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## Parental support and acceptance of LGBTQ+ children: Integrated review

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### Abstract:

Society has made significant progress in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, or Questioning (LGBTQ)+ acceptance and equality, but challenges persist, particularly in parental acceptance of LGBTQ+ children. This review examines the current landscape of parental acceptance and how such behaviour mitigates health risks for LGBTQ+ children. Cultural and social norms that perpetuate suffering underscore the urgent need for education and awareness, highlighting personal narratives and fostering empathy. The LGBTQ+ community continues to face mental health challenges due to systemic stigma, anxiety, guilt, and suicidal ideation, necessitating competent psychological support. Advocacy and allyship often focus on understanding misogyny and intersectionality, which pragmatically addresses discrimination while celebrating diversity. Increased awareness may lead to more tailored mental health support services. Creating inclusive environments is vital for the well-being of LGBTQ+ children, reminding us to continuously promote spaces where individuals can exist fully without policing. This review utilizes methodologies ranging from 2016 to 2023, sourcing data from PubMed, Web of Science, ProQuest, and Google Scholar. The study includes peer-reviewed articles, original research, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses, excluding non-peer-reviewed works and non-English publications.

**Keywords:** Cultural norms, Education and awareness, LGBTQ+ children, Mental health challenges, Parental acceptance

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## Introduction

Society has progressed in both LGBTQ+ acceptance and rights, but centuries-old societal norms cannot take a backseat only to keep pace with advancement. However, more progress is needed. Parental acceptance is imperative for the health of LGBTQ+ Children. Critical pedagogy knows this and teaches about the effects of discrimination and gives hope for a society with justice. It enables young individuals to be moral leaders in the world, supporting human rights and equity.<sup>1-3</sup>

Multiple studies have identified the absence of healthcare perceptions among the LGBTQ+ population as a barrier to universal access. Laws implementing a gender perspective and comprehensive treatment by health professionals assisted fertilization with mental health programs based on community experience in LGBTIQ+ and facilitated entry into volunteer institutionalized fertilizations have built collaborative partnerships between health services, civil society organizations and the LGBTIQ+ community. Key pillars for the realization of these rights and the reduction of internalized stigma include the healthcare system.<sup>3-5</sup>

The aim of this integrated review is to provide an overview of the present scenario about parental acceptance towards LGBTQ+ children and how accepting behaviour from parents helps minimize health hazards.

## Method

Using an inclusive, comprehensive review methodology, we appraised literature related to parental acceptance of LGBTQ+ Children. A thorough search was conducted using PubMed, Web of Science, ProQuest, and Google Scholar databases to retrieve all the suitable information.

The research team cooperatively selected keywords that met the aims and objectives of this study, covering literature from 2016 to 2023. Included keywords were "LGBTQ+ children," "parental acceptance," "mental health," "cultural norms," and "education and awareness." Boolean operators AND, OR were used to combine these different keywords for a more nuanced search, such as LGBTQ+ AND children but also with parental acceptance OR supportive environments, in addition to mental health balanced by unconditional love.

**Study selection:** We used the PRISMA flow diagram to carefully select studies. Two authors conducted a wide search across databases independent from each other and employed the reliable tool Zotero-6 to remove duplications. They then carefully reviewed the titles and abstracts of these studies for inclusion based on predetermined criteria. For those studies with unclear eligibility, we retrieved full-length articles to ascertain eligibility. Disagreements, when present, were resolved through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer, Figure 1.

Inclusion criteria were articles published between 2016 and 2023; types of studies included review articles, original research, systematic reviews and meta-analyses, and publications in peer-reviewed scientific journals.

Exclusion criteria were non-peer-reviewed articles, opinion pieces, editorials, unpublished theses, dissertations and conference papers; published in languages other than English.

## Result

There were 51 studies for final review on the topic after exclusion from 492 retrieved from the database search. The findings of the review are discussed in the relevant headings below, which address the topic of parental support and acceptance of LGBTQ+ children.

