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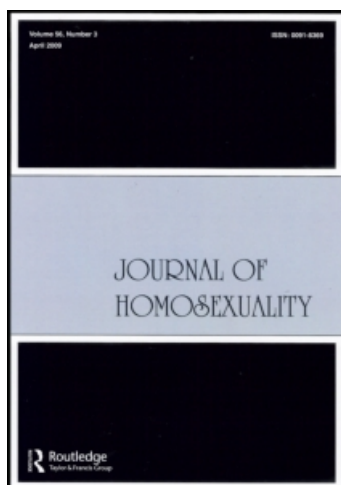
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## Gender Violence

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# Gender Violence: Transgender Experiences with Violence and Discrimination

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**ABSTRACT.** There is a pervasive pattern of discrimination and prejudice against transgendered people within society. Both economic discrimination and experiencing violence could be the result of a larger social climate that severely sanctions people for not conforming to society's norms concerning gender; as such, both would be strongly associated with each other. **Questionnaires** were distributed to people either through events or through volunteers, and made available upon the World Wide Web. A sample of 402 cases was collected over the span of 12 months (April 1996-April 1997). We found that over half the people within this sample experienced some form of harassment or violence within their lifetime, with a quarter experiencing a violent incident. Further investigation found that experiencing **economic discrimination because one is transgendered had the strongest association with experiencing a transgender related violent incident.** Economic discrimination was related to transgendered people's experience with violence. Therefore, both hate crimes legislation and employment protections are needed for transgendered individuals. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

**KEYWORDS.** Transgender, violence, discrimination, hate crimes, harassment

## INTRODUCTION

Gender identity and presentation are popular topics within many fields of study, but few discuss the violence and discrimination experienced by those who do not fit within traditional gender norms. Transgendered people (trans-people) are people who do not follow traditional gender norms. They include intersexed persons, transsexuals, cross-dressers/transvestites, and others who in one way or another do not conform to traditional gender norms. At various times in their lives gender nonconformists become the focus of attention of people or groups who are emotionally invested in enforcing gender norms. Experience demonstrates that this attention is rarely friendly; rather, it often takes the form of hate and violence; as Herek (1990, p. 328) points out, "... the importance of gender nonconformity remains relatively unchanged: People who transgress gender roles remain at the low end of the hierarchy of acceptability. . . ." The purpose of this study was to examine

transgendered people's experience of violence and harassment as an initial attempt at establishing the scope of the problem.

Gender based violence and discrimination results in an environment in which covert if not overt permission is given to society to "punish" people for gender transgressions. This gender fundamentalism operates by denying and stigmatizing any form of gender nonconformity, in the same manner heterosexism denigrates nonheterosexual relationships (Herek, 1990). Like heterosexism, gender fundamentalism is institutionalized. Federal hate crimes' legislation does not document attacks based upon one's gender identity or presentation, and only a few cities currently have employment protection and/or hate crime legislation protecting people from discrimination and violence resulting from their gender nonconformity.

The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP) began to collect data concerning attacks upon trans-people in 1995. While NCAVP documented only 69 such attacks in 1995 (2% of their entire sample), they believe that violence against trans-people is pervasive and grossly underreported (NCAVP, 1995). NCAVP could not draw any definite conclusions because of the small sample size. However, they did find that while trans-people made up only 2% of their entire sample, trans-people made up 16% of all murder victims. For the most part, these incidents either go unreported or are misreported as anti-gay/lesbian incidents.

People within the transgendered community feel that there is a pervasive pattern of discrimination and prejudice against trans-people within society. Economic discrimination and experiencing violence could both be the result of a larger social climate which severely sanctions people for not conforming to society's norms concerning gender; as such, both would be strongly associated with each other. This study hypothesizes that experiencing economic discrimination because he or she was transgendered will have a stronger effect upon the respondent's probability of reporting a violent incident than demographic characteristics.

