

The Trevor Project Research Brief: LGBTQ Youth from Immigrant Families

April 2021

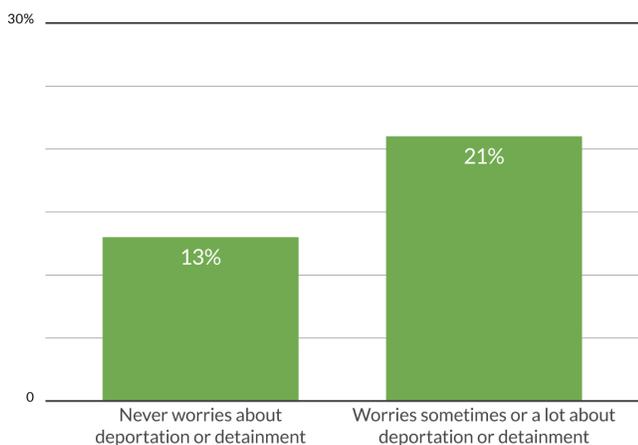
Summary

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth face significant disparities in suicide risk compared to their straight and cisgender peers (Johns et al., 2019; Johns et al., 2020). However, LGBTQ youth living in the U.S. represent a diversity of experiences, including youth who have at least one parent born outside the U.S. (i.e. first-generation immigrants). First-generation immigrants often experience considerable stressors including discrimination, acculturation stress, and immigration concerns (Alegria, Álvarez, & DiMarzio, 2017). Despite the growth in research focused on both LGBTQ youth and first-generation immigrants, examination of suicide risk at the intersection of these two identities is limited. Using data from [The Trevor Project’s 2020 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health](#), this brief explores attempted suicide among first-generation immigrant¹ LGBTQ youth as well as unique experiences that are associated with suicide risk among these youth.

Results

Nearly 1 out of 4 LGBTQ youth (24%) in our sample was a first-generation youth. First-generation LGBTQ youth reported slightly lower rates of anxiety (aOR=0.87), depression (aOR=0.93), and seriously considering suicide (aOR=0.88) compared to LGBTQ youth whose parents were born in the U.S. However, there was no significant difference in rates of attempting suicide in the past year (aOR=0.97).

First Generation LGBTQ Youth Who Attempted Suicide in the Past Year Based on Worries About Deportation or Detainment



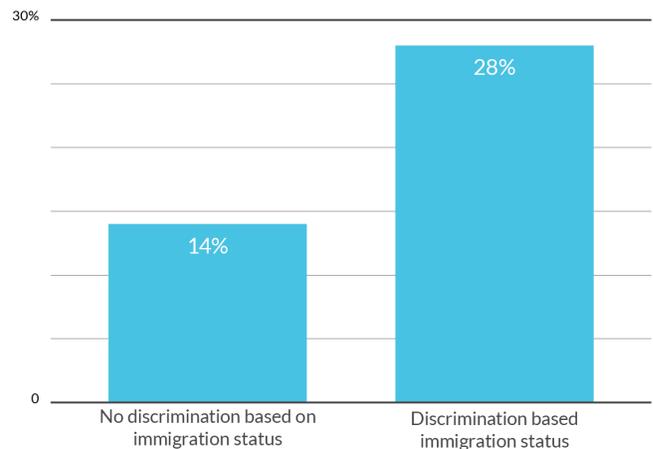
Suicide risk among first-generation LGBTQ youth was associated with worrying about themselves or a family member being detained or deported due to immigration policies. Nearly 1 in 3 first-generation LGBTQ youth (30%) worried “sometimes” or “a lot” about immigration-related detainment or detention compared to 5% of LGBTQ youth whose parents were born in the U.S. Immigration fears were reported most often by first-generation Latinx LGBTQ youth (57%), followed by first-generation LGBTQ youth who are more than one race/ethnicity (34%), Asian/Pacific Islander (26%), Black (20%), and White (10%). Overall, first-generation LGBTQ youth who reported being worried about themselves or a family member

being deported had 63% greater odds of reporting a suicide attempt in the past year (aOR=1.63).

¹ While the term “first generation” does not have an agreed upon definition, it is defined in this brief as having at least one parent born outside of the United States.

First-generation LGBTQ youth who faced discrimination based on their actual or perceived immigration status had more than 2.5 times greater odds of attempting suicide compared to first-generation LGBTQ youth who did not (aOR = 2.63). Discrimination based on actual or perceived immigration status was reported by 9% of first-generation LGBTQ youth compared to 2% of LGBTQ youth whose parents were born in the US. First-generation LGBTQ youth who are Latinx (18%), Asian/Pacific Islander (9%), Black (6%), and more than one race/ethnicity (11%) reported higher rates of discrimination based on immigration status compared to first-generation LGBTQ youth who are White (2%).

First Generation LGBTQ Youth Who Attempted Suicide in the Past Year Who Faced Discrimination



Methodology

A cross-sectional online survey was used to collect data between December 2019 and March 2020. LGBTQ youth ages 13–24 who resided in the U.S. were recruited via targeted ads on social media. The final analytic sample was 40,001 LGBTQ youth. Youth were asked, “Was at least one of the parents or caregivers who raised you born outside of the US or US territory?” Our analyses included all youth who selected yes ($n = 9,185$). Adjusted odds ratios predicting a past-year suicide attempt controlled for sex assigned at birth, gender identity, age, and sexual orientation (gay/lesbian, straight, bisexual, pansexual, queer, or not sure). Immigration-related worries were assessed using a question that asked youth, “How often do you worry about you or someone in your family being detained or deported due to immigration policies?” with responses of “never,” “sometimes” and “a lot.” Finally, youth were asked about immigration-related discrimination with a question that stated, “During the past 12 months, were you discriminated against for any of the following reasons? Please select all that apply.” There were nine possible response options, including: “Your actual or perceived immigration status.”

Looking Ahead

The intersection of being a first-generation immigrant and LGBTQ affords unique experiences for youth that should be addressed in both research and prevention efforts. These findings suggest that LGBTQ youth who are raised by parents who are immigrants to the U.S. may not face mental health disparities due to their first-generation status in and of itself. Instead, concerns about their own or their family’s potential detainment or deportation and discrimination based on their actual or perceived immigration status were associated with greater risk for attempting suicide for first-generation LGBTQ youth. This demonstrates that policies and environmental factors impact mental health among first-generation LGBTQ youth. Stakeholders supporting first-generation LGBTQ youth should be aware of the impact these experiences can have on their overall mental health and well-being.

At the Trevor Project, we believe all youth deserve to feel safe and supported. We are fully committed to supporting all LGBTQ youth, including first generation LGBTQ youth whose challenges may be connected to immigration-related policies and discrimination. Our crisis services team recognizes that multiple forms of stress related to identity-based stigma, such as discrimination and bias based on both one's immigration status and sexual and/or gender identity, can dramatically impact youth's mental health and remains committed to continued efforts to address all aspects of youth's identities in providing support. Further, Trevor's research team will continue to disseminate data that explores the intersections of identities among LGBTQ youth, including first generation LGBTQ youth, to allow Trevor and other stakeholders to better understand how to address the needs of all LGBTQ youth.

References

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