

The Trevor Project Research Brief: LGBTQ Youth in the Workplace

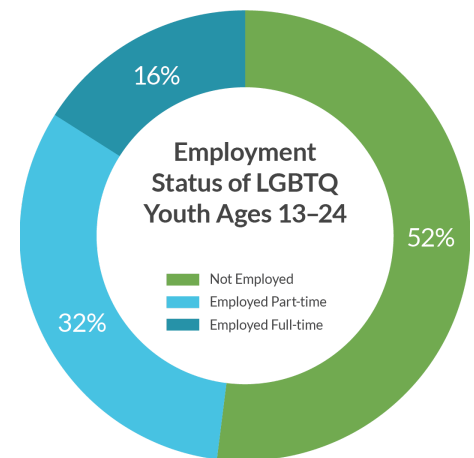
March 2021

Summary

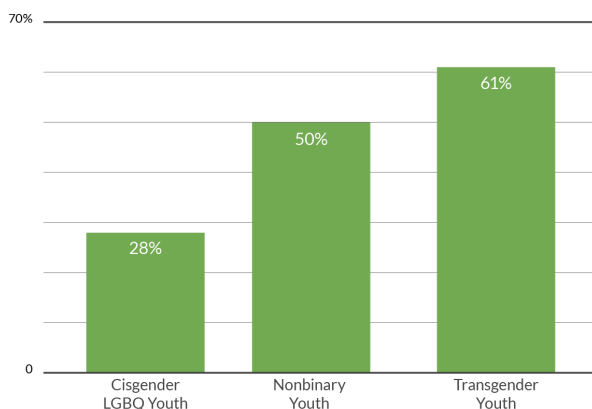
LGBTQ youth are at elevated risk for suicide compared to straight/cisgender peers due in large part to experiences of stigma and discrimination related to their LGBTQ identity (Meyer, 2003). For many LGBTQ youth, this discrimination can occur at their place of work or as they are attempting to obtain a job. Fortunately, a recent Supreme Court decision explicitly affirmed that LGBTQ people have the right to be free from discrimination in the workplace (Bostock v. Clayton County, 2020), and policies that are supportive of LGBTQ people have the potential to positively impact mental health and reduce suicide risk among LGBTQ youth (Raifman et al., 2017). However, in addition to policies that provide legal protection to LGBTQ youth, corporations and workplaces must also provide supportive and affirming environments that allow LGBTQ youth to thrive. This brief uses data from The Trevor Project's [2020 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health](#) to examine LGBTQ youth experiences in the workplace.

Results

Nearly half (48%) of LGBTQ youth ages 13–24 were employed either full-time (32%) or part-time (16%). Among those aged 18–24, 70% were employed. Cisgender LGBTQ men had greater odds of being employed compared to cisgender LGBTQ women (aOR=0.89), transgender women (aOR=0.65), transgender men (aOR=0.60), and nonbinary youth (aOR=0.71). White LGBTQ youth had significantly greater odds of being employed compared to Asian/Pacific Islander LGBTQ youth (aOR=0.60), Black LGBTQ youth (aOR=0.71), Latinx LGBTQ youth (aOR=0.73), and youth who reported more than one race/ethnicity (aOR=0.82).



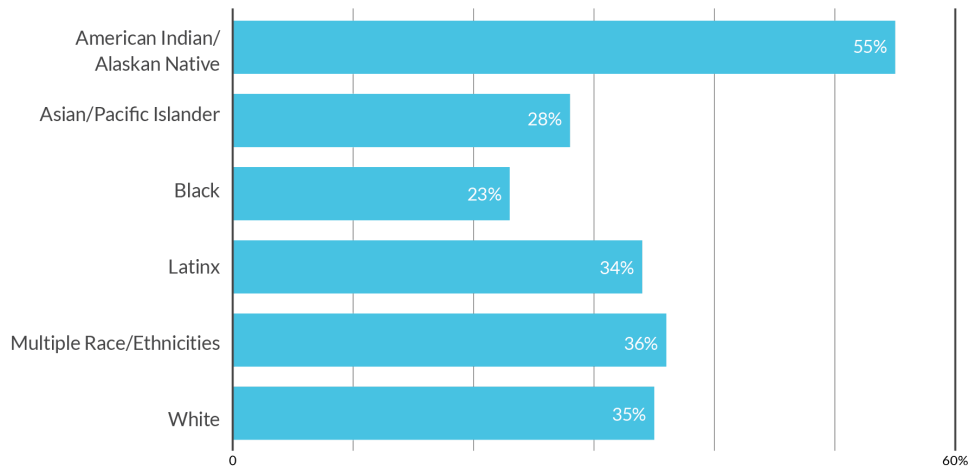
LGBTQ Youth who Experienced LGBTQ-based Discrimination in the Workplace by Gender Identity



