

Gender Diversity in the VAW Sector: Identifying Barriers and Recommendations for Consideration

A Discussion Paper informed by the
Learning Network Knowledge Exchange,
November 2016

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We would like to extend our sincere gratitude and appreciation to all participants who contributed to the success of the Knowledge Exchange. Your commitment to gender diversity and inclusion in the VAW sector is inspiring.

As well, thank you to the following reviewers for sharing their expertise and ensuring that the major themes shared at the exchange are reflected in this paper.

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PREFACE

We are grateful for the contributions made by participants to an insightful and critical conversation on the important issue of gender diversity in the violence against women (VAW) sector.

Participants at the Knowledge Exchange represented a range of community organizations and services including LGBTQ support services, women's shelters and transition houses, counselling centres, and legal supports. Some of these organizations are involved in VAW work and vary in the degree to which their services or programs are trans-inclusive. Some expressed the interest and desire to learn more about what it means to be inclusive of transgender and gender-diverse people, some have already implemented policies supporting inclusivity, and others have been committed to responding to the needs of these individuals for quite some time.

We also wish to recognize that participants who attended the Knowledge Exchange and their respective organizations are not representative of the entire VAW sector in Ontario and that there are other individuals, organizations, and service providers who continue to work tirelessly to improve access to supports and services for transgender and gender-diverse survivors of violence. Nonetheless, we hope this paper adds to previous discussions¹ and will contribute to ongoing efforts to enhance accessibility to the valuable services provided by the VAW sector.

Although discussions at the Knowledge Exchange attempted to include the perspectives of different groups that may seek or benefit from VAW services and supports, we realize that some may have been missed. We believe that learning is a continuous process and we will continue to work towards strengthening our knowledge base to be as inclusive and sensitive as we can be.

Further, we wish to acknowledge the complexities and implications of language. A number of terms exist in the literature that refer to the diversity in gender identities, expressions, and roles. These include *genderqueer*, *gender fluid*, *gender non-conforming*, and *gender non-binary* (definitions can be found in the glossary). More commonly, "transgender" continues to be used as an umbrella term that refers to a wide range of people whose gender identity or expression may not match the sex they were assigned to at birth. The authors of this document

have chosen to add the term "gender-diverse", to refer to the wide range of gender identities that individuals may self-identify with; and to acknowledge the cultural and societal limitations of "trans" as a word to describe all gendered ways of being outside of what is perceived as the norm. Although we hope that the terms "transgender" and "gender-diverse" are seen as inclusive of different identities, we understand that some individuals may prefer other terms. Please substitute the terms in this document with those that provide the most comfort to you.

Finally, while the ideas presented at this Knowledge Exchange were identified by participants, they were captured by several note takers from the Learning Network team. Thus, this document is being presented through our lens and to some extent, through the lens of the reviewers. We encourage you to share your thoughts and ideas with us at vawln@uwo.ca.

¹For example: [Intimate Partner Violence in Rainbow Communities: A Discussion Paper Informed by the Learning Network Knowledge Exchange November 2014](#)

INTRODUCTION

In March 2009, The Domestic Violence Advisory Council for the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues in Ontario proposed an [Access and Equity Framework](#) that is designed to:

“Achieve a vision of a province where all women experiencing violence regardless of their social location or identity/ies will be supported by an inclusive, responsive, accountable, and integrated violence against women (VAW) system that is created in partnership with women and the communities in which they live.”¹

Since this framework was proposed, increasing attention has been paid to how to incorporate the intersections of gender and/or sexual diversity in the VAW sector in order to provide greater options, choice, and access to safety.

Despite efforts, transgender and gender-diverse individuals do not experience equal access to safety and supports in the VAW sector and many sexual violence and intimate partner violence (IPV) services are not adequately responding to the unique needs of transgender and gender-diverse survivors of violence.² Consequently, these individuals often do not report this type of violence or risk discrimination and re-traumatization when doing so.³

Recognizing the need to explore and understand the key issues surrounding gender diversity within an integrated and inclusive VAW sector, the Learning Network organized a Knowledge Exchange for invited participants to share experiences, enhance knowledge, identify barriers, and develop recommendations for moving forward.

The Knowledge Exchange was held on November 14, 2016 in Toronto, Ontario and was attended by 40 participants including survivors of violence, researchers, service providers, front-line workers, educators, and more. Participants represented a diverse group including young and older adults, trans and gender-diverse individuals, Two Spirit communities, new immigrants/refugees, people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, and racialized communities.

ORGANIZATIONS PARTICIPATING IN THE KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

- Center for Independent Living in Toronto
- Covenant House Toronto
- Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children
- Elder Abuse Ontario
- Guelph Wellington Women in Crisis
- LEAF/Legal Education and Action Fund

- Learning Network
- LGBT Youth Line
- Luke's Place
- METRAC: Action on Violence
- Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses
- Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres
- Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants
- Ontario Native Education Counselling Association
- Ontario Women's Directorate
- Ontario Native Women's Association
- Primal Glow
- Sexual Assault Support Centre of Ottawa
- South Asian Women's Centre
- Springtide Resources
- The Redwood
- Toronto Rape Crisis Centre/Multicultural Women Against Rape
- University of Windsor
- Women's College Hospital
- Women's Multicultural Resource & Counselling Centre of Durham
- Yellow Brick House
- Independent advocates

An overview and analysis of the current state of gender diversity in the VAW sector and related research was provided by panelists and follow-up discussions. The day ended with small group discussions aimed at addressing gaps in research and evidence and identifying strategies needed for service providers to better facilitate equity and access for all people with lived experience of violence. For biographies of panelists and facilitators, please refer to Appendix A.

