

**Status of Women and Girls in Ventura County**

**as Measured by**

**Power to Meet Basic Needs**

**Power to Attain Educational and Occupational Goals**

**Power to Stay Safe and Healthy**

**Power to Make Political Policies and Decisions**

**Power to Meet Basic Needs**

Participants in the "Basic Needs" focus group referred to Dr. Abraham Maslow's much-respected and oft-quoted "*Hierarchy of Needs*" study that states that humans, who are not able to adequately meet their most basic *physiological needs* (i.e. food, water, sleep, etc.), are generally unable to rise to the level where they are able to adequately meet their higher level *safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization needs*. These concerns resonated with the "Basic Needs" focus group participants when discussing challenges experienced by Ventura County women and girls.

Focus group participants agreed that Ventura County women and girls who are currently struggling to meet their most basic shelter, food, and clothing needs, experience stress and pressures in their attempts to achieve the next steps in the hierarchy. Focus group participants agreed that for Ventura County women and girls, their incomes and the incomes of their families are the greatest determinants of whether or not a woman is able to adequately and appropriately meet her most basic needs when she leaves her family of origin. For girls and women who are placed in out-of-home placements such as foster care, the economic struggles are even more severe. The women who are currently struggling the most to meet their most basic needs are the same women who are generally unable to finish high school, vocational school, and/or attain a college/university education and, therefore, the higher paying occupations that could help them adequately and appropriately meet their most basic needs are out of reach. It is a difficult and, often multi-generational, problem that focus group participants would like to see resolved or, at least, made more equitable.

**Findings**

**Ventura County Women and Income**

Overall, Ventura County is a wealthy county. It is currently the 15th wealthiest California county of 58 counties statewide and the wealthiest Southern California county. Although overall it is an economically advantaged county (36.1% of the households in Ventura County report annual incomes of more than \$100,000.00), a significant number of Ventura County households report annual incomes of less than \$25,000.00 and a significant number of Ventura County households report annual incomes that fall at or below the federal poverty level.

**Table 9. Total Households, Total Households with High Annual Incomes, Total Households with Low Annual Incomes, and Total Households with Very Low Annual Incomes in California, Ventura County, and Ventura County Cities**

	Total Households	Total Households with	Total Households with	Total Households with
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		Annual Incomes of More than \$100,000.00	Annual Incomes of Less than \$25,000.00	Annual Incomes that Fall at or Below the Federal Poverty Level
California	12,392,852	3,457,606 (27.9%)	2,466,178 (19.9%)	1,264,071 (10.2%)
Ventura County	264,305	95,518 (36.1%)	37,796 (14.3%)	17,708 (6.7%)
Camarillo	23,698	9,290 (39.2%)	2,796 (11.8%)	806 (3.4%)
Fillmore	4,345	1,082 (24.9%)	912 (21.0%)	348 (8.0%)
Moorpark	10,412	5,352 (51.4%)	802 (7.7%)	271 (2.6%)
Ojai	3,005	944 (31.4%)	556 (18.5%)	78 (2.6%)
Oxnard	51,284	12,359 (24.1%)	9,693 (18.9%)	6,359 (12.4%)
Port Hueneme	7,069	1,089 (15.4%)	1,393 (19.7%)	862 (12.2%)
Santa Paula	8,433	1,619 (19.2%)	2,209 (26.2%)	1,257 (14.9%)
Simi Valley	40,244	17,144 (42.6%)	3,904 (9.7%)	1,730 (4.3%)
Thousand Oaks	44,392	21,930 (49.4%)	4,706 (10.6%)	1,554 (3.5%)
Ventura	40,265	11,717 (29.1%)	7,006 (17.4%)	2,698 (6.7%)

Source: 2010 United States Census

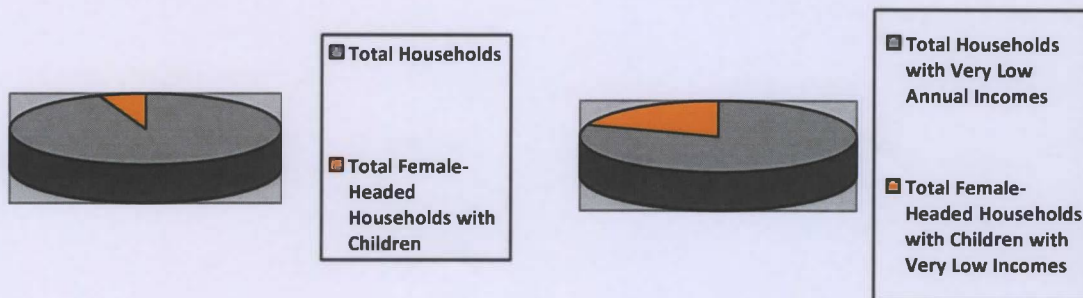
While approximately one (1) out of every three (3) women in Ventura County reside in households with high annual incomes, the number of households in Ventura County that have very low annual incomes – annual incomes that fall at or below the federal poverty level – are disproportionately female-headed households. In Ventura County, 11.8% of all households are female-headed households, yet, 18.0% of all households that report annual incomes that fall at or below the federal poverty level are female-headed households (*2010 United States Census*).



**Figure 1. Total Ventura County Households Compared with Total Female-Headed Households and Total Ventura County Households with Very Low Annual Incomes Compared with Total Female-Headed Households with Very Low Annual Incomes**

Further, in Ventura County, 5.9% of all households are female-headed households with children, yet, 24.6% of all households that report annual incomes that fall at or below the federal poverty level are female-headed households with children (*2010 United States Census*).





**Figure 2. Total Ventura County Households with Children Compared to Female-Headed Households with Children by Incomes**

This low-income household indicator is particularly acute in the cities of Oxnard, Port Hueneme, and Santa Paula. These cities are predominately home to **Hispanic low-income residents**.

**Table 10. Households that are Female-Headed Households, Households that are Female-Headed Households with Very Low Annual Incomes, Households that are Female-Headed Households with Children, and Households that are Female-Headed Households with Children with Very Low Annual Incomes in California, Ventura County, and Ventura County Cities**

	Households that are Female-Headed Households (% of Total Households)	Households that are Female-Headed Households with Very Low Annual Incomes (% of Total Households with Very Low Annual Incomes)	Households that are Female-Headed Households with Children (% of Total Households)	Households that are Female-Headed Households with Children with Very Low Annual Incomes (% of Total Households with Very Low Annual Incomes)
California	13.0%	24.6%	7.2%	32.8%
Ventura County	11.8%	18.0%	5.9%	24.6%
Camarillo	9.7%	14.2%	4.7%	20.0%
Fillmore	13.7%	7.7%	6.7%	10.3%
Moorpark	10.6%	5.0%	5.2%	9.1%
Ojai	11.8%	9.7%	6.4%	9.9%
Oxnard	15.3%	25.3%	7.9%	32.1%
Port Hueneme	15.8%	24.4%	8.4%	38.6%
Santa Paula	15.2%	30.4%	7.7%	35.9%
Simi Valley	11.3%	11.2%	5.2%	14.9%
Thousand Oaks	9.3%	13.4%	4.5%	18.3%
Ventura	12.2%	15.2%	6.2%	23.5%

Source: 2010 United States Census



It is important to note that 7.7% of the Ventura County households that report annual incomes that fall at or below the federal poverty level fell to that level during the last 24 months and 41.9% of the Ventura County female-headed households with children that report annual incomes that fall at or below the federal poverty level fell to that level during the last 24 months (*United States Census, American Community Survey, 2012*). This is further evidence that suggests that women and children are disproportionately affected by the negative impacts of the economic downturn.

It is also important to note that focus group participants – depending on the age of the participant – had differing opinions about the impact of the economic difficulties experienced by some female-headed households with children. Older adult women tended to view the economic difficulties with a focus on the long-term impact.

***"The gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' is growing and, unfortunately, the children who are being raised in low-income single-mother homes are likely to end up on the side of the 'have-nots'."***

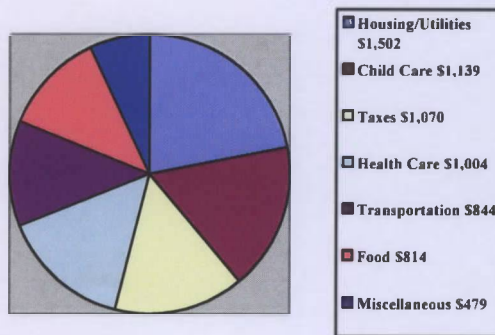
Younger adult women tended to view the economic difficulties with a focus on the short-term impact.

***"The single mothers in our county are struggling on their own to pay for housing, clothing, food, child care, and everything else. We really need to help them."***

Teen girls tended to minimize these economic difficulties. The results of the teen girls' focus group surveys indicate that, while teen girls consider the abundance of female-headed households with children to be a problem in Ventura County, they do not view it as an economic problem. The results of the teen girls' focus group surveys indicate that low-income households – households that do not have the financial resources to meet basic needs – are only a small problem in Ventura County. The teen focus group participants saw the day-to-day struggles with school and with being a teenager (i.e., body image, bullying, etc.) as much more urgent problems.

#### Ventura County Cost of Living

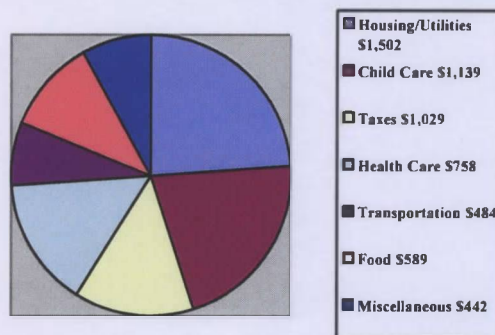
According to the 2012 Report on Ventura County prepared by the California Budget Project, a two-parent family with both of the parents working and two young children needs an annual income of at least \$82,231.00 or \$6,853.00 per month to achieve a modest standard of living in Ventura County. Further, according to the same report, a one-parent family with the parent working and two young children needs an annual income of at least \$71,314.00 or \$5,943.00 per month to achieve a very modest standard of living in Ventura County.



Monthly Total: \$6,853.00  
Source: California Budget Project (2012)

**Figure 3. Monthly Cost of Living**  
**Two-Parent Family with Both of the Parents Working and Two (2) Young Children**

Bar Graphs rather than pie charts might be more understandable (for me)



Monthly Total: \$5,943.00  
Source: California Budget Project (2012)

**Figure 4. Monthly Cost of Living**  
**One-Parent Family with the Parent Working and Two (2) Young Children**

According to the 2012 Report on Ventura County prepared by the California Budget Project, a significant number of Ventura County households do not meet these thresholds; particularly one-parent households. Because the majority of one-parent Ventura County households with children are female-headed households (68% of all one-parent households) this is again further evidence that women and children are disproportionately affected by the negative impacts of the economic downturn (*2010 United States Census*).

Ventura County "Living Wage" is this with or without health insurance??

According to the *Poverty in America - 2012 Living Wage Calculator*, the current "living wage" in Ventura County is \$12.17 per hour. The "living wage" is the hourly wage that an individual must earn to support his/her family if he/she is the sole provider for his/her family. The "living wage" is based on an individual working full-time – 2,080 hours per year. The following table

provides a comparison between the Ventura County "living wage," the Ventura County "poverty wage," and the Ventura County "minimum wage" for six (6) common family structures. The hourly wages that are below the Ventura County "living wage" are presented in red.

**Table 11. Ventura County "Living Wage" Compared to Ventura County "Poverty Wage" and Ventura County "Minimum Wage"**

	One Adult	One Adult One Child	One Adult Two Children	Two Adults	Two Adults One Child	Two Adults Two Children
Living Wage	\$12.17	\$23.96	\$27.59	\$17.38	\$22.06	\$23.39
Poverty Wage	\$5.21	\$7.00	\$8.80	\$7.00	\$8.80	\$10.60
Minimum Wage	\$8.00	\$8.00	\$8.00	\$8.00	\$8.00	\$8.00

The following table provides the average hourly wage in Ventura County for several common occupational areas. The hourly wages that are below the Ventura County "living wage" for one (1) adult supporting one (1) child are presented in red.

**Table 12. Average Hourly Wage in Ventura County for Select Occupational Areas**

	Average Hourly Wage
Management	\$50.67
Business and Financial Operations	\$32.28
Computer and Mathematical	\$40.66
Architecture and Engineering	\$40.79
Life, Physical and Social Science	\$32.75



	Average Hourly Wage
Community and Social Services	\$22.10
Legal	\$47.22
Education, Training, and Library	\$25.18
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	\$24.37
Healthcare Practitioner and Technical	\$36.19
Healthcare Support	\$13.37
Protective Service	\$22.53
Food Preparation and Serving Related	\$9.28
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	\$11.60
Personal Care and Services	\$10.78
Sales and Related	\$12.94
Office and Administrative Support	\$16.65
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	\$9.04

	Average Hourly Wage
Construction and Extraction	\$23.55
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	\$21.63
Production	\$13.73
Transportation and Material Moving	\$13.84

Homeless Women in Ventura County

One segment of the population that is not usually included in the standard poverty rate statistics is the homeless population. According to the 2012 Ventura County Homeless Count, which was conducted by the Ventura County Homeless and Housing Coalition on January 24, 2012, homelessness continues to be a significant problem in Ventura County.

*There are 1,936 homeless adults and children on any given day in Ventura County.*

*There are 517 homeless female adults on any given day in Ventura County.*

*There are more than 200 homeless children on any given day in Ventura County.*

*There are more than 100 homeless families on any given day in Ventura County.*

While three cities in Ventura County – Oxnard, Simi Valley, and Ventura – have the largest homeless populations, all of the cities in Ventura County, as well as, the unincorporated areas of the county have homeless populations.

**Table 13. Total Number of Homeless Adults and Children, Total Number of Homeless Adults, Total Number of Homeless Female Adults, and Total Number of Homeless Families in Ventura County, Ventura County Cities, and Unincorporated Areas of Ventura County**

	Total Number	Total Number	Total Number	Total Number
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	of Homeless Adults and Children	of Homeless Adults	of Homeless Female Adults	of Homeless Families
<b>Ventura County</b>	1,936	1,722	517	115
<b>Camarillo</b>	30	17	10	6
<b>Fillmore</b>	16	12	5	3
<b>Moorpark</b>	5	5	1	0
<b>Ojai</b>	41	40	8	1
<b>Oxnard</b>	522	449	135	43
<b>Port Hueneme</b>	12	7	2	1
<b>Santa Paula</b>	60	59	17	1
<b>Simi Valley</b>	284	270	74	14
<b>Thousand Oaks</b>	90	77	16	7
<b>Ventura</b>	701	644	187	23
<b>Unincorporated Areas of Ventura County</b>	175	142	62	16

Source: 2012 Ventura County Homeless Count

The population of Ventura County homeless women is a diverse population. According to the 2012 Ventura County Homeless Survey, which was conducted by the Ventura County Homeless and Housing Coalition in March 2012:

- *Race/Ethnicity:* Fifty-two percent (52%) were white, 29% were Hispanic, 4% were African-American, 3% were Asian-American/Pacific Islander, and 12% were other races/ethnicities.
- *Age:* Twelve percent (12%) were 18 - 24 years old, 80% were 25 - 61 years old, and 8% were 62 years old and older.
- *Length of Homelessness:* Fifty-six percent (56%) were homeless for one (1) year or more.
- *Veteran Status:* Seven percent (7%) were veterans.
- *Domestic Violence:* Fifty-two percent (52%) were victims of domestic violence.

While the number of Ventura County homeless women is troubling, the fact that a significant percentage of the "chronically homeless" in Ventura County are women is especially troubling. According to the 2012 Ventura County Homeless Survey, which was conducted by the Ventura County Homeless and Housing Coalition in March 2012, twenty-three percent (23%) of the "chronically homeless" in Ventura County are women.

According to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, the term "chronically homeless" is used to describe an individual or a family that:



- Is homeless and lives or resides in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter;
- Has been homeless and living or residing in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter continuously for at least one (1) year or on at least four (4) separate occasions in the last three (3) years; and
- Has an adult head of household (or a minor head of household if no adult is present in the household) with a diagnosable substance use disorder, serious mental illness, developmental disability, post-traumatic stress disorder, cognitive impairments resulting from a brain injury, or chronic physical illness or disability, including the co-occurrence of two (2) or more of those conditions. ...Who has been continuously homeless for over one year.

### Expert Comment

### INSERT EXPERT COMMENT

### Conclusion

Ventura County women – particularly women that are single (with or without children) and women that(who) reside in predominately Hispanic, low-income communities – are disproportionately negatively impacted by economic downturns and changes in the overall "cost of living" in Ventura County. The women and girls who reside in female-headed households are much more likely to have annual household incomes that fall at or below the federal poverty level compared to male-headed households (with or without a spouse and with or without children). As a result, these are the women and girls who are most often struggling with meeting their basic needs (i.e., shelter, food, clothing, etc.) and are, therefore, often unable to focus on attaining the education that will help them to obtain a higher paying occupation and have an annual income that will allow them to comfortably support their household. It is a cycle of poverty that is often multi-generational. While these problems may seem overwhelming, the focus group participants provided some very practical recommendations on how the cycle of poverty can begin to be broken for low-income Ventura County women and girls.

### Recommendations

#### Local Government and Local Educational Agencies

- ✓ Adopt local "living wage" ordinances
- ✓ Expand the successful **One Stop Program** for homeless individuals into other areas of Ventura County
- ✓ Assist community-based organizations with revitalizing "meals on wheels" programs for struggling senior citizens
- ✓ Educate teen girls about the "cost of living" and the impact of education and occupation on the "cost of living"

### Community-Based Organizations

- ✓ Establish high-quality, year-round homeless shelters for homeless women, homeless women with children, and homeless families that provide programs, services, and interventions that will elevate clients from homelessness
- ✓ Revitalize "meals on wheels" programs for struggling senior citizens

### Business

- ✓ Provide employees with a "living wage"
- ✓ Increase the number of farmers' markets selling low-cost healthy foods
- ✓ Sell low-cost healthy foods through supermarkets and local markets

### Individuals

- ✓ Advocate for local "living wage" ordinances
- ✓ Support – through time, talent, and money – church and community-based organization programs, services, and interventions that provide immediate, as well as, ongoing assistance to struggling senior citizens and to struggling single mothers
- ✓ Encourage supermarkets and local markets to sell low-cost healthy foods

### **Future Research Recommendations**

It would be highly beneficial for additional research to be conducted on why, in Ventura County, single-parent households headed by females are so much more likely to fall into poverty than single-parent households headed by males. Definitive data and information on this topic, which is currently only available as anecdotal data, would enable government agencies and nonprofit organizations to more appropriately develop programs, services, and interventions for single-parent households headed by females that are "at-risk" of falling into poverty; to streamline the provision of these programs, services, and interventions; and to provide these programs, services, and interventions in a more timely manner.

