

CHALLENGES THAT PREVENT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS FROM LEAVING ABUSIVE PARTNERS

One of the first questions that a victim of domestic violence is asked is: **WHY DID YOU STAY?** This question is asked by law enforcement, judges, family and friends. The assumption is that she stayed by choice, and that she must take responsibility for enduring abuse at the hands of her perpetrator. **ASKING WHY SHE STAYS, HOWEVER, DETRACTS FROM HOLDING PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR ACTIONS.** Additionally, it doesn't take into account the numerous cultural and systemic barriers that prevent victims of domestic violence from leaving their abusers.

- **1 IN 4 WOMEN** experiences some form of violence in her lifetime.
- While domestic violence impacts both men and women, it is largely a gendered crime, with **WOMEN MAKING UP 86% OF VICTIMS** involving boyfriends and partners.¹
- Of these women, **98% EXPERIENCE FINANCIAL ABUSE.**² This can include: not having access to a job, being financially dependent on her abuser, having to give her perpetrator her check at the end of the week, not having access to a bank, or not having access to resources that would help her become financially independent.
- Over **90% OF HOMELESS WOMEN** have reported that they've experienced physical and sexual abuse at some point in their lives, and **63% HAVE BEEN VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE** during their adult lives.³ Reports⁴ have illustrated that housing options for domestic violence victims have decreased over the past several years while the demand has increased. Leaving her abuser may not always be an option if she is not financially independent or cannot find immediate placement at a local domestic violence facility.

¹ 2 Family Violence Statistics: Including Statistics on Strangers and Acquaintances. 2005. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/fvs02.pdf>

² <https://purplepurse.com/get-the-facts/about-the-allstate-foundation/newsroom-introduction/the-allstate-foundation-domestic-violence-program>

³ Browne, A. 1998. "Responding to the Needs of Low Income and Homeless Women Who are Survivors of Family Violence." *Journal of American Medical Women's Association*. 53(2): 57-64

⁴ http://nnedv.org/downloads/Census/DVCounts2014/DVCounts14_NatlSummary_Color-2.pdf

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- The mere presence of a gun in a domestic violence relationship **INCREASES THE RISK OF LETHALITY BY 5 TIMES**. And domestic violence assaults that involve guns are 12 times more likely to result in death than those involving other weapons. One of the most dangerous times for a victim of violence is when she leaves—the presence and threat of guns often results in victims opting to stay in an abusive relationship, understanding that her risk of fatality will increase exponentially if she leaves.
- While all women experience domestic violence across the board, the challenges women of color and immigrant women face in leaving an abusive home are heightened.
 - Immigrant women often come from countries where cultural norms are accepting of domestic violence, or they may not have access to legal and social services in the U.S. due to linguistic and cultural barriers.⁵ They may also not have access to domestic violence programs that provide linguistically and culturally appropriate services, which could prevent them from considering leaving their abuser.⁶
 - Native women face the highest rates of violence, with double the rate of violence than the general population.⁷ **OVER 70% OF THESE CRIMES ARE COMMITTED BY NON-INDIAN PERPETRATORS**. Because of complex issues around jurisdiction and the fact that a non-Indian perpetrator cannot be prosecuted by tribal courts, perpetrators have historically been immune from being held accountable.⁸ This has resulted in a high rate of non-reporting by Native women.
 - For African American women, the likelihood of domestic violence is **LARGELY TIED TO ECONOMIC FACTORS**, and occurs most amongst: married couples that are low income⁹, relationships in which the male partner is either underemployed or unemployed¹⁰, or when a couple is living in a poor neighborhood.¹¹

⁵ Orloff et al., 1995. "With No Place to Turn: Improving Advocacy for Battered Immigrant Women." *Family Law Quarterly*, 29(2):313.

⁶ Orloff et al., 1995. "With No Place to Turn: Improving Advocacy for Battered Immigrant Women." *Family Law Quarterly*, 29(2):313.

⁷ Greenfeld, Lawrence & Smith, Steven. *American Indians and Crime*. Bureau of Justice Statistics, US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, February 1999. NCJ 173386. <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/aic.pdf>

⁸ Deer, Sarah. (2005) Sovereignty of the Soul: Exploring the Intersection of Rape Law Reform and Federal Indian Law. *Suffolk University Law Review*, 38, 455-466

⁹ Benson, M.L. and Fox, G.L. (2004) *When violence hits home: How economics and neighborhood play a role*. Washington, DC.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

¹⁰ Hampton, R.L. & Gelles, R.J. (1994). Violence toward black women in a nationally representative sample of black families. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 25, 105-119.

¹¹ Benson, M., Wooldredge, J., Thistlethwaite, A., Fox, G. (2004). The correlations between race and domestic violence is confounded with community context. *Social Problems*, 51, 326-342