

An aerial, high-angle photograph of five young people walking on a light-colored, possibly wooden, floor. The individuals are slightly out of focus, suggesting movement. From top-left to bottom-right, there is a young woman with long blonde hair wearing a red and white striped shirt and blue jeans; a young woman with dark hair wearing a green top and blue jeans; a young man with dark hair wearing a yellow hoodie and dark shorts; a young woman with long dark hair wearing a white top and orange pants; and a young man with dark hair wearing a blue and white striped shirt and blue jeans. The background is a plain, light-colored floor.

Minnesota Youth Sex Trading Project (MYST): *A Community Based Exploration of Sex Trading Among Native+ Youth*

Minnesota Indian Women's Sexual Assault Coalition Conference, January 2024



Co-contributors for today's presentation



Katie Johnston-Goodstar (she/her)
Associate Professor, School of Social
Work



Anne LaFrinier-Ritchie (she/her)
Safe Harbor Regional Navigator,
Someplace Safe



Lauren Martin (she/her)
Associate Professor, School of
Nursing



The MYST Project



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
Driven to Discover

The Minnesota Youth Sex Trading Project



MENDING THE SACRED HOOP



Minnesota Indian Women's Sexual Assault Coalition

MYST Native Community Advisory Board

- Our project responds to community concerns about sexual exploitation and specifically to recent MMIW task force recommendations:
 - **Indigenous-specific data:** Native youth specific data and community-engaged analysis
 - **Increase awareness:** Tribal communities, tribal policymakers and service providers are first-to-know and engage the data, share findings in engaged and accessible ways
 - **Inform and develop:** Co-develop initiatives, services and safe spaces for Native youth guided by a community-engaged analysis of the data

Data Source: The Minnesota Student Survey (MSS)

Tri-annual, census of youth health and wellbeing administered in regular public schools, charter schools and other settings.

Collected by the **State of Minnesota** in school classrooms/spaces.

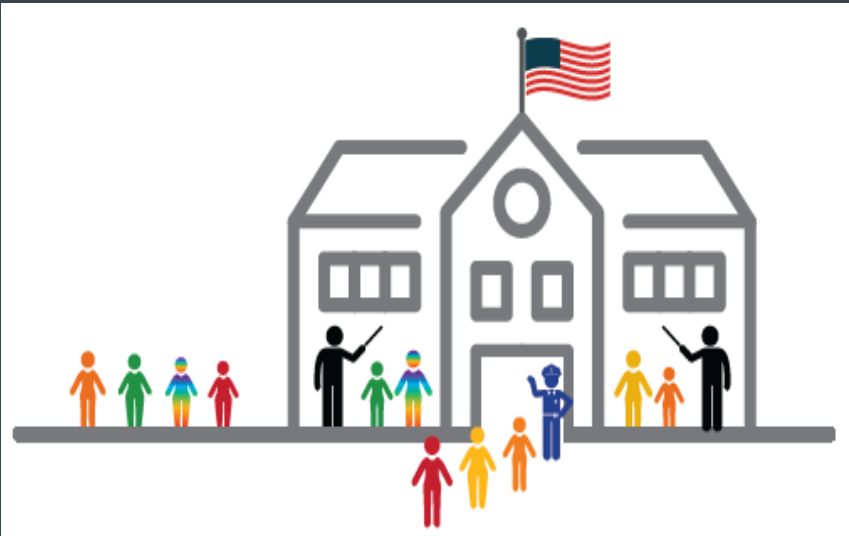
- MSS began in 1989
Similar to the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)
- Coordinated by MN Departments of Education, Health, Human Services and Public Safety
- Collected in schools, via a survey with **passive parental consent**
- Students in 5th, 8th, 9th, and 11th grades are invited to fill out the survey
- In 2022: 70% of districts participated (51% and 41% of statewide enrollment for 9th and 11th grade students, respectively)

The MYST Project



The Minnesota Youth Sex Trading Project

Native+ considerations for Minnesota Student Survey (MSS)



Limitations

- Only 1 of 4 Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools participated
- School pushout issues
- We present an ***undercount*** of prevalence

The MYST Project



The Minnesota Youth Sex Trading Project

Native+ Variable

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.

