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Abused Women and Economics

Women often remain trapped in abusive relationships because of simple economics. Like all women, abused women may become the victims of the “feminization of poverty,” should they attempt to support themselves and their children on their own. A woman with children who leaves an abusive partner is likely to face severe economic hardship; abused women know this when they are making choices about their lives.

Divorce can have a profoundly negative effect on a woman and her children’s standard of living. Moreover, an abused woman is frequently coerced by the abuser to accept unfair divorce settlements that do not provide adequate support for the children. The following statistics illustrate the situation facing abused women and their children.

- In the first year after divorce, a woman’s standard of living drops 73%, while a man’s improves by an average of 42%.¹
- 28% of all female-headed households live in poverty.²
- Nationally, over the past few years, unpaid child support has increased in most states. In the fiscal year 2010, the latest year for which national statistics are available, unpaid child support rose to more than \$110 billion.³
- It said that only 46.8% of parents (82.6%, of which are women seeking payments due) are getting the full amount of support owed to them; 29.5% are getting partial payments and 23.7% are receiving no support.⁸

The female-headed household is likely to live in poverty, as these facts show:

- Single-mother families have been and continue to be particularly vulnerable to being poor. The U.S. Census Bureau report showed the poverty rate for single mothers and their children rose as well: from 32.5% in 2009 to 34.2% in 2010⁴
- Children in single female-headed households account for more than 60% of all children in families living in poverty.⁵
- Among whites, children in single female-headed households are almost five times as likely as children in married-couple families to live in poverty.⁵

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Even if employed, an abused woman may face wage discrimination in the workplace:

- Overall, women earn an average 80 cents for every dollar that men earn. Women who are members of minority groups fare worse: black women earn 69 cents for every dollar men make, and Hispanic and Latino women earn just 62 cents for every dollar men earn. ⁶
- In 2010, the median weekly earnings of full-time working women was \$669, compared to \$824 for men. ⁷

Abused women also face the dilemma of finding decent, affordable housing for themselves and their children.

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