



From Adolescence to Adulthood: Association Between Family Structure, Work Status & Happiness

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Introduction

- Adolescence is an important period for social and emotional development, and family environment is often assumed to shape long-term well-being. Research suggests that two-parent households are associated with greater stability and resources (Acock & Kiecolt, 1989), but other studies emphasize that family relationships and broader life conditions may matter more than structure alone (Bell & Bell, 2005; Ramos et al., 2022).
- In addition, economic factors such as employment and access to resources play a key role in shaping happiness (Nikolova & Nikolaev, 2021). This study examines whether family structure at age 16 is associated with adult happiness, while also considering how work status reflects broader social conditions.

Research Questions

- Is family structure at age 16 associated with adult happiness?
- Does work status help explain differences in happiness?

Methods

Sample

- This study comes from the General Social Survey (GSS), a nationally representative sample of United States adults composed of approximately 3,200 entries.

Measures

- Happiness was recoded into a binary variable (happy vs not happy) as the independent variable. Family structure at age 16 was recoded into two-parent and other (including single-parent, step-parent, and other arrangements) dependent variable. Work status was included to capture differences in social and economic roles.

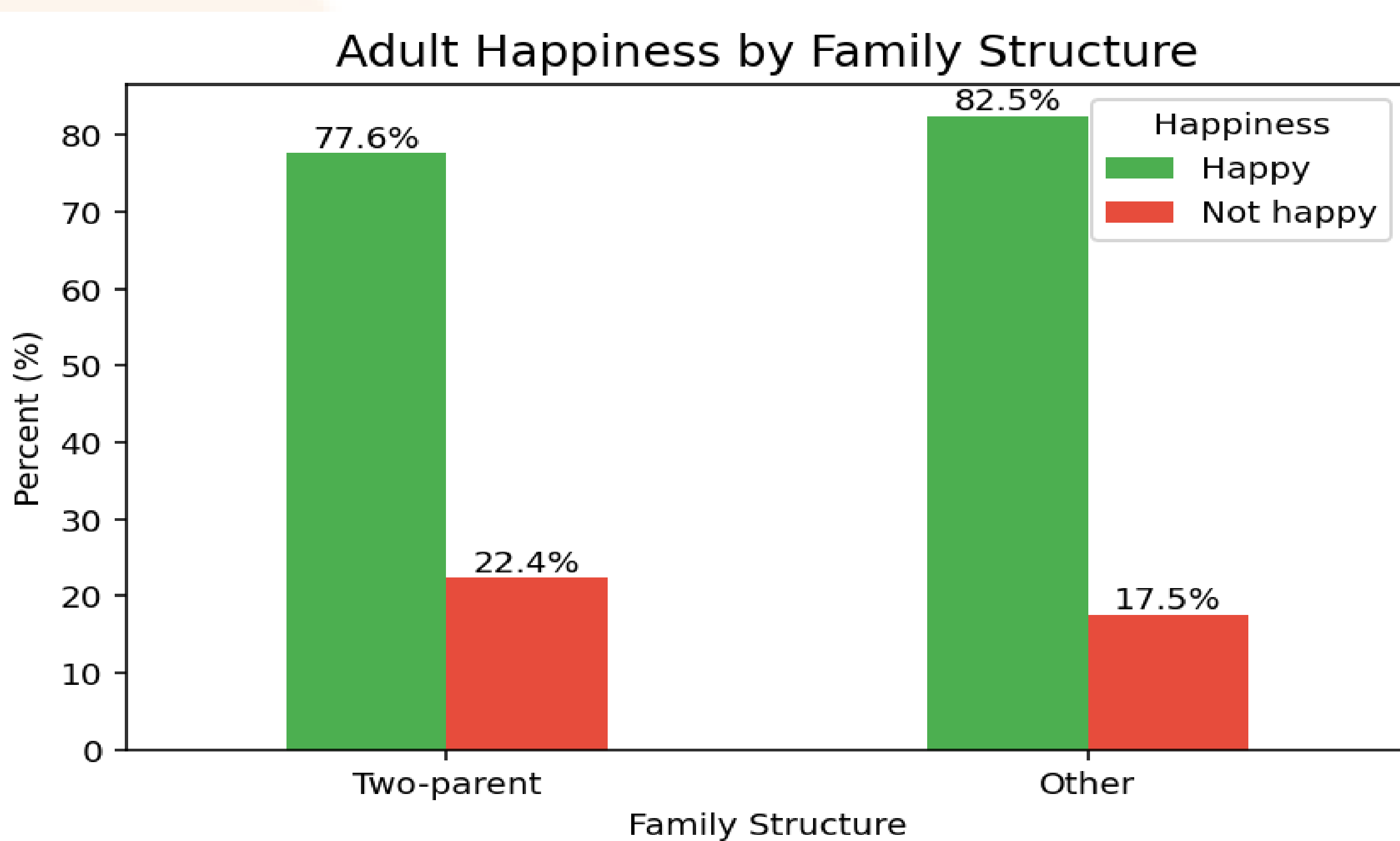
Results

Bivariate

- (Figure 1) Individuals from two-parent households reported 77.6% happiness, compared to 82.5% among those from other family structures. This difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 9.77$, $p = 0.0018$), but the direction is unexpected, with slightly higher happiness in the “other” group.
- (Figure 2) Happiness varies across work status categories. Individuals who are in school and those working full-time or part-time report the highest levels of happiness, while those keeping house report the lowest. A chi-square test confirms this relationship is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 19.96$, $p = 0.0057$), indicating that work status is associated with happiness.