## METHODS

GenderPAC set out to gather data concerning the extent to which transgendered people are at risk for violence and discrimination. The questionnaire used for this study was developed in conjunction with the New York Anti-Violence Project (NYAVP). The questionnaire was based upon the format used by NCAVP in their measurement of people's experiences with violence. However, unlike NCAVP, which measures recent experiences, the Transgender Violence Study measured people's lifetime experiences of vio-

lence and harassment. We asked if they have ever been a victim of violence or harassment because of their status as transgendered people. If they answered yes to this question, they were then asked to proceed and give more details about their experiences, including information about their two worst incidents of harassment and/or violence. If they answered no, they were then finished with the survey.

The study questionnaire was either distributed by GenderPAC personnel directly to transgendered people during events and meetings, or distributed to volunteers across the United States who then copied and distributed the questionnaires to the relevant people in their area. Another method that was used to reach people was by formatting a copy of the questionnaire onto the World Wide Web. We are unable to say how representative our sample is compared to the larger transgender population. However, care was taken in order to make the sample as diverse as possible by reaching out to sub-populations that usually have been neglected in studies of transgendered people (low income, race/ethnic minorities, and female to male [FtM] transgendered people). A sample of 402 cases was collected over the span of 12 months (April 1996-April 1997).

### Study Variables

Information was collected on the respondent's age, race/ethnicity, employment status, income level, sexual orientation, and transgender identity (see Table 1). Respondents were then asked if they have been the victim of violence or harassment because of their status as transgendered people. The respondent could answer either yes (one) or no (zero). If they answered yes to this question, they were asked if they experienced any specific forms of harassment and/or violence in their entire life, within the past year, and the past 30 days. Responses were cumulative over time. These questions were also answered on a yes (one) or no (zero) basis. Once these questions were answered, the respondent was asked to give specific information for the worst two incidents. A variable was created that identified whether a respondent reported at least one violent incident. A violent incident was defined as one of the following: assault with a weapon, assault without a weapon, rape, sexual assault, or attempted assault. A zero indicated that they did not report any violent incidents, while one indicated that they did report at least one violent incident. Respondent's were also asked if they experienced any form of economic discrimination as a result of being transgendered (being fired, not being hired, demoted, losing promotions, or being unfairly disciplined); the question was also scored either yes (one) or no (zero).

TABLE 1. Sample Characteristics (n = 402)

	Percent
Age:	
Less Than 18 Years Old	0.5%
18-22 Years Old	3.0%
23-29 Years Old	11.2%
30-44 Years Old	44.5%
45-64 Years Old	36.6%
65 and older	3.7%
Missing	0.5%
Sexual Orientation:	
Lesbian or Gay	11.2%
Bisexual	16.2%
Heterosexual	38.1%
Questioning	11.7%
Other	6.5%
Missing Data	16.4%
Trangender Status:	
Crossdresser	25.6%
Drag Queen or Drag King	1.2%
Transgendered Men	19.7%
Transgendered Women	6.0%
Transsexual Men (Female to Male)	20.1%
Transsexual Women (Male to Female)	20.9%
Other	6.4%
Race/Ethnicity:	
African-American	4.2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.0%
Latina/Latino	1.5%
Multi-Racial	5.5%
Native American	14.9%
White	70.9%
Other	1.2%
Missing	0.7%
Employment:	
Unemployed	6.0%
Part-Time	8.5%
Full-Time	61.9%

TABLE 1 (continued)

Employment (continued):	Percent
Retired	7.2%
Student	10.0%
On Disability or Welfare	5.7%
Missing	0.7%
Yearly Income:	
Less than \$10,000	17.2%
\$10,000-\$25,000	20.1%
\$25,000-\$40,000	22.6%
\$40,000-\$60,000	19.7%
\$60,000+	16.4%
Missing	4.0%

Specific demographic characteristics were made into dichotomous variables so that their effects upon the reporting of violence could be assessed. Race was measured as whether respondents identified themselves as white (one) or as some other race or ethnicity (zero). Sexual orientation was measured as whether or not respondents identified themselves as heterosexual. Employment was measured as whether they were employed full-time at any job. Whether respondents identified as a transsexual or not was used within analysis. It is likely that transsexuals may be targeted because they present a transgendered appearance consistently across many contexts. Age and income remained as continuous variables (see Table 1).

