

The level of satisfaction with life in Spain is marked by household financial capacity

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In recent decades, Spain has undergone rapid social changes in terms of gender equality, despite, as a result of the Franco dictatorship, starting from a more backward position than most European countries. This

process is hampered by the economic downturn that began in 2008, underlining the importance of the economic context in the development of gender inequality levels. Little attention has been paid in academia to how this gender revolution is associated with factors related to individual wellbeing.

A study by Jordi Gumà, a researcher at the Department of Political and Social Sciences and member of the UPF Sociodemography Research Group (DEMOSOC), together with Bruno Arpino, a researcher at the University of Florence (Italy), explores the association between the subjective level of [satisfaction](#) with life and the degree of relative participation by women and men in terms of providing [financial resources](#) to the household and performing domestic chores among the partnered adult Spanish population.

"When no [financial difficulties](#) are reported, it seems that gender behavior in the home environment has less influence on individuals' levels of [life satisfaction](#), whether men or women, than in homes with [financial problems](#)."

Following their research, published in *Revista Internacional de Sociología*, the researchers (who separate the analysis of the public and the private spheres to capture the effects differentially) conclude that the level of satisfaction with life is marked largely by household financial capacity: "When no financial difficulties are reported, it seems that gender behavior in the home environment has less influence on individuals' levels of life satisfaction, whether men or women, than in homes with financial problems," the researchers assert.

Furthermore, the results reveal that there would be a situation of tension between the social context and inherited values (with an imbalance between gender values, far more egalitarian, and the end practices observed) would affect the levels of individual wellbeing.

The research methodology analyzes Spanish samples from the European Social Survey (ESS) of 2004 and 2010 together, in which questions about family, work and wellbeing were introduced. The various analyses have been carried out independently according to sex, in order to identify possible differences between men and women. The sample was restricted to partnered individuals, within the 25-59 years age bracket.

The researchers state that the relative contribution to [household income](#) and the performance of household chores "has a significant effect on life satisfaction in the specific case of people with financial difficulties." This effect shows that the gender profile in households that report having financial difficulties is far closer to the traditional one. However, significant differences were found between men and women.

The overall situation of the household determines women's satisfaction

With regard to women, the researchers found that "their satisfaction with life is defined mainly by the overall situation of the household, beyond their own situation in terms of their relative contribution to income and relative time spent on household tasks." That is, it is their position within the private sphere that has the greatest impact on the values of life satisfaction in respect of women in Spain.

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Among women who report not having financial difficulties (reaching the end of the month adequately or comfortably), the authors observe a positive relationship between their levels of satisfaction and time spent on household tasks: the greater their dedication, the higher their level of satisfaction. This pattern is exactly the opposite in the case of women

who report having financial difficulties, whereby the greater their dedication to household tasks, the lower their satisfaction.

According to the researchers, one possible explanation is that more solvent households would be more able to hire paid services to perform household chores, so that although these women spend more time on household tasks than their partners, the actual number of hours allocated may be less than those who report having financial difficulties, and neither does this mean that there is parity with men. In fact, if we look at the average number of hours spent on such tasks, the figure is significantly lower among women with greater economic power.

Men's satisfaction with life is marked by their individual situation

In the case of men, the authors found significant differences in the level of satisfaction with regard to their relative contribution to the family budget. In the context of households with financial difficulties, men who report contributing more to total family income display higher levels of satisfaction than those who report contributing less than their partners.

According to the researchers, "being the main provider of material resources to the household is associated with values of satisfaction in the group of men in households with financial difficulties, while among men who report not having financial difficulties, being the main contributor does not seem to give them an extra boost to their levels of satisfaction."

In the context of households with financial difficulties, men who report contributing more to total family income display higher levels of satisfaction than those who report contributing less than their partners.

The same applies in the case of participation in household tasks, where

significant differences were only observed, again, in men with financial difficulties, who reveal that devoting less time than their partners to household tasks is a situation associated with higher levels of satisfaction.

In consequence, according to the researchers, unlike the case of [women](#), Spanish men's life satisfaction is determined to a greater extent by their individual situation, beyond the characteristics of the household as a whole. This suggests that, in this particular group of men, their position within the public sphere continues to set their perception of satisfaction with life.

More information: Jordi Gumà et al, Satisfacción con la vida según la contribución a la esfera pública y privada en las parejas españolas adultas, *Revista Internacional de Sociología* (2021). [DOI: 10.3989/ris.2021.79.1.19.045](#)

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