

GENDER ISSUES

Report: Girls in Minnesota face 'ominous future'

■ Poor self-esteem, abuse and poverty more likely among girls

By Kim Winnege
The Forum

A Moorhead City Council member said Wednesday that a recently released report may "foretell an ominous future" for Minnesota girls.

Council member Diane Wray Williams and others learned during a press conference Wednesday that Minnesota's girls are more likely than boys to experience poor self esteem, suffer from abuse, and live in poverty.

"We are not doing terribly well in our society and if we stop and think about (the report's findings), it reaches huge proportions," Wray Williams said.

The report by the Women's Foundation of Minnesota found that girls in general are suffering, but that girls of color especially continue to be in danger as social, economic, and health conditions worsen among racial and ethnic groups.

Information for the report

was drawn from various state and federal agencies' data.

Foundation officials stopped Wednesday at the Hjemkomst Center in Moorhead as part of its "Road to Equality" tour. The foundation plans to visit 15 Minnesota communities to announce its findings.

Lee Roper-Batker, president and CEO of the women's foundation, stressed that decisive factors are not equal for boys and girls.

"We're not even close," she said. "We have a long way to go yet before we achieve political, social and economic equality, but we're determined to get there and we will get there."

The report found that female-headed families and those from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups are at particular risk of living in poverty, Roper-Batker said.

African American girls experience the highest poverty rate among children in Minnesota, at 43.4 percent,

whereas, 41.5 percent of American Indian girls live in poverty.

"When you see that intersection of racism and sexism and the harm it's causing our girls, what happens?" Roper-Batker asked.

Despite decreasing teenage pregnancy rates for white girls, rates are on the rise for Hispanic, African American, and American Indian girls, Roper-Batker said.

By ACT data standards, 28 percent of girls are college-ready, compared to 36 percent of boys.

Additionally, girls are more likely than boys to see themselves as overweight, to employ unhealthy methods of weight control, and to have suicidal impulses.

"People have been really startled and are somewhat overwhelmed and find (the statistics) very depressing," Roper-Batker said.

Data for the foundation's report came from the U.S. Census Bureau, the Minnesota Student Survey Interagency Team, the Minnesota Department of Health, and the Minnesota Department of Education. The Institute for Women's Policy Research collaborated with the foundation on the study.

But however dismal the statistics are, Wray Williams said she is confident that community leaders can live up to the foundation's tour name: "Road to Equality."

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