



“This is not What God Intended”: Attitudes Toward Adoption by Same-sex Couples in Ecuador

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Abstract

Introduction In Ecuador, adoption is limited to heterosexual couples and information on attitudes toward same-sex couples who intend to become parents following this pathway is scarce. This study aimed to identify the beliefs of a sample of 319 cisgender people in Ecuador regarding the adoption of children by same-sex couples and explore the reasons why they consider it is appropriate or not for lesbian and gay (LG) couples to adopt children.

Methods Between May and October 2019, participants responded quantitative and qualitative questions after reading a vignette about a couple interested in adopting a child. Participants were randomly presented with one out of three versions of the vignette based on the couples' sexual orientation (L,G, heterosexual). Descriptive, correlational statistics and analysis of variance were used to conduct quantitative analyses. Qualitative responses were analyzed using thematic and content analysis.

Results Results indicate favorability toward adoption by all couples in general. However, people showed the highest concerns about adoption by LG couples. Qualitative answers indicate the existence of nine types of arguments used by participants to explain their position in favor or against adoption by same-sex couples.

Conclusion Some are problematic since they are rooted in prejudiced ideas about heterosexual people's superiority regarding their capacities to create emotionally nurturing environments.

Policy Implications Providing information regarding LG parenting might be a way of achieving legislative changes that might, in turn, promote social change by providing a legal platform for same-sex couples to achieve parenthood.

Keywords Adoption · Attitudes · Gay and lesbian parents · Same-sex couples · Ecuador

Introduction

South America has been the scenario of important improvements for the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and other sexual and gender minorities (LGBTIQ+) in the last few years (Costa & Salinas-Quiroz, 2021). In Ecuador,

since 1997, there has been legal advancements against discrimination toward minorities and in favor of de-criminalizing same-sex behavior, allowing same-sex unions and same-sex marriage (Vega Suriaga, 2019). However, adoption is currently limited to heterosexual couples (Suárez Andrade & Berni, 2017). To date, there is insufficient information regarding attitudes toward adoption by same-sex couples in Ecuador. Previous research in the country has explored the attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights, and the predictors of gay and lesbian parenting using quantitative methods (Hermosa-Bosano et al., 2021a, b). This study expands the available literature by analyzing the attitudes toward adoption in a sample of cisgender individuals using mixed methods.

A General Landscape of Adoption in Ecuador

Adoption is a legal mechanism created to ensure the right of children and adolescents to have a family. From a

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normative perspective, in Ecuador, adoption is regulated by the Children and Adolescents' Code (articles 151 to 189) (Congreso Nacional de la República del Ecuador, 2003) and the Civil Code (articles 314 to 330) (Congreso Nacional de la República del Ecuador, 2005). To apply, people must reside in the country; be legally qualified to exercise their political rights; be older than 25 years of age; have no previous criminal records; be in good physical and mental health; and have enough financial resources to meet children's needs (Ministerio de Inclusión Económica y Social (MIES), 2021). Single people and couples can take part of the process; couples adopting children must be heterosexual and be legally married or in a civil partnership for at least 3 years prior to starting the process (MIES, 2021).

The adoption process comprehends an administrative and a legal phase (Congreso Nacional de la República del Ecuador, 2003). The administrative phase starts with the registration process and an initial interview in government facilities known as Technical Adoption Units (TAU). In this phase, applicants receive formal training on different topics regarding the adoption process, including psychosocial aspects of childrearing, family relationships formation, and strategies to facilitate family adjustment after the child's arrival. If adopters are favored, they are matched with a child and begin a process of adaptation. After determining the viability of the adoption, the process goes to a judicial instance, in which the minor is registered with the last names of their adoptive parents. After the judicial phase is over, the Technical Adoption Units conduct follow-up evaluations for 2 years.

Same-Sex Adoption in Ecuador

In Ecuador, same-sex couples are not allowed to participate in adoption processes. However, there is information suggesting that there are children living in same-sex adoptive households. In a 2013 survey conducted by the National Statistical and Census Institute (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, INEC, in Spanish), it was found that, out of 2805 LGBT people, 10.4% reported having children. Among those who were parents, 85.6% reported having biological children and 14.6% declared having children through adoption (INEC, 2013). Unfortunately, there is not enough information about the nature of the adoptions carried out by the participants from this survey. It is possible that people went through single adoptions, or adopted their children informally, without being legally recognized as their child's legal parent.

Despite the lack of statistical information on LGBTIQ+ parenting in the country, in recent years there have been significant legal changes directed at the recognition of family rights for sexual and gender minorities in the country. In 2008, the Constituent Assembly changed the constitutional definition of family (Constitución Política Del Ecuador, 2008), and more recently, in June 2019,

the Constitutional Court allowed same-sex marriage (el Universo, 2019). Regarding same-sex parenting, article 68 of the Ecuadorian Constitution explicitly states that adoption is restricted to different-sex couples (Constitución Política Del Ecuador, 2008). However, to the best of our knowledge, there is growing interest from several activist organizations to fight for same-sex adoption. The Interamerican Human Rights Court (Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, CIDH, in Spanish) released in 2017 Resolution 24/17 mandating different States to regulate on sexual and gender minority issues, including same-sex adoptions (CIDH, 2017). It is possible that this resolution will allow the Constitutional Court to rule on same-sex adoption, the same way it did with same-sex marriage.

Regarding social attitudes, there is evidence that there has been a steady increase in the levels of acceptance and support toward LGBTIQ+ people and their rights in the country (Flores, 2021). According to the 2020 William Institute Report on social acceptance toward LGBTIQ+ people, Uruguay, Brazil, and Argentina are the most accepting nations in the list of Latin American countries, followed by Chile, Colombia, and Venezuela. Ecuador occupies the 9th place, followed by Bolivia, Peru, and Paraguay. It has been argued that changes in attitudes in these countries are possibly a consequence of the legal achievements regarding decriminalization of same-sex behavior, civil unions, and/or marriage. In fact, in 2020, Corrales ranked countries based on the legal changes experienced in Latin American countries. According to this author, Ecuador is considered within the high achiever category, a group encompassing countries which have created progressive laws that protect sexual and gender minorities over the last years.

