

STUDY OF COVID-19 IMPACT ON TRANSGENDER, NONBINARY & GENDER DIVERSE PEOPLE IN BALTIMORE



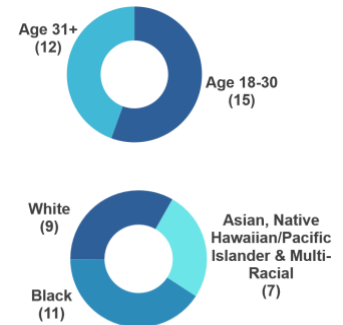
INITIAL FINDINGS

SUMMER 2023

Overview

The goal of this community-engaged study is to understand the early COVID-19 experiences of transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse (TNBGD) people in Baltimore, MD.

We interviewed 27 TNBGD people of different ages, races and ethnicities, in-person and virtually, from July 2022 - March 2023.



Initial Themes

Changing access to gender-affirming services

During the pandemic, it was harder for some people to access gender-affirming social, medical, and legal services. They couldn't go to their regular doctor's appointments, and some surgeries were delayed or cancelled. Legally changing names also took longer than usual. Some people couldn't get their medications because there weren't enough in stock. People who used services often said they couldn't get the same quality of care as before.

Using telehealth made it easier for many people to get help, even from far away.

“They deemed different gender affirming procedures as not priority, or secondary, and so all of those stopped. And at the time I was in the process of getting a procedure and initially it was stopped, so we delayed things for quite a while.”

(Trans male; non-Hispanic Black; 30s)

Impacts on gender identity and expression

Many people had more time to think about who they were and how to express themselves during the pandemic. This was especially true for people who recently recognized they were TNBGD. They used this time to understand and express their gender identity better. People who were already transitioning noticed the pandemic made it harder to express their gender because they couldn't access gender-affirming activities and services.

“Before the pandemic I was out as nonbinary. But I wasn't out as a trans woman. When the pandemic happened, I thought we were all gonna die. So, I said, ‘hey, I'm a trans woman too, so I wanna do this, whether we live or die cause I need to let people know who I am– for my own comfort.’ I feel like more of us came out, more of us got scared that we would never ever have our truth be known.”

(Trans woman; non-Hispanic Black; 30s)

Opinions about wearing masks varied. Some people felt that masks helped them be correctly gendered. Others were misgendered more often when wearing masks because they covered gendered parts of their face like beards or makeup. Some even used their masks for gender expression. For example, some wore masks with patterns that represented their transgender identity, like the colors of the trans flag.

Life transitions

The pandemic caused big changes in people's lives. Some lost their jobs, and others had to start taking classes online. Some people had to find new places to live. Some started working towards their dream jobs to serve their communities. This included becoming nurses, social workers, and people who help keep communities healthy and safe.

“Another big reason why I want to eventually become a nurse practitioner is so I can start prescribing [hormones] so I can be like, ‘Listen, I can help you get a script.’”

(Trans woman; non-Hispanic Asian; 40s)

Because of rules like social distancing and staying home, many people got closer to their bio or chosen families. They moved in together, started talking again, or took care of older family members. Even with these changes, many said they felt lonely and far apart from their friends and communities during the pandemic.

Perceptions of emotional & physical safety

Some people felt less safe during the pandemic because they experienced more racism and transphobia. They had more encounters with people who were aggressive towards them. Some people felt especially unsafe around those who didn't want to wear masks, those who didn't want to get vaccinated, and far right political activists. They also felt less safe when interacting with the police. This was especially true when police were enforcing public health rules like staying at home. They were worried that the government wasn't doing enough to help during the pandemic.

Wearing masks made some people worry about their safety. They feared getting into fights with anti-maskers, and they worried about being misgendered while wearing a mask. A few transgender women were especially concerned that men might act violently if they realized they were transgender after approaching them.

There was some good news too. Queer and transgender people found safety in their communities.

People came together to take care of each other's health, find housing, and make sure everyone had enough food. This solidarity made them feel safer during a difficult time.

“We keep us safe, it's not going to be the government, obviously, it's not going to be the police. We are the ones who do that, and we do it by making policy choices that give people money and security and shelter.”

(Nonbinary, agender, trans; non-Hispanic White; 30s)

Preliminary Take-Aways

We learned important things about how the pandemic affected TNBGD people in Baltimore, in good and bad ways. Importantly, the community supported each other and tried to create safety while times were difficult. We hope to learn more from our study, share this information with community and allies, and work together towards better health and well-being for all TNBGD people in Baltimore.

TO LEARN MORE OR HELP OUT:

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