



Best U.S. Cities for Women's Well-Being

by [Olivia Roat](#) | May 15, 2012

Well-being is a broad term and encapsulates different things for different people. For some, well-being connotes a long life and good relationships, for others, it may mean an enjoyable, well-paying job. While well-being is often tied to emotional, physical, and mental health, a recent [report](#) shows that well-being has a geographic component as well. The best cities for women's well-being: Washington D.C., San Francisco, and Boston.

The report, released by Measure of America, ranked the top 25 U.S. metro areas for women's well-being. It gauged well-being by using the American Human Development Index, a summary measure of well-being that combines health, education, and income indicators into a single number between zero and ten. The index looks at data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the CDC in three essential areas: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge, and a decent standard of living. Life expectancy at birth determines people's ability to live a long and healthy life, school enrollment and educational degree attainment indicate access to knowledge, and median earnings represent standards of living.

Washington D.C. scored high in all three areas. Women in the nation's capitol are highly educated—45% have Bachelor's degrees and 20% have graduate degrees. They also earn more money than women in any other city: women in D.C. earn on average around \$38,000, far exceeding the national median earnings for women of \$24,000.

San Francisco, which ranked second, had the highest life expectancy of all metro areas: women live an average of 84.5 years, about three years longer than the national average. Boston, the third-ranked city, scored high on educational measurements: around 91% of women have a high school diploma and school enrollment is measured at 82%.

Houston, San Antonio, and Riverside-San Bernardino in California took the bottom 3 spots in the ranking. In Riverside San Bernardino, one in five women never completed high school, and the typical female worker earns around \$22,300, which according to the study's researchers is a wage on par with those that prevailed in the U.S. as a whole in 1970. The report actually noted large gaps in well-being between the top-scoring cities and the low-scoring ones. For example, in the top three cities, between 42 and 45% of women have Bachelor's degrees; in the bottom three, that percentage drops to between 19 and 25%. In regard to standards of living, women in the top three cities earn between \$32-38,000, while women in the bottom three earn between \$22-24,000.

In addition to ranking the cities in terms of life expectancy, educational access, and median income, the report noted some interesting findings. Among them: earnings in metro areas track closely with education in these areas and women tend to earn more in metro areas where greater numbers of women are unmarried.

The report concludes that women can no longer be considered a monolithic category, as the American Human Development Index highlights the tremendous variation that exists among women by race, place, age, and marital status. They also conclude that "on the whole, women living in the most populous metro area have higher levels of well-being than the typical American women."

Yet, women living in the bottom three cities are lacking in regard to health, education, and income. The report knows that the first thing people will do after learning about the findings is question why disparities exist in U.S. metro areas. They anticipate this question, and while they acknowledge that only detailed study can provide explanation, they do identify some potential "well-being risk factors," i.e. low birth weight, percentage of adults who smoke, and preschool enrollment.

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