

Experiences of Trans and Non-Binary Youth on the Autism Spectrum Under Age 16 in Clinical Care

What is “Autism/The Autism Spectrum”?

Autism spectrum is an umbrella term that describes a wide spectrum of experiences or challenges. People are born autistic, and autism is a type of neurodiversity (diversity in the way brains work). A person on the autism spectrum may connect differently with others in the way they communicate, handle social situations, or perceive others, and may also have sensory sensitivities, or engage in repetitive behaviours.

Why “Autistic”?

We use the term ‘**autistic**’ here because this is the preferred term by autistic trans and gender-diverse youth from our community consultation committee, and it also aligns with what is generally understood within autistic community as respectful because it’s the preferred term for self-identification. However, we acknowledge the autistic community is large and diverse, and not everyone (including the youth reported on here from this study) will identify with this term, and we respect any other terms those on the autism spectrum use to self-identify.

There are 10 youth who were on the autism spectrum*:



7 Female/Girls
& 3 Male/Boys



All 10 were enrolled in school
(either public or private school)



2 identify as Indigenous
& 8 identify as White



All 10 were living with their
birth/adoptive family



4 youth come from
an immigrant family

Average age at enrollment (first medical appointment at gender clinic) is 13.5 years (from age 11 up to a maximum age of 15.9).

**Extracted from clinic medical records—not from survey self-report.
Diagnosis may not be confirmed.*



CAUTION: We want to share these results because data on autistic trans youth is so limited, BUT:

- 1) With only **10 autistic youth**, results should not be over-interpreted, and
- 2) Results are for autistic trans youth in clinical care and could differ from the larger group of autistic trans youth not in clinical care.

Most Common External Stressors Experienced by Families of Autistic Youth (as reported by youth)

1. Someone in youth’s family got involved with youth’s school regarding gender issues
2. Unwanted parenting advice from strangers
3. Someone in youth’s family had to get involved regarding a uniform dress code
4. Unwanted parenting advice from friend/family
5. Someone in youth’s family had to defend right to use washroom
6. Other family members no longer speak to youth’s family

Most Common Sources of Support for Autistic Youth

1. Parents
2. In-person friends
3. Other in-person peers (e.g., trans friends, non-trans friends, classmates)
4. Adult leaders (e.g., extracurricular leaders, coaches, and teachers)
5. Other family members (e.g., extended family and siblings)
6. Youth’s regular doctor (e.g., family doctor or pediatrician)
7. Online friends
8. Youth’s mental health provider
9. Community support (e.g., faith-based, cultural/ethnic, or LGBT2Q community)

Autistic Youth Living in Their Gender



10% - None of the time

30% - Some of the time

60% - All of the time

Autistic youth were living in their gender “**all of the time**” *less* than the other youth in the study, and autistic youth were living in their gender “**some of the time**” or “**none of the time**” *more* than the other youth in the study.

We did not find any significant difference* between autistic youth & the rest of the youth in the study for the following:

- Total months spent seeking hormone treatment
- Level of youth’s gender positivity¹ and gender distress²
- Level of youth’s overall social support, emotional/informational support, tangible support, affectionate support, and positive social interaction
- The number of different types of providers seen before gender clinic
- Whether youth participated in (or their parents considered having them participate in) conversion therapy
- Their ages through key milestones in their gender journey
- Parental support youth said they had for their gender identity and their gender-affirming medical care (when youth first disclosed their gender and currently)

**Note of caution: With only 10 autistic youth, these comparisons have low statistical power.*

Who are the participants in this study?

There are 174 youth and 160 parents/caregivers participating in the Trans Youth CAN! study. Youth aged 15 or younger and who had reached puberty were recruited at their first appointment after referral for blockers or hormones at one of 10 medical clinics across Canada (Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, London, Toronto, Hamilton, Ottawa, Montreal, Halifax). Youth could also invite one parent or caregiver to participate. This data was collected between September 2017 and June 2019.

- 1 - What is Gender Positivity? Learn how we define and measure it here: <https://bit.ly/37irU3k>
- 2 - What is Gender Distress? Learn how we define and measure it here: <https://bit.ly/3rUvt9s>

