

**evolve**

March 2023

**Mental health &  
anxiety levels in the  
LGBTQIA+ community**

GLOBAL EDITION



# This resource is produced by Evolve, an inclusive mental health app that prioritises the mental health and wellbeing of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Evolve is on a mission to create a level playing field when it comes to access to mental health. We're among the leading mental health apps globally that focus specifically on the needs of the LGBTQIA+ community. The Evolve app provides a virtual safe space to members of the community along with evidence-based interventions to improve mental health outcomes. The app has over 400,000 installs and has been named by Google as one of the 'Top 5 Innovative Apps out of Asia-Pacific'.

Most research studies focusing at the intersection of mental health and LGBTQIA+ estimate that a queer-identifying individual is 3-4 times as likely to experience poor mental health compared to the general population. In this report, we aim to use proprietary data collected via our app to corroborate some of these findings by focusing specifically on the anxiety levels members of the community experience.

## The study

The report covers responses from over 2,100 individuals (55% of whom identify as LGBTQIA+). The data used combines responses to the GAD-7 questionnaire (a widely accepted assessment to measure anxiety levels) along with various qualitative research questions to dive deeper into the causes and symptoms of the anxiety.

We hope the data and findings in this report are used by researchers, policymakers and other stakeholders to advance policies and practices that foster mental health equity across the world.

To find out more about our app, scan the QR code below or visit [evolveinc.io](https://evolveinc.io)



## GAD-7 anxiety scores: Members of the community reported higher levels of anxiety

In this report, we've chosen to use anxiety as a proxy for mental health levels of the users who are part of this study. In order to objectively measure anxiety, we decided to use the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale-7, commonly known as the GAD-7. Further details about the questionnaire used and the scoring scale can be found in the appendix.

2,137 users completed the GAD-7 assessment, in which they answered seven questions and were scored on a scale of 0-21. A higher score indicates higher levels of anxiety. We observed that users who identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community reported higher anxiety levels on average (13.9) in comparison to those who did not identify as part of the community (13.1). Any score above 14 on the GAD-7 is considered to indicate a risk of 'Severe anxiety' and amongst the LGBTQIA+ cohort, over 45% of respondents had scores in this bracket compared to 38% of respondents in the non-LGBTQIA+ cohort. The high level findings clearly indicate that members of the community are at higher risk of experiencing poorer mental health compared to the overall population.

### Average GAD-7 Score (out of 21)



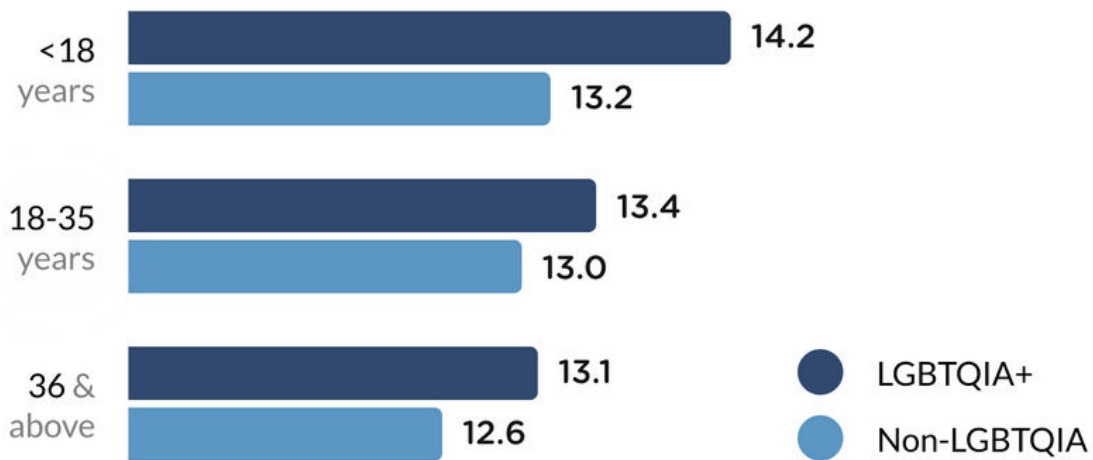
The participants identifying as queer reported higher anxiety levels in comparison to the non-LGBTQIA+ group.

While we saw a difference in GAD-7 scores across all users, we were keen to understand if this was a consistent trend across age groups. We noticed that across all 3 age categories we segmented the users into ( less than 18 years, 18-35 years and over 36 years), users who identified as LGBTQIA+ reported higher levels of anxiety.

