

From Me to You: Time Together and Subjective Well-Being in the UK

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Giacomo Vagni 

University College London, UK

Abstract

Time together as a family is a crucial dimension of family life. However, its impact on personal happiness is not well understood. I use the United Kingdom Time Use Survey 2014–2015 to study how time spent with partners and children affects daily subjective well-being. Overall, I find that family time, couple time, and time alone with children contributes significantly to mothers' and fathers' well-being. I show that the activities that families share together mediate an important part of the enjoyment of time together but do not entirely explain this association. This suggests that beyond what families do together, families enjoy being together. I find that fathers enjoy family time more than mothers do. I demonstrate that the unequal division of labour during family time explains this discrepancy. I conclude by discussing the recent transformations of intimate relationships.

Keywords

family, gender, subjective well-being, time use

Introduction

Spending time with family members is hailed as an almost sacred form of social interaction. Time shared with family members is often depicted as a special moment for families to foster cohesion and to relax from the frenzy of the outside world. However, the question of how time spent with partners or with children affects well-being is not without complications. Interactions with partners or with children, especially for mothers with young children, can be a source of significant stress and anxiety (Daly, 2001; Hochschild, 2012). Moreover, it is not clear if time together in families is experienced similarly for mothers and fathers (Larson et al., 1997).

In this paper, I investigate how time shared with partners and children is enjoyed in the British context, using detailed couple time diary data from the United Kingdom Time

Corresponding author:

Giacomo Vagni, Social Research Institute, UCL Institute of Education, University College London, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL, UK.

Email: g.vagni@ucl.ac.uk

Use Survey (UKTUS) 2014–2015.¹ The aim of this study is to better understand how family time contributes to subjective well-being and how this relation differs for mothers and fathers. Estimating how time with family members shapes well-being is important because the primary sources of social contact and social interaction for parents are those with their partners or with their children (Bianchi et al., 2006).

This study makes several contributions to the literature. The first contribution is that it uses couple time diaries to investigate well-being in families. Comparing diaries from mothers and fathers from the same couple offers invaluable insights about the gender differences in the experience of family time. The second contribution of the study is to shed light on the importance of the presence of partners and children, net of contextual factors, such as activities. This article offers new insights about the intimate functioning of modern families.

Literature review

Family time is thought to be an important mechanism for family cohesion (Berger and Kellner, 1964; Buswell et al., 2012; Lesnard, 2008; Täht and Mills, 2016). This assumption underlines studies on the effects of non-standard working hours on family issues (Strazdins et al., 2006; Taiji, 2020). On the one hand, there is evidence that partners try to organise their work schedules to maximise time together (Carriero et al., 2009) and on the other hand, some evidence shows that parents will desynchronise their schedules to care for young children (Presser, 1994; Täht and Mills, 2012).

Couples with children face a multitude of conflicting time demands and expectations regarding how to best use their time. In contemporary societies, individuals are involved in different social circles and face pressure to excel in different areas of social life. Mothers in particular face intense conflicting expectations (Johnston and Swanson, 2006; Thompson, 1991). While the numbers of women pursuing careers have continuously increased since the 1950s, men have not fully embraced their responsibilities in the sharing of childcare and domestic work (Altintas and Sullivan, 2016; Gershuny and Sullivan, 2019). Thereby, mothers are still prone to ‘second shifts’, which is working a full-time job and assuming the bulk of childcare responsibilities (Hochschild, 2012). Managing the expectations between all the social roles—being a good parent, a good worker, and a good partner, as well as having a fulfilling personal life (Hays, 1996)—can be psychologically taxing and can lead to anxiety and distress. A large literature has investigated the contradictory expectations of parenthood and, especially, motherhood (Arendell, 2000).

The contradictory expectations of parenthood can also be applied to modern romantic relationships (Illouz, 2012). Personal fulfilment in relationships has become a core principle of romantic partnerships (Giddens, 2013; Mansour and McKinnish, 2014). However, fulfilment in relationships is becoming harder and harder given the increasing complexities of even finding time for each other (Flood and Genadek, 2016; Lesnard, 2008). With the relaxing of religious and social pressures on partnership, marriage and childbearing, as well as the growth in individualism, partners nowadays are increasingly choosing one another based on similarities in preferences, personality, attitudes and tastes (Amato et al., 2007; Coontz, 2005; Lundberg, 2012; Young and Willmott, 1974). Individuals often seek the ‘perfect’ match (Hollander, 2011). The transformation of intimacy has heightened the expectations from personal relationships and thereby increased the reasons for separation (Amato et al., 2007).

These transformations of personal life (greater choice of partners, greater control over the timing of childbirth and heightened expectations) would suggest that, at the same time, individuals derive more happiness from family relationships than in the past but also more frustrations and stress.

Time together, well-being and gender

Parenting. A vast literature investigating the relationship between having children and well-being by comparing parents and childless individuals has led to mixed results, with some studies finding that children enhanced happiness and others finding a negative effect of children on well-being (Deaton and Stone, 2014; Hansen, 2012; Kohler et al., 2005; Nelson et al., 2013; Ruppanner et al., 2019).

Parallel to this literature on parenthood and well-being, a growing body of research is interested in the daily experiences of parenting, as opposed to parenthood (Musick et al., 2016: 1070). Using the Well-Being Module for the American Time Use Survey (ATUS 2010-2013), Musick et al. (2016) show that time with children increases happiness and the meaning of activities while also increasing stress and fatigue. Other works using the ATUS show that the overall experience of daily parenting tends to be more positive than negative (Connelly and Kimmel, 2015). Nelson et al. (2013) also report in a comprehensive set of studies that parents experienced more positive momentary emotions than non-parents and paint a more positive picture of parenting than is generally assumed.

