



# RESPONDING TO TRANSGENDER VICTIMS of Sexual Assault

Message From the Director

About This Guide

Transgender 101

Sexual Assault in the Transgender Community

Tips for Those Who Serve Victims

JUNE 2014

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## Sexual Assault in the Transgender Community

- The Numbers
- Gender Identity and Sexual Assault
- Chicken or Egg?
- Community Ramifications
- Notes

## Sexual Assault in the Transgender Community

This section discusses sexual assault as it affects transgender individuals, covering—

- [The numbers.](#) How many transgender people are sexually assaulted? Who are the victims? The perpetrators? How do hate crime and intimate partner violence factor in?
- [Gender identity and sexual assault.](#) Is gender identity a cause of sexual assault?
- [Chicken or egg?](#) Does sexual assault in childhood influence gender identity?
- [Community ramifications.](#) Does the relatively small size of transgender communities have an adverse effect on transgender victims?

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## The Numbers

Statistics documenting transgender people's experience of sexual violence indicate shockingly high levels of sexual abuse and assault. One in two transgender individuals are sexually abused or assaulted at some point in their lives.<sup>1</sup> Some reports estimate that transgender survivors may experience rates of sexual assault up to 66 percent, often coupled with physical assaults or abuse.<sup>2</sup> This indicates that the majority of transgender individuals are living with the aftermath of trauma and the fear of possible repeat victimization.

This section covers statistics related to the following topics:

- [Victims.](#)
- [Perpetrators.](#)
- [Hate crimes.](#)
- [Intimate partner violence.](#)

### Victims

Sexual violence has been found to be even higher in some subpopulations within the transgender community, including transgender youth, transgender people of color, individuals living with disabilities, homeless individuals, and those who are involved in the sex trade. For example, the 2011 *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey* found that 12 percent of transgender youth report being sexually assaulted in K-12 settings by peers or educational staff; 13 percent of African-American transgender people surveyed were sexually assaulted in the workplace; and 22 percent of homeless transgender individuals were assaulted while staying in shelters.<sup>3</sup>

### READ MORE

- [Transgender Rates of Violence](#)
- [Transgender Survivors: Statistics, Stories, Strategies](#) (webinar)

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### Perpetrators

Sexual assaults can be perpetrated by any individual; however, it is particularly startling when professionals who are in "helping" roles abuse their power and sexually assault individuals they are supposed to be serving. Fifteen percent of transgender individuals report being sexually assaulted while in police custody or jail, which more than doubles (32 percent) for African-American transgender people. Five to nine percent of transgender survivors were sexually assaulted by police officers.<sup>4</sup> Another 10 percent were assaulted by health care professionals.<sup>5</sup>

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### Hate crimes

Sexual assault perpetrated against transgender individuals may be a component of an anti-transgender hate crime or may be linked to other demographic variables such as race. According to the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP):

Acts of hate violence, such as harassment, stalking, vandalism, and physical and sexual assault, are often supported by more socially sanctioned expressions of transphobia, biphobia, and homophobia and are intended to send a message to LGBTQ communities. . . . Many LGBTQ people also face substantial bias because they belong to other traditionally marginalized groups along other axes of identity such as race, class, incarceration history, immigration status, or ability. . . . membership in more than one traditionally marginalized community can increase targeting for severe violence.<sup>6</sup>

In the NCAVP 2009 report on hate violence, 50 percent of people who died in violent hate crimes against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people were transgender women; the other half were male, many of whom were gender non-conforming.<sup>7</sup> Sexual assault and/or genital mutilation before or after their murders was a frequent occurrence.

In 2009, 17 percent of all reported violent hate crimes against LGBTQ people were directed against those who identified themselves as transgender, with most (11 percent of all hate crimes) identifying as transgender women.<sup>8</sup> The remainder identified as transgender men, genderqueer, gender questioning, or intersex.

