

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

The Commission's Vision:

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



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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.

While the lives of women and girls have improved significantly in most aspects over the past few decades, an assessment of their current status in Sonoma County is essential to assuring that the strides forward continue. As the responsibilities to the family and the community as a whole increase for this group, the support systems required to prevail often lag behind, are inadequate, or are simply not in place to meet the demands.

This report involves a quantitative review of several areas important to the quality of life for women and girls. Its purpose is to answer specific questions about their status in Sonoma County, to address strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT analysis) and to make recommendations for action and change. Each study area committee was chaired by a CSW Commissioner and included other Commissioners, representatives from community based organizations, educational institutions, and individual volunteers who met monthly over a year and a half period.

Statistical data is gathered from various published primary and secondary sources including community agencies and organizations. The analysis of such data reveals significant facts about the lack of parity and equality for the population of females in Sonoma County based on age, race, ethnicity, income, and household structure. The lack of data collected by race and gender posed a considerable challenge in assessing and addressing the needs of ethnic females in the county.

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.

Full report available at www.Sonomacountywomenscommission.org.

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

Women make up 50.6% of the total County Population of 458,614 with 59% of females in the County over 65 years of age. This distribution by age in Sonoma County is similar to that for the State of California.

The largest minority group in Sonoma County is Hispanic, accounting for 16% of all women and 19% of men. 83% of all women in Sonoma County are White. African American and Native American women represent 1% of the female population, Asian and Pacific Islanders are 3% of the total population of women in the County.

Married couples comprise 50% of Sonoma County households. 10% of households are headed by women and 60% of those households have children under 18 years of age. 16% of women in the County live alone and of this group 49% are aged 65 or older.

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

Women & Childcare, Healthcare & Housing

Childcare

Having childcare provides women with the ability to maintain employment, improving overall the quality of life for self and family. Several programs and local agencies provide needed assistance in providing cost effective childcare services in the County. The majority of childcare workers however are women who earn less than living wage in the industry. Childcare is not integrated into the social service system, and the quality of childcare creates issues of concern and challenges for working mothers. Educating employers and policy makers about the importance of quality childcare and financial investments in the infrastructure is essential. A stronger infrastructure, Universal Preschool, rating systems which measures childcare programs, and an increase in public funding and subsidies create a Focus for Community Action that would benefit women, children and the community as a whole.

Childcare – Facts

Households with Children:

- 50% of the County's family households include children.
- 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 for an infant in a childcare center 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.

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.
- 9% of children in Sonoma County live below the federal poverty level.



Focus for Community Action – Childcare

- 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).

Healthcare

According to Sonoma County Public Health (2006), the top four leading causes of death for women in the County are lung cancer, heart disease, stroke, and chronic lower respiratory disease. Insurance costs continue to increase and the percentage of individuals with employment-based health insurance coverage has significantly decreased in recent years. A significant weakness in the system is the classification of Sonoma County as “rural” in the Medicare reimbursement system, which has caused some physicians not to accept new Medicare patients. The closure of Sutter Hospital in Santa Rosa poses a severe threat to the preservation of women’s inpatient reproductive health, the adherence to end-of-life healthcare directives, and the needs of rape victims. The Focus for Community Action includes the promotion of preventive care and that health services available through Sutter continue in some form.



Healthcare - Facts

Primary Health Concerns for 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.
- While more men are infected with HIV/AIDS, the number of women who are newly diagnosed with the virus has jumped sharply; women represented 3% of those newly diagnosed in 1999, and they represented 24% in 2004.
- Obesity has increased 60% in women since 2001. The percentage is even greater for poor women in Sonoma County.
- 17% of women in California are without insurance including 32% percent of Hispanic women.

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 attribute to mortality and morbidity in 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.



Housing

The Sonoma County Housing Coalition along with a number of other organizations offer support services to people who are homeless and those with disabilities. The median price of homes in Sonoma County presents a formidable obstacle to home ownership. County residents in low wage jobs cannot afford the median rents. Providing education for women on purchasing homes, and implementing programs and incentives for developers that are successful would be helpful in addressing housing issues.

Housing – Facts

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.

Homelessness:

- 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 (up to age 18) represent 21% of the county’s homeless population (2005).
- For the academic year 2005-2006, the Sonoma County Office of Education reported 473 homeless students (K-12) county wide.

Focus for Community Action - Housing

- 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.
- Explore implementing affordable housing financial programs and incentives for developers that are successful in other jurisdictions.
- Fund additional programs for homeless women with children that provide a safe environment and a sense of security.

