New Research on the Status of Women and Girls in Minnesota Illuminates Pathways to Gender Equality
Data findings in economics, safety, health, and leadership

MINNEAPOLIS – (June 3, 2014) – The Women’s Foundation of Minnesota, in partnership with the University of Minnesota Humphrey School’s Center on Women & Public Policy, released new research today on the status of women and girls in the state in four key areas: economics, safety, health, and leadership. The research is available at WFMN.ORG.

Produced biennially, the Foundation uses the research to raise awareness and energize the momentum to shift attitudes, institutions, systems and policies that creates pathways to economic prosperity, safety, wellness, and equal leadership for all of the state’s women and girls.

“At the Women’s Foundation, we know that the strongest grantmaking and policies to improve the lives of all Minnesotans is data driven,” said Lee Roper-Batker, president and CEO of Women’s Foundation of Minnesota. “A great example: our economics research provided the basis for the Women’s Economic Security Act, signed into state law by Gov. Dayton on Mother’s Day (May 11, 2014).”

According to Roper-Batker, the overall research shows that while inequalities exist for all women and girls in Minnesota, even greater disparities exist for women and girls of color, rural women and girls, and older women.

“Gender inequality continues to render women the nation’s poorest, reinforce systemic violence, produce substandard health outcomes, and deny women leadership opportunities across all sectors,” said Roper-Batker. “When women thrive, so do their families and communities. Minnesota can and must do better. The data help us get there.”

ECONOMICS

“We know that for women in our state to achieve economic security, women must first have economic opportunity, including access to education and training, good jobs, and childcare. This will improve the lives of women and of all Minnesotans,” said Roper-Batker.

According to Roper-Batker, the data reveal that the greatest barriers to economic security are poverty, the wage gap, and occupational clustering.

Minnesota’s female-headed households are more likely than other family configurations to be in poverty. Since 2000, there has been a 64 percent increase in the number of families with children below the poverty line. This is important, because working mothers in Minnesota are increasingly the primary breadwinners in their families.

“Regardless of education, age, or race and ethnicity, the wage gap continues to prevent Minnesota women and their families from receiving their fair share,” said Roper-Batker.

According to the research, all full-time working women earn less than white men. White, Asian American, African American, American Indian and Latina women earn $0.80, $0.74, $0.62, $0.62 and $0.57 on the dollar, respectively, compared to white men. Women with
disabilities and women who have lived in the U.S. six-10 years earn $0.61 and $0.58 on the dollar, respectively, compared to white men.

“Occupational clustering also contributes to the wage gap, threatens women’s economic security and stability, and compromises the productivity of Minnesota’s economy,” said Roper-Batker.

Twenty-nine percent (29%) of Minnesota’s white men work in sales, office and service compared to 63 percent of African American, 62 percent of American Indian and 57 percent of Latina women.

The poverty rate for Minnesota’s African American families with children is higher than the national average, 13.9% for married households in Minnesota compared to 11% nationally and 58.7% for Minnesota’s female-headed families versus 47.5% nationally. Poverty rates are also high for Latina (50%) and American Indian (52.1%) female-headed families.

There are more than twice as many Minnesota elder women living in poverty than men (38,463 compared to 16,915).

SAFETY

The world over and here in Minnesota, gender-based violence is a reality for women and girls. “Minnesota girls are growing up in a culture that both sexualizes them and normalizes gender-based violence,” said Roper-Batker.

“The Centers for Disease Control estimates that 684,000 Minnesota women are survivors of rape, physical violence and/or stalking -- a number, for example, that could fill the 39,000-seat Target Field 17 times,” said Roper-Batker. "While the Twins are hitting home runs for the win, let’s do the same to create a safe world for our state’s women and girls.”

Objectification

According to the research, almost sixty percent (60%) of Minnesota 9th and 11th graders spent two or more hours per school night watching television, movies or videos, where they are bombarded with images of sexualized female bodies. Even in G-rated family films, female characters continue to show dramatically more skin than their male counterparts, and feature extremely tiny waists and other exaggerated body characteristics. From a very young age, this hypersexualization and objectification of female characters leads to unrealistic body ideals.

The report also found that girls exposed to sexualizing and objectifying media are more likely to experience body dissatisfaction, depression, lower self-esteem, and diminished cognitive abilities. Such exposure also impacts girls’ and boys’ views on dating, boys’ views on sexual harassment of girls, and “normalization” of sexual violence by both boys and girls.

Harassment

Many teen girls regard harassment and violence as a normal part of everyday life in middle and high schools. Approximately one in four Minnesota 9th grade girls report “unwanted sexual comments, jokes and gestures.”

