

## Gender gap in status of subjective well-being among dual-earner couples

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### Abstract

Dual-earner couples juggle multiple roles including work. A common problem for dual-earner couples in today's society is increased responsibilities from work and family. With the addition of children to the family, caregiving responsibilities increase dramatically. Consequently, the combination of employment and family roles may well have impact on subjective well-being. This is especially true of the female spouse as she has major responsibilities of family roles as well as work role. Some studies found that time spent on housework as well as paid work contribute to gender gap in well-being. Women experienced generally lower sense of well-being than men. The present study was conducted on dual-earner couples of Jaipur city to find out the gender gap in status of subjective well-being among dual-earner couples. Total 200 couples (200 wives and 200 husbands) were selected for the study. Data were analyzed using SPSS 16.0 statistical tools. Result shows that husbands exhibited signs of good subjective well-being compared to wives. Husbands scores high on positive dimensions of subjective well-being while, wives scores high on negative dimensions of subjective well-being. This indicates that husbands experience more life satisfaction and frequent joy as compared to their wives. Wives perceived poorer mental and physical health and experienced greater negative affect than their husbands.

**Keywords:** dual-earner couples, gender differences, subjective well-being, role strain

### 1. Introduction

Subjective well-being is the overall field that attempts to understand how people evaluate their own lives and includes variables such as life satisfaction and marital satisfaction, lack of depression and anxiety, and positive moods and emotions (Diener, *et al.*, 1997) <sup>[4]</sup>. A person's evaluation of his or her life may be in the form of cognitions (e.g., when a person gives conscious evaluative judgments about his or her satisfaction with life as a whole, or evaluative judgments about specific aspects of his or her life such as recreation). However, an evaluation of one's life also may be in the form of affect (people experiencing unpleasant or pleasant moods and emotions in reaction to their lives). Thus, a person is said to have high SWB if she or he experiences life satisfaction and frequent joy, and only infrequently experience unpleasant emotions such as sadness and anger. Contrarily, a person is said to have low SWB if he or she is dissatisfied with life, experiences little joy and affection, and frequently feels negative emotions such as anger or anxiety (Diener *et al.*, 1997) <sup>[4]</sup>.

Subjective Well-being of individual members in dual earner families is of great interest to family therapists. A large number of studies on the dual earner families reveal a lower level of life satisfaction for dual earner couples. This is especially true of the female spouse as she has multiple roles to play. Few studies have also indicated the mental health problems of male spouses in these families.

### Gender Gap in status of Subjective Well-Being

In all countries of the world, especially in high-income countries, women declare a higher level of life satisfaction than men when they experience similar conditions (for example, pay and working conditions), but score lower on

measures that capture short-term positive and negative emotions, and suffer from higher levels of depression. It is true that the advantage of women in terms of happiness and life satisfaction is not uniform along the life cycle: women are less happy than men before the age of 18, happier than men afterwards and until their fifties, and less happy again thereafter. The positive gap in life satisfaction is not explained by women's situation on the labour market, their income, education, personality traits or other personal features or living conditions. On the contrary, women would have obvious reasons to be less satisfied with their life and their professional situation than men: they perform longer hours of unpaid work, receive lower wages and are still predominantly clustered into less prestigious occupations (Senik, 2015) <sup>[16]</sup>. Similar findings also made by Inglehart (2002) <sup>[7]</sup>, who observed that in almost every society, men have higher incomes, more prestigious jobs and more authority than women--all links with relatively high levels of subjective well-being. So women show low level of happiness than men.

Empirical data show a consistent disadvantage of women in respect to negative affect and subjective health: Women have higher rates of negative affect and depression and poorer subjective health than men (Nydegger, 2004). Mellner *et. al* (2006) <sup>[10]</sup> observed that the high workload of paid and unpaid work has been found to increase the risk of negative health outcomes among middle-aged women. Kim & Park (1989) <sup>[8]</sup> revealed that middle-aged women are primarily responsible for education of the children, family management and taking care of their parents, and burdened with ever-increasing roles and responsibilities, they suffer psychological distress such as dissociation, depression and anxiety. Andrade *et al.* (1999) <sup>[1]</sup> found that wives scored

more poorly than their husbands on various measures of subjective well-being. In particular, wives perceived poorer self-health and experienced greater negative affect than their spouses.

Zimmerman, *et al.* (2003) <sup>[17]</sup> stated that wives contribute more to child care than husbands, and wives also help more with the family organization. In general, women have a broader range of everyday tasks to complete than men. Men tend to have more specialized areas and are able to stay in their comfort zone. Grant-Vallone (2001) <sup>[5]</sup>, they suggested that employees who reported high levels of work-family conflict also reported lower levels of positive well-being.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Locale

The present study was conducted in Jaipur city of Rajasthan state.

