

Saying NO to Citizen Complacency

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The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services recently released updates on child abuse or neglect across Texas. The report indicates 583 confirmed cases of child abuse or neglect in Tom Green County for 2014. This number translates to a local rate of child abuse that is more than double the level for the State of Texas as a whole.

Despite such alarming numbers, however, San Angelo citizens have some things to celebrate on the community's accomplishments toward lowering levels of overall violence. The newest update of the West Texas Violence Index produced by Community Development Initiatives at ASU documents the good news, as well as the bad.

The best news is that a previous release of the Violence Index in December of 2013 tagged San Angelo as one of the most dangerous cities when compared with three other West Texas cities that included Abilene, Odessa, and Midland. The current update indicates improvements that now position the city as one of the safest areas of the region.

The West Texas Violence Index compares data for the four cities 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 single type of violence at a specific point-in-time.

Indicators of the West Texas Violence Index

Indicators of the West Texas Violence Index	Abilene (Taylor County)	Midland (Midland County)	Odessa (Ector County)	San Angelo (Tom Green County)
Violent Crime, 2011-2013	82	99	0	96
Family Violence, 2011-2013	16	64	50	18
Sexual Assault, 2011-2013	0	53	72	100
Child Abuse or Neglect, 2011-2013	0	92	89	15
Suicide, 2010-2012	12	66	27	100
Accidental Death, 2010-2012	11	48	27	100
Violence Index Score (Average of Indicator Scores)	20	70	44	72

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 and neglect, suicide, accidental deaths, and sexual assault.

We use a scoring system at Community Development Initiatives to compare differences between the cities on these indicators. We placed the most recent available data for each type of violence on a 100-point scale with higher scores representing lower rates of occurrence for each indicator.

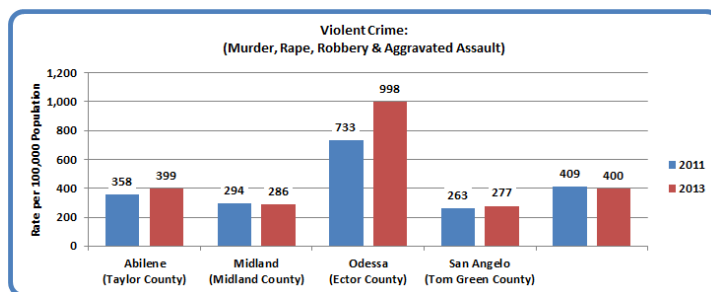
Then, we use a three-year trend adjustment factor to decrease the score if a city is moving toward more of a given type of violence. The adjustment factor, of course, increases the score for a city if the trend displays less of a type of violence over the three years.

In sum, lower current levels of violence and trends toward decreasing violence drive scores higher in our system. High current levels of violence and increasing trends push the scores lower.

San Angelo's average of 72 for all six indicators identifies the city as the least violent of the four West Texas cities. Midland is close with an average score of 70 followed by Odessa and Abilene. Interestingly, however, the cities differ in terms of the types of violence that are more (and less) prevalent in each locale.

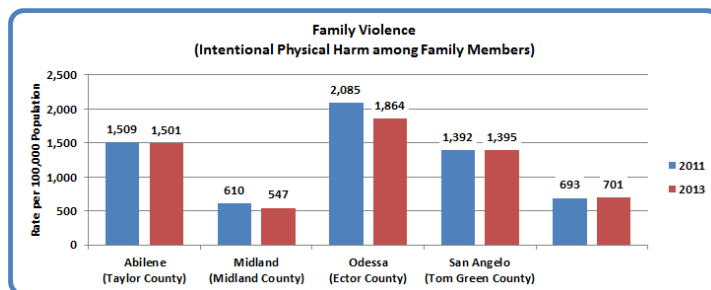
Odessa, for instance, experiences a substantially higher violent crime rate than the other cities. In 2011, Odessa's rate of violent crime was 733 incidents per 100,000 residents. This climbed by 36 percent to 998 per 100,000 in 2013. San Angelo, at 277 violent crimes per 100,000 residents, maintains the lowest violent crime rate of the West Texas cities.

Comparison of Violent Crime Indicators



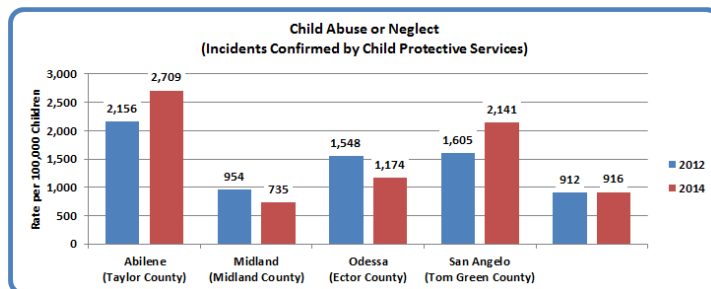
Family violence in Odessa is also higher than in the other three regional cities, but the good news for Odessa is that the rate of violent family incidents fell by 11 percent between 2011 and 2013.