This discussion paper, *Gender Diversity in the VAW Sector: Identifying Barriers and Recommendations for Consideration*, is informed by the November 14, 2016 Knowledge Exchange. It examines the key themes that emerged from discussions and includes references to recent literature whenever possible.

The paper begins with an overview of intersectionality as a guiding principle critical to the analysis of gender diversity, a brief explanation of gender and its elements, and a summary of recent research findings on

experiences of violence in transgender and gender-diverse communities. This is followed by an overview of barriers identified at the Knowledge Exchange that impede gender inclusion in the VAW sector: limited understanding of the issues, stigma and embarrassment when seeking help, and resistance towards gender-inclusive practices.

Lastly, considerations for moving forward are discussed. They include effective policy implementation and

accountability, training on gender inclusion, improving hiring practices, strengthening safe spaces in the VAW sector, and supporting diverse sources and types of knowledge. While the themes presented help shed light on gender diversity in the VAW sector, opportunities for further discussion on this issue are critical for enhanced gender inclusion in VAW work.

FIGURE 1: AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

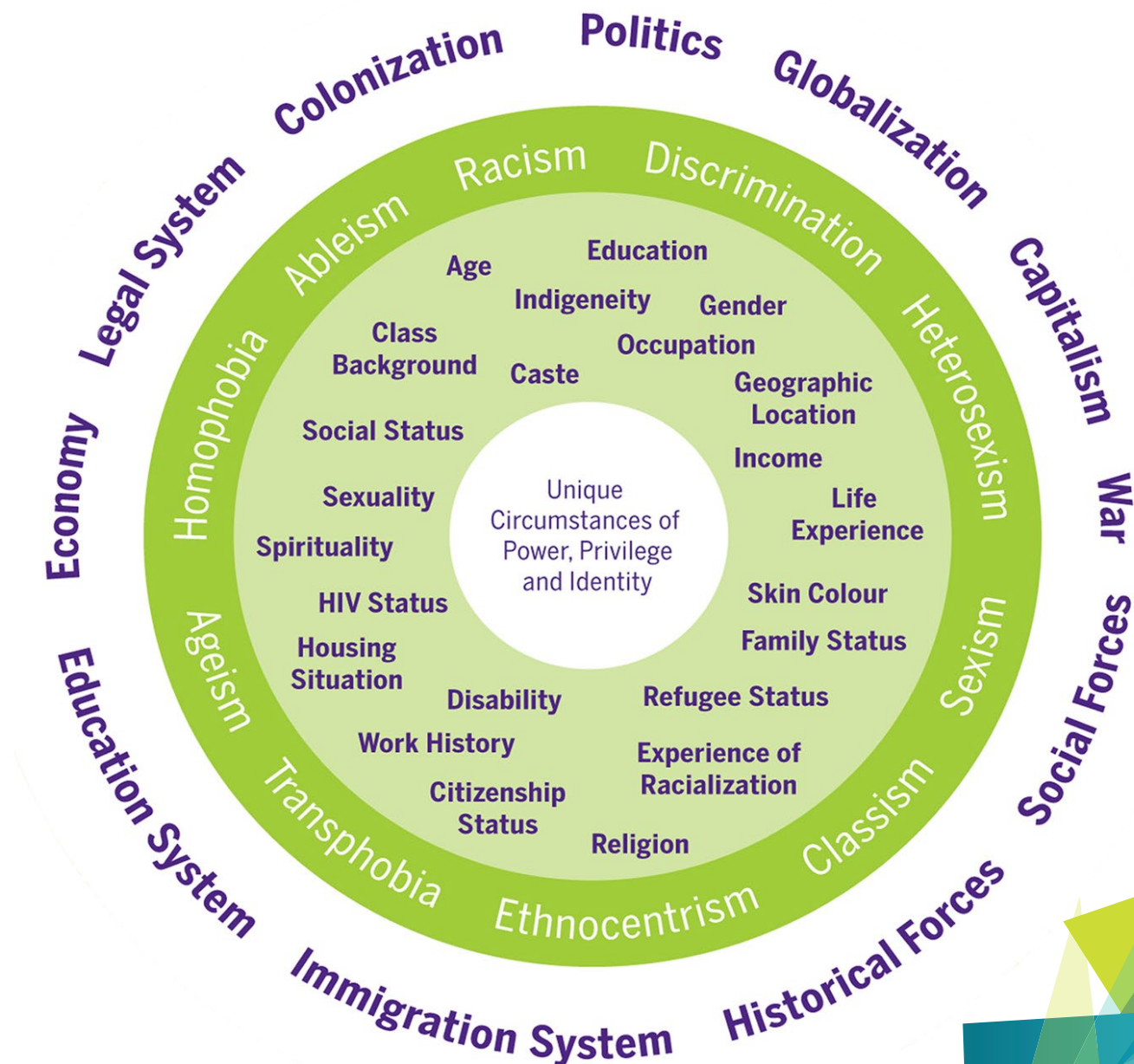


Figure 1: Graphic adapted from CRIAW/ICREF’s Intersectionality Wheel Diagram published in *Everyone Belongs. A Toolkit for Applying Intersectionality* (2009, p.6)

GUIDING PRINCIPLE: INTERSECTIONALITY

A critical analysis of gender diversity in the VAW sector cannot take place without looking at the issue from an intersectional lens. To better understand the issues that exist and to develop appropriate strategies, a deeper examination into individual experiences, identities, social contexts, and circumstances must be considered.

