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# **An Environmental Scan of Strategies to Safely House Abused Women**

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## Executive Summary

Violence from intimate partners and homelessness are two significant issues that have serious ramifications for the lives of a number of Canadian women. The impacts of violence against women are not merely health concerns such as injury and possible lethality, but include serious mental health considerations such as fear, depression and other reactions to the trauma of being victimized by a loved one (Tutty, 2006). Being exposed to such violence also affects children and youth.

From the early days of acknowledging woman abuse, the knee-jerk response has been “why doesn’t she just leave?” Increasingly it is becoming clear that a lack of affordable and safe housing has a significant impact on women’s decision-making. Can she find adequate resources to live separately from an abusive partner? Housing has been identified as a significant concern, one that not uncommonly can force a return to an abusive relationship (Tutty, 2006; Melbin, Sullivan & Cain, 2003; Thurston et al., 2006). For some abused women, leaving becomes a path to homelessness.

On leaving a VAW shelter, women are often faced with inadequate housing and financial support that leaves them with a choice between homelessness and returning to the abusive partner. Homeless women are commonly former shelter residents who failed to find adequate and/or safe housing (Breton & Bunston, 1992; Charles, 1994). Several more recent studies, one in the United Kingdom (Malos & Hague, 1997) and one in the U.S. (Baker, Cook, & Norris, 2003), raise similar concerns. In Baker and colleagues’ study of 110 women, 25 to 50% reported housing problems and 38% were homeless.

In summary, although we have tended to treat homeless women and abused women as separate and distinct populations, the literature suggests considerable overlaps in both their experiences and their needs, housing being a key consideration. How best can such women be safely housed remains a question. Housing programs and initiatives for abused women have tended to focus on shelters that house women in critical need of the safety of emergency and second stage shelter. What housing options work for the large majority of abused women who may choose not to leave their homes for emergency shelter or those that have left shelter to live back in the community?

This environmental scan consists of a review of published academic literature and internet sites on best practices to safely house abused women. The range of housing options for abused women is examined, from emergency VAW shelters or transition shelters, to second and third stage housing. We also look at options to assist women to remain in the family home while increasing the women’s safety from an abusive intimate partner. For example, initiatives such as emergency protection orders have been commonly developed as provincial legislation in Canada, the United States and Australia. Each housing option is evaluated with respect to five key variables: safety, maximum length of stay, quality of housing, emotional support and access, issues that would affect the applicability of the option for at least some population of abused women.

The document examines the housing options available for abused women including those commonly used in Canada such as emergency protection orders, emergency women’s shelters, second stage shelters, and permanent housing through both the public and private sector. It also explores several novel models for housing abused

Canadian women through the use of safe homes, interim housing, and third stage shelters. Finally this literature/internet review examines some models being used in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom intended to enhance women's security while they remain in their own home.

The information regarding each housing option is subdivided into the following format: an overview of the option, safety issues, maximum stay length, quality of housing, emotional support, and access. These variables were selected based on the authors' long histories interviewing and working with abused women with respect to numerous issues including housing. The last variable, other issues, includes funding issues as well as any other factors considered pertinent to the option presented. A summary table of housing options is in Appendix 1.

## **Discussion**

While not exhaustive, this review of abuse-specific and non-abuse-specific housing options for women presents a number of possibilities. The risk in providing such a comprehensive list is that it appears that abused women at risk of homelessness have many options. In fact, as has been noted throughout, many of these options are not available, not feasible or questionably safe.

That the Canadian stock of safe, affordable, permanent housing is at crisis low proportions is generally accepted and the public are generally aware of homelessness. However, the stereotype of a homeless person remains that of a man with severe substance abuse and mental health problems. The plight of homeless women and the extent to which many have histories of violence and have fled violent relationships is still not common knowledge. It requires a more nuanced set of solutions and programs.

The factors of safety, providing emotional support, the maximum length of stay, quality of the housing and access utilized in the previous review, often have to be balanced or traded off. Ideally safety is a factor in every housing decision. Addressing a range of safety options, such as facilitating access to a personal safety button if requested, could provide added safety for some women.

However, not all women whose partners have abused them require emotional support, or, at any rate, they do not need it continually. Knowing the name and contact information of a support person such as a shelter follow-up or outreach worker, may be all that some women need to feel that support is available at the end of a phone-line. Having stated that, though, providing the option of supportive counselling to women who have acquired emergency protection orders or personal safety devices, could assist them in ensuring that their safety plans are up-to-date and as comprehensive as necessary.

In general, the maximum lengths of stays in VAW and homeless shelters in Canada are relatively short, given the difficulty accessing not only housing but social assistance, schooling and employment – issues for most women who have decided to leave abusive partners. Even a couple of weeks or two extra in an emergency shelter could make a tremendous difference for most women.

Concerns about the quality of the long-term housing options can lead to women moving from residence to residence, especially when good quality housing is in short supply and their income is likely to be reduced after leaving their abusive partner. As

mentioned in the literature review, what is accessible (public housing) may not be safe. Finally, how long are the waiting lists to get into public housing?

The unique safety needs of abused women, especially those whose partners remain threats, must be the core issue when considering housing. However, the entire population of abused women must be considered; which includes a large number who never have nor are likely to access emergency shelters for women. As such, housing options that would be appropriate for women with fewer safety risks might simply never be appropriate for women whose partners have been brutally violent.

Both VAW and homeless first-stage shelters are intended to be short-term resources for women. The institutional and the grass-roots response to both abuse and homelessness has been to develop shelters and transition houses to provide at least temporary safety and services in the hope of interrupting the cycle. Each Canadian province and territory has a number of shelters that both address violence against women and homelessness. There is little overlap, although a few organizations either house women with both problems or have separate shelters to address each. Indeed, the bulk of the research literature on women's homelessness and abuse focus on the issues separately. While there are admittedly key differences in both the populations they serve and the services they offer, what is clear is that shelters not uncommonly deal with the same women.

Second stage housing in both the VA and housing sectors is intended to provide women with a transitional step between the shelter and living independently. They offer some stability in housing and in meeting her basic needs, so that she has a foundation from which to rebuild her life and reintegrate into the dominant community. Second stage housing for abused women offers enhanced security to protect families from dangerous or homicidal ex-partners as well as emotional support. Second stage VAW shelters are less common than emergency shelters and, as such, preference is given to women at high risk from their previous partners. The general lack of second-stage housing beds means that they are not an option for the majority of abused women, many of whom will move back into the community.

Some second stage shelters in both sectors offer programs, services and supports to aid the women's attempts to rebuild their lives. Both second stage shelters struggle with no funding or under funding, and limited availability. There appears to be even fewer second stage housing opportunities for women who have been homeless.

For women leaving VAW or homeless shelters, access to social housing is a problem. While most provinces or territories offer priority access to women who have been abused in recognition of their safety needs, there are also concerns related to the conditions under which women are recognized as abused. A woman may not have the necessary documentation to "prove" to the local housing authority that she has indeed fled from an abusive partner. Priority access is extremely rare for women who are homeless. Leaving an abusive partner is when women and children's safety are statistically at greatest risk, the time when women and children are more likely to be murdered (Ellis, 1992).

## **Interim Recommendations**

This project constitutes the first phase of a recently approved project, “Identifying Best Practices to Safely House Abused and Homeless Women” funded by the Homelessness Knowledge Development Program, Homeless Partnering Secretariat, Human Resources and Social Development Canada. The second phase of the project is to more systematically interview personnel from unique housing models for abused women across Canada and elsewhere. The third phase of the project entails interviewing from 49 to 70 women who have been both abused and homeless from across the country to discover their perspectives and ideas about what models of housing would best meet their needs. These two phases are underway at the writing of this document.

Given this context, we propose the following interim recommendations with the proviso that more comprehensive ideas, grounded in the experiences of these women and organizations to be accessed in the near future, may be forthcoming at the end of the project.

### **Recommendation One: Consider implementing innovative third stage housing model elsewhere in the province.**

The WINGS collaboration with City of Edmonton social housing and the newer Family Violence Housing First Case Management Team in Calgary seem to be working well to date. Both were developed with a clear and full understanding of the needs of abused women when they exit second stage shelters and hope to establish themselves and their children safely in the community. These collaborations involve already existing housing stock and add emotional support for those who feel the need.

### **Recommendation Two: Consider lengthening the stays in Alberta’s emergency and second stage shelters.**

Research from the United States and internationally clarify that both emergency and second stage shelter stays are generally longer. According to Melbin, Sullivan and Cain (2003), the average stay at U.S. emergency shelters is 60 days. In the U.S., most second stage shelters allow women to stay 12-24 months (Correia & Melbin, 2005; Melbin, Sullivan, & Cain, 2003). In both cases, such longer stays would allow women to develop more stable plans including a search for more adequate housing.

The downside in most urban shelters is that allowing current residents to stay longer would prevent women ready to enter the shelter from being able to do so. However, the appropriateness of this possibility could be considered.

### **Recommendation Three: Advocate increasing the availability of public housing**

Despite the importance of second stage shelters as housing options, ultimately moving out into the community into safe, affordable, permanent housing is the goal of most abused women. For many, this is difficult. Not only are there long waiting lists for most social housing, but the stock is often old and in less-desirable neighbourhoods. New models that support building social housing in new municipal developments are one strategy to enhance the quality of social housing, yet are often critiqued.

Shelter directors in the VAW network have been involved in lobbying for better public housing for many years, understanding the importance of this option for some

women. Novac (2006) cites Shin et al. (1998) as finding that, in spite of all issues that homeless women face, subsidized housing was the primary predictor of housing stability - and that remained true for up to five years (p. 14). Adding shelter outreach staff to provide support to women who wish it would enhance this option.

**Recommendation Four: Support the use of emergency protection orders for women whose partners are at low risk to reoffend.**

Despite the general scepticism about EPOs, could their use be enhanced with consultation between the police and community with respect to access and breaches? The review of the *PAFVA* legislation (Tutty et al., 2005) highlighted its under-utilization from 2002 to 2004 in Alberta. Used much more often in Edmonton than any other Alberta community, the provisions to give women possession of the family home are powerful and, if the abuser is not at risk of breaching the order, can be effective. This would be appropriate for perhaps a small group of abused women, but if the women's safety could be established, would give her much more flexibility than having to move. This is supported by research on low reassault rates for women who went through the process of making the emergency orders into permanent orders (Holt et al., 2002)

Nevertheless, concerns about the police either not facilitating access to the orders (Tutty et al., 2005) or responding to reported breaches (Rigakos, 1997) suggest the importance of shifting these responses first before ever implying that women are safe with the orders.

To conclude, as noted already, this literature/internet review is but the first step in a more comprehensive research project to inform communities of the importance of enhancing and developing additional housing options for women who have been abused and are at risk of homelessness. That this population and their children are at significant risk cannot be disputed. It is society's responsibility to meet the needs of our most vulnerable citizens.

That many cities across Canada have recognized homelessness as an issue of serious concern is encouraging. However, the fact that women abused by intimate partners make up a large portion of the population of homeless women and those at risk of homelessness is not yet understood by many members of the general public or some homelessness advocated. Continuing to raise the profile of this significant social problem is essential.



## **Chapter One: Background to Safely Housing Abused Women**

Violence from intimate partners and homelessness are two significant issues that have serious ramifications for the lives of a number of Canadian women. The impacts of violence against women are not merely health concerns such as injury and possible lethality, but include serious mental health considerations such as fear, depression and other reactions to the trauma of being victimized by a loved one (Tutty, 2006). Being exposed to such violence also affects children and youth.

From the early days of acknowledging woman abuse, the knee-jerk response has been “why doesn’t she just leave?” Increasingly it is becoming clear that a lack of affordable and safe housing has a significant impact on women’s decision-making. Can she find adequate resources to live separately from an abusive partner? Housing has been identified as a significant concern, one that not uncommonly can force a return to an abusive relationship (Tutty, 2006; Melbin, Sullivan & Cain, 2003; Thurston et al., 2006). For some abused women, leaving becomes a path to homelessness.

On leaving a VAW shelter, women are often faced with inadequate housing and financial support that leaves them with a choice between homelessness and returning to the abusive partner. Homeless women are commonly former shelter residents who failed to find adequate and/or safe housing (Breton & Bunston, 1992; Charles, 1994). Several more recent studies, one in the United Kingdom (Malos & Hague, 1997) and one in the U.S. (Baker, Cook, & Norris, 2003), raise similar concerns. In Baker and colleagues’ study of 110 women, 25 to 50% reported housing problems and 38% were homeless.

A report on abused women’s experiences with the Ontario welfare system (Mosher, Evans, Little, Morrow, Boulding, & VanderPlaats, 2004) suggests that inadequate social assistance creates significant barriers to women’s abilities to flee abusive relationships and to achieve safety for themselves and their children. They found that many women were spending all, or almost all, of their monthly social assistance cheque on housing costs, and had little or nothing left for food, utility bills, house repairs, clothing, and transportation.

To further complicate the issue, a recent study conducted by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC, 2006) suggests that abused women not only have difficulty finding safe and affordable housing, but may also be discriminated against by landlords who know that they are fleeing partner abuse. Landlords most commonly raised concerns regarding the women’s ability to pay the rent, and/or had concerns about her abusive partner’s potential for further violence. A small number of landlords were described as “openly hostile” (p. 3) towards battered women, blaming them for the abuse they experienced and were not willing to rent to them under any circumstances.

In summary, although we have tended to treat homeless women and abused women as separate and distinct populations, the literature suggests considerable overlaps in both their experiences and their needs, housing being a key consideration. How best can such women be safely housed remains a question. Housing programs and initiatives for abused women have tended to focus on shelters that house women in critical need of the safety of emergency and second stage shelter. What housing options work for the

large majority of abused women who may choose not to leave their homes for emergency shelter or those that have left shelter to live back in the community?

This environmental scan consists of a review of published academic literature and internet sites on best practices to safely house abused women. This chapter begins by providing an overview of the issue of homelessness in Canada focusing on the associations between intimate partner abuse and homelessness. In each of these sections, Canadian research and literature is presented, followed by international literature and research with respect to the issues under consideration.

The range of housing options for abused women is examined, from emergency VAW shelters or transition shelters, to second and third stage housing. We also look at options to assist women to remain in the family home while increasing the women's safety from an abusive intimate partner. For example, initiatives such as emergency protection orders have been commonly developed as provincial legislation in Canada, the United States and Australia. Each housing option is evaluated with respect to five key variables: safety, maximum length of stay, quality of housing, emotional support and access, issues that would affect the applicability of the option for at least some population of abused women.

In many cases, the literature has not kept pace with the sector. Thus, some of the information contained in this document is from representatives of several provincial women's transition house associations or directly from the shelters utilizing innovative approaches.

### **Homelessness in Canada**

This section provides an overview of homelessness in Canada. It examines the complexity involved in defining homelessness and how various definitions influence determining how many people are homeless. It also explores the contention of many scholars and researchers that homelessness in Canada is inherently gendered, that more women are homeless than men. Finally, this section explores the government response to homelessness.

**Defining Homelessness:** In examining the association between woman abuse and homelessness in Canada, it seems reasonable to try to determine how many women may be affected. However, this process is not straightforward; one of the first challenges is a lack of consensus regarding how homelessness is defined (Novac, 2006; Tutty, Ogden, & Weaver-Dunlop, 2007). How one defines homelessness, of course, influences how many women are identified as part of this population.

Definitions of homelessness vary in a continuum from narrow to broad (Begin, Casavant, & Miller Chenier, 1999). The narrow end of the continuum defines homelessness simply as the absence of a roof over one's head. Kelling (cited in Rokach, 2005) reflects the broad end of the continuum by making the point that homelessness is not only rooflessness; homelessness also occurs when people do not have a secure and satisfactory home.

In the International Year of the Homeless, the United Nations concurred with the broader end of the continuum, by breaking the concept of homelessness into two categories: (1) absolute homelessness and (2) relative homelessness (Begin, et al., 1999).

Absolute homelessness describes the type of homelessness with which the average Canadian is probably most familiar: that is people who are on the street, “with no physical shelter of their own, e.g., sleeping in temporary shelters or in locations not meant for human habitation (also known as ‘sleeping rough’)” (Novac, 2006, p. 1).

Some researchers further divide the concept of absolute homelessness into another three categories: chronic, cyclical, and temporary homelessness (Begin, et al., 1999). The term “chronically homeless” applies to the severely marginalized in society and are often people who are struggling with substance abuse or mental illness.

The next category refers to the “cyclically homeless”; individuals who have become homeless due to an event in their lives, such as the loss of employment, a move, hospitalization, or imprisonment. Other cyclically homeless people include those who use temporary or emergency shelters or soup kitchens for reasons such as fleeing an abusive partner. The last category, the “temporarily homeless,” refers to people who are without shelter for fairly short periods of time (i.e. people who have lost their homes as a result of disasters). This category also includes individuals whose economic and/or personal circumstances change temporarily (Begin, et al., 1999).

The second category of homelessness identified by the United Nations is “relative, hidden or concealed homelessness [which] applies to people living in spaces that do not meet minimum standards. That is, they lack adequate protection from the elements, access to safe water and sanitation, secure tenure, *personal safety* [sic], affordability and access to employment, education, and health care” (Novac, 2006, p.1). Novac (2006) italicized the words *personal safety* to emphasize that women who are being abused by their intimate partners could fall in the category of relative homelessness. In Australia, the term “housed homelessness” was coined to refer to abused women whose personal safety is under threat (Gregory, 2001, cited in Novac, 2006).

Whitzman (2006) notes that most of the Canadian hidden homeless are women. This category applies to many abused women. For example, Du Mont and Miller (2000) point out that women moving from one location to another in an effort to keep themselves safe from an abusive partner are part of the hidden homeless.

Also pertinent to the discussion of relative homelessness is the idea of housing poverty - people who are spending so much of their income to pay for housing that they cannot afford to meet their other basic needs. In addition, their home may well be illegal, crowded and/or substandard (Novac, 2006).

In Canada, core housing need is defined as householders whose homes do not meet the standards of affordability adequacy and suitability (CMHC, 2004; Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008). Under the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Commission’s guidelines, a home is affordable if the householders are paying 30% or under of their gross income (Carter, 1997). The home is not adequate if it is not meeting all acceptable housing standards (including condition and repairs). Finally, a home is only considered suitable if it is large enough for the size of the family and has enough bedrooms to the standards regarding age defined privacy needs of the tenants (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008).

Public or social housing refers to those accommodations that receive public subsidies to make the unit affordable to the renter (Carter, 1997). Generally, there are guidelines regarding who can qualify and, most often, the renter pays 30% of their gross income for the unit (Carter, 1997). Whitzman (2006) notes that spending over 30% of one's gross income for housing places one at risk for homelessness. However, the Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning (2007) contend a home is not affordable if people must pay 30% or more of their before tax income on accommodation and utilities (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007). Utility costs are a major expense for many Canadians when one considers our harsh winters and is a particular issue for those living in older homes with poor insulation and for those living north of 60 (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007; Tutty, et al., 2007).

In 1996, using the United Nation's definition of adequate housing, the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation conducted a national evaluation, concluding that 18% or 1.7 million Canadian households could be considered in need of core housing (CMHC, 1996, cited in Du Mont & Miller, 2000). Unfortunately, the percentage of people in need of core housing seems to be rising. In 2004, the Canadian Mental Health Association reported that 20% or one in five Canadian households could not afford adequate housing. In 1996, the average renter spent 24% of her/his income on accommodation (Carter, 1997). In 2001, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities estimated that over one-third (34.6%) of Canadian renters spent 30% or more of their gross income on accommodation (cited in CMHA, 2004).

### **Determining How Many Abused Women are Homeless**

Theoretically, most Canadian researchers concur with the United Nation's broad definition of homelessness (Begin, et al., 1999; Novac, 2006). However, in practical terms, it is very difficult to measure the numbers of Canadians whose housing is inadequate (Begin et al., 1999). Instead, most researchers attempt to measure the numbers of people facing absolute homelessness. Yet, even then, there are difficulties; much of the literature regarding absolute homelessness is focused on large urban centres (Whitzman, 2006). Part of this focus may simply reflect how challenging it is to connect with and estimate the numbers of Canadians who are mobile, without a fixed address.

In 1987, the Canadian Council on Social Development made the first attempt to measure numbers of homeless people by sending surveys to staff of homeless shelters. While this study reported between 130,000 and 250,000 homeless people in Canada, these numbers are considered an underestimation of the actual population since many of the homeless do not use shelters. In that same year, Fournier (cited in Begin, et al., 1999) estimated that 30% of the homeless were women. Statistics Canada also attempted to measure the numbers of homeless in 1991, but did not publish the results as they lacked confidence in the quality of the data (Begin, et al., 1999).

Individual Canadian cities have provided counts of the numbers of homeless in their municipalities – for example, it was reported that 26,000 people in Toronto used the shelter network in 1996. In Calgary, the 2006 count found 3,436 homeless people – up 32.3 % from 2004. The 2008 count in Calgary found 4,060 homeless individuals – up 18.2% from 2006. Calgary's findings reflect the national trend of urban centres reporting

increasing numbers of people facing absolute homelessness (National Homeless Initiative, 2004).

