



What Women in Rural North Carolina Have to Say About Their Lives:

“Everything that is done in the world is done by hope.”

--Martin Luther King, Jr.

Access to quality healthcare, insurance, and jobs that pay a living wage are primary concerns for women in rural North Carolina. Lack of economic growth in our rural communities has left many women and their families out of work or working in jobs with few benefits and no health insurance. Health and hope suffer as a result. Rural women have a lot to say about their lives. This is evident in the following responses to an open ended community survey question asking women what is the most pressing issue facing their community:

“The increasing cost of health care, not only premiums for coverage but the cost of prescriptions, co-pays, hospitals, etc. The cost for those without coverage is ridiculous and causing some people to go without needed tests, prescriptions etc.”

“THE ECONOMY! I live in a very small town that once thrived off the tobacco market and textiles. Over the past 10-15 yrs. the economy has gotten worse due to changes in tobacco industry (which I don’t object to) and effects of NAFTA on textiles causing plant closures.”

“Wages aren’t keeping up with the total rising cost of living that increases every year as women’s health has a tendency to decline as we get older and need more medications.”

“Small businesses keeping up with high competitors. There is a lack of economic growth in these small and poor communities.”

Statistical frequencies for community survey question responses provide powerful, valuable information regarding the lives of women in rural North Carolina:

- *In a random sample of the community approximately 22% of the women surveyed rated their health as fair or poor.*
- *29% reported at least three days of poor physical health in the past thirty days.*
- *38% reported at least three days of poor mental health (including stress, depression, and problems with emotion) in the past thirty days.*
- *21% reported that poor mental and/or physical health prevented them from doing their usual activities for at least three days of the past thirty.*
- *24% had no form of health care coverage, including health insurance, prepaid plans such as HMOs, or government plans such as Medicare or Medicaid.*
- *Over 50% were trying to lose weight.*
- *84% believe economic conditions in their community are the same or worse than they were one year ago.*
- *69% believe economic conditions in their community are the same or worse than they were five years ago.*

Healthy weight is a strong indicator of overall health. Self reported Body Mass Indexes (Weight in Pounds and Height in Meters) of the women surveyed revealed that nearly 60% were obese; this percentage does not include those considered overweight. HOPE Works is addressing the links between health/weight and poverty.

The most frequently cited problems facing rural communities:

- Job loss and the economy
- Drugs and alcohol
- Social change/Loss of capital
- Poverty
- Immigration
- Cost of healthcare and prescriptions
- The community environment (hog/poultry farms, proposed landfills)
- Health issues (including obesity and lack of health insurance) were frequently mentioned within the context of poverty and unemployment. (Nearly ¼ of women had no form of health care coverage whatsoever)

Additional concerns of rural women:

“Education (lack of) and the ability to pay for it.”

“Over crowding in our school districts, lack of money for education.”

“Lack of educational opportunities and motivational tools for children in disadvantaged households. Also drugs and its trickle down effect with respect to crime.”

“We don’t have any restaurants that serve healthy food. Everything is fast food.”

“Drugs, violence, alcohol, and abuse.”

“The water in our community is a very big issue.”

“The growing poverty and Medicaid population.”

“Meeting the needs of people in crisis situations, help for single income homes to be able to live more independently.”

“Environmental issues.”



Rural women in North Carolina want and deserve adequate health care, health insurance, and more jobs that provide a living wage to cover basic needs. They are informed, empowered, and have a lot to say about their lives. They can tell you how rural communities in North Carolina can be improved for the betterment of our state and our families. Are you ready to listen?

Data provided in this handout is from a 2005 UNC Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention community survey.

Surveys were distributed to a random sample of women drawn from the North Carolina Division of Motor Vehicle’s records. This analysis is from 555 returned surveys. They provide insight into the health of rural NC women and what they believe are the biggest challenges facing their communities. The surveys are part of The HOPE Works and Seeds of HOPE projects. Data gathered from the surveys was used to assess relationships among hope, body mass index, demographic, health, economic, and social factors¹. HOPE stands for Health, Opportunities, Partnerships, and Empowerment.

¹ Benedict, Salli et al. Report from the CDC: "Seeds of HOPE: A Model for Addressing Social and Economic Determinants of Health in a Women’s Obesity Prevention Project in Two Rural Communities". *Journal of Women’s Health*: Volume 16, Number 8, 2007: 1117-1124.