Multivariate

- A logistic regression model was conducted to examine happiness while accounting for both family structure and work status. The overall model was statistically significant ($p = 0.0001$), indicating that these variables are associated with adult happiness.
- Family structure remained significant ($p = 0.001$), with individuals from two-parent households having lower odds of reporting happiness. Several work status categories were also significant predictors of happiness, including being in school ($p = 0.008$), unemployed ($p = 0.005$), temporarily not working ($p = 0.047$), and working part-time ($p = 0.003$). The predicted probability graph shows that while family structure differences remain across groups, variation in happiness is more strongly associated with work status.



Adjusted Probability of Happiness by Family Structure and Work Status

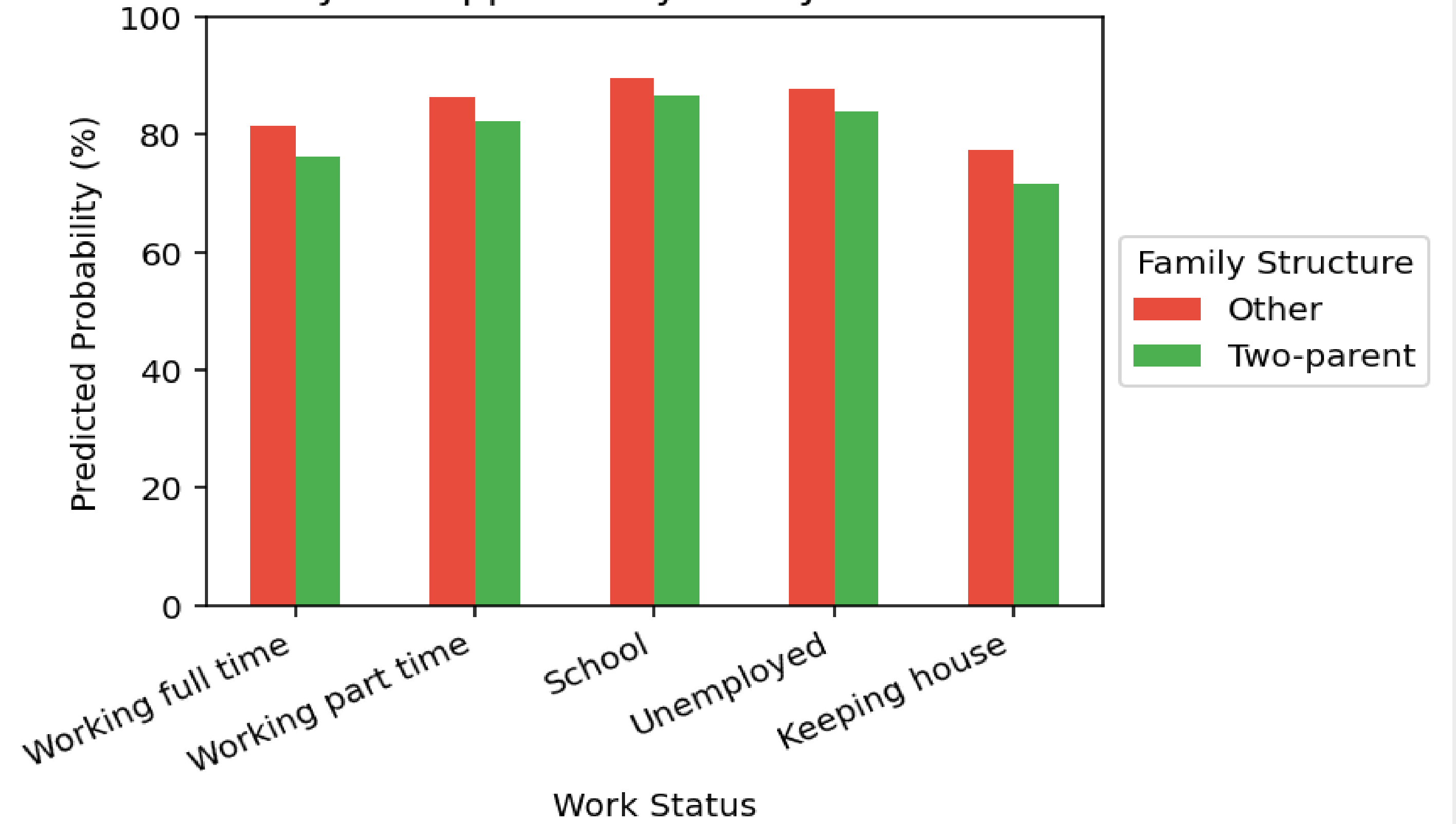


Figure 3: Predicted happiness by family structure and work status.

