

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Birkbeck College, University of London
Unit of Assessment: 4: Psychology, Psychiatry & Neuroscience
Title of case study: Informing practice and legal frameworks for adoption by LGBT parents
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2014
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 1 August 2013 to 31 July 2020.
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Dr Fiona Tasker's research on LGBT-parented families shows that children's wellbeing and development are not negatively affected by their parents' sexuality, thus providing empirical evidence to dispel prejudice against LGBT adoption. Her findings have informed changes and improvements in adoption practice in the UK and internationally, thereby increasing the pool of available adoptive parents for vulnerable children and improving the experience of the adoption process for prospective LGBT parents. Her research findings also fed into parliamentary debates on same-sex adoption in both Italy and Portugal, contributing to changes in legalisation in Portugal in 2016.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Tasker's research on LGBT-led families investigated parenting practices, the experience of parents and children, and the development of children brought up in these families. Earlier research in this area has mainly studied lesbian mothers, reflecting prevalent gendered expectations around parenting. Tasker's work has extended this narrow focus by including families led by gay fathers, transgender parents, and blended families. Her research has played a vital role in understanding the diversity of family experience and their implications for the wellbeing and psychosocial development of children brought up in atypical family settings, with implications for practice in clinical, legal and social policy settings.</p> <p>Tasker was a lead researcher in the first large-scale study of UK adoptive families led by lesbian, gay and heterosexual parents, following changes to UK law in 2005 that enabled adoption by LGBT individuals. This study was conducted in collaboration with the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), with a specific emphasis on families led by gay fathers. Based on a sample of 130 families, it found more positive parental well-being and parenting in gay father families compared to heterosexual parent families. It also revealed that gay fathers showed higher levels of warmth and responsiveness to their children than heterosexual parents [1]. Using the same large data base, Tasker also explored the reasons for parents to enter into adoption as a means of achieving parenthood [2]. Results showed that adoption provided a compelling and conscientious option for same-sex parents to achieve equal, non-genetic relationships to their children. Many gay and lesbian couples identified advantages to adoption that made it preferable to biological parenthood, challenging prevailing social attitudes which emphasise heteronormative ideals about parenting.</p> <p>An earlier UK-based survey on the parenting circumstances and experiences of gay and bisexual men conducted by Tasker [3] was the first of its kind and size to gather demographic data and personal accounts of parenting by gay and bisexual men in the UK and Ireland. Results demonstrated a diversity of routes into parenthood. They also showed that adolescent children were more likely than younger children to know about their parent's sexuality, and that female children showed greater sympathy about parental sexuality than male children. Significantly,</p>

men living with their male partners in new relationships met parenting challenges as successfully as those still living with the mother of their children.

In a comprehensive and highly cited meta-review of 35 US- and UK-based studies of developmental outcomes for children in lesbian and gay parented families [4], Tasker found that **children of lesbian and gay parented families showed the same levels of psychological adjustment, peer relationships, and psychosexual development as children with heterosexual parents.** This review also demonstrated **similarities in the quality of family relationships for children living with lesbian and heterosexual single mothers, and equivalent parenting skills of divorced gay and divorced heterosexual fathers.** In another highly cited review of research on gay and lesbian parenting [5], Tasker focused specifically on methodological challenges for this research and the cultural context in which it takes place.

