

# Economic abuse affects 1 in 7 Kiwi women, research finds

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Economic abuse is common, affecting about 15% or 1 in 7 women who have been in a relationship, new University of Auckland research finds. [The study](#) is published in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.

Further, economic violence compounds the impacts of other forms of intimate partner violence.

Economic abuse is where a partner uses tactics aimed at controlling a women's financial resources, including restricting access to finances, controlling women's money and sabotaging their ability to earn an income.

The most prevalent act was a refusal to provide money for household expenses, reported by 8.8% of women.

The study, led by researchers at Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland, used data from the NZ Family Violence Study, including 1,464 women who had been in a relationship.

The study, as a whole, measured women's experience of [physical violence](#), sexual violence, [psychological abuse](#) and controlling behavior, as well as economic abuse.

Women who had experienced economic abuse on top of other forms of abuse were almost five times more likely to have experienced [food insecurity](#) compared with women who were not abused.

Women who reported economic abuse were also almost three times more likely to be receiving a benefit.

"This study is telling us is that, when economic abuse is added into the picture, it really increases the devastating consequences for women."

Women who had experienced any form of [intimate partner violence](#) were twice as likely than other women to have a diagnosed mental health condition, such as depression or anxiety.

However, women who experienced economic abuse as well as other forms of physical, sexual or psychological violence by a partner were almost five times more likely to have a diagnosed mental health condition compared with women who were not abused.

"In a country where we have a mental health crisis, part of addressing it involves asking, 'What are we looking at?' 'What are some of the underlying causal factors that might be underpinning this crisis?' It may be experience of violence," says lead author Professor Janet Fanslow of the University's School of Population Health.

"Abuse causes a whole cavalcade of problems, but if we only think about it as a single act, like being hit or punched or having your arm broken, we miss the broader mental health and [economic consequences](#) it creates. This stops us from being able to offer people the help they need," says Fanslow.

"Intimate partner violence tends to be a whole pattern of different types of abusive behavior."

The researchers looked particularly at women in this study, because the pattern of abusive behavior and control that women experience from men is really different from what men experience.

"We're not seeing the same things for men," Fanslow says.

A common impact of financial abuse is it makes it more difficult for women to leave a relationship.

So, it is crucial for organizations providing direct assistance to women to conduct assessments that consider not only physical and [sexual violence](#) but also economic abuse and other controlling behaviors.

From a legal perspective, recognizing economic abuse as part of coercive control is essential.

Legal systems often struggle to address the complex dynamics of abusive relationships, so recognizing and acknowledging the broader pattern of behavior can lead to more effective support for women seeking legal recourse.

Moreover, it highlights the importance of screening for multiple forms of abuse in general health and mental health services.

Addressing these issues is crucial for ensuring individuals' safety and well-being, as they cannot achieve mental [health](#) without feeling safe.

On a broader level, it raises questions about gender equality, including economic disparities such as the gender pay gap, which can impact women's ability to leave and stay out of violent relationships safely.

Overall, the research underscores the need for comprehensive approaches to abuse.

**More information:** Brooklyn M. Mellar et al, Economic Abuse by An Intimate Partner and Its Associations with Women's Socioeconomic Status and Mental Health, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2024). [DOI: 10.1177/08862605241235140](https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605241235140)

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