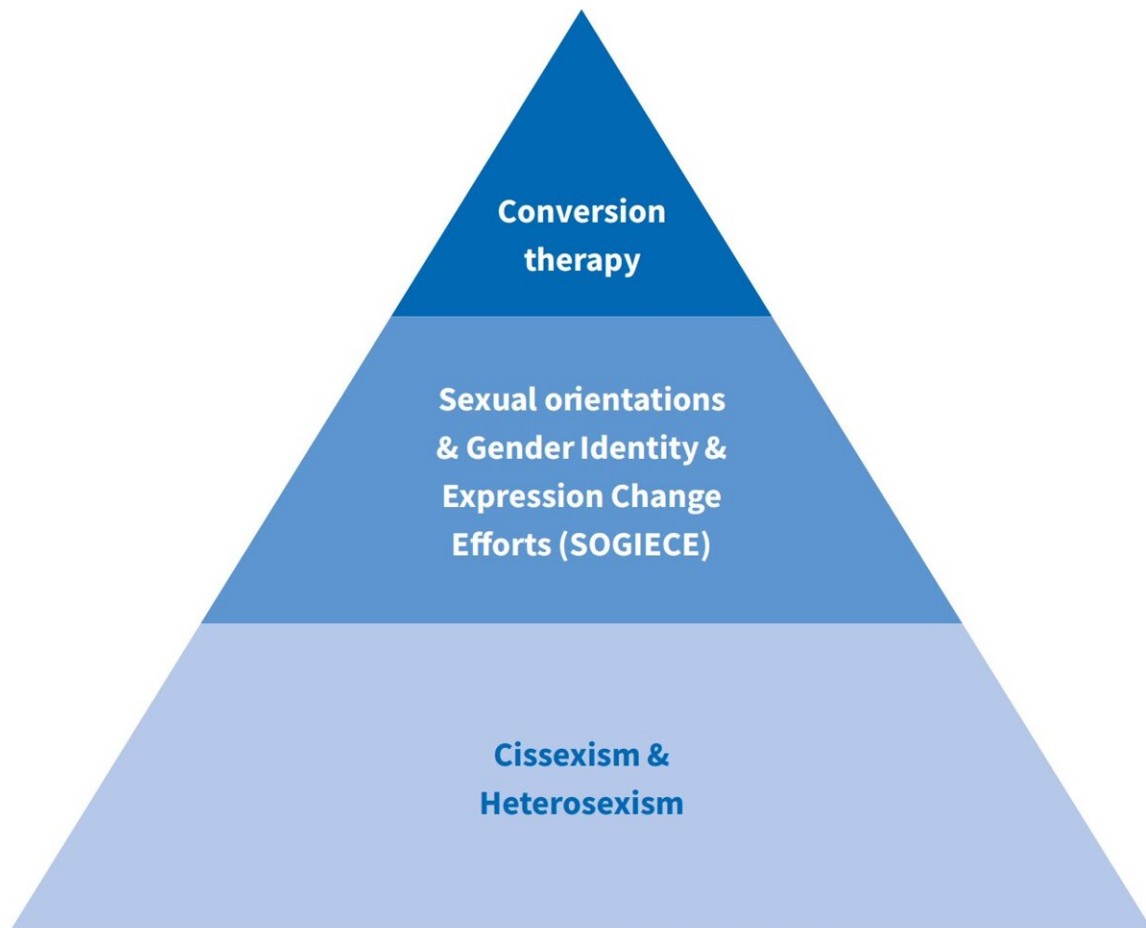


Study explores conversion therapy practices in Ireland

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SOGIECE Pyramid (Kinitz et al., 2021 p444). Credit: An Exploration of Conversion Therapy Practices in Ireland (2023).

Researchers from Trinity's School of Nursing and Midwifery have found indications that conversion therapy practices take place in Ireland. The research, commissioned by the Irish government will inform plans to ban the practice. Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O'Gorman recently launched the report.

The research—the first of its kind in this country—provides an insight into how conversion therapy practices operate in Ireland. It also includes an examination of the growing body of recent international research literature in the area. It confirms the harm that is inflicted on those who experience such practices.

