Trends in Marathon County LIFE Survey Results, 2013 - 2019

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Executive Summary

This is the first year that a database has been created to combine data from multiple years of the LIFE surveys conducted by the United Way of Marathon County every other year for the past twenty years. This report summarizes the results from the 2013, 2015, 2017 and 2019 surveys.

The LIFE survey has evolved over time with changes in topics and answer options. This report details what these changes have been relative to the 2019 survey and discusses why the SRC included or excluded responses from prior years in the historic database. Because some of the data included involve a certain amount of interpretation of the degree to what different answer options mean, it is important to understand the caveats associated with some of the graphs presented in this report.

Satisfaction with Community Services

All four LIFE surveys included in the historical database asked Marathon County residents how satisfied they were with a variety of community characteristics and services. The list of characteristics/services changed slightly through the years and the phrasing has also changed (e.g. accessibility vs. availability of things like childcare, health care, etc.). With that caveat in mind, Figures 1a – 1c show:

- There are relatively high levels of satisfaction with key health services (health and dental), the natural environment (parks, recreation and natural open spaces) and key social environmental factors (safe places to walk/bike and the arts and entertainment opportunities) in Marathon County.
- There are moderate levels of satisfaction with a number of other social factors (educational preparation for college or work, community information, rolling out the welcome mat for new residents), and family issues (family friendly activities, services for victims of domestic violence).
- There are low levels of satisfaction with some Marathon County factors relating to infrastructure (road maintenance, public transit), health (mental health services, alcohol and other drug treatment), vulnerable population (elders and children) and sense of community (tolerance of people from different backgrounds).
- Comparing 2019 results to earlier years, there were statistically significant declines in satisfaction in many factors, including availability of child and elder care, availability of services for victims of domestic violence, mental health services, information about community services, maintenance of roads and highways, public transportation availability, availability of arts and entertainment, how welcoming and tolerant of people from different backgrounds their community is.
Level of Concern about Marathon County Issues

The list of concerns considered has changed over time, as have the answer options. But, because respondents could identify the issues about which they were “Very Concerned” in all four LIFE survey years, and because this response suggests a degree of prioritization, the SRC calculated the percentage of people who were “Very Concerned” about each issue across time (Figures 2a – 2e).

- The factors that are of **greatest concern** to the most people are things that often impose risks on residents that are beyond their own control (drivers who are impaired by alcohol consumption or are texting and the negative consequences of illegal drug use).
- Factors of **moderate concern** focus on factors related to basic human needs (affordability of health care and jobs that pay enough to meet basic household expenses) and behaviors that many find problematic (prescription drug abuse and e-cigarettes/vaping).
- Comparing 2019 to earlier years, the proportion of respondents who were “very concerned” about the affordability of childcare, post-high school education, and use of e-cigarettes/vaping increased significantly.
- The proportion of Marathon County respondents who were very concerned about the affordability of health and dental care, illegal drug use, a number of jobs paying a living wage, the amount of quality time parents have with their children, and their safety in their homes and in their neighborhoods during the day or night were all significantly lower in 2019 than in earlier years.

The issues of greatest concern to Marathon County residents (**Figure 3a**) were:

- focused on key household welfare issues (affordability of health care and jobs that pay enough to cover household expenses) and social pathologies (texting and driving, drinking and driving, illegal drugs).
- Because choice options have changed over time, year-to-year comparisons are not perfect. However, there appear to have been significant declines in the proportion of Marathon County residents who identified the following as one of their top three concerns: affordability of health care, alcohol abuse, illegal drug use, drunk driving, availability of living wage jobs, and the amount of quality time parents have available for their children.
- It appears that concern is significantly higher in 2019 than in previous years with respect to e-cigarettes/vaping, texting and driving, unhealthy eating, and lack of physical activity.

Marathon County as a Place to Live

In 2019 and 2017 only, County residents were asked to assess how good Marathon County is as a place to live for adults, families, children, seniors, working parents, people with disabilities and people from different ethnic backgrounds. About 80% or more of respondents in both 2017 and 2019 agreed or strongly agreed that Marathon County is a good place to live for families, adults and children (**Figure 4**). Only about 50% felt that is the case for diverse ethnic groups.
What Connects Residents to Their Marathon County Community

In 2017 and 2019 only, LIFE respondents were asked what connects them to Marathon County. Friends and family are what connects the largest proportion of respondents to their community (Figure 5a). Organizations such as clubs and churches and access to needed services were also somewhat important connections to community.

Discrimination in Marathon County

In both 2017 and 2019, LIFE respondents were given a definition of discrimination and asked how many times in the previous year they had experienced discriminatory behavior (Figure 7).

- the proportion who said they had not experienced any discrimination fell from 77% in 2017 to 69% in 2019.
- There was a significantly higher incidence of people feeling they had experienced discrimination in 2019 compared to 2017.

Work Ethic

In 2017 and 2019, respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which people with whom they currently work or with whom they did work when they were in the labor force would agree that they have a strong work ethic. Respondents overwhelmingly feel that their colleagues would say they have a strong work ethic (Figure 8).

Job Satisfaction

Though the structure and, to a certain degree, the answer options changed, the most recent four LIFE surveys all asked about job satisfaction. The results show that a large majority of Marathon County respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they got satisfaction from their job (Figure 9).

Sources of Job Dissatisfaction

The most recent four LIFE surveys all included a question about sources of job dissatisfaction. The structure and answer options have changed substantially over the years and the reader is particularly encouraged to review the assumptions used by the SRC in constructing this data series. As noted, there is relatively little job dissatisfaction in Marathon County but there appears to be rising dissatisfaction with wage growth and, to a lesser degree, workers’ benefits package, advancement opportunities, and overall work environment (Figure 10a).
**Health and Wellness**

**Figure 11a** indicates that over the past two LIFE surveys, 87% of respondents said they had health insurance coverage in the previous year. The primary reason given for not having health insurance was that it was too expensive (**Figure 11b**).

**Use of Health Professionals**

**Medical Doctors.** **Figure 12a** shows that the proportion of respondents who said that neither they, nor a member of their family, avoided going to the doctor when they needed to has fallen fairly dramatically since 2013. The primary reason they didn’t go see a doctor when needed was because they couldn’t afford to do so (**Figure 12b**).

**Dentists.** There were significantly fewer respondents in 2019 compared to earlier years who always saw a dentist when needed (**Figure 12c**). As with doctors, the main reason Marathon County residents didn’t go to a dentist when needed was they couldn’t afford treatment (**Figure 12d**). The percentage of respondents saying this has increased significantly over time.

**Mental Health Provider.** **Figures 12e and 12f** show a similar pattern with respect to accessing needed services from a mental health provider; a significant decrease in the proportion of Marathon County residents who said there was never a time in the previous year when they or someone in their households failed to see a mental health professional if they needed such services and the primary cause of the decline was being unable to afford such services.

**Medical Debt**

There has been a significant decline in the proportion of Marathon County residents who reported having no medical debt (**Figure 13a**); in 2019 fewer than half the LIFE respondents reported no medical debt. Not only is the likelihood of carrying medical debt increasing, but **Figure 13b** shows such debt has risen steeply, especially among those with at least $10,000 in medical debt, which increased by 474% between 2013 and 2019.

