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The *Botshelo* Ba Trans Study Results of the first HIV prevalence survey conducted with transgender women (TGW) in South Africa

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Introduction

- Access Chapter 2 (AC2)
- Social, Health and Empowerment Feminist Collective of Transgender Women of Africa (S.H.E.)
- Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT)
- Gender DynamiX (GDX)



Botshelo Ba Trans Study



Overall aim: To understand the burden of HIV amongst TGW in South Africa

- *Botshelo* from Sesotho means life, love and happiness
- First HIV bio-behavioural survey (BBS) targeting **exclusively** TGW in South Africa

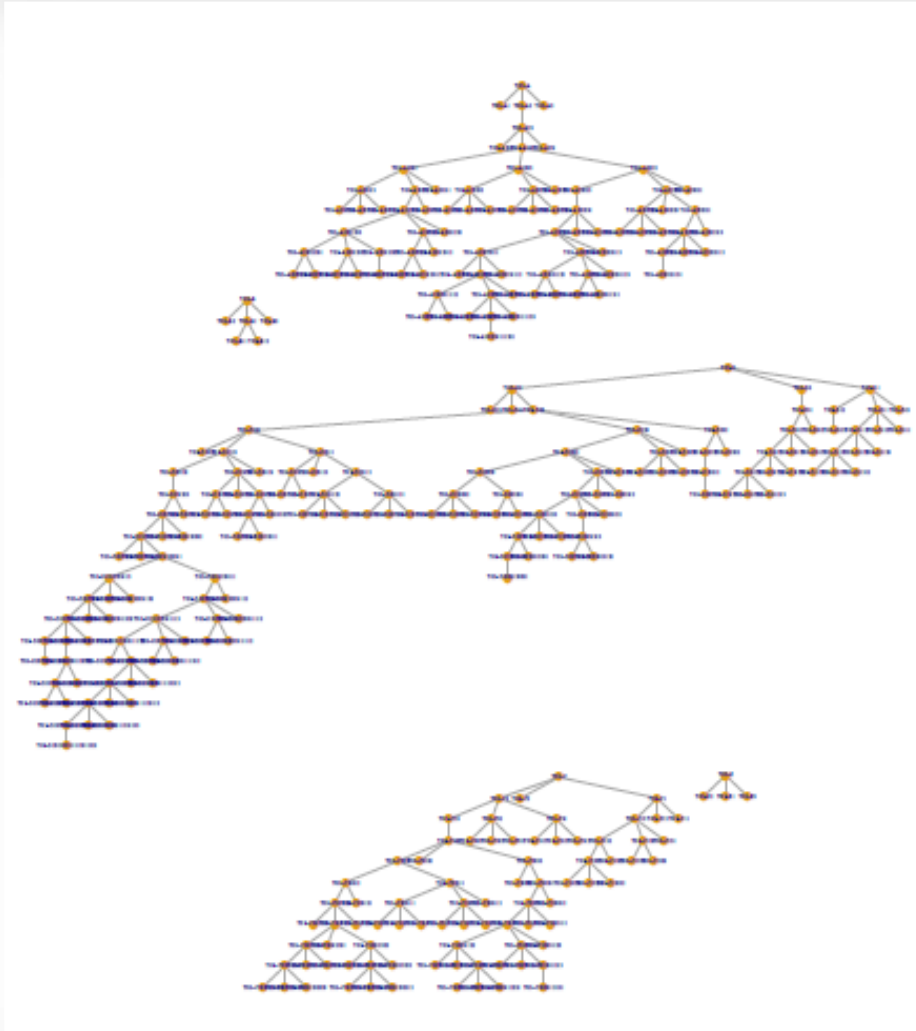
Rationale for the study

- Globally, TGW have been shown to be at high risk for HIV infection
- TGW are nearly 49 times more likely to be living with HIV than any other adults of reproductive age
- In South Africa we currently have little information regarding the specific HIV vulnerabilities of TGW, **except for data extracted from studies where the target population was men who have sex with men (MSM)**
- Prior to this study, HIV prevalence amongst TGW in South Africa was undocumented

Study setting

- This study was conducted
 - The **Cape Town metro - municipality**, located in the Western Cape Province,
 - **Johannesburg metro - municipality** area in the Gauteng province,
 - **Buffalo City metro - municipality** located in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa.
- The rationale for conducting the study within these metros is because of existing organisations working with TGW

Methodology used



- Respondent-driven sampling (RDS) (i.e. peer-driven recruitment) was used to recruit TGW
- Dried blood spot (DBS) specimens and surveys, were used to assess HIV prevalence and risk behaviours amongst TGW aged 18 years and older.
- We estimated crude and adjusted HIV prevalence and behavioural risk factor prevalence and generated weights that adjusted for personal network size and biases in recruitment using Respondent Driven Sampling Analysis tool (RDS-A).

