

The Trevor Project Research Brief: Asexual and Ace Spectrum Youth

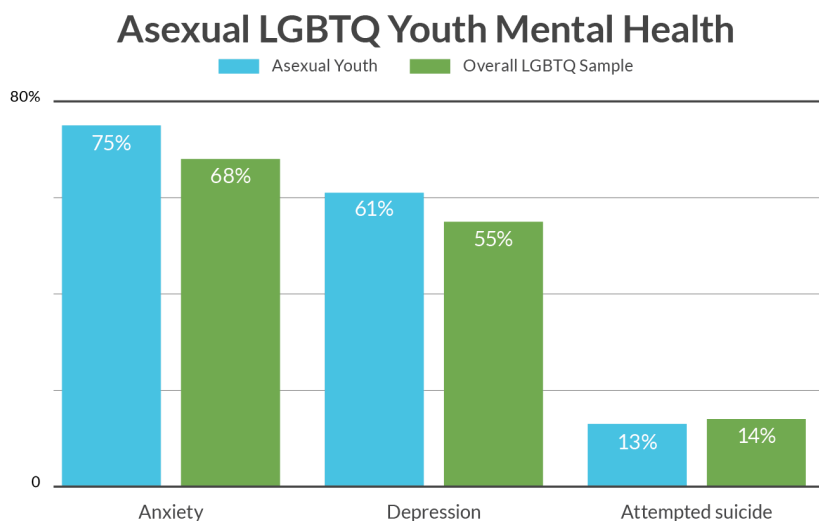
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Summary

Someone who is asexual (or ace) does not experience, or experiences very little, sexual attraction and/or does not desire sexual contact (Asexual Visibility and Education Network, 2020). Because sexual attraction is only one type of attraction, a person can still be physically or emotionally attracted to someone including engaging in romantic activities such as dating, falling in love, or getting married. Therefore, any asexual or ace spectrum person can also be straight, gay, lesbian, queer, or any other sexual or romantic orientation (Brotto et al., 2010). There is diversity within the asexual community with many adopting additional terms to explain their sexual orientation with respect to romantic desires or types of relationships (Prause & Graham, 2007; The Trevor Project, 2019). However, there has been a lack of research on asexuality, despite growing calls from within the asexual community for increased visibility and awareness (Brotto et al., 2010). Even less is known about asexual youth. Using data from [The Trevor Project's 2020 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health](#), this brief explores sexual orientation, gender identity, and mental health indicators among asexual youth.

Results

In our sample of over 40,000 LGBTQ youth, 10% identified as asexual or ace spectrum. When given additional options to describe their sexual orientation, asexual youth further selected demisexual (15%), polyamorous (9%), and greysexual (9%). And consistent with previous research, many asexual youth also selected romantic attraction labels such as panromantic (20%), biromantic (17%), and aromantic (13%).



Asexual youth reported higher rates of depression and anxiety compared to the overall LGBTQ sample. Asexual LGBTQ youth reported slightly greater rates of symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder (aOR = 1.12, $p < .001$) and major depressive disorder (aOR = 1.19, $p < .001$) in the past two weeks compared to LGBTQ youth who did not identify as asexual. Rates of attempted suicide in the past year were slightly lower for asexual youth (aOR = .82, $p < .001$).

A larger proportion of asexual youth were transgender or nonbinary compared to the overall sample of LGBTQ youth. Overall, 25% of the LGBTQ youth in our sample were transgender or nonbinary, and 9% were questioning if they were. This compares to 41% of asexual youth who were transgender or nonbinary, and 13% who were questioning if they were transgender or nonbinary. Within these broader categories, 3% of cisgender men, 9% of cisgender women, 6% of transgender women, 13% of transgender men, 20% of nonbinary youth, and 15% of youth who were questioning their gender identified as asexual.

Methodology

A cross-sectional online survey was used to collect data between December 2019 and March 2020. LGBTQ youth ages 13–24 who resided in the U.S. were recruited via targeted ads on social media. The final analytic sample was 40,001 LGBTQ youth. Youth were first asked, “Which of these options best describes your sexual orientation. We understand that there are many different sexual identities (e.g., asexual, sapphic, sapiosexual, etc), please pick the one that best describes you here first, and you will be given the option to elaborate in the next question.” Youth were then provided a follow-up question, “Do you have any other way(s) of describing your sexual orientation? Please select all that apply,” with 31 possible choices. Our analyses included all youth who selected asexual/ace spectrum ($n = 4,029$). Adjusted odds ratios predicting mental health indicators controlled for sex assigned at birth, gender identity, age, and sexual orientation.

Looking Ahead

While not everyone who is asexual wishes to be part of the LGBTQ community, LGBTQ youth who are asexual are an often-overlooked group. These results show that most asexual youth who identify with the LGBTQ community endorse a range of sexual and romantic orientations. Additionally, more asexual youth in our sample were transgender or nonbinary compared to the overall sample of LGBTQ youth. Finally, asexual youth reported higher rates of depression and anxiety compared to the overall sample of LGBTQ youth sample. Taken together, these findings suggest that efforts must be made to include asexual youth in LGBTQ youth outreach and in suicide prevention and intervention efforts. As part of The Trevor Project’s mission to end suicide among all LGBTQ youth, we recognize the need to include asexual youth in all aspects. We integrate information about asexuality into all of our trainings and services. We are also actively involved in recognitions and celebrations of the Asexual Awareness Week (Ace Week) and have included information about asexuality in our online resources.

References

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