

Family time increases parents' wellbeing, especially couple time

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Time spent together in families significantly contributes to mothers' and fathers' happiness when compared to being alone, shows new research from a UCL academic. The research also finds that couple time spent alone without children contributes to the largest increase in wellbeing.

Published today in *Sociology*, the study analyzes data from 236 couples who participated in the 2014-2015 United Kingdom Time Use Survey and finds that fathers often reported enjoying family time more than mothers do. The parents, who were born in the 1980s with a median age of 35, were asked a series of questions about what they did with their time and how much they enjoyed it.

The activities parents were asked to rate their enjoyment of were: Paid work (including education and commute), personal care (including sleep), [childcare](#), eating, unpaid work (domestic work), leisure (including TV, sports, reading, and voluntary), travel, and other activities.

The activities were rated on a scale of 1-7 for enjoyment, with paid and unpaid work being the most disliked, and sleep and leisure (e.g., watching TV) being reported as the most enjoyable activities.

Study author Dr. Giacomo Vagni (UCL Institute of Education) said, "Family time and time alone with children contributes significantly to mothers' and fathers' well-being. However, couple time spent without the children has the most positive effect on parents' daily happiness.

"Part of the reason for this increased happiness comes from the activities that families do together such as reading or playing games, however even just being together as a family is significantly associated with daily well-being. This demonstrates the importance of face-to-face interactions for happiness."

The study highlights that the time fathers spend with their children plays an important role in shaping their well-being, and fathers are negatively affected by not being with their children on weekends.

The findings show that fathers have more leisure time than mothers on

weekends, even when families are together. On weekdays during family time, mothers do an average of 38 minutes of childcare compared to 29 minutes for fathers, and on weekends, they do 70 minutes of childcare compared to 57 minutes for fathers.

Dr. Vagni explained. "Interestingly, we found that fathers enjoy family time more than mothers do. This can be explained by the division of labor at home, with mothers doing more housework during their 'family' time.

"When we account for the unequal distribution of chores, the difference in enjoyment between mothers and fathers disappear[s]. The study highlights how mothers still bear a disproportionate share of domestic and care work and even when families are spending time together."

The study also shows how important connectedness between family members is and how this influences people's moods. "What the partner is doing, even when not together, has a significant impact on the other partner's mood. Partners and [parents](#) are profoundly interconnected in not just what they do but also how they feel and therefore a partner's enjoyment of a situation is one of the most important predictors of a person's own enjoyment," said Dr. Vagni.

"The study clearly shows that, beyond what families are doing, being together is a source of enjoyment. This fact has interesting ramifications because, as in the case of childcare, the findings show that the activity of childcare negatively affects enjoyment, while the presence of [children](#) positively affects it."

The author notes there are some limitations to the study in that the findings show the "average" effect of family time of wellbeing. Despite these limitations, the author says the study makes important contributions to the study of [family](#) interactions, gender inequality and

subjective well-being.

More information: Giacomo Vagni, From Me to You: Time Together and Subjective Well-Being in the UK, *Sociology* (2021). [DOI: 10.1177/00380385211033147](https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385211033147)

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