

CA Legislators Blame Religious People For High LGBT Suicide Rates

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By [Glenn T. Stanton Federalist](#) FEDERALIST, JUNE 27, 2019

Legislators in California have discovered yet another way to make it clear that mainstream religions holding to the sexual teachings of their sacred texts have no business doing so in the Golden State. Why? Because these faiths, which billions of good people worldwide happily hold, do not embrace homosexuality. This includes the three largest: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

In a resolution that recently passed the state assembly, “the Legislature calls upon all Californians to embrace the individual and social benefits of family and community acceptance” of LGBT people. It singles out especially faith-motivated individuals and organizations.

These legislators make a very ugly accusation against such people. California lawmakers are planning to spread the idea, with the power and moral authority of the state, that such religious beliefs actually *kill* people, including children. The [text of this bill](#) boldly states:

WHEREAS, The stigma associated with being LGBT often created by groups in society, including therapists and religious groups, has caused disproportionately high rates of suicide, attempted suicide, depression, rejection, and isolation amongst LGBT and questioning individuals...

Note the absoluteness of their conclusions, particularly two words: *create* and *cause*. Stigma, *created* by religious groups, *causes* high rates of suicide.

Do Religious People Make Others Commit Suicide?

Let it sink in. Christians, Muslims, and Jews, your beliefs make gay people kill themselves. If this is indeed true, we are among the worst of the worst kinds of

people. These legislators believe this is true and are doing something about it. California is trying to insist that churches, synagogues and mosques, their leaders, congregants, grade schools, universities, and families fully and uncritically support homosexual, bisexual, and transgender identities in every way.

Thus, any teaching, preaching, writings or practices that are faithful to the clear sexual instructions of these faiths will be beyond the pale of official California values. They will not be tolerated. This charge makes this legislation overwhelmingly serious and consequential because of the seriousness of this charge. Either one party is directly culpable for deaths or the other of making such a dreadful allegation.

To be clear, what they're proposing is a resolution and would not have the razor-sharp edge of law. But it would have the real and devastating blunt force of state-sanctioned shaming of religious convictions. They couldn't criminalize you, but they could obliterate your reputation and your life. There are too many vivid examples of this already. Of course, this resolution will grease the skids for it becoming enforceable law.

I want to demonstrate, through some objective and undeniable facts, coupled with simple reasoning, why this long-used accusation has no foundation. The case consists of three basic points:

- There is simply no dependable research support for the accusation. None.
- Gay and lesbian individuals themselves report being significantly more likely to choose to attend the very churches that teach a more traditional sexual ethic than they do so-called "welcoming and affirming" churches.
- The most dramatically gay-friendly places in the world still have incredibly and disproportionately high rates of suicides among their gay and lesbian individuals.

1. No Real Evidence

There is no reputable, serious research showing people commit suicide because a particular religion refuses to embrace homosexuality. None. It is largely created as an ideological assumption and political cudgel. But to even question the assertion will cast you immediately as a heartless stone. Remember, any science that does not permit it to be questioned has become fundamentalist dogmatism.

There *is* a very small amount of literature on the general harms of family rejection (which we at Focus on the Family strongly advise against), but none showing it *causes* suicide. There is certainly *none* establishing religious causation. That is an objective fact. Quite simply, anyone making the claim family responses and religious teaching cause suicide do so absent any bit of scientific proof.

2. LGBT People Choose More Traditional Churches

Let's look at data that raise serious questions about the "religion kills" assertion. Research done by two gay-friendly scholars from Columbia and the University of California at Los Angeles found that, to their absolute disbelief, church-attending, same-sex-attracted individuals are 2.5 times more likely to attend congregations that hold and teach a more traditional, biblical view of sexuality than they are to attend so-called welcoming and affirming churches.

Let's consider the implications of this interesting finding. Suppose for a moment that the "religion kills" accusation is correct. Either these individuals are too dull to realize they are doing grave harm to themselves by regularly attending such churches, or they find such churches are quite lovely and helpful. Why else would they choose to wake up early on a Sunday morning and go to the trouble of getting themselves there?

