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Monday, 6 March 2017

The rise of the female breadwinner

For International Women's Day last year, Roy Morgan investigated the topic of [gender parity in the workforce](#). And because the workforce can reveal so much about a society's gender norms, this year's International Women's Day is a great opportunity to shine the spotlight on Australia's working women once again. This time, we reveal that more women than ever are their household's main income earner.

In 2006, 39% of all Australian women reported being their household's main income earner, compared with 73% of men. A decade later, the latest findings from Roy Morgan show that more than half (52%) now say they're the main breadwinner, with the proportion of men saying the same barely changing (74%).

Obviously, a person's living arrangements influence their breadwinner status. For example, while 57% of women who live with a partner but no kids say they're the main income earner (up from 37% in 2006), only 33% of those who live with their partner and at least one child self-identify this way. Unsurprisingly, 95% of women in single-parent households are the main breadwinner (up from 91% a decade ago).

Main income earner in household by gender: 2006 vs 2016

	2006		2016	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Total % who consider themselves their household's main income earner	73%	39%	74%	52%
% living with partner/no kids who consider themselves their household's main income earner	82%	37%	85%	57%
% living with partner and kids who consider themselves their household's main income earner	85%	19%	86%	33%
% single parents who consider themselves their household's main income earner	85%	91%	91%	95%
Average income of paid full-time employees	\$69,600	\$51,000	\$87,000	\$73,500

Source: Roy Morgan Single Source (Australia), Jan-Dec 2006 (n=24,421) and Jan-Dec 2016 (n=14,330). **Base:** Australians 14+

Curiously, the proportion of partnered men who consider themselves their household's main income earner has changed little since 2006, despite the growing proportion of women identifying themselves this way. Some 85% of men who live with their partner but no kids say they earn the main income (compared with 82% in 2006), as do 86% of those living with their partner and kids (up from 85%). Among single fathers, 91% say they're the main breadwinner (up from 85%).

Sharp-eyed readers would have noticed that, in the case of couples living together (regardless of whether there are children in the household), the proportions of men and women who believe they're the main income earner add up to more than 100%. This suggests that in some couples, both parties consider themselves the main breadwinner!

So what has propelled this dramatic growth in women earning their household's main income? One key factor is undoubtedly the steep rise in the average income earned by full-time female workers over the last decade: from \$51,000 to \$73,500. Whereas women's incomes were an average 27% less than men's in 2006, the gap is gradually closing—with the mean income of full-time female workers now 16% lower than that of their male counterparts.

What's more, the proportion of Australian men in full-time employment fell from 54% to 46% between 2006 and 2016, while that of full-time women remained steady at 25%.

Norman Morris, Industry Communications Director, Roy Morgan Research, says:

"The latest research from Roy Morgan about main income earners is noteworthy for two main reasons: the sharp rise over the last 10 years in the proportion of Australian women who identify as their household's main income earner, and the curious fact that there has been no corresponding decline among Aussie men who identify this way.

"With the average income of women in full-time employment rising by 44% in the last decade (compared with a 25% increase for men), it makes sense that this would translate into more women taking on main breadwinner status. Yet their male partners are showing no sign of recognising this, and are slightly more likely than they were in 2006 to consider themselves the main income earner of their household.

"Whether this stems from the fact that they don't know how much their partner earns, a sense of denial among those who no longer work full time, or simply the result of outdated gender preconceptions would require further research.

"However, it is not so puzzling to learn that a lower proportion of women living with their partner and kids identify as their household's main breadwinner than those without kids at home, since women continue to be more likely than men to take time out from their career to raise children.

"With International Women's Day this Wednesday, 8 March, it is an opportune time not only to draw attention to continued gender inequality in the workplace (particularly where salaries are concerned) but also to reflect on improvements to this imbalance. The growing proportion of Aussie women being their household's main breadwinner is a great example of this."

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Margin of Error

The margin of error to be allowed for in any estimate depends mainly on the number of interviews on which it is based. Margin of error gives indications of the likely range within which estimates would be 95% likely to fall, expressed as the number of percentage points above or below the actual estimate. Allowance for design effects (such as stratification and weighting) should be made as appropriate.

Sample Size	Percentage Estimate			
	40%-60%	25% or 75%	10% or 90%	5% or 95%
5,000	±1.4	±1.2	±0.8	±0.6
7,500	±1.1	±1.0	±0.7	±0.5
10,000	±1.0	±0.9	±0.6	±0.4
20,000	±0.7	±0.6	±0.4	±0.3
50,000	±0.4	±0.4	±0.3	±0.2