

Harms Suffered by Children with Same-sex Parents – A Research Summary

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Research that compares children in the care of homosexual couples with those with man-woman parents has shown substantial harm in psychological and developmental outcomes. This backgrounder briefly summarizes the major findings. For more detail or defense on any point, please consult the endnote references.

Despite politicized claims by the major social science associations, all scientifically valid random-sample studies of children in the care of same-sex parents have found evidence of harm relative to children raised by a man and a woman.¹ The four largest statistically representative datasets used to address the question—the Canadian Census, with about two million cases; the U.S. National Health Interview Survey, with 1.6 million cases; the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health, with 20,000 cases; and the New Family Structures Survey, with 3,000 cases—have all found that children with same-sex parents fare substantially worse—most measures show at least twice the level of distress—than do children with opposite-sex parents on a range of psychological, developmental and emotional outcomes. Here are the major findings.

Compared to opposite-sex parents, children in the care of same-sex couples are:

- At more than twice the risk of emotional problems, including depression, anxiety, misbehavior, poor relationships with peers and inability to concentrate. They are twice as likely to have seen a doctor or to have taken medication for a psychological condition in the past year.² The risk of emotional problems is higher if the same-sex parents are married.³
- Twice as likely to have been diagnosed with a developmental disability such as a learning disability or attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD),⁴ and one-third less likely to finish high school (secondary school).⁵
- Ten times more likely to have been sexually touched by a parent or other adult and four times more likely to have been forced to have sex against their will. Abuse is more likely if the same-sex parents are married.⁶
- *Less likely* to have been bullied or picked on in school, despite widespread speculation to the contrary.⁷
- Much more likely to have already experienced one parental breakup prior to landing with their same-sex parents, and remain more likely to experience yet another breakup of the same-sex couple and transition to a third set of parents.⁸
- In adolescence, they are less likely to have romantic relationships or to envision themselves in a future relationship involving pregnancy or marriage.⁹
- Problems persist into adulthood. As adults, persons who report having same-sex parents are twice as likely to be depressed and four times as likely to consider suicide.¹⁰ They are more likely to smoke, use marijuana, to have been arrested and to have pled guilty when they were arrested. They are over three times more likely to have had a marital affair or to

be unemployed and receiving public assistance.¹¹ By age 30, women who had same-sex parents are only half as likely to be married or to be in any relationship that has lasted three years or longer, and only a third as likely to have ever been pregnant.¹²

- Dozens of adults have published accounts of their difficulties growing up as children raised by lesbian couples. Some report horrendous abuse and instability, but the most common complaint is that, despite having loving mothers, they struggled and felt incomplete without a relationship with a father.¹³

EVERY CHILD WITH A SAME-SEX COUPLE IS DEPRIVED OF THE CARE OF ONE OR BOTH OF HIS/HER NATURAL PARENTS. There is always at least one absentee parent of the opposite sex of the homosexual partners with no access or only greatly restricted access to care for the child. Yet the research shows that “[b]iological parentage uniquely and powerfully distinguishes child outcomes between children with opposite-sex parents and those with same-sex parents.”¹⁴ The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child says, “The child shall have the right from birth ... to know and be cared for by his or her parents” (Art. 7), and that governments “shall respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents” (Art. 9).

¹ Of the several dozen extant studies on same-sex parenting, only nine have used a random sample large enough to find evidence of lower well-being for children with same-sex parents if it exists. Of these nine, the six most recent studies, by Dr. Mark Regnerus, Dr. Douglas Allen, Daniel Potter, and two by Dr. Paul Sullins, report substantial and pertinent negative outcomes for children with same-sex parents. The American Psychological Association ignores these studies. The four earlier studies, by Dr. Michael Rosenfeld and three by Dr. Jennifer Wainright and colleagues, find no differences for children with same-sex parents because, due to errors in file coding and analysis, a large portion of their same-sex parent samples actually consists of children with heterosexual parents. When the sample used by Wainright’s three studies is corrected of this error and re-analyzed, these data also show negative outcomes for children with same-sex parents similar to those reported by Regnerus and Sullins.

² D. Paul Sullins, “Emotional Problems among Children with Same-Sex Parents: Difference by Definition,” *British Journal of Education, Society and Behavioural Science* 7, no. 2 (February 18, 2015): 99–120. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2500537> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2500537>.

³ D. Paul Sullins, “The Case for Mom and Dad,” *Linacre Quarterly*, 2021, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3744451.

⁴ Sullins, “Emotional Problems among Children with Same-Sex Parents.”

⁵ D Allen, “High School Graduation Rates among Children of Same-Sex Households,” *Review of Economics of the Household* 11, no. 4 (2013): 635–58.

⁶ Mark Regnerus, “How Different Are the Adult Children of Parents Who Have Same-Sex Relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study,” *Social Science Research* 41, no. 4 (July 2012): 752–70; D. Paul Sullins, “The Unexpected Harm of Same-Sex Marriage: A Critical Appraisal, Replication and Re-Analysis of Wainright and Patterson’s Studies of Adolescents with Same-Sex Parents,” *British Journal of Education, Society & Behavioural Science* 11, no. 2 (August 8, 2015), <http://sciencedomain.org/abstract/10443>.

⁷ Sullins, “Emotional Problems among Children with Same-Sex Parents.”

⁸ Walter R. Schumm, “Comparative Relationship Stability of Lesbian Mother and Heterosexual Mother Families: A Review of Evidence,” *Marriage & Family Review* 46, no. 8 (2010): 499–509.

⁹ Sullins, “Family Formation and Sexual Identity Development among Children with Same-Sex Parents”.

Unpublished research in process; details available by request via sullins@cua.edu.

¹⁰ D. Paul Sullins, “Invisible Victims: Delayed Onset Depression among Adults with Same-Sex Parents,” *Depression Research and Treatment* 2016 (2016), <http://www.hindawi.com/journals/drt/2016/2410392/abs/>.

¹¹ Regnerus, “Adult Children of Parents Who Had Same-Sex Relationships.”

¹² Sullins, “Family Formation”.

¹³ Denise Shick and Jerry Gramckow, *My Daddy’s Secret* (U.S.: Xulon Press, 2008); Dawn Stefanowicz, *Out From Under: The Impact of Homosexual Parenting* (Redemption Press, 2014); Robert Lopez and Rivka Edelman, eds., *Jephthah’s Daughters* (Northridge, CA: International Children’s Rights Institute, 2015).

¹⁴ Sullins, “Emotional Problems among Children with Same-Sex Parents.”