RESEARCH BRIEF

SAME-SEX COHABITATION

LOVE AND FAMILIES OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER PEOPLE IN VIETNAM

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Hanoi, April 2020

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INTRODUCTION

The Law on Marriage and Family in 2014 marked a historic change when marriage between two persons of the same sex is now no longer included in the list of cases where marriage is prohibited (or "same-sex marriage is no longer prohibited", as the media and the public may call it). However, Vietnam has yet to officially recognize and legalize same-sex marriage, even in cases of marriage abroad or marriage to a citizen of a country that has legalized same-sex marriage. In reality, the lack of legal recognition of same-sex marriage or other forms of partnership has left same-sex couples with no legal protection, including provisions on inheritance rights, property, identity and children (biological and adopted children).

With the aim to understand the current situation of same-sex cohabitation in Vietnam in order to make specific and practical recommendations for policy advocacy efforts towards legalizing same-sex marriage, the Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment (iSEE) conducted this "Same-sex Cohabitation" research to answer the following questions:

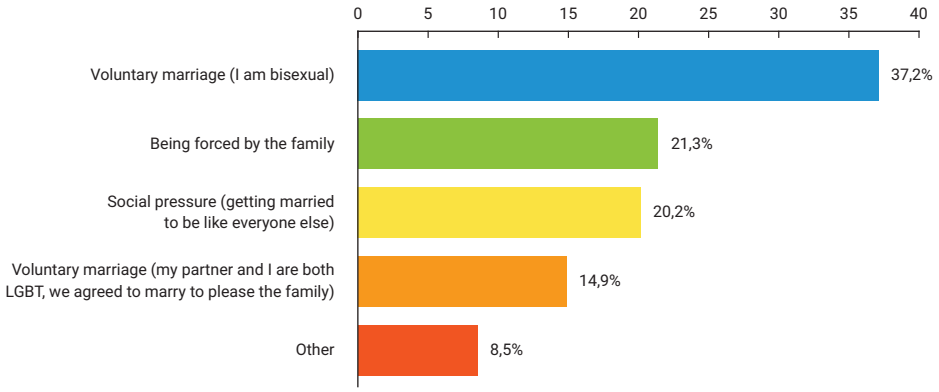
1. Perceptions and expectations of the LGBT community in Vietnam on same-sex love and cohabitation.
2. Real-life cohabitation experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people today, including the formation of cohabiting relationships, living arrangements, problems that may arise and ways to solve problems in their life together.
3. The need to form marriage relationships of the LGBT community in Vietnam and their point of view on the process of legalizing same-sex marriage?

The research was conducted in April - May 2019 by the iSEE research team. 5999 LGBT Vietnamese people nationwide and abroad responded to the online research questionnaire, and 20 typical cases of same-sex couples currently living together, as well as some parents of LGBT people in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, were interviewed during this research.

PERSPECTIVES OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER PEOPLE ON LOVE, COHABITATION AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

94 cases out of the surveyed population (1.7%) said they were currently in a different-sex relationship or had had an experience with different-sex marriage in their lifetime. The primary reason for different-sex marriage is recorded as voluntary marriage (when they are bisexual), or voluntary "lavender" marriage (not on the basis of love but to conceal oneself or please the family) between a gay and a lesbian person, or between a transgender person and someone of a different sex on paper. Another significant percentage of those in “lavender marriages” reported that their marriage was not voluntary, but due to family and social pressures, they were forced to accept the marriage. Nearly half of the group who have been/are in a different-sex marriage reported that they are divorced (41.5%) or separated and in the process of divorce proceedings (7.4%). The main cause of divorce is because they realize that a marriage without love is a mistake, the marriage is no longer happy, or because of conflicts with the spouse and with the spouse's family due to them being LGBT.

REASONS FOR AN LGBT PERSON TO MARRY A PERSON OF A DIFFERENT SEX (N=94)



More than half of the online survey respondents (54.1%) said that they are now in a same-sex relationship. Specifically, 37.6% have been in this type of relationship in less than a year. 44.4% reported that their same-sex relationships have been 1 to 3 years long; 10.6% of them have 4 to 5 year-long relationships; 6.3% have 6 to 10 year-long relationships and a small percentage (1.3%) has been in a same-sex relationship for more than 10 years.

A same-sex relationship is understood as a relationship with a partner/lover that the respondents consider serious and long-term. We can see their seriousness and sincerity in their desire for a long-term and sustainable relationship, and in the plans that they commit to working together to achieve. Maybe it's a commitment to a long time living together, or a commitment to their future lives, including establishing bonds with their family, relatives, as well as mutual interests in assets, home, land, and children.

