

**HOT TOPICS**
**Violence, Substance Abuse, and HIV Risk Behaviors Are Greater Among Sheltered Homeless Women than Low-Income Housed Women**

Violence, substance abuse, and HIV risk behaviors (those behaviors—such as casual or unprotected sex—that increase one's risk for HIV) are three of the greatest threats to women's health. Further, these threats often go hand in hand. Understanding differences in the prevalence and co-occurrence of these health risks among subgroups of indigent women is important for designing and funding community-based prevention and intervention efforts. A study conducted among sheltered and low-income housed women in the city of Los Angeles has found that sheltered women are more likely than low-income housed women to have experienced any or a combination of these health risks in the recent past. Although low-income housed women are at somewhat higher risk than U.S. women in general, the findings suggest that housing may afford women some protection. What's more, the findings support the urgent need to provide women in shelter situations with comprehensive health services, preferably within the shelter environment.

**READ MORE:** [Violence, Substance Abuse, and HIV Risk Behaviors Are Greater Among Sheltered Homeless Women than Low-Income Housed Women](#)

**Contributing and Protective Factors for Physical Violence Against Impoverished Women**

Violence is an important health problem for women, particularly impoverished women. A national council commissioned by Congress in 1994 called for increasing understanding of violence against women, particularly the underserved, so that prevention and intervention programs can be developed. The study that compared the health risks of sheltered and low-income housed women in the city of Los Angeles followed these same women over a six-month period and found that they are more likely to experience violence than are U.S. women in general. Three factors increased the risk of experiencing future violence: experiencing physical violence or mental health problems in the six months prior to the beginning of the study, having more than one sex partner, or having experienced physical or sexual abuse as a child. Nearly half the women studied reported physical or sexual abuse as a child. Strong social support appeared to protect women against subsequent violence. This study highlights the persistence of violence in the lives of indigent women and points to several areas where prevention or intervention efforts may be critically needed,

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including screening for childhood abuse and education about intimate partner violence.

**READ MORE:** [Physical Violence Against Impoverished Women](#)

**Do Indigent Women Undergo HIV Testing?**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advocates that HIV testing and counseling be recommended routinely and be made available in settings where clients are at increased risk for acquiring or transmitting the infection. The prevalence of having been tested for HIV was assessed among the sheltered and housed women in the city of Los Angeles study. To identify barriers to being tested, the researchers further interviewed women who said they had not been tested, to determine why. Although 83 percent of women reported having been tested, those less likely to have been tested were housed (vs. sheltered), were older, had no regular source of health care, were not drug or alcohol dependent, had not experienced sexual violence, and were at higher risk for mental health problems. The most common testing site was a clinic or physician's office; however, sheltered women were more likely than housed women to have been tested in a treatment program, mobile van, hospital emergency department, or jail. Few barriers to testing were cited: The most common reason women gave for not having been tested was their belief that they were not at risk. Efforts to encourage testing among older women, housed women who lack a regular source of health care, and women at high risk for mental health problems may be needed.

**READ MORE:** [HIV Testing Among Indigent Women: Who Gets Tested?](#)

**JUST RELEASED**
**HIV-Positive Parents Limit Child Interaction**

Interviews with parents from a nationally representative sample of HIV-positive adults revealed that nearly 40 percent limit some forms of physical contact—such as kissing, hugging, and sharing utensils—with their young children because of fears of spreading the disease or contracting an opportunistic infection. Although few parents limited routine physical contact, clinicians may need to provide education and reassurance to HIV-positive parents regarding the risks of HIV transmission.

**READ MORE:** [HIV-Infected Parents Report Limiting Physical Contact With Their Children](#)

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