

CORRELATION BETWEEN CHILD SEXUAL ASSAULT AND LGBTQIA+ IDENTIFICATION

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QUESTION

What is known about the causal nature of child sexual abuse/assault for determining gender identity and identification as transgender (or LGBTQIA+)?

SEARCH LIMITS

English-language.

SEARCH METHODOLOGY

A systematic search was conducted for literature. The results were screened by two librarians using [Covidence](#). See the Appendix for the PRISMA chart, search terms, and Medline search strategy.

DATABASES SEARCHED

- Medline – index of peer reviewed articles across health sciences and medicine.
- Embase – index of biomed and pharmacological peer reviewed journal articles.
- Emcare – index of nursing, allied health, critical-care medicine and more.
- PsycINFO – index of psychology and psychiatry articles.
- Cochrane Library – collection of databases containing high-quality independent evidence.
- Grey literature – Google, Google Scholar, Trip database, Biomed Central Proceedings.

LITERATURE RESULTS

All articles can be provided in full text - email library@monashhealth.org a list of articles you require.

GENERAL RESOURCES

ONLINE RESOURCES (GREY LITERATURE)

Office for Victims of Crime. (2014). **Responding to transgender victims of sexual assault. Chicken or egg?** [Web link](#).

Studies have shown that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people are more likely to be sexually assaulted in childhood than heterosexual and non-transgender children.²⁵ It is unclear whether perpetrators were reacting to some gender-related cue and assaulted these children

because of it, whether gender insecurity made the children more vulnerable, or whether the attack was meant to "teach the child a lesson."

PEER-REVIEWED LITERATURE - IN REVERSE CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

Articles are grouped by theme:

- Transgender and gender diverse populations – p. 2.
- Cisgender women populations – p. 3.
- Cisgender men populations – p. 5.
- Mixed sexual minority studies – p. 6.

Each article summary contains excerpts from the abstract and an online link.

TRANSGENDER & GENDER DIVERSE POPULATIONS

Chen, Y., et al. (2023). **Exploring the long-term sequelae of childhood sexual abuse on risky sexual behavior among Chinese transgender women.** *Frontiers in psychology*, 14, 1057225. [Click for full-text.](#)

In the sample of 247 adult TGW, 14.2% of them had a CSA history.

Thoma, B. C., et al. (2021). **Disparities in Childhood Abuse Between Transgender and Cisgender Adolescents.** *Pediatrics*, 148(2), e2020016907. [Click for full-text.](#)

19% of trans adolescents reported sexual abuse. Compared with heterosexual CGAs, TGAs had higher odds of sexual abuse.

Newcomb, M. E., et al. (2020). **High Burden of Mental Health Problems, Substance Use, Violence, and Related Psychosocial Factors in Transgender, Non-Binary, and Gender Diverse Youth and Young Adults.** *Archives of sexual behavior*, 49(2), 645–659. [Click for full-text.](#)

Among TGD youth, we found high rates of violence (incl. CSA). Non-binary AMAB youth reported the highest rates of certain outcomes, including traumatic experiences. Findings point to the diversity of experiences within the TGD population and critical needs for intervention approaches to mitigate health disparities.

Reback, C. J., et al. (2017). **Physical and/or sexual abuse are associated with negative health outcomes among transgender women of color living with HIV.** *Violence and Gender*, 4(4), 130–136. [Request full-text.](#)

Eighty percent of the participants reported a past experience of abuse including physical gender abuse (21.8%), CSA (27.3%), or both (30.9%).

Rimes, K. A., et al. (2017). **Non-binary and binary transgender youth: Comparison of mental health, self-harm, suicidality, substance use and victimization experiences.** *The international journal of transgenderism*, 20(2-3), 230–240. [Click for full-text.](#)

Female sex assigned at birth participants (binary and non-binary) were more likely to report childhood sexual abuse than male SAAB participants (binary and non-binary).

Gehring, D., et al. (2005). **Prevalence of Childhood Trauma in a Clinical Population of Transsexual People.** *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 8(1), 23–30. [Request full-text.](#)

Few studies have focused on the prevalence and extent of childhood trauma in the transsexual population. In our study of 42 transsexual people (34 = natal males, 8 = natal females), 55% (n = 23) reported experiencing an unwanted sexual event before the age of 18, with the average age of initial sexual contact being 13.

