



D.C. WOMEN'S NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Survey Findings

Metropolitan Washington COG Homeless Services Committee
October 3, 2018

Background: D.C. Women's Needs Assessment

- Women's Task Force of the DC ICH worked from summer 2017 - 2018
- Strong participation by over 40 women and men representing 30 homeless services providers, victim services providers, and government partners
- Significant opportunity for collaboration of homeless services providers and domestic violence providers
- Priority concerns:
 - Women's needs assessment to get a deeper look at the lived experiences of women
 - Access to housing; engage and inform CAHP process
 - Access to year-round, low-barrier shelter; engage and inform ERSO process
 - Intersection of domestic violence and homelessness

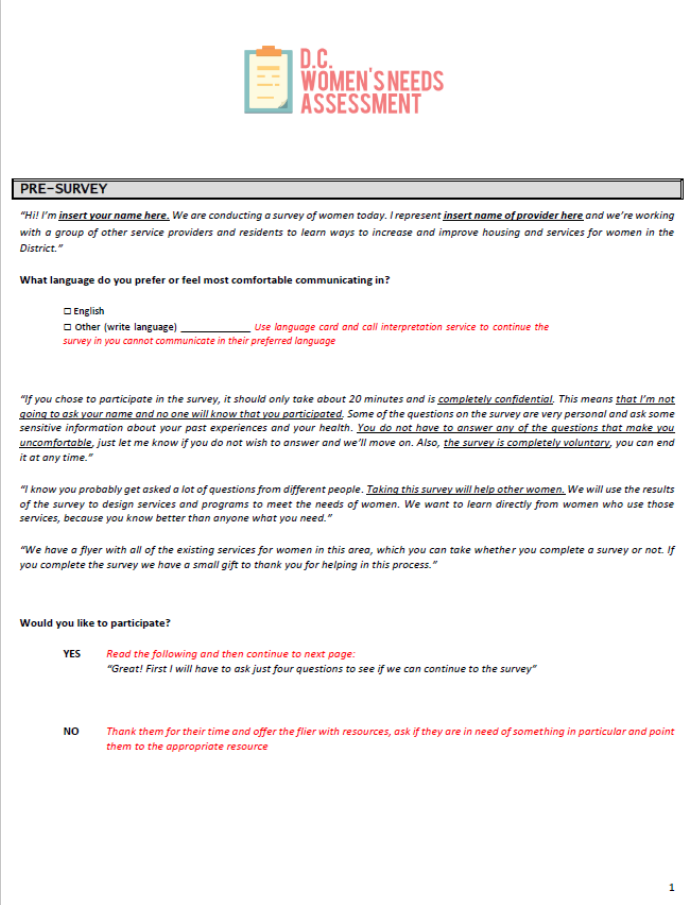
Background: D.C. Women's Needs Assessment


- 2017 DC Women's Needs Assessment (DC WNA) provided the foundation of the Task Force's work
- Understood as we started that there is an intersectionality of race and gender, specifically the ways that women of color experience poverty and homelessness disproportionate to the total population of women in DC
- The National Women's Law Center's work shows that African American women in DC experience the highest rates of poverty (25.9%) as compared to women overall (18.2%) and compared to men
- DC WNA affirmed this data - Black/African American women make up the largest share of women who are homeless (75%) in DC, a rate disproportionate to the DC population where they are only 52% of the adult women
- Another key finding of the DC WNA was that nearly one-third of the women in the study indicated that violence is the cause of their homelessness or housing instability
- These two data points – along with others in the report – point to the need for DC to focus greater attention and resources on the housing and specific service needs of women

SURVEY

ANALYSIS

- Findings are of 434 responses to the Women's Needs Assessment survey;
- Descriptive analysis of aggregate responses;
- Valid sample size of unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness relative to PIT;
- Excludes item non-response.



**D.C. WOMEN'S NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

PRE-SURVEY

"Hi! I'm insert your name here. We are conducting a survey of women today. I represent insert name of provider here and we're working with a group of other service providers and residents to learn ways to increase and improve housing and services for women in the District."

What language do you prefer or feel most comfortable communicating in?

English
 Other (write language) _____ *Use language card and call interpretation service to continue the survey in you cannot communicate in their preferred language*

"If you chose to participate in the survey, it should only take about 20 minutes and is completely confidential. This means that I'm not going to ask your name and no one will know that you participated. Some of the questions on the survey are very personal and ask some sensitive information about your past experiences and your health. You do not have to answer any of the questions that make you uncomfortable, just let me know if you do not wish to answer and we'll move on. Also, the survey is completely voluntary, you can end it at any time."

"I know you probably get asked a lot of questions from different people. Taking this survey will help other women. We will use the results of the survey to design services and programs to meet the needs of women. We want to learn directly from women who use those services, because you know better than anyone what you need."

"We have a flyer with all of the existing services for women in this area, which you can take whether you complete a survey or not. If you complete the survey we have a small gift to thank you for helping in this process."

Would you like to participate?

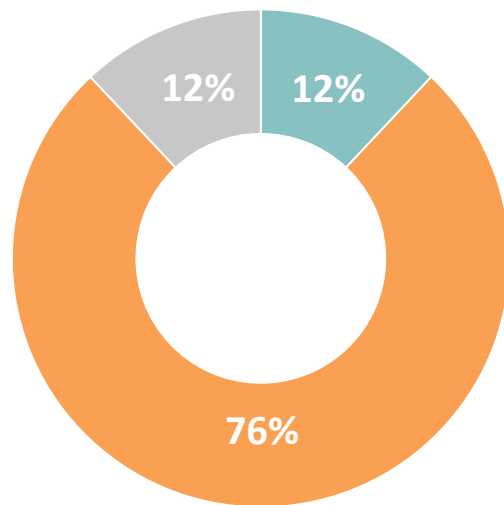
YES *Read the following and then continue to next page:*
"Great! First I will have to ask just four questions to see if we can continue to the survey"

NO *Thank them for their time and offer the flier with resources, ask if they are in need of something in particular and point them to the appropriate resource*

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Where are women staying the night?

