

# GENDER DYSPHORIA

## The Management of Gender Dysphoria in Children and Adolescents

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GENDER DYSPHORIA

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# Importance of understanding and managing gender dysphoria in young populations

- A. Introduction
- B. Treatment Goals
- C. Early Identification and Support
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- E. Social Transition
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- I. DISCUSSION & Conclusion

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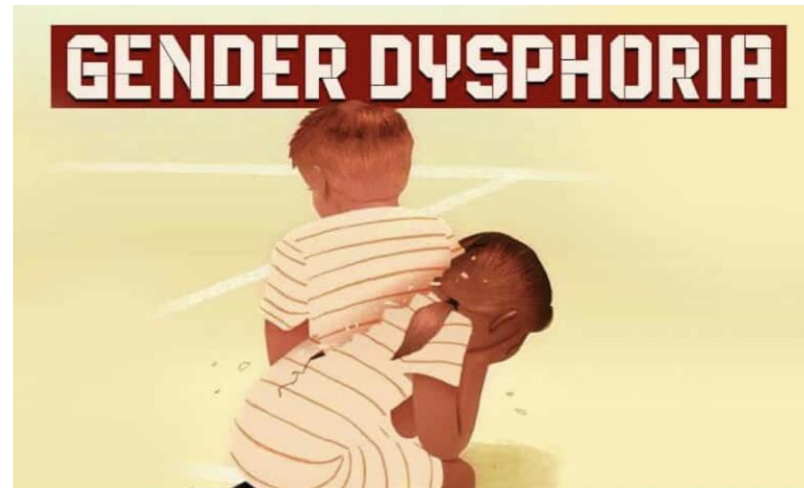


## A. Introduction

- ✓ Importance of **Understanding** and **Managing** Gender Dysphoria in Young Populations and
- ✓ It's Impact on **Mental Health** and **Well-being**

# Importance of understanding and managing gender dysphoria in young populations

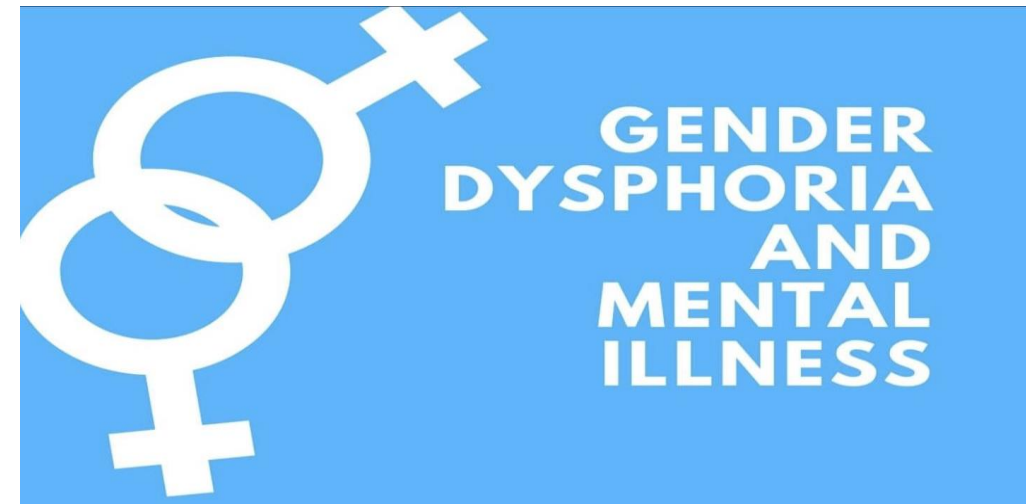
- Data demonstrates that Trans and Gender Diverse (TGD) children and adolescents are at risk of :
  - ✓ bullying,
  - ✓ discrimination,
  - ✓ social exclusion, and
  - ✓ physical assault and
- experience high rates of:
  - ✓ Depression,
  - ✓ Anxiety, and
  - ✓ Self-harm.



# Importance of understanding and managing gender dysphoria in young populations (Cont.1)

- TGD adolescents have higher rates of:

- ✓ Suicidal ideation,
- ✓ Life-threatening behaviour,
- ✓ Self-injurious thoughts or self-harm than their non-TGD peers.



- They experience **pervasive stigma** and **discrimination** in health care and difficulty in accessing health care.



