

FIGURE 14.

Physical changes of early adolescents over past year.

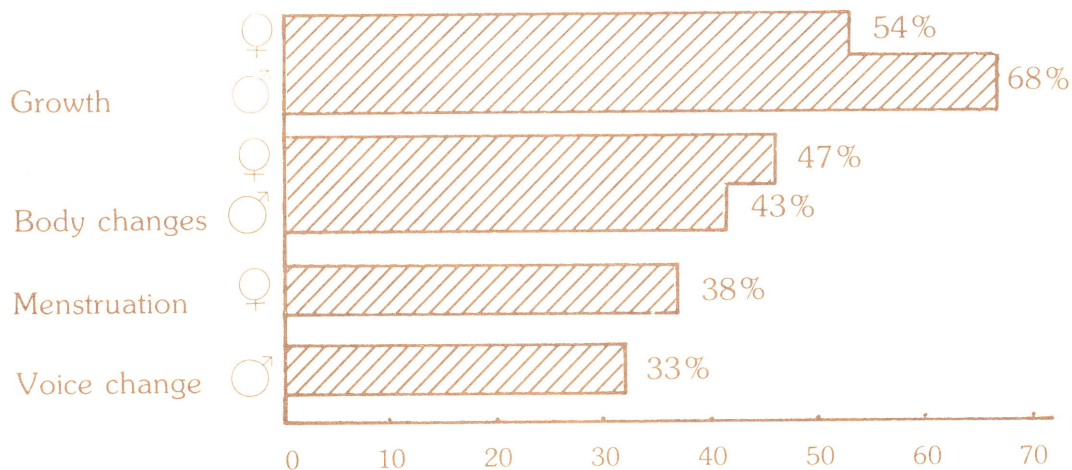


FIGURE 15.

Family changes experienced by early adolescents during past year.

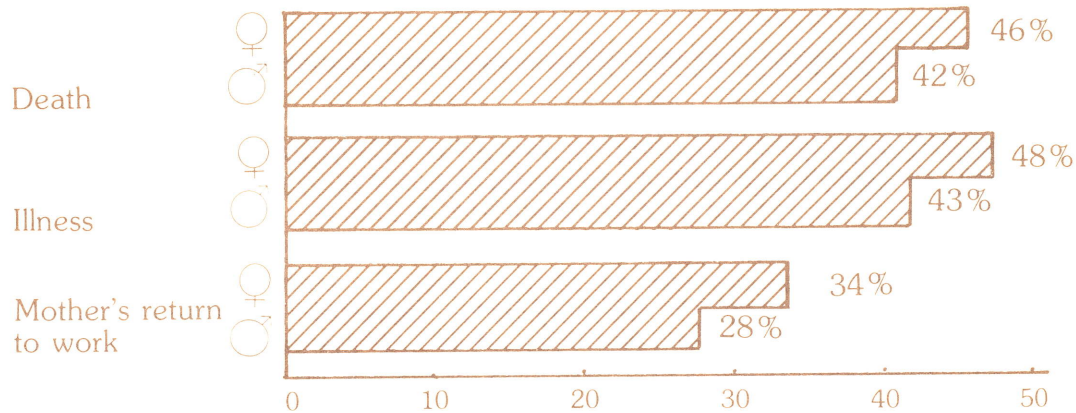
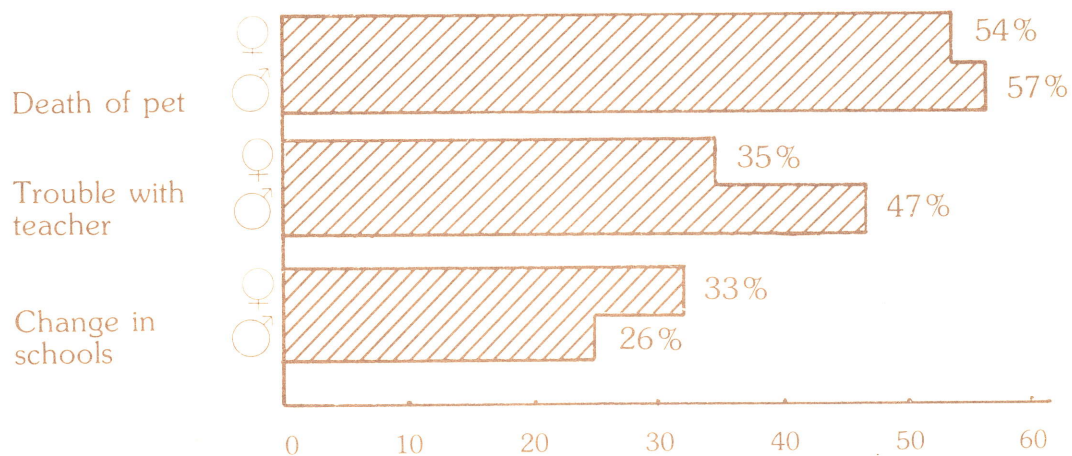


FIGURE 16.

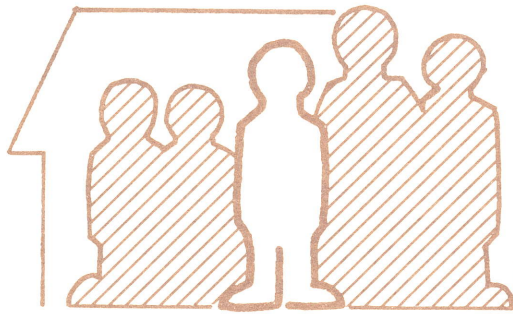
Changes outside the family experienced by early adolescents during past year.



THE EARLY ADOLESCENT IN THE FAMILY

The family serves as an important environment in and through which the developmental tasks of early adolescence are learned. For those tasks that demand environments other than the family, the family plays a large part in when, where, and how the early adolescent enters those environments. For example, in order for early adolescents to become autonomous, they need to begin taking more responsibilities in the family and outside of the family. How those responsibilities are chosen for and by the early adolescent and how much supervision the early adolescent is given are important to how the youth develops into a responsible, self-managing person.

The following sections report on the information found in the Michigan Early Adolescent Survey. Each section discusses a different topic related to early adolescents and their families.



HIGHLIGHTS: EARLY ADOLESCENT IN THE FAMILY

FAMILY COMMUNICATION

The people to whom youths talk depends on the topic:

Girls are more likely to talk to their mothers about friends and their bodies.

One-third of the youths said that they would talk to neither parent about friends or body changes.

The degree of communication that parents reported as taking place was greater than what the youths reported.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

94 percent of the youths said that they felt close or very close to their mothers; 86 percent said the same about their fathers.

Two-thirds of the youths said that they felt close or very close to their siblings.

Fathers reported significantly higher home-family self-esteem on four of six items than did mothers.

FAMILY TIME AND ACTIVITIES

58 percent of the mothers said that they spent about the right amount of time with their child; 45 percent of fathers said the same.

The youths were more likely to report that they were doing daily activities with their parents than were the parents.

PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS FOR EARLY ADOLESCENCE

A slight majority of parents did not believe that early adolescence is the stereotypically difficult time that is often portrayed.

Parents were more likely to have positive attitudes toward their own youth than toward youths in general.

Parents who held negative attitudes toward teens in general felt the same way about their own teen.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Over 50 percent of the parents said they would like help in teaching their child to use computers, work with the elderly, learn about other cultures, and learn leadership and communication skills.

Different family types indicated different needs.

Family Communication

Communication is vital to every person and family. It is through communication that socialization occurs. It is through communication that family values are taught and maintained. In essence, it is through communication that the family functions. The importance of communication relates it to all of the developmental tasks defined by Hill (1980).

The stereotypic thinking about early adolescence is that it is a time when there is a "gap" between the early adolescent and his/her parents. Is this true? Is it true for both parents regardless of whether their child is a girl or boy? Are there some topics that early adolescents are more likely to talk about with their parents than others?

In order to answer these questions, early adolescents were asked if they found it easier to talk to their mothers, fathers, both parents, or neither about a set of topics. These topics were: school, money, friends, changes in their bodies, something they had done wrong, permission to go somewhere, something they were upset about, and unfair rules at home.

TO WHOM DO EARLY ADOLESCENTS TALK?

Figure 17 provides the percentages of girls and boys who said that they would talk to one or the other parent, neither of them, or both of them about the topics listed above. The person to whom the youths said they talked seemed to be related to gender and the topic.

Girls, as can be seen, are much more likely to talk to their mothers only about friends and body changes than are boys. Boys are more likely to talk to their mothers about unfair rules at home.

When the category "talk to father only" is examined, few major differences were found. Body changes is the exception to this. Over one-fourth of the boys said that they would talk to their father only about body changes. None of the girls said that they would discuss this topic with their fathers only.

More boys than girls said that they would talk to both of their parents about their friends and body changes. Girls were more likely to talk to both of their parents about unfair family rules.

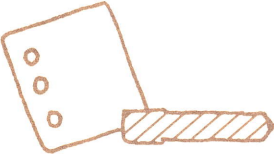





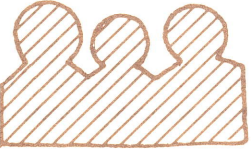








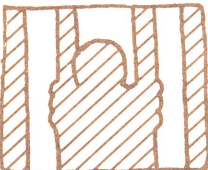





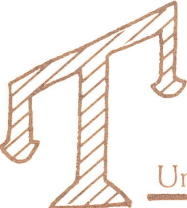


When the response "neither parent" is examined, some disturbing results are found. A surprising one-third of boys and girls said that they would talk to neither parent about their friends. Almost this same percentage of boys said that they would talk to neither parent about body changes. Almost one-fifth of early adolescents would talk to neither parent if they were upset about something. These findings indicate that there is a group of early adolescents who are not talking to their parents about some of the most important changes taking place in their lives.