Unfortunately, the fact that Ecuador has had significant changes in the legal landscape does not necessarily mean that people support LGBTIQ+ individuals in the private sphere. This lack of support may have consequences on the personal well-being and mental health of LGBTIQ+ people as well as their social life. For example, di Marco et al. (2019) conducted two studies to unveil the experiences of LGB and heterosexual Ecuadorian workers' attitudes toward homosexuality using semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Results from these studies indicate that some LGB people in Ecuador tend to hide their sexual orientation, avoid participating in social events, and lie about their personal life. Heterosexual participants described LGB individuals, especially gay men, "as loud and promiscuous people who dress as women and wear makeup and high heels" (p. 52). Furthermore, they characterized the behavior of LGB people as disrespectful and considered jokes and negative comments against them as a consequence of their behaviors (di Marco et al., 2019). These results are in line with those found by Hermosa-Bosano et al. (2021a, b) who used a quantitative approach to study attitudes toward homosexuality, gay and

lesbian rights, and same-sex parenting among a self-selected sample of Ecuadorian individuals. Results from these studies suggest that men, heterosexuals, those who practice their religion, those who attend more frequently to religious services, and those who identify as conservative showed higher levels of prejudice against LG people as well as less support toward their rights. Regarding LG parenthood, the authors found that people strongly supported the idea that children of LG parents would be victims of discrimination as a consequence of their parents' sexual orientation.

Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Adoption

In general, research on attitudes toward adoption by same-sex couples is relatively scarce compared to studies on the acceptance of homosexuality, same-sex marriage, and gay and lesbian rights. Existing studies are concentrated in the Global North (Crawford & Solliday, 1996; Crawford et al., 1999; McLeod et al., 1999; Takács et al., 2016), while research in Latin American countries is very scarce. Overall, this body of research has found that people experience greater resistance to the idea of gay and lesbian couples adopting children, compared to same-sex behavior, same-sex unions, and marriage (Costa et al., 2013; Takács et al., 2016). Studies have also found that being a man, being older, having less education, being religious, and having a right-wing political ideology are related to negative attitudes towards gay parenting (Gross et al., 2018; Pacilli et al., 2011; Vecho et al., 2019; Webb et al., 2017). Other studies have also linked psychological factors to attitudes, including beliefs about gender roles and sexism, beliefs about the origin of sexual orientation, and the frequency of contact with sexual and gender minorities (Costa & Salinas-Quiroz, 2019; Costa et al., 2015; Frias-Navarro et al., 2015; Pistella et al., 2018; Vecho et al., 2019).

Attitudes toward adoption by same-sex couples are closely linked to the views people have regarding family and kinship (Takács et al., 2016). In contexts where the traditional family is considered the basic unit of society, same-sex adoption is seen as a threat since it implies some distancing from the basic precepts on which the conventional family model rests, including marriage, sexual reproduction, and the existence of biological ties between parents and children. Likewise, the presence of same-sex couples raising children is considered a potential hazard to their well-being due to the possible consequences that could result from the absence of different-sex parents (Golombok, 2015). These consequences include the development of a non-heterosexual sexual orientation, gender role confusion, development of a non-normative gender identity, and discrimination and bullying by people in their social network (Golombok, 2015). Previous research indicates that one of the main concerns of those who reject adoption by same-sex couples is the fear of the social and psychological consequences that discrimination and rejection

at schools would entail for children (Hermosa-Bosano et al., 2019; Pennington & Knight, 2011).

Empirical research has found consistency in the types of arguments people use against gay and lesbian parenting and same-sex adoption. For example, Clarke (2001) identified the most common arguments used against gay and lesbian parenting in newspaper/magazine articles, talk shows, and a series of focus groups with university students. Using content analysis, this author identified six categories that included arguments based on religion (e.g., "The bible tells me that lesbian and gay parenting is sinful"), biology (e.g., "Lesbian and gay parenting is unnatural"), the selfishness of parents (e.g., "Lesbian and gay parents are selfish because they ignore the best interests of the child"), the absence of different-sex figures (e.g., "Children in lesbian and gay families lack appropriate role models"), the potential development of a gay/lesbian sexual orientation (e.g., "Children in lesbian and gay families grow up gay and confused"), and the potential discrimination children might face (e.g., "Children in lesbian and gay families get bullied"). As this author suggests, the main function of these arguments is to convey a message that lesbians and gay men should not be parents, thereby maintaining the idea of the heterosexual couple as the only model of family that guarantees the well-being of children. She further suggests that people who oppose gay and lesbian parenting typically use "god, nature, children's developmental needs or society or [...] highlight their concern for children's welfare to protect themselves from having to be answerable for their prejudicial opinions" (Clarke, 2001, p. 567). In a study conducted by Costa et al. (2013) in Portugal, the authors found similar categories to oppose gay and lesbian parenting. As in Clarke's study (2001), these researchers expressed their concern about how these arguments are used to place responsibility of society's rejection on gay and lesbian parents, instead of questioning the heterosexist fabric of society that enables and perpetuates discrimination against alternative family models.

In terms of methodology, the available literature has used various strategies to collect data including the use of self-report questionnaires. These studies have yielded information about some variables that predict attitudes towards parenting by same-sex couples. Other research teams have used vignettes which contain the stories of couples willing to adopt a child (Crawford et al., 1999; McCutcheon, 2011; McLeod et al., 1999). In these studies, participants are asked to read a story and decide whether to recommend the child for adoption, as well as the reasons why to do so. Research using these procedures has found that attitudes vary according to factors such as the gender and sexual orientation of the parents, the gender of the child and their ethnicity (McCutcheon, 2011). People tend to prefer adoption when the adopters are lesbian women; they also prefer heterosexual couples adopting rather than same-sex couples (McCutcheon, 2011). Similarly, it is known that when the

child's gender is considered, people tend to be reluctant to approve the adoption of male children to gay male partners (Crawford et al., 1999). These results suggest that behind attitudes towards adoption there are beliefs associated with gender roles such as the perception of men as being incapable of carrying out parenting tasks, the need of two different-sex parents to ensure the development of a normative gender identity in their children, and the idea that LGBTIQ+ people are emotionally unstable, among others.

