Improving American Men's Quality of Life by Economically Empowering American Women

Margot Rosenblatt
Scripps College

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarship.claremont.edu/scripps_theses

Part of the American Politics Commons, Behavioral Economics Commons, Econometrics Commons, Growth and Development Commons, Income Distribution Commons, Labor Economics Commons, Political Economy Commons, and the Women's Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
Rosenblatt, Margot, "Improving American Men's Quality of Life by Economically Empowering American Women" (2024). Scripps Senior Theses. 2387.
https://scholarship.claremont.edu/scripps_theses/2387

This Open Access Senior Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Scripps Student Scholarship at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scripps Senior Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact scholarship@claremont.edu.
IMPROVING AMERICAN MEN’S QUALITY OF LIFE BY ECONOMICALLY EMPOWERING AMERICAN WOMEN

by

MARGOT L. ROSENBLATT

SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

PROFESSOR NOVY
PROFESSOR VAN HORN

APRIL 23, 2024
A personal story: my mother grew up in a tumultuous household with an alcoholic father whose economic fortunes rose and fell with the stock market. My grandmother took matters into her own hands by defying 1960s societal norms for housewives and going to college to get a degree in library science. Her income as a librarian kept her family afloat in hard times. It also gave my grandmother an important sense of freedom — she could leave if she really wanted to, and my grandfather knew that. My grandmother’s income was also a boon for my grandfather because he no longer had to worry about being the family’s sole provider. Far from emasculating him, it freed him, and later in life, it helped pay for his substantial hospital bills. It also taught my mother the value of education and economic freedom, which she passed on to me. True masculinity means doing what’s best for your family, and I believe my grandfather showed that by supporting my grandmother’s career wholeheartedly from its conception to the end of his life.

Abstract: In this paper, I explore the relationship between women’s economic empowerment and men’s quality of life in the United States. I created an index of women’s economic empowerment based on county-level data on labor force participation rates, rates of pay, teen birth rates, and families in which a woman is the primary income earner. I then created an index of men’s quality of life based on financial, physical, and mental health indicators. Adjusting for income, dominant industry type, age, population density, race variables, and environmental factors, I found a statistically significant positive correlation between women’s economic empowerment and men’s quality of life. This gives credence to the idea that giving women more economic opportunities improves the lives of men.
**Background**

It is easy to ignore the problems of men in America because many groups “have it worse.” No matter what, American men are in crisis and require the attention of sympathetic researchers and policymakers. It is crucial that we pay attention to what actually helps men. In this study, the effect that women’s economic empowerment has on men is examined. While this thesis makes conclusions as to the effect of women’s empowerment on men, it is an exploration of the data, not an argument one way or the other.

Economically, social mobility for American men has become harder to achieve (Lu, 2020), but the ethos of the “American dream” gives them absolutely no excuse for their constant inexplicable failure. This is especially true for white men because they are always told how easy life is for them when in reality, it is anything but. As a result, hopelessness is an epidemic.

Male anguish has also led to the rise of influencers who make the problems worse by convincing men that depression is not real (Horowitz, 2024) or “redpilling” them into thinking that an easily marketable toxic distortion of masculinity is the only viable metric of their worth (Usher, 2022).

Men try to achieve what the influencers tell them is “success,” but then the political left chastises them (POLITICO, 2023). To be born male, especially a white male, is like the modern original sin — men have to apologize and repent forever for the incident of their birth. At least Christians get some instruction on how to overcome the moral failings of their creation; modern men get little instruction on how to “be better,” creating completely understandable frustration with devastating consequences.
Men, especially white men, are killing themselves at the highest rates in decades. In the United States, approximately 35,000 men die by suicide each year, or one every 15 minutes (Whitley, 2021). This epidemic is silent, with 60% of victims having no documented mental health conditions (Fowler et al., 2022). This feeling of utter hopelessness has also contributed to the opioid crisis (Graham, 2019) and the ever-climbing number of mass shootings (Brucato et al., 2021).

As the world ignores them, many American men have congregated around women’s empowerment as a major reason behind their problems. One could make the case that the rise of women in the workplace has coincided with the fall of economic patriarchy — that is, as women flooded into the labor force, it became progressively harder for men to get ahead in the rat race or even make decent living wages as labor supply increased.