However, parenting is a distinctively different experience for mothers and fathers. In their study, Nelson et al. (2013) note that fathers derive more happiness from parenting than mothers. This is consistent with the literature on the heterogeneity of the gendered experience of family life (Fowers, 1991; Ruppanner et al., 2019; Shaw, 2008). Musick et al. (2016) show that mothers experience more stress and less happiness compared to fathers. They show that the type of time use activities, as well as solo parenting, explain the gender difference in happiness and stress. This finding highlights the persisting unequal division of labour between fathers and mothers.

Other research has investigated gender differences in the enjoyment of activities, especially leisure activities (Connelly and Kimmel, 2015; Larson et al., 1997; Offer, 2016; Offer and Scheiner, 2011; Shaw, 1992; Sullivan, 1997). For instance, mothers are less likely to enjoy their free time because it is more likely to be interrupted by children (Bittman and Wajcman, 2000). Leisure shared with family members is also more tainted by domestic chores for mothers (Larson et al., 1997; Shaw, 1992). Some studies find that mothers enjoy leisure more when away from family members (Larson et al., 1994, 1997), while fathers, having the luxury to draw a clearer distinction between work and family, are more likely to experience family time as a moment for fostering attachment and cohesion (Freysinger, 1995). Hence, fathers enjoy this time more than mothers do.

Couple time. The importance of couple time is demonstrated in a handful of empirical research showing that activities shared with partners are more enjoyed than activities done alone. In an early study of enjoyment of activities within couples, Sullivan shows that leisure shared with a partner is the most enjoyed activity and that, thereby, couples try to coordinate their time to maximise shared leisure (Sullivan, 1996a). She also found that other activities, such as domestic chores, were more enjoyed when shared with others (see also Dunatchik and Speight, 2020).

Flood and Genadek (2016) extend and generalise this finding by showing that sharing an activity with partners increased feelings of happiness and meaningfulness and reduced stress. They did not find any differences in the report of happiness, meaningfulness, or stress between men and women (Flood and Genadek, 2016). However, their study did not use diaries of men and women from the same couple. Couple diaries can reveal subtle gendered experiences of daily life. For instance, a study using couple diaries found that, when partners were alone together, women tended to do more domestic work than men (Vagni, 2019a).

The focus of this literature has mainly been on the activities partners do together. Less attention has been paid to the dimension of the presence of partners in shaping well-being. In other words, beyond what partners do together, do partners enjoy the presence of each other? This question is directly connected with literature focusing on human contact and human interactions (Collins, 2004; Pinker, 2014). Face-to-face interactions and physical contact between partners are important mechanisms in explaining how relationships shape well-being (Debrot et al., 2013).

Data and methods

Data

To investigate how time together shapes well-being, I use the United Kingdom Time Use Survey 2014–2015 (UKTUS), a national representative survey of British households. The UKTUS is the most recent comprehensive British survey on how individuals use their time. It is a paper-pencil survey asking all household members to fill one diary on a weekday and one diary on a weekend (see Online Appendix for more details). The survey focuses on three main aspects of time use: what individuals do, with whom and where. The UKTUS 2014–2015 also collected information about how individuals enjoyed a specific period of time. The enjoyment information enables a better understanding of how different activities can affect individual well-being. The survey collected time diaries for multiple household members, including partners and children. The diaries are organised in 10-minute intervals starting at 4 a.m. for 24 hours, which equals 144 episodes of 10 minutes each. So, there are 144 observation periods of enjoyment for each respondent per day.

The analytical sample used in this paper is composed of 289 heterosexual couples (578 individuals).² Of that amount, 262 couples filled two time use diaries (one weekend and one weekday) and 27 couples only filled one day (15 filled a weekday and 12 a weekend, see Online Appendix Table A.5). I focus on couples with children (biological or not) under 8 years of age. The description of the sample can be found in the Online Appendix.

Measures

Subjective well-being

Our main dependent variable is a measure of enjoyment (Gershuny, 2013; Kahneman and Krueger, 2006). Measures of enjoyment, also known as experienced utility or process utility (Sullivan, 1996b), differ from global evaluations of life satisfaction, as they are measured with ‘reference to a particular point in time’ (Helliwell et al., 2017: 10).

The notion of enjoyment can be confusing because enjoyment seems to imply ‘enjoyment of something’. However, in this paper, I am referring to enjoyment in the sense of ‘mood’. The notion of mood captures more clearly what ‘enjoyment’ is meant to denote.

Mood is a temporary emotional state. I am using here the concepts of enjoyment, mood and subjective well-being interchangeably.

The enjoyment information was collected in addition to information about activities, location and copresence (with whom). The exact question was 'How much did you enjoy this time?'. The following instructions were given: 'Please write in how much you enjoyed the time on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 meaning you didn't enjoy it at all and 7 meaning that you enjoyed it very much. Your level of enjoyment may change during an activity. If so, please record the new level of enjoyment too'. The distribution of this variable can be found in the Online Appendix.

Explanatory variables

The main explanatory variables are the presence of the spouse and the children. The copresence information was collected as a set of dummy variables (1 = presence or 0 = absence), indicating if the partner, child, or others were present during this time interval. The exact wording of the question in the time use diary read 'Were you alone or with somebody you know?' The respondent could then indicate if the partner and/or child was present or if someone else (not living in the household) was also present ('others').

Due to the large amount of time spent sleeping together (and the very high enjoyment of time spent sleeping), I focus the analyses on the hours of the day from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.