> *"I hope to be able to get married, have a family, have children, and the biggest hope is that I don't have to live many different lives, separate from each other. I am able to get married, have friends and they all know each other."*
> *– (Nhi, a lesbian, 27 years old, Ho Chi Minh City)*

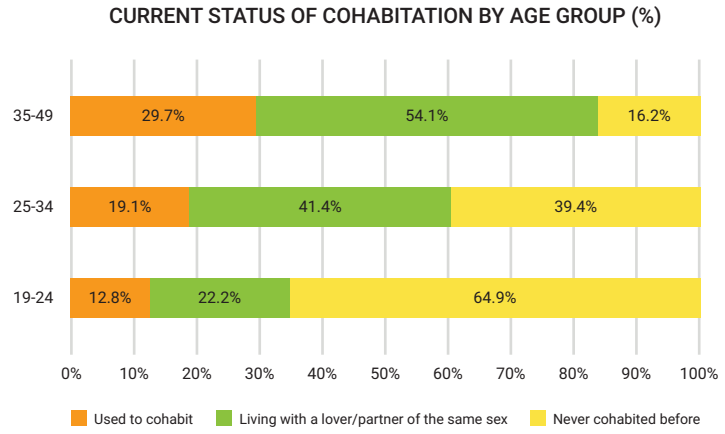
With such expectations, many LGBT people wish that their love would be recognized and protected, like the love of different-sex couples, by marriage and legal recognition.

Current situation of same-sex cohabitation

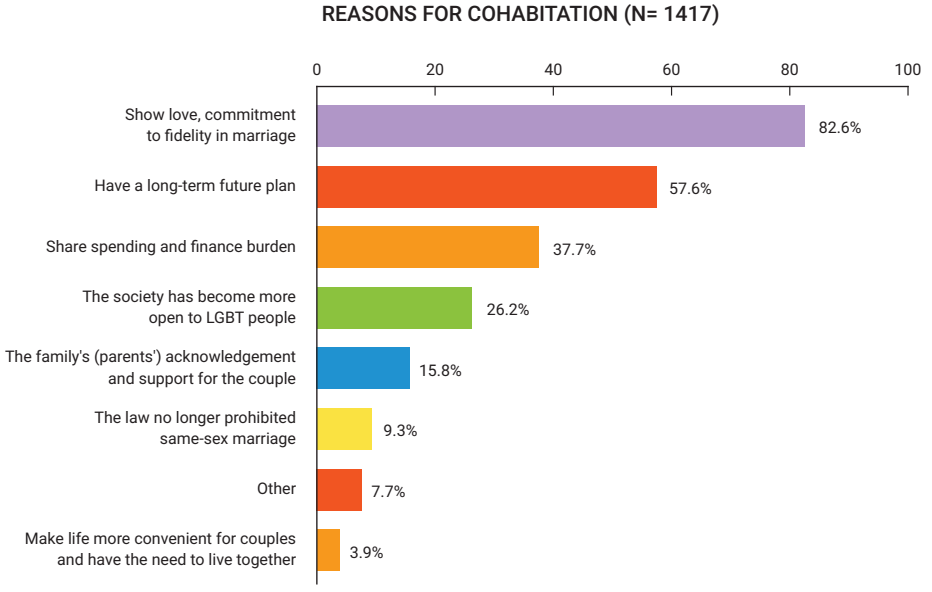
When asked about their current same-sex cohabitation status, 26.8% of people currently in same-sex relationships said they are living with their lover/partner, 14.4% said they had cohabited together in the past, and 58.7% said they have never cohabited with their current partner.

In terms of age group, the respondents of older age groups have higher rates of experiencing and currently living with a same-sex lover/partner than those of younger age groups. While 83.8% of respondents in the group of 35-49 years old have been or are living with a partner of the same sex, this figure is 60.6% in the group of 25-34 years old and 35.1% in the group of 19-24 years old. In the group of people aged

35-49 who currently have a lover of the same sex, 54.1% are currently living together. This rate is also quite high in the group of people aged 25-34 (41.4%). People currently living with a partner of the same sex tend to be currently employed rather than students or unemployed.



Compared with the findings of the same-sex cohabitation study conducted by iSEE in 2013, the rate of couples in a same-sex relationship choosing to live together has increased many times. The study in 2013 found that about 15% of same-sex couples were living together, while in this study, this figure reaches 26.8%.



Reasons for cohabitation

For many couples, the moment they decide to live together and transition to cohabitation is an important moment that marks the transformation in their love relationship, a milestone for a *stable, serious, long-term relationship*, meaning that they are well-prepared for *the future*. Or for many other people, choosing to live together simply helps them to solve financial problems or makes it easier to date and strengthen their relationships.