The Present Study

In Ecuador, adoption by sexual and gender minorities is expressly prohibited and limited to heterosexual couples under the premise that the traditional family must be made up of men and women. However, there is no evidence on how widespread this idea is among people in the population or on the nature of beliefs regarding adoption by same-sex couples. On the other hand, studies on attitudes towards adoption are scarce in Latin American countries (Costa & Salinas-Quiroz, 2019). To add to the literature on this subject, the present article analyzes the attitudes toward adoption using both quantitative and qualitative strategies. The usefulness of incorporating both types of methodologies reside in their capacity to enhance the benefits they offer separately. Likewise, adopting a mixed-method approach will allow the identification of possible inconsistencies in the results obtained by both strategies. Thus, this study aimed to (1) identify the series of beliefs cisgender people in Ecuador have regarding the adoption of children by same-sex couples, and (2) explore the reasons why they consider appropriate or not the adoption by lesbian and gay couples.

Methods

Research Design

This study is part of an international initiative to evaluate the attitudes toward gay men, lesbians, and their rights in Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries in Central America, South America, and Europe. In this article, we analyze only the data obtained from Ecuador. The international study used a cross-sectional, comparative design.

Participants

Participants were 319 individuals, 213 women (33.2%) and 106 men (66.8%). Their mean age was 28.84 (SD = 11.6). Table 1 shows their sociodemographic characteristics in further detail.

Table 1 Sample characteristics

	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Men	106	33.2
Women	213	66.8
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual	206	64.6
Gay	36	11.3
Lesbian	18	5.6
Bisexual	54	16.9
Other	5	1.6
Civil status		
Single	233	73.0
Married	50	15.7
Civil union	15	4.7
Divorced	21	6.6
Children		
Yes	66	20.7
No	253	79.3
Highest education level		
High school	116	36.4
Undergraduate	123	38.6
Postgraduate	80	25.1
Religion		
Christian/Catholic	154	48.3
Other religion	15	4.7
No religion	150	47.0
Frequency of attendance to religious services		
Weekly (several times or at least once a week)	43	51.2
Monthly (once or several times a month)	22	26.2
Sporadic/episodic (once or twice a year, on holidays or religious festivities)	19	22.6

Instruments

Participants were asked to complete an online survey available in Qualtrics. The instrument included sociodemographic questions, as well as measures to assess attitudes toward gay men, lesbians, their rights, same-sex adoption, and other variables such as level of comfort around gay people, and interpersonal contact. In this article, the data from the following instruments will be analyzed.

Sociodemographic Questionnaire This section of the questionnaire included multiple-choice questions regarding participants' age, sex assigned at birth, gender identity, civil status, parenting status, educational level, religion, and frequency of attendance to religious services.

Perceptions of Adoptive Families To assess the attitudes towards same-sex adoption, each participant was presented with a story of a couple seeking to adopt a child. The couple in each vignette was described as having favorable social and economic conditions (e.g., family social support, stable paid work). The only difference between vignettes was the sexual orientation of the couple (i.e., gay, lesbian, or heterosexual). These vignettes were created by Costa et al. (2013) based on the procedures of Camilleri and Ryan (2006). In their study, Costa and colleagues (2013) asked a group of psychology professionals to evaluate whether the vignettes covered key aspects that people would consider important when judging each family suitability for adoption.

In our study, the survey was programmed in such a way that it randomized participants automatically; thus, they were presented with only one version of the vignette. After its presentation, participants had to answer questions regarding the adoption of the minor. Specifically, they had to express if they thought the parents in the vignette would be good parents (i.e., Do you think Antonio and Rodrigo will be good parents?), if the child could have emotional problems (i.e., If Antonio and Rodrigo adopted, do you think the child could be in risk of having emotional problems?), and if the child would be victim of discrimination or rejection at their school (i.e., If Antonio and Rodrigo adopted, do you think that the child would be mocked or rejected by his/her classmates?). These questions used a 4-point Likert type response format (1 = definitely no, 2 = probably no, 3 = probably yes, 4 = definitely yes). Subsequently, participants had to explain the reasons why they considered that the couple in the story was or not a good candidate to adopt the child through an open-ended question; the qualitative data collected in this section of the questionnaire was used to assess participants' arguments in favor or against same-sex adoption.

Interpersonal Contact. Interpersonal contact was measured using a 5-item version of the interpersonal contact questionnaire (Costa et al., 2015). Participants were asked to indicate whether they had (1) any gay and lesbian friends, (2) any gay and lesbian family members, and whether they knew (3) any gay and lesbian-headed family. Responses were in a dichotomous "yes" or "no" format.

Procedures

The data for the article was collected between May and October 2019 using an online virtual survey. To recruit participants, the first two authors distributed the survey link through their personal and professional social networks using platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, and college mailing lists. The first two authors also published the survey link on the official Facebook account of their research group. To participate, people had to be Ecuadorian and be at

least 18 years old. Before completing the survey, participants had to read and accept the informed consent form available on the first page of the survey. The consent included information about the objective of the study, the conditions of participation, and information regarding the possible risks and benefits. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and individuals were offered the ability to withdraw from the study at any time through the closure of the survey. Ethics committee approval was granted to the corresponding author.