Hate crimes are more prevalent against people of color. In 2009, 53 percent of LGBTQ hate crime victims were people of color.<sup>9</sup> Of the 22 anti-LGBTQ hate crime murders documented by NCAVP that year, 79 percent of the victims were people of color.<sup>10</sup> As noted above, 50 percent (11 individuals) of the 2009 murders tracked were transgender women; of those, 9 were people of color (82 percent). Of the other 11 murders of gender non-conforming people, 5 (45 percent) were people of color.<sup>11</sup>

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### *Intimate partner violence*

Many incidents of intimate partner violence include some form of sexual assault.<sup>12</sup> According to the 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, "bisexual women experienced significantly higher lifetime prevalence of rape and other sexual violence by an intimate partner when compared to heterosexual women" and "significantly higher lifetime prevalence of rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner when compared to lesbian and heterosexual women."<sup>13</sup> Some studies indicate that between 20 and 35 percent of LGBTQ couples experience domestic violence.<sup>14</sup> According to another, 50 percent of transgender people surveyed had been hit by a primary partner after coming out as transgender.<sup>15</sup> LGBTQ youth report a 30 percent incidence of dating violence, compared to 9 percent for heterosexual students.<sup>16</sup>

Only one in five LGBTQ victims of intimate partner violence or sexual assault get help from service providers.<sup>17</sup>

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## Gender Identity and Sexual Assault

People may assume that being visibly transgender or having a transgender history is a direct cause of sexual assault. There is some truth to this: A number of murders of transgender people (particularly transgender women of color) have taken place when new sexual partners "discover" their sexual partners were assigned male at birth and/or have a penis.<sup>18</sup> This should not be used to blame transgender victims of assault. It is more accurate to observe that anti-transgender bias motivated the assault—not the gender or genitals of the victim.

Some hate crimes and murders have included genital mutilation and sexual assault. One person reported a workplace rape related to the victim's transgender identity: "My close friend was sexually assaulted at work because he was trans. His job discouraged him to [sic] report it and fired him a week later."<sup>19</sup> In other cases, perpetrators may be motivated by reasons that have nothing to do with the victim's perceived or actual gender.

### READ MORE

- Transgender Day of Remembrance: When Violence Becomes Deadly ([fact sheet](#), [webinar](#))

When asked, "Was gender a contributing factor in the abuse/assault?" 29 percent of respondents to FORGE's 2005 survey said no, 42 percent said yes, 21 percent were unsure or didn't remember, and 8 percent gave other responses.<sup>20</sup> It is contextually important to note that some respondents appear to believe that sexual assault only happens to women or people perceived to be female:

All of the unwanted/persuaded sexual contact in my life has been directly because of my being seen as female-and-sexually-attractive, and this is a very strong contributing factor in my renouncing female identity altogether (no matter what declared orientation), as many straight men simply do not get the clue and assume that any personable demeanor is an invitation for their advances.<sup>21</sup>

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## Chicken or Egg?

The vast majority of transgender sexual assault survivors who responded to FORGE's 2005 survey were first assaulted as children or youth.<sup>22</sup> Many transgender people first realize they do not identify with their assigned gender when they are young.<sup>23</sup> This is not a coincidence and may make it harder for survivors to figure out which came first and whether one influenced, mediated, or even caused the other. Respondents came down on all sides of the question<sup>24</sup>:

Being raped did not make me attracted to lesbians. Nor did it make me trans. Providers should know that and not say so or imply it. Even noting that many women who are abused "become" lesbians or that many lesbians have been abused in such a way is rather offensive and kept me from going to a gyn[ecologist] for some time.

\*\*\*

I kept blaming things on trauma from the rape that were really trans-related. But, I can see how that could be a hard call to make dealing with a queer teenager that was raped at 8 years old.

\*\*\*

I'm afraid to go anywhere for help, because they will say my transgenderism is related to abuse, or that I somehow egged it on by being a freak. I do not want to have it affect my ability to rightfully claim my own identity. I was transgendered before I was ever abused, but I don't think they will understand.

\*\*\*

I don't know if this was a negative impact or not, but several of the mental health providers whom I saw suggested that my sexual and/or gender ambiguity was caused by the sexual abuse. I bought that at first. I don't believe that to be true anymore. I've healed from the sexual abuse—truly—and I remain sexually/gendered ambiguous. This is just who I am. Maybe more sensitivity in the fact that gender identity does not have to be a direct result of sexual abuse. It can just 'be' and should not just automatically be thrown in as being the same issue.

\*\*\*

I understand that my gender dysphoria arises from the childhood abuse. I had researched this area fairly carefully, and if useful, I have literature suggesting abuse as a possible cause of gender dysphoria.