Couples' reality of cohabitation

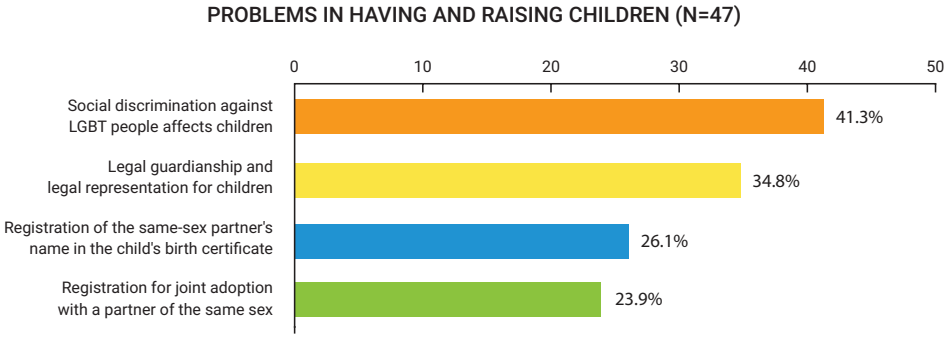
A. Duration of cohabitation: When analyzing the duration of cohabitation of same-sex couples, it is easy to see that respondents in the older age group have a longer time living together. Specifically, the rate of couples living together for more than 5 years in the group of 35-49 years old is 40% while it is only 12.3% in the group of 25-34 years old, and only 1.2% in the group of 19-24 years old.

B. Accommodation: 30.6% of cohabitants reported that they had to change their living place at least once during their cohabitation with a partner. The longer they lived together, the more likely they had to change the living place. Notably, a certain percentage said that they had encountered some problems related to stigma and discrimination against same-sex couples in the place where they lived, causing them to decide to leave. 10.5% said their former landlord expressed discriminatory attitudes towards LGBT people, and 12.7% said that their neighbors expressed discriminatory attitudes towards LGBT people.

C. Asset ownership and related issues: When creating a life together, a same-sex couple often makes a flexible decision on how to contribute and share their financial burden, depending on each person's background and their long-term plans and wishes. They do more shopping and have more savings over the time they live together. For example, in the group of 35-49 years old, up to 55% of cohabiting couples currently share high-value assets (i.e. cars, savings books, gold, etc.), 50% share capital contributions in business investment, 57.9% currently own the same house and land (however, the ownership paper is registered only in the name of one),

and 20% said that they own real estate in the name of both partners. Many other couples choose to follow an equal financial model, with equal contributions for daily expenses. Others choose to be completely independent of each other in terms of financial responsibilities.

D. Having and raising children: 3.2% of respondents said they have children (47 cases). Of those who have children, 12 said they adopted children (of which 9 respondents said they adopted 1 child, 3 respondents adopted 2 children), 16 said they currently live with the biological children of their partners, 19 said they had their own children. For those who have children, the most popular concern when raising their children is that the discrimination against LGBT people in society can have a negative impact on their children (41.3%).



For those who currently have a same-sex partner but without children, when being asked about their desire to have children in the future, up to 62.9% said they want to have children, 28.2% said they have not considered this issue (mostly due to being in the young age group), and 9% said they do not want to have children.

For couples who have loved and lived together for many years, children seem to be a topic of long and unending discussion. Among the population participating in the qualitative research, only three couples have children and raise children together: a transgender man and his girlfriend having a child together by using a sperm bank, then the girlfriend became pregnant and gave birth to a baby; a gay couple living with a biological child between one of them and his ex-wife, and a gay couple having a child together by surrogacy.

Evidently, they all think that having a baby will bring joy, happiness and cohesion to the couple and their families.

> *"A child is the bond between the two. A child is the result of love blossoming, helping the couple to be more connected, to take care of and raise the child together. As for me, parenthood is a very divine feeling."*
> *- Huan, a gay, 28 years old, Ho Chi Minh City.*

However, in reality, it takes a long way for a same-sex couple to come to a decision and realize their wish of having a child. Financial capacity to raise the child is one of their worries, but most same-sex couples are usually more concerned about their psychological readiness to be parents and how to deal with the challenges that both the baby and themselves will face to raise the child. They are afraid of discrimination from the community, they even fear that their own family may not accept the child. They are concerned about the difficulties in paperwork and other procedures for their child, which they think will make the child disadvantaged in terms of access to medical care and education.

