



# HER HEALTH, HER HOUSING

IMPROVING SERVICES FOR WOMEN  
EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

MAR. 6-28 • [NHCHC.ORG/VIRTUAL](http://NHCHC.ORG/VIRTUAL)

## The Nexus of Sex Work and Homelessness

Wednesday March 6, 2019

Quality | Access | Justice | Community | [nhchc.org](http://nhchc.org)

NATIONAL  
HEALTH CARE  
for the  
HOMELESS  
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# Disclaimer

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# Presenters

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Pronouns: They/Them  
Ali Forney Center

# Learning Objectives

Participants will be able to...

- Provide introduction to the relationship between sex work and homelessness among diverse feminine-presenting communities.
- Present service delivery efforts for feminine-presenting clients engaging in sex work, specifically with NYC youth.
- Discuss nuances, challenges, and successes of providing care to special populations at the intersections of oppression



# AGENDA

- The Basics
- Defining Sex Work
- What is Feminine presenting/Transgender/Gender Non-Binary/Gender Non-Conforming and why is important
- Increases in Homelessness 2017-2018
- Snapshot: Largest Health Disparities for Women in NYC
- Ali Forney Center
- Trends seen among Feminine-Presenting Homeless Youth in NYC
- Service Delivery Efforts
- Tailoring client engagement for clients engaging in sex work
- Street Outreach
- Callen-Lorde's HOTT Program
- Understanding legal systems
- Mobile Health Role in working with Street Youth
- Tools for engaging clients who disclose participating in sex work
- Multiple systems of oppression and prioritizing client need

# THE “BASICS”: CIS-WOMEN & LGBTQ YOUTH

- Economic/Employment
- Discrimination
- Interpersonal Violence
- Mental Illness
- Health Disparities
- Substance Abuse
- Familial Rejection
- Intersections of Institutional Oppression
- Lack of Data



# DEFINITIONS

- **SEX WORK** – any type of labor when the explicit goal is to produce a sexual or an erotic response in the client in exchange for material (e.g. money, food, housing, goods) or emotional gain.
- **FEMININE PRESENTING** - An individual's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut or voice, that may be socially associated to feminine/non-masculine behaviors and characteristics
- **CIS-WOMEN** – an individual whose gender identity matches the sex that they were assigned at birth

# DEFINITIONS

- **TRANSGENDER** – an individual who feels their sex assigned at birth is a false or incomplete description of themselves (NOTE: those under the “Trans-Umbrella” may or may not identify as transgender)
- **GENDER NON-BINARY** – an individual who does not identify as either male or female
- **GENDER NON-CONFORMING** – an individual who may act or present in a way contrary to societal expectations of their gender

# NATIONAL HOMELESSNESS BY GENDER/GENDER IDENTITY 2018

Gender/ Gender Identity	% of People Experiencing Homelessness
Female	39.1%
Transgender	0.5%
Gender Non-conforming	0.2%

\*2018 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress

# Increases in National Homelessness (2017-2018)

- 3% more women experience homelessness as individuals
- Women in sheltered locations increased by 2%
- Women as individuals in unsheltered locations increased 4%
- Transgender individuals increased by 22%

\*2018 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress

# GREATEST HEALTH DISPARITIES in NYC for WOMEN

- Death rate due to HIV/AIDS was 9 times higher among single adult women who used the shelters than among the NYC adult population.
- Females 11X higher TB Rates among adults in single adult shelters

\*The Health of Homeless Adults in NYC (DHS 2005)

# HOMELESSNESS AND SEX WORK

- Risk based on race, class, gender, nationality, and citizenship
- Exposure
  - Violence
  - Rape
  - Coercion
- Lack of resources
- Gendered Power Dynamics on the Streets
  - Intimate Relationships

# THE ALI FORNEY CENTER

Mission: Our mission is to protect LGBTQ+ youth from the harms of homelessness and empower them with the tools needed to live independently.

Population Served: LGBTQ + Youth, ages 16-24, experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness

Scope of Services: *comprehensive, wrap-around services, including:*

Case Management/Intensive Case Management

Therapy and Psychiatric Services

Medical

Housing (Drop-In, Emergency, Transitional, Transgender)

Drop-In (24/7)

Meals

Clothing

Vocational/Educational

Outreach

Advocacy





# Family Rejection



# LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness

- Approx. 40% of youth experiencing homelessness are LGBT
- Family conflict: primary cause of homelessness for all youth
- 50% of LGBT youth faced negative reactions from parents/caregivers when they came out
- 26% were thrown out of their homes
- They experienced 7.4 more acts of sexual violence
- Higher rates of:
  - **Mental health problems**
  - **Dropping out of high school**
  - **Engaging in survival sex**
  - **Victimization**
  - **Involvement with the criminal legal system**

