



## **New Evidence Documenting the Relationship Between Domestic Violence and Welfare**

*A Research Compilation from the Project for Research on Welfare, Work, and Domestic Violence, a collaborative project of Taylor Institute and the University of Michigan Research Development Center on Poverty, Risk and Mental Health*

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**TRAPPED IN POVERTY/Trapped by Abuse: New Evidence Documenting the Relationship Between Domestic Violence and Welfare**  
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**This report is a product of the Project for Research on Welfare, Work, and Domestic Violence, a collaborative project of Taylor Institute and the University of Michigan Research Development Center on Poverty, Risk and Mental Health.**

**The Project for Research on Welfare, Work, and Domestic Violence provides national coordination of research and public education on the relationship of domestic violence to poverty and welfare use. Readers are encouraged to share information--either data or anecdotes--with the project and should seek to join its network of researchers by contacting Jody Raphael at Taylor Institute or Rich Tolman at the University of Michigan. In September 1997 the project plans a conference for persons interested in developing research projects around the issue of domestic violence and welfare, at which time methodological issues and a future research agenda will be discussed. Interested parties can also consult the Project at <http://www.ssw.umich.edu/trapped>**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

***TRAPPED BY POVERTY/TRAPPED BY ABUSE: NEW EVIDENCE DOCUMENTING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND WELFARE*** is a summary and analysis of recent research studies which help us identify the extent of domestic violence among women receiving welfare and to gauge the effects of this violence on women's lives, their use of welfare, and on their ability to become economically self-sufficient.

### Four Recent Studies

1. *The Passaic County Study of AFDC Recipients in a Welfare-to-Work Program*, a research effort conducted by the Passaic County Board of Social Services, reports on a sample of 846 women on AFDC in one northern New Jersey county participating in a mandatory pre-employment assessment and training program between December 1995 and January 1997.

- 14.6% of the sample reported current physical abuse by an intimate partner and 25% verbal or emotional abuse, with 57.3% of the entire sample reporting physical abuse some time during their adulthood.
- 12.9% of the entire sample, and 39.7% of those current physical abuse victims, reported that their partner actively prevents their participation in education and training.

2. *In Harm's Way? Domestic Violence, AFDC Receipt and Welfare Reform in Massachusetts* reports on a random sample of 734 women in the Massachusetts welfare caseload, surveyed between January and June 1996 by the University of Massachusetts Boston. This study is the first scientific sampling of one state's entire AFDC caseload which measured both current and past prevalence of domestic violence.

- 19.5% of the sample reported current physical violence at the hands of an intimate partner, with 64% experiencing intimate partner violence ever in life as an adult.
- Abused women in the sample were 15 times more likely than their never abused counterparts to have a current partner who would not like them going to school or work.

3. *The Worcester Family Research Project* is a five year study of 436 women, most of whom were welfare recipients, both homeless and housed, in Worcester, Massachusetts, conducted by the Better Homes Fund between August 1992 and July 1995.

- The study found that, of the entire sample of homeless and housed women, 61% had been severely physically assaulted by an intimate male partner as adults; nearly one-third (32%) had experienced severe violence from their current or most recent partner. Over one-third (34%) had been threatened with death by an intimate partner.
- This research also documented current high prevalences of mental health problems and posttraumatic stress disorder within the sample at levels two to three times that in the general female population.

4. *The Effects of Violence on Women's Employment* is a random survey of 824 women in one low-income neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois, conducted by the Joint Center for Poverty Research at Northwestern University between September 1994 and May 1995.

- Although rates of violence were high for the entire neighborhood sample, (11.8%), AFDC recipients experienced three times the amount of physical violence than their neighborhood counterparts within the last year (31.1%), and two-and-a-half times the amount of severe physical aggression within the last year. (8.1% compared with 19.5%).

### Comparative Prevalence of Domestic Violence

The four studies found large and consistently high percentages of women on AFDC currently embroiled in violent relationships. The studies also document that the majority of women on welfare are past victims of domestic violence.

Study	Current physical	Ever in life
Passaic County	14.6%	57.3%
U Mass	19.5%	64.9%
Better Homes Fund	32%	61%
Northwestern U	19.5%	33.8%*

\*Fewer items in the conflict scale were included when the prevalence of violence ever in life was measured, which probably accounts for the differences between this study and others.

### The Characteristics of Domestic Violence Victims

- Ever abused women on welfare currently suffer from depression, other mental health problems, posttraumatic stress disorder, drug and alcohol abuse, and physical health problems at much higher rates than their non-abused counterparts in the studies as well as in the general female population.
- High percentages of abused women reported arguments about child support, visitation, and child custody, and police visits to their homes, as well as interference from their intimate partners with education, training and work.
- Two studies (University of Massachusetts and Northwestern University) report no significant differences in educational status among abused and non-abused women, a fact which indicates that many women on welfare need specialized domestic violence services.

## **Policy Implications**

The new data support the hypothesis, advocated by welfare-to-work providers, that many women on welfare who do not comply with work or training requirements while receiving assistance may be prevented from doing so by the direct behavior of an abusive partner, or by the indirect effects of the abuse on their health and well-being. Recent changes in welfare law, with rigid requirements for employment and time limits for welfare receipt, will place some battered women and their children at great risk for continued and increased violence and long-term poverty. With the high prevalence of domestic violence across women's life spans, paternity and child support collection policies may also endanger some women and revictimize them and their children. Given the extent of the problem, it is essential that state welfare departments take a careful look at the impact of domestic violence as they redesign their policies and programs.

### **✓ Identification of Domestic Violence**

Because these new data spell out a variety of different ways in which domestic violence can affect women, welfare departments must determine a mechanism to let battered women on welfare decide for themselves to disclose whether domestic violence is present in their lives, and describe whether and how it is serving as a welfare-to-work barrier. Failure to possess this knowledge about battered women's needs will further endanger those battered women who are unable to comply with work requirements within the context of time-limited welfare programs. Welfare departments should work closely with battered women's service groups and advocates to design methods by which battered women will feel comfortable in disclosing domestic violence after they have received notice of their right to do so and why it might be in their best interest to share the information.

### **✓ Addressing the Implications of Domestic Violence**

- The Wellstone/Murray Family Violence Amendment in the new federal welfare legislation gives state welfare departments the flexibility to provide battered women on welfare more time to remove the domestic violence barrier by obtaining specialized domestic violence services. At the same time it allows states to escape federal penalties for not having requisite percentages of women at work in any given month if domestic violence is the reason.
- Temporary waivers of time or of state welfare program requirements are only one part of the necessary response. Welfare departments should work in partnership with their communities to create a network of needed services for the large numbers of abused women on welfare who will need specialized assistance. States should also be creative about fashioning new welfare programs which might facilitate women's ability to escape violence. One researcher, for example, has suggested providing battered women with a one-time lump sum payment to enable them to relocate to a new community.
- It is essential that child support collection workers inform all women on welfare that they have a right not to cooperate with paternity and child support enforcement if this action would put them and their children at risk of further violence.

- Because the data indicate that the majority of women on welfare have an intimate male partner in their lives, anti-poverty policy which exclusively focusses on low-income girls and women misses a critical element. The new data suggest that it is essential that we hold batterers accountable for their behavior and that we intervene in ways that deter abuse. It is possible that promoting job training and employment for low-income men and, when possible, involving males positively in their children's lives can be positive factors in fighting poverty in women's lives. However, this intervention must be accomplished in a manner that is safe for children and their mothers.

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the past two years, grass-roots welfare-to-work programs have reported finding a great deal of domestic violence among their participants, impressions documented by Taylor Institute in two reports, issued in 1995 (*Domestic Violence: Telling the Untold Welfare-to-Work Story*) and 1996 (*Prisoners of Abuse: Domestic Violence and Welfare Receipt*). These welfare-to-work programs consistently describe patterns of sabotage employed by intimate partners to prevent low-income girls and women from gaining education and employment. Nor does the violence and sabotage end when women leave their abusers; in many instances the amount of violence increases. In addition, programs report that their participants suffer from traumatic effects of the abuse, resulting in symptoms like depression, persistent anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder, which seriously affect women's ability to seek and hold employment.

