Trans pláticas: Trans Latin@s in LA County sharing dialogue, strength, and resilience

Exploring the experiences of transgender Latin@/x/e immigrants in Los Angeles County through pláticas about their interactions with law enforcement and their mental health.

dom serrano, M.S. | Bamby Salcedo, M.A.

Monday, October 19, 2026

In gratitude and acknowledgement

Positionality

Shared community, though not exact intersectional experiences **01**

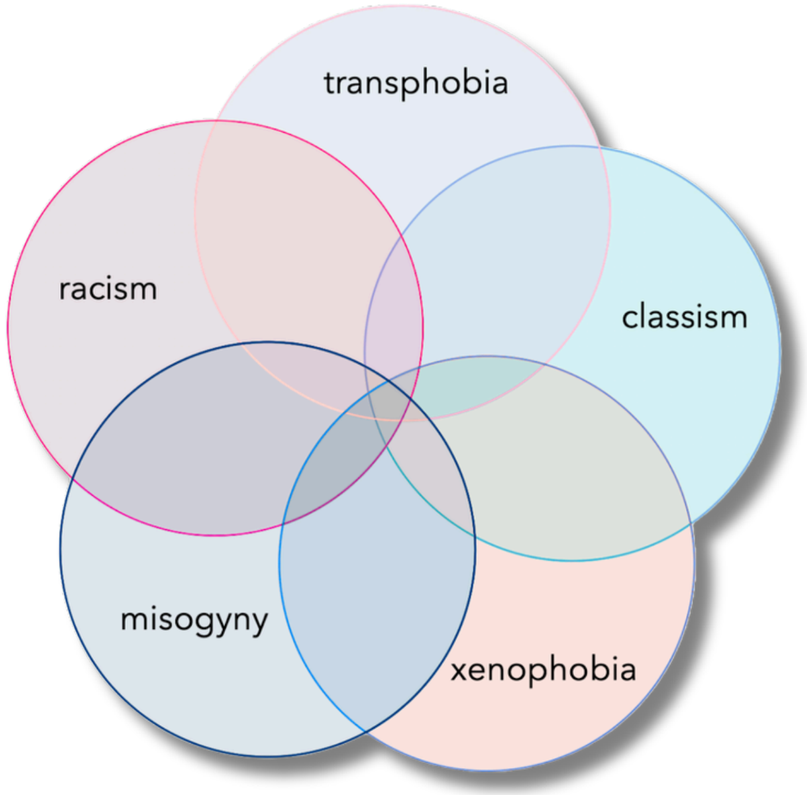
Child of immigrants, though not first-generation **02**

Latinx, though born & raised in the U.S. **03**



Introduction

Interlocking systems of oppression impact transgender Latinx immigrants in Los Angeles County.



Understanding the Problem

The systems that were intended to protect individuals from facing violence fail to do so for trans Latin@ individuals.

Instead, they perpetuate this violence through:

- police brutality
- discrimination practices by law enforcement
- unsafe conditions in detention centers.

Understanding the Problem

- Many trans Latin@/x/e individuals have created their own social support networks amid these injustices, comprised of family, friends, and community members.

- Organizations have provided support directly as well as in liaison work with police to reduce these occurrences.

And yet, these issues persist.

The Impact

Conditions that most frequently impact transgender Latin@/x/e individuals:

Anxiety / Depression

(Caraves & Salcedo, 2016; Bazargan & Galvan, 2012, Yamanis et al., 2018).

Suicidal ideation

(Bazargan & Galvan, 2012; O'Hanlan et al., 2018).

Traumatic stress

(Estrada et al., 2021)

Discrimination Anxiety

(Bazargan & Galvan, 2012; O'Hanlan et al., 2018).

Purpose

- to create a space for transgender Latin@/x/e immigrants in Los Angeles to discuss their experiences with systemic and interpersonal violence, including police brutality and discrimination from law enforcement

- to identify the impact on their mental health, and existing coping mechanisms through these pláticas

- to create a forum for community-based participatory action research.