# Importance of understanding and managing gender dysphoria in young populations (Cont.2)

- Experiences unique to Gender Dysphoria individuals (e.g., stigma-related stressors) can influence mental health outcomes. (Dulcan2023)
- Children, adolescents and/or their families who experience distress regarding the young person's gender identity should have access to mental health care.





# B. Treatment Goals

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# Goals of Treatment for Gender Dysphoria

- Are centered around;
  - ✓ Helping individuals achieve comfort and congruence with their gender identity,
  - ✓ Improving their overall psychological well-being and quality of life.





# Goals of Treatment for Gender Dysphoria (Cont.1)

- Some of the key goals:
  - ✓ Exploring Gender Identity
  - ✓ Reducing Distress
  - ✓ Improving Self-Fulfillment
  - ✓ Supporting Transition
  - ✓ Enhancing Social Functioning
  - ✓ Providing Comprehensive Care



# Goals of Treatment for Gender Dysphoria (Cont.2)

- All treatments should help children **feel comfortable** in their gender identity and **support them** in facing issues that arise.(Brierley et al.)
- It's important to note that the specific goals can **vary** greatly from person to person, as each individual's experience with gender dysphoria is unique.
- The treatment plan is often personalized to match the individual's needs and goals.





# C. Early Identification and Support

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# 1. The importance of early recognition

- The early recognition of gender dysphoria is crucial for providing timely and effective support to those who experience it.
- Here are some key points emphasizing its importance:
  - ✓ Early Intervention (1),
  - ✓ Preventing Mental Health Issues (2),
  - ✓ Supporting Healthy Development (3),
  - ✓ Improving Quality of Life (4),
  - ✓ Facilitating Social Transition (5),
  - ✓ Access to Resources (6),
  - ✓ Informed Decision Making (7).



# 1. The importance of early recognition (Cont.1)

- It's important for healthcare providers, educators, and families to be **aware** of the signs of gender dysphoria and to create environments where individuals feel safe to express their gender identity.
- This proactive approach can lead to better outcomes and a more positive trajectory for those experiencing gender dysphoria.



# D. Management Approaches

1. Main practice areas in guidelines
2. Overview of psychological support and counseling
3. Role of primary health care providers (1)
4. Importance of a multidisciplinary team

# Main practice areas in guidelines

- Care models, principles and practices
- Multidisciplinary team composition, roles, competencies and training
- Assessment
- Psychosocial care
- Information, education and advocacy
- Social transition
- Puberty suppressant hormones
- Feminising/Masculinising hormones
- Surgical interventions
- Fertility care
- Other interventions (eg, voice therapy, hair removal)
- Sexual health and functioning
- Physical health and lifestyle



# Care models

- Most guidelines recommend a specialist multidisciplinary team of :
  - ✓ Mental health professionals,
  - ✓ Endocrinologists and
  - ✓ Other professionals with expertise in gender and child development delivers assessment and care.





