

# Homelessness and Sexual Assault Training

Sponsored by Common Ground Santa Barbara County



# No Safe Place: Sexual Assault in the Lives of Homeless Women

Research studies are limited due to narrow definition of homelessness. Many survivors are the “hidden homeless” which means they may not be staying in homeless shelters or on the streets but rather couch-surfing with friends or family, returning to abusers if shelters are full, those who trade sex for a place to sleep, etc.

Most research is directed at homeless women. However, we know that men are also survivors of sexual assault.

# What We Do Know

The most comprehensive and rigorous studies on homeless women conducted to date continue to note the extraordinarily high levels of abuse and victimization that homeless survivors endure before, during, and after episodes of homelessness.

# By the Numbers

— [ 13% of homeless women reported having been raped in the past 12 months

— [ 9% of homeless women reported at least one experience of sexual victimization in the last month

— [ Also disturbing is the finding that compared to their low-income housed counterparts, the sexual assault experiences of homeless women are more likely to be violent, and to include multiple sexual acts

# By the Numbers

- [ 92% of homeless mothers had experienced severe physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lives
- [ 43% report sexual abuse in their childhood
- [ 63% report intimate partner violence in adulthood

# By the Numbers

- Homeless women with serious mental illnesses such as major depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder are highly vulnerable to victimization.
- In one in-depth study 97% of the participants, all of whom were homeless and had a mental illness, reported experiences of violent victimization at some point in their lives

# Effects on Mental Health

— [ Homeless women who experience sexual assault may suffer from a range of emotional and physical challenge

— [ 45% report suicide attempts

— [ 47% report depression

— [ 45% report drug or alcohol dependence

— [ 39% report PTSD

# Increased Risk Factors

— [ Childhood abuse

— [ Substance dependence

— [ Length of time homeless

— [ Location while homeless

— [ Presence of mental illness

— [ Engaging in economic survival strategies (panhandling, sex trade, etc)



# LGBTQ Youth

- A growing body of research bolsters the conclusion that LGBTQ youth represent approximately 20% of homeless youth. This is disproportionate to the number of LGBTQ youth (10%) in the general population.
- Conservatively estimated, each year over 300,000 LGBTQ youth experience at least one night of homelessness in America.

National Alliance To End Homelessness

# LGBTQ Youth

- Many experience abandonment and severe family conflict stemming from their sexual orientation and gender identity but other factors are also present: physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, substance abuse by parents, and mental health disabilities.
- LGBTQ youth are particularly vulnerable during episodes of homelessness. Once homeless, LGBTQ youth experience higher rates of physical and sexual assault than heterosexual homeless youth. National Alliance To End Homelessness

# What Needs to be Changed?

- [ Outreach to people where they are
- [ Train all homeless service providers in trauma informed care
- [ Help teach homeless survivors about self-care and self-soothing techniques
- [ Advocates to help homeless survivors report assaults and seek needed resources (shelter, counseling, etc)
- [ Access to emergency shelter and permanent housing



# To learn more....

— [ Check out [VAWnet.org](http://VAWnet.org) (National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women)