

# **Context and Practice: Trauma-Informed Approaches to Building Affirming Environments for LGBTQ+ Youth**

## **Presenters:**

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- **Martel Okonji**, Youth Development Coordinator, Children, Youth & Family Services, Los Angeles LGBT Center

## **Facilitator:**

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## **Welcome to the Webinar**

**We will begin at 11:00am (PT) / 2:00pm (ET).**

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# DEFENDING CHILDHOOD

PROTECT HEAL THRIVE



- **US Department of Justice**
  - Office of the Attorney General
  - Office of Justice Programs
    - Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
    - Office for Victims of Crime
    - National Institute of Justice
  - Office on Violence Against Women
  - Office of Community Oriented Policing
  - Executive Office of US Attorneys
- **US Department of Health and Human Services**
- **US Department of Education**



- Prevent children's exposure to violence.
- Mitigate the negative effects experienced by children exposed to violence.
- Develop knowledge about and spread awareness of this issue.



- Research and Evaluation
- Direct Action in Communities
  - Comprehensive Demonstration Project
  - Safe Start Program ([www.safestartcenter.org](http://www.safestartcenter.org))
  - OVW Children Exposed to Violence grants
- Training and Technical Assistance
- Attorney General’s Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence ([www.justice.gov/defendingchildhood/cev-rpt-full.pdf](http://www.justice.gov/defendingchildhood/cev-rpt-full.pdf))
- Attorney General’s Task Force on American Indian and Alaska Native Children Exposed to Violence ([https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/defendingchildhood/pages/attachments/2015/03/23/ending\\_violence\\_so\\_children\\_can\\_thrive.pdf](https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/defendingchildhood/pages/attachments/2015/03/23/ending_violence_so_children_can_thrive.pdf))
- Action Partnerships with Professional Organizations

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**LOS ANGELES LGBT CENTER**

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# Context and Practice: Trauma-Informed Approaches to Building Affirming Environments for LGBTQ+ Youth

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**Martel Okonji**, Youth Development Coordinator, Children, Youth & Family Services

**Devika Shankar**, Program Coordinator, Mental Health Services

**Krystal Torres-Covarrubias**, OUT for Safe Schools Coordinator, Public Policy & Community Building



# Objectives

- To increase knowledge of LGBTQ youth identities and structural realities
- To share perspective on unique challenges of domestic violence in LGBTQ communities
- To address the impact of domestic violence on children and youth
- To introduce a trauma informed care approach for supporting LGBTQ youth



# The Los Angeles LGBT Center

- Since 1969 the Los Angeles LGBT Center has cared for, championed and celebrated LGBT individuals and families in Los Angeles and beyond. Today, we provide services for more LGBT people than any other organization in the world
- The Center's more than 550 employees provide services and programs that span four broad categories: **Health, Social Services and Housing, Culture and Education, Leadership and Advocacy.**



To increase knowledge of LGBTQ youth identities and structural realities



# Gender and Sexual Orientation

## *Biological/Anatomical Sex*

- The physical structure of one's reproductive organs that is used to assign sex at birth. Given the potential variation in all of these, biological sex must be seen as a spectrum or range of possibilities rather than a binary set of two options.

## *Gender Identity*

- One's innermost concept of self as male or female or both or neither—how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves.

## *Gender Expression*

- Refers to the ways in which people externally communicate their gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, haircut, voice, and other forms of presentation.

## *Sexual Orientation*

- Term that refers to being romantically or sexually attracted to people of a specific gender.



# Gender Diverse Terminology

## *Trans\*/Transgender*

- An umbrella term used to describe people whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth.

## *Gender Fluid*

- A person who does not identify themselves as having a fixed gender.

## *Gender Nonconforming (GNC)*

- A person who has, or is perceived as having, gender characteristics and/or behaviors that do not conform to society's expectations. People who are gender non-conforming may or may not be transgender and can have any sexual orientation.

## *Non-binary*

- A person who do not identify as either man/male or woman/female. People who are gender non-conforming may or may not be transgender and can have any sexual orientation.

## *Intersex*

- A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male

## *Cisgender*

- A term used to describe people whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth.



