

# NATIONAL LAW CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY

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## **Some Facts on Homelessness, Housing, and Violence Against Women**

Domestic and sexual violence are leading causes of homelessness nationally, especially for women. In varying regions around the country, significant percentages of homeless women report that domestic violence was the immediate cause of their homelessness. Up to 100% of homeless women have experienced domestic or sexual violence at some point in their lives. Some survivors and their families become homeless when they flee abuse. Others become homeless upon being denied alternate housing or after being wrongfully or discriminatorily evicted from their current housing as a result of the violence against them.

Understanding the connections between homelessness, housing, and violence against women is important in order to identify solutions to homelessness for survivors and their families. NLCHP works as the legal arm of the movement to prevent and end homelessness in the U.S., including by working explicitly to improve access to housing for survivors of violence against women and their families. Additional information about NLCHP's Domestic Violence Program is available online at

<http://www.nlchp.org/program.cfm?prog=3>

### **A significant majority of homeless women have experienced domestic or sexual violence at some point in their lives, depending on the region and type of study.**

- A study of homeless and low-income women in Worcester, Massachusetts, found that 63% of these women had experienced some form of severe physical violence by their current or most recent partner.<sup>1</sup>
- The same Massachusetts study found that 92% of women interviewed had experienced severe physical violence or sexual assault at some point in their lives.<sup>2</sup>
- A survey conducted in ten locations around the U.S. in 2003 found that almost all of the 100 participating homeless mothers had experienced or witnessed domestic violence during their lifetimes.<sup>3</sup>
- In a study from Chicago, Illinois, 56% of women in shelters revealed that they had experienced domestic violence, and 36% stated that they had experienced physical or sexual abuse in their homes as a child.<sup>4</sup>
- In Minnesota, 45% of women reported being physically abused as a child, and 42% had been sexually abused as a child.<sup>5</sup>
- Almost 50% of homeless women in San Diego, California, reported being victims of domestic violence.<sup>6</sup>
- Approximately 50% of families in the city's mainstream homeless shelter system in Washington, D.C., have experienced domestic violence.<sup>7</sup>

- Over 1,300 homeless individuals surveyed in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area in 2005 reported being victims of domestic violence, or about 12% of individuals surveyed.<sup>8</sup>
- In Los Angeles, California, 34% of homeless family members reported being victims of domestic violence.<sup>9</sup>
- In Kentucky, Tennessee, and the Carolinas, 60% of homeless parents living in shelters with their children reported experiencing domestic violence for a 2000 study.<sup>10</sup>
- According to a 1999 report, 47% of homeless school-aged children and 29% of homeless children under five have witnessed domestic violence in their families.<sup>11</sup>
- In a 1997 study conducted among homeless women who had been diagnosed with major mental illness, 50% of the women surveyed reported histories of child physical abuse, child sexual abuse, adult physical abuse, and adult sexual abuse.<sup>12</sup>

**Violence against women is a principal cause of women's homelessness. Between 22% and 57% of homeless women report that domestic or sexual violence was the immediate cause of their homelessness, depending on the region and type of study.**

- A comprehensive study released in 2005 found that one out of every four homeless women is homeless because of violence committed against her.<sup>13</sup>
- A survey conducted in ten locations around the U.S. in 2003 found that 25 out of 100 homeless mothers had been physically abused within the last year.<sup>14</sup> The cities were: Albuquerque, New Mexico; Los Angeles, California; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Pueblo, Colorado; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; New Orleans, Louisiana; Springfield, Massachusetts; Phoenix, Arizona; and Seattle, Washington.
- In Chicago, Illinois, shelters, 22% of homeless women reported being homeless as a result of domestic or sexual violence.<sup>15</sup>
- In Minnesota, 27% of homeless women in the Twin Cities area reported that domestic violence was the immediate cause of their homelessness in 2003; in greater Minnesota, 39%.<sup>16</sup>
- In Fargo, North Dakota, and Moorhead, Minnesota, one in five homeless women in 2004 reported fleeing abuse as one of the main reasons for leaving their last housing.<sup>17</sup>
- A 2004 study in Los Angeles, California, showed that 34.3% of homeless women had experienced domestic violence during the past year. Of these homeless women, 57.8% reported becoming homeless as a direct result of fleeing the domestic violence.<sup>18</sup>
- In Massachusetts in 2005, 57% of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) victims of domestic violence reported becoming homeless as a result of the domestic violence.<sup>19</sup>
- In New York City in 2002, almost half of all homeless parents had experienced domestic violence; 25% of all homeless parents were homeless as a direct result of the abuse.<sup>20</sup>