Devor, H. (1994). **Transsexualism, dissociation, and child abuse: An initial discussion based on nonclinical data.** *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality*, 6(3), 49–72. [Request full-text.](#)

Interviewed 45 self-defined female-to-male transsexuals (aged 22–53 yrs) as part of a wide ranging sociological field study that examined Ss' childhood experiences of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. 60% reported 1 or more types of severe child abuse. Ss reported having experienced many commonly cited initial and long-term effects of child abuse, including fear, anxiety and depression, eating disorders, substance abuse, excessive aggression, and suicide ideation and attempts. It was not possible to determine to what extent the sources of these complaints lay in child abuse, in gender dysphoria, in some combination of the two, or elsewhere. Preliminary results suggest that, in some cases, transsexualism may be an adaptive extreme dissociative survival response to severe child abuse.

CISWOMEN POPULATIONS

Liu, G. S., et al. (2021). **Nonvoluntary or Forced Sex Among Women, by Sexual Identity, Attraction, and Behavior - National Survey of Family Growth, United States, 2011-2017.** *MMWR. Morbidity and mortality weekly report*, 70(38), 1326–1331. [Click for full-text.](#)

Compared with sexual majority women,* prevalence of any male-perpetrated nonvoluntary first vaginal intercourse or forced sex (nonvoluntary or forced sex) was higher among women who identified as bisexual (36.1% versus 17.5%), reported attraction to the opposite and same sex (30.3% versus 15.8%), and reported sexual behavior with the opposite and same sex (35.7% versus 15.9%). These sexual minority women reported that their earliest experience of nonvoluntary or forced sex occurred at younger ages than did that of sexual majority women. Among women who were unsure of their sexual attraction, the prevalence of nonvoluntary first vaginal intercourse was also higher than among sexual majority women.

Hequembourg, A. L., et al. (2013). **Sexual victimization and associated risks among lesbian and bisexual women.** *Violence against women*, 19(5), 634–657. [Click for full-text.](#)

Half (51.2%) of women reported CSA and 71.2% reported adult sexual victimization.

Lehavot, K., et al. (2012). **Childhood Trauma, Adult Sexual Assault, and Adult Gender Expression among Lesbian and Bisexual Women.** *Sex roles*, 67(5-6), 272–284. [Click for full-text.](#)

Results indicated that a more butch/masculine current self-assessment of gender expression, but not gender identity, was associated with more overall reported childhood trauma (incl. CSA).

Austin, S. B., et al. (2008). **Disparities in child abuse victimization in lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual women in the Nurses' Health Study II.** *Journal of women's health (2002)*, 17(4), 597–606. [Click for full-text.](#)

Similarly, comparing sexual abuse victimization occurring in both age periods, lesbian (19%, PR 2.16, 95% CI 1.80, 2.60) and bisexual (20%, PR 2.29, 95% CI 1.76, 2.98) women were more likely to report victimization than were heterosexual women (9%).

Austin, S. B., et al. (2008). **Sexual violence victimization history and sexual risk indicators in a community-based urban cohort of "mostly heterosexual" and heterosexual young women.** *American journal of public health*, 98(6), 1015–1020. [Click for full-text.](#)

Compared with self-reported heterosexual women, self-reported "mostly heterosexual" women were more likely to report having been the victim of childhood sexual abuse. Childhood sexual abuse did not mediate relationships between sexual orientation and sexual risk indicators.

Robohm, J. S., et al. (2003). **Sexual abuse in lesbian and bisexual young women: associations with emotional/behavioral difficulties, feelings about sexuality, and the "coming out" process.** *Journal of lesbian studies*, 7(4), 31–47. [Click for full-text.](#)

Lesbian and bisexual participants with CSA history varied widely as to whether and how they felt a CSA history affected their feelings about their sexuality or their "coming out" process.

Hall J. M. (1998). **Lesbians surviving childhood sexual abuse.** *Journal of lesbian studies*, 2(1), 7–28. [Request full-text.](#)

No participant expressed a belief that her sexual orientation was a result of childhood sexual abuse.

