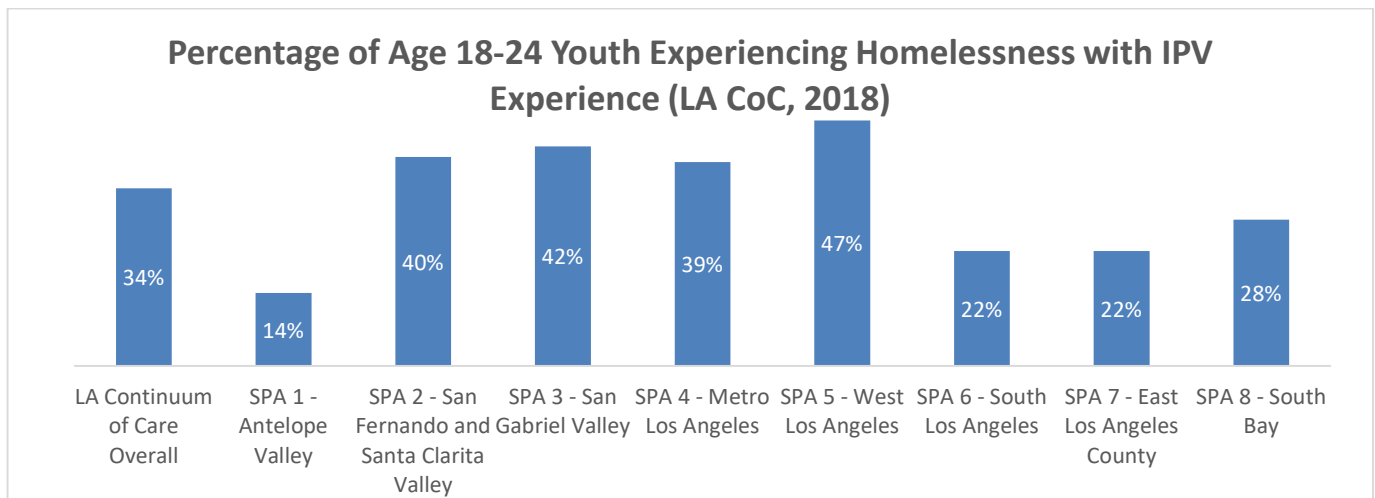




## Intimate Partner Violence Among Youth Experiencing Homelessness

### Background

Intimate partner violence (IPV) describes physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). According to the 2018 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count, 34% of 18-24 year old youth experiencing homelessness in the region reported having been victimized by some type of intimate partner violence (IPV) (LAHSA, 2018). Reported IPV victimization is more common among youth experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles than mental illness, substance abuse, physical disability, HIV positive status, and veteran status (LAHSA, 2018). Research on the subject suggests that female-identifying and LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness report disproportionately high rates of IPV victimization (Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2015; Tyler et al., 2009), and studies have found a positive relationship between experiencing childhood abuse and IPV victimization among youth experiencing homelessness (Melander & Tyler, 2010; Slesnick et al., 2010). Indirect exposure to IPV in the home is also a factor; youth experiencing homelessness report higher rates of having witnessed IPV within their families than housed youth (Kennedy, 2007). This literature review provides details on the impact and prevalence of IPV among youth experiencing homelessness, an area that warrants increased attention from service providers, policymakers, and researchers.



Source: LAHSA - 2018 Youth Count

### Key Takeaways:

- Youth experiencing homelessness are more likely to be victims of IPV than housed youth
- Female-identifying and LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness report higher rates of IPV victimization than their male-identifying, heterosexual, and cisgender peers
- Youth experiencing homelessness who are victims of childhood abuse and/or who witnessed IPV in their homes as children are more likely to be victims of IPV than those who were not exposed to violence
- IPV victimization is associated with housing instability and exhibiting more HIV risk behaviors
- IPV is often bidirectional, with both members of the relationship perpetrating and experiencing IPV
- According to the 2018 Los Angeles Homeless Count, transition aged youth in Los Angeles County who have experienced IPV are more likely to be unsheltered than sheltered