**Drug Abuse**

Despite the extensive coverage given to prescription drug abuse, particularly opioid pain relievers, there has not been an increase in the proportion of Marathon County residents’ concerns about family members abusing legal (e.g. opioids) or illegal (e.g. heroin) drugs (**Figure 14**).

**Body Mass Index**

The proportion of Marathon County adults who would be classified as obese has increased and the proportion classified as normal has declined (**Figure 15**). The average BMI for 2019 (28.5) is
not significantly higher than the average over the 2013 – 2017 period (28.0) at the 5% level but is significantly greater at the 10% level.

**Missed Rent/Mortgage Payment**

In both 2017 and 2019, fewer than 10% of the Marathon County respondents said they had missed a rent or mortgage payment in the previous year (Figure 16a). There has been little change between 2017 and 2019 in the percentage of respondents who’ve missed paying their rent/mortgage 1 – 2, 3 – 6, or 7 or more months in the previous year (Figure 16b).

**Missed Utility Bills**

About one-in-five respondents reported missing at least one utility bill during the previous year in both 2017 and 2019 (Figure 16c).

**Missed Important Event Because of Lack of Transportation**

Only about 6% of respondents in both 2017 and 2019 couldn’t get to work, an appointment or other important event because they didn’t have reliable transportation (Figure 16e).

**Source of Transportation Problems**

Over time, the proportion of respondents who reported that they had missed work, a medical appointment or other important event because of a transportation problem has risen significantly (Figure 17a). Lacking a car or owning one that is unreliable is, by a substantial margin, the most common reason given for missing an important event because of a transportation problem (Figure 17b).

**Housing Issues**

About half the respondents in all four years for which we have data spend 30% or more of their total household income on housing (Figure 18a).

Figure 18b indicates that over the four most recent LIFE surveys, about 40% of Marathon County residents don’t have enough in savings to cover their household expenses for three months.

**Charitable Activities**

About 90% of respondents have consistently said that they/their family has donated items or money to charity and 75% reported helping someone outside their family or volunteering their time (Figure 19).
Well Water Testing

Because of major changes in answer option, it is not possible to compare 2019 LIFE survey responses to those in earlier years. For those with private wells, the dominant reason given for not having tested their water was that they have been drinking it for years without any problem (Figure 20).

Disposal Practices

Figure 21 shows that more than 90% of the respondents in all four surveys said they disposed of things they no longer wanted via recycling. The only other disposal practice used by a majority of Marathon County residents is donating goods.

Environmental Concerns

The environmental issues of greatest concern to LIFE survey respondents were the cleanliness of local lakes and rivers, energy conservation, and protection of natural and open areas. All three showed significant increases in concern in 2019 compared to 2017 (Figure 22a).

Patterns of Weekly Behavior

Over the past four LIFE surveys, 16% of the respondents said they don’t ever exercise for 30 minutes in a typical week (Figure 23a). Only about one in five get 30 minutes of exercise 5 – 7 days per week (Figure 23b).

Over the 2013 – 2019 period, about 15% of respondents said they never eat with family or friends in a typical week (Figure 24a). The average number of days that Marathon County residents eat with friends or family was significantly lower in 2019 than in previous years (Figure 24b).

Alcohol Consumption

The rate of binge drinking (5+ drinks in a single sitting) in Marathon County in 2019 was significantly higher compared to the 2013 – 2017 surveys (Figures 25a and 25b).

Figure 26a shows that the proportion of respondents who, over the previous 30 days, had not driven after consuming two or more standard drinks in an hour has been between 90% and 93% over the past 4 surveys. There are no clear trends with respect to the proportion of Marathon residents who’ve driven at least somewhat impaired 1-2 times, 3-5 times, 6-10 times or 10+ times (Figure 26b).
**Social Support System**

More than 90% of Marathon residents feel they have someone with whom they can share any personal problems they have (Figure 27).

**Demography of Respondents**

**Gender.** During the past two LIFE surveys, respondents have been fairly equally split between males and females (Figure 28).

**Age.** Despite drawing a sample that was weighted toward those under 35 years of age in both 2017 and 2019, Figure 29 shows that Marathon residents under 25 years of age were underrepresented and those over 65 were overrepresented in the data.

**Ethnicity.** Figure 30 indicates that the LIFE samples included a higher proportion of people who identified themselves as white (93% in 2019 compared to the census figure of 89%) and Asians (3% of the 2019 sample vs. 6% in the Census) and Hispanics (<1% in the 2019 sample vs. 3% in the Census) were underrepresented.

**Years Resident Marathon.** Because of changes to this question, comparisons of 2019 and earlier data are not possible. In 2019, more than 70% of the respondents said they had lived in Marathon County for more than 20 years (Figure 31).

**Education.** Figure 32 indicates that Marathon County residents with at least a 4-year college degree have been slightly over-represented in all four LIFE surveys, compared to data from the U.S. Census. Those with a high school diploma or less, in contrast, have been somewhat under-represented in the LIFE surveys.

**Relationship Status.** Figure 33 suggests that the relationship status of LIFE respondents has been fairly consistent across the four surveys considered. Roughly two-thirds of the respondents were married.

**Income.** Over the most recent four LIFE surveys, the proportion of respondents earning at least $50,000 per year, has been steadily increasing and is significantly higher in 2019 than in earlier years (Figure 35).
2013 – 2019 LIFE Data Analysis

Satisfaction with Community Services

The first question of the 2019 Marathon LIFE survey asked respondents how satisfied they are with a variety of aspects/services in their community. There were a number of somewhat subtle differences between how this question was asked in 2019 and 2017 compared to 2015 and 2013:

- 2013 & 2015 asked about “accessibility” of childcare, elder care, services for victims of violence, health care, mental health services, and dental care. In 2019 and 2017 they were asked about availability of these services.
- 2013 and 2015 asked about satisfaction with "Cleanliness of our lakes and rivers,” 2017 and 2019 didn't.

In 2019 and 2017, Marathon residents were asked about satisfaction with the availability of alcohol and other drug services or treatment, how well public K-12 education prepares youth for a career, how well public K-12 prepares youth for college, the availability of family friendly activities, and how fairly people from different backgrounds are treated. The earlier surveys did not ask about these either at all or asked about them in incompatible ways.

