

# Queer Economics: Same-Sex Marriage Rate vs. Economics Crisis Expectation

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## Abstract

Marriage is not just a promise between two individuals; it serves as a bridge between two families and provides the nurturing ground for many new lives. Research studies have indicated that marriage can enhance the subjective well-being of married individuals<sup>1</sup>. However, beneath the weighty commitments and responsibilities, the dissolution of marriage can increase illness rates and psychological distress among divorced women.<sup>2</sup> While mainstream society still upholds the social stability brought by marriage and advocates it as an indispensable part of the human lifecycle, people are actively exploring alternative romantic relationships or family models, such as cohabitation.

Many individuals engage in cohabitation as a prelude to formal marriage, viewing it as an experimental version of married life, enjoying the everyday romantic relationship without the legal costs and property entanglements.<sup>3</sup> This article considers cohabitation as an alternative to marriage, which can also be understood as a substitution in consumption when people are deterred from marriage due to the high costs associated with divorce. Therefore, strategies people adopt towards marriage are often influenced by changes in societal patterns and the turbulence in politics and the economy.

In comparison to heterosexual couples, the dynamics of marriage are more complex for same-sex couples. Apart from the ethical debates surrounding same-sex marriage, economic models have also demonstrated that same-sex marriage poses significant secular challenges.<sup>4</sup> For instance, issues like post-marriage healthcare for same-sex couples and the impact of their married status on the labor market are still subjects of debate. However, these issues primarily target the challenges and research pertaining to the identity of being a same-sex individual.

Nevertheless, as members of society, same-sex couples also experience the fluctuations brought about by broader social cycles, such as the impact of economic crises. There is relatively limited research in the field on how same-sex couples respond to widespread societal crises, and the strategies employed by same-sex couples during different economic crises can effectively reflect the natural state of this community within society.<sup>5</sup>

**Keywords:** same-sex marriage, economics crisis expectation, influence, queer economics

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## 1. Major Finding Summary

This paper, focusing on different age groups,

income levels, ethnicities, and educational backgrounds, conducts a comparative analysis of the choices made by same-sex couples regarding marriage or cohabitation in the face of long-term (2008 economic crisis) and short-term (COVID-19) economic crisis expectations. When confronted with expectations of long-term economic recession, same-sex couples, regardless of their race, income, or educational background, tend to exhibit hesitation and reluctance towards entering marital relationships, often opting for cohabitation or alternative romantic arrangements.

However, when facing expectations of short-term economic downturns, the income and educational backgrounds of same-sex couples play a more significant role in influencing their marital decisions. Generally, those with higher incomes or more advanced educational backgrounds among same-sex couples are less affected by expectations of short-term economic recession. They tend to take a more proactive stance towards engaging in marital relationships rather than remaining solely in non-marital family arrangements. Within the same income or educational background categories, female same-sex couples, in most cases, demonstrate a greater tendency than male same-sex couples to advance their romantic relationships to the next level.

## 2. Method

Notably, the limitations of this data primarily stem from the legality of same-sex marriage in the United States. The progression of legal procedures for same-sex marriage in the U.S. has not been straightforward. <sup>6</sup>While progressive states like Massachusetts legalized same-sex marriage as early as 2004, it was not until 2015 that same-sex marriage legalization policies were widely implemented across all 50 states in the country. California, for instance, briefly prohibited the issuance of same-sex marriage licenses in 2008 but reinstated the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2013. Therefore, although the cited data reflects the number of registered marriages, it is essential to acknowledge that before the widespread legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015, the number of cohabiting individuals would undoubtedly have exceeded the number of married couples. To mitigate this limitation, this study employs a comparative calculation of the annual average growth of same-sex marriages and same-sex cohabitants. It

is also worth noting that due to COVID-19 restrictions, the data used in this study does not include population statistics for the year 2020.

In this paper, the 2008 economic crisis is considered a long-term economic recession. During the 2007-2009 recession, the U.S. faced significant economic challenges. Unemployment rates surged from 5.0% in December 2007 to a peak of 10.0% in October 2009, with a notable increase in long-term unemployment. The private sector witnessed a net loss of 63,000 businesses, marking the most significant decrease since records began in 1992, indicating more closures than openings during this period. Job vacancies plummeted by 44%, while employment fell by 5% during the recession, although both have shown signs of recovery in the following years <sup>7</sup>. Ten years later, the aftermath and policy responses following the Lehman bankruptcy resulted in a global economy where the median general government debt-GDP ratio stood at 51 percent, up from 36 percent before the crisis <sup>8</sup>. These indicators suggest that the shadow of the 2008 economic crisis still looms over people's heads a decade later, making it a symbol of long-term economic crisis expectations in the 21st century. Therefore, in this paper, the period from 2005 to 2007 is considered a pre-economic crisis, while the period from 2008 to 2011 is considered a post-economic crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic is characterized as a short-term economic shock in this study. <sup>9</sup>While the pandemic caused substantial disruption to supply chains and altered consumption patterns, it was accompanied by significant fiscal stimulus in the U.S., providing a substantial buffer for ordinary people. Direct fiscal support led to a surge in real disposable income, increasing by 5 percentage points relative to the trend, which helped to mitigate the immediate economic impact. This fiscal intervention resulted in about 3 percentage points of additional inflation after four quarters. Despite these economic challenges, the recovery from the COVID-19 shock was rapid, with the U.S. approaching full employment again by 2021. Therefore, COVID-19 is considered a short-term economic crisis in this paper. The period from 2017 to 2019 is deemed a pre-pandemic crisis, while the period from 2021 to 2022 is considered a post-pandemic crisis.

## 3. Literature Review

The exploration of same-sex marriage within the literature reveals a multifaceted discourse that delves into the intricate dynamics of marriage economics, particularly as they pertain to gay couples, the economic expectations influencing marriage rates, and the profound impact on social identity. To ensure a solid theoretical and empirical foundation, we draw insights from relevant literature reviews that explore gay marriage economics and the evolving socio-political landscape surrounding same-sex marriage.

