



Homelessness Through Domestic Abuse

By Preston Saunders

Everyone has their own idea of what being homeless means. To many, unemployment and poverty are the most prevalent issues and the leading causes of homelessness. Another reason for homelessness is domestic abuse and partner violence, an issue that women have dealt with for centuries but that is often obscured from the public eye. However, we don't see the same amount of consideration for spousal abuse when creating policies for women, who make up 25 to 30% of the homeless population in America. Not only is the issue of abuse swept under the rug or ignored, which drives women out of their homes, but women are not cared for after they become homeless and lack support systems to bolster their health and independence.

Only 1 in 10 cases of domestic violence are ever reported to the police. That is a shocking number. The current statistic is determined by multiple factors: manipulation of the victim by their abuser, a victim's fear of both the abuser and the police, and the lack of living arrangements outside of the one provided for them by an abuser. Law enforcement and social workers are not thorough in checking the background of suspects, often disregarding reports and claims as exaggerated. Not only do many police and social workers receive inadequate training around domestic abuse, family conflicts are treated as a private matter by police and thus removes the possibility of outside help for individuals in controlled home environments. This allows the number of cases to escalate in severity. Around 40 to 50% of homeless women became so as a result of physical abuse, psychological abuse, or general conflict with a spouse or sexual partner.

Women that go to court typically receive protection orders, but there is still a gap in enforcement. Abusers also have power over victims due to land ownership, the ability to remove the victim from their property, and have advantages in gaining sole custody of children. Therefore, women have few options and choose to become homeless in order to escape their respective situations, or to save their children from similar abuse.

After becoming homeless, women have very few resources to support themselves. Mothers with children are the most rapidly growing homeless population, and are also the group with fewest social support systems. Current shelters and crisis centers are severely lacking in funding and volunteers. Many programs for battered women, due to limited spots and resources, turn away victims and are unfairly criticized for it. The government and law enforcement are at fault for not prioritizing areas of spending that support human rights programs and stopping abuse in its preliminary stages. Without money to create private spaces for residents and feed them all regularly, as well as maintain a staff of therapists and mental health professionals, it is impossible to keep running a shelter and keep all of its residents in good conditions. Domestic abuse is a difficult problem to solve unless the systems that are already in place have stricter policies requiring reform. Believing victims, providing them accessible resources, and training law enforcement to properly deal with situations of abuse is key to diminishing the problem of homelessness among vulnerable groups of women.

References

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