

## Episode 2 Transcript

Leo

Hi everyone. Thanks for joining and welcome back to the Trans Pulse Canada COVID-19 podcast miniseries. Last episode I talked with our guests about the impact of COVID-19 on healthcare and gender affirming healthcare. Today, we're focusing on another theme we found in the trans pulse COVID qualitative paper. In this episode, we're talking about the heightened financial employment and housing precarity that some trans and nonbinary folks experienced during the pandemic. Before we get into things, I want to share a little bit of a content warning. I'm going to share some quotes that are from participants that can also be found in our paper and some of the content in these quotes relates to mental health and suicide. There will be links and information in the episode description for mental health resources if they're needed. If you're listening and you find the content distressing, take a break, check out some resources, or reach out to a family member or a loved one. Before we get into the content, I'll just ask my guests to introduce themselves.

Hazel

Hi there, my name is Hazel, and I am 25. I go by she her pronouns and I am a transwoman who has been out for about two years. And yes, it's nice to meet you guys.

Leo

Thanks so much, Hazel. It's good to have you here today. So I'm first going to share some quotes that participants wrote into these open text boxes in our COVID-19 survey. And then we'll talk a little bit about those. The first participant, so. I have had several periods of housing instability. This has negatively impacted my mental and physical health to the point where I'm seeking access to necessary resources. Another participant said I planned to move out of my parents' home in March. This was delayed and by March they made March 2020. This was delayed and I ended up living with them until mid-July. I became suicidal and moved in with friends for a couple of months I have just now moved again and am living alone. I feel incredibly grateful for the ways my trans community has shown up for me. So Hazel, my first question for you is listening to these quotes. Is there anything that resonates with experiences that you've had during the pandemic?

Hazel

Yeah, there is quite a bit that resonates with me in that regard. I feel like housing and stability is something that I've always worried about ever since I've become an independent adult, there's often an application process for getting a job or getting a house, and it's just kind of something that's always in the back of your mind. Feel like trans women are, like, very like we're the face of the of the trans community. Sometimes to some extent. And we're, you know, like very sexualized and everything. And it definitely leaves you in a place where, you know, I feel like I always have to be on basically my "best behavior". You know when I'm at work or when I'm trying to, you know, apply for a house or a job and it it's taxing. It's very taxing. And yeah, it definitely resonates with me. I feel like finding housing has become harder and every potential move, our new apartment that I move to, there's kind of a level of precarity worrying if my roommates are, for example, coworkers going to be transphobic. I always have to wonder how my being trans is going to impact my interactions with other people and how they see me. And to me, it does feel like there's always a level of judgment and staring and kind of just being

perceived that people don't even realize that they're doing. But you know, when you're trying to, like, apply for an apartment and the lady at the reception is constantly misgendering you and you're trying to keep a straight face and like, act like it's totally fine. It's hard. There's definitely points where it feels easier - I'm sure this is an experience a lot of trans people can resonate with - but it feels easier to simply go along with it and let those people view you as a man or woman are whatever gender they're misgendering you as.

Leo

Thanks. I think it's a really important point that a lot of this like financial employment, housing, stuff, a lot of it for trans people, comes down to safety. And so folks have trouble finding places that are safe accepting this is so this is, like, workplaces that are that. Feel safe that are accepting of who they are, where they're not going to get misgendered and the same like with housing. You need to feel safe where you live or you hope that you can find a place where you feel safe. I'm wondering how safety factored into the way you experience changes during the pandemic in terms of employment or your housing situation? Was there anything that came up where like that was really a concern?

