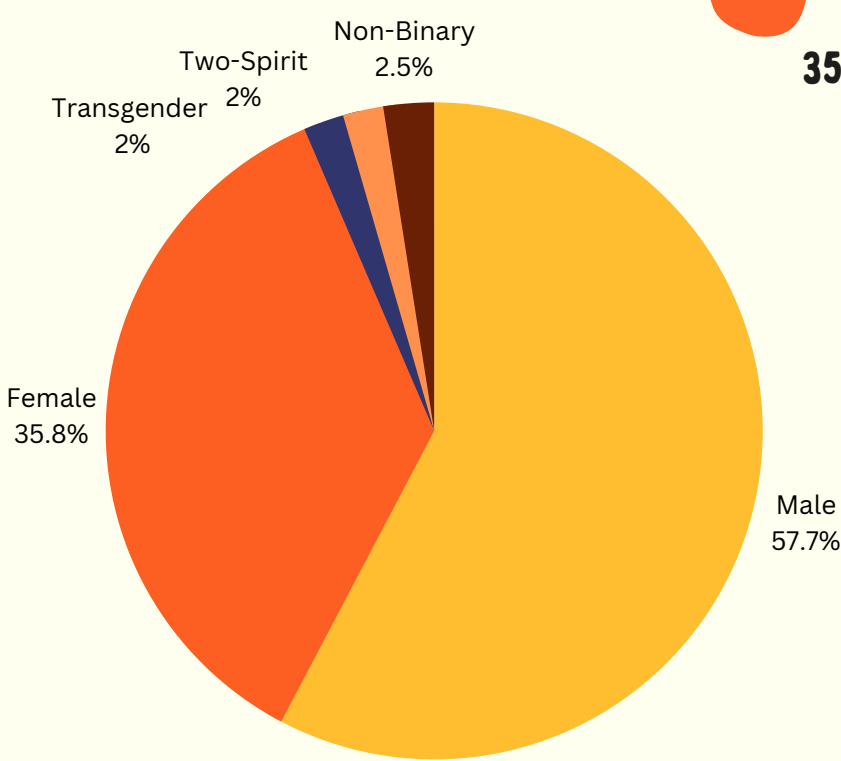


# UNDERSTANDING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS & MENTAL HEALTH

## WHAT'S GENDER GOT TO DO WITH IT?



(Gaetz et al., 2016)

### 35000-40000 YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS IN ANY GIVEN YEAR

When we hear about young people experiencing homelessness, they are often categorized into one group. But Canadian statistics tell us that various gender identities are represented in the population.

### GENDER MATTERS!

## THE STUDY

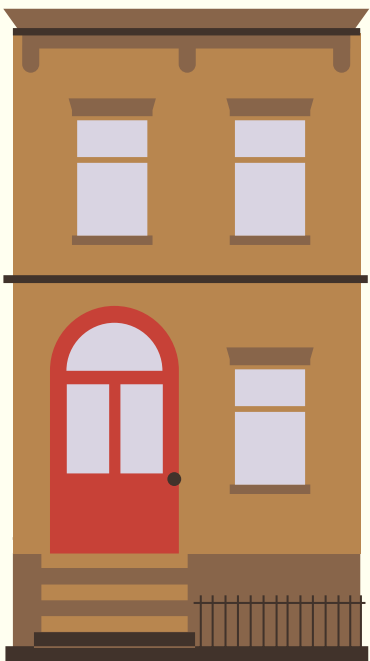


Youth who were between the ages of **16 and 24** were interviewed to discuss their experiences of **gender, mental health, and homelessness**. They described **four contextual factors** that influence their mental health, but in different ways depending on their gender identity.

01

"If I don't have stable housing, I get stressed out so it, uh, puts some stress on my mental health" (Female Participant)

## ENVIRONMENT IS CRITICAL TO MENTAL HEALTH, BUT THE PROCESS OF ACQUIRING HOUSING HAS GENDERED CHALLENGES



The men in this study expressed challenges acquiring housing through both the rental market-"there's always cheaper places that say female only"- and in the shelter system-"There's at least like 3 or 4 other women's just shelters that you can go to. There's not just man's shelters."



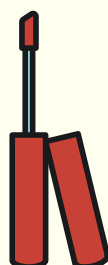
Whereas the women in this study described negative experiences with landlords that involved situations of sexual harassment and coercion. One participant when describing her former landlord said that "he was nice in the beginning and then he started asking me for hugs everyday and eventually it got a little weird."

02

## APPEARANCES INFLUENCE MENTAL HEALTH

The youth in this study described how their appearance, which includes the way they dress, the make-up they wear, and the way they present themselves while homeless, is a pressing matter in terms of their mental health.

"I FEEL LIKE, LIKE I CAN'T, LIKE I DON'T WEAR, LIKE I DON'T KNOW IT'S LIKE LITTLE THINGS. LIKE I DON'T TAKE CARE OF MYSELF THE SAME WAY. LIKE I DON'T WEAR THE CLOTHES THAT I WANNA WEAR. UM I DON'T, I HAVEN'T WORN MAKEUP IN WEEKS. LIKE IT'S JUST A LOT OF LITTLE LIFESTYLE THINGS. BUT THOSE ARE LIKE BIG THINGS TO MY MENTAL HEALTH THOUGH." (MALE PARTICIPANT)



"I WORRY WHEN I GO OUT OR LIKE EVEN JUST WHEN I'M PICKING OUT WHAT TO WEAR IN THE MORNING...EVEN THOUGH I WAS HOMELESS I WOULD STILL TRY AND MAKE MYSELF LOOK PRESENTABLE, SO I DIDN'T LOOK HOMELESS." (FEMALE PARTICIPANT)

## CLEANLINESS & HYGIENE INFLUENCE AN INDIVIDUAL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THEMSELVES & OTHERS

Relating to acquiring housing, one participant in this study described how rental advertisements asked for "**a clean female.**" She capitalized on this, but due to it not being a reflection of her true behaviour left her "liv[ing] in a facade." **This resulted in roommate conflict.**

Another female participant described some of the things she learned while experiencing homelessness. "**You learn to shower with seven water bottles when you're out there.**"

When a non-binary participant described their experience living in shelter, they were quick to explain that they keep their space organized and tidy. This participant described their need for order and said "**it's like I have OCD.**"



## MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCE ACCESS & UTILIZATION

Interestingly, it was the men in this study who described that **there are many mental health resources that are accessible** and available. Yet, gendered barriers arose in terms of utilizing those resources.



Men described independence, internalized stigma, and examples of hegemonic masculinity as barriers to utilizing mental health resources. It was common for men to make comments such as "**I don't like receiving help from anyone**" or "**I gotta do everything on my own.**"

**GENDER**



**GENDER CANNOT BE IGNORED WHEN LOOKING TO UNDERSTAND THE MENTAL HEALTH OF YOUTH WHO ARE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS. GENDER SHAPES AND CONSTRAINS EXPERIENCES, MAKING THE INTERSECTION OF HOMELESSNESS AND MENTAL HEALTH COMPLEX FOR ALL YOUTH. BUT THE COMPLEXITY LOOKS DIFFERENT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE DEPENDING ON THEIR GENDER.**