

Does Happiness have a Gendered Face?

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Abstract

This article examines whether gendered identities have an impact on men's and women's perceptions regarding the concepts 'happiness' and 'unhappiness'. In other words: whether happiness or unhappiness carry different meaning for the people of different gender categories. In investigating this question, the paper draws on narratives of 63 male and female participants alongside ethnographic observations. The study was conducted in Sylhet, Bangladesh and evaluates these accounts in the context of existing social science literature. This study reveals that the participants' happiness is inextricably linked with their gendered identities. Women in most cases appear to define happiness in terms of their children's and family's wellbeing. However, this of course cannot be said about the male participants. Happiness for the male participants were more closely associated with their material pursuits and the ability to uphold their image as a 'real man'. This study argues that the processes of gendering, cultural values of Bangladeshi society and social expectations lead men and women to define their happiness in gender - specific ways.

Index terms— men, women, happiness, unhappiness, gender, culture.

1 Introduction and Context of the Study

What makes a person happy? This question hardly has a straightforward answer, partly because different disciplines explain it from dissimilar perspectives; and partly because it seems to have a relationship with a variety of issues of a person's life and in the society within which (s)he lives. In recent decades studies related to people's happiness received much importance from psychology, sociology, economics and other disciplines (Veenhoven 1991). The studies revealed dissimilar sources of happiness, and therefore most of the studies agreed to the fact that happiness in general are determined by multifarious factors and it is not easy to identify a particular element as the source of happiness. In this article I use the terms happiness, life satisfaction, wellbeing and subjective wellbeing interchangeably. Veenhoven (2008) perceives happiness as a subjective state of mind. According to Veenhoven (1991) if a person possesses more favourable attitude towards the overall quality of his or her life then the person may perceive him/herself happy; while a person may not feel happy even in a standard situation if (s)he does not like the life or requires more to claim himself or herself happy. Easterlin (2001) maintains although individuals are free to define happiness in their own terms, in most cases it has been observed that there are a few things which largely determine and shape people's happiness. Economists, even a couple of decades ago, tended to pay substantial emphasis on income as the main source of happiness. Correspondingly, unemployment has been identified as a major source of unhappiness in many studies (Oswald 1997). More recent studies conducted by economists, however, demonstrate that an increase in one's income does not automatically escalate a person's happiness. Rather, they go on to say that there are many other factors at play and these factors also need closer inspection to understand the inner dynamics (Easterlin 1995 and 2001). It has also been documented by studies that gender difference may serve as an important aspect and accordingly men and women may find happiness in dissimilar sources (Argyle 1987).

In this study my aim is to facilitate, through gender analysis, a greater understanding of men's and women's perspectives regarding happiness and unhappiness in the context of Sylhet, Bangladesh. Although globally

1 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

45 happiness studies have managed to draw immense attention among scholars, there has not been a great deal of
46 work published in this field pertaining specifically to happiness in less developed countries. This is especially true
47 for Bangladesh. There are many studies conducted in Bangladesh -widely discussing women's paid employment
48 and its impact on their status (e.g., Kibria 1995, Kabeer 1997 Salway et al. 2005). Some of these studies
49 (e.g., Haque and Kusakabe 2005, Kibria 1995, Kabeer 1997 also mentioned how women's paid employment
50 and corresponding men's unemployment influence women's wellbeing negatively, how domestic violence lessens
51 women's satisfaction and how cultural values of the society put constraints on women to uphold their wellbeing.
52 Nevertheless there was a dearth of information regarding gender based perceptions about happiness. To fill this
53 vacuum, in this study I intend to address the questions: what are the sources of happiness for the men and
54 women who are situated at the poorer strata of the society? Do men and women derive happiness from dissimilar
55 sources? Do poorer women's engagement in paid employment and breadwinning role make an impact on their
56 wellbeing? Do societal values and gendered socialisation lead women and men to derive happiness from particular
57 sources? To deal with these questions I use qualitative data gathered from the fieldwork conducted in Sylhet,
58 Bangladesh. In order to explain the gender based inequality and resultant varied perceptions of men and women
59 regarding happiness, I draw on different theoretical explanations made in existing literature.

