Research Brief

Mississippi Urban Research Center
College of Public Service
Jackson State University

March, 2016
Vol. 1, Issue 1

A Survey of Quality of Life Perceptions in Jackson, Mississippi

Authors: Melvin Davis, Ph.D., Executive Director; Dawn Camel, B.A., Research Associate; Sam Mozee, Jr., Ph.D., Associate Director for Research; Maury Granger, Ph.D., Research Fellow

This brief begins a series of articles discussing findings from a survey on quality of life issues. The goal is to provide local officials and other interested parties with evidence regarding citizens' perceptions on quality of life issues in the City of Jackson. This first brief specifically provides an overview of citizens' feedback regarding their perceived quality of life and standard-of-living. Future research briefs will discuss survey findings related to such areas as "the direction the city is moving"; "trust in police officers and the judicial system"; and "solutions recommended by local citizens."

These briefs fill a research void regarding the availability of primary data on the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of Jackson residents concerning quality of life. From the perspective of local policymakers, it is often difficult to separate perceptions, myths, and facts when developing and implementing public policy initiatives. Therefore, these briefs are designed to help accurately gauge, analyze, and interpret citizens' perceptions in terms of their public policy implications. This series of research briefs will provide relevant information that can be used to make policy, programmatic, and financial decisions. Special thanks are extended to all those individuals and organizations that helped with circulating and completing this survey project.

Survey Context. The City of Jackson is the capital city for the State of Mississippi. It serves as the state's major hub in the areas of government, finance, education, transportation, and medical facilities. It is home to more than 173,000 people. After seeing its population peak around 202,000 residents in the early 1980s, the City of Jackson's population has seen a steady decline while its surrounding suburbs have grown significantly.[i] [ii] Jackson has loss approximately 82,000 White residents between 1970 and the year 2010; while gaining approximately 76,000 Black residents during this same period. [iii] As suggested by these opposing migration patterns, there seems to be a difference in viewpoints regarding the desirability of living in Jackson. The goal for undertaking this survey project was to gather statistically valid evidence that could help analyze socio-economic changes occurring in the City of Jackson. By collecting, analyzing, and reporting this study's findings, the Mississippi Urban Research Center at Jackson State University seeks to fulfill its mission of using basic and applied research to help solve problems facing Mississippi's urban areas. One of the first steps in solving these problems is to be able to separate perceptions-from-reality, facts-from-myths. This study seeks to assist the public officials and other interested parties in taking that first step.

Research Methods

Design. This study used a non-experimental, quantitative exploratory research design to collect primarily ordinal level perceptual and attitudinal data via a survey instrument. A self-designed survey instrument was administered to Jackson residents. Non-Jackson residents also had an opportunity to respond. The research period was from October 01, 2015 to February 28, 2016. Study participants consisted of persons responding to the invitation to complete a questionnaire online or hardcopy. The sample size calculator (www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm)

indicated that 439 completed questionnaires would produce a 95% confidence level with a margin of error of +/- 4.67%.

Description of the Sample. The questionnaire was completed by *n* = 578 persons, however, *n =439* persons indicated that they live in Jackson, and *n* = 98 persons stated that they do not live in Jackson. Forty-one persons did not respond to the question "Do you live in Jackson?" Table 1 shows respondents' distribution across the Wards, which differed geographically and economically.

Table 1. ***Respondents' Distribution across the Wards***

Wards	Frequency	Percent
1	90	15.6
2	49	8.5
3	61	10.6
4	63	10.9
5	51	8.8
6	52	9.0
7	37	6.4

