



# Speak Out: Addressing 2SLGBTQ Youth Dating Violence

Lessons on how to support 2SLGBTQ youth who  
face dating violence in Canada



July, 2022



# Land Acknowledgement

We would like to begin by acknowledging that Egale is based on the traditional shared territories of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. The territory is protected by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. The concepts of gender, sexuality, and oppression that we often rely on in 2SLGBTQI advocacy work are largely based in White, Western, colonial systems of thought and do not represent the multitude of understandings of identity that exist outside of this viewpoint. Colonial violence created the foundations for the landscape of gender-based violence that we understand today. Indigenous communities and Two Spirit activists, scholars, writers, and artists have gifted us with ample tools to work with as we move toward the collective liberation of gender and sexuality minority people. We are grateful to carry these with us here and in our work beyond. The violence of colonialism is ongoing. So too are movements toward resisting this violence.

# Copyright and Acknowledgements

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*We are deeply grateful to the youth who took the time to fill out our survey and share their experiences with us.*

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## Egale Canada

Egale is Canada's leading organization for 2SLGBTQI people and issues. We improve and save lives through research, education, awareness, and by advocating for human rights and equality in Canada and around the world. Our work helps create societies and systems that reflect the universal truth that all persons are equal and none is other.

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# Glossary

**2SLGBTQ:** An acronym that stands for Two Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual trans, queer, or questioning. The order of the acronym beginning with Two Spirit recognizes the presence of Two Spirit and Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island, and the historical erasure of Two Spirit people through settler colonialism and in mainstream queer organizing. For a full glossary of terms, see: <https://egale.ca/awareness/glossary-of-terms/>

**Dating:** In the study, ‘someone you are dating’ could include a boyfriend, girlfriend, or a date-friend (a gender-neutral term equivalent to boyfriend/girlfriend); this could refer to casual dates (e.g., socializing without being supervised) with someone you like or love, and/or a relationship that involves sex.

**Dating violence:** In this study, dating violence is defined as any physical, emotional, or sexual violence directed at a youth by someone they were dating, either while they were in a relationship with the person or after the relationship ended. Emotional or sexual violence could also take place online (i.e., ‘virtual’ violence). Dating violence is also commonly referred to as intimate partner violence (IPV) in academic literature, with IPV often applied to adults (Reuter & Whitton, 2018).

**Physical violence:** Any physically aggressive or violent behaviour directed against another person with the intent to harm them, either with or without using a weapon (Hamby & Turner, 2013). Physical violence includes actions that may appear minor, like grabbing or pushing. Physical violence can also be part of other forms of dating violence; for example, if someone is consistently subjected to threats of physical violence, they will also experience emotional violence.

**Emotional violence:** Any action which intentionally causes emotional disturbance of another person, such as isolating them from friends and family, trying to control how they act and/or making them feel unsafe (Zweig et al.,

2013). Emotional violence can also be used to inflict other kinds of violence, such as trying to pressure a partner into having sex when they don't want to (Everhart & Hunnicut, 2013).

**Sexual violence:** Any unwanted sexual behaviour or sexual attention directed against a partner or former partner (Hamby & Turner, 2013). This definition includes rape, but also unwanted sexual touching, sexual comments or conversation, or sexual acts performed in front of someone when that person doesn't want to see them. Because sexual activities are a normal part of romantic and/or casual sexual relationships, it can be confusing if someone forces sex on their partner. The victim may not identify it as sexual violence because these same acts have happened before with the consent of both people (Everhart & Hunnicut, 2013). It is also emotionally painful when a trusted person forces another person into sexual activity (Smollin, 2014). The victim may not want to identify this experience as rape or sexual assault. In the survey, youth were asked if they had engaged in specific sexual when they did not want to, rather than using the explicit language of sexual violence which they might hesitate to associate with their romantic relationships.


**Virtual violence:** Any violence directed against a dating partner using technology, such as threats sent on social media (Zweig et al., 2013). Virtual violence includes harassment over text messaging or monitoring a partner's social media accounts to prevent them from having privacy.

**Cisheteronormativity:** A set of societal assumptions, norms, expectations, and beliefs that centers cisgender and heterosexual experiences. These beliefs and practices perpetuate the privileging of heterosexuality and binary, cisgender identities, and lead to stereotyping and policing of people, beauty standards, and relationships for 2SLGBTQ people and communities.

# What is known about dating violence among 2SLGBTQ youth

There are many ways that 2SLGBTQ youth navigate healthy relationships and find joy in their relationships with friends, family, and partners (Asakura, 2019). However, from the available Canadian research, it is known that 2SLGBTQ youth have an equal or greater chance of encountering dating violence when compared with their cisgender and heterosexual peers, particularly if they are multiply marginalized (Dank et al., 2014; Martin-Storey, 2015; Reuter & Whitton, 2018; Smollin, 2011). Recent research from Exner-Cortens et al. (2021) found that one in three Canadian adolescents had experienced dating violence, and the prevalence rates were highest for nonbinary youth. This increased risk of dating violence can also be linked with systemic violence (i.e., cisheteronormativity, settler colonialism, and ableism), which perpetuate dehumanization and translate into interpersonal violence (Abbas, 2022). Despite the increased risk of dating violence for 2SLGBTQ youth, the resources they turn to are not well-informed about issues such as transphobia and homophobia (Quinn & Ertl, 2015).

