

State *Of the* State Survey

*Marriage in Michigan:
Factors that Affect Satisfaction*

by Clifford L. Broman

Briefing Paper No. 2000-48

Contributors to the State of the State Survey 1995-99

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prepared by

Clifford L. Broman

Professor
Department of Sociology
College of Social Science

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Please contact the following for further information:

About this report: Clifford L. Broman, Professor, Department of Sociology; 517-355-1761; Internet: broman@pilot.msu.edu. **About SOSS:** Brian D. Silver, Director of SOSS (Phone: 517-355-2237; Internet: bsilver@pilot.msu.edu) or visit the SOSS web site at <http://www.ippsr.msu.edu/soss/>. **About the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research:** Philip R. Smith, Director, IPPSR (Phone: 517/353-9019; Internet: philip.smith@ssc.msu.edu). General contact for media and press: AnnMarie Schneider, Public Relations, IPPSR (Phone: 517/355-6672 x 143; Internet: schneider@ssc.msu.edu).

OVERVIEW

Divorce has become relatively common in the United States, with current projections that about one-half of all marriages will end in divorce¹. Between 1960 and 1998, the rate of divorce rose sharply. Divorce touches all social classes, age categories, religions, and ethnic groups. Perhaps the most important factor in divorce is poor marital quality. Research has found that poor marital quality is linked to subsequent separation and/or divorce². Therefore, there is a strong need to study quality in marriage.

How do Michigan residents rate their own marriages? Does happiness in marriage differ across social and economic status? What factors contribute to a happy marriage for Michigan residents? Are there seeds of discord in otherwise happy marriages among married Michigan residents? Using data from the State of the State Survey (SOSS) from the fall of 1999, we can examine these questions and see how Michigan residents feel about their own marriages.

THE SURVEY

Between September 29 and December 30, 1999, IPPSR conducted a survey of adult residents of Michigan. The survey focused on volunteer activities, mental health, families, and marriage. A total of 1,457 interviews were completed.

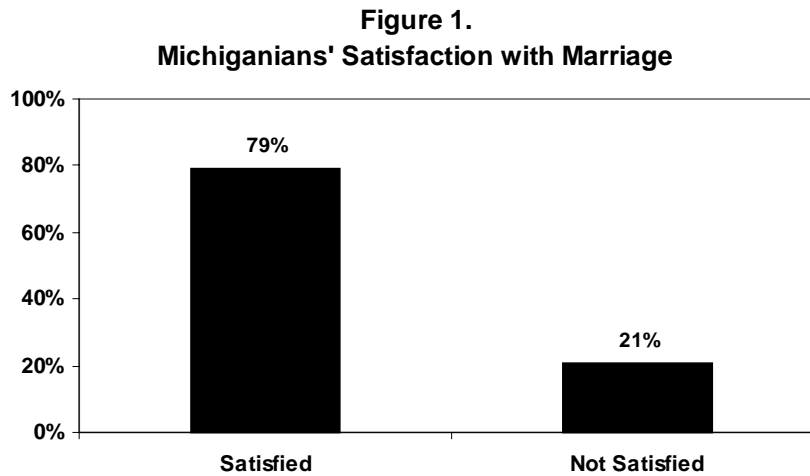
¹U. S. National Center for Health Statistics, "Births, Marriages, Divorces and Deaths for 1997." Monthly Vital Statistics Report 46(12). July 28, 1998.

²Amato, Paul and Rogers, Stacy. "A longitudinal study of marital problems and subsequent divorce." Journal of Marriage and the Family, 1997, 59(3): 612-624.

KEY FINDINGS

Satisfaction with Marriage

- **Almost four-fifths of married adults in Michigan are satisfied with their marriages.** Seventy-nine percent (79%) of respondents reported that they were “strongly satisfied” with their marriages. (Figure 1).



