FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS
Six, two-hour focus groups were conducted from 10/22-10/25, 2018 with women residents of El Paso. The groups had between 5 and 7 participants.

Given that the survey’s sample skewed towards higher income and higher education, the groups focused on capturing the experiences of low to median income women.

Four of the groups were conducted in English, with age and income as the key classifying variables.

Two groups were conducted in Spanish, with age being the main classifying variable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENGLISH GROUPS</th>
<th>GROUP 1</th>
<th>GROUP 2</th>
<th>GROUP 3</th>
<th>GROUP 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGE GROUP</td>
<td>18-35</td>
<td></td>
<td>36 - 65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCOME</td>
<td>&lt;$30K</td>
<td>$31K +</td>
<td>&lt;$30K</td>
<td>$31K +</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPANISH GROUPS</th>
<th>GROUP 5</th>
<th>GROUP 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGE GROUP</td>
<td>18-35</td>
<td>36 - 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCOME</td>
<td>ALL INCOMES</td>
<td>ALL INCOMES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The discussion guide was structured to address key hypotheses presented in the research proposal, using as an orienting framework the “sticky floor” metaphor to social mobility (Harlan and Berheide, 1994).

- **Conceptual Framework**
  - **Sticky Floors**
    - Poor women
    - Scarce level of education and training
    - Out of job market and precarious jobs
  - **Glass Ceilings**
    - Women with higher education
    - High household income
    - Faced with barriers that hinder their progress
  - **Broken Ladders**
    - Secondary education
    - Middle income
    - Lacking safety nets that allow them to progress or prevent them from falling to sticky floors
## Age, Marital Status and Children

### Age Range

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-21</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-29</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-39</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Marital Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Mothers with children under 18 in the home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO*</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you have children under the age of 18 living at home with you?

*7 of those who are not parents live in households along with siblings or with grandchildren under 18.

Which age range best describes you?

N = 35
## Education and Income Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Level of Education</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not complete High School</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School/GED</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college*</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Graduate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $30K</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000 - $59,999</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000 - $74,999</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000 - $99,999</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 - $149,999</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150,000 +</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is the highest level of education you have completed? What is your annual household income before taxes?

*4 of the 14 respondents are currently attending college.*
### Ethnicity and Employment Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican/Mexican American</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not employed, looking for work</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not employed, NOT looking for work</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which of the following categories best describes your ethnic background?
Geographic Representation

What is your ZIP code?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zip Code</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>79938</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79936</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>79930</td>
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<tr>
<td>79928</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79925</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>79924</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79915</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>79912</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>79908</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>79907</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79906</td>
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<td>79904</td>
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<tr>
<td>79902</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79821</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>
The session began by discussing respondents’ educational journey.

- Some participants shared that education was not always a priority in their lives, and only later in life have they come to understand – and to regret, the impact on their ability to secure a well-paying job.
- Whether participants opted to marry, have children, or postponed their education to join the workforce, most have struggled securing employment and are now in the process of resuming their education.

I got pregnant at 19...I was super sick and I couldn't't make it to classes...going to college just wasn't in the cards for a long time, daycare was really expensive and it just wasn't feasible. I took time off for the family...I am doing on-line school now.

Shanna - 31, income of $51K
Sticky Floor Issues
Education

- Participants who are currently in college must work to cover expenses financial aid does not.
  - Those who rely on public transportation have a particularly difficult time scheduling classes and work, as bus schedules and routes are not always accommodating.
- Participants who are seeking graduate degrees are relying on student loans to finance their education, and anticipate that in order to reach their peak earning potential (and to afford paying back the loans) they will have to leave El Paso.

Q. How has your family situation influenced your educational goals?

“I told my mom I wanted to go back to school, and my mom told me “No, no, no, you stay there working. I need you to provide for the house.” I still would like to further my education.”
- Mary- 40, income of $8k

“No puedo completar el GED porque tengo que cuidar a mi niña y necesito pagar guardería si vuelvo a la escuela porque no tengo familiares aquí en El Paso.”
- Jomayra- 31, income of $21k
Across all participants, finding full time employment has proved challenging.

- Employers prefer to offer part time positions to avoid having to provide benefits.

