

Housing Assistance Underfunded but Critical for Survivors of Domestic Violence

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a National Survey policy brief from ICPH

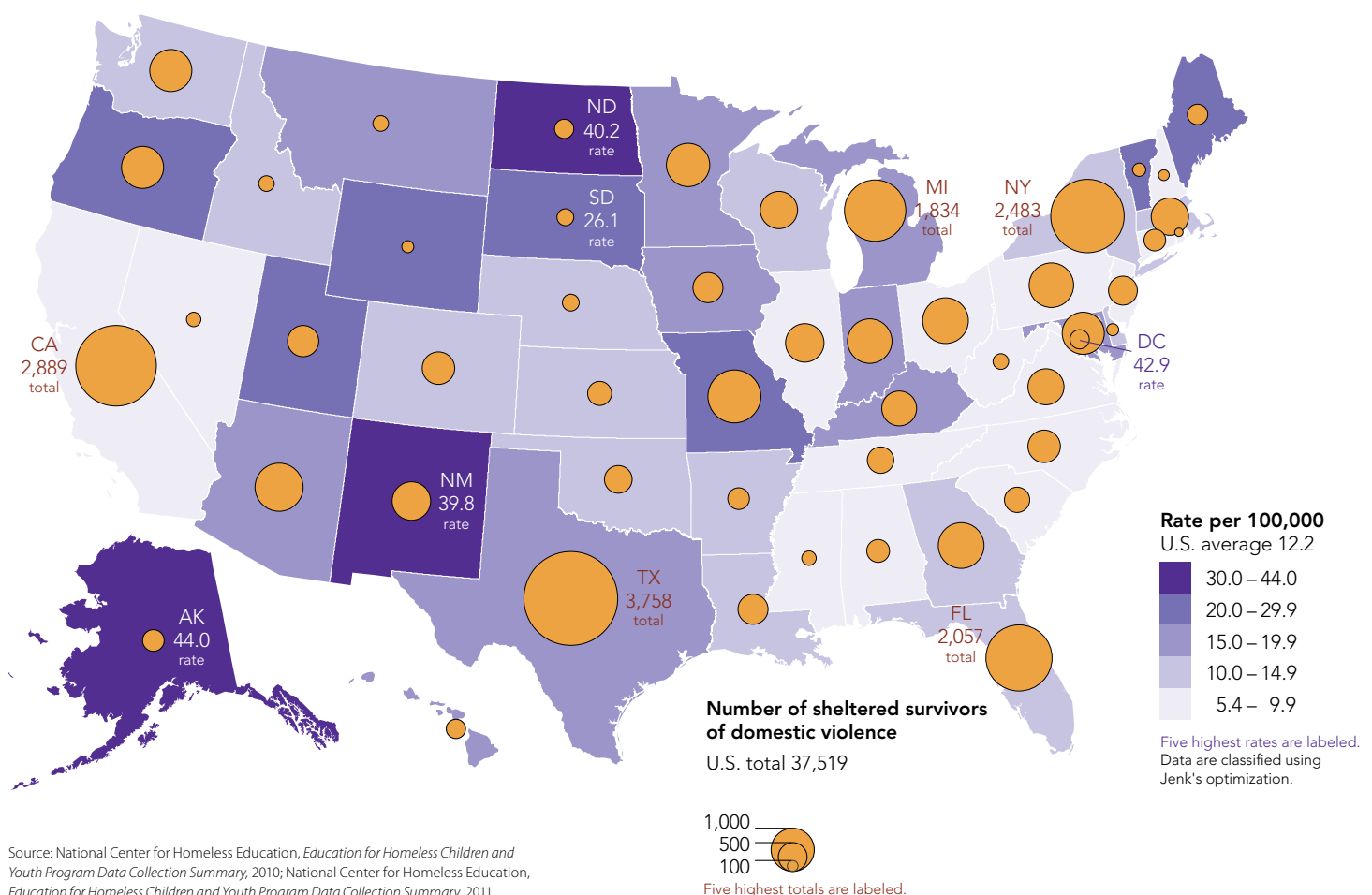
In honor of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and the homeless families affected by violence, ICPH's report highlights the importance of housing and supportive services for survivors.

