

U.S. Transgender Survey Reveals Inequalities in Income & Employment

On Thursday, December 8, the National Center for Transgender Equality released the results of their U.S. Transgender Survey (USTS) (<http://www.ustranssurvey.org/>); the largest survey focused on the experiences of transgender, trans, genderqueer, and non-binary people.

Conducted in 2015, the USTS serves as a follow up to the groundbreaking National Transgender Discrimination Survey (NTDS) (http://www.thetaskforce.org/static_html/downloads/reports/reports/ntds_full.pdf). Nearly 28,000 trans people responded to the survey, which covered housing, employment, access to healthcare, and other aspects of life.

The U.S. Transgender Survey's findings correlate in many ways to what we learned from the earlier NTDS. At home, at school, out in public and at work, trans people continue to face "injustice at every turn", as the subtitle for the NTDS noted.

Income & Employment Status

As the NTDS found in 2008, trans people remain disproportionately unemployed and/or living in poverty as compared to the national averages.

- USTS respondents' unemployment rate was 15%, three times higher than the 5% national unemployment rate (at the time of the survey, in 2015).
 - The trans POC unemployment rate is even higher, ranging from 20% for black trans people to as high as 35% for Middle Eastern respondents.
 - Nearly one quarter (24%) of respondents with disabilities reported being unemployed.
- 29% of respondents living in poverty, which is double the poverty rate in the US adult population (14%). The rate increases to 69% for undocumented respondents and 62% for those working in the underground economy.
- 12% reported an annual HOUSEHOLD income under \$10k, which is 3x higher than the US adult population in that income bracket.

Employment and the Workplace

According to the survey authors, “transgender people face pervasive mistreatment, harassment, and discrimination in the workplace and during the hiring process.” USTS respondents were asked about being out, as well as about the levels of support they receive from supervisors and coworkers.

- Almost half of employed respondents reported not being out to their supervisors or bosses.
 - Of those with coworkers, 42% said none on their coworkers know they are trans.
- Of those employed, 16% reported losing a job due to their gender identity and expression over their lifetime.
- Over a quarter (27%) reported being fired, denied a promotion, or not hired due to their gender identity and expression.
- 15% experienced verbal and physical harassment on the job, and 23% reported experiencing other forms of mistreatment.
- Over three quarters of respondents (77%) took action to avoid discrimination at work (including hiding their gender identity, delaying transition, and quitting the job).
- 53% reported hiding their gender identity at work. Nearly half didn’t ask to be referred to with correct pronouns due to fear of discrimination. Nonbinary respondents were twice as likely to avoid correcting pronoun use.

Altogether, these results describe a reality in which trans people face higher barriers to securing employment and moving out of poverty. Coupled with other forms of discrimination, such as on the basis of race, class, or ability, these barriers increase. Still, the survey authors note the positive impacts of visibility and acceptance. They note the record number of respondents- 27,715- which is four times as high as in the previous NTDS. Respondents also highlighted increasing acceptance by family, friends, and coworkers. For example, over two-thirds (68%) of those out to coworkers said their coworkers were responsive.

In a national survey conducted earlier this year by Out & Equal, The Harris Poll, and Witeck Communications, (<http://www.theharrispoll.com/business/2016-Out--Equal-Workplace-Survey.html>) we also found evidence of Americans’ increasing acceptance of transgender people. By significant majorities, most Americans agree that transgender workers must be shown respect and dignity in the workplace.

- 88% of all Americans agree that employees should be judged for how well they perform their jobs, and not whether they are transgender.
- 75% of all Americans agree that regardless of the legal name and gender of an employee, employers should use an employee’s pronouns and desired name when communicating with them and when referring to them to third parties.
- 63% of all Americans agree that employers should intervene when an employee regularly misuses a co-worker’s pronouns or preferred name.

Even as acceptance and visibility continue to grow, many transgender workers lack state and federal nondiscrimination protections. When informed that there is no federal law today that protects someone who is transgender from employment discrimination, 67% of Americans said they would support such a law.

We shouldn’t be discouraged by the results of the US Transgender Survey. Rather, respondents’ experiences reflect the importance of committing to workplace equality for the LGBT community. Out & Equal believes education is the first step– that’s why we offer resources such as in-person training (<http://outandequal.org/on-site-training/>), events such as the Workplace Summit (<http://outandequal.org/event/the-2017-workplace-summit/>), and resources like the Workplace Gender Identity and Transition Guidelines (<http://outandequal.org/transition-guidelines/>), which provide information for employers who want to support gender non-conforming and/or transitioning employees.

Together, we can work to ensure that workplaces are welcoming and inclusive for employees, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity and expression.

Feature photo: #WOCinTech

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