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Identifying Needs Using Secondary Data Sources[1]

Lionel J. Beaulieu[2]

It is important for local leaders and concerned citizens to develop a good understanding of the issues facing their community. An attempt was made to outline a framework that could help individuals to assess in a systematic manner the needs existing in the community (see Needs Assessment: A Framework for Determining Community Needs:). As was noted, an important step associated with that needs assessment model was the determination of the present situation (What is?) through the use of primary and secondary data collection techniques. Primary sources for gathering information were elaborated upon in the paper titled, "Conducting a Community Needs Assessment: Primary Data Collection Techniques." Our intent is to now present a detailed treatment of secondary sources of information relevant to community needs assessment activities. Let us begin by providing information on some of the key attributes associated with this approach.

SECONDARY DATA APPROACH

Purpose

To obtain insights about the issues and problems impacting on the community through the use of **non-attitudinal** statistical data.

Approach

The process involves the tapping of information sources that already exist in either published or unpublished form. These data may come from such sources as the U.S. Census or state agency reports. An attempt is usually made to identify key variables (for example, the number of families with incomes below the poverty level) that have important value from a needs assessment perspective. That is, one seeks to examine data that might provide some suggestion of needs that exist in the community. It is desirable that data be examined for more than one point in time so that some evaluation can be made about the nature and extent of changes occurring in the community.

SOURCES OF SECONDARY DATA

Statistical data on many areas of local concern are published by local, state and federal government agencies. Private organizations also release information that may prove useful for local communities. Some of these include:

Federal Sources

- Censuses of Population, Housing, Agriculture, Government, Transportation, Business, Manufacturers, plus others.

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2. Lionel J. Beaulieu, professor, rural sociology, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.

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- *Statistical Abstract of the United States*.
- *County and City Data Book*, which includes data on a county and city basis.
- *County Business Patterns*, published annually by the Bureau of the Census. This publication provides detailed information on the business and industrial composition of all counties in the United States.
- *The Municipal Yearbook*, published by the International City Managers Association.
- *County and Metropolitan Area Data Book for Hospitals, Health Manpower, and Nursing Homes*, published by the U.S. Public Service.

State Reports

- *Florida Statistical Abstract*, which contains state and county data on a myriad of items, including population, housing, income, agriculture, employment, etc.
- Employment and unemployment figures prepared monthly by the Florida Department of Labor and Employment Security.
- *Population Studies Bulletins* published by the Bureau of Economic and Business Research, University of Florida, which present up-to-date estimates on the age, race and sex composition of the state and its counties, as well as number of households and average household size at both the state and county levels.
- *Florida Vital Statistics*, published by the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS). Excellent information on the health status of Floridians is also reported in HRS's Annual Statistical Report.
- *Annual Report on Crime in Florida*, published by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.
- *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Education: Profiles of Florida School Districts*, a compilation of enrollments in various education programs in the state (i.e., K through 12, vocational education, exceptional education, and adult education programs).

Local Reports

Includes sources such as the city directory, reports issued by city or county government, documents prepared by regional and local planning councils, and local Chamber of Commerce publications. Also relevant are minutes of local meetings of the county/city commissions, school board, and other local public agencies. Your local library can perform a very useful role in assisting you in securing locally produced information on your community.

TYPES OF INFORMATION

Secondary sources of data can provide information on a variety of items of importance within the local community. Examples of these are:

- Population size, growth/decline, processes and composition.
- The social behavior and well-being of people, such as crime rates, poverty status, family stability, and morbidity/mortality rates.
- The general condition of various community sectors, such as housing, employment, health, and local government.

SOME ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Advantages

1. Needs assessment employing secondary data sources can be carried out quickly.
2. The approach makes good use of already existing statistical data.
3. Secondary data can be secured at relatively low cost by persons with limited research training or technical expertise.
4. It offers one of the easiest ways to monitor changes occurring to a community over time and the needs associated with those changes.
5. This approach represents a good way to compare the level of well-being of different geo-political units (i.e., county vs. state).
6. It's a technique that complements primary data collection approaches (such as key informants, surveys).

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Disadvantages

1. Many of the data utilized are only indirect measures of problems or concerns that might exist in the community.

2. It is difficult to determine the reliability of some of the data being used.

3. Some of the available data may be relatively dated.

4. Extreme caution must be exercised when merging data from different sources in order to make sure that they are measuring the same thing.

