PewResearchCenter

May 29, 2013

Breadwinner Moms

Mothers Are the Sole or Primary Provider in Four-in-Ten Households with Children; Public Conflicted about the Growing Trend

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT

Pew Research Center
1615 L St., N.W., Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20036

Media Inquiries:
202.419.4372
www.pewresearch.org

Breadwinner Moms

Mothers Are the Sole or Primary Provider in Four-in-Ten Households with Children; Public Conflicted about the Growing Trend

By Wendy Wang, Kim Parker and Paul Taylor

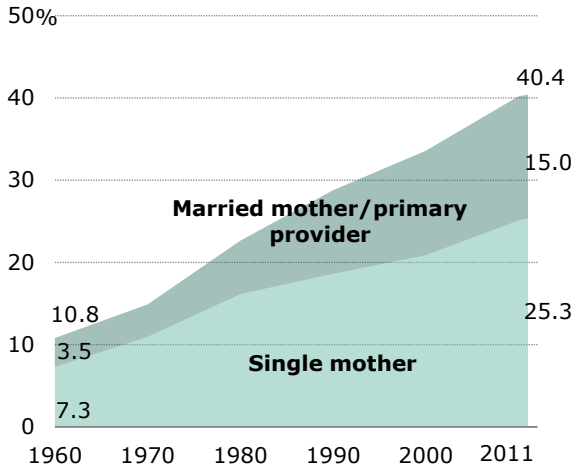
A record 40% of all households with children under the age of 18 include mothers who are either the sole or primary source of income for the family, according to a new Pew Research Center analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau. The share was just 11% in 1960.

These "breadwinner moms" are made up of two very different groups: 5.1 million (37%) are married mothers who have a higher income than their husbands, and 8.6 million (63%) are single mothers.[1]

The income gap between the two groups is quite large. The median total family income of married mothers who earn more than their husbands was nearly $80,000 in 2011, well above the national median of $57,100 for all families with children, and nearly four times the $23,000 median for families led by a single mother.[2]

Mother as the Sole or Primary Provider: 1960-2011

% based on households with children under age 18



Note: Single mothers include mothers who are never married, divorced, widowed, separated, or married but the spouse is not in the household.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the Decennial Census and American Community Surveys (ACS) Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample (IPUMS) files

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The groups differ in other ways as well. Compared with all mothers with children under age 18, married mothers who out-earn their husbands are slightly older, disproportionally white and college educated. Single mothers, by contrast, are younger, more likely to be black or Hispanic, and less likely to have a college degree.

[1] Based on Pew Research Center analysis of 2011 American Community Survey, the unit of analysis is the household head; single mothers who are not the head of household (e.g., single mothers living with parents) are not included in the count. Similarly, married couples in which neither of the spouses is a household head are not included in the analysis.

[2] The income gap between the two groups remains when using personal income as the measure. The median personal income of married mothers who out-earn their husbands was $50,000 in 2011, compared with $20,000 for single moms. Both personal and family income was self-reported. There is a small difference between the median personal income of single mothers and their family income. It could be due to financial contributions of other adult family members such as a cohabiting partner or a parent.

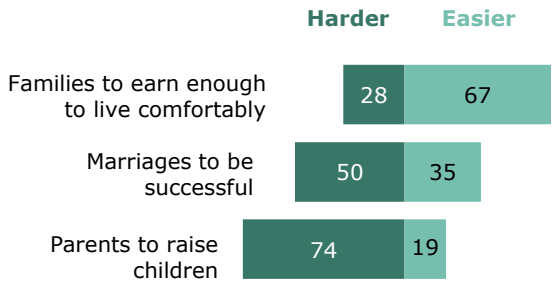
The growth of both groups of mothers is tied to women's increasing presence in the workplace. Women make up almost of half (47%) of the U.S. labor force today, and the employment rate of married mothers with children has increased from 37% in 1968 to 65% in 2011.[3]

The impact the recession may have had on this trend is unclear.[4] However, a Pew Research Center survey conducted in November 2012 found that mothers' views about whether and how much they would like to work had changed significantly since 2007 (before the recession officially began). The share of mothers saying their ideal situation would be to work full time increased from 20% in 2007 to 32% in 2012. And the share saying they would prefer not to work at all fell from 29% to 20%.

A new Pew Research Center survey finds that the public remains of two minds about the gains mothers have made in the workplace– most recognize the clear economic benefits to families, but many voice concerns about the toll that having a working mother may take on children or even marriage. About three-quarters of adults (74%) say the increasing number of women working for pay has made it harder for parents to raise children, and half say that it has made marriages harder to succeed. At the same time, two-thirds say it has made it easier for families to live comfortably.

Women, Work and Families

% saying the increasing number of women working for pay outside the home has made it easier/harder for ...



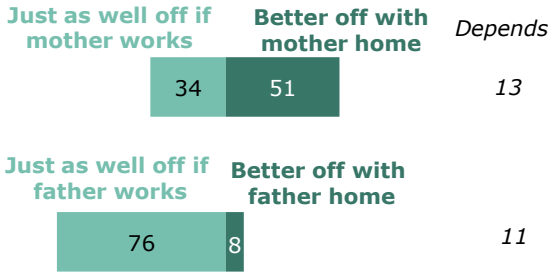
Note: "Hasn't made much difference" and "Don't know/Refused" responses not shown.

Source: Pew Research Center survey, conducted April 25-28, 2013, N=1,003.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The Public Differs in Role of Fathers and Mothers

% saying children are ...



Note: The questions were asked separately for mothers and fathers. Responses of "Just as well if mother/father works" and "Depends" are not shown.

Source: Pew Research Center survey, conducted April 25-28, 2013, N=1,003.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

[3] See Kim Parker and Wendy Wang, "Modern Parenthood: Roles of Moms and Dads Converge as They Balance Work and Family," Pew Research Center Social & Demographic Trends project, March 14, 2013.
[4] Trend analysis is based on Decennial Census data. There may be fluctuations within each 10-year period which are not reflected in the chart on p.1.

While the vast majority of Americans (79%) reject the idea that women should return to their traditional roles,[5] the new Pew Research survey finds that the public still sees mothers and fathers in a different light when it comes to evaluating the best work-family balance for children.

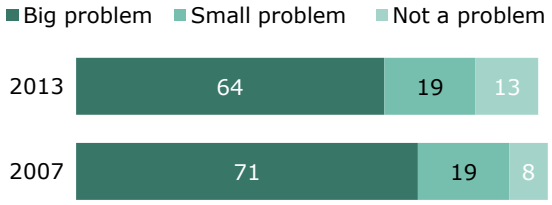
About half (51%) of survey respondents say that children are better off if a mother is home and doesn't hold a job, while just 8% say the same about a father.

On the topic of single mothers, most Americans (64%) say that this growing trend is a "big problem"; however, the share who feel this way is down from 71% in 2007. Also, young adults are less concerned than older adults about the trend. About four-in-ten adults under age 30 (42%) view it as a big problem, compared with 65% of those in their 30s and 40s and 74% of adults who are 50 and older.

