

Thriving in the Inland Empire:

Women & Well-Being through the Lens of Vital Conditions

FIRST
LOOK

The **IECF Women's Giving Fund** commissioned a study by the **UCR Center for Community Solutions** to explore what helps—or holds back—women's ability to thrive in the Inland Empire (Riverside + San Bernardino counties). Drawing upon **data from an original survey and publicly available sources**, we **examine women's well-being through the lens of vital conditions**, revealing variation in women's lived experience, where our region excels and where challenges persist. This report provides a first look at key insights, with the full findings to be unveiled at an exclusive event on June 3rd. Scan the QR code to learn more about the study and register for the event. Space is limited.



THRIVING, STRUGGLING & SUFFERING IN THE IE

The Cantril Ladder measures well-being by asking people to **rate their lives today and in five years on a 0–10 scale**, and then sorts them into three groups based on their answers: thriving, struggling, or suffering.

In the Inland Empire, most women are struggling—they are getting by but are uncertain about the future. Prior research finds that people who are struggling are more likely to experience financial stress, unstable resources, and emotional strain, highlighting the need for policies and investments that strengthen the vital conditions for well-being in our region.

36% of women in the IE are **THRIVING**

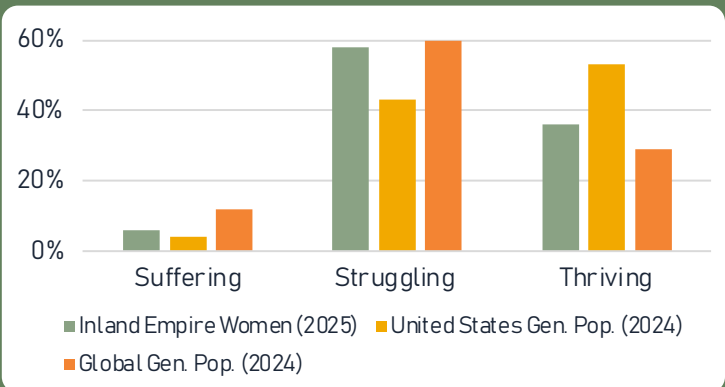
58% of women in the IE are **STRUGGLING**

6% of women in the IE are **SUFFERING**

Survey (n=1000) of Riverside and San Bernardino county residents over the age of 18 who identify as women. Survey developed by UCR CCS and administered by Dynata, 1/28/25 – 2/3/25.

HOW DOES THE IE COMPARE TO THE US & THE WORLD?

Women in the Inland Empire are **less likely to suffer than the global population average**, but with **58% struggling—well above the U.S. rate (43%)**—there's room to boost well-being. Investing in vital conditions that foster thriving communities could help close the **thriving gap (36% IE vs. 53% U.S.)** and create a more vibrant Inland Empire.



United States & Global values are taken from the Gallup Life Evaluation Index, 2024 and are inclusive of men and women.

THE RIVERSIDE / SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY OPTIMISM GAP

Around the world, people typically expect their future to be brighter than their present, which is reflected in a positive “swing” in their Cantril Ladder scores. **Most women in the IE report a positive swing**—meaning they are optimistic about their future well-being and life's opportunities—but the counties diverge in that **women in Riverside County are more likely to have a negative view of their future than those residing in San Bernardino County.**

36%
of women in
Riverside County
anticipate being
worse off in 5
years

9%
of women in
San Bernardino
County anticipate
being worse off in
5 years









Center for Community
Solutions

visit us at
communitysolutions.ucr.edu
or email us at
solutions@ucr.edu



We pair our survey findings with publicly available data that offers a wider lens on women’s well-being in our region. Secondary data provided by the **American Community Survey (2023)** and **California Health Interview Survey (2019-2023)** is free to use, generally representative, and can be sorted into the Vital Conditions Framework **to compare Riverside and San Bernardino counties—to each other and to Orange and Los Angeles counties—across key conditions for thriving.** Although the Vital Conditions Framework includes a category for Thriving Natural World, this domain is excluded from our analysis. Because the natural environment impacts everyone, the available data does not provide impactful insights specific to women, rather reflecting trends for the entire population. This snapshot highlights some of the most revealing patterns tied to vital conditions. Please scan the QR code below for graphs of these data.

					
Belonging & Civic Muscle	Basic Needs for Health & Safety	Humane Housing	Meaningful Work & Wealth	Lifelong Learning	Reliable Transportation
38% 41% SB County Riv County OC: 25% LAC: 30% of Regional Women Reported They “Definitely” or “Probably” Had Confidence to Contact Elected Officials	38% 40% SB County Riv County OC: 56% LAC: 46% of Currently Uninsured Regional Women Remain Uninsured Due to Cost	86% 88% SB County Riv County OC: 88% LAC: 80% of Regional Women Feel Safe in Their Neighborhood “Most” or “All” of the Time	\$25,804 \$26,992 SB County Riv County OC: \$26,357 LAC: \$24,067 Median Income for Regional Women with Less than a High School Education	30% 44% SB County Riv County OC: 53% LAC: 53% Percentage of 3-4 Year Old Girls Enrolled in School (Public or Private) in the Region	29 min. 30 min. SB County Riv County OC: 25 min LAC: 30 min Average Commute Times for Regional Women
79% 75% SB County Riv County OC: 80% LAC: 80% of Regional Teen Girls Believe They Can Make a Difference	78% 78% SB County Riv County OC: 80% LAC: 79% of Regional Women Have a Usual Source of Health Care	97% 93% SB County Riv County OC: 96% LAC: 94% of Regional Women Have Stable Housing	12% 9% SB County Riv County OC: 6% LAC: 7% of Regional Women Work in the Transportation + Warehousing Sector	16% 16% SB County Riv County OC: 13% LAC: 19% of Regional Women Aged 25+ who Have Less than a High School Diploma	86% 82% SB County Riv County OC: 77% LAC: 75% of Regional Women Use an Automobile to Go to Work

The **Center for Community Solutions** is a research center at the **UCR School of Public Policy** with a mission to contribute to the region’s growth by conducting community-engaged research that addresses critical policy questions, fostering knowledge exchange between research and practice, and developing the next generation of policy leaders.

Scan the QR code to register for *She Counts* on **June 3rd, 12pm-1:30pm**, and be among the first to explore new data on IE women, hear from experts, and connect with local leaders over lunch! Space is limited.



THRIVING IN THE INLAND EMPIRE: WOMEN & WELL-BEING THROUGH THE LENS OF VITAL CONDITIONS

TECHNICAL APPENDIX

The IECF Women's Giving Fund commissioned a study by the UCR Center for Community Solutions to explore what helps—or holds back—women's ability to thrive in the Inland Empire (Riverside + San Bernardino counties). Drawing upon data from an original survey and publicly available sources, we examine women's well-being through the lens of vital conditions, revealing variation in women's lived experience, where our region excels and where challenges persist. This technical appendix to our two-page "first look" report offers additional information on our methodology and graphs of survey respondent characteristics, as well as the publicly available measures selected for inclusion from the American Community Survey and California Health Interview Survey.

SURVEY OF WOMEN IN THE IE

METHODOLOGY

To better understand the self-reported life experience and well-being of women in the Inland Empire, we conducted a survey designed to align with the Vital Conditions framework. The survey gathered insights on subjective life expectations and key areas affecting quality of life, including economic stability, social connections, health, and access to resources.

The survey was administered online between January 28th, 2025 and February 3rd, 2025 to a sample of 1000 women living in Riverside (n=500) and San Bernardino (n = 500) counties. Participants were sampled through Dynata, a survey research firm that recruits individuals for inclusion on their survey panels through diverse channels to ensure broad representation of the target population. Only individuals who 1) self-identified as a woman, 2) lived in Riverside or San Bernardino counties, 3) were over the age of 18, and 4) were able to complete a survey in English were eligible to participate in this study. Unfortunately, given time and cost constraints, the survey was only offered in English.

The questionnaire included both closed- and open-ended questions, allowing respondents to share both quantitative ratings and qualitative experiences. This included Cantril's Ladder to assess overall subjective well-being, a series of statements aligned with the Vital Conditions framework to gauge levels of agreement on key factors that shape quality of life, and measures of individual characteristics—ranging from housing cost burden to caregiver status and general demographics. A full presentation of the findings will be shared at the *She Counts* event on June 3rd.

