

# The Australian same-sex marriage debate is putting children and adolescents at risk

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Credit: Murdoch Childrens Research Institute

As the marriage equality debate continues, misinformation is circulating in the public domain that children and adolescents with same-sex parents are at risk of poorer health and wellbeing than other children.

Australia's top paediatricians reviewed the evidence, published in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, titled *The kids are OK: it is discrimination not same-sex parents that harms children*, and found that children raised in same-sex parented families do as well as children raised by heterosexual couple parents.

The consensus of three decades of peer-reviewed research is that children raised in same-sex parented families do as well emotionally, socially and educationally as children raised by heterosexual couple parents. These findings have been replicated across independent studies in Australia and internationally.

Australian children come from diverse families including transsexual and gender diverse, as well as same sex attracted and bi-sexual parents.

"The negative and discriminatory rhetoric of the current marriage equality debate is damaging the most vulnerable members of our community – children and adolescents. It's essential that we recognise the potential for the debate about marriage equality to cause harm for our children and young people," senior author Professor Frank Oberklaid said.

Young people who express diversity in their sexual orientation or gender identity experience some of the highest rates of psychological distress in Australia.

"Young LGBTIQ+ people are much more likely to experience [poor mental health](#), self-harm and suicide than other young people. Sadly, this is largely attributed to the harassment, stigma and discrimination they and other LGBTIQ+ individuals and communities face in our society," Professor Oberklaid said.

There is solid evidence in countries that have legalised same-sex marriage that it has had a positive impact on the [mental health](#) and wellbeing of same-sex parented families and LGBTIQ+ young people.

"As part of the medical community we feel a duty of care to all groups in our society, particularly to those who are vulnerable. Our duty extends to making sure that accurate, objective interpretations of the best

available evidence are available and inaccuracies are corrected in an effort to reduce the destructiveness of public debate," Professor Oberklaid said.

As leaders in child health in Australia, Melbourne Children's - which is made of up of four premier child health organisations - The Murdoch Children's Research Institute, The Royal Children's Hospital, the University of Melbourne, Department of Paediatrics and The Royal Children's Hospital Foundation – is standing up for our most vulnerable members of the community – children.

"Melbourne Children's supports equality for all. We stand behind the evidence that children raised in same-sex parented families do as well as children raised by heterosexual parents. The social stigma and discrimination faced by these families and young LGBTQI individuals must end and so we call for a halt to the distribution of the negative messages that have the potential to cause harm for [children](#) and young people during the marriage equality debate," Professor Oberklaid said.

**More information:** The kids are OK: it is discrimination, not same-sex parents, that harms children. *Med J Aust* 2017; 207 (9): 1. || [DOI: 10.5694/mja17.00943](https://doi.org/10.5694/mja17.00943)

Provided by Murdoch Childrens Research Institute

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