The public's opinions about unmarried mothers also differ by party affiliation and race. Republicans (78%) are more likely than Democrats (51%) or independent voters (65%) to say that the growing number of children born to unwed mothers is a big problem. Whites are more likely than non-whites to view it as a big problem (67% vs. 56%). The views of men and women on this issue are the same.

Public Somewhat Less Concerned About Rising Share of Single Moms

% saying the growing number of children born to unmarried mothers is a ...



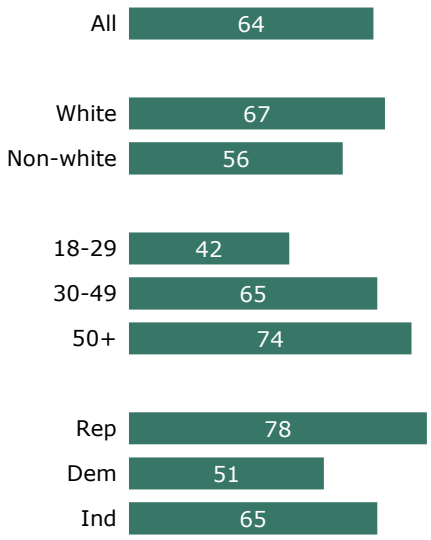
Source: Pew Research Center survey, conducted April 25-28, 2013, N=1,003.

Note: "Don't know/Refused" responses not shown.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Views about Unmarried Mothers

% saying the growing number of children born to unmarried mothers is a "big problem"



Source: Pew Research Center survey, conducted April 25-28, 2013, N=1,003.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Data for this report are mainly from Pew Research analysis of multiple years of Census Bureau data as well as a recent Pew Research

[5] Based on a 2012 Pew Research Center survey. For more details, see "Partisan Polarization Surges in Bush, Obama Years: Trends in American Values 1987-2012," Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, June 4, 2012

survey conducted by landline and cellular telephone April 25-28, 2013, among a nationally representative sample of 1,003 adults living in the continental United States. More detailed information about the data sources can be found in Appendix 2.

Other Key Findings

- **Both groups of breadwinner mothers, married and single, have grown in size in the past five decades.** Of all households with children younger than 18, the share of married mothers who out-earn their husbands has gone up from 4% in 1960 to 15% in 2011, nearly a fourfold increase. During the same period, the share of families led by a single mother has more than tripled (from 7% to 25%).

- **The total family income is higher when the mother, not the father, is the primary breadwinner**. In 2011, the median family income was nearly $80,000 for couples in which wife is the primary breadwinner, about $2,000 more than it was for couples in which husband is the primary breadwinner, and $10,000 more than for couples in which spouses' income is the same.

- **Married mothers are increasingly better educated than their husbands**. Even though a majority of spouses have a similar educational background, the share of couples in which the mother has attained a higher education than her spouse has gone up from 7% in 1960 to 23% in 2011. In two-parent families today, 61% have a mother whose education level is similar to her husband's, 23% have a mother who is better educated than her husband, and 16% have a father who is better educated than his wife.

- **Most people reject the idea that it is bad for a marriage if a wife out-earns her husband.** When asked if they agree or disagree that it is generally better for a marriage if a husband earns more than his wife, some 28% of survey respondents say they agree and 63% disagree. When a similar question was asked in 1997, 40% said they agreed. In the new survey, adults with a high school diploma or less were twice as likely as those with a college degree (35% vs. 18%) to say it is generally better for a marriage if a husband out-earns a wife. There were no significant differences between men and women on this question.

- **Today's single mothers are much more likely to be never married than were single mothers in the past.** The share of never married mothers among all single mothers has increased from 4% in 1960 to 44% in 2011. During the same period,

the share of single mothers who had children from previous marriages has gone down from 82% to 50%.

- **Never married mothers have a distinctive profile.** Compared with single mothers who are divorced, widowed or separated, never married mothers are significantly younger, disproportionally non-white, and have lower education and income. Close to half of never married mothers in 2011 (46%) are ages 30 and younger, six-in-ten are either black (40%) or Hispanic (24%), and nearly half (49%) have a high school education or less. Their median family income was $17, 400 in 2011, the lowest among all families with children.

PUBLIC VIEWS ON CHANGING GENDER ROLES

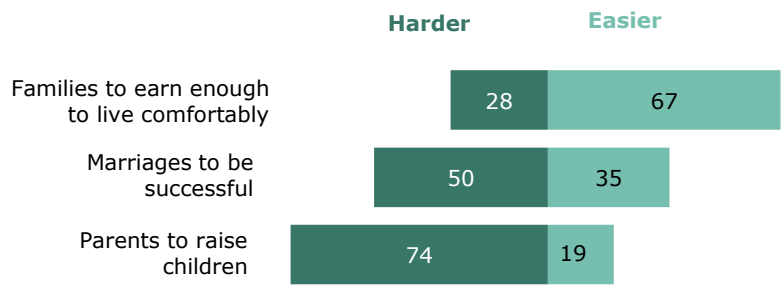
The public has mixed views about the changing role of women in the workplace and the impact this has had on family life. Today women make up almost half of the U.S. labor force, and in 2012 nearly as many working-aged women (68%) as men (79%) were in the labor force.[6] Most Americans applaud these trends, and very few would favor a return to more traditional gender roles. In a 2012 Pew Research survey, only 18% of all adults agreed that "women should return to their traditional roles in society." Fully eight-in-ten adults (79%) rejected this idea.[7]

When it comes to mothers of young children, the public is more conflicted. Relatively few (21%) think the trend toward more mothers of young children working outside the home is a good thing for our society[8], and only 16% say having a mother who works full time is the ideal situation for a young child.[9]

A new Pew Research Center survey, conducted April 25-28, 2013, finds that the public remains of two minds about the gains women have made in the workplace–most recognize the clear economic benefits to families, but at the same time many voice concerns about the toll having a working mother may take on children.

Women, Work and Families

% saying the increasing number of women working for pay outside the home has made it easier/harder for …



Note: "Hasn't made much difference" and "Don't know/Refused" responses not shown.

Source: Pew Research Center survey, conducted April 25-28, 2013, N=1,003.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Respondents in the new poll were asked how the increasing number of women working for pay outside the home has affected different dimensions of family life. Fully two-thirds (67%) say this change has made it easier for families to earn enough money to live

[6] Based on Pew Research Center tabulations of Bureau of Labor Statistics data. For a more detailed discussion of trends in women in the labor force, see Ibid. "Modern Parenthood: Roles of Moms and Dads Converge as They Balance Work and Family Life."
[7] See Ibid. "Partisan Polarization Surges in Bush, Obama Years: Trends in American Values 1987-2012."
[8] See Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends project, "The Decline of Marriage and Rise of New Families," Nov. 8, 2012.
[9] See Ibid. "Modern Parenthood: Roles of Moms and Dads Converge as They Balance Work and Family Life."

comfortably. About three-in-ten (28%) say this change has made it harder for families to earn enough, and 2% say it hasn't made much difference in this regard.