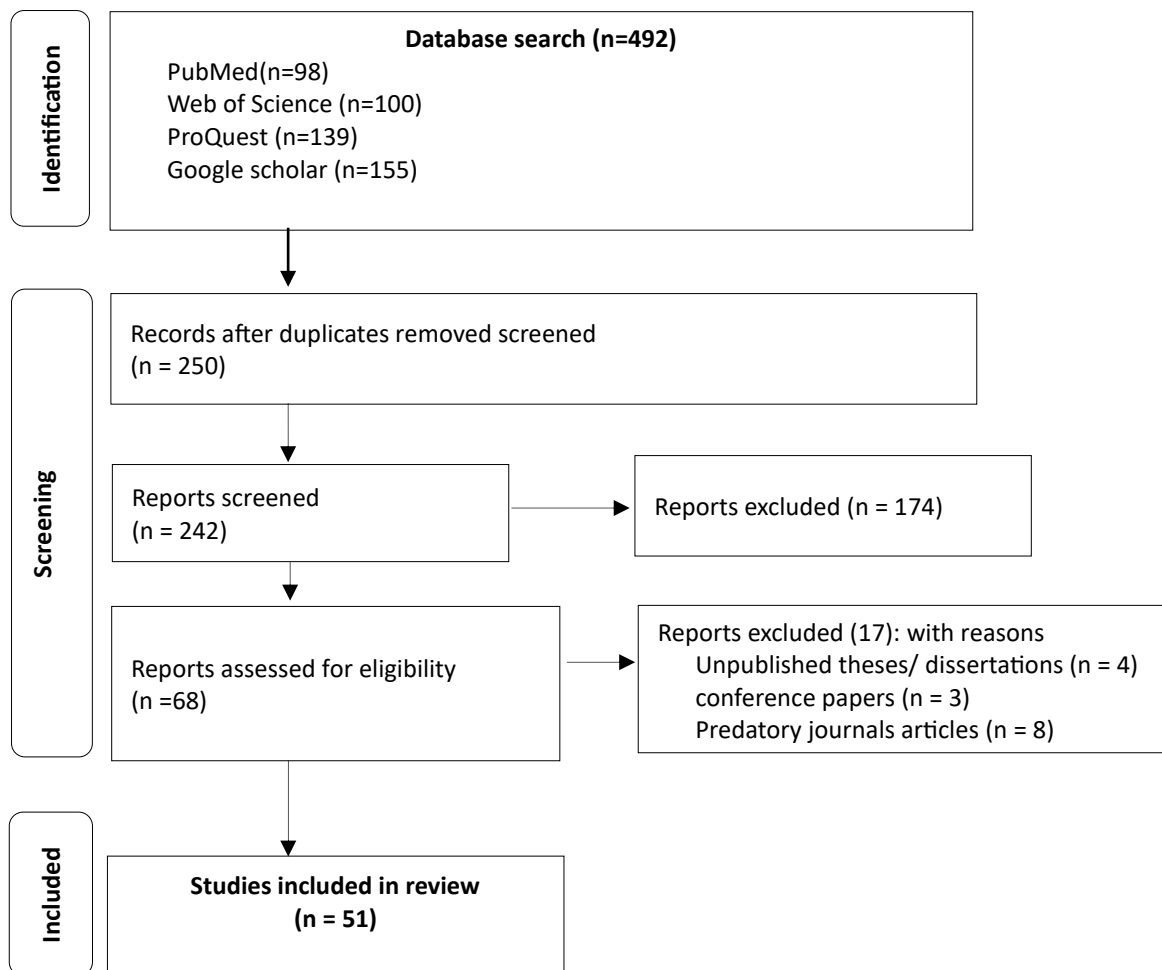


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram of the study selection

## Discussion

### The impact of familial acceptance on the health and well-being of LGBTQ+ Children

A child with accepting parents is more likely to be emotionally and psychologically healthy, which offers the most basic platform for a member of LGBTQ+ groups to express their true selves in an environment such as home. Unconditional love and acceptance are essential in creating a nurturing environment where LGBTQ+ Children can thrive. This principle is backed by evidence, such as landmark longitudinal studies focusing specifically on how the supportive environment at home can affect LGBTQ+ Children's relationships with their

parents and well-being in adolescence. The expert consultations have, in turn, further deepened our thinking and pointed us to key areas that require additional inquiry development, thereby allowing healthcare providers and other stakeholders alike to promote fostering environments for the development of LGBTQ+ Children.<sup>6,7</sup>

Thus, various aspects have been investigated that are positively associated with the acceptance of parents: cognitive flexibility, less tendency toward religious fundamentalism, an increased feeling of the sanctification of parents and the female gender or non-heterosexual orientation of parents. These factors affect how accepting or not the children's attitudes towards