I focus on three main types of time together: Couple Time, Family Time and Parental Time. Couple time refers to the time when partners are together without the children. Family time includes the presence of partners and the presence of children. Parental time refers to the time that parents spend alone with the children. I also included the presence of others in my analysis, which groups 'others you may know' (e.g. friends, acquaintances, etc.). I direct the reader to the Online Appendix for a more detailed discussion of the construction of the variable of time together. The issue with the construction of this variable is that it includes the reports of fathers and mothers, and these reports can differ. I show in the Online Appendix that these report differences did not affect my results. I reduced the time use activities to eight broad categories. The eight activities are Paid Work (including education and commute), Personal Care (including sleep), Child Care, Eating, Unpaid Work (domestic work), Leisure (including TV, sports, reading, and voluntary), Travel, and Other Activities. The distribution of the time use variables can be found in the Appendix. All the analyses are weighted according to the sampling weights provided in the survey.

Analytical strategy

The strength of the UKTUS 2014-2015 is to provide numerous observation periods for each respondent. As explained above, respondents were observed for two days: one weekend and one weekday (two times 144 episodes, 288 episodes in total). The main unit of analysis is the 288 individual time slots. I am interested in estimating the effects of the presence of the spouse and children on enjoyment (Y_{it}). With time use diaries, it is possible to control for time varying contextual factors, such as activities, time of day, day of the week and time with others. A natural strategy for data with repeated observations is to use fixed effect models³ (Allison, 2009). I assume that enjoyment is cardinal and can be compared across respondents (for a demonstration see Ferrer-i-Carbonell and Frijters, 2004).

Fixed effects are widely used in empirical research because they enable control for fixed unobservable characteristics (for instance stable personality traits). However, fixed effects models only estimate within effects, discarding all between variations. This is not an issue here because most of the variation lies within units (see the Online Appendix).

I explain enjoyment by the time shared with partners (couple time), time with children (mother time/father time), time with partners and children (family time), time with others, the time use activities of the respondent and the partners' activities, the time of the day (7 a.m.–12 p.m., 12–2 p.m., 2–7 p.m. and 7–10 p.m.), and finally a control for whether the respondent did not fill any time alone or with others (missing). The reference category is a person doing leisure alone in the morning (7 a.m.–12 p.m.). I present a set of models where I first introduce the time together variables (Model 1), then the activities (Model 2), then the partners' activities (Model 3) and finally the partner's enjoyment (Model 4). Note that, when the regression is explaining a mother's enjoyment, the model takes the point of view of the mother, meaning that mother time (alone with the children) refers to her own time with the children and that father time refers to the time that her partner spends with the children (vice versa for fathers). The reader must keep in mind this subtlety. The regressions are run separately for weekends and weekdays.

Finally I compare the enjoyment of mothers and fathers from the same couple (i) directly by subtracting the mother's (m) enjoyment at time (t) from the father's (f) enjoyment, such as

$$y_{it}^* = y_{it}^m - y_{it}^f, \quad (1)$$

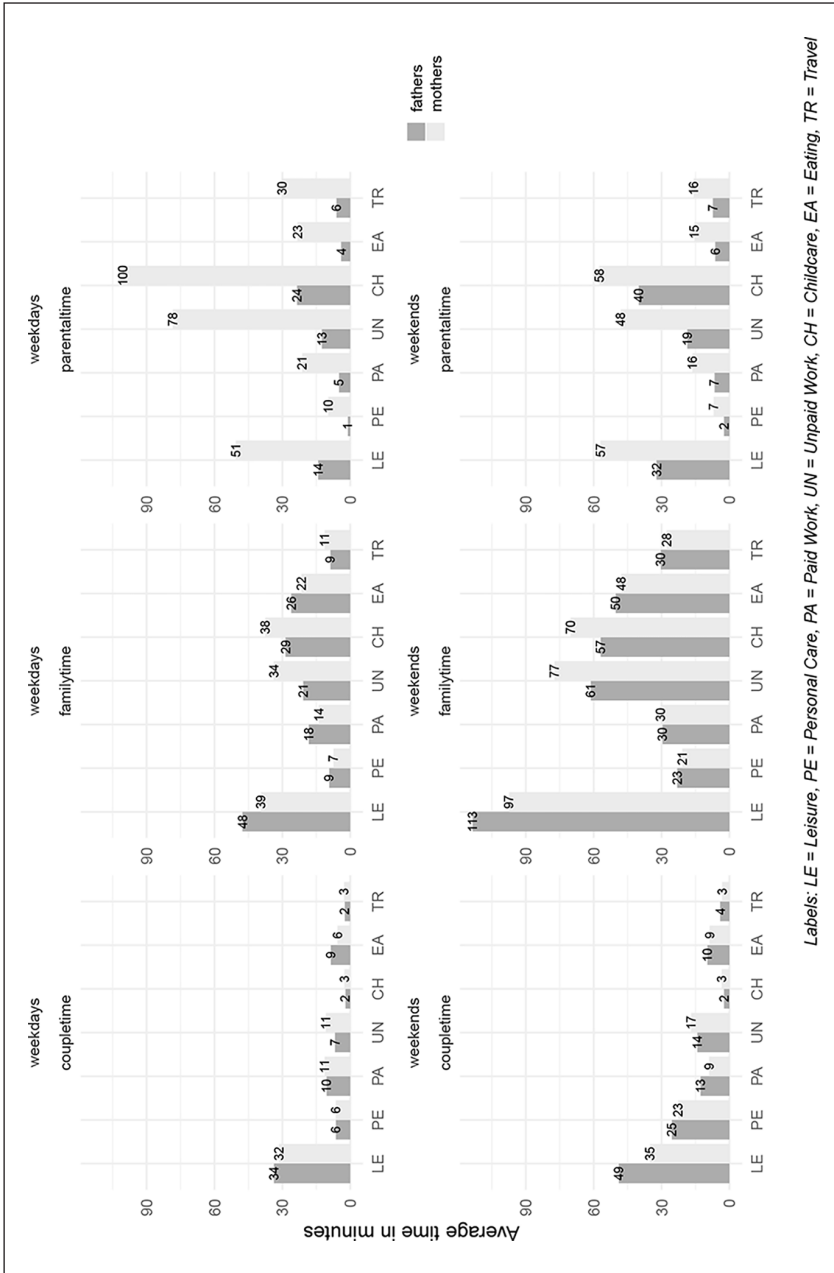
One interesting feature of the UKTUS is that enjoyment can vary independently from activities and the presence of others. In the American Time Use Survey, the well-being module is formulated in relation to activities. In the UKTUS, the framing of the question is independent and more closely linked to a particular moment of time rather than an activity.

