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## Economic Abuse: The Hidden Barrier Keeping Victims Trapped

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Amy\* lived in fear for 25 years, enduring violence and sexual abuse at the hands of her husband. When a doctor warned her children were at risk, she found the courage to leave, but financial control had left her powerless. Despite once earning a six-figure income as a company director, Amy had no access to money or resources. This is the insidious reality of economic abuse, a form of domestic violence where abusers manipulate or restrict their partner's financial independence, trapping them in cycles of dependency and fear.

Economic abuse, when a partner controls money, food, clothing, or transportation, remains a widespread yet often overlooked form of domestic violence. A survey by the UK charity Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA) found that 15% of women surveyed in the year ending November 2024 experienced economic abuse. That equates to roughly 4.1 million women across the country. Despite these alarming figures, successive governments have struggled to address the problem effectively.

Labour leader Keir Starmer has called economic abuse a “national emergency,” urging stronger action as the current administration prepares to unveil its new Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy. This plan aims to halve violence against women within ten years, following a 2021 VAWG initiative under the Conservative government, which the National Audit Office criticized for making “little progress.”

Surviving Economic Abuse, a leading advocate for victims like Amy, remains cautiously hopeful. SEA’s chief executive, Sam Smethers, emphasizes that tackling economic abuse must be central to any successful strategy. “It’s the only way to help survivors and their children escape and safely rebuild their lives,” Smethers said. “To break the cycle of domestic abuse once and for all, the government must put economic abuse front and center.”

Economic abuse rarely occurs alone. According to SEA’s research, 56% of women who experienced financial control also faced physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. This interconnected nature of abuse underscores the urgent need for comprehensive policy responses.

However, the current government’s track record on protecting women and families from such abuse leaves much to be desired. While rhetoric around new policies often promises change, practical measures and adequate funding have lagged. Without prioritizing economic abuse, any strategy risks falling short, leaving vulnerable women like Amy trapped in abusive environments with few avenues for escape.

Addressing economic abuse means more than just criminalizing financial control—it requires robust support systems, including financial counseling, emergency funds, and accessible legal protections. It also demands cultural change to recognize economic abuse as a serious violation, not a private matter.

As the government prepares to release its latest VAWG plan, the eyes of advocates and victims alike are watching closely. For millions like Amy, the hope is that this time, real action will follow, breaking the cycle of violence and giving survivors the tools to reclaim their independence.