



Domestic violence, housing instability, and homelessness: A review of housing policies and program practices for meeting the needs of survivors

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ABSTRACT

Evidence suggests that domestic violence is among the leading causes of housing instability (including homelessness) nationally for women and children. In this paper, we focus on housing policies and practices that may inadvertently make it more difficult for women to secure stable housing after having left an abusive partner. We review the types of housing options available for survivors of domestic violence, as well as housing policies and practices, including their strengths and limitations. In addition, the level of coordination between domestic violence and housing/homeless service systems is discussed. Our rationale for this review is to highlight not only the intent of specific policies and programs but also the effect of their implementation on women's ability to secure stable housing. Finally, we explore alternatives to current housing policies and program practices that may serve as models for how to think "outside the box" so that women's housing and safety needs can be better met.

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1. Introduction

Approximately 1 in 5 women report being physically assaulted by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008). Each year, domestic violence results in an estimated 1200 deaths and 2 million injuries among women (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003). In addition to these physical consequences, there are psychological and social consequences, including depression, PTSD, poverty, and social isolation (Byrne, Resnick, Kilpatrick, Best, & Saunders, 1999; Campbell, 2002; Campbell et al., 2002; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008; Coker, Smith, Bethea, King, & McKeown, 2000; Golding, 1999; Rose & Campbell, 2000; Sutherland, Bybee, & Sullivan, 1998).

There are also consequences to women's and children's housing stability with research showing a relationship between domestic violence and female homelessness (Baker, Cook, & Norris, 2003; Browne & Bassuk, 1997; Bufkin & Bray, 1998; Metraux & Culhane, 1999; Shinn et al., 1998; Toro et al., 1995; U.S. Conference of Mayors-Sodexo, 2005). Evidence suggests that domestic violence is among the leading causes of homelessness nationally for women (Institute for Children and Poverty, 2002; Jasinski, Wesely, Mustaine, & Wright, 2002; Levin, McKean, & Raphael, 2004; Wilder Research Center, 2007; U.S. Conference of Mayors-Sodexo, 2005). Only a few studies have explored the relationship between domestic violence and housing instability, which is not only a precursor to homelessness, but is also a significant stressor in women's and children's lives. Housing instability can include multiple unwanted moves, not paying other bills in order to pay rent, eating less or skipping meals to pay rent, doubling up with family or friends, being threatened with eviction, or experiencing rental or credit problems (Baker et al., 2003; Tolman & Rosen, 2001). One study that investigated this relationship found that domestic violence was a significant predictor of housing instability for women (Pavao, Alvarez, Baumrind, Induni, & Kimerling, 2007). There is a need for additional research on domestic violence and housing instability that moves beyond simply documenting the association between the two but also attempts to understand why such an association exists.

To address this gap, the current paper examines potential reasons why domestic violence, combined with current housing policies and programs, may result in women's housing instability and homelessness. In many instances, it may be the policies and programs as much as the complications arising from women's experiences with domestic violence that hinder their ability to become stably housed after leaving the abuser. Therefore, we will discuss the complexity of issues surrounding domestic violence and safe housing, and then review the types of housing options available for survivors of domestic violence as well as housing policies, including their strengths and limitations from the standpoint of meeting survivors' needs. We will also examine domestic violence and housing program practices, specifically the criteria used by providers to determine eligibility for housing services, as well as the level of coordination between the domestic violence and housing/homeless service systems. Finally, we will explore alternatives to current housing policies and program practices that may serve as models to increase housing stability so that women's safety needs are better met.

2. The complex relationship between domestic violence, housing instability, and homelessness

Although previous research suggests a link, the relationship between domestic violence and housing instability is not necessarily a direct one. Rather, there is a complex interplay of issues that may affect women's risk of housing instability or homelessness after separating from their partners. These issues may result in significant barriers for women in obtaining and maintaining stable housing for themselves and their children, and range from insufficient income to live independently, limited availability of affordable housing, poten-

tial housing discrimination against them as domestic violence survivors, histories of credit or rental problems, a criminal history, or ongoing harassment and assaults by the ex-intimate partner.

As women attempt to secure housing away from their abusers they face economic barriers that may be related to difficulties in finding living wage jobs or that result from limited job experience. Past exposure to domestic violence has been shown to be linked to future unemployment and poverty for women (Byrne et al., 1999). Even for women who are working, staying employed may be difficult, as dealing with the violence and its aftermath can compromise steady attendance and work performance. Research shows that abusers frequently stalk or harass women in their workplace, and sabotage women's ability to keep their jobs. In a sample of women with abusive partners, approximately 50% of those who worked reported losing a job because of the actions of the abuser (Riger, Ahrens, & Blickenstaff, 2000). In addition, female victims of domestic violence worked fewer hours than women who did not experience such abuse (Browne, Salomon, & Bassuk, 1999); and one in six women who reported domestic violence also reported time lost from paid work (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003).

Achieving stable housing is further challenged by a lack of affordable housing stock. One report documents that there has been no funding for new public housing since 1996, even though over 100,000 units of existing public housing have been lost to demolition, sale, or other removal (Western Regional Advocacy Project, 2006). Even in cases where women have the economic resources to find housing they can afford, they may be denied housing by landlords concerned about the potential risk to other tenants or property damage if the abuser continues to pose a threat on those premises (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2007).

