Results

Of the entire sample of LGBTQ young people in The Trevor Project’s 2023 National LGBTQ Youth Mental Health Survey, 4.9% reported having been in foster care in the past and 0.4% reported they were currently in foster care (5.3% reported ever experiencing foster care). Additionally, 9.5% of the sample reported being threatened with conversion therapy in the past and 4.8% reported being subjected to conversion therapy in the past.

LGBTQ young people who had ever been in foster care reported higher rates of past conversion therapy threats (18.3%) and conversion therapy experiences (12.1%) compared to their peers who had never been in foster care (9.1% and 4.4%, respectively). Additionally, within LGBTQ young people who had ever been in foster care, they reported that conversion therapy was more often delivered by religious leaders (6.9%) than healthcare providers (4.5%).

LGBTQ young people who had ever been in foster care had two times greater odds of being threatened with conversion therapy (aOR=2.10, CI=1.76-2.50, p<.001) and two and a half times greater odds of being subjected to conversion therapy (aOR=2.52, CI=2.04-3.11, p<.001) at some point in their lives, compared to their LGBTQ peers who had never experienced foster care.
Interpretation

These findings suggest a significant relationship between foster care and conversion therapy, which could indicate: 1) LGBTQ youth who were threatened with or subjected to conversion therapy might have faced situations that increased their likelihood of entering foster care, such as being expelled from their homes or choosing to leave due to the surrounding environment, 2) LGBTQ youth who had ever been in foster care might have been subjected to conversion therapy, possibly while in foster care or afterwards, as well as other possible conclusions. Given that our data is cross-sectional, the chronological order of experiences nor causality cannot be determined. These findings only suggest a relationship between these variables. Thus, communication around these findings should be careful and deliberate so that miscommunication does not occur.

Methodology

Data discussed in this report were collected through The Trevor Project’s 2023 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ Young People. In total, 28,524 LGBTQ young people between the ages of 13-24 were recruited via targeted ads on social media.

LGBTQ young people were asked: “Did you ever receive treatment from someone who tried to change your sexual orientation or gender identity (such as trying to make you straight or cisgender)? This is sometimes referred to as “conversion therapy.” Please select all that apply” with “No,” “No but someone threatened to send me,” “Yes, from a healthcare professional,” “Yes, from a pastor, priest, or other religious leader at my church or house of worship,” “Yes, from a religious leader (such as a spiritual counselor or other member of a religious community) that was not my church or house of worship” as response options. Additionally, participants were asked “Have you ever been in foster care or stayed in a group home (even if only for a short period of time)” with “No,” “Yes, I have in the past but I am currently not,” and “Yes, I am currently in foster care or a group home” as response options. For some analyses, responses were dichotomized such that participants either had experienced foster care or not, had been threatened with conversion therapy or not, and had experienced conversion therapy or not. Additionally, types of conversion therapy providers were dichotomized (i.e., religious figures vs. healthcare providers) for another analysis.

Chi-square tests were used to examine differences between groups. All reported comparisons are statistically significant at least at p<0.05. This means there is less than a 5% likelihood these results occurred by chance. Adjusted logistic regression models were run to determine the association between experiencing conversion therapy and foster care while controlling for race/ethnicity, age, family support, Census region, and socioeconomic status. Variables were also checked for multicollinearity before running regression models.

References

The Trevor Project (2023). 2023 U.S. national survey on the mental health of LGBTQ young people. [Data set].

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