LGBTQ and illustrate the multifaceted nature of the family and the degree to which parental attitudes spill over onto the social development of LGBTQ Children.<sup>3</sup> LGBTQ+ college students, in particular, experienced increased stress—up nearly 21.5 per cent; depressive symptoms—rising more than eight percentage points; and anxiety (more than a two-percentage-point rise) during the pandemic period specifically. Nonetheless, it was also a time that emphasized the importance of family and friends to keep one safe, with strong parent-child relationships crucial for continuity in thriving. These results imply that maintaining positive family and social support networks may be particularly important in mitigating the damaging effects of substantial life stressors, such as a pandemic, on LGBTQ+ college students' mental health.<sup>8,9</sup> Additionally, the experiences of LGBTQ+ foster children reveal a paradox within these systems, showing that full acceptance and lack of discomfort from caregivers result in increased happiness for those experiencing both validated identities, directly influencing overall quality of life.<sup>1,10</sup>

### **Challenges in LGBTQ+ acceptance and the impact of education**

Parents of LGBTQ+ Children often face significant hurdles before fully embracing their children. Social pressures, personal convictions and concerns about the future contribute to these challenges. Upon learning about their child's sexual or gender identity, many parents initially experience shock, confusion and a sense of hopelessness.<sup>1</sup> Making sense of their biases regarding their child's identity can be challenging. Education and awareness are crucial in shaping parents' attitudes toward LGBTQ+ acceptance.<sup>11</sup> Accurate information helps parents understand the complexities of sexual orientation and gender identity, challenging stereotypes and misconceptions. Learning about diverse LGBTQ+ experiences fosters empathy. However, the impact of cultural and socio-demographic factors like parental income, education level and race/ethnicity on personal, relationship and

family experiences remain debated and warrants further study.<sup>12</sup>

Schools worldwide play an essential role in fostering knowledge, skills, cultural awareness and values. They must provide safe and inclusive environments conducive to learning for all students. Unfortunately, LGBTQ+ students often face intimidation, harassment and discrimination, significantly impacting their health, well-being and academic performance.<sup>13-16</sup> Parents' reactions to their children's sexual orientations range from distrust to astonishment, influenced by prior awareness. Responses vary from negative to positive, with attitudes being silent, dismissive, ambivalent, or supportive. Younger individuals often receive more supportive reactions, but invalidating responses are common across all ages. Many older LGBTQ+ individuals struggle to openly discuss their sexual identities with their parents.<sup>17</sup>

### **Creating change through personal stories and empathy**

The value of personal narratives and experiences cannot be underestimated, as they are central to changing parental attitudes about LGBTQ+ acceptance. Hearing from LGBTQ+ individuals about their experiences helps parents understand and relate, gaining insights into the challenges and triumphs of the community. These stories highlight the courage and resilience of LGBTQ+ individuals and their families.<sup>18,19</sup> Previous research has predominantly focused on lesbian-parent families formed through donor insemination, underscoring the need for broader studies on diverse LGBTQ+ family forms.<sup>20</sup> Research on children in families produced via donor insemination between two women shows favourable overall results comparable to those of standard heterosexual comparator groups, but it also underlines the particular difficulties and advantages of lesbian-parent families.<sup>21</sup> The US National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study (NLLFS) has shed light on child development in

lesbian-parent homes formed via donor conception. This groundbreaking 25-year study has tracked children from early years into adulthood, revealing psychological adjustment and the effects of societal stigma.<sup>19,21</sup> These studies provide valuable knowledge on LGBTQ+ families and the well-being of donor-conceived children.<sup>12,21</sup>

### **Cultural norms and their impact on LGBTQ+ acceptance**

Cultural norms and traditions wield significant influence over parental acceptance of LGBTQ+ children, entrenched within societies often dominated by heteronormativity. Yet, globalization and increased interconnectedness are gradually challenging these norms, compelling parents to confront them out of love for their children and a desire for a more inclusive society. Overcoming these cultural barriers demands courage, but the payoff includes the growth and well-being of LGBTQ+ children.<sup>22-24</sup> Differences in LGBTQ+ cultural competency among healthcare providers is evident, with greater expertise observed in diverse professionals. Inclusive LGBTQ+ health education, incorporating perspectives from diverse gender, sexual and racial backgrounds, can enhance cultural competence. Pioneering research highlights higher LGBTQ+ cultural competency among individuals with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and racial backgrounds.<sup>25</sup>