Additional difficulties may stem from poor rental history, which may result from women's multiple moves to elude a persistent abuser or because of evictions that arise from the abuser's actions (Martin & Stern, 2005; National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2007). In other cases, women may have difficulty paying rent on their own which may lead to evictions and subsequent credit problems, thus reducing their ability to access alternate housing. As well, some domestic violence survivors may have a criminal history. This is not uncommon because of arrests that are related to the abuse or to surviving the abuse. For example, women may be forced to participate in illegal activities by their abusive partners (Richie, 1996). Such a criminal history excludes women from public housing (Martin & Stern, 2005).

Further, separation from the abuser is a known "trigger" for severe violence and is a risk factor for intimate partner femicide (murder of women) (Campbell et al., 2003); this means that just at the time she is seeking safety through relocation and separation, she is most at risk from the abuser. Finally, women may still be dealing with their own or their children's mental and physical health needs resulting from the abuse, which may impair their ability to work and to seek out housing solutions (Campbell, 2002; Evans, Davies, & DiLillo, 2008; Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt & Kenny, 2003; Wolfe, Crooks, Lee, McIntyre-Smith, & Jaffe, 2003). This confluence of barriers to permanent stable housing coupled with the increased risk further interferes with women's ability to obtain the stability needed to access additional services that can increase their safety and promote their ability to maintain the separation.

What is clear from these examples is that women, especially poor women, who are trying to escape abusive partners need an array of services to meet their needs. These services include immediate crisis intervention such as food and shelter, longer-term assistance in overcoming the emotional or psychological impact of domestic violence on themselves and their children, and assistance related to economic security and housing stability. In particular, recent research has emphasized the critical importance of tangible resources for women during this post-separation period (Glass, Perrin, Campbell, & Soeken, 2007; Goodman, Bennett, & Dutton, 1999); stable housing may be one of the most important of these tangible resources.

3. “Lay of the Land:” Housing options for domestic violence survivors

Before reviewing current housing policies and practices, it will be helpful to provide a brief discussion of the types of housing options that are available to women after separation from an abuser. To begin, some women with financial resources can access private housing and rent or purchase their own homes without any particular assistance. However, many women leaving abusive relationships and almost all women accessing domestic violence victim services are not immediately able to pay the deposit, first and last month’s rent and 100% of the ongoing rent. Thus, many women victims, without some kind of assistance to obtain permanent housing, may be left to find a temporary solution to their housing needs while hoping for permanent housing in the future.

In response to this recognized need for housing solutions, a variety of housing options have been developed to assist women separating from an abusive partner. They range on a continuum from short-term crisis intervention to permanent housing, and include emergency shelter, transitional housing, and subsidized permanent housing options. However, as described above, these options are not always available or accessible, and may have limitations in meeting the complex needs of domestic violence survivors.

3.1. Emergency shelter

On one end of the continuum of housing services accessed by victims is emergency shelter, including domestic violence shelters, homeless shelters and motel vouchers. Domestic violence shelters are essential life-saving resources for many victims of domestic violence, and can be a first step to accessing resources for longer-term stability. They offer a 24-hour safe haven, often with a confidential location, making it more difficult for abusive partners to locate women. Typically, a domestic violence shelter allows women to stay from 30 to 60 days, and provides services specifically related to domestic violence, such as safety planning, emotional support, support groups, and advocacy for other needed services. A recent study demonstrates that a majority of women who stay at shelters benefit from the services provided there and view the experience positively (Lyon, Lane, & Menard, 2008). However, in many communities available shelter space is inadequate; they are often full and, therefore, not available to women. For example, on one day in September 2008, the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) found that nationally there were 3,286 requests for emergency shelter that could not be met by existing domestic violence emergency shelters (NNEDV, 2008).

By contrast, while perhaps more readily available in some communities, homeless shelters may not provide the same safety options as domestic violence shelters, and the services available to residents generally do not address domestic violence in a systematic way (McChesney, 1995). For domestic violence survivors, emergency shelters for homeless individuals or families have intrinsic problems such as mixing female and male (sometimes abusive male) residents in the same building, with minimal safety protocols to prevent harassment or assault in the public areas. In addition, some homeless shelters will not accept victims of domestic violence. Some may also require that residents vacate the shelter during the day, making a woman and her children more vulnerable to stalking and attack from an abusive partner if they have no safe place to go during this time.

Another form of emergency shelter is the use of motels. In some communities domestic violence providers utilize a system whereby arrangements are made between the provider and cooperating motels to house referred individuals or households for a designated period of time when shelters are full. Use of motels may effectively expand shelter capacity in a relatively cost-effective manner, provide immediate safety off the streets for survivors who may otherwise delay leaving an abusive situation, and provide an alternative to the typical shelter’s community-living situation that many women in crisis find difficult. However, on-

site supportive services may be limited or unavailable, their location may be readily identifiable to the abuser, or the motels may feel socially isolating to women especially if they have already experienced forced isolation from their abusers. In addition, some survivors with greater needs may not be able to obtain other services or take the needed steps without the structure of the 24-hour staffing that most domestic violence shelters provide.

