



# HER HEALTH, HER HOUSING

IMPROVING SERVICES FOR WOMEN  
EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

MAR. 6-28 • [NHCHC.ORG/VIRTUAL](https://nhchc.org/virtual)

An Attack on Women: The Intersection of  
Violence and Homelessness

Thursday, March 7, 2019

Quality | Access | Justice | Community | [nhchc.org](https://nhchc.org)

NATIONAL  
HEALTH CARE  
for the  
HOMELESS  
COUNCIL

# Disclaimer

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# Presenters



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Los Angeles, CA

# 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

# Report demonstrates multitude of ways trauma impacts women experiencing homelessness

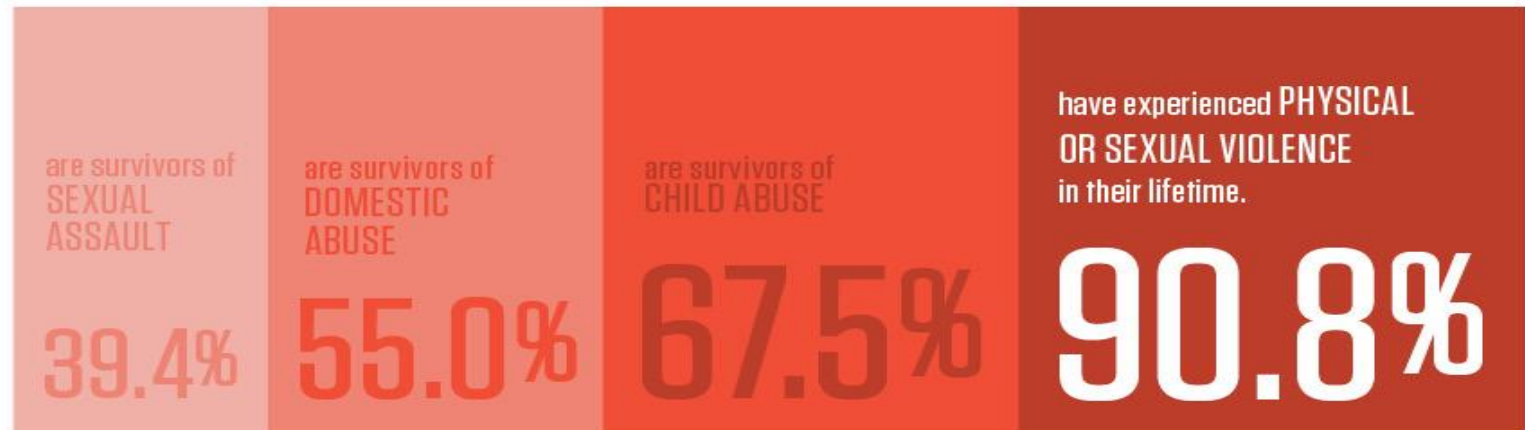


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# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

THE PERSISTENTLY HIGH RATE OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IS ONE OF THE MOST DISTINGUISHING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.

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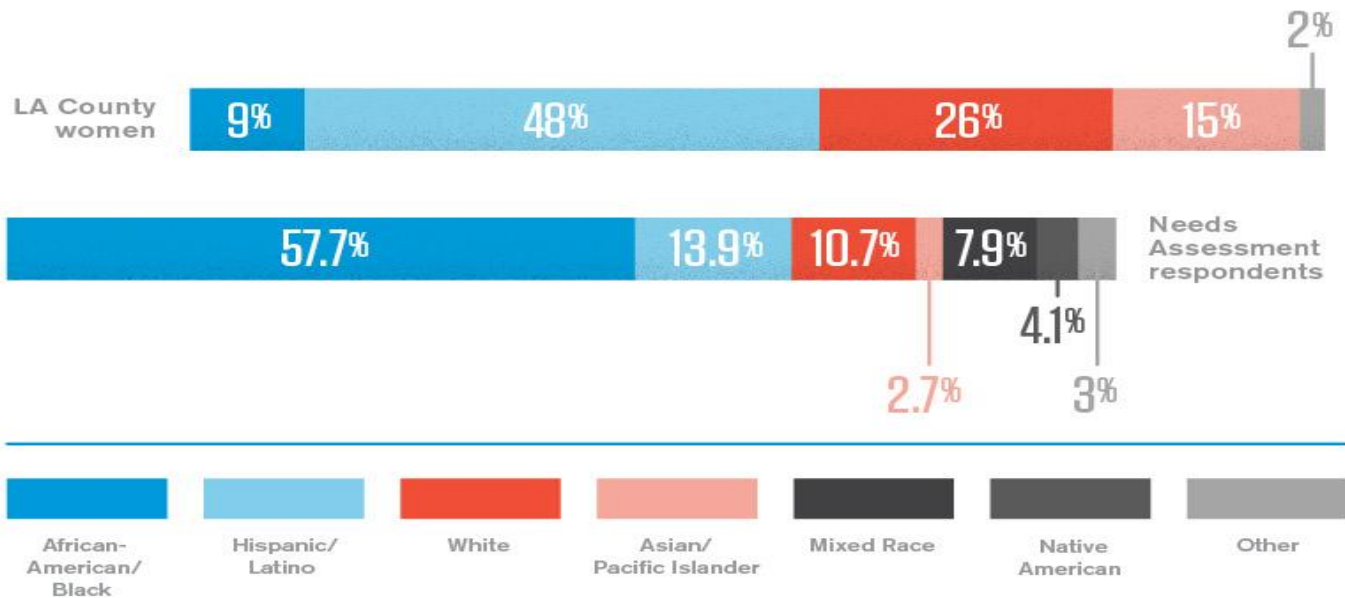
## SOLUTIONS:

