

NATIONAL LAW CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY

SOME FACTS ON HOMELESSNESS, HOUSING, AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women is a leading cause of homelessness. Some domestic violence survivors, particularly those with limited resources, become homeless after fleeing an abusive relationship or after being evicted for reasons related to the abuse such as police involvement or property damage.

Statistics show that domestic violence survivors are discriminated against in finding new housing, and a lack of affordable housing and housing assistance further limits the options available to these women.

Understanding the connections between homelessness and violence against women is important to identify solutions to homelessness for domestic violence survivors and their families.

The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (NLCHP) works as the legal arm of the movement to prevent and end homelessness in the U.S. An important part of this movement is working to improve access to housing for survivors of violence against women and their families.

For more information about NLCHP's Domestic Violence Program, go to http://www.nlchp.org/FA_DV/index.cfm or call 202-638-2535.

A clear link exists between homelessness and a history of domestic violence.

Nearly 25% of all U.S. women have experienced domestic violence in their lifetimes,¹ but homeless women have experienced domestic violence at even greater rates.²

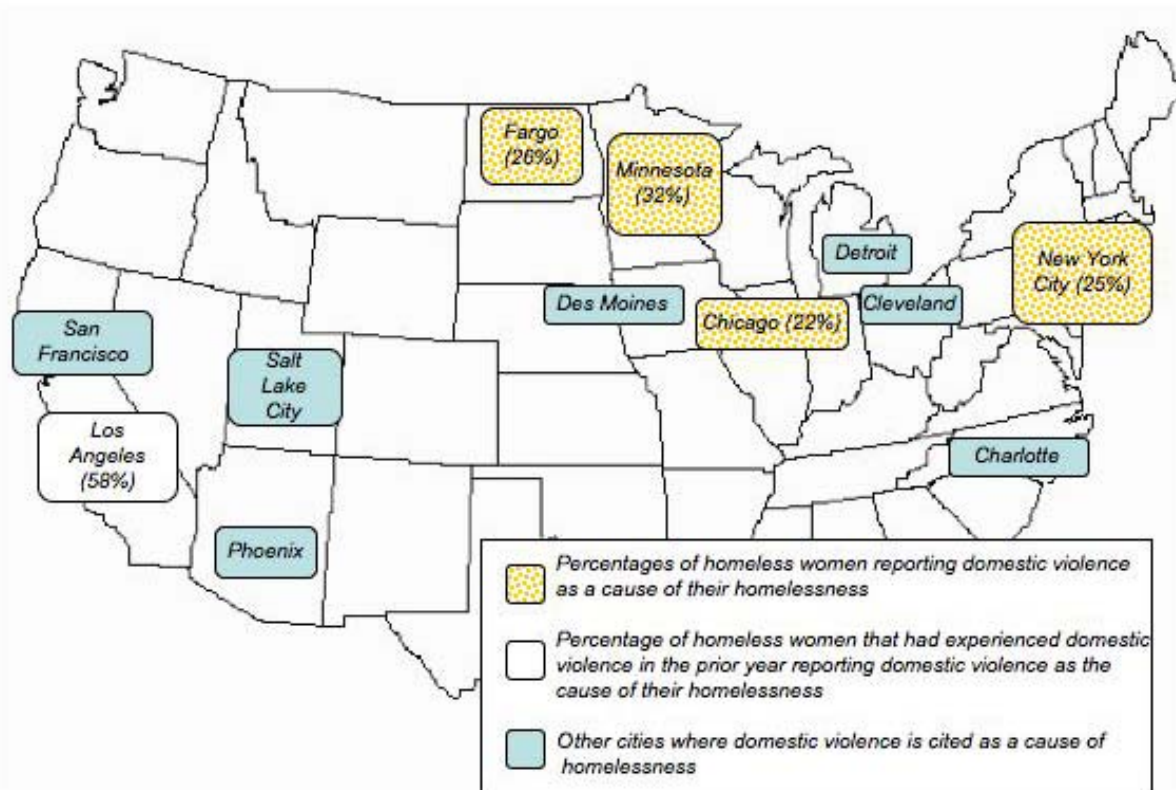
- 35% of homeless mothers in a 2003 study of 10 U.S. cities reported being physically abused as children, and 40% reported being sexually abused as children.³
- 56% of homeless women in a 2003 Chicago study reported being victims of domestic violence, and 36% reported physical or sexual abuse as children.⁴

- 44% of homeless women in a 2006 Minnesota study reported being physically abused as children, and 40% reported being sexually abused as children.⁵
- A study of homeless women in Los Angeles in 2007 showed that 70% had experienced domestic violence, sexual assault and/or child abuse during their lifetimes.⁶
- 65% of homeless parents living in shelters in Kentucky, Tennessee, and the Carolinas in 2000 reported experiencing domestic violence.⁷
- In New York City in 2002, almost 50% of all homeless heads of household had experienced domestic violence.⁸

Violence against women is one of the primary causes of homelessness.