Previous research has shown that most service providers are not equipped to help 2SLGBTQ youth deal with dating violence, especially in smaller communities with less resources overall. Services meant to support survivors of dating violence often lack inclusion of 2SLGBTQ identities and the way these identities complicate experiences of violence (Eisenberg et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2015; Tesch & Bekerian, 2015; Turell et al., 2012; Weisz & Black, 2009). One challenge with dating violence services for 2SLGBTQ people is the lack of service providers who are also part of 2SLGBTQ communities. Counsellors and other emotional support professionals acknowledge it is important for 2SLGBTQ people to receive help from people who share their identity (Weisz & Black, 2009). Counsellors and other service providers who are not 2SLGBTQ can still provide effective support, but they rarely receive any kind of education on 2SLGBTQ issues, and in some cases, are actively encouraged to avoid discussion of gender or sexuality (Taylor et al., 2015; Weisz & Black, 2009).



More research on 2SLGBTQI youth communities' experiences of gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, and the ways they are or are not supported in the aftermath is needed to better understand and address these youths' needs. This report helps fill this knowledge gap.

## **The Speak Out Survey: Research Design and Methods**

The Speak Out project is a multi-phase project, with phase one encompassing a survey of youth across Canada about their experiences of gender-based violence. For this phase, Egale partnered with Ley Fraser and Dr. Tracey Peter from the University of Manitoba to co-create and launch a national youth survey to investigate youths' connections to other sexual and gender minorities, their sense of community support, experiences of transphobic and homophobic discrimination, as well as experiences of various kinds of dating violence.

The research was guided by the following questions: (1) What are 2SLGBTQ youths' experiences of gender-based violence? (2) What kinds of supports were available to these youth related to their experiences of gender-based violence? For most of the questions in our survey, youth could select as many answers as they felt applied to them (exceptions included age, province, and living arrangements). For example, when we asked about gender, youth could choose trans, woman, and nonbinary if those terms all corresponded to their identity. No questions were mandatory except for the question regarding consent to participate. Participants could skip any question they did not want to answer and leave the survey at any time, which would redirect them to a neutral website ([google.ca](http://google.ca)).

### **Participant Recruitment**

The Speak Out survey was hosted on a secure online platform (Qualtrics) and was available in both English and French. The survey was open for 10 months (November 2019–June 2020). The call for participation was circulated on social media (Egale's Facebook page and Instagram) and via Egale's newsletter, The Acronym. Additionally, the call for participation was distributed via email

and Facebook to Canadian social services organizations and 2SLGBTQI nonprofits or nonprofits associated with 2SLGBTQI issues. The research team used purposeful recruitment with organizations working to address issues of disability, youth in care, and youth who are Indigenous, Black, and People of Color. These individuals are often underrepresented in 2SLGBTQI research.

