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Charity condemns BBC misinformation about trans children

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BBC is getting established facts wrong, says Trans Media Watch

Trans Media Watch has condemned the BBC for the misleading approach it took to issues concerning trans children in Wednesday's edition of Newsnight, and raised concerns about a documentary, *Transgender Kids: Who Knows Best?*, scheduled to air tonight.

Newsnight presenter, Emily Maitliss, introduced the programme with the question "Is it right that

primary school children should be permitted gender reassignment surgery?” and repeated this question on Twitter.

Surgery of this sort is not available to young people below the age of majority in the UK. A quick search of the BBC’s own website confirms this was already known. Made aware of this, Maitliss acknowledged that she had made an error, but went on to state that hormone treatment is given to children this age. This is also inaccurate. In some cases, puberty blockers (which are not cross-sex hormones) are made available to trans children over the age of 12. Precocious puberty in primary school children has been treated with puberty blockers for years, for reasons that have nothing to do with a child’s experience of gender. Trans Media Watch has asked the BBC to correct these mistakes, which could potentially deter parents with vulnerable children from seeking help, placing those children at increased risk.

In addition to this, Newsnight presented Dr Ray Blanchard as an expert on trans issues without noting that his work has been dismissed by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) for falling below their scientific standards, without noting that his work has been widely discredited by others working in the field, and without noting his link to Dr Kenneth Zucker who was briefly discussed in the interview.

“The objective data show that the rates of suicide ideation and gestures in gender dysphoric children are the same as the rate of those gestures and ideation in other psychiatric populations of children and adolescents,” said Dr Blanchard. This is objectively not true, as can be observed from the work of Dr Louis Gooren, who carried out the only large scale study on a non-selective data set to date, in the Netherlands.

Tonight’s documentary features Dr Kenneth Zucker, whose work has also been subject to challenge. The Telegraph and Daily Mail report that the programme makes the case that some people presenting as trans may in fact be confused autistic people.

“The mistaken idea that trans children must be ‘autistic’ fails to account for the different way that Autistic Spectrum children interact with the world around them. The unspoken barriers to coming out as trans are often not detected by Autistic Spectrum children, making it more likely that they come out. While most children’s sensitive social radar picks up subtle signs hinting that being trans may be risky or unacceptable to friends, autistic spectrum children are often not able to detect these, or do not care about them, and consequently become visible in greater numbers,” said Natacha Kennedy, a transgender academic at Goldsmiths, University of London, who researches trans issues.

The documentary has led to an anguished response from a mother who feels that the BBC lied to her in order to persuade her family to take part. “[The] synopsis is embarrassing and hurtful to us as a family. It’s shaming us and saying we did the wrong thing,” she continued. ‘My daughter is very public with her transition, and she recently won a huge award from our governor general for her advocacy... This synopsis for the documentary is like throwing everything back in her face. Did they think we were a joke? Were they laughing at us while we thought we were doing a good thing? It’s very insulting,” she told Gay Star News.

A representative from Trans Media Watch has a pre-arranged meeting with the BBC’s Head of Diversity on Friday afternoon.