

Does History Repeat Itself? Replication of the 1984 Public Policy Survey

Cheryle Jones Syracuse (NC) – Past National President (2000) and Historian, Christine Kniep (WI) – Past National President (2002), and Dave Beebe (TX) – Executive Director

Family and Consumer Science Extension Educators across the nation are in a unique position of being in close touch with women and families at county and community levels. Educators pride themselves for reaching the "grass roots" educational needs of the consumers with whom they work.

Meeting the needs of their clients has been a goal of members of the National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Science since the Association's inception in 1934. In 1984, during the 50th anniversary year, the Association conducted a survey to determine the major concerns of families. The results of the survey were used to promote the work of the Association's members, launch a public policy education program for members and give direction to decision makers, business leaders and volunteer organizers.

One of the outcomes of the survey was an educational resource on insurance produced for NAEHE/NEAFCS. One packet was sent to each county office.

A press conference was held on Monday September 10, 1984 during the Association's (then NAEHE) Annual Meeting in New York City. Chesebrough Ponds, Inc. sponsored this press conference and Elaine Rose-Ruderman, New York Consumer Affairs Extension Associate, presented the results of the survey. Two instrumental people from Chesebrough Ponds, Inc. that provided guidance for the project were Grace Richardson, Director of Consumer Affairs, and Kenneth Lightcap, Vice President of Public Affairs and Investor Relations. Also prior to presenting the findings of the survey, a videogram, *Helping You Put Knowledge to Work*, developed by Betty Fleming of ES-USDA, was shown to the press.

According to Charlotte Young, the Association's President that year, "The NAEHE 50th press conference was the first of its kind for the Association with the theme being *Major Concerns of Families in the 80's*. As a result of the press conference, a graphic reporting the survey appeared in the next day's *USA Today*. Young also remembers that "copies of the *USA Today* article were as scarce as hen's teeth the next morning and not many available and the attendees scooped them up fast. To make the front page was really unbelievable."

1984 SURVEY DESIGN

With the help of a steering committee and two USDA specialists, 13 issues were selected based on their timeliness and relevance to priority areas of the Extension Home Economics program. Members were asked to rank these issues based on "how concerned the majority of the people in their counties or area were about each of these 13 issues."

The original survey was sent to a random sample of active members in each state/region. Anna-Mae Kobbe, who was President-Elect in 1984, remembers physically pulling the labels from the lists and affixing them to the envelopes in the mail survey.

The responses were received from 547 Extension Home Economists out of a sampling of 856 names (25% of the membership). The completed questionnaires represented a 64% response rate.

The leading public policy issue in 1984 was **medical costs**. Meeting medical costs was ranked first by 36% of all respondents and identified as one of the top three most important issues by a total of 61%. The second most important concern was **pay equity for women**, given top choice by 19% of the respondents and named amount the three most important issues by 40%.

Two issues, closely related, virtually tied as a third ranked choice. The problem of **preschool childcare** was cited by 31% of the respondents, and **care for the elderly** was identified by 30%.

To determine the issues not already covered, an open response question asked respondents to list three concerns of families which were now or could become problems in the future. A wide range of problems emerged; however, it was interesting to note that **high unemployment and lack of jobs** were mentioned by almost a fifth (19.4%) of all respondents. **Difficulties in family relationships and parenting** emerged as the second most frequently mentioned concern (15%) and **housing problems and the cost of housing** were mentioned 11% of the time.

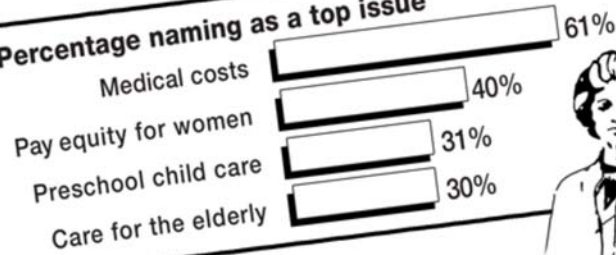
USA SNAPSHOTS

A look at statistics that shape the nation

Medical costs top concern

Rising medical costs are cited, in a report released today, as the most important public issue facing American families in a survey of over 500 extension economists from across the USA.

Percentage naming as a top issue



Source: National Association of Extension Home Economists

USA Today — September 11, 1984

For more information on the 1984 survey including purpose, design, the 13 public policy issues, results and implications, [visit this section of the Association's historical archives](#).

In 2009 the survey was replicated to determine if current family and public policy needs have changed in the last 25 years. While the 1984 survey was conducted by mail the 2009 survey was sent electronically. The findings of this historical survey will be released to the members and the press for the Association's 75th Anniversary celebration in Birmingham, Alabama in September, 2009.

Proud Sponsor of the  Public Service Campaign