Women's earnings found to drop after childbirth
20 April 2022, by Jim Hanchett

"The gender revolution has stalled, and women remain economically vulnerable," Musick said, noting the country is an outlier among wealthy nations in offering no mandated paid leave following childbirth, no system of subsidized childcare and scant public support for working families.

The study is one of the first to assess changes over time in within-family earnings inequality, tracking what happened to the incomes of couples over a full 10 years. The researchers used detailed survey results and administrative tax records that provide long-run data on earnings, birth and marriage dates and key characteristics such as education.

The researchers analyzed a period of about 30 years, from the 1980s through the 2000s. They found a brief period in the 1980s when wives became less financially dependent on their husbands after parenthood. Wives' earnings share dropped 13 percentage points following the first birth in the 1980s, relative to 10 percentage points in the 2000s. That modest change held largely true no matter the education or income level of the husband and wife.

Musick said the similarities by education were something of a surprise because disparities—especially among those with and without a college degree—have grown in other aspects of family life over this time period. "Across groups, wives become more financially dependent on their husbands after parenthood," the researchers concluded, a worrying sign particularly in the U.S., where divorce remains common and policy support for families is weak.

"The pandemic puts into sharp relief the pitfalls of our fend-for-yourself approach to managing work and family," Musick said. The pandemic also creates an opening for policymakers to build a stronger "infrastructure of care" and the success of that effort will shape gender inequalities in work.
and family in the decades to come, she said.


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