

Young Children with Caregiving Parents in the Labor Force

DEFINITION

This indicator measures the percentage of New Hampshire children under six with all caregiving parents in the labor force. A family is deemed to have all caregiving parents in the labor force if both spouses in a married-couple family with young children are in the labor force, or if the male or female parent in a single-parent family with young children is in the labor force. The labor force includes those currently employed, in the armed forces, or seeking a job.

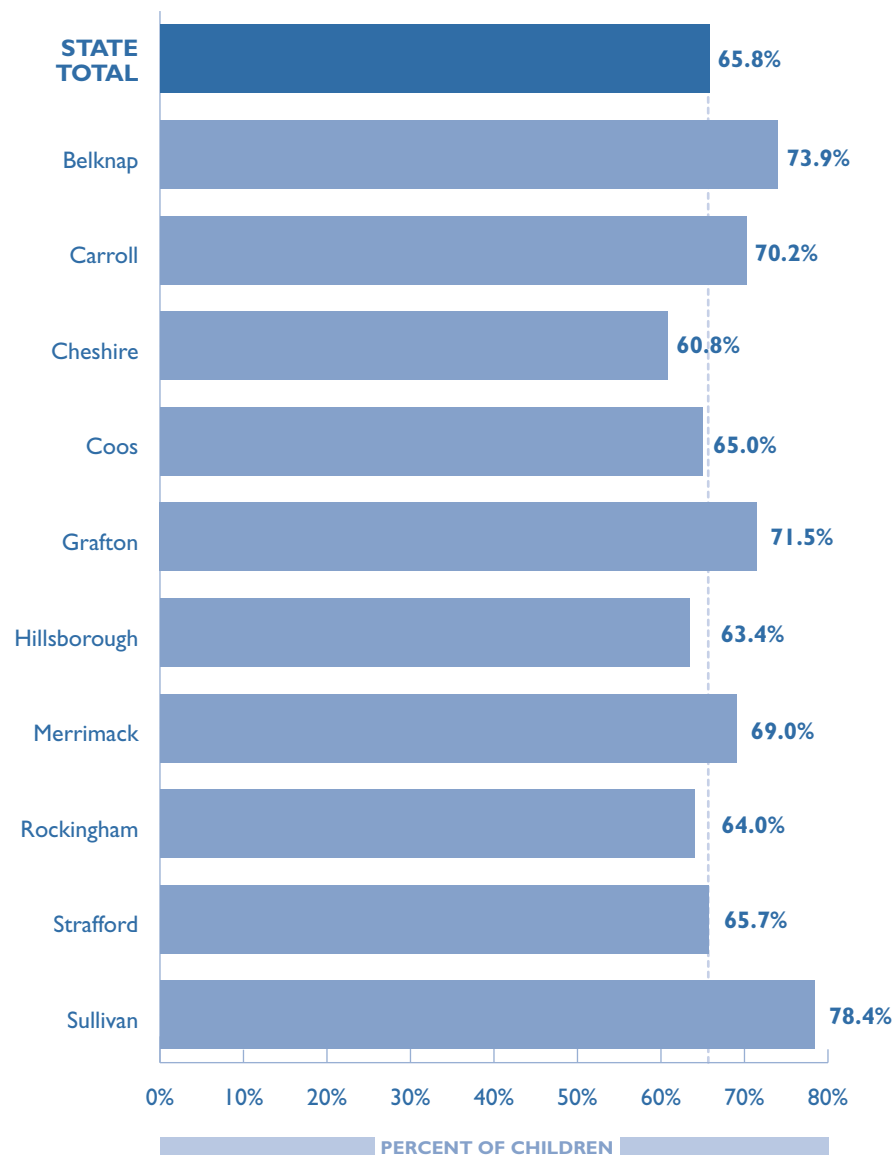
CONTEXT

In New Hampshire and across the country, the majority of children grow up in families with all parents employed (Kreiger and Elliot 2010 and U.S. Census). Steady employment improves the economic stability of a family and, when available, flexible work arrangements can allow parents to juggle work and family demands (Smith and Smith 2010).

The number of children with all caregiving parents in the labor force has increased dramatically since post-World War II when most women in married-couple families cared for children in the home. In 1969, 56 percent of mothers in married-couple families with children under the age of 15 were in the labor force, which rose to 66 percent by 1979; 75 percent in 1989; 76 percent in 1999 and 74 percent in 2009 (Kreider and Elliott 2010). Recent research indicates married couple families have become more dependent on wives' employment over the last few years as recession-related job losses have disproportionately affected men (Smith 2010b).

Flexible work arrangements including flexible hours and shifts, paid vacation, sick leave and family leave, part-time schedules, and work from home arrangements can help parents balance the demands of earning sufficient income and being available for their children. In a recent New Hampshire survey of 500 working parents with children under 18, more than two thirds of parents surveyed rated their jobs as somewhat or very flexible. Parents in the northern and western areas of the state reported less flexibility than parents in central New Hampshire and the Seacoast region. Most parents in the survey (68 percent) reported working regular, daytime hours. Seventeen percent of parents were self-employed. Not all parents enjoy flexible work arrangements and survey results suggest some parents have to turn down higher-paying jobs to allow for family-friendly flexibility (Smith and Smith 2010).

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By County, 2006-2008, three-year average



A study of low-income United States families examining the impact of mother's work on their children's lives found that, "Stable employment in a job with a regular work schedule has beneficial effects on children; unstable employment, job churning, or employment in a job with an unpredictable work schedule has harmful effects" (Conrad 2010, 1046).

NEW HAMPSHIRE FINDINGS

From 2006-2008, 65.8 percent of New Hampshire children under six had all caregiving parents in the labor force compared to a national rate of 62.5 percent. The percent of young children with all caregiving parents in the workforce ranged from 60.8 percent in Cheshire County to 78.4 percent in Sullivan County. (see chart on previous page)

The number of New Hampshire mothers in the armed forces, though small, is rising. In 2009 an estimated 59 New Hampshire mothers of children under 18 served in the armed forces, less than .04 percent of all New Hampshire mothers. This number is up from 2007 when fewer than 40 New Hampshire moms were serving in the armed forces.

SOURCE OF DATA FOR ILLUSTRATION/METHODOLOGY

U.S. Census. 2010. American Community Survey, Table C23007 3-year average 2006-2008.

These data exclude caregivers other than parents, such as grandparents raising their grandchildren or cohabiting partners or a single-parent, who may care for children in the family. American Community Survey only reports the relationship of each family member to the householder and therefore cannot accurately estimate such non-traditional family arrangements, which have grown in importance. Another annual source, the Current Population Survey, provides the best estimates of non-traditional arrangements, but limits its data to national, regional and state level estimates (U.S. Census 2009).

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