

Executive Summary

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Task Force

A report to the Minnesota Legislature

THE MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN (MMIW) INJUSTICE

Indigenous (American Indian, Native American) women, girls, and two spirit people are far more likely to experience violence, be murdered, or go missing than other demographic groups in Minnesota.



Although American Indian women and girls make up just **1% of the state's population**, from 2010 through 2018, **8% of all**



murdered women and girls in Minnesota were American Indian.



From 27 to 54 American Indian women and girls in Minnesota were missing in any given month from 2012 to 2020.

Throughout this report we refer to this issue as “the MMIW injustice.” This issue has recently begun to be recognized by the general public and policymakers, although Indigenous communities have been traumatized by this set of injustices for centuries.

The root causes of the MMIW injustice include colonization and historical trauma, racism, and sexual objectification of Indigenous women and girls. These root causes have led to increased systemic risk factors for experiencing violence and abuse among Indigenous women and girls, including poverty and lack of housing, involvement in the child welfare system and criminal justice system, being a victim of domestic violence, and being involved in prostitution and trafficking.

Once an Indigenous woman or girl goes missing or dies under suspicious circumstances, the investigation, prosecution, and sentencing processes that are supposed to serve justice often fail to provide equal and fair treatment for these Indigenous victims.

Finally, the system does not offer adequate culturally responsive healing resources for Indigenous victims/survivors, families, and communities.

The MMIW Task Force

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Task Force was created through unanimous bipartisan support from the Minnesota Legislature, and was coordinated by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety. On behalf of the Task Force, Wilder Research conducted extensive research, including reviewing published articles, summarizing laws and policies, accessing relevant data points from state data systems, interviewing 32 experts, and hearing public feedback during several open public comment sessions. The Task Force heard presentations on key aspects of the systems that are involved in the MMIW injustice. They deliberated extensively in subcommittees focused on systems, data, and community resources. This learning and collective expertise is reflected in this report.

Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women

Injustice in Minnesota

Root causes

- Colonialism
- Racism
- Sexual objectification of Indigenous women and girls

Demand

for Indigenous women & girls (sex and violence)

- Internet
- Extractive industries
- Entertainment: hotels and casinos, sporting events

Tribal-county-state relations and jurisdiction issues affect the investigation and prosecution of MMIW cases.

Risk factors

for Indigenous women & girls to become MMIW

- Child welfare system involvement
- Domestic violence
- Incarceration
- Prostitution & trafficking

Indigenous women get murdered and go missing at a higher rate than other groups.

"Many of the women and children I meet need concrete services before we can do therapeutic work. They need a place to sleep, a warm meal, a place to shower. They have to ask themselves if they are willing to compromise their safety to have a roof over their head. They might be moving from abusive relationship to abusive relationship just to have a place to stay."



—Key informant

"We need to change how systems respond to women when they come forward with experiences of violence. Make sure they are protected, honored, and heard." —Key informant



Factors

that affect if, when, and how MMIW are found and served justice

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- Investigation – missing persons and suspicious deaths
 - Prosecution and sentencing
 - Data systems
 - Public awareness (general and specific MMIW cases)
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Systems

that can provide an "off-ramp" to prevent Indigenous women and girls from becoming MMIW


- Education
- Health care
- Child welfare
- Law enforcement
- Courts and criminal justice
- Industry
- Media
- Community-based organizations and healing services

"Whatever happens next has to be led by people most knowledgeable and connected and within the Indigenous community. This isn't something the state should do to them. It should come from within the community."


—Key informant

Overview of solutions developed by the Task Force as requested by the Minnesota Legislature


Address the systemic causes behind the disproportionate violence experienced by Indigenous women and girls.




Collect and report data on violence against Indigenous women and girls.




Address policies and practices in institutions that impact violence against Indigenous women and girls.



Reduce and eliminate violence against Indigenous women and girls.



Help Indigenous women and girls who are victims/survivors, their families, and their communities prevent and heal from violence.



A Call to Action

Mandates from the MMIW Task Force

The following mandates were thoughtfully crafted by the MMIW Task Force for the Minnesota Legislature, state agencies, tribes, and other stakeholders to address the MMIW injustice in our state. More information about these mandates can be found on pages 12-14 of the summary and 119-133 of the full report.

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- 1. Create an **MMIW Office** to provide ongoing attention to and leadership for this issue.
 - 2. Ensure adequate **funding and resources** to implement these recommendations.
 - 3. Address **systemic racism**.
 - 4. Focus on **eliminating poverty and meeting basic needs**.
 - 5. Produce an **annual MMIW report and dashboard** to provide an overview of the MMIW injustice and track changes over time.
 - 6. Ensure state and federal technical assistance and support is provided so tribes have access to and can fully participate in all relevant **data systems**.
 - 7. Support tribes to **exercise their sovereignty and increase their jurisdictional authority** to investigate, prosecute, and sentence perpetrators of violence against Indigenous women and girls.
 - 8. Advocate for the U.S. Congress to **pass the 2020 Violence Against Women Act**.
 - 9. **Expand Minnesota's Safe Harbor law** to all trafficking victims (not just those age 24 and younger).
 - 10. Increase **personnel and state resources** dedicated to addressing the MMIW injustice.
 - 11. Provide more training and resources, especially in Indian Country and greater Minnesota, to **conduct effective investigations of MMIW-related cases**.
 - 12. Ensure that all MMIW-related **deaths receive an autopsy and are investigated** by a coroner or medical examiner.
 - 13. Strengthen the **trauma-informed and victim-centered response** of law enforcement, courts, and the health care system to Indigenous sexual assault, trafficking, and violence survivors.
 - 14. Address the harm that the **child welfare system** has done to Indigenous families and communities.
 - 15. Provide age appropriate, culturally responsive, trauma-informed education on **healthy relationships and consent** to all students in Minnesota's K-12 schools.
 - 16. **Increase awareness** of MMIW issues and specific MMIW cases among the general public.
 - 17. **Prevent and reduce the harms of trafficking, sexual exploitation, and normalized violence** for Indigenous women and girls who are at the most risk of becoming MMIW.
 - 18. Require **sex trafficking awareness training and targeted prevention** to Indian Country, areas where extractive industries such as oil and mining camps are located, and casinos and hotels.
 - 19. Ensure that initiatives and decisions related to the MMIW injustice are **informed by Indigenous women and girls**, especially those who have lived experiences with violence and exploitation.
 - 20. Promote healing of perpetrators, survivors, relatives, and communities by supporting **culturally responsive, community-led efforts**.