



NATIONAL CENTER FOR LESBIAN RIGHTS

Research Brief Documents the Shockingly Disproportionate Harms Discrimination Inflicts on LGBTQ People of Color

EMBARGOED UNTIL 8:00am (ET) June 16, 2021. Today, a coalition of leading LGBTQ rights groups joined together to release the most extensive summaries to date of scholarly data on the intersection of anti-LGBTQ and racial discrimination. The research brief, authored by the [What We Know Project](#) at Cornell University, found overwhelming consensus among peer-reviewed and other studies that discrimination inflicts profoundly greater harm on LGBTQ people of color in a wide range of areas, including grossly disproportionate rates of: experiencing discrimination over the past year, poorer mental and physical health, greater economic insecurity, and attempts to die by suicide. In addition, LGBTQ people of color are more likely than white LGBTQ people to live in states without protections against discrimination and that state anti-LGBTQ laws harm LGBTQ people.

“This research brief makes clear the tangible harms that discrimination inflicts on LGBTQ people of color, and the urgent need for public policy that reflects what the research tells us about how we can reduce those harms,” said [Dr. Nathaniel Frank](#), the study’s author.



“These painful figures highlight an indisputable link between discrimination, economic security, mental and physical health. People with multiple stigmatized, marginalized social and political identities, particularly Black LGBTQ+/Same Gender Loving people, bear a disproportionate amount of the weight illustrated by the data in this study. Statutory equality for LGBTQ+ people nationwide is a necessary foundation to remove the gaps in existing civil rights laws if we are to ever live up to our country’s founding promises of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all.”

—David Johns, Executive Director, National Black Justice Coalition



“The majority of Black LGBTQ people live in the South, with nearly half (44%) of all Black women couples raising children. Even today, most of these states still do not protect LGBTQ people from discrimination and have overtly discriminatory laws on their books. It is no wonder the disparities are so profound and it is a testament to the strength and resilience of our people that they are doing as well as they are. For our community and for our children it’s time for federal action!”

—Kierra Johnson, Executive Director, National LGBTQ Task Force



“This important brief only further solidifies what we have known for a very long time—the combination of racism and anti-LGBTQ discrimination has serious and long-lasting effects for the health and well-being of LGBTQ people of color. This research highlights why federal non-discrimination protections are overdue and vital to protecting the most some of the most underrepresented and vulnerable members of our community. Federal anti-discrimination protections are absolutely necessary in protecting and supporting all LGBTQ people, and this is especially true for LGBTQ people of color.”

—Imani Rupert-Gordon, Executive Director, National Center for Lesbian Rights



“Study after study shows that nondiscrimination protections improve economic opportunities, public safety, and physical and mental well-being of LGBTQ people. It is well past time for the essential protections available only in some of our states and cities to be extended to all LGBTQ Americans, especially LGBTQ people of color, who are disproportionately burdened by the lack of protections.”

—Kasey Suffredini, CEO and National Campaign Director, Freedom for All Americans

Highlights of the research brief's findings include:

LGBTQ people are more likely than non-LGBTQ people to be people of color, and Black LGBTQ Americans are disproportionately likely to live in states without protections against discrimination. For example, 42% of LGBT people are people of color compared to 32% of non-LGBT people and the majority of Black LGBT Americans live in the South (51.4%, more than twice the share of any other region), where most states lack anti-discrimination protections.

LGBTQ people of color face higher odds of discrimination than both non-LGBTQ individuals and LGBTQ white people. For example, LGBTQ people of color are more than twice as likely to experience anti-LGBTQ discrimination (slurs or other verbal abuse) when applying for jobs than white LGBTQ individuals (32% vs. 13%). LGBTQ people of color are more than twice as likely as white LGBTQ people to experience anti-LGBTQ discrimination when interacting with the police (24% vs. 11%).

Black LGBT Americans are more likely to experience economic insecurity than Black non-LGBT Americans. For example, the majority of Black LGBT people (56%) live in low-income households (below 200% of the federal poverty level) compared to 49% of Black non-LGBT Americans, and Black LGBT adults are also more likely to experience food insecurity than Black non-LGBT adults (37% compared to 27%).

