



New Trends
in Psychology

Transgender Youth in Romania: Psychological Challenges, Social Perceptions, and Evidence-Based Clinical Interventions

Nicu-Ionel Sava¹, Brigitte Popa², Andreea Lungu³

Abstract: This article explores the psychological challenges, social perceptions, and evidence-based interventions concerning transgender youth in Romania, a population facing heightened vulnerability due to stigma, discrimination, and limited access to affirming care. Addressing this topic is crucial for advancing clinical practice and educational policy in a context where public discourse remains polarized. While international research has extensively documented the mental health risks of transgender youth, including elevated rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidality (Olson et al., 2006; Turban et al., 2020), Romanian data remain scarce. This article builds on global literature while contextualizing findings within the cultural, legal, and social realities of Romania. The article employs a theoretical review combined with illustrative case vignettes based on clinical and educational observations. Sources were drawn from peer-reviewed literature, WHO guidelines, and WPATH standards of care. Findings highlight pervasive social stigma, lack of family and institutional support, and systemic barriers to healthcare access. Evidence-based interventions—such as gender-affirming psychotherapy, family counseling, and guided social transition—demonstrate positive outcomes for psychological well-being and resilience. This work provides a culturally adapted framework for

¹ Ph.D, Lecturer, School of Human Advancement & Life Sciences, Danubius International University of Galati, Romania, Address: 3 Galati Blvd., Galati 800654, Romania, E-mail: nicuionelsava@univ-danubius.ro.

² Student, School of Human Advancement & Life Sciences, Danubius International University of Galati, Romania, Address: 3 Galati Blvd., Galati 800654, Romania, Corresponding author: afterschool.ace@yahoo.com.

³ Student, School of Human Advancement & Life Sciences, Danubius International University of Galati, Romania, Address: 3 Galati Blvd., Galati 800654, Romania, E-mail: lunguandreea254@gmail.com.



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clinicians, educators, and policymakers, advocating for inclusive mental health services and systemic reforms. It contributes to the limited Romanian literature on transgender youth, offering actionable recommendations for improving support and reducing risk.

Keywords: transgender youth; transsexual; differences; normalization; acceptance

1. Introduction

Transgender youth represent a growing and increasingly visible population worldwide, and Romania is no exception to this trend. The challenges they face are complex, spanning psychological, social, and educational domains, and often compounded by systemic gaps in support. Recent years have brought greater public awareness and debate around gender identity, but also persistent stigma and misinformation, which may exacerbate stress and emotional vulnerability among these young people.

From a psychological perspective, adolescence is a critical period for identity development, and gender identity exploration can intensify feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, or isolation when met with misunderstanding or rejection. International studies have consistently shown higher rates of depression, suicidal ideation, and self-harming behaviors among transgender adolescents compared to their cisgender peers. In Romania, where specialized services remain scarce and social attitudes can be conservative, these risks may be heightened, pointing to an urgent need for targeted interventions.

This article aims to explore the psychological challenges faced by transgender youth in Romania, analyze the role of societal perceptions in shaping their experiences, and present evidence-based clinical and psychoeducational interventions that can foster resilience and well-being. By integrating findings from recent literature with current European and local data, the study seeks to contribute to a more inclusive and supportive framework for mental health care and educational practice.

2. Literature Review

Research on transgender youth consistently highlights the complex intersection between psychological vulnerability, social environment, and systemic barriers. International studies reveal that transgender adolescents are significantly more likely than their cisgender peers to experience anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation,

largely due to discrimination, social exclusion, and limited access to gender-affirming care (Olson et al., 2006; Turban et al., 2020). The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) and the American Psychological Association (APA) emphasize that these outcomes are not intrinsic to gender identity but are shaped by minority stress — a chronic exposure to stigma and rejection that erodes mental health.

In the Romanian context, few systematic investigations exist, but available reports suggest that conservative cultural norms, limited sexual education, and uneven access to psychological services amplify these risks. Bullying and school-based discrimination remain widespread, while supportive networks and inclusive curricula are scarce. Family rejection is particularly damaging, with studies demonstrating its strong association with poorer mental health outcomes, substance use, and increased suicide attempts (Ryan et al., 2010). Conversely, family acceptance and guided social transition have been shown to dramatically improve resilience and bring mental health indicators close to those of cisgender peers (Durwood et al., 2017).

Evidence-based interventions, including gender-affirming therapy, puberty blockers, hormone therapy, and structured family counseling, are strongly recommended by international guidelines and have been associated with improved psychological well-being and lower suicide risk. Social support programs and community advocacy groups play a complementary role, offering safe spaces where young people can explore their identities without fear of judgment. This literature collectively points to an urgent need for Romania to align clinical, educational, and policy frameworks with global best practices to foster a healthier developmental context for transgender youth.

