

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

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **Shelter Study Materials**

**1. How can I access the Shelter Study materials?**

You can access the Shelter Study materials by going to [www.vawnet.org](http://www.vawnet.org)

**2. What materials are available?**

General Materials

- [Meeting Survivors' Needs: A Multi-State Study of Domestic Violence Shelter Experiences](#) (Full Report)
- [Executive Summary](#) – Meeting Survivors' Needs: A Multi-State Study of Domestic Violence Shelter Experiences
- [Research In Brief](#) – Meeting Survivors' Needs: A Multi-State Study of Domestic Violence Shelter Experiences
- [News Release](#) – Domestic Violence Shelters Are Meeting Needs of Most Victims, Comprehensive Federally-Funded Study Finds

Webinar Tools

- [Shelter Study Webinar Recording](#) – To access this recording of *Meeting Survivors' Needs: A Multi-State Study of Domestic Violence Shelter Experiences* you must register and join using the link delivered to your email address. The webinar is always open and available free of charge.
- [Transcription of Shelter Study Webinar Recording](#) – This transcript is a written record of the webinar audio accompanying the release of the report, *Meeting Survivors' Needs: A Multi-State Study of Domestic Violence Shelter Experiences*.
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#) – The present document provides a synopsis of the presenters' answers to common questions posed during the April 7, 2009 webinar accompanying the release of the report, *Meeting Survivors' Needs: A Multi-State Study of Domestic Violence Shelter Experiences*.
- [Mini Collection: Conflict Resolution Tools for Shelter Staff](#) – Findings from *Meeting Survivors' Needs: A Multi-State Study of Domestic Violence Shelter Experiences* suggest that conflicts with other residents are among the main challenges faced by survivors while staying in shelter. This mini collection of resources addresses the need for enhanced training on conflict resolution for shelter staff.

## Shelter Study Findings

### **3. Was any information collected on how many individuals may have come to shelter more than one time?**

24% reported they had stayed at this particular shelter in the past; for 58% of this group with prior stays, the most recent past stay was more than a year before the current one.

### **4. Did the study results indicate if a resident's length of stay was based on "time limits" or due to the survivors finding something more permanent? Was there any information about the number of survivors who were homeless upon leaving shelter?**

We did not ask where they were going when they left shelter, or why they were leaving. 16% reported that time limits were an issue or problem for them (and half of these said the problem had been resolved).

### **5. Can we get information on the different types of shelter models used by the participating agencies, e.g. individual apartment-style units, shared kitchens and bathrooms, etc.? Curious to know which types of facilities may lessen conflict between residents.**

Questions about shelter models was not asked of programs. We did find that difficulty obtaining privacy was an issue indicated by 16% of the survivors.

### **6. Did any of the participating shelter programs support military families?**

None of the shelters reported this was a specific service. However, several were located in areas near military bases and no doubt served military families.

### **7. The criminal justice needs seemed low. How was the question presented? Were the needs already met before shelter?**

All needs were indicated by checking from a list of 38 possible kinds of help. The introductory language was "While I'm here I hope I can get help with (check all that apply to you; there are no "right" answers): (followed by the list). One section was "legal system/legal issues" followed by 6 specific items that started with "protective/restraining order." We did not ask what needs had been met before they arrived.

### **8. Did any of the programs provide shelter to male survivors of domestic violence?**

Yes. We did not specifically ask this question, and the study addressed survivors in traditional shelters only, not those who received motel vouchers and services from programs, or those who stayed in safe homes or transitional housing. We obtained responses from 13 male survivors in shelters, and analyses are provided in detail in the full report.

**9. Did shelter staff reflect survivors' ethnicities?**

Individual shelter programs varied widely in staff ethnicity, and some likely reflected survivors' ethnicities rather closely. Over all, survivors were more likely than staff to be people of color.