PARENTAL RESPONSES

Both parents were asked which parent their child talked to about the same set of topics. Parents indicated that they believe that more communication is

FIGURE 17.

People with whom early adolescents talk.*

		Mothers only	Fathers only	Both	Neither	
	School work		40	9	46	5
			43	10	41	7
	Money		29	16	46	9
			25	20	42	13
	Friends		47	2	18	32
			23	7	37	33
	Body changes		80	0	5	15
			15	26	27	32
	Permission		38	12	49	2
			42	16	41	1
	Wrong doings		42	5	33	20
			41	9	28	23
	Upset		48	4	28	20
			44	7	33	16
	Unfair rules		21	13	53	13
			33	13	43	10

*Numbers indicate percentages.

taking place than early adolescents did. On most topics, mothers and fathers were slightly more likely to say that their child talked to them (only) than was the child. However, there were differences. On the topic "when the child is upset," twice as many mothers said that their child talked only to them than was reported by the early adolescents. Fathers were more likely to report that the child talked to both parents than was reported by the early adolescents.

SIBLINGS

In a related section, early adolescents were asked if they would talk to their siblings if they were upset about something. A large majority said that they would not. Eighteen percent of the boys replied that they would, and 29 percent of the girls said that they would. Siblings do not seem to be a source of support for most youths when they are upset (see Fig. 18).

COMMUNICATION OUTSIDE OF THE FAMILY

Youths were asked to whom they would talk if they had a problem. Boys answered "yes" to the following: relative (15%), teacher (11%), and counselor (12%). Girls' responses were similar: relative (19%), teacher (11%), and counselor (13%). For most youths, adults outside of the family were not a major source of support when the youths were upset (see Fig. 19).

FIGURE 18.

Percent of early adolescents who talk to siblings when upset.

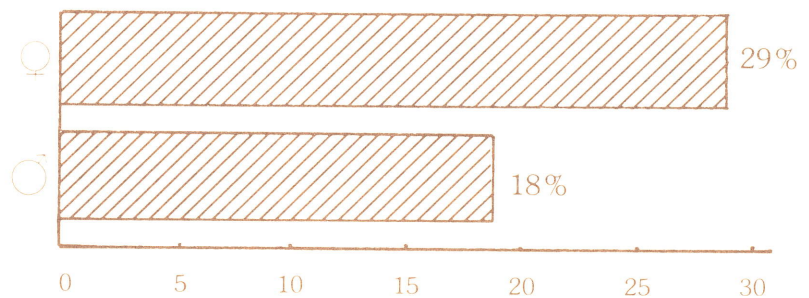
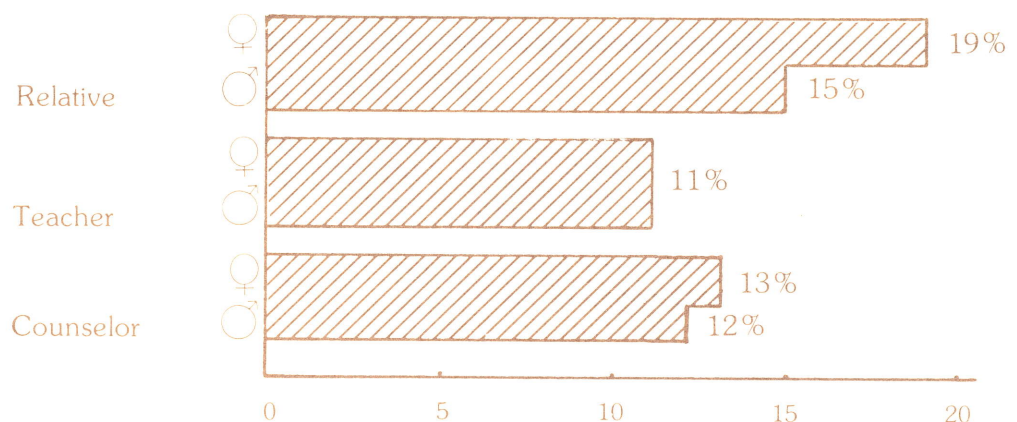


FIGURE 19.

Percent of early adolescents who talk to people outside of family when upset.



Family Relationships

Family relationships can be important to all of the developmental tasks of early adolescence. When early adolescents have a positive relationship with their parents, they are more likely to develop into healthy, growing people.

Three aspects of family relationships were examined so that the relationships between early adolescents and their families could be assessed: closeness of relationships in the family, family self-esteem, and overall ratings of the early adolescent and the family in the past year.

CLOSENESS

Figures 20 and 21 show responses of early adolescents and their parents to a question that asked them how close they felt to various family members. They were asked if they felt very close, close, not close, or not close at all to each other.

Ninety-four percent of the early adolescents reported feeling close or very close to their mothers. Eighty-six percent reported this level of closeness to their fathers. Ninety-one percent of the mothers said that they felt close or very close to their sons; 96 percent reported this level of closeness to their daughters. Eighty-three percent of the fathers said that they felt close or very close to their sons; 87 percent reported this level of closeness to their daughters. Mothers reported a significantly higher level of closeness to their daughters than to their sons. No differences were found for fathers.

Two-thirds of the early adolescents reported being close or very close to their brothers and sisters. In both girls and boys, these feelings of closeness seemed to increase after age 10. In boys, this was indicated by a 10 percent increase in the number of boys between ages 10 and 11 who said that they felt very close to their siblings. The percentage stayed the same after this (28%). The percentage of girls (34%) who said that they did not feel close to their siblings dropped to 15 percent after age 10 and stayed at that level.

PARENTAL HOME-FAMILY SELF-ESTEEM

Parents responded to the same set of statements from the Coopersmith family subscale as did the early adolescents. As reported earlier, 72 percent of the early adolescents reported that they felt good about their families. Girls were less likely to feel that their family pushed them than were boys.

Seventy-eight percent of the fathers and 67 percent of the mothers said that they felt good about their families (see Fig. 22). Fathers responded more positively to the following items:

- My family considers my feelings.**
- My family understands me.*

FIGURE 20.

Level of closeness to parents as indicated by early adolescents.

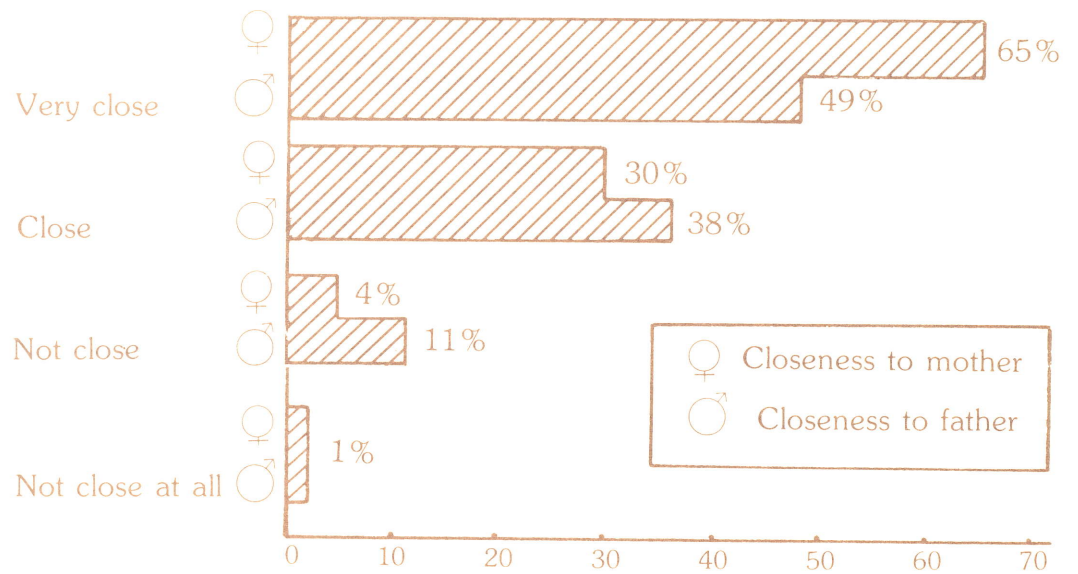


FIGURE 21.

Level of closeness to early adolescents as indicated by parents.