Until recently, we have depended on this data from welfare-to-work programs to estimate the extent of this problem. The estimated percentages of current domestic violence among women in these programs are high, generally hovering around the 50% mark, but the samples have been small and the methods unrigorous.

These early studies have encouraged researchers to examine the prevalence of domestic violence within AFDC caseloads. We now have results from four recent in-depth studies, each involving fairly large samples. These published and unpublished studies allow us to more accurately answer the question about the extent of current and past domestic violence among women receiving welfare. We can also begin to gauge the effects of this violence on women's lives, on their use of welfare, and on their ability to become economically self-sufficient.

Although the studies use somewhat different methods, including random and nonrandom surveys of welfare caseloads and random neighborhood surveys, the prevalence of violence across the studies is high and remarkably consistent.

These studies clearly demonstrate that domestic violence is a factor in a high percentage of welfare recipients' lives. Some women on welfare who do not comply with work and/or training requirements while receiving assistance are being prevented from doing so by the direct behavior of an abusive partner, or by the indirect effects of the abuse on their health and well-being. Recent changes in welfare law, with rigid requirements for employment and time limits for welfare receipt, will place some battered women and their children at great risk for continued and increased violence and long-term poverty. Stricter federal rules about establishing paternity and collecting child support could prove dangerous for some women who have escaped domestic violence but who might face reactivation of the abuse as a result of child support enforcement. For these reasons, it is essential for welfare policy makers to recognize and understand the role of abusive relationships in these women's lives.

The Family Violence Amendment in the new federal legislation gives state welfare departments the flexibility to provide battered women on welfare more time to remove the domestic violence barrier by obtaining specialized domestic violence services. As state welfare departments design their state plans and determine whether or not to choose the Family Violence option, they must better understand how domestic violence serves as a welfare-to-work barrier and modify provisions of their state welfare plans to meet the needs of battered women and their children for safety. We believe that this report provides much needed information to inform this decision-making process.

This report compiles and compares data across all available studies. First, the report summarizes the data in four new research studies:

- *The Passaic County Study of AFDC Recipients in a Welfare-to-Work Program*, a sample of 846 women on AFDC in a mandatory pre-employment training program;

- *In Harm's Way? Domestic Violence, AFDC Receipt, and Welfare Reform in Massachusetts*, a random sample of 734 women in the current state caseload;
- *The Worcester Family Research Project*, a five-year study of 436 homeless and housed women, most of whom received AFDC; and
- *The Effects of Violence on Women's Employment*, a random survey of 824 women in one low-income neighborhood of Chicago.

Following this presentation, all studies are considered and compared from the standpoint of what is now known and what is unknown about welfare and domestic violence. Lastly, this report summarizes some of our initial views about the implications of this data for welfare and anti-poverty policy.

## FOUR NEW MAJOR RESEARCH STUDIES WITH COMPARABLE DATA

**I. Report Title:** *The Passaic County Study of AFDC Recipients In A Welfare-To-Work Program: A Preliminary Analysis*

**Research Team:** Passaic County Board of Social Services

**Author: William Curcio.** For further information contact Curcio at Passaic County Board of Social Services, 80 Hamilton Street, Paterson, New Jersey 07505, 201-881-3169; fax: 201-881-3232.

**Sample:** 846 women on AFDC in Passaic County, all mandatory participants in education, training and jobs-related activities. In New Jersey at the time of the study women may become exempt from participation if they have a dependent child under age two, are needed at home to care for a disabled person, have an illness or incapacity, are in the third trimester of pregnancy, are over age 60, or live in a remote part of the state. The sample represents 22% of the non-exempt AFDC population, and 12% of the overall caseload in the county. Forty-four and-a-half percent of the sample were African-American, 5.9% White, and 48.9% Hispanic.

**Time Frame of Study:** December 1995-January 1997

**Methods:** Women on AFDC participating in an eight week Life Skills Program operated by the Passaic County Board of Social Services were confidentially surveyed about the prevalence of domestic violence in their lives. The study used a 45-item self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was introduced after students had attended the program for approximately five to seven days, when security and mutual support had been established and participants had already shared their life experiences with the class. The researcher cautions that respondents in this sample are those who showed up and remained in the program for the first two weeks. Those who didn't come or dropped out are probably those women with the most problems of one kind or another; it can be assumed that of these dropouts, a significant number may be suffering from the effects of past or present domestic violence which hampers their ability to participate in the program. Therefore, estimates of domestic violence among this group are likely to underestimate the prevalence among mandatory, non-exempt participants.

## FINDINGS

### A. Prevalence of Domestic Violence

Sixty-five and-a-half percent of the AFDC participants surveyed stated that they are currently involved in a relationship with a man. (Only in about half of these relationships is the intimate partner helping the respondent financially.) Using its measure of domestic violence, the study reports on the prevalence of this violence currently and ever in life.

The questionnaire asked women whether they were ever victims of physical domestic violence, verbal or emotional abuse, or sexual abuse. The questionnaire did not define these terms.

However, the terms had been discussed in the Life Skills sessions the women had attended. Unlike other studies, this study depends more on the subjective judgment of participants as to whether they have been abused. Other studies use variations of the Conflict Tactics Scale, which asks respondents to report on whether or not they have experienced specific behaviors (*e.g.* slapping, punching.) Verbal or emotional abuse was also measured with a single item, defined in the group, but not in the survey itself.

Entire Sample	Currently	Ever in Life
Physical domestic abuse	14.6%	57.3%
Verbal or emotional abuse	25.1%	66.8%

This study also reports percentages of abuse experienced by women who are currently in relationships, and not surprisingly this percentage (19.7%) is higher than for the entire sample. It should be remembered that even women who do not define themselves as currently in a relationship may experience physical abuse and harassment by their ex-partners.

#### Sample of Those Currently in a Relationship

Physical domestic abuse	19.7%
Verbal or emotional abuse	30.8%

### B. Other victimization

The study collected data on the experience with other kinds of victimization within the women's lifetimes. Domestic violence victims are more likely to have suffered from sexual trauma than non-victims. Of those reporting physical domestic abuse, 74.7% have also experienced some form of sexual trauma.

	Entire Sample	Domestic Abuse Victims Ever inLife
Victim of rape	22.2%	30.8%
Victim of sexual assault	23.8%	34.7%
Victim of childhood molestation	21.1%	27.1%
Victim of incest	10.1%	13.7%
Victim of sexual abuse of any kind	24.1%	35.3%

Almost a third of those experiencing any type of sexual trauma have never told anyone about these situations.

### C. The characteristics of domestic violence victims: differences between ever abused women and never abused women

**Mental health:** The study finds that 10.1% of the entire sample, and 18.7% of those who are currently abused, reported that they have a current problem with drugs and alcohol.

The questionnaire asked participants whether they were “severely depressed now” without defining “depression.” About thirty-two percent (31.8%) of the entire sample, and 54.1% of those currently in an abusive relationship, reported that they are severely depressed now. When the study’s author administered a standardized test for depression (the CES-D) to a smaller sample of 568 women, 66.2% scored as having depression; Eleven percent (11.1%) of the entire sample scored as acutely depressed.

**Education, training, and employment:** Respondents who are currently abused reported more often that their partner does not encourage attempts at education and training (46.7% compared to 37.8% for the entire sample); three times as many currently abused women as non-abused women stated that their intimate partner actively tried to prevent them from obtaining education or training (39.7% as compared with 12.9% for the entire sample).

**Conflicts With Men:** Of those current victims of physical violence, 46.7% stated that their partner helps financially, and 34.2% reported that he uses financial help to influence and get his wishes. This statistic indicates that the majority of current victims of physical abuse do not receive financial assistance from their partner.

### D. Conclusions from this data

- Within this fairly large sample of welfare participants in one county, two-thirds are currently involved in a relationship with an intimate partner. Almost one-fifth of these relationships were currently physically violent. A high percentage of the entire sample (14.6%) were current abuse victims. The majority of the sample, 57%, have been victims of physical domestic violence ever in their lifetime. Current domestic violence victims have experienced sexual trauma at higher rates than women in the sample who have never been victims of domestic violence.

