Fall 2003

How Safe Do Individuals Feel in Clayton County?

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ABSTRACT

To determine if individuals feel safe in their communities, a self-administered questionnaire was distributed to six hundred residents of Clayton County, Georgia. In addition to overall safety, the survey sought to measure how being a victim of a burglary or rape and the level of income impacts the individuals' feeling of safety. The survey also sought to measure how safe those same individuals believed the community was for their children and how likely a terrorist attack was in the county. Non-probability sampling, specifically the accidental sample, was used for conducting the research.

The results of the survey show that half of the respondents feel extremely safe or safe most of the time in their community and as high as, 90% feel at least reasonably safe.

The survey also indicated that approximately 85% of rape victims felt at least reasonably safe, while a slightly higher number, 87% of the victims of burglaries felt at least reasonably safe in their community.

Nearly 72% of parents believed that the community is not as safe for their children as compared to five years ago and half, 51%, of the community is at least somewhat worried about a terrorist attack.

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INTRODUCTION/STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

American society has an unexplainable and surreal obsession with crime and criminal behavior. Gangsters, serial killers, and terrorists have always been a popular subject of movies and television specials and today, names like Al Capone, Jimmy Hoffa, Charles Manson, Ted Bundy, and Timothy McVeigh are as common and as well known as any President of the United States. Undoubtedly, more Americans can name Lee Harvey Oswald, the man who killed President John F. Kennedy, than can name his successor, Lyndon Johnson. Perhaps, it is only fitting, since most credit Kennedy's election to his mastery of a new medium in politics – television. Most remember exactly where they were when they heard the news that Kennedy had been assassinated and many spent the next days riveted to the television coverage. It was the first revelation for television executives that news could make money. By the end of the next decade, television news was responsible for nearly sixty percent of a network's revenue (Kappeler, Blumberg, and Potter, 2000: 5). As a result, executives began to search for the stories that would hold the public's fascination and attract viewers. What they learned was the more bizarre and gruesome the story was, the higher the ratings.

The media recognizes better than any other industry what appeals to the citizenry and how to capture and hold an audience. The motto "if it bleeds, it leads," has never been more true than in today's battle for television news ratings superiority and the premium advertising dollar that accompanies it. Seldom can the evening news be turned on without the first ten to fifteen minutes of the broadcast focusing on the gruesome details of the crimes of the previous day. Sensational stories like the Columbine High School shooting often become the focus of local, network, and even international news

for days and weeks. Prime time television follows the lead of the evening news and has long been dominated by crime dramas, but no period in television history could rival today's plethora of "cops and crime" viewing on the networks. Every night has at least one offering and the Nielsen ratings are dominated by the genre. New industries such as video gaming are also trying to capitalize on the growing popularity of crime and violence in entertainment. The *Grand Theft Auto* series of PC games are destined to become the all-time leaders in sales in an industry whose growth seems to be uncharted. Because of the increased coverage and intense focus and emphasis, many would naturally believe that crime is out of control in the United States and that communities across the country are somehow not as safe as they once were. Certainly, local law enforcement agencies lend credence to that belief, when they champion a budget increase for additional manpower or more modern equipment – all under the guise of lowering the crime rate and protecting its citizenry. Even national politicians like President Bill Clinton raise that same banner. His enormous crime bills included funding to put an additional one hundred thousand police officers on the streets, an extraordinary measure to tame an out of control crime rate. However, statistics simply do not support the theory that crime is out of control and, in fact, show that it has been on the decline each year over the past two decades. This research project will attempt to measure, on a very small scale, how safe citizens feel in their community, specifically, Clayton County, Georgia.

In September 2001, an exploratory study was conducted on this same topic, sampling fifty-one residents of Clayton County through the use of a questionnaire and interviews. Although the sample size was small, the results supported the theory that individuals believe that they are extremely safe in their community. In fact, seventy-one

percent of the respondents felt extremely safe or safe most of the time in their community and as high as ninety percent felt at least reasonably safe. A remarkable ninety-six percent of the respondents felt reasonably safe or safer inside of their homes or residences. The survey was conducted prior to the tragic events of September 11, 2001, so this project will measure any change, due in part, to those events.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Clayton County is one of the original five counties to comprise the Atlanta Metropolitan Area and is located just south of the Atlanta city limits. In fact, Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport, annually ranked as one of the world's busiest airports, lies within the northern-most boundaries of the county. While the county is one of the smallest in the state geographically, with a population over 246,000, it is one
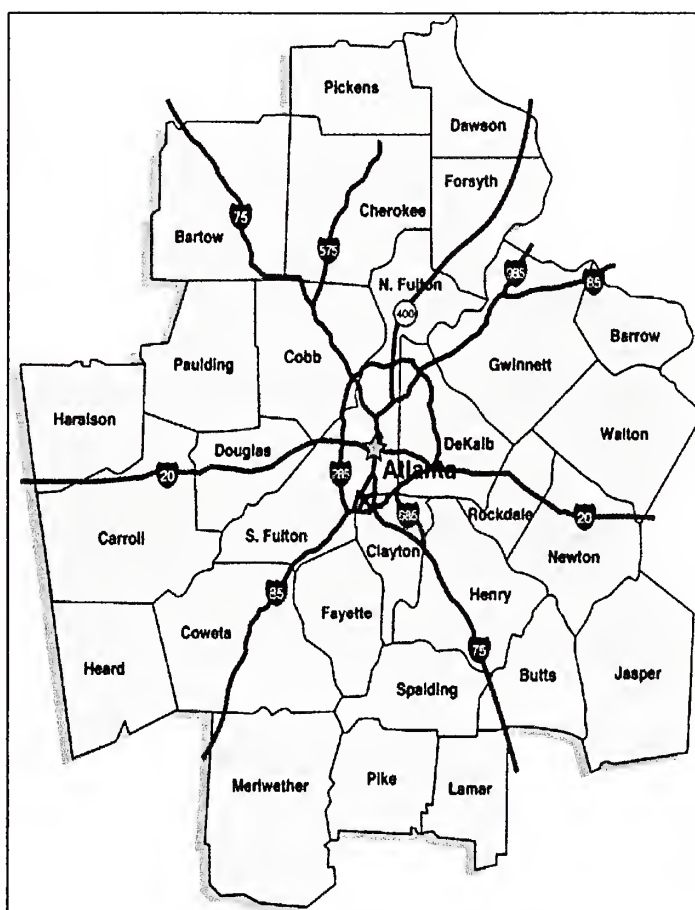
of the most densely populated. It is also a rapidly growing and changing population. In 1990, U.S. Census figures showed that Clayton County had a population of 182,052, mostly white residents. In fact, more than seventy-two percent of its citizens were white,

while less than twenty-four percent were black. Less than one percent of the residents were Asian or Hispanic. By the year 2000, the face of Clayton County had changed dramatically. U.S. Census figures showed that nearly fifty-two percent of its residents were now black, while slightly less than thirty-eight percent of its residents were white. In addition, nearly five percent were Asian and more than seven percent were Hispanic or of Latino origin. In ten years, the racial makeup of the population of Clayton County had almost completely reversed itself.

Crime rates also changed dramatically over that same period. While violent crime had been on the decline nationwide, Clayton County's violent crime rate seemed to be going in the opposite direction. According to Georgia Bureau of Investigation (G.B.I.) statistics, in 1980 there were only four murders in Clayton County. By the year 1990, that number had risen to ten, and by the year 2000, it had more than doubled to twenty-one. While an increase would be expected, it should be proportionate to the growth in population. However, while the population increased by thirty percent between the year 1990 and the year 2000, the murder rate grew by more than one hundred percent in that same ten year period. The same pattern exists for sexual assaults. Fifty-seven rapes were reported to the G.B.I. in the year 1980 and by the year 1990, they too had nearly doubled to ninety-six. Between the year 1980 and the year 2000, the number of robberies increased from slightly more than two hundred to nearly five hundred. The number of assaults grew from nearly three hundred reported in the year 1980, to more than five hundred fifty in the year 2000, all staggering numbers when one considers that crime rates have been on the decline nationwide for years.

Clayton County government is doing its best to stay on top of the growth in crime. Its municipalities, the Cities of College Park, Jonesboro, Forest Park, Lake City, Morrow, and Riverdale each have their own police department and there is also a county-wide police department, sheriff's department, and drug task force. Additionally, the City of Atlanta, U.S. Customs, the D.E.A., and other three letter agencies are represented at Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport. There is obviously, no shortage of law enforcement presence in the county. In fact, the FY2003 budget calls for Clayton County taxpayers to spend nearly forty million dollars on its three county-wide agencies, which equates to more than one-third of the county's annual budget. The figures do not include the costs associated with prosecution. Does this overwhelming presence of law enforcement make the citizens of Clayton County feel safer or does it have the opposite effect and make them feel unsafe and vulnerable?

While crime may not be out of control nationwide, the nation has chosen to surround itself with the violent images associated with criminal behavior. While all entertainment mediums are guilty, television has become the primary source of this "make believe" crime and punishment as network programming is packed with "real-life" crime dramas. These dramas have traveled light years from Joe Friday on *Dragnet* in the 1950's to Detective Andy Sipowicz and his colleagues on the long running *NYPD Blue*. The programming has become so popular that the producers of NBC's *Law & Order* have created three spin-offs. *Law & Order: Criminal Intent, Law & Order: Special Victims Unit, and Law & Order: Crime and Punishment* joined network programming and were immediate ratings successes. *Crime and Punishment* follows actual prosecutors and actual cases from the San Diego County, California District Attorney's Office. The *Law*

& *Order* formula obviously works. The top twenty shows for the week of July 21, 2002, according to the Nielsen Corporation, included all of the *Law & Order* offerings. The original series came in third, *Criminal Intent* came in at number seven, *Crime and Punishment* finished thirteenth, and *Special Victims Unit* came in twentieth (Nielsen Media Research 2002). All four series easily won their time slots. *CSI*, CBS's portrayal of crime scene investigators was the top-rated show and has been so successful that CBS created its own spin-off, *CSI: Miami* for the fall 2002 schedule. NBC capitalized on the popularity of the forensic crime solvers by creating its own, *Crossing Jordan,* and it too, has been a regular finisher in the top twenty. Each new season brings new offerings that try to capture the viewer's cravings for more violence. Of course, the good guys always win in these made for television dramas and they always manage to do so in less than one hour. They likely make viewers feel good about their communities for another reason, as well; these dramas take place in New York, Miami, or Los Angeles – a long way from Clayton County.

