

Rollins B C & Feldman H. Marital satisfaction over the family life cycle.

J. Marriage Fam. 32:20-8, 1970.

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This paper presents a descriptive study of the developmental pattern of marital satisfaction over the life career of stable marriages. The pattern that emerged is a U-shaped curve, the depression identified at stages of the marital career when dependent children reside in the household. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI)® indicates that this paper has been cited in over 135 publications and is the second most cited for this journal.]

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In 1960, as a PhD candidate, I served as a research associate with Harold Feldman at Cornell University on an NIMH-sponsored project studying the marital dyad. Nearly a decade later, while on sabbatical leave as a visiting scholar at the Family Studies Center, University of Minnesota, the emerging Family Development Theoretical Framework was receiving much attention. I was encouraged by Reuben Hill and Joan Aldous to further analyze the Feldman data to help describe transitions in marriage over the career of the family. The data on marital satisfaction were analyzed and published. According to the editorial staff

of the journal in which it was published, this article has been most popular in terms of permission requests to republish from it.

Several events likely account for the attention the article received: (1) the fledgling Family Development Theoretical Framework was receiving much rhetoric at the time, and the article provided an empirical descriptive statement showing utility of the framework; (2) folk wisdom at the time suggested that the bearing and rearing of children might strengthen a failing marriage, and the article challenged such wisdom; and (3) use of the cross-sectional design in the study to provide evidence of a developmental trend was criticized methodologically.^{1,2} The results of the study were not in agreement with the already famous Blood and Wolfe study,³ which had indicated that marital satisfaction remained depressed after children were launched from the home.

I have published two subsequent articles on the same topic.^{4,5} The first article, using a sample of a new population, confirmed the pattern of a U-shaped curve of marital satisfaction across the marital career. It also presented an empirically based methodological explanation of data coding problems in the Blood and Wolfe study that, if corrected, would provide results similar to those of Rollins and Feldman. The second article is an accepted theory⁶ that explains the U-shaped curve of marital satisfaction over the career of marriage.

1. Miller B C. Studying the quality of marriage cross-sectionally. (Letter to the editor.) *J. Marriage Fam.* 37:11-12, 1975.
2. Rollins B C. Response to Miller about cross sectional family life cycle research. (Letter to the editor.) *J. Marriage Fam.* 37:259-60, 1975.
3. Blood R O & Wolfe D M. *Husbands and wives: the dynamics of married living*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1960. 293 p. (Cited 570 times.)
4. Rollins B C & Cannon K L. Marital satisfaction over the family life cycle: a reevaluation. *J. Marriage Fam.* 36:271-82, 1974. (Cited 90 times.)
5. Rollins B C & Galligan R. The developing child and marital satisfaction of parents. (Lerner R M & Spanier G B, eds.) *Child influences on marital and family interaction: a life-span perspective*. New York: Academic Press, 1978. p. 71-106.
6. Spanier G B & Lewis R A. Marital quality: a review of the seventies. *J. Marriage Fam.* 42:825-39, 1980.

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