3.2. Transitional housing

Transitional housing for domestic violence survivors offers women more stability by allowing them to stay for a longer period of time, typically 1 to 2 years. There are a variety of transitional housing models that have been developed to address the needs of survivors for longer-term stability and to fill the gap created by limited affordable housing or subsidized permanent housing resources. We will discuss two types in this paper: facility-based programs and programs that provide temporary rental subsidy. Many of the first-developed transitional housing programs were facility-based programs. In this model, a domestic violence agency utilizes a building specifically set aside for victims of domestic violence and their children. These facilities may utilize a communal living approach, or may be set up as separate apartments leased or owned by the program, in which survivors and their children can live in for a designated period of time. Most facility-based programs offer services such as counseling, job search programs, and case management (National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 1998). In some programs, participation in these services is required as a condition of being allowed to stay in the housing units (Baker, Holditch Niolon, & Oliphant, 2009). Interviews with survivors have indicated that although they were mostly satisfied with facility-based transitional programs, they were unhappy at being required to participate in services in addition to having to follow the many rules put in place by program staff (Melbin, Sullivan, & Cain, 2003).

Another approach to transitional housing is to offer temporary vouchers or rent assistance, helping women to pay their rent in houses or apartments located in the community (“scattered site”), or helping women remain in their existing home if the abuser has vacated and they feel it is safe for them to stay. Vouchers or rent assistance can be short-term (1–2 months) or can last up to two years. The longer-term rent assistance programs may require that the resident begin assuming more of the responsibility for paying the rent over time. Some programs require women to meet prerequisites, such as completing a stay at a shelter or attending counseling, before moving into more stable housing. Other programs place women and their children in housing as quickly as possible after a relatively short period of crisis stabilization/intervention.

One such program model, known as “Housing First” (also called “rapid re-housing”), focuses on providing homeless people with access to permanent housing immediately (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2006). This model was developed and implemented as a method for reducing chronic homelessness and homelessness among individuals with severe and persistent mental illness (Pearson Montgomery, & Locke, 2009; Perlman & Parvensky, 2006; Tsemberis, Gulcur, & Nakae, 2004; Tull, 2004). The rationale behind this model is the belief that individuals would be far more likely to voluntarily access and continue supportive services if they were doing so from their own homes rather than from the streets, where day-to-day survival is the priority. Housing First programs also offer services to individuals/families after housing placement, where services are based on the needs of the family. However, many also have specific requirements in order for the client to receive services and ongoing rent assistance. In all cases, in a Housing First program the client must agree to comply with a standard lease agreement.

Although both facility-based and temporary rental subsidy programs can be considered transitional housing, the philosophy behind the two approaches is different. With facility-based transitional housing, women

are required to vacate the unit after a period of time and find another place to live, thus the program retains the unit and can make it available for use by another survivor in need. In programs providing temporary rental subsidy, the goal is to help women achieve stable permanent housing, with reductions in rental subsidy from the program as women become more able to take on their own expenses. In this model, women do not have to move again, and can concentrate instead on sustaining their home. This model can minimize disruption, particularly in cases where a required move could be detrimental to women's employment and children's school adjustment.

Because the goal of temporary rental subsidy programs is to give women the opportunity to find a place that they can eventually afford and for which they will only need rental assistance temporarily, these programs are sometimes identified as permanent housing programs. However, there is no guarantee that after a specified time of rent assistance women will be able to pay their own rent or that the program will continue payments as long as needed. Therefore, as we move from discussion of transitional housing to a look at permanent housing, the distinction we make is that permanent housing is permanently, rather than temporarily, subsidized.

3.3. Permanent housing

The Housing Voucher Program, also known as Section 8, is one example of a subsidized permanent housing program, where the woman rents a unit in the community, a portion or all of her rent is paid, and she is allowed to stay in the unit as long as she can pay her portion of the rent or meets the income eligibility requirements to have all of her rent paid. These subsidized permanent housing options are almost entirely funded by the Federal government (e.g., Section 8 or public or project-based low rent public housing). Specifically, with Section 8, women are given a voucher that can be taken to any rental unit as long as the landlord has applied, been accepted into the Federal Section 8 program, and will accept the vouchers. In contrast, public or project-based housing is restricted to certain housing developments or units (Correia & Rubin, 2001).

Subsidized permanent housing options, although an important resource, also have significant limitations. They are difficult to access because the reduction in funding for housing subsidy programs has limited the number of units available. The length of waiting lists to obtain vouchers is excessive from several weeks to several years in some communities. Should women eventually receive a voucher, they struggle with finding landlords who will accept vouchers (Martin & Stern, 2005; National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2004). In fact, some women end up losing their vouchers because they are unable to locate a housing unit within the specified time allotted; the failure rate, or proportion of voucher holders not able to use their vouchers, was 31% nationally in 2000 (the last year for which figures are available) (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2007). Related to the reduction in funding for housing subsidy programs, a report indicated that in 2005, the Housing Voucher Program was able to serve 1.95 million households (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2007). However, the need was much greater. According to HUD's analysis of Census data in 2005, 6.5 million low-income renter households qualified for housing assistance but did not receive it; this number increased by 20% between 2001 and 2005.

4. Current housing policies and program practices

In the previous section, we described the different types of housing options that may be available to women who are fleeing abusive relationships. In this section, we examine current policies and program practices associated with these housing options, how they provide protections for domestic violence survivors, and where they fall short and hinder women's ability to obtain safe and affordable housing.

