



WPATH'S INAUGURAL: U.S. SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

FEBRUARY 2017

UCLA, Los Angeles, California

CONFERENCE

World Professional Association of Transgender Health, first [U.S. Inaugural Scientific Conference](#)

TITLE

COPING WITH DISCRIMINATION: CAN FAMILY OR FRIEND SUPPORT INFLUENCE COPING SKILLS AND IMPROVE HEALTH OUTCOMES?

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PURPOSE

The frequency and negative consequences of discrimination against the transgender/gender non-conforming (t/gnc) population are widely documented. Coping with discrimination by avoiding social situations and hypervigilance can increase stress and lead to poor health outcomes such as depression. Within the t/gnc community, family and social support decreases the occurrence of depression. However, the influence of family and social support on coping practices used to deal with the negative impact of discrimination is less well researched.

Transcend the Binary, a Metro Detroit care management service for the t/gnc community, began a community discussion about coping with discrimination in 2015. Information gathered from interviews and focus groups revealed that quality of life was often dramatically affected by persistent daily concerns about discrimination. These concerns appeared greatest among those with low social support. Because community members expressed interest in learning about how others coped with daily discrimination as a means to achieve greater personal strength, Transcend undertook the development of a survey to gather and share coping strategies with the t/gnc community and educate health providers and allies about the negative effects of daily life discrimination.

METHODS

To gather such data, Transcend the Binary undertook the creation of an on-line survey. A model that relates the impact of the burden of daily discrimination to coping behaviors drove questionnaire content. Coping behaviors were hypothesized to influence health outcomes such as depression, loneliness and overall health status. Within

the model perceived emotional support by family and friends was proposed to mediate the types of coping skills utilized and thus influence health outcomes.

Transcend staff in partnership with selected community members developed the questionnaire content. The questionnaire includes both forced-choice questions (e.g., multiple choice questions, checklists) as well as open-ended questions. The questionnaire asks about daily worries about discrimination within residences, neighborhoods, healthcare settings, work, school and public places. Requested information includes coping tactics used and the perceived effectiveness of those tactics. A coping with discrimination scale, the Multidimensional Scale for Perceived Social Support, the Loneliness Scale, the Abbreviated Heightened Vigilance Scale, and the PHQ-2 are used to measure coping behaviors, social support, loneliness, vigilance and the presence of depressive symptoms, respectively. A question about self-rated health status is also included. Demographic data related to age, income, highest educational level achieved, and relationship status (e.g., married, partner relationship) is included. Gender identity is requested via an open-ended question to allow individual expression.

RESULTS

The survey is currently being conducted with results available in late 2016. Initial responses have shown high survey completion rates. The number and range of responses given to questions about daily discrimination, coping skills and health outcomes suggests that path analysis can be used to examine relationships as proposed by the questionnaire model. Write-in responses provide significant insight.

CONCLUSIONS

Understanding the relationship among coping, social support, and health outcomes creates opportunities to strengthen coping behaviors within the t/gnc community and give healthcare providers and allies greater insight into the negative impact of daily life discrimination.

Transcend the Binary would like to thank our focus group participants who guided the Finding our Strength survey design and our community partners that assisted in survey implementation.