

REPORT *on the*
STATUS OF WOMEN
in **SONOMA COUNTY**
2007

***“ Setting an action agenda is essential.
The status of women and the well being
of our children and families are in great danger.
We cannot afford to waste one minute
in implementing an agenda that will protect
and enhance the status of and opportunities
for women and girls throughout California,
and the United States and the World. ”***

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi

December 2004

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COMMISSIONERS
2007**

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Table of Contents

3	Introduction
5	Recommendations
5	For all Policy Makers
5	To the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors
7	Facts about Women in Sonoma County
7	Population
7	Age Distribution
7	Race/Ethnicity Distribution
7	Female Population by Age & Race/Ethnicity
7	Household Structure
8	SWOTs (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Assessments and Focus for Community Action
8	Women & Childcare, Healthcare and Housing
17	Women & Criminal Justice System and Physical Safety
23	Women & Employment, Earnings, Training and Education
29	Women & Political Representation
31	Spotlight on the Issues
31	Transportation: A Gap in Access
32	Mid-Life and Older Women: A Growing Population
32	Women as Caregivers
33	Latina Women
35	Public Policy Recommendations – California Statewide Agenda for Women and Girls
36	Dialogue for the Future
37	Voices of Young Women
42	Appendix 1: 1982 CSW Position Statements
44	Appendix 2: Listening to Women: Community Forums
47	Appendix 3: Listening to Young Women: Surveys and Focus Groups
51	Appendix 4: Acknowledgements

Introduction

The Commission on the Status of Women (referred to as CSW or the Commission) is a public advisory body comprised of 15 members appointed by the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors. The purpose of the Commission is to promote equal rights and opportunities that enhance the quality of life for all women and girls and to address issues of discrimination and prejudice that negatively affect women in Sonoma County.

In 2005, the Commission decided that, to fully embrace their mandate, they would address the question of how women and girls are currently faring in Sonoma County. The socio-economic issues that women face have become more obscured over the 30 years since the Commission was established. While many people are aware that domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment and discrimination continue to occur, few are aware of whether and how the status of women has become better or worse over the years. Given the widespread social problems of our day that affect everyone, the question becomes “are women and girls disproportionately affected?”

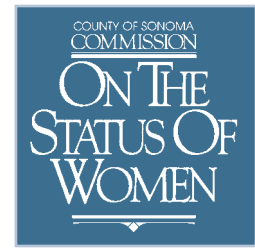
To answer this question, the Commission decided to produce a Report on the Status of Women in Sonoma County with the following goals:

- **Identify areas of discrimination and prejudice that negatively affect women and girls.**
- **Determine the needs of women and girls in Sonoma County.**
- **Prepare and disseminate information needed in order to bring about positive change.**
- **Develop baseline statistical information regarding the socio-economic status of women in Sonoma County including, but not limited to, education, employment, and access to services.**
- **Report to the Board of Supervisors, pointing out the key issues concerning women and girls after evaluating the research data.**

The Commission has a rich history in Sonoma County. It has been an important part of the local women’s movement, promoting women’s history, reporting on women’s issues, and recognizing the work of women in the community. The current Commission used the work of a prior Commission, “A Positions Paper,” adopted in April of 1982, as a starting place. The paper established ideal positions for women’s quality of life in 12 areas. The Commission created four committees to address nine of the Paper’s 12 quality of life areas. (See Appendix #1.) Each committee was charged with deciding on the focus of their research and gathering the relevant information. The committees were formed around the broad topics listed below:

- Childcare, Healthcare, and Housing**
- Criminal Justice and Physical Safety**
- Employment, Earnings, Education and Training**
- Political Representation**

Each committee was chaired by a CSW Commissioner. The Committees were made up of other Commissioners, representatives from community based organizations, educational institutions, and individual volunteers who met monthly over a year and a half period.



THE COMMISSION’S VISION:

To move beyond equal access and equal representation to embrace self-esteem, self-determination and self-sufficiency for all.





They started with specific research questions and gathered data through a variety of means. The Committee Chairs then summarized the information using a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis. The information in each Committee's SWOT represents the work of the committee and the opinions of committee members as perceived by the committee chair. The SWOTs revealed gaps in services currently being offered in Sonoma County and identify action areas for community. Priorities were identified and became the Recommendations for the Board of Supervisors and Action Steps for the Commission. A conclusion follows.

The Appendices contain more details about the information women shared at community forums and the work of 18 Junior Commissioners over two academic years assessing the opinions of their high school peers around issues today's young women face.

As the project progressed, the Commissioners realized that besides reporting on how women are faring in our County today, the Report should also serve as a "springboard" for the future. It should stimulate action and encourage dialogue on how to address issues that negatively affect women as well as create a baseline of information for measuring future progress.

The process of gathering data, holding forums and interviews, and going on site visits strengthened the relationship of the Commission to the community. Partnerships were created for working together in the future. The Commission hopes that the report will serve as a resource for policy makers, organizations, and individuals in the community and will result in making Sonoma County a better place for women and girls and, therefore, for everyone.



Recommendations

Recommendations for all Policy Makers

- Track issues by gender.

Without statistical inclusion of gender in reports it is impossible to assess the impact of policies on women.

Recommendations to the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

1. Disseminate the Report to all Department Heads for their review and implementation where appropriate.
2. Provide a copy of the Report to the County's Legislative Analyst to identify advocacy areas to be addressed on behalf of women in Sonoma County.
3. Request that County Departments keep statistics related to their services by gender whenever feasible and use the data to ensure that equal access issues are addressed in programs, services and policy development.
4. Support the Sonoma County Childcare Planning Council in their work to increase public funding and subsidies for childcare and preschool to begin to bridge the gap between the federal income guidelines (\$39,000 for family of four) and what it takes for a family of four to meet their basic needs in Sonoma County (\$55,967).
5. Maintain the County's strong support for the continuance of essential health care services for women now being provided through Sutter Hospital.
6. Support the efforts of Sheriff's Department to guarantee equity and parity of access to drug treatment programs, such as Starting Point, for female inmates. This will better prepare women to meet the societal and economic pressures that were factors in their addiction, when they are released.
7. Request that the District Attorney apply pre-trial pressure to get more batterers into state mandated programs, regardless of conviction status.
8. Initiate educational programs, support services, and advocacy efforts that work towards lifting women out of poverty, including the working poor. These efforts need to address the goals of ensuring a living wage for working women, and recognizing the value of the women's roles as caregivers.



Action Steps by the Commission on the Status of Women

1. Disseminate the Report to community agencies, business and labor, those in political offices at the state and federal level, secondary and post-secondary schools, and the general community.
2. Hold a public event on the Report on the Status of Women in Sonoma County. Invite elected officials, housing and planning commissioners, planning staffs, and the general public with goal of providing education on programs and policies that work for women and children as outlined in the Report.
3. Work with partner agencies to implement a self-sufficiency/living wage on-line calculator including budgetary tools for women.
4. Gather interested groups to facilitate a partnership between businesses and the labor community to support women in non-traditional fields by offering career exploration programs.

5. Gather possible partner agencies and develop a program to provide stronger encouragement of all women, particularly ethnic women, to run for public office or be appointed to boards.
6. Work with Family Violence Prevention Council on taking steps to eliminate violence against women in Sonoma County.

The CSW strategic plan for 2007-2011, will focus on priority issues highlighted in this report. The Commission will partner with community groups, governmental agencies, business and education to identify programmatic, administrative, and public policy areas that support women and girls.

Action Steps for the Community

Each topic area in the report is followed by a list areas of Focus for Community Action. They represent area for local action and partnership. The CSW will begin to convene these groups to initiate a community dialogue on the topics.

Facts About Women in Sonoma County

Unless otherwise stated, all facts were taken from the U.S. Census 2000 data for Sonoma County. Citations will indicate when more current information was available. The goal was to produce a base-line of data to be revisited after the next Census in 2010 is published.

Population:

Women make up 50.6% of the total County population of 458,614.

Age Distribution:

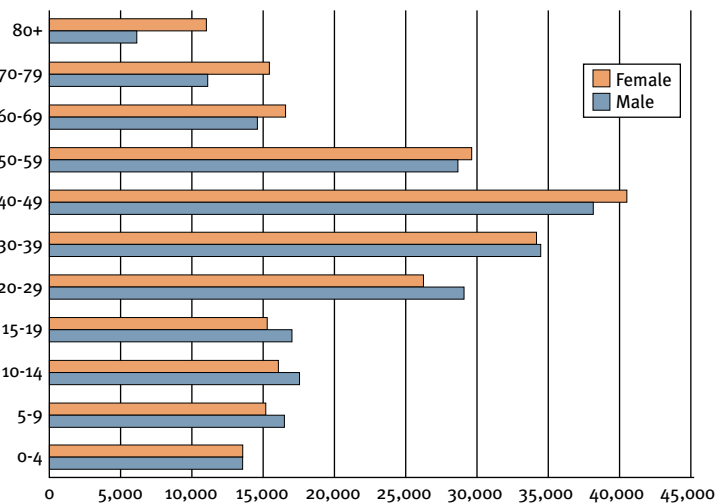
Women outnumber men in each of the 40-years-and-over age groups.

The gender gap is widest in the 80 years and over age group. Women make up 64% of this population.

59% of residents over age 65 are women.

Sonoma County's age distribution by gender is similar to the distribution for the State of California.

Age Distribution by Sex, Sonoma County, 2000



Race/Ethnicity Distribution:

- The largest minority group in Sonoma County is Hispanics, accounting for 16% of women and 19% of men.
- 60% of California women are White, compared to 83% in Sonoma County.

Note on how race is reported: Race and Hispanic ethnicity are measured separately by the U.S. Census. A person of Hispanic ethnicity is anyone who identifies with that social group, and so can be of any race. Thus, the racial categories above include both Hispanics and non-Hispanics.

Racial/Ethnic Distribution of California and Sonoma County, 2000 Census

	CALIFORNIA		SONOMA COUNTY	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
White	59%	60%	80%	83%
African American	6%	7%	2%	1%
Native American	1%	1%	1%	1%
Asian & Pacific Islander	11%	12%	3%	3%
Other Race	23%	21%	14%	12%
Non-Hispanic	67%	69%	81%	84%
Hispanic	33%	31%	19%	16%

(Note: Hispanics can be of any race.)

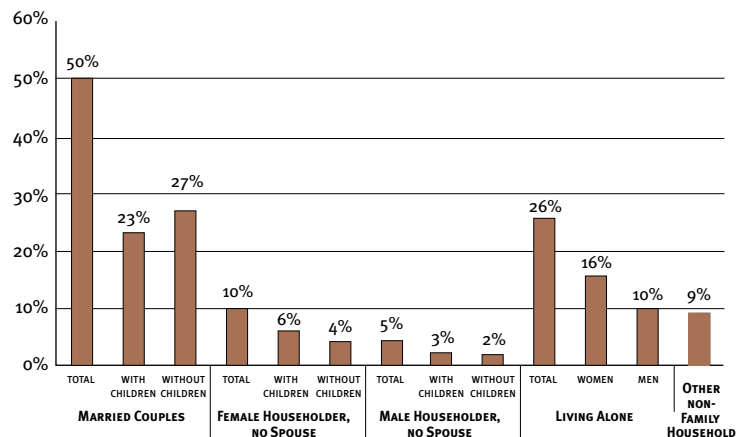
Female Population by Age & Race/Ethnicity:

- When compared to other racial groups, a higher percentage of women age 40 and above are white. This is especially true in those above 60 years of age.
- The highest percentage of those in the "Other Race" category are girls under age 10. Many Latinos are in this "Other" category
- African Americans and Native Americans also show higher percentages of girls under age 10 than do Whites or Asians.

Household Structure:

- Married couples comprise 50% of Sonoma County households.
- 10% of households are headed by women without a spouse, and 60% of those have children under 18.
- 16% of households are women living alone
- Among women living alone, 49% are aged 65 and older.
- Among men living alone, only 24% are aged 65 and older.

Household and Family Structure, Sonoma County, 2000 Census



SWOTS

(Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, & Threats)
and Focus for Community Action

COMMISSIONERS:

Roxane Meuse, Chair
Donna Roper

Women & Childcare, Healthcare, and Housing

The research of this committee was guided by the following questions:

- Is there quality childcare available for all children who need it in Sonoma County? If there are gaps between need and availability, how do those gaps affect women?
- What health challenges do women face?
- Do all women and girls have access to medical and mental health services specific to their health needs as a female? What gaps are there in services for women and girls?
- How many women are homeless and what are their special needs? How are their needs as women addressed in available services?
- What barriers exist in securing adequate and affordable housing for all women and their families?

Other questions arose out of the course of their study and were explored.

Facts:

CHILDCARE

Population of Children Under 14 Years of Age

- In Sonoma County according to the Sonoma County Childcare Planning Council, 19% of the population is under 14 years of age – the age up to which childcare is typically provided. Of these children:
 - 12% are infants (0-24 months)
 - 26% are preschoolers (2-5 years)
 - 62% are school-age (6-13 years)

Households with Children:

- 50% of the County's family households include children. Of these households:
 - 74% are two-parent families
 - 18% are female head of household without a husband present
- The average family size is 3.12.
- 58% of families with children under 6 have both parents or the single head of household in the workforce.
- 70% of families with school age children have both parents or the single head of household in the workforce.

The Cost of Childcare:

- According to the Community Child Care Council of Sonoma County's Market Rate Survey, 2004:
 - The annual cost of childcare for an infant is \$9,080, and this cost is among the highest in the state.
 - The annual cost for a preschooler in a childcare center is \$6,550 and \$8,040 in a family child care home.

A Personal Story from Junior Commissioner's Focus Group

"My sister, who is a teen mother, has had a problem trying to get childcare. When she started the Junior College, she really needed someone to take care of her daughter. The childcare at the school was not sure if they could take the girl, which made it more of a problem because since she was a full-time student, she could not afford to pay for childcare. Luckily, the childcare at the school did find a way to take the girl."

