

TANF/Child Support and Domestic Violence: Building Opportunities for Victim Safety and Economic Stability

Improving Families' Well-Being during Challenging Times:
Bi-Regional State and Tribal Technical Assistance Conference

Denver, CO

August 3, 2011

Anne Menard

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

amenard@pcadv.org

*When we say “domestic violence”,
what do we mean?*

A pattern of abuse and coercive behaviors, including physical, sexual, and psychological abuse as well as economic coercion, used against an intimate partner.

Domestic violence often involves the use of a combination of tactics aimed at establishing control of one partner over the other.

Not just physical violence...

- ◆ stalking and threats to kidnap, kill, or otherwise harm family, friends, or property
- ◆ threats to commit suicide
- ◆ repeated use of degrading or coercive language
- ◆ controlling access to food or sleep and withholding access to money, credit cards or medical care
- ◆ denying contact with friends or family

What do we know?

Key findings from NVAW Survey:

- ◆ Nearly 1 in 4 women are beaten or raped by a partner during adulthood.
- ◆ Each year approximately 2.3 million people (disproportionately women) are raped and/or physically assaulted by a current or former spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend.

What do we know?

The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports:

- ◆ Every day in the United States, an average of 3 women are killed by a current or former intimate partner.

What do we know?

- ◆ Leaving an abusive relationship does not guarantee the reduction or elimination of violence or risk.
- ◆ In fact, leaving may create new risks or increase existing ones (kidnapping, threats against family and friends). The rates and seriousness of physical abuse increase during periods of separation or divorce.

What do we know?

- ◆ While domestic violence occurs in all social groups (as defined by age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or economic circumstances), poor women experience violence by their partners at higher rates, partly because they have fewer options.
- ◆ The combination of poverty and violence creates particular difficulties for women's well-being and ability to achieve self-sufficiency. Access to independent economic resources, including welfare, is central to abused women's decision-making and safety planning.

Domestic Violence and Economic Support

- ◆ Women with abusive partners often use welfare as a bridge out of these relationships.
- ◆ Numerous studies have found that between 40-60% of current welfare recipients have experienced domestic violence at some point in their lives. Up to 25% report that the abuse is a current problem.

Domestic Violence and Economic Support

Meeting Survivor's Needs:

*A Multi-State Study of Domestic Violence
Shelter Experiences*

-surveyed 3,400 shelter residents in 8 states in 2008 and found that 93% of these survivors reported needing help with economic issues, including finding affordable housing, job training, transportation, and education and assistance managing money.

Each
domestic violence
victim's circumstances,
risks and resources
will be different,
and may change as the
tactics used by an abusive
partner change.

Not Enough: What TANF Offers Family Violence Victims

*Findings from a national survey
conducted in late 2009 by
NRCDV and Legal Momentum*

www.vawnet.org > Search: Not Enough

THE SURVEY - Fall 2009

- Nearly 600 respondents, including individuals from all 50 states and Washington, D.C.
- The majority (78%) of respondents work at domestic violence or dual domestic violence/sexual assault programs. Also responding were staff from legal aid or other anti-poverty programs (13%) and from TANF/CSE agencies (5%).
- Most respondents (82%) provide direct services to victims.

KEY RESULTS

- TANF is important to domestic violence victims (96%).
- TANF can make a significant difference - when it works well.
- TANF can make a significant difference - when it doesn't work well.

KEY RESULTS

When TANF does work well for victims --

- Collaboration between DV and TANF and Child Support agencies
- Trained responders
- Flexible use of TANF funds
- Streamlined processes
- Benefits for immigrant victims

KEY RESULTS

When TANF doesn't work well for victims --

- Application process creates barriers
- Benefits too low and often delayed
- Screening is often inconsistent and ineffective
- Notification of FV specific waivers, services is often ineffective
- Disclosures may not lead to needed help
- Some responses make things worse = less safe
- Child support enforcement is also inconsistent in addressing safety and financial concerns

MAKING TANF MORE EFFECTIVE

(top ranked from 1st)

- Employment services
- Child care
- DV training for CS/TANF workers
- Relocation assistance
- Transportation
- Improve FV screening
- Increase TANF benefit levels

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

- Shorten application process/less documentation
- Flexible FV exemption and work requirements
- Access to mental health, substance abuse, and trauma services
- Onsite advocates, TANF workers
- Pre-sanction screening for domestic violence
- Improve confidentiality
- Remove barriers for immigrants
- More specialized services