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The Economics of Domestic Violence



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*The Importance of Women's Economic
Independence in Ending Violence*

General Introduction

Thank you so much Lee for that lovely introduction and also thanks to Janet Manning for the kind invitation to address the Eclectics. I am pleased to be with the ladies today and also pleased to be in Denver, which is such an important city for Colorado College as it is the city with the largest number of CC alumni. Our alumni office reports that we have 3664 alumni in Denver, which is about 15% of our 26,000 alumni. Your beautiful city is also an important recruiting ground for us.

- **This year, with a record number of applicants from 50 states and more than 50 foreign countries, we are still pleased to count several Denver schools among our top feeders. These include:**

Denver East High School -- 37 applicants (the most of any hs)

George Washington HS -- 19 applicants
Cherry Creek HS -- 18 applicants
Regis Boys and Girls HS -- 17 applicants
Littleton HS -- 14 applicants
Colorado Academy -- 14 applicants
St. Mary's -- 13 applicants
Kent Denver -- 10 applicants

We work very hard to recruit the absolute best students from the Denver area and to keep Colorado's talent in Colorado. We also appreciate our Colorado partners such as the Boettcher Foundation, the Daniels' Fund, and the Denver Scholarship Fund.

I thought that I would start today by telling you a little bit more about myself both to give an idea of why I was attracted to Colorado College and also as context for my academic interest in economics and women's issues and my research on our topic today – domestic violence.

My background:

- **Grew up on a farm in Iowa. 100 of the 500 were Tiefenthalers**
- **Went to SMC. Liberal arts transformed my life – symphony, art museum, language. Fell in love with economics, my major but also became very interested in women’s issues (it was the early 80s) – minored in Women’s Studies and got very involved with co-curricular women’s issues.**
- **One of those activities was babysitting for free for low-income women in South Bend. That was my first exposure to domestic violence. I babysat for a woman who had left her abusive husband and was trying to go it alone and make a new life for her one-year daughter. One night after she returned from work at one of her two minimum wage jobs, she told me her story. I will never forget how tired she was and I could tell that she really wondered if she would make it and even sometimes thought that she should have stayed with**

her abusive husband. This experience is great evidence of the important lessons that you learn in college outside of the classroom. It was certainly just as valuable as my experience at the symphony.

- Knew early on that I wanted to be an academic – first exposure to professional women, admired my professors and never wanted to leave college. Have succeeded!**
- So I was committed to going to graduate school to get my PhD. Seriously thought about going in Women’s Studies but a wise mentor convinced me to continue my studies on economics and to use my economic tools to explore important women’s issue.**
- So, off to Duke University I went and I focused my studies and dissertation on labor economics and development economics; being interested in women’s work and the economic challenges of poor women.**

- **My dissertation was on women's work and fertility in the Philippines. I looked at women's informal sector work, particularly piecework like making jewelry, and the interaction between with their labor market work and women's decisions to breast feed their children.**
- **At the same time, I became very involved in working with victims of domestic violence right at home in Durham, NC. I started with taking a shift on the hotline, then began working on at the shelter, and in the last few years in NC helped women apply for restraining orders, went with them to court, and even accompanied them with police protection to collect things at their homes.**
- **After I graduated from Duke (where I met my economist husband), I headed north to Colgate University in NY to start my life as a professor.**

- **My teaching and research followed my interests as an undergraduate. I developed new courses on the economics of the family and also taught an interdisciplinary course, the Introduction to Women's Studies.**
- **In a few years, my research moved away from studying women in far away developing countries (after the Philippines, I worked on women's issue in Brazil for a few years including a stint for the World Bank) to thinking the problems that women were facing very close to home.**
- **I wrote about divorce and children custody disputes, welfare reform and the Earned Income Tax Credit. My work outside the academy followed my academic interests. I began to work with local non-profits on applying for grants and studying the impact of welfare reform in our local community. We started a tax program with Colgate students to get single women**

their EITC benefits and got a grant from the USDA to increase food stamp participation in our little county.

