

Transition to parenthood in same-sex couples: A systematic review

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Abstract

The transition to parenthood in same-sex couples is an important and complex issue that causes a variety of challenges and opportunities, while understanding the factors that influence this transition is vital. Legal recognition of same-sex couples regarding parenthood differs worldwide. In some societies, the lack of legal recognition can create barriers to issues such as adoption and parental rights. Societal prejudices and tolerance towards parenthood in same-sex couples still vary. Acceptance and support from society is critical to creating a supportive environment for these couples. This paper focuses on the study of the transition to parenthood for same-sex couples as it focuses on society's and same-sex couples' own perceptions of parenthood, while highlighting the need for further research and awareness to create an environment that supports equality and tolerance in parenting issues in all families, regardless of sexual orientation. For the purpose of this work PRISMA method was chosen, making use of appropriate keywords. The findings from the 15 studies highlight the difficulties faced by same-sex couples in the matter of parenthood, the lack of uniform legislative protection and the need for education and awareness at a societal level. From the analyzes, no negative effect of same-sex parenting on the child's well-being emerged, apart from the stigmatization, marginalization and bullying that the child may experience at school or in the wider community.

Keywords: Same-sex couples; Parenthood; LGBTQI; Family rights; Child welfare

1. Introduction

The transition to parenthood for same-sex couples is an important but complex process, shaped by legal, social, and psychological factors (1). This study addresses the sensitive and complex issue of transitioning to parenthood in same-sex couples. Individuals from the LGBTQ+ community increasingly choose to become parents through relationships with same-sex partners(1). Various pathways to parenthood for same-sex couples include donor insemination (2,3), adoption, fostering (4), and surrogacy (5). Key concerns arise regarding the challenges same-sex couples face when seeking to become parents, which stem both from conservative societal attitudes and the legal framework that governs parenthood.

A crucial aspect in examining same-sex parenthood is the well-being of children, with a focus on ensuring and protecting their rights (6). To answer questions about the suitability of any individual to raise a child, it is essential to define what it means to be a parent. According to Bucay and Bucay (7), parenthood is developed through raising a child rather than being solely defined by biological connections. Parenthood involves behaviors and feelings toward the child and necessitates a readiness to reorganize one's life and priorities (8). In many societies, dominant perceptions of parenthood dictate that child-rearing should be undertaken by heterosexual couples, making parenthood inaccessible or significantly challenging for same-sex couples (9).

Homophobic attitudes, discrimination, and the lack of legal recognition of same-sex marriage and parenting rights impact the relationships, family life, and overall well-being of same-sex couples (10). The perceptions of same-sex

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relationships and family life, combined with existing legal frameworks, deny same-sex couples fundamental human rights, such as the recognition of family status, adoption rights, joint parental recognition, and legal entitlements related to financial, insurance, and inheritance matters (11,12). Additionally, arguments against same-sex parenting often focus on questioning their suitability as parents (12).

In Greece, homophobia and the stigmatization of same-sex couples reached levels exceeding 70% in the previous decade (13,14). However, the current decade has brought promising changes toward overcoming discrimination. The impact of same-sex couples raising children is increasingly viewed beyond stereotypes, and research confirms that a same-sex parental relationship does not affect a child's sexual identity (15). Moreover, same-sex relationships are now recognized as equally stable, committed, and fulfilling as heterosexual relationships (16). These societal shifts, influenced by the European Union and progressive policies in other European nations, have gradually transformed Greek public perceptions on same-sex couple cohabitation and adoption (17).

A significant milestone in same-sex couple rights in Greece was the legalization of civil partnerships in 2015 (Law 4356/2015)(18). This legislation granted same-sex couples' legal recognition and rights similar to those of heterosexual couples. Nonetheless, many issues remain unresolved, particularly regarding parenthood and adoption. Another step forward was taken in 2018 when legislation permitted same-sex couples to become foster parents without exclusion (Law 4538/2018)(19). However, this law does not yet grant adoption rights, leaving a significant gap in addressing discrimination against same-sex couples in family life.

The challenges that same-sex couples face in their pursuit of parenthood generate significant research interest (20). Societal perceptions and legal barriers prevent same-sex couples from enjoying equal family rights, including parental recognition and adoption, thus threatening the well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals (21). The purpose of this systematic review is to explore the obstacles faced by same-sex couples in achieving parenthood, highlight progress made, and examine prevailing attitudes and perceptions. The ultimate goal is to summarize findings on same-sex parenting transitions, contribute to research, and inspire further studies that will reveal the complexity of this issue and the pressing need for policy reform.