Cosentino, C. E., et al. (1993). **Cross-gender behavior and gender conflict in sexually abused girls.** *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 32(5), 940–947. [Request full-text.](#)

Sexually abused girls manifested significantly more cross-gender behavior on the GRAS-C (in the areas of gender role preference and aggression) and gender identity conflict than did nonabused girls in both comparison groups. For the sexually abused and psychiatric control groups, their parents reported greater involvement in traditionally masculine games on the CGPQ, but on the CBAQ-F, no significant group differences were found.

Aiosa-Karpas, C. J., et al. (1991). **Gender identification and sex role attribution in sexually abused adolescent females.** *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 30(2), 266–271. [Request full-text.](#)

Measures of gender identity found that sexually abused and nonabused treatment groups differed significantly from the no-treatment controls. Distinct patterns of gender identification emerged for the sexually abused victims.

CISMEN POPULATIONS

Zhao, M., et al. (2021). **Association of sexual minority status, gender nonconformity with childhood victimization and adulthood depressive symptoms: A path analysis.** *Child abuse & neglect*, 111, 104822. [Click for full-text.](#)

Sexual minority status and gender nonconformity are indicators of men's increased risk of childhood victimization and adulthood depressive symptoms.

Boroughs, M. S., et al. (2015). **Complexity of childhood sexual abuse: predictors of current post-traumatic stress disorder, mood disorders, substance use, and sexual risk behavior among adult men who have sex with men.** *Archives of sexual behavior*, 44(7), 1891–1902. [Click for full-text.](#)

Rates of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) among MSM have been estimated as high as 46 %.

Hequembourg, A. L., et al. (2015). **Sexual assault risks among gay and bisexual men.** *Journal of sex research*, 52(3), 282–295. [Click for full-text.](#)

One-half of men (50.8%) reported CSA.

Hidalgo, M. A., et al. (2015). **The impact of childhood gender expression on childhood sexual abuse and psychopathology among young men who have sex with men.** *Child abuse & neglect*, 46, 103–112. [Click for full-text.](#)

MSM are disproportionately impacted by CSA compared to heterosexuals. Some evidence suggests that childhood gender nonconformity, a natural variation of human gender expression, is more common in MSM than heterosexual males and places MSM at greater risk for CSA. Young MSM with childhood gender nonconformity may be disproportionately victimized by CSA.

Rind B. (2013). **Homosexual orientation-from nature, not abuse: A critique of Roberts, Glymour, and Koenen (2013).** *Archives of sexual behavior*, 42(8), 1653–1664. [Click for full-text.](#)

Roberts, Glymour, and Koenen (2013), using instrumental variable models, argued that child abuse causes homosexual orientation, defined in part as any same-sex attractions. Their instruments were various negative family environment factors. In their analyses, they found that child sexual abuse (CSA) was more strongly related to homosexual orientation than non-sexual maltreatment was, especially among males. The abuse model is criticized for being based on the sexual victimological paradigm, which developed to describe the female experience in rape and incest. This poorly fits the gay male experience, as demonstrated in a brief non-clinical literature review. Validly understanding male homosexuality, it is argued, requires the broad perspective, as employed here.

Brady S. (2008). **The impact of sexual abuse on sexual identity formation in gay men.** *Journal of child sexual abuse*, 17(3-4), 359–376. [Request full-text.](#)

Emerging data suggests that as children, gay males have an increased risk for physical and sexual abuse. This article describes the incidence of childhood abuse in the lives of gay men and the probable impact of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse.

Gill, M. et al. (1998) **Sexual Identity Issues for Male Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse: A Qualitative Study**. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 6(3), 31-47. [Request full-text.](#)

This study explored the impact of sexual abuse on male sexual identity, utilizing qualitative methodology in interviews with 10 sexually abused men. The findings suggest that male survivors struggle with the disparity between sexual victimization and societal stereotypes of masculinity. The greatest difficulty was with social sex role identity; however, male abuse survivors also question their gender identity. While participants had no sexual orientation identity problems, they tended to find sexual contact threatening.