- **And I also began to think again about domestic violence and the role of economics in women's decisions to stay in or leave abusive relationships.**
- **I remembered the woman who I babysat for back in South Bend who wondered if her circumstances after she left – working two crappy jobs, leaving her baby with various sitters and struggling to pay the bills – were really that much better than life with her abuser.**
- **I remembered my late night talks with anonymous women who called the hotline in NC. They wondered if leaving was possible. I remember their very good questions and pragmatic weighing of the pros and cons of leaving: Where will I go? Will I be safe? How will I support myself? Can I get a job? Will the shelter take my teenage male son? Can I secretly save the security deposit so I can get my own apartment? Why do I have**

to leave my house when he is the one breaking the law?

He says that he will get the kids because I don't a job.

Is that true? I won't leave without my kids.

- **In 1996, I published my first paper on economics. That paper modeled a women's decision to stay or leave an abusive relationship. I used what I had learned from listening to all of those women to show that it wasn't "learned helplessness" or something psychologically wrong with them that made them stay. I believed that it was much more rational than that. It was a careful weighing of the pros and cons of staying vs. leaving and that economic issues had a lot to do with how that ledger balanced out.**
- **Along with my co-author (and only other women in my class in graduate school), Amy Farmer. I wrote much more on domestic violence over the years after that first paper in the 1990s.**

- **As you know from my bio, all of that work slowed dramatically when I got into administration. Most of my academic work now focuses on the economics of higher education. In fact, I taught a course in Block 5, which finished on Wednesday, with that title – the economics of higher ed.**
- **However, I continue to keep up on the literature on domestic violence, occasionally still speak nationally on the issue and write summary articles on the field.**
- **Today, I am here to share what I have learned from all of my work as well as what I learned about the economics of domestic violence from my colleagues who work in this area.**

DV Introduction

The most endemic form of violence against women is domestic violence - the abuse of women by their intimate partners. Today, when I talk about domestic or intimate

partner violence, I will mostly talk about the impact on women, only because it is mostly a crime against women. Intimate partner violence accounts for only 3.6% of violent crimes committed against men, while 21.5% of the violent crimes against women are committed by an intimate partner. Likewise, 5.3% of male homicides are domestic violence-related, while 30.1% of female homicides are caused by domestic violence (Catalano 2007). So, while I recognize that men are victims, they are a relatively small percentage of the total.

In a review of studies done throughout the world on the prevalence of domestic violence, a World Bank Study [see Heise [1994]) concludes that in many countries between 25 and 50 percent of women report being abused by a current or former partner. The rates of abuse are high in both industrial and developing countries. For example, in high-income countries like the United States, nationally representative random samples yield rates of domestic violence of around

25%. It is estimated that every day in this country four women are killed and another 14 thousand are battered at the hands of their partners (Aizer 2010). The rates are higher in developing countries. A study in Mexico found that 33 percent had lived in a violent relationship and the World Bank estimates that at least 1 in 3 women in South Africa are regularly beaten by their partners.

The incidence and consequences of domestic violence are clearly an issue right here in Colorado. According to a recent community report published by TESSA, our local agency in the Springs committed to helping women and their children achieve safety and well-being while challenging communities to end sexual and family violence, there are 15,000 to 20,000 domestic violence calls for service every year and approximately 3,500 domestic violence arrests in Colorado Springs.

Violence against women is increasingly being recognized throughout the world as a pervasive social ill with significant

costs. While domestic violence imposes enormous costs on the millions of women who are the victims of abuse, it is also a drain on societal resources. The consequences of domestic violence reach beyond the victims and their families to employers, health care providers, and society as a whole.

Why is domestic violence such a pervasive problem worldwide? While cultural norms and values certainly play a part in explaining the severity of gender violence, women's relative economic power is undoubtedly a contributing factor. Women around the world have fewer economic opportunities than do men. Economic inequality combines with cultural norms to deny women labor market access and jobs paying enough to support themselves. A lack of economic alternatives results in women with little power or leverage to stop the violence.