The SRC looked at the percentage of respondents who said they were satisfied or very satisfied with each aspect of/service in their community. We split them into three subgroups:

- Factors/aspects for which at least two-thirds of the respondents said they were satisfied or very satisfied in 2019 (high level of satisfaction).
- Factors/aspects for which between about half and two thirds of the respondents were satisfied or very satisfied in 2019 (moderate level of satisfaction).
- Factors/aspects for which a minority (less than 50%) of the respondents were satisfied or very satisfied in 2019.
Some key points from the above figures:

- There are relatively **high levels of satisfaction** with key health services (health and dental), the natural environment (parks, recreation and natural open spaces) and key social environmental factors (safe places to walk/bike and the arts and entertainment opportunities) in Marathon County (Figure 1a).
- There are **moderate levels of satisfaction** with a number of other social factors (educational preparation for college or work, community information, and rolling out the welcome mat for new residents) and family issues (activities, services for victims of domestic violence/abuse) (Figure 1b).
- There are **low levels of satisfaction** with some Marathon County factors relating to infrastructure (road maintenance, public transit), health (mental health services, alcohol and other drug treatment), vulnerable population (elders and children) and sense of community (fair treatment of people from different backgrounds) (Figure 1c).
- Comparing 2019 results to earlier years, there were statistically **significant declines** in satisfaction in many factors, including availability of child and elder care, availability of services for victims of domestic violence, mental health services, information about community services, maintenance of roads and highways, public transportation availability, availability of arts and entertainment, how welcoming and tolerant of people from different backgrounds their community is.
- No factors had significantly higher levels of satisfaction in 2019 than in earlier years.

In sum, despite an on-going economic expansion over the 2013 – 2019 time period, the satisfaction of Marathon County residents with a majority of community services and characteristics has been trending downward.

**Level of Concern about Marathon County Issues**

The second question in the 2019 and 2017 survey asked Marathon County residents how concerned they were with 23 issues that might affect their community. The list of concerns was similar to the factors/aspects included in question 1 (satisfaction with community services).

There are a number of differences between how this question was asked in 2019 and 2017 compared to 2015 and 2013. The biggest issue is that the answer options were quite different. In 2019 and 2017 answer options were very concerned, concerned, somewhat concerned, not concerned and don’t know. In 2013 and 2015 the answer options were “Very Concerned,” “Somewhat Concerned,” “Neither Concerned or Not Concerned,” “Not Concerned” and “Don’t Know/Not Applicable.”

Additional differences across the three years were:
• 2013 and 2015 asked about "Availability of assistance programs for those in need"; 2017 didn't.
• 2019 and 2017 asked about "Texting and driving" and "Meeting the needs of the growing aging population" and 2013 and 2015 didn't.
• In 2019 and 2017 we asked separately about "Unhealthy eating" and "Lack of physical activity" but in 2013 and 2015 asked about "Unhealthy eating and/or lack of physical activity" in a single question
• In 2019, residents were asked about their concern regarding “Affordability of safe housing,” but weren’t ask about concern about the “Availability of arts and entertainment” or “Meeting the needs of an aging population.

In 2019 and 2017 residents were asked about "Affordability of mental health, alcohol or drug services/treatment" and in 2013 and 2015 they were asked about "Affordability of mental health services."

Because respondents could identify the issues about which they were “Very Concerned” in all four years, and because this response suggests a degree of prioritization, the SRC calculated the percentage of people who were “Very Concerned” about each issue across time. The results are summarized in Figures 2a – 2e.

The issues are grouped as follows:

• Issues for which a majority of respondents in 2019 said they were very concerned were deemed to be of high concern.
• Issues for which between about 40% and 50% of respondents said they were very concerned were classified as being of moderate concern.
• Issues identified for which between 25% and about 40% of respondents were very concerned were said to be of some concern.
• If fewer than one-quarter but more than 15% of respondents said they were very concerned about an issue it is listed as being of slight concern.
• If fewer than 15% were very concerned, the issue was said to be of little concern.
Key messages from Figures 2a – 2e are:

- Based on these responses, the factors that are of greatest concern to the most people are things that often impose risks on residents that are beyond their own control. The dangers posed by other drivers who are impaired by alcohol consumption or are texting and the negative consequences of illegal drug use (crime, violence, etc.) were, by a considerable margin, of greatest concern to Marathon County residents.
- Factors of moderate concern focus on factors related to basic human needs (affordability of health care and jobs that pay enough to meet basic household expenses), and behaviors that many find problematic (prescription drug abuse and e-cigarettes/vaping).
• There are a relatively large number of issues that the SRC classified as being of some concern to Marathon County residents. Most of these are factors that tend to affect subsets of the overall County population, often in a very significant way: alcohol abuse, affordability of dental care and tertiary education, domestic violence, availability of services for those with issues related to mental health, consumption of alcohol or other drugs, the amount of time parents have to spend with their children, and the affordability of care for the elderly.

• Likewise, there was a relatively long list of factors the SRC classified as being of slight concern to Marathon County residents. This group included some factors that related to individual behavior (unhealthy eating, lack of physical exercise), some economic factors (affordability of child care and safe housing), and some social factors (availability of public transportation and acceptance of people from different backgrounds).

• Marathon County residents have relatively little concern about their personal safety (during the day or night in their neighborhood or in their homes).

• Comparing 2019 to the earlier years, the proportion of respondents who were “very concerned” about the affordability of child care, post-high school education, and use of e-cigarettes/vaping increased significantly.

• The proportion of Marathon County respondents who were very concerned about the affordability of health and dental care, illegal drug use, the availability of jobs that pay enough to meet basic household expenses, the amount of quality time parents have with their children, and their safety in their homes and in their neighborhoods during the day or night were all significantly lower in 2019 than in earlier years.

Issues of Greatest Concern

In 2019 and 2017, respondents were asked to consider the list of issues summarized in graphs 2a-2e and identify, in rank order, their top three concerns. In 2013 and 2015, respondents were asked to identify their three top concerns but were not asked to rank them. The list of issues, as noted above, changed over time. For this trend summary, the SRC identified the proportion of respondents who identified each issue in the 2019 survey as one of their top three concerns and ignored the ranking given in 2017 and 2019.

In Figures 3a – 3d, the SRC divided the concerns into four groups:

• **Highest concern issues** – there were at least 20% of respondents who identified these issues as their greatest concern.

• **Moderate concern issues** – between 10% and 19% of respondents identified these issues as their greatest concern.

• **Lower level concerns** – between 7% and 9% of respondents rated these as their greatest concern.

• **Lowest level concerns** – 6% or less identified these as their greatest concern.
Figure 3a: Highest Ranked Marathon County Concerns, 2013 - 2019

- Illegal Drugs
- Texting and Driving
- Health Care
- Drinking and Driving
- Living Wage Jobs

Figure 3b: Moderately Ranked Marathon County Concerns, 2013 - 2019

- Prescription Drug Abuse
- Elder Care
- Cost Post-High School Ed
- Alcohol Abuse
- Family Violence

Figure 3c: Lower Ranked Marathon County Concerns, 2013 - 2019

- E-Cigarettes/Vaping
- Dental Care
- Mental Hlth, Alc, Drug Serv
- Child Care Affordability
- Parents’ Quality Time
- Safe Neighborhoods at Night
Figures 3a – 3d indicate that:

- The issues of **greatest concern** to Marathon County residents (Figure 3a) focused on key household welfare issues (affordability of health care and jobs that pay enough to cover household expenses) and social pathologies (texting and driving, drinking and driving, illegal drugs).
- Marathon County residents have **moderately high levels of concern** about the social issues of abuse of alcohol and prescription drugs as well as domestic violence. Many were also concerned about the financial stresses caused by the cost of post-high school education and caring for the elderly.
- The issues of **lower concern** are likely to affect smaller subsets of Marathon County residents: the cost of dental and day care, availability of mental health, alcohol, or drug services, parents’ spending quality time with their children, use of e-cigarettes, and the safety of their neighborhood at night.
- Even **fewer County residents were concerned** about their personal safety in the home or in their neighborhood during the day, the lifestyle issues of unhealthy eating and lack of physical exercise, the affordability of safe housing, public transportation options, or their community’s acceptance of people with different backgrounds.
- Because choice options have changed over time, year-to-year comparisons are not perfect. However, there appears to have been significant declines in the proportion of Marathon County residents who identified the following as one of their top three concerns: affordability of health care, alcohol abuse, illegal drug use, drunk driving, availability of living wage jobs, and the amount of quality time parents have available for their children.
• Given the caveat in the previous bullet, it appears that concern is significantly higher in 2019 than in previous years with respect to e-cigarettes/vaping, texting and driving, unhealthy eating, and lack of physical activity.

