



# LGBTQ Adult Homelessness

John Ecker, PhD

Canadian Observatory on Homelessness

University of Ottawa

# Background

- We know little about the population
  - Very few examples exist in the literature
  
- What do we know?
  - Youth population overrepresented (20-40%)
  - Canadian studies and point-in-time counts (~10%)
  - San Francisco (30%)

# Background

- Entries into homelessness?
  - Speculative
    - Familial rejection
    - Income disparity
    - Homophobia/transphobia
      - Discrimination in workplace, housing
    - Individual-level factors
      - Substance use
      - Mental health

# Background

- Programming needs
  - Physical health
    - HIV, Hep C
  - Mental health and substance use
  - Service use
  - Victimization
- Homeless exits
  - Speculative

# The Current Study

- Addresses the research gap
- Exploratory study that focused on three main topics:
  - Homeless entries
  - Service use experiences within the general homeless service sector
  - Homeless exits

# The Current Study

- Qualitative interviews with 20 LGBTQ adults
  - Over the age of 18
  - Self-identified as LGBTQ
    - Issue?
- Sampling strategy
  - All shelters in Ottawa
  - Majority of drop-ins
  - “General” services
    - Did not sample from agencies tailored to the LGBTQ community or with higher levels of LGBTQ clients
  - Poster in each of these agencies
    - Rainbow flag
    - Honorarium

# The Current Study

Do you identify as part of the **LGBTQ** (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) spectrum?



If so, I would like to hear from you!

I am looking for LGBTQ individuals to participate in a small study. Your participation would involve a face-to-face interview that should last about one hour. The interview will ask questions about your experiences as a LGBTQ adult who has had a housing loss. I am only looking to interview individuals 18 years of age and older. The interviews will be audio recorded.

You will be compensated \$20 for your time.

If you are interested in participating, please speak to:

1) A staff member at the front desk

OR

2) John (study coordinator) at 613-562-5800 Extension 4454 OR by Email – [jecke081@uottawa.ca](mailto:jecke081@uottawa.ca)

# The Current Study

- What did the sample look like?

<b>Current living situation</b>	9 own apartment 7 homeless 4 temporary stay with friends/family OR rooming house OR room in a house
<b>Gender</b>	11 males; 6 females; 3 transgender females
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	6 gay males; 5 bisexual males; 5 bisexual females 3 lesbians; 1 heterosexual transgender female
<b>Average age</b>	41.2 (s.d. = 10.47)
<b>Ethnicity</b>	13 Caucasian; 2 Aboriginal; 5 other
<b>Employment</b>	8 working full- or part-time

# Results

- Homeless entries

- Substance use

- “Entry into homelessness? The addiction. One hundred percent. No doubt about it.”
    - “Uh, my drug addiction came in. I keep falling down and stumbling. Now, I wasn’t aware of at the time, like I couldn’t figure out why I was doing this stuff, and then I would resort back to drugs and drinking.”
    - “I think it was my addictions back then. Like, just, like, not following, like, rules of leases and what not and, like, ending back homeless. And I think those times I wasn’t ready.”

# Results

- Homeless entries
  - Mental health
  - Income
  - Domestic abuse
  - Eviction

# Results

- Homeless entries

- Sexual orientation

- Discrimination from landlords
- Lack of safety with other tenants

- “I can’t afford regular market rent, so I’ve been living in subsidized housing or low-income housing. And I find it really hard to live with these people. Not to [characterize people] or anything, but a lot of them have alcohol and addiction issues. A lot of them have mental health issues. And, um, being gay, not only at the shelter but in these living environments, low-income housing or subsidized, I’ve become a target and I’ve often been chased out.”

# Results

- Service use experiences
  - Shelter & Drop-ins
    - Generally positive
    - About 1/4 were out
    - Felt supported by staff
    - Many felt safe staying in the shelter
    - Friendships developed with other residents and clients

# Results

- Shelter use experiences

- Challenges

- Homophobia and transphobia

- “[There is] a single tub room where [I] can go for privacy, to get changed, to bathe, but it’s still stressful in the general environment.”
- “I’ve seen some abuse in the shelters. There’s one guy at the [name of shelter] now, he sits quiet, doesn’t bother anybody and people walk by him and “fucking freak fag” and stuff. Because he is so outwardly gay and he gets abused by some of the guys. For no reason. He minds his own business and doesn’t bother anybody. Guys that do that are hurting inside themselves. They’re angry at their life and they want to project it on someone else. It’s very common. And who’s better than the poor gay guy in the corner.”

- Identity management

# Results

- Service use suggestions
  - Promotional material – what’s available in the city?
    - “Honestly, one thing maybe, they will be missing is more like a flyers or something like that to let them know those things exist”
  - Counsellors who identify as LGBTQ
    - “I know it’s more than just me that’s gay here. Some of them are very scared to come out to say “I’m gay.” But if they had like a counsellor or something to come and talk to, you know, bring stuff up.”
  - Groups/drop-ins
    - “Ya, make a group. Or something like that. I don’t know if there are other ways to make a group, but make some kind of activity that will relate to them, where everybody’s welcome. Not just LGBT. Where everyone is welcome, but made by LGBT people. You know? To help those people living in homeless, like me, they exist. They exist. To help them out to be accept themselves. Because I’m pretty sure I’m not alone.”

# Results

- Homeless exits
  - Challenges
    - Discrimination from landlords
    - Homophobia and transphobia from other residents
  - Many participants could not name barriers to achieving housing due to their sexual or gender identity
    - More focused on financial concerns

# What do these results means?

- LGBTQ adult homelessness is real
- Substance use is common among the population
  - Area for targeted intervention
  - Prevention
- Staff are working well with clients
  - In house training? or Equipped with these skills already?
- Participants are still encountering/witnessing homophobia and transphobia in shelters and drop-ins
- Landlord discrimination

# What do these results mean?

- Participants are asking for more supports tailored to the LGBTQ community
  - Private accommodations
    - Choice?
  - Advisory councils?
  - Collaboration with LGBTQ groups in the city?
  - LGBTQ-identified staff

# Next steps

- Two-pager with findings and recommendations provided to participating agencies
- A series of manuscripts
- Blog post, dissemination strategy
- Expanding research to other locations

# Thank you

- Thank you to all of the participants who share their story with me
- Thank you to all of the agencies who helped out with this study
- For more information:
  - John Ecker – [jecker@edu.yorku.ca](mailto:jecker@edu.yorku.ca)