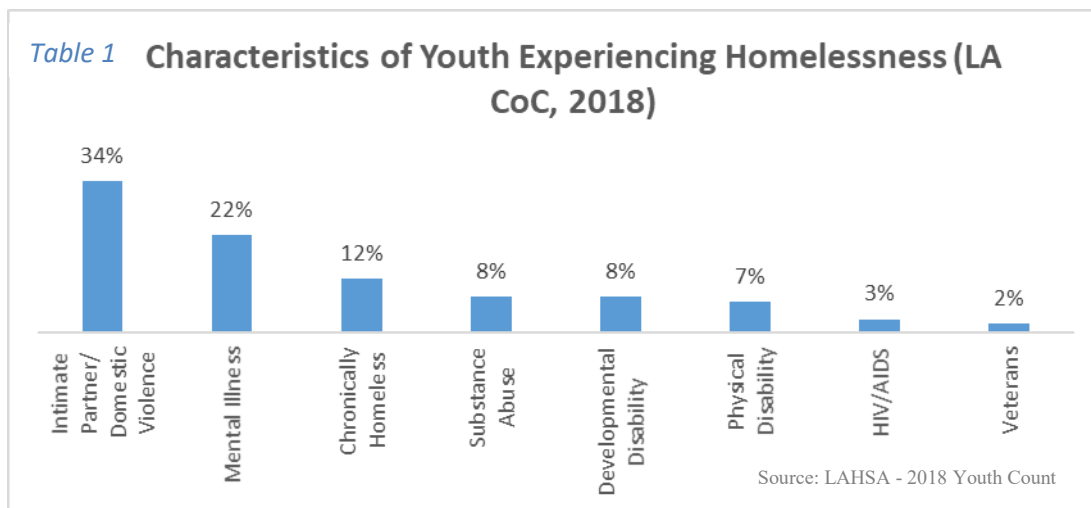


## Literature Review & Data Analysis

### Background and Research Motivation

Intimate partner violence (IPV), or “physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018), is a pervasive yet relatively understudied phenomenon in the context of youth experiencing homelessness. While Los Angeles Homeless Count data shows that 34% of Los Angeles youth experiencing homelessness have experienced IPV (LAHSA, 2018), rates vary widely across studies. Kennedy (2007) found that 75% of her subsample of adolescent urban mothers experiencing homelessness were victims of IPV. Tyler & Melander (2011) reported an IPV victimization rate of 59% within their sample of 19-25 year olds with lived experience of homelessness. An earlier study of youth experiencing homelessness by the same authors found that 69% of its sample had been victimized by an intimate partner (Tyler et al., 2009). Regardless of the variation, the lowest rate of IPV victimization uncovered by this literature review was 30%, which speaks to the pervasiveness of the issue (Slesnick et al., 2010). Further, self-reporting rates for IPV victimization may be lower than what the true rates of IPV are among youth experiencing homelessness due to stigmas, trauma, and fear, suggesting that IPV warrants increased attention from service providers, policymakers, and researchers (Tyler et al., 2009). **Table 1**, below, indicates that young adults experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles County reported IPV experience more frequently than mental illness and substance abuse combined (LAHSA, 2018).

Determinants of IPV among the general population are well documented, but there is a “dearth” (Tyler et al., 2009) of studies that investigate the relationship between IPV and youth experiencing homelessness specifically. Research in the past decade has overwhelmingly relied on data from various Midwestern urban areas, although more recently studies examining IPV and youth experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles have emerged. Research on the subject generally falls into one of two broad categories: 1) prevalence and determinants of IPV among youth experiencing homelessness and subgroups, and 2) outcomes and impacts of IPV for youth experiencing homelessness. This literature review will describe some studies and key findings from each of these categories, and seeks to highlight the need for unique and targeted interventions to address this issue.





## **Prevalence and Determinants of IPV among Youth Experiencing Homelessness and Subgroups**

The previous section describes the high prevalence of IPV victimization within the overall population of youth experiencing homelessness, however research has found that certain subsections of that population face disproportionately higher risks of experiencing IPV.

### *Women*

Slesnick et al. (2010) found in a study of transition aged youth experiencing homelessness in Columbus, Ohio that women in their sample were more than twice as likely as men to be physically harmed by their intimate partners. In that study, female respondents reported significantly higher rates of experiencing physical violence in general than the male respondents. In their study surveying young adults experiencing homelessness in three Midwestern cities, Tyler & Melander (2011) determined that being female was associated with a 31% higher likelihood of experiencing IPV than being male. A paper on bidirectional IPV among young adult couples experiencing homelessness found that females were more likely to have been a victim of IPV than males, and, interestingly, were also significantly more likely to victimize their partners than males (Tyler et al., 2009). However, the authors cited that these findings may be the result of males underreporting the frequency in which they victimized their partners due to societal stigmas attached to violence towards women (Tyler et al., 2009). Petering et al. (2014) examined the social networks of youth experiencing homelessness who have experienced IPV in Los Angeles County, finding that for females, the number of male friendships was positively associated with experiencing IPV.

### *LGBTQ Youth*

While exact numbers vary widely, researchers have found that youths who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) are overrepresented in the overall population of youth experiencing homelessness (Cunningham et al., 2014). Cray et al. (2013) reported that LGBTQ youths comprise between 20 and 40 percent of youth experiencing homelessness but only 4 to 10 percent of the general population. LGBTQ youth also disproportionately experience IPV victimization; Dank et al. (2013) found that LGBTQ youth reported significantly higher rates of physical dating violence (43%) than heterosexual youth (29%), and that 89% of transgender youth reported experiencing physical dating violence. Despite these findings, very few studies have examined the intersection between sexual orientation and gender identity, youth homelessness, and intimate partner violence. One study surveyed a mix of LGBTQ youth, some of which had a history with homelessness, and found that experiencing homelessness made LGBTQ youth nearly three times more likely to experience IPV than housed LGBTQ youth (Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2015). The same study named experiencing homelessness as a risk factor for IPV victimization among LGBTQ youth along with familial abuse and binge drinking (Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2015).

