

Article

The Importance of Job and Family Satisfaction for Happiness among Women and Men in Different Gender Regimes

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Abstract: The family and the work place are two arenas of central importance for most adult people. Consequently, one can assume that the level of satisfaction with one's family life and job may be critical to one's level of happiness in general. However, there are reasons to believe that there are variations according to gender and gender regime. The general aim of this study is to analyse the relative importance of job satisfaction and satisfaction with family life for happiness among women and men in different gender regimes. Analyses are based on comparative data from the International Social Survey Program 2012. Results show that the level of satisfaction with family life appears more important to the general level of happiness than the level of job satisfaction. This is true for both women and men and in different gender regimes. However, the level of satisfaction with family life appears less important to men's level of happiness in countries representing a conservative gender regime. Another interesting related result is that the level of happiness appears generally lower among women living in a conservative gender regime.

Keywords: gender; gender regime; happiness; job satisfaction; life satisfaction; men; satisfaction with family life; women

1. Introduction

The family and the work place are two arenas of central importance for most adult people. The family often offers intimate relationships and love, which have major significance for people's wellbeing. The work place often offers daily activity, friendship relationships and a salary, which are also critical to peoples' ability to create good living conditions. Consequently, one can assume that one's level of satisfaction with the family life and job may be critical to the level of happiness in general. However, there are reasons to believe that the relative importance of job and family satisfaction for happiness in life may vary according to gender and context. Women have traditionally been more involved in family life, while men have been the main breadwinner, which can mean that the family is more important to women's happiness level and jobs more important to that of men. There are also reasons to believe that these gender differences are even more prominent in a conservative gender regime (where paid and unpaid work is more traditionally divided) than in an egalitarian gender regime (where paid and unpaid work is more equally divided). Therefore, it is of interest to study the relative importance of job satisfaction and satisfaction with family life for happiness among women and men living in different gender regimes.

1.1. Work, Family and Happiness

Many studies have noted the great importance of work in people's lives. The level of employment commitment is generally high among people, indicating that people are highly motivated to be engaged in working life. Studies show that the income is one motivating factor; however, many studies

indicate that there are also psychosocial benefits of being engaged in paid work [1,2]. The results indicate that having a job in most cases generates a feeling of collective belonging, meaningful and regular activity, daily social contacts, a social identity and pay, all of which are important for life satisfaction and wellbeing [3,4]. Losing one's job often means a loss of these functions, and, consequently, unemployment is in most cases related to decreased wellbeing and life satisfaction [5–9].

Studies also show that having a pleasant job that is perceived as meaningful is more important for people's wellbeing than a job that is not particularly enjoyable. This shows that not only having a job is important but also the experience of the specific job [8,10,11]. These results indicate that people who have satisfying jobs have a higher level of wellbeing and happiness than employed people who have low job satisfaction.

Close and intimate relationships are of major importance for people's levels of wellbeing and life satisfaction [7,10,12,13]. One of the most central arenas for developing intimate relationships is the family. Studies have shown that people who have a partner are generally happier and more satisfied than people living alone [5,14,15].

Additionally, in this case, the question is not only whether one has a family. Results indicate that the quality of family relationships is critical; people who are satisfied with their family life have a higher level of wellbeing than those who have a more negative experience of their family situation [11,16]. In fact, people in unhappy marriages seem to report a lower level of life satisfaction than people living alone [17,18]. This highlights the importance of the level of satisfaction in family life for the level of wellbeing and life satisfaction. People who are satisfied with their family life experience higher wellbeing and happiness than people who are less satisfied.

Happiness is used in this study as a measure of the relative importance of family and life satisfaction for the individual. The most commonly used definition of happiness is how satisfied overall the individual is with her own life [10]. This definition will also be used in this study.

1.2. The Meaning of Gender and Gender Regime

Family life has traditionally and to a large extent been the responsibility of women, and men have traditionally been more active on the labour market. This could mean that the quality of family life in general is more important to women's level of happiness and that job quality is more important to life satisfaction among men. However, there are large country variations in how paid and unpaid labour is divided between women and men. Different parts of Europe have been defined as representing different gender regimes [19,20].

The Nordic states are often described as representing an extensive and comprehensive policy context. Its characteristics include encouragement of independence, mainly through paid labour, in combination with universal social policy schemes. Family policy encourages female labour market participation, emphasises gender equality and women's independence from men and aims at enabling the combination of paid work and parenthood among both mothers and fathers. Although work is relatively traditionally divided, the division is less traditional than in most other parts of the world, which means that the Nordic countries can be characterised as representing a relatively egalitarian gender regime [19–24].

