

Government set to begin next phase of gender transition research

In the government's landmark LGBT Action Plan last year, the Government Equalities Office (GEO) committed to . exploring the issues faced by young people changing their gender.

New figures from the NHS's Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS) show that the number of children and young people being referred to the service is still increasing, up 6% when compared to the previous year.

In 2018/19, 2,590 children and young people were referred to GIDS, with the service continuing to see an increasing number of girls referred. Nearly three quarters of those referred last year were female, mostly of adolescent age.

Whilst the number of referrals last year still represents only a small fraction of the UK population (0.05% or around 1 in 1,900 of 13-17 year olds), it is clear that more young people, particularly adolescent girls, are seeking support around their gender identity from health services.

In a bid to better understand why so many young people, particularly girls, are being referred, the government has been reviewing evidence from gender identity services in other countries.

This shows that the pattern in the UK (where 2.8 natal girls are being referred for every 1 boy), is mirrored in a number of other developed countries:

- Tampere, Finland: 6.8 girls referred for every 1 boy
- Toronto, Canada: 1.8 girls referred for every 1 boy
- Amsterdam, Netherlands: 1.7 girls referred for every 1 boy

What it is not clear is what might be driving these increases. Despite a wide variety of theories, there is little hard evidence to support these at present.

That is why the government has been reviewing existing evidence, including information from other countries, to better understand whether the trends seen in the UK are also happening elsewhere. Following on from this, the GEO will now commission brand new research to explore the nature of adolescent gender identity and transitioning.

Minister for Women & Equalities, Penny Mordaunt, said:

"The statistics we have been made aware of show that more and more young people, particularly girls, are using health services to explore changing their gender.

"It is vitally important that we prioritise finding out why this is the case,

making sure we gain an understanding of the driving factors behind this whilst doing everything we can to support these individuals and their families.”

A tender for the next stage of research will be released in the coming weeks. This will include a comprehensive international evidence review and analysis of referral data.

Alongside this clinicians and young service users will be interviewed, giving us a better understanding of their experiences and reasons for seeking support.

Government will also seek to improve understanding of gender identity among young people in the UK more generally, by including new questions on robust social surveys.

Alongside this the NHS have already started a series of longer-term studies to better understand the outcomes of children and young people who are referred to gender identity services.

Further Info:

This trend of higher numbers of adolescent girls presenting as transgender was also observed in responses to the government’s own National LGBT Survey. Of the 2,040 trans respondents aged 16-17, 39% identified as trans men, compared to 10% trans women. 51% identified as non-binary.