

Sexual minority families fare as well as—and in some ways better than—'traditional' ones, finds pooled data analysis

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Sexual minority families—where parental sexual orientation or gender identity is considered outside cultural, societal, or physiological

norms—fare as well as or better than "traditional" families with parents of the opposite sex, finds a pooled data analysis of the available evidence, published in the open access journal *BMJ Global Health*.

Parental sexual orientation isn't an important determinant of children's development, the analysis shows.

The number of children in families with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer parents has risen in recent years. But despite a shift in [public attitudes](#), sexual [minority](#) parenting still provokes controversy, and whether parental sexual orientation affects family outcomes continues to be a matter of debate, say the researchers.

To strengthen the evidence, and find out whether there were differences in outcomes between sexual minority and different sex (straight) parent families, they systematically reviewed 34 relevant studies published between January 1989 and April 2022, and carried out in countries where same sex relationships were legally recognized.

The studies were categorized into 11 main themes: children's psychological adjustment, [physical health](#), gender role behavior, gender identity/sexual orientation and educational attainment; parents' mental health and parenting stress; and parent-child relationships, couple relationship satisfaction, family functioning, social support.

A pooled data analysis of the results of 16 of the 34 studies showed that most family outcomes were similar between these two family types. In some domains, such as child psychological adjustment—preschoolers, in particular—and child-parent relationships, these were actually better in sexual minority families.

"Growing up with sexual minority parents may confer some advantages to children. They have been described as more tolerant of diversity and

more nurturing towards younger children than children of heterosexual parents," explain the researchers.

But the analysis indicated that sexual minority parents didn't outperform different parental sex families on couple relationship satisfaction, mental health, parenting stress, or family functioning.

Risk factors for poor family outcomes for sexual minority families included experiencing stigma and discrimination, inadequate social support and co-habiting rather than married parents.

"Legal marriage confers a host of protections and advantages to the couples who marry and to their children," note the researchers.

The results of the narrative synthesis (18 studies), showed that children who lived in sexual minority parent families were less likely to expect to identify as straight when they grew up than were children who lived in "traditional" set-up families.

"There may be less gender stereotyping in minority parent families, and this effect may be positive," suggest the researchers. "Exploration of [gender identity](#) and sexuality may actually enhance children's ability to succeed and thrive in a range of contexts."

They acknowledge various limitations to their findings, including that the included studies were limited to regions where same-sex relationships were legalized, and where the social climate for these families is generally favorable.

Most of the study participants were also from gay and lesbian households and it wasn't possible to account for potentially influential demographic factors.

But the researchers conclude that children from sexual minority families are not at a disadvantage compared with children from different sex parent families.

"One contribution of this review is the recognition that parents' sexual orientation is not, in and of itself, an important determinant of children's development," they write. "Another... is that there are significant [risk factors](#) often associated with the [sexual minority](#) experience and family functioning, such as stigma, poor [social support](#) and parenting styles."

They add, "Policymakers, practitioners, and the public must work together to improve [family](#) outcomes, regardless of [sexual orientation](#)."

More information: Family outcome disparities between sexual minority and heterosexual families: a systematic review and meta analysis, *BMJ Global Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjgh-2022-010556](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2022-010556)

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