- to learn from these experiences and collaboratively create an action that directly serves the community

- to provide information to mental health providers on how to provide higher-quality care for transgender Latin@ migrants.

Aim of Study

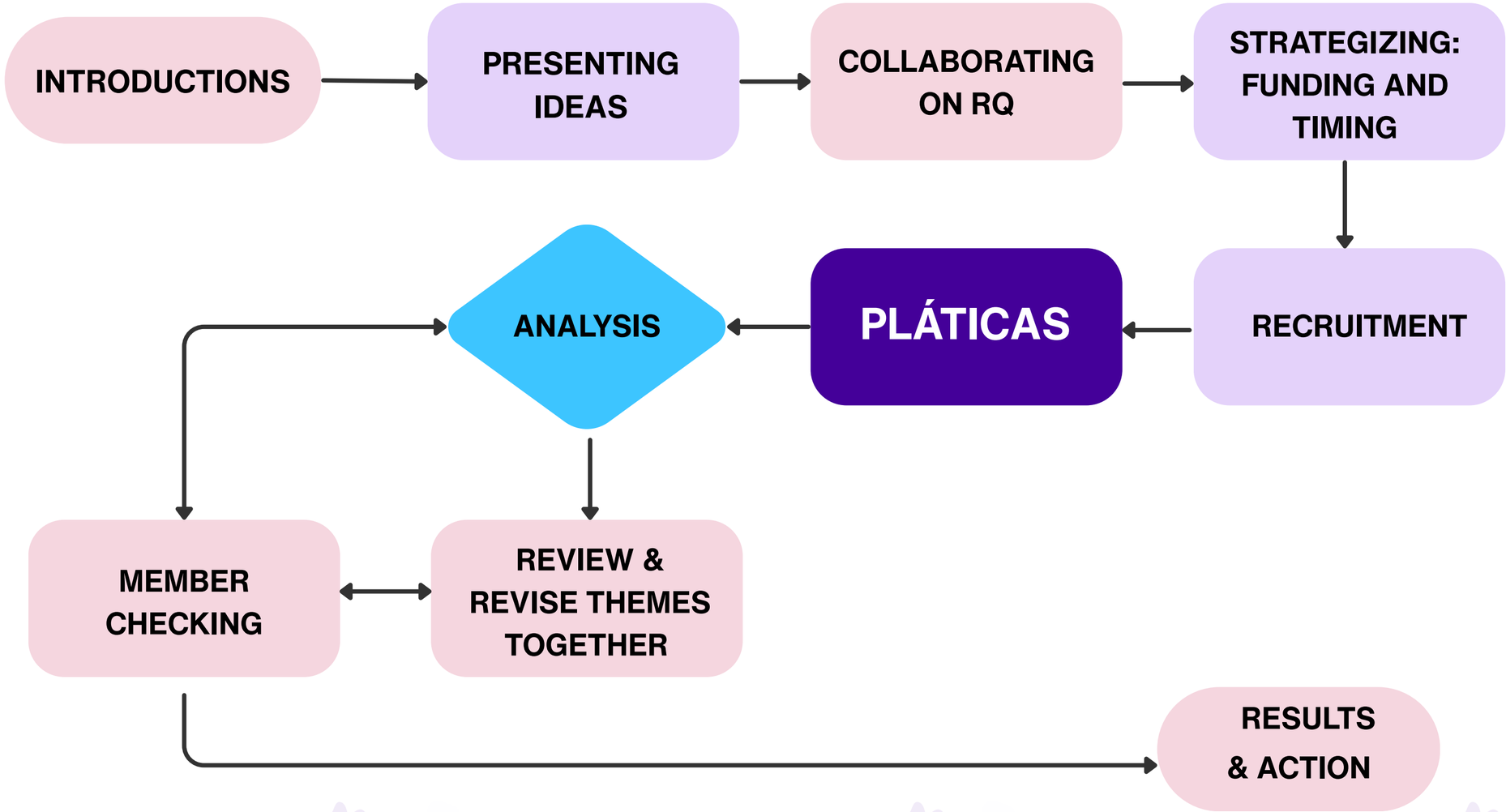
The aim of this study was to explore interactions with law enforcement, experiences of violence, and trauma as they relate to the mental health of transgender Latinx immigrants.

i. What are the experiences of transgender Latin@ immigrants when interacting with law enforcement?

ii. What are the impacts of these experiences on their mental health?

iii. What are existing coping mechanisms and outlets for transgender Latinx immigrants?