### *Childhood Abuse and Violence*

Multiple studies have linked either experiencing familial abuse or witnessing IPV as a child to an increased likelihood of IPV victimization among youth experiencing homelessness. Kennedy (2007) found that among her sample of adolescent urban mothers, those who were experiencing homelessness or had a history of homelessness had significantly higher rates of witnessing parental violence, abuse by a parent or adult caregiver, and IPV victimization than housed adolescent urban mothers. The same study also found that witnessing parental violence increased the odds of ever being homeless by 31% (Kennedy, 2007). In their study of IPV among social networks of youth experiencing homelessness, Petering et al. (2014) found that 44% of their respondents experienced physical abuse inflicted by a



family member as a child and 39% witnessed violence between family members. According to Slesnick et al. (2010), youth experiencing homelessness with a history of childhood abuse (physical or sexual) were more than twice as likely to have experienced IPV victimization as those who had not experienced childhood abuse. Experiencing multiple types of childhood abuse has also been shown to increase the likelihood of experiencing IPV (Melander & Tyler, 2010). Youth experiencing homelessness in general report disproportionately high rates of witnessing interfamily verbal and physical abuse, and Ferguson (2008) posits that youth experiencing homelessness who have witnessed this abuse are more likely to perceive this behavior as normal and replicate it or accept it in their own intimate relationships. Tyler et al. (2009) corroborate this idea in their study on bidirectional IPV among youth experiencing homelessness, noting that childhood sexual abuse and neglect were associated with both IPV victimization and perpetration.

### **Outcomes and Impacts of IPV for Youth Experiencing Homelessness**

Evidence suggests that IPV victimization has adverse health impacts beyond physical injuries for youth experiencing homelessness. Researchers have found that youth experiencing homelessness who have experienced IPV victimization are more likely to engage in HIV risk behaviors such as trading sex and injecting drugs (Melander & Tyler, 2010). The same study also found that female respondents who experienced more forms of partner violence were especially more likely to exhibit more HIV risk behaviors (Melander & Tyler, 2010).

Research has also linked IPV to negative mental health outcomes like depression (Lindhorst & Oxford, 2008) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Lang & Stover, 2008) in general population studies. Researchers that have examined these outcomes specifically for youth experiencing homelessness have presented results consistent with these findings. For example, Tyler et al. (2009) found that both being a victim and a perpetrator of IPV was associated with higher levels of PTSD among youth experiencing homelessness than for those with no IPV experience. Boris et al. (2002) found a significant and positive correlation between past IPV experience and depressive symptoms for both male and female youth experiencing homelessness. In addition, IPV also increases the likelihood of substance abuse by both victims and perpetrators of IPV among youth experiencing homelessness (Tyler et al., 2009; Tyler & Melander, 2015). It is hypothesized that in some cases, victims of IPV turn to substance abuse as a way to cope with the trauma of violent victimization (Tyler & Melander, 2015).

Furthermore, some service providers note a connection between IPV and sex trafficking and/or survival sex. According to Covenant House (2013), one in four youth experiencing homelessness has either been a victim of sex trafficking or has engaged in survival sex. In some cases, youth turn to survival sex or become victims of sex trafficking victimization as a result of trauma from IPV victimization (Covenant House, 2013). Inversely, youth experiencing homelessness who turn to survival sex have increased vulnerability to exploitative relationships and partner abuse (Hollywood Homeless Youth Partnership, 2007).

### **Policy and Provider Implications**

Given that IPV victimization is common among youth experiencing homelessness, providers that serve youth experiencing homelessness should work to create safe environments at their facilities and develop strategies to address this problem. This involves ensuring that agency and organizational staff are educated about IPV and trained in assessing and responding to IPV when it affects the youth experiencing homelessness that they are serving (Hollywood Homeless Youth Partnership (HHYP),



2007). Providers should also include an IPV assessment in their intake procedure that asks youth in a confidential, non-judgmental, and age-appropriate way about their experience with both IPV victimization and perpetration (HHYF, 2007). Providers should be aware of the implications of contacting law enforcement to intervene in IPV cases, as some youth want the abuse to end but do not necessarily want their partners arrested (HHYF, 2007). HHYF (2009) also recommends trauma-informed approaches to programs for youth experiencing homelessness, which take into account the challenges these youth face and the fact that the trauma they have experienced may shape their core identities.

On a systems level, increased coordination and collaboration between domestic violence agencies and homeless service providers will help support IPV survivors who are youth experiencing homelessness (HHYF, 2009). Local governments should focus on creating more youth-specific housing options and develop innovative models that can safely and confidentially house youth experiencing homelessness who are involved in abusive relationships (HHYF, 2009). Municipal domestic violence planning bodies should also develop youth-specific subcommittees that prioritize interventions for youth involved in abusive relationships and promote IPV prevention programs (HHYF, 2009).

*For questions about the Homelessness Policy Research Institute,  
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