


## ARTICLE

# Exploring the intersection of gender identity and homoparental family structure: Implications for educational, family and personal well-being in Spanish students

Álvaro Marchesi-Ullastres<sup>1</sup> | Eva María Pérez-García<sup>1</sup> |  
Ricardo Lucena-Ferrero<sup>2</sup> | Javier Martín-Babarro<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Department of Research and Psychology in Education, Complutense University of Madrid, Madrid, Spain

<sup>2</sup>Department of Pedagogy, Escuni University Education Center, Madrid, Spain

**Correspondence**

Javier Martín-Babarro, Department of Research and Psychology in Education, Complutense University of Madrid, Madrid, Spain.

Email: [jbabarro@psi.ucm.es](mailto:jbabarro@psi.ucm.es)

**Abstract**

This study explores the relationship among self-perceived gender, family type (heteroparental or homoparental) and socioeconomic factors concerning various educational, family and personal well-being domains. The data are derived from a large sample of 69,088 students from 465 schools (65% public; 35% private or semi-private) in Spain. Five separate multi-level generalized mixed (logistic or linear) regression models were calculated. Key findings include that non-binary students from homoparental families reported lower evaluations in multiple dimensions, suggesting the need for additional support. Likewise, students from homoparental families exhibited lower personal well-being and family relationship assessments, possibly due to perceived social stigmatization and peer bullying. This study sheds light on the complexities of gender identity and family type in educational settings, emphasizing the importance of addressing these issues for students' well-being and academic success.

**KEYWORDS**

bullying, gender identity, homoparental family, non-binary, personal well-being

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

© 2024 The Authors. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd on behalf of British Psychological Society.

## BACKGROUND

In recent decades, the study of family influence on child development and well-being has evolved significantly. While the 1970s and 1980s primarily focused on family structure to draw conclusions about its impact on child rearing, there has been a gradual shift towards a systemic and contextual model. This model considers the influence of family members' relationships and the social environment. Factors such as the affection and trust that parents convey to their children, their ability to cope with stress and potential homophobic contexts, the family's economic status, perceived and experienced social support, children's adaptation to school and societal attitudes towards homoparental families have been incorporated into this new perspective.

The objective of this article is not to verify the development of children raised in homoparental families but to assess their personal well-being, family dynamics, relationships with teachers and peers, potential stigmatization and gender identity in comparison to children living in heteroparental families. These analyses include the impact of sociocultural factors and the effect of educational stage.

The text initially presents the main findings of studies on families with two mothers and two fathers, especially with a special emphasis on the impact of social and educational stigmatization. It also addresses the gender identity of children in homoparental families and the influence of the socioeconomic level. Subsequently, the study's characteristics and methodology are described, data analysis is conducted and key conclusions are highlighted.

### Children well-being in families in homoparental families

The majority of studies on families with two-mother families, whether their children were born in prior heterosexual relationships, initial homosexual relationships or through adoption, conclude that the quality of emotional relationships, communication and trust with their children does not differ from those in heteroparental families in similar circumstances (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010; Fedewa et al., 2015; Gartrell et al., 2018; Golombok, 2015; Golombok & Tasker, 2015; Mazrekaj et al., 2022; Patterson, 2017; Tasker & Golombok, 1995, 1997). Similar conclusions are reached for children adopted by two-father families, as there are no differences compared to children with two mothers or heteroparental families (Golombok, 2015; Golombok et al., 2018; Golombok & Tasker, 2015; McConnachie et al., 2021). Despite the widely accepted belief in women's greater effectiveness in childcare, studies on the role of fathers in two-father families have not revealed such differences.

Many studies emphasize the negative influence of stigma and microaggressions on the development, adaptation and learning of students living in homoparental families. Stigmatization results from societal and cultural intolerance towards the lifestyles of minority groups (Bos et al., 2004). Microaggressions (Green, 2013; Wegner & Wright, 2016; Wright & Wegner, 2012) are understood as brief verbal, behavioural or social slights, often automatic, directed at minority populations. Their perpetuation through the abuse of power leads to bullying. Additionally, minority groups such as homoparental families are at higher risk of stress (Meyer, 2003) due to living in an environment that can provoke discrimination, marginalization and stigmatization. This homophobic environment can affect the self-esteem and mental health of those who experience it.

Golombok et al. (2018) and Green et al. (2019) concluded that the majority of homoparental families perceived low levels of stigmatization. However, some studies have found that gay fathers experience higher levels of stigmatization in society (Carneiro et al., 2017) and in schools (Díaz-Serrano & Meix-Llop, 2016). Gay fathers who felt higher levels of antigay microaggressions towards their family members and were more aware of the stigma experienced a greater negative impact on their family's and children's adaptation (Farr & Vázquez, 2020).

## The effect of socioeconomic level

The influence of socioeconomic context on the well-being of homoparental families and their children's academic outcomes has been investigated in various studies, with not always coinciding results. Rosenfeld (2010) attributed the lower-grade repetition of children in heteroparental families to their higher socioeconomic status compared to children in homoparental families. Mazrekaj et al. (2020) used data from the Netherlands, including 2971 children with homoparental parents. The data indicated that children of homoparental couples had a higher socioeconomic background and achieved better results on standardized tests in both primary and secondary education than children of heteroparental families, even when controlling for their socioeconomic context. Similar conclusions have been drawn in Sweden for 10-year-old children of two-mother families in Mathematics and Swedish (Aldén et al., 2017).