> *"We had discussed with each other; we find having a baby is somewhat burdensome. I think a lot, a lot about having a child. Firstly, will our feelings for each other be as complete as it is at this moment? Because many issues may occur when having a child. Secondly, when our child grows up, will they change along with the current social bias, will they encounter any problems when having two fathers and no mother, is there any problem when they go to school?"*
> *- (Quy, 32 years old, gay, Hanoi)*

Moreover, the complexity of legal regulations and paperwork for LGBT people to implement assisted reproductive technologies is also a big obstacle that hinders their decision. Even when couples are ready to overcome their own psychological difficulties to become parents or accept to go through the complicated process of paperwork to have children, they still have a long way to go to get their family's and society's acceptance for children with two fathers or two mothers.

Adoption is the method mentioned by many couples. On the first thought, it is to avoid difficulties in childbirth or procedures related to artificial insemination, egg/sperm donation, or surrogacy. Another thing is that adopting orphans is

considered a good deed. However, some issues related to legal papers may affect daily life as well as the education for children of same-sex couples.

Despite their anxiety, they still hope and long to be parents, and they managed to find the best ways to be well-prepared to make their desire a reality.

> ***"We already have a plan to prepare embryos and hire a surrogate. Actually, we don't have any financial difficulties. Ever since we met each other, our life has been very comfortable and much easier than other couples, who sometimes struggle to make money and are unable to take care of their family."***
> ***- Duc, gay, 37 years old, Hanoi***

DIFFICULTIES SAME-SEX COUPLES FACED WHEN LIVING TOGETHER

The most common difficulty experienced by same-sex couples living together is that their families don't support their relationship (47.3%). This type of difficulty is much more common in the younger age group (48.6% in the group aged 19-24 and 47% in the group aged 25-34, while in the older age group it is not a major problem (11.8%). It can be simply explained that couples in the older age group have been in love and lived together for a longer time, so they have overcome most of the ups and downs of their common life, their families are more or less persuaded and understanding after many efforts. In addition, they are also more financially stable, self-sufficient and more independent from their families than when they were younger; therefore, whether to have their families' support is no longer an urgent matter. Meanwhile, couples in the younger age group may be largely dependent on their family or yet to have stable financial and social capital; therefore, families' objections can put great pressure on their relationships and cohabitation situation.

DIFFICULTIES IN SAME-SEX COHABITATION BY AGE GROUP

	19-24 (N=977)	25-34 (N=449)	35-49 (N=34)	Total (N=1462)
Difficulty in obtaining the right to legally register a marriage***	27.3%	42.8%	35.3%	32.4%
Difficulty in household registration***	18.6%	32.7%	32.4%	23.4%
Authorizing the same-sex partner as the other's legal representative in emergency cases***	24.0%	42.3%	35.3%	29.8%
Buying, selling, dividing and inheriting shared assets	11.4%	26.7%	23.5%	16.3%
Childbirth and joint adoption***	18.3%	35.0%	26.5%	23.6%
Families' objection to same-sex love relationships***	48.6%	47.0%	11.8%	47.3%
Community and society's stigma against LGBT*	44.8%	45.7%	26.5%	44.6%

Difficulties in household registration for same-sex couples are mentioned by many respondents (23.4%). For the group of younger respondents (19-24), it is possible that because they mainly live in rented houses, the procedure for temporary residence registration is usually simple, so the rate of having difficulties in household registration is small (18.6%); but for the other two older groups, probably because they already own a house, or live with their parents and want to register their partner in the same household, which requires much more complicated and difficult legal procedures, the number of respondents reporting related difficulties was also higher (approximately 32% in these two older groups).

Authorizing the lover/partner to be their legal representative in emergency cases is also a difficulty that many same-sex couples report (29.8%). The group of 25-34 years old has the highest number of respondents reporting this difficulty (42.3%).

The analysis of interviews in the qualitative research reveals more specific stories with these difficulties:

The difficulties of same-sex couples within their relationship, as well as compromises and conflict resolution, are based only on their own efforts, having no support and help from families and society and no legal basis for protection in dispute situations. For most couples and families, whether of different sex or of the same sex, arguments and conflicts are inevitable in their daily lives. However, couples of different sex can more or less seek advice, sharing, or support from friends, parents, families, even ask for legal interventions when it comes to conflict or violence. In the case of same-sex couples, if the conflict is not so serious that it must be treated as a criminal or civil situation, they rarely get mediation, counseling, or support from families and the community, especially couples who have not yet gotten the family's acceptance and support, or who have not yet come out.

When conflicts occur, it is difficult for same-sex couples to get support or help from families and relatives. People around them may know about their love, but few of them can understand and empathize with the problems that same-sex couples may face to be able to give advice, counseling, or intervention when necessary. Even when same-sex couples need advice from experts, it is difficult for them to find suitable services, because as of now, **specialized relationship counseling services for LGBT couples are very limited**.