Hundreds of studies conclude that experiencing anti-LGBTQ discrimination increases the risks of poor mental and physical health, including depression, anxiety, suicidality, PTSD, substance use, and psychological distress.

LGBTQ people of color face disproportionate odds of suicidality, which is linked to discrimination. For example, while 12% of white LGBTQ youth attempted suicide, the rate is 31% for LGBTQ Native/Indigenous youth, 21% for LGBTQ Black youth, and 18% of LGBTQ Latinx youth.

While supportive laws, family, and peers lower the risk of poor health outcomes for LGBTQ people of color, anti-LGBTQ state laws inflict tangible harm on sexual minority populations. For example, states with “denial of service” laws that give license to discriminate against LGBT residents between 2014 and 2016 were linked with a 46% increase in LGBT mental distress. Black LGBTQ youth who reported high levels of support from at least one person, or who had access to an LGBTQ-affirming space, reported attempting suicide at lower rates than those who lacked such support (16% vs. 24%).

For Comments / Interviews:

FOR: Dr. Nathaniel Frank, Director, What We Know Project – Cornell University:
CONTACT: Roberta Sklar, Communications Consultant
(917) 704-6358 / robertasklar@yahoo.com

FOR: Kierra Johnson, Executive Director, National LGBTQ Task Force:
CONTACT: Cathy Renna, Communications Director
(917) 757-6123 / [@cathyrenna](mailto:crenna@thetaskforce.org)

FOR: David J. Johns, Executive Director, National Black Justice Coalition:
CONTACT: Brett Abrams, Unbendable Media LLC
(516) 841-1105 / brett@unbendablemedia.com

FOR: Imani Rupert-Gordon, Executive Director, National Center for Lesbian Rights:
CONTACT: Christopher R. Vasquez, Communications Director
(415) 365-1337 / CVasquez@NCLRights.org

FOR: Kasey Suffredini, CEO and National Campaign Director, Freedom for All Americans:
CONTACT: Angela Dellara, Vice President of External Communications
(646) 430-3925 / adallara@freedomforallamericans.org

RESEARCH BRIEF:

Anti-LGBTQ Discrimination Inflicts Disproportionate Harm on People of Color

June 2021



THE PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH PORTAL

More than a third of LGBTQ Americans (36%) have experienced past-year discrimination (mistreatment in their public, work, or personal lives) based on race, ethnicity, national origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, economic status, immigration status, and/or age, according to a 2020 probability survey. More than half (52%) said their psychological well-being was adversely affected as a result.¹ This research brief describes the disproportionate impact of that discrimination on LGBTQ people of color.²

LGBTQ people are more likely than non-LGBTQ people to be people of color, and Black LGBTQ Americans are disproportionately likely to live in states without protections against discrimination and to face economic insecurity.

- **42% of LGBT people are people of color compared to 32% of non-LGBT people.**³
- Over 5.5 million LGBTQ people of color live in the U.S., and about half live in states without protections from discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.⁴
- The majority of Black LGBT Americans live in the South (51.4%, more than twice the share of any other region), where most states lack anti-discrimination protections.⁵
- Black LGBT Americans are more likely to experience economic insecurity than Black non-LGBT Americans. The majority (56%) live in low-income households (below 200% of the federal poverty level) compared to 49% of Black non-LGBT Americans. Nearly 40% have annual incomes below \$24,000 compared to 33% of Black non-LGBT Americans. Black LGBT adults are also more likely to be unemployed (14% compared to 10%) and to experience food insecurity (37% compared to 27%) than Black non-LGBT adults.⁶

LGBTQ people of color face higher odds of discrimination than LGBTQ white people.

- **43% of LGBTQ people of color report experiencing past-year discrimination of some kind, compared to 31% of white LGBTQ respondents.**⁷
- 53% of Black LGBTQ youth say they have experienced past-year racial discrimination, and 41% have experienced anti-LGBTQ discrimination.⁸
- **LGBTQ people of color are more than twice as likely to experience anti-LGBTQ discrimination (slurs or other verbal abuse) when applying for jobs than white LGBTQ individuals (32% vs. 13%).**⁹
- **LGBTQ people of color are more than twice as likely to experience anti-LGBTQ discrimination when interacting with the police (24% vs. 11%).**¹⁰
- Black sexual minority women face greater discrimination frequency and poorer psychological and social well-being than both white sexual minority women and Black sexual minority men.¹¹

Experiencing discrimination is associated with greater odds of harm to psychological and economic well-being, which is reflected in data on disparities for LGBTQ people of color.

