

Examining Abuse and Suicide Attempts by Gender Identity

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Background

Among gender minority people, the suicide attempt rate is 41%, nearly 10 times higher than the general population, and 3 times higher than sexual minority individuals (Haasm et al., 2014).

- Yet, the experiences of gender minority individuals, and the unique minority stress they experience, are not often studied.

Gender minority populations face unique challenges associated with risk of suicide-related behaviors, including:

- Internal conflict and gender dysphoria, or the strong and persistent distress related to the inconsistency between one's sex assigned at birth and gender identity (American Psychiatric Association, 2016; Meyer-Bahlburg, 2010).
- Higher levels of depression, relative to cisgender youth (O'Brien et al., 2016).
- Social isolation within family and broader sexual and gender minority communities (Subhrajit, 2014), contributing to lower levels of self-esteem.

While studies of gender minority individuals have not focused on family mistreatment, sexual minority samples report high levels of family discord and mistreatment (Smally, Warren, & Barefoot, 2016).

- Among sexual minority samples, family acceptance may protect against depression, substance abuse, and suicide-related behaviors (Ryan et al., 2010).
- Research has not examined how parental abuse may relate to suicide attempts among gender minority youth.

Current study: We examined subgroup differences among transgender youth in suicide attempt risk and past family violence, as well as potential differences in association between family violence and suicide attempt risk.

- How are experiences of family abuse associated with self-reported suicide attempts?
- Is the relationship between family abuse and suicide attempt risk moderated by gender identity?

Methods

This study used the *Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors* dataset (n=121,150) collected from hundreds of US communities and schools by the Search Institute. **Table 1** presents demographic characteristics of the sample.

Measures included:

- **Gender identity:** Response options included, *Female; Male; Transgender, male-to-female; Transgender, female-to-male; Transgender, do not identify exclusively male or female; Not sure.*
- **Abuse:** "Have you ever been physically harmed (that is where someone caused you to have a scar, black and blue marks, welts, etc.) by someone in your family or someone living with you?" (1 = *Never*, 5 = *More than 10 times*)
- **Suicide attempts:** "Have you ever tried to kill yourself?" (0 = *No*, 1 = *Yes, once*, 2 = *Yes, Twice*, 3 = *Yes, more than two times.*) The variable was dichotomized to reflect ever attempting suicide.
- **Correlates** included race/ethnicity, age, parent education, and rurality.

Table 1. Sample demographics

Gender Identity	Sexual orientation		Race-ethnicity	
	n	%	n	%
Cisgender girls	60973	50.33%	105932	87.44%
Cisgender boys	57871	47.77%	5895	4.87%
Transfeminine	202	0.17%	4068	3.36%
Transmasculine	175	0.14%	727	0.60%
Nonbinary	344	0.28%	847	0.70%
Questioning	1052	0.87%	3681	3.04%
Missing	533	0.44%		

Results

Descriptive statistics were run in SPSS; Missing data were handled with multiple imputation (20 data sets).

Figure 1 shows mean levels of abuse and suicide attempts by gender identity. ANOVAs identified significant differences between groups in levels of abuse ($F[5, 120616] = 89.733$) and the percentage reporting a prior suicide attempt ($F[5, 120616] = 437.833$).

- Cisgender youth had significantly lower mean levels of both abuse and fewer suicide attempts than transgender youth.
- There were no differences within transgender subgroups in levels of family abuse.
- Youth with transmasculine and nonbinary gender identities reported the highest frequency of prior suicide attempt, relative to all other groups.