Marathon County as a Place to Live

For Different Demographic Groups

In 2019 and 2017 only, County residents were asked to assess how good Marathon County is as a place to live for adults, families, children, seniors, people with disabilities and people from diverse ethnic backgrounds. In 2019, residents were also asked how good Marathon County is for working parents. In Figure 4, the SRC shows the percentage of respondents who strongly or somewhat agreed that Marathon County is a good place to live for each group.

![Figure 4: Respondents Who Strongly or Somewhat Agree Marathon County Is Good Place to Live, 2017 - 2019](image)

Roughly three-quarters or more of the 2019 respondents felt that Marathon was a good place to live for families, adults, children, seniors and working parents. Fewer than 60% felt the County was a good place for young adults (18-29), people with disabilities or people from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The decline for young adults between 2017 and 2019 is statistically significant.
Why People Choose to Live in Marathon County

In 2017 and 2019 (but not in either 2013 or 2015), people were asked to identify up to three reasons they have chosen to live in Marathon County. A factor was identified as “more important” if at least 25% of the respondents selected it (Figure 5a) as less important if less than 25% did so (Figure 5b).

Tables 5a and 5b indicate:

- The primary reason, people live in Marathon County, by more than a factor of 2, is to be near friends and family.
• More than one-quarter of all respondents said they live in Marathon County because of the rural lifestyle it affords, the size of their community, job opportunities, and because they feel safe.

• One-quarter or less of 2019 respondents said they live in the County because it is a good place to raise kids, it offers a low cost of living, has good schools, and recreation opportunities.

• Few live in Marathon County because they find it to be a welcoming community or the entertainment opportunities.

• Compared to 2017, significantly higher proportions of 2019 respondents said they choose to live in Marathon County because of its rural lifestyle and because it is a safe community.

**What Connects You to Your Marathon County Community**

In 2017 and 2019, LIFE respondents were asked to select the factor that most connects them to their community in Marathon County. This question was not asked in 2015 or 2013. Responses for the past two surveys are summarized in Figure 6.

![Figure 6: Connections to Marathon County Communities, 2017 - 2019](image)

Figure 6 indicates that:

• Friends and family are what connects the largest proportion of respondents to their community.

• Organizations such as clubs and churches and access to needed services were also somewhat important connections to community.

• There were significant declines from 2017 to 2019 in the proportion saying they are linked to their community through friends and family, organizations, and through the services they access there.
None of the factors showed significant increases in importance.

**Discrimination in Marathon County**

In both 2017 and 2019 (but not in 2013 and 2015), respondents were given the following definition of discrimination, *“Discrimination occurs when a person is treated unfairly based upon personal characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, income, religion, disability or handicap, etc.”* They were then asked to estimate how many times in the previous year they, or members of their household, had experienced discrimination in Marathon County. Answer options were: none, one time, two – five times, six – ten times, 11 – 20 times, twenty-one plus times and don’t know. In the analysis to follow, those who selected the “don’t know” answer option were excluded and we focus on the proportion who said they’d experienced no incidents of discrimination.

![Figure 7: Percent No Incidents of Discrimination in Marathon County, 2017 - 2019](image)

Key points from Figure 7 include:

- **In both years, more than two-thirds of the respondents said they had experienced no instances of discrimination** in Marathon County. But, the proportion who said they had not experienced discrimination fell from 77% in 2017 to 69% in 2019.
- **There was a significantly higher incidence** of people feeling they had experienced discrimination in Marathon County in 2019 compared to 2017.
- The proportion of respondents saying they experienced 2-5 instances of discrimination in Marathon County increased from 11 to 16%.
Work Issues in Marathon County

Work Ethic

In 2017 and 2019, respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which people with whom they currently work or with whom they did work when they were in the labor force would agree that they have a strong work ethic. This question was not asked in 2013 and 2015. In Figure 8, we track the proportion of respondents who said their colleagues would agree or strongly agree that they have a strong work ethic.

Key points regarding the work ethic of respondents in Marathon County:

- Respondents overwhelmingly feel that their colleagues would say they have a strong work ethic.
- Fewer than 2% said they disagreed or strongly disagreed that their colleagues would say they have a strong work ethic.
- The increase from 2017 to 2019 is not statistically significant.

Job Satisfaction

Respondents in 2017 and 2019 were also asked the extent to which they agree that they get satisfaction from their current job or got satisfaction from the most recent job they had. The 2013 and 2015 surveys had a question that read, “I am satisfied with my full time or part time job.” The 2015 and 2013 versions did not include a “neither agree nor disagree” response option. The SRC dropped the “neither agree nor disagree” responses from the 2017 and 2019 data and in the analysis to follow we focus on the proportion who agreed or strongly agreed that they get/got job satisfaction.
Figure 9 shows that:

- Over the 2013 – 2019 period a large majority of Marathon County respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they got satisfaction from their job.
- The responses for 2019 are not significantly higher than the overall average from previous years.

Sources of Job Dissatisfaction

The 2017 and 2019 surveys had a question that asked, “If you don’t get satisfaction from your current job or the one you had most recently, which of the following are reasons for your dissatisfaction?” Answer options were: not applicable, it’s boring, low wages, too few hours, no benefits, poor work environment, lack of advancement, and other. The 2013 and 2015 surveys had a similar question and most of the same answer options. However, the earlier surveys did not have a “not applicable” option, presumably because those who had said they got satisfaction with their job in the previous question were skipped over this question. To align answer options over the years, if a respondent said they agreed or strongly agreed that they get job satisfaction in the previous question, they were recorded as not applicable in this one. The 2013 and 2015 also did not have an “It’s Boring” option but did have a “Job does not use educational background.” The SRC assumed that a job that didn’t use one’s education would likely be boring. In the analysis that follows, the SRC excludes the “not applicable” responses, which were covered in the previous graph.

As noted in Figure 9, there appears to be relatively little job dissatisfaction in Marathon County. Table 10a indicates that there appears to be rising dissatisfaction with wage growth and, to a lesser degree, workers’ benefits package, advancement opportunities, and overall work environment. Again, because this question was asked in somewhat inconsistent ways over the years, interpretation of the results is somewhat challenging.
Figure 10b shows that very few Marathon County employees find their work boring, nor are they frustrated by having too few work hours.