What did this actually look like?



Partnerships

SOMOS FAMILIA VALLE

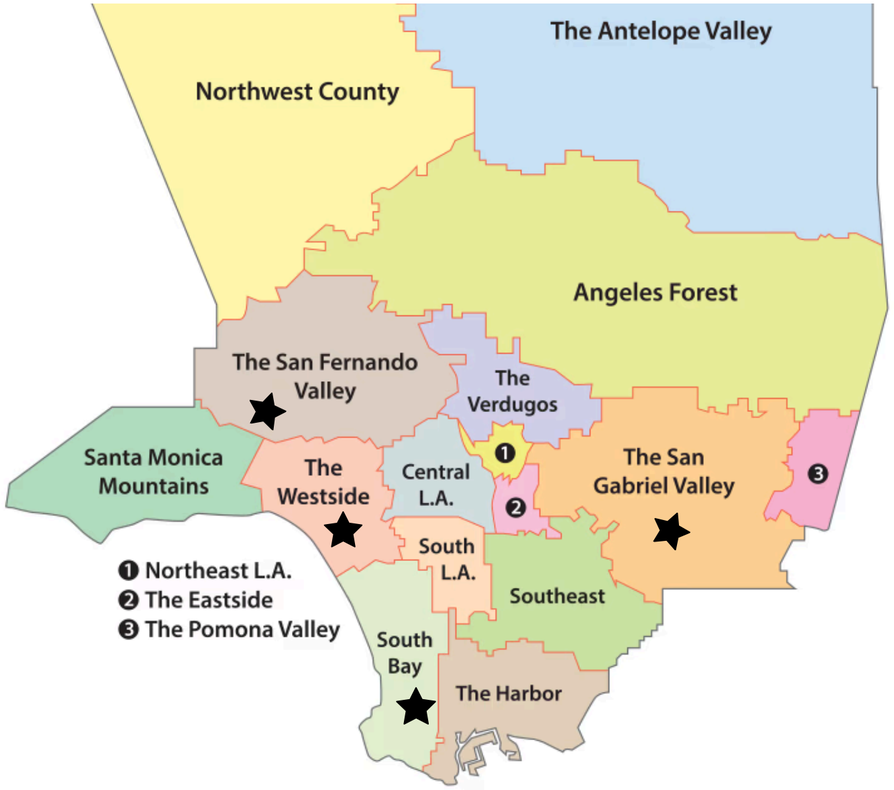
THE VOICE OF TRANSLATIN@S
TransLatin@ COALITION
IN THE USA

SGVLGBTQ SAN GABRIEL VALLEY CENTER

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Purposeful sampling

1. Transgender, gender-diverse, and intersex (TGI) individuals
2. Latin@/x/e individuals
   - individuals of Latin American descent, from countries of origin in Mesoamerica, Mexico, Central America, and South America.
3. Immigrants



