

## Wives Earn Higher Salaries Than Their Husbands in 20 Percent of Families

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Wives earn a higher salary than their husbands in 1 in 5 families, and data show that this share is growing, according to information collected by the Census bureau.

The earnings gap between couples is narrowing as the share of wives who earn more than their husbands has increased 25 percent in five years.

The Census says that one possible factor affecting this data is educational attainment.

“Although in the past more men than women had a college education, this is no longer the case,” said Jamie Lewis, a statistician at the Census. “Indeed, my colleagues found that women now lead men in college attainment.”

The Census found in 2000 that in 16 percent of families, the wife earned more than her husband. In 60 percent of families, the husband earned more than his wife. In the remaining 24 percent of families, the husband earned within \$5,000 of his wife.

Five years later, families in which wives earned more grew to 20 percent, families with husbands earning more than wives declined to 55 percent, and wives and husbands earning within \$5,000 of each other stayed almost the same at 25 percent.

Dan Mitchell, a senior fellow specializing in fiscal policy at the Cato Institute, says that assortative mating, layoffs during the recession, and misguided government policies affecting unemployment may contribute to the findings in these data.

“It is much more common today to find upper-middle-class professionals getting married to each other, the economic version of ‘assortative mating,’” Mitchell said. “And since there is not systematic discrimination in the labor force like Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders might claim, it’s no surprise that a growing number of these women are earning more than their husbands.”

“Another reason more women are earning more than their husbands may be that men were disproportionately laid off during the last recession,” he said. “And when they got new jobs, in some cases they didn’t get paid as much. So this also may be a factor that is showing up in this data.”

“I can’t imagine that government policy has any impact on the trend toward assortative mating, but bad policies were a major cause of the last downturn,” Mitchell said. “And since misguided government policies affect unemployment, and to the extent that unemployment hits men, that could help explain why a growing number of wives are earning more than their husbands.”

“Given a broader context of an enduring gender earnings gap, the finding that wives’ earnings made gains relative to husbands’ earnings is noteworthy,” said Lewis.

“For context, my colleagues found that the female-to-male earnings ratio has not increased since 2007. In 2014, the median earnings of women who worked full-time, year-round remained at 79 percent of what their male counterparts earned.”