A couple living together, they have to get married, get a marriage certificate, and then have legal protection. When it comes to a conflict, they can think about how the legal process can protect them. Sometimes, the law enforcement agency can provide some counseling and mediation. Who is going to mediate for us in case something comes up between us? No legal protection, no agency, absolutely none. We can only look for psychologists, who are not completely specialized in solving our problems.
- Kien, gay, 29 years old, Ho Chi Minh City

The objection from families and the community is also a challenge for many same-sex couples, especially for those who are not ready to share their sexual orientation with their families and the society, or couples who have not yet received the acceptance of both families. Without the support of family and relatives, couples seem more hesitant in making long-term commitments and future plans.

The community looks at same-sex couples living together in an unfriendly way and shows discrimination against them. The stigma and discrimination against both the couple and their child make them exhausted and distressed, and concerned about any psychological effects the child may be experiencing.

...Sometimes I feel like I should just disappear. My child is very playful, but when he went to the common playground, all the other kids kept away from him. I didn't realize it at first, I thought they were just having fun so they moved around. But later, a boy pointed at me and said that I was a girl, then I realized that their parents taught them not to play with someone like me, a pê đê (a derogatory term for gay people or people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identities). So, they kept away from my child as he was with me.

Even my neighbor, they saw me from afar when I was pushing the stroller, the walkway is very wide, but they turn to another direction and go around. People are willing to go a different way so they don't have to say hello to us... My son has absolutely no friends in that area. Children sometimes are very playful, so they want to run after others, but none of them, twenty or thirty children, but not a single child wants to play with my child. It's a social problem, their parents taught them to act in that way. It doesn't matter if the law is changed or not.

So many times I think I shouldn't show my face, people won't know who his father is, it's better for him to be the child of a single mother without a husband than to be the child of a pê đê. That way it will be less discriminatory to my son, as people still interact with the children of single mothers, but not of a pê đê.
- Tien, transgender man, 27 years old, Hanoi

Difficulties in legal procedures, paperwork related to permanent residence registration for couples living with family or owning house and land together. Difficulties in legal procedures, property and asset ownership papers are very evident for couples who are older and have lived together for more years. Particularly, it is difficult for couples to register as the owner of real estate and proceed with household registration when owning land and a house. For example, when a person wants to register their partner into the same household with their family, or when a couple wants to register as joint owners on real estate ownership papers, it is difficult for them to explain to the authorities about the nature of their relationship.

Same-sex couples are not entitled to family-related benefits and policies. At many agencies, businesses and organizations, employees are entitled to benefits related to marriage, illness, childbirth, or family vacations; these benefits are usually provided based on the employee's marital status and the number of legal children. Imperceptibly, this has excluded same-sex couples from the organizations' list of beneficiaries, even though they have been living together as a family for a long time.

Difficulty in acting as the legal representative/guardian for the partner in emergencies or civil transactions requiring the presence of both persons.

I think the most important is when going to the hospital, if I am not a family member, I will not be allowed in. That is a huge disadvantage because if there is a serious problem, doctors could not ask for my idea, they would have to consult my parents, while my partner's opinion also matters. It's no different from other heterosexual couples, who have been living together as life partners but are not consulted at such times. The point is it is impossible to take care of your partner, it is something very terrible, especially for me. I consider it the most difficult thing.
- Linh, lesbian, 29 years old, Hanoi

Difficulties in couples' asset ownership - there is no legal framework to regulate and guide through possible situations when a breakup leads to a dispute over asset ownership. Couples who have lived together for a long time have more and more assets over time and can afford to buy houses/land to serve their needs or invest and do business. Their economic relationship is no longer simply income contribution and daily expenditure. Since there are no specific legal provisions for asset ownership shared by same-sex couples, nor are there any precedents for them to follow, asset ownership becomes a sensitive topic in their relationship.

Some couples choose to share their assets as economic partners. Some couples choose to have one person act as the owners of assets, so ownership of shared assets depends entirely on their mutual trust. The most common form today is couples with many shared land and assets discuss and agree with each other to divide the ownership of each item for each person. However, all couples expressed a desire to find a way for them to legally jointly own their shared assets so that their shared assets would be more meaningful to their relationship and protected by law.

Having children, raising children and ensuring their happiness is also a concern for same-sex couples.

