

A Longitudinal Analysis of Family Functioning and Mental Health in Transgender Youth and Families

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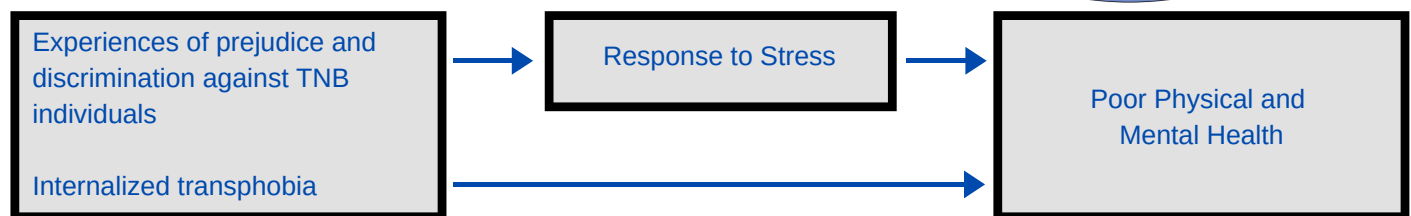
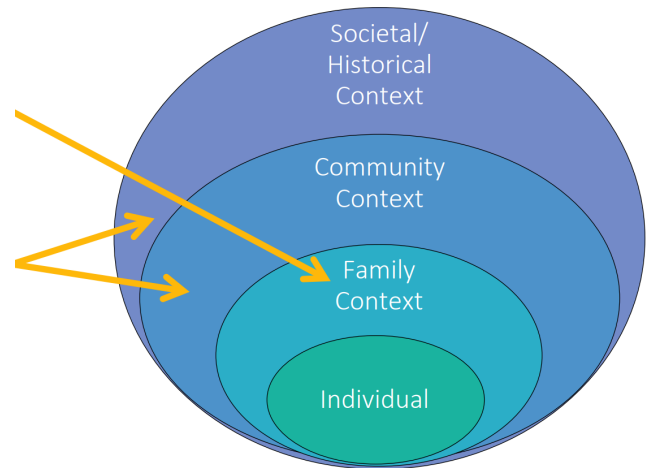
Trans Teen Family Narratives Project

Background

Some studies have found that **transgender and/or nonbinary (TNB) youth** are at a higher risk of mental health concerns. We wanted to find out **how family functioning might protect youth and their families against these risks.**

Our study is based on two theories:

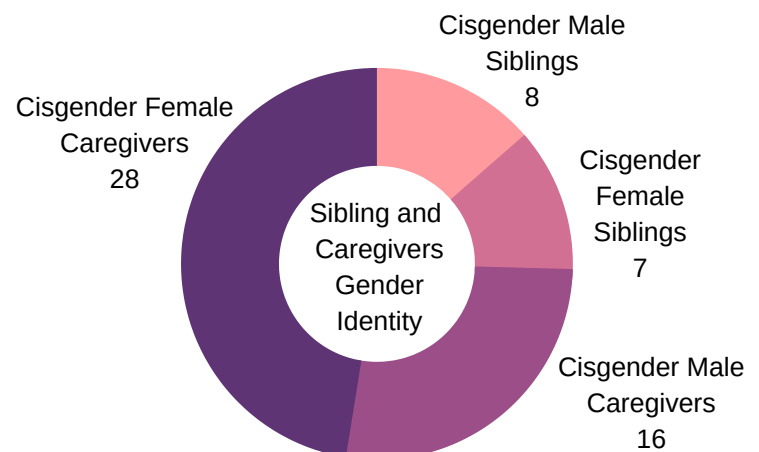
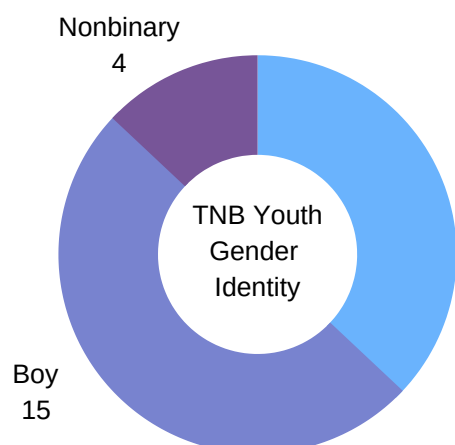
- **Family Systems Theory:** This theory suggests that family members depend on and are affected by each other. So when one member experiences some change, the rest of the family feels it too.
- **Minority Stress Theory:** This theory suggests that someone who holds a stigmatized minority status in society, such as TNB youth, may experience worse health outcomes than someone in the majority. The stress of experiencing discrimination may impact all family members.