Data Analysis

Descriptive, correlational statistics and analysis of variance were used to conduct quantitative analyses. SPSS version 25 was used to conduct the analyses (IBM Corp., 2017). Participants' qualitative responses were explored using thematic (Nowell et al., 2017) and content analyses. Both qualitative methodologies examine the manifest (visible) and the latent (underlying meanings) content of the material and allow making inferences from it; however, content analysis allows the quantification of the data (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Given the exploratory nature of the study, no analytical categories were established a priori; they were developed inductively. Thus, the material served to identify themes (Mayring, 2000). To ensure the quality of the analysis, we considered the criteria for credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One of the researchers created open codes by analyzing the responses one by one in Microsoft Excel. Then, responses were sorted into categories. The resulting matrix was reviewed independently by two of the co-authors. Although "every analysis of latent content is a unique interpretative action" (Gavora, 2015), at the end of the coding process, a conversation was held between all authors to discuss the content of the codes and categories and reach a consensus, ensuring validity. We also followed the recommendations suggested in the literature to improve the trustworthiness of the data during the preparation, the organization, and the reporting phase (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Elo et al., 2014). However, caution must be exerted when generalizing the results (transferability), given the composition of the sample. Finally, for additional quantitative analysis of the data, the frequency of the categories was also obtained.

Results

Attitudes Toward Adoption Based on Parents' Sexual Orientation

From the total sample of 319 participants, 101 people were randomly presented with the heterosexual couple vignette, 99 people with the gay couple version, and 96 people were presented with the lesbian couple story. As seen in Table 2,

Table 2 Participants' responses based on parental sexual orientation

	Yes	No	
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	
Parental quality			
Heterosexual	99 (98.0)	2 (2.0)	
Gay	91 (91.9)	8 (8.1)	
Lesbian	83 (86.5)	13 (13.5)	
Emotional risk			
Heterosexual	17 (16.8)	84 (83.2)	84 (83.2)
Gay	27 (27.3)	72 (72.7)	72 (72.7)
Lesbian	29 (30.2)	67 (69.8)	67 (69.8)
Social risk			
Heterosexual	25 (24.8)	76 (75.2)	76 (75.2)
Gay	79 (79.8)	20 (20.2)	20 (20.2)
Lesbian	69 (71.9)	27 (28.1)	27 (28.1)

participants indicated greater favorability toward adoption by heterosexual parents. Almost all participants (98.0%, $n=99$) indicated that the heterosexual couple depicted in the vignette would be good parents. This percentage is higher compared to those obtained by the gay and lesbian couples; in our sample, 91.9% ($n=91$) of participants indicated that the gay couple would be good parents whereas 86.5% of participants ($n=83$) considered that the lesbian couple would.

Results also show that participants tend to favor heterosexual couples regarding their perceptions of the potential emotional damages among children; in our sample, only 16.8% ($n=17$) agreed with this affirmation. Approximately 30% of participants indicated that children would potentially experience emotional hardships in case they were adopted by the gay and lesbian couples depicted in the vignettes.

The favorability biases are more evident when participants were asked to identify whether they think the children depicted in the vignette would be at a higher risk of being discriminated against because of their parents' sexual orientation. In our study, 79.8% ($n=69$) reported that children of the gay couple would be at a higher risk of discrimination, followed by the lesbian couple (71.9%). The percentage of agreement significantly drops when the heterosexual couple is considered. In this case, only 24.8% of participants agreed with this item.

Questions were as follows: Do you think (name) and (name) will be good parents?; If (name) and (name) adopted, do you think the child could be in risk of having emotional problems?; If (name) and (name) adopted, do you think that the child would be mocked or rejected by their classmates?

To identify whether the observed differences were statistically significant, we conducted a one-way ANOVA using the parental sexual orientation (gay, lesbian, heterosexual) as the comparison variable and the responses to each question as dependent variables (1). We found differences based on the evaluations of parental quality based on parents' sexual orientation, $F(2, 293) = 5.62$, $p = 0.004$, $h^2_p = 0.037$. Tukey's post hoc test indicated that participants rated the lesbian couple as the least fit couple compared to the heterosexual and gay couple. No differences were detected on the evaluation of parental quality between the heterosexual and gay couple. We also identified differences regarding the social risks of having gay parents, $F(2, 293) = 46.15$, $p < 0.001$, $h^2_p = 0.240$. Participants perceived that the child with the heterosexual couple would be significantly in less risk of discrimination compared to the child with the gay and lesbian adoptees. No differences were found between the lesbian and gay couple (Table 3).

Arguments Used in Favor or Against Gay and Lesbian Adoption

To obtain quantitative data on frequencies and percentages, we first divided the qualitative answers into three main types of answers: favorable, against, and ambivalent toward adoption. Most people indicated being favorable toward adoption by the couples in each vignette regardless of their sexual orientation. The lesbian couple received more negative comments ($n=18$, 18.8%) compared to the gay couple ($n=16$, 16.2%). Ambivalent or neutral comments, such as those arguing there was not enough information to agree with the adoption or that the decision should consider other variables, were more prevalent for the heterosexual couple ($n=11$, 11.1%). Table 4 presents descriptive information for each type of answer given by participants.

Qualitative analyses indicated the existence of several arguments to explain participants' positions regarding their view on whether the couple described in each vignette were

Table 3 One-way ANOVA comparing attitudes toward adoption based on type of couple

	Heterosexual	Gay	Lesbian	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	h^2_p
Parental quality	<i>M</i> (SD) 0.99 (0.1)	<i>M</i> (SD) 0.91 (0.28)	<i>M</i> (SD) 0.87 (0.34)	5.62	2, 293	0.004**	0.037
Emotional risk	0.17 (0.38)	0.28 (0.45)	0.30 (0.46)	0.454	2, 293	0.087	0.016
Social risk	0.25 (0.44)	0.80 (0.41)	0.71 (0.45)	46.2	2, 293	0.000**	0.240

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 4 Descriptive analysis based on types of qualitative answers given by participants

	Heterosexual		Gay		Lesbian	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Favorable toward adoption	87	87.9	74	74.7	76	79.2
Against adoption	1	1.0	16	16.2	18	18.8
Ambivalent toward adoption	11	11.1	9	9.1	2	2.1
Total	99	100	99	100	96	100

good or bad candidates to adopt a child. We identified nine categories while conducting the analysis. Table 5 shows all the categories, their main purpose of use (e.g., to be in favor or against adoption), their definitions, and the number of observations according to the type of couple. Some of the answers were coded in more than one category. We found three categories that were commonly used to express opposition toward gay and lesbian couples adopting children. These categories were named *biological reproduction and nature*, *social structure and function of the family*, *social approval*, and *consequences for the child*. Three categories emerged as common arguments used to express favorable opinions regarding same-sex couples. These categories were branded as *personal characteristics and desire to adopt*, *external support, stability and resources*, and *legitimacy*. Finally, we found three types of responses that were considered as ambivalent regarding their position and were labeled as *other*, *not enough information*, and *inscrutable*.

