

Breadwinning mothers are increasingly the U.S. norm ^[1]

Author: Glynn, Sarah Jane

Source: Center for American Progress

Format: Report

Publication Date: 19 Dec 2016

AVAILABILITY

Full report available online ^[2]

Introduction and summary

In 2015—the year for which the most recent data are available—42 percent of mothers were sole or primary breadwinners, bringing in at least half of family earnings. Nearly another one-quarter of mothers—22.4 percent—were co-breadwinners, bringing home from 25 percent to 49 percent of earnings for their families. This represents an increase over previous years and is the continuation of a long-running trend, as women’s earnings and economic contributions to their families continue to grow in importance.

The Center for American Progress first described the role of working mothers as breadwinners in 2009 with *The Shriver Report: A Woman’s Nation Changes Everything*, in a chapter titled “The New Breadwinners.”¹ Authored by former CAP economist Heather Boushey, “The New Breadwinners” was among the first pieces of research to quantify the ways that women’s labor force participation has increased since the 1960s and what that means for families’ incomes. Boushey’s research focused on data that demonstrated how much likelier it is for today’s mothers to provide critical financial support to their families compared with earlier generations. While subsequent authors and publications have replicated her analysis in the ensuing years, often using slightly different definitions and variables,² this update will continue the trajectory first laid out in her original work.

This report updates Boushey’s original analysis of breadwinning and co-breadwinning mothers and a 2014 follow-up report from CAP —“Breadwinning Mothers, Then and Now”—using the most recent data available. While this newest report revises the original analysis, it also provides new analyses looking at differences in breadwinning and co-breadwinning based on race and place. Specifically, it dives deeper into differences between black and white mothers in the frequency with which they combine paid employment with family caregiving and the different ways that they contribute to their families’ bottom lines. Most notably, the report highlights differences in the rates of breadwinning and co-breadwinning among different racial and ethnic groups. It also explores how rates of breadwinning differ across the United States, looking at differences between states and between rural and metropolitan areas.

It is true that there are significant differences between groups of breadwinning mothers based on their backgrounds and where they live. But while there are differences across the country and within groups of women, one overarching fact remains indisputably true: With the majority of women working for pay, and their earnings being so vital to the economic well-being of their families, the days of full-time, stay-at-home mothers are long past. Women are crucial economic actors for their families, local communities, and the overall U.S. economy.

However, the fact that women are bringing home a significant portion of their families’ incomes does not mean that there is gender parity in the workforce, nor does it mean that working parents and caregivers have the supports they so vitally need. Issues such as the gender wage gap and a lack of policies such as universal paid family and medical leave, paid sick days, and workplace flexibility still hold women back from reaching their full economic potential.

It is a testament to the hard work and tenacity of women that they have reached the level they occupy today. However, there is far more work to be done to ensure that U.S. labor standards and workplace policies are updated to reflect the reality of the 21st century workforce and to ensure that the nation’s public policies are in line with the needs of today’s working families.

Related link: Report: The days of stay-at-home moms 'long gone' ^[3]

Region: United States ^[4]

Tags: women's labour force participation ^[5]

women ^[6]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/17/01/breadwinning-mothers-are-increasingly-us-norm>

Links

^[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/17/01/breadwinning-mothers-are-increasingly-us-norm> ^[2]

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2016/12/19/295203/breadwinning-mothers-are-increasingly-the-u-s-norm/> ^[3]

<https://www.childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/17/01/report-days-stay-home-moms-long-gone> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7865> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/womens-labour-force-participation> [6]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/women>