



HOMOSEXUAL PARENT STUDY

Summary of Findings

Peter Sprigg

There has been a great deal of media attention focused on a pioneering new study of children with homosexual parents (defined as parents who had a same-sex romantic relationship while the child was under age 18). The first [article](#) based on the [New Family Structures Study \(NFSS\)](#) was published by lead researcher Mark Regnerus in the journal *Social Science Research* in June 2012.¹

This study is the first to truly bridge the gap in our knowledge left by previous studies that have shown the benefits of being raised by a married mother and father (but which did not include direct comparisons with homosexual parents), and previous studies on homosexual parents (which, however, did not use large, representative samples).

The results of this study were no surprise to pro-family researchers, but have been [bitterly attacked](#)² by pro-homosexual activists. As summarized on the NFSS website,

[T]he data show rather clearly that children raised by gay or lesbian parents on average are at a significant disadvantage when compared to children raised by the intact family of their married, biological mother and father.

Family Research Council (FRC) has already published an [analysis](#) of the NFSS methodology and some of its findings,³ but we offer this to provide a more specific documentation of the key findings.

COMPARISONS WITH MARRIED BIOLOGICAL PARENTS

While all the findings are important, we can have a higher level of confidence that findings represent actual differences in the overall population if they are “statistically significant.” If they are statistically significant after “controlling” for other variables that might influence a particular outcome, that is even more compelling. Below are some of the statistically significant findings comparing children who had homosexual parents with children raised by their married mother and father. (Some of these figures represent percentages reporting certain experiences, while others represent average scores on scales created by Regnerus.)

Significant for both lesbian mothers (LM) and gay fathers (GF), with & without controls:

Compared with children raised by their married biological parents (“intact biological family,” or IBF), children of homosexual parents (LM and GF):

- Are *much* more likely to have received welfare growing up (IBF 17%; LM 69%; GF 57%)
- Have lower educational attainment (IBF 3.19; LM 2.39; GF 2.64)
- Report less safety and security in their family of origin (IBF 4.13; LM 3.12; GF 3.25)
- Report more ongoing “negative impact” from their family of origin (IBF 2.30; LM 3.13; GF 2.90)
- Are more likely to suffer from depression (IBF 1.83; LM 2.20; 2.18)
- Have been arrested more often (IBF 1.18; LM 1.68; GF 1.75)
- If they are female, have had more sexual partners – both male (IBF 2.79; LM 4.02; GF 5.92) *and* female (IBF 0.22; LM 1.04; GF 1.47)

Significant for lesbian mothers (LM) with & without controls

Compared to children from intact biological families (IBF), children of lesbian mothers:

- Are more likely to be currently cohabiting (IBF 9%; LM 24%)
- Are almost 4 times more likely to be currently on public assistance (IBF 10%; LM 38%)
- Are barely half as likely to be currently employed full-time (IBF 49%; LM 26%)
- Are more than 3 times more likely to be unemployed (IBF 8%; LM 28%)
- Are nearly 4 times more likely to identify as something *other than* entirely heterosexual (Identifies as entirely heterosexual: IBF 90%; LM 61%)
- Are 3 times as likely to have had an affair while married or cohabiting (IBF 13%; LM 40%)
- Are an astonishing *11 times more likely to have been "touched sexually by a parent or other adult caregiver"* in childhood (but not necessarily by the homosexual parent; IBF 2%; LM 23%)
- Are nearly 4 times as likely to have been "physically forced" to have sex against their will (at some time in their life, not necessarily in childhood; IBF 8%; LM 31%)
- Are more likely to have "attachment" problems related to the ability to depend on others (IBF 2.82; LM 3.43)
- Use marijuana more frequently (IBF 1.32; LM 1.84)
- Smoke more frequently (IBF 1.79; LM 2.76)
- Watch TV for long periods more frequently (IBF 3.01; LM 3.70)
- Have more often pled guilty to a non-minor offense (IBF 1.10; LM 1.36)

COMPARISONS WITH OTHER HETEROSEXUAL PARENTS

Critics of the Regnerus study have argued that he compared apples with oranges in defining two groups on the basis of the sexual orientation of the parents (as measured by whether they had a same-sex romantic relationship), while defining the other six comparison groups on the basis of family structure. Since most of the media attention has focused on the comparison between children of homosexual parents and children of "intact biological families" (that is, children raised by their own biological mother and father who are married to one another), critics argue that the children of homosexuals did worse only because most of them in this study had experienced instability in their family structure (e.g., divorce or a single parent), not because of the parent's sexual orientation.

