

## **Women and Children Experiencing Homelessness Fact Sheet**

There are an estimated **1,225,198 women<sup>1</sup>** (State of Homelessness, 2023; Domestic Shelters, n.d.) and **2.5 million children** (SAMHSA, 2022) **who experience homelessness every year in the United States**, making them the fastest growing populations to experience homelessness. For women and children, the leading causes of homelessness include domestic or intimate partner violence and lack of affordable housing. **80% of women with children who experience homelessness have been a victim of domestic violence** (Institute for Children, 2018) and **57% of women cite domestic violence as the immediate cause of their homelessness** (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2019).

Mothers who experience homelessness are often their children's sole providers. Families make-up about 30% of those experiencing homelessness (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2023), and **women representing 77.6% of the adults counted as experiencing homelessness in families with children** (USICH, 2018). Disproportionately impacted in the job sector, women earn less than their male counterparts, inherently establishing a cycle of underpaid head of households and an overpriced housing market, resulting in housing instability and/or homelessness.

Children and youth who are exposed to adverse childhood experiences, like victimization, domestic violence and homelessness, often show signs of behavioral, emotional and mental health challenges, as well as developmental delays and school readiness. Nationally, an estimated **3.3 million children are exposed to domestic violence every year** (MDC Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team, n.d.), and 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).

Without a home, limited access to resources, and left to fend for themselves, women and children experiencing homelessness have many special, gender-specific needs which require multiple levels of intervention and wrap-around support. Women who experience homelessness are faced with compound layers of stress, concern, and fragility, all while trying to care for themselves and provide for their children. The failure to address these complex needs will have grave life long and intergenerational consequences for children and their families.

The intersection between domestic violence, unresolved childhood abuse and homelessness are undeniable. To adequately address and reduce the traumatic effects of domestic violence and homelessness, it is imperative that shelters are able to provide enriched therapeutic services with deep protective factors for women and children. Research shows evidence based therapies and services can reduce children's trauma symptoms, improve child behavior, reduce parenting stress and enhance mother-child relationships. With early intervention and enriched therapeutic support, we have a real opportunity to heal bonds of attachment broken by violence.

Furthermore, holistic wrap-around services provide alternative pathways to healing and uplift women with support, tools and resources to truly break the cycle of abuse, violence and homelessness many have known their entire lives, allowing women and families a real opportunity to transform their lives, achieve greater self sufficiency, feel empowered and build brighter futures.

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<sup>1</sup> The combined number of reported women who enter shelters, both homeless (222,970) in addition to domestic violence shelters (927,405) in addition to unsheltered women (74,826) equals 1,225,198.

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