

SOCIAL SUPPORT ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE OF YOUNG TRANSGENDER PEOPLE IN QUEENSLAND

Disclosure of interest statement – Industry: None

Acknowledgment of funding -

Authors:

Winwood J,¹ Mutch A,¹ Hannan K¹, Dean J¹, McDaid L², Pickard C³, Fitzgerald L¹

1. School of Public Health, University of Queensland, 288 Herston Road, Brisbane, QLD 4006
2. ISSR
3. Open Doors

Background:: To date, research exploring the health and wellbeing of transgender and gender variant young people has predominantly focused on mental health, identity, and surgery (Marshall et al., 2019). A broader body of evidence suggests social support can provide a protective buffer to stress and adverse mental and physical health outcomes; however research exploring the role social support plays in assisting transgender young people to navigate their health and identities, is largely absent.

Methods:: The *Sexual Health of Queer Young People in Queensland* study (SHYQQ) is a participatory longitudinal qualitative study. Semi-structured interviews have explored the healthcare experiences and needs of gender variant and sexually diverse young people (GVSDYP) aged 16-24. Round two interviews, conducted in 2020-21, used the life trajectories method to explore the identities, social supports and health journeys of GVSDYP. This presentation focusses on the health and social support trajectories of the 15 transgender young people who have participated in SHYQQ.

Results: Social support needs were highly contextual and temporal, as participants navigated fluidity of identities and critical lifecourse moments. Participants drew on and negotiated support needs within small webs of support, engaging in active, relational work to negotiate support across family, friends, (online) communities of identity and formal networks. In early adolescence, sources of direct support were often limited and fragile, with many participants turning to online queer communities and formal supports for informational and emotional support. For some, formal support from healthcare networks, particularly mental health professionals and GPs, provided continuity of support and care which was critical in supporting participants as they navigated their health and identities.

Conclusion: The findings demonstrate the active, relational work young transgender people undertake to access social support, their changing social support needs across the life course, and the importance of formal healthcare supports for young transgender people with fragile informal networks.