Results

Figure 1 shows the distribution of activities done together for mothers and fathers. On the upper panel, I present the activities performed together on weekdays and on the lower panel the weekend activities. Regarding couple time (together without the children), we see that leisure constitutes the bulk of couple time on weekdays and weekends. We can note, however, that fathers are having more leisure than mothers are on weekends, even when both report being together. Mothers are also doing more domestic work during couple time and family time. On weekdays during family time, mothers are doing, on average, 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. During family time, we can see that fathers are reporting having much more leisure compared to mothers.

Family time increases substantially on weekends (see Table C1 and C2 in the Online Appendix). Mothers spend, on average, 301 minutes alone with their children on weekdays, compared to 63 minutes for fathers, and about 205 minutes alone with their children on weekends, compared to 107 minutes for fathers (see Online Appendix).

Tables 1 to 3 show the fixed effects regression estimates. The (unstandardised) coefficients in the models range from around 0.2 to 0.5. This represents between a fifth



Labels: LE = Leisure, PE = Personal Care, PA = Paid Work, UN = Unpaid Work, CH = Childcare, EA = Eating, TR = Travel

Figure 1. Parents' family time use during weekends and weekdays (average minutes per day). Couple time refers to time with the partners without the children, family time refers to time with the partners and children and parental time refers to time with the children without the partners.

Table 1. Fixed effects regressions on mothers' enjoyment.

	Weekends		Weekends		Weekends		Weekdays		Weekdays		Weekdays	
	(Model 1)	(Model 2)	(Model 3)	(Model 4)	(Model 5)	(Model 6)	(Model 7)	(Model 8)	(Model 7)	(Model 6)	(Model 5)	(Model 8)
Couple time	0.53*** (0.03)	0.27*** (0.03)	0.26*** (0.03)	0.24*** (0.03)	0.44*** (0.03)	0.26*** (0.03)	0.23*** (0.03)	0.21*** (0.03)	0.23*** (0.03)	0.26*** (0.03)	0.44*** (0.03)	0.21*** (0.03)
Family time	0.32*** (0.03)	0.22*** (0.03)	0.22*** (0.03)	0.19*** (0.03)	0.42*** (0.03)	0.27*** (0.03)	0.25*** (0.03)	0.23*** (0.03)	0.25*** (0.03)	0.27*** (0.03)	0.42*** (0.03)	0.23*** (0.03)
Father time	-0.14*** (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.06 (0.04)
Mother time	0.24*** (0.03)	0.12*** (0.03)	0.13*** (0.03)	0.14*** (0.03)	0.44*** (0.02)	0.30*** (0.02)	0.32*** (0.02)	0.31*** (0.02)	0.32*** (0.02)	0.30*** (0.02)	0.44*** (0.02)	0.31*** (0.02)
Others	0.45*** (0.03)	0.22*** (0.02)	0.21*** (0.02)	0.20*** (0.02)	0.26*** (0.02)	0.22*** (0.02)	0.22*** (0.02)	0.22*** (0.02)	0.22*** (0.02)	0.22*** (0.02)	0.26*** (0.02)	0.22*** (0.02)
(Mothers) personal		0.56*** (0.03)	0.58*** (0.03)	0.59*** (0.03)		0.43*** (0.04)	0.43*** (0.04)	0.44*** (0.04)	0.43*** (0.04)	0.43*** (0.04)	0.43*** (0.04)	0.44*** (0.04)
(Mothers) paid		-0.61*** (0.03)	-0.58*** (0.03)	-0.57*** (0.03)		-0.66*** (0.03)	-0.65*** (0.03)	-0.65*** (0.03)	-0.65*** (0.03)	-0.66*** (0.03)	-0.65*** (0.03)	-0.65*** (0.03)
(Mothers) unpaid		-1.04*** (0.02)	-1.00*** (0.02)	-0.99*** (0.02)		-0.93*** (0.02)	-0.92*** (0.02)	-0.93*** (0.02)	-0.92*** (0.02)	-0.93*** (0.02)	-0.93*** (0.02)	-0.93*** (0.02)
(Mothers) childcare		-0.10*** (0.02)	-0.06** (0.02)	-0.05* (0.02)		-0.17*** (0.02)	-0.16*** (0.02)	-0.16*** (0.02)	-0.16*** (0.02)	-0.17*** (0.02)	-0.16*** (0.02)	-0.16*** (0.02)
(Mothers) eat		0.03 (0.03)	0.05 (0.03)	0.05 (0.03)		0.08* (0.03)	0.08** (0.03)	0.08* (0.03)	0.08** (0.03)	0.08* (0.03)	0.08* (0.03)	0.08* (0.03)
(Mothers) travel		-0.76*** (0.03)	-0.74*** (0.03)	-0.73*** (0.03)		-0.69*** (0.03)	-0.66*** (0.03)	-0.66*** (0.03)	-0.66*** (0.03)	-0.69*** (0.03)	-0.66*** (0.03)	-0.66*** (0.03)
(Fathers) personal			-0.07* (0.03)	-0.13*** (0.03)			0.003 (0.04)		0.003 (0.04)			-0.05 (0.04)
(Fathers) paid			-0.17*** (0.02)	-0.06* (0.02)			-0.09*** (0.02)		-0.09*** (0.02)			-0.04 (0.03)
(Fathers) unpaid			-0.16*** (0.02)	-0.04 (0.02)			-0.04 (0.03)		-0.04 (0.03)			0.02 (0.03)
(Fathers) childcare			-0.12*** (0.03)	-0.11*** (0.02)			-0.07* (0.03)		-0.07* (0.03)			-0.07* (0.03)
(Fathers) eat			-0.07* (0.03)	-0.08** (0.03)			-0.01 (0.03)		-0.01 (0.03)			-0.02 (0.03)
(Fathers) travel			-0.09** (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)			-0.22*** (0.03)		-0.22*** (0.03)			-0.17*** (0.03)
Partner's enjoyment				0.12*** (0.01)								0.06*** (0.01)
R ²	0.03	0.19	0.20	0.21	0.06	0.15	0.15	0.16	0.15	0.06	0.15	0.16
N cases	274	274	274	274	277	277	277	277	277	277	277	277
N episodes	24660	24660	24660	24660	24930	24930	24930	24930	24930	24930	24930	24930
Time periods	90	90	90	90	90	90	90	90	90	90	90	90

