

## Perceived Social Support and Satisfaction with Life among Working and Non-working wives of Seafarers

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### Abstract

*The study aimed to explore the Perceived Social Support and Satisfaction with Life among Working and Non-working wives of Seafarers. The sample size was 200 (100 working and 100 non-working wives of seafarers) within the age range of 25-35 years. The database of Merchant Navy Officers Association (MNOA) served as the universe of the study out of which a sample was selected using purposive sampling. Statistical Analysis included Pearson's Product Moment correlation and t-ratio using SPSS. The results revealed a significant difference in perception of social support and satisfaction with life among working and non-working wives of seafarers. It further concludes that there is a significant correlation between satisfaction with life and perception of social support.*

**Keywords:** social support, satisfaction with life, wives of seafarers

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### Introduction

In the last decade, family structures and the labour market have changed dramatically. The entry of women as workforce into the labour market has changed their role in society. It can be said that their role has evolved. Most women now pursue a career as well as manage to keep up with the commitment to their families.

With this expansion to their lives where career is included, they must also maintain their conventional role at home. Women still remain the main in charge of taking care of the needs of the family and are also the primary caregiver for the children and the elderly. All of this adds to a very demanding schedule. So, this multiple role handling and the attempt to achieve work-life balance leads to stress and strain among working women. There is always a continuous need for a fellow-being to share the burden and to feel a sense of support, especially from the spouse.

Wives of seafarers, whether working or non-working, experience alternating absence and presence of the seafarer (intermittent husband presence) which uniquely affects them. During the husband's absence, wives of seafarers experience a lack of support which includes lack of intimacy and companionship. The emotional needs are not met; thus, loneliness and frustration might be the outcome. Also, they handle a variety of issues alone while the husband is at sea and when the husband is back home, he might bring rules of work at home which might lead to conflict.

A Seafarer is a person who navigates water-borne vessels or assists as a crewmember in their operation and maintenance. Work Schedules of seafarers include spending extended periods at sea. They are hired for voyages that last for several months which requires them to be at sea and stay away from family where the communication is minimal.

Mental health professionals often talk about the importance of having a strong social support network. When trying to reach goals or deal with a crisis, people tend to lean on their friends and family for support. Once the goal is achieved or the crisis is appropriately dealt with, it leads to a sense of satisfaction and a feeling of fulfilment. Studies have indicated that receiving support from one's spouse was related to lower levels of distress (Schuster, Kessler, & Aseltine, 1990; Frazier, Davis-Ali, & Dahl, 1995; Druley & Townsend, 1998). Interpersonal networks that provide emotional and practical support can be very important in managing stress and promoting well-being (Sonntag & Frese, 2003) that contribute to overall life satisfaction.

Social Support is the presence and accessibility of individuals on whom we can depend on, They are a part of our interpersonal organization of correspondence and shared commitment.

The concept of social support has variously been defined by the researchers as social bonds, social networks, meaningful social contact,

availability of social confidants and human companionship.

It is seen that the literature inclines to put emphasis on an individual's perception of whether social relationships are sufficiently supportive or not. Therefore, perceived social support can be defined as a person's impression of if his or her social network is supported or not (**Cobb, 1976**).

Thus, it is an individual's impression of whether the social network is satisfactorily supportive or not. In this sense, social support is an individual's own appraisal of his relationships. It is contended that individuals who are loved and wanted in various aspects of life and who find help when they are in need are more satisfied with their close ones and feel that they have the support of others.

Social support, be it in work or personal setting, is expected to serve as a protective factor that counters the negative effects of stress and facilitates coping.

Research evidence tends to suggest that perceived social support, but not received support, is more strongly related to life satisfaction. (**Kazarian & McCabe, 1991**)

Life satisfaction is a subjective assessment of the quality of one's life. According to **Diener et al., 1999** subjective well-being has an affective (i.e., emotional) and a cognitive (i.e., judgmental) component. Life satisfaction is considered to be the cognitive component of this construct.

People might be satisfied with one aspect of their life and not the other; it was pointed out that some people may be particularly unhappy with the particular area of their life but satisfied with other areas. However, an individual might be satisfied with more areas of their lives and still be dissatisfied overall because of the impact of that particular area. (**Diener, 1984**).

**Reviewing the literature**, it appears that two trends are reported.

One is based on the effort-recovery model (**Meijman & Mulder, 1998**) which conveys that performing any task requires effort and when the individual doesn't have to put in mental or physical effort, recovery takes place.

The basic assumption of this theory is that extensive effort to do a task is associated with

unwanted bodily reactions (like changes in blood pressure, functioning of heart and fatigue) if recovery is limited due to continuous stress. Repetition of extensive effort without taking required break reduces the possibility of recovery (**Geurts & Sonnentag, 2006**), increases probability of depression (**Geurts, Kompier, Roxburgh, & Houtman, 2003**) and reduces mental well-being and positive emotions (**Fritz, Yankelevich, Zarubin, & Barger, 2010**).

