



Survivors Hidden Among the Homeless

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National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-7233

Put yourself in a victim's shoes: your partner is an alcoholic who's easily angered, when they drink, they tend to take out their emotions on you by means of hitting and punching, they may throw and break things against the walls or the floor, they seem to apologize for their actions the next day, but you know last night's events will be repeated. Your partner instills fear in you through violence and manipulation. Now imagine this with a child by your side. So many good memories may have been had with this partner, but you can no longer put yourself -nor your child- in danger.

This and like experiences to this are exactly what drive many people to homelessness. With no family or friends to run to, no place to call a home, and likely few funds to support an far-away trip, thousands of parents and partners are forced from their abusive households into shelters and onto the streets daily.

Sometimes what you see on TV really is true. You may have seen a TV show on Netflix called *Maid* and, if you're like me, you found it difficult to watch. The main character is a mother who is attempting to escape her abusive partner and get their daughter, Maddy, to safety. Through this process she is faced with the harshness of homelessness, unemployment, and the jarring judicial system that does not lean her way in a custody case. This work of realistic fiction is sadly more realistic than anyone could imagine it being.

Just like in the show, many women leave their homes to escape brutality, yet are then left with nowhere to go. Most landlords have a “zero tolerance for crime” policy that therefore excludes these victims from being able to find a place to live -and without a place to live it is difficult to find a place to work and vice versa. According to ACESDV, mental health issues arise in domestic violence victims such as anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and depression. Many people don’t seek help for these problems, and when someone is mentally ill *and* homeless, they face a number of obstacles that usually end up making their health worse rather than better.

To zoom into the lens of homelessness, over half of the homeless parent and children populations left their last residence due to domestic abuse and violence. Many people decide not to come forward about domestic violence so this number may be higher than is reported. In one homeless shelter in Missouri, 27 percent of people were domestic violence survivors. Imagining that nearly one-third of the homeless population are people fleeing their homes as a result from domestic abuse is horribly astonishing.

There is the STOP Violence Against Women Act that states and programs became eligible for in 1994 which provides training and funds to aid in situations regarding domestic abuse and violence, which is helpful but it is not helpful enough. There should be a widespread understanding of the assistance that domestic violence survivors need after they escape their abusive residence. These people -generally women and children- are likely to feel utterly alone and helpless or may be suffering from the mental disturbances previously described. They should not be disallowed to rent a place because of their being involved in a crime (especially as a victim); they should not have to be turned away from shelters because of lack of funding; and they should never have to go homeless because their abusive past partners have scared them away from their own home.

Donate time or money to shelters that care for survivors, reach out to people you suspect may be in a dangerous situation, and always lend a hand to those in-need.

Works Cited:

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