Inclusion criteria

- The inclusion criteria for the survey:
 - Aged 18 years and older
 - (Self-reported) consensual sex* within the last 6 months
 - Lives in the Cape Town metropolitan municipality, Western Cape Province, Johannesburg metropolitan area, Gauteng or in Buffalo City metro municipality
 - Sex at birth = male
 - Current Gender = Female or Trans/gender/female or identify as “other” than male or man

- *For inclusion criteria purposes, sex is defined as oral, vaginal, or anal sex.

Realised study sample

In total **888** TGW were found to be eligible

Name of metro	Recruitment Period	Number of seeds	Total number of recruitment coupons issued	Final sample size
Buffalo City	34 weeks	5	932	305
Cape Town	34 weeks	7	727	259
Johannesburg	34 weeks	5	947	324
Total				888



Results



Socio-demographic characteristics (1)

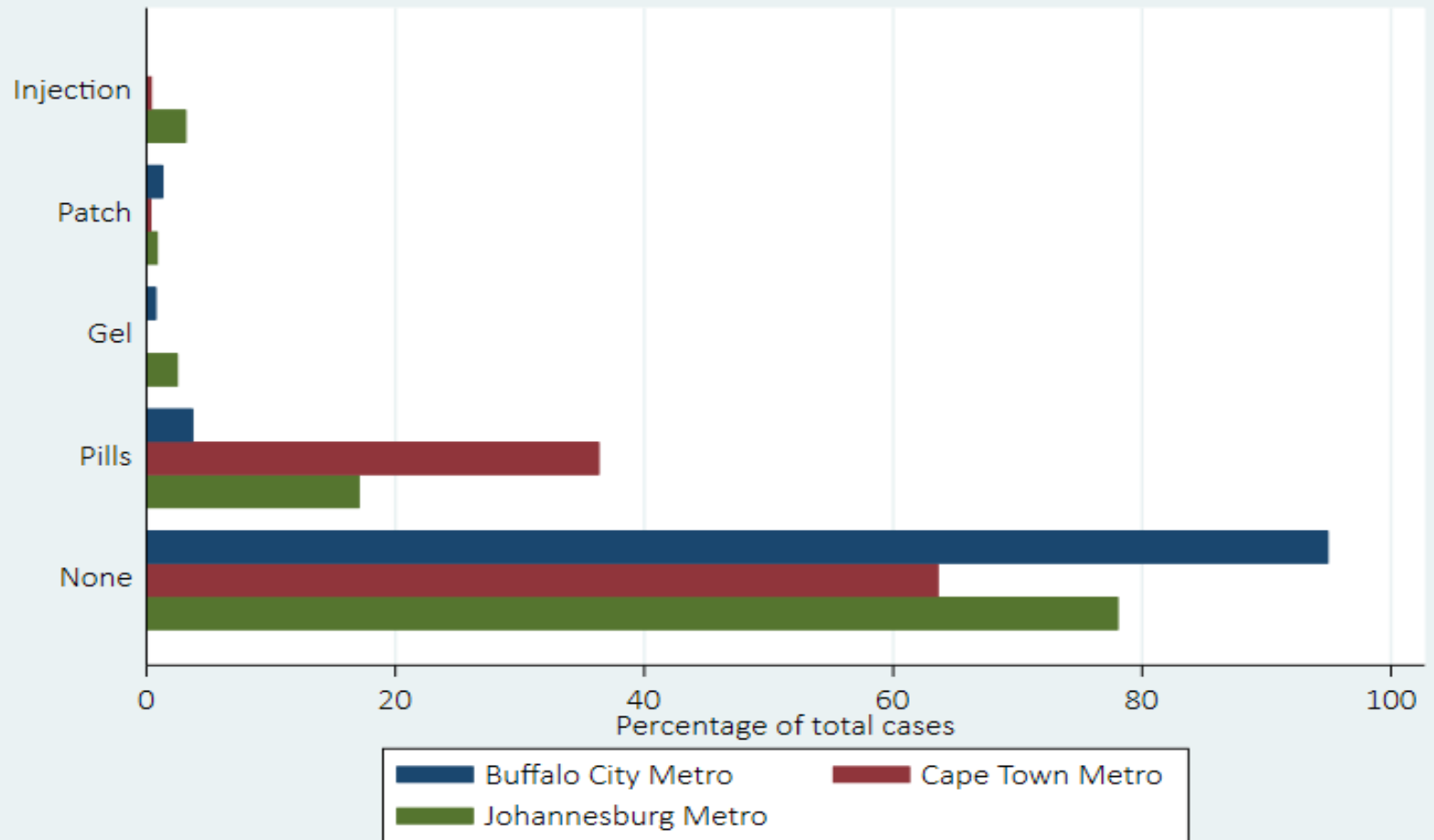
In each of the 3 study locations, survey respondents were:

- Buffalo City (18-24: 55.2%; 25 years and older: 44.8%)
- Johannesburg metro (18-24: 51.1%; 25 years and older: 48.9%)
- Cape Town: (18-24: 39.8%, 25+: 60.2%)
- **Race:** Reflects the dominant racial groups resident in each of the 3 metros
 - Buffalo City: Black African: 93.2%;
 - Cape Town: 'Coloured': 63.1%;
 - Johannesburg: Black African: 96.1%

Socio-demographic characteristics (2)

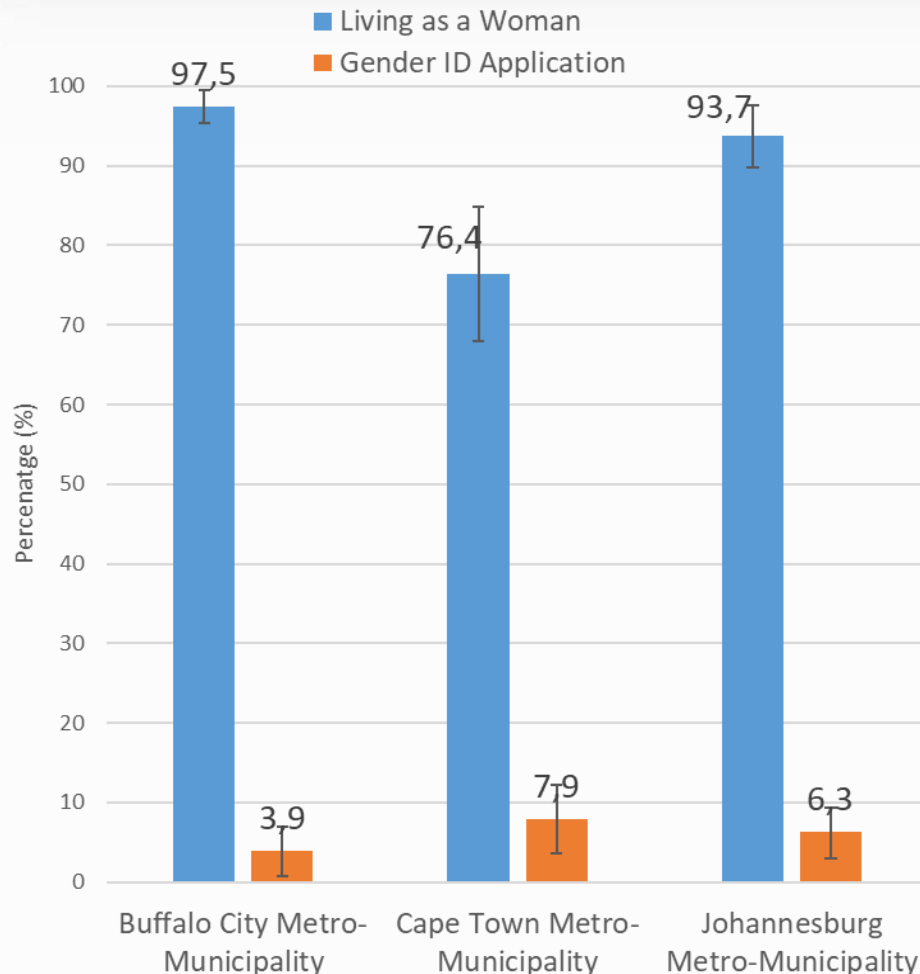
- Employment status
 - **Unemployed**
 - Buffalo City: 37.1%;
 - Cape Town: 60.0%;
 - Johannesburg: 52.0%
 - » Of note: **44.8% students** in Buffalo City
- Highest educational level completed
 - **Matric**
 - Buffalo City: 55.4%;
 - Cape Town: 42.9%;
 - Johannesburg: 61.0%
- Marital status: **Single**
 - Buffalo City: 95.5%; Cape Town: 78.0%; Johannesburg: 80.2%