It is important to acknowledge, however, that statistics gathered regarding homelessness do not represent the gravity of the situation in Canada. For example, women tend to access homeless services less frequently than men - perhaps because the services are typically geared towards men (Tutty, et al., 2007). Moreover, these counts do not include the hidden homeless. Since the streets tend to be unsafe for homeless women, they are more likely to couch surf, finding temporary accommodation with friends and family (Novac, Brown, & Bourbonnais, 1996). Finally, Begin, et al. (1999), note that current statistics do not include the large numbers of Canadians who are living in inadequate or unsafe housing conditions (see also Canadian Mental Health Association, 2004).

### **The Gendered Nature of Homelessness**

Du Mont and Miller's (2000) literature review reveals that various scholars and researchers have attributed Canada's homeless crisis to a number of factors including unemployment, poverty, punitive social policy and the lack of provincial and federal interest in sheltering the absolute homeless. Ten percent of Canadians live below the Statistics Canada low income cut-off (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008), however many more women than men live in poverty. In fact, women are the poorest people in Canada (National Working Group on Women and Housing, 2006). According to this report, 19% of all Canadian women live in poverty (National Working Group on Women and Housing, 2006). Thirty-three to 43% of women-headed lone parent families live in poverty (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008) but a staggering 73.8% of Aboriginal lone mothers live poverty (National Working Group on Women and Housing, 2006).

In addition, various scholars and researchers note that systems in Canada do not tend to acknowledge that "the experience of homelessness and risk of homelessness is inherently gendered" (Thurston et al., 2006, p. 8; Du Mont & Miller, 2000). The association between men's violence against women and women's subsequent homelessness tends to be ignored, and thus, "confounds our understanding of the aetiology, scope, and experiences of homelessness, as well as our ability to redress the problem" (Du Mont & Miller, 2000, p. 2). According to these authors, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities acknowledged homelessness and the impact of the affordable housing crisis in 1999 and urged steps to address the issues but they did not identify the needs of abused women as a priority. In contrast, in Ontario, the United Way of Greater Toronto, and Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) have both articulated the housing needs of abused women.

The United Nations has recommended that Canada address the fact that so many women live in poverty and "increase its efforts to combat poverty among women in general and vulnerable groups of women in particular" (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2003, p. 5). Specifically, Canada needs to address its "persistent systematic discrimination faced by aboriginal women in all aspects of their lives" (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2003, p. 6).

In 2003, Statistics Canada indicated that “the average pre-tax income for women over the age of 16 was just 62% that of men” (National Working Group on Women and Housing, 2006, p. 1). “Despite laws requiring gendered pay equity, women still receive at least 29% less for work than their male counterparts” (OAITH, 2008, p. 3). Waylishyn and Johnson (1998) note that, “women experience a greater vulnerability to poverty, and women, once economically disadvantaged, tend to stay poor for longer periods of time” (p. 973).

In 2003, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended that the Canadian federal, provincial and territorial governments introduce mechanisms to ensure that gender based discrimination against women is addressed and that equal pay for equal work principles are instituted across the country.

In particular, the United Nations raised concerns about how disproportionate pay restricts women’s access to services. The United Nations recommended that federal legal aid specifically allocate poverty related funds for civil and family law cases to women since current practices and access to legal redress are disproportionately restrictive towards women; while men can afford to pay lawyers and move through the legal system, women cannot (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2003)

Women face stigma, discrimination, and stereotypes from other people for being homeless (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007). People tend to view homelessness as a result of women’s poor choices. The very real issues faced by women tend to be ignored. As already indicated, the United Nations has already raised concerns about Canadian’s reluctance to address the systemic issues faced by homeless women. Thus, it isn’t surprising that women’s personal issues are similarly ignored.

Novac’s 2006 Canadian literature review found that many homeless people have experienced childhood abuse, a statistic that is even more common for women and youth. Novac cites Farrell et al.’s 2000 study of homeless people in Ottawa that reported that 42% of men and 76% of women had been physically abused as children. In contrast, in the general Canadian population, 31% of men and 21% of women have experienced physical childhood abuse. Yet, the funding limitations faced by many homeless shelters means the focus tends to be on providing basic needs; thus, counselling or other emotional supports are not offered to clients (Tutty, et al., 2007).

### **The Canadian Response to Homelessness**

Federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments seem to recognize the seriousness of homelessness. For example, Canada signed the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1976; Article 11(1) of this document recognizes that every person has the right to adequate housing. (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1966). “In 1998 the mayors of the largest Canadian cities declare homelessness a national disaster” (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2004, p. 2). Yet, northern Canadian communities have few or no shelters, and the climate is so severe in the winter that to be without shelter and heat overnight is life threatening (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007; Novac, 2006).

To date, there is no official government data on homelessness. However, in 1999, the government of Canada launched the National Homeless Initiative, to assist Canadian communities in their efforts to support homeless individuals and families to achieve and maintain self-sufficiency. The initiative funds collaborative community projects and programs aimed at long term and preventive programs to address homelessness. The Homeless Individuals and Families Information System Initiative (HIFIS), part of the National Homeless Initiative, is a computerized management system that is provided free of charge to community stakeholders.

HIFIS collects information about the homeless population who use shelters, and also assists shelters in their daily operations (from the webpage of the National Homeless Initiative, 2004). The intention of this data collection program is to identify the characteristics of the homeless accessing various housing programs to assist government and service providers with more accurate information to better meet the needs of this population (Du Mont & Miller, 2000).

However, Du Mont and Miller (2000) note that women shelter representatives have been concerned that the information collected could compromise women's safety and privacy, and that the label of homelessness could be used against women. They purport that some of the information collected duplicates information that women shelters must collect for other funders. With no funding attached to HIFIS, they are concerned about how staff time and resources can be allocated for this data collection - especially when women's shelters are consistently under-funded. Lastly, they note the lack of a federal commitment to allocate additional social housing to abused women.

Canada is the only developed nation without a national plan for addressing homelessness (Du Mont & Miller, 2000). Internationally, Canada's lack of action to address homelessness and its failure to live up to its commitments under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) has been repeatedly addressed by the United Nations: the Committee on the of the Child, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing. All of these committees have written reports reminding Canada that it is in violation of its Human Rights commitments and recommended that Canada honour the covenants it has signed (Kothari, 2007; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2003; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008).

Canadians have also called upon the federal government to honour its international commitments and commitments to its citizens. In Ontario, a Private Member's bill, "Bill 47, an Act to establish the right to adequate housing as a universal human right, passed first reading on March 27, 2008 ... Passage of [this bill to] legislation would be a tremendous step towards realizing the rights recognized in the ICESCR" (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008, p. 57). The Ontario Human Rights Commission (2008) recommends that all levels of government honour the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007, suggests that Canada needs to live up to our "human rights obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights guaranteeing a right to an adequate standard of living and adequate housing" (p. 20).

Sev'er (2002) states that abused women are similar to those of other marginalized groups such as the homeless, and that the Canadian government has "an obligation to fulfill the basic human rights and dignified living conditions for all their citizens, especially those who are the most vulnerable" (p. 321). Du Mont and Miller (2000) are also concerned that the definition of hidden homelessness does not adequately identify the needs of abused women. They recommend that "abused women be properly designated as the hidden homeless via the inclusion of gender safety as a salient feature of housing adequacy guidelines under the United Nations and Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation" (p.5).

The Ontario Human Rights Commission (2008) further recommended, "that the Government of Canada adopt a national housing strategy, in consultation with provincial, territorial and municipal governments" (p. 86). Such policy must include funding and measurable targets to ensure "all Canadians, including those of limited income, to housing of an adequate standard without discrimination" (p.86). The clause 'without discrimination' is important since zoning laws, municipal by-laws often have restrictions in place to limit public or supportive housing to certain areas—with the restrictions based on stereotypical views of the people who may be living in the units. For example, housing providers have been required by municipalities to ensure residents could not open windows, that windows were frosted so residents cannot see out, and that entrances were barred so residents could not leave at night.

The Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning (2007) made similar recommendations in their qualitative study examining women's homelessness north of the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel. They note that honouring Canada's commitments under ICESCR means that an adequate supply of safe, low-income housing stock is needed. Yet there is a national crisis in terms of public housing stock (see also Novac, 2006; Tutty, et al., 2007). The Four Words Centre for Development Learning recommends that the federal government needs to institute funding mechanisms that encourage and support the development of low-income housing stock.

### **Abused Women's Experiences of Homelessness**

Our literature and internet search on women's homelessness and intimate partner abuse indicates that the research on these two groups is relatively separate. However, some Canadian research confirms the association (CMHC 2004; Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007; Novac, 2006; Tutty et al., 2007). For example, Gardiner and Cairn's 2002 Calgary homelessness study indicated that 29% of the absolutely homeless women and 37% of the relatively homeless women were fleeing abusive partners (cited in Novac, 2006). O'Grady and Gaetz' 2004 study of Toronto street youth concluded that women are more likely to identify physical and sexual abuse as the reasons for their homelessness.

The association between fleeing an abusive partner and becoming homeless is also an issue in other countries. In England, 2005 statistics for public housing acceptance indicates that 13% of those households identified their primary reason for becoming homeless was fleeing an abusive partner (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006). Research from the United States supports the association between women's homelessness and intimate partner violence. Rosenheck, Bassuk and Saloman's



(1999) U.S. study of homelessness also had similar findings to those of Gardiner and Cairns.

U.S. researchers, Tessler, Rosenhek, and Gamache (2001) conducted a study exploring the pathways to homelessness, recruiting a total of 7,224 participants (4,997 men and 2,727 women) from 18 sites in 15 cities across nine different states. Their findings suggest gendered differences between the factors contributing between men's and women's homelessness. Men were more likely to cite "loss of a job, discharge from an institution, mental health problems, and alcohol or drug problems" (Tessler, et al., p. 4) as factors influencing their homelessness. Women were more likely to cite the violent behaviour of others (especially intimate partners) as a factor contributing to their homelessness. In 2000, 56% of the cities surveyed at the U.S. Conference of Mayors identified domestic violence as the primary cause of homelessness (Correia & Rubin, 2001).

Researchers have suggested that, while at least half of the homeless population have experienced violence and abuse in their lifetime, the relationship between violence and homelessness is especially profound for women (Baker, et al., 2003; Clarke, Pendry, & Kim, 1997; Novac, Serge, Eberle, & Brown, 2002). In one U.S. study, 61% of homeless and poor housed mothers reported severe violence by a male partner (Browne & Bassuk, 1997).

Arangua, Andersen and Gelberg (2005) estimated that 13% of American homeless women were raped within the past year (compared to less than 1% in the general U.S. population), and 34% were physically abused within the past year (compared to 6% of women in the general U.S. population). Similarly, Wenzel, Leake, and Gelberg (2001) found that one third of 974 American homeless women had been victims of major violence in the previous year, such as being kicked, bitten, hit with a fist or object, beaten up, choked, burned, or threatened or harmed with a knife or gun. The authors provide two possible explanations for such high levels of violence: 1) that women are less protected from violence when they live on the street or in high crime areas, and 2) that their homelessness was precipitated by physical violence from a partner.

Abuse is a significant factor in homelessness amongst Canadian single mothers. In fact, according to Begin, et al. (1999), "families most at risk are those in which domestic violence prevails" (p. 21). Women who have children and are homeless are more likely to homelessness again (Novac, 2006). Novac cites Bassuk and Perloff's 2001 study findings indicating that women whose abusive partners found them after the women had re-established housing with their children were more likely to face homelessness again.

In assessing the reasons for repeat stays in an American homeless shelter, Metraux and Culhane (1999) reported that domestic violence was one of three factors that put women at risk of repeat stays. The other two risk factors were having young children in the family, or having absent children (children who were absent for at least part of the shelter stay). Metraux and Culhane suggest that young children put additional financial and social strain on women who are already impoverished, and they may be unable to escape the cycle of homelessness and poverty. Roll, Toro, and Ortola (1999) reported that homeless women with children had the highest rates of recent physical assault (in the past

six months), compared with homeless single women and homeless men. These authors suggest that the children's fathers were likely still in contact with the women, accounting for the high rates of assault.

Stainbrook and Hornik's U.S. study (2006) suggests that the needs of women with children in homeless shelters are similar to their counterparts in domestic violence shelters. When the two populations are compared, they have similar rates of mental health issues, substance abuse problems, and lifetime rates of victimization and trauma. Both groups also experienced similar poverty-related struggles. Not surprisingly, the women from the domestic violence group did report experiencing more recent violence. Given the fact, however, that there were many more similarities than differences between these two populations, the authors recommend that families at homeless shelters be provided with the same degree of support as those in domestic violence facilities. In particular, they highlight the need to address homeless women's histories of trauma and violence - a service not normally provided in homeless shelters.

Fleeing an abusive partner is not only a factor in women becoming homeless but also influences their continued homelessness:

Under such circumstances, the concept of home as a place where one is safe is shattered. Home is a prison, a place that becomes more dangerous than anywhere else. This reality, perhaps more than any other, distinguishes battered women and their children from other homeless families and makes resolution of their situations even more complex. This issue is not one of finding a home, it is one of finding a home that offers safety. The fear of being found and harmed keeps many battered women on the move. It keeps many of them homeless (Zappardino & DeBare, 1992, p. 755, cited in Novac, et al., 1996).

Scholars and researchers have suggested that, for many Canadian women, homelessness is an initial solution to fleeing an abusive partner because their homes are so unsafe (Neal, 2004; Thurston et al., 2006).

There is also U.S. research supporting this viewpoint. Roll, et al. (1999) contend "that domestic violence has a major impact upon women and often results in their becoming homeless, suggesting that many women would rather turn to the streets than face victimization by their partners" (p.195). In Clarke, Pendry and Kim's 1997 qualitative study, the seven American homeless women with whom they spoke identified abuse as a primary cause of their homelessness. The authors' stated the women's "homelessness was the adaptive response to battering" (p. 490).

As previously mentioned, identifying how many abused women become homeless is difficult, since women seem to be reluctant to access formal resources. Most abused women do not go to shelters for abused women. Statistically, only 11%, of abused women access VAW shelters (Statistics Canada, 2005b). Most women first seek help from their informal support system, relying on friends or family for a place to stay (Du Mont & Miller, 2000; Novac, 2006; Tutty, 2006). Thus, they are part of the hidden homeless and are not part of the absolute homeless statistics.

Women may then eventually become homeless as they exhaust their informal support system (Du Mont & Miller, 2000; Novac, 2006). U.S. researchers Wesely and

Wright (2005) suggest that the relationship between experiencing abuse from partners and homelessness among women is not linear, but rather complex and multifaceted. The American homeless women in their qualitative research reported diverse experiences with their intimate partners. However, there was one point of convergence: their relationships “contributed to diminishing resources, social exclusion, economic vulnerability, and eventual homelessness for the women” (Wesely & Wright, 2005, p. 1099). In Tessler, and colleague’s (2001) study of pathways to homelessness, American women also cited loss of social supports, exhausting the aid of friends and family, as well as eviction as the major factors contributing to their homelessness.

Canadian women fleeing an abusive partner may also find themselves in their own apartment, but struggling to pay the rent, and then eventually be evicted because they got behind on the payments (Begin, et al., 1999; Novac, et al, 1996; Novac, 2006). “In other words, family violence may trigger a series of moves, yet not be the immediate reason for using a shelter” (Novac, 2006, p. 20).

Thus, accessing affordable housing can be a key consideration for women when they are considering leaving an abusive partner (Tutty et al., 2007). As such, the national crisis related to public housing has consequences for abused women.

When marital relationships breakdown, the economic consequences are considerably different for them [women] than for men. After divorce, the poverty rate among women increases almost threefold. Their household income drops by more than 40%, while men’s increases slightly (Finnie 1993). Single women and single mothers account for almost half of households with affordability problems (CMHC, 2000). (Novac, 2006, p. 19).

Scholars and service providers consistently report that the lack of safe affordable housing contributes to the continuation of women’s experience of intimate partner abuse (Novac, 2006). Without alternative housing, women’s choices are limited - they may well be faced with the dilemma of staying with an abusive partner versus being inadequately housed in an unsafe, dangerous neighbourhood or even being homeless. Homeless women are commonly former violence against women shelter residents who failed to find adequate and/or safe housing (Breton & Bunston, 1992; Charles, 1994). Thus the options associated with leaving may actually do little to increase the women’s and children’s safety.

Internationally, women face similar dilemmas. The U.S. National Organization for Women conducted a literature review in 2002 concluding “that the primary cause of homelessness among women in developed nations continues to be inadequate affordable housing and insufficient income, a situation which is often set into motion by physical abuse by a male partner” (Whitzman, 2006, p. 384-385). Several more recent studies, one in the United Kingdom (Malos & Hague, 1997), one in Australia (Office for Women, n.d.) and one in the U.S. (Baker, et al., 2003) raised similar concerns. Baker, et al. and Norris (2003) reported that 38% of a sample of 110 separated, abused American women recruited from the welfare, criminal justice, and shelter systems were homeless. A similar number of abused women in Baker and colleagues’ study reported housing problems such as late rent payments and eviction notices. In this study, the predictors of increased housing problems included experiencing a greater severity of abuse, contacting less

formal systems, receiving less informational support, and receiving a negative response from the government welfare department for assistance.

In Canada, the fear of homelessness may also be a significant factor influencing abused women's decisions to remain with or return to an abusive partner. Sev'er (2002) stated that, "for some women, their escape means long durations of unacceptable living conditions or homelessness. According to shelter statistics, the wait for subsidized housing is anywhere from three weeks to five years" (p. 320). Sev'er suggests that "abused women often provide a vivid picture of their fear of homelessness" (p. 319). Over 50% of the women in her study stayed in their abusive relationships because they were afraid they would not be able to access decent accommodation. Women will remain with partners rather than face homelessness (Du Mont & Miller, 2000).

American research also shows that women without housing may return to abusive partners (Correia & Melbin, 2005; Melbin, et al., 2003). In 1988, in New York City, close to a third (31%) of all shelter residents returned to their abusive partners because they were unable to obtain safe and affordable housing (Zorza, 1991, cited in Melbin, et al., 2003). In 2000, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) estimated that this percentage has increased because of ongoing reductions in public housing funding (Cuomo, 2000, cited in Melbin et al., 2003).

### **Intersecting Critical Issues**

Issues of intersectionality also need to be taken into account when one is looking at the association of homelessness and intimate partner abuse. "Intersectionality", captures the complexities of not only these women's lives but the solutions needed to address their multiple and significant needs. In Canada, abused Aboriginal women, abused women living in remote or rural areas, and abused immigrant women are two populations that face additional issues and barriers with regard to potential homelessness.

Canada's history of colonization, discrimination and marginalization by the dominant culture serves as an overarching issue that influences the reality of abused and homeless Aboriginal women (Tutty, et al., 2007). Novac notes that Besserer et al.'s 1999 General Social Survey of criminal victimization found that Aboriginal women were three times more likely to have experienced intimate partner abuse than non-Aboriginal women.

Women living on reserves are often face institutional systemic dilemmas because the Matrimonial Real Property Act specifies that housing ownership is through men (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007; Tutty, et al., 2007). Thus if she leaves her abusive partner, she loses her housing and will not qualify for her own home (Tutty, et al., 2007).

The lack of housing stock on reserves forces many people to live in overcrowded conditions and what housing exists is often substandard, not meeting basic health standards. One of the key community respondents in Tutty, and colleague's 2007 qualitative study reported:

*Overcrowding is also on the reserve. There is a five year line-up for housing on the reserve I come from. They have people living in old trailers, in third world conditions. Of course there are horrific water problems on reserves. People are*

*getting sick from the water. Large numbers of people are living in the same home. There is chronic over-crowding, this is standard.* (p. 86)

Tutty et al. (2007) state that, considering these intersecting issues and barriers, it is understandable that Aboriginal women face a number of dilemmas when they are abused and homeless. Some women ultimately decide to go off reserve in search of the ability to meet their basic needs, and to gain a measure of safety from their abusive partner. Yet when women move off reserve, they often face issues of racism and discrimination from the dominant society. In addition, non-Aboriginal services may lack cultural sensitivity. Some of the barriers to services are systemic, while other barriers are created by individual staff members displaying discriminatory or racist attitudes.

Women who live in remote or rural Canadian communities and are abused by their partners tend to have few alternatives since shelters or other VAW services are more difficult to access, maintaining confidentiality or anonymity in small communities is more difficult, and there are often few options in terms of alternate housing (Novac, 2006; Tutty, Ogden, Wyllie, & Weaver-Dunlop, 2006; Whitzman, 2006). For example, if a woman lives in rural area and does not have her own car, the options available are even more limited because she cannot access services (Tutty, et al., 2006; Whitzman 2006).

The Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning (2007) identifies housing cost, scarcity of employment and scarcity of public housing as factors that contribute to narrowing the options for women living in the north who are abused. If women wish to leave an abusive partner, they must often weigh leaving against the possibility of becoming homeless. Because of the distances involved, women in the North must often leave their home communities and support systems if they wish to access formal services. Many women living in the North must fly in from their home communities to access the territorial shelter (see also Tutty, et al., 2007).

