

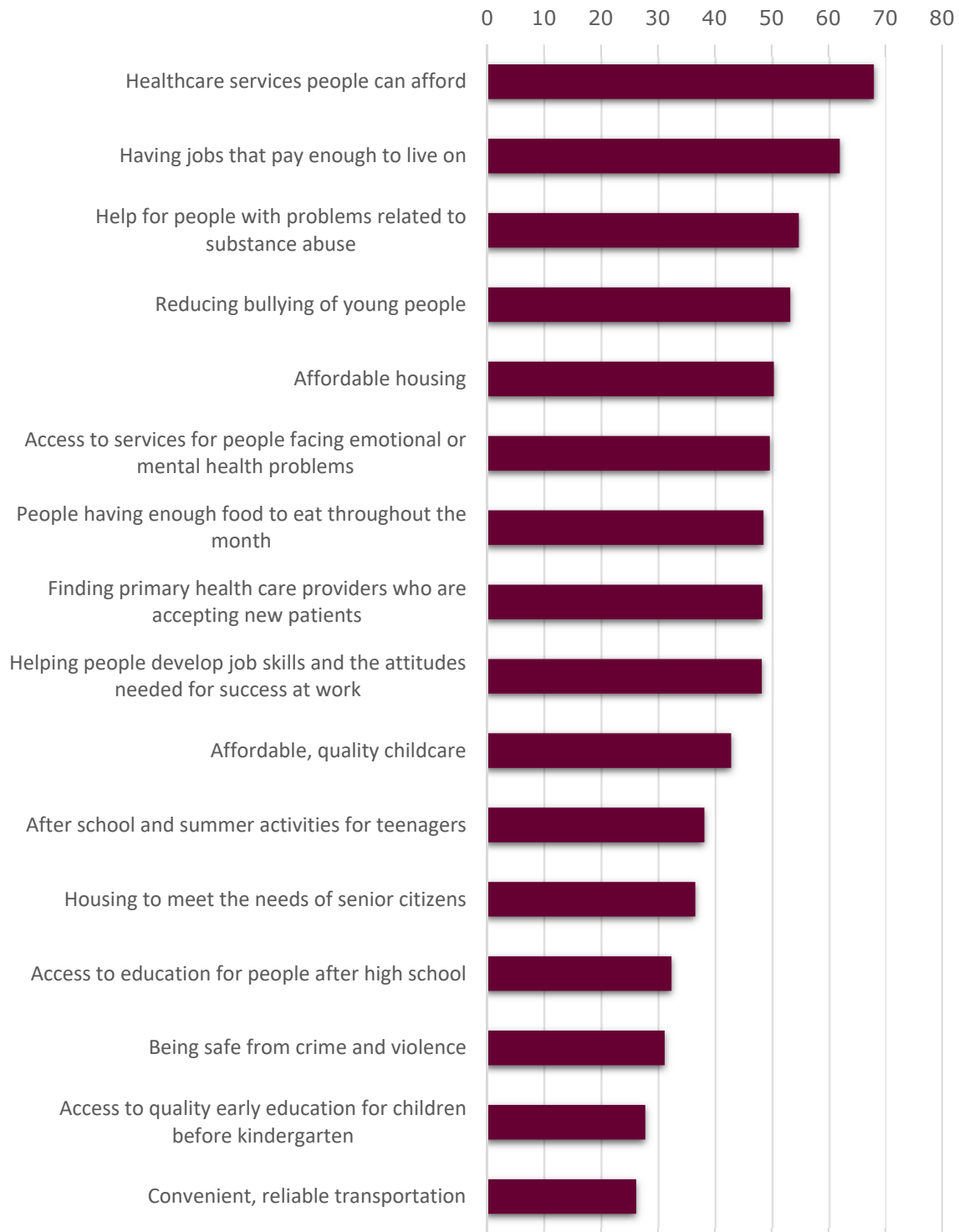
Isabella County Needs Assessment Survey: Report of Findings to the Community

During Winter and Spring 2018, the Center for Applied Research and Rural Studies at CMU contacted a random sample of Isabella County households, inviting them to complete a needs assessment survey. In the end, 531 county completed an interview over the telephone or returned questionnaires mailed to them through the U.S. postal system. The sample appropriately represents residents in the City of Mount Pleasant and elsewhere in the county. While highly educated respondents and higher income households are overrepresented in the final sample, about one quarter of respondents are from households with yearly incomes of less than \$25,000.