2. Material and methods

The transition to parenthood for same-sex couples is a topic that concerns the scientific community, the LGBTQ+ community, and society as a whole. It is an issue that has sparked opposing views, which, over time, are beginning to converge towards the recognition of every individual's right to create a family and enjoy all the rights they deserve without discrimination (22). In order to crystallize contemporary trends and perceptions, highlight the challenges same-sex couples face during their transition to parenthood, and clarify the impact of this transition on children's well-being, it is necessary to synthesize research findings (23).

This systematic literature review aims to identify, evaluate, and synthesize the findings of previous studies on the transition to parenthood for same-sex couples who have either already had children or wish to have children in the future. To answer the research questions, 15 articles were analyzed, selected based on specific inclusion/ exclusion criteria. These articles were compiled into a table for a collective overview, followed by data analysis.

2.1. Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion of Articles

For the selection of the articles studied, certain criteria were set. The selection and exclusion criteria for the articles used in the systematic literature review on research regarding the transition to parenthood for same-sex couples are presented in the table below:

Table 1 Selection and Exclusion Criteria for Articles

	Selection Criteria
1	Articles written in the English language.
2	Articles published in globally recognized scientific journals.
3	Articles published within the time period 2017–2023.
4	Selected studies included cross-sectional studies or case studies with a clearly defined sample.
5	Articles focusing on same-sex couples and individuals from the LGBTQ+ community.

Exclusion Criteria	
1	Reviews, systematic literature reviews, and meta-analyses were excluded.
2	Articles that were found to be bibliographic references to more recent articles on the same topic were excluded.
3	Articles that focused exclusively on the legal framework of the transition to parenthood for same-sex couples were excluded.

2.2. Information Sources and Search

To achieve the research objective, a systematic literature review was conducted between September 2023 and November 2023 using the databases Google Scholar, PubMed, and Scopus. All search limitations were applied, including publication year (2017–2023) and language (English). The following keywords were used for the search: (Same-sex couples OR Non-traditional Families) AND (LGBTQ people OR lesbian OR gay OR bisexual OR transgender) AND (parenthood OR transition to parenthood OR Parenting Desire OR Parenting Intention OR Parenting Experience) AND (Children's rights OR children's wellbeing).

The PRISMA method (24) was utilized for the search process (Diagram 1). Initially, 256 articles were retrieved. After removing duplicates, 112 articles remained for title and abstract screening. Forty-eight articles were excluded based on title and abstract, as they were not relevant to the objective of this review. Among the remaining sixty-four articles, sixteen had unrelated research focus, twelve had an irrelevant sample, eleven presented non-relevant findings, and ten focused on an unrelated topic. Consequently, fifteen studies met the inclusion criteria and were evaluated in the final review.

2.3. Data Analysis

The articles were evaluated using a hierarchical structure, starting with the title and abstract. For those selected, a full-text reading was then conducted. The data extraction process included the author (name/ year of publication), the country where the study was conducted, the study's objective, the number of participants, the data collection method, the assessment tools, and finally, the key findings.