An intersectional approach seeks to understand an individual's experience of violence through their unique circumstances, aspects of their identity (i.e. disability, skin colour, age, gender, housing situation), types of discrimination faced by the person (i.e. Islamophobia, homophobia, racism, classism, ableism, ageism), and larger systems of power and oppression (i.e. colonization, capitalism, war, immigration system, legal system). How violence is experienced, responded to, and whether safety and supports are available are all determined by intersecting social contexts such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation (see Figure 1).

Historically, the VAW sector has utilised various frameworks to guide their work, with the foundation being rooted in anti-racism and anti-oppression approaches. Kimberlé Crenshaw's seminal piece on intersectionality created a framework where we can understand the interconnections in and between the various social identities, privilege, power, and oppression that occurs and exists.

Regardless of the terminology used, there is wide agreement in the VAW sector that intersectionality is foundational to understanding gender-based violence and an access and equity framework.

Participants at the Knowledge Exchange agreed that some groups are targeted for violence differently than others and that history shapes different groups' experiences of violence. Access and barriers to supports can also differ depending on one's social location. Recognizing the unique experiences of survivors and the broader factors at play can shape the way service providers address violence within a community. VAW policies and programs lacking an intersectional dimension are likely to exclude survivors of violence who exist at points of "intersections between inequalities".⁴

When designing programs and policies to respond to the needs of transgender and gender-diverse survivors of violence, service providers must consider the level of impacts on all survivors seeking support. For example, a white, middle-class transgender woman who speaks fluent English may benefit greatly from a VAW service, however,

that same service may be unable to meet the needs of a racialized transgender woman who speaks limited or no English and who is living on a limited means of income. It is important to be mindful of how multiple marginalities that some survivors live may complicate the violence they experience and may exacerbate the difficulties that they face when seeking help (i.e. from the criminal justice system, police services, health services).

To learn more about intersectionality, check out the [Learning Network's Newsletter, Issue 15 on intersectionality](#).

UNDERSTANDING GENDER

While many have a comprehensive understanding of gender, participants at the Knowledge Exchange identified the need for more opportunities for staff, administrators, service allies, policymakers, funders, and the public to learn more about the complexities of gender and its elements (gender identity, gender expression, and biological sex).

Society tends to view gender within a strict binary concept with only two fixed options: man and woman. In addition, these two options are commonly expected by society to connect to one of two hegemonic constructs of gendered expression: masculine (for those presenting as men) and feminine (for those presenting as women). As a result, societal structures, institutions, and norms are inherently “cisnormative”. Cisnormative is the assumption that all individuals are cisgender (where their biological sex aligns perfectly with how they identify and express their gender). This assumption tends to shape the way services, including VAW services and supports, are designed and offered for survivors. As a result, transgender and gender-diverse survivors of violence are often excluded or find that their needs cannot be met.

Gender is situated on a “gender spectrum” instead of within a binary, which suggests there are many gender identities and a wide range of gender expressions that may or may not conform to societal expectations.

A brief overview of gender and its elements is illustrated below²:

1. GENDER IDENTITY



Gender identity refers to each person’s internal and individual experience of gender and how individuals see themselves: as a woman, a man, or as “genderqueer”, an identity that is somewhere between woman and man, or sometimes as neither.

2. GENDER EXPRESSION



Gender expression represents the many different ways individuals can demonstrate aspects of their gender (femininity or masculinity) through actions, clothing, and interactions. The term “androgynous” describes gender expression that is both masculine and feminine.

3. BIOLOGICAL SEX



Biological sex refers to the organs, hormones, and chromosomes that determine whether someone is biologically female or male. The term “intersex” describes an individual born with sex characteristics that are not distinctly male or female.

Although gender identity, gender expression, and biological sex are *interrelated*, they are *independent* of one another.

Also related to gender but constructed within a different binary (“straight” versus “gay”) is sexual orientation.

4. SEXUAL ORIENTATION



Sexual orientation refers to who an individual is attracted to. “Heterosexual” or being “straight” means people are attracted to other individuals of the opposite sex. “Same-sex” refers to people who are attracted to people of the same sex, or being “gay” or “lesbian.” “Bisexual” means being attracted to people of both sexes.

²Images adapted from [It’s Pronounced Metrosexual \(2011\)](#).

A SNAPSHOT OF VIOLENCE IN TRANSGENDER AND GENDER DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

Violence in transgender and gender-diverse communities is an emerging area of research. Existing studies that attempt to capture these experiences have limitations (addressed in more detail later in the paper). Studies often have small sample sizes, are not generalizable, and do not reflect the experiences of gender-diverse survivors from different groups such as newcomer and refugee, racialized persons, or other nuanced aspects of social location that could impact lived experience. While some studies on violence in LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) communities include transgender respondents, their numbers are much smaller and their experiences are frequently lumped together with other groups.

While there is a dearth of research in this field, the following research findings out of the United States and Canada helps shed light on violence impacting transgender and gender-diverse communities.