The challenge of finding a job is made greater for those just entering the workforce after college. Lacking experience, they often settle for low-skill positions that pay minimum wage.

Older women face a similar problem for the opposite reasons: they are often let go so employers don’t have to compensate them based on their accumulated experience.

Many recent arrivals find they can’t secure a job unless they are functionally bilingual.

- This applies to women who relocate to El Paso as a result of a partner’s military assignment, as to women who move here from Mexico.

Some women with small children opted not to return to the workforce given the cost of childcare – they calculate that their contribution to the household income would not justify leaving their kids.

- Those who do work rely on family members for childcare.
Pressing financial needs and few employment opportunities have lead women to participate in the informal economy by providing goods and services on a small scale.

The most common venture is selling homemade foods – often in partnership with other women who finance the enterprise for a share of the profit.

Some women earn money by baby sitting or cleaning yards, while others sell assorted items they secure at low cost over the internet.

“I do poop scooping for other people’s yards.”
- Danielle, 26, 32k household income

“Back when I didn’t have Medicare, I needed to buy my medicines. My sister said, “pos pon la feria” and I asked, “que vamos a vender?” she said, “empanadas de carne molida y chile Colorado.”
- Shirley, 51, 25k household income

“I do little businesses on top of my job. Like selling Christmas decorations, for example, ordering stuff on Alibaba, and then reselling it on eBay and Amazon. I do stock trading.”
- Angie, 30, 160k household income

“I used to sell burritos. This girl would put all the capital and I would do the labor... First day we made $400 and something only in 3 hours.
- Mary, 40, 8k household income
A few of the women pursued their entrepreneurial interests and are actually making a living.

- When asked, most expressed an interest in starting their own business, but very few are confident about their credit history to be able to secure a small business loan.
- In fact, several were vocal about not trusting financial institutions, preferring instead to borrow from family or friends.

“Tengo un salon de estetica. Me fui a la escuela de lo de cosmetologia. Termine lo de cosmetologia...y comprando todo muy sencillito, basico y ya tengo 4 años con el salon. Pero si es mucha dedicacion, dedicarle mucho tiempo.”

-Liliana, 45, 35k household income

“Yo estoy haciendo una loteria antigua, como la loteria pero esto es de puras antiguedades. He hecho eventos para niños...El siguiente va a ser en el hospital Thomason para diciembre para la gente de cancer, entonces ahí mismo yo vendo mi producto, le saco poco pero estoy ayudando.”

-Patricia, 61, 60k household income
Regardless of income, respondents wish they had better financial management skills.

Parents were a positive influence for some who learned good **spending and saving** habits at home – most have carried those habits to adulthood.

A majority, however, learned how to manage their funds via trial and error.

With few exceptions, participants do not have a savings fund for emergencies, leading some to declare **bankruptcy** when financial issues became unmanageable.

Still, even those with **emergency funds** often see themselves challenged by unexpected expenses.

**We have an emergency savings, but it's going out the door this year...we've had car issues, our dryer went out, the water heater busted, then we found out our daughter had type 1 diabetes so then we had to pay for the insulin. 5 pens is $600. We started the year with about 7 grand in savings and now we are down to about $200.**

Jennifer – 31, income $12K
In spite of their best efforts, some women mentioned that the spending habits of their spouse/partner is a significant factor in their inability to keep within their budget or to accumulate any savings.

Home ownership is a goal for all renters, but many mentioned that credit card debt and student loans are keeping them from being able to save for a down payment.

Given the opportunity, a majority would attend classes for first-time home buyers.

Most were unaware that local financial institutions already have such programs in place.

Q. Do you have your own spending money? Do you have a savings account?

“I will start saving up because my husband loves to spend money like if it falls from the sky.” Veronica- 41, income of $24k
Broken Ladder Issues
Childcare

- While participants recognize the high cost of childcare, cost is not the reason most do not place their children in daycare centers.
- Concern about the dangers children might be exposed to in daycare has led mothers to keep the children at home, or to rely only on relatives.
  - Mothers are even more reluctant to rely on daycare when their children have special needs.

