



The Link Between Domestic Violence and Homelessness

By Elise Powers

The popular narrative of homelessness spins that homeless people are simply lazy. In the eyes of the mainstream press, the archetypal homeless person is simply a failure, someone who lacked the talent or motivation to make anything of themselves and are now reaping the rewards. Putting aside the obvious dark implications of this fallacy—do people deserve to go without shelter simply due to a lack of talent?—this dominant narrative ignores the multitude of *other* reasons why people might end up homeless: a lack of a support system, disownment by relatives, mental illness discrimination, and domestic violence.

Domestic violence is an often under looked cause of homelessness; though it seems obvious: of *course* women leaving their homes to escape an abusive partner would likely find themselves with nowhere to go. Yet sadly, it remains a glossed-over part of the homelessness experience even today. Fully 80% of single mothers with children are estimated to be escaping an abusive spouse, and over 230,00 children currently living in homeless shelters are escaping from an abusive parent. In the year 2014 alone, over 196,000 people fleeing domestic abuse

were heartbreakingly turned away from shelters because these shelters were at full capacity. Clearly, domestic violence is one of the biggest drivers for homelessness, especially among women and children, that we have today.

What is behind this big drive? For one, many women who escape a domestic violence situation find themselves forced to choose between either staying and continuing to endure the abuse or leaving without a shelter to go to. A common tactic of abusive partners is to cut off their spouse's other relationships, rendering the victim unable to seek help from friends or relatives. In addition to this tactic, many abusers *also* work to systematically dismantle their victim's sense of self-worth, leading victims to commonly *not* seek help when it is possible to do so. In addition, many women fleeing domestic violence have children with them, and that factor alone makes it more difficult to find housing: each child means another bed taken up, after all, making shelters more likely to turn large families away.

There are more insidious reasons for this correlation, as well. Women who report on domestic violence are sometimes evicted for reporting it, and many landlords and rental services often discriminate against women who are survivors of domestic violence. In addition, many women who are victims of domestic violence have little savings of their own, as abusive partners sometimes prevent their spouse from working outside the home and frequently also control what little money they do earn.

Additionally, there is compelling evidence that domestic violence actually changes the brain itself. Survivors often report with symptoms of PTSD, which can include anxiety, loss of sleep, depression or a sense of psychological "numbness", and flashbacks—all of which, suffice to say, will inhibit performance at work, possibly leading to unpaid bills and eviction.

In conclusion, domestic violence is one of the largest driving factors of homelessness, especially homelessness of women and children, today. It is a critical component in homelessness, and a major facet of the struggles of survivors.

Citations

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