Paris, J., et al. (1995). **Psychological factors associated with homosexuality in males with borderline personality disorder**. *Journal of Personality Disorders*, 9(1), 56–61. [Click for full-text.](#)

Homosexual Ss with BPD, as compared to the heterosexual BPD Ss, had significantly higher rates of childhood sexual abuse. Psychological factors in homosexuals with BPD were similar to those described in community samples with respect to parental bonding but not for sexual abuse.

MIXED SEXUAL MINORITIES STUDIES

McCabe, S. E., et al. J. (2022). **Sexual orientation differences in childhood sexual abuse, suicide attempts, and DSM-5 alcohol, tobacco, other drug use, and mental health disorders in the US**. *Child abuse & neglect*, 123, 105377. [Click for full-text.](#)

Childhood sexual abuse was most prevalent among sexual minorities, especially bisexual females. Nearly one-third of bisexual females (30.6%) reported experiencing two or more types of CSA, $p < .001$.

Xu, Y., et al. (2017). **Does Sexual Orientation Precede Childhood Sexual Abuse? Childhood Gender Nonconformity as a Risk Factor and Instrumental Variable Analysis**. *Sexual abuse : a journal of research and treatment*, 29(8), 786–802. [Click for full-text.](#)

We found that heterosexual and nonheterosexual men who were more gender nonconforming in childhood were significantly more likely to report having a history of CSA than their gender-conforming counterparts. There was no relation between CSA and CGNC for heterosexual and nonheterosexual women. The instrumental variable analysis revealed that the increased prevalence of CSA experienced by nonheterosexuals compared with heterosexuals may be due to the influence of sexual orientation on CSA. In sum, the results suggest that nonheterosexuality may increase the risk of childhood sexual abuse.

Flynn, A. B., et al. (2016). **Victimization of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual People in Childhood: Associations with Attempted Suicide**. *Suicide & life-threatening behavior*, 46(4), 457–470. [Request full-text.](#)

Childhood sexual abuse among men and childhood sexual and physical abuse among women were found to mediate the association between LGB identity and attempted suicide. The experience of childhood abuse likely plays a significant role in the relationship between LGB identity and attempted suicide, but other factors such as experience of discrimination are also important.

Bos, H. M., et al. (2015). **Depression and anxiety in patients with and without same-sex attraction: differences in clinical expression, lifestyle factors, and vulnerability indicators.** *Brain and behavior*, 5(9), e00363. [Click for full-text.](#)

Regarding stressful childhood experiences, men with any same-sex attraction reported more sexual abuse during childhood than men with a heterosexual orientation (20.4% vs. 8.5%, $P = 0.005$).

Xu, Y., et al. (2015). **Prevalence of Childhood Sexual Abuse among Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual People: A Meta-Analysis.** *Journal of child sexual abuse*, 24(3), 315–331. [Click for full-text.](#)

The results revealed no significant difference in the prevalence of child sexual abuse between homosexual and bisexual people for both sexes. The prevalence of child sexual abuse among female sexual minorities was significantly higher than that among male sexual minorities. The definition of child sexual abuse, dimension used to measure sexual orientation, year of data collection, and the mean age of participants at the time of assessment influenced the estimated prevalence of child sexual abuse. We conclude that many variables influence the reported prevalence of child sexual abuse among sexual minorities.

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Roberts, A. L., et al. (2013). **Does maltreatment in childhood affect sexual orientation in adulthood?** *Archives of sexual behavior*, 42(2), 161–171. [Click for full-text.](#)

Studies directly assessing the association between these diverse types of maltreatment and sexuality cannot disentangle the causal direction because the sequencing of maltreatment and emerging sexuality is difficult to ascertain. In this study, history of sexual abuse predicted increased prevalence of same-sex attraction by 2.0 percentage points. Effects of sexual abuse on men's sexual orientation were substantially larger than on women's. Our results suggest that causal relationships driving the association between sexual orientation and childhood abuse may be bidirectional, may differ by type of abuse, and may differ by sex.

Sweet, T., et al. (2012). **Associations of sexual identity or same-sex behaviors with history of childhood sexual abuse and HIV/STI risk in the United States.** *Journal of acquired immune deficiency syndromes*, 59(4), 400–408. [Click for full-text.](#)

Overall, 14.9% of women and 5.2% of men reported CSA. Among women, bisexuals, lesbians, and heterosexuals with same-sex partners had 5.3 times, 3.4 times, and 2.9 times the odds, respectively, for CSA occurring sometimes/more frequently (vs. never) compared with heterosexuals not having same-sex partners or attractions. Among men, bisexuals, gay men, and heterosexuals with same-sex partners had 12.8 times, 9.5 times, and 7.9 times the odds, respectively, for CSA.