Much research exists on the alleged zero-sum game of women’s empowerment and men’s high quality of life on the international stage. For example, Audette (2019) studied the effect of gender equality on life satisfaction in developed nations, especially in the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and several European countries. It found that gender equality correlates with “life satisfaction” quite strongly. This is just one of several global studies that have looked at the correlation between gender equality and happiness and found similar results (Ermiş-Mert, 2023; Ferrant et al., 2017; Özlem, 2016; Qian, 2017).
While there is a strong correlation between gender equality and “life satisfaction,” it does not imply causation. More spending power boosts life satisfaction, which then frees up time and opportunities for women. Nobel Prize-winning economist Claudia Goldin showed that as rich countries get richer and wages rise, females—particularly married women—are more likely to enter the labor force at the margin (Goldin, 1995). Conversely, as poorer countries get richer and wages rise naturally, females are more likely to drop out of the labor force. This is due to the substitution effect — the opportunity cost of not working is too steep when wages are high—women make so much more money working that it tips the scales. For this reason, more wealth may be the cause of women’s increased economic empowerment, not the other way around.

The problem with an international focus on women’s empowerment’s effects on men is that American male struggles are economically and culturally unique. Also missing from these studies is a specific focus on men instead of the quality of life for everyone. This is not inherently bad, but it is important to focus on men’s experiences because they are so often ignored. Past research also takes a very wide view of “gender equality,” including controversial metrics such as reproductive rights and attitudes toward female sexuality. This study is meant as a bare-bones check of whether women in the workforce hurt men or help them.

Several compelling arguments exist to explain why more women in the workforce may hurt men. Microeconomic theory stresses the basics of supply and demand in the labor market, suggesting that an influx of female workers causes a glut of labor that drives its price (wages) down. This theory seems to match reality; as women entered the workforce in the early 1970s (Yellen, 2020), wages stagnated even as productivity grew extremely fast (Shambaugh & Nunn, 2017).
Another line of reasoning suggesting that economically empowering women harms men is that women receive special treatment in professional or educational settings due to gender inclusion initiatives. As a result, men lose opportunities while women’s fortunes increase.

A popular claim is that economically empowered women no longer need providers, which can be demoralizing to men. It gets worse if it seems society favors women over men. Men are once again trapped in a catch-22 wherein success means being the provider for their families but striving for such a goal makes them “sexist.” In this way, men can only be successful if they are sexist. Or, if men choose the feminist route, they can never be truly successful according to masculine conventions. Economically empowering women may trap men in this impossible choice, hurting them in the long run.

Without a need for male providers, women may leave their relationships with men. Single and divorced men are statistically more at risk for depression (Whitley, 2021a). Being promoted dramatically increases women’s chances of divorce, but the same is not true for men (Folke & Rickne, 2020). However, getting top jobs is just a tiny fraction of women’s economic empowerment. Some research suggests that more female labor market participation actually decreases divorce rates (Yilmaz, 2022).

It is arguable that working prevents women from staying at home and fulfilling their roles as mothers and homemakers. This forces men to take on more household chores, making them more
tired and miserable. It also may negatively affect kids, who get less attention from two working parents than they would with a stay-at-home mother.

The saying goes that “a rising tide lifts all boats,” and thus, there are several strong arguments that women’s economic empowerment leads to better quality of life for men; more women in the workplace and positions of power increases the availability of qualified workers, improving the labor force and bolstering the economy (Audette, 2019). Similarly, working women bring in more money for their families than if they had stayed out of the market. While money does not buy happiness per se, it does buy better health care and reduces stress for all genders. More money also comes with increased investment in future generations, which then improves the quality of life in perpetuity. Research from the International Monetary Fund found that adding women to a male-dominated workplace increases productivity more than adding the same number of men. The study suggests that men's and women’s skills complement each other, so increasing women’s economic empowerment leads to more wealth and well-being for men (Lagarde & Ostry, 2018).

**Methodology**

**Women’s Economic Empowerment Index (WEEI)**

The Women’s Empowerment Index (WEEI) is a rating out of 100 points for each county in the United States. It is based on women’s labor force participation rates, the percentage of families headed by women, the pay gap between men's and women’s median incomes (shown as a percentage of men’s median income), and teen birth rates. Labor force participation rate is the
most direct measure of women’s economic empowerment; for this reason, labor force participation rates had twice the weight of any of the other indicators, which were evenly weighted. Because each indicator comes as a percentage of the county population, I multiplied each percentage by the number of points in its category. Labor force participation rates were out of 40 points, and the other three indicators were out of 20, with a perfect score equal to 100 points.

Women’s labor force participation rates, the percentage of families headed by women, and the percentage of men’s average wages that women receive are all positive measures where a higher number indicates more empowerment. Teen birth rates are an important indicator to include because they indirectly show the level of economic and career opportunities perceived by women. More babies at younger ages show that women do not see a bright future for themselves and therefore are less careful about potentially throwing away future opportunities. To keep this consistent, I used one minus teen birth rates in the WEEI, effectively using data on the percentage of babies not born to teen mothers.

