



CROSSING THE LINE

Lived experience of sexual violence
among trans women of colour in Australia

OBJECTIVES

In this presentation we will:

1

Report the lived experience of sexual violence against trans women of colour, in an Australian context

2

Highlight that sexual violence is a significant issue for all women in Australia

3

Suggest solutions to address sexual violence among trans women of colour

4

Highlight the policy implications of our research findings



WHO ARE TRANS WOMEN OF COLOUR?

Transgender ("trans")

Transgender ("trans") describes a person who does not identify with their gender assigned at birth

Trans woman

A trans woman is a person who was assigned male at birth, but identifies as a woman

Trans women of colour

Trans women of colour are from a range of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups, living in predominantly white societies, such as Australia

LGBQ

Some trans people identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer (LGBQ); others identify as heterosexual or straight

Cisgender

Cisgender people are those who identify as the gender assigned at birth

WHAT IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

Sexual harassment

Unwanted touching, grabbing, kissing or fondling; indecent phone calls, texts, emails or posts; inappropriate comments about body or sex life; indecent exposure; receiving unwanted sexual photos

Sexual assault

Rape, attempted rape; aggravated sexual assault (assault with a weapon); indecent assault; penetration by objects; forced sexual activity that did not end in penetration; attempts to force a person into sexual activity

“

Sexual violence is everywhere. I've had this cloud over me that sexual violence is real and it's happening all the time around me and it's happening to me as well.

Fiona

EXPLORING SEXUAL VIOLENCE EXPERIENCES AMONG TRANS WOMEN OF COLOUR

What is our evidence?