Firstly, couples who want to adopt a child must declare their parenting capacity and reason to adopt a child in the adoption papers. It is often difficult for applications of same-sex couples to be accepted; so in many cases, they have to choose to adopt a child as a "single mother" or "single father". However, this leads to difficulties in paperwork for the child, and the rights and responsibilities of the remaining parent to care for and protect the child are not legally recognized.

Birth certificates for children remain a problem for same-sex couples. Although Vietnamese law allows children to be registered with only one mother or father, they are not allowed to have two mothers or two fathers. Therefore, the mother or father who is not stated in the child's birth certificate will not be recognized by the law as the legal guardian of the child, which means that it is difficult for them to act as the legal representative of the child in cases of medical examination and treatment, school enrollment, or even accompanying them on flights as a family.

> ***I had to do long research before I decided to have a baby because there were so many problems. For example, whose surname that the child will follow, the answer is the***

mother's surname. There are many complicated issues, including the child's insurance. Generally speaking, I'm nominally nothing to this child, even though he's my son, I don't know what to do with that, but I have to accept it....

My wife wanted to take my embryo and put it into her body to get pregnant, so the child would be from both of us. My wife thought so, but surrogacy is not allowed, it's only allowed for an infertile heterosexual couple, not for a couple like us. My wife had to get pregnant by herself. The child's birth certificate has only the mother's name, and left the father's name blank. We don't have a marriage certificate, I consulted a lawyer, who said that if I also want to take care of this baby as a legal guardian, I can ask to be his adoptive mother.

I think he would suffer from more discrimination when I became his adoptive mother. So I said, just let my wife be her only mother, leave the father's name blank. .....the baby is often sick, so every time he needs to go to the hospital, I can't go because I'm nobody, I can't sign anything for him, it must be his mother who signs the papers. So there were many times in the hospital, I did the paperwork when his mother carried him away. The medical staff there asked me who I was, as she didn't see the father's name, so I said I was a friend of my wife. Then she told me that I had no obligation, I couldn't submit these documents, and I had to ask my wife to submit them by herself. So you see, I am not allowed to even only submit documents.
- Tien, transgender man, 27 years old, Hanoi

In fact, despite all facing certain difficulties in their cohabitation, same-sex couples are more or less flexible and adaptable to those difficulties to maintain their family relationships. For example, couples of the older age groups have agreements on responsibilities for shared assets before living together and assets acquiring after starting living together, they implicitly agree with each other based on the regulations for different-sex marriage as 'common practices' for them to follow, recorded by consent or civil documents that they develop themselves.

However, the need for access to legal protection is still essential. The first need is the official recognition of the couple's relationship status, which is a title protected by law. Next, the rights of marriage registration will relieve the concerns of same-sex couples in asset and real estate ownership, children and other related issues. The legalization of same-sex marriage is seen as a part of human rights that they wish to be protected and enforced by law.

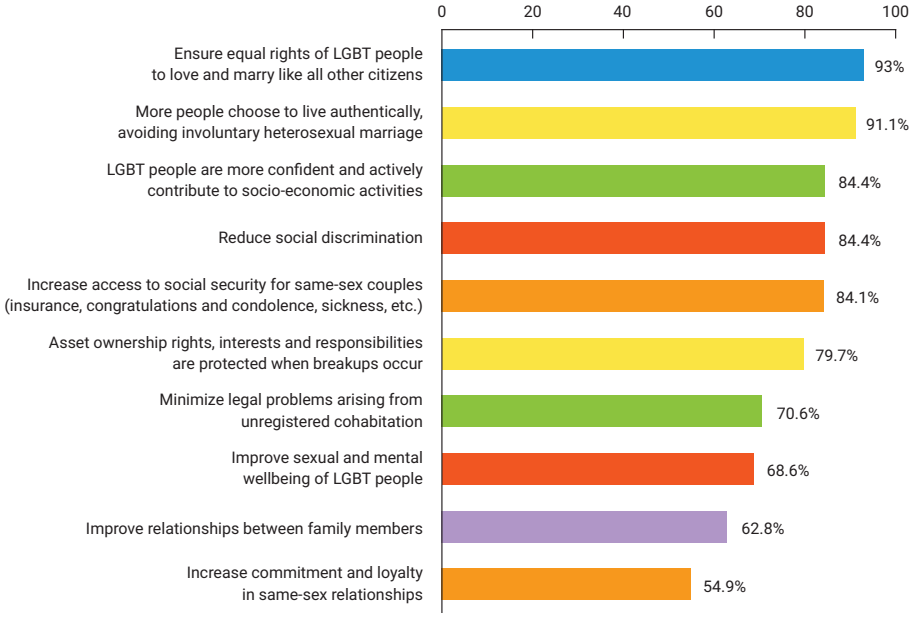
Recognizing same-sex marriage means recognizing human rights. Then, the human rights of LGBT people will be respected at the company and jeering/gossips will be avoided. Now that the law has recognized me, you have no right to insult me. I think it's good for the LGBT community, good for society. LGBT people can be better at work, they will develop very well in all aspects. I think same-sex marriage rights are very important, just like citizenship.