Approximately 15.5 million children are exposed to domestic violence each year.¹ In 2010, 17,113 adults and 20,406 children escaping abuse were served in emergency domestic violence shelters and transitional housing throughout the country, with another 33,129 adults and children receiving non-residential

assistance.² Texas sheltered the most survivors (3,758) in 2010, while Alaska had the highest rate of survivors (44 per 100,000 persons [map 1]). These data likely represent an undercount, as only one-quarter to one-half of women who experience domestic violence report their abuse.³ Domestic violence has a devastating effect on women nationwide, but its prevalence among low-income and homeless women is especially high; approximately 91.6% of homeless mothers experience severe physical and/or sexual abuse during their lifetimes.⁴

Map 1

NUMBER AND RATE OF SHELTERED SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (2010)

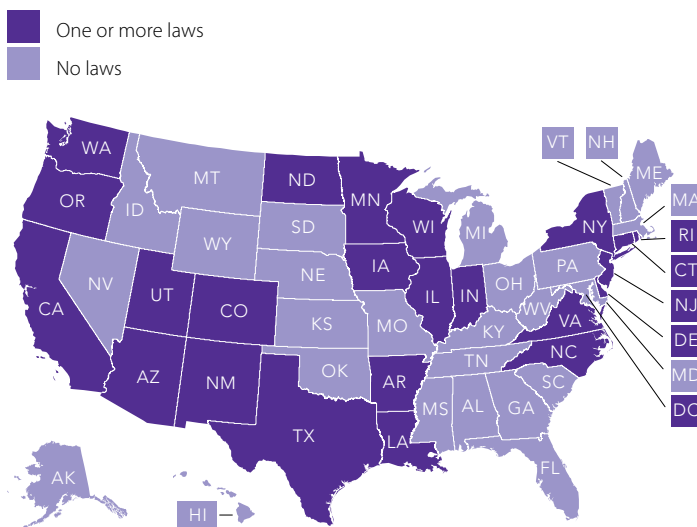


Women facing domestic violence experience high rates of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and physical health problems. These women are more likely to abuse alcohol and drugs (15 and 9 times, respectively) than women who have not suffered from violence.⁵ Hospitalization and trauma recovery may necessitate leaves of absence from work, negatively impacting women's ability to support their families. Nationally, survivors lose nearly 8.0 million days of paid work due to violence each year. Physical assault and rape result in an average of \$4.1 billion in direct medical care and mental health bills and \$1.8 billion in indirect costs of lost productivity and present value of lifetime earnings.⁶

Abuse can have severe and long-lasting effects on children's well being. Children who grow up in households where domestic violence is prevalent are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, attempt suicide, and have mental health problems. These children often experience violence themselves. Men who witnessed and experienced abuse as children are almost four times more likely to perpetrate violence as adults. Women who experienced childhood physical or sexual abuse are three times more likely to be victimized as adults.⁷

Map 2

STATES WITH LAWS AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOUSING DISCRIMINATION



Note: Laws against domestic violence housing discrimination include, but are not limited to, defense against eviction; restrictions on the ability of public housing agencies to terminate tenancies or the requirement that they assist tenants who are forced to leave their housing; prohibition to waive tenant's right to call law enforcement; requirement of landlords to release tenants from rental agreements; prohibit landlords from rejecting potential tenants based on their status as victims of domestic violence; or the ability to change locks for victims of domestic violence.

Source: Legal Momentum, *State Law Guide: Housing Protections for Victims of Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence and Stalking*, January 2010.