Comparison of Family Violence Indicators

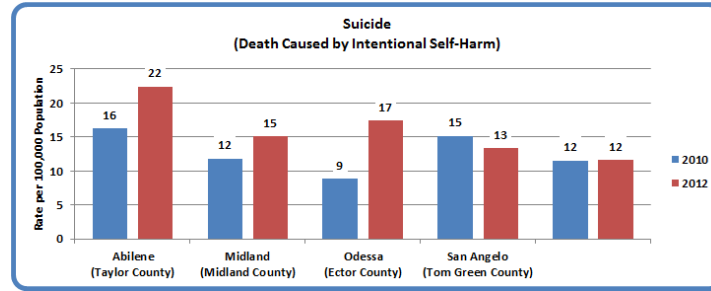


The recent data places Abilene and Taylor County at the top of the four West Texas cities on three different types of violence tracked in the index. The Abilene area registered the highest rates among the four cities on the incidence of suicide, child abuse or neglect, and sexual assault.

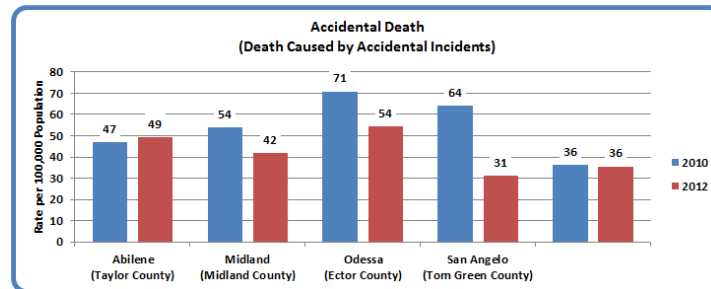
Comparison of Child Abuse Indicators



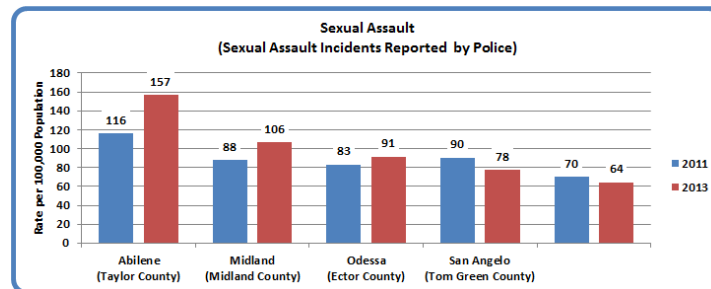
Comparison of Suicide Indicators



Comparison of Accidental Death Indicators



Comparison of Sexual Assault Indicators



A group of local residents recently announced intentions to form a new Concho Valley Citizens Care group to “build a positive support system” for law enforcement. The local community should join with the group and sing praise to law enforcement workers and the many other men and women doing the daily work to guide us toward lower levels of violence.

They include police and sheriff’s officers to be sure, but also judges, lawyers, justices of the peace, counselors, social workers, ministers, mentors, and crisis intervention workers who help us over the rough times to correct our behavior, and sometime deliver due sanctions. The energy the Concho Valley Coalition against Violence brings toward creating awareness of the issues is also moving.

Serving as a panelist at a recent forum on community-police relations, Police Chief Tim Vasquez, noting the good fortune of the relatively low crime rate in the city, cautioned against citizen complacency.

After all, we still live in a community with startling disparities in levels of crime and violence between the central city areas compared to the most privileged outer-loop neighborhoods to the

southwest of town. Perhaps the most troubling feature of the violence picture for San Angelo and West Texas, however, is the high level of regional violence compared to the state overall.

One of the four area cities, for instance, has a rate of violent crime that is more than double the level for the state. In addition, three of the regional cities have rates of family violence that are significantly higher. Three regional cities also outpace the state on rates of accidental deaths and on child abuse or neglect. All four-area cities have suicide and sexual assault rates exceeding the statewide benchmark.

Overall, the West Texas Violence Index includes 24 comparisons relating the most recently available data for the four regional cities with the state. The disquieting picture for West Texas is illustrated by the fact that the four area cities display higher levels of violence than the state on 18 (75%) of the 24 comparisons.

Chief Vasquez was on-point with the message on complacency. The time is right to celebrate progress. However, we have much, much more to do toward developing a community that heals the scars created by excessive, unjustifiable violence toward our families and neighbors.