Tasker's work also provided new insights into the development and mental health of children with a transgender parent, and in particular on how the parents' gender identity affects the psychosocial development of their children [6]. Based on extensive data provided from the Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS) for children and adolescents in London, she concluded that **the children of transgender parents are NOT more likely to develop features or mental health problems associated with gender identity dysphoria,** with obvious implications for adoption decisions made for these families. However, there was evidence that these children may experience specific difficulties related to conflict between transgender and non-transgender parents, which has an impact on the levels of support required by these families.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Golombok, S., Mellish, L., Jennings, S., Casey, P., **Tasker, F.** and Lamb, M. (2014) Adoptive gay father families: parent-child relationships and children's psychological adjustment. *Child Development*, 85 (2), pp. 456-468. ISSN 0009-3920.
<https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cdev.12155>
2. Jennings, S. and Mellish, L. and **Tasker, F.** and Lamb, M. and Golombok, S. (2014b) Why Adoption? Gay, lesbian, and heterosexual adoptive parents' reproductive experiences and reasons for adoption. *Adoption Quarterly*, 17 (3), pp. 205-226. ISSN 1092-6755.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10926755.2014.891549>
3. Barrett, H., & **Tasker, F.** (2001). Growing up with a gay parent: Views of 101 gay fathers on their sons' and daughters' experiences. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 18(1), 62–77. (Copy available on request)
4. **Tasker, F.** (2005) Lesbian mothers, gay fathers and their children: A review. *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics*, 26, 224-240
[https://journals.lww.com/jrnldb/Abstract/2005/06000/Lesbian Mothers, Gay Fathers, and Their Children .12.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/jrnldb/Abstract/2005/06000/Lesbian_Mothers,_Gay_Fathers,_and_Their_Children_.12.aspx)
5. **Tasker, F.**, & Patterson, C. J. (2008). Research on gay and lesbian parenting: Retrospect and prospect. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 3 (2-3), 9-34.
https://doi.org/10.1300/J461v03n02_02
6. Freeman, D., **Tasker, F.**, & Di Ceglie, D. (2002). Children and adolescents with transsexual parents referred to a specialist gender identity development service: A brief report of key development features. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 7, 423–432.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104502007003009>

Details of External Research Grants

(a) Grant holder: University of Cambridge. (Dr. Fiona Tasker: Research Associate). *Parenting and the psychological development of children raised in gay father families*. ESRC Project Grant, October 2009 – September 2012. GBP346,498. Grant reference: ES/G027080/1

(b) Grant holder: Dr. Fiona Tasker, Birkbeck College. *Parental Influences on the Psychological Development of Children: The Role of Gay Fathers*. The Wellcome Trust. January 1999 to April 2002. GBP139,661. Grant reference: 054026/Z/98

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

By providing empirical evidence that atypical family structures do not impair children's well-being and psychosocial development, Tasker's research has informed and changed adoption practice and support for LGBT parents in the UK and internationally, and contributed to legislative change in Portugal and Italy.

Adoption Practice

Although same-sex couples are legally entitled to adopt jointly in the UK since 2005, discrimination against LGBT individuals remains, seriously limiting the pool of prospective parents available to vulnerable children. Tasker has worked closely with adoption practitioners and agencies and with Family Law Courts to provide research evidence in order to tackle this discrimination and facilitate practical change.

Her research has informed training, resources and communications for **adoption professionals** provided by a UK national network for LGBT adoptive and foster families, with a membership of 3,000 individuals. It was cited in every training session delivered since 2015, reaching 40 adoption agencies and a minimum of 800 adoption professionals. Tasker's research findings on the wellbeing of children with LGBT parents are also cited prominently in the current guidance for social workers and adoption practitioners [Bi] published by NFS and made available via CoramBAAF, the UK's largest network of adoption organisations. Her research is also cited in guidance on LGBT adoption for prospective parents [Bii] provided by the national adoption information service for England (First4Adoption), and in a review of the recruitment and support of LGBT adoptive parents produced by the Rees Centre at Oxford, which is used a resource by the British Association of Social Workers who have a membership of 21,000 UK social work professionals [Bii].

Tasker has shared her research findings with judges and barristers at **Family Law Courts**, which handle adoption cases in the UK. She regularly delivers training courses on LGBT-led families and child wellbeing to legal practitioners that were attended by approximately 540 attendees since 2014 [Ci]. Tasker published reviews on the developmental outcomes for children in lesbian and gay adoptive families in the journal *Family Law*, which specifically addresses legal practitioners in this area. The original review [Cii] and an expanded and updated version published in 2019 [Civ] advocate evidence-based legal procedures for LGBT-led families to counteract remaining discriminatory practices within adoption and fostering. Tasker's work on the development of children with transgender parents [6] is cited in current guidance provided by the Gender Identity Research and Education Society for transgender parents navigating the Family Court system [Cv].

