

The Importance of Accurate Data about Youth Sex Trading: Prevalence Rates from a Public Health Survey to Guide Prevention

Presented to the Education Policy Committee, MN House of Representatives

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The Minnesota Student Survey (MSS) added a question in 2019

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% answered "yes"

The question was only asked of 9th and 11th graders

Minnesota Department of Health spearheaded the new question

Presentation Overview

Background

2019 MSS Data

Closing

Transactional Sex/Trading Sex

Exchange of sex or sexual activity in order to receive something of value (e.g. money, food, drugs, clothes, a place to stay)

Can include many different **experiences** such as survival sex, exploitation, and trafficking*

Associated with many negative outcomes* such as:

- Sexual risk taking and substance use
- Trauma (child abuse, sexual assault, neglect, violence)
- STIs, unwanted pregnancy
- Homelessness and poverty
- Mental health problems (e.g. suicidality, depression, PTSD)
- And MORE

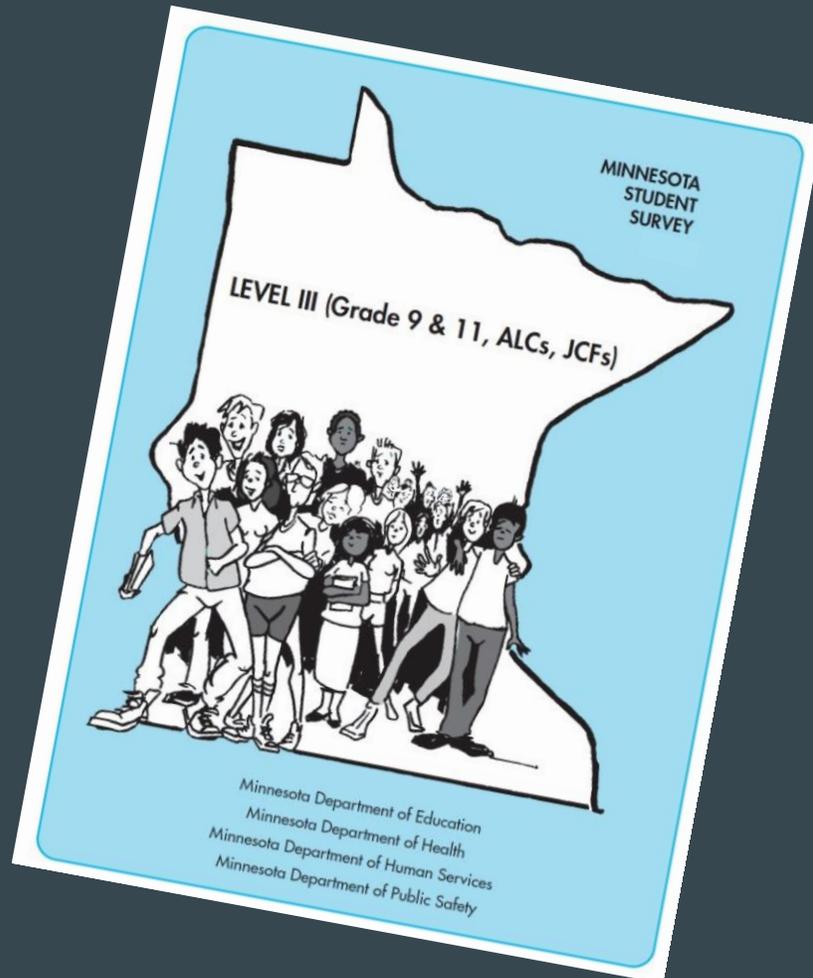
*Citations on the last slide.

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Terminology



When young people trade sex, many view it as **sexual exploitation**

Due to the wording of the question on the Minnesota Student Survey, **we use the term “traded sex”**

Students who answered the survey question did so based on the term “traded sex or sexual activity.” We cannot know how they viewed it.

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Prevalence: A Thorny Issue

Common **questions** in the field:

“How many young people are impacted?”

“Who is most impacted?”

“What are the intersections?”

Few empirically-based answers

Why do we need to know the prevalence of trading sex in the general population of youth?