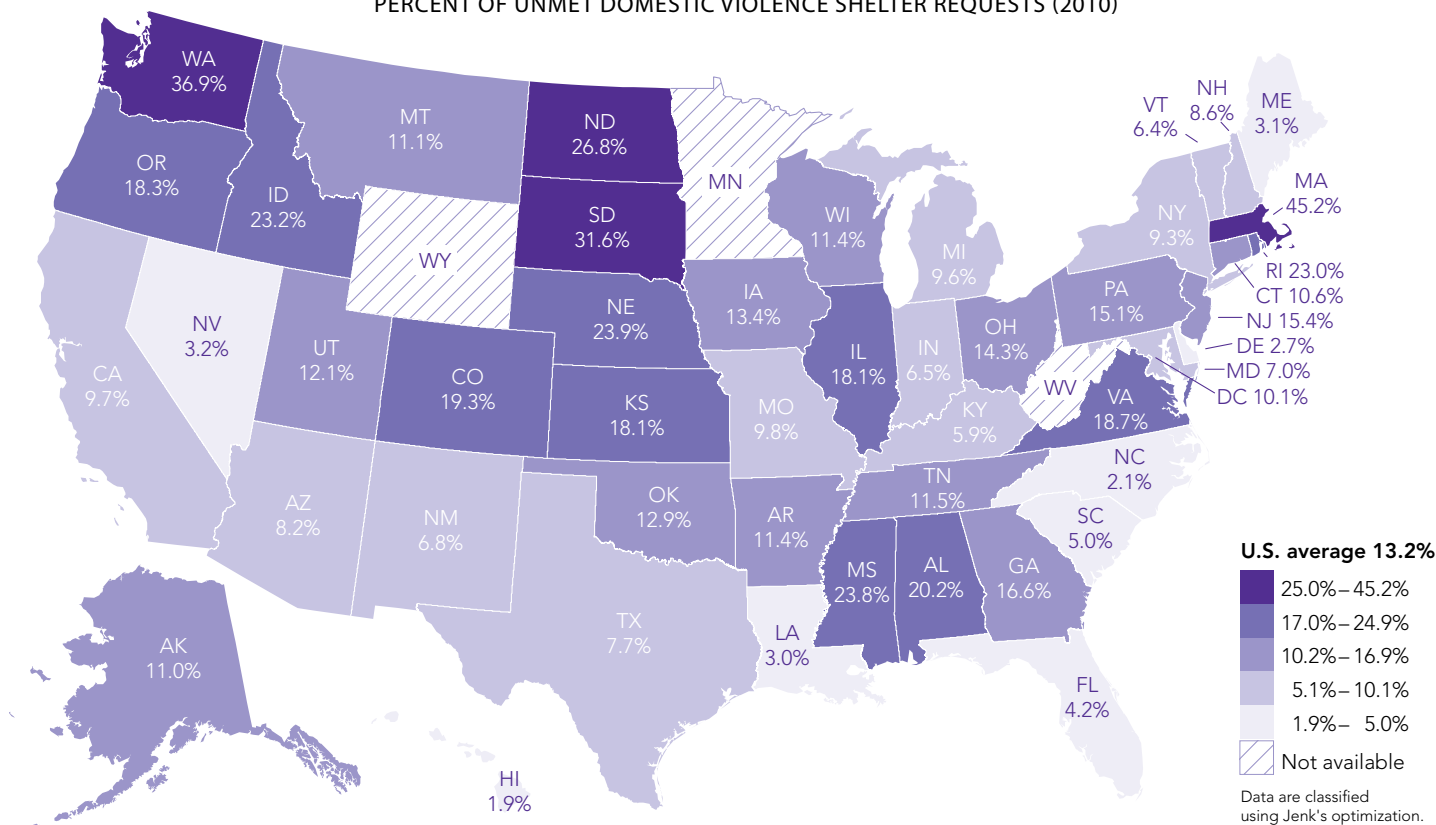
Abused women are often cut off from social and financial supports by their abusers, leaving them with few alternative housing options. A Minnesota study revealed that one in three women listed domestic violence as a primary reason for their homelessness. Almost half (47.7%) of homeless women in Minnesota reported staying in abusive relationships because they had nowhere else to go.⁸ Because battered women usually attempt to leave their abusers several times before successfully escaping, their children may experience multiple episodes of homelessness.

