

Economic Well-being and the Great Recession: Dual Earner Married Couples in the U.S., 2006 and 2011

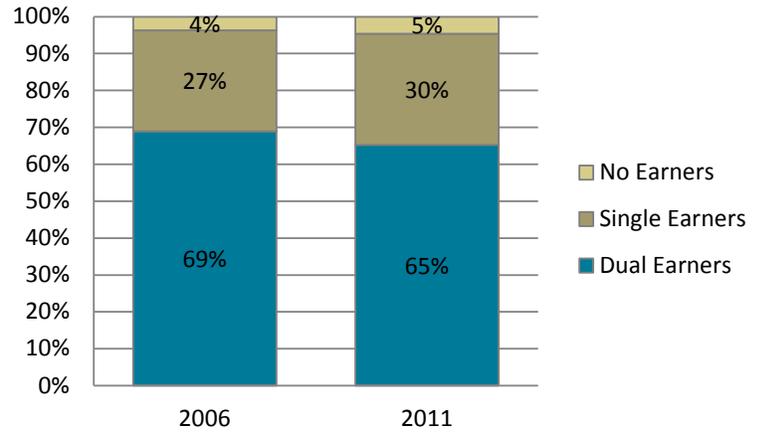
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Dual earner marriages are the new normal as the rise in married women's labor force participation continues. Although men remain more likely to be employed than women, the gender gap is shrinking (FP-12-20). Since the Great Recession of 2007-2009, the number of women who are sole earners in married couple families has increased (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010); some husbands have become unemployed while their wives remain employed, and some wives have re-entered the labor force (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This profile examines changes in the median earnings of dual earner married couples prior to and following the Great Recession using data from the American Community Surveys, 2006 and 2011.

Married Couples & Earner Classification³

- Dual earning couples declined over the period from 2006 to 2011, while single earning couples increased.
 - Dual earning couples declined by 6% over the period, from 69% in 2006 to 65% in 2011.
 - Single earning couples increased by 11% from 27% in 2006 to 30% in 2011.
 - In 2011 the percent of couples with no earnings increased from 4% to 5%.

Figure 1. Percentage of Married Couples aged 15-65 by Classification of Earner, 2006 & 2011

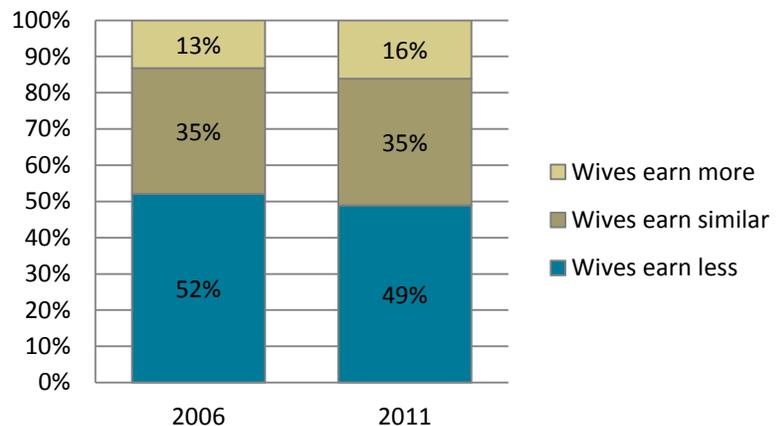


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates, 2006 & 2011

Dual Earner Married Couples & Earnings of Wives Relative to Husbands⁴

- Among dual earner couples, wives contributed 38% to the couple's total earnings in 2006 and 40% in 2011, on average, an overall increase of 5% (results not shown).
- The percentage of dual earner couples in which wives have more earnings than their husbands increased from 2006 to 2011.
 - There was an approximately 23% increase in the percentage of wives who earned more than their husbands among dual earner couples.
- The percentage of wives earning less than their husbands declined by almost 6% (52% in 2006, 49% in 2011).

Figure 2. Percentage of Dual Earner Married Couples aged 15-65 by Wives' Earning Classification, 2006 & 2011



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates, 2006 & 2011

¹All earnings are adjusted for inflation and represent median individual or couple earnings in 2011 dollars.

²This profile is limited to opposite-sex married couples aged 15-65 years.

³"Dual earner" indicates husband and wife report receiving wages or salary from an employer, own business or farm in past 12 months; "single earner" indicates either husband or wife report receiving wages or salary from an employer, own business or farm in past 12 months; and "no earner" indicates neither husband nor wife report receiving wages nor salary from an employer, own business or farm in past 12 months.

⁴"Wives earning less" indicates wives' annual earnings are less than 40% of the total couple's earnings; "wives earning similar" indicates they earn at least 40% but less than 60% of the total couple's earnings; and "wives earning more" indicates they earn greater than 60% of the total couple's earnings.

Median Earnings of Dual Earner Wives and Husbands by Gender

- The overall median earnings of dual earning married couples declined very slightly between 2006 (\$79,206) and 2011 (\$79,100).
- Among dual earner couples in which the wives earned less, both husbands and wives experienced median earnings gains from 2006 to 2011, with wives experiencing greater gains.
 - Among couples where wives earned less, median earnings of husbands increased by \$297 and earnings of wives by \$1,266.
- For couples in which wives earned more, both husbands and wives experienced losses in median earnings from 2006 to 2011. Overall, median earnings of husbands decreased by \$1,080 and earnings of wives by \$1,779.

Figure 3. Median Earnings of Dual Earner Couples, 2006 & 2011



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates, 2006 & 2011

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3. U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). *Employment status of married-couple families by presence of own children under 18 years: 2008 and 2009*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/acsbr09-10.pdf>