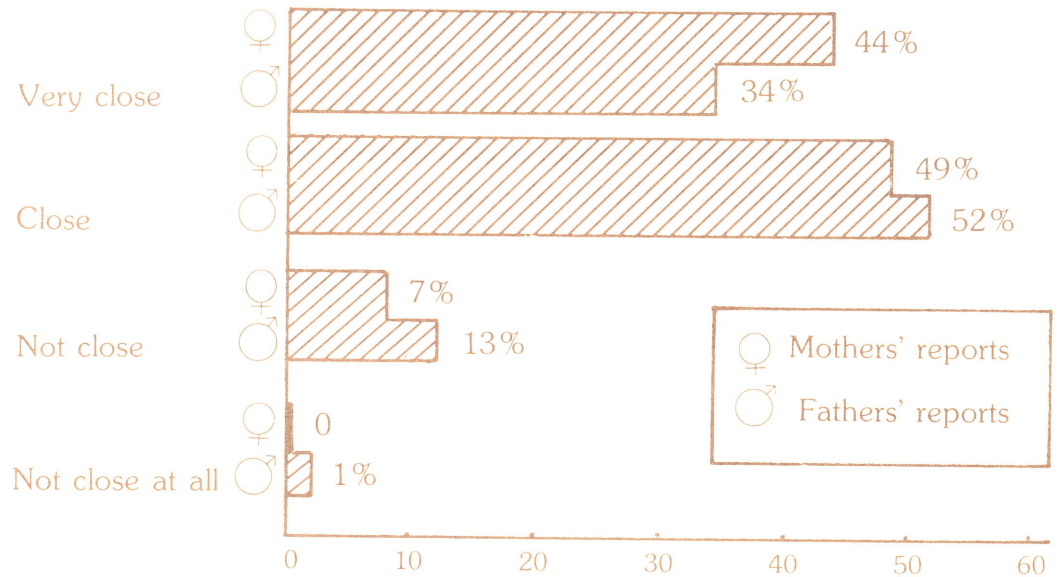
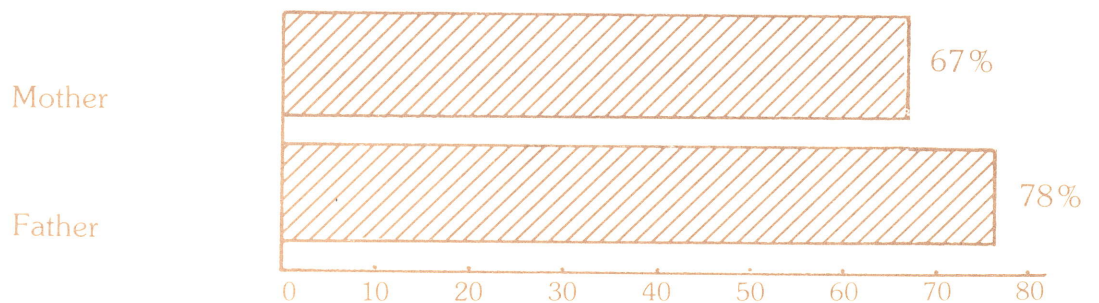


FIGURE 22.

Parents' levels of self-esteem related to home-family.



They responded more negatively to:

- At times I feel as if my family is pushing me.*
- At times I would like to leave home.***

CHILD AND FAMILY IN PAST YEAR

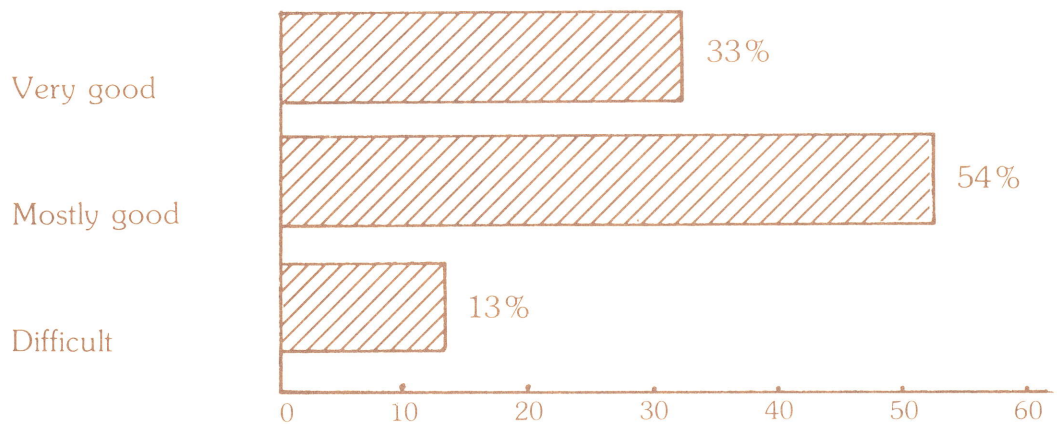
When parents were asked how their family had been doing in the past year, most indicated that it had been a good year. There were no differences between mothers and fathers. One-fifth reported that it had been a very good year; almost two-thirds reported that it had been mostly good. Almost 15 percent reported that their past year had been somewhat difficult. Four percent reported a very difficult year.

When parents were asked how their child had been doing in the past year, almost one-third stated that their child had had a very good year. Slightly over 50 percent reported that their child had had a mostly good year. Thirteen percent reported that the past year had been very difficult for their child. See Figure 23.

Parents were asked if they enjoyed parenting their child more now than in the past. Fathers were more likely to say "yes" than were mothers. This was more true if they had sons (63%) than if they had daughters (57%). Almost 50 percent of mothers answered that they enjoyed parenting their child more now. Their answers were the same whether they had a son or a daughter. The age of the child did not seem to make any consistent difference to the parents.

FIGURE 23.

How parents rated their child's past year.



Family Time and Activities

The developmental tasks of attachment, achievement, and identity require that early adolescents move out into the world and spend less time with their families than they did when they were younger. This does not mean that family time is unimportant. In fact, the opposite may be true. If youths are spending less time with their families, it may mean that this shorter amount of time spent is more important. When this is considered in the social context of more employed mothers, more single parents, and less human labor needed in the home, it becomes important to look at how families do spend the time that they have and how they feel about it.

In order to look at these pieces of family life, the parents were asked about the amount of time that they spent with their children and about the use of leisure time (such as movies and sports). Both parents and children responded to a list of activities that showed the kinds of daily activities in which parents participate with youths. Some of the activities about which they were asked were how often they ate meals, did homework, watched TV, went to the library, played games, did crafts, and prepared or cleaned up after meals together.

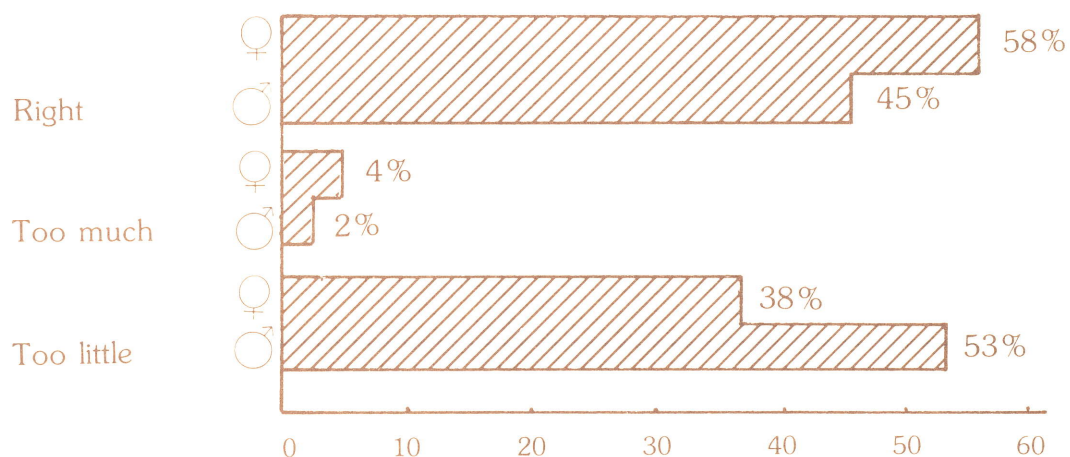
FAMILY TIME

Mothers (58%) were more likely to say that they spent about the right amount of time with their early adolescents than were fathers (45%). Mothers were also a little more likely to say that they spend too much time with their child (4%) than were fathers (2%) (see Fig. 24).

When the youths were asked if they had enough time to do what they liked to do, half said that they had a lot of time to do with as they pleased and almost that many said that they had some time to do with as they wanted.

FIGURE 24.

Parents' ratings of the amount of time they spend with their early adolescent.



FAMILY ACTIVITIES

The findings on family activities are reported in Figure 25.

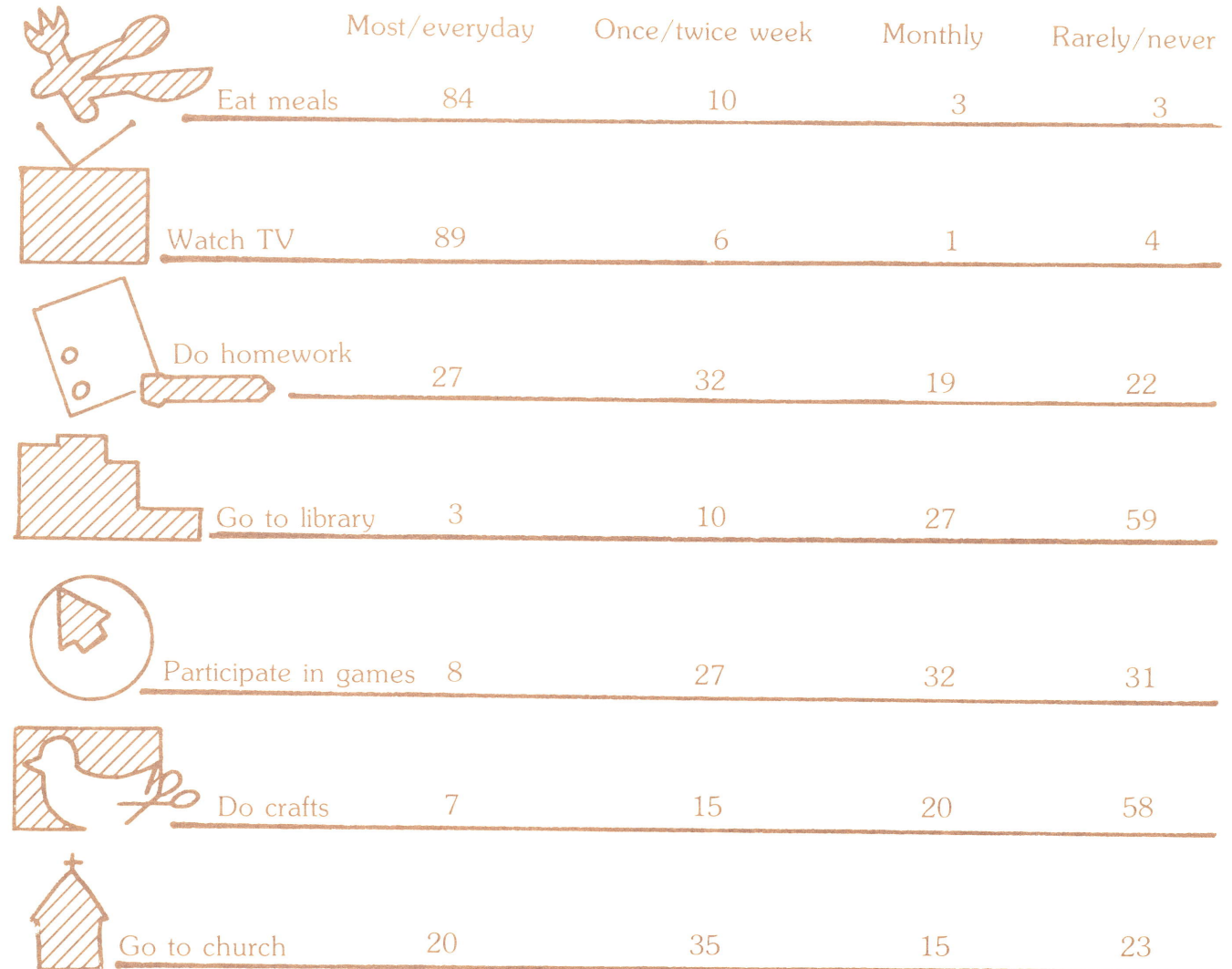
In general, early adolescents were more likely to report that they were doing daily activities with their parents than were the parents. About 50 percent of the youths said that they ate dinner with their parents every day. Forty percent of parents reported doing so. Twenty-seven percent of the early adolescents said that they did homework with parents each day while only 4 percent of the parents said the same. Almost 90 percent of the youths reported watching television with their parents every day. Only 29 percent of the parents reported this.

