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***Empirical analysis of research on children
raised in same-sex unions***

***Empirična analiza raziskav otrok,
vzgojanih v istospolnih zvezah***

POVZETEK

Cilj raziskave je bil preveriti metodološko verodostojnost študij, ki so preverjale kvaliteto razvoja otrok v družinah z očetom in materjo s kvaliteto razvoja otrok, ki odraščajo v družinah istospolno usmerjenih partnerjev. V raziskavah smo preverili velikost vzorca in način vzorčenja, saj sta to nujna pogoja za posplošitev ugotovitev na celotno populacijo.

Ugotovili smo, da sta izmed 31 študij, ki smo jih zajeli v metaraziskavo, samo dve imeli vzorec, izbran na način verjetnostnega vzorčenja, pri čemer je bila povprečna velikost vzorca 45 enot. Na podlagi teh ugotovitev avtorji sklepamo, da izsledkov tovrstnih raziskav zaradi premajhnega vzorca in pomankljivega, v nekaterih primerih celo neustreznega načina vzorčenja, ne moremo posplošiti.

KLJUČNE BESEDE

Otroci, istospolne skupnosti, empirične raziskave, vzorčenje

SHORT ABSTRACT

The main aim of this study was to test the credibility of studies which researched the quality of development in children who lived with a mother and father and children raised in same-sex unions.

Sample size and sampling techniques were examined in all of the empirical studies, considering that these two criteria are of key importance when applying research findings to the general population.

It was concluded that among the 31 empirical studies underlining the 'no difference' claim, only two were carried out by means of probability sampling, and the average sample size in all of the studies was 45. On the basis of these findings it was concluded that, due to insufficient sample size and inadequate sampling techniques, the results of these empirical studies cannot be applied to the general population.

KEY WORDS

Children, same-sex union, empirical research, sampling

Introduction

Studies examining the link between the sexual orientation of parents and its effect on various aspects of child rearing and development have produced considerably varied results. Some of them suggest that homosexuality in parents is not detrimental to children's development, that children do not need parents of both sexes to thrive and that the important thing is growing up with loving parents (APA, 2005: 15; Bilbarz and Stacey, 2010: 16; Patterson, 2006: 243; Short, Riggs, Perlesz, Brown and Kane, 2007: 25). However, other studies present findings which suggest that children from heterosexual families make better progress and that their parents can offer them the best environment for social development and success in education (Sarantakos, 1996:23; Moore, Jekielek and Emig, 2002: 6; Regnerus, 2012: 752). Such different results with regard to the same issue prompted Sullins (2015:2) to focus on the question or concern whether the results of studies indicating no difference in the development of children in same-sex unions (SSU) and father-and-mother families (FMF) might be a consequence of the inadequate size of the random samples used. This would mean that the results obtained should not be applied to the general population. Similarly, Rosenfeld (2010: 757) argues that the main flaws of existing studies are non-probability sampling or combined probability and non-probability sampling, and low statistical power of sample (Allen, 2013: 640–641).

In order to apply the results of scientific research to the general population it is vital for a study to include a large enough sample which is selected on the basis of probability sampling. Relying on data from general social research, Nock (2001: 12) states that the entire population comprises 1-4 % homosexual women and 3-7 % homosexual men. A sufficient sample should comprise at least 400 same-sex couples with children, or better still, more than 800, which means that at least 160,000 people should be included in the random sample. Adherence to these guidelines could reduce the likelihood of type II statistical error, which in our case is the questionable confirmation of the hypothesis that there are no developmental differences between SSU and FMF children (Sullins, 2015: 2). Furthermore, in order to generalize research results, sampling should be probability-based, which means that every member of a certain population has the same chance of being included in the sample. Past studies obtained such samples from: censuses (Rosenfeld, 2010: 759), national studies (Sullins, 2015: 5) and special surveys which placed special emphasis on probability-based selection and sample representativeness (Regnerus, 2012: 755).

In cases where the sample was selected using convenience sampling techniques, the results can present findings only for the group analysed in the study, and by no means can they be applied to the general population (Nock, 2001: 15).

