

Executive Summary

“What makes us happy?” This question has been posed for centuries, starting with the ancient Greek philosophers and persisting with today’s celebrities, researchers, and the media. Research has shown a link between life satisfaction and physical and emotional health, which spurs us to identify the things that make us happier and healthier. We sought to understand: does the “joy of giving” lead to a happier life?

Women Give 2017 is a step forward in understanding what makes us happy. It delves deeply into the connections between happiness and charitable giving. The research addressed two central questions:

**Does the “joy of giving” affect all individuals and households equally?
Does the impact of giving on overall happiness vary by gender?**

This study examined these issues by looking at the same households over a number of years. It offers new insights on how life satisfaction is shaped by household characteristics - such as composition, income, gender roles within the family, and how decisions around charitable giving are made. The findings provide strong evidence about the link between happiness and giving, and illuminate differences in how and when men and women experience the joy of giving. The study also uncovered a new idea: a link between household happiness and the role of women in their families’ financial decisions.

What We Learned:

Giving makes us happy. The study found that giving to charitable organizations is positively related to life satisfaction. The more a household gives as a percentage of income, the higher the household’s life satisfaction.

Giving makes us all happy. Across marital status (single women, single men, and married couples), giving to charitable organizations is positively related to a household’s life satisfaction.

Changes in giving habits affect men and women differently. Single men see the greatest increase in life satisfaction when they become donors. For single and married women, life satisfaction increases most when they increase their giving.

When women drive charitable decisions, more giving means higher satisfaction. For households where either the wife makes charitable decisions or spouses make charitable decisions jointly, life satisfaction increases with the percentage of household income given to charity.

This impact is greater in lower-and middle-income households. For households where charitable decisions are driven by women and more than two percent of their incomes are given to charity, households making less than \$100,000 per year experience more of a boost in life satisfaction from giving than those making \$100,000 or more.

Women Give 2017 is an important achievement in the ongoing effort by the Women’s Philanthropy Institute to understand differences in the way men and women give. This study’s findings have deep implications for philanthropy and fundraising. With a better understanding of how and when men, women, and families derive happiness from giving, nonprofit leaders can more effectively engage their donors, and philanthropists will gain greater joy from giving. WPI is guided in our research efforts by the idea that understanding the many ways in which gender influences philanthropy will unlock a new era of giving by all.

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Read the full report: philanthropy.iupui.edu/womengive