## Gender identity of children in homoparental families

Individuals raised by homoparental families may possess broader views on gender compared to those brought up in heteroparental families. Same-sex families could be less likely to discourage exploration of non-binary gender identities or non-heterosexual relationships (Gartrell et al., 1999). Children and adolescents in homoparental families feel less parental pressure to conform to gender stereotypes (Bos & Sandfort, 2010), showing greater flexibility in accepting and considering both a non-conforming gender identity and sexual orientation compared to heteroparental families (Goldberg, 2007; López Gaviño, 2014). They also exhibit behaviours, clothing choices and play activities that deviate from the majority's gender-typed societal norms (Green et al., 1986). In qualitative research conducted by Goldberg (2007), about one-third of participants from same-sex parent families highlighted the significant influence their parents had in shaping more flexible perspectives on gender. The presence of a parent identifying as a sexual minority led them to reassess their own sexuality, question traditional binary concepts and view the exploration of one's sexuality as a natural aspect of human development. Longitudinal research conducted in the United States over 25 years with 76 offspring of two-mother families (Gartrell et al., 2018) indicated that among women from homoparental families, the percentage of identification as a sexual minority decreased from 49% to 30% between the ages of 17 and 25. It also decreased in men from 22% to 10%. The study concluded that planned offspring of two-mother families are more likely to demonstrate diversity in their attraction, identity and sexual expression, largely due to living in a more open environment that is not opposed to these types of relationships.

Despite all these findings, some authors have not found differences between children from homoparental families and those from heteroparental families in terms of psychological gender development (Brewaeys et al., 1997; Chan et al., 1998).

## Current study

The primary objective of this study was to conduct an exploratory analysis of children and adolescent well-being and gender identity in homoparental families compared to children in heteroparental families. Additionally, the study aimed to explore interaction moderation effects between the mentioned variables based on socioeconomic context and educational stage. The data represent a subsample of a larger study evaluating educational institutions, in which initial student surveys included questions about family structure, socioeconomic context and gender identity, allowing for comparisons with the responses of students from heteroparental families.

## METHOD

The data used for this study were collected between January and May 2022 and are part of a larger study with the overarching goal of understanding the perspectives of students, their families and their teachers regarding various educational and relational aspects within school settings.

### Participants

The sample consists of a total of 465 schools located throughout Spain that voluntarily participated in the study. The voluntary nature of participation allowed for a significant number of schools to be included, resulting in an incidental sample rather than a clustered or randomized one. Of the participating schools, 65% were publicly owned and 35% were privately contracted. In total, 69,088 students participated in the study, with 33.3% attending 4th, 5th, or 6th grade of primary education, 66.7% enrolled in secondary education and the remaining students in baccalaureate or vocational training. The broader study examined various variables related to the functioning of educational institutions and the quality of relationships established within them. For the purpose of this article, the focus is on variables related to students' assessments of their teachers, peers, family environment, personal well-being and experiences of bullying. Special attention is given to students who identified as non-binary and those from homoparental families, whether with two mothers or two fathers, comprising 0.6% of the participants.

### Procedure

The schools were invited to participate with the commitment that they would receive a report with the opinions of their students, teachers and families compared to those of the total participants. Initial contact was made through regional governments in the case of public schools and through congregations or associations of schools in the case of semi-private and private ones. Subsequently, direct contact was made with each of the schools, where the school management team received a model of the report they would receive in exchange for their participation. Families completed a consent form for their children to participate (parents themselves completed a questionnaire not included in the present investigation but as part of a larger study). This approach facilitated the collection of a substantial amount of responses and the organization of databases within a relatively short timeframe. One quantitative instrument was designed for students. Since the study was designed with the expectation of a large number of participants, questionnaires were administered through a dedicated survey platform. The student questionnaire primarily relied on 4-point Likert scales, it was applicable from 4th grade of primary education onwards and included dimensions related to school evaluation, relationships and coexistence. It also contained basic sociodemographic identification questions (age, grade, gender, family type, parents' education and occupation, books at home and available resources), allowing for differentiated analyses.

### Data analysis

All data analyses were performed using the SPSS 27.0 statistical program, following a specific sequence. Initially, general means were calculated, and then the dependent variables were analysed by gender. Subsequently, ANOVA tests were conducted to compare girls, boys and non-binary students across the same factors. Pearson correlations of the dependent variables were calculated. Two Chi-square tests were then performed to analyse family type and socio-economic status on one hand, and family type and gender on the other. The intraclass correlation

coefficient (ICC) was used to analyse the variance between schools for the dependent variables (teacher evaluation, student evaluation, family evaluation, personal well-being and bullying victimization) finding moderate values (ICC = 0.10, ICC = 0.11, ICC = 0.15, ICC = 0.08 and ICC = 0.06, respectively). Finally, five separate multi-level generalized mixed (logistic or linear) regression models were calculated. The independent variables at the individual level included gender, family type, socioeconomic context and educational stage. At the school level, the variable was the level of cultural diversity. Double interactions were analysed by calculating simple slopes (through estimated marginal means, EMM) and performing Bonferroni analysis. Fifteen double-interaction analyses were conducted to examine the moderation of socioeconomic context on the relationship between non-binary gender, families with two mothers and families with two fathers, with each of the independent variables. Additionally, five analyses were conducted to assess the moderation of educational stage on the relationship between gender with each of the dependent variables.

## Measures

### Gender

This variable was coded into three categories: 1 = boys, 2 = girls and 3 = non-binary. 48% ( $n = 33,187$ ) of participants were boys, 49.3% ( $n = 34,047$ ) were girls and 2.7% ( $n = 1854$ ) identified as non-binary (Table 1).

