

Study finds labor market support for transgender people is lower than for other sexual minorities

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In 2020, the United States Supreme Court ruled in "Bostock vs. Clayton County" that transgender people are legally protected from employment discrimination. This came at a time of increased visibility, but also of legal and social challenges to the rights of transgender individuals. Meanwhile, there has been very little study of labor market discrimination against them.

Rensselaer researcher Billur Aksoy, Ph.D., has recently conducted an innovative survey of Americans' attitudes toward [transgender people](#) in the workplace.

Her paper, "Understanding Labor Market Discrimination Against Transgender People in the US: Evidence from a Double List Experiment and a Survey," is [published](#) in *Management Science*.

Aksoy, an assistant professor of economics at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and her co-authors Christopher S. Carpenter of Vanderbilt University and Dario Sansone of the University of Exeter, are the first to utilize a list experiment technique, in which respondents are given a list of statements and asked to report how many (but not which specific ones) are true for them, to analyze Americans' views about transgender managers in the workplace, as well as their support for employment non-discrimination protection for transgender individuals.

The technique allowed the researchers to overcome social desirability biases in survey responses—the idea that respondents might either overstate or downplay their support of transgender people out of fear of reprisal.

"Understanding the true level of support for employment non-discrimination protection is important. For example, it helps us figure out how well these policies might work and how we can make things better for transgender folks in the U.S.," said Aksoy.

The researchers found that support for transgender people in the [labor market](#) is significantly overreported (by 8–10%), but they also found that, after correcting for social desirability bias, more than two-thirds of Americans would be comfortable with a transgender manager at work and would support non-discrimination protection and employment for transgender people.

Women, [sexual minorities](#), and Democrats expressed more positive views and greater support for transgender people than men, heterosexuals, and Republicans or independent voters did.

The analysis of the supplementary survey data showed significantly higher support for LGB people in the workplace than for transgender people; they also demonstrated that respondents severely underestimated the support for transgender people, by up to 53%.

"The fact that Americans underestimate the actual level of support for transgender people is notable. Previous research shows that individuals' beliefs about the views of others can impact their own views, suggesting that support for correcting these misperceptions could further increase support for transgender people in the workplace. This is something we consider exploring further in future research," said Aksoy.

"Sex discrimination laws, endorsed by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, offer a potent weapon against bias in the workplace," said Mary Simoni, Ph.D., dean of the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences at RPI.

"These protections, especially crucial for transgender individuals, not only empowers workers but also signify a crucial step toward a more inclusive and equitable society."

More information: Billur Aksoy et al, Understanding Labor Market Discrimination Against Transgender People: Evidence from a Double List Experiment and a Survey, *Management Science* (2024). [DOI: 10.1287/mnsc.2023.02567](https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2023.02567)

Provided by Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

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