While every effort was made to ensure a representative dataset, some biases are inherent. Non-random sampling through an online panel in our region may over- or under-represent certain groups, particularly those with limited internet access or non-English speakers. Further, response

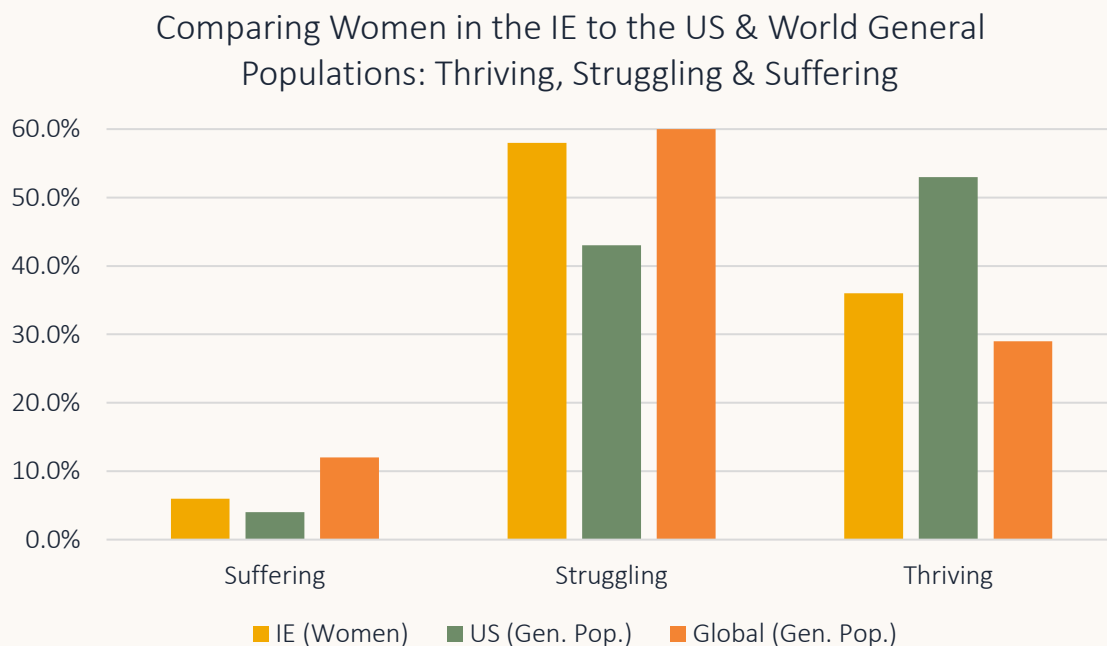
bias could skew results toward those more engaged or opinionated. Despite these limitations, we find our respondent's characteristics generally mirror that of women in the region overall and we are confident the findings offer valuable insights into women's well-being in the Inland Empire.

CANTRIL'S LADDER: A MEASURE OF THRIVING IN THE IE

A core measure in our analysis is the Cantril Ladder, a widely used, subjective tool for assessing life expectations and well-being (see: Gallup 2024, Cantril 1965; Yin et al. 2023; Kahneman & Deaton 2010; among many others).

Cantril's Ladder asks respondents to rate their current lives on a 0-10 scale, with 0 representing the worst possible life and 10 the best possible life. They also estimate where they expect to be in five years using this same scale. The "swing" between present and future ratings provides insight into optimism, resilience, and perceived opportunity. Globally, most people expect their future selves to be better off, making a negative swing a critical indicator of distress or diminished hope for upward mobility. Within the Vital Conditions framework, Cantril's Ladder is used to better understand subjective well-being and provides a baseline from which communities can work to pinpoint where conditions—such as economic security, social connection, and reliable healthcare, among others—may be falling short in supporting thriving communities.

Based on Gallup's global research on life evaluations, Cantril Ladder scores are typically categorized into three well-being groups: thriving, struggling, and suffering, each with distinct implications for well-being and perceived life opportunities (Gallup 2009). Individuals who rate their current lives at 7 or higher and their future at 8 or higher are considered to be thriving, meaning they experience strong well-being and feel optimistic about their future. Those in the struggling category, who rate their life between 5 and 6, face uncertainty and instability, despite



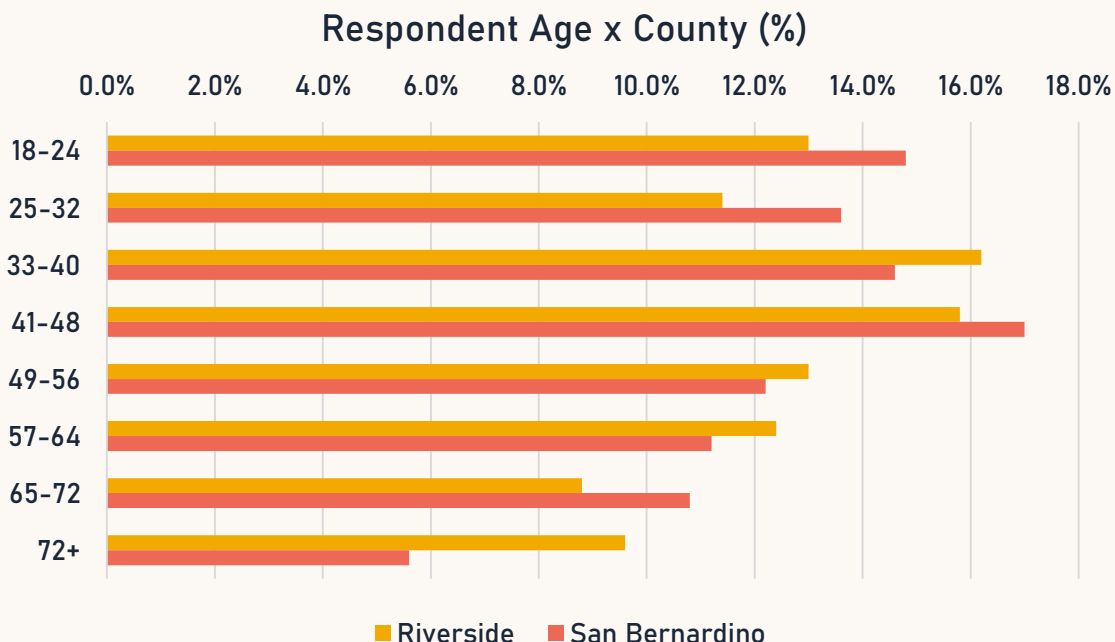
Source: 2025, UCR Center for Community Solutions Survey of IE Women

avoiding severe hardship. Research shows that struggling individuals are more likely to experience higher levels of worry and daily stress, poorer physical health, and are more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors such as smoking and poor diet choices (Gallup, 2024). Individuals who are suffering rate their present and future life at 4 or below, and tend to lack access to basic needs, experience extreme stress, and face significant barriers to a better future. Belonging to the suffering group is correlated with higher levels of depression, anxiety, and chronic illness (Gallup 2024).

In the Inland Empire, a lower share of women are suffering compared to global averages, but a high percentage remain in the struggling category. (See: graph above.) Further, there is a thriving gap between the US general population's percentage thriving (53%) versus the IE's (36%). Together, these asymmetries in subjective well-being underscore the need to better understand the causes and conditions of thriving in the IE, as well as policy and other investments to decrease the thriving gap.

SURVEY RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

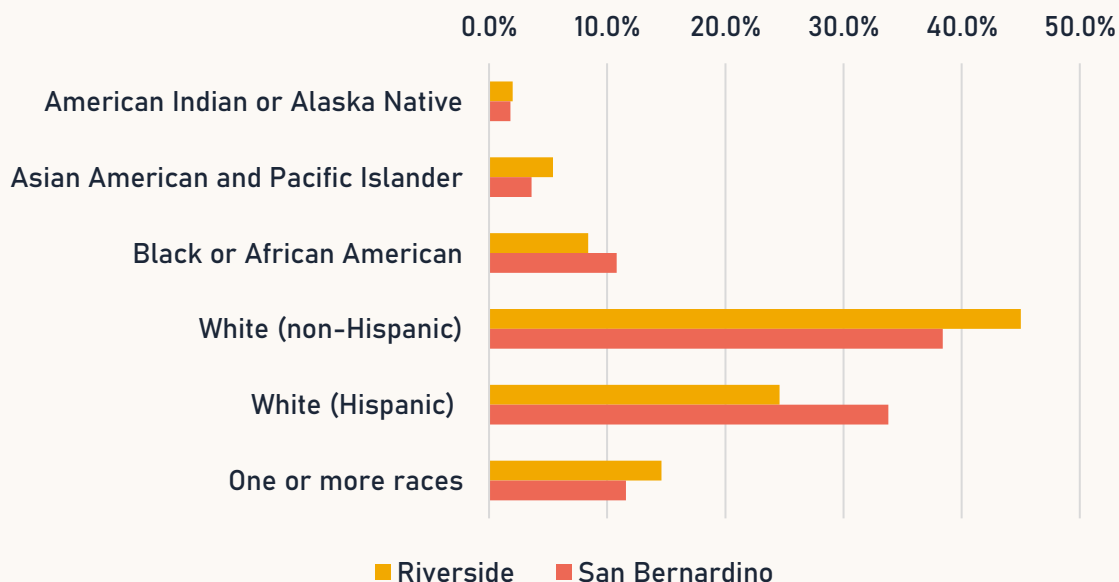
The following nine graphs provide a snapshot of key characteristics of the women in Riverside and San Bernardino counties who participated in our survey, offering important context on who is represented and whose experiences shape these findings. Where available, we present data from the American Community Survey for the Riverside-Ontario-San Bernardino Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) in the notes underneath each graph as a point of comparison to assess representativeness. By examining differences in education, race, housing cost burden, caregiver status, and more, these data help us understand who we are in conversation with and the diverse realities of women in the Inland Empire.