Yet, some territories have residential clauses regarding access to subsidized housing; women must have lived in the community for a minimum of six months in order to qualify. Thus, women who have come from smaller or more remote communities to access the shelter and other formal services do not meet the minimum requirements to apply for public housing. At that point, their choice is to try to find something they can afford in the private sector. Failing that, women can be faced with the dubious choices of becoming homeless or returning to their abusive partner. However, if they opt to return home, many women have to apply with the appropriate ministry to fly home. It is at the ministry's discretion whether the request is granted. In addition, Tutty and colleague's (2007) findings indicate that if women flee south in search of housing and/or increased safety from their abusive partners, the ministry will not aid women who then wish to return if they find the cultural shock of the south too great.

Immigrant and refugee women are more vulnerable if they are trying to deal with an abusive partner. Novac (2006) notes that Oxman-Martinex et al.'s 2002 study found that immigrant perpetrators were over-represented in Montreal domestic violence court cases; and in one-quarter of those cases, the victim did not speak either official language. Women who are new in the country also face institutional barriers based on their citizenship status (Ogden, 2003; Thurston et al., 2006). If a woman is sponsored by her

partner, she is barred from accessing language classes; she does not qualify for most social services.

Thurston and colleagues (2006) examined the issue of homelessness among immigrant women abused by intimate partners finding that the major causal factors for the women's homelessness were all related to systemic barriers. Immigration laws disqualify many women from accessing social services and income security (Thurston et al., 2006). A woman who was sponsored by her husband to come to Canada can only gain access to services if she can prove sponsorship breakdown. But "proving breakdown seems to be a difficult and confusing process" (Thurston et al., 2006, p. 28). Prior to 2002, until sponsorship breakdown can be proved, the sponsor is financially responsible for the woman for ten years. Since 2002, sponsors are financially responsible for their partners for three years.

Novac's 2006 literature review and Thurston and colleague's 2006 qualitative study concurred that a number of immigrant and refugee women return to abusive partners because they cannot earn a sufficient income to meet their basic needs, or access affordable housing. Thus, it is possible that an immigrant woman becomes homeless when she flees her abusive partner because her options are so limited. Because of the systemic barriers faced by newcomers to Canada, Thurston and colleagues suggest that advocacy is key if abused immigrant women are to secure housing. These authors also suggest that interagency collaboration could help address the individual needs of immigrant women who are abused; the issues they face are complex, they often face systemic barriers, thus interagency collaboration could help reduce some of these issues. They note that the Australian literature shows that such an approach tends to encourage earlier intervention and the crafting of solutions that are both long-term and sustainable.

### **Compounding Issues**

This section examines the compounding issues that affect women who are abused and homeless. As Neal (2004) highlights, homelessness in Canada is not simply a housing issue it is a multi-faceted problem related to conditions of impoverishment. In addition to affordable housing, changes are also needed to income support programs, to the National Child Benefit program, and to Employment Insurance programs. Morell-Bellai, Goering and Boydell (2000) concur, stating that, "government funds for non-profit housing must be restored and funding must be made available for retraining and adequate public benefits" (p. 601).

Importantly, cuts to the Canadian social safety net affect abused women in other ways, by making it more difficult to qualify for social assistance, or to find alternative housing, in particular. Across the country, women stay in VAW shelters longer because they cannot secure financial assistance or find affordable housing. Cuts to health and mental health services have led to a reported increase in residents with significant mental health and substance abuse problems. Few services in the community can assist shelter staff in addressing women's needs appropriately and women also have great difficulty finding and keeping accommodation after leaving the shelter. Other cuts to essential supports such as legal aid, child care and community counselling have seriously eroded the safety net of programs needed to assist women's freedom from violence (Chapman & Breitzkreuz, 1995; OAITH, 1996 cited in Du Mont & Miller, 2000).

While homeless men and women both experience severe poverty, lack of housing, and lack of employment, women are at a higher risk for poverty than men. As previously mentioned, the rates of poverty among adult women in Canada have increased over the past two decades, to the extent that almost 19% of adult Canadian women are impoverished (Neal, 2004). Women who are especially vulnerable to poverty include single mothers with low incomes, married mothers in poor families, and single women with low incomes (Neal, 2004).

O'Grady and Gaetz' (2004) study of Toronto street youth found that women under 45 were even more disadvantaged and vulnerable than men. Their findings indicate that even when young homeless men and women are engaged in similar economic activities, men are more able to earn money independently and to have greater control over their earnings than women. Homeless young men reported more satisfaction with their means of earning income than women, and young women are more likely to report experiences of abuse and humiliation as reasons for not liking their work. Further, the women were more likely to go without food for a whole day, and have less earning power in the informal street economy (with the possible exception of sex trade workers).

Intimate partner violence has also been reported to adversely affect women's abilities to maintain employment. In Browne, Salomon and Bassuk's 1999 longitudinal study of ethnically diverse, extremely poor women in the United States, those who had experienced violence from an intimate partner were significantly less likely to keep a job for at least 30 hours per week for six months or more than non-abused women. This association persisted even when controlling for other potentially confounding variables. Moe and Bell (2004) also reported from their qualitative research that experiences of battering prevented or disrupted American women's employment.

Many Canadian women rely on social assistance to sustain themselves and their children. Nationally, 27% of Canadian single mothers are dependent on income assistance (National Working Group on Women and Housing, 2006). However, across Canada, when the federal government began removing itself from social housing, most provinces also made spending cuts to social programs (Shapcott, 2002) and this trend has continued to the present day (Du Mont & Miller, 2000). For example, Bryant (2004) noted that in 1995 the Ontario government rescinded rent controls, placed a moratorium on social housing construction, and reduced social assistance by 22%. This 22% decrease in the social assistance rates was believed by some to contribute to a 45% increase in the number of homeless families (Begin, et al., 1999). Ontario Human Rights Commission (2008) recently completed a province wide consultation on rental housing and human rights. One of the overriding issues across the province is that "rates of public assistance and minimum wage have not kept pace with the average rents" (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008, p. 4).

The cuts to income support payments have damaged the Canadian social safety net. Most notably, across the country, income support payments do not meet the subsistence costs for food and shelter (Du Mont & Miller, 2000). Indeed, 2005 national statistics reveal that welfare incomes are less than two-thirds of the poverty line (NWG, 2006). Alberta had the dubious honour of offering the lowest income payments in the country; for example, a woman with one child received 48% of what one must make to meet the poverty line (National Working Group on Women and Housing, 2006, p. 3).

The Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses' (OAITH) 1996 study found cuts to social assistance as their primary reason women gave for returning to their abusive partners (cited in Du Mont & Miller, 2000). Further studies and reports in 2004 (Mosher Evans, Little, Morrow, Boulding, & VanderPlaats) and 2008 by OAITH found that these issues continue to plague women who are abused and often instrumental in their decision to return to abusive partners.

All of the participants in the Four Worlds Centre's for Development Learning (2007) study on homeless Northern women negatively viewed their interactions with Income Support:

The rules that guide these programs are punitive, onerous, and opaque. Waiting times are too long, and have to be restarted every time someone reapplies. Even when women do manage to qualify for support, the level of their benefits is not sufficient to cover basic living expenses. For example, food money often only lasts for two weeks (p. 12).

A report on abused women's experiences with the Ontario welfare system (Mosher, et al., 2004; see also Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008) suggests that inadequate social assistance creates significant barriers to women's abilities to flee abusive relationships and to achieve safety for themselves and their children. Similar to the Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning's (2007) findings, Mosher and colleagues found that many women were spending all, or almost all, of their monthly social assistance cheque on housing costs, and had little or nothing left for food, utility bills, house repairs, clothing, and transportation. Often women were living in inadequate or overcrowded housing.

Not surprisingly, income is a critical issue in a woman's ability to prevent homelessness. Without income, it is almost impossible for women to establish or maintain housing (Thurston et al., 2006). When women are struggling to survive on too little money, their problems cascade. When so much income has to go to rent, she has less money to spend on other items, such as food:

The only obvious difference to these women between a healthy and unhealthy choice is the price, and food with no nutritional value provides a greater quantity at a lesser cost. A poor diet inevitably leads to various health complications, which further hinders a woman's capacity. A woman often has many mouths to feed. She will go hungry herself to feed her children. The feelings of disempowerment experienced by these women when they continually fail to feed their children and themselves (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007, p. 18).

Mosher and colleagues suggest that inadequate welfare rates are a significant factor in women's decisions to remain in or return to abusive relationships. One of the recommendations of their report is to "increase benefit levels to reflect the actual costs of living, including realistic amounts for rent, nutritional food, utilities, telephone and transportation" (2004, p. 12).

Aboriginal women with Status also face jurisdictional issues when they are trying to access income support (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007). For



example, women who are fleeing their abusive partner and move communities lose their Band support in their home community but do not qualify for Band support in their new community. In addition when women move from one territory to another may not qualify for support unless the two territories have shared services agreements.

It seems that the United States is dealing with similar cuts to the income support. A 1998 estimate by Bassuk, Buckner, Perloff, and Bassuk suggested that families comprise 36.5% of the homeless population. Bufkin and Bray, (1998) proposed that homeless women with children comprise the homeless group most rapidly increasing. Page and Nooe (2002) noted that, compared to several years ago, homeless mothers with children are facing a new set of vulnerabilities as a result of restrictions on family welfare benefits. Only 55% of homeless families in their study received some form of social assistance.

The cuts to the Canada's income assistance create additional dilemmas for women who are parents. Canadian research shows that women's children are being apprehended if the women are homeless or are living in substandard housing. In 2001, Toronto child welfare statistics show that inadequate housing was the reason for temporary guardianship in one of every five cases (Shapcott, 2002). Whitzman's (2006) study in Haliburton, Kingston and Oshawa indicated that that the two major reasons that women hid their homelessness were to avoid child welfare involvement and to protect their children from teasing at school. Some study participants did, indeed, have their children taken into care when authorities learned that they were homeless. In 2008, the Ontario Human Rights Commission province-wide consultation noted that taking children into care because parents cannot access stable, affordable, safe housing is inconsistent with Canada's international obligations and recommendations with the United Nations.

Canada's cuts to the social safety net also mean that it is more difficult for women to access childcare. If women are going to be able to successfully rebuild their lives after leaving an abusive partner, they need to be able to access affordable, reliable childcare (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007). Again, Canada has been cited by the United Nations for its reluctance to report information regarding childcare. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2003) expressed concern that all levels of Canadian government except Quebec failed to report if available childcare met demand and was affordable.

Averitt's (2003) American research highlights that affordable, quality childcare is a primary need for homeless women with children if they are to exit from homelessness. Averitt reports "the lack of affordable child care resulted in the inability of the women to access social services necessary to get out of the shelters" (p. 91).

The final compounding issues discussed in this literature review are those related to health. Socioeconomic status is the most reliable predictor of one's health (Wasylishyn & Johnson, 1998). In turn, adequate housing is a key factor in one's physical and mental health (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2004; Wasylishyn & Johnson, 1998). "Given the links between domestic and sexual violence, poverty and homelessness, it is hardly surprising that impoverished women often speak of extreme physical and mental stresses associated with keeping their lives and their families' lives together" (Whitzman, 2006, p. 385).

Thurston and colleagues (2006) described the relationship between abuse, homelessness and health in their study:

Health both affected and was affected by various individual causes of homelessness. An example of how this cycle occurred follows: a woman is depressed and feeling chronic pain after years of family violence. She manages to leave the relationship and find some form of housing, however low income, lack of social support, and poor working conditions now negatively affect her health. Poor health status then begins to affect her ability to earn income, seek out support from friends or agencies, or reliably get to work and function well. These factors, income in particular, combine to jeopardize her housing status. Clearly there is an important interaction between family violence, health and many of the causes of homelessness (p. 29).

Understandably, women and children who are homeless live in tension, anxiety and fear (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007). “Having no fixed address means being exiled from the mainstream patterns of day-to-day life. Without a physical place to call ‘home’ in the social, psychological and emotional sense, the hour-to-hour struggle for physical survival replaces all other possible activities” (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2004, p. 3). Those who are homeless are burdened with the daily challenges of survival, and their energies are focused on trying to obtain basic necessities such as food and clothing. They also face violence, feelings of being social outcasts in society, loneliness, depression and fear (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007; Rokach, 2005; O’Grady & Gatez, 2004; Thurston et al., 2006; Whitzman, 2006). Unsurprisingly, these circumstances are also associated with poorer mental health (Whitzman, 2006).

American researchers Roll and colleague’s 1999 study findings indicated that homeless women were more depressed, anxious and reported other psychological distress than single homeless men, despite not having a greater likelihood of diagnosed mental illness or hospitalization for mental illness. The authors speculated that this may be because homeless women may be more distressed by their experiences of homelessness, or by the crisis that precipitated their homelessness. The homeless women were more likely than men to have been recently assaulted.

Up to 30% of homeless people in Canada have a mental health diagnosis, while 75% of homeless single women have such a diagnosis (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2004). American research by Bassuk and colleagues (1998) also found homeless solitary women at greater risk. Single homeless women were more likely than homeless mothers to have mental illnesses or substance abuse problems. Many of these solitary homeless women have children, but their children do not live with them. Approximately half of the homeless solitary women in their study have a dual diagnosis, such as a mental illness and a substance abuse problem, compared with 27% of the general population. Rates of psychiatric hospitalization among homeless single women in the U.S. are approximately 24% - far higher than the rates for homeless mothers or poorly housed families.

However, the findings of Bassuk et al. (1998) indicate that homeless mothers are more vulnerable than poorly-housed mothers. Bassuk and co-authors concluded that homeless mothers are more likely to have depression and substance abuse difficulties than low-income mothers on social assistance. Homeless mothers had higher lifetime

rates of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and substance abuse problems than the general population. The authors suggest that the high prevalence of psychiatric disorders among homeless and low income women is attributable to “multiple stressors associated with poverty” (p. 1564). They also propose that the high levels of violence experienced by these women may also account for the emotional difficulties experienced by the women: 83% had been physically or sexually abused at one point in their lives.

In addition, homeless mentally ill women seem to have little safety in their lives. Goodman et al. (1995) investigated the prevalence of physical and sexual assault among 99 episodically homeless mentally ill women in the United States. Their findings indicate that most of these women had experienced abuse both as children and as adults. Only three women in the study had no abuse experiences. Goodman and colleagues found that as adults, 87% of the women had been physically assaulted and 76% had been sexually assaulted. 80% of these women had experienced physical assaults by an intimate partner, while 40% had been sexually assaulted by their intimate partner. Over one-quarter (28%) of the women had been assaulted within the past month.

All of the women were specifically asked about their experiences of violence when they had been homeless (Goodman, et al., 1995). What became clear is that these women live in danger on the street. 34% of the women were sexually assaulted while they were homeless. 30% had been physically assaulted while they were homeless. The women reported that 62% of these assaults had occurred on the street, 31% in shelters, and 23% in an acquaintance’s home.

Canadian research by Thurston and colleagues (2006), and Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning (2007) indicate that the women’s feelings of depression, worthlessness and even suicidal ideation are responses to their circumstances. Thus it seems sensible to address the women’s basic needs, including that of housing. The Canadian Mental Health Association (2004) contends that people who are experiencing symptoms of mental health issues while homeless need to have their housing needs addressed first. It is only with stable living accommodation that one can reasonably be expected to successfully intervene/treat the person’s other presenting problems.

The high number of homeless people in Canada has also been attributed by some researchers to the era of post-deinstitutionalization of mental health services. As Stuart and Arboleda-Florez (2000) state, “critics view the high prevalence of mental illness among homeless populations as harsh testimony to a poorly functioning, fragmented, and limited community mental health treatment system” (p. 55). In their research, almost 75% of the homeless sample from Calgary reported some mental health symptoms, with depression and anxiety being the most commonly reported concerns (especially for women). One-third of the sample reported significant symptomatology – defined as four or more symptoms.

Stuart and Arboleda-Florez (2000) suggest that homeless people with a mental illness are the most vulnerable population amongst the homeless. They report greater hardships, report more life events prior to their homelessness, and more often face barriers to housing stability such as unemployment and low education levels. Forchuk Russell, Kingston-MacClure, Turner and Dill (2006) concur with this analysis, noting that Canadians diagnosed with psychiatric disorders are commonly discharged from

hospitals to shelters or the streets. The authors suggest that “a number of systems issues, including a decrease in available affordable housing, a decrease in psychiatric hospital beds, and a shortened length of psychiatric stay, have all contributed to this problem” (p. 306).

Novac (2006) notes that women who are poor and have a psychiatric diagnosis “are at very high risk of being abused and being homeless. Being abused and being homeless also constitute traumas that exacerbate, if not cause, mental health problems” (p. 17). In addition, homeless single women are more likely to experience major depressive illness than homeless single men (Cheung & Hwang, 2004).

Goodman et al. (1995) discussed their concern that U.S. mental health therapists tend to be reluctant to explore abuse histories of the serious mentally ill. They contend that it is difficult to design effective interventions if one doesn't link the women's experiences of abuse, homelessness and their mental health issues. Given that so many of the women are in danger in their daily lives, recognizing and talking about this could help service providers understand why the women behave and respond in certain ways - what may have seemed odd to the service provider could possibly be understood as reasonable reactions if one were to consider their life circumstances. Finally, these researchers contend that women's physical safety needs to be addressed before the women can be expected to make any gains in managing her mental health issues.

A related issue for Canadian women who may not have major mental health diagnoses but do wish to receive mental health services to help them deal with issues from being abused by an intimate partner often have difficulty finding services covered by public insurance (Novac, 2006). The respondents in Wasylshyn and Johnson's Canadian qualitative study (1998) stated that would be interested in seeking counselling to help them deal with past trauma, yet could not afford to do so. Whitzman (2006) suggests that integrated health services are important for homeless women. One idea is to have a geographic location that concentrates services. Rurally, the suggestion for such one-stop service is either to provide phone contact or mobile health units.

Canadian researchers have also found that being homeless creates physical health risks. Lack of sleep, poor nutrition, repeated injuries and the inability to maintain good personal hygiene are just some of the realities of homelessness that contribute to the overall poor health of the homeless (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007; Rokach, 2005; Thurston et al., 2006). Researchers have reported that homeless people have high rates of medical conditions, tuberculosis, HIV infection, mental illness, substance abuse problems and traumatic injuries (Cheung & Hwang, 2004; O'Grady & Gaetz, 2004) Research from other countries including the United States (Arangua, Anderson, & Gelberg, 2005) and Spain (Munoz, Crespo & Perez-Santos, 2005) report similar findings.

Research from the United States details the compounding issues of substance abuse for abused women. Salomon, Bassuk and Huntington (2002) concluded that intimate partner violence is a risk factor for substance abuse among poor, homeless women in the United States. Women with histories of intimate partner victimization were more than three times as likely to use illegal drugs as non-abused poor women. In this study, the history of partner violence strongly predicted new habits of drug use, rather

than the continuation of previous drug abuse (Salomon et al., 2002). An American longitudinal research study found that homeless women who had been physically abused in the previous 12 months were more likely to use crack cocaine at follow-up (Tucker, d'Amico, Wenzel, Golinelli, Elliott, & Williamson, 2005).

In turn, another U.S. research study found that individuals with recent or longstanding substance abuse problems reported more severe homeless histories (Booth, Sullivan, Koegel, & Burnam, 2002). Jainchill, Hawke and Yagelka (2000) reported similar findings among Americans - that homeless women in drug treatment centres were more likely than homeless men to have been sexually abused as children, and were more likely to have post-traumatic stress disorder.

O'Grady and Gaetz' 2004 Canadian research indicated that homeless individuals, especially women, are at an increased risk of criminal victimization and the health risks associated with such victimization, since their income-generating activities tend to occur in unsafe places, with dangerous people, and involve physical risks. Women may have to prostitute themselves in exchange for money or accommodation (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007; Tutty & Nixon, 2003). As highlighted by these authors, health problems become part of a vicious circle of homelessness, since health challenges make it difficult for homeless people to be able to attend work regularly. "Because of poor living conditions, homeless women are subject to higher rates of almost every disease and poor health condition as compared to the general female population" (Whitzman, 2006, p. 388). However, women who are homeless have difficulty accessing health care services (Shapcott, 2002). In addition women who are homeless frequently cannot afford to pay for medication (Whitzman, 2006).

A Canadian study conducted by Little, Shah, Vermeulen, Gorman, Dzendoletas, and Ray (2005) also linked homelessness with neonatal risks for children of homeless women. The risks included increased odds of preterm delivery, low infant birth weight, and the delivery of newborns small for their gestational age. For women who are both homeless and have problems with substance abuse, the neonatal risks are even higher.

Two American studies reported similar findings. More severe homeless histories are associated with preterm and low birth-weight babies, greater gynaecological problems, and more experiences of being raped (Arangua, Anderson, & Gelberg, 2005; Stein, Lu, & Gelberg, 2000). Surprisingly, in Arangua et al.'s 2005 study, homeless white women were the most vulnerable of the ethnic groups with respect to their health status. They were most likely to report three or more serious health problems than other racial groups, less likely to access birth control services, less likely to receive prenatal care, and more likely to report unmet health needs. On the other hand, another U.S. study conducted by Stein, et al. (2000) reported that African American women who were homeless had more preterm births than Caucasian women, and also had the highest numbers of low birth weight babies.