However, the largest difference was observed was amongst the cohort that was less than 18 years old. 51% of the LGBTQIA+ respondents in this age group reported GAD-7 scores that constitute a 'severe risk' of Generalised Anxiety Disorder against 37% in the 18-35 years segment. Queer teenagers are often the most vulnerable segment when it comes to poor mental health because they're unable to freely explore their identity and aren't independent enough to avoid homophobic family and friends.

The 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, carried out by The Trevor Project, found that 60% of queer youth that wanted mental health support were unable to get it. This presents an extremely serious problem and innovative challenges that leverage technology and can deliver discreet interventions to these vulnerable segments are the need of the hour.

### Age profile comparison for anxiety



While the anxiety levels of the LGBTQIA+ cohort was higher across age groups, the highest difference was observed amongst teenagers.



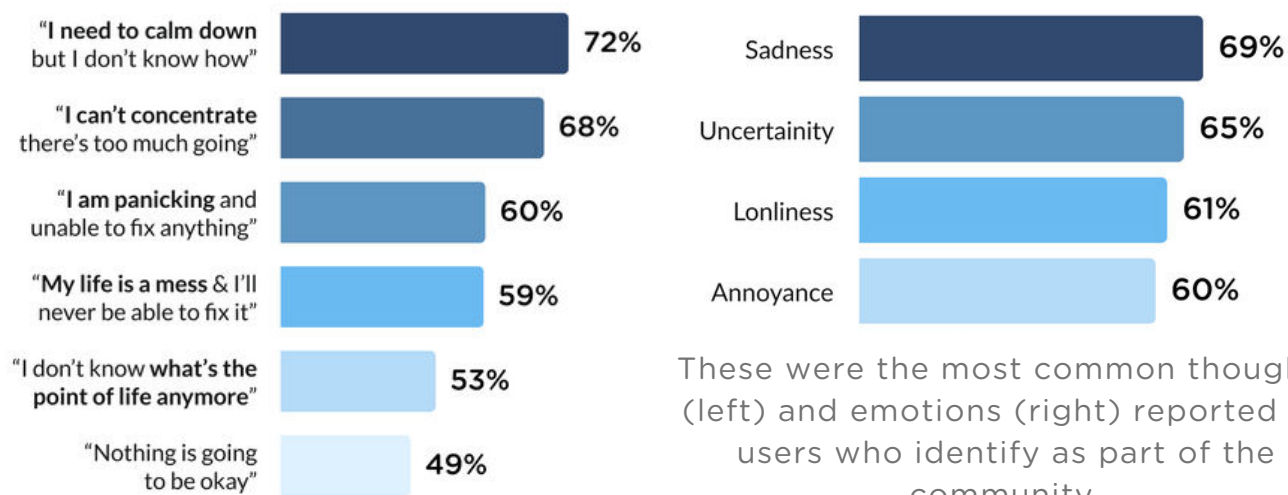
## Sof Mendoza (Any Pronouns)

Partnerships Manager - North America, Evolve



"The marginalization and discrimination experienced by LGBTQIA+ individuals in healthcare is a well-documented and pressing issue that requires systemic change. As a member of the community, I find this particularly concerning because LGBTQIA+ people often have unique health needs that are not taken into account by healthcare professionals, leaving our community with inadequate care. It's very important to create safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ people to feel comfortable and open about our identities, providing our community with the best care possible. A multi-faceted approach, including targeted training and inclusive policies for healthcare professionals, are some of the necessary steps to address this issue."

## Thoughts & emotions associated with anxiety



These were the most common thoughts (left) and emotions (right) reported by users who identify as part of the community.

The most common feelings and emotions associated with anxiety were reported to be sadness, uncertainty and loneliness. When we spoke to some of our users who participated in the study, there is often a feeling of extreme isolation with no one in their lives they can truly trust to vent out to or help them. They explained how experiences of discrimination and harassment in day-to-day life, rejection from one's family and friends and being subjected to hate crimes and incidents impact their mental health.

These feeling manifest into different negative thoughts highlighted above, some of which represent severe anxiety and indicate the need for immediate mental health intervention. Particularly thoughts like "I don't know what's the point of life anymore" and "My life is a mess and I'll never be able to fix it." This correlates with a survey of 34,000 youth carried out by the Trevor Project found that 45% of LGBTQ+ youth had seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year.

In order to help our users who feel isolated when dealing with anxiety, the Evolve app includes a collective safe space and communities to give users the support they often lack. In addition, we have virtual therapies that users can do at their own time and convenience without having to rely on finding time with an expert. These focus on extremely contextualised stressors members of the community experience, for example 'dealing with homophobic parents', 'dealing with micro-aggressions at work', etc.