# Orientation Diverse Terminology

## *Lesbian*

- A female-identified person who is romantically and/or sexually attracted to primarily other female-identified people.

## *Gay*

- A male-identified person who is romantically and/or sexually attracted to primarily other male-identified people.

## *Bisexual & Pansexual\**

- A person of any gender identity who is romantically and/or sexually attracted to others who identify as male or female or have no gender preference. This attraction does not have to be equally divided.

## *Asexual*

- A person of any gender identity that is not sexually attracted to others.

## *Heterosexual/Straight*

- A person of any gender identity who is romantically and/or sexually attracted to primarily people who identify with a gender identity 'opposite' of their own.



# Structural barriers for LGBTQ+ Youth

## 2013 National School Climate Survey (GLSEN):

- 55.5% of LGBT students felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, and 37.8% because of gender expression.
- A third (33.1%) heard negative remarks specifically about transgender people frequently or often.
- 74.1% of LGBT students were verbally harassed (e.g., called names or threatened) in the past year because of their sexual orientation and 55.2% because of their gender expression.

## Gender Nonconforming Youth:

- Gender nonconforming youth report incidents of harsh school discipline and biased application of policies
- Gender nonconforming youth report being blamed for their own victimization

## LGBTQ Youth of Color:

- LGBTQ youth of color report increased surveillance and policing
- LGBTQ youth of color report incidents of harsh school discipline and biased application of policies
- LGBTQ youth of color report being blamed for their own victimization



# Structural barriers for LGBTQ+ Youth

## Homelessness

- LGBT youth represent approximately 40% of all homeless youth<sup>1</sup>

## Foster care

- 13.6% of foster youth in Los Angeles identify as LGB or questioning
- 13.2% reported some level of same sex attraction
- 5.6% identify as transgender
- 1.5-2X as many LGBTQ Youth living in foster care as LGBTQ youth estimated to be living outside of foster care

## Juvenile justice system

- LGBTQ youth make up approximately 15% of the juvenile detention population but only 6% of the general population



To share perspective on unique  
challenges of domestic violence in  
LGBTQ communities



## DV/IPV Defined

*A pattern of abusive behavior in any intimate relationship that is used by one intimate partner to systematically gain and/or maintain power and control over another intimate partner.*



# Unique Issues & Challenges

- *Fear of continued victimization*
- *Fear of being outed*
- *Treated together in couples therapy*
- *Not considered to be acceptable family or partnership*
- *Hospitals and doctors*
- *Lack of visibility*
- *Denied safety/shelter due to gender*
  - *or due to abuser being allowed in*
- *Intersection of DV/IPV and HIV*
- *Portraying violence as mutual or consensual*



# Impact on LGBTQ+ Survivors

Current research confirms that DV/IPV is just as prevalent (occurring in 25-33% of relationships) and just as harmful and dangerous among LGBTQ+ people as among cisgender heterosexual people.

But, there are far fewer resources and protections for individuals experiencing LGBTQ+ DV/IPV.



# LGBTQ+ Youth and IPV

Research shows that LGBTQ+ youth experience significantly higher rates of all kinds of relationship abuse/violence, both as victims and as perpetrators, compared to non-LGBTQ+ youth.



# Barriers for LGBTQ+ Youth

- *Homo/bi/transphobia*
  - *Internalized*
  - *Externalized/Institutional*
- *Shame and embarrassment*
- *Social expectations of gender roles*
- *Fear of not being believed*



# Barriers for LGBTQ Youth

- *Fear of retaliation*
- *Fewer legal protections or legislated discrimination/policies*
- *Loss of support systems or community*
- *Lack of resources or knowledge of resources*



To address the impact of domestic violence on children and youth



# Effects of exposure to DV/IPV on Children & Youth

## Short-Term:

- *Generalized anxiety*
- *Sleeplessness*
- *Nightmares*
- *Difficulty concentrating*
- *High activity levels*
- *Increased aggression*
- *Increased separation anxiety*
- *Increased worry about their safety or the safety of a parent*



# Effects of exposure to DV/IPV on Children & Youth

## Long-Term/On-Going:

- *Physical health problems*
- *Behavior problems in adolescence (e.g., trouble with juvenile justice system, alcohol/substance abuse)*
- *Emotional difficulties in adulthood (e.g., depression, anxiety disorders, PTSD)*

These effects result in major changes in the brain that cause youth to develop fewer or unsafe coping skills, self-regulation tools, and social development skills.



