

Building a provincial intersectoral network on trans-affirming practice to support sexual assault survivors: Planning stage

by Joseph Friedman Burley, Melissa Miljanovski, Megan Saad, Sheila Macdonald, Chett Bradley, & Janice Du Mont

What is the problem?

Transgender (trans) persons in Ontario are at significant risk of experiencing sexual violence, may have complex needs post-victimization, and are known to avoid or delay seeking care due to past and/or anticipated experiences of stigma and discrimination in healthcare settings (Bauer, Scheim, Deutsch, & Massarella, 2014).

What has been our response?

Dr. Janice Du Mont of Women's College Research Institute, Women's College Hospital has been collaborating with Egale Canada Human Rights Trust and the Ontario Network of Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centres (SA/DVTCs) on the trans-LINK Project – a multistage, intersectoral initiative devoted to the development of a provincial network on trans-affirming practice to better support sexual assault survivors.

This initiative builds on earlier research in which the need for training on the care of sexually assaulted trans clients among sexual assault nurse examiners working in Ontario's 35 SA/DVTCs (Du Mont et al., 2019) was assessed and, based on the findings, a curriculum on the provision of trans-affirming care developed and evaluated. We discovered that these nurses lacked knowledge about trans-positive services in their communities with whom they could refer or consult. To better connect SA/DVTCs with such services, between June 7 and July 11, 2019, 106 representatives from 96 of Ontario's SA/DVTCs and trans-positive community organizations attended one of *seven knowledge mobilization and community engagement meetings* held in Toronto, Mississauga, North York, London, Ottawa, Sudbury, and Thunder Bay.

trans-LINK PROJECT

What were these meetings about?

The goals of these meetings were to:

- (1) **Mobilize Knowledge** on the newly developed and successfully evaluated curriculum for sexual assault nurse examiners.
- (2) **Engage Community** in collaborative activities to promote dialogue about how an intersectoral network could strengthen services and supports at two interlocking levels of practice:

Regionally: Connect SA/DVTCs and trans-positive community organizations to establish longer-term referral relationships, increase collaboration, and enhance the continuum of care for trans survivors.

Provincially: Brainstorm the formation of a network to advance research, policy, and practice focused on sexual violence against trans communities.

What were some key insights learned?

Key insights that arose from discussions across the meetings, reflected in 18 core themes, are shown below:



The five most prominent themes included:

(1) Education and Training: Participants suggested that the prospective network should assume a central role in the design and facilitation of cross-sector education and training on the provision of trans-affirming care. These trainings could build upon the core components of our existing curriculum for sexual assault nurse examiners, for example, by including content on the use of proper names and pronouns with trans clients. There was a firm belief that embedding this kind of education and training across sectors (e.g., law enforcement, healthcare, social services) would help to ensure that service providers across the care continuum are offering sensitive and appropriate supports.

(2) Peer Involvement: Participants stressed the importance of centering the voices, experiences, and needs of trans community members in the continued development of a network and partnership building within and among regions. This sentiment was often linked to a desire to empower trans communities and to adequately acknowledge and compensate peer workers and advocates for their work.

(3) Advocacy: Participants identified a role for the network in advocating for broader change that addresses sexual violence against trans communities – at both the institutional (hospital policies/procedures to ensure safer environments for trans survivors) and structural (promotion of policy change to address the underlying social causes of violence against trans persons) levels.

(4) Accessibility: Participants highlighted the need to enhance the geographical, physical, and/or social accessibility of services and supports for trans survivors as an important component of the network. The topic of accessibility frequently emerged in dialogue regarding care in emergency departments as a barrier to accessing health services, including those offered by the SA/DVTCs.

(5) Knowledge Sharing and Exchange: Participants expressed a desire to identify more effective modes of communication and knowledge mobilization among service providers and supports. Recommendations included sharing resources through a virtual platform

that could be accessed by all network members, as well as the development of a comprehensive, up-to-date, and accessible resource list that could aid in the provision of better and safe(r) referrals for trans survivors.

How are we using this information?

From July to September 2019, participants were surveyed to gather feedback on these initial insights gathered across the seven regional meetings and to consolidate network membership. Through this survey, participants are able to indicate their level of interest in participating in the network and in what capacity, expectations of the network regarding its mission, vision, and values, and recommendations regarding its structure and resources.

Based on these survey responses, the trans-LINK Project team will draft several foundational network documents, including a terms of reference, mandate, and communications plan, as well as grant proposals that could further expand and support the network.

About the Project Team:

Principal Investigator: Dr. Janice Du Mont, Senior Scientist, Women's College Research Institute and Professor, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto.

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