Analysis

The analysis presented percentages for the demographic variables as well as for the variables measuring respondent’s experiences with violence and/or harassment. Logistic regression was then used to examine if demographic factors could influence people’s experience with violence. Demographic characteristics were entered first, followed by economic discrimination. Being white, heterosexual, employed full-time, a transsexual, older, or having a high income may influence a person’s likelihood of experiencing a violent incident, but there effects should be less than the effect economic discrimination has upon experiencing violence.



## RESULTS

### Study Characteristics

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the sample. Overall, the sample for this study was found to be predominately white (70.9%), employed full-time (61.9%), heterosexual (38.1%), and 30 or more years old (84.8%). Crossdressers and transsexuals make up the majority of the sample. It is important to note that the numbers of male to female (MtF) and female to male (FtM) transsexuals are similar to each other; many surveys in the past have generally underrepresented FtM transsexuals. People's income was on the average between \$25,000 and \$40,000 (22.6%).

### Overall Experience of Harassment or Violence

Table 2 presents people's report of harassment or violence. Reports of more than one experience are common. For example, someone could report being assaulted without a weapon in the same time period that he or she reported being raped and verbally assaulted. The most common experience was verbal abuse. Over half the sample experienced, at some time in their lives, verbal harassment for being transgendered. Being stalked is the second most common experience, followed by assault without a weapon. Overall, 59.5% of the sample experienced either violence or harassment (26.6% experienced a violent incident), and 37.1% reported some form of economic discrimination.

### Rape/Attempted Rape

Close to 14% of our sample reported being raped or someone attempting to rape them at sometime in their lives. Further analysis found that the percentage for both MtF and FtM transsexuals were approximately 21% for each. The reason transsexuals would have a higher rate than the others may be due to the fact that they interact more within society as a transgendered person and are more likely to be noticed and targeted by others. Further analysis did not find a statistically significant difference between FtM and MtF transsexuals' reports of rape or violence in general.

### Assault

Over their lifetimes, 19.4% of the sample reported being physically assaulted without a weapon, 17.4% reported having objects thrown at them, and 10.2% reported being assaulted with a weapon. Overall, close to half this sample (47%) was assaulted in some way in the course of their lives.

TABLE 2. Experience with Violence or Harassment (n = 402)

			Number		Percent	
Victim of Violence or Harassment (Lifetime) Percent of Entire Sample			239		59.5%	
Experienced Violence (Lifetime) Percent of Entire Sample			107		26.6%	
Experienced Economic Discrimination (Lifetime) Percent of Entire Sample			149		37.1%	
Percent of Entire Sample Number indicates the number of cases reporting the specific experience. Multiple experiences were possible.	Past Month		Past Year		Lifetime	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Street harassment/ Verbal abuse	72	17.9%	135	33.6%	223	55.5%
Being followed or stalked	12	3.0%	37	9.2%	92	22.9%
Assaulted without a weapon	7	1.7%	26	6.5%	78	19.4%
Objects thrown at you (e.g., bottles, rocks)	9	2.2%	26	6.5%	70	17.4%
Rape/attempted rape	2	0.5%	11	2.7%	55	13.7%
Assaulted with a weapon	5	1.2%	12	3.0%	41	10.2%
Robbed (by one person)	2	0.5%	7	1.7%	37	9.2%
Unjustified arrest	3	0.7%	8	2.0%	31	7.7%
Robbed (by a group of people)	1	0.2%	5	1.2%	19	4.7%

Logistic Regression

Table 3 presents the results of the logistic regression upon experiencing economic discrimination. Heterosexuals were approximately two times less likely to experience some form of economic discrimination than non-heterosexuals. Those with high incomes were not as likely to experience economic discrimination as those with low incomes. Transsexuals were close to three times more likely to experience some form of economic discrimination than nontranssexuals.