4.1. Federal housing policies

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA; Public Law 109-162) was originally passed in 1994 and reauthorized in 2000 and 2005. VAWA provides protections for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking. The 2005 re-authorization of VAWA added important housing provisions, as Congress acknowledged the link between domestic violence and housing instability. One provision is that VAWA 2005 prohibits evictions based on real or perceived domestic violence, dating violence or stalking (sexual assault is specifically not included in these provisions). VAWA also explicitly creates an exception to the federal "One-Strike Rule" which states that any drug-related and certain other criminal activity by any household member is grounds for eviction (Renzetti, 2001). This exception reads: "An incident of actual or threatened domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking does not qualify as serious or repeated violation of lease or good cause for terminating assistance, tenancy, or occupancy rights of the victim." One caveat is that this exception does not apply if the public housing authority or landlord can show that having the victim remain would pose an "actual and imminent threat" to staff or other tenants (not just to the victim). A survivor may be evicted for other violations of the lease, but they may not be held to a higher standard than other tenants.

Another provision of 2005 VAWA is portability. Voucher and public housing programs often prohibit moves in the first year of tenancy, and regulate the frequency of future moves. VAWA establishes that a family with a voucher may move to another jurisdiction if the family has complied with all other obligations of the program and is moving to protect the health or safety of an individual who is or has been the victim of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking – even if moving otherwise would be a lease violation. VAWA also provides other potential relief, as it gives Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) flexibility that can help domestic violence survivors. For example, PHAs may bifurcate leases (remove the abusive partner from the lease, but retain the survivor); they may also turn the voucher/apartment over to the survivor even if she was not on the lease, but was a household member; and they may grant emergency transfers.

However, not all victims receive the benefit from the additional relief offered by 2005 VAWA. Other federal law and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) regulations may limit the ability of local PHA's to respond to victims. For example, they must consider credit history, criminal activity, debts to housing authorities, and income requirements in making housing allocations. It may be more difficult for survivors to meet these requirements for housing, particularly if domestic violence affected their credit history, rental history or employability.

Additionally, although in principle VAWA 2005 allows women to relocate without the risk of losing their vouchers, in actuality, women are vulnerable to landlords or PHAs who might seek to deny such a request because of the extra expense incurred by the PHA in helping women relocate. Because of this, women may experience a great deal of PHA scrutiny or other administrative barriers before such a request to relocate is approved. Further, many landlords, and even many PHAs are unaware of the VAWA regulations (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2007) and so have not changed their practices to be in compliance.

A major gap in the VAWA protections is that prohibition against discriminatory evictions and denials based on domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking only covers Public Housing and Section 8 (vouchers and project-based). VAWA does not cover private housing or other federally subsidized housing; and it does not cover victims of sexual assault in these provisions (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2008). A survey of 76 legal and social services providers around the country who work with homeless and low-income domestic violence victims indicated that 11% of the total evictions they handled were victims of domestic violence evicted specifically because of the domestic violence against them (National

Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2007). We should note that even among the types of housing (Public Housing and Section 8) where women are protected from eviction and anti-discrimination there is evidence that such practices are still occurring (Martin & Stern, 2005).

Other federal policy, while not intentionally aimed at excluding victims of domestic violence, has made it difficult for women to access housing-related services. Until recently, victims who were staying with family or friends were excluded from the definition of homelessness as adopted by HUD. "Doubling up" is an extremely common first step for women after fleeing an abuser. This exclusion has had a double impact: the first is that women and their children who are doubled up were not included in community assessments/counts of homeless individuals; thus a smaller percentage of Federal and/or local funding had been set aside for housing for women, and therefore, for survivors of domestic violence. Second, social service agencies required to use the HUD definition of homelessness as a method for distributing housing resources turned away some survivors of domestic violence because they were not eligible to receive these resources under the current definition.

Recent legislation which reauthorized the McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance programs has changed this definition so that victims fleeing domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence or stalking in their current housing situation would be defined as homeless and therefore would be eligible for HUD services for homeless people. This legislation, which incorporated provisions put forward in two previous bills (i.e., HEARTH Act, S. 1518/H.R. 7221), was signed into law on May 20, 2009 by President Obama. Included was an expansion of the definition of homeless so that people who are precariously housed, such as those doubled up with friends or relatives or living day-to-day in motels, with money and options running out would now have access to housing services. However, as has been the case with issues of adherence to some VAWA statutes, the actual implementation of this legislation and its effect on precariously housed survivors of domestic violence remains to be seen.

4.2. Program services for domestic violence survivors

Although emergency shelters (both domestic violence and homeless) offer many critical services and can provide high levels of security and safety, they may also pose barriers to victims of domestic violence. Some of these barriers arise from the physical structure of shelters, which are often located in older houses or buildings that do not afford much privacy and where communal living is the only option. Many have outdated or inadequate facilities, often because of limited funding for infrastructure improvements. Also, if the shelter is in a confidential location or far away from their support network or community, women may feel isolated. Other women may be hesitant to access services because of the stigma attached to being homeless or a victim of domestic violence.

Often an outgrowth of the building's physical layout rather than a programmatic decision, living in a shelter requires living in close community with others, which may create specific barriers for some populations. For example, lesbian women may feel uncomfortable going to a shelter because of fear of discrimination or rejection by other residents, or because they do not feel safe from their abusers, who, by posing as victims, could also gain entry into the shelter (Renzetti, 1999; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005). This model may also not be conducive for immigrant women or women of color who, like lesbians, may face discrimination or isolation from others in the shelter who are from different religious, racial, social, or cultural backgrounds (Bauer, Rodriguez, Quiroga, & Flores-Ortiz, 2000; Dasgupta, 1998; Ingram, 2007; Preisser, 1999; Santiago & Morash, 1995). In addition, and again often as a function of location in older buildings and inadequate funding for improvements, shelters may

not be fully accessible to women with disabilities. A recent survey of shelter residents showed that while almost all shelters in the sample had the capacity to accommodate residents with at least one type of disability (e.g., physical, hearing impairment, health needs, visual impairment, or cognitive disabilities), only one in three had the facilities to assist with all of these disabilities (Lyon et al., 2008). Women who need personal care attendants or guide dogs may be further excluded, as these supports are often not allowed in shelters.