Biological Reproduction and Nature. Answers that were coded in this category were used to comment on the importance of heterosexual procreation as the only way to create a “normal” and legitimate family. According to these views, biological reproduction is natural, desirable, and morally correct. People who used these arguments view biology as a natural law and men and women as complementary sexual entities that must join to create new life (e.g., *the natural biological law does not allow it*—female, 51 years old [y/o]). Kinship, according to these points of view, is reduced to biological ties between parents and children, positioning other types of bonds, including adoption, as less valid. Also, people who mentioned the importance of biology when creating a family argued on the importance of having two different-sex parents to facilitate developmental processes to ensure a child’s well-being. Comments that exemplify these types of arguments include the following: *children repeat by the example, therefore, [having gay parents] would induce them to adopt that behavior [homosexuality] even if, deep down, it goes against biology* (female, 21 y/o). It is also interesting to note that people place less moral value to gay and lesbian couples who choose to adopt. For some people, gay and lesbian parents are selfish because they are viewed as actively seeking to satisfy a personal desire (e.g., being a parent), not necessarily thinking of the child’s well-being, their best interest, or what nature expects from men and

women (e.g., *children should identify with mom and dad, that is what is natural and not selfish*—female, 59 y/o). It is noteworthy to mention that no single comment in this category was made regarding the heterosexual couple.

Social Structure and Function of the Family. Comments in this category were mostly used to deny gay and lesbian adoption and, in turn, argue in favor of the traditional family model. These types of answers positioned “the family” as a uniquely structured social institution in which gender roles are clearly defined and mutually exclusive for men and women. Arguments in this category tended to express a direct opposition to the idea of gay/lesbian couples adopting a child, because they represent a direct menace to the institution of family. In some cases, the family was viewed as an institution created by God and society, and gay and lesbian parenting as an alternative that destroys the boundaries of what is considered traditional and good. An example was given by a 21 y/o male who expressed: *Of course not, because the concept of family will be destroyed, and nature cannot be disturbed. Every child must have a father and a mother so that he can be a balanced person [...], [if not] the perversion of society and humanity will begin*. A 44 y/o woman, who evaluated the heterosexual couple adoption, also commented that she was in favor of the adoption (...) *because they would constitute a family with the design that God implanted*. People who used these types of arguments also indicated that children have a social right to have two different-sex parents and therefore, it is important that society guarantees this right (e.g., *The story sounds good. However, from my point of view, all children have the right to have a father and a mother*—male, 23 y/o). These types of answers were mostly used by those evaluating the lesbian couple ($n = 10$) compared to the gay one ($n = 3$). Also, there was only one argument in this category in favor of the heterosexual couple because they would create a *normal home* (female, 44 y/o).

Social Approval and Consequences for the Child. This category was mainly used to highlight society’s level of approval toward different family structures. According to participants who used these types of arguments, gay- and lesbian-headed families should not be accepted because society is not ready to welcome alternative family structures. These types of arguments position society as intolerant and homophobic. An example of the answers coded in

Table 5 Categories and frequencies based on type of couple

Category	Type of use	Description	Examples	Couple		
				Heterosexual	Gay	Lesbian
Biological reproduction and nature	Typically used against gay/lesbian parenting	This category includes comments regarding the importance of having two parents of different biological sex when raising a child, as well as the value of biological procreation as the only pathway to family formation	Every child deserves a mother and a father (female, 22 years old) No, because they are a same-sex couple (female, 63 years old)	0	3	5
Social structure and function of the family	Typically used against gay/lesbian parenting	This category includes comments that sustain a heteronormative society and argue in favor of the traditional family and traditional gender roles	No, because of the family structure. The roles inside a family are important (female, 32 years old) No, a family should have the image of a father (man) and a mother (woman) (male, 58 years old)	1	3	10
Social approval and consequences for the child	Typically used against gay/lesbian parenting	This category includes comments that highlight society's level of acceptance and respect for different family structures and homosexual couples. It also includes comments regarding the possible impact that the child could face because of being adopted and/or because of having gay or lesbian parents	Yes, if they teach him that people could love each other regardless of their gender, the child could probably understand [same sex parenting] (female, 21 years old) No, because the child could also change his/her sexual orientation (male, 27 years old)	4	7	12
Personal characteristics and desire to adopt	Typically used in favor of gay/lesbian parenting	This category includes comments that highlight the positive personal qualities of the adoptees and the general perception of their quality as human beings. It also includes answers that highlight couples' capacities to provide care and love to the child and the adoptees' strong willingness to care for the child or to become parents	[I agree] because they bring together the skills, values, and competencies, both individually and as a couple, thus they should be able to adopt the child, forming a stable couple with both emotional and economic resources for the upbringing of the adoptee (female, 24 years old) Yes, because the important thing is the love and affection that they will have for the child, regardless of whether the [type of] family is common or not. (Female, 18 y/o) Because they want to [adopt], they might not be perfect, but they will try (Female, 35 y/o)	41	47	54
External support, stability, and resources	Typically used in favor of gay/lesbian parenting	This category contains comments that highlight qualities of the couple, such as financial stability, family support, and education	They are professionals who have economic and emotional stability, they have the support of family and friends, maintain a friendly environment, and have the desire and commitment to care for, raise, and protect a child (female, 28 years old) Yes, because they maintain a stable relationship, they both work, which contributes to a lifestyle without economic deprivation, so they will be able to cover the expenses of a son or daughter. Also, they have the support of their parents and have good references from their friends. They have shown to be responsible; they have some knowledge regarding childcare and, in general, they have the desire to be parents (female, 21 years old)	66	54	47