**Power to Attain Educational and Occupational Goals**

**There is no mention of Adult Education in this section and there are adult education programs in Ventura County that help with employment.**

The desire to meet and/or exceed one's educational and career goals was universally shared by focus group participants regardless of race/ethnicity or age. Adult focus group participants described the keen sense of satisfaction and purpose that they had acquired through the achievement of their educational and career goals. Further, these women were adamant that all women and girls regardless of background be given the mentoring, knowledge, and skills needed to achieve their own educational and career goals. Teen focus group participants enthusiastically shared their dreams and goals for the future and their desire that everyone, regardless of the community/family that an individual is part of, have the opportunity to realize their educational and career dreams.

It is, therefore, vitally important that government agencies, local educational agencies, community-based organizations, businesses, and individuals that comprise Ventura County, analyze the shortcomings in our educational systems and develop the policies and the infrastructure that will enable all Ventura County women and girls to achieve their educational and career goals.

**Findings**

Ventura County has a robust public education system. According to the California Department of Education, the Ventura County Office of Education and twenty (20) independent school districts are providing high-quality educational services to approximately 140,000 students through one hundred thirty-three (133) elementary schools, twenty-eight (28) middle schools, twenty-four (24) high schools, six (6) alternative high schools, eleven (11) continuation high schools, and twelve (12) other schools. The student populations that are served through these school districts are racially/ethnically diverse.

**Table 14: Total Enrollment and Percentage of Total Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity at Ventura County Office of Education and Independent School District Schools**

	Total Enrollment	White Percentage of Total Enrollment	Hispanic Percentage of Total Enrollment	African-American Percentage of Total Enrollment	Other Races/Ethnicities Percentage of Total Enrollment
Ventura County Office of Education	2,375	44.3%	47.2%	1.9%	6.6%
Briggs Elementary	555	14.8%	84.1%	0.4%	0.7%
Santa Paula					
Conejo Valley Unified	21,091	63.5%	21.9%	1.6%	13.0%
Thousand Oaks					
Fillmore Unified	3,776	10.4%	88.1%	0.3%	1.2%
Fillmore					
Hueneme Elementary	8,122	7.7%	82.0%	2.2%	8.1%
Port Hueneme					
Mesa Union Elementary	1,254	50.7%	36.3%	4.6%	8.4%
Somis					
Moorpark Unified	7,208	50.1%	38.9%	1.6%	9.4%
Moorpark					
Mupu Elementary	137	13.9%	82.5%	0.0%	3.6%
Santa Paula					
Oak Park Unified	4,002	77.5%	5.5%	1.4%	15.6%
Oak Park					
Ocean View Elementary	2,519	9.1%	83.8%	2.5%	4.6%



Oxnard					
Ojai Unified	3,005	62.1%	32.0%	1.1%	4.8%
Ojai					
Oxnard Elementary	15,870	4.8%	89.4%	1.8%	4.0%
Oxnard					
Oxnard Union High	16,676	17.0%	72.2%	2.4%	8.4%
Oxnard and Camarillo					
Pleasant Valley Elementary	7,275	49.3%	32.9%	3.2%	14.6%
Camarillo					
Rio Elementary	4,487	5.9%	83.8%	2.2%	8.1%
El Rio and Oxnard					
Santa Clara Elementary	55	67.3%	32.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Santa Paula					
Santa Paula Elementary	3,661	5.2%	94.3%	0.2%	0.3%
Santa Paula					
Santa Paula Union High	1,626	5.0%	93.4%	0.4%	1.2%
Santa Paula					
Simi Valley Unified	19,933	59.2%	28.0%	1.3%	11.5%
Simi Valley					
Somis Union	474	39.7%	54.0%	2.1%	4.2%
Somis					
Ventura Unified	17,509	45.0%	46.3%	1.6%	7.1%
Ventura					

Source: California Department of Education, 2012

It is important to note that the school districts with the highest percentages of Hispanic students are also the school districts with the highest percentages of low-income students and students who are classified as English Learners.

**Table 15. Percentage of Total Enrollment Eligible for Free/Reduced Cost Meals, Percentage of Total Enrollment Classified English Learner, and Primary Language(s) of English Learner Students at Ventura County Office of Education and Independent School District Schools**

	Percentage of Total Enrollment Eligible for Free/Reduced Cost Meals	Percentage of Total Enrollment Classified English Learner	Primary Language(s) of English Learner Students
Ventura County Office of Education	37.6%	12.3%	Spanish
Briggs Elementary	71.5%	21.3%	Spanish
Conejo Valley Unified	18.8%	9.8%	Spanish
Fillmore Unified	76.6%	35.7%	Spanish
Hueneme Elementary	72.3%	47.2%	Spanish and Mixteco
Mesa Union Elementary	14.6%	9.2%	Spanish
Moorpark Unified	31.2%	18.5%	Spanish
Mupu Elementary	46.0%	8.8%	Spanish
Oak Park Unified	4.3%	2.2%	Hebrew
Ocean View Elementary	81.2%	63.7%	Spanish
Ojai Unified	36.7%	12.4%	Spanish
Oxnard Elementary	81.9%	48.2%	Spanish and Mixteco
Oxnard Union High	40.8%	19.5%	Spanish

Pleasant Valley Elementary	26.8%	10.9%	Spanish
Rio Elementary	71.6%	42.3%	Spanish and Mixteco
Santa Clara Elementary	12.7%	3.6%	Spanish
Santa Paula Elementary	79.1%	53.6%	Spanish
Santa Paula Union High	74.0%	33.1%	Spanish
Simi Valley Unified	27.3%	10.2%	Spanish
Somis Union	32.1%	20.7%	Spanish
Ventura Unified	48.1%	14.7%	Spanish

Source: California Department of Education

There are also eighty-one (81) private (parochial and non-parochial) schools – forty-one (41) kindergarten - 8<sup>th</sup> grade schools, nine (9) 9<sup>th</sup> grade - 12<sup>th</sup> grade schools, and thirty-one (31) kindergarten - 12<sup>th</sup> grade schools – providing high-quality educational services to approximately 14,000 students (*California Department of Education, 2012*).

Ventura County also has a robust public/private higher education system. There are three (3) community colleges – Ventura College, Oxnard College, and Moorpark College – and two (2) universities – California State University, Channel Islands and California Lutheran University – that are located in Ventura County.

**Table 16. Total Enrollment, Total Enrollment by Gender, and Median Age of Students at Ventura County Colleges/Universities**






	Total Enrollment	Total Enrollment (Male)	Total Enrollment (Female)	Median Age of Students
California State University, Channel Islands Camarillo	4,179	1,463 (35.0%)	2,716 (65.0%)	22 years old
California Lutheran University	4,103	#	#	#
Ventura College Ventura	13,763	6,190 (45.0%)	7,573 (55.0%)	25 years old
Oxnard College Oxnard	7,440	3,343 (44.9%)	4,097 (55.1%)	26 years old
Moorpark College Moorpark	15,385	7,269 (47.2%)	8,116 (52.8%)	24 years old

Source: California State University, Channel Islands; California Lutheran University; and Ventura County Community College District

**Table 17. Percentage of Total Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity at Ventura County Colleges/Universities**

White	African- American	Hispanic	Asian- American/ Pacific	Other Race/ Ethnicity
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	Islander				
California State University, Channel Islands	50.0%	2.0%	30.0%	7.0%	11.0%
California Lutheran University					
Ventura College	34.7%	3.9%	48.5%	6.7%	6.2%
Oxnard College	18.7%	4.1%	64.1%	8.1%	5.1%
Moorpark College	56.9%	2.7%	22.4%	10.5%	7.5%

Source: California State University, Channel Islands; California Lutheran University; and Ventura County Community College District

Ventura County Educational Attainment Levels

Ventura County is an educationally advantaged county – 82.3% of the residents of Ventura County (25 years old and older) have earned a high school diploma and 30.8% of the residents of Ventura County (25 years old and older) have earned a bachelor's degree or higher (*2010 United States Census*). While this is admirable, it is important to note that 17.7% of Ventura County residents (25 years old and older) have not completed high school (*2010 United States Census*). By comparison, 80.7% of Californians have earned a high school diploma and 30.0% have earned a bachelor's degree of higher.

**Table 18. Population by Educational Attainment Level in California, Ventura County, and Ventura County Cities**

	No High School	Some High School	High School Graduate	Some College	Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate Degree
California	10.4%	8.9%	21.5%	21.5%	7.7%	19.2%	10.8%
Ventura County	9.9%	7.8%	19.8%	23.6%	8.1%	19.6%	11.2%
Camarillo	3.3%	5.0%	17.5%	26.1%	9.8%	24.3%	14.0%
Fillmore	21.4%	11.6%	25.9%	22.2%	5.7%	7.8%	5.4%
Moorpark	6.8%	6.6%	18.1%	22.9%	8.2%	24.7%	12.8%
Ojai	6.7%	4.6%	17.3%	23.9%	7.4%	22.1%	18.0%
Oxnard	23.0%	14.0%	20.6%	19.8%	7.2%	10.6%	4.8%
Port Hueneme	12.5%	10.7%	19.5%	28.6%	8.4%	13.7%	6.7%
Santa Paula	24.8%	11.5%	25.7%	21.5%	5.6%	7.0%	3.9%
Simi Valley	4.3%	5.7%	23.9%	26.0%	8.8%	21.9%	9.4%
Thousand Oaks	3.1%	3.2%	16.3%	21.5%	7.7%	29.5%	18.7%
Ventura	4.9%	7.9%	19.5%	26.8%	9.2%	19.1%	12.4%

Source: 2010 United States Census



The cities that have the overall highest educational attainment levels – Camarillo, Moorpark, Ojai, Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks, and Ventura – are predominately white, high-income communities. The cities that have the overall lowest educational attainment levels – Fillmore, Oxnard, Port Hueneme, and Santa Paula – are predominately Hispanic, low-income communities.

Table 19. Educational Attainment Levels by Gender in Ventura County

	No High School	Some High School	High School Graduate	Some College	Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate Degree
Male	49.8%	50.4%	49.0%	47.2%	43.0%	48.4%	49.7%
Female	50.2%	49.6%	51.0%	52.8%	57.0%	51.6%	50.3%

Source: 2010 United States Census

While Ventura County females are earning high school diplomas, attending college, and earning college degrees at a higher rate than Ventura County males, they are also dropping out of the formal education system prior to high school at a higher rate than their male counterparts. According to the Ventura County Office of Education, this dichotomy is most acutely realized in the predominately Hispanic, low-income communities throughout Ventura County.

INSERT HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION AND HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT TABLE  
TABLE 20

To further explore this dichotomy, focus group participants were asked *why are teen girls who reside in predominately low-income Hispanic communities dropping out of high school at a higher rate than teen girls who reside in predominately high-income white communities?*

Adult female focus group participants expressed that all teen girls – particularly low-income teen girls – are not encouraged to seek higher education at the same rate as teen boys, so it is easier to drop out of high school if something unexpected happens (i.e., teen pregnancy, decrease in household income, etc.). Adult focus group participants also expressed that all teen girls – particularly low-income Hispanic teen girls – are not encouraged to enroll and/or participate in classes that have the propensity to lead to higher incomes in the long-term (i.e., mathematics, science, technology, engineering, etc.).

Adult male focus group participants expressed that, while the school environment has improved for female students during the last twenty (20) years, there are still a wide range of cultural issues that hamper the educational endeavors of Hispanic teens, in general, and female Hispanic teens in particular. These cultural issues include: expecting teen girls to not leave the local area, expecting teen girls to help take care of the home and assist with the raising of younger siblings while both parents work, and accepting young teen mothers as the norm rather than the exception.

In comparison, teen focus group participants felt that all teen girls are encouraged to both seek higher education and enroll/participate in classes that are traditionally male-dominated (i.e., mathematics, science, technology, engineering, etc.). These teens universally stated that they felt very supported in their academic endeavors by both teachers and parents. When asked why they

thought that Hispanic girls dropped out of high school and colleges/universities more often than males and females of other race/ethnicities, they expressed that Hispanic teen girls may be struggling more with issues that are uniquely cultural such as parents not allowing daughters to leave the local area and parents expecting daughters to assist with housekeeping and child rearing of younger siblings.

Ventura County Educational Attainment Levels and the Impact on Ventura County Incomes

In Ventura County, as in the majority of other regions throughout the United States, there is a direct correlation between an individual's educational attainment level and an individual's income.

**Table 21. Median Incomes by Educational Attainment Levels in Ventura County**

	No High School or Some High School	High School Graduate	Some College or Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate Degree
Ventura County	\$17,583.00	\$30,352.00	\$37,769.00	\$56,755.00	\$81,221.00
Ventura County (Male)	\$20,930.00	\$33,563.00	\$47,066.00	\$70,322.00	\$101,173.00
Ventura County (Female)	\$15,407.00	\$26,192.00	\$31,150.00	\$46,188.00	\$63,094.00

Source: 2010 United States Census

Unemployment in Ventura County

The July 2012 unemployment rate in Ventura County – the most recent available – was 9.4%, which is lower than the July 2011 unemployment rate of 10.1%. While the unemployment rate is decreasing both countywide and in all Ventura County cities, the predominately Hispanic, low-income cities of Fillmore, Oxnard, Port Hueneme, and Santa Paula continue to have significantly higher unemployment rates than other Ventura County cities.

**Table 22. Unemployment in Ventura County**

	Number of Unemployed (July 2012)	Unemployment Rate (July 2012)	Number of Unemployed (July 2011)	Unemployment Rate (July 2011)
California	1,961,700	10.7%	2,189,600	11.9%
Ventura County	40,900	9.4%	43,900	10.1%
Camarillo	2,200	6.7%	2,300	7.2%
Fillmore	900	12.9%	1,000	13.8%
Moorpark	1,700	8.8%	1,800	9.4%
Ojai	500	10.7%	500	11.5%
Oxnard	11,600	12.7%	12,500	13.6%



Port Hueneme	1,200	11.0%	1,300	11.8%
Santa Paula	2,300	15.4%	2,500	16.4%
Simi Valley	5,400	7.7%	5,800	8.3%
Thousand Oaks	5,200	7.3%	5,600	7.8%
Ventura	5,200	8.5%	5,600	9.1%

Source: California Economic Development Department, Labor Market Information Division, 2012

**Expert Comment**

**INSERT EXPERT COMMENT**

**Conclusion**

While Ventura County females are earning high school diplomas, attending college, and earning college degrees at a higher rate than Ventura County males, they are also dropping out of the formal education system prior to high school graduation at a higher rate than their male counterparts – particularly in predominately Hispanic, low-income communities. Simultaneously, the communities that are experiencing the highest rate of females dropping out of the formal education system prior to high school graduation are the same communities that have the highest number of households reporting annual incomes that fall at or below the federal poverty level. The women and girls who reside in low-income households – particularly low-income Hispanic households – are so busy struggling to meet their basic needs (i.e., shelter, clothing, food, etc.) that they are often forced to put their educational and occupational aspirations aside to address short-term, immediate needs. Once these women and girls leave the formal education system, they generally do not return to complete their educational and/or career goals and, therefore, are often relegated to a lifetime of struggling and living in households that have low or very low annual incomes. While this situation is often considered overwhelming and distressing, the focus group participants were quick to point out "assets in the community" that are helping to reverse this trend and made concrete and meaningful recommendations about how these assets can be enhanced and expanded to help even more Ventura County women and girls achieve their educational and occupational aspirations.

**Recommendations**

Local Government and Local Educational Agencies

- ✓ Develop "female-only" mathematics, science, engineering, and technology classes at high schools where girls are enrolling and/or performing in these classes at a significantly lower rate than their male counterparts
- ✓ Expand the AVID Program to all high school throughout Ventura County that have a high percentage of Hispanic students
- ✓ Provide intensive mentoring and tutoring services, as well as needed individual and family interventions, for any teen girl who is at-risk of dropping out of school

Community-Based Organizations



- ✓ Partner with local schools to establish high-quality mentoring and tutoring programs
- ✓ Provide "teen centers" that provide a safe place for teens to complete homework, receive tutoring, and work with a mentor

#### Business

- ✓ Establish comprehensive employee mentoring programs for all new employees
- ✓ Encourage continuing education by assisting with the costs of continuing education
- ✓ Establish internships for high school females in areas where mathematics, science, engineering, and/or technology are prominent

#### Individuals

- ✓ Serve as a mentor for a woman striving to achieve her occupational goals
- ✓ Serve as a mentor for a girl striving to achieve her educational goals
- ✓ Serve as a tutor for a girl struggling to achieve her educational goals
- ✓ Encourage a teen mother to complete her education by assisting with babysitting and other basic needs

#### **Future Research Recommendations**

With the large and growing Hispanic population and the growing Mixteco population in Ventura County, it would be highly beneficial for additional research to be conducted as to why, in Ventura County, Hispanic teen girls – particularly low-income Hispanic teen girls – continue to drop out of the formal education system prior to high school graduation at a higher rate than their male counterparts or teen girls of other races/ethnicities. Definitive data and information about this topic, which is currently only available as anecdotal data, would enable local educational agencies to more appropriately develop programs, services, and interventions for Hispanic teen girls – particularly low-income Hispanic teen girls. This data and information would also enable local educational agencies to streamline the provision of these programs, services, and interventions and provide these programs, services, and interventions in a more timely and effective manner.

## Power to Stay Safe and Healthy

The VCCW agreed that assessing women's power within a community must include the measure of women's health and survival, psychological well-being, and freedom from crime and violence. Because women are typically the primary caretakers within families, securing and improving women's health positively impacts the family and the broader community. Because women often live longer, improved health improves quality of life throughout a woman's lifespan, which also positively impacts the next generation of caretakers.

### Findings

#### HEALTH CONCERNS FOR WOMEN IN VENTURA COUNTY

Before addressing specific health issues that impact women, two overarching issues will be discussed: the need for the prevention of obesity to impact several health concerns and the need for access to healthcare.