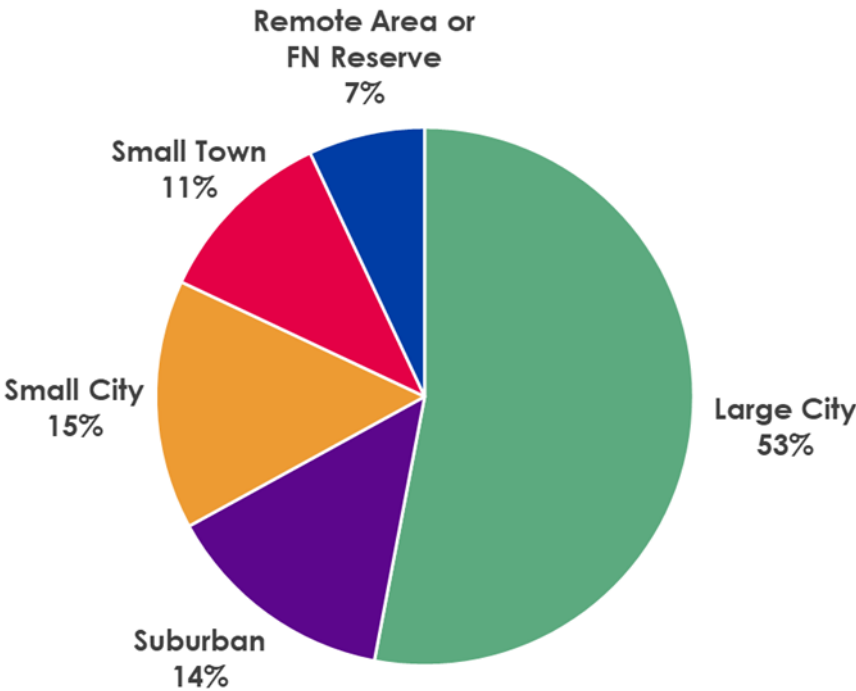
## Participant Demographics

After data cleaning, the final data set included responses from 292 youth. The participants were aged 14–24, with an average age of 18, with three-fourths (73%) of the participants being 18 and under. Nearly half of the participants were from Ontario (49%), followed by British Columbia (16%), and Québec (11%) (see Table 1 for full distribution). There were no participants from Yukon, Northwest Territories, or Nunavut. Most participants lived in large cities (i.e., with populations >100,000) (see Figure 1) and with their parents (see Figure 2). Participants were primarily White (86%) and 9% were Indigenous (see Figure 3). Most youth were born in Canada (91%) and 9% indicated they were born in another country. Similarly, most had parents born within Canada (74%), while 16% had at least one parent who had been born in another country. Almost half (49%) of youth who completed the survey said they were raised in a Christian religion.

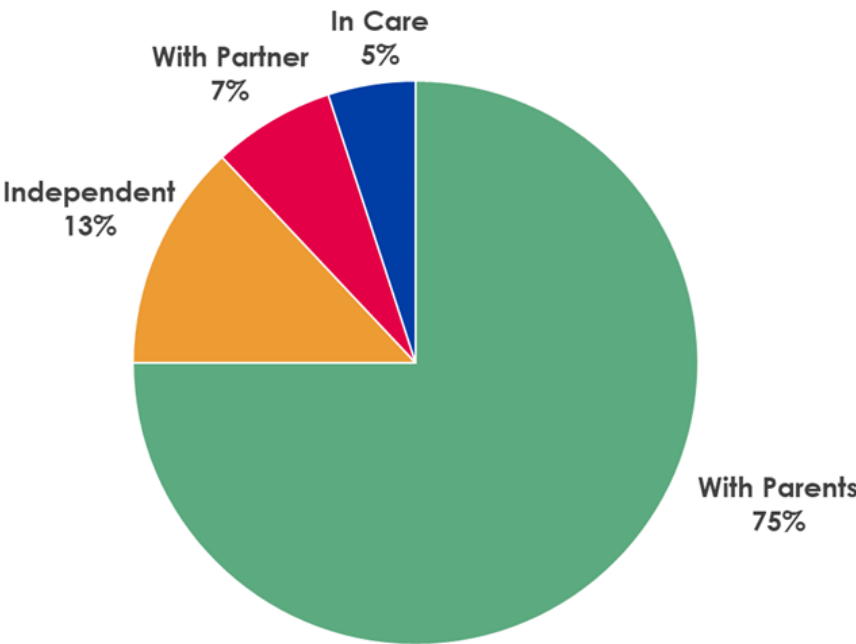
**Table 1. Participant distribution by province and territory**

Provinces and Territories	Number of Participants	Percent
British Columbia	47	16%
Alberta	25	9%
Saskatchewan	<10	<5%
Manitoba	13	5%
Ontario	143	49%
Quebec	33	11%
New Brunswick	<10	<5%
Nova Scotia	<10	<5%
Prince Edward Island	<10	<5%
Newfoundland and Labrador	<10	<5%
Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>100%</b>

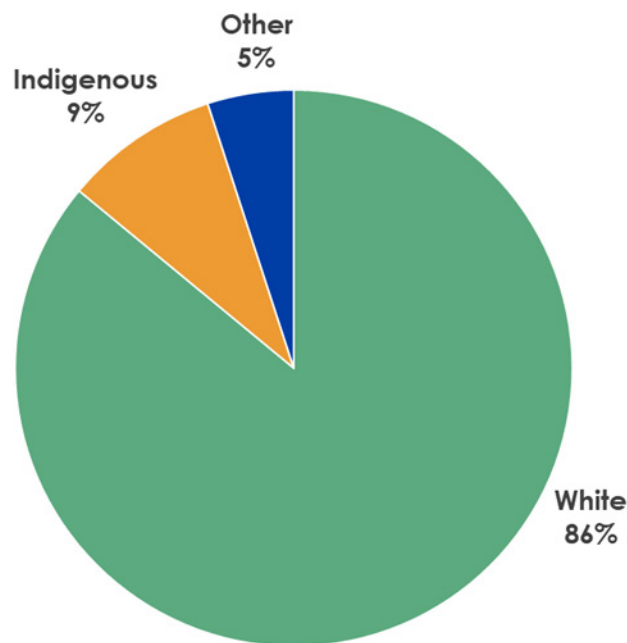
**Figure 1. Participant distribution by area type/city type.**



**Figure 2. Participant living situation.**




**Figure 3. Participant ethno-racial identity.**



In the survey instrument, the researchers provided the following definition of gender: “gender refers to your own internal feeling of what your gender is and may not match what your birth certificate says or what other people assume your gender is. If you are unsure of what a term means, you can find definitions here.” Participants were able to select all terms that applied and were able to select “another option” and provide an option not listed. In terms of gender identity, 52% of participants chose woman/girl, 24% chose man/boy, 30% chose trans, 20% chose transmasculine, 21% chose cisgender, and 27% chose nonbinary. Other gender identities selected included agender (6%), genderqueer (12%), genderfluid (12%), Two Spirit (<5%), transfeminine (<5%), and another option not listed (<5%).

