



Princeton Area Community Foundation
FUND for **WOMEN** and **GIRLS**

SHAPING THE FUTURE: WOMEN AND GIRLS IN CENTRAL NEW JERSEY



A Research Report
of the Princeton Area Community Foundation
Fund for Women and Girls

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www.pacf.org/fwg

About this Research

This research on the status of women and girls in Mercer County was conducted by Dr. Sandy Gibson from the Counselor Education Department at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ), in collaboration with graduate student Ms. Lisa Camposano. The researchers examined census data, data from county and federal governments and individual programs within Mercer County, and program specific annual reports. To confirm observations from this review and to examine perceptions of needs in relevant service populations, Dr. Gibson interviewed 10 executive directors of key service agencies in the county. Focus group discussions among service providers, high school girls, and young women between the ages of 18 and 24 provided additional observations.

An undergraduate student and member of the Women in Leadership and Learning program at TCNJ, Ms. Chaya Himelfarb, assisted in creating a comprehensive directory of services for all programs in Mercer County. Using the directory, the researchers connected identified needs of women and girls with relevant services, if available.

This abridged report was prepared by Phyllis Frakt, a member of the Fund for Women and Girls and the former Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Rider University (retired).

About the Fund for Women and Girls

The Fund for Women and Girls is dedicated to creating a community of philanthropists working together to improve the lives of women and girls in central New Jersey.

The fund commissioned this inquiry to better understand the needs of women and girls in Mercer County, so that future grant funding can be targeted to address the most critical needs.

For more information, visit www.pacf.org/fwg.

Demographics

Mercer County's population of women and girls — 51.2% of a total of 366,513 people — is diverse in terms of race, age, birthplace, and marital status.

- Approximately 55.3% of the female population of Mercer County is Caucasian, 20.2% is African-American, and 8.9% is Asian. The census reports that 13.6% of women are Hispanic, but this percentage is likely to be lower than the actual number.
- Overall, about 21.6% of the female population is comprised of girls under the age of 18, and 14.5% of the female population is over the age of 65, although the percentages vary significantly by ethnicity.
- Only 53.5% of all females living in the county were born in New Jersey. The number of immigrants in Mercer County has grown by 48% from 2000 to 2006 as compared to overall population growth of five percent.
- About half (51%) of the female population in Mercer County, age 25 or older, is currently married. Of the same population group, 19% has never been married, but this percentage steadily decreases as age increases. About 3% of women, age 25 or older, are legally separated and 11% are divorced. Another 12% are widows, the vast majority of whom are over the age of 65.

Economic Security and Housing

Mercer is a relatively rich county, but income varies significantly by gender, location, age, and status as head of household. Women head the majority of homeless families. The median income in the county is insufficient to purchase a home, and even average rentals require incomes beyond the reach of poor families.

- Mercer ranks sixth among New Jersey counties in median household income (\$71,767). However, there are significant income disparities between men and women and among municipalities, age groups, and number of bread-winners in a household. Single mothers residing in Trenton currently have

a median income of \$20,522. About 15.5% or 12,891 Mercer County children are impoverished, representing the eighth highest percentage among New Jersey counties. In Trenton, 7,419 or 35.5% of all children living in the city, and 11,979 women or 30.9% of all women in the city, live below the poverty line.

- In 2011, women were 68.4% of the approximately 158 Mercer County families reported to be homeless. About 16.5% of this population is reportedly homeless as a result of domestic violence, with related problems of limited access to possessions, child support, and support systems to make a fresh start. Some low-income women remain in unhealthy or violent relationships in order to maintain housing for their families.
- Mercer County women also face challenges in regard to home ownership or even rental. Owning a home in Mercer County is nearly impossible for women who earn the median county income of \$31,204. Even renting can be overwhelming: a family must earn \$48,960 a year to afford the fair market rent of \$1,224 per month for a two-bedroom apartment. Renters comprise 32% of Mercer's households and of that, 62% are unable to afford a two-bedroom apartment at the fair market rent.

Education and Experience in School

Employment and financial stability are directly affected by deficiencies in education. Except for Trenton, all municipalities in the county exceed the state percentage for women with a high school education. Trenton, along with East Windsor, also exceeds the state average for school drop-outs. Minorities and students with special physical or language needs are particularly vulnerable to dropping out. Poor districts have especially suffered from cuts in school budgets.