5. Does not reveal individual values, beliefs, or reasons that may be underlying current trends.

6. Great quantity of data may overwhelm the user unless selectivity is exercised.

7. Caution must be exercised when interpreting data.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR ANALYZING SECONDARY DATA

One of the apparent difficulties associated with the use of secondary data is the tendency for people to feel overwhelmed by the abundance of information existing on their community or county. How can one avoid falling into this trap? Obviously, an important first step is to have a clear understanding of what you want to do and why. In conducting a needs assessment, have a clear, well-defined purpose for carrying out the study. Next, specify what audience(s) or specific problem(s) you wish to collect information on. Equipped with this information, you will be in a better position to ascertain what secondary data sources are of greatest utility. The important thing is to have some focus to your secondary data collection activities.

Once data have been collected, what next? It is recommended that you undertake a close examination of the information to determine what it may suggest as to problems or concerns facing the community. Some of the areas to consider include:

- local conditions that the data describe

- the direction of change (that is, are things better or worse?)

- the intensity of change (how much better or worse do things appear to be?)

- how your community or county compares with other similar communities/counties or the state in terms of conditions and changes in conditions

- the comprehensive picture that the data suggest about your community or county (that is, what are the priority concerns that appear to be reflected in the data?)

In most instances, it is recommended that secondary data be secured at two or more points in time. By so doing, more informed decisions can be made regarding the nature and extent of changes taking place in your local area.

ANALYZING SECONDARY DATA

As suggested earlier, secondary data are available on at least three important community/county dimensions: (1) population size, growth/decline, processes and composition; (2) the social behavior and well-being of people; and (3) the general conditions of various community sectors. It would be useful to briefly discuss each information type and to present examples of each.

Demographic Analyses

The study of population, including its size, composition, distribution and changes is known as the field of demography. An excellent treatment of demography and its application to the study of local population dynamics is contained in a publication authored by C. Shannon Stokes titled, *Community Population Analysis*. We would like to briefly highlight some of the excellent points presented in this document.

Stokes notes that the demographic approach to communities can be separated into two major categories: **structural characteristics** and **demographic processes**. Elements associated with the former include population size, distribution, and composition, while fertility, mortality and migration represent aspects of the latter category. The basic concepts and measures relevant to community population analysis are presented in Table 1.

Stokes presents an excellent treatment of the two basic demographic concepts in his publication. The following is an excerpt of that discussion:

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Table 1. Basic Concepts and Measures of Demographic Analysis.

Structural Characteristics		Demographic Processes	
SIZE	Growth or decline, absolute and relative growth	FERTILITY	Crude birth rate, age-specific fertility rate, fertility ratio
DISTRIBUTION	Population density, rural-urban residence	MORTALITY	Crude death rate, infant mortality, age-specific mortality rate
COMPOSITION	Age, sex, racial and socio-economic composition	MIGRATION	In and out migration, selective migration

Structural Characteristics

Structural characteristics refer to population **size**, **geographic distribution**, and **composition**. Any population unit (community, county, state or nation) may be described on these dimensions and compared to other populations. The importance of growth or decline in population size is well known. However, it is important to distinguish between absolute and relative growth or decline. Absolute change in population refers to the actual number of persons added or lost during a given period of time. While such numbers are important for local planning purposes, they do not provide the *comparative* information needed to evaluate the position of one area in relation to others. Relative population change refers to the percentage change. Two communities can be compared accurately using percentage change data regardless of their respective sizes. Absolute change can be misleading unless the communities are approximately the same size. In addition, percentage changes are given in most census publications, thus permitting comparisons of community growth/decline with state and national growth patterns.

Population distribution refers to the geographic location of population over the available land area. Analysis of population distribution focuses upon a community, county, state or other recognized units of analysis. The growth or decline of these units, movement from one unit to another -- rural to urban, metropolitan to non-metropolitan -- and the changing characteristics of each unit are important for understanding population trends such as suburban growth or rural population change.

Population composition refers to the distribution of one or more traits or attributes of individuals within a population. This includes not only the age and sex composition of a population, but also important characteristics like race, ethnic origin, occupation, income level and educational status.

