

# Culture of Safety

FREEDOM FROM PHYSICAL, SEXUAL, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

## Why It's Important

Violence is a public health issue and it is preventable. Lacking a culture of safety negatively impacts the health outcomes of marginalized groups of people through discriminatory practices, violence, and trauma. A lack of safety can occur at the individual, household, and community level. Physical abuse, psychological abuse, experienced racism and discrimination, gendered violence, sexual assault, and living in an unsafe area all threaten one's sense of safety. Systems have historically allowed those who abuse power to thrive and disadvantaged those who are the most vulnerable.

*"The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation."- World Health Organization Definition of Violence*

Violence towards women and children can impact the physical and mental well-being of multiple generations. Experiencing violence and trauma in the home can lead to unstable housing and homelessness, difficulty in school, food insecurity, and other negative effects that impede the ability for a child to grow, play, and learn. Figure 1 illustrates how violence is connected to every aspect of our lives: when it is present it can have a negative impact on everything from our physical health to our ability to maintain a job, in its absence people and communities can thrive. The effects of violence and trauma on children have been associated with substance use, depression, suicide, lower educational attainment, and poverty.<sup>1</sup> Communities across Minnesota are working together to end violence.

**Figure 1. Interconnection of Violence and Basic Needs**



*"[Women and children need] access to a life free of trauma- this includes having programs and policies in place to prevent traumatic events (abuse, violence, oppression, separation from parents) as well as programs and resources to help address trauma in a healthy manner so that people can heal."- Needs Assessment Discovery Survey respondent*

## CULTURE OF SAFETY

This topic is especially important because it affects women of all ages, races, and economic statuses and can occur anywhere. A CDC analysis of women murdered in the United States over a period of 11 years found that over half of the murders were by intimate partners.<sup>2</sup> Eight percent of rapes occur at work.<sup>3</sup> 1 in 4 college women are raped during their time in school and nearly 2 out of 3 will experience sexual harassment while receiving higher education.<sup>3</sup>

There are many different forms of violence that impact individuals and communities. For the purpose of this brief, we will be highlighting sexual violence, intimate partner violence, and violence experienced by youth.

### **Sexual Violence**

Most female victims of completed rape experienced their first rape before the age of 25 and almost half experienced their first rape before age 18 (28.3% between 11 and 17 years old and 12.1% at or before the age of 10).<sup>4</sup> Sexual violence is a serious problem in Minnesota's communities, and includes other forms of violence beyond rape.

Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual violence and happens when someone engages in commercial sexual activity. A commercial sexual activity occurs when anything of value or a promise of anything of value (e.g. money, drugs, food, shelter, rent, a higher status in a gang or group) is given to a person by any means in exchange for sexual activity. Sexual exploitation includes sex trafficking. During April 2019, 58 people were arrested in Minnesota in an undercover sting operation after soliciting children for sex or sex trafficking during the last weekend of the NCAA Final Four basketball tournament. Twenty eight victims, including one child, were rescued from trafficking situations during the same weekend.<sup>5</sup> While major sporting events receive attention as being hot spots for sex trafficking and sexual exploitation, it is important to understand that sex trafficking happens 24 hours a day seven days a week, not just at national championship games.

### **Intimate Partner Violence**

Intimate partner violence occurs when a person of any sex or gender causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm to their partner. Approximately 1 in 4 women and nearly 1 in 7 men in the U.S. have experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime.

In Minnesota, 35 percent of homeless women are homeless because of domestic abuse and 53 percent of Minnesota homeless women have a child or multiple children with them.<sup>6</sup> Additionally 92 percent of women are raped by someone they know: 51 percent by an intimate partner and 41 percent by an acquaintance.<sup>3</sup>