- Violence is often “motivated by intolerance, fear, or hatred of the person’s gender identity, attraction, and/or gender expression” and takes place in homes, schools, communities, religious and spiritual centers, public spaces, and health institutions.⁵
- The Trans PULSE research project suggests that 20% of all trans Ontarians “had been physically or sexual assaulted for being trans” and another 34% “had been verbally threatened or harassed but not assaulted.”⁶
- The same study found that many trans people did not report these assaults to police and that 24% reported having been harassed by police.⁷
- Another Trans PULSE study on gender- diverse and Two-Spirit Indigenous persons indicated that “73% had experienced some form of violence due to transphobia, including 43% who reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence.”⁸
- In one U.S. study of 5,647 middle and high school students, it was found that transgender youth experienced higher rates of all forms of interpersonal violence than cissexual students, with almost 9 in 10 (89%) transgender respondents reporting physical IPV and over half (59%) experiencing psychological violence in a dating relationship.⁹
- The *2014 LGBTQ Hate Violence Report* from the U.S. National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs found that transgender people were more likely to experience threats, intimidation, harassment, discrimination, and sexual violence than non-transgender LGB people.¹⁰

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE THEMES

Analysis of the discussions that took place at the Knowledge Exchange revealed several major themes: violence against transgender and gender-diverse individuals is a form of gender-based violence; there are many barriers to inclusion of transgender and gender-diverse individuals in the VAW sector; and system-level considerations for moving forward can lead to greater access, options, and safety for all survivors of violence. A brief summary of these themes, including references to relevant literature, is presented below.

VIOLENCE IS GENDERED

When addressing gender diversity in the VAW sector, an assertion identified by those involved in the line of work is that violence is gendered: that is, the targets of violence and perpetrators of violence are clearly differentiated by gender. Accordingly, many cisnormative people working in this field fear that the gender-specific reality of violence/abuse in relationships (i.e. that women and girls are most likely to be subjected to male violence) will be lost if the notion of gender diversity—a decreased use of binary terms such as “woman”, “man” or “violence against women” — is acknowledged and included in the analysis.

Participants at the Knowledge Exchange addressed this assumption and asserted that transgender and gender-diverse experiences of violence is a form of gender-based violence because violence is perpetrated mostly by cisgender men.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is “violence perpetrated against someone based on their gender expression, gender identity, or perceived gender.”¹¹

While one form of GBV is violence against women and girls, GBV has a “disproportionate impact on LGBTQI2S (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, and two-spirit) and gender-non conforming people.”¹² This is because GBV is rooted in “expressing and maintaining the unequal power relations of oppressive gender orders.”¹³

Transgender individuals are at increased risk of being targeted with GBV because they challenge traditional gender norms and roles by not conforming to socially sanctioned stereotypes of men and women.¹⁴ We also know that the violence experienced by “feminized” transgender people is quite different than that of more “masculinized” individuals.

GBV is perpetuated by gender stereotypes that produce rigid conceptions of gender roles (what it means to be a

woman and what it means to be a man) as well as one’s sexuality (who should be attracted to whom) and what kinds of romantic, sexual, and family relationships are viewed as socially acceptable.¹⁵

The patriarchal structure of society works with other forms of discrimination such as colonialism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, and poverty to produce GBV.¹⁶ These structural inequalities support power imbalances, increase the risk of being targeted for GBV for some groups, and impede access to supports.¹⁷ These inequalities intersect with the privileging of masculinity in society.

Comments at the Knowledge Exchange reinforced the sentiment that by embracing transgender and gender-diverse individuals, the VAW sector would not lose the gender-specific reality of violence and abuse in relationships, but instead would gain a better understanding of the underlying issues and contexts of abuse — particularly the direct link between experiences of violence and gender.

BARRIERS TO GENDER DIVERSITY IN VAW SECTOR

Using research findings, lived experience, and front-line work experiences, participants at the Knowledge Exchange identified many barriers that impede gender diversity in the VAW sector. Although research presented at the Knowledge Exchange and in this discussion paper is largely out of the United States, the findings resonate with barriers identified by participants. While the themes are similar, caution is urged against applying the quantitative findings of U.S. studies to the Ontario context.

A 2011 study conducted by FORGE, a U.S. national transgender anti-violence organization, revealed that of more than 1000 transgender and gender non-binary individuals, 61% would not use a domestic violence agency and 31% might use one.¹⁸ The same study found that the use of sexual assault agencies was even less likely; 63% would not use a sexual assault center and 37% might use one.¹⁹

These findings appear to relate to several barriers that were also discussed at the Knowledge Exchange: limited understanding by

others of the issues related to experiences of violence against transgender and gender-diverse individuals, the fear of being stigmatized or mistreated when seeking support, and resistance towards gender inclusion in the VAW sector. This list is not meant to be exhaustive but provides an indication of the main points identified by participants. These points are described more fully below.

Limited Understanding of the Issues

Despite recent advances in the field, there is limited recognition and research on experiences of violence and help-seeking behaviours by persons identifying as transgender and gender-diverse. Existing research is largely out of the United States, although Canadian data is slowly emerging. Population data for transgender and gender-diverse communities is also hard to find as they are not explicitly included in the national census or Statistics Canada surveys. Recent estimates suggest that as many as 1 in 200 adults may be trans (transgender, transsexual, or transitioned).²⁰

Participants at the Knowledge Exchange agreed that in order to evaluate gender diversity in VAW services, there needs to be sufficient data that captures the experiences of transgender and gender-diverse survivors. This challenge can be seen as a “chicken and egg” scenario. Service providers require constructive input from individuals accessing services and supports to make necessary improvements but that data cannot be collected if transgender and gender-diverse individuals are not accessing the services. This lack of access may be misinterpreted as lack of need, precluding service providers to assess the inclusiveness of their policies and programs. When barriers are reduced for certain communities, there is often an increase in those communities using such services.

