

Introduction/Overview

The Citizen Review Panel (CRP) of the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse developed a survey to learn more about how the public perceives the state's child welfare system. The survey was aimed specifically at assessing reports from citizens about the impact of the New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) on their communities.

A subcommittee of the CRP was commissioned to prepare, distribute and collect the surveys. After extensive review and editing, the survey was distributed to the general public through a number of methods including by e-mail, by hand and by the electronic survey tool, Survey Monkey. The survey was prepared in both English and Spanish. Surveys were collected via the same methods.

271 completed and valid surveys comprise this analysis. Most of these surveys were completed in full. The items where respondents were most likely not to answer were Household Income (237 of 271 replied – 87.5% response rate), Primary Language and Number of Children (both 228 of 271 – 84.1%), and Age (206 of 271 – 76%). In comparison, all but four people (267 of 271 – 98.5%) responded to the inquiry about Ethnicity and 265 of the 271 (97.8%) indicated their Gender.

More than _ of the total respondents (77.5%) were Caucasian/White. Combined with the responses for African-American (10.5%) and Hispanic (6.4%), this sample of survey respondents is different, from a racial/ethnic perspective, than the state of New Jersey. According to the 2000 US Census, 72.6% were Caucasian/White, 13.6% were African-American/Black and 13.3% were Hispanic or Latino (of any race). The survey sample slightly over-represents Caucasian/Whites, under-represents African-Americans and greatly under-represents Hispanic/Latino residents.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity	N	Percent
Caucasian/White	207	77.5%
African-American/Black	28	10.5%
Hispanic	17	6.4%
Bi-racial	7	2.6%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3	1.1%
Other	5	1.9%
Total	267	100.0%

Survey respondents were likely to be married (60.4%), a rate just slightly higher than the overall rate of 57.7% for New Jersey in 2000 (US Census Bureau). However, 15.5% of the respondents were single and 23% were divorced, widowed or separated. Both figures deviate from the recent (2000) norms for New Jersey (US Census Bureau) – 31.1% and 11.1%, respectively for single and divorced, et. al. residents. Therefore, survey respondents under-represented single persons by nearly half and over-represented divorced et. al. persons by more than two times.

Marital Status

Marital Status	N	Percent
Single	41	15.5%
Married	160	60.4%
Divorced/Widowed/Separated	61	23.0%
Other	3	1.1%
Total	265	100.0%

Survey respondents were overwhelmingly female (92%). Females made up 51.5% of the population of New Jersey in 2000 (US Census Bureau).

Gender

Gender	N	Percent
Female	243	92.0%
Male	21	8.0%
Total	264	100.0%

Comparisons of household income data for the 237 respondents who provided data with US Census Bureau income data for New Jersey (in 1999) show that the respondents were more affluent across most of the income categories. For example, 11.7% of the New Jersey population had a household income of less than \$15,000; just 8.9% of the respondents fell into that income category. Approximately 26.7% of New Jersey households had an income greater than \$90,000. More than 32% of survey respondents reported a household income greater than \$90,000. In 1999, the median household income for New Jersey was \$55,146. The median household income for the survey respondents was approximately \$69,750.

Household Income

Household Income	N	Percent
\$0 - \$15,000	21	8.9%
\$16,000 - \$30,000	16	6.8%
\$31,000 - \$45,000	24	10.1%
\$46,000 - \$60,000	37	15.6%
\$61,000 - \$75,000	32	13.5%
\$75,000 - \$90,000	31	13.1%
Above \$90,000	76	32.1%
Total	237	100.0%

According to the US Census (2000), about 75% of New Jersey residents speak only English. Over 97% of survey respondents indicated that English was their "Primary Language." If those New Jersey residents who speak a language other than English but who say they speak English "very well" are added to the "only English" group, the resulting percentage of total residents - 88.9% - still does not match the percentage (97.4%) of those who are "Primary Language - English" in the survey.