Q. What challenges do you face finding accessing childcare?

“My son has ADHD and my daughter can’t keep an eye on him.”
- Mary- 40, income of $8k

“I do want to work but I don’t trust people with my kids, I wont leave my kids with anybody. Especially with my new born daughter she’s only 4 months old. Its hard for me to trust people especially knowing that not everyone is who they say they are.”
- Marissa- 29, income of $14K
Only in a few instances did lack of affordable childcare prevent respondents from following their professional goals.

However, mothers looking to return to the workforce often find that daycare schedules are not accommodating of all work schedules.

Unable to return to work, some of these women find themselves isolated and depressed.

Some women find themselves already planning for the time when they will be charged with caring for their aging parents.

In some instances, women are already responsible for the medical care of an ill, elderly parent and have made financial sacrifices to have parents move in to their homes.

Those who still have children in the home stress over the added expense of having to care for a parent, especially when the parent requires ongoing medical attention and medications.
Affordable healthcare is a major concern for most participants, many who have postponed medical care because of cost or work-related constraints, sometimes with extreme negative health consequences.

- About half of respondents are uninsured and some have often traveled to Juarez for cheaper medical care and medications.
- Those with insurance anticipate their costs to continue to rise and are concerned for older children who will age-out of family policies.

“I [did not forego medical treatment ] because someone else needed it, but because of work, because I am afraid to ask for time because then he’s going to be like “she’s not serious about her work. “

Annie – 30, income of $160K
Q. Did you ever have to forego medical attention because you could not afford it or because someone else in the family needed it more?

“Yes, my teeth. I have an under bite. It’s awful! My little boy needed to go to the ear doctor. Medicaid doesn’t even provide dental.”
- Veronica- 41, income of $24k

“Yes, I was saving for my dental work but then my daughter got sick and gave her the money. Later on I saved the money.”
- Maria- 56, income of $19k
Most respondents are aware of food insecurity in their communities or have experienced it first hand.

Poor spending habits and lack of budgeting leads some to run out of funds midway through the month – food spending suffers most.

Others find that their income disqualifies them from assistance programs, but what they make is still not enough to cover all living expenses.

It was mentioned that this is an issue few would openly discuss because of shame, and pride keeps people from seeking government assistance.

Few had any knowledge of local resources where families can receive food assistance.

“A friend told me about a month ago that she is starving herself so her kid could eat. She’s been doing this for about 6 months. She fell into the middle class thing where she couldn’t afford food but didn’t qualify for food stamps.”

Jenn - 31, income of $12K

“Being in the military…I know a lot of military families who have struggled especially the lower enlisted. Low income people are shamed for buying good foods on SNAP, like people will yell at them at the grocery store.”

Shanna - 31, income of $51k
Q. Have you or someone you know faced food insecurity?

“I get $98 of food stamps. If you don’t buy frijoles, sopa, chile y queso no te rinde... I don’t know where to seek for assistance.”
- Shirley- 51, income of $25k

“Bueno si porque una vez le traje a mis niños sus taquitos de carne molida con arroz pero no alcancé a comer yo. Y me termine comiendo un plátano.”
- Jomayra- 31, income of $21k
Glass Ceiling Issues
Gender Discrimination, Sexual Harassment

- Regardless of age and income, participants experienced some form of discrimination in the workplace.
  - Older participants were locked out of job opportunities because they were seen as “overqualified” while younger women expressed frustration at not being given the opportunity to gain experience.
  - The recent public discussion of the #metoo movement led older participants to recognize they had been sexually harassed, most during their first employment experience.
  - Some participants in their 20s did not seem to have a clear understanding of sexual harassment.

“I work in a male dominated industry. I face age discrimination, sex discrimination, and glass ceiling every day. I don’t get invited to certain meetings even though I am a program manager and my boss likes certain men who talk about football. I get paid less than everyone and I think age has a lot to do with it too. When there is administrative work, it goes to me and it is not given to the intern who is a male.”

Annie – 30, Income of $160K
Glass Ceiling Issues
Gender Discrimination, Sexual Harassment

Q. Have you ever faced sexual harassment?

“I feel like every woman has a “me too” story unfortunately, but I did have one when I was 19... I happened to get on the elevator [at work] and [the security guard] was in the elevator and when the elevator closed he said "hey you got something in your eye"...he came up to me so I moved back and he pushed me back, grabbed my chest and started kissing me...the door opened and he laughed and just walked away.”

