



Trans PULSE E-Bulletin

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Trans PULSE is a community-based research project investigating the impact of social exclusion and discrimination on the health of trans people in Ontario, Canada. Funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, this project is a partnership between researchers, trans community members, and community organizations committed to improving health outcomes for trans people. We hope that health professionals, policy makers, trans communities and allies will use the results of this research to remove barriers, create positive changes, and to improve the health and well-being of trans people.

Background

Transphobia has been described as an “irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against people whose gendered identities, appearances, or behaviours deviate from societal norms”.¹ This includes transgender, transsexual, transitioned, transgender, and gender-queer people, as well as some two-spirit people. Transphobia exists within a context of cisnormativity, the expectation that all people are- and should be- cisgender, or non-trans.² Transphobia includes acts of exclusion, discrimination, and violence, as well as attitudes that trans people may themselves internalize. Here we present information about the types and levels of transphobia experienced by trans people in Ontario.

Our Approach

Trans PULSE used a research method that allowed us to take the most statistically accurate picture possible of trans Ontarians.³ Surveys were completed in 2009-2010 by 433 trans people age 16 or older who lived, worked or received health care in Ontario. Participants indicated that they fit under the broad umbrella term of “trans”, identified with a range of gender identities, and were not required to have begun a social or medical gender transition. Our measure of perceived experiences of transphobia (modified from a scale developed by Diaz et al.⁴) accounts for instances of transphobic discrimination and for internalized transphobia resulting from those instances and from societal cisnormativity. Levels of transphobia were categorized based on the average frequency of experiences reported; low levels represent having experienced any or all of the forms listed one or two times, moderate levels represent having

	Total %
Because you are trans/for being trans, have you...	
Ever been made fun of	73
Ever been hit or beaten up	26
Ever heard that trans people aren't normal	96
Ever been objectified or fetishized sexually	57
Ever felt that being trans hurt or embarrassed family	78
Ever tried to pass as non-trans	74
Ever been turned down for a job	39
Ever had to move away	32
Ever been harassed by police	24
Ever worry about growing old alone	77
Ever feared you will die young	67

Please note: these represent statistical estimates that have a margin of error. Please use caution when interpreting these numbers.

experienced them sometimes, while high levels represent having experienced them many times, on average.

Key Findings

Experiences of transphobia were nearly universal among trans Ontarians, with 98% reporting at least one experience of transphobia. Almost all (96%) had heard that trans people aren't normal. Every type of transphobia measured was experienced by at least one-quarter of trans Ontarians, including physical violence and police harassment. About three-quarters of trans Ontarians have been made fun of for being trans, have felt that being trans hurt or embarrassed their family, have tried to pass as non-trans, and worry about growing old alone. However, trans Ontarians do not all experience the same amount of transphobia.

While 11% of trans Ontarians report experiencing high levels of transphobia and 51% have experienced moderate levels, 39% have experienced lower levels. We also found that, on average, female-to-male or transmasculine spectrum individuals (FTMs) experience transphobia less frequently than male-to-female or transfeminine spectrum individuals (MTFs). FTMs are statistically significantly more likely than MTFs to report experiencing low levels of transphobia (47% for FTMs versus 29% for MTFs). Among individual questions, FTMs were significantly less likely to report having been made fun of, having to move away, or having worried about growing old alone.

Implications

Unfortunately, the vast majority of trans Ontarians experience transphobia. That the most commonly experienced form of transphobia was hearing that trans people are not normal reminds us that societal cisnormativity must be challenged to improve the health and well-being of trans people. Transphobia is detrimental to the physical and mental health of trans people and is associated with increased risk of depression.⁵ For those who face all these types of transphobia on a regular basis, impacts may be

	Total %
Level of transphobia experienced*	
Low	39
Moderate	51
High	11

* Percentages have been rounded and may not add up to 100%. Please note: these represent statistical estimates that have a margin of error. Please use caution when interpreting these numbers.

especially severe. It is important to note that despite the fact that MTF Ontarians are less likely than FTM Ontarians to be living in their felt gender full or part-time,⁶ they experience transphobia more often. This highlights the need for anti-transphobia initiatives that address the particular impacts of transphobia on MTF-spectrum trans people. Thankfully, since these data were collected, explicit gender identity and expression protections have been added to the Ontario Human Rights Code, and legislative efforts are underway to add gender identity to the Canadian Human Rights Act and Criminal Code hate crimes provisions. In addition, the Accepting Schools Act recently enacted in Ontario will help address transphobia in the province's high schools.

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Contributing Authors:

Roxanne Longman Marcellin, Ayden Scheim, Greta Bauer, Nik Redman

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