



WomanView

Volume 12, Issue 10

April 27, 2009

Poverty in the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community

A groundbreaking analysis of the economic realities faced by lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people reveals the need for data collection that takes sexual orientation into account. The analysis in the [recent report](#) released by the UCLA School of Law's Williams Institute recommends that policymakers and advocates reexamine policies and procedures which assume that poverty is a problem only among heterosexuals.

The Williams Institute's analysis shows that poverty is a serious concern for LGB individuals and families:

- A range of characteristics that predict poverty having been accounted for, same-sex couples are significantly more likely to be poor than heterosexual couples.
- In general, lesbian couples have much higher poverty rates than either different-sex couples or gay male couples. Lesbian couples who are 65 or older are twice as likely to be poor as heterosexual married couples.
- Among people 18 to 44, gay/bisexual men and heterosexual men are equally likely to be poor (15 percent versus 13 percent), and lesbian/bisexual women are more likely to be poor than heterosexual women (24 percent versus 19 percent).
- African Americans in same-sex couples and same-sex couples living in rural areas have particularly high poverty rates.
- Children of gay and lesbian partners are twice as likely to be poor as children of heterosexual married couples.
- Many more LGB people live in families with very low incomes, defined as 200 percent of the federal poverty level.
- Both gay and lesbian individuals and couples are more likely than married people to receive government cash supports.

Worsening the rates of poverty among the LGB population are certain factors—such as the lack of official approval to be married and the lack of protections against employment discrimination—characteristic of LGB people's social and policy environment. Economically vulnerable, LGB people face complex challenges in maintaining a decent standard of living. Equal protection of LGB individuals' civil rights, including access to the institution of marriage, is integral to developing economic stability within the LGB community.

Antipoverty campaigns must recognize that equal rights are central to any effort to build economic opportunity. More research is needed to understand better the causes and consequences of the poverty of LGB individuals and their families. Ultimately achieving equal rights promises to be the most sustainable way of promoting long-term economic security among the LGB population.

For more information, contact [Wendy Pollack](#), director, Women's Law and Policy Project, Shriver Center, 312.263.3830 ext. 238.

Published by the SARGENT SHRIVER NATIONAL CENTER ON POVERTY LAW. Funded in part by generous grants from the Chicago Foundation for Women and the Jo & Art Moore Family Fund.