-Laura- 51, income of $54k

Q. Have you ever faced gender discrimination?

“At my job uhm, at first they thought women couldn’t’ t be translators. At first they thought men could talk to women about like a pap-smear or like a C-section...but I am getting paid $2 [an hour] less than what a guy is getting paid.”

-Bianca- 23, income of $22k

Q. Did you report it?

A. “Yo lo quise reportar porque - si de por si no creo que este seguro lo que me hizo, no le quise llamar la atención. Tenia miedo de que ese alumno me esperara fuera de clase.”

-Sofia- 19, income of $5k
A few participants know people who are reluctant to seek government assistance because they fear being targeted by immigration.

They have avoided asking for financial aid, food stamps and medical services.

In one instance, a parent self-deported for fear of being incarcerated long-term given prior immigration violations.

“Even if (women) have kids who are U.S. citizens, they don’t want to ask for food stamps. But I tell them that it’s for their kids not for you.”

Maria – 56, income of $19k

“Yo si llegue al extremo de no pedir Medicaid ni nada porque si mi esposo quiere renovar la residencia y no se la dan. Si calificábamos, y este y ya ahorita se hizo ciudadano.”

-Jomayra- 31, income of $21k
Other Relevant Topics
Civic Participation

- With few exceptions, participants were following coverage of the issues in the upcoming midterm elections, planned on voting or had voted.
- The few who had no intention on voting said they are uninformed and feel their vote does not count.

Q. Will you vote on the upcoming [November] elections?

No because I don’t think my vote counts. I lost faith in our political system. It’s a waste of time. Everyone was for Hillary and Trump still won.

Mary C. - 40, Income of $8k

“I feel like my vote doesn’t matter, but at the same time I do believe it counts.”

-Teresa- 42, income of $20k
A number of women shared their experiences of being date raped, being raped on campus by an instructor, being sexually molested during their childhood by family members, or being physically and mentally abused by a partner.

Some of these women had never verbalized their experience to anyone, ever, and expressed a sense of relief at being able to openly discuss their trauma.

The long term negative impact of these events on the women was very different, but for all of them it was haunting.

A young college-aged woman who was raped by a boyfriend in high school has since been unable to focus on her academics. She is depressed and feels *as if she’s lost*. She has never sought professional help and has never told her family or friends.

An older woman who was raped during graduate school in the ’90s also described episodes of severe depression. Her disposition, however, is one of self-indulgence. She can’t hold a job for very long, and careless spending has led to significant debt.

“One year into my master’s degree this instructor took advantage of me, he’s a rapist...he was not convicted. I had to leave El Paso- I didn’t want to be seen as ‘that girl who was raped’...he’s back teaching.”

-Teresa- 42, income of $20k

“My father sexually abused me as a little girl, my mom did not believe me.”

-Mary- 40, income of $8k
Sexual Violence is a Common Experience

Lifetime Impact

- Those who describe childhood sexual abuse have a hardened attitude towards life. In both instances, their mothers did not believe them – so they constantly had to face their abusers at family gatherings.

- The women had to leave their home as teenagers in order to survive – they dropped out of school, and only years later did they get their GED.

- In both instances, their partners were physically and verbally abusive.

- With one exception, women never reported the sexual abuse and sexual assaults they were victim to.
  - When family members were involved, no action was taken to report them to the authorities.

- The consequences associated with a rape trial – where the accused was not convicted, led the woman to leave El Paso to avoid being ostracized.

“I was sexually abused as a child [by my father] and I then was severely abused my the father of my kids, he broke my ribs and my back. He also cut my hair, humiliated me.”
- Shirley- 51, income of $21k
Discussion of mental health issues led some respondents to reveal their struggles with depression and anxiety – in some cases, due to trauma from sexual violence.

An issue of concern is that only a few have sought help from mental health professionals or have discussed their trauma with anyone.

Most did not know where to go to receive mental health counseling.

More troubling is the unwillingness by some women to acknowledge their mental illness.

Whether this is a result of a family’s cultural or religious norms, some described quietly suffering through episodes of severe depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder – sometimes over the span of decades.

The few who eventually sought professional help wished they had done it sooner.

Upon feeling better, they often had to explain to their family the medical nature of their mental illness – something not all families were willing to accept.