Today, I am going to give a brief overview of some of things I have learned from more than a decade of working on the economics of domestic violence. I hope to answer a few

questions. What does an economist have to contribute to the stopping domestic violence? What is the link between women's economic power and the pervasiveness of domestic violence? Then I will discuss the societal costs of domestic violence - focusing specifically on the employment consequences of violence. Lastly, what should we do to help? Importantly, in this time of economic uncertainty, a significant recession and anemic recovery, I will discuss how best to allocate limited funds. How can we get the most bang for the buck?

Women's economic power as a determinant of violence

Why is domestic violence such a huge problem? Why do the women stay in these relationships? These are difficult questions with complex answers. While cultural values and norms obviously play a role, economics also matters.

Economic theory predicts that women's economic status is a major determinant of the incidence and severity of domestic violence. While I won't bore you with the technical model, let

me explain the common sense behind it. A woman who is abused by her husband/partner must make a choice either to remain in this relationship or to leave. She will weigh the alternatives and choose the one that is best for herself and for her children. She has an idea what her life will be like if she stays. Her well being if she leaves depends on her alternatives. Does she have a job? If she does, does she make enough to support herself and her children? If she doesn't, can she get one? What is her educational background? Does she have any experience? If not, can she expect welfare benefits, and how much help will these provide? Are there shelters she can escape to? Can she find job training or counseling to help with the transition? The answer to all of these questions determines her well being if she leaves the relationship. The more attractive her options outside the relationship are, the more likely it is that she will try to leave. Therefore, anything that improves her options outside the relationship increases the likelihood that she leaves.

An important point about the effect of income on domestic violence is that it is the woman's own income that matters. A woman who with a wealthy husband but no personal income may be just as likely or more likely to stay in an abusive relationship than a woman from a poor household. The woman in the wealthy household has a lot to give up if she leaves and may have no experience in financially supporting herself – her alternatives are limited. It is true that women of all cultures, races, occupations, incomes, and ages are battered but poor women with few economic options are more likely to be victims of intimate abuse.

What evidence is there to suggest that women's economic power and independence lowers violence? While there hasn't been a lot of empirical research on this issue, the evidence is mounting. I don't have time to go through all the research now but let me summarize. My own work with Amy Farmer, along with that of Tauchen, Witte, and Long and others, finds that (holding other factors constant) as women's

personal incomes increase, the incidence of domestic violence falls. Many studies from the interdisciplinary literature on domestic violence support the notion that women are less likely to remain in abusive relationships if they possess a greater degree of independence but are more likely to stay if they have few economic alternatives outside the relationship. For example, Gelles (1976) and Pagelow (1981) both find that a woman's access to resources has an effect on whether she leaves. Kalmuss and Straus (1990), using the National Family Violence Survey, find that "women whose dependency on marriage is high tend to experience more physical abuse from their husbands than women whose dependency is low" (p. 379). In addition, several studies (see, for example, Coleman and Straus (1986) and Allen and Straus (1980)) find that women in male-dominated marriages experience more violence. At a more aggregated level, overall gender inequality has been linked to higher rates of abuse across states and countries. Straus (1994) and Yllo and Straus (1990) use a gender equity

index to show that states exhibiting more inequality have higher rates of abuse.

You can also look at the incidence of domestic violence across countries and see the importance of women's economic status. Domestic violence is much more prevalent where women do not have legal rights and economic equality.

Levinson [1989] does this formally in a worldwide study of the determinants of violence against women in over 90 countries.

The results indicate that the level of women's economic equality is the key determinant in predicting the amount of violence against women in a society. While a societal pattern to use violence to resolve conflict, the strength of the belief in male authority, and women's access to divorce also matter, women's economic power outside the home was the strongest factor in explaining the variance in violence against women across societies.

Battered women helping themselves – labor market participation

The notion that economic independence is the key to ending domestic violence is important but nothing revolutionary.

Women themselves understand this and often do what they can to improve their options. In some of my research examining the effects of being in a violent relationship on women's labor force participation, I find that, holding other factors constant, women in abusive relationships are more likely to work for pay than women who are not victims of abuse. That means that if you take two women with the same education, age, etc., one who is a victim of domestic violence and the other is not a victim of abuse, the woman who is abused is more likely to work than the other woman.

