

Transgender Youth Allowed to Use Their Chosen Name Have Fewer Mental Health Problems

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INTRODUCTION

Transgender people—people whose gender identity does not align with their sex assigned at birth—are at higher risk of poor mental health than people who are not transgender.

Being able to use a “chosen name,” that is, a name that is different from their birth name that more closely matches their gender identity, is part of the social transition process for transgender people that allows them to align their gender presentation with their gender identity. However, many transgender and gender nonconforming youth are not able to use their chosen name. For example, families or peers may refuse to use the chosen name, while medical practitioners or schools may require a legal name change before calling youth by their chosen name.

Transgender youth whose gender expression and names do not appear to match may make them vulnerable to unintended disclosure, or “outing,” and to discrimination or victimization. This mismatch, therefore, can lead to mental health problems. This brief examines the relationship between chosen name use—which is a proxy for youths’ gender affirmation in various contexts—and mental health among transgender youth.

Using data from a community cohort sample of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer youth, and youth with same-sex attractions, transgender youth were asked if they were able to go by their chosen name at home, school, work, or with friends. The authors then compared these responses to levels of depression, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behavior.

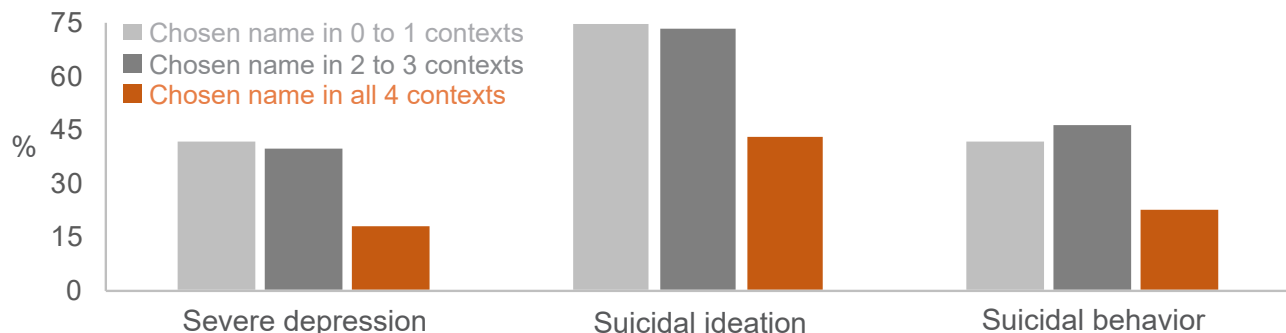
POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Schools, community organizations, workplaces, healthcare providers, and other institutions could institute policies and regulations that allow for the use of transgender youths’ chosen names. Information systems can be updated so that youths’ chosen names are used whenever legal names are not required. Allowing for the use of chosen names across multiple contexts will likely improve the mental health of transgender youth.

KEY FINDING

> **Transgender youth who were able to use their chosen name at home, in school, at work, and with friends had lower levels of severe depression, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behaviors** (see figure).

TRANSGENDER YOUTH WHO COULD USE THEIR CHOSEN NAME AT HOME, SCHOOL, WORK, AND WITH FRIENDS HAD THE LOWEST LEVELS OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS



REFERENCE

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