

Depression Rates Rise for Minority Youth in States With Anti-LGBT Legislation

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WEDNESDAY, July 5, 2023 (HealthDay News) -- Youth who are both LGBTQ+ and either Black or Hispanic and live in U.S. states that have discriminatory policies are more likely to have depression than their counterparts in states that are more affirming to gender and sexual identity, new research finds.

"This study provides scientific evidence to what many queer and trans people of color in the U.S. are experiencing day to day," said study co-author Tyler Harvey, program administrator of the Yale School of Medicine's SEICHE Center for Health and Justice.

"Queer and trans youth living in states such as Florida that are passing anti-LGBTQ+ legislation know this to be true: Their surroundings are influencing their mental health," Harvey said in a school news release.

When controlling for individual experiences of bullying based on race and ethnicity or sexual orientation, Black and Hispanic LGBTQ+ youth were 32% more likely to have symptoms of depression in states without protections such as anti-bullying legislation and conversion therapy bans, the study found.

"The laws, policies and overall social conditions within which individuals live take a toll on their health and well-being," said lead study author Skyler Jackson, an assistant professor in Yale's department of social and behavioral sciences. "This study helps to complete the puzzle of the various ways that stigma might show up within the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals."

Jackson is part of a team of researchers and staff members who are affiliated with the Yale LGBTQ+ Mental Health Initiative, meant to understand and improve the mental health of LGBTQ+ populations in the United States and around the world.

Study authors ranked states based on nine anti-LGBTQ+ structural stigma indicators that were specifically relevant to adolescents. Two of the indicators were considered harmful: the presence of "Don't Say Gay" laws and anti-LGBTQ+ community attitudes.

Other indicators were considered protective, including a greater density of high schools with gender-sexuality alliance groups.

While Alabama, Oklahoma and Texas had the highest anti-LGBTQ+ structural stigma, California had the lowest.

The findings were published recently in the *Journal of Psychopathology and Clinical Science*.

Jackson said the study addresses a need to demonstrate that actions at the state level can affect the daily lives of young people.

"The laws that many of us view as unjust, as hateful, don't exist in a vacuum with no real consequences," he said in the release. "When policies are implemented that undermine the rights, protections and dignity of LGBTQ+ individuals, that's felt in real and tangible ways. We are becoming more acutely aware of this as there are so many sociopolitical battles going on across the country right now, particularly related to trans kids and adolescents."

The researchers also wanted to start by studying Black and Hispanic LGBTQ+ youth.

"While most research of this kind begins with a broad cross-section of the LGBTQ+ population and adopts a one-size-fits-all approach, we made the decision to begin at the margins and consider how youth may experience anti-LGBTQ+ structural stigma alongside other forms of discrimination, such as racial/ethnic bullying," Jackson said.

"It still will take time for us to learn how structural stigma might land differently among LGBTQ+ youth of color," he added.