While this trend may be beneficial for family finances, the public thinks having more women in the workplace has not had a positive effect on child rearing and even marriage. Roughly three-quarters of adults (74%) say the increasing number of women working for pay has made it harder for parents to raise children. Only 19% say this has made it easier to raise children, and 2% say it hasn't made much difference.

Half of all adults say the trend toward more women working has made it harder for marriages to be successful. Only about one-third (35%) say this change has made it easier for marriages to be successful, and 5% say it hasn't made much difference.

These attitudes have changed somewhat over the past decade and a half. In a survey conducted by the Washington Post, the Kaiser Family Foundation and Harvard University in 1997, most adults saw the economic benefits of having more women in the workplace: 60% said this trend made it easier for families to earn enough money to live comfortably. That share is even higher today (67%).

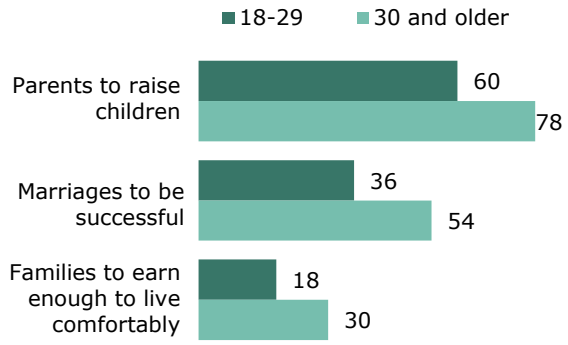
Compared with current attitudes, the public had a more negative assessment in 1997 of the effect this trend was having on children and marriage. Fully 82% said having more women working for pay outside the home made it harder for parents to raise children (compared with 74% today), and 67% said this trend made it harder for marriages to be successful (vs. 50% today).

There is no significant gender gap in views about how having more women in the workplace affects marriage and child rearing. However, men are more likely than women to see the economic benefits of this trend.

There are significant differences of opinion across age groups. Young adults (those ages

Young Adults Differ in Views about Working Women

% saying the increasing number of women working for pay outside the home has made it harder for …



Source: Pew Research Center survey, conducted April 25-28, 2013, N=1,003.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

18-29) are less likely than older adults to see negative consequences from this trend and more likely to see positive effects.

For example, while 78% of those adults ages 30 and older say having more women in the workforce has made it harder for parents to raise children, only 60% of those ages 18-29 agree with this assessment. Similarly, while more than half (54%) of adults ages 30 and older say the rising share of women in the workplace has made it harder for marriages to be successful, only 36% of young adults agree. Not surprisingly, there are also large gaps by age in the incidence levels of marriage and parenting. Among the survey respondents, only about one-quarter (26%) of those ages 18-29 reported having a child under age 18. This compares with 66% of those ages 30-49. Roughly one-in-five (19%) of those under age 30 said they were married, compared with more than half (58%) of those ages 30 and older.

When it comes to earning enough money to live comfortably, young adults (79%) are more likely than those ages 30 and older (64%) to say having more women working outside the home has made this easier to accomplish.

The Rising Share of Single Mothers

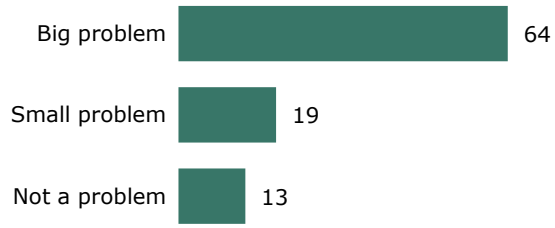
When it comes to the rising share of single mothers, the public takes a mostly negative view. About six-in-ten adults (64%) say the growing number of children born to unmarried mothers is a big problem. An additional 19% say this is a small problem, and 13% say this is not a problem at all.

Opinions on this issue have softened somewhat in recent years. In a 2007 Pew Research survey, 71% of adults said the rising share of single mothers was a big problem, and only 8% said it wasn't a problem at all.[10]

In the current survey, whites are more likely

Public Has Concerns about Rise in Unmarried Mothers

% saying the growing number of children born to unmarried mothers is a ...



Source: Pew Research Center survey, conducted April 25-28, 2013, N=1,003.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

[10] See Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends project, "Fewer Mothers Prefer Full-time Work: From 1997 to 2007," July 12, 2007.

than non-whites to see this trend as a problem. Some 67% of whites compared with 56% of non-whites say the growing number of children born to unmarried mothers is a big problem.[11]

Young adults have much different views on this issue than do middle-aged and older adults. Only 42% of those ages 18-29 view the rising share of unmarried mothers as a big problem. By contrast, 65% of those ages 30-49 say this is a big problem, as do 74% of those ages 50 and older. Among young adults, most say this trend is either a small problem (35%) or not a problem at all (19%).

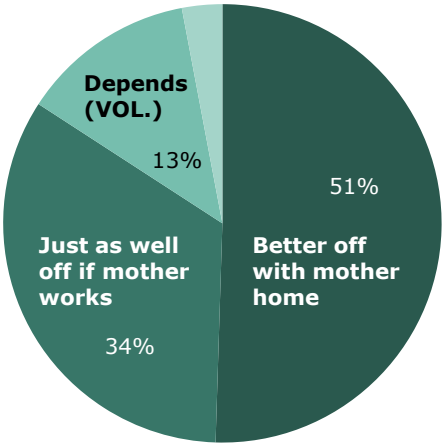
What's Best for Children?

In 2012, roughly two-thirds (65%) of women with children younger than age 6 were either employed or looking for work. This share is up dramatically from 39% in 1975. While working outside the home is now more the norm than the exception for mothers of young children, the public remains conflicted about this trend. In the new Pew Research poll, 51% of the adults surveyed said children are better off if their mother is home and doesn't hold a job, while only 34% said children are just as well off if their mother works. An additional 13% of respondents volunteered that it "depends" on the circumstances.[12]

A decade ago, the public felt even more strongly that the best thing for children was to have a mother who stayed home. In a 2003 CBS News/New York Times survey, 61% said children are better off if their mother doesn't hold a job, while 29% said children were just as well off if their mother worked.

Mother's Role and Children's Wellbeing

% saying children are ...



Source: Pew Research Center survey, conducted April 25-28, 2013, n=511 (Form 1 respondents only). "Don't know/Refused" responses shown but not labeled.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

There is a gender gap on this question: 45% of women say children are better off if their mother is at home, and 38% say children are just as well off if their mother works. Among

[11] Due to limitations in sample sizes, "non-whites" includes Hispanics (regardless of their race).
[12] The question did not specify the age of the children.

men, 57% say children are better off if their mother is at home, while 29% say they are just as well off if their mother works.

