


Conversion Therapy for LGBT Kids Linked to Higher Risks of Depression & Suicide

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A new study has found that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth who experience attempts by their parents or others to change their sexual orientation — often called conversion therapy — report higher levels of depression and suicidal behavior, lower levels of self-esteem, social support, and life satisfaction, as well as lower levels of education and income in young adulthood.

According to researchers with the Family Acceptance Project (FAP) at San Francisco State University, efforts by parents, as well as external sexual orientation conversion interventions by therapists and religious leaders contribute to multiple health and adjustment problems in young adulthood.

In the study, more than half (53 percent) of LGBT non-Latino white and Latino young adults, ages 21-25, reported experiencing sexual orientation change efforts during adolescence.

Of these, 21 percent reported specific experiences by parents and caregivers to change their sexual orientation at home, while 32 percent reported sexual orientation change efforts by both parents and therapists and religious leaders.

Notably, any sexual orientation change efforts — whether by parents alone or by parents, therapists and religious leaders — contributed to higher risks for LGBT young people, the researchers reported.

However, those who experience both parental and external conversion efforts by therapists or religious leaders had the highest levels of risk, they add.

Rates of attempted suicide by LGBT young people whose parents tried to change their sexual orientation were more than double (48 percent) the rate of LGBT young adults who reported no conversion experiences (22 percent).

Suicide attempts nearly tripled for LGBT young people who reported both home-based efforts to change their sexual orientation by parents and intervention efforts by therapists and religious leaders (63 percent), according to the study's findings.

High levels of depression more than doubled (33 percent) for LGBT young people whose parents tried to change their sexual orientation compared with those who reported no conversion experiences (16 percent). It more than tripled (52 percent) for LGBT young people who reported both home-based efforts to change their sexual orientation by parents and external sexual orientation change efforts by therapists and religious leaders, the researchers reported.

Sexual orientation change experiences during adolescence by both parents and externally by therapists and religious leaders were associated with lower young adult socioeconomic status, including less educational attainment and lower weekly income, according to the study's findings.

LGBT adolescents from highly religious families and those from families with lower socioeconomic status were most likely to experience both home-based and external conversion efforts. Those who were gender-nonconforming and who were from immigrant families were more likely to experience external conversion efforts initiated by parents and caregivers, the researchers said.

"Although parents and religious leaders who try to change a child's LGBT identity may be motivated by attempts to 'protect' their children, these rejecting behaviors instead undermine an LGBT child's sense of self-worth, contribute to self-destructive behaviors that significantly increase risk and inhibit self-care, which includes constricting their ability to make a living," said Dr. Caitlin Ryan, director of the Family Acceptance Project at San Francisco State University and lead author of the study.

"That's why we developed a family support model to help diverse families learn to support their LGBT children that we're integrating in behavioral health, out-of-home care, primary care and pastoral care in communities across the country."

"We now have even more dramatic evidence of the lasting personal and social cost of subjecting young people to so-called 'change' or 'conversion' therapies," said study co-author Stephen T. Russell, Ph.D., Regents Professor at the University of Texas at Austin.

"Prior studies with adults have shown how harmful these practices are. Our study shows the central role that parents play. It is clear that there are public health costs of 'change' efforts for LGBT adolescents over the long-term. The kind of change we really need is family education and intervention."

The study was published in the *Journal of Homosexuality*.

Source: [San Francisco State University](#)

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