Reference categories: alone and leisure.

Controls: Hours of the day, other household members, no reporting with whom (not shown).

Couple time refers to time with the partners and without the children, family time refers to time with the partners and children, parental time refers to time with the children and without the partners. Enjoyment is a numerical variable ranging from 1 to 7, with 7 indicating the highest level of enjoyment.

Standard Errors in parentheses. Unstandardised coefficients.

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Table 2. Fixed effects regressions on fathers' enjoyment.

	Weekends		Weekends		Weekends		Weekdays		Weekdays		Weekdays	
	(Model 1)	(Model 2)	(Model 3)	(Model 4)	(Model 5)	(Model 6)	(Model 7)	(Model 8)	(Model 7)	(Model 6)	(Model 5)	(Model 4)
Couple time	0.45*** (0.03)	0.23*** (0.03)	0.22*** (0.03)	0.19*** (0.03)	0.53*** (0.03)	0.25*** (0.03)	0.26*** (0.03)	0.25*** (0.03)	0.27	0.25*** (0.03)	0.53*** (0.03)	0.19*** (0.03)
Family time	0.32*** (0.03)	0.23*** (0.02)	0.23*** (0.02)	0.20*** (0.02)	0.58*** (0.02)	0.30*** (0.02)	0.30*** (0.02)	0.29*** (0.02)	0.27	0.30*** (0.02)	0.58*** (0.02)	0.20*** (0.02)
Father time	0.36*** (0.04)	0.25*** (0.03)	0.24*** (0.03)	0.24*** (0.03)	0.63*** (0.04)	0.39*** (0.04)	0.39*** (0.04)	0.39*** (0.04)	0.27	0.39*** (0.04)	0.63*** (0.04)	0.24*** (0.03)
Mother time	-0.11*** (0.03)	-0.07** (0.03)	-0.07* (0.03)	-0.08** (0.03)	-0.04* (0.02)	0.004 (0.02)	0.002 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	0.27	0.004 (0.02)	-0.04* (0.02)	-0.08** (0.03)
Others	0.09*** (0.02)	0.06** (0.02)	0.05* (0.02)	0.04 (0.02)	-0.24*** (0.02)	-0.14*** (0.02)	-0.14*** (0.02)	-0.15*** (0.02)	0.27	-0.14*** (0.02)	-0.24*** (0.02)	0.04 (0.02)
(Fathers) personal	0.48*** (0.03)	0.48*** (0.03)	0.50*** (0.03)	0.52*** (0.03)		0.79*** (0.04)	0.83*** (0.04)	0.83*** (0.04)	0.27	0.79*** (0.04)		0.52*** (0.03)
(Fathers) paid	-0.87*** (0.02)	-0.87*** (0.02)	-0.85*** (0.02)	-0.83*** (0.02)		-0.79*** (0.02)	-0.80*** (0.02)	-0.79*** (0.02)	0.27	-0.79*** (0.02)		-0.83*** (0.02)
(Fathers) unpaid	-0.99*** (0.02)	-0.99*** (0.02)	-0.95*** (0.02)	-0.94*** (0.02)		-0.91*** (0.03)	-0.92*** (0.03)	-0.92*** (0.03)	0.27	-0.91*** (0.03)		-0.94*** (0.02)
(Fathers) childcare	-0.11*** (0.02)	-0.11*** (0.02)	-0.08** (0.02)	-0.06** (0.02)		0.01 (0.03)	0.005 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	0.27	0.01 (0.03)		-0.06** (0.02)
(fathers) eat	0.07** (0.02)	0.07** (0.02)	0.05* (0.03)	0.06* (0.03)		0.20*** (0.03)	0.20*** (0.03)	0.20*** (0.03)	0.27	0.20*** (0.03)		0.06* (0.03)
(Fathers) travel	-0.79*** (0.03)	-0.79*** (0.03)	-0.76*** (0.03)	-0.75*** (0.03)		-0.85*** (0.03)	-0.84*** (0.03)	-0.83*** (0.03)	0.27	-0.85*** (0.03)		-0.75*** (0.03)
(Mothers) personal			-0.10** (0.03)	-0.16*** (0.03)			-0.15*** (0.04)	-0.18*** (0.04)	0.27			-0.16*** (0.03)
(Mothers) paid			-0.05 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)			0.05* (0.02)	0.08*** (0.02)	0.27			0.02 (0.02)
(Mothers) unpaid			-0.11*** (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)			0.04* (0.02)	0.10*** (0.02)	0.27			0.01 (0.02)
(Mothers) childcare			-0.12*** (0.02)	-0.11*** (0.02)			0.04 (0.02)	0.05* (0.02)	0.27			-0.11*** (0.02)
(Mothers) eat			0.02 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)			-0.001 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.27			0.01 (0.03)
(Mothers) travel			-0.10** (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)			-0.01 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.27			-0.02 (0.03)
Partner's enjoyment				0.11*** (0.01)				0.06*** (0.01)	0.27			0.11*** (0.01)
R ²	0.04	0.20	0.20	0.21	0.14	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.14	0.21
N cases	274	274	274	274	277	277	277	277	277	277	277	277
N episodes	24660	24660	24660	24660	24930	24930	24930	24930	24930	24930	24930	24930
Time periods	90	90	90	90	90	90	90	90	90	90	90	90

