



## ***What does social science research\* tell us about . . .***

### **VIOLENCE AND SUICIDE IN THE TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY?**

Transgender and gender non-conforming people face alarmingly high rates of violence in virtually all life domains and high rates of suicidal behavior. Although sampling transgender and gender non-conforming people is challenged by a lack of knowledge of the actual population of diverse genders in the U.S., scientific studies highlight the damage of discrimination and violence targeted at these community members' gender identities and gender expressions.

#### **Suicide Attempts are Associated With Violence**

Numerous studies cited by the American Psychological Association <sup>(1)</sup> have shown that up to a third of transgender people are struggling with **substance abuse, depression, and suicidal thoughts or attempts**. Although acknowledging the high rates of serious mental health problems among transgender and gender non-conforming people is important for understanding how to prevent it, it is also important to recognize protective factors as well. For example, when young LGBT adults had families accepting of their identity, they show better self-esteem, general health, and lower depression and suicidality. <sup>(4)</sup> Although many transgender and gender non-conforming people suffer greater violence and psychological damage, most also live satisfying and healthy lives despite these challenges.

#### **Attempted Suicide Among Specific Populations of Transgender People**

The National Transgender Discrimination Survey <sup>(3)</sup> is regarded as the most comprehensive survey of transgender and gender non-conforming people. This 2011 survey (also referred to as the NTDS) found an overall 41% of transgender and gender non-conforming people made one or more suicide attempts.

Consistent across many studies is that transgender and gender non-conforming people of color experience even higher rates of violence than their white counterparts. Higher rates of attempted suicide were reported in the NTDS <sup>(3)</sup> among respondents who were people of color, including:

- 56% of American Indian respondents
- 56% of Asian/Pacific Islander respondents (*Please note: report available in English, traditional Chinese, Hindi, Korean, Tagalog, Tamil, and Vietnamese*)
- 54% of those who reported themselves as Multiracial
- 45% of Black respondents
- 44% Latino/a respondents (report also available in English and Spanish)

Other groups who reported higher levels of suicide attempts in the NTDS <sup>(3)</sup> survey were:

- 51% who reported family rejection
- 45% who had medically transitioned
- 44% who were visually non-conforming in their gender expression
- 44% of those who were generally out about their gender
- 43% who had surgically transitioned

#### **School-Based Harassment and Violence Leads to Higher Rates of Attempted Suicide**

School-based harassment and violence leads to alarmingly higher rates of suicide and attempted suicide. According to the 2011 NTDS, <sup>(3)</sup> the suicide attempt rates were much higher when the discrimination and violence occurred in a school setting, including:

- 76% when a teacher physically assaulted the student
- 69% when a teacher sexually assaulted the student

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*\* All research cited is representative of a larger body of peer-reviewed research. Please note, not all individuals or families are affected in the same way.*

- 59% when a teacher harassed or bullied the student
- 51% who were bullied, harassed, assaulted, or expelled from school because of their gender expression

In a statewide survey of transgender Virginians <sup>(2)</sup> reported in 2012, trans-men and trans-women's history of gender-based violence **when they were youth in school** had nearly four times the odds of at least one suicide attempt:

- 46% of trans-women who experienced gender-based school victimization reported a suicide attempt compared to 14.4% of those who were not victimized
- 41% of trans-men who experienced gender-based victimization in school reported at least one suicide attempt, compared to 19% of those who were not victimized

### Research also links suicide attempts to physical and sexual violence

Trans-men and trans-women also had a greater number of suicide attempts when they had survived physical or sexual violence. In a review of self-report research, hotline data, and crime reports, Stotzer <sup>(5)</sup> concluded that the majority of transgender people experience physical and/or sexual violence, often multiple times, throughout their lifespan.

The NTDS <sup>(4)</sup> also reported higher levels of suicide attempts among those who were assaulted, including:

- 64% who were sexually assaulted
- 61% who survived bias-based physical assault.

In a 2012 study <sup>(6)</sup> of 271 self-identified transgender people:

- 38% reported surviving physical violence (98% of these reported the violence was targeted at their gender identity or expression)
- 27% reported sexual violence (with 89% targeted at their gender identity or expression).
- Of those who reported surviving violence in the survey, very few reported this to the police (11% of physical violence; 9% of sexual violence).
- Trans-women who had survived physical violence had **5 times** the odds of a suicide attempt than trans-women who had never been assaulted, and trans-women who survived sexual violence had **3.6 times** the odds of suicide attempt
- Trans-men who had survived physical violence had more than **3 times** the odds of suicide attempt than trans-men who had not been physically assaulted, and trans-men who survived sexual violence had 5 times the odds of a suicide attempt.
- Of those who reported surviving violence in the survey, few reported this to the police (11% of physical violence; 9% of sexual violence).

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### WORKS CITED

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