Studies have shown that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people are more likely to be sexually assaulted in childhood than heterosexual and non-transgender children.<sup>25</sup> It is unclear whether perpetrators were reacting to some gender-related cue and assaulted these children because of it, whether gender insecurity made the children more vulnerable, or whether the attack was meant to "teach the child a lesson."<sup>26</sup> One child abuse survivor said that gender identity was a factor in not reporting the abuser: "By me putting up with it, I thought it would help me to be 'normal,' not transgendered or lesbian."<sup>27</sup>

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## Community Ramifications

Some transgender victims of sexual assault show signs of posttraumatic stress disorder or skills deficits that may stem from the assault. These may include hyper-vigilance (being constantly on the lookout for danger); being easily or extremely startled by sudden sounds or movements; poor concentration; irritability or outbursts of anger; panic attacks; sudden intense emotions; flashbacks or hallucinations; dissociation (having a reduced awareness of one's self and/or the environment); disorientation; amnesia; confusion; isolation; denial; numbing; fatigue; headaches; self-harming behaviors such as cutting; addictions; and substance abuse. Where can they turn for support?

The Internet provides ample information about transgender health, gender transition, and social issues, and most medium- and large-sized communities have in-person support groups or informal social networks where transgender people can meet and exchange information and support. However, these local transgender communities are generally rather small. Having such a small and interconnected social circle may be detrimental if the perpetrator is part of the same community. Two respondents to FORGE's 2005 survey talked about this problem<sup>28</sup>:

My partner's coerced/nonconsensual sex with another FTM has fractured the local community into parties who believe my partner, parties who believe the perpetrator, and parties who don't want to take sides (who are perceived to not believe my partner as a result). Moreover, there's no useful way to clear the air or hold the perpetrator publicly responsible without some degree of ostracizing him. It's a really evil situation.

\*\*\*

My trans ex and I are part of a very small trans community, and as a result of our breakup, I have become largely alienated from our community. He is a respected leader in the trans community. He spreads rumors about me, and I don't defend myself because I don't want to engage him. But after leaving my abusive relationship, I pretty much lost my community. People don't take what happened seriously. It's difficult because it seems like every organization I want to be part of, he's there.

Because the transgender community is so interconnected, and most communities have limited resources and inclusive support services, it can be challenging for transgender individuals and their loved ones to access support if the perpetrator is transgender or part of the transgender community. In these cases, providers and neutral community members should be prepared to help survivors find safe supporters and activities outside of the transgender community.

If an assault involving members of the transgender community is known publicly within the community, there may be extensive ramifications. Rumors about providers "taking sides" may encourage leaders within the

### READ MORE

In this e-pub\*—

- Transgender 101: [The Numbers, The Transgender Community](#)

\*Clicking these links will take you to other sections in this e-pub. To return, hit your browser's "back" button.

community to advise against seeking services from a particular provider. Due to the small nature of the community, individuals frequently know who works with which providers and may share providers, which may cause people to no longer feel safe accessing certain professionals for support. This can have a significant negative impact on the provider and the community. Physicians and therapists with large transgender client bases may quickly lose a large portion of their clientele due to community fissures caused by a within-group assault. The community also loses a potentially valuable source of support.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> FORGE, 2005, Sexual Violence in the Transgender Community Survey, unpublished data; G. Kenagy, 2005, "The Health and Social Service Needs of Transgender People in Philadelphia," *International Journal of Transgenderism* 8(2/3):49–56; G. Kenagy and W. Bostwick, 2005, "Health and Social Service Needs of Transgendered People in Chicago," *International Journal of Transgenderism* 8(2/3):57–66.

<sup>2</sup> J. Xavier, J.A. Honnold, and J. Bradford, 2007, *The Health, Health-Related Needs, and Lifecourse Experiences of Transgender Virginians*, Richmond, VA: Community Health Research Initiative, Center for Public Policy, Virginia Commonwealth University, accessed Sept. 7, 2010; C. Reback, P. Simon, C. Bemis, and B. Gatson, 2001, *The Los Angeles Transgender Health Study: Community Report*, Los Angeles, CA: University of California at Los Angeles; J. Xavier, M. Bobbin, B. Singer, and E. Budd, 2005, "A Needs Assessment of Transgendered People of Color Living in Washington, DC," *International Journal of Transgenderism* 8(2/3):31–47; C.K. McGowan, 1999, *Transgender Needs Assessment*, New York, NY: New York City Department of Health, HIV Prevention Planning Unit; E. Lombardi, R. Wilchins, D. Priesing, and D. Malouf, 2001, "Gender Violence: Transgender Experiences With Violence and Discrimination," *Journal of Homosexuality* 42(1):89–101; K. Clements, M. Katz, and R. Marx, 1999, *The Transgender Community Health Project: Descriptive Results*, San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Department of Public Health.

