

City Has High Levels of Elderly Abuse, Accidents

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San Angelo has the lowest violent crime rate out of the four area West Texas cities including Abilene, Midland, and Odessa. The crime rate, however, does not account for all kinds of violence taking place in communities. When we add-in those other types, San Angelo joins Odessa as one of the two most dangerous places in the region. The newest update of the West Texas Violence Index by Community Development Initiatives at ASU informs this basic picture.

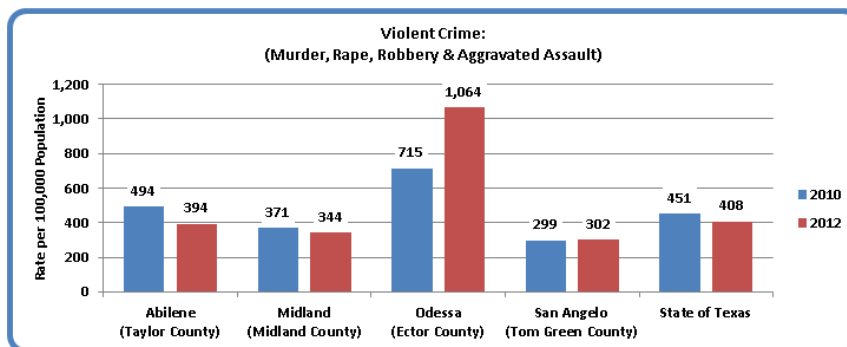
The West Texas Violence Index compares the four area cities of Abilene, Midland, Odessa, and San Angelo on violent events that can devastate a community and its people. A distinctive aspect of the Index is that, unlike a snapshot of a crime spree or a rash of accidents, it looks beyond a particular form of violence at a single point-in-time. The Index tracks six indicators of different types of violence over the most recent three-years of available data for each type. The six indicators for the Index are violent crime, family violence, child abuse or neglect, suicide, accidental deaths, and abuse of elderly and disabled persons.

We use a scoring system at Community Development Initiatives as one technique to analyze differences between the cities on the violence indicators. First, we place the most recent available year of data for each six types of violence on a 100-point scale with higher scores representing less violence. Then a three-year trend adjustment factor proportionately decreases the score if a city is moving toward more violence on an indicator. Of course, the city's score will increase by the trend adjustment if it is displaying less violence over three years. A lower level of violence or a trend toward decreasing violence drives scores higher for a city. A high level of violence or an increasing trend pushes scores lower.

Midland averaged 68 on the 100-point scale for all six indicators showing that it represents the least violent of the four West Texas cities. Abilene is next with an average score of 55.

Lower averages of 44 for San Angelo and 40 for Odessa indicate that these are the more dangerous places among the four cities. Interestingly, however, these cities differ in terms of the types of violence that are more prevalent in each.

Comparison of Violent Crime Indicators

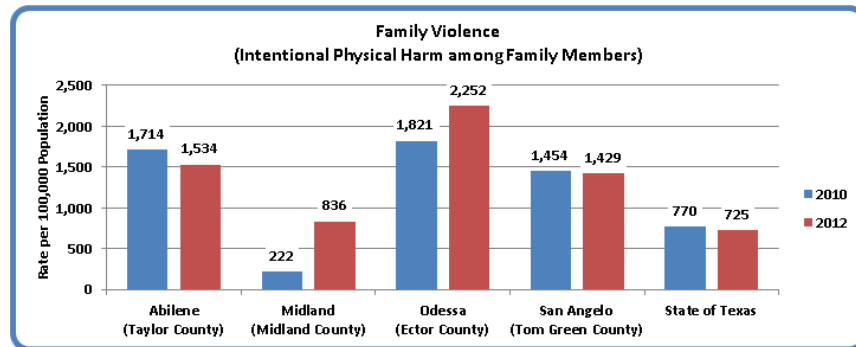


Odessa has a substantially higher violent crime rate challenge compared to the other cities. In 2010, Odessa's rate of violent crime was 715 per 100,000 residents. This climbed by 49 percent

to 1,064 per 100,000 in 2012. Even as San Angelo maintains the lowest violent crime rate of the West Texas cities, it was the only other of the four places to see an increase (albeit a minimal increase) of violent crime.

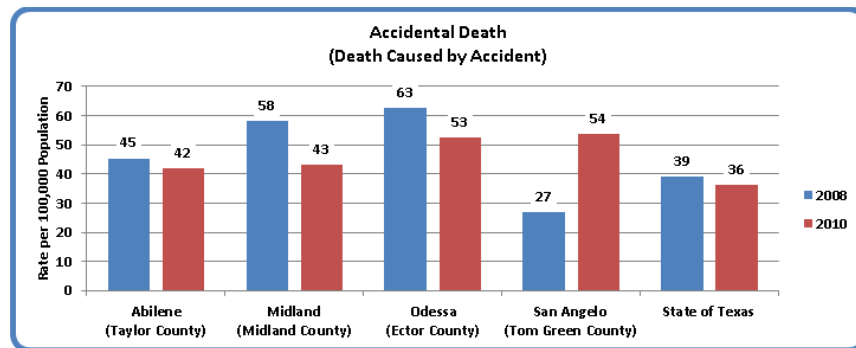
Family violence in Odessa is also high and rising. In 2010, Odessa had 1,821 incidents per 100,000 people. It shot up to 2,252 per 100,000 for 2012. Odessa’s family violence rate was 47 percent higher than the next level of 1,534 per 100,000 in Abilene.

