

Domestic Violence and Homelessness

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This fact sheet examines the relationship between domestic violence and homelessness. A list of resources for further study is also provided.

BACKGROUND

Domestic violence is defined as emotionally and/or physically controlling an intimate partner, often involving tactics such as physical assault, stalking, and sexual assault (Domesticviolence.org). Approximately one out of every four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime and 1.3 million women are victims of domestic violence each year. Victims of domestic violence lost about 8 million days of paid work because of the violence that they experienced. 4.1 billion dollars is spent directly to on mental health and medical services for domestic violence victims (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, [http://www.ncadv.org/files/DomesticViolenceFactSheet\(National\).pdf](http://www.ncadv.org/files/DomesticViolenceFactSheet(National).pdf)). Considering the cost and prevalence, as well as the direct relationship between housing and domestic violence, a majority of homeless women are victims of domestic violence. 28% of families were homeless because of domestic violence in 2008 (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2008). 39% of cities cited domestic violence as the primary cause of family homelessness (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2007).

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AS A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR TO HOMELESSNESS

When a woman decides to leave an abusive relationship, she often has nowhere to go. This is particularly true of women with few resources. Lack of affordable housing and long waiting lists for assisted housing mean that many women and their children are forced to choose between abuse at home and life on the streets. Approximately 63% of homeless women have experienced domestic violence in their adult lives (National Network to End Domestic Violence). Moreover, shelters are frequently filled to capacity and must turn away battered women and their children. In 2008, a majority of cities saw an increase in family homelessness, though a large number of foreclosures has also influenced this number. Yet, cities have been responsive. Barely any homeless families were found living on the streets in 2008 compared to 2007 when 25% of people living on the streets were families (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2008).

Some cities have decided to combat the increase of homeless families by providing motel vouchers for the nights when the shelters are full. But, because of the nature of being a homeless family, it takes a longer period of time to find permanent housing. Compared with single men and women, families remained in emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing longer (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2008). There are a number of reasons for this finding, but domestic violence victims in have

particular difficulty. Victims often have poor credit records and employment histories because of the violence they have experienced. Landlords often discriminate against victims if they have a protection order or any other indicator of domestic violence. If violence occurs in the home, landlords can evict their tenants, resulting in a victim becoming homeless because she was abused.

POLICY ISSUES

Currently, victims of domestic abuse have unmet needs for both short and long-term housing. On a given day, 1,740 people could not be provided emergency shelter and 1,422 could not be provided transitional shelter (National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2007).

Shelters provide immediate safety to battered women and their children and help women gain control over their lives. The provision of safe emergency shelter is a necessary first step in meeting the needs of women fleeing domestic violence.

A sizable portion of the welfare population experiences domestic violence at any given time. Thus, without significant housing support, many welfare recipients are at risk of homelessness or continued violence. In the absence of cash assistance, women who experience domestic violence may be at increased risk of homelessness or compelled to live with a former or current abuser in order to prevent homelessness. Welfare programs must make every effort to assist victims of domestic violence and to recognize the tremendous barrier to employment that domestic violence presents.

In 2005, the 'Violence Against Women Act' was passed. This bill mandated that programs receiving funds from McKinney Vento Homelessness Assistance Act and data collected by The Homeless Management Information Services (HMIS) could not give identifying information about the victims.

Long term efforts to address homelessness must include increasing the supply of affordable housing, ensuring adequate wages and income supports, and providing necessary supportive services.

RESOURCES

[National Alliance to End Homelessness](#), 1518 K Street NW, Suite 410, Washington, DC 20005
(Tel) 202. 638.1526 , (Fax) 202.638.4664, naeh@naeh.org

[National Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#), P.O. Box 18749, Denver, CO, 80218-0749;
303/839-1852, Fax: 303/831-9251.

National Coalition for the Homeless, 2201 P St NW, Washington, DC 20037, 202.462.4822

[National Domestic Violence Hotline](#), 3616 Far West Boulevard, Suite 101-297, Austin, TX
78731-3074. Hotline numbers: 1-800-799-SAFE(7233), 1-800-787-3224 (TDD) .

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, 6400 Flank Dr., Suite 1300, Harrisburg, PA
17112-2778; 800/537-2238.

National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women, 125 S. 9th St., Suite 302,
Philadelphia, PA 19107-5116; 215/351-0010; Fax: 215/351-0779.

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