

Family acceptance of LGBT identity linked to reduced stress

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Ohio University Associate Professor of Psychology Dr. Peggy Zoccola has determined that those who identify as LGBT and have come out to their family carry less stress hormones than those who have not come out, which may ultimately benefit their health.

The recent study by Zoccola and coauthor Andrew Manigault, M.S., published in the October issue of *Psychosomatic Medicine*, journal of the Psychosomatic Society, discusses how feeling able to comfortably talk about your sexual identity with [family](#) members specifically, appears to be most linked to output of the [stress hormone cortisol](#), a [hormone](#) that if too much is produced, it can damage an individual's health.

"The real [stress](#) punch seems to be with the family," said Zoccola when referencing how greater disclosure of a LGBT individual's sexuality to their family is strongly linked to lower [cortisol](#).

She points out that there has been sparse research on how the aspects of coming out by LGBT adults affect the release of [stress hormones](#), however, some early studies have shown that if people who identify as sexual minorities feel acceptance from their families, they have higher self-esteem, lower depression and substance use rates and are less likely to think about suicide.

For the study, Zoccola had 121 sexual minority adults ages 18 to 35 take a survey about their depression and anxiety levels, sociodemographic factors and how much support they felt. They were also asked how out

they were to family, friends, acquaintances, coworkers and clergy in religious organizations, as well as provided their age when they came out. Following the survey, 58 individuals from the group were randomly selected to provide a saliva sample to show their cortisol levels.

The results of Zoccola's research showed that the more open people were to disclosing their sexuality with their family, the lower cortisol levels they had.

"For these emerging adults, the family provides a foundation of support," said Zoccola. "If they're comfortable disclosing to their family, they seem to have a protective stress profile."

Provided by Ohio University

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