With women from many different backgrounds attempting to co-exist in shelters with little space and minimal privacy during one of the most stressful times in their lives, there may also be conflicts and misunderstandings among women (both residents and staff). In fact, among a sample of shelter residents the most common problem encountered was conflict with other residents (Lyon et al., 2008). These clashes may be exacerbated in instances where the shelter, due to low wages and high staff turnover, is understaffed or has staff who may not be adequately trained to address the needs of a diverse group of residents.

Finally, many agencies operating shelters have established specific policies that may make it difficult for some women to get the help they need in these programs. For example, shelters may have strict rules that women must follow or risk being asked to leave, including curfews, chores, and mandatory participation in services. Shelters may also have eligibility requirements that exclude some women. It is not uncommon for shelters to screen out women with active alcohol and drug problems, suicidal ideation, or non-medicated mental health problems.

Policies and practices within facility-based domestic violence transitional housing programs may also pose barriers to women in need of housing services. These transitional housing programs may have exclusions similar to shelters, such as requiring that women not have any active substance abuse or mental health problems in order to be eligible for transitional housing (Baker et al., 2009). In addition, facility-based programs may have evening curfews, stipulate that there can be no overnight guests or alcohol on the premises, and require that women submit to housing inspections (Melbin et al., 2003).

Other exclusionary criteria are common for both facility-based and rental assistance types of transitional housing, including requiring that women complete a 30–60 day shelter program before being eligible for any type of transitional housing. One rationale behind this criterion may be a concern that women will return to the abusive partner or that women may still be in crisis immediately following separation, and therefore unable to take full advantage of the benefits provided by a transitional housing program. Other exclusions may be related to the funding source for the program, as some funding agencies require that their dollars not be used to support undocumented individuals or may require that women have children, as in the case where funding is provided from federal Temporary Aid for Need Families (TANF) funds (Baker et al., 2009).

Like transitional housing programs, subsidized permanent housing programs offer women the potential for stable housing, but also may have specific criteria that may make it difficult for domestic violence survivors to qualify. Women with a criminal history are not eligible for government-funded subsidized housing, and women with a poor credit or rental history may be denied access to housing by landlords. Permanent subsidized housing options often do not provide domestic violence specific interventions, such as safety planning, advocacy, and referrals to other services; women in these programs must seek out services on their own or go without, which may compromise their ability to resolve their issues and maintain their housing. However, by far the chief downside of subsidized permanent housing programs is their limited availability and subsequent long waiting lists. This availability is critical as women's inability to access stable housing may increase the likelihood that they will return to their abusers (Davies, Lyon, & Monti-Catania, 1998).

5. Limited coordination between domestic violence and housing/homelessness systems

From the previous examples, it is clear that within the housing/homeless and domestic violence systems there are policies and practices that may not be conducive to helping women obtain stable housing. However, coordination between these two services systems is as important to women's outcomes as are the specific policies and practices of each of the systems. Despite the clear link between domestic violence, housing instability, and homelessness, we continue to see a disconnect between the domestic violence service system and the housing/homeless service system. At the 2008 national conferences of the National Alliance to End Homelessness and the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, there was little evidence in workshop or plenary offerings that these national organizations saw their conferences as a platform for discussion about the crossover between these two issues. Lack of collaboration is likely a result of the different frameworks of the two systems — or simply the fact that both are working with issues that overwhelm their funded capacities.

Domestic violence programs are focused on safety planning and crisis intervention, and offer a wide array of advocacy services that victims need and want, including assistance in obtaining emergency and/or other types of housing (although they may not know the range of housing options and programs or work-related resources in their community). Housing and homeless service providers are focused on a move to stable housing and improved financial stability, but may have little knowledge or expertise in providing services to survivors. Because of differences in history, philosophy, and practices between these two systems, women, who are often faced with a variety of barriers after separating from an abusive partner, may not fit perfectly into either system, and therefore, receive insufficient or inappropriate services.

6. Promising policies and practices

In recognition of the complex relationship between domestic violence and housing instability, as well as the need for policies and programs that respond to the housing-related challenges faced by battered women and their children, in 2000 the National Advisory Council on Violence Against Women put forth an agenda for the nation (NACVAW, 2000). In particular, there were recommendations to modify existing housing policy and programs to increase their responsiveness to battered women, and to promote new policies and programs that would increase women's access to safe, affordable, and stable housing (Menard, 2001). In this section, we highlight some promising policies and practices that have been implemented since this call to action, including changes in: 1) state and local policies; 2) funding priorities; 3) program services that promote survivor autonomy and address the shortage of affordable housing; and 4) communication between domestic violence and housing/homeless service systems.

