

*“We're going to leave you for last because of how you are”*  
Transgender women’s experiences of gender-based  
violence in Latin America and the Caribbean

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## Participatory Research to Inform HIV Programming

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# Thank You

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## Civil Society Organizations:

- **Trinidad & Tobago:** Friends for Life, CARE, Family Planning Association of Trinidad and Tobago
- **Barbados:** Community Education Empowerment & Development, EQUALS, Jabez House, B-Glad
- **El Salvador:** Asociación Díké de Personas Transgénero y LGBTI+, ASPIDH Arcoíris, COMCAVIS-TRANS
- **Haiti:** Arc en Ciel, ANAPFEH, Facdis, FEBS, FOSREF, GHESKIO, Gran Lakou, Kouraj, ORAH, Serovie
- The Innovative Response Globally for Trans Women and HIV

## Peer data collectors:

- **Trinidad & Tobago:** Brandy Rodriguez
- **Barbados:** Dadrina Emmanuel
- **El Salvador:** Britany M. Castillo, Camila Vargas, Nissa Kahory Sánchez
- **Haiti:** Wilfrid Junior Moril, Palemon Wikenson, Veillard Reginald, Caimitte Jn Elie, Clifford Cherisier



Trinidad and Tobago study team

# Background

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- What is gender-based violence?
  - Any violence directed at an individual based on their biological sex, gender expression or gender identity
  - Emotional, physical, sexual, and economic abuse and other human rights violations
- GBV is a known risk factor for HIV transmission
- HIV prevalence among trans women 49 times higher than general population

Baral et al. [Lancet Infect Dis.](#) 2013  
Mar;13(3):214-22.



Haiti study team

# Study Objectives

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To better understand experiences of GBV to:

1. More effectively identify and prevent GBV against trans women
2. Offer tailored support for GBV victims within HIV services
3. Support the development of laws and policies to prevent and respond to GBV against trans women

# Methods

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- This study was a partnership among UNDP, LINKAGES, University of the West Indies, and local organizations in Trinidad & Tobago, Barbados, El Salvador and Haiti
- Trans women actively engaged throughout the research process
  - Participants were recruited through local organizations serving trans women
- Received guidance from global networks and regional and national advisory groups

