

# Transgender Health Care in Europe example of Turkey

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- Media
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- Providing health services
- Discrimination and human rights violations



# general atmosphere of Turkey

- Being TG isn't only a personal matter. It affects TG person's family & their community
- TG individuals' legal, medical, mental health and bodily rights are issues of minority rights, the country's health policies, related legal regulations and the society's view of women and GLBT people.
- 90% of Turkey's population is Muslim.
- The commitment to religion ranges widely in overall population. Family ties are always very important.

# According to the Turkish Republic's Constitution nobody can be discriminated

- Based on gender, race, ethnicity, language and political ideology. But, in the recent constitutional law change in 2014, the governing party rejected the expressions of “gender identity” and “sexual orientation” with the reason that they are not in accordance with the concept of “General Turkish moral values”.



# In Turkish society, matters of sexuality are taboo

- Gender roles and behaviors are separated with strict and clear rules.
- Behaviors that are not in accordance with a person's biological gender stand out and are generally not approved.
- It's a culture where sexism and heterosexism are dominant.

# Understanding/sensibilities of families in this climate

- Not only teenagers but TG people of all ages struggles to obtain their family's consent and support during their transition process.
- They try to prevent their family from harming them



# The most dominant theme in their therapy is family

- The difficulties of coming out to family and disappointment and anger after coming out to the family are frequently expressed. Anxious statements such as

“how should I explain it to my family?”

“Will they be very angry when they find out?” are frequently mentioned.

- After finding out, some families cut financial support, some threaten to use violence and some actually use violence to discourage their children from making the transition.
- Young transwomen from small towns leave their families and run to big cities because of threats to their lives and serious violence acts.
- Once in a big city, they face difficulties in finding work or they end up working in risky jobs without insurance or work as a sex worker.



# In our culture, parents make their children feel guilty to get what they want

- “I have sacrificed so much”,
- “if you upset me I won’t give you my blessing”,
- “I got sick because of you” are statements used.
- Some TG people who blame themselves because they are TG and who think they shamed their family, might postpone their coming out until the death of their parents.
- Especially if a parent has a disease they might experience serious guilty feeling that the parent got sick because of them

- The most important factors shaping the acceptance process of the family of a transgender person are their general acceptance of gender and how much they have internalized the binary/ heteronormative gender system of society.
- Reactions within family may differ; such as age, education level, a conservative world view, being religious, etc.
- The parents' acceptance is more difficult in families with strong religious convictions. But the degree of religious conviction does not determine acceptance alone.



## Middle class & highly educated families always don't accept easily

- Some middle class families tend to be more resistant towards the situation of their children.
- Some expect new scientific methods to cure trans people.
- Some families from low SES may show more tolerance since they see the situation as a medical condition that cannot be changed. They accept their fates as a reality.

# The first period of the acceptance process frequently creates crisis

- During the period, acceptance of the family might go through ups and downs and not all family members accept at the same rate. Some parents, who have accepted their child's sex change might step back from their decision when others criticize them.
- Professionals have to be careful about families who demand a breach of privacy as their right. For exm; A family member of an adult TG might come to us in secret to receive information and try to dictate us what to say to him/her.
- When it's explained to them that the sessions are confidential, they might threaten us



# Turkish family attaches enormous social value to male children

- It is more difficult for families to accept their transwoman daughters and they might use much more pressure and violence towards them.
- Families have a well-developed gender hierarchy with codes of behavior for their male and female members.
- On discovering that their child is TG, parents experience an 'injury' to their honor & social status

# Religion

- In Islam, all kinds of sexuality other than heterosexuality are considered shameful and sinful.
- TG people who have strong religious beliefs feel guilty about their identity



- Religious rules have major differences between men and women in clothing and in religious practices such as prayer
- Religious TG people practice religion according to the gender they would like to change into

- Some Religious trans men, while always wearing pants etc have difficulty taking off the headscarf;
- During therapy process, some of them remove the headscarf only in selected safe environments like group sessions and it takes a long time for them to remove the headscarf in other surroundings.



# TG group meeting in Istanbul University (2013 Jan)





# Some religious families are tolerant towards their trans male children

- Some families consult religious authorities. Religious authorities may give permission that if they live a monogamous life it is not a sin.
- We have also seen some transmen who want to prevent their desire to change themselves and showing different reactions. These biological women had started wearing the hijab and exercising religious tasks in order to put themselves off, even though they didn't have religious and covered families. They came to us when the "preventive measures" they have taken has not suppressed their gender dysphoria.



# Meaning given to disease

We can accept that being tg is an identity not a pathology (as a professional).

