

ECONOMIC ABUSE FACT SHEET

What is economic abuse?

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

A pattern of coercive behaviors within a relationship, whereby one person uses tactics of power and control over the other person, over a period of time.

Physical Abuse

Sexual Abuse

Emotional Abuse

Stalking

Economic Abuse

An abuser's distinct tactics to control a partner's ability to acquire, access, and maintain economic resources, to hinder her economic self-sufficiency, and to damage her economic self-efficacy.

Economic Control

- Partner demanding to know how money was spent
- Partner making important financial decisions without prior discussion
- Keeping financial information from her
- Making her ask for more money
- Demanding her to give receipts and/or change after spending money

Employment Sabotage

- Partner keeps her from going to work
- Partner demands she quits her job
- Partner threatens her to make her leave work
- Beats her up if she said she needed to get a job
- Showing up at her work to harass/embarrass her to jeopardize her job

Economic Exploitation

- Paying bills late/not paying bills that were in her name
- Spending money needed for rent or bills
- Build up debt under her name (i.e. by using her credit card)
- Excessive gambling
- Purposefully ruining her credit score with the intent of keeping her solely dependent on him

References

Hahn, S.A. and Postmus, J.L. (2014). Economic empowerment of impoverished IPV survivors: A review of best practice literature and implications for policy. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 15*(2), 79-93.
Huang, C.C., Postmus, J.L., Vikse, J.H., and Wang, L.R. (2013). Economic abuse, physical violence, and union formation. *Children and Youth Services Review, 35*, 780-786.
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What is the impact of economic abuse?

Economic abuse impacts all levels including individual, family, and community. When the abuser has control over finances, he traps her in the relationship, making it more difficult for her to leave.

“Economic abuse creates a home environment where the victim is continually anxious about material or financial issues. This stress is related to depression, anxiety, and parenting problems.”²

Individual Impact

Economic abuse decreases the psychological well-being of the victim.

Mothers who experience economic abuse are **1.9 times** more likely to experience depression than those who have not.⁶ Economic abuse is more predictive of depression over time than physical and psychological abuse. Having a partner control access to money or preventing independence through work or school may leave a lasting impact on women’s mental health, especially when experienced over time.

Family Impact

Within the family, economic abuse permeates each relationship.

According to the spill-over hypothesis, hostility and conflict in one family system (i.e. the parental unit) negatively influences other family systems (i.e. the parent-child unit). Mothers who experience economic abuse are less likely to engage in parent-child activities and they are **1.5 times** more likely to use spanking than mothers who did not experience such abuse.⁶

“Witnessing abuse has been associated with problems among children including difficulties with temperament, social competence, and internalizing behaviors and aggression.”⁶

“Economically abusive tactics may propel survivors toward poverty, if not already trapped by it. The combination of abuse and poverty may force women to remain in their abusive relationships as well as keep their focus on basic economic survival.”⁷

Community and Societal Impact

Economic abuse impacts women’s and society’s economic well-being.

The costs of IPV against women in 1995 exceeded **\$5.8 billion** and included nearly **\$4.1 billion** in the costs of medical and mental health care and nearly **\$1.8 billion** in the costs of lost productivity.⁴ Survivors lose nearly **8 million days of paid work**—the equivalent of more than **32,000 full-time jobs**—and almost **5.6 million days** of household productivity each year.⁴ IPV is a primary cause of homelessness among women, which is a major barrier to their workforce participation.⁵

References

- ¹Hahn, S.A. and Postmus, J.L. (2014). Economic empowerment of impoverished IPV survivors: A review of best practice literature and implications for policy. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 15(2), 79-93.
²Huang, C.C., Postmus, J.L., Vikse, J.H., and Wang, L.R. (2013). Economic abuse, physical violence, and union formation. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35, 780-786.
³Mathisen-Stylianou, A., Postmus, J.L., and McMahon, S. (2013). Measuring abusive behaviors: Is economic abuse a unique form of abuse? *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 28(16), 3186-3204.
⁴National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. (2003). *Costs of intimate partner violence against women in the United States*. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
⁵NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund. (2002). *Surviving violence and poverty: A focus on the link between domestic violence and sexual violence, women’s poverty and welfare*. Washington, DC.
⁶Postmus, J.L., Huang, C.C., and Mathisen-Stylianou, A. (2012). The impact of physical and economic abuse on maternal mental health and parenting. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34, 1922-1928.
⁷Postmus, J.L., Plummer, S.B., McMahon, S., Murshid, N.S., and Kim, M.S. (2012). Understanding economic abuse in the lives of survivors. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 27(3), 411-430.

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Action Plan for Practitioners and Advocates

Identify

Scale of Economic Abuse (SEA-12)

Utilized in the screening of economic abuse victims, the SEA-12 identifies the frequency of economic abuse experienced in relationships.

This scale is comprised of three categories:

- *Economic Control* (5 items)
- *Employment Sabotage* (4 items)
- *Economic Exploitation* (3 items).

What is Economic Empowerment?

Economic empowerment comes from gaining independence over one's own financial capital.

Increasing assets and income, as well as acquiring knowledge and the ability to control one's own financial capital, can enhance economic empowerment.

Advocate

Practitioners should utilize best practices to economically empower survivors.

Educating survivors about economic abuse tactics including those that are controlling, exploitive, or employment sabotage activities should be part of economic advocacy efforts. Providing information on economic abuse and promoting economic justice will provide survivors with a greater understanding of how abusers control them economically.

"It is critical to understand the factors that increase abusers' risk of perpetration and to identify pathways that lead to perpetration in order to design appropriate intervention strategies to address these issues."²

"Advocates should be prepared to offer financial tools and strategies in an effort to increase survivors' economic self-sufficiency."⁵

Intervene

Financial Education Programs

These programs provide financial education to increase knowledge about financial management skills.

Topics covered include: money and power, developing a cost-of-living plan, building and repairing credit, banking and investing, oppression and economic abuse, economic abuse and relationships, financial fundamentals, creating long-term financial success, and strategies for immigrants/refugees.

Asset Building Programs

The use of these programs is one of the most effective ways to build economic security and safety from abuse. These programs are based on the asset-based theory, which states that having assets stimulates and facilitates the development of human capital and thereby indirectly contributes to the economic empowerment of impoverished people.

References

- ¹Hahn, S.A. and Postmus, J.L. (2014). Economic empowerment of impoverished IPV survivors: A review of best practice literature and implications for policy. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 15*(2), 79-93.
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