

UNDERSTANDING INTIMATE PARTNER ABUSE IN RUNAWAY & HOMELESS YOUTH

Intimate Partner Abuse (IPA) is abuse that is committed by a current or past spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend, and includes actual or threatened physical and/or sexual assault, emotional abuse, and/or verbal abuse. IPA occurs in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships.

Homeless youth are at increased risk for intimate partner abuse for a variety of reasons. A significant number of youth leave home because of family conflict or family violence. Having experienced or witnessed domestic violence, abuse or neglect, these youth are left without role models of healthy relationships. In addition, without income, many youth turn to prostitution, drug dealing, or other illegal activities to survive on the streets, which increases their vulnerability to exploitative relationships and partner abuse. In Hollywood, California in 2007 we found that:

- 23% of sexually active youth reported ever having exchanged sex for resources or drugs.
- 70% reported some involvement with the criminal justice system including arrest, probation, or incarceration.

Add in substance abuse and mental illness and the risks increase for both aggressive behavior and vulnerability to violence. Nearly half (49%) of the sample of homeless youth surveyed in 2007 met diagnostic criteria for depression. Almost a quarter had been threatened with a weapon while on the street and a quarter had been assaulted while on the street (an additional 13% had been sexually assaulted).

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR WORKING WITH HOMELESS YOUTH INVOLVED IN IPA

While homeless youth involved in abusive relationships face similar risks to their health and safety as adults and their non-homeless peers, their status both as youth and as homeless individuals presents unique challenges to service delivery. For one thing, abuse is often what they are sued to. And for another, most of these young people don't have safe places to escape to. They can't just walk away.

Concurrent substance abuse and mental health issues: Given these youth's extensive experience with trauma and their lives on the street, it is common for them to use drugs and alcohol, and many youth have significant mental health issues. Residential or service programs that require sobriety will exclude a significant number of youth. Similarly, residential programs that

don't provide access to mental health services may not be able to help youth achieve the stability they need to live independently.

Dependence on street relationships: Many homeless youth, abused by their parents or caregivers or pushed-out of their homes as teens, create new families on the street. Even when their relationships with other homeless youth or adults are exploitative or abusive, they may be reluctant to use services that require them to sever ties with the only "family" that they have and with the individuals that have protected them or provided for them.

GLBT youth: Existing domestic violence prevention and intervention services are largely designed for heterosexual women. However, there is growing recognition that partner abuse occurs in gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender relationships as in heterosexual ones. Homeless GLBT youth need access to sensitive and appropriate prevention and intervention services.

Traditional safety planning isn't responsive to youths' needs and experiences: Current approaches to safety planning are based on a victim profile that is often not reflective of homeless youth. Traditional safety planning recommendations rely heavily on the use of domestic violence shelters and restraining orders, which may not be available to or appropriate for homeless youth. Few of the existing safety planning options offer any real protection to homeless youth.

Concerns about warrants and reluctance to engage law enforcement: In order to survive on the street, many homeless youth engage in illegal activities and may have had significant negative experiences with law enforcement and the juvenile or criminal justice systems. As a result, they may be extremely reluctant to report abusive relationships or assault to law enforcement. Many of them also have outstanding warrants, further contributing to their reluctance to file a restraining order or police report.

SAFETY PLANNING- Remind young people to:

1. Keep important phone numbers with them at all times.
2. Carry their own documents and medication, or ask an agency to store them.
3. Tell people they trust about the abuse, and develop code words to use in case they need help.
4. Make an escape plan that includes 4 places to go to be safe right away.



RESOURCES

It is important to create a culture in your agency where violence and the threat of violence are not tolerated and where there are clear expectations for conduct. In addition, your services should include skill-building and prevention education to help keep youth safe and maintain healthy relationships. Offer groups that explore healthy relationships and intimate partner abuse, and provide concrete resources and guidance to youth. For copies of our homeless youth-specific prevention curriculum, Relationship Traffic, contact the Division of Adolescent Medicine at Childrens Hospital Los Angeles at (323) 361-2390.

Advantages of Domestic Violence Shelters Over Youth Shelters:

- Most DV shelters are confidential locations, offering safety and protection.
- DV shelters will generally accept woman with children.

What DV Agencies Need to Be Aware of with Homeless Youth:

- Services need to be responsive to young people's age-specific needs and their sexual orientation.
- Mental health and substance abuse needs are common.
- Many homeless youth in abusive relationships are male.
- Some homeless youth are unaccompanied minors.
- Insistence on immediately applying for a restraining or protective order may be a disincentive for youth interested in shelter.
- Many homeless youth need to attend school or go to work during the day in order to move toward stabilization.

Mandated Reporting: For state-by-state resources and legal information on reporting IPA, go to <http://www.womenslaw.org> or <http://www.sexlaws.org>. For general information about mandated reporting of child abuse and neglect, contact the National Center for Youth Law at www.youthlaw.org.

Duty to Warn:

For specific information about the duty to warn in your area, visit the American Psychological Association at www.apa.org.

Injury Reporting:

Health care providers may have an additional duty to report intimate partner abuse in states that require reporting of domestic violence-related injuries. For more information about the additional reporting duties of health care providers, visit the Family Violence Prevention Fund at www.endabuse.org.

Restraining or Protective Orders: For state-by-state instructions on obtaining restraining orders, go to www.WomensLaw.org

Are you seeing more and more HOMELESS YOUTH at your DV agency? Are you baffled about how to help them? Here is what you need to know.

WHO ARE HOMELESS YOUTH?

Homeless youth are individuals aged 12 to 24 who have left home or been kicked out of their homes and lack a regular nighttime residence. A recent homeless count in Los Angeles projects that over 5,000 youth are homeless in Los Angeles over the course of a year.

Results of research conducted in Hollywood, California in 2007 revealed that:

- Homeless youth come from all over the US.
- One quarter (25%) of homeless youth in Hollywood are under 18.
- 85% of Hollywood's homeless youth are young people of color.
- 68% are male and 32% are female.
- 36% report as gay, lesbian or bisexual (an additional 5% are transgender).



The majority of these young people disclosed abusive backgrounds, many as the reason they left home or were kicked out:

- More than half (51%) reported being victims of child physical abuse.
- Almost a quarter (23%) reported being victims of child sexual abuse.
- Almost half witnessed physical abuse between their parents.

This guide was produced by agencies of the Hollywood Homeless Youth Partnership (Childrens Hospital Los Angeles, Covenant House California, Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Center, Los Angeles Youth Network, My Friend's Place and the Saban Free Clinic) and colleagues at Break the Cycle and Peace Over Violence. It was informed by work initially supported through a grant from the SAMHSA Community Collaborations to Prevent Youth Violence and Promote Youth Development #1H79-SM553-17 and was further refined and expanded with support from the Department of Health Services, Administration on Children Youth and Families, Grant Agreement # 90EV033801.