

## Gendernomics

### The Recession is Impacting Women and Men Differently — And That Difference Could Alter Family Lifestyles



Reporting has exploded on how the recession has affected women and men differently, focusing on such topics as women who have suddenly become family breadwinners, the rise of stay-at-home dads, and stay-at-home moms re-entering the workforce, increasing work hours, or looking into entrepreneurship.

Gender differences in unemployment are striking. Author and labor force expert Ira Wolfe, quoted by the Public News Service, expresses it clearly: male workforce participation is decreasing, while female participation continues to rise. Over 80 percent of laid-off employees are men, resulting from the heavy toll on industries like manufacturing and construction.

The implications are complex. The *New York Times* reported on a YMCA changing the name of a daytime class from “Mommy and Baby” to “Parent and Baby” to reflect more fathers participating. And the *Globe and Mail* ran a story on a “daddy blogging” trend, with U.S. men sharing online the experience of transitioning to a stay-at-home role.

Change inevitably creates stress. Women re-entering the workforce or launching businesses may face increased work–life balance stress. Men may experience depression and self-esteem issues after job loss. Families may find themselves entering uncharted territory, rearranging household logistics while dealing with a strained budget.

But with thought, planning and, most importantly, constant communication, the stress can be managed. Successfully managing the transition could, in turn, reap unexpected dividends.

#### Steps to Reduce Stress from Economy-Driven Lifestyle Changes

- 1. Recognize that the Change could be Temporary.**  
Disruption of a lifestyle that had been reasonably balanced may call for a temporary shift in responsibilities and priorities. But with time, the change could present unexpected, positive outcomes. A layoff may motivate new ideas for self-employment options or a family business. Opportunities for retraining, continuing education, or a favorable career change may also emerge.
- 2. Communicate -- Early and Often.**  
Don't keep emotional issues bottled-up, such as a woman feeling the stress of increased work-life balance challenges or a man feeling awkward staying at home. By talking early and often, you'll be more likely to tackle issues constructively.
- 3. Approach Businesslike Matters in a Businesslike Manner.**  
Instead of waiting until there's a problem to discuss things like financial strains or divvying up family workloads, schedule a weekly “meeting” to focus on them as issues to be managed, not

emotional hot buttons. Keeping discussions as specific as possible will encourage positive outcomes.

4. **Recognize that Adjustments Take Time.**

If Mom is suddenly working more, it may take time for Dad and kids to adapt. This can be especially intense in families with preschool children, who are very routine-focused and sensitive to changes. Similarly, if Dad is suddenly home after years of 60 hour weeks at the office or shift work at the plant, he may go through a period of acclimation to the very different — yet equally demanding — run and rhythm of the weekday family regimen.

5. **Focus on the Positive.**

If Dad's home with the kids, it's an opportunity to be more involved in their lives, which is almost certain to have a positive impact that will continue after the economy shifts. Similarly, Mom's reentering the workforce or exploring new professional applications of her talents could result in many long-term rewards.

In the long run, unexpected benefits at the cultural level could also emerge. As an example from the past, numerous women entered the workforce during World War II. While many returned to traditional roles, others continued working, trailblazing vast new choices for their daughters, granddaughters, and beyond. Current changes, driven by immediate need, could also lead to far-reaching family and cultural enrichment.