Walker, M. D., et al. (2012). **Childhood sexual abuse and adult sexual identity formation: Intersection of gender, race, and sexual orientation.** *American journal of family therapy*, 40(5), 385–398. [Request full-text.](#)

There is a significantly higher rate of childhood sexual abuse among individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. We describe how being a survivor of childhood sexual abuse can later affect adult sexual identity formation by examining it through the intersection of gender, race, and sexual orientation. Adult lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer abuse survivors may experience unique clinical challenges while healing from this type of traumatic experience and developing a healthy lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer identity.

Wilson, H. W., et al. (2010). **Does physical abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect in childhood increase the likelihood of same-sex sexual relationships and cohabitation? A prospective 30-year follow-up.** *Archives of sexual behavior*, 39(1), 63–74. [Click for full-text.](#)

Individuals with documented histories of childhood sexual abuse were significantly more likely than controls to report ever having had same-sex sexual partners; however, only men with histories of childhood sexual abuse were significantly more likely than controls to report same-sex sexual partners.

D'Augelli, A. R., et al. (2006). **Childhood gender atypicality, victimization, and PTSD among lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth.** *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 21(11), 1462–1482. [Request full-text.](#)

Nearly 80% reported verbal victimization, 11% physical, and 9% sexual, with males reporting significantly more victimization. Victimization began, on average, at age 13. Verbal attacks occurred as early as age 6, physical attacks at 8, and sexual attacks at 9.

Balsam, K. F., et al. (2005). **Victimization over the life span: a comparison of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual siblings.** *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology*, 73(3), 477–487. [Request full-text.](#)

Compared with heterosexual participants, LGB participants reported more childhood psychological and physical abuse by parents or caretakers, more childhood sexual abuse, more partner psychological and physical victimization in adulthood, and more sexual assault experiences in adulthood. Sexual orientation differences in sexual victimization were greater among men than among women.

Tomeo, M. E., et al. (2001). **Comparative data of childhood and adolescence molestation in heterosexual and homosexual persons.** *Archives of sexual behavior*, 30(5), 535–541. [Click for full-text.](#)

Forty-six percent of the homosexual men in contrast to 7% of the heterosexual men reported homosexual molestation. Twenty-two percent of lesbian women in contrast to 1% of heterosexual women reported homosexual molestation.

NOTE: There are issues with the reporting of data for this article, see [Editorial Expression of Concern](#) for more details.

