

Domestic Violence: A Primary Path to Homelessness

Ellen L. Bassuk, M.D.

&

Dawn Jahn Moses, M.P.A.



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Family Homelessness

for every child, a chance

Women As Property

- **Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act (1753)**
 - Marriage laws = Property laws
 - Wife, her money, and children belonged to husband in perpetuity
- **Divorce impossible**
- **Rule of Thumb (1782)**
- **Rape in marriage not a crime**

Power, Control, Coercion

Domestic Violence:

“A pattern of behavior used by one intimate partner or spouse to **control** the other. A domestic violence abuser may be physically violent, and may also use coercion, threats, intimidation, or isolation to control the victim.” (1)

Intimate Partner Violence:

“Any behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological, or sexual harm to those in relationship. Such behavior includes: acts of physical aggression, psychological abuse, forced intercourse, and other forms of sexual coercion and various controlling behaviors.” (2)

Domestic Violence

- **Overall prevalence rates:**
 - 22.1% physically assaulted over lifetime
 - 1.3% physically assaulted in prior 12 months
 - 4.5 million victimizations annually
 - 2 million injuries annually
 - 1,300 deaths annually

National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. *Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States*) Atlanta (GA): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention); 2003

Domestic Violence: Women Living in Poverty

- **Women with annual incomes below \$10,000 are four times more likely to be violently attacked ⁽¹⁾**
- **Greatest risk of severe assaults from intimates**
- **For welfare recipients, lifetime rates were 65% and current rates were 20% ⁽²⁾**
- **Perpetrator more likely to be unemployed men**

1: Kaplan, A. (1997) Domestic violence and welfare reform. Welfare Information Network: Issues Notes: 1-9, p. 395. 2: Allard, M.A. (1997). In Harm's Way? Domestic Violence, AFDC Receipt, and Welfare Reform in Massachusetts. Boston: University of Massachusetts. Boston.

Domestic Violence and Homeless Mothers

- **During childhood**
 - 66%: severe physical violence
 - 43%: sexually molested
- **During adulthood**
 - 63%: violence by intimate partner ⁽¹⁾
 - 32% current or most recent partner was physically abusive ⁽²⁾
 - 25%: physical or sexual assaults by non-intimates
- **Lifetime**
 - 92%: severe physical and/or sexual assaults

1: Bassuk, E.L, Weinreb, L., Buckner, J., et al. (1996) The Characteristics and Needs of Sheltered Homeless and Low-Income Housed Mothers. JAMA, 276: 640-646.

2: Browne, A., & Bassuk, S (1997) Intimate Violence in the Lives of Homeless and Poor Housed Women: Prevalence and Patterns in an Ethnically Diverse Sample. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, Vol. 67, no 2

Homeless Mothers and Domestic Violence

- **Health**

- 27% needed or received medical treatment as a result of abuse ⁽¹⁾
- 60% higher rates of health problems than women with no abuse history ⁽²⁾
- Longer and more severe the abuse, the greater cumulative effect on health ⁽³⁾

1: Bassuk, E.L., Weinreb, L., Buckner, J., et al. (1996) The Characteristics and Needs of Sheltered Homeless and Low-Income Housed Mothers. *JAMA* 276: 640-646.2: Campbell J, Jones, AS, Dienemann J, (2002) et al. Intimate partner violence and physical health consequences. *Archives of Internal Medicine*; 162:1157-63. 3: Leserman, J., Drossman, D.A., Li, Z., Toomey, T.C. et al. (1996) Sexual and physical abuse history in gastroenterology practice: How types of abuse impact health status. *Psychosomatic Medicine* 58: 4-15

Homeless Mothers and Domestic Violence

- **Social**
 - Isolated by their partners from family and friends
 - Kept from obtaining needed services

Heise L, Garcia Moreno, C. (2002) Violence by intimate partners. World Report on Violence and Health. Geneva: World Health Organization.

