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ARTICLE JUL 13, 2021

Black LGBTQ Individuals Experience Heightened Levels of Discrimination

2020 Survey Results Highlight Disparities in the Workplace, in Police Interactions, and in Mental and Physical Health

The compounding effects of discrimination for Black LGBTQ Americans are evident in the workplace, health care systems, and police interactions, leading to gaps in economic advancement and mental and physical health outcomes.

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People holding signs supporting Black transgender people gather during a candlelight vigil in West Reading, Pennsylvania, on September 14, 2020. (Getty/Ben Hasty/MediaNews Group/Reading Eagle)

For more information on LGBTQ individuals of color, see "LGBTQ People of Color Encounter Heightened Discrimination: 2020 Survey Results on Experiences in Health Care, Housing, and Education."

A nationally representative survey conducted in June 2020 by the Center for American Progress highlights that LGBTQ people of color are more likely than white LGBTQ individuals to encounter discrimination in a variety of settings.

READ THE COLUMN

This year will likely be remembered for important and positive moments for the United States, including passage of the Equality Act in the U.S. House of Representatives and the widespread distribution of COVID-19 vaccines that

have provided nearly half of the population with full immunity. However, it also comes with a sobering statistic: 2021 is on track to become the deadliest year in history for violence against Black transgender individuals, at least 16 of whom have been killed in hate incidents as of this April. Broadly, Black LGBTQ individuals find themselves at the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination, as anti-Blackness and anti-LGBTQ sentiment compound to result in a higher incidence of police interactions, toxic workplace discrimination, and large-scale economic difficulties.

A recent analysis* of data from a 2020 Center for American Progress survey shows that 33 percent of Black LGBTQ individuals reported experiencing discrimination in the last year and that this had a significant impact on their lives and everyday experiences. Black LGBTQ individuals regularly alter their behavior to avoid potentially harmful experiences: Nearly 1 in 3 report avoiding public spaces such as stores or restaurants to avoid experiencing discrimination; 2 in 5 have moved away from family to prevent discriminatory experiences; and 1 in 5 avoid travel. They are also more likely than their white counterparts to experience discrimination within LGBTQ spaces. This column outlines areas with the most evident disparities between Black and white survey respondents.

Police interactions

Black people have always faced systemic and pervasive discrimination at the hands of police; due to racial profiling, Black individuals are pulled over for traffic stops at significantly higher rates than white individuals—a phenomenon known as “driving while Black.” They are also disproportionately targeted by stop-and-frisk policies and overpoliced in predominantly Black neighborhoods. Soberingly, Black men are roughly 2 1/2 times as likely as their white counterparts to be killed by police. Meanwhile, LGBTQ individuals—particularly transgender individuals—are more likely to be targeted by police for stops and arrests than non-LGBTQ individuals and are overrepresented in prison populations as a result.

- 25 percent of Black LGBTQ individuals reported experiencing discrimination when interacting with law enforcement; 13 percent of white LGBTQ respondents reported the same.
- 40 percent of Black LGBTQ individuals reported avoiding law enforcement to avoid experiencing discrimination; 28 percent of white LGBTQ respondents reported the same.

Workplace mistreatment

LGBTQ individuals experience high rates of discrimination and harassment in hiring practices and in the workplace. For example, studies have shown that employers are less likely to reach out to perceived LGBTQ job candidates for interviews, and other research indicates that LGBTQ STEM professionals are more likely to face career limitations and harassment. These concerns are compounded for Black individuals, who are paid less for doing the same job as white workers and are given fewer job opportunities in the face of occupational segregation.

- 78 percent of Black LGBTQ individuals report that discrimination has affected their ability to be hired to some degree; 55 percent of white LGBTQ respondents reported the same.
- 56 percent of Black LGBTQ individuals report that discrimination has affected their ability to retain employment to some degree; 46 percent of white LGBTQ respondents reported the same.
- 40 percent of Black LGBTQ individuals made specific decisions about where to work in order to avoid discrimination; 33 percent of white respondents reported the same.

Economic difficulties

Black individuals face higher rates of discrimination from banks and lenders, are less likely to receive a quality education, and are less likely to own homes than their white counterparts. Centuries of discrimination have resulted in a significant wealth gap between Black and white Americans, as the latter have been able to build and store income, assets, and credit over multiple generations. LGBTQ individuals—who are also less likely to own a home and face high levels of discrimination from financial institutions—report higher rates of food insecurity and homelessness than non-LGBTQ individuals. As a result of such discrimination, Black LGBTQ people are more likely to experience poverty than both their white LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ counterparts.