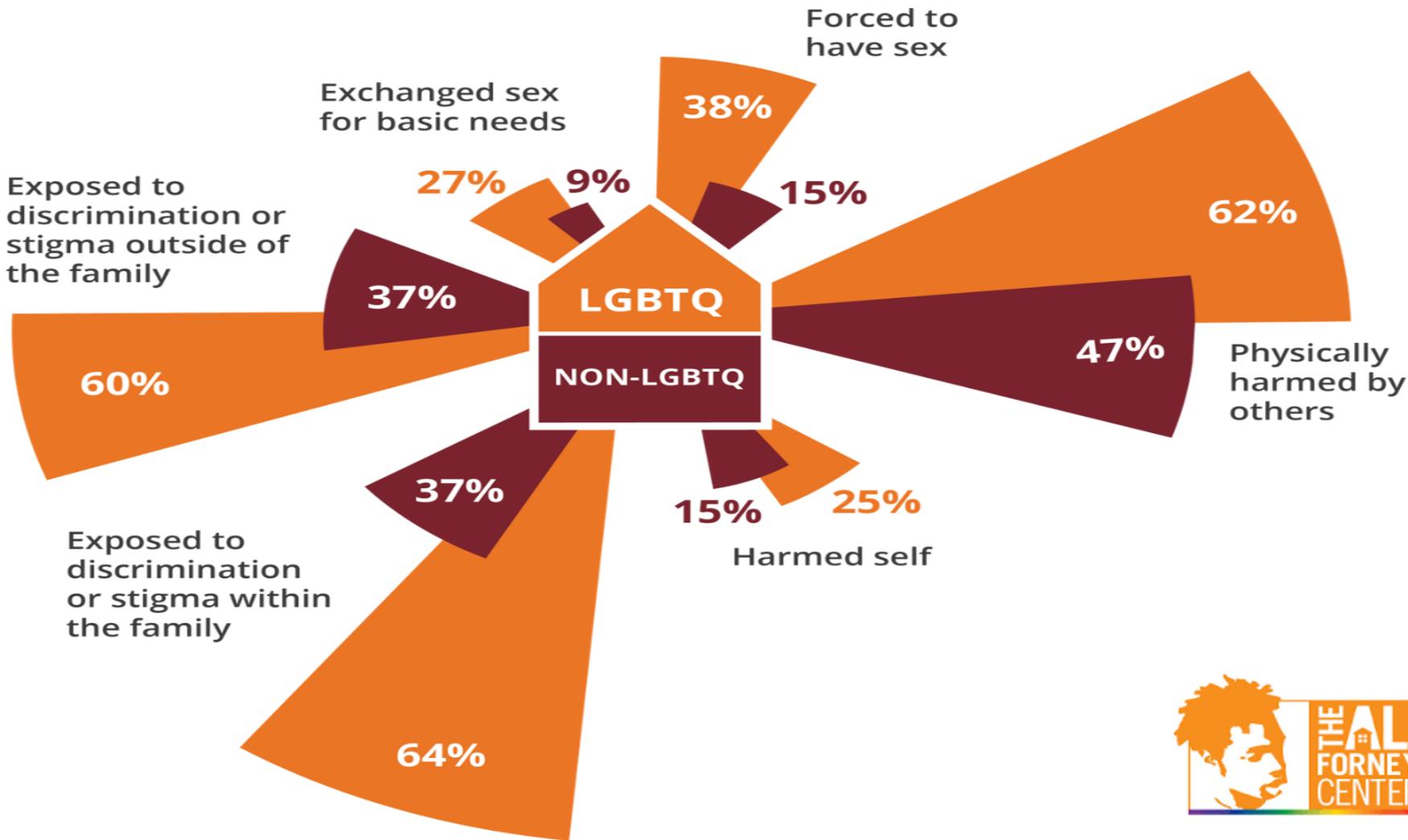




**Rejection can function as a source of anticipation of ongoing rejection and pain.**



**CalLEN-LORDE**



(Source: VoYC In-Depth Interviews)

# LGBTQ Youth and Trauma

## Trauma Stats 2017 Intakes

Event	% (n=466)
Child abuse	63%
Childhood sexual abuse	45%
Witness DV as a child	64%
IPV	30%
Sexual assault/rape (adult)	29%
Witness assault	63%
Witness killing/serious injury	33%
Stalking	44%
Food insecurity	74%
Kicked out of home	71%
In current danger	28%



# Impacts of Trauma

Trauma impacts all aspects of an individual, including:

- Self concept
- Relationships with other individuals, communities and environments

Trauma often results in recurring feelings of:

- Shame
- Guilt
- Rage
- Isolation
- Disconnection



# Underground Street Economy

## What is it?

- Engaging in illegal behaviors as a means to access resources needed to survive, such as money or a place to stay. Clients often do not have other ways of accessing resources.
- It is important that we create a non-judgmental environment where clients can discuss their involvement in these acts and explore ways that we can help clients access resources in other ways.



