

White, straight women leading surge in infertility treatments

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Heterosexual white women are twice as likely as racial or sexual minority women to obtain medical help to get pregnant, according to a recent study published by the American Psychological Association.

While income and lack of insurance only partially explained the lower number of racial minority [women](#) receiving fertility assistance, lack of insurance appeared to play a crucial role in whether lesbian and bisexual women received medical fertility help, especially in more recent years, according to the nationally representative study published in the APA journal *Health Psychology*.

"White, [heterosexual women](#) have apparently been the prime beneficiaries of the recent surge in medical infertility treatments," said the study's lead author, Bernadette V. Blanchfield, MA, a doctoral student at the University of Virginia.

Blanchfield and her co-author Charlotte Patterson, PhD, also of the University of Virginia, analyzed data from two studies, one conducted in 2002 and the other conducted from 2006 to 2010. In the first study, they found that 13 percent of white, heterosexual women reported having received medical assistance to get pregnant. This included getting advice from a doctor in addition to more advanced treatments such as fertility testing and drugs, surgery and artificial insemination. In comparison, 7 percent of racial minority heterosexual women and 7 percent of white sexual minority women said they had received medical fertility assistance, while 1 percent of racial minority lesbian and bisexual women said they had. In the second study these numbers were 13 percent, 6 percent, 7 percent and 7 percent, respectively.

Lack of insurance was a factor in lower rates of sexual minority women seeking pregnancy help in both studies. "These findings add to knowledge

about health disparities among [sexual minority](#) women by revealing inequities in use of reproductive technology," said Patterson.

The researchers selected data from 19,922 women, ages 21 to 44, from the two most recent surveys in the National Survey of Family Growth study. They adjusted the samples to reflect the U.S. population, a common practice for large, national surveys and the result was 66-71 percent white and 15-22 percent black, with 7-19 percent reporting another racial identity. The ranges reflect the differences between the two studies. White lesbian and bisexual women made up about 3-5 percent of the sample and black gay and bisexual women were 1 percent.

Women in the study were interviewed in their homes by trained female interviewers, with some sensitive questions being asked via computer. A participant was identified as gay or bisexual in the study if she identified herself as such and if she reported being attracted to people of the same sex.

"There have been relatively few studies addressing the sexual and reproductive health of lesbian and bisexual women, but these findings reveal that sexual [minority women](#) do face inequities in fertility care. Further research on the access to and use of reproductive health care by lesbian and [bisexual women](#) is vital to understanding health disparities in the U.S.," said Blanchfield.

More information: "Racial and Sexual Minority Women's Receipt of Medical Assistance to Become Pregnant," Bernadette V. Blanchfield, MA, and Charlotte J. Patterson, PhD, University of Virginia; *Health Psychology*, online Aug. 11, 2014.

Provided by American Psychological Association

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