Another entertainment industry trying to tap into the nation's fascination with violence is the video gaming industry. In 2002, industry analysts predicted sales to exceed $20 billion (National Institute on Media and Family 2002: 2). The best selling games seem to be those that glorify and reward violent behavior. *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* was released in October 2002, and sold more than 1.4 million copies in just two days making it the fastest selling game in the thirty year history of the industry (National Institute on Media and Family 2002: 2). In it, the player portrays Tommy Vercetti, a career criminal back on the streets after spending time in prison. The player is rewarded for stealing ambulances, decapitating police officers, and for using whatever means of

violence necessary to get revenge on those he believes wronged him. Industry analysts

predict that it will sell more than ten million copies and gross more than a half billion

dollars (National Institute on Media and Family 2002: 2). Most do not believe that

playing violent games or watching too much television causes individuals to act out

violently, but does it desensitize them to the world around them? George Gerbner, Dean

of the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Pennsylvania, believes

that if someone watches enough brutality on television, he comes to believe that that he is

living in a cruel and gloomy world where he feels vulnerable and insecure (Glassner

1999: 44). He calls it the "mean world" syndrome.

Print media also capitalizes on the morbid curiosity of its readers and utilizes its

own sensationalism to sell copies. In March 1991, Army Specialist Anthony Riggs

returned home to Detroit and was killed outside of his apartment home. It was reported

in the newspapers that the streets of America were more dangerous than a war zone.

Riggs had just returned home from the Persian Gulf War when he was killed. The

Washington Post reported it this way:

> Conley Street, on this city's northeast side, is a pleasant-looking row of
> brick and wood homes with small, neat lawns, a street that for years was
> the realization of the American dream for middle-income families. But in
> the past few years, Conley has become a street of crack, crime, and
> occasional bursts of gunfire. And at 2:15 a.m. Monday, the bullets killed
> Army Specialist Anthony Riggs, something that all of Iraq's Scud missiles
> could not do during his seven months with a Patriot missile battery in
> Saudi Arabia (Phillips 1991: A1).

This was the ideal crime story - an innocent victim, in this case a war hero, and faceless

thugs that gunned him down for no apparent reason. It was a drive-by shooting that

shocked the community. It was covered by national and international news agencies for

weeks as reporters demanded that police find the killer. It became only a footnote buried

deep in the news when it was learned that Rigg's widow had hired the killer only to gain an insurance payout. One does not have to look to national publications for sensationalized coverage of the news. The Metro section of the August 4, 2002, edition of the Atlanta Journal Constitution had a full front page story detailing the violent death of fifteen year old teenage girl. The story describes Katie Hamlin as an outgoing teen with bright eyes and a wide smile who was found naked and burned in a creek bed in Cherokee County (Brett 2002: F1). Only a slight mention is given to the fact that Katie bragged to friends of doing Ecstasy and Heroin and that friends worried she was running with the wrong crowd. Instead readers find images of the blue sky and white clouds painted over her bed and a photograph of her standing in front of the Golden Gate Bridge in California. Deeper in the Metro section are details of several shootings under the banner headline *String of Shootings Gives Police Little Time to Catch Their Breath*. The article describes five shootings, three that were fatal, and the fact that police had no leads in four of the five (Mungin 2002: F3). Deeper in the Metro section, a Law and Order column details a three hour standoff between police and a man carrying a shotgun near the state capitol and the discovery of a body in the parking lot of a Kroger grocery store in Atlanta. Less than a couple of paragraphs are devoted to each crime because they lack excitement and therefore also lack mass appeal.

The authors of *The Mythology of Crime and Criminal Justice* argue that a "myth" exists in the United States that crime is out of control. They place a large portion of the blame on the entertainment industry, in which they include print and broadcast news, as well as primetime television programming and movies. But they also contend that the FBI, the very agency that reports the nation's crime statistics that show a decline in

violent crime, is partly responsible for the creation of the "myth" (Kappeler, 2000: 8). They believe that the FBI's promotion and use of a crime clock is misleading and alarming. It measures and presents the number of crimes committed in either minutes or seconds. The United States is comprised of almost 280 million citizens and each day has only 24 hours, so it appears as if crimes are occurring with frightening regularity. In 1997, the FBI's crime clock showed a murder took place every 29 minutes, a rape every 5 minutes, a robbery every minute, and an assault every 31 seconds (Kappeler, 2000: 8). The actual method used to collect and report data is also partially responsible for the creation of the "myth." The FBI uses its Uniform Crime Reports to compile and publish data reported to them by local law enforcement agencies. The data includes crimes that are known to the police or in other words, reported to the police. A large percentage of crimes are never reported to the police for a variety of reasons, perhaps the crime involved only a slight monetary loss or the crime was committed by a family member and it is not reported out of embarrassment. The report also ignores corporate crime and white collar crime, a category growing at an alarming rate. Obviously, violent offenses, resulting in serious injury or death, are reported to police, which creates the impression that violent crimes are occurring at an alarmingly high rate. Additionally, the FBI only requires that the offenses be known to the police and does not require any follow up investigation to actually substantiate that the offense is founded. Finally, and without question, record keeping and reporting has improved due to the growth in the use of computer technology by law enforcement agencies, which contributes to the appearance that serious crime is out of control.

The Gallup News Service conducts a poll each year that measures how Americans feel about the growth of crime in the United States. Since a high of eighty-nine percent in 1992, the percentage of those that believe there is more crime in the country than in the previous year has been declining. In September 2000, only forty-seven percent of Americans believed that there was more crime than the previous year. Only thirty-four percent of those same individuals indicate that there is more crime in their area. Almost half of all respondents believed that there is less crime than in the previous year. When asked if they believed that crime was a problem in the area where they lived, almost sixty percent of the respondents believed that it was not a serious problem compared with a staggering ninety-five percent that believe it is at least a moderately serious problem nationwide. In October 2001, after the events of September 11, the same questions were posed by the Gallup organization with surprisingly similar results. Only forty-one percent of those surveyed believed that crime was up nationally and a smaller percentage, twenty-six, believed that it was higher than the previous year on the local level. Fifty-two percent believed that crime was lower than the previous year in their local area. When asked if there was an area near where they live where they would be afraid to walk alone at night, only thirty percent said yes, while sixty-nine percent responded that there was not a place that they felt unsafe. The sixty-nine percent response represents the highest such level since 1968. The 2000 Crime Prevention Survey, sponsored by the National Crime Prevention Council and ADT Security Services, Inc., measured the fear of crime as well and found similar results. A remarkable seventy-three percent of respondents believe that their level of fear in their neighborhoods has not changed from the previous year. It also showed that forty-seven percent of respondents with school age

children were extremely or very concerned about the safety of their children at school, while only twenty-two percent were not very or not at all concerned.

Crime or the fear of crime appears to be perceived as a national problem that does not exist in local communities. However, while citizens might not feel like crime is a problem in their community, they still support tougher sentencing and never fail to provide funding for the building of more prisons or the hiring of more police officers. A survey conducted by Time magazine in 1994 indicated that eighty-one percent of the public favored life imprisonment for anyone convicted of three violent crimes. Additionally, eighty-four percent of the public believed that the courts did not deal harshly enough with criminals and seventy-four percent supported the death penalty for murderers (Lacayo, 1994: 53).

OBJECTIVES/HYPOTHESES

Research Objectives

The overall objective of the research project was to determine how safe individuals felt in their community, specifically, Clayton County, Georgia. It also examined how safe each person felt at night in their community and whether or not they felt safe when inside of their home or residence. Additionally, the research examined how an individual's level of household income influenced, if at all, their feeling of safety. It also sought to establish how concerned parents are about the safety of their children while they are at school and whether a residential burglary or rape victim's perception of safety in the community was affected by their victimization. Finally, the research

examined whether or not the events of September 11, 2001, caused residents to fear that a terrorist attack could take place in their community.

Hypotheses

There are six hypotheses associated with this research:

1. Overall, individuals will feel safe in Clayton County.

2. The level of household income will have no impact on an individual's feelings of safety in their community.

3. Individuals with children will worry more about their safety at school than in their neighborhood or community.

4. Individuals who have been the victims of rape or sexual assault will feel less safe in their community.

5. Individuals who have been the victims of burglary will feel less safe in their community.

6. Individuals will not believe that a terrorist attack in Clayton County is very likely.

Independent and Dependent Variables in Each Hypothesis

In the second hypothesis, the independent variable is the total level of household income and the dependent variable is how safe they feel in the community. The independent variable in the third hypothesis is whether or not the respondent has school age children. The fourth and fifth hypotheses share a common dependent or outcome variable. It is that individuals will feel less safe in their community. Each of those hypotheses has a distinct independent or cause variable. In the fourth, it is that the respondent will have been a victim of rape or sexual assault and in the fifth it is that the respondent will have been the victim of a residential burglary.

Operationalized Variables

For purposes of the survey, community is defined as the area surrounding where an individual lives. In the first hypothesis, an individual who feels safe in their community will be operationally defined as a person who responds extremely safe, safe most of the time, or reasonably safe to each of the last four questions of the survey. In the fourth and fifth hypotheses, the dependent variable, feeling less safe, is defined as individuals who respond that they feel safe some of the time or not at all to each of the last four questions of the survey. In the fourth hypothesis, rape will be defined according to the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, Title 16:6-1. It defines rape as follows:

> A person commits the offense of rape when he has carnal knowledge of:
> (1) A female forcibly and against her will; or
> (2) A female who is less than ten years of age.
>
> Carnal knowledge in rape occurs when there is any penetration of the female sex organ by the male sex organ. The fact that the person allegedly raped is the wife of the defendant shall not be a defense to a charge of rape.

