
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Intimate Partner Violence and Homelessness among Women: The Role of the YWCA to Rebuild Their Lives

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ABSTRACT

The problem of intimate partner violence is multifaceted and intricate. Women face intimate partner violence due to a lack of control over power and economic resources. Women experience various issues, i.e., economic and sexual coercion, emotional abuse, and so on. In many cases, they faded out of their social circumstances, and they were inefficient at moving forward with their lives. In extreme cases, they become homeless and socially isolated. In that situation, extensive social support is required to bring them back to a normal life. The study aims to explore the role of the YWCA in rebuilding women's lives who experienced IPV. The study sought to shed light on their systems for addressing intimate violence cases and how they advocate for and support the victims to resume their social lives following traumatic experiences and promote safe housing. The study's findings showed that when women experienced physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, they were often trapped and subjugated by their intimate partners. The women faced restrictions and control over the financial resources and activities that were imposed by their intimate partners. Therefore, due to limited interactions with neighbors and friends, women were also disadvantaged in seeking support from others. Hence, the YWCA plays a noteworthy role for women in mitigating and coping with the traumatic experiences of intimate partner violence and homelessness.

KEYWORDS

IPV, homelessness, Shelter, social support, advocacy, YWCA

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1. Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) and homelessness are interconnected issues that affect women disproportionately more than men. IPV may occur in an intimate relationship where the intimate partner causes harm, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, stalking, and economic abuse (Adams et al., 2020; Krebs et al., 2011; Ahmed and Tabassum et al., 2022). Intimate partner violence refers to the range of physical, sexual, or psychological abuses and threats that can occur in existing or past relationships. Victims often face multiple types of abuse in a single relationship (Krebs et al., 2011). It has serious health repercussions (Raihen, M. N., Tabassum, F., Akter, S., and Sardar, M. N. et al., 2023), may lead to chronic health disease that has no symptoms at first, can result in serious health damage (Farjana A. et al., 2023) like HIV and in the worst situations, it frequently results in homelessness. A stable house is crucial to people's lives, and being homeless indicates a lack of access to essentials. To escape an abusive relationship or circumstance, women who experience IPV may feel compelled to leave their homes to escape from their abusive partner. Their once-safe home becomes unsafe and menacing, prompting them to leave in order to defend themselves and their kids (Smith, 2018). Women who are fleeing an abusive relationship frequently struggle to locate a secure, stable home, and it becomes a challenge for them. These women fear becoming homeless if they have no support network or

access to resources (Johnson et al., 2020). They could not have the necessary financial means, familial support, or access to housing, and it gets harder if they have kids (Brown & Williams). As a result, leaving an abusive relationship can result in homelessness, and the absence of a permanent housing alternative may drive the victim to either return to the abusive spouse, stay with them, or find other unsafe living arrangements (Jones & Miller, 2017). In some circumstances, leaving an abusive relationship can immediately result in homelessness, emphasizing the urgent need for comprehensive networks of assistance that simultaneously address both problems (Adams & Martinez, 2021).

In response, agencies and non-profit organizations help the survivors attain safe and stable housing; this may include individual advocacy and flexible funding to help the survivors meet their organization's goals. The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) is one such non-profit organization that has been working for 160 years in the most important social movement to empower women and promote their awareness of their civic rights. In addition, they offer them other resources like crisis hotlines, safe housing, medical and legal counsel, neighborhood and preventative measures education, and a program to acquire financial literacy skills. The current study involves conducting case studies with the advocates of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) to know how intimate partner violence results in homelessness among women and they are giving support to the IPV survivors, ensuring women's safety, and solving the instability of housing to meet their organizational goals. This study adds to a growing body of evidence supporting this model's effectiveness and to our understanding of factors impacting long-term housing stability and safety for IPV survivors.

2. Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature. An exploratory case study was undertaken to direct this study. A total of five semi-structured interviews were conducted to analyse the cases of YWCA advocates who dealt with incidents of Intimate Partner violence as professionals. All of the interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants, and later, verbatim transcriptions were generated to analyse the data. Therefore, a thematic analysis of the cases was used to see how intimate partner violence causes women's homelessness and how the YWCA is rebuilding these women's lives to achieve their goal of formal social support.

