

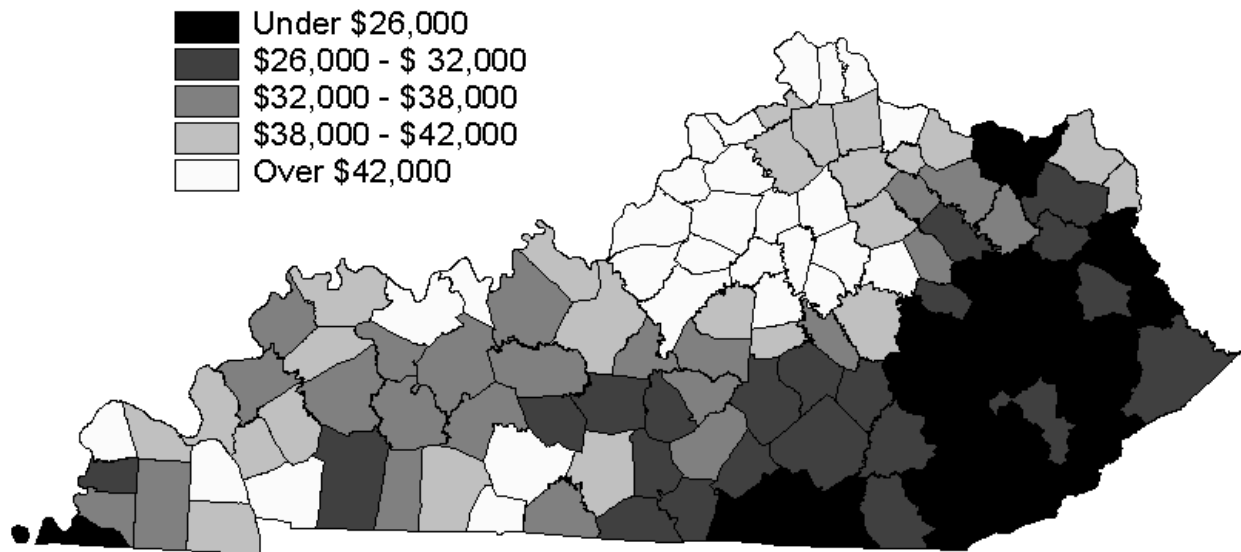
Kentucky's Cities -- Nice Safe Places for Teens ("Long Version")

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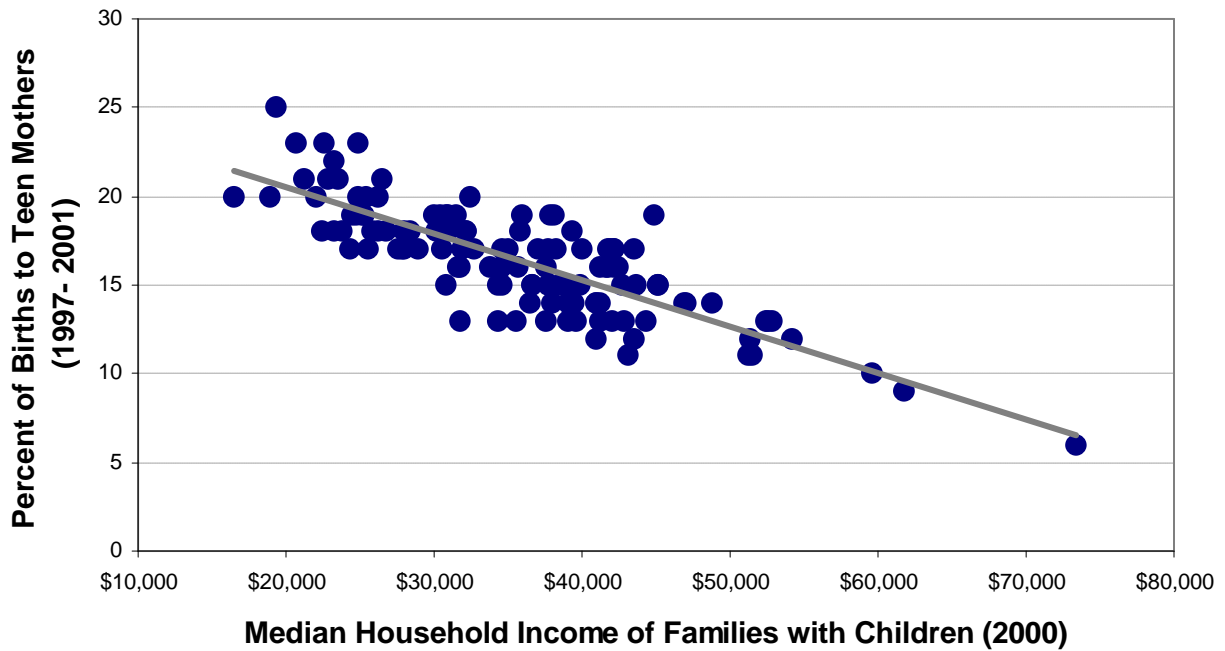
Reality is an amazing thing that surprises you sometimes. Recently the Kentucky State Data Center posted 2003 data for the Kentucky *Kids Count* project its web page. The *Kids Count* data gives all sorts of information pertaining to children and families in Kentucky.