- Hundreds of studies conclude that experiencing anti-LGBTQ discrimination increases the risks of poor mental and physical health, including depression, anxiety, suicidality, PTSD, substance use, and psychological distress.¹²
- LGBT people of color have work-place experiences that are more negative than those of white LGBT employees, reporting that their success and work-life balance are fostered less extensively, they have less transparent evaluations, and they are respected less by supervisors.¹³
- **Among LGBTQ people surveyed, 51% of Black respondents say discrimination harms their ability to be hired, compared with 33% of white respondents; 41% say it has an impact on their ability to retain employment, compared with 31% of white respondents; 77% of Black respondents report that discrimination impacts their psychological well-being, a rate nearly 50% higher than the total LGBTQ survey population.**¹⁴
- While racial discrimination on its own is not associated with mental health disorders, the combination of racial discrimination with gender and/or sexual orientation discrimination is significantly associated with increased odds of a past-year mental health disorder.¹⁵

LGBTQ people of color face disproportionate odds of suicidality, which is linked to discrimination.

- **Around 25% of LGBTQ youth of all races have attempted suicide, but the rates are starkly higher for LGBTQ youth of color than their white counterparts: While 12% of white LGBTQ youth have attempted suicide, the rate is 31% for LGBTQ Native/Indigenous youth, 21% for LGBTQ Black youth, and 18% for LGBTQ Latinx youth.**¹⁶
- In a 95%-non-white LGBT sample, those who report experiencing anti-LGBT victimization (such as bullying and harassment) are 2.5 times more likely to report a past-year suicide attempt compared to those who do not report victimization.¹⁷
- **Black LGBTQ youth who experience anti-LGBTQ discrimination face twice the rate of past-year suicide attempts compared to youth who do not (27% vs. 12%).** Black LGBTQ youth who experience race-based discrimination also face higher odds of attempting suicide than those who do not (20% vs. 14%).¹⁸
- Black LGB adults are over 40% more likely to have made a serious suicide attempt in their lifetime than white LGB adults.¹⁹
- Latinx and Native American/Pacific Islander LGBT youth are 50% more likely to attempt suicide than white LGBT youth. Latinx LGBT girls are nearly twice as likely to attempt suicide than white LGBT youth.²⁰
- LGBTQ students who experience discrimination “based on multiple social identities” report more use of deliberate self-harm compared to LGBTQ students who experience racial discrimination alone or who do not experience significant discrimination of any kind.²¹

Supportive laws, family, and peers lower the risk of poor health outcomes for LGBTQ people of color.

- **Suicide attempts by LGBT youth dropped by 7 percent in states that legalized same-sex marriage.**²²
- The corollary is that anti-LGBTQ state laws inflict tangible harm on sexual minority populations. States with “denial of service” laws that give license to discriminate against LGBT residents were linked with a 46% increase in LGBT mental distress.²³
- **Black LGBTQ youth who reported high levels of support from at least one person, or who had access to an LGBTQ-affirming space, reported attempting suicide at lower rates than those who lacked such support (16% vs. 24%).** Those with high levels of family support had rates of past-year attempted suicide nearly one third as high as those who lacked such support (22% vs. 8%).²⁴
- Protective measures that have been found to help reduce anxiety, depression, and suicidality among LGBTQ youth include: Establishing inclusive practices and anti-discrimination policies; peer, community, and family support, including dedicated school groups; access to affirmative mental health and social services; societal confrontation of attitudes and norms that exacerbate minority stress; and practitioner training and interventions designed to disrupt negative coping responses and build resilience.²⁵

The What We Know Project is a research portal based at Cornell University’s Center for the Study of Inequality. With an emphasis on peer-reviewed, LGBTQ population research, it aggregates scholarly data about public policy issues and shares consensus findings so that policymakers, journalists, other researchers, and the general public have access to crucial information. More is available at <https://whatweknow.inequality.cornell.edu>. Inquiries about this research brief can be made to the project’s director, Dr. Nathaniel Frank, at Nathaniel@NathanielFrank.com.