Demographics

5 groups

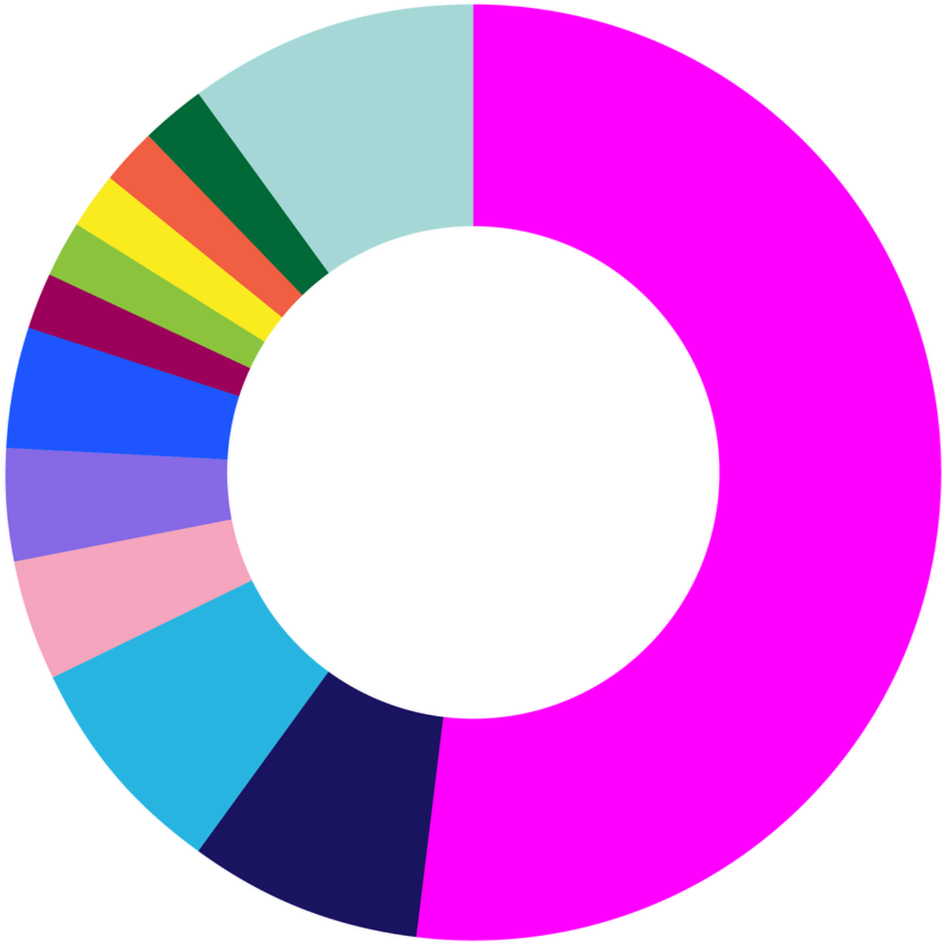
50 participants, 2 withdrew

Age ranged from 23 to 67,
with the mean age of 47.3

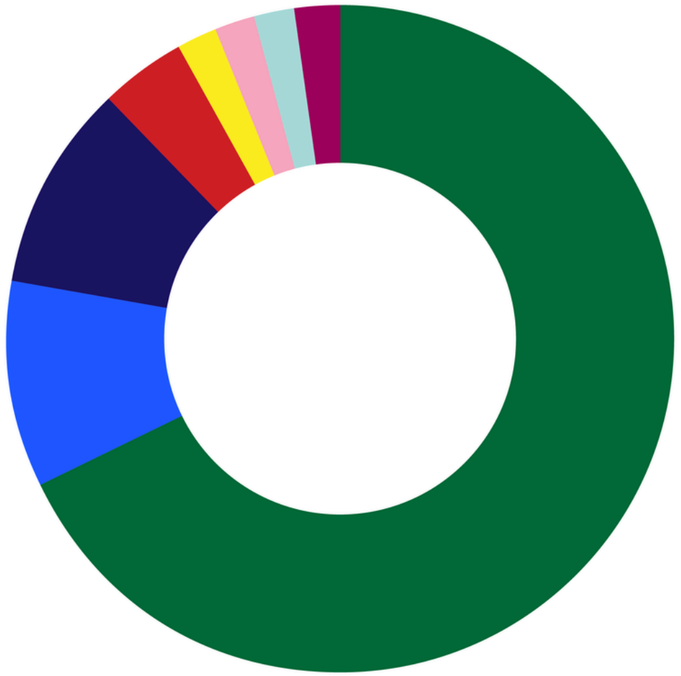
Gender	#	%
Trans	14	28
TS	8	16
Transgender	5	10
F	4	8
Trans woman/Mujer trans	3	6
FT	2	4
M/Male	2	4
Mujer	2	4
She	1	2
Transmasculine	1	2
Transhétero	1	2
Non-binary Trans Femme Presenting	1	2
Transsexual/Transexual	1	2
Transfem	1	2
Latina	1	2
Trans she/Ella trans	1	2
(blank)	2	4