I am a data nut -- always curious about anything that can be plotted or mapped in some way. I plotted and mapped a few things from the Data Book, just to satisfy curiosity. Some of what I plotted and mapped reinforced the usual notions we all have. For instance, the *Kids Count* 2003 data gives the median household income for families with kids for all Kentucky counties. The median household income for families with kids in Jefferson County in 2000 was \$46,880, meaning half the families with kids in Jefferson County made more than this, and half made less. I mapped this data, by county, for all of Kentucky. No surprises -- families in the eastern part of the state make less than families elsewhere.

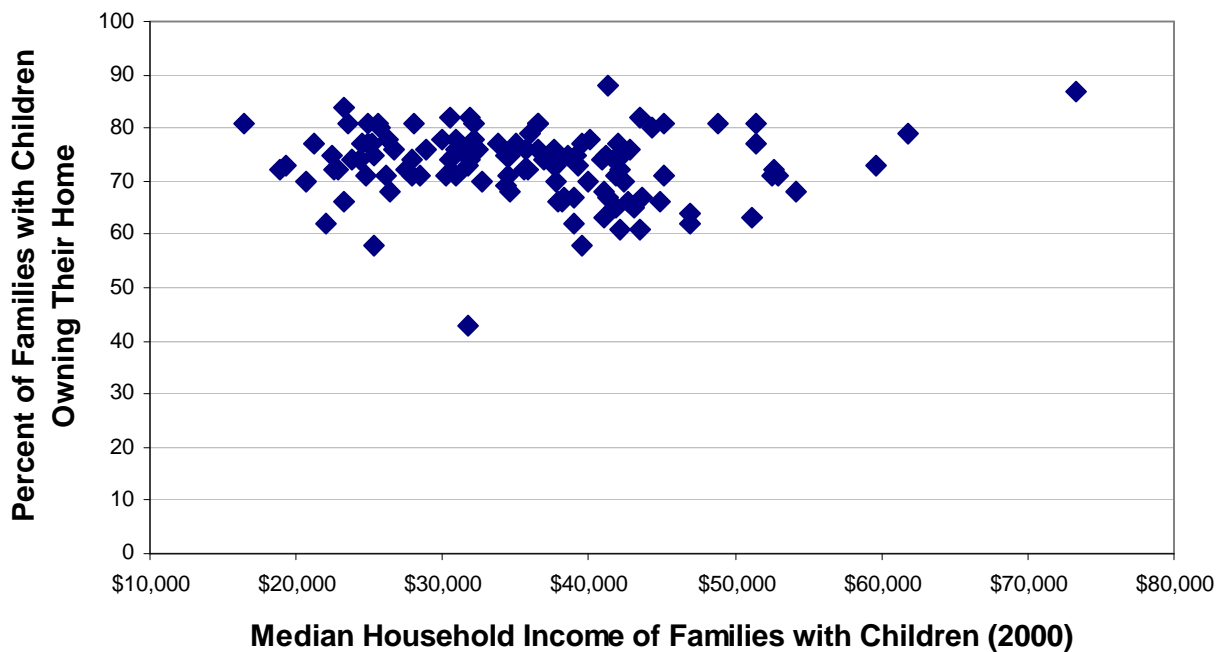
Median Household Income for Families with Children