Table 5 (continued)

Category	Type of use	Description	Examples	Couple		
				Heterosexual	Gay	Lesbian
Legitimacy	Typically used in favor of gay parenting	This category includes mentions of equity or having the legal right or option for adopting a child. The answers in this category highlight that adoption should be granted to gay/lesbian couples since they should have equal opportunities as their heterosexual counterparts	Because they have everything that is politically correct to adopt a minor with the only difference being that they are a gay couple (female, 25 years old) Because they have the right to be parents and to create a family (female, 22 years old)	3	6	0
Other	Typically used in favor of gay/lesbian adoption	This category includes answers which view adoption not only dependent on the qualities of the adoptees but rather the characteristics of the child, the process of adoption, or the context	Maybe yes, but not only the economic sphere should be analyzed, as in the case, but also the social one (male, 22 years old) Perhaps, apparently having everything necessary does not mean that they are good candidates, being good candidates depends on the child (female, 18 years old)	3	7	3
Not enough information	Doubtful about the adoption	This category groups all the comments that explicitly stated that there was not enough information to be in favor or against the adoption	Maybe yes, but the information given is too little to know if they will really be good parents (female, 18 years old) Nothing is certain, there is very little informative data to ensure that [they will be good parents] (female, 36 years old)	6	0	0
Inscrutable	Yes/no answers	This category gathers the statements without explanation	Yes, they are able [to adopt] (female, 20 years old) No (male, 27 years old)	6	10	4

this category was provided by a 33 y/o female participant who mentioned: *They are probably good candidates, but society would reject them; we are not a tolerant society.* It is interesting to note that people who used these arguments deny the possibility of adoption to gay and lesbian couples simply because the general society cannot change or evolve their views on non-traditional families. As a result, gay and lesbian couples should refrain their life projects to satisfy “society’s will” and live their lives without contemplating a possibility that is only available to heterosexual couples. Based on this idea, gay and lesbian couples should ignore and abandon their desire to be parents, and leave society as it is, without questioning the heterosexist social context in which they live.

Participants also mentioned their fear of the possible consequences a child could experience because of their parents’ sexual orientation. Comments of this nature were more frequent regarding lesbian mothers compared to gay and heterosexual parents. For both the lesbian and gay couple, the most common fear was that the child would be confused or emotionally unstable because of the lack of traditional male and female models in their family. For some participants, the absence of male role models in lesbian-headed families could possibly lead children to become gay themselves. A participant, for example, commented that lesbian mothers *will show a bias in terms of the sexual orientation of the child, since they will direct their son, either consciously or unconsciously, towards a psychological and emotional tendency [that results in a homosexual orientation] without mentioning that they are not considering the opinion of the child* (male, 20 y/o). Another concern was about the potential rejection children would experience at school. A 20 y/o female participant indicated the following: *I consider that both are good candidates to adopt, however, the boy or girl could be rejected by their classmates. This does not mean that inside the house he/she would feel bad (...)*. Interestingly, some participants indicated that they believed all children could experience negative outcomes regardless of their parents’ sexual orientation. This was seen in comments such as *all children have the probability of having emotional problems or having emotional difficulties, depending on the age of the child* (female, 24 y/o).

Personal Characteristics and Desire to Adopt. Most participants referred to the personal characteristics they could infer from the story in the vignette including their personality, their moral values, their empathy, and their quality as human beings (e.g., *Apparently, they are good people, the environment where they interact is the most suitable for a child. Surely, love will not be lacking* — female, 27 y/o). This category also groups comments that referred to people’s capacity and willingness to adopt (e.g., *unlike many families, they have financial support and, above all, the desire to have*

a planned family — female, 23 y/o), and to love and care for the child (e.g., *family is where love is* (male, 24 y/o); *family is constituted on a fundamental pillar that is not gender, rather than love and values* (male, 26 y/o); and *what matters is the affection and care they will have for the child [...]* (female, 18 y/o)).

Comments in this category were typically used in favor of gay/lesbian parenting. Interestingly, most people mentioned these characteristics for the lesbian couple compared to the gay and to the heterosexual couple. Also, on some occasions, people tended to recognize the personal qualities and strengths of the couple and indicated that the only problem regarding gay and lesbian adopting children is society. The following excerpt is an example of this: *Yes, they are self-confident women, they will be a great example for their son or daughter. The only problem is people’s intolerance, especially the religious ones, who educate their children under a closed [-minded] system* (female, 45 y/o).

External Support, Stability, and Resources. This category encompasses comments such as having enough financial resources, a stable relationship, a loving extended family, and educated professionals surrounding the family, among others. For some participants, gay and lesbian parents can provide loving family environments that allow them to grow up learning about diversity and protect them from the potential discrimination they might encounter in a heterosexist context. A participant mentioned the following: *[...] The sexual orientation of a person, in this case, a couple, will make the child grow up surrounded by diversity and with zero prejudice; he will be a child loved not only by his parents but also by his grandparents and the rest of the family.*

However, not all comments in this category were in favor of the couples. For example, one participant indicated that the lesbian couple’s *emotional stability and way of relating to each other could set a trend* (male, 48 y/o), implying that their sexual orientation would influence on their child’s sexuality. Similarly, for gay parents, two respondents stated that *having everything -apparently- does not mean that they are good candidates, being good candidates depends on the child* (female, 18 y/o); *they comply with everything to be good parents. Unfortunately, we still live in a backward and conservative society* (male, 25 y/o).

Legitimacy. In few cases, legal rights were also mentioned in some of respondents’ arguments, especially regarding adoption by gay couples (e.g., *they deserve the same opportunity as everyone else* — female, 24 y/o). However, no comments of this nature were made in the case of lesbian couples. Some people indicated that heterosexuals had every right to be adoptive parents whenever they chose to (e.g., *they have every right* — female, 25 y/o; *they comply with all the necessary requisites* — male, 18 y/o).

