

## FACTORS INFLUENCING RELATIONSHIPS IN SAME-SEX PARENTING

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**Abstract:** *The article "Factors Influencing Relationships in Same-Sex Parenting" offers in-depth insights into the elements shaping relationship quality and resilience among same-sex family. The academic focus on same-sex parenting relationships has gained momentum in recent years due to social, legal, and technological changes that underscore the complexities of family life within diverse family structures.*

**Keywords:** *development, relationships in same-sex parenting.*

The article "Factors Influencing Relationships in Same-Sex Parenting" offers in-depth insights into the elements shaping relationship quality and resilience among same-sex families.

The academic focus on same-sex parenting relationships has gained momentum in recent years due to social, legal, and technological changes that underscore the complexities of family life within diverse family structures.

These issues offer insights into how relationships within same-sex families cope with unique challenges, often arising from societal prejudice and discrimination, which can impact both the partners' well-being and the overall welfare of all family members, including children (Goldberg & Smith, 2013; Patterson, 2017). Previous studies have examined how unique social and legal experiences impact relationships within same-sex parenting families. Goldberg and Smith's (2013) study demonstrated that same-sex families often face societal discrimination and judgment, which may lead to unique relationship challenges. Similarly, Herek's (2006) research emphasized the impact of social stigma on the security and stability of same-sex couples. Additional research by Frost and Meyer (2012) highlights the importance of LGBTQ+ communities in supporting these couples, providing them with significant emotional and social support networks, particularly in regions and countries with strong social and institutional barriers.

Moreover, numerous studies underscore the psychological effects of discrimination and harassment on the mental health of same-sex couples and the subsequent impact on relationship

stability. Bos et al. (2016) found that same-sex couples experience heightened levels of stress and pressure due to exposure to discrimination, which can negatively affect relationship dynamics. Another study by McDaniel and Coyne (2016) discovered that communication technologies may serve as an essential support tool for same-sex couples, making it easier to maintain the relationship and share experiences with other couples facing similar challenges.

The present article aims to examine the factors that influence relationships within same-sex parenting families, focusing on four main factors: social, psychological, legal, and technological. These factors are grounded in the research I am conducting, wherein I analyze and examine these influences. The research findings will provide a deep understanding of how these factors impact the relationship and parenting lives of same-sex couples, while also discussing strategies for improving the welfare and stability of these families through tailored policies and practices.

**Social Factors:** Analysis of Social Support, Family Support, and Stigma on Relationships, the positive influence of family and social support on the stability of relationships in same-sex families has been well-documented. Studies suggest that same-sex families who receive support from their extended family and broader social networks experience greater relationship stability, as this support provides a psychological and emotional safety net for parents (Tasker & Patterson, 2007). Different types of social support are received from various groups (e.g., workplace colleagues versus personal friends). Notably, significant differences exist in the type of support provided by these groups. While personal friends are more likely to offer emotional support, workplace colleagues can offer more practical assistance, such as flexibility at work. However, the importance of each type of support may vary depending on the different situations family life presents (Oswald, 2002).

### **Social Discrimination and Stigma**

Social discrimination and stigma pose a substantial challenge for same-sex couples, who frequently face negative social reactions and prejudices. Herek's (2006) research highlights the direct impact of social stigma on relationship security and overall satisfaction. However, studies reveal that couples who develop coping mechanisms, such as seeking support from LGBTQ+ groups or turning to psychological counseling, successfully mitigate the effects of stigma and strengthen the resilience of their relationship. Support from these communities provides not only a supportive social network but also a sense of safety and belonging, which aids couples in coping with external social pressures.

The Role of Local Community (e.g., LGBTQ+ Communities) in Supporting Same-Sex Couples. Local LGBTQ+ communities play an essential role in providing social and emotional

support for same-sex couples. Research suggests that these communities offer a safe space for their children and enable them to feel accepted and free from discrimination (Frost & Meyer, 2012). The level of social support for same-sex couples may vary depending on the social groups involved. For example, Oswald (2002) points out that while personal friends typically provide more meaningful emotional support, workplace colleagues tend to offer practical support, such as assistance with work flexibility. These differences in types of support are particularly significant for same-sex parents balancing family life with work demands. The research emphasizes that different types of support help reduce pressures, particularly when meaningful emotional support is available from close social circles, strengthening the couple's relationship.

