



GENDER MINORITY YOUTH: LINKS BETWEEN STATE LAWS, REGION, AND GENDER AFFIRMATION EXPERIENCES

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Introduction

Both sexual and gender minority (SGM) youth¹ have historically experienced significant discrimination compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers.² Gender minority youth (GMY) experience particularly elevated levels of discrimination, and relatedly, are also more likely to report higher levels of mental health concerns and stress.^{3,4} This stress can be exacerbated by experiencing “misgendering and deadnaming (i.e., called by an undesired name) by peers and teachers.”⁵ In addition, the inability to access bathrooms/locker rooms appropriate for youths’ gender identity further contributes to stress and health disparities. On the other hand, “using the correct pronouns and names to recognize and support gender identity (i.e., gender affirmation) is associated with feelings of social acceptance and reduced anxiety and depression.”^{5,6}

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State Laws and Gender Minority Youth Experiences

A recent study conducted by researchers from the University of Connecticut looked at **two types of youth-specific school-related state-level laws** geared toward sexual and gender minority youth.⁷

1. **“Anti-LGBT laws”** include regulations that prohibit school staff from mentioning SGM issues or people and those that prevent the addition of SGM protections to school policies.
2. **Conversion “therapy” bans** “prohibit licensed mental health practitioners from subjecting LGBTQ minors to harmful conversion ‘therapy’ practices that attempt to change their sexual orientation or gender identity.”⁸

The researchers examined data from the LGBTQ National Teen Survey, collected in 2017, and analyzed a subsample of 4,000 youth (aged 13-17 and living in the U.S.) who indicated that they were transgender (43.5%) or nonbinary (56.5%).⁹

Looking at that subsample, the researchers tested whether the presence of these laws in a state was associated with three experiences unique to **gender minority youth** in schools:

- **Name use** (being called by the correct names),
- **Pronoun use** (being called by the correct pronouns), and
- **Experiences in school sex-segregated spaces** (having access to the bathrooms/locker rooms that match a youth's gender identity).

Main Findings

State Laws

- The absence of laws that restricted rights for sexual and gender minority people was associated with both higher levels of correct pronoun use and higher levels of correct name use.
- Conversion ban laws were not associated with pronoun or correct name use.
- Neither anti-LGBT laws nor conversion ban laws were significantly associated with school bathroom/locker room use for gender minority youth in general.

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Nonbinary and Binary Transgender Youth

- Identifying as nonbinary was associated with lower instances of bathroom/locker room use relative to identifying as binary transgender.
- Identifying as nonbinary was associated with lower levels of proper pronoun and name use compared to identifying as binary transgender.

Regional Differences

- For gender minority youth in general, living in the Northeast, Midwest, and West was associated with greater correct instances of bathroom/locker room use as compared to youth in the South.
- Living in the Northeast and West was associated with higher levels of proper pronoun use compared to the South; living in the Northeast, Midwest, and West was associated with higher levels of correct name use relative to the South.

Implications

Given these findings about anti-LGBT laws, and because correct pronoun and name use are so important to the mental health of gender minority youth, the recent upsurge in anti-LGBT legislation is concerning.¹⁰ Although conversion ban therapy laws were not associated with either pronoun/correct name use nor school bathroom/locker use, the use of these un-scientific and potentially harmful therapies can cause significant harm and negative mental health effects.¹¹

The nonbinary youth in this study were less likely to be called by the pronouns by which they wished to be called. These findings point to the importance of sharing and asking about pronouns given nonbinary individuals may have pronouns that are different from those assigned at birth.

The nonbinary youth in this study were less likely to report using the bathrooms and locker rooms that aligned with their gender identity; this could be because many schools do not offer gender neutral bathrooms or single stall bathrooms, leaving no other option for gender diverse youth.

Finally, the finding that gender minority youth living in the South are less likely to be called by the correct names and pronouns and are less likely to have access to the bathrooms/locker rooms that match their gender identity compared to gender minority youth in other regions is noteworthy, especially given the recent passage of additional anti-LGBT legislation and policies.

Additional Resources

[Snapshot: LGBTQ Equality by State](#)

An interactive website created by the Movement Advancement Project (MAP) that tracks over 50 different LGBTQ-related laws and policies. Users can review detailed state profiles or search by specific issues.

[Southern Trans Youth Emergency Project](#)

A project created by the Campaign for Southern Equality to provide rapid response support directly to the families of youth who are impacted by anti-transgender healthcare bans in the South.

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¹ The term “sexual minority” is used to describe individuals who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, or who are attracted to or have sexual contact with people of the same gender. “Gender minority” is used to describe individuals whose gender identity or expression is different from their sex assigned at birth. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, December 23). *Terminology*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/terminology/sexual-and-gender-identity-terms.htm>.

² Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., Truong, N. L., Zongrone, A. D., & Gay, L. and S. E. N. (GLSEN). (2020). *The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation’s schools*. Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN).

³ Reisner, S. L., Vettes, R., Leclerc, M., Zaslow, S., Wolfrum, S., Shumer, D., & Mimiaga, M. J. (2015). Mental health of transgender youth in care at an adolescent urban community health center: A matched retrospective cohort study. *The Journal of Adolescent Health: Official Publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine*, 56(3), 274–279. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2014.10.264>.

⁴ Hendricks, M. L., & Testa, R. J. (2012). A conceptual framework for clinical work with transgender and gender nonconforming clients: An adaptation of the Minority Stress Model. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 43(5), 460–467. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029597>.

⁵ Renley, B. M., Burson, E., Simon, K. A., Caba, A. E., & Watson, R. J. (2022). Youth-specific sexual and gender minority state-level policies: Implications for pronoun, name, and bathroom/locker room use among gender minority youth. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 51(4), 780–791. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-022-01582-9>

⁶ Fontanari, A. M. V., Vilanova, F., Schneider, M. A., Chinazzo, I., Soll, B. M., Schwarz, K., Lobato, M. I. R., & Brandelli Costa, A. (2020). Gender affirmation is associated with transgender and gender nonbinary youth mental health improvement. *LGBT Health*, 7(5), 237–247. <https://doi.org/10.1089/lgbt.2019.0046>.

⁷ Renley, B. M., Burson, E., Simon, K. A., Caba, A. E., & Watson, R. J. (2022). Youth-specific sexual and gender minority state-level policies: Implications for pronoun, name, and bathroom/locker room use among gender minority youth. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 51(4), 780–791. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-022-01582-9>

⁸ Movement Advancement Project. (2017b). Equality Maps: Conversion Therapy Laws. https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/conversion_therapy.

⁹ 10% of respondents reported that the sex assigned to them at birth was male; 90% reported that the sex assigned at birth was female.

¹⁰ Cunningham GB, Watanabe NM, Buzuvis E. Anti-transgender rights legislation and internet searches pertaining to depression and suicide. *PLOS ONE*. 2022;17(12):e0279420. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0279420

¹¹ Green AE, Price-Feeney M, Dorison SH, Pick CJ. Self-Reported Conversion Efforts and Suicidality Among US LGBTQ Youths and Young Adults, 2018. *Am J Public Health*. 2020;110(8):1221-1227. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2020.305701