Reference categories: alone and leisure.

Controls: Hours of the day, other household members, no reporting with whom (not shown).

Couple time refers to time with the partners and without the children, family time refers to time with the partners and children, parental time refers to time with the children and without the partners. Enjoyment is a numerical variable ranging from 1 to 7, with 7 indicating the highest level of enjoyment.

Standard Errors in parentheses. Unstandardised coefficients.

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Table 3. Fixed effects regressions on the enjoyment difference between partners.

	Weekends	Weekends	Weekdays	Weekdays
	(Model 1)	(Model 2)	(Model 3)	(Model 4)
Couple time	0.13** (0.04)	0.08 (0.04)	-0.08 (0.05)	-0.02 (0.04)
Family time	0.03 (0.04)	0.02 (0.03)	-0.17*** (0.04)	-0.05 (0.04)
Father time	-0.42*** (0.05)	-0.20*** (0.05)	-0.68*** (0.05)	-0.41*** (0.05)
Mother time	0.39*** (0.04)	0.23*** (0.04)	0.46*** (0.03)	0.29*** (0.03)
Partner's enjoyment	0.31*** (0.03)	0.18*** (0.03)	0.20*** (0.03)	0.15*** (0.03)
Control for activities	No	Yes	No	Yes
R ²	0.02	0.14	0.04	0.15
N cases	274	274	277	277
N episodes	24660	24660	24930	24930
Time periods	90	90	90	90

Controls: Hours of the day, other household members, no reporting with whom, number of children, age, education (not shown).

Negative values indicate that a father's mood is higher than a mother's mood, and positive values indicate that a mother's mood is higher.

Couple time refers to time with the partners and without the children, family time refers to time with the partners and children, parental time refers to time with the children and without the partners. Enjoyment is a numerical variable ranging from 1 to 7, with 7 indicating the highest level of enjoyment.

Standard Errors in parentheses. Unstandardised coefficients.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

to a third of a standard deviation of enjoyment. I find it useful to understand the size of these coefficients relative to activities known as being particularly disliked, such as paid work (Kahneman and Krueger, 2006). I will come back to the substantial implications of these results in the discussion section.

Table 1 shows the regressions' results for mothers' enjoyment. It shows eight different models, comparing time together (couple time, family time and parental time), with and without activities, for weekends and weekdays. The reference categories for the time use variables of interests are being alone and leisure.

Model 1 shows the results for enjoyment during time together on weekends. We can see that couple time, family time and parental time are all positively associated with mothers' enjoyment. Time with others (non-family members) is also positively associated with enjoyment. We see that the coefficient for couple time is larger than family time and mother time.

Model 2 includes mothers' own time use activities. The inclusion of activities decreases the main effect of time together (couple, family and time with children) on well-being. This indicates that an important share of the positive effect of time together is due to what families do together. However, this relationship is not entirely mediated by activities, showing that there exists a direct effect of the presence of family members on a mother's mood. Couple time still has a larger effect than family time or time alone with children. It is interesting to note that the activity of childcare has a negative effect on a mother's mood, while the presence of the child is positive. Model 3 introduces the father's activities (i.e. the partner). The reference category of the model is mothers and fathers having

leisure alone (not together). All the coefficients of the father's activities are negative, indicating that somehow mothers are not enjoying their own solo leisure when their partners are doing other non-leisurely activities alone on weekends. Model 4 shows that the partner's mood is positively associated with the mother's mood, net of activities.

Models 5, 6, 7 and 8 show the results for weekdays. Model 5 shows the model without activities, Model 6 shows the model with activities, Model 7 introduces the partners' activities, and Model 8 introduces the partners' enjoyment. The results on weekdays are consistent with the results on weekends. Nonetheless, we see that the size of the coefficients of time with family members are larger (more positive) on weekdays. We see that a mother's time alone with children is more enjoyed on weekdays than on weekends. It is also the case that childcare is less enjoyed on weekdays compared to weekends (see Model 6). I looked into the kind of childcare done (e.g. cleaning, playing, and reading) between weekdays and weekends and did not find large differences in the type of childcare performed between weekends and weekdays. Mothers also enjoy paid work less on weekdays than on weekends. We can also see that the presence of 'others' (i.e. friends, acquaintances, etc.) is more positively associated with well-being on weekends than on weekdays. On weekdays, the 'others' category is likely to refer mainly to co-workers. It is interesting to note that most of the coefficients for partners' activities are also negative on weekdays (Model 7). Finally, Model 8 shows the positive association between the partner's mood and the mother's mood; however, this association is much lower on weekdays than on weekends.