### 2.2 Sample Selection

Total 40 organisations were selected for data collection, which are expected to meet out the objectives of the study i.e. such organisations 1) where a good number of females are working, 2) work has to be done as per the MNCs or large organisation management system, 3) where the employee is suppose to work hard to meet out their targeted work in stipulated time and 4) minimum working hours being 8 hours.

Five female respondents and their husbands were randomly selected from each organisation after acquiring the list of workers from the organisation. Those female respondents were selected who fulfil the study criteria. The study criteria was (1) nuclear family (2) husband-wife and at least one child living together (3) youngest child below 12 years of age and (4) husband – wife each having at least eight hours job period. Total 200 dual earner couples (200 wives and 200 husbands) were selected for the study.

### 2.3 Instruments

In the study, for assessing the subjective well-being of the dual-earner couples, the Subjective Well-Being Inventory (SWBI) developed by Sell & Nagpal in 1992 <sup>[15]</sup> was used. Subjective well-being conceptualizes positive and negative aspects of well-being as experienced by an individual. The Inventory represents the 11 factors or dimensions of well-being or quality of life. These 11 dimensions were further grouped into two categories i. e. positive affects (well-being) and negative affects (ill-being). The six dimensions i. e. general well-being - positive affect, expectation-achievement congruence, confidence in coping, transcendence, family group support and social support were included in positive affects and four dimensions i.e. inadequate mental mastery, perceived ill health, deficiency in social contacts and general well-being negative affect were included in negative affects and one dimension i. e. primary group concern was included in both positive and negative affects.

### 2.4 Research Design

This descriptive research encompasses a cross-sectional study with survey method was used.

### 2.5 Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed to the female respondents

in their working places after the permission of their managing director along with written and verbal instruction that explained the nature and scope of the study. Two sets of the questionnaire were distributed to each respondent, one to be filled by female respondents and other by male respondents i.e. their spouses. Respondents were requested to complete the questionnaire without discussing their responses with others. After few days questionnaire were collected by investigator.

## 2.6 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS 16.0 statistical tools. To analyze the status of subjective well-being of husbands and wives, numbers and percentages were used.

## 3. Results & Discussion:

### 3.1 Status of Positive Dimensions of Subjective Well-Being:

**General Well-Being – Positive Affect (GWBPA):** This dimension assesses feelings of well-being arising out of an overall perception of life as functioning smoothly and joyfully. Table-1 highlights that 64.5 percent husbands showed good status of general well-being positive affect as compared to 51.5 percent wives. While, 43.5 percent wives and 34.5 percent husbands show medium status of general well-being - positive affect. It indicates that husbands' score outweigh wives' score in general well-being - positive affect and husbands in dual earner families enjoy a higher level of positive affect. The reason is that in dual earner families' women still tend to perform more housework and family responsibility than men. This clarifies that increased levels of engagement in multiple roles are burdensome and increases strain among women and decrease their general well-being - positive affect. Similar findings were also made by Banga (1997) <sup>[2]</sup>, who revealed that working women with young children are experiencing role strain which is reflected in their low life satisfaction scores.

**Expectation - Achievement Congruence (EAC):** This refers to the feelings of well-being generated by achieving what one aspires or expects. Majority (64.5 %) of the husbands achieve good status of expectation congruence while 45.5 percent wives were in this category. Majority (49 %) of the wives and 33.5 percent husbands achieved medium status of expectation congruence. Wives scored less than their husbands on expectation-achievement congruence because Indian working women have dual responsibility of concentrating on the work as well as family responsibility. Due to dual responsibilities these women have not achieved up to their expectations in their life compared to their counterparts. These findings were supported by Philip (2010) <sup>[14]</sup>, who concluded that husbands enjoy a higher level of expectation-achievement congruence compared to their wives.

**Confidence in Coping (CIC):** This means the subjective perception of one's coping potential. The way one deals with stressors and strain depends to a great extent on the coping potentials and patterns of coping. Majority (57%) of the husbands showed good status of confidence in coping as compared to 44.5 percent wives. Majority (53 %) of the wives showed medium status of CIC. This indicates that

females have lower level of confidence in coping with strain as compared to their male counterparts. Philip (2010) [14] revealed that male spouses exhibited a higher level of confidence in coping compared to female spouses.

**Transcendence (T):** It refers to the feelings of subjective well-being derived from spiritual life and the sharing of

values. It was observed that majority 44.5 % wives and 38.5 % husbands show good subjective well-being in transcendence dimension. This indicates that wives experience higher feelings of well-being derived from spiritual life and sharing of values compared to their male counterparts.

