Quality of Life in Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People in England: Brief Report of Initial Findings

May 2018

Summary of Research Progress to Date

In 2016, Gendered Intelligence teamed up with researchers from Goldsmiths, University of London, to launch a project examining quality of life in Transgender and Gender Nonconforming (TGNC) People in England. This ongoing project aims to understand quality of life in TGNC people by examining both positive (e.g., life satisfaction) and negative (e.g., depression) indicators of life quality, as well as the life events (e.g., gender-related discrimination) that may contribute to these. Data collection for this project to date has been carried out via online surveys. The first survey that we asked people to respond to was between August and October 2016. Through understanding people's responses to this survey, we can gain an insight into the thoughts, feelings, emotions, and experiences they were having in 2016. However, life is not static, and people may change and develop over time. Therefore, we also asked people to respond to a second survey in 2017, and will continue to ask people to respond to our surveys yearly. By examining people's responses over time, we can see how they change, or indeed remain the same, and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of life events in the longer term. In this report, we will briefly discuss the findings of our initial survey in 2016.

Participant Characteristics

We collected data from 923 TGNC people living in England. Participant age ranged from 18 to 78 (average = 33.5) years. All participants reported that they did not identify as the gender they were assigned at birth; then, 18.5% of the participants described their identity as trans man, 18.4% as trans woman, 14.3% as non-binary, 8.7% as woman with a trans history, 6.4% as other (i.e., people chose to write their own identity), 6.2% as genderqueer, 5.2% as agender, 4.4% as woman, 4.3% as genderfluid, 3.3% as man, 3% as man with a trans history, 2.8% as gender nonconforming, 2.7% as transsexual, 1% as androgynous and 0.8% as transvestite/cross-dresser. Regarding ethnicity, 0.6% of the participants identified as Black (British, Caribbean and other), 1.2% as Asian (British, Indian, Pakistani, Chinese and other), 1.3% as another ethnic background, 3.7% as mixed ethnic background and 93.2% as White (British, Irish and other). In terms of education, 2.1% of the participants said that they had no formal qualifications, 5.6% described their highest attainment as PhD or equivalent, 9.1% as GCSE or equivalent, 16% as MSc/MA or equivalent, 31.4% as AS/A-levels or equivalent and 35.8% as BSc/BA or equivalent.

We also collected data from 147 non-TGNC people living in England for comparison purposes. Participant age ranged from 18 to 84 (average = 45.3) years. All participants reported that they did identify as the gender they were assigned at birth; then, 52.4% of the participants described their gender identity as woman and 47.6% as man. Regarding ethnicity, 0.7% of the participants identified as another ethnic background, 1.3% as Black (British and Caribbean), 2.7% as mixed ethnic background, 4.8% as Asian (British, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Chinese) and 90.5% as White (British and other). In terms of education, 2.7% of the participants described their highest attainment as PhD or equivalent, 4.8% said that they had no formal qualifications, 5.4% as MSc/MA or equivalent, 27.9% as AS/A-levels or equivalent, 28.6% as GCSE or equivalent and 30.6% as BSc/BA or equivalent.

Note. Information about several other participant characteristics were collected for both groups, but are not reported here due to space restrictions. These are available upon request (see contact details at the end of the document).

Initial Findings
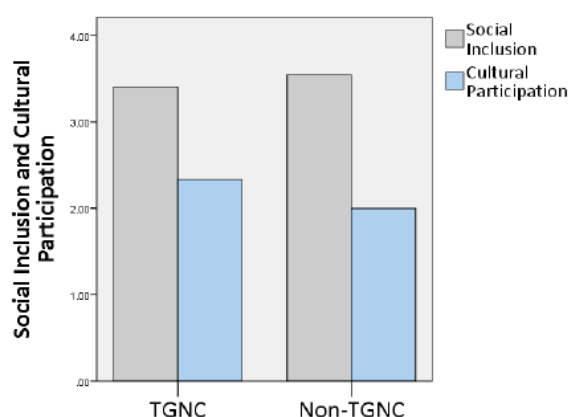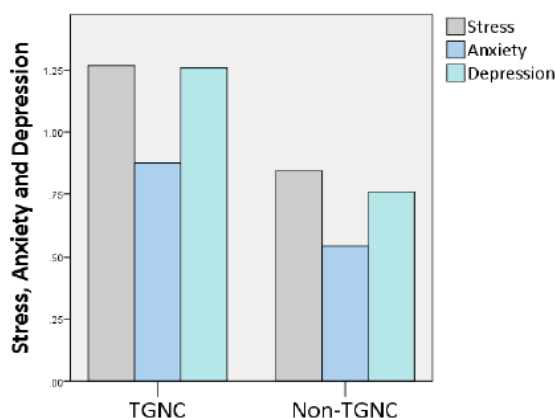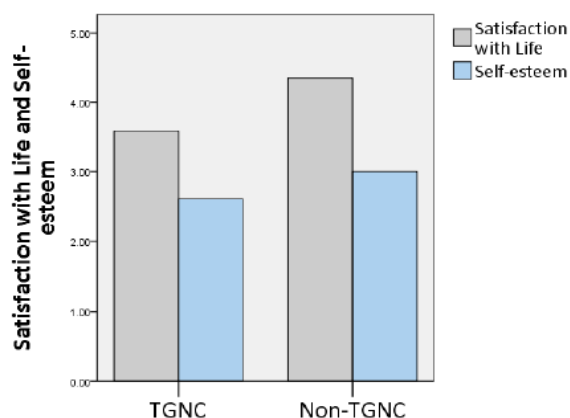
In the first stage of analysis, we compared TGNC and Non-TGNC participants on their average scores on our quality of life indicators.