Among countries in central and southern Europe, there is great heterogeneity regarding the types of policies and welfare state arrangements and countries in central and southern Europe are most commonly categorised as two separate clusters; for instance the conservative cluster and the Latin Rim [25]. Despite this diversity among the countries in central and southern Europe these countries are generally characterised by more passive and less comprehensive family policies than the Nordic countries. There are fewer policy measures aimed at breaking up the traditional division of labour and the strengthening of women's independence from men. However, there is a development trend among most central and southern European countries towards similarity to the Nordic model. Although family policies have become more similar to the family policies in the Nordic countries, the southern European policies still primarily consist of support from the state for the male breadwinner

family; that is, families consisting of a full-time employed man and a woman shoulder the primary responsibility for housework and childcare. Consequently, the division of paid and unpaid work is more traditionally divided between men and women in central and southern Europe compared to, for instance, the Nordic countries [19,20,23,24].

The policy in eastern European countries (former Eastern Europe) has, on the whole, been characterised by a generous and interventionist social policy, which was based on the right (and to some extent duty) to full-time employment for both men and women. Also in this case there are significant differences between countries and the develop trends vary from country to country. For instance, in countries like Poland, Slovakia and Latvia there is little public support for parents while policies in Slovenia and Lithuania support continuous employment among women and active fatherhood [26]. However, comparative studies have shown that eastern European women and men in general are more likely to express a more traditional gender ideology than those living in other parts of Europe. This means that they are more inclined to support the idea that women should bear the main responsibility for the household while men should be the main breadwinners. The results also show that household work is generally and to a great extent divided according to a traditional gender pattern [27,28]. As a result, one can argue that countries in this part of Europe also represent a relatively conservative gender regime.

Countries classified as representing a liberal gender regime are often placed somewhere between the first cluster on the one hand and the second and the third on the other hand in studies of gender regimes. Attributes of the liberal or market-centred welfare state are means-tested assistance, modest universal transfers and a predilection for market-provided welfare. Even in this case, there are few state-financed family policy measures with the aim of facilitating continued work for mothers (and fathers; however, there are women who have the main responsibility for childcare). Liberal countries normally stress the importance of a strong work ethic among both men and women; however, paid and unpaid work still remain more traditionally divided than in the Nordic countries [19,23,24,27,29].

The above description of different gender regimes may mean that the relative importance of family life and jobs differs between women and men in a conservative gender regime but not in an egalitarian gender regime, where both women and men are relatively strongly engaged in both family and working life. If this is true, there may be a gender difference regarding the importance of job and family satisfaction for the general level of happiness in central, southern and former Eastern Europe but less in the Liberal and, especially, the Nordic countries.

In sum, research has shown that the levels of job satisfaction and satisfaction with family life are of major importance for the overall levels of life satisfaction and happiness. However, a question that remains is which of these two domains is most important to the general level of happiness. Based on the different levels of engagement that men and women traditionally have in these domains, it is also interesting to examine whether the level of satisfaction with family life is more important for women's happiness and whether job satisfaction is more important for the general level of happiness among men. Finally, in light of the different gender regimes that varying parts of Europe represent, it is interesting to study the meaning of job and family satisfaction for happiness in different gender regimes. Is there a gender difference regarding the meaning of job and family satisfaction in countries classified as representing a conservative gender regime but not in countries classified as an egalitarian gender regime? This leads us to the following aim and research questions.

2. Aim and Research Questions

The general aim of the study is to analyse the relative importance of job satisfaction and satisfaction with family life for the level of happiness among women and men living in different gender regimes. The following research questions will be analysed.

1. Is satisfaction with family life or job satisfaction more important for happiness?

2. Is satisfaction with family life more important among women and job satisfaction more important among men for the level of happiness?
3. Are gender differences regarding the importance of family and job satisfaction for happiness more prominent in a conservative gender regime than in an egalitarian gender regime?

3. Data and Variables

The study is based on data from the International Social Survey Program (ISSP). The aim of the ISSP is to assemble comparative statistics on attitudes and values in approximately 40 industrialised countries. Data consist of a representative sample of the adult population of each country (approximately 1000–2000 individuals per country). The ISSP investigations are conducted annually, and each investigation includes one in-depth theme that is replicated, allowing comparisons between nations as well as over time. The analyses are based on data from the module “Family and Changing Gender Roles” from 2012. For this study, 22 countries that represent different gender regimes are selected. The analyses include all respondents who are engaged in some type of paid work.