3. IPV and Homelessness of Women

3.1 The Intersection of IPV, homelessness and Financial Dependency

IPV may be a main reason behind housing instability when a survivor is forced to leave their own home without the financial means to support themselves or when an abusive partner stops contributing to the household. The survivors often have to choose whether to live in a dangerous house or go without housing if they want to be safe (O'Campo et al., 2016). Economic dependence can lead to a power imbalance in a romantic relationship, while one partner controls the finances and restricts the partner from working outside the home (Raihen, M. N., Akter, S., & Sardar, M. N. et al., 2023). This makes women dependent on their partners, leading to a lack of financial autonomy. According to the World Economic Forum, women face many barriers to participating in the economy. They are more likely to be engaged in unpaid work at home, and therefore, they become dependent on their partner (World Economic Forum 2020). Women facing IPV face several barriers to leaving an abusive relationship, and most importantly, financial dependency becomes the major factor. According to research, economic constraints are associated with a higher likelihood of women staying in an abusive relationship, limiting women's resources and scope to leave abusive partners. IPV, which drives people to leave their homes, may include the abusive partner preventing the survivors from paying the bills, ruining the survivors' credits, causing physical and mental injuries for which the victims become unable to maintain the household work or continuously stalks and threatens the survivors so that they lose their residences (Adams et al., 2013; 2020; laceyet al., 2013). Around 46% of women in Minnesota reported being violated and staying in that abusive relationship because they had nowhere else to go (Wilder Research Center 2004). One shelter serving women of color reported that nearly 85 percent of clients returned to abusive relationships because of their difficulties finding housing and employment (Kimberle, 1991). In 2003, 44% of women reported being in abusive relationships for two years at some point, as they did not have any other housing options (Wilder Research Center 2004). Moreover, women's fear of losing their housing, social isolation, and concern about their child custody may further mitigate their actions to leave that relationship (Adams et al., 2008). YWCA's advocate Rachel says,

"abusers....use control tactic...UM, controlling their finances, so they pretty much have no choice but to be homeless if they leave.....sometimes people get violated for many years, but at some point, they decide that, okay, I-I have to flee from the home usually it takes like seven to 13 different times trying to leave before they actually leave. And most of the time, they do end up going back."

When victims reach a breaking point and cannot tolerate it anymore, they just become more concerned about their survival from that abusive relationship than the long term-planning (Raihen, M. N., & Akter, S. et al., 2023). In situations of acute danger, leaving the home becomes a viable option for them. Study shows that women facing IPV for a long period of time left the abusive relationship to ensure their immediate safety without a solid plan (Goodman et al., 2009). Regarding this, YWCA's shelter advocate Andrea Stedge says,

"Sometimes the partner won't pay the rent or withholds the funds Um... controls the money, makes some handover every paycheck that they get, or don't allow their partner to work. So the non-abusive partner, um, can face eviction or foreclosure on the home, or they're always moving from place to place because, you know, situational violence.....they wanna move around so nobody catches on to what they're.... People are questioning what's going on in the home. Um, sometimes if they're, you know, if they are forced to leave their abuser partner or choose to leave their abuser partner, then they become homeless because, um, it may be at the spur of the moment, or they've never explored resources and how to get out. They just gotta go."

3.2 Lack of social support, coercive control and IPV

Social support, like emotional and instrumental efforts, is necessary for an individual's life, and it plays a protective factor in the cases of IPV (Branch, 2008; Larance and Porter, 2004). Research shows that women who have more friends are more likely to disclose abuse (Browning, 2002), and having more support means more resources in deciding to leave abusive relationships (Van Wyk et al., 2003). It also helps women to mitigate the health issues that are associated with abusive relationships. It is also shown in research having higher levels of social support have better physical, mental health and lower psychological distress and depression compared to the women reported lower levels of social support (Kamimura et al., 2013). Coercive control is a behavior to make a person dependent by making them isolated from the support, deprived from independence and regulate their every behavior (Lisa F. T. et al., 2023). The main thing of coercive control is isolating the victims from a social network and managing their daily lives by using threats. This isolation can make it more challenging for the victims to seek help or escape from an abusive relationship (Dutton et al., 2006). Coercive control may have more significant psychological effects than physical, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorders (Stark 2006). According to YWCA's Emergency Response Team advocate Lindsey:

"They may have no social support anymore... they became isolated from them. Whether that be like intentional by the perpetrator ...sometimes they have tactics like...I don't want you talking to your friends. I don't want you talking to your mom".

Another advocate Bridgett says,

"Not having any support system or being isolated from all your supports can kind of make you, like, go crazy because you're just alone with your thoughts and you have nobody else to process them with...it can show a lot of different trauma responses".

Coercive control makes the women isolated from their social network, family, and friends, which mitigates the scope of getting help from others. Abusers often use this strategy to maintain control and power over their victims, to make them feel they have no one to turn to for support. Therefore, it becomes tough for victims to take any action against their abuser.

