

## An Exploratory Study

# of Healthcare Services and Lived-Experience of Persons with Intersex Status in Vietnam

*In Vietnam, the intersex community is still facing many difficulties and challenges in their daily lives. These challenges range from access to quality healthcare services to social issues such as prejudice and limited understanding, rendering them isolated and unrecognized. In international discourse, interest in the intersex community has expanded from the medical profession to other issues such as self-determination and bodily integrity, but there is currently a lack of research on this topic. The diverse challenges faced by intersex communities are largely unresolved, requiring comprehensive strategies to effectively support them.*



*Actually, I have always known that there is something very, very different about me. But I never really put my mind to it, but until I knew the (medical test) results, I didn't think it was that terrible. (Hoa)*



The growing presence of the LGBTI community does not necessarily mean adequate attention is paid to intersex people, especially in Vietnam. This study seeks to bridge this gap by exploring the life experiences of intersex people in Vietnam, including daily challenges, social interactions, and experiences in the healthcare system. It also aims to identify the psychological and social problems they face, as well as the healthcare process from diagnosis to treatment.

The study also has limitations on the number of participants and limited time and resources, leading to a low generalizability of the results. However, it lays the groundwork for further in-depth studies on the intersex community in Vietnam. The objective of the study is to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and life experiences of intersex people in Vietnam, thereby raising awareness and appropriate support for this community.

# Results and Discussion

## Healthcare services for intersex people in Vietnam

Through a literature review and interviews with healthcare professionals with experience working with intersex people/persons with disorders of sex development (DSD), the study found that healthcare services for this group were lacking and not specialized. There is a lack of healthcare professionals with knowledge and experience in the care and diagnosis of disorders of sex development, leading to ineffective medical care. Many intersex people feel hesitant and have a bad experience with health services due to the lack of understanding and sensitivity on the part of some health workers.



*I also want to have a health check-up to know about my situation and the cause of it, I mean now I want to be a bit clearer about it, as if to take off the burden in my heart. (Minh Anh)*



Studies on intersex people in Vietnam are only available in the medical field. To date, there is almost no research approaching the issue of intersex people from a social and anthropological perspective.

## Self-discovery and self-acceptance process of intersex people in research

Intersex people who participate in the study express feelings of confusion and anxiety when they find themselves with intersex characteristics.

- Lack of information about their own “differences”, causing confusion
- Lengthy diagnostic process that lasts many years and takes a lot of effort and money
- Poor experience with healthcare services due to the lack of sensitivity and expertise of medical staff
- Loneliness due to not being able to share with others, or not knowing anyone in the same situation or anyone having the same intersex characteristics
- Difficulty in receiving the desired understanding and empathy from family members and society



*I also often carry in my body the feeling that I am different, there is no one telling me about this, no one guiding me about this. (Phương)*



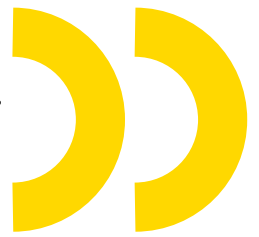
## Self-discovery and self-acceptance process of intersex people in research

Finding a community is one of the major motivations for intersex people in the study to start accepting themselves.

- They have a need to have a community to share and learn from each other, especially about surgical experiences and managing their health conditions.
- Participating in a community helps intersex people reduce loneliness when they know they are not alone.
- Having an intersex community in Vietnam that can help intersex people access suitable physical and psychological healthcare services and support.



*I want a community to know that I'm not the only one.*  
(Hoa)

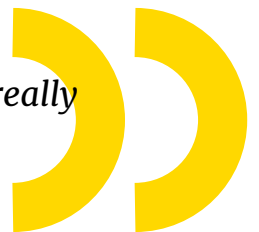


However, intersex people have not yet felt their presence in the LGBTI community in Vietnam.

- The number of studies on LGBTI people has increased, but there is still few and almost no activities or studies dedicated to intersex people.
- There are no specialized support services available for the needs of intersex people, such as physical and psychological healthcare services and/or consulting services with accurate information.
- There is still little information, understanding, and accurate awareness of intersex people in the LGBTI community.
- Some of the individuals who participated in the study found a lot of psychological and physical health support through medical services and counseling at transgender facilities. However, other participants did not feel much connection to the LGBTI community in general.



*Actually, I support the LGBT movement but Mai doesn't really see a connection with that group.* (Mai)



# Recommendations

**01.** Improve Healthcare Resources: Developing training and resources for healthcare professionals to improve the diagnosis and treatment of intersex conditions/disorders of sex development and overall medical experiences of intersex people. This includes updating medical content on intersex conditions/disorders of sex development, avoiding unnecessary surgical procedures, and providing adequate information for intersex people and their families.

**02.** Raise Public Awareness: Increasing public awareness of intersex people's stigma and isolation. Launch a public education and communication campaign to promote an inclusive environment for intersex people.

**03.** Amend the Legal Framework: Update the official definitions and concepts of intersex conditions. Improve anti-discrimination policies to protect the right to body integrity and legal gender recognition of intersex people.

**04.** Build and Maintain Communities for Intersex people: Building a community dedicated to intersex people and their families, creating a place to share experiences and improve access to support resources.

**05.** Continue to conduct research about intersex people and intersex conditions in Vietnam: Encourage research to provide better understanding and data, supporting effective health policymaking and practice.

**06.** Strengthen Cooperation and Coordination: Collaboration between governments, healthcare providers, the intersex community, and community organizations can help address the challenges faced by intersex people through the development of policies and campaigns to raise awareness and provide needed services.

Please visit [thuvien.lgbt/documents](http://thuvien.lgbt/documents) to read the full research report.

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