Among Friends: Beyond Positive Intentions: Providing Equitable Services for LGBTQ+ Newcomers

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Presentation Outline

- Terminology
- LGBTQ+ Refugees/Newcomers: Historical & Current Context
- Research Impetus
- Key Findings: Barriers & Challenges
- Key Findings: Social & Health Impacts
- Beyond Positive Intentions: Gaps & Needs
- Access Alliance: Promoting Positive Spaces
- Questions
**LGBTQ+ Newcomer Woman**: woman/femme who has immigrated to Canada within the past 7 years and self-identifies as a gender and/or sexual minority

**LGBTQ+ Asylum-Seeker**: someone pursuing legally-recognized ‘refugee’ status within Canada, on the grounds of persecuted gender and/or sexual identity elsewhere

**LGBTQ+ Refugee**: someone who has been granted legal ‘refugee’ status within Canada, on the grounds of persecuted gender and/or sexual identity elsewhere
The Importance of Context

“Politics of care enables a form of “armed love” in which the moral imperative to act is accompanied by practices of violence and containment, which end up reproducing inequalities”

(Prof. Kobelinsky, on ‘Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France’ by Miriam Ticktin)
The “‘bad’ country of origin vs ‘good’ country of refuge (Canada)" narrative justifies and obscures the global politics that create refugees.
“Bad country of origin”

History of Global Homophobia & Transphobia

- British ‘queered’ colonial subjects to justify colonial rule

- India had "the first colonial ‘sodomy law’ integrated into a penal code … Its influence stretched across Asia, the Pacific islands, and Africa, almost everywhere the British imperial flag flew" (Gupta, ‘This Alien Legacy: The Origins of “Sodomy” Laws in British Colonialism’)

- “One of the major findings of our data analysis is the correlation between having a British legal origin and having a law criminalizing homosexual conduct. Of those states with such a law, 57 per cent have a British legal origin. Of those states with a British legal origin, almost 70 per cent continue to criminalize homosexual conduct” (Prof. Han & O'Mahoney, ‘British colonialism and the criminalization of homosexuality’)

“Bad country of origin”

Present Aggravators of Global Homophobia & Transphobia

- Global economic dynamics established during colonialism persist

- EG) sub-Saharan Africa is a net creditor to the rest of the world (Various NGO’s, Honest Accounts 2017)

- Intolerant attitudes towards gays and lesbians are inversely correlated with economic development (2012 Gallup World Poll)

- EG) Socio-economic status safeguards against transphobic/homophobic discrimination (Prof. Murray, ‘The Homonational Archive: Sexual Orientation and Gendered Identity Refugee Documentation in Canada and the USA)

- Queers are housed in bodies – with material needs. We can’t limit our concern for ‘LGBTQ+ well-being’ to only their persecution as queers.
“Good country of refuge (Canada)”

The Refugee System

▪ Eligibility criteria: ‘Safe Third Country’ Agreement (recently struck down); failure to recognize economic and climate refugees

▪ Processing: backlogs; CBSA check-ins; detention; intrusive refugee hearing process; deportation – effectively “fraudulent until proven refugee”

To those fleeing persecution, terror and war, Canadians will welcome you, regardless of your faith. Diversity is our strength. #WelcomeToCanada (PM Justin Trudeau; Jan 28, 2017)

YET
“Good country of refuge (Canada)”

Being LGBTQ+ in Canada

Despite globally/historically-unprecedented recognitions, protections, and affirmations, LGBTQ+ people in Canada experience:

- Higher rates of poverty & homelessness
- Poorer mental health
- Familial rejection, bullying, hate crimes, violence
- Institutional discrimination (e.g. healthcare)
- Political dehumanization
- Lack of political representation

Outcomes are more stark for trans/gender-non-conforming people; and those experiencing additional oppressions
“Good country of refuge (Canada)”

Refuge on Stolen Land

“Canada’s national identity and its regulation of immigration is informed through ongoing settler colonialism in which the erasure of Indigenous persons and the control of non-White immigrants go hand in hand with the creation of the Canadian state and the solidifying of its borders”