U.S. research also has limitations. For example, studies on violence in LGBT communities that have also examined IPV, tend to group transgender respondents in with gay, lesbian, and bisexual respondents without considering the different realities and contexts of these communities.²¹

Furthermore, studies on violence against transgender persons focus primarily on experiences of transsexual Male to Female (FTM) or Female to Male individuals.²² Research findings on persons who identify as transsexual may not be applicable to persons identified as transgender and who are not on the continuum of transitioning.²³ Much of the research is also focused on transsexual experiences of violence in sex work. Such research does not capture

experiences of violence outside of these contexts (i.e. partner violence, family violence).²⁴ Further, when violence is studied within a given context (i.e. sex work), transgender individuals are often blamed for the violence that they experience versus them experiencing violence because of transphobia. This absolves the perpetrator of responsibility, and inaccurately shifts the blame for violence onto the worker, as is commonly observed in commentaries on sex work.

Research on violence in transgender and gender-diverse communities must pay careful attention to the unique contexts of different groups. For example, experiences of black, Latino, immigrant and refugee, Two-Spirit and Indigenous transgender and gender-diverse people must be considered in research studies. While some dynamics and barriers may be common across groups, the interaction and influence of factors related to aspects of individual identity, internalized homo/bi/transphobia discrimination in social settings, and broader social factors will vary for individuals within given groups, as well as between groups.

Stigma, Embarrassment, and Mistreatment

Participants at the Knowledge Exchange noted that a major barrier to access in VAW services for transgender and gender-diverse individuals is the fear, and often experience, of facing stigma, discrimination, and mistreatment. This is consistent with statistics on reporting; transgender and gender-diverse individuals often do not report experiences of violence as when they do, they can be subjected to harassment from police.²⁵

Some VAW services and organizations may be perceived as being unwelcoming to transgender and gender-diverse people. Even if it is the only option available in the area, the services may not be sought under these conditions. Also, there is the fear that because these services are often designed to meet the needs of cisgender people, it will pose problems when using washrooms, filling out paperwork, dressing and disrobing, and interacting with other clients. Finally, transgender and gender-diverse people may fear (or experience) that service providers have limited understanding of the contexts and concerns impacting their day-to-day lives.

Resistance Towards Inclusion

Discussion at the Knowledge Exchange highlighted the resistance that may emerge when providing trans-inclusive services, specifically in shelters.

A FORGE study interviewing over 20 shelters that provided trans-inclusive or gender-integrated (serving all genders of survivors) services indicated that the biggest challenge was pushback from staff.²⁶ Reasons for staff resistance included:

- belief that shelter would lose cisgender female clients who were uncomfortable;
- fear of child maltreatment at the hands of trans women;
- concerns that perpetrators may infiltrate shelter under the guise of being a victim; and,
- concerns about development of sexual relationships between residents.²⁷

While experiences of fear are real, there is not substantial evidence to support the feared outcomes listed above. Such fears may be a result of a lack of knowledge, misperceptions of transgender individuals, and/or transphobia.

Additional reasons for resistance include:

- fear of offending trans client by saying the wrong thing;
- lack of education and training to be appropriately affirming to trans clients.²⁸

Client objections came largely from cisgender female clients in response to having male-identified survivors in the shelter (both cisgender males and trans-identified males).²⁹

As frontline workers, the attitudes and behaviours of staff determine the quality of service received by clients. If staff members are resistant to gender diversity in their organization, or are unprepared to fruitfully problem-solve the above concerns, this will be reflected in their culture, policies, and programs and can engender resistant or hostile behaviours from clients towards gender diversity.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Discussions following the panel session, research presentation, and small-group activity highlighted recommendations that can support gender diversity in the VAW sector. Again, these are by no means exhaustive, however, they do represent some of the key directions identified by participants at the Knowledge Exchange.

Policy Implementation and Accountability

Participants agreed that to increase access, options, and supports for transgender and gender-diverse survivors of violence, VAW services and organizations must be aware of heteronormative and cisnormative assumptions in their policies.

VAW services and organizations who imply they are inclusive but have programs and procedures designed for cisgender female clients cannot adequately meet the needs of transgender and gender-diverse individuals. For example, referring a transgender survivor to use a male or female designated washroom at a sexual assault clinic reinforces cisnormativity and may create added discomfort for the survivor who is already in a vulnerable position. Providing gender-neutral washrooms is a policy that demonstrates respect and consideration for all needs.

Policy development responsive to transgender needs must be implemented with clear communication and consistency among staff and clients. It is important to be aware of who is doing the research, which groups are being consulted, and that lived-experiences inform policy decisions. Clients play a key role in the consultation process as they are uniquely positioned to support the creation of safe spaces.

Policy accountability includes policy evaluation. Policies need to be evaluated over time to measure progress. For instance, evaluations need to determine whether policies reflect advances in our knowledge base, are implemented consistently and in ways that reflect the true intent of the policy, and ensure that the intent of the policy is being realized from the perspective of clients, staff, government bodies, and the communities the organization serves.

Training

Administrators and staff in VAW services and organizations play a key role in ensuring that gender-diversity and inclusion is supported in their workplace. Participants at the Knowledge Exchange recommended that service providers be asked what their level of knowledge is with respect to trans-gender and gender-diverse experiences of violence. Participants identified that currently this is not being adequately assessed prior to training so that knowledge gaps can be addressed. Limited opportunities for learning regarding gender diversity leads to the problem that “we don’t always know what we don’t know.” If opportunities to discuss gender diversity and inclusion do not exist, staff and administrators may not be able to recognize knowledge gaps.