Previous research



Interviews + photovoice

- 31 interviews
- 19 photovoice participants



Online forum analysis

- 950 posts analysed

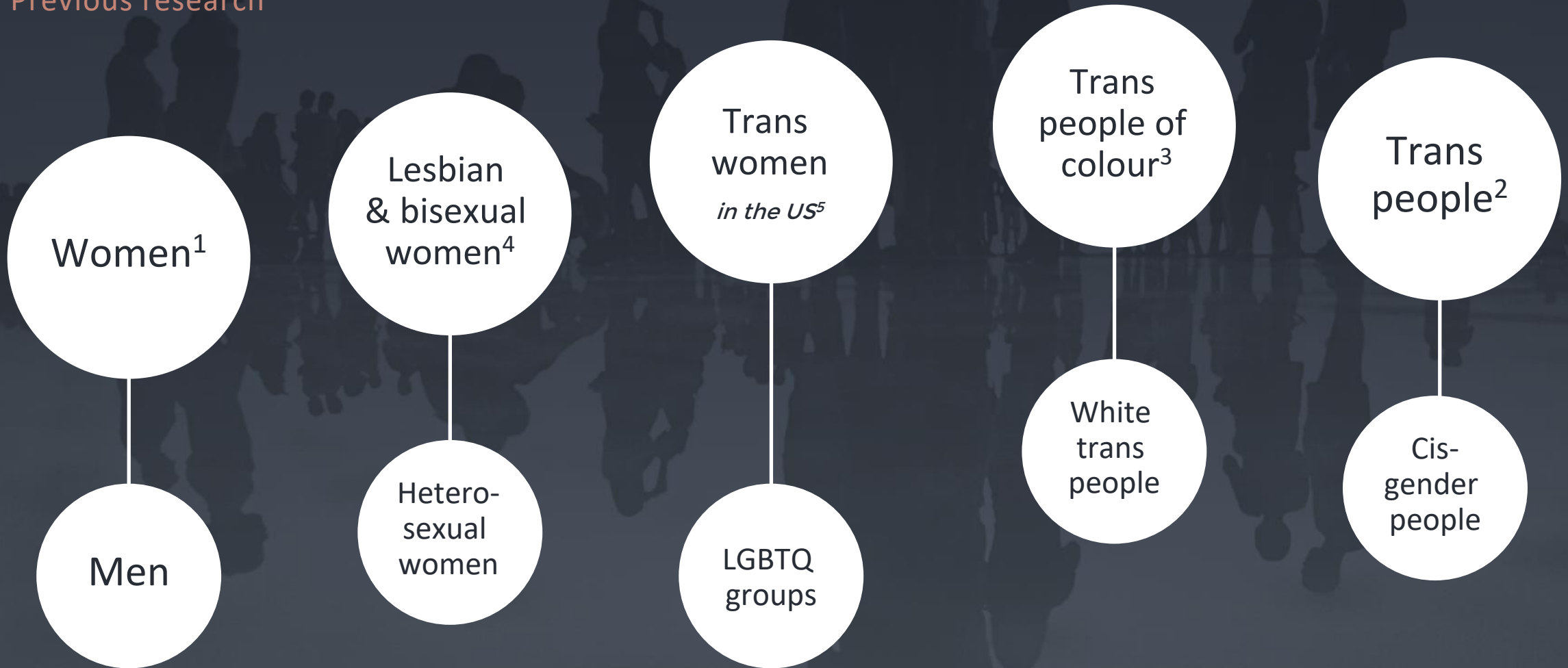


Online survey

- trans women (n=180, 15% CALD)
- cisgender heterosexual women (n=1249, 8% CALD)
- cisgender LBQ (n=866, 13% CALD)

WHO IS AT RISK OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN ADULTHOOD?