The researchers provided the following definition of sexual orientation in the survey: “sexual orientation refers to who you are romantically and/or sexually interested in.” Participants were able to select all terms that applied and were able to select “another option” and provide an option not listed. In terms of sexual orientation, 36% chose bisexual, 32% chose queer, 25% chose pansexual,



22% chose lesbian, 17% chose gay, and 17% chose questioning. Other sexual orientations selected included demisexual (12%), Two Spirit (<5%), aromantic (<5%), and another option not listed (6%).

In representing the data in this report, the researchers made the decision to indicate responses fewer than 5% as “<5%” in tables and in the results and discussion section. The rationale behind this decision was to avoid compromising the anonymity of youth participants.

### **Data Collection Error (Survey Tool)**

In assessing relationship and dating violence among 2SLGBTQI youth, the survey covered four domains: (a) physical violence, (b) emotional abuse/control, (c) sexual violence, and (d) virtual violence. Due to a data collection error relating to the survey tool, the first two domains were visible only to the participants who completed the survey in the first month ( $n = 126$ ). Questions about experiences of sexual violence and virtual violence (the third and fourth domains, respectively) were shown throughout the entire period the survey was open (i.e., all participants [ $N = 292$ ] had these two latter domains visible).

### **Data Collection in the Context of COVID-19**

Though every effort was made to ensure the survey was accessible, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the shape of data collection. For example, COVID-19 resulted in the closure of many public services that 2SLGBTQ youth would normally access. The closure of community spaces such as libraries and 2SLGBTQI centers may have meant that some 2SLGBTQ youth were unable to access or complete the survey due to a lack of internet access or privacy at home. This lack of access to publicly available technology may mean an underrepresentation of 2SLGBTQ youth who typically rely on such services for access to the internet and social media.


# Results and Discussion

## Connections to 2SLGBTQI Communities

After the demographics section of the Speak Out survey, participants were asked about their community, family connections, and personal support. These questions examined how youth felt they were treated in their community relative to their gender, sexuality, or in some cases other marginalized identities.

**Gender and sexual orientation.** While nearly 7 in 10 youth said they were open about their gender identity ( $n = 146$ ; 68%) and sexual orientation ( $n = 195$ ; 68%) with “everyone close to them,” a smaller proportion chose the option stating their parents (26%), sibling (18%), or at least one other family member (21%) knew about their gender, and less than a quarter said their parents (24%), sibling (22%), or another family member (17%) knew about their sexual orientation. This disconnect between being generally “out” about their gender and sexuality but not specifically out to all family members suggests that “everyone close to me” may not include blood relatives or traditional immediate family members. This could be because many young people depend on their family to feed and house them, and in fact, most youth in this survey (75%) indicated they lived with their parents. While research shows that youth who feel permission to come out have better mental health (McConnell et al., 2016; Ryan et al., 2010), youth may hesitate to come out to family who may kick them out of their home or impose other negative consequences on their home life. However, a large proportion of the youth participants (45%) said at least one friend or chosen family member knew about their sexual orientation, suggesting some youth have alternative social support. These findings are in line with previous research that has indicated that youth are often selective about who they are “out” to depending on their unique situation (Caba et al., 2022).

**Social contacts.** Social connections in the 2SLGBTQI community could influence how youth cope with dating violence. Most youth knew someone who was a gender minority, such as a friend/acquaintance (82%) or a friend/chosen family member (54%). Almost all gender minority youth (98%) who took our survey




knew at least one other gender minority person. Similarly, most youth also knew someone who was a sexual orientation minority, whether a friend/acquaintance (84%) or a friend/chosen family member (85%). Sixteen percent had a sibling who was a sexual orientation minority, and more than a quarter had another family member who was. Losing a friend after disclosure of their sexual orientation was reported by 16% of participants. Loss of friendship is a particularly significant consequence of coming out as peer relationships are especially important during adolescence and early adulthood (Rossi, 2010). Previous research has indicated that sexual minority youth had smaller social networks, had drifted away from friends, and had higher worries about losing friends than their heterosexual peers (Bond, 2018; Diamond & Lucas, 2004). Given the number of individuals who have lost a friend after disclosing their sexual orientation, this seems to remain a significant issue for 2SLGBTQ youth and may impact the quality and amount of social support that they receive following experiences of gender-based violence.

## Feelings of (Un)Safety

Unfortunately, 2SLGBTQ youth tend to experience negative attitudes and hostility from members of society including their peers which can create isolation and feelings of rejection (McCabe et al., 2013; Myers et al., 2020). Many participants in our survey reported being discriminated against in their daily lives based on their gender expression (50%) and sexual orientation (43%). Participants also noted that there were other aspects of their identity that contributed to them feeling unsafe, particularly mental health (64%), class (22%), real or perceived ethnicity (12%), and real or perceived religion (11%).