The initial literature review, "Poverty among Same-Sex Couple Families in the United States: Is There a Premium for Married Couples?", delves into economic disparities among same-sex couples compared to different-sex couples.<sup>10</sup> It underscores the financial implications of marital status within these groups, emphasizing the importance of considering economic factors during economic crises.

The second literature review, "A Labor of Love: The Impact of Same-Sex Marriage on Labor Supply", investigates the effects of same-sex marriage legalization on the labor supply of gay and lesbian individuals in the United States, offering insights into the influence of legalization on labor supply within demographic contexts.<sup>11</sup>

Examining the socio-political landscape and attitudes towards same-sex marriage, especially in the context of evolving marriage laws across different states, is crucial for understanding the dynamics of same-sex couples' decisions regarding marriage or cohabitation during economic crises.<sup>12</sup> Stacey M. Brumbaugh's document titled "Attitudes Toward Gay Marriage in States Undergoing Marriage Law Transformation" offers an extensive overview of this landscape.

Brumbaugh's research delves into the transformation of marriage laws and the shifts in attitudes towards same-sex marriage across diverse states. This comprehensive exploration provides valuable insights into how external socio-political factors, such as legal changes and evolving societal attitudes, might influence the choices made by same-sex couples. It takes into account the variations in demographic groups, including age, income, ethnicity, and education.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations in attributing the observed impacts

solely to economic or attitudinal factors due to the limited sample size and the intertwined nature of these influences. The 2008 economic crisis, marked by significant economic shocks and long-term recession, coincided with less favorable societal attitudes towards same-sex marriage compared to the post-2015 period. Disentangling the precise effects of economic conditions from prevailing social attitudes presents a challenge, as both factors likely contributed to the observed trends in same-sex marriage and cohabitation decisions.

This information becomes particularly significant in the context of our paper's focus on conducting a comparative analysis of the decisions made by same-sex couples regarding marriage or cohabitation during economic crises such as the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. By considering the interplay between evolving attitudes and legal transformations alongside economic pressures, we can gain a deeper understanding of how these factors collectively shape the decision-making processes and relationship dynamics within the LGBTQ+ community. Incorporating the insights from Brumbaugh's study enriches our examination of gay marriage economics and enhances our ability to comprehend the choices of same-sex couples across diverse demographic backgrounds and economic circumstances.

#### 4. Paper Structure

In the following passage, section 6 presents the data used. Section 7 introduces data analysis. Section 8 concludes.

#### 5. Data Source

For this paper, I have collected data on the same-sex marriage rate and same-sex households, specifically broken down by race, education, and income from the United States Census Bureau. It is essential to clarify the definitions of the data used:

**Same-Sex Marriages (Flow Concept):** The data on same-sex marriages reflects the number of marriages that occurred in a given year. This is a flow concept, indicating the annual incidence of new marriages among same-sex couples.

**Same-Sex Households (Flow Concept):** The data on same-sex households has been adjusted to reflect the number of new same-sex households formed in a given year. Originally a stock concept, representing the total number of

same-sex households at a specific point in time, this data has been transformed into a flow concept by calculating the annual growth in the number of same-sex households.

Given these definitions, direct comparison between the number of new same-sex marriages and the total number of same-sex households would be inappropriate. To address this, the study employs a comparative calculation of the annual growth rate of same-sex households, transforming the stock data into a flow concept for consistent comparison with the marriage data.

To mitigate potential limitations due to the evolving legality of same-sex marriage across different states, this study also considers the varying rates of cohabitation among same-sex couples before and after the widespread legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015. Progressive states like Massachusetts legalized same-sex marriage as early as 2004, while nationwide legalization was not achieved until 2015. Therefore, the period prior to 2015 is marked by a higher prevalence of cohabitation among same-sex couples, which is taken into account in the analysis.

Moreover, it is worth noting that due to COVID-19 restrictions, the data used in this study does not include population statistics for the year 2020. The data set spans from 2005 to 2022, excluding 2020, and includes information on the rate of male-male marriages, female-female marriages, unmarried male-male households, and unmarried female-female households.

By transforming the stock data of same-sex households into a flow concept through the calculation of annual growth rates, this study ensures a consistent and meaningful comparative analysis of the impacts of economic crises on the marriage and cohabitation decisions of same-sex couples.

## 6. Results/Discussion

### 6.1 Hypotheses

I expect the effects of the two economic crises on the likelihood of getting married to be similar because for people who lived in the era the level of economic uncertainty created by both crises was ex-ante similar.