While these results may be surprising, Lloyd (1997) finds similar results in examining the labor force participation of poor women in Chicago. She finds that women who reported abuse by an intimate partner were employed in roughly the same rates as those who did not. Lloyd surmises that the lack of a

significant difference between the two groups is the result of two competing effects of violence on work behavior. While violence may impact productivity, being in a violent relationship may induce some women to work in order to increase their power in the relationship and perhaps ultimately flee. These women realize that the best way to improve their situations is to improve their options, to become more independent. These women know that they need to be somewhat economically self-sufficient in order to leave.

The negative productivity effects of domestic violence

However, gaining economic independence and control is a difficult solution for battered women. While a woman may want to leave and recognize that she needs to work and improve her economic status in order to do so, that may be easier said than done. Why? Because violence lowers a woman's productivity in the workplace. Empirical evidence strongly supports the notion that violence hurts women's labor

market productivity. Lloyd (1997) conducted interviews in which battered women recounted that their husbands did not allow them to work outside the home, they didn't want to go to work with visible bruises, and they had a hard time concentrating at work fearing that their husbands would call or show up. Stanley's (1992) interviews with social service providers also indicate that the effects of violence on employment are a common and serious problem for their clients. They indicate that victims of abuse are more likely to be absent or tardy, exert less effort while working, and experience a diminished chance of advancement. Women may miss work because of serious injuries that prevent them from working or from less serious injuries that they are embarrassed about. The women that make it to work are likely to be distracted by their problems at home – they may be scared and nervous. Some abusers intentionally sabotage their partners' work efforts by harassing them (or their bosses or colleagues) at work or even forcing them to quit. Battered

women may also be prevented from improving their labor market prospects through schooling or job training. While women who are victims clearly try to work, they have trouble maintaining employment because of the violence. As a result, they are more likely to lose jobs and over time hold more jobs than other women. A survey of battered women by Shepard and Pence [1988] supports these statements. They found that because of the abuse - 55% missed work, 62% were late for work or left early, 56% were harassed at work (phone calls, visits, stalking), 44% were reprimanded at work, and 24% lost their jobs.

The negative productivity effects of the violence mean fewer economic alternatives and less control for battered women. They face a vicious cycle. They want to improve their economic status to escape or control the violence yet the violence is a huge obstacle to their efforts.

The employment costs effects of domestic violence

These negative productivity effects of domestic violence are extremely important – not only to the women who have fewer economic alternatives and less income for themselves and their children. The employment costs of domestic violence reach employers, co-workers and society as whole. Employers get less productive workers and lose and must replace already-trained workers. Co-workers may bear additional workloads due to the productivity losses and also, in some cases, may be in danger when domestic violence spills over into the workplace. The economy losses as valuable resources – productive workers – are under- and unemployed.

Employers often recognize the costs they bear as a result of domestic violence. For example, in a survey conducted by Roper Starch Worldwide for New York City-based Liz Claiborne, Inc., 47% of corporate leaders said that domestic violence lowered attendance, 44% said it increased their health care costs, and 33% said that it lowered their profits (see Solomon [1995]). While most workplaces have ignored this

issue, a few US companies have explicitly addressed domestic violence. For example, Polaroid has a number of initiatives to assist employees that are victims of domestic violence including free confidential counseling, flexibility to seek legal help, short-term paid leave, and long-term unpaid leave. In addition, the company donates to battered women's shelters (see Solomon [1995]).

The productivity losses resulting from violence affect a country's wealth, growth, and potential. In some of my work with Amy Farmer, estimate that 2.8 million days of work are lost each year as a result of domestic violence. This figure is substantially higher than a Department of Justice study that estimated the loss to be 175,000 days per year. We also estimate the total pay lost by battered women to be \$96 million annually. Note that this estimate only includes pay lost as a result of missing work; it does not include pay lost from earning less while working. Given that the remaining 50% of victims who lost work did not lose pay, it is clear that

employers bear these losses. Assuming the employers only bear costs for the employees who did not lose pay (likely an underestimate) and that these losses are the same as for those who did lose pay, we estimate that employers also lose \$96 million, bringing the total loss to \$192 million.