Discussion

- The results show that both family structure and work status are associated with adult happiness. However, individuals from non-two-parent households reported slightly higher happiness, suggesting that family structure alone does not determine well-being.
- When work status is considered, differences in happiness vary more across social roles. Categories such as being in school and working part-time are significantly associated with higher happiness, indicating that daily roles and life conditions play an important role. Overall, these findings suggest that happiness is influenced by a combination of family context and broader life conditions, rather than family structure alone.

References

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Ramos, M. C., et al. (2022). Positive family relationships across 30 years: Predicting adult health and happiness. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 36(6), 807–817.

Happiness by Work Status

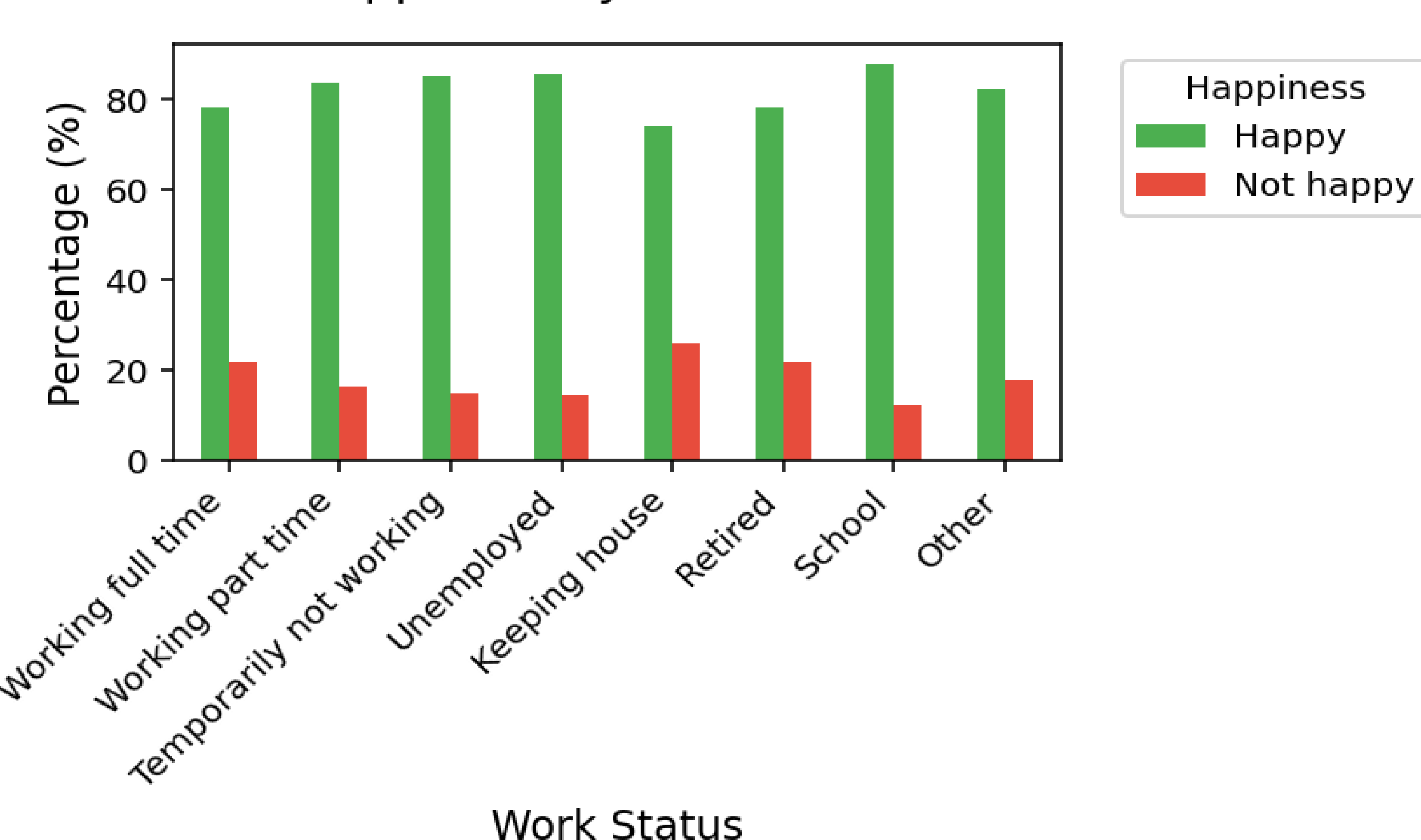


Figure 2: Percentage of respondents reporting happiness by work status