To accurately scale and direct resources, policy, funding, and public awareness.

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Prevalence

We need recent, population-level, LOCALIZED and contextual prevalence estimates on which to base a public health response.

Most research on transactional sex uses **non-probability sampling**.

Limited representative samples or **population-based surveys**

Very difficult to do!

- Dangerous and stigmatized
- Lack of shared terms
- No list or sampling frame

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About the Minnesota Student Survey (MSS)

Tri-annual, **census survey** on youth's health and wellbeing administered in public schools and other settings.

Collected by the State of Minnesota

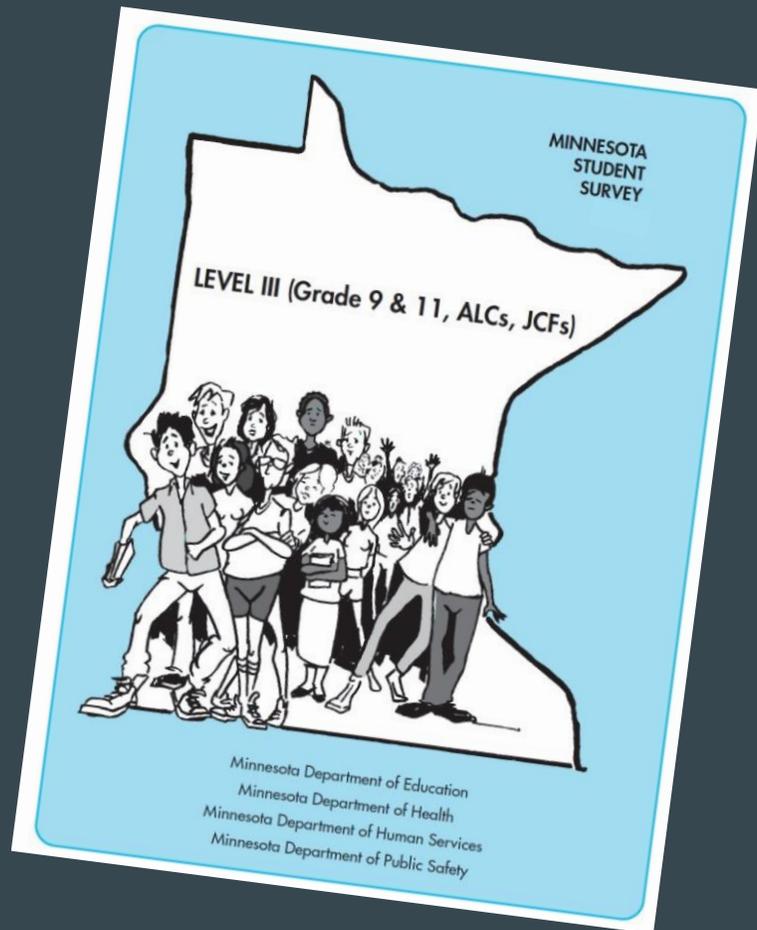
- Surveillance program, began in 1989
 - Similar to the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)
- Coordinated by MN Departments of Education, Health, Human Services and Public Safety
- Passive parental consent
- Students in 5th, 8th, 9th, and 11th grades are invited to fill out the survey
- Special populations: juvenile correction facilities and alternative learning centers

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More details about 2019 MSS



Response rates:

