

Sex and the Social Worker: How a Social Work Degree Helps in the Bedroom

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Abstract This non experimental approach examined 104 participants of the Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program (BPD) on the impact work and children living in the home (under age 18) had on married couples' perception of their sex lives. Multiple and linear regression were used to assess work life, work hours, and the impact of having children (under age 18) who resided in the home on participants' perception of their sexual satisfaction. Results indicated that children do not have a statistically significant relationship on married couples' marital sexual satisfaction while work life/work hours did have a significant relationship. These findings suggested therapists, counselors, and social workers acknowledge how work and children impact the sexual relationship of dual career couples as they try to balance their careers and family life.

Keywords Dual Career Couples, Marital Quality, Marital Satisfaction, Sexual Satisfaction, Social Workers

Introduction

Families with two working spouses, known also as dual-career couples, have become the most prevalent family type in the United States (Fouad & Tinsley, 1997). With the large increase in this family style, concern have been raised about the issues couples are faced with when compared to more "traditional" married couples, where one spouse is paid for work done outside of the home while the other spouse, usually the wife, stays at home with no viable income brought into the household (Hyde, DeLamater, & Hewitt, 1998). Dual-career couples must wrestle with the dilemma of how to balance both family and work. Moreover, there are many questions as to how these families cope with the role changes they are faced with. Therefore a dissertation topic entitled "The Effects on Perceived Sexual Satisfaction in Marriages When Both Parents Work and Children under the Age of 18 Live in the

Home," was forged in 2011 to determine whether having young children at home adversely affected perceived marital sexual satisfaction. As the literature review was conducted, the researchers hypothesized the results would reveal how the exhaustion of maintaining a dual-income family with younger children still at home would minimize marital sexual satisfaction. However, when the results of the original study formalized, we quickly realized Bachelor degree-level social workers seemed to defy what other literature had suggested. Instead of reporting a decrease in marital sexual satisfaction, married social workers with children still at home participating in the study reported that having children under 18 still living at home did not negatively affect perceived marital sexual satisfaction.

Marital satisfaction is the individual feelings of happiness within a marriage and has been viewed as an important element of overall marital value (Sokolski & Hendrick, 1999). There are a variety of terms referred to as marital satisfaction such as marital stability (Blum & Mehrabian, 1999), marital success (Murray, 2000), marital quality (Perrone & Worthington, 2001), and marital happiness (Tsang, Harvey, Duncan, & Sommer, 2003).

During the 1930s and 1940s, researchers observed spousal differences associated with marital happiness and the early findings indicated there was an association between couple's personalities and marital quality (Caughlin, Huston, & Houts, 2000). In a study conducted by Gattis, Berns, and Christensen (2004), the factors of neuroticism (psychological distress), extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and positive forms of expression were six personality dimensions explored in a study of 180 married couples. The study used the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) and identified 132 out of the 180 couples were distressed (Spanier, 1976). The terminology of being "distressed" indicated the couple's self-reported marital satisfaction based on the couple's perceived agreement in important matters, cohesive thinking on common activities, satisfaction with the overall progress of the relationship,

and the expression of satisfaction with the couple's affective and sexual life. The Global Distress Scale (GDS), a validity scale of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory-Revised (MSI-R)(Snyder, 1997), was also used to measure overall dissatisfaction of couples in their relationships. The MSI-R and the DAS were noted to have strong convergent validity. Although Gattis et al., (2004) found low levels of psychological distress and high levels of agreeableness, conscientiousness, and positive expressivity were related to marital satisfaction, Zentner (2005) found that among couples tracked over a nine-month period, agreeableness and openness to experience were the two personality dimensions most closely related to marital satisfaction.

