



Registered Charity No: 1068137

Gender Identity Research and Education Society

admin@gires.org.uk
<http://www.gires.org.uk>
01372 801554

**GIRES, Molverley, The Warren
Ashtead, Surrey KT21 2SP, England**

**Gender Dysphoria, Transsexualism and Transgenderism:
Incidence, Prevalence and Growth in the UK and the
Implications for the Commissioners and Providers of Healthcare**

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Abstract

Some commissioners of healthcare use the 1998 survey of people experiencing gender dysphoria, which was conducted in Scotland, to estimate the likely requirement for treatment in their areas. Prevalence was then estimated to be 8 per 100,000 people aged over 15 years. A survey conducted in The Netherlands in 1996 produced quite similar results. However, later government data support an upward revision of these earlier estimates. Current prevalence may now be 21 per 100,000, i.e. 10,500 people, of whom 80% were assigned as boys at birth (who may become trans women) and 20% as girls (who may become trans men).

Government data indicates growth of 6% per annum compound in the number who have transitioned since 1995. However, the number of people currently being referred to the specialist NHS and private providers of medical care for gender variance in the UK, 1,200 per annum, indicates a faster growth rate, 12% per annum. Incidence may now be 2.6 per 100,000 people aged over 15. The private sector is currently caring for about 23% of the referred people.

The reservoir of transgender people, from among whom a small proportion are seeking medical care for their condition, is mainly hidden but may be very large. Based on American and Dutch estimates, there may be 300,000 transgender people in the UK, a prevalence of 600 per 100,000. The median age at which people undergo transition has been fairly stable in recent years, at about 42. Hence, there is, as yet, no sign that the number who are likely to seek care is being exhausted and the current rate of incidence may continue for a lengthy period. In any case, service providers and employers need to be aware that transgender people comprise quite a large group.

Among young people, the transgender population is even more invisible. Very few present for treatment despite the fact that most gender dysphoric adults report experiencing gender variance from a very young age. At present, only 64 children and adolescents are referred annually to the UK's sole specialised NHS gender identity service, compared to 1,100 referred to the NHS clinics for adults. Yet, the number of youngsters presenting is doubling every five years and would grow much more rapidly if a larger proportion of gender variant people sought medical care earlier.

The growth in the numbers of young and adult gender variant people seeking medical care has significant implications for commissioners and providers of healthcare. Already, the 6,200 people who have transitioned to a new gender role, whether in the NHS or private sector, require life-long hormone therapy. Among trans women, the annual number needing genital surgery may be approaching 400 per annum. Virtually all trans men need chest reconstruction surgery, an annual requirement approaching 200 procedures. Trans women and trans men also have individually varied needs for hair removal, counselling and many other types gender confirmation surgery. In respect of the growing number of gender variant adolescents, bringing UK treatment into line with the international standards of care and the practice in leading treatment centres overseas would profoundly affect the sole service provider, especially in respect of endocrinology. Family members of both transgender and transsexual people of all ages may need support.

Key Words: Gender Dysphoria, Transgender, Transsexual, Prevalence, Incidence, Treatment Needs