One-third to one-half of overweight girls report harassment or bullying based on their appearance, and 42% of Somali girls report the same based on ethnicity and national origin. Harassment and bullying based on non-dominant identities is more common in rural areas of the state.
In Minnesota, the most common forms of bullying are verbal and based on enforcement of gender norms. “Whore,” “slut,” “fag,” “dyke” or “gay” are the most common and lethal derogatory expressions used by teens. Nine out of 10 LGBT students reported regularly hearing homophobic, sexist and negative remarks related to their gender expression.

Sexual Violence

The data demonstrate that Minnesota women are on a trajectory towards sexual assault. By mid-life, 33% of Minnesota women have experienced a rape crime. The proportion of lifetime victims varies across the state, from 18% in southeast Minnesota, to a high of 33% in West Central.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, most female rape victims (estimated at 452,000 in Minnesota) experienced their first rape before the age of 25; 30% were between 11 and 17 years old, and 12% less than 10 years old.

Eight percent (8%) of Minnesota 11th grade girls report sexual abuse inside or outside of their family at some point in their life. The highest levels are among American Indians (16%), African Americans (13%), and Latinas (15%).

Sexual assault is common on our college campuses. By age 23, nearly one in four of Minnesota’s female college students reports that they have been sexually assaulted. This level of violence has remained relatively constant over the past decade.

Intimate Partner Violence

Over 60,000 Minnesota women sought domestic violence services in 2012 and estimates are that only one in five women access services. Women subjected to intimate partner violence are more likely to say that they did not report the violence to the police because they feared the abuse would get worse or that the abuser would not let them report, and are more likely to have gone to an emergency room or sought medical attention or counseling than male victims.

Domestic violence is the second leading cause of homelessness among Minnesota women. Almost one-third reported that they were homeless in part due to an abusive relationship. Nearly 50% of homeless women stayed in an abusive relationship because they had no other housing options. Homeless women are also more likely to be a victim of childhood sexual and physical abuse.

Mental health effects for Minnesota children who witness physical abuse in their homes, and those who experience it directly, are equally devastating. Seventy-one percent (71%) of girls from homes with domestic violence reported depression and hopelessness, 36% hurt themselves, and 35% contemplated suicide. Twelve percent (12%) of girls living with domestic violence attempted suicide in the past year (compared to 3% for those from homes without violence).

HEALTH

“Across multiple indicators of health and wellness, many Minnesota women and girls are at growing risk,” said Roper-Batker.

When compared to other states, Minnesota’s health outcomes for women and girls look positive. But a closer examination of the data reveals persistent health disparities for Minnesota women of color and women in greater Minnesota.
Physical Health

According to the research, a majority of Minnesota adult women are now considered obese or overweight. In 2012, 24% of Minnesota women were obese and 31% overweight, with greater Minnesota women at even higher risk. These levels have been relatively flat for the past four years, but have grown slightly since 2000, when 28% of the state’s women were overweight and 17% obese. Excessive weight places women at higher risk for many chronic diseases, such as diabetes, cancer, heart disease, and stroke.

Minnesota’s 9th and 11th grade girls are less likely than boys to be physically active for 60 minutes or more daily (11% of girls, compared to 25% of boys), and white girls are more likely to participate in school sports daily than girls of color (37% compared to 18-21% of Latinas, American Indian, Asian-American and African American girls).

Reproductive Health

Teen birth rates for Minnesota’s African American and white girls are lower than the national average, and for Latina girls, on par. For Minnesota’s American Indian and Asian American teens, the birth rate is double the national average (72 compared to 36 births per 1,000 among Native American teens and 29 compared to 10 births per 1,000 among Asian American teens).

A significant proportion of sexually active Minnesota 8th and 9th graders do not practice pregnancy prevention. Twenty-five percent (25%) of African American girls who are sexually active and 21% of Latinas used no form of birth control the last time they had intercourse; 16% of American Indian and Asian American and 14% of white girls took similar risks. One-third of sexually active 8th and 9th graders report that they never discuss pregnancy prevention.

Access to prenatal care remains unequal. While 90% of white pregnant women in Minnesota are accessing first trimester prenatal care, only 63% of American Indian, 73% of Latinas, and 74% of African American pregnant women receive this critical care.

Mental Health

Minnesota Student Survey data is consistent with research showing that gender norms and social definitions of masculinity and femininity have psychological consequences that emerge in adolescence. On average, women and girls are more likely to have internalizing problems, such as depression, which are more self-destructive, while men and boys have externalizing problems, like anti-social behavior, which are more destructive to others. Minnesota’s 9th grade boys are twice as likely as girls to have hit or beat someone up, while girls are twice as likely to report significant problems with feeling very trapped, lonely, sad, blue, depressed, or hopeless.

