

Study examines relationship between parental acceptance of LGBTQ children and later-life mental health

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A new study, released today at the American Psychiatric Association's 2021 Annual Meeting, held online, examines the relationship between parental acceptance of lesbian and gay children's sexual orientation and their mental health in later life. The study finds that a consistent perspective, even negative, leads to better outcomes for lesbian and gay people, than parents with changing perspectives.

Lesbian and gay individuals experience higher rates of [mental health](#) and substance use disorders than the general population, while also dealing with varying parental responses to disclosure of sexual orientation. Previous research has shown a [negative relationship](#) between levels of parental support and mental health or [substance use disorders](#) at one point in time. This study looked at the effect of parental support on depression, anxiety, or substance use over time.

For this study, adult gay and [lesbian](#) participants were recruited via social media. More than 175 people completed demographic surveys and questions about initial and current level of their parental support regarding their sexual orientation. Based on the level of parental support reported, participants were divided into three groups—consistently positive, negative to positive, and consistently negative. A fourth group, positive to negative, was excluded because it was too small to analyze. Participants were also given screening assessments for depression and anxiety.

The study found that while the consistently positive group had the lowest symptom scores, the difference between the consistently positive and consistently negative group were not statistically significant. The findings were significant for the consistently positive and consistently negative when compared to the negative to positive group. Consistency in attitude appears to be as important as positivity toward their child's sexual orientation, study author Matthew Verdun, M.S. (The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, Psy.D., Applied Clinical Psychology, 2021) concludes.

While this research did not seek answers to the reason for better outcomes in persons with consistently unsupportive parents, Verdun suggests some potential reasons for further research. One possible reason is that people with unsupportive parents received support elsewhere, such as from their community, school, peers, or other family. It is also

possible that participants developed internal resources to navigate across social contexts, assert personal agency, un-silence their own sexual and social identities, cultivate meaningful relationships, and engage in healing. Further research could also identify the interaction between these previously identified factors and resiliency seen in this study.

Verdun notes the findings can help inform mental health professionals working with gay and [lesbian people](#) to identify supports and build resilience factors that support improved mental [health](#) outcomes.

Provided by American Psychiatric Association

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