Medical Transitioning: Gender-Affirming Hormone Therapy



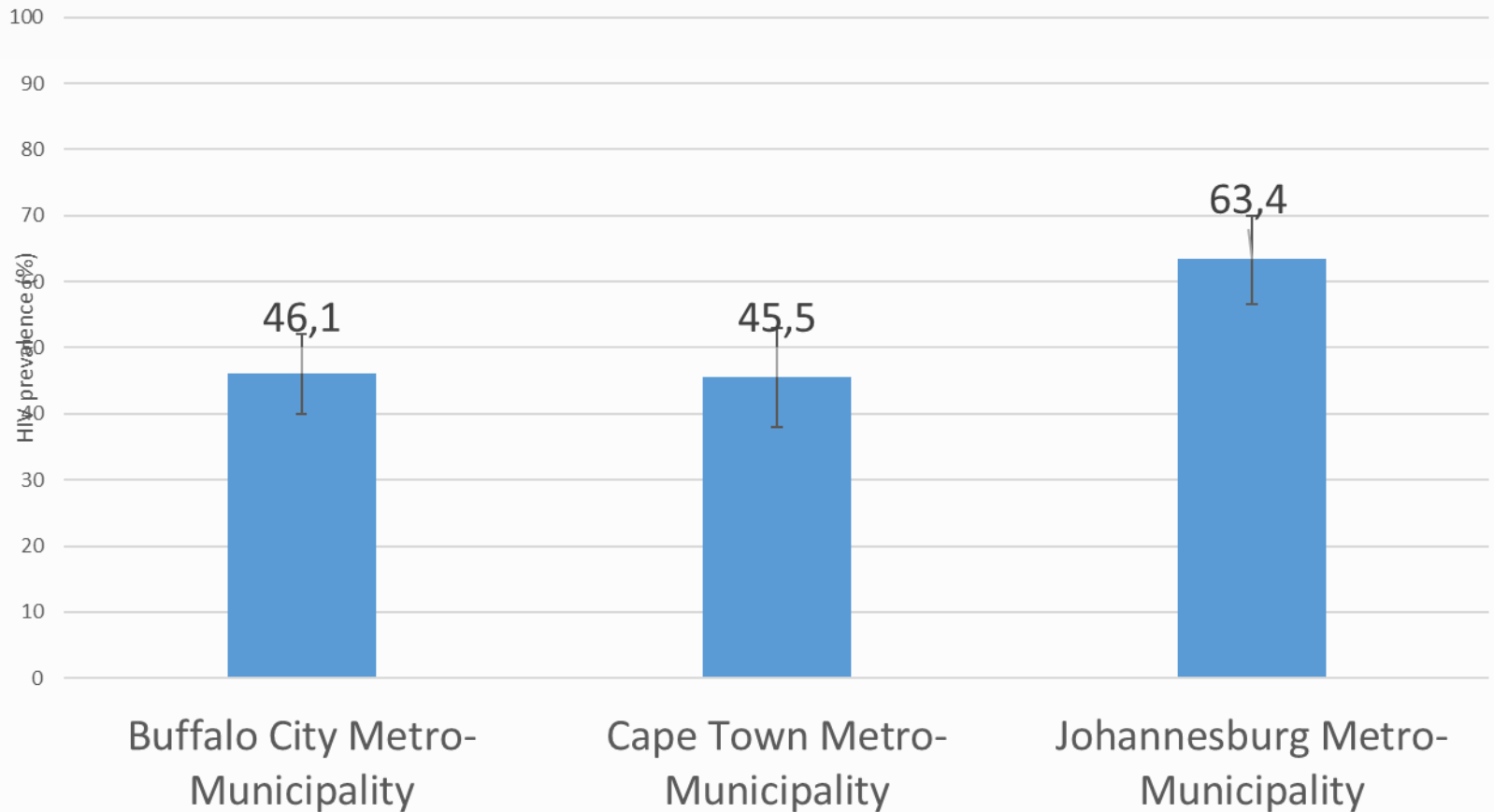
Source: Data from SA TG-RDS Study, 2018/9

Social Transitioning



- Most TGW self-reported to *live as a woman* in the last 6 months
- Most TGW have *not applied for a change in gender marker*

