

Study: Women are shortchanged in economics, safety, health and leadership

MINNEAPOLIS – (June 17, 2010) – A study on the status of women and girls in Minnesota has found that women are “shortchanged in economics, safety, health and leadership.”

The study was released last week from research conducted by the Women’s Foundation of Minnesota, in partnership with the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey Institute’s Center on Women & Public Policy.

“Since gaining the right to vote in 1920, women have made great strides toward equality. We’ve changed laws, practices and attitudes to promote fairness and opportunity,” said Lee Roper-Batker, president and CEO, Women’s Foundation of Minnesota. “But today, our research shows that women in Minnesota continue to be shortchanged in wages, safety, health, and leadership. By shortchanging women, we’re hurting families, communities, and the entire state.”

According to Roper-Batker, while inequalities exist for all women and girls in our state, even greater disparities exist for women of color, rural women, and older women in Minnesota.

In the area of economics, the research shows that the wage gap shortchanges Minnesota women and their families an average of \$11,000 each year, or \$1 million over her lifetime. Full-time working women in Minnesota

earn less than white men.

According to the study, White, African American and Latina women earn \$0.76, \$0.61 and \$0.56 on the dollar, respectively, compared to white men.

While women in Minnesota now earn the majority of post-secondary degrees at all levels, the data show that education often increases the wage gap. Minnesota women with professional and Master’s degrees face even larger pay gaps than women with less education, resulting in an estimated lifetime loss of \$2 million dollars in wages.

In Minnesota, female-headed households are most likely to be in poverty: 60 percent of Native American, 46 percent of Latina, 44 percent of African American, and 42 percent of Asian female-headed households with children fall below the federal poverty line.

Minnesota’s senior women are at higher risk than senior men of falling below income levels needed to maintain homes and meet basic needs. More than twice as many women over 65 than men live below the poverty line, earning just over \$11,233 a year in social security benefits.

Minnesota has the third highest accredited childcare costs in the country. Here, accredited care for one child

exceeds the average tuition and fees at public colleges and all other household expenses, including the mortgage, for many families.

The data demonstrate that sexual assault begins early. Based on the data, girls are on a lifetime trajectory toward sexual assault.

By the time Minnesota girls graduate from high school, about 12 percent report a date-related sexual assault. By the time they finish college, 29 percent of females have been sexually assaulted. By mid-life, 33 percent have experienced a rape crime.

Another form of sexual abuse is the prostitution of children, mostly girls, throughout the state. New, ongoing research conducted for the Women’s Foundation of Minnesota showed that in February 2010 an estimated 80 girls under 18 were sold in Minnesota, through the Internet or escort services.

The effects on Minnesota’s sexually abused girls are devastating. Sexually abused girls are three times more likely to have an emotional or mental health problem lasting more than a year, twice as likely to be depressed, and three times more likely to hurt themselves on purpose.

Another devastating consequence is teen pregnancy. An estimated 60 percent of teen first pregnancies are preceded by experiences of molestation, rape, or attempted rape.

Women’s physical safety is also at risk in Minnesota.

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By their 40's, approximately 33 percent of women in Minnesota have been a victim of intimate partner violence. The data show that significant levels of intimate partner violence occur across all socioeconomic backgrounds and all over the state, with some of the highest levels occurring in greater Minnesota.

Violence at home is the second leading cause of homelessness among Minnesota women, with 32 percent reporting that they were homeless in part due to an abusive relationship.

Minnesota girls are less likely than boys to be physically active daily – 10 percent of 12th grade girls compared to 24 percent of 12th grade boys. Girls are also less likely to participate in school sports – 48 percent of 12th grade girls compared to 59 percent of 12th grade boys.

Cancer incidence and mortality impact women in the northeastern region of Minnesota and women of color in the state disproportionately.

Breast and cervical cancer incidence and lung cancer mortality are significantly higher for women in the northeastern region than the statewide average.

While cancer mortality for Minnesota women overall is lower than the national

average, Native American women here are two times more likely to die from cancer than Native American women nationally. Native American women in Minnesota are 10 percent more likely to be diagnosed with cancer than white Minnesota women, but 58 percent more likely to die from it.

A majority of Minnesota adult women are now considered obese or overweight, and the rates are increasing. In 2008, 25 percent of Minnesota women were obese and 31 percent overweight, with greater Minnesota women at even higher risk.

While the data indicate the need for mental health treatment and services, it also shows that women and girls of color are less likely than their white counterparts to receive therapeutic treatment: 57 percent of African American girls and 51 percent of Asian girls who reported a mental or emotional problem lasting a year or more had not received treatment, compared to 33 percent of white girls.

At 34 percent, Minnesota is a national leader in the proportion of women serving in the state Legislature. But progress has stalled, well short of women's share of the population. And the recent decline in the number

of women candidates for the Legislature does not bode well for reaching parity at this level.

The data also show that while women running for the Minnesota Legislature are winning at equal rates to men, women candidates and elected officials are more qualified by some measures than their male counterparts. Women were more likely to hold leadership roles in almost all sectors before running.

Women leaders in business are conspicuously absent. The data show that none of Minnesota's Fortune 500 companies are led by a woman; 66 percent are Human Resources executive officers and 16 percent are Chief Financial Officers.

In the judiciary, the data show that only one woman has ever been appointed to the Federal 8th Circuit Court of Appeals. This powerful court, which includes Minnesota, sits just below the U.S. Supreme Court and has the worst gender diversity of any circuit court in the country.

"Women remain underrepresented in the Minnesota state house, courthouse and boardroom. Progress for women leaders in Minnesota has flat-lined, and in some areas, is on the decline," said Roper-Batker. □