It is true that Regnerus did not compare "stable homosexual families" with "stable heterosexual families," for a simple reason—he could hardly find any "stable homosexual families." Of the 248 children with homosexual parents who were surveyed, [only two](#) had lived with their homosexual parent and the parent's partner during their entire childhood from birth to age 18.⁴

However, it is *not* true to imply that Regnerus failed to compare the children of homosexual parents (who almost always had an unstable family structure) with children of *heterosexual* parents who *also* experienced unstable family structures growing up. Regnerus not only compared the children of lesbian mothers (LM) and gay fathers (GF) with children from intact biological families (IBF); he *also* compared them with the following (letter codes are mine):

- children who were adopted by strangers before age two (AD);
- respondents whose parents "divorced late," after the child reached adulthood (DV);⁵
- children who lived in a step-family (STP);
- children who lived with a single parent (SNG);
- and children in "All other" situations (OT—e.g., children with a parent who died).

When all of Regnerus' findings are analyzed, they show that the children of lesbian mothers and gay fathers tended to do worse than those from any heterosexual family structure, including more unstable, non-intact ones.

STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT COMPARISONS BETWEEN LESBIAN MOTHERS AND OTHER HETEROSEXUAL PARENTS

Because of the larger number of children with “lesbian mothers” (175) than with “gay fathers” (73) in his sample, comparisons with the LM were more likely to be statistically significant.⁶ Regarding these, Regnerus states:

[N]ot counting those differences with Group 1 (IBFs) . . . the young-adult children of lesbian mothers display 57 [between-group differences] . . . that are [statistically] significant . . . , and 44 that are [statistically] significant after controls (not shown). The majority of these differences are in suboptimal directions.

Regnerus actually understated the case here. A careful examination of his data shows that the results for lesbian mothers were “suboptimal” on *all 57 statistically significant bivariate comparisons*. These include two comparisons with GFs; the other 55 statistically significant comparisons were between children of lesbian mothers and children of non-IBF (and thus, presumably more “unstable”) heterosexual family structures – and *in every single one, the children of lesbian mothers fared worse*.

Here is the complete list of the 57 statistically significant comparisons between children of lesbian mothers and other children who did *not* grow up in an “intact biological family:”

Percentage reporting certain experiences (Regnerus Table 2, p. 761)

Currently cohabiting: LM 24%; AD 7%

Family received welfare growing up: LM 69%; AD 12%; DV 47%; STP 53%; SNG 48%; OT 35%

Currently employed full-time: LM 26%; STP 47%; SNG 43%

Currently unemployed: LM 28%; SNG 13%

Voted in last presidential election: LM 41%; GF 73%; DV 63%; STP 57%

Identifies as entirely heterosexual: LM 61%; AD 82%; DV 83%; STP 81%; SNG 83%; OT 82%

Had affair while married/cohabiting: LM 40%; DV 12%; SNG 19%; OT 16%

Ever touched sexually by parent/adult: LM 23%; GF 6%; AD 3%; OT 8%

Ever forced to have sex against will: LM 31%; SNG 16%; OT 11%

Scores on a continuous scale (Regnerus Table 3, p. 762)