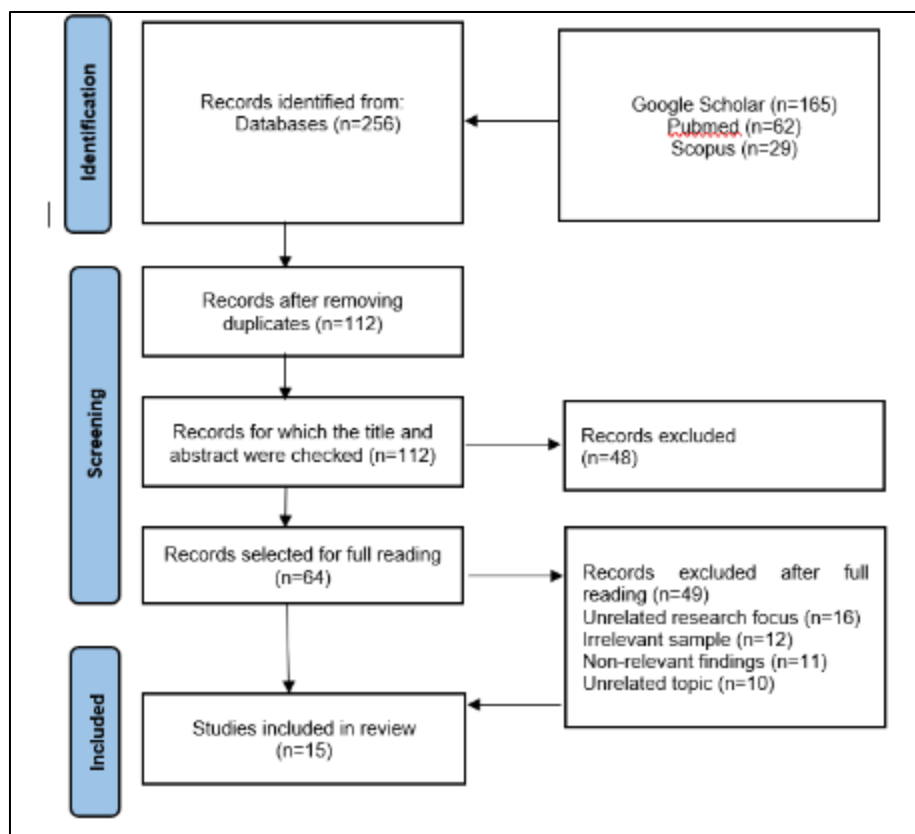


Figure 1 PRISMA Flow Diagram

3. Results

3.1. Results Table

The literature review identified 15 studies that met the inclusion and exclusion criteria and were deemed suitable for inclusion. Of these 15 studies, 6 used the interview method, 5 utilized an online questionnaire, 1 study combined a questionnaire with an interview, and 4 were retrospective studies.

Table 2 Review of the Final 15 Studies

Author/ Year	Country	Study Purpose	Number of Participants	Data Collection Method	Assessment Tools	Results
Charlton et al., 2022	United Kingdom	Investigation of the motivations of same-sex couples in family planning, influencing factors, and parenting experiences.	4 same-sex couples (8 individuals over the age of 18)	Voluntary participation Semi-structured interviews conducted via the Zoom video conferencing platform.	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)	Financial stability and relationship security play a crucial role in the decision to become parents. The process of having a child and the delays involved can be frustrating for same-sex couples and create challenges.
Costa et al., 2017	Portugal	Investigation of the desire, intentions, and experiences of same-sex individuals regarding parenthood.	568 lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals (aged 18-76) - 64% gay or bisexual men - 36% lesbian or bisexual women.	Online survey with a questionnaire.	Likert-type scale, IBM SPSS Statistics version 20	The majority of childless Portuguese LGB individuals aspire to become parents. Age plays a significant role in parenthood intentions, with younger individuals showing stronger intent. Age was the strongest predictor of parenthood intention, followed by religiosity and LGBT socialization.

Evertsson et al., 2018	Sweden	Examination of the impact of transitioning to parenthood on parental leave distribution among same-sex and different-sex couples.	403 same-sex and 224 different-sex couples (aged 20-49) who entered cohabitation/marriage before, during, or within the first year after their first child's birth	Retrospective study	SPSS Statistics	Birth mothers take longer parental leave than their partners in both same-sex and different-sex couples. Birth mothers in same-sex relationships take, on average, 7 weeks less parental leave than those in different-sex relationships, indicating that the partner's gender plays a significant role. The birth mother's parental leave is negatively associated with her income but not with her partner's income.
Gartrell et al., 2019	USA	Assessment of the most challenging and most rewarding parenting experiences in non-traditional families.	131 LGBTQ+ parents (whose first child reached the age of 25)	Self-assessment questionnaire (online)	Qualitative Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), Krippendorff's alphas, Descriptive Statistics	Challenges: Fear of exclusion, heterosexism, homophobic stigma towards children, lack of acceptance of lesbian-maternal families, lack of public education on queer parenting, homophobia/hostility towards non-traditional families, and insufficient legal protections for sexual minorities. Positive experiences:

						Serving as role models, promoting greater LGBTQ+ acceptance, protecting LGBTQ+ parents, teaching children to appreciate diversity, and fostering pride in their non-traditional families.
Gato et al., 2019	Portugal	Examination of the desire and intention for parenthood among childless lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual women.	257 women (under 45 years old)	Self-assessment questionnaire (online)	2002 NSFG, 5-point Likert-type scale, Cronbach's alphas	No differences were observed between groups regarding the desire for parenthood. Lesbian and bisexual women reported lower intentions to have children than heterosexual women. Although lesbian women perceived a higher likelihood of experiencing social stigma as mothers, this was not associated with their desire for parenthood.
Goldberg et al., 2019	USA	Investigation of the sexual identity of polysexual women (e.g., bisexual, pansexual) with a male partner during the first year of parenthood.	28 polysexual women (18+) with a male partner.	Online questionnaire, interview (in participant's home or via phone).	Systematic Text Condensation (STC)	Most women retained their polysexual identities during the first year of parenthood. They highlighted pressures from family, friends, and society to conform to a heterosexual relationship

