

# Women's subjective well-being declined

## Wharton researchers found women's happiness has decreased since the 1970's

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Economic equality does not always guarantee happiness, according to two Wharton professors.

In their paper entitled, "The Paradox of Declining Female Happiness," Business and Public Policy professors Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers compared changes in the levels of women's happiness with those of men in light of changes in economic equality since the 1970s.

The results suggested that the happiness of women has declined both absolutely and relatively to the happiness of men over the past several decades despite increased economic equality for women over the years.

According to the study, there is evidence for growth in women's objective well-being since the 1970's. For example, the wage gap between men and women has partially closed, female labor force participation has greatly increased and the opportunities for women outside of marriage abound.

Despite these changes in women's equality, subjective happiness - women's self-assessments of their actual happiness - seems to have decreased, with the exact reason still unknown.

Wolfers said that he and Stevenson outlined several different possible reasons for this decline within their paper, adding that there was no single over-arching cause to the trend because specific causes affect certain groups of women differently.

For example, the decline in women's happiness might have resulted from women feeling too overwhelmed by having responsibilities both at home and in the office.

Stevens and Wolfers also theorized the apparent drop in female subjective well-being was due to inconsistent measures of subjective happiness.

Furthermore, the study theorized that the gender differences and changes could have occurred because the expectations for women today are much greater than they were in the seventies.

In the seventies, women may have been more satisfied fulfilling the role of homemaker since it was one of the few opportunities women were allowed to have, the article suggested.

Today, however, women may feel dissatisfied that they have not met the many new expectations created by the women's movement.

Rising College sophomore Alison Lai said she found the study's results surprising.

Since women have been granted more opportunities, Lai said she expected that they would feel happier with their equality with men.

Lai added that she believed women's increased duties could explain the decrease in happiness.

"Along with the new opportunities come excess responsibilities in addition to the ones already established, such as housekeeping and childbearing," she said.

Despite the inability to find a clear explanation for the phenomena, Wolfers said he hopes the study will be useful to policy makers interested in gender differences or in assessing public policy.

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