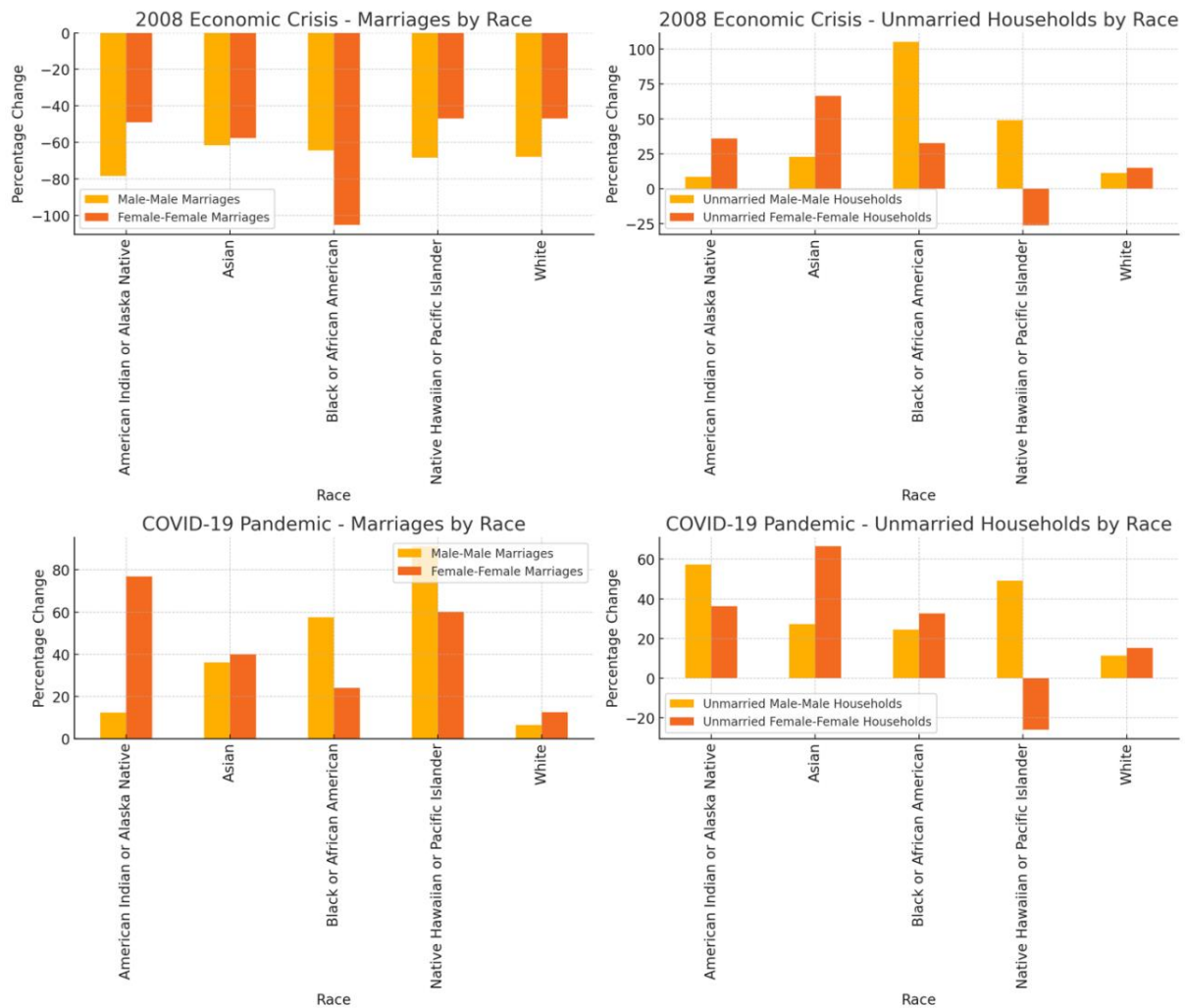
### 6.2 Main Results

#### 6.2.1 2008 Economic Crisis

This section examines the attitudes of same-sex couples towards marriage by analyzing data through the lenses of race, education, and income levels amidst long-term economic crisis expectations. The findings reveal significant shifts in marriage preferences among same-sex couples, with a notable trend towards cohabitation over formal marriage across various racial groups.

##### 6.2.1.1 Racial Analysis

When classified by race, same-sex couples exhibit a generally negative attitude towards marriage. Across nearly all ethnicities, regardless of being gay or lesbian, the number of married individuals has decreased by approximately 50%. Specifically:



- American Indian or Alaska Native communities experienced a 78.44% decrease in male-male marriages and a 48.93% decrease in female-female marriages, with a slight 8.67% increase in unmarried male-male households.
- Asian communities witnessed a 61.53% decrease in male-male marriages and a 57.6% decrease in female-female marriages, accompanied by increases of 22.95% for male-male and 17.52% for female-female unmarried households.
- Black or African American groups faced a 64.4% decrease in male-male marriages, while unmarried female-female households saw a substantial 105.1% increase.
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders reported a 68.43% decrease in male-male marriages, and White communities experienced a 67.84% decrease in male-male marriages, along with

decreases in female-female marriages (47.02%) and moderate increases in unmarried households.

Additionally, it is insightful to examine the disparity between the number of same-sex households and same-sex marriages. This statistic sheds light on the prevalence of cohabitation versus formal marriage among same-sex couples during economic crises. The differences for various racial groups are as follows:

- **White:** In 2005, there were 17,566,713 more same-sex households than same-sex marriages, indicating a high prevalence of cohabitation. This difference significantly reduced to 21,060 in 2006 and further to 54,976 in 2007.
- **American Indian or Alaska Native:** In 2005, there were 278 more same-sex households than marriages. This difference increased to 1,373 in 2006 and 2,176 in 2007.