In the fifth hypothesis, burglary will also be defined according to the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, Title 16:7-1, which defines it as follows:

> A person commits the offense of burglary when, without authority and with the intent to commit a felony or theft therein, he enters or remains within the dwelling house of another or any building, vehicle, railroad car, watercraft, or other such structure designed for use as the dwelling of another or enters or remains within any other building, railroad car, aircraft, or any room or any part thereof.

Hypotheses Linkage to the Literature

A Gallup News Service poll conducted between August 29 and September 5, 2000, found that sixty percent of the respondents believed that crime was an extremely serious or very serious problem in the United States. A remarkable ninety-five percent

found that crime was at least a moderately serious problem or worse in our nation (Simmon, September 7, 2000: 2). What makes that news remarkable is that FBI statistics indicate that the crime rate in the United States has been declining for the past several years. The 1998 crime statistics provided by the FBI showed that the overall crime rate was down seventeen percent since 1991. In fact, crime rates are at their lowest point in several years. The murder rate in 1998 was at its lowest since 1967 and the robbery rate was its lowest in thirty years (Kappler, 2000: 33).

Surprisingly, that same survey found that only twelve percent believed crime was a very serious problem or an extremely serious problem in the area where they lived. In fact, almost fifty percent believed that it was not a serious problem at all (Simmons, 2000: 2). A Wirthlin Report survey conducted in February 2001, found that seventy-three percent of Americans felt no need to reduce their activities in their neighborhoods out of fear of being a victim of crime. Only one in six felt the need to somewhat reduce their activities out of fear. The data suggests that, although individuals perceive a nationwide crime problem, they feel safe in their communities.

Victims of rape and burglary were specifically targeted in the questionnaire because of the intrusive nature of each crime and the lasting psychological and emotional effects of the traumatic event. An estimated 683,000 women are forcibly raped each year in the United States and nearly one-third of all rape victims develop symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder sometime during their lifetime (National Center for Victims of Crime & Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center, 1992). Those symptoms include nightmares and dreams that cause the victim to relive the rape, social withdrawal, and avoidance behavior, such as refusing to drive near the location of the

rape or refusing to go out at night. Victims often seek relief from the symptoms through drugs and alcohol. Rape victims are 13.4 times more likely to have alcohol problems and 26 times more likely to have serious drug abuse problems (National Center for Victims of Crime & Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center, 1992). According to the National Center for Victims of Crime 2002 Crime Clock, a burglary takes place every ten seconds in the United States. Like rape, it is an intrusive crime that violates the ultimate sanctuary for most individuals. The home for most is thought to be a place immune to the violent world that exists, often just outside the front door. When that feeling of ultimate safety and security is violated, it often causes irreparable harm to the psyche of the homeowner.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Method

The research for this project was conducted primarily through the distribution of a self-administered questionnaire. There are several advantages to the questionnaire, including the low cost to produce and tabulate, as well as the relative short amount of time required to complete the survey. Perhaps the most important advantage is the ability on the part of the respondent to remain anonymous. It frees the respondent to answer more honestly without fear of repercussion or the embarrassment of being identified (Fitzgerald and Cox, 1994: 35).

There are also several disadvantages to the use of questionnaires. The first is the requirement of a literate response group. Clayton County has a very diverse ethnic population with a rapidly growing Hispanic and Asian community. With that diversity

come the obvious language barriers. The respondent might not completely understand the questions being asked and in this format there is no opportunity to clear up confusion. Often, a poor response rate is an additional disadvantage in the use of questionnaires.

The questionnaire was designed using fixed alternative questions, which require an individual to select an answer from a printed list of choices. It makes the questionnaire easy to complete and easy to tabulate, but it also might force an individual to select an answer that would not necessarily be their choice.

Sampling

The largest percentage of the data collected in the research was done through the use of non-probability sampling. This technique prevents the researcher from determining the probability of any element being included in the sample. It was largely an accidental sample. In other words, those individuals who came to the tag office and were willing to complete a survey were the ones used for the questionnaire. Victims of rape and burglary were specifically targeted to ensure an adequate representation in the sample.

Data Collection

Approximately five hundred fifty questionnaires were randomly distributed to residents who came to the Clayton County Tag Office in Jonesboro, to renew their license plates between January and March 2003. In addition, the Southern Crescent Sexual Assault Center administered the questionnaire to approximately forty victims who came to the Center for counseling and the Victim Witness Program of the Clayton County District Attorney's Office distributed by mail fifty surveys to known victims of burglary. The questionnaire included an introductory statement providing an explanation

as to the purpose of the survey and a promise of anonymity. There appeared to be no confusing questions on the surveys as all were properly completed, however, nearly two dozen individuals did not indicate their level of household income and another ten individuals did not provide their age.

Tabulation and Analysis Procedures

Each questionnaire was hand-checked for completeness and accuracy. The results of the fixed-alternative questions were coded on a blank questionnaire and calculations were done by hand, as well as by using Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to ensure accuracy. There were no open-ended questions on the survey. However, there were questions that, if answered in the affirmative, required the respondent to answer additional fixed-alternative questions. Percentages were calculated using Microsoft Excel spreadsheets.

RESULTS (Tables, Graphs, and Discussion)

Annotated Questionnaire

HOW SAFE DO YOU FEEL IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

Please take a few moments to complete the following survey. It is being conducted as part of the requirements of a graduate class on research methodology and your assistance is greatly needed and appreciated. Please be assured that your responses will remain completely anonymous.

Background Information – Please answer the following questions, which will be used for classification purposes only.

1. What is your age in years? **39.58**

2. What is your gender?
 272 Male
 304 Female

3. What is your present marital status?

__176__ Single
__318__ Married
__20__ Widowed
__6__ Separated
__54__ Divorced

4. Which one of these racial or ethnic groups do you consider yourself a member?

__20__ Native American
__8__ Asian
__300__ Black or African American
__214__ White or Caucasian
__26__ Hispanic or Mexican American
__6__ Other, please specify _____

5. What was your total household income from all sources before taxes in the past calendar year?

__26__ Less than $10,000
__56__ $10,001 to $20,000
__94__ $20,001 to $30,000
__98__ $30,001 to $40,000
__88__ $40,001 to $50,000
__50__ $50,001 to $60,000
__136__ Greater than $60,000

6. Which one of these situations would best describe your living arrangements?

__396__ Own home
__152__ Rent or lease apartment or home
__2__ Public housing
__36__ Live with parents or other family members (Do not pay rent)
__0__ Assisted Living / Nursing Home
__2__ Other, please specify _____

7. How long have you been living at your present residence?

__58__ Less than six months
__56__ Six months but less than one year
__182__ One year but less than five years
__146__ Five years but less than ten years
__134__ More than ten years

8. What is the zip code of your current home or residence? _____

30236 – 118	**30349 – 22**	**30260 – 16**
30238 – 94	**30294 – 20**	**30281 – 16**
30274 – 62	**30297 – 20**	**30214 – 8**
30228 – 48	**30273 – 18**	**30215 – 8**

Children at Home – If you do not have children living at home with you, proceed to question 13.

9. Do you allow your children to walk to and from the school bus stop without an adult?

__92__ Yes
__140__ No

10. How often do you leave your children at home alone before or after school?

__42__ Every workday

__20__ 2-3 times during the week

__24__ One day per work week or less

__236__ Never

11. Do you feel it is as safe today for children in your community as it was five years ago?

__96__ Yes

__244__ No

12. How are worried that your children will be the victims of violence in their school?

__42__ Extremely worried

__54__ Very worried

__126__ Somewhat worried

__46__ Not very worried

__48__ Not worried at all

Personal Safety – Please check the correct blank for each question.

13. Do you have an alarm system installed in your present home or residence?

__334__ Yes

__240__ No

14. Has your current home or residence ever been burglarized? (If no, skip to question 15)

__48__ Yes

__526__ No

14a. If yes, how often has your current home or residence been burglarized in the past five years.

__36__ Once

__8__ 2-3 times

__0__ 4-5 times

__0__ More than five times

__4__ Not in the past five years

15. Have you ever been the victim of a sexual assault or rape? (If no, skip to question 16)

__64__ Yes

__510__ No

15a. If yes, how long ago did the assault take place?

__2__ Less than six months

__2__ Six months but less than one year

__6__ One year but less than five years

__6__ Five years but less than ten years

__48__ More than ten years

15b. How often do you, yourself, worry about again being the victim of a sexual assault?

__12__ Frequently

__20__ Occasionally

__18__ Rarely

__8__ Never

16. In the past five years, have you been the victim of any crime other than a burglary or a sexual assault?

__42__ Yes

__516__ No

17. How confident are you in the ability of the police to protect you from a violent crime?
__36__ Extremely confident
__88__ Very confident
__274__ Reasonably confident
__128__ Not very confident
__36__ Not confident at all

18. How worried are you about your community being attacked by terrorists?
__38__ Extremely worried
__56__ Very worried
__194__ Somewhat worried
__186__ Not very worried
__94__ Not worried at all

19. Overall, how safe do you feel in your community?
__72__ Extremely safe
__236__ Safe, most of the time
__206__ Reasonably safe
__42__ Safe, some of the time
__18__ Not at all

19a. How safe do you feel at night in your community?
__82__ Extremely safe
__232__ Safe, most of the time
__182__ Reasonably safe
__56__ Safe, some of the time
__20__ Not at all

19b. How safe do you feel inside of your current home or residence?
__162__ Extremely safe
__242__ Safe, most of the time
__126__ Reasonably safe
__26__ Safe, some of the time
__12__ Not at all

20. Overall, how safe do you feel today as compared to five years ago?
__46__ More safe
__256__ Just as safe
__234__ Less safe
__34__ Not safe at all

Composition of the Sample

Five hundred surveys were distributed randomly to individuals who entered the

main office of the Clayton County Tax Commissioner in Jonesboro, Georgia, to renew

their license plates. An additional fifty questionnaires were administered by the Southern

Crescent Sexual Assault Center to individuals known to have been victims of sexual

assault and an additional fifty were administered by the Victim Witness Program of the

Clayton County District Attorney's Office to known victims of residential burglaries. All but four individuals who completed their surveys included their ages. The oldest respondent was 83 years of age and the youngest, 15 years of age. The average age of the group of respondents was 39.58 years of age. The largest group of respondents was from the 40-49 year range. More than seventy-five percent of all respondents fell between the twenty to forty-nine year old age categories (see Graph A for data analysis).