HIV prevalence amongst TGW in 3 metros in South Africa



Age at first sex with a man

35.9% to 55.2% of TGW reported age at first sex:
15-17 years old

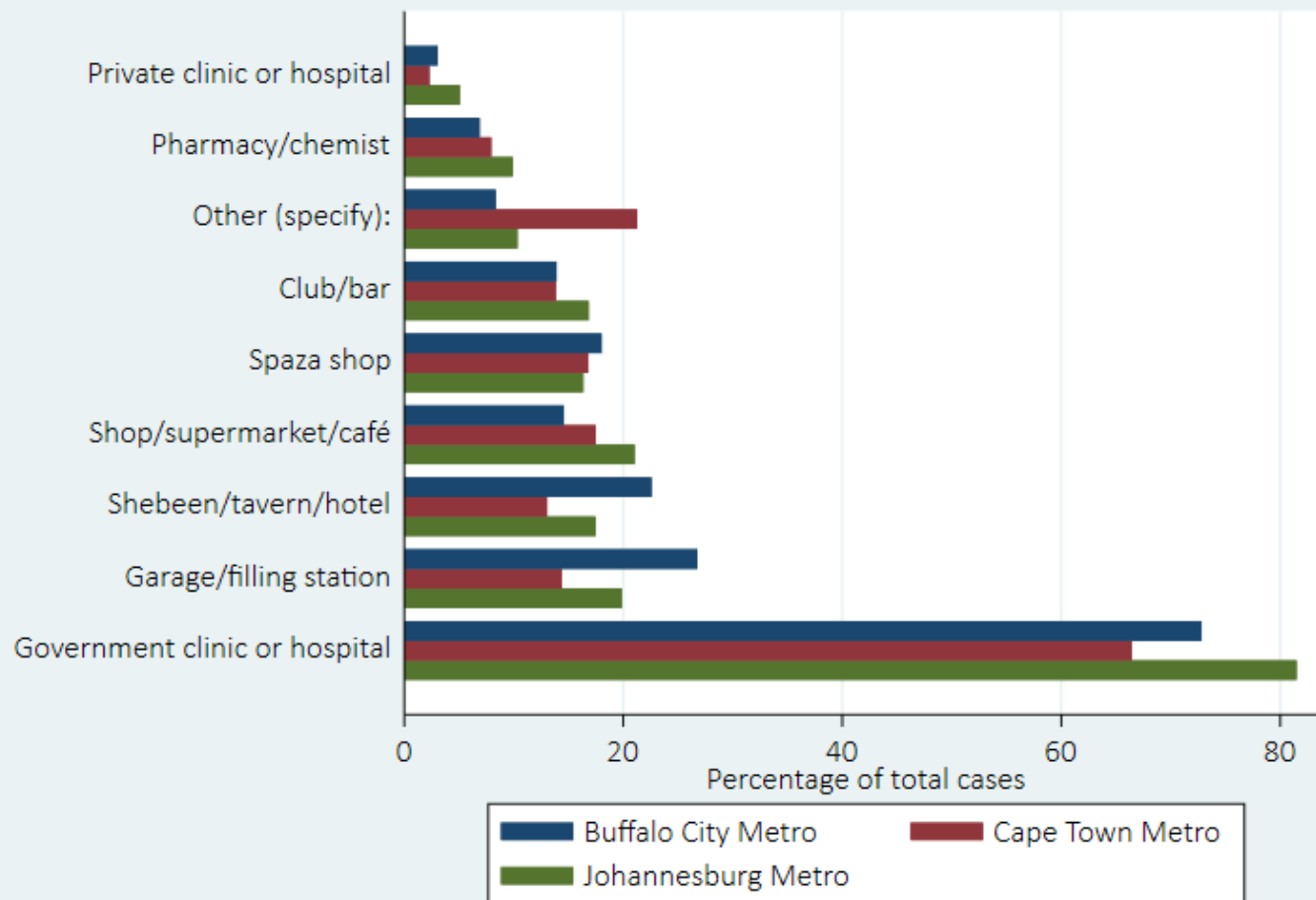
Table 1. Population adjusted estimates of age at first sex with a man amongst TGW in Buffalo City, Cape Town and Johannesburg metro-municipalities (2018-2019)

Variable	Buffalo City Metro-Municipality (N=305)				Cape Town Metro-Municipality (N=259)				Johannesburg Metro-Municipality (N=324)			
	n	Crude %	Adjusted %	Adjusted 95% CI	n	Crude%	Adjusted %	Adjusted 95% CI	n	Crude%	Adjusted %	Adjusted 95% CI
5-14 years	71	24.9	24.9	18.9-32.0	83	33.1	31.6	23.6-40.9	89	28.3	21.8	16.8-27.8
15-17 years	125	43.9	41.9	34.8-49.4	96	38.2	35.9	27.8-45.0	148	47.1	55.2	48.0-62.3
18-24 years	87	30.5	32.6	25.9-40.0	63	25.1	28.6	21.0-37.5	75	23.9	22.8	17.5-29.1
25+ years	2	0.7	0.6	0.1-3.4	9	3.6	3.9	1.6-9.0	2	0.6	0.2	0.0-0.8