Health and Wellness in Marathon County

Question 11 of the 2017 and 2019 surveys asked Marathon County residents if they had health insurance coverage in the previous 12-months and, if not, what prevented them from having such protection. While there was a similar question in 2013 and 2015, the answer options were quite different and the SRC recommended that the data from those earlier years not be included in the historic database.

Figure 11a indicates that over the past two LIFE surveys, 87% of respondents said they did have health insurance coverage in the previous year (Figure 11a).
The primary reason given for not having health insurance was that it was too expensive (Figure 11b). Very few Marathon County respondents said that they lacked health insurance coverage because their employer did not offer it.

![Figure 11a: Percent Marathon County Respondents with Health Insurance, 2017 - 2019](image)

![Figure 11b: Why Marathon County Respondents Had No Health Insurance, 2017 - 2019](image)

Use of Health Professionals

The next set of questions, in both the 2017 and 2019, surveys asked if the respondent or someone in their family should have seen a health professional (doctor, dentist, mental health provider) but didn’t. In both 2013 and 2015 these topics were also covered. In each case there was a separate “gate-keeper” question that asked, “Was there a time in the past 12 months that you or someone in your household needed to see a (doctor, dentist, mental health service provider), but could not?” Answer options were “yes” and “no”. The SRC coded “no” answers
as "NA" to correspond to answer options in 2017 and 2019. We coded the other 2013 and 2015 responses as:

- “did not know how/where to find provider” as "didn't know how to find provider,"
- "distance/transportation" coded as "distance/no transportation,"
- "did not have insurance" coded as "no insurance,"
- "no available appointments" coded as "no available appointments,"
- "had no means to pay for service" coded as "couldn't afford," and
- "chose not to" coded as "chose not to."

Medical Doctors

Figures 12a and 12b summarize the responses of Marathon County residents with respect to whether or not they saw a medical doctor when needed.
Figure 12a shows that the proportion of respondents who said that neither they, nor a member of their family, avoided going to the doctor when they needed to, has fallen fairly dramatically since 2013. Compared to earlier years, a significantly lower proportion of 2019 respondents said no one in their household had avoided going to the doctor when they should have during the previous year.

Figure 12b, in contrast shows a substantial, and statistically significant, increase in the proportion of respondents who said they, or someone in their household, didn’t go see a doctor when needed because they couldn’t afford to do so. The proportion who chose not to, or couldn’t get an appointment to see a doctor, have also increased significantly over time, though both are less important reasons for not seeing a doctor.
Figures 12c and 12d summarize the responses of Marathon County residents with respect to whether or not they saw a dentist when needed.

The pattern over time of Marathon County respondents who always saw a dentist when needed is very similar to what we saw with respect to medical doctors (Figure 12a). There were significantly fewer respondents in 2019 compared to earlier years who always saw a dentist when needed.

Also similar to medical doctors, the proportion who failed to see a dentist when needed because they couldn’t afford the treatment has increased significantly over time. The
proportion who chose not to go to the dentist has also increased significantly, but the portion who said they didn’t go because they lacked insurance coverage has actually fallen significantly.

**Mental Health Provider**

Figures 12e and 12f summarize the responses of Marathon County residents with respect to whether or not they saw a mental health provider when needed.

Figure 12e shows the now familiar pattern of a significant decrease in the proportion of Marathon County residents who said there was never a time in the previous year when they or someone in their households failed to see a mental health professional if they needed such services.
As for doctors and dentists, the primary reason for not going to see a mental health provider is an inability to afford the service. The percentage unable to afford mental health services was significantly higher in 2019 than in earlier years, as was the proportion who said they didn’t know how to find a mental health provider.

Medical Debt

In 2017, and 2019, Marathon County residents were asked to indicate how much medical debt their family/household is currently carrying. Answer options were $0, $1 - $999, $1,000 - $4,999, $5,000 - $10,000 and $10,001+. In 2013 and 2015, respondents were first asked if they had any medical debt; "No" answers were coded as $0. In 2015, if the respondent had medical debt they were asked how much and could select from the same debt categories used in 2017 and 2019. In 2013, respondents filled in a specific number and the SRC coded their responses into the ranges used in 2015 - 2019.

Because Figures 12b, 12d, and 12e all showed a rise in the proportion of Marathon County households forgoing health service treatments because they couldn’t afford them, the results depicted in Figure 13a should come as no surprise. Figure 13a shows a declining proportion of households who are carrying no medical debt. The decline depicted in Figure 13a is statistically significant. Based on these data, in Marathon County in 2019, about half the households were carrying some medical debt.
Not only is the likelihood of carrying medical debt increasing, but Figure 13b shows such debt has risen steeply over this time period. Compared to 2013, the proportion of households with medical debts of:

- Under $1,000 was 185% greater in 2019
- Between $1,000 and $4,999 was 160% higher in 2019
- Between $5,000 and $10,000 was 261% higher in 2019
- More than $10,000 was 474% higher in 2019

Clearly, the most rapid rates of increase were in the highest debt load categories, which is concerning.

**Drug Abuse**

In the 2015, 2017 and 2019 surveys, but not in 2013, respondents were asked, ‘In the past year, have you been concerned about someone in your family misusing drugs (prescriptions or illegal)?’ Answer options were yes, no, or don’t know.

Despite the extensive coverage given to prescription drug abuse, particularly opioid pain relievers, there has not been an increase in the proportion of Marathon County residents’ concerns about family members abusing legal (e.g. opioids) or illegal (e.g. heroin) drugs (Figure 14, next page). In all three years for which there are data, between 6% and 7% were concerned about this and another 2% - 3% said they didn’t know. Between 91% and 92% said they were not concerned about this.
Body Mass Index

Though it was not a question in the health and wellness portion of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to record their height and weight, which allows us to calculate the “Body Mass Index.” This is a widely used anthropometric indicator of obesity, which is often linked to health and wellness issues.

Height and weight information were gathered in all four years. The SRC calculated the Body Mass Index (BMI) for respondents using the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) formula \[ \text{BMI} = \frac{\text{weight in pounds}}{\text{height in inches}^2} \times 703 \]. Further, we used the CDC classification ranges; BMI under 18 = underweight; 18 - 25 = normal; 25.1 - 30 = overweight; 30+ = obese.
Figure 15 indicates that over time, the proportion of Marathon County adults who would be classified as obese has increased and the proportion classified as normal has declined. The average BMI for 2019 (28.5) is not significantly higher than the average over the 2013 – 2017 period (28.0) at the 5% level, but is significantly greater at the 10% level.

Household Finances

In 2019 and, for the most part, 2017, respondents were asked in how many months they had:

- Skipped meals to save money?
- Used a food pantry and/or ate a free community meal?
- Missed/Was late with your rent/mortgage?
- Missed/Was late with monthly bills (utilities, phone, etc.)?
- Missed work, a medical appointment or other important event because you had no transportation?

