

# Transgender children risk 'serious damage'

**Leading psychiatrist says medical procedures are given go-ahead without sufficient investigation**

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TRANSGENDER children who undergo medical or surgical treatments risk "serious and irreversible damage", a leading psychiatrist has warned, as he accused lobby groups of "silencing debate".

Critical discussion about transgenderism and gender dysphoria has been

"shut down" by activists, according to Dr David Bell, a consultant psychiatrist at The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust.

Dr Bell, who is a former president of the British Psychoanalytic Society, works in the adult department of the Tavistock Centre in north London where he directs a specialist unit for serious or enduring complex disorders.

He explained that his involvement in the area of transgender children was prompted by "the sudden exponential growth" of youngsters who "declare themselves as being in the wrong body".

There is a pressure for such declarations to be immediately accepted with-

out "sufficient investigation for its basis", Dr Bell added.

The number of children being referred to gender identity clinics has almost quadrupled in the past four years, figures show.

The Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS), which is the NHS's only facility for transgender children and is based at the centre, show that 2,590 children and teenagers were referred last year, compared to 678 in 2014-15.

Writing the foreword to the book *Inventing Transgender Children and Young People*, Dr Bell said that gender dysphoria was a "highly complex problem with many causal pathways". Despite this, gender services "tend

towards a damaging simplification", a stance encouraged by a lobby group that provides "ideological support" for this approach.

"Many services have championed the use of medical and surgical intervention with nowhere near sufficient attention to the serious, irreversible damage this can cause and with very disturbingly superficial attitudes to the issue of consent in young children," he said.

Dr Bell went on to raise concerns about how those who "refuse to accept the dominant ideological position" are often accused of being "transphobic", which has had a chilling effect on public debate. "And this silencing has

been remarkably successful, resulting in a simplification of a very complex problem that needs to be understood at both individual and sociocultural levels," he said.

The rapid escalation of child referrals must be viewed in the context of social and cultural forces, which are poorly understood and need "urgent investigation", he added.

Leaders at the GIDS have previously warned that parents are risking psychologically damaging their children by allowing them to "socially transition" their gender without medical or psychiatric advice.

Primary school-aged children are increasingly being encouraged to for-

mally switch, in defiance of the recommended "watchful waiting" approach, they said in July.

Earlier this year, ministers ordered a review to establish why there has been a surge in the number of girls seeking help.

Almost three-quarters of children seeking help with their gender are now female-born.

The book, due to be published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing, is a collection of essays by clinicians, psychologists and sociologists.

Dr Bell said he was writing the book's foreword in a personal capacity and that his views did not represent those of the Tavistock Centre.