3.3 Women help seeking behavior and the role of YWCA

Despite the high prevalence of Intimate Partner violence around the world and its adverse health effect on women (Raihen, M. N., Akter, S., & Sardar, M. N. et al., 2023), the rate of help seeking for IPV is low. Social support is crucial in the help-seeking process for IPV survivors. Social support initially evolved from a concept of care and belonging to a more multifaceted notion (Heaney & Israel, 2008; Thoits, 2011; Trotter & Allen, 2009). Rachel says,

"And most of the time, they do end up going back. As it is a hard process, um, but you do need to have a lot of Support that you have in order to leave, because it is very scary."

Social support sources can be divided into two types: formal and informal. Informal social support typically used by survivors includes friends and family (Alaggia, Regehr, & Jenney, 2012; Lucea et al., 2013). Informal support includes the organization, medical professionals, mental health counselors, domestic violence shelters or programs, and courts (Sylaska & Edwards, 2014). Formal and Informal support both has been rated significantly by the IPV survivors instead of handling alone (Brabeck & Guzmán, 2008). YWCA is providing formal social support to IPV victims and survivors in order to help them to develop independence and rebuild their lives. The role of YWCA:

3.4 Advocacy

YWCA provides advocacy to advance their mission, depending on women's need. YWCA advocates on behalf of IPV victims and survivors to address the women's specific needs affected by intimate partner violence. This may include awareness raising, promoting policy changes, and ensuring the survivors' voices are heard and respected. YWCA provides these services

through different teams like the Emergency response team and shelter advocacy team. Women who first call the YWCA are immediately put in touch with the First Emergency Response Team (ERT). The ERT team interacts with the survivors to determine their needs and preferences. The ERT members coordinate the required help and start the relevant support services based on the survivor's needs, such as advocacy, counselling, or shelter. As Andrea says,

"If they need subsidized housing...we try to advocate them...help with budget...advocate helps them in developing literacy skills".

3.5 Therapy

YWCA offers counselling and therapy services to the survivors who are dealing with emotional and psychological trauma. They work with Kalamazoo Integrated Services, and if they need mental health assistance, YWCA work with them; even if the survivor needs to see a doctor, they connect them with that and help them get their medical insurance as well (Das M.C. et al., 2023).

3.6 Shelter, housing and other services

The YWCA provides emergency shelters for people and families who are facing homelessness or escaping domestic abuse. Survivors can flee immediate danger in these shelters' private, secure surroundings. They provide people access to helpful professionals who are able to provide emotional support, safety planning, and contacts to other services in addition to giving them a place to physically hide out. They also help the survivors by providing transitional housing programs; they offer long term accommodation for up to 2 years for the individuals and families to ensure their independence and permanent housing. They also do personal protection orders (PPO) for the victims to ensure their safety. According to shelter advocates of YWCA,

"We did a case recently, and PPO went through, and it was in her favor; she didn't have to leave the home he did. It would be like establishing the PPO order, maybe an option, um, legal advocacy through a legal department...we accept that, and we just continue to support them as they want, ...we don't decide what's best for that".

They also provide transportation assistance, including bus tokens, to the survivors to travel somewhere and give rides if it's urgent. They try to connect survivors' children to the public schools by ensuring transportation.

"Whatever school that they attend, they have to provide transportation to the shelter...if it's a surrounding school, they can't make them transfer to UM. Your schools, like, let's say they came from Vicksburg, E.G., that's where they were living. They could still go to Vicksburg schools because they're in a shelter."

3.7 Forensic Examination

YWCA does forensic examinations or evidence collection for survivors, especially for sexual abuse. Trained nurses at the YWCA ensure the proper collection and preservation of physical and medical evidence related to the alleged abuse. This evidence can be instrumental in supporting legal cases and investigations.

3.8 Reproductive health

Ensuring reproductive health is another mission of the YWCA, and reproductive health includes healthcare, family planning, and sexual health education. For IPV survivors, it is crucial to address health concerns connected to their health experiences and provide them with the tools they need to make wise decisions about their futures and bodies (Raihen, M. N., Akter, S., Tabassum, F., Jahan, F., & Sardar, M. N. et al., 2023).

3.9 Comprehensive Family Support

The YWCA offers survivors with children a wide range of programs that are specifically suited to their needs, going beyond only helping women. The special requirements of families dealing with issues like domestic abuse are taken into account in this comprehensive approach. Services involve ensuring kids have access to high-quality education, fostering healthy child development through daycare and counseling, providing parental advice and support groups, linking families with necessary resources, and fighting for the rights and welfare of kids. The YWCA wants to empower survivors and make it possible for families to succeed in the face of tragedy by encouraging a supportive atmosphere for the entire family.