Educational outreach and nurturing healthcare for LGBTQ+ individuals involve bridging gender identity, sexual orientation disparities and racism. This way, providers can pinpoint where growth is needed in advocacy work and training that is still riddled with assumptions to meet the individualized care needs of LGBTQ+ populations accordingly, offering deserving high-quality healthcare experiences for these patients.<sup>25</sup> A 40% of mistreatment in health care settings for LGBTQ+ has been reported before. Research has

shown that service providers are biased or do not broach the topic of gender and sexuality in their patient encounters, while others are less competent culturally when it comes to caring for LGBTQ+ people. Gender identity, sexual orientation and race are notable predictors of LGBTQ+ cultural competency among healthcare providers<sup>26-27</sup> such that disparities in cultural competence persist. Nevertheless, our review found no comprehensive attempts to directly compare these demographic groups.<sup>28,29</sup> The LGBTQ+ healthcare workers may face discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity from non-sympathetic colleagues or organizations even though they identify with the same values of respect for self-identity as their minority community members necessary to deliver culturally competent care.<sup>30-32</sup> For this reason, it is crucial to continue studying the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ healthcare workers to improve connecting points with non-LGBTQ+. A better understanding of the hurdles encountered by LGBTQ individuals will help all types of healthcare professionals ensure that their patients are receiving treatment tailored to them.<sup>33</sup>

### **Psychological and mental health challenges in the LGBTQ community**

The LGBTQ+ community faces many psychological and mental health challenges due to societal stigma, discrimination and internal struggles. LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to suffer from high levels of anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts compared to their heterosexual counterparts. The process of coming out can worsen these struggles, leading to feelings of loneliness and rejection. Family and peer rejection, along with limited access to LGBTQ+ affirmative mental health services, further elevate the risk of emotional disturbances. Research has shown that LGBTQ+ adolescents experience discrimination, including verbal harassment and physical aggression.<sup>34,35</sup> Disturbingly, they face more acute forms of peer

victimization than their heterosexual peers, with instances reported as early as eight or nine years old. Significant psychological distress is highlighted by high rates of suicidal ideation and long-term depression among LGBTQ+ individuals.<sup>36-39</sup> Although there has been progress towards LGBTQ+ inclusion, younger LGBTQ+ members still face barriers related to their sexuality. LGBTQ+ adolescents endure higher rates of suicidal ideation, depression and substance abuse than their straight peers. They also suffer from increased aggression, victimization and psychosocial issues, including alcohol/drug-related problems and eating disorders. Peer victimization among LGBTQ+ Children is associated with negative psychological outcomes and academic challenges, showcasing the broad mental health effects of discrimination.<sup>40-44</sup>

### The impact of unconditional love on the well-being of LGBTQ+ children

The impact of unconditional love on the well-being of LGBTQ+ children is massive. It is empowering for children to feel a sense of belonging, self-worth and emotional security when parents completely accept them as they are - namely, accepting their sexual preference or gender changes. Supporting LGBTQ+ Children in finding self-affirmation, navigating complications with resilience and managing healthy relationships.<sup>2,45</sup>

Studies have consistently shown that parental acceptance can play a huge role in helping to prevent mental health problems like depression, anxiety and suicide ideation among LGBTQ+ folks. It is that unconditional love space where LGBTQ+ Children get to be, well themselves - really and truly without needing the fear of shame or rejection. It empowers them with the ability to take on the world and help create a society where people can just be themselves.<sup>1,45-47</sup>

**Table 1. Impact factors on parental acceptance of LGBTQ+ children**

Factors	Description	Impact on LGBTQ+ Child
<b>Cultural Norms</b> <sup>33</sup>	How LGBTQ+ identities are perceived according to prevalent cultural norms and beliefs.	Shapes parents' reactions and acceptance, possibly perpetuating or disrupting stigma.
<b>Education and Awareness</b> <sup>11</sup>	The degree of knowledge of families on LGBTQ+ topics such as sexual orientation or gender.	More knowledge and education = More acceptance and support.
<b>Mental Health Support</b> <sup>8,34,35,45</sup>	Availability and accessibility to mental health resources for LGBTQ+ children and their parents.	Accepting can be made easier with mental health services that provide the support needed.
<b>Societal Stigma</b> <sup>3, 21</sup>	The extent to which LGBTQ+ individuals and identities are socially stigmatized.	Fear of stigma: Many parents may be averse to accepting their child due to fear of discrimination.
<b>Personal Narratives</b> <sup>18,19</sup>	Exposure to personal stories and experiences of LGBTQ+ people.	LGBTQ+ digital stories serve to humanize and attempt de-stigmatization of the LGBTQ+ experience.