## Rohan Arora (he/him)

Co-founder, Evolve



“Talking to our users, we have realized that there are varied challenges affecting individuals in the community at every stage of their lives. It starts from coming out to themselves and embracing their authentic being to dealing with reactions of near and dear ones to microaggressions in everyday life. These stress processes are chronic and additive and mostly cultural/societal.”

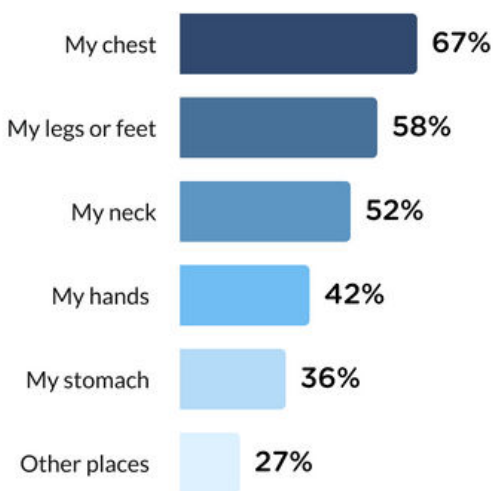
# Anxiety & its manifestation in the body

Anxiety, specially when chronic, manifests in the body in different ways. As part of the survey, we wanted to make users more self-aware about the physical symptoms of anxiety they experience. The most common areas in the body where users felt the anxiety were the chest (67%), feet (58%) and neck (36%). The most common symptoms included irregular/increased heart rates, restlessness and headaches which impact one's ability to be productive and function in one's daily tasks.

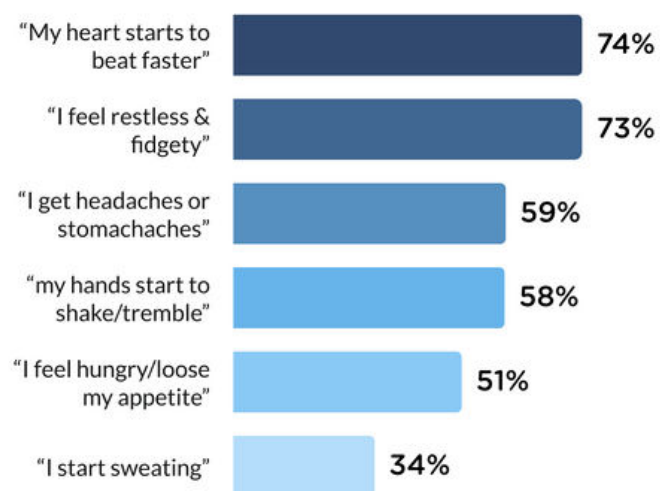
When anxiety builds up in the body for long periods of time, it can often impact other aspects of one's physical wellbeing leading to chronic inflammation and ailments. With the high rates of anxiety we've witnessed through this study, it also implies members of the LGBTQIA+ community, particularly the youth risk experiencing adverse impacts to their physical wellbeing as well.

This is compounded by the fact that members of the community often don't feel comfortable discussing physical or mental health issues with professionals because of fear of judgement and invasive questioning (United States Census Bureau).

## Where in your body do you feel anxiety?



## What symptoms do you experience?







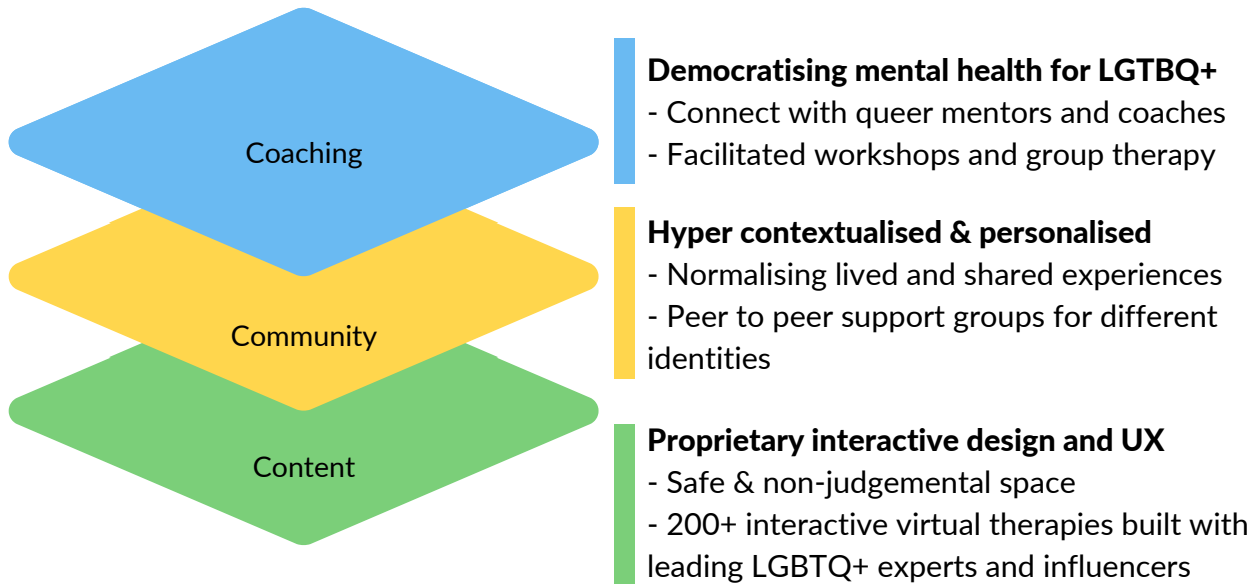
## Dr Sukriti Rex (she/her)

