

Simply Stated...

June 2009

Impact of Economic Downturn on SC Teen Pregnancy Prevention

In **troubled economies** the greatest impact is often felt by those working in social service, education and non-profit organizations. When these organizations are faced with **shrinking budgets** and **decreased funding**, it is reasonable to expect that the services they provide will also be affected. Teen pregnancy prevention programs in South Carolina often rely on public dollars (both state and local) to support their services and the impact of the current economy on these organizations is especially telling. In recent years, South Carolina and the country as a whole have seen reversals of the progress made in reducing teen pregnancy rates during the late 1990s and early 2000s. The **teen pregnancy rate increased** in South Carolina by 8% from 2004 to 2006. There has never been a more important time to **focus on teen pregnancy prevention**. The SC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (Campaign) recently initiated a survey of pregnancy prevention organizations from across the state, with a particular focus on programs that receive public dollars—Medicaid Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Services (MAPPS) and Community Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (CAPP) funding. The purpose of the survey was to better understand **how local organizations are coping** with the effects of the economy and more importantly, to gauge how the Campaign could **best support** these local organizations during the current downturn and beyond.

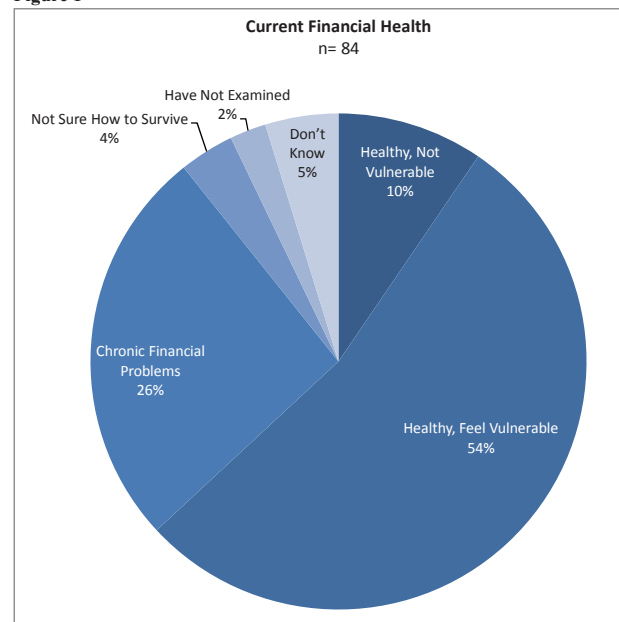
METHODS

An online survey was created, modeled on similar surveys developed by the South Carolina Association of Nonprofit Organizations (SCANPO) and the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. Dissemination occurred through an email distribution list with follow up emails sent to organizations that receive MAPPS/CAPP funding. Survey instructions indicated that only one person per organization, with knowledge of the organization's financial status, should complete the survey. Eighty-six organizations, including 38 that receive MAPPS/CAPP funding, serving 34 SC counties, participated. Some organizations did not complete some questions. As a result, several questions have fewer than 86 responses.

KEY FINDINGS

IMPACT OF ECONOMIC DOWNTURN: Ninety percent (90%) of all organizations indicated that they had been impacted by the economic downturn (Figure 1). Perhaps

Figure 1



more telling, slightly more than half (54%) showed concern about the future even though they characterized their current financial status as healthy. The next largest group (26%) reported that they had chronic financial problems but do expect to survive. Only 10% of the organizations indicated they are healthy and do not feel vulnerable.

FUNDING SOURCES: Slightly more than half of all organizations reported that they receive foundation or private funding. Of the 38 organizations that indicated they receive MAPPS or CAPP funding, more than half (55%) receive at least 80% of their overall funding from these public dollars.

