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Preliminary Report:

***FEAR OF CRIME &
RELATED PERCEPTIONS --
1997***

A Statewide Survey of Florida

**Survey Research
Team:**

*Ted Chiricos
Principal Investigator*

*Marc Gertz
Research Associate*

*Rhonda Dobbs
Research Assistant*

*Rance McEntire
Research Assistant*

*PROPERTY OF
National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS)
Box 8003
Rockville, MD 20849-8003*

**School Of Criminology and
Criminal Justice
Florida State University
Dan Maier-Katkin, Dean**

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This is a *summary* of the **Final Report on Fear of Crime & Related Perception in Florida – 1997**. The original report was prepared for the Florida Department of Community Affairs, James F. Murley, Secretary, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance.

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Points of view, opinions and conclusions expressed in this report are those of the recipient and do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the State of Florida Department of Community Affairs, the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs or any other agency of the state or federal government.

Additional support was provided by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Florida Statistical Analysis Center, the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice and the School of Criminology & Criminal Justice at Florida State University.

Methodology

The Sample

Between October and December of 1997, a random sample of 4,500 Florida adults (18+) was drawn, using a two-stage Mitofsky-Waksberg sampling design. A ten call-back rule was employed before replacement. Spanish speaking interviewers were used for calls to predominantly Hispanic areas.

The final sample had the following characteristics (1990 census figures for persons 18 years or older are in parentheses):

- 53% Female (52%)
- 11% African-American (11%)
- 16% Hispanic (12%)
- 92% High School Graduate (74%)
- 36% College Graduate (24%)
- 16% Criminal Victimization (household) Previous Year
- 17% Age 65 or Older (18%)

The slight over-representation of women and those with higher education is not uncommon in telephone surveys.

The Survey

The survey was conducted by The Research Network, Inc., a public opinion polling firm located in Tallahassee. They were chosen as the result of sealed competitive bids issued by the Purchasing Department of Florida State University.

The first portion of the survey consisted of a "Core" of 15 questions asked of all 4500 respondents. Additional questions asked of 2250 persons, distinguished survey versions "A" and "B" respectively. A copy of both survey versions is attached as an appendix (K) to this report.

The telephone survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete. The principal issues examined in the survey and the questions asked to address them include those listed below.

Fear of Crime

The fear of crime was assessed by means of the following question:

"On a scale from one to ten, with one being **not at all fearful** and ten being **very fearful**, how much would you say you fear . . .

. . . having your car stolen?

. . . having someone break into your home while you are away?

- ... having someone break into your home while you are there?
- ... being robbed or mugged on the street?
- ... being raped or sexually assaulted?
- ... being murdered?"

A "fear of crime" score is the sum of all six items (range: 0-60). "High fear of crime" is a sum of 48 or more across all six items.

Perceived Safety

This item is often included in public opinion polling as a measure of "fear," though it is more appropriately considered a cognitive assessment of risk. To measure this factor, we asked the following two questions:

"How safe would you feel being out alone in your neighborhood at night: **very safe, somewhat safe, not very safe, or not at all safe?**"

"How safe would you say you feel being home alone at night: **very safe, somewhat safe, not very safe, or not at all safe?**"

The response categories **not very safe** and **not at all safe** were combined as "not safe" for the analysis.

Concern About Selected Crimes

There are several crimes of interest to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement because of their statewide jurisdiction and responsibilities. We assessed the extent to which respondents are concerned about these crimes by asking:

"On a scale from one to ten, with one being **not at all concerned** and ten being **very concerned**, how concerned are you about the following:

- Violent crime in Florida?
- Drug trafficking?
- Abuse of government power?
- Corruption by public officials?
- Crimes that use computers, including the Internet?
- Medicaid fraud?
- Credit card fraud?
- Hate-motivated crimes?
- Domestic violence?
- Crime in your neighborhood?
- Crime by male teenagers in your neighborhood?

Crime by female teenagers in your neighborhood?
Juvenile gangs in your neighborhood?"

We consider scores of 8 or more on a scale of 10 to be an expression of "high concern" and response patterns are described in terms of the *percent* expressing "high concern" for each item separately.

Perceptions About Law Enforcement

Respondents were asked to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with local law enforcement by means of a five part question as follows.