- Quy, gay, 29 years old, Hanoi

THE NEED FOR LEGAL PROTECTION FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER RELATIONSHIPS

I will register my marriage, (if it's allowed) I prefer to have a marriage registration, not just a wedding. Organizing a wedding is just to mark a milestone, the moment of declaring that I am not alone anymore, I moved to another stage of my life. But then people will soon forget, but the marriage registration certificate under the legal protection or issued by some organizations has a higher meaning, I think it is more valuable.
– Minh, lesbian, 34 years old, Ho Chi Minh City

IMPACTS OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE RECOGNITION AND LEGALIZATION



Nearly all survey respondents (99.8%) supported legislative advocacy towards recognizing same-sex couples as being equal and able to marry as different-sex couples. Likewise, nearly all surveyed population (96.1%) wishes that Vietnamese law allows same-sex couples to adopt children, to have a favorable legal environment for

them to access assisted reproductive technologies, specifically regulations on artificial insemination, surrogacy, etc. for same-sex couples who wish to have children (95.5%).

Participants in the study also made their comments and predictions about possible social impacts if same-sex marriage is recognized and legalized in Vietnam.

First of all, being recognized by the law will help couples of the same sex improve the relationship with their families, especially those families who do not understand and accept their relationship. The partner of an LGBT person is officially recognized as one member of the family, then the family bond is also strengthened.

> ***Now if there is a law, she will be my family's daughter-in-law. Even though we don't have any children, she is always respected by my family. Even if there is a law, it won't change the situation in her family, but in mine, every year when it comes to a family gathering or an anniversary, she can meet my mother, as a daughter-in-law.***
> ***- An, transgender man, 28 years old, Ho Chi Minh City***

Being recognized and protected by law will help *to improve the mental wellbeing, quality of life and happiness of same-sex couples in particular and the LGBT community in general*. Having a positive change momentum when regulatory and protective legal frameworks are in place, same-sex relationships themselves will become healthier. Couples no longer have to find ways to deal with situations that are not regulated by the law; risks in asset ownership, disputes over children, or becoming a victim of domestic violence will also be reduced.

It becomes easier to *open up about gender and sexual identity, and it is easier for families and the community to be accepting and supportive* because once recognized by the law, information and knowledge about LGBT will be more available. Couples who are still hesitant about their future can be more confident to make a decision on marriage or have long-term plans.

If I could contribute to the adoption of the law, I would seriously think about it [come out to my family]. Because if I cannot let my parents know this part of my life, it's like I am hiding a part of myself. I don't think it's fair to my parents that I've hidden parts of my life, obviously this is a huge part of me. I live a very normal life, we are living and working together, we are helping each other to improve, so why can't my parents know about it?

That's why I talked about the quality of life, the quality of life for everyone, not just mine and Nhi's. I and Nhi are the direct beneficiaries of this law, our families will also benefit from the law and so will Nhi's brothers and sisters in the future. Our future children must continue to receive these benefits.

- Phuong, a lesbian, 27 years old, Ho Chi Minh City

Being protected by law will be a premise for reducing social discrimination against LGBT people, as there is a legal basis to respond to cases of discrimination against LGBT people. To date, responding to and living along with stigma and discrimination based on gender and sexual identity are all self-efforts of the LGBT community. In many cases, LGBT people have to remain silent, ignore, and live with this problem without knowing where to seek support and help. Being recognized and protected by law, the role and position of same-sex couples will be legalized, which means they can actively speak up to protect themselves and the community or seek support when facing any discrimination.

Recognition and legalization of same-sex marriage can help *reduce the anxiety of couples in their decisions to have and raise children*.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 -
Promote the amendment of the "Law on Marriage and Family" to promote recognition and legalization of marriage regardless of gender.

This research has pointed out the urgent need of same-sex couples for legal recognition and protection. Recognizing and legalizing same-sex marriage is an important solution because it both protects the equal rights of LGBT people and their families as well as helps to deal with the legal consequences arising when two persons of the same sex live together and establish family relations. This process does not mean creating new regulations specifically for same-sex couples, but making current regulations in the establishment, maintenance and termination of marriage that apply only to different-sex couples neutral/applicable to everyone. This not only preserves the uniformity and consistency in the legal system but is also consistent with the principle of equality and non-discrimination in the basic principles of the marriage and family regime.

