



**National Coalition for the Homeless**

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## **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 the streets. Moreover, shelters are frequently filled to capacity and must turn away battered women and their children. An estimated 32% of requests for shelter by homeless families were denied in 2005 due to lack of resources (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2005).

### **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AS A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR TO HOMELESSNESS**

Many studies demonstrate the contribution of domestic violence to homelessness, particularly among families with children. A 1990 Ford Foundation study found that 50% of homeless women and children were fleeing abuse (Zorza, 1991). In 1998, a study of 777 homeless parents (the majority of whom were mothers) in ten U.S. cities, 22% said they had left their last place of residence because of domestic violence (Homes for the Homeless, 1998). 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). In addition, 50% of the 24 cities surveyed by the U.S. Conference of Mayors identified domestic violence as a primary cause of homelessness (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2005). 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).

- Shelter providers in Virginia report that 35% of their clients are homeless because of family violence (Virginia Coalition for the Homeless, 1995). This same survey found that more than 2,000 women seeking shelter from domestic violence facilities were turned away.

## **POLICY ISSUES**

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 thus 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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Homes for the Homeless. Ten Cities 1997-1998: A Snapshot of Family Homelessness Across America. Available from [Homes for the Homeless](#) & the Institute for Children and Poverty, 36 Cooper Square, 6th Floor, New York, NY 10003; 212/529-5252.

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Mullins, Gretchen. "The Battered Woman and Homelessness," in Journal of Law and Policy, 3 (1994) 1:237-255. Entire issue available for \$30.00 from William S. Hein & Co., Inc., 1285 Main St., Buffalo, NY 14209; 800/828-7571.

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U.S. Conference of Mayors. A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: 2005. Available for \$15.00 from the U.S. Conference of Mayors, 1620 Eye St., NW, 4th Floor, Washington, DC, 20006-4005, 202/293-7330.

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