Conversion therapy is an umbrella term that describes a range of practices which specifically aim to change or suppress an individual's sexual orientation or [gender](#) identity expression.

Researchers noted some anecdotal evidence that the practice exists in Ireland, there was no robust evidence that provides a clear understanding of the prevalence or nature of conversion therapy practices.

Considerable research has largely concluded that sexual orientation change efforts are pseudo-scientific, ineffective, and harmful to the individual being 'treated.'

Aims/objectives

The overall aim of this study was to explore the practice of conversion therapy in Ireland. Specifically, the research sought to establish:

- a definition of conversion therapy and conversion practices as they operate in Ireland (including what conversion practices are used, what signifiers are used and how people consent or assent)
- who is subjected to conversion practices (minority sexual orientation/minority gender identity)

- if there are longer term consequences of such practices for the individual
- if there are any support needs for people who have been subjected to conversion therapy.

Given the aims and objectives of the research, data were collected from a review of the literature, a survey administered to the LGBTI+ community and in-depth individual interviews with individuals who experienced conversion practices.

Findings

Definition of conversion therapy

Within the research literature there are moves to use the terms Sexual Orientation Change Efforts [SOCE] and Gender Identity Changes Efforts [GICE] often combined as SOGICE. The participants in this study used the term conversion therapy to describe their experiences and generally meant it as religious or professional attempts to change or modify minority sexual orientation or gender identity.

What conversion practices are used?

In the context of SOCE the findings suggest that a combination of cognitive, behavioral, psychoanalytical and religious/spiritual methods are used which focus on reducing same sexual behavior.

Corresponding increases in heterosexual behavior were signifiers of 'success.' In terms of GICE, the findings suggest that similar strategies are used although interactions with therapists who created barriers to gender affirming care or closed down discussions about gender identity were interpreted as a form of conversion therapy. One participant who

identified as trans and intersex argued that the surgery that she had to assign gender when she was born was a form of conversion therapy.

Consent and assent

The five gay men who were interviewed were clear that they voluntarily accessed and sourced SOCE themselves although this needs to be taken in the context of the internal, religious and societal pressures that encouraged them to seek [conversion therapy](#) in the first place. In the survey, the majority of the participants stated that they did not provide consent and in some cases there were indications that it was provided against the participants will. Five of the seven trans participants indicated that they did not provide consent.

Who is subjected to conversion practices?

Individuals with minority sexual orientation and minority gender identity were exposed to conversion practices in this study. Individuals who identified as intersex and trans or non-binary were also exposed to conversion practices.

If there are longer term consequence of such practices.

For both the survey and interview participants there were both short and long term harmful consequences for those exposed. These harms were marked and enduring for those participants who had been exposed to formal practices over a longer timeframe to the extent that some had not resolved some of the issues at the time of interview. These harms extended to spouses and children where participants had been encouraged to marry.

The combined evidence from the literature and the study is clear that conversion practices pose a significant risk to [mental health](#). In addition, conversion practices delay acceptance of sexual orientation or gender identity. For people of faith, the lack of 'success' may worsen guilt and perpetuate internalized homophobia or transphobia.

Support needs for people who have been subjected to conversion therapy

There was limited discussion about support needs within the literature with only one paper specifically looking at the area. In this study, those who were adversely affected by conversion practices resolved their distress by navigating informal and formal supports. Recovery was contingent on recognizing that mental health had been affected and where necessary sourcing therapy that affirmed their [sexual orientation](#) or [gender identity](#) was accessed. For some, accessing an LGBTI+ affirmative church or faith based organization was also central to recovery.

Dr. Brian Keogh, associate professor in mental health nursing and lead author of the study said, "The results of this study demonstrate that conversion practices are happening in Ireland with 11 of the 38 survey respondents stating that they had been exposed to it in the last five years."

"While this is a small study, the combined survey results, qualitative interviews and literature review contribute to the growing international evidence that conversion practices are ineffective and can have a negative impact on people who are exposed to them."

More information: Report: [nursing-midwifery.tcd.ie/news/ ... ices_Full_Report.pdf](https://nursing-midwifery.tcd.ie/news/...ices_Full_Report.pdf)

Provided by Trinity College Dublin

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