60 In Bangladeshi society, gendered socialisation of boys and girls starts from birth (Chowdhury 2000). From
61 childhood a Bangladeshi girl is trained to accept her subordinate position in society through the process
62 of gendered socialisation. She is taught the 'feminine' virtues, for instance, tolerance, patience, devotion,
63 submissiveness and faithfulness to fit with the societal ideal of 'perfect woman' (Chowdhury 2000;Choudhury
64 2014). Marriage and the issues related to marriage occupy the central position of the life of a girl since her
65 childhood. According to Sanyal (2009), cultural practices and rubrics that govern marriage and married women's
66 demeanor efficiently keep them (women) from achieving greater control over their lives. Nevertheless marriage
67 continues to be the most important event in life of an overwhelming majority of women. Socialisation, education
68 and all other important aspects of a girl's life revolves around the thoughts of marriage (Khan 1993 cited in
69 Akmam 2004). In recent decades some transformations have been observed in parents' thought pattern regarding
70 daughters' education and socialisation (Chowdhury 2009). It has also been observed that the gender based
71 socialisation has made such a profound impact on girls' and women's perceptions that minor shifts in parents'
72 worldview has yet to bring significant changes. Goldberg (1993) observes that the difference between men and
73 women does not lie in their physiology rather women's lack of motivation to achieve success holds them back.
74 In line with Goldberg (1993) I argue that women's socialisation process precludes them from being motivated
75 to seek better positions with greater spirit and perseverance. Even a great majority of educated women were
76 seen not to take their professional career seriously. Rather, both women and society tend to consider women's
77 paid employment only an option. In this way, women continue to devalue their potential to emerge as equal
78 contributors to society and family. A good number of educated women seemed reticent -not wishing to challenge
79 the existing gender hierarchy and relations. If they enter into the field of paid employment, most of them
80 concentrate in female stereotype jobs and earn 'pin money'.

81 Cultural norms and the process of gendering in a patriarchal society seem to shape women's worldview and
82 eventually determine their destiny both at the familial and societal levels.

83 As mentioned earlier, in Bangladesh marriage as an institution has been given much importance and this
84 is especially true for women (Chowdhury 2000). A newly married woman's relationship with her husband is
85 hierarchical and her status in marital home is very fragile. She is expected to be compliant and shape herself
86 according to the wishes of her husband and inlaws (Gardner 2006; ??ikri1999;Jha et al. 1998). In Bangladeshi
87 society a man is expected to be the household head, breadwinner, guardian of his dependants and the decision
88 maker of the family. Wife, on the other hand, is clearly subordinate to her husband and required to fit with the
89 ideal of 'perfect women'widely valued in the context of Bangladesh (Ahmed 1991, Kabeer 1991 ?? Dube 1997).

90 Bangladeshi society tends to emphasise heavily on women's responsibilities as wife and mother. And
91 subordinating their own interests to the wellbeing of their husbands and families is perceived as natural (Kabeer
92 1994 and. Women in Bangladesh are predominantly responsible for the tasks that take place within the home.
93 I am not suggesting that all women in Bangladesh uniformly shoulder domestic responsibilities. I do recognise
94 that women's socioeconomic position and location play an important role in constructing their experience within
95 the home. In concurrence with my own studies (Choudhury 2013a and 2013b), I, nevertheless, argue that an
96 overwhelming majority of Bangladeshi women continue to bear the full burden of domestic work regardless of
97 their location, position and involvement in the labour market.

98 Paid employment outside the home also leaves a mixed impact upon the lives of poorer women in Bangladeshi
99 society is patrilineal and patrilocal and as mentioned earlier, here men are culturally responsible for earning an
100 income for their family. However, in recent decades financial hardship, men's inability to run the family with
101 single incomes, unavailability of a reliable male breadwinner and women's improved employment opportunities
102 concurrently have contributed to a shift in existing gender role-relations in Bangladeshi society. Participant
103 women of this study entered into the world of paid labour predominantly due to poverty. A great majority of the
104 female participants of this study do not have a reliable man to earn a living for their family. I am not suggesting
105 that all women want to rely on men for their upkeep and those women who want to rely on men, they do so due
106 to the fact that they do not want to work outside. Here I am arguing that under classic patriarchy in Bangladesh
107 men and women alike are socialised in ways that obliged many of them to continue to adhere to the orthodox

108 values of female seclusion. Consequently, infringing the artificial boundary of men's and women's domains exerts
109 immense social and psychological stress on them. As stated earlier, poorer women who are pushed to the labour
110 market, generally are not deemed suitable for better paid employments. In the labour market they earn less in
111 comparison to their male counterparts, experience different forms of exploitation and discrimination, and in the
112 home they do the 'double shift'.