### Family type

This variable was also coded into three categories, with 94.3% ( $n = 65,146$ ) of students coming from heteroparental families, 0.3% ( $n = 184$ ) from families with two mothers and 0.3% ( $n = 190$ ) from families with two fathers.

TABLE 1 Demographic data.

Variable	N	%
Educational Level		
Primary	22,973	33.3
Secondary	35,776	51.8
Baccalaureate	10,340	15
Gender		
Boy	33,137	48
Girl	34,047	49.3
Non-binary	1854	2.7
Family type		
Two mothers	183	<1
Two fathers	190	<1
One mother and one father	65,520	99.4
SES		
Low	5587	8.5
Middle	31,289	47.7
High	28,732	43.8

## Educational level

This variable was coded into two levels, with 33.3% (22,972) of participants in primary education and 51.8% (46,116) in secondary education.

## Socioeconomic context

This variable was calculated using six items related to the level of education of both parents, the occupation of both parents, reading habits, museum visits and material resources at home. Each item was weighted and transformed on a scale from 0 to 100. The variable was divided into three groups: low level (0–33.3), medium level (33.4–66.6) and high level (66.7–100).

## Teacher evaluation

Comprised of four items related to students' assessment of teachers' assistance, empathy and interest in their needs (e.g., 'I am sure my teachers will help me if I have emotional problems' or 'Our teachers take into account our interests and motivations to adapt to our needs') (range = 1–4;  $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ;  $\alpha = .84$ ).

## Peer evaluation

Consisted of four items for evaluating relationships with classmates (e.g., 'I am comfortable with my classmates') (range = 1–4;  $M = 3.05$ ,  $SD = 0.54$ ;  $\alpha = .71$ ).

## Family evaluation

Comprised three items related to the relationship with parents, family atmosphere and the willingness of parents to listen (e.g., 'In general, I have a good relationship with my parents', 'My parents are willing to listen when I need it') (range = 1–4;  $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = 0.51$ ;  $\alpha = .83$ ).

## Personal well-being

Formed by two items: 'I feel happy and cheerful' and 'I am satisfied with the life I have' (range = 1–4;  $M = 3.19$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ;  $\alpha = .78$ ).

# RESULTS

## Descriptive analysis

The results of the descriptive analyses and correlations of the dependent variables are presented in [Table 2](#). To facilitate comparative evaluation of the indicators, the values of each variable were divided by the number of items comprising each of them. Family evaluation displayed the highest average scores ( $M = 3.59$ ), while teacher evaluation showed the lowest level of appraisal ( $M = 3.01$ ). Regarding the correlations among the analysed variables, teacher evaluation showed a significant correlation with peer evaluation ( $r = .20$ ,  $p < .001$ ), family evaluation ( $r = .32$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and personal well-being ( $r = .68$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

TABLE 2 Descriptive statistics and correlations of dependent variables.

	Total		Girl		Boy		Non-binary		Correlations.				
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Teacher evaluation	3.01	0.69	3.03	0.68	3.02	0.68	2.44	0.81					
2. Peer evaluation	3.04	0.54	3.02	0.55	3.08	0.51	2.78	0.61	.20**				
3. Family evaluation	3.59	0.60	3.55	0.63	3.66	0.53	3.11	0.93	.32**	.28**			
4. Personal well-being	3.17	0.76	3.08	0.77	3.30	0.70	2.61	0.96	.68**	.32**	.50**		
5. Bullying	0.05	0.21	0.04	.20	0.04	0.21	0.15	0.36	-.05**	-.31**	-.10**	-.11**	

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Similarly, peer evaluation exhibited positive correlations with family evaluation ( $r = .28$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and personal well-being ( $r = .32$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and a negative correlation with bullying ( $r = .31$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Notably, family evaluation demonstrated a strong relationship with personal well-being ( $r = .50$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

The data revealed that students from homoparental families had significantly lower socioeconomic status than heteroparental families (Table 3). 9.2% of heteroparental families had a low socioeconomic context, whereas 23.7% of two-mother families and 23.4% of two-father families had low socioeconomic contexts. A Chi-Square analysis indicated significant differences between the categories of each variable examined,  $\chi^2 = 106.13_{(1,4)}$ ,  $p < .001$ .

An analysis was also conducted on the relationship between family type and self-perceived gender. There was a noticeable difference between students from heteroparental families who identified as non-binary (2.4%), while this percentage rose to 25.5% for students from two-mother families and 24.7% for students from two-father families (Table 4). A Chi-Square analysis showed significant differences between the categories,  $\chi^2 = 940.66_{(1,4)}$ ,  $p < .001$ .

## Multi-level analysis

To investigate the differences in the evaluation of each of the gender options and family types concerning the assessment of each of the dependent variables, five multi-variate multi-level GLMM models were conducted (see Table 5). Below are the primary simple interactions obtained from the analysis. The results indicated significant coefficients for several predictors. Gender exhibited significant differences concerning three analysed dependent variables. Specifically, non-binary students demonstrated lower evaluations of three evaluation figures: teachers ( $F_{2,68,323} = 78.43$ ,  $p < .001$ ), peers ( $F_{2,68,323} = 18.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ), families ( $F_{2,68,323} = 101.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and personal well-being ( $F_{2,68,323} = 67.07$ ,  $p < .001$ ), compared to students identifying as boys and girls. Furthermore, non-binary students displayed higher levels of bullying than self-identified boys and girls ( $F_{2,68,323} = 27.67^{***}$ ).

