

Using chosen names reduces odds of depression and suicide in transgender youths

March 30 2018

In one of the largest and most diverse studies of transgender youths to date, researchers led by a team at The University of Texas at Austin have found that when transgender youths are allowed to use their chosen name in places such as work, school and at home, their risk of depression and suicide drops.

"Many kids who are transgender have chosen a name that is different than the one that they were given at birth," said author Stephen T. Russell, professor and chair of human development and family science. "We showed that the more contexts or settings where they were able to use their preferred name, the stronger their mental health was."

The study in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* was published this week in advance of Saturday's annual Transgender Day of Visibility.

Researchers interviewed transgender youths ages 15 to 21 and asked whether young people could use their chosen name at school, home, work and with friends. Compared with peers who could not use their chosen name in any context, young people who could use their name in all four areas experienced 71 percent fewer symptoms of severe depression, a 34 percent decrease in reported thoughts of suicide and a 65 percent decrease in suicidal attempts.

Earlier research by Russell found that transgender youths report having suicidal thoughts at nearly twice the rate of their peers, with about 1 out of 3 transgender youths reporting considering suicide. In the new study,

having even one context in which a chosen name could be used was associated with a 29 percent decrease in suicidal thoughts. The researchers controlled for personal characteristics and social support.

"I've been doing research on LGBT [youth](#) for almost 20 years now, and even I was surprised by how clear that link was," Russell said.

The study interviewed 129 youths in three U.S. cities, one each in the Northeast, the Southwest and the West Coast. Transgender youths are estimated to be only about 1 percent of the population and are difficult to reach, so the research team worked with [community organizations](#) serving LGBT youths and other venues to reach as diverse a population of transgender youths as possible, Russell said. He calls the sample "remarkably ethnically and geographically diverse and diverse in terms of social class."

Because many names are common to one gender, allowing [transgender](#) youths to use a chosen name is one simple step that institutions such as schools, hospitals, financial institutions, workplaces and community organizations can use to help young people affirm their gender identity, Russell said.

"It's practical to support young people in using the name that they choose," Russell said. "It's respectful and developmentally appropriate."

Amanda M. Pollitt, also of The University of Texas; Gu Li of the University of British Columbia; and Arnold H. Grossman of New York University were also authors of the paper.

Provided by University of Texas at Austin

Citation: Using chosen names reduces odds of depression and suicide in transgender youths

(2018, March 30) retrieved 8 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-03-chosen-odds-depression-suicide-transgender.html>

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