Women are less likely to report their abuse when they fear eviction. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's "one-strike" policy formerly allowed federally subsidized housing providers to evict families for crimes or disturbances committed in the residence, regardless of cause or circumstance. One study revealed that 11.1% of public and private housing evictions are based solely on women's histories as survivors of domestic violence. Discrimination also prevents survivors from obtaining housing.⁹ Over one-quarter (27.5%) of New York City housing providers with vacancies either refused to rent or failed to follow up upon learning that the tenant was a survivor of violence.¹⁰ The 2005 reauthorization of the federal Violence Against Women Act of 1994 added legal protection against eviction and discrimination to survivors living in public housing and using Section 8 rental vouchers, but enforcement has proved challenging. More than half (27) of states lack any laws explicitly guaranteeing survivors freedom from housing discrimination (map 2).¹¹

Eighty-three percent (82.5%) of housing and supportive service providers nationwide noted an increase in the demand for domestic violence services in 2010, despite 77.4% of programs reporting reduced funding. In 2010, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided temporary stimulus funds for 854 local domestic violence programs. However, one in eight (13.2% or 5,686) women and children seeking assistance were not provided shelter in the same year (map 3). Massachusetts had both the highest percent (45.2%) and number (619) of clients turned away, while states that sheltered the greatest numbers of survivors—Texas (3,758), California (2,889), and New York (2,483)—reported relatively low rates of unmet needs (7.7%, 9.7%, 9.3%, respectively). One quarter (24.0%) of all programs cited lack of available beds or money for hotels as a barrier to serving families in need. Due to budget restrictions, some shelters have been forced to cut individual counseling and child care programs, which is detrimental to mothers with young children.¹² Domestic violence shelters are critical resources to help survivors escape their abusers and begin to rebuild their lives, yet remain underfunded.

Map 3

PERCENT OF UNMET DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SHELTER REQUESTS (2010)

Source: National Network to End Domestic Violence, *Domestic Violence Counts 2010*.

Endnotes

- ¹ National Network to End Domestic Violence, *Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Fact Sheet*, 2010.
- ² National Network to End Domestic Violence, *Domestic Violence Counts 2010: A 24-hour Census of Domestic Violence Shelters and Services*.
- ³ U.S. Department of Justice, *Problem-oriented Guides for Police Problem-specific Guides Series No. 45: Domestic Violence*, January 2007.
- ⁴ Ellen Bassuk, et al., "The Characteristics and Needs of Sheltered Homeless and Low-income Housed Mothers," *The Journal of the American Medical Association* 276, no. 8 (1996): 640–646.
- ⁵ National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, *Domestic Violence and Substance Abuse*.
- ⁶ National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, *Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States*, March 2003.
- ⁷ National Network to End Domestic Violence, *Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Fact Sheet*, 2010; Sujata Desai, et al., "Childhood Victimization and Subsequent Adult Revictimization Assessed in a Nationally Representative Sample of Women and Men," *Violence and Victims* 17, no. 6 (2002): 639–653.
- ⁸ Wilder Research, 2009 *Homeless Adults and Children in Minnesota Statewide Survey: Physical and Sexual Abuse*, June 2010.
- ⁹ National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, *Lost Housing, Lost Safety: Survivors of Domestic Violence Experience Housing Denials and Evictions Across the Country*, February 2007.
- ¹⁰ Anti-Discrimination Center of Metro New York, *Adding Insult to Injury: Housing Discrimination Against Survivors of Domestic Violence*, August 2005.
- ¹¹ Legal Momentum, *State Law Guide: Housing Protections for Victims of Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence and Stalking*, January 2010.
- ¹² National Network to End Domestic Violence, *Domestic Violence Counts 2010*.

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The Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness (ICPH) is an independent nonprofit research organization based in New York City. ICPH studies the impact of poverty on family and child well-being

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and generates research that will enhance public policies and programs affecting poor or homeless children and their families. Specifically, ICPH examines the condition of extreme poverty in the United States and its effect on educational attainment, housing, employment, child welfare, domestic violence, and family wellness. Please visit our Web site for more information: www.ICPHusa.org.

The *National Survey of Programs and Services for Homeless Families* is an online resource for service providers, advocates, researchers, and public policy makers working in the field of family homelessness. The Web site provides a state-by-state snapshot of the interconnections between governmental and nonprofit work to end family homelessness. www.icprwb.org.



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