The dependent variable Happiness is measured by the question: If you were to consider your life in general, how happy or unhappy would you say you are on the whole? The response alternatives vary in seven steps from 7 “completely happy” to 1 “completely unhappy”. The independent variables job satisfaction and family satisfaction are measured by the questions: All things considered, how satisfied are you with your main job? All things considered, how satisfied are you with your family life? The response alternatives for both questions vary in seven steps from 7 “completely satisfied” to 1 “completely dissatisfied”. Gender is coded 1 for “women” and 0 for “man”. Possible interaction effects between gender and job and family satisfaction are measured by two interaction terms, gender*job satisfaction and gender*family satisfaction, in the multivariate analyses.

The multivariate analyses in Table 4 control for some of the variables that in earlier studies have been shown to be correlated to the level of happiness. Respondents’ level of education is measured by total years of schooling. Stage in life cycle is indicated by age (years). Family situation is indicated by whether or not the respondent is cohabiting/married.

In Table 1, a gender ideology index is used to measure gender attitudes within each gender regime. The index is constructed from six statements about attitudes towards gender—A working mother can establish just as warm and a secure relationship with her children as a mother who does not work—A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works—All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job—A job is all right, but what a woman really wants is a home and children—Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay—A man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s is to look after the home and family. The answers to the statements vary in five steps from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. They are strongly correlated to each other (Cronbach’s alpha 0.79) and are therefore summarised into a “gender ideology index” varying from 0 to 24; the higher the score is, the more egalitarian the gender attitudes are [30].

Countries’ categorisation in different gender regimes and numbers of respondents within each country are shown in Table 1. The Nordic cluster, representing an egalitarian gender regime, consists of Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark, including a total of 4599 respondents. Countries classified as representing a liberal gender regime are Canada, the United States, Great Britain and Australia, including a total of 3127 individuals. Countries representing a conservative gender regime are Spain, France, Switzerland, Austria and Germany (west and east), including a total of 5947 respondents. The final column in Table 1 includes countries from former Eastern Europe, including Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia and Bulgaria. The final category consists of a total of 4987 respondents and can also be seen as representing a conservative gender regime.

Table 1. Countries included in different types of gender regimes and number of respondents who are working.

	Gender Regimes			
	Nordic	Liberal	Conservative	Eastern
FI-Finland	804			
IS-Iceland	897			
NO-Norway	1089			
SE-Sweden	846			
DK-Denmark	963			
CA-Canada		599		
US-United States		814		
GB-GBN-Great Britain		590		
AU-Australia		1124		
ES-Spain			1538	
FR-France			1677	
CH-Switzerland			899	
AT-Austria			702	
DE-W-Germany-West			788	
DE-E-Germany-East			343	
PL-Poland				597
RU-Russia				856
SK-Slovakia				734
CZ-Czech Republic				1069
LT-Lithuania				628
LV-Latvia				597
BG-Bulgaria				506
Gender ideology index (mean)	16.84	14.26	14.13	11.55
N	4599	3127	5947	4987

In the penultimate row in Table 1, mean values on the gender ideology index for each category of gender regime are shown. Values are largely in line with what could be expected in light of what characterises the different gender regimes. The most egalitarian values are found among respondents living in the Nordic countries (mean 16.8) and the most conservative gender ideology is found among respondents living in countries belonging to the former Eastern Europe (mean 11.6). The mean values for the liberal and conservative clusters are 14.3 and 14.1 respectively, indicating that there is a marginal difference between these two clusters of countries. Based on these figures and the discussion about different gender regimes in the introduction, the Nordic cluster of countries represent a typical egalitarian gender regime, whereas especially the former Eastern Europe represent a typical conservative gender regime. The liberal cluster and countries belonging to the former Eastern Europe are between these two extremes.

It is of course complex to analyse statistics generated from comparative surveys. First, the framing of questions and attitudes is context dependent, which means that certain questions may be understood and interpreted differently in different national contexts. Therefore, the results must be interpreted with caution. Second, there are some differences between the studied countries regarding sampling, representativeness and response rates. However, the respondents are weighted to ensure that the samples correspond to comparable sources of statistics in each country. This means that the samples should be nationally representative.

4. Results

In this section, the main aim and research questions will be analysed. The analyses are structured as follows. First, the relationships between happiness and the independent variables job satisfaction and satisfaction with family life will be analysed. This will be followed by an analysis of the relationships between these variables among women and men living in different gender regimes.

The final part of this section will show multivariate results of the relationships between the general level of happiness and the independent variables measuring job satisfaction, family satisfaction, gender (and interaction terms of gender and job satisfaction/family satisfaction), education, age and marital status in different gender regimes.