Childcare and Access to Financial Assistance:

- To qualify for a childcare subsidy in Sonoma County, a family of four would need to make less than \$39,000. According to the Californians for Family Economic Self-Sufficiency, a family of four needs to make \$55,967 to meet their basic needs.
- 9% of children in Sonoma County live below the federal poverty level.
- The Sonoma County Child Care Needs Assessment, 2004, shows there is a gap between demand and supply of child care. The shortage is determined in a range from best case (with estimated surplus indicated in parentheses) to worst case scenarios:
 - For infant care: 1,914 – 4,786
 - For pre-schoolers, (626) – 5,384
 - For school-aged children, 5,264 – 29,937

A Personal Story from River Childcare

“There seem to be programs available to the low income families. For those of us who don’t meet that criteria and don’t have a large income, child care is completely out of our price range.”

Mother of 3

Strengths:

- Having childcare provides women the time to find and maintain employment, thereby increasing self-determination, self-sustainability and increased quality of life.
- Licensed childcare programs typically have links with or directly offer parenting classes, which can increase women’s confidence in their parenting abilities and decrease women’s feelings of isolation around parenting issues.
- There are several childcare voucher programs which help many low income women pay for the high cost of childcare. Without this assistance, many women could not maintain employment because of childcare costs.
- Several local agencies provide a range of support services for women seeking childcare and service delivery systems are well coordinated: Community Child Care Council (4C’s), River Child Care, Professional Association for Childhood Education Alternative Payment Program (PACEAPP) and the Sonoma County Child Care Planning Council (SCCCPC) are a few of these.
- California Parenting Institute’s Behavioral Consultation Project, funded by First 5 Sonoma County, builds the capacity of child care providers to cope with the challenging behaviors of children in their care through on-site consultation in English or Spanish.
- Women comprise the majority of County’s childcare workers, thereby constituting a strong industry for female workers.

SWOT Analysis: CHILDCARE

Weaknesses:

- Childcare is a low-wage industry. The many women employed in childcare often make less than the living wage, which can lead to employment instability. A starting early childhood teacher with 12 college-level ECE units who works full-time would earn approximately \$24,500 a year in a county where the median income is \$61,021 for a family of four.
- High-quality childcare is often out of reach for low-income women unless they have access to financial assistance. Even when they do, the cost of high quality childcare (\$9,080 per year for an infant) makes the cost prohibitive.
- The childcare system is not integrated to the social service system or the K-12 public education system, making it yet another system with rules and procedures that women must learn.
- Demand for childcare subsidies far exceeds state funding for these programs. For example, at any given time, there are approximately 2,000 eligible children waiting



for a subsidized childcare slot; without a space mothers are often prevented from accepting employment or entering into job training programs.

Opportunities:

- Identifying methods of integrating the childcare system into the broader existing educational and social service systems will increase efficiency and participation in all systems.
- Educating the employers and policy makers about the need for quality child care and the need to invest in the childcare infrastructure will benefit all participants.

Threats:

- Without increased public investment, wages for childcare providers will continue to undercut women's economic stability and self-determination.
- Income criteria for state-funded childcare services affects women whose increased wages surpass the threshold but are not sufficient to pay for childcare and other living expenses on their own.

-
- Develop flexible structures for working women with children, such as work site childcare, high level part-time jobs, job sharing, and flexible family leave policies.
 - Create Universal Preschool like the public school system, giving access to all families with children.
 - Implement a quality rating system for childcare programs.
 - Increase public funding and subsidies for childcare and preschool to address the gap between the federal income guidelines (\$39,000 for family of four) and what it takes for a family of four to meet their basic needs in Sonoma County (\$55,967).

**Focus for
Community Action:
CHILDCARE**



SOURCES

Childcare Profile for Sonoma County from appendices in *Sonoma County Childcare Needs Assessment (2004)*.

Sonoma County page from *2006 California Childcare Portfolio*.

For the Children: A Comprehensive Plan for Child Care and Learning Programs, Sonoma County 2005-2010 by Sonoma County Child Care Planning Council.

www.huduser.org for median family income figure.

First Five Sonoma County.

US Census 2000.

"The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Sonoma County, CA, 2003, Santa Rosa, CA PMSA" by Brooks J. Pearce with Californians for Family Economic Self-Sufficiency.

The Top Four Causes of Death for Women in Sonoma County:

(According to Sonoma County Public Health, 2006)

1. Lung Cancer
2. Heart Disease
3. Stroke
4. Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease (i.e. Emphysema)

Primary Health Concerns for Women:

(According to Sonoma County Public Health, 2006)

- Diseases related to the unique physiology and anatomy of women:
 - Certain cancers, such as breast cancer and ovarian cancer
 - Diseases related to childbearing and reproductive health
- Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) such as Chlamydia are more prevalent in women 15-29 years of age than men in the same age group.
- Sonoma County's rate of prenatal care is significantly lower than California's rate. Between 5% and 14% of pregnant women abuse alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Fetal exposure to alcohol can lead to lifelong physical and neurological disabilities.
- Gonorrhea appears in a larger percentage of women, ages 15-24, but in older age groups, there are a greater percentage of men with the disease than women.
- While more men are infected with HIV and AIDS, the percentage of increase in newly diagnosed women has increased dramatically from 3% in 1999 to 24% in 2004.
- Obesity has increased 60% in women since 2001. The percentage is even greater for poor women.
- Domestic violence presents a serious threat to women's physical, emotional and mental health. More women are the victims of domestic violence than men.
- Mental health issues such as depression and anxiety disorders are more prevalent among women.
- Sonoma County's rate of prenatal care is significantly lower than California's rate. Between 5% and 14% of pregnant women abuse alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Fetal exposure to alcohol can lead to lifelong physical and neurological disabilities.

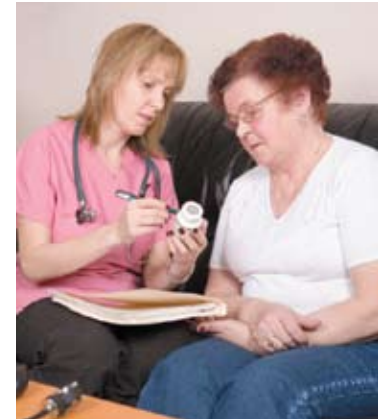
Health Care Coverage:

- 17% of women in California are without insurance including 32% percent of Hispanic women.
- Health insurance coverage rates generally increased with reported household incomes. Households earning between \$10,000 and \$15,000 reported the lowest coverage rate – 58.5%.
- Only 77.5% of Latino respondents reported being covered by health insurance.
- The percentage of people with employment-based health insurance coverage has significantly decreased in recent years.

Disabled Women & Girls:

(Non-Institutionalized and as defined in the US Census 2000)

- 11% of young women, age 16 to 20, have a disability and of that group:
 - 56% are employed
- 16% of women, age 21 to 64, have a disability and of that group:
 - 55% are employed



- 25% of women, age 65 to 74, have a disability
- 51% of women over age 65 have a disability

SWOT Analysis: HEALTHCARE

Strengths:

- Sonoma County's Department of Health Services (especially the Public Health Division) provides a variety of services for women and has been an advocate for their needs in the Sutter Hospital closure crisis.
- Collaborative efforts in Sonoma County, funded by First 5 Sonoma County and the California Endowment, have improved screening of pregnant women for alcohol and drug abuse. Additional capacity for drug and alcohol treatment as well as for smoking cessation is now available for pregnant women.
- Prenatal care is available in all regions of the county for Medi-Cal clients.
- The Family PACT Program has helped facilitate early entry into care through access to pregnancy testing, counseling and referral. It also provides services at many of the county's prenatal sites that allow women to transition from postpartum care to reproductive health.
- Spanish-speaking clinicians are available to provide bilingual and bicultural services to Hispanic women through the Family PACT Program and other community clinics.
- Gender-specific substance abuse treatment programs exist for both residential and outpatient care and some programs accommodate children along with their mothers.
- An array of reproductive health services, such as screening for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), contraception, emergency contraception, pregnancy testing, abortion, breast cancer screening and cervical cancer screening are available in Sonoma County.
- College students at SRJC and SSU can access birth control and STD services through their campus health centers

Weaknesses:

- Sonoma County has been classified as "rural" in the Medicare reimbursement system. Since this results in a lower reimbursement rate, many physicians are unwilling to accept new Medicare patients.
- 8,000 of the County's children are uninsured. Approximately 5,330 of them are eligible for Healthy Families or Medi-Cal but are not enrolled. Of the remaining third (2,670), half are not eligible for public health insurance because of income eligibility requirements, and the other half do not meet the citizen/residency requirements.
- Specialty services during pregnancy are lacking. These include cardiology, neurology, mental health, social work, and gender-specific smoking cessation programs. Bilingual specialty services are especially lacking. A lack of specialists in the County who accept Medi-Cal is a serious issue.
- Seniors in the unincorporated areas of the County, especially West County, have concerns about accessible healthcare due to their lack of transportation. Since the majority of seniors are women, they are disproportionately affected by the limited public transportation.
- 48% percent of seniors responding to a focus group for the Sonoma County Area Agency on Aging cited healthcare as the most critical unmet need for older adults.

Personal Story from Community Forum in District Four

A woman who had breast cancer received lots of resource information, but it was all in print. She couldn't read well while ill and wasn't able to access what was available to breast cancer patients. Patients need a personal advocate in the health care system. Airport Club offers free health club membership for breast cancer patients. Sutter Breast Care Center is great; it has a nurse navigator and patient advocate.

Opportunities:

- Support proposals that address the hidden costs associated with the uninsured, lower health care costs, create a healthier California through prevention and wellness and provide coverage for all Californians. Insurance coverage for all Californians will be especially beneficial to women.
- The 2010 Healthy People Objectives for improving the health status of pregnant women, children and adolescents are important objectives for consideration in further health initiatives for Sonoma County.
- The 2010 Healthy People Objectives establish important goals and guidelines for the reduction of intimate partner physical assault.

Threats:

- The proposed closure of Sutter Hospital in Santa Rosa poses a severe threat to the preservation of women's inpatient reproductive health (i.e., the availability of postpartum tubal ligations, the retention of inpatient abortion services for women with unviable or life-threatening pregnancies), the adherence to end-of-life healthcare directives and that the needs of emergency department rape victims. Santa Rosa Memorial will be the only large hospital and, because of the limitations of its religious affiliation, will not serve as a replacement for many of these services.
- Teen girls ages 15-19 in Southwest Santa Rosa and the West College Area have significantly higher birth rates than the rest of the County and some of the highest in the State. In 2003, 65% (271) of the births to mothers, age 15-19 years, were Hispanic. Seven percent of births to mothers, age 15-19 years, occurred within 24 months of a previous birth.
- A new federal policy prohibits children born to low income illegal immigrants from being automatically enrolled in health insurance through Medicaid/Medi-Cal. The perception that applying for the health insurance could jeopardize their remaining in the United States can be an insurmountable roadblock to uninsured families. Therefore, families forego health insurance, which increases the number of uninsured children and the subsequent strain on public health services.

Focus for Community Action: HEALTHCARE

- Implement a statewide or national program that enables health insurance coverage for everyone.
- Promote preventive care for early detection and treatment of diseases that kill women.
- Require that the essential health care services for women now available through Sutter Hospital continue.
- Offer gender-specific treatment for health conditions. More women succeed in making health changes when programs are tailored to the needs of women.
- Support pregnancy prevention programs for teen girls in Sonoma County.
- Increase accessibility of pre-natal care to all women in Sonoma County.
- Promote exercise programs for all women.
- Increase social marketing campaign efforts to prevent violence against women.
- Offer preventive mental health services tailored for women.

SOURCES

2006 Sonoma County Indicators; Maternal, Child, and Adolescent Health Five-Year Needs Assessment for 2005-2009.

Sonoma County Area Agency on Aging *Living Longer, Living Well*

Press Democrat article March, 2006 on testimonial of more than 80 medical professionals: <http://www1.pressdemocrat.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070208/NEWS/702080305&SearchID+=73277942042369>

Interview in March 2007 with Dr. Mary-Maddux Gonzales, Director of Public Health, County of Sonoma Department of Health Services.

First Five Sonoma County Report



**Facts:
HOUSING**

Home Ownership:

- 51% of homes are owned by married couples.
- Non-married women own 25% of homes, while 19% of non-married home owners are men.
- While figures are not specifically available for the number of Hispanic women homeowners, 10% of homeowners are Hispanic in Sonoma County, compared to 22% for California as a whole.

**Personal Stories
from the Living Room,
a day program for
homeless women
and their children**

*“Loving folks. My life matters.
A sensitive ear. Fabulous food.
A comfortable safe environment.
Resources. Support. Love.
Someone cares. I matter.
I’m worth it. Help is available.
A reason to go on. I’m not alone.
I can do it.”*

*“What a blessing this place has
been to me. I have been able to
make phone calls concerning
employment and housing at no
charge.”*

*“The Living Room has provided
a stable, safe, constant
environment for my children and
me as well as many others.”*

Homelessness:

- Homeless Count 2007 – 34.8% of those answering question on gender (1,827) indicated they were women.
- Homeless county 2005 - Among the 830 women and girls counted, 478 were “primary contacts” (most likely heads of household). Thus, 21% of the total number of people counted were women head of households.
- Children (0-18yrs) comprise 21% of the counties homeless (2005).
- Homeless women were much more likely to be a part of a family than were homeless men.
- For the academic year 2005-2006, the Sonoma County Office of Education reported 473 homeless students (K-12) county wide.

**SWOT Analysis:
HOUSING**

Strengths:

- The Task Force on the Homeless is tracking the homeless population in Sonoma County through its biennial census count that gathers data on people who are homeless and what they need. The Task Force works to keep the issue in the public eye and before policy makers.
- The Sonoma County Housing Coalition offers support services to people who are homeless and those with disabilities.
- Burbank Housing provides a range of assistance with affordable housing, along with programs that support healthy neighborhood interaction.
- Sonoma County has various programs to help relieve the housing crisis. These include: down payment assistance programs for first-time buyers; rehabilitation of run-down properties; self-help housing built by the sweat equity of new owners and supporters; multifamily rental housing, often with childcare and after school programs on site; service enriched housing for persons with physical and/or mental disabilities; and transitional housing for people gaining the skills needed to re-enter the job market and live independently.
- The Living Room provides special services for homeless women in Sonoma County, offering a safe space for women and children during the day.
- Women Build, a program of Habitat for Humanity, gathers women to help with building houses for other women.
- Kid’s Street Learning Center was developed to provide a holistic approach to helping children without homes and other at-risk youth break the cycle of self-deprecation and poverty.