113 Bangladesh (Choudhury 2013a). Given the sociocultural discourses of izzat (honour) and shame, women face
114 various obstacles while entering the labour market. Hartman (1976) argues that women's labour power does not
115 belong to them and lack of control over their labour power is viewed by her as an important source of exploitation.
116 In this study I also found that women are less likely to have control over their labour power. Studies (Kabeer 1997,
117 Choudhury 2013a revealed that women's participation in paid work in many ways contribute to their wellbeing.
118 Conversely, my own study (Choudhury 2013b) also found that earning an income cannot be translated in more
119 marital power. Moreover, women's earning capacity may expose them to domestic violence. It is evident from the
120 above discussion that having a detail understanding about gender based happiness or unhappiness in the context
121 of Bangladesh is a complex process. The article investigates this complex process in the light of the following
122 theoretical arguments.

123 Studies conducted in different parts of the world reveal dissimilar findings about gender based happiness. For
124 example: Wood, Rhodes and Whelan's (1989) meta-analysis of 93 studies, Mookherjee's (1997) study conducted
125 in USA and the study done by Lu et al. (1997) among the Chinese community in Taiwan found that women
126 were happier than men.

127 Whereas, Stevenson and Wolfers' (2009) study conducted in American context reveals that despite many
128 positive changes in women's status almost over the past four decades, women's subjective wellbeing is not
129 improving. Rather their study reports a decline in women's wellbeing in comparison with that of men. My analysis
130 also suggests that although there are many poorer women in Bangladesh who are the principal breadwinners of
131 the family and able to make at least some important decisions for themselves, this scenario has not enhanced
132 women's subjective wellbeing to a great extent. Similarly, Clisby and Holds worh (2014) put forward the argument
133 that the process of gendering of women can and do have an important impact on women's mental wellbeing and
134 this in turn influences women's 'choices, opportunities and constrains'. Clisby and Holds worh (2014:5) explain
135 mental wellbeing as a state that 'includes a broad range of mental health issues, such as low self-esteem, lack of
136 confidence, feelings of low self-worth, anxiety and depression'. Lu and Shih's (1997) research on Taiwanese people
137 also supported this contention. In their study they demonstrated that women's happiness mostly emanates from
138 harmonious relationship with their near and dear ones. Men, on the other hand, find happiness from material
139 pursuits and career success. In line with Stevenson and Wolfers (2009), in this study I also argue that change
140 in women's market position has not automatically promoted their wellbeing and there is aVolume XVII Issue III
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143 Year 2017 large gap still exists between the genders regarding this matter.

144 Clisby and Holdsworth (2014) though captured the scenario of the process of gendering of men and women
145 in the British contexts, the situation of my participants fit with their explanation of the dissimilar process of
146 gendering. Drawing on Clisby and Holdsworth (2014), I contest in societies where male domination is persuasive,
147 gender based inequality is nothing but natural and cultural values are in favour of hierarchical relations between
148 men and women, in such societies women's wellbeing will suffer to a great extent. Similar to Clisby and Holdsworth
149 (2014), Ialso contend that women's lower mental wellbeing effectively put constraints on them to avail different
150 opportunities open to them, hold them back to make choices more freely and reduce their appetite to strive for
151 the best for themselves.

152 Mencarini and Sironi (2012) argue that unequal gender division of labour in the household has a profound
153 impact on a woman's personal wellbeing. In line with them I also argue that Bangladeshi women's position
154 appears to fit with this explanation as in Bangladesh the divisions of labour along gender lines is paramount
155 both within and outside the home (also see Choudhury 2013a; 2013b and 2014). And this gender based division
156 of labour places extra burden on women. Vyas and Wats (2009) maintain when women take paid employment
157 outside the home, they may experience some positive changes in their households. However, women's access
158 to an income and ability to make decisions about important issues of their life may have a negative impact on
159 their conjugal relationship. As mentioned earlier, the hierarchical gender relations and patriarchal societal values
160 in Bangladesh seem not to promote women's individualism even when they make visible contributions to the
161 household. Rather on many occasions they encounter the wrath of their husbands who consider their income
162 earning ability as a threat to their masculine identity. I contest in order to escape masculine domination and
163 domestic violence many women downplay their economic role and this in turn reduces their wellbeing.