#### **The Need for Prevention of Obesity**

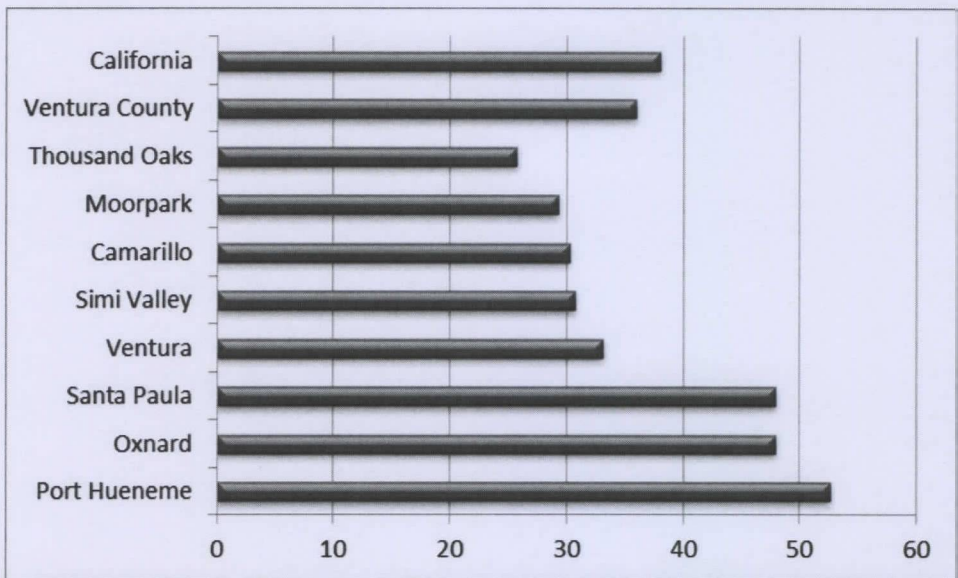
*"Prevention...prevention...prevention, so that we never get to the point of needing to diagnose. If we can prevent obesity, cancer, diabetes, then we have the ultimate cure" (American Cancer Society – Ventura County, 2012). Before examining specific health risks for women, it is critical to emphasize the importance of prevention. "If women exercise, then cardiovascular issues, stress, and anxiety are reduced. In our imbalanced lives, this has been understated in our society" (former nurse and current nonprofit CEO).*

Obesity is the most critical and pervasive health prevention issue Ventura County currently faces. With an alarming **59.6% of Ventura County adults identified as overweight or obese** (California Health Interview Survey, 2009), Ventura County faces a daunting health challenge. The American Cancer Society reports that one-third of all cancers are preventable through proper exercise and diet. In fact, 37% of deaths in Ventura County are directly related to diseases that have strong correlations with being overweight or obese, such as heart disease, diabetes, cancers and stroke (Network for a Healthy California, 2011).

*"The best hope for lowering obesity rates is to stop people from getting fat to begin with: Experience and studies show that it is difficult for obese adults to permanently shed fat and that children who are already overweight or obese are highly likely to be overweight as adults" (The Los Angeles Times, January 18, 2012). Understanding that prevention is the best long-term solution, it is important to assess the obesity rate among Ventura County children and youth. In July 2012, California Department of Education's 2010 Physical Fitness Tests data emphasized the severity of childhood obesity in Ventura County through an analysis of obesity rates among 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> graders in 250 cities throughout California. Focus group participants expressed great concern over the fact that more than one-third of Ventura County children are obese and overweight. **Three Ventura County cities – Port Hueneme, Santa Paula, and Oxnard – are in the top 20 cities out of 250 studied for children who are obese or overweight.** In addition, 75% of overweight teens are likely to be obese as adults. (UCLA Center for Health Policy Research and the California Center for Public Health Advocacy, 2012). For the first time in*



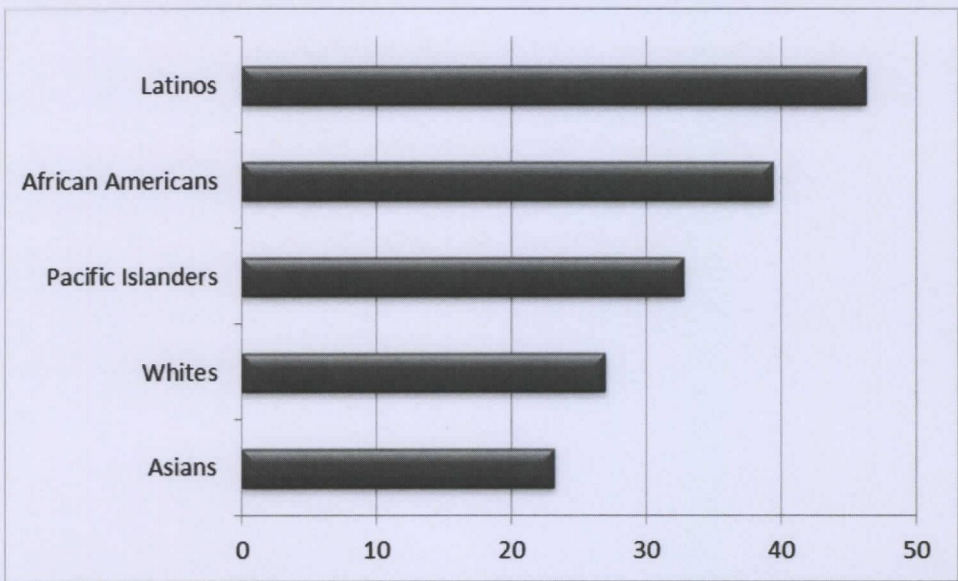
decades, parents are concerned that their children will live shorter lives than themselves due to poor health outcomes from obesity (VCPH Preventive Health Program representative).



Source: Babey SH, Wolstein J, Diamant AL, Bloom A, Goldstein H. *Overweight and Obesity among Children by California Cities - 2010*. UCLA Center for Health Policy Research and California Center for Public Health Advocacy, 2012. Only Port Hueneme 5<sup>th</sup> graders were studied. Fillmore and Ojai were not included in the report.

Figure 5. Percentage of Overweight and Obesity among Ventura County Students

Obesity and Race/Ethnicity: The cities with the highest proportion of Latino children, such as Port Hueneme, Santa Paula, and Oxnard, have the highest overweight and obesity rates in Ventura County and Latinos had the highest **overweight and obesity rate at 66%** compared to 54% whites in these same cities (UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, 2011).



Source: Ibid.

Figure 6. Childhood Obesity and Overweight by Ethnicity/Race in California



Ventura County students ages 12-17 experience an average of only 2.2 days of Physical Education per week – ranking among the five counties (out of 54) with the **lowest amount of time in PE** in CA and among the lowest seven counties (out of 54) for days students report being physically active per week (*Adolescent Physical Education and Physical Activity in California*, UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, 2011).

The teen girls' focus group had a lot to say about obesity. Girls from the east county attributed high obesity rates among youth on boredom, lack of activities for teens, and the prevalence of fast food. Participants in the teen girls' focus group agreed that overeating and not exercising are both related to depression. *“Women are more emotional and we eat to settle our emotions.” “It is the atmosphere of girls to talk ourselves down, perpetuating the depression. Girls’ emotions are up and down, we struggle with body image, and the media shows perfect bodies for us to compare ourselves to – it all leads to pressure and negative feelings.” Some girls think, “I can never look that good so I might as well pig out.”*

**Rate of Uninsured/Access to Healthcare**

*"Lack of insurance is the greatest issue of the day, because you can't get preventive care or early intervention care without it. For workers making \$10 to \$15 an hour, the cost of insurance premiums is not affordable. Parents who cannot afford the co-pay for their care will choose not to get medical attention **FOR** themselves, because they will save whatever money they have to pay for their children's medical care"* (retired hospital CEO).

In the 2008 VCPH Community Health Status Report, California was ranked 7<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states for the highest proportion of uninsured resident (20.8%). Insurance coverage for women (and men) has decreased dramatically from 2007 to 2010. Due to the economic downturn, numerous baby boomers lost their jobs and health insurance, which made them the largest age group of uninsured patients being treated at county hospitals and clinics – the county’s medical safety net (Ventura County Health Care Agency, 2010). Because of their marital status, age and pre-existing conditions, **one out of four unmarried female baby boomers in California was uninsured** in 2009 (UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, 2010). The study revealed that uninsured women were more than five times as likely to put off a Pap test as those who receive employment-based coverage.

**Table 23. Percentage of Ventura County Residents without Health Insurance by Sex/Age**

	Male	Female
18-24 Years	36.5%	24.4%
25-34 Years	38.2%	26.9%
35-44 Years	24.0%	19.3%
45-54 Years	20.3%	15.1%
55-64 Years	11.2%	10.5%
65-74 Years	2.5%	3.4%
75 Years and Over	1.1%	0.6%
Total Number	66,162	49,450
Total Percentage	20.0%	16%

Source: US Census Bureau American Fact Finder 2010 American Community Survey 1-year estimates

Lack of adequate mental healthcare coverage is also a growing concern countywide. VCBH notes that there is a large percentage of self-pay (uninsured) women who have inadequate mental health care plans OR due to unemployment or under-employment have no mental health benefits or coverage for counseling services and/or hospitalization coverage. *“Sliding fee scales with some of the outpatient “helping” organizations can be more than individuals can manage, especially when it’s the choice between eating, keeping lights on etc. or paying a therapist. \$20.00 can be a lot of money.”* Medicare benefits for behavioral health were cut several years ago.

**Critical Health Risks for Ventura County Women and Girls**

The 2011 *Ventura County Public Health Community Health Status Report* identified the top ten causes of premature death among women. Quantifying the causes of premature death highlights the conditions that cause Ventura County women to die before their expected life span and calculates the years of potential life lost. Not calculated is the potential quality of life lost due to poor health in the years prior to death. Not only does the list distinguish the top health concerns for women as compared to men, but it also focuses attention on the precursory and dangerous behaviors that, if avoided, will extend the life spans and quality of life of Ventura County’s women and girls. To investigate the status of women’s health, the top six causes of premature **health DEATH** and the contributing factors of those causes were explored for this report.

**Table 23. Top Causes of Premature Death among Women in Ventura County**

Rank	Cause of Premature Death	Number of Deaths	Years Lost
1	Coronary Heart Disease	227	2,809
2	Breast Cancer	150	2,515
3	Lung Cancer	194	2,327
4	Drug Overdose	58	1,679
5	Motor Vehicle Crash	42	1,458
6	Suicide	49	1,350
7	Cerebrovascular Diseases	92	1,316
8	Diabetes Mellitus	80	1,090
9	COPD/Emphysema	108	994
10	Colorectal Cancer	69	990
Total		1,069	16,528

Source: *Ventura County Public Health Community Health Status Report 2011* using data from the California Department of Public Health, Center for Health Statistics Death Statistical Mater files, 2006-2008. Note: Updated statistics are currently in process at VCPH, but are not yet available.

**Coronary Heart Disease**

Long thought to be a man’s disease, coronary heart disease is the number one killer of American women, killing one out of every four American women annually. Heart disease kills more American women – of all racial and ethnic groups – each year than men and more than all forms of cancer, combined (The American Heart Association and the US Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). Table 23 identifies Coronary Heart Disease as the leading cause of premature death among women in Ventura County by a wide margin.



According to the Center for Disease Control, several factors are known to increase a person's chances of developing heart disease: alcohol dependence, high blood cholesterol levels, diabetes, high-fat diet, heredity, high blood pressure, obesity, physical inactivity and tobacco use. Unfortunately, a high percentage of Ventura County adults put themselves at risk for heart disease, because they fail to heed CDC warnings: 13% smoke, 24% do not participate in daily exercise, 26% have high blood pressure, 49% eat fewer than five fruits and vegetables per day, and 59.6% are overweight or obese (UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, 2011).

**Breast Cancer and Screening**

Breast cancer ranks as the second highest cause of premature death among Ventura County women. The impact of breast cancer varies by demographic group. Nationally, white women have higher incidence rates of breast cancer, but black women have a higher rate of death from breast cancer (*U.S. Mortality Files*, National Center for Health Statistics, CDC, 2010). According to the American Cancer Society - Ventura County, African American women die at higher rates of breast cancer, because they typically develop a more aggressive form of breast cancer. Of all cancers, breast cancer is the cancer that is most common among Latinas and second most common cancer among white, black, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native women.

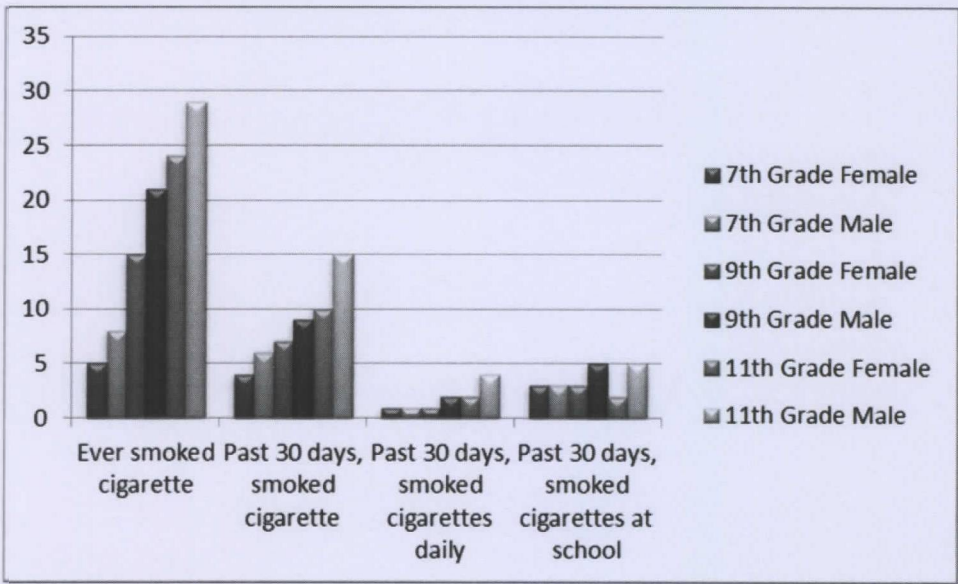
To address the fact that certain populations experience breast cancer at higher rates, it is important to educate women about early detection through the triad of breast self-exam, clinical exam, and annual mammography starting at age 40 (American Cancer Society, 2012). Unfortunately, breast cancer screening rates decrease as education and income levels decrease, so education about the importance of early detection and therefore screening, is especially critical among low-income populations. Due to statewide budget cuts, several programs that offered free mammograms to uninsured and underinsured women (e.g., Every Woman Counts programs) have been de-funded in Ventura County. Uninsured women were **nearly four times as likely to delay mammograms as those who receive employment-based coverage** (UCLA Center for Health Policy Research study, 2010).

**Lung Cancer and Smoking Rates**

Lung cancer is the third highest cause of premature death among Ventura County women. While breast, cervical, and most other cancer rates have declined across the US, lung cancer rates have remained stable (*Annual Report on the State of Cancers, Cancer* 2012). Nationwide 21% of adult men smoke and 17.3% of adult women smoke. **Lung cancer diagnoses among women have increased six-fold in the last 30 years.** It is the most common cancer among white, black, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native women and second most common cancer among Latinas nationwide. Nationally, one in five women diagnosed with lung cancer never smoked (*Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and National Cancer Institute*; 2012). Lung cancer is particularly insidious, because symptoms, such as a persistent cough and difficulty breathing, do not cause immediate alarm. By the time most victims receive a diagnosis, the lung cancer is often in an advanced stage. In contrast to modern breast cancer victims, those diagnosed with lung cancer have a high death rate. Because the best screening tool now is a chest x-ray, more research is needed to identify a better screening process.



In Ventura County, an estimated **13% of adults and 15.4% of youth smoke** (C-STATS, CTS, CSTS, 2008). Higher rates of smoking are seen in lower income, less educated households (UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, 2011). The American Cancer Society – Ventura County warns that nicotine creates a similar addiction to that of heroine. Therefore, **the best cure for lung cancer is to stop teens before they start smoking**. Once a young person chooses not to smoke, they will likely be a lifetime non-smokers. Table 24 documents Ventura County youth smoking habits. According to the Ventura County CHKS, 14% of 7<sup>th</sup> graders, 35% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders, and 51% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders find is very easy to obtain cigarettes. In June 2011, the countywide Tobacco Coalition performed a sting operation of tobacco retailers in the city of Ventura and discovered that 27% sold to underage buyers.



Source: California Healthy Kids Survey: Ventura County Secondary Schools 2009-2011, Main Report

Figure 6. Smoking Patterns among Secondary Students in Ventura County (2009-2011)

According to the Ventura County American Cancer Society (2012), teens and young adults face a new smoking temptation through an increasing number of hookah establishments, which provide an exotic, social atmosphere in which to smoke flavored tobacco (shisha) heated in a water pipe to create a "buzz" for users. Mayo Clinic, American Cancer Society, Center for Disease Control, and the World Health Organization warn that while many hookah smokers may consider this practice less harmful than smoking cigarettes, water pipe smoking delivers the addictive drug nicotine and is at least as toxic as cigarette smoke. When a hookah smoker is exposed to hookah smoke (the addictive stimulant nicotine) for 45-60 minutes, it is the equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes (American Lung Association, 2007).

Drug Overdose and Substance Abuse

The fourth highest cause of premature death in Ventura County women is drug overdose. In 2011, a higher percentage of accidental deaths among women were caused by drug overdose

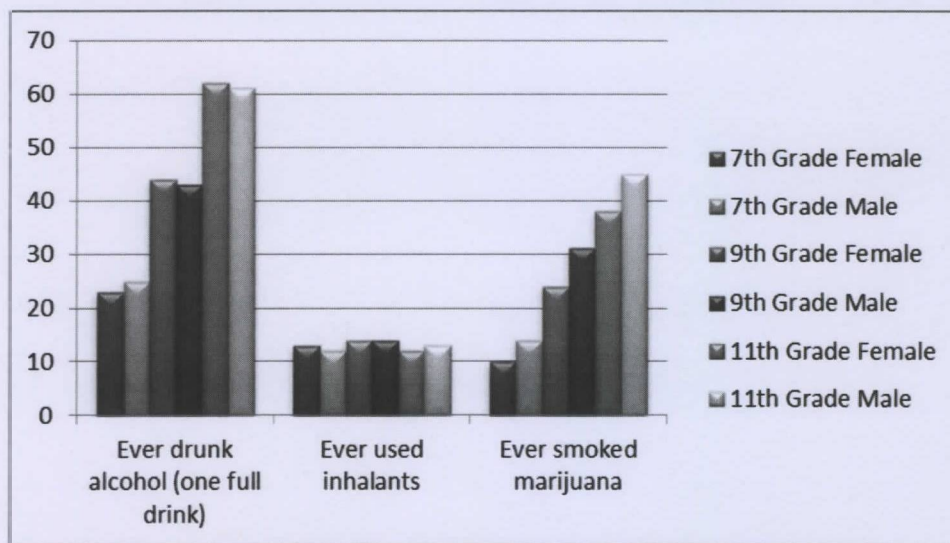
than among men (42% and 37% respectively) (Ventura County Coroner's Office records, May 2012).

