

Stockton report depicts sweeping South Jersey poverty zone

By REUBEN KRAMER, Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, May 12, 2015 2:18 pm

Six South Jersey counties rank among the most impoverished counties in the state, creating a sweeping, southern poverty zone that contrasts starkly with Central and Northern New Jersey, according to a report released Tuesday by Stockton University.

“When comparing New Jersey’s twenty-one counties, six of the eight Southern New Jersey counties rank in the bottom ten for median household income, percentage of households living in poverty, rates of unemployment, educational attainment levels, and health outcomes,” according to a report by Stockton’s William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy.

Why?

“It’s related to income, which is related to education attainment, which is related to education opportunity, which is related to transportation. All of these are interrelated,” said Kelly Sloane, a public policy researcher at Stockton who authored the study. “It is circular and it’s intergenerational,” she said.

The optics of poverty in large cities like Trenton and Newark are striking. South Jersey, though, is beset by an insidious, sprawling, often rural strain of poverty that obscures New Jersey’s acute north-south poverty divide, according to the report, “Economic Indicators and Quality of Life in Southern New Jersey.”

Atlantic and Cumberland Counties were among the worst-performing counties on several metrics, including 2015 unemployment rates. At 10.9 percent and 10.7 percent, respectively, they had the two highest rates in the state.

They also registered the lowest 2013 median incomes in New Jersey.

Cumberland’s, at \$48,694, ranked last. Atlantic County, at \$52,646, was second-lowest.

Both were far below that state average of about \$70,000 and were less than half the median income of state-leading Hunterdon County’s \$105,950 figure. Camden, Cape May, Ocean and Salem Counties also ranked in the state’s lowest-ten median county incomes.



All six counties ranked in the top-eleven for percentage of population living below the 2013 federal poverty threshold. Cumberland County, at 18.5 percent, had the highest rate in the state.

Burlington County, which had the fourth-lowest rate in New Jersey, was a consistent exception to the cluster of struggling South Jersey counties, as was Gloucester County.

Again, Sloane said, a web of factors are likely at work. "I would assume that proximity to Philadelphia has some bearing," she said.