

Health & Safety

INDICATORS

2009

Health & Safety is the second of three sections in the Foundation's Annual Indicators on the status of women and girls in Dallas. Economic Security was released in the fall of 2008, and this report will be followed in the year ahead by Education. In this segment of the study, the Dallas Women's Foundation compiled 13 indicators measuring the health and safety of women in the 12 counties in the Dallas-Fort Worth region. These indicators focus on five critical areas affecting women's well-being: health care access and healthy behavior, disease, mortality, reproduction and safety.

With a purely local, woman-focused baseline established in this initial study, we will expand the view of our annual study in subsequent years. We will also perform in-depth studies using other important demographic lenses to delve into the needs of specific populations and how we are faring compared to our peers nationwide.

It is a widely acknowledged fact that when you help a woman, you also help her family. With this report, we put forth a valuable tool for strengthening the status of women and lifting the entire community. We invite you to join us as we strive to create a bright future not only for women, but also for the entire Dallas-Fort Worth area.

Note: Sources for the enclosed findings are detailed in Dallas Women's Foundation Health & Safety Indicator Study available at www.dallaswomensfoundation.org/research.

For more information about the Dallas Women's Foundation and how to get involved visit www.dallaswomensfoundation.org or call 214-965-9977. To be added to Dallas Women's Foundation's secure database to receive invitations to events and periodic updates, please email: lgrindele@dallaswomensfoundation.org.

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Lifting Communities
by investing
in women

The health and safety of a woman affects much more than her medical well-being. It impacts her ability to fully engage in all aspects of her life as a woman, mother, worker, wife, friend, leader and caregiver. If women are the foundations of families and communities, then their collective health is the cornerstone.

STUDY OVERVIEW

Dallas Women's Foundation's annual indicator study will examine three areas: *Economic Security, Health & Safety* and *Education*. Each is essential to self-sufficiency and well-being – and therefore essential to our work with women and girls.

The Economic Security report was released in the fall of 2008, and this report addresses Health & Safety. The Education section will follow in the months ahead. In subsequent years, we will revisit the same indicators annually, as well as focus periodically on detailed topics and trends that concern the community.

KEY FINDINGS

A significant population of women in Dallas-Fort Worth faces obstacles to accessing health care due to lack of health insurance.

Nearly 20 percent of the female population in Dallas-Fort Worth – more than 419,500 women – live without health insurance. That is almost 50,000 more individuals than live in the entire city of Arlington.

Texas has the highest uninsured rate in the nation. Even with a recent 25 percent decrease in regional uninsured rates for women, we still lag behind the rest of the country. Given the state of the economy, we are not likely to see employee-sponsored health insurance help to reverse this trend.

Bottom line, far too many of our region's women are uninsured and therefore go without critically important preventive care and medical treatment.

Rising obesity and overweight rates are contributing to a troubling shift in chronic disease risk factors for Dallas-Fort Worth women.

More than half – 56 percent – of women in the Dallas-Fort Worth region are either overweight or obese, and those numbers are growing. As a result, a troubling shift in chronic disease risk factors is occurring.

It is true that, thanks to decreases in smoking and more routine breast and cervical cancer screenings, fewer women are dying from cancer and heart disease. But, without halting the increase of obesity, the recent positive trends in chronic disease death rates could potentially be reversed. Unless we can stem the rising tide of high blood pressure, diabetes and other issues related to obesity, there are likely to be increased heart disease, stroke and other chronic disease deaths among our region's women.

Advances in medical knowledge and technology, while positively impacting some areas, are creating new challenges for women in caregiver roles.

Thanks to breakthroughs in medicine, more women are able to bring high-risk pregnancies to live births. In place of fetal death, we are happily seeing more of these babies go on to live full, healthy lives. But, there are unintended consequences: babies are dying at a higher rate in the first months of life, and a greater percentage of newborns have a very low birth weight that brings associated issues and risks.

Similarly, toward the end of life, women (as well as men) are receiving better care to extend their lives. As a result, more of the population is living

longer with chronic illnesses like heart disease and cancer. Likewise, more are alive at an older age to experience the onset of Alzheimer's disease and to need intense personal care.

As a result, these increasing trends are presenting mothers, daughters, wives and other female caregivers with new challenges to their own health, mental well-being and economic security.

The toll that violence takes on women is incompletely and inconsistently documented.

Violence against women is an all-to-real daily fact in our community. Dallas-Fort Worth sees an average of just under 100 incidents of domestic violence against women and girls every day – approximately one every 15 minutes. In addition, an average of six forcible rapes is reported daily.

We also know many victims don't report rapes or assaults out of fear, so these figures are certainly low. Further contributing to a lack of reliable data are changing police reporting methods, confidentiality surrounding these cases and the lack of a central data source for shelter admittances.

What is certain is that, without reliable information, charting and measuring any approach for addressing violence against women is much harder. Without new strategies and interventions, violence against women will perpetuate as a significant problem in our community and a threat against the well-being and very lives of women in Dallas-Fort Worth.