While some VAW services and organizations who have conducted past LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) violence training feel as if they have paid attention to transgender issues, most general LGBTQ training focus primarily on issues related to sexual orientation rather than gender identity.³⁰ This gap can perpetuate misgendering, discrimination, and mistreatment against transgender and gender-diverse individuals.

Training on transgender issues can be more effective when facilitated or co-facilitated by transgender community leaders or in partnership with cisgender allies.

Hiring Practices

Critical to policy implementation and training on transgender needs in the VAW sector is ensuring that transgender and gender-diverse individuals are represented in the sector as staff, leaders, and consultants. This ensures that their voices are heard within an organization and that their needs help inform policies and practices.

Participants at the Knowledge Exchange emphasised that in addition to hiring front-line workers with credentials and appropriate training to work in VAW services, employees can also be hired based on lived experience with violence. Transgender and gender-diverse survivors have an essential role in supporting those with similar experiences and in identifying gaps in current services.

Strengthening Safe Spaces in VAW Services

Those involved in the VAW sector recognize the importance of providing safe spaces for survivors of violence and strive to do so in their everyday work.

Participants at the Knowledge Exchange emphasised the need for strengthening these safe spaces to include transgender and gender-diverse survivors of violence.

This includes recognizing cisnormativity in VAW services and its impacts on policy and program development, evaluation, client experiences, and services offered.

Elements of safe spaces for transgender survivors of violence may include such approaches as:

- Allowing clients to self-identify as outside of “male” or “female”, including in paperwork
- Asking what pronouns clients would like to be addressed by
- Providing gender-neutral washrooms
- Respecting confidentiality around transgender status or history
- Ensuring sleeping arrangements are based on self-identification of gender and not on surgical status
- Providing additional time and privacy for dressing/ disrobing
- Offering trans-friendly supplies (wigs/wig alternatives, razors, makeup, breast forms and hip pads, gaffing devices, etc.)

Transgender and gender-diverse survivors may be more likely to use supports and services when they believe their needs will be respected and considered. Marketing materials and public messaging for services and organizations must convey that they are an inclusive provider that accommodates gender diversity, and then, the promise of inclusionary practices must be experienced by clients.

Supporting Diverse Knowledges

Participants at the Knowledge Exchange recognized that while research is an important tool for understanding issues, different forms of knowledge exist at the academic, experiential, and community level that can help to better understand the experiences of violence against transgender and gender-diverse individuals.

Participants expressed that often, academic research is considered as the most “legitimate” form of research. However, this research is not always accessible to marginalized communities and, too often, they are not

consulted even when they are the subjects of the research. In other circumstances, consulted experts with lived experience do not have access to research results.

Community research is less likely to be recognized as legitimate even though it may come from lived experience. Activism, advocacy, and community-based research can create and foster access and inclusion.

Marginalized groups such as transgender and gender-diverse communities must be meaningfully involved in research. This will elicit better rapport with the community and foster both improved information gathering and improved recommendations for next steps. Members of communities are more likely to be familiar with the language, traditions, and cultural norms that can facilitate participation and information-sharing. They can also help to inform recommendations for increasing inclusion, including implementing steps towards improved inclusion at agency, personnel and frontline service levels. Last, community research approaches are well-positioned to share research results with the community itself. This can improve knowledge for both researchers and the community, and can lead to better solutions for both as well.

Knowledge production also has different meanings for different groups. For example, some communities constitute research as pictures or oral history rather than statistics or published materials. Applying different lenses and worldviews of those typically marginalized or excluded from the production of knowledge can address the inequities and power struggles that exist. A range of knowledge sources contributes to a meaningful knowledge base that can advance inclusive practices. Further, these approaches provide the critical information that enables a meaningful contextual analysis of quantitative research.

We invite you to join the discussion (Twitter: [@learntoendabuse](#) | [#GenderDiversityKE](#)) or send us your thoughts about this discussion paper and possible next steps for addressing gender diversity in the VAW sector. (vawln@uwo.ca)

GLOSSARY

It is preferable to ask people how they identify their gender and sexual orientation, including their preferred use of pronouns.

Binary/Non-binary (gender)

The belief and cultural expectation that there are only two sexes or genders (i.e. male/female). Binary gender may also extend to the belief that the two genders are “opposite” of each other and do not overlap.

Cisgender

Individual whose gender identity, body of birth, and gender presentations have always been aligned as either male or female.

Cisnormativity

The assumption that all human beings are cisgender, i.e. have a gender identity which matches the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is violence that is directed against a person on the basis of gender. It constitutes a breach of the fundamental right to life, liberty, security, dignity, and equality between women and men, non-discrimination and physical and mental integrity. GBV is sometimes used interchangeably with “violence against women” although the latter is a less inclusive concept.

Gender expression

A term which refers to the ways in which we each manifest masculinity or femininity. It is usually an extension of our “gender identity”, our innate sense of being male, female, etc.

Gender fluid

A gender identify which refers to a gender which varies over time. A gender fluid person may at any time identify as male, female, or any other non-binary identity, or some combination of identities.

Gender diversity

Refers to the extent to which a person’s gender identity, role, or expression differs from the cultural norms prescribed for people of a particular sex. This term is becoming more popular as a way to describe people without reference to a particular cultural norm.