Regarding family type, students from homoparental families (children of two mothers or two fathers) exhibited lower evaluations of teachers ( $F_{2,68,323} = 18.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ), peers ( $F_{2,68,323} = 19.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ), personal well-being ( $F_{2,68,323} = 28.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and higher levels of bullying ( $F_{2,68,323} = 13.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ) compared to students from heteroparental families.

Socioeconomic status also demonstrated interaction effects with all analysed dependent variables: teacher evaluation ( $F_{2,68,323} = 6.98$ ,  $p < .01$ ), peer evaluation ( $F_{2,68,323} = 5.00$ ,  $p < .01$ ), family relationships ( $F_{2,68,323} = 32.92$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and personal well-being ( $F_{2,68,323} = 16.17$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In all these cases, students with lower socioeconomic status significantly rated all the figures mentioned lower than students with medium and high socioeconomic levels. Regarding the educational stage, during secondary education, students generally evaluated their teachers ( $F_{1,68,323} = 823.54$ ,  $p < .01$ ), peers ( $F_{1,68,323} = 16.58$ ,  $p < .01$ ), families ( $F_{2,68,323} = 142.03$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and personal well-being ( $F_{1,68,323} = 349.91$ ,  $p < .01$ ) lower than primary education students. In relation to bullying, the primary school student had a higher level than the secondary education student ( $F_{1,68,323} = 55.00$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

TABLE 3 Socioeconomic status of different family models.

	SES	Count	Percentage
Mother and father	Low	6364	9.2
	Medium	33,607	48.5
	High	29,299	42.3
Two mothers	Low	47	23.7
	Medium	87	43.9
	High	64	32.3
Two fathers	Low	50	23.4
	Medium	103	48.1
	High	61	28.5

TABLE 4 Self-perceived gender options in relation to family type.

	Gender	Count	Percentage
Mother and father	Boy	31,487	48.3
	Girl	32,120	49.3
	Non-binary	1539	2.4
Two mothers	Boy	62	33.7
	Girl	75	40.8
	Non-binary	47	25.5
Two fathers	Boy	84	44.2
	Girl	59	31.1
	Non-binary	47	24.7

Finally, regarding the variable for the level of diversity, centres with greater diversity exhibited higher evaluations of teachers ( $F_{2,68,323} = 11.50, p < .01$ ) and personal well-being ( $F_{2,68,323} = 11.04, p < .01$ ).

Regarding the double-interaction effects found, the students' socioeconomic context demonstrated a moderating effect on the relationship between non-binary gender and four of the dependent variables: teacher evaluation ( $F_{2,68,323} = 5.63, p < .01$ ), peer evaluation ( $F_{2,68,323} = 7.35, p < .01$ ), family evaluation ( $F_{2,68,323} = 35.90, p < .01$ ) and personal well-being ( $F_{2,68,323} = 23.15, p < .01$ ). Non-binary students showed lower evaluations of teachers, families and personal well-being than self-identified boys and girls. However, these evaluations were even lower when students belonged to a low socioeconomic status (teachers: EMM = 2.25, SE = 0.06; peers: EMM = 2.53, SE = 0.05; family: EMM = 2.43, SE = 0.06; personal well-being: EMM = 2.11, SE = 0.07) compared to non-binary students with high socioeconomic status (teachers: EMM = 2.43, SE = 0.05; peers: EMM = 2.77, SE = 0.05; family: EMM = 3.01, SE = 0.05; personal well-being: EMM = 2.67, SE = 0.06).

The socioeconomic context of the students also displayed a similar moderating effect on the relationship between homoparental families and the analysed dependent variables. This moderating effect occurred for the relationship between belonging to a family with two fathers and three dependent variables: peer evaluation ( $F_{2,68,323} = 3.45, p < .05$ ), family evaluation ( $F_{2,68,323} = 8.37, p < .01$ ) and personal well-being ( $F_{2,68,323} = 5.87, p < .01$ ). Students from two-father families rated teachers, families and personal well-being lower compared to self-identified boys and girls, but these evaluations were even lower when students had a low socioeconomic status (peers: EMM = 2.60, SE = 0.08; family: EMM = 2.76, SE = 0.08; personal well-being: EMM = 2.50, SE = 0.11) compared to students from two-father families with high socioeconomic status (peers: EMM = 2.88, SE = 0.07; family: EMM = 3.19, SE = 0.07; personal well-being: EMM = 2.98, SE = 0.09).

Finally, the educational stage also had a moderating effect on the relationship between non-binary gender and two of the analysed dependent variables: teacher evaluation ( $F_{2,68,323} = 88.06, p < .001$ ) and personal well-being ( $F_{2,68,323} = 16.07, p < .01$ ). Students with self-perceived non-binary gender showed lower evaluations of teachers and personal well-being than those self-identified boys or girls. However, these levels were even lower when non-binary students were in secondary education (teachers: EMM = 2.16, SE = 0.04; personal well-being: EMM = 2.29, SE = 0.05; bullying: EMM = 0.29, SE = 0.03) compared to non-binary students in primary education (teachers: EMM = 2.59, SE = 0.05; personal well-being: EMM = 2.50, SE = 0.06; bullying: EMM = 0.47; SE = 0.05).

## DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study has been to analyse the well-being and gender identity of children and adolescents within homoparental families compared to heteroparental families.

### Family type and socio-personal well-being

The data on the personal well-being of students with two fathers and two mothers are not in line with the results reported in the majority of research on this topic (Gartrell et al., 2018; Golombok, 2015; Golombok & Tasker, 2015; Mazrekaj et al., 2022; McConnachie et al., 2021). The assessment of the personal well-being of these students is significantly lower than that of the overall student population from heteroparental families, reflecting, according to the questionnaire used, a lower level of enthusiasm and life satisfaction.