Weaknesses:

- Affordable housing in Sonoma County is a challenging issue. The 2006 Sonoma County Indicators Report stated that the median price of a home has almost tripled in just seven years.

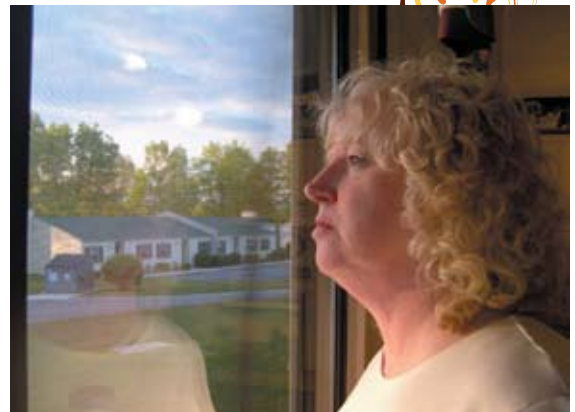
- In January 2007 the median price of a house in Sonoma County was \$545,00. Only seven percent of households in Sonoma County could afford a median priced home in May 2006. The median family income needed to purchase a median priced home was estimated at \$133,311 while the median income of a four-person household in the county was \$75,100 in 2006.
- The median monthly rent for a 2-bedroom was estimated at \$1,111. Assuming housing expenses consume 50% of gross monthly income, someone would need to make at least \$12.81 an hour working full-time to afford to rent. Working full-time for a minimum wage of \$7.50 per hour would not cover the median rent.
- Women with children face unique and more difficult housing problems:
 - Women traditionally earn less and thus may have more difficulty qualifying for a loan.
 - Welfare-to-work programs offer lower paying jobs and that income may not be sufficient to cover the high cost of housing.

Opportunities:

- The Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) has given a Regional Housing Allocation to jurisdictions in Sonoma County. This means that the cities are tasked with building a certain number of affordable housing (low, very low, or moderate income units). Very low income is defined as making less than 50% of the median income for Sonoma County. Currently, two of Sonoma County's nine major cities, Cloverdale and Petaluma, have built or approved the required number of units of their affordable housing allocation from 1999-2009.

Threats:

- Many residents are not knowledgeable about the County's homelessness situation. There is little community acceptance that working families are often one paycheck away from losing their homes.
- Senior citizens are the fastest growing group of homeless people seeking shelter according to shelter providers.
- 21% of the County's homeless are classified as chronically homeless. Chronically homeless means being without housing for more than a year. This group often has disabilities such as substance abuse or mental illness.
- Homeless women are more vulnerable than men, and most report fearing for their safety.
- Sometimes shelters provide inadequate security for women and they fear the other clientele in the shelter. For that reason, women can be reluctant to go to a shelter and choose instead to take their chances on the street.
- Most homeless children are in the care of homeless mothers and there is a problem of what to do with their pre-school-aged children during the day if they aren't in shelters.
- Many homeless people are employed, but earn too little to acquire or maintain housing. They live in shelters, cars, tents, transitional houses, campers or with friends or relatives.
- The homeless students currently enrolled in the K-12 public school system are the tip of the "at risk" iceberg for future social problems including gang involvement, reduced educational success, unwanted pregnancy, criminal behavior, mental health problems and drug abuse.



-
- Educate elected officials, housing and planning commissioners, planning staffs, and the general public on housing programs and policies that benefit women and children.
 - Provide education for women on methods on achieving homeownership through programs such as first time buyer programs, sweat equity and Habitat for Humanity.
 - Fund additional programs for homeless women with children that provide a safe environment and a sense of security.
 - Explore implementing affordable housing financial programs and incentives for developers that are successful in other jurisdictions.

SOURCES

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"Singing the Housing Blues," Beacon Economics, 2006

US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2003.

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Lindabeth Swan, The Living Room.

Maureen Wallace, Assistant to Dr. Carl Wong, Superintendent of the Sonoma County Office of Education.

Women & Criminal Justice System and Physical Safety

COMMISSIONERS:

Rebecca Hollingsworth, Chair
Jennifer Blackwood

The research of this committee was guided by the following questions:

- Is there just and humane treatment for women and girls in the criminal justice system, both as victims and as offenders?
- Are women offenders in Sonoma County receiving equal treatment while in the criminal justice system and equal and appropriate support services when they are released?
- How safe are women and girls in Sonoma County? How safe do they feel?
- What preventive measures are being taken to protect the safety of women and girls?
- Are adequate services provided to women and girls who have been victims of domestic violence, rape or other crimes?

Other questions arose out of the course of their study and were explored.

Arrests and Criminal Charges:

Facts: CRIMINAL JUSTICE

The 2005 statistics for Sonoma County from the California Department of Justice show:

- 1,082 women were arrested on felony charges compared to 3,967 men.
- 21% of felony arrests were women.
- 21% of those arrested for assault were women.
- 100% of those charged with rape were men.
- 1 out of 6 charged in a homicide was a woman.

The 2005 statistics for the unincorporated areas of Sonoma County as reported by the Sonoma County Sheriff's Department show:

- 79% of the 304 suspects were men and 21% were women.

Probation:

- Out of 1,342 adults granted formal probation in fiscal year 2004-2005, 81% were male and 19% were female.
- Of the 158 juvenile probationers (without a gang condition), ages 11-14, 75% were male and 25% were female.
- Of the 54 juvenile probationers (with a gang condition), ages 11-14, 74% were male and 26% were female.



Strengths:

SWOT Analysis: CRIMINAL JUSTICE

- Inmates, both men and women, in the Adult Detention Facility have access to an extensive number of services. The services provided include substance abuse education and counseling, basic education, vocational education and job skills training, life skills and behavior modification classes, law library and recreational reading programs, religious programs, recreational programs and correspondence courses.
- The Sonoma County Sheriff's Department is offering an unfunded pilot program to expand Starting Point, the drug treatment program for inmates at the county jail,

to include female inmates. This help not only the inmates, but their dependent children, for who they are frequently the primary caregiver.

- The Sierra Youth Center is a County program specifically designed for female youth sentenced to probation. Program statistics show that 95% of its participants successfully return to public school within eight months.
- In the City of Santa Rosa, Measure O grant money is being used for programs aimed at preventing of gang activities, and some of those programs focus on girls.
- Girl Scouts of Konocti Council provides programs to prevent gang affiliation, services to families of migrant workers and other underserved populations in Sonoma County.
- Restorative Resources, a partner in restorative justice, offers restorative justice practices, including restorative conferencing, and preventive programs to address the harm done by criminal offending, reduce risk of future harm, and focus on strengthening and building the community.



Weaknesses:

- Probation and parole guidelines require inmates to refrain from associating with other parolees or those on probation. Being in supportive relationships with other women who have had a similar experience is a key factor to the successful rehabilitation of female inmates and these relationships are lost when the women leave jail. Women lose their support system at a time when support is most needed.
- An entire sub-group of inmates, women arrested as prostitutes, lack programs to address the trauma they experience either prior to entering the sex trade or as a result of their experiences. Experts believe that treatment for the trauma would help “break the cycle” that keeps women addicted to drugs and in prostitution.
- Youth development programs, like Measure O preventive programs in Santa Rosa, need to expanded to other cities and unincorporated areas of the County.
- There is a lack of awareness among the general public about the issue of human trafficking and the shocking extent to which it exists in Sonoma County.

Opportunities:

- Exploring the establishment of a “John’s School,” similar to the one established by the District Attorney in San Francisco, in order to generate more program income funds for drug treatment and therapy services for incarcerated prostitutes.
- Increasing funding for counseling and restorative justice services could help women caught in the criminal justice system.
- An increased effort to break the cycle of trauma and incarceration that perpetuates prostitution will have a positive impact on the growing problem in Sonoma County.
- Developing more awareness about human trafficking in Sonoma County will bring this critical issue to the forefront.
- Working with local federal policy makers, public safety and human service organizations to increase public awareness of the impact and effects of human trafficking in the county.

Threats:

- Without counseling for trauma, female victims are more likely to return to and remain in the criminal justice system.
- Limited public transportation means that some low income women and girls can have difficulty performing court-ordered community service because they are unable

to reach out-of-town job sites, and thus violate the conditions of their parole or probation.

- According to Sonoma County's Multi-agency Gang Enforcement Team, there has been an increase in violent gang crimes involving females being used as drivers, for counter surveillance, and as decoys to set up the victims.

**Focus for
Community Action:
CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

- Make drug treatment, such as Starting Point, available to female inmates so that their treatment is not postponed until they return to society and are faced with the societal and economic factors that may have lead to the addiction.
- Develop specific services for the rehabilitation and restoration of women convicted of prostitution and to help break the cycle of trauma and incarceration.
- Support funding to maintain a range of specialized services for girls at Sierra Youth Center.
- Develop mentoring programs for women being released from jail so that the critical relational support is available, thereby increasing the chances for a successful recovery.

SOURCES

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"Half of domestic abusers don't finish state program" by Clea Benson (Sacramento Bee) in the Press Democrat, Nov. 22, 2006
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Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence. Kaiser Permanente Northern California, Family Violence Prevention Program. November 2005.
Sonoma County Sheriff's Department, Inmate Programs in Sonoma County's Adult Detention Facilities Report, 2006.
United Against Sexual Assault Client Demographic Summary Report, 10/4/04-9/30/05.
Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault Unit, Statistical Information, Year 2005, Sonoma County Sheriff's Department.
"Attorney General Lockyer Report on Domestic Violence Finds Criminal Justice is Failing to Protect Victims, Families, AG Task Force Makes 44 Recommendations to Reduce Domestic Violence," July 26, 2005, <http://caag.state.ca.us/newsletter>
"Key Findings from Our Survey of 100 Intimate Femicide Cases," from Murder at Home: An Explanation of Legal and Community Responses to Intimate Partner Femicide in California. 2006.
"An Overview of Sonoma County Female Gang Members and Affiliates," PowerPoint by Sonoma County Multi-Agency Gang Enforcement Team. Presented by Lt. Lorenzo Duenas, Sonoma County Sheriff's Department, 2006.

**Facts:
PHYSICAL SAFETY**

While any discussion of women's safety must include a discussion of rape and domestic violence, women are also victims of other crimes. Unfortunately, the lack of consistent gender information in other crime reporting makes it impossible to accurately report on the level of victimization women in Sonoma County experience.

Rape Statistics:

The 2004 statistics from the California Department of Justice for Sonoma County show:

- There were 214 counts of Forcible Rape reported to law enforcement.
- Approximately 84% of rapes go unreported. Therefore, it is likely that 1,070 forcible rapes occurred, translating to:
 - 89 rapes per month, and
 - three and a half rapes every day in Sonoma County
- These figures do not take into account attempted rape, forced sodomy or oral copulation, or other forms of sexual violence.

Domestic Violence Statistics:

The 2005 statistics from the Sonoma County Sheriff's Department for the unincorporated areas show:

- Of the 304 domestic violence cases, 77% of the time a woman is the victim.

Strengths:

SWOT Analysis: PHYSICAL SAFETY

- Several community based organizations are doing outstanding work in the area of domestic violence and sexual assault prevention, including:
 - United Against Sexual Assault (UASA) has spent five years building relationships with law enforcement across the county to ensure prompt and appropriate treatment for victims of sexual abuse.
 - The YWCA operates the County's domestic violence hotline and offers safe and confidential shelter to families fleeing domestic violence.
 - YWCA Advocates are placed in most law enforcement agencies including the Sheriff's Department, and the police departments of Santa Rosa, Sonoma and Healdsburg.
 - "My Strength," a program offered by UASA, targets the most common potential perpetrator, the young man.
- Several organizations work to counter violence, bullying, and harassment in our schools, including:
 - Community Matters in Sebastopol, offering a school safety program called Safe School Ambassadors, which trains students in techniques to reduce bullying and harassment in the schools.
 - The Commission on Human Rights offering a comprehensive "Hate Free Campus" project at local high schools and works to support on-campus diversity clubs.
- Girls Circle in Cotati teaches communication techniques to build empathy and find common ground.
- Girl Scouts of Konocti Council offers "Sisters Stayin' Safe," funded by an anti-gang educational grant from Measure O funds.
- The Victim Assistance Center, a program of the Sonoma County District Attorney's office, offers compensation and assistance for every crime.



Weaknesses:

- While there is information on the number of reported domestic disturbance calls, not all municipalities participate in the county wide consortium, which uses standardized forms and data collection.
- Statewide, less than half of those sentenced to anger management and drug and alcohol programs through the court system are completing their sentences.
- Although the District Attorney's "Zero Tolerance" policy has ensured the strict application of domestic violence law, an unintended consequence is that batterers who are able to avoid prosecution aren't held accountable.
- There is a lack of "female specific" resources to deal with the challenges younger women face after sexual assault. Specifically, girls are reluctant to discuss issues like sexual abuse that are often central to their presenting behavioral issues, in a mixed gender setting.
- Intervention and prevention services are predominantly based in the County's large population centers (Santa Rosa, Petaluma, and Sonoma). A lack of public

transportation makes it difficult for women and girls in remote areas and those without vehicles to access these services.

- The large and growing Hispanic population in the County is not well connected to public and private, non-faith-based, social support systems. There is a lack of Spanish interpreters for cases of sexual assault and domestic violence.
- There is only one domestic violence shelter, operated by the YWCA. Sonoma County needs additional safe houses for females escaping batterers and seeking safe havens from sexual predators.
- Prostitutes are considered criminals, not victims, and can only get assistance once they are incarcerated.
- There is a lack of affordable, specialized counseling for incest and abuse victims.

