

USU UWLP Releases Research on Utah Women's Safety and Security

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The Utah State University [Utah Women & Leadership Project](#) (UWLP) released the third of five white papers sharing results of a study conducted in the fall – [Women's Safety and Security 2025: Utahns' Awareness, Understanding, and Attitudes](#). The study supports “[A Bolder Way Forward](#),” a statewide UWLP initiative focused on ensuring that more Utah girls, women, and their families thrive.

“For those who want to understand the perceptions and attitudes regarding the challenges Utah women and girls face, this 38-page report contains critical data that can help, and we invite the public to review it,” said lead researcher and author Susan Madsen, UWLP founder/director and the USU Extension Professor of Leadership. “This is our third year of data collection, and the report addresses data changes compared to the 2023 and 2024 surveys.”

The 83-item survey, administered from Oct. 1 to Nov. 19, 2025, included two samples (representative and convenience) totaling 5,212 Utah participants. The white paper reported on survey items that focused on understanding Utahns' awareness and perceptions of four key areas: child sexual abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault, and poverty/homelessness.

Child sexual abuse survey items:

1. In your immediate community (e.g., neighborhood, family, faith, club, business), child sexual abuse is a problem.
2. Child sexual abuse is preventable.
3. Child sexual abuse is more prevalent in Utah than the national average.

4. I know where to find resources to help prevent child sexual abuse.

More than half of respondents (51.4%) disagreed on some level or were neutral regarding child sexual abuse being a problem in their immediate community, and women agreed significantly more than men. Residents of San Juan, Duchesne, Emery, Uintah, and Carbon counties had the highest levels of agreement, while Tooele, Summit, Piute, Millard, Weber, and Wasatch counties had the lowest levels of agreement.

Domestic violence survey items:

1. Domestic violence is a problem in my community.
2. When considering domestic violence, emotional abuse is just as serious as physical abuse.
3. I know where to find domestic violence resources and support in my community.
4. I know how to take concrete steps to help address domestic violence in my community.

Nearly 60% of respondents agreed on some level that domestic violence is a problem in their community. While 71.8% of respondents indicated at least some degree of familiarity with resources and support, respondents who were unemployed and full-time students knew less about where to find resources and support. Respondents in Emery, Garfield, and Sanpete counties expressed the lowest levels of agreement.

“Research shows that one in three Utah women will experience some form of intimate partner violence in her lifetime,” said Madsen. “This is deplorable, and we need to make it a top priority to keep women safe.”

Sexual assault survey items:

1. I don't think sexual assault is a big problem in Utah.
2. Any unwanted sexual contact or behavior is sexual assault.
3. I don't think there is much I can do about sexual assault in my community.
4. I know where to find sexual assault resources in my community.

The study addressed the significant social, criminal justice, and healthcare issues of sexual assault. One source cited that Utah is currently ranked 7th of 50 states for the number of forcible rapes per capita.

While 75.4% of respondents recognized on some level that sexual assault is a big problem in Utah, 66% indicated

some degree of ambivalence in terms of being able to help reduce sexual assault. In fact, men were more likely to agree with the statement, "I don't think there is much I can do about sexual assault in my community."

One responder commented, "Women in Utah are forced to navigate a culture where hostility, discrimination, and even violence are too often minimized or explained away. Women here are conditioned to defend or rationalize our own reactions instead of seeing the conduct itself named and condemned. The effect is cumulative: it erodes safety, silences our voices, and reinforces the very patterns that keep sexism in place."

Poverty and homelessness survey items:

1. If one is experiencing poverty in Utah, it is the result of their own choices.
2. If one is experiencing homelessness in Utah, it is the result of their own choices.
3. I don't think there is much I can do about poverty and homelessness in my community.
4. Home is the first step toward positioning children and families for the opportunity to thrive and plan for the future.

Although Utah fares better than many other states, both poverty and homelessness are daily realities for thousands of Utah women and their families, and the intersections with domestic violence and sexual assault cannot be ignored.

While most respondents disagreed at some level that experiencing poverty is a result of an individual's own choices, 18.7% of respondents indicated some level of agreement. This is similar to the survey item regarding homelessness being a result of one's own choices, where 20.5% of respondents agreed on some level. Qualitative comments, however, describe the impact, specifically on single women and mothers, who sometimes feel they are in lose-lose situations.

One respondent noted, "The culture here shames women for working and not being a stay-at-home mom. I am a single mom working three jobs. There are no resources for someone like me who makes more than the poverty level."

Madsen reiterated that Utah must do better to ensure that everyone thrives.

"As Utah decision makers and residents join to find ways to strengthen the impact of girls and women, we cannot disregard the fact that without safety and security, women, girls, and their families are simply surviving – and some

barely so," she said. "We cannot continue to claim 'This Is the Place' when, for too many of our girls and women, this is a place where suffering is ignored, even tolerated. We can do better. The health of Utah's future families hinges on making definitive changes...now."

April Townsend, research fellow, Utah Women & Leadership Project, is co-author of the report.

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