

Boys Involved in Trading Sex: Data from the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey



Myths and misconceptions about sexually exploited youth have led to gaps in research on boys who trade sex.

Trading sex is linked to harms for all youth. Using data collected by the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey, this brief is focused on the experiences of boys who trade sex. Given every three years to 9th and 11th grade students in Minnesota’s public schools, the Minnesota Student Survey can show who these young people are and what may be contributing to their experiences.

Have you ever traded sex or sexual activity to receive money, food, drugs, alcohol, a place to stay, or anything else?

NO YES

1.4% of all students answered “yes”

1.2% of boys answered “yes”

DEFINITIONS:

Boy and Girl in this brief refers to cisgender youth whose sex assigned at birth matches their gender identity. We developed this definition based on feedback from youth with lived experiences and input from communities. We have a brief specifically about transgender and gender diverse youth who trade sex, linked below.

Trading Sex is a term used to describe exchanging sex for anything of value including money, basic needs, and more.

♀
1.2%
BOYS

♂
1.3%
GIRLS

Trading Sex Among Boys and Girls

Boys and girls trade sex at similar rates; however, most research on trading sex is focused on girls. Unequal emphasis in research makes boys who trade sex less visible because data often drives funding and policy. Boys who trade sex do not have the same access as girls to resources and supports to help with harms of sex trading.

Boys from a diverse range of racial, ethnic, and sexual identities reported different rates of trading sex.

Those with marginalized identities tended to report higher rates of trading sex. For example, among boys who identify as Black, African, or African American, 2.3% answered “yes” to the question about trading sex. And among boys who identify as gay, 7% reported trading sex.

BOYS BY RACE & ETHNICITY

Percentage of boys who answered “yes” within each category.

Black, African, or African American	2.3%
Native+ ¹	2.1%
Multiple Races	1.4%
Hispanic/Latinx	1.3%
White	1.0%
Asian/Asian American	0.6%

BOYS BY SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Percentage of boys who answered “yes” within each category.

Gay	7.0%
Pansexual	4.7%
Bisexual	4.1%
Questioning	2.0%
Heterosexual	1.0%
Another identity not listed	1.0%

¹ Includes all students identifying as only American Indian or Alaska Native (AIAN), as only Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (NHPI), as AIAN and additional racial and ethnic identities, or as NHPI and additional racial and ethnic identities.

RELEVANT EXPERIENCES & CONTEXTS

Boys who have experienced other hardships report higher rates of trading sex. For example, almost one in four (23.3%) of boys who had unstable housing in the past year (either with family members or alone) reported trading sex; compared to 1.2% of all boys.

Unstable housing in the past year

23.3%

Ever been in foster care

19.7%

Food insecurity (skipped meals) in past month

18.0%

EMOTIONAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCE USE

Many factors can make it difficult for boys to ask for, accept, or access help related to trading sex. This may help explain why boys who trade sex report high rates of emotional distress and unhealthy coping.

Among boys who trade sex:

37.4% report elevated rates of depressive symptoms

40.2% report long-term mental, behavioral, or emotional health issues

21.1% report being treated for alcohol or drug problems

PLANS FOR AFTER SCHOOL

Like all young people, boys who have traded sex have plans and dreams for their futures. Helping youth reach these goals is vital to reducing and preventing harms. The graphic below represents the post-high school plans of boys who reported trading sex:

 **67.3%**
Higher education

 **14.9%**
Work/career training

 **6.6%**
Join the military

 **11.2%**
Other
Including GED, not planning to graduate, or no specific plans.

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

Sexually exploited youth, including boys, are in our high school classrooms, and some are connected to other systems (e.g. foster care, juvenile corrections). We can build relationships and help them thrive. Minnesota's Safe Harbor network of services offers a statewide response for youth age 24 and under who are at risk of, or experiencing, sexual exploitation. Youth, families, and service providers can find assistance and resources at <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/safeharbor>.

If you or someone you know is being sexually exploited or trafficking, contact the **Day One Hotline at 1-866-223-1111**.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The Minnesota Student Survey is coordinated by the Departments of Education, Health, Human Services, and Public Safety. In 2019, 81% of public school districts participated. Throughout the state, 66% of 9th and 54% of 11th graders completed the MSS. Passive parental consent was used, following federal laws. The primary MSS sample is comprised of 71,007 students who answered the new question about sex trading. The focus of this brief is on the sample of 32,311 ninth and 11th grade students who self-reported that they were male and did not identify as transgender, genderqueer, or genderfluid. Smaller samples of students in alternative schools, ALCs, and juvenile correctional facilities are also available. Thank you to the The Link Survivor Advisory Committee for reviewing this brief (thelinkmn.org).

Additional MYST Project infographics focused on other populations can be found at: <https://hdl.handle.net/11299/257434>

Additional information is available here, Martin L, McMorris BJ, Rider G.N. Sex Trading Among Adolescent Cisgender Boys. *Pediatrics*. 2023;151(5): e2022058729. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2022-058729>

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MYST PROJECT


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