

## Episode 4 Transcript

Leo

Hi everyone and welcome back to the TransPULSE Canada COVID-19 podcast miniseries last episode my guest and I discussed the impact of the pandemic on social networks, peer support, and overall community connection throughout this podcast series. I've been sharing results of a thematic analysis from free form responses in our survey. Today we are addressing safety concerns. Today I am joined by Heather and I will let her introduce herself.

Heather

I'm Heather. My pronouns are she her. I work in IT, in the public sector.

Leo

Thanks so much, Heather. It's really lovely to have you here today. Thanks so much. For joining me before we get too into things, I just want to give folks a little bit of a heads up and a little bit of a content warning that we are talking about safety concerns. In this episode, and if you're trans, are nonbinary, you know that there is a lot that goes into safety for trans people and a lot of a lot of topics there that can be kind of hard hitting or heavy. And the same with changes in in life experiences during COVID. So definitely take breaks if you need to during this episode, reach out to a friend or loved one. There will be contact info for mental health supports in the episode description if you need them. So to start us off, Heather, I'm going to share some quotes that are from our participants. They wrote these directly in the open text box of our survey. And then we can reflect on how they relate to or different from your experience. "During the early days of the pandemic, I was aware of being more visible as a queer person in a relationship that appeared to be outside of a nuclear family and therefore breaking physical distancing guidelines. Also, more disconnected from queer and trans communities". Another participant said "It's weird being seen and how I present myself is both anxiety filled and also necessary. Like when COVID happened the fact that I wouldn't be dressing up for work bothered me. On the other hand, I still do my makeup every day because of zoom meetings, so there's some continuity. Also, having to wear a mask in public can be really, really wonderful, because I don't need to worry about being clocked (that means read is trans) as much". So these are two quotes from our participants. Do either of these resonate with you or any experiences you had during COVID or are there other safety concerns that that came up for you or for you know your bubble or your community during the pandemic?

Heather

One very specific thing about safety that happened was. There was a great big backlash against. Nominally against public health. Public health. Protections, but it really did. Just gather the who's who of reactionary of reactionary forces. I wasn't in Ottawa, so I didn't quite get that apocalyptic experience. Every Saturday for I don't remember how long I, many months we had a truck caravan rolling through, rolling through downtown here and. You know the connections between it had been organized by open white supremacists. You know, that had been reported. There were people at these events with Confederate flags and anti-trans posters. So part of it is that we're living within earshot of that parade route. So for half of a day every weekend, you're hearing all these sounds, which we came to associate

with aggression and lack of safety. Living pretty close to downtown, like couldn't really leave our apartment without coming into contact with them. With people who were who were doing that thing. So for however many months, I basically didn't go out on a Saturday, you know, maybe occasionally in a car in the evening or something. I was afraid that if I went out, if I went out on foot, if I went anywhere near downtown that I that I'd be assaulted. It's still, there's still some lingering fear. Even if they aren't, aren't doing truck parades anymore. Those people, those people, are all still out there. They're still emboldened by their sense of power in numbers and by the fact that one of the policies that they were that they were yelling about. Of course, that ties in with a whole bunch of other stuff that's happening in that's happening in politics like the. That's not the only place or time and anti-trans backlash has come up but it was in a way like this is a pretty queer friendly town. Well, I knew about the politics, about the anti LGBT politics everywhere, that was what made it feel like it was on our doorstep. Like that was the difference between this is horrible and it's everywhere and knowing intellectually that. Even though this is a kind of left of center stronghold that it was still here. Threats were ready to bubble to the surface whenever there was something that came to instigate it. So that was. I mean, I don't. I haven't recovered from that. I don't know if I'll ever recover from that like that. I lost a lot of a lot of sense of safety there and in the same way that people, maybe in a way it was an illusion of safety that I was able to hold on to a lot longer than a lot of other people in a lot of other places. And that's. You know, that was a privilege to not feel that fear every to not feel that fear every day but. That probably happened to a lot of people over the course of COVID. And it's just one of many factors that that built that up.

Leo

Yeah, I think this is such a good point and a really important topic to bring up. I'm not sure how much of A sense of the impact of that on trans nonbinary people like public health practitioners, people who work in policy, like really have a sense of, I don't think they quite understand the way that transness was sort of tied into all of these protests. And the way that being trans was really targeted. And also at the same time there were sort of like growing anti trans laws happening in the United States and like other attacks in the world that really just culminated I think in a lot of trans people feeling incredibly unsafe during the pandemic for a lot of different reasons. So thanks so much for bringing up that point. I just want to ask you now. Do you think there's anything that policymakers or people who work in public health who might influence policy you should know in relation to those safety concerns that that you just brought up? Is there anything that can be done? Are there any recommendations that you might have for ways to support trans people?

Heather

That is such a hard one for me. It's the kind of question that. It's hard to even think about because of my own disillusionment and cynicism. Like I think about how could how could public health support people like me? How could the how could the government promote my safety and my brain is just like they won't. I have just lost, I have lost completely lost faith in not just the ability, but the idea that public policy makers and legislators have any interest in protecting people like me.