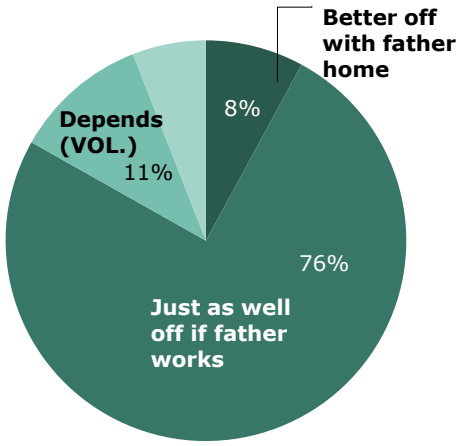
There is an age gap on this question as well. Again, young adults express a different set of views than their older counterparts. Nearly half (46%) of those under age 30 say children are just as well off if their mother works, while 37% say they are better off with a mother who stays home. Among those ages 30 and older, the balance of opinion is just the opposite: 55% say children are better off if their mother is home, and 31% say they are just as well off with a working mother.

The public is not conflicted at all about whether fathers should work or stay home with their children. Fully 76% say children are just as well off if their father works, while only 8% say children are better off if their father is home and doesn't hold a job. An additional 11% say it depends on the situation.

Views on whether fathers should work or stay at home do not differ by gender or age. Equal shares of men and women (76%) say children are just as well off if their father works. Similarly, 74% of young adults and 77% of those ages 30 and older agree that having a father who works outside the home is not harmful to children.[13]

Father's Role and Children's Wellbeing

% saying children are …



Source: Pew Research Center survey, conducted April 25-28, 2013, N=1,003. "Don't know/Refused" responses shown but not labeled.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

[13] The two questions: "Do you think children are better off if their mother is home …" and "Do you think children are better off if their father is home …" were rotated by form in the survey. Half of the sample was asked about mothers first, while the other half was asked about fathers first. The rotation was put in place to avoid having all respondents make a direct comparison between mothers and fathers. The percentages reported here for mothers are based only on Form 1 respondents (who were asked about mothers first), because that form was more comparable to the 2003 CBS News/New York Times trend. The percentages for fathers are based on the full sample, to avoid any bias that might be introduced by question ordering.

What's Best for Marriage?

These days, in most two-parent households (59%), both the mother and the father work outside the home.[14] In a majority of those households, the father has a higher income than the mother, but for a growing share of these couples, the mother out-earns the father.

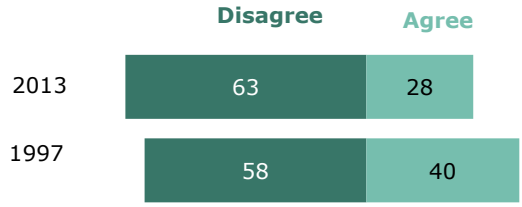
In the new Pew Research survey, respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that it's generally better for a marriage if the husband earns more money than his wife. About three-in-ten adults (28%) said they agree with this statement, while 63% said they disagree. When the same question was asked in 1997, a significantly higher share of adults (40%) agreed that it's best for a marriage if a husband out-earns his wife, while 58% disagreed.[15]

In the current poll, similar shares of men (62%) and women (63%) reject the notion that it's best for a marriage if the husband out-earns his wife. And solid majorities of younger and middle-aged adults express the same view. Adults ages 65 and older are somewhat more conflicted about this. Among that age group, some 37% agree that it's better for a marriage if the husband earns more money than his wife, and 51% disagree.

College graduates are among the least likely to agree that it's better for a marriage if the husband out-earns his wife—only 18% support this view. Fully 75% of college graduates disagree with this notion. Among those with a high school diploma or less, roughly one-third (35%) agree that it's better for a marriage if the husband has a higher income, while 54% disagree.

Does It Matter Who Earns More?

% saying they agree/disagree that "It's generally better for a marriage if the husband earns more than his wife"



Source: For 2013, Pew Research Center survey, conducted April 25-28, 2013, N=1,003. For 1997, Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard survey, conducted Aug 14-Sept 7, 1997, N=1,202.

Notes: Trend should be interpreted with caution, due to differences in question order and context. "Don't know/Refused" responses not shown.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

[14] Based on Pew Research analysis of American Community Survey 2011. See Appendix 1 for historical data. Some two-parent households are headed by same-sex couples (rather than a mother and a father). The Pew Research Survey does not allow for analysis of same-sex couples, because respondents are not asked about their sexual orientation.

[15] In the 1997 survey, this question was asked in a somewhat different context. The statement was part of a list of items and was asked near the end of long survey with many questions about work, gender and family. Comparisons to the 1997 findings should be made with caution.

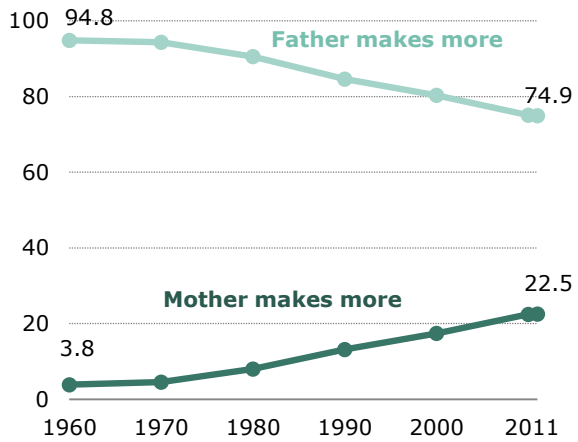
MARRIED MOTHERS WHO OUT-EARN THEIR HUSBANDS

Married mothers are more likely than before to be the primary provider in the family. Among married couples with children, the proportion in which the wife's income tops her husband's has increased from about 4% in 1960 to 23% in 2011.[16] By contrast, the share of couples in which the husband makes more than his wife has fallen about 20 percentage points, from 95% in 1960 to 75% in 2011.[17]

One factor directly related to mothers' rising income is their increased employment rate. The share of employed married mothers has increased dramatically since the 1960s, which results in more families with two working parents.[18] In 2011, nearly six-in-ten married couples with children had two incomes, up from a quarter in 1960. The share in which the father is the breadwinner and mother is the homemaker, by contrast, has fallen from about 70% in 1960 to 31% in 2011.

