



# APA Public Interest Government Relations Office

## Marriage Equality and LGBT Health

There is no scientific basis for the assertion that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons are not fit to marry or to become parents of healthy and well-adjusted children (Herek, 2006; Kurdek, 2004; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007).

Marriage bestows substantial psychosocial and health benefits to individuals, due to the moral, economic, and social support to married couples. The denial of marriage rights to same-sex couples, therefore, adversely affects the health and well-being of the individuals involved, as well as their families and friends (Herdt & Kertzner, 2006).

Recent empirical evidence illustrating the harmful psychological effect of policies restricting marriage rights for same-sex couples is discussed below.

### Findings

- Researchers have consistently shown that gay men and lesbians exposed to the stigma of homosexuality have a higher risk of experiencing distress and adverse psychological outcomes (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007).
- According to a quantitative study with more than 1,500 lesbian, gay, and bisexual participants, living in a U.S. State where same-sex marriage is outlawed was *directly* related to chronic social stress and psychological problems, and *not* due to pre-existing mental health issues or other factors (Rostosky, Riggle, Horne, & Miller, 2009).
- Beyond the negative effect of marriage restrictions for gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals, new research evidence indicates that the families of origin and allies of sexual minorities may suffer from some of the same serious negative physical and mental health consequences experienced by their loved ones (Arm, Horne, and Levitt, 2009).
- Children raised by same-sex couples are equivalent in their psychological adjustment, cognitive abilities, and social functioning to children of heterosexual partners (Fulcher et al., 2006; Tasker, 2005).
- Being denied the right to marry reinforces the stigma associated with a minority sexual identity, and can particularly undermine the healthy development of a well-adjusted emotional and social attachment style among adolescents and young adults (Herdt & Boxer, 1993).
- Emerging longitudinal evidence suggests that same-sex couples in legal unions are more likely to remain in a committed relationship, i.e., a legalized relationship status may positively impact relationship longevity over time (Balsam et al., 2008; Kurdek, 2004).

### Recommendations

Scientific research provides no evidence that would justify discrimination against same-sex partners and their families. In its 2004 resolution on sexual orientation and marriage, APA strongly supports policy and legal decisions that support the health and well-being of same-sex couples, their children, and their communities.

Specifically, APA recommends:

- Adopting initiatives that support legal access to civil marriage and all its associated rights, benefits and privileges for same-sex couples.
- Funding and evaluation of further scientific studies that can enlighten and be utilized in policy development concerning sexual orientation and marriage.
- Efforts to increase the dissemination of empirical research to inform the U.S. population and policy makers regarding marriage equality issues.

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