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# Distressed assets: Women's lives in a bad economy

Nicole Sotelo | Mar. 19, 2009

Home foreclosures are up. Stocks are down. And many countries around the globe have begun to see a rise in prostitution, domestic violence and other systemic abuses against women. People may talk about their retirement portfolios suffering, but the real distressed assets are women who carry some of the greatest wounds in this global recession.

How is the recession linked to a rise in violence against women? Abusive partners or customers of sex workers do not so much seek to be consoled, as to control. So as our economy spirals out of control, people feel powerless and, in turn, often seek to control something, anything, including women, and often violently.

Already, the wage gap between men and women spans 22 percent globally, with women earning 78 cents to every dollar earned by men, according to the International Trade Union Confederation?s study published this month. With decreased incomes and increased job losses, women are faring poorly and groups working with prostitutes report a rise in women entering the sex trade in order to help themselves and their families survive.

The New Zealand Prostitutes Collective has indicated a rise in women entering the sex trade since the global recession began, and a recent study in that country revealed 93 percent of sex workers named financial reasons as their motive for entering the field. The same is true across the globe. In Prague, a woman can make the equivalent of $150 for a half-hour of work at some of the more expensive sex clubs, whereas, the average yearly income for a teacher in the Czech Republic a few years ago was approximately $15,000.

In China, a woman may work in a factory 12 hours a day and earn approximately $50 a month or may enter the sex trade and earn the same amount in one day. Many Chinese women have families still living in the countryside whom they support. It is clear that the choice to enter the sex trade is really no choice at all.

As more women enter the sex trade in the economic downturn, competition increases and women find themselves capitulating to more risky situations in order to gain clients -- putting them at increased risk of violence in the process. A Project Manager at the U.K.-based Magdalene Group, which works with prostitutes, told a local newspaper two weeks ago that, ?Violence is a form of control and I think the amount of violence used against sex workers will also increase.?

Not only do more women feel forced into an increasingly risky sex trade, but the economic recession is also linked to a spike in women experiencing domestic violence. News articles from Las Vegas to Niagara have reported increases linked to downturns in the local economy. The *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* reports that the National Domestic Violence Hotline observed a 21 percent increase in calls in September 2008 at the beginning of the financial crisis over the same month in 2007 and that more callers are linking violence to economic problems.

This rise is not limited to the United States. Countries ranging from Britain to Malaysia have expressed concerns that domestic violence incidents are increasing or will increase based on the faltering economy. For example, the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry in Malaysia recently added 50 male

counselors to assist families with the stress and potential violence that changing financial conditions bring.

As world leaders seek solutions to the global economic recession, any solutions must be created from an understanding of the recession?s cost to women?s lives. With millions of women experiencing not only home and job loss, but violence, too, we can?t afford not to pay attention to the unique ways women?s lives are entwined with the fate of the global economy.

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[1] http://www.WomenHealing.com