Perceptions of Community Needs

Respondents were asked whether each of 16 issues was a “major need,” a “moderate need,” a “minor need,” or “not a need” for people in their community. As Figure 1 shows, the percentages of residents reporting that an issue is a “major need” varies considerably from a high of 68 percent to a low of 26 percent. **The two areas with more than 60 percent indicating “major need” are “health care services that people can afford” and “having jobs that pay enough for people to live on.”** Responses to an open-ended, qualitative question about the biggest problem facing Isabella County residents corroborate the quantitative data. None of the 16 issues under consideration here is viewed as “not a need” by more than 10 percent of residents.

**Figure 1: Perceptions of Community Needs:
Percent Saying "Major Need" for Isabella County Residents**

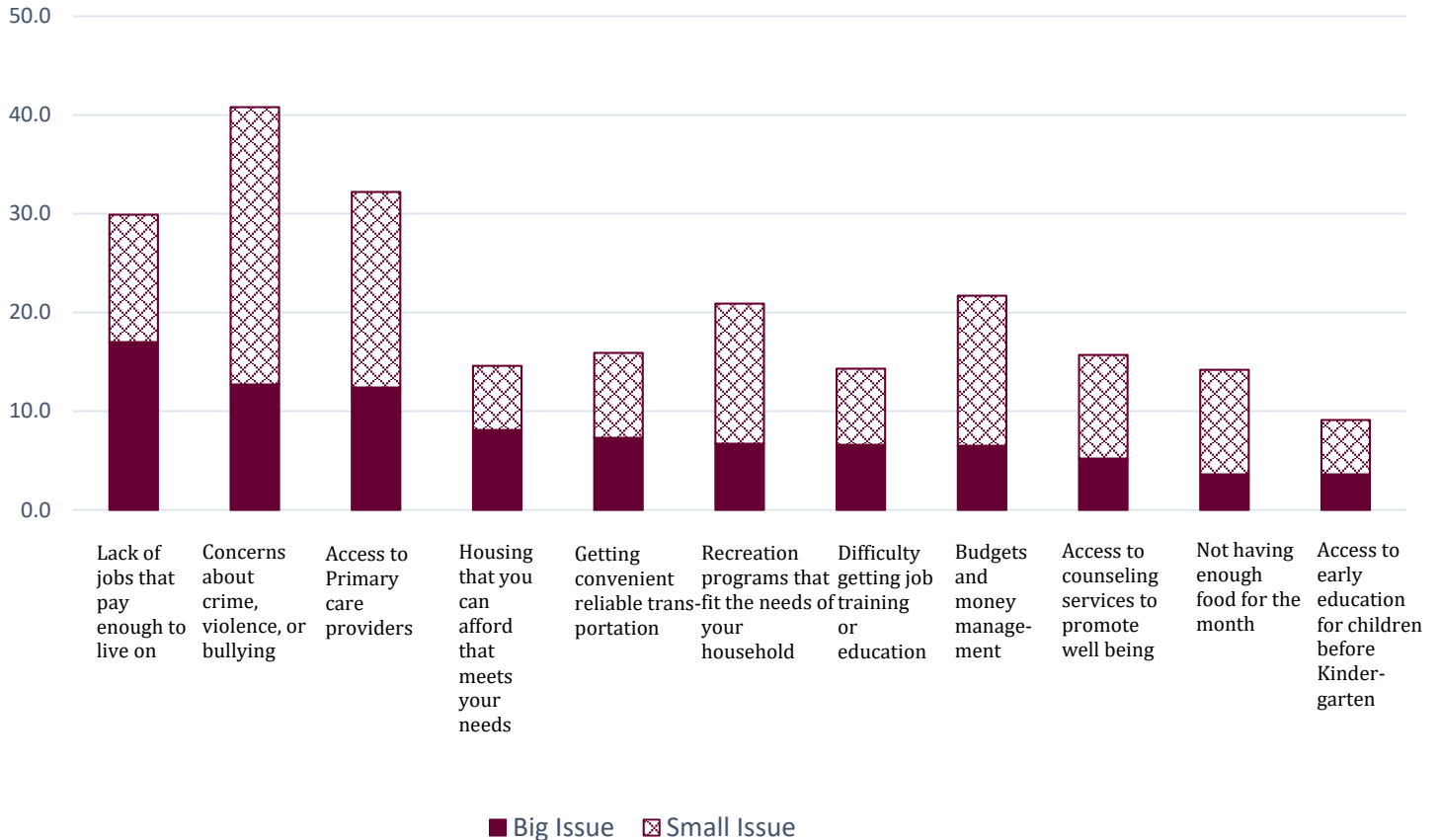


Problems Experienced in the Household

Respondents were also asked whether each of 11 issues had been a “big issue,” “small issue,” or “not an issue” affecting them or members of their household in the last year.

