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Trends in Men's Economic Characteristics and Marriage

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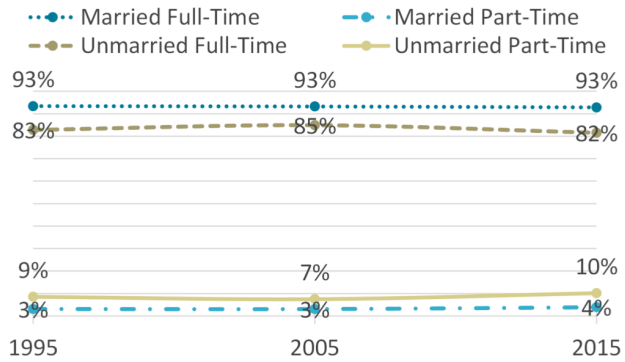
The "hollowing out" of the middle class has more than just economic implications. The declining prospects of securing stable, well-paying employment arguably have diminished men's economic attractiveness as potential husbands and contributed to the delay in marriage among young adults (Cherlin, 2014). This profile explores trends in male employment and income by marital status using data from the 1995, 2005, and 2015 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement, focusing on civilian men ages 25-44. All wages are adjusted to 2015 dollars. Overall, the proportion of men working full-time has decreased, falling from 82% in 1995 to 78% in 2015 (not shown).

Employment and Marital Status

- From 1995-2015, the proportion of men aged 25-44 employed part-time and full-time by marital status has remained stable.
- Full-time employment is consistently higher among married men than unmarried men, with 93% of married men employed full-time compared to 82% of unmarried men in 2015.
  - The gap widened by three percentage points between 2005 and 2015.
- Part-time employment was consistently higher among unmarried men than married men, at 10% and 4%, respectively, in 2015.
  - Here, too, the gap has widened between 2005 and 2015, increasing by nearly two percentage points.

Figure 1. Trends in the Proportion Working Part- and Full-Time by Marital Status among Men 25-44, 1995-2015



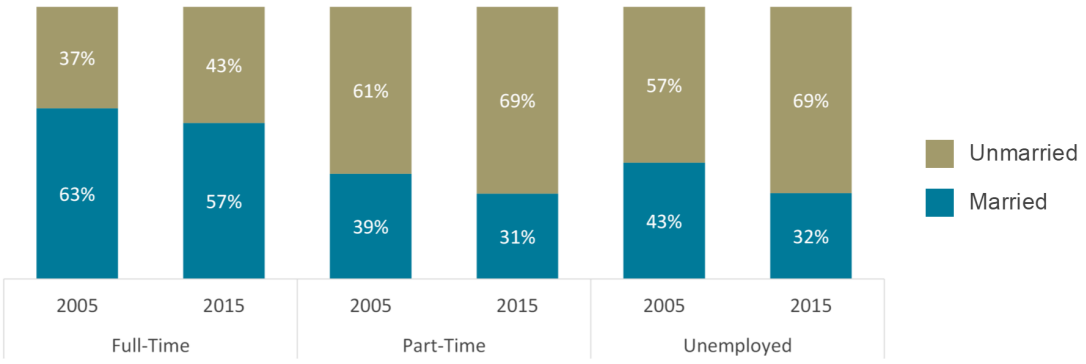
Source: Current Population Survey - Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 1995, 2005, & 2015

Proportion Married by Employment Status, 2005 & 2015

Changes in employment are concentrated between 2005 and 2015, so we focus on these two time points hereafter.

- While the percentage of men who are married has decreased across all employment groups, a greater proportion of men working full-time are married in both 2005 and 2015.
- The proportion of unemployed men who are married fell by eleven percentage points, with an eight percentage point drop among men working part-time.
- For men employed full-time, the decline was only six percentage points between 2005 and 2015.

Figure 2. Proportion Married by Employment Status among Men 25-44, 2005 & 2015



Source: Current Population Survey - Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2005 & 2015

Income, Education, and Marital Status of Men Working Full-Time, 2005 & 2015

From 2005 to 2015, the median personal income of men working full-time dropped from $43,690 to $42,500— a 2.7% reduction in wages. Wages of married men working full-time decreased across all education levels. For unmarried men, it fell for all groups except those with a Bachelor's degree (not shown).

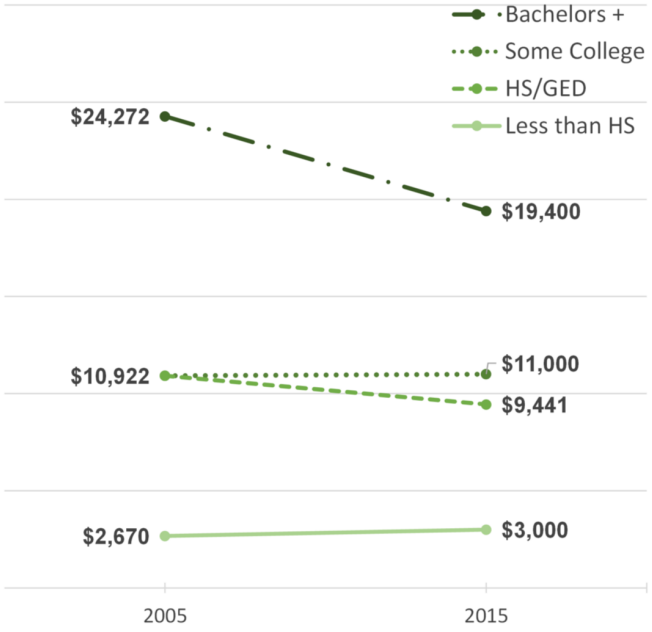
- For married men, the absolute decline is largest for married men with some college ($3,758) and men with a Bachelor's degree ($3,843).
- For unmarried men, the median personal income increased by $1,029 for those with a Bachelor's degree between 2005 and 2015.
- Among unmarried men without a Bachelor's degree, the median income declined by $2,029 for those with no high school degree, $1,554 for those with a high school education, and $3,835 for those with some college.

The Marriage Premium, 2005 & 2015

The marriage premium is the difference in median personal income between married and unmarried men (Figure 3).

- The marriage premium continues to have an educational gradient.
- In 2015, those with a Bachelor's degree have the largest marriage premium ($19,400), and those with less than a high school education have the smallest ($3,000).
- Since 2005, marriage premiums have declined among men with only a high school degree and those with at least a Bachelor's degree.
  - Despite having the largest absolute premium at both time points, those with a Bachelor's degree exhibited the largest decrease in the marriage premium over time, dropping around $6,000.
- The marriage premium increased slightly among men with less than a high school degree and stayed essentially flat for men with some college.

Figure 3. Difference in Median Personal Income between Full-Time Employed Married and Unmarried Men 25-44, 2005 & 2015



Source: Current Population Survey - Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2005 & 2015

References:

Cherlin, A. J. (2014). *Labor's Love Lost*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

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