- Higher percentages of those in abusive relationships currently suffered from problems that could inhibit gainful employment like depression and alcohol and drug abuse than do those not currently abused.
- Three times as many currently abused women as non-abused women (39.7% as compared with 12.9%) reported that their intimate partner actively prevents their participation in education and training, spelling out the implications of current domestic violence for welfare women's ability to enter the labor market.

*"I had already worked for the welfare department for 22 years. And when I took over the Life Skills Program, I thought I knew what was really happening out there. Having come up through the ranks in the welfare department, I thought I understood the dynamics of poverty. And that soon changed....During the self-exploration phase of Life Skills, which lasts from about five to seven days, we go through a number of exercises to get the students to think about how they got to this point. They take stock of their lives, in essence, so they can move on from there. While I was teaching this class on Self-Exploration, stories of domestic abuse and sexual trauma kept coming up over and over and over again in the class. And everyone was deeply engaged in the discourse about these issues. Many of the students would ask to speak to the trainers privately after class if they weren't strong enough to really talk about it openly in class.*

*And so this was a part of welfare that I had never seen before...I began to see over and over again horrible stories and a huge number of these stories. Simultaneously I was also observing overt manifestations of this whole issue. People would come to class beat up, with black eyes, or they would disappear from class for a couple of days. And stalking. We'd have to call the police a number of times. The very first time I taught the class, a person went out for a break. I never saw her again. I found out days later that when she went outside the building to smoke a cigarette, her boy friend grabbed her, threw her in the car, whisked her away, and she was gone. So the combination of the stories in class, what was being physically manifested, and the fact that students would ask to speak to me personally, I was being educated to something I didn't even know was going on."--William Curcio, Passaic County Board of Social Services*

**2. Report Title:** *"In Harm's Way? Domestic Violence, AFDC Receipt and Welfare Reform in Massachusetts"*

**Research Team:** The University of Massachusetts Boston: McCormack Institute and the Center for Survey Research

**Authors:** **Mary Ann Allard, Ph.D.; Mary Ellen Colten, Ph.D.; Randy Albelda, Ph.D.; and Carol Cosenza.** For further information contact: University of Massachusetts Boston Center for Survey Research, 100 Morrissey Blvd., Boston, Massachusetts 02125-3393, 617-287-7200; fax: 617-287-7210.

**Sample:** 734 women currently receiving AFDC in Massachusetts. Forty-five percent of the sample were White, 19.6% African-American, 31.9% Hispanic, and 3.7% other.

**Time Frame of Study:** January-June 1996

**Methods:** Women were interviewed in English and Spanish in 40 of the 42 welfare department offices during the mandatory recertification process using probability sampling techniques. The very small and difficult to reach offices on the islands of Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard were excluded. The interview sample adequately reflects the characteristics of the entire AFDC caseload in Massachusetts. The project identified 1260 eligible interviewees, and of this sample, 734 (58.3%) completed interviews. Of the non-completed interviews, 5.5% refused, 17.5% did not have time, 14.9% agreed to be interviewed but the interviews were not completed before the women left the welfare office, and 3.8% did not complete for other reasons, including partial interviews. The race of the sample was very similar to state estimates of race of welfare recipients. Women under 35 years of age and women with higher education were slightly overrepresented. The interview was conducted verbally. For abuse questions, respondents listened through headphones to an audio tape and used an answer sheet to enhance women’s willingness to answer these questions without the embarrassment of disclosure to the interviewers.

## FINDINGS

### A. Prevalence of Domestic Violence

Almost forty percent of the entire sample stated that they were currently in a relationship with a man. Of the studies reviewed here, the University of Massachusetts study reports the lowest percentage of women reporting involvement with a male partner. This is not surprising as the interviews took place at the welfare office, during recertification. It seems probable that those conditions would be most likely to result in an underreporting of male involvement, for fear of loss of benefits.

The authors constructed three indices of abuse and measured the prevalence within the past year and ever in life.

**Three Item Index:** Hit, slapped or kicked  
 Thrown or shoved  
 Hurt badly enough to go to the doctor

*Ever happened:* 57.7%  
*Happened in past year:* 13.8%

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**Six-Item Index:\*** Hit, slapped or kicked  
 Thrown or shoved onto floor, against wall, or down stairs  
 Hurt badly enough to go to doctor  
 Used a gun, knife, or other object  
 Forced to have sex or engage in sexual activity against will  
 Made you think you might be hurt

*Ever happened:* 64.9%  
*Happened in past year:* 19.5%

\* Note: this index corresponds to the legal definition of domestic violence in Massachusetts, as set forth in the 1978 Massachusetts Chapter 209A Abuse Prevention Act.

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**Nine-item Index:** Hit, slapped or kicked  
 Thrown or shoved  
 Hurt badly enough to go to doctor  
 Used a gun, knife or other object  
 Forced to have sex  
 Made you think you might be hurt  
 Destroyed or taken possessions  
 Tried to keep you from seeing friends or family  
 Consistently told you that you were worthless or was demeaning

*Ever happened: 70.3%*

*Happened in past year: 26.0%*

The study reports on some additional indicators of the severity of the violence welfare recipients are experiencing. The following chart indicates that formal attention is being given to the violence in many of these women’s lives and that women are seeking help for the violence:

Within the last year	Ever abused	Never abused
Has had a restraining order in effect	18.0%	.4%
Has called the police	18.0%	.8%
Has had police come to house	32.6%	13.6%
Sought medical treatment for abuse	3.5%	n.a.

**B. Other victimization:** A large percentage of the women indicated that as children they had been exposed to violence, either as a witness or as a victim. Using a five-item violence scale (kick, bit, or hit with a fist; hit or try to hit with something; beat up; choke; burn or scald), abused women were more than twice as likely to have been exposed to violence as children, both as victims and as witnesses; over a third (35.3%) of abused women experienced at least one of the items at the hands of an adult in their households while they were growing up, in contrast with 17.4% of the non-abused group; and 33.5% of the abused, compared with 15.1% of the non-abused, lived in households as children where these behaviors were carried out between adults.

### 3. The characteristics of domestic violence victims: differences between ever abused women and never abused women

**Health:** The study used three indicators to measure mental health: self-esteem was measured with the ten-item Rosenberg self-esteem scale; sense of mastery with the seven item Mastery Scale developed by Pearlin; and symptoms of depression and anxiety were measured with the six-item non-specific distress index developed at the University of Michigan.

Using the six-item index of abuse as the criterion, women who have been abused are more likely than non-abused women to report a physical disability, handicap, or any other serious physical, mental or emotional problem. (31.7% of abused women, as compared with 21.4% of non-abused women.) The data indicate that women who have been recently abused appear to be worse off than women whose abuse occurred prior to the past year. Recently abused women reported lower self-esteem, less sense of mastery, and more emotional distress than women who were abused prior to the past year and those who were never abused.

**Health of children:** Abused women were significantly more likely than non-abused to report that they had a child with an on-going disability that limits his or her activities (33.7% vs. 19.8%) . Over twice as many abused as non-abused women (14.8% vs. 6.3%) stated that they had a child whose disabilities keep him or her from attending regular day care or regular school.

**Education, training and employment:** Abused women were 15 times more likely than their never abused counterparts to have a current or former partner who would not like them going to school or work. (15.5% as compared with 1.6%). There are no educational differences between the abused and non-abused groups and no differences in current school, training status, or work histories.

**Conflicts with men:** Many of the women who did not disclose current domestic violence did report disagreements with men, including those concerning child support, visitation, or custody. Although many couples may have such disagreements, in the context of the abuse in these women’s lives these issues are fraught with danger and may necessitate coping strategies that can interfere with work. For example, abused women may be reluctant to leave their children in child care either in or outside the home. Some batterers may raise custody and visitation issues as ways of continuing to have contact with their partners, or as ways to control or terrorize their partners.