Graph A

AGE DISTRIBUTION

Legend:
- ■ <20
- ☐ 20-29
- ▦ 30-39
- ▨ 40-49
- ▩ 50-59
- ▨ 60-69
- ▧ 70-79
- ▨ 80 +
- ▨ No Response

Values: 12, 130, 144, 160, 92, 16, 16, 2, 4
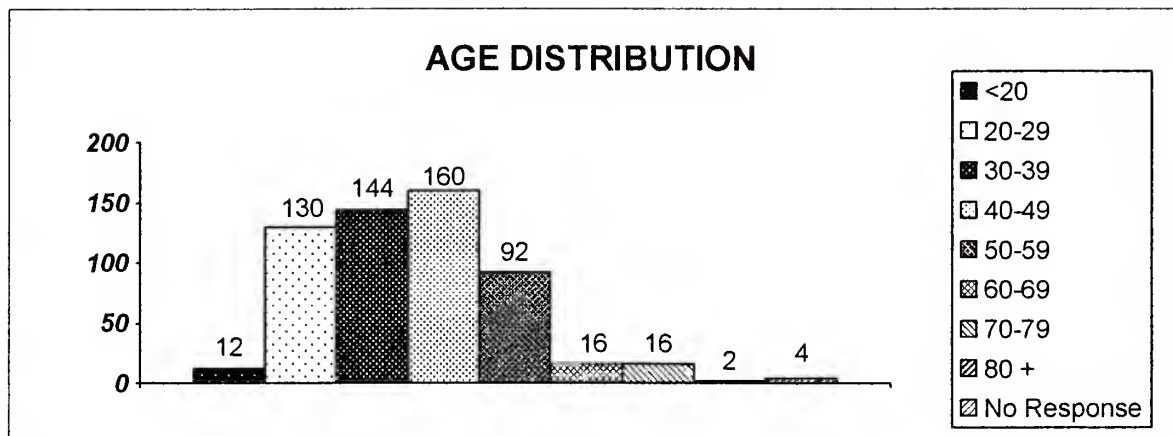
Of the five hundred seventy-six respondents, two hundred seventy two were male and three hundred four were female (see graph B).

Graph B

GENDER DISTRIBUTION

Legend:
- ■ Male
- ☐ Female

Values: 272, 304
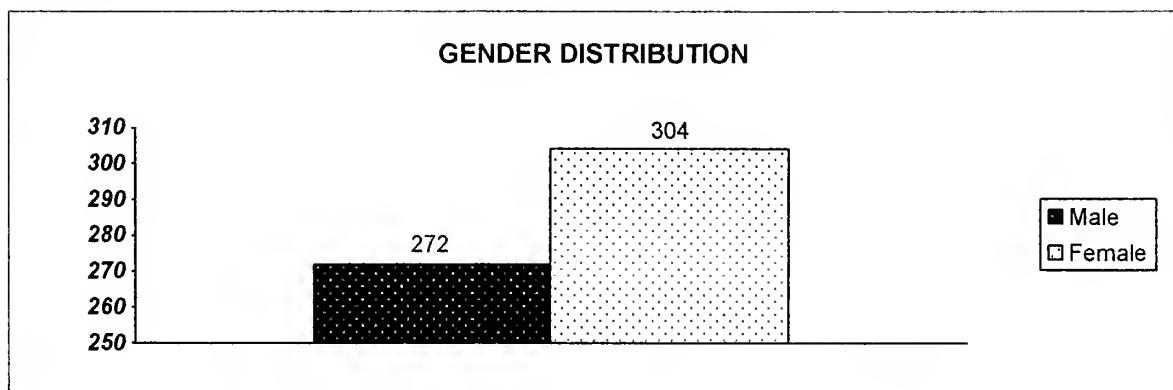
Three hundred, or slightly more than 52.3 % of the respondents classified themselves as

black or African American, only slightly higher than the 51.6 % of those classifying

themselves as black or African American in the year 2000 U.S. Census for Clayton

County. Two hundred fourteen or 37.3 % of respondents classified themselves as white

or Caucasian, nearly identical to the 37.9% classifying themselves white or Caucasian in

the year 2000 U.S. Census. Only twenty-six individuals or 4.5 % of the respondents

classified themselves as Hispanic or Mexican American and only 8 individuals or 1.4%

of the respondents classified themselves as Asian, both lower than the percentages in the

year 2000 U.S. Census for Clayton County. Twenty individuals or 3.5% of the

respondents classified themselves as Native American and six individuals or 1.0% of the

respondents listed themselves as other, however they did not provide any specific

information (see Graph C).

Graph C
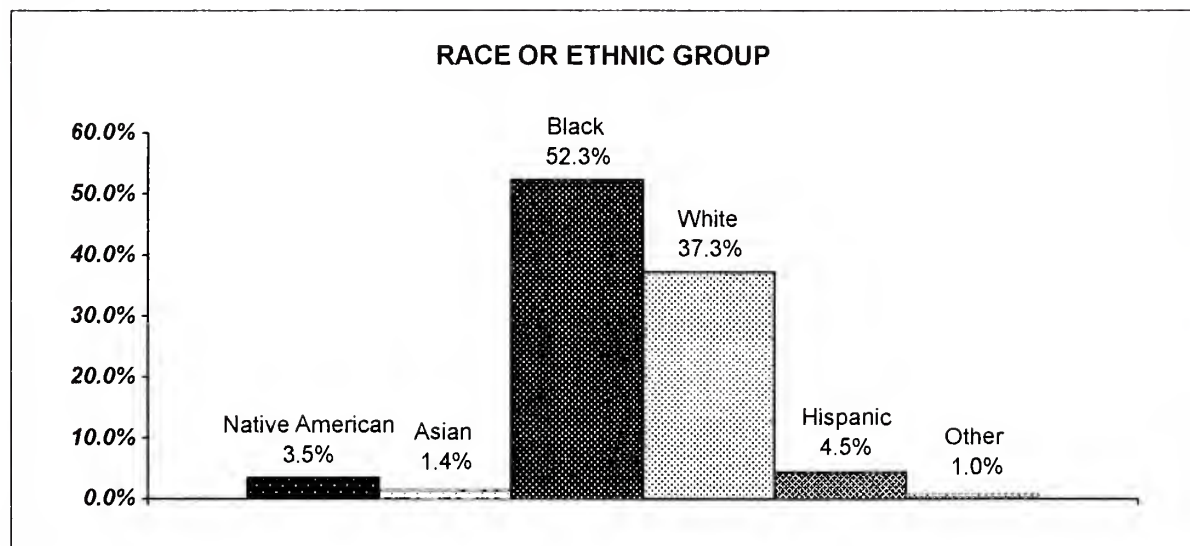
Three hundred eighteen individuals were married, which represents fifty-five percent of

the respondents. One hundred seventy-six individuals were single, fifty-four individuals

were divorced, twenty respondents were widowed, and an additional six respondents were separated. (See Table D).

Table D

Marital Status	Frequency
Single	176
Married	318
Widowed	20
Separated	6
Divorced	54
No Response	2
Total	576

Twenty-five percent of all respondents listed their total household income as being more than $60,000, on an annual basis, and a remarkable fifty percent had a total household income of $40,000, or greater. Only fifteen percent of all respondents listed their total household income as being less than $20,000 (see Graph E).

Graph E

TOTAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME

4.8% 10.2% 17.2% 17.9% 16.1% 9.1% 24.8%

Less than $10,000
$10,001 to $20,000
$20,001 to $30,000
$30,001 to $40,000
$40,001 to $50,000
$50,001 to $60,000
Greater than $60,000
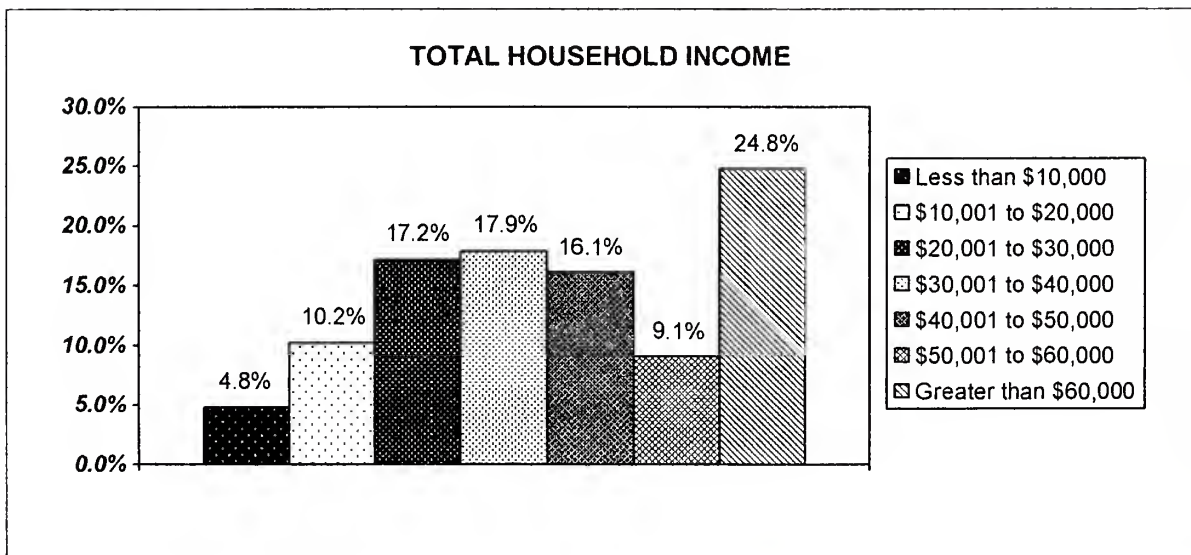
Seventy percent of all respondents owned their own home, while an additional twenty-six percent rented or leased an apartment or home. Only two respondents lived in public housing and three dozen respondents lived at home with their parents or other family members. Consistent with the changing demographics of the population in Clayton County, more than fifty percent of all respondents indicated that they had lived in the county for five years or less (see Graph F). In fact, twenty percent had been in the county for one year or less. Only slightly more than twenty percent indicated that they had been residents for more than ten years.