**Table 1:** Gender differences between Status of Positive Dimensions of Subjective Well-Being (SWB) {N=400 (200+200)}

S. No.	Status of Positive Dimensions of SWB	Female (No. & Percentage)			Male (No. & Percentage)		
		Good	Medium	Poor	Good	Medium	Poor
1.	GWBPA	103 (51.5%)	87 (43.5%)	10 (5%)	129 (64.5%)	69 (34.5%)	2 (1%)
2.	EAC	91 (45.5%)	98 (49%)	11 (5.5%)	129 (64.5%)	67 (33.5%)	4 (2%)
3.	CIC	89 (44.5%)	106 (53%)	5 (2.5%)	114 (57%)	86 (43%)	0
4.	T	89 (44.5%)	84 (42%)	27 (13.5%)	77 (38.5%)	87 (43.5%)	36 (18%)
5.	FGS	59 (29.5%)	123 (61.5%)	18 (9%)	133 (66.5%)	66 (33%)	1 (0.5%)
6.	SS	105 (52.5%)	83 (41.5%)	12 (6%)	128 (64%)	70 (35%)	2 (1%)

*SWB- Subjective Well-Being, GWBPA- General Well-being Positive Affect, EAC- Expectation Achievement Congruence, CIC- Confidence in Coping, T- Transcendence, FGS-Family Group Support, SS- Social Support*

**Family Group Support (FGS):** It includes the positive feelings derived from the perception of the larger family as supportive, cohesive and emotionally attached. Majority of husbands (66.5 %) perceive a good status of family group support. While only 29.5 percent wives perceived good status of family group support. Majority (61.5 %) of the wives’ perceive medium status of family group support whereas 33 percent husbands were in this category. This indicates the perception of female spouses as having least family group support in dual earner families because of the major role played by wives in these families in homecare management and child rearing process. This could be due to the traditional sex role orientation of their husbands. In Indian society husbands generally do not involve in homecare management and child rearing process. Daalen *et al.* (2005) [3] concluded that as for the non-work related sources of social support, men receive more social support from their spouse, while women receive more social support from relatives and friends.

**Social Support (SS):** It measures the perception of the social environment as supportive in general, and in times of potential or existing crisis. Majority (64 % husbands and 52.5 % wives) of the respondents receive good social support. The findings of this table indicate that wives receive less social support compared to their male counterparts. This could be due to their restricted social interaction resulting from the increased family responsibilities. When family responsibilities are more, one does not get enough time for outside contacts and such a restriction will force one to receive less social support in times of crises as one's contacts are restricted. Husbands, in case of dual-earner couples receive more social support as their social interactions and social contacts are more than their wives.

**3.2. Status of negative dimensions of subjective well-being:**

**Primary Group Concern (PGC):** It includes the happiness or worry about the relationship with spouse and children. A

large number of respondents (64% wives and 44% husbands) showed a higher level in primary group concern (Table- 2). The primary group concern was lower among husbands than their wives. This could be due to the low level of involvement in family and domestic affairs by the husbands. Wives in Indian society involve more in domestic affairs and child rearing process and hence they are exhibiting a higher degree of concern about their relationship with spouse and children.

**Inadequate Mental Mastery (IMM):** This is measured by the extent of feelings of reduced well-being from a sense of insufficient control or inability to deal efficiently with life phenomena that are capable of disturbing the mental equilibrium. It was observed that 28.5 percent wives had higher level of inadequate mental mastery as compared to 7 percent husbands. Female spouses had higher level of inadequate mental mastery means poor mental health and poor subjective well-being due to heavy workload as compared to their husbands. Daalen *et al.* (2005) [3] stated that men reported better health and psychological well-being than women. Melchior *et al.* (2007) [9] concluded that men and women simultaneously exposed to high levels of work stress and family demands are at high risk of experiencing mental health problems, particularly depression.

**Perceived Ill Health (PIH):** It measures the worry over or suffering from physical complaints. Twenty one percent wives perceived more of ill health as compared to 1.5 percent husbands. However 66.5 percent wives and 69 percent husbands perceive less of ill health. It indicates that wives have a high perceived ill-health indicating a poor subjective well-being and more health problems compared to the male spouses. Women may report more health complaints because they receive less social support from different sources and experience more stress than men. Working women in the Netherlands and other European countries, report more health complaints than men, particularly stress-related illness and fatigue (Paoli & Merllié, 2001) [13].