Table 2 shows the results for fathers. Models 1, 2, 3 and 4 show the results for weekends, and Models 5, 6, 7 and 8 show the results for weekdays. The results for weekends show that couple time, family time, and time alone with the children (father time) all positively increase a father's mood. The presence of others is positive, but the size of this coefficient is smaller for fathers compared to mothers. We can see that on weekends a mother's time alone with the children is negatively associated with the father's mood (bear in mind that the reference category is being alone). One interpretation would be that fathers are negatively affected by not being able to participate in time shared with their children. Model 2 and Model 6 (weekdays) introduce the father's activities. Paid and unpaid work are the most disliked time use activities. Similar to mothers, fathers dislike working on weekends more than working on weekdays. The activity of childcare on weekends is also negatively associated with a father's mood. Similar to mothers, the association between time together (couple time, family time and father time) and a father's enjoyment is greatly reduced once the activities are introduced (Model 2 and 6). However, a direct effect of time together on enjoyment persists after controlling for what families do together. On weekdays, father time alone is more enjoyed than couple time and family time.

Model 3 and Model 7 introduce the partner's activities. Model 3 in Table 1 shows that a mother's activities,⁴ such as paid work, unpaid work and childcare, are negatively associated with a father's mood. This phenomenon is similar for fathers. Fathers are also negatively affected by mothers not enjoying leisure when the fathers enjoy leisure alone on weekends. For instance, fathers who enjoy leisure alone on weekends are negatively affected by 'knowing' that their partner (the mother) is doing unpaid work or childcare. However, this is not the case for weekdays. In Model 7, we can see that mothers working for pay or doing unpaid work positively affects the fathers' mood.

One interesting result from Model 4 and Model 8 is that the coefficient of the partners' mood is larger in the mothers' regressions, indicating that the variation in the fathers' enjoyment affects the mothers more than vice versa. In other words, a mother's mood is more responsive to a father's mood swing, net of activities, than the contrary.

I now move on to Table 3, which directly compares the enjoyment of fathers and mothers from the same couple. Models 1 and 3 present the results for weekends and weekdays unadjusted for activities, while Model 2 and Model 4 introduce mothers' and fathers' activities. The negative values indicate that a father's mood is higher than a mother's mood, and positive values indicate that a mother's mood is higher.

Model 1 and Model 3 show a negative coefficient for father time and a positive coefficient for mother time, which simply indicates that when the parent is alone with the child his/her mood is higher than their partner's mood. In Model 3, we see that family time is negative ($-.17, p < 0.001$), indicating that fathers derive more enjoyment from family time than mothers do on weekdays. Models 1 and 3 are unadjusted for activities and show that the enjoyment of couple time is higher for mothers compared to fathers on weekends. When adjusted for activities (Models 2 and 4), we see that mothers still seem to derive more enjoyment from couple time than fathers do but the effect is not statistically significant anymore (which could be due to low statistical power). We also see that fathers do not derive more enjoyment from family time anymore. To understand more fully these results, one must be reminded of the distribution of activities by gender during time together (see Figure 1). The activities performed during family time are unequally distributed between mothers and fathers (fathers report having much more leisure than mothers, while mothers report doing much more domestic work and childcare). The activities are much more equally distributed during couple time (even though men still enjoy more leisure time during couple time than mothers do⁵). Therefore, when this unequal distribution of activities is taken into account, I find that the enjoyment of family time is no longer skewed in favour of fathers.

Discussion

In this paper I have explored how time with partners and time with children affects the subjective well-being (or "mood") of mothers and fathers in the United Kingdom. Overall, I find that time spent together in families significantly contributes to subjective well-being when compared to being alone. I find that even after accounting for what families do together, the presence of partners and children is still significantly associated with higher instantaneous well-being. My analyses strongly suggest that parents derive high enjoyment from family time, couple time and parental time. Time alone is, on average, negatively associated with enjoyment (see the sensitivity analyses in the Online Appendix). These findings are broadly in line with a growing body of research looking at family interactions and subjective well-being (Flood and Genadek, 2016; Musick et al., 2016; Sullivan, 1996b). I find that, in general, couple time has the most positive effect on parents' mood. This result highlights the importance of time together for both individual happiness and partnership happiness (Lesnard, 2008; Liu et al., 2011; Taiji, 2020).

The study highlights the deep connectedness and awareness that families have with the different members of the household. What the partner is doing—even when not together—has an impact on the other partner's mood. Each members' schedule is inter-linked with the other members' schedule. Everyone in a household is interdependent, and researchers should be aware of this interdependence. Partners and, especially, parents are profoundly interconnected in not just what they do but also how they feel.

The fact that partners intimately affect each other is also demonstrated by how the partner's mood directly impacts the respondent's mood (regardless of the activities performed). How one partner is feeling influences how the other is feeling. This has already been highlighted by Sullivan (1996b), when she showed, also using time diary data, that a partner's enjoyment of a situation was one of the most important predictors of a person's own enjoyment. My results show that the partner's mood is important in shaping one's own mood, but it is not the most central factor.