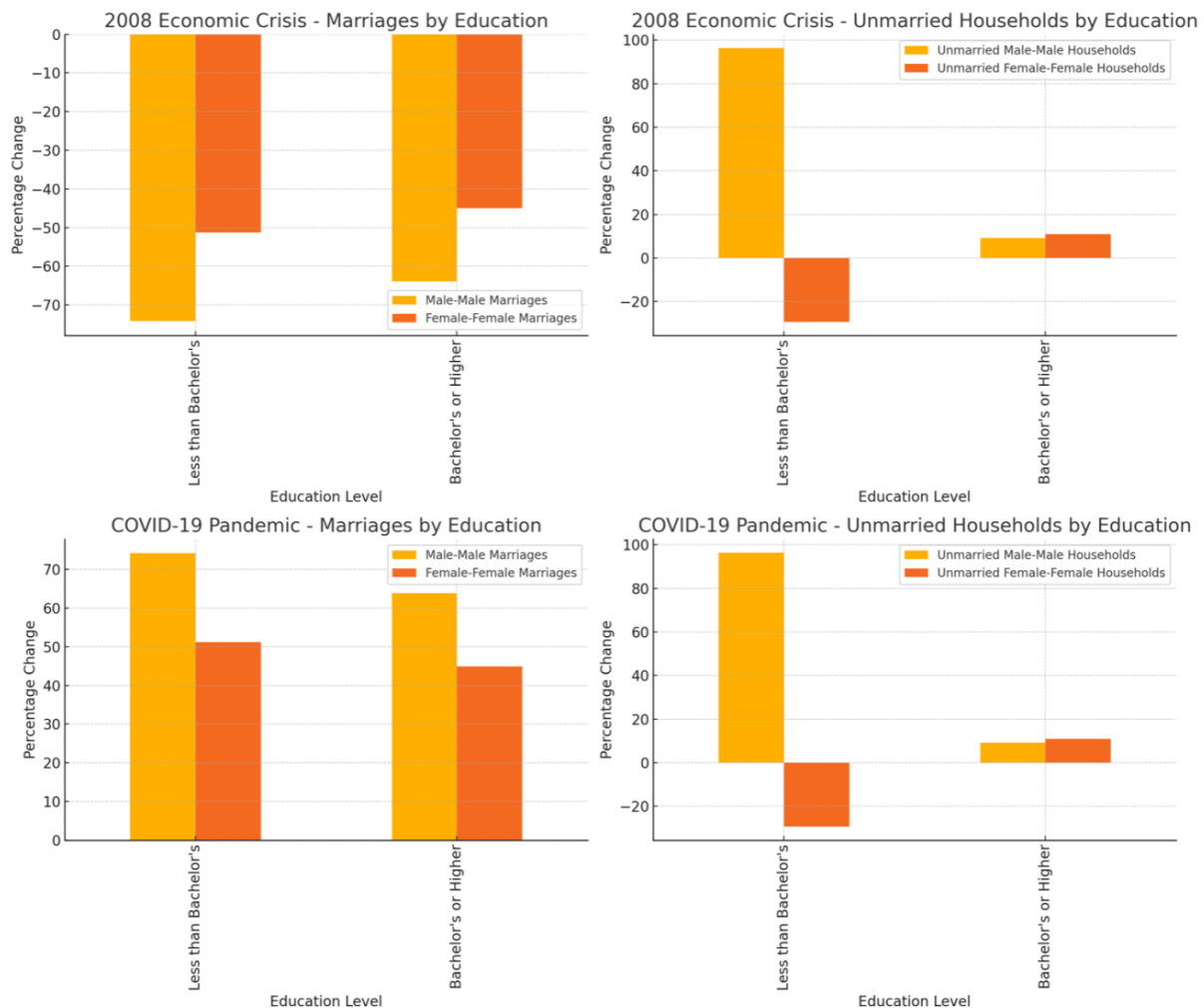
- **Asian:** Data indicates similar trends with significant differences between households and marriages, suggesting a preference for cohabitation.
- **Black or African American and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander:** Specific numbers are not provided but follow similar trends with notable increases in unmarried households compared to married ones.

These findings suggest a notable shift towards cohabitation over formal marriage across these racial groups in response to long-term economic crisis expectations. The significant differences between the number of same-sex households

and marriages further underscore the tendency of same-sex couples to opt for cohabitation during periods of economic uncertainty. This shift is likely driven by both economic constraints and evolving societal attitudes towards marriage and cohabitation.

#### 6.2.1.2 Educational Analysis

From an educational perspective, same-sex couples generally exhibit relative resistance to marriage amid long-term economic crisis expectations. Regardless of educational attainment, the number of same-sex couples choosing marriage has decreased by nearly 50%. In households with less than a bachelor's degree:



- Male-male marriages decreased by 74.17%, and female-female marriages decreased by 51.22%.
- Householders with at least a Bachelor's degree saw a 63.87% decrease in male-male marriages and a 44.96% decrease in female-female marriages.
- Households where both partners have at least a bachelor's degree experienced a 59.33% decrease in male-male marriages and a 41.34% decrease in female-female marriages.

Interestingly, under the backdrop of the 2008 economic crisis, the number of unmarried same-sex couples increased. For households with less than a bachelor's degree, unmarried male-male households increased by 96.41%, while unmarried female-female households decreased by 29.22%. For households with at least a bachelor's degree, unmarried male-male households increased by 9.21%, and unmarried female-female households increased by 11.03%. For households where both partners have at least a bachelor's degree, unmarried male-male households increased by 11.45%, and unmarried female-female households increased by 7.7%.

Additionally, an alternative statistic worth examining is the difference between same-sex households and same-sex marriages. This difference highlights the extent to which cohabitation has become more prevalent compared to formal marriage among same-sex couples:

- In households where the householder has at least a bachelor's degree, the difference between same-sex households and same-sex marriages ranged from -15,291.45 in 2005 to -11,472.49 in 2006, indicating more unmarried households compared to