						and their struggle to maintain their polysexual identity.
Kolk et al., 2020	Sweden	Examination of perceptions of marriage and divorce among same-sex individuals in Sweden from 1995 to 2012 and the role of parenthood.	2,142,905 men and 1,893,518 women (under 50), including 4,230 women and 2,444 men in same-sex relationships.	Retrospective study	Descriptive Statistics	The legalization of same-sex marriage in 2009 had little impact on the number of same-sex marriages. However, legal changes supporting parental rights and same-sex unions may have encouraged same-sex female marriages and parenthood. Divorce rates were higher among same-sex female couples than in other groups.
Klittmark et al., 2019	Sweden	Exploration of LGBTQ+ individuals' experiences with the assisted reproduction system in Sweden.	12 LGBTQ+ patients (aged 30-45)	Qualitative thematic interview analysis	Systematic Text Condensation (STC)	Deficiencies and mistreatment in reproductive healthcare for LGBTQ+ individuals were identified, highlighting the need for improved reproductive care. The study emphasized the necessity of interventions to support LGBTQ+ individuals in their transition to parenthood.
Manley et al., 2018	USA	Investigation of participants' perceptions regarding	29 polyamorous women (over 18 years old)	Interview	Qualitative Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)	Barriers limiting the women's participation in both the

		their involvement and acceptance by the wider community and the LGBTQ+ community.	with a male partner			LGBTQ+ community and the broader social community were identified, such as practical barriers (time constraints, community-level restrictions), rejection from the LGBTQ+ community, and psychological factors like internalized stigma.
Rubio et al., 2017	France, Netherlands, UK	Investigation of parental emotions during pregnancy, as well as parenting ability, enjoyment of parenthood, and parents' emotional state.	144 families (35 gay fathers, 58 lesbian mothers, 41 heterosexual parents)	Semi-structured interviews	SPSS Statistics V.19, Multilevel modeling (HLM 7.01)	Heterosexual parents reported fewer positive emotions at the beginning of pregnancy compared to lesbian mothers, while gay parents reported fewer positive emotions at the end of pregnancy than lesbian mothers but more positive emotions regarding parenthood during the first weeks after birth compared to heterosexual parents.
Simon et al., 2018	USA	Investigation of the intention and desire for parenthood among bisexual, lesbian, and heterosexual women.	196 women (108 heterosexual, 35 bisexual, 53 lesbian)	Online questionnaires	Descriptive Statistics, Likert scale	No differences were found related to sexual orientation regarding women's desires, intentions, and perceptions of self-efficacy in

						child-rearing. Differences were found in desires for companionship and partner involvement, as well as career intentions (e.g., desire for a permanent position before becoming a parent).
Titlestad et al., 2019	Australia	Investigation of the positive aspects of female same-sex relationships, parental care, and the strengths these couples may exhibit.	13 female same-sex couples (28-48 years old)	Interview	Thematic analysis	Undefined social roles for these couples allow flexibility and negotiation of joint custody and collaborative parenting. The resilience of these couples was supported by the LGBTQ+ community and efforts from organizations such as schools and hospitals promoting the inclusion of same-sex couples in society.
Turcan et al., 2020	Czech Republic	Investigation of the changes over time in the desire of Czech lesbian women to have children through various methods of conception	318 lesbian women (Group A: n=151, clinic visits 2009-2013; Group B: n=167, clinic visits 2013-2017)	Retrospective study	Statistica programme v. 10.0	The percentage of Czech lesbians who have children or want children has increased in recent years, influenced by changes in conception methods and the acceptance of lesbian parenthood from other Western European countries.

Van der Vleuten et al., 2023	Sweden	Investigation of income development in same-sex and heterosexual couples during the transition to parenthood	3,184 same-sex couples and 1,188,748 heterosexual couples (ages 20-55)	Retrospective study	Descriptive Statistics	Female couples have more equal income development within the couple during the transition to parenthood compared to heterosexual couples.
Voultos et al., 2019	Greece	Investigation of the experiences and attitudes of lesbians toward parenthood in Greece.	59 lesbian women	Qualitative Semi-structured interview	NVivo software	A clear trend emerged among participants who desired to have their own biological children, primarily based on the belief that pregnancy would lead to a sense of self-fulfillment and/or self-realization. The negative impact of biases and social oppression on reproductive autonomy was highlighted. Reproductive choices were negatively influenced by family and the broader socio-cultural environment.