- Approximately 15,000 women in Mercer County (about 12% of the female population age 25 and over) do not have high school diplomas or equivalent certificates, a deficiency that affects employment and financial stability. Although an increasing number of women are enrolling for adult education courses, many women face obstacles: lack of childcare or transportation, unplanned pregnancies, addictions issues, incarceration, fear of violence or abuse, lack of family support, and cost of registration.
- All municipalities in the county, with the exception of Trenton,

exceed the overall state percentage (87.1%) of female adults who have graduated from high school. All municipalities except Trenton and Hamilton exceed the overall state percentage (32.7%) of female adults who hold a post-secondary degree.

- The Trenton public school district has been consistently identified as a district that is “in need of improvement.” Test scores continue to greatly lag behind state averages. While standardized test proficiency rates in Trenton charter schools also fall short of statewide averages, these scores are generally higher than those of the Trenton public school district.
- The rate of students who drop out of high school prior to graduation is a pressing public education issue. Approximately 1.5% of female students in the state drop out of school. Two districts in Mercer County, Trenton and East Windsor, exceed this average, with dropout rates significantly higher among African American and Hispanic girls and among girls with disabilities or limited English proficiency.
- Mercer County has the second largest percentage (19.1%) of special education students with Individualized Education Plans in the state, exceeding the state average of 15.5%. Currently, none of the school districts in Mercer County meet all of the state special education goals. Significant differences between state goals and school performance exist in some districts, including Trenton.
- Although the New Jersey Supreme Court ordered an increase in aid to the state’s poorest school districts, students have been affected by decreased state aid and failed school budgets. Teachers and security officers have been laid off, class sizes have increased, and arts programs and extracurricular activities have been reduced or eliminated.

Out of School Time

High cost and limited access are obstacles to child care. Single mothers spend an average of 28 to 34% of their income on child care for pre-school children. Economic conditions have forced some affordable child care centers to close. Because of cost or distance, many afterschool and summer programs are not accessible. More than half of the afterschool programs in Mercer County are in Trenton, but other needy areas are less well served.

- While there are many afterschool and summer programs within the county, these programs are out-of-reach for some girls due to cost or distance. More than half (52.9%) are located in Trenton and almost a quarter (23.5%) are in Hamilton. There is an obvious need for free or low-cost programs for children in Trenton, but there are fewer afterschool options available in other needy areas, particularly in Hightstown, East Windsor, and Ewing. The majority of summer programs have registration fees, and few summer programs are intended specifically for girls. While summer camps and programs are located throughout the county, programs are concentrated in Trenton, Hamilton, and Princeton.
- Approximately 25% of Mercer County children reside with an adult female householder. Municipalities that contain the largest percentages of children whose primary caregiver is a single female householder are Trenton (55%), Ewing (21%), and Lawrence (20%). Single mothers may not have had an opportunity to complete their formal education and therefore are more likely to be unemployed or employed in low-paying jobs. Single mothers currently spend an average of 34.1% of their income on childcare for an infant child and 28.3% of their income on childcare for a preschool-aged child.
- Due to challenging economic times, some parents are moving their children from licensed programs to informal child care settings. Severe funding cuts in recent years have impaired or closed community-based child care centers that offer affordable child care for working parents, particularly low-income families.

Health

Poor women in Mercer County face a variety of health care issues: access to preventive health care and health insurance and to special programs for mental health, addiction, and Sexually Transmitted Infections. In addition to poverty, access to health care is limited by lack of transportation, child care, knowledge about available services, language ability, and housing, and sometimes also by stigma, stress, abuse, and other problems that inhibit the incentive to seek help. Poverty also affects nutrition: because of poor nutrition and lack of exercise, nearly half of girls in Trenton are overweight.

- Health insurance is crucial in improving accessibility to health

care, including preventive, primary, and special care. About 13.1% of all women in Mercer County do not have health insurance. Hispanic women in New Jersey are more than three times likely to be uninsured than Caucasian women, while African American women are more than twice as likely to be uninsured. Access to health care is linked to income. Of the 9,212 uninsured children in Mercer County, 53.3% are living at or below 200% of the poverty line.

