

Outcomes and Impact Quarterly

Volume 2
Issue 3 *Focusing on Individuals' Well-being*

Article 3

9-21-2022

An Assessment of Priority Community Needs and Issues in Summit County

Jared Hawkins
Utah State University, jared.hawkins@usu.edu

Lendel K. Narine
Utah State University, lendel.narine@usu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/oiq>



Part of the [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hawkins, Jared and Narine, Lendel K. (2022) "An Assessment of Priority Community Needs and Issues in Summit County," *Outcomes and Impact Quarterly*. Vol. 2: Iss. 3, Article 3.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26077/bfc5-0697>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/oiq/vol2/iss3/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Extension at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Outcomes and Impact Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.



An Assessment of Priority Community Needs and Issues in Summit County

Jared M. Hawkins & Lendel K. Narine

Abstract

Utah State University Extension conducted a needs assessment in Summit County to identify the most pressing social issues related to home and community. Key informant interviews with county stakeholders and survey data from county residents revealed that mental health and youth development are high-priority issues in Summit County.

Introduction

USU Extension provides research-based educational programs to residents to improve the lives of individuals, families, and communities (USU Extension, 2022). Within the Home and Community Department of USU Extension, faculty deliver educational programs and resources in areas such as health, wellness, finance, and relationships. Given a broad scope of potential topic areas, USU Extension conducted a needs assessment to determine which educational topics would be most beneficial for Summit County residents. USU Extension sought to understand the highest priority needs or gaps in societal issue areas (Altschuld, 2004). This assessment aimed to enable effective and efficient resource allocation to relevant programs that target high-priority needs (Narine et al., 2021).

Response

Following a three-phase needs assessment framework, the first phase entails gathering secondary data (Wikin & Altschuld, 1995). Several data sources were located from county and state government and nonprofit organizations. The major issues identified from secondary data were examined using content analysis to develop the key informant interview guide and survey.

In the second phase, qualitative key informant interviews were conducted with Summit County stakeholders to identify priority home and community-related needs. Stakeholders were asked questions, such as, “Based on your experience, what are some major issues or problems facing residents of Summit County?” and, “What additional educational resources are needed to address these issues?” Content analysis was conducted to highlight major themes from the interviews. Findings from the content analysis, secondary data, and existing USU Extension program efforts were used to generate a list of topics for investigation in the resident survey.

In the third phase, a Qualtrics survey was used to gather exploratory data from Summit County residents. Participants answered questions about their perceptions of various home and community issues and their access to educational resources on those issues. Participants also answered questions about their perceptions of the level of effort USU Extension should place on those issues. Data from the quantitative needs assessment were analyzed using Narine and Harder’s (2021) Ranked Discrepancy Model (RDM). Further, descriptive frequencies were used to explain the level of effort Extension should place on issues based on residents’ perceptions.

Participants

Qualitative key informant interviews were conducted with 31 county stakeholders, including leaders in government, healthcare, education, religion, and community. Stakeholders were invited to participate based on recommendations from colleagues and local partners. The stakeholders represented diverse cultural groups, ages, and geographic areas in Summit County.

Qualtrics survey data were gathered from a sample of Summit County residents ($n = 139$) through USU Extension email lists and social media posts. A majority of the sample lived in rural areas of the county (86%). Only two respondents completed the Spanish version of the survey. The majority of respondents were female (84%) and between 35-44 years old (31%). Most of the respondents were white (77%), and few identified as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino (4%). Respondents most often had a bachelor's degree (33%), and more than half (54%) were employed full-time. Finally, the majority of respondents were married (84%), and half did not have any children in their household (50%).

Results

Key Informant Interviews

Five major themes were identified from the key informant interviews as the most important home and community needs in Summit County (Figure 1). These included mental health, substance use, family issues, economic stress, and lack of resources for Latinx and rural residents. Stakeholders discussed these five themes as interconnected issues, with each issue affecting the others.

Mental Health: Stakeholders described an increase in mental health issues, especially for adolescents, and described significant barriers to accessing mental health support. General subthemes included COVID-19-related stress, suicidal ideation, lack of available and affordable mental health providers, and stigma. Subthemes specific to adolescents included stress/perfectionism, violence/bullying, unhealthy relationships, and lack of social activities. As an example of stigma and lack of help-seeking, one school leader said youth often “hide” and “deal with stress alone” for fear that “everyone will know” what they’re struggling with.