Overall, more than one in three (35%) employed LGBTQ youth experienced workplace discrimination, with significantly greater rates reported by transgender and nonbinary youth. Transgender men had over 3.5 times greater odds (aOR=3.55) and transgender women had nearly triple the odds (aOR=2.87) of experiencing workplace discrimination compared to cisgender LGBTQ men. Nonbinary youth (aOR=2.06) had twice the odds of experiencing LGBTQ-based workplace discrimination compared to cisgender LGBTQ men. Cisgender LGBTQ women (aOR=0.77) had slightly lower odds of experiencing workplace discrimination compared to cisgender LGBTQ men.

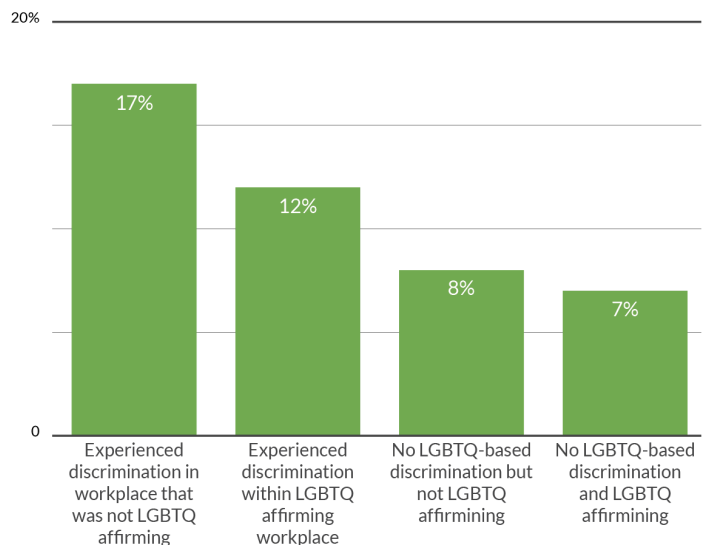
Latinx LGBTQ youth and youth with multiple race/ethnicities had similar odds to White LGBTQ youth of having experienced LGBTQ-based workplace discrimination, while Asian/Pacific Islander (aOR=0.70) and Black LGBTQ youth (aOR=0.55) had lower odds. American Indian/Alaskan Native youth (aOR=2.17) had more than double the odds of reporting LGBTQ-based workplace discrimination compared to White LGBTQ youth.

LGBTQ Youth who Experienced LGBTQ-based Discrimination in the Workplace by Race/Ethnicity



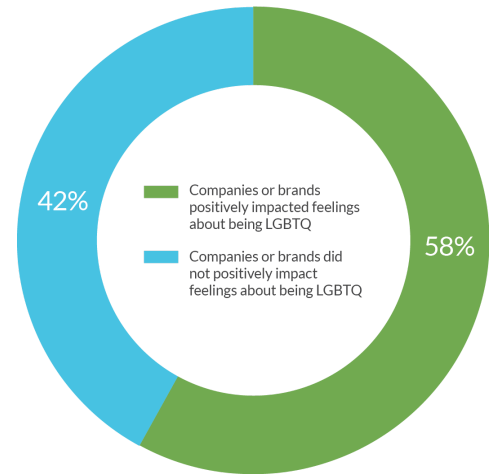
Experiencing LGBTQ-based discrimination in the workplace was associated with greater risk of a past-year suicide attempt, while being employed in a workplace that is LGBTQ-affirming was associated with lower rates of a past-year suicide attempt. LGBTQ youth who experienced LGBTQ-based workplace discrimination had more than twice the odds of attempting suicide in the past year compared to those who did not (aOR=2.11). Among those who experienced workplace discrimination, 81% reported experiencing it from co-workers, 50% reported experiencing it from supervisors, and 39% reported experiencing it as part of a hiring process. Each form of workplace discrimination was associated with at least twice the odds of a past-year suicide attempt. On the other hand, employed LGBTQ youth who said that their workplace was LGBTQ-affirming had lower rates of attempting suicide in the past year (9%) compared to those who did not report their workplace as LGBTQ affirming (12%). In instances where youth experienced discrimination in the workplace, having the feeling that the overall workplace was LGBTQ-affirming served as a protective factor. LGBTQ youth had the lowest rates of attempting suicide when they were free from discrimination in an LGBTQ-affirming workplace. Unfortunately, only 36% of LGBTQ youth described their workplace as LGBTQ-affirming, indicating that most LGBTQ youth are employed in a setting that they do not feel affirms their LGBTQ identity.