I also charted the percent of births to teen mothers against median household income for families with kids. Again, no surprises -- teen mothers are less common in counties where families make more money.

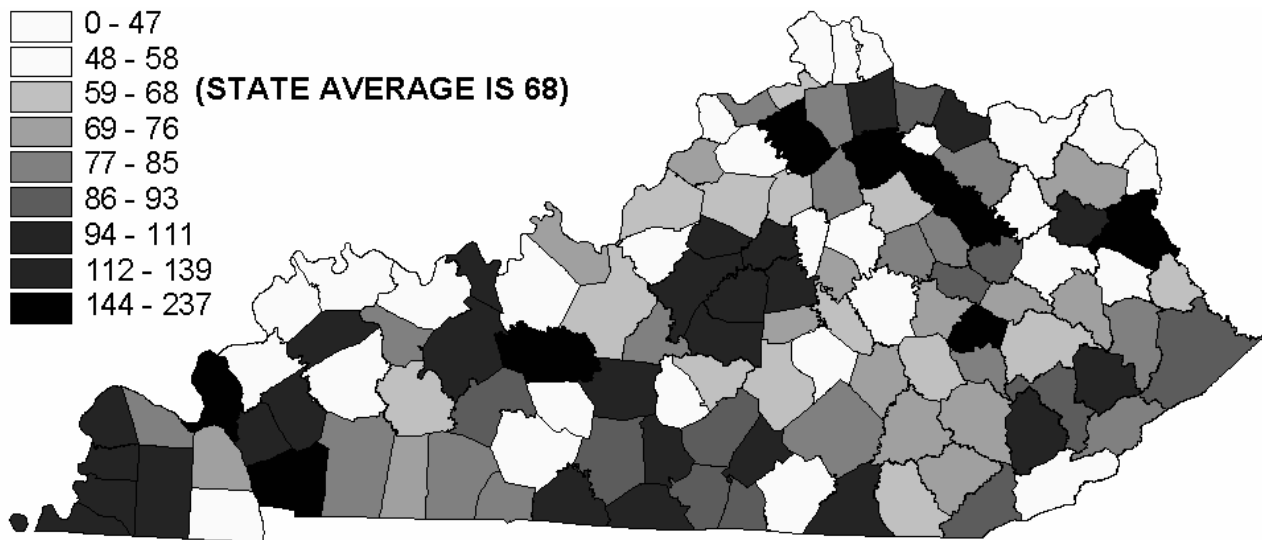


But not everything is as expected. For instance, I would have sworn that if families made more money, they would be more likely to own their own homes. Not true. Across Kentucky's counties household income seems to have no impact on home ownership. That's surprising.



The most surprising information, however, had to do with the safety of teens. The *Kids Count* data includes the rate of violent deaths (homicides, suicides, accidents) among teenagers during the 1980's and 1990's for Kentucky and its counties. Amazingly, there is no pattern to the teen violent death rate across the state. No, eastern Kentucky, with its poverty and winding roads, is not particularly more dangerous for teens than anywhere else. Perhaps more surprising, Kentucky's urban areas are not particularly dangerous for teens. In fact, urban counties are relatively safe places for teens.