Previous research



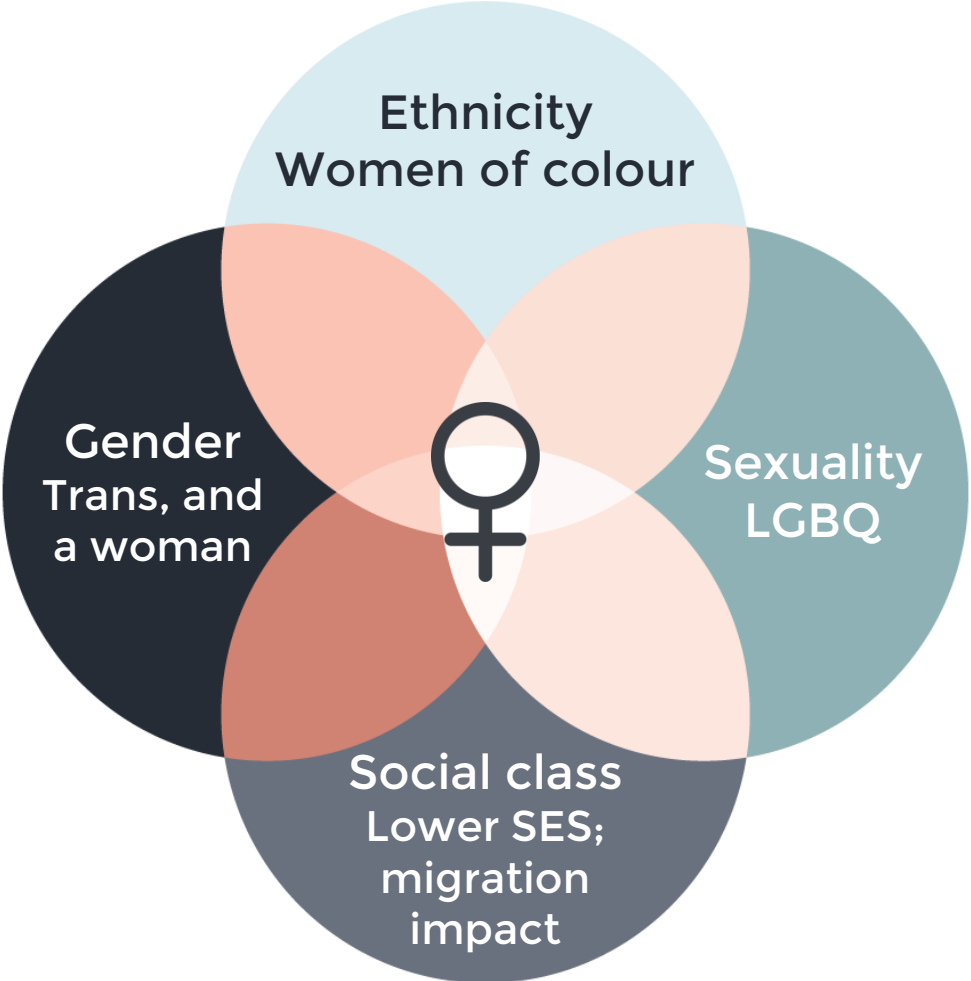
More at risk
Higher rates

1. Callander et al 2019; Stozler, 2009 2.. Callander et al 2019; Stozler, 2009 3. James et al., 2016 4. Callander et al., 2019; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010; Drabble, 2013; Stozler, 2009 5. National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs 2014, 2015, 2016

Less at risk
Lower rates

TRANS WOMEN OF COLOUR ARE AT HIGH RISK OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Intersecting identities



HOW DO TRANS WOMEN OF COLOUR UNDERSTAND SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

Sexual harassment

Unwanted touching, grabbing, kissing or fondling; indecent phone calls, texts, emails or posts; inappropriate comments about body or sex life; indecent exposure; receiving unwanted sexual photos

Transphobic abuse: misgendering, "catcalling", hostile looks + staring, fetishisation

