

Methodology

Meeting Survivors' Needs is designed to help fill gaps in current knowledge about the range of services that domestic violence shelters provide, the needs and experiences of survivors who turn to shelters for help, and the types of help they receive at shelter programs.

Data were collected from October, 2007 to March, 2008 through surveys completed by 3,410 residents of 215 domestic violence shelters – 81 percent of the shelters in eight states (Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Washington). Researchers chose these states to maximize geographical, population, rural/urban and economic diversity. The large sample size, the inclusion of shelter programs from eight diverse states, the variety of communities in which the shelters are located and the diverse needs of those they serve make this a reasonable reflection of shelters across the nation.

Shelter residents were asked to complete a written survey at or near entrance, and again at or near exit. Materials were translated into eleven languages to increase accessibility; most were completed in English or Spanish. Both surveys asked about 38 different possible areas of concern, probing survivors' entry experiences, their needs, the extent to which their needs were met, any conflicts or problems with rules they encountered, changes they attributed to their shelter stay, and their ratings of the help they received. The first survey also addressed initial impressions and concerns, and the second addressed immediate outcomes, difficulties experienced during the stay, and the respect and support survivors received from shelter staff.

In addition, programs provided information about their capacity (number of beds and staff) and the services they provide. Researchers collected Census data about the regions served by the shelters.

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

Summary of Findings

Key Findings

Nearly three-quarters of survivors (74 percent) rated the assistance they received as very helpful and another 18 percent said it was helpful. The results make clear that domestic violence shelters serve a critical need for people who have experienced abuse, which many survivors described as life-saving. Respondents reported that if the shelter did not exist, the consequences for them would be dire: homelessness, serious losses including loss of their children, actions taken in desperation, or continued abuse or death.

The results also demonstrate that shelters provide a wide variety of educational, emotional, psychological, attitudinal and concrete benefits to victims, including changing their perceptions of what resources they need in order to live safer and more fulfilling lives.

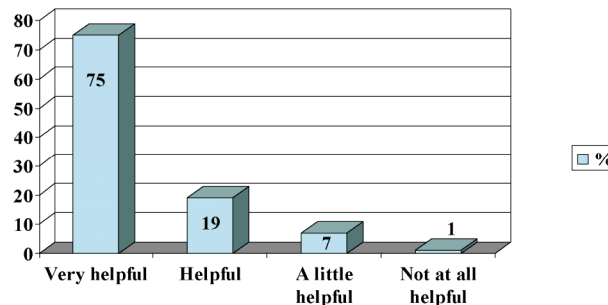
Meeting Survivors' Needs finds that the services provided to residents (as well as non-residential program clients) have become complex and comprehensive.

Shelters Have Capacity to Meet a Range of Needs

- More than four in five shelters (82 percent) allow survivors to stay more than 30 days and 34 percent allow a stay of more than 60 days.
- Nearly all shelters in the study (98 percent) have the capacity to accommodate residents with disabilities.
- More than four in five shelters (82 percent) have staff members who speak at least one language other than English.
- The most common types of advocacy offered by shelters are: housing (offered by 95 percent of shelters in the survey), civil court (82 percent), criminal court (81 percent), health (81 percent), TANF/welfare (80 percent), child protection (79 percent), job training (78 percent), immigration issues (76 percent) and divorce/custody/visitation issues (73 percent).

- The most common types of shelter services are: support groups (offered by 97 percent of shelters in the survey), crisis counseling (96 percent), individual counseling (92 percent), parenting classes (55 percent), counseling for children (54 percent) and child care (50 percent).

Rating of Help Received



Shelters Serve Diverse Survivors

- More than three in four survivors (78 percent) reported that they had children under the age of 18, and 68 percent had minor children with them at the shelter.
- Most survivors (70 percent) were 25 to 49 years old. One in five was younger than 25.
- More than half (52 percent) of the survivors were white, 22 percent were African American and 12 percent were Hispanic/Latino/a.
- Nearly all survivors surveyed were women (99.6 percent). Thirteen men were a part of the survey. This is because men who seek emergency shelter are most likely to obtain housing through safe homes or motel vouchers, and these facilities were not included in this study of shelter residents.

- Most survivors were high school graduates (29 percent) or completed some college (33 percent).
- More than nine in ten (93 percent) survivors identified themselves as heterosexual.

Survivors Say Shelters Are Meeting The Needs They Identify

- For all identified needs, 75 percent of survivors got at least some of the help they wanted.
- Nearly all survivors (99 percent) reported they got the help they wanted with their own safety and safety planning (95 percent).
- More than four in five (81 percent) got help finding affordable housing; three in four got help with a job or job training.

- Nearly all mothers got help with their children's safety (98 percent) and schooling (92 percent). Nearly all shelters (95 percent) paid attention to the needs of survivors' children.
- Nine in ten survivors (91 percent) got help with a protective or restraining order, more than four in five with divorce issues (82 percent), immigration issues (84 percent), and custody/visitation issues (83 percent).

If the Shelter Didn't Exist...

"Be at a homeless shelter or begging friends to stay with them, and putting them at risk of abuse by my ex-boyfriend."

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

"Stayed with my abuser and continued to get beat every day."

There Are Challenges

- In general, survivors reported high rates of resolution of any problems; most of those that were not resolved were related to limited program resources, challenges associated with group living, or program policies developed to provide safety for all residents.
- Conflicts with other residents were the most common conflicts identified in the survey, affecting three in ten survivors (32 percent). Nearly three-quarters of those conflicts (73 percent) were resolved.
- Almost one in four survivors (24 percent) experienced transportation conflicts and more than half of those conflicts (54 percent) were resolved.
- Survivors also reported problems with finding privacy (16 percent, 47 percent were resolved), time limits on shelter stay (16 percent, half were resolved),

curfew (14 percent, 61 percent were resolved), child discipline and monitoring (13 percent reported; two-thirds were resolved) and chores (13 percent reported, 59 percent were resolved).

Implications of the Study

The positive responses strongly suggest that shelter programs should continue working to address the broader array of needs that victims bring, rather than merely putting a roof over their heads in the short term. Shelters are doing a good job, but the study did identify areas where there is room for improvement.

Shelter programs can improve their strategies for addressing survivors' emotional and mental health needs, physical

health issues, housing, educational and economic issues, as well as substance abuse. These were the most prominent needs that shelter residents said were not being fully met.

Meeting Survivors' Needs

also finds that many survivors struggle with some shelter rules related to eligibility for admission, what they must do while they are in residence, and how long they may stay. While most shelter staff members are trained in conflict resolution, the frequency of reports of conflicts with other residents suggests that this kind of training could be enhanced or offered even more widely or frequently.

Because of Shelter Experience, I Feel...

I will achieve the goals I set for myself	93%
I know more ways to plan for my safety	92
I can do more things on my own	91
I know more about my options	91
More hopeful about the future	91
More confident in my decision-making	90
More comfortable asking for help	89
I know more about community resources	85
More comfortable talking about things that bother me	85

Meeting Survivors' Needs identified some differences in needs based on the race/ethnicity of survivors. These are detailed in the full report, and they include problems with lack of respect for customs (which was the kind of conflict least likely to be resolved). The study found some differences in survivors' experiences by race/ethnicity in first impressions as well. Certainly, efforts to expand staff diversity and to create working environments supportive to all staff should continue.

Further research would be useful, both in supplementing these findings and in studying other services domestic violence programs provide, such as support groups and advocacy.

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The full study is available online at:
www.vawnet.org

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