**10. Is there anything in the study that is teen-specific?**

A total of 9 survivors reported that they were age 17 or younger. Although analyses compared responses across age groups, nine is too small a number and percentage of the total group to be able say anything definitive about them. Some shelter programs reported that they offer special services to teens.

**11. The data shows a high level of residents over the age of 35. Did you see differences in needs across age?**

Yes, but it is difficult to summarize and is reported in detail in the full report. For example, survivors between age 50 and 64 were more likely than those in any other age group to want help handling stress. Those over age 65 were least likely to say they wanted counseling or emotional support, or help with job training.

**12. Were there differences in shelter needs for survivors over the age of 50 years old?**

Survivors age 50 – 64 were most likely to want help with health issues, and least likely to want help with TANF. Those over age 65 were least likely to want help with a protective/restraining order. Mothers age 50 – 64 were most likely to want help with school, counseling, and health issues for their children, and with responding to their children when they are upset or causing trouble.

**13. Any data on how many deaf victims completed the surveys?**

No. 68% of the shelter programs indicated they had the capacity to accommodate residents with hearing impairments, however.

**Shelter Study Implications & Recommendations for Best Practices**

**14. What are some of your recommendations to address the implications found in the study?**

Despite the overwhelmingly positive ratings of shelter services, the study can also be used as an opportunity for programs and coalitions to engage in discussion and self-reflection about how policies and services can best respond to survivors' needs. In addition, survivors continue to face obstacles in certain areas (e.g. economic issues, health, and housing) that may require policymakers to provide resources and support partnerships that extend beyond the current scope of domestic violence shelter services. The study findings also help identify areas in which staff and volunteers should receive ongoing training and support, such as in conflict resolution, and in which ongoing discussion should occur to ensure that we enhance access and services to better address the needs of diverse survivors. The shelter study provides important guidance in these areas.

**15. Please discuss more about how the conflict resolution training for staff can and should be addressed.**

Communal living is always challenging, and even more so when residents are in crisis. Most programs do provide staff and volunteers conflict resolution training, but the shelter study findings suggest that it could be supplemented as issues arise, or offered more frequently. Problems related to conflicts among shelter residents was the most commonly cited, and conflicts with staff were reported by 13% of shelter study participants. It could also be addressed in staff support or supervision sessions, as well as through technical assistance from the state domestic violence coalition. To assist in this effort, the NRCDV staff have compiled a mini-collection of resources on conflict resolution, which can be found at:

[http://new.vawnet.org/category/index\\_pages.php?category\\_id=940](http://new.vawnet.org/category/index_pages.php?category_id=940)

**16. One recommendation of the shelter study was to “consider shelter rules”. Could you expand more on this?**

This covers both eligibility requirements as well as rules for residents. For example, some shelter study participants reported that they had been turned away because they had been arrested in the past, or had a history of substance abuse or other issues. Some had been turned away because they had sons over age 12. Such eligibility requirements can prevent survivors from accessing necessary services. It may be possible for more programs to develop options for survivors who disclose these issues. Regarding shelter rules, one example involves requiring all residents to perform all chores. Survivors who are pregnant may want to avoid some chemicals used in cleaning. Some survivors may associate particular rooms with traumatic experiences, and have difficulty spending time in those rooms. These are just a few examples, but programs can consider the types of individual accommodations they can make to address individual circumstances.

**17. Is there a “model shelter rules/policies” for domestic violence programs?**

Although there is no national “model” in terms of shelter rules’ design and implementation, there are programs and state coalitions in the country that have done very progressive work in this area. The focus of their work reflects a survivor-centered advocacy approach. What follows are resources available from the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WSCADV) that provide valuable information on this topic. Access these titles under “Advocacy” at <http://www.wscadv.org/resourcesPublications.cfm>.

- [Rethinking Punitive Approaches to Shelter](#) – Writing from the position of both a survivor and shelter manager, Deb Adams discusses the ongoing challenge of keeping shelter rules minimally oppressive and maximally respectful.
- [Rules: the Good the Bad and the Ugly](#) – Former Eastside Domestic Violence Program shelter program Executive Director Linda Olsen reflects on how shelter program rules can end up conflicting with our best intentions for dv programs.