Women & Criminal Justice System & Physical Safety

2005 statistics for Sonoma County show that 1,082 women were arrested for felonies, representing 21% of all felony arrests. Of all adults granted formal probation, 19% were female. While inmates in the Adult Detention Facility have access to an extensive number of services, drug treatment is often postponed until their release. County programs provide support for women and girls that prevent gang affiliation and services to the families of migrant workers and other underserved populations in Sonoma County. There is a lack of programs that address the trauma experienced by prostitutes, prior to entering, or during their involvement in the trade. Increased awareness of the issue of human trafficking and its proliferation in Sonoma County is imperative. Opportunities for improvement within the system include the establishment of programs that would provide drug treatment, and programs for restorative justice and counseling for trauma of incarcerated females. Limited public transportation often means that females have difficulty performing court-ordered community services as part of their parole or probation.

Criminal Justice - The Facts

Arrests and Criminal Charges:

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 arrest were women
- 1 out of 6 charged in a homicide was a woman.
- 79% of the 304 suspects in unincorporated areas of Sonoma County were men and 21% were women.



Focus for Community Action - Criminal Justice

- Make drug treatment programs, such as Starting Point, available to female inmates so that their treatment is not delayed 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.



Physical Safety

The California Department of Justice indicates that there were 214 counts of forcible rape reported in Sonoma County in 2004. However, because approximately 84% of rapes go unreported, as many as 89 rapes may occur each month in the County. Of the 304 reported cases of domestic violence, over three-quarters of the victims were women. Several community based organizations are doing outstanding work in the area of domestic violence and sexual assault prevention. However, a number of weaknesses in the system include lack of reporting of domestic violence that tracks gender and the fact that there is only one domestic violence shelter in Sonoma County. Sexual Resources to

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.

deal with the challenges younger women face after sexual assault are also limited. One consequence of the District Attorney's "Zero Tolerance" policy regarding domestic violence eliminates plea agreements. Previously, cases that were not prosecutable were settled by plea bargains that mandated treatment. Perpetrators are now released without treatment. Several opportunities exist to improve the physical safety of women and girls that include tracking gender-based information about the perpetrators of crime and their victims. This systematic change in reporting will provide information needed to compete for federal grant money for gang and domestic violence prevention and human trafficking.

Physical Safety - Facts

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:

- 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:
 - o 89 rapes per month, and
 - o 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.

Focus for Community Action - Physical Safety

- Recommend that the District Attorney expand accessibility to 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.

Woman & Employment, Education & Training

In 2005, Sonoma County women working full-time for a year earned 80 cents for every dollar earned by men. Women are concentrated in lower earnings categories and the median earnings for men is \$10,000 higher than that of women. Women have higher poverty rates than men, with 25% of women working full-time earned less than \$25,000 per year, versus 17% of men. Strengths for women in employment in the County include the findings that women own 30% of all businesses and that they are active in ways that benefit the community. Training women and girls in non-traditional jobs, improving job skills, and providing opportunities for women to advance in their chosen field would increase and improve the quality of employment opportunities for women. Available training for older job seekers, especially over 65, would be of assistance. A major threat to advancement for women in employment and earnings is the premise that the struggle for women's equal rights is essentially complete. Most County programs are designed to assist women at the low end of the financial spectrum, and do not emphasize preparation for non-traditional or higher-paying jobs. The downward trend in earnings among lowest-earning workers nationwide is also apparent in Sonoma County and raises concerns about the County's working poor.

Employment and Earnings - Facts

Earnings & Income:

- In 1999, men's median income in Sonoma County was \$44,038 for full-time, compared to \$33,500 for women.
- Compared to 18% of men, only 6% of women employed full-time earn over \$75,000 per year.
- Almost half of the full-time employed women earn between \$20,000 and \$40,000.
- Women make only 25% of annual salaries over \$50,000 and 15% of those over \$100,000.

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.
- 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.

Poverty:

- Women in Sonoma County 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.

Focus for Community Action - Employment and 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.

*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.

- Educate young women about their career choices, including non-traditional employment options.
- Implement a self-sufficiency/living wage on-line calculator, including a budgetary tool for women.



Training and Education

There are more boys enrolled in elementary, middle and high schools than girls. However, fewer girls drop out before finishing high school than boys. More women than men are enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs and the number of women is increasing. Compared to state averages, women's enrollment is strong in math and biological sciences in Sonoma County. Academic and other training programs in the County contribute to the training and recruiting of women and girls into non-traditional jobs. However, despite heavy recruitment efforts, Sonoma County women are not entering labor apprenticeship training programs in significant numbers. Opportunities exist to improve these numbers by developing alliances between business and labor and organizations active in the support of women in career exploration and transition. The tracking of data by gender would assess status and needs of women and

girls in education. This is especially important since the County's Economic Development Board predicts the most job growth is in technology sector, requiring knowledge of physical sciences where women are currently under-represented.