- Despite eligibility for assistance, some women fail to enroll in subsidized health care programs because of lack of language ability, transportation, child care, knowledge about services, or housing.
- The number of facilities and specialists willing to perform procedures such as mammograms has been decreasing. Age, race, and level of education may also influence the likelihood to pursue preventive health care. The percentage of women who receive early prenatal care has remained generally steady since 2000, ranging from 76.3% to 78.1%, but only about two-thirds of expecting mothers in Trenton receive early prenatal care. During the years 2000 to 2007, low birth weight percentages in Mercer County ranged from 8.3% to 9.9% while these percentages ranged from 7.6% to 8.5% statewide.
- Several programs and coalitions provide services related to suicide prevention but focus less on depression and mental health screening and prevention. Many factors cause women to hesitate about seeking help with mental conditions: stigma, stress of work and home responsibilities, abuse, poverty, or a lack of health insurance.
- Alcohol and heroin abuse are the most common reasons for admission to substance abuse treatment centers among Mercer women. Since 2003, 35% of all women admitted for treatment were treated for heroin addiction and an additional 27% were treated for alcohol addiction. Mercer County currently lacks some necessary substance abuse treatment programs, including residential treatment, halfway house services, and detoxification treatment. Social barriers to treatment include fear of reprisal from significant others or family members, lack of child care, fear of discrimination, confidentiality concerns, linguistic or cultural barriers, social stigma, fear of child protection involvement (DYFS), and financial concerns such as a lack of money or insurance.
- Drug use also influences the number of people living with HIV/

AIDS. As of 2010, 35% of women diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in Mercer County contracted the disease through injection drug use. The illegal nature of injection drug use creates an additional barrier to accessing adequate treatment and prevention services.

- The Mercer County Advisory Committee on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse identified pregnant women with drug/alcohol abuse issues as the neediest population in regard to substance abuse prevention and treatment.
- Women represent about a third (32.3%) of all HIV/AIDS cases, and 27.2% of AIDS-related deaths. Approximately two-thirds of the women were diagnosed between the ages of 25 and 44. Girls and young women who were diagnosed at the age of 24 or younger represent 12% of all female HIV/AIDS cases. Trenton residents represent 81.2% of people currently living with HIV/AIDS and 83.4% of all reported cases of HIV/AIDS in Mercer County. Approximately 1 in every 63 African American females living in Trenton has HIV/AIDS.
- The overall number of reports of Sexually Transmitted Infections has increased by 41% from 1999 to 2009. Among reported STIs, Chlamydia is the most prevalent STI among women and girls in our area. In 2009, 1,095 women in Mercer County were diagnosed with Chlamydia, a 9% increase from the previous year. African American women account for 40.1% of all Chlamydia cases among women even though they only represent about 20% of the overall population.
- Poor nutrition and a lack of exercise are related to financial hardship and the cost of healthy foods. In Trenton, 46% of girls are either overweight or obese compared to 31% of girls nationally. A factor that may contribute to physical inactivity is that neighborhoods are perceived as unsafe.
- A strength related to healthcare in Mercer County is the low number of women and girls who smoke cigarettes. The county has the lowest rates of cigarette smoking among high school students in the state, and girls in Mercer County are even less likely to try cigarettes as compared to boys.

Crime, Personal Safety, & Physical Violence

While crimes against personal safety -- domestic violence, sexual violence, gang violence, child abuse and neglect, teen dating

violence, bullying, street gangs, and human trafficking -- are often underreported, some seem to be on the rise. Rates of domestic violence and sexual assaults have increased, particularly in Trenton. Crimes that especially affect children and adolescents, such as child abuse and neglect, dating violence, bullying, and street gangs, are difficult to address because victims do not know how to seek help, feel stigmatized, or worry about reprisals from peers or parents.

- In 2009, there were 2,889 reported domestic violence offenses (domestic assaults, harassment, and domestic sexual assaults), a 6.8% increase from the previous year. Of all municipalities in Mercer County, Trenton saw the largest percentage (47%) of domestic violence incidents. African American women seem to be overrepresented among female victims of domestic violence. Many incidents of domestic violence go unreported because of fear, lack of understanding or knowledge of how to get help, embarrassment, economic dependency, and family privacy.
- Incidents of sexual violence are also often unreported. In 2009, there were 1,041 reported cases, but sexual violence programs funded by the New Jersey Division on Women served 3,431 new primary victims and 751 secondary victims that year -- over three times the number in the 2009 New Jersey Uniform Crime Report.
- Although reports of sexual assaults statewide have decreased, reports in Mercer County continue to increase. From 2008 to 2009, the number of reported rapes increased 14% in Mercer County, the majority in Trenton, Lawrence, and Hamilton. Some local colleges and universities have established their own offices or initiatives to address sexual violence on campus.
- "Dating violence" is a pattern of abusive and coercive physical, emotional, or sexual behaviors or actions when one dating partner seeks control over the other. An emerging concern is the use of technology to bully, harass, or abuse others. Only about one-third of teens who are in abusive relationships tell someone about it because they may be unsure if what they have experienced is abuse or because they may be concerned about parental response.
- In 2010, Mercer County represented about 4% of the state's reported and substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect, with 63% of cases occurring in Trenton. Hamilton, Ewing, and East Windsor also had high percentages of reported and substantiated child abuse and neglect. Reports are likely to

be lower than the actual number of incidents. Poverty is the greatest predictor of child abuse and neglect, while risk factors also include family domestic and sexual violence, parents' history of abuse as children, substance abuse, and marital status. Support and counseling is scarce for young adults who have experienced abuse and neglect.

