

Life Satisfaction of Married Women: Working Women Vs. Housewives

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Abstract:

Marriage has been a primordial practice that spans societies and cultures globally, affecting men and women differently. Women's role in society has undergone a drastic – being a housewife has almost gone out of fashion and being a working woman has become the new trend. However, despite the sense of independence and freedom that working women enjoy, there has been a noticeable change in the subjective well-being (SWB), life satisfaction and happiness of women. The two main theories regarding life satisfaction: bottom-up and top-down theories are explored briefly. Several factors including marital satisfaction, employment satisfaction, spouse satisfaction and parental satisfaction have an overall influence in the happiness level of a married woman's life. Moreover, the idea that a woman's ultimate freedom lies in the labor market is challenged as well – several studies show that some housewives have a greater life satisfaction than married working women. However, there are yet other sources that suggest the subjective well-being of a married women lies beyond the income of the household but the context of where they live is also important, such as the economic standing of the country.

Keywords: Life Satisfaction, Married Women, Working Women, Housewife

Introduction

According to the 2019 Compendium on Gender Statistics of Pakistan, out of the 73.11 million women in Pakistan aged 15 years and above, 63.08% of them are currently married (Pakistani Bureau of Statistics, 2019). The concept of life satisfaction is based on one's perceived assessment regarding the extent to which one feels content with his/her own life. It is well accepted that a low level of life satisfaction could directly and negatively influence the experience of one's life course, health, work performance, and social development (Huang et al., 2018).

A nation's objective standard of success may incorporate factors such as lowering taxes, increasing income, decreasing crime rates, declining unemployment rates etc. to overall influence the quality of life of each of its citizens – however, they have a weak connection with the people's own subjective self-satisfaction with their lives (Sousa & Lyubomirsky, 2001). Cognitive evaluation is done in the light of what people aspire to have and the life they are presently leading (Paschali, 2010). Life as a whole or its specific domain should be evaluated (Huebner, 2005).

The most important theories regarding life satisfaction are split into two approaches: Bottom-up approach and Top-down approach (Headey, Veenhoven, & Wearing, 1991). Bottom-up theory advocates that an individual's overall life satisfaction is a product of the satisfaction they experience in different domains within their lives, for example at work, in relationships, with friends and family, level of health and personal development etc. Top-down theory, on the other hand, states that an individual's overall life satisfaction influences how satisfied they feel in the various domains of their life (Schimmack et al., 2002). Which of these two theories is more accurate is debatable, however, these theories present that overall life satisfaction and level of satisfaction in various domains of one's life are closely related and dependent upon each other (Ackerman, 2018).

Ferree's (1976) study on the effects that doing housework and working outside one's home have on the level of women's satisfaction with their life put forths the argument that women who were working outside their homes were much more satisfied with their lives when compared with the ones staying home and looking after their families (Ferree, 1976). However, the study failed to discover any differences that were steady or

suggestive in the level of life satisfaction in both the groups. Wright also advocated that “employed women do not differ from homemakers in their level of satisfaction” (Wright, 1978).

Marital Satisfaction

Marital life is the primary medium through which families are built and future generations raised (Larson & Holman, 1994). Any family structure, regardless of the type, depends upon the quality of the relationship that exists between the couple (Sayehmiri et al., 2020). Numerous studies have been conducted which claim that that married people are much happier and more satisfied with their lives in comparison to people who are single, divorced or separated (Mookherjee, 1997).

One way to define marital satisfaction would be to refer to it as a mental state which reflects the benefits and costs of the marriage as the individual perceives them. The more the costs, the lower the levels of marital satisfaction but the higher the benefits, the higher will be the levels of marital satisfaction (Stone & Shackelford, 2007). A study conducted by Craddock showed that a higher level of marital satisfaction could be witnessed in the couples that were much more flexible and compatible with each other as compared to couples whose marriages were rigid and chaotic (Craddock, 1991).

Marital satisfaction, as a whole, is affected by various aspects of the marital relationship of a couple; which includes happiness, commitment, sexual and emotional satisfaction, adjustment, integrity, happiness etc (Bashiri et al., 2016). To say that a couple has achieved marital satisfaction means to say that their marital relationship is consistent with their expectations of marriage (Janati Mehrdad & Leila, 2010). Extensive research has been done on how marital satisfaction varies according to the duration of the couple’s relationship with differing results. Some studies show that over time, marital satisfaction declines (Blood & Wolfe, 1961). While some suggest a decrease in marital satisfaction in the early years with a gradual increase witnessed later (Rolins & Feldman, 1970). On the other hand, some studies indicate that there is, in fact, no substantial change in marital satisfaction over time (Bossard & Boll, 1955).

