Study Shows Link Between Conversion Therapy and Transgender Suicide Attempts

Findings from researchers at The Fenway Institute, Massachusetts General Hospital (Harvard Medical School), and McLean Hospital (Harvard Medical School) support recommendations that gender identity conversion efforts at any age are harmful.

BOSTON (PRWEB) September 11, 2019 -- A new study published today in JAMA Psychiatry found that exposure to attempts by professionals to change a person’s gender identity from transgender to cisgender is associated with a range of adverse mental health outcomes, including suicide attempts. The study was authored by researchers at The Fenway Institute, Massachusetts General Hospital (Harvard Medical School), and McLean Hospital (Harvard Medical School) and is believed to be the first to show an association between exposure to gender identity conversion efforts and adverse mental health outcomes among transgender adults in the United States. The study also builds on previous work published last month by the same researchers documenting the widespread prevalence (13.5%) among the U.S. transgender population of having experienced gender identity conversion efforts by therapists, counselors, and religious advisors.

“The rate of previous suicide attempts among transgender people in the United States is extremely high, with 41 percent reporting that they have had that experience,” said Dr. Alex Keuroghlian, senior author of the study who directs the National LGBT Health Education Center at The Fenway Institute and the Massachusetts General Hospital Psychiatry Gender Identity Program. “What this new study shows is that transgender people who are exposed to conversion efforts anytime in their lives have more than double the odds of attempting suicide compared with those who have never experienced efforts by professionals to convert their gender identity from transgender to cisgender.”

Findings from the study titled “Association Between Recalled Exposure to Gender Identity Conversion Efforts and Suicide Attempts” support recommendations by the American Psychiatric Association, the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the American Academy of Pediatrics advising mental health care providers that gender identity conversion efforts at any age are harmful.

Lifetime exposure to gender identity conversion efforts was associated with a broad range of adverse mental health outcomes, including suicidal ideation in the previous 12 months and severe psychological distress in the previous month. Additionally, associations with adverse mental health outcomes held true whether the person conducting the conversion efforts was a secular therapist or a religious advisor.

“One of the most alarming findings from this study was the association between exposure to gender identity conversion efforts during childhood and a four-fold increased odds of lifetime suicide attempts,” said Dr. Jack Turban, resident physician in psychiatry at The Massachusetts General Hospital and McLean Hospital and lead author of the study. “This is important because some experts continue to advocate for gender identity conversion efforts for young children. We hope our findings contribute to ongoing legislative efforts to ban gender identity conversion efforts.”

The study uses data from the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey conducted by the National Center for Transgender Equality and includes responses from over 27,000 transgender people in the U.S. Its publication comes one month after The American Journal of Public Health published “Psychological Attempts to Change a Person’s
Gender Identity From Transgender to Cisgender: Estimated Prevalence Across US States, 2015” showing that nearly 200,000 transgender people representing every U.S. state have been exposed to gender identity conversion efforts.

About Fenway Health & The Fenway Institute
Since 1971, Fenway Health has been working to make life healthier for the people in our neighborhoods, the LGBTQ community, people living with HIV/AIDS and the broader population. The Fenway Institute at Fenway Health is an interdisciplinary center for research, training, education and policy development focusing on national and international health issues.

About Massachusetts General Hospital
Massachusetts General Hospital, founded in 1811, is the original and largest teaching hospital of Harvard Medical School. The MGH Research Institute conducts the largest hospital-based research program in the nation, with an annual research budget of more than $925 million and comprises more than 8,500 researchers working across more than 30 institutes, centers and departments. In August 2019 the MGH was once again named #2 in the nation by U.S. News & World Report in its list of "America’s Best Hospitals.”

About McLean Hospital
McLean Hospital has a continuous commitment to put people first in patient care, innovation and discovery, and shared knowledge related to mental health. In 2017 and 2018, it was named the #1 hospital for psychiatric care in the United States by U.S. News & World Report. McLean Hospital is the largest psychiatric affiliate of Harvard Medical School and a member of Partners HealthCare. For more information, please visit mcleanhospital.org or follow us on Facebook or Twitter.
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