



Meeting Survivors' Needs: A Multi-State Study of Domestic Violence Shelter Experiences

Meeting Survivors' Needs: A Multi-State Study of Domestic Violence Shelter Experiences brings to light the true experiences of survivors of domestic violence. This groundbreaking study captured the experiences of 3,410 shelter residents in 215 programs across 8 states. Survey instruments were offered in 11 languages.

Conducted by the University of Connecticut's Institute for Violence Prevention and Reduction at the School of Social Work in conjunction with the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, the study was funded by the Family and Youth Services Bureau, Family Violence Prevention and Services Program and administered by the National Institute of Justice.

What do domestic violence shelters look like?

The average domestic violence shelter program...

...has 16 to 17 staff and 17 monthly volunteers

...has 25 beds available (capacity ranged from 4 to 102)

...sheltered 130 adults and 114 children last year.

Responding to the Diverse Needs of their Communities

- 98% of sampled shelters have capacity to accommodate residents with disabilities.
- 82% have bilingual staff, including 71% who speak Spanish; sampled programs had staff/volunteers who speak 37 different languages.
- 62% of residents have graduated high school or attended some college.
- 70% of residents are between 25-49; only 10% are over 50.
- Residents are ethnically diverse: 52% White; 22% African American; 12% Hispanic; 6% Multiracial; 5% Native American; 1% Asian/Pacific Islander; 2% Other.

Providing Comprehensive Services

The average shelter stay is 33 days. 82% of shelters allow stay of more than 30 days, depending on survivor's needs and funder requirements. During that time, survivors benefit from a wide range of advocacy and services:

Type of Service or Advocacy and Percent of Programs Offering It			
Support Groups	97%	Health Advocacy	81%
Crisis Counseling	96%	TANF Advocacy	80%
Housing Advocacy	95%	Child Protection/Welfare	79%
Children's Services	95%	Job/Job Training	78%
Individual Counseling	92%	Immigration Advocacy	76%
Civil Court Advocacy	82%	Divorce/Custody/Visitation	73%
Criminal Court Advocacy	81%		

What if shelter hadn't been there?

"I'd be sleeping in my car, lose my children and my job."

"Probably I would have been killed. Cause I had nowhere else to go. "

95% described what they would do if shelter were not available – most were dire: homelessness; losing everything; continuing abuse; and risking injury or death.

Providing Respect and Support

Between 98% and 92% of survivors agreed that staff/volunteers showed respect along nine key dimensions (including their disability, youth, age, religious views, racial/ethnic background and sexual orientation.)

Problems were infrequent and those that arose were usually resolved. The most common problem encountered by residents was conflict with other women (32%), as might be expected in a group living environment; 73% of those conflicts were resolved.

What do survivors need and want from shelters?

- **Personal safety** – 99%.
 - 99% reported they got the safety they wanted; 95% got help with safety planning.
- **Support**, such as counseling, emotional support and access to faith community – 99%.
 - 89% got the emotional support and 86% got the counseling they wanted.
- **Help with economic issues**, including finding affordable housing, job training, transportation, education, managing money – 93%.
 - Economic needs were also highly likely to be met: job or job training (75%), finding affordable housing (81%), TANF (84%) or other governmental benefits (81%), budgeting (81%), and transportation (88%).
- **Child-related needs**, such as safety for children, counseling for children, health issues for kids, child care – 99% of mothers.
 - 98% of mothers got help with children's safety; 92% with children's schooling; 90% with parenting, particularly “responding to my children when they are upset or causing trouble.”

The longer survivors stayed at the shelter, the more likely they were to receive the help they needed. For example, 89% of those who stayed more than two weeks at the shelter got the counseling they wanted, compared to 80% who stayed for a shorter time.

What impact do shelters have?

Access to Safety: more ways to plan for safety (91%), options and choices (91%), and community resources (85%)

Increasing Survivor Confidence: will achieve goals (93%), hopeful about future (92%).

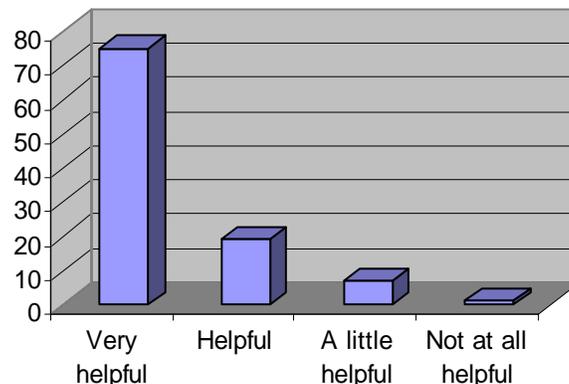
Improvements for Children: feel more supported (84%), understand what is happening (78%), able to express feelings without violence (77%).

These outcomes are associated with longer-term improved safety (less violence) and well-being in experimental, longitudinal studies.¹

When and where is the study available?

The final report has been approved by the National Institute of Justice and will be released February 18, 2009 by the University of Connecticut and the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. The *Meeting Survivors' Needs: A Multi-State Study of Domestic Violence Shelter Experiences* overview and related fact sheets will be available on www.vawnet.org.

How Survivors Described Their Shelter Experiences



¹ Bybee, D. I., & Sullivan, C. M. (2002). The process through which a strengths-based intervention resulted in positive change for battered women over time. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 30(1), 103-132.