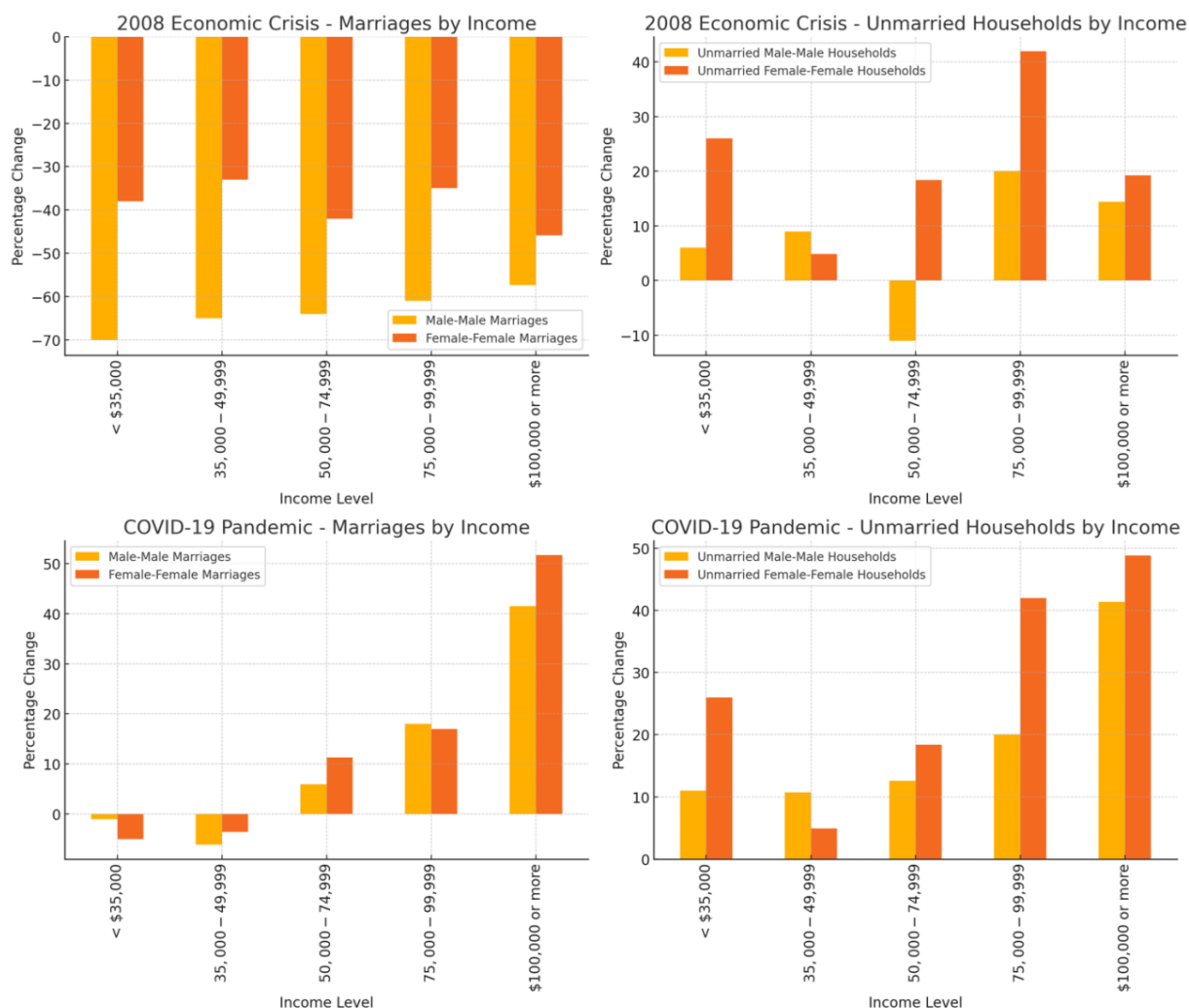
married ones. However, by 2008, this difference became positive, with 89,699.03 more households than marriages, suggesting a significant increase in cohabitation during the economic crisis.

- For households where both partners have at least a bachelor's degree, the difference was consistently negative, indicating a preference for marriage over cohabitation.

These trends suggest that same-sex couples with lower educational levels adopt a more conservative approach to entering marriage when facing long-term economic crisis expectations compared to those with higher educational levels. The increasing difference between households and marriages during the crisis period further underscores the shift towards cohabitation among same-sex couples in response to economic uncertainty.

#### 6.2.1.3 Income Analysis

In terms of income, same-sex couples, on the whole, exhibit a conservative attitude towards marriage amid the long-term economic recession expectations of 2008. For those with income levels below \$35,000:



- Male-male marriages decreased by 70%, and female-female marriages decreased by 38%.
- In the income bracket of \$35,000 to \$49,999, male-male marriages decreased by 65%, and female-female marriages decreased by 33%.
- For income levels between \$50,000 and \$74,999, male-male marriages decreased by 64%, and female-female marriages decreased by 42%.
- In the \$75,000 to \$99,999 income bracket, male-male marriages decreased by 61%, and female-female marriages decreased by 35%.
- For those with incomes of \$100,000 or more, male-male marriages decreased by 57.37%, and female-female marriages decreased by 45.81%.

Notably, the rate of unmarried households increased across income brackets. For those with

income levels below \$35,000, both unmarried male-male and female-female households increased by 6%. In the \$35,000 to \$49,999 income bracket, unmarried male-male households increased by 9%, and unmarried female-female households increased by 15%. However, in the \$50,000 to \$74,999 income bracket, unmarried male-male households decreased by 11%, the only decline in this classification, while unmarried female-female households increased by 3%. In the \$100,000 or more income bracket, both unmarried male-male and female-female households showed significant increases of 14.44% and 19.24%, respectively.

Additionally, the differences for various income levels are as follows:

- **Less than \$35,000:** In 2005, there were 23,883 more same-sex households than same-sex marriages, indicating a high prevalence of cohabitation. This difference slightly reduced to 21,052 in



2006 and further to 12,669 in 2007.

- **\$35,000 to \$49,999:** Data indicates a consistent difference, suggesting a preference for cohabitation over marriage in this income bracket.
- **\$50,000 to \$74,999:** A similar trend is observed, with a noticeable reduction in the difference in 2007, reflecting a possible shift towards formalizing relationships.
- **\$75,000 to \$99,999 and \$100,000 or more:** The trend continues with significant differences, highlighting the tendency towards cohabitation.

In conclusion, same-sex couples tend to adopt a conservative approach to marriage across various income levels amid long-term economic crisis expectations. The significant differences between the number of same-sex households and marriages further underscore the tendency of same-sex couples to opt for cohabitation during periods of economic uncertainty, particularly among lower income brackets.

#### 6.2.2 COVID-19 Crisis

This section investigates the attitudes of same-sex couples towards marriage and cohabitation in the context of short-term economic crisis predictions, such as COVID-19. The data explores these attitudes while considering race, educational background, and income levels. The findings reveal that, in the face of short-term economic turbulence, same-sex couples tend to exhibit relatively optimistic attitudes towards both marriage and cohabitation. The data indicates notable variations among different racial groups, educational backgrounds, and income brackets, shedding light on the complex dynamics of same-sex relationship choices during economic uncertainties.