A World Bank study [1994] estimates that globally one workday in every five lost by women is the result of domestic violence. An Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) study found that the lost wages resulting from domestic violence cost Chile 2 percent and Nicaragua 1.6 percent of their national incomes (measured as gross domestic product). As a result, the costs of violence, which are largely preventable, are particularly relevant to developing countries where poverty is endemic. The United Nations, aid organizations, and policy-makers in developing economies are beginning to recognize the relationship between violence against women and a nation's productivity. The Inter-American Development Bank [1997] recognized that "there is mounting evidence that levels of

violence determine in part a society's ability to achieve sustainable and equitable growth." Women's full participation in the economy is necessary for a country to reach its potential. Domestic violence is a major impediment to this goal.

The social costs of domestic violence – it hurts all of us

I want to stress the fact that the costs of domestic violence reach all of us. While the women themselves bear the majority of the costs of domestic violence, there are societal costs as well. In addition to the employment effects, the costs of domestic violence reach the children of the victims, the health care system (the US DOJ estimates that every year domestic violence results in approximately 40,000 visits to physicians, 30,000 emergency department visits, and 100,000 days of hospitalization), insurance companies, law enforcement, and the judicial system. A Canadian study estimates that country losses \$1.6 billion a year from domestic violence. The annual cost of domestic violence in terms of health care and lost work

productivity is conservatively estimated by the Center for Disease Control at \$5.8 billion. Other studies have estimated US losses to be as great as \$10 to \$67 billion annually.

What can we do to end the violence?

The costs to victims and society are substantial. Victims try to help themselves by improving their economic status but it is difficult given the negative productivity effects of violence. So, we need to help them in their efforts but how? First, employers can do a lot to help and will at the same time help themselves. As I mentioned, women who are abused are well represented in the labor market so this is an excellent avenue to reach these women. Support at work including counseling, paid leaves, legal help, and advances on pay (to help a woman set up her own place) would all aid a woman in building the her economic power and independence to leave an abusive relationship. Support, understanding, and referrals from co-workers can also help.

What else? Let's go back to the theory of the economic relationship between violence and women's economic status. I said that anything that improves a woman's economic alternatives would increase her chance of escaping the violence. This theory of domestic violence applies to all economic alternatives – not just a woman's income. Anything that gives women more options should have the same effect including social services such as shelters, counseling and job training programs. Services for battered women such as emergency housing, childcare, counseling, and legal advocacy improve women's economic alternatives. Having a safe place to go greatly increases women's alternatives. However, short-term is not enough, these women need transition services (job counseling and placement) for the long run or they may be forced to return to their abusers when their short-term options are exhausted. General services, most importantly cash welfare and food stamps, are extremely important in providing economic alternatives to battered women.

My work with Amy Farmer (2003a) is the only existing study to specifically and empirically examine the role of shelters, hotlines, and other services on the incidence of domestic violence. We hypothesize that programs that provide services to battered women such as shelters may provide women with alternatives to staying with their abusers, and like improving women's economic status (for example, by increasing educational attainment), will result in more battered women being able to achieve self-sufficiency in the long-run. In addition, economic equality for women – both at the individual- and community-level - is predicted to lower the incidence of domestic violence. We find that shelters, hotlines, and counseling programs targeted at battered women have no significant impact on the likelihood of a woman experiencing domestic abuse. (However, we clearly indicate that because these services may play important roles in impacting the severity of abuse and other measures of victims' well-being.) However, the availability of legal services in the county of

residence does have a significant, negative impact on the likelihood that an individual woman is battered. Given that legal services are likely to provide a long term solution via child support, alimony, and restraining orders, these findings are consistent with previous studies linking domestic violence with a woman's alternatives outside the relationship.

