

SUICIDE AND THE TRANSEXUAL AND TRANSVESTITE POPULATION: WHAT MAKES THESE PEOPLE NOT WANT TO LIVE ANYMORE?

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Abstract: Suicide is a complex phenomenon affecting over 800,000 people annually, according to WHO data (2019). The transgender and travesti community, despite advancements in the struggle for rights and recognition, continues to suffer intensely from stigma and discrimination, as pointed out by ABGLT (2014). Authors such as Brosin and Tokarski (2017) highlight that the persistence of prejudice is deeply rooted in the normalization of heterosexuality, which exerts constant pressure on individuals who diverge from this standard. For the transgender and travesti population, the process of name and gender rectification can be particularly challenging, as noted by Ribeiro (2001). This moment is often marked by stress, violence, and the possibility of rejection—factors that can lead to serious psychological problems, including suicide. However, there is a significant gap in the academic literature regarding the interrelation between suicide and the transgender and travesti population, especially in the context of São Paulo. Given this absence of in-depth studies, there is a need to investigate the psychosocial factors that directly impact the mental health of this population, understand the reasons that lead them to consider suicide, and highlight the fundamental role of psychologists and public health systems in this context.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite advances (ABGLT, 2014), the transsexual and transvestite population face stigma and discrimination related to gender expression, violence, criminalization, etc., according to the WHO (2019) more than 800 thousand people commit suicide annually. Prejudice persists due to heteronormative standardization (Brosin and Tokarski, 2017).

Vergueiro (2015) addresses the hegemony of heterosexuality as a power base in society, while Plummer (2020) and Oliveira and Carneiro (2019) discuss the discrimination and exclusion faced by transgender people and transvestites. Suicide is complex and multifaceted, influenced by individual and social factors throughout history (Porto; Delziovo; Queiroz, 2019). Pereira (2013) reports a study carried out at Columbia University, in the United States of America, according to which homosexual adolescents aged between 13 and 17 years are five times more likely to attempt suicide compared to heterosexual young people in this age group. Transphobia is identified as a contemporary social problem that requires intervention. Taking all these data into account, we understand that there are no large in-depth studies that relate the issue of suicide with the transsexual and transvestite population, highlighting the vulnerability of this population, and with this we understand the need to delve into this theme from the perspective of these people in the state of São Paulo.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

TRANSSEXUALITY: DEFINITION AND CHALLENGES

Gender identity, defined as the internal and individual experience of being a man, woman, or other, plays a central role in building the mental health of individuals. When this identity is not aligned with biological sex, a scenario of disconnection arises that can generate profound psychological



impacts, especially in societies where gender diversity still faces resistance and discrimination. For the transsexual population, this incongruence between biological sex and gender identity is the central point of their existence, and the search for recognition, acceptance and body adequacy is an essential part of the process of gender affirmation.

Transsexuality is characterized by the incongruence between the biological sex and the gender identity of the individual, where transsexual people often seek to adapt their physical characteristics through medical interventions, such as the use of hormones and sex reassignment surgeries, in addition to legal changes of name and gender. These interventions aim to align their gender identity with their body expression, ensuring that they live a life that is more consistent with their sense of identity (GOMES et al., 2018; MONTENEGRO; REZENDE, 2018). The recognition and treatment of this population involves respect for their gender identity and requires specialized multidisciplinary care that takes into account both physical and mental health, as established by Resolution No. 2,265/2019 of the Federal Council of Medicine (CONSELHO FEDERAL DE MEDICINA, 2019).

The term “transsexual” was coined by endocrinologist Harry Benjamin in 1953 to describe people who, despite not having genital anomalies, wished to modify their biological sex to align their appearance with their gender identity (Azeem et al., 2019; Yarns et al., 2016). Over the years, society has shown progress in understanding transsexuality, but transgender people continue to face significant barriers when it comes to accessing basic rights, such as the use of a social name, the alteration of legal documents, and access to health services, education, and formal employment.