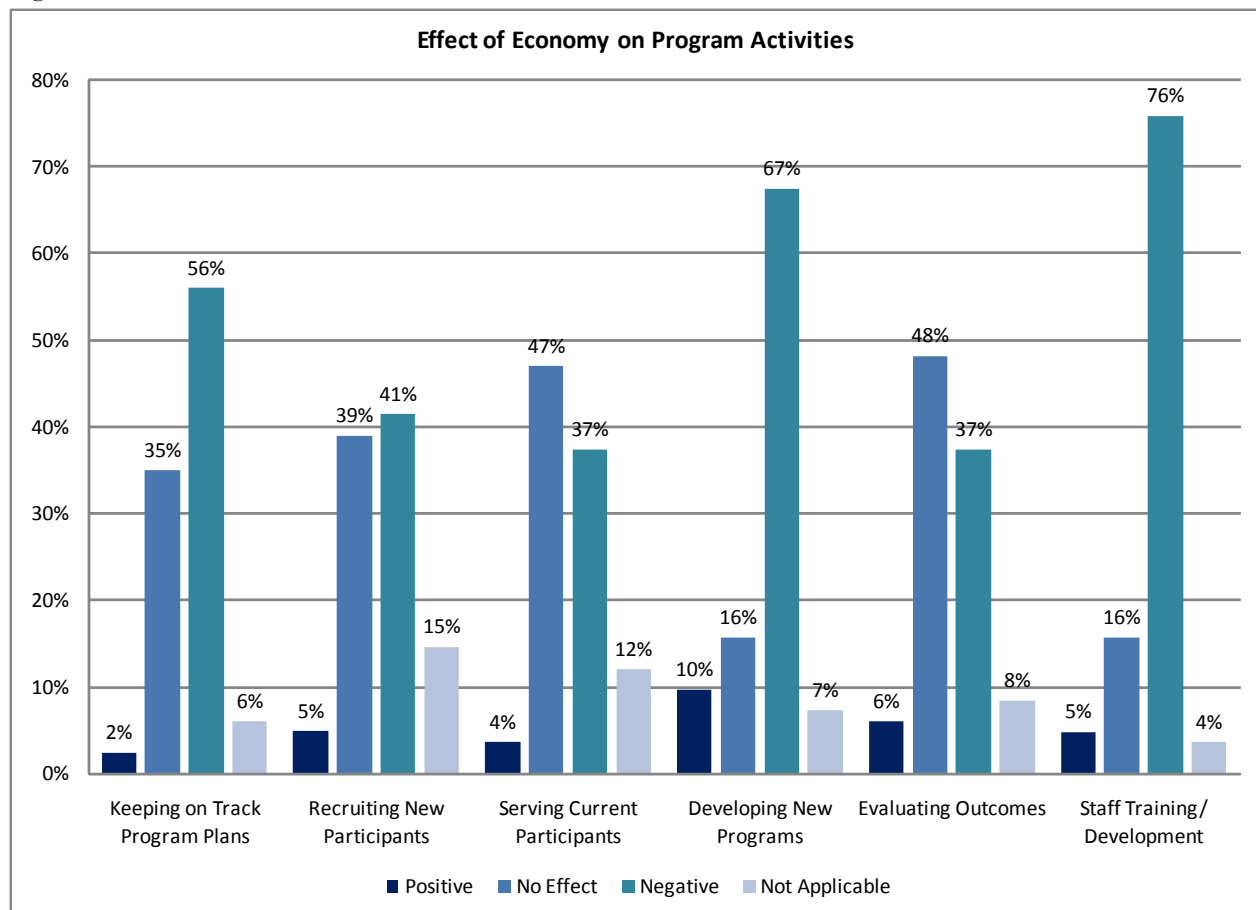
PROGRAMMATIC IMPACT: When asked about the impact of the economy on various program activities: 76% of organizations indicated staff training and professional development was negatively impacted and 67% reported that new program development was negatively affected. More than half (56%) responded they will have trouble keeping on track with annual program plans (Figure 2).

STAFFING: Twenty-three percent (23%) indicated their

organization had already reduced staff and 19% indicated their organization expects to make staff reductions in the coming year. Of those that had lost staff, the most common positions reduced were direct service/program staff (75%) and administrative staff (65%). The loss of direct service and program staff has a direct correlation with the number of youth agencies are able to serve. Nearly half (49%) indicated they were “unsure” or “it depends on circumstances” if they make staff reductions this year.

PROACTIVE APPROACHES: In response to financial pressure, local programs reported making several proactive changes in their internal operations and future planning. This is a positive signal that organizations are trying to do what they can to continue offering services even if funding is reduced. More than half of organizations (56%) reported increasing their use of electronic communications. Fifty-nine percent (59%) of organizations reported they are currently seeking new funding sources and another 20% are considering seeking new funding sources. Eighty-one percent (81%) of organizations indicated they are currently engaged in strategic planning or considering it.