Opportunities:

- Tracking gender-based information about the perpetrators of crime and their victims will provide community based organizations with the information needed to compete for federal grant money for gang prevention, domestic violence prevention, human trafficking enforcement, and other issues.
- Create a Family Justice Center to provide a central location for all services to domestic violence victims, a mobile unit would bring these services to the less populated areas of Sonoma County.
- Additional support for organizations and programs which focus on prevention and in empowering young women and girls, such as Girl Scouts and Girls Circle, is imperative for the social development of this group.
- Increasing classes and programs in the schools, which address diversity, violence prevention techniques, social differences and tolerance, all which include sensitivity to gender issues, are important to student success and prepare students to function in a diverse society.
- It is important to include the voice of youth in policy discussions about public safety to arrive at solutions that will work for them.
- Increase awareness among law enforcement, the criminal justice system and victim assistance professionals about the value of safety conferencing. Safety conferencing is a restorative justice tool that can be used to displace assumptions about victims and to build the individual and collective strength needed to reshape connections, make sound choices, and promote the safety of women and children from diverse cultures. In Sonoma County, restorative justice techniques are not considered an appropriate course of action in cases involving sexual assault or domestic violence.

Threats:

- While rape is not the only type of violence women experience, these numbers, and the statistics on domestic violence, indicate women face serious threats simply because they are women.
- Infrastructure gaps, such as in public transportation, disproportionately affect women and girls seeking to receive community services available only in Santa Rosa.
- Limited education is available for girls and women on personal safety and assertive vs. aggressive behavior. Structural hurdles exist in the legal system which frame the victim as part of the evidentiary case and provide assistance from that point of view.

A former prostitute testified before our committee about the vicious cycle of trauma, self medication through drug abuse, prostitution to support her habit, followed by incarceration. Her story of childhood sexual abuse by an uncle is a familiar refrain to professionals working in juvenile justice, gang abatement, and crisis counseling. Her successful reintegration into society, thanks in part to a dynamic new counseling technique called "Rapid Eye Movement Desensitization," provides inspiration for the rehabilitation of those caught in this cycle.



- Recommend that the District Attorney expand accessibility of services and rigorously hold batterers accountable.
- Require gender specific data on the victim on every criminal complaint and have jurisdictions in Sonoma County standardize their reporting.
- Establish residential services for rape victims.



SOURCES

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[http://oak.cats.ohiou.edu/~ad361896/anne/cease/rapestatistic page.html](http://oak.cats.ohiou.edu/~ad361896/anne/cease/rapestatistic%20page.html)

"Half of domestic abusers don't finish state program" by Clea Benson (Sacramento Bee) in the Press Democrat, Nov. 22, 2006

"How Women are Doing in Sonoma County, Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence & Crime" by Sarah West and Stacey Quick, paper for SSU Professor Ai Chu at Sonoma State University, May 2006

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United Against Sexual Assault Client Demographic Summary Report, 10/4/04-9/30/05.

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"Attorney General Lockyer Report on Domestic Violence Finds Criminal Justice is Failing to Protect Victims, Families, AG Task Force Makes 44 Recommendations to Reduce Domestic Violence," July 26, 2005, <http://caag.state.ca.us/newsletter>

"Key Findings from Our Survey of 100 Intimate Femicide Cases," from Murder at Home: An Explanation of Legal and Community Responses to Intimate Partner Femicide in California. 2006.



Women & Employment, Earnings, Education and Training

COMMISSIONERS:

Carol Russell, Chair
(September 2005 – February 2006)

Chris Allen, Co-Chair
(March 2006 – June 2007)

Robyn Bramhall, Co-Chair
(March 2006 – April 2007)

Sharon Bass

Dena Lash

Roxanne Meuse

Carol McHale

The research of this committee was guided by the following questions:

- Do women have equal access to meaningful work and adequate compensation?
- What do women make on the dollar compared to men? Has the ratio improved over time?
- What are the issues and barriers for women seeking employment or starting businesses for themselves?
- Is appropriate information and support available for women who want to pursue non-traditional careers for women?
- How prevalent is sexual harassment and discrimination of women in the work place?
- Do women and girls have equal access to education and training opportunities?
- Are opportunities for promotion and success open to women in all work settings?

Other questions arose out of the course of their study and were explored.

Earnings & Income:

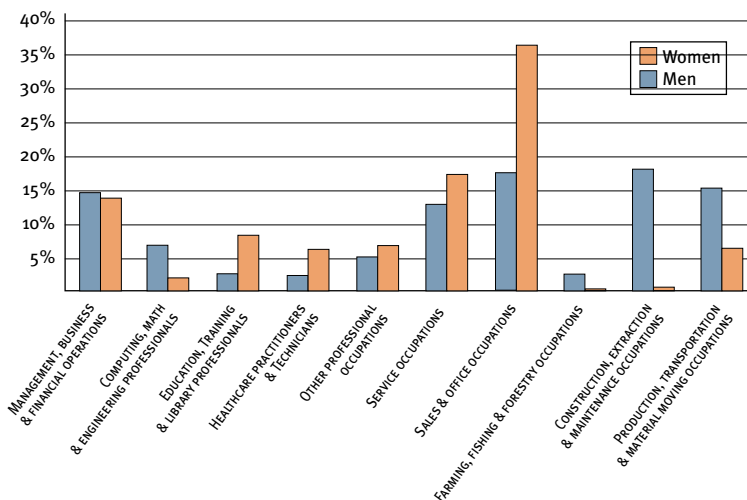
- In 1999, men's median income in Sonoma County was \$44,038 for full-time, full-year work, compared to \$33,500 for women.
- For both part-time and full-time workers: men's median annual earnings are over \$10,000 higher than women's.
- Women are concentrated in the lower earnings categories, while men are in the higher earnings categories.
- Compared to 18% of men, only 6% of women employed full-time, full-year earn over \$75,000 per year.
- Almost half of the full-time, full-year employed women earn between \$20,000 and \$40,000.
- Women make only 35% of all aggregate earnings in the County.
- Women make only 25% of annual salaries over \$50,000 and 15% of those over \$100,000.
- In 2005, Sonoma County women working full-time full-year made 80 cents on the dollar compared to men. The ratio in California was 83 cents on the dollar. (US Census Bureau 2005 American Community Survey) This has improved since 2002 when women made 67 cents on the dollar to men.

Occupation & Industry:

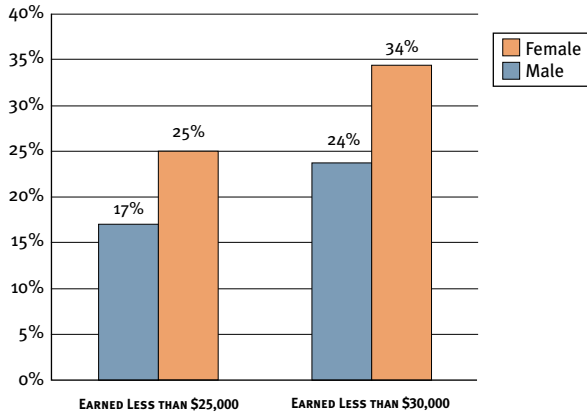
- 37% of women work in sales and office occupations, compared to 18% of men.
- 29% of women work in education, health and social service occupations compared to 9% of men.

Facts: EMPLOYMENT & EARNINGS

Occupation by Gender, Employed Civilian Population age 16+, 2000



Percentage of Men and Women in Sonoma County Earning Less than a Living Wage



- Only 1% of women work in construction and maintenance, compared to 18% of men.
- Only 2% of women work in computing, math, and engineering professions, compared to 7% of men.
- Women own 29.3% of local small businesses according to Dun & Bradstreet Business Database, 2007.

Living Wage:

The Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County defines a “living wage” as a self-sufficiency wage which enables a person to pay for housing, medical care, transportation, childcare and food without relying on public or private assistance. For Sonoma County, this is \$11.70/hour with benefits and \$13.20/hour without benefits. Using a full-time, full-year employment figure of 2,080 hours to make the computations, this would be an annual salary of \$24,336 with

benefits and \$27,456 without benefits.

When the living wage guidelines for Sonoma County are applied to 2000 census data, it is apparent that more women than men are earning less than a living wage.

According to the 2005 American Community Survey, figures for Sonoma County show that:

- 25% of women working full-time, full-year earned less than \$25,000, compared to 17% of men. Thus one-quarter of women working full-time earn less than a living wage.
- 34% of women working full-time, full-year earned less than \$30,000, compared to 24% of men.

NOTE: The minimum wage in California in 2007 is \$7.50/hour (\$8.00 beginning January 1, 2008), and working full-time, full year generates an annual salary of \$15,600 annually (\$16,640 at the 2008 minimum wage rate).

Poverty:

- Women have higher poverty rates than men.
- Almost twice as many women than men over age 65 have incomes below the federal poverty line: 7% of women compared to 4% of men.
 - Among working-aged women (18 to 64 years), 9% are poor compared to 7% of men.
 - Women’s rates of poverty increase with age.
- Of County residents under the age of 18, 8% of girls and 9% of boys are poor.

NOTE: “Poverty” and “poor” are defined using the federal poverty levels, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau and Social Security. Poverty Guidelines are another version of the federal poverty measure. They are issued each year in the Federal Register by the Department of Health and Human Services. These guidelines are often used to determine eligibility for various federal programs. For one individual, the poverty threshold is not to exceed \$8,794.

Personal Stories from Community Forum District One

One woman shared her experience of working as a Medical Assistant and as a Meat Cutter. She experienced quite a contrast between the jobs, one as being very traditionally female and the other being traditionally male:

Medical Asst. vs. Meat Cutter	
not paid well	paid well
woman’s job	man’s job
needs more skill/knowledge	can make error without consequence
needs certification	no certification required

A woman shared that remarrying helped financially giving her access to much needed health insurance coverage. Financially, it would be disastrous if she was on her own.

SWOT Analysis: EMPLOYMENT & EARNINGS

Strengths:

- Women leaders in business are active in the community and are publicly recognized for their contributions through the North Bay Business Journal.
- Women own almost 30% of local businesses.
- The county’s largest employer, the County of Sonoma, has had a 50% increase in the number of female department heads over the last two years (2005-2007). These newly

hired County department heads have decision-making authority in positions that can positively affect the community.

- Increasing attention is being given to the economic issues of older women, which is important in light of their relatively high numbers in the County and their real and potential participation in the workforce.
- Sonoma County CARES, funded in part by First 5 Sonoma County and administered by the Child Care Planning Council, offers education stipends to early care and education providers to support their professional development.

Weaknesses:

- In 2005, Sonoma County women made 80 cents on the dollar to men.
- Women predominate in occupations with lower earnings than those where there are more males. Training and education in non-traditional fields is not widely available, and many women perceive barriers to entry and limitations within these fields.
- More women live below the poverty level than men, especially over age 65.
- Sexual harassment cases are increasing in number and severity, especially for women in service jobs and male-dominated fields.

Opportunities:

- Creating more part-time, professional level positions for women who are balancing work with the care-taker role will keep women in the workforce and add to their quality of life.
- Sexual harassment continues to be a factor for women in the workplace. Providing training on “what to do if it happens to you”, especially for women employed in service jobs and male-dominated workplaces will have a positive impact.
- Implementing programs to create and encourage opportunities for women to advance in their chosen fields will maximize workforce resources and reduce barriers to self-determination.
- Developing job seeking and job skill programs for older women who need to be in the workforce will be beneficial for them and for the workforce.
- Training women and girls for non-traditional occupations that enable self-sufficiency provides an important resource to the workforce of Sonoma County.
- Providing more training for employers on the liability and impact of sexual harassment could help reduce the number of occurrences.

Threats:

- Many people consider the struggle for women’s equal rights to be essentially complete, and may not be fully aware of the barriers and missed opportunities for women’s full and equal involvement in the workforce. Young women may feel especially unsupported when facing difficulties they think were eradicated years ago.
- Most County programs are designed to assist women into employment, usually at the low end of the financial spectrum, and do not generally emphasize preparation for higher-paying, non-traditional jobs.
- Job seeking services often have income guidelines that may exclude older women who especially need the support.
- Recent trends downward in earnings among the lowest-earning workers nationwide is mirrored in Sonoma County and raises concerns about the situation of the “working poor,” who require assistance to meet basic needs for their families and themselves.
- Employers often don’t fully recognize the diverse skill set mature, experienced women can offer.

Personal Stories from Community Forum District Two

One woman shared of her experience with workplace discrimination: “They knew I’d get it done so they gave me everything they didn’t want to do. Then my male boss took credit for my work and he got the raise.”

A woman spoke of her experience of getting caught in the Workers’ Compensation insurance system. It is not easy to negotiate through the system around the complexity of workers’ comp laws. For the first year and a half, she was denied workers compensation. One local clinic was very helpful. Women must be tenacious in working with the ‘system.’ Laws may have changed – but a LOT hasn’t when you listen to individual women’s experiences.

Personal Story from Community Forum District Five

A woman shared her concerns about a friend living in Sebastopol. Her friend is an elderly Native American woman who flew supply planes in “the War.” She lives on a fixed pension income and can barely survive, given the cost of living in the area. The recent increases in utility rates are making it almost impossible for her to afford to live in the home she has rented for many years. Her other major challenge is getting access to health care, because the bus schedule/routes do not provide efficient service between Sebastopol and the area of Santa Rosa where her health clinic is located.

**Personal Stories
from Community Forum
District One**

An older woman shared that she is a retired teacher and that her teachers' retirement plan and social security only covers her mortgage, so she works temporary jobs. She won't work for less than \$10/hour. She has found it very hard to a good wage in Sonoma Valley, even as retired professional. Finding something for \$12-\$15/hour is difficult. Gas costs have impacted where she can go for a temp job. EDD does testing and workshops and is good for career help. Job Link in Santa Rosa offers good career help for older workers, but has income guidelines, so she did not qualify.

**Focus for Community Action:
EMPLOYMENT & EARNINGS**

- Explore strategies to ensure a living wage throughout the County as a step toward economic self-determination for women, who predominate in low-earning occupations.
- Create job-seeking programs for older women that are not income-dependent.
- Educate young women about their career choices and non-traditional options.
- Implement a self-sufficiency/living wage on-line calculator, including a budgetary tool for women.

SOURCES

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Census 2000 data
First Five Sonoma County.
Sonoma County Job Link staff interviews.
Sonoma County Economic Development Board
North Bay Business Journal, Women in Business, June 26, 2006.