Hazel

As I progress in my transition and the more visibly feminine I feel generally speaking, the less safe I feel particularly being someone who's on estrogen, I'm not as physically strong as I used to be and I was never a super strong person to begin with. But you know, I'm not, as you know, physically capable of physically capable as I used to be. And there's also the factor of trans hate crimes, just they don't, you know, they're probably not going to get prosecuted as much. You're probably, you know, if someone like spits on you and calls you a slur or that's another example. But even just someone who's like sexually harassing you in a grocery store, for example, is something that happens. I felt basically that as a trans woman, I couldn't really do anything about it. Or speak up about it, because no one would listen to me in regards to jobs and employment, I feel somewhat safe as in employment. I'm a barista. I deal with the public a lot. I definitely do feel unsafe at times. I think in in any point in history when there's been like some kind of oppressed group, be it people of color, people who are gay, people who are trans, when you're in that minority group, if you fight back against someone who's discriminating, you even rightfully so, you're going to be viewed as the aggressor. In that situation, and that's something I always have to worry about and. I think that happens as well in housing. I actually have a semi relevant story about housing and safety. If you would like me to share it. It's not super long, but it's kind of a story involving me and some other people and our trans safety during housing. Long story short, me and my partner at the time we split up very amicably we had both transitioned. We were moving along in our transitions and realized we weren't the best fit for each other anymore and that that's all great and OK. And my partner who is who is trans masc no longer my partner was with their boyfriend at the time and they both lost their housing and they came to live with me because the only other option at that time was for them to go to homeless shelter because the other person that they were living with basically violently kind of removed them from their housing made it very difficult for them to stay in the apartment that they were living in safely and I was not about to let 2 trans people have to have to be in a homeless shelter, which I felt like would have been even more dangerous for them and they needed a place to stay after surgery and recovering from surgery. And I think that's just like a really good example of, you know, the only reason that those two were able to be safe was because I happened to be living in this place that I had lived in for four years, that we had lived in for four years. And I just, I can't help but think

if we had been cis it just would have been a totally different story. It would have been so much safer for all of us to seek outside resources, but because we were all trans, it kind of it really felt like we needed to huddle together and protect each other because in that situation it did not feel, you know, safe to seek housing support outside of the group there and I will say as again as a trans person, you are more likely to experience. I think you know crimes and violence towards you to some extent and.

Leo

Yeah, exactly. And in addition, we have plenty of research that tells us that trans people don't make as much money as people like just across the board like there are some studies that show that trans people might even be a little bit more educated than the average person and yet still don't make as much money as cisgender people or the average person. And that must have really taken a toll during the pandemic, and I really wonder about your experience hearing that you've worked as a barista. How do you think your experience as a trans person compared to cisgender people during the pandemic then related to like finances?

Hazel

Well, to give a very brief timeline, the first year of the pandemic, you know, April 2020, my work shut down and they're like we have no idea what's going. We're just we're going to shut everything down. I went to work with my dad and concrete for a while. Eventually stopped working with my dad. Different reasons and then I was unemployed for about a period of four months, and then that same job where I was a barista in Vancouver offered me the position back. So I took it. I knew at the time taking the job back that I was going to have to come out of I. I knew I had already known when I accepted the job offer. I had already discovered my transgender identity, I just wasn't fully ready to come out yet, so there was a period of two months where I was in the closet working at this job, not ready to come out, had worn some really feminine clothing, you know, like I wore like a romper with, like, straps and all that. But still, you know, not really like fully out as a woman at all and. I was scared. I there was. There was a part of me that was scared that I was going to be fired just for being trans. And this was like I was working with like, very relatively non-judgmental people. I had no reason to believe that these people were going to discriminate against me, and yet I still was scared of being discriminated against. In terms of my livelihood and the amount of money I was making, thankfully it's never decreased although. I will say when I moved here and I was working as a barista I there was a job that I worked at briefly in a richer suburb, and I was essentially let go for like, "not being a good fit for the team". But one of the owners of this company told me that there had been a number of complaints received about me. And it's just weird because I've been a barista for many years, and I've never, I haven't had an extraordinary amount of complaints made about me, if any, and I couldn't help but feel that had to do with my chance identity because there were a few times that I corrected customers, you know, elderly white people on my pronouns. And I believe that led to complaints, which ultimately led to me being terminated. And since then, you know, I've always kind of been very hesitant about asserting myself and my pronouns towards people because it will. I'm worried that I'm going to. Lose my job.

