

## **Lesbian couples raise well-adjusted teenagers**

17:25 15 November 04  
NewScientist.com news service

Teenagers raised by lesbian mothers show no developmental differences compared to those brought up by heterosexual parents, according to the first large national study in the US.

Previous research has focused mainly on younger children and found no significant disparities in child welfare between same-sex and heterosexual families.

But few studies have been done on adolescents, who some researchers think may be more prone to - or conscious of - discrimination against their families. Others have speculated whether a teens' own sexuality is affected by that of their parents.

"There's been this debate about whether being raised by single-sex couples is good or bad for children," says Stephen Russell, a sociologist at the University of Arizona in Tucson, US. "We would call into question suggestions that growing up with single-sex parents is somehow problematic."

### **12,000 interviews**

Russell and colleagues Charlotte Patterson and Jennifer Wainright at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, US, came to this conclusion after sifting through interviews from 1995 with about 12,000 US teenagers and their families. The teens were part of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, the largest and most comprehensive study of the age group in the US.

"This is the best available evidence to date about how adolescent children fare in families with single-sex parents," Russell told **New Scientist**.

The researchers found 44 teens being raised by two women in a "marriage-like" relationship. Only six teens reported living with two gay men, so male single-sex families were excluded from the study.

Each teen studied was matched with a counterpart from a heterosexual family, who shared the same sex, age, ethnicity, adoption status and family income, among other factors.

### **Same-sex attractions**

The researchers found no differences between the two groups in terms of depression, anxiety, self-esteem and school grades. Exactly the same proportion of both groups also reported having had sex (34%).

But while a previous study suggested children of gay parents were more likely to consider homosexual relationships, this study was unable to provide such information because so few teens reported same-sex attractions and romances.

The single most important predictor of the teens' well being, the study showed, was their relationship with parents - regardless of family type. "What's really important is the quality of the relationship," Russell told **New Scientist**.

As a result, the authors write that their findings "provide no justification for limitations on child custody or visitation by lesbian mothers" and "do not support the idea that lesbian and gay adults are less likely than others to provide good adoptive or foster homes".

Russell says future studies could see how the same group of teens fared in young adulthood.

Journal reference: *Child Development* (vol 75, p 1886)

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