Primary Language

Primary Language	N	Percent
English	222	97.4%
Spanish	6	2.6%
Total	228	100.0%

The average age of survey respondents was 43.8 years. The median age for this group was 44 years. This variable included the most missing data - 24% - for any data field (65 of 271 did not respond). In 2000, the median age in New Jersey was 36.7 years. Survey participants were much older than the general population in New Jersey.

Age

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Age	206	21	73	43.80

Survey respondents were residents of every county in New Jersey. Cape May (11.4%) and Mercer (7.7%) were the counties most represented by respondents. The residence of more than 1/5 of respondents (22.2%) could not be determined or was missing (not indicated). The majority of those who could not be determined was due to the listing of a town/residence that exists in more than one county (e.g., Washington Township).

A comparison of the percentage of respondents from each county to the county percentage of the state's total population in 2000 (US Census Bureau), indicates that the percentage of respondents over-represented the actual county/stage percentage for four counties (Cape May, Mercer, Salem and Sussex) and under-represented that figure for six counties (Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Morris, Passaic and Union). Over-representation is defined as a respondent percentage two or more times greater than the actual percentage; under-representation is defined as a respondent percentage \leq or less the size of the actual percentage. Whereas the four over-represented counties are from all three geographic areas of the state (north, central and south), the six under-represented counties are all from the northern part of the state.

County of Residence

Counties	N	Percent	County % of State Population*
Atlantic	10	3.7%	3.0%
Bergen	14	5.2%	10.5%
Burlington	12	4.4%	5.0%
Camden	11	4.1%	6.1%
Cape May	31	11.4%	1.2%
Cumberland	5	1.8%	1.7%
Essex	10	3.7%	9.4%
Gloucester	9	3.3%	3.0%
Hudson	3	1.1%	7.2%
Hunterdon	4	1.5%	1.5%
Mercer	21	7.7%	4.2%
Middlesex	16	5.9%	8.9%
Monmouth	14	5.2%	7.3%
Morris	3	1.1%	5.6%
Ocean	12	4.4%	6.1%
Passaic	6	2.2%	5.8%
Salem	6	2.2%	0.8%
Somerset	7	2.6%	3.5%
Sussex	10	3.7%	1.7%
Union	4	1.5%	6.2%
Warren	3	1.1%	1.2%
Could Not Determine	20	7.4%	
Missing	40	14.8%	
Total	271	100%	100%

* U.S. Census Bureau (2000)

Despite the instructions to choose one, survey respondents often chose more than one alternative when describing themselves (*all* responses were recorded and included in the table below). Parent (28.3%) and Social Worker (21.7%) were the most frequent choices. The third most frequent choice was “Other.” Of the 57 “Other” responses where a description was written in, 35 or 61.4 % described themselves as school or education-related personnel (e.g., school administrator, guidance counselor, school nurse, teacher). Thus, if there had been a category, “School Personnel,” it would have included 11.1% (35 of 314) of the responses and been the third most frequent choice, after Parent and Social Worker.

Respondent Information

Respondent	N	Percent
Parent	89	28.3%
Foster Parent	27	8.6%
Adoptive Parent	19	6.1%
Client/Service Recipient	1	.3%
Social Worker	68	21.7%
Service Provider	21	6.7%
Concerned Citizen	19	6.1%
DYFS Worker or under DYFS contract	11	3.5%
Unfamiliar	1	.3%
Other	58	18.5%
Total	314	100.0%

Qualitative Reactions

Respondents were asked to react to eight statements about DYFS and/or child protective services. Below are each of the eight statements followed, in each case, by the survey results for that statement.

1. DYFS has made child protection a priority.

	N	Percent
Strongly Agree	34	12.5%
Agree	152	56.1%
Disagree	54	19.9%
Strongly Disagree	20	7.4%
N/A	7	2.6%
Total	267	98.5%
Missing	4	1.5%
Total	271	100.0%

More than 2/3 of the respondents (68.6%) agreed or strongly agreed that child protection has been made a priority by DYFS. Just over of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. There were a relatively small number of N/A responses or no response (Missing).

