

Just why are women unhappier than men?

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Unhappy days: Only 22 per cent of women are 'happy'

On the face of it, women have gained much over the last few decades - careers, greater independence and a chance to make an impact on the world.

But as their choices and opportunities have increased, their happiness seems to have diminished, according to a survey.

The findings emerged from one of two major surveys into happiness. Both teams of researchers came to the same conclusion - that women, in general, are unhappier than men.

These results are a dramatic aboutface on the results from four decades ago, when women were more content with their lot.

The scales are thought to have tipped in men's favour because they have learned to relax more and work less - while women work at least as much today as they did in the Sixties.

The first study was the work of husband and wife economists Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers at the University of Pennsylvania.

They said that in 1976, 16 per cent of men were satisfied with their lives.

This has increased to 25 per cent today, according to their survey.

But the number of women who are happy has stayed at 22 per cent.

Miss Stevenson said: "Thirty or 40 years ago, women were happier because they probably had narrower ambitions. They compared themselves to each other and not to men.

"Now women are more competitive and more ambitious. But it seems it doesn't make them any happier."

Miss Stevenson said that a female business school student had summed up the dilemma women face.

The student said her mother's goals in life were to have a beautiful garden, a well-kept house and well-adjusted children who did well in school.

"I sort of want all those things, too," said the student. "But I also want to have a great career and have an impact on the broader world."

The second study was carried out by Alan Krueger, an economist at Princeton University in New Jersey.

He analysed surveys on time-use taken since the Sixties and discovered that men have gradually cut back on activities they find unpleasant.

But over the same period, women have simply replaced housework with paid work, and are doing different tasks over the same amount of time.

Forty years ago, a typical woman spent 23 hours a week on activities she considered "unpleasant", which was 40 more minutes than a typical man.

Today, she still spends 23 hours a week on unpleasant chores, but men spend only 21 1/2 hours - so the gap has widened to 90 minutes.

Mr Krueger said: "Women now have a much longer to-do list.

"They can't possibly get it all done, so many end up feeling as if they are somehow falling short."