3.2. Analysis of the 15 Studies/ Scientific Articles

The 15 studies included in this literature review explored various aspects of same-sex couples' desire for parenthood, the prerequisites they consider essential, the difficulties they face, and the social and religious perceptions regarding parenthood in same-sex couples. In the study by Charlton et al. (25), which explored the motivations of same-sex couples in the decision-making process for starting a family, the importance of financial and relational stability before becoming parents was highlighted. This stability is seen as an attempt to counteract negative assumptions about gay and lesbian parents. The study also discussed the challenges and uncertainties faced by couples during adoption and assisted reproduction processes, as well as the impact of institutions and norms supporting heteronormativity. It emphasized the coping mechanisms used by same-sex couples during their parenthood journey, including self-doubt, lack of support, and guidance. Costa et al.(26) investigated the desires, intentions, and experiences of LGBT individuals regarding parenthood. The study found that most Portuguese LGBTQ individuals without children aspire to become parents, with age playing a significant role in the intention to have children. Younger individuals expressed a stronger desire, followed by religious beliefs and socialization within the LGBTQ community, which plays a significant role in advancing parenthood. Evertsson et al. (27) conducted a retrospective study examining the impact of the transition to parenthood on the distribution of parental leave in same-sex and heterosexual couples. The findings revealed that the

mother's parental leave is longer than that of the partner in both same-sex and heterosexual couples. Mothers in same-sex couples, however, received an average of 7 weeks less parental leave than heterosexual mothers, suggesting that the gender of the partner plays a significant role. Gartrell et al. (28) assessed the most difficult and rewarding aspects of child-rearing in non-traditional families from the perspective of 131 LGBTQ parents, whose first child had reached the age of 25. Difficult experiences included anxiety about exclusion, heterosexism, and homophobic stigma, as well as a lack of public education on queer parents. Positive experiences included being role models for greater LGBTQ acceptance and teaching children to appreciate diversity. Gato et al. (22) investigated the desire and intention for parenthood among lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual women without children and found no significant differences between the groups in terms of desire for parenthood. Lesbians and bisexual women showed less intention to have children than heterosexual women, although they did not link this to the desire for parenthood.

Goldberg et al. (29) focused on the sexual identity of polyamorous women with a male partner during the first year of parenthood. The study noted the pressures placed on women by family, friends, and society to have heterosexual relationships, alongside efforts to maintain their polyamorous identity. Kolk et al. (30) explored perceptions of same-sex marriage and divorce and the role of parenthood. They found that while the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2009 had little effect on the actual marriage rates among same-sex couples, legal changes supporting parental rights and same-sex unions encouraged more same-sex marriages and parenthood. Divorce rates were higher among same-sex couples compared to others. Klittmark et al. (31) examined the experiences of LGBTQ individuals in Sweden regarding assisted reproduction. The study revealed deficiencies and mistreatment in the reproductive process for LGBTQ individuals, highlighting their desire for improvements in reproductive healthcare. Manley et al. (32) investigated the perceptions of polyamorous women regarding their participation and acceptance by the broader society and the LGBTQ+ community. Barriers were identified, including practical barriers, rejection from the LGBTQ+ community, and psychological factors such as internalized stigma.

Rubio et al. (33) conducted a study across three countries to investigate parental emotions during pregnancy and feelings of parental capability. The study found no significant differences that would suggest LGBTQ parents lack adequate parental feelings. Simon et al. (34) examined the intention and desire for parenthood among bisexual, lesbian, and heterosexual women. They found no significant differences related to sexual orientation in their desires, intentions, and perceptions of self-efficacy in caring for a child, but differences were found in their desires for companionship and partner involvement. Titlestad et al. (35) investigated positive aspects of same-sex relationships among women, focusing on co-parenting and the strengths of these couples. The study highlighted the flexibility in social roles for same-sex couples, which enabled negotiation of shared co-parenting responsibilities and resilience supported by the LGBTQ community.

Turcan et al. (36) studied the changes over time in the desire of lesbian women in the Czech Republic to have children through various reproductive methods. The findings showed an increase in the percentage of Czech lesbians wanting or having children, driven by changes in reproductive methods and acceptance of lesbian parenthood from other Western European countries. Van der Vleuten et al. (37) explored the income development of same-sex and heterosexual couples during the transition to parenthood, highlighting that female same-sex couples experience more equal income progression within the couple compared to heterosexual couples. Finally, Voultsos et al. (38) examined the experiences and attitudes of Greek lesbian women towards parenthood. A clear trend was identified where participants expressed a desire to have their own biological children, based on the belief that pregnancy would lead to a sense of self-fulfillment. The study also noted the negative impact of prejudices and social oppression on the reproductive autonomy of women, with reproductive choices being negatively influenced by family and broader socio-cultural environments.