Fifty-two percent of those abused within the last 12 months reported that they were in an argument about at least one of the topics listed below, as compared to 20% of the never abused. Forty-two percent of the women who had any custody disagreement in the past year also experienced abuse during the year. The data, reproduced below, illustrate the many ways in which conflicts with men interfere with the welfare-to-work process.

Within the last year	Ever abused	Never abused
Has argued about child support	29.2%	17.5%
Has argued about visitation issues	23.7%	9.3%
Has argued over child custody	14.7%	4.7%

#### 4. Conclusions from this data

- Using the definition of domestic violence provided by Massachusetts law, most of the women surveyed, 64.9%, have been victims of domestic violence, and one-fifth of the women interviewed experienced physical abuse within the past twelve months.
- Abused women were more likely to have lower self-esteem, more symptoms of emotional distress, and a higher prevalence of physical disabilities themselves and among their children than women who were not abused, all factors which could be barriers to employment.
- A substantial percentage of women who reported being abused were currently embroiled in disagreements with current or former husbands or boyfriends, including conflicts over custody, child support and visitation, supporting concerns about the wisdom of paternity and child support collection when domestic violence is a factor.

**“Given the known emotional and physical consequences of domestic violence for women and children, the state’s new two-year time limit may not be sufficient for many women to successfully break away from their batterers, find the support they need, and become economically self-sufficient.”--Mary Ellen Colten, University of Massachusetts Boston Center for Survey Research**

**3. Report Title:** *The Worcester Family Research Project. Project findings are reported in Bassuk E, Weinreb L., Buckner J., Browne A., Salomon A., and Bassuk S., The Characteristics and Needs of Sheltered Homeless and Low-Income Housed Mothers, The Journal of the American Medical Association August 28, 1996 (Vol 276, No. 8 at 640); and Salomon A., Bassuk S., and Brooks, M., Patterns of Welfare Use Among Poor and Homeless Women, American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 66(4) 510-524. \**

**Research Team:** The Better Homes Fund; The Department of Family and Community Medicine, University of Massachusetts Medical Center, Worcester; the Department of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School; and the Department of Epidemiology, Harvard School of Public Health.

**Authors:** **Ellen L. Bassuk, MD; Linda Weinreb, MD; John Buckner, Ph.D.; Angela Browne, Ph.D.; Amy Salomon, Ph.D.; and Shari Bassuk.**

For further information contact: The Better Homes Fund, 181 Wells Avenue, Newton Centre, Massachusetts 02159, 617-964-3834; fax: 617-244-1758.

*\* For additional information consult: Browne A. and Bassuk S., Prevalence and Patterns of Intimate Violence in an Ethnically Diverse Sample of Homeless and Poor Housed Women, American Journal of Orthopsychiatry (in press); Brooks M., and Buckner J., Work and Welfare: Job Histories, Barriers to Employment, and Predictors of Work Among Low-Income Single Mothers, American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 66(4) 525-537; Perloff J. and Buckner J., Fathers of Children on Welfare: Their Impact on Child Well-Being, American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 66(4)557-571; and Bassuk E., Buckner J., Single Mothers and Welfare, Scientific American, 275(4) 60-67.*

**Sample:** 220 homeless women most of whom were on AFDC, and a comparison

group of 216 never-homeless AFDC women, including a total of 627 children aged three months to 17 years. The race/ethnicity breakdown of the sample is as follows: for the homeless: 32.7% White, 43.2% Hispanic, 22.7% African-American, and 1.4% other. For the housed, 45.4% White, 42.1% Hispanic, 10.2 African-American, and 2.3% other.

**Time Frame of Study:** August 1992-July 1995

**Methods:** Homeless women were enrolled from nine out of 10 emergency shelters and transitional housing facilities and from two welfare hotels in Worcester, Massachusetts. Non-homeless women were randomly recruited at the Worcester Department of Public Welfare. All respondents took part in three to four face-to-face sessions lasting over ten hours, using various standardized assessment instruments measuring childhood experiences, income, work history, housing, social supports, experiences with violence, and mental and physical health.

## FINDINGS

### A. Prevalence of Domestic Violence

The Better Homes Fund did not report on what percentages of women were living with intimate partners, but it did determine what percentage of the entire sample had experienced physical violence from their current or most recent partner using a definition of severe violence. The study also measured a number of other types of abuse, detailed below, including suicide and homicide threats.

The Better Homes Fund study used the following definition of severe violence:

- Slapped six or more times
- Kicked, bit, or hit with fist
- Hit with object
- Beaten up
- Choked, strangled, or smothered
- Threatened with knife or gun
- Assaulted with a knife or gun
- Threatened life in some other manner

Using this definition of severe violence by an intimate partner, the study reports on the prevalence of this violence ever within the lifetime of the sample respondents. As in other studies, the majority have been victims of severe physical violence, with 63.1% of the homeless and 58.1% of the housed reporting such violence within their life span.

When the prevalence of severe violence from their current or most recent partner within the prior two years is determined, the numbers decrease, but remain substantial:

Within the Past Two Years	Homeless %	Housed%
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Severe physical violence	32.3%	32.6%
Threatened to kill himself	26.4%	18.1%
Threatened to kill respondent	19.4%	18.1%
Assaulted, threatened, or harassed post-separation	21.0%	27.1%

**B. Other victimization**

Domestic violence victims reported high levels of severe physical violence (being kicked, bitten, or hit with a fist; being hit with an object; being beaten up; being burned or scalded; being threatened or assaulted with a knife or gun; or having one’s life threatened in some other manner) and sexual molestation in childhood.

	Homeless%	Housed%
Sexual molestation in childhood	43.1%	41.7%
Severe physical violence in childhood	66.5%	59.5%

**C. The characteristics of domestic violence victims**

**a. Health:** The Better Homes Fund study is able to report on many lifetime health and mental health problems of homeless and housed AFDC women. Most of the data relate to the entire sample of both abused and non-abused women. Because so many of these women have been victims, the data does provide an idea of the extent of these problems for battered women. However, the data also demonstrate that some welfare recipients, even those non-abused, may have major mental and physical health problems that can limit work.

The following chart provides information about those victims who needed medical treatment:

	Homeless %	Housed %
Needed medical treatment for violence		
Violence by primary parents	20.0%	15.5%
Sexual molestation in childhood	20.2%	11.4%
Violence by adult partners	26.7%	19.5%
Ever attempted suicide	31.2%	25.6%
Alcohol/drug abuse or dependency	41.1%	34.7%
Hospitalization for mental health	12.0%	4.2%

Over one-third of the sample reported a current chronic health condition. In both homeless and housed women, the prevalence of asthma, anemia, and ulcers was high compared with the general population of women younger than 45 years:

	Homeless%	Housed%	Gen. fem.pop
Current alcohol/drug abuse	4.6%	3.7%	
Asthma	21.8%	23.2%	5.4%
Anemia	20.4%	15.0%	2.4%
Chronic bronchitis	5.4%	10.0%	5.8%
Hypertension	4.0%	8.1%	3.2%
Ulcer	4.5%	6.5%	1.4%

### **Mental Health:**

The study measured the lifetime prevalence and current prevalence of selected mental and substance-use disorders using the Structured Clinical Interview for the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Third Edition, Revised, Non-Patient Edition. Health status was assessed using the SF-36 Short Form Health Survey.

When compared to the general female population, the sample demonstrated elevated prevalences of major depressive disorders, including posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Posttraumatic stress disorder represents one of the most severe outcomes of interpersonal or other trauma and is characterized by intrusive thoughts, periods during which past traumas are relived, vivid recollections, and symptoms of increased arousal such as intense startle reactions and sleep disturbances. These symptoms are interspersed with periods of constricted affect and psychic numbing.

	Homeless%	Housed%	Gen. Female Pop.
Current prevalence			
Major depressive disorder	9.6%	11.6%	
PTSD	17.5%	15.5%	
Lifetime prevalence			
Major depressive disorder	44.9%	42.8%	21.3%
PTSD	36.2%	34.1%	12.4%

Respondents who were long-term welfare recipients were more likely to be suffering from mental health and substance abuse problems than short-term users. For example, substance abuse was represented at nearly twice the rate among long-term welfare users among the homeless and almost one-and-a half times higher among the housed.