In the 1950s, researchers focused on the roles of cognition, affect, and the level of social support within marital relationships by reviewing twenty-three studies to examine the evidence of attributions (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). Literature on cognition suggested that spousal and negative attributions created unfavorable marital outcomes (Bradbury et al., 2000). Gottman and Notarius (2002) reported moderate and high relationship measures of marital functioning as well as moderate correlations of marital satisfaction with spouse's description of their spouse's personality traits resulted in two replicated phenomena in the area of marital research. This occurrence was known as the halo phenomena and suggested the personality was associated with marital satisfaction, but found the perception of how each spouse viewed their spouses' personality was actually what was related to marital satisfaction (Gottman et al., 2002).

During the 1970s, researchers shifted the focus from individuals to interactional behavior patterns of couples and how couples achieved marital satisfaction (Ebling&Levenson, 2003). By the 1980s and 1990s, McCabe (2006) modified the research to include the interactions of husbands and wives to get a clearer understanding of the elements significant to marital satisfaction. During the investigation, the demand/withdrawal pattern was explored in which one spouse criticized the other spouse who would then withdraw from the argument. The results indicated this repeated process caused a decline in marital satisfaction (McCabe, 2006).

In the latter part of the 20th century, researchers began to look at a variety of demographic, economic, social, and cultural changes in the United States that affected marital quality including age at current marriage, duration of marriage, children, and employment (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003). The increase in age at marriage was associated with improvement in the quality of marriages. Amato et al, (2003) also indicated marital happiness tended to decrease with duration of marriage. Couples with children reported less marital happiness, and although wives' employment improved the economic well-being of their household, the increase in dual-career arrangements decreased marital happiness as a result

(Amato et al., 2003). Tsang et al., (2003) found couples had the lowest marital satisfaction during childrearing years because spouses spent more time taking care of their children than taking care of their relationship. Marital satisfaction tended to follow a curvilinear pattern in which the highest satisfaction was indicated in new marriages, declining in the middle years, and returning in the later years (Story, Berg, Smith, Beveridge, Henry, & Pearce, 2007).

Perrone et al. (2001) found marital quality had essential effects on a couple's overall well-being. The study proposed and tested an initial model of marital quality among 52 men and 55 women who all balanced careers and marital roles. The model was designed within a social role framework and included variables that positively and negatively influenced marital quality. Positive factors included resources for living such as material possessions and social support necessary to strengthen and maintain social roles. Secondly, married couples had relationships that contributed to marital quality such as love, sexual satisfaction, and communication, and married couples had coping methods to help deal with threats to their social roles. Also, part of achieving high quality in one's role was managing one's combination of roles effectively. Finally, the more affectionate marital interactions occurred, the greater the marital quality. A negative factor found in the study was the roles of couples. The authors found that when the roles of married couples became problematic and failed to satisfy needs or when the roles presented several competing demands, this caused role strain (Perrone et al., 2001). Variables examined in the study were love, sexual satisfaction, communication, and satisfaction with the dual-career lifestyle (Perrone et al., 2001). The instrument used was a 10-item Marital Satisfaction subscale that measured global marital quality reported by the married individuals. Participants that reported a high degree of love, sexual satisfaction, and communication also reported high marital quality. Perrone et al., (2001), in support of the social role theory, found when husbands and wives carried out their marital roles with a high degree of love and sexual satisfaction, role patterns were developed, contributing to an improvement in marital satisfaction. According to Barnett, Del Campo, Del Campo, and Steiner (2003), achieving quality and satisfaction in any given role was predicated upon the ability to manage one's combination of roles effectively.

Tsang et al. (2003) reported marital happiness to be a major contributor to global happiness. The determinants researched included satisfaction of physical and emotional needs, perception of equity and equality in household labor, and responsibilities and gender. These factors were found to be negatively affected by the addition of children into a relationship. A subset of 1, 275 respondents that remained married and who worked 40 hours or more a week with preschool children ages five and under were selected throughout the three wave panel study from 1980 to 1988 (Tsang et al., 2003). Six hypotheses were tested for effects

on the variables. Hypotheses one and two explored marital happiness in couples with preschool children, hypotheses three to five were about children, marital structure, and marital happiness, and hypothesis six was about the influence of traditionalism and dual-earner status on marital structure effects. Results showed that the addition of children negatively affected marital structure, decreased marital satisfaction, and increased role strain arising from more wives participating in the work force (Tsang et al., 2003).

