Are children of same-gender parents worse off?

There is over a decade of scientific research demonstrating that the outcomes for children of same gender-parents[1] are just like those for children of mother-father parents.[2] In some instances, children of same-gender parents may even fare better.[3] The collective research does not support the idea that children need specific gender figures (i.e. "a mother and a father") to have positive childhoods, be well-adjusted, or succeed. Instead, what matters are things like family stability, economic resources, supportive parenting, and parental warmth.[4]

Nonetheless, some people believe that same-gender parents are less suitable than heterosexual parents or mother-father parenting couples.[5] In a 2012 U.S. survey of over 1000 participants, less than half of respondents agreed that same-gender parents could raise children as well as mother-father couples.[6] Some even rated single parents as better for children than two same-gender parents.[7]

The acceptance of same-gender parents has improved in the last 10+ years, but there is still a substantial group of people who continue to believe harmful misconceptions[8] about LGBTQ+ and same-gender parents. This is reflected in ongoing policies. For example, in some states, child placement agencies are allowed to discriminate against LGBTQ+ parents.[9] LGBTQ+ people wanting to become parents continue to face obstacles, especially those who are transgender, racialized, or have less access to financial resources.[10]

---

[1] "Same-gender parents" refers to a parenting couple comprised of two mothers or two fathers. The research cited in this article uses terms such as "same-sex parents", "same-gender" parents, and "gay and lesbian parents". Though sex, gender, and sexual identity are distinct concepts, this article uses "same-gender parents" as an umbrella term for clarity and consistency when discussing these family structures.

[2] Baiocco et al. 2024; Fedewa et al. 2015; Knight et al. 2017; Manning et al. 2014; Moore and Stambolis-Ruhstorfer 2013; Prickett et al. 2015; Reczek 2020

[3] Baiocco et al. 2024; Kabátek and Perales 2021; Mazrekaj et al. 2020

4 Baiocco et al. 2024; Manning et al, 2014; Reczek 2020

[5] Cheng et al. 2023; Manning and Gustafson 2025

[6] Cheng et al. 2023

[7] Cheng et al. 2023

[8] Manning and Gustafson 2025

[9] Every Child Deserves a Family, n.d.

[10] Goldberg 2023

Myth #1: Children of same-gender parents are worse off.

Broadly, research finds that children of same-gender parents do not have a disadvantage compared to children of mother-father parenting couples.[11] Differences in child outcomes are primarily explained by things like socioeconomic factors and access to resources,[12] family stability,[13] stigma,[14] and family transitions,[15] not by parents' sexual orientation or gender.

In 2012, researchers conducted a meta-analysis examining 40 studies on same-gender families in the USA.[16] Across the studies reviewed, findings consistently showed that American children raised by same-gender parents fare just as well as children raised by mother-father parents.[17] This was true for a wide range of measures including:

- academic performance
- cognitive development
- social development
- psychological health
- sexual behavior (STI, pregnancy, rates of sexual activity, age of sexual activity) and;
- substance use

Another meta-analysis from 2015 looking at 33 studies with a total of 5272 children also failed to find any evidence that showed that children of same-gender parents are worse off than children of mother-father parents.[18] However, the researchers did find that in some cases, children of same-gender parents had better parent-child relationships[19] and slightly better psychological adjustment.

Interestingly, some research indicates that children of same-gender parents engage in more prosocial behavior, which involves helping others, showing kindness, and having empathy.[20] Certain studies have also demonstrated better academic outcomes for children

[11] Baiocco et al. 2024; Fedewa et al. 2015; Knight et al. 2017; Manning et al. 2014; Moore and Stambolis-Ruhstorfer 2013; Prickett et al. 2015; Reczek 2020

[12] Manning et al. 2014; Reczek 2020
[13] Manning et al. 2014
[14] Reczek 2020
[15] Reczek 2020
[16]` Manning et al. 2014
[17] Manning et al. 2014
[18] Fedewa et al. 2015
[19] Fedewa et al. 2015
[20] Baiocco et al. 2024

with same-gender parents compared to children of mother-father parents,[21] including scoring higher on standardized tests,[22] being more likely to graduate high school,[23] and being more likely to enroll in college, [24]

Historically, children of same-gender parents were sometimes found to be behind in school in comparison to children of mother-father parents.[25] However, researchers discovered that these differences disappeared over time.[26] By 2008, it was only in areas with anti-LGBTQ+ laws and negative attitudes towards LGBTQ+ communities that children of same-gender parents were falling behind, and from 2010 on, researchers were unable to find such differences.[27] This means that stigma and structural inequality, not parent sexuality or gender, were likely responsible for these earlier differences.[28]

It is difficult to say for certain why children of same-gender parents might fare better in certain areas, such as academics. One hypothesis is that it is typically more complicated for same-gender parents to have children, potentially involving time-consuming and expensive steps, such as adoption or IVF; therefore it is possible that same-gender parents are more likely to have a higher socioeconomic status,[29] a factor which has been demonstrated to impact child wellbeing and success regardless of parent gender or sexuality, [30]