- **There are important demographic differences in satisfaction with marriage.** Young marrieds were significantly less likely to be strongly satisfied with marriage than were their older counterparts. Men and women were about equally likely to be satisfied with marriage, as were people with different levels of education. Income and race are important factors in marital satisfaction: higher income respondents were more likely to be strongly satisfied, and whites were significantly more satisfied with their marriages than were African-Americans and people of other races (Figures 2A-2E).

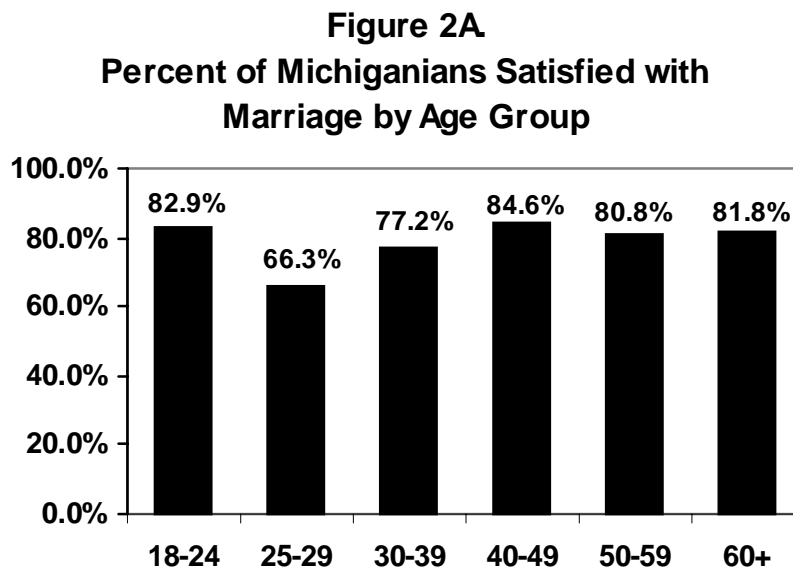


Figure 2B.
Percent of Michiganians Satisfied with Marriage by Gender

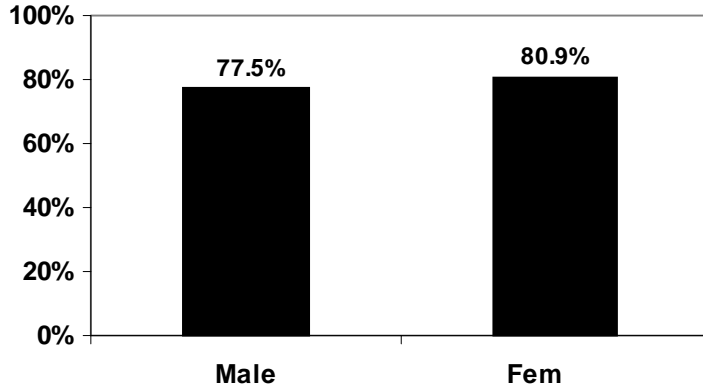


Figure 2C.
