

Why Economic Security and Domestic Violence?

Higher Ground: NCJW's Campaign against Domestic Violence is a national effort to end domestic violence and increase survivors' autonomy by improving the economic status of women. Grounded in the understanding that economic security is critical to women's safety, Higher Ground educates and mobilizes advocates, community members, and decision-makers to promote progressive policy solutions that champion economic justice.

Domestic violence is often addressed with community service work and advocacy initiatives that primarily focus on the provision of services to survivors. While these short-term interventions are critical for people in crisis, more must be done to alleviate the conditions that put women at risk for this type of violence. NCJW believes that by working to improve women's economic status, we can add to the important intervention work that is already being done and can help eradicate one of the largest systemic reasons that domestic violence persists: lack of financial security.

A woman's ability to leave or avoid domestic violence is often directly related to her level of economic security. In 2008, 28.7 percent of female-headed households were living in poverty compared with only 13.8 percent of their male counterparts.ⁱ It is not surprising, then, that “studies have found that the most common reasons given by women who stayed in abusive relationships were lack of money, shelter, and police support.”ⁱⁱ Compounding this problem, estimates from the National Violence Against Women Survey indicate that women in the US lose nearly 8 million days of paid work each year because of domestic violence.ⁱⁱⁱ Between one-quarter and one-half of domestic violence victims report that they lost a job, at least in part, due to domestic violence.^{iv}

What do we mean when we say “domestic violence”?

Domestic violence, sometimes referred to as intimate partner violence, is physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, or economic abuse by a current or former intimate partner. Domestic violence happens in between dating and married partners and to people who are heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender. People of all sexes can be survivors of domestic violence, though 85% of victims identify as women.

What do we mean when we say “economic security”?

Economic or financial security is the condition of having stable income or other resources to support a basic standard of living now and in the foreseeable future.

Women striving for financial security face significant challenges. As a result, they are more likely than men to live in poverty.

- On average, women earn 78 cents for every dollar earned by a male.^v
- Women are more likely to hold teaching, child care, nursing, cleaning, and waitressing jobs — jobs that typically pay less than those in industries dominated by men. In 2007, nearly half — 43 percent — of the 29.6 million employed women in the United States were clustered in just 20 occupational categories, of which the average annual median earnings were \$27,383.^{vi}
- Women are more likely to bear the economic burden of raising children and providing other forms of unpaid care (e.g., caring for a sick or elderly family member). As such, women are more likely to work part time or take time out of the workforce to care for family. In doing so, they often miss out on advancement opportunities and earn and save less over the course of their career.

While women are currently handicapped by outdated public policies that do not promote financial autonomy, there is much that our elected officials can do to remove barriers. Policy-makers should:

- **Make work pay** by raising the minimum wage, promoting equal pay, and encouraging family-friendly workplace policies;
- **Create pathways out of poverty** for women and girls by investing in education and job training; and
- **Shore up our nation's safety net** so that women and families in crisis receive the services they need to recover and rebuild.

ⁱ United States. U.S. Census Bureau. *Table 4. People and Families in Poverty by Selected Characteristics: 2007 and 2008*. U.S. Census Bureau, Sept. 2009. <<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/poverty08/table4.pdf>>.

ⁱⁱ Shobe, Marcia A. and Jacqueline Dienemann. 2008. "Intimate Partner Violence in the United States: An Ecological Approach to Prevention and Treatment." *Social Policy and Society* 7.2: 185-195.

ⁱⁱⁱ National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. *Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States*. Atlanta (GA): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2003.

^{iv} Zink, T. and Sill, M. (2004). Intimate Partner Violence and Job Instability. *Journal of the American Women's Medical Association*. 59(1):32-5.

^v United States. U.S. Census Bureau. *Men's and Women's Earnings by State: 2008 American Community Survey*. By Jessica Semega. U.S. Census Bureau, Sept. 2009. <<http://www.census.gov/prod/2009pubs/acsbr08-3.pdf>>.

^{vi} Cawthorne, Alexandra. "The Straight Facts on Women in Poverty." Center for American Progress, 8 Oct. 2008. <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/10/women_poverty.html>.