



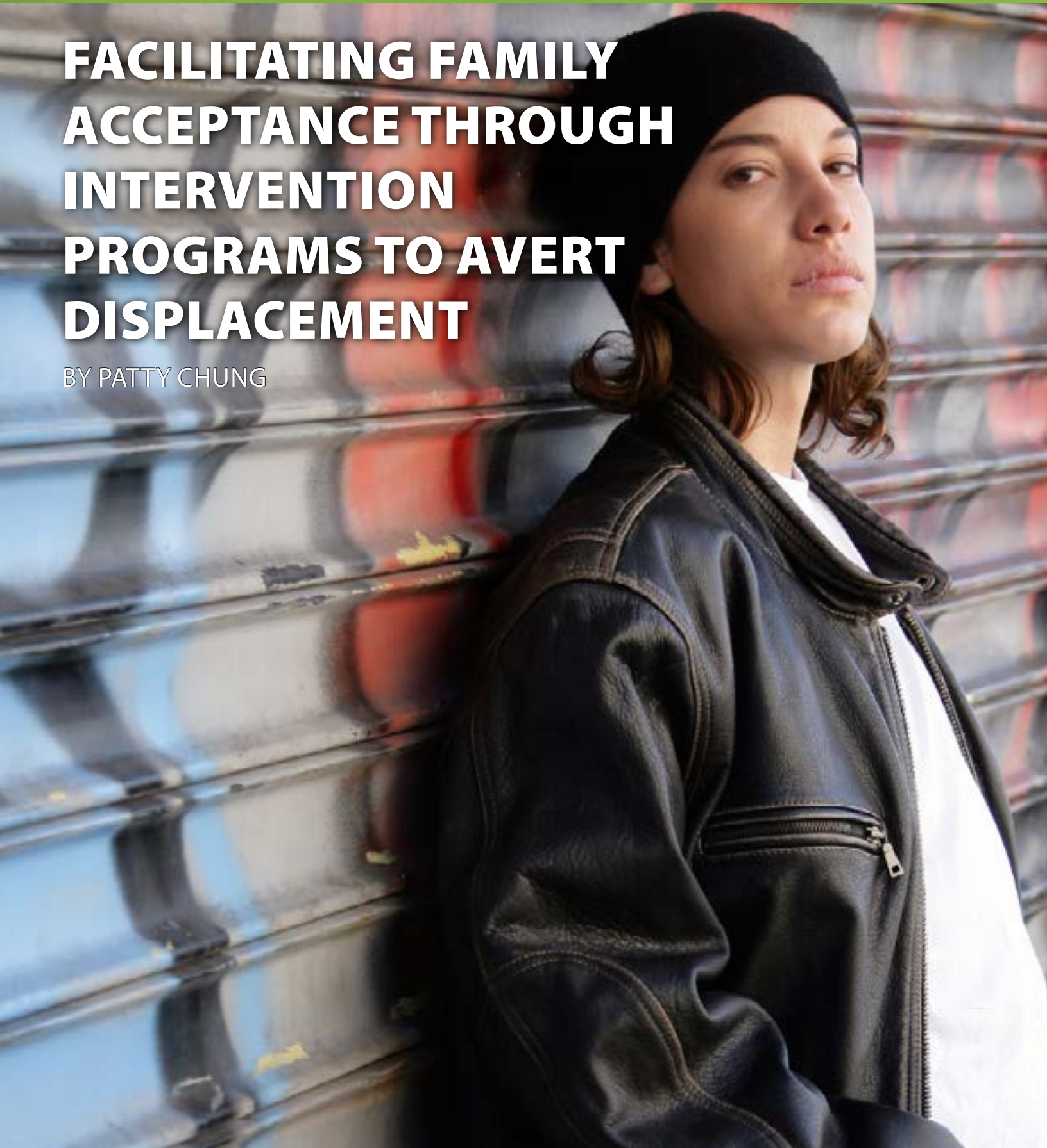
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Policy Brief 10

RETHINKING POLICY ON GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND WOMEN'S ISSUES