Who Makes More in the Family? 1960-2011

% based on married couples with children under age 18



Note: The category of father and mother having the same income not shown.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the Decennial Census and American Community Surveys (ACS) Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample (IPUMS) files

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Rising education levels among women can also contribute to the increased share of married mothers who out-earn their husbands. Even though most people are married to someone with a similar educational background, the number of couples in which the wife is better educated than her husband has increased. Among all married couples with children in 1960, about 16% had a husband who was better educated than his wife and the opposite was true for 7% of couples. About five decades later, the pattern has flipped: In about 23% of couples, it is the

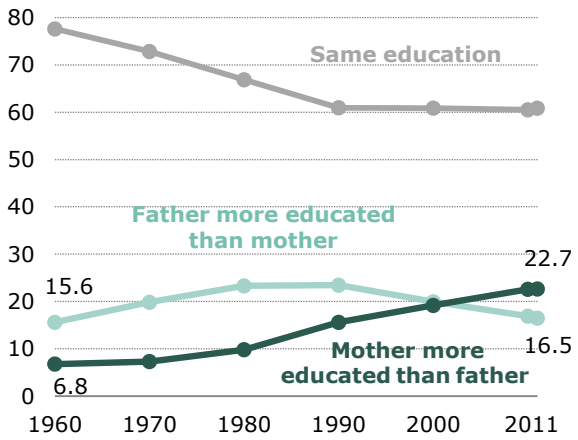
[16] The unit of analysis is the household head, therefore married couples in which neither spouse is the head of household are not included. For more details, please see Appendix 2.
[17] Total personal income in the census includes each respondent's total pre-tax personal income or losses from all sources for the previous year. For the American Community Survey, the reference period was the past 12 months. Each person has an income, regardless of his or her employment status. The value of income could be zero or negative.
[18] Employment status in the Census/ACS data is measured for the previous week. For more information on mothers' employment status, see Ibid. "Modern Parenthood: Roles of Moms and Dads Converge as They Balance Work and Family."

wife who has attained a higher education level than her husband, and among 17% of families the husband is better educated than the wife.[19]

The higher education of mothers relative to their spouses is correlated with the higher incidence of mothers who out-earn their husbands. In 2011, among couples in which the wife has more education than the husband, 38% of wives have higher income than their husbands. When the spouses have the same education, some 23% of wives make more money than their husbands. And when the husband has higher education, only 14% of mothers make more than their husbands.

Mothers Are Increasingly More Educated than Fathers

% based on married couples with children under age 18



Note: Education is measured in three categories: High school or less, some college, college or more. The combined category of father and mother having the same education not shown.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the Decennial Census and American Community Surveys (ACS) Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample (IPUMS) files

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Despite the fact that mothers are generally more educated than their husbands today, a majority of fathers still earn more than their wives. The share of couples in which the husband's income exceeds the wife's was about 75% in 2011. This in part reflects different employment rates between married parents: about 65% of married mothers were employed in 2011, compared with about 90% of fathers. But it also reflects different earning patterns among men and women. Even in dual income families in which both fathers and mothers are working, 70% of these families consist of fathers who earn more than mothers.[20]

Characteristics of Married Mothers Who Out-earn their Husbands

Married mothers who out-earn their husbands are a highly educated group. Nearly half (49%) have a college degree or higher. This share is significantly higher than it is among women whose husbands are the primary breadwinners (37%) and among those who make the same level of income as their husbands (39%).

[19] When comparing education level between fathers and moms, education is measured in three categories: high school or less, some college, and college or more.

[20] One possible reason is that women with young children are more likely to work part time than their partners. Among dual income families, fathers on average spend 42 hours at paid work, while mothers spend 31 hours at paid work. For more information, see Ibid. "Modern Parenthood: Roles of Moms and Dads Converge as They Balance Work and Family."

About 65% of married mothers who out-earn their husbands are white; this share is higher than the average of all mothers (60%), but slightly lower than it is among married mothers whose husbands make more (67%).

Married black mothers are more likely to be the primary breadwinner than to be mothers whose husbands have a higher income. The share of black mothers among those who out-earn their husbands is 10%, compared with 6% among couples where the husband is the primary breadwinner.

A Comparison of Married Mothers

% based on mothers with children under age 18

	All Mothers	Husbands earn more	Same as husbands	Out-earn husbands
Age	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**
15-30	19.1	16.8	17.4	13.9
31-46	63.9	65.6	65.9	66.8
47-65	17.0	17.6	16.7	19.4
Race				
White	60.3	66.6	58.8	64.9
Black	12.4	5.5	7.6	10.2
Hispanic	18.9	18.7	21.3	14.8
Asian	6.1	7.2	10.6	7.9
Education				
College or more	33.5	36.6	38.6	48.5
Some college	33.7	31.7	29.9	29.8
HS grad or less	32.8	31.7	31.5	21.7

Note: Mothers ages 66 and older not shown. Asians include Pacific islanders. Whites, blacks and Asians include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2011 American Community Survey Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample (IPUMS) files

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Compared with married mothers whose income is less than or equal to that of their husbands, mothers who out-earn their husbands are somewhat older. About 14% of them are ages 30 or younger, and a majority (67%) are in their 30s through age 46, an additional 19% are ages 47 to 65. By contrast, about 17% of mothers in the other two groups are ages 30 or younger, and their shares of adult ages 47 to 65 are lower. In addition, children of mothers who out-earn their husbands are slightly older than those in other type of families. The average age of youngest child is 7.6 for mothers who are the primary breadwinner, 7.2 for families in which fathers are the primary breadwinner, and 7.3 for families with both parents equally contributing to the family income.

Among married couples with children, the total family income is highest when the mother, not the father, is the primary provider. In 2011, the median family income is nearly $80,000 for couples in which wife is the primary breadwinner, about $2,000 more than it is for couples in which husband is the primary breadwinner and $10,000 more than it is for couples in which the spouses' incomes are identical.

Family Income by Who Provides More

Median family income for married couples with children in 2011



Note: Based on all two-parent families with own child(ren) under age 18 in the household.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2011 American Community Survey (ACS) Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample (IPUMS) files

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

This is related to the employment arrangements between the couples. In families where the mother out-earns the father, about seven-in-ten (71%) have two working parents and 22% consist of couples in which the mother is the sole earner of the family. However, when the father out-earns the mother, he is more likely to be the sole breadwinner. In about four-in-ten of these families (41%), only the father is employed, while in 54% of these families, both the mother and the father are employed.

Income and Education among Newlyweds

The rise of married mothers who out-earn their husbands is a part of a broader trend of wives' increasing economic power relative to their husbands. Today, in nearly one-quarter of married couples with or without children (24%) the wife is the primary breadwinner.[21]

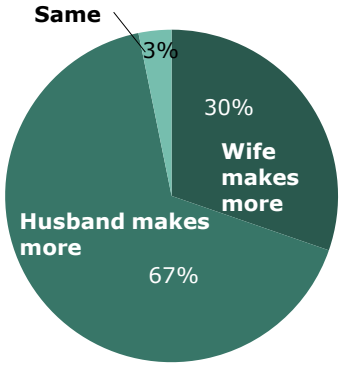
The share of "breadwinner wives" is even higher among recently married couples. In 2011, three-in-ten newlywed couples consisted of a bride whose income was higher than that of her husband.

Today's newlywed women are generally better educated than their husbands. In 2011, the wife's education level was higher than the husband's in 26% of newlywed couples. In only 16% of couples did the husband's educational attainment exceed that of his wife. For a majority of newlyweds (57%), the husband and the wife had a similar level of education.

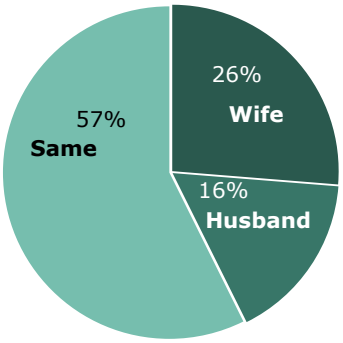
Despite these education gains for women, even among newlywed couples, the most common situation remains for the groom to earn more than the bride (67% of couples fell into this category in 2011).