*"The underlying factors contributing to substance abuse include self-medicating a mental disorder, environmental and social factors (e.g., unstable households, decreased family support, community and peer influences); as well as greater accessibility and availability of illicit drugs and prescription drugs." (VCBH LCSW). "Mishandling of medications is problematic among senior women" (CEO of a senior-serving nonprofit agency).*

An alarming number of women are reportedly taking drugs while pregnant. Through the VCPH Perinatal Addiction Prevention Project, more than 300 Ventura County prenatal care providers screen with an evidence-based tool called *4-Ps Plus* to identify pregnant patients at risk for substance abuse. In fiscal year 2011-2012, almost 3,000 women were screened. Of those 3,000 women, nearly 22% admitted using alcohol, tobacco or another harmful substance during the month before they became pregnant and this gave them a positive screen. Of the 22% who used a harmful substance in the month before they knew they were pregnant, 54% continued to use a harmful substance – sometimes throughout their entire pregnancy. That means 11.8% of all women screened used a harmful substance after they knew they were pregnant. Just over 10,000 babies were born in Ventura County in 2011. With 11.8% of those babies exposed to a harmful substance in utero, that means that more than 1,100 babies were substance exposed prenatally in that one year. Keep in mind that this rate is based on women served by VCPH and who are willing to admit their substance use. Private practice physicians are reticent to screen patients for substance abuse, even though perinatal substance abuse spans all economic levels (VCPH and VCBH interviews). Substance-exposed children face multiple potential problems related to learning disabilities, self-control issues, and health issues related to sight, hearing, and self-regulation. Of the pregnant and parenting mothers who are identified as substance abusers and referred to New Start for Moms, 68% report methamphetamine use, 10% alcohol, 9% marijuana, 6% heroin 2% cocaine/crack, 2% other opiates or synthetics, and 1% other substance (2010). There is no safe amount of smoking or substance use/abuse during pregnancy (VCBH).

California Healthy Kids Survey, 2009-2011 reveals that the percentage of students that try alcohol and marijuana increases with every grade level in Ventura County.



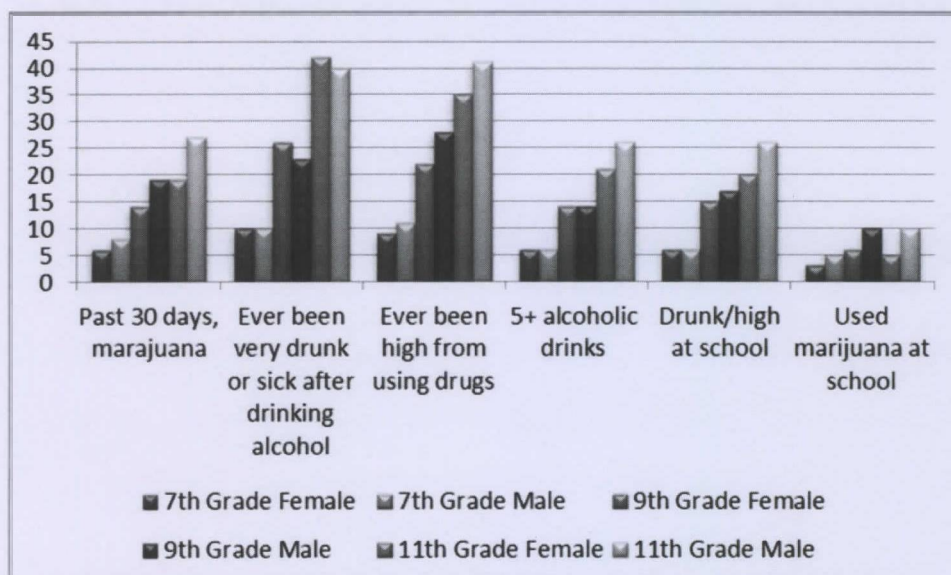


Source: California Healthy Kids Survey, 2009-2011, Ventura County – Main Report

**Figure 7. Percentage of Ventura County Student Alcohol and Drug Experiences**

#### THESE CHARTS ARE KIND OF HARD TO UNDERSTAND

The percentage of Ventura County students who report indicators of more involved substance abuse also consistently increases with age. By the time girls reach 11<sup>th</sup> grade, 19% smoked marijuana within 30 days of taking the survey, 20% had been drunk or high at school, 35% had been high from using drugs at least one time, and 42% of 11<sup>th</sup> grade girls have been drunk or sick after drinking alcohol.



Source: California Healthy Kids Survey, 2009-2011, Ventura County – Main Report

**Figure 8. More Involved Drug and Alcohol Experience for VC Students**

According to teen girl focus group participants, substance use is common among Ventura County teens, including being under the influence at school. Public schools, private schools, faith-based schools – drugs are there. Drugs are prevalent in middle and high schools and teachers are



perceived as looking the other way. *"I watched a kid tripping out on LSD in my health class."* *"People can get their hands on drugs so easily in Moorpark. It is too accessible. Why not do it, because everyone is doing it?"* *"Instagram is a place for kids to post drug pictures."* *"Even people who are great athletes are doing drugs."* *"The mentality for people who don't join is that you don't know what you are missing and you are just buying a bunch of lies that drugs will hurt you."* These perceptions are particularly prevalent in the middle and upper middle class areas where kids can more easily afford to buy drugs. In fact, Conejo Valley Unified School District is partnering with VCBH to address the issue of prevalent drug use in more affluent areas where communities have previously been reluctant to admit that drugs are an issue. According to the Executive Director of a nonprofit organization serving at-risk teens in Oxnard, teen girls in low-income areas do not have money to buy drugs, but they gain access to drugs through gang association. Boys recruit girls to hang around with gangs, offer drugs and take advantage of them sexually. Girls drawn to gang life often experience substance abuse and domestic violence at home through family as well as friends that family members allow into the home. Prescription drugs, which can be bought, stolen or given for favors is an increasing problem within low-income areas.

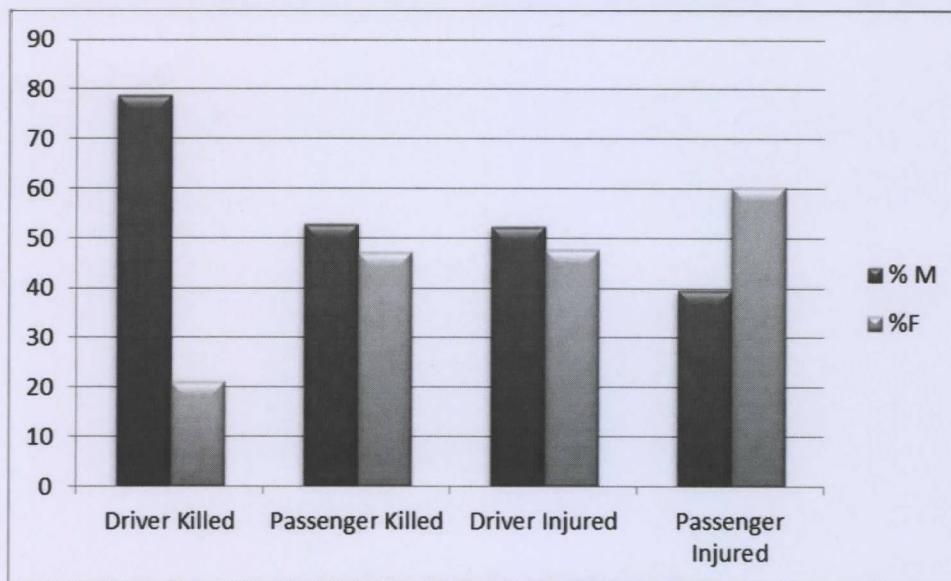
**Teens caution parents:** *"Some families tolerate drugs and alcohol and even expect it as part of being a teenager."* *"A lot of parents don't pay attention to their kids, because they only think about working. They don't notice that they are changing or notice who their kids are hanging out with. They don't notice that their kids are slipping into drugs."* *"Moms, especially middle and upper middle class women tend to justify alcohol use and are poor role models. Moms teach your daughters by example."*

**Employers caution teens:** Employers, such as the CHP, are seeing a rise in job applicant disqualifications due to drug use, including non-uniform positions. Girls who are 15 or 16 need to think about their choices related to substance use and other negative choices (such as bad credit) that will limit their future.

#### Motor Vehicle Crashes

Motor vehicle crashes are the fifth highest cause of premature death among Ventura County women and girls. The Ventura County Coroner's office data indicates that men are at an even greater risk than women for motor vehicle death, because it is the second highest cause of premature death for men (*Ventura County Public Health Community Health Status Report 2011*). According to the CHP, Americans used to believe women are not aggressive drivers, which is why insurance is less for teen girls than boys. However, this assumption is not true anymore, which is why the CHP developed *Start Smart* classes to help train parents and teens about defensive driving.

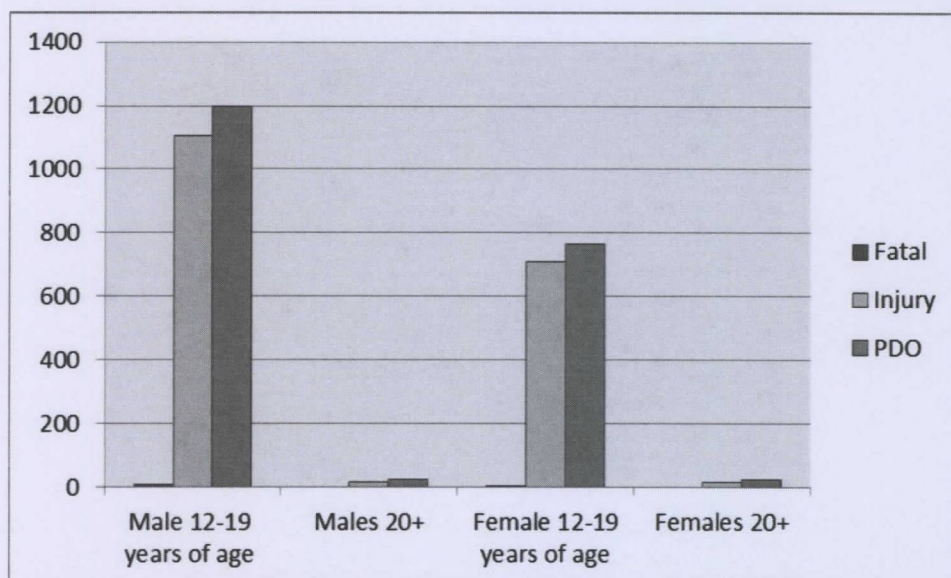
In 2012, 34% of accidental deaths for men were caused by traffic accidents and 23% of accidental deaths for women were caused by traffic accidents (Ventura County Medical Examiner's Office records). Although male Californians are more likely to die in traffic accidents than female drivers, traffic accidents still pose a serious threat to women's safety (California Office of Traffic Safety, 2009). While only 20% of driver fatalities are female, 48% of passenger fatalities are female. In addition, 48% of drivers injured in traffic accidents are women and 60% of passengers injured are women.



Source: California Office of Traffic Safety, 2009

**Figure 9. Percentage of California Traffic Accident Victims by Level of Injury and Sex**

According to the California Highway Patrol, younger drivers are tremendously more at-risk for traffic collisions where driver inattention is a factor.



Source: California Highway Patrol – Moorpark, retrieved August 2012

**Figure 10. Drivers where Inattention is a Factor by Sex, Age, and Severity of Collision**

The California CHP tracks data about collisions where inattention was a factor and a teen was driving. Of those incidents, the top causes of distracted driving in 2010 were the radio/CD, cell phone, other electronics, and eating. Unfortunately, CHP records related to the cause of distracted driving were incomplete and 65% of the reports did not site the cause of the distraction. In 2010, California conducted its first observational survey of cell phone use by drivers and reported that drivers are talking or texting at a combined rate of a minimum of 9% at



any given time (California Traffic Safety Score Card 2010). **Teen girl focus group participants emphatically agree that it is the moms who text and talk while driving.**

Health and Safety Focus Group Input: The CHP representative who was interviewed for this report observed seeing higher levels of drugged driving in Ventura County than driving under the influence of alcohol. In addition, a county court representative noted that in the past five years there has been a dramatic rise in young women/young moms driving under the influence of prescribed medications (e.g., vicodin, valium) and endangering their children. The problem is more prevalent among women and spans the socio-economic spectrum. People do not seem to understand until they are arrested that driving under the influence of prescription drugs is still a DUI. They seem to be in denial about the danger. When a medication says, *“Do not operate heavy machinery, it means your car, not a tractor.”* Medical providers voiced concern that it is too easy for women to receive prescriptions for anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. Medical marijuana prescriptions are sometimes questionable and becoming problematic in the county.

Driving Under the Influence: In 2010, the 21-24 age group had the highest percentage of drivers in fatal crashes with BAC levels of 0.08 or higher – 30% (California Traffic Safety Score Card 2010). DUI conviction rate for 2008 was 79% (2011 Annual Report of the California DUI Management Information System). A 2009 study reported that 16.3% of nighttime drivers were drug-positive. According to the Ventura County CHKS, 49% of 7<sup>th</sup> graders have driven with someone who had been drinking, 24% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders had been driven by a friend who had been drinking, and **32% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders had driven or been driven by a friend who had been drinking.** **BLOOD ALCOHOL CONCENTRATION LEVEL (BAC)**

#### Suicide and Depression

Only 27% of suicides in Ventura County are committed by women, with 73% committed by men. Even so, because it is the sixth leading cause of premature death among Ventura County women, the suicide rate is an indicator of mental health concerns among women.

According to one VCBH representative interviewed for this report, one of the underlying factors that contributes to suicide include mind-altering chemicals, which play a significant role in a person's decision toward self-harm. Another contributing factor to suicide is depression. In 2010, VCBH saw 7,877 adult patients and, of those, **49% (3,833) were diagnosed with a depression condition.** The race/ethnicity of those diagnosed with depression was as follows: 53% white and 33% Latino, 11% did not report a race/ethnicity, and 1.5 % Asian or Pacific Islander. VCBH notes that many women of color and minorities in general are less likely to seek mental health services due to stigma, no access resources, and mistrust of the “system.” Of those diagnosed with a depression condition, 73% were 26-64 (both men and women), 22% 18-25, and 5% were 65+. According to Senior Concerns, older women struggle a lot with alcohol, depression, and suicide due to lack of stimulation and discomfort with admitting depression. **Of those diagnosed with a depression condition, 59% (2,251) were women** (*Ventura County Behavioral Health Quality Improvement Manager, June 2012*). **59% OF WHICH WOMEN?**

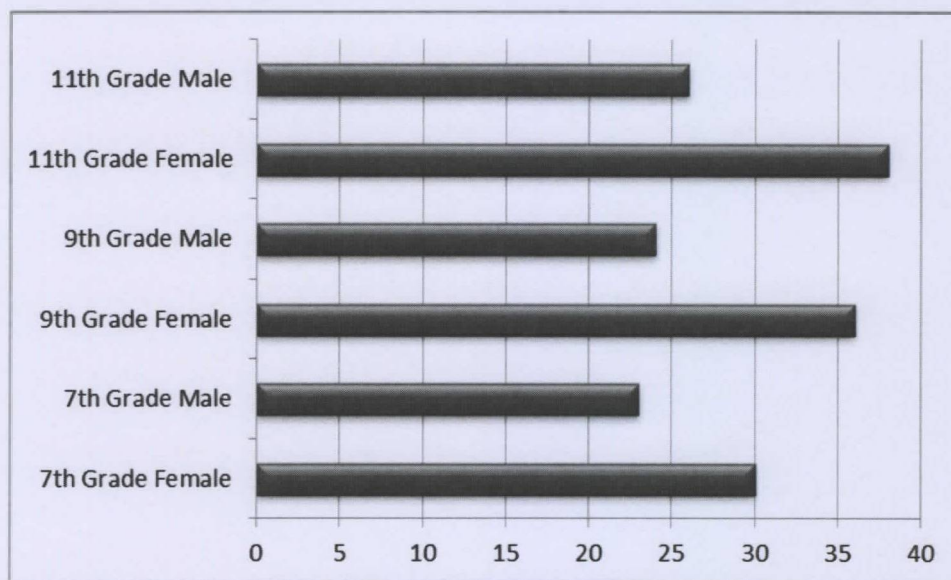


Acute Care Patients: Of the two acute psychiatric facilities in Ventura County, approximately 3,600 patients may be hospitalized in Ventura County in a year. Inpatient care is only when other outpatient clinical interventions fail, or if/when an individual is psychiatrically impaired to a degree that s/he presents as an imminent risk: a danger to self, danger to others or gravely disabled. The top diagnoses/reasons for placement in acute care for women include: depression, bipolar disorder, co-occurring disorders (bipolar and substance abuse) and psychotic disorders, i.e., schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorders. Women battling co-occurring disorders often experience a downward spiral effect: increased non-adherence to medication leads to treatment failures, which lead to extended psychological effects on the person, family, friends and co-workers. The spiral effect leads to overall poorer functioning, increased risk of relapse, magnified medical issues, and increased episodes of psychosis. The downward shift leads to: marginal neighborhoods/drug communities, decline of social relationships, and easy access to other social groups whose activities center around drug use.

Depression Among Women Veterans: There is a growing population of women veterans in Ventura County, especially younger veterans recently leaving military life. According to the Women Veterans Response to the 2011 Survey, California Research Bureau, 2012, women involved in the most recent conflicts (Operation New Dawn and Global War On Terror) emphasize the need for mental health care (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Military Sexual Trauma care needs). The most frequent current mental health condition for female veterans is depression, following by PTSD and anxiety.

Depression Among Pregnant and Parenting Mothers: Depression among pregnant and parenting women is one of the top two concerns among VCBH visiting nurses – second only to substance abuse. By implementing two evidence-based tools to screen every pregnant and post-partum women served by VCPH, home nurses report that **51% screen positive for possible maternal depression**. Those screening positive are referred to VCBH. Of the 22% who admit to substance use (see discussion above), 40.3% show signs of depression as well. Of those women who admit to substance use, 48% of them also screen to be at risk for domestic violence. Some new mothers can suffer from such severe post-partum depression that they may need inpatient psychiatric hospitalization services.

Depression Among Teens: When asked if the respondent “ever felt so sad and hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more that the respondent stopped doing some usual activities,” teen girls consistently responded affirmatively at higher rates than boys and at an increasing rate the older the respondent was (California Healthy Kids Survey, 2011).