3.3. Difficulties Faced by Same-Sex Couples Regarding Parenthood

The results of the current research confirm that same-sex couples often face various difficulties and challenges related to parenthood due to social and legal obstacles. Some of these challenges include issues related to legal matters, such as the right to adoption (22,25–28). In certain areas, same-sex couples may face restrictions in adopting children, and they may not have the same legal rights as heterosexual couples. Furthermore, same-sex couples often encounter prejudice and social criticism regarding their parenthood and their relationship itself, leading them to feel they lack social acceptance to move forward with parenthood (22,28–33).

Another concern for same-sex couples is the education of their children and their acceptance and adaptation to the school environment. They fear that their children might experience discrimination from other children in school. Additionally, same-sex couples face emotional challenges as they must be prepared to deal with potential comments or questions about their family situation. In some areas, gay parents may feel isolated due to a lack of community support

and socialization. Another significant issue is the accessibility of healthcare services, as the availability of healthcare services that understand the unique needs of same-sex couples may be limited (25,37). It is important to note that these challenges vary depending on the region and legislation, and there are many groups and organizations working to promote equality and understanding in this field (35). Table 3 summarizes the difficulties faced by same-sex couples regarding parenthood, as identified and highlighted by the 15 studies included in this research.

Table 3 Difficulties faced by same-sex couples regarding parenthood

Author/ Year	Legal Restrictions/ Prohibitions	Family Support	Social Support	Medical Support	Financial Difficulties	Workplace Issues
Charlton et al. 2022	Time-consuming adoption processes	Not always available	Heteronormativity and stereotypes	Inadequate procedures	Economic stability as a prerequisite	Employer leave and support
Costa et al. 2017	Adoption	Not always available	Influence of stereotypes	Not mentioned	Economic stability as a prerequisite	Not mentioned
Evertsson et al. 2018	Parental leave	Not always available	Influence of stereotypes	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Parental leave
Gartrell et al. 2019	Inheritance issues, recognition by the other parent	Noticeable progress	Stereotypes, bullying, homophobia, marginalization	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Homophobic comments, bullying, marginalization
Gato et al. 2019	Adoption	Not always available	Influence of stereotypes	Not mentioned	Higher expenses	Prejudice and homophobia
Goldberg et al. 2019	Not mentioned	Pressure for a heterosexual relationship	Influence of stereotypes	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Homophobic comments
Kolk et al. 2020	Progress exists	Not always available	Influence of stereotypes	Not mentioned	Economic stability as a prerequisite	Not mentioned
Klittmark et al. 2019	Time-consuming adoption processes	Not always available	Heteronormativity and stereotypes	Mistreatment	Additional expenses	Issues with employer due to long absence periods
Manley et al. 2018	Not mentioned	Pressure for a heterosexual relationship	Influence of stereotypes	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Homophobic comments
Rubio et al. 2017	Time-consuming adoption processes	Not always available	Stereotypes, bullying, homophobia, marginalization	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Homophobic comments
Simon et al. 2018	Inheritance issues, recognition by the other parent	Not always available	Influence of stereotypes	Not mentioned	Economic stability as a prerequisite	Homophobic comments

Titlestad et al. 2019	Inheritance issues, recognition by the other parent	Noticeable progress	Noticeable progress	Not mentioned	Family and social support available	No reported problems
Turcan et al. 2020	Adoption	Not always available	Influence of stereotypes	Not mentioned	Higher expenses	Prejudice and homophobia
Van der Vleuten et al. 2023	Time-consuming adoption processes	Not always available	Heteronormativity and stereotypes	Mistreatment	Additional expenses	Homophobic comments
Voultsov et al. 2019	Inheritance issues, recognition by the other parent	Not always available	Influence of stereotypes	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Homophobic comments

3.4. Parenthood of Same-Sex Individuals and Its Impact on Children's Well-Being

Research findings on the parenthood of same-sex individuals and its impact on the well-being of children raised in families with same-sex parents suggest that the sexual orientation of the parents does not negatively affect the children's well-being (25,26). According to the studies included, children raised in families with same-sex parents exhibit normal cognitive and emotional development and well-being, and they perform equally well academically compared to children from heterosexual families. Furthermore, the research findings indicate that children raised in families with same-sex parents do not experience difficulties in their social relationships, nor do they show lower academic performance compared to other children (30,31).

Additionally, children raised in same-sex-parent families do not differ in terms of their sexual identity or gender identification. It is important to note that the diversity of family situations is broad, and the impact of parenthood on children's well-being depends on many factors, not just the gender of the parents. Moreover, social perceptions and legal restrictions vary by region, affecting the experiences of same-sex couples and their children (37,38).

Table 4 presents the results of this study regarding the impact of same-sex couples' parenthood on children's well-being. Specifically, some elements that contribute to a child's well-being in the family, school, and social environment have been identified. No negative impact of the parents' sexual orientation on the child's well-being is highlighted. If no negative impact is found, it is noted as "No impact", indicating that the authors consider the parents' sexual orientation to have no influence on the child's well-being.