- Mercer County is home to 4% of street gangs in New Jersey. Many of these gangs have large memberships, especially in Trenton, but also in Princeton. Girls represent a considerable, but unknown, percentage of gang-involved youth.
- Human trafficking is an umbrella term for crimes such as sex trafficking and forced labor. Due to location, transportation, and population size, New Jersey is one of the states where human trafficking occurs more frequently. Eight programs in New Jersey, including Womanspace, provide services for victims.

Girls

There are 41,408 girls under the age of 18, approximately 22.4% of the overall female population, in the county. Girls as well as boys can be victims of child abuse, dating violence, bullying, and street gangs, but several additional health and safety issues are specific to adolescent girls. Rates of teen pregnancy are increasing, along with related outcomes such as premature births and low birth weight. Girls are more likely than boys to suffer from cyber-bullying and to become runaways. Girls between the ages of 15 and 19 are the largest group of women affected by Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) in the county. Budget cuts have limited services to help girls with STI and cyber-bullying.

- The number of babies born to teenage mothers in Mercer County is higher than the state average and continues to rise. In urban areas like Trenton, where there are lower levels of educational attainment and higher rates of poverty, teen pregnancy rates are higher and can become a cycle in many families. About three-quarters of Mercer County teenage mothers who gave birth in 2005 lived in Trenton. Children of teen mothers are more likely to be born prematurely or at a low birth weight, increasing their risk of health problems.
- Teenage girls between the ages of 15 and 19 represent the largest group of women affected by Sexually Transmitted

Infections (STI) in the county. Girls in this age group had 40.1% of all Chlamydia cases and 31.8% of all Gonorrhea cases among women in the county in 2009. The New Jersey Sexually Transmitted Disease Program provides confidential and no- or low-cost STI testing at six locations in Trenton, Hamilton, and Princeton. As a result of recent budgetary cuts, many state programs have reduced services and hours of operation. Several other organizations offer similar testing, such as HiTOPS and the Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital clinic.

- Girls are significantly more likely to suffer from cyber-bullying than boys. School counselors generally provide bullying prevention education within schools, but many counselor positions were eliminated during recent budgetary cuts in districts such as Trenton.
- Girls represent about 36% of all juvenile arrests, a percentage that is significantly higher than arrest statistics among adults. Overall, girls are significantly less likely to commit violent crimes than boys.
- Girls significantly outnumber boys in the number of runaways taken into protective custody by the police in both Mercer County and the state. In 2010, 329 Mercer County girls were taken into protective custody, compared to 149 boys. The vast majority of these arrests, approximately 80%, occurred in Trenton. African American girls were about twice as likely as Caucasian girls to be runaways.
- Females comprise the majority of college students. However, there is still a significant gender gap in students' major areas of study, with female students outnumbering male students in lower-paying teaching and nursing/health profession fields and male students outnumbering female students in higher-paying engineering, math, physical science, and business fields.

Aging

Of 46,347 Mercer County residents who are 65 years of age or older, 27,230 (60%) are women. Some of them, especially in Trenton, Lawrence, and Ewing, are primary caregivers for their grandchildren. Older women are at greater risk of living in poverty than older men, with Hispanics and African Americans at even higher risk. Poverty affects nutrition and health, as older adults choose between paying for food or medications.

- Approximately 7,700 grandparents reside with at least one grandchild. Of these grandparents, about 2,200 are the primary caretakers of their grandchildren. Trenton, Lawrence, and Ewing exceed the county average for children living with grandparents.
- Approximately 6.2% of the elderly population in Mercer County is living in poverty. Older women are at a significantly higher risk of living in poverty than men: 70% of elderly Mercer residents living in poverty are women. Hispanics and African Americans are overrepresented in this population.
- Poor nutrition affects countless older adults in Mercer County. With medical and prescription costs continuing to rise, some older adults in Mercer County must choose between buying food or medications.
- The leading causes of death among women in Mercer County, ages 65 and up, are heart diseases (30%), cancer (21%), stroke (6%), Chronic Lower Respiratory Diseases (5%), and Alzheimer's Disease (4.5%).
- The Mercer County Office on Aging offers a variety of free health, social, and other services for adults 60 years of age and older and their caregivers. Although all older adults are eligible for services, emphasis is placed on serving older adults in greatest social and economic need.

