Methods and Data

Findings reported in this brief are taken from a statewide needs assessment study conducted in between 2018 - 2019 among self-identified sexual and gender minority Mississippians. Data were collected via: individual interviews with organizational stakeholders; a series of semi-structured focus groups in seven geographic districts across Mississippi; and a statewide survey of 500 LGBTQ-identified Mississippians. Additional findings and details about study methodology are available in the full report corresponding to each data collection mode.

Organizations and Networks

- A total of 28 organizations were identified in the state that include LGBTQ advocacy of service provision work as part of their core mission. Major challenges and needs facing LGBTQ work in Mississippi include: (1) a need for stronger coalitions and improved resource sharing; (2) backlash experienced in LGBTQ organizing efforts; and (3) challenges associated with identifying and working with funding sources.
- 13 of the 28 identified organizations are located in the Greater Jackson Area; other notable geographic clusters include the Gulf Coast, Hattiesburg, Oxford, and Starkville.

Focus Groups of LGBTQ Mississippians

- Focus group participants overwhelmingly reported experiences characterized by adverse or challenging conditions tied to their gender or sexual identities. Adverse experiences spanned across family life, health and mental healthcare, and interactions with the legal system.
- Participants described the overall climate of Mississippi toward LGBTQ people; individuals across multiple groups and geographies report fear and vigilance resulting from adverse experiences, or expectations of adverse experiences.
- Participants described day-to-day living in the context of fear, highlighting severe challenges and community resilience. Coping strategies used range widely from healthy to unhealthy.

Survey Results

- **Mental Health:** Respondents reported disproportionately high potential for suffering from severe mental illness (SMI) as compared to the general population of adults in Mississippi and the United States. An alarming rate of survey respondents (18%) also reported high rates of substance use needed to "block out bad feelings." Increased rates of mental health distress were reported by respondents of color, transgender respondents, respondents living in rural areas, and younger respondents.

- **Safety and Fear:** A sizable portion of the sample reported having been the victim of physical violence, harassment, and sexual abuse. In addition, nearly the entire sample reported experiencing fear in various social contexts and concealing their sexual orientations or gender identities as a result of this fear. Transgender respondents and respondents of color reported negative interactions with law enforcement and periods of homelessness more frequently than other demographic groups in the sample.

- **Neighborhoods and Communities:** Most survey respondents reported few opportunities for networking with other LGBTQ folks in their communities. Respondents generally felt that their communities were somewhat inclusive to LGBTQ people. Respondents of color and those living in rural areas reported fewer opportunities for networking. Transgender respondents reported attending pride events more often when compared to cisgender respondents.

- **Life Satisfaction:** Approximately half of survey respondents reported feeling generally satisfied with their lives, feeling safe and secure, and feeling generally happy most of the time or often. Respondents belonging to older age cohorts reported greater life satisfaction, while transgender respondents generally reported decreased life satisfaction.

- **Family:** The majority of respondents reported relatively good familial relationships characterized by general family acceptance of their LGBTQ identities. Notably, nearly one quarter (24%) of respondents reported that they were parents, with 65% reporting that their children live with them most or all of the time. Respondents of color and transgender respondents reported higher rates of familial discord more often characterized by physical assault, homelessness, and lack of support.

Recommendations

Communities

- Target outreach and recruitment strategies to strengthen networks and social integration for the most underserved sub-groups of the LGBTQ population, including transgender populations, racial minorities, and the most rural areas of the state.
- Support efforts to provide stable, safe housing for transgender Mississippians.
- Create material resource support mechanisms for LGBTQ people of color.

Families and Children

- Create networking and support opportunities for LGBTQ parents.
- Reduce bullying and harassment of LGBTQ students in Mississippi public schools via evidence-based, data driven approaches.
- Revise institutional policies and curricula that ingrain LGBTQ discrimination into schools at the structural level.

Legal and Safety Issues

- Increase voter registration among young LGBTQ Mississippians; Increase LGBTQ voter mobilization in local and state elections.
- Support coalitional and intersectional efforts to decrease sexual violence against women
- Support efforts to decrease sexual violence against nonbinary and gender nonconforming people.
- Support coalitional and intersectional efforts to improve the relationship between law enforcement and people of color
- Support efforts to improve the relationship between law enforcement and transgender and gender non-conforming populations.
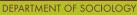
Health Care

- Develop or support evidence-based transgender-specific healthcare education, advocacy, and training programs.
- Support improved care coordination between physical and mental health services.
- Build a resource guide for more effective referral processes.
- Build or support evidence-based programs to reduce alcohol and substance dependence tailored specifically to LGBTQ populations.

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