

Study: Women lag behind men

Researchers looked across state for report

By Amy Bowen

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Details of a Women's Foundation of Minnesota study on gender equality in the state show rural areas lag behind urban centers.

About 30 women and one man discussed findings in "Status of Women & Girls in Minnesota" on Wednesday at Great River Regional Library. It was the final stop in a seven-city tour for the researchers.

The study found that women lagged behind men in all four categories researchers examined — economics, safety, leadership and health, said Lee Roper-Batker, president and CEO of the

foundation.

Erin Schafer works at St. Cloud State University's Women's Center. She listened to the presentation with co-workers. She first reviewed the foundation's findings when it was released earlier this month.

"When I first saw those statistics, it was depressing," Schafer said. "I was surprised."

Among the findings, women in the workplace make on average 70 percent of their male counterparts, Roper-Batker said. The disparities are higher in outstate Minnesota and among older women and minorities, she said.

Physical and sexual abuse is common, too. Research found that one in three women will experience physical or sexual violence by mid-life. Again women in outstate Minnesota are at higher

risk, Roper-Batker said.

Community leaders see other unsafe situations created by technology. Technology has increased the incidences of stalking and access to violent pornography, said Jane Olsen, director of St. Cloud State's Women's Center during the meeting.

"It creates such a sexually toxic society," Olsen said. "It's adding a new dynamic."

The community meetings were part of the foundation's plan to use feedback to help determine future policy-making plans and how to award grant money.

"We really want to be solution-focused," Roper-Batker told the group. "We really want to hear from you. You are instrumental to change."

The report is available for comment at www.wfmmn.org.