MEDLINE SEARCH STRATEGY

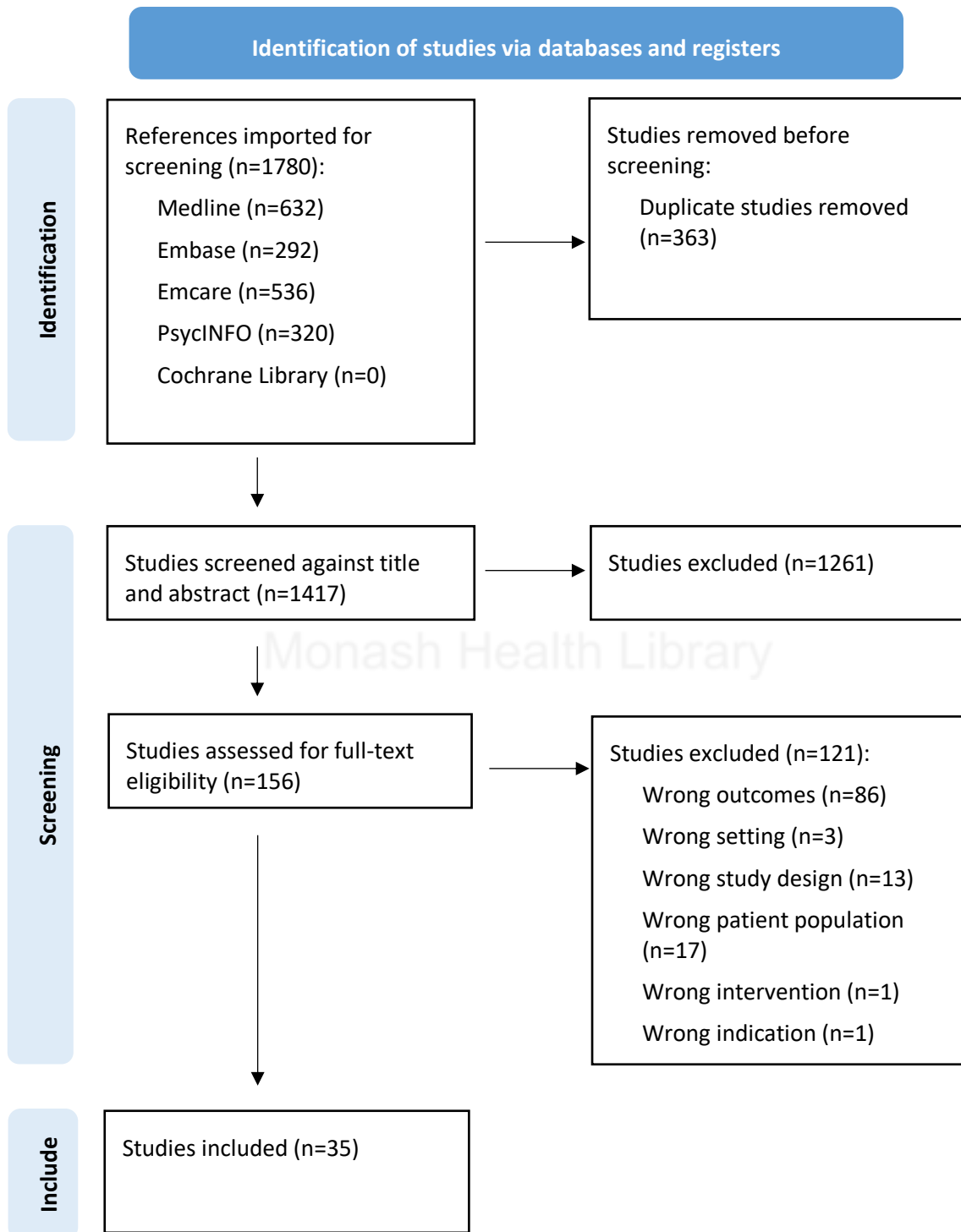
1. (gender adj3 (identity or expression or diverse or dysphoria or \$assign* or minorit* or variant or fluid or trans*)).mp.
2. (lgbt* or transgender or transsex* or transfeminine or transmasculine or non?binary or inter?sex or sexual orientation or sexuality or assigned sex or non?conform*).mp.
3. (Gender Identity/ or Transgender Persons/ or Transsexualism/ or "Sexual".mp.) and "Gender Minorities "/
4. 1 or 2 or 3
5. (Child* adj3 (sexual abuse or sexual assault or sexual exploitation or sexual offence or sexual violence or molest* or sexual maltreatment)).mp.
6. Child Abuse, Sexual/
7. 5 or 6
8. 4 and 7
9. limit 8 to english language

SEARCH TERMS

Concept	MeSH headings	Keywords
LGBTQIA+	Gender Identity; Transgender Persons; Transsexualism; Gender Minorities	Gender [within 3 words of] identity or expression or diverse or dysphoria or assign(ed) or minority or variant or fluid or trans(gender)(sexual)(feminine)(masculine) Lgbt(QIA+); transgender; transsex(ism)(ual); transfeminine; transmasculine; non(-)binary; inter(-)sex; sexual orientation; sexuality; assigned sex; non(-)conform(ing)
Child sexual abuse	Child Abuse, Sexual	Child [within 3 words of] sexual abuse or sexual assault or sexual exploitation or sexual offence or sexual violence or molest(ation)(ed) or sexual maltreatment

APPENDIX

PRISMA CHART



This report contains curated literature results against a unique set of criteria at a particular point in time. Users of this service are responsible for independently appraising the quality, reliability, and applicability of the evidence cited. We strongly recommend consulting the original sources and seeking further expert advice.