

Rights and Personal Safety

Description

The level of respect that citizens have for each other's rights can be reflected in a variety of behaviors. Data was collected for SCAN on the occurrence of neighborhood property crime and vandalism, and the availability of legal assistance. Individuals were also asked about their perceptions of community issues including domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, and protecting civil rights. Because of the sensitive nature of these topics, and possible legal implications, respondents were not asked about direct experience with these issues. It is more difficult to get an accurate picture of the actual occurrence of these problems, and more projections are used.

Monroe County Fast Facts

- There were a total of 4,343 crimes reported in Monroe County in 2000 (see *page 29 in the Supplement*).
- The teen birth rate was 16.7% in 2001. See *the Supplement for more statistics*.

Key Findings

Respondents were asked if they had been a victim of a household crime or experienced vandalism to their homes. The responses follow:

Being a victim of a household crime, like burglary or theft?	Major Problem	Minor Problem
general households	3%	8%
households with income < \$25,000	6%	6%
households with income < \$15,000	10%	5%
Provider clients	5%	5%

Having vandalism to your home?	Major Problem	Minor Problem
general households	1%	8%
households with income < \$25,000	2%	9%
households with income < \$15,000	5%	14%
Provider clients	5%	5%

The results showed very little difference between the general household respondents, lower income households and provider clients. The general households reported a slightly higher incident of minor problems with household crime.

When asked if they or anyone in their household had problems finding or keeping housing or employment because of race, ethnicity or sexual orientation, less than 2% said it was either a major or minor problem. None of the respondents in the lower income categories reported difficulties. Several of the provider clients reported difficulties finding housing because of race and sexual orientation.

Perceptions of Community Issues

The respondents' perceptions of the prevalence of other serious community issues were:

In your community, is domestic violence – where a spouse or partner is being hurt by someone else in their household a...	Major Problem	Minor Problem
general households	10%	24%
households with income < \$25,000	17%	18%
households with income < \$15,000	19%	14%
Provider clients	36%	27%

In your community, is sexual assault...	Major Problem	Minor Problem
general households	12%	36%
households with income < \$25,000	13%	28%
households with income < \$15,000	19%	10%
Provider clients	36%	26%

In your community, is child neglect – placing a child in danger or physically harming a child...	Major Problem	Minor Problem
general households	11%	27%
households with income < \$25,000	20%	20%
households with income < \$15,000	29%	10%
Provider clients	48%	5%

In your community, is the under-reporting of child molestation or sexual abuse...	Major Problem	Minor Problem
general households	11%	18%
households with income < \$25,000	11%	24%
households with income < \$15,000	10%	14%
Provider clients	36%	14%

In your community, is teenage pregnancy...	Major Problem	Minor Problem
general households	11%	37%
households with income < \$25,000	18%	30%
households with income < \$15,000	10%	38%
Provider clients	34%	29%

The 42 provider clients that were interviewed at the four social service agency locations tended to perceive the three areas listed above as greater community issues than did the general public. While they were not asked directly about their personal experiences with these issues, their descriptions of the challenges in their lives during the open interview portion completed after the challenges survey indicated that many of them had direct experience with some of these issues, or knew people who had.

JUSTICE

Key informants discussing these issues often brought up the need to do something about the large back-log of individuals awaiting trial, and the need for alternative forms of providing justice and sentencing. Many believed that mediation services could help deal with some court cases more effectively and efficiently. Some issues, especially family matters, could be settled outside of court, saving tax dollars and court time.

Those working with children see an urgent need to streamline the system. Currently, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), an organization that trains volunteers to advocate for children during legal proceedings, estimates it is only serving 30% of the children who need their services. There is concern among providers that allowing time to pass before addressing a problem or settling a case can be especially detrimental to children who are still developing mentally, physically and emotionally. Barriers include

the need for additional resources and changes in state policies for family law. Many would also like to see a greater emphasis on prevention, instead of punishment.

There is insufficient legal help available for low income individuals. There are some free legal services, but one organization is restricted to family law, divorce, adoption, guardianship, support, custody cases, and enforcement for visitation. Supervised law school students also provide services for credit. Indiana Legal Services estimates that for every person served by them, one to two are not; they lack the funding and staff necessary to meet the demand. There is also a need for more CASA volunteers to work with divorce, and abuse and neglect cases.

Certain populations are more likely to experience legal challenges, including individuals with mental health issues who may become victims of abuse and neglect and some non-native English speaking clients who do not understand their rights. There is also a concern that individuals without sufficient funds may be at a disadvantage in a legal situation. In addition, families living together in non-traditional combinations may not be entitled to the benefits that traditional families get, and are not necessarily recognized in the family court structure.

Law enforcement and probation officers would like to see more early intervention for troubled families through programs focused on case management and continuity of services and parenting classes. Many low income individuals can't afford these classes, but when families suffer from a lack of parental training and education, the children have more problems in school and in adjusting to society. Education and intervention are needed to break the cycle of dysfunctional families. Providers often reported working with children dealing with substance abuse, and other traditionally adult problems, in increasing numbers.

Community Resources

- Middle Way House is a Domestic Violence Program and Rape Crisis Center. There is a 24-hour crisis line (336-0846) for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. MWH provides shelter for battered women and their dependent children and support services (case management, support group meetings, life skills workshops, child care and after school programs, parenting workshops, referral services and legal advocacy). Services to battered women and teens who are not in shelter are also available, as are advocacy and support services for rape survivors, their families, and friends.
- CASA provides trained community volunteers to advocate on behalf of abused and neglected children in the Monroe County juvenile court. Advocates make recommendations to the court regarding the child's placement and services to the child and his or her family. Advocates also monitor compliance with court orders.

Places to Start

- Strengthen the collaboration among key players to take a more in-depth look at issues facing the judicial system.
- Identify additional sources of pro-bono or low-cost legal assistance to qualifying individuals. Some have suggested a closer partnership with the IU Law School that would require every law student to complete an internship. This would result in 600 students each handling 4 cases, compared to the 32 students who currently voluntarily participate in the IU Legal Clinic.
- A cooperative group of human service agencies should develop and implement a plan for recruiting and training mediators based on the work of alternative dispute resolution already being done at Indiana University (Bingham in SPEA) and the community.
- More bi-lingual personnel are needed in the judicial system.
- Create a program to identify new mothers in at-risk situations, and pair them with a mentor mom.
- Continue efforts to educate the community about the serious issues and personal crimes related to domestic violence, sexual assault and child neglect and abuse. Agencies working in these areas should continue the awareness work they are doing with law enforcement officers and the courts.