

The Intersection Between Homelessness and Domestic Violence

The intersection between gender-based violence and homelessness is pervasive. Nationally, **80% of women with children who experience homelessness have been victims of domestic/intimate partner violence** (Institute for Children, 2018) and **57% of women cite domestic/intimate partner violence as the immediate cause of their homelessness** (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2019) - making domestic/gender based violence the lead cause of homelessness for women and children.

Fleeing domestic/intimate partner violence, many women and children are forced into homelessness. Often their children's sole provider, faced with countless barriers such as little to no money or support system, and the lack of affordable childcare and housing, mothers experiencing homelessness must choose between taking care of their children or seeking employment, making the climb out of homelessness impossible for many. Without access to safe, supportive and trauma informed shelter, many women are forced to remain homeless or return to abusive, and potentially lethal, relationships. Barrier-free access to trauma-informed shelter and wrap-around supportive services that meet the specific needs of women and their children are not only life-changing, but life-saving.

Here in our Miami-Dade community, we know that approximately **1 in 4 women experience homelessness because of gender-based violence** (DVOB Gaps & Needs Report, 2020), many of whom have extensive trauma histories stemming from childhood. This year alone, Lotus House has sheltered 1,091 women, youth, and children — a number expected to increase by the end of year. Of these, a staggering 872 (80%) women, children, and youth were victims of crime - of which 532 (61%) were victims of domestic violence and 292 (33%) witnessed domestic violence. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Lotus House has faced both rising rates of reported domestic violence and increased demand by women and children seeking shelter.

Consistent exposure to adverse childhood experiences and unstable home environments can have detrimental effects on a child's development and create inter-generational cycles of abuse, violence, and homelessness. Children who grow up witnessing domestic violence are **3 times more likely than their peers to engage in violent behavior, and more likely to be in an abusive intimate partner relationship or continue the cycle of violence for the next generation** (U.S. DOJ, 2020). An estimated **3.3 million children are exposed to domestic violence every year** (MDC Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team, n.d.), and data shows that **30-60% of perpetrators of domestic violence also abuse children in the household** (National DV Hotline, n.d.). The Florida Department of Children & Families (DCF) reported that between 2019-2020 there were **3,336 child removals involving domestic violence** (DCF, 2022).

According to the Uniform Crimes Reports of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE, 2020), from 2008 through 2020, there were 122,336 reported domestic violence offenses in Miami-Dade County (MDC) and the highest number, and percentage of county-wide total, of reported domestic violence offenses were made by the police departments for (FDLE, 2020):

1. Miami-Dade County – 39,477 at 32.3%
2. City of Miami – 30,216 at 24.7%
3. Miami Gardens – 9,062 at 7.4%
4. Hialeah – 9,000 at 7.4%
5. Miami Beach – 6,185 at 5.1%
6. North Miami – 4,985 at 4.1%
7. Homestead – 4,945 at 4.04%
8. Florida City – 2,816 at 2.3%

9. North Miami Beach – 2,357 at 1.9%
10. Doral – 1,200 at 0.98%

In 2020, there were a staggering **7,470 reported domestic violence related offenses in MDC**, including 23 murders/manslaughters, 308 forcible rapes, 1,505 aggravated assaults and stalking, and 5,634 other assaults (FDLE, 2020). The **top ten highest jurisdictional reported offenses accounted for 92% of all reported domestic violence offenses** and include the following jurisdictions:

1. Miami-Dade County – 3,274 at 43.8%
2. City of Miami – 1,212 at 16.2%
3. Hialeah – 529 at 7.1%
4. North Miami – 414 at 5.5%
5. Miami Beach – 406 at 5.4%
6. Miami Gardens – 399 at 5.3%
7. Homestead – 222 at 3.0%
8. Florida City – 219 at 2.9%
9. North Miami Beach – 105 at 1.4%
10. Doral – 78 at 1.0%

From 2008-2017, MDC ranked #1 in the largest number of reported domestic violence offenses in the state of Florida. In 2018, MDC dropped to the #2 ranking position behind Orange County. However, 2018 was one of the deadliest years on record for domestic violence fatalities (FDLE, 2018). As reported by the MDC Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team between 1999 and 2021, **889 domestic violence related fatal incidents resulted in 1,187 domestic violence related deaths** (MDC Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team, 2021). Children account for **27% of domestic homicide victims - 90% of whom are under age 10, and 56% are under age 2** (MDC Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team, n.d.) To date, MDC has remained amongst the top three in the largest number of reported domestic violence offenses in the State.

Despite these numbers, research shows that the actual number of domestic violence offenses reported is only about **46% of the total domestic violence incidents experienced by victims** (U.S. DOJ, 2021). Although extraordinary work has been conducted in the domestic violence field, there continues to be little awareness of the linkages between domestic violence and homelessness, and the pervasiveness of these issues.

Homelessness and domestic violence are urgent public health issues which can be prevented if adequately resourced via a multi-sector, comprehensive, coordinated system of care providing wrap-around support services and enriched, therapeutic trauma-informed services and resources. In the absence of shelter, many women are forced to remain in abusive situations, which all too often, escalate and become lethal. Often faced with little to no options, emergency shelters and wrap-around supportive services are nothing short of life saving for our most vulnerable women and children.

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