Condom and lube use

- **Condom use at last anal sex with a man**
 - Buffalo City: 80.0%
 - Cape Town: 73.1%
 - Johannesburg: 76.7%
- **Lube use at last anal sex with a man**
 - Buffalo City: 83.3%
 - Cape Town: 70.4%
 - Johannesburg: 93.4%

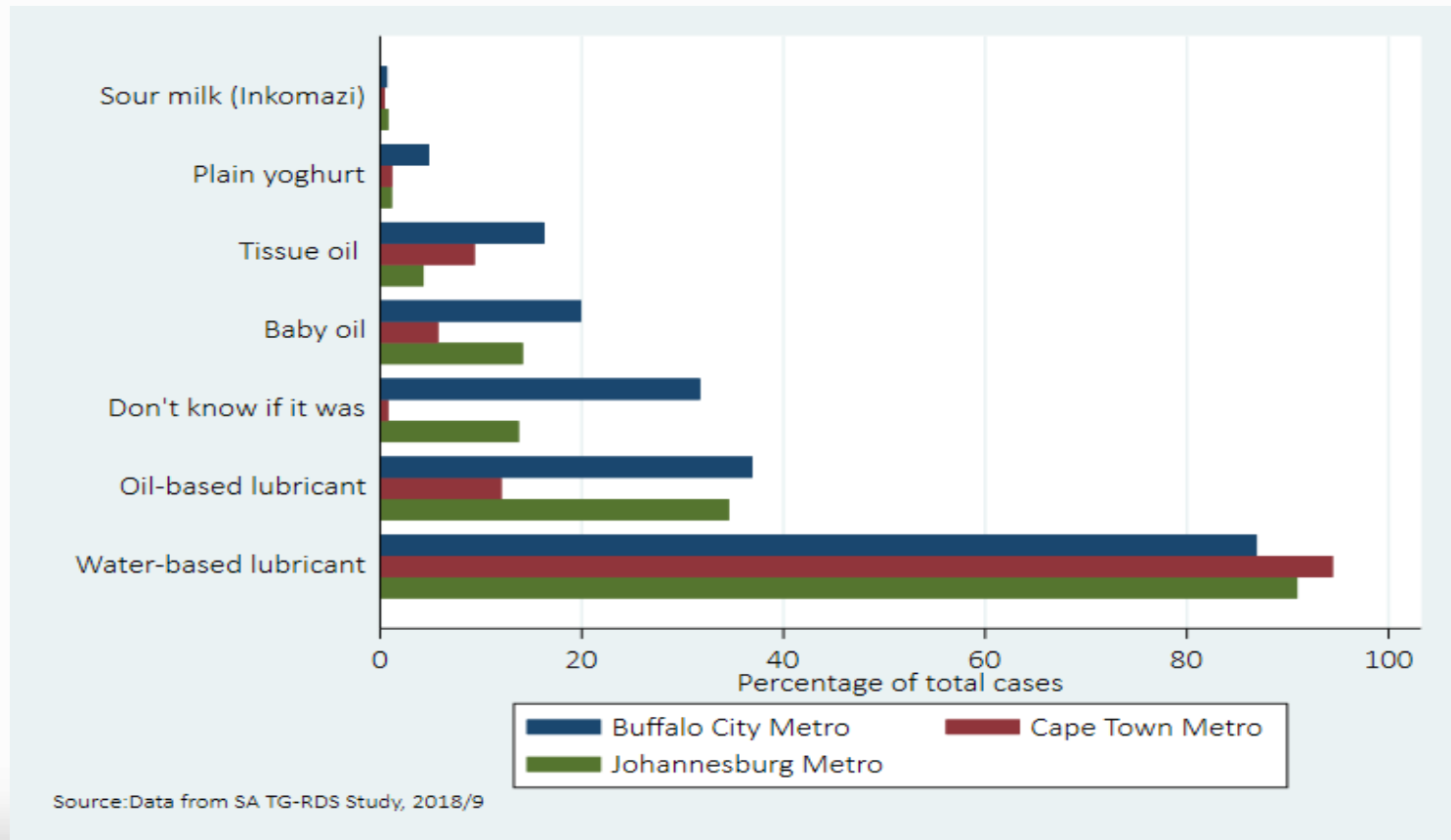
Source of obtaining condoms



Source: Data from SA TG-RDS Study, 2018/9

Types of lube used

- TGW use **water-based lube with a condom**
 - **72.4%: Buffalo City; 66.5%: Cape Town; 85.0% in Johannesburg**



