

Sigma's VIRTUAL 31st International Nursing Research Congress (Wednesday, 22 July - Friday, 24 July)

Lost in Gender: A Scoping Review of Parents' Acceptance of Gender Nonconformity in Prepubertal Children

Mark Wallace Flener, MSN, RN, CCRN

School of Nursing, Indiana University Purdue University of Indianapolis (IUPUI), Indianapolis, IN, USA

Janet S. Fulton, PhD, RN, ACNS-BC, ANEF, FAAN

School of Nursing, Indiana University, Indianapolis, IN, USA

Ukamaka Marian Oruche, PhD, RN, PMHCNS-BC, FAAN

Indiana University School of Nursing, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, Indianapolis, IN, USA

Purpose:

Young children (3-12 years) expressing gender nonconformity (GNC) are at greater risks for family rejection and psychological trauma. Parental rejection toward GNC has been shown to predict higher rates of suicide attempts among children. The purpose of this review was to examine the influences of parents' acceptance toward young children exploring GNC. The study aims were: 1) synthesize empirical evidence to understand individual experiences of gender nonconforming children and their parents; 2) describe relationship patterns between the children's expression and parents' acceptance of GNC; and 3) describe gender affirming behaviors that improve the child/parent relationship.

Methods:

An Arksey and O'Malley scoping review was conducted utilizing the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews: (PRISMA-ScR) Checklist. Databases searched included: Academic Search Premier, CINAHL Complete, Psyc INFO, Family and Society Studies Worldwide, and Families Study Abstract. Grey Literature was reviewed and included Google Scholar and Gender Watch (ProQuest). Empirical articles and publications published between 2013 and 2019 were examined for relevant studies. Fifteen articles met the inclusion/exclusion criteria.

Results:

Participants within the studies included parents or caregivers of transgender and/or gender nonconforming children that had or had not experienced social transition. Sample sizes ranged from 8 parents of 5 gender nonconforming children to 563 LGBT adults. The majority of parental responses were from mothers. Rarely did children directly report their experiences. The following key findings supported our proposed aims:

Aim 1: Children experience higher levels of stress related to parents' rejection, while parents' acceptance promoted better psychosocial health. Children experienced stress when required to use bathrooms, locker rooms, or play activities that divided boys and girls. Parents' concerns with GNC were associated with internalized transphobia, societal acceptance, and children's safety. Parents experienced a loss/grieving process before they accepted children's GNC.

Aim 2: In relationship patterns, mothers are the emotional caretaker of the child's gender role. Fathers had greater discomfort toward GNC than mothers and specifically toward natal boys. Fathers were shown to be physically and verbally aggressive toward natal boys expressing GNC, while both parents showed minimal concern toward GNC in natal girls. Concerns over GNC dissipated when children were allowed to socially transition to the affirmed gender.

Aim 3: Parents and children experienced higher levels of happiness after the social transition. Affirming gender identity was essential to children's social transition and was demonstrated through the use of preferred names, pronouns, dress, and peer socialization. Additionally, parents played a significant role in the social transition through advocacy for children's affirmed identity among peers, schools and society.

Conclusion:

Findings show that there is a correlation between parental acceptance of gender nonconforming behaviors and securing a child's gender affirmation. Parental rejection can adversely affect children's gender identity development. Early implementation of social affirmation can reduce psychological distress for parents and children, while securing a safe pathway to children's happiness and mental well-being. Future research should explore differences in acceptance by parent role and examine specific risk factors and mechanisms that contribute to fathers' rejection of gender nonconformity.

Title:

Lost in Gender: A Scoping Review of Parents' Acceptance of Gender Nonconformity in Prepubertal Children

Keywords:

child, gender nonconformity and parent

Abstract Summary:

Research synthesized in this scoping review informs readers of the current evidence in prepubertal children experiencing gender nonconformity and the impact of parents' acceptance. Upon completion, readers should have a better understanding of children's gender health, parental influences toward gender identity, and the importance of gender affirmation.

References:

- Alegria, C. (2018). Supporting families of transgender children/youth: Parents speak on their experiences, identity, and views. *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 19(2), 132- 143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15532739.2018.1450798>.
- Alonso, D., Blotner, C., Durwood, L., Edwards, D., Lewis, K. & Olson, K. (2019). Family discussions of early childhood social transitions. *Clinical Practice in Pediatric Psychology*, 7(3), 229-240. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/cpp0000289>.
- Budge, S., Katz-Wise, S., Nava-Coulter, B., Nguyen, B., Orovecz, J. & Thomson, K. (2017). Imagining the future: Perspectives among youth and caregivers in the trans youth family study. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 64(1), 26- 40. <http://do.doi.org/10.1037/cou0000186>.

- Carmichael, P. & Graaf, N. (2019). Reflections on emerging trends in clinical work with gender diverse children and adolescents. *Clinical Child Psychology*, 24(2), 353-364. doi: 10.177/1359104518812924.
- Diamond, L., Huebner, D. & Spivey, L. (2018). Parent responses to childhood gender nonconformity: Effects of parent and child characteristics. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*, 5(3), 360-370. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000279>.

First Primary Presenting Author

Primary Presenting Author

Mark Wallace Flener, MSN, RN, CCRN
Indiana University Purdue University of Indianapolis (IUPUI)
School of Nursing
PhD student
Indianapolis, Indiana
USA

Author Summary: A 2016 graduate of Gonzaga University's School of Nursing receiving a master's degree in nursing education. Master's thesis focused on the experiences of transgenders seeking healthcare service in rural populations. Currently a first year PhD student in clinical nursing research at IUPUI's School of Nursing. Research focus is on the experiences of prepubertal children expressing gender nonconformity and parents' attitudes toward gender nonconforming behaviors.

Second Author

Janet S. Fulton, PhD, RN, ACNS-BC, ANEF, FAAN
Indiana University
School of Nursing
Professor & Associate Dean for Graduate Programs
Indianapolis, Indiana
USA

Author Summary: Dr. Fulton is Associate Dean for Graduate Programs at Indiana University School of Nursing. She has held multiple academic and professional leadership roles in the area of advanced practice nursing, and has many publications and presentations regarding clinical nurse specialist role and practice. Her textbook, *Foundations of Clinical Nurse Specialist Practice*, received a 2014 AJN Book of the Year award. She is currently the Editor of *Clinical Nurse Specialist: The Journal for Advanced Nursing Practice*.

Third Author

Ukamaka Marian Oruche, PhD, RN, PMHCNS-BC, FAAN
Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis
Indiana University School of Nursing
Assistant Professor
Indianapolis, Indiana
USA

Author Summary: Dr. Ukamaka Oruche is an Associate Professor at the Indiana University School of Nursing. A nationally recognized expert in psychiatric nursing, Dr. Oruche has made sustained and exemplary contributions to our understanding of the challenges experienced by families of adolescents with Disruptive Behavior Disorders. Dr. Oruche is a fellow of the American Academy of Nursing; and Co-Chair of the academy's Psychiatric, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Expert Panel.