Canadians who are homeless also have significantly higher risks of premature death – especially young homeless women. Researchers have reported that the above array of health problems, combined with extreme poverty, have led to high mortality rates among homeless people (Cheung & Hwang, 2004). In Toronto, mortality rates among homeless women 18-44 years of age were reported to be 515 per 100,000; a rate on par

with homeless young men, and ten times higher than their counterparts in the general population. In seven cities across North America and Europe, the risk of death among homeless women 18-44 years of age was greater than young women in the general population by a factor of 4.6 to 31.2 (Cheung & Hwang, 2004). Normally young women have a much lower risk of dying than young men, especially for those of low socio-economic status. The most common causes of death among these younger women were HIV/AIDS and drug overdose. On the other hand, while older homeless women are not at the same level of risk of younger women, they are, in fact, much less likely to die than older homeless men (Cheung & Hwang, 2004).

Hecht and Coyle (2001) conducted research regarding American homeless older women (55 and above). Their findings indicate that homeless older women differ from homeless younger women in important ways, and they also differ significantly from homeless older men. In general, the older women tended to have higher incomes than the younger homeless, and did not cite domestic violence as reasons for their homelessness as frequently as the younger homeless population. They also do not report problems with drug abuse nearly as often.

However, there were no differences with respect to the frequency of alcohol abuse between the older women and their younger counterparts. The older women were less likely to report alcohol abuse than their male counterparts, but more likely to report a history of mental illness. The older homeless population had been homeless for a longer period of time than the younger homeless. Yet, the older homeless women had been homeless for a shorter period of time than homeless men. Older women's homelessness is more often precipitated by crises than for men; eviction was the most commonly reported cause of their homelessness. The older men were more likely to be chronically homeless (Hecht & Coyle, 2001).

In summary, although homeless women and abused women tend to be treated as separate and distinct populations, the literature suggests considerable overlaps in both their experiences and their needs, housing being a key consideration. The literature review also highlighted that Aboriginal women, immigrant women and women living in rural or remote communities face additional issues, such as discrimination and systemic barriers including access to fewer services. The compounding issues that homeless and abused women face include cuts to the Canadian social safety net which serves to create more barriers and further restrict the options available to women.

## **Chapter Two: Housing Options for Abused Women**

The next several chapters examine the housing options available for abused women including those commonly used in Canada such as emergency protection orders, emergency women's shelters, second stage shelters, and permanent housing through both the public and private sector. It also explores several novel models for housing abused Canadian women through the use of safe homes, interim housing, and third stage shelters. Finally this literature/internet review examines some models being used in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom intended to enhance women's security while they remain in their own home.

In many cases, the literature has not kept pace with the sector and the approaches different provinces/territories and countries are taking to house abused women. As such, some of the information in this document was from representatives of the provincial women's transition house associations or directly from the shelters utilizing various approaches.

The information regarding each housing option is subdivided into the following format: an overview of the option, safety issues, maximum stay length, quality of housing, emotional support, and access. These variables were selected based on the authors' long histories interviewing and working with abused women with respect to numerous issues including housing. The last variable, other issues, includes funding issues as well as any other factors considered pertinent to the option presented. A summary table of housing options is in Appendix 1.

### **Keeping Women Safely in their Homes: Protection Orders**

Protection orders, either emergency orders (EPOs) or permanent protection orders (in Alberta, Queen's Bench protection orders) were conceived as one strategy to keep the victims of intimate partners in their homes by requiring the perpetrator to leave. Developed for perpetrators who are at low risk of re-offending, an EPO has a number of provisions that could assist victims including stipulations to prohibit the respondent from contacting or communicating with the victim or others named in the order and from attending at or near the victim's residence. It is civil legislation, so the perpetrator will not face criminal charges or conviction, although breaching an order is a criminal offense. Restraining orders are another form of order that could be considered, however in Alberta there is a provision in the PAFVA orders that specifically relates to keeping victims in their homes.

The province of Alberta's *Protection Against Family Violence Act (PAFVA)* came into effect on June 1, 1999 and was revised in 2005. Similar to legislation adopted in other Canadian provinces, the intent is to protect family members from domestic violence by allowing a claimant to receive an emergency protection order (EPO) issued by a provincial court judge or justice of the peace, usually with the assistance of the police. An EPO must be reviewed by a Court of Queen's Bench justice within seven working days of the order being granted. A Queen's Bench protection order is a second type of protection order that a claimant can directly apply for at the Court of Queen's Bench. The orders are intended to complement other tools of the justice system, such as criminal

charges, restraining orders and peace bonds, to more effectively address and provide consequences for the serious nature of intimate partner violence.

Reviews of civil domestic violence legislation have taken place in Saskatchewan (Turner, 1995), Prince Edward Island (Bradford and Associates, 1998) the Yukon (Bala & Ringseis, 2002) and Alberta (Tutty, Koshan, Jesso & Nixon, 2005). In the PEI review, the civil legislation was viewed as an important tool and the flexibility of the Act was praised, as was the minimal paperwork. Also, since the process is expeditious, it reportedly may be more appealing to some victims of domestic violence, particularly those who do not want their partners charged. The use of this legislation was continually referred to as a beneficial first step toward a victim regaining control and moving away from their abusive partners. Similarly, in the Saskatchewan review (1999), participants agreed that the legislation helps victims of domestic violence by providing immediate protection and allows the victims to remain in the family home and community. Additionally, the legislation conveys the message that domestic violence is a serious concern and will be treated as such by the criminal justice system.

Victims are reportedly highly supportive of this legislation in all jurisdictions that have enacted civil domestic violence legislation and completed evaluations. Victims reportedly appreciate the immediacy of the protection afforded using this legislation as well as conditions such as exclusive occupation of their home and temporary custody of their children (The Ad Hoc Federal-Provincial-Territorial Working Group Reviewing Spousal Abuse Policies and Legislation, 2003).

Legislative reviews suggest that more police training is needed to facilitate the police becoming more aware of the civil legislation and to suggest it to victims of domestic violence where applicable. They also support developing a common understanding among justice personnel of when it is most appropriate to use the legislation. Finally, more public education is needed to inform victims of this legislation (The Ad Hoc Federal-Provincial-Territorial Working Group Reviewing Spousal Abuse Policies and Legislation 2003).

Over the past twenty years, a number of studies have evaluated civil protection orders. Although many took place in the United States, their results can be seen as applicable to the Canadian context given the relatively few evaluations in this country. Of the sixteen studies, twelve support the effectiveness of protection orders (Carlson, Harris & Holden, 1999; Kaci, 1994; Keilitz, Hannaford & Efke, 1997; Ptacek, 1999; Holt, Kernic, Lumley, Wolf & Rivara, 2002; Holt, Kernic, Wolf & Rivara, 2003; Kinports & Fischer, 1993; Fischer and Rose, 1995; Johnson, Luna & Stein, 2003; Gist, McFarlane, Malecha, Willson, Watson, Fredland, Schultz, Walsh, Hall & Smith, 2001; McFarlane, Malecha, Gist, Watson, Batten, Hall & Smith, 2004; Humphreys & Thiara, 2003).

The results of three studies suggest that civil protection orders are not generally effective (Harrell & Smith, 1996; Klein, 1992; Adhikari, Reinhard & Johnson, 1993) and one reported mixed results (Grau, Fagan & Wexler, 1985). Several of these studies will be presented in more detail suggesting on the whole that women experience less domestic violence with protection orders in place, based upon self reports, police reports, and reports from key stakeholders.



**Safety:** A major intent of emergency protection orders is to keep women safe and housed in their own homes. Do the orders maintain this safety? If the perpetrator has a history of ignoring justice responses (i.e. breaching restraining orders) then an emergency protection order is probably not a good solution for his partner. However, do emergency protection orders work for lower risk offenders? While there are, of course, no guarantees, some research supports EPOs as a tool that maintains safety for some women.

Holt et al. (2002) studied the extent to which obtaining a protection order was associated with subsequent police-reported intimate partner violence in a retrospective cohort study of 2691 adult women in Seattle, Washington. Similar to Alberta, women in Washington first apply for a temporary protection order, which is granted by a judge for two weeks before a court review that can result in a longer term protection order that can last up to a year or more. “Permanent” protection orders were associated with an 80% reduction in police-reported intimate partner violence in the 12 months after an initial incident. Women with permanent protection orders were less likely than those without orders to be physically abused. Permanent, but not temporary protection orders are associated with a significant decrease in risk of police reported violence against women by their male intimate partners.

Several additional studies have documented that once protection orders are obtained, further violence is decreased. Kaci (1994) surveyed 137 individuals by mail one and four months following temporary or permanent protection orders. Even though the response rate was low (26% at 1 month and 10% at 4 months), 87% of the women at one month and 100% at four months reported that the protection order helped stop further abuse. Similarly, Ptacek (1999) interviewed 40 women in two different courts who were seeking protection orders. 86% of the women reported that the abuse either stopped or was reduced as a result of the order. Another study of 210 women who obtained protection orders reported a 66% decrease in police contact when compared to reports of physical assaults two years prior compared to two years after the protection order was obtained (Carlson, et al., 1999).

In a descriptive longitudinal study, Gist et al. (2001) compared 180 women who were victims of intimate partner violence; 90 of whom applied for a protection order and 90 of whom were pursuing assault charges. Measures of the type, frequency and severity of violence occurred at an initial interview, one month and six months and for women seeking a protection order. A final measure was also taken at one year and for women seeking charges, two years after the initial visit. Standardized measures used included *Severity of Violence Against Women Scale (SVAWS)*, *Stalking Victimization Survey (SVS)*, *Danger Assessment Scale (DAS)*. The results indicated that both groups of women reported lower levels of intimate partner violence for up to two years after seeking assistance. However, those women who qualified for but did not receive a protection order reported significantly more threats of abuse and physical assault at six months compared to those who received a protection order.

In Australia, a major domestic violence focus has been using exclusion orders to force the perpetrator to leave the family home (Office for Women, n.d.). This focus has come out of the view that women and children should not be forced to leave the family home in order to be safe and also out of “the difficulty and dislocation in establishing affordable and appropriate housing” (Office for Women, n.d., p. 2).

**Enforcing Protection Orders:** One safety concern is whether EPO breaches are addressed by the police (as mentioned, breaching an EPO is a criminal offence). In a Canadian study, Rigakos (1997) examined the enforcement practices of police officers when responding to breaches of civil restraining orders and peace bonds. Questionnaires were administered to 45 police officers from British Columbia and focused on how they have reacted to peace bonds and restraining orders in the past; factors that encourage or discourage them to arrest for breaches of these protective orders; and their general perceptions of the effectiveness of protective court orders. An arrest ensued in only 21% of the breaches of a civil restraining order (n = 19) and 35% of breached peace bonds (n = 29).

Civil restraining orders were less likely to be enforced than criminal court orders; however, both orders rarely resulted in arrests when breached. More officers recommended that women obtain a civil restraining order (62%) than a peace bond (53%), which may be reflective of the view that domestic violence is a private and civil family matter. The most significant factor for not arresting for either peace bonds or restraining order breaches is when police believe that the claimant originally allowed the offender into the residence. Cases in which arrests occurred for breaches of protective court orders involved signs of forced entry, the abuser was a potentially violent offender, or signs of a struggle (a woman's plea to act ranked 6th out of the 12 situational variables inciting the police to enforce the order). Further, the police were less inclined to arrest if they believed that the victim was intoxicated or unlikely to appear in court. This discretion in addressing breached civil orders suggests that the police do not fully understand the dynamics of domestic violence and that women continue to be blamed for their abusive partner's actions. Thus abusive partner are not held accountable for domestic abuse related crimes unless there are other criminal code violations.

Johnson et al.'s (2003) study of orders of protection examined the effectiveness and the nature of the police response to reported violations. Twenty-one of 37 respondents (57%) expressed negative comments about how the police responded suggesting, for example, that the police believe that claimants use the orders to harass former partners. The researchers concluded that even with enhanced criminal justice response to domestic violence, major issues with enforcing the orders in a fair and consistent manner continue.

**Maximum Stay Length:** Although this could be considered as not applicable because women are in their own homes, protection orders are time limited, typically for a year.

**Quality of Housing:** Presumably staying safely in one's own residence has numerous advantages for both mother and children.

**Emotional Support:** No support services have been linked to EPOs across any of the jurisdictions reviewed. The addition of support services could be considered as victims may feel quite vulnerable with respect to whether they will remain safe. Advocates could assist women in making safety plans in the event that they decide to leave the family home.

**Access:** Relevant to this examination of housing, in a review of two and a half years of EPO's in Alberta (Tutty, et al., 2005), 64% of applications were granted exclusive occupation of the residence (508 of 796). After the protection order became a Queen's Bench order, 58.3% (234 of 384) continued to be granted exclusive occupation of the residence.

Relatively few EPO's were accessed in the 2.5-year period (908 applications for the entire province) raising questions about access. Several women interviewed for the Tutty et al. study had their requests for EPOs turned down by police officers.

Martz and Sarauer's 2000 qualitative study of women experiencing intimate partner abuse in east central Saskatchewan found that only 2 of 19 survivors were able to access Emergency Intervention Orders to remove their abusive partner from the family home. The other women seemed to believe that, in their circumstances, such an order was not helpful because they lived in remote rural locations and would have no protection should their partner violate the order.

### **Sheltering Women**

The terminology to identify different types of shelters varies across the county. Thus, for the purposes of this review, the terms *shelter*, *women's shelter*, and *VAW shelter* will refer to the short-term emergency shelters designed to temporarily safely house and provide services of women fleeing an abusive partner. *Homeless shelter* will be the term used to refer to those shelters designed to provide short-term housing to women (and men) who are homeless. *Second stage shelters* will refer to those programs that offer abused women the option of staying in their own apartment but also provide additional support services. These programs are time limited and help women transition into the community.

The term *third stage shelter* refers to another alternative available to women who have been abused, also offering time limited programs for housing and support. Third stage is generally available to women after they have completed a second stage program but still need housing and some support in the community.

In Canada, the number of shelters offering residential services (including safe homes, general shelters serving women, women's emergency shelters and second stage housing) for abused women has risen from 470 in 1998, to 543 in 2004, to 553 in 2006 (Statistics Canada 2007a).

The Transition House survey, conducted in 2003/2004 by Statistics Canada (2005b), was sent to 543 shelters known to provide residential services for abused women (with 473 completed surveys returned). It should be noted that not all of the shelters provide services exclusively to abused women, but also serve homeless women and those facing other difficulties. In the year ending March 31, 2004, 95,326 individuals (58,486 women and 36,840 dependent children) were admitted to these shelters. While a minority of these simply needed housing, most (over 82%) were leaving abusive partners. This number was slightly down from previous years.

A new trend in the 2003/2004 Transition House Survey is that one-fifth of shelters (including general emergency and women's emergency shelters) accommodate those with problems other than or in addition to abuse by an intimate partner. Several newer types of

shelters include safe home networks, rural prevention centres to address intimate partner violence in Alberta and Ontario's Family Violence Resource Centres, many of which were developed for rural communities where a full shelter would be impractical from a resource perspective. About 7% of the shelters were on reserve and less than half of these were emergency shelters.

### **VAW Emergency Shelters**

In Canada, women's emergency shelter organizations have taken the lead in providing not only residential care for women and children fleeing abusive partners, but advocacy and counselling for both shelter residents as well as women in the community dealing with an abusive partner and children who are witnessing this abusive behaviour against their mothers. Individual emergency shelters in urban centres serve 1000 to 1500 women and children each year, whereas in rural areas the numbers are slightly fewer (Statistics Canada, 2007a).

**Safety:** Most shelters have enhanced security measures to protect women and children from the women's abusive partners. Women within shelters are safe, but, notably, only a relatively small proportion of abused women access shelters. Additionally, the proportion of women able to access shelters is declining. The 1993 Violence against Women survey reported that only 13% of abused women had used shelters (Rodgers, 1994). The 1999 General Social Survey reported that 11% of abused women had used shelters in some manner. The 2004 General Social Survey (Statistics Canada, 2005a) reported that only 11% of women who had experienced spousal violence in the past five years had contacted a shelter, with about 6-8% actually using a residential service.

**Maximum Stay Length:** The majority of the 473 Canadian shelters that completed the 2003/2004 Transition Home survey are "first-stage" transition homes, offering shelter for an average of three weeks. However, the maximum allowable stay seems to be lengthening. More recent information indicates that how long women can stay in shelter varies across Canada, ranging from the shortest at 21 days, to a year, and even one territory (Nunavut) has no maximum. Surprisingly, Alberta has the shortest maximum lengths of stay in the country since both non-reserve and on reserve shelters have considered 21-days as the maximum. How provinces and territories grant extensions to families also varies across the country. In Alberta, shelter executive directors have the discretion to extend a family's stay.

Tutty and colleague's interviews with key Canadian stakeholders in 2007 indicated that 30 days was the most common maximum length of stay. But the key informants reported a wide range, noting that in some provinces/territories women may stay in a VAW shelter for six months and, in others, up to a year. One respondent commented:

*Women don't leave our VAW shelter unless they have safe, affordable housing - unless she's been a risk factor to the other residents. Women can be funded in a shelter for up to a year; we have global funding which means that we get money each year. If we have a chicken pox quarantine and we can't take anybody in and our numbers go down, we still get the same amount of funding. Women stay for a day or a year—it is still the same amount of funding. (Tutty, et al., 2007, p.50.)*

Shelters specializing in work with older women often have longer maximum stays. For example, Ama House in Whiterock, BC allows women to stay for six months. They offer the longer stay in recognition that it can be even more difficult for older women to find affordable, safe, permanent housing. Similar to other shelters, it is communal living, but each woman has her own room. In contrast, Rotary Kerby Centre shelter in Calgary offers women (and men) aged 50 to 55 years a three week maximum with the possibility of a day-to-day extension for another three weeks. Women over 55 at Kerby Centre face the same time lines: a three week maximum with a possibility of extension for another three weeks.

The key stakeholder respondents from across Canada in the Tutty, et al. national study (2007) noted that women are staying longer in shelters as access to housing becomes increasingly difficult for women. In this study, provincial transition house associations were contacted, and their representatives expressed the same concerns. Also consistent with the literature, was the concern that women are returning to their abusive partners because no affordable long-term housing is available

Internationally, the length of stay in emergency is somewhat longer than what is common in Canada. In the United States, the average length of stay at emergency shelter is 60 days (Melbin, et al, 2003). In Israel, at least one shelter reported an average length of stay of three six months (Itzhaky & Ben Porat, 2005), more similar to the length of stay in second-stage shelters.

**Quality of Housing:** The quality of shelter accommodations varies across the country. Some shelters are converted houses that are now aging and need upgrades; others are relatively new and were designed to meet the needs of sheltering abused women. Newer buildings are more likely to address accessibility issues for women with disabilities. This can be difficult to “add-into” older converted houses (Tutty, 1999).

**Emotional Support:** Shelter programs have expanded over time. Providing secure accommodation remains their most important purpose, but they also offer counselling, linkages to community agencies, crisis telephone lines, follow-up support for former residents (Tutty, 1996), outreach for women who may never come into the shelter and training for professionals (Davis, Hagen, & Early, 1994; Johnson, Crowley, & Sigler, 1992). Treatment for children exposed to intimate partner abuse is now common, as are prevention programs and even programs to treat abusive partners.

VAW shelters offer emotional support and advocacy for their clients. According to the 1999/2000 Transition Home Survey, most Canadian shelters offer in-house short term counselling (90%), advocacy (89%) and specialized services for older women (84%). In the 2005/2006 survey most shelters offered safety planning (92%), in-house short term counselling (91%), advocacy (90%), transportation and accompaniment (90%), and housing referrals (86%). Most also offered services to women who were not residents: crisis phone lines (68%), safety planning (66%), short-term counselling (63%), and advocacy (63%) (Statistics Canada, 2007a).

Most shelters also offer follow-up or outreach services to women. The authors of several studies on follow-up and advocacy services (Sullivan & Bybee, 1999; Tutty, 1993; 1996; Tutty & Rothery, 2002) all support extending services to abused women beyond their shelter residency. Without such support abused women may be especially

vulnerable to becoming homeless (Breton & Bunston, 1992). The 2005/2006 Transition Home Survey (Statistics Canada, 2007a) reported that 496 facilities provided outreach workers for a national average of 48 hours a week; in Alberta, outreach averaged 55 hours a week. Outreach workers provided information to victims, provided support and counselling to clients, court accompaniment, and participated in providing services to drop-in centres. In Manitoba, shelters incorporate outreach services to women in public housing, thereby ensuring they have support as they transition back into the community.

Canadian evaluations support the importance of shelters and shelter programs (Tutty, 2006; Grasley, Richardson, & Harris, 2000; Tutty & Rothery, 2002; Rothery, Tutty, & Weaver, 1999; Tutty, Weaver, & Rothery., 1999; Tutty, Rothery, Cox, & Richardson, 1995; Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 1994). Most of these used exploratory or descriptive research designs. Many included qualitative components that allowed women to present their own perceptions. In addition, in surveys, abused women have rated shelters as their most effective source of help, more important than traditional service agencies (Bowker & Maurer, 1985; Gordon, 1996). It is clear that the safety and support offered to residents have helped many to leave abusive partners (Dziegielewski, Resnick, & Krause, 1996; Orava, McLeod & Sharpe, 1996; Tutty, et al., 1999).