Despite the general belief that the world is now more LGBT-friendly (Browne & Nash, 2014), more than half of the youth who completed our survey had still heard the word “gay” used as an insult (59%). In fact, routinely hearing homophobic comments (e.g., “that’s so gay,” “dyke,” “faggot”) is a common occurrence for 64% of Canadian students who heard these slurs on a weekly basis (Peter et al., 2021). Among Speak Out participants, most had heard the derogatory expression “that’s so gay” (73%) or slurs like faggot or dyke (74%).



The majority (73%) also heard negative comments or jokes about the 2SLGBTQ community from people around them who did not realize that they were 2SLGBTQ-identified.

Furthermore, almost half (45%) of the youth had been criticized for not dressing “normal” for their gender. Fifty-two percent had been told to act more “masculine” or “feminine.” Some youth (17%) had been told that being gender nonconforming or transgender made a family member uncomfortable. Twenty-five percent of youth had been told their identity was “just a phase” by a family member—a persistent myth about minority sexual orientation or gender (Munro et al., 2019). Unfortunately, some youth (8%) had been told this by a lesbian, gay, or bisexual person. This demonstrates that discrimination persists within the 2SLGBTQ community as well as from outside of it. Facing discrimination from another 2SLGBTQ person may be particularly disheartening to youth who look to 2SLGBTQ communities for support related to their emerging identities. Overall, however, a large majority of the harassment participants experienced was from those outside 2SLGBTQ communities.

Research with LGBTQ youth demonstrates that they encounter microaggressions related to their gender and sexuality in day-to-day life (Munro et al., 2019), which was reflected in the findings of the survey. A common experience participants had was being referred to by the wrong pronoun, including by a family member (36%), or a stranger or acquaintance (41%). Thirteen percent of participants had someone avoid sitting next to them. Seven percent experienced a co-worker or boss being unfriendly to them due to their gender expression. Concerningly, 16% had been called “it” or another dehumanizing term. Participants also reported being gawked at in public (36%) and receiving rude comments on their appearance (18%).

Participants in this survey experienced greater negativity about their gender identity than their sexual orientation. This might be because of increased visibility and improved rights for those with sexual minority identities due to political activism in recent years (Browne & Nash, 2014). Some argue that this has led to greater acceptance for sexual minorities while acceptance of gender


expression and nonconformity consistently lags (Munro et al., 2019). However, despite any gains, cisheterosexism is still very present in Canadian schools and communities. All across the country, 2SLGBTQ people and youth are negatively impacted by the reassertion of the heterosexual norm (i.e., heterosexism) and of the gender binary, therefore, despite legal advancements, we have yet to achieve equity and equality for all 2SLGBTQ people in Canada (Nash & Browne, 2021; Stonefish & Lafreniere, 2015).

## Relationships and Dating Violence

Many participants (82%) had been in a romantic relationship (defined as someone they spend time with, or a relationship that involves sex). Less than half (40%) of youth said they were currently in a relationship when they completed the survey. Youths' dating partners encompassed a broad range of genders, including man/boy (38%), woman/girl (33%), nonbinary (16%), trans (15%), and transmasculine (10%). Most youth were dating someone their age (39%) or 1–2 years older than them (23%). Encouragingly, more than half of the youth in our survey (62%) said they had been in at least one healthy relationship. Most (70%) said they had been with a partner who had shown affection to them (e.g., made them laugh, said they cared for them).

## Experiences of Dating Violence


**Physical Violence.** Of the 126 participants who answered questions related to physical abuse, very few reported any incidents. While in low percentages (i.e., for each item, <5% but greater than 0%), participants reported that someone they were dating physically assaulted them. Due to the data collection error, it is likely that the low percentage of those who experienced physical abuse is an underrepresentation of the rate of physical abuse among 2LSGBTQ youth. Literature from the US indicates that LGBT youth are at a higher risk for all forms of violence, including physical violence, in dating relationships as compared to their heterosexual peers (Dank et al., 2014; Luo et al., 2014; Reuter et al., 2015). As such, the likelihood of physical violence being underrepresented or misrepresented in this study is high.



**Emotional violence.** Like physical violence, very few participants reported emotional violence. For 5% of youth, their partner insisted on knowing who they were with all the time, and 6% of youth reported feeling owned or controlled by their partner. Seven percent of youth indicated that someone they were dating lied to them (e.g., about where they were or things they did), while 12% noted that their dating partners did not let them spend time with other people. Ten percent of participants' partners insisted that they didn't say or do something that they knew they did (gaslighting). Additionally, 5% of youth indicated that their partner said or did things to hurt their feelings on purpose. While in lower percentages (i.e., for each item, <5% but greater than 0%), participants also reported that their partners: blamed them for the bad things they did; brought up something from the past to hurt them; threatened self-harm if they broke up with them; made them afraid to tell others the truth; treated them in a way that resulted in them feeling insecure about their housing; insulted, swore, shouted, or yelled at them; used a slur towards them based on their race, ethnicity, religion, ability, or other identity; cheated on them by having a sexual relationship with someone else; and made them feel unsafe or uneasy when spending time together.