### **Violence Experienced by Youth**

Among those who ever experienced rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner, about 22 percent of female victims and 15 percent of male victims experienced it for the first time between the ages of 11 and 17 years of age. Nearly half of female victims (47%) and more than one-third of male victims (39%) were between 18 and 24 years of age when they first experienced violence by an intimate partner.<sup>7</sup> According to the 2016 Minnesota Student Survey, 12 percent of 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 9<sup>th</sup> graders report that a parent or other adult in their household has hit, beat, kicked, or physically hurt them in any way. Among 11<sup>th</sup> graders in Minnesota, 17 percent of females report that they have been called names or put down verbally by someone they are dating or in a serious relationship with. Today teens report dating abuse via cell phones as a serious problem with harassment and controlling behaviors through text messages as very common.<sup>8</sup>

## Focus on Health Equity

### Historical Trauma

Historical trauma is the cumulative psychological and emotional suffering carried across and through generations. Historical trauma experienced by communities in Minnesota includes mass murder, forced child removal, forced boarding school attendance, forced removal from land, cultural criminalization, slavery, and medical exploitation. While discriminatory practices may not be legally allowed in the modern day, discrimination, racism, and daily hassles called microaggressions as well as overt discriminatory practices and racism still target individuals from diverse racial and ethnic groups.<sup>9</sup> Health disparities, substance use, and mental illness are all commonly linked to experiences of historical trauma.<sup>10</sup>

### Intersectionality & Violence

Intersectionality is a term that describes what happens when forms of discrimination combine, overlap and intersect. Intersectionality calls for us to understand discrimination – racism, sexism, and classism – in terms of the complex and cumulative relationship of these experiences, rather than in isolation. Intersectionality is critical for all communities. We need to acknowledge the intersectionality of race in white dominant communities when we examine how privilege is playing a role in the work that is being done and how that perpetuates disparities.

People of color and American Indians are more likely to experience traumatic events and not seek mental health treatment while also being at a greater risk of being the victim of a violent crime.<sup>11</sup> **Black women** disproportionately experience violence at home, at work, in their communities, and at school.<sup>12</sup> More than 4 in 10 black women experience physical interpersonal partner violence while White women, Latinas, and Asian/Pacific Islander women report lower rates. A 2015 study found that black women are two and a half times more likely to be murdered by men than white women: more than 9 in 10 black female victims know their killers.<sup>12</sup>

In a recent analysis of data from 2010-2019, Minnesota came in 9<sup>th</sup> in the country on a list of states with the highest number of missing and murdered indigenous women.<sup>13</sup> 84.3 percent of **American Indian women** experience violence in their lifetime. This includes 67 percent who experience psychological aggression from an intimate partner, 56.1 percent who are the victims of sexual violence, 56 percent who experience physical intimate partner violence, and 49 percent who have been stalked.<sup>14</sup> One in three American Indian and Alaska Native women (40 percent) have experienced violence in the last year.<sup>14</sup> Among the American Indian and Alaska Native women who are the victims of violence, 66 percent do not feel safe, 41 percent were physically injured, 49 percent needed services, and 41 percent missed work or school due to the violence they survived.<sup>14</sup> American Indian women were 1.9 times more likely than white women to miss days or work or school due to violence, which has significant economic impacts on American Indian communities. Nearly 40 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native victims were not able to receive the services they needed, 2.5 times the rate of non-Hispanic white women who needed services.<sup>14</sup>

Research shows **women with disabilities** are more likely to experience emotional abuse, domestic violence, and sexual assault than women without disabilities.<sup>15</sup> Women with disabilities may also feel or be unable to report the abuse, especially if they are dependent on their abuser for care. As is true for violence against women in general, women with disabilities are statistically most likely to be abused by someone they know.<sup>15</sup>

Another important consideration with intersectionality and violence is police brutality and racialized experiences with the justice system. Black people are three times more likely to be killed by the police

than white people, and in 2015 30% of black victims were unarmed compared to 21% of white victims.<sup>16</sup> In Minneapolis, 30 people have been killed by police officers since 2000. Nineteen of the victims were black, five were white.<sup>17</sup> Black people are twice as likely to be pulled over as whites and four times as likely to be searched during a traffic stop.<sup>18</sup> A national study of misdemeanor arrests published in 2018 found that the black arrest rate is twice as high as the white arrest rate for disorderly conduct, drug possession, simple assault, theft, vagrancy, and vandalism. It is five times higher than the white arrest rate for prostitution, and ten times higher for gambling.<sup>19</sup> And despite the fact that both black and white people use and sell drugs at the same rate, black people are consistently arrested, charged and convicted of drug crimes at far higher rates than white people.<sup>20</sup> People of color often fear victimization by the police more than they fear violent crime. A culture of safety also means you are safe within the criminal justice system itself, and this isn't experienced by all people living in Minnesota equally.