TABLE 3. Logistic Regression Analysis of Experiencing Economic Discrimination

	b	Stand. Error	Odds Ratio
Age	−0.088	0.154	0.916
Heterosexual	−0.667	0.246	0.513**
White	−0.187	0.268	0.830
Employed Full-Time	−0.311	0.276	0.733
Yearly Income	−0.294	0.112	0.746**
Transsexual	1.013	0.231	2.753***
Goodness of Fit	375.144		
Chi-Square	62.954***		

\*\* ≤ .01    \*\*\* ≤ .001

Table 4 presents the results of the logistic regression upon experiencing a violent incident. Part A shows the results for the demographic variables. Part B shows the results for demographic and discrimination variables. Part A shows that age, being employed full-time, and income all have a negative effect upon the probability of experiencing violence. Older people, those employed full-time, and those with a high income all have a lower probability of experiencing violence. However, once economic discrimination was entered, the effect of income was no longer significant (Part B). Further, economic discrimination had the strongest association with experiencing violence. People who have experienced some form of economic discrimination were close to five times more likely to experience some form of violence. Younger people remained more likely to have experienced a violent activity controlling for their experiences with economic discrimination, but its effect was smaller than that of economic discrimination. Lastly, transsexuals remained approximately two times more likely to experience some form of violence than nontranssexuals within the sample, both before and after economic discrimination was entered into the equation. The implications of the findings will be discussed within the next section.

## DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to present information about trans-people's experience with violence and harassment. What we found was that over half the people within this sample experienced some form of harassment or violence within their lifetimes, with a quarter experiencing a violent incident. Fur-

TABLE 4. Logistic Regression Analysis of Experiencing Violence by Demographic Characteristics and Experience with Economic Discrimination

	A			B		
	b	Stand. Error	Odds Ratio	b	Stand. Error	Odds Ratio
Age	−0.404	0.170	0.668*	−0.453	0.180	0.636**
Heterosexual	−0.444	0.275	0.641	−0.251	0.293	0.778
White	−0.250	0.287	0.779	−0.229	0.298	0.794
Employed Full-Time	−0.632	0.300	0.531*	−0.545	0.313	0.580
Yearly Income	−0.286	0.124	0.751*	−0.226	0.129	0.798
Transsexual	0.838	0.256	2.311***	0.576	0.274	1.778*
Experienced Economic Discrimination				1.530	0.275	4.618***
Goodness of Fit	394.882			351.491		
Chi-Square	67.015***			99.692***		

\* ≤ .05    \*\* ≤ .01    \*\*\* ≤ .001

ther investigation found that experiencing economic discrimination because one is transgendered was the strongest predictor of experiencing a transgender related violent incident. While it is possible that economic discrimination could lead to a greater likelihood of experiencing violence, it is more likely that a pervasive pattern of discrimination and prejudice exists for transgendered people which can influence their experiences of both economic discrimination and violence.

Working adults who disclose their transgendered experience, or request reasonable accommodation to it, are fired, harassed, intimidated or assaulted by supervisors and coworkers, have their privacy violated, have their property defaced and destroyed, or are murdered. Workplace discrimination is so rampant that it is the norm among transgendered people, while outside the workplace visibly transgendered people are harassed, intimidated, and assaulted in public places (GenderPAC, 1997).

Another finding of this study was that younger people have a greater likelihood of experiencing violence than older people. Transgendered youths who disclose their status are scorned, attacked, and locked into or thrown out of their homes. Once homeless, many may have little alternative to sex work and all the risks to their life and health associated with it. While there were too few cases of people under the age of eighteen to make any conclusive statements,

people have found that transgendered youths are at a very high risk for many problems. Rogers (1995) stated that transgendered youths have a greater likelihood of attempting suicide, substance use, unsafe sexual practices, of being exposed to STDs (including HIV), of being homeless, dropping out of school, and of experiencing high levels of distress, as well as experiencing many forms of discrimination, harassment, and violence. Unfortunately, little has been done to examine the problems and needs of this population.

Violence and harassment can have other implications upon the lives of trans-people. Otis and Skinner (1996) found that victimization had a positive effect upon depression for both gay men and lesbians. Further, Meyer (1995) found that experiencing minority stress (stress resulting from a person's stigmatized status) increases gay mens' feelings of distress. It is possible that victimization could also have the same effect upon trans-people. Victimization could also impact people's lives in other ways like substance use. Further investigation is needed to understand the effects that discrimination and prejudice has upon the lives of transgendered people.

