



Victims of Domestic Violence and TANF Reauthorization

660 Pennsylvania Ave., S.E., Suite 303, Washington, DC 20003 Phone: (202) 543-5566 Fax: (202) 543-5626

Over 60% of women receiving TANF have experienced physical abuse by an intimate partner. Thirty-percent of TANF recipients reported abuse within the last year.¹ Research indicates only 1/3 of the decline in the welfare rolls can be attributed to a successful transition from welfare to financial independence. The number of impoverished families eligible but not receiving welfare has continued to increase,² and many of the needs of battered women and children in poverty continue to be neglected. The intersection between domestic violence and public assistance is an issue being considered by policy makers in the reauthorization of TANF.

The Family Violence Option

- Most battered women work or want to work *if they can do so safely*.
- Many women use welfare and work as a way to escape an abusive relationship. Abusers often sabotage their partners' efforts to gain financial security through threats, harassment, and withholding transportation. In addition, too many battered women face multiple barriers to employment – physical disabilities, inadequate health care and insurance, and lack of adequate housing, childcare, and transportation, all of which impede their ability to work. Some of these women are also dealing with emotional trauma, mental health issues, or substance abuse problems. As the number of barriers increase, a woman's capability to obtain employment are significantly diminished.³
- All but 5 states have adopted the Family Violence Option (FVO) included as part of the 1996 welfare reform bill or enacted similar provisions to address domestic violence. However, many victims are unable to access this assistance because the entire option was not adopted or caseworkers and social workers are not adequately trained to inform and assist battered women in obtaining this option.⁴
- Implementing minimal requirements for all states to address domestic violence as well as providing adequate funds for training TANF caseworkers could increase the effectiveness of the FVO.

The Marriage Promotion Initiative

- Marriage promotion initiatives may stigmatize single parents, single-parent families, or divorce. This stigmatization will make it more difficult for some women to leave abusive relationships.
- Participation in marriage promotion *could be or could be perceived to be* linked to the receipt of benefits (whether TANF benefits, housing, Head Start, or other services), aggravating the problem of women remaining in abusive relationships for fear of losing crucial assistance.

- The use of financial incentives to promote marriage or participation in marriage promotion activities is a form of economic coercion and may place desperately poor battered women at an increased safety risk. Financial “bonuses” for married families discriminate against single headed households.

Education and Training

- 38% of battered women were forced to drop out of school because of harassment or abuse. Another fifty-six percent reported missed school days due to abuse.⁵ Without educational and employment training opportunities designed to address both safety and self-sufficiency concerns, battered women are more vulnerable to the controlling tactics of their abusers, and less likely to escape poverty.
- Research has shown that the welfare-to-work programs that have been most successful in helping parents work more and increase earnings over the long run are those that include substantial access to education and training, together with employment services and a strong overall focus on work as the goal.⁶
- Education is crucial to alleviating poverty for both men and women. However, research indicates that education is even more important for women, who are at greater odds for extreme poverty.⁷ This is particularly true for victims of domestic violence.
- Women leaving welfare, including many battered women, usually obtain low-paying jobs, and the likelihood of their achieving economic success remains low unless interventions are offered that will help them acquire better skills and better jobs.⁸
- Some training or education beyond high school is required to qualify for family-supporting jobs, yet only one-sixth of welfare recipients have any postsecondary education.⁹

Victims of domestic violence face enormous obstacles in the struggle for safety and financial independence. Many women use welfare programs to escape their abusers and start a new life for themselves and their children. A high number of battered women and children receive Temporary Aid to Needy Families, and it remains an important safety net for them. Congress’ decisions in reauthorizing TANF will have a profound impact on battered women and their children.

¹ Lawrence, Sharmila. 2002. *Domestic Violence and Welfare Policy: Research Findings That Can Inform Policies on Marriage and Child Well-Being*. Research Forum on Children, Families, and the New Federalism. National Center for Children in Poverty, Issue Brief.

² Scher, Bill. 2002. “Government Data Show Welfare Reform Failure.” NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund. New York, New York.

³ Danziger, Sandra; Mary Corcoran, Sheldon Danziger, et al. 2000. *Barriers to the Employment of Welfare Recipients*. University of Michigan.

⁴ Personal conversations between The National Network to End Domestic Violence and Beth Satre of the Montana Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault; Amy Correia of the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence; and Verlaine Gullickson of the South Dakota Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. February 10, 2003.

⁵ Shook, Kristen and Carrie Guthrie. 1998. *Domestic Violence, Economic Hardship, and Employment*. University of Chicago, School of Social Service Administration.

⁶ Straun, Julie. *Why Congress Should Expand, Not Cut, Access to Long-Term Training in TANF*. CLASP. March 2004

⁷ Case, Timothy. 2002. *Reading Between the Lines: Women’s Poverty in the United States, 2002*. Now Legal Defense and Education Fund. New York, New York.

⁸ Negry, Cynthia; Stacie Golin, Sunhwa Lee et al. 2001. *Working First But Working Poor: the Need for Education and Training Following Welfare Reform*. Institute for Women’s Policy Research and NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund. New York, New York.

⁹ Strawn, Julie. 2004. “Why Congress Should Expand, Not Cut, Access to Long-Term Training in TANF.” *Center for Law and Social Policy*. Washington, DC.