*“We were really struck...by the disconnect between what we were seeing as the complex and full story of poor women’s lives, and what the solutions that were being proposed for welfare reform.” Amy Salomon, Better Homes Fund*

**Education, training and employment:** A fluid pattern of AFDC use among study respondents became apparent, with approximately one-third of the sample reporting more than one stay on AFDC. These cyclers were three times more likely to have worked in the past year than were continuous AFDC users. However, cyclers used AFDC for longer total durations than the continuous use group. To examine the relationship between domestic violence and welfare use, the study sorted participants into two groups, short/moderate-term users and long-term users of AFDC. Both groups included cyclers and continuous users of AFDC.

Rates of violent victimization, both in childhood and in adulthood, high across the sample, were uniformly higher in the long-term welfare group for all types of victimization:

Demographic and Social Characteristics in Relation to Length of AFDC Use: At Risk for Long-Term Use \*

	Homeless		Housed	
	Short/moderate	Long	Short/mod.	Long
Violence-lifetime prevalence				
Childhood physical	60.0/1%	67.2%	51.7%	64.7%
Childhood sexual	27.5%	43.3%	37.9%	46.4%
Physical by partner	66.7%	81.7%	58.6%	63.2%

\* This analysis includes only women who would have been eligible to receive welfare for five years or more due to the age of their child(ren). This is to eliminate assignment of women who are new to welfare to the “short-term” group, when they might become long term users when a longer time period elapses.

The study’s authors found that welfare cyclers were far more likely to have ever worked and to have had income from a job in the past year. However, cyclers were more likely to have experienced violence on all five indicators than were continuous users, with trends far more pronounced for the housed than the homeless. The authors believe that these findings support the conclusion that violence and its secondary effects may play a significant role in women’s ability to remain off welfare.

**Relationships with men:** Only small percentages of intimate partners have provided financial assistance within the past year to this sample of AFDC recipients. Of the homeless, only 25.5% of those short-term welfare users and only 9.7% of long-term welfare users had such financial support; among the housed, 8.8% of the short-term welfare users and 8.6% of the long-term users had financial support from a partner. These data indicate that most of the women on welfare within this sample had experienced high levels of domestic violence and were not receiving economic support from their partner.

**D. Conclusions from this data**

- Although the study's authors expected to find high levels of domestic violence within the homeless AFDC sample, they were startled to find that violence was pervasive throughout the entire sample. The study found that, of the combined homeless and housed sample, 61% had been severely physically assaulted by an intimate male partner as adults. Within the past two years, 32% had experienced severe physical violence from their current or most recent partner.
- The physical and emotional well-being of many women in the sample has been profoundly compromised. When compared to the general female population, the sample demonstrated current elevated prevalences of major depressive disorders, including posttraumatic stress, which present significant barriers to employment.
- Rates of violent victimization, both in childhood and in adulthood, were uniformly higher in that part of the sample which had used welfare for long periods of time as compared to shorter term users. The cyclers, who tended to receive benefits over longer cumulative time periods than continuous AFDC users, were particularly vulnerable to violent victimization. The authors hypothesize that violence and its secondary effects (e.g. PTSD) may play a significant role in women's ability to stay off AFDC.

*"A critical component of a comprehensive strategy for addressing cycling as well as long-term AFDC use would be to develop programs and policies that not only address the economic and labor market issues, but also the high rates of violent victimization in our society... These women would greatly benefit from targeted programs and policies that address the pernicious and often long-term sequelae of violent victimization... Clearly, a broad preventive and rehabilitative strategy must be developed to address the interface of poverty and violence."-- Better Homes Fund*

#### **4. Report Title:** *The Effects of Violence On Women's Employment*

**Research Team:** Joint Center for Poverty Research and Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University

**Author: Susan Lloyd, Ph.D.** For further information contact the Joint Center for Poverty Research, 2040 Sheridan Road, Evanston, Illinois 60208-4100, 847-491-3395; fax: 847-491-9916. To reach Susan Lloyd: 312-726-8000 ext.251.

**Sample Size:** 824 English and Spanish-speaking adult women in the low-income West Humboldt Park neighborhood of Chicago. Fifty-five percent were African-American, 39.2% Latina, and 5% Caucasian. One-third of the sample received AFDC within the last 12 months, 42.7% Food Stamps, and 45.3% Medicaid.

**Time Frame of Study:** September 1994-May 1995

**Methods:** Women were randomly selected and surveyed ( in both English and Spanish) in their homes for approximately 55 minutes by a female interviewer. The survey used a standardized instrument that includes questions dealing with labor force participation, employment and

educational history, background and family characteristics, community life, criminal victimization, personal and household income, personal and household social welfare program participation, and experience of male violence and coercion in the past twelve months, ever in adult relationships, and ever in life. In-depth interviews with a subset of 24 women whose experiences represent patterns suggested by quantitative analyses then occurred.

## FINDINGS

### A. Prevalence of Domestic Violence

Seventy-one percent of the entire sample were in a relationship with a male, and the majority of these (69.8%) lived with their husbands or boyfriends. Of those on public assistance within the last 12 months, 63% were in a relationship with a man considered to be their boyfriend, with 52% living with their intimate partner.

This study used an expanded version of the Conflict Tactics Scale to measure abuse. Collaborating with battered women's advocates, Lloyd generated additional measures to reflect the reports of battered women and service providers. The rates reported here are based on a smaller set of items. Current physical aggression was defined by:

- throwing objects
- pushing
- grabbing
- slapping

Current severe aggression was defined by:

- kicking
- hitting
- beating
- injuring
- threatening with or using a weapon

Lifetime severe aggression was defined by:

- kicking
- hitting
- biting
- beating
- injuring
- raping
- threatening with or using a weapon

The study found significantly high levels of violence within women’s intimate relationships and even higher levels among those women in the community who are welfare recipients.

Women receiving AFDC in the study’s sample were more likely to experience physical abuse and severe aggression, either in the past 12 months or ever in life, than women not on welfare. Over half (55.1%) of the women who reported having experienced physical aggression in the past 12 months had received AFDC benefits during that time, compared to 33.3% of the sample.

The rates for abuse are as follows:

Physical aggression (including throwing objects at respondent, pushing, grabbing and slapping)

	Within last 12 months	Ever in Life*
Non-AFDC women:	10.3%	
AFDC participants:	31.1%	

\* Fewer items were included in the ever in life scale and did not include those defining physical aggression, so that no data can be reported.

Severe aggression (including kicking, hitting, beating, injuring, raping, and threatening with or using a weapon)

	Within last 12 months	Ever in Life*
Non-AFDC women:	7.3%	23.0%
AFDC participants:	19.5%	33.9%

\* Fewer items are included in the ever in life scale, which could affect comparisons with other studies. (For example, slapped, pushed or shoved are not included as they were in other research designs.)

Verbal and symbolic aggression (including attempting to control, harassing, and threatening children and friends)

	Within last 12 months	Ever in Life*
Non-AFDC women:	41.6%	33.1%
AFDC participants:	57.9%	48.0%

**B. The characteristics of domestic violence victims: differences between ever abused women and never abused women**

**Health:** This study's survey asked respondents about problems with depression, anxiety and anger which enables the author to determine the percentage of those abused which stated they had mental health problems or any disabilities which interfered with work:

Sample Of Those Abused Within the past 12 months (includes AFDC and non-AFDC women)

	Total sample	Syml. Agg.	Phy. Agg.	Severe agg.
Problem w. depression	24.8%	27.2%	37%	42.3%
Work-limiting disability	19.8%	20.5%	23.1%	23.9%

**Education, training and employment:** Significant differences in educational status among abused and non-abused women were not found in the study. For women in the sample, almost as many abused women within the last 12 months had high school degrees or the GED certificate as those who were not abused (45% compared with 37%).

Of the 637 women who responded to items measuring abuse in the past 12 months, 8% of the sample reported that their boyfriend or husband prevented them from going to school or work. Approximately 2% of the entire sample reported that within the past 12 months their intimate partners harassed them with telephone calls at work and 1.7% reported that their partners showed up at the workplace to harass them. Importantly, women whose partners prevented their working or threatened their children were also significantly more likely to be unemployed. Women whose partners bothered them at work were employed significantly fewer hours.

