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HEADLINE: Minnesota girls at risk, report finds

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Kim Winnege, The Forum

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Minnesota girls are more likely than boys to experience poor self-esteem, suffer from abuse and live in poverty, a new report shows.

The findings may "foretell an ominous future" for **Minnesota** girls, Moorhead City Council member Diane Wray Williams said Wednesday.

"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 **Women's Foundation** of **Minnesota** report 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.

Wray Williams

Graphic: Poverty WDAY: Status of women Kim Winnege Archive

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 statewide 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, black, 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 unhealthful 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.

The figures released Wednesday encompass the entire state and weren't available for individual counties or communities.

However dismal the statistics are, Wray Williams said she is confident that leaders can live up to the foundation's tour

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