International researchers have evaluated shelter services offered in their countries. A recent study in an Israeli shelter by Itzhaky & Ben Porat (2005) found significant improvements from week one to three months later on women's self-esteem, empowerment (both personal, with professionals and with services), well-being (satisfaction with life & hope).

American surveys of abused women have rated shelters and support groups as among the most effective help sources (Gordon, 1996). However, Wathan and MacMillan's 2003 article reviewing evidence about interventions for violence against women states that, "no high-quality evidence exists to evaluate the effectiveness of shelter to reduce violence" (p. 589), meaning that the majority of the studies that they reviewed were not randomized clinical tests. However, using research methods that randomly assign women to research conditions such as shelter or no-shelter condition is simply not possible, nor would it be ethical.

Wathan and MacMillan note that studies conducted by Sullivan and colleagues did use a random clinical trial design, randomly assigning shelter residents to either receive advocacy and counselling post-shelter, providing strong evidence for their efficacy. These series of studies identified that these services had a significant impact on the women's ability to access resources, better social supports and greater quality of life (Sullivan & Davidson, 1991; Sullivan, Tan, Basta, Rumptz, & Davidson, 1992). Ultimately, those receiving advocacy and counselling did experience less physical violence (but not psychological abuse) compared to women who did not receive the services both after the intervention and two years later.

However, conceptualising the reduction of violence as the main outcome variable is questionable since women have little control over being the recipient of violence. They may leave to go to a shelter and may remain safe while in residence, but once they leave, it is the responsibility of the abuser to stop the violence. Given that women have little control of this, using violence reduction as an outcome seems rather like blaming the victim.

Many Canadian VAW shelters also offer services to children. The 1999/2000 Transition Home Survey found that more than two-thirds of the children residing in shelters were offered individual counselling (69%) or group intervention (54%). Nationally, the 2005/2006 Transition Home Survey reported that the in-house services offered to children included: indoor recreation spaces (78%), outdoor recreation spaces (81%), group counselling or support (56%), individual counselling (67%), programs for child witnesses or victims of abuse (52%). In Alberta, the in-house services offered to children included: indoor recreation space (83%), outdoor recreation space (79%), group counselling (52%), individual counselling (50%), babysitting services (50%), and culturally sensitive services for Aboriginal children (48%)

**Access:** Becoming a resident in a shelter can be difficult, particularly in rural and northern communities where women have to travel long distances to reach a shelter. In some provinces or territories the police will take women to shelter if they don't have pending calls; others use volunteer pools to transport women. However, there are concerns about insurance coverage and liability should the driver have an accident or a particularly aggressive partner follow the fleeing woman (Tutty, et al., 2006). Access becomes even more difficulty when women have to be flown to the nearest shelter (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007; Tutty, et al., 2007).

Women may not be able to access a shelter because it is full. Shelters cannot serve all that come to their doors, often sending away as many women as they take in or more. In 2002, a one-day Canadian women's shelter count indicated that close to one quarter (23.9%) of the (115 of 482) participating shelters had turned women and children away that day because they were full (SPR Associates, cited in Novac, 2006). Further, statistics from three Alberta shelters for April 1999 through March 2000, a total of 913 women were admitted, but 6668 women were not (Carolyn Goard, personal communication) a ratio of about 1:7. Being turned away seems to be of particular concern for women living in urban areas.

**Other Issues:** Funding has been a perennial problem for transition houses (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007; MacLeod, 1989; Tutty, 2006; Vis-à-vis, 1989) Non-reserve shelters tend to funded provincially, on reserve shelters are federally funded. In Tutty's 1999 study, funding has been the number one challenge mentioned in interviews with provincial shelter association coordinators. The respondents noted that across federal and provincial governments virtually all social agency funding has been cut, so shelters are not alone in adapting to down-sizing.

However, since shelter budgets have never been large, even small reductions cut to the bone. Wages have traditionally been low: in some provinces and territories front-line worker's pay has been described as "desperately low". (Tutty, 2006) Over the years, provincial funding models have typically offered some increased wages, but seem based on a view of shelter workers as semi-skilled. It is impossible to compare wage levels across regions, because economic conditions vary widely and workers are not necessarily paid for regular work-week hours. Furthermore, benefits are not necessarily included in these packages. As such, the continuing dedication and hard-work of shelter staff, despite relatively low wages, is commendable.

Many provinces fund only the internal house activities, despite the fact that shelters extend support to abused women beyond their stay and provide many services to non-residents (Tutty, 2006). The funding that most shelters receive from their provincial/territorial governments has never covered the total costs of providing shelter. Shelters are typically reimbursed for 65 to 80% of their costs, with the rest made up from fund-raising activities. Poorer provinces and territories, in particular, have fewer resources to fund shelters, and the expectation that the communities will contribute a portion further creates difficulties for poorer regions and rural/northern regions that have a much smaller population base.

Even so, most shelters continue to “do it all” by working within the constraints of their current budgets. For example, several creative programs have been funded by paying the night staff less money by allowing them to sleep, giving staff pagers or temporarily closing down beds. These are controversial decisions, but are typically made only after other avenues for additional funding have been exhausted. The current funding model leaves shelters in some provinces with little flexibility, since they are already functioning with minimal services. Most shelter directors and boards spend a considerable amount of time applying for grant money and conducting community fund-raisers.

The lack of funding to women’s shelters is a severe enough problem that it has received international attention. In 2003, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations recommended that all levels of government in Canada increase “its efforts to combat violence against women and girls and increase its funding for women’s crisis centres and shelters in order to address the needs of women victims of violence” (p. 8).

The provincial departments responsible for funding shelters vary and include Health, Social Services, and Children’s Services. In many provinces and at the federal level, other ministries also offer services of relevance to woman abuse. Each has a mandate much broader than solely providing safety to abused women. In the realm of other programs to address woman abuse, these ministries are typically responsible for services to a wide range of members of the public including abused children, victims of sexual assault, and those with mental health or substance abuse issues. Most also have the mandate to promote public awareness and to fund prevention programs. From the governmental point of view, while they are committed to protecting abused women, they have a host of other funding responsibilities.

With respect to the cost-effectiveness of shelters, the Project Haven evaluation (1994a) calculated that three to four times the number of non-residents were provided services compared to shelter residents each day, and at a small portion of the cost of a shelter stay. When such figures are factored into discussions about cost, concerns about funding shelters seem less dramatic. For women who do not utilize shelters at all, simply knowing that the facility exists provides them with information about abuse and the sense that they can choose to use the service if needed.

## **Second Stage Shelters**

Second stage shelters provide women who are leaving their abusive partners with a transitional step between the short-term measures of a VAW shelter and living independently. Generally, in second stage shelters, women live with their children in their



own apartment; but the units have enhanced security measures to address the families' safety needs as well as programs, services and/or supports (Tutty, et al., 2007). Thus, by providing increased safety measures, and emotional support for women who needed additional support or were dealing with more dangerous/obsessed partners, women were able to more successfully re-establish in their lives in the community (Du Mont & Miller, 2000; Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007). Second stage shelters in the United States also have the same conception of purpose (Correia & Melbin, 2005).

**Safety:** As already mentioned, second stage shelters in Canada generally have enhanced security measures to address the woman's safety needs. These features can be quite critical for women's survival since women are at greatest risk of being stalked, assaulted or murdered by their abusive partners when they make the decision to permanently leave (Du Mont & Miller, 2000). For example, when women leave their abusive partners, they are an estimated six times more likely to be murdered by these men (Statistics Canada, 1998).

Some second stage shelter programs retain apartment leases and utilities in the program's name in order to make it more difficult for the abusive partner to find the woman (MacFarlane & de Guerre, 2008).

**Maximum Stay Length:** Allowed lengths of stay in second stage shelters vary across the country but range from six months to eighteen months, with a year being the most common option (Tutty, et al., 2007; 2003/2004 Transition Home Survey in Statistics Canada, 2007a). However, in Alberta, most second stage shelters only allow women to stay for six months. Although the length of stay is longer than in emergency shelters (typically 6 months to one year), this is still a relatively short time-period in which to reside in one facility and at the end of their tenure women and their children must still seek appropriate accommodation in the community.

In the United States, most second stage shelters allow women to stay for a maximum of 12-24 months (Correia & Melbin, 2005; Melbin, et al., 2003). Correia and Melbin note that maximum stay lengths tend to be determined by funders and not by the women's needs.

**Quality of Housing:** The literature search found no information regarding the quality of second stage housing in Canada. In the United States, some second stage housing exists in one building where all the residents are part of the program; others are not in a designated building, the housing units are scattered, with the unifying feature being the programming offered (Correia & Melbin, 2005).

**Emotional Support:** With funding cuts, many provinces and territories are struggling to provide services for women in second stage shelters. For example, in Saskatchewan second stage shelters aren't funded. Thus, various strategies have been instated by second stage shelters to provide services to their clients. In most cases, local VAW shelters are covering by providing at least partial staffing in-house or by using their outreach staff; these workers are putting in extra time to support the women in second stage.

In Canada, several evaluations have been conducted on second stage shelters. Russell (1990) reviewed evaluations on four second stage shelters including the YWCA

Munroe House in Vancouver (Barnsley, Jacobson, McIntosh, & Wintemute, 1980), Safe Choice in Vancouver (Russell, Forcier & Charles, 1987), Discovery House in Calgary (McDonald, Chisholm, Peressini & Smillie, 1986), and Women in Second Stage Housing (WISH) (Scyner & McGregor, 1988). Although the results of the four diverse studies are not directly comparable, all of the programs asked about consumer satisfaction. Individual counselling was seen as helpful for both the women and their children.

Russell (1990) reported that residents commonly valued individual counselling provided to them and their children – though, not surprisingly, needs vary and not all women require the same types or levels of help. Russell concluded that “given the prevalence of psychological concerns among women in shelter, reluctance to provide counselling services can be viewed as counterproductive and even dangerous” (p. 26). Many of the difficulties that the women reported in these studies are the expected tensions associated with communal living, including conflicts over children’s behaviour and varying childcare practices. In Calgary, McDonald (1989) reported that women had “more internal control and more social independence at six month follow-up compared to what they experienced when they entered the house” (McDonald, 1989, p.122).

An evaluation of 68 second-stage shelters of the CMHC Canadian Next Step Program (SPR Associates, 1997) concluded that second stage housing is a critical factor in women deciding not to return to abusive partners. In general, women who had stayed in the second-stage facilities were highly satisfied compared to those who had accessed other assisted housing options. As one would expect, finding affordable permanent housing on leaving second-stage facilities was a major concern for the women in the study.

MacFarlane’s 2007’s results indicate that women in Calgary second stage shelters believed that the most helpful services to them are/or would include “assistance with childcare, education and training, access to recreational services, computer access, instrumental and emotional support” (cited in MacFarlane & de Guerre, 2008 p. 19). However, MacFarlane and de Guerre note that childcare is difficult for women to access in Calgary, thus they recommended that second stage shelters consider establishing in-house childcare services for their residents.

While education and training are difficult for any single agency to establish, MacFarlane and de Guerre (2008) recommend that second stage shelters establish partnerships with training institutes that can educate women for skilled work that would not only offer them a living wage upon hiring but be sustainable and offer room for advancement. To support women in education or training, these authors’ also recommend that second stage shelters have computers available to both residents and children. In addition to offering the women formal support services, MacFarlane and de Guerre encourage and support women and children’s attempts to become involved with the community.

In the United States, Correia and Melbin (2005) conducted phone interviews with 12 second stage shelters across the U.S. regarding the programming they offered residents. Since outcomes and effectiveness measures varied so widely between the various programs, the authors did not develop a list of best practices. However, they did note the vast range of services from, “childcare, child development programs, financial assistance, clinical therapy, and counselling in life planning and job development” (p. 3).

Some offer play therapy for children and support groups for teens. Other programming included: support groups for domestic violence, substance abuse, and/or sexual assault; family therapy; academic tutoring; civil liberty advocacy; accompaniment to appointments. In many programs, the former residents can access follow-up services with workers for six months to two years after they have left the second stage shelter (Correia & Melbin, 2005).

Some U.S. second stage shelters are exploring innovative approaches to house women who have traditionally had difficulty finding housing (Correia, 1999). For example, one second stage shelter in Massachusetts serves women with multiple needs including abuse, substance abuse and mental health. These women may or may not have children with them. For women with children, a parent child program offers a parenting classes and art therapy for children. Other second stage shelters working with women with multiple needs decided to address the difficulty women had in finding permanent, safe, affordable housing in their areas by developing some of their own.

Finally, second stage housing is still a relatively short term solution; thus it can be helpful to recognize that many families will require financial support to make the transition into permanent housing. Canada Mortgage and Housing's Corporation's 2004 report indicated that few studies have conducted long term follow-up evaluations of women's housing stability after they have left second stage programs. Yet, the CMHC findings indicated that post-program residents tended to maintain housing if they were able to access permanent subsidized housing. The other predictor of success was the availability of services to support the family as they transitioned back into the wider community.

**Access:** Across Canada, access to second stage housing appears limited for most women and children. In Tutty and colleague's 2007 study, the key community stakeholders from across Canada perceived a relative gap in the availability of second stage housing, commenting that there are not sufficient numbers of second stage shelters in their province or territory. Three provinces/territories have no second stage shelters (see also Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007).

Even if a woman lives in a province that has second stage shelters, they are fewer in number than emergency shelters and typically house fewer residents. With the limited access, some second stage shelters screen potential clients, taking those women whose safety is at greatest risk from their abusive partners. In some provinces, only women who were first in a VAW shelter can access a second stage shelter.

Proportionately, the United States offers more transitional housing; every state has at least one second stage shelter (Melbin, et al., 2003). One of the factors influencing this difference may be that federal funding has continued to support existing services and build new units (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2004).

**Other Issues:** If one examines the history of second stage housing in Canada, it was originally a fairly strong service (Du Mont & Miller, 2000). However, across Canada, funding was cut so that now most second stage shelters do not receive core funding from their home province/territory (Du Mont & Miller, 2000; Tutty, et al., 2007). Mosher and colleagues (2004) recommend the availability of more second stage shelters, considering the importance of both the physical safety offered by the second stage

shelter, as well as the emotional support while women rebuild their lives. However, without core funding, this might be a difficult goal to achieve.

How each second stage shelter is funded varies. In three provinces, the provincial government provincial governments do provide some funding: the housing department funds the actual structure, while the VAW departments fund programming. Two provincially funded pilot projects are running in Alberta. Yet, funding for second stage shelters in other provinces/territories has no or only minimal government support. For example, in Saskatchewan, second stage shelters aren't funded. Yet one respondent noted that funding is changing to some degree. The federal government has provided some finances through their homelessness initiative to provide money for a building, for the physical space, but no funding for staff. Some second stage shelters on reserves receive a combination of provincial and federal funding, while others rely completely on federal funding (Tutty, et al., 2007).

In most provinces, second stage shelter providers must be creative to keep their shelters operating. Aurora House in Manitoba is primarily a women's shelter, but also operates a three unit second stage apartment; the rental income supports the shelter. The purchase and renovation was financed through Canada Housing and Mortgage Corporation. The shelter staff provide counselling and support to the families in the second stage shelter.

Similar to Canadian second stage shelters, U.S. second stage shelters tend to be collaborations between funders that provide housing and housing subsidies, and key community partners that provide the programming (Correia & Melbin, 2005). Correia and Melbin point out that, for long-term sustainability, most second stage shelters have separate funding sources to address the various needs of the shelter. Capital costs are those that apply to acquiring the physical building itself or to the individual units. These are usually one-time costs. Operating costs are those required to cover expenses related to mortgage, utilities, insurance etc. And a program budget covers the costs for services such as staff.

In Canada, most second stage programs receive rent payments from their clients. For example, in Calgary, second stage shelters charge residents the same rent as those who qualify for subsidized housing, which tends to be 30% of one's gross income. The funding dilemma is that while they collect some rent money from the tenants, these fees do not cover their operational costs (MacFarlane & de Guerre, 2008).

Second stage housing in the United States also charges subsidized rental rates to their clients (Melbin, et al., 2003). How rent payments are handled vary. Some second stage units have one flat rate, irrespective of women's actual income; however, the most common approach is to take a 30% of her income using U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) guidelines (Correia & Melbin, 2005). Some second stage programs use 'income disregards' to determine the resident's income. "In this case, programs will subtract certain daily living costs from a participant's monthly income, such as transportation or childcare costs. The monthly rent required by the program is then a percentage of this lesser income" (Correia & Melbin, 2005, p. 10).

Correia and Melbin (2005) note that some funders also have income limits on who can qualify for the rent subsidy. Some U.S. second stage shelters have then secured

separate funding so that women's access to the program is determined by need and not the funder's eligibility requirements.

According to Correia and Melbin (2005), some American second stage shelters have also implemented programs in which they set aside a certain portion of the resident's rent. These monies are returned to her when she leaves to help her establish permanent housing and can help her cover the extra costs of moving, or to help pay for her security deposit or mortgage.

MacFarlane and de Guerre (2008) recommend that Canadian second stage shelters consider adopting a version of the U.S. plan; that when women are earning enough that their 30% portion of rent would be above the rates set by social assistance, the agency place that money into an account for the resident and that money is then given back to her at the end of her stay. McFarlane and de Guerre suggest that agencies find community partners to match the women's contribution. These saving accounts "provides the opportunity for residents to move towards more financial independence and does not penalize them for increasing their income" (p. 24).

### **Other Models for Housing Abused Women**

This final section examines other models for housing women such as safe homes, interim housing and third stage shelters. These are relatively new strategies in the violence against women sector; therefore, there is little or no published literature about them. Most of the information about these approaches was gleaned from representatives and service providers in the sector. The very last subdivision of this section looks at models for enhancing women's security while allowing them to remain in their own home.

### **Safe Homes**

In some rural and northern communities that do not have a shelter, community members open their home to women fleeing an abusive partner. These safe homes offer temporary refuge.

**Safety:** Since safe homes are essentially family homes there tends to be no added security measures. The 2003/2004 Transition Home Survey highlights that utilizing safe-homes without the safety provisions of a traditional VAW shelter is controversial and the safety of residents and staff could be at significant risk.

**Maximum Stay Length:** Safe homes are intended as short-term emergency housing with a maximum stay limit of seven days. The length of stay is intended to provide women the opportunity to make the necessary travel arrangements to the nearest VAW shelter or to have refuge until space is available at the nearest women's shelter. Provincial and territorial shelter representatives state that women tend to stay 3-5 days.

**Quality of Housing:** It isn't clear whether guidelines have been established regarding the quality of the home and if so what they are.

**Emotional Support:** In some provinces or territories the host families are trained to help victims of domestic violence. It isn't clear if all provinces and territories using safe homes have training programs in place.

BC and the Yukon also have safe homes in communities that do not have shelters. Individuals living in the community offer free space in their homes for women and children fleeing abusive partners. The hosts receive training to help the women and children that may come into their home. In addition, there is a coordinator in each area who does outreach.

Women who access the safe homes generally move on to women's shelters. Frequently, this means that women are leaving their home communities in order to access longer-term housing (even transitional shelters). Some safe homes are designed to specifically meet the needs of older women who may benefit from the quieter environment and have more space to themselves.

**Access:** Safe homes tend to be located in rural or northern communities in which fairly lengthy travel would be necessary for women to access a shelter. Travel is still necessary to reach safe homes, and women must generally make those arrangements for themselves. If they don't have their own mode of transportation, then reaching the safe home can be problematic. In some remote communities, women still have to fly in to the nearest safe home. One territorial official commented because of this expense they try to contact extended family members first to see if they'll take in the woman. This same official commented that they are more likely to use safe homes in less serious cases of abuse, or if the woman has a history of returning to her partner (Tutty, Ogden, & Weaver-Dunlop, 2007).

**Other Issues:** Funding for safe homes tends to be through the province or territory.

### **Interim Housing**

In Manitoba, some shelters offer interim housing, which provides longer-term shelter space as an adjunct to the emergency shelter. The interim housing is meant to provide women with a place to stay while she is waiting for longer term housing, whether that is second stage housing or permanent housing in the community.

**Safety:** Most of the interim housing are Manitoba Housing units, thus added security is not available. However, two Manitoba shelters have apartments within their physical space that are used as interim housing, so these families have the added security offered by the shelter.

**Maximum Stay Length:** The maximum length of stay ranges from 90 days to six months. However, exceptions can be made depending on the women's circumstances. One representative noted that one woman stayed in interim housing for over a year before she was able to secure housing through the provincial housing authority.

**Quality of Housing:** No information available regarding the quality of the housing.

**Emotional Support:** Shelter staff provide support to the families in the interim housing.

**Access:** Whether or not interim housing is available varies region to region, thus women's access to service depends on the region.

**Other Issues:** The interim housing units are provided by Manitoba Housing under the control of the shelters. The shelters incur the expense of the operations but not the rent. The exception to this are the two shelters that have interim housing within their physical structure. These shelters do receive reimbursement for occupancy.

