

# Who Are We Missing? The Impact of Requiring Parental or Guardian Consent on Research With Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Two-Spirit, Queer/Questioning Youth

## WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

There is a need for high-quality research on the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two-spirit, and queer/questioning (LGBT2Q+) youth. In Canada, research ethics boards typically require the consent of parent/guardians when conducting research with adolescents. However, this requirement may undermine young people's sense of agency and autonomy and overestimate the risk of research participation. This requirement may also systematically exclude some LGTBQ2+ youth from participating. This has ethical and practical implications, as this exclusion may lead to a biased sample and biased conclusions that may influence policy and practice.

The goal of this study was to test whether a requirement for parent/guardian consent would systematically limit which LGBT2Q+ youth participated in a survey study.

## WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

The researchers surveyed 60 youth (ages 14 to 18 years) in Ontario. Parent/guardian consent was not required to participate. As part of a larger study, participants answered a question about whether they would have participated in the research if parent/guardian consent was required. The researchers then compared the demographics of youth who would not participate if parent/guardian consent was required, with those who would.

## WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

- The results of this study suggest that requiring parent/guardian consent to participate in research may prevent the most vulnerable LGBT2Q+ youth from being represented in research.
- Researchers who study adolescent wellbeing (and organizations that partner with such researchers) and research ethics boards should consider the risks and benefits of requiring parent/guardian consent in order to participate in research.



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## **WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?**

22 out of 60 (36.7%) of youth said they would not have participated in the study if parent/guardian consent was required. Compared to those who would have participated, these youth had more negative attitudes towards their LGBT2Q+ identity, less family support, and more anxiety.

## **HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?**

Researchers can use this study to inform study designs and research ethics board applications. This study raises questions about how study procedures can lead to certain youth – and, specifically, vulnerable youth – from being excluded from health research. Researchers, as well as schools and organizations that partner in research, should consider ways to ensure their study populations represent all youth, including LGBT2Q+ and other underrepresented groups. The study authors suggest a number of alternatives to requiring parent consent, including encouraging youth to speak to a trusted adult in advance of deciding whether to participate.

## **ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS**

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## **KEYWORDS**

LGBT; Consent; Research ethics;  
Adolescent research

## **FULL REFERENCE**

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