

6-2007

Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey Briefing

Community Research Institute-Johnson Center

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Community Research Institute-Johnson Center, "Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey Briefing" (2007). *Research, Reports, and Publications*. 18.
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Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey Briefing:

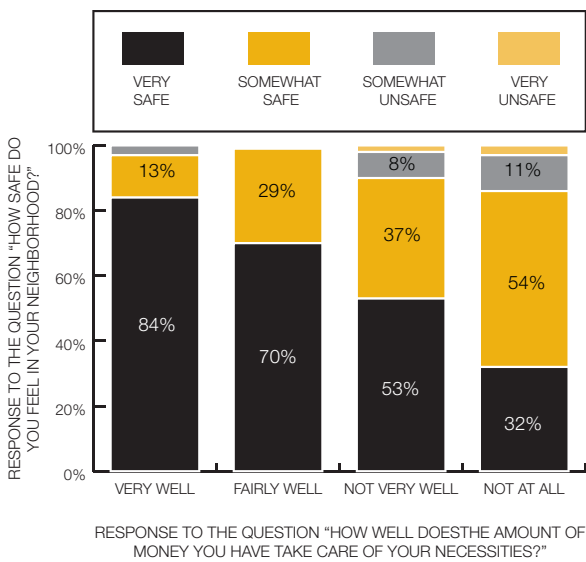
Safety



Safety and Basic Needs

One aspect of safety is the perception of economic security. The 2005/2006 Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey asked Kent County residents several questions related to meeting basic needs. The data show a distinct correlation between perceived neighborhood safety and perceived economic security (see chart below). Eighty-four percent of respondents who had indicated that they are financially able to take care of their necessities very well felt very safe in their neighborhoods, and almost none felt very unsafe. Thirty-two percent of survey participants who stated that the amount of money they have does not take care of necessities at all felt very safe, while 3% felt very unsafe. This same relationship exists among residents who worry about running out of money for shelter. Seventy-seven percent of respondents who never worry about running out of money felt very safe (0% felt very unsafe), while 26% of individuals indicating that they worry about running out of money all the time felt very safe (3% felt very unsafe).

RESPONDENTS' PERCEIVED NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY BY RESPONDENTS' PERCEIVED ECONOMIC SECURITY



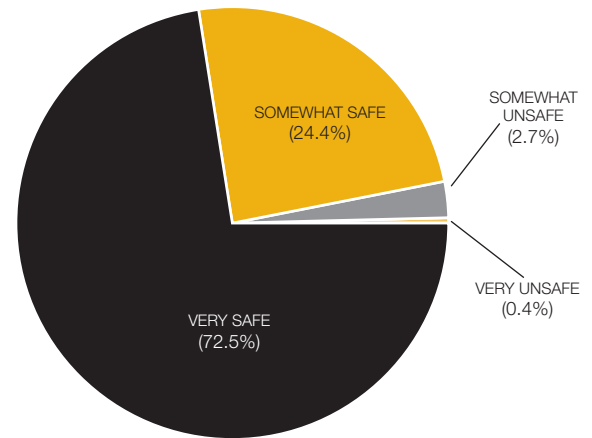
KENT COUNTY 2006

How Safe is Kent County?

Safety means different things to different individuals. Strong social networks, systems for preventing and remedying injuries, and clean, hazard-free neighborhoods all contribute to the safety of the community, but perhaps the most commonly considered aspect of a safe neighborhood is a low crime rate. The Michigan State Police Uniform Crime Report indicates 62,510 offenses were committed in Kent County in 2005—approximately one incident for every ten residents. This is very similar to the statewide rate and that in Ottawa County. It is lower than the number of offenses per capita in Muskegon, Wayne, and Ingham Counties.

The 2005/2006 Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey asked Kent County residents a number of questions on various topics including safety. The vast majority of survey respondents indicated that they felt “very safe” (73%) or “somewhat safe” (24%) in their neighborhoods (see *Indicator 1*). Less than 1% indicated feeling “very unsafe.”

**INDICATOR 1:
HOW SAFE DO YOU FEEL IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?**



KENT COUNTY 2006

Demographics and Safety

The Community Survey data show that not all Kent County residents feel equally safe. Income, race, and other factors are related to perceived safety. Income and feeling safe are directly related, according to survey data (see *Indicator 2*). Respondents reporting a household income of less than \$10,000 in the last year reported feeling less safe—54% feeling “very safe” and 2.6% feeling “very unsafe” in their neighborhoods—than those of any other income level. More survey participants with an income of \$140,000 or greater indicated that they felt safe than any other group, with 97% percent stating they felt “very safe” and none stating “very unsafe” or “somewhat unsafe”. Another factor that affects perceptions of safety is location of residence. Sixty-one percent of urban respondents indicated feeling “very safe,” while 80% of both suburban and rural