Source: California Healthy Kids Survey, 2012

**Figure 11. Depression Indicators in Ventura County Students (2009-2011)**

### Diabetes

Diabetes is the eighth leading cause of premature death among Ventura County women. In fact, 6.8% of adults 20+ were diagnosed with diabetes and 16.3% of Ventura County adults age 60+ were diagnosed with diabetes; of those diagnosed, 89.2% were diagnosed with Type II diabetes (*CA Health Interview Survey*, UCLA, 2009; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: National Diabetes Surveillance System, 2008). African-American women nationwide have a higher rate of diabetes (4.9%) and kidney disease (3.3%). Hispanic women nationwide have higher rate of diabetes (5.4%) and associated unintentional injuries (4.8%). In 2006, 35.7% of Ventura County diabetes cases were among Latinos (*Green Access*, 2011). The diabetes rate among VC Latinos doubled in four years from 2005 to 2009 (*CA Health Interview Survey*, UCLA, 2009).

### CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN IN VENTURA COUNTY

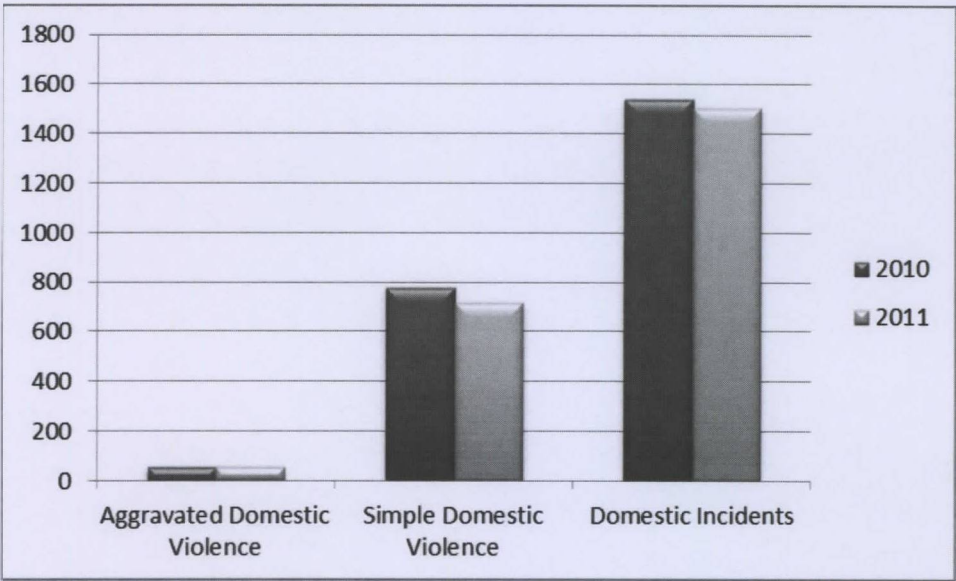
While physical and mental health concerns profoundly impact girls, teens and women, the power of women to stay safe in their homes and communities is also a critical measure of the status of women.

### Domestic Violence

Ventura County has the second highest per capita rate of domestic violence calls in California. There were 8.87 domestic violence related calls to police per 1,000 Ventura County residents, compared to a state average of 4.46. The rate of domestic violence is reportedly particularly high among the Mixteco population where 74% reported being victims of verbal, psychological or physical abuse in both Mexico and the US (Ventura County study, 2012). Participants in the Mixteca teen focus group explained: "*Women feel trapped in domestic violence, especially if they have kids. They know that it is abusive for kids to witness abuse, but they feel trapped. They*



feel that a man is a good provider if he has a job and can meet their kids' needs for shelter and food.” Domestic violence shelters only allow women to stay for 30 days. The gap in service is in transitional housing to help women live independently (Executive Director of a nonprofit agency serving at-risk women). Of pregnant women who admit to substance use during pregnancy, 48% of them also screen to be at risk for domestic violence (VCPH Perinatal Addiction Prevention Project, 2011).



Source: Ventura County Crime Report 2010 and 2011

Figure 12. Number of Reported Domestic Violence Incidents in Ventura County

Table 24. Number of Victims of Domestic Violence Served by Race/Ethnicity and Age

Age of Client	Total	White	Hispanic	African American	Asian American	Pacific Islander	Native American	Other	Unknown
< 2	74	17	51	2	3	0	1	0	0
2-12	452	110	306	28	2	0	2	4	0
13-17	128	41	75	6	1	0	2	3	0
18-25	71	25	40	3	1	0	0	2	0
26-40	275	91	150	22	5	0	0	7	0
41-60	163	79	52	24	2	0	1	5	0
61+	4	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0
Unknown	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1,167	364	676	85	15	0	6	21	0

Source: Interface Children & Family Services, Domestic Violence Shelter and Response team Programs, Ventura County, 2011-2012

Interface Children and Family Services, among other non-profit agencies in Ventura County, provides services to families victimized by Domestic Violence. Of those served in fiscal year 2011-2012, 96% of the clients were women and, of those, 58% were Hispanic, 31% were white, 7% were African American, 1% were Asian, and 3% other. Nationally, an estimated 25% of women have experienced domestic violence (US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2011). Of those, an estimated 25% of domestic crimes are reported to the police. Of those who are victims of domestic violence, 85% to 95% are women. Women ages 20-24 are at the greatest risk. It is estimated that 50% of all homeless women and children are fleeing domestic violence (*County of Ventura District Attorney Victim Service, 2011*).

Health and Safety Focus Group participants emphasized a strong link between domestic violence and substance abuse:

*"Substance abuse and domestic violence are strongly related. Many women experienced abusive childhoods and then choose abusive men who also often have substance abuse issues. Women with chaotic childhoods tend to be attracted to chaotic men who don't treat them well. Children of women in this cycle expose their children to disharmony and violence at a very young age, so the children become disregulated very early. A child doesn't have to be physically harmed to be damaged by domestic violence. If discovered, the kids may then be in and out of foster care, awaiting reunification."* (VCBH New Start for Moms)

*"It is not uncommon for me to see second and third generation people who were abused and go on to abuse their children due to domestic violence and substance abuse. Anyone convicted of domestic violence does 52 weeks of domestic violence classes and if identified as having substance abuse problems will also be referred to the VCBH Drug and Alcohol program. Young men will say, 'I watched my father beat my mother and I promised myself that I would never do that. And here I am [in domestic violence court as the perpetrator]. Before we can address domestic violence, we must address the substance abuse.'" (Ventura County court representative)*

Teen Girls: According to the 2011 California Healthy Kids Survey, 6% of girls reported that they had been hurt on purpose by a boyfriend. The teen girls focus group participants reported being aware of intimate relationship violence either in their own homes or with friends. *"Some teen girls don't get the love they need from their parents, so they don't want to give up a boyfriend. They are afraid to lose him."* *"Girls are idealistic about boys and think that he will grow out of it. Once a girl is rejected by too many guys, she gets desperate. Some girls don't realize that they don't even need a boyfriend."* *"Depression is part of putting up with dating violence, too."* *"Some girls don't tell, because they are ashamed."*

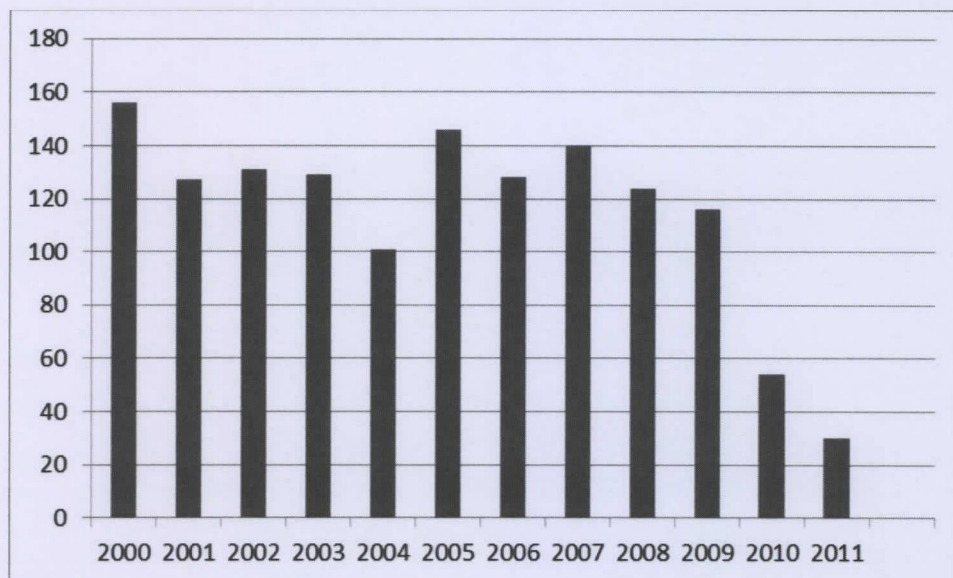
### Rape and Sexual Assault

Reported rape and sexual assault rates appear to be decreasing in Ventura County. Demographic data about the race/ethnicity and age of Ventura County victims is limited. Nationally, 38% of date rape victims are young women from 14-17 years old. **A troubling 68% of young women raped knew their rapist as a boyfriend, friend, or casual acquaintance.** Six out of ten rapes of young women occur in their own home or a friend or relative's home. Moreover, 20% of



female high school students report being physically or sexually abused by a dating partner (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012; National Institute of Justice, 2003).

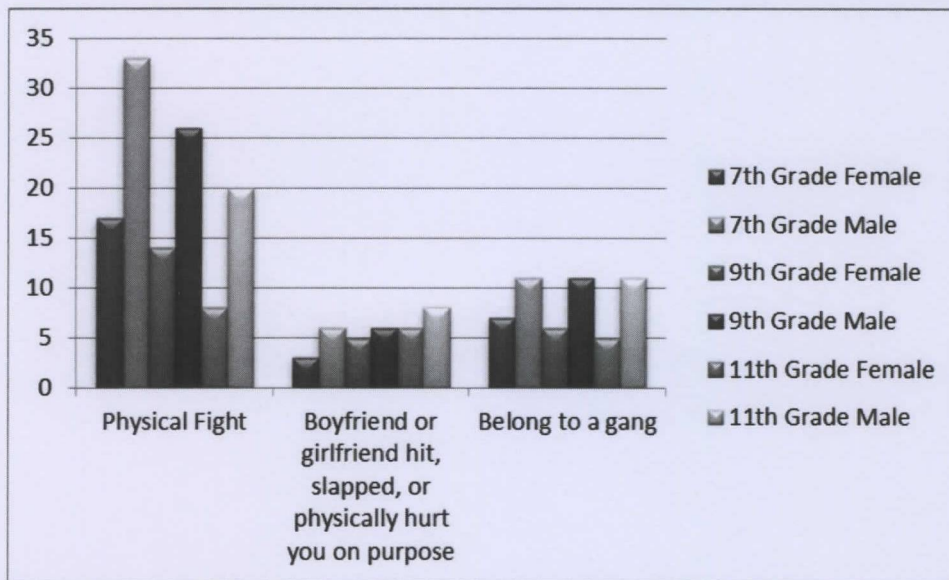
**Military Sexual Trauma and Sexual Harassment:** According to the *2012 Women Veterans Response to the 2011 Survey*, California Research Bureau, 61.3% of women veterans report experiencing sexual harassment while in the service. Sexual harassment was associated with higher levels of PTSD, anxiety, sleep disorders and substance abuse. In addition, **37% of respondents reported experiencing military sexual trauma**, which was closely associated with anxiety, sleep disorders, depression and PTSD. The Veterans Administration Oxnard Community-Based Outpatient Clinic reports serving a growing number of women veterans who represent between 5.4% and 6.4% of the veteran population in each Ventura County city. California houses 9% of the total US women veterans – more than any other state (Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Public Affairs Fact Sheet: Women Veterans Population, November 2011).



Sources: Ventura County Crime Report 2000 – 2011

**Figure 13. Reported Rapes in Ventura County**

**Gang Affiliation:** Compared to boys, teen girls are less likely to join a gang in Ventura County. However, some girls are affiliated with gangs, which means they are then victimized by gang members. This reality was spotlighted on September 2, 2012 when Karen Farfan released her haunting mini-documentary entitled “Escaping Cycles” about teen girl victims of gang affiliation in Oxnard. On the film, a former gang member describes his lifestyle of forcing teenage girls into prostitution for gang members. Girls formerly affiliated with gangs, because of the groundbreaking work of HopeGirlz, describe how growing up in violent homes drew them to gang life and how they are breaking the dark cycle of gang entrapment.



Source: California Healthy Kids Survey, 2011

Figure 14. Involvement in Physically Dangerous Activity by Sex

#### Other Crimes Against Women in Ventura County

**Identify Theft:** Women are more likely (53%) to be victims of identity theft, especially white women. The most common identity theft victims tend to be middle-aged (35-64 year old, married females; divorcees; or those who make more than \$75,000 a year (Nationwide Insurance, 2009).

**Elder Abuse:** Ventura County is home to 130,397 elderly people over 60 years of age (US Census, Elder Abuse Daily, 2011). An estimated 11% or 14,403 cases of elder abuse occur annually in Ventura County. Nationally, 67.3% of elder abuse victims are women with a median age of 77.9 years of age. In addition, 66.4% of elder abuse victims were white, 18.7% black, and 10.4% Hispanic. In addition, 58.5% of reported elder abuse cases are for neglect, 15.7% for physical abuse, 12.3% for financial exploitation, 7.3% for emotional abuse, and 5.3% are for another reason. Nationwide, 68% of Adult Protective Service cases that involved elder abuse were family perpetrated, almost always perpetrated by adult children or spouses. Also, 91% of nursing homes lack adequate staff to properly care for patients with 36% in violation of elder abuse laws (National Center on Elder Abuse, Bureau of Justice, 2010). A key informant who serves the elderly warns that because so many Ventura County citizens will be in their late 70s and 80s soon, the county needs a system to help seniors help themselves. Senior women are more likely to be widowed and live alone, but do not have the knowledge or physical ability to maintain a home (e.g., make repairs, keep up the yard), are vulnerable to repairperson fraud, and are particularly impacted emotionally by being isolated socially.

#### Expert Comment

**INSERT EXPERT COMMENT**

#### Conclusion



Ventura County women experience wide-ranging health and safety problems. The topics raised in this chapter emerged in large part based on the level of concern expressed by focus group participants and key informants as measured by the intensity and length of discussion. Clearly, women in Ventura County are deeply troubled about obesity, particularly because obesity contributes to the top medical causes of premature death – including heart disease, most cancers, and diabetes. Due to the ongoing economic downturn in California, being uninsured or underinsured is a growing concern, especially as it impacts women's choices to forego preventive health measures (e.g., cancer screening) and early intervention mental health care. After hearing from the hearts and minds of numerous women and teens, it is evident that the impact of depression and substance abuse is profound and far-reaching in Ventura County. For example, depression often leads to misuse of prescription drugs, which leads to the increasing trend of drugged driving, which leads to children being at risk and disregulated for varying conditions. And the cycle repeats. Although the statistics are sobering about women's health, mental state, and personal safety; report participants generated a wealth of practical and hopeful recommendations to improve the length and quality of the lives of teens and women.

## **Recommendations**

### Local Government and Local Educational Agencies

- ✓ To reduce obesity through increased exercise, fund projects to improve walking environments, especially in low-income neighborhoods
- ✓ Provide funding for more schools to provide PE classes
- ✓ Assist small, local business owners located within low-income areas to properly stock fruits and vegetables by providing refrigeration and scales
- ✓ To maintain and increase preventive care (e.g., breast cancer screening), provide coverage at no cost to low-income patients, offer more walk-in clinics, and increase funding for free clinics
- ✓ To enhance emotional well-being, increase accessibility and affordability of mental health preventive services without co-pays and a diagnosis
- ✓ To reduce lung and other cancers (as well as other smoke-related conditions), create policy changes to ensure smoke-free housing and work environments
- ✓ To address substance abuse and related mental health issues (that could lead to harm to self or others), provide legal oversight to substance abuse offenders through the establishment of drug/mental health courts, and also develop a media blitz to inform about accessible resources, reduce stigma about accessing mental health services
- ✓ To address distracted driving rates, CHP should require officers to identify the cause of distracted driving collisions as often as possible
- ✓ To address teen depression, substance abuse, intimate relationship violence and other at-risk behaviors; provide education starting in elementary school, offer prevention and early intervention through "Group" or other peer support group models at schools countywide
- ✓ To address domestic violence, develop more transitional housing for women with children who are escaping violence at home

### Community-Based Organizations

- ✓ Empower residents to insist on safe parks and safe passage to school, so that residents can maintain a healthy lifestyle
- ✓ Fundraise for lung cancer research to raise awareness of the rise of lung cancer among non-smokers and the need for safer screening procedures
- ✓ Develop peer programs such as the Promotoras or the VCPH Peer-to-Peer programs countywide to help mothers motivate one another to provide healthier meals, increase exercise, practice responsible substance abuse, safe driving, non-violent homes, safe neighborhoods and to serve as role models for their children
- ✓ To reduce the temptation of risky behaviors (e.g., smoking, substance abuse), provide more activities for teens in Moorpark and Simi Valley
- ✓ To combat elder abuse and neglect and to increase health and safety among seniors, develop programs, such as walking clubs for seniors; community models such as the Stephen Ministry within churches; and community-based programs like The Village, where neighbors join a membership program to trade services and take care of each other's needs (e.g., make phone calls, grocery shop, change light bulbs)

### Business

- ✓ To address obesity and related diseases, physicians should prescribe 30-60 minutes of daily exercise
- ✓ To reduce perinatal substance abuse and subsequent damage to children and potential child abuse after birth, all perinatal care providers should use the *4 Ps Plus* screening tool for substance abuse
- ✓ Increase mental health services for pregnant and parenting women to reduce substance abuse and alleviate depression in order to prevent prenatal damage to the child and child abuse after birth
- ✓ To address misuse of prescription drugs, physicians should check patient history of prescription drug use before prescribing additional drugs and emphasize the hazards of driving while under the influence of some prescription drugs

### Individuals

- ✓ To improve health and well-being, women and girls should follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations to eat a healthy diet, maintain a healthy weight, exercise regularly, don't smoke, and limit alcohol use
- ✓ To address substance abuse and depression, women need to recognize that there IS a problem, develop support systems within and outside of the family, reach out for support and help, and learn the signs and symptoms of depression
- ✓ Pregnant moms: remember that there is no safe amount of tobacco, alcohol, or drug use for your baby
- ✓ Teen girls: get busy serving in your community and serve as a role model for other students
- ✓ Parents: look for warning signs of boredom, substance abuse, depression, and dependence on boys in teen daughters



- ✓ Young Women: Stay in school so that you can support yourself and your children in the future if needed. Learn what abusive behavior looks like and choose a man who respects you instead

### **Future Research Recommendations**

The Ventura County Health Care Agency is currently installing a state-of-the-art, comprehensive Electronic Medical Record (EMR) system, which is scheduled to be fully operational in 2013—. With this new on-line system, all electronic health records will use a standardized method of collecting and reporting data. Research should be conducted to identify community members with risk factors for chronic disease (e.g., BMI, blood pressure cholesterol, tobacco use, glucose levels), because the system will enable VCPH to identify populations with health disparities, monitor patient progress, and aggregate data within the clinic population.