Source: 2025, UCR Center for Community Solutions Survey of IE Women

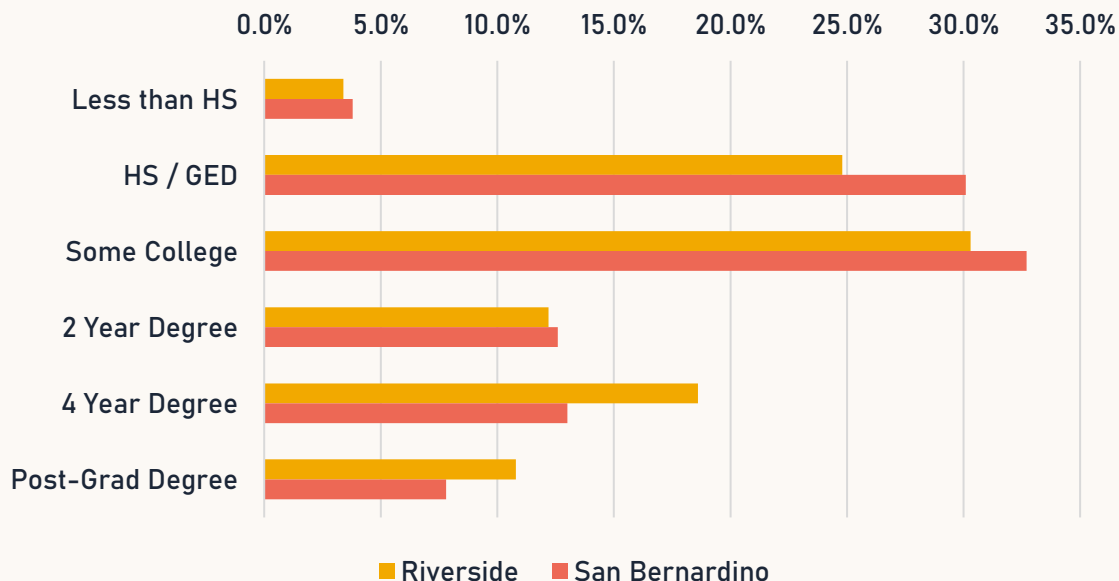
Note: The median age of the Riverside-Ontario-San Bernardino MSA is 35.2 years. The median age of our sample is 44 years. This difference is likely driven, at least in part, by our sample focusing on adults; the MSA median includes children and decreases the median, our sample includes only women over the age of 18 years.

Respondent Race x County (%)

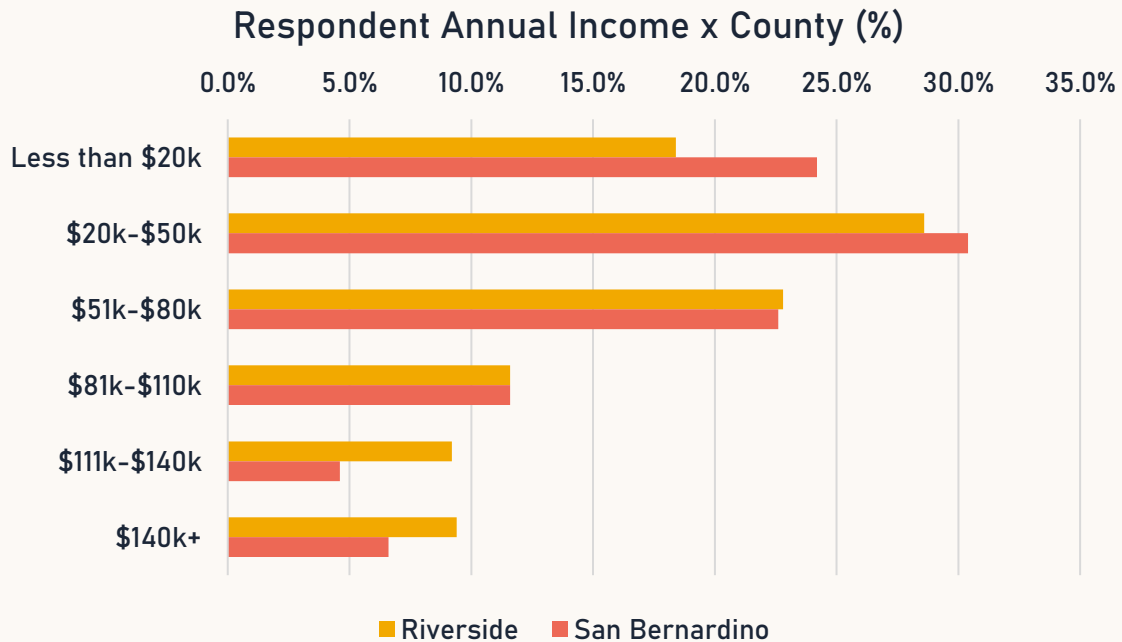


Source: 2025, UCR Center for Community Solutions Survey of IE Women
Note: The racial composition of the Riverside-Ontario-San Bernardino MSA is: 2% American Indian or Alaska Native; 8% Asian American or Pacific Islander; 8% Black or African American; 27% White (non-Hispanic); 51% White (Hispanic); 4% one or more races.

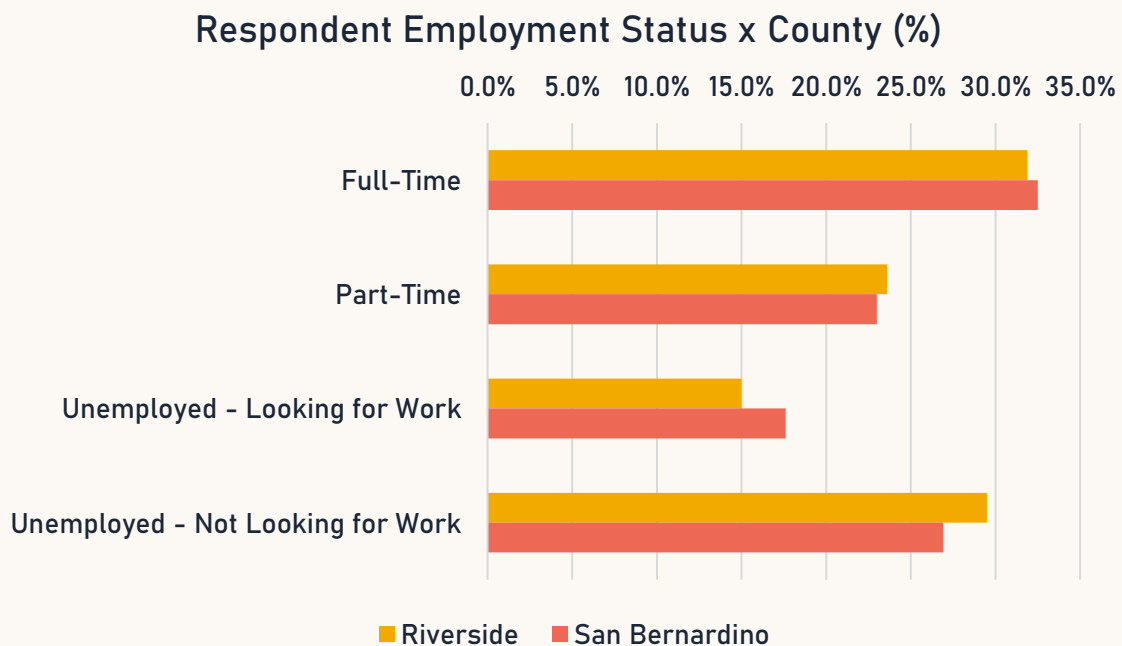
Respondent Educational Attainment x County (%)



Source: 2025, UCR Center for Community Solutions Survey of IE Women
Note: Educational attainment for the general population over age 25 in the Riverside-Ontario-San Bernardino MSA is: 17% No Degree, 28% HS Degree, 30% Some College; 16% Bachelor's Degree; 9% Post-Graduate Degree.

