

The economics of caregiving for working mothers ^[1]

Although overwhelmingly employed in caregiving industries, women cannot afford child care

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AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

Excerpted from the introduction and summary

All across the nation—regardless of region and across a diversity of family types, racial and ethnic groups, and ages of children—mothers are driving forces of the American economy. Virtually all of the economic gains experienced by the typical middle-class family since 1970, for example, have been due to increases in women’s earnings. From 1970 to 2013, women’s increased labor force participation and increased earnings grew the U.S. economy by 13.5 percent, which translates into an additional \$2 trillion in economic activity. Women, and mothers in particular, make up a significant proportion of the labor force, and their employment and wages are vital to the overall health of the labor market and the U.S. economy.

While the effects are enormous at the macro level of the economy, women’s and mother’s labor force participation and earnings are also vital to the well-being of their individual families. Long gone are the days when the stereotypical working mother was employed part time, after her children were all of school age and she was simply interested in bringing home pocket money to supplement her husband’s earnings. To be clear: This “Leave It to Beaver” cliché was never accurate for wide swaths of the population, including women of color, immigrant women, and working-class women, all of whom have historically been much more likely to work for pay than white middle-class women. But it is even less true today, when 64 percent of mothers are the primary breadwinners or co-breadwinners in their households, meaning that they earn a significant portion of their family’s income. Women of color, and Black women in particular, are especially likely to play this role for their families. More than 8 in 10—84.4 percent—of Black mothers are breadwinners or co-breadwinners, as are 6 in 10—60.3 percent—of Latinx mothers.

Related link: Canadian and American moms face equally expensive child care ^[3]

Region: Europe ^[4]

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mother's labour force participation ^[6]

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