The paper makes an important contribution to the study of well-being and family interactions by showing that the presence of family members is a source of well-being. I show clearly 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, I demonstrate that the activity of care negatively affects enjoyment, while the presence of children positively affects it.⁶ This 'presence effect' has been overlooked in the literature, which focuses extensively on shared activities. More research is needed in this area to understand how this 'presence' mechanism works. It is difficult to know exactly what the presence refers to (e.g. communication, touch, or simple passive presence). For instance, studies show that touch and affection play an important role in well-being (Debrot et al., 2013). However, it would be interesting to investigate if there is a true presence effect in the sense of, for instance, the 'warmth' of someone's presence. Whatever the mechanism is, this study highlights the importance of being around one another for a family's well-being.

Even though my research stresses the importance of taking a household perspective in the study of individual well-being, I also find important gender differences within couples. Regarding time together, the effect of couple time alone is larger on a mother's mood than on a father's mood, even after controlling for activities and other contextual factors. This finding can be linked to differential expectations between men and women involved in romantic partnerships (Gager and Sanchez, 2003).

I find that fathers, on average, enjoy family time more than mothers do. However, I show that, once accounting for the unequal distribution of chores, this gender difference disappears. This means that mothers do more housework during family time and this causes their enjoyment of family time to be lower than that of fathers. The results shed light on an important reality of family life: while domestic chores are now more equal than in the past (Altintas and Sullivan, 2016), mothers still bear a disproportionate share of domestic and care work. This is true even when families are spending time together (Vagni, 2019b).

Father time plays an important role in shaping fathers' well-being, and fathers are negatively affected by not being with their children on weekends. The literature has documented a shift in fatherhood towards more involved fathers (Sullivan, 2010). The fathers in my study roughly belong to cohorts from the 1980s (median age of the sample

is 35 years old) and represent a new generation of fathers more eager to share time with their children. This touches on a more general point about generational changes. Gender relationships have changed since the 1950s towards more equality, intimacy and a search for personal fulfilment (Giddens, 2013; Hochschild, 2012; Sullivan, 2006). The composition of partnerships, thus the selection into partnership, also changed to favour men with more progressive attitudes. This might explain in return why mothers seem to derive much more enjoyment of family life than it is generally thought, for instance from classical works like Hochschild's (2012) *Second Shift*, originally published in the late 1990s. The enjoyment of family time might reflect a new equilibrium in family relationships, as described by Esping-Andersen and Billari (2015).

Moreover, it is possible that the transformation of labour markets, and the growing instability and unpredictability of employment have led individuals to expect more from family formation than in the recent past. As labour markets became more deregulated in the 1980s in the United Kingdom (Deakin and Reed, 2000), fewer workers are spending their entire careers in the same firm or even doing the same job. Consequently, it is possible that over time individuals are expecting less from work and more from non-market spheres, such as personal relationships and families. As noted in the introduction, relationships have become more and more based on choice, equality and intimacy (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Coontz, 2005; Giddens, 2013). The rise of 'elected' families might have revitalised one of the oldest institutions—the family—and given it new meaning. Today, families are more diverse, directly mirroring greater individual choices. Relationships such as friendships, thanks to social media, might also have become more elective, and thus, we can hypothesise more enjoyable. We might be witnessing a unique combination of attention for the self and attention to others (in the sense of renewed enthusiasm for personal relationships). In other words, a unique combination of individualism and altruism.

Several limitations should be addressed in this study. It is worth stressing that I only addressed the 'average' effect of time together. Further work should focus on the heterogeneity of these effects. It is certainly the case that, in some situations (for instance an abusive relationship), time together might be detrimental to well-being. Secondly, time use data only offer a snapshot into personal relationships. Panel data are needed to follow couples over time to understand how enjoyment varies at different stages of relationships. Unfortunately, very few panel data have a time use component.

The strength of the UKTUS 2014–2015 is to have recorded enjoyment continuously. However, enjoyment is only one emotion. For instance, the American Time Use Surveys collect several other dimensions of subjective well-being, such as stress and tiredness (however, the weakness of the ATUS is that it does not record these measures continuously). Issues related to causality are also important to consider. Time use is not randomly allocated, people select themselves based on their preferences, which are in part driven by their enjoyment of time. Fixed effects solve some endogeneity problems but by no means all (Abadie et al., 2015). Nonetheless, there are good reasons (both based on theory and the empirical evidence displayed here and elsewhere) to think that time together in families does causally increase enjoyment. Despite these limitations, this study makes important contributions to the study of family interactions, gender inequality and subjective well-being.

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ORCID iD

Giacomo Vagni  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8140-1361>

Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. Both the UKTUS 2014–2015 and the ATUS 2010–2013 can be freely accessed at <https://www.mtusdata.org/mtus/>
2. I compared my sample to the Understanding Society sample of parents during the same period of time and found no significant differences in terms of age, number of children, employment and education (see Online Appendix).
3. I present the random effects model in the Online Appendix.
4. Which is the partner in the father's model.
5. This is even more pronounced when we consider the reporting of couple time from the individual diarist's perspective (see Online Appendix).
6. I ran supplementary analyses desegregating different types of childcare (routine, reading and playing). Indeed, I found that routine childcare is negatively associated with a mother's enjoyment, while reading is positively associated. Nonetheless, this did not change the fact that the overall presence of the child is positively associated with a mother's mood.

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Giacomo Vagni is a postdoctoral researcher at the Centre for Time Use Research, University College London. His research interests are families, gender, social stratification, and the sociology of time. He completed his PhD in Sociology at Nuffield College, University of Oxford. His work has appeared in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *European Sociological Review* and *British Journal of Sociology*.

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