Nighttime Locations of WNA Participants



■ Unsheltered ■ Sheltered ■ Unstable Housing

Unsheltered: Any outside situation or place not meant for human habitation; on the streets; parks, sidewalks, bus stops, car/RV, tent, etc.

Sheltered: Includes: Emergency Shelter (Low Barrier Shelter), Transitional Housing, and Safe Housing for survivors of Domestic Violence.

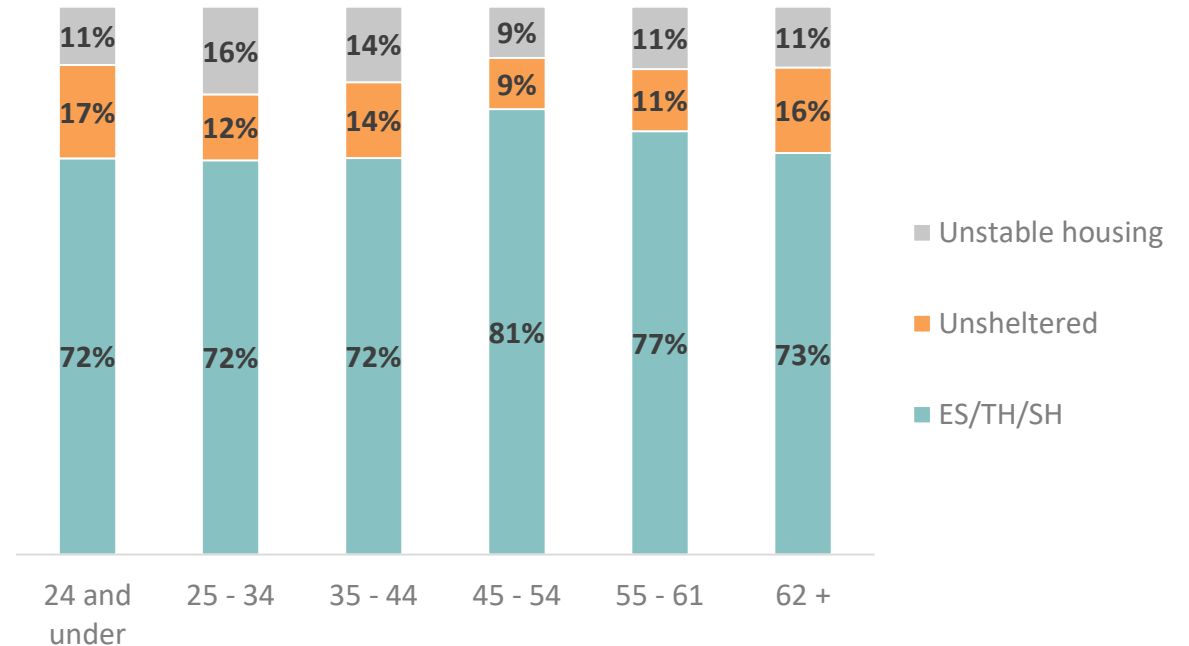
Unstable Housing: "Couch-surfing" or staying with friends or family due to a loss of housing or no resources. Temporary, might be on a night-to-night basis or an extremely limited period of time.

DEMOGRAPHICS

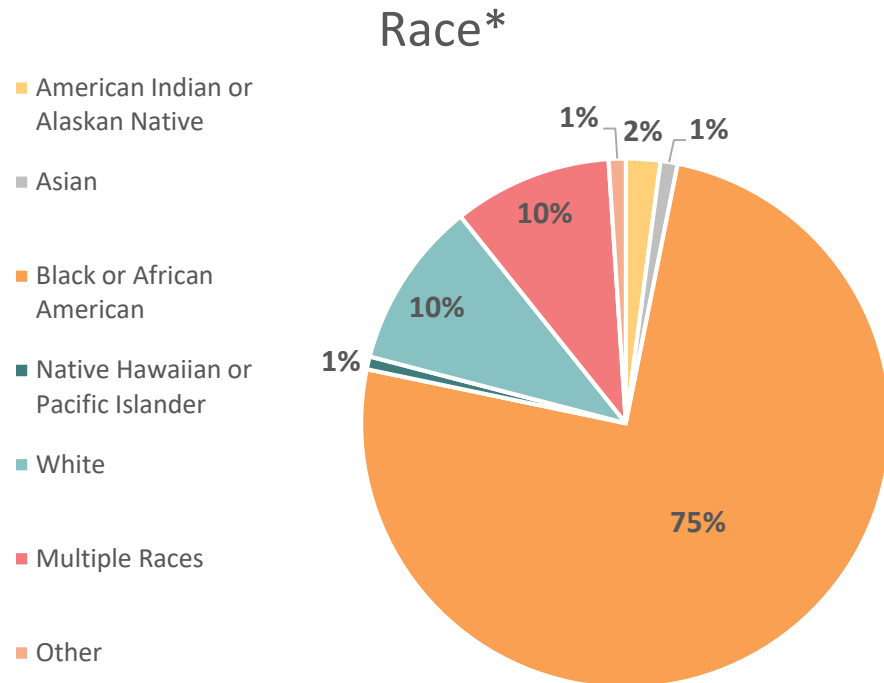
Demographics: Age

- Range: 17 to 78 years old;
- Median age is 49;
- Distribution of age is similar to what we saw at PIT;
- Nighttime locations are similar across age ranges.

