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HEALTHY COMMUNITIES: *Housing and Women Victims of Domestic Violence (WVODV)*

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Housing has long been recognized as an important need for victims of domestic violence. However, the original goal of service providers was to enable women to leave abusive situations immediately and not find new permanent homes. Thus, the need for emergency shelters increased. Past studies have concluded that **transitional shelters** are "refuges" that provide "a turning point for many women to take the first steps in a transition to a life free of abuse." Although these findings overwhelmingly indicate success in achieving the primary goal of safety, transitional housing programs are only short-term, possibly limited, responses[4]. The goal is to support women in leading violence-free lives in the long term. Their ultimate success depends on women's ability, including those with multiple barriers, to move on and remain safe in permanent housing[7].

Image by Carteret County Domestic ViolencePrograms
https://www.carteretdomesticviolence.com/help/

Overview

Domestic violence (DV) is a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that one partner uses to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, psychological, technological, or threats of actions or other coercive behavior patterns that influence another person within an intimate partner relationship (according to the US Department of Justice-USDOJ).

According to the CDC and USDOJ, there are over 10 million domestic violence incidents yearly (in the U.S.), with approximately 85% of the reported abuses against women in the United States. Over half of the domestic violence against women goes unreported.

One in four women has been a victim of domestic violence. About 11 million women reported experiencing **sexual violence, physical violence, or stalking** by an intimate partner in their lifetime. They have said they first experienced these forms of violence before the age of 18[15].

About 60% of men abusing women also abuse children; when children witness such abuse, they are two times more likely to be abusers or victims when they grow up[33]. Over 50% of female victims experience abuse between 11-24 years and are more likely to become domestic violence victims in the future. An intimate partner killed 16% of murderer victims, and women account for two-thirds of murder victims killed by an intimate partner[14].

The National Network to End Domestic Violence reports that up to 57% of homeless women and children are homeless due to domestic violence. More than 90% of homeless women experience severe physical or sexual abuse at some point in their lives, and 63% have been victims of domestic or sexual violence. Being a victim of domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness, and survivors are four times more likely to experience housing instability and face barriers[21]. Victims who leave their abusive partner multiple times due to domestic violence often experience multiple events of homelessness[3,13].

When a victim of domestic violence chooses to leave, housing is one of the primary barriers they will face for themselves and their children. In a one-day survey (2016), more than 41,000 adults and children fleeing domestic violence found refuge in emergency shelters

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or transitional housing programs. Out of 11,991 unmet requests that day for domestic violence services, 66% were for housing and shelters. In another nationwide study, more than half (51.5%) of the victims who identified a need for housing services did not receive them[13].

Shelters and Housing

Though **emergency shelters** can be a source of immediate short-term safety, **transitional housing programs** offer victims a housing option and supportive services—including counseling, childcare, transportation, life skills, education, and/or job training—for up to 24 months. It is a safe, affordable option that empowers survivors to begin to build their lives after fleeing abuse. Transitional housing programs give survivors the time and services they need to achieve long-term safety and stability goals. Without these programs, survivors may have no option but to return to their abusers' homes or face homelessness[13]. **Permanent supportive housing** offers safe and stable housing environments with voluntary and flexible support and services to help people manage serious, chronic issues such as mental, physical, and substance use disorders. Providing permanent supportive housing is effective for people experiencing domestic violence and chronic homelessness[3]. A national study found that 84% of WVODV need help finding affordable housing[2].

Barriers

Though emergency shelters were developed as a core option for domestic violence victims with no place else to find safety, shelter beds are not always available—or the best option—for every survivor. And once survivors access a shelter, they might face barriers to securing permanent-affordable housing[6.] Transitional Housing offers domestic victims more stable and safe housing with supportive services for up to 24 months. WVODV are often housed in shelters and transitional housing with other individuals and families suffering from poverty, homelessness, mental disorders, and substance use disorders[10].

Survivors of domestic violence also suffer from physical and mental health consequences, as well as a loss of social networks, that might remain prevalent after the abuse stops and can make it difficult to obtain and sustain employment, adversely affecting their ability to find and keep permanent housing.

The barriers WVODV faces with housing include the following;

- **Conflict with other residents in the shelter**
  Most WVODM face conflict during their stay in different shelters. Disagreements over potential thefts and drug use often occur.
- **Limited access to transportation**
  WVODV experience challenges with transportation, such as needing assistance with public transportation, including bus passes, gas funds, and community rides.
- **Lack of privacy**
  The lack of privacy in shelters, with limited space, sharing bedrooms, and finding quiet space, especially with children.
- **Lack of supportive service for WVODV with children**
  Shelter and Transitional housing often lack appropriate policies and strategies to help WVODV who have children when they flee from an abuser, such as daycare services.
- **Lack of long-term support**
  Many Shelters and Transitional housing don't have adequate resources to help WVODV when they leave. Often their only choice is to go back to the abuser or go homeless.
- **Economic barriers to assistance**
  WVODV often face serious financial problems; limited or no income and limited access to credit or money. Many victims depended financially on their abusers, limiting their access to education and employment. Some employers discriminate against WVODV with lower wages or limit their marketplace options.