Through CDC grant funding, VCPH is currently tabulating countywide health disparity data and a policy scan to prioritize needed policy changes in Ventura County to be released in early 2013. Funding should be sought to implement recommended policy changes and track the impact on community obesity rates and chronic diseases.

**Include a list of acronyms and meanings**

## Power to Make Political Policies and Decisions

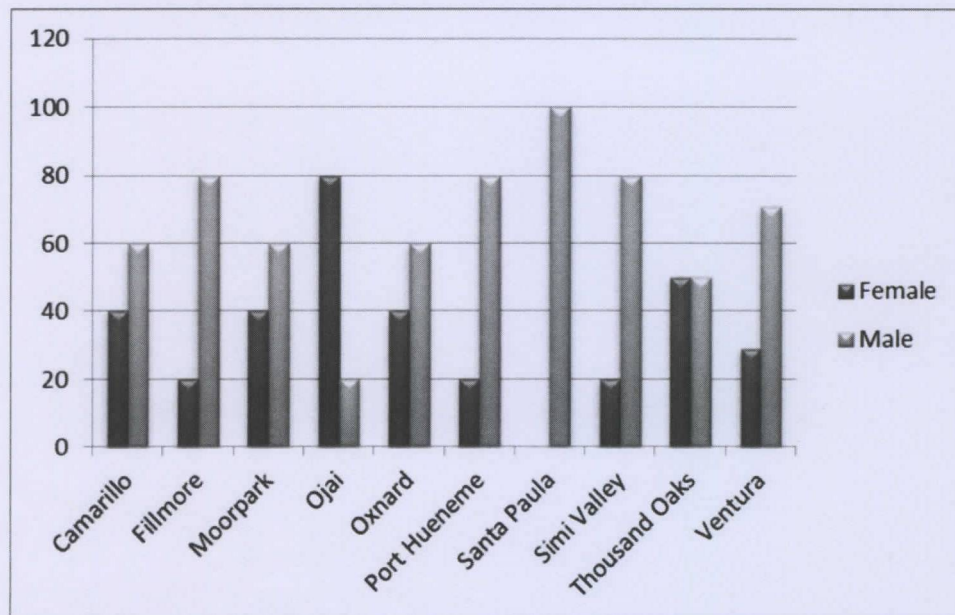
*"The only reason anyone should run for office is because she wants to do something for the community, state, nation...the people. It isn't a job; it's a career, a vocation, and a labor of love for the betterment of the community and to serve the public."* (Ventura County Political Leader).

Another critical measure of the power of women in a community is their level of involvement in making public decisions and impacting policies. An analysis of decision-making and policy-making power includes assessing the demographics of city, county, state, and national leaders elected to represent a community; identifying the factors that may serve as barriers for women who might otherwise pursue elected office; and analyzing the demographics of those registered to vote, who turn out to vote, as well as those citizens who choose not to participate in elections.

### Findings

#### WOMEN IN ELECTED OFFICE REPRESENTING VENTURA COUNTY

**Local Elected Officials in Ventura County:** One indicator of the power of women in a community is women's representation in local, regional and national governing bodies as currently measured and how closely the percentage of women in elected office resembles that of the population. Underrepresentation indicates the need for increased empowerment for women ([www.un.org/womenwatch](http://www.un.org/womenwatch)). Although women make up 53% ISN'T THIS 50.3% of the Ventura County population, they only make up 33% of the city councils (June 2012). Figure 15 indicates that Ventura County city councils vary widely in gender makeup, whereas Santa Paula currently has an all-male council, Thousand Oaks is represented by two males and two females, and Ojai has four women councilmembers with one male.

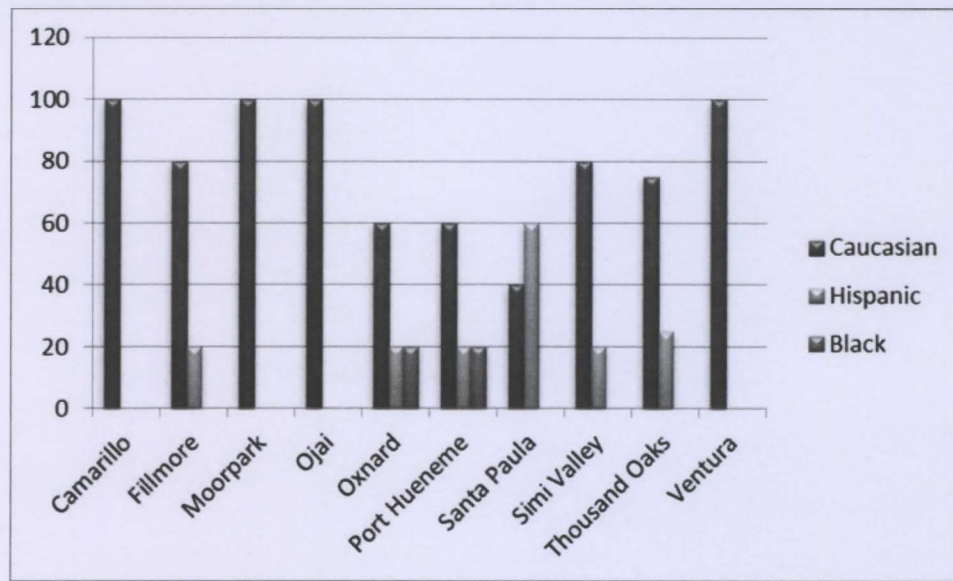


Source: Retrieved from each Ventura County City Council's Website June 11-13, 2012



**Figure 15. Percentage of Men and Women Elected to Ventura County City Councils (2012)**

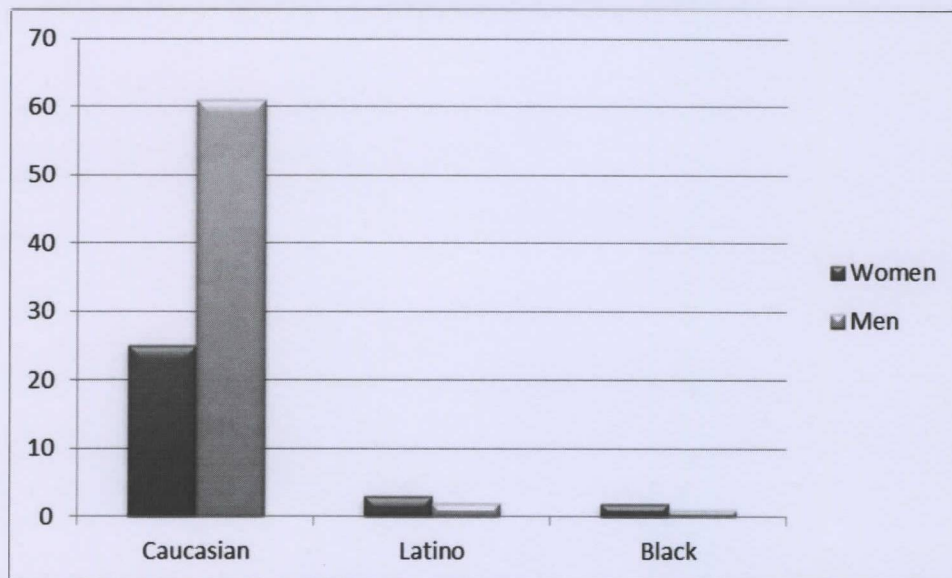
Although the representation of women on city councils shows some promising trends, the representation of people of color on Ventura County city councils is discouraging. Out of the 51 total available city council seats, only 14 (or 27%) are held by people of color of either sex – four African-Americans and ten Latinos. No current council members are Asian or Native American.



Source: Retrieved from each Ventura County City Council's Website June 11-13, 2012

**Figure 16. Percentage of All Ventura County City Council Members by Race/Ethnicity**

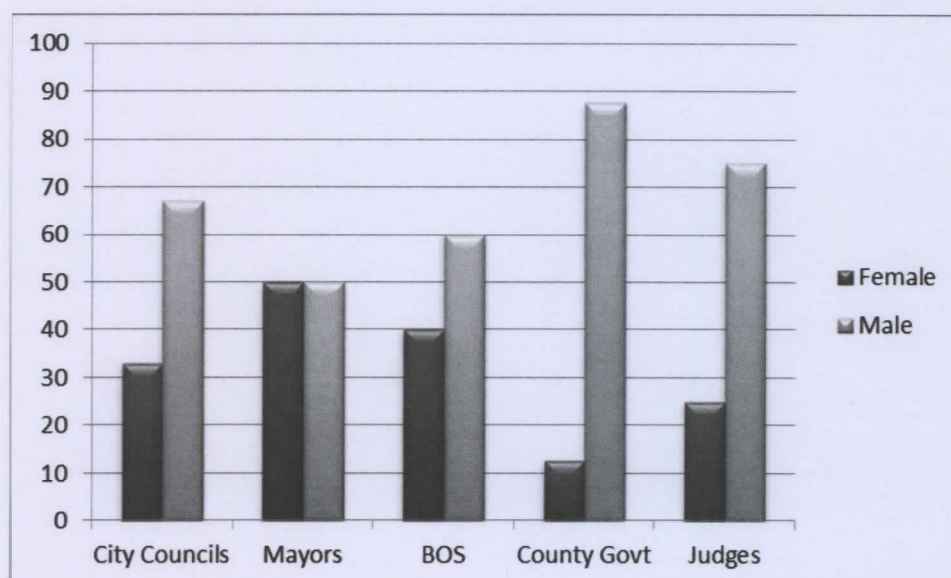
Of the council members of color, only four are women – one African-American and three Latinas. Although Latinas make up 40.9% of the county, they make up only 5% of the city council members.



Source: Retrieved from each Ventura County City Council's Website June 11-13, 2012

**Figure 17. Percentage of Ventura County City Council Members by Sex and Race/Ethnicity**

It is noteworthy that Ventura County currently boasts of an equal number of male and female mayors. However, women only hold 24% of the elected positions at the county level.



Source: Retrieved from Ventura County Board of Supervisors' website and Ventura County City Council's Website June 11-13, 2012

**Figure 18. Percentage of City and County Elected Officials in Ventura County by Sex**



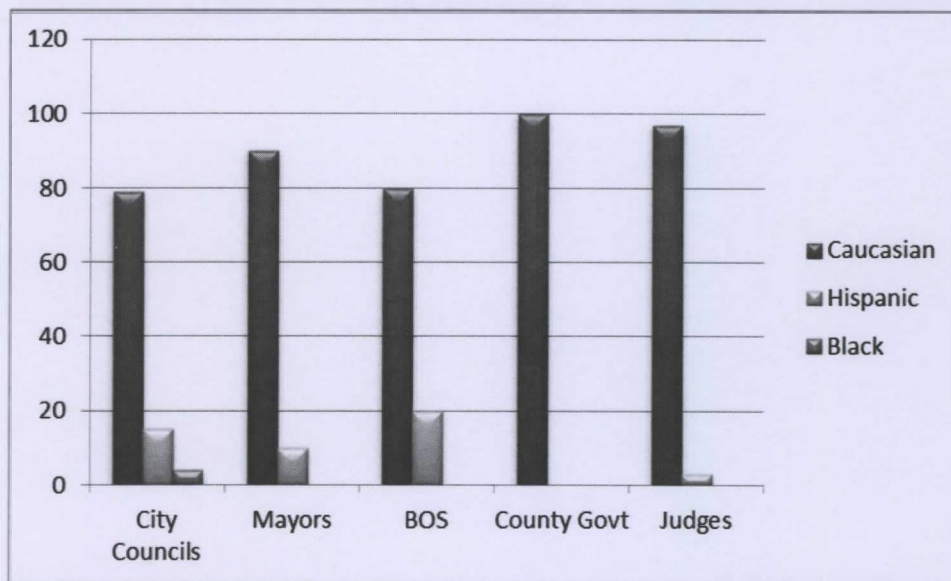
County Commissioners: The Ventura County Board of Supervisors is responsible for 372 appointments of county commissions, boards, advisory committees, advisory councils, etc. Of those appointments, 66% are men and 33% are women as of September 7, 2012. However, two of the larger commissions are staffed with only women: the Ventura County Commission for Women and the Local Planning Council that oversees child care issues. If those two groups are removed from the tabulation of the sex of appointed commissioners, then out of 348 appointments, 71% of the appointments are men and 29% of the appointments are women. Many of the groups include additional members who are not appointed by the Board of Supervisors.

A former elected official and current community activist challenges women to consider public office: *"Women and people of color ask me why run for office when you can do so much in the community without the political restraints? Sure, it is direct and immediate to serve a hundred people one-on-one, like handing out food or backpacks. But consider the difference between the direct impact on a few individuals today versus the long term and potentially permanent impact on thousands of people when you implement policy change."*

### **Comparison of Ventura County Elected Official Demographics and State and National Demographics:**

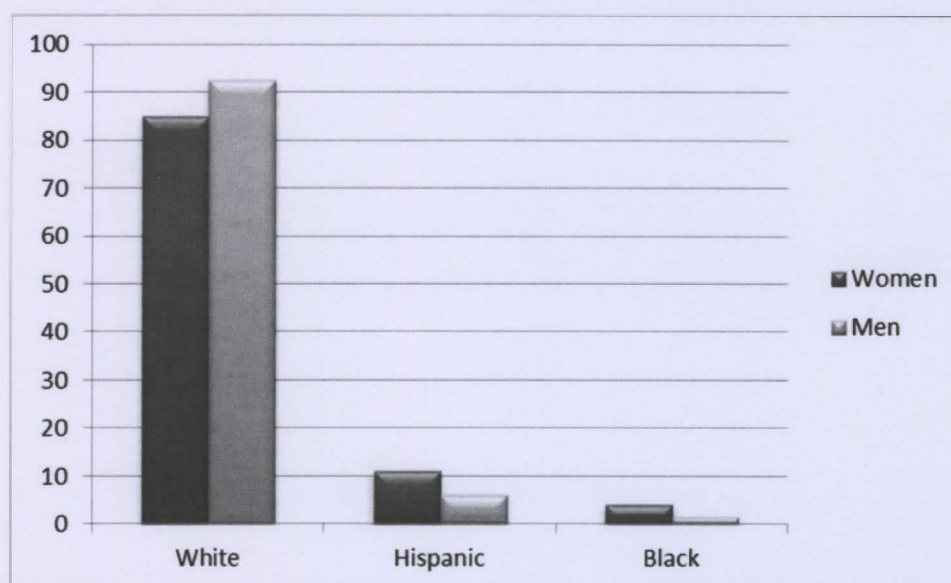
Board of Supervisors: The representation of women on the 2012 Ventura County Board of Supervisors (40%) far surpasses the 24% average representation across all California counties. (*Analysis of California Board of Supervisors*, compiled by California Women Lead, June 2012). Out of 296 Board of Supervisor seats statewide, only 72 are currently held by women (same source). Even more impressive, Ventura County Board of supervisors held the same two/five ratio of female supervisors ten years ago in 2002. Judges: In Ventura County, 26% of judges seated are women -- slightly short of the state average of 30%, the national average of 27% (Forster-Long, Inc. reported by the National Association of Women Judges website retrieved Sept. 2012) and the US Supreme Court with 33% women.

The elected official data indicates some good news in Ventura County and some areas needing more attention to close the gender gap. How does the county fair in terms of representation of people of color on the elected official roster? Of the 91 people that make up the total city councils and elected county government officials, seven are people of color, which is only 8%. Women of color make up 5% of the publically elected Ventura County officials. According to the Ventura County Star, most judges are white, one Ventura County judge is Latino, one is mixed race and one refused to identify race/ethnicity. According to the sixth annual report from the Judicial Council of California, Administrative Office of the Courts, there were 1,677 judges in California in 2011. Of those judges, 1,212 (72%) are white, 137 (8%) are Hispanic, 96 (6%) are African-American, and 94 (6%) are Asian. The rest are other races, listed more than one race or did not provide information (Ventura County Star, April 4, 2012). Of the nine US Supreme Court Justices, three are women and, of those, one is Latina. **A SPACE OS NEEDED JERE**



Source: Retrieved from each Ventura County City Council's Website June 11-13, 2012.

**Figure 19. Percentage of City and County Elected Officials by Race/Ethnicity**



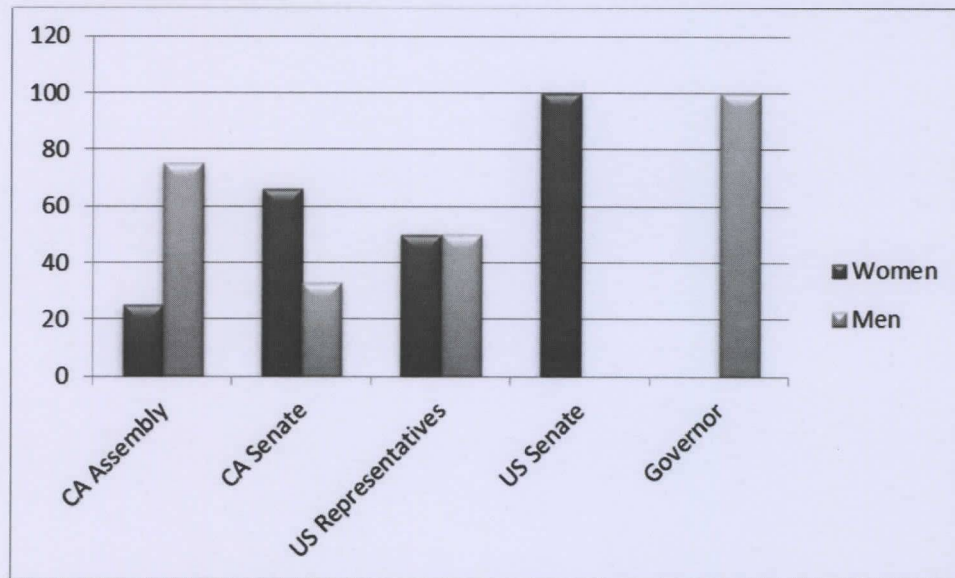
Source: Retrieved from each Ventura County City Council's Website June 11-13, 2012.