Graph F

Length at Present Residence

- Less than six months
- Six months to one year
- One year to five years
- Five years to ten years
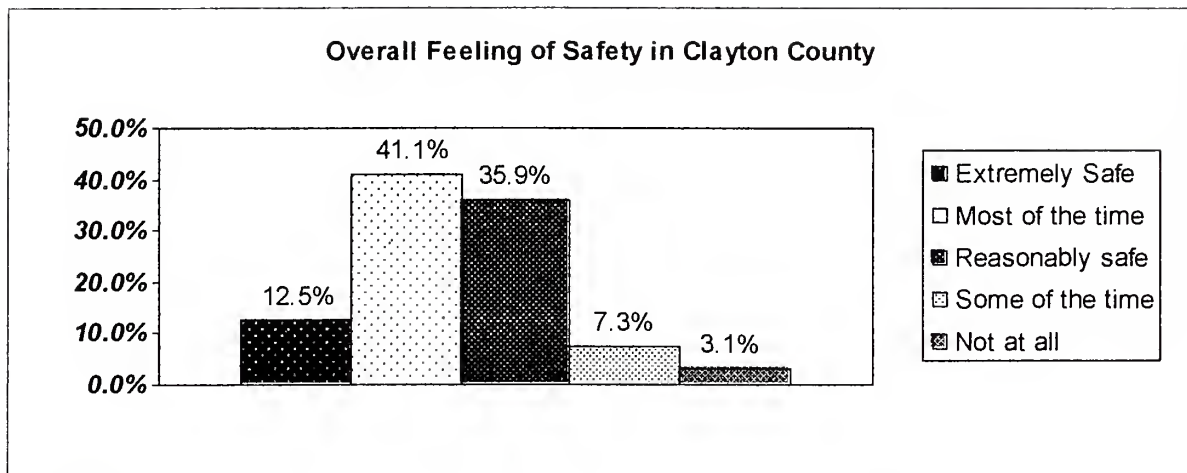- More than ten years
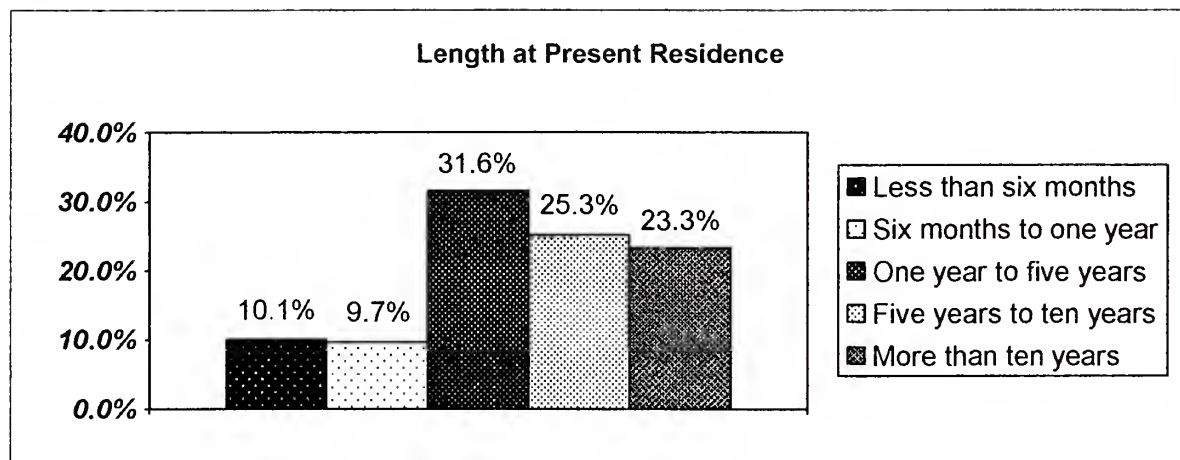
Findings Keyed to Each Objective

The first hypothesis stated that, overall most individuals would feel safe in Clayton County. The data certainly supports the hypothesis. As Graph G indicates, nearly ninety percent of all respondents felt at least reasonably safe, however only slightly more than fifty percent felt extremely safe or safe most of the time in their

community. More than ten percent of the respondents felt safe only some of the time or not all in their community.

Graph G

Overall Feeling of Safety in Clayton County

- 12.5%
- 41.1%
- 35.9%
- 7.3%
- 3.1%

Legend:
- ■ Extremely Safe
- □ Most of the time
- ▦ Reasonably safe
- ▤ Some of the time
- ▨ Not at all

The numbers do not change much when the sun goes down either (see Graph H). Nearly eighty-seven percent of the respondents still felt at least reasonably safe or safer in their communities at night and only thirteen percent felt safe some of the time or not at all.

Graph H

How Safe Individuals Felt at Night

- 14.3%
- 40.6%
- 31.8%
- 9.8%
- 3.5%

Legend:
- ■ Extremely safe
- □ Most of the time
- ▦ Reasonably safe
- ▤ Some of the time
- ▨ Not at all
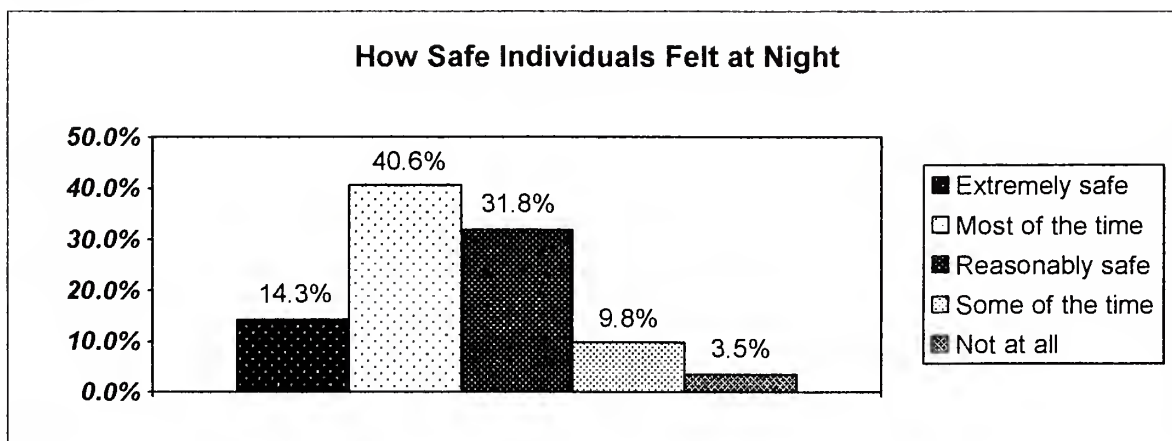
Even more remarkable, more than ninety-three percent of those responding felt at least reasonably safe inside of their home or residence (see Graph I). Less than five percent

felt safe some of the time and two percent responded that they never felt safe inside their home.

Graph I

How Safe Residents Felt Inside of Their Home

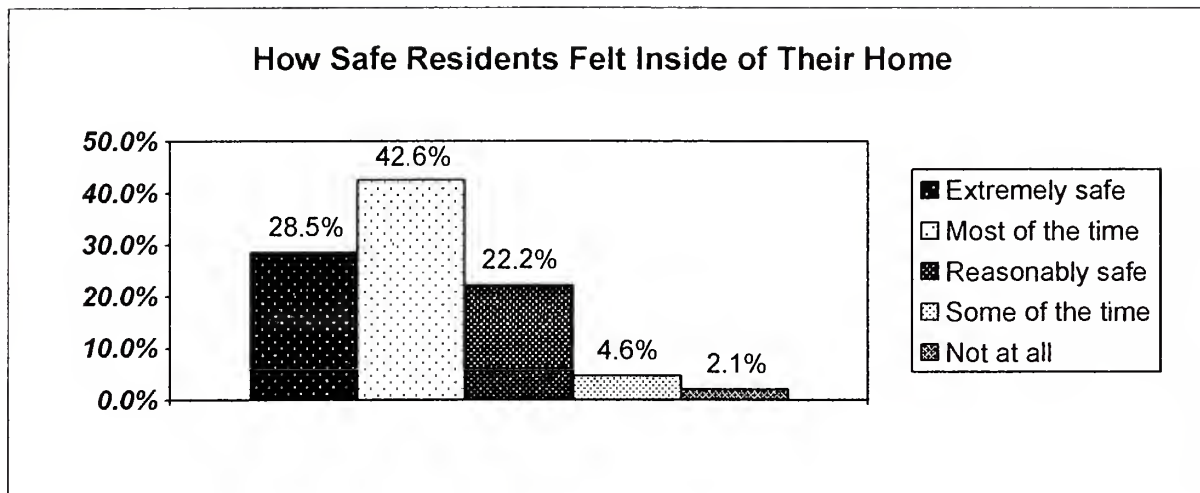28.5% — 42.6% — 22.2% — 4.6% — 2.1%

Legend:
- Extremely safe
- Most of the time
- Reasonably safe
- Some of the time
- Not at all

The news is not all good, however. When asked to compare their level of safety today as compared to five years ago, nearly half of all respondents felt it was less safe or not safe at all. Only slightly more than eight percent believed that it was safer today in Clayton County than it was five years ago (see Graph J).