Their assessment of their family environment also shows significant differences. Groups of students from homoparental families express a lower evaluation in this dimension, which primarily pertains to their good relationship with their family and the ability of their parents. These data do not correspond with the majority of research on relationships in families with two fathers or two mothers, which do not find differences between different types of families (Lamb, 2012; McConnachie et al., 2021).

What could be causing these difficulties in family relationships and personal well-being? Possibly, as detected by a large number of studies (Bos & Van Balen, 2008; Crouch et al., 2012; van Gelderen et al., 2009, 2012), social stigmatization perception may be influencing this, which affects family functioning and, consequently, the personal well-being of students. There may be a link between social stigmatization, family assessment and the personal well-being of the children of homoparental families. However, the present study does not provide data to confirm the perception of stigmatization by families. Nevertheless, there is a higher percentage of bullying experienced by these students from their peers at school, so this type of aggression may be the origin of their problems in family and school settings and their personal well-being. Students from homoparental families have also expressed lower satisfaction in their relationships with their peers, which is undoubtedly related to the experienced aggressions. Some studies (van Gelderen et al., 2009) have highlighted that microaggressions and harassment of students from homoparental families can lead to an increase in personal distress, adaptation difficulties and decreased self-esteem.

Comparisons between students from families with two fathers and two mothers do not show significant differences between them, but there is a trend of higher assessment of students with two mothers compared to students with two fathers in the dimensions of family relationships and personal well-being. This same trend is also found in relation to the gender of students from these families: women indicate a higher evaluation of their families than men, although these differences are not significant due to the small number of participants. This indicates the specific problems that the male gender experiences in homoparental families. Analysed together, the data show that

**TABLE 5** Multi-level regression analysis to predict the evaluation of teachers, students, family, personal well-being and victimization based on gender, family type, socioeconomic context, educational level and school diversity.

	Teacher evaluation			Peer evaluation			Family evaluation			Personal wellbeing			Bullying victimization		
	M	SE	F	M	SE	F	M	SE	F	M	SE	F	M	SE	F
Individual level															
Gender															
Boy	2.98	(2.91, 3.05)	81.11 (2, 68,323)***	2.92	(2.87, 2.98)	18.23 (2, 68,323)***	2.51	(3.44, 3.57)	101.50 (2, 68,323)***	3.17	(3.01, 3.25)	76.07 (2, 68,232)***	0.08	(0.06, 0.12)	27.67 (2, 68,232)***
Girl	3.11	(3.03, 3.18)	68,323)***	2.92	(2.85, 2.98)	68,323)***	3.40	(3.33, 3.42)	68,323)***	3.06	(2.98, 3.14)	68,232)***	0.09	(0.06, 0.13)	68,232)***
Non-binary	2.41	(2.32, 2.49)		2.66	(2.58, 2.73)		2.80	(2.72, 2.88)		2.42	(2.32, 2.52)		0.37	(0.30, 0.45)	
Family															
Two fathers	2.73	(2.64, 2.83)	31.10 (2, 68,323)***	2.76	(2.68, 2.83)	19.57 (2, 68,323)***	3.09	(3.00, 3.17)	75.59 (2, 68,323)	2.82	(2.72, 2.92)		0.24	(0.27, 0.32)	13.29 (2, 68,232)***
Two mothers	2.75	(2.65, 2.84)	68,323)***	2.79	(2.71, 2.87)	68,323)***	3.13	(3.05, 3.22)		2.76	(2.65, 2.86)		0.17	(0.11, 0.25)	68,232)***
Mother and father	3.01	(2.98, 3.03)		2.95	(2.93, 2.97)		3.48	(3.46, 3.50)		3.07	(3.05, 3.10)		0.07	(0.07, 0.08)	
SES															
Low	2.71	(2.62, 2.79)	6.98 (2, 68,323)**	2.75	(2.68, 2.83)	5.00 (2, 68,323)***	3.00	(2.92, 3.07)	32.92 (2, 68,232)***	2.71	(2.61, 2.81)		0.17	(0.12, 0.23)	n.s.
Medium	2.87	(2.80, 2.93)	68,323)**	2.83	(2.78, 2.89)	68,323)***	3.29	(3.23, 3.35)		2.86	(2.79, 2.94)	16.17 (2, 68,232)***	0.15	(0.11, 0.29)	
High	2.91	(2.84, 2.99)		2.91	(2.84, 2.97)		3.42	(3.35, 3.48)		3.07	(2.99, 3.16)		0.13	(0.09, 0.17)	
Educational stage															
Secondary	2.58	(2.54, 2.63)	823.54 (1, 68,323)***	2.80	(2.77, 2.84)	16.58 (1, 68,232)***	3.14	(3.10, 3.18)	142.03 (2, 68,232)***	2.70	(2.65, 2.76)	349.91 (1, 68,232)***	0.10	(0.08, 0.13)	55.00 (2, 68,232)***
Primary	3.08	(3.02, 3.13)		2.86	(2.82, 2.91)		3.30	(3.28, 3.37)		3.06	(3.00, 3.12)		0.21	(0.17, 0.25)	
School level															
Diversity															
Low	2.80	(2.75, 2.84)	11.50 (1, 68,323)**	2.85	(2.81, 2.89)	11.04 (1, 68,323)**	3.24	(3.19, 3.28)	n.s.	2.88	(2.82, 2.93)		0.14	(0.11, 0.17)	n.s.
High	2.86	(2.81, 2.92)	68,323)**	2.81	(2.77, 2.86)	68,323)**	3.23	(3.19, 3.27)		2.89	(2.84, 2.94)		0.16	(0.13, 0.19)	
Interactions															
SES × Non-binary			5.63 (2, 68,323)**		7.35 (2, 68,323)**			35.90 (2, 68,323)***			23.15 (2, 68,323)***				n.s.
SES × Two fathers			n.s.		3.45 (2, 68,323)**			8.02 (2, 68,323)***			5.87 (2, 68,323)**				n.s.
SES × Two mothers			3.51 (2, 68,323)*		n.s.			13.42 (2, 68,323)***			7.18 (2, 68,323)**				n.s.
Educational stage × Non-binary			88.06 (1, 68,323)***		n.s.			n.s.			16.07 (1, 68,323)***				13.07 (1, 68,323)***