## Additional factors for LGBTQ+ Children & Youth

- *Homo/bi/transphobia*
- *Bullying and harassment*
- *Lack of peer/social acceptance*
- *Microaggressions*
- *Less protection under laws and legislated discrimination/policies*
- *Police misconduct/harassment*
- *Family maltreatment and abuse/denial of identity/expulsion from home*



## Additional factors for LGBTQ+ Children & Youth

These additional factors for LGBTQ+ children and youth exacerbate the effects of exposure to DV/IPV, increase the level of isolation and risk, and can lead to homelessness and major physical and emotional/mental health problems, including increased risk for suicidal ideation and attempts.



# Recommended Practices

- *Use gender neutral language*
- *Educate yourself*
- *Be aware of confidentiality concerns*
- *Talk about healthy relationships*
- *Use a trauma-informed approach*



To introduce a trauma informed care approach for supporting LGBTQ youth



## What is Trauma Informed Care (TIC)?

*is an organizational structure and treatment framework that involves understanding, recognizing, and responding to the effects of all types of **trauma**.*



## Types of Trauma

- *Physical, emotional, sexual and Verbal Abuse*
- *Neglect and Bullying*
- *Community-based violence*
- *Terrorism, war and disaster*

LGBTQ+ Youth face various traumas usually based from a lack of acceptance from family and communities, verbal and physical abuse, bullying, homelessness which lead to behavioral and physical health disparities



## Some LGBTQ+ Youth Stats

- *2 times physical abuse than straight counterpart*
- *9 times more likely to commit suicide*
- *6 times more likely to experience depression*

LGBTQ+ youth of color and trans youth experience the most amount of trauma especially when those identities (trans and of color) intersect.



# Trauma Informed Approaches

How do we create a TIC environment for LGBTQ+ Youth?

- 1. Start at the waiting room, intake, the first step into the space- create visibility, be vocal*
- 2. Language plays a huge part*
- 3. Have affirming resources within your organization*
- 4. Have a list of affirming providers for your clients to access other safe spaces*
- 5. Show YOUR support*



# References

Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network's 2013 National Climate Survey

GSA Network and Advancement Project's *Gender Nonconforming Youth: Discipline Disparities, School Push-Out, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline*

GSA Network and Advancement Project's *LGBTQ Youth of Color: Discipline Disparities, School Push-Out, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline*

The Williams Institute's *Findings from a National Survey of Services Providers Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth Who Are Homeless or At risk of Becoming Homeless*

The Williams Institute's *Sexual and Gender Minority Youth in Los Angeles Foster Care*

National Child Traumatic Stress Network- <http://www.nctsn.org/>



# Questions and Discussion



# Contact us:

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# Supporting LGBTQ Survivors: New Resources

38

## “Caring Relationships, Healthy You” Safety Cards and Poster

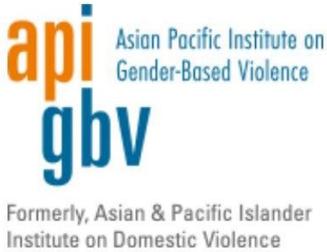
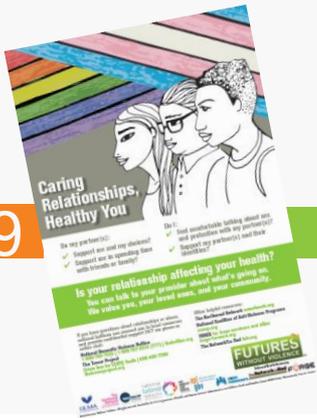
In English and Spanish

[www.futureswithoutviolence.org/health/lgbtq-ipv/](http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/health/lgbtq-ipv/)



# In collaboration with...

39



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