**Conflicts with Men:** In the past 12 months 4.5% of the entire sample reported that their partner threatened to take their children away, and 1.7% threatened to hurt the children. Sixteen percent of the entire sample stated that they had money withheld or taken from them.

#### **D. Conclusions from this data**

- In this random sample from one low-income neighborhood in Chicago, many women were found to have experienced male violence in their intimate partner relationships. Although rates of violence were high in the entire sample, AFDC recipients experienced higher rates than their non-AFDC counterparts. Using the severe aggression violence indicator alone, just over one-third of the AFDC recipients in the sample had experienced violence ever in life, and 19.5% were victims of such aggression within the past 12 months.

*"...the survey findings are immediately germane to the challenges confronting policy makers involved in the redesign of public assistance and employment and training programs. Women in the sample who received Aid to Families with Dependent Children also reported significantly higher reported levels of violence and coercion in their intimate relationships than women who did not receive public assistance...Due to violence in their lives, some AFDC recipients may find it especially difficult to meet the work and other requirements mandated by new federal and state public assistance regulations."--Susan Lloyd, Northwestern University*

### **SIX OTHER RESEARCH SAMPLES OF INTEREST**

**I. Report Title:** *Commonwealth Fund Survey on Women's Health*

**Research Team:** The Commonwealth Fund. *For further information contact the Commonwealth Fund at One East 75th Street, New York, New York 10021-2692, 212-535-0400.*

**Author:** Stacey Plichta, Sc.D., Assistant Professor, Old Dominion University, College of Health Sciences.

**Sample Size:** 2,010 women nationally

**Time Frame of Study:** 1993

**Methods:** This study was a telephone survey of adults 18 and over residing in the continental United States. Women of color (439 African-Americans and 405 Hispanic women) were oversampled to permit more detailed analysis of these groups. Survey data were weighted by age, race, insurance status, and Census region to create representative estimates of the health factors measured. Among the variables measured were domestic violence and welfare status.

**Prevalence of Domestic Violence:** The survey defined domestic violence using a version of the Conflict Tactics Scale that contained the following items:

pushed, shoved, or slapped  
kicked, bit or hit with a fist or some other object  
beat up  
choked  
threatened with a knife or a gun  
used a knife or gun

Respondents were asked whether any of these things happened in the past five years with the partner that they are living with or married to currently. Domestic violence was defined as having occurred if a woman answered yes. Welfare status was defined by answers to a single item regarding receipt of public assistance. Women were classified as welfare recipients if they reported receiving Food Stamps, AFDC, SSI, or other public assistance from state or local welfare offices.

The study found that 24.0% of the welfare recipients reported domestic violence in the past five years with their current partners. Only 6.8% of other respondents reported domestic violence.

**2. Report Title:** *Survey of AFDC Recipients: Domestic Violence and Women's Employment*, conducted for the Missouri Department of Social Services, Division of Family Services

**Research Team:** Horizon Research Services. For further information, contact Horizon Research Services at 409 Vandiver Drive, Building 6, Suite 102, Columbia, Missouri 65202, 573-874-6904.

**Sample Size:** 404 AFDC participants in Kansas City and Independence, Missouri (Jackson County.) Sixty-two percent were African-American, 37% were White, and 5.5% were Hispanic.

**Time Frame of Study:** two months during the summer of 1996

**Methods:** New AFDC applicants and AFDC applicants with appointments for recertification were given the survey as they checked in at the welfare department reception desk. They were asked to fill in the survey on a voluntary basis and drop the sealed survey in a prominently marked drop box. Although the respondents were self-selected and non-random, the representation of racial groups in the study roughly mirrors that of the AFDC population in Jackson County, Missouri. Since some AFDC participants arrive at the welfare office with their abusers, the authors assume that some of these women did not fill out the survey or did not fill out the survey honestly. In general, many participants may have lacked the time to complete the survey and return it to the box.

**Prevalence of Domestic Violence:** This study contains detailed information about the intimate partners in the respondents' lives. Almost 40% reported they currently have a boyfriend or steady partner. Of these in a current relationship, 50.4% have been in the relationship from between two to ten years; 27.5% have been in the relationship from between five to ten years. The majority (57% ) report seeing their partner on a daily basis. Almost half of these partners fail to provide financial support.

Just over 10% of respondents reported that partners currently hit, slapped or kicked them, said they were worthless or called them names, or made them think that they might hurt them. Seven percent of the entire sample reported that their partner interfered with work or school. Nineteen percent of the respondents reported that they have missed work during their lifetime because of a partner.

**3. Report title:** *Kearns, Utah Single Parent Employment Demonstration Program (SPED)*

**Research team:** Mary Lloyd, Self Sufficiency Supervisor, Utah Single Parent Employment Demonstration Program. For further information, contact SPED at 4115 West 5295 South, Kearns, Utah 84118, 801-964-7740.

**Methods:** The Utah Single Parent Employment Demonstration Program was a pilot project in certain Utah welfare department offices which required all AFDC recipients to participate in employment-based activities. Participants received incentives for work by being allowed to keep larger portions of their welfare grant once they went to work and were provided intensive on-site case management and social work services. SPED also provided on-site clinical services, based on a brief therapy model and focussing on minimizing or eliminating barriers to employment.

**Prevalence of domestic violence and other problems:** The SPED project has identified domestic violence as a major barrier to the welfare-to-work transition. In 162 case staffings held between August 1995 and April 1, 1996, by definition a sample representing the hardest to serve cases in its Kearns, Utah office, 27% involved current domestic violence. Additionally, 69% of the cases were identified as having mental health problems, with 36% substance abuse issues and 22%

medical problems. The bulk of these participants, (77%), exhibited four or more of these risk factors.

**4. Report title:** *Oregon Adult and Family Services Division Client Characteristics Affecting Employment and Self-Sufficiency Study*

**Research team:** Shirley Iverson, Oregon Adult and Family Services. For further information contact Oregon Adult and Family Services at 500 Summer Street NE, Salem, Oregon 97310, 503-945-6902.

**Methods:** In a five county review of 4,670 case files, (three Adult and Family Services districts, two of which are rural and one urban), supplemented by participant interviews, the Division reviewed those case files in which progress toward work did not appear to be occurring.

**Prevalence of domestic violence:** In fifty percent of the cases, participants admitted they had been physically or sexually abused during their life-time. Fifty percent admitted to having alcohol or drug issues. Seventy-five percent suffer from mental health problems, ranging from depression and anxiety to more serious conditions.

**5. Report title:** *The Washington State Institute for Public Policy Family Income Study*

**Research team:** Greg Weeks, The Evergreen State College. For further information contact Evergreen State College, Seminar 3162, Mailstop TA-00, Olympia, Washington 98505, 206-866-6000, extension 6380.)

**Methods:** The Washington State Institute for Public Policy undertook a five-year Family Income Study which interviewed a representative sample of the entire AFDC population in the State of Washington (1318 respondents). In the fifth year of the study, administered in 1992, women were asked if they had been physically or sexually abused as adults.

**Prevalence of domestic violence:** Sixty percent reported some type of abuse (physical and/or sexual) as adults. Fifty-five percent reported being physically abused by a spouse or boyfriend.

**6. Report title:** *Family Violence and Welfare: The Utah Experience, a Preliminary Report*

**Research team:** Ruth Brandwein, Ph.D., State University of New York at Stony Brook, School of Social Welfare. For further information, contact Dr. Brandwein at Health Sciences Building, Level 2, Stony Brook, New York 11794, 516-444-3176.

**Methods:** This researcher has compared police incident reports of domestic violence with applications for AFDC in Salt Lake City, Utah between January 1993 and February 1996 to attempt to demonstrate the role that welfare plays in escaping domestic violence.

