

No difference in outcomes for children of same-sex versus different-sex parents

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For children of lesbian or gay parents, psychological adjustment is about the same as in children of heterosexual parents, reports a study in the *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics* .

"Our findings suggested that children with same-sex [parents](#) fare well, both in terms of psychological adjustment and prosocial behavior," according to the research by Prof. Roberto Baiocco, Ph.D., and colleagues of Sapienza University of Rome. The study adds to a preponderance of evidence showing no increase in problems for children of gay or [lesbian](#) parents, compared to children of heterosexual parents.

With Same-Sex or Different-Sex Parents, Child Outcomes Linked to Family Functioning

The study included three groups of Italian parents: 70 gay fathers who had children through surrogacy, 125 lesbian mothers who had children through donor insemination, and 195 heterosexual couples who had children through spontaneous conception. The children were 3 to 11 years old; the groups were matched for child characteristics.

Parents completed questionnaires assessing their ability to act successfully as parents (self-agency), extent of agreement/adjustment between parents, [family](#) functioning, and the child's psychological adjustment—namely his/her "strengths and difficulties." Outcomes were compared for families with lesbian, gay, or heterosexual parents, with

adjustment for other factors.

The results showed no major differences in the children's psychological adjustment among the three groups of families. Overall, children of same-sex parents had fewer reported difficulties than children of different-sex parents. The researchers note that scores were in the normal range for all three groups.

In line with previous studies, for all three types of families, girls were reported as being "more prosocial" and having fewer externalizing problems (such as aggressive behavior), compared to boys.

Across groups, parents who felt less competent as parents, were less satisfied in their relationship, and perceived lower levels of family flexibility reported more problems in their [children](#). "Family structure is not predictive of child health outcomes once family process variables are taken into account," Dr. Baiocco and colleagues write.

Some indicators of family functioning were better among same-sex parents—particularly for gay fathers. This might reflect the high level of commitment needed for gay men to become parents via surrogacy, Prof. Baiocco and colleagues suggest. They also note that the gay fathers in the study were older, economically better off, better educated, and had more stable relationships than the lesbian mothers and different-sex parents.

With the growth of assisted reproductive technologies, parenthood has become more accessible for same-sex couples. Over the years, most studies have found no difference in child [psychological adjustment](#) or in the quality of parenting and family relationships for gay or lesbian parents, compared to [heterosexual parents](#).

The results may have special resonance for same-sex parents in Italy—where lesbian women and gay men are denied access to assisted

reproduction techniques. Prof. Baiocco and coauthors conclude: "The present study warns policy-makers against making assumptions on the basis of sexual orientation about people who are more suited than others to be parents or about people who should or should not be denied access to fertility treatments."

More information: Roberto Baiocco et al. Same-Sex and Different-Sex Parent Families in Italy, *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics* (2018). [DOI: 10.1097/DBP.0000000000000583](https://doi.org/10.1097/DBP.0000000000000583)

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