Church (35%), games (27%), and sports activities (24%) were the most likely ways that parents and children spent time together. Craft activities, family meetings, and outings to the library or movies happened less frequently. Mothers were more likely to go to movies with their children than were fathers. Mothers of girls were less likely to report attending sports events with sons and more likely to report attending them with their daughters.

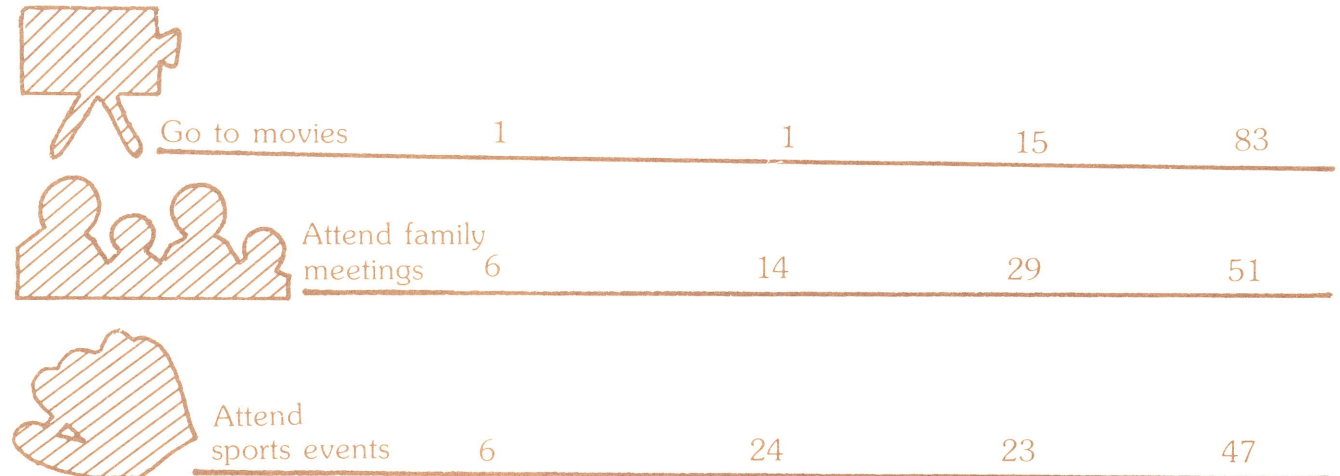
FIGURE 25.

Frequency of participation in family activities.*

Children's responses:



Parents' responses:



*Numbers indicate percentages.

Parental Expectations for Early Adolescence

Many adults in this culture view early adolescence as a time of "storm and stress." This is probably the result of the psychoanalytic view of adolescence as a time in which rebellion is necessary so that early adolescents can begin to achieve the developmental tasks of autonomy and attachment. In any case, if a few adults are asked what teenagers are like, they are likely to say that they are sassy, rebellious, and not very pleasant to be with! If these adults are parents of early adolescents, these attitudes may influence how the parent interacts with the child, and the attitudes may have negative effects on the parent-early adolescent relationship.

In order to see if parents of early adolescents thought of the teen years as particularly difficult, parents were asked to what extent they agreed with 10 statements that are common stereotypes of this stage in life. An example is: Most teenagers are lazy. These answers were combined to form a total. In another part of the questionnaire, parents were asked if similar statements were like their child or unlike their child. These answers, too, were combined to make a total.

PARENTS' RESPONSES

There were three major findings from the parents answers:

1. A slight majority of the parents did not believe that teenagers in general were all the horrible things that are sometimes said and thought about youths at this age.
2. Parents were more likely to have more positive attitudes toward their own child than toward teens in general.
3. Parents who had negative attitudes about teens in general held these same attitudes about their own child.

It is not clear from this analysis whether parents' attitudes affect early adolescent behavior or if early adolescent behaviors affect parents' attitudes. It seems likely that both serve to increase the stereotype about teens in general and the parents' own child. These findings point out the important influence that parental attitudes may have on children. If these parental attitudes do influence how parents interact with their early adolescents, it is important that the attitudes be shaped in ways that help the early adolescent grow and that do not hinder growth.

Early Adolescent Skill Development: Parental Needs for Help Outside the Home

During early adolescence, youths begin to develop those skills which are related to the developmental task of achievement in many areas: play, work, and study. Many life skills are taught in informal settings such as the family or community groups. To what extent do parents perceive that certain life skills are needed? To what extent do they feel that they need help so that their early adolescent can develop these skills?

Parents were given a list of 20 life skills and asked if each skill was important and whether early adolescents could learn it within the family or whether outside help was needed. The skills can be put into five groups: technical, mechanical, interpersonal, personal, and household.

IMPORTANCE OF SKILLS

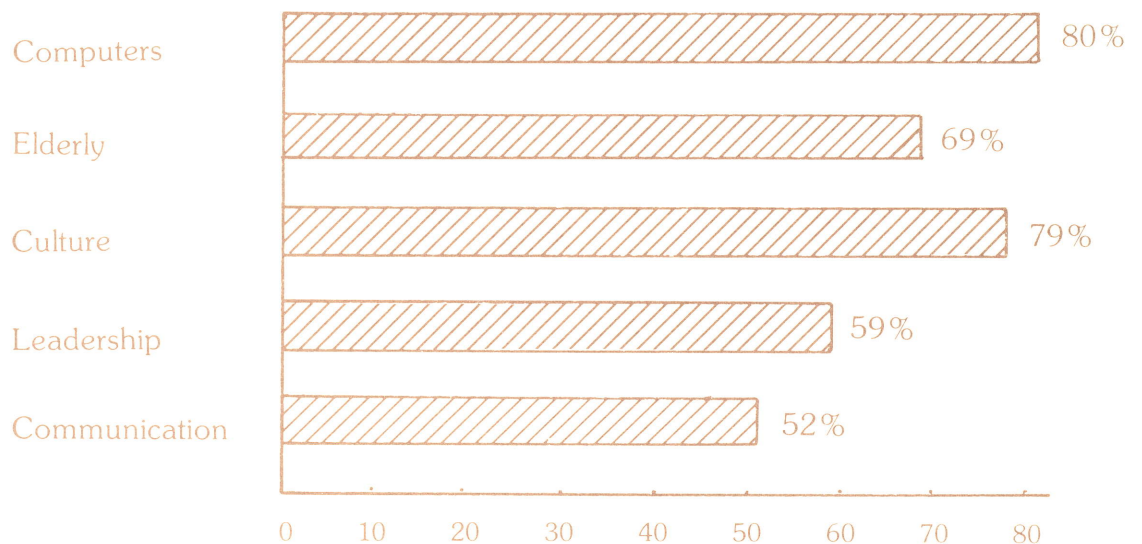
Over 90 percent of the parents indicated that the following skills were important: computer programming, caring for children, cooking, sewing, house-keeping, understanding other cultures, decision-making, managing time, developing self-confidence, communicating, and knowing about sexuality. Parents were more likely to say that learning to care for young children was more important for their daughters than for their sons.

WHERE HELP IS NEEDED

Mothers and fathers were in agreement about which skills were the ones with which they would need help from outside of the home if their early adolescents were to learn these skills. There were five skills with which over 50 percent of the parents said they would need help: computers (80%), working with the elderly (69%), learning about other cultures (79%), leadership (59%), and communication (52%) (see Fig. 26).

FIGURE 26.

Skill areas in which parents would like help for their early adolescent.