About 20% of homeless women report domestic violence or abuse as a reason for their homelessness,⁹ and 39% of 23 U.S. cities surveyed in 2007 reported that domestic violence was a primary cause of homelessness.¹⁰

- About 50% of persons in families in the Washington, D.C. shelter system in 2002 were estimated to have experienced domestic violence.¹¹
- For 22% of homeless women surveyed in Chicago in 2003, domestic violence was the immediate cause of homelessness.¹²
- 32% of homeless women surveyed in Minnesota in 2006 were homeless at least in part due to domestic abuse.¹³
- About 58% of the homeless women in a 2004 Los Angeles study who had experienced domestic violence in the past year reported becoming homeless as a direct result of fleeing the abuse.¹⁴
- For 26% of homeless women interviewed in Fargo, North Dakota in 2006, one of the main reasons for leaving their last housing was to flee abuse.¹⁵
- Domestic violence is one of the top 5 factors contributing to homelessness in Iowa according to a 2005 statewide survey.¹⁶
- In New York City in 2002, 25% of all homeless heads of household cited domestic violence as the direct cause of homelessness.¹⁷



Poor women, already vulnerable to homelessness, are at particularly high risk for domestic violence, as are single mothers.

- Women in socio-economically disadvantaged neighborhoods experience intimate violence at twice the rate, and are more likely to be abused repeatedly or to experience severe violence, as compared to women in more advantaged neighborhoods.¹⁸
- Women in households with the lowest incomes experience intimate partner violence at greater rates than women with higher household incomes.¹⁹
- Over 85% of homeless families in the United States are headed by single women with children.²⁰ 93% of Washington, D.C.'s homeless families in 2003 were single-parent families.²¹

Discriminatory evictions against domestic violence victims increase their risk of homelessness.

- Studies in several U.S. cities have shown that minority women face particularly high eviction rates.²²

Domestic violence victims are subjected to other discriminatory housing practices, limiting their alternative housing options.

- 65% of Washington, DC housing providers tested by the Equal Rights Center illegally denied housing to a survivor by refusing to rent, by refusing appointments or by failing to offer incentives that were available to other prospective tenants.²³
- 27.5% of New York City housing providers, in a 2005 investigation, either refused to rent to, or failed to follow up with, an applicant for housing after learning that the applicant was survivor of domestic violence.²⁴

Alternative housing options are further limited by shortages in affordable housing and housing assistance.

- The U.S. has a shortage of affordable housing, *i.e.*, housing that costs no more than 30 percent of the annual income of a household.²⁵ It has been reported that demand exceeds supply by 4.5 million people.²⁶
- 7,707 requests for domestic violence services from 1346 providers went unmet on a single day in 2007, 61% of which were for housing. On the same day, there were over 25,000 requests for emergency shelter from survivors.²⁷
- 52% of cities surveyed in 2007 reported turning away homeless persons from shelters due to lack of resources.²⁸ 87% of the cities stated that lack of affordable housing was a cause of homelessness.²⁹
- Often long waiting lists exist for housing assistance in the form of HUD Section 8 vouchers³⁰—which subsidize the cost of privately-owned rental units— or HUD public housing units.³¹ A 2004 27-city survey reported that the average wait for Section 8 vouchers is 35 months, and the wait for public housing is 20 months.³²

A lack of suitable alternative housing can cause domestic violence victims to remain with or to return to their abusers.

- 46% of homeless women in a 2006 study in Fargo, North Dakota reported that they had stayed in abusive relationships in the past because they had no other housing options.³³
- 45% of homeless women surveyed in a 2006 statewide study of homelessness in Minnesota reported that they had stayed in abusive relationships because they had no other housing options.³⁴

¹ Patricia Tjaden & Nancy Thoennes, U.S. Dept. of Justice National Institute of Justice, *Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence* iii (2000), available at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/pubs-sum/181867.htm> (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

