

SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY & SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS



SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Socioeconomic status (SES) encompasses not just income but also educational attainment, financial security, and subjective perceptions of social status and social class. Socioeconomic status can encompass quality of life attributes as well as the opportunities and privileges afforded to people within society. Poverty, specifically, is not a single factor but rather is characterized by multiple physical and psychosocial stressors. Further, SES is a consistent and reliable predictor of a vast array of outcomes across the life span, including physical and psychological health. Thus, SES is relevant to all realms of behavioral and social science, including research, practice, education, and advocacy.

SES AFFECTS OUR SOCIETY

SES affects overall human functioning, including our physical and mental health. Low SES and its correlates, such as lower educational achievement, poverty, and poor health, ultimately affect our society. Inequities in health distribution, resource distribution, and quality of life are increasing in the United States and globally. Society benefits from an increased focus on the foundations of socioeconomic inequities and efforts to reduce the deep gaps in socioeconomic status in the United States and abroad.

SES AFFECTS THE LIVES OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER PERSONS

Evidence indicates individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender (LGBT) are especially susceptible to socioeconomic disadvantages. Thus, SES is inherently related to the rights, quality of life, and general well-being of LGBT persons.

Differences in Income

Prior research has shown that LGBT people and same-sex/gender couples are more vulnerable to conditions of poverty as compared to heterosexual people and couples (Badgett, Durso, & Schneebaum, 2013; Grant et al., 2011).

- Low-income LGBT individuals and same-sex/gender couples have been found more likely to receive cash assistance and food stamps benefits compared to heterosexual individuals or couples.
- Among women 18-44 years of age, 29% of bisexual women and 23% of lesbians are living in poverty, compared to 21% of their heterosexual counterparts.
- 20% of gay men and 25% of bisexual men 18-44 years of age are living at or below the federal level of poverty, compared to 15% of heterosexual men.
- A study of transgender adults in the United States found that participants were nearly 4 times more likely to have a household income of less than \$10,000 per year compared to the general population.

Raising the federal minimum wage would benefit LGBT individuals and couples in the United States. Research has shown that an increase in the minimum wage would reduce the poverty rate by 25% for same-sex/gender female couples and 30% for same-sex/gender male couples. Poverty rates would be projected to fall for the most vulnerable individuals in same-sex/gender couples, including African Americans, couples with children, people with disabilities, individuals under 24 years of age, people without high school diplomas or the equivalent, and those living in rural areas (Badgett & Schneebaum, 2014).

Discrimination Due to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

An individual's socioeconomic position may also be related to experiences of discrimination. Evidence has shown that gay and bisexual men who earned higher



higher incomes were significantly less likely to report discrimination compared to those of lower socioeconomic position. Attributing discrimination to one's socioeconomic position was also related to higher depressive symptoms and anxiety scores (Gamarel, Reisner, Parsons, & Golub, 2012).

In many cases, discrimination against and unfair treatment of LGBT persons remains legally permitted. The U.S. legal system does not prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in several states, including workplace discrimination. Discrimination against LGBT persons in the workplace is a significant factor in socioeconomic differences for LGBT persons (McGarrity, 2014).

- Studies have shown that 42% to 68% of LGBT individuals report experiencing employment discrimination (Badgett, 2012; Fassinger, 2007).
- In one study, 90% of surveyed transgender respondents reported experiencing harassment, mistreatment, or discrimination at work due to their gender identity (Grant et al., 2011).
- 47% of transgender individuals also reported being discriminated against in hiring, firing, and promotion; over 25% reported they had lost a job due to discrimination on the basis of their gender identity (Grant et al., 2011).

Marginalization of LGBT Youth

A lack of acceptance and fear of persecution can lead many LGBT youth to leave their homes and live in transitional housing or on the streets. Many LGBT youth may also be rejected by their family of origin or caregivers and forced to leave the home as minors. The consequences of youth homelessness have many implications for the socioeconomic status of LGBT youth. Studies on LGBT youth reveal the following:

- LGBT youth experience homelessness at a disproportionate rate. Studies indicate that between 11% and 45% of all homeless youth identify as LGBT (Durso & Gates, 2012; Gattis, 2009; Wells, 2009).
- LGBT homeless youth are more likely than their homeless heterosexual counterparts to have poorer mental and physical health outcomes, including major depressive disorders, PTSD, and substance abuse (Keuroghlian, Shtasel, & Bassuk, 2014). Becoming homeless is also related to future depressive and anxiety symptoms, disorderly conduct, and substance use disorders, which highlights the long-term impact of unstable housing on LGBT homeless youth (Rosario, Scrimshaw, & Hunter, 2012).

- LGBT homeless youth are 62% more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual counterparts, and they are at greater risk for sexual abuse, exploitation, sexual violence, and drug abuse (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2009).
- The three most common reasons cited among LGBT youth for becoming homeless are (a) running away from families who reject them because of their sexual orientation or gender identity; (b) being forced out of their homes after disclosing their identities; and (c) aging out of or running away from the foster care system and the possible violence toward LGBT youth that can occur there (Keuroghlian et al., 2014).

Legal Barriers to SES Equality for LGBT Persons and Families

Although the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2015 that states must issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples and recognize same-sex unions that have been legally performed in other states, legal barriers continue to exist. These barriers, including workplace and housing discrimination, can result in increasing SES disparities for LGBT persons and families.

- Twenty states and the District of Columbia currently prohibit discrimination in the workplace based on sexual orientation and gender identity (Human Rights Campaign, 2017).
- Eighteen states have no laws prohibiting workplace discrimination against LGBT people (Human Rights Campaign, 2015).
- Nineteen percent of transgender individuals in one study reported having been refused a home or apartment and 11% reported being evicted because of their gender identity or expression (Grant, Mottet, & Tanis, 2011).

GET INVOLVED

- Consider SES in your education, practice, and research efforts.
- Stay up to date on legislation and policies that explore and work to eliminate socioeconomic disparities. Visit the Office on Government Relations for more details: <http://www.apa.org/about/gr/pi/>
- Visit APA's Office on Socioeconomic Status (OSES) website: www.apa.org/pi/ses
- Visit APA's Office on Aging website: <http://www.apa.org/pi/aging/>

References can be found at <http://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/fact-sheet-references.aspx>