The relationships among the general level of happiness and the independent variables job satisfaction and satisfaction with family life among all the respondents included in the study are shown in Table 2. The mean values on happiness indicate that the higher the levels of job and family satisfaction are, the higher the level of happiness is. People who are completely dissatisfied with their jobs have a mean of 4.47, whereas people who are completely satisfied with their jobs have a mean of 6.01 on the happiness scale. The mean values follow a similar pattern regarding the relationship between satisfaction with family life and happiness and vary from 3.50 to 6.15. The eta value is 0.42 regarding job satisfaction and 0.63 regarding family satisfaction, which indicates that satisfaction with family life is somewhat more important than job satisfaction for the level of happiness.

Table 2. Job satisfaction and family satisfaction by happiness.

	Job Satisfaction			Family Satisfaction		
	Mean	N	Eta	Mean	N	Eta
Completely dissatisfied	4.47	165		3.50	83	
Very dissatisfied	4.75	289		3.74	154	
Fairly dissatisfied	4.69	988		4.12	661	
Neither dissatisf nor satisf	4.81	2211		4.44	1470	
Fairly satisfied	5.18	7351		4.97	5633	
Very satisfied	5.64	5487		5.62	6892	
Completely satisfied	6.01	2008		6.15	3185	
			0.42			0.63
Total	5.32	18,499		5.33	18,077	

Table 3 illustrates how job satisfaction and satisfaction with family life are correlated with happiness among women and men in different gender regimes. The results for the entire sample confirm the results in Table 2 showing that there is a weaker correlation between job satisfaction and happiness (0.40) than between family satisfaction and happiness (0.63), and this is true for both men and women. This pattern is also more or less similar in the different gender regimes.

There seem to be a somewhat weaker correlation between job satisfaction and happiness and a somewhat stronger correlation between family satisfaction and happiness in the Nordic cluster compared to the other gender regimes. There are also indications that job satisfaction is more strongly correlated to happiness among men than among women in the Nordic countries and among women than among men in the liberal countries. In the conservative cluster and countries in former Eastern Europe, there seems to be a tendency in which family satisfaction has a weaker correlation with happiness among men than among women. These relationships are further analysed in Table 4.

Table 3. Job satisfaction and family satisfaction by happiness among men and women in different gender regimes (Pearson).

	Job Satisfaction	Family Satisfaction	N
All			18,499
Happiness	0.40 **	0.63 **	
Men	0.40 **	0.61 **	
Women	0.41 **	0.65 **	
Nordic			4568
Happiness	0.35 **	0.65 **	
Men	0.37 **	0.65 **	
Women	0.33 **	0.65 **	
Liberal			3111
Happiness	0.42 **	0.63 **	
Men	0.40 **	0.63 **	
Women	0.44 **	0.63 **	
Conservative			5895
Happiness	0.41 **	0.60 **	
Men	0.40 **	0.57 **	
Women	0.42 **	0.62 **	
Eastern			4925
Happiness	0.40 **	0.61 **	
Men	0.40 **	0.58 **	
Women	0.41 **	0.64 **	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In Table 4, relationships among job satisfaction, satisfaction with family life, gender and happiness in different gender regimes are analysed using OLS-regression. With the aim of further investigating whether there is an interaction effect between gender and job satisfaction and between gender and family situation, interaction terms constructed from these variables are included. All the analyses control for education, age and marital status.

Table 4. OLS-regression. Job satisfaction, satisfaction with family life and gender by happiness in different gender regimes (b-coefficient).

	All	Nordic	Liberal	Conservative	Eastern
Constant	1.989	1.488	1.422	2.240	2.486
Job satisfaction	0.188 ***	0.182 ***	0.187 ***	0.197 ***	0.176 ***
Family satisfaction	0.445 ***	0.524 ***	0.530 ***	0.403 ***	0.379 ***
Gender	−0.161 *	0.114	0.316	−0.299 **	−0.385 **
Gender*job satisfaction	−0.002	−0.007	0.001	−0.006	0.005
Gender*family satisfaction	0.032 **	−0.011	−0.048	0.057 **	0.062 **
Education (years)	0.003 ***	0.006 *	0.001	0.002 *	0.009 **
Age	−0.004 ***	−0.005 ***	−0.001	−0.006 ***	−0.008 ***
Cohabiting/married	0.072 ***	0.134 ***	0.082 **	0.113 ***	−0.023
R ²	0.438	0.463	0.452	0.416	0.428

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.005$, * $p < 0.05$.