**Figure 20. Percentage of City and County Elected Officials by Sex and Race/Ethnicity**

**State Representatives of Ventura County:** More women represent Ventura County **overall** compared to state and federal levels. State Representation of Ventura County Residents: Currently, Ventura County is part of four State Assembly districts (35<sup>th</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup>, 38<sup>th</sup>, and 41<sup>st</sup>) and one of the four (25%) representatives is a woman. The county is currently part of three state senate districts (17<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 23<sup>rd</sup>) and two of the three (66%) state senators are



women. Federal Representation of Ventura County Residents: Of the two current congressional districts (23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>) representing Ventura County, one of the two (50%) US Representatives is a woman. Both US Senators (100%) representing Californians are women. The current California governor is male, which has been true historically – no woman has earned the top state executive seat yet. All of the currently seated women California state and federal representatives are Caucasian.



Source: Ventura County and California websites retrieved September 2012

**Figure 21. Percentage California State Elected Officials Representing Ventura County by Sex**

Due to recent and heavy redistricting, the political landscape in Ventura County is in transition. The county will be represented by fewer elected officials who will each represent larger percentages of Ventura County within their districts. After the November 2012 elections, Ventura County will be part of two California State Assembly Districts (37<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup>) and two California State Senate Districts (19<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>) instead of three. After the November 2012 elections, Ventura County will be represented by three US Representatives (23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and the new 26<sup>th</sup>). (Redistricting information was confirmed by the Ventura County representative on the California Redistricting Committee on September 11, 2012.)

On the state and federal stage, women, and especially women of color, are still under-represented at all levels of government. In fact, only 17% of congressional leaders are women. Of those, only 27% are women of color. Of the women of color, seven are Latina – four of whom represent California – and 13 are African-American – three of whom represent California. Only 23% of statewide elective executive offices are filled by women nationwide. And 24% of state legislators are women with 20% of those being women of color – 66 Latinas and 240 African-American women. (*Women in Elective Office 2012*)

**Table 25. Percentage and Number of Women in Elected Office by Race/Ethnicity**

	% of Women in Elected Offices Nationally	% of Elected Women who are of Color Nationally	% and # of Women Elected in California	# of Latinas Elected Nationally	# of Latinas from CA	# of African-American Women Elected Nationally	# of African-American Women from CA
<b>Congress</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>38% (21)</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Statewide Elective Executive Offices</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>29% (2)</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>State Legislators</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>34 (28.3%)</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>2</b>

Source: *Women in Elective Office 2012*, Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, 2012.

Other State and National Facts (same source):

- Women constituted 54% of voters in the 2008 elections, but only 24% of state legislators.
- Only 6 out of 50 states have a female governor.
- On average, male cabinet appointees outnumber women cabinet appointees in our states by a ratio of 2 to 1.
- Women of color represent only 4% of Congress.
- Women of color constitute 4.7% of the 7,382 state legislators.

#### **Factors Impacting Women as Potential Political Candidates**

Given the low numbers of women in elected office, it is important to investigate the factors which impact women as potential political candidates. Fewer women choose to pursue elected office. Fifty percent (50%) fewer women than men consider of running for office. Of those, 30% fewer actually run, with only a fraction seeking higher office. (Source: Lawless, Jennifer and Richard L Fox. *It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2005.) "*When women run, women win at the same rate as men in comparable elections, But they haven't been running.*" Debbie Walsh, Director of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University as quoted in the Los Angeles Times May 23, 2011.

Synthesized responses from the decision-making and policy-making focus group members and key informants offer insight into factors that impact whether or not women run for office.

Women face practical barriers that are typically less significant for men:

**Multiple Responsibilities:** Women typically do at least two jobs: a job for pay and then they also raise their children and run the home. Single mothers bear an even greater burden with the



same two jobs mentioned above but with no support from a spouse. Although running for office as a single parent can be done, it is financially and emotionally difficult.

**Time:** Because they tend to enter political office after their children are grown, women tend to be older when they enter public life compared to men and may then have shorter political careers on average. As a result, women may not be able to rise to high levels of power in their shorter careers.

**Finances:** The average person finds it hard to raise the amount of money needed to run for office—from the City Council on up. People who run for office invest their own personal funds plus they must invest a lot of time asking others for financial help. Women don't like to ask for money or to impose on others.

**Tedious Application Process:** Talented women do not want to go through the tedious, long process of being vetted as a potential candidate, which includes filling out duplicate paperwork and attending numerous meetings to screen the candidate.

#### Societal Barriers:

**Gender Bias:** The glass ceiling, good ol' boys network, sexism -- whatever you call it, it is still there. Women who run for and hold office are held to a higher standard than men. Women have to strike a balance between appearing to be in touch with everyday people and being tough, competent, and independent enough to lead. Once in office, a woman has to do the job better and work harder to be respected. Serving is frustrating, often an elected woman offers a lone voice and isn't listened to. In fact, elected women can be hard on other women attempting to be elected.

**Race/Ethnicity Bias:** Ventura County demographic data reveal that more women of color are in poverty and fewer participate in higher education compared to white men. The root causes of poverty and lack of education must be addressed within women of color before the percentage of women elected officials will increase. Potential leaders are overlooked, because of their accent or language skills. The lack of women of color in office makes pursuing office more intimidating and less recognizable as an option for young women of color.

Many of the perceptions voiced by Ventura County focus group participants about the factors affecting women running for political office were echoed by the 1,303 women in elected office surveyed by the Center for American Women and Politics. Survey results were compiled into a report: *Poised to Run: Women's Pathways to the State Legislatures* (Rutgers University, and the Eagleton Institute of Politics, retrieved July 2012). Below are some additional factors that impact whether or not a woman will run for office:

**Political Parties Strongly Influence Potential Women Candidates:** Women are more likely than men to run for office because they were recruited -- particularly from their political party -- than deciding to run on their own. About one-third of elected women surveyed say that someone tried to discourage them from running—most often an officeholder or political party official.

**Women May Enter Politics Differently than Men:** Women are more likely than men to come from health and education fields rather than business or law before pursuing public office and tend to run for office because of public policy issues within their chosen field. More so than men, women tend to build their skills and experience before running for office, because they are more likely to seek campaign training PUT A COMA HERE more likely to have campaign DOES THIS ALSO NEED A COMMA? and staff experience and have been more active in their political parties.

**Gender Stereotypes Still Play a Role:** Both male and female voters are much more judgmental about the appearance and style of a female candidate than of a male candidate. If a woman candidate is unmarried, both male and female voters perceive her as less likely to share their own family values.

**Money Counts:** Fundraising is a key concern for women candidates, especially women of color. In highly competitive races, the gap between the top-raising female and male U.S. Senate challengers in 2008 was almost \$14 million (Senator Kay Hagan raised \$8.5 million and Al Franken \$22.5 million), which is \$8 million more than the difference in 2006. Male U.S. House incumbents raised on average \$196,281 more than women in 2008. The top three women who enjoyed incumbency advantage in 2008 raised approximately \$33 million—\$16 million less than the total for the top three male incumbents. Women are not as likely as men to support candidates financially and make smaller contributions when they do give Only five of the 1,303 women candidates relied on women for more than half their contributions. THIS NEEDS A PERIOD AND SPACE

### Gender Differences

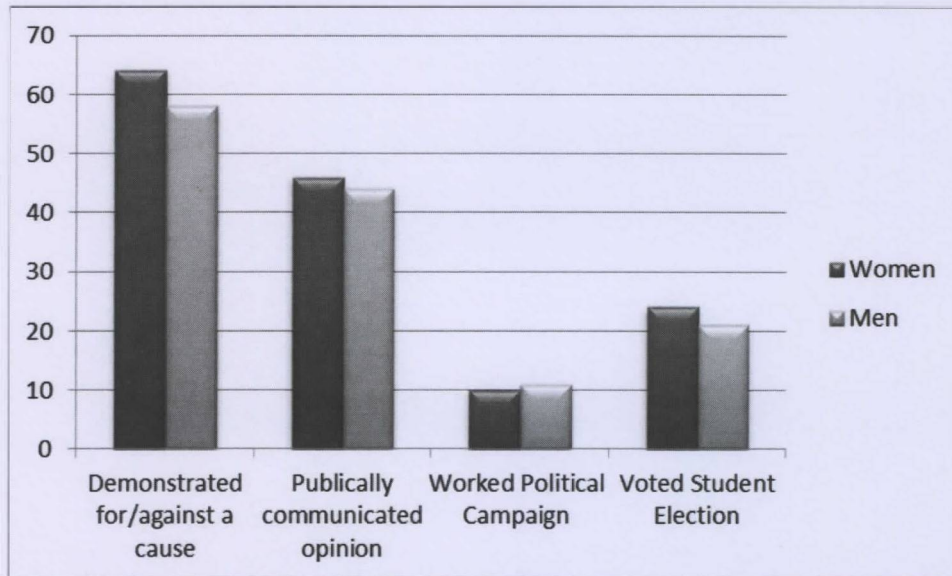
Although several focus group members and informants mentioned the reality of the glass ceiling, more passionate discussion focused on the perceived reality of gender differences related to leadership style preferences. Gender differences impact women's comfort within the current political climate, which many perceive to be an inherently male-oriented system. A common theme of focus groups and interviews was that women may simply choose not to run for office, because they do not enjoy the political arena structure, which rewards a competitive, adversarial and solo champion fighting an opponent to create change. Numerous groups and individuals repeated a similar perception that women tend to prefer working cooperatively in groups with shared leadership, responsibility and glory. Without systemic revision of the political system, three potential outcomes could occur: 1) women will continue to choose arenas other than the political arena to impact their communities, 2) the political arena will slowly change due to feminine impact and attract a growing number of women over time, or 3) only women who can tolerate the aggressive atmosphere will choose to enter and stay in politics.

A member of the men's focus group explained it this way: *"The political system is set up as a winner-take-all, competitive system, which is a man's form of interacting with the world. The political realm is not a feminine culture. Women don't like people speaking badly about them and criticizing their opinions. Men are perceived as being overconfident and ready to make a decision without needing much input from a group. We can either change what it means to be a public office holder, broaden the vision, or women will have to be on steroids."*



### Insight from Nationwide College Freshmen Women

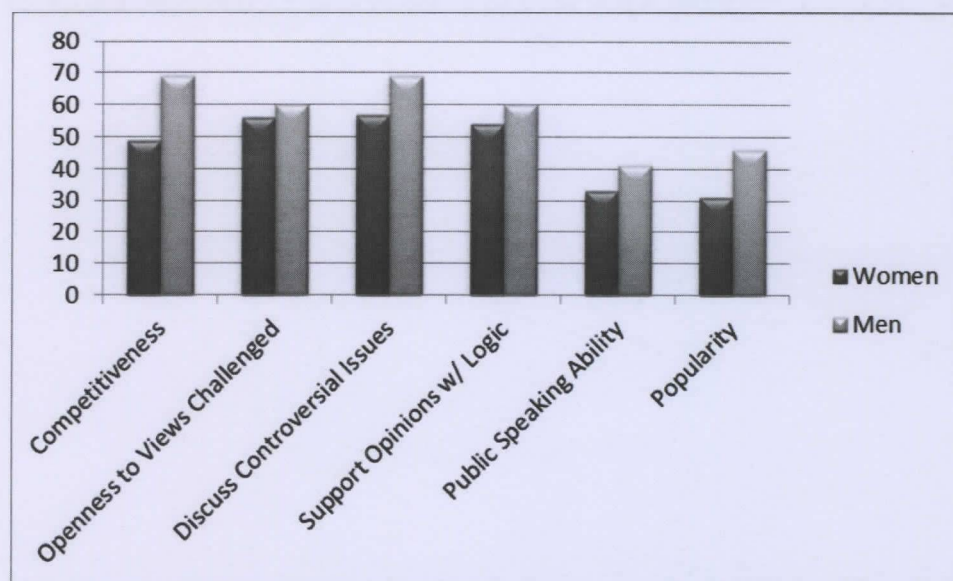
One way to look into the mind of women, particular young women, is to review the findings of *The American Freshman Survey 2012* based on the responses of full-time first year students at 270 institutions nationwide in the fall 2011. When asked about their political behavior, freshmen women self-report to be equally, if not more likely, to be politically active as young men by demonstrating for or against a cause, publically communicating an opinion, working a political campaign and voting in a student election.



Source: *The American Freshman: National Norms Fall, 2012* conducted by the Cooperative Institute Research Program at the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. No VC institutions participated.

**Figure 22. Percentage of Freshmen Men and Women who Reported Political Involvements**

Although college men and women are similarly active in political involvements, women tend to consistently rate themselves lower on communication and social skills related to political communication. As seen in Figure 22, fewer first year college women consider themselves to be competitive, be open to having their views challenged, find enjoyment in discussing controversial issues, support their opinions with logic, possess effective public speaking abilities, and/or are popular among peers. This finding reflects the perceptions of men's, women's and teen girls' focus groups who independently mentioned that women underestimate their abilities and men tend to overestimate them. The outcome is that fewer women choose publically risky ventures, such as running for an elected office, even though they are involved in the political arena.

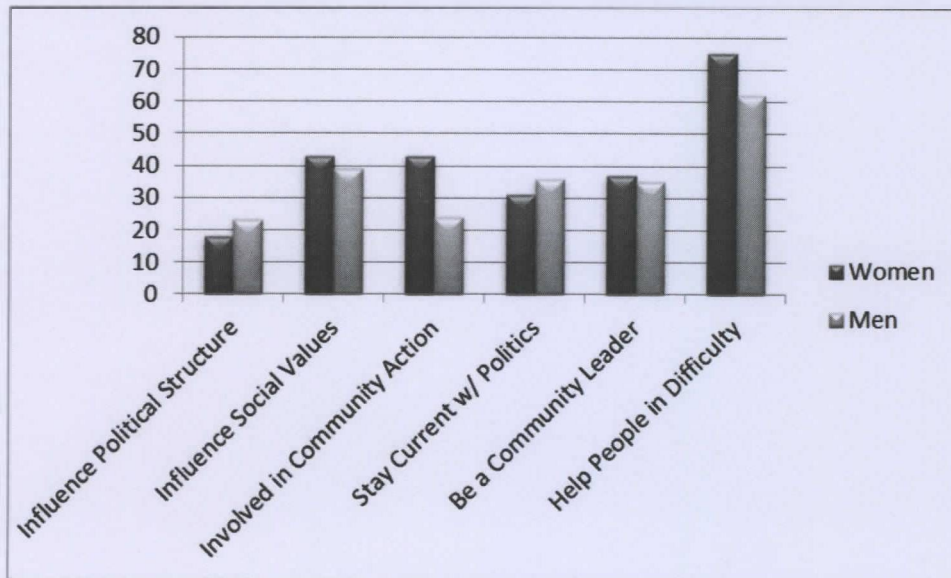


Source: *The American Freshman: National Norms Fall, 2012* conducted by the Cooperative Institute Research Program at the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA.

**Figure 23. Percentage of Freshmen Men and Women who Rate Themselves Well on Specific Communication and Social Skills**

One way to understand the mindset of young women pertaining to their preferred role in the political arena, is to examine their view of themselves now and in the future. When asked what is essential to them in their future life, both freshmen men and women reported the desire to raise a family (73%) and to be well-off financially (78% for men, 77% for women). In addition, 73% of women hope to help people in difficulty, 41% want to participate in community action and influence social values, and 34% hope to be a community leader surpassing men in their desire to achieve each of these goals. Interestingly, only 18% hope to influence political structure, which indicates that women seem to perceive helping others in difficulty as something different than influencing the political structure.





Source: *The American Freshman: National Norms Fall, 2012* conducted by the Cooperative Institute Research Program at the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA.

**Figure 24. Percentage of Freshmen Men and Women who Rates Personal Objectives as Being Essential to the Respondent**

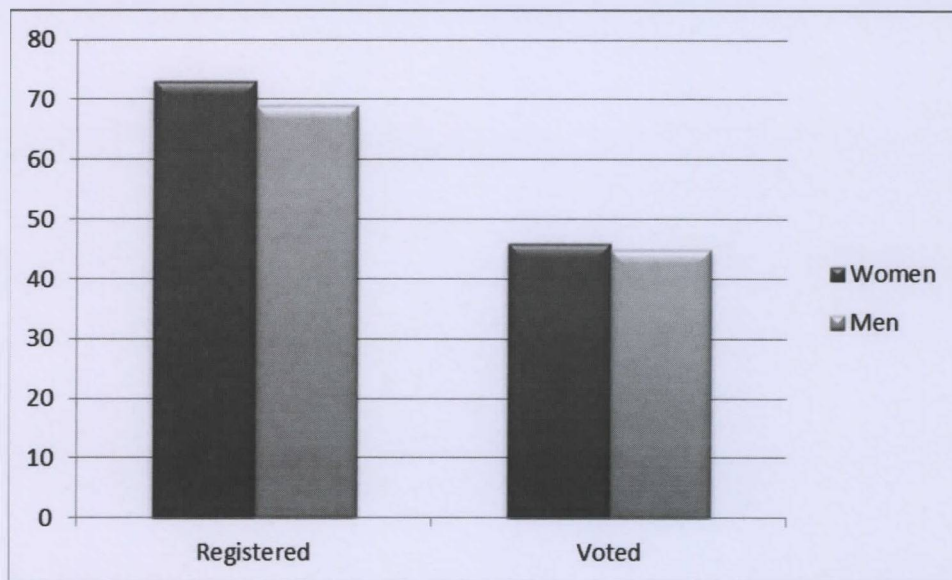
Women strive to impact their community and help people, but increasingly not through elected office. Ventura County can boast of many outstanding role models within public office, but also outside of the political arena. For example, the county has seen a recent and dramatic rise in women in leadership within law enforcement: Chief of Police in Oxnard and Port Hueneme as well as the Commander of California Highway Patrol – Moorpark Area are women.

### **PARTICIPATION IN THE VOTING PROCESS**

*"If you don't like what is being done in your community, then get involved. If you don't, then you get what you deserve. Things won't change until you get people into office that you trust. You need to pay attention to what is going on in your community. Get a vision for what you want your community, your city, your county, your state to look like. Find the candidate whose vision is most like yours and support that person."* (Ventura County Political Leader)

Another measure of the power of women to make decisions and policies is the percentage of women who exercise the right to vote and the demographics of those who do not. County specific information about voter registration and turnout is not available, but national and state census track data indicate trends about the power of various segments of women to make decisions and impact **polities?** through voting.

