

Let's Talk About:

The Cass Review

Date/Time:

Friday 14th April 2024 12:00 – 14:00

Location:

Sunny Room (Community Space),
Sahir HQ, Liverpool, L2 2AH.

Facilitator(s):

Kath Charters (Wirral HIV Support Lead),
Rachael Hickmott (CYP Support Worker)

1. Introduction

Purpose

A facilitated discussion at Sahir for all members of our community to come together to talk about the Cass Review and propose actions to support our gender diverse community and stand up for trans rights.

Background

Dr Hilary Cass has submitted her final report and recommendations to NHS England in her capacity as Chair of the Independent Review of gender identity services for children and young people. The Review was commissioned by NHS England to provide recommendations on improving NHS gender identity services, ensuring that children and young people questioning their gender identity or experiencing gender dysphoria receive high-quality care that is safe, holistic and effective.

Upon publication, the Cass Review's findings and recommendations were welcomed by the majority of UK media outlets, NHS England, the Editor-in-Chief of the medical journal BMJ, conversion therapy proponents such as SEGM, Sex Matters, and Transgender Trend, as well as spokespeople for the Conservative and Labour parties, who pledged to ensure its full implementation.

Conversely, the Review has faced extensive criticism from trans community organisations, medical practitioners working in transgender healthcare and scholars in fields such as transgender medicine, epidemiology, neuroscience, psychology, women's studies, feminist theory and gender studies. Critics have highlighted issues including overt prejudice, pathologisation, poor and inconsistent use of evidence, non-evidenced claims and the intentional exclusion of service users and trans healthcare experts from the Review process.

2. Attendance

Participants

Community members & allies, gender diverse clinicians, mental health providers, gender diverse charities supporting children and young people and other healthcare professionals.

Attendance Statistics

24 attendees from across the Liverpool City Region. Over half of attendees were members of the LGBTQ+ community. A third of attendees identified as transgender or non-binary.

3. Agenda

- Introduction
- Overview of the Cass Review
- Impact of the Cass Review on our community
- Community Response & Concerns
- Q&A & Open Discussion

4. Discussion

The concerns and issues we discussed were informed by materials from Stonewall, Mermaids and other reliable sources.

- **Cass Review Misrepresentation:** contrary to media reports, the Cass Review does not recommend a blanket ban on social transition for any age group. It specifically acknowledges the rights and agency of young people to present themselves as they choose.
- **Lack of Policy Clarity:** several statements and recommendations in the Cass Report lack detailed explanations of their policy intentions or implications, making it difficult to draw clear conclusions about access to patient treatments.
- **Concerns Over “Follow-Through Service”:** experts, activists and families of trans youth have expressed concerns about the report’s 23rd recommendation to establish a “follow-through service” for 17-25-year olds.
- **Quality of Research:** the Cass Report asserts that much of the existing research into clinical guidance for treating trans people is of “poor quality” and “not a reliable evidence base”. It also critiques the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH), an internationally recognised organisation, for lacking “developmental rigor”.
- **Unclear Impact on Support for Trans Youth:** questions remain about whether the approach outlined in the Cass Report will be beneficial or detrimental to providing trans youth with the support they need.
- **Need for Clear Communication:** clear and accessible language is crucial, especially in a context where there is significant hostility and misconceptions about trans people, particularly in the media.
- **Private and Overseas Care Recommendations:** the review makes unclear recommendations regarding private and overseas care which could impact access to these services and potentially affect future access to NHS services.

- **Neurodivergence and Mental Health:** the Cass Report acknowledges that neurodivergence and mental health conditions are common among trans young people, necessitating a holistic approach to support all their needs. However, it does not clarify why all young people should be screened for these conditions or the potential impact on access to specialist gender care and waiting times.

Community Comments

“The research the Cass Review is based on seems biased, claiming no difference in outcomes for trans people who wait until after puberty to access trans support.”

“I’m concerned about the potential consequences the Cass Review will have on gender-affirming clinics and service users. Not all patients have the opportunity to move to a trans-friendly GP.”

“The Cass Review needs to be available in child-friendly, readable and translated versions to ensure accessibility for all.”

“I’m fearful that third sector organisations will be forced to withdraw their support for trans people due to the toxicity of the report leading funders to pull their support for trans organisations.”

“The psychological impact of the Cass Review on community members is a significant concern. It may cause trans people to question their identity, implying they are ‘mentally ill’ or that being trans is ‘just a phase’.”

“The report marginalises and pathologises children which could lead to significant mental health issues.”

“How many children will be deterred from accessing gender-diverse services after the negative spotlight is put on them?”

“How many suicides will this lead to?”

“Will these suicides be accurately reported?”

“Most counselling services are not aware of gender diversity issues, raising concerns about the respect for gender-diverse opinions.”

“Patients are being asked to share data, leading to concerns about how this data will be used. Clarification is needed, and until then, patients should be advised not to share data that could be used against the community.”

“Meetings have been cancelled in gender identity clinics after one clinical lead lost their job. The costs of indemnity insurance for private GI clinics are increasing, making it high risk for insurance to cover, potentially restricting services. Some regions already have the toughest regulations on prescribing.”

“Services will be reduced and bridging prescription guidelines are changing for under-25s.”

“The Cass Review does not consider intersectionality leading to further marginalisation of di-verse groups within the trans community.”

“Delaying access to GI clinics until young people are ‘older’ will result in clinics seeing more people in greater mental distress and complexity that could have been avoided.”

“There are concerns about the potential consequences the Cass Review will have on adult gender-affirming care clinics and their service users.”

“The Cass Review is seen as part of a wider government agenda aimed at claiming that under-25s do not know their own minds, possibly to reduce the capacity of young left-wing voters.”

“Being trans is a protected characteristic. Where do we stand? Why is no one challenging this? How can we challenge this?”

“There has been no statement yet from the British Psychological Society, but there is a desire to see one.”

5. Next Steps

Proposed next steps were suggested emphasising the need for the community to unite and take the lead on these actions.

- Writing letters to MPs, Parliamentary candidates, the NHS and professional bodies
- Organising to meet with local MPs (Sahir could facilitate this)
- Raising awareness within other organisations that community members frequent
- Organising/attending protests and demonstrations (Pride)
- Fundraising for organising such as Sahir to ensure that trans support services can continue

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the challenges highlighted by the Cass Review call for us to come together as a community. Despite the hurdles, we are inspired by our unity and determination. Let's keep supporting each other, making sure that trans voices are heard and respected. Together, we believe can create a better, more inclusive future. We are stronger together.

7. Resources & Reference Materials

<https://mermaidsuk.org.uk/news/mermaids-response-to-the-cass-review-in-depth/>

<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/cass-review>

<https://thekitetrust.org.uk/our-statement-in-response-to-the-cass-review-report/>

<https://transactual.org.uk/?s=cass>



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