² Many survivors are not counted in the official homeless counts because they live doubled-up or in unsafe housing, and so do not meet the federal definition of homelessness even though they lack safe and affordable housing. Estimates of the number of homeless in the United States are scarce, and vary at any given time because of the frequently temporary nature of homelessness. National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, *Homelessness in the United States and the Human Right to Housing* 7 (2004), available at http://www.nlchp.org/view_report.cfm?id=123 (accessed Sept. 28, 2008). According to an Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress, there were an estimated 334,744 sheltered homeless persons in the United States on an average day between February 1 and April 30, 2005. The United States Conference of Mayors – Sodexho, *Hunger and Homelessness Survey* 11 (2007) (citing U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *The Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress* 22 (2007)), available at <http://www.usmayors.org/publications/> (accessed Sept. 28, 2008). Estimates show that about 65% of adult members of homeless households with children are females, and about 32.5% of single homeless people are females. The United States Conference of Mayors – Sodexho, *Hunger and Homelessness Survey* 15 (2007), available at <http://www.usmayors.org/publications/> (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

³ National Center on Family Homelessness & Health Care for the Homeless Clinician’s Network, *Social Supports for Homeless Mothers* 14 (2003), available at http://www.familyhomelessness.org/resources_pubs.php, (accessed Sept. 28, 2008). Participants were from Albuquerque, New Mexico; Los Angeles, California; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Pueblo, Colorado; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; New Orleans, Louisiana; Springfield, Massachusetts; Phoenix, Arizona; and Seattle, Washington.

⁴ Rebekah Levin et al., Center for Impact Research, *Pathways to and from Homelessness: Women and Children in Chicago Shelters* 9 (2004), available at http://www.issuelab.org/organizations/center_for_impact_research (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

⁵ Wilder Research Center, *Overview of Homelessness in Minnesota 2006* 17 (2007), available at http://www.wilder.org/reports.0.html?&no_cache=1 (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

⁶ Downtown Women's Action Coalition, *Growing Need & Shrinking Opportunities: Findings and Recommendations from the 2007 Downtown Women's Needs Assessment 2* (2008), available at <http://www.dwcweb.org/womenhomeless/dwac.htm> (accessed Sept. 28, 2008). This is compared to a 2004 report showing that 59% of homeless women in Los Angeles reported being victims of domestic violence during their lifetime, and the reported rate among homeless families in Los Angeles was 34%. Institute for the Study on Homelessness and Poverty at the Weingart Center, *Homelessness in Los Angeles: A Summary of Recent Research 18* (2004), available at <http://www.bringlahome.org/reports.htm> (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

⁷ 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), available at <http://www.icpny.org/index.asp?CID=4&PID=84> (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

⁸ The Institute for Children and Poverty, *The Hidden Migration: Why New York City Shelters Are Overflowing With Families* (2002), available at <http://www.icpny.org/index.asp?CID=4&PID=83> (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

⁹ Jana L. Jasinski, et al., U.S. Dept. of Justice National Institute of Justice, *The Experience of Violence in the Lives of Homeless Women: A Research Report 2*, 65 (2005), available at <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/211976.pdf> (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

¹⁰ The United States Conference of Mayors – Sodexo, *Hunger and Homelessness Survey 64* (2007), available at <http://www.usmayors.org/publications/> (accessed Sept. 28, 2008). The cities were Boston; Charleston, South Carolina; Charlotte, North Carolina; Chicago; Cleveland; Denver; Des Moines; Detroit; Kansas City, Missouri; Los Angeles; Louisville, Kentucky; Miami; Nashville; Philadelphia; Phoenix; Portland, Oregon; Providence, Rhode Island; Salt Lake City; San Francisco; Santa Monica; Seattle; St. Paul, Minnesota; and Trenton, New Jersey.

¹¹ 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)), available at www.some.org/docs/COHHO/_facts.pdf (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

¹² Rebekah Levin et al., Center for Impact Research, *Pathways to and from Homelessness: Women and Children in Chicago Shelters 3* (2004), available at http://www.issuelab.org/organizations/center_for_impact_research (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

¹³ Wilder Research Center, *Overview of Homelessness in Minnesota 2006 16* (2007), available at http://www.wilder.org/reports.0.html?&no_cache=1 (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

¹⁴ Downtown Women's Action Coalition, *Many Struggles, Few Options: Findings & Recommendations from the 2004 Downtown Women's Needs Assessment 3*, 26 (2005), available at <http://www.dwcweb.org/womenhomeless/dwac.htm> (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

¹⁵ Wilder Research Center, *Homeless Adults and their Children in Fargo, North Dakota and Moorhead, Minnesota: Regional Survey of Persons without Permanent Shelter 4* (2007), available at http://www.wilder.org/reports.0.html?&no_cache=1 (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

¹⁶ Iowa Council on Homelessness, *2005 Iowa Statewide Homeless Survey 29* (2006) (Table 5.2), available at <http://www.iowapolicyproject.org/EconomicOpportunity.html> (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

¹⁷ The Institute for Children and Poverty, *The Hidden Migration: Why New York City Shelters Are Overflowing With Families* (2002), available at <http://www.icpny.org/index.asp?CID=4&PID=83> (accessed Sept. 28, 2008). For more on domestic violence as a cause of homelessness, see Joan Zorza, Woman Battering: A Major Cause of Homelessness, 25 CLEARINGHOUSE REV. 420 (1991).

