Gender, Income, and Head of Household

Data & Results Summary

Kathryn Wantlin & Brian Ventura

Data

The American Community Survey (ACS) is sent to approximately 3.5 million households every year and is the largest household survey administered by the Census Bureau. Designed to replace the long form decennial census, it contains questions previously only on the long form of the decennial census, including questions regarding educational attainment, employment, migration, and more. In particular, it includes questions that ask respondents to 1) identify a head of household and 2) list the relationships of other members of the household to the head of househole (spouse, child, parent, etc.).

We use the 2016 ACS data downloaded from the IPUMS database.[1] The IPUMS database is a collection of microdata used frequently by economists, policy researchers, and the like. Information from decades of Census data and well as ACS data since 2005 can be found in the database.

For our purposes, we construct a dataset that includes data concerning relationship to head of household, income, age, sex, gender, race, education attainment, marital status, usual number of hours worked weekly, a household serial number, and more.[2] We limit our study to non-same-sex married couples, of which one member is identified as head of household.

As such, we drop all individuals are not married or for whom their spouse is not present, as well as individuals who are not encoded as head of household or spouse of head of household from the dataset. We also drop all same-sex married couples by identifying couples by household serial number and dropping those couples who have the same gender. We also construct two additional variables: "breadwinner," which encodes if an individual makes more than their spouse, and "relative income," the difference between an individual's income and their spouse's income.

This ultimately gives us approximately 1.2 million observations representing about 622,000 non-same-sex married couples where both members of the couple are present in the household.

Results Summary

We look at whether gender and income are important predictors for identification of head of household in households with non-same-sex married couples. Preliminary analysis finds that being female and being head of household are negatively correlated, while being the breadwinner is positively correlated with being head of household. We also find a negative correlation between being female and being the breadwinner.

Through regression analysis, we find that being female is associated with a 15.2 percentage point decrease in the likelihood of being identified as head of household. We find an opposite effect for breadwinner status; namely, making more money that one's spouse is associated with a 15.8 percentage point increase in the likelihood of being identified as head of household.

Interestingly, we find no impact from personal income or income relative to one's spouse on the identification of head of household. It ultimately appears that only whether or not you make more money than your spouse, regardless of income level or by how much, is predictive of head of household status.

---

[1] Steven Ruggles, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, and Matthew Sobek. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 7.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2017. https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V7.0.

[2] Full data set is attached, along with a codebook containing descriptions of each variable.