Effects of Breadwinner Status on Marital Satisfaction: How Income Disparity Between Spousal Partners Affects Happiness

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**Abstract**

Previous research shows mixed results when it comes to the effect of the breadwinner status on marital satisfaction. Our purpose is to examine whether who has the higher income in a marriage, the man or the woman, has an effect on the reported marital satisfaction of the couple. Using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (2000), we examined this question. We found that who the breadwinner is has no effect on marital satisfaction. These results are encouraging for women who aspire to high-status, high-paying careers. Our findings indicate that women should not hold back from these aspirations on account of concern for jeopardizing their chances of marital satisfaction.

**Methods**

- Marriages in which the husband’s income exceeds his wife’s (N=542)
- Marriages in which the wife’s income exceeds her husband’s (N=1994)
- Marriages in which the husband’s income exceeds his wife’s (N=1994)

**Hypothesis**

We hypothesize that if the woman’s income is greater than that of her husband’s in a marriage relationship, they will be less satisfied with their marriage than those couples that adhere to traditional gender roles. Further, we hypothesize that these trends will be accentuated for marriages in which the wife’s income exceeds her husband’s. We also hypothesize that if the woman’s income is greater than that of her husband’s in a marriage relationship, they will be less satisfied with their marriage than those couples that adhere to traditional gender roles about breadwinner and caretaker status.

**Results**

In our first regression analysis, we tested “marital happiness”(Model 1) and found that the sex of primary breadwinner does not increase or decrease marital satisfaction a significant amount. We believe that this is an indication of the changing gender roles, and their societal norms. These results are encouraging for women who aspire to high-status, high-paying careers.

**Conclusions**

Our findings indicate that, contrary to our hypothesis, conformity to traditional gender roles about breadwinner and caretaker status does not affect marital satisfaction. In fact, the sex of primary breadwinner does not increase or decrease marital satisfaction a significant amount. We believe that this is an indication of the changing gender roles, and their societal norms. These results are encouraging for women who aspire to high-status, high-paying careers. Our findings indicate that women should not hold back from these aspirations on account of concern for jeopardizing their chances of marital satisfaction.