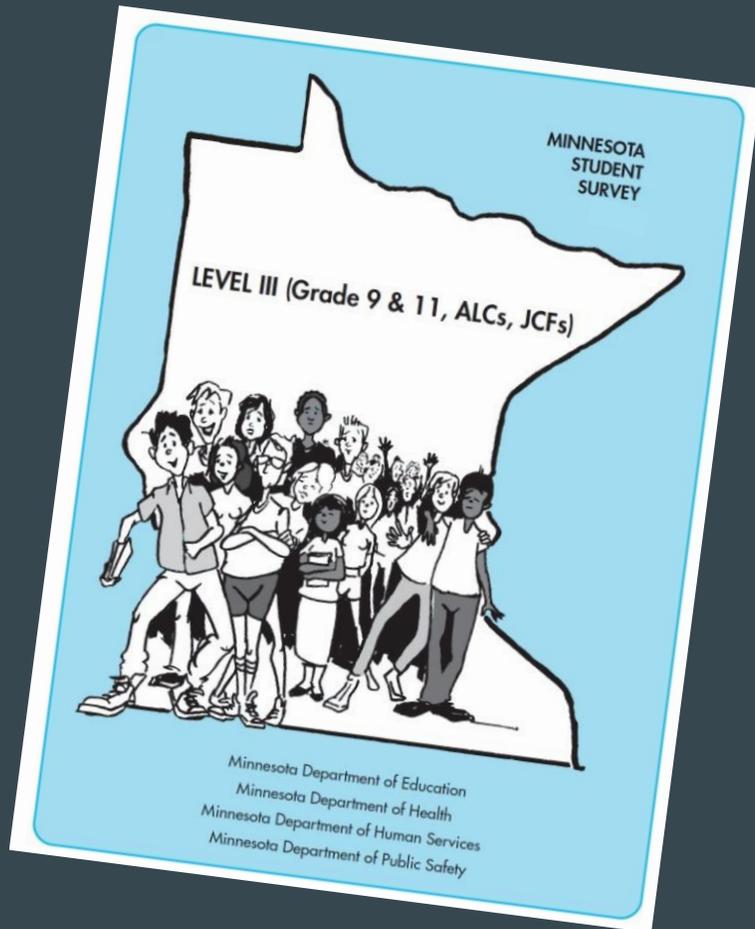
- 81% of MN public school districts participated
 - Students all across MN took part
- N = 80,456 9th and 11th graders filled out the survey (mostly online)
- Our analysis focused on N = 71,007 students in 9th and 11th grades who answered the new question

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2022 MSS



2022 is currently underway

- Jan – June 10th

Please encourage your school districts to participate

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Prevalence: Among High School Students in MN

1.4% in **public schools** indicated “yes” to trading sex

5.4% in **alternative learning centers (ALC)** indicated “yes”

12% in **juvenile correctional facilities** indicated “yes”

These figures are likely **underestimates**.

- Sensitive question
- Only students **attending** school on that day;
- **School push-out and drop-out** disproportionately impacts those high school students who are likely to trade sex (American Indian students, students of color, homeless and highly mobile)
- MSS not consistently administered in ALCs or juvenile correctional facilities