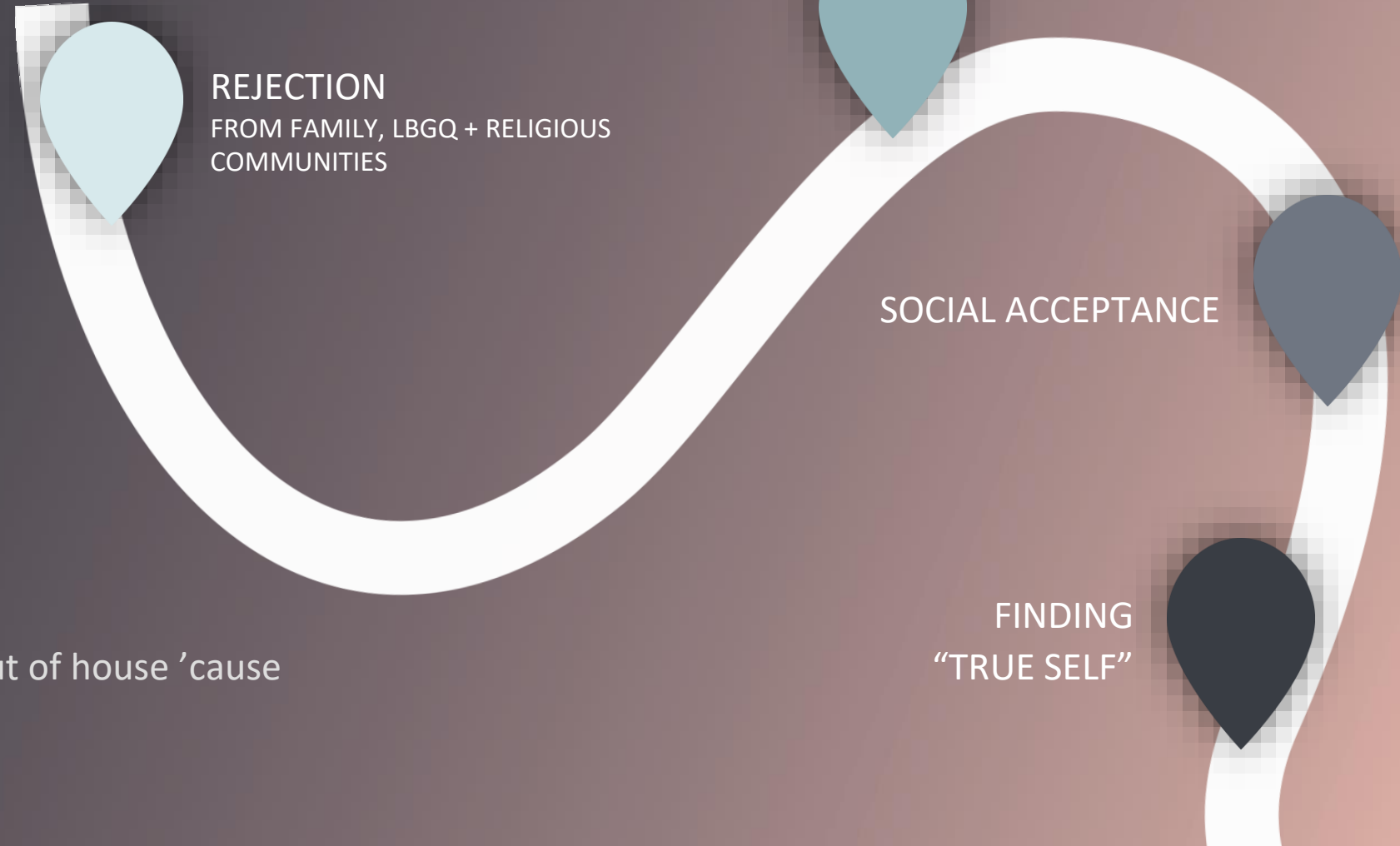
Sexual Assault

Rape, attempted rape; aggravated sexual assault (assault with a weapon); indecent assault; penetration by objects; forced sexual activity that did not end in penetration; attempts to force a person into sexual activity



Gender transitioning and sexual violence

There is increased risk of sexual violence during and after transitioning.



She [Asami's mother] just kicked me out of house 'cause I told her I was trans.

Asami



*Positive consequences
of gender transitioning*

It's literally, I was at a place
where I feel at home in my body
and non-traumatised.

Lin

*Feeling feminine,
feeling like a woman.*

White roses represent new beginnings, new life. I feel like I have a new life now, I'm a woman now, and, you know, I'm a different person than who I used to be. I'm much more authentic. I'm much more real.

Gabriella



*Migration provided
opportunity for gender
affirmation*

I went to the airport and I changed out of my guy clothes and that was that, that was the start of my true life pretty much, and ever since then I've been happy and I haven't stopped feeling happy.

Emma



Pressure to “pass” to avoid sexual violence

“Transwomen are incentivized to embody heteronormative femininity and comply with heterosexual practices. If they do not, they may encounter violence or harassment.”

(Yavorsky & Sayer, 2013, p. 514)

I specifically remember how I felt that day. I was dressed, and I went to the theatre to see a musical. And while I was at a theatre, like I had all these men telling me that I looked beautiful, and I looked amazing. So on a day like that day I just felt like the prettiest girl in the world.

Gabriella





*Being a woman =
fear and risk of violence*

My biggest shock came not from
being the target of transphobia,
but misogyny.

Online Forum-010

Embodying modifications that leads to certain kinds of gender
outcomes and differing degrees of vulnerability.

Lin

*Being a trans woman =
fear and risk of violence*

It was a car that drove past me in the opposite direction ... It was just a guy who gave a generic "woo". I don't know if it was because I was a woman or a trans woman who doesn't pass.

