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Study looks at poor among gays, lesbians

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By Andrea Stone, USA TODAY

Lesbian couples are more likely to be poor than married heterosexuals, and children of same-sex parents are twice as likely to live in poverty as those of traditional married couples, a new report shows.

UCLA's Williams Institute, which studies gay issues, says its report out today is the first to analyze poverty among gay and lesbian couples.

The report is an analysis of the most recent data on same-sex unmarried partners from the 2000 Census and two smaller surveys that include questions on sexual orientation. Together, it argues, they debunk "a popular stereotype (that) paints lesbians and gay men as an affluent elite."

Unlike the upper-middle-class gay characters on TV's *The L Word* and *Will and Grace*, "There are clearly many poor lesbian, gay and bisexual people," says co-author Lee Badgett, an economist at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

"That alone is an important finding," Badgett says.

The data she used include the 2002 federal National Survey of Family Growth and the 2003 and 2005 California Health Interview surveys.

The data were adjusted to account for differences in race, education and geography but do not reflect the impact of the current recession, Badgett says.

Even though single mothers are most likely to be poor, Badgett says, the study did not focus on single lesbians and gay men because most population surveys don't ask about sexual orientation unless respondents volunteer that they are living with a same-sex partner.

The report comes as the California Supreme Court weighs the legality of the state's ban on gay marriage and a bill to outlaw job discrimination based on sexual orientation awaits action in Congress.

Badgett says same-sex partners are more likely to be poor because they lack such safety nets as a spouse's health insurance coverage and Social Security survivor benefits.

Robert Rector, a poverty scholar at the conservative Heritage Foundation, calls the study "garbage."

He says it is flawed because by studying only couples, it overlooks a larger group in poverty, single mothers.

"When you look at it, this is ... a very small group," says Rector.

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