Breadwinning, Main-earning and Subjective Wellbeing

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Abstract
Previous literature has found a negative association between the woman's contribution to the couples' total incomes and subjective wellbeing for both women and men. Despite female-breadwinner couples tend to be poorer than other couple types, the mediating effect of absolute incomes on subjective wellbeing has not been tested yet. This contribution aims to fill this gap using longitudinal data from the Understanding Society for the period 2009-2016 for Britain. We also study wellbeing effects of couples' earning arrangements and whether and how subjective wellbeing of women and men in dual-earner couples changes after transitioning to a single-earner couple, depending on the gender of the single earner. Our findings suggest that gender differences in subjective wellbeing by couples' relative incomes disappear when couple-fixed effects are accounted for. Women in male breadwinner (MBW) and female breadwinner (FBW) households are less satisfied with their lives compared to dual earners. We find that income mediates the relationship between breadwinning and wellbeing: while men are generally less satisfied with their lives in FBW households compared to men in other earning arrangements, men in FBW at the top of the couples' income distribution are as satisfied with their lives as men in other couples. Furthermore, we find that becoming a single-earner couple does not affect a woman’s subjective wellbeing when she becomes non-employed, instead, it lowers men’s subjective wellbeing when he becomes non-employed.