



## Justice for Girls Fact Sheet:

### *Violence, Mental Health and the Well-being of Girls in Washington State*

In Washington state, girls<sup>1</sup> are disproportionately witnessing or experiencing violence in their lives, which can have negative impacts on their mental health and well-being. This is especially true for girls of color growing up in communities where systemic racism has prevented access to services or where services do not meet community needs. More than their white peers, girls of color witness physical abuse, feel unsafe at school, are disconnected from adults who they see as helpful and access fewer after-school activities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified this crisis and is widening the gap between the marginalized and the privileged. It is exacerbating the ways violence, mental health and economic instability impact WA state girls, particularly for those living in communities disenfranchised and under-resourced by systemic racism and those facing housing instability and/or involvement in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems.

Reform efforts **must** address the overlapping impacts these issues have on marginalized<sup>2</sup> girls and gender expansive young people – particularly girls and gender expansive young people of color – and directly address these impacts in COVID-19 related responses. Reforms that are girl-centered, racially equitable, and community-driven solutions for safety and opportunity must be included in local and state budgets.

### **Quick Facts: Violence, Mental Health & Well-being of Girls in Washington State<sup>3</sup>**

- Girls across all racial groups in WA state are **more likely than boys** to experience at home emotional abuse, anxiety and depressive feelings, attempt suicide, feel unsafe by a person they are dating, be bullied at school, be harassed on social media and receive sexually suggestive images on social media. Girls of color **report negative impacts more than white girls** in every one of these indicators apart from experiencing higher levels of anxiety.
- As WA state girls get older, across all racial groups, they witness the **same or more violence** and their **levels of hope decline**. Across all racial groups, “People who help me” decreases for girls in 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

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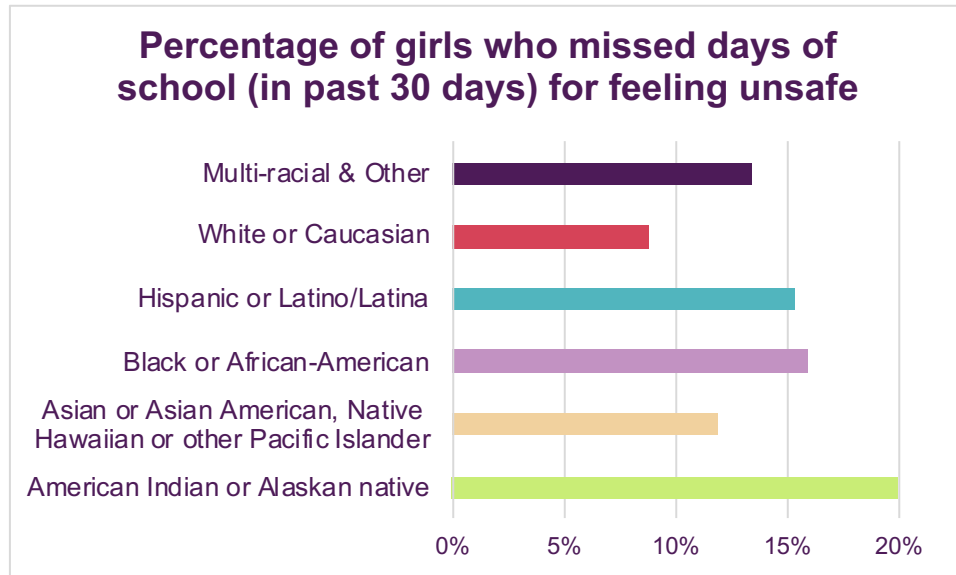
<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document, the term “girl(s)” refers to gender expansive youth (cis girls, trans girls, non-binary youth, gender non-conforming youth, gender queer youth and any girl-identified youth).

<sup>2</sup> The [Girls@theMargin national alliance](#) uses the term “marginalized” not to describe girls and young women, but to call attention to their treatment by decision makers, communities, families, and the systems charged with their care.

<sup>3</sup> All of the data presented in this document is compiled from 2018 Washington Healthy Youth Survey reports (<https://www.askhys.net/Reports>). For Washington state residing, female-identified students in grades 8, 10 and 12, where applicable. In 2018, the Healthy Youth Survey was completed by 234,610 students in all 39 counties, in 238 school districts, in 970 schools. Of those students surveyed, **10,986** students identified as female for grades 8, 10 and 12 statewide.

