

Children's Rights

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<https://www.childrensrights.org/national-survey-brings-needed-attention-to-lgbtq-youth-mental-health-crisis/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

By Meredith Giovanelli, Policy Analyst

Last month the Trevor Project [published its latest survey on LGBTQ youth mental health](#). The report is shocking to read, but a powerful signal that it is time to act to provide adequate resources and protections to ensure the mental health and stability of LGBTQ youth.

Nearly 34,000 LGBTQ people aged 13 to 24 45% of whom were people of color and 48% transgender or nonbinary filled out the survey. Their answers paint a grim picture: in the last year, **45% of respondents seriously considered attempting suicide, 73% reported symptoms of anxiety, and 58% reported symptoms of depression.**

The data demonstrates how LGBTQ youth face higher rates of mental illness due to social conditions, cultural norms, and institutional policies that challenge their well-being. These challenges can be compounded by intersecting identities, such as race and socioeconomic status. For example, the survey underscores a clear and urgent need for access to mental health care resources. **Of the 82% of respondents who wanted mental health services in the past year, 60% could not access them.** The top three barriers to care were fear of discussing mental health concerns and obtaining caregiver permission, fear of not being taken seriously, and affordability.

Of particular concern were responses to survey questions seeking the experiences of LGBTQ youth related to the Covid-19 pandemic, and to the wave of anti-transgender legislative action in states across the country.

A majority of LGBTQ youth reported that because of the pandemic their mental health was poor. This finding highlights what we already know from the [U.S. Surgeon Generals advisory on Youth Mental Health](#), while calling attention to the specific needs of LGBTQ youth.

Survey results also reveal how state legislation targeting LGBTQ people has impacted youth mental health. The vast majority of respondents said they worry they will be denied access to gender-affirming medical care, restricted from accessing the bathroom of their choice, or prevented from competing on school sports teams. Regardless of the legislative outcome, the ugly political rhetoric behind these bills is generating enormous national media coverage, resulting in trauma and stigmatization that could have long lasting, detrimental effects on youth mental health.

LGBTQ youth also reported being physically threatened just for being themselves. Over 30% reporting being harmed due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. These rates are higher for Native and Indigenous youth than any other race or ethnicity. Furthermore, over 70% of LGBTQ youth reported experiencing discrimination due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

These findings are tragic and troubling. But we know community and familial support can be protective factors in combating a hostile social and political environment that marginalizes and stigmatizes LGBTQ youth. For instance, LGBTQ youth with highly supportive families and schools or communities that are LGBTQ-affirming reported lower rates of attempted suicide.

Unfortunately, family supports like these too often elude children and youth in the child welfare system, where LGBTQ young people are over-represented. Nearly 80% of the over 400,000 children in foster care in America suffer from a mental health condition. Its hard to believe, but youth in foster care experience PTSD at two times the rate of US war veterans.

LGBTQ youth placed in institutions are disproportionately young people of color and therefore exposed to overlapping inequalities associated with that intersectionality. LGBTQ youth are also at higher risk of being rejected by their families and experiencing discrimination, institutionalization, and abuse in foster care. They are more likely to age out without achieving permanency and to become homeless, live in poverty, suffer from mental health disorders, and experience chronic illness.

There is a dearth of data on LGBTQ youth in the child welfare and juvenile legal systems, but general population data like the Trevor Project survey can help us draw parallels to system-involved youth. In doing so, it is critical to acknowledge that structural inequities lead to the overrepresentation of Black, Brown, and LGBTQ children in these systems, compared to the overall youth population.

Communities are where children can heal, which is why Childrens Rights is working to ensure that laws and policies recognize and address the critical need for community mental health services that can keep children at home and families together. Too often, police officers are the only available emergency responders to children in mental distress. We are calling for an end to criminalizing these youth and instead investing in community services that can help them heal. [You can sign our petition here.](#)

At the federal level, we applaud [Presidents recent Executive Order on advancing equality for LGBTQI+ individuals](#) in response to unrelenting political and legislative attacks on LGBTQ children and families in particular that threaten the civil rights gains of the last half century are asking Congress to pass the Equality Act to protect LGBTQ+ youth from state policies that deny them resources like suicide prevention hotlines, and access to information about gender and sexual identity. [You can sign our petition here.](#)

There is a long journey ahead of us to address the mental health crisis children and youth are experiencing outside and inside government systems. But knowledge is power. The Trevor Projects critical data provides us with an urgent roadmap to how we can make things better now we must act.

Meredith Giovanelli is a policy analyst at Childrens Rights

Stop Criminalizing Children, Invest In Their Healing

Call on policymakers to close prison pipelines and fund community services.

Demand Equality NOW

We need laws and policies that celebrate and empower LGBTQ+ youth. Call on your senators to pass the Equality Act.

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