Research Lead, Evolve

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“We must recognize that the LGBTQIA+ community faces deep rooted stressors from society because of their identity. Members of the community face discrimination, prejudice, denial of civil and human rights, harassment and family rejection, which can lead to feelings of hopelessness, anxiety and despair. These feelings are often accompanied by extreme physical symptoms.”

# How Evolve is leveraging technology and design to solve this problem



At Evolve, we've created a three layered approach to improving mental health outcomes for the community. Our team has spent the last two years understanding user needs and creating a virtual safe space where users can be vulnerable and work on their stressors without any fear of judgement. We've collaborated with queer psychologists, influencers and other experts to create over 200 virtual therapies focused on contextualised causes of stress and anxiety such as homophobia, microaggressions and relationship anxiety.

The second layer of our solution is a peer to peer support layer for users to interact with others from around the world and openly talk about their experiences. For minority groups, research has proven that normalising lived and shared experiences through social validation helps reduce anxiety.

Over 400,000 users have interacted with our app and our average app rating is 4.7★



“This app is so beautiful and sweet, I feel so accepted I’m actually crying 💕”

Linda, 20



## Anshul Kamath (he/him)

Co-founder, Evolve



"This analysis conducted by our team at Evolve shares similar findings to multiple research initiatives at the intersection of mental health and the LGBTQIA+ community. Due to factors such as discrimination by mainstream society, excessive bullying and trauma, members of the community on average experience higher levels of anxiety and poorer mental health. Even within the community, certain sub-identities such as those who identify as bisexual or non-binary experience even higher levels of anxiety. Yet most mainstream mental health solutions fail to focus on the queer individuals and their differentiated needs. At Evolve, our mission is to make mental health solutions more equitable and accessible for the LGBTQIA+ community around the world. With over 400,000 users and an award-winning app, we're in a unique position to drive solutions at scale for the community and truly solve for this challenge. "



## Partner with us!

We're actively looking to partner with researchers and organisations exploring the intersection of mental health for the LGBTQIA+ community. If you'd like to know more about our research initiatives or work with us, write to us at [info@evolveinc.io](mailto:info@evolveinc.io)



## Appendix: GAD-7 Questionnaire used

Each participant was asked the following questions related to their anxiety levels in the past 2 weeks. This is a standard assessment scale that has been used in 1000's of research studies and Evolve has not modified any question or option.

Over the <u>last two weeks</u> , how often have you been bothered by the following problems?	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
1. Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge	0	1	2	3
2. Not being able to stop or control worrying	0	1	2	3
3. Worrying too much about different things	0	1	2	3
4. Trouble relaxing	0	1	2	3
5. Being so restless that it is hard to sit still	0	1	2	3
6. Becoming easily annoyed or irritable	0	1	2	3
7. Feeling afraid, as if something awful might happen	0	1	2	3

## Scoring

Each question has an assigned score of 0, 1, 2, and 3 to the responses “not at all,” “several days,” “more than half the days,” and “nearly every day” respectively. The final GAD-7 score ranges from 0-21 and is calculated by adding up the scores obtained in each question. Further, the scores are grouped to determine anxiety levels as per the intervals below:

0-4: "Minimal anxiety"

5-9: "Mild anxiety"

10-14: "Moderate anxiety"

15-21: "Severe anxiety"

## Appendix: Profile of study participants

- Total users surveyed: 2,583
- 1,079 identified as LGBTQIA+ and 1,058 identified as non-LGBTQIA+. 446 users who preferred not to disclose their gender identity and sexuality were excluded from the final analysis.
- 71% of the respondents identified as female, 13% as male and 16% as genderfluid/non-binary
- The study includes participants from across the world with the top geographies being US, India, Philippines, UK and South Africa
- In terms of age, 42% were 18. years or under, 46% were between 19 and 35 years and the rest were above 36 years.