Lisa





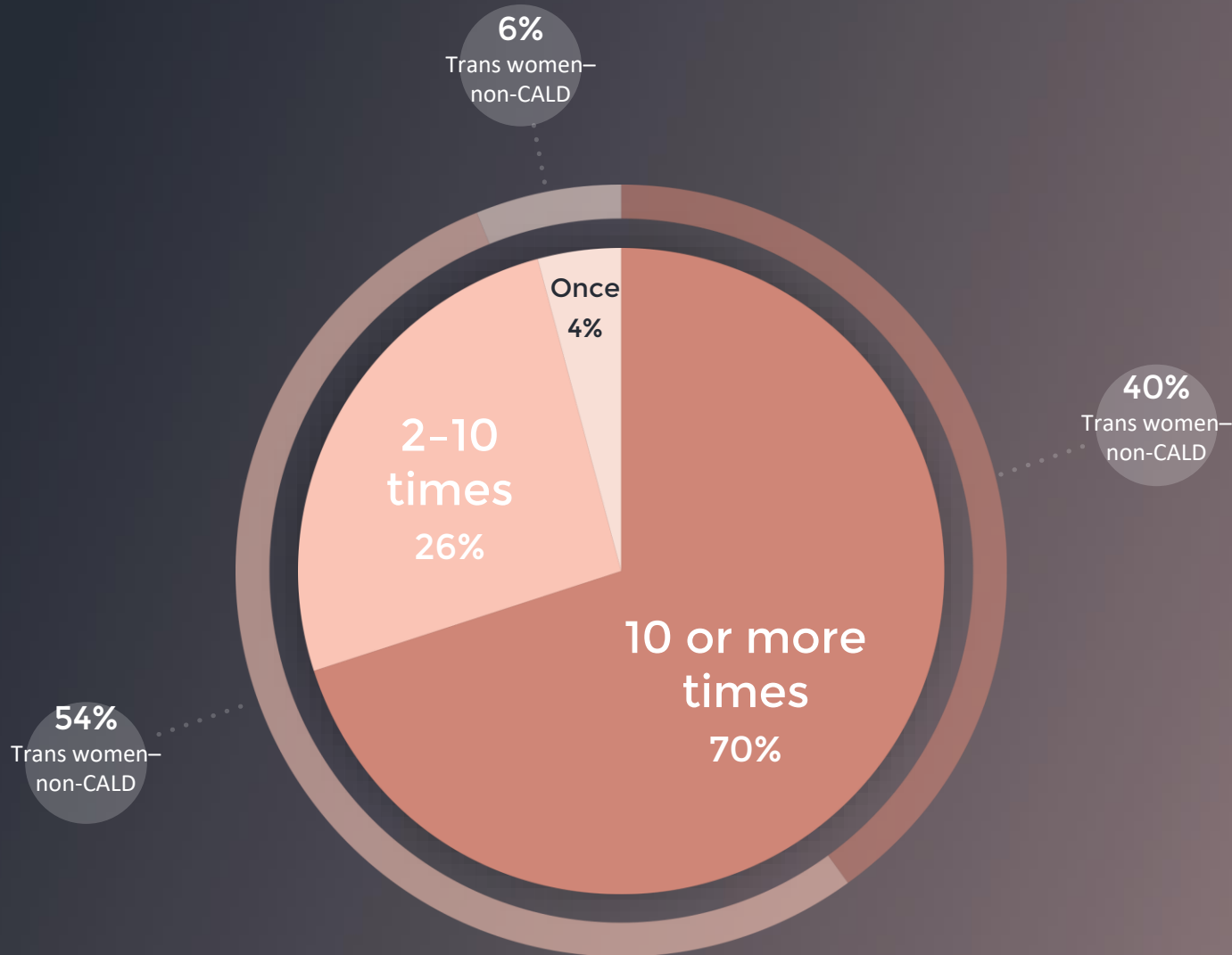
White femininity and struggles to pass

As a trans woman of colour, I have brown skin, everyone literally in the trans community is, like, **you have to lighten up your skin for you to be prettier, for you to be more passable, for you to be more feminine.**

