



Trans Youth and the Right to

Access Public Washrooms

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Trans, transgender, gender identity, gender expression, bill C-279, safety, access, washroom, youth programs

POPULATION GROUP

LGBTTQ Youth

STEPPING UP THEMES

Health & Wellness; Diversity, Social Inclusion & Safety; Coordinated & Youth Friendly Communities

RESEARCH ORIGIN

Ontario

SOURCE

YouthREX

“Misconceptions, myths, and a lack of understanding either intentionally or unintentionally lead to discrimination. Education can help cisgender people understand the experiences of trans people and change their actions to be more inclusive.”

1. What is the research about?

This YouthREX Research to Practice report defines, explores, and analyses some of the challenges, fears, anxieties and issues trans-identified youth experience, particularly with respect to safe access to public washrooms. The report places current debates about the rights of trans youth, which have become increasingly public, in context by critically engaging recent research and social policy. The report concludes with recommendations for youth programs and services to ensure that they are inclusive and accessible for trans youth.

2. Where did the research take place?

This report focuses on trans youth experience in Canada.

3. Who is this research about?

This report focuses on the needs of trans-identified and gender-questioning youth, and how youth sector stakeholders can better support their wellbeing.

4. How was the research done?

This report is the result of a focused desk review of the literature and a critical social policy analysis including both national and international sources with a similar social, economic, and political context. The author focused on three lines of research: 1) Trans youth experience; 2) Trans youth and the right to safely use public washrooms; and 3) Youth work practices and policies to support the wellbeing of trans-identified youth. Literature selected includes recently published books, peer-reviewed journal articles, social policies and grey literature.

5. What are the key findings?

Trans-identified youth face daily discrimination in every major developmental context. Transgender research to date has mainly focused on the diagnosis and the physical and the psychological transition of trans people, and less on the social conditions that produce hardship. While some research has examined the experiences of transgender youth in formal education and health settings, there is a lack of research on transgender youth experiences in out-of-school settings.

Gender segregation into the categories of male and female sex presents a range of challenges for trans youth, especially for those who have chosen a non-medical transition. Recent research finds that gender-segregated spaces are considered the most unsafe by LGBTQ identified youth. At minimum, trans-identified youth need access to safe washrooms that are not anxiety or fear provoking. Imagine wanting to attend a youth development program, but being unable to participate because you are not able to safely use the washroom. This research argues for the importance of upholding the basic human right of trans-identified youth to enjoy the freedom to safely access the public washroom of their choosing.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

Safe access to a public washroom should be a basic human right and it should be available to all in youth programs, schools and beyond. This is merely one of the many issues trans youth face. Some steps that youth programs and services can take to become more inclusive for trans youth include:

1. Do not ask for sex, gender, or sexual orientations unless absolutely necessary.
 - A good practice is to simply ask for gender and leave space for youth to write whatever response they please.
2. Ensure that your space is inclusive which means providing access to gender-neutral washrooms.
3. Do not essentialize or assume how a person identifies.
 - Youth are not only coming from a variety of social locations, cultural backgrounds, and religious backgrounds, but also have various gender identities and sexual orientations.
4. Undertake training, education, and awareness-raising efforts to introduce cisgender staff, volunteers, and program participants to the complexities of gender identity, gender expressions, and the negative consequences of assumptions.



Jonah, J.J. (2016). *Trans Youth and the Right to Access Public Washrooms: A Critical Perspective on a Social Policy*. Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange (YouthREX). Toronto, ON.

FIND IT ONLINE

<http://exchange.youthrex.com/report/trans-youth-and-right-access-public-washrooms-critical-perspective-social-policy>