

The Transgender Community

In 2006, the District of Columbia added a provision for “gender identity and gender expression” in its Human Rights Act, and therefore explicitly prohibited discrimination against gender-variant people including the District’s transgender community. This population remains, however, marginalized by the discrimination it faces on a daily basis and suffers from being essentially invisible in official data.

Vulnerable Socio-Economic Status:

- According to the Washington Transgender Needs Assessment Survey (WTNAS), the District’s transgender population has lower educational outcomes with **40%** of the respondents without a high school diploma.
- In fact, employment is the biggest obstacle to overcome for trans people:
 - In the District of Columbia, **42%** of respondents were unemployed, **29%** had no income and **31%** had incomes of under \$10,000/year (source: WTNAS).
 - According to the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, **15%** of transgender people reported incomes of \$10,000 or lower, compared with 7% for the general population.
- Consequently, housing instability remains an issue:
 - **26%** of transgender people have a hard time finding different places to sleep at for short periods of time and **11%** have been evicted at least once¹.
 - In the District, 19% of transgender respondents do not have a living space, and 13% of those who have a living space do not feel safe in their own home (source: WTNAS).

Specific Health Concerns:

- The transgender community is disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS.
 - **25%** of transgender respondents reporting living with HIV. Male-to-female people are even more at risk with a 32% rate (source: WTNAS).
 - National HIV rates in the male-to-female population are more than 3 times that for men who have sex with men (MSM), and sixty times of the general population².
- Transgender people struggle with accessing medical care:
 - **39%** do not have a physician for routine health care.
 - While **52%** of the respondents had taken hormones at some point in their lives, **37%** did not know where to obtain trans-related services (source: WTNAS)
- The transgender population is more at risk in terms of mental health:
 - **35%** of the District’s respondents have experienced suicidal ideation, and **64%** of them attributed it to gender identity issues (source: WTNAS)
 - On average, **50%** of the transgender community suffers from mental health issues compared to 5% of the LGB community and 2% of the heterosexual population³.
 - Respectively **34** and **36%** of transgender persons reported an alcohol or drug abuse problem (source: WTNAS).

¹ National Center for Transgender Equality & the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, “National Transgender Discrimination Survey” – page 3

² Center for Disease Control

³ Movement Advancement Project, “Advancing Transgender Equality”, March 2009

A population often subjected to violence:

- According to the Movement Advancement Project, most transgender participants reported some form of violence: **35%** reported forced sex, sexual assault or rape, **42%** reported some form of physical abuse and **80%** reported verbal abuse.
- In the District, **43%** declared being victims of violence or crime with **75%** attributing to transphobia and/or homophobia (source: WTNAS).

Barriers to full rights and meaningful participation within society:

- Negative outcomes of lower economic status:
 - In the Washington Transgender Needs Assessment Survey, **47%** of transgender people reported not having health care insurance.
 - Lack of financial means may lead to harmful self-treatment: **58%** of transgender people have acquired hormones from friends or on the street.
 - A lower socio-economic status reduces access to information: **37%** of participants declared not knowing where to obtain trans-specific services and less than **10%** knew of the Benjamin *Standards of Care*⁴. Additionally, **25%** of those engaging in unsafe sexual behavior admitted they didn't know there was a risk associated with the behavior (source: WTNAS).
- In spite of DC's trans-inclusive legislation, discrimination is the biggest obstacle to self-sufficiency:
 - "Provider insensitivity or hostility to transgendered people" is cited as one of the main reasons explaining the low overall access to transgender care services (source: WTNAS). Indeed, **30%** of transgender adults are more likely to delay or not seek care for fear of mistreatment, especially if they have to "out" themselves⁵.
 - In DC, **15%** of transgender people reported losing a job due to discrimination based on their gender identity. A rate that is even higher nation-wide with **26%**⁶.
- Finally, transgender people still face safety issues in public spaces:
 - According to a survey carried out by DC Trans Coalition, **68%** of transgender people have been denied access to, verbally harassed in, and/or physically assaulted in public bathrooms⁷.
 - Transgender people are also more likely to have negative interactions with the police because they "fit" the profile of sex workers: **33%** of transgender respondents declared fearing violence from the police⁸, and **75%** reported worse treatment and human rights violations while locked up⁹.

This information is drawn from the Washington Transgender Needs Assessment Survey and several national reports in order to have a broader perspective on the challenges facing the District's transgender population. This fact sheet only begins to inform us on the needs of transgender people in Washington, DC. More data is needed, especially on transgender youth and transgender elders.

⁴ The Benjamin Standards of Care are a protocol for people who wish to undergo hormonal and surgical gender-reassignment.

⁵ SAGE & Movement Advancement Project: "Improving the Lives of LGBT Elders", March 2010 - page 31

⁶ National Center for Transgender Equality & the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, "National Transgender Discrimination Survey" – page 1

⁷ <http://dctranscoalition.wordpress.com/2009/11/08/our-survey-results/> Consulted on August 12th, 2010

⁸ The Alliance for a Safe and Diverse DC "Move Along: Policing Sex Work in Washington, DC", page 38

⁹ The Alliance for a Safe and Diverse DC "Move Along: Policing Sex Work in Washington, DC", page 44