The highest score went to Banner County, NE (82.62), and the lowest score went to Loving County, TX (33.08). The average score was 64.73.

**Men’s Quality of Life Index (MOQLI)**

The Men’s Quality of Life Index (MQOLI) consists of 13 factors chronicling physical health (6 factors), mental health (5 factors), earnings (1 factor), and juvenile detention rates (1 factor) in
each American county. Some of the indicators could be put in multiple categories, but I separated them for simplicity. All factors are equally weighted, and a perfect score equals 100.

I calculated physical health in the MQOLI using the percent of people in fair or poor health, the average percent of the year taken up by physically unhealthy days, the preventable hospitalization rate, life expectancy, the percentage with access to exercise opportunities, and the percentage with access to healthy food. The first four of these indicators are listed such that a lower number is better, so to keep consistency in the MQOLI, I counted them as one minus (indicator), making a higher number show better health.

I incorporated mental health factors in the MQOLI, such as the percentage of the year taken up by mentally unhealthy days for the average person in each county, the percentage of people getting insufficient sleep, the percentage prone to excessive drinking, the percentage of frequent mental distress, and the age-adjusted suicide rate. Although I use cirrhosis death statistics in other parts of my analysis, it is not included in the MQOLI because the data is sparse and mostly captured by data on the percentage of the population prone to excessive drinking. Under mental health, I also included juvenile arrest rates, which indirectly capture kids’ perceptions of their future. Kids take more risks doing illegal activity if they have less to lose in their future, indicating a lower quality of life. I calculated the preventable hospitalization rate, life expectancy, and death rate as percentiles, with the lowest number represented by 0% and the highest at 100%. All indicators for which lower numbers are preferable were transformed into one minus (indicator) so that a higher score corresponded to a higher quality of life for men.
With the exception of men’s median earnings, these measures are not gender-specific due to limited data availability. However, many of these chosen statistics skew towards men. For example, men commit 80% of suicides in the United States (CDC, 2023), so suicide rates are a good metric for men’s mental health. Similarly, alcoholism affects more men than women, with 13% of adult men suffering from an alcohol use disorder compared with 9% of adult women (CDC, 2024). Men are also likely to binge drink more and more often than women (CDC, 2024). Males also make up a majority of juvenile arrests; in 2020, males accounted for 80% of all youth arrests for violent crimes in the United States, 92% of murder arrests, and 88% of robbery arrests (Ryan & La Vigne, 2022). For health indicators, I purposely excluded obesity rates because they lean toward women; it is not as large of a problem for men (Cooper et al., 2021).

I calculated earnings using men’s median income in each county. Income was weighted by percentile, with the lowest number at 0% and the highest at 100%.

The highest score went to Los Alamos County, NM (88.98), and the lowest score went to Foard County, TX (52.52). The average score was 75.27.

**Adjustments**

The relationship between men’s quality of life and women’s economic empowerment is influenced heavily by several outside factors, especially wealth, education, environment, and age.
I control for income levels because higher-income families can afford to have a parent stay at home doing unpaid household labor, affecting labor force participation rates. Similarly, in poorer areas, women need to work more to keep their families afloat. To account for this, I controlled for per capita income and federal food stamp assistance to balance out the influence of wealth and poverty on my model.

Education is an important factor affecting both men's and women’s income and health (Virginia Commonwealth University, 2015). These are important indicators in both the WEII and MQOLI. I controlled for education levels using data on high school diplomas and GED holders in each county. I chose to exclude data on a four-year college education because its effects were already picked up by other factors in the model, such as income.

Race variables are also heavily correlated with health and economic opportunities, affecting any conclusions about women’s empowerment and men’s quality of life. Not only do women of color face intersectional challenges in their struggle for economic equality, but many types of data are likely to be skewed by racial bias, such as suicide reporting and juvenile arrest rates. For this reason, I controlled for the percentage of the population that are people of color. I also controlled for segregation because it correlated with income and health variables. I did not control for specific ethnic and racial groups because their effects were so similar and instead consolidated them into one “nonwhite” variable.

I also controlled for the type of industry prevalent in each county because some industries are male-dominated, such as mining (90.6% men) (Zippia, 2024), construction (93.8% men)
(Construction, n.d.), and agriculture (66% men) (NCFH, n.d.). These industries may prevent women from doing as much work as men by nature of the type of work available to them. I adjust for the percentage of each county’s economy made up of these three industries. Similarly, population density could affect several variables; in highly dense areas, there are more people to report crime and often more economic opportunities than in rural areas. Economic opportunities are also different, like less agriculture and more construction in urban areas.