**Facts:
EDUCATION & TRAINING**

Educational Enrollment & Attainment:

- More boys than girls are enrolled elementary, middle, and high schools.
- The overall drop out rate for Sonoma County is lower than that of California, and fewer girls drop out before finishing high school than boys. (Source: California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Unit, 2/8/2007)
- More women than men are enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs.
 - 19% of both women and men have a Bachelor degree, while the percent of people with a graduate or professional degree is 9% for women and 11% for men.

**SWOT Analysis:
EDUCATION & TRAINING**

Strengths:

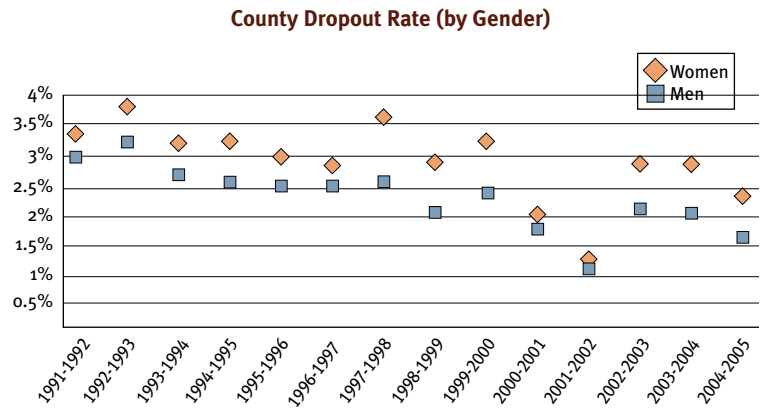
- The number of women enrolled and graduated from institutions of higher education has increased.
- Women students are a major presence at the local California State University - Sonoma State University - including a majority of the transfers from Santa Rosa Junior College.
- Compared to state averages, women's enrollment in both math and biological science is strong at Sonoma State University, suggesting that women feel relatively supported by the social and/or academic environment there.
- Technology High School, located on the SSU campus, is enrolling more girls each year, and female students report increased comfort being a part of what was, until recently, an almost all-male student body.
- Sonoma County Habitat for Humanity's Women Build project promotes the involvement of women in the construction of Habitat houses. Women-built projects provide an opportunity for women to learn construction in a supportive environment.



- The Northern California Laborers’ Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee, among other trade organizations, is making a concerted effort to recruit women into their training programs.

Weaknesses:

- Although a larger percentage of Sonoma County women have attended college and attained higher educational levels than state and national norms, women’s educational attainment rates are lower than men beyond the bachelor’s level.
- Despite heavy recruitment efforts and attractive, equal pay, Sonoma County women are not entering labor apprenticeship training programs, in significant numbers.



Opportunities:

- Women in non-traditional disciplines often face unique challenges. Developing a support system for these women would help them thrive.
- Since there appears to be a lingering perception among women that discrimination persists in labor fields, the business and labor community could partner with agencies and organizations already active in supporting women in career exploration or transition to learn about their concerns and ways to address them.
- There appears to be some sense that Title IX guidelines force schools to create a one-size-fits-all model that does not serve young women. The trend in California away from affirmative action as a social policy threatens to leave unfinished the business of providing women with full and equal opportunities in the educational system. Tracking the participation and performance of youth by gender would assist in determining whether there was equity.

Threats:

- Women in Sonoma County earn less on average than men, despite near equality in educational achievement. The numbers of women enrolled or even degreed at the baccalaureate level may not reflect increased opportunities or earning potential for those women.
- The County’s Economic Development Board predicts the most job growth in the technology sector. Many of these jobs will require advanced knowledge in physical sciences, where women are currently under-represented at both the undergraduate and graduate levels
- The trades offer many jobs that don’t require a college education. Women could be left out of these jobs and the self-sufficiency they offer, if they are unable to obtain the training and opportunities provided by established apprenticeship programs.
- Create career awareness programs for women of all ages to educate them on career options, including the trades and other non-traditional fields. Expand school counselor’s ability to inform girls about how their educational choices guide their future options.

**Focus for Community Action:
EDUCATION & TRAINING**

- Facilitate a partnership between business and the labor community to support women in non-traditional fields by offering career exploration programs.
- Create programs to support women who make non-traditional career choices.



SOURCES

California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office 2004 Reports
Sonoma County Economic Development Board publications
Laura Triantafyllos, Counselor at Technology High School, Rohnert Park
Amy Lemmer, Sonoma County Habitat for Humanity
Northern California Laborers' Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee
2000 US Census

Women & Political Representation

The research of this committee was guided by the following questions:

- How well are women represented in political/policy making positions in Sonoma County?
- How well are women's issues addressed by local governments in Sonoma County?
- Do women participate equally in all levels and aspects of the political process?

Other questions arose out of the course of their study and were explored.

COMMISSIONERS:

Pat Sheehan, Chair
(September 2005 – February 2006)

Tiffany Renée, Chair
(January 2006 – June 2007)

Pat Boyd
Robyn Bramhall

Facts: POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

LOCATION	POSITION	MALE	FEMALE	% OF WOMEN
Santa Rosa	City Council	4	3	43%
Petaluma	City Council	3	4	57%
Cloverdale	City Council	3	2	40%
Cotati	City Council	2	3	60%
Healdsburg	City Council	4	1	20%
Rohnert Park	City Council	2	3	60%
Sebastopol	City Council	3	2	40%
Sonoma	City Council	4	1	20%
Windsor	Town Council	3	2	40%
County of Sonoma	Board of Supervisors	4	1	20%

SONOMA COUNTY	MALE	FEMALE	% OF WOMEN
Board of Zoning Adjustments Commission	7	3	30%
Ag Preservation & Open Space Advisory Committee	8	7	47%
Board of Building Appeals	5	0	0%
Community Development Committee	3	3	50%
Economic Development Board	7	3	30%
Developmental Disabilities Board	0	1	100%
Local Agency Formation Commission	9	3	25%
Planning Commission	7	3	30%

BUSINESS	POSITION	MALE	FEMALE	% OF WOMEN
Medtronic	Board of Directors	9	2	18%
St. Josephs Health	Board of Directors	15	10	40%
JDS Uniphase	Board of Directors	9	0	0%
State Farm	Board of Directors	10	3	23%
AFC (Tellabs)	Board of Directors	8	2	20%
AT&T	Board of Directors	11	6	35%
PG&E	Board of Directors	11	2	15%

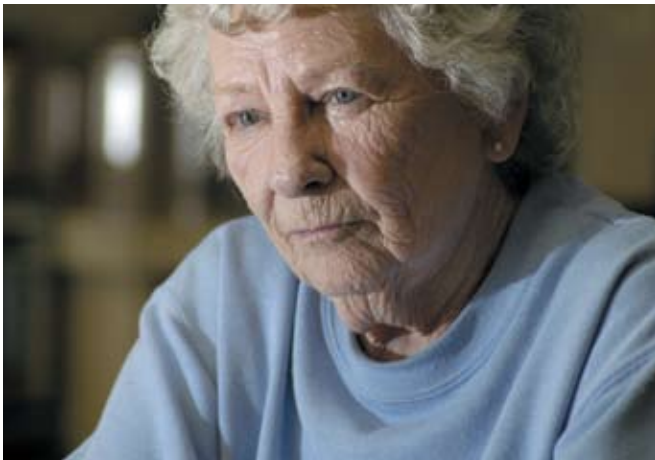
SWOT Analysis:
POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Strengths:

- Women are equally represented on three city and town councils.
 - Petaluma, Cotati and Rohnert Park have women majorities.
- Women tend to have higher numbers on the more socially-oriented boards.

Weaknesses:

- Two cities have a disparity with only one woman council member: Sonoma and Healdsburg.
- No cities have an ethnic women on council at this time as far as can be known from the data.
- There is only one woman on the Board of Supervisors.
- Men tend to dominate the boards of the traditionally male fields such as development and economy.
- Women are not represented at parity on Boards of Directors of the major corporations doing business in the County.



Opportunities:

- Creating more opportunities for ethnic women to be appointed to councils would add perspective on issues that specifically impact their communities. Diversity could be achieved by encouraging the appointment of ethnic women whenever possible to city and county boards, commissions and committees.

Threats:

- Without women, particularly ethnic women, on the major councils the issues affecting them may go overlooked or misunderstood from lack of voice.
- Lack of women on Corporate Boards of Directors may result in a lack of voice on hiring, advancement, benefits and wage issues.

Focus for Community Action:
POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

- Provide stronger encouragement for women, particularly ethnic women, to be appointed to commissions, boards and to run for public office.
- Provide cultural and diversity training for existing council and board members.
- Watchdog local boards and councils on their voting record as it affects women's issues.
- Actively promote public forums on issues concerning the future of women's participation in all aspects of public life in the County.

SOURCES

Research of Intern Nera Brent on women on councils, boards, and commissions. County, City and Town websites, 2006, updated by Tiffany Renee for March, 2007.
Corporate Board data from North Bay Biz 500.

Spotlight on Issues



The committees identified common themes that arose during their research. These common issues effect women's self-sufficiency, health, education, economic status and community participation and are spotlighted here.

Transportation: Access to Services

The year-long hearings and public forums held by the Commission on the Status of Women revealed that Sonoma County's rural heritage presents a significant obstacle when it comes to getting around. The geography of Sonoma County includes many natural boundaries which present a unique challenge to the delivery of services throughout the area. Santa Rosa, the County seat, is the center of health and social services, but because of geography, access to these services from outlying areas can be difficult. This creates a need to provide services to people in their own communities or improve and enhance existing public transportation.



In almost every area studied, the lack of reliable, affordable public transportation put an additional burden on women and girls in their efforts to experience self-determination in Sonoma County. The lack of affordable housing in Sonoma County may contribute to some women living far from their jobs. Lower income families may find themselves with one car that is being used for the commute to and from work. Childcare arrangements add to the complexity of women getting to and from work when a car is not available. In the outlying areas of the County, bus service is infrequent, may not stop near the workplace, school, childcare, or the doctor's office, and if it does stop close by, people may wait an hour or longer for the bus to return.

Limited transportation options present a significant obstacle to women who need healthcare services. Even if medical providers are close to a bus route, patients have to contend with limited schedules and circuitous routes, as well as having to deal with a bus environment and whatever medical condition they have. For residents in the more remote areas of the County who need hospital out-patient services, such as chemotherapy or dialysis, these obstacles can be life-threatening.

While some para-transit services are available for the disabled and elderly, women facing challenges of dementia, Parkinson's or other age-related illnesses may simply lack the energy to deal with the challenges that a lack of public transportation brings. Some elders living in rural areas have been in their home for most of their life and while at one time they could drive to services, they may longer have that option. Women comprise a growing majority of elder citizens.

For women seeking new job skills in order to improve their family's standard of living, public transportation limits education options when there is not sufficient public transportation to get to work and school efficiently, or at all. The efforts being made by many trade organizations to recruit women into high-paying fields may be hindered by a lack of public transportation available to and from worksites, especially from outlying areas.

Incarcerated women from more remote communities in the County whose families lack private transportation have fewer, less frequent visitors—especially those with minor children, who play an important role in encouraging prisoner rehabilitation. Additionally, a lack of services between the major cities and the more remote, outlying areas, can mean that girls who have been sentenced to community service as a condition of probation may not be able to get to their assigned jobs, which is a violation of the terms of their probation.

New approaches addressing the needs of non-driving citizens will be necessary to ensure access to employment, educational, recreational, medical, and social events in our county.

Other communities have developed coordinated transportation plans that include modified fixed route in urban areas, volunteer driver programs, jitneys, expanded bus schedules and paratransit routes. The Sonoma County Transit Authority and Metropolitan Transit Authority are working on some of these alternatives. Sonoma County transportation, employment and training, health and human service agencies can be key participants in efforts to link County, city, and regional public transportation systems.



Midlife and Older Women: A Growing Population

For 2000-2010, the projected growth rate for people over 60 is 48% and the population of those over 85 is projected to grow by more than 75%. Women outnumber men in all age categories, from age 40 and up. Women comprise 64% of the over-80 population and 59% of residents over 65. This “boomer” demographic has wide-spread implication for the services needed by midlife and older women.

As previously documented in sections on employment and earnings, women generally earn lower wages during their working years and thus have less income security later in life. Social Security is the largest source of income for older women (45% of older women’s income) and women in California typically receive only about half as much annual income from Social Security as men (\$7,350 vs. \$14,314). Women have longer expected life spans than men and may be in need of greater support services for longer.

Women need to be better educated on money and retirement, social security, pensions, saving and investments so they can make informed decisions for a secure retirement. Businesses, nonprofit, and public agencies can re-evaluate wage structures, health benefits and retirement plans in order to capitalize on the skills of women who may want to stay in the workforce, even part-time, beyond retirement age.

Most of us hope to “age in place,” in the homes and communities where we have lived and raised our families. To do so will require a network of community services and support, including more at home care and support options. The cost of support services, allowing a senior to live at home, is about \$750 a month compared to the over \$3,000 a month required for an assisted living facility.

Changes that benefit the economic the well-being of women of all ages will result in more women being self-sufficient after they leave the work force..

SOURCE DATA:

WISER-Women’s Institute for a Secure Retirement, “Minority Women and Retirement Income (2002)”, Sonoma County Area Agency on Aging Needs Assessment, 2005.

Personal Story from Community Forum in District Three

A woman shared that her elderly neighbor died (non suicide) in her own home and did not have someone checking on her. This happens more often than we think in Sonoma County. Post carriers are trained to look for this. More services should be in place to help seniors live at home safely.

Women as Caregivers

More women move in and out of the labor force than men, experiencing breaks in employment history, mainly to provide care for family members. According to the Social Security Administration, women workers retiring in 2000 at age 62 had an average of 32 years service credit for benefits while comparable men had 44 years of credit. Women with lower incomes are more likely to spend more time caring for a family member living with them than women with higher incomes. Grandmothers often play an important role in caregiving, which negatively impacts their health and finances.

Caregiving results in financial consequences for the caregiver including deciding to work part-time or to decline promotions and trainings, and reductions in savings and retirement benefits. One study found that, on average, caregivers lost \$659,130 over a lifetime in reduced salary and retirement benefits.

