Effects of Marriage on Workforce Participation

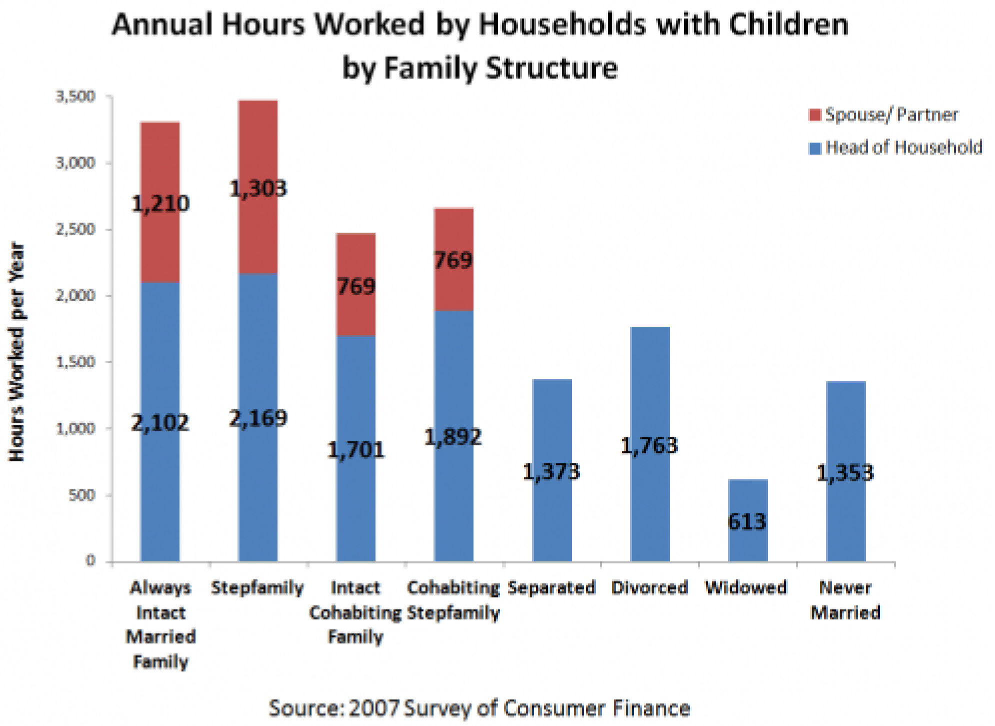
1. Work Hours

The average number of hours worked per year in the labor force differs by family structure. All three types of two-parent families with children under 18—intact-married families, stepfamilies, and cohabitants—put many more hours into the workplace, on average, than do the single-parent families. This observation may not seem all that profound, as two adults can work more hours than one. However, the always-intact family, which works slightly fewer hours in the workplace than the stepfamily, actually earns more; it works smarter and more efficiently. The time difference is due to the greater number of hours that the stepfamilies' secondary-wage earner (normally the wife) works outside the home, relative to the secondary-wage earner of always-intact families. The fact that during one stage of her life, the stepmother was divorced and thus worked a regular workweek as the sole family provider may explain her longer hours in the workplace. A stepfamily mother, therefore, tends to report higher levels of labor-force participation than does the mother of an always-intact family.

2. The Marriage Premium

The "marriage premium" is the name economists give to the increase in husbands' productivity and earnings caused by their entering marriage. One study claims that married men make, on average, almost 30 percent more than their non-married counterparts in hourly wages.[1] In accord with this, a study which controlled for all factors, including genetics, puts the marriage premium at 26 percent.[2] Marriage increases earnings for white men by approximately 24 percent and for black men by approximately 20 percent.[3] Twice as many (32 percent) married fathers worked 45 hours or more per week in 1997, compared to cohabiting fathers (16 percent).[4]

The chart below summarizes our findings in analyzing the Federal Reserve Board's 2007 Survey of Consumer Finance on average hours worked by householders by family structure. Gary Becker in his *Treatise on the Family* [5] argues that working longer and more regularly incentivizes a worker to increase his productivity (to further reap income benefits); hence we have one synergistic path to the marriage premium, a significant strength that is missing in most of the other family structures.



This difference in earnings for men increases significantly as they age. Nobel Laureate George Akerlof found that young married men are more likely to be in the labor force, employed, and working a full-time job than their non-married counterparts.[6] Twenty- to 24-year-old married men earn 11-14 percent more than single men their age.[7] Married white men between 55 and 64 years old make 19.5 percent more than divorced, separated, and widowed men, and 32 percent more than all unattached men.[8]

The marriage premium is a general economic phenomenon, and these results are not restricted to the United States. In South Africa, the marriage premium for men is 23 percent after controlling for education, occupation and industry categories.[9] Between 1979 and 1986, married men in seven developed countries (Australia, France, United States, Germany, Israel, Luxembourg, and Switzerland) earned at least 20 percent more than unmarried or never-married men. Married men earned 10-20 percent more than unmarried or never-married men in the United Kingdom, Norway, the Netherlands, Italy, and Canada.[10] The marriage premium does not hold at the same level in the stepfamily. Among married men with children, men in stepfamilies make about 15 percent less per hour than fathers in intact families.[11]

[1] Hyunbae Chun and Injae Lee, “Why do Married Men Earn More: Productivity or Marriage Selection?” *Economic Inquiry* 39, no. 2 (April 2001): 311.
[2] Kate Antonovics and Robert Town, “Are All the Good Men Married? Uncovering the Sources of the Marital Wage Premium,” *American Economic Review* 94, no. 2 (2004): 317-321.
[3] Philip N. Cohen, “Cohabitation and the Declining Marriage Premium for Men,” *Work and Occupations* 29, no. 3 (2002): 356.
[4] B.V. Brown, “The Single-father Family: Demographic, Economic, and Public Transfer Use Characteristics,” *Marriage and Family Review* 29, (2000): 203-220.
[5] Gary S. Becker, *A Treatise on the Family* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1991).
[6] , [7] George A. Akerlof, “Men without Children,” *The Economic Journal* 108, no. 447 (March 1998): 296.
[8] Robin Bartlett and Charles Callahan, “Wage Determination and Marital Status: Another Look,” *Industrial Relations* 23, no. 1 (1984): 93.

[9] Daniela Casale, “The Male Marital Earnings Premium in the Context of Bridewealth Payments: Evidence from South Africa,” *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 58, no. 2 (2010): 219.
[10] Robert F. Schoeni, “Marital Status and Earnings in Developed Countries,” *Journal of Population Economics* 8, no. 4 (November 1995): 357.
[11] Naoko Akashi-Ronquest, “The Impact of Biological Preferences on Parental Investments in Children and Step-children,” *Review of Economics of the Household* 7, no. 1 (2009): 73.

This entry draws heavily from Marriage and Economic Well Being: The Economy Rises or Falls with Marriage, The Family GDP: How Marriage and Fertility Drive the Economy, and How Broken Families Rob Children of their Chance for Future Prosperity.