164 3 II.

165 4 Methodology

166 This research is based on ethnographic observation, life history interviews with 43 female participants and in-
167 depth interviews with 20 male participants. The data were collected in Sylhet, Bangladesh in 2010-2012 and

168 a follow-up in 2017. My female participants were involved in construction work in Sylhet, Bangladesh and male
169 participants were either involved in construction work directly or familiar with construction work via their wives.
170 My female participants' marital status varies: they were married, widowed, separated, deserted by husbands and
171 a few of them were in a second marriage following divorce. Accounts of both male and female participants were
172 included in the analyses to capture a broader picture of men's and women's perceptions regarding happiness.
173 Incorporating participants of both genders allows us to compare and contrast men's and women's perspectives.
174 In addition, inclusion of both husband and wife means in some cases husbands' accounts corroborate those of
175 their wives and the vice-versa. The sample was purposively selected from three different congregation points of
176 construction workers in Sylhet, Bangladesh. The sample was only limited to construction workers and husbands
177 of female construction workers, majority of whom are also employed in other labour intensive work and the result
178 cannot be generalised to other classes. My female participants range in age from 21 to 56 and male participants
179 from 17 to 56. Among the female participants 41 of them had at least 1 child when they were interviewed.

180 Men and women alike the participants of this study were from the poorer strata of the society and female
181 participants were engaged with manual labour that are designated as 'unskilled'. A great majority of the
182 female participants were unschooled. However, all my participants were one way or another constrained by
183 their socioeconomic and educational capital to find a better position for themselves in the society. The life
184 history interviews with female participants lasted from 7-8 hours over several sessions and in-depth interviews
185 with male participants lasted from 1 1/2 to 2 hours in single sessions. The interviews were audio recorded with
186 their informed consent and transcribed later.

187 5 Happiness and unhappiness: the male perspective

188 As mentioned before, my male participants were either construction workers or well informed about construction
189 work through their wives. The construction sector in Bangladesh is overwhelmingly male dominated and
190 hierarchical on the basis of gender (Choudhury 2013a). Accordingly, being familiar with construction work as
191 workers and being acquainted as husbands of female construction workers carry different meaning for the male
192 participants. Again, male participants' position in the construction labour market also has an important impact
193 in shaping their experience and perceptions. Although in this study I found that there were a few common sources
194 of happiness for all male participants, it has also been observed that there were some other sources which were
195 closely related to the personal circumstances of the participants. For example, participants who were working
196 as rajmistris 1 1 Head construction workers/masons they earned as much as 700 tk. (approximately £7) a day.
197 Among the construction sector workers they are considered to be the most successful. Their relative higher
198 income gives them an edge to spend little more money in comparison to other male workers who were working
199 as jogalis 2 in the construction sector. Jogalis generally earn 450 tk. (approximately £4.5) to 500 tk a day.
200 Rajmistris wear better clothes in comparison to beta jogalis 3 Male construction sector helpers, who required
201 their wives' income to run the household and thereby indorsed their wives' paid employment outside the home,
202 consider it a laceration on their identity as 'men' (Choudhury 2013a). Since the childhood they heard numerous
203 gender biased discourses, for example, women should stay at home and men should deal with the activities that
204 take place outside the home, women of izzatdar (respectable) families do not work outside the home and so on.
205 Through the process of gendering these men internalised men's and women's dissimilar roles and responsibilities
206 in the society. Their inability to adhere to these esteemed cultural practices of the society thought to discredit
207 them as men both in family and wider society and also exposes them to potential . They (Rajmistris) often
208 spend money on ready food, buy tea and tobacco for themselves from the shops near to the construction sites.
209 Sometimes they even treat their 'favourite' co-workers with, tea, juice, biscuits and snacks. In this way rajmistris
210 demonstrate their affluence and derive some satisfaction that they are certainly better off than their female and
211 also some of the male co-workers.