Approximately 37.0% (*n* = 201) of the respondents were male and 63.0% were female (*n* = 342). Gender was missing for 35 respondents. Fifteen point nine percent (*n* = 92) were 15 to 24 years old, 12.8% (*n* = 74) were 25 to 34 years old, 15.2% (*n* = 88) were 35 to 44 years old, 16.1% (*n* = 93) were 45 to 54 years old, 19.6% (*n* = 113) were 55 to 64 years old, and 13.8% (*n* = 80) were 65 years old or older. Regarding race, 74.5% (*n* = 404) of the respondents were African Americans, 19.9% (*n* = 108), were White and those remaining were other race. Relative to total household income, 8.6% reported less than $10,000; 5.1% reported $10,000 to $14,999; 9.7% indicated between $15,000 to $24,999; 11.3% received between $25,000 and $34,999, 17.3% reported between $35,000 to $49,999, 25.7% indicated between $50,000 and $74,999, 7.8% reported 75,000 to 99,999, 8.2% indicated between $100,000 and $149,999, 2.3% stated between $150,000 and $199,99, and 4.1% received $200,000 or more into their household. Thus, household income is very diverse with 42.7% of the respondents indicating that their household income is $50,000 or greater. Thus, as described in a previous MURC publication (*MURC Digest*, 2012), while the City of Jackson's population has become "blacker," it is not necessarily poorer relatively speaking.

Results

Quality of Life

A large percentage (90.9%) of the respondents reported a good to very good quality of life (See Table 2). However, a smaller percentage (67%) reported an improved standard of living. Although this percentage is smaller, it is noteworthy that over three fourth of the respondents expressed that their standard of living improved. Further analysis documented a significant relationship between respondents' perceived quality of life and their standard of living, $r = .369$, $p = .0001$. Thus, as the respondents' perceived standard of living increased, their perceived quality of life also increased.

Table 2. ***Response Percentage for Select Variables***

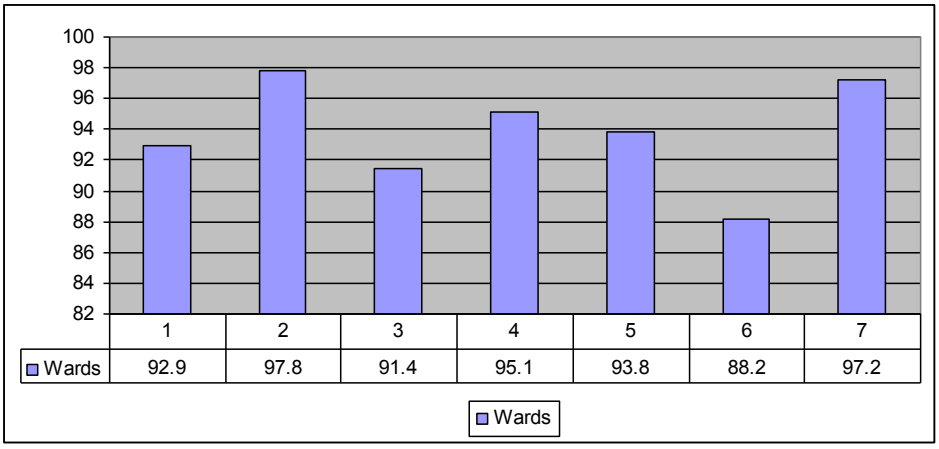
Variables	**Count**	**Percent**
Good to Very Good Quality of Life	399	90.9
Improved Standard of Living	294	67.0

Perceptions by City Wards

Responses were received from citizens in all seven City of Jackson wards. A ward is a geographical area within a city established for electoral and administrative purposes. The purpose for examining these areas is to compare similarities and differences among the wards regarding selected perceptual issues.

The survey items asked respondents about their perceived quality of life and standard of living. Figures 1 and 2 show the results (See Figures 1 and 2). Overall, the differences in perceived quality of life was not statistically significant (that is, significantly different) across the Wards with chi-square values being χ^2 (6) = 5.32, p = .504. However, the percentage of Jackson residents listing their quality of life as "good to very good" ranged from 88.2% to 97.8%. Thus, a majority of the Ward residents tended to perceive themselves having a 'good to very good' quality of life. Since a common definition of quality of life was not listed on the survey, the definition of quality of life might not mean the same thing to every person who responded to the survey item.