Via these different routes, Tasker's research has helped to improve adoption practice in the UK and facilitated more equal treatment of LGBT parents. Government statistics show a steady increase in the proportion of LGBT adoptions during the census period, with approximately 1 in 7 adoptions in England now made by an LGBT-led family [D]. To foster the parenting skills of prospective and new LGBT parents, Tasker has developed an on-line *Same-Sex Parenting* training course [E] with Tavistock Relationships, a world-renowned Psychotherapy Institute, which has trained 500 participants to date.

In addition to its impact in the UK, Tasker's research has also affected LGBT adoption practice in other countries. In **Portugal**, it has been used as a resource by a central adoption unit to guide adoption practitioners in their engagement with same-sex couples.

In **Italy**, Tasker's research is cited prominently in training courses on LGBT adoption delivered at the University of Rome to teachers, social workers and psychotherapists working with LGBT adoptive families. In the **USA**, current LGBT advice for adoption professionals by the federal government [Fiv] which affects the practice of 3,000 agencies is based on a policy statement by the American Academy of Pediatrics on the wellbeing of children in LGBT families [Fiv], which cites Tasker's research.

Legislative Change

Tasker's research provided important evidence for political campaigns on legalising LGBT adoption outside the UK. In **Italy**, it was cited in parliamentary debate on LGBT civil partnerships and adoption, and was used to underpin campaigns resulting in the formal naming of both same-sex parents on foreign birth certificates, a landmark change in Italian court practice. In **Portugal**, her research findings contributed to the legalisation of same-sex adoption in 2016. They are cited in a technical paper by the Portuguese Psychologist's Association [Hi], which was the basis for a submission to parliament.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[B] [i] de Jong, A. & Leary-May, A. (2013) Linking, matching and placing children with lesbian or gay adopters or foster carers. *New Family Social and BAAF Adoption and Fostering*. Available via CoramBAAF.

[ii] First4Adoption LGBT guidance (cites the Cambridge Study on which Tasker was a Research Associate);

Brown, H., Sebba, J. & Luke, N. (2015). *The recruitment, assessment, support and supervision of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender foster parents: an international literature review*. Rees Centre, University of Oxford and the University of Bedfordshire;

Additionally, screenshots of the British Association of Social Workers website, which states their membership at 21,000.

[C] [i] Information on relevant legal training/workshops delivered by Tasker with approximate numbers of attendees, screenshots and programmes where available.

[iii] Tasker, F. & Bellamy, C. (2007). Reviewing lesbian and gay adoption and foster care: the developmental outcomes for children. *Family Law*, 37, 524-529.

[iv] Tasker, F., & Bellamy, C. (2019). Adoption by same-sex couples--reaffirming evidence: could more children be placed?. *Family Law*, February, 171-179.

[v] Gender Identity Research and Education Society (2015) *Court Information for Trans Parents*.

[D] Department for Education (UK) Statistical Release on Looked After Children in England, 2018-2019. Screenshot and link provided. Tab E3 of this spreadsheet shows 590 adoptions by same-sex couples in the year 2018-2019;

Coram Adoption, '5 Facts about Adoption'. Screenshots and link provided.

[E] Document including screenshots of the same-sex parenting relationship training at Tavistock Relationships.

[F]

[iv] Child Welfare Information Gateway (2016) *Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Families in Foster Care and Adoption*. (US Children's Bureau);

American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health (2013) *Organizational Principles to Guide and Define the Child Health Care System and/or Improve the Health of all Children: Policy statement on Promoting the well-being of children whose parents are gay or lesbian*. *Pediatrics*; 131(4) 827-830.

[H] [i] Technical paper of the Portuguese Psychologist's Association (and official English translation of relevant sections).