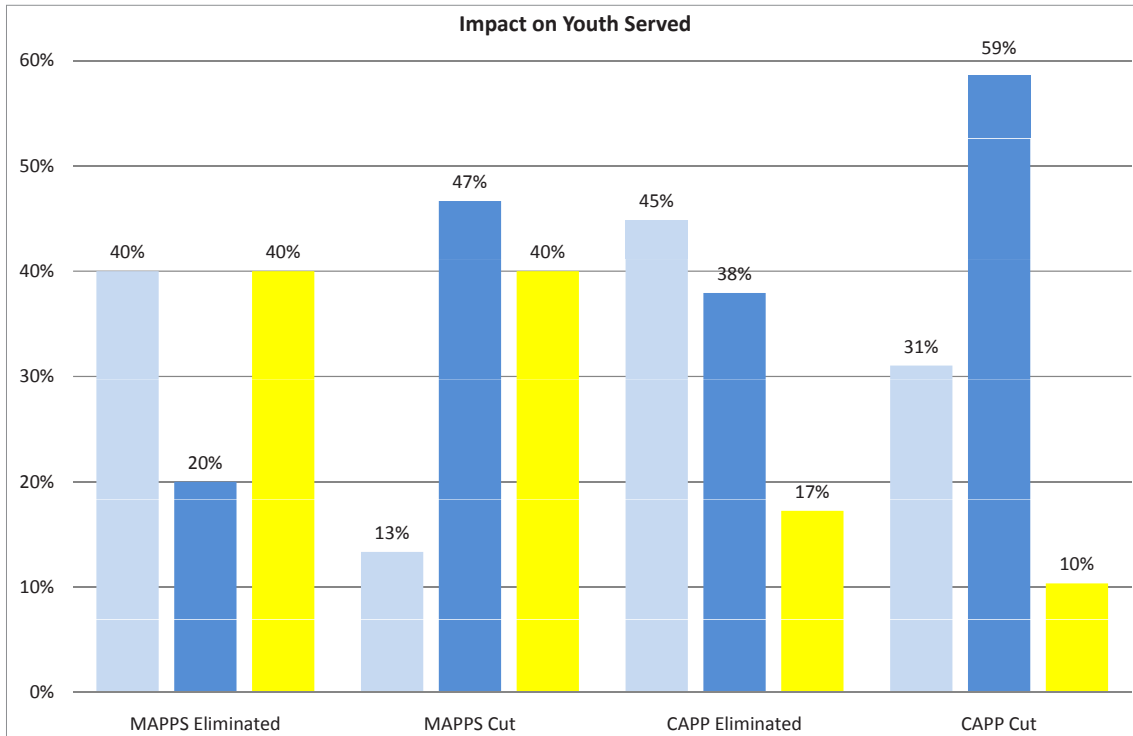
Figure 2



IMPACT ON YOUTH IF MAPPS/CAPP FUNDING CUT OR ELIMINATED

Forty percent (40%) of organizations that receive MAPPS funding indicate they would stop serving youth if MAPPS funding were eliminated and 45% of organizations that receive CAPP funding indicate they would stop serving youth if CAPP were eliminated (Figure 3). Sixty percent (60%) of MAPPS recipients and 83% of CAPP recipients would serve either no youth or significantly fewer youth without these sources of funding. The majority (74%) of organizations included in this survey reported that they serve at least 100 youth annually.

Figure 3



DISCUSSION

Almost all organizations (90%) indicated that the economic downturn has impacted their teen pregnancy prevention program. More than half (54%) indicated their organization is currently healthy, but there is concern about the future. Many organizations have already made staff reductions or plan to do so in the coming year. Organization-level stress, including staff reductions and financial instability, can greatly affect an organization's ability to impact the youth they serve. Continued reductions of this nature, particularly the elimination of staff positions that work directly with youth could have serious implications on the quantity and quality of programming available.

Organizations reported a negative impact on multiple dimensions of program operations. The most common categories included staff training and professional development (75%) and developing new programs (67%). While reducing training and professional development is an understandable response to such conditions, this reduction could have implications for staff retention and for the quality of programming delivered. Training and program development are connected; without increasing the skills and training of staff, it may be more challenging to deliver innovative programs to youth.

Thirty-eight of the 86 (42%) organizations indicated they receive MAPPS and/or CAPP funding. The majority of these organizations reported the elimination or reduction of these sources of funding would be a major blow to the number of youth served and the number of staff retained to provide services. This finding underscores the significance of continued state funding for pregnancy prevention services. Fortunately, despite the negative impact the economy appears to be having, organizations indicated they are taking a proactive approach by seeking new sources of funding, engaging in strategic planning and cutting costs where they are able.

NEXT STEPS

In light of the challenges facing teen pregnancy prevention in South Carolina, the SC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is increasing its effort to support local organizations. The combination of strained budgets and a struggling economy have the potential to negatively impact already increasing teen pregnancy rates. Attention to sustainability, continuous quality improvement and outcomes is critical.

To this end, the Campaign is committed to:

- 1. Expansion of current education offerings.** Organizations who responded to the survey identified several topics of interest for future training including grant writing (44%), using data for marketing (43%), and strategic planning (38%). This interest underscores the positive steps local organizations are taking to deliver services during the economic downturn and a central way the Campaign can support them.
- 2. Emphasis on outcomes.** The Campaign will expand opportunities for mini-grants to local teen pregnancy prevention programs in the coming year. An emphasis of these mini-grants will be replication of research proven programs and improved behavioral outcomes for young people.
- 3. State and national level advocacy.** The SC Campaign recognizes the need for a sustained commitment in teen pregnancy prevention. There are few investment opportunities, especially in the current time, that guarantee a return. An investment in teen pregnancy prevention can do exactly that. We can no longer afford to pay the costs, both economic and social, that are associated with a failure to do our part in investing in this critical issue.

ABOUT THE SC CAMPAIGN

Now in its 15th year, the SC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy works state-wide to prevent adolescent pregnancy in South Carolina through education, technical assistance, public awareness, advocacy and research. The Campaign is the only organization in the state, working in all 46 counties, to reduce teen pregnancy.

The Campaign promises to:

- **Communicate** with and listen to parents, providers, key leaders and community members throughout South Carolina to gain an increased understanding of local needs and assets;
- **Customize approaches** that combine evidence-based approaches with the unique fabric of every community it serves;
- **Increase the capacity** of community members (parents, youth serving organizations, school staff, faith leaders and youth) to address the complex issue of teen pregnancy; and
- **Commit and fully invest** in prevention for the long term.

*Written by Shannon Flynn, MSW, Director of Research & Evaluation
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