With Strong Family Support, Trans Kids May Skip Mental Health Woes

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Although a slew of reports have focused on the high rates of anxiety, depression and suicide among transgender youth, a recent study published in the journal Pediatrics offers a glimmer of hope. Trans kids surrounded by love and encouragement at home can enjoy a positive mental health outlook, with rates of depression and anxiety no higher than those experienced by the rest of their peers who didn't identify as transgender, NBCNews.com reports.

For the study, researchers at the University of Washington studied 73 kids, ages 3 to 12, who had recently transitioned to their preferred gender and changed their names, clothing and hairstyles to match this preference. (Scientists conducted this first large-scale, longitudinal study of transgender children in the United States as part of the TransYouth project.)

The researchers asked parents to complete two short surveys to determine whether or not their children had experienced symptoms of depression or anxiety during the last week. Findings suggested that transgender children in the study group suffered rates of depression and anxiety no higher than those experienced by two different control groups: their own siblings, as well as a group of age and gender-matched children. In addition, researchers found that transgender kids' rates of depression and anxiety were significantly lower than those of gender non-conforming children from studies conducted in previous years.

"The thinking has always been that kids who are not acting gender-stereotypically are basically destined to have mental health problems," said Kristina Olson, PhD, assistant professor of psychology at the University of Washington and the study's lead author. "In our study, that's not the case."

The authors concluded that family support may have buffered these children from the onset of mental health problems so commonly observed in transgender people. The researchers also noted that the findings further challenge out-of-date theories that regard being transgender as a type of mental disorder.

Next, researchers plan to look at how factors outside of the family, such as peer attitudes and when children choose to transition, act to predict these youngsters' future mental health.

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