In September and October 2004, a Web-based survey was sent to employees of the County of Sonoma, Kaiser Permanente Medical Center in Santa Rosa and Petaluma, St. Joseph Health System in Sonoma County (Santa Rosa Memorial and Petaluma Hospital) and Sutter Medical Center. A total of 392 employees identified themselves as caregivers and completed the survey. While the numbers are not representative of all caregivers, they do offer insight into caregiver issues faced by self-selected respondents who work for some of the County's largest employers. Eighty-two percent (82%) of respondents were women and 88% were between the ages of 41 and 45.

Those receiving care were:

- 70% women and 71% were over 75 years old.
- 64% were giving care to parents and 17% to parents-in-law.

Those giving care:

- 36% have been caring for an elderly person from 3-5 yrs.
- 32% of those who are caring for a senior are also caring for a child or dependent under 18.
- 80% spent 1-10 hrs giving care.
- 58% spend 1-5 hrs.

Caregivers experience powerful benefits in caring for family members. However, the growing number of women caring for elders find a lack of needed resources. Most urgently needed are subsidized respite care for the caregiver, caregiver support groups, and affordable quality in-home care. Acknowledging the value of women as primary caregivers during various stages of life enriches our community.

SOURCE DATA:

WISER-Women's Institute for a Secure Retirement, "Minority Women and Retirement Income (2002)", and "Financial Steps for Caregivers". www.wiserwomen.org
 Sonoma County Area Agency on Aging Needs Assessment, 2005.



Hispanic/Latina Women

According to the 2000 Census, 16% of the women in Sonoma County are Hispanic and 19% of Sonoma County men are Hispanic.

- Under age 60, Hispanic men outnumber Hispanic women by 19%
- Over age 60, Hispanic women outnumber Hispanic men by 18%
- 20% of Hispanic women work part-time and 35% are not employed

Poverty is an issue for Hispanic women in Sonoma County. Hispanics of all ages have higher poverty rates than non-Hispanics:

- 14% of Hispanics have income levels below federal poverty guidelines compared to 7% of non-Hispanics
- 15% of Hispanic children are poor, compared to only 8% of non-Hispanic children
- 15% of Hispanics over age 65 are poor, compared to only 4% of non-Hispanic elderly

While specific figures were not available for Sonoma County, a study called "The State of Latinas in California, 2005 Year in Review" shows that in California:

- While 23% of kids enrolled in California's public schools are Latinas, in 2004, Latinas represented only 7% of total UC enrollment and 13% of CSU enrollment. "The result of Latinas not entering California's public university systems, translates into low education attainment rates for Latinas as a whole."
- The 2000 Census revealed that only 5% of Latinas over 25 held a Bachelor's degree and only 4% held an Associates degree.

*Personal Stories from
 a focus group held at
 Windsor High School
 by Junior Commissioner
 Talya Hezi*

**The Influence of Family
 and Relationships on Women:
 How do family values
 influence the college path
 of Hispanic girls?**

Most of the Hispanic girls in this focus group still held firmly to acceptance of the "housewife" doing all the chores around the house. Their families do not permit them the same freedom as their brothers especially with regard to curfew and friends. The girls in the focus group thought this was

(continued)

(continued)

for their own protection because according to their family, they as girls are much more fragile and easily hurt than boys. Following this same logic, the girls claim that they often argue with their families about going away to college. The family may be okay with them attending Sonoma State (which is close by, and perceived as convenient and “safe”) but they don’t want them to go further away even if that would be the girl’s choice. This differs from the treatment of their brothers because the parents don’t expect the sons to take care of them when they grow old; hence there’s no need for the boys to stay in the area.

On the subject of relationships, according to the girls, Hispanic boys do not value protected sex, look down upon girls who have are not virgins, and often view their girlfriends as objects. This attitude heavily affects the girls’ path to college because of risks of getting pregnant, believing that a girl is an “object,” an inferior, and so education for them should come second to family or marriage.

- Latinas comprise 40% of the female workforce in California while earning an average of \$12,000 annually.
- In 2005, no Latina women were serving on High School or Unified School District Boards in Sonoma County or in the State.

Hispanic women and girls can be on the forefront of community growth and change in our community if public agencies address the need to increase the educational level of both school age students and young adults. This bilingual workforce needs access to education and training in higher paying jobs, affordable housing, health care and social services in order to be full participants in the economic and social life of our county.

SOURCE DATA:

“The State of Latinas in California, 2005 Year in Review by HOPE,” www.latinas.org
US Census 2000

Public Policy Recommendations from the California Statewide Agenda for Women and Girls

The Sonoma County Commission on the Status of Women supports the California Statewide Agenda for Women and Girls as developed by the Women's Foundation of California, (www.womensfoundaca.org):

1. **Address the need for Universal Healthcare.**
2. **End the epidemic of violence against women.**
3. **Ensure participatory democracy for all.**
4. **End poverty and close the economic gap between men and women.**
5. **Develop the next generation of leadership.**

Public Policy Recommendations from the California Commission on Women For Consideration in Sonoma County

The Sonoma County Commission on the Status of Women endorses the California Commission on Women's Recommendations for implementation in the state and in Sonoma County.

Housing Homelessness

- Affordable and availability option for low-income working families, seniors and people with disabilities
- New housing should be universally designed to meet needs of seniors and disabled.
- Senior assisted living facilities near transportation and medical services

Healthcare

- Establish a single payer universal health care system for CA*
- Need to attract more doctors specializing in illnesses of seniors, including mental health service.

Childcare

- Increase and streamline funding for quality childcare for children from birth to age five in low-income families *

Political Representation—Equity

- Require all local data be collected by gender and provide statistics on all ethnic groups*
- Increase English as a second language programs for immigrant communities, with ready access within the local community*

Criminal Justice & Safety

- Advocate for increased services for sexual assault and domestic violence programs *
- Provide specialized services, education and service/protocol coordination, case management, intervention and prevention programs for sexually exploited women*
- Establish community-based facilities and program within the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation for women convicted on non-violent crimes. *

- Provide drug and alcohol programs to service adolescent girls before they become part of the adult corrections system.*
- Fund gender responsive program for girls that re an alternative to custody in the juvenile justice system.*

Employment and Training

- Upgrade caregiver training and create a livable wage job
- Prohibit employment discrimination based on familial status/care giving responsibilities*
- Expand Paid Family Leave Act to add grandparents, sibling, in-laws and grandchildren as family members needing care*

Education

- Support programs that encourage participation by girls in math, science, and technology to increase interest in high-wage, high-demand careers.*

Transportation

- Develop a coordinated transportation system, which meets needs of non –driving youth and seniors, including those in rural areas.

Care Giving / Long Term Care

- National policy addressing needs of informal (family) caregivers
- Grant credit for years missed from work as result of family care giving
- Advocate for in-home care and quality caregivers
- Promote development of more adult facilities to accommodate individuals with dementia and other impairing conditions*
- Offer tax credits for those offering care
- Improve wages and benefits of paid caregiver work force.
- Eliminate institutional bias in long term care policy

* *Priority Areas for the California Commission*



Dialogue for the Future

Our research over the past two years indicates the single most important thing that can be done to move towards ensuring women in Sonoma County have equal access and treatment is the inclusion of gender in statistics gathered by the County, the cities, and others in doing research. To understand and evaluate how women are faring, we need to track the issues by gender. We hope this report creates a base line against which future progress can be measured.

We found that there is an outstanding network of public and community based organizations in the areas of employment, training, homelessness, childcare, physical safety and criminal justice in our county who are dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls and, by extension, everyone in the County.

We discovered that local issues and problems often mirrored state and national issues and problems. In many cases, our recommendations at the program level mirrored the California Commission on the Status of Women's Report to the State Legislature and fit with the Women's Foundation five agenda items.

The Commission plans to continue to build its partnerships and reach out to the community around the issues that women face. It is our hope that this Report only begins a dialogue for the future on how we can work collaboratively to address inequities and social ills that disproportionately affect women and girls. We can work together to improve the self-sufficiency, self-determination, and self-esteem for all residents of Sonoma County.

The Voices of Young Women

The Commission on the Status of Women operates a nationally recognized Junior Commissioner Project. Each year, 8-12 high school students are selected to serve on the Junior Commission. The goal of the Junior Commissioner Project is to give young women the opportunity to learn about a public sector commission while helping them develop advocacy, communication, facilitation, and presentation skills. It empowers them as young people, to make a positive impact in their communities around women's issues. Each year, the Juniors take on a different project related to the work of the Women's Commission.



2005-2006

Operating on an academic year, in 2005-2006, the Juniors developed and conducted an on-line survey for their peers to determine what issues young women face in Sonoma County today. Their topic areas were as follows: Safety; Body

Image; Eating Habits; Self-Esteem; Drugs/Alcohol; Sex; and The Future.

One of the Juniors summarized their findings in an article that was printed in *The Community Voice*, the local newspaper for Rohnert Park, Cotati, and Penngrove on October 12, 2006.

The Status of Young Women: A Report Card

By Yiren Lu, 14, Sophomore, Representing the Junior Commission on the Status of Women

Even in today's increasingly equalized world, the status of young women remains ambiguous. Sure, we have data and brochures and pamphlets, but many of these materials have little relevance to modern young women. So this past year, nine high school girls from Sonoma County developed a survey, took it out to their peers, and gained answers to the age-old question, "Where are we now?"

The nine girls were the Junior Commissioners on the Status of Women in Sonoma County. Selected from diverse high schools, they met monthly to discuss, compile, and hopefully influence. This year's assignment was the Report Card Project. The survey revealed the joys, worries and thoughts of young women in our county; it's a chance to celebrate what we have accomplished, and to acknowledge the long road ahead.

Safety

Other than in their own homes, young women in Sonoma County seem to have a degree of apprehension regarding their safety. Girls talked about strange men following them home, lewd comments, and in a couple of instances, unwanted sexual advances. Many mentioned "certain parts of town" they deem unsafe. As one girl said of her neighborhood, "You can't walk around without worrying about getting raped." As shocking as it is, even in Sonoma County, physical safety is not a given.

Body Image

When we asked the girls to tell us what they liked and disliked about their bodies, we got three pages of answers. Although 73 percent of the survey takers said they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their bodies, most of the comments we received were negative. However, girls often said if they exercised and were in shape, they tended to feel better, regardless of whether they had the infamous “perfect figure.”

Eating Habits

Eating disorders have affected people from Hollywood to the Big Apple and everywhere in between. Our survey found that while only 10 percent had ever had an eating disorder, 37 percent did not know where to get help for it. And while almost all agreed that eating three balanced meals a day is critical, 42 percent of young women categorized their own eating habits as “unhealthy,” which could range from skipping breakfast to avoiding carbohydrates altogether.

Self-Esteem

Our survey-takers generally felt good about themselves, noting their looks, grades and relationship with family as factors of self-esteem. The inadequacy complex popped up from time to time, particularly around people smarter, prettier or higher up on the social scale. Many girls reported feeling pressure to “dumb down” to fit in and impress people. One young woman admitted that she has done so with boys; her AP classes and high GPA intimidate them.”

Drugs and Alcohol

Fifty-five percent of the survey group had used drugs or alcohol, which reflects the lifestyle of the average high-schooler today. Alcohol was the most commonly abused substance, followed by marijuana. Interestingly enough, peer pressure was not a major cause. Many were quoted as saying that it was a “personal choice” and “for a good time.” An overwhelming majority knew the penalties when they first used drugs. In the words of one junior commissioner, “there seems to be a disparity between what the kids know and how they apply it to themselves.”

Sex

The percentage of girls who had had sex was a relatively low 24 percent, but of those, 1/3 reported having unprotected sex, mostly because they trusted their partners. In addition, the population was split on whether oral sex was considered sex, although it carries many of the same implications. As with drugs and alcohol, many believed the effects outlined by numerous sources did not pertain to them. The invincibility factor remains an obstacle to effective sex education.

The Future

We wrapped up the survey with a question regarding the girls’ goals for their futures. Some had no idea, but innately felt that it will be “great,” while others had clear-cut goals. One young woman voiced eloquently what the rest of us were thinking: “I don’t know. Some days I feel like I’m getting somewhere, others I feel so lost. I think that all I can hope for is to be happy with whatever comes my way.”

Over a hundred young women took part in this survey, and we were both thrilled and touched by their openness and honesty. Early in 2006, we gave a group presentation for the Youth Activist Convergence, bringing what we had learned to other teenage girls in hope that they would join us in advancement of our gender. It is a quest that we, as young women of the 21st century, should never forget to continue.



2006-2007

In the 2006-2007 school year, another group of Junior Commissioners took on a project of holding focus groups with their peers on their high school campuses to find out what youth are thinking about women's issues. Some of the focus group reports have been shared throughout the Report where the stories collected were relevant to topics being discussed. Other focus group reports with the opinions they captured are listed below.

Women in Math and Science: Why don't more women choose careers in these fields?

The answers given showed that those in the focus group didn't think that females were any less competent than males in the fields of math and science. The reason they offered for the lack of female involvement in these areas was that they were traditionally male-dominated fields, and that they personally would feel intimidated in a work situation where they were in the minority. They agreed that if there were more women in such careers it would encourage them to enter these professions.

"I think that if women are very capable of doing good work in these disciplines, and if they are encouraged to enter them the ratio of men to women in such workplaces will eventually level out."

In a second group, held at another high school, most of the participants thought that women were not incapable of attaining math and science careers, nor were they in any way less able than men, but felt that the lack of women in these fields was due to three primary reasons:

- The media's stereotype of women does not include having science-related occupations.
- The conflicting desires of women to have a home and family clash with what is seen as a demanding and inflexible career in math or science.
- Women simply choose not to enter these fields because of natural disinterest.

Women in Politics: Why aren't there more women in politics? What are the barriers?

In response to the question "Is our country is ready for a woman president?" Most of the females in the group answered "yes." They believed the country would benefit from a woman because she would be less militaristic and just as smart and powerful as men. They all agreed that as long as the woman is just as qualified as the man she deserves it just as much. Others in the group thought that we may be ready in the future, but not now. They all agreed that we are still learning to accept a woman as president and that perhaps the majority of people are not ready. One male believed our country was ready, but the woman would have to have no flaws because of the expectations the public holds (even though we elect imperfect males).