These findings support previous literature that has found that LGBTQ youth are at an increased risk of psychological and/or emotional dating violence (Dank et al., 2014; Gillum, 2017). Specifically, Dank and colleagues (2014) found that sexual minority youth were 46% more likely to experience psychological dating violence than their non-sexual minority peers, and Gillum (2017) reported that 88% of their sample reported psychological/emotional abuse in their dating relationships.

**Virtual violence.** With the rise of social media and other forms of digital communication (e.g., texting), technology is increasingly being used by abusive partners to limit or control their partner's behaviour and social connections. The most common methods of virtual violence youth reported were a partner




checking up on them via text messages (34%), making them afraid to ignore phone calls or other contact (18%), and surveilling their social media (18%). Lesser common methods of virtual violence that youth reported included being sent sexually suggestive messages and/or photos the sender knew they didn't want (12%), being pressured to send sexually suggestive photos of themselves (11%), and being threatened over text, instant messaging, or on the phone (9%).

The proliferation of electronic media allows an abusive person constant access to their partner. Virtual violence makes it more difficult for youth to find a safe space where they do not have to cater to the partner's demands. While there is a dearth of literature on virtual violence, our results are in line with a report by the Urban Institute Justice Policy Center (2013). In this report, Zweig and colleagues (2013) indicate that there are high rates of cyber dating abuse among youth, and LGBTQ youth reported the highest levels of cyber dating violence in their sample.

**Sexual violence.** Questions about sexual violence were only shown to those who answered 'yes' ( $n = 66$ ) to a question inquiring whether they had ever had sex when they didn't want to (i.e., "Have you ever had sex with the person or people you are currently dating [or if you are not currently dating, the person or people you most recently dated] when you didn't want to because of the following reasons?"). The phrasing for this question was chosen based on past research which has shown that people are less likely to admit to sexual harm if stronger language acknowledging sexual violence is used (Edwards et al., 2014).

Most youth had not experienced sexual violence (and had never sexually harmed a partner themselves). While in low percentages (i.e., for each item, <5% but greater than 0%), participants reported that their partners: used force (hitting, holding down, using a weapon) to make them have sex; insisted on sex when they did not want to, or insisted on sex without a condom (but did not use physical force); and pressured them to have sex with people other than them for money. Of the 23% ( $n = 66$ ) who had engaged in sexual behaviour when they did not want to, the most common reason endorsed was that they wanted to




please their partner (73%), or they felt they had to (71%). Thirty-five percent said that they were afraid that the other person would end the relationship; 26% said the other person made them feel worthless or humiliated until they gave in; 23% said the other person held them down or made it so they could not leave; 18% said the other person threatened to end the relationship; 21% said they were afraid the other person would use physical violence; 9% said the other person used physical violence; 14% said they were so drunk or high that they were unaware of what was going on; 12% said they were so drunk or high that they could not do anything to stop the person; 26% said they were so drunk or high they felt they did not care.

Sexual minority youth are more likely than their heterosexual peers to abuse substances (Watson et al., 2018), which puts them at increased risk of violence. They are also more likely than their heterosexual peers to be houseless and forced to tolerate abuse for shelter (Abramovitch, 2012). The findings from our survey shared above thus reflect specific risk factors for violence among 2SLGBTQ youth.

## Seeking Help

We asked youth what kind of support they sought in the aftermath of gender-based violence as well as what services they wanted related to dating violence. Sixty-one percent of youth who experienced dating violence did not seek help. Of those who did, 53% said they did so after experiencing emotional violence. Smaller proportions sought help due to sexual violence (31%), physical violence (12%), or for other reasons (13%). Many forms of violence in romantic relationships go unreported (Stephenson et al., 2019). In addition, youth may know reporting physical or sexual violence to a service provider could result in authorities (such as the police or child services) intervening or their parents being informed (Miller et al., 2010). Youth may not seek help out of fear of being outed to their families, which might occur if authorities became involved. When asked what kind of help they wanted with dating violence, over 96% of the youth did not choose intervention from police, school authorities, or other official sources. This reluctance could be related to historical and ongoing violence experienced by 2SLGBTQ people at the hands of authorities such as the police.



Experiences of violence via the police is particularly prevalent for people who are Black, Indigenous, disabled, poor, working class, and sex workers who are part of LGBTQ communities (Waldron, 2020). Lack of help-seeking could also reflect culturally inappropriate service suggestions (Cochran, 2001; Higgins et al., 2021).

Of those youths who experienced dating violence, over half (55%) sought help a month or less after it occurred. Most of the remaining youth sought help within 6 months (29%), with a smaller number of people waiting a year or more to look for help (16%). Only 15% of those who faced dating violence sought help after the first incident, while roughly twice (32%) that number sought help after 2–3 instances of violence. The remaining 53% said they had sought help after dating violence occurred on four or more occasions.