"Next, I will read five statements about law enforcement in your community. Please tell me if you **strongly agree**, **agree**, **disagree**, or **strongly disagree** with the following:

I am satisfied with the level of police protection in my neighborhood.

The police in this community treat everyone the same, regardless of who they are.

The police are helpful in dealing with problems in my neighborhood.

Police in this neighborhood seem to stay in their patrol cars rather than getting out among the people.

The police are open to the opinions of citizens in this neighborhood."

Responses are compiled for each item separately. Response patterns are described in terms of the *percent* who *agree*, which is a combination of *agree* and *strongly agree*, with each statement.

Worry About One's Children

Questions were developed to assess the extent to which parents are worried about crime related activities in relation to their own children.

The following was asked of respondents *only* if they had children between the ages of 5 and 17.

"On a scale from one to ten, with one being **not at all worried** and ten being **very worried**, how much do you worry about the following things happening to your child:

Your child joining a gang?

Your child being murdered?

Your child getting addicted to drugs?"

For each separate worrisome event, we report the *percent* of respondents who have a “high” degree of worry, which is defined as 8 or more on a 10 point scale.

Concern About Types of Strangers

Respondents were asked to express their concern about being approached by various persons at night by asking:

“On a scale from one to ten, with one being **not at all worried** and ten being **very worried**, how worried would you be if one of these persons came up to you at night as you were unlocking your car:

A group of female teenagers

A group of male teenagers

A black male adult

A black male teenager

A white male teenager

An Hispanic male adult

An Hispanic male teenager?”

For each type of stranger, we report the *percent* of respondents who have a “high” degree of worry, defined as a score of 8 or more on a 10 point scale.

What to Do About Crime?

Respondents were asked to express their support for various policy options to deal with crime and criminals by asking:

“On a scale from one to ten, with one being the **least support** and ten being the **most support**, how much would you support each of these proposals:

Make sentences more severe for all crimes

Put more police on the streets, even if it means paying higher taxes

Limit appeals to death sentences

Make prisoners work on chain gangs

Take away TV and recreational privileges from prisoners?”

“High support” for a particular proposal is defined as a score of 8 or more on a 10 point scale. The *percent* of respondents showing “high support” for a particular proposal is displayed.

What To Do About Juvenile Crime?

Respondents were asked to address a variety of policy options concerned with the punishment and/or possible prevention of juvenile crime. These options were presented as follows.

“Different things have been suggested to reduce juvenile crime. On a scale from one to ten, with one being **least agree** and ten being **most agree**, how much do you agree that the following will reduce juvenile crime?

Locking up more juvenile offenders.

Big brother/sister role model programs.

Death penalty for juveniles who murder.

More jobs available for young people.

Sending repeat juvenile offenders to adult court.

Curfew laws for young people.

Let kids who are unsupervised at home stay at school until early evening.

Prevention programs aimed at students who have been suspended or expelled from school.

School uniforms through the eighth grade.

Programs for teenage girls who are pregnant.”

A score of 8 or above on a 10 point scale is considered “high support” for a particular measure. The *percent* of respondents showing “high support” for each measure is displayed.

Special Note:

There are so many ways to look at each of the foregoing measures -- by race, sex, income, victim experience, place, etc. that many hundreds of tables and figures are possible. We present selected highlights from the survey findings here and in the appendices.

Findings

Fear of Crime

The fear of six specific crimes was measured by questions described on page 5 of the **Methodology** section above. Responses to each could range from (1) “*not at all fearful*” to (10) “*very fearful*.” Persons who average 8+ across the six crimes (48+ of possible 60) are considered having “high fear.”