### **Third Stage Shelters**

As previously mentioned, the terms used across Canada by the violence against women sector are not uniform. In Alberta, the term *third stage* refers to shelters that offer housing placement, often after a second stage shelter, but do not offer permanent housing. In British Columbia, the term *third stage* refers to shelters that offer services to abused women with unique needs.

In this section, most of the information regarding a third stage shelter applies to the third stage shelter program running out of Edmonton, Alberta. This third stage shelter is run by Wings of Providence (a second stage shelter) in partnership with two local non-profit housing societies, social assistance and Alberta Children's services to provide third stage housing. Just recently a new community partner has come to the table, a private individual who supports public housing.

The information regarding British Columbia's third stage shelters is less detailed and can be found under the 'other' heading of this subdivision.

**Safety:** Women live in Edmonton's third stage shelter are residing in units that are part of the regular social housing stock, thus there are no enhanced security measures

**Maximum Stay Length:** The third stage shelter program is open to single mothers and their children for two full school years. Depending on when families arrive, this means they can often stay for over two calendar years.

**Quality of Housing:** The housing provided for the women is part of the regular public housing stock, so quality of housing can vary.

**Emotional Support:** The Wings of Providence use their second stage outreach workers to provide support to the women participating in the third stage shelter program. Generally, the women require more intensive support when they are beginning (every week to every other week) than they do later in the program.

The community partners responsible for the third stage shelter meet monthly. The function of those meetings is to provide the community partners with the opportunity to discuss how the program is running, explore any issues pertaining to clients, problem solving if necessary, liaising between the landlord and tenant, as necessary.

**Access:** Most women are referred to the third stage shelter through a second stage program, but some women do enter the program directly from the community.

Twenty subsidies are available to the program; thus the number of program participants is limited to 20. One of the current challenges is that with the high cost of living people are not moving from public housing. As such, women who qualify for the program can be turned away simply because there is not housing available to them.

**Other Issues:** In this third stage program, women's combined payment for rent and utilities maximizes at 27-30% of her gross income. Once a woman has completed the

program, she and her children can stay in their public housing unit as long as they qualify under the normal guidelines and their rent will be adjusted accordingly (going up since this program offers two subsidies).

If women establish a new relationship while she is in the third stage shelter, she must leave the program (since program is aimed at helping single mothers). She can stay in the unit with her new partner if they qualify with their combined income.

As previously mentioned, in British Columbia, the term *third stage* refers to shelters that offer services to abused women with unique needs. For example, Harrison Place in Victoria offers support for women 50-65. They can stay at least 1 ½ years. Bridge House has 36 long-term apartments with eight that are designated for abused women with significant mental health issues. It is permanent housing so there is no maximum length stay. Peggy's Place is classified as a third stage shelter for women with mental health disorders and have experienced trauma (including abuse from a partner). The maximum stay is six months. Another third stage shelter in B.C. is Shimai House, run through Atira Women's Resource Society, and provides short-term shelter for 30-90 days to women who have left abusive partners and are dealing with substance abuse issues.

### **Family Violence Housing First Case Management Team**

An innovative pilot project in Calgary was recently funded to meet the service needs of families recently re-housed from a VAW emergency shelter or transitional shelter. The pilot is led by the Discovery House Family Violence Prevention Society and the Woman's Shelter Directors Network, partnering with the CUPS Rapid Exit Program.

The key program objective is providing assistance and support to families after having resided in women's shelters and to decrease their risk of further homelessness as a result of systemic issues such as violence and poverty. Workers from the CUPS Rapid Exit Program will secure appropriate housing for families fleeing domestic violence and help identify families that need specialized support to maintain their housing.

### **Summary**

To conclude this chapter, the bulk of efforts to provide housing to abused women fall within the realm of emergency facilities. Although VAW emergency shelters are the mainstay and safest housing options, since the majority of women abused by intimate partners never reside in VAW shelters, additional options were considered.

It is also clear that housing options that extend lengths of stay beyond 6 months or a year are being developed and evaluated. These innovations hold promise and also signal that the housing crisis for women victimized by their intimate partners has been recognized.



### **Chapter Three: General Housing for Women (Non-Abuse Specific)**

As noted in the discussion of Canada's Transition House surveys, across the country there exist other housing options and shelters not specific to abused women. Among these are general shelters for women, homeless shelters, and homeless shelters specific to women. Women who reside in such facilities often have a history of domestic violence, which may or not be addressed. Finally this section documents issues related to permanent rental and social housing.

As previously mentioned, the experience of homelessness is gendered (Thurston et al., 2006). Women still receive 29% less pay than men for their work (OAITH, 2008). Thus, women's options are more limited in terms of housing. Therefore, it is not surprising that women are more likely to rent than men (Reitsma-Street, Schofield, Lund, & Kasting, 2001). "Forty-two percent of single-mothers who rented had housing affordability problems as compared to just over 20% for two parent families" (National Working Group on Women and Housing, 2006, p. 1). As already discussed, women who are abused are often at risk of homelessness, thus the discussion with regards to permanent housing options is pertinent. They are more likely to be searching both the public and private markets for affordable homes.

Shapcott (2002) stated that although Canadians seem to agree that a rental housing crisis exists, the true extent is obscured because national statistics through the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation are based on conventional units and does not take into account secondary units which include rented condominiums, basement suits, or other units which are illegal under a community's zoning laws. While on the surface this seems to increase the number of available rentals, illegal suites are not subject to laws regarding safety, building codes, or tenant/landlord protection.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission (2008) note that only 4% of their cases are with regard to housing discrimination, however they contend that this percentage does not accurately reflect the prevalence of human rights violations. Rather, people who are experiencing such discrimination are among the most disadvantaged in society and do not take their cases to the commission. The Commission noted a number of barriers that prevent people from bringing their cases forward: the process is complex; centralized offices and internet access to services assume people have ready access to technology; people may not have a permanent phone numbers or addresses at which the Commission workers can contact them; if people are in housing, they are often afraid that they will face reprisals from the landlord if they make a complaint; finally, some people may be unaware of their rights. Ironically, most of the barriers that prevent people from going forward to the Commission are systemic.

#### **Non-Domestic Violence Shelters**

As noted previously, in the 2003/2004 Transition House Survey one-fifth of the 543 shelters sent surveys accommodate women with problems other than or in addition to abuse by an intimate partner. In Canada, for example, the YWCA has existed for more than 130 years and is, perhaps, the largest organization offering general shelter spaces for women. Since the early years, one of its central services was providing shelter to women.

**Safety:** some security

**Emotional Support:** The shelter staff may provide individual and group counselling.

**Maximum Stay Length:** The length of stay varies across facilities. As one example, Mary Dover House in Calgary has six emergency beds for single women and children. It often takes the overflow clients for emergency shelters. The maximum stay is 14 days at no cost to residents

**Access:** The YWCA Canada offers a number of non-specific DV shelters in addition to the 14 violence specific transition homes.

### **Homeless Shelters**

Homeless shelters provide a crucial service by offering shelter to women with no or few resources. Some shelters have the capacity to provide bed space only, while others have the ability to help women reintegrate into the dominant community. The majority of homeless shelters provide services to both men and women, although women are usually housed in a separate room or on a different floor from the men. Most homeless shelters provide short-term accommodation on a night-by-night basis (Tutty et al., 2007).

As identified by Tutty and colleagues, the guiding philosophy of shelters can potentially create overarching differences between the two. VAW shelters tend to be based on feminist principles, while most homeless shelters are not. A number of homeless shelters are operated by organizations based on spiritual or religious principles. Among those key informants with whom we spoke, only homeless shelters specific for women tended to be based on feminist principles.

One of the key factors influencing the types of services that shelters can offer their clients is funding. The funding structures between homeless and VAW shelters differ. Provincial and territorial governments tend to provide funding for the operation of VAW shelters. While some homeless shelters receive such funding, there is great variability across the country in this regard. Some homeless shelters receive operational grants, but more commonly receive per diems based on the number of people they house on any given night. In addition, some provinces have turned over the responsibility for housing the homeless to individual municipalities. Homeless shelters associated with churches or other religious organizations may primarily rely on donations from their faith group to fund them.

Under-funding is an issue with which both VAW and homeless shelters struggle. Fund-raising is a common activity among those working in both sectors. However, the key informants noted that their success may be influenced by public perceptions of their clients. While homeless and abused women often struggle with perceptions of others in the community and negative judgements about their situations, the key informants noted that community members tend to be more sympathetic towards women who are abused. Community members often place more negative judgements on homeless women, seeing them as individuals who have made a wide range of bad choices and are less deserving of help.

With the exception of the few shelters that offer services to both homeless and abused women, the sectors are relatively separate in their day-to-day functioning. However, both mentioned that they may work with the same woman. At times VAW

shelters will take in women whose presenting issue is homelessness. Some provinces have a broader mandate about who VAW shelters can house, allowing them to take in women in need if they have bed space. This is also more common in remote or rural areas. Other provinces are much more vigilant that the women must have been in a recently abusive relationship. But the decision to open the doors to homeless women can also be influenced by funding guidelines. Some provincial and territorial funders will cut funding for the length of time a “homeless” woman is in a VAW facility. It seems much more common that homeless shelters will house women who are abused.

**Safety:** A number of women believe that their personal safety is at risk in homeless shelters. American research by Goodman, Dutton and Harris (1995) found that close to one-third (31%) of the 99 women who participated in their study were assaulted while staying in homeless shelters.

**Emotional Support:** The programs offered to women in homeless shelters vary along a continuum from simply offering concrete services to offering more therapeutic services, including counselling. Most shelter services tend to concentrate on aiding a woman’s ability to meet her basic needs, focusing on providing women with a bed and are in fact, closed through the day (Tutty et al., 2007).

**Maximum Stay Length:** Generally not available.

**Quality of Housing:** The conditions within the shelters vary; in some, women sleep on mats, in others, several women share a room.

**Access:** In some communities, shelter spaces for women who are homeless are simply not available. In other communities where homeless shelters exist, women’s access to them is often limited.

### **Homeless Shelters for Women**

Homeless shelters that provide accommodation specifically for women are much less common in Canada.

**Safety:** Some security

**Emotional Support:** Some support

**Maximum Stay Length:** Residency longer than non-gendered homeless shelters

**Access:** Few in Canada. Most in larger cities.

**Other Issues:** Some homeless shelters provide not only emergency beds for a place to sleep overnight, but also second stage programs for women. However, some second stage transitional housing is not gender specific.

Across Canada, there are few second stage homes for women who are homeless. Few key informants in the Tutty et al. (2007) study had information on this; however seventeen key informants commented that second stage shelters for women who have been homeless would provide a transitional step between staying in homeless shelters and living independently. Second stage housing provides a foundation and supportive environment from which women can rebuild their lives and reintegrate with the dominant community. The option of second stage housing provides a vital service for women.

Second stage housing for single women tends to be designed as communal living in which women have their own room but share common living areas. For women with children, self-contained units are a more typical design. The allowed lengths of stay in second stage shelters for homeless women vary, ranging from three months to two years to no time limit at all. The services and programs offered in specific second stage shelters for women who had been homeless also varied widely.

### **Social Housing**

Some researchers argue that, essentially, homelessness arises when there is a lack of affordable housing, and, therefore, one solution lies in increasing the availability of such housing. This issue is not confined to Canada; other nations are struggling with similar issues. A U.S. study reported that the most powerful predictor of exiting homelessness is the availability of affordable housing (Metraux & Culhane, 1999). Examining a number of factors associated with repeated episodes of homelessness, Metraux and Culhane reported that the factor most strongly associated with avoiding repeat shelter stays was exiting from a shelter to one's own home. Even though their study identified a number of risk factors for homelessness, the authors suggest:

The extremely strong associations ... between housing exits and decreased risk of shelter returns offer affirmation for those who regard homelessness as primarily a housing issue ... This strengthens the argument for providing sheltered women and their households with affordable, stable housing as the first step in addressing other problems associated with them and their families. Although housing cannot remediate problems such as experience with domestic violence, for example, it can provide an atmosphere more suitable to addressing these problems, and it can prevent a single homeless episode from becoming a series of repeated stays (p. 392).

For this literature review, the women's options for finding and maintaining affordable housing are key considerations.

To understand what has happened to public housing in Canada and how we came to the point that we are experiencing a national crisis, it is helpful to understand the history of affordable housing in Canada. Social housing was developed in Canada to offer affordable housing to those with low incomes. The term social housing includes public, non-profit and co-op housing (Wolfe, 1998). Social housing refers to those accommodations that receive public subsidies to make the unit affordable to the renter (Carter, 1997). Generally, there are guidelines regarding who can qualify and the renter pays 30% of their gross income for the unit (Carter, 1997).

In the 1980s, the federal government reviewed social housing and made the decision that it was too expensive; thus they began cost sharing with the provinces - but only to those in core need (Wolfe, 1998). In the nineties, along with most Western countries, Canadian housing policy moved away from providing social housing (Du Mont & Miller, 2000; Wolfe, 1998).

The Canadian Mental Health Association (2004) made the following comments about the housing situation in Canada. In 1990, the Canadian federal government cut funding for low-cost housing by \$51 million over two years. In 1992, they ended the

cooperative housing program. “Between 1980 and 2000, the number of affordable housing units created by the federal government dropped from 24,000 to 940” (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2004, p. 2). In 1993, the federal government ended the programs for new social housing (Bryant, 2004; Carter, 1997; Shapcott, 2002; Wolfe, 1998).

In 1996, “the Minister responsible for CMHC, Diane Marleau, declared that the administration of all social housing would be transferred to the provinces, again citing the elimination of costly overlap” (Wolfe, 1998, p. 125). At the same time that the federal government removed itself from social housing, most provinces made spending cuts to social programs including housing - Quebec, B.C., PEI and the territories were the notable exceptions (Shapcott, 2002). However, since 2001, B.C. has been reducing their commitments to social housing (Shapcott, 2002). Provinces have also begun moving out of social housing, instead placing this responsibility on individual municipalities (Shapcott, 2002).

The federal government reintroduced financial support for public housing in 2001 allocating \$680 million over five years for affordable housing (Bryant, 2004; Shapcott, 2002). The Affordable Housing Framework Agreement was signed by the provinces, territories and federal government in November of 2002; “the provinces and territories agreed to provide matching dollars” (p. 7). However, except Quebec, most provinces are taking advantage of loopholes to avoid matching the funding:

The definition of ‘affordable’ has been changed to ‘average market rents’; which means that housing produced under this agreement will be at the same level as existing market. In most parts of the country, as many as two-thirds of renter households cannot afford average market rents, which will put the housing well out of the reach of those who need it most. (Shapcott, 2002, p. 7).

Shapcott notes that the funding sounds adequate but even if the project were fully funded, it would only translate “into about 5,000 units a year over five years, well short of the amount needed to meet the massive growing need for affordable rental housing” (Shapcott, 2002, p. 7).

**Safety:** The social housing approaches used in both Canada and the U.S. are based on the idea of helping those in greatest need whereas the European nations tend to base allocations on values of universal entitlement (Worts, 2005). Worts (2005) argues that the North American approach segregates people by class and gender by targeting low-income households into housing projects which can in turn increase the vulnerability of some of the recipients. For example, in some provinces and territories, public housing is in unsafe neighbourhoods (DeKeseredy, Alvi, Schwartz, & Perry, 1999; Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008; Thurston et al., 2006; Tutty, et al., 2007; Walks & Bourne, 2006; Wolfe, 1998; Worts, 2005).

DeKeseredy, et al. (1999) explored women’s safety from violence and harassment in six Canadian public housing estates in Eastern Ontario. They distributed surveys to 1200 households and received 216 responses - 76% from women. Their findings indicated that 19.3% of the women had experience physical violence from an intimate partner in the past year. Since the overall prevalence in Canada based on Johnson’s (1996) Statistics Canada’s

Violence Against Women survey is 10%, the women in the study experienced a higher rate of violence than women in the general population.

One can speculate why this might be. DeKeseredy and colleagues suggest that strain theory and male peer support theory could explain this finding. These theories contend that gender socialization and living in such poverty support men's violence against women. These theories are based on the assumption that some men chose to commit crimes against women to bolster their self esteem and gain status. However, DeKeseredy and colleagues also expressed concern that theories could be used to pathologize people living in poverty and point out that violence against women occurs in all socioeconomic strata.

Other explanations for these findings also exist. When Canadian women leave their male partners, statistically, the women's income drops. Many women turn to public housing as an affordable alternative in which to raise their children. Yet, leaving does not ensure that these women are safe from their abusive partners - their former partners could be stalking them, or the women could still have contact with their former partners because of child access agreements and the men are using these as opportunities to abuse the women. Thus, it is possible that the women in this study were more willing to report abusive behaviour from intimates to the police; it is also possible that the police were more willing to charge.

The findings of DeKeseredy and colleagues (1999) suggest that these women were not living in safe neighbourhoods. As already noted, this study also examined the resident's experiences of harassment in public settings. Over one-quarter of the women (26%) had experienced racial, homophobic, or sexual harassment from strangers, while in public. Such demeaning comments can be quite frightening for women because they have no way of knowing whether the perpetrators will escalate into physical violence. DeKeseredy and colleagues commented that it is quite realistic for women to be concerned for their personal safety because other researchers (such as Hanmer & Saunder, 1984; Stanko, 1990; DeKeseredy & Kelly, 1993 cited in DeKeseredy et al., 1999) have found that some perpetrators do act on their abusive threats.

Other Canadian researchers have also noted that neighbourhood safety is a concern for women in subsidized housing (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007; Thurston et al., 2006; Wasylshyn & Johnson, 1998; Wolfe, 1998). Indeed, the participants in two qualitative studies expressed specific concerns regarding their children's safety since they were witnessing others using drug/alcohol, used needles were left in the hallways or yards of their buildings, and their children were seeing criminal activity in their neighbourhood (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007; Thurston et al., 2006). Women will also try to enhance their safety "by spending a larger proportion of their income on rent in order to live in better neighbourhoods" (Nairne, cited in Wasylshyn & Johnson, 1998, p. 979).

Concerns about safety in public housing are not confined to Canada. In the United States, there is an effort to address safety in public housing projects, a "One Strike" policy was instituted (Renzetti, 2001). Should a tenant or anyone visiting a tenant come to the attention of the public housing authority by being involved in criminal activity, the family is evicted. While this policy was intended to address drug/gang activity, Renzetti contends that this policy is detrimental for women, and particularly women who have been abused. For example, if one of her children is caught with drugs, the family is evicted. Thus financial

circumstances may then force women to return to her abusive partner in order to ensure she and her children have accommodation. In addition, if a woman's abusive ex-partner chooses to harass her, stalk her, assault her, or otherwise disrupt her home—she can again be evicted.

Scholars, municipalities and service agencies across the country have been examining the issue of Canadian ghettoization of racialized groups into poor neighbourhoods and housing projects (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008; Walks & Bourne, 2006). Part of the concern stems from the existence of U.S. ghettos and research that shows that, “living in a highly segregated neighbourhood not only increases the chance that one is already poor, but also limits the ability of residents to escape poverty” (Walks & Bourne, 2006, p. 275).

Walks and Bourne examined the possibility of Canadian ghettoization of urban areas using census information from 1991 and 2001. Their findings show that the majority of Canadian urban areas are less segregated than many cities in the U.S. or Britain. Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Vancouver had the highest level of visible minority segregation, followed by Abbotsford and Calgary. The four most segregated cities in Canada (Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver) had higher levels of segregation than the largest cities in Britain and Australia.

Across Canada, in segregated neighbourhoods, Walks and Bourne's census comparison between 1999 and 2001 showed that the proportion of people paying more than 30% of their income on housing more than doubled. In addition, levels of low income in Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal and Winnipeg were “clearly associated with concentrations of both recent immigrants and concentrations of aboriginals and certain other minority groups, namely blacks, Latin Americans, and in Vancouver and Toronto, Southeast Asians” (p. 291). Further, Walks and Bourne (2006) concluded that Canadian indicators for poverty and ghettoization are: neighbourhoods with concentrations of apartment housing, of visible minorities in general and a high level racial diversity in particular. They also noted that low-cost housing (including social housing) placed in the least desirable neighbourhoods increased the likelihood of ghettoization. Walks and Bourne's finding have implications for women's fleeing abusive partners in terms of their options for permanent housing.

When women face neighbourhood safety concerns for themselves and their children, coupled with the potential long-term issues of ghettoization, they may well believe that they ultimately have only negative options. If they remain with their abusive partner, they are not safe; yet, it is questionable how safe they will be if they leave, and statistically, face the reality of less income - even poverty, living in unsafe neighbourhoods.

To partially address ghettoization and the safety needs of abused women, cooperative housing has been raised as an alternative. Based on the assumption of housing as a universal right, cooperative housing began in Canada in 1973, inviting people “to develop ‘sustainable communities’ by drawing members with a mix of social backgrounds and income levels” (Worts, 2005, p. 450) with rents geared to income for the residents. Other cooperative housing units are designed so all the units are subsidized but that the tenants are expected to work together in its operation (Wasylishyn & Johnson, 1998). It was also thought that this approach could help reduce tenants' isolation.

