

Dispelling the myth of gay affluence

June 20 2013, by Mike Fricano



Cameron (left) and Mitchell are a well-off gay couple raising an adopted daughter on the sitcom "Modern Family," but a new Williams Institute study shows that members of the LGB community are more likely to be poor.

(Phys.org) —As poverty rates for virtually every demographic group increased during the recent recession, lesbian, gay and bisexual Americans are more likely to be poor than heterosexual people, according to a new nationwide study by researchers at the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law.

These findings counteract the myth of gay affluence, perpetuated by gay characters on sitcoms like ABC's "Modern Family"—Mitchell is a successful lawyer and his partner Cameron is a professional party clown

and they live in a nice house in suburban Los Angeles. While these pop-culture portrayals have helped bring lesbians and gays into the mainstream, they have also created a [misperception](#) among many that same-sex couples and individuals are financially well-off.

"The gay family on 'Modern Family,' if it were to truly represent the characteristics of a gay couple most likely to be raising children, would be a black, female same-sex couple living in Mississippi," said Laura Durso, co-author of the recently released study, "[New Patterns of Poverty in the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Community](#)," and a researcher at the Williams Institute. The Williams Institute is a think tank dedicated to research on [sexual orientation](#) and gender identity law and public policy.

The [demographic characteristics](#) of the family Durso described would also put it among the most vulnerable to [poverty](#). In the Williams' study, women in same-sex couples, children raised by same-sex couples and African American same-sex couples are the most likely to be poor, according to Durso.

The new study updates a similar Williams Institute report released in 2009, which was the first study ever to measure poverty in the LGB community. "Being able to show this trend over time across multiple datasets allows us to feel more confident that the patterns we see were not simply found by chance," Durso said.

A crucial part of the study was controlling the many factors that can lead to poverty so the researchers could compare, for example, a same-sex and a different-sex couple with the same race, level of education and employment status. "What is important is that even when controlling for all these other factors that we know are associated with poverty, we still find that same-sex couples and LGB people are more likely to be in poverty," said Durso, who conducted the research with M.V. Lee

Badgett, research director of the institute, and Alyssa Schneebaum, a doctoral student at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

Durso said that the importance of the research goes beyond pointing out that popular media portrayals paint an inaccurate picture of the LGBT population for the American public. The myth that same-sex couples are more affluent has been used to argue against passing laws and policies that support LGBT people and families, including the battle over Proposition 8 here in California, she said.

"If the stereotype of the wealthy LGBT person remains unchallenged and affects the way people approach providing services to the poor, we risk turning a blind eye to some of the most vulnerable members of the LGBT community," Durso said.

Key findings of the report include:

- African American same-sex couples have [poverty rates](#) (18.8 percent for male same-sex couples, 17.9 percent for female) more than twice the rate of different-sex married African Americans (8 percent).
- One-third of lesbian couples and 20.1 percent of gay male couples without a high school diploma are in poverty, compared to 18.8 percent of different-sex married couples.
- Lesbian couples who live in rural areas are much more likely to be poor (14.1 percent), compared to 4.5 percent of their counterparts in large cities.
- Almost 25 percent of children living with a male same-sex couple and 19.2 percent of children living with a female same-sex couple are in poverty, compared to 12.1 percent of children living with married different-sex couples. African American children in gay male households have the highest poverty rate (52.3 percent) of any children in any household type.

The new report draws on recent data from the 2010 American Community Survey (which comes from the U.S. Census Bureau), the 2006-2010 National Survey of Family Growth, the 2007-2009 California Health Interview Survey and the Gallup Daily Tracking Poll.

"We have all these interesting data about how race, class, sexual orientation and other characteristics intersect," Durso said, "and future research in this area should consider the ways in which these factors are all associated. This way we can know whether a one-size-fits-all approach to ending poverty will be useful or whether we need to approach ending poverty through different mechanisms in different communities."

One group in particular that needs further study is the transgender population, Durso said. Only the Gallup poll included references to transgender people, but it did not differentiate between LGB and transgender individuals, the report noted.

Ultimately, to begin explaining findings like why the LGB population is more likely to be poor, Durso said that researchers need more data beginning with direct questions that ask about sexual orientation. The Williams Institute website contains documents that recommend questions surveyors should ask about sexual orientation and gender identity.

"Because the LGBT community is largely invisible in federal and state surveys, we're basically starting at the beginning here on federal data collection," Durso said. "Simply asking good-quality, tested questions about sexual orientation and [gender identity](#) will go a long way to being able to describe what is going on in our community."

More information: [williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu ... -Update-Jun-2013.pdf](http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu...-Update-Jun-2013.pdf)

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

Citation: Dispelling the myth of gay affluence (2013, June 20) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-06-dispelling-myth-gay-affluence.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.