

# Progressive gender views may protect health of financially dependent men

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As it becomes more common for women to be the breadwinner of their family, men's health may be affected depending on their views on gender ideology, according to Penn State researchers.

The researchers found that men who were financially dependent on their wives and who also had more traditional beliefs about gender roles tended to have higher "allostatic loads," or wear and tear on the body as the result of stress.

Men who had more "egalitarian" or progressive views about gender seemed to be protected from this effect.

Joeun Kim, a doctoral candidate in sociology and demography, said the results—recently published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family*—are an example of how gender equality can benefit men as well as [women](#).

"In a lot of discussions about gender equality, men are often left out of the conversation," Kim said. "But it's not just about women, it's about true equality across gender. Men are also bearing the burdens imposed by society, for example, the pressure to be the family breadwinner. We know that men tend to die earlier than women, and this research speaks to how we can help improve [health measures](#)."

The researchers said that while men being the main breadwinner of the family is an enduring social norm in the United States, the percentage of women earning more than 50% of their household's income rose from 16% in 1981 to almost 30% in 2017, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Previous research has found links between threats to masculinity and increased stress, which the researchers said could have myriad effects on [health](#). While a former study also found connections between male unemployment and stress, the researchers were curious about whether men's financial dependency on women would have a similar effect.

The researchers used data about 348 heterosexual males who were married to or cohabitating with women. Data was collected on the [men's health](#) and ideologies about gender, as well as details about the households' income. Ideologies were measured by asking the participants how much they agreed with the statements "men should equally share housework" and "men should equally share child care."

Saliva, blood and [urine samples](#) were also used to calculate the participants' allostatic load, which Kim explained is a biological indicator of wear and tear on the body that happens as a result of chronic stress.

"Previous studies have found that if you going through adverse experiences like poverty as a child, you have higher allostatic load as an adult," Kim said. "It's measured through several biomarkers, and combining that information gives you an allostatic load score. It's helpful to have biological data, because men often underreport their symptoms in health studies."

After analyzing the data, the researchers found that there was no general association between men having partners who make more money than they do and a higher allostatic load. But, when the researchers took into account the men's beliefs about gender roles, they found that more traditional views were linked to higher allostatic load.

"This may speak to the implications that female breadwinning may be threatening in a way that could potentially impact health, depending on a

person's ideas about [gender roles](#)," Kim said. "When we talk about [gender](#) equality, I think it's important to remember to include men in the discussion, because these issues affect them, as well."

Kim said that because studies have shown that higher allostatic load can contribute to the development of chronic diseases such as diabetes, [coronary heart disease](#), dementia and higher mortality risk, future research could explore ways to reduce these risks.

**More information:** Joeun Kim et al, Men's Economic Dependency, Gender Ideology, and Stress at Midlife, *Journal of Marriage and Family* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/jomf.12615](https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12615)

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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