

Domestic Violence and Homelessness

NCH Fact Sheet #7

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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

When a woman leaves 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 or life on the streets. Moreover, shelters are frequently filled to capacity and must turn away battered women and their children. An estimated 29% of requests for shelter by homeless families were denied in 2006 due to lack of resources (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2006).

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AS A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR TO HOMELESSNESS

Many studies demonstrate the contribution of domestic violence to homelessness, particularly among families with children. 39% of cities cite domestic violence as the primary cause of family homelessness (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2007). Two years prior, that figure had been 50% (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2005). A 2003 survey of 100 homeless mothers in 10 locations around the country found that 25% of the women had been physically abused in the last year (American Civil Liberties Union, 2004). State and local studies also demonstrate the impact of domestic violence on homelessness:

In Minnesota, one in every three homeless women was homeless due to domestic violence in 2003. 46% of homeless women said that they had previously stayed in abusive relationships because they had nowhere else to go (American Civil Liberties Union, 2004).

In Missouri, 27% of the sheltered homeless population are victims of domestic violence (American Civil Liberties Union, 2004).

In San Diego, a survey done by San Diego's Regional Task Force on the Homeless found that 50% of homeless women are domestic violence victims (American Civil Liberties Union, 2004).

A recent study in Massachusetts reports that 92% of homeless women had experienced severe physical or sexual assault at some point in their life. 63% were victims of violence by an intimate partner. (NAEH Fact Checker, 2007)

POLICY ISSUES

Currently, victims of domestic abuse have unmet needs for both short and long-term housing. The National Network to End Domestic Violence reports that 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 states that have looked at domestic violence and welfare receipt, most report that approximately 50-60% of current recipients say that they have experienced violence from a current or former male partner (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 1997). 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.

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

[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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