

Supporting Trans Latinas in gender-based violence services: A call to action





#### Acknowledgement

This report was created in collaboration with The TransLatin@ Coalition and Esperanza United (formerly Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families & Communities). We hope that this report brings awareness to the realities of Trans Latinas while seeking gender-based violence services and brings attention to the research, policy, and practice work that needs to happen in order to transform services delivery to TransLatin@s.

Suggested reference: Esperanza United. (2021). Supporting Trans Latinas in Gender-Based Violence Services: A Call to Action.

Esperanza United has chosen to use "@" in place of the masculine "o" when referring to people that are either gender neutral or both masculine and feminine in make-up. This decision reflects our commitment to gender inclusion and recognizes the important contributions that all people make to our communities.

#### **Relevant terms**

The following terms are terms that are used in different aspects within our society. This glossary of terms can help you understand the terminology that is used in multiple settings within social service spaces.

**Sex** is the physical traits you are born with or develop that we think of as "sex characteristics," as well as the sex you are assigned at birth (Sam Killermann, 2017).

**Cisgender** refers to a person who conforms to dominant gender behavior by living in the sex category assigned at birth. Cisgender status is considered the norm and is rarely questioned, criminalized, or pathologized unless one has a disability and/or form part of a racial/ethnic/religious/body-type minority (Padrón & Salcedo, 2013).

**Sexual orientation** includes different forms of attraction, behaviors, and identitites. Sexual orientation can but does not always match sexual/physical, romantic and emotioanl attraction expectations. Sexual orientation is more focused on who you like (Trevor Project, n.d.)

**Gender identity** is a "person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms" (International Commission of Jurists, 2006)

**LGTBQ+** is an acronym for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer" as well as the infinite number of ways for people to express their sexuality, gender, or sex.

**Transgender** is the term used for people who identify differently from their sex assigned at birth. It is also an umbrella term used to include transexual, crossdresser, gender queer, femme queen, A.D., two spirit, and many more who defy imposed gender norms (The Sylvia Rivera Law Project, n.d.).

**Trans:** is an adopted and embraced term by members of the Transgender community. This term is now commonly used as an abbreviated version of the term "Transgender" (Padrón & Salcedo, 2013).

**Transphobia:** is commonly understood as fear, rejection, violence, and discrimination towards a person or a group of people whose gender identity, behavior, and presentation vary from the normalized gender identity of the majority (Padrón & Salcedo, 2013).

**Gender non-conforming** is the term used for people who do not follow societies' ideas or stereotypes about how to look or act based on the female or male sex they were assigned at birth (The Sylvia Rivera Law Project, n.d.)

Trans Latina refers to individuals who identify as trans feminine and as Hispanic or Latina.

**Culturally specific services** refers to community-based, culturally relevant, and linguistically specific services and resources provided to culturally specific communities. "Culturally specific" means primarily directed toward racial and ethnic minority groups (as defined in section 1707(g) of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 300-u-6(g)). In this document, culturally specific programs are referred to as Community Based Organizations (CBO)

**Passing** is a term used to describe whether a person is perceived as a certain gender; for example, "passing as a woman" or "passing as a man." For many transgender people, being able to "pass" as the gender they align with is important for a sense of well-being, and "passing privilege" (The Trevor Project, n.d.).



### Supporting Trans Latinas in gender-based violence services: A call to action

Esperanza United (formerly Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network) seeks to better serve the Trans Latina community. Gender-based violence (GBV) and culturally specific organizations have the responsibility to acknowledge the realities, barriers, and challenges that Trans Latinas face when accessing services from mainstream and Latina-specific gender-based violence services. This call-to-action report seeks to bring awareness to Trans Latina experiences of gender-based violence, racism and transphobia in the gender-based violence field, and proposes future steps to better serve Trans Latina survivors of gender-based violence.

#### Introduction: Gender-based violence (GBV) among Trans Latinas

It is important to note the unique realities of Trans Latina survivors who seek GBV services. The first step is to understand Trans Latina identity. Sexual orientation and gender identity are fluid constructs. The acronym LGTBQ+ has been adopted to describe the number of ways for people to express their sexual orientation and gender. Identifying as transgender comes with unique challenges when seeking GBV services. The terms transgender and trans, while holding different meaning for different people, refers to an individual's gender identity and gender expression that opposes expectations. It is important for GBV providers to ask all people how they would like to be addressed and what pronouns they use instead of making assumptions based on the providers' t experience working with other trans or other LGBTQ+ identity. Appendix 1 describes the fluidity of gender and sexual orientation.

Although there have been increased efforts to address GBV in Latina and LGBQ communities, Latina transgender survivors are often unseen and their needs are unmet. The National Sexual Violence Resource Center found that individuals from LGBTQIA and gender non-confirming communities experience the same 1 in 4 rate of intimate partner violence and sexual assault as heterosexual communities (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2012). A 2015 study led by the Trans Latin@ Coalition found that 47% of transgender people are sexually assaulted at some point. Another 2015 survey on LGTBQ experiences of IPV from the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP,2016) reported that 46% of homicides were transgender women of color including Trans Latinas. Transgender survivors were also three times more likely to report being stalked compared to cisgender survivors. Furthermore, survivors who identified as



Latinas were 2 times more likely to report experiencing violence by a former or ex-partner compared to non-Latina survivors. Despite mounting evidence of the need for culturally relevant GBV services, there has been a lack of funding and services specifically tailored for Trans Latina survivors.

