

Is women's competitiveness expressed vicariously through their husband's income?

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Abstract

Prior research on the contribution of competitiveness on the gender income gap has focused on the effect of individual competitiveness.¹

However, individual's competitiveness may not be solely expressed in their own labor market performance, but also in the labor market performance of their domestic partners with whom they enjoy public goods and a shared income.

We investigate the influence of heterosexual individuals' own and cohabiting partner's competitiveness on their own and partner's future income.

Our evidence suggests that competitive women match with higher potential income men as spouses and motivate these men to earn a higher income, increasing the future income of their household.

Data and Methods

Large representative sample survey of Dutch population

- Dutch Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS)
- Self-reported competitiveness²
 - one-time survey in March 2017
 - "How competitive do you consider yourself to be?"
 - 11-point Likert-scale response: from 'not competitive at all' to 'very competitive'
- Future monthly income (2018 – 2021)

Empirically estimating the causal effect of competitiveness on future income
We use men's and women's March 2017 income as proxy controls for unobserved individual and couple heterogeneities.

Table 1. OLS regressions of coupled men's and women's average monthly income on both men's and women's competitiveness (by year)

(Euros)	Average monthly income				
	March 2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Panel A. Coupled men's average monthly income					
N ≈ 595; Adjusted R-squared ≈ 0.170					
Men's competitiveness	194.2***	205.3***	268.5***	266.5***	223.0***
Women's competitiveness	182.1***	234.5***	238.1***	242.3***	266.3***
Panel B. Coupled women's average monthly income					
N ≈ 609; Adjusted R-squared ≈ 0.243					
Men's competitiveness	61.71	7.678	8.610	6.275	1.154
Women's competitiveness	136.0***	137.6***	136.7**	160.1***	149.5**
Panel C. Coupled men's average monthly income controlling for March 2017 income					
N ≈ 580; Adjusted R-squared ≈ 0.824					
Men's competitiveness		12.33	57.74	64.10*	39.91
Women's competitiveness		54.10**	64.22*	79.33**	104.9**
Panel D. Coupled women's average monthly income controlling for March 2017 income					
N ≈ 583; Adjusted R-squared ≈ 0.812					
Men's competitiveness		-34.63	-19.57	-16.73	-13.31
Women's competitiveness		14.95	19.06	49.48	54.37

Controls: Men's and Women's age and education, Marital status, and Children. Panels B and D also include both Men's and Women's March 2017 income.

Table 2. OLS regressions of individuals' average monthly income on own competitiveness (by gender and cohabitation status)

(Euros)	Average monthly income			
	Single men N ≈ 232	Coupled men N ≈ 815	Single women N ≈ 297	Coupled women N ≈ 926
Panel A. Average monthly income (April 2017 – Jan 2021)				
Competitiveness	124.0	232.5***	197.1***	96.17**
Panel B. Average monthly income (April 2017 – Jan 2021) controlling for March 2017 income				
Competitiveness	89.52**	36.56	45.48	6.400

Controls: Age, Education, Marital status, and Children.

Table 3. OLS regressions of men's and women's average work hours on both men's and women's competitiveness

(hours per week)	Average work hours conditional on positive work hours	
	Coupled men N ≈ 301	Coupled women N ≈ 252
Panel A. Average work hours (2018–2021)		
Men's competitiveness	1.407**	-0.586
Women's competitiveness	-0.497	1.497**
Panel B. Average work hours (2018–2021) controlling for 2017 work hours		
Men's competitiveness	1.404***	-0.176
Women's competitiveness	-0.902	0.458

Controls: Men's and Women's age and education, Marital status, and Children. Panel B also includes Men's and Women's 2017 work hours, respectively.

References:
1. Shurchkov, O., & Eckel, C. C. (2018). Gender differences in behavioral traits and labor market outcomes (pp. 480-512). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
2. Buser, T., Niederle, M., & Oosterbeek, H. (2021). Can competitiveness predict education and labor market outcomes? Evidence from incentivized choice and survey measures (No. w28916). National Bureau of Economic Research.

Main Results

Panel A: Coupled men's income on couples' competitiveness

Men's and women's competitiveness is positively associated with men's income.

Panel B: Coupled women's income on couples' competitiveness

Women's, but not men's, competitiveness is associated with women's income.

→ *Consistent with competitive women selecting high-income men or vice versa.*

Panel C: Coupled men's income on couples' competitiveness controlling for March 2017 income

Only the female partner's competitiveness, but not his own, increases coupled men's income (2.1% per std).

Panel D: Coupled women's income on couples' competitiveness controlling for March 2017 income

Men's nor women's competitiveness increases the female partner's income.

→ *Significant and positive effect of women's competitiveness on male partner's future income controlling for men's own competitiveness and the couples' past labor market incomes.*

Additional Results

Table 2. Panel B: Individuals' income on own competitiveness controlling for March 2017 income

Single men's competitiveness increases their own income, but not coupled men's, nor single and coupled women's competitiveness.

→ *Whereas men's competitiveness increases their income only as singles, women's competitiveness never increases their income.*

Table 3. Panel B: Men's and women's work hours on couples' competitiveness controlling for 2017 work hours.

Men's competitiveness, but not women's, increases coupled men's work hours.

→ *Women are not increasing their male partner's income by increasing their work hours as might be predicted by the standard marriage model.*

Conclusions

Consistent with competitive women matching with higher income men and motivating these men to earn a higher income, women's competitiveness is positively associated with and causally increases their male partner's income. Men's competitiveness increases their own income only as singles.

Inconsistent with competitive women increasing men's income by specializing in household production, women's competitiveness does not affect men's work hours. Men's competitiveness increases men's work hours.