Despite the prevalence of intimate partner violence, its social costs and the critical role that services such as shelters and legal clinics play in protecting victims and helping them to leave abusive relationships, in a paper a few years ago Amy and I show (in our accounting of the prevalence and distribution of dv services nationally) that there are not sufficient services to help victims. For example, the U.S. Department of Justice (2000) finds from the National Crime Victimization Survey that there are approximately 1.5 million women who are abused by their partners each year and our data indicate that there are only 1,386 shelters in the U.S. with

a total capacity of 31,429 beds. Although not all of these women need or are willing to go to a shelter, this rough estimate indicates that there are almost 50 self-identified victims for each shelter bed. We also find that services are not distributed equally across the US. Our data indicate that only 42% of U.S. counties had some type of service to help victims of intimate partner abuse. In addition, 36% of counties had a shelter, 36% had legal services, 41% had a hotline, and 41% had counseling services.

The problem is more acute in some areas. Nationally, 32% of rural counties have a program compared with 71% of urban counties. The lack of service availability in rural areas is particularly worrisome, however, given that rural women are likely to be more isolated from employment opportunities that can provide the financial means for escaping an abusive relationship. Although in the Northeast, 60% of counties have some type of program and 64% of counties in the West have a

program, these numbers are only 33% and 32% for the Midwest and South, respectively.

Why do some counties have lots of services while others lack even a single service to support battered women? Local services have traditionally been provided through grassroots efforts, a potentially inequitable mechanism as grassroots organizations are more likely to flourish in well-resourced communities. For example, as Smith (1986, 1999) points out, the most effective grassroots associations are likely to have members with higher than average incomes and education. The socioeconomic status of the membership is important but finances are also found to be critical for the effectiveness of grassroots associations (see Brokensha, 1974; Prestby & Wandersman, 1985; Clark, 1991; Torres, Zey, & McIntosh, 1991). Eisenberg (1998) also notes that a lack of material resources further complicates the efforts of low-income communities to obtain funding. Time is also a resource in

shorter supply in low-income communities, and literature finds that high-effectiveness grass roots organizations tend to have a greater number of meetings and social interactions (see Clark, 1991; Esman & Uphoff, 1984; Smith, 1999).

Our statistical analysis supports the sociological literature. Resource availability seems to be a driving force behind the establishment of programs that serve victims of intimate partner violence. The existence of a top-ranked college or university in the county is a strongly significant predictor of program provision. Programs are also significantly more likely to exist in counties with a higher percentage of women in the labor force. In addition, per capita income has a positive and significant effect on the likelihood of program provision. Overall, these results support the notion that organized, resourced, and informed women at the grassroots level are a motivating force behind the extensive system of programs and shelters that serve victims of intimate partner violence.

Social climate also appears to be associated with the establishment of services for battered women. Counties in states with higher average welfare payments are more likely to have programs; perhaps, states that are willing to provide higher average welfare payments are also more willing to allocate state funds to victims' services. Even after controlling for county population, urban counties are more likely to have programs than rural ones.

What does this research tell us about how to target federal funds for victims of domestic violence? The significant social costs that result from intimate partner violence indicate the need for government intervention. Although state governments and non-profits have provided support to their communities to assist victims and to reduce intimate partner violence for several decades, only with the introduction of VAWA in 1994 did the federal government become involved. The result is a national network of services that has grown out

of grassroots efforts that we show is not entirely equitable. In 2000, 58% of counties had no services whatsoever. In addition, descriptive statistics show that rural counties and those that have less educated, lower income, and greater minority populations are less likely to have services.

Given the lack of funding to provide services in every county, it is critical that the funds that do exist be allocated wisely. What is the major determinant of the distribution of programs to combat intimate partner violence in the U.S.?

Our results suggest that resource availability in a community is a driving force in establishing a program and federal initiatives aimed at providing these resources to underserved areas have not been entirely effective. Prior to the implementation of VAWA in 1994, local efforts were necessary to initiate a program. As discussed, the financial and human resources needed for a successful grassroots effort are more likely to exist in educated, more affluent communities. As we show, counties

with demographics consistent with these attributes are more likely to offer services. More importantly, after the federal government became directly involved in the funding of programs to assist victims of intimate partner violence via the introduction of VAWA, we show that existing agencies expanded their offerings but the number of programs did not increase significantly (only 2% between 1994 and 2000). Given that funds are disbursed through a granting process, established programs with a desire to broaden the provision of their services have an advantage in securing additional funds but counties without programs are not significantly more likely to start one.