Leo

What do you think the common trans experience related to housing and? Employment during the pandemic was like was there anything that you saw happening in your community that you felt like was pretty common?

Hazel

I think like one, probably very common experience is that a lot of people, myself included, came out to ourselves and to other people the world as transgender. And I think there's this period when you first come out where you're kind of like an awkward baby. You've just started hormones, or you're just figuring out how to dress, how to present yourself. You're going by a new name and that's a period of time more than any other point in your transition where you're going to be really visible as a trans person, you're going to be really visible to just the world around you and. I think. One thing I experienced during that was perhaps feeling the need to hide that early transitioning part of myself as much as possible in order to ensure my job stability and my housing stability. I did not come out to the landlord liaison who dealt with all my problems in my house for a while. I didn't come out to him for, like, until I had been trans for almost a year, because I just didn't feel safe in his presence. I thought, you know, I was. I was worried he was going to make up something about me and go to the landlord and just get me evicted in this place that I've been living for in four years and yeah, I think. You know, I have. I had a trans friend as well who was just, uh, you know, totally stealth at work, never came out and felt like it was the safer option. And I think for the trans people who can do that, who can pass and who are afforded that privilege. Are always like 98% of the time are going to not out themselves and I see that it's just a very common thing. It's just a way to ensure safety. So I think you know that experience of being trans during the pandemic is essentially in a lot of ways that you don't want to be perceived, and that if the option is available to be stealth and to be passing, it's going to be taken. And I would say that for myself.

Leo

As well, yeah, I can say the same is true. My partner and I, we moved like we were living in a bigger city and we moved to a smaller city during the pandemic, and I think a lot of people in general did that and I think a lot of trans people did because of, like, worry about finances and that kind of thing. We moved to pay less rent and to be closer to family. But living in a smaller town like definitely had safety concerns about outing ourselves as trans. And so we really, we never did like there we did. Our neighbors don't really know we're trans, and usually I'm the kind of person that's like I'm trans. I love trans people. Like it's just such a thing I usually celebrate in life. But living in like a smaller city than I'm used to. I was like, this doesn't feel like the safe way to go. So some of our listeners might be people who work in public health and. Do advocacy or work around public health interventions or changes, or they might work in the policy arena and. I'm wondering if you have any ideas about. What would be a good message to tell those people? So if policymakers are listening or people who work in public health, what might be something? That they should know about the experience of trans nonbinary people during the pandemic.

Hazel

This is going to come off as negative, but I don't view it as a negative thing, but I will say to all the public health officials out there, anyone listening to this who's a policy maker, et cetera, it is so much worse than you think it is. And I'm telling you that because as a trans person, I only you know, it took me 6 months to realize how bad it was when I experienced the suicide of a friend of mine who was trans just to a due to a complete lack of acceptance from her, her family, and her support network. The reason I say that is because I think it's good to remember past times in history when there have been groups that were, you know, the target of the rest of humanity are large portions of the world are demographics.

That there are always going to be so many things about the trans experience that you're never going to read up on, that you're not going to see reported in the media even in little articles, there's very subjective things about the experience and it's just very difficult to exist as a trans person in this world. And anyone who proceeds with the decision to transition is giving up a large degree of safety and comfort in order to be who they truly are. So I think just keep in keep, keep that in mind, keep that in mind, you know, be compassionate because God knows the trans people. We all need it.

Leo

I think it's really easy for cisgender people to not really know what the trans experience is like or how hard it is to be trans, especially if they're disconnected from the community. If they don't know anyone who's trans, so they haven't heard stories, they might be like, oh, we, Canada isn't accepting country because we have, you know. Policies that allow people to access hormones we don't. We're not. We're not the United States. We're not doing what Trump did. So it's like so much better and so much safer here. But that's not the case for everyone and people. Really struggle and it is it is hard to be trans. Can you think of any particular - this might be too big of a question - but can you think of any ways that policymakers could make changes to policy that would help trans folks?

