

# WOMEN'S WELL-BEING:

## RANKING AMERICA'S TOP 25 METRO AREAS



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# Conclusion

Women are not a monolithic category. Tremendous variation exists among them by race and place as well as by age and marital status. Understanding differences among women is critical to crafting policy and making public investments that meet their needs and expand their choices and opportunities.

The American Human Development Index shines a spotlight on these noteworthy disparities. It shows that, on the whole, women living in the most populous metro areas have higher levels of well-being than the typical American woman. Washington, DC, San Francisco, and Boston are home to women with the highest levels of well-being.

Women living in Houston, San Antonio, and Riverside–San Bernardino, on the other hand, are doing less well when it comes to health, education, and income. In **health**, the most significant life expectancy variations can be found between women of different racial and ethnic groups; at the national level, the life expectancy of Asian American women, for example, is eleven years longer than that of African American women.

Nonetheless, place also matters, as evidenced by the differing life spans of women from the same racial or ethnic group from metro area to metro area.

In **education**, women’s increasing levels of schooling can be seen clearly by comparing the degree attainment of women of different age groups. In all twenty-five metropolitan areas reviewed for this study, young women are now significantly more likely than young men to have completed a bachelor’s degree or higher, and in the majority of metro areas, they are more likely to have done so than women ten or twenty years older.

In **income**, cities with higher proportions of never-married women tend to have higher female earnings as well. In addition, the financial returns to education vary from place to place for women.

The question that typically follows a presentation of American Human Development Index findings is “Why?” Why do these tremendous disparities exist? Why are women in Washington, DC, and San Francisco doing so much better on the whole than women in San Antonio and Riverside–San Bernardino? Answering these deceptively simple question is the holy grail of social science. It is impossible to make blanket statements, and only careful study of specific cases yields methodologically defensible explanations.

Nonetheless, it is possible to identify factors that research suggests may contribute to specific outcomes, as well as to identify factors that are associated with specific outcomes. **BOX 2** is an example of such an exploration, using the top and bottom metro areas for women. The set of indicators presented in the **DASHBOARD** includes those that research has consistently shown present significant threats to the expansion of people’s abilities to seize opportunities and live healthy, fulfilled, and productive lives. Explorations like these are critical to understanding the factors that contribute to different outcomes as well as identifying possible levers for change.

**Women are not a monolithic category.**

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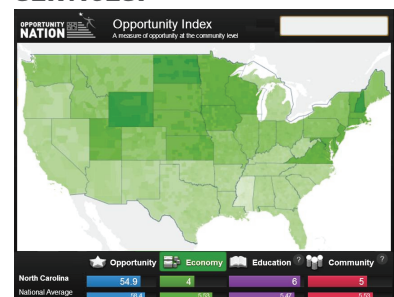
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