Marriage equality: the international experience

The research

Professor M. V. Lee Badgett is a prominent researcher and acknowledged expert on the impact of marriage equality.

In this fact sheet we summarise her research into marriage equality in the Netherlands and Massachusetts. Prof Badgett is a professor of economics at the University of Massachusetts and the research director of the Williams Institute at UCLA. She is the author of When Gay People Get Married: What happens when societies legalize same-sex marriage.

At a glance...

- 93% of same-sex who marry do so because of the love and commitment they share.
- 72% of married same-sex partners feel greater commitment to their spouses.
- 60-70% feel more accepted by family and community.
- 25% of married same-sex partners have children and most of these marry because of their children.
- 93% of gay parents say their children are happier having married parents.
- Civil unions are seen as “making a statement about the inferiority of gay people”.
- In the first year after marriage equality in Iowa, Vermont and Massachusetts, 30% of same-sex couples had married. After one year of civil unions in six different states, only 18% of same-sex couples had entered such unions.
- The economic benefit of marriage equality to the Australian economy will be at least $161 million.
- If Tasmania goes it alone the benefit will be $96 million.

The impact on couples

The right to marry reduces the sense of social exclusion of gay men and lesbians. Gains from inclusion include improvements in the mental and physical health of gay people by reducing “minority stress” and increasing social support for gay couples.

Marriage strengthens relationships. Seventy-two percent of individuals in married Dutch couples reported feeling more responsible and committed to their spouse as a result of marriage. These effects translate into healthier, longer-lasting relationships.

Marriage “made me feel more accepted” to spouse

Marriage “made me feel more accepted”

Marriage “made me feel more committed” to spouse

Marriage “made me feel more committed”

The impact on children

The children in same-sex couples’ families gain when their parents can marry. More than one-quarter of same-sex couples indicate that they have children in their home and that they and/or their spouse serves as a parent to those children. Of these households, nearly all (93%) agreed that their children are happier and better off as a result of their marriage.

Many parents reported that their children felt more secure and protected. Others noted that their children gained a sense of stability. A third common response was that marriage allowed children to see their families as being validated or legitimated by society or the government.

The impact on families

Access to a social institution that is widely recognized—marriage—enhances same-sex couples’ interactions with their families and communities.

Seven out of ten feel more accepted in their own community as a result of being married. Sixty-two percent of same-sex couples agreed that their families have become more accepting of their partner as a result of being married.

Children “happier & better off” as a result of parents’ marriage

Civil unions rejected

Lesbian and gay people see alternative ways of granting legal status, such as civil unions, civil partnerships, domestic partnerships or registered partnerships, as inferior social and legal statuses.

When given an option of marriage or registered partnership, Dutch same-sex (and, for that matter, different-sex) couples were much more likely to formalize their unions with marriage.

Dutch couples understood the political point of registered partnerships as making a statement about the inferiority of gay people generally.

Likewise, in the United States, there is strong evidence that same-sex couples prefer marriage to civil unions, even though civil unions come with very similar legal rights and benefits.
In the first year after marriage equality in Iowa, Vermont and Massachusetts, 30% of same-sex couples had married. After one year of civil unions in six different states, only 18% of same-sex couples had entered such unions.

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<th>Take-up of Marriage vs. Civil unions</th>
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<td><strong>Marriage:</strong> (1 year on)</td>
<td>30% of same-sex couples were married.¹</td>
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<td><strong>Civil unions:</strong> (1 year on)</td>
<td>18% of same-sex couples were ‘civil-unioned’.²</td>
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¹ Iowa, Vermont & Massachusetts, USA  
² An average of six different states, USA

**Benefits for the economy**

Marriage equality also benefits the economy. In Massachusetts the economic dividend from same-sex weddings was a boost of $111 million over five years.

In Australia, allowing same-sex marriages would inject at least **$161 million** into the national economy.

If a state like Tasmania were to become the first state to allow same-sex marriages it would benefit by at least **$96 million**.

**Note:** These Australian estimates, above, are conservative figures based on the lowest estimate of the number of same-sex couples and the lowest estimate of same-sex wedding spend. In 2010 Australian Marriage Equality estimated that the Australian same-sex wedding spend would be $742 million. This was based on same-sex couples spending the same amount on their weddings as heterosexual couples. Prof Badgett assumes same-sex couples spend 75% less on their weddings than heterosexual couples because same-sex couples may receive less financial support from their parents to cover wedding costs, and same-sex couples who have been together for many years might not spend as much as newer couples.