

Top 12 studies showing risks to couples in same-sex unions

Catholic Courage Homosexuality

by Rick Fitzgibbons

Last month the LGBT-activist Human Rights Campaign (HRC) carried out its latest campaign – targeting eight Catholic bishops in the U.S. who publicly expressed support for traditional marriage, the Courage apostolate and, in some cases, even quoted the constant teaching of the Church (see CCC nos. 2357 -2359) concerning homosexual conduct and persons with same-sex attraction (SSA). The aim of this Synod-related effort was to push for the acceptance of homosexual conduct and unions by the Catholic Church and to marginalize bishops who spoke out against such conduct and unions.

The demonstrations against these bishops likely had no effect on the Extraordinary Synod or the targeted bishops. The HRC-friendly confusing language on homosexual persons and unions in the interim report was replaced by paragraph 55 in the final, official *Relatio*, which reverted to Catholic teaching as set forth in the Catechism. Yet, a surprising one-third of the bishops at the Extraordinary Synod (62/180) rejected the approach based on the Catechism and a 2003 statement by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: “There are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God’s plan for marriage and family.’ Nevertheless, men and women with a homosexual tendency ought to be received with respect and sensitivity” (no. 55).

It is hoped that during the Synod on the Family that will take place in October 2015, the discussion of homosexual unions will take into account the serious risk factors inherent in the homosexual lifestyle. In fact, an understanding of these physical, emotional and spiritual risks is essential to fostering a charitable, pastoral approach to those with SSA. I use the term “fostering” rather than developing because such an outreach to those with homosexual tendencies and their families has been present internationally in the Church for over 30 years, thanks to the apostolate of Courage International.

Today, numerous peer-reviewed published studies report serious psychological and medical risks associated with same sex unions. Ten of these studies are described below.

1. One of the most extensive studies of same-sex couples found that only seven of the 156 couples had a completely exclusive sexual relationship and that the majority of relationships lasted less than five years. Couples whose relationship lasted longer than five years incorporated some provision for outside sexual activity in their relationship. The psychologists wrote, "The single most important factor that keeps couples together past the 10-year mark is the lack of possessiveness. ... Many couples learn very early in their relationship that ownership of each other sexually can be the greatest internal threat to their staying together" (McWhirter, D. and Mattison, A. 1985. "The Male Couple: How Relationships Develop." (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall). The risks? Outside sexual activity can expose the partner to sexually-transmitted diseases, and relationship break-up typically gives rise to emotional distress.
2. Partner instability is also present in lesbian relationships. A 2010 study in a respected peer-reviewed journal, showed lesbian relationships to be statistically less stable than heterosexual relationships. (Schumm, W. 2010. "Comparative Relationship Stability of Lesbian Mother and Heterosexual Mother Families: A Review of Evidence," *Marriage and Family Review* 46: 499-509)
3. A 2011 study analyzed the impact of sexual orientation on suicide mortality in Denmark during the first 12 years after legalization of same-sex registered domestic partnerships (RDPs), using data from death certificates issued between 1990-2001 and Danish census population estimates. This study found that the age-adjusted suicide risk for same-sex RDP men was nearly eight times greater than the suicide risk for men in a heterosexual marriage. (Mathy, R. et al. 2011. "The Association between Relationship Markers of Sexual Orientation and Suicide: Denmark, 1990-2001," *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 46: 111-117)
4. In a 2010 report, the U.S. National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study, 40 percent of the lesbian couples who had conceived a child by artificial insemination had broken up. (Gartrell, N. & Bos, H. 2010. "U.S. National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study: Psychological Adjustment of 17-year-old Adolescents," *Pediatrics*, 126 (1): 28-36.)
5. A 2002 study of lifetime abuse victimization revealed that 7 percent of heterosexual males reported being abused whereas 39 percent of males with SSA reported being abused by other males with SSA. (Greenwood, G. et al. 2002. "Battering victimization among a probability-based sample of men who have sex with men," *American Journal of Public Health*, 92:1964-69).

6. A major study published in the journal "Cancer" in May 2011 revealed that men with SSA in California are twice as likely to report a cancer as heterosexual men. Most troubling is the mean age of onset of cancer in the men with SSA - age 41, compared to age 51 in heterosexual males. (Boehmer, U. et al. 2011, "Cancer Survivorship and Sexual Orientation," *Cancer*, 117:3796-3804.)
7. A November 12, 2014 article in the "Wall St. Journal" on HPV-related throat cancers stated that it increased by 72 percent between 2000 and 2004. Most of that growth has been in men and the number of sexual partners was suggested as a contributing factor. A researcher stated that, "the problem with HPV-positive oral cancer is that premalignant lesions are not clinically detectable. They're deep within the tonsils that are in the base of the tongue. By the time HPV-infection is detected, they usually already have Stage 3 or 4 cancer."
8. Finneran and Stephenson (2012) conducted a systematic review of 28 studies examining interpersonal violence among men who have sex with men. The authors concluded that, "The emergent evidence reviewed here demonstrates that IPV – psychological, physical, and sexual – occurs in male-male partnerships at alarming rates" (p. 180). (Finneran, C., Stephenson, R. 2012. "Intimate Partner Violence Among Men Who Have Sex With Men: A Systematic Review," *Trauma, Violence and Abuse*, 14: 168-185.)
9. A 2007 study published by the New York Academy of Medicine found that over 32 percent of active homosexuals report that they have suffered "abuse" by one or more "partners" during the course of their lives. Fifty-four percent (n = 144) of men reporting any history of abuse reported more than one form. Depression and substance abuse were among the strongest correlates of intimate partner abuse. (Houston, E. & McKiman, D.J. 2007, "Intimate Partner Abuse Among Gay and Bisexual Men: Risk Correlates and Health Outcomes," *Journal of Urban Health* 84: 681-690.)
10. A 2014 systematic review of 19 studies examining associations between intimate partner violence (IPV) and men with SSA. The pooled lifetime prevalence rate of any form of IPV was 48 percent. (Buller, A. et al. 2014. "Associations between Intimate Partner Violence and Health among Men Who Have Sex with Men: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *PLOS Medicine*, 11(3): e1001609. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1001609.)
11. Research on men with SSA in Amsterdam found that 86 percent of new HIV infections occur within steady partnerships. The researchers concluded, "Prevention measures should address risky behavior, especially with steady partners, and the promotion of HIV testing." (Xiridou, M. et al., 2003. "The contribution of steady and casual partnerships to the incidence of HIV infection among homosexual men in Amsterdam," *AIDS* 17:1029-38.)

12. Research on persons who had sought help from Courage revealed that those with SSA had more mental health distress than a heterosexually-oriented, normative sample. SSA respondents who had become more chaste had an improvement in their overall mental health. Measures of authentic spirituality were also positively correlated to increased mental health. Positive correlations were also found between chastity, religious participation and self-reported measures of happiness. (Harris, S. 2009. "Mental health, chastity and religious participation in a population of same-sex attracted men." Doctoral dissertation.)

The recommendation of an international expansion of this effective apostolate should be considered by the Synod as a primary pastoral outreach to those with homosexual tendencies and their families. As St. John Paul II said of this apostolate, "COURAGE is doing the work of God!"

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