Highlights

- ◆ The mean level of fear in Florida was slightly higher in 1997 (28.4) than in 1996 (27.7).
- ◆ The percent of Floridians expressing “high fear” rose from 14.8% in 1996 to 16.8% in 1997. This is in contrast with a 2.6% drop in Florida’s crime rate as reported by FDLE.
- ◆ Women (23.5%) express “high fear” substantially more often than men (9.3), but fear increased more for men between 1996 and 1997 than for women.
- ◆ Hispanics (31.9%) are more likely to express “high fear” than Blacks (25.3%) or Whites (11.6%). Fear levels dropped for Blacks between 1996 and 1997 but rose for Whites and Hispanics.
- ◆ “High fear” is most characteristic (20.4%) of younger respondents (ages 18-34) and least characteristic (12.9%) of older (65+) respondents. Fear increased between 1996 and 1997 for each age group except for the oldest.
- ◆ “High fear” decreases with income and increases with victim experience.
- ◆ Florida’s Index crime rate in 1997 was 7,298 per 100,000. Only 11% of those living in cities with a crime rate below 8,000 express “high fear,” compared with 20.3% of those living in cities with a rate of 12,000-14,999.
- ◆ Among cities, Hialeah stands out with 43.3% expressing “high fear.” Miami (28.0) and Jacksonville (22.8) are next highest on that measure. Fort Myers (9.3) and St. Petersburg (11.6) have the fewest residents with “high fear.”
- ◆ Between 1996 and 1997, Hialeah (- 8.6%) and Orlando (- 4.5%) saw substantial *decreases* in fear, while Jacksonville (+10.8%), Miami (+6.5%), Tampa (+4.0%) and Hollywood (+3.9) saw substantial increases.
- ◆ Fear of crime in Florida is unrelated to the total amount of time respondents spend watching television.
- ◆ Fear increases steadily with the frequency of watching *local news* on television.
- ◆ Respondents who watch *local news* on television at least seven times a week are almost

twice as likely to express “high fear” (18.7%) as those who do not watch local news at all (9.7%).

Findings

Perceived Safety

The perception of personal safety in one’s neighborhood and/or home is a common measure in public opinion polling. It is often taken to be an indicator of “fear” though it is more appropriately considered a cognitive judgement of risk.

Respondents were asked “how safe” they feel being home alone at night and “how safe” they feel being out alone in their neighborhood at night. Responses were “*very safe*,” “*somewhat safe*,” “*not very safe*,” or “*not at all safe*.” The latter two were combined as “not safe” for purposes of analysis.

These questions were not asked in the 1996 survey, making year to year comparisons not possible.

Highlights

- ◆ 13% of Floridians report feeling “not safe” in their neighborhood at night and 5% feel “not safe” in their homes at night. Both of these are lower than similar results reported for a national sample in 1996.
- ◆ Differences between women and men on these measures of perceived safety are considerably greater than differences in reported “fear.” That is, while women are more *fearful* than men, their feelings of being *not safe* are substantially higher than men.
- ◆ Hispanic women (15.4%) feel “not safe” at home most often, followed by Black (10.6%) and White (4.8%) women. Comparable proportions for men are: Hispanic (6.3%); Black (2.5%) and White (1.7%).
- ◆ Concerning safety in one’s neighborhood at night, Hispanic women (36.4%) feel “not safe” twice as often as Black women (18.6%) and almost three times as often as White women (13.0%). Comparable proportions for men are: Hispanic (19.8%), Black (6.4%) and White (6.0%).
- ◆ It is noteworthy that Hispanic *men* (19.8%) feel less safe in their neighborhoods than either Black (18.6%) or White (13.0%) *women*.
- ◆ Perceived lack of safety in one’s *home* is little effected by the magnitude of the crime rate in respondents’ city until the crime rate gets above 12,000 per 100,000 -- which is more than 50% above the state average.

- ◇ Perceived lack of safety in one's *neighborhood* increases dramatically with increases in the crime rate of respondents' city -- until the crime rate exceeds 14,999 per 100,000.

Findings

Concern About Selected Crimes

Respondents were asked "how concerned" they were about a variety of specific crimes on a scale that ranged from (1) "*not at all concerned*" to (10) "*very concerned*." In these analyses, scores of 8+ were considered "high concern."

Highlights

- ◇ More than two-thirds of Florida residents express "high concern" for violent crime (77.1%), drug trafficking (76.3%), domestic violence (72.6%) and hate crimes (68.0%).
- ◇ Less than half of Floridians report "high concern" for crime by female teens (36.7%), juvenile gangs (36.8%), crime by male teens (45.1%) and crime in one's own neighborhood (48.2%).
- ◇ There is greater concern for Medicaid fraud (63.0%) than credit card fraud (56.2%). Corruption of public officials (62.2%) and abuse of government power (62.2%) are of similar concern to Florida residents.
- ◇ "High concern" for drug trafficking, violent crime and domestic violence drops as income increases -- but is never lower than 66%.
- ◇ Similarly, "high concern" for Medicaid fraud, credit card fraud, abuse of government power and corruption by public officials is *lowest* among Floridians with the *highest* income.
- ◇ The frequency of watching local TV news has little influence on concern about crime in one's own *neighborhood*.
- ◇ But for crime and violent crime in *Florida*, the more often people watch local TV news, the more often they report "high concern."