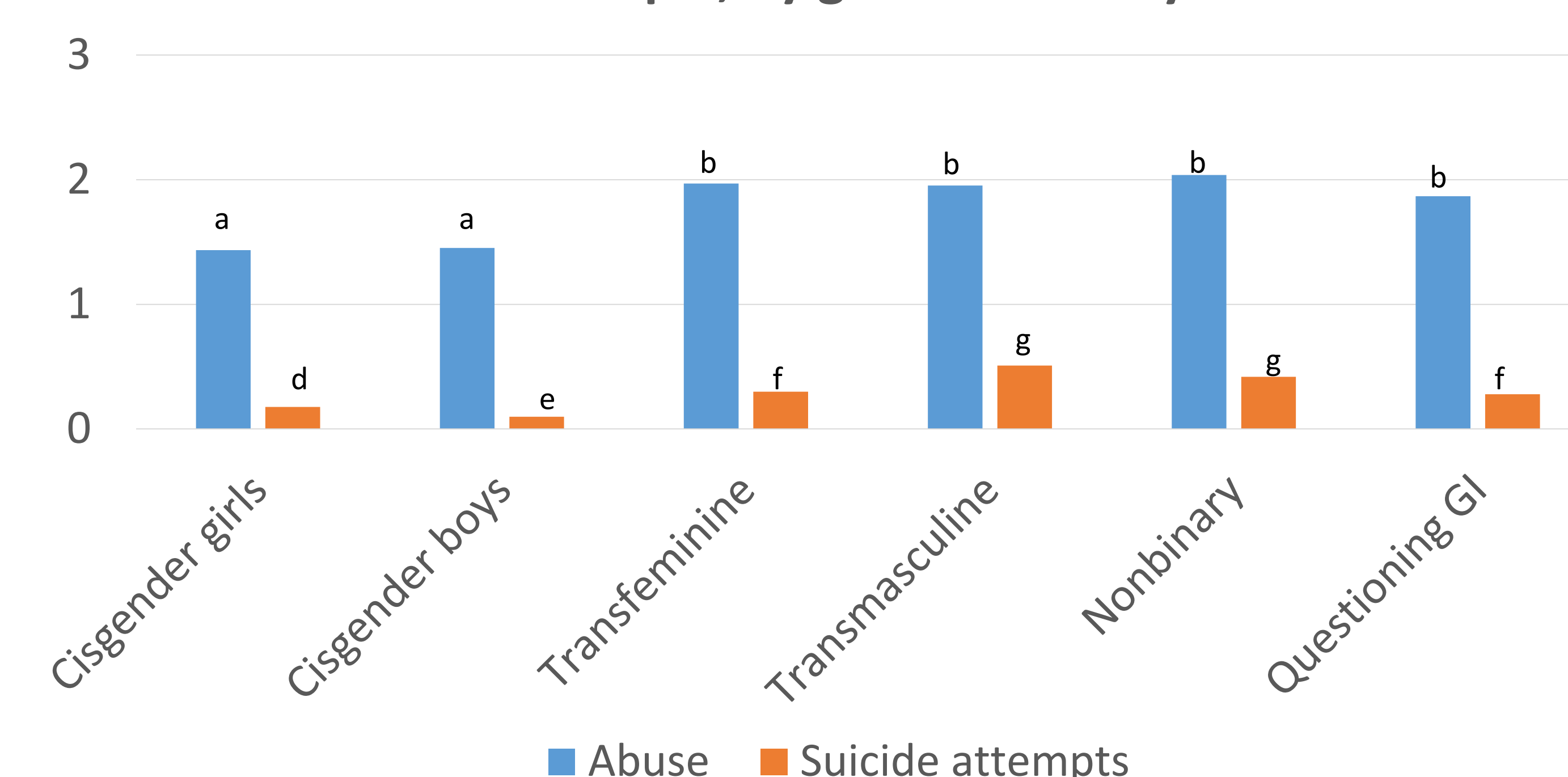
Multigroup logistic regression in Mplus (Version 7.0) was used to examine the association between family abuse and suicidality by gender identity. **Table 2** displays confidence intervals for adjusted odds ratios predicting suicide attempts by gender identity.

- Family abuse is associated with higher odds of suicide attempts, regardless of gender identity.
- Among cisgender girls and boys, non-white race-ethnicity is associated with higher odds of suicide attempts.

Table 2. Confidence intervals for odds ratios of suicide attempts, by gender identity

	Cisgender girls	Cisgender boys	Transfeminine	Transmasculine	Nonbinary	Questioning
Abuse	(1.43,1.46)	(1.33,1.37)	(1.2,1.76)	(1.16,1.63)	(1.28,1.59)	(1.16,1.33)
Age	(1.01,1.03)	(1.04,1.06)	(0.86,1.17)	(0.93,1.19)	(0.91,1.12)	(0.93,1.03)
Parent Education	(0.96,1.02)	(0.91,0.99)	(0.76,2.63)	(0.56,1.97)	(0.71,1.66)	(0.67,1.07)
Urban (=1)	(0.92,0.94)	(0.94,0.96)	(0.93,1.32)	(0.87,1.18)	(0.85,1.06)	(0.86,0.97)
Mostly heterosexual	(1.54,1.69)	(1.58,1.81)	(1.06,5.9)	(1.08,6.23)	(0.36,1.28)	(0.88,1.46)
Bisexual	(2.52,2.79)	(2.37,2.87)	(1.16,4.35)	(1.61,6.59)	(0.77,2.3)	(1.35,2.29)
Mostly Lesbian/Gay	(2.03,2.7)	(1.49,2.25)	(1.41,6.25)	(1.31,6.59)	(0.77,2.53)	(1.31,2.65)
Only Lesbian/Gay	(1.86,2.54)	(1.81,2.37)	(1.79,7.49)	(1.64,7.46)	(0.64,2.04)	(1.08,2.22)
AI/NA	(1.11,1.46)	(1.06,1.38)	(0.66,3.59)	(0.15,4.66)	(0.42,1.81)	(0.58,1.44)
Asian	(0.98,1.09)	(1.04,1.17)	(0.32,2.19)	(0.33,1.43)	(0.32,0.97)	(0.62,1.19)
Black	(1.05,1.17)	(1.08,1.22)	(0.3,2.44)	(0.28,1.62)	(0.4,1.48)	(0.62,1.33)
Latinx	(1.29,1.39)	(1.2,1.33)	(0.63,3.27)	(0.41,2.15)	(0.62,2.29)	(0.68,1.45)
NHPI	(1.13,1.59)	(1.25,1.74)	(0.31,2.4)	(0.16,1.23)	(0.4,2.1)	(0.45,2.04)
Other RE	(1.09,1.26)	(1.12,1.32)	(0.47,3.78)	(0.1,2.87)	(0.52,1.66)	(0.56,1.08)
Multiracial/ethnic	(1.2,1.33)	(1.23,1.38)	(0.52,2.22)	(0.45,1.73)	(0.78,2.02)	(0.68,1.17)

Figure 1. Mean levels of abuse and suicide attempts, by gender identity



Conclusions and Implications

- While parental abuse was associated with higher odds of suicide attempts, gender minority youth, specifically youth with transmasculine and nonbinary gender identities, reported higher levels of abuse.
 - Sexual minority identity and race-ethnicity were also associated with higher odds of suicide attempts.
- Intersectional theories are imperative to examine how the combination of multiple identities and aspects such as race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status, contribute to suicide-related outcomes (O'Brien et al., 2016).

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