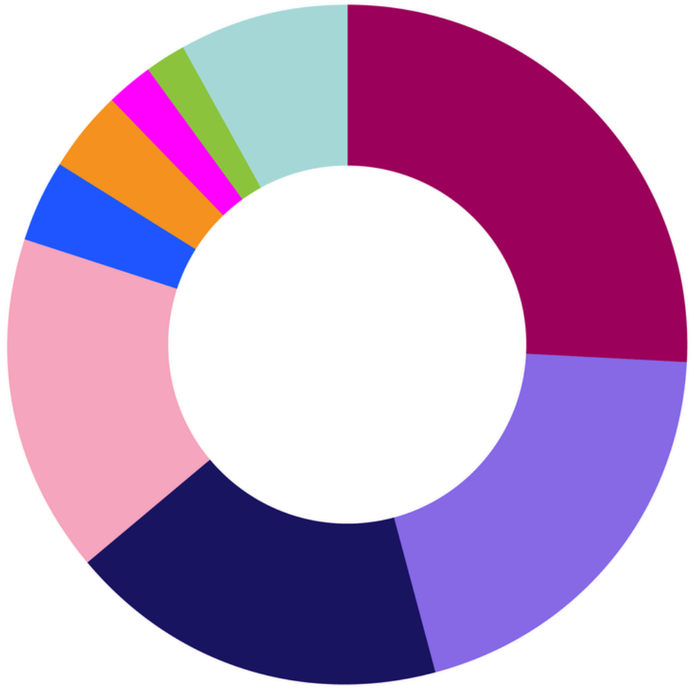
Sexual Orientation	#	%
Heterosexual/Straight	26	52
Transgender/Transgénero	4	8
Gay	4	8
Men/Hombres	2	4
Femenino	2	4
Lesbian/Lesbiana	2	4
Queer	1	2
Transgender Woman (Mujer Transgénero)	1	2
F	1	2
Pansexual	1	2
Pasiva	1	2
(blank)	5	10



Country of Origin	#	%
Mexico	34	68
El Salvador	5	10
Guatemala	5	10
United States	2	4
Colombia	1	2
Nicaragua	1	2
Honduras	1	2
Cuba	1	2



Documentation Status	#	%
Citizen	13	26
Undocumented	10	20
Permanent Resident	9	18
Refugee/Asylum	8	16
Withholding of Removal	2	4
U-Visas	2	4
Multiple Statuses	1	2
DACA	1	2
(blank)	4	8



Analysis Methodology

Findings


Negatives Experiences in Custody
Gender-based Targeting
Sexual Harassment
Complex Legal Systems
Impact on Employment
Abuse of Power
Fear
Systemic Issues
Nuanced Experiences
Experiences With Law Enforcement
Coping
Alone
In Community
Within Organizations
Self-care Strategies
Religion and Church
With Other Trans Latines
Resource-related Support

Abuse of Power

“Hemos sido las más humilladas, las más maltratadas, pero también las más queridas en silencio por los poderosos.”

[We have been the most humiliated, the worst treated, and also the most loved in silence by those in power].



Systemic Issues

“La primera vez trabajaba en un restaurante. Les tuve que dar culpable porque los abogados me dicen ‘tienes que decir de culpable para que te dejen salir.’ Tuve que decir que era prostituta para que me dejaran salir. El abogado que nos da la corte me dijo, ‘tienes que decir que eres prostituta para que puedas salir o te van a poner un juicio de 10 personas, y no creo que vayamos a ganar porque son 10 personas que son ciudadanos de El Monte y tú no tienes papeles, no tienes nada. Darte culpable.”

