

# The Status of WOMEN and GIRLS in New Hampshire

Prepared by: Daphne Kenyon, Ph.D, D.A. Kenyon & Associates and Jennifer Frizzell, NH Women's Policy Institute. May, 2011

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March of 2011 the White House Council on Women and Girls released a statistical snapshot of the status of women in the United States showing significant progress over the last 20 years across five domains: demographic and family changes, education, employment, health, and crime and violence. While there has been significant progress across the country on all five measures, the report identified a number of areas where improvement is possible. For example, while labor force participation and education levels for women have increased significantly, these trends have not resulted in a similarly significant reduction in the wage gap between men and women.

This study examines the well-being of New Hampshire's women and girls through a similar set of lenses: economic security, health, education, and safety and violence. It provides a framework and methodology for tracking progress, or the lack thereof, over time in the status of New Hampshire women. This study can be used to guide future public policy decisions and philanthropic choices, and more generally inform debates on where the state and local communities need to focus public and private sector resources.

The process of developing this report began with identifying characteristics which were important for state policy makers to measure and understand. Similar reports in other states were used as a guide to the themes and likely data indicators. These themes and the indicators included within the themes are:

### Economic Security

This theme describes various characteristics of the economic status of women, including earnings, labor force participation, wages relative to men, and poverty rates.

### Health

This theme explores the health and well-being of women through a review of smoking rates, obesity levels, mental health, and early use of prenatal care.

### Education

This theme describes various characteristics of the education status through a review of women's educational attainment, educational test scores, and drop-out rates.

### Safety and Violence

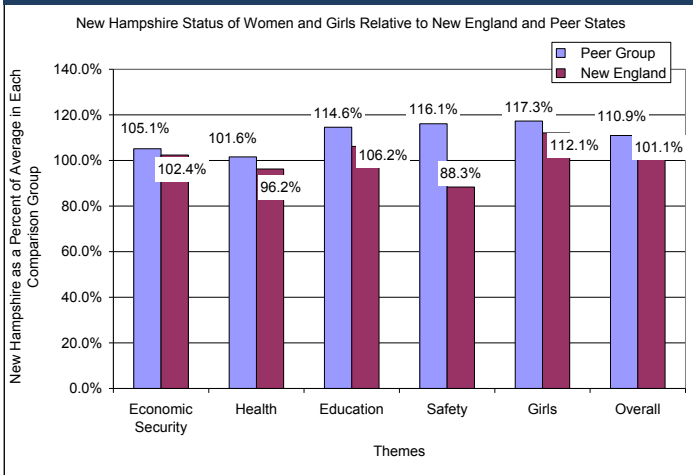
This theme provides a preliminary and unfortunately incomplete analysis of crime, physical safety and violence against women through a review of nursing home deficiencies and rates of rape.

### Girls

This theme describes the levels in teen birth rates, STD rates for girls, and reports of drug, alcohol and tobacco use for girls.

Data on these statistical indicators were collected, and five separate indices of well-being were developed to compare New Hampshire to other states. The two sets of comparison states are the other New England states and New Hampshire's socio-demographic peers, which include Alaska, Minnesota, Nevada, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

Figure 1: A Dashboard for the Well-Being of NH's Women and Girls



Note: When indices are below 100%, NH compares poorly relative to other states; when indices are above 100%, NH compares favorably.

Figure 1 shows the New Hampshire score within each of the themes as a percentage of both the New England states and New Hampshire's socio-demographic peers. When indices are below 100 percent, New Hampshire compares poorly relative to other states; when indices are above 100 percent, New Hampshire compares favorably. For example, in the Health theme, New Hampshire rates 1.6 percent better than its peer group, but 3.8 percent worse than New England states on average.

For most indices New Hampshire compares favorably to both peer and New England states. For example, New Hampshire rates 15 percent higher than its peer states, and 6 percent higher than the other New England states, in the education theme as measured by test scores, educational attainment and high school drop out rates. However, even amid this good news, girls' proficiency in mathematics remains below that of boys. In addition, New Hampshire scored well within the theme of economic security relative to both peer and the other New England states. Yet within this overall favorable performance, a significant wage gap and low rates of female business ownership persist.

In two areas in particular, however, New Hampshire scored less favorably. New Hampshire scores were slightly better than peer states on health measurements, but the state does worse than other New England states. These results were driven by relatively high rates of obesity, heart disease, cancer, and poor mental health. The second relates to safety and violence. New Hampshire compared favorably to its peer states, but poorly compared to New England states. These results, however, should be interpreted with caution. Despite the importance of safety to women's lives, there are fewer reliable statistical indicators for this theme than any other. According to the two indicators available — rates of serious nursing home deficiencies and forcible

rape — New Hampshire measures significantly worse than other New England states but better than its peer states. More data in comparable format need to be collected on this topic to make it meaningful.

The study also includes a very preliminary assessment of the well-being of New Hampshire girls. For this assessment, education indicators were combined with several measures of risky behavior — drug, alcohol, and tobacco use; teen birth rate; and rates of sexually transmitted disease (STD rate). Although the index of girls' well-being indicates that New Hampshire rates better than other New England states as well as its peer states, this should be taken as a very preliminary result. For a reliable overall measure of the well-being of girls, adequate data on safety, economic well-being and other health indicators needs to be collected.

### Geographic Variation: Not 'One' NH

Looking at these data at the state level hides significant geographic variation in the welfare of women and girls. In the health theme, data point to significant geographic disparities in health outcomes, with the northern part of the state facing the greatest health challenges. With respect to economic security, the southeastern part of New Hampshire has relatively low levels of poverty, but pockets of poverty can be found in the north, central and southwestern parts of the state. Data at the sub-state level, however, were not consistently available.

While much of the data is not consistently available at the sub-state town level, it is useful to think about poverty as a proxy measure of geographic variation in the indicators above, as income is correlated with many of the indicators used in this analysis. In most communities in New Hampshire, town and city level data on poverty rates are too imprecise to be used as a tool to understand variation in poverty. Point estimates at the county level confirm the findings from our analyses within themes. Poverty tends to be higher the further west and north one travels in New Hampshire, with Coos County having the highest poverty rates in the state. However, Strafford County is also remarkable with the second highest point estimate for poverty rates.

