

Every Child is Precious, and Every Adult as well

Transgender Day of Remembrance 2025

Every TDOV and TDOR I write a short article on the transgender community based on my community experiences. These are my own reflections and do not represent the views of TransgenderSG. – Rain Khoo

The Transgender Day of Remembrance is a day when we remember those we lost to suicide and violence. Earlier this year, one of our co-founders at TransgenderSG went missing while travelling overseas. The next news we heard, she had passed away. She was only 28 years old. Her family was distraught, and so we never questioned and we never did find out the cause of her death. Would things have turned out differently for her had she not been trans? Possibly.

Transgender persons are often targeted by predators. I witnessed two young trans persons who are leaders and academic scorers at their university being preyed upon by a stalker who threatened to kill their family. POHAs were not effective as the stalker went through burner social media accounts as rapidly as one changes clothes. This highly distressing and prolonged episode occurred just as they were graduating, and it deeply affected their transition to work. One was let go of from their first job. The other was unable to complete their Masters. Both are in positions far behind those of their peers today.

Earlier this year, a study of suicides amongst adolescents aged 10-19 was published in a medical journal in Singapore¹. In one public hospital, there were 221 cases of admissions due to suicide or self-harm attempts in 2021. Of these, 16.7% disclosed they had gender identity issues. There were 37 adolescent deaths by suicide that year.

Every child is precious. Gender identity does not have to be a cause of suicide. Based on a 2% trans population estimate and considering the number of children in each family, there are an estimated 4,000 – 5,000² families with trans kids.³ Our family support group, My Family Matters, which is organised with Oogachaga and SAFE supports only 40+ families. It would be nice to think that the rest have more accepting families – but based on my community work, most parents find it hard to accept the transgender part of their child.

Transphobia is similar in nature to the stigma around disabilities and mental health. Back in the pre-social model days, when disability was primarily viewed through the medical model, having disabilities was seen as not being “normal”. Parents hid their children with disabilities at home to avoid questions and stares from strangers. Persons with disabilities were made to feel that they were a burden to their families.

¹ Chong, D.K.S. et al. Feb 2025. Adolescent self-harm and suicide attempts: An analysis of emergency department presentations in Singapore.

² Total adolescents in June 2025 is 418,000. 2% is 8,360. Singapore population trends provides breakdown for number of children from typical parent age groups, used to estimate average children per family. We use 30-49 years old, with an average of 1.79 children, which gives us 4,685 families.

³ Some might argue that I should use the more conservative estimate of 0.1 – 0.3% of population, an average of 0.2% still makes it 400 – 500 families.

Having a transgender child triggers a sense of shame for many parents in Singapore. Like persons with disabilities, most of us would rather not have these identities because they bring so much difficulty. Unfortunately, being transgender is often perceived to be a selfish choice because the stigma imposed on our identity is viewed as disrupting the harmony and order within a family. In Asia, where family comes first, the finger of blame is pointed to the western individual choice. Our identity is not a western concept. How else can we live with ourselves, aside from accepting ourselves? Conversely, with the acceptance of society, we bring out the strengths of gender diversity. Having lived on both sides of the coin, we can illuminate gender differences and help societies move beyond stereotyping and biases towards a richer diversity of thought and perspectives.

In recent years, public health policy makers quietly increased the minimum age to receive medical transition care from 18 to 21 years old. This means that even if you have supportive parents and you are below 21, you can only receive medical treatment in private sector. If you are from a lower socioeconomic group with supportive parents, seeking private treatment may not be an option. Does this send a message that only the richer can transition? Or perhaps the system does not recognise that severe gender dysphoria can happen to children too.

Gender affirming healthcare is already guarded by multiple gatekeepers – if we decide to take our surgery in Singapore in public hospitals, we have go through the polyclinic, then the endocrinologist, psychologist, psychiatrist, and sometimes the therapist, and be on at least a year of hormone treatment, before being referred to the surgeon, who may require you to see a social worker and have your surgery approved by the ethical board. By then, transgender persons who have spent years just waiting for medical appointment while struggling with their gender dysphoria. We are adults and pay taxes too. Why is the system making it so difficult for us to access the healthcare we need?

In disability advocacy, there is a rallying cry: “Nothing about us, without us.” It essentially says - don’t make decisions about disability without persons with disabilities. Transgender people find ourselves in a similar situation. Many of us want to change their gender marker to avoid the discrimination and harassment that come with official documents that do not match our appearance – only 6% of trans people who want to change their gender marker have been able to do so because of the onerous, risky and expensive surgical requirements. However, because current policy does not address community needs, this policy, and others, continues to hold back transgender persons from living full lives.

In Singapore, transgender people of every age are still getting left behind. We tend to express more empathy for youths, but every life is worth its dignity and full lives are worth living at every age. You, the reader, may not be in that decision-making seat, but by repeating our realities and challenges in spaces where we cannot reach, or by bringing us into that decision-making space, you can help create a more inclusive Singapore for the transgender community.

TransgenderSG is conducting its first physical fundraising event in February 2026. Pls email contacttransgendersg@gmail.com if you are interested in finding out how you can support.

[1] Chong, D.K.S. et al. Feb 2025. Adolescent self-harm and suicide attempts: An analysis of emergency department presentations in Singapore.

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