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# Index of Youth Vulnerability

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Healthy Youth/Healthy Regions produced a series of twelve related Working Papers. These papers can be accessed via the Center for Regional Change website: <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/hyhr/main>

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## Key Findings

The Healthy Youth/Healthy Regions research team developed a geo-referenced Index of Youth Vulnerability to offer policy makers, advocates, foundations and other key stakeholders with a way to measure and target efforts to address disparities in youth well-being. The purpose of this index is to:

- Identify geographic areas with high concentrations of adolescents likely to face disproportionate levels of challenge in making a healthy transition to adulthood;
- Provide baseline data for tracking change over time;
- Provide a tool for modeling the potential effects of focused attention on particular populations.

### *Methods*

The index employs five research-based indicators/data points associated with young adult marginalization from pathways to a healthy adulthood: not completing high school, teen birth, foster care placement, involvement with the juvenile justice system, and low family income. Our dual objectives of presenting an analysis at the smallest feasible geographic enumeration unit (zip code) and using data that can be updated annually (we used 2008 data) have guided our selection of data sources and data points.

- High School Dropout. Research shows that youth who do not complete high school are vulnerable in many ways, including their economic well-being and health outcomes. We collected data for adults aged 18-24 who completed 9th to 12th grade but received no diploma, from the American Community Survey 2006-2008 3-year Estimates Dataset.
- Teen Birth. It has been shown that the population-wide percentage of teen births strongly resembles the teen birth rate. Data for all California births are available annually at the California Department of Public Health's vital records website.
- Foster Care. Yearly data on foster care entry and referral rates are collected and made available annually via the Child Welfare Dynamic Reporting System.
- Juvenile Felony Arrests. A state data request on youth engaged in the juvenile justice system was put on hold, so we used felony arrest data obtained from the California Department of Justice crime statistics website. The challenge of identifying and obtaining data on youth engagement in the juvenile justice system is an important finding of this work unto itself.
- Median Income. We used Geolytics, Inc. data to obtain information on median household income by zip code in the region.

We also look at the distribution of young adults who are neither in school nor working, and are therefore likely confronting substantial barriers in transitioning to a healthy, independent adulthood. Using data from an industry-based source of demographic data (Geolytics, Inc.) we show the ranking and underlying rates of disconnected youth in our region, although the unit scale masks what are likely greater differences across communities.

### *Mapping Youth Vulnerability*

The index map depicts, by zip code, the concentration of vulnerable populations, with darker blue areas indicating higher concentrations of vulnerability (Figure 1).

## Capital Region Index of Youth Vulnerability (By Zip Code)

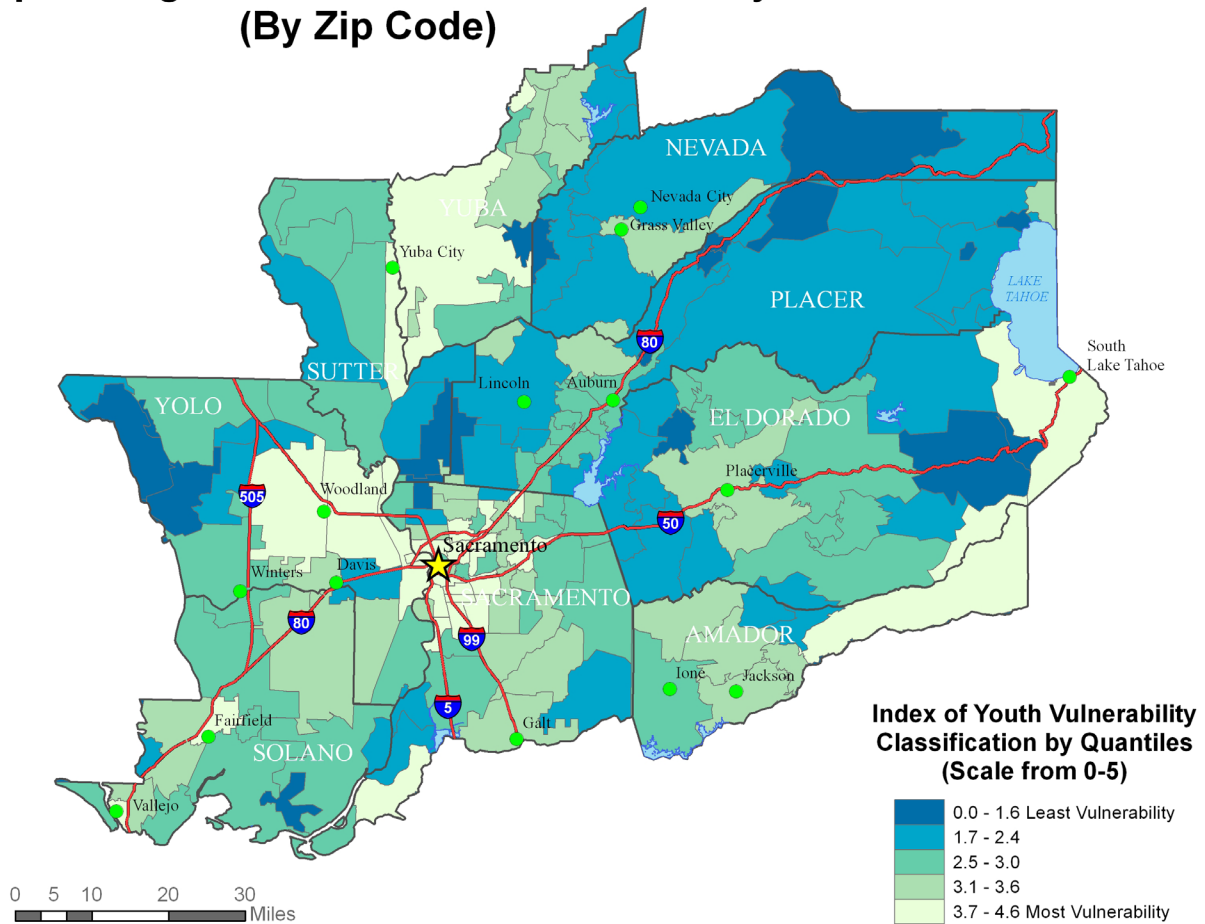


Figure 1: The index of youth vulnerability is based on the average of rank scores from: high school dropout, teen birth, foster care referral, juvenile felony arrest and median household income. The highest quintile (lightest color) represents places where relatively higher concentrations of youth are facing circumstances that increase their vulnerability to poor health, educational, economic, and civic trajectories.

## Implications for Action

Although some of the data did not lend itself well to zip code level interpretation (especially school dropout, out of work and out of school youth, and juvenile felony arrests), we believe there is value in drawing attention to geographies with high concentrations of young people likely to need additional support around transitioning to independent, healthy adulthood.

Viewing the region as a whole, areas in which young people are facing these challenges at consistently higher rates include Yuba County, West Sacramento, neighborhoods and unincorporated areas south and north of Sacramento, the Fairfield, Vallejo and Rio Vista areas of Solano County, and the South Lake Tahoe area of El Dorado County. Creative investments in and engagement with young people in these areas are especially needed to promote youth and regional health.