6.1. State and local policies

To address HUD's definition of chronic homelessness, and how it limits women's ability to access housing services, some communities did not wait for the U.S. Congress to approve legislation expanding the definition but developed their own definition of homelessness that is more inclusive of domestic violence survivors. In order to open up specific funding streams to a wider range of homeless people, including survivors of domestic violence, Portland, Oregon developed and implemented the following working definition for chronic homeless families: "Households with one or more children or the hardest to house adult/s with a disabling condition and/or multiple or severe barriers, who have experienced homelessness two or more times in a three-year period, or living outside, doubled up or in shelters for six months or more. Barriers include: criminal history, eviction history, immigrant

status, financial issues, language/culture, *domestic violence*, (emphasis added) disabilities in the household, credit history, child welfare involvement, alcohol and drug issues, and lack of skills and employability" (Citizen's Commission on Homelessness, Bureau of Housing and Community Development, 2004). Local adoption of such definitions may provide an immediate safety net for survivors until the new HUD guidelines can be fully implemented, and may pave the way for the development of collaborative approaches between local domestic violence and housing and homeless services systems, thus, opening up local funding streams for housing for domestic violence survivors.

A promising policy at the state-level is a result of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which the U.S. Congress passed in 1996. The legislation gave states great flexibility in how they might spend funds to help people achieve financial independence. For example, this block grant structure made it possible for states to design programs that may assist domestic violence survivors to overcome an abusive partner's sabotage of their efforts to become economically independent (Walton, 2002). Under PRWORA, at least 38 states have created programs that can boost domestic violence survivors' attempts to secure safe and stable housing. Michigan, for example, used funds from PRWORA to expand transitional housing programs. Alabama, Florida, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Utah, and West Virginia allocated funds for emergency housing or relocation programs for domestic violence survivors. Oregon implemented TA-DVS (Temporary Assistance for Domestic Violence Survivors). This unique program has less stringent eligibility requirements than usual in recognition that domestic violence survivors may not have access to household assets controlled by the batterer, such as the household checking account or even her own paycheck. Case-workers may authorize up to \$1200 as often as every three months to help a survivor achieve safety and independence; these funds are often applied to application fees, move-in costs, and other expenses related to the establishment of safe housing.

6.2. Funding priorities

Recently, there have been several funding priorities that seem to suggest that funding agencies are beginning to change their view of the types of services that are needed to help domestic violence survivors. First, agencies are now stipulating that domestic violence programs cannot mandate services. As an example, in 2007–08, the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) awarded over 200 grants to agencies developing housing interventions for domestic violence survivors. Grantees under this solicitation are not allowed to mandate services as a condition of entering or remaining in a transitional housing program (Kristin Weschler, U.S. Department of Justice, personal communication; <http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/docs/fy09-transitional-housing-solicit.pdf>). At the same time, state coalitions are advocating for similar changes to all domestic violence programs, regardless of their source of funding and the requirements attached. For example, in 2007 and 2008, the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence sponsored statewide trainings to facilitate domestic violence agencies' examination of their shelter rules with an eye to reducing mandatory requirements and rules or guidelines that, to many domestic violence survivors, mimic the controlling conditions under which they lived with their abusers, or at a minimum do not serve the needs of survivors.

Second, funding agencies are emphasizing the development of longer-term housing programs. OVW-awarded programs included both facility-based transitional housing and rapid re-housing or Housing First models, which are being implemented by domestic violence providers and homeless services providers, often in collaboration. These changes are not just within OVW; HUD has also committed funds for a new *Rapid Re-Housing for Families Demonstration* program (www.hudhre.info). Funds will support projects that provide access to immediate and permanent housing to households with dependent children residing on the street or in emergency shelters. Although domestic violence

survivors are not specifically mentioned, the program's target population of households with dependent children who have lived in emergency shelters or on the streets for at least seven consecutive days make it likely that survivors will be eligible for these services and/or that domestic violence programs can access the funds.

In addition, OVW has allocated \$43 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Recovery Act) Funds for transitional housing assistance for victims of domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and sexual assault (<http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/recovery.htm>). Similarly, HUD is making available \$1.5 billion of Recovery Act Funds that will go toward homelessness prevention, including a continued focus on rapid re-housing programs (<http://www.hudhre.info/index.cfm?do=viewHPRP>). Both OVW's and HUD's commitment to rapid re-housing for families in shelters and on the streets shows an intention, backed by federal dollars, to support services beyond the emergency/crisis intervention provided by shelters, potentially expanding the response to domestic violence in our communities.

These changes in funding to focus more on longer-term housing solutions are likely associated with concerted advocacy efforts by the domestic violence provider community. Among domestic violence providers, there is growing evidence of an increased difficulty that domestic violence survivors face in obtaining housing post-shelter. For example, the average length of stay at a shelter in Portland, Oregon has increased from 11 days in 1991 to 56 days in 2007 (Chiquita Rollins and Annie Neal, Multnomah Department of County Human Services, personal communication), in large part due to the lack of available, affordable housing for victims to move into after a shelter stay. This type of data obviates the need to shift from a focus on services that respond primarily to the most immediate needs of domestic violence survivors, such as emergency shelter and appropriate police response, to the development of services that specifically address the ongoing and long-term needs of survivors — including permanent housing.

This shift is illustrated by one program's decision to close its emergency shelter entirely in favor of a model that is focused on permanent housing. Volunteers of America Oregon's *Home Free* program observed the multiple barriers that survivors faced to establish safe permanent housing and the comparatively high cost of staffing an emergency shelter (which requires 24 h staffing and facilities costs). *Home Free's Housing First* program provides long-term intensive services to victims of domestic violence in order to address complex needs resistant to short-term resolution. The program emphasizes addressing the family's barriers to obtaining permanent housing by supporting a rapid return to stable housing. Program services include active advocacy with landlords and helping each survivor obtain a home for which she can realistically expect to assume the costs following a period of up to two years of subsidization. Once housing is established, survivor and advocate together tackle the family's other needs to help optimize the chance of lasting stabilization.