Based on the literature review, many studies were conducted on how families balance their work and family lives. Little research, however, had been investigated on the effects that work and children living in the home (under age 18) had on marital sexual satisfaction. Therefore, in 2011, a research study was conducted to examine how couples balanced both family and work, but this study provided a more in-depth understanding of how important sex is in marriages and attempted to answer three research questions: 1.) For dual working couples, is there an association between sexual satisfaction and children? 2.) For dual career couples, what is the impact of work life on perceived sexual satisfaction? 3.) For dual career couples, what is the impact of work hours on perceived sexual satisfaction?

Methodology

Research Design

A non-experimental design was conducted using a quantitative approach for a 12 month period. Data was collected from two measures: a demographic and a self-administered questionnaire created in Survey Monkey.

Criteria for Inclusion/Exclusion

Two inclusion criteria's were used in this study. First, all participants had to be married for at least three years. Secondly, children had to be less than 18 years of age and living in the home. Exclusion criteria included unmarried couples who did not have children, or dual incomes.

Selection of Sample

A random sample was drawn from a listserv of a thousand members of the Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors (BPD). The participants consisted of Bachelors of Social Work (BSW) directors, faculty, administrators, publishers, researchers, and doctoral students, who were married for at least three years, with dual incomes.

Analyses

In performing the analyses, multiple and linear regression

were used to assess work life, work hours, and the impact of having children (under the age of 18) who resided in the home on participants' perception of their sexual satisfaction. Data was entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19.0 for Windows for analysis. The data was reviewed to ensure responses were consistent, within range of the response options and that participants met the inclusion criteria. Response criteria included the employment of both the respondent and his or her partner (dual career) and marriage length of at least three years. Descriptive statistics was calculated to describe the participant characteristics and the research variable.

Data was obtained from the *Sexual Satisfaction Survey* and the associated participant demographics. Composite scores were created to measure two of the research variables (sexual satisfaction and work life). These variables included multiple items measured with a Likert-type scale in which 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Items in the scale was summed and divided by the number of items in the scale to create the composite score. Sexual satisfaction was created using items 16, 20, 22 and 23. Work life was created using items 17, 18, 19 and 21. Reliability of the scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha to provide an estimate of the internal consistency of the scale.

Results

The hypotheses in this study were used to address three basic research questions. The discussion centers on the research questions and the results of the tests of hypotheses provided answers to the research questions. Further, the results of the study spurred the authors on to determine why the original theory did not provide the results expected.

Research Question 1

For dual-career couples, is there an association between perceived sexual satisfaction and children living in the home (under the age of 18)?

Based on the review of literature, it was expected that dual-career couples' sex lives would be negatively impacted when they have children living in the home (under age 18). In support of this assumption, the sexual dissatisfaction model indicated it was more difficult for couples to have sexual relationships with children in the home because children demanded a great deal of attention, and these demands often times interfered with the parents' own pleasures (Twenge, Campbell, & Craig, 2003).

One hypothesis was established for the purpose of answering research question one.

Ha1: There will be a significant relationship between dual-career couples with children living in the home (under age 18) and perceived sexual satisfaction. Results of the Linear Regression indicated that children in the home do not have a statistically significant impact on perceived sexual satisfaction; therefore, Ha1 could not be rejected.

This finding indicated children do not have an impact on dual-career couples' sex lives. However, this contradicts previous literature which, indicated that when children live in the home (under age 18), they do impact the sexual relationship of dual-career couples. Call, Sprecher, and Schwartz (1995) suggested the decline in frequency of marital sexual intercourse was a result of increasing roles such as parenthood or having a demanding job. In addition, Twenge et al., (2003) reported children contributed to stress and strain partially due to decreased time for couples to have discussion, interference with the couples' companionship, and interference with the couple's sex life.

