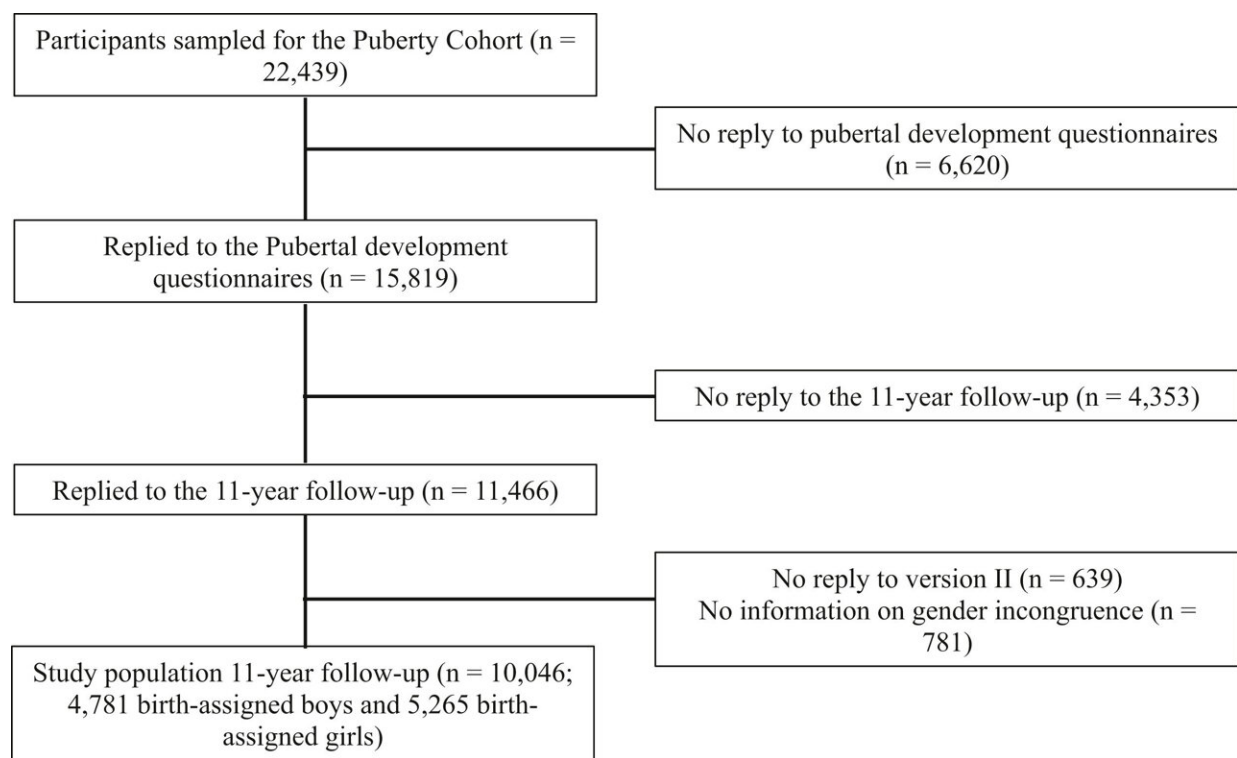


Research suggests that children who doubt their gender identity may enter puberty earlier

November 18 2022



Flowchart of the study population. Credit: *Fertility and Sterility* (2022). DOI: 10.1016/j.fertnstert.2022.07.018

A new study from Aarhus University shows that children who have expressed a desire at the age of 11 to be a different gender enter puberty

earlier than their peers. However, more research is required, says the researchers behind the study.

The transition to [puberty](#) can be difficult for [children](#) who are afflicted by doubt about their own [gender](#) identity. New research from the Department of Public Health at Aarhus University suggests that these children also enter puberty earlier than children who are not in doubt about their [gender identity](#). Master's program student Anne Hjorth Thomsen and Professor Cecilia Ramlau-Hansen are behind the study.

The study, which is one of the first in the world to examine the correlation between children's desire to be the opposite gender and their development in puberty, was undertaken as part of the research project "Better Health for Generations" (BSIG), which has monitored 100,000 Danish women's pregnancies and births, as well as the growth and development of their children, since 1996.

In the study, the children were asked at the age of 11 about a possible desire to be the opposite gender. This information was then combined with data in which, every six months, the children reported their current stage in various puberty milestones. At age 11, around 5% of the children in the study reported either a partial or a full desire to be the opposite gender.

"The results indicate that children who at age 11 reported a desire to be the opposite gender tended to go into puberty before children who had not expressed a desire to change their gender. In the study, both birth-assigned boys and girls with a previous expressed desire to change gender entered puberty around two months earlier than their peers," says Anne Hjorth Thomsen.

Anne Hjorth Thomsen stresses that more research is needed before any final conclusions can be drawn, but that it is important that health staff

are aware of children's previous puberty development.

"Health professionals may encounter a desire to slow down puberty, because the child may not feel comfortable in their own body, or able to identify with it. It is therefore important that the [healthcare professionals](#) possess basic knowledge about the puberty development of the children, so that treatment can be applied at the right time."

Anne Hjorth Thomsen and Professor Cecilia Ramlau-Hansen recommend that the research results be followed up by new studies.

"In this study, we see earlier puberty development among children who wish to be the opposite gender, compared to children who do not wish to be the opposite gender. But we do not know whether the children's own gender perception affects their puberty development, or whether there may be other explanations. We do not know the underlying causes," says Anne Hjorth Thomsen.

The research was published in *Fertility and Sterility*.

More information: Anne H. Thomsen et al, Gender incongruence and timing of puberty: a population-based cohort study, *Fertility and Sterility* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.fertnstert.2022.07.018](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fertnstert.2022.07.018)

Provided by Aarhus University

Citation: Research suggests that children who doubt their gender identity may enter puberty earlier (2022, November 18) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-11-children-gender-identity-puberty-earlier.html>

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