212 All my participant rajmistris were able to discharge the culturally prescribed masculine responsibility of
213 providing for their dependants and keeping their wives from entering into the labour market; while in most cases
214 construction sector helpers were not able to do so. Emerging as a successful breadwinner was also a matter
215 of pride and happiness for the rajmistris. These rajmistris' ability to discharge provisioning role also serves to
216 entrench their power base within the home. Monzurul, Bazlu, Mahbub and all other rajmistris were happily
217 mentioned that their wives required to follow their instructions as they are getting their wives food and other
218 necessary household items at home. All of them were able to make significant changes in their material condition
219 in terms of buying a piece of land, renovating their old houses or constructing a new house in their place of
220 origin and making small investments in local business. Their children of school going age were attending school
221 and these men possessed high aspirations for their children. None of them wanted their children to work in the
222 construction sector. These men appeared to receive greater recognition from their family and friends. Similar
223 to Lu and Shih (1997), in this study I also found that access to resources and success in career contributed to
224 my participant rajmistris happiness. challenges from their wives. And this concomitantly contributes to men's
225 unhappiness.

226 From the above discussion we see my male participants appeared to derive happiness from different sources,
227 yet, they all were seen to be very happy to be 'men' in Bangladeshi context. I am not suggesting that all men are
228 uniformly more powerful than women in Bangladesh; what I am trying to say that the local gender discourses
229 award men greater control both in the private and public spheres. The existing belief of male pre-eminence in the

society, assigns them such a higher status that regardless of their personal circumstances, men (and also women) tend to believe that they (men) are superior as a gender. It has been observed that using this societal discourse of male supremacy, male construction sector helpers get higher wages than female construction sector helpers (Choudhury 2013a). It has also been observed that the discriminatory practice of receiving differential wages on the basis of gender has far reaching implications on the lives of both men and women. Whist wage discrimination in the labour market constitutes the basis of satisfaction for many of my male participants, it effectively weakens many female construction workers' confidence and motivation as workers and dwindle their self-esteem as equally competent contributors to their households in particular and society in general. The worldview of men of being superior to women though may increase their satisfaction, my analysis suggests that it efficiently limits the wellbeing of the women of their immediate surroundings -for instance -wives, other female family members and female co-workers.

6 III. Happiness and Unhappiness for Women

As stated earlier, at present a great majority of women in Bangladeshi society cannot afford to conform to the archetype of 'ideal women' by staying at home as they require to earn an income for their family. Inability/unwillingness on the part of the husbands to provide for wives and children has accelerated the need for married women to take paid employment in the public sphere. Although these women's entry into paid employment in most cases was the upshot of men's actions (e.g., lack of effort to earn a living for the family, physical illness), both men and women suffer alike from the psychological pressure when they cannot comply with the cherished age-old gender roles(Choudhury 2013a).Female construction workers work in both public and private places, and also routinely mingle with nonkin men for work purpose which are inconsistent with the feminine norms in the context of Bangladesh. My participants, Jahela, Rokeya, Rehena, Muleda and many others do not tell their extended family members and acquaintances that they work in the construction sector. Even they deliberately avoid the situations where the possibilities arise to be identified as construction workers by the networks which are not related to their work. This finding concurs with my own study (Choudhury 2013a).Morzina, one of my participants, considered herself unlucky as her husband neither made a significant financial contribution to the household nor did he possess the desire to do so. Her comment portrayed women workers' dissatisfactions: I am from a religious family. My family members offer people religious education and I am working on the street. I cannot face my near and dear ones. I am ill-fated and this is why my husband is worthless. Had I been lucky, he would have taken care of me (Morzina, 32, married).

It emerged from the narratives of my participants that women's socialisation process and the life-long training to become a 'perfect woman' in the context of Bangladesh serve as a basis for further vulnerability. It seemed that women also feel unhappy to perceive that they are contravening the social norms.

Studies (Kibria 1995;Kabeer 1997; Choudhury 2013a and 2013b; Vyas and Wats 2009) demonstrated that paid employment resulted in women's improved position in home and wider society, in this study I also found the same. In the present study I came across particular examples where women's paid employment facilitate them to actively negotiate at home and wider social contexts. However, women's ability to take advantage of their changed economic circumstances is contingent. In Bangladeshi society, the roles of married women (especially those live with husbands) as the primary breadwinner and decision maker of the household are less likely to be admired. On many occasions women deliberately restrain themselves from asserting authority at home (Kabeer 1997;Choudhury 2013b). Moreover, they tend to keep gender relations unchanged to circumvent conflicts at home. In order to keep the gender relations intact women require to compromise their own wellbeing. They work long hours on construction sites and do most of the domestic chores which reduce their leisure time substantially (see Choudhury 2013a and 2013b). Most of my participants reported that they do not find time to chat with friends or relatives, spend some time indolently, take care of their personal needs or even think about themselves. Men, conversely, did not report to experience such busy schedules at home. At home nearly all of my male participants had free time. While women were always in rush and required to discharge their responsibilities. Similar to Mencarini and Sironi (2012) I also argue that the long working hours of women both at home and workplace decline their physical and mental wellbeing.