There were no similar questions asked in the 2013 and 2015 LIFE surveys. In 2017, the first question asked if they had, ‘Struggled to cover food expenses?’ and didn’t have a question about the use of food pantries or free community meals. The other three questions were identical in 2017 and 2019 and are summarized below. One of the answer options for this question was “Don’t Know” and these responses were excluded in the following analysis.

Missed/Late Rent/Mortgage Payments

In both 2017 and 2019, fewer than 10% of the Marathon County respondents said they had missed or were late with a rent or mortgage payment in the previous year (Figure 16a).

Figure 16a: Percent Marathon Residents Missed No Rent/Mortgage Payments, 2017 - 2019

![Figure 16a: Percent Marathon Residents Missed No Rent/Mortgage Payments, 2017 - 2019](chart)
There has been little change between 2017 and 2019 in the percentage of respondents who've missed paying or were late in paying their rent/mortgage 1 – 2, 3 – 6, or 7 or more months in the previous year. There is not a statistically significant difference in the average number of months of missing a rent/mortgage payment or making late payments over these two years.

**Missed Utility Bills**

Most respondents never missed or were late paying a utility bill (Figure 16c). About one-in-five respondents reported missing or were late with at least one monthly bill (utilities, phone, etc.) during the previous year in both 2017 and 2018 (Figure 16d).
Considerably higher percentages of Marathon County respondents missed or were late with at least one monthly utility bill than was the case for missing or being late with rent/mortgage payments. Still the changes between 2017 and 2019 are not significant statistically.

**Missed Important Event Because of Lack of Transportation**

Only about 6% of respondents in both 2017 and 2019 couldn’t get to work, an appointment or other important event because they didn’t have reliable transportation (Figure 16e).
As with the financial stress indicators just discussed, there were little (and not statistically significant) change between 2017 and 2019 in the proportion of the Marathon County population missing important events because they have unreliable vehicles (Figure 16f).

**Source Transportation Problem**

In 2017 and 2019 respondents were asked, ‘If, during the past year, you or someone in your household missed work, a medical appointment or other important event because you had no transportation, which of the following caused this problem?’ Answer options included not applicable, no car, unreliable car, couldn’t afford gas/cab fare, unable to drive, no one available to drive me, no public transportation, and other. Respondent could select as many answers as applied to their situation.

In 2013 and 2015 there were similar questions. Differences from 2017 and 2019 were:

- In the earlier years, respondents were first asked if there had been a time in the past 12 months when they, or someone in their family, had no transportation to get to a needed activity such as work, medical appointments, shopping, etc. If the respondent answered “no” to this question, the SRC coded them as “not applicable.”
- In 2013 and 2015, one reason for missing an important activity was “no car or unreliable one,” which were separate options in 2017 and 2019. The SRC combined the 2017 and 2019 responses into one category (=0 if neither chosen, =1 if either was chosen).
- The 2013 and 2015 option of “couldn’t afford gas” and “couldn’t afford cab fare” were two separate options. After 2017; these two options were combined into one.
- 2013 and 2015 included an “unable to drive because of my health” (= “Unable to Drive”).

![Figure 16f: Percent Marathon County Residents Missing Events Due Poor Transport, 2017 - 2019](image)
• “No family, friends, or volunteers were available to take me (=“no one available to drive me”).
• “No access to a bus” (= “No public transport (bus, cab)”).

In the analysis to follow, the SRC excluded “other” responses because of their disparate nature and “not applicable” responses to focus on the nature of transportation problems facing Marathon County residents.

Figure 17a shows that the proportion of respondents who reported that they had missed work, a medical appointment or other important event because of a transportation problem has been rising over time. Compared to 2013 – 2017, the proportion who missed an important event because of transportation problems is significantly higher.
There is a good deal of volatility in the specific types of transportation problems faced by Marathon County residents over time (Figure 17b). Lacking a car or owning one that is unreliable is, by a substantial margin, the most common reason given for missing an important event because of a transportation problem. Roughly one-third of the respondents in 2019 said they’d missed an important event because of the lack of public transport or because they couldn’t afford gas or cab fare. There are no significant differences between 2019 and the earlier years with respect to the issues summarized in Figure 17b.

Housing

In 2019 and 2017, respondents were asked if they spend 30% or more of their total household income on housing (including rent/mortgage, utilities, home/rental insurance, and property taxes). Answer options were yes, no, and don’t know. Similar questions were asked in 2013 and 2015 but included a “don’t care to say” answer option. For this analysis, the SRC eliminated the “don’t know” and “care not to say” responses.

![Figure 18a: Percent Marathon County Households Spending 30% of Income on Housing, 2013 - 2019](image)

About half the respondents in all four years for which we have data spend 30% or more of their total household income on housing. Though 2019 is slightly higher than earlier years, the difference is not statistically significant.

The second part of this question asked respondents if they have enough of a savings/rainy day fund to cover their expenses for 3-months in case of sickness, job loss, or other emergency. Similar questions were asked in all four years and, as with the preceding question, the SRC excluded “don’t know” and “don’t care to say” responses.
Figure 18b indicates that over these four survey cycles, about 40% of Marathon County residents don’t have enough in savings to cover their household expenses for three months. Obviously, the amount a given household would need in savings to cover expenses for three months depends on numerous factors (size of family, monthly rent/mortgage, commuting distance, etc.). But, according to recent data reported by CNBC the median level of household savings in the U.S. is $11,700 and 29% have less than $1,000 in savings. ([https://www.cnbc.com/2018/09/27/heres-how-much-money-americans-have-in-savings-at-every-income-level.html](https://www.cnbc.com/2018/09/27/heres-how-much-money-americans-have-in-savings-at-every-income-level.html))

The Marathon LIFE data seem to align with these national data, suggesting that a substantial proportion of residents would face financial stress if an unexpected calamity befell them.

**Charitable Activities**

All four LIFE surveys asked two questions about Marathon County residents’ charitable activities:

- Have you/your household donated items or made a financial contribution to a charity
- Helped individuals outside your household or/and volunteered in the community

Answer options in 2017 and 2019 were yes, no, and don’t know. The earlier survey versions did not have the don’t know option, so the SRC excluded those responses from the analysis.
Figure 19 shows that about 90% of respondents have consistently said that they/their family has donated items or money to charity in all four years of the LIFE survey. The proportion who said they have helped others outside their family or volunteered their time has been growing. The 75% who helped others or volunteered in 2019 is significantly higher than the average over the 2013 – 2017 period.

Environmental Issues

Well Water Testing

In the four most recent LIFE surveys, there has been a question about testing well water. However, the 2019 version included 11 answer options plus an “other, please describe. The 2017 survey included only six answer options plus an “other” and 2015 and 2013 only four options plus an “other”. Because there is so little commonality, it is not advisable to include the historical record in this analysis. Figure 20 shows the percentage of respondents in 2019 who selected each option as one of the three most important reasons they didn’t test their well water.

It should also be noted that 15% of the 2019 respondents didn’t select any of the options in Figure 20 and most answered subsequent questions. This suggests that 15% of the sample and 47% of those not receiving their water from a municipal system did have their water tested.

