

# The Association Between Reported Relationship Satisfaction and Financial Well-Being in Married Couples



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## Introduction

- Is there a correlation between wealth and happiness? Within a country, household wealth has been shown to improve individual well-being by providing a safety net of protection against negative income shocks, by allowing current and expected consumption flows, and by its potential use as a collateral (Senik, 2014).
- While the association between individual wellbeing and financial stability, measured through subjective well-being measures, has been well established in the literature, less is known about the interplay of financial well-being in marriages and reported relationship satisfaction.
- Researchers agree that financial problems are a primary stressor for couples (Britt, S.L., Huston, S.J. 2012).

## Research Questions

- Is there a relationship between individuals who report less difficulty paying bills (the individual or their spouse) and reported happiness within their relationship?
- Does the association between financial difficulty within relationships (falling behind on bills) and relationship satisfaction differ amongst different levels of socio-economic status?

## Results

### Univariate

- 50.86 % of the participants or their partner experienced difficulty paying their bills.
- 58.47 % of the participants reported being not too happy in their relationship.
- The largest group was in the middle level socio-economic status group (levels 4-7 making up approximately 59.4% of respondents).

### Bivariate

- Chi-Square analysis showed a strong statistically significant relationship between reported relationship happiness and falling behind on bills,  $\chi^2 = 41.039$ , 1 df,  $p < .001$ .
- OR = 1.567(1.366-1.797). An odds ratio of 1.567 for those who struggled to pay their bills on time in their relationship indicates a higher likelihood of not being happy in their relationship.

### Multivariate

- As seen in the bivariate analysis, financial difficulties (OR=1.436, CI=1.244-1.657,  $p < .001$ ) are related to greater relationship unhappiness after controlling for SES
- Individuals from middle and upper SES groups are significantly less likely to report "not too happy" as opposed to the lower status. Middle: (OR = .7048,  $p < .001$ ) Upper: (OR=.5644,  $p < .001$ )

## Methods

### Sample

- Young adults (grades 7-12) in the United States who were followed over time. There are two time points, wave one - in their adolescence and wave five - in their late 30s/early 40s. They were drawn from the U.S. National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health (ADDHEALTH).
- ADDHEALTH is a nationally representative sample of over 20,000 adolescents; Wave one, taken during the 1994-95 school year and Wave five, taken in 2016-2018. Data from the project have been analyzed in thousands of publications in peer-reviewed journals. It is largest most comprehensible longitudinal survey of adolescents ever taken.

### Measures

- Social, behavioral, environmental, biological, and retrospective childhood questions were all collected through in person interviews and **Computer-Assisted Personal Interview Systems (CAPI)**.
- Relationship satisfaction - "How are happy are you in your relationship?" Responses were categorized in three levels: 1- very happy, 2- fairly happy, 3- not too happy
- Financial status relating to their partner -- "In recent years, many people have experienced financial difficulties and even trouble paying their bills, especially since the 2008 economic recession. Since 2008 did you or your spouse fall behind on paying your bills?" Responses were categorized in two levels: 0- no, 1-yes
- Socio-economic status (SES) - "Think of a ladder representing where people stand in the U.S. At the top (Step 10) people who have the most money and education. At the bottom (Step 1) are the people who have the least money and education. Where do you think you stand?" Responses were categorized in 10 chronological levels reflecting their estimation of this question.

## Discussion

- Individuals who struggle financially, such as falling behind on bills, report less relationship satisfaction.
  - With the additional variable of different SES levels, the relationship between financial issues and reported happiness is less pronounced as you increase SES.
- Further research with additional variables is needed to determine how financial difficulties in relationships interacts with other moderating factors.
  - Confounders such as age, culture, education, length of the relationship and substance habits could potentially add nuance to these findings.
- Implications of these findings could help promote the teaching of financial literacy within marriage counseling, and enhancing access to financial support could help mitigate the negative impacts of finance on relationships.

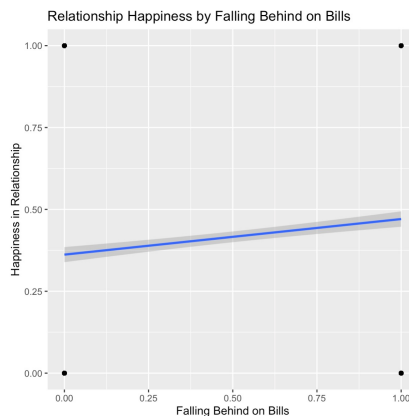


Figure 1. Happiness in Relationship (0=not happy, 1=happy) by Falling Behind on Bills (0=no, 1=yes)

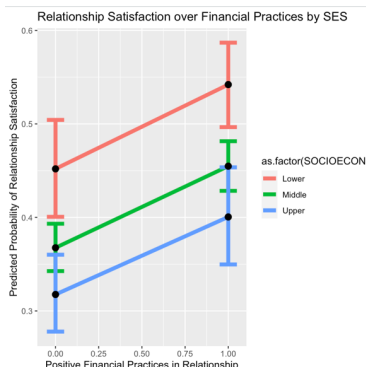


Figure 2. Relationship Happiness over Financial Practices by Socio-Economic Status

Britt, S.L., Huston, S.J. (2012). The Role of Money Arguments in Marriage. *J Fam Econ Iss* 33, 464-476. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10834-012-9304-5>

Gudmundsdottir, D. G. (2013). The Impact of Economic Crisis on Happiness. *Social Indicators Research*, 110(3), 1083-1101. <http://www.istor.org/stable/24719093>

Senik, C. (2014). Wealth and happiness. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 30(1), 92-108. <http://www.istor.org/stable/43664595>