Most youth elected to go to a friend or chosen family member (29%) while others went to a school counsellor (12%). Youth also chose other options (7% or less) such as parents, community service providers, physicians, and others. These results are in line with the broader body of literature on dating violence reporting among youth which identifies friends and other informal sources of support as being the most popular help-seeking options (Bundock et al., 2018). Of those who chose to give another answer, most mentioned a therapist or therapy app. The lack of interest in seeking help from parents, community service providers, and physicians could be explained in several ways. For example, a youth who has unsupportive parents might not be able to make an appointment with a counsellor if it requires a parent's involvement (e.g., to drive to appointments, or handle insurance claims; Higgins et al., 2021). Notably, the majority of youth in this survey (70%) indicated that, had parental permission been required to participate, they would have been unable to complete the survey. This may indicate a lack of support from parents and caregivers more broadly. Alternatively, youth may be wary of counselors, community services, or physicians who are not explicitly LGBT-friendly (Higgins et al., 2021). Whatever the reasons, 2SLGBTQ youth respondents are not accessing many formal supports. Service providers may need to reduce barriers or reach out to youth proactively. A good first step would be to ensure 2SLGBTQ information

is prominently displayed, as well as to ensure patient confidentiality so youth could be reassured that they will not be outed to their parents if they seek help.

Almost half of the youth who sought help said they received the help they wanted (49%). For the largest proportion this was emotional support such as counselling (29%) or advice (18%). Only 36% received help from someone who was 2SLGBTQ, though most youth (78%) said they would prefer to get help from a 2SLGBTQ person. Of those youths who were raised in a specific religion, many said they would want a service focused on a particular religion (78%). This is particularly important as many organized religions repress or outright discriminate against 2SLGBTQ people. Youth may find services more useful if they are informed by their religious background, though these services must be accepting of 2SLGBTQ people. Some Black, Indigenous, and POC youth (33%) said they would be interested in services focused on specific racial groups.

Though 57% of youth knew of a 2SLGBTQ organization in their community, it was harder to access specific service providers (e.g., counsellors) who were 2SLGBTQ-identified. Often service providers do not have any 2SLGBTQ staff, particularly in remote communities (Weisz & Black, 2009). Almost half of youth (49%) wanted a dating violence support group focused on 2SLGBTQ youth, while some (25%) were fine with a group focused just on youth. Thirty-seven percent of youth wanted a service that focused specifically on the needs of gender minorities, while 31% of youth preferred a service focused on sexual orientation. Overwhelmingly, most youth chose online resources about dating violence (78%). The relative anonymity of finding information online might play a role in this preference. Other popular options were community resources (55%), drop-in centres (45%), text/email (40%), in person (40%), or posters (39%). A smaller number (17%) wanted to find information from an authority such as the police.


When we asked youth what kind of help they wanted related to dating violence, peer-to-peer support with youth who have faced similar experiences was the most popular (61%). This reflects research showing that LGBTQ youth look to their peers the most for support (Bundock et al., 2018). Youth also selected



group counselling with other youth who had similar experience (45%). This suggests that if there is an effort to bring together youth who have faced dating violence, more youth may sign on if it is conducted peer-to-peer rather than in a group therapeutic setting. This could be due to factors such as privacy. Professional help may require family involvement or be bound by reporting requirements which actively put youth at risk of being outed (Higgins et al., 2021). A peer is not bound by any professional code of ethics, so they are not mandated to report instances of abuse to the authorities. For youth who are marginalized by their gender or sexual orientation, this type of privacy may be preferred. Service providers should explore options to provide indirect support to youth. While the ethical obligations of service providers are unlikely to change, there are ways to communicate and support at a distance until youth are ready to seek formal services. Research has indicated that peer-to-peer programming is appropriate and effective for youth dating violence prevention among post-secondary students (Warthe et al., 2013) lending credence to the applicability of these programs for younger individuals as well.

Online support was the most consistently endorsed form of support. Specifically, online documents or info sheets (57%), online live chat with a counsellor or other support (52%), and texting/phoning a crisis line (49%) were the top choices. This trend is reflective of a broader trend towards seeking health help and advice online (Naslund et al., 2016). However, a large proportion were also interested in in-person help: at a private office (59%), community centre (49%), or drop-in centre (37%). For both online and in-person help, some youth commented with concerns that the services would not be extended to rural communities.

Out of the options provided on the survey, the majority wanted one-on-one counselling (79%), while other forms of support included testing for sexually transmitted infections (STIs; 68%), or a safe space for the night (67%). Though most youth who completed the survey lived at home (75%), almost half (49%) said they would like housing/houselessness resources. This suggests youth feel their position in the family home is not stable and that they are in danger of being homeless, which is reflected in the broader research as well (Abramovitch, 2012).



In order to discern what issues were most important for support services to focus on, we asked youth to rank the types of dating violence by importance. The highest average ranking was homophobic violence. Online violence and transphobic violence followed. Next, emotional, physical, and sexual violence were selected. Cultures of transphobia and homophobia are thus topics that youth would like to see prioritized in gender-based violence prevention efforts in addition to being provided information about different types of violence (emotional, physical, sexual). Youth seem to be aware of the pervasive quality of cisheteronormativity in shaping experiences of discrimination and violence (Donovan & Barnes, 2020).