### Additional Considerations

Data related to violence is often self-reported and therefore prone to under-reporting. Rape is the most under-reported crime with an estimated 63 percent of sexual assaults never being reported to the police.<sup>3</sup> Over 90 percent of sexual assaults on college campuses are not reported.<sup>3</sup>

### Structural Violence

Structural violence is when social structures, policies and institutions harm people and communities by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. Structural violence often occurs at the intersection of multiple systems, leading to poor long-term, potentially multi-generational, outcomes.

An example of structural violence is: Black girls are more likely to be suspended or expelled, perceived as being “disruptive” or “loud,” punished for dress code violations, and reprimanded for “defiant” behavior than their classmates.<sup>10</sup> School discipline disparities are closely linked to juvenile justice involvement, with over 40 percent of girls being arrested in connection with a school incident and black girls making up a disproportionate percent of referrals to law enforcement.<sup>10</sup> Young black women are four times more likely to be imprisoned than white girls, with girls and women of color being the fastest growing population in the U.S. prison system. The increase in incarceration has been attributed to differential school discipline practices, drug policies, and institutionalized racism and sexism.<sup>12</sup>

Other examples of structural violence are the high prevalence of workplace harassment and unequal pay. Despite being almost half of the total workforce, women make on average 81 cents for every dollar earned by men. The gendered wage gap of almost 20 percent is seen in nearly every occupation. Black and Hispanic women earn far less than white and Asian women, with Hispanic women earning just 53 percent and black women earning 60.8 percent of the median annual earnings of white men. At current rates of wage growth, it will take until 2059 to close the wage gap with women of color not achieving pay parity until 2119.<sup>21</sup>

### The Importance of Trauma-Informed Approaches and Practices

There is a difference between violence and trauma. Violence is the use of physical force, coercion, manipulation, and psychological control with the intent to hurt, damage or kill someone or something. Trauma is a possible outcome from exposure to violence, but not all experiences of violence result in a traumatic experience for an individual or community. Trauma occurs when an event or circumstances is perceived as harmful or threatening and can have long-lasting effects.

Trauma-informed care is an approach that includes understanding, recognizing and responding to trauma. Because trauma is so present in our communities, trauma-informed care training for health care

providers, first responders/law enforcement, and teachers is particularly important to build capacity so that they can respond sensitively to the experiences of the individuals they are serving.

## Discovery Survey Results

In the summer of 2018, Minnesota’s Title V Maternal and Child Health Needs Assessment distributed a Discovery Survey asking people living in Minnesota, “What are the biggest unmet needs of women, children, and families in your community?” More than 2,700 people responded. There were 126 “Culture of Safety” responses. Responses included mentions of sexual violence, domestic violence, harassment, safety, discrimination, trauma, human trafficking, stalking, and gun violence. This theme of safety was within the top 10 themes of tagged responses for African American and American Indian respondents and within the top 20 for all respondents.

## Important Note on Equity and Intersectionality

The Minnesota Department of Health’s Title V Needs Assessment team acknowledges that structural (social, economic, political and environmental) inequities can result in poor health outcomes across generations. They have a greater influence on health outcomes than individual choices or a person’s ability to access health care, and not all communities are impacted in the same way.

### **All people living in Minnesota benefit when we reduce health disparities.**

We also acknowledge that the topic addressed in this data story does not exist in isolation— which is important to remember as we do needs assessments and as we start thinking about how we approach solutions. In addition to the needs themselves being intersectional, there are also intersecting processes and systems through which power and inequity are produced, reproduced, and actively resisted.

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## CULTURE OF SAFETY

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