- A 1997 survey found that 22% of homeless parents in ten cities around the U.S. left their last residence because of domestic violence.<sup>21</sup>
- In New York, 25% of homeless heads of households reported being homeless because of domestic violence.<sup>22</sup>
- In a 2001 study of homeless youth, 61% of homeless girls and 19% of homeless boys reported having been sexually abused before leaving home.<sup>23</sup>
- In 1995, 35% of homeless persons in Virginia shelters reported being homeless because of family violence.<sup>24</sup>
- According to a 1990 study, 50% of all homeless women and children are fleeing abuse.<sup>25</sup>
- In 2005, 50% of U.S. cities surveyed reported that domestic violence was “a primary cause of homelessness” – overall – in their cities. These cities were: Burlington, Vermont; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Charleston, South Carolina; Chicago, Illinois; Los Angeles, California; Nashville, Tennessee; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; St. Paul, Minnesota; Salt Lake City, Utah; San Antonio, Texas; Seattle, Washington; and Trenton, New Jersey.<sup>26</sup>
- According to a 2005 survey, domestic violence is one of the top five factors contributing to homelessness – overall – in Iowa.<sup>27</sup>
- In 2001, 27% of homeless individuals in Missouri shelters were survivors of domestic violence, making domestic violence a leading cause of homelessness in the state.<sup>28</sup>
- In 1995, a survey of homeless adults in Michigan found that a leading cause of homelessness was physical abuse.<sup>29</sup>

**Women-headed households are disproportionately represented among homeless families, among residents of subsidized housing, and in court eviction proceedings.**

- Little or no national data is available that disaggregates national housing trends by sex or gender.<sup>30</sup>
- Over 85% of homeless families are headed by women – specifically, by single women with children.<sup>31</sup>
- In Washington, D.C., families account for 43% of the city’s homeless population. Single-parent families comprise 93% of that figure. Single women without children represent 15% of the city’s homeless population.<sup>32</sup>
- National data collected in 1996 indicated that women constituted 61% of homeless individuals who never had been homeless in the past.<sup>33</sup>
- Fully 79% of households receiving federal housing assistance are headed by women.<sup>34</sup>
- Households that are headed by women constitute 84% of the households receiving assistance through the federal Housing Choice Voucher Program (tenant-based Section 8 assistance).<sup>35</sup>

- In 100% of 331 metropolitan areas surveyed for a 2005 national fair lending study, “subprime” lenders (with higher-than-average interest rates) significantly outpaced “prime” lenders in their rates of mortgage loans to women borrowers.<sup>36</sup>
- A 2006 study based on federal data confirms that women, and especially women of color, are more likely than men to receive subprime mortgages. This disparity holds true across subprime loans for home purchase, refinance, and home improvement.<sup>37</sup>
- The majority of tenants in Baltimore, Maryland, who face eviction have been found to be low-income women of color with limited economic resources.<sup>38</sup>
- Research has found that 70% of tenants facing eviction in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, were women of color, and that 83% of the same tenants were persons of color.<sup>39</sup>
- One study found that in Los Angeles, California, households that were headed by African-American women with children faced higher eviction rates than others.<sup>40</sup>
- A 2004 national report found that women living in disadvantaged neighborhoods were more than twice as likely to be the victims of intimate violence compared with women living in more advantaged neighborhoods.<sup>41</sup>

**Inadequate housing and shelter options, evictions, discrimination, poverty, and other factors contribute to the crisis. Furthermore, many women remain in an abusive relationship because of these barriers.**

- A 2005 survey in New York City found that 27.5% of housing providers who had a vacancy either flatly refused to rent, or failed to follow up as promised, after they learned that a domestic violence survivor would be residing in the apartment.<sup>42</sup>
- A 2005 survey of 76 legal and social services providers around the country found that 28% of all housing denials handled by these advocates, and 11% of all evictions, resulted from domestic violence against the tenant.<sup>43</sup>
- In 1987, 31% of domestic violence victims in New York City returned to their abuser after leaving because they did not have access to long-term housing.<sup>44</sup>
- In 1984, New York City shelters turned away 59% of domestic violence victims and their children because of insufficient space.<sup>45</sup>
- In 2003, 44% of homeless women in Fargo, North Dakota, reported that they had previously stayed in abusive relationships because they had nowhere else to go; in Minnesota, 46%.<sup>46</sup>
- A manager of a confidential domestic violence shelter in Los Angeles, California, reported for a 1991 article that 85% of their clients returned to abusive relationships because of a lack of housing and employment.<sup>47</sup>

For more information, please contact NLCHP’s Domestic Violence Staff Attorney, Kathy Zeisel, at [kzeisel@nlchp.org](mailto:kzeisel@nlchp.org) or 202-638-2535 or visit our website at [www.nlchp.org](http://www.nlchp.org).