Of these skills, only leadership opportunities were addressed by the early adolescent interview. In this area, responses showed that 58 percent of the boys and 49 percent of the girls had given a speech; 10 percent of the boys and 21 percent of the girls had held an office in a club or at school; 75-percent of the boys and 59 percent of the girls had been on a team; and 20 percent of the boys and 16 percent of the girls had organized a play or club at some time. These findings indicate that more opportunities need to be provided to youths so that they can develop the skill of leadership.

DIFFERENCES BY FAMILY TYPES

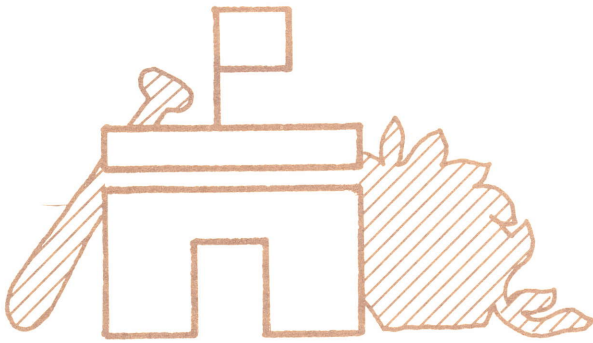
Different needs were reported by different family types. Family types were defined as single mother, dual earner, and traditional. Statistical differences occurred between family types on 7 of the 20 skill areas. Those skill areas are: home repairs,*** decision-making,*** caring for children,* raising food,* information about sexuality,* self-confidence,* and mechanics.*** At least 50 percent of parents in all three family types said that they needed help with the following skills: mechanics, computers, working with the elderly, leadership, and communication. In addition, at least 50 percent of single mothers said that they needed help teaching home repairs and self-confidence. Learning about other cultures, caring for children, self-confidence, getting along, and managing time were reported as those areas with which 50 percent or more of dual earner families would like help. Traditional families listed learning about cultures as well as the common five on their list of skills with which help was needed.

EARLY ADOLESCENT ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

The time that early adolescents spend outside of school is more than simply for leisure or play. It can be related to all of the developmental tasks examined in the Michigan Early Adolescent Survey. The development of attachment is encouraged during the time that children interact with their friends after school, whether in structured clubs or classes or in "hanging around." The opportunity to be with friends in different settings exposes the early adolescent to the world and helps him/her shape his/her identity as well as become more autonomous. Simply being part of an outside experience puts the early adolescent "on his/her own two feet" and allows him/her the opportunity to take responsibility for him/herself.

Achievement, too, is promoted by outside-of-school activities. Studies have shown that how children use their time outside of school is important to how they do when they are in school. Outside activities also can teach youths skills that are necessary in daily living as well as those necessary for vocational preparation.

The Michigan Early Adolescent Survey looked at four outside activities: television, after-school care, club involvement, and leisure activities.



HIGHLIGHTS: ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

AFTER-SCHOOL CARE

81 percent of the youths said they go home after school on most days.

18 percent of the youths reported that they stay at school, and 5 percent said they go into town after school.

YOUTH GROUPS

Most early adolescents belong to a sports team, church group, or other kind of youth group.

75 percent of the youths joined the group because of its interesting and fun activities.

The youths reported learning skills and knowledge (70%), responsibility (33%), and meeting new friends (33%) in their youth groups.

Parents reported that their child gained social skills, subject knowledge and skills, personal skills, and self-esteem from being part of a youth group.

ACTIVITIES AND CLASSES

The most popular activities were outdoor activities.

Girls reported that they enjoyed or would like to learn traditionally feminine activities; boys said that they enjoyed or would like to learn traditionally masculine activities.

In general, the youths indicated they would like to learn new activities in a group setting.

TELEVISION

90 percent of the youths said that they watched TV every day.

Situation comedies and adventure shows were best liked.

Significantly more girls than boys watched "soap operas."

Almost half of the youths reported that there were some shows that they were not allowed to watch.

After-School Care

With the increase in the number of employed mothers, after-school care has been a topic of concern to many people. With the growing autonomy of early adolescents, many people feel that most youths can be left at home after school with no negative consequences. In fact, it could be argued that the one or two hours spent alone after school provide an excellent way to promote autonomy. Other people feel, however, that it is exactly because the early adolescent is at such a changing period of development that he/she needs to be cared for after school. These people would argue that autonomy is a process that needs supervision.

Early adolescents were asked a number of questions to show where they go after school and who takes care of them during the after-school hours.

WHO NEEDS AFTER-SCHOOL CARE?

Eighty-one percent of the youths said that they came home after school most of the time. Twelve percent stayed at school for clubs, sports, and classes. Seven percent said that they did something else.

WHO IS PROVIDING AFTER-SCHOOL CARE?

Of the youths who said that they went home, 86 percent said that someone else was there with them. This means that 14 percent of these youths were home alone. Seventy-three percent said that their mother was home when they got home. Twenty-five percent said that their father was there. Only 2 percent of the youths reported that a child care provider was waiting for them. Forty-one percent reported that an older sibling was at home after school; 22 percent said that a younger sibling was at home. It is difficult to tell from the data whether the 22 percent with younger siblings were under the care of the early adolescent or if a parent was also at home.

Of the 7 percent of youths who said that they went somewhere else after school, 69 percent said that they went into town. Eight percent were with child care providers, 4 percent were with neighbors, another 4 percent with relatives, and 15 percent had other arrangements.

Youth Groups

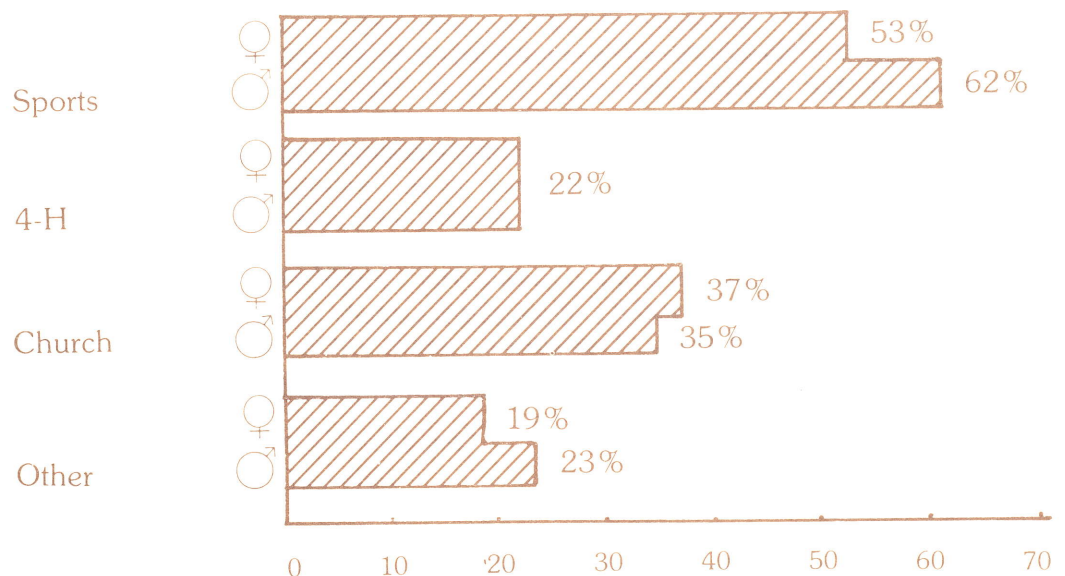
Youth groups and clubs can be an important force in the mastery of the developmental tasks of early adolescence. These groups provide an excellent place where youths can go out into the world and still be supervised to a greater or lesser extent by an adult. They often provide the peer group where attachment and identity development can be enhanced, where there is some kind of product or goal that promotes the task of achievement, and where the youths are expanding their world, which is part of autonomy.

WHO IS INVOLVED IN YOUTH GROUPS?

When asked about youth group participation, many early adolescents reported belonging to some kind of group. Fifty-three percent of the girls and 62 percent of the boys reported that they were on sports teams. Twenty-two percent said that they were in 4-H, 35 percent said that they were in church youth groups, and 18 percent reported belonging to some other kind of club (see Fig. 27).

FIGURE 27.

Groups to which early adolescents belong.



WHY YOUTHS JOIN GROUPS

Over 75 percent of the youths said that they had joined the group because it was fun or had interesting activities. Almost 40 percent said that they had joined to learn a specific skill or activity. One-third said that they had joined because a friend was in the group.

WHAT YOUTHS SAY ABOUT BEING IN YOUTH GROUPS

Seventy percent of the early adolescents said that they had gained a skill or knowledge because of their participation in a group. One third reported that they had met new friends as a result of belonging to a group. Another third said that they had learned responsibility from being in a group.

When asked what, if anything, they disliked about being in a youth group, the early adolescents answered: other members, uninteresting meetings, and losing.

Early adolescents described a good youth leader as being nice, caring, helpful, understanding, and knowledgeable about club activities.

WHAT PARENTS SAY ABOUT YOUTH GROUPS

When parents were asked what their child had gained from belonging to a youth group, they answered: social skills, subject matter knowledge and skills, personal skills, and self-esteem.

Outside-of-School Classes and Activities

Just as club participation can promote mastery of the developmental tasks of early adolescence, so can outside-of-school activities and classes. With the growing number of options available to early adolescents, it is important that the classes and activities offered are those in which youths are interested.

Early adolescents were given a list of activities. They were then asked if they liked to do each activity and if they were interested in learning the activity. If the youths said that they would like to learn the activity, they were then asked if they would like to learn the activity alone or in a group.

ACTIVITIES EARLY ADOLESCENTS LIKE TO DO

The most popular activities were outdoor activities. Over half of the boys and girls said that they liked to play softball, bicycle, camp, fish, swim, and jog. Boys were more likely to say that they enjoyed softball, canoeing, fishing, snowmobiling, and engaging in survival activities (see Fig. 28).