In general, those in the focus group believed that women have been more accepted in politics and that progress has been made. Most believe sexism is still an obstacle and that the stereotypes that women are weak and less intelligent are major barriers. Because of this, women need to be more qualified than their male competitors. One girl thought that being a female would be a benefit because it brings a new perspective to the field. The males in the group focused on how emotional women can be, while one male thought this was an irrational fear. He blamed men, on the other hand, as the ones that crave power and money. The bias of the voter is the barrier.

? Women and the Media: How does the media influence how girls feel about their bodies?

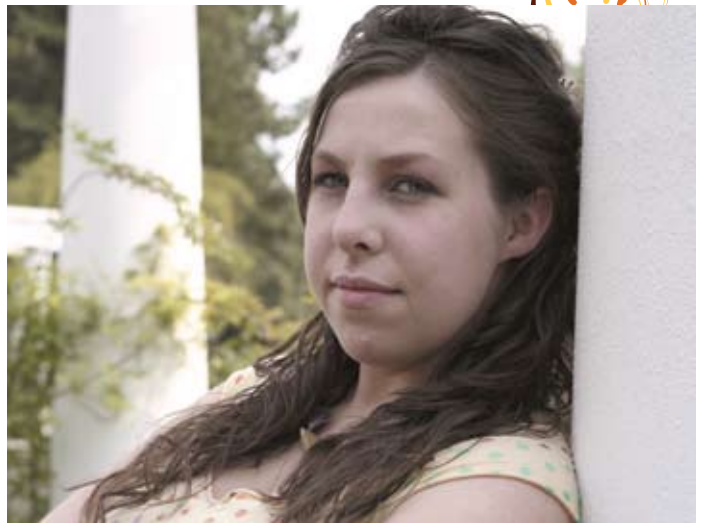
When asked the question “why do teens pay attention to the media?” The young women answered that:

- Peer pressure plays a big part.
- Girls often feel they lack of control and the one thing they can control is their weight.
- Everyone wants to be someone else.
- Girls are often negative and critical instead of positive.
- Schools aren’t supportive of who they are.
- Girls are trying to get attention from guys.
- Girls who are confident are looked down upon.
- A girl who is comfortable with herself is degraded by society.

“I’m comfortable with myself, but it’s hard to escape the image of who the media thinks you should be completely.”

? Contemporary attitudes about abortion: “Can one both support women’s rights and oppose abortion?”

- Students seemed able to pinpoint the cons and pros of abortion.
- As a group, and after much discussion, they concluded that abortion has become a double edged sword for women’s rights.
- They thought it is more about how abortion fits into our culture and how a women’s choice to undergo or not undergo an abortion influences the status of women with our culture.



? Young women and use of birth control: “What choices do young women make about birth control?”

- All the girls thought birth control should be dispensed at high schools because it is positive and helpful in avoiding unwanted pregnancy and STD’s.
- It was also agreed the availability of birth control is not a suggestion to have sex
- Everyone agreed they would not feel comfortable with asking for birth control because they found it embarrassing.
- No one in the group would feel comfortable if parental consent was required, with the exception of abortion in certain cases.
- The group was unanimous in agreeing that parental consent for abortion was a difficult subject to discuss. There were good reasons for and against abortion and the necessary parental consent. The fear was that some parents may force their daughter to have a baby against her will.
- The group believed birth control and abortion should be available to teen girls to help protect them.

More detailed reports on their results can be found in the Appendix.

Appendix 1

POSITIONS OF THE SONOMA COUNTY COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Adopted April 15, 1982

The Sonoma County Commission on the Status of Women does hereby affirm its support for the following positions:

I. FAIR REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

Election and appointment of increased numbers of women to political positions.

Increased participation of all women in all levels and aspects of the political process.

II. EQUAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Enactment and enforcement of federal, state and local laws which guarantee equal access to and treatment in all educational, vocational and athletic programs and facilities.

Development of nondiscriminatory educational and vocational guidance programs, with equal access for all students.

Elimination of sex role, racial and cultural stereotyping at every level of the educational system, and in educational materials.

Inclusion of realistic curricula on health and human sexuality throughout the educational process.

Equalization of financial aid and research opportunities.

Equity in funding from private and public sources for organizations providing programs, opportunities and services for girls and women.

Development of continuing education programs to meet the needs of varying life patterns, and to assess and give education credit for appropriate life experiences.

Increased numbers of women on faculties, administrations and policy making bodies at all levels of educational systems.

Incorporation of women's issues into all areas of educational curricula.

The right of all women to make career choices and receive appropriate training.

Appropriate encouragement for young women in pursuing careers relevant to math and science programs.

III. MEANINGFUL WORK AND ADEQUATE COMPENSATION

Enforcement of legislation prohibiting discrimination and providing equal opportunity at all levels of employment.

Extension of anti-discrimination legislation to cover all employers, public and private.

Extension of the basic worker's benefits and rights to groups of workers not now covered: household workers, migrant and agricultural workers, and homemakers.

Economic and legal recognition of homemakers' work.

Development and enforcement of affirmative action programs in the public and private sectors.

Assurance of equal access to job ladders, promotion policies, and employer or government funded career development training programs that expand employment and management opportunities for women.

Provisions for flexible work schedules which do not in any way abrogate protections and benefits of collective bargaining agreements.

Enforcement of current legislation and recognition of pregnancy related disabilities as normal temporary employment disabilities.

Increased representation of and participation by women in all levels of union activity.

Attainment of equal pay for comparable work, that is, work frequently performed by women which is equivalent to work performed by men, but for which women receive less pay.

Development of programs which counter prevailing myths and stereotypes regarding women workers, and which recognize the ability of women and men alike to set goals and to achieve success in work.

The right of women to re-enter the work force regardless of age.

Elimination of sexual harassment in the work place.

The right of women to pursue careers in homemaking, parenting and volunteerism.

IV. EQUAL ACCESS TO ECONOMIC POWER

Enactment of federal, state and local laws which would guarantee equal access to economic independence respecting the individual rights and dignity of all women.

Elimination of discrimination in income tax laws, removal of sex bias from the social security system and introduction of coverage for unpaid homemakers.

Elimination of discrimination against women applying for credit.

Elimination of discrimination in insurance, benefits & pension plans.

Comprehensive revision of family laws that relate to the economic status of women.

Elimination of discrimination by sex in inheritance laws.

Removal of all barriers to women entrepreneurs.

Legislation which recognizes and does not preempt states rights to treat retirement and other like benefits provided by federal law the same as any other marital property.

Continued military medical benefits and commissary privileges for ex-spouses of military personnel, regardless of marital status.

V. QUALITY CHILDCARE FOR ALL CHILDREN

Creation of a comprehensive and adequate system of child care.

Establishment of convenient and responsible child care facilities and programs that encourage parent involvement.

Continued support for child care tax credits / tax deductible expenses.

Alternatives for employer responsibility in child care service systems.

Development of and funding for programs for the recognition, treatment and prevention of child abuse.

Promotion of legislation encouraging equal parenting opportunities between mother and father.

Employers assume increased responsibility for child care services.

VI. QUALITY HEALTH CARE AND SERVICES

Access to responsible and responsive medical and mental health services for all women and their families.

The legal right of choice for women regarding their own reproductive systems.

Expansion of private and public health insurance to provide for women's special needs.

Increased attention to and support for research into the development and safety of drugs and medical procedures that have special significance for women.

Increased participation of women in decision making with regard to medical care.

Recognition of the special needs of women and provision of appropriate treatment programs for alcoholism and drug abuse.

Removal of barriers to full participation in society by women with disabilities.

VII. ADEQUATE HOUSING

Elimination of discrimination in the sale and rental of housing and in granting mortgages, insurance and other credit requirements.

Programs to assure access to suitable and affordable housing for women of all incomes.

Creation of adequate emergency housing facilities.

VIII. JUST AND HUMANE TREATMENT IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Implementation of and compliance with laws within the criminal justice system which provide for equal treatment of women offenders.

Equalization of services and privileges for women and men offenders.

Provision of comprehensive health programs and medical facilities for women in institutions.

Effective rehabilitation programs that permit expansion of economic and social opportunities for women offenders.

Elimination of employment barriers to women charged with or convicted of criminal offenses.

Continued development of programs that provide community support and services for indicted and convicted women and their families.

Provision of community based prevention and intervention programs for girls and women.

Achievement of expanded representation and participation of women in positions of authority in the criminal justice system.

Improved treatment of and services for victims of rape, family violence and sexual abuse.

Continued legal recognition of rape as a crime of violence.

Development of therapeutic treatment programs for perpetrators of domestic violence and child sexual abuse.

Development of therapeutic treatment programs for rapists during incarceration.

Elimination of sexual harassment of incarcerated women.

Continued reform of laws that make it difficult to convict rapists.

IX. FAIR TREATMENT BY AND EQUAL ACCESS TO MEDIA AND THE ARTS

Increased support and exposure of women's artistic efforts, and work in the media.

Expansion of opportunities for the entry of more women into careers in the arts and media.

Increased participation and fair treatment of women in all aspects and levels of the media and communications industries.

Enforcement of equal treatment requirements by the broadcasting industry.

X. PHYSICAL SAFETY

Public education regarding the necessity for and access to self defense instruction for women and assault prevention instruction for children.

Government funding for the creation and expansion of support programs for victims of sexual assault.

Expansion of programs for victims of domestic violence and child sexual abuse to ensure physical safety.

Government funding for the development of adequate and safe emergency shelter programs for women and children fleeing domestic violence.

Development of non-militaristic alternatives for handling international disputes.

Implementation of safe environmental management programs and technologies.

World-wide nuclear disarmament.

XI. RESPECT FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

Protection of the right to privacy of relationships between consenting adults.

Extension of all civil rights legislation to prohibit discrimination based on affectional or sexual preference.

Elimination of discrimination against women based on marital status.

Elimination of discrimination, both individual and institutional, based on sex, race, religion, national origin, sexual preference or condition of disability.

Appendix 2

Voices of Women in Sonoma County

Community Forums by Districts

The Commission held public forums in the community rooms of public libraries in each of the five supervisorial districts over the summer of 2006. What follows are summaries of the opinions of women by district.

District One: Sonoma Valley Community Forum: July 29, 2006

Issues in Sonoma Valley

- Migrant programs don't address women's and children's needs.
- Sonoma Valley is isolated and not very connected to many services that are available only in Santa Rosa. This affects women's access to services. Money for services often stays in Santa Rosa. On the plus side, local groups help local people, e.g. FISH and Meals on Wheels.

Economics

- Social Security is real a means of existence for women. Any threat to Social Security will threaten many older women's only source of income.
- Sonoma County has been coded as rural for Medicare and medical reimbursements and has a problem attracting physicians because of the low reimbursement rate. Medicare important. Reimbursement is different in rural areas vs. urban areas. This affects the quality and quantity of health care available to women.

Safety

- Most women feel safe in Sonoma Valley, though violent incidents seem to have increased. Some women have experienced being threatened, but found that knowing your neighbors is helpful. They watch out for each other. "Meth" users and alcohol abusers are dangerous. They are not aware of what they are doing. One woman lives across from the park. Police are called for large teenage parties in the park. Physical safety not overt problem but police don't have time to respond to small disturbance calls, making it feel unsafe if no help is available.
- Big safety issue for children is walking to and from school. Some kids have to walk along Sonoma Hwy. to get to school. It isn't safe.
- Parents of young children often prefer to drive kids to school if that's an option because of stories about predators. Walking is better for the kids, but is it safe? How can parents check for predators in the area? One woman's daughter was harassed on the way home, but it didn't appear in the local newspaper which would have warned others. It is important to report to the police even if nothing can be done, for statistical purposes. Writing letters to the Editor to publicize is an option
- Woman alone running in Annadel Park has to watch out. There are some things women learn not ever to try by themselves.

Community Diversity

- Big divide in Sonoma – East vs. West – Hispanic vs. Caucasian population. A lot of separation between Hispanic community and the rest of the community. Are there any programs to address this? Potlucks at LaLuce didn't have good response. Diversity programs in schools are helpful; Human Rights Commission, Race Equality Week, Cinco de Mayo are all centered in Santa Rosa.
- There is a need for more specific outreach and activity with the Hispanic community.

District Two: Petaluma Community Forum: August 12, 2006

Services

- Mary Isaac Homeless Center in Petaluma is a wonderful center. Shelter is often at capacity. So important to provide shelter and transitional housing.

Healthcare

- Healthcare is such a problem. How a person is treated in the “healthcare system” is also an issue. Getting insurance is hard if self-employed and a caregiver. If no money, you’re in better good shape to get healthcare than if one of the working poor.

Economic Power

- In divorce, men’s income goes up and women’s income goes down. Husband now has two homes, while she is renting. Women are often working hard and raising the children. Kids should get what they need.
- In 1970’s if you were a man, they would give you this loan – and it would be a woman loan officer helping. A woman without her own credit couldn’t get a loan. Having a co-signer made a difference, and being tenacious.
- Disability / SSI systems work for child support of minor child.

Employment, Training

- Hidden discrimination: men are trained at work, then get the promotion and become Account Executives. To promote, requires extra hours. With childcare schedule and caretaking responsibilities, can’t do the extra hours. Can’t promote.

Domestic Violence

- There is power in women’s networking to help each other. In domestic violence situations, there is power in numbers. Women shouldn’t feel scared to call the police. What does a woman do without a phone at home and she is being beaten by husband?
- Solution is to raise non-violent, respectful men.

District Three: Santa Rosa Community Forum: August 21, 2006

Services

- Availability of services – How do women get information about what services are out there? There is a lot out there, but women don’t know where to go or how to access the information. Women need an information clearinghouse or website which lists and cross references all services women might need.

Childcare

- A woman shared that she is in the business of childcare. She provides service to many professional families in Hidden Valley neighborhood and works with 4Cs. She has had to fight to get use permit to increase from 12 to 24 kids, even though her property backs to school and keeps same schedule as elementary school. Any outdoor noise blends in with noise of the school kids. She even keeps the same holiday schedule. She can’t make a decent living with 12, but could with 24 kids. Her house and yard meet the size requirements. She has a waiting list. SR Planning Commission blocked her use permit. It was on appeal. Her question was “why can’t we as a community support more available quality childcare?” We need to provide coordinated support to women who choose to go into the childcare business.