Demographic Processes

The demographic processes of **fertility**, **mortality** and **migration** are as important as the structural characteristics of populations. These three processes are both determinants and consequences of changes in population size, distribution and composition. **Fertility** refers to the actual number of births occurring in a population, while **mortality** measures the number of deaths. **Migration** includes movement into and out of an area. The interdependence of demographic processes and structural characteristics may be illustrated by an extreme example.

A population composed of a disproportionate number of elderly persons will tend to have above-average mortality and lower-than-average fertility even in areas where health conditions are excellent. Pinellas County, Florida, for example, has more deaths than births. In 1987, the crude death rate (deaths per 1,000 population) was 15.1; the crude birth rate (births per 1,000 population) was 11.1. If one examines only the total number of births and deaths, or the crude birth and death rates, one could conclude that is a most unhealthy place to live. Of course, this is not the case; the rates merely reflect the disproportionate number of elderly persons in the total population and the relatively smaller percentage (compared to the nation) of women in the childbearing ages, 15-49. This illustration points out the necessity of viewing population structure and the demographic processes as interdependent. To understand a community's population properly, a number of separate but interrelated pieces of information are required.

Examples of Demographic Analysis

The following are intended to illustrate some of the ways in which demographic analyses of the type suggested by Stokes can prove instrumental in many

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needs assessment activities. Both examples employ statewide data in the analyses.

> **Ex. 1: The purpose of this exercise is to examine what the pattern of population growth has been and is anticipated to be in Florida, and how this compares to the United States as a whole. A related issue is what the sex and age composition of that population has been and will be.**

The essential information for addressing these items is reported in Tables 2 and 3. Table 2 presents data on the United States, while Table 3 deals with Florida-specific information. As you can see, both provide population size figures (in absolute form) for the years 1970, 1980, 1990 and 2000. In addition, relative growth in population for the periods 1970-80, 1980-90 and 1990-2000 are noted. The age and sex distribution of the population at four points in time is outlined as well. One the basis of the data contained in both tables, the following type of analysis might be prepared:

> Recent data released by the U.S. Bureau of the Census document the continued growth of the population in the United States. Estimates indicate that our country's population grew by 23.9 million (from 226.5 million to 250.4 million) over the 1980 to 1990 period, a growth rate of 9.5 percent. Assuming no major deviation from current trends or policies, it is expected that the U.S. population will exceed the 268 million mark by the turn of the century.

Table 2. Estimates of Changes in the United States Population: The Years 1970 to 2000.

	1970	1980	1990	2000
Total Population	203,302,031	226,504,825	250,410,000	268,266,000
AGE DISTRIBUTION				
Less than 15	28.5%	22.6%	20.3%	18.8%
15 to 24	17.4%	18.7%	15.7%	15.1%
25 to 44	23.6%	27.7%	32.7%	30.2%
45 to 64	20.6%	19.7%	18.7%	22.9%
65 or over	9.9%	11.3%	12.6%	13.0%
SEX DISTRIBUTION				
Male	48.7%	48.6%	48.8%	48.9%
Female	51.3%	51.4%	51.2%	51.9%
PERCENT POPULATION CHANGE				
1970 to 1980	11.4%			
1980 to 1990	9.5%			
1990 to 2000	6.7%			

Source: Florida: Final Population and Housing Unit County, PHC80-V-11, 1980 Census of Population and Housing; (March) 1981. 1980 Obers BEA Regional Projection, U.S. Department of Commerce: (July) 1981. Projects of the Population of the United States, by Age, Sex, and Race; 1988 to 2080, Series P-25, No. 1018, U.S. Dept. of Commerce, 1989,

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Of particular importance, are the demographic characteristics associated with the U.S. population. The data presented in Table 2 signal a number of significant trends. First, the United States will experience a decline in the proportion of its population under 25 years of age. Second, an expansion of the population 65 years of age or older will persist through the 1990s. And third, females will constitute a majority of the national population during the remainder of this century.

Over the 1980 to 1990 time period, Florida experienced a 25.9 percent growth, or over 3.4 million persons. While the magnitude of the growth over the next 10 years is not expected to rival the 1980-90 growth pattern, it is believed that the state's population will expand at a rate two to three times that of the nation as a whole.