Figure 1. ***Perceived Quality of Life by Ward ("Good to Very Good")***

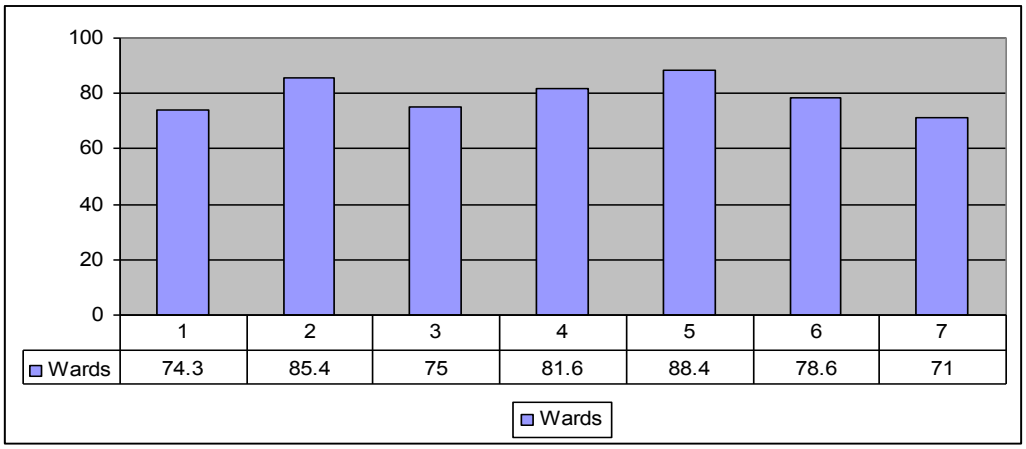


χ^2 (6) = 5.32, p = .504

Perceived Standard of Living

As with perceived quality of life, a statistically significant difference was not observed among the Wards (*p value* = .458). However, other notably differences did emerge. The lowest percentage of persons stating that their standard of living improved is associated with Ward 7, and the highest is Ward 5. Also, the percentage of persons across the Wards stating that their standard of living improved ranged from 71.0% to 88.4%. Of course, the reference point for this improvement cannot be determined from the current results. However, there appears to be a general perception by a majority of respondents that things are improving.

Figure 2. ***Perceived standard of living by Ward ("Improved")***



χ^2 (6) = 5.69, p = .458

Discussion and Implications

The goal of this first research brief was to provide an overview of key citizens' perceptions in such areas as overall quality of life and perceived standard-of-living. Over 400 Jackson residents provided responses to survey questions. A large percentage (94%) of the respondents reported a "good to very good quality of life", with a smaller percentage (79.3%) reporting an improved standard of living. These two findings seem to run counter to the anecdotal perceptions that Jackson citizens do not think highly of their overall quality of life.

In looking at the results of this research brief from a big picture perspective, Jackson residents appear to be enjoying a good quality of life and standard of living. While knowing these perceptions is helpful to local officials, their interpretation is restricted due to limited knowledge of what those terms meant to each individual respondent. It is not known what, if any, city programs and services were contributing to such positive quality of life/standard of living responses. What can be deduced from the findings is that according to the survey sample, "doom-and-gloom" anecdotal perceptions regarding quality of life and standard of living are not supported by the data. The obtainment of additional information would be very helpful in determining what specific areas, programs, and/or services contributed to such positive quality of life scores. Additional qualitative data revealing more insight would provide greater clarity on what citizens' view as contributing positively to their overall quality of life/standard of living. By obtaining such information, local officials could then seek to replicate and/or expand upon those qualities via appropriate public policy initiatives.

It is recommended that city officials and other interested parties use these initial findings to launch additional inquiry at the community level regarding what citizens' view as contributing to their overall quality of life and standard of living. The next round of research briefs associated with this survey series will provide additional information on more specific city-related programs and services.

Endnotes

[i] U.S. Census Bureau Decennial Population Data --- 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010.

[ii] Blacker and Poorer? An Examination of White Flight from the City of Jackson. Amechi Bowser and Sam Mozee, Jr. The MURC Digest. Volume 7, Issue 1. March, 2012.

[iii] U.S. Census Bureau Decennial Population Data --- 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010.