

For kids raised in stable families, no difference in well-being with same-sex versus different-sex parents

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Children raised by same-sex female parents with a stable family life show no difference in general health, emotional difficulties, coping and learning behavior, compared to children of different-sex parents in similarly stable relationships, concludes a study in the April *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics*, the official journal of the Society for Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics.

"Our study of households with no divorces or other family transitions finds that spouse-partner and parent-child relationships are similar regardless of family structure," comment lead researchers Henry Bos, PhD, and Nanette Gartrell, MD, of the University of Amsterdam. "These strong relationships are important contributors to good child outcomes—not whether the parents are same-sex or different-sex."

Further Evidence of 'No Difference' in Outcomes for Children of Same-Sex Parents

The researchers identified 95 female same-sex parent households and 95 different-sex parent households, matched for parent and child characteristics. The families were drawn from a very large, nationally representative study, the National Survey of Child Health. (Male same-sex couples were not included because of the small number of households meeting the study criteria.)

The current study focused on households with no history of family instability, discontinuity, or transitions—limited to parents who were raising their own children since birth, without divorce, separation, or adoption. Thus, the study minimized the impact of family disruption on child well-being.

The results showed no differences between the two groups in terms of spouse or partner relationships, parent-child relationships, or any of the child outcomes assessed. The only difference between the two groups of households was higher reported parenting stress among the same-sex couples.

In both groups of families, more positive parent-child relationships were associated with higher levels of children's [general health](#) and better coping and learning behaviors. Better spouse/partner and parent-child relationships were associated with lower levels of children's [emotional difficulties](#).

As the number of children raised by gay and lesbian parents continues to grow, there is an ongoing and highly politicized debate over same-sex parenting and child outcomes. A large majority of studies have found no difference in outcomes for children raised by same-sex versus different-sex families. Most of these studies were based on convenience samples or fertility clinic recruitment.

In contrast, the current study was drawn from a population-based survey on children's health approved by the National Center for Health Statistics of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The results show that, for [children](#) with stable and positive family relationships, outcomes are similarly good in both same-sex and different-sex parent families.

That's despite the higher levels of parenting stress reported by same-sex

parents, Dr. Bos and colleagues note. They call for further studies to assess the source of this stress, suggesting that the "cultural spotlight" on child outcomes in families with same-sex parents might be a contributing factor.

The findings highlight the need to "move beyond anti-LGBT politics," according to a commentary by Nathaniel Frank, PhD, Director of the What We Know Project at Columbia Law School. He writes, "The study corroborates the 'no differences' conclusions that have been reached by at least 73 other scholarly studies."

Especially since the US Supreme Court decision resolving the status of legal same-sex marriage, Dr. Frank states, "The scientific debate over the politics of gay parenting is over, and equal treatment has won." He believes that future research should focus on meeting the health and well-being needs of the under-served LGBT population.

More information: "Same-Sex and Different-Sex Parent Households and Child Health Outcomes: Findings from the National Survey of Children's Health" [DOI: 10.1097/DBP.0000000000000288](https://doi.org/10.1097/DBP.0000000000000288)

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