Graph J

How Safe is Clayton County Compared to Five Years Ago

8.1% — 44.9% — 41.1% — 5.9%

Legend:
- More safe
- Just as safe
- Less safe
- Not safe at all
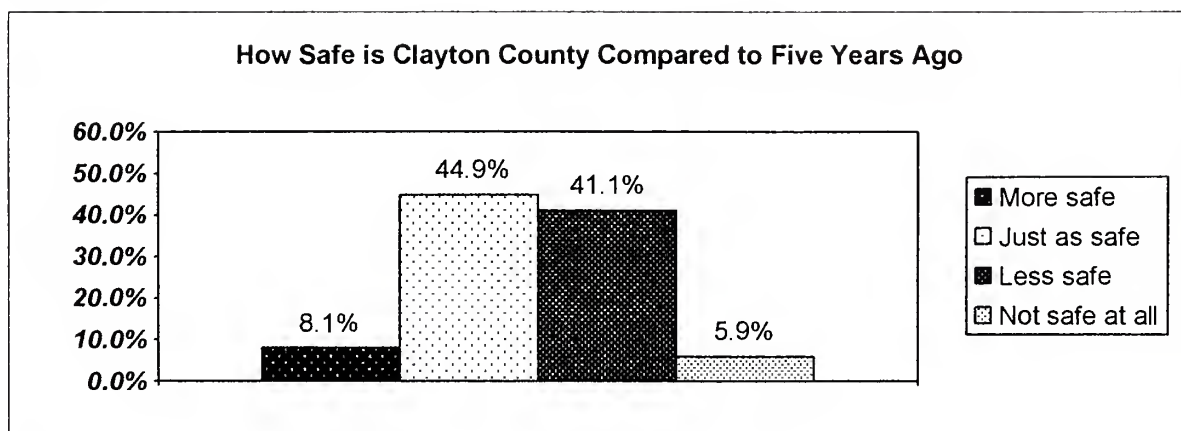
Perhaps tied to those sentiments, less than twenty percent of respondents believed that the police could protect them from a violent crime. Fifty percent were only reasonably confident in the "men in blue," while nearly thirty percent were not very confident or not confident at all that the police could protect them from violent crime.
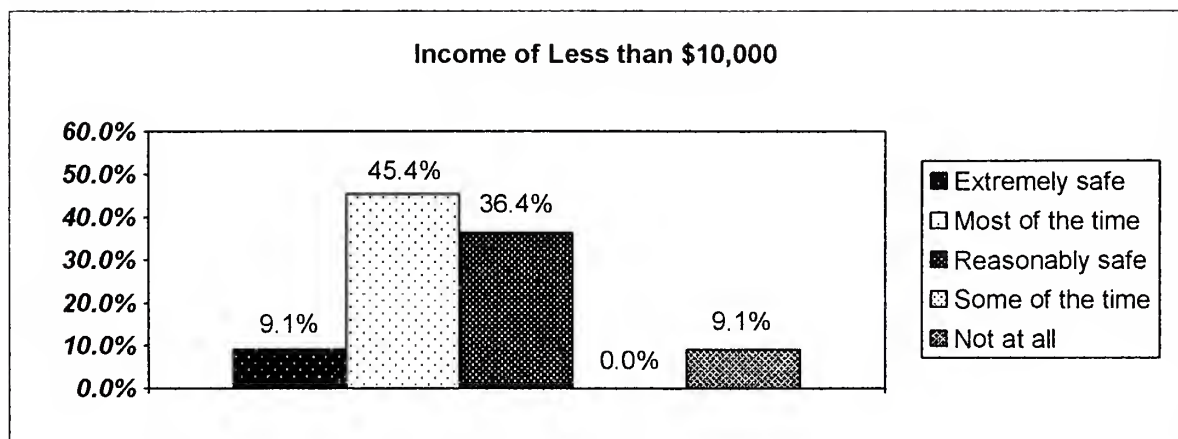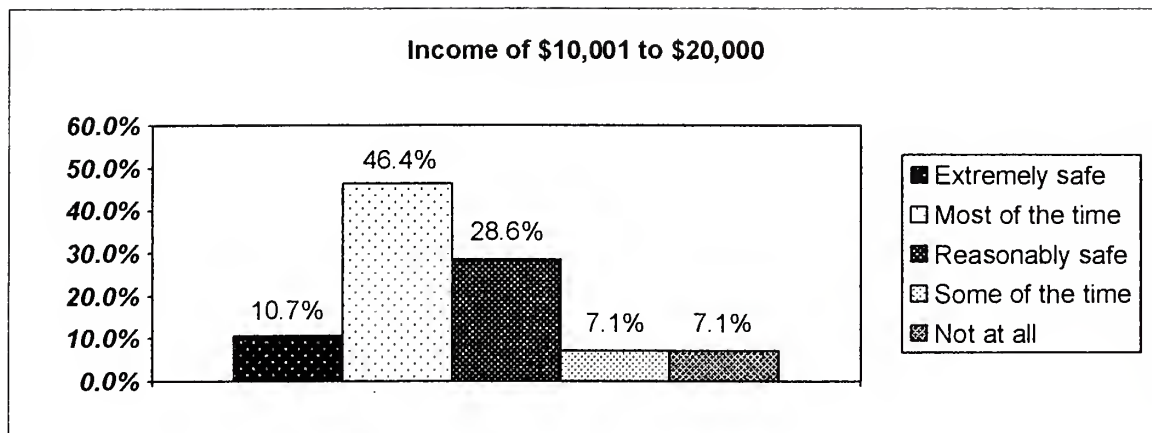
The second hypothesis stated that an individual's household income level would have no effect on their feeling of safety in their community. At least eighty-five percent of all respondents in every income category felt at least reasonably safe or safer in their community, while one hundred percent of respondents having a total household income of $50,001 to $60,000 indicated that they felt reasonably safe or safer in their community (see Graphs K-Q). Not a single person surveyed in the income category felt safe some of the time or not at all. Nearly ninety-seven percent of individuals with a household income of greater than $60,001 felt reasonably safe or safer in the county. While individuals in the higher income groups felt slightly safer than those in lower income categories, overall, the data supports the hypothesis.

Graph K

Graph L

Income of $10,001 to $20,000

10.7% 46.4% 28.6% 7.1% 7.1%

- Extremely safe
- Most of the time
- Reasonably safe
- Some of the time
- Not at all

Graph M

Income of $20,001 to $30,000

7.7% 35.9% 41.0% 10.3% 5.1%

- Extremely safe
- Most of the time
- Reasonably safe
- Some of the time
- Not at all

Graph N

Income of $30,001 to $40,000

18.4% 39.5% 28.9% 7.9% 5.3%

- Extremely safe
- Most of the time
- Reasonably safe
- Some of the time
- Not at all

Graph O

Income of $40,001 to $50,000

- 14.3%
- 34.3%
- 40.0%
- 8.6%
- 2.8%

Legend:
- ■ Extremely safe
- ☐ Most of the time
- ▨ Reasonably safe
- ▩ Some of the time
- ▨ Not at all

Graph P

Income of $50,001 to $60,000

- 5.5%
- 33.4%
- 61.1%
- 0.0%
- 0.0%

Legend:
- ▨ Extremely safe
- ☐ Most of the time
- ▨ Reasonably safe
- ▤ Some of the time
- ▨ Not at all

Graph Q

Income Greater than $60,000

- 15.4%
- 44.6%
- 36.9%
- 3.1%
- 0.0%

Legend:
- ■ Extremely safe
- ☐ Most of the time
- ▨ Reasonably safe
- ▤ Some of the time
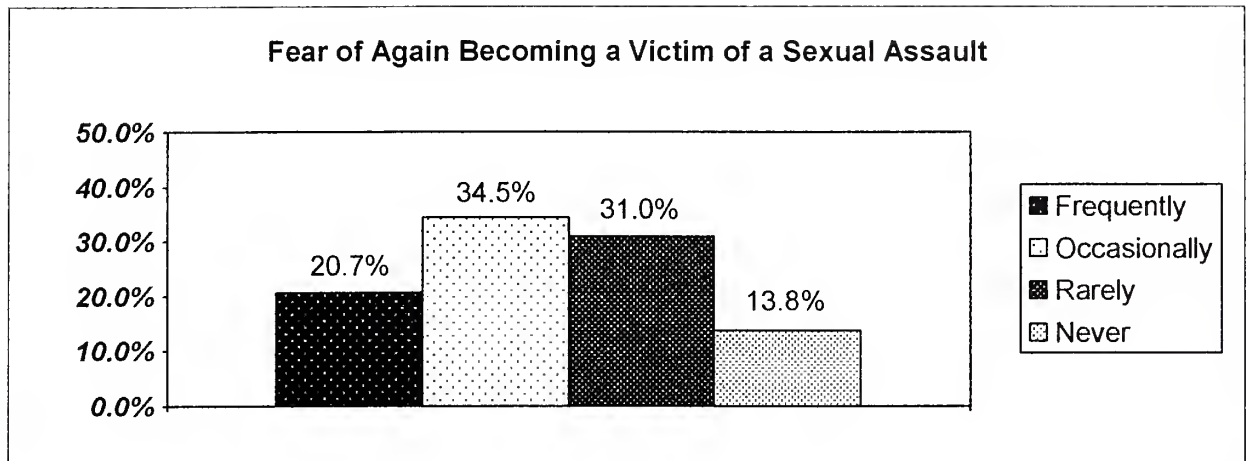- ▨ Not at all

The third hypothesis stated that individuals with children at home would worry

about their safety at school more than at home in their neighborhood or community. A

series of questions were asked, the first concerning individuals allowing their school-age children to walk alone to and from the bus stop. More than thirty-seven percent of the respondents did not allow their children to walk alone to and from the bus stop while twenty-four percent did. A high percentage, thirty-eight percent, indicated that they did not have children that rode the bus to and from school. The second question dealt with the amount of time school-age children were allowed to stay at home alone, before and after school. Seventy-three percent of all respondents indicated that they never left their children at home alone. Thirteen percent responded that they left their children at home every workday, six percent did so two to three days during the week, and seven percent indicated that they did so one day per week.

When asked if individuals felt their community is as safe today for children as it was five years ago, nearly seventy-two percent believe that it is not as safe, while twenty-eight percent of the respondents believe that it is just as safe today as five years ago (see Graph R). The final question dealt with violence in schools and how worried individuals were that their children would become victims of that violence. More than seventy percent of the respondents indicated that they were at least somewhat worried, very worried, or extremely worried that their children would become a victim of violence in their schools. Less than thirty percent were not very worried or not worried at all about violence in the schools (see Graph S). The data would seem to indicate that individuals are more fearful for their children's welfare, whether at home or in school in the community, than their own safety.