Table 4 Same-Sex Parenting and Its Impact on Child Well-Being

Author/ Year	Parent-Child Relationship	Cognitive Development	Emotional Development	Gender Role Behavior	Sexual Identity	Academic Performance	Social Relationships
Charlton et al. 2022	No impact	No impact	No impact	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	No impact	Stereotypes, Heteronormativity
Costa et al. 2017	No impact	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Stereotypes, Heteronormativity
Evertsson et al. 2018	No impact	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned
Gartrell et al. 2019	No impact	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Stereotypes, Bullying, Homophobic

							Comments, Marginalization
Gato et al. 2019	No impact	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Stereotypes, Bullying, Homophobic Comments, Marginalization
Goldberg et al. 2019	No impact	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned
Kolk et al. 2020	No impact	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Stereotypes, Bullying, Homophobic Comments, Marginalization
Klittmark et al. 2019	No impact	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Stereotypes, Bullying, Homophobic Comments, Marginalization
Manley et al. 2018	No impact	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Stereotypes, Bullying, Homophobic Comments, Marginalization
Rubio et al. 2017	No impact	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Stereotypes, Bullying, Homophobic Comments, Marginalization
Simon et al. 2018	No impact	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Stereotypes, Bullying, Homophobic Comments, Marginalization
Titlestad et al. 2019	No impact	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	No impact
Turcan et al. 2020	No impact	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Stereotypes, Bullying, Homophobic Comments, Marginalization
Van der Vleuten et al. 2023	No impact	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Stereotypes, Bullying, Homophobic Comments, Marginalization
Voultos et al. 2019	No impact	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Stereotypes, bullying, homophobic comments, marginalization

3.5. Perceptions of Parenthood in Same-Sex Couples

Perceptions of parenthood in same-sex couples vary depending on the social, cultural, and religious challenges of each community. In some societies, there are prejudices and discrimination against same-sex couples, and these perceptions may influence how their parenthood is evaluated. In other regions and communities, there is increasing tolerance and support for parenthood in same-sex couples. Many people recognize the importance of family and love over the gender of the parents (25–28). Furthermore, legislation and politics can influence the perceived legality and acceptance of parenthood in same-sex couples. If legal protections are limited, this may negatively affect societal perceptions and become a barrier to a same-sex couple's efforts to build their family (30,31). On the other hand, some societies exhibit more progressive views where the sexual identity of the parents is not considered a criterion for evaluating parenthood. Finally, it should be noted that religious beliefs can play an important role. In some cases, religious views may affect how the parenthood of same-sex couples is perceived. It is important to note that these perceptions continue to evolve and vary in different communities and regions. Education, awareness, and dialogue can contribute to forming more sensitive and supportive perceptions of parenthood in same-sex couples (35). Table 5 presents the perceptions of parenthood in same-sex couples as identified and highlighted by the 15 studies included in this systematic review.

Table 5 Perceptions of parenthood in same-sex couples

Author/ Year	Bias and Discrimination	Openness and Support	Legislation and Policy	Religious Beliefs	Breakdown of the Family Institution	Negative Impact on Children
Charlton et al. 2022	Stereotypes, Heteronormativity	Progress exists	Legal barriers	Prejudice	-	-
Costa et al. 2017	Stereotypes, Heteronormativity	Progress exists	Legal barriers	Prejudice	-	-
Evertsson et al. 2018	Stereotypes, Heteronormativity	Progress exists	Parental leave	-	-	-
Gartrell et al. 2019	Stereotypes, Bullying, Marginalization	Progress exists	Legal barriers	Prejudice	-	Stigma, Marginalization
Gato et al. 2019	Stereotypes, Bullying, Marginalization	Progress exists	Legal barriers	Prejudice	-	Stigma, Marginalization
Goldberg et al. 2019	Stereotypes, Bullying, Marginalization	Not enough progress has been made	-	Prejudice	Pressure from family environment for a heterosexual relationship	Stigma, Marginalization
Kolk et al. 2020	Stereotypes, Bullying, Marginalization	Progress exists	Legal barriers	Prejudice	-	Stigma, Marginalization
Klittmark et al. 2019	Stereotypes, Bullying, Marginalization	Progress exists	Legal barriers	Prejudice	-	Stigma, Marginalization
Manley et al. 2018	Stereotypes, Bullying, Marginalization	Not enough progress has been made	-	Prejudice	Pressure from family environment for a heterosexual relationship	Stigma, Marginalization
Rubio et al. 2017	Stereotypes, Bullying, Marginalization	Progress exists	Legal barriers	Prejudice	-	Stigma, Marginalization