Ambivalent Responses. The last three categories showed ambivalent responses. The category *other* was created to

classify comments that did not express either agreement or disagreement with the adoption case presented in the vignettes. Most of these statements were for gay parents (e.g., *the fact that they are good people does not guarantee that they could be good parents* – female, 57 y/o) although there were some for the heterosexual (e.g., *Not necessarily; my parents comply with all of this and I came out pretty bad anyway* – male, 69 y/o) and the lesbian couple (e.g., *Probably yes, since the success of raising a child does not lie in their professional success or good people, but in the time they dedicate to guide their son or daughter* – male, 24 y/o). Other comments fell in the *not enough information* category, because they explicitly stated that there was not sufficient data to determine whether the couple in the vignette would be good parents. Comments on this category were only given for the heterosexual couple. The final category, *inscrutable*, grouped the comments that did not have an elaborated answer and only included yes or no responses.

Discussion

Ecuador has experienced multiple changes in favor of the recognition of gay and lesbian individual and family rights (Vega Suriaga, 2019). However, the existence of legal protections for sexual and gender minorities does not necessarily mean that people have positive attitudes toward same-sex behavior, same-sex marriage, and more specifically, adoption by same-sex couples (Chaux et al., 2021). We conducted this study to analyze the beliefs people have regarding gay and lesbian couples adopting children. Identifying these ideas and the types of arguments people offer to explain their positions may be useful to understand the characteristics of the environments in which gay- and lesbian-parented families live and the difficulties they may encounter, and more importantly, analyze cognitions that could be subject of intervention in settings such as schools, universities, and workplaces.

Results from our study indicate that most participants reported being in favor of gay men and lesbians having children. However, our results also confirm the existence of biases that favor heterosexual couples. Quantitative results from our study indicate participants' tendency to believe that heterosexual people would be better suited parents, as well as believing that their children would fare better compared to those of gay and lesbian parents. Descriptive and comparative analyses confirmed this observation and is consistent with previous studies (Costa et al., 2013; Crawford & Solliday, 1996; Crawford et al., 1999). Even though we did not find statistical differences regarding the emotional risk scores, we did identify differences concerning the parental quality and social risk scores. For example, participants believed the lesbian couple would be less fit to become

good parents. These results went against our expectations since women are believed to be naturally inclined toward motherhood (Hicks, 2008). One possible explanation for this finding is the fact that we presented a case in which participants were asked about the adoption of a male child. This may have sparked in some participants negative ideas about the potential consequences of the absence of a male role model for children. Previous research has found that, for some people, the presence of a mother and a father is considered important to ensure the fulfillment of a child's basic needs; without any of those figures, a family is believed to be incomplete, and thus a child would grow in a state of deprivation (Hicks, 2008, 2013).

Our results also suggest that participants believed children of same-sex couples might be more likely to be discriminated against compared to those of their heterosexual counterparts. Further analysis indicated higher prejudice against gay couples compared to lesbians. These findings are in line with previous studies in which participants have expressed similar concerns (Costa et al., 2013; Hermosa-Bosano et al., 2019; Pennington & Knight, 2011); furthermore, they indicate the idea that gay men and lesbians should desist parenthood to avoid potential consequences that may affect their children's well-being. As Costa et al. (2013) stated, these types of arguments place the responsibility on parents' sexual orientation, instead of focusing on the social roots of prejudice and discrimination. Also, they convey the idea that same-sex parents do not make active efforts to create loving, nurturing, and secure environments for their children. For example, it is known that gay and lesbian parents make careful school selection choices (i.e., private, open-minded, diverse) to diminish the probabilities of children encountering discrimination (Goldberg, 2014; Goldberg & Smith, 2014). We believe viewing gay and lesbian parents as active agents concerned with providing safe environments through their choices may be helpful to eliminate prejudice against them (Hermosa-Bosano, 2017).

Qualitative results further reveal different types of arguments to oppose or express support toward adoption by same-sex couples. Like in previous studies, participants relied on biology, society, and religion to argue against gay and lesbian parenting; also, participants expressed ideas about what they believed was best for children and their developmental needs. As Clarke (2001) pointed out, these arguments express popular conceptions about what is needed to ensure the proper development of children and help them achieve what is believed to be normal, expected, and adequate for their well-being (i.e., being cisgender and heterosexual). However, we believe these arguments are problematic since they are rooted in prejudiced ideas about heterosexual people's superiority regarding their capacities to create emotionally nurturing environments. Moreover, they reinforce the idea that biology and kinship are

intrinsically related concepts, leaving aside the possibility of co-constructing family bonds outside of reproduction, as well as socially created institutions like marriage. The consequences of these ideas are not only the reinforcement of a hierarchical ideological system in which certain types of families are viewed as more legitimate and better than others, but also the creation of stigma toward different family configurations including same sex parented families, as well as adoptive families.

We thus believe it is important to start deconstructing some of these ideas. Heterosexuality is certainly not a better sexual orientation than others, nor is it an essential requirement to have children (as shown by assisted reproductive technologies — ART), co-create family bonds (as in the case of adoptions), and create families (as demonstrated by same-sex parent families). Results from our study also indicate that people view sexual orientation as a trait that is socially learned by observation and that children in same-sex families would have higher chances to be gay and lesbian themselves (Rye & Meaney, 2010). The ideas about the etiology of sexual orientation have been found to be one of the most important predictors of attitudes toward same-sex parenting (Costa & Salinas-Quiroz, 2019; Frias-Navarro et al., 2015; Hermosa-Bosano et al., 2021a). However, behind these ideas there are several prejudiced notions that need to be critically questioned such as the fact that children discovering themselves as gay is wrong or undesirable (Kupalanka, 2013). Research has found that most children in gay- and lesbian-headed households identify themselves as heterosexual. Nevertheless, there is evidence that some children do identify as LGBTIQ+ and that they might even encounter several protective factors in same-sex households such as increased acceptance and exposition to diverse environments (Kupalanka & Goldberg, 2009).

