

SURVEYS OF SEASONAL RESIDENTS IN FLORIDA

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ABSTRACT

It is well known that a seasonal variation exists on the south and west coasts of Florida. A large number of people arrive in the winter and leave after the spring of every year. However, no information exists on the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of these people. This lack of information creates problems in local and state future development plans. To gather this information, a statewide household survey program has been launched. As a pilot study of the program, surveys in Sarasota and Duval counties were conducted during the first four months of 1980. These two counties were selected because of their contrasting characteristics regarding residents' seasonality. The survey results showed that 20 percent of the Sarasota County residents had gone away during the summer of 1979, while only 3 percent of the residents in Duval County had done so.

INTRODUCTION

Florida is one of the fastest growing states in the U.S. The 1980s Census results show a population increase of 43.4 percent in the past ten years. However, it is a well-known fact that Florida's population varies during the year. The pleasant winter climate and beautiful beaches attract thousands of northern "snowbirds" during the winter. These seasonal residents stay in the state part of a year and head home after the season. In some areas, this seasonal variation is remarkable, yet no information exists on the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of these people. The proportion of these seasonal residents to the permanent residents is also unknown. This lack of information creates severe problems in the areas of adequate community services, market research and future development plans.

To gather data on this seasonality and on the demographic characteristics of households, the statewide household survey program has been launched at the Bureau of Economic and Business Research at the University of Florida. As a pilot study for this program, telephone surveys in Sarasota and Duval counties were undertaken in the first four months of 1980.

This article summarizes the results of the surveys in these two counties regarding residential seasonality.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DATA

Sarasota and Duval counties were chosen for the surveys because of their contrasting characteristics, including seasonal variation in residents. Sarasota County is relatively small in area, rapidly growing, and has a population displaying highly seasonal characteristics. In contrast, Duval County is large and slow-growing and has a more stable, less seasonal population. From 1970 to 1980, Sarasota's population increased by 68 percent while Duval's population increased only 8 percent. In terms of population per square mile, Sarasota has grown by more than 163 percent over the last two decades while Duval

County has increased by only 25 percent (BEBR, 1981).

Some remarkable contrasts were found in the pilot-study household surveys (Shih, 1980^{a,b}). Duval County residents were much younger^a, and earned much less than Sarasota County residents. Furthermore, length of residence in Florida is significantly different. While a majority of Duval residents (73 percent) were native Floridians or had lived in the state ten years or longer, only 35 percent of the residents in Sarasota were.

DATA COLLECTION

Data for the two counties were collected by telephone with the random digit-dialing (RDD) technique. To reduce the problem of dialing non-working telephone numbers, Wakersberg's (1978) 2-stage random digit-dialing method was used in the surveys.

The Sarasota County survey was conducted during January and February, 1980. Usable data for 517 households were gathered through 2,289 attempted telephone calls ("no answers" were called back six times). Duval County data were collected during March and April, 1980. Data for 510 households were gathered from 2,036 attempted calls. Among the households responding to the telephone calls in these two counties, 30 percent refused to be interviewed or to complete the interviews.

Each interview lasted four to five minutes. Respondents were asked for (1) demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the household, such as household members' age, sex, relationship to respondent, marital status, education and household income and (2) travel activities.

SURVEY RESULTS--SEASONALITY CHARACTERISTICS

In the travel activity question, respondents were asked, "In 1979, did any member in the household physically reside away from this house for a month or more?" If they answered "yes," they were further asked the months, destination and length of travel.

As expected, Sarasota residents resided away more often than Duval residents. While only 3 percent of the respondents in Duval County had gone away from home a month or more in 1979, 20 percent of the Sarasota sample had done so.

Among those travelers, seasonal variations were seen in Sarasota but not in Duval (Table 1). In Sarasota, travel activities were peaked in the summer with the highest proportion (15.1 percent) of residents away from home in the month of July. To the contrary, the percentage of travelers from Duval was less than 2 percent each month through the entire year; the number of travelers in the summer was not significantly larger than that in any other season.

The travelers from Sarasota County were further broken down by age categories. As Figure 1 shows, the travel activity of every age group peaked during June, July and August. However, striking differences were observed in the proportions of travelers among different age groups.

Table 1. Number of residents away from home one month or more in 1979 for Sarasota and Duval Counties

Month	Duval County		Sarasota County	
	N	%*	N	%*
January	16	1.1	42	3.5
February	16	1.1	44	3.7
March	17	1.2	37	3.1
April	17	1.2	69	5.7
May	16	1.1	116	9.6
June	13	0.9	150	12.4
July	21	1.5	182	15.1
August	20	1.4	173	14.3
September	12	0.9	123	10.2
October	10	0.7	102	8.5
November	8	0.6	69	5.7
December	11	0.8	38	3.2

*Percentage of people away from home to total samples in the county. Total samples for Sarasota were 1207 and for Duval were 1405.

While only 6 percent of people age 44 and younger had gone away a month or longer in July, almost 30 percent of the persons age 65 and older had done so. This elderly group obviously is responsible for remarkable residential mobility in Sarasota. This survey result reveals that in senior citizen communities almost one out of every three households went away during the summer of 1979.

Table 2 details travelers' destinations. Of these 230 respondents in Sarasota County away from home a month or longer during 1979, the largest group (28.3 percent) went to an east north central state, especially Illinois. The second largest group (24.3 percent) went to a middle Atlantic state and the third and fourth largest to the south Atlantic and New England states, respectively. This rank matched exactly with the order of respondents' residences before they moved to Florida. This implies that these part-time residents either maintained homes in two states or stayed with relatives or families in their hometown during the summer.

The Duval County travel pattern differs from that of Sarasota in destination, as well as seasonality. In Duval, among those people away from home a month or longer, over 60 percent went to the south Atlantic area. Of this, 40 percent went away from Duval County but remained in Florida. Therefore, only 20 percent of them were actually out of the state. One can conclude from the data that the people in Duval County were much less mobile than those in Sarasota County.

Table 2. Areas to which residents went away from home one month or more in 1979

Region	Sarasota		Duval	
	N	%	N	%
New England Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts New Hampshire, Vermont	28	12.2	1	2.3
Middle Atlantic New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania	56	24.3	0	0.0
South Atlantic Maryland, N. Carolina, S. Carolina Virginia, W. Virginia, Florida	39	17.0	26	60.5
East North Central Illinois, Indiana, Michigan Ohio, Wisconsin	65	28.3	2	4.7
East South Central Alabama, Kentucky	15	6.5	7	16.3
West North Central Iowa, Minnesota	4	1.7	2	4.7
West Central Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, Utah	8	3.5	1	2.3
Pacific California, Washington	3	1.3	3	7.0
Foreign Country	12	5.2	1	2.3
Total	230	100.0	43	100.0

SUMMARY

The household surveys were conducted in Sarasota County and Duval County, Florida, during January through April, 1980, by the random digit-dialing technique. In the surveys, a remarkable residential seasonality was seen in the fast-growing southwestern county of Sarasota. However, this phenomenon was not shown in the slow-growing, northeastern Duval County. In Sarasota County, almost one-third of the retirees went away from home a month or more during the summer of 1979. This striking mobility of residents has certainly caused significant seasonal variation in the local community.

REFERENCES

- Shih, W.F., 1980^a, "Household Survey in Duval County," Bureau of Economic and Business Research, University of Florida. Working Paper No. 1.
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