

## Why the Economy Hurts Women More

To the Editor:

Re "Women Are Now Equal as Victims of Poor Economy" (front page, July 22):

After years of increasing participation in the work force, women, you report, have reached a much less desirable milestone: a fall in the percentage who are working. But contrary to the suggestion that women are now on par with men because they're leaving the work force at similar rates, we know that women have always lagged well behind in good times and bad.

This is especially true for low-income women and women of color who face multiple barriers to economic security: race, gender and class.

Today, despite decades of struggle for job access and pay equity, women are paid 77 cents for each dollar a man makes; the disparity is worse for African-American women, who earn 62 cents, and Latinas, who earn 53 cents.

Nearly 10.5 million women are single parents (as compared with 2.5 million single fathers). For them, opting out for any reason — like motherhood or education — is not viable.

Already disadvantaged by years of workplace and legislative failures, women and their families face an increasingly insecure future if policies are not adjusted to meet their ever more pressing needs.

SARA K. GOULD  
President and Chief Executive  
Ms. Foundation for Women  
New York, July 22, 2008

To the Editor:

Your article should create alarm among all people concerned about economic justice.

Women who use a layoff from a manufacturing job as an opportunity to seek higher education, like one woman you cite, are certainly seizing the initiative to improve their situation. But in a highly competitive economy, education provides no guarantee. College graduates are also having difficulty landing jobs with adequate salaries and health care.

If this country is unable to provide enough jobs with living wages and benefits for average people, policy makers and legislators need to repair and then enhance the social safety net so that everyone can afford decent housing, health care, child care and transportation.

AMY LAIKEN  
Chicago, July 22, 2008

To the Editor:

Your article underplays one of the groups most affected by the slowdown: single women who are heads of household.

These women have about one-half the income and less than one-third the wealth of other households. They make up 62 percent of the 5.8 million American families with children in poverty and are more likely to hold subprime mortgages. Many women from this category would like to leave the work force in order to take care of children or other family members but simply cannot afford to do so.

We need supportive public policies and programs, including paid sick leave and quality child care if women and their families are to thrive and flourish.

LINDA BASCH  
President, National Council  
for Research on Women  
New York, July 22, 2008



KELLY BLAIR

To the Editor:

There is another compelling reason that women are leaving the work force: in addition to an unfriendly economy, many face a hostile work environment that fails to accommodate care-giving responsibilities.

Many women have jobs that do not offer paid sick days that we can use for ourselves or our children, no flextime, and only unpaid family and medical leave.

In addition, the Supreme Court took us backward last year in *Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company*, which made it more difficult for victims of wage discrimination to win justice by limiting when lawsuits can be filed.

We need Congress to pass legislation mandating paid family and medical leave and paid sick days and to restore fair pay laws. Until it does, women and families will continue to suffer, and our country will lose out on the talents of half its citizens.

DEBRA L. NESS  
President, National Partnership  
for Women and Families  
Washington, July 22, 2008