Comparison of Family Violence Indicators



San Angelo leads the four West Texas cities on two different types of violence. In 2010, San Angelo and Tom Green County registered 54 accidental deaths per 100,000 residents. Although this was barely higher than the accidental death rate for Odessa and Ector County, it was a major spike up from the rate of 27 per 100,000 in 2008. Meantime, accidental deaths in Odessa and Ector were falling.

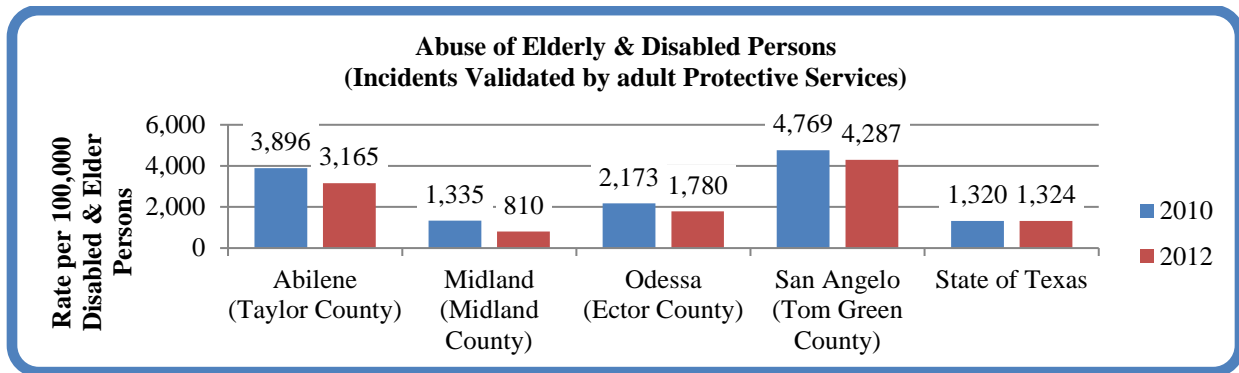
Comparison of Accidental Death Indicators



San Angelo also leads the four cities on the rate of abuse involving elderly and disabled persons. San Angelo and Tom Green County had 4,287 instances of abuse per 100,000 elder and disabled individuals in 2012. This was 1,122 (or 35%) more than Abilene and Taylor County with the next highest rate. The good news about abuse of elderly and disabled persons is a three-year trend toward reduction of this type of violence in all four West Texas cities.

Still, the most troubling feature of the picture for West Texas overall is its high level of violence in general. A trained eye will see this in charts comparing area cities with the State of Texas as a whole.

Comparison of Abuse of Elderly & Disabled Persons



Forty-eight comparisons between the four cities and the state are available in the charts. Half relate to the most recent data for each indicator and the other half compare data from 3 years prior.

The disquieting picture for West Texas is illustrated by the fact that the four area cities present higher levels of violence than the overall state on 34 (71%) of the 48 comparisons in the charts. The number of troubling comparisons for West Texas is proportionately higher (18 or 24 or 75%) if we focus only on the most recent regional and statewide data.

Ironically, the West Texas cities compare most favorably to the state as whole on the most well-known and widely distributed violence indicator, the measure of violent crime produced by the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting system. Only one West Texas city, Odessa, had a violent crime rate higher than the statewide level in 2012. By looking at a broader mix of events, however, we learn that West Texas is generally more dangerous than the overall state.

Javier Auyero of the University of Texas at Austin studies the impact of violence on neighborhoods and communities. His work highlights what should concern us about the disturbing levels of violence in West Texas. Understanding the dangers of violence "requires objective measures like counting bodies and injuries," he writes, "but we also need to understand how constant exposure to violence shapes individual ... worldviews [and] that means listening to those who suffer most – such as children and adolescents."

Improving neighborhoods or communities where people experience a "constant exposure to violence" is no easy matter, but neither complacency nor fatalism about the potentials offer any solution. Ask Shirley Franklin, a former big-city mayor who – like many other caring civic leaders – wondered what would become of Atlanta's most violent neighborhood.

Then, a philanthropic Atlanta-based land developer came on the scene to lead a public-private coalition to plan a redevelopment effort that would offer residents "an opportunity to thrive." Today, that most violent Atlanta neighborhood is flourishing with revitalized mixed-income housing options, high-quality cradle-to-college education opportunities for children and families, and a lively assortment of recreational and commercial service anchors.

It is amazing what communities can do when people work together!