Figure 2 shows that **the three issues that were most likely to be experienced by Isabella County households were “lack of jobs that pay enough to live on,” “access to primary care providers,” and “concerns about crime, violence, or bullying.”** At least 30 percent of respondents report each of these issues has been a “big” one or a “small” one for their household in the last 12 months. Fortunately, the percentage of respondents reporting that each issue is “not an issue” for members of their household exceeds 50 percent in each case.

Figure 2: Experience of Problems in the Household in the Last 12 Months: Percentages Reporting “Big Issue” or “Small Issue” for Isabella County Residents



Use of Services by Residents in Need

Large percentages of respondents who report that their household has experienced a problem in the last year also tell interviewers that they have NOT used community services available to help with that problem. Table 1 shows that at most 55 percent of households experiencing a problem report that they have used a community service. The three areas of greatest need—“lack of jobs that pay enough to live on,” “access to primary care providers,” and “concerns about crime, violence, or bullying”—are also areas where relatively low numbers of people connect with community services. In none of these areas do more than 38 percent of respondents with a need report service use. The numbers of respondents reporting that their household has experienced a problem are found in parentheses in the table.

Table 1: Percentage with Problem in Household Using Service for Isabella County Residents

| | Percent Experiencing Problem Who Used Service |
|--|---|
| Budgeting and money management (N=104) | 16.3 |
| Concerns about crime, violence, or bullying (N=194) | 28.4 |
| Lack of jobs that pay enough to live on (N=140) | 30.0 |
| Housing that you can afford that meets your needs N=(69) | 31.9 |
| Access to primary care providers (N=157) | 38.2 |
| Difficulty getting job training or education (N=65) | 40.0 |
| Access to early education for children before Kindergarten (N=45) | 40.0 |
| Getting convenient, reliable transportation (N=80) | 41.3 |
| Not having enough food throughout the month (N=69) | 53.6 |
| Recreational programs that fit the needs of your household members (N=101) | 55.4 |
| Access to counseling services to promote well being (N=79) | 55.7 |

Opinions about the Community

Respondents were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with a number of statement about the community. Table 2 shows that respondents are divided in their views. More than 90 percent of respondents agree that the county is a good place to raise children, while almost one third disagree that it is a desirable place for young professionals to live. About two thirds of respondents think that poverty is a major problem in the county, while less than one third report that enough is being done to help people get out of poverty. Fully 90 percent of this sample of respondents agree that the quality of life in Isabella County is good “for people like me,” although more than 20 percent of respondents disagree when asked whether race relations in the county are positive.

**Table 2: Opinions about Isabella County:
Percentage Distributions for Isabella County Residents**

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Isabella County is a good place to raise children. | 34.2 | 61.9 | 3.3 | 0.6 |
| Isabella County is a desirable place for seniors to live. | 15.8 | 70.5 | 11.9 | 1.8 |
| Isabella is a desirable place for young professionals to live. | 10.1 | 58.1 | 28.3 | 3.6 |
| Relationships between CMU and the community are good. | 17.8 | 67.1 | 13.0 | 2.2 |
| Race relations in Isabella County are positive. | 11.3 | 67.1 | 18.3 | 3.3 |
| Poverty is a major problem in Isabella County. | 19.7 | 47.2 | 29.4 | 3.7 |
| Enough is being done in the county to help people get out of poverty. | 3.2 | 28.7 | 53.8 | 14.3 |
| The quality of life in Isabella County is good for people like me. | 19.0 | 70.9 | 8.2 | 1.9 |
| It is easy to find out what is going on in the community. | 14.8 | 61.5 | 21.2 | 2.5 |

Differences in Experiences and Opinions by Household Income

Respondents from lower income households (those with incomes less than \$25,000) differ in important ways from those living in higher income households (those with incomes of \$75,000 or more). Respondents in higher income households are more likely than those in lower income households to strongly agree that the quality of life in the county is “good for people like me”—29% versus 13%, respectively. As shown in Figure 3, **residents from lower income households are more likely to experience a variety of challenges in their household** (nine out of the 11 under analysis here). The differences in experience are often large as seen by the difference in height of the high income and low income bars.

Figure 3: Experience of “Big” Problems in the Household in the Last 12 Months by Household Income: Percentages of Isabella County Residents

