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Tasmanian women, children focus of housing after family violence report

Tasmanian women and children experiencing domestic violence are more likely to stay in abusive environments due to difficulties accessing social and affordable housing, the latest Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) report revealed today.

Lead author of the AHURI report, 'Housing outcomes after family violence', the University of Tasmania's Research Fellow Dr Kathleen Flanagan, said Tasmania's shortage of long-term housing leaves many women and children at risk of homelessness.

She said while the findings highlighted immediate responses to domestic and family violence were generally effective and timely, the demand outweighed the supply.

"There is just not enough social housing and far too much demand," Dr Flanagan said.

"Where 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.

"It's not just about providing our most vulnerable with suitable housing, it represents how we value our people and families.

"We need to be providing them with homes that are safe, stable, affordable and secure into the long term, so they can go on and flourish."

Dr Flanagan led the AHURI research with support from fellow researchers Jane Henriette (UTAS), and Associate Professor Kylie Valentine and Dr Hazel Blunden (University of New South Wales).

She said the research examines how housing and other forms of support for vulnerable families can best be integrated to improve safety and wellbeing.

"We found that, in general, the 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 those people in need," Dr Flanagan said.

“However, data suggests Specialist Homelessness Services, the principal crisis responders, can do little to provide a pathway from crisis to stable, secure and long-term accommodation, which is largely because the supply is inadequate.

“Without an adequate supply of affordable, suitable housing, moving from short-term or transitional accommodation to permanent, independent housing is very difficult and sometimes unachievable.”

To respond effectively, Dr Flanagan said Tasmania needs greater investment in affordable housing options alongside the investment in service responses to family violence.

“Programs designed to support renting in the private sector can be effective for some women, but in tight, competitive housing markets, where landlords have many other applicants to choose from, women and their children will often miss out,” she said.

“More broadly, the private rental market doesn’t tend to offer the very long-term stability and affordability people need.

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

The report can be downloaded from the AHURI website at:

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

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