When comparing children living in SSU and children living in FMF, the only variable in the research should be the sexual orientation of the parents or partners. Here, the research variable should be specific as to whether a child is living with their biological mother in a same-sex relationship or two adoptive mothers, or living with their biological father or with two adoptive fathers. This is the only way to arrive at clearer conclusions about differences in child development. This topic requires cause and effect research, which means it should cover a long time period. Studies should therefore be carried out repeatedly with the same individuals over an extended period (Nock, 2001: 16).

Methodology

This meta-study was carried out by including studies which led their authors to conclude that the homosexual orientation of parents does not have an effect on their children or their personal development, sexual identity development and social relationships. Eight studies were obtained, each of them including several research papers as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Literature cited in the statement of the Slovenian Psychologists' Association

<i>Paper title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Control sample</i>	<i>Sampling technique</i>	<i>Description</i>
Amicus Curiae Brief of American Psychological Association	APA (2005a)	-	-	-	Theoretical research
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Parented Families: A literature review prepared for The Australian Psychology Society	Short et al. (2007)	-	-	non-probability	Meta-research
Children of Lesbian and Gay Parents	Patterson (2006)	55	25	non-probability	Empirical research

Psychological Adjustment, School Outcomes, and Romantic Relationships of Adolescents With Same-Sex Parents	Wainwright et al. (2004)	44	44	probability	Empirical research
How Does the Gender of Parents Matter?	Biblarz and Stacey (2010)	-	-	non-probability	Meta-research
Delinquency, Victimization, and Substance Use Among Adolescents With Female Same-Sex Parents	Wainwright in Patterson (2006)	44	44	probability	Empirical research
Lesbian mothers and their children: A comparison with solo parent heterosexual mothers and their children	Green et al. (1986)	50	40	non-probability	Empirical research
Lesbian and Gay Parenting	APA (2005b)	-	-	non-probability	Meta-research

The studies given in Table 1 comprise four empirical studies, three meta-studies and one theoretical study. The theoretical study was not researched further in our study. The meta-studies *How Does the Gender of Parents Matter?* and *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Parented Families: A literature review prepared for The Australian Psychology Society* include 357 papers. Also examined were papers from a meta-study conducted by the American Psychological Association and analysed before by Marks (2012) in his meta-study *Same-sex parenting and children's outcomes: A closer examination of the American Psychological Association's brief on lesbian and gay parenting*.

From the studies mentioned in the above meta-studies, we could not obtain, examine or assess the following nine studies for inclusion in our meta-study: Gay parenting couples parenting arrangements, arrangement satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction (McPherson, 1993), Children from anonymous donors: an inquiry into homosexual and heterosexual parents' attitudes (Brewaeys, Ponjaert, van Steirteghem and Devroey, 1993), Lesbian and Gay parenting (Tasker, 2000), Lesbian mothers, gay fathers, and their children: a review (Tasker, 2005), Lesbian, gay and bisexual families (Savin-Williams and Esterberg, 2000), The way we really are: Coming to terms with America's changing families (Coontz, 1997), Families headed by lesbian and gay parents (Patterson and Chan, 1999), Lesbian, gay, and bisexual families (Craig, 2003), Predictors of psychosocial and behavioural adjustment of children: A study comparing children raised by lesbian parents to children raised by heterosexual parents (Kunin, 1998). These studies could not be found in any online database of papers, library catalogue or other accessible source.

The criterion for selecting a study and including it in this meta-study was that it should be an empirical study which compares the lives of children in SSU and other types of family (e.g. FMF, one-parent families). Some of the studies described the quality of relationships in families or unions raising children, the cognitive functioning and behavioural adjustments of the children, parent-child relationships, the social and emotional development of the children and the development of their sexual identity. Our research excluded studies which do not deal with the well-being of children or the quality of couple relationship (e.g. studies which measure labour division between parents). If the same study appeared in several meta-studies, it was only listed in Table 2 once.