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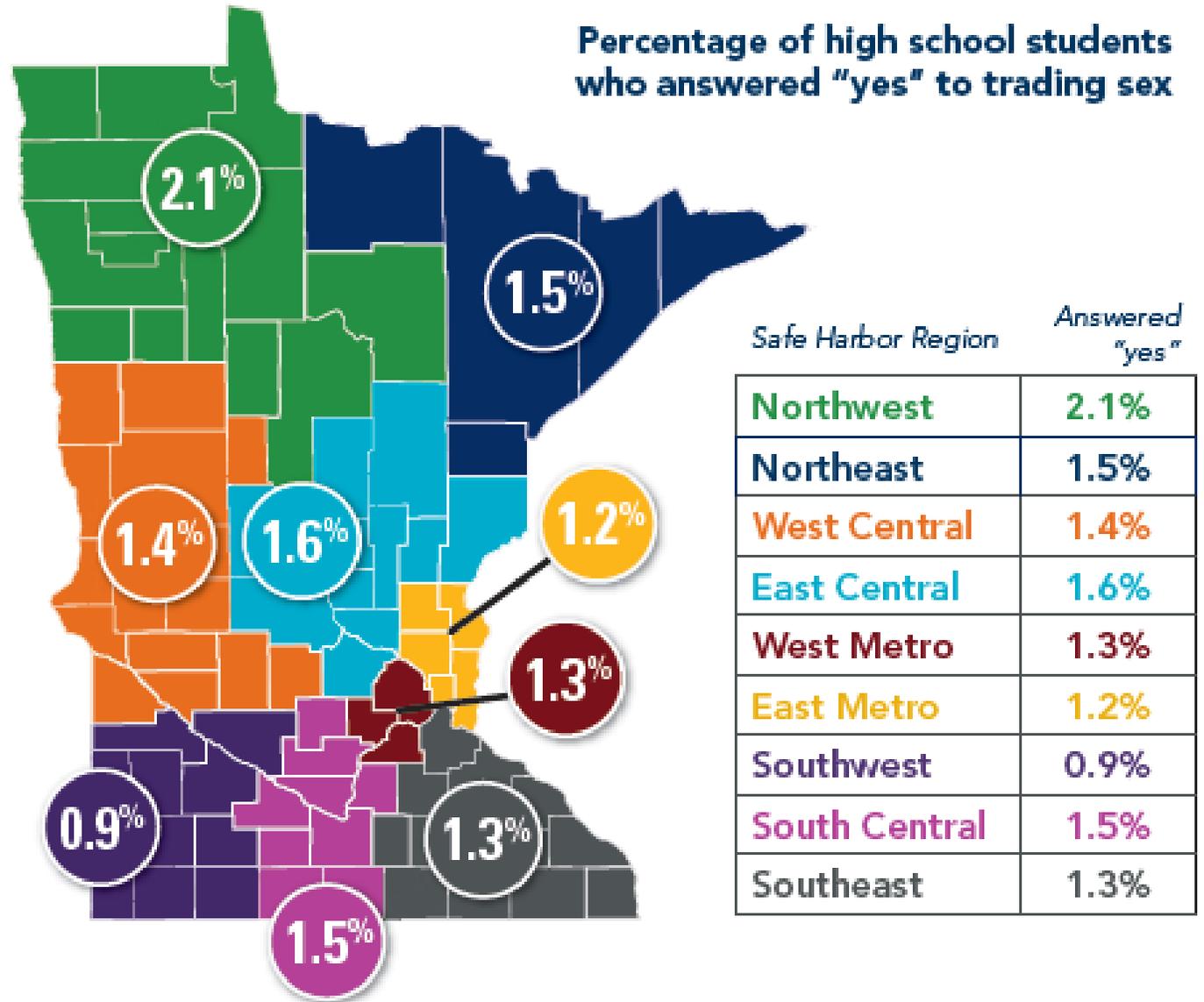
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Prevalence by Location

Students all across the state said “yes” they traded sex.

The map here shows the Minnesota Department of Health Safe Harbor regional navigator areas as of January 2020.

MDH Safe Harbor Contact:
Caroline Palmer: Caroline.Palmer@state.mn.us
<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/safeharbor/>



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Prevalence by gender

Cisgender is a term for those whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth.

Transgender is a term that describes individuals whose gender identity differs from social or cultural expectations of their sex assigned at birth.



Cisgender
boy

1.2%



Cisgender
girl

1.3%



Transgender

5.9%



Unsure about
gender identity

3.3%

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Prevalence by race & ethnicity

Students from many different backgrounds reported trading sex.

Disproportional impacts

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

American Indian/Native+ ³	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%

³ This category includes all students identifying as American Indian or Alaskan Native (AIAN) only or AIAN plus other races/ethnicities or Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (NHOPI) or NHOPI plus other races/ethnicities.

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Pause and Breathe

Minnesota Student Survey Findings:

Digging Deeper....

Compare rates of

- anxiety
- suicide attempts

between students who traded sex
and
students who never traded sex,
by gender identity group

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Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-2)

Elevated scores indicate a positive screen for generalized anxiety disorder for which further diagnostic evaluation by a health care provider is needed.

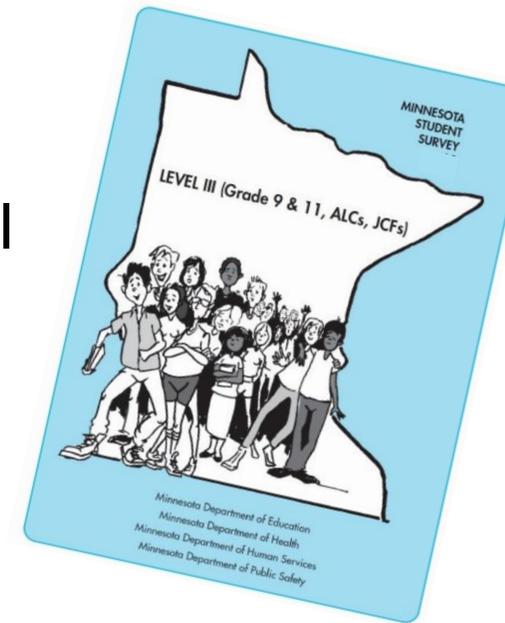
Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by:

Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge?