The first column in Table 4 shows b-coefficients measuring the relationship between the dependent and independent variables for the total sample. Both job and family satisfaction are again strongly related to happiness, and the coefficient is higher for family satisfaction (0.445 versus 0.188). Gender is significantly negative related to happiness, which means that women are experiencing a lower level of happiness than men. There is no significant relationship between happiness and the interaction

term of gender and job satisfaction; however, gender*family satisfaction is significantly positive related to happiness. This means that family satisfaction is more important for the level of happiness among women than among men. Education is positively correlated with happiness; the more years of schooling one has, the higher one's level of happiness is. Higher age means a lower level of happiness, and cohabitants/married couples are significantly happier than singles.

The next four columns in Table 4 illustrate the results for the four different clusters representing different gender regimes: the Nordic, liberal, conservative and eastern clusters of countries. The level of family satisfaction is more strongly correlated with happiness than job satisfaction in all the gender regimes. Among the conservative and eastern clusters, gender is significantly negatively correlated with happiness, indicating that women have a lower level of happiness than men in the countries classified as representing a relatively conservative gender regime. The interaction term between gender and job satisfaction is insignificant in all the gender regimes, meaning that there is no difference between women and men regarding the meaning of job satisfaction for happiness. However, the interaction term gender*family satisfaction has a significant relationship to happiness in the conservative and eastern European clusters. This indicates that family satisfaction is more important for happiness among women than among men in these contexts but not in countries classified as representing a more egalitarian gender regime.

Education is significantly related to happiness in all the clusters of countries other than the liberal cluster. The same pattern is found for age, which is significantly negatively correlated with happiness in all the clusters other than the liberal one. Cohabiting/married people are happier than singles in all the clusters of countries other than the eastern European cluster.

5. Conclusions

The results from this study show that the level of satisfaction in family life appears more important to the general level of happiness than the level of job satisfaction. This is true among both women and men and among people living in different gender regimes. However, the level of satisfaction in family life seems to be of less relative importance for men's level of happiness in countries representing a conservative gender regime than in countries representing a more egalitarian gender regime. Another interesting related result is that the level of happiness appears generally lower among women living in countries classified as representing a conservative gender regime.

The result showing that the level of satisfaction with family life is more important for the general level of happiness than the level of job satisfaction is perhaps no surprise. This result may be explained by the fact that the family often offers intimate and close relationships that in many cases are lifelong and therefore have been shown to be more important for the individual than relationships to work mates, which can be more temporary and shifting [7,13]. Based on the differences in responsibilities between women and men—where women often have a greater responsibility for family life and men are more engaged in working life—one could expect that job satisfaction would be more important among men and that family satisfaction would be more important among women for the level of happiness. However, no such general gender differences were found.

Nevertheless, the results supported the idea that the level of satisfaction with family life appears more important for happiness among women than among men living in countries classified as representing a conservative gender regime. No such gender difference was found in the Nordic and liberal gender regimes. These results may be explained by the fact that women are more strongly involved in family life and men much less so in a conservative regime than in a more egalitarian gender regime [19,20,23,24]. As a result, the level of family satisfaction can be more important for women than for men in a conservative regime. In light of these results, one could expect that job satisfaction would be more important for men than for women in countries representing a conservative gender regime; however, no such pattern was found. One reason for the fact that men do not seem value job satisfaction more than women in a more conservative context can possibly be explained by the fact that women who value work less are less often employed in such a context.

In sum, this study confirms the results from other studies that the quality of intimate relationships, such as relationships within the family, are of major importance for people's level of happiness [7,10,12,13]. However, the results from this study indicate that there exist gender differences in contexts characterised by a relatively conservative gender ideology and division of labour. The quality of family relationships seems to have different meanings for women and men in such a context. In contrast, in a more egalitarian context, characterised by attitudes that are more egalitarian and a division of work that is more gender equal, there is no gender difference regarding the importance of family life satisfaction for the level of happiness. Another interesting related result is that women's level of happiness seems to be lower than men's level of happiness in a conservative gender regime. This may be an indication that it is more beneficial for women to live in countries representing an egalitarian gender regime than in countries representing a conservative gender regime.

It has to be noted that there of course are a number of other factors, both structural and individual, that are related to the level of happiness that not have been included and discussed in this study. There are for instance major differences between countries regarding the levels of happiness, explained by for instance differences in living standards and social policies. With some exceptions, the levels of happiness are relatively high in countries classified as representing a Nordic and liberal welfare regime and relatively low in countries in southern and former Eastern Europe [14]. Other individual factors that are not included in this study, but have shown to be related to the level of happiness, are labour market status, if there are children or not in the household, work-family balance, health status, victim of violence, and so on [5,14,17,31]. Therefore, there is a need for further studies analysing how the levels of satisfaction in family and working life relate to happiness in varying settings and under control for other independent variables that are not included in this study.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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