This exclusion is intensified by violence and transphobia — the aversion or discrimination against transgender people. In Brazil, the transsexual and transvestite population is often the victim of physical and verbal aggression, death threats and social exclusion. These structural forms of violence limit the right of these people to enjoy their identity and, in many cases, push them to the margins, such as prostitution, creating an environment of extreme social and psychological vulnerability (JESUS, 2013).

Living with the imminent risk of suffering violence for simply being who you are directly



contributes to the increase in suicide rates among transsexuals. People in this community often seek mental health services due to problems such as dissatisfaction with their genitalia, the need to be treated according to the gender with which they identify, as well as facing dissatisfaction with their biological sex and non-acceptance by their family (SOUZA, 2015). The consequences of this rejection and marginalization include depression, suicidal behaviors, eating disorders, self-mutilation, and a host of other psychological problems (MARCIA; ZAIIDHAFT; MURTA, 2008).

Transsexuality, therefore, involves not only the bodily dimension, but also psychological and social dimension. Lack of acceptance, prejudice and violence are factors that intensify the vulnerability of these people, highlighting the urgency of promoting public policies and multidisciplinary care that guarantee the physical and mental health of the transsexual and transvestite population.

TRANSSEXUALITY: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The history of transsexuality is marked by a long process of invisibility, stigmatization and struggle for recognition. The term “transsexuality” emerged in the twentieth century to describe people who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth and seek to reaffirm their gender identity with their physical expression. However, there is historical evidence of individuals who have transcended gender norms in diverse cultures. During the twentieth century, transsexuality was treated as a psychiatric disorder, and it was only in 2018 that the World Health Organization (WHO) removed it from the category of “mental disorders” and recognized it as a condition related to sexual health, reflecting advances in the struggles of transsexual movements. These struggles gained momentum in the 1960s and 1970s, with the active participation of transvestites and transsexuals, especially figures such as Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera. The 1990s brought advances in the legal recognition of transsexuality, with some countries allowing name and gender changes in official documents.



TRANSSEXUALITY IN BRAZIL

In Brazil, the trajectory of the trans population is marked by marginalization and stigmatization, often associated with the historical link between transvestites and prostitution, a consequence of exclusion from the formal labor market. In the 1970s and 1980s, transvestites were targets of police repression and violence. It was only in the 2000s that public policies began to emerge, such as the creation of the Comprehensive Health Outpatient Clinic for Transvestites and Transsexuals, which guaranteed access to hormones and surgeries through the SUS. The struggle of transgender people in Brazil extends on several fronts, from the fight against violence and discrimination to the search for inclusion and access to fundamental rights. Despite the advances, the recognition of transsexual identities continues to be a process surrounded by challenges, with high rates of violence and social exclusion, reinforcing the need for urgent public policies.

HEALTH MENTAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACTS: RISKS AND INTERVENTIONS

The transsexual population faces negative mental health outcomes at rates much higher than the general population, with emphasis on depression, suicidal ideation, substance use, and suicide attempts. In Brazil, the life expectancy of trans people is only 35 years, with suicide being the second leading cause of death among this population. Marginalization, discrimination and violence are factors that intensify this reality. Studies show that visibility and the use of bathrooms according to gender are protective factors for this population, and that the construction of support networks, including family, friends, and health professionals, is essential for the promotion of mental health. However, the lack of training of health professionals to deal with the specificities of the trans population still perpetuates marginalization. Therefore, it is crucial that psychosocial interventions and therapies respect and value gender identity, providing a safe and inclusive space for the transsexual and transvestite population.



PUBLIC POLICIES

In Brazil, policies aimed at the trans population are still insufficient to guarantee protection and equality. The Transexualizing Process of the Unified Health System (SUS), although an important achievement, does not completely solve the problems of access to comprehensive health. According to Teixeira et al. (2018), the omissions in the implementation of policies that address the specific needs of this population, such as inclusive education, employability, and public safety, are evident. The lack of professional training programs and the persistence of prejudice in the labor market make the insertion of this population in the work environment extremely difficult.