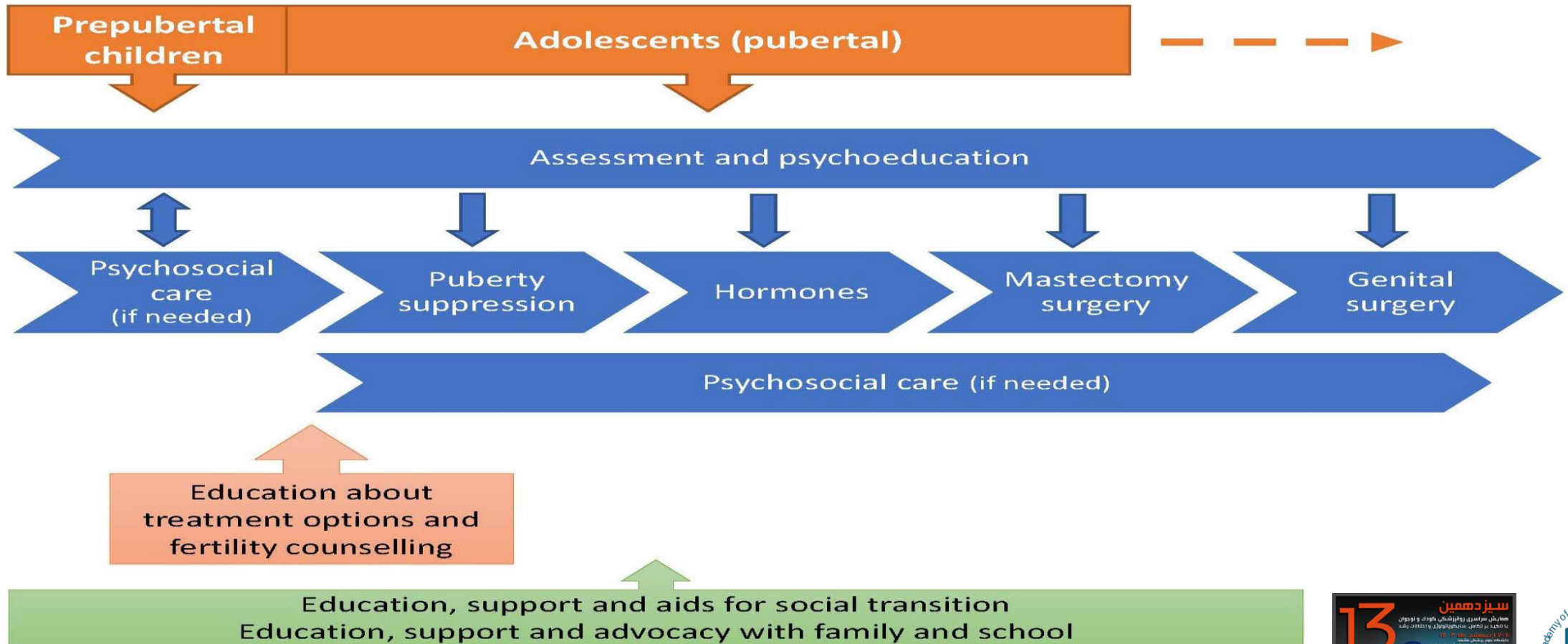


## Care models (Cont.1)

- Most guidelines **distinguish** between care for prepubertal children and adolescents, recommending a **phased approach**.
- This...
  - ✓ begins with psychosocial support for children/adolescents and parents,
  - ✓ followed by puberty suppressants and
  - ✓ then hormones for adolescents, and
  - ✓ surgical interventions in adulthood ([figure 1](#)).
- Assessment and psychoeducation are suggested along the pathway.



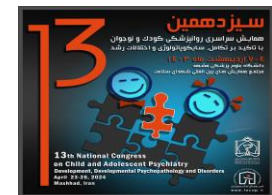
**Figure 1. The phased pathway of assessment and care described across the guidelines.**





# Assessment

- All guidelines recommend multidisciplinary assessment.
- Three types were identified:
  - (1) Comprehensive **psychosocial** assessment,
  - (2) **Medical** or ‘readiness’ assessment for adolescents seeking hormonal treatments and
  - (3) **Diagnostic** assessment for gender dysphoria/incongruence.



# Mental Health Assessment

A comprehensive mental health assessments to;

- ✓ Identify any co-occurring mental health issues and to
- ✓ Support the overall well-being of the child or adolescent





# 1. Overview of psychological support and counseling

- Psychological support and counseling play a crucial role in the management of gender dysphoria.
- The goal of psychological support and counseling in gender dysphoria management is to ensure that individuals feel supported and understood while navigating their gender identity and to promote overall mental well-being.



# 1. Psychological support and counseling

1.1 Psychosocial care for children and adolescents

1.2. Psychosocial support for parents

1.3. Psychoeducation and advocacy



# 1.1. Psychosocial care for children and adolescents

➤ Psychosocial and psychological care as a **key care component**.

- With multiple aims, range from:
  - ✓ Supporting **exploration** of gender experiences and identity;
  - ✓ Improving psychosocial **functioning**;
  - ✓ Treating **co-occurring** mental health difficulties;
  - ✓ Facilitating healthy psychosexual development;
  - ✓ Alleviating **gender-related distress/dysphoria**;
  - ✓ Assisting **families** to create a gender-affirming environment;
  - ✓ Preparing/Supporting social or medical transition and support to manage stigma or discrimination.



## 1.2. Psychosocial support for parents

- Children benefit from parental support in their gender development or care.
- There is no consensus about which interventions should be offered, and terms applied include counselling, supportive counselling, psychosocial support, psychoeducation, consultation and psychotherapy.
- Some guidelines recommend considering **family therapy**.