Leo

Yeah, it's a completely valid feeling to have. And I don't have great ideas either. That's why I'm asking the question and not answering it.

Heather

I think there have been a bunch of studies and a bunch of recommendations from people who study public health in impoverished communities, in racialized communities and all of those things. Also trans communities like there are so many marginalized groups who are vulnerable in the same. In the same ways, because we don't have, don't have the same, don't have the same wealth and income on average. We experience various kinds of discrimination and micro to macro aggressions from the medical system. I so I don't. I don't have any ideas, but if I had to talk to a policy maker right now under the gun snapped no time to prepare, I'd say listen to Indigenous leaders, listen to activists and theorists from disabled and racialized communities.

Leo

During the pandemic, I definitely heard from a lot of folks in my community and people that I interacted with about concerns related to getting COVID and being a trans person. And so I heard things like people worrying about how they'll be treated in the hospital if they need to be hospitalized for COVID not being able to like, have a friend or advocate there with them. Things like that. Were there any specific concerns that you had about getting COVID or about being sick during the pandemic that was also related to being trans?

Heather

Well, I think one of the places that there was maybe a bit of an intersection was... thinking about the possibility of being, you know, long term neurological damage. I've kept the job that I had before I transitioned and. I am aware that that's pretty rare. A lot of people, especially without union representation, it's. People get fired when they come out a lot. People don't usually find jobs that. You know that pay the same. A lot of people don't find jobs at all. It was always on my mind that if I got sick, if in the long term I wasn't able to do this job well enough that I might not be able to recover my career. That I'm kind of lucky to be where I am in a lot of ways and there's absolutely no guarantee that if that if I lost that, if I lost a job that I would ever be able to recover from that.

Leo

I haven't seen any numbers or anything like that, but I wonder how many trans people did lose their jobs during the pandemic and the impact that that really has had because. Especially for our listeners, if you're not aware, a lot of trans people struggle to get employment or struggle to get well paid employment. And so yeah, there are probably lots of folks out there who did lose their jobs and I'm. I'm concerned for them. I think that this is the place where maybe public health and policy interventions can do somethings to support people that have maybe lost their jobs during the pandemic.

Heather

Not from data, just from people I know a lot of trans people do have near minimum wage jobs in food service or customer service and. Of course, those were those were decimated. Were decimated by COVID and by the time those sectors were recovering. We had big tech with the Uber eats and such that cut the already slim margins, especially in in foodservice, so that restaurants could only a lot of them could only really stay open by exploiting employees even harder than before. That's pretty miserable disproportionately. A lot of trans people so far as I can see work in, you know, work as social workers as,

nurses, as people who are doing frontlines health stuff with other people in marginalized communities. Those sectors are almost collectively the entire health sector is burnt out. You know, there's been a huge amount of a huge amount of turnover in those sectors because. I don't think there was ever really a plan to keep people doing like public outreach safely. People you know, accepted that they were going to get COVID a whole bunch of times and be in danger of that you know that same kind of violence themselves, or they or they had to get out, so that also became a kind of a kind of a hostile place that drove a lot of people out. I yeah, I'd be interested to see some statistics to see if that actually bears out in reality, or if it's just my bubble. But I'm also afraid to see those statistics right. I need sources of hope and I don't think that's going to be one of them.

Leo

Yeah, unfortunately, statistics about the trans community often do not result in hope. It would be lovely if we had more of that. I think in a lot of ways COVID has just shown us that the experience of being trans or nonbinary and the challenges that we have because of that, the levels of discrimination, the lack of access to health care, it's all just been magnified and. I don't know that it's getting better in this, like, "post pandemic world". And again, I don't have any recommendations for policy here, but I do think, I hope that there are people listening who may have power or privilege or worked in that realm who have ideas about ways to fix this because it is absolutely just like compounding issues for our community.

Heather

It is. It's compounding issues for our community and its compounding issues for all for all vulnerable communities and in a way, it feels like it has accelerated and magnified a lot. Not only do I not have a recommendation for policy I also don't have a recommendation for how to organize. And make collective make collective action out of that awareness. I hope that someone listening does. I hope that there can be mass movements that come out of this. I don't think the policy changes are going to happen without that. I think what needs to happen is organization then maybe government policies can change.

Leo

Yeah, I definitely think for a lot of people it feels truly insurmountable to make any kind of change because there's so much that needs to change, but I think any little thing that we can do to support our community, to support one another, to push for change to even to say, hey, we don't know what policymakers should do, but you should think about it. I think that's, it's moving us somewhere. It has to. It has to result in something happening, I hope.

Thanks so much for joining me for the transpose Canada COVID-19 podcast miniseries. I've greatly enjoyed being your host, and I hope you learned a lot along the way. If you have questions about the podcast or our research paper, feel free to reach out to myself or members of the research team. For the most up-to-date content on results from the work of trans PULSE Canada, visit the study's website @transpulsecanada.ca.