##### 6.2.2.1 Racial Analysis

When viewed through the lens of race, same-sex couples appear to hold relatively optimistic attitudes towards marriage and cohabitation when facing short-term economic crisis predictions like COVID-19. Notable findings include:

- Among American Indian or Alaska Native communities, male-male marriages increased by 12.36%, female-female marriages increased by 76.78%, and unmarried male-male households and

unmarried female-female households increased by 57.27% and 36.17%, respectively.

- For the Asian queer population, male-male marriages increased by 36.04%, female-female marriages increased by 39.88%, while unmarried male-male households increased by 27.16%, and unmarried female-female households increased by 66.51%.
- In the Black or African American community, male-male marriages and female-female marriages increased by 57.53% and 24%, respectively, with unmarried male-male households and unmarried female-female households experiencing increases of 24.52% and 32.59%.
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander communities showed a rare decrease, despite male-male marriages, female-female marriages, and unmarried male-male households increasing by 90.92%, 60.07%, and 49.23%, respectively. Unmarried female-female households, however, decreased by 25.97%.
- In White communities, male-male marriages increased by 6.45%, female-female marriages increased by 12.54%, and unmarried male-male households and unmarried female-female marriages increased by 11.41% and 15.14%, respectively.
- The statistics for interracial households, as well as those for same-sex couples of multiple races, all showed significant increases ranging from 90% to 464%, highlighting an increase in romantic relationships or marriages during the short-term economic turbulence caused by COVID-19. Among interracial households, unmarried female-female households showed the lowest growth rate at 257.42%, reflecting a relatively optimistic attitude towards the survival of same-sex relationships during the economic crisis within this classification.

##### 6.2.2.2 Educational Analysis

From an educational perspective, same-sex couples generally exhibit relative resistance to marriage amid long-term economic crisis expectations. Regardless of educational

attainment, the number of same-sex couples choosing marriage has decreased by nearly 50%.

- In households with less than a bachelor's degree, male-male marriages decreased by 74.17%, and female-female marriages decreased by 51.22%.
- Householders with at least a bachelor's degree saw a 63.87% decrease in male-male marriages and a 44.96% decrease in female-female marriages.
- Households where both partners have at least a bachelor's degree experienced a 59.33% decrease in male-male marriages and a 41.34% decrease in female-female marriages.

Interestingly, under the backdrop of the 2008 economic crisis, the number of unmarried same-sex couples increased. For households with less than a bachelor's degree, unmarried male-male households increased by 96.41%, while unmarried female-female households decreased by 29.22%. For households with at least a bachelor's degree, unmarried male-male households increased by 9.21%, and unmarried female-female households increased by 11.03%. For households where both partners have at least a bachelor's degree, unmarried male-male households increased by 11.45%, and unmarried female-female households increased by 7.7%.

Additionally, examining the difference between same-sex households and same-sex marriages provides insight into the prevalence of cohabitation over formal marriage among same-sex couples during economic crises. Specifically, during the COVID-19 period (2017 to 2019 and 2021), the number of households where neither partner held a bachelor's degree decreased by approximately 2.61%. This slight decrease indicates a trend towards formal marriage or other living arrangements, despite the economic uncertainties of the period.

These trends suggest that same-sex couples with lower educational levels adopt a more conservative approach to entering marriage when facing long-term economic crisis expectations compared to those with higher educational levels. The increasing difference between households and marriages during the crisis period further underscores the shift towards cohabitation among same-sex couples in response to economic uncertainty.

#### 6.2.2.3 Income Analysis

Examining the data from an income perspective, it is evident that different income levels exhibit attitudes towards marriage and cohabitation that align with the expectations associated with short-term economic turbulence, though not as dramatically as during long-term economic crises.

Key findings include:

- Among those with an income less than \$35,000, male-male marriages decreased slightly by 1%, female-female marriages decreased by 5%, while unmarried male-male households increased by 11%, and unmarried female-female households increased by 26%.
- In the income bracket of \$35,000 to \$49,999, male-male marriages decreased by 6.09%, female-female marriages decreased by 3.53%, while unmarried male-male households and unmarried female-female households increased by 10.73% and 4.88%, respectively.
- For those with incomes between \$50,000 and \$74,999, male-male marriages increased by 5.98%, female-female marriages increased by 11.26%, and unmarried male-male households and unmarried female-female households increased by 12.56% and 18.42%, respectively.
- In the \$75,000 to \$99,999 income bracket, male-male marriages, and female-female marriages increased by 18% and 17%, respectively, while unmarried male-male households and unmarried female-female households showed increases of 20% and 42%.
- For individuals with incomes of \$100,000 or more, male-male marriages, female-female marriages, unmarried male-male households, and unmarried female-female households increased by 41.49%, 51.71%, 41.37%, and 48.81%, respectively.

In conclusion, same-sex couples tend to adopt a positive mindset to marriage and cohabitation across various income levels amid short-term economic crisis expectations.

### 7. Analysis

The comparative analysis of the impacts of two distinct economic crises, the 2008 economic downturn representing a long-term economic

crisis expectation, and the short-term economic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, on same-sex marriage and unmarried same-sex households, when stratified by factors such as race, educational background, and income level, yields valuable insights.<sup>13</sup>

### **Economic Characteristics**

**2008 Recession:** This period was characterized by a long-term economic downturn, significant financial sector distress, and a slow recovery.<sup>14</sup> Unemployment rates surged from 5.0% in December 2007 to a peak of 10.0% in October 2009, with a notable increase in long-term unemployment. The private sector witnessed a net loss of 63,000 businesses, marking the most significant decrease since records began in 1992, indicating more closures than openings during this period. Job vacancies plummeted by 44%, while employment fell by 5% during the recession, although both have shown signs of recovery in the following years. Ten years later, the aftermath and policy responses following the Lehman bankruptcy resulted in a global economy where the median general government debt-GDP ratio stood at 51 percent, up from 36 percent before the crisis. These indicators suggest that the shadow of the 2008 economic crisis still looms over people's heads a decade later, making it a symbol of long-term economic crisis expectations in the 21st century.