Table 2. Examined and included studies from the meta-studies How does the gender of parents matter? (Biblarz and Stacey 2010), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Parented Families: A literature review prepared for The Australian Psychology Society (Short et al. 2007) and Lesbian and Gay Parenting (APA 2005b)

<i>No.</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Paper Title</i>	<i>Authors</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Control sample</i>	<i>Sampling technique</i>
1	How Does the Gender of Parents Matter? (Biblarz and Stacey 2010)	Child Adjustment and Parenting in Planned Lesbian-Parent Families	Bos et al. (2007)	100	100	non-probability
2	HDGPM	Donor insemination: Child development and family functioning in lesbian mother families	Brewaeys et al. (1997)	30	68	non-probability

3	HDGPM	Who is mommy tonight? Lesbian parenting issues.	Ciano-Boyce and Shelly-Sireci (2002)	67	44	non-probability
4	HDGPM	Individual Differences in Gender Development: Associations with Parental Sexual Orientation, Attitudes, and Division of Labor	Fulcher et al. (2007)	33	33	non-probability
5	HDGPM	Family Functioning in Lesbian Families Created by Donor Insemination	Vanfraussen et al. (2003)	24	24	non-probability
6	HDGPM	Experience of parenthood, couple relationship, social support, and child-rearing goals in planned lesbian mother families	Bos et al. (2004)	100	100	non-probability
7	HDGPM	Children raised in fatherless families from infancy: a follow-up of children of lesbian and single heterosexual mothers at early adolescence	MacCallum and Golombok (2004)	63	38	non-probability
8	HDGPM	Lesbians choosing motherhood: A comparative study of lesbian and heterosexual parents and their children	Flaks et al. (1995)	15	15	non-probability

9	HDGPM	Children raised in fatherless families from infancy: family relationships and the socioemotional development of children of lesbian and single heterosexual mothers	Golombok et al. (1997)	71	42	non-probability
10	HDGPM	Children With Lesbian Parents: A Community Study	Golombok et al. (2003)	99	74	non-probability
11	HDGPM	Planned lesbian families: their desire and motivation to have children	Bos et al. (2003)	100	100	non-probability
12	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Parented Families: A literature review prepared for The Australian Psychology Society (Short et al. 2007)	The role of co-mothers in planned lesbian-led families	Tasker and Golombok (1998)	15	84	non-probability
13	LGBT Parented Families	Children's acquisition of sex-role behavior in lesbian-mother families	Hoeffler (1981)	20	20	non-probability
14	LGBT Parented Families	The child's home environment for lesbian versus heterosexual mothers: A neglected area of research	Miller et al. (1981)	34	47	non-probability

15	LGBT Parented Families	Parenting behaviors of homosexual and heterosexual fathers	Bigner and Jacobsen (1989b)	33	33	non-probability
16	LGBT Parented Families	Children in three contexts: Family, education, and social development	Sarantakos (1996)	58	116	non-probability
17	Lesbian and Gay Parenting (APA 2005b)	The value of children to gay and heterosexual fathers	Bigner and Jacobsen (1989a)	33	33	non-probability
18	LGP	Psychosocial adjustment among children conceived via donor insemination by lesbian and heterosexual mothers	Chan et al. (1998)	55	25	non-probability
19	LGP	Contact With Grandparents Among Children Conceived Via Donor Insemination by Lesbian and Heterosexual Mothers	Fulcher et al. (2002)	55	25	non-probability
20	LGP	Gay and lesbian parents	Harris and Turner (1985/86)	23	16	non-probability
21	LGP	A comparative study of self-esteem of adolescent children of divorced lesbian mothers and divorced heterosexual mothers	Huggins (1989)	18	18	non-probability

22	LGP	Heterosexual and homosexual mothers' self-described sex-role behavior and ideal sex-role behavior in children	Kweskin and Cook (1982)	22	22	non-probability
23	LGP	Lesbian mothers' custody fears	Lyons (1983)	43	37	non-probability
24	LGP	Lesbian and traditional mothers' responses to adult response to child behavior and self-concept	Mucklow and Phelan (1979)	34	47	non-probability
25	LGP	Heterosexual and lesbian single mothers: a comparison of problems, coping, and solutions	Pagelow (1980)	20	23	non-probability
26	LGP	The value of children to lesbian and non-lesbian mothers	Siegenthaler and Bigner (2000)	25	26	non-probability
27	LGP	Growing up in a lesbian family	Tasker and Golombok (1997)	27	27	non-probability

Two measurable variables were selected, the size of the study sample and the sampling method, where the sample consisted of homosexual persons (or children raised in SSU) and the control sample of heterosexual persons – the children's parents (or children raised in FMF). Studies which did not include a control sample were eliminated from our research. Studies with a control sample consisting of single mothers were likewise excluded. The sampling method was defined as probability or non-probability sampling.