Most researchers agree that marital satisfaction is positively influenced through the presence of effective communication between the couple. According to maintenance and relational characteristics study done in 2002, the probability of couples feeling happier, more committed to their relationship and satisfied in their marriage is higher in those couples who make an effort to maintain their relationship through good communication and handling conflicts together (Canary, Stafford, & Semic, 2002).

Some researchers suggest that the occurrence of frequent conflict within a relationship is an indicator of low relational satisfaction (Lloyd, 1990). On the other hand, other researchers suggest that the level of marital satisfaction can be predicted through the intensity of the conflict (Janicki, Kamarck, Shiffman, & Gwaltney, 2006).

According to Roloff and Ifert (2000), management of a conflict in an effective manner within a relationship has the ability to increase the perceived level of satisfaction (Roloff & Ifert, 2000). Avoiding conflicts can be a source of greater satisfaction in relationships (Rands, Levinger, & Mellinger, 1981) but the constant emergence of demand and withdrawal patterns can ultimately result in a lowering in the levels of marital satisfaction (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000).

Job Satisfaction

Taking Edwin A. Locke’s, a renowned American psychologist, definition – job satisfaction is a “pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (Locke, 1976).

More research has shown that higher life satisfaction is connected with variables including higher career satisfaction, organizational commitment, and especially, job satisfaction, which not only affects the employee’s performance but their happiness as well (Diener & Tay, 2017).

There are three hypotheses which have been derived with the aim of explaining the relationship between job satisfaction and life satisfaction. These include: the segmentation hypothesis, the compensation hypothesis and the spillover hypothesis (Rain et al., 1991; Heller et al., 2002; Bowling et al., 2010). The segmentation hypothesis developed by researchers claims that job satisfaction and life satisfaction are not related to each other and have no considerable influence upon one another (Rain, Lane, & Steiner, 1991). According to the compensation hypothesis, people tend to look for satisfaction, which they lack in their jobs, in other aspects of their lives. Similarly, the hypothesis also states that the same is true for life satisfaction - whatever satisfaction people lack in their lives, they tend to compensate for it in their jobs (Iris & Barrett, 1972). On

the other hand, the spillover hypothesis claims that there exists a positive relationship between the levels of job and life satisfaction (Steiner & Truxillo, 1987).

In a 2017 study, Yazicioğlu and Kubilay found a positive relationship between the participants' job satisfaction and life satisfaction levels. They illustrate that "as job satisfaction level increases life satisfaction level increases and as life satisfaction level increases job satisfaction level increases" (Yazicioğlu & Kubilay, 2017).

Another study revealed similar results, that "life satisfaction and career satisfaction are positively associated both within and across time" – meaning career satisfaction and life satisfaction show a positive influence from both, top-down and bottom-up perspectives (Hagmaier, Abele, & Goebel, 2018).

Spouse Satisfaction

When it comes to relationships, especially marital relationships, the nature, and economic basis of the spouse can be a profound influence in altering the life satisfaction of the married woman. Researcher Frederike Esche particularly backs this claim up in their 2020 study which reveals that unemployment has a significant impact on the life satisfaction of both partners. There is a certain 'spillover effect' too, where the job loss of both partners affects the other partner, however, in the case of the woman losing her job, the husband faces lesser effects of a lowered life satisfaction than in the inverse situation (Esche, 2020).

A report given by Stavrova (2019) attempts to discover and uncover a connection between life satisfaction and the longevity of life. One of the factors that forms this connection is said to be observed in the spouse's behaviour and support in influencing the health and happiness of their partner (Stavrova, 2019). The study showed that spousal life satisfaction projected longevity of life as greatly as an individual's own life satisfaction – revealing that the individual alone does not determine their mortality, and in turn their life satisfaction, but the spouse has an equal such effect (Stavrova, 2019).

Parental Satisfaction

Few studies tackle the concept of parental satisfaction that is concerned with not only the child or adolescent but also its effect on the parents themselves. In a 2019 study by Lee and Lee, this subject is precisely breached. The study finds that parenting attitude has a significant effect on the life satisfaction of both the parents and their adolescents – positive parenting, especially when the household is at a lower income level, shows more effects on the life satisfaction of the parents (Lee & Eunmi, 2019).