**Prevalence of domestic violence:** Within one year of the domestic violence police report, 19.1% of the women in 1993, 15.9% in 1994, and 15.5% in 1995 applied for AFDC. However, equally high

numbers were already on AFDC when the police report was made: 15.7% in 1993; 11.5% in 1994 and 18.9% in 1995. When the two categories are melded, very high percentages of women involved in domestic violence police reports in Salt Lake City--35.7% in 1993, 29% in 1994, and 31% in 1995--were AFDC recipients. As 11 to 12% of the total female population in Salt Lake City was on AFDC at the time, AFDC participants are represented in police reports at almost three times the rate in the general population.

## COMPARING THE DATA: WHAT DO WE KNOW AND WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW

### WHAT WE NOW KNOW

Each of the studies used a different method for measurement of domestic violence. New Jersey used only a single item self-definition of domestic violence and sexual trauma. However, women had attended several group sessions in which these terms were defined and discussed, and given the level of trust built in the group, women were probably more likely to correctly self-identify than in surveys where women do not know the interviewer or are unfamiliar with terms used in a questionnaire. The University of Massachusetts used, as did Northwestern University and The Better Homes Fund, a multi-item version of the Conflict Tactics Scale to define domestic violence. The University of Massachusetts used self-administration techniques (via a tape recorder) to minimize embarrassment or fear of reporting domestic violence. Northwestern University used face-to-face one-time interviews. The women interviewed in the Better Homes study were interviewed a number of times, perhaps increasing their willingness to report the abuse they were experiencing.

The samples of each study also differed. New Jersey and The University of Massachusetts sampled only AFDC recipients in service settings (a welfare to work, and welfare office respectively). The Better Homes Fund interviewed homeless and non-homeless recipients, almost all on AFDC, in the community, as did Northwestern University. The studies vary in the degree of complexity of the statistical techniques used. Some studies report only percentage differences. In some cases, it is not clear that the differences reported are statistically significant.

The data we have presented must be viewed as preliminary and tentative. However, taken together, the picture that emerges about the connection between domestic violence and welfare is a consistent one. The majority of welfare recipients have experienced abuse in their adult relationships. A high percentage are currently experiencing abuse. Abused welfare recipients experience higher levels of health, mental health and other problems.

#### ❖ Prevalence of domestic violence

Three of the four studies demonstrate what those working closely with welfare recipients have long understood: although they are supposedly single mothers living without a man, a majority of AFDC participants are involved with an intimate partner.

Study	In a relationship with a man currently
U. Mass:	39.8%
Passaic County:	66.0%
Northwestern U.	63.0%

Unfortunately, however, large percentages of these relationships are violent. The four major research efforts present remarkably consistent patterns of domestic violence within these samples of the AFDC population, validating the experiences of grass-roots welfare-to-work providers which have consistently reported high prevalence of domestic violence among their training population.

The prevalence of current physical violence is reported in the range of 14% to 32%, while the occurrence of physical violence ever in life is consistently reported in the 33.8% -61% range.

❖ **Comparative Prevalence of Domestic Violence Across The Studies**

Physical Abuse

Study	Current	Ever in Life
U.Mass. County	14.9%	57.3%
Northwestern U.	19.5%	33.8%*
Better Homes Fund	32.3 % **	61.0%
Passaic		64.9%

\* In measuring violence “ever in life” the Northwestern University study used fewer items of aggression than did other studies, (slapping, pushing, or shoved was not included, for example), which probably accounts for the differences between this study and others.

\*\* This percentage is higher because the definition used includes violence within the past two years as well as with the most recent, not just the current partner.

❖ **The characteristics of domestic violence victims: past victimization**

The consistent finding that high percentages of women on welfare are past victims of physical violence is of grave concern for several reasons. Although not all former victims continue to suffer the effects of that violence, large percentages apparently do. All four studies find high levels of physical and mental health problems among those women who have experienced domestic violence. For example, the Passaic County study found that 54% of the currently abused stated that they were depressed. The University of Massachusetts study found that 31.7% of those ever abused currently had a physical disability, handicap, or other serious physical, mental or emotional problem. In the Northwestern University study, 42.3% of those abused within the past year stated they had a problem with depression. When a sample of over 500 abused and non-abused women in Passaic County was administered a test for depression, 11.1% were found to be suffering from current acute depression, the identical percentage found for the entire Better Homes sample for a major depressive disorder.

### ❖ Other victimization

Three of the studies which measured childhood prevalence of sexual abuse and physical assault found that high percentages of the entire welfare sample were victims of childhood abuse, with substantially higher numbers of these victims found among domestic violence victims. These high rates of violent victimization across the life span have important implications for anti-poverty policy for welfare women.

### Educational Status of Victims

Two of the four studies (University of Massachusetts and Northwestern University) found no real differences between the abused and the never abused in terms of high school educational attainment, with the implication that strategies geared toward education alone, like literacy, GED, and job training programs, may be inadequate when the barrier affecting self-sufficiency is domestic violence; specialized domestic violence services, aimed at removing the barrier of domestic violence and helping the woman recover from its effects, will be needed.

### ❖ Relationship to Employment

Several of the studies report interference from intimate partners with education, training and work (Passaic County, Northwestern), as well as arguments about child support, visitation and child custody (U Mass) which can prevent abused women from using child care necessary for employment or deter them from getting other needed support.

The studies also confirm that abused women do seek employment but are not able to maintain it. In the University of Massachusetts study, more of the ever abused have held jobs (90.9%) than the never abused (83.3%). The Better Homes study found that welfare cyclers, who go on and off welfare but who spend more overall time on public assistance, have higher prevalence of domestic violence. Eighty-eight to 89% of these cyclers have ever worked as opposed to 67.6%-71.9% of the non-cyclers. Northwestern University's research reported that of those suffering abuse in the past 12 months, two-thirds have been employed. Clearly, abused women, as demonstrated by past work history, do work, but it is possible that domestic violence presents a barrier to sustained labor market participation.

## WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

### ◆ Demonstrating the effects of abuse

Although we have labeled some of the health and mental health conditions of welfare recipients in the sample as characteristics of abuse, we believe that these conditions are largely effects of the abuse. Certainly the conclusion that abuse is likely to create health, mental health, and other problems for victims is supported by the literature on domestic violence and its effects. However, it cannot be determined from the data in these studies alone whether these conditions are direct effects of the abuse women receive.

The preliminary data presented by the authors of these studies for the most part include only descriptive statistics and bivariate analyses of abused vs. non-abused welfare recipients. Longitudinal data (which look at whether these conditions are more likely to follow abuse) and multivariate analyses (which adjust for other differences between the abused and non-abused groups) will be necessary to more adequately sort out the extent to which abuse causes the conditions from which abused welfare recipients suffer. Longitudinal and multivariate analyses will also be necessary to adequately understand the impact of domestic violence as a barrier to economic self-sufficiency for victims of abuse.

### ◆ What are effective welfare-to-work strategies for battered women?

The new data highlight one important unanswered question: what are the successful strategies which women on welfare who are battered can use to become economically self-sufficient? Not all battered women present similar needs. Some, for example, desire to work and will be able to do so, although they may not be able to sustain employment over time unless the violence stops. These women will need assistance in dealing with the domestic violence ( domestic violence counseling, getting an order of protection, etc.) as opposed to employment issues. For other women, recovery from the effects of domestic violence will be necessary before they will have the resiliency to seek and retain employment. Still others may have developed disabilities as a result of the trauma. These disabilities may be undiagnosed, and may not be sufficiently severe to warrant receipt of federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. For these reasons, it would be useful to see the development and evaluation of welfare-to-work demonstration projects at the grass-roots level which work with women on welfare who are battered to remove the barrier of domestic violence and which can demonstrate the range and types of successful intervention strategies.

