

**Highlighting New  
Poverty Research****by Taryn Lindhorst,  
Monica Oxford, and Mary  
Rogers Gillmore**

Taryn Lindhorst, Monica Oxford and Mary Rogers Gillmore, "Longitudinal Effects of Domestic Violence on Employment and Welfare Outcomes," published in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Vol. 22, No. 7, 2007.

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**Domestic Violence, Employment, and  
Welfare Outcomes**

**Background:** Many domestic violence advocates fear that partner abuse could disrupt victims' ability to find and keep a job if, for example, abusers prevent women from getting to work or otherwise disrupt their employment. If domestic violence reduces victims' employment prospects, they could also be at higher risk of welfare use. Some previous research has shown a higher likelihood of welfare receipt among women experiencing partner abuse; but clear evidence is not seen of a link between domestic violence and a decreased likelihood of current employment. Because existing research is based on cross sectional data, we know little about whether or how the experience of domestic violence influences victims' employment prospects and their need for cash assistance and services over time and whether this relationship may have changed after welfare reform.

**Methods:** Using longitudinal data from a study of over 200 adolescent mothers from the Seattle area, UW Associate Professor of Social Work Taryn Lindhorst and colleagues investigated the short-and long-term effects of experiencing domestic violence during the transition between adolescence and adulthood. In particular, the authors tested whether experiencing domestic violence had a direct effect on employment and welfare outcomes before and after welfare reform. Because some have suggested that the effects of domestic violence on employment may be mediated by its effect on psychological well-being, the researchers also investigated whether psychological distress can explain any observed link between domestic violence and employment outcomes.

**Key Findings:** In contrast with previous research, Lindhorst and colleagues found that past experiences of domestic violence were not related to increased welfare use either before or after welfare reform. Cumulative domestic violence was unrelated to unemployment prior to welfare reform, but was related to unemployment in the first two of three time periods after welfare reform. In other words, in the years immediately following welfare reform, sample members with a history of domestic abuse were not more likely to be on welfare than those with no history of abuse but were more likely to be unemployed. By the end of the 13-year observation period, however, the negative effects of a history of domestic abuse on employment had diminished.

Although domestic violence increased symptoms of psychological distress, the effect of domestic violence on unemployment remained even after controlling for psychological distress, suggesting that domestic violence itself had a negative impact on these women's employment prospects. The authors suggest that domestic violence during adolescence might be restricting victims' social networks and job ties or disrupting the development of a positive early work history. The authors also found that women with both risk factors (domestic violence and elevated levels of psychological distress) were less likely to be employed than women with neither, or only one of these risks, suggesting that the co-occurrence of these risks may be important to understanding the long-term effects of domestic violence on employment. The long-term links these authors have uncovered between domestic violence, unemployment, and mental health highlight the importance of identifying victims of both past and current domestic violence, screening them for signs of psychological distress, and providing targeted services to help them find and maintain employment.

# Poverty Research Flash

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## Poverty Research Flash 2008-02

### Domestic Violence, Employment, and Welfare Outcomes

**New research from Taryn Lindhorst, Monica Oxford, and Mary Rogers Gillmore**

- Among a sample of adolescent mothers in the Seattle area, over two-thirds (69 percent) reported experiencing at least one incident of domestic violence between their pregnancy and turning 18. By the end of the study 13 years later, the proportion of mothers reporting domestic violence dropped to 15 percent.
- In contrast with previous research, Lindhorst and colleagues found that past experiences of domestic violence were not related to later welfare use either before or after welfare reform. Although they were not more likely to be on welfare than non-victims, victims of domestic violence were more likely to be unemployed in the years immediately following welfare reform.
- The negative effects of domestic violence on employment persisted after accounting for psychological distress, suggesting that experiencing domestic violence itself contributes to poor employment outcomes.
- Women who had experienced both domestic violence and psychological distress were less likely to be employed than women with neither, or only one of these risks.