

Ask and Tell

PROMOTING SAFETY AND STABILITY FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS RECEIVING ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE

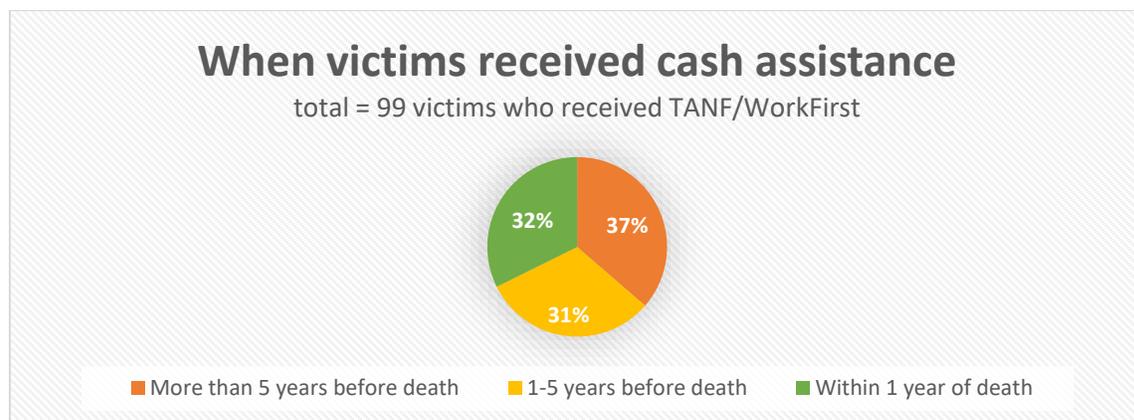
Economic benefits are critical to stability and safety for domestic violence survivors

Domestic violence survivors face enormous barriers to economic stability. Violence interferes with survivors' ability to maintain education or employment. Abusive partners often deliberately sabotage financial well-being as a means of exerting control. Services designed to promote economic resilience must take family violence into account in order to be effective. Economic supports for survivors are less effective when they do not specifically attend to victim safety.

Because the impacts of abuse are often financially devastating, many survivors seek public benefits. Washington State's Domestic Violence Fatality Review (DVFR) has consistently identified public benefit programs as a critical point of intervention for victims and their children.

Analysis of 421 intimate partner violence homicides in Washington State over 15 years showed that nearly half of victims had received some form of assistance before their death. Of those, 72% had received assistance within the year before their death.

Nearly a quarter of victims had received cash assistance through Washington's Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, WorkFirst. Of those, about a third (32%) received benefits within the year before their death. Another 31% received benefits within the five years before their death.



Most victims do not disclose domestic violence in response to screening questions

Despite the lethal danger they faced, most victims did not disclose domestic violence to a DSHS worker. Only 9% of domestic violence homicide victims who received WorkFirst assistance had disclosed family violence in response to screening questions. Twelve percent had family violence activities included in

required individual work plans, indicating that a case worker had identified family violence as an issue and referred the client to supportive services.

Of 99 domestic violence homicide victims who received TANF, benefits were terminated in two cases due to victims reaching the 60-month time limit. When domestic violence is identified as an issue, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) may grant time limit extensions for survivors receiving benefits. Neither of the victims identified by the fatality review had been granted a time limit extension.

Over the years, WSCADV has conducted focus groups with domestic violence survivors accessing TANF to explore the many reasons they did not discuss domestic violence with case workers. Survivors reported that:

- they did not understand why they were being asked about their relationship in the context of applying for benefits;
- they were unclear about how disclosing information might affect their access to resources;
- they were afraid that a “wrong answer” would limit eligibility for benefits;
- they were concerned that disclosing family violence would result in a report to child protective services.

Practice Implications

Studies estimate that [1 in 4 women in the United States](#) have experienced intimate partner violence that resulted in significant impact such as missing work or school, and that [50-60% of women accessing TANF](#) have experienced abuse.

Given the prevalence of domestic violence and the many barriers to disclosing abuse, case workers cannot rely solely on screening to identify all clients who may be victims. Practices that actively reduce barriers to economic supports are critical for victim safety and stability.

- Clearly and repeatedly communicate to clients the relief, resources, and benefits that are available to survivors of family violence.
- Provide domestic violence information and referral to safety resources to **everyone** receiving DSHS benefits. Routinely make resources available in areas where individuals can help themselves to the information, such as in restrooms, in the front office waiting area, and on the desks of all case managers and social workers. Include domestic violence resources and safety planning information in DSHS mailings and websites. Consider using evidence based tools such as [Futures without Violence safety cards](#) to provide information.
- Continue implementation of policies that consider whether a client may be a victim of domestic violence, and explore every avenue to remove barriers to support before applying sanctions, time limits, or other measures that may limit benefits.