3. Methodology

This article employs a theoretical and integrative review design, synthesizing psychological, sociological, and public health research on transgender youth in Romania and internationally. The aim of this methodological approach was to identify common psychological challenges, patterns of social perception, and evidence-based clinical and educational interventions that can improve well-being and support identity development.

The literature review followed a structured and iterative process. Relevant studies were identified through searches in academic databases such as PsycINFO, PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar, using keywords including transgender youth, gender dysphoria, adolescent mental health, Romania, social stigma, and gender-affirming care. Priority was given to peer-reviewed empirical studies, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses published between 2015 and 2025, ensuring that the conclusions reflect both international research and local realities.

Inclusion criteria focused on studies addressing:

- Psychological challenges such as gender dysphoria, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation among transgender youth.
- Social and cultural perceptions, including discrimination, bullying, and family acceptance.
- Evidence-based interventions, including psychological counseling, social transition, family therapy, and medical gender-affirming care.

Exclusion criteria ruled out purely opinion-based articles, anecdotal reports without methodological transparency, and studies focusing exclusively on adult transgender populations.

Findings were thematically organized under three domains: psychological challenges, social perceptions, and clinical interventions. Where possible, Romanian sources were included to contextualize global findings to the specific sociocultural climate of Romania. International guidelines from organizations such as WPATH (World Professional Association for Transgender Health) and APA (American Psychological Association) were integrated to highlight best practices in clinical care.

This methodological approach allows the article to go beyond description and to critically analyze how systemic barriers, cultural attitudes, and psychological vulnerabilities intersect. It also lays the groundwork for developing a contextually appropriate framework for clinical practice, social advocacy, and educational reform.

4. Findings

The synthesis of current research and first-hand accounts reveals that the psychological difficulties faced by transgender youth in Romania are largely shaped

by social environments rather than by their gender identity per se. Many adolescents experience a fluctuating emotional burden characterized by anxiety, sadness, hypervigilance, and moments of relief when they are affirmed. Gender dysphoria, where present, appears to intensify in contexts where recognition is withheld or delayed, and to ease when supportive interactions occur. Sam's testimony illustrates this pattern: after the initial empowerment of coming out, renewed stress was triggered by bureaucratic barriers to changing legal documents and by persistent feelings of being observed or judged in public spaces.

Schools were consistently described as pivotal settings that could either amplify or buffer stress. Students reported that they often chose selective disclosure, avoiding activities or spaces where they might be misgendered or harassed. Such strategies offered short-term safety but sometimes restricted access to support. Robin's narrative reflects this dilemma, as his decision to limit disclosure reduced opportunities for assistance and accommodation. When schools implemented inclusive practices, such as consistent use of affirmed names and pronouns and prompt intervention in cases of peer harassment, students displayed improved attendance, greater engagement, and better academic performance, highlighting the protective role that an affirming school climate can play.

Family acceptance emerged as the most robust protective factor for mental health. Supportive family responses were associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression and facilitated better social integration. Coe's experience demonstrates how even partial acceptance, particularly from a primary caregiver, can reduce isolation and foster resilience. Conversely, mixed or rejecting messages from parents, such as those reported by Robin, contributed to chronic tension and sustained dysphoria despite peer support.

Another significant finding concerns the limited availability of specialized, gender-affirming care in Romania. Adolescents described prolonged waiting lists, uneven expertise across regions, and bureaucratic delays that prolonged psychological distress. Sam's frustration over the slow update of his gender marker, despite an approved name change, exemplifies how structural barriers can erode the benefits of personal and social affirmation.

Despite these challenges, many adolescents displayed remarkable resilience. Consistent recognition of their affirmed identity across different contexts was strongly associated with improved emotional well-being. Peer networks—both offline and online—offered safe spaces for expression and mutual support, allowing

youth to practice coping skills and develop self-confidence. Psychological counseling that integrated identity-affirming frameworks with emotion regulation techniques supported adolescents in navigating uncertainty and mitigating the impact of stress.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the difficulties transgender youth face are not intrinsic to their identities but are contingent upon the quality of social, familial, and institutional responses they receive. Multi-level interventions—combining individual therapy, family counseling, school-based inclusion policies, and access to medical transition services where appropriate—were consistently linked to improved outcomes, including reductions in anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. The evidence underscores the urgent need for coherent, affirming, and sustained support systems capable of altering life trajectories in a positive direction.

5. Discussion

The results of this synthesis highlight a clear tension between individual resilience and structural vulnerability for transgender youth in Romania. While adolescents demonstrate remarkable adaptive capacities, the environments in which they grow and learn often fail to provide the consistent affirmation necessary for healthy psychosocial development. The clinical significance of these findings lies in the confirmation that psychological distress among transgender youth is not inherent to their identities but largely driven by systemic rejection, stigma, and lack of access to gender-affirming care.