Age Groups, By Nighttime Locations



Demographics: Race & Ethnicity



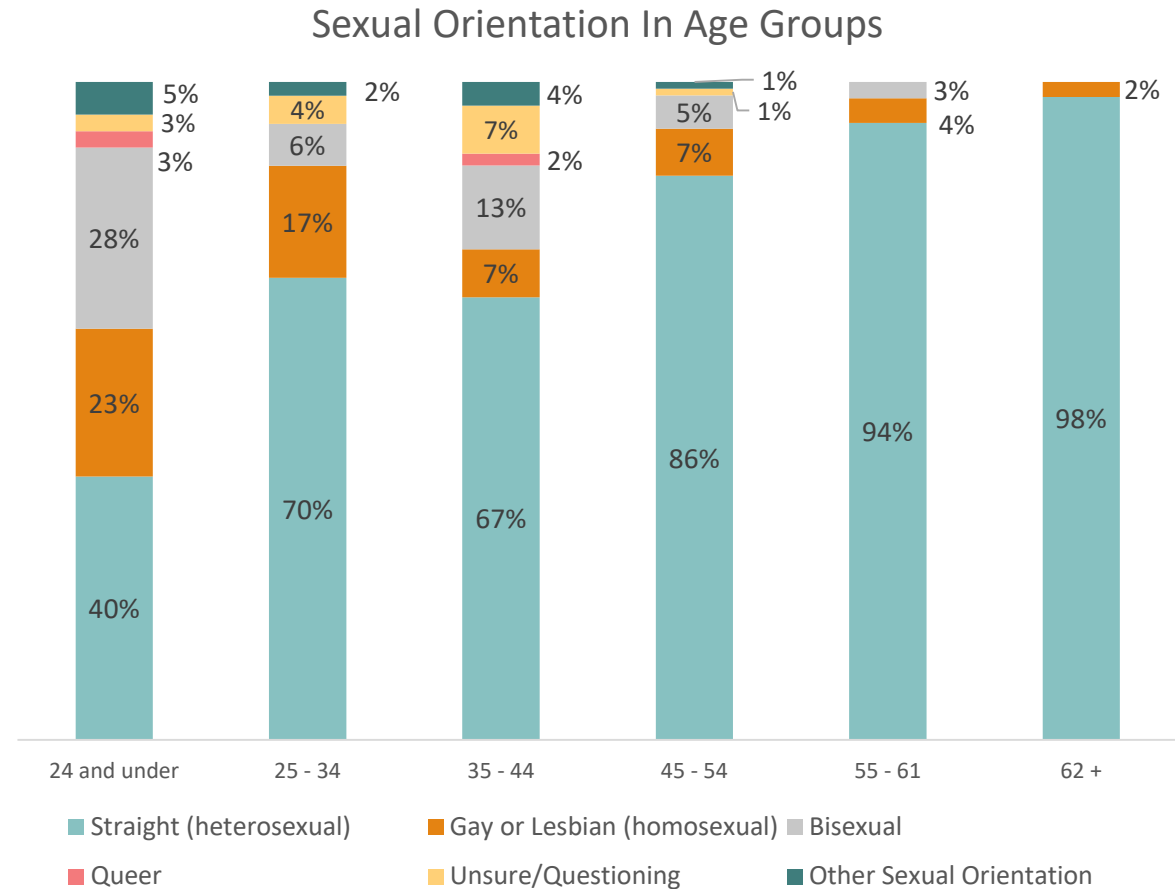
- Black or African American women make up largest share of the population;
- 6% identified as Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or Latinx;
- Distribution of race is similar to that observed in the 2017 PIT Count;
- Official race estimates for the District of Columbia indicate Black or African American women are experiencing much higher rates of homelessness or housing instability than other races†.

*Race categories in the chart (above right) display single race selections alone, all multiple selections of race are included in "multiple races" category.

† U.S. Census Bureau (2016). Selected Race and Sex Characteristics, 2016 American Community Survey 1-year estimates. Retrieved from https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_16_1YR_B01001B&prodType=table

Demographics: Sexual Orientation

- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and women who are unsure/questioning their sexual orientation make up **21% of those who responded**;
- **3 out of 5 youth** selected a sexual orientation other than heterosexual;
- Similar rates of chronicity:
 - LGBQ = 53%
 - heterosexual = 55%
- To be inclusive of all women, the survey did not specifically ask about gender identity – though several respondents self-identified as trans on open questions.