I also considered elevation because studies suggest that the lower oxygen concentrations at high altitudes can influence moods, cognition, and depression levels, affecting men’s quality of life indicators (Heinrich et al., 2019).

Because the MQOLI is heavily based on physical health, I adjusted for men’s median age in each county because health declines with age, inflating negative health indicators. Age is also generally correlated with income, an important factor in men’s quality of life.
Results and Discussion

Fig. 1: Women's Economic Empowerment and Men's Quality of Life

\[ y = 0.3995x + 48.68 \]
### Table 1: Effect on Men’s Quality of Life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Coefficient (Error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Economic Empowerment Index (WEEI)</td>
<td>0.064 (0.015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Capita Income</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Population in Poverty</td>
<td>-0.351 (0.012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of the Population with less than a High School Diploma or GED</td>
<td>-0.125 (0.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population Density (per square mile)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Economy Made up of Male-Dominated Industries</td>
<td>0.007 (0.011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Population that are People of Color</td>
<td>0.032 (0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segregation Index</td>
<td>0.029 (0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Male Age</td>
<td>-0.18 (0.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Population less than 18 Years of Age</td>
<td>-0.199 (0.019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elevation (feet)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>85.574 (1.605)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of observations</td>
<td>2038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-Squared</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1 plots the relationship between WEEI and MQOL. We can see a positive correlation. While the graph suggests a positive relationship between WEEI and MQOL, we want to control for other factors that might influence MQOL in order to assess the true impact.

Table 1 presents the results when controlling for income, education, population density, industry type, racial diversity, and age. We still see a positive correlation between the WEEI and MQOL. When women’s economic empowerment increases by one point, men’s quality of life increases by 6.4 percent.

Other standout variables in this model were socioeconomic; of all the factors tested, the percentage of the population in poverty showed the greatest effect on men’s quality of life. However, per capita income had no measurable effect, meaning that outside of poverty, the impact of wealth on men’s quality of life balances out between the rich and the poor.

The percentage of the population with less than a high school education was another very important factor negatively affecting men’s quality of life. Poor education, especially primary education, is tied deeply to poverty, especially generational poverty. I anticipated this result given that poverty affects financial, physical, and mental health, three of the main factors used to determine men’s quality of life.

Although people of color in the United States tend to be poorer than white Americans, the model indicated that counties with higher racial diversity also have a higher average quality of life for men. However, segregation also showed a positive impact on men’s quality of life, indicating
that a more racially diverse county with more segregation correlates to a higher quality of life for men. This is unexpected because predominantly non-white counties have far higher poverty rates than white-majority counties (Economic Research Service, n.d.), and I expect income to correlate positively with men’s quality of life.

We expected population density to correlate with men’s quality of life because population centers offer more opportunities than rural areas, but the model did not show this. This could be because many American cities are densely populated compared to rural areas, but they are still too spread out to allow for the proper multitude of opportunities required for a healthy economy. When I run the regression in separate rural and urban parts (based on the majority of the population living listed as rural), it still holds that women’s economic empowerment correlated with improved quality of life for men (see STATA log).

Age was another factor heavily correlated with men’s quality of life. Despite the assumption that older people have higher average incomes, a higher median age correlated with a worse quality of life. This is likely due to declining health measurements, which are a major part of the Men’s Quality of Life Index (MQOLI).

According to this model, the higher the percentage of each county’s population under 18, the lower the quality of life for men. The large population of minors is likely a result of environmental factors causing low life expectancy, such as high crime rates, poor access to medical care, and environmental factors like pollution.
Lastly, elevation had no discernable effect on men’s quality of life. Although serotonin levels may decrease with oxygen at high altitudes, other factors, such as average health and income, may overcome this effect.

**Policy Suggestions**

There is enough evidence to reject the idea that empowering women in the workforce does not affect men’s quality of life; controlling for income, education, economy, race, age, and environmental factors, I can state with a high level of confidence that empowering women in the workforce is good for men physically, mentally, and financially. Correlation is not causation, and I recognize that there could be other factors causing this correlation that I did not consider. However, my results provide evidence that policies that entice American women into the workforce will help American men.

Gender roles are the main reason women do not enter the workforce fully. They funnel women into hard, low-paying jobs such as childcare and health work (Glynn & Boesch, 2022). Gender roles also keep women at home doing household chores instead of working. Any policy suggestions to help men through economically empowering women should focus on getting women into better, higher-paying jobs and lightening the burden of domestic labor.

