An Attack on Women: The Intersection of Violence and Homelessness

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Disclaimer

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Presenters

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Learning Objectives

Participants will be able to...

• Describe past research to understand violence against women experiencing homelessness.

• Describe programs providing clinical services to address violence against women experiencing homelessness.

• List recommendations for caring and working with women experiencing homelessness.
Your Role

In addressing the intersection of...

Homelessness...
Violence... and
Women...

In addition to clinical services...
  • Research
  • Policy

Recommendation: Champion consumer voices
Violence and Homelessness

Estimate prevalence of violence victimization 14%-21%

• Council’s study 50%
• Witnessing violence 30%
• Compared to the general population

• Sub-populations of homelessness

• Consequences

Recommendation: Community partnerships!
Formation of NCAB (National Consumer Advisory Board)

- NCAB formed in 2003
- Currently and Formerly Homeless Clients of HCH Programs
- 3 Original Steering Committee Members
- Present NCAB Steering Committee
History of Consumer Participation Outreach Surveys (CPOs)

• Contract with Paul Boden for Outreach Training

• Previous CPOs

• Violence CPO-Violence Study

• Current CPO
Violence Study

• San Francisco Meeting

• Development of Survey Questions

• Development of Consent Form

• Development of Local Community Resources
Violence Study

Participating Sites
1. Detroit
2. Ft. Lauderdale
3. Nashville
4. Houston
5. Worcester

• Application to IRB
  • Nashville Metro Health Department
NCAB’s Role on Study

- Review of All Research Materials
- Involving Local CAB Members
- Interviews
  - Participation Criteria
    1. 18 Years or Older
    2. Formerly or Currently Homeless
    3. Used Service at HCH Program
My Role on Study

• Chair of NCAB
• CITI Certification
• Co-Investigator
Analysis and Dissemination

• Research Committee
  • Molly Meinbresse
  • Darlene Jenkins

• Vanderbilt
  • Lauren Brinkley-Rubenstein

• Dissemination to Sites
  • Site Specific Data
Written Article

• Article Written By Council Staff
  • Review and Comments From NCAB

• Submission to Academic Journal
  • Journal of Violence and Victims (2014)

• Authors
  • Molly Meinbresse, MPH
  • Lauren Brinkley-Rubenstein, MA, MS
  • Amy Grassette
  • Joseph Benson
  • Carol Hall
  • Reginald O. Hamilton
  • Marianne Malott
  • Darlene Jenkins, DrPH, MPH, CHES
Study Results

• Half of participants reported being the victim of a violent attack while homeless.

• Those who have been homeless for a longer time and are older in age were most likely to experience violence.

• Women are more likely to experience rape.

• Rape by a stranger; rather than someone they know, is more prevalent among homeless women.
Recommendations

• Homeless health care providers to increase screening for experiences of violence during primary care visits.
• Provide victimization prevention programs.
• Increased outreach to patients less likely to access primary care.
• Screening for trauma and using trauma-informed approaches.
• Increased access to STD and pregnancy tests for women who are victims of sexual assault.
• Agencies who provide services to women should provide wrap-around, comprehensive services that can help prevent; and if necessary, identify and treat sexual assault and the long-term suffering associated with victimization.
DWC Programs & Services

DWC is nationally recognized as a prototype for unique and effective programs serving homeless women and ending homelessness. DWC serves over 3000 women every year.

DROP-IN DAY CENTER
- Services: Meals, showers, phones & mail
- Trauma Recovery Center

CLINICAL HEALTH SERVICES
- Case management, mental health & medical services

HOUSING
- 119 units of permanent supportive housing
- Community Based Housing for survivors of Domestic Violence, Veterans, and utilizers of County Health Services

PERSONAL & FINANCIAL OPPORTUNITY
- Education, skill development, on-the-job training & transitional jobs
- Competitive job placement
2018 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count

Total of homeless women in LA CoC: 31% (15,565)
  • Sheltered Women: 5,546
  • Unsheltered Women: 10,019

People who Experienced Domestic Violence: 30% (13,560)
  • Sheltered Individuals: 1,593
  • Unsheltered Individuals: 11,967

People who were Homeless due to Fleeing Domestic Violence: 6% (2,801)
  • Sheltered Individuals: 394
  • Unsheltered Individuals: 2,407

https://www.lahsa.org/homeless-count/
Report demonstrates multitude of ways trauma impacts women experiencing homelessness
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The persistently high rate of intimate partner violence is one of the most distinguishing differences between women and men experiencing homelessness.

- 39.4% are survivors of sexual assault
- 55.0% are survivors of domestic abuse
- 67.5% are survivors of child abuse
- 90.8% have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.

Solutions:
Prioritizing Trauma-Informed Care training for service providers, implementing “Safety Zones,” and advocating for more single-gender housing and shelters are all part of DWAC’s commitment to women’s safety in Skid Row.
RACE & ETHNICITY

Demographic data shows women in Skid Row are far more likely to be older and African-American than women in LA County, suggesting these groups experience homelessness and extreme poverty at disproportionately high levels.

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SOLUTIONS: We need for culturally competent services that target older women and the impact of institutionalized racism as a factor causing homelessness.

DOWNTOWN WOMEN'S ACTION COALITION | DOWNTOWNWOMENSCENTER.ORG/NEEDASSESSMENT
COMMUNITY PROFILE: CRISTINA ALVAREZ
DOWNTOWN WOMEN'S CENTER PARTICIPANT

After my brother attacked me, I couldn't afford to live in Los Angeles. I wanted to work and save money, but I couldn't. I had no way to get help, so I ended up sleeping in the streets. I stayed with a family member, who was staying in her car, and I had to go to the hospital. She helped me, and I had to leave. Despite being a young woman, I had to watch my safety. I was afraid to go home, but I had no choice but to stay in the streets. Now, I have a place to live, and I'm happy. It's the first time I've had a roof over my head.

