BEYOND THE DIFFERENCES: ANALYSIS OF THE PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH OF SPANISH ADOLESCENTS ACCORDING TO THEIR GENDER IDENTITY

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Gender identity refers to the individual’s identification with sociocultural expectations associated with gender. In most instances, this identity is congruent with the sex assigned at birth (cisgender). However, there are people who have a gender identity that is not fully aligned with their sex (transgender and gender nonconforming people, TGNC). Overall, research suggests that TGNC people report worse psychological health than cisgender people, such as higher levels of depressive symptoms or suicide attempts. So, TGNC people seem to be at risk, particularly the adolescents, who must cope specifically tasks of their lifespan and the possible victimization due to their gender identity. Thus, studying the characteristics of these groups is necessary to satisfy appropriately their needs. The aim of this study was to analyze possible differences in global health according to the gender identity of Spanish adolescents.

17641 adolescents between the ages of 15 and 18 (M = 16.23; SD = 1.09) participated in the 2018 edition of the survey ‘Health Behaviour in School-aged Children’ in Spain. Instruments employed were two questions about biological sex and gender roles to obtain gender identity and four measures of health: life satisfaction, self-rated health, health-related quality of life and psychosomatic complaints. After controlling age effects, Kruskal-Wallis tests and Eta-Squared were used to compare medians and to estimate the effect size of the possible differences.

The prevalence of TGNC adolescents was 2.2% (n = 389). Although comparisons between cisgender and TGNC groups showed significant differences in the measures of health (p < .001), the effect size was negligible in all cases (η2 < .02).

These results, contrary to what was expected in the literature, invite us to rethink methods to understand gender identities diversity and their health disparities and similarities related, as well as to comprehend the factors that promote positive youth development.