



## Nov. 20 is Transgender Day of Remembrance!

by Roslyn Manley

Board of Directors

UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns

Our community and our nation have been shocked by the recent number of gay suicides. These deaths are a shocking travesty and give testament to unchecked bullying that some experts believe have anti-gay religion at its core. These unnecessary deaths rob not only young people of their lives, but our planet of the talents and skills they might have bestowed upon all of us.

Lost in this conversation, however, is the murder, suicide and attempted suicide rates among transgenders and those perceived as transgender. The Day of Remembrance website recorded 100 transgender deaths in 2009. These include only those who are known to them by direct community reporting or newspaper accounts. There are undoubtedly more.

Years ago, researcher Kay Brown calculated the transgender murder rate to be 16 times that of the general population and 3 times that of African American men, the next closest group. According to Ms. Brown, a transsexual person is more likely to be murdered than they are to be married!

The “Day of Remembrance,” according to project founder Gwendolyn Smith, was set aside to memorialize those who were killed due to anti-transgender hatred or prejudice. The date of this event, November 20th, was chosen to honor Rita Hester, whose murder kicked off the “Remembering Our Dead” web project and a candlelight vigil in 1999 in San Francisco. Rita was stabbed to death in her own apartment. Like so many other anti-transgender murders, her death has yet to be solved.

Plan on attending a “Remembering Our Dead” event in a city near you. If one is not being held, consider organizing one. Information on local events and tips on how to organize an event can be found at:

[www.transgenderdor.org](http://www.transgenderdor.org). Resources are available at [www.glaad.org/dayofremembrancekit](http://www.glaad.org/dayofremembrancekit).

The sad reality about our statistics is that they only include personal identification or public records. Who knows how many gender non-conforming children and adults commit suicide with their deaths attributed to other causes?

The National Center for Transgender Equality reported the following:

WASHINGTON, Oct. 7—More than half of transgender and gender non-conforming people who were bullied, harassed or assaulted in school because of their gender identity have attempted suicide, according to just-released findings from the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, conducted by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and National Center for Transgender Equality.

“From our experience working with transgender people, we had prepared ourselves for high rates of suicide attempts, but we didn't expect anything like this,” says Mara Keisling, executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality. “Our study participants reported attempting suicide at a rate more than 25 times the national average.” Forty-one percent of all respondents reported that they had attempted suicide, compared with a national estimated rate of 1.6 percent.

“These shocking and disheartening numbers speak to the urgency of ending bullying in our nation's schools and ending discrimination in our nation's workplaces. We know from the recent rash of suicides among young people who have been bullied just how critical it is that we act now and act decisively to save lives,” says Rea Carey, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Among those who had been bullied, harassed or assaulted while they were in school, half reported having attempted suicide. Most notably, suicide attempt rates rise dramatically when teachers were the reported perpetrators: 59 percent for those harassed or bullied by teachers, 76 percent among those who were physically assaulted by teachers and 69 percent among those who were sexually assaulted by teachers.

Of those who reported that they had to “leave school because the harassment was so bad,” 68 percent said they attempted suicide. Fully 61 percent of respondents who expressed a transgender identity or gender non-conformity while in school reported significant abuses in educational settings. From elementary through graduate school, the survey showed high levels of harassment and bullying (59 percent), physical assault (23 percent), sexual assault (8 percent), and expulsion from school (5 percent), all on the basis of gender identity or expression.

Other findings include:

- Thirty-five percent of the participants who had been bullied, harassed, assaulted or expelled because of their gender identity or expression while in school said that they used drugs or alcohol to cope with the effects of discrimination, compared to 21 percent of those who had not had similar experiences in school.
- Twenty-five percent reported that they were currently or formerly homeless, compared to 14 percent of those who did not report mistreatment in schools.
- Those who reported they had to "leave school because the harassment was so bad," had an HIV infection rate of more than 5 percent, which is more than eight times the HIV infection rate for the general U.S. population.

These suicide statistics are part of broader findings related to health care and health for transgender and gender non-conforming people that will be released next week. Preliminary findings related to employment and economic insecurity, which describes employment discrimination and unemployment rates, were previously released late last year and are available here.

The National Transgender Discrimination Survey is the most extensive survey of transgender discrimination ever done. It includes responses from more than 6,400 people from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

**The United Church of Christ Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns advocates for the full inclusion of LGBT people in church and society. For more information, visit the Coalition website at [UCCcoalition.org](http://UCCcoalition.org).**