



In Recession, Wives Are Winning More Of Families' Bread

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DURHAM, N.H. – Women's contributions to family earnings leapt during the first year of the recession, marking the largest single-year increase in the past decade, a new report from the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire has found. In 2008, employed wives contributed 45 percent of total family earnings, a statistically significant rise from 44 percent in 2007.

"This recession, with job loss in male-dominated industries like construction and manufacturing, has affected men's employment more than women's," says author Kristin Smith, family demographer at the Carsey Institute and research assistant professor of sociology at UNH. "This translates into a greater reliance on employed wives to bring home the bread."

According to Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data released today, of the 7 million jobs shed during the recession, 72 percent were held by men. Overall unemployment dropped slightly to 10 percent, but men's unemployment is at 10.5 percent while women's is much lower at 7.9 percent. This report uses BLS employment data in addition to data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplements from 2000 to 2009.

Several population groups – low-income families with children, families with African American husbands, and families with husbands with less education – have seen even more pronounced rises in the contribution of wives' earnings to family earnings. In families living in poverty, where employed wives' wages account for the majority of family earnings, the share of the family earnings contributed by wives with children jumped from 51 to 56 percent during the first year of the recession.

Employed wives with African American husbands contributed 53 percent of total family earnings – the highest proportion among all groups -- in 2008, up from 51 percent. When husbands had less than a high school degree, wives contributed 52 percent of total family earnings, compared to 40 percent when husbands held a college degree.

"Job loss and unemployment are expected to rise for the next year, alongside the growing importance of wives' earnings to family stability," says Smith. "This increased reliance on wives as breadwinners will continue to shine a spotlight on changing gender roles in the family, equity in the workplace, and work/family tensions."

The brief, "Increased Reliance on Wives as Breadwinners during the First Year of the Recession," will be available to download Dec. 4 at 9:30 a.m. at <http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/publications/IB-Smith-Breadwinners09.pdf>. Funding for this work was provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation's initiative to strengthen rural

families, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and an anonymous donor.

The Carsey Institute conducts policy and applied research on vulnerable families and on sustainable community development, giving policy makers and practitioners the timely, independent resources they need to effect change in their communities. Learn more at <http://carseyinstitute.unh.edu/>.

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