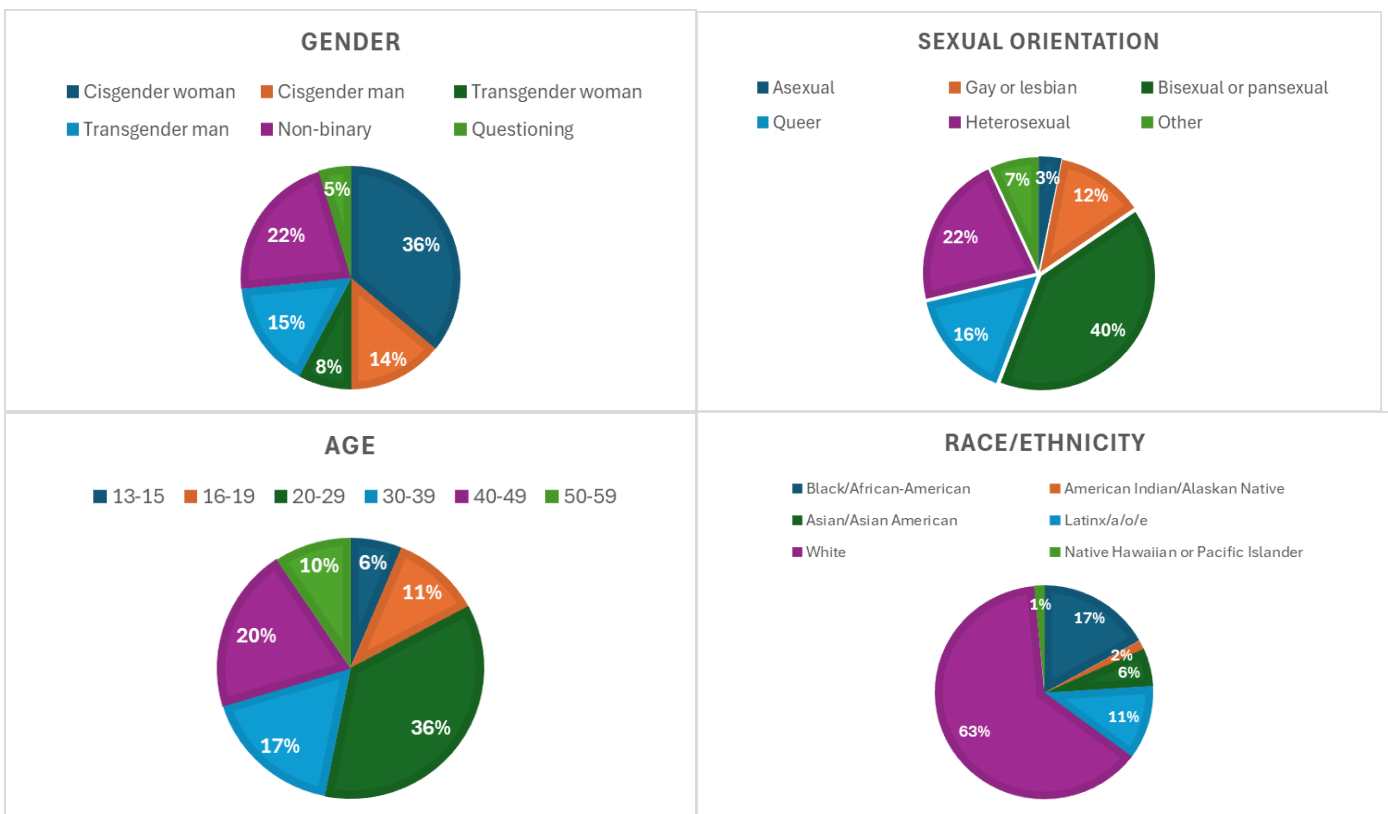


# Research Brief: Systemic Issues Impacting LGBTQ+ Crisis Services in Kansas

**Background:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) individuals face high rates of stigma, oppression, and victimization, increasing their need for supportive mental health and crisis response services.<sup>1,2</sup> Simultaneously, LGBTQ+ people report barriers to accessing supportive and affirming crisis care.<sup>3</sup> The social and political contexts that LGBTQ+ people are situated in also impacts their mental health, with hostile or stigmatizing contexts leading to increased mental health concerns, including suicidal ideation and attempts.<sup>4</sup> To decrease barriers and increase access to supportive and affirming crisis services for all Kansans, it is necessary to understand the systemic issues impacting the provision of crisis services to LGBTQ+ people in Kansas.