Jennifer

INTERSECTING IDENTITIES

CALD trans women reported more frequent sexual harassment than other women

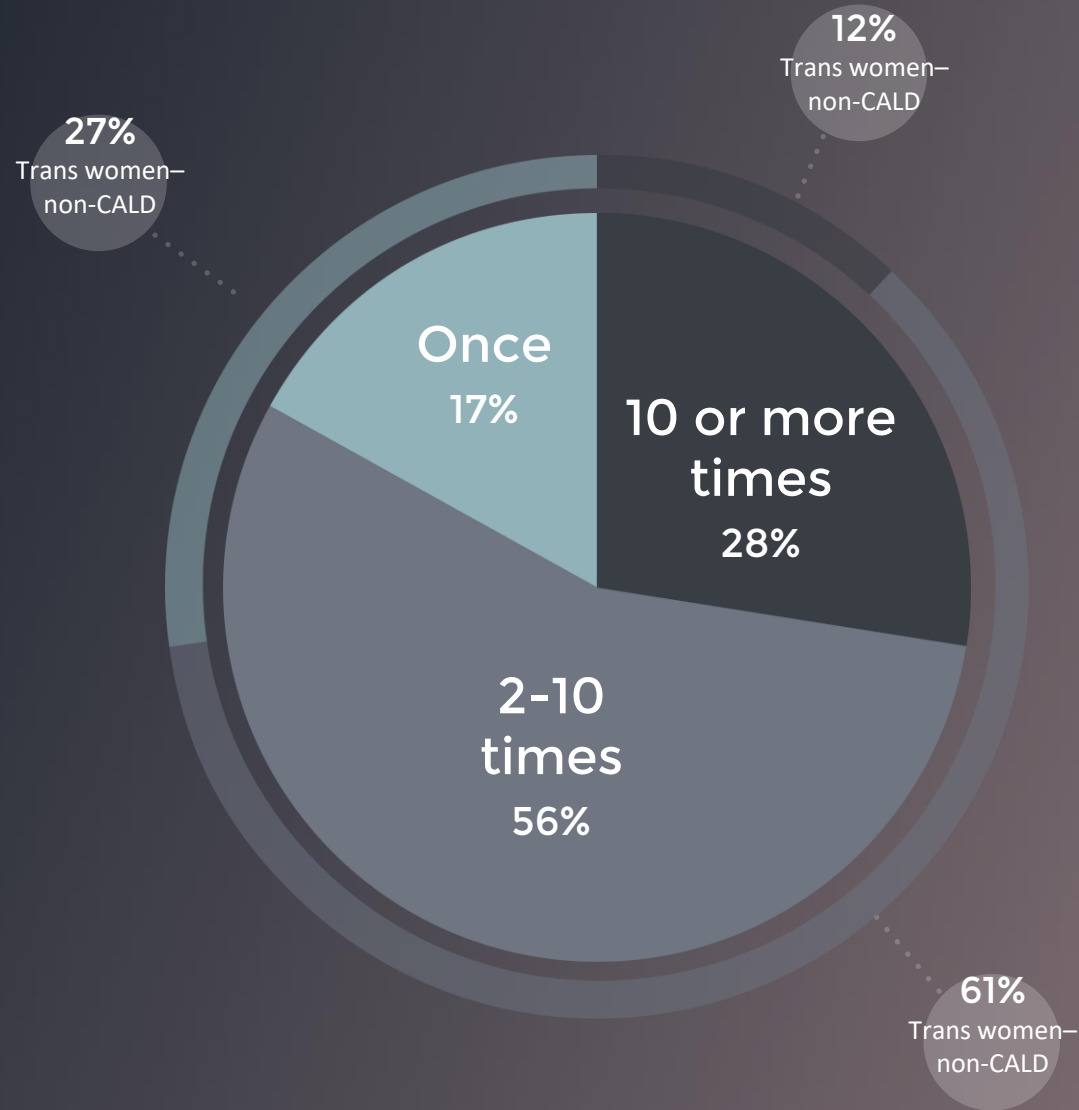


The intersection of gender, cultural identity, and sexual identity intensifies harassment

- Misgendered, transphobic comments, mockery, insult
- Outed as trans or as a man—could lead to social exclusion, or danger
- Verbal abuse when using women’s public toilets; called “predators” or “perverts”

INTERSECTING IDENTITIES

CALD trans women more likely to report having been sexually assaulted 10 or more times



Assault ranged from groping or unwanted touch—commonly in clubs or on public transport—to forced sexual acts and rape

The sexual assault was often accompanied by physical assault—primarily by groups of cisgender men



Sometimes, a man, sometimes they will actually touch the, the woman's part.

Mei

That's actually a photo of the train, where I was physically harassed. I was harassed multiple times on public transportation.