## Conclusion

Most youth said they were open with everyone about their sexual orientation and gender, however, ‘everyone’ may not include relatives or immediate family members. A large proportion said they were open about their sexual orientation and gender to friends and chosen family members. In terms of youths’ social contexts, most youth knew someone who was a gender minority or a sexual minority. It was more common for youth to have someone in their family who was a sexual minority as opposed to a gender minority.

A large number of participants reported being discriminated against based on their sexual orientation and gender. Other aspects of their identity (i.e., mental health, class, ethnicity, religion) also contributed to them feeling unsafe. More than half of the youth had heard gay used as an insult and jokes or negative comments about 2SLGBTQ communities. Just under half of all youth were criticized for not appearing “normal” for their gender and a quarter were told it was a phase. Misgendering was also a common experience for youth and some youth experienced hostile treatment related to their gender expression. Negativity about gender expression was more common than about sexual orientation.

The majority of participants had been in a relationship and dating partners came from a diverse range of genders. Most youth did not report most forms

of dating violence, although this could be attributable to a data error. In terms of emotional violence, participants reported a range of controlling behaviours. For sexual violence, participants cited a number of factors that influenced their experiences, such as drugs and alcohol, physical force, verbal threats, and feelings for their partner (i.e., wanting to please them).

Nearly two-thirds of youth did not seek help following experiences of dating violence. Of those youths who seek help, over half sought help within a month. Most youth chose to go to friends or family members for support. Nearly half of youth who sought help received the help they wanted, such as counselling or advice. Very few received help from a 2SLGBTQ person, though it was strongly preferred. When seeking information about dating violence, most youth chose online resources and preferred peer-to-peer support.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this report, the following recommendations are put forward to further support 2SLGBTQ youth and research into this area:

1. **More service providers need training in how to best support 2SLGBTQ youth:** Service providers can support 2SLGBTQ youth by ensuring all their youth services are visibly 2SLGBTQ-friendly, rather than expecting youth to disclose their identity to inquire about 2SLGBTQ support. Even further, service providers need to have developed and established cultural competency and humility with which to support LGBTQ youth who have experienced dating violence (Reuter & Whitton, 2018). Often LGBTQ youth do not have formal services they can safely go to when they face difficulties, especially if they are also part of another disadvantaged group (e.g., those living with disabilities) (Gower et al., 2019).
2. **More mental health service providers who are part of 2SLGBTQ communities are needed:** Given youths' preference to receive mental health services from a 2SLGBTQ provider, more individuals from these communities need to be recruited and trained in mental health care. Research indicates that individuals in the LGBTQ community matriculating


into clinical training programs face unique issues while enrolled in these programs (Hsueh et al., 2021; Lykins, 2021). Programs should strive to improve their recruitment and retention of these individuals by addressing the barriers identified in the literature.

3. **More services need to be developed to better meet the needs of**

**2SLGBTQ youth in the aftermath of gender-based violence:** Due to the higher prevalence of dating violence among 2SLGBTQ youth, there needs to be targeted and tailored services for this population. However, services must consider that 2SLGBTQ youth are heterogeneous, and are impacted by violence differently depending on their situation, social location, and other individual and systemic factors (Subirarna-Malaret et al., 2019). Despite many youth choosing not to seek help from ‘official’ sources (such as police) there were significant levels of interest in almost all of the dating violence assistance options we offered. Additional services looking to serve 2SLGBTQ youth specifically should favor privacy, peer support, and flexible (e.g., online) options which make allowances for the additional privacy youth may need to protect themselves from discrimination or backlash.

4. **More research on experiences of dating violence among Canadian**

**2SLGBTQ youth is needed:** Research is needed to explore how homophobia and transphobia and the systems of oppression that intersect with them perpetuate trauma and dehumanize 2SLGBTQI youth such that these youths sometimes perpetrate violence against their own partners. The one aspect of the survey that was not taken up in this report was survey respondents’ perpetration of emotional (11%), physical (4%), digital violence (24%), and sexual violence (19%). Future research should explore how 2SLGBTQ youth can become both perpetrators and victims within systems of domination, such as cisheteronormativity and White supremacy, which perpetuate violence, including intergenerationally. Future research should also consider including comparison groups (e.g., heterosexual and cisgender youth), other methodologies (e.g., longitudinal research), and ethnically and racially diverse sampling (Reuter & Whitton, 2018).



While this report provides an important baseline of knowledge, more research on individuals who are outside of the demographics need to be undertaken. Given that our sample is mostly White, living in Ontario, and Christian, more research on minority individuals and those living in other provinces is needed. The survey did not capture well the experiences of youth who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, or youth with disabilities, who are at disproportionately high risk of gender-based violence (Abbas, 2022). Further, there were no participants from Yukon, Northwest Territories, or Nunavut. Given the differences in access to medical care between the southern and northern parts of Canada (Crooks & Schuurman, 2012), future research examining individuals in the territories would be of value and may reveal different patterns of service use and support among youth.

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