Teen Violent Death Rate 1992-2001
(per 100,000 teens aged 15-19)

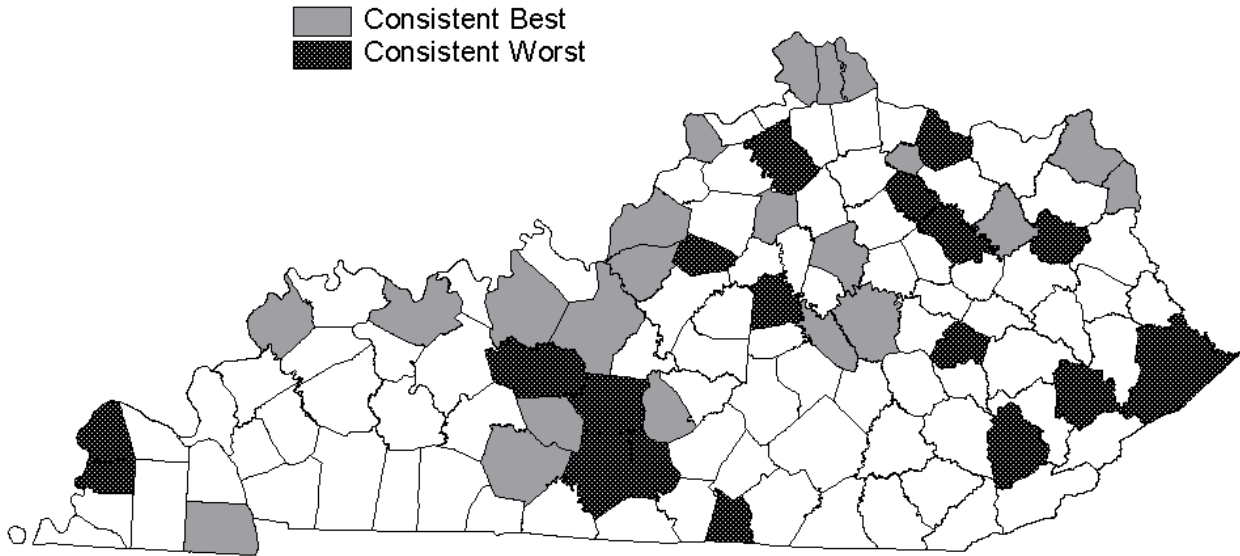


All of the counties containing Kentucky's largest urban areas -- Louisville, Lexington, Northern Kentucky -- had teen violent death rates less than the state average of 68 deaths per 100,000 teens. Between 1992 and 2001, Jefferson County (with a rate of 59) was a statistically safer place to be a teen than neighboring Oldham (with a rate of 74), Shelby (65), Spencer (108), and Hardin (63) counties. Jefferson and Bullitt (58) counties had roughly equal rates.

Take a slightly different view, include the longer term, and you get the same results. I looked at the 1980's data as well as the 1990's data, grouping Kentucky counties into thirds for both decades -- the "most safe" or top third of counties, the middle third, and the "least safe" or bottom third. I then looked for counties that fell into the best and worst groups both decades.

