

Long-term mental health benefits of gender-affirming surgery for transgender individuals

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For transgender individuals, gender-affirming surgery can lead to long-term mental health benefits, according to new research published online today in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*. The study found that among transgender individuals with gender incongruence, undergoing gender-affirming surgery was significantly associated with a decrease in mental health treatment over time.

Researchers Richard Branstrom, Ph.D., and John E. Pachankis, Ph.D., with the Yale School of Public Health, New Haven, Connecticut, used the Swedish Total Population Register to identify more than 2,500 individuals who received a diagnosis of gender incongruence (i.e., transsexualism or [gender identity disorder](#)) between 2005 and 2015. Among individuals with gender incongruence, just more than 70% had received hormone treatment and nearly half (48%) had undergone gender-affirming surgical treatment during the 10-year follow-up period. Nearly all (97%) of those who had undergone surgery also received hormone treatment. Less than one-third had received neither treatment.

They analyzed mental health treatment in 2015 in relation to the length of time since gender-affirming hormone and [surgical treatment](#), including distinguishing the potentially interrelated effects of the two treatments. The mental health measures included health care visits for mood and anxiety disorder, antidepressant and anti-anxiety prescriptions, and hospitalization after a suicide attempt.

Increased time since last gender-affirming surgery was associated with reduced likelihood of use of mental health treatment. The study found the odds of receiving mental health treatment were reduced by 8% for every year since receiving gender-affirming surgery over the 10-year follow-up period. They did not find the same association for [hormone treatment](#).

The study also found that compared with the general population, transgender individuals with a gender incongruence were

- about six times as likely to have had a mood or anxiety disorder health care visit;
- more than three times as likely to have received prescriptions for antidepressants and anti-anxiety medication; and
- more than six times as likely to have been hospitalized after a [suicide attempt](#).

Despite the reduced mental health treatment use after gender-affirming surgery, treatment use among transgender individuals continued to exceed that of the [general population](#).

The authors conclude that "In this first total population study of transgender individuals with a gender incongruence diagnosis, the longitudinal association between gender-affirming surgery and reduced likelihood of [mental health treatment](#) lends support to the decision to provide gender-affirming surgeries to transgender individuals who seek them."

More information: *American Journal of Psychiatry* (2019). [DOI: 10.1176/appi.ajp.2019.19010080](https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2019.19010080)

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