Homeless Mothers and Domestic Violence

- **Psychological**
 - Three times the rate of PTSD (36%)
 - Twice the rate of drug and alcohol dependence (41%)
 - Twice the rate of major depressive disorders

Bassuk, E.L., Weinreb, L., Buckner, J., et al. (1996) The Characteristics and Needs of Sheltered Homeless and Low-Income Housed Mothers. JAMA 276: 640-646.

Homeless Children and Domestic Violence

- **3 to 10 million children exposed to DV annually**
- **Behavioral and emotional problems**
 - Increased externalizing and internalizing behaviors
 - Lower social competence
 - Increased anxiety, depression and post trauma symptoms
- **Cognitive functioning may be impaired**
- **Cycle of violence perpetuated**

Relationship Between Domestic Violence and Homelessness

- **Complex and multi-faceted**
- **44% of cities surveyed reported domestic violence as a main cause of homelessness**
- **For many families, domestic violence significantly contribute to homelessness, but not immediately**

Domestic Violence: A Primary Path to Homelessness

- **For those fleeing abuse:**
 - Access to resources limited
 - Lack of decent, affordable housing
 - Few tangible social supports
 - Limited enforcement of child support and alimony payments
- **Eviction from public housing for any violent activity**

Domestic Violence: A Contributing Factor in Homelessness

- **Contribution of domestic violence may be elusive**
- **Impact of trauma can limit a woman's ability to:**
 - Pursue and complete education and job training opportunities
 - Obtain and maintain employment
 - Build healthy, trusting relationships

Domestic Violence and Repeated Homeless Episodes

- **Childhood Risk Factors**
 - Childhood sexual abuse
 - Foster care placement
 - Institutional placement
 - Running away

- **Adult Risk Factors**
 - Psychiatric diagnoses
 - Domestic Violence

Bassuk, EL, Perloff, J, Dawson, R. (2001) Multiply Homeless Families: The Insidious Impact of Violence. *Housing Policy Debate* 12:299-320.

Domestic Violence and Repeated Homeless Episodes

- **Domestic Violence**
 - Decreased likelihood of receiving a housing subsidy
 - Greater likelihood of recidivism among sheltered mothers who returned to a violent relationship after being rehoused

Where Do Survivors Go?

- **Arbitrary distinctions between homeless and DV shelters**
- **Choice of shelters determined by timing; eligibility criteria, and bed availability**
- **Eligibility criteria vary**
- **Services uneven**
- **Lengths of stay may be limited**

Homelessness and Trauma

- **Path to homelessness is traumatic**
- **Homelessness itself is traumatic**
 - Traumatic losses
 - Abrupt family separations
 - Catastrophic illness
 - Violence and victimization

What Can Homeless Programs Do?

- **Ensure safety**
- **Become trauma-sensitive and trauma-informed**
- **Screen for trauma**
- **Respond to caregivers and children and a unit**
- **Provide access to trauma-specific services**
- **Educate and build community partnerships**

Ensure Safety

- **Ensure safety of physical environment**
- **Assess current risk**
- **Assist with legal protections**
- **Protect privacy**
- **Build trusting relationships**

Become Trauma-Informed

- **Train staff**
- **Avoid retraumatization**
- **Maximize choice and control**
- **Minimize power differentials**
- **Maintain clear and consistent boundaries**
- **Deliver services in a non-judgmental and respectful manner**

Screen for Trauma

- **Caregivers and children**
- **Comprehensive assessment**
- **Confidential**
- **Flexible process**

Respond to Caregivers and Children as a Family

- **Mother's response most important factor in determining child outcomes**
- **Children's needs must be considered**
- **Respond to mother and child as a dyad**

Provide Linkages to Trauma-Specific Services

- Individual therapy
- Group work
- Family counseling

Educate and Build Community Partnerships

- **Cross training**
- **Cross referral**
- **Information and other resource sharing**
- **Public education and advocacy**

Domestic Violence: A Pathway to Homelessness

As expressed so well by Shamita Das Dasgupta, "We have a word for creatures who have no voice, no voice that they cannot speak a language understandable to us. It is abola. So those who are not allowed to speak, by their husbands or by institutions or because of violence, are abola" (Pence, 1997), Dutton, 20002, p. 155.