

Transgender Homeless Youth: Health Needs and Health Disparities



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Background

- Clear disparities in morbidity and mortality have been demonstrated independently for transgender populations and for homeless youth.
- Homeless youth are disproportionately transgender: 3% to 6.8% of homeless youth are transgender, compared to 0.3% of the general population.^{1,2,3}
- Experiences of bias and marginalization result in pronounced health concerns: 28% of transgender women and 56% of black transgender women are HIV+; 41% of transgender adults have attempted suicide.^{4,5}
- No published research has explored the health needs of transgender homeless youth.



Methods

- Ongoing recruitment of two populations in partnership with San Francisco and Alameda County-based service organizations: (1) Youth ages 15-25 who self-identify as transgender and have experienced homelessness in the last 6 months. (2) Key informants: staff from service organizations and experts on the first population.
- Obtained informed consent, collected demographics, and conducted 45-90 minute semi-structured interview on topics including: physical and mental health, identity, causes of homelessness, survival strategies, HIV risk, violence, stigma, and service access. Participants receive \$20 reimbursement.
- Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, verified.
- Grounded theory analysis will entail open coding to develop a code book, then coding in Dedoose. Coding reports will aid in developing memos and a model describing youths' lived experience and health.

Table 1: Emerging themes and representative quotes

Disproportionate homelessness	<i>I don't know any trans people who haven't been homeless at one point or another.</i> <i>The groovy people that I've been hanging out with are in need... I think all of them are homeless or in a shelter. Or in the process of getting an SRO or finding some kind of apartment or something... For whatever reason and wherever they were from, it seems like everybody is homeless or looking for shelter.</i>
Mental health disparities	<i>It's kind of hard to be homeless and then come out of it and not be a little traumatized. I guess the traumatizing part of being homeless would be... you never really know where food is going to come from. You don't know where you're going to sleep or if you're going to be able to sleep... You're not used to having things in general.</i> <i>There's your emotional health... Especially when you're switching onto hormones, or you're going through your second puberty or whatever... I feel like the overall mental stability, it just takes a toll on trans people.</i>
Hygiene concerns	<i>I think cleanliness is a huge thing... especially when you're injecting your testosterone – whether you're transitioning either way – having the access to alcohol wipes or just to the clean needles and things... If people are sleeping on the streets, obviously it's not very clean anywhere around you.</i>
HIV risks, safety & survival tradeoffs	<i>On dates [sex work clients will] just be like, well, I'll give you more money if you don't use a condom... [Street-based sex workers] will not wear protection because they get more money... There's a lot of incentives of why they don't fucking do [condoms]. Trust me, I used to do that... [For] drugs. A place to stay for a while. Money. A lot of money. A shopping spree. A wide variety of things. Food. Dinner... [Now] I work from my [transitional youth] house. It's private... It's easier for me that way because... I can feel safe. I won't have to worry about nothing happening as far as me getting assaulted.</i>
Intersecting hardships	<i>I just think [trans homelessness is] more intense and also harder to solve... The hardest part for my experience in being trans is just all of the different hoops that I've had to jump through just to get basic things. Because people tend to not want to take trans people seriously... It makes it harder to access housing, to access healthcare, and to have those issues addressed. It makes accessing therapy, mental healthcare a lot more difficult... It allows for more damage to be done to trans people.</i>

Preliminary Results

- Data collected from 4 youth (ages 19-23), 1 key informant
 - Gender: 2 transwomen, 2 genderqueer, 1 transman
 - Race/ethnicities: American Indian, Black/African American, Middle Eastern/North African, and white
 - Housing situations: transitional housing, staying with friends, and staying outdoors
- When asked directly, participants expressed that homeless trans youth communities have the following health concerns (listed by decreasing frequency):
 - Mental health: depression, anxiety, PTSD, loneliness, suicidality & suicide
 - Hormones: access, syringe access and disposal, access to maintenance bloodwork
 - HIV & STIs
 - Addiction and drug use
 - Fear of violence from individuals, institutions, police
 - Hygiene



Conclusions & Next Steps

- Transgender youth who experience homelessness face significant obstacles to health. The social and structural factors highlighted in this study could be modifiable targets for health and wellbeing interventions by service provision organizations, clinics, and at policy levels.
- Ongoing recruitment and interviews of up to 10 key informants and 25 youth in this hard-to-reach population.
- Continued codebook development, coding, and analysis, toward publication of a resultant grounded theory model.

REFERENCES: ¹ Choi 2015; ² Administration For Children And Families, Family And Youth Services Bureau Street Outreach Program 2016; ³ Gates 2011; ⁴ Grant 2011; ⁵ Herbst 2008.

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