Graph R

**Is It as Safe Today for Children as It
was Five Years Ago?**

71.8%

28.2%

100.0%
80.0%
60.0%
40.0%
20.0%
0.0%

■ Yes
☐ No

Graph S

**How Worried are Parents that Their Children will be Victims of Violence
at School**

39.9%

13.3%   17.1%   14.6%   15.2%

50.0%
40.0%
30.0%
20.0%
10.0%
0.0%

■ Extremely worried
☐ Very worried
▨ Somewhat worried
▨ Not very worried
▨ Not worried at all
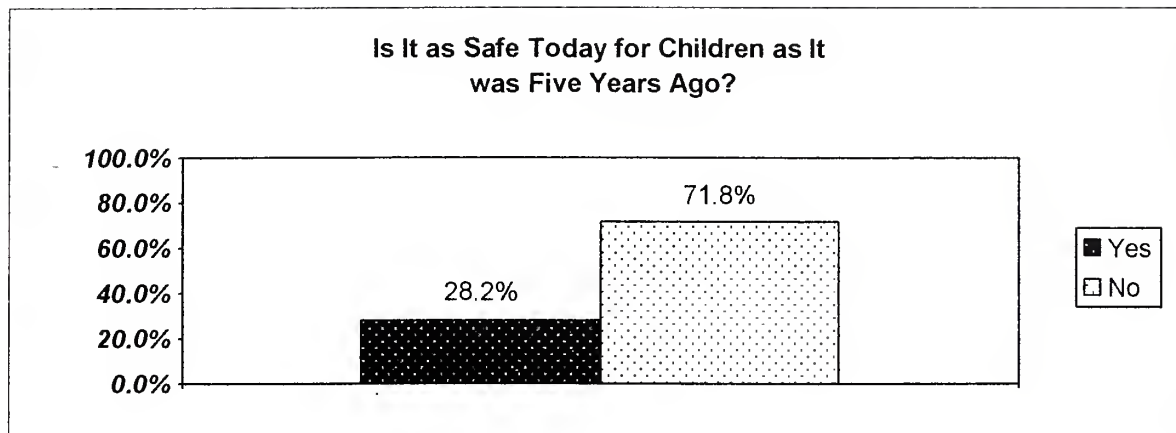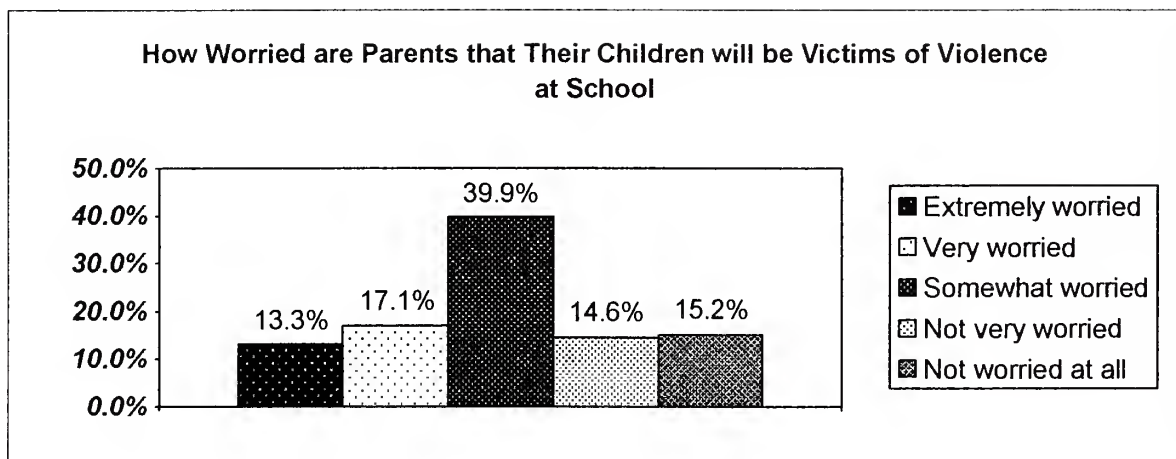
The fourth hypothesis stated that victims of rape or sexual assault would feel less safe

in their communities. More than fifty-five percent of the respondents who had been the

victim of a rape or sexual assault at least occasionally worried that they would again

become the victim of a sexual assault (see Graph T).
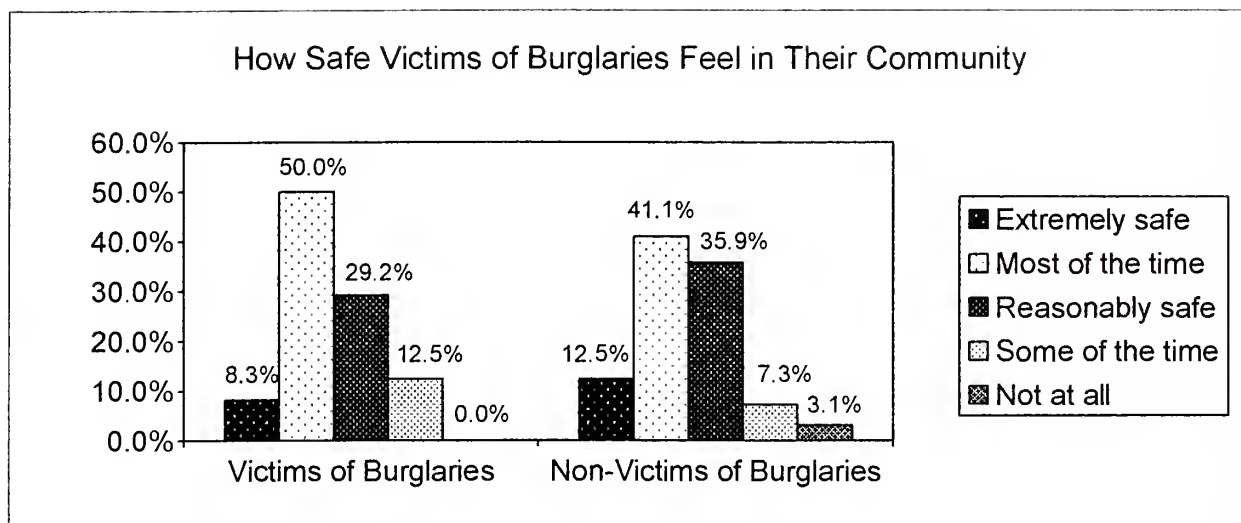
Graph T

Fear of Again Becoming a Victim of a Sexual Assault

Bar chart showing: Frequently 20.7%, Occasionally 34.5%, Rarely 31.0%, Never 13.8%. Legend: Frequently, Occasionally, Rarely, Never. Y-axis ranges from 0.0% to 50.0%.

Approximately one third of the respondents rarely worried about becoming a victim again and only thirteen percent never worried about being raped or assaulted sexually again. The data would seem to support the hypothesis that they felt unsafe in their community. However, when asked how safe they felt overall in their community, nearly eight-five percent of the respondents felt reasonably safe or safer in their community – only slightly less than the eighty-nine percent of respondents who did not indicate that they were victims of a sexual assault (see Graph U). The percentage of respondents indicating they only felt safe some of the time or not all, fifteen percent, was only slightly higher than those respondents, ten percent, who were not victims of a sexual assault. The data seems to only marginally support the hypothesis. In fact, a higher percentage, nearly twenty-two percent of the victims of sexual assault compared to twelve percent, felt extremely safe in their community.

Graph U

How Safe Victims of Sexual Assault Feel in Their Community

50.0%	

Victims of Sexual Assault:
- 21.9%
- 28.1%
- 34.4%
- 6.2%
- 9.4%

Non-Victims of Sexual Assault:
- 12.5%
- 41.1%
- 35.9%
- 7.3%
- 3.1%

Legend:
- ■ Extremely safe
- □ Most of the time
- ▦ Reasonably safe
- ▧ Some of the time
- ▨ Not at all
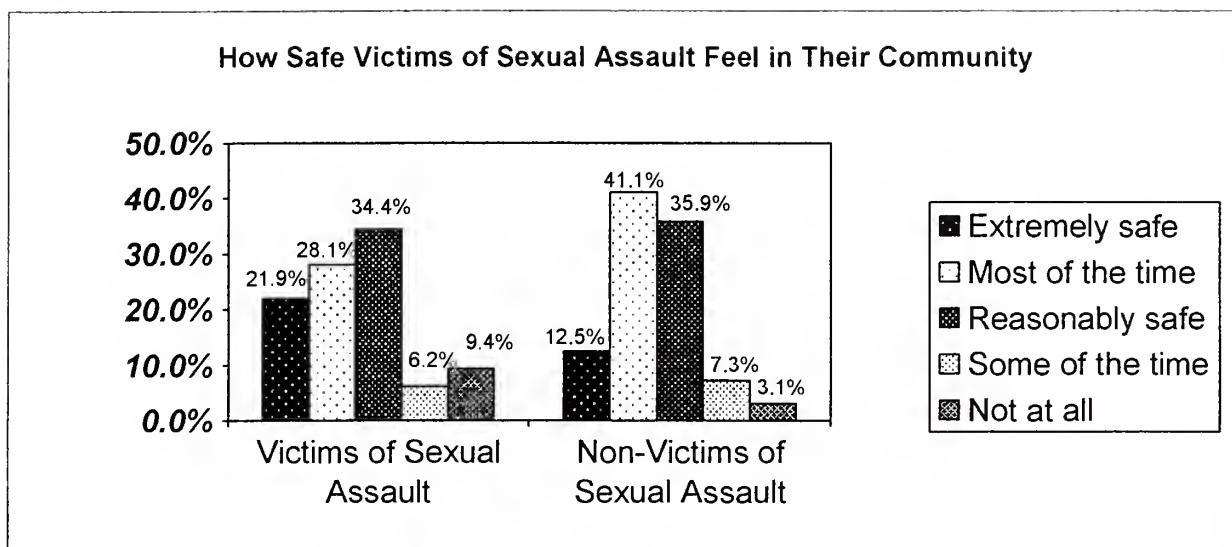
The fifth hypothesis stated that victims of residential burglaries would also feel less safe in their community. However, nearly eighty-eight percent of respondents who had been the victim of a residential burglary indicated that they felt reasonably safe or safer in the community. In fact, a higher percentage, fifty-eight as compared to fifty-three, felt safe most of the time or extremely safe in the community (see Graph V). While twelve percent of the respondents felt safe only some of the time, not a single respondent indicated that they never felt safe in their community. Therefore, the data does not support the hypothesis – victims of burglaries felt just as safe in their community as individuals who had never been a victim of a burglary. Respondents were also asked if they had an alarm system installed in their home or residence. Nearly sixty percent indicated that they did have a system installed to protect themselves and their property.