I think that we need to have a resource center in downtown Los Angeles. We've been living in the streets for so long, and it's hard to find a place to stay. We need to have a resource center that can help us find a place to live, and we need to have a place to go when we need help. I think that we need to have a resource center in downtown Los Angeles. It's the first time I've had a roof over my head.

SAFETY IN SHELTERS AND ON THE STREETS

Unfortunately, women who reported sleeping most frequently in shelters or on the street were more likely to experience violence than women who slept most frequently in permanent housing. Of women who reported sleeping most frequently in a shelter or on the street, 40.3% had experienced sexual or physical violence in the last year, compared with 22.2% of women who slept most frequently in permanent housing. As outlined in the housing section of this report, many women said they faced unsafe shelters and high rates of violence. Women who reported sleeping most frequently in the streets faced more violence: 40.3% had experienced domestic violence, and 22.2% had experienced sexual assault within the last 10 months.

EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN

This year's survey results show that the women surveyed were susceptible to exploitation and, in some cases, felt pressured to exchange sex for basic needs. Of women surveyed, 35% reported being forced to engage in sex for money, alcohol, or drugs, shelter, food, or other goods. There was a breakdown in the women's ability to negotiate terms, and 31% reported being forced to exchange sex for food or shelter. Men who forced women to exchange sex for food or shelter were more likely to be under the influence of substances. Women who reported being forced to exchange sex for food or shelter were more likely to be under the influence of substances.

SUSTAINABLE SEX

Survival sex is the act of exchanging sex as a means to meet the most basic needs of women, including food, shelter, and clothing. Often, women who have no other resources to turn to are forced into survival sex.

THE DATA ALSO REFLECTS A PERSISTENT AND SEVERE LACK OF RESOURCES FOR WOMEN WHO HAVE SURVIVED VIOLENCE.

30 DOWNTOWN WOMEN'S ACTION COALITION | 2016 NEEDS ASSESSMENT

https://www.downtownwomenscenter.org/2016-needs-assessment/
Trauma-Informed Care Organizations

A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed:

- **realizes** the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;
- **recognizes** the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system;
- and **responds** by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively
- **resist re-traumatization**.
Changes the helping paradigm from “What’s wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?”

--Sandra Bloom, 2007

Women not only experience traumas inflicted in individual relationships they also experience trauma in the context of SAMHSA’s 6th TIC Principle, cultural, historical, and gender issues.

DWC’s Advisory Board reflects principles of Trauma Informed Care, including: Empowerment, Voice and Choice & Mutuality and Collaboration
Trauma and Resiliency Informed Care Toolkit

https://www.downtownwomenscenter.org/trauma-informed-care/
Domestic Violence Homeless Services Coalition

Vision: Create a client-centered system that increases access to safe housing and supportive services for survivors of domestic violence and their families.

Goals:
• Decrease number of women entering chronic homelessness as a result of past experiences of domestic violence
• Increase number of women moving from homelessness to permanent housing
• Replicate Coalition model designed for dissemination across the country
Coalition Greatest Accomplishments

• Information and knowledge sharing within new forums
• Developing relationships between Coalition members
• Increased coordination between otherwise siloed systems
• Ensured the voices of those with lived experience is front and center
Focus Group Report Highlights

12 county-wide focus groups with 81 individuals in 2017.

Participants in all groups consistently described challenging service experiences, which not only interfered with their ability to obtain support and housing, but very often reinforced their lack of power/choice, and re-traumatized them in the process.

Participants recounted feeling judged and dismissed when interacting with providers. Many felt as though they had no recourse and a few expressed a conscious decision not to engage with supportive services systems any further.

The length of time to finding adequate services was long; however, once they were found their experiences became more positive.
Focus Group Recommendations

• Increase access to permanent housing for survivors
  • Develop flexible funding for significant one-time costs and rental assistance programs that foster effective relationships between landlords and survivors

• Reduce barriers and increase access to services
  • Provide mobile advocacy services for services to help survivors obtain resources including restraining orders, public benefits, and affordable housing

• Understand trauma and it’s impact

• Increase domestic violence advocacy and education
  • Foster opportunities for peer support (including advocacy efforts and support groups)
  • Increase access to information regarding legal rights of survivors (including custody, housing, and restraining orders)

• Provide Reasonable accommodations for survivors with unique needs
  • Provide translation services (especially for complex legal and medical matters)
  • Increase services to those without documentation (including legal assistance, language classes, and vocational opportunities)
  • Develop training and technical assistance for providers to better ensure system-wide progress on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion
Resources

- https://www.downtownwomenscenter.org/dvhsc/
- https://rainbowservicesdv.org/news-events/resources/
- https://safehousingpartnerships.org/
THANK YOU!

@dwcweb
www.downtownwomenscenter.org
213-680-0600
AmyT@DowntownWomensCenter.org
Resources

- **Consumer Participation Outreach** Reports and Recommendations
  - Safety in the Health Care for the Homeless Settings: Consumer Perceptions and Advice
  - Creating a Culture of Safety at Health Centers
  - Protecting the Unprotected: A Survey of Violence Experienced While Homeless
  - Crime Victims Fund Fact Sheet

- **Responding to IPV: Tools & Resources for HCH Staff**