
- ◆ Family and Relationships (89%)
- ◆ Housing (85%)

Slightly more than three out of four reported the perception that poverty has increased in Milwaukee County over the past three years. Virtually all respondents (95%) were somewhat or very concerned personally about poverty in Milwaukee County.

Gaps in Human Service Provision

In all but one of the eight core areas related to poverty, a clear majority of respondents reported that not enough was being done to reduce poverty in Milwaukee County. The following provides the percentages of respondents who reported that not enough was being done for each core area.

- ◆ Employment (77%)
- ◆ Health and Healthcare (72%)
- ◆ Food and Nutrition (61%)
- ◆ Education (74%)
- ◆ Use of Available Income (71%)
- ◆ Transportation (54%)
- ◆ Family and Relationships (72%)
- ◆ Housing (68%)

A majority of respondents reported that each core area is important to address, as reported below.

- ◆ Employment (87%)
- ◆ Health and Healthcare (78%)
- ◆ Food and Nutrition (67%)
- ◆ Education (85%)
- ◆ Use of Available Income (70%)
- ◆ Transportation (51%)
- ◆ Family and Relationships (80%)
- ◆ Housing (70%)

Barriers that Keep People in Poverty

In some cases more than three of four respondents reported that each of the nine barriers identified in the survey was very or somewhat likely to keep people in poverty, as shown below.

- ◆ Alcohol and Drug Abuse (93%)
- ◆ Unhealthy Family Relationships (93%)
- ◆ Economic Ups and Downs (91%)
- ◆ Poor Neighborhood Conditions (87%)
- ◆ Community Violence or Public Safety Issues (84%)
- ◆ Ineffective Poverty Reducing Programs (84%)
- ◆ Ineffective Government Policies and Programs (84%)
- ◆ Lack of Poverty Reducing Programs (80%)
- ◆ Discrimination or Racial Injustice (74%)

It is interesting to note that the barriers most likely perceived to keep people in poverty – holding economy separate as an issue related to history – start at the individual level and expand progressively wider. The two most likely barriers perceived to keep people in poverty are alcohol and drug abuse (individual) and unhealthy family environment (family level). This progresses to the next systemic level of immediate neighborhood with poor neighborhood conditions; and eventually at the community level (community violence). The remaining barriers are also at a larger systems-wide level (government or non-governmental systems and societal level).

Strategies to Reduce Poverty

Respondents were asked to identify the most important things that could be done to reduce poverty in Milwaukee. Across all of the responses, the most frequently cited themes from respondents are consistent with earlier results such as seriousness of the issue, importance of addressing, and whether enough is being done.

Employment: Three of five (58%) respondents who answered this question provided an employment-related response toward reducing poverty. The bottom-line on suggested strategies: more jobs, more job-related training, and better pay are the top employment-related actions needed to reduce poverty.

Education: Just under half (45%) of respondents who answered this question provided an education-related response for reducing poverty. In terms of reducing poverty, the top suggestions are education – either in general, improved, or more; improving the school system, and decreasing drop-outs.

Family and Relationships: One in five (21%) respondents gave one or more responses related to family and relationship issues as a means to reducing poverty. Respondents suggested that improving family functioning – through parenting skills, child management, structure, environment, or in general – were also important actions to reduce poverty in Milwaukee County.

Health and Healthcare: Just under one-fifth (19%) of respondents provided responses related to health and healthcare issues to reduce poverty. The results suggest that the need for healthcare which is appropriate and affordable is an important element to reducing poverty.

Changes to Programs or Resources: This theme relates to responses where a respondent either mentions actions that change the available programs or resources for the community. The most common response in this category is to increase community awareness of available programs and resources. Other respondents suggested more programs and resources for those in need or more federal aid or government support.

The information above will be used to advise and guide the CR-SDC as it plans programming for low-income individuals in 2010 and beyond. These results will also be used to inform and educate community leaders on issues related to poverty in Milwaukee. As reports become available, they will be posted at www.cr-sdc.org.