

Transgender Identity and Experiences of Violence Victimization, Substance Use, Suicide Risk, and Sexual Risk Behaviors Among High School Students

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

Teen dating violence (TDV) is an issue that can affect any youth, but previous studies have found that transgender adolescents are more likely to report violence victimization overall than their cisgender peers. However, the prevalence of dating violence experienced by transgender students in the larger population remains unknown. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the prevalence of transgender identity among high school students and investigate their experiences of TDV victimization in a population-based survey.


Definitions: Sex refers to an individual's biological status as a female, male, or something else, and it is assigned to individuals at birth. Gender identity refers to an individual's sense of themselves as female, male, transgender, or something else. Transgender people have a gender identity that does not align with their sex assigned at birth. Cisgender people have a gender identity that does align with their sex assigned at birth. Many transgender people experience transphobia (i.e., prejudice and discrimination from people and institutions because they are transgender), which is a root cause of health disparities faced by this population.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

This study used data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), a national American survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In this study, 131,901 grade 9-12 youth from 10 states and nine urban school districts were surveyed about their gender identity and health risk behaviors. To assess gender identity, youth were asked "Some people describe themselves as transgender when their sex at birth does not match the way they think or feel about their gender. Are you transgender?" Response options were no, I am not transgender; yes, I am transgender; I am not sure if I am transgender; I do not know what this question is asking. Youth were also asked about their experience of sexual and physical dating violence victimization in the past 12 months.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- Approximately 1.8% of high school students identified as transgender.
- This study found that these transgender youths reported significantly more experiences of physical and sexual dating violence than their cisgender peers.
- This result indicates that strategies to protect transgender youth from victimization are critically needed.



Transgender Identity and Experiences of Violence Victimization, Substance Use, Suicide Risk, and Sexual Risk Behaviors Among High School Students

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

Data showed that 1.8% of high school students identified as transgender; 1.6% said they were unsure; and 2.1% said they didn't understand what the question was asking. Students identifying as transgender (1.8%, n=2845) reported significantly more experiences of physical and sexual dating violence than their cisgender peers. Specifically, 26.4% transgender students reported having experienced physical dating violence in the past 12 months (compared to 5.8% of cisgender males and 8.7% of cisgender females), and 22.9% of transgender students reported having experienced sexual dating violence in the past 12 months (compared to 3.5% of cisgender males and 12.0% of cisgender females).

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

This study indicates that there is a critical need to support transgender youth. This includes both individual-level strategies, such as creating safe learning environments and providing physical and mental health services, as well as societal-level changes. In particular, transphobia and other discrimination faced by transgender students cannot be ignored as part of prevention strategies, as it is a root cause of victimization.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS:

Michelle M Johns, MPH, PhD, Health Scientist at Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia
Richard Lowry, MD, MS., Medical Epidemiologist Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia
Jack Daniel Andrzejewski, MPH, ORISE Research Fellow at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia
Lisa Barrios, ScM, DrPH, chief of the research application branch in the Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia
Zewditu Demissie, PhD, MPH. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia
Timothy McManus, MS, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia
Catherine N. Rasberry, PhD, Health Scientist at Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia
Leah Robin, PhD, Lead Health Scientist at Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia
J. Michael Underwood, PhD, Health Scientist at Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia

KEYWORDS

Transgender identity, violence victimization, substance use, suicide risk, sexual risk behaviors

FULL REFERENCE

Johns, M. M., Lowry, R., Andrzejewski, J., Barrios, L. C., Demissie, Z., McManus, T., Rasberry, C. N., Robin, L., & Underwood, J. M. (2019). Transgender Identity and Experiences of Violence Victimization, Substance Use, Suicide Risk, and Sexual Risk Behaviors Among High School Students—19 States and Large Urban School Districts, 2017. *MMWR. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 68(3), 67–71. <https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6803a3>