Findings

Perceptions About Law Enforcement

Perceptions of local law enforcement -- in one's neighborhood and community -- are measured by five statements that are summarized in the **Methodology** section above. They are intended to reflect whether respondents agree or disagree that police (1) provide

satisfactory protection, (2) are helpful, (3) treat everyone the same, (4) stay in their cars and (5) are open to opinions of others.

The first three of these statements were also asked in 1996, allowing year to year comparisons.

Highlights

- ◆ 78% of Floridians are satisfied with their police protection and agree that the police are helpful in dealing with neighborhood problems. Both measures show slight change from 1996 to 1997.
- ◆ Satisfaction with police protection is higher among Whites (82%) than among Hispanics (71%) and Blacks (66%).
- ◆ Similarly, police are perceived to be helpful more often among Whites (81%) than among Blacks (71%) or Hispanics (69%).
- ◆ The perception that police “treat everyone the same” regardless of who they are improved slightly from 53.8% in 1996 to 56.1% in 1997. All of this improvement is accounted for by Black Floridians, whose agreement with that statement rose from 37% to 45% from year to 1996 and 1997.
- ◆ Both White and Hispanic residents were less likely to agree that police “treat everyone the same” in 1997 than they were in 1996.
- ◆ 63% of Whites, as compared with 53% of Blacks and 55% of Hispanics agree that police are “open to the opinion of others.”
- ◆ The perception that police “stay in their patrol cars” is most often expressed by Hispanic respondents (61%). Black (53%) and White (55%) respondents are somewhat less likely to agree with that perception.
- ◆ Satisfaction with police protection diminishes steadily with the increase in fear of crime. Those with “low” fear are satisfied 86% of the time, compared with 76% for those expressing “moderate” levels of fear and 65% for those with “high” fear -- averaging 8+ on a 10 point scale for the six fear items.
- ◆ Similarly -- though less dramatically -- satisfaction with police protection decreases as the crime rate in the respondent’s city of residence increases.
- ◆ Those who have experienced criminal victimization in their household during the past year are less often (66%) satisfied with police protection than those who have not been victimized (80%).

Findings

Worry About One's Children

Respondents who have children between the ages of 5 and 17 were asked how much they worried about their children "joining a gang," "being murdered" or "getting addicted to drugs." A response of 8+ on a 10 point scale is considered a "high" degree of worry.

Highlights

- ◆ Worry about each of the three activities grew appreciably between 1996 and 1997.
- ◆ Two thirds of Hispanics (66%) are "highly worried" about their children joining a gang. Among Black respondents, this proportion is 45.8% and for Whites, it is 28.8%.
- ◆ Worry about drug addiction is consistently higher than about joining a gang. Nearly 70% of Hispanics are worried about their children becoming addicted, compared with 53.9% of Blacks and 41.6% of White respondents.
- ◆ The greatest worry concerns the possibility of one's children being murdered. Again, Hispanics (75.8%) are most likely to be "highly worried," followed by Black (66.3%) and White (46.0%) residents.
- ◆ The frequency of watching local TV news appears unrelated to worry about one's children becoming addicted to drugs.
- ◆ However, worry about their child joining a gang, and especially worry about their child being murdered are greatly increased by daily watching of local TV news.

Findings

Concern About Types of Strangers

Respondents were asked how much they would worry if different types of strangers "came up to you at night as you were unlocking your car." The objective was to assess whether the age, race, or number of strangers made a difference in generating this kind of worry.

Responses ranged from (1) "*not at all worried*" to (10) "*very worried*" and a response of 8+ was considered as "high worry."

Highlights

- ◆ The most worrisome strangers are a *group of male teens*, for whom 58.4% of Floridians express a "high" degree of worry.