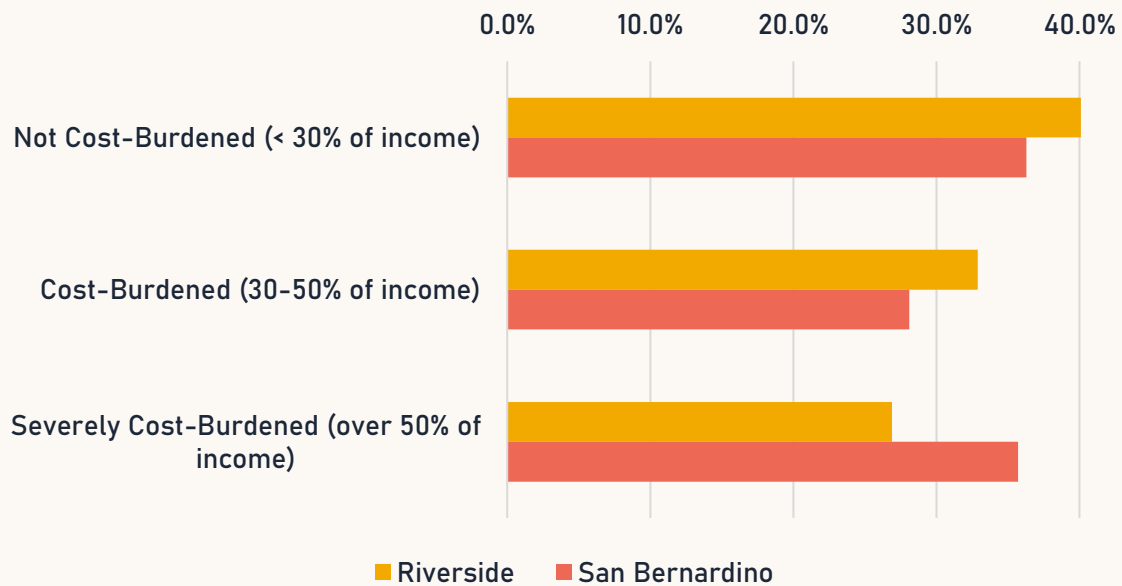


Source: 2025, UCR Center for Community Solutions Survey of IE Women
Note: The median income for the Riverside-Ontario-San Bernardino MSA is \$35,408 per year.



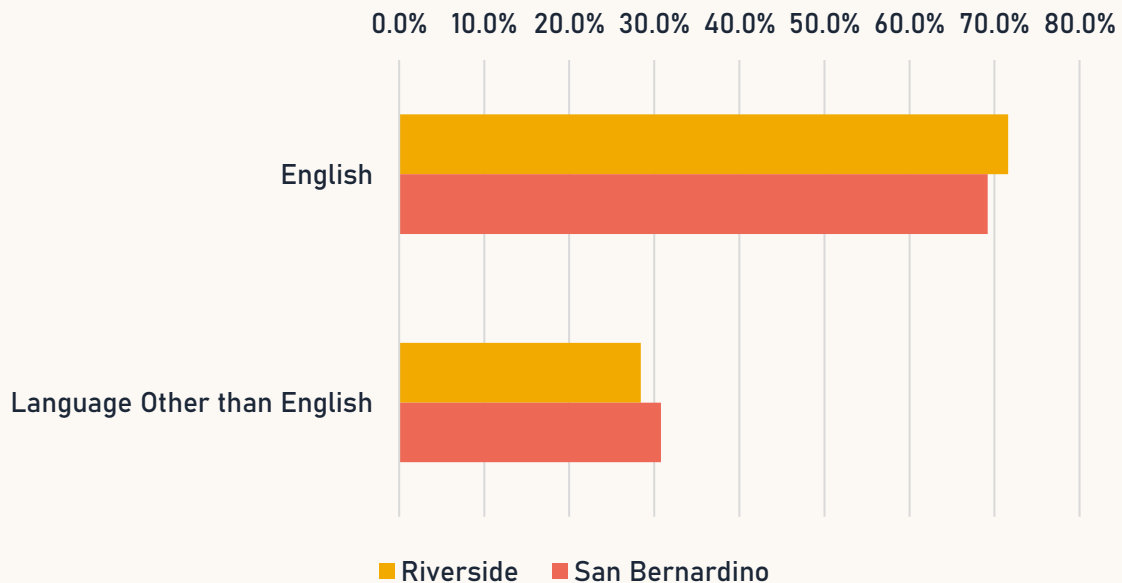
Source: 2025, UCR Center for Community Solutions Survey of IE Women

Respondent Housing Cost Burden x County (%)



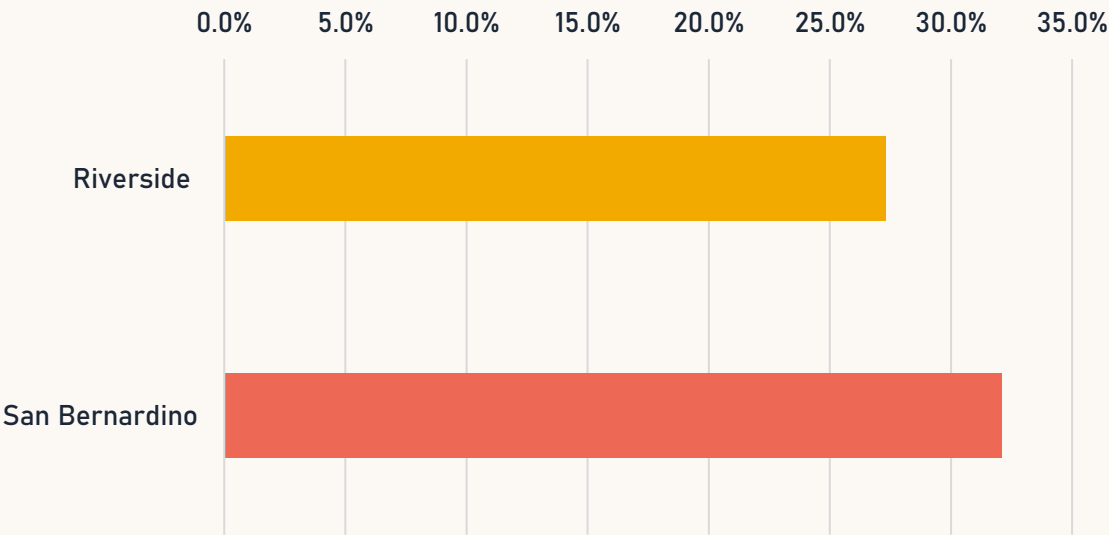
Source: 2025, UCR Center for Community Solutions Survey of IE Women

Language Spoken at Home x County (%)



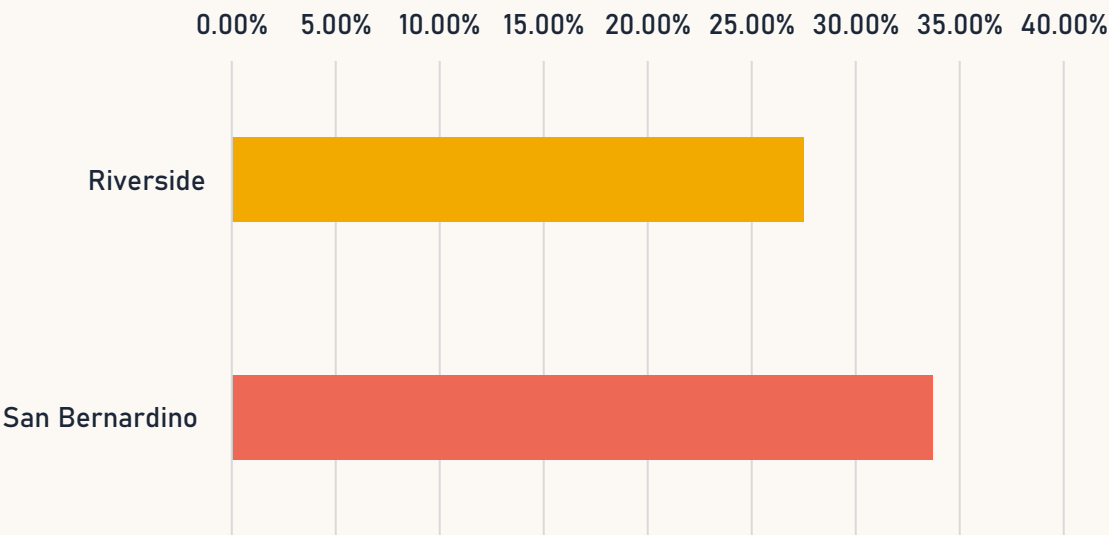
Source: 2025, UCR Center for Community Solutions Survey of IE Women