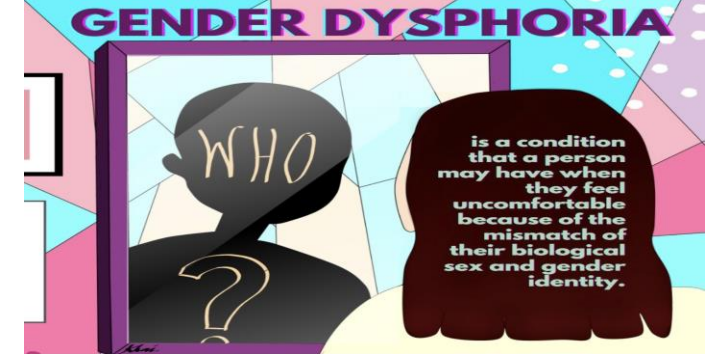


## 1.3. Psychoeducation and advocacy

- Most guidelines suggest providing **education** about gender development and identity to children/adolescents and families.
- Several guidelines suggest **peer support groups**.
- Joint working, education and/or advocacy with schools and other services is recommended.



# Psychotherapeutic Treatments



- The multiple pathways linking minority stress exposure to mental health problems have following components:
  - ✓ **Cognitive** (e.g., internalized negative beliefs about sexual orientation or gender identity),
  - ✓ **Affective** (e.g., emotional dysregulation), and
  - ✓ **Behavioral** (e.g., avoidance).
- Because existing cognitive-behavioral and emotion-focused therapies (e.g., CBT, ACT, DBT) provide strategies for **effectively coping with distress**, they offer a solid foundation for **adaptations** that integrate minority stress considerations into case conceptualization and treatment.(Dulcan2023)



## 2. Role of primary health care providers

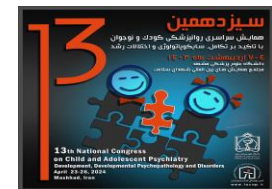
- Primary health care providers play a vital role in the management of gender dysphoria, especially for adolescents.
- Primary health care providers often serve as the first point of contact for individuals experiencing gender dysphoria and can have a significant impact on the trajectory of their care.
- It's important for these providers to have a good understanding of the complexities of gender dysphoria and to be able to provide compassionate, informed care.





# 3. Importance of a multidisciplinary team

- Such a team typically includes a range of specialists who work together to provide **comprehensive** care tailored to the individual's needs.
- The team often includes, but is not limited to, primary care physicians, endocrinologists, mental health professionals, surgeons, and sometimes legal advisors.
- The collaborative effort of such a team ensures that individuals receive the most effective and compassionate care possible.





# 3. Importance of a multidisciplinary team

- Some key reasons why a multidisciplinary team is crucial:
  - ✓ Holistic Care (1)
  - ✓ Expertise (2)
  - ✓ Personalized Treatment (3)
  - ✓ Coordination of Services (4)
  - ✓ Supportive Environment (5)
  - ✓ Informed Decision-Making (6)
  - ✓ Comprehensive Follow-Up (7)





# E. Social Transition

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# Social transition

- Nearly all guidelines that discuss social transition, recommend
  - ✓ providing information about benefits and risks of social transition, and
  - ✓ psychosocial care for decision-making and during social transition.
- Several guidelines recommend framing social transition in a way that ensures children/adolescents feel free to reconsider or reconceptualise their gender feelings as they develop.
- Several guidelines recommend an educational and advocacy role with families, schools and other settings.



# Definition and Importance of Social Transition

- Social transition refers to the process by which a person begins to live and identify as the gender they feel internally, which may differ from their sex assigned at birth (1).

This can include changes in name, pronoun usage, clothing, hairstyle, and other forms of gender expression.

It's a nonmedical step that helps individuals align their external appearance and social interactions with their gender identity (2).







# Definition and Importance of Social Transition

## (Cont.1)

- Social transition is a critical aspect of managing gender dysphoria, especially for children and adolescents.
- It's important to note that social transition is a **highly individual process** and can **vary** greatly from person to person.
- The goal is to **support** the individual's needs and preferences in a way that **promotes their well-being and happiness**.