- Not at all
- Several days
- More than half the days
- Nearly every day

Not being able to stop or control worrying?

- Not at all
- Several days
- More than half the days
- Nearly every day



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Positive Screen for Anxiety: Sex Trading and Gender

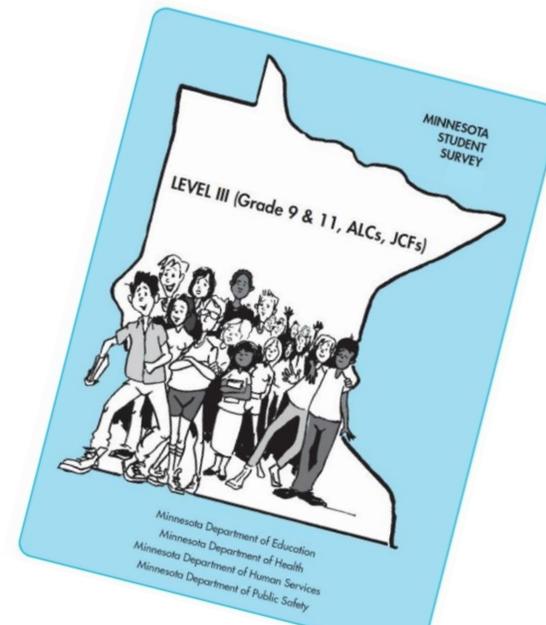
		By sex trading		By sex trading + gender		
 All MN students	28%	Students who traded sex	56%	Transgender youth	69%	
				Cisgender girls	66%	
				Cisgender boys	40%	
	Students who never traded sex	27%			Transgender youth	55%
					Cisgender girls	36%
					Cisgender boys	16%

Lifetime Suicide Attempts

Rates include self-reports of suicide attempts during the last year and more than a year ago.

Have you ever actually attempted suicide?

- No
- Yes, during the last year
- Yes, more than a year ago



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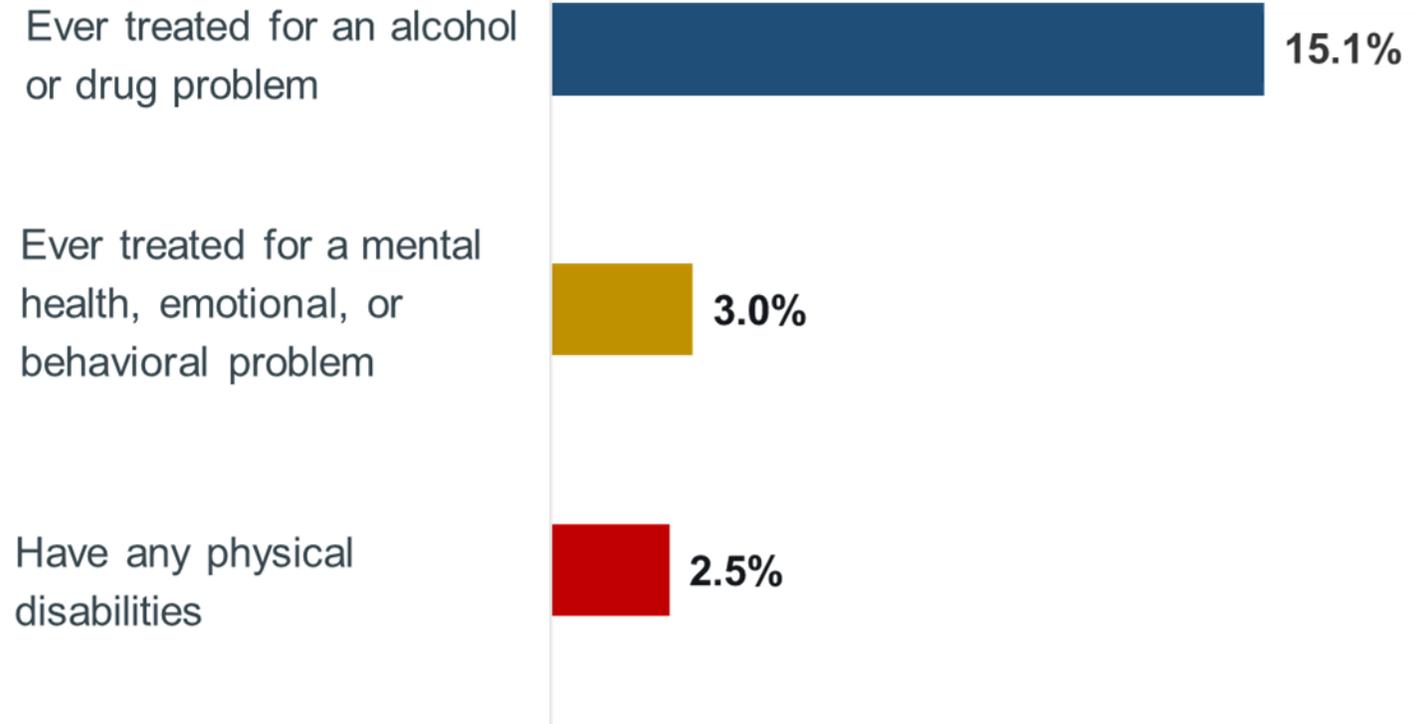
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Lifetime Suicide Attempts: Sex Trading and Gender