Violence and harassment of transgendered people can also have other effects upon victims. Berrill and Herek (1990) state that violent incidents lead to people's sexual orientation being exposed, which then could lead to other experiences of discrimination such as being fired from a job, or denied housing. They refer to this as secondary victimization—experiencing other forms of discrimination resulting from victimization that is mostly legal and widely condoned. It is likely that trans-people will especially suffer from secondary victimization. Once a person's gender status becomes known, they may be fired, thrown out of their dwelling, or fall victim to any number of things because they do not have any legal protections from such forms of harassment. Berrill and Herek (1990) conclude that policy changes are needed so that victimization based upon sexual orientation is stopped, and it is just as important to change governmental policies so that the victimization of trans-people is stopped as well.

Violence which is motivated by hatred of or bias against a particular group or characteristic and where a consensus exists that such violence should be stopped is often dealt with legislatively in the following ways: (1) the incidence of violence is statistically tracked so that it can be better understood; (2) educational efforts are designed and implemented so that law enforcement, social services, and other involved professionals can recognize it; and (3) penalty-enhancement legislation is enacted so that those who commit such violence are singled out for particularly severe treatment. During the 104th Congress, 2d Session, the Hate Crimes Statistics Act (HCSA), 28 U.S.C. e534 note, was re-authorized and funded through 2002. The HCSA facilitates data gathering about hate crimes that involve bias against race, religion, sexual ori-

entation, and/or ethnicity. The HCSA does not, however, specifically identify hate crimes based on bias against gender identity and presentation.

Employment discrimination is another issue in need of being addressed. Currently, only a few cities have specific protections for transgendered people regarding employment discrimination (e.g., San Francisco and Minneapolis). Legislation concerning employment discrimination is just as important as legislation concerning hate crimes. Allowing the discrimination of transgendered people will continue to give society the view that transgendered citizens do not have all of the rights that nontransgendered citizens have and, therefore, can be targets for all forms of violence and harassment. While hate crimes legislation covering incidents involving transgendered people is important, it is also necessary to deal with the issue of economic discrimination.

It is important to note that such legislation could also help those who do not remotely consider themselves as transgendered. Namaste (1996) stated that gender based violence can have profound affects upon all people. Gender based violence and discrimination acts to maintain conformity to the traditional gender system, and many people may experience a small aspect of it whenever they transgress certain gender norms. Because transgendered individuals are seen as breaking gender norms in a major way, they are most likely to experience extreme sanctions for it, such as violence and discrimination.

### Limitations

We cannot say that the sample generally represents the larger population of trans-people. Selection was not conducted through any particular sampling technique. Further, we cannot calculate the total number of forms that were distributed, as volunteers from across the country made copies of the form as needed. Their actions were crucial in exposing as many people to the study as possible, considering our lack of funding. Regardless, our goal was to make sure we represented as many types of people as possible. We were partially successful in this regard. We were able to collect information within a wide income range (from low income to high income), and the number of FtM transsexuals is comparable to the number of MtF transsexuals. We were unable to gather a racially diverse sample, and the respondents tended to be over thirty years of age. This greatly limited our ability to infer information concerning transgendered youths or racial and ethnic minorities. Further studies must make better arrangements in order to achieve a more diverse sample.

Another issue is the labeling of trans-people. While this study allowed a wide range of choices in relation to one's transgender identity, it was still found to be too rigid. In relation to issues of discrimination or violence, the use of identities may not be reliable. What could be important is how "out" people

are to the larger society, not whether someone is a crossdresser or a transsexual. The more people are aware of a person's transgendered status (regardless of whether they are a crossdresser or transsexual) could allow for more opportunities for violence and discrimination to occur. It is important to note that there are transsexuals who are not "out" to others and are not identified by society as transgender. As such, this measure was not a strong measure of visibility.

In conclusion, violence and discrimination against transgendered people is an issue that cannot be ignored any longer. Presently, activists across the country are organizing in order to deal with these issues at all levels of government. Unless policies are changed to allow for the existence and acceptance of transgendered people, they will continue to experience violence and discrimination as a result of their gender nonconformity.

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