



Adolescent Gender Diversity and Mental Well-Being in Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development Study: Exploring Gender and Sexuality

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Abstract

This research article investigates the nuanced relationship between adolescent gender diversity, mental well-being, and the exploration of gender and sexuality within the framework of the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development (ABCD) study. Adolescence is a pivotal period for self-discovery, during which individuals explore their gender identity and sexual orientation. Understanding the impact of these explorations on mental health is essential for providing a valuable platform for examining these factors in a large and diverse sample of American youth. There are known associations between mental health symptoms and transgender identity among adults. Whether this relationship extends to early adolescents and to gender domains other than identity is unclear. This study measured dimensions of gender in a large, diverse, sample of youth, and examined associations between diverse gender experiences and mental health.

Keywords: Adolescents; Children; Youth; Mental health

Adolescence is a time of profound physical, psychological, and social changes. Among these changes, the exploration of gender identity and sexual orientation can have significant implications for an adolescent's mental well-being. Gender diversity, including transgender and non-binary identities, has gained increasing recognition and visibility. However, the specific mental health challenges and strengths of gender-diverse adolescents remain an understudied area. Transgender psychological distress is not only higher than their cisgender, heterosexual peers but also higher than their cisgender, sexual minority peers. In this review, we document these mental health disparities and discuss potential explanations for them using a minority stress framework. We also discuss factors that may increase and decrease TGD youth's vulnerability to psychological distress. Further, we review interventions, including gender-affirming medical care, that may improve mental health in TGD youth. We conclude by discussing limitations of current research and suggestions for the future. Gender diversity, encompassing a range of gender identities beyond the traditional binary of male and female, has gained increasing recognition and visibility in recent years. It is essential to explore the impact of gender diversity on mental well-being, as individuals experience and express their gender in ways that are authentic to them. Understanding the unique mental health challenges and strengths associated with gender diversity is crucial for promoting the well-being of gender-diverse individuals.

The ABCD study, launched in 2016, has provided a unique opportunity to explore these issues. This study aims to investigate the following aspects

the experiences of gender-diverse adolescents within the context of their families, schools, and communities.

the influence of gender exploration on mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, self-esteem, and overall well-being.

the intersectionality of gender diversity with sexual orientation and its impact on mental health.

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Received: 01-Sept-2023, Manuscript No. jcen-23-116734; **Editor assigned:** 04-Sept-2023, Pre QC-No. jcen-23-116734 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 18-Sept-2023, QC No: jcen-23-116734; **Revised:** 25-Sept-2023, Manuscript No. jcen-23-116734 (R); **Published:** 30-Sept-2023, DOI: 10.4172/jcen.1000206

Citation: Shiraishi W (2023) Adolescent Gender Diversity and Mental Well-Being in Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development Study: Exploring Gender and Sexuality. *J Clin Exp Neuroimmunol*, 8: 206.

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discrimination, social stigma, and the challenges of navigating a world that may not fully understand or accept diverse gender identities.

: The presence of strong social support networks, including accepting friends and family, plays a significant role in