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- <sup>1</sup> Ellen Bassuk, M.D., National Center on Family Homelessness, *Written Submission to the U.N. Regional Consultation on Women and the Right to Adequate Housing in North America 2* (October 15, 2005) (on file with NLCHP) (citing E.L. Bassuk et al., *The Characteristics and Needs of Sheltered Homeless and Low-Income Housed Mothers*, 276 J. AM. MED. ASS'N 640-46 (1996)).
- <sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 2.
- <sup>3</sup> National Center on Family Homelessness & Health Care for the Homeless Clinician's Network, *Social Supports for Homeless Mothers* 14, 26 (2003).
- <sup>4</sup> Rebekah Levin et al., Center for Impact Research, *Pathways to and from Homelessness: Women and Children in Chicago Shelters 2* (2004).
- <sup>5</sup> Wilder Research Center, *Homeless in Minnesota 2003 22* (2004).
- <sup>6</sup> San Diego Regional Task Force on Homelessness, *Domestic Violence and Homelessness*, available at <http://www.co.san-diego.ca.us/rtfh/victims.html> .
- <sup>7</sup> Coalition of Housing and Homeless Organizations, *Homelessness in Washington, D.C.* 3 (2004) (citing Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness, *FY 2002 Continuum of Care Inventory: Public and Private Homeless Services in the District* (2002)).
- <sup>8</sup> Homeless Services Planning and Coordinating Committee, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, *Homeless Enumeration for the Washington Metropolitan Region* 19 (2005) (Figure 8).
- <sup>9</sup> Institute for the Study on Homelessness and Poverty at the Weingart Center, *Homelessness in Los Angeles: A Summary of Recent Research* 18 (2004) (citing Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, *2001 Los Angeles Continuum of Care, Exhibit Narrative*).
- <sup>10</sup> Homes for the Homeless, *The Other America: Homeless Families in the Shadow of the New Economy, Family Homelessness in Kentucky, Tennessee, and the Carolinas* 3 (2000).
- <sup>11</sup> Homes for the Homeless & Institute for Children and Poverty, *Homeless in America: A Children's Story, Part One* 23 (1998).
- <sup>12</sup> Lisa A. Goodman et al., *The Relationship between Dimensions of Violent Victimization and Symptom Severity among Episodically Homeless, Mentally Ill Women*, 10 J. TRAUMATIC STRESS 59 (1997).
- <sup>13</sup> Jana L. Jasinski et al., *The Experience of Violence in the Lives of Homeless Women: A Research Report 2*, 65 (2005) (Univ. Cent. Fla., submitted to National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice).
- <sup>14</sup> National Center of Family Homelessness & Health Care for the Homeless Clinician's Network, *Social Supports for Homeless Mothers* 14, 26 (2003).
- <sup>15</sup> Rebekah Levin et al., Center for Impact Research, *Pathways to and from Homelessness: Women and Children in Chicago Shelters 2* (2004).
- <sup>16</sup> Wilder Research Center, *Homeless in Minnesota 2003 22* (2004).
- <sup>17</sup> Wilder Research Center, *Homeless Adults and Their Children in Fargo, North Dakota, and Moorhead, Minnesota: Regional Survey of Persons Without Permanent Shelter 4* (2004).
- <sup>18</sup> Downtown Women's Action Coalition, Los Angeles, Cal., *Many Struggles, Few Options: Findings & Recommendations from the 2004 Downtown Women's Needs Assessment* 3, 26 (2005).
- <sup>19</sup> GLBT Domestic Violence Coalition & Jane Doe Inc., *Shelter/Housing Needs of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Victims of Domestic Violence: Analysis of Public Hearing Testimony, Massachusetts State House (October 27, 2005)* at 6.

