

# Gender-Affirming Care in South Africa:

## Gender Identity, Need and Access to Social, Legal and Medical Transition and HIV Services for Transgender and Gender Diverse People

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# Introduction

- Trans and gender diverse (TGD) people are a marginalized community who face discrimination and stigma in South Africa.
- TGD people are those whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth:
  - Transgender women or gender diverse/non-binary people assigned male at birth (AMAB)
  - Transgender men or gender diverse/non-binary people assigned female at birth (AFAB)
- Research has shown a high prevalence of adverse health outcomes for this population including high rates of HIV, STIs, mental health disorders, violence, and substance abuse (1-3).

1. James S, Herman J, Rankin S, Keisling M, Mottet L, Anafi Ma. The report of the 2015 US transgender survey. 2016.
2. Baral SD, Poteat T, Strömdahl S, Wirtz AL, Guadamuz TE, Beyrer C. Worldwide burden of HIV in transgender women: a systematic review and meta-analysis. Lancet Infect Dis. 2013;13(3):214-22.
3. Müller A, Daskilewicz K. Are we doing alright? Realities of violence, mental health, and access to healthcare related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression in East and Southern Africa: Research report based on a community-led study in nine countries. Amsterdam: COC Netherlands; 2019.



# Introduction

- Gender-affirming care encompasses a range of social, psychological, behavioral, and medical interventions designed to support and affirm an individual's gender identity when it conflicts with the sex they were assigned at birth (4, 5). Includes:
  - **Social transition:** changing names/pronouns, gender expression
  - **Legal transition:** legal change of name or gender marker on identity documents
  - **Non-medical gender-affirming practices:** binding breasts and packing (AFAB), tucking penis and padding breasts (AMAB)
  - **Psychosocial care:** support for mental wellbeing
  - **Medical transition:** hormone therapy and gender-affirming surgery
- Despite the critical role of gender-affirming care and HIV services for TGD people, access to care remains understudied in South Africa.

4. Coleman E, Radix A, Bouman W, Brown G, De Vries A, Deutsch M, et al. Standards of care for the health of transgender and gender diverse people, version 8. International Journal of Transgender Health. 2022;23(sup1):S1-S259.

5. Tomson A, McLachlan C, Wattrus C, Adams K, Addinall R, Bothma R, et al. Southern African HIV Clinicians' Society gender-affirming healthcare guideline for South Africa. South Afr J HIV Med. 2021;22(1):1-27.



# Objectives

- **Aim:** To describe access to and need for gender-affirming care and HIV services for TGD people in the Western Cape and Eastern Cape, South Africa.
- **Objectives:**
  1. To describe the demographic profile of TGD individuals.
  2. To describe for TGD individuals their need and access to social transition, legal transition, non-medical gender-affirming practices, psychosocial care, hormone therapy and surgery.
  3. To describe for TGD individuals their need and access to HIV prevention, testing and treatment services.



# Methodology

- **Design:** Cross-sectional, quantitative survey
- **Study population:** 150 self-identified TGD people in Western Cape and Eastern Cape, South Africa.
- **Recruitment:** Convenience sampling through Safe Space network and social media.
- **Data collection:** Structured questionnaire completed in person from January-June 2024.
- **Data analysis:** Descriptive analysis using Stata 18.
- **Ethics:** Informed consent was obtained prior to participation. All data in the analysis and write-up are de-identified.
- **University of Cape Town HREC approval:** #505/2023

# Results: Demographics

- 150 respondents completed the survey.
- 111 (74%) people assigned male at birth (AMAB) and 39 (26%) people assigned female at birth (AFAB).

