

Study: Despite progress, gay fathers and their children still structurally stigmatized

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The study's researchers, including Sean Hurley, an associate professor in the University of Vermont's College of Education and Social Services, analyzed anonymous, online survey responses from 732 gay [fathers](#) of 1,316 children, from 47 states. Among the questions asked of participants was whether the fathers and/or their children had been "made to feel uncomfortable, excluded, shamed, hurt, or unwelcome" in various social contexts. Almost two-thirds of fathers responding (63.5 percent) reported they had experienced stigma over the past year based on being a gay father.

Most stigma occurred in religious environments (reported by 34.8 percent of fathers), while about one-quarter of respondents reported experiencing stigma in the past year from [family members](#), neighbors, gay friends and/or service providers such as waiters and salespeople. Nearly 19 percent of fathers reported that their children had avoided activities with friends for fear of encountering stigma.

"The results of the study are important because they highlight that while much progress has been made in terms of the experiences of gay men parenting, we find that they and their children are still experiencing potentially harmful stigma in a variety of social contexts," says Hurley, who served as the study's methodologist.

For these families, the presence of laws and policies supportive of LGBT populations in states where they live reduced the experience of [stigma](#). Prior research has shown that the amount of community support

provided to members of sexual minorities is related to the well-being of lesbian and gay adolescents, adults, and children with lesbian or gay parents, and impacts rates of suicidality and psychiatric disorders.

This study's authors encouraged pediatricians caring for children and their gay fathers to have discussions with these families about potentially stigmatizing experiences to help them learn strategies to counteract their harmful effects. Researchers agree that pediatricians, as leaders in their communities, also have an opportunity to help oppose discrimination in religious and other community institutions.

More information: Ellen C. Perrin et al, Barriers and Stigma Experienced by Gay Fathers and Their Children, *Pediatrics* (2019). [DOI: 10.1542/peds.2018-0683](https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-0683)

Provided by University of Vermont

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