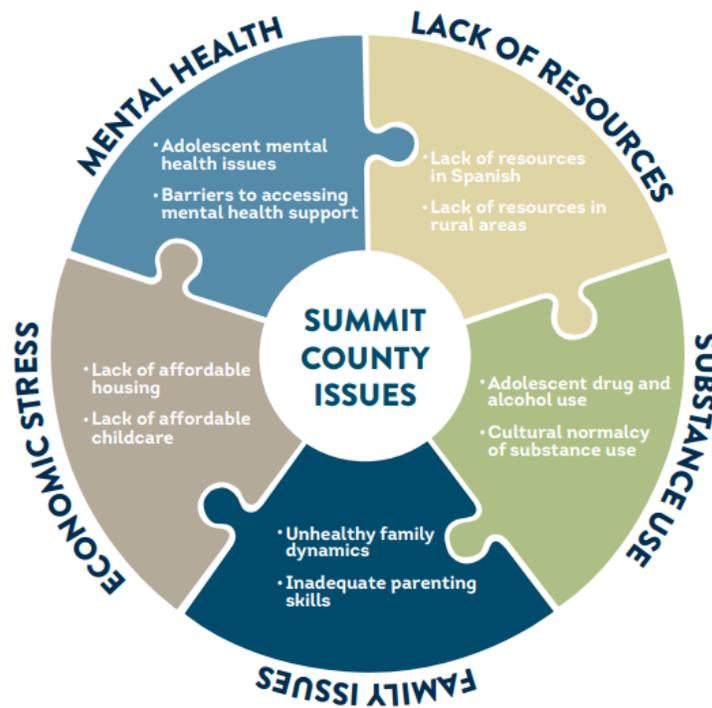
Substance Use: Stakeholders described an increase in drug and alcohol use among adolescents. One director of community programs explained how the “ski town partying culture” in Park City creates normalcy of substance use that particularly permeates the west side of Summit County.

Family Issues: Stakeholders discussed several family-related issues, including unhealthy family dynamics, lack of parenting skills, and inadequate support for adolescents’ mental health. For example, one school counselor said that many parents do not know how to respond to their children’s experiences with sexual orientation or gender identity, or their struggles with mental health issues and suicidal ideation. They added that, as a result, parents often minimize their children’s experiences, leading to a lack of connection.

Economic Stress: Stakeholders frequently mentioned the lack of affordable housing. They also highlighted the lack of available and affordable childcare and general financial stress (e.g., inadequate wages, working multiple jobs, etc.). One community program director said that many parents are working multiple jobs, and their stress and lack of time and energy create problems in the home.

Lack of resources for Latinxs and rural residents: Stakeholders pointed to a comparative dearth of resources and educational programs in rural areas of Summit County. Stakeholders also discussed the additional economic and social stressors experienced by Latinxs and the lack of resources and programs available in Spanish. One community leader noted the lack of Spanish-speaking mental health providers makes it difficult for some Latinxs to receive services.

Figure 1: Interconnected Issues in Summit County



Resident Survey

Needs: Table 1 provides a descriptive summary of the Ranked Discrepancy Scores (RDS) for each topic examined in this assessment. The RDS shows the gap between a “current” and a “desired” state. The current state reflects residents’ perceived level of access (A) to educational resources on the topic, and the desired state reflects residents’ beliefs about the importance (I) of the topic. A need (or discrepancy) exists when residents did not have sufficient access to educational resources on relatively important topics. A negative RDS suggests a discrepancy, an RDS of 0 represents equilibrium, and a positive RDS indicates a gap or need does not exist for that item. A greater *negative* RDS represents a larger discrepancy or need.

Based on results in Table 1, the top five needs from the sample of Summit county residents were; (1) helping youth improve mental health (*RDS* = -56), (2) helping youth manage stress (*RDS* = -54), (3) helping youth form healthy relationships (*RDS* = -53), (4) improving mental health (*RDS* = -42), and (5) reducing drug and/or alcohol abuse (*RDS* = -42). While these were the highest priority needs, all other items examined in the assessment were categorized as needs based on the *RDS*, except for enhancing parenting skills and learning career skills.

