



Gender identity is not as simple as ABC(D)

By Dr. Jessica K Edwards

Alexandra Potter and colleagues in the USA have used data collected as part of the longitudinal Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development (ABCD) US cohort study to examine associations between diverse gender experiences and mental health. They first determined the prevalence of transgender-identified participants in the study cohort of nearly 12,000 children aged 9-10 years old. Here, they found that 0.5% youth (n=58) responded “yes” or “maybe” when asked if they are transgender. Recurrent thoughts of death were significantly more prevalent in these 58 children compared to the rest of the cohort.

After 1-year follow-up, the children (now aged 10-11 years) completed a multi-dimensional gender survey that assessed felt-gender, gender noncontentedness and gender nonconformity on a 5-point scale. Of the ~5,000 children that completed this survey, around one third provided responses that did not exclusively align with one gender. Notably, the researchers found associations between mental health symptoms and all of the measured gender dimensions.

Potter *et al.* conclude that the association between mental health and gender diversity extends beyond youth with a transgender identity. The percentage of children at risk of mental health problems associated with gender diversity might, therefore, be greater than originally thought. Importantly, more than one third of children in this study did not understand the term “transgender”. Thus, asking children about their “felt-gender” might constitute a more developmentally appropriate way to evaluate gender diversity in this age group.

Referring to:

Potter, A., Dube, S., Allgaier, N., Loso, H., Ivanova, M., Barrios, L.C., Bookheimer, S., Chaarani, B., Dumas, J., Feldstein-Ewing, S., Freedman, E.G., Garavan, H., Hoffman, E., McGlade, E., Robin, L. & Johns, M.M. (2020), *Early adolescent gender diversity and mental health in the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development study*. *J. Child Psychol. Psychiatr.* doi: 10.1111/jcpp.13248.

See also:

<https://abcdstudy.org/>