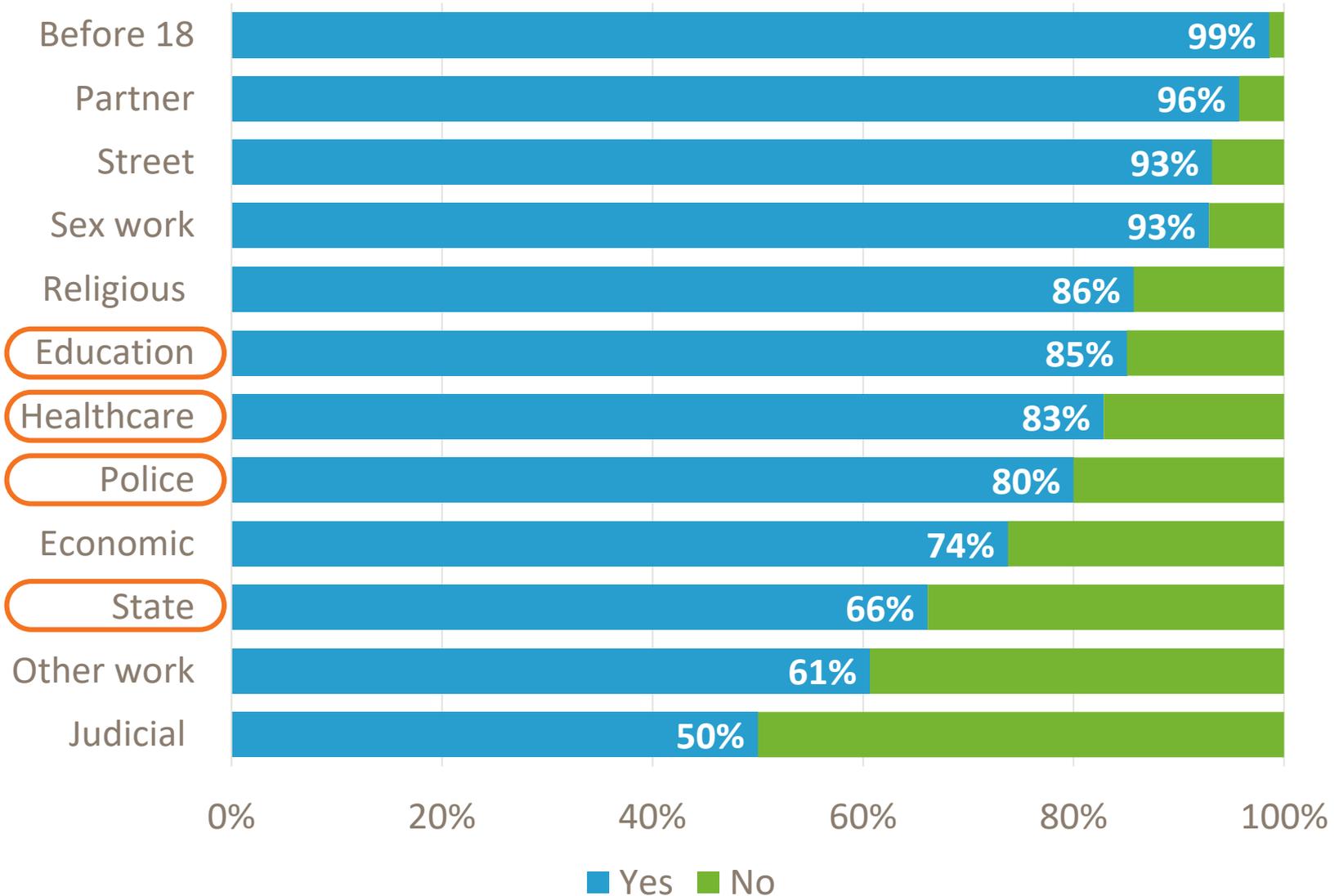


# Methods

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- 12 trans women conducted 74 qualitative interviews
- **Open-ended responses:** Coded in QSR NVivo and conducted applied thematic analysis
- **Closed-ended responses:** Entered in EpiData, exported to STATA 13 and analyzed descriptively
- **Data interpretation** meetings held in each country

# Results: Violence Across Contexts



# Violence in education

In an educational setting, have you ever...	%
<b>Emotional</b>	
Been harassed	62
Experienced negative, stigmatizing, insulting, or humiliating comments	57
Been bullied	55
Been lectured or scolded	47
Been cyber-bullied	43
Been threatened	37
Been excluded	35
<b>Economic</b>	
Experienced extortion, blackmail, or demanding money because you are a transgender woman	23
<b>Physical</b>	
Been physically abused	19
Faced violence when using bathrooms	18
<b>Other</b>	
Been denied education	19
<b>Sexual</b>	
Been sexually abused	5

# Violence in education

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- Some were **sent home from school, received failing grades, were suspended or expelled**
- Perpetrators were **usually other students** but also teachers and administrators
- Some participants went to teachers, counselors, or administrators for help but were **further abused**

# Violence in education

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*“In secondary school I was actually beaten up by [...] about eight or nine boys [...] for being queer [...] I started to run, and they caught up to me. I had to curl myself in a ball, cover [...] while it was just kicks passing on the floor. And all I could do at the end of it all is just pick myself up and pretend I wasn't hurt or I wasn't in pain or I wasn't sad [...] to make me look strong in front of everybody else.”*

- age 26, Trinidad and Tobago

# Violence in health care

## Did any experiences in a health care setting include...

%

### Emotional

Gossiping about you to other staff or patients	50
Lecturing or scolding	49
Negative, stigmatizing, insulting, or humiliating comments	46
Sexual comments	41
Recommending something you did not like	41
Blaming you for your illness/injury	40
Assuming your illness is caused by your gender identity	39
Not keeping your information confidential	30
Making you wait in a separate area	26
Threats of violence	24

### Other human rights violations

Giving other clients priority when it was your turn to be seen by the health care provider	40
Refusing to treat you	32

### Economic

Extortion, blackmailing, or demanding money because you are a transgender woman	27
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# Violence in health care

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- **Directly denied services**
  - Staff told them they were “different” and they should get health services elsewhere
- **Indirectly denied services**
  - Staff unable to find their medical records, or switched them to a different doctor without explanation
- **Sub-standard or neglectful care**
  - Providers uncomfortable with trans patients
  - Did not think they deserved high quality care

# Violence in health care

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*“The nurse in charge of weighing the patients told me, ‘look, we're going to leave you for last, because of how you are.’ So I felt bad when that happened.”*

- age 26, El Salvador

# Violence from police

Have you ever experienced any of the following from the police:

%

## Emotional

Negative, stigmatizing, insulting, or humiliating comments 57

→ Telling you that crime perpetrated against you is your fault 43

Lecturing or scolding 43

Not ensuring that an officer of your gender is present during a physical exam 18

## Other human rights violations

Not serving you when you requested help 46

## Physical

Physical assault 34

## Economic

Extortion, blackmailing, or demanding money because you are a transgender woman 27

Stealing from you 26

## Sexual

→ Demanding sex for your freedom 26

Sexual assault 18

# Violence from police

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- Intimidation, stop and searches
- Made them take off their clothes, forcibly cut their hair
- Arrested or detained because of gender identity
- Location of violence:
  - Street (most common)
  - Sex work establishments
  - Police stations
- Consequence: many trans women did not trust the police and did not seek help from them

# Violence from police

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*“I would like it to be taught at the police academy that they should respect people’s rights, that they should know everyone is a person and everyone is free; they have their own choices.”*

- age 29, Haiti

# Violence from other state institutions

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- 25% of participants were denied legal documents or were not provided with legal documents with the correct gender identity
- Identity cards that match gender expression facilitate access to services

# Accessing services

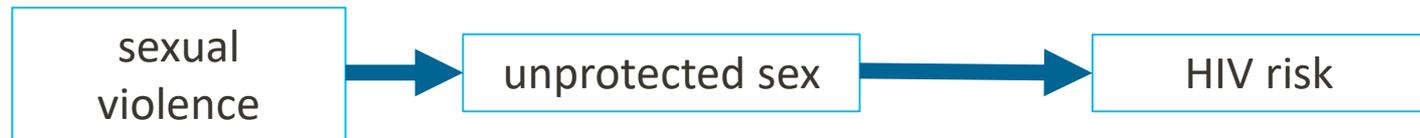
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- Most did not seek services for the violence they experienced
- Trans women wanted services that are accepting, private, safe, confidential, and respectful of trans women

# Risk of HIV from GBV

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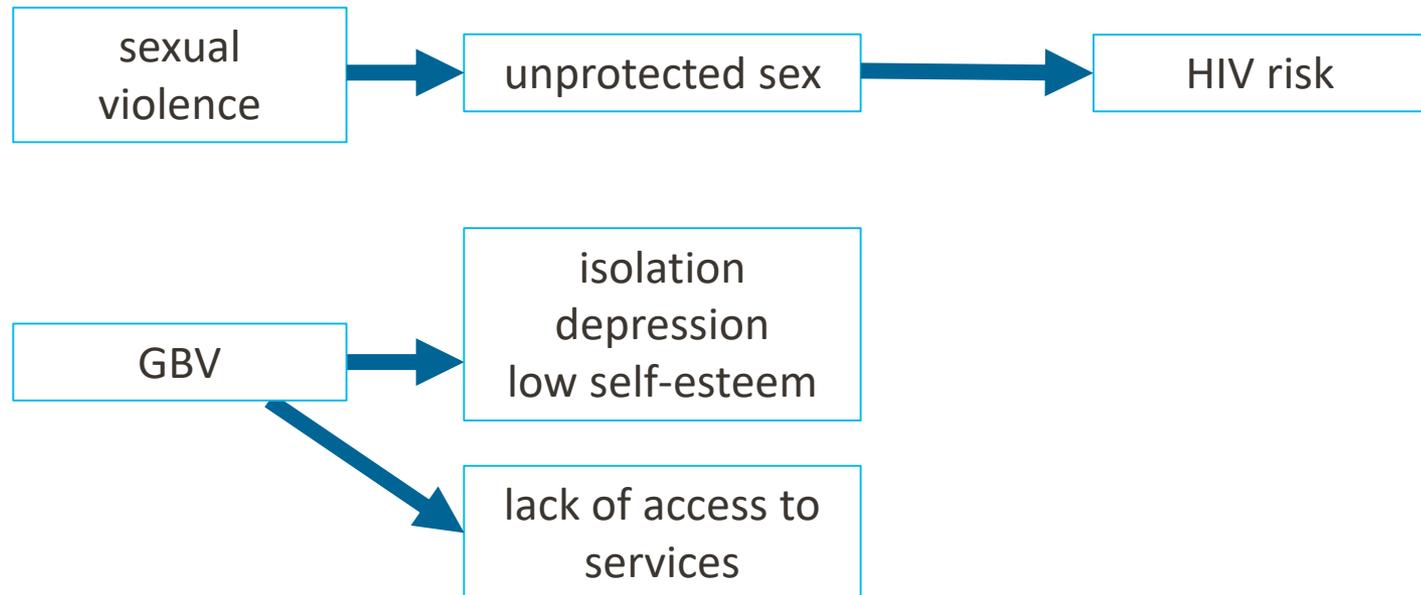
- Only 34% of participants thought the violence or discrimination they experienced put them at risk of HIV
- Perception of risk for HIV came from sexual violence or unprotected sex