FIGURE 28.

Most popular outdoor activity preferences of youths.

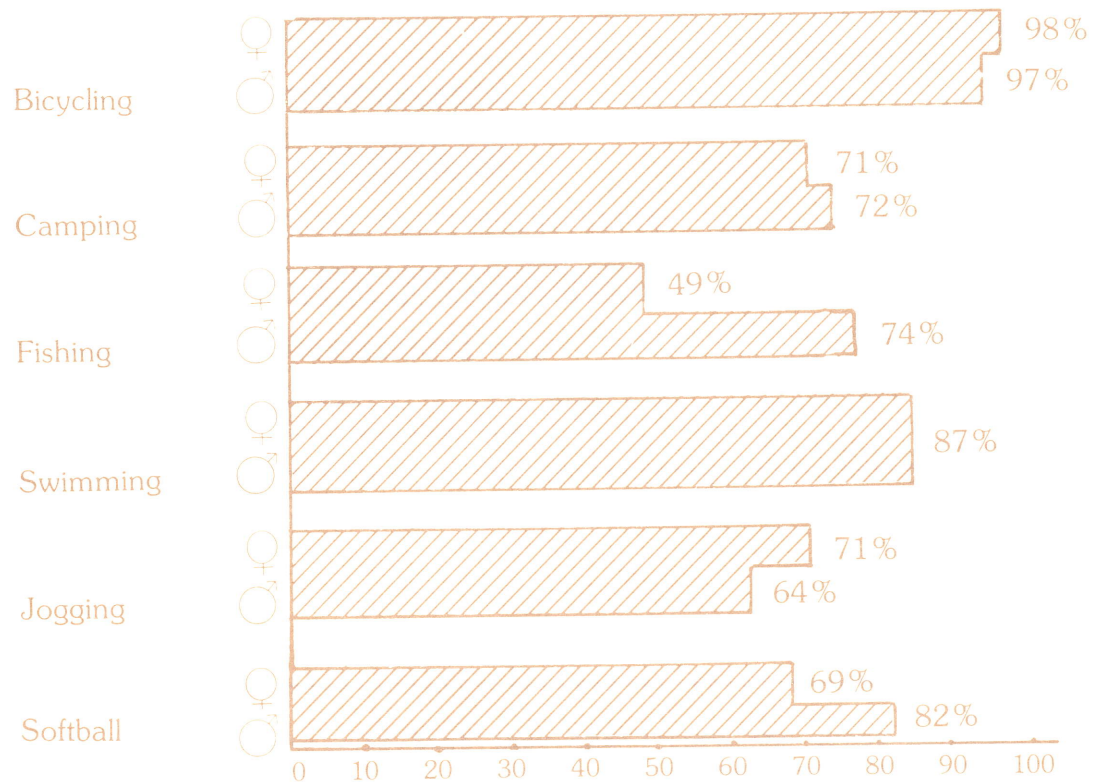


Figure 29 shows percentages of girls and boys who said that they liked to do or were interested in learning selected activities. Large differences were found between boys and girls on traditionally female activities. More girls than boys liked to cook, sew, knit, do crafts, decorate cakes, and do needlework. These differences also existed for the traditionally male activities. More boys than girls liked technical activities that included electronics, rocket-building, model-building, leathercraft, and engine repair. Computer programming was the exception to this trend. Over 50 percent of boys and girls liked computer programming.

Other findings related to activities are: (1) Over 70 percent of the early adolescents said that they liked to raise animals, and (2) More girls than boys liked the creative activities of dancing and drama.

ACTIVITIES YOUTHS WANT TO LEARN

Early adolescents showed an interest in learning many kinds of activities. Outdoor activities included archery, canoeing, snowmobiling, survival skills, and skiing. One-half of the youths said that they would like to learn computer programming or more about computer programming. In the technical area, boys said that they would like to learn electronics and engine repair. Thirty percent of the youths said that they would like to learn dancing and clowning.

HOW EARLY ADOLESCENTS PREFER TO LEARN ACTIVITIES

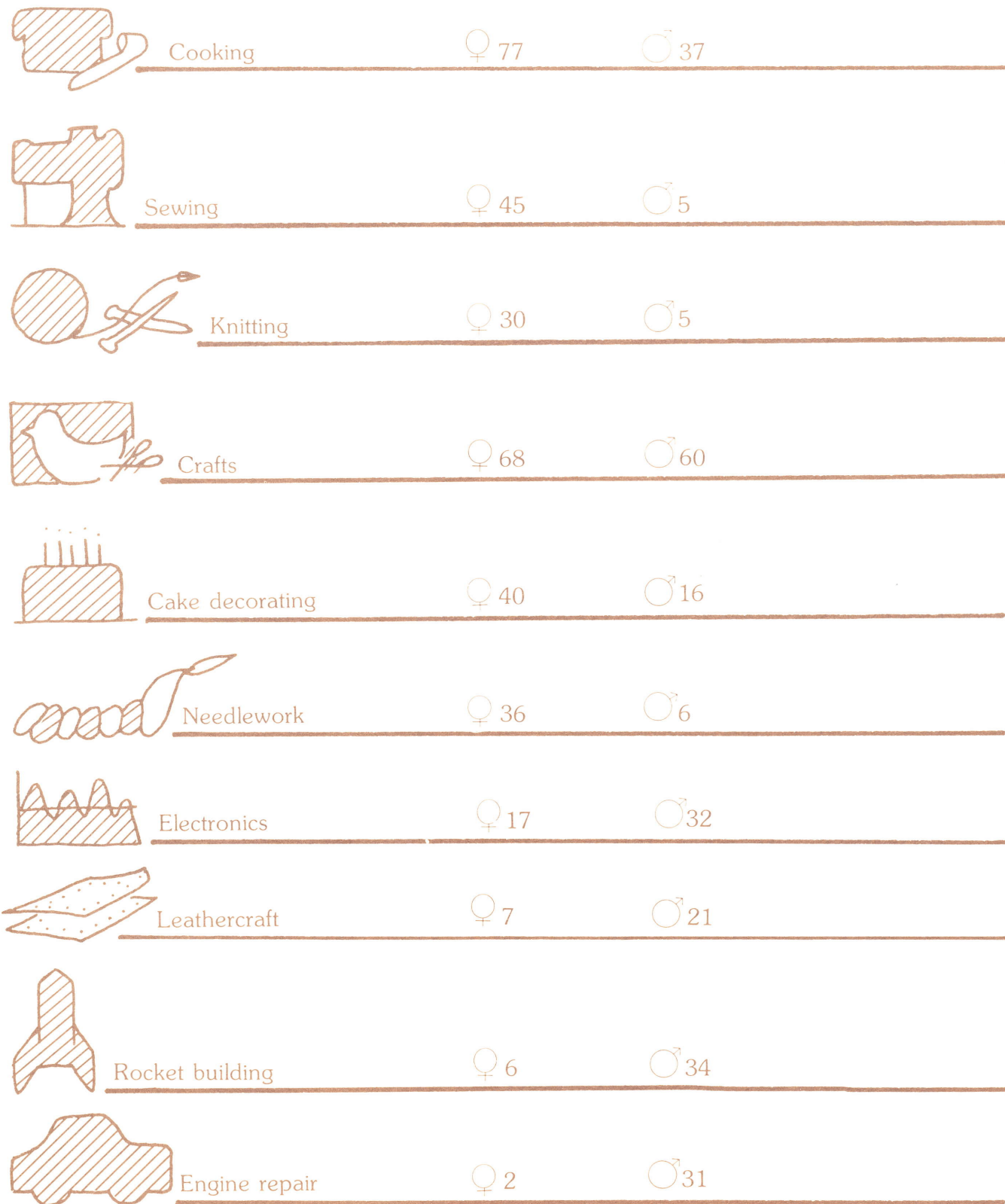
For the most part, the youths said that they would prefer to learn new activities as part of a group. There were a few differences between girls and boys. Over 50 percent of the early adolescents reported that they would like to learn the following activities in a group: archery, softball, canoeing, fishing, snowmobiling, swimming, bicycling, jogging (girls only), survival skills, woodworking, leathercraft, cake decorating (girls only), crafts, needleworking (boys only), model building (girls only), photography, gardening (boys only), horseback riding, computer programming, electronics, dancing, drama, and clowning.

Over 50 percent of the youths said that they would like to learn the following activities in a one-to-one situation: jogging (boys only), skiing, collecting, gardening (girls only), cake decorating (boys only), cooking, knitting, needlework (girls only), model building (boys only), growing plants indoors, raising animals, and drawing.

Girls were significantly more likely to say that they would like to learn snowmobiling, archery, and rocketry in a group. Boys were significantly more likely to say that they would like to learn knitting in a group.

FIGURE 29.

Activity preferences of boys and girls.*



*Numbers indicate percentages.

Television

The amount and kind of television viewing done by children has been the target of much discussion. How much time should be spent with television and what kind of programming is best are questions that will continue into the next decade. Certainly too much television can keep the early adolescent from the kinds of activities that promote mastery of the developmental tasks discussed previously. There has also been concern that some television personalities are not the kind of models that early adolescent should "try on" in the process of identity formation.

Early adolescents were asked questions about television in the first part of the interview. These questions allowed the youths to get used to the interview process and provided an easy topic about which to talk.

WHO WATCHES TV?

Almost 90 percent of the early adolescents interviewed said that they watched television everyday. Sixty-nine percent said that it was usually on in the afternoon and 49 percent reported that it was on during dinner.