Employment and Income

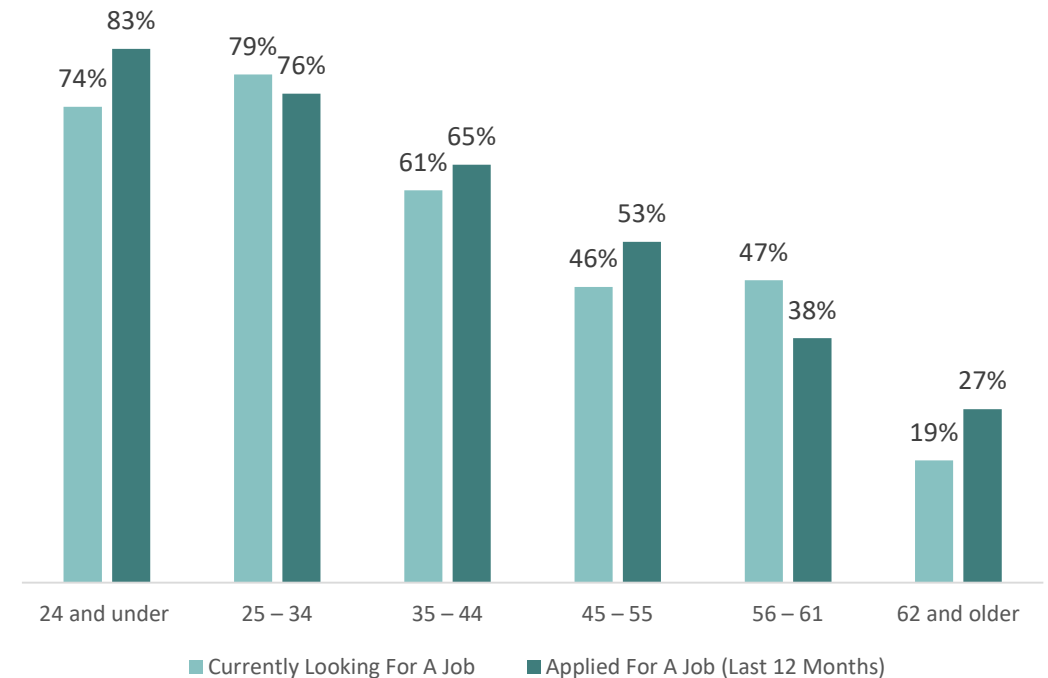
EMPLOYMENT:

- Severely under-employed, but wanting to work;
- About one quarter (26%) of respondents are working (part time, full-time, or seasonal);
- 52% are actively looking for work;
- 55% have applied for work within the last twelve months;
- 3 out of 4 women under the age of 35 are seeking employment and 4 out of 5 has applied for jobs in the past 12 months;

CASH BENEFITS:

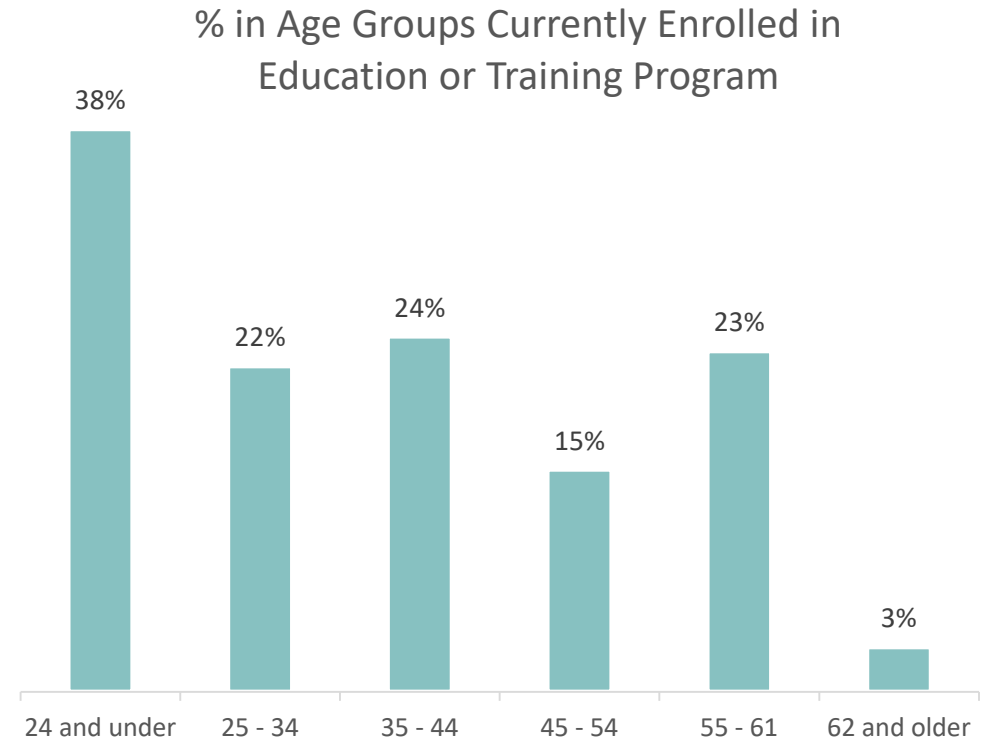
- Over half (55%) do not receive cash benefit income;
- Of those, who do 70% are receiving SSI or SSDI.

Employment Activity in Age Groups



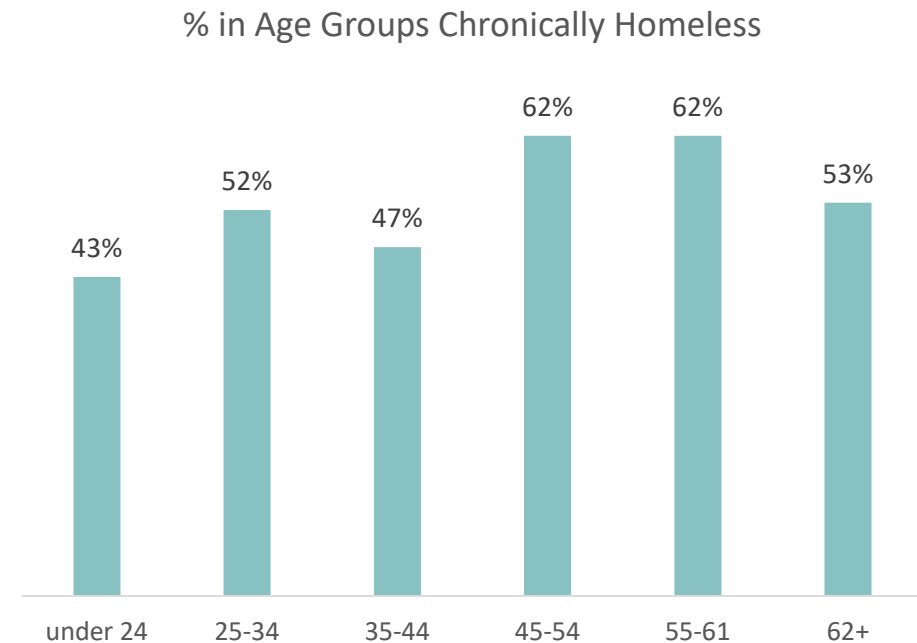
Education

- 1 out of 5 women are currently enrolled in an education or training program.