HIV testing practices of TGW **ever** and in the **last 12 months**

- Ever tested for HIV
 - 95.5% to 97.0%
- Tested for HIV **in the last 12 months**
 - Buffalo City: 78.1%
 - Cape Town: 91.1%
 - Johannesburg: 91.0%

Selling sex

- **Ever sold sex** Buffalo City: 13.8%; Cape Town: 13.1%; **Johannesburg: 38.3%**
- **Transactional sex** (sex in exchange for *cash, goods, place to stay*) **in the last 6 months** Buffalo City: 17.4%; Cape Town: 8.7%; **Johannesburg: 29.5%**

Table 2. Ever having sold sex and transactional sex with men in the last 6 months amongst TGW in Buffalo City, Cape Town and Johannesburg metro-municipalities (2018-2019)

Variable	Buffalo City Metro-Municipality (N=305)				Cape Town Metro-Municipality (N=259)				Johannesburg Metro-Municipality (N=324)			
	n	Crude %	Adjusted %	Adjusted 95% CI	n	Crude %	Adjusted %	Adjusted 95% CI	n	Crude %	Adjusted %	Adjusted 95% CI
Ever sold sex	43	14.1	13.8	[8.6-19.1]	51	19.7	13.1	[6.6-19.6]	143	44.8	38.3	[30.6-46.0]
Transactional sex with men in last 6 months	48	15.7	17.4	[11.2-23.7]	41	15.8	8.7	[4.2-13.3]	105	33.1	29.5	[22.0-36.9]

Experiences of stigma and discrimination

- Ever **felt discriminated** against because of TG status
 - Buffalo City: 14.5%; Cape Town: 15.1%; **Johannesburg: 29.7%**
- Ever experience **any type of violence** because of TG status
 - Buffalo City: 14.9%; Cape Town: 14.1%; **Johannesburg: 25.6%**

Table 3. Stigma and discrimination experiences of TGW in Buffalo City, Cape Town and Johannesburg metro-municipalities (2018-2019)

Variable	Buffalo City Metro-Municipality (N=305)				Cape Town Metro-Municipality (N=259)				Johannesburg Metro-Municipality (N=324)			
	n	Crude%	Adjusted%	Adjusted 95% CI	n	Crude%	Adjusted%	Adjusted 95% CI	n	Crude %	Adjusted%	Adjusted 95% CI
Ever felt discriminated against because of TG status												
Yes	47	15.4	14.5	[9.7-19.3]	59	22.7	15.1	[9.4-20.9]	109	33.7	29.7	[23.3-36.1]
Ever experience any type of violence because of TG status												
Yes	47	15.4	14.9	[9.9-19.9]	53	20.4	14.1	[8.2-19.8]	102	31.5	25.6	[19.6-31.6]

Strengths and limitations of the study

RDS does not sample a population directly, but via a connected social network

- Hence, each network selected in the 3 metros sampled different sectors of TGW
- Crude samples in each of the 3 metros were an over-representation of particular subcategories or social networks of TGW.
- **The key advantage:** Allows researchers to access traditionally 'hard to reach' target populations

Conclusions

- HIV disproportionately affects TGW in each of the 3 study locations
 - Global HIV prevalence estimates amongst TGW:
 - Lesotho: 59.0%(Poteat et.al.(2017);
 - Mumbai, India (63.0%)(Chakrapani,2010);
 - Black/African American TGW: 51.0% (CDC,2019)
- Results will enhance HIV programmatic service delivery significantly

PROJECT APPROACH



Project Approach

Description of the Community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach used in the study

- BBS was conducted through **community participation**
- Civil society organisations and other stakeholders involved in the trans movement in South Africa envisioned **a different model of engagement with research** in the BBS for transgender women.

Project Approach

- Power dynamics between researcher and study participant is challenged.
 - Present the BBS as a case study where large-scale surveys can also be conducted within a social justice paradigm.
- Be inclusive of all stakeholders and activists involved in the health and wellbeing of transgender women in the three metros.
- Important to establish ownership of the study.
- Transgender women were acknowledged as expert knowledge holders throughout the study and were involved in important decision-making.

Project Approach

- **Building meaningful connections and creating ownership of the study**
- **First** establishment of a Steering Advisory committee
 - “Influencers” and activists in the transgender movement of South Africa.
 - Transgender women recruited from trans-inclusive NGOs and were either involved in the sex worker movement or engaged in HIV prevention for key populations, including transgender women.

Project Approach



- **Second:** Members of the research team were engaged in several events organized by S.H.E. and GDX.