LGBTQ+ communities provide a critical support network for same-sex couples. Studies indicate that belonging to a community that legitimizes their identity and family structure offers a sense of acceptance and belonging. Frost and Meyer's (2012) study emphasizes that LGBTQ+ communities provide social and emotional support essential for same-sex parents facing social prejudice and that the acceptance and security offered by the community enhance relationship stability.

### **Psychological Factors: The Role of Psychological Pressures in Relationship Stability.**

Psychological factors are critical to relationship stability in same-sex families, especially among couples who have become parents. Several studies indicate that the pressures and stress experienced by same-sex couples due to social stigma, discrimination, and internalized conflicts are directly reflected in relationship stability and quality. This section discusses the ways same-sex couples cope with the stress and pressure associated with parenting, differences in stress levels between same-sex and heterosexual couples, and the impact of parental mental health on relationship stability.

The family of origin significantly influences relationship and parenting dynamics within same-sex families, particularly regarding emotional support, the effect of internalized stigma, and conflict resolution. Research in this area suggests that support from the family of origin can be a pivotal factor in the mental well-being of same-sex couples; however, it can also pose a challenge when there is a lack of support or when stigma is present within the family.

For example, Goldberg and Smith's (2011) research found that same-sex couples who receive positive support from their family of origin report higher levels of relationship satisfaction and greater confidence in their roles as parents. Such support enhances feelings of belonging and acceptance, contributing to mental resilience in the face of external societal

pressures. However, couples who encounter a lack of support or discrimination from their family of origin often experience emotional isolation and increased psychological stress, which may negatively impact relationship stability and amplify relational pressures.

Additional studies emphasize the influence of what is known as “internalized homophobia,” which is exacerbated when the family of origin expresses non-acceptance towards the couple’s sexual identity or family structure. Oswald (2002) argues that when the family is unsupportive, same-sex couples may internalize feelings of rejection or shame, leading to increased levels of stress and anxiety. Internalized homophobia can affect interpersonal interaction between partners, fostering insecurity within the relationship.

### **Emotional Bond with Family of Origin and Its Impact on Parenting Style.**

Research by Lick et al. (2013) indicates that same-sex couples who maintain positive relationships with their families show a higher capacity to provide emotional support to their children and display higher levels of positive parenting behaviors. In contrast, couples experiencing conflict with their families struggle to offer the same level of emotional support and often have to manage both external and internal pressures simultaneously.

### **Differences in Stress Levels Between Same-Sex and Heterosexual Couples.**

Research shows that same-sex couples experience higher levels of stress compared to heterosexual couples, primarily due to the challenges of overcoming social prejudices and legal barriers. For example, Bos et al. (2016) found that same-sex couples report elevated stress levels due to the constant need to protect their identity and their children in environments that may not always be supportive. Additionally, Herek (2006) notes that same-sex couples frequently encounter negative reactions and rejection from their surroundings, further adding to the emotional and relational stress they experience.

This heightened stress among same-sex couples can lead to relational burnout if adequate community support or coping mechanisms are not available. LGBTQ+ communities provide these couples with unique social support, helping to alleviate stress and prevent relational burnout.

Parental mental health is a crucial factor in relationship stability and the ability to maintain a stable relationship in same-sex families. Goldberg and Smith's (2011) research found that when same-sex parents receive social support and, if needed, psychological treatment, their stress levels decrease, leading to higher relationship satisfaction. This support safeguards their mental health, enabling them to optimally cope with the challenges of both parenting and maintaining their relationship. Same-sex couples tend to experience higher rates of depression and anxiety, often stemming from difficulties related to the lack of social acceptance. Research

by Bos et al. (2016) found that same-sex couples are more likely to report feelings of anxiety and depression due to daily encounters with social discrimination and stigma. Herek (2009) notes that couples struggling to find social support experience higher rates of depression and anxiety, which can lead to emotional burnout and affect relationship stability.

In contrast, when social and community support is available, feelings of depression and anxiety decrease, contributing to improved relationship quality and the ability to sustain a healthy, stable partnership. Overall, research suggests that reducing stress through social, psychological, and community support is a key factor in relationship stability and helps protect the mental health of parents, thus enhancing relationship stability and quality.