Table 1: Ranked Needs Based on the RDS among Summit County Residents

Rank	Items	n	Wilcoxon Ranks converted to %			RDS
			A<I	A>I	A=I	
1	Helping youth improve mental health	120	68	13	19	-56
2	Helping youth manage stress	121	69	15	17	-54
3	Helping youth form healthy relationships	121	68	15	17	-53
4	Improving mental health	121	59	17	25	-42
4	Reducing drug and/or alcohol abuse	117	60	18	22	-42
5	Managing stress	121	56	17	26	-39
5	Managing finances	116	59	21	20	-39
6	Making healthy food choices	117	52	21	27	-32
7	Learning food preservation techniques	116	48	21	31	-28
8	Strengthening couple/marriage relationships	120	51	26	23	-25
9	Running a business	116	47	28	25	-18
10	Learning cooking skills	115	44	29	27	-16
11	Enhancing parenting skills	119	36	37	27	1
12	Learning career skills	115	35	43	23	8

Note. A = Access to educational resources; I = Perceived level of importance

Program Effort by Extension: While the RDM identified community needs within the home and community context, some items may not be appropriate or relevant for Extension programming in Summit County. Therefore, Table 2 describes residents’ perceptions of the level of effort USU Extension should place on issues. Items were ranked based on the frequency distribution of responses. The results show mental health, personal financial management, nutrition, and family relationships were the top five (5) issues that Extension should place its efforts on. Consistent with results in Table 1, mental health appears to be a major priority issue for the sample of Summit County residents; it was ranked as the highest priority need, and 71% of respondents indicated Extension should place a high or very high effort on mental health.

Table 2: Perceived Level of Effort for USU Extension among Summit County residents

Rank	How much effort do you think USU Extension should spend on these issues and topics?	N	%				
			N	L	M	H	V
1	Mental health	139	4	4	21	45	26
2	Personal financial management	138	1	7	35	39	18
3	Nutrition	138	1	7	39	39	14
4	Family relationships	135	4	8	33	44	10
4	Drug and/or alcohol abuse	137	4	8	40	33	15
5	Food preservation	138	1	15	41	28	15

5	Parenting skills	134	6	10	36	37	10
6	Cooking	139	1	14	48	25	12
6	Workforce readiness	135	2	12	47	30	8
7	Couple/Marriage relationships	136	5	11	45	29	10
8	Language acquisition	138	2	19	49	18	12
9	Entrepreneurship	138	1	19	46	28	5
10	Sewing/quilting	137	2	31	44	20	4

Note. N = None; L = Low; M = Moderate; H = High; V = Very High

Public Value

This needs assessment provides a framework for examining county issues to direct educational programming. USU Extension in Summit County found that the highest ranked needs were helping youth improve mental health, manage stress, and form healthy relationships. Survey participants reported that USU Extension should focus a high level of effort on mental health. A summary report of results was shared with local organizations to inform stakeholders and facilitate partnerships in addressing county needs. USU Extension will use the results of this needs assessment to develop and implement programs that target high-priority issues. Using these findings, USU Extension in Summit County will focus its home and community program efforts on mental health and youth development.

References

- Altschuld, J. W. (2004). Emerging dimensions of needs assessment. *Performance Improvement*, 43(1), 10-15.
- Boyle, P. G. (1981). *Planning better programs* (pp. 143-159). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Narine, L. K., Ali, A. D., & Hill, P. A. (2021). Application of a three-phase needs assessment framework to identify priority issue areas for Extension programming. *The Journal of Extension*, 58(4), Article 24. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol58/iss4/24>
- Narine, L. K., & Harder, A. (2021). Comparing the Borich model with the Ranked Discrepancy Model for competency assessment: A novel approach. *Advancements in Agricultural Development*, 2(3), 96-111. <https://doi.org/10.37433/aad.v2i3.169>
- USU Extension. (2022). About Us | USU Extension. [online] Extension.usu.edu. Available at: <<https://extension.usu.edu/about-us>> [Accessed 11 July 2022].
- Witkin, B. R., & Altschuld, J. W. (1995). *Planning and conducting needs assessments: A practical guide*. Sage.