4. Limitations and suggestions from the Advocates

The study was an attempt to investigate the intersection of IPV and homelessness among women and how the non-profit organization YWCA plays a role in rebuilding women's lives to ensure their goals. The YWCA is running various programs to develop women's literacy skills, make them independent, provide shelter, etc., yet they have some limitations in providing

their services due to the funding. Advocates have faced some shortcomings and have given some suggestions to develop the services of the YWCA. According to Bridgett,

"Our number of housing units, and, like, low income housing... in general Kalamazoo, is in a housing crisis. Even like the shelter we have, the shortcomings of the shelter maybe make you want it, or if we could just expand our space."

According to Lindsey,

"We have a connection with the UM SPCA, so animal shelters pet only for two weeks... If we had an animal shelter, not knowing what they were going to do with their pet and not having support with their children, especially when people are in such mental and emotional turmoil, they would need their animals... They can be in a really deep depression, sometimes even having thoughts of self-harm or not wanting to be alive anymore. But their pet is, what gives them purpose. I have something to take care of it... emotional turmoil, they need their animals like they really do."

Despite its significant and impactful work, the YWCA still has persistent financing issues that limit its capacity to provide shelter facilities, housing, and other arrangements, despite its enormous development and influential work. The YWCA should think about expanding its financing sources, participating in focused fundraising activities, establishing connections with donors, looking for strategic collaborations, and maintaining open and responsible financial management methods in order to solve these problems successfully. These steps can assist the organization in obtaining the resources required to carry out its fundamental purpose of assisting those in need and enhancing its facilities and services.

5. Results and Discussion

The issue of intimate partner violence (IPV) is widespread worldwide and continues to be a major concern among affluent nations like the United States. Our research has encompassed five case studies on YWCA advocates, who were our respondents, to delve into the intricate interplay between IPV and homelessness among women. Additionally, we have looked at the crucial role that the YWCA, a recognized social assistance organization, played in helping these women reconstruct their lives. Women frequently find themselves becoming financially dependent on their male partners throughout romantic engagements. This dependency emerges because partners deliberately constrain their ability to seek employment outside the home, thereby rendering them financially beholden. In addition, violent relationships frequently isolate these women from their social and family networks, which are essential resources for mental support and consolation. As a consequence, women who are caught in abusive relationships frequently have anxiety about leaving their abusers because they lack not just the required resources but also social support and financial independence. In dire situations, these women, driven solely by the instinct to survive, are compelled to abandon their homes, ultimately leading them into homelessness.

The YWCA is an organization that specializes in handling cases of IPV by providing various types of aid, such as refuge, advocacy, and a wide range of services in line with their corporate objective. They have an Emergency Response Team, a shelter team, and a group of skilled nurses at their disposal, and they all work together to offer unwavering support to IPV survivors. Beyond providing them with immediate relief, the YWCA serves as a vital source of emotional nourishment for these women, providing them with access to living facilities through their transitional housing program and opportunities for literacy skill development. The group works carefully to make it easier for survivors to become independent and self-sufficient again. The YWCA also broadens its assistance to cover these women's reproductive health and actively participates in providing educational opportunities for their children.

6. Conclusion

The study found a significant relationship between intimate partner violence and homelessness among women in Michigan, USA. The advocates at the YWCA informed us that most of the women who experienced abusive behavior from their partners became homeless very often. Besides that, due to their limited social relationships with friends and neighbors, they face difficulties seeking help in needy situations. The abusive male partner takes advantage of women's financial limitations and sole dependency on them. Women were manipulated by their partners on an emotional, social, and even physical level. In such a situation, the role of the YWCA is crucial because the organization is passionately working for the women who experienced the IPV. The organization constantly supports the women and helps them find safe houses for their safety. It involves various services such as crisis hotlines, medical emergencies, legal assistance, finding new jobs to manage their monthly expenses, and admitting their children to school. However, though the YWCA is delivering its best effort to support, mitigate, and rebuild the lives of victims of IPV, it has some limitations due to the limited funding. The findings of this study will help the different stakeholders—private, public, and non-government organizations— focus on this issue and raise awareness regarding IPV. The findings will also help researchers and

policymakers design and implement a new strategy to reduce the risk of intimate partner violence and an easier way to seek support in extreme cases.

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