- ◆ The least worrisome strangers are a *group of female teens*, for whom 32.1% of respondents express a “high” degree of worry.
- ◆ Overall, race and age appear to make little difference when the approaching stranger is alone. The levels of “high worry” produced by individual strangers are relatively consistent across these types: White male teen (42.0%); Hispanic male teen (42.7%); Black male teen (46.2%); Black male adult (44.7%); Hispanic male adult (43.2%).
- ◆ Among female respondents, the levels of “high worry” associated with a *group of male teens* is consistently high, ranging from 70.1% for white women to 79.3% and 79.8% for Black and Hispanic women, respectively.
- ◆ However, while White males (38.1%) and Black males (36.4%) express similar levels of worry about a *group of male teens*; Hispanic men (64.6%) admit finding the approach of such strangers substantially more worrisome.
- ◆ This pattern of consistently higher worry expressed by Hispanic males as compared to Blacks and Whites, holds for each stranger type considered.

Findings

What To Do About Crime?

Public support for various policy options to deal with crime and criminals was measured by asking respondents “how much you would support” each of the following: more severe sentences for all crimes; more police on the street, even if it meant higher taxes; chain gangs; limiting appeals to death sentences; taking away TV and recreational privileges from prisoners.

Responses ranged from (1) “*least support*” to (10) “*most support*.” Scores of 8+ were considered to reflect “high support.”

Highlights

- ◆ Roughly two-thirds of Floridians express “high support” for limiting appeals to death sentences (65%) and more severe sentences for all crimes (67.6%).
- ◆ A majority of Florida residents express high support” for chain gangs (58.3%), more police on the street, (57.3%) and the elimination of TV and recreational privileges for prisoners (54.8%).
- ◆ Among Floridians earning less than \$30,000, “high support” for more severe sentences for all crimes is expressed by 72.8%. Among those earning more than \$50,000, “high support” drops to 60.2%.

- ◆ “High support” for more severe sentences rises steadily as the crime rate of the respondent’s city increases. In places with a crime rate of less than 8,000 (per 100,000) that level of support is 60.6%. In places with a crime rate above 15,000, “high support” is given by 75.5% of respondents.
- ◆ Fear of crime greatly influences support for more severe sentences. Florida residents with “high” fear express “high support” 84.4% of the time, compared with 59% among those with “low” fear.
- ◆ The more often respondents watch local TV news, the more likely they are to support more severe sentences for all crimes.