Nearly two-thirds of the 460 respondents in 2019 said they get their water from a municipal water service, so well water testing is not applicable. Nearly one-in-five respondents said they haven’t tested their water because they’ve been drinking it for year without any problems.
There are, however, a number of reasons given for not testing that would seem to be amenable to educational efforts:

- 8% didn’t realize they should test their water
- 5% didn’t know how to test their water
- 5% didn’t know what to test for
- 4% didn’t know testing is available
- 4% didn’t know testing is available

While the LIFE survey itself may have raised the consciousness of those who received it about testing well-water, these results suggest a more deliberative educational effort is warranted.

**Disposal Practices**

2019 and 2017 respondents were asked, "In addition to trash hauling, over the last year have you disposed of things by any of the following?" Answer options included: composting, donating, recycling, re-using, using a medication drop box, properly disposing of hazardous wastes, purposely buying products with less packaging, and other.

The 2013 LIFE survey did not include "using a medication drop box." In 2013 and 2015, there was an option that read "pay attention to packaging when buying products," which the SRC equated with purposely buying products with less packaging. Otherwise, choices across the last four surveys were identical.
Figure 21 shows that more than 90% of the respondents in all four surveys said they disposed of things they no longer wanted via recycling. The only other disposal practice used by a majority of Marathon County residents is donating goods (e.g. to Goodwill or similar organizations); the proportion of people donating goods was significantly higher in 2019 than over the 2013 – 2017 period. Proper disposal of hazardous waste declined significantly over the 2013 – 2019 period, but composting increased significantly. Other disposal methods were relatively constant.

Environmental Concerns

In 2019 and 2017, Marathon County residents were asked to indicate how concerned they are about: drinking water quality, the cleanliness of local lakes and rivers, the availability of drinking water, air quality, climate change, energy conservation, soil erosion, and protection of open and natural areas. Answer options were very concerned, concerned, neither concerned nor unconcerned, unconcerned and very unconcerned. There were not comparable questions asked in 2013 or 2015.

Figure 22a shows the environmental concerns for which at least two-thirds of the respondents reported being concerned or very concerned. The cleanliness of local lakes and rivers was the top environmental concern in 2019 (78% concerned or very concerned), followed by energy conservation (73%) and protection of natural and open areas (67%). There was a significant increase in the average level of concern about all three of these issues from 2017 to 2019.

Figure 22b shows the environmental concerns about which between roughly 50% and 60% were concerned or very concerned. The most rapid increase of all the environmental concerns was for climate change, which increased from 47% to 60% between 2017 and 2019. Other than availability of drinking water, the level of concern about all the other factors increased significantly over this two-year period.
Figure 22a: Top Environmental Concerns, Marathon County Residents, 2017 - 2019

- Cleanliness Lakes/Rivers
- Energy Conservation
- Protection Natural Areas

Figure 22b: Moderate Environmental Concerns, Marathon County Residents, 2017 - 2019

- Drinking Water Quality
- Air Quality
- Soil Erosion
- Climate Change
- Availability Drinking Water
The Respondents

Patterns of Weekly Behavior

From the 2013 to the 2019 LIFE surveys, Marathon County residents were asked, ‘In a typical week, how many times do you:

- Participate in 30 minutes or more of physical activity (walking, running, swimming, etc.)?
- Eat a meal at a table with family and/or friends?

Answer options included: zero, 1 – 2, 3 – 4, and 5 – 7. In 2013 and 2015, there was also a ‘don’t know’ answer option; these were excluded from the following analysis.

![Figure 23a: Percent Marathon County Residents Never Exercising 30 Minutes/Day, 2013 - 2019](image)

![Figure 23b: Number Days Marathon County Residents Exercise 30 Minutes, 2013 - 2019](image)
Figure 23a indicates that over the past four LIFE surveys, 16% of the respondents said they don’t ever exercise for 30 minutes in a typical week. Figure 23b shows that, for the most part, the proportions who exercise 30 minutes per day 1 – 2 days, 2 – 4 days, and 5 – 7 days in a typical week have also remained consistent. Roughly one-third each exercise 1 – 2 days and 3 - 4 days in a typical week. Only about one in five get 30 minutes of exercise 5 – 7 days per week.

Marathon County residents were also asked in the past four LIFE surveys how many days a week they typically have a meal at a table with family or friends. In 2013 and 2015, respondents had a “don’t know” answer option and these responses were excluded from the following analysis.
Figure 24a shows that over the 2013 – 2019 period, about 15% of respondents said they never eat with family or friends at a table in a typical week. Figure 24b shows a sharp drop in the proportion of Marathon County respondents who eat a meal with family or friends at a table at least five times a week. The average number of days that Marathon County residents eat with friends or family was significantly lower in 2019 than in previous years. Because these values had been quite stable over the three previous surveys, it may be that the 2019 figure was just a quirk of the sample. But, this is a metric that bears watching as it may be an indicator of increasing social isolation.

Alcohol Consumption

In both 2017 and 2019, Marathon County residents were asked to indicate the number of times in the past 30 days that they had:

- Consumed five or more drinks on one occasion, where a drink is defined as a 12 oz. beer, 5 oz. wine, or 1½ oz. liquor?
- Operated a motor vehicle after consuming two or more drinks in an hour?

The answer options for both questions were: 0, 1 – 2, 3 – 5, 6 – 10, 10+.

In 2013, respondents were asked to fill in a blank with the number of times in the past 30 days they had consumed five or more drinks. In 2015, respondents had the following response options: none, once, 2 times, 3-5 times, 6-9 times, 10 times and don’t know. The SRC recoded the 2013 and 2015 responses into the 2017/2019 categories and dropped the “don’t know” responses.

Figure 25a shows the proportion of respondents who said that they had never, over the past 30 days, consumed five or more standard drinks in a single sitting. Consuming five or more drinks in a single sitting is sometimes referred to as “binge drinking.” Figure 25b (next page) shows the proportion who’ve consumed this amount of alcohol during the past 30 days.

The rate of binge drinking in Marathon County in 2019 was significantly higher compared to the 2013 – 2017 surveys.
In terms the number of times Marathon County respondents said they had driven a car after having two or more drinks in an hour, Figure 26a shows that the proportion of respondents who, over the previous 30 days, had not driven after consuming two or more standard drinks in an hour has held steady over the past four surveys.
Similarly, there are no clear trends with respect to the proportion of Marathon residents who’ve driven at least somewhat impaired 1-2 times, 3-5 times, 6-10 times or 10+ times.

Considering Figures 25a/25b and 26a/26b together, the data indicate that there are many more respondents who admit to binge drinking than to driving under the influence.
Social Support System

In 2017 and 2019, respondents were asked, ‘Do you have at least one person you can talk to if you have a personal problem? Answer options for this question were “yes” or “no.” Nothing similar was asked in 2015 or 2013.

The vast majority of Marathon County residents feel they have someone with whom they can share any personal problems they have (Figure 27). The increase from 2017 to 2019 is not significant.

Gender

All of the LIFE surveys since 2013 have asked Marathon County respondents if they were male or female. In 2019, respondents had a third gender option of “other,” but no one selected that answer option.
According to the 2013 – 2017 American Community Survey of the U.S. Census, the overall adult population in Marathon County is about 50% male and 50% female. The 2017 and 2019 surveys have been more representative of the gender balance in Marathon County than were the data from 2013 and 2015.

