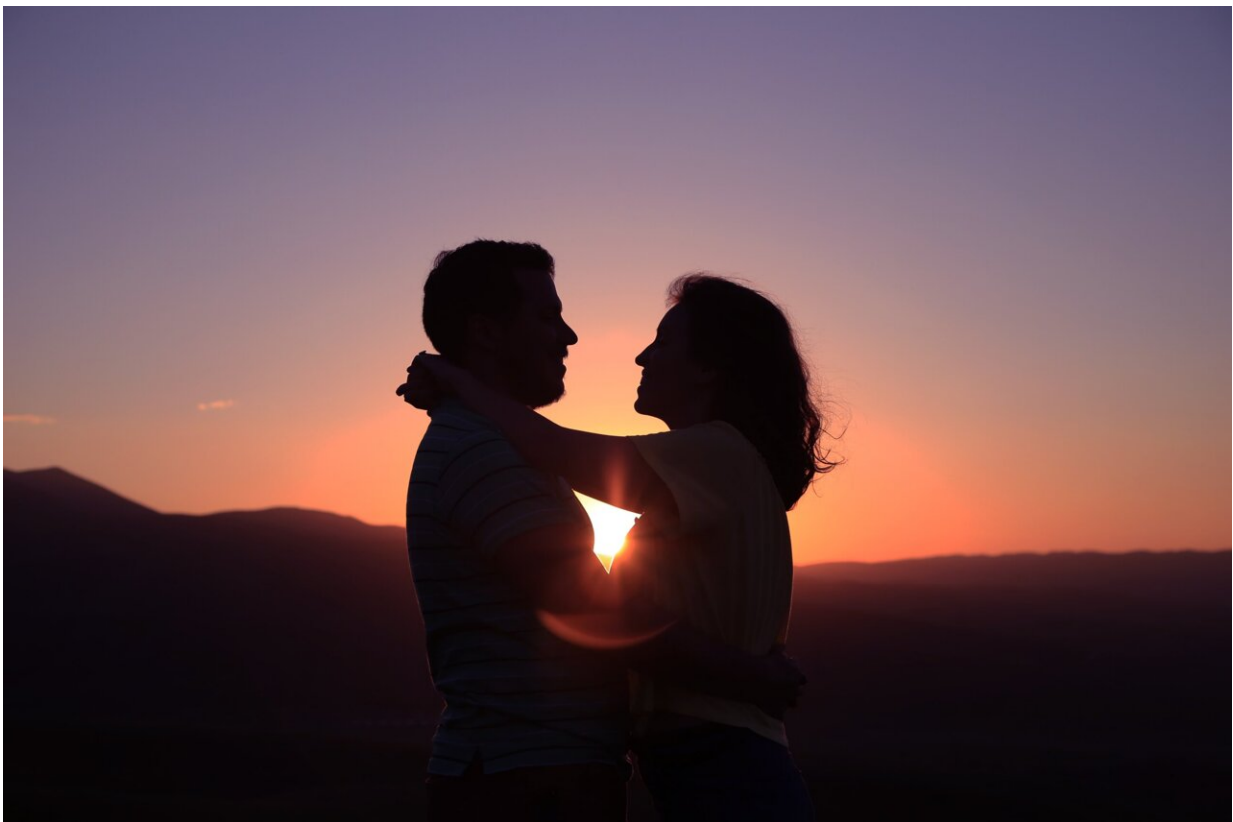


# People who practice consensual non-monogamy can face negative social stigma, research finds

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Despite rising interest in polyamory and open relationships, new research shows that people in consensually non-monogamous (CNM)

relationships report experiencing a negative social stigma that takes a toll on their well-being.

Prior research has found that people tend to view consensually non-monogamous relationships more negatively than monogamy, and a new article in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* suggests that [public opinion](#) can have real-world effects.

"People in consensually non-monogamous relationships do indeed report experiencing stigma in a variety of ways," says lead author Elizabeth Mahar of the University of British Columbia. "Furthermore, this experienced stigma is associated with [psychological distress](#)."

Researchers surveyed 372 people in CNM relationships for their first study, asking if and how they have experienced this stigma. Roughly 40% of people in CNM relationships reported experiencing a negative stigma as a result. Of those who reported experiencing no stigma, most (70%) limited the number of people who knew about their relationship.

Four themes emerged among those who said they had experienced a CNM-related stigma:

- Expressions of discomfort or disapproval of their CNM relationship
- Loss of resources or threatening behavior
- Devaluation or diminishing of their character
- Devaluation or diminishing of their relationship

"Previous research has found that people with marginalized identities (e.g., LGBTQ individuals) experience stigma in a variety of unique ways," says Dr. Mahar. "We found a similar pattern for people in consensually non-monogamous relationships."

The second study examined the effects of this stigma on the well-being of people in CNM relationships. Surveying 383 participants, researchers found that experience of a negative stigma related to increased psychology distress. They noted that this association is also connected to anticipated stigma (the extent to which people expect to be treated or thought of poorly) and internalized stigma (the degree to which people feel guilty about their CNM relationship).

Over one-fifth of Americans and Canadians report having been in a CNM [relationship](#) at some point in their life. Dr. Mahar notes that it is important to be mindful of how you may be engaging in behaviors that negatively affect the well-being of people in CNM relationships.

"Gaining a better understanding of [stigma](#) and how it is linked to well-being will make it possible to develop and implement interventions to effectively mitigate the harmful effects of minority stress for consensually non-monogamous people."

**More information:** Elizabeth A. Mahar et al, Stigma Toward Consensual Non-Monogamy: Thematic Analysis and Minority Stress, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/01461672221139086](#)

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