**The Project:** A team consisting of academic researchers, crisis counselors, LGBTQ+ Kansans, and community leaders advertised focus groups and interviews for 1) crisis providers in Kansas and 2) LGBTQ+ Kansans. A total of 64 people participated: 28 engaged in one of nine focus groups, 28 completed interviews, and an additional 8 completed an alternate anonymous survey. Of the 64 participants, 24 were crisis providers (11 of whom were LGBTQ+) and 40 were LGBTQ+ Kansans. Participants’ gender, sexual orientation, age, and race/ethnicity are shown below.



Participants were spread throughout the state with 64% in the Northeast, 23% in the Southeast, 11% in the Middle, and 2% in the Southwest regions. About 16% lived and/or worked in rural communities. Participants answered questions about their experiences with crisis services and their perspectives of the state, sociopolitical, and systemic issues impacting crisis provision. Their answers were analyzed by the research team to better understand the ways in which these systemic issues impact crisis provision to LGBTQ+ Kansans. Participants talked at length about the systemic issues impacting their work as crisis providers with LGBTQ+ communities and as LGBTQ+ Kansans experiencing mental health issues or accessing crisis services.

## Anti-LGBTQ+ Policies and Rhetoric Negatively Impact LGBTQ+ Kansans and Crisis Service Organizations

Many LGBTQ+ participants had heightened awareness of proposed or passed anti-LGBTQ+ state-level legislation, as well as how federal policies, legislation, and legal decisions impacted LGBTQ+ Kansans. Even when bills did not pass into law, they were still felt as harmful due to the rhetoric they promoted and the fear they caused Kansans. Crisis providers who were not LGBTQ+ were less likely to discuss anti-LGBTQ+ policies as a systemic issue facing LGBTQ+ Kansans and crisis services.

*“The political climate right now is pretty aggressive with libraries being attacked and having LGBTQ materials getting banned in some areas or protested.”*

*“There was a really bad trans bill passed last...session...it was mainly just targeted toward trans youth, which was really disappointing.”*

Participants also discussed the impacts of anti-LGBTQ+ policies--and the rhetoric surrounding them--on LGBTQ+ Kansans and crisis service organizations. Many LGBTQ+ participants discussed fear, increased mental health issues, hopelessness, and feelings of worthlessness. Subsequently, despite having greater need for crisis services, many reported concerns about contacting crisis services in light of the hostile sociopolitical climate. Several participants discussed impacts on crisis organizations such as loss of funding and having to be secretive about their support for LGBTQ+ communities.

*“We’re already in a state of being closer to being in a crisis and then afraid to contact any official place because of all the anti-LGBTQ rhetoric that’s out there.”*

*“It just makes you feel like an outcast, or you're not wanted. It definitely adds mental stress.”*

## The Sociopolitical Climate of Kansas Impacts LGBTQ+ Kansans Mental Health and the Ability of Crisis Service Organizations to Support Them

Participants also discussed how the general conservativeness of the state impacted crisis providers' abilities to provide LGBTQ+-competent services and LGBTQ+ Kansans' need for and access to crisis services.

*“I think even when there are services in the area, a lot of queer people don't really feel safe to access those, depending on the environment politically or otherwise of where they're living.”*

*“Politics and religion are a big one for Kansas, and that affects how a lot of the communities...view the population (including) people who are making decisions for communities, like what services they're wanting to provide for people and what they're not.”*

## Rurality and Regional Variation Impact Systemic Support or Oppression Toward LGBTQ+ Kansans and the Provision of Crisis Services

Participants discussed how there are differences based on rurality or region of the state in terms of how much support and/or oppression LGBTQ+ Kansans experience and crisis providers experiences providing services.

*“So when you talk about more rural and individuals trying to seek the support, they often don't have it, especially when you're talking about really small towns. But even in the large towns, you're still going to have people who just are going to be very bigoted and hateful. I saw a lot of that when we went to the Pride parade. People would just drive by and yell at us, and it's just unfortunate. It's the area we live in.”*

### Recommendations

- It is important for state organizations to challenge systemic oppression and anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and policies. This may be a challenge for state agencies because of state funding. We suggest creative ways of using research with Kansans to report their experiences and suggest changes based on these findings.
- Crisis organizations can be more explicit in their support for LGBTQ+ Kansans and ensure their staff and volunteers receive training so that this advertised support is enacted in practice. Organizations can express their affirmation of LGBTQ+ communities in explicit and implicit ways.
- Crisis organizations should recognize past harms by mental health workers to LGBTQ+ Kansans as an essential component of creating a safe and supportive environment.
- Crisis providers should receive ongoing training about working with diverse, marginalized groups.

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