Despite having able bodied husbands, Noorjahan, Mahmuda, Minara, Rokeya and many others performed the role of principal breadwinners of their family. Their husbands were not willing to shoulder either financial or domestic responsibilities with them.

Furthermore, instead of being thankful to wives for earning incomes for the family most of them were critical about their wives' paid employment and reputation as women. It emerged from the narratives of my participants that husbands' irresponsible and inconsiderate behavior/statements not only hurts women but also contributes to lessen their confidence and selfrespect. My own studies (Choudhury 2013a and Choudhury 2013b) claimed that husbands' attitude matters the most to the women because they are socialised to believe that husband is the 'master' of a woman's life. Children also play an important role in constructing women's experiences. Children, those who were grown up, on many occasions reflected negatively on their mothers' work in the construction sector. Aklima, one of my elderly participants, for example, narrated that her sons were incessantly nagging that her work in the construction sector was ruining their image. However, they were reluctant to provide for her. Aklima seemed to feel very unhappy to think that her children do not care about the fact that their aged mother works hard in the construction sector to meet her needs but they care for their izzat in front of others. I,

292 conversely, found that women received much appreciation from their children who were relatively young. After
293 taking paid employment in the construction, all of the female participants were better able to support their
294 children and themselves. They were not able to gain much material success like many of their male co-workers,
295 yet, they were able to buy small things for their children-for example, toys, a new pair of shoes, a dress and
296 occasionally a meal of their children's choice. Some of them were able to buy a television and other cheap
297 consumer goods to meet the long-lasting demand of their children. Women's ability to meet the demands of their
298 children appeared to be a great source of their satisfaction.

299 Similar to Lu (2000), in this study I found that the thought about children's wellbeing was at the centre of
300 my participant women's lives. Naju, the youngest of my female participants, did not remarry despite immense
301 pressure from her natal family and social surroundings. She knew that her second marriage would make her
302 children more vulnerable. She did not want them to suffer, instead she struggled with two small children
303 without receiving support from her near and dear ones. Similarly, Rina, Julfa, Firoza and many others did
304 not remarry considering their children's wellbeing. Hasna, Mahmuda and others continued to be in an abusive
305 relationship for the sake of their children. They thought walking out on their husbands and starting a new
306 family would reflect negatively on their children's wellbeing. However, such concerns were not expressed by male
307 participants. According to the law, it is mandatory on the part of husbands to get unconstrained consent of their
308 existing wife before taking another wife. Hasna and Swapna's husbands got married without even informing
309 them, Afia's husband got married to her hiding his first wife and children. All these stories of my participants
310 clearly demonstrate how men's and women's perspectives differ in upholding or sacrificing their own interests
311 and corresponding wellbeing.