In addition, the law is also a tool for education; therefore, acknowledging same-sex relationships as legal and equal as different-sex relationships will help to reduce stigma, discrimination and violence against LGBT people and their family members.

In reality, advocacy for law amendment is a long process and needs to go through many stages. In the initial stage, it is necessary to influence legislators through seminars, scientific reports, meetings and discussions between LGBT groups and legislators as well as related agencies and organizations. Draft law amendments can be developed and proposed by a 'working group' consisting of legal and policy experts, organizations specializing in LGBT rights and the LGBT community itself. The proposed draft amendment will be the main document for the process of policy advocacy.

- 2 -
Review relevant laws to ensure qual rights for LGBT people

In addition to amending the Law on Marriage and Family to recognize same-sex marriage, Vietnam should have a clear roadmap in amending relevant laws to protect the equal rights of same-sex couples. For example, the Civil Code, the Labor Code, the Law on Gender Equality or the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention should have additional guidance on how to deal with situations related to same-sex couples, or include provisions to protect the equal and legal rights of same-sex couples in future revisions. Hence, in parallel with the process of advocacy to develop a draft amendment to the Law on Marriage and Family, the 'working group' needs to review and summarize other relevant provisions, document all collected contents as reference for legislators, agencies, organizations, and experts interested in the process.

- 3 -
Support psychological and emotional counseling services for same-sex couples

This study has shown a gap in the specialized emotional and psychological counseling services for same-sex couples. There is a need for this service, but not satisfactorily met or not accessible. For any couple, whether of the same sex or of different sex, it is necessary to be well prepared before living together and establishing a family so that they know how to deal with any differences when moving in and committing to each other. This is even more important for LGBT people as they still face discrimination from society and even in the families.

It is necessary to supplement more knowledge for same-sex couples in the general content on marriage and family counseling for young people. To do this, it is possible to collaborate with LGBT social organizations or LGBT community groups to develop appropriate content.

Counseling services centers can be developed to provide psycho-emotional support, help to deal with domestic violence cases with skills and understanding of the characteristics of same-sex couples. Capacity building services can also be provided to existing service centers through sets of documents, counseling manuals, and training courses to improve knowledge and skills for consultants. In addition, the establishment of new counseling service centers is highly encouraged, exclusively for LGBT customers, which can be managed and operated by LGBT people themselves.

- 4 -
Promote support to change the public discourse on LGBT people and related topics, thereby reducing discrimination against the LGBT community and their families

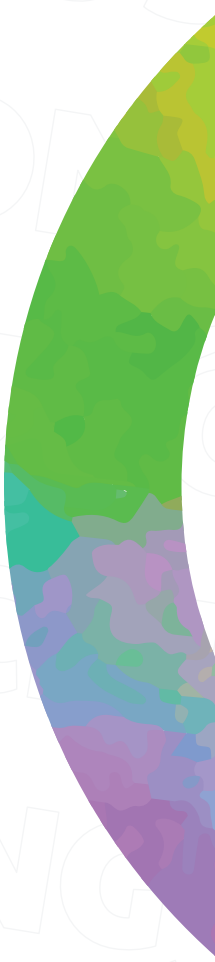
This research and many other studies have shown that the media plays an important role in changing society's perception of LGBT people. Changing public attitudes towards LGBT people and on same-sex relationships is not just the responsibility of LGBT people and social organizations. It should be the responsibility of state agencies, educational institutions as well as other social institutions. Therefore, it is necessary to include sexual diversity content in schools as well as extracurricular programs for students.

The image of LGBT people in the mass media also needs to be changed. It is necessary to encourage the promotion of positive images of LGBT stereotypes, couples, and love in the public media. In recent years, more and more LGBT celebrities and influencers appear on social networks, popular media channels, in popular culture products, making the public have a certain understanding and sympathy towards the LGBT community. The promotion of beautiful images, romantic and touching stories, and positive contributions of LGBT people not only helps to gradually eliminate bias but also create a more natural sensibility of LGBT love, as well as inspire LGBT people themselves.

- 5 -
Support in-depth research

It can be seen that the experiences of love, cohabitation, and children of gay, lesbian, and transgender groups vary, depending on their characteristics as well as the level and types of discrimination from the society targeting each group. Therefore, to have a more specific understanding of each group, it is necessary to have in-depth studies, focusing on analyzing the situation and specific needs of each group. Moreover, available literature and current studies often focus on large cities where LGBT communities are quite present and community services are more or less readily available. We hope in the future there will be more research towards the LGBT community in rural and remote areas, where there is little access to information or no development of services or support available to them.





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