Respondent as a Caregiver to a Child Under the Age of 18 x County (%)



Source: 2025, UCR Center for Community Solutions Survey of IE Women

Respondent as Caregiver to Someone Over the Age of 18 x County (%)



Source: 2025, UCR Center for Community Solutions Survey of IE Women

ANALYSIS OF PUBLICLY AVAILABLE DATA

ABOUT THE DATA

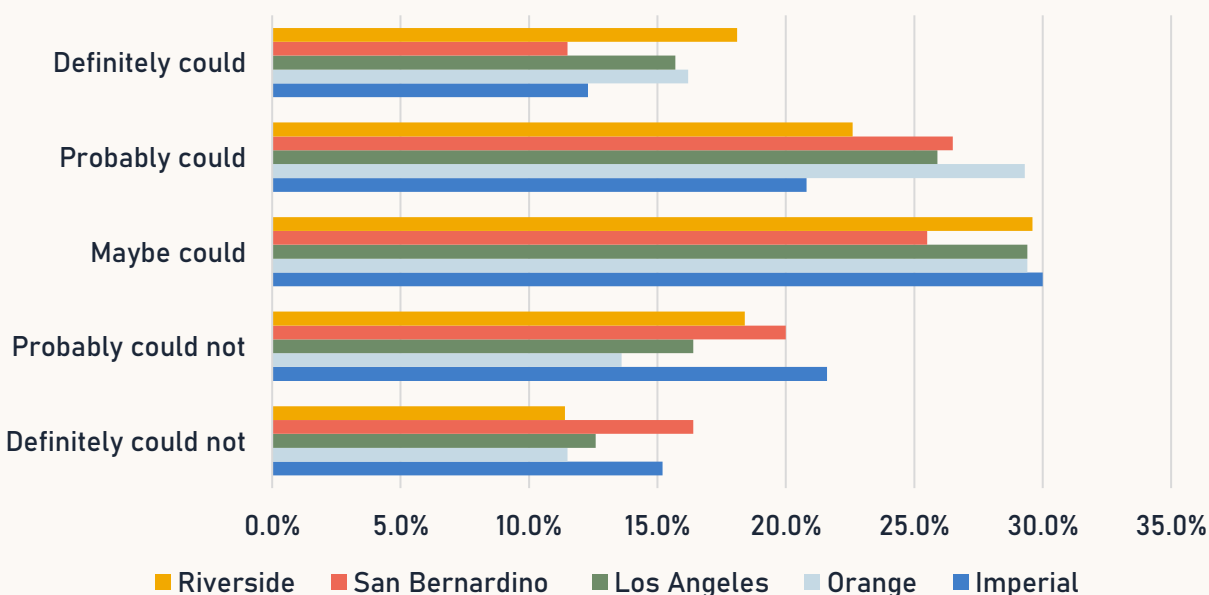
We reviewed available ACS and CHIS data against the variables currently collected for each Vital Condition by the IE Vital Conditions Network. Because the Vital Conditions themselves are for the entire population and not just a subset, we had to make several judgement calls about which indicators to split out by sex, and which indicators would not be meaningful divided in this way. For example, we chose to omit “Thriving Natural World” as a category altogether, as due to the constraints of this project, encapsulating the impact on women in a single metric was not meaningful.

We chose to use the ACS 2023 1-year sample as it provides the most recent data available. For the CHIS data we similarly wanted to reflect recency, but needed to balance that against statistical stability; accordingly, several of the measures are pooled across a few years to create stable estimates. In selecting variables we considered the following:

- inclusion as part of the IE Vital Conditions measures;
- has data for 2023 or 2023, including pooling;
- can be meaningfully cut by sex;
- had data at the county level (i.e., Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino).

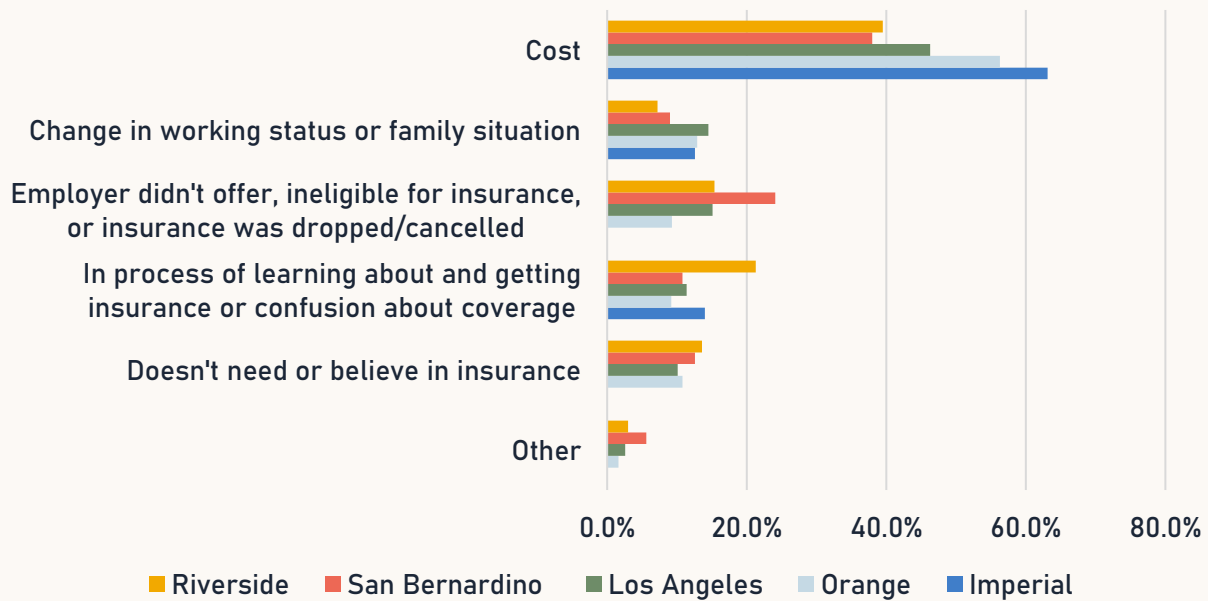
Once we had our universe of potential variables, we ran an initial pass, comparing outcomes for all five counties. Based on our Center’s prior experience with community groups, funders, and government agencies, we sought to identify two variables for each Vital Condition that would be potentially compelling for leaders throughout this region. Below are 12 graphs representing each of the statistics presented in the report.

Can Contact Elected Officials in the Community - Adult Women



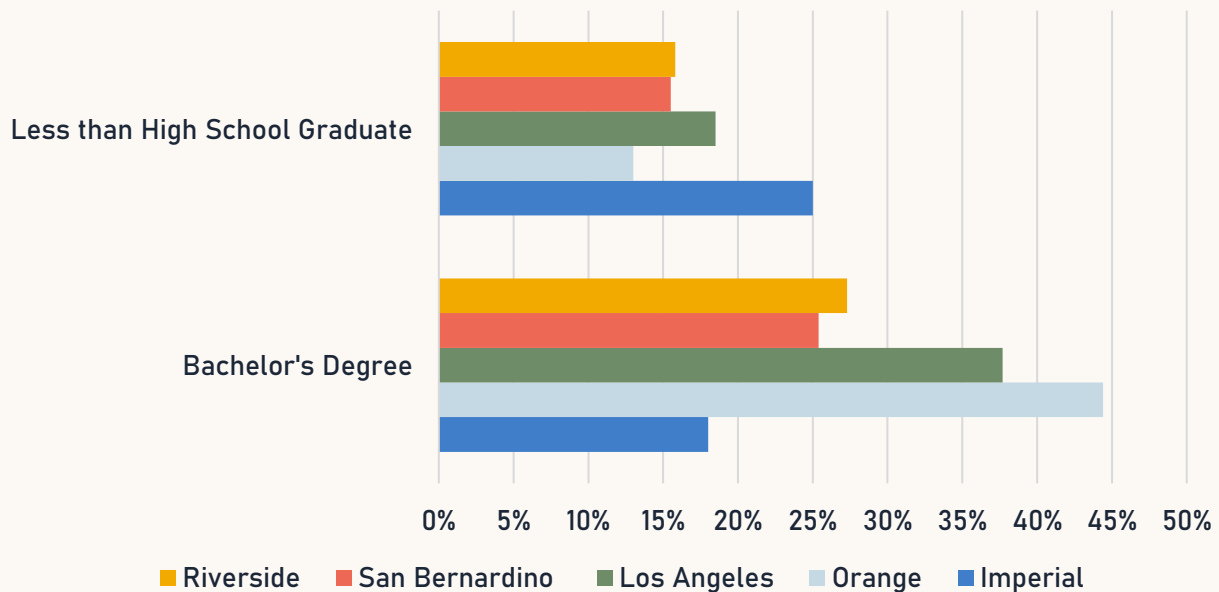
Source: 2023 California Health Interview Survey