Jennifer



Sexual violence and fetishisation

- Dating and new relationships brought a heightened risk of physical and sexual violence
- Physical and sexual assault from clients during sex work: transphobia and racism, reduces safe spaces to practice sex work
- Physical sexual assault reflects the fetishisation of trans women of colour—served to legitimate objectification and sexual violence
- Women experienced invasive questioning about and touching of genitals

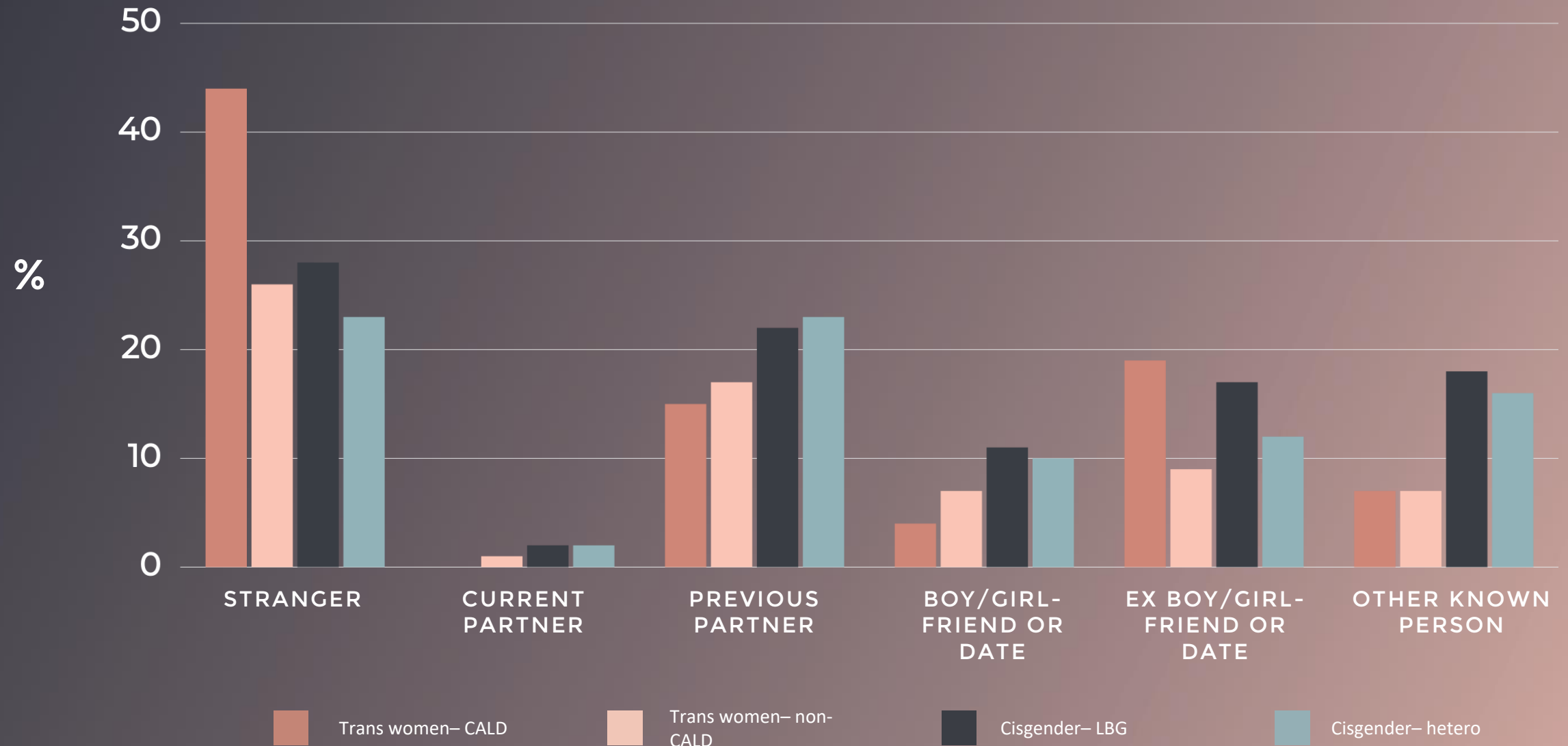
This is also one meaning of sexual violence for me, is to be objectified, like, eggplants ... if guys see trans women they already have assumptions about what we are, and what we can do. So, we're, like, being turned into something we're not.