Permanent Supportive Housing

Permanent Supportive Housing links affordable rental housing to case management, job training, and other supportive services based on residents' needs. The permanent supportive housing model emphasizes four key principles: affordability; safety and comfort; flexible and accessible support services that target residential stability; and empowerment and independence[7]. In an article by Botein and Hetling (2010), clients' and administrators' goals will sometimes differ. Their research found implications for other programs and policy development of permanent supportive housing models for domestic violence victims and other populations. The characteristics and needs of domestic violence victims make them a seemingly obvious target population for permanent supportive housing programs. Experiences of domestic violence and homelessness are linked in multiple and complex ways[7].

Example

For example, the YWCA of Binghamton/Broome County provides shelters and services for WVODV. Their service area is known as the Binghamton, Union Town/Broome, Otsego, Chenango, Delaware, Cortland, Tioga CoC (NY-511). In 2021, there were 1,014 domestic crimes reported against women (18 years and older) and 576 against family members (under 18 years) in CoC NY-511. This represents 85% of all reported domestic violence crimes. It is estimated that another 659 domestic violence crimes go unreported against women and 374 against other family members. With the unreported crimes, it is estimated that 2,624 women and family members (under 18 years old) were victims of domestic violence in 2021).

The table above shows the shelters and available housing for the homeless, Women Victims of Domestic Violence Victims (WVODV), and others in need of shelter or housing in the NY-511 CoC.

CoC NY-511 has only one project (Cortland, NY), with 25 units (32 beds) of permanent supportive housing dedicated to serving women victims of domestic violence and their children. YWCA Cortland and Christopher Community partnered to build and operate The Grace Brown House, which opened in July 2022 (for more information, see this link: https://shnny.org/blog/entry/ywca-cortland-and-christopher-community-opens-grace-brown-house/).

Within 60 miles of Binghamton, there are only 71 beds dedicated to providing emergency shelter to victims of domestic violence in New York State (63) and Pennsylvania (8).

Need

In CoC NY 511, there are estimated to be 15 Transitional Housing beds and 77 Permanent Supportive beds (which include 32 beds at Grace Brown House in Cortland and 45 beds at scattered sites in Binghamton). **These beds fill less than 5% of the total estimated need.**

CoC Name: Binghamton, Union Town/Broome, Otsego, Chenango, Delaware, Cortland, Tioga Counties CoC (NY-511)[1]

Summary	Family Unit[4]	Family Beds[4]	Adult Only	Child Only	2022 WVODV	Total Yr-round	Seasonal	Overflow Vouchers	Subset of Inventory-Bed		
									Chronic[5]	Veterans[6]	Youths[6]
Emergency, Safe Haven & Transitional Housing	**42**	**130**	**339**	**0**		**484**	**0**	**7**	**n/a**	**4**	**15**
Emergency Shelters	38	122	274	0		396	0	7	n/a	0	40
Transitional Housing	4	8	65	0	15	88	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	11
Permanent Housing	**90**	**215**	**335**	**0**		**627**	**n/a**	**n/a**	**67**	**19**	**0**
Permanent Supportive Housing[2,3,7]	67	137	272	0	77	486	n/a	n/a	67	19	0
Rapid Rehousing	23	78	63	0		141	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	0
Grand Total	**132**	**345**	**674**	**0**		**111**	**0**	**7**	**67**	**23**	**15**

1. Source: HUD (https://files.hudexchange.info/reports/published/CoC_HIC_CoC_NY-511-2021_NY_2021.pdf)
2. HUD's point-in-time count does not include persons or beds in Permanent Supportive Housing as currently homeless.
3. Other Permanent Housing (OPH) - consists of PH - Housing with Services (no disability required for entry) and PH -MIS Data Standards.
4. Family Units and Family Beds categories include units and beds for households with one adult and at least one child under age 18.
5. Chronic Beds include beds in Permanent Supportive Housing dedicated to serving chronically homeless persons.
6. Veteran Beds and Youth Beds, respectively, include beds dedicated to serving homeless veterans and their families and include beds dedicated to housing homeless youth aged 24 and younger.
7. The only Permanent Supporting Housing dedicated to WVODV and those with children are the Grace Brown House in Cortland, NY, with 25 Units (32 beds). In 2022, HUD awarded YWCA Binghamton funding to run a Domestic Violence Survivor program for 40 homeless households on scattered sites, which includes 45 beds for Permanent Support Housing and Rapid Rehousing and 15 beds for Transitional Housing.

Conclusion

Women victims of domestic violence are an underserved population group, and their need for emergency shelters is high (and only provides a short-term solution). More Permanent Supportive Housing is needed, together with the service for these women and children. This type of housing model emphasizes four key principles: affordability; safety and comfort; flexible and accessible support services that target residential stability; and empowerment and independence.

What are your thoughts?

(Information and Data provided by Asterhill Research Company)

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