

BRIEFINGS ON TRANS HEALTHCARE

RAPID-ONSET GENDER DYSPHORIA

2024



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“Rapid onset gender dysphoria” is a supposed phenomenon where gender dysphoria allegedly occurs rapidly as a result of “social contagion” (e.g., social influences such as peers and social media), mental health struggles, and/or neurodiversity.¹ It has been used to dismiss young people’s identities and prevent them from accessing gender-affirming healthcare under the guise of scientific-sounding language.¹

Research does not support “rapid onset gender dysphoria” as a distinct phenomenon, repeatedly demonstrating that young people are aware of their gender identity long before they tell their parents.^{2,3} Moreover, the recency of gender knowledge (i.e., when a person self-realises their identity and then “comes out” as trans) is **not** associated with poor mental health and neurodevelopmental conditions, gender dysphoria symptoms, having gender-supportive online friends, or general support from online friends or transgender friends.⁴ In fact, the early research used to support the hypothesis of “rapid onset gender dysphoria” has been widely critiqued for poor study design; the primary piece of research used to evidence the alleged phenomenon has been heavily corrected post-publication, did not include any trans young people as participants nor observe the development of gender dysphoria, and recruited participants claiming to be the parents of trans young people from websites that took hostile stances towards gender-affirming healthcare and trans people more broadly.^{1,5}

“Rapid onset gender dysphoria” is not a useful or legitimate descriptor of young people’s circumstances. In fact, research has shown that in a large sample of trans adults, there was, on average, a 14-year gap between them realising they were trans and disclosing this to anyone; many had realised they were trans in their youth.⁶ It is quite common for trans people to become aware of gender dysphoria as they start to go through puberty. As societal acceptance improves, and gender affirming-healthcare becomes more widespread, more people are beginning to openly discuss their trans identities and seek out medical affirmation at an earlier age.^{1-3,5,7} Best practice gender-affirming healthcare is never rushed or routine and is tailored to each individual person.

Intended use of information

While we make every effort to make sure the information in this resource is accurate and informative, the information does not take the place of professional medical advice.

Do not use our information as a substitute for the advice of a health professional.

If you are an individual seeking medical or health information for yourself or for someone else, you should obtain advice relevant to your particular circumstances from a health professional.

More information and support

For clinicians, please contact AusPATH for resources and support. www.auspath.org.au

For families and young people, please contact Transcend Australia for resources and support. www.transcend.org.au

This resource and associated evidence briefs and fact sheets can be downloaded from www.transcend.org.au/resources/evidence

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