Main Reason for Currently Uninsured Status – Percentage of Adult Women



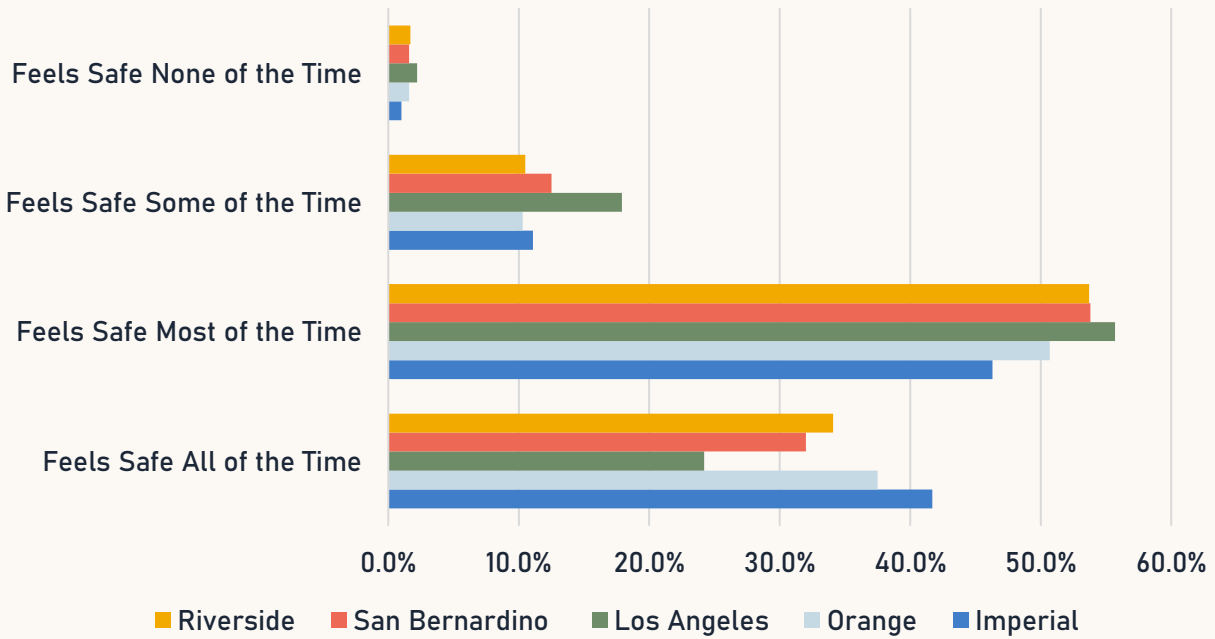
Source: 2019-2023 California Health Interview Survey

Educational Attainment – Percentage of Adult Women (25+ years)



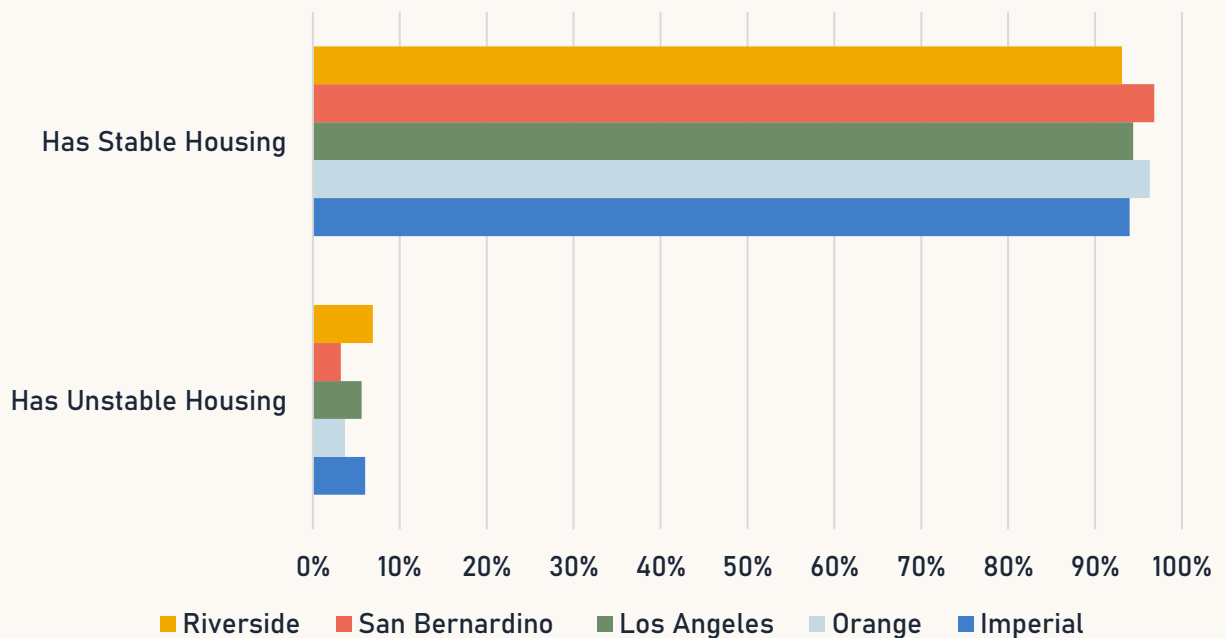
Source: 2023 ACS 1-year

Feels Safe in Neighborhood - Percentage of Adult Women



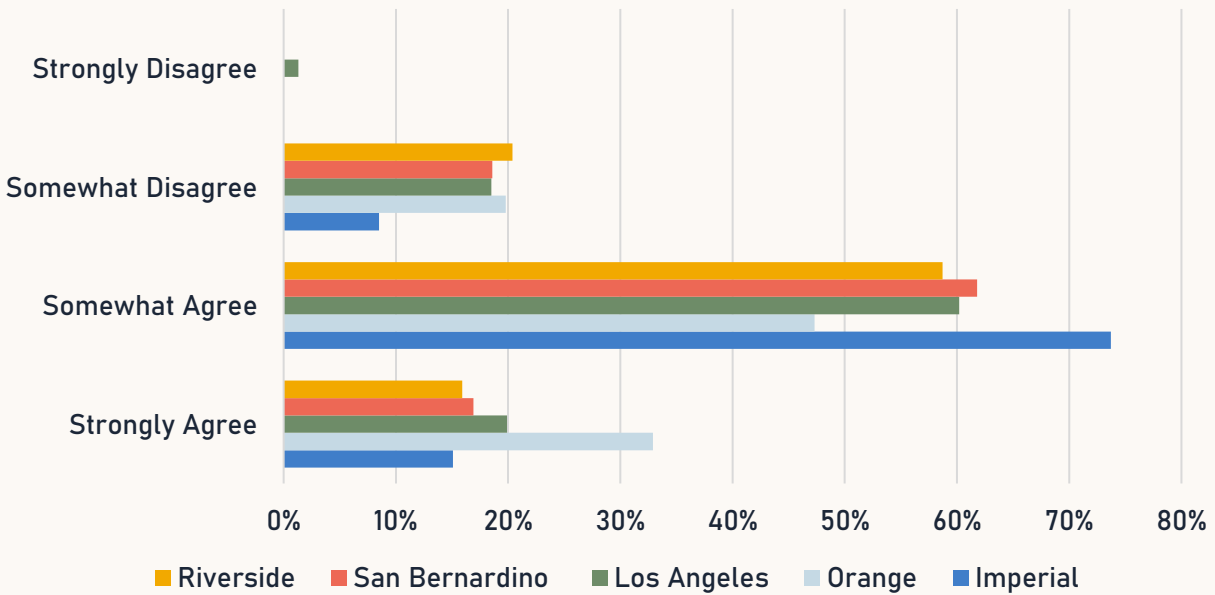
Source: 2019-2023 California Health Interview Survey

