

## The Concerns of Youth

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This study reports the results of a search for identifying the concerns of 400 ninth and tenth grade students. The concerns identified included alcohol, dating, drug abuse, dress, ecology, population, and youth input in decision making. These factors were then ranked differently by size of school, place of residence, work status, or absence of mother or father in the youth's home. The authors also try to see where the 4-H program ranks compared with other youth organizations in helping youth meet these concerns.

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What are the most important concerns of our youth? Are there any differences in the concerns of rural youth versus city or small town youth? Does the presence (or absence) of a mother or father in the home influence the concerns of youth? How does 4-H compare with other youth organizations in meeting the needs of youth?

Seeking answers to these questions, Phil Weedin, University of Missouri Extension youth specialist for the Missouri Valley Program Planning Area, initiated a study. He was concerned with the dropout of high school age youth from Extension youth programs. He wanted to look at the

concerns and attitudes of youth to discover voids so programming could be adjusted to attract and retain this age group in Extension programs.

But why worry about youth's concerns and attitudes? Because an important step in program development is analyzing the situation and identifying the problems of the audience group.<sup>1</sup> Information and data need to be collected from the potential learners so the planned educational programs will be appropriate for the clientele it's supposed to reach.

As Extension youth programs broaden to include more than traditional 4-H project work, difficulties occur in identifying

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the needs and problems of youth. Help is needed for the youth agent. Henderson found one of the reasons youth agents resign or change jobs—they were encouraged to work with youth programs beyond the traditional 4-H program, but weren't given help on how to do it.<sup>2</sup>

If a county or area Extension staff is really going to contribute something educationally to the people of the area, it must have a program to fit the needs of the people in the county or area.<sup>3</sup>

### The Study

The study was limited to 9th and 10th graders in Saline County's public schools. To help in the design and in data collection and interpretation, Weedin worked with 8 students, 19-21 years old, from the humanics class in Missouri Valley College at Marshall. They were aware of many of their own concerns and had an inkling of what might be in the minds of their fellow students.

Paired comparisons—the respondent chooses which of two concerns is most important to him—were used to collect the data. In this study, we worked with a limited number of the concerns that were considered the most important for youth. They were:

1. Alcohol.
2. Dating.

3. Dress.
4. Drug abuse.
5. Ecology.
6. Population.
7. Youth voice in decision making.

The humanics class felt alcohol, a concern some people would classify under drug abuse, was sufficiently different to be considered apart from drug abuse. The concern over alcohol relates to drinking wine, beer, whiskey, etc. In the minds of youth, drug abuse refers to use of marijuana, amphetamines, heroin, barbiturates, and other drugs. It was felt that most youth wouldn't consider or think of alcohol as a drug abuse concern.

The concern labeled ecology was meant to include concerns over the environment and pollution. The other concerns were self-explanatory.

After pre-testing the questionnaire in a high school class in Concordia, the statements were refined and put in a form for use with the youth in Saline County. A total of 490 questionnaires in April, 1973, were completed.

### Findings

#### School Ranking

Table 1 shows the ranking of concerns for the 3 high schools in Saline County: Marshall—a city of 12,051; Sweet Springs—a town of 1,716; and Malta Bend—a rural village of 342.

Table 1. Ranking of concerns by school.

Rank	Marshall (364)	Sweet Springs (90)	Malta Bend (36)
1	Drug abuse	Drug abuse	Drug abuse
2	Ecology	Alcohol	Ecology
3	Alcohol	Ecology	Alcohol
4	Population	Youth voice	Youth voice
5	Youth voice	Dating	Population
6	Dating	Population	Dating
7	Dress	Dress	Dress

One of our questions was: "Do these youth rank the concerns in the same order?" All three schools agreed in ranking drug abuse as the Number 1 concern and dress as the Number 7 concern.

There were minor differences in the rankings of the other five concerns. For example, Sweet Springs, the small town, ranked alcohol higher than that of ecology.

Another difference in the rankings was that of population. Population was ranked higher by the students of the city high school than by the other schools. The high school facility in Marshall is crowded and this no doubt made the students more aware of this as a higher ranking concern.

We were surprised at the rather low ranking of youth voice in decision making. Among the concerns in the study, this factor ranked either fourth or fifth. In fact, it ranked lower in the largest school where we thought there would be greater interest on the part of the youth in decisions affecting them.

Dating ranked rather low in the order of concerns being either fifth or sixth, but just above dress in the rural and the city high schools. Dress codes have been eliminated from all of the high schools and this is no doubt the reason why this concern was at the bottom of the list.

#### Residence Ranking

We have looked at the ranking of concerns by location of high school in either a city, town, or rural area. Now let's look at the place of residence of the students, to see if we can uncover any additional differences in ranking.

Greater agreement exists according to the place of residence than the school attended. Students living in the city (over 2,500 population) and in rural areas had identical ranking of concerns. Students living in town (incorporated areas under 2,500 population) ranked alcohol over ecology and youth voice in decision making over population. Otherwise, the ranking was the same.

Table 2. Ranking of concerns by place of residence.

