

# Transcript: Preliminary Findings from the LIT Cohort: Unmet Needs of Transgender Women in Baltimore

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## **Title Slide 1**

Hello. My name is Andrea Wirtz, and I am a faculty member at Johns Hopkins University, and today I am going to present some preliminary findings from the LITE cohort.

## **Slide 2 – Methods**

LITE is a multi-site study that has enrolled almost 1,500 participants in the baseline survey. This includes 747 transgender women with a negative HIV test, and 273 with a positive test at baseline. These participants participate at partner sites in New York City, Boston, Baltimore, Washington, DC, Atlanta, and Miami. Briefly, participants with a negative baseline test are eligible to continue in the cohort, and complete survey and rapid HIV tests every three months, as well as annual STI testing.

We also follow a separate online cohort that includes 468 participants from 50 cities in Eastern and Southern U.S., which participates only via remote methods. Given that the methods for the online cohort are a bit different, the online cohort data are not included in today's presentation.

While the original focus of the cohort was to understand more about HIV risks that are unique to transgender women, the survey is broad to allow us to evaluate other health and social concerns. All surveys and measures are available in English and Spanish, and we work closely with our Community Advisory Board that reviews the methods and study progress.

## **Slide 3 – Where do LITE Baltimore Participants Live?**

In Baltimore, we have enrolled 131 transgender women. Among these participants, 41-percent were living with HIV at baseline. Our catchment area is quite broad; participants generally come from Baltimore City, but some travel significantly further outside of the City.

## **Slide 4 – Demographics, social and structural characteristics**

The next few slides show Baltimore-specific data alongside from the full cohort, including Baltimore City. This is not meant for comparison purposes, but to display findings for the wider participants across Eastern and Southern U.S.

Consistent with the demographics of the City, the majority of the participants in Baltimore identify as non-Hispanic Black or Multiracial.

There are notable challenges with about one-quarter who have lower literacy levels, and only one-third who report full- or part-time employment. These two points likely reflect historical discrimination in education and employment. Likely related to the last point, almost two-thirds of participants report engagement in sex work at one point in their lifetime.

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It is worth noting that these data were collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, so it is possible that some of these findings around employment status have changed since then.

### **Slide 5 – Demographics, social and structural characteristics [continued]**

There are other notable immediate challenges, including high levels of food insecurity, unstable housing, and experiences of arrest.

On a positive note, however, the vast majority report that their health is Good to Excellent.

### **Slide 6 – Experiences of Violence**

One of the most salient findings from this research is the high level of violence victimization reported by transgender women. Over one-third of participants reported an experience of violence within the last three months; and almost 85-percent report lifetime experiences of violence. To put this in perspective, the most commonly reported statistic is that one in three cisgender women experience violence in their lifetimes. Unlike other populations for whom intimate partners are the most common perpetrators of violence, LITE participants report that strangers, family members, as well as current or former partners, were common perpetrators of violence.

In our prospective data, it's worth noting that participants can often continue to report violence over time, and about 40-percent of participants who reported a recent experience of violence continue to report that over subsequent follow up visits. This highlights the fact that violence is prevalent, but it is also persistent for transgender women.

### **Slide 7 – Barriers to care in Baltimore, by HIV diagnosis at baseline**

Related to other discussions in this meeting, we ask participants about common barriers to healthcare they faced. This slide displays results for Baltimore participants and is stratified by baseline HIV diagnosis. Transportation related barriers are one of the leading challenges participants face, though we see this is quite different for participants who are not diagnosed with HIV.

Halfway down on the graph, you will see another transportation related barrier, which is concern about safety in transit to and from a provider's office. Related to an earlier slide about experiences of violence victimization, several participants have reported experiencing violence simply waiting at a bus stop. I think it's also important to remember from the provider's perspective, that what we may perceive as a simple trip to a health clinic requires some transgender women to weigh the potential benefit of the medical visit against their own safety.

Participants also reported significant barriers related to perceived or experienced stigma and discrimination in the health care setting. Collectively, almost half of participants reported at least one barrier related to poor experiences in the past, feeling that providers were uncomfortable caring for trans patients, or being mistreated by staff or other patients.

### **Slide 8 – Challenges to addressing the needs of transgender women in Baltimore**

In planning HIV prevention and care services in Maryland, it's important to remember that these services will have limited impacts if more immediate socio-economic needs, such as

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employment and housing, are not supported for transgender women. LITE participants recognize the risk of HIV and the importance of prevention and care, but these socio-economic challenges, violence, and other issues take priority.

**Slide 9 – Transgender Response Team**

I'd like to close by thanking the Transgender Response Team for their support. Regularly meeting with other folks who are dedicated to providing affirming health and related services has provided important opportunities to inform the LITE study, aid in recruiting participants, coordinate with other activities in the City, and share progress and study findings.

**Slide 10 – Acknowledgements**

I'll close by acknowledging all the people who make this study possible, particularly the participants. And a special thanks to the Transgender Response Team, and to Jean-Michel.

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LITE Baltimore Infographic - [http://weebly-file/7/3/7/6/73764281/lite-infographic\\_v2.pdf](http://weebly-file/7/3/7/6/73764281/lite-infographic_v2.pdf)

To learn more about the LITE study, please visit: <https://www.litestudy.org>