In addition, Souza and Lima (2020) highlight that the absence of an intersectoral approach in public policies leads to the marginalization and vulnerability of the trans population, increasing the risks of suicide. The protection of human rights and the promotion of mental health should be priorities on government agendas, because without these protections, many trans people remain vulnerable to situations of violence and discrimination, factors that increase suicide ideation rates.

Finally, Barbosa and Koyama (2006) emphasize that public policies need to include psychological and social support mechanisms that consider the uniqueness of the experiences of the trans population, aiming at promoting mental health and well-being.

TRANSCIDADANIA PROGRAM – SÃO PAULO/SP

The Transcitizenship Program is an initiative of the government of the state of São Paulo, created in 2015, with the objective of promoting citizenship and social inclusion of the trans population. The program aims to offer support to transvestite and transsexual people in situations of social vulnerability, especially those who face difficulties in accessing education, health and work.



LAW AND STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAMME

The Transcitizenship Program was instituted by Law No. 16,933, sanctioned in 2018. This legislation establishes the creation of actions aimed at the inclusion of the trans population, recognizing the need for specific public policies that meet their demands.

MAIN OBJECTIVES:

- Offer professional training and inclusion in the labor market;
- Provide psychological support and social assistance;
- Ensure access to health services, respecting gender identity;
- Promote full citizenship and combat discrimination.

The creation of the Transcitizenship Program is a response to the high rates of vulnerability, discrimination, and violence that the trans population faces, including exclusion from the labor market and social marginalization. The need for a specific public policy arose from the recognition of the difficulties faced by transvestites and transsexuals in Brazil, a country that historically has high rates of violence against this population.

The program has been an attempt to guarantee rights and dignity to trans people. Since its implementation, Transcidadania has worked to improve living conditions and promote social inclusion, with training programs and employment opportunities. In addition, it seeks to create a support network, offering a safe and respectful space for the trans population.

CHALLENGES

Despite the advances, the Transcitizenship Program still faces challenges, such as the need for adequate resources, the continuity of public policies, and cultural resistance to the acceptance of



the trans population in society. The struggle for rights and recognition continues to be a crucial part of the activism and human rights advocacy agenda in Brazil.

This information provides an overview of the Transcidadania Program and its impact on the promotion of citizenship and inclusion of the trans population in São Paulo.

THE REALITY OF THE TRANSSEXUAL AND TRANSVESTITE POPULATION: CONTEXTS GLOBAL

The transsexual and transvestite population faces alarming challenges in several countries, with high rates of discrimination, social exclusion, violence and suicide. In the United States, a survey on discrimination against transgender people revealed that 63% of respondents faced mistreatment, abandonment, job loss, denial of care in health services, and even physical and sexual violence (Edwards et al., 2019). These factors have a direct impact on the mental health of this population. The National Center for Transgender Equality (2015) found that 40% of transgender people in the U.S. reported suicide attempts, a number significantly higher than the national average, attributed to discrimination and lack of social support.

Despite this worrying scenario, initiatives such as Trans Lifeline, which offers emotional support and specific resources for the trans community, highlight the importance of dedicated support networks. In addition, the implementation of inclusive public policies has shown positive impacts in reducing suicide rates and improving the mental health of this population.

In Brazil, the reality is also alarming. According to the National Association of Transvestites and Transsexuals (ANTRA), in 2020 there was a 49% increase in the number of murders of transgender people compared to the previous year, in addition to records of attempted murders, suicides, and human rights violations (Benevides & Nogueira, 2020). Discrimination, marginalization and the historical association of transvestites with prostitution further aggravate the vulnerability of this population.