<sup>3</sup> J.M. Grant, L.A. Mottet, J. Tanis, J. Harrison, J.L. Herman, and M. Keisling, 2011, *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*, Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, accessed Feb. 4, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> FORGE, Sexual Violence in the Transgender Community Survey; National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 2009, *Hate Violence Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People in the United States*, New York, NY: National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, accessed Jan. 28, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> J.M. Grant et al., *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*.

<sup>6</sup> National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 2010, *Hate Violence Against the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Communities in the United States in 2009*, New York, NY: National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, accessed Jan. 28, 2011. NCAVP is a coalition of about 40 organizations that focus on serving lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer victims of intimate partner violence, sexual assault, hate crimes, and police misconduct.

<sup>7</sup> National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, *Hate Violence Against the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Communities in the United States in 2009*. Since the development of this online guide, new information on hate violence against these communities has been made available.



See NCAVP's [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and HIV-Affected Hate Violence in 2012](#).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Analysis based on narratives in the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs' [Hate Violence Against the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Communities in the United States in 2009](#).

<sup>12</sup> Among FORGE survey respondents who self-reported details of the types of violence they experienced, at least 21 percent of those who experienced intimate partner violence were sexually assaulted as part of that violence. FORGE, 2011, Transgender Individuals' Knowledge of and Willingness to Use Sexual Assault Programs, unpublished survey data, Morehouse School of Medicine's Institutional Review Board.

<sup>13</sup> M.L. Walters, J. Chen, and M.J. Breiding, 2013, [The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2010 Findings on Victimization by Sexual Orientation](#), Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 18–20, accessed Dec. 13, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> More information is available at [Show Me Love Campaign's Web site](#), accessed Jan. 28, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> J. Risser, A. Shelton, S. McCurdy, J. Atkinson, P. Padgett, B. Useche, B. Thomas, and M. Williams, 2005, "Sex, Drugs, Violence and HIV Status Among Male-to-Female Transgender Persons in Houston, Texas," in W. Bockting and A. Avery, eds., *Transgender Health and HIV Prevention: Needs Assessment Studies from Transgender Communities Across the United States*, Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, 67–74.

<sup>16</sup> Massachusetts Department of Education, 2004, *2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey Results*, Malden, MA: Massachusetts Department of Education.

<sup>17</sup> M. Ciarlante and K. Fountain, Ph.D., 2010, [Why It Matters: Rethinking Victim Assistance for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Victims of Hate Violence and Intimate Partner Violence](#), Washington, DC: National Center for Victims of Crime, and New York, NY: New York City Anti-Violence Project, accessed Jan. 28, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Anecdotal data from the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs. Also see the [Remembering Our Dead Web site](#), which highlights the stories of some transgender individuals who were murdered, and the [Transgender Day of Remembrance Web site](#), which documents some of the details of victims who were killed.

<sup>19</sup> FORGE, Sexual Violence in the Transgender Community Survey.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> American Psychiatric Association, 1994, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV*, Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association; A.I. Lev, 2004, *Transgender Emergence: Therapeutic Guidelines for Working With Gender-Variant People and Their Families*, Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Press.

<sup>24</sup> FORGE, Sexual Violence in the Transgender Community Survey.

<sup>25</sup> N. Ray, 2006, *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth: An Epidemic of Homelessness*, New York, NY: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute and the National Coalition for the Homeless; Lambda Legal and Child Welfare League of America, 2012, *LGBTQ Youth Risk Data*, New York, NY: Lambda Legal, Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.

<sup>26</sup> K.F. Balsam and A.R. D'Augelli, 2006, "The Victimization of Older LGBT Adults: Patterns, Impact, and Implications for Intervention," in D. Kimmel, T. Rose, and S. David, eds., *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Aging: Research and Clinical Perspectives*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 112.

<sup>27</sup> FORGE, Sexual Violence in the Transgender Community Survey.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.