- [How We Gave up Curfew](#) – A program director reflects on how her program's staff worked to pare down the shelter rules, rethinking what was necessary and reexamining their own investment in particular rules.
- [Model Policy on Shelter Rules](#) – Look here for general guidelines to keep in mind when crafting shelter rules, a model set of rules structured in the form of rights and responsibilities, recommendations on warning and exit policies, concrete suggestions for how programs can minimize rules and make sure the ones they have are respectful, and critical questions to ask about Shelter Rules.
- [Moving from Rules to Rights and Responsibilities](#) – One of the most engaging articles written on shelter rules, the author of this paper tells an inspiring tale. Molly Curren takes the reader through Hickman House's journey from over-regulation to embracing a common sense and value driven process for deciding what rules their program wants.
- [Physical "Fixes" That Help Programs Minimize Rules](#) – It's easier to control physical spaces than people. Here are some ideas for changing physical environments in shelters so that potentially oppressive rules can be eliminated.
- [Changing the Script: Thinking about our Relationships with Shelter Residents](#) – This article challenges advocates to consider what "script" they bring into their interactions with shelter residents (Parent? Coach? Drill sergeant?) and challenges them to change the script to one that is mutually respectful and encourages teamwork.

In addition to the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (MCADSV) is also working in the area of shelter rules' reduction/elimination. A statewide pilot project focused on this issue has been conducted since 2007. For additional information please, contact MCADSV at 573.634.4161.

The following resources provide creative solutions and critical thinking related to the design and implementation of shelter rules when working with specific populations:

- [Working with Battered Women and their Teenage Boys in Shelter](#) – This model protocol contains a recommended policy, and recommended procedures on working in shelter, program activities for teens, community collaboration, training and confidentiality and safety planning. Three appendices include how to respond when your teen become violent, behavior checklist follow-up for parents, and a teen resource list.
- [Enough and Yet Not Enough: DV Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities](#) – This WSCADV educational resource manual on domestic violence advocacy for persons with disabilities was developed to enhance the skills of community based domestic violence advocates.

## Future Research

### **18. Are there any plans to extend this to a longitudinal study?**

Because of the anonymity of survivors' responses, that would not be possible.

### **19. Are there any plans to replicate this study in other states?**

Not at this time, although there was great interest in pursuing future research. Seventy-seven percent of Shelter Study webinar participants agreed it would be helpful to conduct similar research on the array of services provided to domestic violence survivors who are not seeking emergency shelter, e.g. support groups, hotline, advocacy, counseling, transitional housing, etc.

### **20. Will this study lead to more in-depth discussion and/or recommendations on "best practices" in the delivery of shelter services?**

Both the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRCDV) and the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) will continue to explore best practices approaches and disseminate this information to the field.

## Funding & Policy Implications

### **21. Based on the study, if there was one place where funding is needed, where do you think it should be directed?**

This study and the [2008 Domestic Violence Counts census](#) of domestic violence services confirm that every day domestic violence shelter programs turn away victims of domestic violence because they lack the resources to provide shelter to everyone seeking assistance. Given the demand for this life-saving service, increased support for expanding core services must be a priority. In addition, survivors, and the shelters that serve them, would benefit from technical assistance and resources to expand economic advocacy and specialized services, such as behavioral health services, to increase survivors' long-term well-being.

### **22. Based on any qualitative information you gathered from the Shelter Study, can you tell us what the impact might be on victims/survivors if any shelter services were cut?**

Drawing from the qualitative responses to the question "What do you think you would have done if this shelter didn't exist?" it is likely that cuts in shelter funding could be devastating in some areas, especially since we also learned that 9% had been turned away in the past (largely because of lack of room), and they had remained in an abusive situation.