- 53 percent of Black LGBTQ individuals reported a household income of less than \$40,000 a year; 41 percent of white LGBTQ respondents reported the same.
- 69 percent of Black LGBTQ individuals reported that discrimination has negatively affected their financial well-being to some degree; 50 percent of white LGBTQ respondents reported the same.
- 55 percent of Black LGBTQ individuals reported that discrimination has negatively affected their ability to rent or buy a home to some degree; 32 percent of white LGBTQ respondents reported the same.
- 36 percent of Black LGBTQ individuals reported receiving assistance from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the past year; 20 percent of white LGBTQ respondents reported the same.
- 28 percent of Black LGBTQ people reported experiencing discrimination in an apartment community; 14 percent of white LGBTQ respondents reported the same.
- 24 percent of Black LGBTQ people reported that they avoided getting necessary services for themselves or their family to avoid discrimination; 17 percent of white LGBTQ respondents reported the same.
- 23 percent of Black LGBTQ people reported avoiding travel to avoid experiencing discrimination; 16 percent of white LGBTQ respondents reported the same.

- 16 percent of Black LGBTQ people reported postponing adding children to their family to avoid experiencing discrimination; 8 percent of white LGBTQ respondents reported the same.

Mental and physical health

Consistent discrimination takes a significant toll on individuals' mental and physical health. Physiologically, harassment and mistreatment have been shown to lead to cortisol dysregulation, which affects a wide range of bodily functions. As a result, Black LGBTQ individuals often experience mental and physical health challenges.

- 83 percent of Black LGBTQ individuals reported that discrimination has negatively affected their physical well-being to some degree; 61 percent of white respondents reported the same.
- 95 percent of Black LGBTQ individuals reported that discrimination has negatively affected their psychological well-being to some degree; 88 percent of white respondents reported the same.
- 86 percent of Black LGBTQ individuals reported that discrimination has negatively affected their spiritual well-being to some degree; 69 percent of white respondents reported the same.

Black individuals also face high rates of mistreatment from doctors, stemming from both a long history of medical racism and misconceptions about Black people's bodies that are perpetuated in many medical schools. These inequalities lead to structural disparities in medical outcomes.

- 15 percent of Black LGBTQ people reported some form of negative or discriminatory treatment from a doctor or health care provider in the year prior.
- 14 percent of Black LGBTQ people reported that they had to teach their doctor about their sexual orientation to get appropriate care.
- 7 percent of Black LGBTQ people reported that a doctor refused to see them because of their sexual orientation, and 11 percent said they had a doctor who was visibly uncomfortable due to their sexual orientation.

Conclusion

Black LGBTQ individuals face disproportionate levels of discrimination, from more frequent police interactions to mistreatment in the workplace to discriminatory treatment from health care providers. This pervasive discrimination has led to large-scale economic disparities as well as significant mental and physical health concerns. Data from CAP's 2020 survey support literature that shows the compounded harm of experiencing multiple forms of discrimination. These findings underscore that policymakers must consider the specific needs of the Black LGBTQ community when pursuing efforts to combat discrimination and promote equality.

Lindsay Mahowald is a research assistant with the LGBTQ Research and Communications Project at the Center for American Progress.

** Data are from a nationally representative survey of 1,528 LGBTQ+-identifying individuals, jointly conducted in June 2020 by the Center for American Progress and NORC at the University of Chicago. Unless otherwise indicated, all comparisons between white respondents and Black respondents are significant at the 0.05 level.*

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The Center for American Progress has worked with NORC at the University of Chicago to design a comprehensive, nationally representative survey that collects data on the lives, attitudes, and experiences of LGBTQI+ Americans. The survey results reveal LGBTQI+ communities’ experiences in a wide range of situations in both the public and private spheres—including discrimination, physical and mental well-being, medical care, the workforce, education, and government services. It also breaks down participants’ responses along demographic lines such as race and ethnicity, gender identity, age, disability status, and educational attainment. Survey results play a critical role in better understanding these groups’ realities and informing policy responses to disparities as well as paths forward for potential future research.

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