Participants

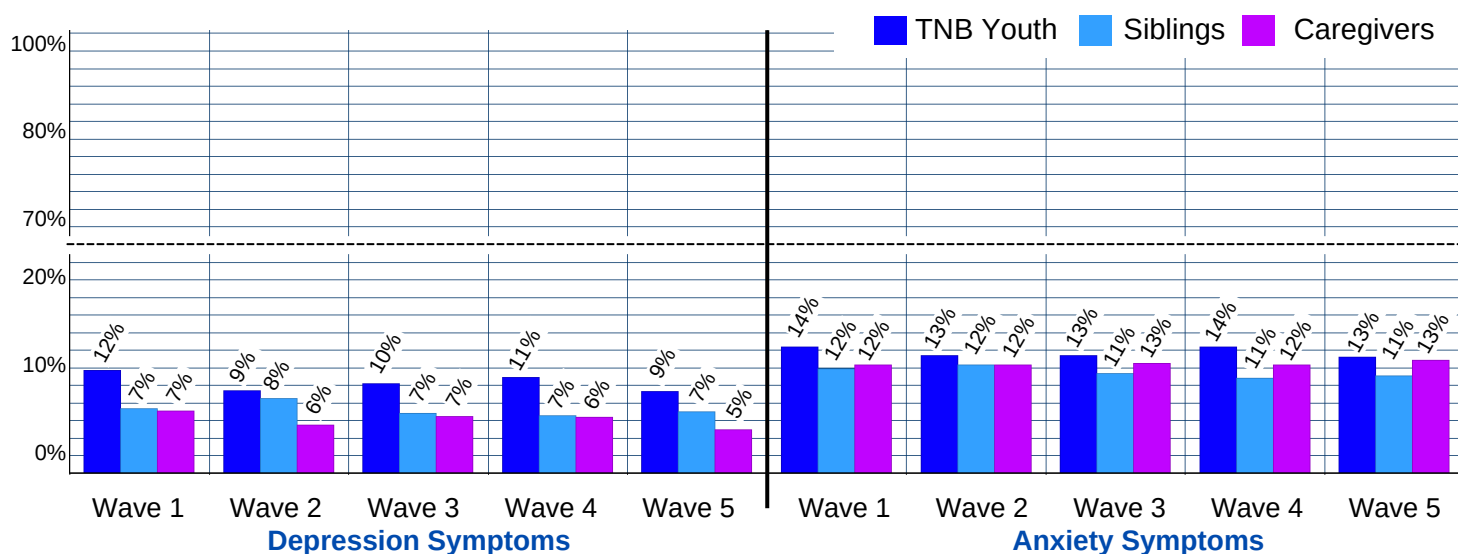
Our study included 89 family members from 30 families with TNB youth ages 13-17 years from throughout New England. Family members included parents/caregivers and siblings ages 14-24 years. Family members completed a survey at Waves 1-5 of a longitudinal study to help us understand the family functioning (such as quality of communication and satisfaction with family) and mental health of TNB youth and their family members.

- 84% of participants lived in metropolitan areas (including cities and suburbs).
- 25% of parents/caregivers had a master's degree or higher.
- 73% of TNB youth identified as White, and 93% of parents/caregivers identified as White.



TNB youth had poorer mental health outcomes than other family members

TNB youth in our study expressed greater mental health concerns than their siblings or caregivers across all waves. However, siblings and caregivers also experienced mental health issues, especially anxiety.



TNB youth and siblings had a strong sense of self

TNB youth and their siblings had high resilience and self-esteem. Across waves 3-5, on a scale of 1-5, the average resilience score was 3.7 for TNB youth and 4.0 for siblings. On a scale of 10-40, the average self-esteem score was 28.3 for TNB youth and 28.9 for siblings.

😊 TNB Youth (Waves 3-5)
😊 Siblings (Waves 3-5)

Resilience (Waves 3-5)



Self-esteem (Waves 3-5)



Perception of family functioning helped all family members

Family members who perceived **better quality communication and family satisfaction** within the family experienced **less depression, less anxiety**, and **more self-esteem and resiliency**. However, this was not always consistent among family members. **Trans teens and siblings tended to perceive similar levels of family functioning**, as did **siblings and caregivers**. However, trans teens did not tend to share perceptions of family functioning with their caregivers.

This study demonstrates that family members may have different perspectives of family functioning, as well as different levels of depression and anxiety symptoms.

Clinical Implications

These results show that perceived family functioning varies over time, differs between some family members, and may impact the mental health of TNB youth and their families. TNB youth often shared similar perceptions with their siblings, but rarely did so with their caregivers.

Interventions should address the similar perspectives that both TNB youth and their siblings share as well as those shared by siblings and caregivers. This may offer potential opportunities for strengthening relationships between family members and strengthening family functioning overall.