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

the greatest difficulties in family relationships and personal well-being are experienced by the boys living in two-father families.

The more negative evaluations of students from homoparental families in the three previously mentioned dimensions have a positive counterpoint in their opinion about teachers. In this dimension, there are no differences between different family models.

What might be the reason for teachers being relatively more valued than families and peers? Possibly, students from homoparental families see them as a reference for advancing their learning and compensating for the difficulties they experience in other environments and relationships such as their family and peers.

## Gender identity

Firstly, concerning self-perceived gender in relation to the dependent variables studied, non-binary students from homoparental families expressed poorer assessments compared to non-binary students from heteroparental families in all the variables studied: teacher evaluation, peer evaluation, family evaluation and personal well-being. This implies that they also do not perceive sufficient support from teachers, which was found among students with homoparental families. All of this creates a situation of greater distress and helplessness for these students.

Moreover, the level of self-perceived gender indicated was related to the type of family to which one belonged. 2.4% of students from heteroparental families chose the non-binary option, while this percentage increased to 26% among students from homoparental families. These data are similar to other studies on this topic (Gartrell et al., 1999; Goldberg, 2007; López Gaviño, 2014), although it is important to note that the ages of the participants in different studies may not be the same. The reasons commonly given to explain why the children of homoparental families choose the non-binary option more frequently are greater tolerance, permissiveness and appreciation of relationships and gender identification in their families. Parenting in homoparental families encourages greater flexibility in embracing non-conforming gender identity and sexual orientation compared to heteroparental families, facilitating a more comfortable and open approach to constructing one's gender identity (Bos & Sandfort, 2010; López Gaviño, 2014).

## Socioeconomic context

The data from this study show that students from homoparental families have significantly lower socioeconomic status than heteroparental families.

What does a lower context imply? Typically, it involves greater economic difficulties, fewer opportunities for additional leisure or learning activities and less cultural interest within the family. These difficulties can be exacerbated if homoparental families have to finance the gestation of their children or deal with the separation of a previous heteroparental marriage. The lower socioeconomic context of these families in this study could complicate living within the family.

## CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusion of the study is that children living in homoparental families experience greater relationship difficulties and communication issues with their family and peers, and they suffer more maltreatment than their peers from heteroparental families, which affects their personal well-being. These findings, except for school stigmatization, deviate from the general trend of the majority of research conducted on these topics.

The interpretative hypothesis for these results considers that school stigmatization is at the root of the difficulties expressed. The reflection posed by Mazrekaj et al. (2022) based on the minority stress theory supports this interpretation: if minority groups based on social, racial, sexual or cultural criteria experience greater stress in adapting to the majority models of society, how do these stresses not affect the emotional balance and well-being of their children? In the present study, the greater school bullying experienced by students from homoparental families has been verified, but the social stigmatization of families has not been studied. However, it would not be surprising if they also experienced this situation, which, along with school bullying, would be responsible for the difficulties experienced in the family and at school, affecting the personal well-being of the students.

A relevant point is the differences based on the type of homoparental family. The trend shown in this study is that two-father families face more difficulties than two-mothers families, as the children of the latter express a higher evaluation of their family and personal well-being, as well as a lower level of bullying at school.

The study also shows differences based on the gender of the children of homoparental families. Boys experience their family situation worse than girls, possibly due to their greater communication difficulties, greater incapacity to seek positive coping strategies and greater rejection by their male peers of this type of family union.

From the data obtained in the study, it can be inferred that there is no widespread social acceptance of homosexuals and their marital relationships in Spain. Comparisons between students from homoparental and heteroparental families should also consider the impact of the social and educational evaluation of homoparental families when interpreting the results. A cross-cultural study by Bos and Van Balen (2008) showed that Dutch children growing up in two-mother families exhibited less homophobia and emotional problems than American children with the same characteristics. It is worth noting that the Netherlands was the first country to legalize these marriages in 2001, while it was legalized in the United States in 2015. The legalization of these unions does not always reflect the overall assessments of society due to the influence of deeply rooted social and cultural values and traditions.

A similar situation could explain the results obtained in Spain. Although the legalization of homoparental marriage in Spain occurred in 2005, making it one of the pioneering countries in this regard, it can be interpreted from the data of the present study that legal changes have been faster than social and educational attitude transformations. It may also be influenced by two main factors. The first is cultural values widely rooted in Spain that do not appreciate family unions of two men or two women. Although these assessments are changing rapidly in the new generations, they still have a notable influence on a sector of society and the media. The second factor is Spain's widespread religiosity, whose values are contrary to homoparental marriages, significantly impacting negative social attitudes towards these unions, as pointed out by Whitley (2009) and Bos and Sandfort (2010). The goal of equality and recognition and respect for different types of families and gender options is far from being achieved.

