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Stay-at-Home Moms in U.S. Lean Independent, Lower-Income

Fourteen percent of U.S. women are stay-at-home moms, while 24% are working moms

by Lydia Saad

PRINCETON, NJ -- Fourteen percent of American women currently have a child under age 18 in their household and aren’t formally employed. While few in this group would be able to identify with Mitt and Ann Romney’s wealth, it is the segment of the population that could potentially be offended by recent commentary that Ann Romney’s lack of work experience -- she stayed home to raise their five now-adult sons -- makes her unqualified to advise her husband on economic matters.

The recent hullabaloo about stay-at-home-mothers started when Hilary Rosen, a Democratic National Committee strategist, commented that Romney isn’t qualified to advise her husband on what women think of the economy because she has never worked. Ann Romney countered that she indeed worked very hard raising her five sons, a choice she is proud of, and Rosen responded, saying "most young American women have to both earn a living and raise children." The implication is that in addition to lacking economic perspective, Ann Romney is privileged.

So what are the demographic facts and the potential implications of the controversy for the presidential election?

According to Gallup Daily tracking interviews with more than 45,000 U.S. adult women, aged 18 and older, between Jan. 2 and March 31, 63% of women with children under 18 in the home are employed -- representing 24% of all women. The remaining 37% of mothers of children under 18 are not employed -- the aforementioned 14% who are stay-at-home moms. Thus, speaking to Rosen’s comments, more mothers of children indeed work outside the home than don’t work outside the home.

Whether stay-at-home mothers lack economic perspective is not something the Gallup data can speak to. However, it does appear that stay-at-home mothers are more economically disadvantaged than working mothers, rather than more advantaged. And this may be directly related to education.

The percentage of mothers who are employed rises from 48% among those with no college education to 66% of those with some college experience, 75% of those with a college degree, and 84% of those with postgraduate education. By contrast, the large majority of men with children are employed regardless of their educational background, including 76% of those with no college education and 94% of those with postgraduate education.

Percentage of Parents Who Work, Based on Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have a child under 18, not employed</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have a child under 18, employed</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No child under 18, employed</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No child under 18, not employed</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>24</td>
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</tbody>
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GALLUP

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A similar pattern is seen by income, contradicting any possible assumption that stay-at-home moms are largely privileged. Low-income mothers are far less likely to be employed than are upper-income mothers (45% vs. 77%), a finding that is repeated with fathers.

These patterns may highlight the economic constraints that childcare costs put on women and families. Unless a mother can obtain a good job, likely depending on whether she has advanced education, there may be little or no financial benefit to her working. And, as a result, the household's overall income is lower than in households where the mother does work.

Women's lifestyle preferences may also play a role, as separate Gallup polling has found U.S. women closely divided over whether they would prefer to work or stay home and take care of their house and family if they were free to do either. Gallup's most recent data on this, from 2008, find 52% of women preferring to work and 45% preferring the more domestic lifestyle. By contrast, men favor working over staying home by 74% to 23%.

**Political Fallout?**

Compared with all women, stay-at-home mothers are less likely to consider themselves either Republicans (22%) or Democrats (30%) and are more likely to be politically independent (45%). Additionally, after those who lean to either the Republican or Democratic party are removed, 19% of stay-at-home mothers are "pure independents," compared with 14% of all U.S. women.

At the same time, stay-at-home mothers' ideological views mirror those of the broader population of women, with 37% describing their views as conservative, 39% as moderate, and 20% as liberal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stay-at-home mothers</th>
<th>All women</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>37%</td>
<td>39%</td>
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<tr>
<td>39%</td>
<td>39%</td>
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<tr>
<td>20%</td>
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Implications

Few women can personally relate to the kind of wealth enjoyed by Ann Romney, or possibly to her choice to have never spent time in the workforce. However, they might still sympathize with her position as a target in the cultural debate over the value of stay-at-home vs. career moms.

If the controversy does give stay-at-home mothers pause about whether the Democratic Party respects them, this could affect as many as 14% of all women, but would more likely be limited to the subset of stay-at-home moms who are politically independent -- roughly 3% to 6% of all women, depending on how independents are defined.

Survey Methods

Results are based on telephone interviews conducted as part of Gallup Daily tracking Jan. 2, 2012-March 31, 2012, with a random sample of 88,909 adults aged 18 and older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia, selected using random-digit-dial sampling.

For results based on the total sample of national adults one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum margin of sampling error is ±1 percentage point.

For results based on the total sample of 45,548 women, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum margin of sampling error is ±1 percentage point.

For results based on the total sample of 4,176 stay-at-home mothers, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum margin of sampling error is ±2 percentage points.

Interviews are conducted with respondents on landline telephones and cellular phones, with interviews conducted in Spanish for respondents who are primarily Spanish-speaking. Each sample includes a minimum quota of 400 cell phone respondents and 600 landline respondents per 1,000 national adults, with additional minimum quotas among landline respondents by region. Landline telephone numbers are chosen at random among listed telephone numbers. Cell phone numbers are selected using random-digit-dial methods. Landline respondents are chosen at random within each household on the basis of which member had the most recent birthday.

Samples are weighted by gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education, region, adults in the household, and phone status (cell phone only/landline only/both, cell phone mostly, and having an unlisted landline number). Demographic weighting targets are based on the March 2011 Current Population Survey figures for the aged 18 and older non-institutionalized population living in U.S. telephone households. All reported margins of sampling error include the computed design effects for weighting and sample design.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into
the findings of public opinion polls.

For more details on Gallup's polling methodology, visit [www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com).