



Housing, Homelessness and Domestic Violence

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The link between domestic violence and homelessness is undeniable.

- Among cities surveyed, 44 percent identified domestic violence as a primary cause of homelessness.¹
- 92% of homeless women have experienced severe physical or sexual abuse at some point in their lives.² Of all homeless women and children, 60 percent have been abused by age 12, and 63 percent have been victims of intimate partner violence as adults.³

It is difficult for victims of domestic violence to attain stable housing, and advocates and survivors consistently report that housing issues are a major barrier for victims seeking to end abusive relationships

- The national “housing wage” – the amount a person working full-time must earn to afford a two-bedroom apartment while paying no more than thirty percent of income in rent – has climbed to \$15.21 an hour, almost three times the minimum wage.⁴
- 36,900,000 households in United States (31% of all households) lacked safe, decent, and affordable housing (as measured by the number of households living in substandard, or overcrowded conditions and paying housing costs in excess of 30% of household income) in 2001.⁵
- The average stay at an emergency shelter is 60 days, while the average length of time it takes a homeless family to secure housing is six to ten months.⁶ Many domestic violence shelters are unable to house families longer than 30 days to allow space for individuals in immediate danger.
- There are not enough federal housing rent vouchers available to accommodate the number of people in need. Some people remain on the waiting list for years, while some lists are closed.⁷
- As a result, women are staying longer in emergency shelters and the shelters are frequently full and must turn families away. Request for emergency shelter by homeless families with children increased in 88% of U.S. cities surveyed in 2003.⁸ In the same year, 30% of the requests for shelter by homeless families went unmet due to the lack of emergency shelter beds available.⁹
- Victims of domestic violence often return to their abusers because they cannot find long-term housing.¹⁰

Lack of availability is not the only barrier facing battered women in their search for housing.

- Women and families across the country are being discriminated against, denied access to, and even evicted from public, subsidized, and private housing because of their status as victims of domestic violence or the abuse perpetrated against them.¹¹ Landlords frequently turn away women who have protection orders or other indications of domestic violence.
- Landlords often threaten victims with penalties or evictions, or unfairly hold victims accountable for the behavior of their abusers. Consequently, victims express fear of calling law enforcement if they are in danger because they are concerned they will be evicted.¹² Some advocates advise women not to seek protection orders because it will place their housing in peril.

Helping families and individuals access and maintain transitional and permanent housing is an effective solution that allows victims of domestic violence to attain safety and self-sufficiency.

- Homeless individuals are more likely to sustain housing when given a permanent home. When afforded residential stability, homeless persons were considerably less likely to return to emergency shelter.¹³
- Transitional housing resources and services provide an essential continuum between emergency shelter provision and independent living.¹⁴ A majority of women in transitional housing programs stated that had these programs not existed, they would have likely gone back to their abusers.¹⁵

ENDNOTES

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- ¹ U.S. Conference of Mayors, *A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: A 25-City Survey*, December 2003.
- ² Browne, A. & Bassuk, S., "Intimate Violence in the Lives of Homeless and Poor Housed Women: Prevalence and Patterns in an Ethnically Diverse Sample," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 67(2) 261-278, April 1997; Browne, A., "Responding to the Needs of Low Income and Homeless Women Who are Survivors of Family Violence," *Journal of American Medical Association*, 53(2), 57-64. Spring 1998.
- ³ Browne, A. & Bassuk, S., "Intimate Violence in the Lives of Homeless and Poor Housed Women: Prevalence and Patterns in an Ethnically Diverse Sample," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 67(2) 261-278, April 1997; Browne, A., "Responding to the Needs of Low Income and Homeless Women Who are Survivors of Family Violence," *Journal of American Medical Association*, 53(2), 57-64. Spring 1998.
- ⁴ *Housing in America: Recent Research on Housing Trends*. Campaign for Housing and Community Development Funding. 2003.
- ⁵ *Housing in America: Recent Research on Housing Trends*. Campaign for Housing and Community Development Funding. 2003.
- ⁶ *Lifting the Voices of Homeless Women*, Roofless Women's Action Research Mobilization, Women's Institute for Housing and Economic Development, 1997.
- ⁷ Davies, J. & Hammeal-Urban, R. *Federal Housing and Domestic Violence: Introduction to Programs, Policy, and Advocacy Opportunities*, National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. 1999.
- ⁸ U.S. Conference of Mayors, *A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: A 25-City Survey*, December 2003.
- ⁹ The United States Conference of Mayors, *Sodexo Hunger and Homelessness Survey 2003*, December 2003.
- ¹⁰ Correia, A., *Housing and Battered Women: A case study of domestic violence programs in Iowa*. Harrisburg, PA: National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. March, 1999.
- ¹¹ National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. *Interviews with State Coalitions and Local Shelter Programs*. Spring 2003.
- ¹² Texas Council on Family Violence and National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Spring 2003.
- ¹³ See: Shinn, M., Weitzman, B. C., Stojanovic, D., Knickman, J. R. Jimenez, L. Duchon, L. and Krantz, D. H. (1998). Predictors of homelessness among families in New York City: From shelter request to housing stability. *American Journal of Public Health*, 88(11), 1651-1657; Friedman, D.H., Meschede, T. and Hayes, M. (2003). Surviving against the odds: Families' journeys off welfare and out of homelessness. *Cityscape: A journal of Policy Development and Research*, 6(2), 187-206; Culhane, D. P. (1992). The quandaries of shelter reform: An appraisal of efforts to "manage" homelessness. *Social Service Review*, 66, 428-440; Stretch, J. J. & Krueger, L. W. (1992). Five year cohort study of homeless families: A joint policy research venture. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, XIX(4), 73-88.
- ¹⁴ U.S. Conference of Mayors, *A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: A 25-City Survey*, December 2003.
- ¹⁵ Melbin, Anna, Chris Sullivan & Debra Cain. "Transitional Supportive Housing Programs: Battered Women's Perspectives and Recommendations" *AFFILIA*, Vol. 18 No. 4. 2003.