Hazel

I think also to have just like. More concrete protections for trans people in housing and employment, and that's a hard one because it's very hard, fundamentally to, I think, prove discrimination is occurring. But I think if there's- I just I think there has to be a way. I think there has to be a way to ensure that trans people are safer than they are. Because right now, you know, we do have it in our like constitution that trans people deserve to be treated the same as everyone else. And yet, that's clearly not reflected in like the act of going on of our society. I just think that more support, more public health resources for trans people, because those are very limited. I live in probably the best place in the world to be trans, and I still to wait almost five freaking months to get on hormones. It felt like forever. That is not acceptable even though. We as the best place in the world we should be doing better and I think a good place to start with that is providing more resources for trans people to access what they need, be it STI testing, hormones, surgeries, we're all we all spend so much time waiting. And I think one more thing that I would add is some kind of program to like better educate doctors on how to treat and interact with trans people because many of them, medical professionals who have been spending decades working in their field have no idea how to interact or treat trans people. Anyways, thank you for your time.

Leo

I second all of that. It's especially educating healthcare providers is something that I think is really important right now. And you also touched on the importance of money, which I mean again part of this episode was to talk about finances and if a government isn't spending more money investing money. And trans people, I think that ends up trickling down to a situation where trans people are continuing to be less financially stable than cisgender people. It's just all comes down to. Needing more money to be towards interventions towards helping people towards you. Know accessing surgeries and those sorts of things that trans folks need. This has been a great chat. My last question is just if there's anything else you would like to say on the topic of the episode, which is again about, you know, finances, employment, and housing issues for trans and nonbinary people during.

Hazel

I don't know many trans people that are relatively well off. I know trans people who make a decent income and are available to live affordably. It's just good to know for like all the listeners out there that that if you know trans person, chances are they're struggling financially in some way it's more than likely, like probably 95% certainty. I'm struggling to find out every trans person that I know that I hold close in my life. We're all pinching pennies just to get by- overhauling our wardrobes, getting hormones, all that kind of stuff costs money, but also just. Trying to maintain stable housing and employment is incredibly extra hard for us, and it's hard for us to assert our own rights currently.

Leo

Thanks so much again for joining me, Hazel, this was a great chat. I really appreciate you taking the time to be here for our listeners. Stay tuned next time for an episode about the impact of physical distancing and switch to virtual communication and isolation that trans, nonbinary folks experienced. During pandemic. In this episode, Hazel also pointed out a number of areas which are relevant to the fifth theme of our qualitative analysis, the ways in which COVID impacted gendered experiences and gender affirmation. She mentioned misgendering, which if you're not familiar, is when someone uses the wrong pronoun to address an individual. Misgendering is something that negatively impacts the mental health and well-being of trans and nonbinary people. We know it increases anxiety, is distressing and can increase feelings of dysphoria. In the thematic analysis we conducted of the COVID-19 data, we saw participants talk about the changes in experience related to misgendering that they experienced. For some people, wearing a mask in public meant they were less likely to be misgendered. For others, it occurred more frequently while masking. The increasing use of online video conferencing during COVID also allowed many people to easily specify pronouns in meetings. Spending more time with cameras on may have also led to some increases in dysphoria for trans nonbinary people. Alternatively, in our analysis, some participants felt that time spent home away from others allows them time to explore their gender expression safely. Overall, there seems to have been some shifts and changes for trans nonbinary people related to how they were gendered and possibly in feelings of dysphoria or euphoria during the pandemic. Staying home may have promoted a sense of safety despite increasing social isolation or feeling disconnected from community. As we addressed in a previous episode. Public health research may be beneficial to understand how these pandemic experiences may have impacted health or well-being of trans and nonbinary people, especially with the lens towards addressing the question of how to protect trans folks during future public health emergencies. In this episode, we also addressed some topics related to safety. We'll talk more about safety for trans people during the pandemic in the last episode of this series, so stay tuned for more.