This is not to suggest that women are entitled to equal opportunities in all fields of work; physical labor-intensive jobs should not be forced to accept women who are less able to handle the workload compared to a man on average. Men have more muscle mass than women (Gentil
et al., 2016) and stronger motor skills on average, making men better suited to do physical jobs like construction (Grant, n.d.).

Women are not as muscular as men on average, but they have other strengths: studies suggest that women are better at intuitive thinking, analyzing, and drawing conclusions (Grant, n.d.). As a result, evidence shows that women are often better than men at being managers (Mahesh, 2022), accountants (Heal & Tete, 2024), and scientists (Thompson, 2022), to name just a few examples.

Pushes to educate men at trade schools have been successful, so I suggest a similar tactic for women. Girls do better than boys in school on average (Pyne, 2022), so merit-based scholarships and cash prizes in lower grades (for all genders) could be a way to get girls into higher-paying careers without excluding boys. Boosting women’s workforce participation improves men’s well-being.

Men sharing the burden of household chores is another major factor that would economically empower more women. Although men and women pay household bills at the same rate, women do the majority of household tasks and are blamed when the tasks do not get done (Brenan, 2020). This leads to worse mental health and higher rates of burnout for women than for men. For this reason, unpaid care work is a major factor determining both whether women enter and stay in paid employment and the quality of their work (Seedat & Rondon, 2021). Any policy to encourage men to take on household tasks would be beneficial to all parties involved.
Better access to contraception would likely increase their economic empowerment by reducing the time and energy women spend on childcare. On the other hand, single mothers are forced to work out of necessity, which does economically empower them. However, single mothers receive significant welfare (Financial, 2023), which may even out the effect. Distribution of contraceptives at community centers may help women be more economically empowered and improve men’s quality of life.

I do not suggest that improving women’s economic empowerment is the only or the best way to help men in the United States. Men need help on many different fronts, so one strategy will not suffice. I simply point out that helping women be stronger economically is not at all mutually exclusive with helping men, and in fact, it probably helps men. I do not recommend policies based on the assumption that disempowering women makes “more room” for men, thereby improving their quality of life. I also hope to dispel the notion that keeping women in their traditional gender roles is good for men. Empowering women economically makes men happier, healthier, and richer.

Works Cited

https://post.ca.gov/portals/0/post_docs/publications/Building a Career Pipeline
Documents/safe_harbor.pdf

Beattie, J. (2023, December 4). Why are dual-income families on the rise? The Economics Review.
https://theeconreview.com/2023/12/05/why-are-dual-income-families-on-the-rise/

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291721000076


https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/mens-health.htm

Construction Worker Demographics and Statistics in the US. Zippia. (n.d.).
https://www.zippia.com/construction-worker-jobs/demographics/


https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/rural-poverty-well-being/

Ermiş-Mert, Aslı (2023) "Happiness, Life Satisfaction, and Gender Equality at the Micro and
Macro Levels," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 25(4) Article 18

https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol25/iss4/18


https://doi.org/10.1787/f7e0c69c-en.


https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2022.02.021


https://blog.dol.gov/2022/03/15/connecting-the-dots-womens-work-and-the-wage-gap/


Heal, A., & Tete, S. (2024, March 13). The top 11 jobs dominated by women. STYLECRAZE.


Horowitz, J. (2024, March 1). As men struggle with mental health, Manosphere influencers say depression doesn’t exist. Media Matters for America.


Mahesh, G. (2022, November 27). 7 jobs where women are better than men. Medium.

https://medium.datadriveninvestor.com/7-jobs-where-women-are-better-than-men-9366d17c657a


https://www.ncfh.org/facts-about-agricultural-workers-fact-sheet.html#:~:text=Sixty%2Dsix%20percent%20of%20crop,workers%20self%2Didentify%20as%20Hispanic.&text=Sixty%2Dsix%20percent%20of%20respondents,as%20Black%20or%20African%20American.

Özlem, Y (2016, March 7) Relationship between Happiness and Gender Inequality Index: Canonical Commonality Analysis. Research in World Economy (7)1
doi:10.5430/rwe.v7n1p11

POLITICO. (2023, July 16). Democrats have a man problem. these experts have ideas for fixing it. - politico. Politico Magazine: The Masculinity Issue.


doi:10.1080/07399332.2016.1198353


Zippia. (2024, April 5). Miner demographics and statistics [2024]: Number of miners in the US.
Miner Demographics and Statistics [2024]: Number Of Miners In The US. Zippia.

https://www.zippia.com/miner-jobs/demographics/