District Four: Windsor Community Forum: August 5, 2006

Services

- In situations of domestic violence, there is a lack of available information on resources and outreach to victims.
- Many services are available, but not well coordinated or communicated
- Women in treatment programs need childcare options and assistance accessing what's available.

Seniors

- Senior Apartment Complex Resident has a Services Coordinator. Program offers free bread and other food. Senior Recreation had been an issue, but pool sharing with kids is now working.
- Aging women should be looking down the road, asking, "How will I cope with aging?"
- Start educating women about retirement planning earlier.

Transportation

- 'Cars are mandatory' to access any services.

Community

- "We're encouraged to help each other". Women are leaders in neighborhood should be organizing. Easier to get to know people in a small community – important to feel connected.

Employment & Training

- Community should have a donations closet for work clothes for women.
- Women starting businesses need extra support
- Women and especially senior women need training on how to use computers to get information and look for jobs. SRJC has lots of courses that can be taken at home, but people don't know about them.
- There is a need for financial planning seminars targeted at women. AARP / Soroptimists did seminars in Santa Clara. The cost was \$25 for a seven week class.

Childcare

- Women turn down raises at work because the additional income will put them over the income guidelines for a childcare subsidy, which is worth more than the raise.

Safety

- Women feel safe in their neighborhoods in the daytime, but know they have to be careful. Most wouldn't walk in neighborhood at 12 a.m. Others wouldn't think twice.

District Five: Sebastopol Community Forum: July 15, 2006

Transportation

- Women have trouble getting to services that are only offered in Santa Rosa. Without a car, the world becomes much smaller. It's difficult to get the help you need.

Appendix 3

Voices of Young Women throughout Sonoma County High Schools

Women in Politics: A Focus Group at Santa Rosa High

By Katy Simons, Senior, Santa Rosa High School

- In general, those in the focus group believed that women have been more accepted in politics and progress was made.
- Most thought sexism was still an obstacle and that the stereotypes that women are weak and less intelligent are major barriers. Because of this women need to be more qualified than their male competitor.
- Another girl thought that being a female would be a benefit because it brings a new perspective to the field.
- The males in the group focused on how emotional women can be. While one male thought this was an irrational fear. He blamed men on the other hand, as the ones that crave power and money. The bias of the voter is the barrier. He also stated that being a female can actually help because companies and fields have to be politically correct these days.
- Most of the girls had not experienced barriers first hand, but said they feel they have to be stronger and more confident because they are female.
- The males had not directly witnessed any barriers personally, but saw the barriers in Congress and in the lack of women among top Fortune 500 CEO positions.
- Some girls in the group thought women in politics were portrayed as lesser than a man and simply lucky just to be there. The women are more ridiculed and viewed as frigid or cold. Women in politics are still a novelty and that the media judges the woman politician on her clothes or approachability, not her focus or goals.
- The other half of the girls thought the image was getting better, but we still only accept women in politics (like Rice and Bush) if they serve a man. This creates the idea that woman cannot handle difficult situations and need help with almost everything.
- The guys in the group had almost the same opinion, that women politicians are viewed as sympathizers who never take a stand, unstable, and not able to base their choices on logic. One male stated that the country doesn't respect Nancy Pelosi and that she was elected to her position out of spite.
- In response to the question "Is our country is ready for a woman president?" The females in the group

answered "yes." They believed the country would benefit from a woman because she would be less militaristic and just as smart and powerful as men. They all agreed that as long as the woman is just as qualified as the man she deserves it just as much.

- Others in the group thought that we may be ready in the future, but not now. They all agreed that we are still learning to accept a woman as president and that perhaps the majority of people are not ready.
- One male believed our country was ready, but the woman would have to have no flaws because of the expectations the public holds (even though we elect imperfect males).
- Another male believed we aren't ready and will not be for a while because there are no qualified females.
- In terms of the image of the woman politician and how this image has shift, almost everyone agreed the image has shifted for that better. The females thought we had a long way to go still. Others thought that there are still parts of the country where it has not changed so much. Yet everyone was in agreement that we have had a lot of progress since the fifties.

Women in Math and Science Careers: A Focus Group at Technology High

By Michelle Atallah, Junior, Technology High School

- It is a fact that girls don't have lower grades or test scores in math and science than boys, but women only hold 12% of jobs in these fields. What do you think is stopping girls from pursuing math and science careers? Some girls said that it has historically been a male dominated field, and that women might feel out of place being the only female in a work environment that is mostly male. Nobody thought that women are any less capable than men
- A study by Brown University says that "Women perform as much as 12 % better on math problems when tested in a setting without men." One reason offered for this was that by being tested with men, women were reminded of the stereotype that they're

not as good at math. Do you think that this is true, and have you ever experienced anything like it? One girl said that testing with anyone can be intimidating because you're always comparing yourself to someone else. Nobody had experienced feeling inferior to guys, nor had they ever pretended to be less smart than they are so that they wouldn't be better than a male. It was just the opposite: they want to make the guy feel that women can be smarter than them. One theory that explains the idea is simply that men have more confidence.

- If there were more women in math and science careers, would it encourage you to consider a job in these fields? Everyone agreed that it would make such careers less intimidating. Someone said that they would feel more comfortable working in a workplace that contained more women.
- Do you think it is more important for guys to take math and science than it is for girls? Everyone said no; it's all valuable information even if you aren't interested in working with math or science.
- The answers given showed that those in the focus group didn't think that females were any less competent than males in the fields of math and science. The reason they offered for the lack of female involvement in these areas was that they were traditionally male-dominated fields, and that they personally would feel intimidated in a work situation where they were in the minority. They agreed that if there were more women in such careers it would encourage them to enter these professions.
- When asked about their intended future jobs, responses such as doctor, nurse, and veterinarian were given. Because our school is very math and science oriented, I asked if those aspects had encouraged them to attend this school. The answer was yes, everyone wanted to become more proficient in these fields. The members of my focus group seemed to like math and science, as can be shown from their choices of future occupations.
- "I think that if women are very capable of doing good work in these disciplines, and if they are encouraged to enter them the ratio of men to women in such workplaces will eventually level out."

Women in Math and Sciences: A Focus Group at Montgomery High

By Rena Wang, Freshman, Montgomery High School

- This focus group's topic was on women in the math, science and technology fields and why there is such an overall lack of female professionals in these areas.
- Most of the participants thought that women were not incapable of attaining math and science careers, nor were they in any way less able than men, but felt that this prominent lack was due to three primary reasons:
 - The media's stereotype of women does not include having science-related occupations.
 - The conflicting desires of women to have a home and family clash with what is a demanding and inflexible career in math or science.
 - Women simply choose not to enter these fields because of natural disinterest.
- None opposed programs that target girls at any early age to help them keep open to developing interests in these professions.

Most of contributors of this group felt it really is a woman's own decision which profession she chooses.

Body Image and the Media: A Focus Group at Maria Carrillo

By Yanran Lu, Freshman, Maria Carrillo High School

- What sort of image of girls does the media convey?
 - Girls should look like this to get attention from everyone
 - Girls should put others down to make themselves feel better
- Why do teens pay attention to the media?
 - Peer pressure plays a big part.
 - Teens often feel they lack of control and the one thing they can control is their weight.
 - Everyone wants to be someone else.
 - Girls are often negative and critical instead of positive.
 - Schools aren't supportive of who they are.
 - Girls are trying to get attention from guys.
 - People who are confident are looked down upon.
 - A girl that's comfortable with herself is degraded by society.

- How should the media portray girls?
 - “Be yourself” and “People are made different ways and we need to learn to accept them as they are.”
- What do you think of the media?
 - The perception is not positive, but people still look up to them.
- Who are positive and negative role models in the media?
 - Tyra Banks and Kate Winslet: 160 pounds and still hot!
 - The Dove commercial that that showed girls and women in lots of body forms is giving a great message.
 - Most commercials focus on getting the perfect body. “Carmen Electra is taking diet pills? She’s not fat! What is that saying?”
 - People like Salma Hayek and “Ugly Betty” will have a ripple effect.
- Do you think the portrayals are getting better or worse?
 - “Models who are skinny aren’t even attractive at all,” though the media is getting better at dealing with skinny/fat issues.
- Does the media affect you a lot?
 - “Pressure is more from school more than media.”
 - “You’re not judged by the media but you are judged at school. If people look at you weird at school, you’re a little hurt.”
 - “I’m comfortable with myself, but it’s hard to escape the image of who the media thinks you should be completely.”

How Family and Other Close Relationships Influence the College Path of Young Hispanic Girls: A Focus Group at Windsor High

By Talya Hezi, Senior, Windsor High School

- Most of the Hispanic girls in my focus group still held firmly to acceptance of the “house wife” doing all the chores around the house.
- Their families do not permit them the same freedom as their brothers especially with regard to curfew and friends. The girls in the focus group thought this was for their own protection because according to their family, they as girls are much more fragile and easily hurt than boys.

- Following the same path of logic, the girls claim that they often argue with their families about going away to college. The family may be okay with them attending Sonoma State (which is close by, and perceived as convenient and “safe”) but they don’t want them to go further away even if that would be the girl’s choice. This differs from the treatment of their brothers because the parents do not expect the sons to take care of them when they grow old; hence there is no need for the boys to stay in the area.
- On the subject of boy friends, according to the girls, Hispanic boys do not value protected sex, look down upon girls who have are not virgins, and often view their girlfriends as objects. This attitude heavily affects the girls’ path to college because of risks of getting pregnant or falling for this idea that a girl is an “object,” an inferior, and hence education for them should come second to family or marriage.
- Programs that support Hispanic high school young women to go on to college are important.

Abortion: Can one Both Support Women’s Rights and Oppose Abortion?

By Sara Haile, Senior, Montgomery High School

The topic I chose to address to my peers was about abortion. The stated question I had given them was: “can one both support women’s rights and oppose abortion?” Off the bat, the students were eager to represent their beliefs loud and clear. The main reason why I chose this as my discussion topic was: 1) because it is a popular debate that almost all people have a biased answer to it and 2) it is a major issue for our society. I chose my Anthropology class as a place to hold the discussion because it is a class that focuses on different cultures. Because students have had access to knowledge about other cultures, they were able to pinpoint the cons and pros of abortion.

- Not one person can answer the question for another. The people who make decisions are mostly men and they should not have the right to determine what a woman should do.
- It is about how abortion fits into our culture and how a women’s choice to undergo or not undergo an abortion influences the status of women with in our culture.
- Everyone thought abortion should be a moral issue, not a political one.

- The woman and her partner, and the parents, if woman is underage, are the ones who should decide. The partner helped made the unborn child, so they should have a say on the outcome as well.
- Parental notification might endanger the girl. If you are so ashamed of your actions, why would you do it?
- Different cultures have different responses to abortion.
- Why does the United States make abortion such a big issue? This is a country where we preach abstinence.
- Roe vs. Wade (Jan 22, 1973) marked a giant step forward for women's rights. The Court recognized that the constitutional right to privacy "is broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy."
- Denying the right for women to choose to have an abortion forces them into submissive roles in society.
- Once a woman becomes a mother her resources to education and employment become severely limited. She becomes a 2nd class citizen.
- Mattie Brinkerhoff: "Women seeking abortion is similar to that of a man who steals because he's hungry."
- A woman who seeks abortion is trying to escape a desperate situation by an act of violence and self-loss.
- Abortion is not a sign that women are free, but a sign that they are desperate.

Through the agreements and of course disagreements present in the discussion on abortion, we finally concluded that abortion has become a double edged sword for women's rights. Although there were more girls in the class than boys, this did not make matters worse. The statements made by the students were separated out equally. I don't think I would have had the discussion on abortion go any other way. So of course it made sense at the end to state that, it is about how abortion is seen in the culture and how a women's choice to undergo or not undergo an abortion influences the status of women with our culture.

Birth Control: How Available is it and Why is it Important to Young Women?

By Sirka Ferrin, Elsie Allen High School

The group discussed the availability of birth control and the pros and cons of abortion. All the girls thought birth control should be dispensed at high schools because it is positive and helpful in avoiding unwanted pregnancy

and STD's. It was also agreed the availability of birth control is not a suggestion to have sex. However, everyone agreed they would not feel comfortable with asking for birth control because they found it embarrassing. No one in the group would feel comfortable if parental consent was required, with the exception of abortion in certain cases. The group was unanimous in agreeing that parental consent for abortion was a difficult subject to discuss. There were good reasons for and against abortion and the necessary parental consent. The fear was that some parents may force their daughter to have a baby against her will. In conclusion, the group believed birth control and abortion should be available to teen girls to help protect them.

The Media and its Effects on Young Women: A Focus Group at Maria Carrillo

By Ridhi Goswami, Junior, Maria Carrillo High School

After having asked my class full of AP English students questions about how media affects teenage minds—both girls and boys—I reached quite a different conclusion than I was expecting. I had gone into the focus group thinking that the girls would think that the media pressure was really high and that the boys (who were immensely outnumbered in the class) would think that it wasn't as big of a deal. But when the discussion group, it seemed that the girls thought that while media pressure was out there most girls were getting smart enough to know that the celebrities weren't the real deal. They believed that girls, at they, were not pressured into changing their eating or dressing habits. The boys in the class, however, felt quite differently. Many thought that the media was encouraging sex in teens. They also felt that girls thought that boys thought they had to behave in a certain way because the media told them to do so. In all reality, boys were able to differentiate between media hype and see celebrities as celebrities and respect girls for just being themselves. Both boys and girls said that they looked down upon girls who thought they had to dress like "sluts" to get attention. Some also noticed that some magazines like Seventeen were starting to focus on celebrities who they thought had a lot of confidence and spunk as opposed to those who partied and were seen at a lot of social events. The media is starting to move away from the "sex is good" image that it has created. The students were in consensus however on the fact that a lot of people still use the media as an excuse when they chose to dress or act a certain way.

Appendix 4

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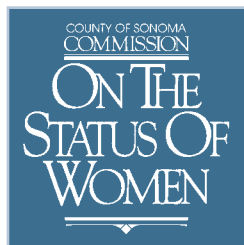
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