



Experiences of trans women and two-spirit persons accessing women-specific health and housing services in Vancouver

Background

There is little information about the experiences of trans women and two-spirit individuals who access women's only health and housing services. While most participants in this study were generally able to access women-specific services, trans women and two-spirit individuals faced various forms of discrimination in that process and within these spaces.

The Question

What are the experiences of trans women and two-spirit people who use women-specific health and housing services in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside?

The Study

The Gender and Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI) research team drew upon data collected through **qualitative interviews conducted between June 2012 and May 2013 with 32 trans women and two-spirit individuals who had accessed women-specific health and/or housing services.** Two trans participants were hired to help analyze the interview data. Participants were recruited from three open prospective cohorts of individuals who use drugs (The At-Risk Youth Study, Vancouver Injection Drug Users Study, and AIDS Care Cohort to Evaluate Access to Survival Services), in addition to an open prospective cohort of sex workers (An Evaluation of Sex Workers Health Access [AESHA]). AESHA is an ongoing study on working conditions, health and safety in the sex industry led by GSHI/BCCfE and UBC, in collaboration with a range of community partners.

The Results

Participants described experiencing three forms of discrimination:

- **Discrimination based on gender identity.** Some were excluded from accessing services because they identified as a trans woman or two-spirit.
- **Discrimination based on gender expression.** Some participants reported facing gender-policing, meaning that they were required to adopt hegemonic feminine behaviours or appearances in order to access services.
- **Discrimination from cisgender women using these services.** Some also felt there was a lack of staff intervention, which made them feel unsafe.

“When I first lived at [supported housing] there was some woman that disrespected me in every way, [saying] I shouldn't be there, I have no right being there and they were gonna sign a petition for us trans people not to live there.”

The Policy Implications

- Trans women and two-spirit persons in this study rely on services for their health and safety, and, therefore, exclusion or barriers from accessing women-specific services has potentially severe adverse consequences. **This study calls for additional services and the implementation of a consistent trans-inclusive policy for women-specific health and housing services, not for the replacement of women-specific services.**
- Structural barriers, such as employment discrimination, can be addressed by hiring policies that include trans people. This study also supports the creation of trans-inclusive workplace policies, such as providing gender neutral bathrooms and trans-specific content, and training staff on how to approach and intervene with transphobic behaviours.

Lyons T., Krüsi A., Pierre L., Smith, A., Small W, Shannon K. (In press) Experiences of trans women and two-spirit persons accessing women-specific health and housing services in a downtown neighborhood of Vancouver, Canada. *LGBT Health*, 2016.