69% of AMAB  
respondents  
identified as  
**transwomen/female.**

56% of AFAB  
respondents  
identified as  
**transmen/male.**

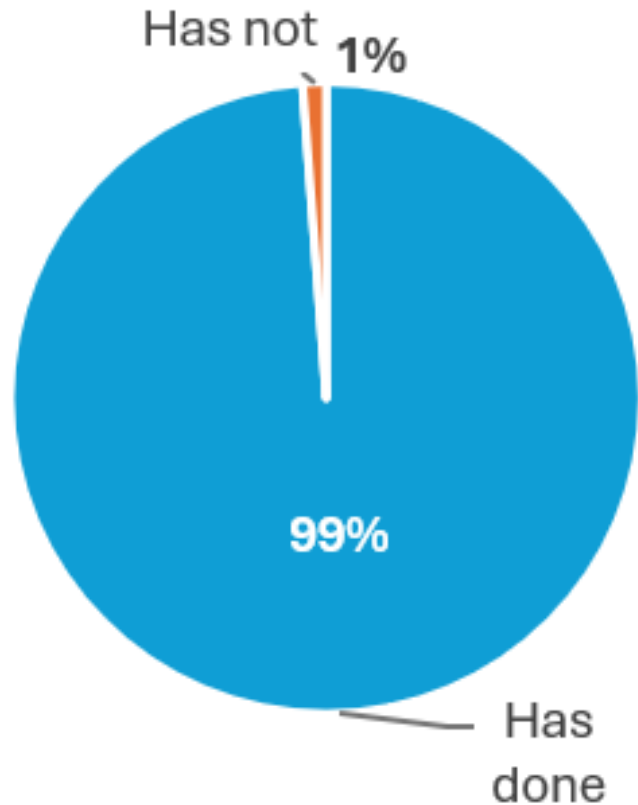
34% of respondents  
identified as **gender  
diverse/non-binary.**

7% of respondents  
were **intersex.**

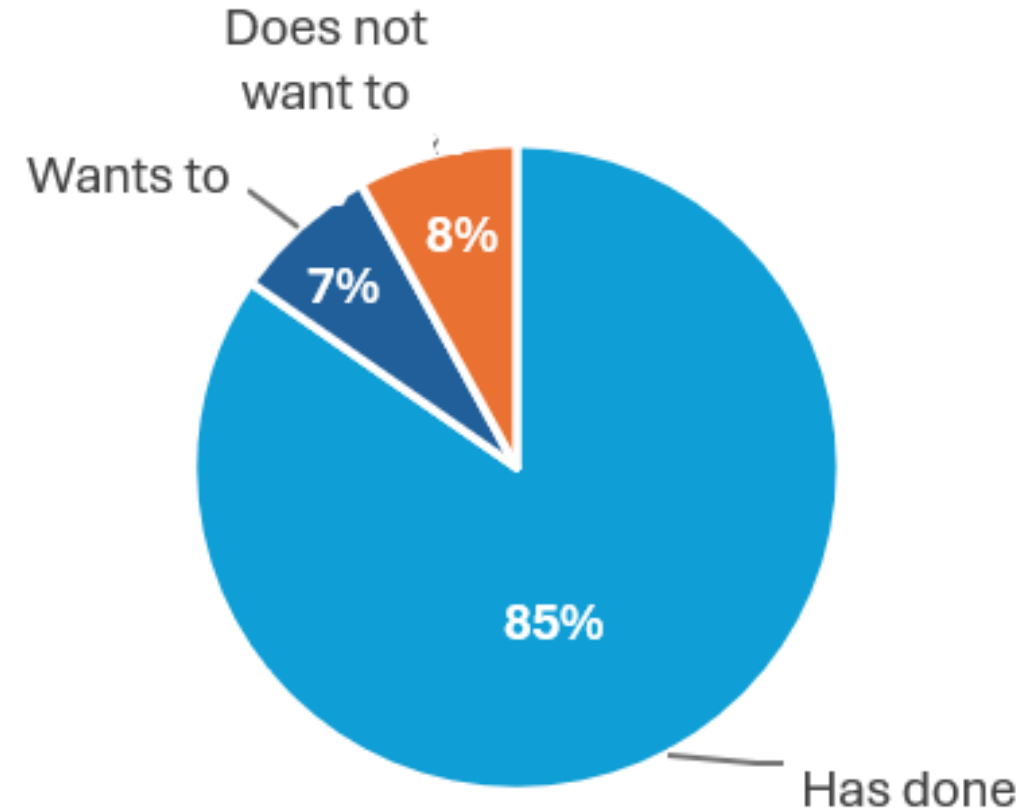
- Demographics showed a vulnerable population with almost **20% homeless** and a very high **(66%) unemployment rate.**