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- <sup>20</sup> Institute for Children and Poverty, *The Hidden Migration: Why New York City Shelters Are Overflowing with Families* (2002).
- <sup>21</sup> Homes for the Homeless & Institute for Children and Poverty, *Ten Cities 1997-1998: A Snapshot of Family Homelessness Across America* 3 (1998).
- <sup>22</sup> Institute for Children and Poverty, *The Hidden Migration: Why New York City Shelters Are Overflowing with Families* (2002).
- <sup>23</sup> Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, *Fact Sheet: The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Homeless Youth*. 1 (citing Richard J. Estes & Neil Alan Weiner, *Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the U.S., Canada and Mexico*, Univ. Pa. (2001) (unpublished)).
- <sup>24</sup> National Coalition for the Homeless, *Domestic Violence and Homelessness: Fact Sheet #8* (1999) (citing Virginia Coalition for the Homeless, *Shelter Provider Survey* (1995) (out of print)).
- <sup>25</sup> Joan Zorza, *Woman Battering: A Major Cause of Homelessness*, 25 CLEARINGHOUSE REV. 420 (1991) (citing Elizabeth M. Schneider, *Legal Reform Efforts to Assist Battered Women: Past, Present, and Future* 7 (ed. Ford Foundation 1990) (out of print)).
- <sup>26</sup> U.S. Conference of Mayors & Sodexho, Inc., *Hunger and Homelessness Survey: A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities* 64 (2005).
- <sup>27</sup> Iowa Council on Homelessness, *2005 Iowa Statewide Homeless Survey* 29 (2006) (Table 5.2).
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- <sup>29</sup> National Coalition for the Homeless, *Domestic Violence and Homelessness: Fact Sheet #8* (1999) (citing Richard Douglass, *The State of Homelessness in Michigan: A Research Study* (1995) (out of print)).
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- <sup>31</sup> Ellen Bassuk, M.D., National Center on Family Homelessness, *Written Submission to the U.N. Regional Consultation on Women and the Right to Adequate Housing in North America* 1 (October 15, 2005) (on file with NLCHP) (citing E.L. Bassuk et al., *The Characteristics and Needs of Sheltered Homeless and Low-Income Housed Mothers*, 276 J. AM. MEDICAL ASSOC. 640-46 (1996)).
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- <sup>33</sup> Martha Burt et al., *HELPING AMERICA'S HOMELESS: EMERGENCY SHELTER OR AFFORDABLE HOUSING?* 225 (2001) (Table 8.1).
- <sup>34</sup> National Alliance of HUD Tenants, *Written Submission to the U.N. Regional Consultation on Women and the Right to Adequate Housing in North America* 2 (October 15, 2005) (on file with NLCHP).
- <sup>35</sup> *Id.*
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- <sup>37</sup> Allen J. Fishbein & Patrick Woodall, *Women Are Prime Targets for Subprime Lending: Women Are Disproportionately Represented in High-Cost Mortgage Market* (ed. Consumer Federation of America 2006).
- <sup>38</sup> Chester Hartman & David Robinson, *Evictions: The Hidden Housing Problem*, 14 HOUS. POLICY DEBATE 461, 467 (2003) (citing Barbara Bezdek, *Silence in the Court: Participation and Subordination of Poor Tenants' Voices in Legal Process*, 20 HOFSTRA L. REV. 533 (1992)).

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<sup>39</sup> Chester Hartman & David Robinson, *Evictions: The Hidden Housing Problem*, 14 HOUS. POLICY DEBATE 461, 467 (2003) (citing David L. Eldridge, *The Making of a Courtroom: Landlord-Tenant Trials in Philadelphia's Municipal Court*, Univ. Pa. Sch. Soc. Work (2001) (unpublished)).

<sup>40</sup> Chester Hartman & David Robinson, *Evictions: The Hidden Housing Problem*, 14 HOUS. POLICY DEBATE 461, 467 (2003) (citing Allan David Heskin & Kevin A. Davidson, *Residential Evictions in the City of Los Angeles (first half of 1991): Ethnicity and Gender*, Univ. Cal. Los Angeles, Graduate Sch. Architecture & Urban Planning (1993) (unpublished)).

<sup>41</sup> Michael L. Benson & Greer Litton Fox, U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, *When Violence Hits Home: How Economics and Neighborhood Play a Role* 1 (2004).

<sup>42</sup> Anti-Discrimination Center of Metro New York, *Center Study Finds Significant Incidence of Discrimination Against Survivors of Domestic Violence* 2 (2005).

<sup>43</sup> National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty & National Network to End Domestic Violence, *Lost Housing, Lost Safety: Survivors of Domestic Violence Experience Housing Denials and Evictions across the Country* (2006). Examples include evictions when the victim called the police, the victim had obtained a civil protection order from the court, or the abuser engaged in criminal activity, property damage, or creating a nuisance in violation of a lease.

<sup>44</sup> Joan Zorza, *Woman Battering: A Major Cause of Homelessness*, 25 CLEARINGHOUSE REV. 421 (1991).

<sup>45</sup> Maria Arias, *Lack of Housing for Domestic Violence Victims*, N.Y.L.J., July 26, 1988, at 3.

<sup>46</sup> Wilder Research Center, *Homeless in Minnesota 2003* 22, 38 (2004).

<sup>47</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*, 43 STAN. L. REV. 1241, 1246 n.13 (1991).