Simon et al. 2018	Stereotypes, Bullying, Marginalization	Progress exists	Legal barriers	Prejudice	-	Stigma, Marginalization
Titlestad et al. 2019	Significant progress and support exist	Significant progress and support exist	Legal barriers	Still part of prejudice	-	No impact
Turcan et al. 2020	Stereotypes, Bullying, Marginalization	Progress exists	Legal barriers	Prejudice	-	Stigma, Marginalization
Van der Vleuten et al. 2023	Stereotypes, Bullying, Marginalization	Progress exists	Legal barriers	Prejudice	-	Stigma, Marginalization
Voultos et al. 2019	Stereotypes, Bullying, Marginalization	Not enough progress has been made	Legal barriers	Prejudice	Pressure from family environment for a heterosexual relationship	Stigma, Marginalization

4. Discussion

The difficulties faced by same-sex couples concerning parenthood are an important topic that requires careful analysis and awareness of the challenges these couples' encounter. The lack of uniform legal protection for same-sex couples regarding adoption rights and the recognition of parental rights is a significant challenge. Legislative changes are necessary to create equal opportunities for all couples (22,25–28).

Furthermore, the discussion highlights the need for education and awareness at the societal level. Increasing social acceptance and combating prejudices can contribute to creating an environment where same-sex couples feel greater support. The need for emotional support is becoming more apparent. Communities, families, and friends can play a crucial role in creating an environment where same-sex couples feel supported and loved (28). Access to health and support services must be uniform and non-discriminatory. The creation of specialized services that understand the unique needs of same-sex couples is necessary (25). Moreover, collaboration with organizations and communities that support the rights of LGBTQ individuals can be constructive. Overall, this discussion emphasizes the need for further research, awareness, and action at various societal levels to create environments where same-sex couples can develop families without prejudice and discrimination.

Contemporary research presents reliable data supporting the view that parenthood in same-sex couples does not negatively affect the well-being of the child. Research indicates that children raised by gay parents typically exhibit normal emotional development and show no differences compared to children raised in heterosexual families. Children raised by same-sex couples appear to develop healthy social relationships, demonstrating that family structure is not decisive for social adaptation (25). Additionally, research findings suggest that children of gay parents do not perform worse academically, making it clear that family structure is not problematic for education. Studies indicate that children's sexual identity is not influenced by the gender of their parents (25–27). The research highlights that the challenges faced by same-sex couples regarding parenthood usually stem from social, legal, and psychological factors. Overall, the research and the above conclusions underline the importance of objectively addressing parenthood in same-sex couples and the need for open discussions and societal awareness to ensure equal rights and opportunities for all families, regardless of the gender of the parents (34–36).

Research and analysis of perceptions reveal a variety of views on parenthood in same-sex couples. While some are supportive, others continue to hold prejudices. These perceptions are strongly influenced by factors such as culture, religious beliefs, and social factors. Multiculturalism and cultural pluralism play a role in these differing views (33–36). Progress in understanding parenthood in same-sex couples is evident, but there are still prejudices and discrimination that persist. Education and awareness are crucial for changing perceptions. Promoting tolerance and understanding can contribute to creating an environment that recognizes the diversity of family structures. Encouraging rights and equality for all families, regardless of the parents' gender, is a crucial step towards building a fairer and more inclusive society. Future research and action should focus on the continuous development and strengthening of social awareness to form

more positive perceptions of parenthood in same-sex couples. Overall, this analysis highlights the importance of ongoing investigation, social dialogue, and education to create a complete and open society that respects and recognizes the diversity of family models.

Limitations

This literature review identified only 15 studies conducted on LGBTQ individuals. Including more studies would likely lead to more reliable conclusions that could be generalized to the LGBTQ community population. Additionally, some studies were retrospective, with data gathered from databases, while others were case studies conducted through interviews. It is estimated that the topic of parenthood in same-sex couples requires further investigation, particularly in response to current data, making case study methods with interviews of LGBTQ couples a more suitable approach.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this research highlight that same-sex couples face significant legal, social, and psychological challenges in parenthood, even when research still demonstrates that children raised by these families exhibit normal emotional, social, and educational development. The lack of equal legal protections, societal prejudices, and limited access to supportive services are the challenges requiring policy revisions and awareness in order to be eliminated. Promoting inclusivity through education and advocacy may result in greater acceptance and equality of opportunity for all families. This research contributes to societal development by reinforcing the need for legal and social recognition of diverse family structures, paving the way towards a more equal and inclusive tomorrow.

Compliance with ethical standards

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