Jennifer



PERPETRATORS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

CALD trans women—highest rate of sexual assault by a stranger



IMPACTS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Hypervigilance and self-isolation

I have learnt to move around the world as a minority person and now as a woman, keeping myself small and quiet and so on, that's the way I avoid [sexual violence] as much as possible.

Elizabeth

Fear and distress

- Constant fear of further sexual violence
- Negative psychological consequences: anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, self-blame, normalisation of sexual violence and vicarious trauma



Behavioural responses to sexual violence

Resilience | Pride | Freedom

Labelling and reporting sexual violence, rejecting self-blame, talking about experiences of violence and prioritising self-healing

Even though I look hella different, I can still pose the same way as you, I can still act same way as you, I can still talk the same way as you, I'm still human. We exist, we deserve attention, we deserve to be recognised and we deserve to be appreciated, as part of the human species, part of our cultural, our humanity, our sexuality.

Sam



SUPPORT IS CENTRAL TO RESILIENCE

Support sought from friends, family, the transgender community, GPs, clinic nurses, and psychologists facilitated coping and resilience

My father decides to commit his beautiful patriarchal faux-pas and says to me "So now, Lin, what do you think you could have done better so that this wouldn't have occurred?"

Lin

Self-support is the primary mode of coping for all women

Trans women–CALD

70% myself (self-support)

30% other support

Trans women–non-CALD

55% myself (self-support)

45% other support

Cisgender–LBQ

70% myself (self-support)

30% other support

Cisgender–hetero

65% myself (self-support)

35% other support

“Other support” includes family, friends, partner, community, medical, psychological, police/justice and no support

Absence of support

- Psychological distress and isolation
- Formal support available to cisgender women often not accessible or adequate for trans women
- Negative experiences with police/legal system—judgement, blame, mistrust, a lack of DNA testing, some experiences of physical violence and sexual harassment

When I was sexually assaulted, I had very bad support and I've been in knots ever since. And even though more recently, I've managed to access support, I still feel like I'm tied in knots and my emotions are very complicated.

Fiona





WHAT DO WOMEN WANT?

Trans women's solutions to
sexual violence

- Education for the public, healthcare professionals and police
- Legal redress, inclusion and empowerment including voice in legislation, policy and practice
- Access to hormones for gender affirmation and legalisation of sex work

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY CHANGE

In addition to existing strategies to address sexual violence against women:

- Provide education/training about gender transitioning and experiences of sexual violence among trans women of colour
- Use language that is inclusive of gender and sexuality diversity
- Establish greater support from the justice system for trans women of colour who have experienced sexual violence
- Recognise the vulnerability and needs of trans women who are sex workers when addressing sexual violence; decriminalise sex work



IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND SERVICES



Sexual violence prevention and support services

- Make information about services accessible, visible, inclusive and sensitive to the needs of trans women of colour
- Ensure support and prevention programs are co-designed by multicultural women's services and LGBTQ services, as well as women leaders from CALD and queer communities.



Migrant services

Make services accessible, visible and inclusive to trans women and those who are sexuality diverse



Healthcare and general practitioners

- Incorporate trans affirmative care: correct pronouns, non-gendered bathrooms, and trans- and gender diverse-specific literature and health resources
- Support gender transitioning to reduce the risk of transphobic violence

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Training resource

This training resource was developed by Alex Hawkey, Jane M. Ussher and Janette Perz, and designed by Eleanor Shepherd, on behalf of the Crossing the Line Study Team. It is based on the project report (add link to report here)

Project report:

Ussher, J. M., Hawkey, A., Perz, J., Liamputtong, P., Marjadi, B., Schmied, V., ... Brook, E. (2020). *Crossing the line: Lived experience of sexual violence among trans women of colour from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds in Australia* (Research report, 14/2020). Sydney: ANROWS.

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