

Will Jenner change things for transgender community?

Yamiche Alcindor USA TODAY

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Bruce Jenner's confirmation that he is transgender makes him part of an embattled population that activists hope will benefit from a new high-profile member.

About 16.9 million tuned in Friday night as Jenner, 65, told ABC News' Diane Sawyer that he is transitioning to a woman. It was *20/20*'s biggest audience in 15 years, according to preliminary Nielsen figures.

Now, activists and experts hope the huge audience Jenner's announcement garnered will look more deeply at the struggles transgender people face, as well as the legal and political changes needed to support them.

"We risk losing everything and everyone when we transition," said Kassidy Graham, a transgender woman and cast member of *New Girls on the Block*, a series about transgender people on the Discovery Life Channel. "Some of us lose jobs that we are good at, loved ones we care about, are evicted from the homes we live in, and face a crippling depression that can often lead to suicide."

Graham, now 30, transitioned at 27 and said she may have been able to accept herself much sooner in life and gotten more support if Jenner's interview had aired when she was growing up. Advocates believe that Graham isn't alone and that Jenner's decision will lead to more acceptance of transgender people across the country.

Statistics about transgender people tell a harrowing tale of the number of issues the population faces, said Nick Adams, director of programs for transgender media and a transgender spokesman for GLAAD, an LGBT advocacy group that monitors the media.

"I'm very hopeful that this interest in Bruce Jenner's story will encourage people to look at the real social and economic challenges being faced by transgender people today," Adams said.

So far this year, seven transgender women have been murdered, Adams said. A 2014 report by the Center for American Progress and Movement Advancement Project found 72% of LGBT homicide

victims were transgender women and transgender people are nearly four times more likely to have a household income under \$10,000 per year than the population as a whole.

A study by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the National Center for Transgender Equality found that transgender people experience unemployment at twice the rate of the general population, 90% of transgender people report experiencing harassment, mistreatment or discrimination on the job, and 41% of transgender respondents to a survey by the groups reported attempting suicide, compared to 1.6% of the general population. Advocates also say the numbers are worse for transgender women of color.

Jay Brown, research director for the Human Rights Campaign, a LGBT civil-rights group, said many of the issues facing transgender people are connected.

"When you look at the harassment and bullying and the violence that is being faced what is underlying that is unemployment, family rejection, very significant barriers to healthcare and these can all be addressed through policy," he said.

Brown said some **insurance** companies deny transgender people coverage for gender reassignment surgeries and hormones and that transgender people may have to travel farther to find doctors willing and competent enough to treat them.

Jenner's story might bring to light the fact that courts are still determining whether discrimination protection will include biological genders as well as gender identity, said John Thomas, a professor at Quinnipiac University School of Law who has studied legal issues faced by transgender people. For example, several state courts are still working on whether transgender women will be protected from discrimination if they want to use the women's bathroom as well be protected from being fired by employers for transitioning.

The Jenner interview was "an important moment not only culturally but legally," Thomas said.

"Almost all significant changes in law affecting individual rights have been catalyzed by personal stories," said Thomas. "[Jenner] would make a difference by ... testifying before legislatures, appearing at high-profile events and showing people he's not a threat to us."

But the direct role Jenner will play in advancing transgender rights has yet to be determined.

"I don't want to see Bruce immediately take on an activist role until Bruce has had a chance to learn more about the community," said Jennifer Finney Boylan, board co-chair of GLAAD. "That trust is going to have to be earned."

Boylan also appeared on the *20/20* special on Jenner and talked with Sawyer about the experience of coming out as transgender and transitioning around 2000.

"We have to fix society," Boylan said. "It's great that Jenner is out but we need transgender senators. We need transgender Nobel Prize winners. The work will never be done until we are seen as boring and as uneventful."