Findings

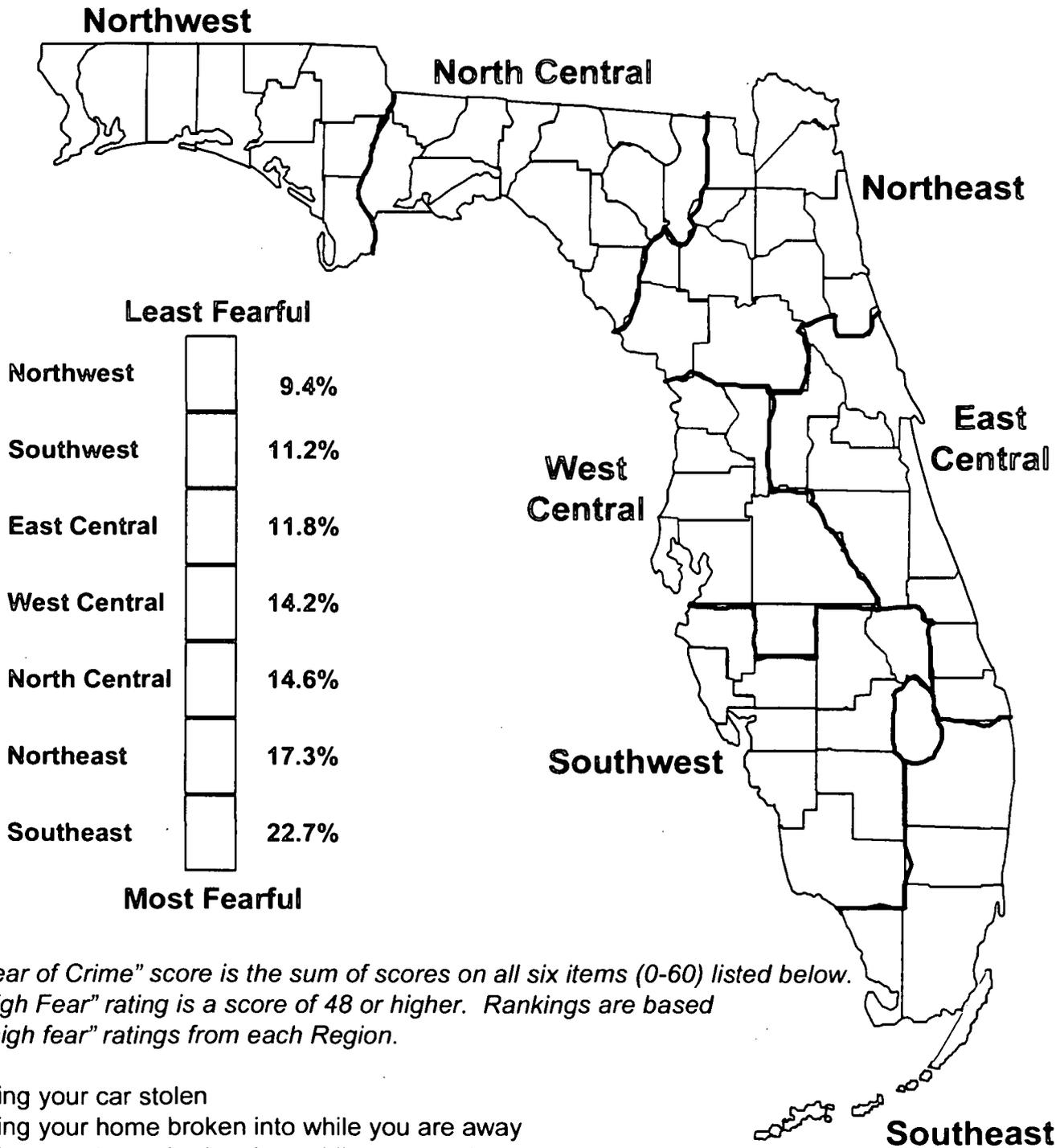
What To Do About Juvenile Crime?

Respondents were asked how much they agreed that a variety of specific policy options “will reduce juvenile crime.” Responses ranged from (1) “*least agree*” to (10) “*most agree*.” The full question used to address these issues is described in the **Methodology** section above. Responses of 8+ on the 10 point scale were considered “high support.”

Highlights

- ◆ The greatest support is expressed for “preventive” measures to deal with juvenile crime, such as “more jobs for young people” (83.4%), “programs for pregnant teens” (82.8%) and “big brother/sister role model programs” (81%).
- ◆ The least support is expressed for the most “punitive” measures, such as imposing the “death penalty for juveniles who murder” (37%) and “locking up more juvenile offenders (46.6%). One departure from this pattern, involves the high degree of support for “sending repeat juvenile offenders to adult court” (72.1%).
- ◆ Substantial support is also expressed for “school uniforms” (55.6%), “curfew laws” (64.2%), “letting unsupervised kids stay at school until evening” (64.5%) and “prevention programs for students suspended from school” (75.2%).
- ◆ Between 1996 and 1997, it appears that support for “preventive” measures rose. For example, “high support” for making “more jobs” available for young people rose from 74% to 83% and it rose from 60% to 64.5% for “letting kids stay at school.”
- ◆ From 1996 to 1997, support for “locking up more juveniles” dropped from 53.7% to 46.6% and it dropped from 47% to 37% for imposing the “death penalty on juveniles who murder.

