

# **Trend in policies against Women and LGBTQ+ individuals**

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Introduction to Psychology - Assignment 1

Response Paper

### **Trend in policies against women and LGBTQ+ individuals**

In early 2024, The American Psychological Association (APA) released a series of scientific articles that detailed common trends that we are observing in social policies, and the psychological consequences of them. One of the articles in this series details the alarming trends observed in policies concerning women and LGBTQ+ or queer individuals.

### **Background**

The report by Clay Rebecca A. (2024) American Psychological Association, states that this trend was set off by the US Government's decision to overturn the historic Roe v. Wade ruling in 2022. Roe v. Wade legalized abortion in the US in 1973 and on June 24, 2022 the Supreme Court ruled against it, ending the constitutional right to abortion after 50 years.

This ruling has made abortion completely illegal in 13 states (Oklahoma being the first state to pass a complete abortion ban), and 28 states have abortion bans based on the gestational duration. This has had several adverse effects not only on women's physical health but also their mental and psychological well-being. Physically, carrying a dangerous pregnancy to full-term can cause hypertension and hemorrhage and in the worst case - death.

Not having access to abortion can also put women at increased risk of depression and anxiety, as their bodily autonomy is stripped away from them. Research has also shown that women denied abortion are more likely to experience poverty and remain in toxic relationships.

Another group of people affected by this incredibly distressing trend are queer individuals but specifically transgender youth. 28 states passed amendments that banned same-sex marriage but even more concerning are the policies that outlaw even the

mention of LGBTQ+ individuals in schools (like the one implemented in Florida). According to the Human Rights Campaign, more than 35% of transgender youth live in states that have banned access to the gender-affirming care that they require. Such policies that don't give people rights over their own bodies, and makes queer individuals feel overlooked, have lasting negative consequences on their mental health.

The Trevor Project's 2023 National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ Young People, gave insights into what exactly the youth was feeling. Nearly 1 in 3 LGBTQ 13- to 24-year-olds said they had poor mental health because of the constant debate about policies regarding their existence. A majority of them also felt unsafe at school, and the aversion to education on topics related to LGBTQ+ individuals only further perpetuates the stigma about them among their classmates.

A study by Abreu, R. L., Sostre, J. P., Gonzalez, K. A., Lockett, G. M., Matsuno, E., & Mosley, D. V. (2022) - illustrated that parental figures of transgender and gender-diverse youth reported that such policies had increased depression, suicidality, and gender dysphoria. They also had decreased access to medical care and felt unsafe when asking for medical help.

To make matters worse, while both groups targeted by these policies are suffering from worse mental health - they also have to deal with a system that makes it harder for them to access mental health care. Due to the evolving nature of the legalities surrounding these policies, psychologists may not be willing to discuss events like abortion with their patients, in fear of losing their jobs.

### **Research-based findings**

The Turnaway Study, conducted under the University of California, San Francisco is a pivotal resource to understand the consequences of having an abortion, compared to carrying an unwanted pregnancy to term. The study tracked these two groups of women for 5 years (in the United States) and what they found was that many of the common claims against abortion are not supported by evidence.

The most common rhetoric against abortion is that it affects the health of the mother and causes depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). As a direct attack to this argument, the study found that women who had an abortion are not more likely to have depression or suicidal ideation. In fact, 95% of women believe that abortion was the right decision for them, and this was reported five years after the procedure. They also found that women denied abortions experienced serious complications like eclampsia (seizures), chronic pain and hypertension. Unfortunately, two of the women who participated in the study even died during childbirth, highlighting the adverse physical consequences of unwanted pregnancy. It has also been seen that these women are less likely to have aspirations and plans for the future, which are possible signs of poor mental health.

Restricted access to abortion also causes women to have four times greater odds of living below the Federal Poverty Level. This also has a negative effect on the children born from the pregnancy as well as the pre-existing children in the family. It has been seen that these children are less likely to form a healthy relationship with their parents and they grow up in poverty. Women who are denied abortions are also more likely to remain with their abusive partners, further worsening the situation at home.

In a similar vein is The Trevor Project, a non-profit advocacy organization for young LGBTQ+ people. In addition to having several resources for queer youth mental health, they also believe that research can empower LGBTQ+ individuals and highlight problems that require solutions. According to them, there are currently 633 anti-LGBTQ+ bills and from 2018 to 2022, 48 anti-transgender laws were enacted across several US states. Further, they also do not feel at ease in their own homes as less than 40% of respondents to the survey described their homes as LGBTQ+ safe. Lee, W. Y., Hobbs, J. N., Hobaica, S., DeChants, J. P., Price, M. N., & Nath, R. (2024) published a paper that showed an alarming increase in the number of suicide attempts by transgender and non-binary youth (by 7-72%) in the year following the enactment of anti-transgender laws.

They also looked into the effect of such negative policies in schools, where young people spend most of their time. Queer youth attending schools that have anti-LGTBQ+ policies like banning them from playing sports or using gendered facilities that go against their identity - have been associated with increased risk of anxiety, depression and suicide and they also experience more bullying.