Accompanying this population expansion will be a major reshifting of the age structure of the state. The proportion of the population 65 years old and over will increase substantially by the year 2000, as will the percentage 25 to 44 years of age. Declines are projected in the less-than-15 and 15-to-24 age groupings. Minor changes in the sex distribution are expected throughout the remainder of the century.

Some of the important implications that can be drawn from these data are: (1) the growth of the state's population will continue at a pace well above the national average, thereby intensifying demands for public services and our vital natural resources (water, land, energy); and (2) with the continued influx of retirees into the state, the median age of the population will proceed on an upward course, thereby suggesting that local/state leaders will have to remain attuned to the needs of an aging population.

Ex. 2: The purpose of this exercise is to examine specific changes that have occurred and will likely take place in the size and composition of the youth population in the Florida.

The size of the youth population by sex and select age groupings are presented in Table 4. Actual figures are presented for 1970, 1980, and 1990, with estimates being provided for the year 2000. Briefly, the data show that the absolute number of persons 5 to 9 years old, and 10 to 14 years of age continues to increase. On the other hand, the 15 to 19 age grouping declined in numbers over the 1980-90 time period, but will increase dramatically by the turn of the century. The number of persons under 5 years old increased rapidly between 1980 and 1990, but is expected to grow much more slowly between 1990 and the year 2000.

While the data outlined in Table 4 are useful in themselves, they take on added meaning when they are compared to statewide population figures. Figure 1 reports Florida's youth population as a proportion of the total population, 1970 through 2000. Visually, the pattern is quite clear--persons 19 years of age and less will comprise a smaller and smaller proportion of the total Florida population by the year 2000.

Table 3. Estimates of Changes in the Florida Population: The years 1970 to 2000.

	1970	1980	1990	2000
Total Population	6,791,418	9,746,324	13,152,701	15,988,031
AGE DISTRIBUTION				
Less than 15	25.8%	19.3%	19.2%	18.3%
15 to 24	15.8%	16.7%	12.9%	11.7%
25 to 44	22.2%	25.1%	29.9%	26.5%
45 to 64	21.6%	21.6%	20.7%	24.4%
65 and over	14.6%	17.3%	17.6%	19.1%
SEX DISTRIBUTION				
Male	48.2%	48.0%	48.4%	48.3%
Female	51.8%	52.0%	51.6%	51.7%
PERCENT POPULATION CHANGE				
1970 to 1980	43.4%			
1980 to 1990	25.9%			
1990 to 2000	17.7%			

Source: Florida: Final Population and Housing Unit County, PHC80-V-11, 1980 Census of Population and Housing; (March) 1981. 1980-2020 Projection of Florida Population by County, Bureau of Economic and Business Research; (May) 1979.

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The critical trend found in Figure 1 would not have been as obvious had we focused solely on the absolute numbers reported in Table 4. This example further highlights the importance of looking at relative growth patterns in addition to absolute ones. Moreover, it shows how data can be transformed into a visually informative diagram (such as Figure 1) to quickly capture what is happening to the size of the youth population in proportion to the statewide population pattern.

Are there important issues that might be suggested by these data? There may be several avenues of investigation that might be fruitful to pursue, such as the growth or decline in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, primary and secondary school enrollments that may occur as a result of the youth population trends, or the contribution to the size and composition of the labor force that will be made by this population segment in the future, etc. Remember, these data will not necessarily answer your questions about what the key concerns are, but they will often guide you in the determination what items should be probed more deeply.

Table 4. Florida Youth Population by Sex and Select Age Grouping: The years 1970 to 2000.

	1970	1980	1990	2000
Total Population	6,789,443	9,745,324	13,152,701	15,988,031
AGE				
Under 5 years	501,179	570,224	908,087	917,488
5 to 9	605,714	621,534	852,624	977,440
10 to 14	643,014	685,016	759,037	1,031,293
15 to 19	576,776	811,340	806,815	994,905
BOYS				
Under 5 years	255,850	291,286	463,122	467,171
5 to 9	308,295	317,254	434,450	497,794
10 to 14	326,969	349,914	388,058	527,107
15 to 19	292,261	411,458	411,022	506,829
GIRLS				
Under 5 years	245,329	278,938	444,965	450,317
5 to 9	297,419	304,280	418,147	479,646
10 to 14	316,045	335,102	370,979	504,186
15 to 19	284,515	399,882	395,793	488,076

Source: Population of Florida: Counties by Age and Sex: April 1, 1980, Population Studies, College of Business. Bulletin No. 59 (March) 1982. 1980 Obers BEA Regional Projections. U.S. Department of Census, Bureau of Economic Analysis. Volume 1 (July) 1980. Population Estimates and Projections. Bureau of Economic and Business Research. Vol. 23, No.3-4, Bulletin No. 93-94, (June) 1990.

