

Native+ Students Involved in Trading Sex: Data from the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey



A critical gap in information about Native+ youth involvement in trading sex hinders work in the field. This brief shares prevalence estimates and culturally-specific information about trading sex among Native+ high school students based on the Minnesota Student Survey (MSS), which added a question about sex trading for 9th and 11th graders in 2019. Trading sex presents many harms to young people, and pre-existing social and historical inequalities further place Native+ youth at risk for harm.



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"

3.1% of Native+ students answered "yes"

What is Native+? Our Advisory team defines Native+ as those students who self-identify as only American Indian or Alaskan Native (AIAN), AIAN plus an additional race (+), only Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (NHPI), and NHPI +. This definition honors the sovereignty of Indigenous nations to determine community membership, reflects the racial diversity in community, and the shared experiences of Indigenous peoples with colonialism, which has been linked to sexual exploitation.^{1,2,3}



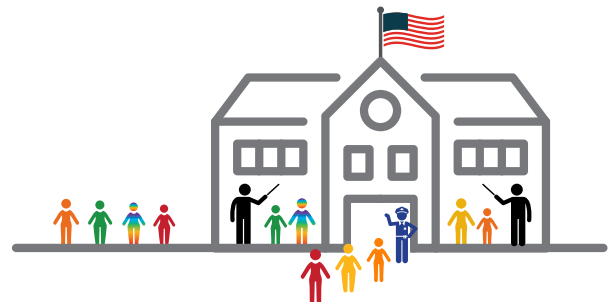
Students with diverse races and ethnicities reported different rates of trading sex.

Percentage of youth who answered "yes" within each category.

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Native+ | 3.1% |
| Asian/Asian American | 0.7% |
| Black, African, or African American | 1.7% |
| Hispanic/Latinx | 1.5% |
| White | 1.2% |
| Multiple Races | 1.8% |



These rates are likely underestimates of the actual numbers of Native+ youth who trade sex. The MSS is completed in schools and does not include youth who were absent from school on the day of the survey or youth who do not attend school. Many Native+ youth do not regularly attend school, with absences related to disproportionate expulsion and suspension rates, and experiences such as racism, historical trauma, bullying, and a lack of resources. Also, students may be reluctant to answer "yes" to the question about trading sex for reasons like shame or fear.

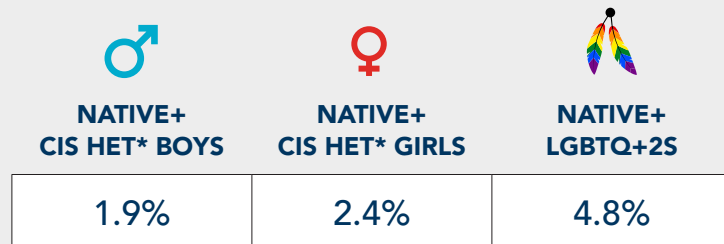


1 Smith, A. (2015). Conquest: sexual violence and American Indian genocide. Duke University Press.
 2 Deer, S. (2015). The beginning and end of rape: Confronting sexual violence in Native America. U of Minnesota Press.
 3 Farley, M., Matthews, N., Deer, S., Lopez, G., Stark, C., & Hudon, E. (2011). Garden of truth: The prostitution and trafficking of Native women in Minnesota. Minnesota Indian Women's Sexual Assault Coalition.

PREVALENCE BY GENDER IDENTITY & SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Native+ students of many gender identities reported trading sex, but LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer and Questioning+) and/or 2-Spirit (2S)-identified Native+ youth reported rates far exceeding the rates of other youth.

For example, 4.8% of LGBTQ+2S youth reported that they traded sex compared to 1.4% of ALL students who answered yes to the question about sex trading in the MSS.



*Cis = Cisgender is a term for those whose gender aligns with their birth assigned sex. Het = heterosexual (straight).

We use the term **“trading sex”** to be consistent with the wording of the survey question. This can include many different experiences, such as exchanging sex for basic needs like food or shelter. It can also include experiences of trafficking. The MSS has one question asking about whether youth engage in trading sex, so we do not know how youth view their experiences or how many youth have been trafficked for sexual exploitation.

“Two-Spirit” or **“2-Spirit”** refers to a person of a culturally and spiritually distinct gender exclusively recognized by Native American Nations.⁴ Before colonization, diverse sexual orientation and gender identities were common in many tribes. Two-Spirit people held important roles which were targeted under colonization. Today, young people use many terms to describe themselves.

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

Sexually exploited Native+ youth are in school classrooms, out-of-school-time programs, and social service systems (e.g., foster care, juvenile justice). We can build relationships and help them thrive. Minnesota’s Safe Harbor network of services offers a statewide and tribal response for youth age 24 and under who are at risk of, or experiencing, sexual exploitation. Youth, families and services providers can also find culturally-specific assistance and resources at: Strong Hearts – strongheartshelpline.org; Tribal Resource Tool (online directory) – tribalresourcetool.org; MIWSAC – miwsac.org.

INDIGENOUS YOUTH FUTURES

A network of services can help secure immediate help, but this alone will not solve the disproportionate risk faced by Native+ youth. Approximately 8% of the women and girls murdered in Minnesota were Native American⁵, despite being ~1% of the population. Over half of cisgender Native women and 27.5% of cisgender Native men reported sexual assault in their lifetime.⁶ Two-Spirit men are up to six times more likely to experience sexual violence.⁷ The vast majority of perpetrators are non-Native (Amnesty, 2007), and many victims report racialized aspects of this violence such as being called squaw, savage or forced to role-play Pocahontas. Stereotypes of hypersexuality and attitudes of disposability and conquest over Native bodies contribute to high rates of sexual violence and exploitation. Poverty, intergenerational trauma, loss of protective cultural knowledge/practices and other legacies of colonization increase this risk. These conditions require different attention; social service is not social justice. Like all youth, Native youth have hopes and dreams for their future! Native communities and allied partners are working hard to disrupt these legacies of colonization and promote community well-being through the restoration of tribal land and lifeways.

Banner art created by K.S. Blue (Anishinaabe). www.ksavblu.com Thank you for allowing us to display it here.

4 This definition was created on February 23, 2021 by Two-Spirit elders: Marlon Fixico, Beverly Little Thunder, Clyde Hall, Senator Red Dawn Foster, Monique Muffie Mousseau, and Felipa De Leon.

5 Martin Rodgers, N. & Pendelton V. (2020). Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Task Force. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3CGISbO>.

6 Rosay, André B. (2016). Violence against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Men: 2010 Findings from the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey. National Institute of Justice Research Report. NCJ 249736. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice.

7 Dame, J., Oliffe, J. L., Hill, N., Carrier, L., & Evans-Amalu, K. (2020). Sexual violence among men who have sex with men and two-spirit peoples: A scoping review. The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality, 29(2), 240-248.

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 and 25% of Bureau of Indian Education schools participated. Throughout the state, 66% of 9th and 54% of 11th graders completed the MSS. 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 3,042 Native+ students who answered the sex trading question. Smaller samples of students in alternative schools, area learning centers (ALCs), and juvenile correctional facilities are also available.

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MYST PROJECT



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