The scarcity hypothesis also conveys that people have limited resources which are not enough to be availed in their multiple roles and the idea of presence of resources and not being able to use them lead to having feelings of guilt, anxiety and reduces psychological well-being and life satisfaction. (**Edwards & Rothbard, 2000**)

The **role strain perspective**, or **scarcity hypothesis**, proposes that increased numbers of roles lead to overload and strain, which can translate into negative effects on physical and **psychological** well-being (**Goode, 1960; Marks, 1977**)

In contrast to the above-mentioned theories, the other trend based on theory of role accumulation (**Sieber, 1974**) proposes that an individual with variety of roles compensates failure in one role with the other roles and in turn various roles cause increase in resources, social connections, and emotional satisfaction of that individual (**Lahelma, Arber, Kivelä, & Roos, 2002**).

Researches also favour the idea that people with multiple roles in comparison with people with lesser roles experience less mental and physical problems (**Barnett & Hyde, 2001**).

According to the theory of role accumulation, there is an increase in the number of social relationships and financial independence when a woman is working. This results in increase in their self-esteem and their capacity to deal with the crisis due to presence of multiple resources. This theory sustains on the belief that social roles and responsibilities are opportunities to accumulate more social capital in the form of economic, emotional and social resources through which one's concept of self, and life satisfaction are enhanced (**Nordenmark, 2004**)

Undoubtedly, managing work and family roles require a lot of effort. Therefore, the resources available to a working woman (financial independence, social status, sense of efficiency, etc.) generate a sense of satisfaction and motivation for playing dual role.

Researchers have revealed conflicting results for working and non-working women. **Singh (2014)**, in his research, has talked about non-working women being more stressed and having lower life satisfaction than working women.

In addition, some researchers have shown that psychological well-being, health, and adaptability of working women are more than non-working. (**Alex, 2015; Janzen & Muhajarine, 2003; Ahrens & Ryff, 2006**) and they have lesser family conflicts and marital problems (**Plaisier et al., 2008; Joshi, Singh, & Jaswal, 2013**).

Some studies also have found that there is no difference between working and non-working women in mental health and marital satisfaction (**Sahu & Singh, 2014; Gupta & Nafis, 2014**).

Given the ambiguity in the literature review, this study aims at examining the Perceived Social Support and Satisfaction with Life among Working and Non-working wives of Seafarers.

### Objectives of the study

The aim of the present study is-

- 1) to compare the working and non-working wives of seafarers on perceived social support and satisfaction with life.
- 2) to explore the relationship between perceived social support and satisfaction with life among working and non-working wives of seafarers.

### Hypotheses

- 1)  $H_0$ : There is a significant difference between working and non-working wives of seafarers on perceived social support and satisfaction with life.
- 2)  $H_1$ : There is a positive relationship between perceived social support and satisfaction with life among working and non-working wives of seafarers.

## Method

### Sample

For the present study, a total sample of 200 wives of seafarers (out of which 100 were working and 100 were non-working) within the age range of 25-35 years was taken. The database of Merchant Navy Officers Association (MNOA) served as the universe of the study out of which a sample was selected using purposive sampling. Statistical Analysis included Pearson's Product Moment correlation and t-Ratio using SPSS.

### Tools used

The subjects were tested on-

- 1) Satisfaction with Life Scale by Diener et al. (1985)
- 2) Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support by Zimet et al. (1988)

Satisfaction with Life was measured using Satisfaction with Life Scale by Diener et al. (1985). It is a 5-item scale designed to measure cognitive judgments of one's life satisfaction. Respondents indicate how much they agree or disagree with each of the 5 items using a 7-point scale that ranges from strongly agree (7) to strongly disagree (1). The scale has desirable psychometric properties i.e., high internal consistency and high temporal stability. The item-total correlations indicate good internal consistency.

Perceived social support was measured using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). Zimet et al. (1988) designed this questionnaire to measure the extent to which an individual perceives social support from three sources: Significant Others (SO) (items 1, 2, 5, and 10), Family (FA) (items 3, 4, 8, and 11) and Friends (FR) (items 6, 7, 9, and 12). MSPSS is a brief, easy to administer self-report questionnaire which includes twelve items rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale with scores ranging from 'very strongly disagree' (1) to 'very strongly agree' (7). The MSPSS has proven to be psychometrically sound in diverse samples, and to have good internal and test-retest reliability, and robust factorial validity. The alpha coefficient was 0.91 and its subscale alpha coefficients ranged from 0.90 to 0.95.

**Statistical Analyses**

Data were analysed using SPSS. Mean, Standard Deviation, Product Moment Correlation

and t-ratio were calculated to compare working and non-working wives of seafarers perceived social support and life satisfaction.