The gender identity of the children of homoparental families mainly shows a heteroparental choice, although the percentage of non-binary choices is significantly higher than that of children from heteroparental families. These data can be attributed to the fact that homoparental families favour a more tolerant and permissive family environment for their children's gender choices and allow their children more freedom to choose the gender identity with which they feel most comfortable.

Their family and social relationship assessment with their peers and teachers is more negative than that of their peers from heteroparental families. They also experience a higher level of maltreatment. The family model in which they live and their non-binary gender option complicates the family, social, educational and personal well-being of these students. They are students at serious risk of victimization and social and educational maladjustment, so information, protection and support for all of them are among the top priorities of prevention and school inclusion programmes. Enrolling with peers who live in a similar family model or who maintain prior friendships are mechanisms that provide better

conditions for protecting students from abuse and marginalization. Research on the usefulness of such initiatives should be part of an agenda focused on student well-being.

The socioeconomic context is a relevant variable for better understanding the social and educational dynamics of families and their children. Contrary to the conclusions of most studies, the data obtained from questionnaires answered by each student indicate that homoparental families have a lower socioeconomic context than heteroparental families. This finding points to the greater problems that these families may experience due to their economic limitations, which are compounded by potential stigmatization. In addition, families situated in a low cultural context may have less communicative competence to address the social and educational pressures with their children. Therefore, it can be expected that they have a greater need for support and protection in facing their difficulties, which they may not easily find.

Some limitations need to be considered, mainly concerning the methodology. Possibly the most important one is that we do not know the characteristics of homoparental families: if their children have been so from their early years or have been adopted or were born from a previous heterosexual union; in the latter case, how is the relationship with the parent who lives outside their family; if information about the history of parenthood has been shared with the children or kept secret; and if they discuss their possible difficulties and the most appropriate ways to deal with them. Golombok et al. (2023) found that young people who knew their biological origins before the age of 7 had less negative relationships with their mothers. It is important not to forget the problems that adopted children may have after living their early years in difficult contexts (Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010) or those born into a heteroparental family who had to adapt to a homoparental family due to the decision of one of their parents (Mazrekaj et al., 2020). All of these experiences and circumstances also influence the personal well-being of the children and their relationships with the family. Knowledge of these situations would provide important clues to understand the reasons for the dissatisfaction of these students.

The anonymity of the responses has its advantages and disadvantages. Among the advantages is the freedom to respond to questionnaires without the possibility of knowing the author of the responses. The main disadvantage is the other side of the coin: not knowing the participants makes it impossible to know what their family is like and to conduct interviews with a sample of them to better understand their history, situation and how they cope with possible difficulties. Perhaps a mixed model, anonymous and with voluntary participation of certain families, could be a more comprehensive approach.

Finally, it is important to note that different types of families, whether they are homoparental, heteroparental, single parent or others, do not constitute a homogeneous group; there are differences among them. Developing new studies that analyse the intragroup differences of the homoparental family model would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that have the greatest impact on their well-being and competence in dealing with social and educational challenges.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

**Álvaro Marchesi-Ullastres:** Conceptualization; writing – original draft; supervision; investigation. **Eva María Pérez-García:** Methodology; validation; writing – review and editing; writing – original draft; investigation. **Ricardo Lucena-Ferrero:** Writing – original draft; writing – review and editing; investigation. **Javier Martín-Babarro:** Formal analysis; data curation; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

All authors declare no conflict of interest related to this work.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

## ORCID

Javier Martín-Babarro  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6560-9923>

