

Youth and Family Assets Across Texas Communities

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Introduction

People leave their communities seeking financial safety and professional development opportunities (Dohlman et al., 2019). As youth leave their communities, those communities suffer from a lack of innovation and knowledge, making them less resilient. Communities can stem the outward flow of skilled individuals through community assets that address their basic needs, enabling them to live and work (Vazzana & Rudi-Poloshka, 2019). Asset-based community development, using community-based participatory research (CBPR), contributes to successful community development (Rollins et al., 2020). Identifying youth and family needs in Texas communities can enable agricultural extension to provide assets that help people thrive in their local community. This research addresses the American Association for Agricultural Education's *Research Priority 6: Vibrant, Resilient Communities* (Roberts et al., 2016).

Conceptual Framework

Community-based participatory research (CPBR) is a promising approach for reducing health disparities and creating sustainable communities (Rollins et al., 2020). CPBR focuses on understanding the priorities of communities. Participatory approaches, such as CPBR, provide the opportunity to create equitable partnerships among community members and researchers (Rollins et al., 2020). Through CPBR, the power of choice is in a community's hands, rather than in the hands of researchers. CPBR allows local community context to guide and influence research (Teufel-Shone et al., 2006). This study used CPBR to determine what assets were perceived by community members as needs, strengths, or irrelevant within their communities. Local knowledge and context to better understand the state of youth and families in communities can contribute to a more accurate and holistic understanding of community assets and needs.

Methods

This project was conducted by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Data were collected through an online Qualtrics survey sent to Texas residents during the spring of 2021. Respondents were asked to assess community, health and wellness, youth, family, agriculture, and natural resource strengths and needs in their community. Survey items were developed based on other state extension service surveys. This study focused on the 15 youth and family assets. The 15-item (*access to high-quality childcare services; strengthening couple and/or marital relationships; affordable housing options; community shelters for domestic violence; senior citizen centers; home financial planning services; individual counseling services; family counseling services; childcare services; senior living communities; getting more adults involved in mentoring youth; helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills; teaching healthy relationship skills to teens; employment opportunities for youth; and after school programs*) questionnaire used a 4-point scale (1 = Strength, 2 = Need, 3 = Not Relevant, 4 = Unsure). Demographic questions about gender, age, education level, race/ethnicity, and income were also included in the questionnaire. Validity and reliability of the items were tested by extension experts. Data were analyzed with descriptive statistics using *SPSS Version 27*.

Results

A total of 18,119 responses were collected. Not all questions were answered by each respondent. Reported percentages are based on the total number of answers for each question. Most

respondents indicated each of the 15 youth and family assets as a need in their community. Community assets that provide services to youth were indicated as a need by the largest percentage of respondents. These needs included teaching healthy relationship skills to teens (73.1%), adults mentoring youth (69.4%), and youth employment opportunities (62.2%). Most respondents also identified affordable housing (59.9%), strengthening couple/marital relationships (59%), childcare-services (56.6%), youth development (55.9%), domestic violence shelters (54.2%), financial planning (52.1%), and family and individual counseling (51%; 50.3%) as needs in their community.

Each of the 15 youth and family assets included in the questionnaire were indicated by more respondents as a need than as a strength or as irrelevant. However, results indicate that there are pockets of strength across Texas communities. Assets supporting the needs of senior citizens were considered strengths by the largest percentage of respondents. Senior citizen centers had the highest percentage of respondents (38.3%) indicate them as a strength followed by senior living communities (36.2%). Respondents deemed all 15 assets relevant to their communities.

Conclusions

Various youth and family asset needs must be addressed in Texas communities for the development of flourishing communities. Time and resources should be prioritized for teaching healthy relationships to teens. This asset had the highest percentage of respondents (73.1%) indicate it as a need and the lowest number of respondents (10.9%) indicate it as a strength. Getting more adults involved in mentoring youth and youth employment opportunities should also be prioritized in Texas communities. While needs exist across all aspects of youth and family assets in Texas, senior citizen centers, senior living communities, and helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills are perceived by the highest percentage of respondents as strengths in their communities.

Implications

Data from the larger study suggest asset gaps in Texas communities across all areas of interest including community, health and wellness, agriculture, natural resource, and youth and families (Wintermute et al, 2022). Youth and family development is clearly a perceived need in Texas communities. Further research investigating these needs and how Texas citizens believe they should be prioritized is critical. Additionally, disaggregating the data by county and extension region and by urban, suburban, and rural areas would be insightful. Better understanding the perceived strengths and weaknesses in different geographic locations and types of communities will be useful to determine the most strategic and effective allocation of resources to communities across the state. Such insights could better inform resource allocation decisions and contribute to programs tailored to unique community needs. Research focusing specifically on youth and family assets beyond what was included in this questionnaire will provide further information for use by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Research specific to youth and family development will allow for other assets and aspects of these areas to be explored, beyond what could be done in this study. Texas can only advance as fast as its people do. Implementing tailored programs that reflect both the environmental and social contexts of communities can encourage community ownership. Continuing further CPBR will continue to produce data grounded in community context. Additionally, CPBR will empower community members and illustrate the efforts to meet the unique needs of their communities.

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