

# Psychosocial factors affecting HIV risk behaviors among male-to-female transgenders (MTF TGs) in San Francisco

Tooru Nemoto, Ph.D., JoAnne G. Keatley, MSW, Don Operario, Ph.D., Toho Soma  
 Center for AIDS Prevention Studies  
 University of California, San Francisco  
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## Focus Groups

- Conducted seven focus groups between November 1999 and February 2000.
- Inclusion criteria: Pre- or post-operative transgender; ever exchanged sex for money or drugs; African American, API, or Latina; 18 years or older.
- 48 MTF transgenders participated: 16 African Americans, 15 Asian Pacific Islanders, 12 Latinas, and 5 other ethnicity.

### Theme 1: Psychological needs and mental health

“For me...what hurts most is not the physical abuse. It’s basically, it’s emotional. Because when people treat you in a different way, you know, they don’t physically hurt you basically they just abuse verbally. That hurts. I think that hurts more, because it, it hurts your moral esteem and your self-esteem and your whole personality.”

### Theme 2: Relationships

“I really want to have a long-term partner. I would like a partner who would like me day and night without any make-up or with make-up. I would like him to like me just the way I am. Even if I have this front part which he really doesn’t like but he likes me for who I am.”

### Theme 3: Inadequate health and social services

“I have been to many doctors around the country, and they never know. They would say ‘Well, we never had any transsexuals. What do we do?’ So we used to have to tell the doctors what we wanted.”

### Theme 4: Need for TG-sensitive, TG-specific HIV and drug abuse prevention intervention programs

“...let them see that HIV and AIDS has a face, that transgenders have HIV and AIDS and they get [it]...and therefore they should be inclusive and included in everything. Now I don’t want transgenders to be an afterthought, ‘Oh yeah, and TG’s.’ And when I go to meetings and I sit there, I don’t want to be diminished because I’m transgender.”

## Survey Research in MTF TG Community

- Interviewed 332 MTF TGs: 112 African American, 110 API, 110 Latina.
- Participants recruited from community venues (bars, restaurants, hair salons, etc.), individual referrals, and collaborating AIDS service organizations.
- 1.5 hour interview using a structured questionnaire.
- Half the Latina interviews conducted in Spanish.

### Self-reported HIV prevalence and testing rates

| HIV                               |     |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| Overall                           | 26% |
| African American                  | 42% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander            | 13% |
| Latina                            | 23% |
| Received an HIV test in past year |     |
| Overall                           | 55% |
| African American                  | 49% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander            | 46% |
| Latina                            | 68% |

### Mental health outcomes

| Depression             |     |
|------------------------|-----|
| Overall                | 40% |
| African American       | 37% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 24% |
| Latina                 | 60% |

Note: Current depression: CES-D (16 or over)

| Ever attempted suicide |     |
|------------------------|-----|
| Overall                | 29% |
| African Americans      | 41% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 15% |
| Latina                 | 45% |

### Transphobia

|  | % ever |
|--|--------|
| • Beaten up for being transgender or effeminate as a child.  | 37%    |
| • Beaten up for being transgender or effeminate as an adult. | 20%    |
| • Lost a job or career opportunity for being transgender     | 38%    |
| • Moved away from family or friends for being transgender    | 53%    |
| • Harassed by police for being transgender                   | 61%    |

### Violence and victimization

| Ever physically assaulted |     |
|---------------------------|-----|
| Overall                   | 39% |
| African American          | 39% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander    | 36% |
| Latina                    | 41% |
| Ever raped as a minor     |     |
| Overall                   | 30% |
| African American          | 40% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander    | 12% |
| Latina                    | 37% |
| Ever raped as an adult    |     |
| Overall                   | 25% |
| African American          | 35% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander    | 16% |
| Latina                    | 23% |

### Socioeconomic hardship

| Housing situation                |     |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| Stable housing                   | 47% |
| Unstable housing                 | 44% |
| Homeless                         | 5%  |
| Monthly income                   |     |
| Less than \$500                  | 19% |
| \$500 to \$1,000                 | 33% |
| \$1,000 to \$2,000               | 21% |
| More than \$2,000                | 25% |
| Employment income, past 6 months |     |
| Full-time job                    | 28% |
| Part-time or temp job            | 18% |
| No employment income             | 54% |

### Unprotected anal receptive intercourse in the past 30 days

|                               | Adjusted % (n / subsample) |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| with primary private partners |                            |
| Overall                       | 36% (62 / 173)             |
| African American              | 36% (24 / 67)              |
| Asian/Pacific Islander        | 34% (19 / 56)              |
| Latina                        | 38% (19 / 50)              |
| with casual partners          |                            |
| Overall                       | 18% (22 / 119)             |
| African American              | 31% (11 / 35)              |
| Asian/Pacific Islander        | 11% (4 / 35)               |
| Latina                        | 14% (7 / 49)               |
| with commercial sex partners  |                            |
| Overall                       | 9% (12 / 131)              |
| African American              | 16% (7 / 44)               |
| Asian/Pacific Islander        | 3% (1 / 29)                |
| Latina                        | 7% (4 / 58)                |

### Sex while under the influence of drugs in the past 30 days

|                              | Adjusted % (n / subsample) |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| with private partners        |                            |
| Overall                      | 72% (117 / 173)            |
| African American             | 76% (51 / 67)              |
| Asian/Pacific Islander       | 54% (30 / 56)              |
| Latina                       | 72% (36 / 50)              |
| with casual partners         |                            |
| Overall                      | 68% (81 / 119)             |
| African American             | 74% (26 / 35)              |
| Asian/Pacific Islander       | 57% (20 / 35)              |
| Latina                       | 71% (49 / 25)              |
| with commercial sex partners |                            |
| Overall                      | 70% (92 / 131)             |
| African American             | 68% (30 / 44)              |
| Asian/Pacific Islander       | 66% (19 / 29)              |
| Latina                       | 74% (43 / 58)              |

## Conclusions

- HIV prevention programs should target risk behaviors in the context of primary private relationships.
- Additional research to build models that link transphobic experiences with risk-taking behaviors.
- Increased funding for transgender-specific research and interventions.