Educational attainment: LM 2.39; AD 3.21; DV 2.88

Family-of-origin safety/security: LM 3.12; AD 3.77; STP 3.52; SNG 3.58; OT 3.77

Family-of-origin negative impact: LM 3.13; OT 2.64

CES-D depression index: LM 2.20; STP 1.91; SNG 1.89; OT 1.94

Attachment scale (depend): LM 3.43; DV 3.08; STP 3.10; SNG 3.05; OT 3.02

Impulsivity scale: LM 2.03; STP 1.86; SNG 1.82

Level of household income: LM 6.08; AD 7.93; DV 7.42;

Scores based on frequency or number of certain experiences (Regnerus Table 4, p. 762)

Frequency of marijuana use: LM 1.84; AD 1.33;

Frequency of smoking: LM 2.76; OT 1.91

Frequency of watching TV [more than 3 hours in a row]: LM 3.70; OT 2.95

Frequency of having been arrested: LM 1.68; AD 1.31; STP 1.38; SNG 1.35; OT 1.34

Frequency pled guilty to non-minor offense: LM 1.36; SNG 1.17; OT 1.17

Number of female sex partners (among women): LM 1.04; AD 0.47; STP 0.47; SNG 0.52; OT 0.33

Number of male sex partners (among women): LM 4.02; OT 2.91

CONCLUSION

While there are, of course, limitations to what any one study can “prove,” the data in the NFSS study are at least *consistent with* the following pro-family principles – ones which, unfortunately, pro-homosexual activists persistently deny:

- 1) **The “intact biological family” remains the normative setting for child-rearing in America today.** Although social reengineers are fond of dismissing the “traditional” nuclear family as an unrealistic relic of a bygone era, Regnerus reported, “A total of 58% of the 15, 058 persons screened [for the study] report spending their entire youth – up until they turned 18 or left the house – with their biological mother and father.”
- 2) **Children do better when raised by their own, married mother and father.** Even *without* the data on children whose parents had same-sex relationships, the NFSS would be a significant contributor to the already large body of evidence showing the superiority of the “intact biological family” over all other household structures.
- 3) **Children suffer when raised by homosexual parents** – not only in comparison to being raised by a married mother and father, but also in comparison to *all* other family structures.
- 4) **Homosexual relationships are intrinsically “unstable.”** The fact that only two of over two hundred children with a parent who had a same-sex relationship lived with that parent and his or her partner from birth to age 18 shows how extraordinarily rare “stable gay relationships” really are.
- 5) **Public policy should continue to encourage the raising of children by a married mother and father,** while discouraging, attempting to reduce, and/or refusing to affirm or subsidize alternatives such as out-of-wedlock births, single parenthood, cohabitation, divorce, or “homosexual parenting.”

Peter S. Sprigg is Senior Fellow for Policy Studies at the Family Research Council in Washington, D.C.

¹ 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* Vol 41, Issue 4 (July 2012), pp. 752-770; online at: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0049089X12000610>

² For a summary of these attacks, see: Andrew Ferguson, “Revenge of the Sociologists: The perils of politically incorrect academic research,” *The Weekly Standard*, Vol. 17, No. 43 (July 30, 2012); online at: http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/revenge-sociologists_648829.html

³ Peter Sprigg, “New Study on Homosexual Parents Tops All Previous Research: Children of Homosexuals Fare Worse on Most Outcomes,” *Issue Brief* (Washington, DC: Family Research Council), June 2012; online at: <http://www.frc.org/issuebrief/new-study-on-homosexual-parents-tops-all-previous-research>

⁴ Mark Regnerus, “Q & A with Mark Regnerus about the background of his new study,” *Patheos: Black, White and Gray Blog*, June 10, 2012; online at: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/blackwhiteandgray/2012/06/q-a-with-mark-regnerus-about-the-background-of-his-new-study/>

⁵ The “Divorced late” category is somewhat confusing. Children whose parents divorced *during* their childhood are classified as SNG if the primary custodial parent did not remarry or STP if they did remarry before the child was 18.

⁶ Regnerus did not specify in his article which comparisons between GFs and the non-IBF heterosexual family structures were statistically significant, but reported that 11 were significant in a bivariate comparison and 24 were significant with controls.