

2020 VOICES OF SONOMA COUNTY WOMEN REPORT | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The *2020 Voices of Sonoma County Women Report* was prepared by the Sonoma County Commission on the Status of Women. The data included in this report was generated from Listening Sessions held throughout the County and with the women housed at the Sonoma County Main Adult Detention Facility, in addition to the Voices of Sonoma County Women survey. Data was collected between January 2019 and January 2020.

The intention of this project is to gain a deeper understanding of the status of women of all backgrounds in Sonoma County and to respond to the specific needs and concerns they have. The Sonoma County Commission on the Status of Women encourages you to read and share this report as a means to advocate on behalf of the women and girls in the county more effectively.

The *2020 Voices of Sonoma County Women Report* identifies numerous structural and individual challenges currently facing women and girls in our communities. The following section provides a brief synopsis of the top issues facing women in Sonoma County collectively, by race, by housing status, and by income. By breaking down the data in this way, we demonstrate the role that social categories can play in shaping the barriers that women face in their daily lives.

TOP ISSUES FACING WOMEN IN SONOMA COUNTY | OVERALL

- **Lack of affordable healthcare** and **lack of low-income housing** are the top issues facing women in Sonoma County
- Women also struggle with finding **access to quality, affordable childcare**
- **Mental health issues** and **lack of mental health services** are also top concerns

TOP ISSUES FACING WOMEN | BY RACE

- Women in the County who identify as American Indian or Alaska Native identify **domestic and/or intimate partner violence** as the top issue they face, followed by **lack of low-income housing** and **substance abuse/addiction**
- Asian/Asian American women say that **the number of women in leadership positions** within the County is their biggest concern
- Black/African American and Hispanic/Latinx women identify the **lack of low-income housing** in the community as a top concern
- White women and women who list more than two races are mostly concerned with the **lack of affordable healthcare** services in the County

TOP ISSUES FACING WOMEN | BY HOUSING STATUS

- **Women** in Sonoma County who own their home cite **retirement insecurities** as their top concern
- However, women who rent, live with family or friends, are homeless, or incarcerated all say **that the lack of low-income housing** in the County is the biggest challenge they face

TOP ISSUES FACING WOMEN | BY INCOME

- Women with incomes less than \$20,000 per year identified **low-income housing, poverty, and substance abuse/addiction** as the top three issues they face
- Women making over \$100,000 per year are concerned with **retirement insecurities, caring for aging parents, and the number of women in leadership positions**

BARRIERS TO RESOLUTION AND REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

In the section that follows, we outline the perceived barriers to resolving the issues identified by women in the County, followed by the recommendations that emerged from this study, and a note regarding our research within the context of COVID-19.

BARRIERS TO RESOLVING THE ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY WOMEN IN THE COUNTY

Women in the County identified the following barriers to resolving the concerns we outlined in the Executive Summary:

1. Lack of finances
2. Unaware of what services are available and how to access them
3. Lack of transportation
4. Language barriers

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

Women in the County feel that they and their communities would benefit from:

1. Community centers or gathering places that provide a space where people can meet and share ideas, access information on resources, form support groups, and receive education and training.
2. Increased access to low-income housing
3. Government responsiveness to gender bias and racial profiling
4. Increased attention to job and income insecurity

OUR REPORT AND COVID-19

With the current state of the world and the COVID-19 pandemic, it is possible that our report results may be considered obsolete. However, as numerous studies have demonstrated, the coronavirus has not changed the struggles that we face, but has instead exacerbated existing inequalities, particularly across lines of race and gender. Therefore, we submit this work along with the caveat that we should assume the challenges and barriers Sonoma County women faced in 2019 have only been amplified in 2020.

THE IMPACT OF THIS REPORT

To our knowledge, this data collection project on the status of women in Sonoma County is the first of its kind. Additionally, though similar research is being conducted by Commissions across the nation, we are among the first to offer incarcerated women the opportunity to participate in such a study. In doing so, we offer a unique set of perspectives on the issues facing women in our community. Thus, the potential for the data within this report to positively impact the lives of women and girls in Sonoma County cannot be overstated. As such, after sharing this report with the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, we intend to communicate our findings with our local governments (e.g., City Councils and Mayors), as well as with community based organizations that we feel could benefit from the information we have collected.

FUTURE VOICES RESEARCH

The Commission on the Status of Women is passionate about hearing from women from a wide range of backgrounds. As we continue with our 2021 Voices research, we plan to expand recruitment efforts and include additional questions that capture a wider array of experiences.