# Results: Access to Gender-Affirming Care

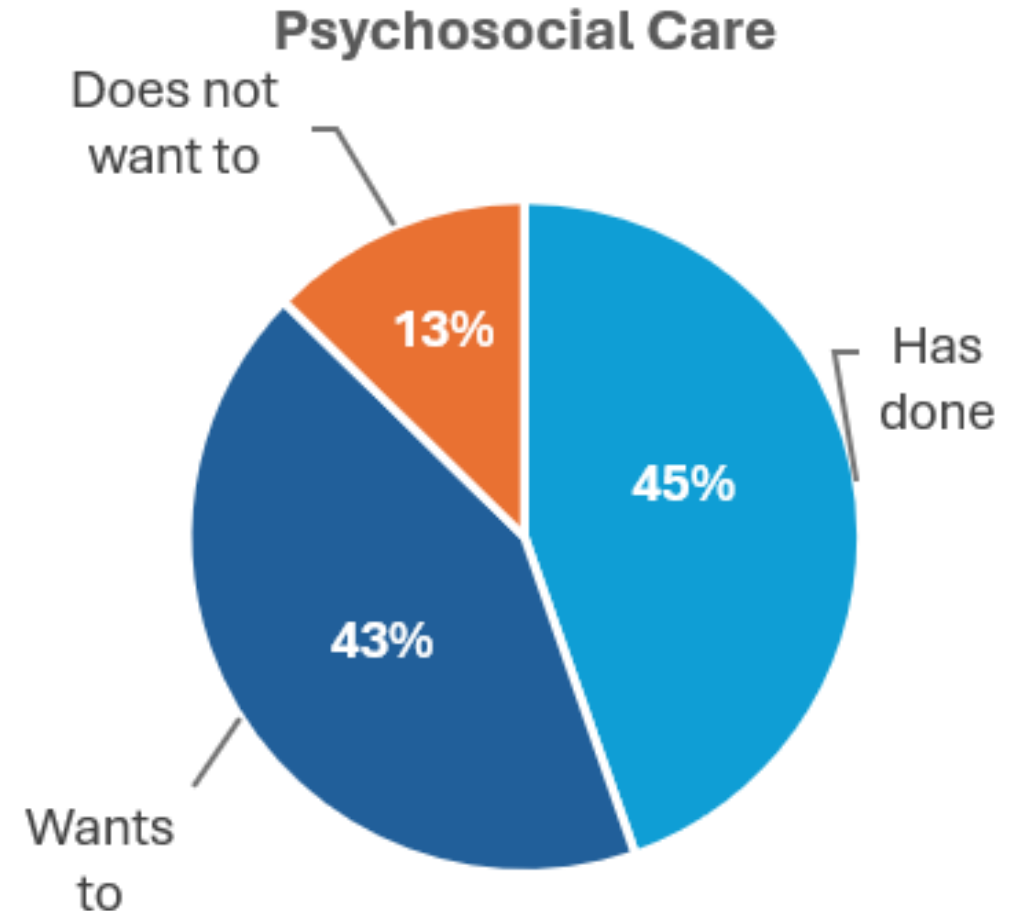
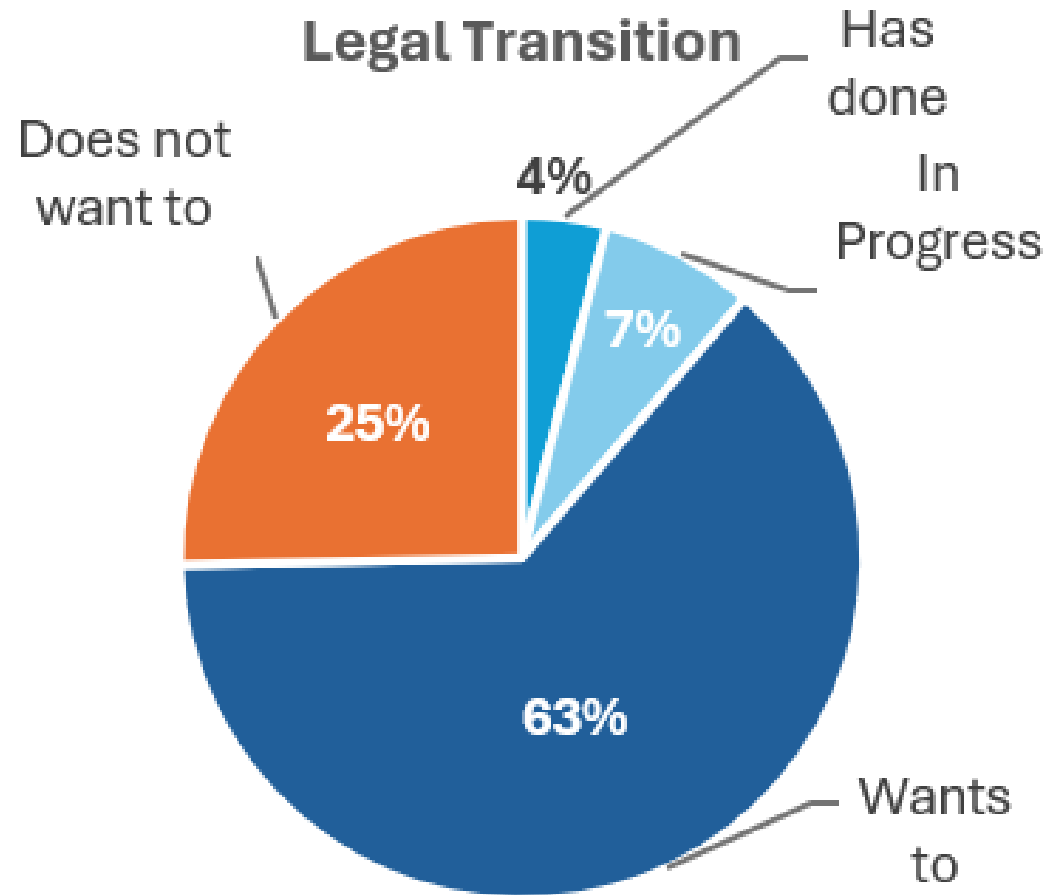
**Social Transition**