Table 2 shows 27 studies from the meta-studies *How Does the Gender of Parents Matter?* (Biblarz and Stacey, 2010), *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Parented Families: A literature review prepared for The Australian Psychology Society* (Short et al., 2007) and *Lesbian and Gay Parenting* (APA, 2005b).

As shown in Table 2, the smallest sample included as few as 15 people and the largest sample 100 people. The average sample size was 45 people. The same values were determined for control samples. Each and every study used non-probability sampling.

Discussion

It was found that only two of the 31 studies examined used a sample selected by means of probability sampling. The largest sample value was 100 people and the smallest 15 people. The same numbers apply to the control samples. In view of the sampling method, only two of these 31 studies were suitable for generalising results: Psychological adjustment and school outcomes of adolescents with same-sex parents (Wainwright, Russell and Patterson, 2004) and Delinquency, Victimization, and Substance Use Among Adolescents With Female Same-Sex Parents (Wainwright and Patterson, 2006). However, the insufficient sample (in both studies the size of both sample and control sample was 44 people) means that there is a high risk of type II statistical error occurring. The studies therefore do not meet the criteria set forth by Nock (Nock, 2001:12).

Our study, like some other studies before, established that there is almost no study which can offer valid proof of the claim that there are no differences in the children's development (Allen, 2013: 653; Nock, 2001: 2). This is primarily due to an inadequate methodological approach to research. Recently, there have been studies on larger samples (e.g. Allen, 2013; Rosenfeld, 2010; Sullins, 2015). These yield results with higher credibility which can be more confidently applied to the general population. Nevertheless, with such a delicate subject as child development, the utmost sensitivity should be exercised when generalising results.

There is a need for longitudinal research (Rith and Diamond, 2013: 133) and research that will explain sexual attraction, behaviour and identity throughout the lifetime (Diamond; 2008: 84). The consequences of influences on child development are not necessarily fully visible during childhood, and not always for the parameters that research has been able to capture and analyse or monitor. They may not manifest themselves until adolescence or adulthood once the child has grown up and started his or her own family or union. Every mother and father belongs to their child, because the child sprang from them. The child carries them in each body cell and yearns for them regardless of whether they live together or not. Given the nature of conception and the natural principles of personal relationships, interference with the natural process of growing up with persons of opposite sexes poses a high risk and does not allow hasty conclusions.

Conclusion

Based on the examination of the studies it may be concluded that they do not satisfy the criteria on sample size and sampling method. Therefore their findings cannot be applied to the general population. Most of the samples in the above studies are not large enough and they were not selected using probability sampling; only two studies included persons selected by means of probability sampling. However, due to the small samples used in these two studies, which entails a high risk for the occurrence of type

If statistical error, their conclusions cannot be applied to the general population. Since the data from the large majority of studies mentioned in this meta-study was obtained from an insufficiently large sample and through non-probability sampling, the data can only apply to the sample included in a particular study, and by no means to the general population. The findings of studies using large samples and dealing with the well-being of children are rather inclined to confirm differences. For greater credibility, studies should not only use a large enough sample (a thousand or more people) and probability sampling, but also be longitudinal, which means including at least two generations in the research. It is the next generation of theorists and researchers of same-sex relationships that may be able to capture a broader range of variations regarding norms and patterns, and the causes and effects of these patterns. Diverse and representative patterns of same-sex couples will be required.

The consequences of being raised within a family unit under our investigation are not apparent in the academic performance of a child; they may manifest themselves when the child becomes an adult and starts a family of their own.

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