Housing Stability - Percentage of Adult Women



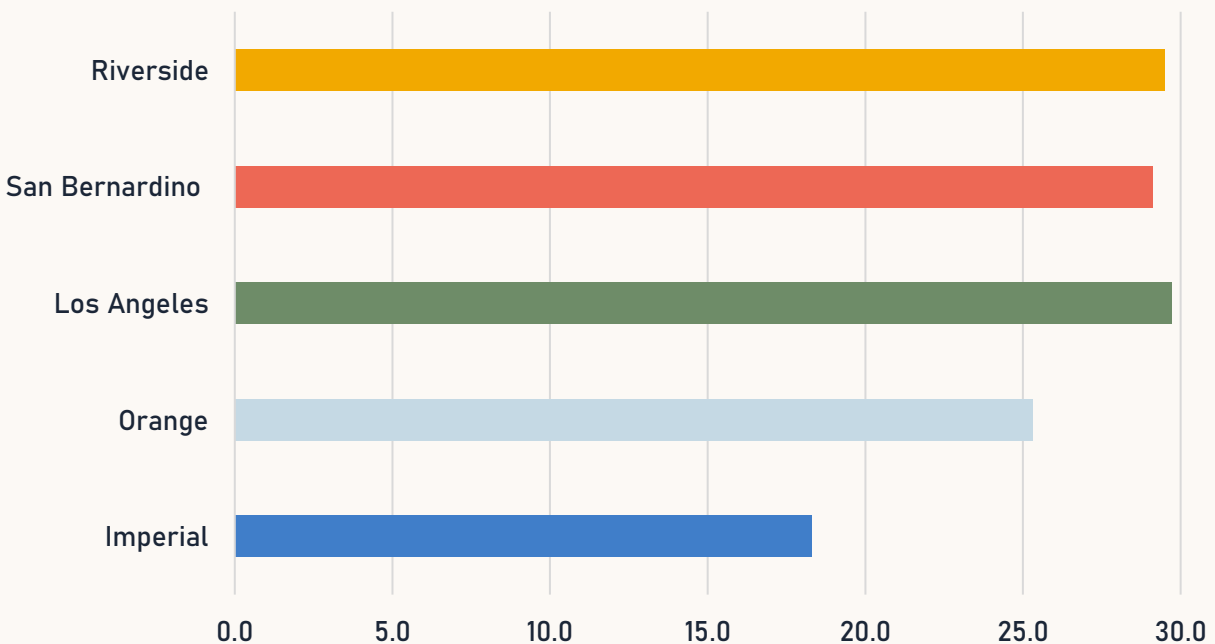
Source: 2022, 2023 California Health Interview Survey

Believes They Can Make a Difference - Percentage of Teen Girls



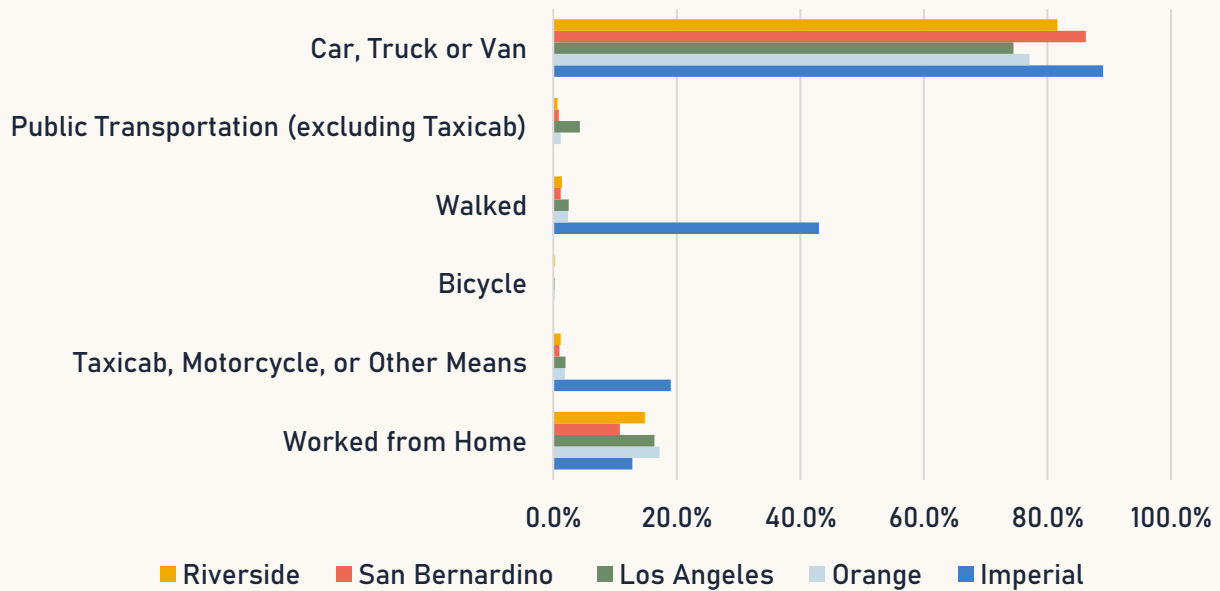
Source: 2019-2023 California Health Interview Survey