Prevalence of Trading Sex among High School Students in the state of Minnesota

In 2019 and 2022, this question was included in the Minnesota Student Survey 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

1.3% of all students answered "yes"

4.3% of Native+ students answered "yes"

The MYST Project



The Minnesota Youth Sex Trading Project

Native+ Findings

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

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

Native+	4.3%
Asian/Asian American	0.5%
Black, African, or African American	1.2%
Hispanic/Latinx	1.2%
White	1.1%
North African/Middle Eastern	2.5%
Multiple Races	1.8%



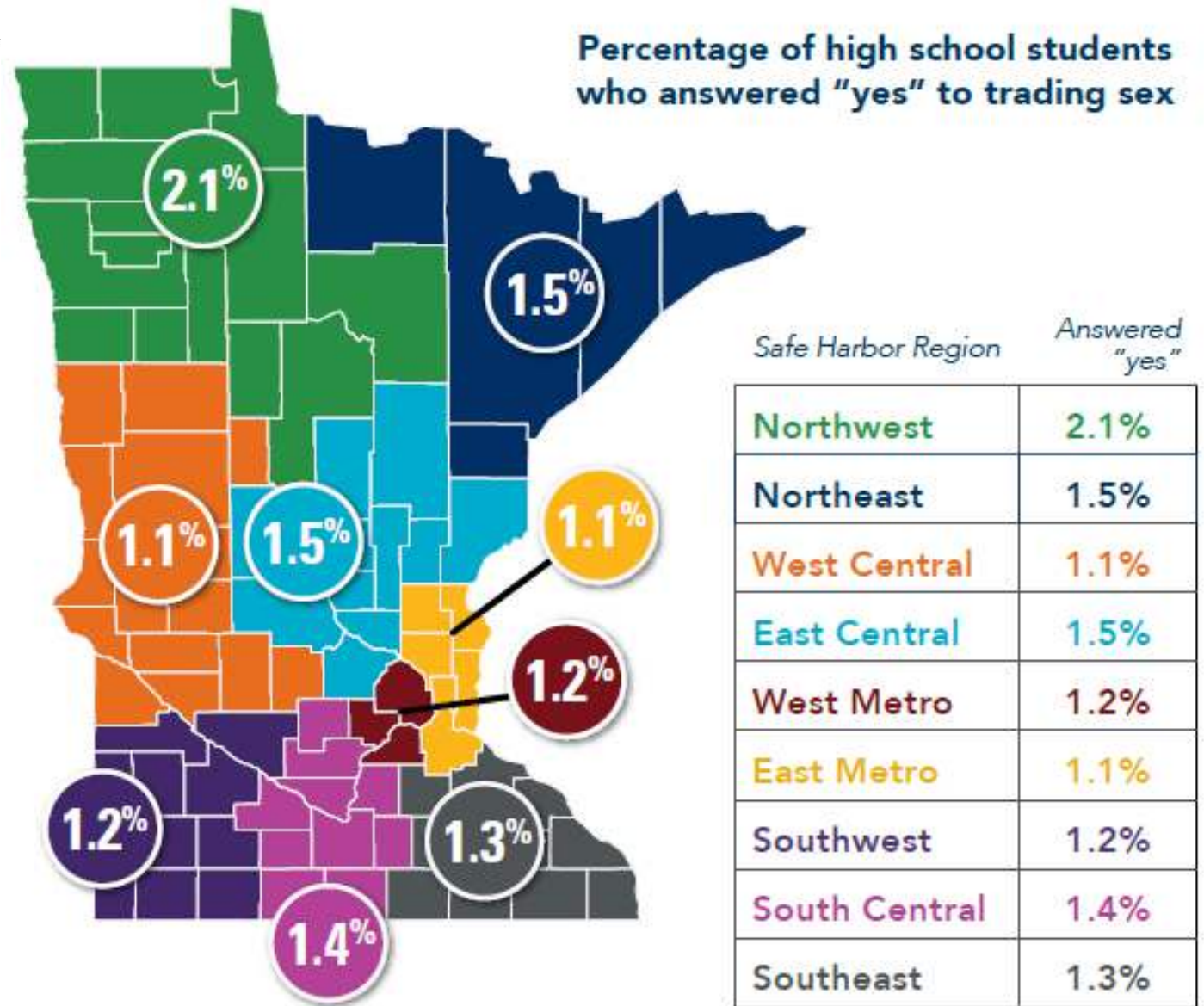
The MYST Project



The Minnesota Youth Sex Trading Project

Prevalence by location

This map reflects the **Safe Harbor** nine regional navigator areas as of January 2020



Gender Identity & Sexual Orientation

Native+ students of many gender identities reported trading sex

LGBTQ+ and/or Two-Spirit youth reported rates much higher than their peers



**NATIVE+
CIS HET* BOYS**

1.6%



**NATIVE+
CIS HET* GIRLS**

1.7%



**NATIVE+
LGBTQ+2S**

8.9%

*Cis = Cisgender is a term for those whose gender aligns with their birth assigned sex

*Het = heterosexual (straight)

The MYST Project



The Minnesota Youth Sex Trading Project

MYST Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project

We established a Native+ YPAR team to help us better understand issues of sexual violence, exploitation and sex trading, identify the root causes of vulnerability and develop strategies to disrupt!