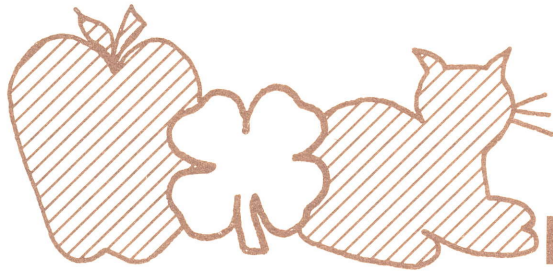
WHAT EARLY ADOLESCENTS WATCH

The programs that early adolescents said that they liked best were situation comedies and adventures. Almost 50 percent of the girls and 21 percent of the boys said that they watched the popular soap opera about which they were asked, a significant difference.***

When the youths were asked if there were programs that they were not allowed to watch, 51 percent of the girls and 42 percent of the boys said "yes." The kinds of shows that were prohibited were soaps, cable movies, horror shows, movies rated "R" and for which parental discretion was advised, and specific shows. Clearly, many parents are making and influencing the television viewing choices of early adolescents. On the other hand, only about one-half are doing so and this means that half of early adolescents are allowed to watch whatever they choose.

SELECTED TOPICS OF INTEREST TO THE 4-H — YOUTH PROGRAMS

Several topics addressed in the Michigan Early Adolescent Survey were of special interest to the 4-H - Youth Programs. In most cases, these topics were related to programming thrusts. The following brief reports discuss those topics.



HIGHLIGHTS: SELECTED TOPICS OF INTEREST TO THE 4-H – YOUTH PROGRAMS

EARLY ADOLESCENTS AND HANDICAPPERS

80 percent of the youths said that they would enjoy having a handicapper for a friend.

50 percent said that they would consider a career working with handicappers.

95 percent of the parents said that working with handicappers was an important skill for their children to learn.

EARLY ADOLESCENTS AND SCHOOL

Slightly more than half of girls said that they did well or very well in school; slightly more than half of boys said that they did fairly or poorly.

Almost 50 percent of the youths said that they liked school “some.”

Girls were significantly more likely to have positive feelings about school than were boys.

EARLY ADOLESCENTS AND THEIR PETS

Almost 90 percent of the youths said that they had cared for a pet for longer than a month at some time in their lives.

94 percent of the parents said that caring for pets was important to the development of their children.

Almost one-half of the youths said that they played with their pets as a way of making themselves feel better when they were upset.

SNACKS AND NUTRITION

Over 63 percent of the youths make snacks every day.

Cookies were the most commonly eaten snack.

Boys were more likely to eat all kinds of snacks except fruit and cheese.

Girls (54%) and boys (45%) reported that they most often learn about nutrition at school.

Early Adolescents and Handicappers

How do early adolescents feel about differences when everything within and about them seems to be changing? Many people note the conformity of dress, hair style, taste in music, and other things common to early adolescents. Does this conformity influence adolescents' attitudes about people who are different from them? Specifically, what are their attitudes about handicappers?

Changes in public policies regarding the concept of normalcy and mainstreaming in public education mean that more early adolescents come into contact with handicappers in their homes, schools, and communities. Twenty-three percent of the MEAS families reported having a child with some type of a chronic illness, such as asthma, or a handicapping condition like mental retardation or hyperactivity.

YOUTHS' ATTITUDES TOWARD HANDICAPPERS

Early adolescent attitudes toward the chronically ill or handicappers were largely positive. Almost 80 percent said that they would enjoy having a handicapper for a friend. Over 50 percent said that they would consider a career that involved working with the handicappers or the elderly.

PARENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD HANDICAPPERS

Parents were also interested in having their children learn skills to work with older people or handicappers. Over 95 percent felt that this was a skill their child should learn. However, almost 70 percent felt that they needed help from outside the home if their child were to learn this skill.

Early Adolescents and School

School has an impact on all of the developmental tasks of early adolescence. How early adolescents master the tasks also involves how they do in school and how they feel about it. The Michigan Early Adolescent Survey asked general questions which related to the tasks of achievement and identity.

Early adolescents were asked to rate how they did in reading, mathematics, and overall. They could choose from these answers: very well, well, fairly, or poorly.

OVERALL RATINGS

When asked how they did "overall" in school, 43 percent of the girls said that they did "well" in school, while 49 percent of the boys reported doing "fairly." Fourteen percent of all early adolescents said that they did very well, and 4 percent said that they did "poorly." When parents were asked the same question, their answers were similar to the youths' except that 19 percent of the mothers reported that their son was doing "poorly" (see Fig. 30).

READING

The differences between how girls said that they did in reading and how boys said that they did in reading were statistically significant.*** Almost one-half (48%) of the boys reported that they did "well" in reading. Another 31 percent said that they did either "fairly" or "poorly." Slightly over half of the girls said that they did "well" in reading (56%). Only 14 percent of them said that they did "fairly" or "poorly." In general, parents were less likely to say that their child was doing well in reading than was their child (see Fig. 31).

MATHEMATICS

Almost one-half (44%) of the boys reported that they did "well" in mathematics. Another 32 percent said that they did "fairly" or "poorly." Forty-eight percent of girls reported doing "well" in mathematics. As in reading, a smaller percentage of girls than boys reported doing "fairly" or "poorly" (27%). Parents' reports were very similar to those of the early adolescents (see Fig. 32.)

HOW EARLY ADOLESCENTS FEEL ABOUT SCHOOL

Early adolescents were asked how they felt about school. The response choices were: like it a lot, like it some, don't like it, and don't like it at all.

The differences between the answers of girls and boys as to how they felt about school were statistically significant.* Boys and girls were as likely to say that they liked school "some" (47%, 46%). A larger number of boys reported that they didn't like school or did not like it at all (28%) than girls (14%). About 16 percent more parents said that their early adolescents liked school than did their early adolescent.

FIGURE 30. Ratings of overall academic achievement of early adolescents.



FIGURE 31. Ratings of reading achievements of early adolescents.

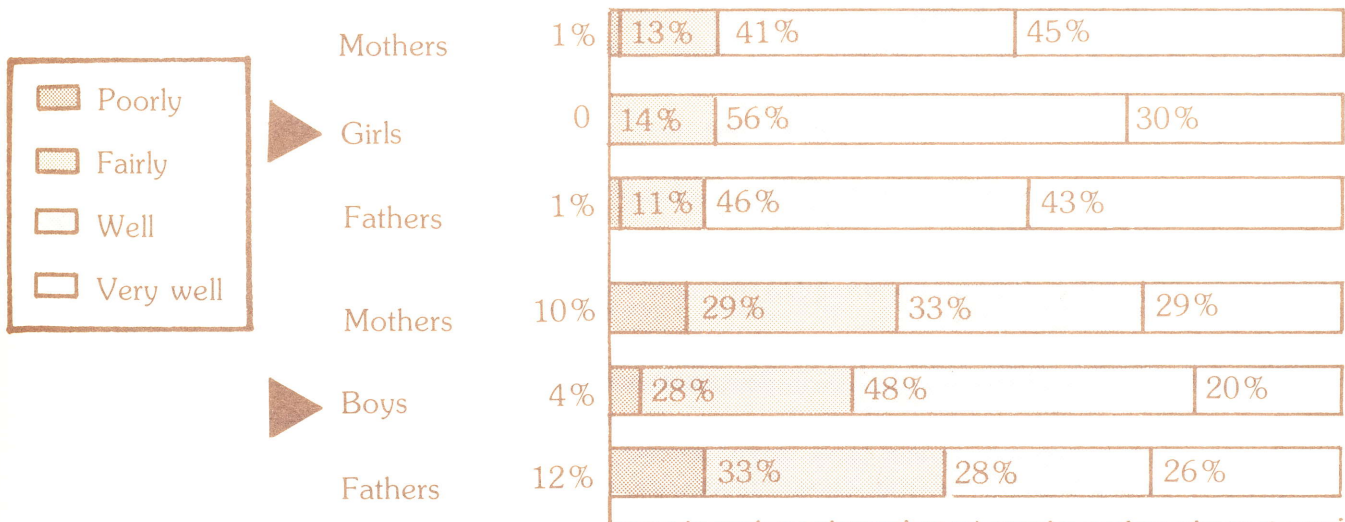
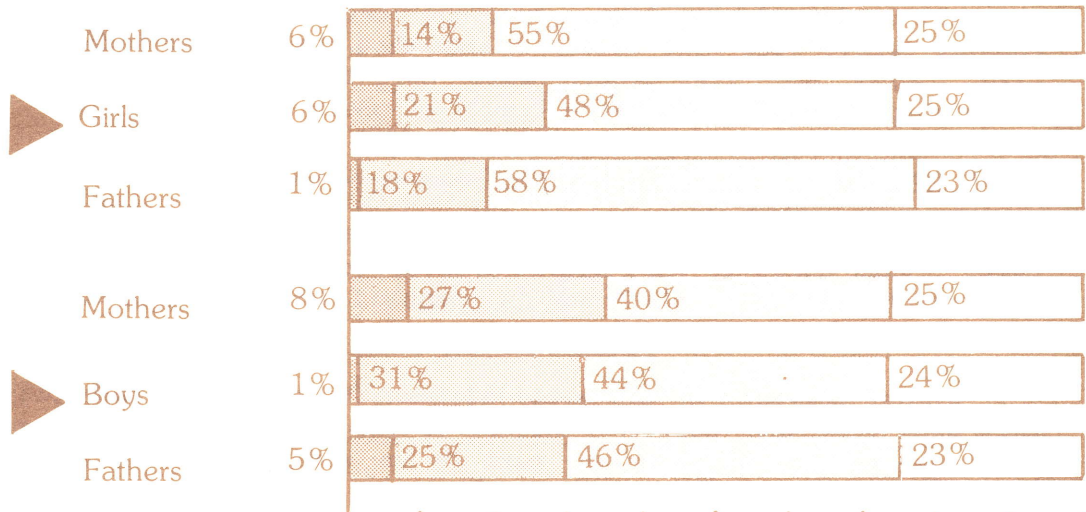


FIGURE 32. Ratings of mathematics achievements of early adolescents.