Percent of Michiganians Satisfied with Marriage by Level of Education

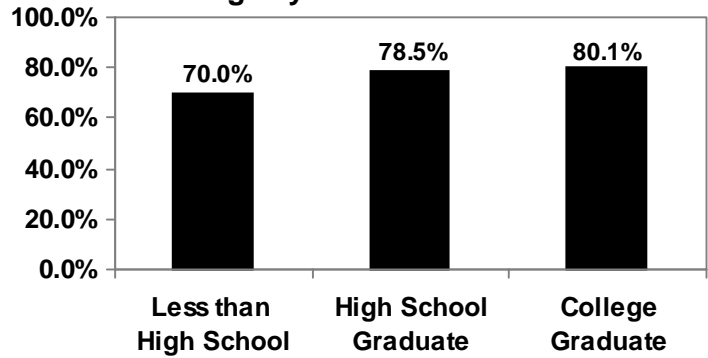


Figure 2D.
Percent of Michiganians Satisfied with Marriage by Annual Income

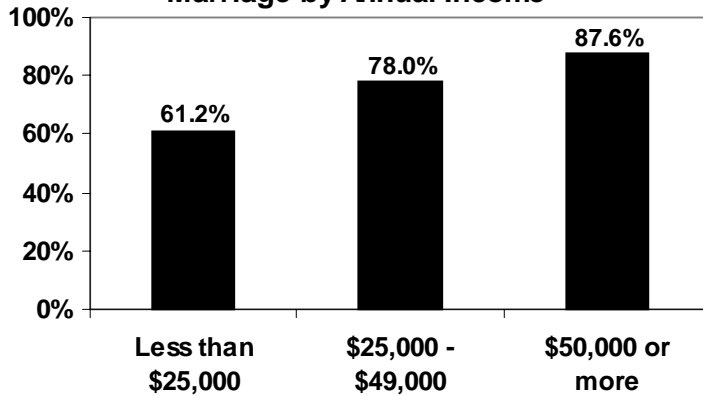
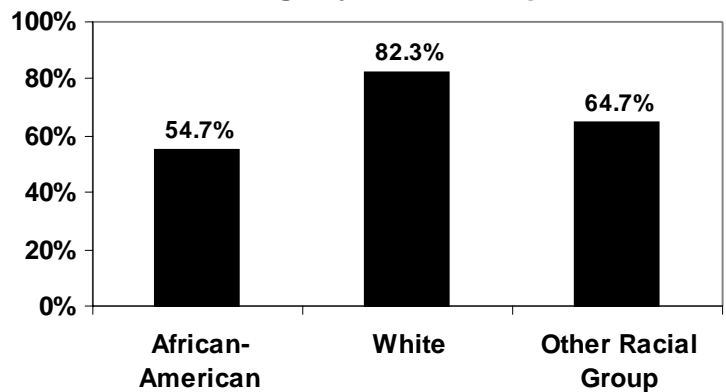


Figure 2E.
Percent of Michiganians Satisfied with Marriage by Racial Group



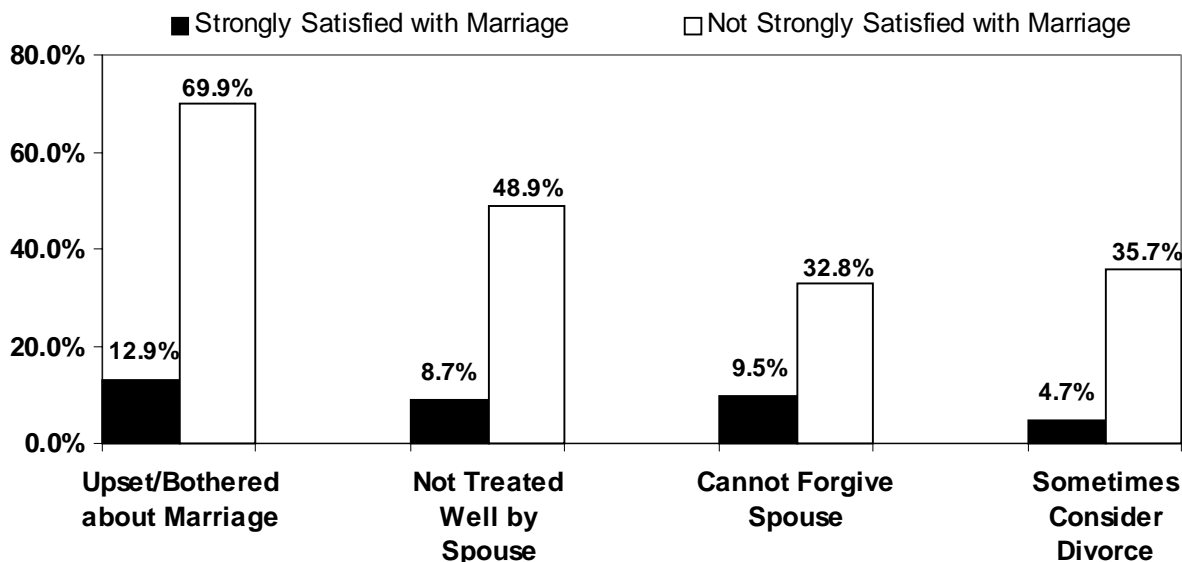
- **Marital satisfaction is strongly affected by the number of children in a household.** Married couples in Michigan with no children living in the home have the highest level of marital satisfaction. Those with two or more children living in the home are much less likely to be satisfied with marriage. It appears, therefore, that children have a negative impact on marital satisfaction.