Newlyweds in 2011: Which Spouse Has More …

Income



Education



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the American Community Surveys (ACS) 2011 Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample (IPUMS) files

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

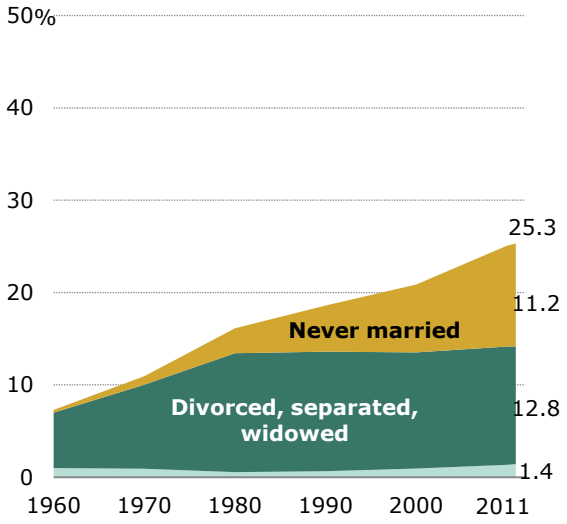
[21] An earlier Pew Research Center report showed that among native-born 30- to 44-year-olds in 2007, 22% of husbands had wives whose income was higher than theirs. See Richard Fry and D'Vera Cohn, "Women, Men and the New Economics of Marriage," Pew Research Center Social & Demographic Trends project, Jan. 19, 2010.

SINGLE MOTHERS

Single mothers are made up of two major groups: one consists of mothers with children from a previous marriage, and the other consists of mothers who have never been married.[22] There is also a small group of mothers who are married but whose spouses are not living in the household. In the past five decades, the share of never married mothers among all families with children has increased from less than 1% to 11%. The share of mothers who are divorced, separated or widowed increased in the 1960s and 1970s and has remained relatively stable since 1980, hovering around 12% to 13% in the past three decades.

Single Mothers, 1960-2011

% based on households with children under age 18



Note: Single mothers who are married but the spouse is not in the household are shown but not labeled.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the Decennial Census and American Community Surveys (ACS) Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample (IPUMS) files

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

These patterns are tied to broader long-term trends in non-marital births and divorce. According to the data from the National Center for Health Statistics, the share of births to unmarried women rose to 41% in 2010 from 5% in 1960. At the same time, the divorce rate rose sharply in the 1960s and 1970s and has declined since 1980.[23] A recent Census Bureau report shows that in 2011, 36% of mothers who gave birth in the preceding year were unmarried. And a majority of these women (87%) had never been married.[24]

[22] By definition, single mothers do not have a partner to help in raising their children, and therefore they become the sole provider for the family by default. In some cases, these mothers may live with an unmarried partner who could potentially contribute to their household income. The American Community Survey doesn't have direct measures about respondents' unmarried partner. According to demographic data from the American Time Use survey of 2003-2011, among parents ages 18 to 64 with children under ages 18 at home, about 4% live with a partner. For more details, see Ibid. "Modern Parenthood: Roles of Moms and Dads Converge as They Balance Work and Family."

[23] See Ibid. "The Decline of Marriage and Rise of New Families." For updated rate of births to unmarried women, see "Births: Final Data for 2010," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Vital Statistics Report, Aug. 28, 2012.

[24] See Rachel M. Shattuck and Rose M. Kreider, "Social and Economic Characteristics of Currently Unmarried Women with a Recent Birth: 2011," American Community Survey Reports, U.S. Census Bureau, May 2013.

As a result, today's single mothers are much more likely to be never married than their counterparts in the past. In 1960, of all single mothers, more than eight-in-ten (82%) were divorced, separated or widowed. An additional 14% were married, but their spouses were not living in the household. Only 4% of all single mothers had never been married.

The makeup of this group has changed dramatically since the 1960s. By 2011, the share of single mothers who had never been married had reached to 44%, while half of all single mothers were divorced, separated or widowed.

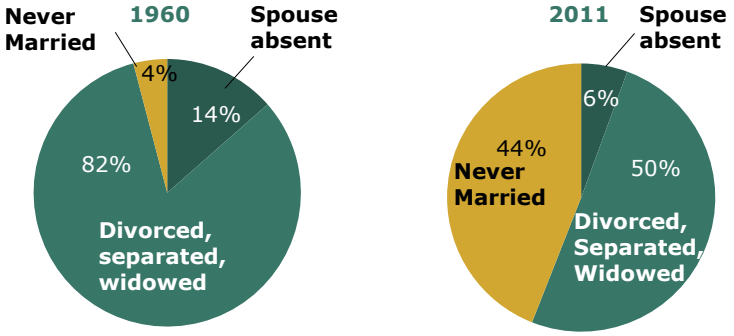
Characteristics of Single Mothers

Compared with all mothers with children under age 18, single mothers overall are younger, black or Hispanic, and less likely to have a college degree.

However, there are significant differences between single mothers who have never married and

The Makeup of Single Mothers, 1960-2011

Among all single mothers with children under age 18



Note: Separated and widowed mothers are included in divorced, etc.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the Decennial Census and American Community Surveys (ACS) Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample (IPUMS) files

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

A Comparison of Single Mothers

% based on mothers with children under age 18

Age	All mothers %	All single mothers %	Never married %	Divorced, separated, widowed %
15-30	19.1	26.8	45.5	11.0
31-46	63.9	58.7	48.5	67.1
47-65	17.0	14.5	6.0	21.9
Race				
White	60.3	45.3	31.5	58.1
Black	12.4	27.5	40.1	17.2
Hispanic	18.9	21.7	23.5	19.3
Asian	6.1	2.3	1.3	2.6
Education				
College or more	33.5	18.0	11.4	23.3
Some college	33.7	40.4	39.7	41.6
HS grad or less	32.8	41.6	49.0	35.1

Note: Mothers ages 66 and older are not shown. Asians include Pacific islanders. Whites, blacks and Asians include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2011 American Community Survey Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample (IPUMS) files

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

those who have children from previous marriages. Never married mothers are significantly younger: About 46% of them are ages 30 or younger; and nearly half are in their 30s and 40s. By contrast, only 11% of divorced, separated or widowed mothers are ages 30 or younger. A majority of them are in their 30s through age 46 (67%), and about 22% are ages 47 to 65.