## Transphobia in advocacy, services, and organizations

Trans Latina survivors' experiences of GBV in their home country and their experience of fleeing violence and persecution add to the barriers in accessing adequate services. A study from The TransLatin@ Coalition in 2012 found that immigration status and legal documentation were key concern with 99% of participants reporting having a legal immigration status as very important. Additionally, participants reported multiple forms of psychological and physical violence, economic marginalization, and the need to 'fulfill one's dreams' as reasons for migrating."

Trans Latinas face additional barriers receiving adequate support from both LGBQ and Latin@ serving GBV organizations. It is important to note that the cultural and social context in which IPV occurs differs from heterosexual victims. Homophobia, heterosexism, and transphobia put LGTBQ victims at a higher disadvantage as abuse further supports the violence power structure. A study that examined experiences of transgender individuals identified transphobia as a barrier for seeking help (2006, pg. 163). Although, the study is not Latina specific, it is a reality that Trans Latinas have encountered. Furthermore, transphobia has been found to be used to perpetrate abuse to trans individuals who are at a structural disadvantage (Courvant & Cook-Daniels, 1998, 2001; Munson & Cook-Daniels, 2003; Ristock, 2011).

Due to these intersectional barriers, such as immigration status, Trans Latinas face additional challenges than the broader trans community such as, migration, acculturation, language barriers, societal discrimination, and marginalization. Despite the significant social and political gains for LGBTQ+ individuals in the past decade, Trans Latinas are still underrepresented and are often lumped together with the broader LGBTQ+ community. LGTBQ+ individuals who "pass" often do not experience the level of transphobia as trans individuals whose gender identity is not seen by others as the gender they identify. Passing is a term used to describe how transgender individuals are perceived a certain gender. For example, "passing as a woman" or "passing as a man" Being able to pass the gender that they align with provides "passing privilege" (The Trevor Project, (n.d.)). Throughout the process of receiving care or help for GBV experiences, Trans Latinas experience discrimination and are left feeling alone. Furthermore, structural realities such as shelters having inadequate policies and protocols to serve Trans Latinas deter trans Latinas from seeking



formal help. These experiences include being turned away from 'women' only shelters and/ or experiencing transphobic comments from staff or residents in shelters.

Organizations such as The TransLatin@ Coalition and the Network la Red have emerged to provide culturally responsive services to our Trans Latina communities. These organizations provide an array of services and resources tailored to the trans Latina community. However, there is still much work to do to adequately serve our Trans Latina community and for others to build inclusivity of Trans Latinas in their work.

# Building organizations, services, supports, that are inclusive of both transgender and Latin@ identities

Trans Latinas seeking help from GBV services, face the challenge of finding a place that understands their intersecting identities as a transgender and Latina person. Although there are a number of organizations that provide GBV services to Latinas and individuals who identify as LGBTQ+, there are very few organizations throughout the country that specifically provide GBV services to transgender individuals, much less to trans Latinas. They must navigate resources and services that were developed through a cisgender lens. LGTBQ+ community services are not always an option for Trans Latinas as these organizations may not comprehend the unique realities of transgender Latinas who experience GBV. Having a Latina identity calls for GBV practices that understand and provide culturally responsive services that include gender identity, orientation, expression, racial and ethnic identities, as well as and language access. Trans Latinas who are unable to receive the care in traditional GBV. LGTBO specific. and Latina specific organizations, turn to informal avenues for help such as family and friends. Organizational commitments are essential in creating inclusive organizational cultures, policies, and practices to ensure trauma-informed and culturally responsive services to trans Latinas.

To build services that are inclusive of Trans Latinas, organizations can do an organizational audit like the Quick Organizational Audit by the NW Network. It is an organizational audit to assess an organzations' inclusion and visibility of LGBTQ + individuals. The Trans Latin@ Coalition recommends for organizations to develop peer programs that are tailored to serve Trans Latinas and hire individuals that identify as Trans Latinas to manage these programs. It is also important for organizations to do a needs assessment specific to the organization's locality and partner with organizations in the community who have experience servicing Trans Latinas. As organizations learn about Trans Latinas experiences, organizations need to continue to build their capacity by expanding tailored specific services and providing adequate training to their current staff.



#### Next steps for practice, policy, and research

The increase of homicide and violence reports combined with impact of COVID-19, Trans Latinas are urgently in need of meaningful services that enhance safety and well-being. It is important to note that although this call to action provides recommendations for practice, policy, and research, it is imperative embrace holistic approaches to transform our work and our social structural. Casa de Esperanza's National Latin@ Network call to action for Trans Latinas to be acknowledged and adequately represented in the GBV movement. The following are suggestions on ways to provide GBV services to Trans Latinas.

#### Practice

- Hire staff with expertise to expand direct services and outreach to Trans Latina survivors.
- Develop or integrate services that are culturally specific and trans-inclusive.
- Develop, implement, evaluate, and disseminate resources specific to Trans Latina survivors.
- Provide ongoing training on the realities of trans Latinas to staff, volunteers, and board to maintain capacity and train new staff who have replaced staff turnover.

#### Policy

- Increase funding at the state and national level for Trans Latina programs.
- Change housing policies based on sex (eliminate the binary concept).
- Increase advocacy of Tran Latin@s rights by creating leadership.
- Create development programs that will support policy development to support Trans Latinas.
- Allocate money in program budgets to support changing legal name when creating programs for Trans Latinas.

#### Research

- Use community participatory approaches to investigate best practices for working with Trans Latina survivors.
- Research risk factors and prevention strategies for Trans Latina youth and adults.
- Conduct studies across diverse communities to examine the scope of the issue of GBV for Trans individuals in the United States.

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