6.3. Program services that promote survivor autonomy

Although there is increased attention to the need for transitional and permanent housing, this does not abdicate the need for emergency shelters. Shelters provide a safe place to stay as well as effective and supportive services for women in crisis. However, as stated above, some women do not feel comfortable going to shelters. Therefore, domestic violence programs are seeking ways to make their shelters more accessible and hospitable to women who traditionally do not seek their services, and there is growing attention to designing programs to better support survivor agency and dignity. As one example, there is a shift toward shelters that are based on an apartment-style model rather than a community-living model.

The Salvation Army's Catherine Booth House, an emergency shelter for women and children leaving domestic violence in Seattle, Washington, ran for almost three decades as a communal living model in a large home housing 15–18 clients. However, there was little

privacy for women, and staff spent a lot of their time sorting out communal living issues. To create a different type of shelter where people had more autonomy, the organization recently purchased a 16-unit apartment building and completely remodeled it with client apartments, project space and staff space. With this change, women now have greater privacy and can choose when and with whom they want to share time and space. However, more importantly, according to the director, survivors can live according to rights and responsibilities instead of rules and regulations (Molly Curran, Director of Programs, personal communication).

Programs are also changing to increase women's autonomy by emphasizing flexibility in service offerings. The AWARE (Assisting Women with Advocacy, Resources, and Education) domestic violence program at Barnes-Jewish Hospital in St. Louis, Missouri, provides women with the option to stay in their own homes (once the abuser has vacated) rather than having to flee, enter a shelter, and eventually search for another home. The program pays a portion of rent and utilities for a two-year period with a gradual decline in the amount of assistance in order to move clients toward self-sufficiency. The program believes it is important for women's and children's sense of stability to be in their own home. The result is a program that is survivor-centered rather than trying to fit women into pre-existing services (Sue Dersch, Program Coordinator, personal communication).

6.4. Program services that address the shortage of affordable housing

A West Virginia domestic violence program made a bold and creative response to the limited housing in their community. This program wrote for and received a federal grant to build an apartment complex. SAFE (Stop Abusive Family Environments) purchased land and formed a construction company to build 40 townhouses for rent to low-income families. Domestic violence survivors and homeless families receive priority for the townhouses (Sharon Walden, Executive Director, personal communication). As SAFE's example illustrates, in the absence of affordable housing options, domestic violence and homeless programs may need to think outside the box, and even to the point of building their own housing.

6.5. Communication between domestic violence and housing/homeless service systems

In addition to the changes within the domestic violence provider community, there are also indicators of increased communication and collaboration between the domestic violence and housing/homeless systems. As an example, the District Alliance for Safe Housing (DASH) in Washington, DC (a housing/homeless service provider) has developed new "low barrier" housing options for domestic violence survivors in the DC area, and is also promoting a model they call Domestic Violence Informed Safe Housing that can be incorporated into any housing program that serves women. DASH's aim is to ensure that wherever a domestic violence survivor turns for help with housing in the DC area, she will encounter informed providers. DASH provides technical assistance to homeless programs and other community-based organizations in DC (www.dashdc.org).

Broader conversations between domestic violence systems and housing/homeless systems are beginning as well. In 2008, a roundtable discussion was held in Washington, D.C. to discuss the policy and practice issues regarding the intersection between domestic violence and homelessness, as well as the challenges ahead in forging a united and vigorous approach to improving response to the issue. This discussion included domestic violence provider agencies as well as representatives of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women, the National Network to End Domestic Violence, HHS Office on Federal Family Violence Prevention Services, the National Alliance to End Homelessness, and the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. This group

plans to publish a white paper addressing the emergency and permanent housing needs of domestic violence survivors as one step in the effort to further the inter-system conversation about this issue.

7. Recommendations

Although we are starting to see the implementation of some policies and practices that improve options for women and begin to fulfill recommendations from the NACVAW's national agenda (NACVAW, 2000), more must be done to ensure access to stable housing for battered women. In this section we will discuss recommendations for policies and practices that, if adopted and fully implemented, would benefit domestic violence survivors and their children.

One recommendation made by the NACVAW in 2000 is still relevant today: programs need to address domestic violence and housing instability simultaneously. We need to continue to emphasize safety and stability for women and their children. All policies and program practices need to be informed by the knowledge that domestic violence and housing instability are inextricably linked, and that a holistic approach is required to achieve safety and stability and to mitigate the negative economic, social, and health outcomes brought about and exacerbated by both experiences of domestic violence and housing instability.

7.1. Policy recommendations

Housing policies that specifically address the needs of survivors of domestic violence need to be fully implemented and enforced. This must include efforts to boost awareness of existing policies (e.g., those put forward in the 2005 re-authorization of VAWA) as well as consistent enforcement of and penalties for noncompliance. Additionally, similar protections for private market housing should be argued for and implemented. A precedent for such protections can be found in the decision of a recent federal sex discrimination lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union and the ACLU of Michigan when Tanica Lewis, a domestic violence survivor, was evicted from her apartment because of her abuser's behavior. The ACLU charged that the apartment management company's policy of evicting domestic violence victims because of their abusers' actions constitutes sex discrimination in violation of the federal Fair Housing Act and Michigan's Civil Rights Act. The settlement serves as an exemplary model for private housing policies throughout the country ([American Civil Liberties Union, 2007](#)). Similar court findings in communities across the nation could serve as effective deterrents for private landlords' attempts at discriminatory practices.