Although the results of the current study did not support hypothesis one, which indicated there would be a significant relationship between dual-career couples with children living in the home (under age 18) and perceived sexual satisfaction, more research is needed on children and the impact they have on the sexual relationship of dual-career couples. The current study indicated that out of the 85 participants that reported they had children (under age 18) living in the home, 33.3% were in the 7-12 age range, while 29.3% were in the 13-18 age range. Research suggested marital sex was significantly less frequent when couples had younger children ages 0-4 (Call et al., 1995). Research also suggested the ages of children, particularly children under 6, had links to negative spillover, while children ages 6 to 18 had positive spillover effects on marital interactions (Kinnunen, Feldt, Geurts, & Pulkkinen, 2006). With 62.6% of the participants having children ranging from age 7-18, this may have impacted the results of the study.

Also, 85% of the participants were social workers. These are professionals who are well-educated, with a host of experience in the areas of marital and family conflicts. With social workers having greater experiences in teaching families how to deal with conflicts as they relate to balancing family and marital interactions on a daily basis, this may be a contributing factor to why the findings contradicted previous literature.

Table 1. Frequencies and Percentages on Age Group for Child for #1 through #4

Child described	Birth to 3	Age 4-6	Age 7-12	Age 13-18
	n(%)	n(%)	n(%)	N(%)
Child #1	18 (21.4)	13(15.5)	25 (29.8)	28 (33.3)
Child #2	8 (17.0)	10(21.3)	18 (38.3)	11 (23.4)
Child #3	2 (13.3)	3(20.0)	6 (40.0)	4 (26.7)
Child #4	0 (0.0)	2(50.0)	1 (25.0)	1 (25.0)
Total in age category	28 (18.7)	28 (18.7)	50 (33.3)	44 (29.3)

Research Question 2

For dual-career couples, what is the impact of work life

on perceived sexual satisfaction?

Based on the review of literature, it was expected work life (which is how individuals balance career and family) would impact perceived sexual satisfaction among dual-career couples. Supporting this assumption is the notion that nearly all couples encounter some conflict related to family and work responsibilities. Various conditions within the work area, including emotional fatigue, role overload, and reduced accomplishment were viewed as factors that impacted marital sexual satisfaction (Barnett, Del Campo, Del Campo, & Steiner, 2003). In addition, an increased work pace and enhanced arousal at the end of the day also resulted in reduction of marital interactions (Schultz, Cowan, Cowan, & Brennan, 2004).

Table 2. Frequencies and Percentages on Responses to items 18, 19, 21 (Work Life)

Work Life items	n	%
Difficult to become sexually aroused after a long work day (item 17)		
Strongly disagree	18	17.5
Disagree	47	45.6
Neither disagree nor agree	8	7.8
Agree	23	22.3
Strongly agree	7	6.8
Work hours impact interest (item 18)		
Strongly disagree	15	14.4
Disagree	30	28.8
Neither disagree nor agree	12	11.5
Agree	36	34.6
Strongly agree	11	10.6
Work life makes it difficult (item 19)		
Strongly disagree	7	6.7
Disagree	25	24
Neither disagree nor agree	14	13.5
Agree	46	44.2
Strongly agree	12	11.5
Work hours so great they take away (item 21)		
Strongly disagree	8	7.8
Disagree	19	18.6
Neither disagree nor agree	15	14.7
Agree	44	43.1
Strongly agree	16	15.7

One hypothesis was established for the purpose of answering research question two. Ha2: There will be a

significant relationship between dual career couples' work life and perceived sexual satisfaction. Results of the Linear Regression indicated work life does have a statistically significant impact on perceived sexual satisfaction; therefore, Ha2 is rejected.

