

same effect. Forest fires and higher temperatures prompt animals to migrate toward inhabited areas in search of food, for example.

Programs to protect biodiversity and natural habitats must be on the agenda once the health crisis from COVID-19 has eased. Countries that allow the raising and sale of exotic species will have to reconsider the appropriateness of such activities, not only given their harmful impact on animal well-being, but also on worldwide public health. More resources will have to be invested in taking down transnational networks that traffic in wild animals and in finding alternative subsistence activities for the people involved.

In addition to policies for the conservation of nature, our methods of production and consumption must be completely redesigned if we wish to reduce our dependence on extractivist economies and minimize our impact on wild environments. This will have the additional benefit of helping us meet our climate obligations, not only because our economy is so reliant on fossil fuels, but also given that livestock agriculture—the cause of much deforestation—is estimated to be the source of 16% to 37% of global greenhouse gas emissions, depending on the study.

Confronted with COVID-19, governments everywhere have freed up colossal resources to support workers and businesses. The same scale and speed of action are required to make a radical course change in our agricultural and environmental policies so as to attack the root of the problem. If a climate crisis has not been enough to convince us to wholly transform our relationship with the environment, might we be more inclined to do it to save ourselves?

**Laura Handal** is a graduate in environmental studies from the University of Quebec in Montreal. Her work focuses on the social, economic and environmental impacts of extractive industries, and on the economic alternatives to such sectors. A version of this article first ran on the blog of IRIS (Institut de recherche et d'informations socio-économiques), a sister organization of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives based in Montréal.

Natasha Bulowski / National

## Economic abuse: hard to spot, harder to recover from

**D**URING THE PANDEMIC, women in abusive relationships face long periods of isolation with their abusers alongside decreased job security and limited access to support systems. This isolation exacerbates all forms of domestic abuse, from verbal to physical to sexual. But there is another type of abuse that is less visible and can also worsen under these conditions.

Economic abuse includes controlling, exploiting and sabotaging not only a survivor's income and finances, but also their access to transportation, education and employment, food, shelter or other non-financial assets. Though the terms *economic abuse* and *financial abuse* are sometimes used interchangeably, the latter can fail to capture the extent of the harm.

Women experiencing economic abuse during the pandemic face heightened levels of social isolation, which makes it even harder to get help from family, friends, women's organizations and legal aid.

"It's about money, but it's also about controlling access to resources, financial knowledge, and manipulation of anything that could make your life more secure, or safer," explains Chitra Raghavan, a professor of psychology who researches intimate partner abuse.

In a U.S. study from 2008, which involved interviews with 120 survivors of intimate partner violence, virtually all of the survivors (94%) said they had experienced economic abuse. According to a 2019 report by the Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT), such abuse is often obscured by gender norms and intertwined with other forms of abuse including psychological, sexual and physical.

Raghavan explains that because gender norms typecast men as the breadwinners and financial head of house, it can be hard to determine what is economic abuse and what is sometimes an agreed upon, if highly gendered, norm in a household.

"When it becomes abusive, to me, is when you can no longer negotiate," she says. "When you can no longer say, 'I'd like to know how much [money] I have. I'd like to know this regularly without asking, and I'd like to be consulted on these decisions.'"

Feminist lawyer Pamela Cross adds, "A really big factor is that people of all genders and ages think that it is impolite to talk about money." She says the taboo around discussing finances means friends and family are less likely to become aware of economic abuse.

"It can also be very easy for people to have a narrow understanding of intimate partner violence and family violence and only think about the physical aspect of that, when really

there's many other kinds of abuse including economic that can be as harmful—or in some cases even more harmful—than physical abuse.”

The 2019 WomanACT study found that, unlike physical abuse, financial abuse often continues long after a woman has left the abusive relationship, because their abuser can maintain contact and control through spousal or child support. Coerced debt and bad credit scores often prevent survivors from securing housing in the short and long terms or make it more difficult to get a credit card, student loan, line of credit, car loan, and potentially a job due to screening by some employers.

As if those challenges are not enough, Cross says women experiencing economic abuse during the pandemic face heightened levels of social isolation, which makes it even harder to get help from family, friends, women's organizations and legal aid. “For women who are still

living with the abuser, it's all but impossible for them to have the privacy that they need to have frank conversations with a lawyer,” Cross explains.

Job loss related to COVID-19 can also force survivors to remain in an abusive situation. “When women do not have an independent income, it is much more difficult for them to leave, especially if there are children,” Cross says.

The CCFWE and organizations like WomanACT are calling for more research on economic abuse in Canada, education initiatives to increase public awareness, and training for both social workers and financial institutions to spot the signs of economic abuse. These groups stress the importance of creating financial literacy programs, credit repair services, and other financial opportunities like special loans and scholarships for survivors of economic abuse.

For this to be done most effectively, the CCFWE says Canada needs to develop a clear definition of economic abuse, to lay the groundwork for these policies and programs. The recently amended Divorce Act now identifies financial abuse as a form of family violence. Though the inclusion of financial abuse in family law is a positive first step, Cross notes that the Divorce Act only applies to people who are married and seeking a divorce, leaving out a significant subset of people.

The CCFWE's long-term goal is for there to be a criminal definition of economic abuse, which could both act as a deterrent for potential abusers and provide survivors with a legal recourse.

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**Natasha Bulowski** is a journalist based in Ottawa. She has been volunteering at the Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment (CCFWE) since June.

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## Statement from the CCPA on systemic state violence and anti-Black racism

THE CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES is angered and outraged by ongoing police violence and brutality against Black citizens and protestors across the continent. And while much of the current media attention is focused on the United States, these same problems are painfully alive and present across Canada, including in every province where CCPA offices are located on Indigenous territories.

We recognize that this state violence is endemic, long-standing and a function of structural white supremacy.

As a research institute committed to social justice, we believe that public policy is an essential vehicle for dismantling systemic injustices—including in relation to the coercive power of the state and state violence, economic and gender inequalities, migration and citizenship, poverty, race-blind data collection, housing and food insecurity, and inequities in health and education. We know our work is far from done. We have a responsibility

to document, challenge and propose solutions to racism and white supremacy, a responsibility we have yet to adequately meet.

Through our research and analysis, we will continue to document the systemic inequality, racism and injustice that dominates our society, limits access to public services and infects our democratic institutions. As we move forward, we will listen to and work in partnership with Black researchers, leaders and organizations to press for root-cause, systemic change while holding the powerful to account.

It is our individual and collective responsibility to ensure that systemic state violence and anti-Black racism are eradicated.

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— This statement is endorsed by the CCPA's B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia and national offices.