Studies have also found that, in some cases, same-gender parents spend more time with their children[31] and show higher parental warmth[32] compared to mother-father parents. Again, it is possible that this is due to same-gender parents having access to more resources. It may also be that same-gender parents feel the need to involve themselves more due to perceived social stigma about their abilities as parents.[33]

[21] Kabátek and Perales 2021; Mazrekaj et al. 2020
[22] Kabátek and Perales 2021; Mazrekaj et al. 2020
[23] Kabátek and Perales 2021; Mazrekaj et al. 2020
[24] Kabátek and Perales 2021
[25] Boertien and Bernardi 2019
[26] Boertien and Bernardi 2019
[27] Boertien and Bernardi 2019

[28] Boertien and Bernardi 2019
[29] Mazrekaj et al. 2020
[30] Manning et al. 2014; Reczek 2020
[31] Prickett et al. 2015
[32] Baiocco et al. 2024
[33] Baiocco et al. 2024

When it comes to adoption, research finds that birth parents are typically open to adoption by same-gender couples, with some even actively seeking out same-gender couples.[34] After adoption, birth parents were found to be happy with the contact they had with same-gender adoptive parents and have warm feelings towards them.[35] Research has also shown that transgender individuals are more open to adopting "hard to place" children, including teenagers, and children with behavioral or mental health challenges.[36]

Finally, it is important to note that research does not find that children's gender identity or sexual orientation changes based on their parents' sexual orientation.[37] Beliefs that same-gender parents try to influence their child's sexual or gender identity are unsupported.

Myth #2: Children need a mother and a father.

Related to the myth that children of LGBTQ+ parents are worse off than children of heterosexual parents is the idea that having a gendered example of both a mother and a father is paramount to the healthy development of children. However, the research does not support this.

As explained in this article, children with same-gender parents (i.e. two "moms" or two "dads") fare as well as children with different-gender parents (a "mom" and a "dad"), demonstrating that a child does not need both a mother and a father to grow up healthy and successful.

Researchers emphasize that when it comes to child outcomes, family stability, access to economic resources, and supportive parenting matters more than the gender of the parents.[38] This is in line with broader sociological research that establishes these factors as key to healthy child development. Research has also shown that regardless of gender, higher parental warmth is associated with more prosocial behaviors, while higher hostility and rejection is associated with more externalizing behavior (e.g.: aggression, drug use, delinquency, antisocial behavior, hyperactivity, bullying, etc.)[39] This shows that the way someone parents their child matters much more than their gender.

---

[34] Farr et al. 2023
[35] Farr et al. 2023
[36] Goldberg et al. 2020
[37] Fedewa et al. 2015
[38] Manning et al. 2014
[39] Baiocco et al. 2024

Furthermore, families with less traditional gender roles may have a less gendered division of labor when it comes to housework and parenting,[40] which could translate to parents spending more equal time with their children and may have a positive impact on children.[41] For families with transgender parents, the transition of the parent can increase family resilience and may encourage children to have broader understandings of gender and develop greater tolerance toward marginalized groups.[42] Many transgender parents and their children report positive parent-child relationships, indicating that even changes in parental gender identity do not have a negative impact on children.[43]

Despite the abundance of evidence that the gender of parents does not have an important impact on children, this myth prevails for many reasons:[44]

- the media representing families with a heterosexual and cisgender mother and father as "the norm";
- believed differences in parenting ability between women and men despite research finding this to be "virtually nonexistent";[45]
- socially constructed expectations about women's roles (e.g. cooking, cleaning and nurturing) and men's roles (working and leading);
- people who have more traditional beliefs about gender roles may be more likely to believe that children "need a mom and dad" despite the evidence showing the contrary.

Importantly, these beliefs about gender roles and parenting are produced by society and not scientifically established.

Conclusion

Many studies have been conducted on the potential differences between children of same-gender parents and mother-father parents. Throughout this large body of literature, researchers have not found evidence to support that children of same-gender parents are at a disadvantage in comparison to children of mother-father parents, nor have they found support for the idea that a child "needs a mother and a father". In fact, some studies point

[40] Moore and Stambolis-Ruhstorfer 2013; Prickett et al. 2015; Reczek 2020
[41] Prickett et al. 2015
[42] Goldberg 2023
[43] Goldberg 2023
[44] Webb et al. 2018
[45] Webb et al. 2018, p.1352

to children of same-gender parents having an advantage over different-gender parents in certain areas.[46]

Children of same-gender parents have been found to experience stress when exposed to homophobia, prejudice, bullying, discrimination, and hostile public rhetoric,[47] demonstrating that the public's reaction to LGBTQ+ families is what can be harmful, not the gender or sexuality of the parent.