7.2. Practice recommendations

Efforts must continue to develop more housing options that respond to the reality that domestic violence survivors are a broad and diverse group of women with varying family compositions, cultural considerations, and ability to live in community while in crisis. The expansion and innovation of existing models of service delivery to provide a broader range of options for survivors can decrease the likelihood that women may choose to stay in an abusive home or devise other makeshift living arrangements not conducive to their safety.

A second practice recommendation is for programs to assess whether eligibility criteria and/or staffing levels may either purposely or inadvertently exclude some populations of women and children from accessing shelter or other housing or victim services. Some program directors report the use of these criteria to meet funding requirements; others believe in the merits of using the criteria ([Baker et al., 2009](#)). While no program can serve all the needs of all survivors, we strongly encourage programs to examine service criteria with an eye to who is turned away and why, and to engage in critical thinking about what may be done to better respond to those typically excluded from services.

While it is important to examine housing programs for their ability to promote clients' housing stability (the end) it is also imperative to consider how this outcome is achieved (the means), with particular scrutiny to the approach and underlying philosophy of different programs. One theme discussed throughout the current paper is the barriers posed by practices/policies that require women to participate in specific services (e.g., attending weekly support groups) as a condition of receiving housing ([Baker et al., 2009](#); [Melbin et al., 2003](#)). Using housing as leverage to promote treatment adherence has had mixed results when applied to homeless populations ([Robbins, Petriola, LeMelle & Monahan, 2006](#); [Tsemberis et al., 2004](#)). Given the experience of domestic violence survivors, whose lives have been marked by the controlling and coercive behaviors by their abusive partners, an emphasis on respect for client autonomy has special significance. Program models that minimize mandatory services and are driven by individual survivors' goals and circumstances may better ensure that they are both accessible to diverse populations of survivors and respectful of the unique needs of survivors for self-determination and choice.

The fourth recommendation is that housing and homeless systems work proactively to better serve the needs of domestic violence survivors. Service providers in these systems need to: 1) become educated about the dynamics of domestic violence and the issues faced by survivors, 2) screen for domestic violence; and 3) be prepared to address the range of issues presented by their clients. At the most basic level, this preparation could include the development of protocols for safety planning and referral, and cultivation of relationships with domestic violence providers.

Conversely, it is recommended that domestic violence providers become knowledgeable about the housing options in their community, and become trained on local, state, and federal housing policies so that they can inform women more effectively as they transition from emergency shelter to long-term housing. Cross-trainings could be offered as a way to promote information sharing and collaboration between the two systems ([Menard, 2001](#)). These relationship-building and cross-training efforts should take place at all levels (i.e., national, state, and local), as each system has much to learn from the other.

A final recommendation is the need for careful evaluation of any new housing policy or program, with evaluation efforts having a dual focus toward:

- 1) Unintended consequences that may disadvantage or endanger victims of domestic violence. Changes in service delivery and/or in types of services funded may create unforeseen burdens on those seeking services. Questions that need to be answered in such an evaluation include: As we expand housing options to include longer-term or permanent housing models for survivors of domestic violence, what are the consequences for women in crisis? Are they excluded from permanent housing because of assumptions about success based on the stage of crisis they are in? Are we shifting resources to expand longer-term housing services at the expense of funding for emergency shelter/housing options for women in crisis? By taking the time to analyze these questions using rigorous methods, we reduce the likelihood that the impact of policy and programmatic changes is different from the intent that fueled the change.
- 2) The efficacy of policies and practices on meeting women's needs. As important as avoiding policy and programmatic changes that result in negative unintended consequences is the evaluation of new and existing policies and practices on whether they effectively address barriers and improve housing-related as well as other health outcomes for women. HUD's new Rapid Re-Housing for Families Demonstration project, for example, includes an evaluation phase in which grantees will be required to gather data to determine whether households are able to independently sustain housing after receiving short-term leasing assistance. Evaluation studies should also examine the effect that different types of housing has on women's level of risk for revictimization, as well as the effect on children, including school

attendance and achievement, and emotional and behavioral outcomes.

With both types of evaluation it will be important to involve multiple voices, including survivors, advocates, providers, landlords, etc. Results from these studies will be important as we continue to refine policies and programs to respond to the complex set of issues faced by survivors in their attempts to end the abuse.

8. Conclusion

While domestic violence, housing instability, and homelessness have been linked together in the literature for some time, policies and program service models for addressing this intersection are still emerging. Progress is apparent as there are new policies directed at protecting survivors of domestic violence and funding streams in place to address the long-term housing needs of domestic violence survivors. Coupled with these, there is evidence of a shift in perspectives, with increasing focus on women's autonomy and agency in service delivery options and provision of flexible long-term services that are tailored to women's needs. To keep this momentum, we need to continue to deepen our understanding of the intersection between domestic violence and housing instability/homelessness, and increase our efforts to apply this knowledge toward the development of more effective responses to these co-occurring problems. Only when we provide services in a holistic and coordinated manner will we be successful in meeting both the housing and safety needs of domestic violence survivors and their children.

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