FACILITATING FAMILY ACCEPTANCE THROUGH INTERVENTION PROGRAMS TO AVERT DISPLACEMENT

BY PATTY CHUNG



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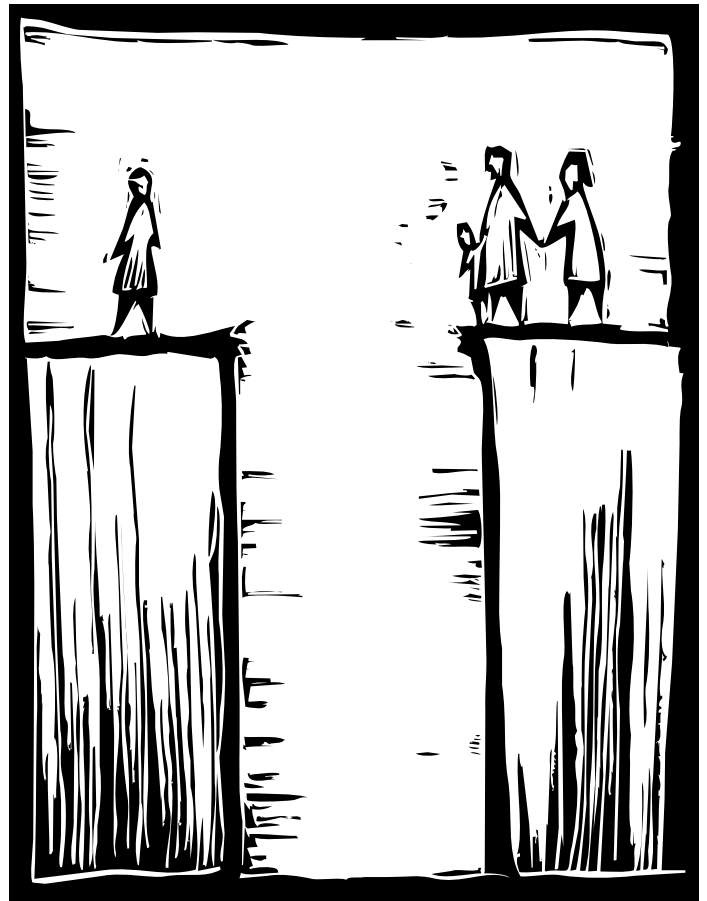
FACILITATING FAMILY ACCEPTANCE THROUGH INTERVENTION PROGRAMS TO AVERT DISPLACEMENT

Increasing the knowledge base of experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) homeless youth through aggressive research will enhance understanding of factors leading to LGBT youth homelessness and support service providers in delivering sound and culturally competent practice.

LGBT HOMELESS YOUTH are at significant risk for suicide attempts, illicit drug use, and contraction of health conditions from risky sexual behavior (for example, HIV, STIs, and STDs).¹ Causes of homelessness among LGBT youth are connected to multiple risk factors, including physical, sexual, and substance abuse, neglect, poverty, and mental health disabilities.² One significant risk factor is family conflict. One study noted that 25% of LGBT homeless youth identified family rejection (for example, verbal and physical abuse) of their sexual identity as a primary motivator for leaving home.³ Contributing factors to the high rates of homelessness in LGBT-identified youth include the systemic failure of child and youth welfare and juvenile systems, discriminatory practices in housing, and a lack of support in facilitating family acceptance of LGBT youths.⁴ Action is needed to develop strategies and increase funding for intervention programs that avert displacement.

CRITIQUE

Family acceptance is a major protective and mitigating factor on negative outcomes such as homelessness. Interventions promoting parental and caregiver acceptance toward LGBT youth is strongly associated with positive



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mental and physical health; yet there is no nationwide policy to combat the family rejection that so often precipitates LGBT youth homelessness.⁵ Prevention programs that target parents of LGBT youth—through in-home counseling, community support services, mental health services, and family reunification programs—are underfunded and inadequate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To effectively curtail rates of displacement among LGBT youth, lawmakers must enact policies that support more prevention efforts through family-based interventions. The Reconnecting Youth to Prevent Homelessness Act of 2011 is one of the first of its kind to properly identify LGBT youth as a population at risk, to seek family acceptance as intervention, and provides funding for the establishment of a federal program designed to target this epidemic. A provision mandates that “the Secretary of Health and Human Services shall establish a demonstration project to develop programs that are focused on improving family relationships and reducing homelessness for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth.”⁶ Additionally, these “demonstration projects” would also include evidence-based interventions to identify and evaluate LGBT youth at risk of being forced from their homes, encourage increase of supportive behaviors from parents, decrease rejecting behaviors, and provide educational resources to help families identify risky behaviors. Educating a diverse range of families in how their behaviors impact their children is a first step.

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CREDITS: Illustration by xochicalco; photo by Stockphoto4u/istockphoto.com

NOTES

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MORE INFO

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