### Girls' Victimization & Violence

- One in three girls experience **at-home emotional abuse** such as being sworn at, insulted, or humiliated by an adult at home. This is especially true for nearly half of all multi-racial girls.
- One in four girls feel **unsafe at school**. This is especially true for Black and Native American girls. Overall, nearly twice as many girls of color compared to white girls say they miss school as a result of feeling unsafe.



- One in four girls are made to **feel unsafe by the person they were dating**. This is especially true for nearly one in three of all girls of color.

**One in four girls (and nearly one in three BIPOC and/or multi-racial girls) were made to feel unsafe by the person they were dating.**

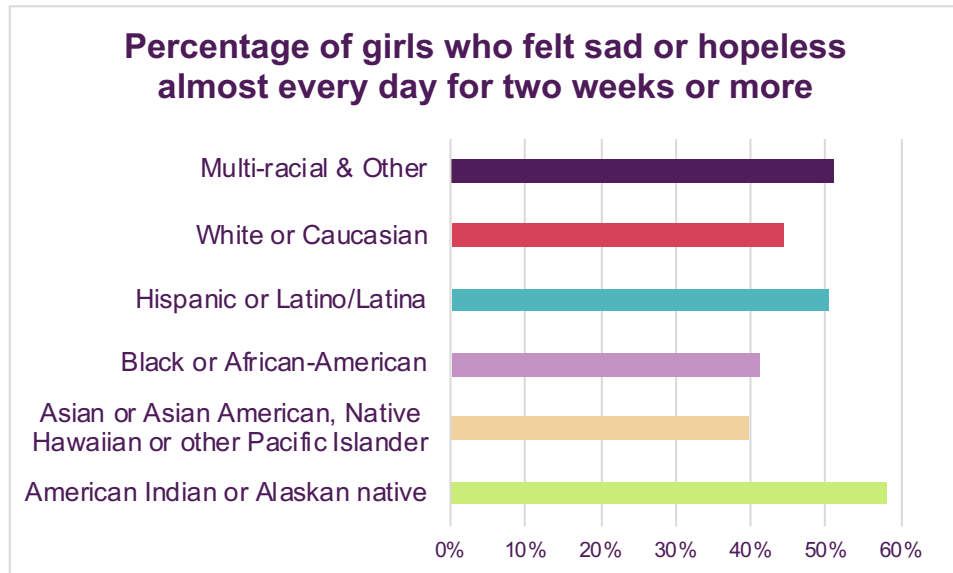


- By 12th grade, nearly one in three of white and Hispanic/Latina, and one of two American Indian/Alaskan Native girls were **forced into sexual situations**.

### Mental Health & Well-being

- One in seven girls **attempted suicide**. This is higher – one in six – for Hispanic/Latina, and one of two American Indian/Alaskan Native girls.

- Almost half of all girls experience **depressive feelings**. More than half of multi-racial girls do.



- Almost three out of four girls experience high levels of **anxiety**. This is especially true for nearly four out of five white and multi-racial girls.
- One out of two girls who experience **at-home abuse** say they have **no hope**.

### Connection to Supportive Adults

- Only about one out of three girls say they **know people in school or their neighborhood** who would provide help if they needed it. Girls of color are less likely to identify supportive adults at school and in their neighborhood than white girls.

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- When girls can talk to adults, they are less likely to report experiencing depressive feelings. In fact, about six out of eight girls who say they can **talk to an adult** report that they experience **no depressive feelings**.

**Under stay-at-home orders and teaching and youth development going on-line, girls with fewer avenues for outside interactions and support, are facing:**

- Greater levels of anxiety and mental health challenges;
- Gender-rooted expectations for household chores and childcare that may impact their ability to succeed in school;
- Potentially elevated levels of abuse by family and caregivers;
- Academic slides and lack of access to academic support for learning styles;
- Digital divides that hamper access to services, resources and education;
- Increased social media harassment and cyber bullying due to greater time spent online.<sup>4</sup>

For more information, including details on the variable questions, dataset specifics and methodology, and/or to obtain a copy of our complete report, contact us directly at [justiceforgirlswa@gmail.com](mailto:justiceforgirlswa@gmail.com).

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<sup>4</sup> This summary is based on findings from research conducted by national partners [Alliance for Girls](#) and [Girls@the Margin](#).