

# Current Social Science Research on Trans Health Issues

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# New Research Challenges

- In the last 15 years, more trans people have become visible, with perhaps the most significant increase in visibility among FTM and transmen populations, trans youth, and non-heteronormative trans people
- Research and scholarly activity on trans issues, across disciplines, has significantly increased
- Along with this trend, trans activism and education have increased and reached new visibility

# New Research Challenges

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- Cross-national exchanges, comparisons, and local adaptations of trans research, scholarship, experiences and activism are on the rise
- Recent scholarship and research point toward revisions of earlier knowledge and standards of care based on this knowledge
- Together, these trends imply proliferation of knowledge affecting trans health care

# Practitioner Challenges

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- Keeping up with new research findings, new community dynamics, increased number of trans patients/clients and continued cuts in health care and research spending
- Diverging fields of practice, information overload, and scarcity of time and access complicate practitioner update and cross-professional information exchange

# Database Review 2007-2010



- Communication and Mass Media Complete
- SocINDEX
- Family and Society Studies Worldwide
- PsycINFO and PsycArticles
- CINAHL (Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature)
- ERIC (Education Resources Information Center)
- Consumer Health Complete

# Abstract Search Keywords

□ Transgender:	1 212 records
□ Transgender & health:	412 records
□ Transsexual:	343 records
□ Transsexualism:	99 records
□ Transsexual & health:	87 records
□ Gender Identity Disorder:	149 records
□ Total	2302 records

# Results

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- Restricted review to transgender & health, gender identity disorder, transsexualism, transsexual & health
- Printed all abstracts
- Manual review for duplication, elimination of book reviews and hits not relevant to trans health
- LGBTQ umbrella: sorted manually by emphasis
- Yielded 600 abstracts

# Results



- Yielded 350 articles/dissertations/papers
- Reviewed abstracts, categorized themes
- Tracked countries covered (only English-language scholarship, or that available in English translation, included)



# National Populations

- Nations represented = trans population represented
- Vast majority of research: US, UK
- Often, baseline studies

Australia

Bangladesh

Belgium

Brazil

Canada

Croatia

England

France

Germany

Hong Kong

Hungary

Italy

Japan

Laos

Macedonia

# National Populations

Malaysia

Mexico

The Netherlands

New Zealand

Pakistan

Poland

Samoa

Serbia

Spain

South Africa

South Korea

United Kingdom

United States of America

roughly: 30 of 200 countries = 15% of nations

- *Thomas Hammarberg, Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, asserts that trans people continue to experience discrimination, intolerance, violence and human rights violations. He writes (2009) that during his official visits to 47 member states of the Council of Europe, he has been “struck by the lack of knowledge about the human rights issues at stake for transgender persons, even among political decision-makers.”*

# Topic Areas (Frequency)

□ GID (both applications & controversy)	26
□ Bailey controversy	26
□ HIV (MTF, sex work, a few MSM)	23
□ Youth	21
□ National population demographics	21
□ Ethnic minorities (US, mostly Latino/a)	15
□ Provider training (across fields)	11
□ Hormones	11
□ Health care access/délivrance	10

# Topic Areas (Frequency)

□ WPATH Standards of Care	9
□ Surgery	9
□ Psychotherapy practices	8
□ Violence	6
□ Drugs, alcohol, tobacco	6
□ Identity formation (more FTM)	6
□ Mental health	6
□ Aging	5
□ Sex work	5

# Topic Areas (Frequency)

- 100+ on individual topics (<3) not captured by these categories including:
  - Adoption
  - Advocacy
  - Femininity
  - Globalization
  - History of trans research
  - Learning disabilities
  - Partner adjustment
  - Speech therapy
  - Body image
  - Prison
  - Gynecology
  - Passing
  - Career counselling
  - Suicide
  - Sports
  - Relations with LGBTQ communities



# Emerging Trends

# Role of Culture

- Baseline research on trans populations in other national cultures (trans populations in 85% of national cultures not captured in English-language research)
- Tension between localized demographics and needs and international standards of care
- Questioning of cultural assumptions embedded in current scientific concepts



# Role of Culture

- Study of trans experiences in societies with different attitudes toward gender binaries and transgressions of binaries may establish that the dis/order is not not a biological disorder as much as a societal disorder of understanding gender/sex/sexuality
- At the same time, integration of western-led initiatives may legitimize study of trans issues in non-western countries and help provide access to care

**“We conclude that the diagnostic category of GIDC should not occur in its current form in future editions of the DSM, as there is no compelling evidence that cross-gender behaviors or identities, in and of themselves, cause distress in the individual.”**

Vasey & Bartlett (2007) reporting on results of a study of the Samoan ‘fa’afaine’

# Role of Culture

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- Studies of trans communities in varying cultural settings will emphasize heterogeneity of trans experience
- Shift from understanding trans experience as medical disorder to gender identity may repeat dynamics of gay & lesbian identity discourse on global scene
- Global-local-glocal tensions of trans constructs

# Documenting Demographics

- Social change, globalization, and research reassessments point to need to provide updated figures about actual size of trans populations
- This is particularly relevant in regard to hypothesized MTF-FTM ratios
- Needed in regard to varying health needs of transpeople depending on sexual orientation
- Needed in regard to shifts in attitudes about medical needs

# Documenting Demographics

- Baseline studies from studies outside of the US, UK, and Canadian context tend to conclude that their demographic assessments vary from the ‘established norm’
- Researchers will need to pursue if the ‘established norm’ is incorrect, if significant cultural differences prohibit determining a norm, or if social practices/research norms preclude cross-population assessment

# Documenting Demographics

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- Significant increase in amount of research on youth
- Smaller increase in amount of research on aging trans population
- All aspects of aging (socio-cultural, health care needs, effects of long-term therapy) established as understudied area requiring more attention
- No studies on intergenerational dynamics

# Documenting Demographics

- Researchers question overrepresentation of transpeople as victims (depression, suicide, substance abuse, sex workers, prison inmates) in terms of empirical accuracy
- Interest in identifying factors that contribute to positive trans experiences
- Are population trends changing due to changes in social acceptance/access to care?

# Understudied Areas

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- Research on youth needed, but growing quickly
- Smaller increase in amount of research on aging trans population
- All aspects of aging (socio-cultural, health care needs, effects of long-term therapy) established as understudied area requiring more attention
- No studies on intergenerational dynamics



# Understudied Areas

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- Trans people with physical disabilities
- Children of trans parents/family dynamics
- Outside of US context, studies of co-cultural groups within national cultures almost non-existent in this body of research
- Creation of effective interventions and programs
- Use of electronic media in health care

# Challenges in Assessments

- Although increasing number of studies focused explicitly on trans populations, whether part of lgbtq umbrella or not, some studies use lgbtq umbrella in keywords, subjects, design but don't actually include any trans people
- Inconsistent use of keywords across studies
- Research growing quickly (dissertations/theses)
- Referencing within research networks