### **Impact of Gender on Voter Registration and Turnout**



Source: US Census 2010 National Data. No County level voter registration and voter turnout data is available by sex.

**Figure 28. Percentage of Population Registered to Vote and who Actually Voted by Sex**

Nationally, more women are registered to vote than men (72% versus 69%), yet only 43% of women actually voted in 2010. Voter registration and turnout is typically higher among white, older, and more educated people. Also people representing higher income brackets and who are homeowners are more likely to register and turnout to vote. 2012 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> year that California women have been able to exercise their right to vote. Although California ratified a women's right to vote in 1911, women voted for the first time in California in 1912.

#### **Impact of Age on Voter Registration and Turnout:**

A high school junior shared her view about voting: *"It is extremely important that all of us vote. Every single person who is eligible should vote. It is such a privilege actually. So many people in the world don't get that privilege -- to weigh out what you want for yourself, for your community, for America."* Unfortunately, the opinion expressed by the focus group member is not typical among today's youngest eligible voters, who are routinely the least likely to vote. Voter turnout is consistently lowest among 18-24 year olds at 25% and increases with age: 39% of 25-44 year olds, 56% of 45 to 64 year old, 62% of 65 to 74 year old, and 67% of those 75 years and older (US Census 2010).

Teen focus group participant's comments about voting highlight possible contributing factors to low voter turnout among young people: *"I don't know anything about politics. I am not confident in how much I can make things better and I'm not encouraged to make changes."* *"I think of voting as a parent responsibility. I don't want to think about that yet. Why do people have to argue about everything?"* *"I was excited to take Government as a senior, but they crammed so much information into one semester. I expected to learn more about how to vote, how to make all*



*those decisions. I'm 18 and when I think about voting, I think I will just put down what my parents put down. It's all so complicated. How can I possibly catch up with all that I have missed?"*

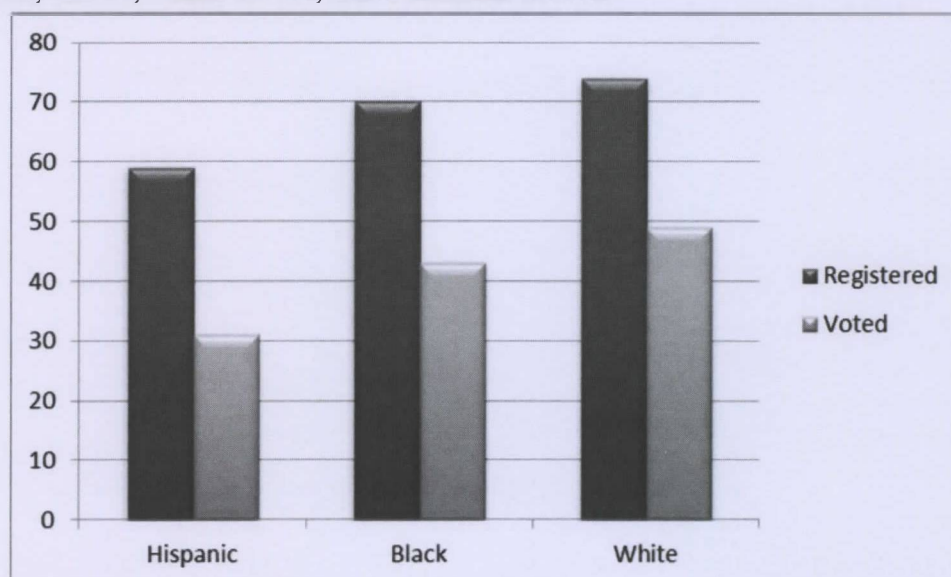
Teens expressed the need for help to understand the voting process: *"Having a say in the government sparks a lot of responsibility as a citizen of this nation. I need to be informed."* *"It would help me if someone could talk through what happens if an adult votes one way or the other -- make it practical."* *"I need to demystify the process and read over a ballot."* *"I know that I can find information about the elections on the website, TV specials, mailed materials."* *"Discussion would be the most helpful for me to learn about government."*

Many focus group participants called on schools to revise the way civics is taught:

*"Teachers should inspire youth to want to vote. Just like other life skills, schools should prepare students to vote, because when you live in a democracy, you are supposed to participate – it is your right and your privilege, so you had better exercise it. If just a small percentage vote, then that group determines the outcome of the elections. That could be disastrous for all of us."* (Political Party Leader)

### **Impact of Race/Ethnicity on Voter Registration and Turnout:**

While 16.6% of US citizens are Latino, only 7% of voters are Latino (Pew Hispanic Center, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). The top three Latino Share-of-States' eligible voters include: New Mexico, 42.5%; Texas 33.7%, and California 27.1%.



Source: US Census 2010 National Data. No County level voter registration and voter turnout data is available by sex.

**Figure 29. Percentage of Registered Voters and Voter Turnout by Race/Ethnicity**

Other focus group participants expressed: *"Schools should motivate underrepresented people to vote by emphasizing the hard fought history to obtain voting rights for women and minorities. Connect the issues people care about with community involvement, so they can see how their vote will make a difference. If a voter wants something to happen in their community, they need to pay attention to who supports that thing and vote for them. If people don't vote, they are letting others make decisions for them. Schools need to help students to get over being intimidated by the voting process."*

**Table 26. Number of Californians who Registered and Turned Out to Vote by Race/Ethnicity (2010)**

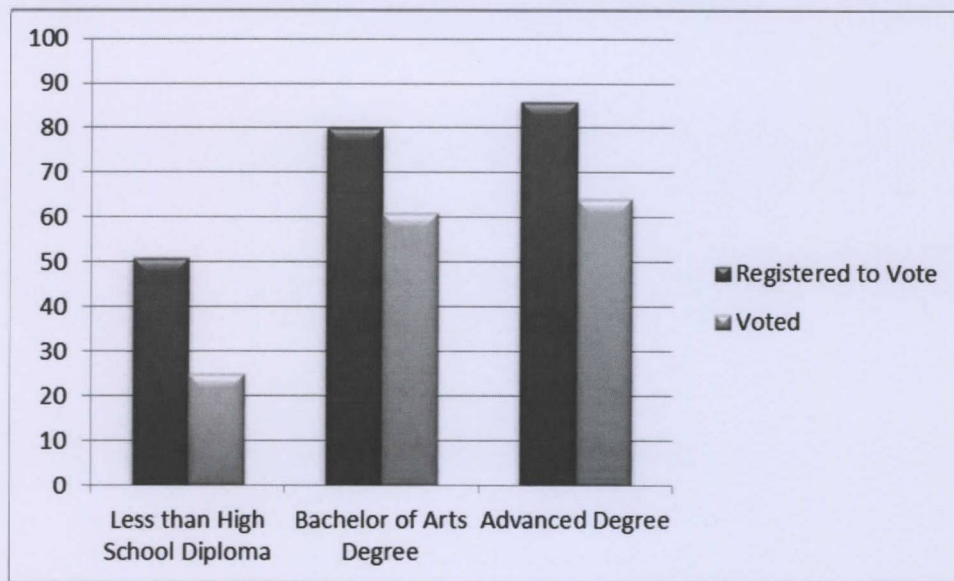
California										
Year	Race	Voting Age Population	Citizen VAP	Registered Voters	REG %	Turn-out	TO %	REG Share	TO Share	Voter Registration Potential
2010	Total	27,381	22,767	13,864	60.90%	10,725	77.36%			8,903
	White	20,828	17,331	11,016	63.60%	8,666	78.67%	79.46%	80.80%	6,315
	Black	1,728	1,661	932	56.10%	708	75.97%	6.72%	6.60%	729
	Latino	9,004	5,816	3,025	52.00%	2,058	68.03%	21.82%	19.19%	2,791
	Asian	3,860	2,938	1,472	50.10%	1,008	68.48%	10.62%	9.40%	1466

US Census 2010. LEGEND: VAP is Voting Age Population; VCAP is Citizen Voting Age Population; REG is Registered Voters; REG% is Registered Percentage; TO is Turnout; Reg/Share is race/ethnicity registration/total registration; TO Share is race/ethnicity turnout/total turnout; VR Potential is unregistered citizens.

**Impact of education on voter registration and turnout:**

*"People today know more about the Kardashians and the Dallas Cowboys than they do about how their county government works. Youth should be taught the qualifications for running for office, what a good elected official does, and the importance of voting in each election. We need better education about the basics of our governmental system using resources, such as the Center for Civic Education, to educate young people about the constitution and what it means to live in a representative Democracy to solve community problems and address grievances."*  
(Attorney)





Source: US Census 2010 National Data. No County level voter registration and voter turnout data is available by sex.

**Figure 31. Percentage of Voter Registration and Voter Turnout by Education**

Focus Group participants gave the following reasons why people don't vote:

- The ballot is complicated and intimidating, so that even informed people struggle to understand. The initiatives are confusing.
- Negative campaigns turn people off, so that no candidate sounds appealing.
- People say they do not have time to learn about the issues and candidates.
- People think their vote will not count
- They think that politicians will do what they want anyway, so voting will not impact anything.
- People are apathetic. Even educated women with higher degrees and professional jobs claim to be too busy to vote. I'm aghast at that. People are too busy with too many demands on their lives if they cannot take time enough to vote.

US Census 2012 asked respondents their reasons for not voting:

- Too busy: 26.6%
- Not interested: 16.4%
- Illness or Disability: 11.3%
- Out of Town: 9.2%
- Other Reasons not provided by the census: 9.0%
- Didn't like Candidates or Campaign Issues: 8.6%
- Forgot to Vote: 8%
- Registration Problems: 3.3%

- Don't know or refused to state a reason: 3.1%
- Transportation Problems: 2.4%
- Inconvenient Polling Place: 2.1%
- Bad Weather Conditions: 0.1%

### **Expert Comment**

### **INSERT EXPERT COMMENT**

### **Conclusion**

Women are underrepresented at all levels of government – 33% of Ventura County city council members; 29% of county commissioners; 28% of California state legislators; and 17% of the national congress. While these facts are troubling, it is even more staggering to recognize the extremely low numbers of women of color in elected office. The lack of Latinas in elected office compared to the percentage of Ventura County Latinas in the population is especially of great concern. Key informants and focus group participants emphasized that many barriers keep women from choosing to pursue elected office: lack of time and money, gender bias, self-doubt, and gender differences. A repeated theme voiced from participants is that the way women typically address community needs tends toward teamwork rather than individual effort, indicating that the political environment is more attractive to the typical male temperament. Therefore, women who are clearly qualified and encouraged to run for office, simply choose not to. They seek other mechanisms to impact their community. Perhaps changes to the current political climate would encourage more women to seek elected office.

Voting trends provide critical information about what segments of American culture see political involvement as productive and important. The people least likely to vote are younger, non-white, non-home owners, with lower incomes and less education. It is evident that a notably large portion of eligible voters do not feel motivated to participate in the democratic process. Training is needed to help citizens understand that voting is both a right and a privilege, to demystify the voting preparation process, and to convince citizens that every voice matters.

### **Recommendations**

#### Local Government and Local Educational Agencies

To address the lack of women in elected office:

- ✓ Board of Supervisors adopt a policy to achieve gender equity 50/50 and dramatically increase the number of people of color on all board commissions and staff at leadership levels in all departments



- ✓ Evaluate and streamline the process required to run for office at the local level. Evaluate barriers to participation in local office (e.g., financial, time) to identify underlying potential gender and racial bias in the application process
- ✓ Establish term limits to encourage change in status quo of demographics of elected officials
- ✓ Develop work teams to accomplish change to encourage more women to get politically involved
- ✓ Provide programs/discussion/training for women to raise awareness of opportunities for them to be part of public office
- ✓ Expand civics education to start younger and to emphasize practical information about why and how to vote and get involved in the political process
- ✓ Approve a Junior Ventura County Commission for Women comprised of high school students representing each county district

To address low voter registration and turnout among underrepresented groups:

- ✓ Make voting easier by changing the day and hours for voting may help engage the Latino community more effectively
- ✓ Australian system: if you don't vote, you are fined. Voting is a requirement, not an option
- ✓ Civic leaders with diverse backgrounds should go into classrooms and share their journey to public office
- ✓ Schools need more time to focus on civic responsibility and what voting means for the future of each student. Focus on the most local issues to show how individuals make a difference
- ✓ Every high school should have a program advocating voter registration as students turn 18

#### Community-Based Organizations

To address the lack of women in elected office:

- ✓ Register voters from underrepresented groups (e.g., young, Asian, Latino)
- ✓ Purposely select board members who reflect underrepresented groups (women, people of color, low income)
- ✓ Reach out to girls, teens and young women to encourage leadership
- **IF THIS IS A SUBSET OF REACH OUT TO GIRLS, PERHAPS ALL THE "O"s COULD BE INDENTED** Raise awareness about the need for teamwork and the tendency of **women** to be more self-critical than **boys** **WRONG COMPARISON. DO WOMEN TO MEN AND GIRLS TO BOYS.**
- Develop ways to involve young people in political knowledge (e.g., constitution context)

- It is the community's responsibility to reach out, help support and train future leaders – make purposeful choices to reach out to women and particularly women of color
- Encourage girls to participate in debate and public speaking activities
- ✓ Recruit and Train Up Emerging Women Leaders
- Start training young women to serve as leaders. Get them involved as volunteers at a campaign or at church leading a youth program. When young girls are put in leadership positions early, they do not see leadership as a risk or as a male/female thing
- Mentor: reach out to women with political leadership potential, starting at the colleges and universities before women get too busy working and raising families. Women of color should not limit their mentors to women of color or even only to women. Male mentors may be more prevalent and may offer a different perspective.
- Organizations should encourage women to take more active rolls on boards and commissions, then encourage women to move up to more responsible positions
- ✓ Train up Emerging Women Leaders of Color:
  - Due to the large Latino population in Ventura, it is critical to reach out to emerging Latina leaders
  - Address barriers, such as language, education, economics
- ✓ Urge women to run for office
  - Build funds to assist women, especially those from underrepresented groups (e.g., low income, racial diversity) to help finance campaigns
  - Support women who run for office. They need encouragement, emotional support and financial support, and volunteer support.
- ✓ Women need to stand with women to encourage them to take leadership roles
- Provide forums to educate women about the need to support women in public office through donations and campaign support
- Women's groups need better ways to link information, so that women hear about available resources, events, training
- Cross ethnicity lines to link together as women

To address low voter registration and turnout among underrepresented groups:

- ✓ Help instill the voting habit in those less likely to vote: young women of color who have a lower income and less education

### Business

To address the lack of women in elected office:

- ✓ Identify and encourage excellent women leaders in businesses and the trades
- ✓ Identify women leaders in the legal community who may be good judicial candidates
- ✓ Local colleges should participate in the Freshmen Survey



To address low voter registration and turnout among underrepresented groups:

- ✓ Employers should offer release time for employees to vote
- ✓ Encourage absentee ballot use **if needed I WOULD REMOVE IF NEEDED.**

**Individuals I LIKE HOW THIS IS HANDLED WITH THE ISSUE AND ITS SUBSETS.**

To address the lack of women in elected office:

- ✓ Regarding mentoring: "Shame on us women who do not do this"
- ✓ Women should support each other and stop tearing other women down
- ✓ Donate funding to women candidates

How to Get Involved in Political Leadership:

- ✓ Start by always voting and being prepared to vote. Elected office isn't the right occupation for you if you have not bothered to vote consistently.
- ✓ Become acquainted with the way local government works
- ✓ If you care about an issue, become devoted to a cause
- ✓ Serve in clubs, charitable organizations, on a commission, or a board
- ✓ Build your skills (e.g., grant writing, parliamentary, community organizing)
- ✓ Seek out many mentors over time in your life and realize that real mentoring takes time
- ✓ Attend campaign school and leadership workshops
- ✓ Join Toastmasters to improve your speaking skills. Practice discussing controversial issues and get comfortable with people not liking your opinion.

To address low voter registration and turnout among underrepresented groups:

- ✓ Attend forums to learn more about candidates and issues
- ✓ Go on-line to research the candidates and the initiatives
- ✓ Parents need to inspire their children by example. Talk through the ballot. Take children along when parents vote. Explain and show by example that voting is a responsibility and an honor that many people around the world do not have.
- ✓ Financially support women candidates that support your beliefs

### **Future Research Recommendations**

Tabulate gender and race/ethnicity of all county commissioners (not just those appointed by the Board of Supervisors).

## Conclusion

While Ventura County is, in many ways, an advantaged county – both economically and educationally – it is also a county where many families are facing severe and very real financial struggles on a daily basis. Significant pockets of poverty are located throughout Ventura County – particularly in predominately Hispanic, low-income areas. The families that reside in these communities – particularly the families that are headed by women (with or without children) – are the families that are struggling the most. These families are more likely to report an annual income that is low or very low (at or below the federal poverty level). With the high cost of living in Ventura County and the low average wage in many of the occupational areas that currently employ the most women, these families are truly suffering. The women and girls that reside in these families are also the most likely to not achieve their educational and/or occupational goals, to drop out of the formal education system prior to high school graduation, and spend their lifetime in an occupation that does not allow them to adequately or appropriately support themselves and/or their family. The women and girls that reside in these families are also, often, the most likely to experience adverse health effects that are primarily determined by "way of life" decisions, such as: diet, exercise, and access to high-quality, preventive health care services. It is imperative that government agencies, local educational agencies, community-based organizations, businesses, and individuals look closely at the recommendations of the focus group participants and take action wherever necessary.

IS THERE A BETTER WAY TO SAY THIS? SORRY I CAN'T THINK OF ONE.



### **Acknowledgements**

The Ventura County Commission for Women extends a sincere thank you to the many agencies, organizations, and individuals that took the time to provide assistance with the research necessary to complete the Status of Women and Girls in Ventura County Report and to share observations and opinions about the "quality of life" of women and girls in Ventura County.

A total of approximately seventy-five (75) men, women, and teen girls participated in seven (7) focus groups and a total of approximately forty-five (45) men and women from a wide range of local government agencies, community-based organizations, and businesses participated in key informant interviews. To encourage participation in these activities, as well as, open dialog, participation in these activities was confidential.

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We also thank K & M Enterprises: Research & Fund Development for conducting the research associated with this project and for preparing the Status of Women and Girls in Ventura County Report.

Finally, we pay particular note to the women and girls of Ventura County, who were the ultimate inspiration for this project.

**Appendix I**

**Ventura County Commission for Women Roster**