LGBT DISCRIMINATION AND DENIAL OF MARRIAGE EQUALITY

Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people and their children face discrimination, stigma, prejudice, and violence. The denial of marriage equality has additional pernicious effects. Marriage has empirically demonstrated financial and health benefits, which would benefit all people.

Many LGBT people and their children face discrimination, stigma, prejudice, and violence.
- Exposure to heterosexist stigma and prejudice leads to increased risk of negative physical and psychological harm (Hatzenbuehler, Phelan, & Link, 2013). Approximately 20% of LGBT individuals have suffered violence and property crime, and about 50% have experienced verbal abuse due to their sexual orientation (Herek, 2009). In 2011, the FBI recorded more than 1500 hate crimes based on the victim’s sexual orientation (FBI, 2012).
- Children of same-sex parents face additional stress as a result of the stigma against their parents’ relationship, societal heterosexism (Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2012), and homophobic encounters (Gartrell, Deck, Rodas, & Peyser, 2005).

Public anti-equality campaigns heighten the harm done to sexual minorities.
- The negative effects of discrimination are heightened by anti-gay campaigns that can make sexual minorities feel judged and hated (Russell & Richards, 2003).
- Living in a state that has outlawed same-sex marriage through public ballot campaigns is directly related to stress and negative psychological outcomes among same-sex couples (Rostosky, Riggle, Horne, & Miller, 2009).

The denial of marriage equality has specific negative effects on same-sex couples.
- Stigma, prejudice, and discrimination resulting from anti-equality marriage laws generate a hostile and stressful environment that for some individuals can lead to mental health problems (Herek, 2011). These can include mood disorders, generalized anxiety disorders, alcohol use disorders, and psychiatric comorbidity (Hatzenbuehler, McLaughlin, Keyes, & Hasin, 2010; Maisel & Fingerhut, 2011).
- Families and allies of those who are denied the right to marry may also suffer negative physical and psychological consequences (Arm, Horne, Levitt, 2009).

Marriage has financial and health benefits.
- Married opposite-sex couples experience greater financial security than unmarried individuals (Herek, 2006).
- Marriage confers health benefits such as decreased cardiovascular mortality risk, which can result from stress and insufficient social and material support (Johnson, Backlund, Sorlie, & Loveless, 2000).
- Legal ties for same-same couples, ranging from jointly owning property to entering into state civil marriage, have been shown to reduce both fear of homophobic encounters and incidences of victimization (Oswald, Goldberg, Kuvalanka, & Clausell, 2008).
- Among same-sex couples, possessing and exercising the right to marry are associated with important psychological benefits, such as greater feelings of social acceptance and inclusion (Badgett, 2011), and decreased psychological distress (Wight, LeBlanc, & Badgett, 2013).
References


This informational document was prepared by scientists from the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI). For further information, please contact SPSSI’s Policy Director, Dr. Gabriel Twose, at 202-675-6956 or gtwose@spssi.org