Age

In all four Marathon LIFE surveys respondents were asked to indicate the age range into which they fell. Answer options in 2019 and 2017 were: 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, and 65+. Both the 2013 and 2015 surveys used the same age groupings except they included ranges of 65-74, 75-84 and 85+. The SRC consolidated these older age groups into a 65+ category.

The final column in Figure 29 shows the age breakdown of adults in Marathon County based on Census’ 2013-2017 American Community Survey. Despite drawing a sample that was weighted toward those under 35 years of age in both 2017 and 2019, Figure 29 shows that Marathon residents under 25 years of age were underrepresented and those over 65 were overrepresented in the LIFE data. The samples represent the age groups between 25 and 64 years of age fairly well.
Ethnicity

All four Marathon County LIFE surveys asked, ‘What racial or ethnic category best describes you?’ with answer options of Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Native American, White, Two or more races, and other.

In drawing the sample for both the 2017 and 2019 LIFE surveys, the SRC “oversampled” for people of color living in Marathon County. Despite this, as Figure 30 indicates, the sample included a higher proportion of people who identified themselves as white (93% in 2019 compared to the census figure of 89%) and Asians (3% of the 2019 sample vs. 6% in the Census) and Hispanics (<1% in the 2019 sample vs. 3% in the Census) were underrepresented.

Years Marathon County Resident

The four most recent Marathon County LIFE surveys all asked how long the respondent had lived in Marathon County. However, the answer options have varied from year to year:

- In 2019, answer options were under 5 years, 5 – 10 years, 11 – 20 years, and 21+ years.
- In 2017, answer options were under 5 years, 5 – 10 years, 15+ years, and lifelong resident
- In 2015, answer options were under 1 year, 1 – 5 years, 6 – 15 years, more than 15 years, and lifelong resident.
- In 2013, the respondent was asked to enter the number of years they have been residents.

Given these differences, comparisons across time are not possible. The U.S. Census doesn’t have a comparable measurement. Figure 31 summarizes the 2019 data with respect to number of years respondents had lived in Marathon County. More than 70% of the respondents said they had lived in Marathon County for more than 20 years. Fewer than 10% had moved to the County in the past 5 years.
Respondents’ Education Level

Respondents were asked to indicate the highest level of education they had completed in all of the LIFE surveys from 2013 onward. Answer options in 2019 and 2017 were no high school or GED, high school or GED, some tech or college, 2-year or associate degree, bachelor’s degree, and professional or graduate degree. The 2013 and 2015 surveys included answer options of “Master’s degree” and “Doctorate degree”, which were combined into the “Professional or Graduate Degree” category.
Figure 32 indicates that Marathon County residents with at least a 4-year college degree have been slightly over-represented in all four surveys, compared to data from the U.S. Census. In 2019, for example, 37% had a bachelor’s degree or a graduate/professional degree compared to only 25% in the Census. Those with a high school diploma or less, in contrast, have been somewhat under-represented in the LIFE surveys (25% of the 2019 LIFE sample compared to 35% for the Census).

**Relationship Status**

In both 2017 and 2019, respondents were asked about their marital status with answer options of single, married, separated or divorced, widowed, and other. In both 2013 and 2015 a similar question was asked, but “Separated” and “Divorced” were separate categories. The SRC combined them into a single “Separated/Divorced” category. “Other” responses were dropped from all years.

Figure 33 suggests that the relationship status of LIFE respondents has been fairly consistent across the four surveys considered. Roughly two-thirds of the respondents were married, 10% were separated/divorced and a similar proportion were widowed. About 15% of the respondents were single.

The U.S. Census reports comparable data, but for males and females 15 years of age or older rather than for adults (18 and older). As a result, it is not surprising that the Census reports a higher proportion of single Marathon residents (27%), and lower proportions of married (56%) and widowed (6%) residents. The proportion of separated or divorced Marathon County residents, according to the Census, is similar to the LIFE samples (11%).
Income

In 2017 and 2019, Marathon County LIFE respondents were asked what their household annual income range is with answer options of prefer not to say, less than $15,000, $15,000 - $24,999, $25,000 - $49,000, $50,000 - $74,999, $75,000 - $99,999, and $100,000 or more. In 2015, the answer options included $25,000 - $34,999 and $35,000 - $49,999, and the top category was $75,000 or more, but were otherwise the same as in 2017 and 2019. The SRC combined the $25,000 - $34,999 and $35,000 - $49,999 into a single category. In 2013, respondents were asked to enter a dollar amount. The SRC combined the top two income categories in 2017 and 2019 and placed the 2013 dollar amounts into the value ranges used in 2015.

The proportion of LIFE respondents who selected the “prefer not to say” option for this question has been falling over time; from 20% in 2013 to 15% in 2015 to 13% in 2017 and 12% in 2019. In the analysis to follow, the “prefer not to say” responses were excluded.

Figure 35 indicates that over the most recent four LIFE surveys, the proportion of respondents from households earning at least $50,000 per year has been steadily increasing. The average income category for 2019 is significantly higher than the average over the 2013 – 2017 period. The SRC and United Way of Marathon County tried to ensure a robust number of responses from lower income residents, by oversampling for low income households and sending 100 copies of the survey to social service agencies in the County that work with low income populations. Despite these efforts, the 2019 sample had fewer respondents from households earning less than $15,000 per year (4% in 2019 compared to 9% according to the Census). In other respects, the income distribution in the 2019 data align well with the census data.
Conclusions

Though many comparisons across the 2013 – 2019 LIFE surveys are straightforward, several required some data manipulations and equating of some responses that are at least somewhat speculative.

In terms of satisfaction with characteristics and services in Marathon County, residents seem to be most content with key health services (health and dental), the natural environment (parks and such), and social/cultural factors (safe walking/biking and the arts and entertainment scene). They are less satisfied with some aspects of the County’s infrastructure (road maintenance and lack of public transit), health services (mental health and alcohol and drug treatment), services for vulnerable populations (childcare, elder care) and sense of community (acceptance of people from different backgrounds).

Residents are most concerned about key household welfare issues (health care affordability and jobs that pay enough to meet basic household expenses) and the behaviors of others that potentially imperil them (impaired driving due to alcohol or texting) and illegal drug use.

Marathon County is seen as a good place to live for families and children, but less so for people from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The theme of concern about openness to people from different backgrounds pops up in several places in the survey results.

Most people like their jobs but worry about lack of wage growth. Stagnant wages probably contributes to things such as concerns about the affordability of health care, increasing incidence of residents failing to access needed services (medical, dental, mental health), rising medical debt, relatively high proportions of respondents who’ve been late paying utility bills and who pay 30% or more of their total household income on housing.

Obesity and overweight issues appear to be continuing to increase in the County.

Though the SRC believes the responses to this survey generally represent the views of County residents reasonably well, and despite significant efforts to address the issue, we would have liked to have had more responses from low income, younger and people of color in the four LIFE survey samples summarized in this report.