

Minnesota

Report: Girls face higher barriers

Minorities even farther behind boys

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Minnesota's girls, especially those of color, must sort through an often daunting set of poverty-related obstacles that can derail their futures, a new report says.

As a group, it says girls are more likely than boys to be victims of sexual abuse, to suffer from poor self-esteem and, despite studying longer, to do more poorly in college testing. Often, problems are greatest in the poorest households.

The report, "Status of Girls in Minnesota," was released Monday by the Women's Foundation of Minnesota and the Institute for Women's Policy Research in Washington, D.C. It uses data from different sources to highlight behaviors and draw comparisons with boys and among races and

regions.

Here are some findings:

- Teen birth rates are much higher for girls of color than for white girls. Between 2001 and 2005, Hispanic girls ages 15 to 19 had 111 live births for every 1,000 girls. The rates were 97 for American Indians, 73 for blacks, 49 for Asians and 20 for whites. Rates have been increasing for Hispanics and American Indians and dropping for whites, blacks and Asians.

- Girls are more likely to be physically and sexually abused than boys. The problem is greatest for Hispanics, American Indians and blacks.

- Despite studying longer hours and having higher aspirations, girls don't fare as well as boys in meeting ACT college readiness benchmarks in all four areas: English, math, reading and science. That's

particularly true in math and science.

- Girls of every racial and ethnic group have lower self-esteem than boys at all grade levels. But while the self-image of boys improves from 6th to 9th grades, it generally drops for girls. Lower self-esteem correlates with binge drinking, smoking and drug abuse.

- Girls of color ponder or attempt suicide more often than boys. That's particularly true of American Indians and Hispanics and occurs at higher rates outside the Twin Cities metro area.

The study recommended different approaches to problems, but often focused on earlier intervention and providing better opportunities. The foundation now will go on a 15-community tour to present the findings, gather additional material and develop policy recommendations.

The report can be found at www.wfmm.org.