**Table 2. Impacts of parental acceptance on LGBTQ+ children**

Aspect of well-being	Impact of acceptance	Impact of non-acceptance
<b>Emotional security</b> <sup>2,45</sup>	High levels of acceptance = feeling more secure and a sense of belonging	Lack of acceptance can lead to isolation and feeling rejected.
<b>Mental health</b> <sup>8,34,35,45</sup>	Acceptance results in marked decreases in depressive, anxiety and suicidal ideation risks.	Lack of acceptance is associated with suicide, depression and other mental illnesses.
<b>Self-image</b>	Affirmation positively affects self-image and confidence.	Low acceptance can be detrimental to self-concept and identity formation.
<b>Societal interaction</b> <sup>2,45</sup>	Acceptance promotes social relations and resilience.	Non-acceptance can result in social withdrawal and difficulty forming

### Striving for a future of complete acceptance and understanding

Some progress has been made, but complete acceptance and understanding are still lacking. We need to do better and move towards a world where every LGBTQ+ child is welcomed with love. This involves ongoing education, dialogue and advocacy. Education is crucial for dispelling stereotypes and building empathy, which is why inclusive sex education programs in schools that cover LGBTQ+ topics are essential.<sup>48</sup> It is equally important to have these conversations within our families and communities to foster understanding. These dialogues can help dispel ignorance, soothe fears and allow love to overcome hate.<sup>48</sup> Building an inclusive society requires teamwork. This means protecting legal rights for LGBTQ+ individuals and their families, dismantling systemic discrimination and creating environments where everyone can thrive.

### Future outlook: continuing the conversation, expanding progress

It is crucial to understand how the experiences of LGBTQ+ children are shaped in relation to their intersecting identities, including race, ethnicity, class and ability. Intersectionality

underscores the compounding adversities endured by individuals who are subject to several forms of discrimination.<sup>49</sup> One of those ways is to move in an effort that goes beyond the superficial and into genuine acceptance - which respects intersectionality and allows for safe spaces where all LGBTQ+ children can express their voices fully with special attention to those Children who experience multiple forms of axes against them. Sustaining progress: Advocacy and allyship Allies can help to question discriminatory beliefs and extend the reach of LGBTQ+ voices. Advocacy work could involve collaborating on LGBTQ+ affirming policies, attending Pride events and promoting educational program access. It fosters acceptance and equality when parents and communities are equipped as strong allies.<sup>50</sup> This increased risk could, in part, be attributed to the sidelined attitudes and prejudices of society that bar many members from a life they may fear is just emerging on this planet. This group of students is "so specific" that specialist mental health support needs to be adapted for them, he insisted. The engagement and dialogue between parents on how to address IPV helps prompt information sharing, which is often considered when working with LGBTQ+ Children experiencing challenging periods.<sup>35,51</sup> Centering mental health care empowers LGBTQ+ Children

to thrive in environments that promote their well-being and capacity.

## Conclusion

The journey to full acceptance and equality for LGBTQ+ individuals has gone a long way, but much more work has to be done. Parental acceptance is the foundation of a decent quality of life for children in this community, allowing them to express themselves freely. Unconditional love benefits LGBTQ+ Children by reducing mental health risks and developing a positive self-image. To attain complete acceptance, ongoing education, discussion and collective action are essential to ensure safety and inclusion within the greater LGBTQ+ community. Recognizing the specific difficulties faced by LGBTQ+ adolescents who cross identities, often known as intersectionality, is critical. Advocacy and allyship allow parents and communities to work together toward a common goal of acceptance and equality while also offering critical mental health services to help children grow up in safe and loving environments. With determination and love, we can create a brighter future for all LGBTQ+ persons and their families.

## Author contribution

Concept design: GSC, RK; Literature search: SKD, RDA, EK, Draft manuscript: GSC, RK, SKD, EK; Final manuscript and accountability: All.

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## Conflict of interest

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## Ethical Consideration

Not applicable

## Supplementary material

The data and supplementary material that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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