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What does the scholarly research say about the well-being of children with gay or lesbian parents?

Overview: We identified 79 scholarly studies that met our criteria for adding to knowledge about the well-being of children with gay or lesbian parents. Of those studies, 75 concluded that children of gay or lesbian parents fare no worse than other children. While many of the sample sizes were small, and some studies lacked a control group, researchers regard such studies as providing the best available knowledge about child adjustment, and do not view large, representative samples as essential. We identified four studies concluding that children of gay or lesbian parents face added disadvantages. Since all four took their samples from children who endured family break-ups, a cohort known to face added risks, these studies have been criticized by many scholars as unreliable assessments of the well-being of LGB-headed households. Taken together, this research forms an overwhelming scholarly consensus, based on over three decades of peer-reviewed research, that having a gay or lesbian parent does not harm children.

Evaluating Studies that Conclude Gay Parenting Raises Risks: With regard to the four outlier studies, all share the same flaw. At most a handful of the children who were studied were actually raised by same-sex parents; the rest came from families in which opposite-sex parents raised their children for a period of time, but in which, often, one or more parent(s) subsequently came out as gay or lesbian and left the family or had a same-sex relationship. The result was a family that endured added stress and often disruption or family breakup. Including such children among those labeled as having been “raised by same-sex parents” is so misleading as to be inaccurate, since these children were generally raised by opposite-sex families and only later, after a family disruption, did they live in households with one or more gay parent(s), and only rarely did two parents of the same sex, in a stable, long-term relationship, actually raise the children together. Authors of these outlier studies argue that, nevertheless, such configurations often represent families with gay or lesbian parents, and hence it is reasonable to count them as indicators of what happens when children live with one or more gay parent(s).

Evaluating Studies that Find No Differences Resulting from Having a Gay Parent: Some critics of the LGB parenting research object to the small, non-random sampling methods known as “convenience sampling” that researchers in the field often use to gather their data. Yet within the field, convenience sampling is not considered a methodological flaw, but simply a limitation to generalizability. Within sociology and especially psychology, small, qualitative and longitudinal studies are considered to have certain advantages over probability studies: Such data can allow investigators to notice and analyze subtleties and texture in child development over time that large, statistical studies often miss. It is

important to note, moreover, that some of the research that finds no differences among children with same-sex parents does use large, representative data. A 2010 study by Stanford researcher Michael Rosenfeld used census data to examine the school advancement of 3,500 children with same-sex parents, finding no significant differences between households headed by same-sex and opposite-sex parents when controlling for family background. Another study drew on nationally representative, longitudinal data using a sampling pool of over 20,000 children, of which 158 lived in a same-sex parent household. Controlling for family disruptions, those children showed no significant differences from their peers in school outcomes.

Scholarly sources finding that children of gay or lesbian parents fare no worse than others:

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3. Anderssen, N., Amlie, C., & Ytteroy, E. A. (2002). Outcomes for children with lesbian or gay parents. A review of studies from 1978 to 2000. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 43(4), 335-351.
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5. Bailey, J., Bobrow, D., Wolfe, M., & Mikach, S. (1995). Sexual orientation of adult sons of gay fathers. *Developmental Psychology*, 31(1), 124-129.
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Scholarly sources concluding that children of gay or lesbian parents face added disadvantages:

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