INDICATOR 2:

RESPONDENTS' PERCEIVED SAFETY BY RESPONDENTS' TOTAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME



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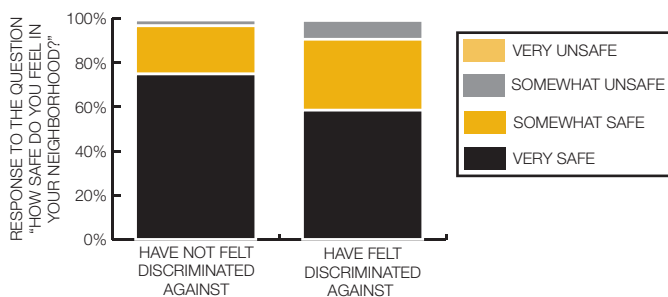
respondents felt that way. Gender has very little effect on perceived safety, according to Community Survey data, which show that 72% of females and 74% of males reported feeling “very safe.” Race has a noticeable effect on safety. Seventy-eight percent of White respondents felt “very safe,” while 59% of Hispanic respondents, 46% of African American respondents, 40% of Native American respondents, and only 33% of Asian American respondents share this perception of safety.

Discrimination and Safety

Recent research suggests that victims of discrimination may feel less safe than those who are not discriminated against. The Community Survey asked respondents if they had felt discriminated against in the past year (whether based upon race, religion, gender, or several other factors). Data show a correlation between the perceptions of discrimination and safety, as 75% of those who had not felt discriminated against and 59% of respondents who had felt discriminated against indicated feeling “very safe” (see *Indicator 3*). Nine percent of participants feeling discriminated against stated that they felt “somewhat unsafe” or “very unsafe,” while 3% of those who were not victims of discrimination indicated feeling unsafe.

INDICATOR 3:

RESPONDENTS' PERCEIVED SAFETY BY RESPONDENTS' FEELINGS OF DISCRIMINATION

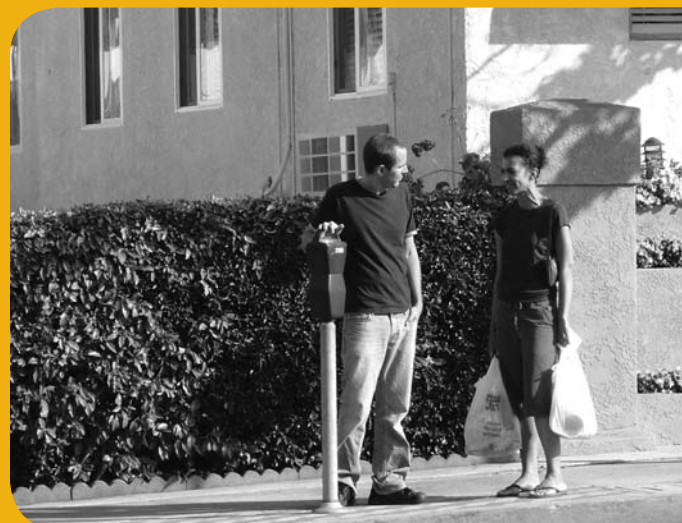


KENT COUNTY 2006

Solving Problems for Safer Communities

Community members can work to solve the safety issues they perceive in their neighborhoods. The 2005/2006 Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey asked Kent County residents several questions related to civic engagement, political involvement, and problem solving. Data from these questions were analyzed to determine the extent to which respondents were active in community matters. More than 70% of respondents indicated talking about politics or current events in the past week. Approximately one-third had worked with someone or some group to solve a problem in the community in the past 12 months. Thirty-seven percent of survey participants had signed a petition in the past 12 months, while 22% had contacted or visited a public official in the last year. Six percent of respondents had taken part in a protest, march, or demonstration in the past 12 months. Nearly half of respondents indicated having expressed their opinions to the media in the last 12 months.

Urban residents were more likely to respond that they had contacted the media or signed a petition than suburban and rural individuals. A higher percentage of respondents living in rural areas talked about politics, contacted elected officials, took part in a protest, or worked with others to solve community problems than respondents in urban and suburban areas.



The Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey, now in its sixth year, assesses citizen opinions, perceptions, and behaviors as they relate to quality of life in the Greater Grand Rapids Area (Kent County). More specifically, the community survey provides population, economic, community and public opinion data to present a picture of the Kent County community as a place to live. The 2006 Survey is a collaborative effort between the Community Research Institute of the Johnson Center at Grand Valley State University (CRI), Grand Rapids Community Foundation, Heart of West Michigan United Way, and the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation.

This report is part of a series of briefing papers. It is available online at www.cridata.org/publications, along with the rest of the series and the 2005/2006 Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey report.



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