Domestic Violence, Housing, and Homelessness

Domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women and their children. Many victims face homelessness when they flee abusive homes. Their experiences are confounded by economic instability, often perpetuated by abusers. Policy makers must work to ensure that safe, affordable housing is available to victims and must reduce the barriers victims face in securing and maintaining housing.

Statistics

- Between 22 and 57% of all homeless women report that domestic violence was the immediate cause of their homelessness.[i] Additionally, 38% of all victims of domestic violence become homeless at some point in their lives.[ii] A victim of domestic violence will often leave an abuser multiple times before finally escaping the violence, therefore, experiencing multiple periods of homelessness.[iii]
- Over 90% of homeless women have experienced severe physical or sexual abuse at some point in their lives, and 63% have been victims of intimate partner violence as adults.[iv]
- In a 2006 report by the U. S. Conference of Mayors, 44% of the cities surveyed identified domestic violence as the primary cause of homelessness.[v]
- Over 80% of survivors entering shelters identified "finding housing I can afford" as a need, second only to "safety for myself" (85%).[vi]

Contributing and Exacerbating Factors

- Abusers commonly sabotage a victim's economic stability, making victims more vulnerable to homelessness. Many victims and survivors of domestic violence have trouble finding rental properties because they may have poor credit, rental, and employment histories as a result of their abuse.[vii]
- In 2005, Congress found almost 150 "documented eviction cases in the previous year where the tenant was evicted because of the domestic violence crimes committed against her," and that nearly 100 persons were "denied housing because of their status as victims of domestic violence."[viii] Another study in 2008, found that 65% of the test applicants looking for housing on behalf of a domestic violence survivor, were either refused housing entirely, or were offered more unfavorable lease terms and conditions than a non-victim.[ix]
- The average stay at an emergency homeless shelter is 60 days, while the average length of time it takes a homeless family to secure housing is 6-10 months.[x]
- According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, for every 100 extremely low income (ELI) renter households, only 30 rental units are readily available and affordable.[xi]
- As long-term housing options become scarcer, victims are staying longer in emergency domestic violence shelters. As a result, shelters are frequently full and must turn families away.
- In FY '10, emergency domestic violence shelters were unable to meet 172,000 requests for shelter due to lack of capacity. The number of unmet requests for shelter has seen a steady increase since 2007 due to programs being at capacity.[xii]
- A multi-state study funded by NIJ indicated that, if emergency domestic violence shelters did not exist, the consequences for victims would be dire, including: "homelessness, serious losses including children [or] continued abuse or death." [xiii]

Needs and Policy Recommendations

- Avenues for economic stability (i.e. job protections, benefits, fair pay, child care, tax credits, individual development accounts);
- Confidentiality protections for survivors accessing housing/homelessness services and supports;
- Funding for safe, affordable housing and shelters; and
- Strong protections against discrimination in housing and policies that promote transfers to safe housing.

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[v] The United States Conference of Mayors. *1999. A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities*, p.39.

[vi] Eleanor Lyon and Shannon Lane, Meeting Survivor's Needs: A Multi-State Study of Domestic Violence Shelter Experiences, Feb 18, 2009.

[vii] Susan A. Reif and Lisa J. Krisher. 2000. "Subsidized Housing and the Unique Needs of Domestic Violence Victim." *Clearing House Review.* National Center on Poverty Law. Chicago, IL.

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[xi] National Low-Income Housing Coalition. *"Housing Spotlight: The Shrinking Supply of Affordable Housing. Vol 2, Issue 1. February 2012.*

[xii] Department of Health and Human Services; Administration for Children and Families; Administration on Children, Youth, and Families. Domestic Violence Services 2010; Family Violence Prevention and Services Act Grantees Data Report (2010).

[xiii] Lyon, E., & Lane, S. (2009). Meeting survivors' needs: A multi-state study of domestic violence shelter experiences. Harrisburg, PA: National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. Retrieved from http://www.vawnet.org.