



WISE LATINA INTERNATIONAL
LATINA IDENTITY PROJECT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
JUNE 11, 2015

BACKGROUND

The Texas Women's Foundation (TWF) produced a report in May 2014 titled the "*Economic Issues for Women in Texas*," which highlights the changing demographics of the state, compelling community organizations, policymakers, and other stakeholders to be proactive. The TWF's study included a series of metro reports, including El Paso and comparing it with Amarillo, Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, McAllen, San Antonio, and Tyler. For the more than 431,000 women and girls living in the El Paso Metro area, including the El Paso and Hudspeth Counties:

- 32% of households are headed by females and represent 53% of households living in poverty.
- 71% of jobs in the El Paso metro area pay less than \$36,360 per year, which does not sustain a single mom with one child.
- Over 116,000 women and girls in the El Paso metro area do not have health insurance.
- 2,583 children received financial assistance for childcare, but 42,291 would likely be eligible for aid.
- High costs of housing make it difficult to afford other basic needs, such as food, clothing, transportation, and medical care.
- The housing burden is highest for single mothers, with 71% spending at least 30% of their income on housing.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

After evaluating the TWF's findings for the El Paso Metro Area, and in light of prior findings from local community forums, this report provides insights to address the knowledge gaps regarding the lived realities of Latinas in El Paso, Texas. To that end, Wise Latina International (WLI) in partnership with MerKadoTeknia Research and Consulting, faculty from the University of Texas at El Paso and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension conducted a qualitative study. By collecting the narratives of Latinas, we sought to identify successful coping strategies as well as barriers to success women in El Paso are currently facing. In addition to personal and external factors Latinas contend with, these narratives describe the resources women access to deal with challenges faced in four key areas:

- Economic Opportunities and Challenges
- Health
- Education
- Housing and childcare

GENERAL FINDINGS

I. ECONOMIC CHALLENGES GIVE RISE TO MOST OTHER PROBLEMS

At the root of education, health, housing and childcare challenges, Latinas in El Paso **lack economic opportunities** to overcome **financial challenges**. Women tell of their **financial difficulties while pursuing higher education**. This is an even greater challenge for women who have children given the added cost of childcare.

- Financial insecurity caused by limited employment opportunities, low wages, and fear of job loss, often leads women to **forego medical insurance and preventive health care and medicine**, risking their long-term health and higher cost of illness down the line.
- Those who are able to earn a college degree or higher often face a local job market that allows **few opportunities for advancement**, and low wages that require they take on a second job or find other ways to supplement their income.
- Women in unhealthy spousal relationships face the most difficult situations. These women are unable to escape due to **lack of financial resources and limited financial management skills**, having been dependent on their male partners for all of their expenses.
- Women who have left situations of **domestic violence** typically move in with a relative or friend, being unable to secure housing on their own due

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to lack of funds or a credit history. In these cases, social networks provide a safety net for women seeking to escape violence; this exposes women to the additional stress and anxiety of an insecure future.

II. WOMEN ARE GAMBLING WITH THEIR HEALTH

In extreme cases, women forego routine preventative care (such as mammograms, eye exams, dental care) because of the cost.

- Use of alternative or traditional medicines is a common strategy used by women who do not access the western healthcare system due to lack of resources or because they are dissatisfied with conventional treatments.
- **Mental health issues go mostly unaddressed**; throughout their many struggles, women describe various stages of depression and anxiety for which few received treatment.

- Feelings of **isolation and low self-esteem** are common for these women; most without health insurance can't access treatment.
- Those **women who did access counseling** free of cost via local organizations, **credited therapy with helping** them move forward and overcoming difficulties.
- **Counselors** were able to offer **support** these women could not get from family or friends, especially in cases where divorce was involved.

III. ROADBLOCKS TO EDUCATION ARE EVERYWHERE

Roadblocks to education **begin at home**, with expectations of women that rarely include higher education. **Women continue to face challenges throughout their educational process**, as they deal with a lack of parental involvement in planning and budgeting for college, employers who are inflexible to class schedules, or spouses who do not support their educational goals.

- Lacking financial resources, **student loans are being used as the sole source of income** for some women who refuse to abandon their educational goals due to financial issues.
- Once women have children, **financial constraints multiply** with childcare being one of the most costly expenses for college students.
- For those working to pay for school, **employers hold the key** to facilitating educational goals by offering or denying flexible schedules.
- In some instances, **the support of employers** who allow flexible scheduling has allowed women to pursue their educational goals.
- Other times, employers are the reason women drop out, choosing to earn a living rather than request time needed to meet academic demands.