		By sex trading		By sex trading + gender	
 All students	8%	Students who traded sex	48%	Transgender youth	76%
				Cisgender girls	55%
				Cisgender boys	35%
		Students who never traded sex	8%	Transgender youth	46%
				Cisgender girls	9%
				Cisgender boys	5%

Prevalence by health experiences

The MSS data verify that youth being treated by **health care providers** report trading sex.



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Prevalence by relevant experiences & contexts

Research and practice have highlighted that **some youth are more impacted by trading sex than others**. The MSS data verify that youth with some experiences and in certain contexts do report higher rates of trading sex.

In a juvenile correctional facility⁴



Ever been in foster care



Ever experienced sexual violence



Unstable housing in the past year



Attend an ALC⁵



⁴ This estimate is derived from a separate sample of youth in juvenile correctional facilities.

⁵ This estimate is derived from a separate sample of students attending alternative learning centers.

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Positive indications

Young people who trade sex have strengths and assets. There are things that can promote **resilience** and could be **protective** from further harm.

72% of students who indicated trading sex **feel safe at school.**



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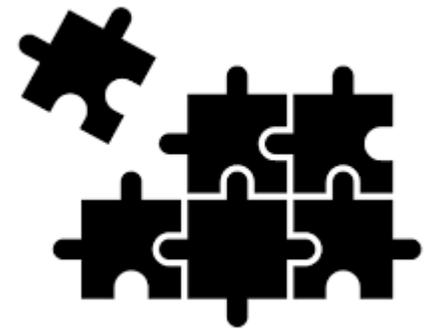
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What is the larger **story** here?

Trading sex **disproportionally** impacts some groups more than others and is correlated with a **LOT of harm**

This is a **public health** issue

Youth who trade sex are in our **schools**, right now



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Questions?



Contact information and funding:

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Our infographic brief is found here:

<https://www.nursing.umn.edu/research/research-projects/trading-sex-and-sexual-exploitation-among-high-school-students>

To request the 2019 MSS data, visit here:

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/data/mchs/surveys/mss/index.html>

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Meet the University of Minnesota MYST Team