312 Lu and Shih's (1997) study maintains that women's happiness is contingent on their relationships. Aldous and
313 Ganey (1999) also found interpersonal relationships and marital satisfaction as important sources of women's
314 happiness. I concur with their assertions. My participants' accounts reiterated that being in an abusive
315 relationship lessens women's physical and mental wellbeing; whilst being in a relatively egalitarian relationship
316 substantially improves women's wellbeing. Shaheda, Meena, Aleya, Benu, Amena, Piyara, Fuli who seemingly
317 had better control over their conjugal relations -appeared to be more satisfied than others. It is not to say
318 that these women did not have dissatisfaction regarding their life. They did have issues with their husbands,
319 nevertheless, their relationships with their husbands were not as hierarchical as many other participants of this
320 study. They were able to maneuver many, if not all, situations in their favour in the home when the need arose. I
321 contend that this also gives women some sort of satisfaction. In the same vein, I argue that women -for instance
322 -Mahmuda, Ranu, Aklima, Rokeya and others -who were not in good terms with their husbands appeared to be
323 more dissatisfied with their lives. Domestic violence is inextricably linked with the lives of these women which
324 has a direct and detrimental bearing upon their wellbeing. In this study I found that people's experiences about
325 domestic violence varies to a large extent depending on their gendered identity. A great majority of my female
326 participants reported to face domestic violence routinely, while none of my male participants made such claims.
327 Even the question of encountering domestic violence did not seem pertinent to my male participants. Female
328 participants, however, were seen to trivialise the issue of domestic violence by putting the blame on their economic
329 condition. Sometimes they even justified domestic violence on the part of their husbands by saying 'if you keep
330 two pots close by, they will collide' or 'it happens as men cannot keep their head cool due to different problems
331 they face in everyday life'. Clisby and Holdsworth (2014) commented that the women of their study perceived
332 domestic violence as a 'mundane' affair. The same assertion can be made about the female participants of this
333 study. Rina, Hasna and many other women who were neither living with husbands nor receiving financial support
334 from husbands, continued to encounter domestic violence committed by their husbands. For Afia, Mahmuda,
335 Ranu, Rokeya, Coomi and many others conjugal conflict was a part and parcel of their daily life. All of these
336 women were members of nuclear family and the violence was perpetrated exclusively by their intimate partners.
337 However, none of these women ever thought about making official complaint against their husbands. This is not
338 the case that these women do not feel bad; they do feel bad but did not protest overtly. In line with Sarker and
339 Yesmin (2013) I contend that the culture of acceptance of domestic violence in Bangladeshi society is pervasive.
340 I would also argue that the socialisation of women and cultural practices of the society simultaneously inhibit
341 women from raising voice and persuade them not to take this seriously even though it has a deleterious effect on
342 their physical and mental wellbeing.

343 However, in stark contrast to these stories I also heard stories of women who uphold their self-respect by not
344 being compliant with their abusive husbands. My participant, Razia, walked out on her abusive husband without
345 giving it a second thought. Assia also left her abusive husband in their village home. Asma told that she would
346 not keep quiet in case of violent behavior on the part of her husband. Another participant, Benu, had a conjugal
347 conflict with her husband. Her husband's siblings used to set him against Benu. The conflict situation at Benu's
348 household got worsened gradually and one day her husband left the house. After his departure, Benu found out
349 that she was pregnant for the third time. She had two children to look after and her husband even did not know
350 about the third baby. Benu neither tried to find her husband nor she looked back, rather she concentrated on
351 her paid work and children. She was working irregularly at the beginning but after giving birth to the baby, she
352 started working with full force. Her husband's patrimony was the main source of conjugal conflict. Her in-laws
353 often blamed Benu saying that she was after her husband's patrimony. Thus, Benu was determined to achieve
354 material success in terms of accumulating money and/or land. She wanted to show her husband and in-laws that

355 she could do things on her own. After almost two years, Benu's husband came back to her. During this period he
356 met an accident, had difficult times and was apologetic for his behavior, hence, Benu accepted him. Even upon
357 his return, Benu continued to make important decisions about the household and her own life. This obviously
358 enhanced her subjective wellbeing.

359 I argued in previous sections that the process of gendering shapes women's worldview and makes them feel
360 bad if they cannot conform to the societal norms of 'stay at home wife'. However, it is not to say that all women
361 feel the same way. There were women who did not want to rely on men. Rather they wanted to work outside
362 the home and live their life not only to fulfill maternal and wifely responsibilities but to fulfill their own dreams
363 and uphold self-esteem. Goldberg (1993) argues that women are behind men in terms of achievement because
364 they lack the motivation. I contend that this is always not the case that women do not have the motivation to
365 achieve material success in life. Benu and Fuli, two of my participants, are the glaring examples of this fact.
366 However, it is no use denying that society does not possess high aspirations for women and this is particularly
367 so for the poorer women. Benu's husband was able to provide for Benu and children. Likewise, Fuli's second
368 husband was willing to support her financially. Nonetheless, they did not leave the labour market. Benu told
369 me that her husband could only give her food and shelter, but in her opinion this was not enough. She wanted
370 to save money for her future. Equally, Fuli was also pertinacious to save up money for future. Both Benu and
371 Fuli had reliable men, at least their husbands verbally assured them that they would take care of their needs,
372 but these two women did not want to relinquish their economic independence and corresponding life chances.
373 They had access to cash income and they retained control over their incomes. Fuli had a particular plan for her
374 future where she wanted to see herself as an independent and successful woman. Similarly, Benu wanted to be
375 successful and accomplish more than her husband to prove her ability to her husband and in-laws. Benu and Fuli
376 wanted to gain respect both in family and wider society and they were working hard for that. This also reflects
377 that some women are trying and successfully infringing the indiscernible ceiling imposed on them.