Subpopulation: Chronically-homeless

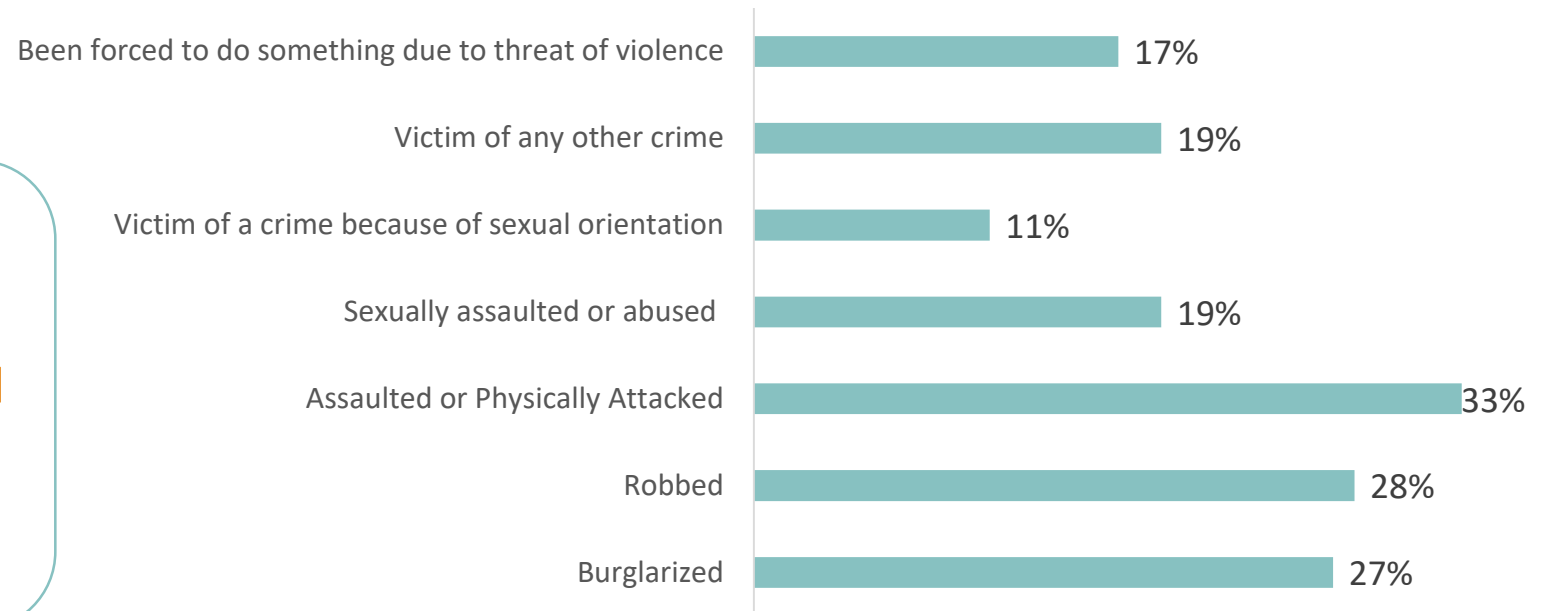
- 55% of literally-homeless are chronically homeless:
 - 60% of unsheltered
 - 54% of sheltered
- 72% of all survey participants meet length of time for chronic homelessness;
- 64% of unstably-housed participants could be considered chronically “unstably-housed”.



EXPERIENCES

Violence and Trauma: Current

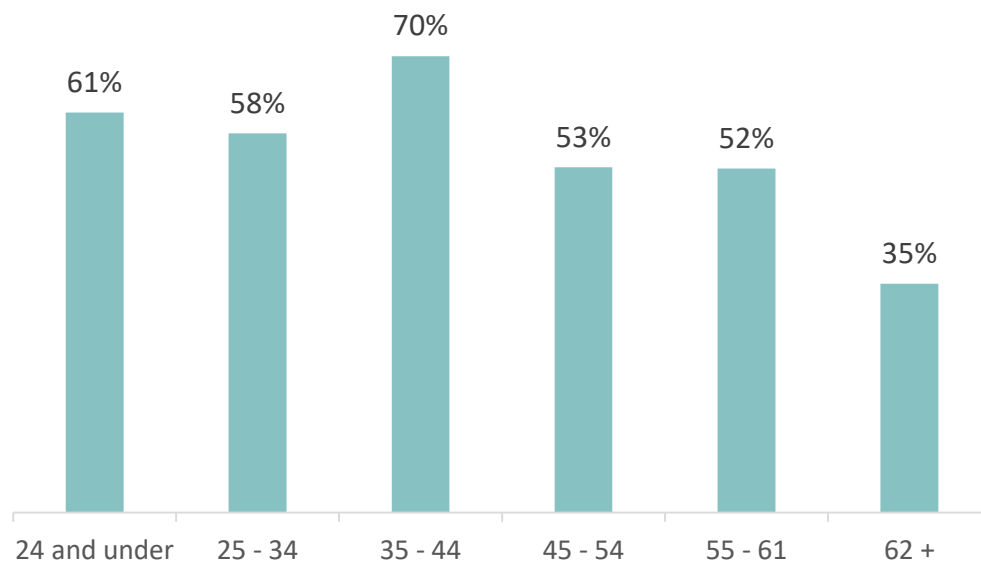
% of Share of Total Women, by Type of Violence or Threat



During this episode of homelessness or housing instability, **54% of respondents experienced at least one act of violence** against her or threat to her safety.

