

# Racist and heterosexist state policies and policing may be increasing Black suicide risk

April 29 2024, by Greg Bruno

---



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Discriminatory legal policies and policing that benefit white heterosexual people may be fueling suicidal ideation and behavior within Black LGBTQ communities, Rutgers Health researchers have found.

While [suicide rates](#) are decreasing among white Americans, trends for Black Americans are heading in the opposite direction, according to experts from the National Institute of Mental Health, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This increase appears to be most pronounced among LGBTQ community members, English said.

"Structural oppression and policing drive everyday [discrimination](#), which is a strong predictor of suicide risk," said Devin English, an assistant professor in the Department of Urban-Global Public Health at the Rutgers School of Public Health and lead author of the [study](#) published in the *Journal of Psychopathology and Clinical Science*. "This link was clear for participants in our study."

To gauge potential associations between state racist and heterosexist legal policies, police stops and discrimination and suicidal ideation and behavior among white and Black heterosexual and lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer (LGBTQ) community members, English and colleagues surveyed more than 5,000 people in three states: New Jersey, Minnesota and Mississippi.

Sample locations were chosen for geographic, demographic and political diversity. Participants were asked about social and political perspectives, mental health, discrimination experiences, neighborhood characteristics and other psychosocial outcomes.

Using [statistical analysis](#), the researchers examined associations between racist policies, as indicated by Black-white inequities in incarceration; heterosexist policies—such as HIV criminalization laws; whether they were stopped by the police in the past year; experiences with discrimination; and suicidal ideation (thinking about killing oneself) or behavior (such as preparing to kill oneself).

They found that for Black LGBTQ participants, racist and heterosexist

policies increased the likelihood of police stops, which were linked to higher rates of discrimination, suicidal ideation and suicidal behavior. For white heterosexual participants, the opposite was true: Racist and heterosexist policies were associated with decreased likelihood of police stops, and thus weaker effects on [suicidal ideation](#) and behavior.

"Both Black heterosexual and LGBTQ participants living in states that had higher Black-white incarceration inequities were more likely to be stopped by the police," English said. "This is important because every participant, regardless of race or [sexual identity](#), reported more discrimination, suicidal thoughts and suicidal behaviors if they had been stopped by the police. However, Black LGBTQ participants were the most likely to be stopped."

Because of limited longitudinal data, English said his findings leave room for interpretation. Yet a growing body of research supports the conclusions, he added.

"This is one of several recent studies to demonstrate that states and municipalities with policies that harm Black and LGBTQ communities actually help white [heterosexual](#) people," English said. "We simply cannot sit back and watch as white supremacist policies are passed by our state legislatures, at the expense of our Black and LGBTQ neighbors. We need to speak up."

**More information:** Devin English et al, Systemic White supremacy: U.S. state policy, policing, discrimination, and suicidality across race and sexual identity., *Journal of Psychopathology and Clinical Science* (2024). [DOI: 10.1037/abn0000891](https://doi.org/10.1037/abn0000891)

Provided by Rutgers University

Citation: Racist and heterosexist state policies and policing may be increasing Black suicide risk (2024, April 29) retrieved 17 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-04-racist-heterosexist-state-policies-policing.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.