



CANADIAN PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION
FOR TRANSGENDER HEALTH

ASSOCIATION PROFESSIONNELLE CANADIENNE
POUR LA SANTÉ TRANSGENRE

CPATH position statement on “rapid-onset gender dysphoria”

The Canadian Professional Association for Transgender Health (CPATH) is the largest national multidisciplinary, professional organization in the world, working to support the health, wellbeing, and dignity of trans and gender diverse people. Our mission includes supporting the health, wellbeing, and dignity of trans and gender diverse people through education and advocacy.

CPATH joins the World Professional Association for Transgender Health in expressing concern about use of the phrase “rapid onset gender dysphoria”. This term is not a medical diagnosis, is not recognized by any major professional association, nor is it a subtype or classification in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) or International Classification of Diseases (ICD). Unfortunately, this official-sounding phrase has been applied as if it were an official diagnostic term and, in some cases, used to invalidate the gender experiences of youth.

“Rapid onset gender dysphoria” is an idea proposed by one researcher after surveying parents who had become aware that their child was transgender after the child reached adolescence. The article was originally published in PLoS ONE in 2018, under the title: *Rapid-onset gender dysphoria in adolescents and young adults: A study of parental reports* (1). In response to concerns about the study methodology and conclusions (2), the publisher conducted a post-publication reassessment involving multiple reviewers.

In 2019, a new version of the article was published with extensive corrections, including an updated title, abstract, introduction, materials/methods, discussion, and conclusion (3). The title of the corrected article is: *Parent reports of adolescents and young adults perceived to show signs of a rapid onset of gender dysphoria*, which more strongly conveys that this was a study of parent perceptions rather than youth behavior or development (3). Accompanying this corrected version was an apology in which the journal’s editor-in-chief stated: “I would also like to apologise in particular to the trans and gender variant community for oversights that occurred during the original assessment of the study” (4). The editor-in-chief made another important statement, that the corrected article, “now provides a better context of the work, as a report of parental observations, but not a clinically validated phenomenon or a diagnostic guideline” (4).

CPATH supports evidence-based care informed by rigorous scientific research and peer review. Therefore, CPATH supports gender-affirmative care as evidence-based practice for trans and gender diverse people of all ages (5,6). Clinicians and gender clinics serving children and youth across Canada practice a gender-affirmative approach, listening to what young people are communicating about their gender with the help of parents and caregivers (5).

It is well-understood that people may come out as trans at any point in their lives and that some do not report gender-nonconforming behavior in childhood (7). However, it is also important to note that young people in particular may not be ready or able to articulate their gender until they acquire the necessary language and feel safe enough to do so. Apprehension regarding the reactions they will encounter cause some youth to wait months or years before coming out or seeking support (8). Fear of rejection by parents and caregivers can leave youth isolated and alone as they gain the

courage to come out or determine that they are no longer able to keep their gender a secret. Disclosure of gender during adolescence may lead some parents/caregivers to believe that their child's gender is a new development (7).

Support from health care providers and other parents/caregivers, access to accurate information, and strong relationships and communication with their children are all factors that can help parents/caregivers navigate unexpected gender journeys (8). As parent/family support is a critical protective factor in the lives of trans youth (9–11), CPATH encourages professionals to provide support to parents and caregivers so that they can in turn provide the affirmation their children need to thrive.

As an organization dedicated to the health, wellbeing, and self-actualization of trans and gender diverse people, CPATH supports gender diversity as a natural and healthy part of the human experience and strongly discourages use of any terminology, including “rapid onset gender dysphoria”, to pathologize or invalidate diverse gender experiences.

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