Early Adolescents and Their Pets

Many parents and adults who work with early adolescents believe that it is beneficial for youths to have pets or to care for an animal. Most feel that this is an important way to develop responsibility--that developmental task of autonomy. There is also a belief that pets provide a "pal" with whom early adolescents can talk and play--perhaps something to work with on the task of identity.

In order to explore what roles pets do play in the life of early adolescents, the youths were asked a number of questions related to pets in order to look at other characteristics of early adolescence in relation to pet ownership.

WHO HAS PETS?

Almost 90 percent of the youths interviewed said that they had cared for an animal for a long period of time (a month or more). Dogs were the more frequently owned pet (40%). Girls were more likely to own cats than boys were. Boys were more likely to own a large animal (horses*****) than girls were. Other findings are:

1. Age made no difference in pet ownership.
2. There were no differences between rural and urban animal owners.
3. Understandably, owners of horses and other large animals lived in rural areas.
4. Families in higher income groups were more likely to own pets.

WHAT PET OWNERS GAIN FROM THEIR PETS

Ninety-four percent of the parents said that they believed that caring for pets was important to the development of their early adolescent. Their belief is confirmed by the fact that pet owners had higher self-esteem than adolescents who didn't own pets. However, they did not have better responsibility skills than early adolescents without pets.

Adolescents said that they gained much from pet ownership: responsibility skills, friendship, love, fun, and knowledge about animals. Rabbit and hamster owners were more likely to say that they gained responsibility. Dog, bird, horse, and fish owners were more likely to say that they received friendship, love, and fun as a result of their pet ownership.

EARLY ADOLESCENTS, STRESS, AND PETS

Over one-half of the youths said that they had had a pet die in the last year. When asked to what degree this affected them, 60 percent said "a lot," 29 percent said "a little," and 12 percent said "not at all." There were no differences based on gender.

Almost one-half of the early adolescents said that they played with their pets when they were upset. Another 26 percent said that they sometimes did. Pets seem to play an important part in how early adolescents cope with stress.

Snacks and Nutrition

The tremendous amount of growth during early adolescence puts heavy demands on the body. Good nutrition is important to the early adolescent's physical needs as well as to his/her psychological needs. Most youths do not appreciate this fact, however.

Questions were asked about how often early adolescents snacked and what snacks they were eating. They were also asked where, if anywhere, they had learned about nutrition.

HOW OFTEN DO YOUTHS SNACK?

Over 63 percent of the youths said that they make snacks after school or in the evening almost every day. An additional 34 percent said that they make snacks once in a while; less than 3 percent said that they never make snacks.

WHAT KINDS OF SNACKS ARE EATEN?

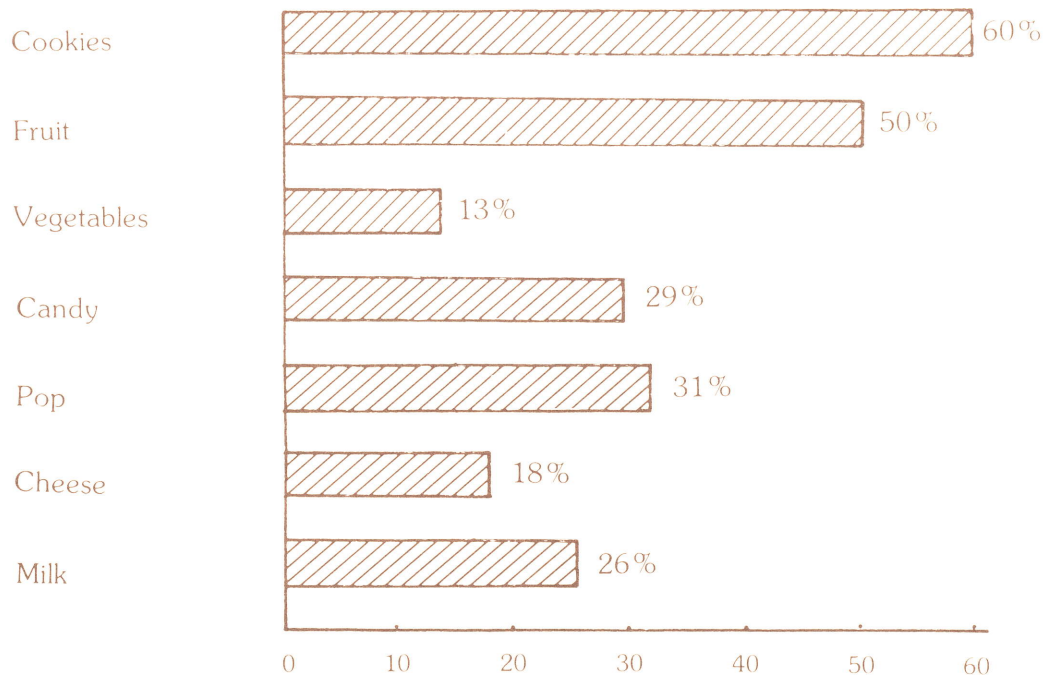
Cookies topped the list when early adolescents were asked what kinds of snacks they ate. The least eaten snacks of those on the list were vegetables and cheese. One-third of the youths reported that they snacked on soft drinks and one-fourth said that they drank milk as a snack. Boys were more likely to eat snacks in every category except fruit and cheese. These were more likely to be eaten by girls (see Fig. 33).

WHERE EARLY ADOLESCENTS LEARN ABOUT NUTRITION

Fifty-four percent of the girls and 45 percent of the boys said that they learned about nutrition from school. Nineteen percent that they learned about it from their parents, and 14 percent said that they learned about it from a combination of the two places.

FIGURE 33.

Snack preferences of early adolescents.



APPENDIX: Description of Sample

Early adolescents were chosen for this study using a stratified multi-stage cluster sampling technique and an equal probability selection method. This means that the study was conducted in such a way that all Michigan early adolescents in public and private schools who lived with their families had an equal chance of being chosen for the study. This also means that the sample provides reliable information about all Michigan early adolescents.

Twenty counties were chosen using the method described above. Two school districts were then chosen from each county. Student names were selected from lists provided from those school districts.

This sample included 304 youths--150 boys and 154 girls. There were 78 fifth graders, 70 sixth graders, 77 seventh graders, and 79 eighth graders. Of the 495 parents interviewed, 283 were mothers and 212 were fathers.

The sample and its relationship to the State of Michigan 1980 census information on families with early adolescents is described below.

Slightly more than half of the early adolescents who completed the survey were females. Three-fourths of the youths were evenly distributed over the ages of 11, 12, 13, and 14. These students were evenly distributed over grades five, six, seven, and eight.

Ninety-five percent of the youths lived with their natural mothers; 76 percent lived with their natural fathers. Almost 2 percent lived with adoptive mothers as well as adoptive fathers. Stepmothers accounted for 1 percent of the sample, and stepfathers accounted for almost 5 percent.

Eighty-two percent of the youths lived in two-parent homes. Sixteen percent lived only with their mother, and almost 2 percent lived only with their father. These proportions are very similar to the Michigan census data.

Eighty-three percent of the people in the sample were Caucasian. Blacks made up 16 percent of the sample, and slightly over 1 percent were Hispanics.

Almost one-third of the sample lived in a rural area; another 10 percent lived on farms. Eight percent lived in large cities of 100,000 or more persons, and 11 percent lived in the suburbs. The remaining 40 percent were divided almost equally among the following settings: small towns (under 5,000 people), towns (5,000-25,000 people), and cities.

The MEAS sample was very similar to the Michigan census information on income for families in this stage of the life cycle. Almost one-third of the households earned \$20,001 to 30,000. Another third earned \$30,001 to \$55,000. One fifth earned \$10,001 to \$20,000. Fourteen percent earned under \$10,000, and 5 percent earned more than \$55,000.

The parents in the MEAS sample were more educated than the Michigan population of parents with early adolescents. Almost twice as many parents in the sample had attended graduate or professional school (MEAS: 12.5%; census: 6.9%). Almost twice as many MEAS parents were college graduates (MEAS: 13.1%;

census: 6.9%). Half again as many parents in the MEAS sample as in the Michigan census had some college education (MEAS: 29.4%; census: 20.5%) Thus fewer sample parents had a high school education only (MEAS: 31.9%; census: 43.1%). Fewer had attended some high school only (MEAS: 8%; census: 17.1%), and fewer had ended their education at the eighth grade (MEAS: 5.2%; census: 7%).

In general, the sample parents were slightly older than the parents in the Michigan census. The majority of them were between 32 and 45 years of age: 23.8 percent were from 31-35 years, 31.7 percent were from 36-40, and 21.5 percent were from 41-45. Five percent of the parents were 30 or under. Slightly over 10 percent were between the ages of 46 and 50. Six percent were over 50.

Fathers were most likely to be employed by someone other than themselves (72.1%). Over half of the fathers reported doing skilled work. One-fifth of the fathers were professional people. Almost 15 percent were in management positions. Almost 20 percent were self-employed.

Twenty-seven percent of the mothers reported being full-time homemakers. Ten percent were self-employed, and 50 percent were employed by someone other than themselves. One-fifth of the mothers were employed in service positions; another third were in office work. Thirteen percent were professional people.