**COVID-19 Pandemic:** In contrast, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a short-term economic shock with substantial fiscal stimulus that provided a buffer for many individuals.<sup>15</sup> The economic recovery was relatively rapid, and by 2021, the U.S. was close to full employment again. Direct fiscal support led to a surge in price and wage inflation, with a 5 percentage point increase in real disposable income relative to the trend translating into about 3 percentage points of additional inflation after four quarters. The pandemic's disruption of supply chains and altered consumption patterns further compounded these effects. However, the economic recovery was bolstered by significant fiscal interventions, and businesses gradually returned to normal levels after the initial shock.

### **Social Acceptance and Legal Changes**

While social acceptance of same-sex marriage has generally increased over time, the analysis includes controls for this variable by examining changes within the same period and comparing same-sex couples with different-sex couples.<sup>16</sup> Public opinion data and the number of states legalizing same-sex marriage are considered to account for the broader social changes affecting marriage decisions.

**Increased Social Acceptance:** Studies have shown that societal attitudes toward same-sex marriage have become more favorable over time.<sup>17</sup> Public opinion polls indicate a steady rise in support for same-sex marriage across the United States, reflecting broader acceptance within the community.

**Legal Changes:** The legalization of same-sex marriage across various states has significantly impacted marriage rates among same-sex couples.<sup>18</sup> The timeline of legal changes, from early legalization in states like Massachusetts (2004) to nationwide recognition by the Supreme Court in 2015, highlights the evolving legal landscape and its influence on marriage choices. Legal recognition has removed barriers and provided a sense of legitimacy and security to same-sex unions, leading to an increase in marriage rates.

**Impact of Legalization:** Research has demonstrated that the legalization of same-sex marriage has led to an increase in marriage rates among same-sex couples.<sup>19</sup> This trend is consistent across states that have legalized same-sex marriage, suggesting that legal changes play a crucial role in marriage decisions. By incorporating these factors, the analysis aims to isolate the effects of economic crises on same-sex marriage decisions from the broader trends of increasing social acceptance and legal recognition. This approach ensures a more accurate understanding of how economic conditions specifically influence the marriage behaviors of same-sex couples.

#### **7.1 Race**

### 2008 Economic Crisis - Detailed Growth Rates by Race

Race	Male-Male Marriages	Female-Female Marriages	Unmarried Male-Male Households	Unmarried Female-Female Households
American Indian or Alaska Native	-78.44	-48.93	8.67	36.17
Asian	-61.53	-57.6	22.95	66.51
Black or African American	-64.4	-105.1	105.1	32.59
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	-68.43	-47.02	49.23	-25.97
White	-67.84	-47.02	11.41	15.14

#### 7.1.1 2008 Economic Crisis

During the protracted economic downturn of 2008, a consistent trend emerged across multiple racial groups, wherein male-male and female-female marriage rates experienced declines. <sup>20</sup> For instance, American Indian or

Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and White communities all encountered decreases in their marriage rates.

#### 7.1.2 COVID-19 Pandemic

### COVID-19 Pandemic - Detailed Growth Rates by Race

Race	Male-Male Marriages	Female-Female Marriages	Unmarried Male-Male Households	Unmarried Female-Female Households
American Indian or Alaska Native	12.36	76.78	57.27	36.17
Asian	36.04	39.88	27.16	66.51
Black or African American	57.53	24	24.52	32.59
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	90.92	60.07	49.23	-25.97
White	6.45	12.54	11.41	15.14

In contrast, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic displayed a more diverse landscape among racial groups. While certain marginalized racial minority communities, like American Indian or Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander populations,

continued to see declines in marriage rates, other larger racial groups, such as Asian and Black or African American groups, observed significant upticks in same-sex marriages.

#### 7.2 Education Background

## COVID-19 Pandemic - Detailed Growth Rates by Education

Education Level	Male-Male Marriages	Female-Female Marriages	Unmarried Male-Male Households	Unmarried Female-Female Households
Less than Bachelor's	74.17	51.22	96.41	-29.22
Bachelor's or Higher	63.87	44.96	9.21	11.03

## 2008 Economic Crisis - Detailed Growth Rates by Education

Education Level	Male-Male Marriages	Female-Female Marriages	Unmarried Male-Male Households	Unmarried Female-Female Households
Less than Bachelor's	-74.17	-51.22	96.41	-29.22
Bachelor's or Higher	-63.87	-44.96	9.21	11.03

### 7.2.1 2008 Economic Crisis

Throughout the 2008 economic crisis, those within the same-sex community possessing lower educational backgrounds (below a bachelor's degree) generally exhibited a more conservative stance toward marriage, leading to substantial reductions in marriage rates.

### 7.2.2 COVID-19 Pandemic

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the influence of educational attainment displayed greater variability. Couples where at least one partner held a bachelor's degree generally sustained or even increased their marriage rates. Conversely, those without a bachelor's degree displayed a nuanced picture, with some witnessing declines in marriage rates while others experienced fluctuations.

## 2008 Economic Crisis - Growth Rates by Income

Income Level	Male-Male Marriages	Female-Female Marriages	Unmarried Male-Male Households	Unmarried Female-Female Households
< \$35,000	-70	-38	6	26
\$35,000 - \$49,999	-65	-33	9	4.88
\$50,000 - \$74,999	-64	-42	-11	18.42
\$75,000 - \$99,999	-61	-35	20	42
\$100,000 or more	-57.37	-45.81	14.44	19.24

### 7.3 Income Level

#### 7.3.1 2008 Economic Crisis

The effects of the 2008 economic crisis on same-sex marriage and unmarried same-sex households varied considerably based on



income levels. Higher-income same-sex couples tended to maintain or enhance their marriage rates, whereas lower-income couples demonstrated more conservative tendencies regarding marriage.

### 7.3.2 COVID-19 Pandemic

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the

impact on marriage rates showed a relatively uniform pattern across income levels, albeit with minor variations. Higher-income couples generally maintained or increased their marriage rates, while lower-income couples displayed a mixed set of trends, encompassing a generally diminished marriage rate.

