NCFR Press Release

February 4, 2004

DOLLARS, DEPENDENCY, AND DIVORCE

Regarding the article published in the National Council on Family Relations February 2004 issue of *Journal of Marriage and Family.*
The article is entitled "**Dollars, Dependency, and Divorce: Four Perspectives on the Role of Wives' Income**"

"Contrary to popular belief," according to Stacy Rogers, researcher at The Pennsylvania State University, "when a wife earns more than her husband, it does not automatically increase the risk of divorce." Instead, men and women in unhappy marriages, who have similar levels of economic resources are more likely to divorce, states Rogers.

Rogers's research, "Dollars, Dependency, and Divorce: Four Perspectives on the Role of Wives' Income," was published February's *Journal of Marriage and Family (JMF)*. Rogers believes the key issue is the combination of the couples' happiness in the marriage, and their individual economic resources. After interviewing 2,033 married persons in 1980 and again in 1983, 1988, 1992, and 1997, she concludes, "In marriages that are under stress, the spouse earning more may feel some obligation to the other spouse. The spouse earning less in that unhappy relationship may feel some dependence on the spouse earning more. In both cases divorce is less likely."

Jay Teachman, a researcher at Western Washington University, has reviewed Rogers' findings and states, "Rogers has conducted a detailed analysis of spouses' relative economic contributions as they relate to the risk of divorce. Assuming an unhappily married couple," continues Teachman, "Rogers's finding that economic dependence reduces the chance of divorce is key. Historically, when most unions involved the economic dependence of women, one can imagine many unhappy marriages just limped along without ending."

On the other end of the spectrum is the unhappy marriage where both partners are financially independent or at least are contributing equally to the family's finances. In this case, Rogers concludes, this couple will have an increased chance of divorce. "The risk of divorce," states Rogers, "is actually highest when both partners believe the marriage to be unhappy and both have similar incomes."

Study results involving the combination of a happy marriage and partners' economic equality present a different picture. Rogers' research shows that in a marriage where both partners are happy and equally rewarded by their work, the increased family income can enhance marital stability, and contribute to the family's economic stability. "It's important to realize," concludes Rogers, "that the consideration isn't just mercenary. In and of itself having more money than your spouse does not lead people to leave a marriage. Wives' economic resources do not undermine families in any way. If the marriage is happy, then the couple's income does not contribute to the likelihood that they will divorce."

“These findings should alleviate fears that the employment of wives does not, by itself, increase the risk of divorce,” states Alexis Walker, editor of *JMF*. “In fact, continues Walker, “given that men’s incomes have not held up well over the past few decades, women’s incomes have become, not only essential to many families, but a contributing factor to the stability of happy marriages.”

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The Journal of Marriage and Family is a quarterly publication of the National Council of on Family Relations, 3989 Central Avenue NE, Suite 550, Minneapolis, MN 55421. On the web at www.ncfr.org .

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