

OVERVIEW AND FINDINGS

Displaced homemakers are women whose principal job has been homemaking and who have lost their main source of income because of divorce, separation, widowhood, disability or long-term unemployment of a spouse, or loss of eligibility for public assistance. Many of these women have serious trouble finding jobs that are adequate to support themselves and their families. Estimates of the number of displaced homemakers range from over 2 million to about 4 million.

Definition and Dimensions of Homemaker Displacement

This report provides the first national estimates of the displaced homemaker population for more than 1 year. Because of the definition and database used, the estimates are conservative—rising from 1.7 million in 1975 to 2.2 million in 1983. Different definitions and different databases have yielded estimates for single years that are more than twice as large. The definitions in various State and Federal laws and programs also differ, with little consistency in those considered eligible for program services.

Under the definition used for descriptive purposes here, displaced homemakers are women who:

1. are between the ages of 35 and 64, and are:
 - divorced, separated, or widowed; or
 - married but husband is absent, seriously disabled, or long-term unemployed; or
 - losing income from public assistance because the youngest child is 17 to 19 years old; and
2. have had serious employment problems, including unemployment, working at pay below the minimum wage, working part time but preferring full time, or dropping out of the labor force from discouragement.

The number of displaced homemakers rose 28 percent from 1975 to 1983. At the same time the population of all U.S. women in the age group rose only 10 percent.

Characteristics of Displaced Homemakers

- Of the estimated 2.2 million displaced homemakers in 1983, over 1 million were divorced, separated, or had an absent spouse. Rapid growth in this group (54 percent) accounted for much of the increase in numbers of displaced homemakers from 1975 to 1983.
- Many displaced homemakers are living in or close to poverty. In 1982-83, nearly half of them had family incomes below \$10,000 a year (1982 dollars). At least 30 percent of those in families of four or more were below the poverty level in 1983, compared with 15 percent of all families at that time.
- A majority (61 percent) of displaced homemakers had children living at home; for 45 percent of the group, the youngest child at home was of school age. Families were generally small; nearly three-fifths of the displaced homemakers were in families of two or three people. Slightly over one-fifth were in single-person families; another one-fifth were in families with four or more members.
- By definition, all of the displaced homemakers were having trouble finding satisfactory jobs. Half were employed, but at pay below the minimum wage or in a part-time job when they wanted a full-time job. In 1975 (latest data available) disproportionate numbers of displaced homemakers, compared to other women workers, were service workers, in such jobs as waitress, hotel maid, or nursing home aide; they were underrepresented in clerical, professional, technical, and administrative jobs.

Displaced Homemaker Programs

- Federal support for displaced homemaker programs began in 1976 in amendments to the Vocational Education Act; Congress recently strengthened support in the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984. Despite the increased support, however, Federal funding of displaced homemaker proj-

ects is still modest in relation to the eligible population of 2 to 4 million.

- In 1984, several hundred displaced homemaker projects existed across the country, probably serving at least 100,000 women a year. Data on displaced homemakers and the programs serving them is sparse, but OTA's research and review of available evidence indicate that the number of displaced homemakers receiving employment and training services has grown in recent years, with the rise in their numbers and a growing awareness that services are available. Funding to support the projects has also apparently grown, though barely keeping up with demand.
- State funds were the main support of displaced homemaker programs in 1984. This situation may change, with the increased funding available to displaced homemaker programs under the Perkins Voc Ed Act. Congress has appropriated about \$63 million under the act for services to single parents and homemakers, including displaced homemakers, for fiscal year 1985. How much of this will go to displaced homemaker programs is uncertain, but it is likely to be a large share and to exceed substantially Federal funding of the past. Despite some resistance from the vocational education establishment to the idea of set-asides under the Perkins Act (especially the set-aside for single parents and homemakers), the act opens new opportunities to projects serving displaced homemakers.
- Many of the services displaced homemakers need can be funded under the Perkins Voc Ed Act, but the main focus of the act is still on vocational training. The Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) stresses job search assistance more heavily. Also, JTPA is another source of funds for services that are still very modestly supported, despite the increased Voc Ed funding for services to single parents and homemakers in the Perkins Act. For these reasons, many displaced homemakers will benefit from access to JTPA as well as to the federally funded vocational training system,
- JTPA funds were a minor source of support for displaced homemaker programs in 1984. By early 1985, it appeared that use of JTPA funds to provide services to displaced homemakers might be increasing, but they were still not a principal source of support. Moreover, most of the JTPA-funded projects were not specially designed to serve displaced homemakers, but served other clients as well. For some displaced homemakers, with little work experience and confidence, this is a substantial disadvantage.
- A serious difficulty in serving displaced homemakers with JTPA funds is that many of these women do not qualify as economically disadvantaged, often because their previous income, before they became displaced, was too high. Thus they are not eligible for JTPA Title IIA programs, which are intended primarily to serve disadvantaged, low-income people. Although there are exceptions to the low-income rules, not too many service providers are making use of them. There are no income limits to service under JTPA Title III (for displaced workers), but in many States, displaced homemakers are not considered eligible because the definition of dislocated workers in the law does not necessarily include them. Other problems are that displaced homemaker project staff often lack information about JTPA, or that local Private Industry Councils, which direct JTPA programs, oppose special services for this group of workers.
- The administrators of displaced homemaker and other women's programs under the Voc Ed Act see data collection as an urgent issue, so that when reports are required after the first 3 years of the new program they can show Congress the results. The act does not specifically require regular reports on services provided to single parents and homemakers, and the U.S. Department of Education has no such requirement. State officials are beginning to develop a consistent, national system of data collection for characteristics of clients served in the women's programs, services provided, outcomes, and

results one year later. If successful, this effort will fill a longstanding need for information about displaced homemakers and the programs designed to serve them.

Design and Performance of Displaced Homemaker Projects

Although no systematic evaluations of displaced homemakers programs have ever been done, a few findings can be drawn from the experience of women who have received the services and from experienced project directors. From OTA-sponsored interviews with 20 directors of displaced homemaker projects and from a few other sources, the following observations emerge:

- Women seeking services from displaced homemaker programs are a diverse group, in age, education, and financial background. Different kinds of services are appropriate to meet the needs of different types of clients, especially rural women, long time recipients of welfare, minorities, widows, and older women. The groups least served at present are minority and rural women.
- For all groups of displaced homemakers, a comprehensive program of services is desirable, particularly one which combines personal counseling with job readiness and skills training. A considerable number of displaced homemakers need remedial or brushup courses in reading and math to qualify for training or good jobs.
- Many displaced homemakers cannot take advantage of the training and education open to them because of lack of income support. Most are not eligible for unemployment insurance, and few have income from other family members. Voc Ed funds can be used to provide child care and other support services, and training stipends in cases of acute economic need, but usually have not been used in this way in the past. JTPA funds can also be used for supportive services and some forms of income support, but little is currently being spent for these services,