Studies show that suicide rates among trans people in Brazil surpass those of other



marginalized groups. The lack of effective public policies, added to social exclusion, contributes significantly to this reality. However, programs such as the Comprehensive Health Outpatient Clinic for Transvestites and Transsexuals, created by the Unified Health System (SUS), have played a crucial role in promoting access to comprehensive health, representing an important advance in tackling this issue.

In Europe, the situation varies between countries. In Sweden, for example, a study by Transgender Europe (2016) showed that the inclusion of specific mental health policies for the trans population resulted in a significant reduction in suicidal ideation. Nordic countries, in particular, have excelled in promoting safe environments and education about gender diversity in schools, effective strategies to reduce stigma and promote inclusion.

These parallels between the USA, Brazil, and Europe show that, despite contextual differences, the common denominator for reducing suicide rates and improving quality of life among the transsexual and transvestite population is the implementation of inclusive public policies and psychosocial support. Suicide prevention depends on a multidisciplinary approach and ongoing efforts to create nurturing environments where all people, regardless of their gender identity, can live with dignity and adequate mental health.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Prevention and care for the transsexual and transvestite population require a multidisciplinary and multiprofessional approach that unites several areas of knowledge. Professionals in psychology, social work, education and public health must collaborate in an integrated way to meet the complex needs of this population, which include not only health issues, but also social and psychological aspects. The construction of a welcoming environment is fundamental; This can be achieved through the creation of safe spaces in schools, clinics, and workplaces, where gender identity and sexual orientation are not barriers to access to health rights and care.



In addition, the formation of teams of gender-sensitive professionals is crucial. This implies training health and education professionals to adequately deal with the specificities of the transsexual and transvestite population, recognizing the impact of prejudice and discrimination on psychological well-being. Souza and Silva (2020) highlight that an approach that includes the active participation of the transsexual and transvestite population in the construction of policies and practices can be more effective, ensuring that their voices are heard and their needs met.

Professional training and social inclusion programs are essential to strengthen the self-esteem and mental well-being of the transsexual and transvestite population. The promotion of initiatives that encourage insertion in the labor market, as well as the provision of adequate mental health services, contributes to suicide prevention and improves the quality of life of these individuals. According to the Federal Council of Psychology (CFP, 2019), the formation of support networks and the promotion of awareness campaigns are strategies that can reduce stigma and promote a culture of respect and acceptance.

Although some initiatives, such as the Transcitizenship Program, have been developed to help the trans population, many challenges remain. The creation of decent employment opportunities, inclusive education policies, and actions against discrimination in the workplace are essential to reduce dependence on prostitution. The implementation of public policies that guarantee rights and safety for the trans population is crucial to change the narrative that marginalizes them.

The variables involving suicide in the transsexual and transvestite population transcend biological, sexual or surgical issues. Socio-emotional aspects, such as non-acceptance of one's own body, difficulties in discovering sexual identity, family acceptance problems, self-mutilation, social transphobia and low situational self-esteem, play significant roles in the vulnerability of this population. Rejection and ignorance of one's own transsexuality also contribute to the high risk of suicide among trans people and transvestites.

In this context, it is essential to promote new studies that demystify transsexuality and create strategies to reduce the stigma and prejudice faced by this population, guaranteeing their human



rights. The promotion of actions at individual and social levels aimed at reducing prejudice and stigma is fundamental, as well as the implementation of affirmative care that respects and validates trans identity.

It is important to highlight that the health of trans people should not be limited to procedures related to gender affirmation, but should include a broad approach to mental health. Public policies aimed at the trans population are essential not only to reduce prejudice, but also to offer mental health support. Care for the process of gender affirmation is a crucial part, but not the only focus on comprehensive care for the trans population (Ferrari, Deyse; Branco, Eduardo; Toledo, Luís Guilherme; Molina, Ludgleydson Fernandes, 2021).

Thus, it is suggested that national and international research be carried out that focuses on the creation of inclusive public policies, aiming to provide a better quality of life for trans people, in addition to promoting a more just and equitable society for all.

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