

**Parkes, G., Hall, I., & Wilson, D. (2009). Cross dressing and gender dysphoria in people with learning disabilities: a descriptive study. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 37, 151-156.**

The prevalence of gender dysphoria and gender identity disorder in the population of individuals with learning disability<sup>1</sup> is unknown. As a result, treatments of gender dysphoria and gender identity disorder in people with learning disabilities have varied and may be determined by what is available locally. There is a clear need for more research focusing on gender disorders in individuals with learning disabilities. The purpose of this descriptive study was to 1) describe characteristics of gender dysphoria and cross dressing in people with learning disabilities; 2) explore reasons why individuals with learning disabilities cross dress; 3) determine whether this population present with any co morbid mental health problems; and 4) provide a treatment summary for this unique group of individuals. A retrospective clinical chart review of 13 adults that were referred with gender dysphoria, cross dressing or a request to have a sex reassignment surgery to a tertiary centre for individuals with learning disabilities who also have needs relating to their sexuality or sexual health was completed. In total 12 biological males and 1 female were included in the sample.

**Key Findings:**

- 1) People with learning disabilities present with similar gender identity issues that are seen in the general population. The most common reason for referral was cross dressing with nine people in total, four of which were also referred for other reasons including issues around identity, sexuality, sex reassignment surgery and stealing underwear. Seven of the thirteen had gender dysphoria and 6 cross dressed without gender dysphoria. Childhood abuse was reported in 62% of the sample, particularly sexual abuse which was reported in 46% of the total sample
- 2) Explanations for cross dressing varied for each participant. One participant only started cross dressing after meeting their current partner whereas another participant was raped and felt gender reassignment would be a way to protect from reoccurrence. Other participants used cross dressing as a means of controlling their anger or as a way to escape.
- 3) Concurrent mental health problems were common with four people diagnosed with schizophrenia and four diagnosed with depression.
- 4) In regards to treatment, capacity issues were documented for at least two participants. Capacity issues were not always well documented in participants' files. Individuals with learning disabilities require full understanding of certain irreversible gender disorder treatments to be able to provide informed consent.

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<sup>1</sup> The Learning Disability group is individuals with Intellectual Disability