2. DYFS shows sensitivity for racial, cultural, & ethnic differences.

	N	Percent
Strongly Agree	19	7.0%
Agree	147	54.2%
Disagree	59	21.8%
Strongly Disagree	13	4.8%
N/A	25	9.2%
Total	263	97.0%
Missing	8	3.0%
Total	271	100.0%

More than 60% agreed or strongly agreed that DYFS demonstrates a sensitivity to racial, cultural & ethnic differences (it would be interesting to measure responses to each of these three variables separately). Again, just over 25% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

3. I have been made aware of child protection services in my community.

	N	Percent
Strongly Agree	26	9.6%
Agree	144	53.1%
Disagree	69	25.5%
Strongly Disagree	15	5.5%
N/A	16	5.9%
Total	270	99.6%
Missing	1	.4%
Total	271	100.0%

Although there was again over 60% or respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that they have been made aware of child protection services in their communities, the percentage who disagreed or strongly disagreed increased from approximately 25% in the previous statements to 31%. Respondents agreed: disagreed with this statement at almost exactly a ratio of 2:1.

4. If involved with DYFS, DYFS has engaged you in developing the case plan.

	N	Percent	DYFS Involved Percent*
Strongly Agree	3	1.1%	3.0%
Agree	37	13.7%	36.6%
Disagree	38	14.0%	37.6%
Strongly Disagree	23	8.5%	22.8%
N/A	161	59.4%	
Total	262	96.7%	
Missing	9	3.3%	
Total	271	100.0%	100.0%

**Valid Percent is based on a comparison to the 101 respondents who indicated involvement with DYFS*

A very high percentage (59.4%) indicated that this statement was not applicable, presumably meaning they had not been directly involved with DYFS. For the remaining 40% of all respondents who are or had been involved with DYFS (101 respondents), more than half (60.4%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that DYFS had involved them in the development of their case plan. Just 39.6% agreed or strongly agreed that DYFS involved them in plan development.

5. DYFS offers services geared towards preventing the removal of children.

	N	Percent
Strongly Agree	24	8.9%
Agree	125	46.1%
Disagree	55	20.3%
Strongly Disagree	24	8.9%
N/A	23	8.5%
Total	251	92.6%
Missing	20	7.4%
Total	271	100.0%

55% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that DYFS offers services geared towards preventing the removal of children. Nearly 30% (29.2%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. A relatively high percentage (15.9%) either did not respond (Missing) or responded that the statement was not applicable (N/A).

6. DYFS is an agency that seeks to help rather than punish families.

	N	Percent
Strongly Agree	23	8.5%
Agree	155	57.2%
Disagree	46	17.0%
Strongly Disagree	26	9.6%
N/A	14	5.2%
Total	264	97.4%
Missing	7	2.6%
Total	271	100.0%

Returning to the general response pattern, about 2/3 of respondents agreed or strongly agreed DYFS seeks to help rather than punish families (65.7%). Over _ (26.6%) disagreed/strongly disagreed.

7. DYFS explores placement of children with relatives rather than in foster care

	N	Percent
Strongly Agree	29	10.7%
Agree	174	64.2%
Disagree	16	5.9%
Strongly Disagree	11	4.1%
N/A	31	11.4%
Total	261	96.3%
Missing	10	3.7%
Total	271	100.0%

Compared to how they reacted to all of the previous statements, the highest percentage of survey respondents (74.9%) were in agreement or strong agreement with the statement that DYFS prioritizes the placement of children with relatives over foster care services. Correspondingly, disagreement and strong disagreement with this statement was very low (10%).