Satisfaction and Being Completely Happy Are Not the Same Thing

While the majority of married Michigan residents report that they are satisfied with their marriages, being satisfied does not imply complete happiness. Additional questions about specific aspects of marriage were asked of respondents to gauge the level of satisfaction with marriage across several domains.

- **A small number (8%-13%) of married Michigan residents who are satisfied with their marriage simultaneously feel bothered and mistreated, and harbor resentment toward their spouse.** About 13% of those satisfied with marriage also feel bothered or upset about their marriage at least some of the time. Nine percent (9%) feel mistreated by their spouse, and about the same percent (9%) feel that their spouse has done something beyond forgiveness (Figure 3).
- **A small number (4%-5%) of married Michigan residents who are satisfied with marriage simultaneously think of divorcing their spouse at least sometimes.** Whereas 36% of those not satisfied with their marriage sometimes think of divorcing their spouse, about 4.7% of those who are satisfied sometimes think of divorcing their spouse (Figure 3).

Figure 3.
Michiganians' Perceptions of Marital Quality
Categorized by Level of Satisfaction



DISCUSSION

The growing number of divorces is a major concern to many in American society. While the emotional and financial toll of divorce is substantial for adults, divorce also has an enormous negative impact on children. One of the central factors contributing to divorce is poor quality of the marital relationship. While most Michigan residents feel that their marriages satisfactory, it has been demonstrated that this does not necessarily mean that some of those marriages are of high quality.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

The questions regarding Michiganians' satisfaction with marriage are listed below, in their entirety, in the order in which they were discussed. Numbers in brackets are the actual question numbers that appear on the survey instrument.

Q. 1. Taking everything into consideration, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your marriage? Would you say you are strongly satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or strongly dissatisfied? [M8]

Q. 2. Taking everything into consideration, how often do you feel bothered or upset by your marriage? Would you say never, hardly ever, some of the time, most of the time, or always? [M1]

Q. 3. For the next set of questions, please tell me the extent to which you agree or disagree with each as it applies to your marriage. Would you say you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree? My spouse does not treat me as well as I deserve to be treated. [M5]

Q. 4. Would you say you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree? There have been things that have happened in our marriage that I can never forgive. [M7]

Q. 5. Would you say you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree? I sometimes think of divorcing or separating from my spouse. [M6]

REGIONAL CATEGORIES

NOTE: This survey was conducted using regions established by the Michigan State University Extension Service, with one exception: Detroit City is treated as a separate region.

Detroit:	City of Detroit
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
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
U.P.:	Alger, Baraga, Chippewa, Delta, Dickinson, Gogebic, Houghton, Iron, Keweenaw, Luce, Mackinac, Marquette, Menominee, Ontonagon, Schoolcraft
West Central:	Allegan, Barry, Ionia, Kent, Lake, Manistee, Mason, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, Ottawa

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 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 Conducts 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 Director of SOSS is Dr. Brian D. Silver, Professor of Political Science. 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 Summer 1999 survey was comprised of:

S. Tamer Cavusgil, Center for International Business Education & Research: (517) 353-4336
Charles Gliozzo, International Studies and Programs: (517) 355-2350
Jeffrey Riedinger, Political Science and International Studies & Programs: (517) 355-2351
Jay Rodman, International Studies & Programs: (517) 355-2350
Brian D. Silver, Professor, Department of Political Science; Survey Director, IPPSR: (517) 355-6672
Scott Whiteford, Anthropology and Latin American Studies Center: (517) 353-1690
David Wiley, Sociology and African Studies Center: (517) 353-1700

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