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IV. HOUSING AND CHILDCARE: BARRIERS TO ASSET BUILDING

Given unstable finances that often result in poor credit, women often don't express the aspiration to become homeowners; they don't plan for home ownership or leave the task to their spouses.

- Because childcare costs demand such a large part of their income, women are unable to save enough for a down payment and must rely on gifts, family loans, or other subsidies to buy a home.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES BY THE NUMBERS

Economic Opportunities and Challenges

- The percentage of Latina women **earning at or below minimum wage** is increasing, **tripling from 2007 to 2012** and contributing to an overall **poverty rate close to three times** that of non-Latina white women.
- Women in El Paso are impacted by **depressed wages and lack of employment opportunities**. Those employed express their interest in going beyond the “adobe ceiling” to move up institutional ranks into better paying positions.
- **Latinas** earn 55 cents for every dollar earned by non-Hispanic white men and **in El Paso** it is reported to be **44 to 47 cents to the dollar**.
- Women carry the majority of the **childcare responsibilities** in their families. When children are ill and need care, schools and daycares require they stay home. As a result, mothers need to take time off work and risk losing their jobs or being penalized in labor performance reviews.
- **Affordable childcare options** are greatly needed.

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Education Opportunities and Challenges

- Latinas suffer from **institutionalized education disparities**: they are underrepresented in honors programs, advanced placement and gifted and talented programs.

Latinas want to move beyond the “**adobe ceiling**” and into better paying careers

- The disparities are not due to a lack of intellectual capabilities, but rather a **deficiency in opportunity**.
- Latinas disproportionately opt for trade programs or two-year community colleges, where opportunities for advanced degrees are often delayed or limited.

▪ Of Latina girls beginning the 8th grade in 2000, only 20% completed a higher education credential 11 years later.

Health and Wellbeing Opportunities and Challenges

- Over 116,000 or **28%** of women and girls in the El Paso metro area do not have health insurance.
- 47% of the uninsured females are between the ages of 35 to 64 and 43% are women between 18 and 34.
- 53% of Latinas get pregnant in their teens, **twice the national average**.
- Many Latina teens are not armed with the information necessary to make safe and healthy decisions about their reproductive and sexual health.
- Lack of **health insurance and lack of accessible and free reproductive healthcare** impedes access to birth control.

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Housing and Childcare Opportunities and Challenges

- In 2013, the average monthly waitlist for childcare subsidies in the Upper Rio Grande Workforce Development area was **912 children**.
- This means that **low-income parents** who are working or in job-training programs are not able to receive the financial assistance for childcare they qualify for and that helps them to **become employed**.
- In the El Paso Metro area, typical cost for full-time childcare for one child is **\$3,776 per year**.
- High child care costs force many **low-wage earning women** to stay out of the workforce, to keep from attending classes or from pursuing their education.

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CALL TO ACTION

Wise Latina International is committed to all Latinas and women in the El Paso Metro region that struggle with economic challenges, limited employment opportunities, child care, housing, education, immigration, domestic violence, mental and behavioral health. Our platform for action will not only shed light on the issues that affect women and their families but also the broader community. **Through partnerships, collaboration, and community engagement**, we aim to create more just and equitable opportunities for the women in El Paso. **Wise Latina International cannot do this alone.**

We are soliciting support from representatives and partners from the public and private sector, elected and government officials, educational institutions, health care representatives, community organizations, policymakers, leaders in the media, and other stakeholders to help address the needs of Latina and women in El Paso.

Wise Latina International is seeking partnerships with stakeholders to address the most pressing issues for women in the El Paso Metro area - which include

- Economic Opportunities
- Education
- Health Insurance & Well Being
- Housing
- Child Care

Wise Latina International also recognizes that this is an opportunity to collaborate and form partnerships to support local efforts and existing resources that will help address the current challenges facing women in our region.

In keeping with Wise Latina's mission, we see the identified priority areas as an opportunity for us to take an active role in challenging negative stereotypes and narratives of Latinas and striking a balance in seeing women not as victims of discrimination but as agents of change.

It is in the interest of our city of El Paso that we are reaching out to key stakeholders, representatives, and influential members of this community to support strengthening the economic security of women that is critical to the success and future of the El Paso Metro area.