

The Trevor Project Research Brief: Holiday Crisis Trends

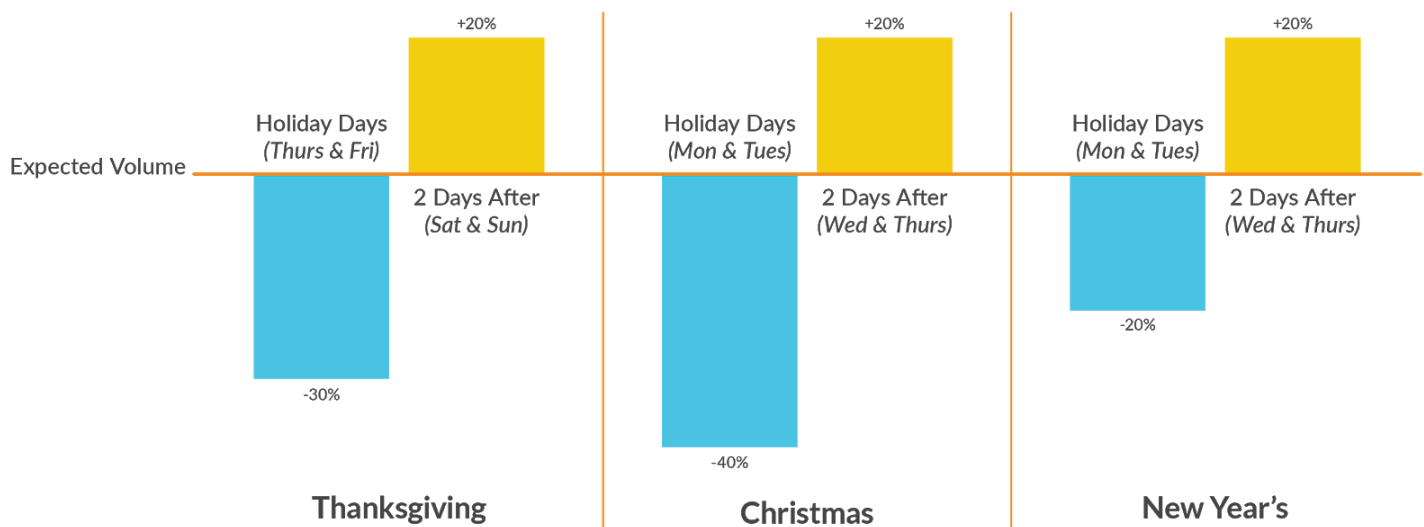
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Summary

Contrary to popular media reports, the notion that overall rates of suicide increase around the holiday season has been unfounded (Annenberg Public Policy Center, 2017). In fact, data collected from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention between January 1999 and December 2017 indicate that the months of November and December have consistently had the lowest rates of suicide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). Declines in suicide rates during this time period have been attributed to increased affiliation with family and friends and an increased sense of belonging (Ajdacic-Gross et al., 2003, Vanorden et al., 2008). However, this time period may be associated with increased crisis levels for LGBTQ youth who experience lower levels of family support and heightened levels of rejection compared to their straight, cisgender peers (Needham & Austin, 2010). This research brief focuses on trends in youth contacting The Trevor Project during the 2018 holiday season.

Results

Youth reached out to The Trevor Project at 20–40% lower rates on holidays compared to our typical contact volume, followed by a rate that was 20% higher than average in the two days after each holiday. More specifically, on the Thursday of and Friday following Thanksgiving, we saw contact volume that was 70% of our expected Thursday/Friday volume, followed by a sharp increase in the weekend that followed compared to a typical weekend. We saw similar reductions in volumes during Christmas Eve/Christmas Day (40%) and New Year’s Eve/New Year’s Day (20%), followed by a 20% elevated rate in the two days that followed compared to our typical volume on those days of the week.



Results (continued)

Several factors might account for the observed trend. For example, youth may be unable to directly reach out to The Trevor Project for support on the days in which they are most likely to be in closest contact with family members and, therefore, increase contact with The Trevor Project in the days following these interactions. Alternatively, some youth may be enjoying close connections on the holidays and experiencing loneliness on subsequent days. Overall, these data point to the potential for seasonal trends for LGBTQ youth that are not being captured by current national data collection efforts on holiday suicide rates.

Methodology

The current analyses compared incoming volume data from the 4 weeks prior to each holiday. We used ratios for average volume for the same days of the week in the previous 4 weeks compared to each two day holiday period and the subsequent two days to control for impact of the weekday on the analysis.

Looking Ahead

Currently, seasonal trends in suicide rates cannot be examined by sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) as these data are not rigorously and systematically collected as part of national reporting systems on mortality such as the National Violent Death Reporting System. The Trevor Project advocates for enhanced training related to the collection of SOGI mortality data, as this data is imperative to better understanding and preventing suicide among LGBTQ youth. Additionally, although the current analyses focus on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's holidays in order to expand on existing research centered on these holidays, The Trevor Project recognizes that we serve a diverse set of youth who may celebrate holidays other than those described in this report. Further analyzing trends in our crisis services volume will allow Trevor to continue improving the services and support offered to all LGBTQ youth who reach out to Trevor every day.

References

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