8. If you have been involved with DYFS, please rate your overall experience.

	N	Percent	Valid Percent*
Excellent	9	3.3%	5.2%
Good	30	11.1%	17.2%
Average	64	23.6%	36.8%
Below Average	41	15.1%	23.6%
Poor	30	11.1%	17.2%
N/A	84	31.0%	
Total	258	95.2%	
Missing	13	4.8%	
Total	271	100.0%	100.0%

**Valid Percent is based on a comparison to the 174 respondents who rated their involvement with DYFS*

Response to this statement was more varied than were responses to the previous statements. First, it should be noted that the modal response (84/31%) was that the statement was not applicable to the respondent (N/A). Combined with the small percentage (4.8%) who did not respond (missing), there were over 36% who did not or could not provide a rating about their DYFS involvement. For those who did rate the statement, the most frequent response was “Average.” The “Valid Percent” column compares individual responses to the total number of respondents who provided a rating (Total N – (N/A+Missing) = 174). “Average” was the response for 36.8% of these individuals. A considerably higher percentage of respondents (40.8%) rated their DYFS involvement as Below Average or Poor than those who rated their involvement as Good or Excellent (22.4%). Therefore, in the absence of the capability of a quantitative mean rating, the overall rating of DYFS involvement was skewed toward a rating of Below Average/Poor than it was toward Good/Excellent.

Qualitative Responses

Respondents were asked two questions with follow up, regarding interaction with DYFS. Below are each of the responses to the questions (and follow up questions) .

1. If you were aware of or suspected abuse of a child, how likely is it that you would report your concerns to DYFS?

Responses	N	Percent
Highly Likely	192	73.3%
Somewhat Likely	50	19.1%
Unlikely	20	7.6%
Total	262	100.0%

Almost _ (73.3%) of the respondents said that it was highly likely they would report concerns to DYFS if they were aware of or suspected abuse of a child. Almost 1/5 (19.1%) said they were somewhat likely to report their concerns. Only 7.6% (20 respondents) said they were unlikely to report their concerns to DYFS.

If you responded "Unlikely," what factor influenced your decision?

Responses	N	Percent
Concerns about confidentiality of the report	5	11.4%
Past negative experiences with DYFS	14	31.8%
I don't know where to call	2	4.5%
Lack of confidence in DYFS's ability	19	43.2%
It is not my responsibility	1	2.3%
Other	3	6.8%
Total	44	100.0%

The follow up question for the 20 respondents who said they were unlikely to report concerns to DYFS if they were aware of or suspected child abuse actually gathered 44 responses. Two factors constituted 75% of the respondents reasons for saying it was unlikely they would contact DYFS. The most frequent reason (43.2%) given was a lack of confidence in the ability of DYFS to address the concerns. A related issue, past negative experiences with DYFS, was the second most frequent response (31.8%). In addition, more than 10% (11.4%) had concerns about the ability of DYFS to maintain confidentiality about the report.

2. How likely is it that you would call DYFS if you needed help with your own children?

Responses	N	Percent
Highly Likely	28	11.3%
Somewhat Likely	49	19.8%
Unlikely	171	69.0%
Total	248	100.0%

A large majority of respondents (69%) said it was unlikely they would call DYFS if they needed help with their own children. Only 11.2% were highly likely to turn to DYFS for help in this situation.

If you responded, "Unlikely," what factor influenced your decision?

Responses	N	Percent
Concerns about confidentiality of the report	19	8.7%
Past negative experiences with DYFS	35	16.1%
Lack of confidence in DYFS's ability	89	40.8%
I don't believe in having government interfere	25	11.5%
Other	50	22.9%
Total	218	100.0%

(As with the previous follow up question, actual responses to this question, 218, were greater than the number of respondents in the previous question (171) who said they were unlikely to call DYFS for help with their own children.)

Lack of confidence in DYFS again was cited as the most frequent factor (40.8%) for why respondents would not turn to DYFS for help with their own children. And again, past negative experiences with DYFS was the second most frequent factor (16.1%) given influencing the decision. A significant percentage of respondents (11.5%), indicated a belief that government should not interfere in their family matters.