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.  
<https://www.downtownwomenscenter.org/2016-needs-assessment/>



# 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.



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

experiencing domestic violence or sexual assault in the last 12 months. Of those who experienced violence in the last 12 months, nearly half (47.2%) had experienced violence at least four times in the last year.

The data also reflect a persistent and severe lack of resources for women who have survived violence. This year, more than half of survey respondents (54.3%) reported not receiving services to deal with the after-effects of trauma. This statistic reflects a persistent and severe lack of resources for women who have survived violence; in 2013, 42.3% were unable to access trauma recovery services. In 2010, a shocking 72% said they had not been offered services to help deal with the after-effects of violence.

A staggering two-thirds of this year's survey respondents (67.5%) had experienced child abuse at some point in their lifetimes, a more than 20% increase from 2013. Child abuse can lead to long-term impacts; research shows that of every three individuals who survive child abuse, two will go on to experience sexual abuse later in life.<sup>4</sup>

Research shows that violence against women is consistently underreported globally.<sup>5</sup> The reasons a woman may not report violence vary, and could include fear of further attacks from her assailant or a desire to avoid the stigma sometimes associated with surviving sexual violence. Therefore, though the numbers included in this report are high, they could potentially be higher.

## COMMUNITY PROFILE: CRISTINA ALVAREZ

### DOWNTOWN WOMEN'S CENTER PARTICIPANT

"After my brother attacked me, I couldn't go to work. I couldn't go back home anymore. I wasn't used to sleeping in my car, and I felt so scattered. It displaced me. I'm from Los Angeles, but I didn't immediately come to Skid Row — I was staying with a family member who was being harassed, and ultimately I had to leave. Despite seeking help and working with my lawyer, I've yet to see justice come out of it, which has made me lose faith in the criminal justice system.

I think that we should have a trauma center in downtown Los Angeles. I've been listening to some women talk about their experiences with violence and how they didn't know that such places like domestic violence groups and women's groups existed. We need to provide more safe spaces for women, and for the sake of future generations, we need to look at this issue carefully and improve."

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

<sup>4</sup> "Sexual Revictimization: A Review of the Empirical Literature," U.S. National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, April 2009. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19781910>

<sup>5</sup> "Tip of the Iceberg: Reporting and Gender-Based Violence in Developing Countries," *The American Journal of Epidemiology*, December 12, 2012. <http://ajph.aphspubs.org/content/102/12/2122>

<sup>6</sup> *Human Trafficking: The Illegal Movement of People, Typically for the Purpose of Forced Labor or Commercial Sexual Exploitation*. It is legally defined as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, or fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. ("Human Trafficking," National Institutes of Justice, July 2016. <http://www.nij.gov/topics/crime/human-trafficking/pages/welcome.aspx>)

<sup>7</sup> *Homelessness, Survival Sex, and Human Trafficking: An Experience by the Government House of New York*, "National Alliance to End Homelessness," May 2013. <http://www.endhomelessness.org/files/4162/00000924/20130520House920ofOrder920University920Trafficking920Report.pdf>

## SAFETY IN SHELTERS AND ON THE STREETS

Unsurprisingly, 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, more than one-third (40.3%) had experienced sexual or physical violence within the last year, compared with 22.2% of women who were in housing. As outlined in the Housing section of this report, many women said they feel unsafe in shelters and experience high rates of violence. Women who reported sleeping most frequently on the streets fared even worse; 41% have experienced domestic violence, and 27.3% have experienced sexual assault within the last 12 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, 19.8% reported trading sex for money, alcohol or drugs, shelter, food, or other goods. There is likelihood this is an underreported number — of the 371 women surveyed, 31.7% checked the option "not applicable" or declined to answer, suggesting some respondents may have felt the need to perform a sexual favor in exchange for basic needs but did not feel comfortable indicating so in the survey. Of women who reported they had engaged in survival sex, a distressing 72.1% said they'd experienced domestic violence or sexual assault as a result.

