

Same-sex cohabitators less healthy than those in heterosexual marriages, study finds

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A study led by Michigan State University sociologist Hui Liu suggests same-sex couples are in worse health than those in heterosexual marriages. Credit: Michigan State University

Same-sex couples that live together report worse health than people of the same socioeconomic status who are in heterosexual marriages, according to a national study that could have implications for the gay marriage debate.

Research has shown that married people are healthier than the unmarried. Yet, while gay [marriage](#) is gaining support in Michigan and around the country, most same-sex cohabitators do not have the option of legally marrying their partners, noted Hui Liu, Michigan State University sociologist and lead investigator on the study.

While Liu's research does not directly assess the potential [health consequences](#) of legalizing same-sex marriage, she said it's plausible that allowing same-sex couples to legally wed could improve their health.

"Legalizing same-sex marriage," Liu said, "could provide the benefits associated with marriage –

such as partner health-insurance benefits and increased social and psychological support – which may directly and indirectly influence the health of people in same-sex unions."

For the study, which appears in the [Journal of Health and Social Behavior](#), Liu and colleagues analyzed the self-reported health of nearly 700,000 participants in the 1997-2009 National Health Interview Surveys. About 3,330 men and women are identified as same-sex cohabitators in the study.

Same-sex cohabitators reported poorer health than heterosexual [married couples](#) of similar socioeconomic status, which takes into account levels of education, income and insurance coverage. Liu said this disparity may be due to a lack of social, psychological and institutional resources that come with legal marriage as well as high levels of stress caused by homophobia and discrimination for [gay couples](#) that live together.

The study also examined differences among racial groups, finding that both white and black lesbian cohabiting women had poorer health than their heterosexual married counterparts. However, while black lesbian women who lived together reported poorer health than other unmarried black women, lesbian white women who cohabitated reported similar or even better health than other unmarried white women.

Liu said white women in same-sex relationships are more likely than their black and Hispanic counterparts to have both partners in full-time employment and adhere to general ideals of equality – factors that may boost health status – while racial minority [women](#) in same-sex relationships may experience more stigma, discrimination and economic disadvantages that in turn undermine health.

Provided by Michigan State University

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