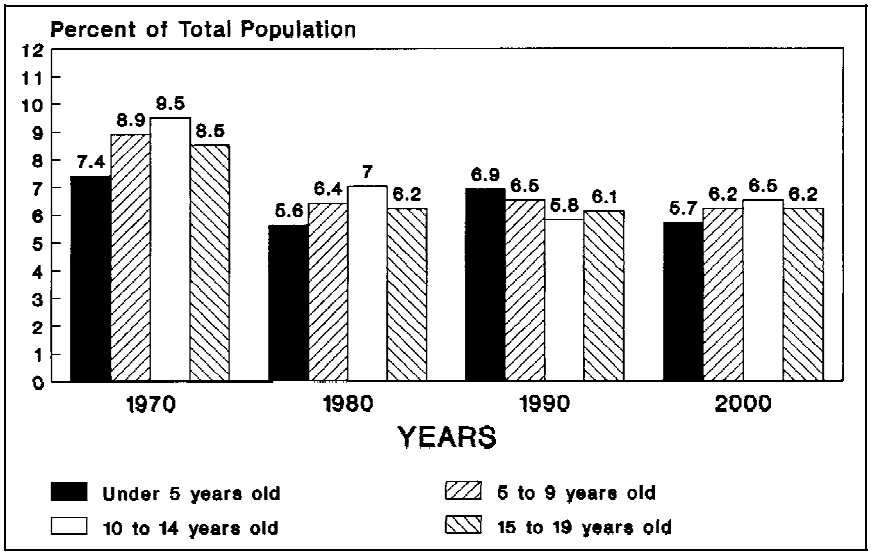

Figure 1. The Florida Youth Population: The years 1970 to 2000.

Social Behavior and Well-being of People

The focus of this source of secondary information is on factors which provide some indication of the health and social well-being of people in the community. Most often, this includes information on the following:

- mortality rates
- morbidity rates for various types of illnesses
- crime rates, including juvenile delinquency
- suicide rates
- family instability, such as divorce rates and one-parent households
- level of alcohol and drug abuse
- poverty status of individuals and families

The bulk of the data outlined above are published by the U.S. Bureau of the Census and various state

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agencies (such as the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, Department of Law Enforcement). When carefully analyzed, these secondary sources can provide a wealth of information concerning needs that might exist in the community. Let us now turn to a couple of examples of data that are reflective of the "social behavior and well-being of people" dimension.

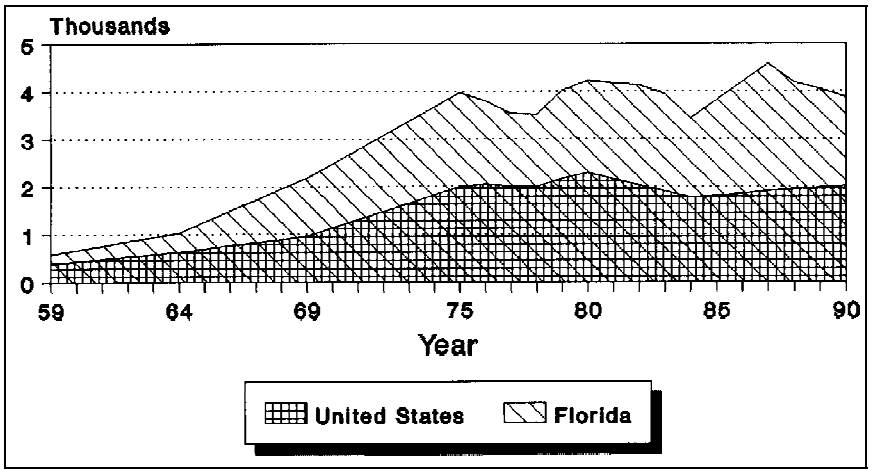

Figure 2. The U.S. Rural Crime Rate and the Florida Rural Crime Rate, Per 100,000 Persons. (Source: Florida Uniform Crime Reports and F.B.I. Crime Reports.)