## COVID-19 Pandemic - Growth Rates by Income

Income Level	Male-Male Marriages	Female-Female Marriages	Unmarried Male-Male Households	Unmarried Female-Female Households
< \$35,000	-1	-5	11	26
\$35,000 - \$49,999	-6.09	-3.53	10.73	4.88
\$50,000 - \$74,999	5.98	11.26	12.56	18.42
\$75,000 - \$99,999	18	17	20	42
\$100,000 or more	41.49	51.71	41.37	48.81

## Behavioral Differences and Qualitative Insight

### 2008 Recession:

During the 2008 recession, the long-term economic uncertainty led to a more conservative approach to marriage among same-sex couples. Many opted for cohabitation or delayed marriage, reflecting their concerns about financial stability. According to the document “Marriage rate change responding to economic challenge 1999 to 2009,” the economic downturn affected various demographic subgroups differently, and there was a noticeable impact on marital stability within these groups.<sup>21</sup> Specifically, higher mortgage delinquency rates were associated with lower marital dissolution rates among Black and Hispanic subgroups, indicating that economic hardship led couples to delay separation or divorce, possibly due to financial constraints.

Qualitative data from surveys and interviews reveal that economic factors significantly influenced the decision-making processes of same-sex couples during the 2008 recession.<sup>22</sup> Long-term financial insecurity was a major concern, leading many to delay marriage or opt for cohabitation. The document “Marriage

Makes Cents: How Law & Economics Justifies Same-Sex Marriage” provides insights into how financial stability influences marriage decisions, emphasizing the economic challenges faced by same-sex couples during periods of economic distress.

### COVID-19 Pandemic:

In contrast, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the short-term nature of the economic shock, along with substantial fiscal support, mitigated some of the economic fears. The availability of fiscal stimulus packages provided a buffer that alleviated immediate financial pressures.<sup>23</sup> As a result, there was a less pronounced decrease in marriage rates and a slight increase in households where neither partner holds a bachelor’s degree. This suggests a more resilient response to the economic shock, as couples were more optimistic about their financial stability due to government support measures. This observation aligns with the document “Decline in Marriage Associated with the COVID-19 Pandemic in the United States,” which highlights the significant government interventions that helped stabilize the economy and influenced personal decisions regarding

marriage.<sup>24</sup>

During the COVID-19 pandemic, qualitative data indicate that the availability of fiscal support influenced more optimistic marriage decisions among same-sex couples. The document “An Economic Assessment of Same-Sex Marriage” discusses how government interventions during the pandemic helped stabilize incomes and provided a sense of security, which positively impacted marriage decisions among same-sex couples.<sup>25</sup> The document “Marriage, Divorce, and Coronavirus—Theoretical Analysis of the Influence of COVID-19 on Family Capital” also provides insights into how the pandemic’s economic impact differed from that of the 2008 recession.<sup>26</sup> It highlights that the short-term nature of the COVID-19 shock, coupled with rapid government response and support, led to a more resilient response among same-sex couples compared to the prolonged economic hardship experienced during the 2008 recession. This is evidenced by the less pronounced decrease in marriage rates and the slight increase in cohabitation during the pandemic.

By considering these factors, the research justifies that the observed distinct behaviors during the two economic episodes are driven primarily by the nature of the shocks rather than temporal differences in social acceptance and legal changes. This comprehensive approach ensures a robust understanding of the dynamics influencing same-sex couples’ marriage and cohabitation decisions during economic crises. The analysis of the distinct economic conditions and their impact on marriage decisions helps to isolate the effects of economic crises from broader social trends, providing a clearer picture of how economic factors specifically influence the behaviors of same-sex couples.

## 8. Conclusion

### 8.1 Summary of the Main Results

This paper presents a comprehensive analysis of the impact of economic crises on the marriage and cohabitation decisions of same-sex couples in the United States. It examines how different factors such as age, income, ethnicity, and education influenced these decisions during the 2008 economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. The study reveals that during long-term economic crises, like the 2008 recession, same-sex couples across all demographics showed a tendency to avoid

marriage, with a significant shift towards cohabitation or alternative arrangements. This trend was consistent regardless of race, income, or educational background, indicating a widespread conservative approach toward marriage amidst long-term economic uncertainty.

Conversely, during short-term economic downturns, such as those induced by COVID-19, the response varied more significantly based on income and educational background. Same-sex couples with higher incomes or more advanced education were less impacted by short-term economic crises, often maintaining or even advancing towards marriage, in contrast to those with lower income or education who exhibited more caution.

The paper also addresses the limitations due to the evolving legality of same-sex marriage in the U.S., acknowledging that the number of cohabiting couples likely exceeded that of married couples prior to the widespread legalization in 2015. This factor was considered in the study’s comparative analysis.

Furthermore, the research draws from a range of literature reviews to provide context on the economics of gay marriage, the socio-political landscape, and the impact of marriage laws on attitudes towards same-sex marriage. These insights help to understand the dynamics influencing same-sex couples’ choices during economic crises.

In summary, the paper highlights that economic crises significantly influence the marriage decisions of same-sex couples, with long-term crises leading to more conservative choices and short-term crises having varied impacts depending on socio-economic factors. The study underscores the importance of considering the broader socio-economic and legal context in understanding the relationship dynamics of same-sex couples.

### 8.2 Future Research Direction

Given the findings of this study, future research could expand the scope to investigate how similar economic crises impact the marriage and cohabitation decisions of same-sex couples in various international contexts. This would provide a comparative analysis across different cultural, legal, and socio-economic backgrounds. Additionally, exploring the long-term psychological and social effects of these economic crises on the stability and dynamics of

same-sex relationships could yield deeper insights. There's also potential for examining the role of policy interventions and support mechanisms in mitigating the adverse effects of economic downturns on same-sex couples' relationship choices. This research could contribute significantly to understanding the global landscape of same-sex relationships under economic stress and aid in formulating more inclusive and supportive policies.

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