# F. Medical Interventions

1. Puberty Suppression
2. Use of GnRH analogs and gender-affirming hormones
2. Differences in hormone therapy regimens for adolescents compared to adults (1)
3. Monitoring and potential side effects



# Medical treatments

- Medical treatments are **not** recommended for **prepubertal children** in any guideline.
- For adolescents, most guidelines describe a **phased approach** starting with puberty suppression (specifically gonadotropin-releasing hormone analogues) **before** feminising/masculinizing hormones (oestrogen or testosterone).



# Treatment of Adolescents

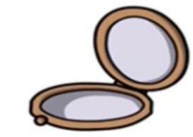
- ✓ 1. Assessing Eligibility
- ✓ 2. Fully Reversible Interventions (Pubertal Blockade)
- ✓ 3. Partially Reversible Interventions (Cross-sex Hormonal Therapy)
- ✓ 4. Irreversible Interventions (Gender-Affirming Surgeries)
- ✓ 5. Fertility Considerations



Behaviour



Dress



Self-Image



Hormone Treatment



Sex-Change Surgery





# Hormone Therapy for Adolescents

- ✓ Effects and Potential Side Effects
- ✓ Monitoring Health and Well-being during Treatment



# 1. Puberty Suppression

Use of puberty blockers in eligible adolescents to

- ✓ temporarily **pause** the development of secondary sexual characteristics,
- ✓ giving them **more time** to explore their gender identity (1).



## 2. Gender-Affirming Hormonal Treatment (GAHT)

- For adolescents, the potential use of GAHT can be considered, which helps align their physical appearance with their gender identity (1)





### 3. Differences in hormone therapy regimens for adolescents compared to adults (1)

- Hormone therapy regimens for adolescents differ from those for adults in several key aspects, primarily due to the developmental considerations and the goals of treatment in these age groups.
- It's important to note that hormone therapy should be personalized and closely monitored by healthcare professionals experienced in transgender health to ensure the safety and well-being of the individual.





## 4. Monitoring and potential side effects

- Monitoring medical interventions in gender dysphoria is essential to ensure the safety and effectiveness of the treatment.
- Here's how it can be done:
  - ✓ Regular Medical Evaluations (1),
  - ✓ Behavioral Health Evaluation (2),
  - ✓ Informed Consent (3).

## G. Surgical treatments

- At the legal age of adulthood, patients may choose to undergo a variety of surgical interventions, including vaginoplasty, phalloplasty, scrotoplasty, breast augmentation, facial reconstruction, hysterectomy, reduction thyroid chondroplasty, among others.
- Patients should be carefully counseled on the risks and benefits of surgery.
- Some surgical interventions may be considered **earlier** in the course of treatment for e.g. some guidelines do not recommend genital surgery but support **mastectomy**.
- Some guidelines do not recommend surgery for adolescents.

# H. Fertility and sexual healthcare

- There is a paucity of research on the effects of pubertal blockade and cross-sex hormonal therapy on future fertility & fertility counselling and preservation recommendations are lacking in guidelines.
- Providing information regarding the **impact** of hormones and surgery on fertility, and fertility preservation options with consensus that this should precede treatment initiation.
- ✓ Some guideline seeks to address this gap by recommending **psychosexual education** about the effects on body satisfaction and sexual function before any interventions.



# SUMMARY

- Gender incongruent and gender dysphoric youth represent a vulnerable demographic with high rates of co-occurring psychiatric conditions and suicidal behavior, likely secondary to minority stress and dysphoria related to living in a body that does not match one's experienced gender.
- Prepubescent children with gender-variant behavior or identification are best supported with psychotherapy.
- For those children who continue to have strong cross-sex identification in adolescence, pubertal blockade, and cross-sex hormone therapy to align patients' bodies with their identities have been shown to improve mental health outcomes.



# DISCUSSION

- Overall, guidelines describe a care pathway that involves psychosocial care for prepubertal children followed by hormonal interventions for adolescents who meet specific criteria, provided by a specialist multidisciplinary team.
- Although guidelines recommend similar treatments there are different recommendations about **when** hormone interventions should be offered and on **what basis**.

# Conclusions

- The treatment of children with gender dysphoria raises important questions concerning personal identity and autonomy.
- Treatment protocols, their clinical, ethical and legal foundations, who should determine them, and how they should be applied are **controversial** and will continue to produce polarised opinions.
- The **balance** between respecting a young person's developing autonomy and protecting them from harm remains crucial. (Brierley et al.)



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