Emma Kelly: Canada is widely considered to be a haven to queer and trans people. However, there is significant evidence that LGBTIQ2S+ Canadians are more likely to be violently victimized than their heterosexual, cisgender counterparts. This is all the more concerning because those in the community - particularly if they are Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour - have reported lower confidence in the police, who are often first responders to these incidents.

In fact, the relationship between the queer and trans community and police has been fraught with tension for decades. The disproportionate exposure of marginalized queer individuals to police, and questions raised about police investigations of crimes against queer and trans people of colour, has led to scrutiny.

Despite this living history of tensions and struggle, there is surprisingly little research on perceptions of police legitimacy by the Canadian LGBTIQ2S+ community. And, which aspects of policing are most important to queer people's judgments of legitimacy is not well understood.

A large body of research has found that across diverse groups, perceptions of procedural justice are strongly related to perceptions of police legitimacy. Procedural justice – or the quality of treatment and quality decision-making by police - is more important in these contexts than notions of police performance or distributive justice, which captures the fairness by which police distribute their services.

To address this gap, I partnered with 5 LGBTIQ2S+ organizations across Canada, who distributed a survey that I developed based on validated scales, via their social media channels. Preliminary analysis of my sample of 366 using multiple regression demonstrates several noteworthy findings.

First, procedural justice far surpasses police performance and distributive justice in determining police legitimacy, meaning that how queer and trans individuals are treated by police is their primary concern.

Second, perceptions of police legitimacy are troublingly low. The average response to questions evaluating perceptions of legitimacy is "disagree" which points to the legitimacy crisis that has been suspected and publicly debated but never directly measured. In open-ended questions, participants cite how police treat queer and trans people of colour as influencing their responses.
Lastly, cisgender men have significantly higher perceptions of legitimacy than cisgender women and individuals who are trans, suggesting that feelings of acceptance and safety vary greatly based on identity within the community.

These findings are important for two reasons. First, they provide an evidentiary foundation to support the points being made by activists, whose arguments that queer people do not feel served by the police have been met with resistance, in part due to a lack of evidence. Secondly, these findings suggest that the safety of LGBTIQ2S+ individuals will not be ensured until changes are made to policing in this community.

On-screen content:
There is a slide included in the presentation shown at various times throughout the video. There is text across the top of the slide, “LGBTIQ2S+ Perceptions of Police Legitimacy.” On the left side three purple text boxes, stacked aligned left. The first box includes text “Procedural Justice: Quality of treatment + quality of decision-making by police.”

The second box directly below includes text “Distributive Justice: The fairness by which police distribute services across communities.” The third box directly below includes text “Police Performance: The capacity of police to undertake their core business.”

These three boxes have arrows originating from them and directing towards a fourth purple box, located top-middle, with the text “Police Legitimacy: Trust in police + Feelings of obligation to obey.” This fourth box then has an arrow originating from it directing downwards to three purple bubbles: “Reporting crime and victimization,” “Cooperation,” and “Feelings of safety.”

On the right side of the slide, text defining the following terms includes: “LGBTIQ2S+: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer, Two-Spirit and more,” “Trans: Gender identity does not correspond with sex assigned at birth,” and “Cisgender: Gender identity corresponds with sex assigned at birth.”

Underneath this text there is a photo. The photo depicts a woman in the middle of a group of people on a street surrounded by buildings. The woman in the middle is holding a megaphone with one arm raised. The photo caption reads “Black Lives Matter at Pride Toronto (Mark Blinch/CP).”

[End of Transcript]