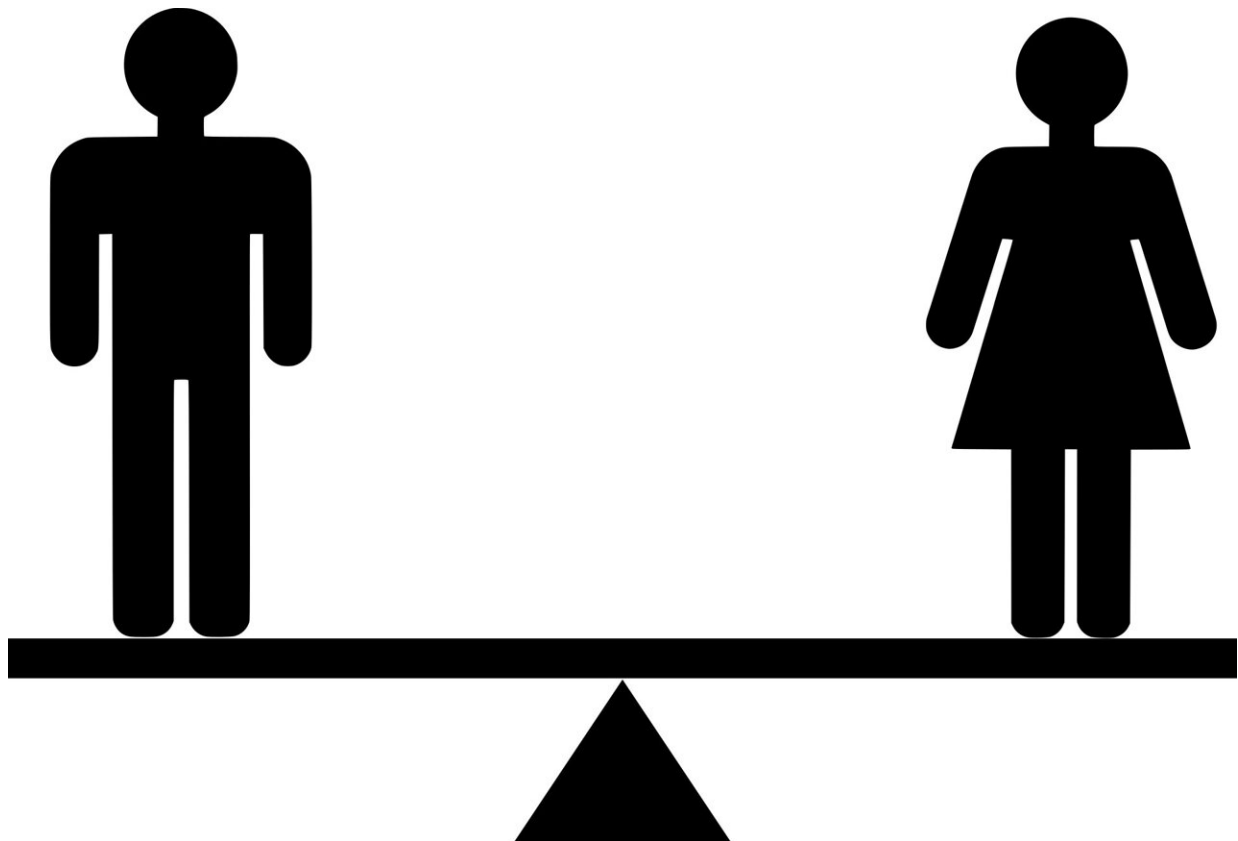


Distinct sex differences persist in countries with higher standards of living, finds study

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Psychological gender differences persist in countries with improved living conditions, according to a study [published](#) in *Perspectives on Psychological Science* by researchers from Karolinska Institutet. Some

differences become larger and others smaller as women seem to benefit more than men from improved living conditions. The findings confirm to some extent the so-called gender paradox.

Whether or not psychological differences between the sexes increase or decrease with improved living standards has been a topic of debate, with some scholars arguing that the differences are less in more equal societies. However, earlier studies have demonstrated greater differences between the sexes—a phenomenon that has been termed the equality paradox.

In their paper, the researchers show that some differences increase while others decrease and conclude that even if living standards improve, we should expect distinct differences between the sexes to persist.

"Our study shows that the pattern of men's and women's strong and weak sides is the same regardless of age, place, or living conditions," says the study's first author Agneta Herlitz, professor of psychology at the Department of Clinical Neuroscience, Karolinska Institutet. "Some sex differences in personality, [negative emotions](#) and certain cognitive functions are greater in countries with a higher standard of living. But it's important to point out that we can't establish any causality."

The study was conducted in two parts: a [systematic review](#) of 54 published articles and the researchers' own analyses of 27 large-scale studies and meta-analyses. In both analyses, they examined the correlation between a number of psychological sex differences and indicators of a country's living standards (e.g., GDP and equality indices).

Women exhibit a higher degree of altruism

Their results show that sex differences in personality, [verbal skills](#),

[episodic memory](#) and negative emotions are even larger in countries with higher standards of living. In terms of verbal skills and episodic memory, it seems that women benefit from the better conditions and increase their lead over the men. Additionally, they exhibit a higher degree of attributes such as altruism and cooperative ability, but also the occurrence of negative emotions.

"The men also demonstrate greater cognitive skills in countries with higher standards of living, but at the same time, the improvement observed for women is greater, which can mean that women are disadvantaged in countries with lower standards of living," says Professor Herlitz.

At the same time, the researchers found smaller differences between men and women in [sexual behavior](#), partner preference and math. Here, the women's behavior approaches that of the men in terms of thinking about and having sex more often and making freer choices of partner. Regarding math, the men's lead has shrunk somewhat in countries with improved living standards.

"We can't say at the moment that these changes are driven by equality more than economic conditions," Professor Herlitz continues. "Even though our study reveals no explanation for the differences, previous research has shown that [women](#) seem to derive more benefit from [higher standards](#) of living than men."

More information: Agneta Herlitz et al, A Systematic Review and New Analyses of the Gender-Equality Paradox, *Perspectives on Psychological Science* (2024). [DOI: 10.1177/17456916231202685](https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916231202685)

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