Our team included 8 young people who represented many tribes, geographic regions, sexual orientations, gender identities, and lived experiences.



**COLONIAL &
HISTORICAL
TRAUMA**

LAND & BODIES

**BASIC
RESOURCES**

**HARMFUL
STEREOTYPES**

**EXISTING
LEGAL SYSTEMS**

MISPLACED "HELP"

Youth Identified Disruption Strategies

INSERT YPAR PHOTO HERE

Youth Identified Disruption Strategies



Decolonize & Revitalize

We believe unlearning harmful ideas and patterns of colonization and revitalizing Indigenous lifeways, language and knowledge are pathways to well-being and can disrupt exploitation.

Some proposals we are interested in supporting are:

- Co-design a cultural revitalization project with our elders for the recovery of Two-Spirit community roles/responsibilities
- Design and deliver land-based learning projects for youth (e.g., sugarbush, food sovereignty, medicinal knowledge, water protectors)
- Revitalize and develop rites, ceremonies and traditions where needed

Youth Identified Disruption Strategies



Indigenized Civic Action

We believe that sovereignty-focused education and leadership education by, for, and with Indigenous youth on policy issues can empower youth and disrupt exploitation. For example:

- Develop “Know your treaty rights” sessions (i.e. what are our rights, how can we enact these and usufructuary rights to hunt, harvest medicine, tap, fish and engage ceremony on our traditional lands)
- Support the renewal of traditional clans and societies to support tribal self-governance
- Create opportunities to organize across communities to build collective social movements (See www.alongwalkhome.org)
- Work on bills that legally protect native people, land and values: repeal the Dakota Removal Act of 1863, reconsider blood quantum policies, land recovery, trans refugee bill, create a state board to fund culture revitalization practices

Youth Identified Disruption Strategies



Critical Education

We believe that outlets and opportunities for historically accurate, culturally-representative and sustaining education to support positive identity development are essential to disrupting exploitation. We would encourage the following:

- Design, deliver, support a Freedom School (community-based, critical education spaces that emerged as part of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960's) or similar youth education project
- Ensure comprehensive sexual health education that includes healthy, consensual relations, body positivity and gender diversity
- Expand and support experiential tribal language opportunities
- Build youth program/spaces that promote a positive "sense of self" such as a comic store, creative internships, public mural

Youth Identified Disruption Strategies



Enhance Basic Resources for ALL

We support actions to ensure that ALL individuals have access to basic human rights without which, conditions of coercion and exploitation flourish:

- Enhance actions that support access to clean environment, food sovereignty, public safety, representation, housing, medicine, education, clothing, transportation and culture
- Encourage actions that challenge a scarcity mindset that is fostered by a global capitalist culture and economy

Youth Identified Disruption Strategies



Campaigns to Counter

We believe that public campaigns can counter mainstream stereotypes and publicly humanize Native people, particularly women and Two-Spirit relatives:

- Design and deliver content series on Instagram, TikTok and other social media platforms
- Curate and install public art and exhibitions
- Develop a #notyourPocahontas series
- Deconstruct "false" indigenous boundaries to affirm indigeneity of the Americas

Youth Identified Disruption Strategies



Righteous Anger, Mourning and Healing Spaces

There exists a need to mourn, grieve and heal and support the development of new ways and ***“spaces for celebration, mourning and safety”*** is critical to reset and begin paths of well-being and thriving:

- Establish ceremonial, radical rest and rejuvenation practices and spaces
- Sponsor a youth summit
- Support Indigenous People’s Day of Rage or Orange Shirt Day for safe collective mourning and action

Contact information and funding:

This research was funded by the
World Childhood Foundation and
the Carlson Family Foundation



Katie Johnston-Goodstar, john1906@umn.edu

Anne LaFrinier-Ritchie, anne.lr@someplacesafe.info

Lauren Martin, mart2114@umn.edu

The MYST Project



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
Driven to Discover®

The Minnesota Youth Sex Trading Project