**Non-Medical Gender-Affirming Practice**



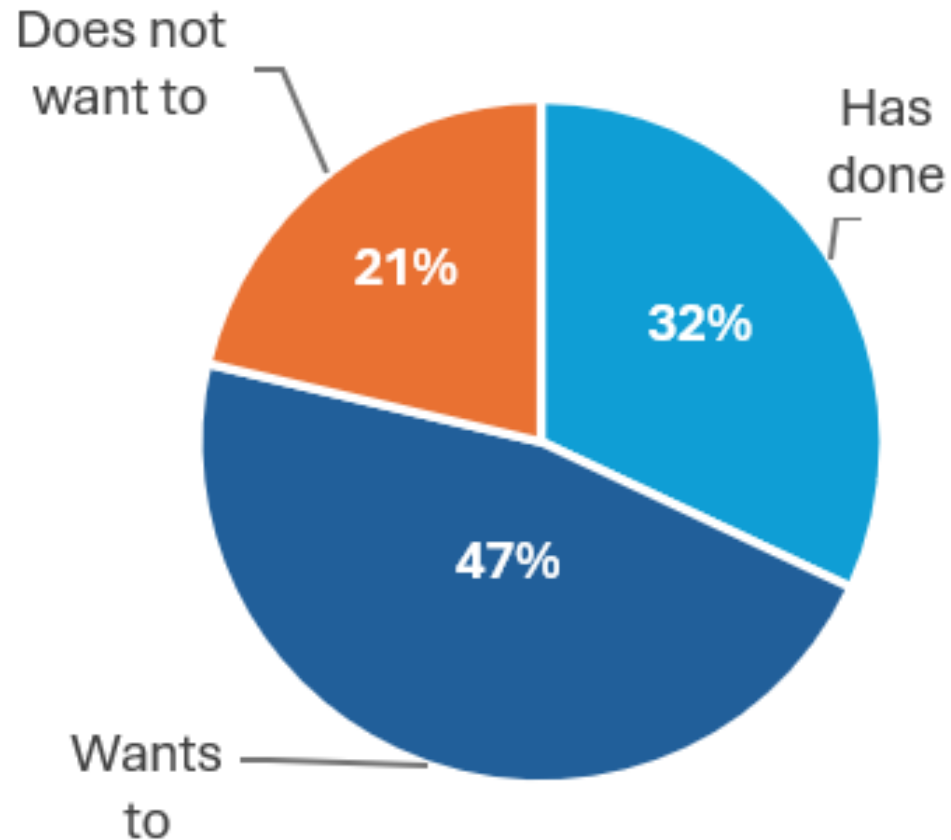
# Results: Access to Gender-Affirming Care