[The first time I worked in a restaurant. I had to plead guilty because the lawyers [public defenders] told me ‘you have to say you’re guilty so they can let you leave.’ I had to say that I was a prostitute so that they could let me leave. The lawyer who represented me in court told me ‘You have to say that you’re a prostitute so that you can leave, or they’re going to give you a 10-person jury, and I don’t think we’re going to win because those 10 people are citizens of El Monte, and you don’t have papers, you don’t have anything. Plead guilty.’]

Nuanced experiences with law enforcement

“El primer policía que llegó a rescatarme fue moreno, y me abrazó y me dijo, ‘Lo siento bastante por lo que te está pasando, y discúlpeme, pero no sé qué hacer con este caso. No he tenido un trato o un caso con una persona como tú.’”

[The first officer who came to rescue me was Black, and he hugged me and told me ‘I’m so sorry for what is happening, and I apologize, but I don’t know what to do with this case. I have never dealt with or had a case with a person like you.’]

Findings

What are the impacts of these experiences on their mental health?

Fear

ICE

Interpersonal discrimination

Police

Self-isolation

Depression

“Pero sí hay miedo, sí hay pánico, porque lo que sea, te sientes perseguida.”

[But there is fear, there is panic, because whatever it is, you feel like you’re being harassed].

Findings

What are existing coping mechanisms and outlets for transgender Latinx immigrants?

- Engaging with community
- Organization-based support
- Religion
- Self-care strategies

Community

“Aquí, por ejemplo, todos me entienden. Me siento bien, porque estamos en el mismo nivel sentimental, emocional; nosotros tenemos la capacidad de sentir dolor que otros sienten.

[Here, for example, everyone understands me. I feel good, because we’re on the same level of feelings, emotions; we have the capacity to feel the pain that others feel.]”

Religion

“Creer en dios y leer la Biblia es el factor 100% que me ayuda.”

[Believing in God and reading the bible is the factor that 100% helps me].”

Organizations

“Que bueno saber que la organización nos va a ayudar. “

[“It’s good to know that the organization will help us out.]

