BREAKING THE CYCLE OF HOMELESSNESS AND IPV:

Rapid rehousing and transitional housing for intimate partner violence survivors enable dual goals of safety and housing stability

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and Housing: Mutually Reinforcing

One in three women in the United States (U.S.) will experience **intimate partner violence** (IPV).[1] IPV includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, stalking, and controlling behavior, including financial sabotage.

IPV undermines survivors' health and well-being;[2] **negative outcomes** include injury, adverse mental health, unintended pregnancy, and risk for sexually transmitted infection, including HIV.

In the United States, over **50% of homicides** of women are perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner.[3] Leaving a partnership significantly increases intimate partner homicide risk among women.[4,5]

Housing Instability is Both a Result of and Risk Factor for IPV

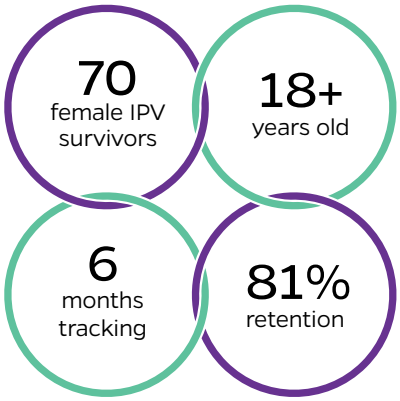
- IPV is a leading risk factor for women's homelessness and housing instability, and increases risk by up to fourfold.[6]
- Violence compromises economic stability. For example, when abusive partners withhold finances, it can place women at increased risk of eviction[7] and job loss,[8] allowing for further interference by abusive partners.[6]
- Women's ability to secure safe housing is further undermined by the gender and race-based pay gaps.[9]

Policy context

In 2016, the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act expanded its definition of homeless to include individuals fleeing or attempting to flee violence, paving the way to housing supports for IPV survivors through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Meeting the housing-related needs of IPV survivors requires recognition of their unique needs, and effective programming to meet their dual goals of safety and housing stability.

Methods

Our team implemented a prospective, quasi-experimental, community-partnered evaluation of rapid rehousing (RRH) and transitional housing (TH) at House of Ruth Maryland, where survivors also received comprehensive IPV support and safety planning. Study recruitment was conducted from June 2019-December 2020. We enrolled 70 female IPV survivors receiving either form of housing support (59 in RRH and 11 in TH); participants were 18 years or older and fluent in English. Key outcomes of safety and housing stability were tracked over a 6-month period, with 81% retention at 6-month follow-up. Qualitative interviews contextualized survey results.



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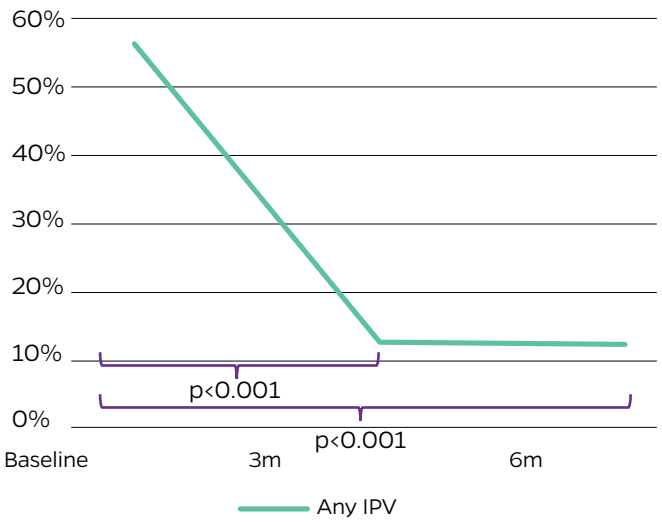
Results:
Safe Housing Reduces IPV Recidicism and Housing Instability among IPV Survivors

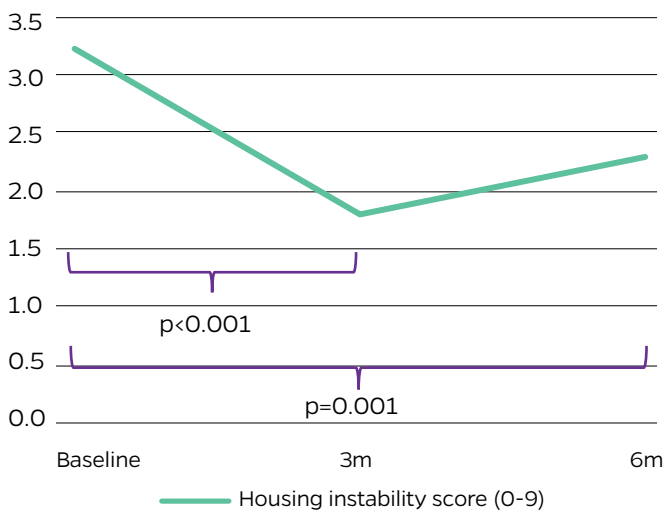
Recent IPV reduced significantly from 56.1% at baseline to 12.3% at 6-month follow-up. Additional IPV indicators included the Women's Experiences with Battering (WEB) Scale, which decreased by an average of 14.06 from 36.63 at baseline to 22.61 at 6-month follow-up; p<0.001. These reductions were statistically significant and evident by 3-month follow-up.

Housing instability was assessed using the Housing Instability Index, designed specifically for this population;[10] higher scores indicate greater instability. Average housing instability score reduced significantly from 3.23 at baseline to 2.31 at 6-month follow-up; p=0.001.

Recent IPV Prevalence



Housing Instability Scores, past 3 months



Housing support to leave an abusive home reduced IPV.