Gender identity

An individual’s internal sense of being male, female, or another gender (not necessarily visible to others).

Gender-neutral bathroom

A gender neutral bathroom is one where signage does not indicate “women” or “men”. Gender-neutral bathrooms can be single unit or multi-stall facilities.

Gender non-conforming

Involves not conforming to a given culture’s gender norm expectations or whose gender expression doesn’t match their society’s prescribed gender roles or gender norms for their gender identity.

Gender non-binary

Used interchangeably with genderqueer, gender non-binary is a catch-all category for gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine and are thus outside of the gender binary and cisnormativity.

Intersectionality

The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems or discrimination or disadvantage.

Intersex

A person whose sexual anatomy or chromosomes do not fit with the traditional markers of “female” or “male” (i.e. people born with both “female” and “male” anatomy (penis, testicles, vagina, uterus); people born with XXY chromosomes).

In the closet

Describes a person who keeps their sexual orientation or gender identity a secret from some or all people.

Transgender

An umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of people whose gender identity or expression may not match the sex they were assigned at birth.

Transition

The process and time within which a person goes from predominantly being seen as one gender to predominantly being seen as another gender. Transition can include one or more of these components: medical transition, legal transition, social transition.

Transsexual

Refers to transgender people who alter their bodies through medical interventions, such as surgery or hormonal therapy, so that their physical being is better aligned with gender identity. They may be known as male to female, female to male.

Questioning

For some, a process of exploring and discovering one's own sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

RESOURCES

Organizations and Networks

2Spirited People of the First Nations

www.2spirits.com

This website offers a number of resources, reports and information regarding aboriginal, LGBTQ and 2 spirit people including information regarding health and domestic violence.

The 519 Church Street Community Centre

www.the519.org

The 519 is a community centre in Toronto that provides supports and services to LGBT communities. Services include education and training, sports and recreation, community drop-in, and newcomer settlement services.

Egale

www.egale.ca

Egale is a national charity that promotes LGBT human rights through education and research on such topics as safe schools and hate crimes. In Toronto, Egale supports the Egale Youth OUT Reach program which provides crisis intervention, counselling and provides assistance with housing for LGBT youth.

Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youthline

www.youthline.ca

1-800-268-9688

The Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youth Line is a toll-free peer support phone line for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, 2-spirited, queer and questioning youth (26 years and younger) in Ontario. The Youth Line also provides support through online forums and email. The Youth Line peers offer callers support, information and referrals.

LGBTQ Newcomer Settlement Network Toronto

[https://sites.google.com/site/](https://sites.google.com/site/lgbtqnewcomersettlementnetwork/)

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The LGBTQ Settlement Network was developed to support frontline staff in their work with LGBTQ newcomers; act as a community hub for those interested in this work; stimulate dialogue in relation to LGBTQ newcomers and their settlement needs in broader forms; act as a forum to develop partnerships; increase visibility of the network in the larger community as well as in LGBTQ communities; coordinate outreach efforts to LGBTQ newcomers; and act as a catalyst for systemic change.

Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses (OAITH)

www.oaith.ca

OAITH is a provincial network of shelters and transition houses serving primarily women who are experiencing violence in intimate relationships.

Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres (OCRCC)

www.sexualassaultsupport.ca

The OCRCC works toward the prevention and eradication of sexual assault. The Coalition recognizes that violence against women is one of the strongest indicators of prevailing societal attitudes towards women. Members of the Coalition include sexual assault centres from across Ontario, offering counselling, information and support services to survivors of sexual violence, including childhood sexual abuse and incest.

Ontario Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf (ORAD)

www.new2.orad.ca

ORAD serves LGBTQ deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people. ORAD coordinates events and activities and provides educational and social outreach workshops. ORAD is located at 519 Church St; Toronto

PFLAG

www.pflagcanada.ca

PFLAG is Canada's only national organization that helps all Canadians with issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. A number of resources and links are identified.

Rainbow Health Ontario

www.rainbowhealthontario.ca

Rainbow Health Ontario (RHO) works to improve access to services and promote the health of LGBTQ communities in Ontario. RHO provides training to service providers about LGBTQ health including trans specific training; shares information and resources; encourages, promotes, and shares research; consults on public policy issues; provides consultations to organizations across the province to develop their capacity; and hosts the only national LGBTQ health conference.

Rainbow Youth Advisory - Ottawa

www.ysb.on.ca

The Rainbow Youth Advisory works with community partners to raise awareness of issues facing Ottawa's GLBTQ youth. Members work with GLBTQ youth in community to identify barriers to accessing existing service and resources, and advocate for services to address their needs.

Resources

Gender-Integrated Shelters: Experience and Advice (2016)

<http://forge-forward.org/wp-content/docs/gender-integrated-shelter-interviews-FINAL.pdf>

This report looks at agencies who have integrated or are in the process of integrating transgender, gender non-conforming, or non-binary individuals into their domestic violence shelters.

Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Abuse Among LGBT People (2015)

<http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Intimate-Partner-Violence-and-Sexual-Abuse-among-LGBT-People.pdf>

This report provides an overview of existing research on IPV and sexual abuse among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LBT) people, along with recommendations for future research.

Let's Talk About It: A Transgender Survivor's Guide to Accessing Therapy (2015)

<https://forge-forward.org/wp-content/docs/Lets-Talk-Therapist-Guide.pdf>

This document serves as a guide to help empower transgender survivors to find a therapist and/or to take the next steps in their healing journey from sexual abuse/assault.

