

Comparing Image of God and Life Regard in Individuals with Gender Identity Disorder after Sex Change Surgery with Those of Their Counterparts before the Surgery

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Abstract

Background and Objective: Research shows individuals' Life Regard and God image can be effective in preventing the vulnerability to physical and mental consequences of psychological disorder. The purpose of this study was to compare the God image and Life Regard in transsexual individuals after sex change surgery with those of their counterparts before the surgery.

Method: The general design of the study was descriptive and correlational. Sixty five individuals with gender identity disorder were selected from among transsexual individuals in Iran using snowball sampling. Some of the participants had undergone sex surgery, while others had not. God Insight Scale and Life Regard Index were administered among the individuals. All ethical issues were observed in this study and the researchers declared no conflict of interests.

Results: The results of data analysis showed that transsexuals who had changed their sex received significantly higher scores in the God image Scale and the Life regard Index. Also, there were significant differences between the two groups in terms of the sub-scale mean scores. However, there was no measurable discrepancy between the scores of two groups with respect to their gender and educational level.

Conclusion: Working on individuals' God image and life regard can modify some maintenance and resonator factors of gender identity disorder and can be effective in their treatment.

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Summary

Background and Objective: Human identity is influenced by a variety of factors such as race, nationality, religion, occupation, and age. In most societies, nonetheless, sexual identity is one of the most important, central, and determining factors. The sexual identity of most people is established up to the age of 2 to 3 years and is usually consistent with their gender (1). However, sociologists believe that gender is the only important characteristic that is mainly built by the effect of social and cultural learning (2). Each of us has a gender identity that, most of the time, leads to reproducing values, insights, and behaviors about both genders, and is rooted in dominant beliefs, thoughts, and cultural clichés (3). Nevertheless, sometimes

gender identity undergoes some processes leading to inconsistency between gender or biological status and registered gender in the birth certificate (1). This enduring desire for belonging to the opposite sex by insisting on belonging to the opposite sex and the excessive discomfort of gender and the sexual role attributed to the individual is known as transsexuality (1). One of the aspects affecting the quality of life is the attitude of the individual to life. The impact of this variable is so profound that some researchers have argued that life regard is constructive for people's psychological state (4). Gibson argues that life regard is an inner concept that makes it possible to adapt to stressors (5). One of the basic concepts of spirituality, which can influence the formation of "self" and mental self-image, is the quality of individuals' concept of

God (6,7). From the psychological perspective, levels of faith in God influence people's insight into life concepts, social deviation, and psychological disorders (8). It can also significantly moderate humans' perceptions of stressful environments. Religious individuals whose beliefs are positive to God and believe that he is available and benevolent are more likely to cope with stressful situations, show more resistance to stress, and demonstrate more resilience and stability (9).

Method: The research adopted a causal-comparative design. Thus, 65 people with gender identity disorder, before and after surgery, were selected from among the transsexuals in Iran by snowball sampling. God Insight Scale (GIS) and Life Regard Index (LRI) were completed by these participants. Data were analyzed through employing independent samples *t*-test and covariance analysis.

Results: The results of independent samples *t*-test showed that there was a significant difference between the mean score of God Insight among those who had sex change and the participants without any sex change ($t=-3.04$) ($p=-0.003$). Also, the results indicated that there was a significant difference between the mean score of Life Regard among participants who had done the surgery and that of individuals who had not undergone the surgery ($t=-3.43$), meaning that the people with sex change had significantly a much more positive life insight ($p=-0.001$).

Conclusion: The first research hypothesis was that there is a significant difference in the mean scores of God Insight Scale between those with a sex change and those without a sex change. Findings from statistical analyses approved this hypothesis and showed that transsexual people with sex change obtained measurably higher scores in God Insight Scale. Although no research about God Insight and gender identity disorder was found in the literature, the results of this study were consistent with recent research indicating that negative God image was accompanied by many more mental disorders (10,11). Recent research has shown when humans believe that God is close to them and protects them against adversities, they experience less anxiety and depression. However, the belief that humans are punished or rejected by God leads to a wide array of psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression, paranoia, psychosis, and obsessive thoughts (12). The second hypothesis was that there is a significant difference in scores of Life Regard Index between people with a sexual identity disorder who had undergone sex change and peers without a sex change. Research findings on examining the second hypothesis showed that the people with sex change obtained significantly higher scores in the Life Regard Index. This shows that changing sex had a significant effect on improving people's view toward life and its meaningfulness. These findings are consistent with the available literature demonstrating that changing sex improves the mental welfare and life quality of the transgender (13,14). In explaining this finding, we can cite predictors heightening transsexuals' view toward

life and its meaningfulness. Research has shown that the degree of happiness and mental health of patients without sex change is significantly less than that of individuals with sex change (15). Furthermore, family functioning and its dimensions like emotional blending, behavior control, and emotional responsiveness have been less efficient among transsexuals in comparison with their peers (16).

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

The Ethics Committee in Biomedical Research of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences has confirmed this research.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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