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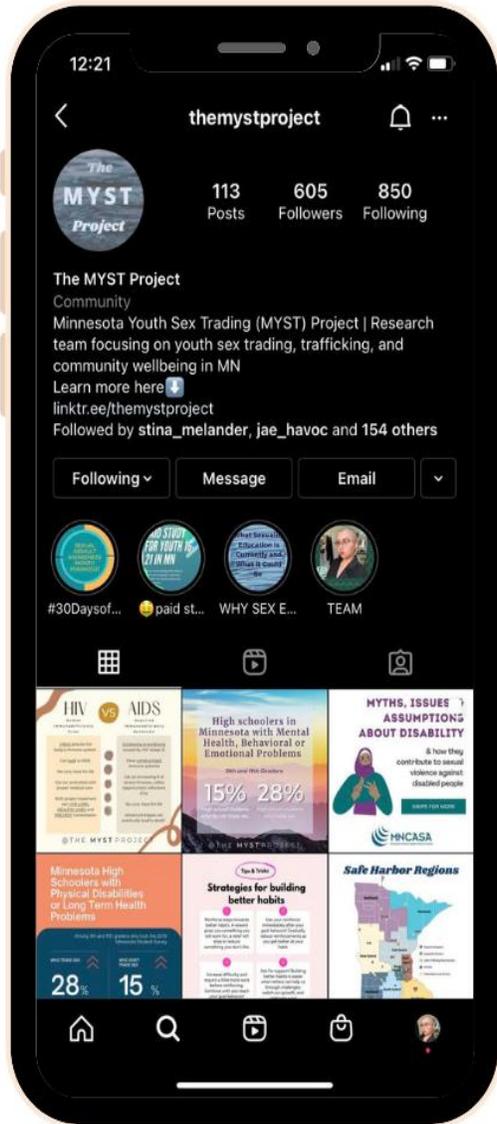
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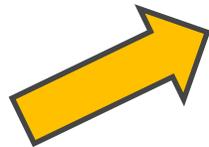
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Accessible infographic data briefs



Trading Sex and Sexual Exploitation among High School Students: Data from the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey

This is the first population-based prevalence estimate of high school students who report trading sex for something of value (including trafficking of minors for sexual exploitation). Trading sex presents many harms to young people. In 2019, the Minnesota Student Survey – a tri-annual census of young people in Minnesota’s schools – included a new question for 9th and 11th graders:

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%** answered “yes”

At least 5,000 YOUNG PEOPLE IN MINNESOTA HAVE TRADED SEX¹

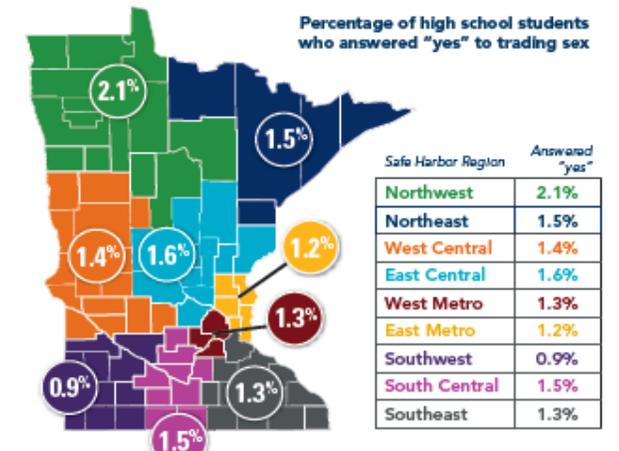
This is likely an underestimate because the MSS is completed by students enrolled in school. It does not include youth who were not in school on the day of the survey or who do not attend school. Young people may also be reluctant to answer “yes” for many reasons, including shame or fear.

¹ This estimate of 5,000 young people is based on the 2018 Census number of 15-19 year olds in the State of Minnesota. We used this formula: 1.4% of 357,809 = 5,009.

MINNESOTA’S RESPONSE: SAFE HARBOR

Youth who trade sex are considered sexually exploited under Minnesota’s Safe Harbor law. Sexual exploitation is a public health issue that harms individuals, communities, and populations across the state. The Minnesota Department of Health Safe Harbor program receives state and federal funds to support a comprehensive response through regional navigators, services providers, and tribal governments. In addition to services, training, and protocol development, the Safe Harbor system supports specialized housing, outreach, and investigations through partnership with public health, human services, and public safety.

The map shown here reflects the Safe Harbor nine regional navigator areas as of October 2020.



Citations

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