1997 Fear of Crime By Region



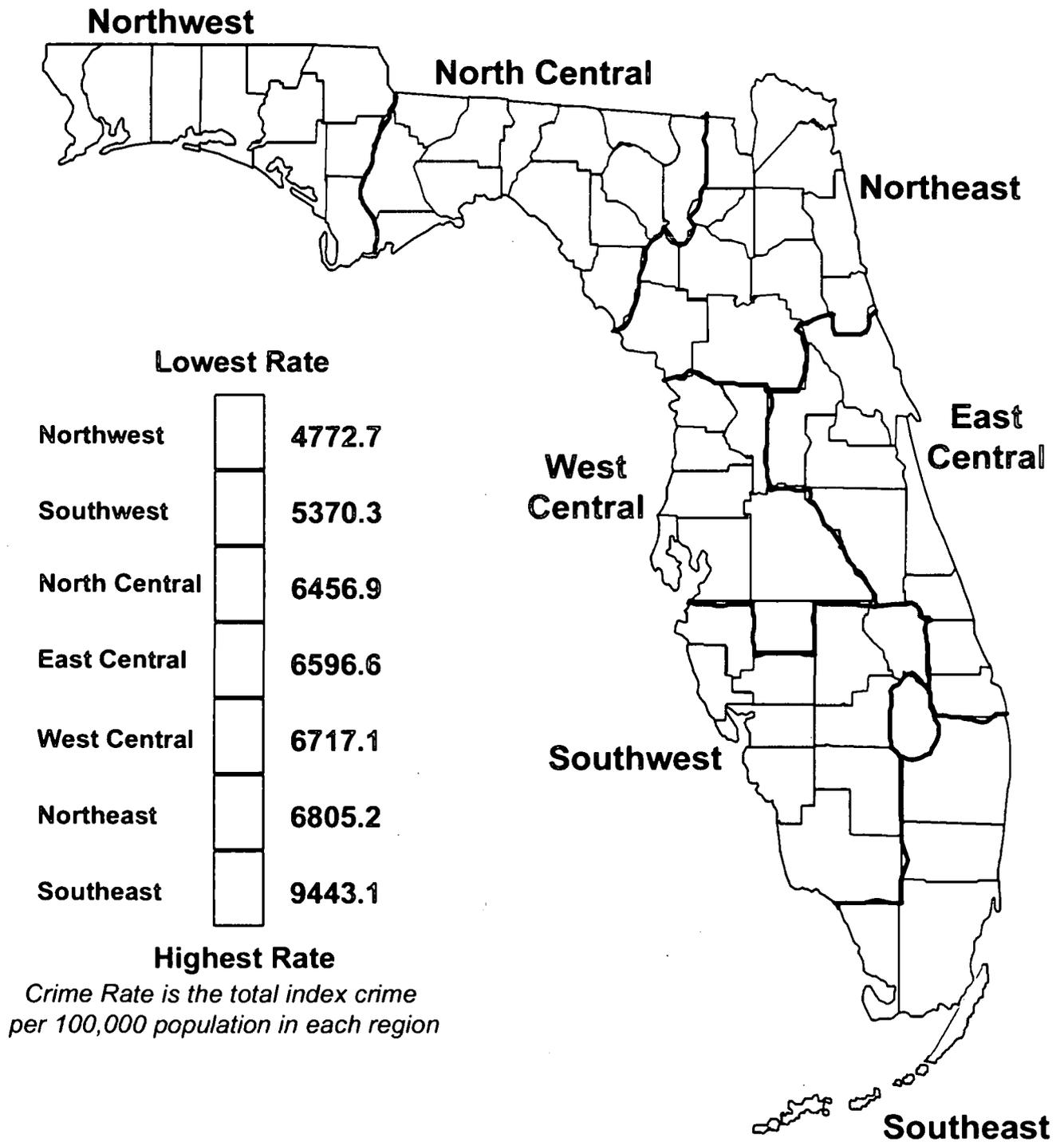
A "Fear of Crime" score is the sum of scores on all six items (0-60) listed below. A "High Fear" rating is a score of 48 or higher. Rankings are based on "high fear" ratings from each Region.

- Having your car stolen
- Having your home broken into while you are away
- Having your home broken into while you are there
- Being robbed or mugged on the street
- Being raped or sexually assaulted
- Being murdered

* Regions represent FDLE administrative districts *



1997 Index Crime Rate By Region



* Regions represent FDLE administrative districts *



For more information about the FEAR of CRIME SURVEY

Contact

Ted Chiricos

School of Criminology & Criminal Justice

Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306

Phone: 850/644-7371 – Fax: 850/644-9614

E-mail: tchirico@garnet.acns.fsu.edu

OR

PROPERTY OF

National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS)

Box 6000

Rockville, MD 20849-6000

Sue Burton

Florida Statistical Analysis Center

Florida Department of Law Enforcement

PO Box 1489

Tallahassee, FL 32302

Phone: 850/ 487-4808 – Fax: 850/ 487-4812

E-mail: sueburton@fdle.state.fl.us