- “Hanging-out” in clubs and other informal events

Project Approach

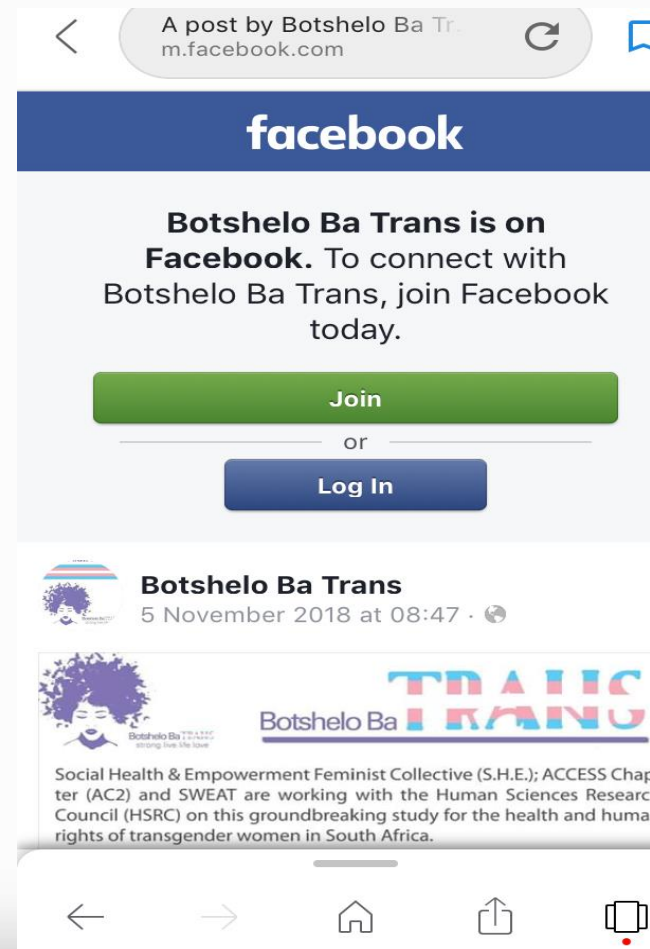


how she expresses herself in drag

In her life off stage, the dame aims to create change through study and policy. "I'm currently working for the Human Sciences Research Council on a transgender project. This is the first of its kind in the country, and we look forward to this study being able to help enlighten everyone, most importantly the heterosexual people, on the risks and issues which we as the transgender community face on a daily basis."

Zsa Zsa started the Trans Power Care Centre in the hope of making providing transgender people with services, education on transgender issues for the public, families, friends and support groups, as well as shelters for homeless transgender people and HIV counselling. She says

Not limited to physical places and events but also occurred through social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp.



Project Approach



- Consulted transgender women concerning the selection of a name for the study
- Held informal group discussions with established support groups for transgender women

Project Approach

- **Transgender women as part of the research team**
 - One of the co-investigators on the study self-identifies as a transgender woman
 - Several members of the research team were transgender women.
- **Establishing ownership of the study amongst transgender women**
 - Engaged transgender women concerning the selection of a name for the study; eligibility criteria; survey instrument etc.

Project Approach

- **Transgender women as cultural insiders**

- Having an ‘insider’ perspective facilitated recruitment of transgender women in each of the three metros.
- Transgender women who were employed in the study harnessed their connections with other transgender women through social networking.
- Transgender women who are considered veterans in the movement managed to mobilize juniors and new advocates
- The importance of reaching and maintaining good relationships with these gatekeepers cannot be undermined.

Project Approach



- Relied on cultural events in the community, e.g. in Buffalo City Metro:
 - Annual Miss Trans Diva beauty pageant
- The annual Queer Pride in Cape Town



Lessons learnt

- Methods should consider additional benefits for transgender women participation in research such as referral to gender affirming care, legal gender recognition and other services

Conclusion

- From protocol/conceptual phase development phase through implementation and dissemination of research, the involvement of transgender women themselves has been instrumental to the successful implementation of the BBS.
- Transgender women form close ties and relationships with each other as a way of building community resilience.
 - This proved to be also true for transgender women in South Africa and had significant implications for the participation of transgender women into our study.

Conclusion

- Using a CBPR approach, in the implementation of the first ever BBS for transgender women in South Africa enhanced the validity and usefulness of study findings and created opportunities for taking the data beyond that of the research study.

Funders



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 - Entitled
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Acknowledgements

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 - Without their voluntary participation, this study would not have been possible
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 - Sex Workers' Advocacy and Education Taskforce (SWEAT)
 - Access Chapter 2 (AC2)
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THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