50 respondents (22.9%) gave “other” reasons for saying it was unlikely they would ask DYFS for help if there were problems with their own children. For 44 of these 50, a written response was provided. These 44 responses were analyzed and sorted into several general response categories.

Response Category	N	Percent
Other alternatives/"use first"	22	50.0%
"Anti" DYFS/"last resort"	7	15.9%
Critical/afraid of DYFS	7	15.9%
Children are adults now/"aged out"	3	6.8%
Would never have abuse problem	2	4.5%
Unintelligible response	2	4.5%
Aware of services/neutral attitude	1	2.3%
Total	44	100.0%

If you responded, "Unlikely," whom would you call for help?

Responses	N	Percent
Family member	85	27.7%
Friend	52	16.9%
Clergy/Religious institution	29	9.4%
Police/Law enforcement	8	2.6%
A hotline	7	2.3%
A medical professional	32	10.4%
A mental health professional	80	26.1%
Other	14	4.6%
Total	307	100.0%

(Again, as with previous questions, actual responses to this question, 307, were greater than the number of respondents in the previous question (171) who said they were unlikely to call DYFS for help with their own children.)

For these respondents who would not contact DYFS if they needed help with their own children, more than _ of the responses given for an alternative to DYFS were either a family member (27.7%) or a mental health professional (26.1%). A friend (16.9%) was the third most likely choice with a medical professional fourth (10.4%).

If you responded “Highly Likely” or “Somewhat Likely” what factor influenced your decision?

Recall that 69% of respondents were *unlikely* to call DYFS if help with their own children was needed. There were 77 respondents (31.1%) who said they were highly likely or somewhat likely to call DYFS for help. Of those 77, 28 (36%) were highly likely to contact DYFS and 49 (64%) were somewhat likely. When asked to write about what factor influenced the decision to call DYFS, 70 individual responses were recorded.

Respondents did not always follow directions when they wrote comment to this question. Often, what was written was a comment about DYFS, positive or negative, that would seem at odds with the

expected comment from someone who had indicated a call to DYFS was “highly likely” or “somewhat likely.” For instance, easily the most frequent response category, with 22 of the 70 responses (31.4%), involved comments about various *problems* with DYFS. Other frequent responses were categorized as “DYFS can help,” (15.7%), “use other alternatives to DYFS,” (12.9%) and “obligated/required/mandated by law to call DYFS,” (8.6%). The nature and variety of these responses would suggest that this question format be reconsidered prior to any further survey efforts.

Please tell us in your own words what you feel can be done to improve DYFS and other child protection services in New Jersey. What changes would you like to see?

The final question of the survey asked respondents to write down comments, ideas and suggestions about changes that would improve DYFS. 209 of the 271 survey respondents provided comment. Often, more than one comment or idea about changing DYFS was submitted by a respondent. Therefore, there were considerably more than 209 individual comments, ideas or suggestions to this question.

Below are the major categories or themes gleaned from the many individual responses to this question. Each of these categories/themes was noted by several respondents. Although a category/theme could be included here if it were identified a minimum of two times, the categories listed below were each identified several times by respondents.

Major categories/themes found:

- Hire more staff
- Reduce caseloads
- Pay workers more/more funding needed for DYFS
- More and better communication needed
- Sensitivity needed (don't be threatening)
- Better training
- Centralized systems (updated technology)
- More “follow-up” or “follow-through”
- Make children a priority/watch out for their safety
- Work/collaborate with schools
- Employees of DYFS should be better qualified with more education & experience
- Maintain/improve the confidentiality of information
- Improved services to clients/more programs
- Return phone calls/e-mails/correspondence
- Keep families together
- Improve teamwork between DYFS employees
- Make unannounced visits to homes
- More positive image of DYFS needed
- More accountability needed for the actions of DYFS employees