**Legal Factors:** The Role of Legal Recognition in Relationship Stability and Emotional Resilience.

Legal factors play a significant role in relationship stability and emotional resilience in same-sex families, particularly for same-sex couples who are also parents. Legal recognition of same-sex relationships contributes to a sense of security and stability for couples, providing official support for parenting decisions and legal authority to care for children without fear of losing parental rights. However, even in countries where legal recognition exists, same-sex couples often face prejudice and discrimination within the legal system, which can undermine their sense of security and create unique challenges in relationships and family functioning.

Legal recognition of same-sex relationships contributes not only to the legal aspects of the relationship but also to the couple's emotional security. Researchers like Herek (2006) and Riggle et al. (2010) found that legal recognition of same-sex relationships in countries like the U.S., Canada, and parts of Europe leads to an improved sense of belonging and social acceptance, reducing feelings of isolation among same-sex parents. Legally recognized couples feel protected both economically and socially, which helps to lower stress levels and improve relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, legal recognition can reduce fears of legal instability concerning children, providing couples with confidence in securing their children's well-being. This recognition includes rights such as making medical decisions for children, financial responsibility, and safeguarding family ties in cases of crisis or separation, all of which are central to the couple's sense of security and provide significant emotional support (Goldberg & Smith, 2011).

**Unique Challenges for Non-Biological Parent.** For same-sex families, the issue of biological connection often poses an additional legal concern. In cases where only one partner is the biological parent, legal issues may arise regarding the parental rights of the non-biological parent. Research by Goldberg et al. (2014) and Lick et al. (2013) indicates that the lack of a

biological connection can place the non-biological parent in a less stable legal position, potentially leading to fears and uncertainties about their parental rights in the future. When full legal recognition of same-sex relationships is absent, the non-biological parent may risk losing their rights to the child in cases of separation or the biological parent's death. This vulnerable status of the non-biological parent can lead to emotional stress within the family and challenge the couple's sense of stability and security as a family unit.

### **Discrimination and Prejudice in the Legal System.**

Same-sex couples frequently face discrimination and prejudice within the legal system. This issue is particularly evident in countries lacking supportive legislation or where there are legal restrictions on parenting rights for same-sex couples. Herek (2006) and Bos et al. (2016) describe how many couples turn to legal support and advice to secure their rights as a family, especially when there is a risk of losing rights in the event of separation. In many cases, same-sex couples rely on legal support groups and community organizations dedicated to promoting LGBTQ+ rights. Frost and Meyer (2012) note that LGBTQ+ communities and legal organizations provide advice and resources for addressing discrimination and protecting parental rights. These services include legal assistance with custody agreements and establishing shared rights over children, ensuring the legal standing of the non-biological parent.

Studies show that legal prejudice negatively impacts relationship satisfaction and the sense of security among same-sex couples. For instance, Bos et al. (2016) found that same-sex couples dealing with an unsupportive legal system report higher levels of stress and anxiety, which may lead to emotional exhaustion. When couples feel that the legal system does not support their rights, they experience vulnerability, which can undermine family stability and community belonging. Furthermore, legal discrimination intensifies feelings of rejection and internalized homophobia, a phenomenon known as "internalized homophobia." Oswald's (2002) study found that same-sex couples facing legal discrimination often experience shame and a sense of exclusion, adding to mental strain and impacting relationship and family quality.

Navigating legal prejudice and concerns about biological aspects of parenting underscore the need for enhanced legal and community support for same-sex couples. Broad recognition of their legal rights can significantly contribute to relationship stability and the welfare of both partners and their children.

**Technological Factors:** The Role of Technology in Relationship Stability and Parenting Support. Technology has a broad impact on same-sex couples, particularly in terms of relationship stability and parenting support. Research by McDaniel and Coyne (2016) and

Gabb and Fink (2015) shows that social networks, dating apps, and other online tools contribute to maintaining relationship strength and managing the unique challenges of parenting within same-sex families.