Association of LGBTQ-based Workplace Discrimination and LGBTQ Affirming Workplaces with Past-Year Suicide Attempt



Companies and brands that voice support for LGBTQ youth can positively impact how youth feel about being LGBTQ. The majority of LGBTQ youth (58%) said that either companies or brands that voiced support for LGBTQ people helped them feel better about being LGBTQ, with 49% saying brands that support the LGBTQ community positively impacted how they feel about being LGBTQ, and 43% saying that companies who voice support for LGBTQ people have positively impacted how they feel about being LGBTQ. Transgender and nonbinary youth (40%) and Black LGBTQ youth (39%) reported the lowest rates of company support for LGBTQ people positively impacting how they feel about being LGBTQ.

LGBTQ Youth who Said Companies or Brands that Support LGBTQ People Positively Impact how They Feel about Being LGBTQ



Methodology

Data was collected from an online survey conducted between December 2019 and March 2020 of 40,001 LGBTQ youth recruited via targeted ads on social media. Youth were asked to indicate whether they ever felt they were the subject of discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity in multiple situations including within the workplace (during hiring, from supervisors, and from coworkers). Questions on attempted suicide (“During the past 12 months, how many times did you actually attempt suicide?”) were taken from the CDC’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Logistic regression models adjusting for gender identity, age, and race/ethnicity, were used to examine the association of these demographic characteristics with employment and employment discrimination as well as the relationship between employment discrimination and past-year attempted suicide.

Looking Ahead

Workplace experiences are both positively and negatively associated with LGBTQ youth mental health and suicide risk. When LGBTQ youth have their identity affirmed and hear companies say positive things about LGBTQ people, they feel better about their identity and report lower rates of attempting suicide. Unfortunately, LGBTQ-based discrimination in the workplace is common and associated with twice the odds of a past-year suicide attempt. Transgender and nonbinary and American Indian/Alaskan Native youth had significantly higher odds of experiencing LGBTQ-based discrimination in the workplace. Further, transgender and nonbinary youth and youth of color had significantly lower odds of actually being employed. Transgender and nonbinary and Black LGBTQ youth also reported the lowest rates of being positively impacted by companies who voice support for LGBTQ people. These data indicate that messaging from companies and brands may not be resonating with these youth. Given the power of inclusive and affirming messaging, companies should find ways to better support and tailor messaging to these youth. Further, our data indicate an urgent need for companies to develop diverse and inclusive hiring strategies as well as to create workplaces that are affirming and supportive of LGBTQ youth, particularly those who are transgender and nonbinary and/or youth of color. Doing so will not only require companies to train all staff on diversity and inclusion but also to create a culture in which diverse identities are appreciated and celebrated.

At The Trevor Project, we understand both the detrimental impact discrimination can have on LGBTQ youth mental health and suicide risk as well as the positive impact affirming spaces can have on their well-being. Our research, advocacy, and education teams aim to support non-discrimination and LGBTQ-inclusive policies and practices for LGBTQ youth at multiple levels including federal, state, and local legislation as well as within settings like schools and workplaces. As we work towards a world where LGBTQ youth are able to live their lives free from discrimination, our crisis services team is available 24/7 to support LGBTQ youth who are struggling with experiences of discrimination based simply on who they are, including but not limited to their sexual orientation, gender identity, and race/ethnicity.

References

- Bostock v. Clayton County. 590, U.S. 2020. https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/19pdf/17-1618_hfci.pdf
- Meyer, I. H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129(5), 674-697.
- Raifman, J., Moscoe, E., Austin, S. B., & McConnell, M. (2017). Difference-in-differences analysis of the association between state same-sex marriage policies and adolescent suicide attempts. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 171(4), 350-356.

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