378 Asma's mother inherited property from her parents but after their death, she lost control over the property.
379 Asma was fighting the legal battle on her own to get back her mother's property. She had brothers but they
380 did not have the courage to endure the lengthy, expensive and complicated legal procedures in order to get this
381 property back. She, however, took this bold step and was going door to door to seek justice for her mother.
382 Asma seemed to be satisfied to hear good comments made about her efforts by her neighbours and acquaintances.
383 When people said that she was performing the role of a 'man' by confronting the influential people of society
384 who grabbed her mother's property, she seemed to feel proud of herself. This suggests that even a brave and
385 competent woman like Asma tends to consider that being male is equated to being superior and this precludes
386 women from taking pride on their identity as 'woman'. I, nevertheless, argue that Asma's desire to be seen as
387 'superior' motivated her to strive for better things, earned her respect from others, enhanced her confidence to a
388 great extent and contributed to her overall wellbeing.

389 7 IV.

390 8 Conclusion

391 This paper clearly demonstrates that gender plays an important catalytic role in determining a person's source
392 of happiness. Men in this study predominantly, if not exclusively, derived happiness from their material
393 achievements. In the same vein, men's unhappiness was also associated with their failure to emerge as successful
394 men by earning an adequate income for their family. Poorer women's happiness, on the other hand, was dependent
395 on a wide range of issues. In general, family continues to be the primary site of importance for women. Children's
396 wellbeing was one of the main concerns for the overwhelming majority of my female participants. Women were
397 seen to relinquish their personal happiness for the sake of their children's wellbeing. This study reveals that
398 women's paid employment outside the home enhances their bargaining capacity at home to some extent but
399 it also exposes them to many other vulnerabilities. In most cases women are the primary breadwinner and
400 responsible for all household tasks, which curtail their free time significantly and ultimately lessen their mental
401 and physical wellbeing. Women's satisfaction about paid employment largely depends on their family members.
402 They seemed to feel satisfied when their sacrifices and contributions are positively valued, conversely, lack of
403 recognition and/or criticisms seemed to make them unhappy. Women value harmonious relationships and this
404 is particularly so with their near and dear ones. Consequently, strained and/or violent relationships with their
405 husbands contribute to their lower self-esteem and satisfaction, and increased mental agony.

406 Drawing on different theoretical frameworks in this study I argue that men's and women's gendered socialisation
407 differently shapes their worldviews and lead them to derive happiness from dissimilar sources. In this study we
408 saw that family, children and husbands continue to get much importance in women's lives. All female participants
409 made considerable sacrifices and adjustments for their husbands and children in different forms and at different
410 junctures of their lives. Women throughout their lives were taught to find happiness in their family's wellbeing
411 and a great majority of women were seen to adhere to such societal values. Men and women in Bangladeshi
412 society learn from the beginning of their lives that it is normal for women to make sacrifices, to do extra work to
413 meet their family's need and accept the pain inflicted on them without much noise. This however, was not the
414 case for my male participants. I contend that this difference of attitude shown by men and women is rooted in
415 the process of gendering and serves to shrink women's wellbeing.

416 However, it is not the case that all women uniformly sacrifice their own wellbeing in favour of children
417 and husbands. In this study I came across women who combined their children's wellbeing and their personal
418 satisfaction through using their agency. They did not renounce different opportunities (e.g., earning an income,
419 retaining greater control over their lives, living on their own, getting married after divorce/desertion) came their
420 way and endeavored to uphold their own wellbeing. Though these women are very few in number, their effort
421 can be viewed as an indication that more and more women in future will follow in their footsteps in upholding
422 their wellbeing and this in turn will push the persuasive gender boundary to achieve greater gender parity in
423 various aspects of life.

Note: This paper partially draws on my PhD thesis. ¹ ²

Figure 1:

424

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