¹⁸ Michael L. Benson & Greer Litton Fox, U.S. Dept. of Justice National Institute of Justice, *When Violence Hits Home: How Economics and Neighborhood Play a Role* 1-3 (2004), available at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/pubs-sum/205004.htm> (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

¹⁹ *Id.* at 2. See also Callie Marie Rennison & Sarah Welchans, U.S. Dept. of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Intimate Partner Violence* 4 (2000), available at <http://www.ncjrs.gov/app/Publications/Abstract.aspx?ID=178247> (accessed Sept. 28, 2008). See also Angela Browne & Shari S. Bassuk, Intimate Violence in the Lives of Homeless and Poor Housed Women: Prevalence and Patterns in an Ethnically Diverse Sample, 67 AM. J. OF ORTHOPSYCHIATRY 261, 263 (1997).

²⁰ 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)).

²¹ The United States Conference of Mayors – Sodexo, *A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: A 25-City Survey* 79 (2003), available at <http://www.usmayors.org/publications/> (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

²² Chester Hartman & David Robinson, Evictions: The Hidden Housing Problem, 14 HOUSING POL'Y DEBATE 461, 467 (2003), available at <http://www.saje.net/atf/cf/%7B493B2790-DD4E-4ED0-8F4E-C78E8F3A7561%7D/Evictions.pdf> (accessed Sept. 29, 2008).

²³ Equal Rights Center, *No Vacancy: Housing Discrimination Against Survivors of Domestic Violence in the District of Columbia* (2008), available at: <http://www.equalrightscenter.org/publications/novacancy.php> (accessed Oct. 2, 2008).

²⁴ Anti-Discrimination Center of Metro New York, Inc., *Adding Insult to Injury: Housing Discrimination Against Survivors of Domestic Violence* 2 (2005), available at <http://antibiaslaw.com/DVReport.pdf> (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

²⁵ U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, "Affordable Housing" (2008), available at <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/affordablehousing/index.cfm> (accessed Sept. 28, 2008). See also Anne Menard, Domestic Violence and Housing, 7 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN 707, 709-710 (2001).

²⁶ National Coalition for the Homeless, *Homeless Families with Children: NCH Fact Sheet #12* (2008), available at <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts/families.html> (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

²⁷ National Network to End Domestic Violence, *Domestic Violence Counts 07: A 24-hour census of domestic violence shelters and programs across the United States* (2007), available at: http://nnev.org/docs/Census/DVCounts2007/DVCounts07_Report_BW.pdf (accessed Oct. 2, 2008).

²⁸ The United States Conference of Mayors – Sodexo, *Hunger and Homelessness Survey* 64 (2007), available at <http://www.usmayors.org/publications/> 17 (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

²⁹ *Id.* at 12.

³⁰ U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, "Housing Choice Vouchers Fact Sheet," available at http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/hcv/about/fact_sheet.cfm (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

³¹ U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, "HUD's Public Housing Program" (2007), available at <http://www.hud.gov/renting/phprog.cfm> (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

³² The United States Conference of Mayors – Sodexo USA, *Hunger and Homelessness Survey* 5 (2004), available at <http://www.usmayors.org/publications/> (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

³³ Wilder Research Center, *Homeless Adults and their Children in Fargo, North Dakota and Moorhead, Minnesota 2006: Regional Survey of Persons without Permanent Shelter 4* (2007), available at [http://www.wilder.org/reportssummary.0.html?&no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[swords\]=homeless%20adults%20and%20their%20children%20in%20fargo&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=1996&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=311&cHash=7094188e14](http://www.wilder.org/reportssummary.0.html?&no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[swords]=homeless%20adults%20and%20their%20children%20in%20fargo&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=1996&tx_ttnews[backPid]=311&cHash=7094188e14) (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).

³⁴ Wilder Research Center, *Overview of Homelessness in Minnesota 2006 16* (2007), available at [http://www.wilder.org/reportssummary.0.html?&no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[swords\]=overview%20of%20homelessness%20in%20minnesota%202006&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=1963&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=311&cHash=98d2316169](http://www.wilder.org/reportssummary.0.html?&no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[swords]=overview%20of%20homelessness%20in%20minnesota%202006&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=1963&tx_ttnews[backPid]=311&cHash=98d2316169) (accessed Sept. 28, 2008).