Graph V

How Safe Victims of Burglaries Feel in Their Community

Victims of Burglaries: 8.3%, 50.0%, 29.2%, 12.5%, 0.0%
Non-Victims of Burglaries: 12.5%, 41.1%, 35.9%, 7.3%, 3.1%

- Extremely safe
- Most of the time
- Reasonably safe
- Some of the time
- Not at all

The sixth and final hypothesis stated that individuals will not believe that a terrorist attack in Clayton County is very likely. However, more than fifty-two percent of the respondents were at least somewhat worried, very worried, or extremely worried that a terrorist attack was likely, disproving the hypothesis. Additionally, only sixteen percent of respondents were not worried at all, while thirty-two percent were not very worried that an attack was likely to take place (See Graph W).

Graph W

How Likely is a Terrorist Attack in Clayton County

6.7%, 9.9%, 34.2%, 32.7%, 16.5%

- Extremely worried
- Very worried
- Somewhat worried
- Not very worried
- Not worried at all
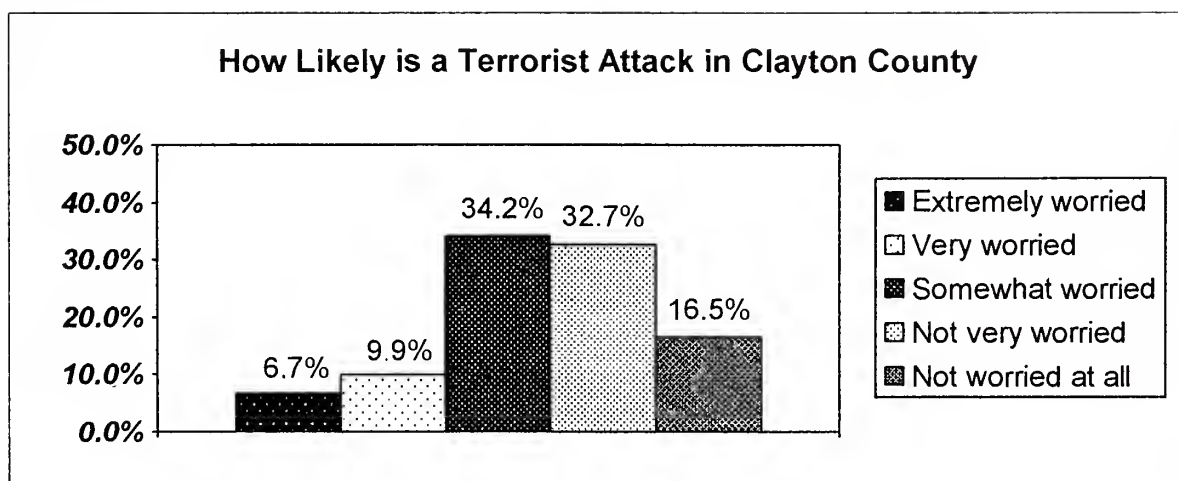
One must keep in mind, of course, that Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, the world's busiest airport, is located in Clayton County and the City of Atlanta borders the county to the north. Both would be likely targets of potential terrorists.

CONCLUSIONS

The data suggests that individuals, at a rate of ninety percent, believe that they are safe in their communities even when nearly fifty percent of those same respondents believe it is not as safe in the community as compared to five years ago. The percentage of those feeling safe at night decreases only slightly and actually increases for individuals while inside of their home. Victims of sexual assault and burglary feel only slightly less safe, but not in any sizeable amounts. Parents do seem to be very concerned about their children, both at home and while at school. Nearly seventy percent of respondents were at least somewhat worried that their child would become the victim of violence at school, an extremely high percentage when one considers the relatively low number of violent incidents that actually occur in schools. Of course when an incident does take place like the shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado or locally at Heritage High School in Conyers, the media coverage is intense. A similarly high number of respondents, nearly seventy-two percent, believed the community was not as safe for children today as compared to five years ago. Residents were evenly divided when asked about the likelihood of a terrorist attack. Approximately fifty-one percent were at least somewhat worried, while forty-nine percent were not very worried or not worried at all.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the sample was fairly representative of the racial makeup of the county when compared to the year 2000 census, especially in regards to the African American and the white or Caucasian groups. However, a better distribution method would likely ensure a proportionate representation of all racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups. A sample group, perhaps targeted by zip codes to ensure equal representation, would more accurately reflect the community. It would be also be beneficial to determine what an individual uses to measure the level of crime in the community, the news media, personal experiences, etc. A simple question asking whether or not crime is a problem in the community or the country would have greatly assisted in determining the priority or importance given to crime. Finally, questions focusing on the perception of crime and crime rates on a national level would be beneficial in determining just how safe individuals feel in their communities.

LIMITATIONS

Due to the method of sampling, accidental, the elements of the sample could not be determined or controlled. As a result, the diversity of the overall population of Clayton County and the nation as a whole was not proportionately represented in the survey. The Hispanic and Asian communities are two of the fastest growing in the United States, as well as in Clayton County, yet less than five percent of the total respondents were representatives of those ethnic groups. The surveys were distributed from the main office of the Clayton County Tax Commissioner in Jonesboro, the county seat. As a result the largest percentage of respondents came from the Jonesboro and

immediate surrounding area. The largest Hispanic community in Clayton County is located in Forest Park, which has its own tag office. In addition, lower income communities were not fairly represented in the survey. The lack of representation is explainable if not acceptable, since the surveys were distributed at the tag office, which requires vehicle ownership. Individuals from lower income groups are not as likely to own a vehicle when compared to those from higher income groups. Of course, nothing prevents individuals from mailing in their tag renewal forms and avoiding the trip to the tag office, which would obviously eliminate them from being a candidate for receiving a survey. The survey also asked individuals to compare their community today to their community of five years ago. However, there was not an adequate way to determine if the respondent was in fact, making a comparison of the same community. An individual could have moved from the most crime riddled section of Atlanta to a quiet neighborhood in the suburbs, or vice versa.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

Blank Questionnaire

HOW SAFE DO YOU FEEL IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

Please take a few moments to complete the following survey. It is being conducted as part of the requirements of a graduate class on research methodology and your assistance is greatly needed and appreciated. Please be assured that your responses will remain completely anonymous.

Background Information – Please answer the following questions, which will be used for classification purposes only.

1. What is your age in years? _____

2. What is your gender?
____ Male
____ Female

3. What is your present marital status?
____ Single
____ Married
____ Widowed
____ Separated
____ Divorced

4. Which one of these racial or ethnic groups do you consider yourself a member?
____ Native American
____ Asian
____ Black or African American
____ White or Caucasian
____ Hispanic or Mexican American
____ Other, please specify _____

5. What was your total household income from all sources before taxes in the past calendar year?
____ Less than $10,000
____ $10,001 to $20,000
____ $20,001 to $30,000
____ $30,001 to $40,000
____ $40,001 to $50,000
____ $50,001 to $60,000
____ Greater than $60,000

6. Which one of these situations would best describe your living arrangements?
____ Own home
____ Rent or lease apartment or home
____ Public housing
____ Live with parents or other family members (Do not pay rent)
____ Assisted Living / Nursing Home
____ Other, please specify _____

7. How long have you been living at your present residence?
____ Less than six months
____ Six months but less than one year
____ One year but less than five years
____ Five years but less than ten years
____ More than ten years

8. What is the zip code of your current home or residence? _____

Children at Home – If you do not have children living at home with you, proceed to question 13.

9. Do you allow your children to walk to and from the school bus stop without an adult?
_____ Yes
_____ No

10. How often do you leave your children at home alone before or after school?
_____ Every workday
_____ 2-3 times during the week
_____ One day per work week or less
_____ Never

11. Do you feel it is as safe today for children in your community as it was five years ago?
_____ Yes
_____ No

12. How are worried that your children will be the victims of violence in their school?
_____ Extremely worried
_____ Very worried
_____ Somewhat worried
_____ Not very worried
_____ Not worried at all

Personal Safety – Please check the correct blank for each question.

13. Do you have an alarm system installed in your present home or residence?
_____ Yes
_____ No

14. Has your current home or residence ever been burglarized? (If no, skip to question 15)
_____ Yes
_____ No

14a. If yes, how often has your current home or residence been burglarized in the past five years.
_____ Once
_____ 2-3 times
_____ 4-5 times
_____ More than five times
_____ Not in the past five years

15. Have you ever been the victim of a sexual assault or rape? (If no, skip to question 16)
_____ Yes
_____ No

15a. If yes, how long ago did the assault take place?
_____ Less than six months
_____ Six months but less than one year
_____ One year but less than five years
_____ Five years but less than ten years
_____ More than ten years

15b. How often do you, yourself, worry about again being the victim of a sexual assault?
_____ Frequently
_____ Occasionally
_____ Rarely
_____ Never

16. In the past five years, have you been the victim of any crime other than a burglary or a sexual assault?
_____ Yes
_____ No

17. How confident are you in the ability of the police to protect you from a violent crime?
_____ Extremely confident
_____ Very confident
_____ Reasonably confident
_____ Not very confident
_____ Not confident at all

18. How worried are you about your community being attacked by terrorists?
_____ Extremely worried
_____ Very worried
_____ Somewhat worried
_____ Not very worried
_____ Not worried at all

19. Overall, how safe do you feel in your community?
_____ Extremely safe
_____ Safe, most of the time
_____ Reasonably safe
_____ Safe, some of the time
_____ Not at all

19a. How safe do you feel at night in your community?
_____ Extremely safe
_____ Safe, most of the time
_____ Reasonably safe
_____ Safe, some of the time
_____ Not at all

19b. How safe do you feel inside of your current home or residence?
_____ Extremely safe
_____ Safe, most of the time
_____ Reasonably safe
_____ Safe, some of the time
_____ Not at all

20. Overall, how safe do you feel today as compared to five years ago?
_____ More safe
_____ Just as safe
_____ Less safe
_____ Not safe at all