

Research on Gender Diversity, Health & Education: *experiences of Children & Youth*

Briefing note for Stakeholders



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	2
2. Rationale.....	2
1. Research Questions	2
2. Methods.....	3
2.1. In-depth interviews.....	3
2.2. Small group discussions	3
2.3. Key informant interviews.....	3
2.4. Structured survey.....	3
2.1. Literature review.....	4
3. Stakeholder Participation	4
4. Ethics	4
5. Publication	5
6. Contact.....	5

1. INTRODUCTION

This study will explore the experiences of gender minority - including transgender, non-binary, intersex, and gender non-conforming - youth within schools and health services in the UK.

The research is being carried out at the Centre for Gender Studies, University of Cambridge, in partnership with Coram International at the Coram Children's Legal Centre, a London based charity supporting children and young people

2. RATIONALE

Recent years have seen an increased visibility of gender variant children and young people in the UK, including within mainstream media. There has been a proliferation in the numbers of young people experiencing issues with their gender identity seeking out information and support.¹ Despite recent attention to the issue, there remains a lack of empirical, social research undertaken in the UK that has focused on exploring the experiences, realities and wellbeing of gender minority youth, including within schools and health systems.

Much of the existing research in this area bundles a vast diversity of gender and sexual differences into one overarching "LGBT(+)" umbrella. Trans², intersex and other gender minority perspectives have been side-lined in discussions, which have largely focused on LGB youth. Furthermore, children and young people have been particularly neglected within the limited body of "T+" focused research that has been conducted, as studies tend to concentrate exclusively on adults.

Indicative evidence suggests that schools and health services (including GPs and CAHMS) in the UK may lack appropriate guidance and knowledge about how to best support the needs and welfare of gender diverse children and youth. There is an urgent need for more evidence on young people's experiences within these settings to guide policy development, leadership and training for improved information, protection and support for young people and their families.

1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do gender diverse youth experience education and health systems and services in the UK?
2. How do these experiences influence aspects of young people's wellbeing?

¹ Websites of specialist gender clinics across the UK note long waiting lists due to unprecedented increases in demand over recent years, including the website for the Tavistock and Portman Gender Identity Clinic which specifically caters for children, see <https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/news/stories/meeting-demand-our-gender-identity-development-service/> accessed May 2017. Childline has also experienced increasing numbers of calls from children and adolescence about gender dysphoria and transgender issues. See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/dec/13/childline-eight-calls-a-day-gender-identity-issues-children-nsppc-helpline-transgender>

² The term 'trans' is often used as an 'umbrella' term to refer to all people whose gender identity does not fit into the social majority categories of 'male' and 'female'.

3. What alternative conceptions of gender, as well as policy and practice changes, might, if embedded within or supported within institutional structures, lead to better wellbeing outcomes for youth?

2. METHODS

The study will use a variety of methods. The aim is to gather a body of evidence that is comprehensive and measurable (quantitative data), as well as explanatory (qualitative data).

2.1. In-depth interviews

Individual interview will be carried out with gender diversity youth ages **18-24 years**. These interviews will explore young people's experiences at school, and accessing health care, and how these experiences may have been influenced by their gender identity: including their experiences of the accessibility of services, relationships with staff and peers, experiences of discrimination, and other topics. Questions will be open ended so that young people are able to raise topics and share experiences of direct relevance and importance to them.

2.2. Small group discussions

Small group discussions will be carried out with gender diverse adolescents ages **14-17 years**. Groups will consist of 2-3 adolescents of a similar age who are familiar and comfortable with each other, along with a support worker from participating institutions. The groups will be kept small, to ensure a safe, intimate and calm atmosphere for the discussion.

Topic guides will be developed to structure group discussions; however, the aim will be to facilitate participatory, youth-directed interactions.

2.3. Key informant interviews

A number of 'key stakeholder' and 'key expert' interviews will be carried out with **parents of gender minority children/ youth**; as well as service providers, teachers, and advocates working on gender minority related issues. The purpose of these interviews will be to gain broad, expert perspectives in relation to the issues explored in the research.

2.4. Structured survey

In addition, a structured survey will be widely distributed via a variety of forums including schools, (gender) clinics (potentially), third sector organisations, and through online platforms. The survey will be designed to be independently filled out by any young person ages 14-24 years (regardless of gender identity) on a strictly anonymous and voluntary basis.

The survey will contain mostly "multiple choice" questions, and will be used to explore relationships between gender-variance, experiences at school, experiences of healthcare, and young people's wellbeing.

2.1. Literature review

The project will also include a review of all existing academic, third sector, policy and practitioner literature on gender diversity and young people's experiences at school, and within health systems.

In addition to more 'formal' data sources, the study will include a "grey literature" review of published evidence and testimony from online media platforms, podcasts, documentary footage, and other media sources that provide evidence on the experiences of gender minority children and youth, and how these are conveyed and debated within public debate.

Finally the study will include a comprehensive look at all law, policy and guidelines governing health and education institutions regarding the protection, treatment and care of gender minority youth (e.g. school policies concerning support provided to students experiencing issues with their gender identity, consent and referral procedures for young people's access to gender related health interventions etc.).

3. STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

We are seeking collaboration for this research from organisations providing support to gender variant children and young people.

In particular, we are requesting:

- Circulation and distribution of the written survey amongst community networks;
- Interviews with key experts and staff working with gender variant youth;
- Interviews and group discussions with gender variant youth ages 14-24 years;
- Interviews with parents and guardians of gender variant youth;
- Advice and consultation on all stages of the research process: methodology, tools, analysis, write up and dissemination to ensure the relevance of the research;

A £30 Amazon gift voucher will be provided to all participants who participate in interviews and group discussions as a token of our appreciation. Travel will also be reimbursed.

All organisations that participate in the research will be acknowledged in publications that result from the research.

4. ETHICS

A detailed ethics protocol has been developed for carrying out the research, and has been approved by the [School Ethics Committee](#) at the University of Cambridge.

This protocol sets out measures for: protecting the rights, welfare, interests, dignity and safety of all participants in the research; ensuring informed consent and voluntary participation; transparency in

the research process and accountability to research participants; anonymity, confidentiality and privacy; data protection, and dealing with child protection concerns.

The project lead, Elizabeth Yarrow is an experienced social researcher with a decade of professional experience conducting interviews with children and young people, particularly on the themes of gender, sexuality, and children and young people's access to sexual and reproductive rights. Liz has worked as a research consultant for the Children's Commissioner for England, UNICEF, UN Women, Save the Children, Plan International, the International Planned Parenthood Federation, and Care International, amongst others.

All information that is collected during the research will be kept strictly confidential and anonymised in any research outputs. No information that could be used to identify research subjects will be shared beyond the research team.

All procedures for handling, processing, storing and destroying data are compliant with the Data Protection Act 1998.

5. PUBLICATION

Findings from the research will be published in academic journals as well as on websites.

At the end of the study, a youth friendly summary of the research will also be published online, and shared with participating organisations, so that all participants in the research are able to read and understand its results.

6. CONTACT

If you would like more information about the research please contact Elizabeth Yarrow:

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