Leadership

Women who hold leadership roles in education, government and politics, business, and non-profit organizations serve as positive role models for younger girls and help bridge the gender gap. Currently, Mercer County women hold leadership positions in all areas, but hold a majority of leadership positions only as school principals and directors of non-profit organizations.

- Three of ten superintendents in Mercer County public school districts are women. Women represent 61.5% of principals in Mercer County public schools, compared to 50.1% of school principals statewide. Women lead six of eight administrative charter schools in the county.
- Women also hold three of five of the highest leadership positions

in higher education, but local colleges and universities follow a nationwide trend of underrepresentation of women in the highest faculty ranks, especially in math and science. Recently Drs. Diane Bates and Lisa Grega from The College of New Jersey received a National Science Foundation grant to promote the careers of women professors in fields such as math, science, and engineering.

- Although female enrollment at area colleges and universities exceeds that of males, many student leadership positions are filled by male students.
- Women in elected offices influence public policy outcomes for women and girls, but women are not equally represented in the four legislative districts in the county. While women hold three out of four state senator positions, they hold only two of eight assembly seats. Moreover, two of the seven county freeholders, two of 13 municipal mayors, and 42% of municipal Council/Committee members are women.
- The percentage of businesses in Mercer County that are owned by women (30%) is slightly higher than the state average (27.3%). Although male business owners outnumber female business owners, women are more likely to own businesses in sectors such as health care, social assistance, waste management, and remediation services, where job growth has occurred during the last ten years. Women are less likely to own businesses in transportation and warehousing, wholesale trades, and manufacturing.
- Of the nine top private sector employers in Mercer County, only two -- both in higher education -- have women in the highest leadership positions.
- Of 116 non-profit organizations that provide services in Mercer County, women hold top leadership positions in 70, representing 60.3% of non-profit organization leaders.
- The Princeton Center for Leadership Training provides peer leadership for girls and boys and school-based workshops for educators. Princeton Day School offers one-week leadership training for girls in grades 8-10, but the registration fee of \$1500 is cost-restrictive for some girls. Hopewell Valley YMCA and the Princeton YWCA offer leadership programs open to girls.

Agenda for the Future: Funding Priorities

The research confirmed that women and girls in Mercer County face serious social issues. A range of non-profit organizations and government agencies provide services to address these issues. Nevertheless, the research showed recurring impediments that limit access to existing services: child care, transportation, and collaboration among programs. In addition, programming to address some social issues seems insufficient to meet existing needs.

- Deficiencies that affect access to employment and social services

Cost of child care

The absence of affordable child care is a barrier to seeking and maintaining employment and to using relevant social services. The cost of child care is a burden for many women, with single mothers spending 28 to 34% of income on child care for pre-school children, when these services are available.

Access to transportation

Lack of transportation affects access to jobs, education, healthcare, and other social services.

Integration and collaboration among existing services

Programs are isolated from each other, sometimes overlap, and rarely coordinate services. Lack of information and interaction among providers limits their ability to refer women and girls to other relevant services.

- Deficiencies in service availability

Mentoring and education needs

Girls need more role-modeling and mentoring opportunities that support safety and physical and emotional health as well as academics. School drop-out rates in Trenton are eight and a half times the state average. The cost of the GED exam is an impediment to women who later seek to complete high school.

Health and nutrition services

Preventive health services have been underutilized or even discontinued because of insufficient information or access. Access also affects nutrition: for many urban residents, supermarkets and farmers' markets are not located within walking distance or on convenient bus routes.

What's Next?

Please join us as we continue to interpret these findings and consider our responses. Over the next few months, we will convene several conversations, share this research with policymakers and the press, and work with nonprofit colleagues to create our long-term plan for future grantmaking.

Learn more and join us by visiting www.pacf.org/fwg or by contacting the Community Foundation at 609 219 1800.

The Princeton Area Community Foundation promotes philanthropy and builds community across greater Mercer County. It provides charitable giving expertise to individuals, nonprofits and corporations, and makes grants to nonprofit organizations. Since its founding in 1991, the Community Foundation has granted over \$35 million to nonprofits and today, it is the steward for nearly \$80 in resources securely invested for of our community's future.



Princeton Area

**COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION**

15 Princess Road
Lawrenceville, NJ 08648

t 609 219 1800
f 609 219 1850

www.pacf.org