Results from Wasylyshyn and Johnson's (1998) qualitative study regarding women's safety were somewhat mixed, indicating that the women felt safer and enjoyed the increased green spaces in the neighbourhood since it was in what the respondents identified as a 'wealthier' area. Yet, at the same time, the women, "struggled with feelings that they did not fit in or belong in such an affluent neighbourhood" (p. 978). The women did not necessarily feel supported by the other tenants; in fact, many described their interactions with others as stressful.

When one considers the indicators towards ghettoization in Canada, where to build new housing stock is also a key question. However, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2008) noted that many neighbourhoods do not want social housing in their area and lobby against it. Thus, it seems that much of the existing housing stock exists in less desirable, less safe neighbourhoods.

Some provinces are trying to address ghettoization and women's safety needs through the idea of inclusionary zoning - that all new private housing developments must contain some subsidized units (Witwere, 2008). Witwere noted that one of the advantages of this approach is that in municipalities that are booming, there is the potential to quickly add to social housing stock and women would have access to neighbourhoods that tend to be safer. However, one would need to be careful about meeting the needs of these tenants. Some new developments assume that the residents will own cars so distances to shops are great, and suburban bus access is sparse. Also, few private developers support inclusionary zoning because building these units interferes with their profits.

**Maximum Stay Length:** This housing is intended to be affordable and permanent, thus as long as women meet the needs criteria financially, they can stay.

**Quality of Housing:** In some provinces and territories the existing housing is old, poorly insulated, and many are in unsafe neighbourhoods (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007; Tutty, et al., 2006; Wolfe, 1998). In addition, in many areas of the country, the existing housing stock has not been kept in good repair or adequate condition (Tutty, et al., 2006; Wolfe, 1998). Poor insulation has driven up heating costs that women on limited budgets cannot afford (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007; Wolfe, 1998). Maintenance concerns from Northern women included mould, leaky windows, mice, inadequate heat and poor maintenance (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007).

Some of the first housing projects were built to be "around communal open spaces with footpath access and the like, [which] was a mistake. Residents feel safer and are more comfortable with 'defensible space' and houses facing the street" (Wolfe, 1998, p. 129). While the intention of the communal design was to improve quality of life for residents and provide green space - this design inadvertently decreased women's safety.

Affordable housing is also based on the concept that certain standards must be met to make the housing adequate. Carter (1997) states that, "a dwelling is 'adequate' if it requires only regular upkeep and possesses hot and cold running water, an inside toilet, and an installed bath or shower" (p.594). In addition, national guidelines regarding occupancy must be met: bedrooms are limited to two persons, children five and over are separated according to gender, children or dependent adults over 18 have their own bedrooms.



While these policies are intended to ensure quality living standards, they have had negative consequences for Northern women. With the severe climate (i.e. temperatures of -60 C in the winter), it is essential that the homeless have shelter. In the past, the North did not have people living on the street—but the lack of adequate housing and limited public housing stock reflected homelessness through overcrowding. Historically, if a family member was in difficulty, other extended family members would shelter that person. Families stayed together. However, the policies and criteria established for affordable housing means that Northern Housing Authorities evict those householders who have anyone other than their nuclear families with them. One representative commented that *“with these changes people are losing pride and dignity. You know, they say it takes a community to make a community well. The community can’t help because our hands are tied.”*

**Emotional Support:** The provision of additional emotional support is generally not available to residents in public housing.

**Access:** Tutty and colleague’s 2007 Canadian study talked with key informants in the violence against women sector, homelessness sector and government regarding women’s housing needs. Sixty-one respondents shared their views on the context of safe, adequate, affordable housing in their provinces/territories; they unanimously expressed concern about the housing situation. The mildest comments described the housing situation in their provinces/territories as “challenging” or “significant.” Thirty-nine (64%) described the housing situation in their province or territory as “very serious; a crisis.”

The respondents stated that of the public housing that was available, most tended to be in urban centres rather than in rural areas and seventeen respondents noted that the lack of safe adequate housing was even more severe on reserves. A major factor contributing to the concerns of these respondents was the lack of social housing stock.

Yet being able to access public housing can be a key consideration for women considering leaving an abusive partner:

When marital relationships break down, the economic consequences are considerably different for them [women] than for men. After divorce, the poverty rate among women increases almost threefold. Their household income drops by more than 40%, while men’s increases slightly (Finnie, 1993). Single women and single mothers account for almost half of households with affordability problems (CMHC, 2000). (Novac, 2006, p. 19).

However, access is not a straightforward process. Women have to apply and if they qualify they then go on the waiting list. Many immigrant women who have been abused do not qualify because they were sponsored by their husbands (Thurston et al, 2006). Thus, women are not eligible for subsidized housing because they are not considered to be permanent residents. In addition, newcomers whose first language is not English or French often find the paperwork a barrier if their reading and writing skills do not meet the requirements necessary to complete the forms (Reitsma-Street, et al., 2001).

In addition, Tutty and colleagues (2007) noted that access for Aboriginal women with First Nations Status becomes complicated because they are often facing institutional discrimination in the guise jurisdictional responsibility. “If she is First Nations with

Status, the provincial government hands the responsibility of funding to the federal government. The federal government says housing is the responsibility of the province. So she gets lost” (p. 87).

All provinces and one territory prioritize public housing for abused women (Tutty, et al., 2007). However, provincial and territorial participants in Tutty and colleague’s study raised concerns about the policy’s effectiveness simply because of the dwindling housing stock. For example, in Ontario people will often not even apply because the wait times are so long - ranging from 5 -10 years (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008). Further, neither the Northwest Territories nor Nunavut prioritizes housing for abused women because of territorial lack of housing stock. In the NWT, housing works on a point system. The only points that one gets are for being homeless - women in shelter do not earn points because they are not viewed as homeless (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007).

Some provinces and territories have dealt with the dwindling supply of public housing stock by increasing the criteria that women have to meet in order to qualify. For example, to qualify for priority in Ontario, women need to prove that they have been physically abused with documentation such as police reports (Du Mont & Miller, 2000). Obviously, this excludes the vast majority of women who do not contact police regarding a physical assault or women whose partners are not primarily physically abusive.

A further issue is that some provinces have turned the existing housing stock over to individual municipalities (Du Mont & Miller, 2000). This creates even more barriers for women who are fleeing abusive partners - in some areas across the country women must prove their residency before they will be considered for social housing. Yet, many women fleeing particularly dangerous partners will move across the country in an effort to remain hidden from them. In addition, women whose home community does not have a shelter must go to other communities to access one. However, under this policy, women in these circumstances are not considered residents and, thus, do not meet the minimum qualifications to apply to public housing.

Another issue related to access is that of discrimination by the gatekeepers of social housing projects. The Ontario Human Rights Commission (2008) provincial consultation raised concerns regarding of ghettoization of racialized groups into certain housing projects (see also Wolfe, 1998). While some respondents saw this as clear indicators of discrimination, other respondents argued that tenants themselves requested those projects. What this article did not raise is the possibility that tenants requested these projects to provide themselves some support against the harassment and discrimination they face in the dominant society.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission (2008) reported that their consultation heard reports that, in both public and private housing, occupancy standards have been used to discriminate against families. For example, a woman with three children was denied a three bedroom apartment because the standards dictated that she should be in a four bedroom unit. There are not many such apartments in public or private housing, and those that do exist in private housing are expensive. In addition, occupancy policies may be used to discriminate against people who live in households that include extended family members. Since inflexible application of the housing standards have denied people

housing, the Ontario Human Rights Commission suggested that the government address these barriers.

Other potential barriers to an abused woman's access to social housing are policies related to rent arrears. "Some social housing providers require a 'clean' 12-month rental record and that others will not consider individuals for housing until all rent arrears or fees for damages to previous rental units have been paid" (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008, p. 34). Some women have lived with their abusive partners in public housing, yet when they try to establish a separate home, the women can then be held responsible for their abusive partner's behaviour if he did not pay rent or if he damaged the suite they had shared (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007). Most Housing Authorities require that the arrears must be paid before her housing application will be considered—and many women have not worked before (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007; Tutty, et al., 2007). One VAW shelter representative from Tutty and colleague's 2007 study noted:

*Their partners are so into power and control that she hasn't been allowed to work, so she has no money saved. If she sees a lawyer and there is evidence of a legal separation, then she will be responsible for only half of the arrears amount - but even so that debt can be overwhelming for the women. For example, if the arrears to the Housing Authority is \$3000.00, the only way she can get out to the point where she will be responsible for half the sum, she has to have something legal—showing they have a legal separation.*

The Ontario Human Rights Commission (2008) suggested that, instead of using damages or rent arrears as a way to deny women housing, the screening process should ask potential tenants about their circumstances, whether the situation has changed, and the landlord works in conjunction with the tenant to make a workable plan on how to reduce future issues.

Access to social housing is also an issue in the United States. In 1997, on average a homeless family in the United States found housing in 6 to 10 months. (Roofless Women's Action Research Mobilization, cited in Melbin, et al., 1997). Changes in U.S. federal policies have shifted funding away from the creation of housing stock, which has resulted in the loss of available housing (Correia & Rubin, 2001). Thus, it is taking people longer to find housing. However, the authors of this literature review did not find current statistics on how long it is now taking families to find housing.

As already mentioned, the United States, has implemented a "One Strike" policy (Renzetti, 2001). Should a tenant or any one visiting the tenant be come to the attention of the public housing authority of being involved in criminal activity, the family's application can be denied (Renzetti). Thus, if a woman's ex-partner has a criminal record and he still has access to the children, her application can be denied. Also Renzetti also noted that if the woman herself has a criminal record, her application can be denied.

It should be noted that the One Strike policy implemented by the United States to screen potential tenants for public housing is against human rights codes in Ontario; record checks and background checks are not permitted (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008). However, the Ontario Human Rights Commission provincial consultation indicated that social housing providers ignore this aspect of the code by

asking criminal history questions on their applications forms and interviews with potential tenants.

**Other Issues:** Most scholars and researchers agree that, not only does existing affordable housing need to be retained and maintained but the social housing stock must be increased (Morell-Bellai, et al., 2000; Reitsma-Street, et al., 2001; Tutty, et al., 2007 ). Neal (2004) suggests that sustained national and provincial housing strategies must be created to increase the availability of affordable housing.

Given the affordable housing crisis in Canada, how to increase public housing stock is a reasonable question. “Dr. David Hulchanski of the Centre for Urban and Community Studies of the University of Toronto on behalf of the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee” came up with idea of the One Percent Solution (Shapcott, 2002, p. 7). This idea is based on Hulchanski’s observation that, combined, all levels of government, spend about 1% of their budgets on housing. The One Percent Solution calls on all governments to double their housing spending by adding an additional one percent to their housing budget. This would result in about \$2 billion in new housing spending annually from the federal government, which would return the housing budget to the levels of the early 1990s.

This plan has been endorsed by groups including the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada and dozens of other national, provincial and local institutions and groups” (Shapcott, 2002, p. 8). The approach would allow the adoption of a national housing strategy to address the need for supply, affordability, support programs for those who need it, housing maintenance, and services and support for the existing homeless population (Shapcott, 2002). Another issue raised by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2008) is that many people oppose the construction of affordable or supported housing in their neighbourhoods. The Commission report stated that such actions are discrimination against the human rights code and that these views prevent, delay and increase the costs of such housing.

A discussion paper by the Regional Planning Services on Vancouver Island (2001) presented a number of options: introduction of a property tax levy to allow investment/construction of affordable housing; develop programs for income mixed housing rather than relying on public housing estates; use government owned land for affordable housing; expand rent supplement programs.

Housing activists would like to see all subsidized housing remain in the public sector; however others argue that rent supplements should go with the tenant rather than the unit so that people have greater choice about where they wish to live (Wolfe, 1998). They also argue that it is more cost effective. Wolfe (1998) notes that a 1997 study by EKOS, “demonstrates that over time (the data showed periods from 4 to 17 years), the construction of [social] housing is cheaper to the public purse than rent supplements in the long run” (p. 130).

### **Private Housing**

Private housing is provided by individuals who are willing to rent space in their homes to others. The role of private housing has become increasingly important across

Canada as the number of subsidized units has decreased. As the social housing crisis deepened across Canada, the number of people who rely on the private market to be housed has increased.

Bryant (2004) contended that shifts in federal and provincial policies with respect to housing have had a major impact on the housing options available to people. For example, in Ontario, in 1995, rent control was rescinded and a moratorium on social housing construction was introduced. At the same time, social assistance was reduced by 22%. While the government stance was that the private sector would provide rentals, this did not happen. Instead, the average rent doubled, and, in 2001, 61,000 households were evicted - 80% of which were unable to pay rent. One quarter of a million (250,000) Toronto residents pay more than 30% of their income on rent and 20% pay more than half. Rent controls were reinstated in 2003.

**Safety:** Generally, no security measures available in private housing. Indeed, for some women even basic security is not provided. Women participating in Reitsma-Street, et al.'s 2001 Canadian study reported that, if their suite was part of a private home or if they were only able to access a room, they often could not lock their own doors, and landlords refused to have them installed. In addition, landlords were not always respectful of the women's privacy; some would not ask for women's permission to enter the suite but would come in whenever they wished. Some women also have landlords or property managers who threaten the woman with eviction unless they have sex with him, or offer to forgive arrears in return for sex, or who will only complete needed maintenance on the unit if she has sex with him (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008; see also Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007; Reitsma-Street et al., 2001).

**Maximum Stay Length:** This housing is on the private market and intended to be permanent, thus as long as women can afford the rent, they can stay.

**Quality of Housing:** The quality of private housing is variable, depending on the particular unit and the neighbourhood. As mentioned earlier, cost is often a factor for women and their finances often dictate that they find something less expensive. This frequently means that women are looking at less desirable housing units on the open market. Women may have to move into substandard units, and/or those in less desirable neighbourhoods. Some women have been told by their landlords that, because their housing is inexpensive, they cannot request maintenance or repairs (Reitsma-Street, et al., 2001). Other women have faced eviction for requesting repairs (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007). "Housing is not maintained because it is not seen as profitable and there are always enough poor people to fill vacancies" (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007, p. 17).

Women living in urban areas where housing is even more difficult to secure, may be renting illegal suites (Reitsma-Street, et al., 2001). In Reitsma-Street and colleague's study, one respondent was told by her landlord that her children could not play in the yard because it could alert authorities to fact that an illegal suite was in the home. The participants of Thurston et al.'s (2006) qualitative study of abused immigrant women reported that small, dark basement suites were often all they could afford.

The housing options for single women on social assistance are even more constrained. Often all they can afford is a single room in a rooming house (Reitsma-

Street, Schofield, et al., 2001). Bathrooms and kitchens are shared. Understandably, depending on the other people living in the home, women could feel quite unsafe.

U.S. researchers, Correia and Melbin (2005) raise similar issues in that the cost of housing on the open market may well be force women to live in substandard units.

**Emotional Support:** Emotional support is not available in private housing.

**Access:** The Canadian literature regarding women's access to the private market consistently raises a number of issues including discrimination. For example, in Reitsma-Street and colleague's 2001 study of housing in three medium-sized Canadian cities (Victoria, Regina, and St. John), the participants often raised concerns about discrimination by landlords. They were discriminated against by a number of characteristics: by race, her age, marital status, and/or income - especially if she were a recipient of social assistance (Reitsma-Street et al., 2001; see also Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, 2007; Mosher, et al., 2004; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008; Wolfe, 1998). Landlords are concerned that women on social assistance will be unable to pay their rent, even though there is no empirical evidence to support this view (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008).

A recent study conducted by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC, 2006) suggested that abused women not only have difficulty finding safe and affordable housing, but may also be discriminated against by landlords who know that they are fleeing partner abuse. Landlords most commonly raised concerns regarding the women's ability to pay the rent, and/or had concerns about her abusive partner's potential for further violence. A small number of landlords were described as "openly hostile" (p. 3) towards battered women, blaming them for the abuse they experienced and were not willing to rent to them under any circumstances. Findings from the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2008) provincial consultation reports the same concerns: landlords will not rent to women fleeing abusive partners because they are concerned that their former partners or their children will damage the property. In addition, aboriginal women who are leaving an abusive partner face even greater difficulty with finding accommodation because they not only have to face with landlord discrimination regarding their circumstances, they also face racialized discrimination (Ontario Human Rights Commission).

Other practises that make it difficult for women leaving an abusive partner to rent on the private market include rent deposits; co-signers guarantors; credit checks; tenant insurance requirements; rental histories and landlord references (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008). These findings indicate that newcomers, Aboriginal families and other visible minorities have been required to pay up to a year's worth of rent in cash in advance. Credit checks can also be problematic for abused women since some men will have denied the women the opportunity to be employed in the paid work-force, or made it too dangerous for them to have any bills/credit in their name. Rental histories are also problematic in that women may not have one; consultants with the Ontario Human Rights Commission pointed out that the absence of a rental history is not the same as a negative rental history.

Discrimination by landlords in the private market is not a problem confined to Canada. Australian women who are attempting to leave an abusive partner have had

similar experiences (Cheung, Kennedy, O'Brien, & Wendt, 2000; Office for Women, n.d.). In addition, some landlords will turn women away when they realize that they are dependent on social assistance.

Landlord's perceptions of a risk to renting to abused women are also apparent in the United States. Menard (2001) noted that some perpetrators cause women to be evicted through tactics of harassment, violent acts and/or property damage.

**Other Issues:** Since private housing is more expensive than public housing, a woman may be forced to look at less desirable properties, in more dangerous neighbourhoods to find accommodation that she can afford. In addition, when the rental vacancy is low, landlords have an increased ability to choose to whom they wish to rent—which means those who are marginalized have even fewer options about where they can live.

On the other hand, the private housing market has been seen as another means to improve housing options for women. A discussion paper by the Capital Region District on Vancouver Island (2001) presented a number of options: relax some zoning regulations to allow for higher density housing; expand rent supplement programs; relax laws so homeowners can let suites to supplement their income and provide affordable housing to others. This paper also discusses forming and maintaining cross-sector partnerships.

One of the problems with building new affordable housing is that the private sector has been hesitant to become involved with social housing. Neal (2004) suggests that as a possible solution to this problem, governments could mandate including low-income units be included in all new developments.

Part of the objection to private landlords becoming involved in affordable housing is that the building costs, maintenance and operating costs for rental housing is high while the income for low and moderate income earners has dropped. Thus the difference between what a tenant “can afford to pay and what the private landlord needs to collect to cover costs plus a reasonable return on investment is substantial and growing” (Shapcott, 2002, p. 9). Rent supplements may be one option for addressing this issue. Rent supplements are used by federal and some provincial/territorial governments to keep housing affordable. Contracts are signed with a landlord stating that in return for receiving the supplement the landlord agrees to maintain the building and cap the rent charged to the tenant (Shapcott, 2002). The advantage to rent supplements is that they go with the tenant rather than the unit so that people have greater choice about where they wish to live (Wolfe, 1998; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008).

Wolfe noted that one option put forward to help relieve the affordable housing crisis is to legalize the apartments that exist illegally in single family homes. While such units exist in every major city, whether this will really help is also subject to debate - generally people are already living in them, and if they were legal, the rent would be taxed and, thus, the landlords would pass that cost onto the tenant—thus any savings the tenant benefits from at this point would be lost.

## **Chapter Four: Other Models to Enhance Security for Abused Women**

The final review chapter explores three strategies used to enhance women's security from abusive partners. These measures are each intended to keep women in their own homes, in their familiar community, while taking their safety needs into account. The first strategy is the use of the electronic devices with which we are familiar in Canada: personal help buttons and cellular phones. Yet, other enhanced security measures are being used internationally.

The second strategy is the U.S. legal system's use of electronic monitoring when men have been criminally charged for their abusive behaviour. Finally, the third strategy details the U.K.'s use of sanctuary schemes to protect women in their homes from significantly abusive partners.

### **Personal Help Buttons**

Personal help buttons (also called panic buttons or duress pendants) are a tool for women to access emergency help without having to reach a phone in the home. Generally the buttons are worn as a necklace or a bracelet. Women simply need to press the button for the police to be dispatched.

The programs providing the panic buttons are generally collaborations between those that can provide the pendants and monitor the electronic devices (such as health care institutions like Bethany, or security firms like ADT) and the police.

**Safety:** Safety is the primary reason for utilizing personal help buttons. These were initially used with seniors whose health care problems necessitated a link to medical health should an emergency arise.

In 1999, a partnership between Bethany Care Centre and Calgary Police Service Domestic Conflict Unit (DCU) was formed to increase women's safety from abusive ex-partners through the use of personal help buttons. Women qualified who were assessed by the DCU as at high risk for further assaults by their partners.

Wallis and Tutty's (2001) qualitative evaluation of this program indicated that women felt safer, and the police arrived promptly if the women needed to use the button. From the women's perspective, the officer's willingness to place the unit in her home indicated that the police believed her and were taking her safety needs seriously. The police interviewed saw this as a benefit to their investigation, especially if the client had had a history of negative contact with police.

