

Marriage legalization could lead to dissolution of same-sex relationships, new study shows

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Many gay and lesbian couples weigh the costs and benefits of migrating to a different state based on the probability of future legalization in their current state of residence.

While courts in Arkansas and other states wrestle with the legality of same-sex marriage, a new study by economists at the University of Arkansas shows that relationship hazard rates – the threat of breakups – among same-sex couples will likely increase with the probability of

legalization.

The study also revealed that the threat of dissolution will increase as costs of migration to a legal jurisdiction decrease.

"Though this and our other findings suggest legalization may not be advantageous for all same-sex couples, we are not advocating for same-sex marriage to remain illegal," said Amy Farmer, professor in the Sam M. Walton College of Business. "We're simply focusing on economics of the household, showing how this rapidly changing issue – through legislation and court decisions – will affect people in this area."

To do this, Farmer and Andrew Horowitz, a colleague in the Walton College economics department, developed a strategic theoretical model of [relationship](#) escalation from dating to cohabitation to marriage, all within the context of uncertainty about future marriage legality and the cost of moving to a legal jurisdiction.

The researchers started with the fundamental assumption that couples who live in a state where same-sex marriage is illegal will weigh both the possibility of moving to a currently legal state and the probability of future legalization where they live.

The model included three stages. Stage one began with participants in a dating relationship revealing their preferences for cohabitation or continued dating. If both players chose the same preference, they moved up to stage two and were placed in those respective categories – "cohabitation" or "continue dating." This move required agreement. Stage three was defined by participants, whether cohabitating or dating, choosing to continue in their current state, get married or exit the relationship. If exit was chosen, they incurred costs that depended on the relationship type. It was assumed that exit costs for a cohabitating player exceeded those from a dating player. Also, the choice to marry also

incurred a relocation cost.

Results revealed that falling migration costs and the greater probability of legalization actually increased relationship hazard rates among same-sex couples.

This is possible, Farmer said, because when migration costs fall marriage is more possible, and all is well if both partners want to marry. In fact, the likelihood that they will want to marry rises. However, if one member of the couple really doesn't want to marry, now they have a point of disagreement, something that wasn't on the table before.

"So the marriage option can create friction if preferences differ," Farmer said. "That friction might result in a relationship hazard."

The model also generated surprising predictions regarding why and how marriage would improve household economics. The researchers found that for some same-sex couples, marriage would not improve the economics of their households, and in some cases it would worsen them.

As of March 2014, 17 of the world's 193 countries legally recognized same-sex marriage at the national level. In the United States, same-sex marriage is legal in 17 states and the District of Columbia. Through legislation or constitutional amendments, 33 states explicitly prohibit same-sex [marriage](#), a situation similar to the variety of U.S. anti-miscegenation laws that were eliminated by a U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1967.

The researchers' study will be published in the *Southern Economic Journal*.

Provided by University of Arkansas

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