- There are TG people in Turkey who see it that way. It is not wrong to say that these people are activists who are familiar with the concept of human rights.
- We have to keep in mind that being TG is connected to the social and political environment one lives in.
- High number of TG people and most of their families see being TG as a disease and some of them feel better if it is seen as such. They see the disease concept comforting as an excuse for the urge of sex-change

# Telling hermofrodit /intersex more comfortable

- They see the disease concept comforting as an excuse for the urge of sex-change. The only cure for this disease is the sex-change!
- Being stigmatized as ill or having an illness seems easier than being labeled as a pervert



# We have to be careful while providing information

- if it is an illness, it has to be cured, if it is not an illness, it seems like a free choice and it can be cured.
- On one hand they want to “come clean” by proving that their TG identity is the result of a disease.
- On the other hand they want to prove that as sane, competent individuals they have the capacity to prove that they are TG and they have the capacity to decide.

# Law, regulation,

- In Turkey, in order for a tg person to undergo surgery, a report must be written by 3 psychiatrists.
- People who apply to court with this document are given permission to undergo SRS if they satisfy proper conditions.
- The person then applies to the court a II time with a document proving that he/she has undergone the SRS surgery and then the gender is changed in the birth certificate.



- Only specialists working in teaching hospitals are authorized to give those reports.
- Specialists working in private sector cannot give reports.
- Before 1988, there were no legal regulations on this subject. There are problems with the change that was made in the 2002 Turkish Civil Code.
- The main problema in the legal status of trans persons is the requirement of being permanently deprived of the capacity of reproduction for having Court's permission to undergo a SRS. BUT

# Yesterday good news

- An application has been made to the European Court of Human Rights (No 14793/08, Y.Y. v. Turkey 6.3.2008)
- ECHR punished Turkey.
- *(It is based on a refusal of the domestic courts to authorise the applicant to undergo SRS on the ground that she did not meet the statutory condition that required her to have been diagnosed as permanently infertile)*



# Their treatment expenses not provided / difficult to obtain

- Many transgender people work informally and without health insurance (*to hide the identity card on which their biological gender is written*)
- Private insurances not cover SRS & hormone usage is difficult to obtain within public health sector.
- They can only find experienced surgeons within private health sector.

# There are also positive developments about TG

1. Gay pride parades are being organized in Istanbul and other cities for the past 10 years.

The attendance has increased rapidly.

Last year 50 thousand or so people joined.

2. Another important development is about the parents of LGBT people. Parents are parading with open identities, without hiding themselves, carrying banners like “I am a TG father/mother” with pride.



- There are 3 university TG support groups in 3 cities and psychosocial support groups organized by an NGO.

- LGBT parent group meetings are conducted in 4 cities.
- There is an award-winning documentary made by parents.
- Many parents watched this documentary and discussed it.
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- *We encounter examples of the opposite situation.*
- *We called on some people who had completed their identity change and with whom we have worked for years one year after their operation to evaluate their situation. Some refused to meet with the fear of “getting caught”, they were afraid of their TG identity being revealed, others said they did not want to remember their past*



# Discrimination and human rights violations

- In the last 8 years, 36 trans-people were killed, 5 of them in the year of 2014.
- Some of the killers received a sentence reduction because the victim was a trans-person.

# problems

- To establish gender team there are limited number of professionals from different disciplines in public sector
- The precondition for SRS report:  
  
(the requirement of being permanently deprived of the capacity of reproduction for having Court's permission to undergo a SRS)
- Specialists working with children and adolescents take it as a temporary situation and they don't give the proper support
- There are problems with prisoners
- There are no precautions for hatecrimes
- Urgent demands of change from those who are not ready to change



# What is gained?

- Associations from different disciplines are sensitive to the issue of gender identity

*(such as Turkish Medical Association (TTB), Psychiatric Association of Turkey (PAT), Sex Education, Research and Treatment Association (CETAD))*

- Number of trained mental health professionals is increasing
- The pioneering group working transpositive in these groups is increasing.

- LGBT organizations are getting widened
- There are transmen and transsexuals separate from LGB groups.
- Parents of LGBT people are raising their voices.
- Transgender people and their families are more visible in media

2013  
June







# Unwritten discrimination/neglect in health care practice

- There are problems in the usage of health care services in the public sector in general. There is no NH insurance to cover everybody
- Trans individuals experience several problems with health services during the transition process.
- The number of experienced and well educated mental health workers, endocrinologists and surgeons who might participate in the transition process is insufficient
- Very few within the public health sector.
- The individuals are in a way forced to see specialists in the private sectors