## REFERENCES

- Aldén, L., Bjorklund, A., & Hammarstedt, M. (2017). Early Health and School Outcomes for Children with Lesbian Parents: Evidence from Sweden. *Institute of Labor Economics Discussion Paper No. 10616; IZA Institute of Labor Economics: Bonn, Germany.*
- Biblarz, T. J., & Stacey, J. (2010). How does the gender of parents matter? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(1), 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2009.00678.x>
- Bos, H. M. W., & Sandfort, T. G. M. (2010). Children's gender identity in lesbian and heterosexual two-parent families. *Sex Roles*, 62, 114–126. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-009-9704-7>
- Bos, H. M. W., & Van Balen, F. (2008). Children in planned lesbian families; stigmatization, psychological adjustment and protective factors. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 13, 221–236.
- Bos, H. M. W., Van Balen, F., Boom, D. C. V. D., & Sandfort, T. G. M. (2004). Minority stress, experience of parenthood, and child adjustment in lesbian families. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 22, 291–304.
- Brewaews, A., Ponjaert, I., Van Hall, E. V., & Golombok, S. (1997). Donor insemination: Child development and family functioning in lesbian mother families. *Human Reproduction*, 12(6), 1349–1359.
- Carneiro, F. A., Tasker, F., Salinas-Quiroz, F., Leal, I., & Costa, P. A. (2017). Are the fathers alright? A systematic and critical review of studies on gay and bisexual fatherhood. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 1636. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01636>
- Chan, R. W., Brooks, R. C., Raboy, B., & Patterson, C. J. (1998). Division of labor among lesbian and heterosexual parents: Associations with children's adjustment. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 12(3), 402–419. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.12.3.402>
- Crouch, S. R., Waters, E., McNair, R., Power, J., & Davis, E. (2012). ACHES—the Australian study of child health in same-sex families: Background research, design, and methodology. *BMC Public Health*, 12, 646. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-12-646>
- Díaz-Serrano, L., & Meix-Llop, E. (2016). Do schools discriminate against homosexual parents? Evidence from a randomized correspondence experiment. *Economics of Education Review*, 53, 133–142.
- Farr, R., & Vázquez, C. (2020). Stigma experiences, mental health, perceived parenting competence, and parent-child relationships among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual adoptive parents in the United States. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 445. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00445>
- Fedewa, A. L., Black, W. W., & Ahn, S. (2015). Children and adolescents with same-gender parents: A meta-analytic approach in assessing outcomes. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 11(1), 1–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1550428X.2013.869486>
- Gartrell, N., Banks, A., Hamilton, J., Reed, N., Bishop, H., & Rodas, C. (1999). The National Lesbian Family Study: 2. Interviews with mothers of toddlers. *The American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 69, 362–369. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0080410>
- Gartrell, N., Bos, H., & Koh, A. (2018). Sexual attraction, sexual identity, and same-sex sexual experiences of adult offspring in the U.S. National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 48, 1495–1503. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-019-1434-5>
- Goldberg, A. E. (2007). (How) does it make a difference? Perspectives of adults with lesbian, gay, and bisexual parents. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 77(4), 550–562. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0002-9432.77.4.550>
- Golombok, S. (2015). *Modern families: Parents and children in new family forms*. Cambridge University Press.
- Golombok, S., Blake, L., Slutsky, J., Raffanello, E., Roman, G., & Ehrhardt, A. (2018). Parenting and the adjustment of children born to gay fathers through surrogacy. *Child Development*, 89(4), 1223–1233. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12728>
- Golombok, S., Jones, C., Hall, P., Foley, S., Imrie, S., & Jadva, V. (2023, April 13). A longitudinal study of families formed through third-party assisted reproduction: Mother-child relationships and child adjustment from infancy to adulthood. *Developmental Psychology*, 59(6), 1059–1073. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0001526>
- Golombok, S., & Tasker, F. (2015). Socio-emotional development in changing family contexts. In R. M. Lerner & M. E. Lamb (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology and developmental science: Vol. 3. Social, emotional and personality development* (7th ed.). Wiley.
- Green, R., Mandel, J. B., Hotvedt, M. E., Gray, J., & Smith, L. (1986). Lesbian mothers and their children: A comparison with solo parent heterosexual mothers and their children. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 15(2), 167–184.
- Green, R.-J. (2013). Family Antigay Microaggression Scale (FAMS). *San Francisco, CA: California School of Professional Psychology, Alliant International University.*
- Green, R.-J., Rubio, R. J., Rothblum, E. D., Bergman, K., & Katuzny, K. E. (2019). Gay fathers by surrogacy: Prejudice, parenting, and well-being of female and male children. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 6, 269–283. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000325>
- Lamb, M. E. (2012). Mothers, fathers, families, and circumstances: Factors affecting child adjustment. *Applied Developmental Science*, 16, 98–111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2012.667344>

- López Gaviño, F. (2014). *Experiencia vital, perfil psicológico y orientación sexual de jóvenes adultos con madres lesbianas o padres gays. Doctoral dissertation. Sevilla University.*
- Mazrekaj, D., De Witte, K., & Cabus, S. (2020). School outcomes of children raised by same-sex parents: Evidence from administrative panel data. *American Sociological Review*, *85*, 830–856.
- Mazrekaj, D., Fischer, M. M., & Bos, H. M. W. (2022). Behavioral outcomes of children with same-sex parents in The Netherlands. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *2022*(19), 5922. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19105922>
- McConnachie, A. L., Ayed, N., Foley, S., Lamb, M. E., Jadv, V., Tasker, F., & Golombok, S. (2021). Adoptive gay father families: A longitudinal study of children's adjustment at early adolescence. *Child Development*, *92*(1), 425–443.
- Meyer, I. H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, *129*, 674–697. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.5.674>
- Palacios, J., & Brodzinsky, D. M. (2010). Adoption research: Trends, topics, outcomes. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, *34*, 270–284.
- Patterson, C. J. (2017). Parents' sexual orientation and children's development. *Child Development Perspectives*, *11*(1), 45–49. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12207>
- Rosenfeld, M. J. (2010). Nontraditional families and childhood progress through school. *Demography*, *47*, 755–775.
- Tasker, F., & Golombok, S. (1995). Adults raised as children in lesbian families. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *65*, 203–215.
- Tasker, F., & Golombok, S. (1997). *Growing up in a lesbian family: Effects on child development.* Guildford.
- van Gelderen, L., Gartrell, N., Bos, H. M. W., & Hermanns, J. M. A. (2009). Stigmatization and resilience in adolescent children of lesbian mothers. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, *5*(3), 268–279. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15504280903035761>
- van Gelderen, L., Gartrell, N., Bos, H. M. W., van Rooij, F. B., & Hermanns, J. M. A. (2012). Stigmatization associated with growing up in a lesbian-parented family: What do adolescents experience and how do they deal with it? *Children and Youth Services Review*, *34*, 999–1006.
- Wegner, R., & Wright, A. J. (2016). A psychometric evaluation of the homonegative microaggressions scale. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, *20*, 299–318. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19359705.2016.1177627>
- Whitley, B. (2009). Religiosity and attitudes toward lesbians and gay men: A meta-analysis. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, *19*, 21–38.
- Wright, A. J., & Wegner, R. T. (2012). Homonegative microaggressions and their impact on LGB individuals: A measure validity study. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, *6*, 34–54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15538605.2012.648578>

**How to cite this article:** Marchesi-Ullastres, Á., Pérez-García, E. M., Lucena-Ferrero, R., & Martín-Babarro, J. (2024). Exploring the intersection of gender identity and homoparental family structure: Implications for educational, family and personal well-being in Spanish students. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, *00*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjdp.12488>