Transgender People in Ontario, Canada: Statistics from the Trans PULSE Project to Inform Human Rights Policy (2015)

<http://transpulseproject.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Trans-PULSE-Statistics-Relevant-for-Human-Rights-Policy-June-2015.pdf>

This report summarizes key research results from the Trans PULSE Project that may help inform discussions, debates, or human rights policy.

Springtide Resources

www.springtideresources.org

Springtide develops and implements programs and resources that support the educational, prevention and training needs of those who work towards ending violence against women. Springtide has developed a number of resources and programs for and about LGBT communities.

Trauma-informed Approaches for LGBTQ* Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence: A Review of Literature and a Set of Practice Observations (2016)

http://www.glbtdvp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/TIP-for-LGBTQ-Survivors_LitReview.pdf

This literature review explores trauma-informed practice and a set of practice observations for LGBTQ* communities. This document is useful for those in domestic and sexual violence organizations as well as practitioners in other anti-violence disciplines, homelessness services, mental health and health care services, criminal legal systems, and more.

Understanding Issues Facing Transgender Americans (2015)

<http://www.glaad.org/sites/default/files/understanding-issues-facing-transgender-americans.pdf>

This guide examines the issues and barriers facing transgender Americans, as well as recommendations for change.

APPENDIX A: BIOGRAPHIES

Dr. Betty Jo Barrett (Panelist):

Dr. Barrett (MSSW, PhD University of Wisconsin, Madison) is an Associate Professor of Women's and Gender Studies and Social Work at the University of Windsor. For over ten years, she has conducted research on intimate partner violence in both heterosexual and LGBTQ+ relationships, with a specific focus on survivors' help seeking and their interactions with formal and informal sources of support in the aftermath of violence. She is currently conducting research on the intersection of animal abuse and woman abuse as well exploring the experiences of bystanders to partner violence in LGBTQ+ communities. She has practiced as a community social worker in the areas of family violence prevention and treatment, housing stability and homelessness, developmental disabilities, and youth mental health.

Tamar Brannigan (Panelist):

"Tamar is a black queer-as-can-be non-binary activist with ancestors from their Caribbean islands and Scottish lowlands. Their working background is in psychology, counseling, and advocacy and they move through these worlds with a keen passion for social justice and equity work, advocacy for people of colour and youth, and radical community-building. A jack of all trades, Tamar is particularly passionate about American Sign Language, community accountability, creating emotionally rich spaces, and promoting and practicing self-care and healing."

Eddie Jude (Panelist):

"Eddie is a white queer and trans community artist, organizer, and educator whose primary focus is in knowledge and equity expansion through accessible creative engagement. They have been developing equity programming and facilitating trainings for almost a decade, working with many institutions, community arts and social services, front line workers, and service users. They hold a bachelor's of fine art from OCAD University and a diploma from the Assaulted Women and Children's Counselling and Advocacy program at George Brown College. Their connection to the Violence Against Women and Intimate Partner Violence movements stem from their own personal lived experiences with violence, as well as in their creative practice, which explores survivorship, trauma and community mutual aid from an anti-oppressive, decolonial, feminist framework that is trans inclusive, pro sex work, and prison abolitionist."

Wendy Komiotis (Facilitator):

Wendy is the Executive Director at The Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC). She is a member of Ontario's Roundtable on Violence Against Women, the first permanent roundtable of its kind. The roundtable and its members provide advice to the government on ongoing and emerging gender-based violence issues and assist the government in implementing the Action Plan. Wendy is also a Resource Group Member of the Learning Network and is on the planning committee for this Knowledge Exchange.

Nadine Sookermany (Facilitator):

Nadine Sookermany is the Executive director at Springtide Resources. She has been an anti-violence activist, advocate, consultant and educator for over 20 years. Her professional experience includes frontline shelter work, harm reduction, community-based education and literacy, as well as coalition work across various disciplines with a focus on intersectionality and anti-oppression. She spent over twelve years as a Community Literacy worker with Parkdale Project Read and almost eight years as a professor with the Assaulted Women's and Children's Counselor/Advocate and Social Service Worker programs at George Brown College. Nadine is also a Resource Group Member of the Learning Network and is on the planning committee for this Knowledge Exchange.

Gloria Mulcahy (ONWA):

Gloria Alvernaz Mulcahy is of Tsalagi Aniyunwiya ancestry. Gloria is a poet who is also a mixed media artist—filmmaker, photographer, musician, past Co-ordinator & curator for the Centre for Creativity, King's University College, University of Western Ontario. Her book *Borderlands & Bloodlines* is focused on her indigenous roots (Tsalagi, Aniyunwiya / Cherokee)—exploring how displacements and relocations become journeys of necessity. The poems reflect on all our relations where cultures/races and classes touch edges occupying land, sea and sacred spaces. Gloria is also included in the 2011 anthology *W'daub Awae: Speaking True: A Kagedonce Anthology* edited by Warren Carriou. Recently, she created drawings influenced by petroglyphs & pictographs

combined with original poetry. The poems sometimes lyrical and centred on the earth & our relations to her also reminds us of the ironies of displacements, poverty and violence. The social commentary re: indigenous / settler relations emerge with poetry on violence to our earth mother as well as to women & children. She became a member of the League of Canadian Poets after her first book of poetry-Songs that Untune the Sky. She has a PhD from the University of Maryland.

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