Minnesota women and girls suffer disproportionately from many “internalized” mental-health conditions, and with counselor-to-student ratios in Minnesota ranked 49th in the nation, too many are left untreated. Women and girls of color are less likely than white girls to receive therapeutic treatment. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of African American 9th grade girls and 66% of similar Asian girls who reported a long-term mental or emotional problem said they had not received treatment, compared to 35% of white girls.
Health Care

Eighty percent (80%) of Minnesota’s low-wage workers, disproportionately women, do not have paid sick leave. Without paid leave, these women are more likely to send children to school and daycare when they are sick, more likely to go to work and spread illness when they are sick, and more likely to return to work before it is medically advisable, thereby extending or compromising recovery.

Many uninsured women in Minnesota are full-time low wage workers. Approximately 42% are working more than 35 hours per week, earning a median income of $23,000.

Seventy-three percent (73%) of Minnesota seniors that live alone are women. These women are at greater risk for loneliness and related mental-health problems (34% compared to 9% for those who do not live alone) and are less likely (25% compared to 5%) to have someone to take care of them if they become sick or disabled. These problems are more pronounced in rural areas where distances are greater and isolation more common. Minnesota’s elder women are also twice as likely to live in poverty, with significantly lower retirement and social-security income available to pay for care

LEADERSHIP

“At all levels of leadership — from school boards to Fortune 500 companies — women remain underrepresented across the nation. In Minnesota, progress for women leaders has slowed, stalled, and in some professions, gone backwards,” said Roper-Batker.

Politics

Women in elected office at the Minnesota Legislature are stuck at one-third, slightly below historic highs. Sixty-eight (68) women serve in the Minnesota House and Senate. The historic high of 70 women was achieved from 2006-2008.

Overall averages mask the fact that large parts of greater Minnesota are not represented by women at all. Almost one-third of the state’s three-seat legislative districts (two House and one Senate) include no women and two-thirds of those are in rural areas of the state. More than 50% of Minnesota’s county commissions do not include women. Representation has actually fallen from a historic high of 15% (1998) to the current 14%. Essentially, women’s voices are shutout of public funding decisions that total $5 billion, annually.

Across the state, women are underrepresented in city government. One in four city councils has no women and 72% of Minnesota’s city council members are men. Women mayors are similarly rare, at 16%. Other local leadership roles remain gendered, with women filling 89% of clerk-treasurer roles but only 26% of city manager or administrator roles.

Women of color and LBT (Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender) women are absent from the majority of local elected bodies. Even in the socially, racially, culturally diverse Twin Cities metro area, the 13-member Minneapolis City Council includes just one woman of color and the seven-member St. Paul City Council has none.

Businesses & Nonprofits
Research shows that a minimum of three women on a board is needed to substantially change group dynamics, impact interactions, influence issues, and affect outcomes. Only 11 of Minnesota’s top 100 publicly-held companies meet these criteria.

In female-dominated occupations, gendered perceptions about men's roles, abilities, and skills privilege them and facilitate men’s advancement to top leadership. Research shows that a “glass escalator” channels men in women’s professions into the most prestigious roles in an occupation so that men retain consistent advantages over women, even when women are numerically in the majority.

Law

Decisions which profoundly impact women’s lives are made in our state and federal courts, yet women remain underrepresented on most courts. In 2013, Jane Kelley became the second woman to ever be appointed to the Federal 8th Circuit Court of Appeals. This powerful court, which includes Minnesota, sits just below the U.S. Supreme Court and is now tied for the worst gender diversity in the country. Only 29% of Minnesota’s Supreme Court justices are women.

While progress has been made to increase the gender diversity of Minnesota’s state courts, it is not spread evenly throughout the state. In some rural areas, significant disparities persist: notably the 6th District Court in northeast and the 8th District Court in west central, each with just 18% women.

About the Status of Women & Girls in Minnesota project

Since 1990, the Women’s Foundation of Minnesota has conducted research to inform its grantmaking and policy work. Launched in 2009, Status of Women & Girls in Minnesota is an ongoing collaborative research project of the Women’s Foundation of Minnesota and the University of MN Humphrey School’s Center on Women & Public Policy. Annually, data specific to Minnesota women and girls is gathered and analyzed in economics, safety, health, and leadership.

The project represents a unique approach to research by using a gender-race-geography-equity lens. Experts from academia, government, nonprofit and private sectors, elected bodies and philanthropy participated in working groups and reviewed data on women and girls in Minnesota to identify the key issues outlined in the research, and proffer solutions.

“Our grant from the Women’s Foundation to conduct research through this project, annually, supports the Center’s mission to apply a gender lens to determine the true status of women and girls in the state and challenge fundamental assumptions about politics, law, and economics,” said Debra Fitzpatrick, director, University of MN Humphrey School’s Center on Women & Public Policy.

The data reviewed and included here comes from published reports produced by government agencies and nonprofits, and original gender-based analysis of publicly available datasets (primarily the American Community Survey and the Minnesota Student Survey). Tables that provide additional detail and geographic breakdowns are available at WFMN.ORG.