# Risk of HIV from GBV

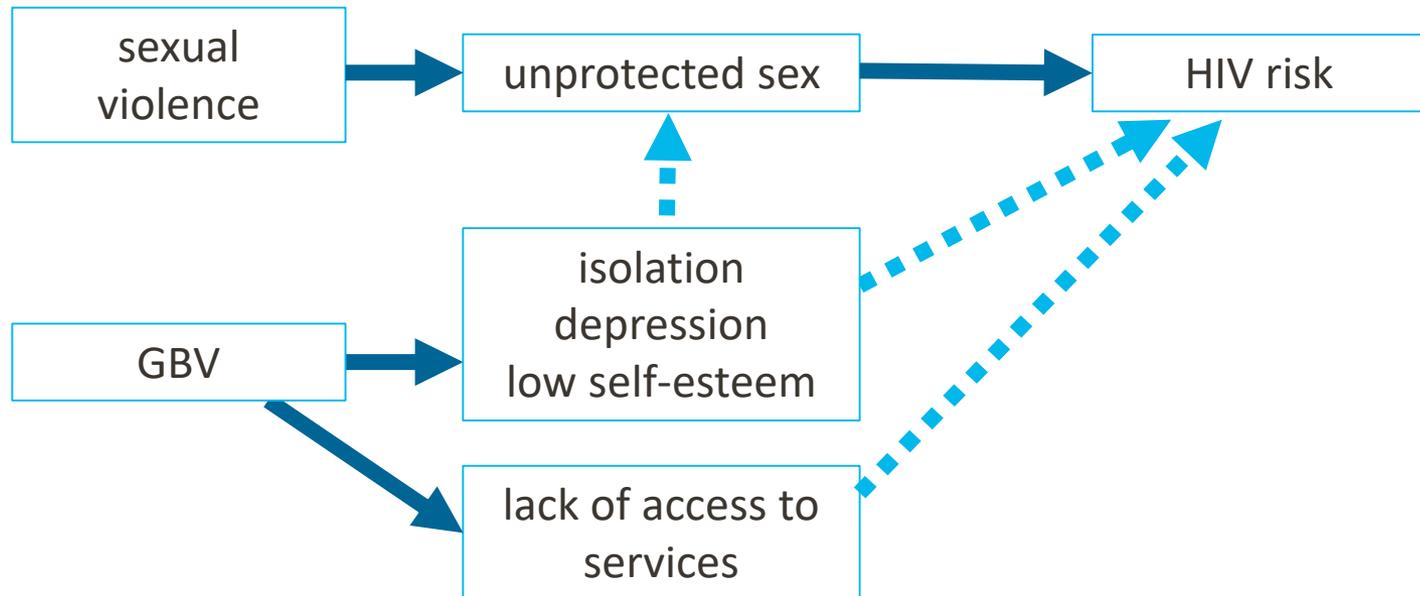
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- Only 34% of participants thought the violence or discrimination they experienced put them at risk of HIV
- Perception of risk for HIV came from sexual violence or unprotected sex



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# Key takeaways

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- Trans women experienced GBV in all aspects of their lives, including while trying to access public services
- GBV prevents trans women from completing education, and obtaining medical care, police services, identity cards
- Few GBV victims accessed services
- 2/3 did not think GBV put them at risk of HIV
- Trans women want access to private, safe, confidential, and respectful services
- Cycle of violence, discrimination and unmet need prevents trans women from realizing their health and human rights.

# Recommendations and resources

1. Advocate for anti-discrimination and gender-identity laws and policies
2. Train healthcare providers and police to:
  - Deliver nondiscriminatory, gender-affirming services
  - Detect GBV and provide first-line support



# Strength and resilience

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*“I am a trans woman. I believe that it’s important to stress that it hasn’t been easy, because people stigmatize you, and there is discrimination towards people with different sexual orientations, and I’ve had to struggle with this. Being trans has brought bad things to my life, and it has been difficult, but I’m overcoming it little by little. Really, now at my age, you can say that I still haven’t completely accepted... the way that I’ve been treated, but I have accepted myself, which I feel is important.”*

- El Salvador

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