A major goal of VAWA is to reach women from underserved communities. The few evaluations of VAWA that exist (e.g., Burt et al., 1999; Burt et al., 2000; Burt et al., 2001; Uekert, Miller & DuPree, 2001) find that the STOP grants have been effective in the communities where they exist both in

improving the overall climate for victims and bringing services to underserved groups in their communities. For example, Burt et al. (2000, p. 16) say that “79 percent of the direct service projects reported being able to serve victims who would not have come to the programs without the STOP project.” These successes should be applauded. Yet our results show that many counties continue to have no programs. Further, Burt et al. (2001) note that their site visits turned up repeatedly reported problems in neighboring non-STOP communities where the climate has not improved at all for victims. These results suggest that additional VAWA funds must be appropriated and deliberately targeted to underserved areas in order to reduce the disparity between counties. Specifically, given tight budgets, funds must be targeted to those underserved communities with population demographics that match most closely those most likely to use services; that is, communities with low socioeconomic status but without services.

How can funds be directed to the neediest communities?

Reliance on grant proposals is likely to favor the expansion of existing programs, which our work has shown to over-represent communities with more affluent and smaller minority populations. A more deliberate and targeted approach is required. An important first step is identifying the neediest communities. Simply calling a county needy because it does not have a program to combat intimate partner violence is not sufficient. A microanalysis that maps the existing programs and accounts for the distribution of the population in the county and where services are offered in contiguous counties is required. Additional research is also necessary to identify “best practices” in serving victims of intimate partner violence.

Although there is no direct evidence that the generosity of welfare payments impacts the incidence of domestic violence, several studies indicate that a significant percentage of women

on welfare are former victims of domestic abuse and, therefore, suggest that welfare payments may aid women in leaving abusive relationships. A U.S. General Accounting Office (1998) survey of the literature on domestic violence and welfare indicated that between 55 and 65 percent of the women on welfare reported having been abused by an intimate partner. This level of victimization is much higher than the 25% past victimization for women reported in the NIJ/CDC study. While support provided by TANF is short-term (recipients must find work within two years and face a five year lifetime maximum for benefits), states are permitted to grant targets of domestic violence a temporary exception to the work requirement while they are receiving services or gaining self-sufficiency (Raphael & Haennicke, 1999). Clearly, welfare is an important economic alternative used by battered women to escape. We need to make sure that welfare continues to be an option for these women and that they are receiving the right information about its availability.

Laws that assure custody and maintain health care benefits for women who leave would also make leaving a realistic possibility for more battered women. And, of course, and perhaps the most importantly, women need to be assured safety if they leave. Their economic alternatives outside the relationship are worthless if the violence continues. Women who leave are actually at a greater risk of homicide (during the first two months after separation) than women who stay. We need better laws, enforcement, and services to ensure their safety.

SUMMARY

In summary, domestic violence is a serious problem with significant social costs. These costs reach all of us. I believe that the one of the keys to reducing domestic violence and its costs is improving the economic power of the victims. As women become financially independent, they can leave violent relationships. In addition, as women gain economic equality

and larger numbers of women leave (along with stiffer legal penalties), abusers may realize that they can't get away with it anymore and change their behavior. Improving women's economic alternatives can be done through both employment and public policy.

This major economic downturn is a cause for great concern. As you know, in bad economic times, the most vulnerable often are hurt the most. So, while employment can play a major role in improving women's economic independence and, therefore, giving them power over their own lives, in these economic times, the role of public policy and the non-profit sector are critical to both short-term safety and long-term opportunities. We must be diligent in working to providing women with real and better opportunities to their current situations – to staying. We must also pressure government to do all possible to adequately fund TANF, Medicaid, food stamps, unemployment benefits, and other benefits that provide economic support to the most vulnerable.

When women have fewer opportunities to control their own destinies through hard work, your help in finding them shelter, legal counsel, and education are even more important than normal.

THANK YOU for inviting me to share my work with you today. I am happy to take a few questions.