An added value of this study is its focus on the reasons why people were in favor of adoption by same-sex couples. This information may be useful to detect ideas that could be used for interventions aiming to improve attitudes toward same-sex parented families. Some of our participants expressed that gay and lesbian couples would definitively be good parents if they are loving, responsible, and emotionally invested and have strong desires to adopt. Moreover, participants placed great value to the social conditions of each couple, especially in terms of personal, financial, and work stability. For some participants, having a bigger social network that includes the presence of each partners' family of origin may be a positive way to provide children with better life conditions, social support if needed, and increased access to emotional and financial resources. We believe these types of arguments may also be influenced by cultural values that are relevant in the context in which this study took place. In Ecuador, as in many other Latin American countries, families occupy a big part of individuals' personal

and social life to the point of influencing their attitudes, decisions, and life trajectories (Valdivieso-Mora et al., 2016). The fact that some participants pointed out the importance of access and integration of children to each partners' families of origin may be culturally informed. Other types of arguments focused on same-sex couples' rights to be treated as equals. This finding is relevant since previous research has found that being socially recognized as equal may lead LGBTIQ+ individuals to feel respected and valued within their communities (Simon et al., 2015). The experience of being respected, in turn, may have important implications for sexual and gender minorities' well-being and mental health.

Finally, it should be noted that some participants were ambivalent regarding their positions on same-sex parents and adoption. Some respondents, for example, believed that to be successful, potential parents had to have several conditions such as emotional and economic stability, interpersonal skills, and strong connections with others. Ultimately, participants in ambivalent positions may be exercising some prejudicing by experiencing a sense of mistrust and requiring the presence of other variables that ensure a positive upbringing.

Implications

The arguments identified in this study can be helpful to design interventions that promote greater knowledge and more positive attitudes. When analyzing our results, we identified several topics that could be worth informing people about such as the development of sexuality (specifically homosexuality), the impact of homonegativity on LGBTIQ+ individuals' mental and physical health, and the importance of creating safe environments for sexual and gender minorities and their families. Other topics that could be addressed in these types of interventions might include aspects regarding children's development in same-sex parented households, the implications for adoption for both parents and children, and the basic conditions to promote children's well-being. Other beliefs that should be addressed have to do with the relationships between biology and kinship, heteronormativity and sexual stigma, and the roots of discrimination against sexual and gender minorities. Schools and universities might be important settings where different programs could take place. Examples of such interventions include the use of inclusive curricular resources that provide positive representations of LGBTIQ+ people and their families, use illustrations of diverse families within their lessons, and talk about issues that affect LGBTIQ+ individuals and families, among others (Byard et al., 2013).

Other interventions might want to utilize different strategies to promote acceptance toward same-sex parents and their children. It is known that greater visibility and representation of LGBTIQ+ in different types of media are

associated with attitudinal changes (Ayoub & Garretson, 2017). Creating spaces portraying LGBTIQ+ individuals and their families in an affirming manner might be useful for people to get an idea of what family life looks like. Previous research has identified that exposition, comfort, and contact to others may be a way of confronting negative ideas and expose people to the fact that gay and lesbian individuals and couples may be excellent parents as well as their heterosexual counterparts.

Lastly, we believe there are implications for policy makers. Ecuador is a country in which same-sex couples are not allowed to adopt children, possibly due to fears regarding children's future development. Data from our study helps us understand the rationale of the arguments that policy makers may be using to oppose legislating on this matter. Providing information regarding LGBTIQ+ parenting might be a way of achieving legislative changes that might, in turn, promote social change by providing a legal platform for same-sex couples to achieve parenthood (Costa & Salinas-Quiroz, 2021).

Limitations and Future Studies

There are a few limitations that need to be discussed. First, this study presented participants with only one out of three vignettes, so it is impossible to determine whether they have similar attitudes toward other couples. This characteristic of our study makes it impossible to determine, for example, if a person who evaluated the gay couple would provide similar arguments for the lesbian mothers. It is possible that people might express greater resistance and provide arguments of different nature in case they were exposed to both vignettes in different moments of time. Also, participants only evaluated a vignette that portrayed the story of couples interested in adopting a male child. This represents a limitation since the gender of the child has been found to have an effect in participants' responses (McCutcheon, 2011). Researchers should take into consideration these details when designing future studies.

Another limitation of this study has to do with the sampling procedures used to gather our data. In this research project, we utilized a self-selected sample using an online questionnaire distributed through the personal and social networks of each researcher. This certainly limits our capacity to generalize our results. Previous studies have noted differences in attitudes based on a series of demographic characteristics including age, socioeconomic and education level, and ethnicity (Costa & Salinas-Quiroz, 2019; Costa et al., 2014; Pacilli et al., 2011). Future research might want to explore other sampling techniques to gather a sample that better represents Ecuadorian society.

We believe future studies should examine participants' responses regarding single parenting. There is a common fear that single gay men and lesbians would expose children

to unhealthy environments (e.g., ideas such as gay men being pedophiles that would rape their children). It would be interesting to evaluate the attitudes considering these types of variables. Ecuador is also a highly diverse country in terms of ethnicity and religion. Thus, it would be interesting to continue exploring the interrelationships between gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and religion regarding the evaluations people make.

Conclusions

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study in the country to utilize both quantitative and qualitative data to understand the beliefs people have regarding same-sex adoption. Results indicate favorability toward adoption by all couples in general; however, people showed highest concerns about adoption by gay and lesbian couples. Qualitative answers allowed us to gather information regarding the nature of these ideas. We believe our findings could be useful to guide professionals in the country to formulate different strategies to create accepting environments for same-sex adoptive families.

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Author Contribution CHB, PHA, and AMV conducted the data analyses and writing of the manuscript. FSQ and PAC designed the study and commented on the initial versions of the manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Data Availability Data is available upon request to the corresponding author.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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