

Study sheds light on protecting transgender individuals from suicide

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The likelihood of a transgender person attempting suicide is very high, often because of the prejudice, transphobia and other stressors he or she may experience. A new study examined factors that may protect transgender adults from attempting suicide. Its conclusions also inform medical and mental health professionals who work with transgender clients.

"Identifying factors that protect transgender people from suicide is critical," said Nathan Grant Smith, associate professor in the University of Houston College of Education. "Our research showed that social support, self-acceptance, and access to health care that affirms their [gender identity](#), among other factors, were all protective against suicidality."

Smith collaborated with researchers Chérie Moody and Sandra Peláez from McGill University and Nate Fuks from The Argyle Institute of Human Relations in Montreal, Canada to examine "suicide protective factors" among transgender adults.

The participants were 133 transgender individuals living in Canada, ranging in age from 18 to 75, who responded to questions through an online, anonymous survey about their thoughts on and attempts at suicide. Nearly 45 percent of respondents said they had had a suicide plan at least once in their lives; 26 percent indicated they had attempted suicide at least once. The majority of the study participants indicated they experienced suicidal thoughts.

Five themes emerged from their responses and were categorized as protective factors. Those were social support, from friends, family and healthcare professionals; gender identity-related factors, such as self-acceptance; transition-related factors, such as being able to live in accordance with their gender identity; individual-related factors, such as optimism and problem-solving skills; and reasons for living, such as the desire to be a role model to others.

"For example, feelings of acceptance and being valued were a life-saving aspect of their [social support](#)," Smith said. "Disclosing their gender identity along with the hope of being able to openly express their gender identity decreased [suicidal thoughts](#) and attempts, and being a role model for other trans individuals all served to protect them from suicidality."

Smith and his colleagues said their findings are important because there has been little research on suicide protective factors in transgender adults. Organizations and practitioners who work with this population can use the information to develop specific prevention programs and mental health support for suicidal transgender individuals.

The study, "'Without This, I Would for Sure Already Be Dead': A Qualitative Inquiry Regarding Suicide Protective Factors Among Trans Adults," was published in the *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, a publication of the American Psychological Association.

"Our research underscores the important role that healthcare providers play in the health of transgender persons," he said. "Professionals should adopt a harm-reduction, client-centered approach and view transition-related care as an important part of [suicide](#) prevention."

Provided by University of Houston

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