There are some disadvantages to panic buttons. One is that they can only indicate distress - they cannot actually protect the woman from a violent partner (Wallis & Tutty, 2001). Another disadvantage is that the radius in which the personal help buttons will work is limited. The device must be able to contact the base in order to signal the police. Thus, the utility of the button is limited to the woman's home. To address these concerns, in Calgary, there is another initiative to collect old cell phones. These phones are then reprogrammed to automatically dial 911 so women's safety is enhanced while they are out in the community. A final concern regarding personal help buttons is that they are not childproof, thus, children could trigger false alarms.



**Emotional Support:** A collaboration in Calgary between ADT, Calgary Police Services and the shelters provides some emotional support since shelter outreach workers are responsible for providing the referral and are generally already supporting the woman in the community.

**Access:** Access to the personal help buttons in Calgary requires a referral. Thus women must be in contact with formal services in the community.

Women must also have a telephone landline in order for the duress pendant system to work. The security system will not work reliably or consistently with an internet telephone system. Women who do not have a good relationship with the telephone company, such as outstanding arrears, must address these issues with the telephone provider before they can access the personal help buttons.

**Other Issues:** In Calgary, there is no cost to the women for the personal help button.

### **Electronic Monitoring**

The United States is using electronic monitoring of persons charged with or convicted of crimes related to domestic violence (Erez, Ibarra, & Lurie, 2004). The rationale behind this model is that by monitoring the offender's location, the woman's safety is enhanced.

Erez, et al. (2004) identify two different types of monitoring: unilateral and bilateral. With unilateral electronic monitoring the man wears a transmitter (usually in the form of a tamper-resistant ankle bracelet) and a receiver in his home registers his presence or absence. This technology ensures that he is maintaining his curfew by being at home during the hours specified on his court order.

The other type of electronic monitoring is called bilateral (Erez, et al., 2004). With this system, not only is the man monitored in his home, but there is also a receiver in the woman's home. The woman's receiver will detect if the man comes within 500 feet of her home. Should this happen, the receiver automatically calls the police. The woman may also carry a transmitter with her when she is out in the community which will warn her of his approach. In some cases, women are also given duress pendants and/or pre-programmed cellular phones to call police.

**Safety:** A U.S. evaluation of two jurisdictions using bilateral electronic monitoring by Erez, et al. (2004) found a man was generally referred to the program during pre-trial and remained with the program until his case was disposed. The two jurisdictions limited bilateral electronic monitoring for this period of time because they viewed the pre-trial phase as the period that women were at greatest risk. Erez and colleagues determined that cases at one site averaged bilateral electronic monitoring for 48 days, and 72 days at the other site. Thus, one of the disadvantages to this approach is that women have no protection after the case is concluded.

Erez and colleagues (2004) reported that some women using the bilateral electronic monitoring commented that it helped them regain some faith in the justice system. This monitoring helped increase their sense of safety, helped them feel that they had regained some control over their lives, and helped their children feel safer.

Indeed, these findings indicated that men tended to avoid personal contact with their wives while they were under bilateral monitoring. There were few instances in which the men breached by going to the women's homes or by intentionally finding her in the community. However, one of jurisdictions examined in this study would only prosecute contact violations if intention on the man's behalf could be established by determining a pattern to his actions. In nine years, this jurisdiction had not ever established deliberate violations.

Another disadvantage to bilateral electronic monitoring is that it can only warn women that they may be at risk. Any further steps to enhance safety must be initiated by the women. Erez and colleagues (2004) noted that bilateral monitoring can only detect face to face violations; other types of violations, such as telephone calls, contact through the mail or by proxy would not register.

Other concerns reported by the women in the study were telephone outages, equipment malfunctions; and the fact that the equipment was not childproof. The women also noted that the field transmitter was bulky and difficult to carry.

**Emotional Support:** No support services are linked to electronic monitoring.

**Access:** As previously mentioned, Erez and colleague's 2004 study found that men were generally referred to the program pre-trial. To be considered as a candidate for electronic monitoring, the man had to be living separate from his partner. However, different jurisdictions have different requirements regarding separation. For example, one jurisdiction accepted temporary separation; therefore, once both parties agree to electronic monitoring, the man had moved to a different address. However, the other jurisdiction required proof of permanent separation, such as separate addresses, divorce papers, a new partner. Erez et al. noted that, when temporary separation was acceptable, the men tended to be charged with domestic violence; in contrast, when permanent separation was required, the men tended to be charged with stalking or invasion of privacy.

Bilateral monitoring is only used when a woman agrees to this approach (Erez, et al., 2004). She must be willing to have the transmitter in her home. Similar to the personal help buttons mentioned above, she must have a landline. She also has to be willing to give up telephone features since call-waiting, call forwarding, and telephone-based internet interfere with the transmitter.

If a woman later changes her mind about participating in bilateral monitoring, the equipment is removed, and the man is then placed on unilateral monitoring - which will only determine if he is abiding by his curfew (Erez, et al.).

**Other Issues:** If a woman agrees to the bilateral monitoring, there are no charges to her for the program costs (Erez, et al., 2004). Depending on the jurisdiction, men may have to pay for the cost of the program. The disadvantage to requiring the man to pay for the program is if the couple is temporarily separated, then part of the burden for payment could fall to the woman. Thus, the wrong person bears responsibility for some of the consequences of the man's abusive behaviour.

## Sanctuaries

A strategy that involves considerable cost and a societal commitment to keeping women safe in their homes is the sanctuary program in the U.K. It is used only in extreme cases and is questionably appropriate for importing to Canada. However, as the extreme end of a continuum of strategies to keep women safe in their homes, it is interesting to consider.

The United Kingdom are using what they term “sanctuaries” for women who do not live with seriously abusive perpetrators and wish to remain in their own homes. Sanctuaries are intended to provide women and children “with additional physical security measures to make the option of remaining safely in their accommodation a realistic one” (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006, p. 5). Sanctuaries are typically reinforced rooms within the home that women and children can lock themselves until the police arrive. In certain circumstances, enhanced security features are applied to the entire house. An example of enhancing security to the entire house includes placing security bars on the windows, replacing outside wooden doors with metal doors and reinforcing these doorframes.

**Safety:** The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG, 2006) reported that surveys through various partnerships in England indicate that victims generally feel safer having sanctuaries. However, some women expressed concern about their safety in the community. Other women were concerned about their partner’s ability to persuade them or their children that they are no longer a threat and could be safely let into the home. DCLG suggests that these findings indicate the need for on-going risk assessments and outreach support services.

**Emotional Support:** One of the advantages to these enhanced security measures is that women can stay in their community, close to their informal and formal support systems (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006).

Access to sanctuary is seen as only part of a woman’s safety plan. In some communities, women have support from the local VAW outreach workers during the assessment phase to help them evaluate if they want a sanctuary in their home and to determine how this plan works with their long-term safety needs. Unfortunately, the DCLG report points out that the availability of support workers across England varies, often determined on the funding circumstances of the local shelter. Some do not have the funding to provide outreach workers and are using trained volunteers through local VAW shelters to offer women support. Ongoing emotional support for women participating in sanctuary schemes is not available.

**Access:** Risk assessments determine whether the woman is a candidate for sanctuary and to assess if the physical structure of her home can accommodate the added security features (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006).

Sanctuary schemes are community partnerships between police, the fire department, a domestic violence specialist, and if appropriate the local housing authority. Any one of these partners can refer a woman to the program. To qualify, the referring agencies must believe that without the sanctuary, the woman is at risk of homelessness. Single women and single mothers are eligible.

Once a woman is referred, in-depth risk assessments are conducted, evaluating the women, her children, the perpetrator and the home. According to DCLG not all properties can be made safe. Women living in rural communities may not be appropriate if they live in remote locations that would take the police too long to respond. In some cases, the perpetrator may be too dangerous to make a sanctuary an appropriate option.

While it is important that women do not feel pressured to accept a sanctuary; the DCLG (2006) report indicates that, “from referral to completed work will normally take up to 2 weeks but it is possible to speed up the process, if circumstances require it” (p. 23).

**Other Issues:** In their discussion of how communities can set-up and maintain sanctuary schemes, the Department for Communities and Local Government (2006) introduced various options for funding this alternative, including: local housing authorities, homeless prevention funds, grants through police crime reduction partnerships. In all circumstances, they stressed that any work must be free of charge to the victim.

### **Summary**

The options described in this section are the most esoteric and least often utilized. They are included to illustrate the lengths that some governments and criminal courts have gone to attempt to assure safety for abused women and their children, when their partners have been persistently stalking and harassing them.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion and Recommendations**

While not exhaustive, this review of abuse-specific and non-abuse-specific housing options for women presents a number of possibilities. The risk in providing such a comprehensive list is that it appears that abused women at risk of homelessness have many options. In fact, as has been noted throughout, many of these options are not available, not feasible or questionably safe.

That the Canadian stock of safe, affordable, permanent housing is at crisis low proportions is generally accepted and the public are generally aware of homelessness. However, the stereotype of a homeless person remains that of a man with severe substance abuse and mental health problems. The plight of homeless women and the extent to which many have histories of violence and have fled violent relationships is still not common knowledge. It requires a more nuanced set of solutions and programs.

The factors of safety, providing emotional support, the maximum length of stay, quality of the housing and access utilized in the previous review, often have to be balanced or traded off. Ideally safety is a factor in every housing decision. Addressing a range of safety options, such as facilitating access to a personal safety button if requested, could provide added safety for some women.

However, not all women whose partners have abused them require emotional support, or, at any rate, they do not need it continually. Knowing the name and contact information of a support person such as a shelter follow-up or outreach worker, may be all that some women need to feel that support is available at the end of a phone-line. Having stated that, though, providing the option of supportive counselling to women who have acquired emergency protection orders or personal safety devices, could assist them in ensuring that their safety plans are up-to-date and as comprehensive as necessary.

In general, the maximum lengths of stays in VAW and homeless shelters in Canada are relatively short, given the difficulty accessing not only housing but social assistance, schooling and employment – issues for most women who have decided to leave abusive partners. Even a couple of weeks or two extra in an emergency shelter could make a tremendous difference for most women.

Concerns about the quality of the long-term housing options can lead to women moving from residence to residence, especially when good quality housing is in short supply and their income is likely to be reduced after leaving their abusive partner. As mentioned in the literature review, what is accessible (public housing) may not be safe. Finally, how long are the waiting lists to get into public housing?

The unique safety needs of abused women, especially those whose partners remain threats, must be the core issue when considering housing. However, the entire population of abused women must be considered, which includes a large number who never have nor are likely to access emergency shelters for women. As such, housing options that would be appropriate for women with fewer safety risks might simply never be appropriate for women whose partners have been brutally violent.

Both VAW and homeless first-stage shelters are intended to be short-term resources for women. The institutional and the grass-roots response to both abuse and homelessness has been to develop shelters and transition houses to provide at least

temporary safety and services in the hope of interrupting the cycle. Each Canadian province and territory has a number of shelters that both address violence against women and homelessness. There is little overlap, although a few organizations either house women with both problems or have separate shelters to address each. Indeed, the bulk of the research literature on women's homelessness and abuse focus on the issues separately. While there are admittedly key differences in both the populations they serve and the services they offer, what is clear is that shelters not uncommonly deal with the same women.

Second stage housing in both sectors is intended to provide women with a transitional step between the shelter and living independently. They offer some stability in housing and in meeting her basic needs, so that she has a foundation from which to rebuild her life and reintegrate into the dominant community. Second stage housing for abused women offers enhanced security to protect families from dangerous or homicidal ex-partners as well as emotional support. Second stage VAW shelters are less common than emergency shelters and, as such, preference is given to women at high risk from their previous partners. The general lack of second-stage housing beds means that they are not an option for the majority of abused women, many of whom will move back into the community.

Some second stage shelters in both sectors offer programs, services and supports to aid the women's attempts to rebuild their lives. Both second stage shelters struggle with no funding or under funding, and limited availability. There appears to be even fewer second stage housing opportunities for women who have been homeless.

For women leaving VAW or homeless shelters, access to social housing is a problem. While most provinces or territories offer priority access to women who have been abused in recognition of their safety needs, there are also concerns related to the conditions under which women are recognized as abused. A woman may not have the necessary documentation to "prove" to the local housing authority that she has indeed fled from an abusive partner. Priority access is extremely rare for women who are homeless. Leaving an abusive partner is when women and children's safety are statistically at greatest risk, the time when women and children are more likely to be murdered (Ellis, 1992).

### **Interim Recommendations**

This project constitutes the first phase of a recently approved project, "Identifying Best Practices to Safely House Abused and Homeless Women" funded by the Homelessness Knowledge Development Program, Homeless Partnering Secretariat, Human Resources and Social Development Canada. The second phase of the project is to more systematically interview personnel from unique housing models for abused women across Canada and elsewhere. The third phase of the project entails interviewing from 49 to 70 women who have been both abused and homeless from across the country to discover their perspectives and ideas about what models of housing would best meet their needs. These two phases are underway at the writing of this document.

Given this context, we propose the following interim recommendations with the proviso that more comprehensive ideas, grounded in the experiences of these women and

organizations to be accessed in the near future, may be forthcoming at the end of the project.

**Recommendation One: Consider implementing innovative third stage housing model elsewhere in the province.**

The WINGS collaboration with City of Edmonton social housing and the newer Family Violence Housing First Case Management Team in Calgary seem to be working well to date. Both were developed with a clear and full understanding of the needs of abused women when they exit second stage shelters and hope to establish themselves and their children safely in the community. These collaborations involve already existing housing stock and add emotional support for those who feel the need.

**Recommendation Two: Consider lengthening the stays in Alberta's emergency and second stage shelters.**

Research from the United States and internationally clarify that both emergency and second stage shelter stays are generally longer. According to Melbin, Sullivan and Cain (2003), the average stay at U.S. emergency shelters is 60 days. In the U.S., most second stage shelters allow women to stay 12-24 months (Correia & Melbin, 2005; Melbin, Sullivan, & Cain, 2003). In both cases, such longer stays would allow women to develop more stable plans including a search for more adequate housing.

The downside in most urban shelters is that allowing current residents to stay longer would prevent women ready to enter the shelter from being able to do so. However, the appropriateness of this possibility could be considered.

**Recommendation Three: Advocate increasing the availability of public housing**

Despite the importance of second stage shelters as housing options, ultimately moving out into the community into safe, affordable, permanent housing is the goal of most abused women. For many, this is difficult. Not only are there long waiting lists for most social housing, but the stock is often old and in less-desirable neighbourhoods. New models that support building social housing in new municipal developments are one strategy to enhance the quality of social housing, yet are often critiqued.

Shelter directors in the VAW network have been involved in lobbying for better public housing for many years, understanding the importance of this option for some women. Novac (2006) cites Shin et al. (1998) as finding that, in spite of all issues that homeless women face, subsidized housing was the primary predictor of housing stability - and that remained true for up to five years (p. 14). Adding shelter outreach staff to provide support to women who wish it would enhance this option.

**Recommendation Four: Support the use of emergency protection orders for women whose partners are at low risk to reoffend.**

Despite the general scepticism about EPOs, could their use be enhanced with consultation between the police and community with respect to access and breaches? The review of the *PAFVA* legislation (Tutty et al., 2005) highlighted its under-utilization from 2002 to 2004 in Alberta. Used much more often in Edmonton than any other Alberta community, the provisions to give women possession of the family home are powerful and, if the abuser is not at risk of breaching the order, can be effective. This would be

appropriate for perhaps a small group of abused women, but if the women's safety could be established, would give her much more flexibility than having to move. This is supported by research on low reassault rates for women who went through the process of making the emergency orders into permanent orders (Holt et al., 2002)

Nevertheless, concerns about the police either not facilitating access to the orders (Tutty et al., 2005) or responding to reported breaches (Rigakos, 1997) suggest the importance of shifting these responses first before ever implying that women are safe with the orders.

To conclude, as noted already, this literature/internet review is but the first step in a more comprehensive research project to inform communities of the importance of enhancing and developing additional housing options for women who have been abused and are at risk of homelessness. That this population and their children are at significant risk cannot be disputed. It is society's responsibility to meet the needs of our most vulnerable citizens.

That many cities across Canada have recognized homelessness as an issue of serious concern is encouraging. However, the fact that women abused by intimate partners make up a large portion of the population of homeless women and those at risk of homelessness is not yet understood by many members of the general public or some homelessness advocates. Continuing to raise the profile of this significant social problem is essential.



### Appendix 1: Summary Table of Options for Housing Abused Women

	Safety	Quality of Housing	Emotional Support	Access	Other Issues
<b>Keeping Women in their Home: Emergency Protection orders</b>	--Developed for "low-risk" offenders. --Some evidence that EOPs prevent further violence in some cases. --are breaches addressed?	--Good. --Children can remain in same neighbourhood & school.	--None available that is tied to the EPO	--Abused women and service providers still having difficulty know how to access. --Some police officers unwilling to use civil remedies	--Powerful provision to take offender from the home and retain house payments.
<b>Emergency Shelter</b>	--Enhanced security	--a temporary residence --Alberta: maximum stay considered to be 21 days. --Nationally: a wide range. 30 days the most frequent allowable maximum --In Israel, women stay 6 months. --Quality of housing varies. --Communal living	--90% of Canadian shelters offer a wide range of in-house, community, and follow-up support and counselling. --Nationally 2/3 of shelters offer in-house counselling to children.	--A relatively small proportion of abused women access shelter services (6-8%) --Access problematic in rural/remote communities --First priority is for women with children.	--Most provincial governments provide core funding, but the departments responsible vary widely. --Maximum lengths of stay vary according to what a particular shelter negotiates with the provincial funder. --Under funding is an ongoing issue. --Many provinces & territories fund only the internal house activities.
<b>Second Stage Shelters</b>	--Enhanced security	--Maximum stay varies from 6-18 months, with 1 year the most common. --Families are in their own apartments.	--Staff offer counselling & support.	--Access limited. Not all provinces/ territories have second stage shelters --Usually open only to women from emergency shelters --Some second stage units do not allow older adolescent boys to live in the shelter.	--Alberta: only 2 second stage shelters are provincially funded. --No core funding for second stage shelters in Canada. Money for the physical space & programming tends to come from separate sources. --CMHC or provincial housing departments may fund the building.
<b>Safe Homes</b>	--No enhanced security	--Maximum stay is 7 days. --As family homes, it isn't clear what guidelines have been established regarding the quality of the home.	--In some provinces or territories the safe home providers are trained to help victims of domestic violence. --BC has area coordinators that provide support	--Access can be problematic: most programs do not provide transportation.	--Funding mostly through provincial governments
<b>Interim Shelters</b>	--In Manitoba, interim housing provides women a	--Stays range from 90 days to six months.	--Shelter staff provide outreach support to the	--Availability varies region to region in Manitoba.	--Manitoba Housing rental units are under the control of the shelters.

	Safety	Quality of Housing	Emotional Support	Access	Other Issues
	place while waiting for longer term housing. --Most do not have extra security; the 2 shelters with interim housing in their physical structure offer enhanced security.		families in the interim housing.		--The shelters incur the expense of the operations but not the rent. --The exception to this are the 2 shelters with interim housing within their physical structure, which are reimbursed for occupancy.
<b>Third Stage Housing (Alberta)</b>	--No enhanced security.	--Program open to single mothers & children for 2 full school years. --Units are part of the regular public housing stock, so quality of housing can vary.	--Women are supported by outreach workers. --The community partners meet monthly. --If any issues, the committee can problem-solve, such as liaising between landlord & tenant.	--Most women referred through second stage program, but some are from the community --20 subsidies are available: the current challenge is that with the high cost of living people are not moving from public housing.	--Third Stage Housing is a partnership between Wings of Providence, City of Edmonton Non Profit Housing Corporation, Capital Region Housing Corporation, Alberta Human Resources and Employment, Alberta Children's Services, and a community member. --Women's combined payment for rent and utilities maximizes at 27-30% of her gross income. --Once women's time is up, they can stay in the unit if they still qualify. --Women can stay in unit with a new partner if their combined incomes qualify.
<b>Non-DV Shelters</b>	--some security	--i.e. Mary Dover House: 6 emergency beds for single women & children. --Overflow for emergency shelters. --Maximum stay is 14 days at no cost to residents	--Staff provide individual & group counselling.	YWCA Canada offers a number of these.	
<b>Homeless shelters</b>	--Women at risk of assaults from male residents	--bare minimum—night to night residency	--typically little support	--available	--little understanding of the unique needs of women
<b>Homeless shelters for women</b>	--Some security	--residency longer than non-gendered homeless shelters	--some support	--Few in Canada: only in large cities	
<b>Public</b>	--No enhanced security	--Housing is long-term.	--none	--Women must qualify based	--To date, no sustained national or

	Safety	Quality of Housing	Emotional Support	Access	Other Issues
<b>Housing</b>	--Some units are in unsafe neighbourhoods	--In some provinces and territories existing housing stock is old, poorly insulated, & poorly maintained.		on income. --All provinces offer priority placement for women fleeing abusive partners. --But Canadian public housing is in crisis. Lack of housing stock has increased wait times, particularly in urban areas.	provincial housing strategies designed to increase the availability of affordable housing.
<b>Private Housing</b>	--No enhanced security	--Variable, depending on the particular unit & the neighbourhood	--None	--Discrimination from landlords who do not want to rent to abused women.	--More expensive than public housing. Women may have to rent less desirable properties, in more dangerous neighbourhoods.

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