This study's abstract states, "Guided by minority stress theory, the authors hypothesized that exposure to non-affirming religious settings would lead to higher internalized homophobia, more depressive symptoms, and less psychological well-being." They were honest in admitting they found "There was no main effect of non-affirming religion on mental health, an unexpected finding

discussed in this article.” No main effect on mental health itself, much less suicide.

3. Gay-Affirming Societies Also Have High Suicide Rates

Leading gay activists and their faithful allies in the media and academia operate on a simple and seemingly reasonable premise: non-acceptance of homosexuality leads to greater levels of suicide. To reduce these tragic rates, replace non-acceptance with full affirmation and all will be well. Doing so would not only dramatically reduce suicide, but also the disproportionately higher levels of mental illness among this population, which are strongly and consistently documented. (See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#) for just three strong examples.)

This thesis is easy to test: Determine the most gay-affirming places in the world. Are the suicide rates of gay and lesbian individuals in these places significantly lower than in non-affirming countries?

The most gay-affirming places on the planet are the [Netherlands and Scandinavia](#). In Amsterdam, the gay movement has received *every* major law, policy, or cultural accommodation they’ve requested, with nearly no opposition, and often with great celebration. They televise their annual gay pride parade, and Amsterdam spends more than a million euros a year to promote itself as “The Gay Capital of the World.” The land of windmills and tulips is gay Valhalla. Their gay and lesbian suicide rates should be extremely low, if non-existent, right? That is not what scholars, government officials, and clinicians find. Rates of suicide and suicidal ideation among gay youth and adults are *remarkably, tragically* high in the Netherlands. Scholars even have a name for this. They call it the “[Dutch Paradox](#).”

Despite the Netherlands’ reputation as a world leader with respect to gay rights, homosexual Dutch men have much higher rates of mood disorders, anxiety disorders and suicide attempts than heterosexual Dutch men. Epidemiologists report similar disparities elsewhere in Western Europe and North America. [Emphasis mine.]

Let's look at just a few examples of evidence. A 2006 [Dutch study](#) published in the Archives of Sexual Behavior reported that despite living "in a country with a comparatively tolerant climate regarding homosexuality" gay and lesbian-identified people were at dramatically higher risk for suicidality than the general Dutch population.

More recently, a 2016 [Swedish study](#) shows that the rate of gay males suffering from lifetime suicidal ideation there is 140 percent greater. The same measure for women there is 110 percent higher than the general population. Bisexuals are curiously even higher, with females 250 percent more likely and bisexual men 160 percent.

In France, fourth on the world's gay-friendly list, gays and lesbians are on [average 80 percent more likely](#) to suffer suicidal ideation than their straight peers. All countries that keep such data [show similar findings](#), regardless of changes in attitudes and policies concerning LGB-identified individuals.

Do Same-Sex Marriage Licenses Affect Rates?

With greater specificity, [a 2016 study](#) published in the *European Journal of Epidemiology* examined how legalizing gay-marriage affected suicidality. It should have reduced it, right? Yet Swedes in same-sex marriages, enjoying their anticipated greater social acceptance and security, retained suicide rates nearly three times that of their married opposite-sex peers. The authors caution these numbers are likely an underestimation. A [similar study](#) found that Danish men in legal same-sex unions had a dramatic eightfold increase in suicide deaths over opposite-sex married peers.

The fact of the matter is this: There is no research whatsoever demonstrating significantly reduced rates of suicidal deaths or attempts among gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered people as the overall acceptance or affirmation of these groups in a country increases. Any honest person who knows this literature well will admit it.

Thus, this is the conclusion that must be admitted: If the “acceptance of homosexuality equals reduction of suicide” thesis has any validity to it, a society would need to far exceed the acceptance, affirmation, and even celebratory actions of the Netherlands and other countries to demonstrate it. Of course, this is reasonably impossible. What is there left to do that these countries are not already doing?

Reasonable people, even those in the gay rights movement, must call for a sharp end to the absolutely vile and false accusation that certain mainstream religious traditions are culpable for the deaths of gay and lesbian people. The Bible Belt does not run through Amsterdam, Stockholm, or Copenhagen.

We must admit that something else is driving the tragically high suicide rates of our gay and lesbian neighbors, and it’s not traditional faith convictions. True compassion demands we find out what that cause is; these lives are too valuable to play baseless politics with.

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