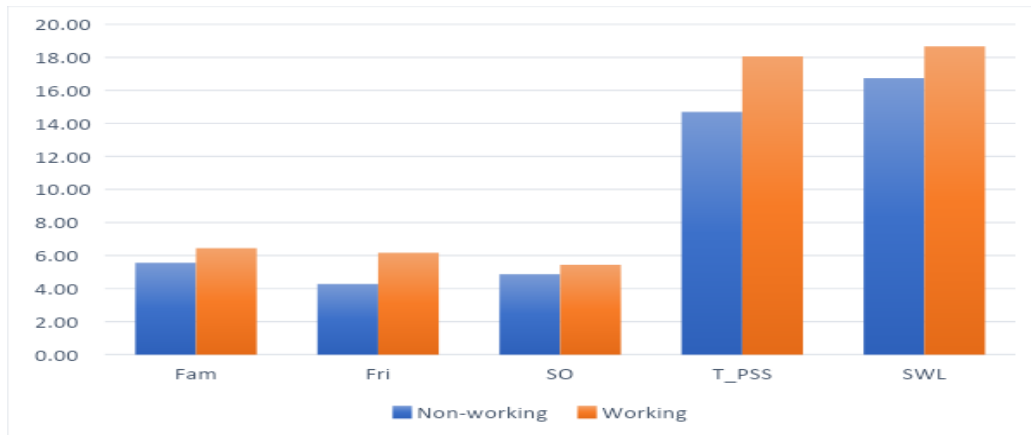
**Results**

**Table 1:** Showing Mean, Standard Deviations and t-ratios for working and non-working wives of seafarers.

Variables	Working wives of Seafarers (N=100)		Non-Working wives of Seafarers (N=100)		t-ratio
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Family	6.45	.69	5.56	1.08	6.971**
Friends	6.17	.93	4.28	1.29	11.887**
Significant others	5.43	.88	4.86	1.64	3.064**
Total Perceived Social Support	18.05	1.59	14.70	2.46	11.434**
Satisfaction with Life	18.66	5.70	16.74	5.56	2.41*

\*\*significant at 0.01 level of significance

\*significant at 0.05 level of significance

**Graph:**

**Graph representing mean of dimensions of perceived social support and satisfaction with life in working and non-working wives of Seafarers**

**Table:2** Showing Correlation between Total Perception of Social Support and Satisfaction with Life

Variables	Product Moment Correlation (r)
Total Perceived Social Support	Non-Working: 0.338** Working: 0.032
Satisfaction with Life	

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

**Discussion:**

The present study aimed to explore the Perceived Social Support and Satisfaction with Life among Working and Non-working wives of Seafarers. For this purpose, 200 wives of seafarers

were taken, out of which 100 were working and 100 were non-working wives. Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) and Multi-dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988) were administered.

The results clearly indicated that the two groups were different on Perceived Social Support, viz Family ( $t= 6.971, p < 0.01$ ), Friends ( $t= 11.887, p < 0.01$ ), Significant others ( $t= 3.064, p < 0.01$ ) and Total Perceived Social Support ( $t= 11.434, p < 0.01$ ).

Working wives of seafarers scored higher than non-working wives of seafarers on Perception of Social Support.

A significant positive correlation was found between the following-

Perception of Social Support and Satisfaction with Life among non-working wives of seafarers

( $r = 0.338, p \leq 0.01$ )

A lot of previous research has indicated the facilitative role of Perceived Social Support in various physical and psychological wellness and work acting as a means to expand social support and resources.

**Kasprzak (2010)** in his study found that practical support and satisfaction with the relationships are the strongest determinants of life-satisfaction.

Employed women are more satisfied with their life than non-working women, and the quality of home and work environment and support determines the impact of employment on the psychological well-being of working women in dual-earner families (**Sinha, 2017**)

Findings of a study by **Arshad et al. (2015)** indicate that there was a significant difference between working and non-working women regarding their positive well-being. Life satisfaction in working women is higher than that of non-working women.

The results of the study by **Irfan et al. (2012)** show that married working females are low on anxiety with higher life satisfaction in comparison to the non-working married females. They perceive their life as challenging and secure whereas, non-working married females are less satisfied with their lives and their anxiety level is also higher than the anxiety level of working females.

**Rout et al. (1997)** have also emphasized on the benefits of multiple role involvement rather than the cost.

The results of a study by **Singh (2014)** revealed that working and non-working women differed significantly on the dimension of life satisfaction. Working women were more satisfied with their lives and, on stress scale, non-working women have a higher level of stress as compared to working women.

Thus, a job or a professional status helps expand social support and brings career satisfaction which further helps buffer the impact of negative emotions and stress.

Among wives of seafarers, social support can be a huge resource to their well-being in the absence of their husbands. At the same time, lack of social support or inconsistency in the availability of social support can negatively impact their overall well-being.

Available social support affects the well-being and perceived social support acts as a shield against the stressors.

In contrast, a few studies (**Chettri, 2015; Beigh & Shafi, 2018**) showed that work and social support cannot always contribute to life satisfaction and well-being.

### **Implications**

Thus, the findings of the present study highlight the need for a strong social support system for the wives of seafarers and the need to invest in professional development or some kind of productive work that provides the wives of seafarers with an opportunity for social engagement and simultaneously propel a feeling of financial independence. While the seafarer is away at sea, the companies of the seafarers should organise social events time to time to keep them engaged and welfare associations for wives should be formed which they can approach in the hour of need.

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