Twenty-eight survey respondents (8.6%) were survivors of human trafficking, the illegal movement of people for the purpose of forced labor or sexual exploitation.<sup>6</sup> Of those

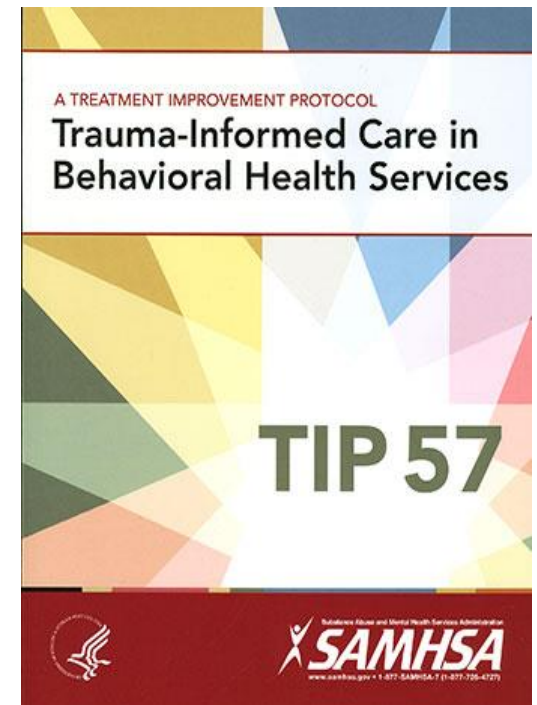
## SURVIVAL SEX

is the act of trading sex acts to meet the most basic needs for survival, including food and shelter. Often, women who have no other resources feel survival sex is their only option.

# 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.

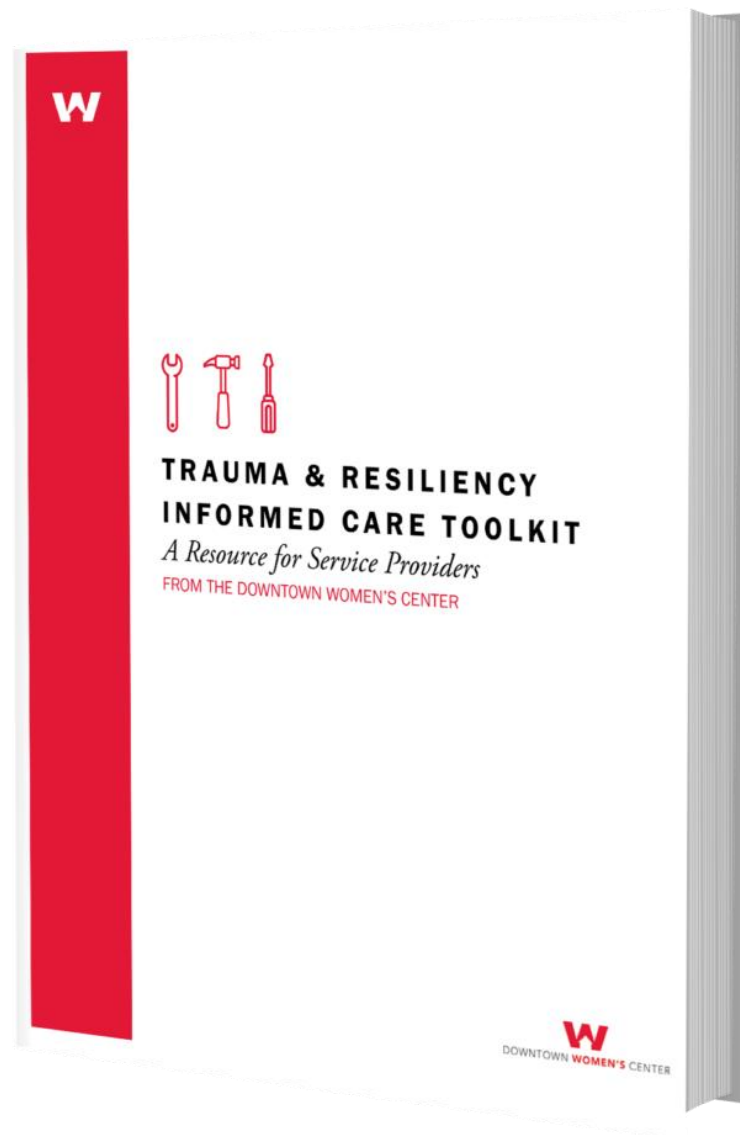


DWC’s Advisory Board reflects principles of Trauma Informed Care, including: Empowerment, Voice and Choice & Mutuality and Collaboration





# 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!**



DOWNTOWN  
**WOMEN'S**  
CENTER

Homelessness ends here.

@dwcweb

[www.downtownwomenscenter.org](http://www.downtownwomenscenter.org)

213-680-0600

[AmyT@DowntownWomensCenter.org](mailto: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](#)



# Q&A



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