Violence and Trauma: Current

Violence During Current Episode of Homelessness, Rates in Age Groups

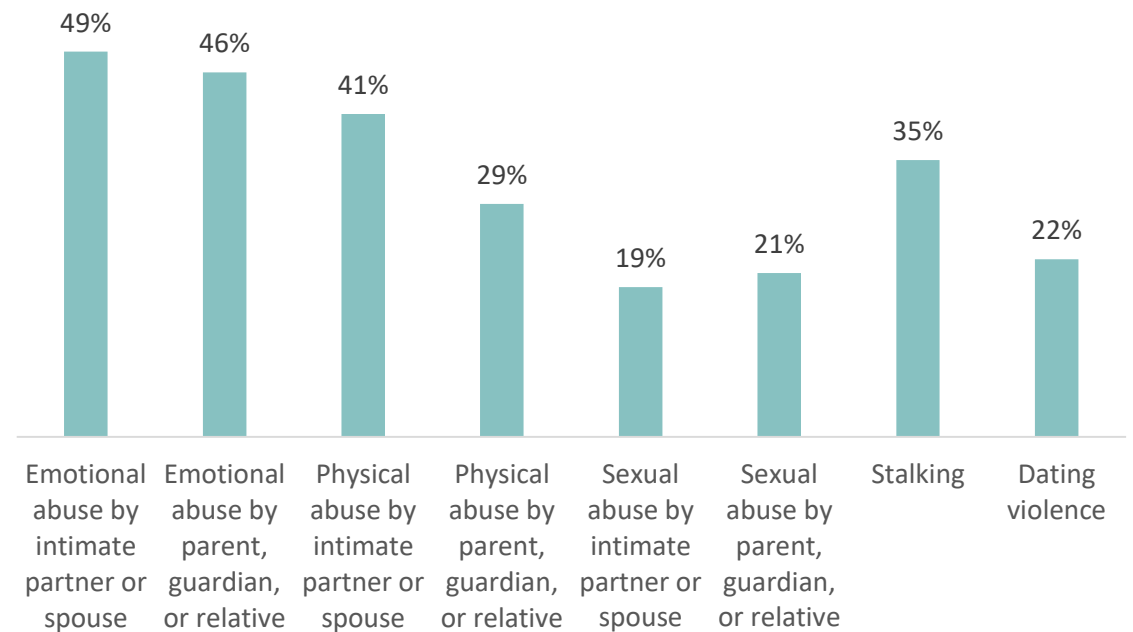


Women between the ages of **35 – 44** experienced the **highest rates of violence against them** relative to other age groups.

Violence and Trauma: Lifetime Experiences

- 3 out of 4 women have had at least one historical experience of violence or threats to their safety;
- 56% are survivors of domestic or intimate partner violence;
- Half (50%) have had experiences of violence perpetrated by a parent or guardian;
- Survivors of violence from an intimate partner/spouse or parent/guardian have higher rates of violence against them during this episode of homelessness or housing instability:
 - 63% of women with a history of violence against them
 - 43% of women without a history of violence against them

Lifetime Experiences of Violence and Threats to Safety*, % Share of Total Population



* Lifetime experiences are not mutually-exclusive.

Violence and Trauma: Fleeing Domestic Violence



- Women fleeing domestic/intimate partner violence make up 31% of the women surveyed;
- Similar distribution of nighttime locations as population at large:
 - 73% sheltered
 - 15% unsheltered
 - 12% unstably-housed
- Over 1/3 (34%) of survivors say that they don't know where they can get help.

Violence and Trauma

Reasons women say they are not reporting violence when it has occurred against them (in order of frequency):

1. Afraid abuse or violence would get worse
2. Didn't know where to go
3. Didn't know who I could trust
4. Afraid someone else would be hurt

“When [I was] younger [I didn't] think it was violence. Nobody told you what abuse was.”

“I thought it was supposed to happen.”

“Too embarrassed; didn't think anyone would believe me.”

“Young. Didn't know the way I was treated was wrong.”

Violence and Trauma: Survival Sex, Rape, and Sex Trafficking

- One third of women surveyed have engaged in survival sex during their lifetime;
- 28% report that they have been forced, threatened or pressured into performing a sex act with another person;
- 36% of women who have indicated that they have been trafficked.

Survival sex: Trading sex for food, money, alcohol or drugs, a place to stay, or any other goods.

Sex trafficking: Being forced, threatened, or pressured into performing a sex act where the perpetrator received payment or something of value in exchange for the act.

Systems Involvement

Child Welfare

- 14% of respondents have experiences in the child welfare system;
- Over half (51%) “aged-out” of the child welfare system;
- 2 out of 3 aged-out into homelessness or housing instability.

Justice System & Police Interactions

- Nearly half (48%) of all respondents have been arrested as a juvenile, adult, or both;
- 38% have spent time in jail or prison in their lifetime;
- One-quarter (25%) of women have had at least one police interaction in the past 12 months, average of 2.5 interactions;
- Common reasons for interaction: “I was arrested or held in custody”, “I was stopped or detained”, and “I sought help from the police”.

