

How marriage may protect transgender couples

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"Our findings highlight the importance of providing gender and sexual minorities legal access to marriage," said Michigan State University sociologist Hui Liu. Credit: Michigan State University

Transgender people who are married are less likely to experience discrimination than their unmarried counterparts, indicates a national

study led by a Michigan State University sociologist.

The findings, published online in the *Journal of Marriage and Family*, speak to the well-established marital advantage even among transgender couples, a fast-growing but little-studied population. Some 1.4 million adults identify as transgender in the United States.

"Past research suggests marriage is related to greater access to economic, social and psychological resources, and we believe access to such resources helps [transgender people](#) combat life stressors related to their gender-minority status, including discrimination," said Hui Liu, MSU professor of sociology and principal investigator of the federally funded study.

Although the Supreme Court made [same-sex marriage](#) a nationwide right in 2015, high levels of transphobia persist, presenting a continued challenge for public policies and programs promoting marriage equality and equal treatment among the transgender population, she added.

"Our findings highlight the importance of providing gender and sexual minorities legal access to marriage," Liu said. "Legalizing [same-sex marriage](#) may help reduce stigma and discrimination, but there is certainly a long way to go to fully eliminate the discrimination."

Liu and Lindsey Wilkinson from Portland State University analyzed the survey data of 4,286 transgender participants in the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, one of the first and most comprehensive national samples of transgender people in the United States.

Among their findings:

- Married transgender people are less likely to experience

perceived discrimination than their unmarried transgender counterparts, in particular their cohabiting or previously-married counterparts. The researchers examined discrimination in four key domains of life: workplace, family, health care and public accommodations.

- The discrimination is seen more among transgender women than among [transgender men](#). This may be partly a result of higher transphobia experienced by transgender women relative to transgender men.
- Economic resources partially explained the findings. The median family income of married transgender women was \$70,000-\$79,999, while the median income of unmarried transgender women was \$30,000-\$39,999. The study notes that greater income may create more privileges; for example, married [transgender](#) women may find it easier to choose their living and work environments and access gender-sensitive services and thus reduce exposure to transphobia and [discrimination](#).

Provided by Michigan State University

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