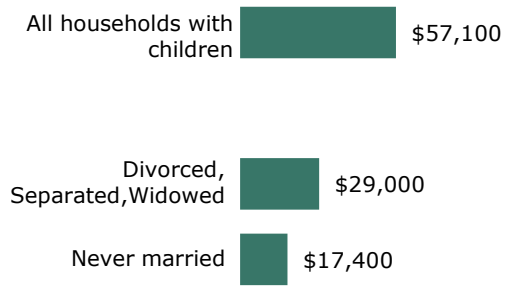
Never married mothers are disproportionally racial and ethnic minorities. As of 2011, about 40% of never married mothers were black (compared with 12% of all mothers), 24% were Hispanic (compared with 19% of all mothers), and 32% were white (compared with 60% of all). There is much less of a racial skew among mothers who are divorced, separated or widowed; 17% of them were black, 19% were Hispanic and 58% were white.

The two groups of single mothers also differ by education. Nearly half of never married mothers (49%) have a high school education or less, compared with 35% among mothers who are divorced, widowed or separated. The share of college graduates is higher among divorced mothers (23%) than among never married mothers (11%).

Even though single mothers as a whole have the lowest income among all families with children, never married single mothers are particularly disadvantaged economically. In 2011, the median family income for never married mothers was $17,400, only slightly over the poverty threshold of $15,504 for families with one adult and one child, but below $18,123, the threshold for families with one adult and two children.[25]

Family Income of Two Types of Single Mothers

Median family income in 2011



Note: Based on families with own child(ren) under age 18 in the household.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2011 American Community Survey (ACS) Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample (IPUMS) files

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

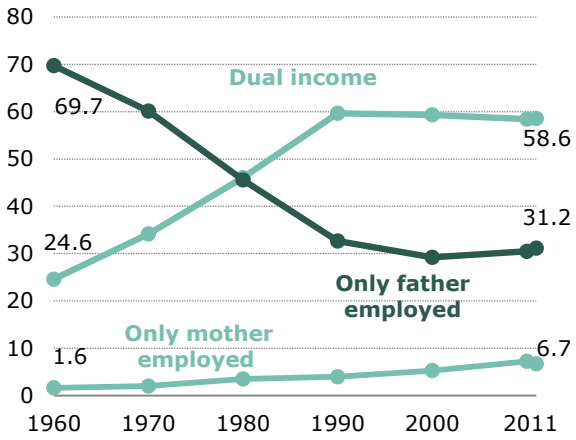
APPENDICES:

[25] Based on 2011 Poverty Thresholds, U.S. Census Bureau.

1. ADDITIONAL CHARTS

Employment Arrangements among Couples, 1960-2011

% of married couples with children under age 18

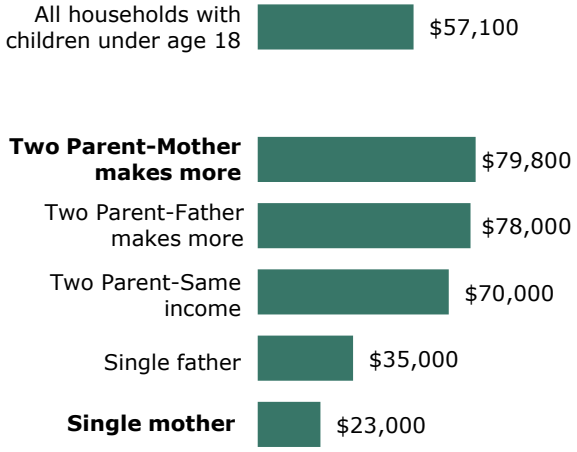


Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the Decennial Census and American Community Surveys (ACS) Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample (IPUMS) files

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Family Income by Who Provides More for the Family

Median family income in 2011



Note: Based on all families with own child(ren) under age 18 in the household.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2011 American Community Survey (ACS) Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample (IPUMS) files

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

A Comparison of Mothers in Different Family Arrangements

% based on mothers with children under age 18

Age	All Mothers %	Married/ Husbands earn more %	Married/ Earn same as husbands %	Married/ Out-earn husbands %	Single Mothers %
Millennials (15-30)	19.1	16.9	17.4	13.9	26.8
Gen X (31-46)	63.9	65.6	65.9	66.8	58.7
Boomers (47-65)	17.0	17.6	16.7	19.4	14.5
Race					
White	60.3	66.6	58.8	64.9	45.3
Black	12.4	5.5	7.6	10.2	27.5
Hispanic	18.9	18.7	21.3	14.8	21.7
Asian	6.1	7.2	10.6	7.9	2.3
Education					
College or more	33.5	36.6	38.6	48.5	18.0
Some college	33.7	31.7	29.9	29.8	40.4
HS grad or less	32.8	31.7	31.5	21.7	41.6

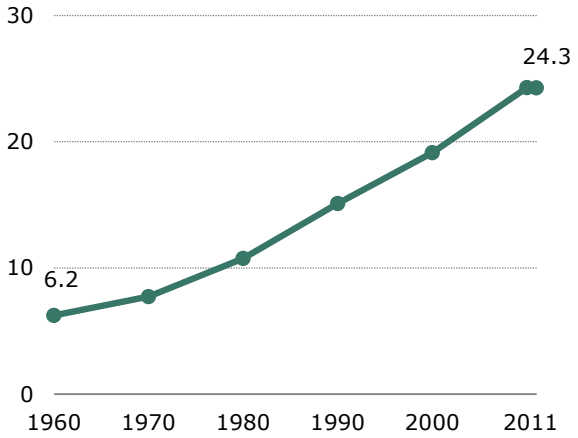
Note: Mothers ages 66 and older are not shown. The reference year for generations is 2011. The Millennial generation refers to those born after 1980; they are the first generation coming of age in the new millennium. Generation X covers people born from 1965 through 1980. Asians include Pacific islanders. Whites, blacks and Asians include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2011 American Community Survey Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample (IPUMS) files

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Married Women Who Make More than their Husbands, 1960-2011

% of all married couples



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the Decennial Census and American Community Surveys (ACS) Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample (IPUMS) files

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

2. DATA & METHODOLOGY

Decennial Census and American Community Survey

Analysis of the characteristics of mothers, married couples and newlyweds are based on the most recent American Community Survey (ACS) data (2011). The data set was obtained from the IPUMS-USA database[26] (http://www.ipums.org/) and constructed by the Pew Research Center.

The analysis of historical trends is based on microdata from the Decennial Censuses of 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990 and 2000 and the American Community Surveys (ACS) of 2010 and 2011. The microdata files were obtained from the IPUMS-USA database. Data are a 1% sample of the U.S. population for the five decennial censuses and ACS.

Except for 1960, the data are limited to the head of the household ages 15 and older. The head of household were ages 14 and older in 1960. The spousal information is attached to the household head if that person's marital status is "married, spouse present."

The American Community Survey is a household survey developed by the U.S. Census Bureau to replace the long form of decennial census program. It is collected throughout the year using mailed questionnaires, telephone interviews, and visits from Census Bureau field representatives to about 3 million household addresses annually.

Parents with children under age 18: This refers to people who have at least one "own" child under age 18 in the household. "Own" children in the Census Bureau data are biological children, stepchildren or adopted children.

