



COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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Fact Sheet 05-05

Issues that Affect Youth Quality of Life in Lyon County: Results of a Community Situational Analysis

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Introduction

Lyon County is located in northwestern Nevada. It is 2,204 square miles in area with a population estimated at 40,000 (2002). There are approximately 8,000 school-aged youth grades Kindergarten through 12.

In July 2003, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension conducted a community situational analysis in Lyon County. The purpose of the analysis was to identify issues that Cooperative Extension might address through research and education programs.

Conducting the Analysis

The following assessment featured a postal mail survey. Questionnaire items to assess critical indicators of youth quality of life were based upon the conceptual framework provided by the National Academy of Science report, Community Programs to Promote Youth Development (Eccles and Appleton-Gootman, 2002). This report synthesizes a wide array of youth development research, presents characteristics associated with successful youth programs and represents the most current framework

for understanding how community programs can enhance the positive development of youth.

Each question asked participants to indicate how youth issues affected the quality of life in their community. The choices featured a Likert scale using a five-point equal weighting with 1 being "not a concern," and 5 being "a major concern." In addition, each item included the choice "Don't Know."

Survey participants comprised a household sample of 400 voters randomly selected from the 2003 list of registered voters in Lyon County. Each randomly selected registered voter received in the mail a seven-page booklet-type questionnaire with a self-addressed, stamped return envelope. A cover letter was included that explained the purpose of the survey, ensured confidentiality and thanked them for their input. The data collection protocol did not require "tracking" respondents and so received exemption from the University of Nevada, Reno, Office of Human Research Protection.

Results of the Analysis

Of the total 400 survey recipients, 163 returned completed questionnaires, resulting in a 41 percent response rate. An estimate of reliability of the 29 items was calculated and found to be high ($r = .932$) (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). This high score for instrument reliability indicates that the questions are

consistent indicators for the items measured.

Descriptive statistics were calculated and provide a ranking of issues that are of “concern” and believed by survey respondents to affect the quality of life for youth in Lyon County. Ranked mean scores for each item are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Ranked Mean Scores for Respondents’ Ratings of Youth Issues Affecting Quality of Life

Youth Quality of Life Issues	N	Ranked M
Use of drugs and alcohol	163	4.61
Driving under the influence	163	4.52
Preventing teenage pregnancy	153	4.49
Peer pressure to be sexually active	147	4.43
Preventing A.I.D.S.	153	4.38
Finances to continue education	145	4.33
Parental support to continue education	144	4.28
Quality of K through 12 education	137	4.26
What to do after high school graduation	144	4.26
Parental support of children	146	4.26
Job skills training and preparation	150	4.25

Table 1. Continued...Ranked Mean Scores for Respondents' Ratings of Youth Issues Affecting Quality of Life

Youth Quality of Life Issues	N	Ranked M
Family abuse (physical, sexual, emotional)	144	4.22
Local access to technical and vocational school	151	4.21
Local part-time jobs for teens	159	4.21
Appropriate adult role models	150	4.20
Harassment from peers (bullying, teasing)	146	4.18
Youth suicide and depression	146	4.16
Dropping out of school	148	4.16
Doing well in school	142	4.16
Wise use of money (shopping and saving)	147	4.10
Local access to community college	151	4.06
Family's ability to pay bills	140	4.02
Gangs and gang violence	157	4.01
Community support of families with children	146	3.98
Personal safety at school	144	3.97
Getting along with teachers	134	3.91
After school and out-of-school programs	142	3.89
Participating in crime and or vandalism	142	3.88
Being a victim of crime	144	3.78

1 = not a concern; 2 = slight concern; 3 = neutral; 4 = a concern; 5 = major concern

Of the 29 items, 23 received ratings of 4 and above indicating that respondents consider the issue to be of concern in affecting community quality of life in Lyon County. The top five concerns were:

- Use of drugs and alcohol
- Driving under the influence
- Teenage pregnancy
- Peer pressure to be sexually active
- Preventing AIDS

A second group of issues also perceived as concerns that affect quality of life, but rating slightly lower, included:

- Finances to continue education
- Parental support to continue education
- Quality of K through 12 education
- What to do after high school graduation
- Parental support of children

Conclusions

Lyon County citizens who participated in a community situational analysis indicated that Lyon County's youth face critical quality of life issues that place them at-risk. In addition to issues involving substance abuse, driving under the influence, teen pregnancy and preventing AIDS, additional issues of concern involve quality of education and access to pursue education after high school.

Additional research surrounding these issues, including surveying youth, is warranted. Additional research could help to clarify key issues to target through Cooperative Extension programs that provide education to both parents and youth about ways to identify and deal proactively with issues that place youth at-risk.

Alternatively, a pilot Extension program that addresses substance abuse and life style choices among youth may provide some immediate attention to perceived concerns. If a pilot program is successful then a youth survey may be incorporated to provide additional quality of life indicators from a youth point of view.

References

- Carmines, E.G. & Zeller, R.A. (1979). *Reliability and validity assessment*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
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