### ◆ How do we understand and intervene with abusers?

Lastly, we need to know more about the abusive men in these girls' and women's lives. It is vital to understand more about why some men are so threatened by the employment of their partners. In the context of current policies, some who are themselves uneducated, unemployed, or underemployed may feel abandoned by both governmental and private philanthropic helping systems, increasing their need to control and dominate their partners. To fully address domestic violence, effective sanctions and intervention must be implemented for the men who perpetrate

the violence. The seeds of constructive interventions with batterers lie in a better understanding of the dynamics of these abusive relationships.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

We believe that domestic violence can be a significant barrier to economic self-sufficiency for women. These studies clearly demonstrate that domestic violence is a factor in a high percentage of welfare recipients' lives. Taken together, they support five key recommendations about welfare policy. These include:

- ✓ 1. **Assessing battered women's needs**
- ✓ 2. **Providing time to use domestic violence services**
- ✓ 3. **Revising paternity and child support policies**
- ✓ 4. **Envisioning new programs for battered women**
- ✓ 5. **Involving men**

### ✓ 1. **Assessing battered women's needs**

The consistently high prevalence of domestic violence in women's lifetimes as demonstrated by these studies makes it essential that welfare departments take this matter seriously. It is important for welfare departments to devise better measures to assess the role that past and current domestic violence plays in recipients' lives. Such an assessment can determine to what extent domestic violence is serving as a barrier to employment, the kinds of specialized services needed to remove the barrier, and help ensure that battered women on welfare receive the necessary services and supports.

By its very nature domestic violence isolates victims, who often need outside intervention and support to extricate themselves. Welfare programs may provide a needed gateway to these services. Some abusers may be less resistant to their partner's participation in welfare programs than in domestic violence services *per se*. Women who may otherwise not seek service may get much needed information and help through their required welfare-to-work activities. Thus the welfare-to-work transition may provide a good way to give some women access to additional support and resources.

Welfare department assessment of domestic violence is, however, a process fraught with difficulties. It is highly unlikely that many women on welfare at first will be willing to share the details of an intimate relationship with a welfare department caseworker. Fears about loss of children to a child protection agency as well as ineligibility for welfare benefits may prevent self-disclosure. Assessment questions, however artfully drafted, may feel intrusive and abusive to the battered woman seeking welfare. Concerns about confidentiality in this context may not be able to be resolved. Although they will be in a minority, there will be some caseworkers who will abuse this information. Inadvertently, negative effects may occur.

This new research data make it all the more important for welfare departments to address the assessment issue creatively. Some advocates have recommended providing information to the applicant or recipient about the benefits of self-disclosure and leaving it up to the woman to provide the information on her own time schedule. This “universal notification,” when coupled with other information about domestic violence along with referrals to community-based providers, is a process which provides a higher comfort level for battered women and better preserves their need for information and choices. It is likely that many women will self-disclose their battering in community-based settings where personnel there are adequately trained. For this reason, as part of their approach to addressing the issue of domestic violence, welfare departments should take care to train community-based social service, welfare-to-work, and job training and placement providers about the complex needs of battered women currently on welfare and should also make certain that they are well-informed about welfare policy and procedures for them.

In serving battered women within the welfare system, it is important that these efforts be coordinated with agencies serving battered women in the community. Partnerships with battered women’s advocates who have the experience and expertise in serving domestic violence victims are critical.

## ✓2. Providing time to use domestic violence services

To the extent that time limitations or state welfare programmatic requirements stand in the way of women being able to take advantage of needed domestic violence services, it will be essential for states to provide temporary waivers of these obligations. Because so many women in current welfare caseloads are former battered women, it seems likely that the AFDC program has served as a means for some women to escape domestic violence. Short time limits for welfare receipt imposed by states--like 90 days, for example--will interfere with women’s being able to carry out escape plans. The Wellstone/Murray Family Violence Amendment, contained in the new federal welfare legislation, gives welfare departments the flexibility to provide battered women on welfare more time to remove the domestic violence barrier, and for states to escape federal penalties for not having requisite percentages of women at work at any given month if domestic violence is the reason.

Because of the very real and serious threat of violence, it is essential for welfare department personnel to work cooperatively with battered women so that they themselves can make determinations about what is safe for them and their children. Women’s situations will present many contrasting scenarios and many distinct paths toward self-sufficiency, with differing service requirements. A sensitive and flexible service response will be required.

In addition, welfare departments should be encouraged to design and implement projects which test and demonstrate the efficacy of domestic violence services for battered women on welfare. These demonstration projects could provide us with needed information about the different service delivery needs of battered women and effective welfare-to-work strategies for them.

## **The Family Violence Amendment**

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, P.L. 104-193, contains the Family Violence Amendment, an important provision to allow states to address domestic violence in crafting state welfare programs under the new Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grants. Sec. 402(a)(7), the Family Violence Amendment, is a state option which invites states to:

- ⇒ Screen applicants for domestic violence while maintaining confidentiality;
- ⇒ Provide referrals to counseling and supportive programs; and
- ⇒ Make good cause waivers for "Other program requirements, such as time limits (for as long as necessary) for individuals receiving assistance, residency requirements, child support cooperation requirements and family cap provisions," in cases where compliance with such requirements would be difficult due to domestic violence.

### **✓3. Revising paternity and child support policies**

The dramatically high levels of domestic violence across the life span reported by these new studies mandates an in-depth look at the trend of federal and state welfare policy, which holds paternity adjudication and child support enforcement as a linchpin of welfare reform strategy.

Child support collection often re-involves the abusive male partner with the family. In addition to a reactivation of violence, this involvement could lead to child visitation or custody awards which could also put women and children at risk of further violence. In turn, revictimization will interfere with women's ability to remain employed, causing renewed spells on welfare.

State welfare departments should be certain to give information to women about the consequences of child support enforcement and provide them the opportunity to determine whether paternity or child support collection activities will be dangerous to them or their children. When this is the case, states should approve a good cause exemption from child support enforcement for as long as is necessary to ensure safety of family members.

### **✓4. Beyond assessment, time and services: envisioning new welfare programs for battered women**

We believe the high prevalence of current violence in welfare caseloads supports the need for even more creativity in devising assistance for women on welfare who want to escape violent relationships. Here are only two examples.

Some women on welfare lack the funds to obtain a permanent place to stay. A special one-time, lump sum grant from the welfare department might be critical to assist women relocate to another community. After this safety plan is implemented, and some time has occurred for the criminal justice system to be activated to provide support, a more successful and permanent transition to the labor market may occur.

Data about welfare cyclers, who go on and off welfare but spend considerably longer time on assistance than continuous users, would also indicate the need to develop sensitive programs and interventions at the state level to help cyclers maintain jobs in the face of the violence.

### ✓5. Involving men

The new data confirm that the majority of welfare participants do become involved in intimate relationships with males. Because many of these relationships are violent, there is a need to focus on men's behavior as an active component to any anti-poverty strategy. The data indicate that many men in these violent relationships do not provide support to their children or intimate partners. In addition to the intervention of the criminal justice system to hold men accountable for violence, it is possible that job training and placement strategies for these women's low-income partners can assist the entire family out of poverty. Programs addressing these men's needs must assess for domestic violence and make it clear that abuse is not consistent with providing support to one's children and family. Referrals to services for batterers must be available. Pilot projects involving men need to be structured within the context of a coordinated community response to violence. Learning whether adding these services can change men's behavior would greatly increase our sum of knowledge about domestic violence and welfare.

## CONCLUSION

Although these research studies document an important connection between domestic violence and welfare receipt, there remains a clear need for additional research so that we may better understand how domestic violence effects welfare recipients' abilities to enter the labor market, how welfare-to-work services might be delivered when domestic violence presents a barrier, and how interventions with the men in these women's lives might be structured to prevent sabotage and violence.

It is crucial that new research efforts be supported, and that investigators become aware of the best practices to follow when conducting research on domestic violence among welfare recipients. Given that the field is in its infancy, and that a great deal of interest has been generated in the issues, there is now an excellent opportunity to launch the field in a planful, coordinated manner which will enhance the efficiency and utility of ensuing research and subsequent practice initiatives.

Because this agenda needs to be set in collaboration with researchers, policy makers, welfare-to-work program providers, and welfare recipients, the Project for Research on Welfare, Work and Domestic Violence plans to hold a conference in September 1997. The project invites potential interested parties to contact us about their research activities and the questions and issues they believe should be raised in future research and evaluation activities. With welfare program restructuring occurring throughout the country, it is essential that we continue to develop information and disseminate it quickly about how domestic violence serves as a barrier to work for women on welfare.