Both the survey and the study highlight the importance of speaking out about these policies and fighting to make a change. Using psychological research, we can provide scientific evidence for the consequences of such laws and in the process, minimize the stigma surrounding these issues. Psychologists have also been fighting against these laws in their own ways, by empowering their patients to speak out and oppose the policies.

## **Reflection and Learning**

The issue about women's reproductive rights and the rights of queer and transgender people to exist and get access to medical care is very important to me and in fact, should become a priority for everyone. These policies are affecting very intimate parts of people's lives and are stripping them of the basic right of getting to choose what they want to do.

Women have always had to fight for themselves and it is disappointing that they have to prove their right over their own reproductive systems in this modern age. As proven by the extensive research cited above, abortions have the potential to improve the women's life, especially if the pregnancy is associated with health concerns. Making abortions accessible also encourages more women to think about their financial and social situation before committing to starting a family.

Denying abortion services also perpetuates a very harmful view that women should not be allowed to make choices about their own bodies. This trend in policies reflects an alarming rise in the number of people that believe that women have 'traditional roles' that they need to play in society - stay at home and have children. This strips away their identity and reduces them to a tool. Thus, abortion access should not be a debate but rather a universally accepted right.

Thanks to the efforts of countless people before us, we are currently seeing more LGBTQ+ support than ever before in history. This is supported by the various resources, parades and protests that are happening all over. We are also observing an increasing number of role models for queer individuals - in movies, TV shows, books and even in the field of STEM. However, government policies and laws do not reflect a similar positive trend.

Countless laws have been enacted that endanger the very existence of queer individuals, threatening their existence and making them feel unsafe. The most surprising policy was that several US states have banned access to puberty blockers and hormones, simple medicines that could help transgender people align their body with their gender identity. Not only is this a violation of their bodily autonomy that could cause them major gender dysmorphia, it could also be dangerous as they would tend to seek out illegal or harmful ways to get the surgery done.

LGBTQ+ people have to deal with already existing stereotypes about them and these policies only spread further misinformation. Only by allowing schools to teach young students about gender identity, sexual orientation and queer history, can we hope to spread acceptance and respect. With proper education, young LGBTQ+ people will also experience less bullying and overall have better mental health.

### **Trends observed in India**

In India, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code was enacted during colonial rule and it prohibited same-sex relationships. On September 6 2018, section 377 was penalized as it infringed on basic fundamental rights. This marked the beginning of legal recognition for the LGBTQ+ community in India.

While the law does recognise these individuals and their relationships, same-sex marriage is yet to be legalised. It recognises some cohabitation or live-in relationship rights for them, but the government doesn't issue marriage certificates or provide legal marriage protection to them.

India has traditionally recognised transgender people (locally known as *Hijras*). The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019 - recognises transgender people as

“whose gender does not match the gender assigned to that person at birth”. The bill prohibits discrimination against transgender people in the field of education, employment, and healthcare. While this bill does not guarantee free gender-affirming surgery, several states do provide this. The states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala were the first Indian states to enact a transgender welfare policy. This policy ensures that transgender people can access free sex reassignment surgery (SRS) in government hospitals, free housing, various citizenship documents etc.

Monumentally, abortion has been legal in India since 1971, with the introduction of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act. In 2021, certain amendments to the act were passed, such as women being allowed to seek safe abortion services on grounds of contraceptive failure and an increase in gestation limit to 24 weeks for special categories of women.

Easy access to abortions ensures better mental health and overall well-being of the women in the country. The policies that recognise LGBTQ+ individuals are also a step in the right direction. However, our society still suffers from a lot of social and religious stigma surrounding these topics. We need to educate people in Indian society by enforcing school curriculum about sexuality and gender identity. While they may be legally recognised, we need to ensure that they are also integrated into society and do not face any biases or societal discrimination.



## Conclusion

We all have important women in our lives and it is only right that we help fight for the rights to their own bodies. Access to abortions helps keep women safe and have control over their lives. LGBTQ+ individuals are also not a topic to be ‘debated’ - they exist all around us, whether among our friends or family, or just in our general society. We need to help create an inclusive environment, free of discrimination and stereotypes. LGBTQ+ youth are especially vulnerable, and need to be protected from these harmful trends in policies that control their lives from a very young age.

Educating ourselves about these topics - by reading up on scientific research and listening to new perspectives - is the first step towards fighting this trend. Participating in protests and involving ourselves in political advocacy at all levels - from school boards, to community meetings - can help spread awareness and hopefully get more people involved in the fight against these trends.

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#### AI Assistance

- **Did you use ChatGpt or any other AI generative tools for this reaction paper?**

Yes.

- **If yes, how did you make use of it?**

I used ChatGPT to help rephrase some sentences using more academic jargon.

- **Hours spent on completing the assignment: 2-3, 3-5, 5-8, 8-10, >10 hours.**

5-8 hours