Mean Travel Time to Work (minutes) - Adult Women



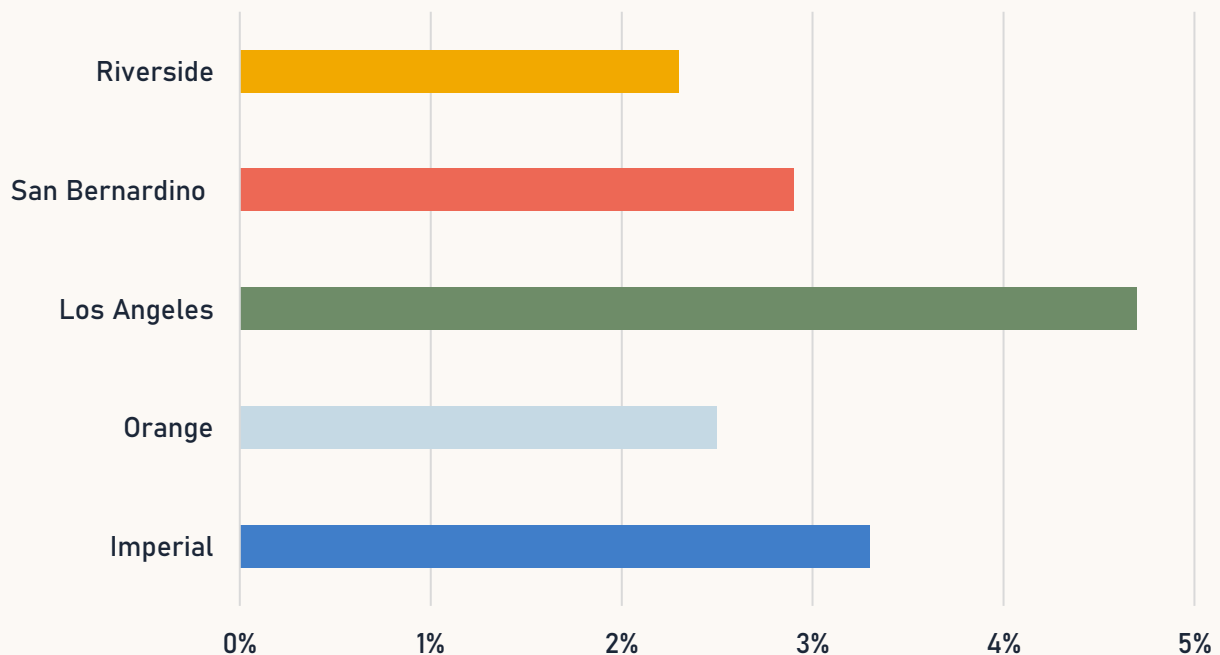
Source: 2023 ACS 1-year

Means of Transportation to Work - Percentage of Adult Women



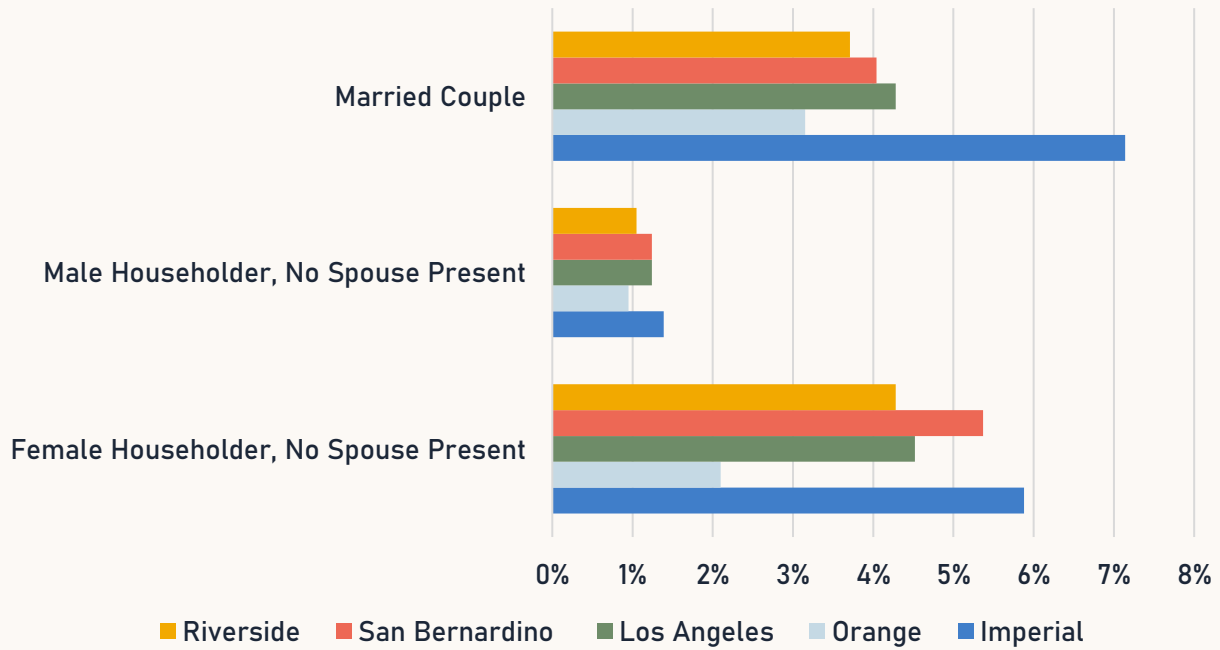
Source: 2023 ACS 1-year

No Vehicle Available - Percentage of Adult Women



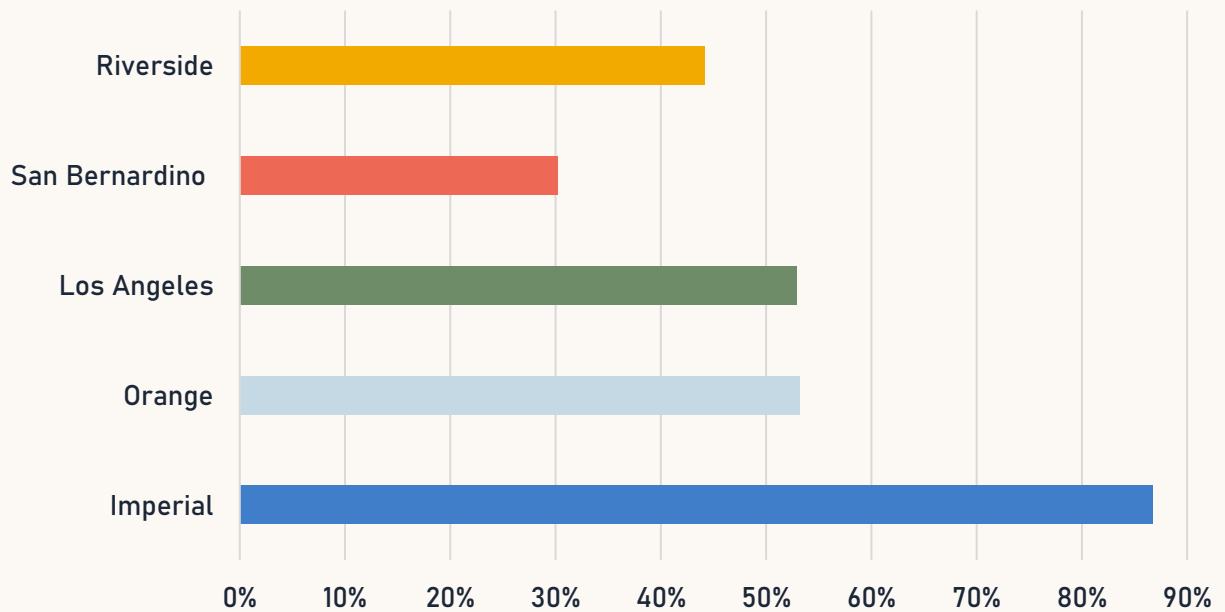
Source: 2023 ACS 1-year

Poverty Status by Family Type - Percentage



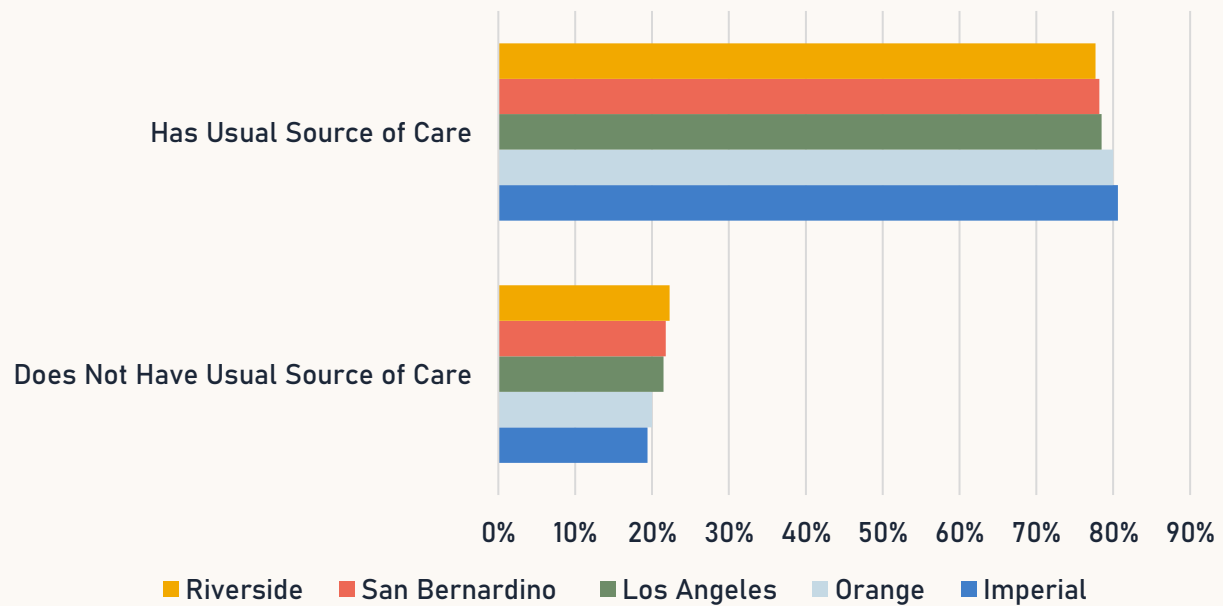
Source: 2023 ACS 1-year

Preschool Enrollment - Percentage of Girls (3-4 Years Old)



Source: 2023 ACS 1-year

Has Usual Source of Health Care - Percentage of Adult Women



Source: 2023 California Health Interview Survey

WORKS REFERENCED

Cantril, H. (1965). *The pattern of human concerns*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Gallup. (2024). "Indicator: Life Evaluation Index." *Gallup.com*, www.gallup.com/394505/indicator-life-evaluation-index.aspx.

Gallup. (2009). "Understanding How Gallup Uses the Cantril Scale." *Gallup.com*, news.gallup.com/poll/122453/understanding-gallup-uses-cantril-scale.aspx.

IEVCN - Measurement & Data. Inland Empire Vital Conditions Network. (2024, July 30). <https://ievitalconditionsnetwork.org/measurement-data/>

Kahneman, D., & Deaton, A. (2010). High income improves evaluation of life but not emotional well-being, *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A.* 107 (38) 16489-16493. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1011492107>

UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. (2025). *California Health Interview Survey (CHIS)*. <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/our-work/california-health-interview-survey-chis>

US Census Bureau. (2025). *American Community Survey (ACS)*. [Census.gov](https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/).

Yin, R., Lepinteur, A., Clark, A. E., & D'Ambrosio, C. (2023). Life Satisfaction and the Human Development Index Across the World. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 54(2), 269-282. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220221211044784>

This project was made possible by a generous gift from the Women's Giving Fund at the Inland Empire Community Foundation, *Where Giving Grows*.