Ex. 1: The purpose of this exercise is to establish whether crime has been a problem in rural areas of the State of Florida.

One of the best known and utilized reports addressing the issue of crime is the *Uniform Crime Report*, published annually by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in concert with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. Examination of the data contained in these documents can provide the basis for determining the extent to which rural crime is prevalent in the state. Figure 2 presents the rate of crime (per 100,000 persons) for a twenty-nine year period (1959 through 1987) for rural areas of Florida. The crime rate is based upon a crime index of seven major offenses, namely, murder, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft. To provide an important point of comparison, the rural U.S. crime rates are shown as well. Clearly, this additional information sheds much light on the magnitude of the crime problem in rural Florida.

What can be said about Figure 2? Basically, these data show a trend of increasing total crime rates for both rural areas of the United States and Florida 1959. Over the period 1959 to 1980, the crime rate for rural America increased some 477 percent (the 1980 crime rate minus the 1959 crime rate/1959 crime rate, then multiplied by 100). In rural Florida, the rate jumped by 625 percent over the same period of time. Crime rates decreased somewhat during the early part of the 1980s, but the Florida rural crime rate rose significantly from 1984 to 1988. In fact, the rural crime problem in Florida remains quite high relative to the remainder of the rural United States. Obviously, the data suggest that further study designed to uncover the root causes of the rural crime problem in the state, or possible strategies for reducing it, might be in order. The result of this effort may be to first design programs to educate the public on the extent of the rural crime problem in their area, or then to implement crime prevention programs targeted to the community, home, farm and/or business establishments. It is important to remember that descriptive data of the type presented in Figure 2 often allow you to make some reasonably sound inferences regarding needs that may exist in your community (or state).

Ex 2: There has been much discussion regarding the large number of unwed teenagers who have become pregnant in the United States. Are there large number of live births to teenage unwed mothers in Florida?

A useful source of information on this problem is the Florida Vital Statistics. Table 5 presents resident live births to unwed mothers under 19 years of age for the 1980 to 1988 period. Figures show that over 32 percent of all live births in 1980 were to unwed mothers 18 years of age and under. In 1988, this proportion dropped to 23.5 percent. While this latter figure represents a substantial proportional decline from the 1980 percentage, a different message is provided when one examines the absolute number of live births to unwed teenage mothers. What you discover is the actual number was 9,720 in 1980 and 12,462 in 1988, a 28.2 percent increase. This brief analysis seems to suggest the level of teenage pregnancies is sizable and this problem is one that may need to be addressed by parents, educators, and/or youth development professionals.

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Table 5. Resident Live Births to Unwed Mothers Under 19 Years of Age, By Age Grouping and Race, 1980-88.

	Overall		White		Black	
	1980	1988	1980	1988	1980	1988
Age of Mother						
10 to 14	571	677	105	173	466	504
15	1,257	1,447	321	424	936	1,023
16	2,091	2,468	619	937	1,472	1,531
17	2,654	3,676	824	1,512	1,830	2,164
18	3,147	4,194	1,063	1,934	2,084	2,260
Total	9,720	12,462	2,932	4,980	6,788	7,482
% change (1980 to 1988)	28.2%		69.8%		10.2%	
a. Total Live Births to Unwed Mothers in 1980:					30,156	
b. Total Live Births to Unwed Mothers 18 and Under in 1980:					9,720	
c. Proportion of Live Births in 1980 to Unwed Mothers 18 and Under:					32.2%	
d. Total Live Births to Unwed Mothers in 1988:					52,953	
e. Total Live Births to Unwed Mothers 18 and Under in 1988:					12,462	
f. Proportion of Live Births in 1988 to Unwed Mothers 18 and Under:					23.5%	
Source: State of Florida, *Florida Vital Statistics 1981*. Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services.						