Recommendations

- There is a limited amount of research on a range of LGBTQ+ parents, including bisexual and transgender parents. Current research does not support that these parents disadvantage children, but more nuanced research beyond "same-gender vs "different-gender" should be conducted to better understand the potential obstacles, challenges, and advantages experiences by various LGTBQ+ family configurations.[48]
- More research is also needed on families with different race and socio-economic backgrounds given that research has historically focused on white and middle-class families.[49]
- Policies must be developed to reduce barriers to becoming parents for LGBTQ+ people and fight the stigma and discrimination that they experience.
    - This should include access to multiple pathways for becoming parents, such as adoption and reproductive technologies (IVF, sperm donation, etc.) as different pathways may be better suited for different LGBTQ+ people/family configurations.[50]

[46] Baiocco et al. 2024; Fedewa et al. 2015; Kabátek and Perales 2021; Mazrekaj et al. 2020
[47] Knight et al. 2017
[48] Moore and Stambolis-Ruhstorfer 2013
[49]Goldberg 2023
[50] Goldberg 2023

References

Baiocco, Roberto, Ainzara Favini, Jessica Pistella, Nicola Carone, Anna Maria Speranza, and Vittorio Lingiardi. 2024. "Prosocial and Externalizing Behaviors in Children Raised by Different-and Same-Gender Parent Families: New Directions in Parenting Research." *Frontiers in Psychology* 14 (January). https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1325156.

Boertien, Diederik, and Fabrizio Bernardi. 2019. "Same-Sex Parents and Children's School Progress: An Association That Disappeared Over Time." *Demography* 56 (2): 477–501.

Cheng, Simon, Kristin Kelley, and Brian Powell. 2023. "One Parent, Two Parents, One Sex, Two Sexes: Public Attitudes toward Single and Same-Sex Parents." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 85 (2): 413–35. https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12899.

Every Child Deserves a Family. n.d. "State Foster Care and Adoption Resources." Accessed May 21, 2026. https://everychilddeservesafamily.com/state-resources.

Farr, Rachel H., Cassandra P. Vázquez, and Emily P. Lapidus. 2023. "Birth Relatives' Perspectives about Same-gender Parent Adoptive Family Placements." *Family Process* (Malden, Massachusetts) 62 (2): 624–40. 164153369. https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12795.

Fedewa, Alicia L., Whitney W. Black, and Soyeon Ahn. 2015. "Children and Adolescents With Same-Gender Parents: A Meta-Analytic Approach in Assessing Outcomes." *Journal of GLBT Family Studies* 11 (1): 1–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/1550428X.2013.869486.

Goldberg, Abbie E., Samantha Tornello, Rachel Farr, JuliAnna Z. Smith, and Liam Miranda. 2020. "Barriers to Adoption and Foster Care and Openness to Child Characteristics among Transgender Adults." *Children and Youth Services Review* 109 (February): 104699. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.104699.

Goldberg, Abbie E. 2023. "LGBTQ-Parent Families: Diversity, Intersectionality, and Social Context." *Current Opinion in Psychology* 49 (February): 101517. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101517.

Kabátek, Jan, and Francisco Perales. 2021. "Academic Achievement of Children in Same- and Different-Sex-Parented Families: A Population-Level Analysis of Linked Administrative Data From the Netherlands." *Demography* 58 (2): 393–418.

Knight, Ken W., Sarah EM Stephenson, Sue West, et al. 2017. "The Kids Are OK: It Is Discrimination Not Same-Sex Parents That Harms Children." *Medical Journal of Australia* 207 (9): 374–75. https://doi.org/10.5694/mja17.00943.

Manning, Wendy D., and Kristen E. Gustafson. 2025. "Attitudes toward Same-Sex Couple Parents: A Decade of Change." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 87 (3): 1321–37. https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.13065.

Manning, Wendy D., Marshal Neal Fettro, and Esther Lamidi. 2014. "Child Well-Being in Same-Sex Parent Families: Review of Research Prepared for American Sociological Association Amicus Brief." *Population Research and Policy Review* 33 (4): 485–502. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11113-014-9329-6.

Mazrekaj, Deni, Kristof De Witte, and Sofie Cabus. 2020. "School Outcomes of Children Raised by Same-Sex Parents: Evidence from Administrative Panel Data." *American Sociological Review* 85 (5): 830–56.

Moore, Mignon R., and Michael Stambolis-Ruhstorfer. 2013. "LGBT Sexuality and Families at the Start of the Twenty-First Century." *Annual Review of Sociology* 39: 491–507.

Prickett, Kate C., Alexa Martin-Storey, and Robert Crosnoe. 2015. "A Research Note on Time With Children in Different- and Same-Sex Two-Parent Families." *Demography* 52 (3): 905–18.

Reczek, Corinne. 2020. "Sexual- and Gender-Minority Families: A 2010 to 2020 Decade in Review." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 82 (1): 300–325. https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12607.

Webb, Stephanie N., Jill M. Chonody, and Phillip S. Kavanagh. 2018. "Do We Think Children Need a Mom and Dad?: Understanding How Gender Ideology Impact Attitudes Toward Same-Gender Parent Family Rights." *Journal of Homosexuality* 65 (10): 1351–71. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2017.1374071.