Focus for Community Action - Education and Training

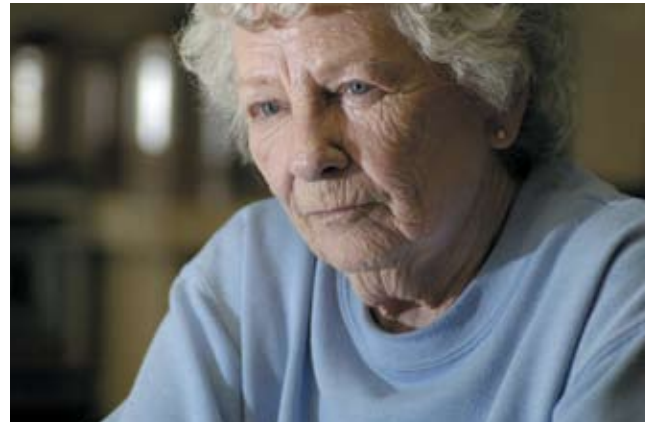
- Create career awareness programs for women of all ages to educate them on career options, including the trades and other non-traditional fields. Expand school counselor's ability to inform girls about how their educational choices guide their future options.
- Facilitate a partnership between business 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.

Women & Political Representation

Women are at parity on many city and town councils, with higher numbers on the more socially-oriented boards. There is only one woman on the Board of Supervisors and men dominate the boards of the traditionally male fields. No cities in the County have a woman of color on council as of this report. Women are not represented at parity on Board of Directors of major corporations in the County. Appointing women, especially ethnic women, to boards, committees and commissions, will provide them with experience and access to elected offices.

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.
- Monitor 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.



Spotlight on Issues

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. Bus service is infrequent in the outlying areas of the county creating a gap in access to employment, education, health services, civic and social events. The lack of affordable housing may contribute to some women living far from their job which also complicates childcare arrangements for those who rely on public transportation. Safety also becomes an issue when transportation requires long waits, or riders must walk long distances for a bus stop, especially in remote areas. New approaches addressing the needs of non-driving citizens will be necessary to ensure full community participation.

Midlife and Older Women: a Growing Population

The “boomer” demographic has wide-spread implications for the services needed by older women in the County. For 2000-2010, the projected growth rate for people over 60 is 48% and women outnumber men in all age categories. Midlife and older women are greatly impacted by most areas in this study: low wages during working years, caregiver responsibilities, high cost of housing, lack of transportation, and the lack of affordable health care.

Women as Caregivers

Caregiving results in financial consequences for the caregiver, including deciding to work part time, declining promotions, and reductions in savings and retirement. One study found caregivers lost an average of \$659,130 over a lifetime in reduced salary and retirement. 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.

Hispanic / Latina Women

Hispanic women and girls are a fast growing population in our community. It is of vital importance that young Latina women receive a range of collaborative services to encourage them to pursue a college education. By increasing educational levels, access to high paying jobs and civic roles, this bilingual population will strengthen the economic and cultural fabric of the county.

The Voices of Young Women

The Commission on the Status of Women operates a nationally recognized Junior Commissioner Project. The goal of the Junior Commissioner Project is give young women the opportunity to learn about a public sector commission while helping them develop leadership and advocacy skills. The experience is empowering and makes a positive impact in their communities around women’s issues. In the academic year, 2005-2006 the Juniors developed and conducted an on-line survey for their peers to determine what issues young women face in Sonoma County. Safety, body image, eating habits, self-esteem, drugs and alcohol, sex, and the future were all issues of concern to the young women of Sonoma County. In the 2006-2007 school year, a second group of Junior Commissioners held focus groups with peers on high school campuses to address many of the issues highlighted in the 2005-2006 project.



Dialogue for the Future

Our research over the past two years indicates the single most important thing that can be done to move toward 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 doing research. To understand and evaluate how women are faring, we need to track the issues by gender. We hope this report creates a baseline 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 is only the beginning of future dialogue for how we can work collaboratively to address inequities and social ills that disproportionately affect women and girls. Together, we can work to improve the self-sufficiency, self-determination, and self-esteem for all residents of Sonoma County.

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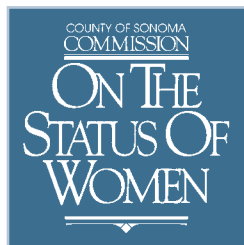
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