

Media Relations

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UNH Research Finds Dual-Earner Families Thrive as Married Women's Earnings Rise

DURHAM, N.H. – While dual-earner families are doing relatively well, family income overall has been stagnant or decreasing among single-earner families resulting in a widening income gap, according to new research from the Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire.

“American families increasingly rely on women’s earnings for their economic well-being,” said Kristin Smith, family demographer at the Carsey School and research associate professor of sociology at UNH. “The contribution of women to family income, particularly in married-couple families, has served to bolster family income even as husbands’ wages faltered during the recession. Yet families reliant on one earner have lost ground since 2000.”

Analysis of Current Population Survey data covering 2000 and 2013 shows dual-earner couples have higher family incomes than sole-earner married couples or single women with or without children. Married couples in which the husband is the primary earner had the highest median family income in 2013 (\$101,000), followed closely by married couples in which both spouses had similar earnings (\$98,000). In contrast, single mothers with children had the lowest median family income (\$30,000). In addition, family income rose among dual-earner couples primarily due to an increase in wives’ earnings but declined among sole-earner married-couple and single-women families.

In addition, Smith found the proportion of women who were in married-couple families in which the husband was the primary earner decreased from 22 percent in 2000 to 16 percent in 2013, and the proportion of women who were single rose from 44 percent to 49 percent over the same time period.

“Rising family income among married-couple families coupled with falling income among single women and single men have exacerbated income equality among families,” Smith said. “State and federal policies that raise wages and encourage better benefits, such as health insurance and worker flexibility for low-wage part-time workers in small businesses could make a substantial difference in the lives of American families.”

The full analysis can be found here: <https://carsey.unh.edu/publication/women-economic-providers>.

The Carsey School of Public Policy conducts research, leadership development, and engaged scholarship relevant to public policy. They address pressing challenges, striving for innovative, responsive, and equitable solutions at all levels of government and in the for-profit and nonprofit sectors.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with

the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 13,000 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

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