Rank	City (191)	Town (124)	Rural (153)
1	Drug abuse	Drug abuse	Drug abuse
2	Ecology	Alcohol	Ecology
3	Alcohol	Ecology	Alcohol
4	Population	Youth voice	Population
5	Youth voice	Population	Youth voice
6	Dating	Dating	Dating
7	Dress	Dress	Dress

#### Work Status Ranking

The work status of the students was thought to influence their concerns. Table 3 shows the ranking of concerns of students who had a job and those who didn't.

The only difference in the ranking of concerns between those who had a job and those who didn't, was in the ranking of alcohol and ecology. Those who had a job ranked alcohol above ecology; those who didn't have a job ranked ecology above alcohol—otherwise the ranking was identical. No doubt the relation between the alcohol problem and employment was a factor resulting in the higher ranking of alcohol among those students who had a job.

#### Presence of Father and Mother Ranking

Parental influence on concerns was studied. The presence (or absence) of the father or mother was considered. The results are given in Table 4.

Where the father was absent, alcohol was ranked higher than

ecology. Otherwise, the presence of a father didn't apparently influence the changing of the rankings. When the mother was absent from the home two differences were noted: (1) alcohol ranked higher than ecology and (2) dress was ranked higher than dating. This was the only subgroup that ranked dress above the Number 7 position. No doubt the absence of the mother influenced the concerns of this group. Those with a father present ranked the concerns in identical order with those with a mother present.

When the father or the mother was absent, alcohol was rated higher than when that parent was present. No doubt, the personal concerns are influenced by the presence or absence of that parent.

#### Organization Effectiveness Ranking

Many organizations work with youth. The participants were asked to rate each organization on the effectiveness of that organization in meeting the needs and concerns of young people in their development.

**Table 3. Ranking of concerns by work status.**

Rank	Have job (188)	No job (286)
1	Drug abuse	Drug abuse
2	Alcohol	Ecology
3	Ecology	Alcohol
4	Population	Population
5	Youth voice	Youth voice
6	Dating	Dating
7	Dress	Dress

To compare this effectiveness, an organizational effectiveness score was calculated. Each respondent was asked to rate the nine most frequent youth groups according to the way he/she regarded that organization as being effective in their development. A scoring system was devised as follows:

Very effective	4
Effective	3
Little effect	2
No effect	1

The average organizational effectiveness scores are given in Table 5.

Church youth groups were reported as having the highest effectiveness in meeting the needs and concerns of youth. Little League, 4-H, and Boy Scouts were ranked high. More restrictive organizations, such as Rainbow Girls, DeMolay, and Key Club, were ranked lower.

#### Summary and Implications

A survey of 490 ninth and tenth grade students in Saline County was conducted in the spring of 1973. The method of paired comparisons was used to obtain the ranking of seven con-

**Table 4. Ranking of concerns by presence of father or mother.**

Rank	Father present (424)	Father absent (60)	Mother present (458)	Mother absent (31)
1	Drug abuse	Drug abuse	Drug abuse	Drug abuse
2	Ecology	Alcohol	Ecology	Alcohol
3	Alcohol	Ecology	Alcohol	Ecology
4	Population	Population	Population	Population
5	Youth voice	Youth voice	Youth voice	Youth voice
6	Dating	Dating	Dating	Dress
7	Dress	Dress	Dress	Dating

Table 5. Organization effectiveness scores.

Rank	Organization	Score
1	Church youth	3.216
2	Little League	2.972
3	4-H Clubs	2.971
4	Boy Scouts	2.952
5	Girl Scouts	2.876
6	Campfire Girls	2.625
7	Rainbow Girls	2.562
8	DeMolay	2.383
9	Key Club	2.258

cerns: (1) alcohol, (2) drug abuse, (3) dating, (4) dress, (5) ecology, (6) population, and (7) youth voice in decision making. Organizational effectiveness scores were determined for the youth-serving organizations.

Rankings placed drug abuse at the top of concerns and dress at the bottom in most cases. Alcohol was ranked second, higher than ecology by students who had jobs and by students who had a mother or father absent from the home. Population, youth voice in decision making, and dating were the next three ranked, with some variation.

Because of the high ranking of drug abuse and alcohol, the drug abuse program recently initiated in the state should be one that will meet a "teachable moment" for these young people. No noticeable difference in the ranking was shown between urban, small town, or rural youth.

Dress ranked lowest. The

students, no doubt, felt less concern in dealing with this problem than some of the others.

The youth organization rated as being the most effective in meeting youth's needs and concerns of youth was church youth groups. Boy Scouts, 4-H, and Girl Scouts ranked close behind. Mean scores put these organizations in the "effective range."

This study indicates that the 4-H program in Saline County is well regarded by the youth as an effective program. It compares very favorably with the church youth groups and the Scouts in meeting the needs and concerns of youth. The high ranking of alcohol and drug abuse indicate areas of health care that might be explored and incorporated to a greater extent into the 4-H program. Thus, by keeping the 4-H program focused on important concerns, the recruiting of youth and youth specialists is expected to be more effective.

## Footnotes

1. Patrick Boyle, *The Program Planning Process with Emphasis on Extension*, Publication No. 24 (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1965).
2. Don Henderson, "Why Youth Agents Resign or Move to Another Position in Extension" (unpublished paper, University of Missouri-Columbia, 1970).
3. J. C. Evans, "Program Planning" (unpublished manuscript, University of Missouri-Columbia, 1965), p. 11.