**Social Networks and Online Support Groups.** Social networks enable same-sex couples to connect with others who have similar experiences and to find support groups in virtual spaces. Frost and Meyer's (2012) study reveals that belonging to online communities provides couples with a safe space to share parenting experiences and feel less socially isolated. Interacting with families in similar situations helps couples maintain a sense of belonging and experience lower mental stress, particularly in regions where support for same-sex relationships may be limited. Additional research by Lindsay et al. (2013) highlights that participating in online support groups enhances feelings of acceptance and inclusion for same-sex couples, improving mental health and relationship quality. Digital interaction provides couples with the opportunity to experience broad social support and freely share their emotions and experiences, even when physical support is limited or partial.

Beyond social networks, time management and family organization apps, such as Cozi and Fam Cal, provide couples with tools to balance parenting responsibilities with nurturing their personal relationship. Research by Nelson and Levant (2015) suggests that same-sex couples find family management apps helpful for coordination and reducing stress, which helps prevent relational burnout resulting from parenting demands. These apps allow couples to dedicate more time to each other and maintain relationship quality. Technology also allows same-sex couples quick access to educational resources and relevant parenting information, which is particularly important given the unique challenges they face. Goldberg and Smith (2011) note that the internet offers same-sex couples access to information on legislation, legal support, and educational tools, which reduces feelings of isolation and helps them feel more secure and informed about their rights and capabilities as parents. This access boosts personal confidence and enables couples to improve their parenting effectiveness within a supportive environment. The rise of online therapy platforms, such as BetterHelp and Talkspace, provides same-sex couples with the option to receive psychological support and immediate assistance for parenting-related questions. McDaniel and Coyne (2016) emphasize that online access to psychological counseling helps couples improve their ability to cope with daily stressors and maintain a sense of belonging and security within their relationship. Similarly, support groups like Reddit and Meetup allow couples to connect with others in similar situations and strengthen their sense of shared experience and empathy.

In general, technology plays a central role in maintaining stability in same-sex relationships and supporting parenting by providing a safety net and a response to the unique challenges faced by these families.

### **Technology for Sperm Donation and Surrogacy.**

Technology also serves as a tool in finding sperm donors and surrogates, a common solution for same-sex couples who wish to become biological parents. The process involves numerous psychological, legal, and ethical considerations and provides couples with the opportunity to have a child in a way that meets their unique needs. This process requires substantial support from medical, legal, psychological, and often family experts. For female same-sex couples, sperm donation is the most common method of achieving parenthood. Research indicates that the choice of donor is based not only on biological characteristics but also on the emotional and identity-related meanings couples assign to the process. For instance, Bos et al. (2013) note that many female couples carefully select their sperm donor to ensure the child can ask questions about their identity in the future.

**There are two main types of sperm donation:** Anonymous Donation where the donor's identity remains unknown to the parents, often chosen to maintain emotional separation. Open or "Identified" Donation – allowing the child to contact the donor upon reaching adulthood, which can help foster the child's sense of identity and biological connection (Goldberg, 2012).

Some couples prefer open donation to provide the child with the option to learn about their biological background, while others choose full anonymity to avoid future emotional complexities.

For male same-sex couples, surrogacy is the most common way to become parents. The process involves a careful selection of a surrogate, considering factors like health status, personal connection, and comfort level. Studies by Greenfeld and Brenner (2015) indicate that many couples seek to establish a relationship with the surrogate to ensure emotional support during and after the pregnancy.

Another critical decision is whether to choose a known surrogate, such as a family member or friend, or an unknown surrogate through an agency.

Known Surrogacy – can offer significant emotional support and a certain level of comfort, yet may introduce challenges related to emotional dependency and family complexities.

Agency-Based Surrogacy – provides a sense of security and professionalism, but often involves higher costs and more complicated bureaucracy.



Surrogacy also involves a variety of legal considerations that vary by country. For instance, countries like Israel and the U.S. offer legal support for surrogacy, but only with the consent of both parties and the required legal oversight. Research by Johnson et al. (2010) indicates that selecting a surrogate often includes legal support to secure the rights of the parents and the surrogate. The research highlights the importance of addressing the unique needs of same-sex couples, especially through emotional, community, and legal support. These insights help researchers understand how to enhance family resilience and improve relationship quality, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of the challenges and strengths of same-sex families in an evolving and advancing world.

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