(Prof. Fobear, ‘Queer Settlers: Questioning Settler Colonialism in LGBT Asylum Processes in Canada’
“refugees don’t need our tears, they need us to stop making them refugees”
Discussion and Reflection on Research

- Challenges in inclusion and exclusion criteria
- Misgendering: Inclusion of trans men and gender non-conforming individuals
- Incentives to participate in research may have impacted participation
- Research is valuable – honor those that shared voices
Among Friends Research Project

Data Collection:

● 16 1-1 service providers interviews
● 3 focus groups of LGBTQ+ Newcomers Women/Femmes including trans and gender non-conforming individuals with 30 participants total
● 3 in depth interviews with LGBTQ+ Newcomer women and 1 gender non-conforming Newcomer

The **challenge** in conducting research with LGBTQ+ Newcomer Women - inclusion/exclusion criteria
## Key Findings:
Systemic Barriers = "Disintegration of Hope"

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectations</th>
<th>Experiences</th>
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<tr>
<td>Life of Safety, security, health and prosperity</td>
<td>Lack of access to safe/affordable housing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employment/economic insecurity</td>
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<td>Social isolation</td>
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Housing

- Lack of access to safe/affordable housing from the first days of arrival
- Negative shelter experiences
- Direct and indirect discriminatory treatments by potential landlords
- Isolated housing
Economic Security

- Meeting daily needs – i.e. food insecurity, clothing and sanitary products
- Leaving resources behind (Everything)
- Limited social and professional connections
- Lack of consistent childcare
Social Isolation

Challenges making social connections

- Racism
- Transphobia, homophobia
- Language – Accent stigma, language barriers
- Income
- Social location – interlocking barriers
- Mainstream culture/not welcoming – Individualistic, consumerist
Social and Health Impacts

Determinants result in damaging impacts on the health and wellbeing of newcomer LGBTQ+ women, and their families including:

- Depression
- Trauma and PTSD
- Lack of self-worth and feeling invisible
- Acute stress and feeling overwhelmed
- Gender dysphoria and confusion
Service Gaps and Needs: Program Level

**Gap:** Lack of peer support groups specific to women and trans/gender non-conforming people

**Need:** Creation of safe spaces and peer support groups in order to

- Reduce social isolation
- Reduce the negative impacts of discrimination and insensitive treatments
- Increase sense of self-esteem and self-worth
- Help clarify how people identify in terms of gender and sexual orientation
- Increase access to programs, services and resources
- Provide a platform for collective action on issues of shared concern
Service Gaps and Needs: Service Level

**Gap:** Services are not inclusive and understanding of entire identity of clients including how wellness is impacted by multiple, intersecting determinants

**Need:** Framework/model in which these programs/services are delivered needs to change in order to promote wellbeing of newcomer LGBTQ+ women
Service Gaps and Needs: Macro/Systems Level

Gaps:

● Policies, organizational models/culture, and programs/services are not consistently grounded on principles of equity

● Lack of recognition that gender and sexual orientation are integral social determinants of health indicators
Service Gaps and Needs: Macro/Systems Level

Needs:

- Build capacity of decision makers and service providers – LGBTQ+ newcomer friendly
- Collect socio-demographic data to ensure equitable services are planned and delivered
- Adopt and deepen equity based hiring practices to increase representation of newcomer LGBTQ+ people
- Meaningfully engage newcomer LGBTQ+ women, in advisory or other guiding capacity
Access Alliance Programs: Promoting Positive Spaces

Systems Level:
- Hiring representative of populations served including Board of Directors and Senior Leadership
- Funding priority for Agency
- $15/Fairness Campaign

Service Level:
- Prioritized Access to Primary Care Services (Unable to cover services that are not covered by OHIP - impacts trans clients)
- Engagement in sectoral tables such as Toronto Neighbourhood Centres Rainbow Alliance Group
Access Alliance Programs: Promoting Positive Spaces

Program Level:

- Settlement Services and connection to resources
- Therapeutic Programming
- Peer engagement
- Code of conduct
- Pride March
Questions?

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