This finding supported the notion that work life stress stems from work stressors that interfered with family roles. In addition, previous research indicated work life issues not only affected couples' time together, but it also impacted their mental health and distress levels (Matthews, Congor, & Wikerama 1996). Further explanations of this finding will be presented later in the Implications section of this chapter.

Research Question 3

For dual-career couples, what is the impact of work hours on perceived sexual satisfaction?

Based on the review of literature, it was expected the higher the number of work hours for dual-career couples, the less time they had to spend together (Kingston & Nock, 1987). Supporting this assumption is the belief that the number of work hours was important because less time was available for marital interactions as a result of extended work hours (Galambos & Walters, 1992). In addition, crossover studies showed that spouse's hours had a direct effect on the amount of time couples spent together (Blair, 1993).

One hypothesis was established for the purpose of answering research question three. Ha3: There will be a significant relationship between dual-career couple's work hours and perceived sexual satisfaction. Results of the Multiple Regression indicated that work hours do have a statistically significant impact on perceived sexual satisfaction therefore Ha3 is rejected.

A post hoc analysis was completed when an interesting relationship between work hours and sexual satisfaction indicated that when work hours increased, sexual satisfaction also increased. Six participants (three African American women, two Caucasian women, and one African American male) were randomly selected at a Social Work workshop to be interviewed. Each participant was asked what he or she thought about the finding that when work hours increased, sexual satisfaction also increased. Post hoc results indicated four of the participants viewed sex as an outlet to relieve stress from a long day's work, while another participant viewed sex as a way to "make up" for the time being away from home, and the last participant indicated that because of the long work hours, when sex finally occurred, it was an opportunity to really romance the partner. Results of the post hoc analysis supported research which indicated couples compensate for each other's stress at the workplace by being physically and emotionally supportive of each other (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989).

Surprisingly, the results indicated children did not have a statistically significant relationship on perceived sexual satisfaction, and yet, work life/work hours did have a statistically significant relationship on dual-career couples'

perceived sexual satisfaction. These findings suggested therapists, counselors, and social workers need to acknowledge how work and children impact the sexual relationship of dual-career couples as they try to balance their careers and family life.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations for Work Hours

Work hours	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Participant	47.26	11.15
Spouse/partner	46.83	11.17

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study were never intended to imply married couples should stop working or having children. The findings, however, have implications for professionals in the field of social work, counseling, and marriage and family therapy for future studies that embrace dual-career couples and the struggles they have with balancing work and children with their sexual relationships. Originally, the sample in the study was selected because the listserv provided an easy opportunity to reach a large pool of participants; however, the participant's education level and knowledge about family functioning appears to have positively skewed the results. Professional Social Workers tend to have a sophisticated level of skills in self-awareness and verbal communication which are both specifically designed to deal with family crisis and marital conflicts. Although self-awareness and communication stand alone in Social Workers' personal and professional relationships, both skills overlap and work together to influence a social worker's daily practice (The New Social Worker, 1997). When it comes to communicating, Social Workers receive ongoing training and practice to pay attention to what is said, what is actually meant, and each is trained to effectively affect change when needed instead of dwelling on the same issues over and over again. Yet, it appears the most meaningful contribution for personal success, especially as it relates to this study, is the Social Worker's ability to put aside work for relaxation.

Although very few peer-reviewed research articles were available to describe how identified social work skills contribute to how social workers manage their own sexual satisfaction in marriage, the National Association of Social Workers provided an ethical principle that included how graduates from social work programs are armed with a strong desire to strengthen, restore, and maintain healthy relationships, and to solve personal and family issues that may arise (NASW, 2011). An article published based on the aftermath of September 11, 2001 (O'Neill, 2002), demonstrated how social workers were able to work through the horror and increased anxiety while still providing services to others in need. In addition, perhaps the University of Pittsburgh (The Many Facets of Social

Work, n.d.) compiled the best list of skills a Social Work graduate possesses. The most important skill related to the findings here notes the social worker's ability to have knowledge and an understanding of human relationships. Therefore, when marital conflict arises, it appears Social Workers have a higher propensity to use learned skills to resolve the issues at hand.