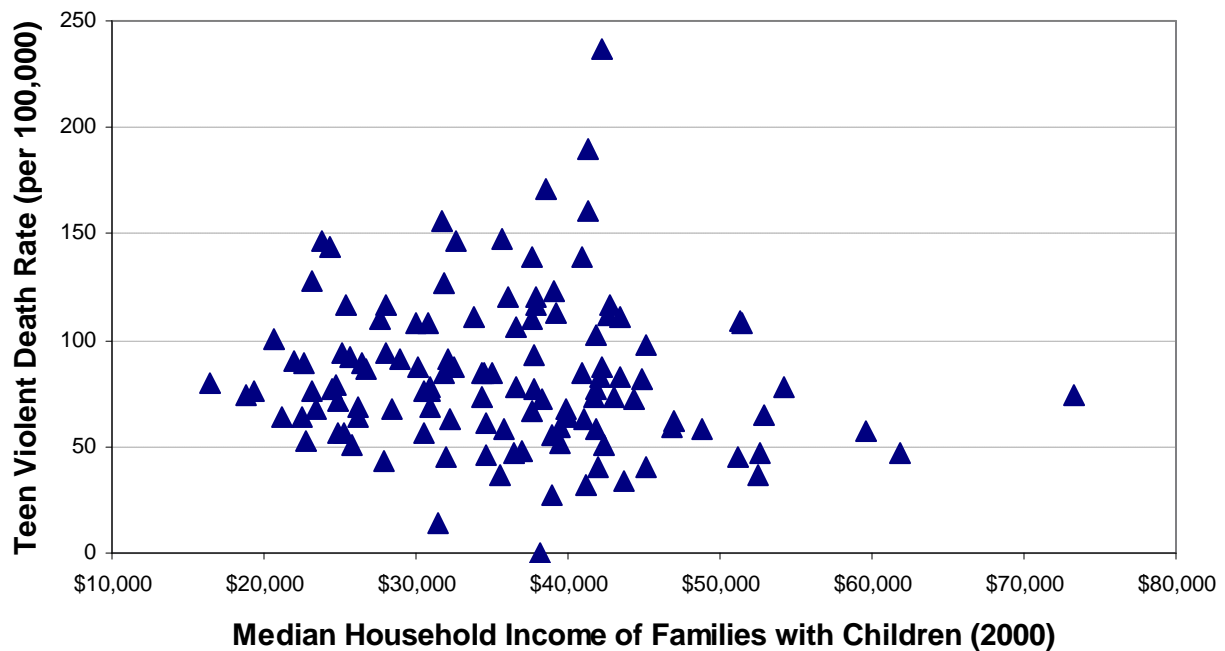
Again, all of the counties that contain Kentucky's urban areas towns made the "consistently best" list.

Teen Violent Death Rate 1982-1991 & 1992-2001



What? Urban Jefferson County, a safe place for teens? Yes. Safer than most of the rest of the state? Yes. Jefferson County? With its gun violence? With the Extreme Park? Yes. Safer than a wealthy, suburban county like Oldham County? Yes.

Money seems to have no bearing on the teen violent death rate, actually. There is no apparent relationship among Kentucky counties between the teen violent death rate and the median household income for families with kids.



Then what is going on? Accidents, probably - especially car accidents. Research at the University of Virginia has indicated that, for the general population, suburban and rural areas are often more dangerous than urban areas because the chances of dying in a car accident trump the chances of dying by crime. This apparently also holds true for Kentucky teens. In an urban area, a teen can travel by foot or bike to destinations that are, thanks to the dense nature of urban areas, relatively near by. Most of Kentucky's urban areas also have public transit options for teens. By contrast, in a place like Oldham County, where it is more difficult to travel by bike or foot without traveling on dangerous roads, where travel by city bus is not an option, and where the distance between destinations is great, the danger to teens is greater.

I've used Oldham and Jefferson counties as examples, but keep in mind that not all rural and suburban counties are as dangerous as Oldham. Some are much more dangerous. Some are safer than Jefferson. But on the whole, they are more dangerous places to be a teen than urban counties. Your best bet for a teen's safety is in the city. Who would have thought it?

All the information presented here is easily accessible to the public. I encourage people to get a copy of some of this data and do some investigating of their own:

- Kentucky *Kids Count* 2003 data in spreadsheet form can be obtained from the Kentucky State Data Center --
<http://ksdc.louisville.edu/1kidscount.htm>
- The *Kentucky Kids Count 2003 DataBook: County Profiles of Child Wellbeing* can be obtained from Kentucky Youth Advocates -- http://www.kyyouth.org/kcd_book.htm
- Information about research at the University of Virginia can be found at the following U.Va. web sites on --
<http://www.virginia.edu/insideuva/2002/17/suburbs.html>
<http://archweb.arch.virginia.edu/plan/ducp.html>
<http://archweb.arch.virginia.edu/plan/faculty/Lucy.htm>