**Table 2:** Gender differences between Status of Negative Dimensions of Subjective Well-Being (SWB) {N=400 (200+200)}

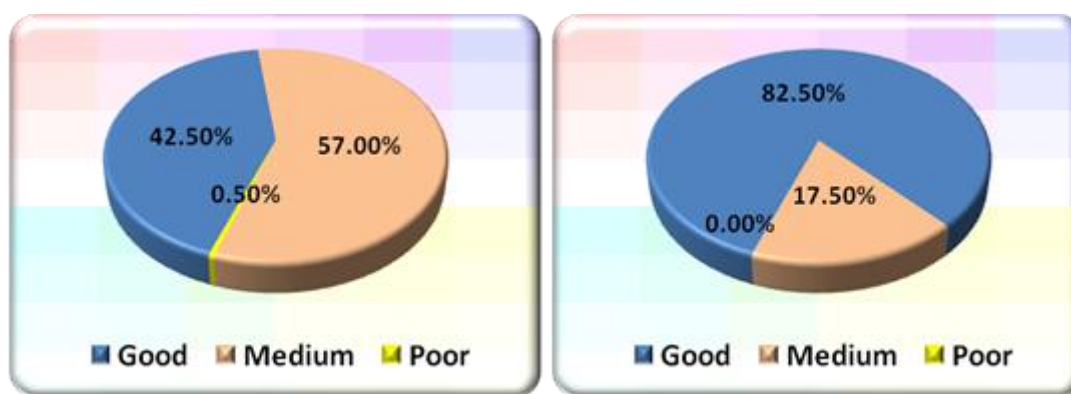
S. No.	Status of Negative Dimensions of SWB	Female (No. & Percentage)			Male (No. & Percentage)		
		Good	Medium	Poor	Good	Medium	Poor
1.	PGC	128 (64%)	66 (33%)	6 (3%)	88 (44%)	87 (43.5%)	25 (12.5%)
2.	IMM	57 (28.5%)	126 (63%)	17 (8.5%)	14 (7%)	140 (70%)	46 (23%)
3.	PIH	42 (21%)	133 (66.5%)	25 (12.5%)	3 (1.5%)	138 (69%)	59 (29.5%)
4.	DSC	97 (48.5%)	82 (41%)	21 (10.5%)	65 (32.5%)	83 (41.5%)	52 (26%)
5.	GWBNA	86 (43%)	96 (48%)	18 (9%)	44 (22%)	113 (56.5%)	43 (21.5%)

*PGC- Primary Group Concern, IMM- Inadequate Mental Mastery, PIH- Perceived Ill-Health, DSC- Deficiency in Social Contacts, GWBNA- General Well-being Negative Effect*

**Deficiency in Social Contacts:** It is assessed by measuring worries over missing a friend or being disliked, or over an inadequate social network. Majority 48.5 percent wives and 32.5 percent husbands perceived higher deficiency in social contacts. This indicates that wives had a higher deficiency in social contacts indicating low social contacts and poor subjective well-being as compared to the husbands. This could be due to the fact that working women have also wider social network outside their home and hence they do not worry generally over being disliked by a friend or missing a friend but working women may not find as much free time to maintain or regulate the social contacts as their counterparts due to their increased participation in homecare and domestic responsibilities.

**General Well-Being Negative Affect (GWBNA):** This refers to the negative feelings and depressed outlook on life. It was observed that 43 percent wives and 22 percent husbands experienced higher level general well-being negative affect. The scores of wives in general well-being negative affect were higher than husbands, it clarifies that husbands experienced a lower level of general well-being negative affect indicating a higher level of subjective well-being.

**Overall Subjective Well-being:** It was observed that majority (82.5 %) of the husbands’ showed good status of overall subjective well-being as compared to 42.5 percent wives. However 57 percent wives and 17.5 percent husbands had medium status of overall subjective well-being (figure-1).



**Fig 1:** Gender differences between overall Subjective Well-being

This indicates that female spouses showed a poor well-being compared to their male counterparts. The reason is that, Indian working women have dual responsibility of concentrating on the family and work. This leads to scarcity of time and energy which may put strain on them and affect their mental and physical well-being. Such findings are in agreement with those of Greenberger and O’Neil (1993) [6], who stated that men reported higher levels of well-being than women and women reported significantly higher levels of depressive symptoms, role strain and higher levels of anxiety than men. Miller *et al.* (2000) [11] concluded that males scored significantly higher on both physical and mental well-being than women, indicating better well-being among men.

**4. Conclusion**

It can be concluded that both spouses experiences good well-being but husbands experienced comparatively high subjective well-being than their wives. Husbands score high on five positive dimension i.e. general well-being positive

affect, expectation-achievement congruence, confidence in coping, family group support and social support dimensions of subjective well-being. It was a sign of good subjective well-being. This indicates that husbands perceive life as functioning more smoothly and joyfully compared to their wives because they do not have heavy burdens of family roles. Wives score high on transcendence (positive) dimension. This indicates that wives share more traditional values and lead a better spiritual life.

However, female spouses show high score on negative dimensions i.e. inadequate mental mastery, perceived ill health, deficiency in social contacts and general well-being negative affect dimension of subjective well-being. It was a sign of poor well-being. Wives have multiple responsibilities i.e. concentrating on the work and family. Due to multiple roles the number of problems and the type of problems confronted by the female spouses are difficult in terms of their solution and hence they have a lower level of SWB as compared to male spouses. Finally, the findings of this study



suggest that subjective well-being of wives was comparatively lower than their husbands.

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