Mothers who are the sole or primary provider (Breadwinner moms): The breadwinner mothers consist of two groups of women with children under age 18: One is married and their income is higher than their husband's, and the other is single (including women who are never married, divorced, separated, widowed, and married but with spouse absent from the household). Because the information about personal earnings (includes wages or income from own business or farm for the previous year) was not available for samples prior to 1990, the total personal income (INCTOT), instead of total personal earned income (INCEARN), was used to compare the earning power between the husbands and wives.

[26] Steven Ruggles, J. Trent Alexander, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Matthew B. Schroeder and Matthew Sobek. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010.

According to the Census Bureau, total personal income (INCTOT) includes each respondent's total pre-tax personal income or losses from all sources for the previous year.

Married population: The currently married population is selected as individuals whose marital status is "married, spouse present." The spouse must be present in the data set to ascertain his/her education and income information. In these data sets all married couples consist of a man and a woman. The unit of analysis in this report is the head of the household, the married couples in which neither of the spouses is a household head are not included in this study. The IPUMS database includes linkages of spouse records and supplies "attached variables" that place the value for the spouse's variable on each record. However, for a married person whose spouse is not in the household (married, spouse absent), the spousal information is not available.

Newly married population: The newly married population is a subset of the currently married population drawn from ACS 2011. Beginning in 2008, the ACS includes questions related to date of marriage. One question asked respondents if they had been married (or divorced or widowed) in the "past 12 months."[27] Those saying they had married are the basis for the analyses of "newlyweds" and "new marriages" in this report.

Race and ethnicity: Unless otherwise noted, the terms "whites," "blacks," and "Asians" exclude the non-Hispanic components of their populations.

Weighting: All estimates have been weighted to reflect the actual population.

Public Opinion Survey

The survey findings presented in this report are based on an omnibus survey, conducted April 25 to 28, 2013, with a nationally representative sample of 1,003 adults living in the continental United States. Telephone interviews were conducted by landline (500) and cell phone (503, including 237 without a landline phone). The survey was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI). Interviews were done in English by Princeton Data Source. Statistical results are weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

[27] Because each year's ACS is an aggregation of 12 monthly samples, responses to this question cannot be assigned to a specific year or set of months. Thus the marriages are reported as occurring in the "previous year."

3. TOPLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

PEW SOCIAL & DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS
APRIL 2013 BREADWINNER MOTHERS OMNIBUS SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
APRIL 25-28, 2013
TOTAL N=1,003

NOTE: ALL NUMBERS ARE PERCENTAGES. THE PERCENTAGES GREATER THAN ZERO BUT LESS THAN 0.5% ARE REPLACED BY AN ASTERISK (*). COLUMNS/ROWS MAY NOT TOTAL 100% DUE TO ROUNDING. UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, ALL TRENDS REFERENCE SURVEYS FROM THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER.

Now a few questions about marriage and family.

ASK ALL:

SD.1 In recent decades, the number of women working for pay outside the home has increased greatly. For each of the following aspects of life, please tell me whether you think this change has made things easier or harder. (First/Next) **[READ AND RANDOMIZE] [IF NECESSARY:** Has the increase in the number of women working for pay outside the home made this easier or harder?]

a. For parents to raise children

Total		*W. Post / Kaiser / Harvard* Aug 1997[28]
19	Easier	15
74	Harder	82
2	Hasn't made much difference **(VOL.)**	1
5	Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**	1
		(N=1,202)

b. For families to earn enough money to live comfortably

Total		*W. Post / Kaiser / Harvard* Aug1997
67	Easier	60
28	Harder	37
2	Hasn't made much difference **(VOL.)**	2
4	Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**	1

c. For marriages to be successful

Total		*W. Post / Kaiser / Harvard* Aug 1997
35	Easier	26
50	Harder	67
5	Hasn't made much difference **(VOL.)**	4
10	Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**	3

[28] In 1997, the question stem was worded as follows. "In recent years, the number of women working for pay outside the home has increased greatly …" The 1997 question included two additional items: "For women to lead satisfying lives," and "For men to lead satisfying lives." All five items were randomized.

ASK ALL:
EMPLOY Are you now employed full time, part time, or not employed?

Total	
45	Employed full time
12	Employed part time
42	Not employed
*	Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**

ASK ALL:
M.1 Are you currently married, living with a partner, divorced, separated, widowed, or have you never been married? **(IF R SAYS "SINGLE," PROBE TO DETERMINE WHICH CATEGORY IS APPROPRIATE)**

Total	
49	Married
7	Living with a partner
9	Divorced
3	Separated
7	Widowed
25	Never been married
*	Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**

ASK ALL:
P.1 Do you have any children under age 18? **IF RESPONDENT VOLUNTEERS THAT THEY HAVE STEPCHILDREN, ASK:** Do you consider yourself (**IF MORE THAN ONE:** their/**IF ONE:** his or her) parent or guardian, or not? **IF YES TO EITHER, ASK:** How many children (OR, **IF APPLICABLE:** stepchildren) under age 18 do you have?

Total	
31	Yes, have children under age 18
69	No, do not have children under age 18
*	Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**

ASK ALL:
SD.2 Do you think children are better off if their **[INSERT ITEM; ROTATE BY FORM]** is home and doesn't hold a job or are the children just as well off if the [mother/father] works?

a. Mother **[FORM 1 ONLY:** n=511]**[29]**

Total		*CBS News/ New York Times* Apr 2009	*CBS News/ New York Times* Jul 2003
51	Better off with mother home	50	61
34	Just as well off if mother works	38	29
13	Depends **(VOL.)**	9	7
3	Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**	3	3
		(N=973)	(N=3,092)

[29] The CBS/New York Times surveys from 2009 and 2003 did not include a companion question about fathers. In the current poll, half of the sample (Form 1, n=511) was asked about mothers first, the other half of the sample (Form 2, n=492) was asked about fathers first. Results shown here are from Form 1, which is more comparable to the CBS/New York Times trend.

SD.2 CONTINUED …

b. Father

Total	
8	Better off with father home
76	Just as well off if father works
11	Depends **(VOL.)**
6	Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**

ASK IF MARRIED OR LWP (M1=1,2): [n=570]

E5 Is your **(IF M1=1**: spouse, **IF M1=2:** partner) now employed full time, part time or not employed?

Total	
57	Full time
9	Part time
34	Not employed
1	Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**

ASK ALL:

SD.3 The number of children born to unmarried mothers in this country has been growing steadily. Would you say this is a big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all?

Total		Feb 2007
64	Big problem	71
19	Small problem	19
13	Not a problem at all	8
4	Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**	2

ASK ALL:

SD.4 Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: It's generally better for a marriage if the husband earns more money than his wife? **REQUIRED PROBE:** Is that strongly or just somewhat **[INSERT:** agree/disagree]?

Total		**Trend for Comparison:**[30] *W. Post/Kaiser/Harvard* Aug 1997
14	Strongly agree	18
14	Somewhat agree	22
27	Somewhat disagree	22
36	Strongly disagree	36
9	Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**	2

[30] In 1997, the statement was part of a list of nine items and came after a long series of questions on work, gender and family.