



More than 50% of trans and non-binary youth in US considered suicide this year, survey says

Description

More than 50% of transgender and non-binary youth in states across the US seriously considered suicide in the past year, according to new survey data on a worsening LGBTQ+ youth mental health crisis.

The Trevor Project, a non-profit organization dedicated to LGBTQ+ youth suicide prevention, on Thursday released state-level [data](#) from nearly 34,000 queer and trans youth ages 13 to 24, showing alarmingly high rates of suicide attempts, depression and anxiety across liberal and conservative regions.

States where lawmakers have aggressively pursued anti-trans legislation, including Texas and Arkansas, have extraordinarily high levels of suicide risk, though the rates are nearly as high in some progressive states, including New York, California and Oregon.

The data release comes amid rising government restrictions on the rights of queer and trans people in conservative states, as well as a drumbeat of vigilante violence targeting LGBTQ+ events and spaces across the US. More than 150 bills to restrict the lives of trans people were filed in state legislatures in 2022, the highest number in the nation's history, the Washington Post reported. Many of these bills targeted trans youth, including restricting their access to gender-affirming medical care, participation in sports, and ability to use bathrooms that match their gender identities.

In California, the most populous state, which recently passed a law to protect trans youth, 44% of LGBTQ+ youth considered suicide and 14% attempted suicide, the survey found; for trans and non-binary respondents, the findings were worse, with 54% considering and 19% attempting suicide. And 70% of LGBTQ+ youth in the state said they had experienced discrimination, with 62% saying they were not able to access mental health care.

The rates of trans and nonbinary youth who seriously considered suicide were similar in the next largest states, at 56% in Texas; 54% in Florida; 50% in New York; 54% in Pennsylvania; 51% in Illinois; 54% in Ohio; 55% in Georgia; 53% in North Carolina; and 52% in Michigan. And 16-20% of

trans and non-binary youth reported attempting suicide across these states. A majority also said they wanted, but did not receive care.

“Even though California is supposed to be the Golden State for all people, trans, gender-nonconforming and intersex people continue to have challenges accessing basic services, so the results are not surprising,” said Bamby Salcedo, the president of the TransLatin@ Coalition in Los Angeles. “There are not enough mental health providers who understand who we are as people and who are sensitive and non-prejudiced. And when we can’t access basic healthcare or housing, or continue to be discriminated against in employment, it all impacts our mental health.”



People hold up signs during the Brooklyn Liberation's Protect Trans Youth event in Brooklyn in 2021. Photograph: Michael M Santiago/Getty Images

The report also found that in many states, 5-10% of youth said they were still subjected to conversion therapy, the widely discredited practice linked to severe psychological harms, and with 10-15% saying they were threatened with it.

“One of the most notable findings from this data was that so many LGBTQ young people across every state are unable to access the mental healthcare that they want,” said Dr Myeshia Price, director of research science at The Trevor Project, in an email. “This ... points to a systemic level barrier to mental healthcare access.”

Susan Williams, the founder of The Transformation Project, a trans youth advocacy group in South Dakota, said she was not surprised to see the alarming numbers in her state, including that only 4% of LGBTQ+ youth said their communities were “very accepting”. “The lack of affirming adults in these individuals’ lives is absolutely one of the reasons that these mental health statistics are so off the charts in South Dakota,” she said.

Her son, who is 16 years old and trans, removes all social media apps from his phone and tries to avoid the news entirely during state legislative cycles, she noted: “It is so incredibly hard for him to see queer identity being debated by our state. He says, ‘I can’t handle this attack on who I am as a person.’” She also gets more calls about bullying when lawmakers are pushing anti-trans policies.

Williams said she hoped that legislators would see this data and recognize that the anti-trans “political

movement” is directly hurting people: “People are just trying to live their lives, and go to school and have a family and get involved in sports, to have fun with their friends, or just get healthcare they need to survive.”

Advocates had long hoped that distress among youth would decrease over time as society and policy shifted, but research has repeatedly shown that hasn’t happened, said Bianca DM Wilson, senior scholar of public policy at the Williams Institute at UCLA. She said that could be in part due to more youth coming out: “In a culture that is so anti-LGBTQ+ in many ways, they are then that much more exposed and vulnerable to victimization and stigma.”

She said the data should serve as a reminder that the passage of laws to protect queer and trans youth is just a start: “What’s happening with the implementation of those laws? Who’s following the laws? Who’s adding support systems to help LGBTQ+ youth?”

Lawmakers must understand these problems aren’t geographically isolated, said Armonde Butler, associate director LGBTQ+ health and rights at Advocates for Youth. “It’s very common for people to say, ‘This isn’t an issue here. We don’t have LGBTQ+ youth here.’ This data shows that this *is* showing up in your communities and in your state. It’s across the board.”

In addition to anti-trans legislation, Republican officials in Texas have recently initiated child abuse investigations into the parents of trans children who were receiving gender-affirming medical care, and in Florida, Republican governor Ron DeSantis passed a “don’t say gay” law that forbade discussion of gender and sexual identity in primary schools, and required that all other school discussions be “age appropriate,” something that Florida teachers said has had a chilling effect on any mention of LGBTQ+ issues.

Members of violent far-right groups, including the Proud Boys, have targeted Pride events and drag queen story hours for children across the country. In November, a mass shooting at a Colorado Springs LGBTQ+ club left five people dead and 25 injured.

by Sam T Levine

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