# Influencers of initiation into the street economy :

- Social control/bonds
- Barriers to the formal economy (e.g., homelessness, educational deficits, mental health problems, incarceration, stigma)
- Tangible and social/emotional benefits of the street economy
- Severe economic need
- The active recruitment of youth experiencing homelessness into the street economy by others.

Acts to obtain resources include:

- Sex work
- Selling illegal drugs or prescription drugs
- Theft



# Sex Work/Survival Sex

- LGBTQ Youth are 7 times more likely to exchange sex for money or shelter
- About one quarter of our clients report exchanging sex during intake



# Harm Reduction Lens

## What is it?

- A set of practical strategies to reduce negative consequences of a risky behavior
- Incorporates a spectrum of strategies including safer techniques, awareness etc.
- Meets people “Where they’re at” but doesn’t leave them there.



# HEALTH OUTREACH TO TEENS (HOTT)

HOTT is a welcoming, non-judgmental, confidential program designed specifically to meet the health & wellness needs of LGBTQ young adults aged 13-24. HOTT provides services to insured & uninsured youth regardless of ability to pay.

## **We Offer:**

Primary care

Trans care & hormone therapy

HIV care

HIV & STI testing

PEP/PrEP care

Women's health services

Therapy & psychiatric care

Care coordination services

Insurance enrollment

Educational & support groups

Flu shots & vaccinations

Onsite pharmacy

# HOTT MOBILE HEALTH SERVICES

Fully-equipped medical vehicle that travels throughout New York City bringing health care to youth:

- Low-threshold health services
  - Sexual health screenings and treatment
    - STIs, HIV, pregnancy testing, GYN exams
  - First Aid and Urgent Care
  - Vaccinations and Physicals
  - Supportive Services
    - Case management, short-term behavioral health interventions, crisis intervention, referrals

# HOTT MOBILE HEALTH SERVICES

- Various sites:
  - Homeless youth drop-in centers
  - LGBT services centers
  - Parks, Outdoor Space where youth congregate
  - Late night events – House/Ballroom Community

# MOBILE HEALTH ROLE IN WORKING WITH STREET YOUTH

Provide services near common strolls, bars, late-night events

Meet youth where they're at – LITERALLY!

Tailor hours to when youth are out and most need support

Presence has dual role of service provision and provision of safety and support

Cultural humility

Role of discretion

Do not assume sexual orientation because of sexual behaviors/practices

Do not assume risk of HIV/STIs because of engagement in sex work

# TOOLS FOR ENGAGING AFTER DISCLOSURE OF SEX WORK

## Care Coordination

- Intakes should include range of definitions of sex work

- Safety planning

- Know Your Rights/Legal Support

- Focus on harm reduction, including for housing and shelter with strict curfews

## Behavioral Health

- Explore feelings of empowerment, control over body, and sometimes affirmation around gender identity

- Equip patients with resources to self-assess power and control with clients

# TOOLS FOR ENGAGING AFTER DISCLOSURE OF SEX WORK

## Medical Assessments

- Focus on Prevention

  - Educate youth on PrEP and PEP

- Sex positivity – be open to asking questions about all sexual behaviors

- Explore role of substance use and sex work

  - In New York City, rise in crystal meth use in these communities

# UNDERSTANDING LEGAL SYSTEMS

- Equip staff and patients with up-to-date legal information that disproportionately target LGBTQ and feminine-presenting communities, youth, communities experiencing homelessness, people of color, and people engaging in sex work
  - Sex work and criminalization – may be included in sex trafficking laws
  - Minors access to health services – PEP, PrEP, sexual health services
  - Access to care for undocumented communities
    - In NYC, 9 out 10 people arrested for sex work are immigrants
    - May lead to detention and deportation
  - “Quality of Life” and loitering discriminatory laws
    - 94% of people arrested in New York City for loitering “with the purpose of prostitution” were black women

*\*State variations in these laws*

# NUANCES OF SEX WORK

## Sex work vs. Sex Trafficking

- Sex trafficking involves the threat or use of force, abduction, deception, or other forms of coercion for the purpose of exploitation ([www.swopebehindbars.org](http://www.swopebehindbars.org))
- Sex work is a consensual transaction
- Those who engage in sex work are not victims and their self-determination and agency should be respected while still understanding systemic oppression that impact other employment/financial opportunities and contribute to their choice to engage in sex work as a means of survival and labor
- Legal complications with youth engaging in sex work, where many human rights advocates define sex work through age of consent laws – some states (New York included) may automatically treat sex work with minors as sex trafficking

# NUANCES OF SEX WORK

## Decriminalization vs Legalization

- Decriminalization: Removal of criminal and administrative penalties that apply to sex work
  - Would allow protections under labor law, would help with issues of workplace health and safety, child custody, social security protections
- Legalization: Regulation of sex work based on other concerns and objectives, such as the health of clients, taxation, or public morality; example: could include mandatory HIV testing

# QUESTIONS???

# CalLEN-LORDE



[ter.org](http://ter.org)

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# CalLEN-LORDE

# Q&A

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