- ¹ Gruberg, S., Mahowald, L., & Halpin, J. (2020). The state of the LGBTQ community in 2020: A national public opinion study. (Center for American Progress publication). <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbtq-rights/reports/2020/10/06/491052/state-lgbtq-community-2020/#Ca=10>.
- ² This research brief culls relevant peer-reviewed scholarship from the What We Know Project's 2019 online literature review of 300 studies entitled, "What Does the Scholarly Research Say about the Effects of Discrimination on the Health of LGBT people?" along with related LGBTQ population research. More information on the methodology of the online review is available at <https://whatwewknow.inequality.cornell.edu/about/search-methodology/>. We would like to thank the Williams Institute for assistance providing research for this brief. Note: Use of "LGBTQ" and related terminology may vary based on the wording and sampling of the cited research.
- ³ The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. (2019). LGBT demographic data interactive. (Williams Institute publication). <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/visualization/lgbt-stats/?topic=LGBT#demographic>.
- ⁴ LGBT people in the U.S. not protected by state nondiscrimination statutes. (2019). (Williams Institute publication.) <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBT-Nondiscrim-Statutes-Mar-2019.pdf>.
- ⁵ Choi, S.K., Wilson, B.D.M. & Mallory, C. (2021). Black LGBT adults in the U.S.: LGBT well-being at the intersection of race. (Williams Institute publication). <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBT-Black-SES-Jan-2021.pdf>.
- ⁶ Choi, S.K., Wilson, B.D.M. & Mallory, C. (2021). Black LGBT adults in the U.S.: LGBT well-being at the intersection of race. (Williams Institute publication). <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBT-Black-SES-Jan-2021.pdf>.
- ⁷ Gruberg, S., Mahowald, L., & Halpin, J. (2020). The state of the LGBTQ community in 2020: A national public opinion study. (Center for American Progress publication). <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbtq-rights/reports/2020/10/06/491052/state-lgbtq-community-2020/#Ca=10>.
- ⁸ Price-Feeney, M, Green, A.E. & Dorison, S. (2020). All Black lives matter: Mental health of Black LGBTQ youth. (Trevor Project publication). <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/All-Black-Lives-Matter-Mental-Health-of-Black-LGBTQ-Youth.pdf>.
- ⁹ NPR/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. (2017). Discrimination in America: Experiences and views of LGBTQ Americans, January 26 – April 9, 2017.
- ¹⁰ NPR/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. (2017). Discrimination in America: Experiences and views of LGBTQ Americans, January 26 – April 9, 2017.
- ¹¹ Calabrese, S.K., Meyer, I.H., Overstreet, N.M., Haile, R., & Hansen, N.B. (2015). Exploring discrimination and mental health disparities faced by black sexual minority women using a minority stress framework. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 39(3), 287-304.
- ¹² What We Know Project. (2019). What does the scholarly research say about the effects of discrimination on the health of LGBT people? (Cornell University website). <https://whatwewknow.inequality.cornell.edu/topics/lgbt-equality/what-does-scholarly-research-say-about-the-effects-of-discrimination-on-the-health-of-lgbt-people/>.
- ¹³ Cech, E. A., & Rothwell, W. R. (2019). LGBT workplace inequality in the federal workforce: Intersectional processes, organizational contexts, and turnover considerations. *ILR Review*, 73(1), 25-60.
- ¹⁴ Gruberg, S., Mahowald, L., & Halpin, J. (2020). The state of the LGBTQ community in 2020: A national public opinion study. (Center for American Progress publication). <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbtq-rights/reports/2020/10/06/491052/state-lgbtq-community-2020/#Ca=10>.
- ¹⁵ Bostwick, W.B., Boyd, C.J., Hughes, T.L., West, B.T., & McCabe, S.E. (2014). Discrimination and mental health among lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults in the United States. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 84(1), 35-45.
- ¹⁶ The Trevor Project. (2021). 2021 national survey on LGBTQ youth mental health. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2021/?section=SuicideMentalHealth>.
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