Substance Use

Nearly one third (31%) of respondents report either past or current substance use:

- 41% say they are not currently receiving any treatment;
- 87% of substance users also report emotional, physical, or sexual abuse by a intimate partner/spouse or by a parent/guardian;
- 64% of substance users say that they have engaged in survival sex.

What women say they need to stay in recovery:

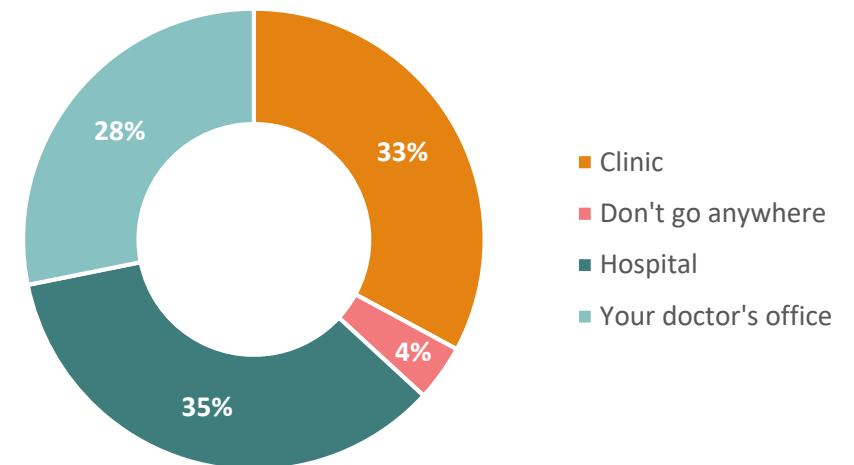
- Meetings / sponsor
- Therapy
- Housing
- Transportation to meetings & appointments
- Support networks / friends

PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH

Physical Health

- 61% of all women say they usually go to a clinic or their doctor's office when they aren't feeling well
 - 86% of women with a chronic medical condition or disability report that they have a regular doctor or clinic that they go to
 - Younger women (34 and under) use emergency rooms more frequently (43%) than women 62 years and older (30%)
- About half (52%) of women reported getting a Pap smear or mammogram in the past year;
 - Of those with abnormal results – 85% say that they received follow-up care;
- Over half (54%) of respondents have visited an emergency room at least once in the past year for both manageable conditions and injuries sustained on the streets.

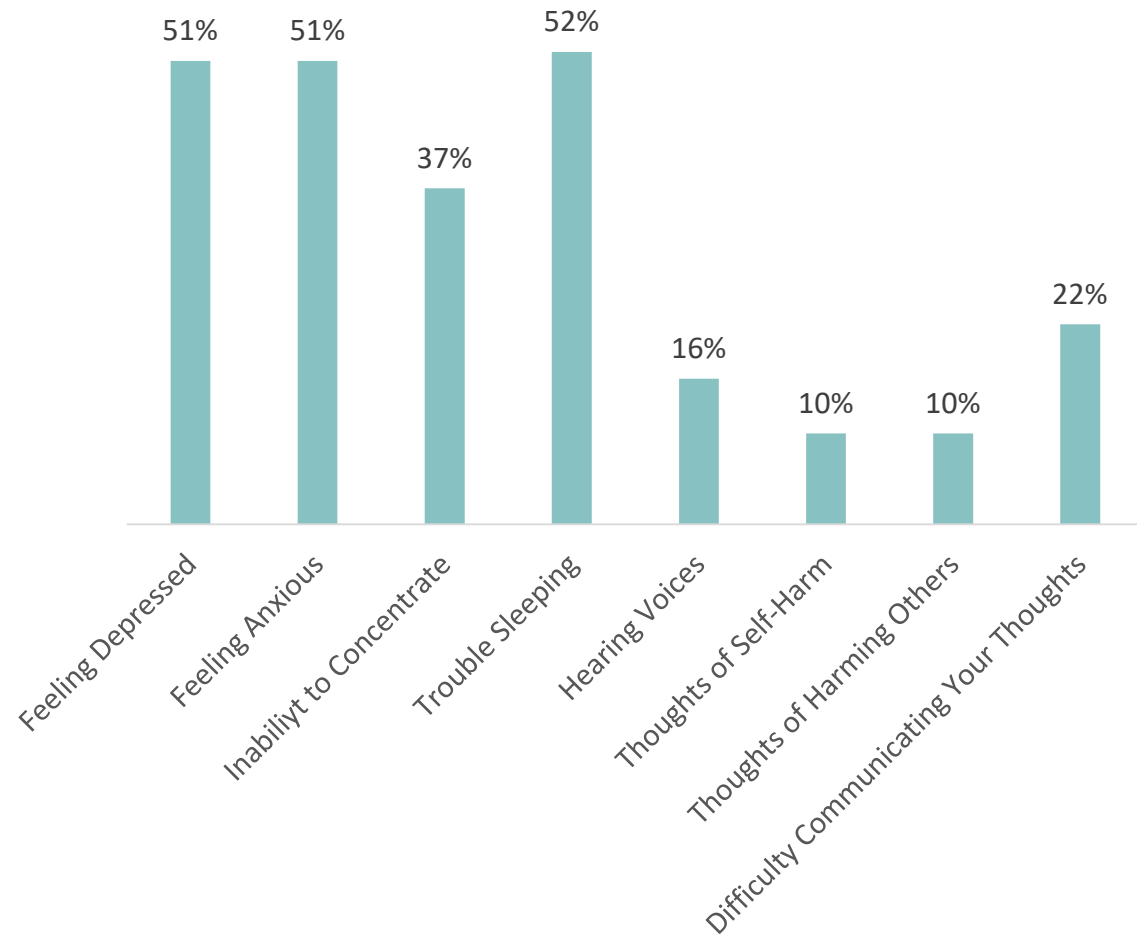
Where do you usually go when you are not feeling well?