The current findings suggested that although there was a statistically significant relationship between work life and sexual satisfaction, the relationship was rather weak. This may also be due to the level of coping abilities the participants (social workers) possessed. Given the level of expertise social workers may have in dealing with these work life issues and how they impact sexual satisfaction in dual-career couples, this may have impacted the weak correlation between work life and sexual satisfaction.

Although the relationship between work life and sexual satisfaction was not strong, the findings still support the role conflict theory, which indicated that heavy workloads outside the family can interrupt marital obligations and alter the amount of time and energy that marital couples spend with one another (Twenge et al., 2003). The results also indicated that work life adds to the literature substantially because work stressors do often times spill over into the couple's family life, contributing to a lack of sexual activity. Although the emotional stress of the workday is linked to the quality of nightly marital interactions (Matthews, Del Priore, Acitelli, & Barnes-Farrell, 2006), the findings suggest couples should not allow one domain (work life) to hinder interactions in other domains (sexual satisfaction).

The results of this study emphasized that dual-career couples must be more attuned to creating a balance between their work life and sexual relationship. Efforts to improve the sexual relationship of dual-career couples with children living in the home (under age 18) may help nurture positive marital interactions by encouraging more sexual involvement between those couples. The findings also indicate further research should investigate flexible working arrangements to discover the potential for reducing work life stressors and their negative influence on sexual satisfaction in dual-career couples.

The findings also indicated there was a statistically significant relationship between work hours and perceived sexual satisfaction. Yet, an interesting discovery showed that when work hours increased, perceived sexual satisfaction also increased. Again, in the final analysis of the data, it appeared the typical skill set of the modern social worker provided strong conflict resolution skills and a desire to meet the partner's needs regardless of the time available. In addition, the study indicated social workers intentionally made the most of any time they did have with their partner. Moreover, the participants in the study were highly educated individuals and research showed the higher the education level, the higher the income (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2003). With greater financial resources made available to more educated individuals, the findings suggested this may also minimize family stressors

that typically spillover and adversely affect marital interactions. One assumption for the impact of work hours on perceived sexual satisfaction was that the more hours worked, the more income received. Having a higher income may make it more affordable for individuals to obtain childcare, and therefore might allow couples an opportunity to spend quality time alone with their partner (Tatman, Hovestadt, Yelsma, Fenell, & Canfield, 2006). These findings suggested a better understanding that dual-career couples both contributed financially to the overall quality of the relationship, and suggested dual-career couples not only acknowledge the gains of employment, but the strains these gains placed on their sexual relationship. Therefore, the findings of the study were consistent with research findings despite the sample in the study being represented only by individuals with high levels of education and professional status.

Finally, perhaps the greatest gain in this particular study was sharing the data back with the participants. While most social workers are in highly stressful and volatile domestic situations at work, it is affirming to see how the skills that serve individuals well at work also serve the social worker's own family at home, because often times these professionals are reshaping the lives of our most vulnerable populations. Greater still is the fact that the children within the social worker's home have the added benefit of seeing a mom and dad having a great partnership and a more satisfactory marriage both in and out of the bedroom.

Despite the limitations and the obvious need to conduct future research studies, this study is an initial step in investigating how professionals should encourage families to balance work and children, since these issues may be contributing to dual career couples' lack of marital sexual satisfaction. Hopefully the findings will stimulate new research by using this instrument with individuals in different career fields such as physicians, teachers, or firefighters with the goal of identifying other disciplines that may not be as equipped to deal with family stressors as social workers. The potential outcome would be for couples to have a healthier sexual relationship, while also balancing their family and work life/hours.

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