These outcomes align with international research emphasizing that affirmation—whether through family acceptance, inclusive school practices, or access to medical transition—has a measurable protective effect on mental health (Olson et al., 2006; Ryan et al., 2010; Turban et al., 2020). What emerges as particularly relevant for the Romanian context is the uneven distribution of support services and the persistence of public discourse that frames gender diversity as controversial or threatening. This climate exacerbates the fear of disclosure, prolongs internalized stigma, and sustains a cycle of stress that might otherwise be mitigated by timely intervention.

At the same time, the narratives included in this study reveal that change is possible when multiple systems work together. Sam's, Robin's, and Coe's experiences point to a common thread: where at least one adult—parent, teacher, counselor—offers

consistent support, the trajectory of distress begins to shift toward resilience. These cases underscore the importance of moving from sporadic, individual acts of support to coordinated, systemic responses. For instance, inclusive policies in schools are not merely symbolic; they create conditions in which young people feel seen, safe, and able to focus on learning rather than self-defense.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that adolescence is a particularly sensitive period in which delays in recognition or support can have long-lasting effects. When gender dysphoria is left unaddressed, it can progress to severe anxiety, depressive symptoms, or even suicidal behavior. Conversely, early access to counseling and, where appropriate, puberty blockers or hormone therapy can significantly improve well-being and reduce long-term mental health risks. This indicates a pressing need for Romanian mental health professionals and policymakers to prioritize timely, evidence-based interventions, removing bureaucratic barriers that keep youth waiting at critical developmental moments.

Finally, the discussion must also acknowledge the potential for positive identity development among transgender youth. Despite adversity, many adolescents build strong networks of peer support, develop sophisticated coping strategies, and become advocates for themselves and others. This resilience, however, should not be romanticized as a reason to withhold systemic change. Rather, it should motivate clinicians, educators, and decision-makers to amplify these strengths by creating environments that nurture, rather than challenge, authentic self-expression.

6. Recommendations

The findings of this article call for a shift from fragmented, reactive responses to a coherent, evidence-based strategy for supporting transgender youth in Romania. The first priority is the integration of gender diversity education into schools. Teacher training programs should include modules on gender identity and inclusive classroom practices, enabling educators to recognize early signs of distress and respond with sensitivity. Creating school protocols for name and pronoun changes, anti-bullying policies explicitly covering gender identity, and safe reporting mechanisms would significantly reduce daily stressors for these students and improve their sense of belonging.

Equally essential is the strengthening of mental health services with a focus on accessibility and cultural competence. Psychologists and school counselors should

receive ongoing professional development in gender-affirming practices, following guidelines issued by WPATH and the APA. Public mental health programs must allocate resources to reduce waiting times for psychological assessments and provide low-cost or free therapy for families seeking support.

From a clinical standpoint, expanding access to gender-affirming medical care is crucial. This includes simplifying the referral pathways for puberty blockers and hormone therapy and ensuring that these treatments are available outside major urban centers. Collaborations between endocrinologists, psychiatrists, and psychologists can ensure that interventions are individualized and developmentally appropriate, preventing the long-term mental health consequences of delayed care.

At the community level, building peer and family support networks is indispensable. Non-governmental organizations should be supported to offer mentorship programs, peer support groups, and workshops for parents. Family counseling services have proven to be one of the most powerful protective factors against depression and suicide risk (Ryan et al., 2010), and scaling up these programs would be a highly cost-effective intervention.

Finally, policymakers should be encouraged to adopt a human-rights-based approach to gender identity. Legislative frameworks that protect transgender individuals from discrimination in education, employment, and healthcare are not merely symbolic; they create the structural conditions necessary for mental health recovery and social integration. Public awareness campaigns, developed in collaboration with psychologists and advocacy groups, can help dismantle stigma and reshape public discourse, making it safer for young people to live openly.

7. General Conclusion

The psychological well-being of transgender youth in Romania remains a pressing concern that extends far beyond individual struggles; it reflects the readiness of our educational, clinical, and social systems to embrace diversity. The analysis presented here demonstrates that these young people face a constellation of challenges — from stigma and family rejection to limited access to affirming care — that collectively intensify their vulnerability to anxiety, depression, and suicidal risk. Yet the evidence also shows that targeted interventions, when implemented systematically, can dramatically improve outcomes and restore a sense of agency and hope.

The task ahead is not merely to reduce harm but to create environments in which transgender youth can thrive. This requires coordinated action: schools that affirm identities, clinicians trained to provide competent and timely care, families empowered to offer support, and policies that protect against discrimination. By aligning clinical practice with evidence-based guidelines, strengthening peer and family networks, and amplifying public awareness, society can transform the trajectory of these young lives.

Ultimately, supporting transgender youth is not an act of concession but an investment in a healthier, more inclusive future. When these young people are given the space to live authentically, their resilience and creativity enrich the entire social fabric.

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