

Bridging current research and best practices in identifying transgender skeletal remains in Canada

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Presentation Description:

Violence against trans women and trans men continues to rise. At the crossroads of forensic anthropology and human rights, this study explores how Canadian death investigators are responding to new tools to identify and count transgender victims of violent crime, to drive social and legal change.

Abstract:

Transgender and otherwise non-binary decedents face erasure from police statistics, forensic death investigation records and government databases. Current research shows concurrence on predictable skeletal changes that trans men and trans women experience due to hormone therapy and/or gender affirming surgery. These findings could help inform the identification of transgender individuals from skeletal remains, allowing for better tailored police investigations and closure to grieve for loved ones. In practice, Canadian forensic skeletal sex assessments and documentation are based on a strict male/female binary with minimal latitude for transgender (or otherwise non-binary) determinations. The lack of more inclusive, nationally streamlined sex and gender data conventions also increases the risk of transgender individuals being misgendered, and therefore misidentified or left unidentified in death, and left out of violent crime and missing-persons statistics, civilian death statistics and in archaeological contexts.