Housing support allowed women to focus foremost on their safety.

> I do feel safer, that's for sure. He doesn't know where I live. Also, it gives me some power. This is power control thing that these abusers do. I do feel a small power in myself that my apartment is protected and that he can't find it.
>
> I didn't have to come up with a security deposit because they paid it for me. That gives you breathing room to just not think about, I'm running from this person, and now I have to worry about how I'm going to pay my bills?
>
> – *RRH/Safe Homes Participants*

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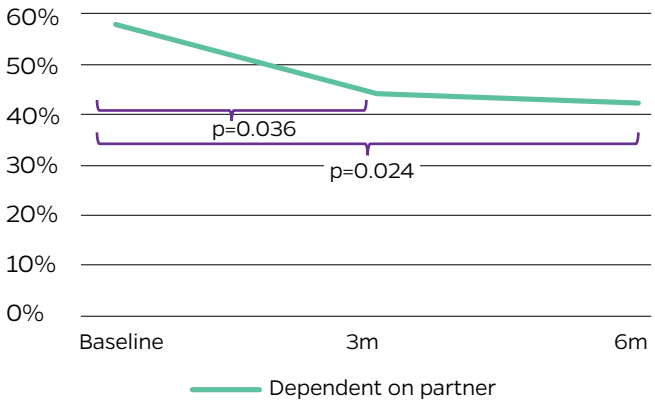
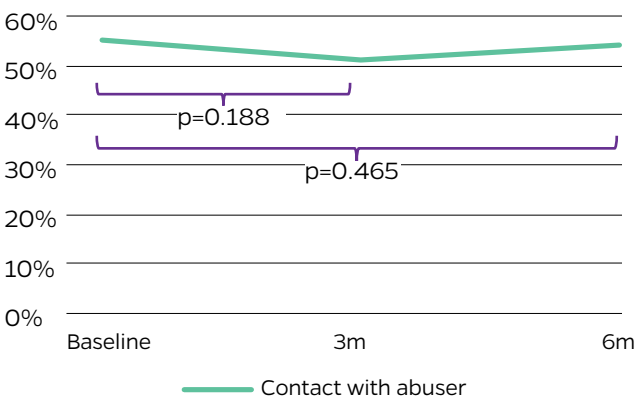
Economically Dependent on Abusive Partner, Past 3 Months



Contact with Abusive Partner, Past 3 Months



Safe Housing Changed Economic and Safety Dynamics with Abusive Partners

During this time, economic dependence on partners also decreased significantly by 3-month follow-up relative to baseline (58.0% vs 43.9%, p=0.036), and was sustained at 6-month follow-up (42.1%, p=0.024).

Notably, contact with abusers did not change substantially over the study period, yet the nature of contact changed as evidenced by both quantitative reductions in IPV, perceived risk of abuse, and economic dependence on men who had used violence against them as well as by women's own accounts of their safety through qualitative interviews.

Housing increased survivor independence, both financial and emotional, causing power shifts in relationships with their abusive partners which, in turn, contributed to increased safety.

> In my last apartment, he was using that to control me. He used to threaten me that my children and I will be evicted in Baltimore City in the middle of brutal winter season because he will stop paying rent. That became abusive cycle where I will cry, and I'll have to beg him. Now that I enrolled in this program that I don't have to be abused in that rent situation.
>
> – *RRH/Safe Homes participant*

Unique IPV impacts: safety and trauma

Though women felt safer overall, they described hypervigilance, checking their surroundings and taking other precautions to ensure continued safety.

> I still find myself doing small stuff like turning my location off and it does kind of suck sometimes because I do still think about certain things. I'm just like, "Well, what if this could happen or this could happen?" Because the front door of the apartment complex is open anybody can open it and get it. I do find myself like, I don't post pictures online about where I live.
>
> – *TH*/Extended Stay participant

Key Learning

- **Safe housing reduces IPV revictimization**. IPV revictimization reduced significantly while survivors received housing support, interrupting potentially escalating cycles of violence.
- Preventing IPV revictimization is possible without fully **ending contact with one's abusive partner**. Women's contact with their partners was unchanged through the study period, yet the nature of their contact changed profoundly: both violence and economic dependence decreased. Results counter long-held assumptions that the only or best way to achieve safety is to separate women entirely from their abusive partners. Social messaging, programming and policy need not require that women sever contact with abusers in order to receive support.
- Supportive housing is **accessible independent of engagement in the criminal legal system**, making it an important path to safety, particularly for women in over-policed communities. Safe and affordable housing for IPV survivors can reduce IPV revictimization, aligned with restorative justice principles that seek to restore the damage incurred while preventing future harm.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

- Safe housing for IPV survivors should be prioritized to reduce the public health and public safety burdens of IPV, IPV-homicide, housing instability and their sequalae to survivors and their families.
- Policy to address homelessness and housing instability among survivors of IPV must embed trauma-informed, IPV-specific supports including safety planning, mental health services, and opportunities to increase economic stability.
- IPV survivors' unique safety and trauma-related considerations must be met.
  - Housing for IPV survivors through comprehensive IPV services is highly valuable in meeting these needs.
  - Housing for IPV survivors through mainstream homeless service systems must partner with IPV service providers to address IPV-related safety and trauma, and protect survivor confidentiality, including location of housing.

Safe, supportive housing is IPV prevention.

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For additional information, contact Michele Decker at **mdecker@jhu.edu** or Janice Miller at **Janice@hruthmd.org**
Follow us online at **@JHUGenViol @michelerdecker @HouseOfRuthMd**