General Condition of Various Community Sectors

The final broadly defined type of secondary data that is useful for community needs assessment activities is one that provides some indication of the general welfare of various aspects of the community, such as housing, business/industry, employment, health manpower and services, public services, and public financing and taxation. These often include information on:

- housing quantity and quality, such as number of housing units, substandard housing, extent of overcrowding
- economic development, including new or expanding businesses and industries in the community
- employment activities, such as number of people in the civilian labor force, unemployment rate, and number of newly created jobs
- supply of health care services, such as number and types of physicians, nurses, dentists, and other health professionals, including health care professional/population ratios; health facilities such as hospitals, nursing care homes, homes for special health-related services, emergency health care clinics
- availability of various public services (e.g., fire and police, recreation facilities, public school)
- government finances, including revenues and expenditures

Many more sources and types of data associated with this dimension could be uncovered. However, those listed above provide some flavor of the type of information that would fall under the rubric of "general condition of various community sectors." A specific example of secondary data of this type is as follows:

Ex. 1: One of the major goals of our educational system is to provide youth with the skills needed to become productive, contributing members of society and their communities during their adult

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Table 6. Estimates and Projections of Employment by Industry for the State of Florida: 1969 to 1995.

	1969	1978	1983	1990	1995
TOTAL NUMBER OF JOBS	2,680,000	3,857,300	4,627,200	5,755,800	6,407,000
PERCENT OF JOBS BY INDUSTRY					
Agricultural Production	3.6	2.8	2.1	1.9	1.8
Agricultural Services, Forestry, Fisheries and Other	1.2	1.8	1.8	2.0	2.0
Mining	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2
Construction	7.3	6.6	7.0	7.2	6.8
Manufacturing	12.5	11.1	10.2	10.3	10.0
Transportation, Communication and Public Utilities	5.7	5.4	5.4	5.2	5.2
Wholesale Trade	4.9	5.0	5.3	5.2	5.2
Retail Trade	17.4	18.8	17.9	19.7	20.0
Finance, Insurance and Real Estate	5.2	6.5	7.2	7.5	6.8
Services	22.7	23.3	25.4	26.4	27.3
Government	19.1	18.4	16.3	14.4	13.7

Source: Obers BEA Regional Projections, U.S. Department of Commerce; July 1985.

lives. One aspect of this effort is to offer youth appropriate career opportunities. What are likely to be the career opportunities available to our youth in the years ahead?

One piece of secondary data that could potentially contribute to the educational system's desire to provide meaningful career choices to our youth is the projected demand for employment by the various industrial sectors in Florida (NOTE: we are utilizing statewide data in this example, but county level data of this type are available as well). Estimates and projections of employment demands by industry are outlined in Table 6. The employment picture for the state suggests that fully one-fourth of the jobs in 1990 will be associated with the service industry. Moderate gains are anticipated in the finance, insurance, and real estate, and in the retail trade industries. Employment in the agricultural production area is expected to decline to 1.8 percent of the labor force by the year 1995. These data raise a myriad of questions. For example, should our educational system by sensitive to these employment trends, and if so, in what way? Will some modification of the curriculum offerings at the high school and/or college levels be required?

SUMMARY

In this class session, we have attempted to elaborate on secondary sources of information that might be tapped when carrying out a community needs assessment study. We have presented three major types of secondary data that might be utilized in your examination, these being **demographic profiles**, the **social behavior and well-being of people**, and the **general condition of various sectors in the community**. Hopefully, they represent a useful framework for classifying the wealth of secondary data that exist on your locality.

We encourage you to closely examine the secondary information you have collected, including what it may be suggesting about local conditions, the direction and magnitude of change, and how your community compares with other communities or the state. The series of examples presented in this module were intended to demonstrate how this might be done with the use of various secondary data information sources.

Archival copy: for current recommendations see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu or your local extension office.

Finally, it is imperative that we remind you that the diversity of secondary information resources that have been discussed in this session will not tell you what the needs of the community are. They will serve as fruitful sources for defining the current situation. Determination of the preferred or desired situation (the second piece of information necessary in any community needs assessment) will require to move beyond these descriptive data. Again, the preferred situation (the "What should be?") will be based on values -- your values, those of community leaders, and/or of local residents. Only with the addition of this second piece of information will you truly be successful in ascertaining the needs of your community.

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