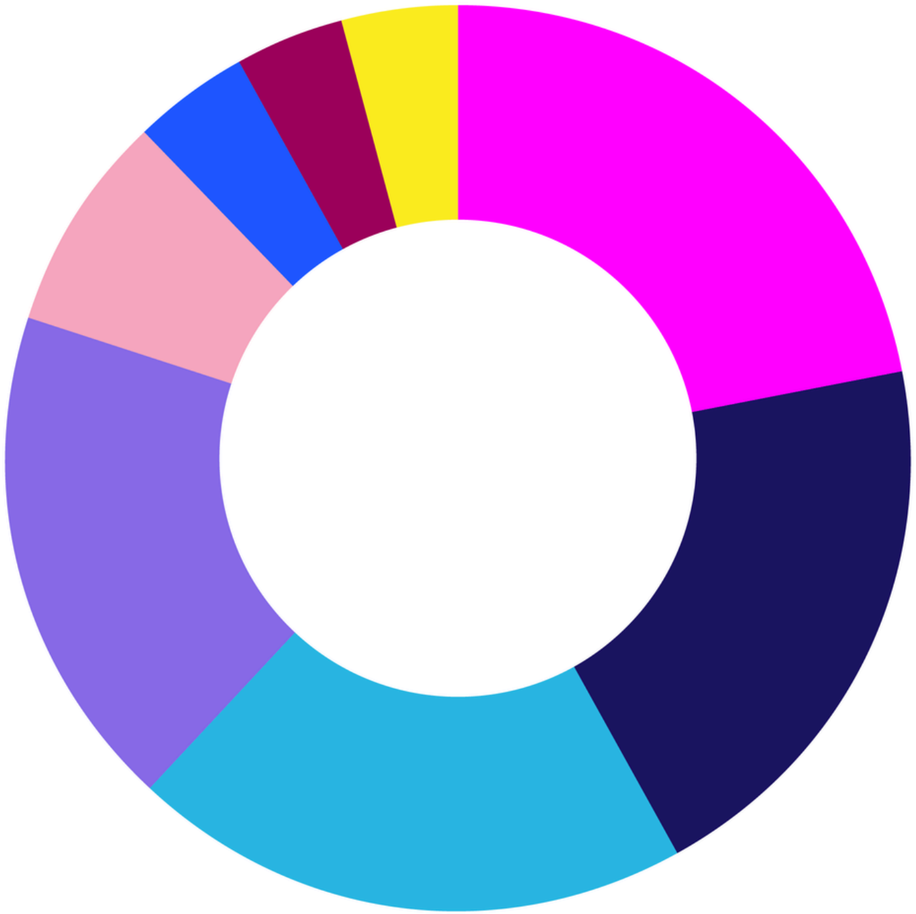
Self-care

“Me divierto con mis amigas, me voy a distraer con ellas y todo.”

[I have fun with my friends; I go to distract myself with them and everything.]

Geographical Differences

Location	#	%
Central LA	11	22
South Bay	10	20
San Gabriel Valley	10	20
San Fernando Valley	9	18
West LA	4	8
Antelope Valley	2	4
South/South Central LA	2	4
East/Northeast/Southeast LA	2	4



Geographical Differences

San Fernando Valley

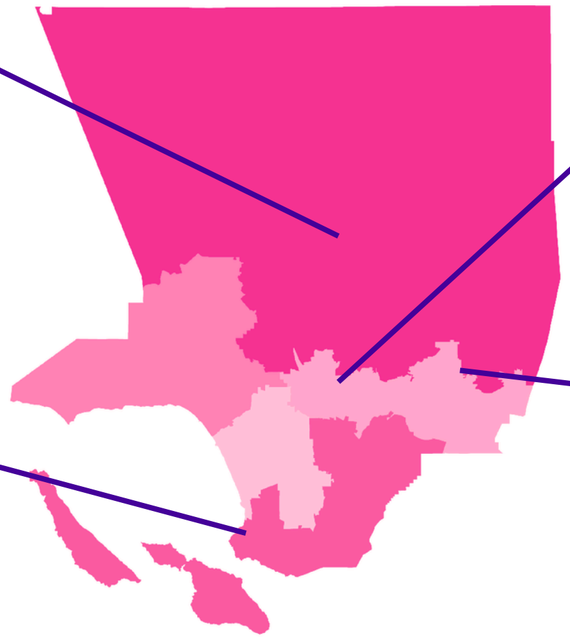
faced systemic issues at multiple fronts

drew resilience from history

Central Los Angeles

complex & nuanced experiences with officers

have organizational resources and still have signifcant needs



South Bay / Long Beach

faced resource-related concerns

had larger gap in experiences with law enforcement

San Gabriel Valley

faced repeated targeted harassment due to their location

drew strength from community

Discussion

- Impacts on mental health
- Negative experiences with law enforcement
- Systemic Issues
- Coping

44% of Latinx Transgender youth participants experienced suicidal ideation.

16% of participants attempted sucide in the last year.

Source: The Trevor Project

42% of respondents reported wanting therapy in the last year but being unable to receive it.

ACTIONS

- Accessible mental health care
- Education
- Legal Resources
- Additional resources

Implications For Treatment

Structurally and in the therapy room



- Gain education on trans issues
- Partner with local trans organizations
- Offer low- or no-cost services
- Offer group therapy with a wider geographical scope
- Consider narrative modalities
- Provide critical attention to social issues and their impact on clients

Implications for Policy

Enforcing existing guidelines for LAPD and creating clearer policies



Ensuring access to local resources for basic needs: housing, food, and transportation

Funding for trans-led and trans-serving organizations so they may serve a wider area



Securing state-wide insurance coverage for TGI individuals



Funding access to more group therapy services



Limitations

Sample size: depth and breadth

Biases

Most participants had access to TransLatin@ Coalition

Questions?



please scan the QR code for references