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Without safe, affordable housing women may return to violent partners

- Immediate responses to domestic and family violence are effective and timely, but constrained by resources and growing demand.
- Due to a chronic shortage of affordable housing, support services can do little to provide a pathway from crisis into stable, secure and long-term accommodation.
- Inadequate income support payments can leave women and children living in poverty and unable to afford decent housing.

While emergency support services for those experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV) are effective and timely, the shortage of long-term housing leaves many women and children at risk of homelessness or considering a return to a violent home, according to new AHURI research.

The research, 'Housing outcomes after domestic and family violence', undertaken for AHURI by researchers from the University of Tasmania and University of New South Wales examines how housing and other forms support for vulnerable families can best be integrated to improve safety and wellbeing.

'We found that, in general, the integrated responses to domestic and family violence adopted by Governments around Australia promote collaborative working relationships amongst services and provide support that is valued and appreciated by service users,' says lead researcher Dr Kathleen Flanagan of the University of Tasmania.

'However, data suggests Specialist Homelessness Services, which provide the principal crisis response for women and children who leave their home due to violence, can do little to provide a pathway from crisis into stable, secure and long-term accommodation, and our research provided us with clear evidence as to why this is the case. Without an adequate supply of affordable, suitable housing moving from short-term or transitional accommodation into permanent, independent housing is very difficult, and sometimes unachievable.'

Where safe, secure and affordable housing is not available, women may decide to return to a violent relationship because they perceive this as a safer option than the alternatives (such as homelessness).

The shortage of affordable housing means women can feel pressured to accept accommodation from support services that is substandard, too far from critical support networks or located in neighbourhoods or settings that are unsafe.

To meet the needs of vulnerable families, greater investment is needed in a range of affordable housing options, especially social and affordable housing that is planned and designed to be safe, secure and supportive as well as affordable in the long term. Programs designed to support renting in the private sector can help, but they are less effective in tight, competitive housing markets.

In addition, the researchers identified that:

- inadequate income support payments can leave women and children living in poverty and unable to afford decent housing
- there is limited protection and assistance for migrant women sponsored to come to Australia by men who later become violent and abusive
- there are challenges at the intersection point between the child protection and family violence systems, particularly where lack of housing prevents women from reunification with children taken into statutory care
- Family Court decisions can trap some women in unaffordable housing markets in order to enable their violent ex-partner to continue to have contact with children.

The report can be downloaded from the AHURI website at

<http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/311>

For media enquiries, please contact:

Anthony Smeaton

Head of Marketing and Communications

Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute

Office +61 3 9660 2312

Mobile +61 404 544 101

Email anthony.smeaton@ahuri.edu.au