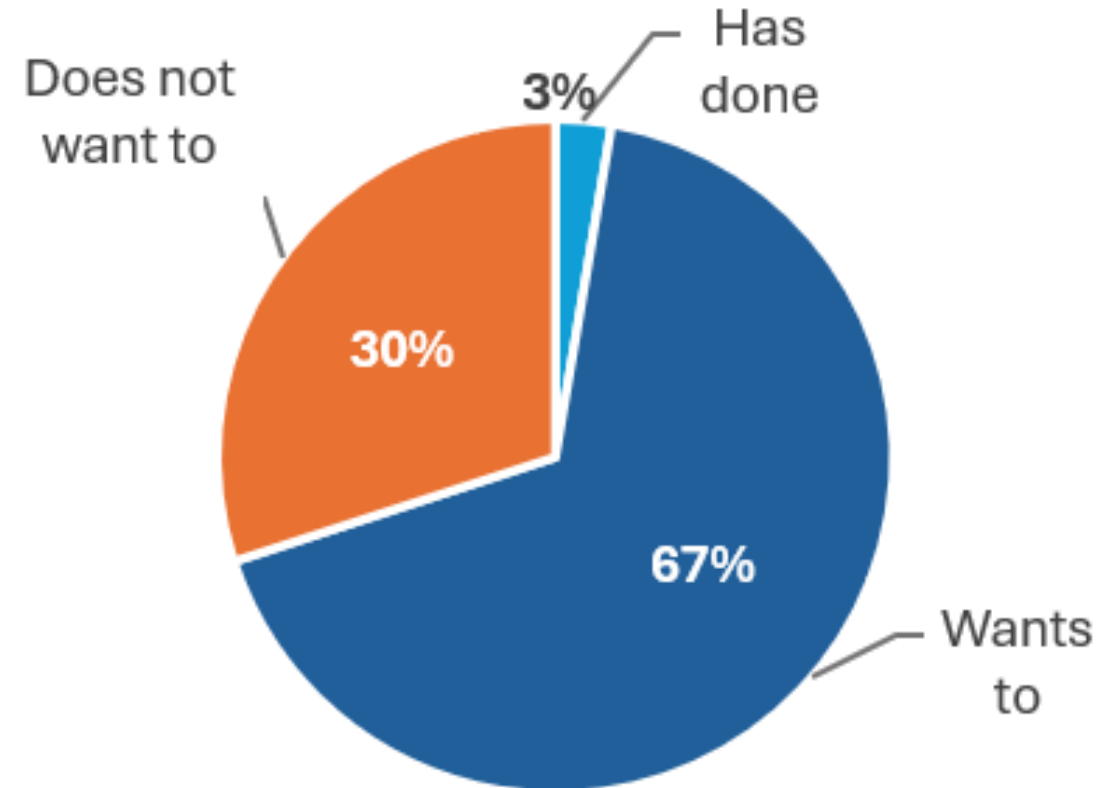


# Results: Access to Gender-Affirming Care

## Hormone Therapy

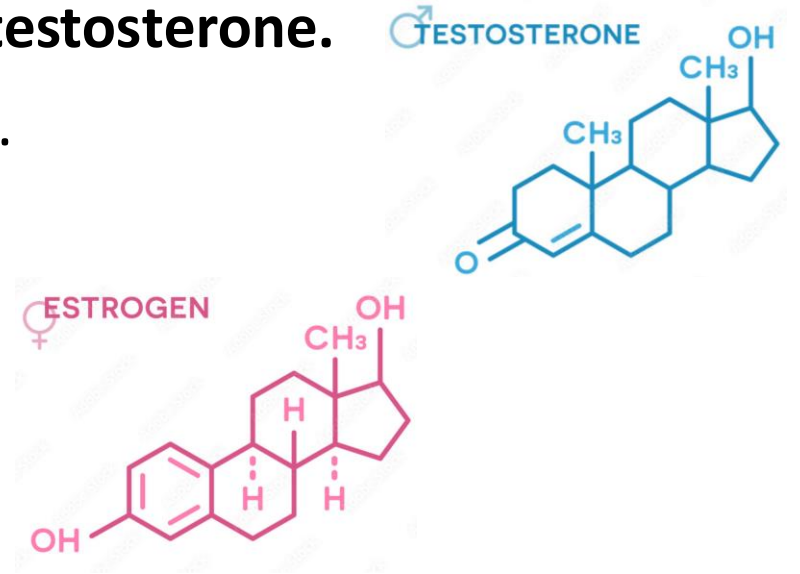


## Gender-Affirming Surgery



# Results: Access to Medical Gender-Affirming Care

- **Less than half (44%)** of AFAB respondents had **accessed testosterone**.
- **Only 22%** of AMAB respondents had **accessed oestrogen**.
- For those who had not accessed hormone therapy:
  - 50% of AFAB respondents wanted testosterone and
  - 67% of AMAB respondents wanted oestrogen.
- **Only 3%** of respondents had **accessed gender-affirming surgery**.
- The unmet need for surgical transition was nuanced:
  - The majority of AFAB respondents wanted top surgery (68%) vs bottom surgery (33%).
  - For AMAB respondents the desire for top surgery (56%) vs bottom surgery (50%) was similar.



# Results: HIV Services

- Almost all (99%) of respondents had had an HIV test.
- 64% of respondents had a test in the last 6 months.

HIV Services	AMAB, n (%)	AFAB, n (%)	Total, n (%)
Living with HIV	38 (34%)	3 (8%)	41 (28%)
On ART	29 (76%)	3 (100%)	32 (78%)
Living without HIV	69 (62%)	35 (92%)	104 (70%)
On PrEP	21 (30%)	2 (6%)	23 (22%)

- HIV prevalence was similar to other national statistics for AMAB respondents (6, 7).

6. Cloete A, Wabiri N, Savva H, Van der Merwe L, Simbayi L. The Botshelo Ba Trans study: results of the first HIV prevalence survey conducted amongst transgender women (TGW) in South Africa. London: AIDS Impact; 2019.

7. Stevens O, Anderson RL, Sabin K, Garcia SA, Fearon E, Manda K, Dikobe W, Crowell TA, Tally L, Mulenga L, Philip NM, Maheu-Giroux M, McIntyre A, Hladik W, Zhao J, Mahy M, Eaton JW. HIV prevalence in transgender populations and cisgender men who have sex with men in sub-Saharan Africa 2010-2022: a meta-analysis. medRxiv [Preprint]. 2023 Nov 9:2023.11.09.23298289.



# Conclusion

- Findings demonstrate a vulnerable population with a critical gap between need and actual access to legal and medical gender-affirming care.
- High HIV prevalence and low PrEP uptake.
- TGD people have variable health needs and require a multi-faceted approach to gender-affirming care.
- Urgent need for the provision of affordable, integrated and accessible gender-affirming care and HIV services as part of comprehensive care for TGD populations in South Africa and more broadly.
- Collaborative, multidisciplinary teams can improve TGD healthcare access.



# Acknowledgements

**Thank you to all respondents who participated in the survey.**

## Recruitment Network

- All individuals and organisations who assisted in recruitment for this study
- Zonwabele LGBTIQ+ Organisation, Triangle Project, Gender DynamiX, RainbowUCT



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