



**NEWS RELEASE**  
February 18, 2009

**CONTACT:** [research@nrcdv.org](mailto:research@nrcdv.org)

## **Domestic Violence Shelters Are Meeting Needs of Most Victims, Comprehensive Federally-Funded Study Finds**

***Victims Report Satisfaction with Services, Help Achieving Long-Term Safety,  
But Say More Help Needed with Health, Housing & Children's Issues***

Becoming homeless. Losing everything, including their children. Doing something desperate. Facing continued, life-threatening abuse. That is what victims of domestic violence who received help from shelters say their fate would have been if those shelters did not exist, according to ***Meeting Survivors' Needs: A Multi-State Study of Domestic Violence Shelter Experiences***. Released today, the groundbreaking study is based on a survey of 3,410 people served by domestic violence shelters in eight states during a six-month period in 2007 and 2008. It finds that three-quarters of domestic violence victims (74 percent) rate the assistance they received at a shelter as "very helpful" and another 18 percent say it was "helpful."

"The National Institute of Justice (NIJ), a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, is proud to have administered this study, which will help us better understand the challenges facing domestic violence survivors," said NIJ Acting Director Kristina Rose. "Domestic violence shelters are a critical resource for keeping victims and their children safe. The data from this study will be instrumental in enhancing the coordinated community response to violence against women."

***Meeting Survivors' Needs*** finds that the most victims staying at domestic violence shelters are 18 – 34 years old, and have children under age 18. One in four (24 percent) had stayed at a shelter before the visit during which they took this survey. Ninety-two percent say they "know more ways to plan for my safety" because of the shelter, 85 percent know more about community resources, and 84 percent of those who are mothers say "my children feel more supported" as a result of their shelter stay.

"This study shows conclusively that the nation's domestic violence shelters are meeting both the urgent and longer-term needs of victims of violence, and helping them protect themselves and their children," said Dr. Eleanor Lyon of the University of Connecticut, Institute for Violence Prevention and Reduction at the School of Social Work, who was the primary researcher for the study. "Victims attribute meaningful change to the help they received at the shelter – but they also see areas where there is room for improvement."

One-quarter of shelter residents (24 percent) faced transportation challenges, and 54 of those challenges were resolved. One-third (32 percent) say they had conflicts with other residents, and 73 percent of those conflicts were resolved, *Meeting Survivors' Needs* finds. Some victims say that the shelter was unable to fully meet their needs related to housing, education and finance, as well as their emotional, mental health and physical health needs.

The study is based on surveys of residents of 215 domestic violence shelters in Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Washington, which researchers say provide a “reasonable reflection” of shelters across the nation. It is the most comprehensive study of its kind ever done. The survey was available in eleven languages.

“This study is a goldmine of valuable information,” said Anne Menard, Director of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. “It validates many of the approaches that programs around the country are using, and the hard work of staff members who work tirelessly to help victims. We take very seriously the areas where victims say improvement is needed. During these grim economic times, when shelters are struggling mightily to do more with less and serve a population in great need, maintaining and expanding core state and federal funding for these emergency shelters becomes even more essential.”

Other findings from *Meeting Survivors' Needs*:

- 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.
- Nearly all survivors (99 percent) reported they got the help they wanted with their own safety and safety planning (95 percent).
- Four in five of those who needed it (81 percent) got help finding affordable housing, and three in four got help with a job or job training.
- Nearly all mothers who needed it got help with their children’s safety (98 percent) and schooling (92 percent).
- Nine in ten survivors (91 percent) who needed it 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).
- 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. Four in five (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).

Data were collected from October, 2007 to March, 2008. 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 needs, 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 had received from shelter staff.

# # # #

Note: The full report, ***Meeting Survivors' Needs: A Multi-State Study of Domestic Violence Shelter Experiences***, as well as a summary of findings, are available online at <http://www.ojp.gov/ncj/vlcvict/docs/MeetingSurvivorsNeeds.pdf>.

*The study was conducted by Eleanor Lyon and Shannon Lane of the University of Connecticut's Institute for Violence Prevention and Reduction at the School of Social Work in collaboration with the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, a project of the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence. It was funded by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, and administered by the National Institute of Justice.*

*This project was supported by Grant No. 2007-IJ-CX-K022, awarded to the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.*