Our findings showed that, in comparison to Non-TGNC participants, TGNC participants had statistically significantly higher levels of stress, anxiety and depression, and lower levels of life satisfaction, self-esteem and social inclusion.

However, in comparison to Non-TGNC participants, TGNC participants had statistically significantly higher levels of cultural participation.

In the second stage of analysis, we examined life events that may (statistically significantly) contribute to average scores on the quality of life indicators in TGNC participants.

Internalised transphobia related to lower levels of life satisfaction, self-esteem, mental health, social inclusion and cultural participation.

Gender-related discrimination related to lower levels of life satisfaction, self-esteem, mental health and social inclusion.

Identity nondisclosure related to lower levels of mental health.

Identity pride related to higher levels of life satisfaction, self-esteem, social inclusion and cultural participation.

Community connectedness was unrelated to any quality of life indicators.
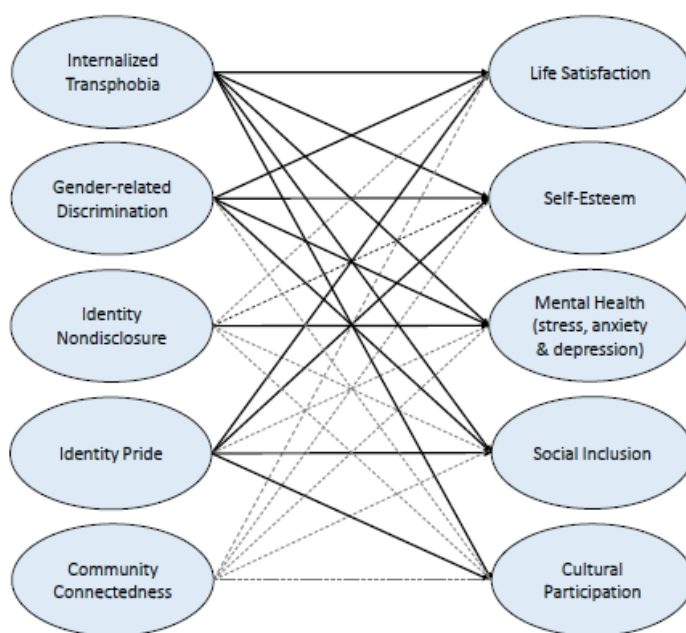
Note. Hard lines = significant relations
Dashed lines = nonsignificant relations

Early Implications

In comparison to Non-TGNC people, TGNC people appear to be disadvantaged across numerous quality of life indicators. This is evident in terms of TGNC peoples' overall statistically significantly lower levels of life satisfaction (i.e., broad appraisal of one's life), self-esteem (i.e., broad appraisal of the self) and social inclusion (i.e., feelings of being included in the society in which one lives), and higher levels of stress, anxiety and depression (i.e., general mental health). These findings are consistent with previous research and indicate the continued need to understand and address the sources of distress and disadvantage within the TGNC community.

Relating to this, we found that several TGNC-specific stressors contributed to poorer quality of life. Internalised transphobia (i.e., TGNC peoples' internalisation of negative societal views about them and their community) and gender-related discrimination (i.e., TGNC peoples' difficulty accessing resources such as medical treatment, legal documents etc.) were particularly robust predictors of poorer life quality. This suggests the need to tackle psychological stressors that exist within the thoughts and feelings of TGNC people, in terms of how they think about themselves and their community, as well as those stressors that exist in the world, external to TGNC people. Identity nondisclosure (i.e., TGNC peoples' efforts to conceal their gender identity/history), on the other hand, was a much less consistent predictor of poorer life quality. This likely represents the complexity associated with this variable; specifically, that identity concealment may sometimes feel stressful and/or awkward, but at times may also be a perfectly reasonable response to a situation judged to be dangerous or risky (i.e., a form of self-protection).

Interestingly, in comparison to Non-TGNC people, TGNC people showed significantly higher levels of general cultural participation (i.e., frequency of participation in cultural activities such as museums, art galleries, theatre performances etc.). Furthermore, identity pride was a particularly robust predictor of better life quality. These two factors may represent sources of resilience and support for TGNC people, and thus represent useful potential leverage points for interventions seeking to enhance life quality.

Next Steps/Moving Forward

We are currently in the process of running more specific and complex analyses focussed on: (1) the long-term impact of stressors such as gender-related discrimination and internalised transphobia on TGNC quality of life; (2) the state of TGNC quality of life across different regions of England; (3) the role of transition status on TGNC quality of life.

The project findings will be discussed further at the Gendered Intelligence Conference on the 9th and 10th November 2018. They will also form the basis of some academic publications over the coming year and will be used to inform Gendered Intelligence's ongoing work. We are currently analysing data from the 2017 survey and will release results on this in due course.

Contact and Other Info

Please do not publish or cite this report without the permission of the authors. This report was authored by Dr Jo Lloyd and Dr Vikki Chalkin from Goldsmiths, University of London, and Dr Jay Stewart and Mr Jamie Pallas from Gendered Intelligence.

Please contact Dr Jo Lloyd (j.lloyd@gold.ac.uk) for any questions about the report, the project or the findings to date.