Mental Health

- 72% of women self-report that they are currently experiencing at least one mental health indicator;
- 56% of all women have been diagnosed by a mental health professional with a mental health condition;
- Most have been prescribed medication (91%) and most (91%) say that they can easily get or afford their medication, but 1 out of 4 do not take their medications regularly.

Self Reported Mental Health Indicators, % of Respondents*



* Self-Reported Mental Health Indicators are not mutually-exclusive.

Mental Health

- 86% with a mental health diagnosis also report a history of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse by a intimate partner/spouse or by a parent/guardian;
- 1 out of 3 of all respondents report having been hospitalized for a mental health crisis, either voluntarily or involuntarily, regardless if they cited a current diagnosis;
- The service next to shelter that women with mental health issues say that they prefer in a woman-only setting is mental health services.

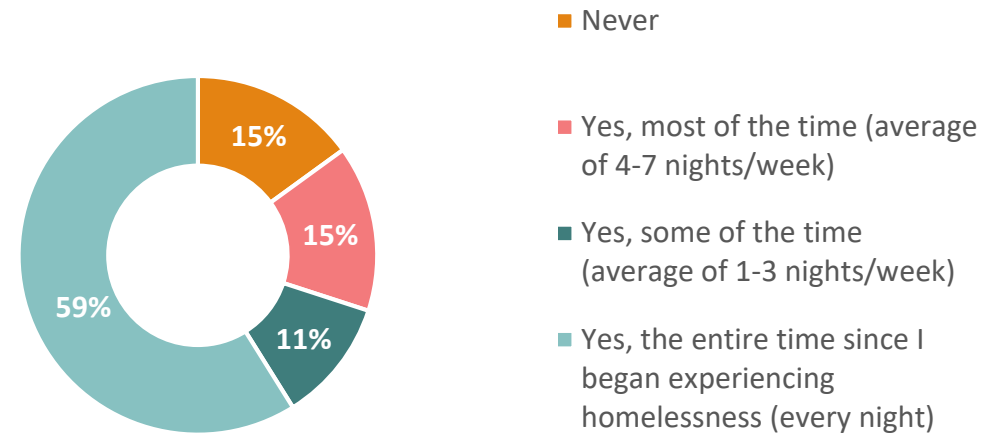
“When I am depressed and anxious I often feel like I have nowhere to turn so I can isolate and not take care of myself, beat myself up, it's like a cycle I can't get out of. Just keep beating myself up and then I don't care about anything.”

EXPERIENCES WITH HOMELESS SERVICES

Homeless Services: Frequency of Stays

- 59% of women say they have stayed in shelter the **entire time** that they have been experiencing homelessness;
- 67% of unsheltered women say **they have not stayed in shelter at any point in the past year.**

Frequency of Stays in ES/TH/SH



Homeless Services

Why don't women access shelter when they need it?

Selections listed in order of frequency:

1. It was too crowded
2. I didn't feel safe
3. Conditions were unhealthy
4. I felt stressed about the situation
5. Other residents don't maintain good hygiene

Homeless Services

Other barriers respondents told us:

- Access to information
- Maintaining employment
- Time constraints with line-ups
- Finding safe, affirming shelters for LGBTQ women

“I didn't know how to go about the process, so I thought I could call, and ask for allotted space, but you have to go and stand in line. Information wasn't readily available, especially over the phone. Different people gave different answers.”

WOMEN TELL US WHAT THEY NEED

What women tell us they need:

TOP TEN RESOURCES OR SERVICES OTHER THAN HOUSING

Listed in order of frequency:

1. Employment and training opportunities
2. Healthcare
3. Educational programs
4. Mental healthcare
5. Access to affordable healthy foods
6. Storage facilities for possessions
7. Legal services
8. Shelter beds/emergency shelter
9. Drug or alcohol recovery programs
10. Programs for survivors of domestic violence/intimate partner violence

What women tell us they need:

“A place for women to run to 24/7 to escape abusive situations”

“Services for college-educated women needing to build skills to reenter the workplace”

“Programs that need volunteers [sh]ould reach out to the women in shelters. It would give them more purpose in their lives and may lead to meeting people who would hire them. It may even help those with addiction or mental illness stay sober and focus on other's needs.”

“Activities like yoga, music, and theater are nice. Improve the quality of programs.”

“Services to help clear up debt/credit in order to be considered for an apartment.”

“Classes to help with finances so I can plan for the future.”

“Help paying security deposit and 1st month's rent.”

“Mock interview services, laundry services, more transportation services integrated into shelter.”

“A support system that listens.”

“[Don't] leave out women in transitional housing, when that ends where do we go?”

OUTCOMES OF THIS WORK

Conclusion

- Work within the DC Coordinated Assessment and Housing Placement (CAHP) system to expand women's access to both the assessment and parity within housing placement (particularly PSH)
- DC Collaborative of Domestic Violence and Human Services – on-going work around the coordination of policy and services for women experiencing violence in both the DV and homeless services systems
- Efforts to expand year-round, low-barrier shelter for women still underway
- Engagement with the Coalition of Nonprofit Housing and Economic Development and the Way Home Campaign around education and advocacy
- New housing for women that will come on-line in FY2019, funded by new HUD joint TH/RRH funding

QUESTIONS?

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