German psychologist, Matthias Pollmann-Schult, investigated the factors which underlie parenting and its impact on each parent's life satisfaction levels. His findings led him to conclude that both parents and non-parents were standing at similar levels of overall life satisfaction as observed during his studies conducted from 1994 to 2000. Pollmann-Schult makes a surprising find in his 2014 study that shows parenthood significantly and permanently boosts life satisfaction, when taking into consideration the cost of children (Pollmann-Schult, 2014).

Furthermore, the study reveals that men and women react differently to the cost of children; men were mainly affected by the financial aspect whereas women were affected by time as well as the financial costs. The father, especially when the mother is not working, experiences greater pressure to overcome the financial cost for their children – while the mother experiences suppressed levels of happiness when there are changes in the time cost of children, since parenthood encompasses the women's working and private life more than the men's (Pollmann-Schult, 2014).

On the converse, he also suggests that the positive aspects of having children and the positive influence of children on an individual's life satisfaction may be suppressed because of the negative influences such as financial burden, the effect of the presence of children in the parents' sex life, lack of time for one's own self, constantly worrying about, caring for and earning for their kids without remembering their own needs and wishes etc. Pollmann-Schult also finds that parents within his studies experienced a decline in their life satisfaction levels as their first or only child grows up. He stated that this decline could be a result of a decrease within the emotional benefits that accompany parenthood (Pollmann-Schult, 2014).

Working Woman vs. Housewife

On the global level, a study through the World Value Survey showed that there was no considerable difference in happiness levels of working and non-working married women belonging to low- and high-

income economies. However, divergence appeared when the population came to middle-income economies, including seventeen countries. Housewives were happier than full-time working women but not happier than part-time working women (Beja, 2012).

A key political determinant of subjective well-being (SWB) is “emancipation” from the market (Radcliff, 2001). Political scientists have shown that being a commodity in the marketplace makes people unhappy (Lane, 2000). In a 2013 Pakistani study, Arshad, et al. used the Satisfaction with Life Scale developed by Ed Diener, et al. to measure and compare the subjective well-being of married women in Faisalabad and Islamabad. Their research showed that working women experience greater life satisfaction in Faisalabad than non-working women – in Islamabad, however, the converse was true (Arshad, Gull, & Mahmood, 2015).

In a 2020 study, Torosyan and Pignatti conducted for observing the happiness of working and non-working women of South Caucasus region, they had significant results. They concluded that working women in Armenia and Azerbaijan were significantly less happy than their housewife counterparts (Torosyan & Pignatti, 2020).

To explore the reasons behind how housewives and even part-time working women are happier than those women who work full-time, a cross sectional survey in 2006 was conducted in the Family Practice Centre, Agha Khan University Hospital, Karachi, Pakistan. The extensive research was aimed at analysing the impact of working status on women’s lives. Although the study revealed that a lot of women were happy to be working due to the various advantages, i.e. financial benefit, sense of independence, children having better prospects etc. they did, however, acknowledge the fact that it was difficult for them to manage the responsibilities of both home and work which led to increased mental stress (Waris, Shahan, Salma, & Syed, 2008).

Conclusion

Marriage is considered an integral social institution of the human life by many, and the practice of marriage is observed to have lasting effects on one of the most essential elements of human mentality – happiness with one’s life. Women make up half of the global population and investigation what impacts their subjective well-being after marriage reveals several underlying socio-economic factors in various aspects of life. Exploring bottom-up and top-down approaches to life satisfaction, considering the relationship between marital satisfaction, job satisfaction, spouse satisfaction and parental satisfaction against a woman’s life satisfaction sheds light on the numerous ways a working married woman’s satisfaction with her life differs from a non-working married woman. The subject at hand is not fully transparent; some studies suggest married working women show greater levels of happiness due to greater economic dependence while other studies conclude housewives are happier because they did not have to bear the financial burden or the additional stress that comes with balancing work and home life. However, employment or lack thereof are not the sole reasons that have effect on a married woman’s life satisfaction – the communication and sustainability of marriage, dependency levels on the spouse and the financial and time cost of their children do have a slight, if not significant, impact on their subjective well-being. Thus, along with marital satisfaction, the relationship between both spouses, employment level of the spouse and the wife, the weight of parenting, all have a hand in altering the life satisfaction of the married woman. Further studies are urged to uncover the limitations and discover methods to overcome the problem of declining life satisfaction for married women. It is important to highlight this topic as it helps generate an insight on the subjective well-being of married women and the objective qualities that surround their life satisfaction levels.

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