
“I Built My House of Hope:” Best Practices to Safely House Abused and Homeless Women



by

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Abstract

Violence from intimate partners is a serious reality for a number of Canadian women. For some abused women, leaving becomes a path to homelessness. In fact, when abused women and their children leave their homes because of partner abuse they become homeless even if they subsequently seek residence in a shelter for woman abuse. While emergency and second stage shelters for violence against women are essential services that can assist women to prevent becoming homeless, they are short-term solutions that are under the same constraints as other organizations when assisting women to find safe and affordable housing out in the community. Abused women and their children can slip through the cracks, sinking into a life of poverty, unsafe housing and/or becoming homeless for extended periods.

This project first reviewed best practices to safely house abused and homeless women, assessing what models of emergency and second stage shelters best address women's housing and what models and or strategies might better assist women who are at high risk to becoming homeless to access safe, affordable and permanent housing. Secondly, we interviewed 62 women from across Canada who had been abused by partners and homeless at some point. The women were asked for their perspectives on what is needed to more adequately provide housing for themselves and their children. The project recommendations stem from both the environmental scan and the women's narratives.

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.

Context and Objectives

On exiting 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?

Methodology

The environmental scan was compiled through 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. 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.

The interviews with women were conducted by the research partners across the country. The interviews were intended to complement the environmental scan of the best practices by asking women who have been abused and homeless to identify their perspectives on preventing homelessness and how best to safely house abused women. The project has clear policy and practice implications, providing best practice models to both VAW and homeless shelters that could more effectively address the needs of their women clients to find safe, affordable and permanent housing.

The women participated in semi-structured interviews of approximately one to two hours in length to discuss their experiences and perspectives to prevent homelessness. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The RESOLVE Alberta team conducted the data analysis using ATLAS-TI qualitative software and standard social work qualitative methodology including identifying prominent themes and sub-themes (Tutty, Rothery & Grinnell, 1996).

Key Findings

The extent to which women are among the ranks of the homeless has rarely been acknowledged. The stereotype of a homeless person remains a man with mental health or substance abuse issues. 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.

That women were even among the homeless was rarely mentioned in the early research on homelessness, with an estimated 3% of the homeless being women research from the 1950s and 60s (Rossi, 1990, cited in Lehmann, Kass, Drake, & Nichols, 2007). Women now make up a much greater proportion of the homeless population; around one-quarter in recent Canadian city's homeless counts (Tutty, et al., 2009).

Women are even less visible when considering that they often use relative homelessness and insecure accommodation when possible. The faces of women among the homeless are also obscured by research on homeless families, the majority of which represent mothers and children. Young women are described in studies as "youth," "runaways," or "prostitutes."

As noted in comments in a previous report (Tutty, et al., 2007), when a woman leaves an abusive partner, even if she goes to a VAW shelter, she and her children are essentially homeless. Yet, the general public tends to believe that she has found

accommodation, forgetting that most Canadian shelters for abused women are limited to offering residence for periods of from three weeks to a month or so.

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, as previously mentioned, the stereotype of a homeless person as a man obscures the plight of homeless women, as well as their experiences of violence and abuse from intimate partners.

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?

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 VAW 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).

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.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The following set of recommendations includes several from the environmental scan that were confirmed by the women interviewed for this phase of the project.

Recommendation One: Develop additional programs to assist abused and homeless women to find safe, affordable, long-term housing.

Second and third stage housing in both the VAW 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

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Beyond second stage shelters, one might look at unique programs across Canada that constitute promising models of "third stage" or supported housing: WING's third stage housing program, Peggy's Place etc. 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 indicate the need.

Similarly, the Homeless Knowledge Program from Nova Scotia seemed a good idea. The housing retention support workers provided services such as information, individual and group counselling, safety planning, life skills, referrals and advocacy in accessing community resources. Manitoba also provides support to abused women in its interim housing.

- Programs to house single women without children are a particular need.

Recommendation Two: Support representatives from VAW and Homeless shelters to work together to create new programs and support already-existing initiatives to address issues and services for abused and homeless women.

Currently existing national organizations such as the Canadian Association of Women's Shelters and the National Working Group on Women and Housing, YWCA of Canada and Sheltersnet, to name a few, are already addressing key aspects of the work that a national network of women's shelters could address, although none holistically address both issues. A national network on abused and homeless women, as proposed in an earlier project (Tutty, et al., 2007), could take the lead in addressing these critical issues for Canada's most vulnerable women. At a local or provincial level, representatives from VAW and homeless shelters could collaborate and conduct cross-training. Ultimately, they share many of the same women as clients.

Recommendation Three: Lengthen the allowable stays in Canadian emergency and second stage shelters.

In Canada, provincial and territorial governments have the responsibility for funding VAW shelters, which overlaps with considerations of the maximum length of residence. Shelters in some provinces have a suggested length of stay of three to four weeks. International and American research clarifies 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, et al.,

2003). In both cases, longer stays would allow women to develop more stable plans including a search for more adequate housing. The downside in most urban VAW emergency shelters is that allowing current residents to stay longer would prevent women ready to enter the shelter from being able to do so.

Recommendation Four: Advocate increasing the availability of subsidized housing

Despite the importance of second stage shelters as housing options for abused women, ultimately moving out into the community into safe, affordable, permanent housing is the goal of most shelter residents. 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.

Shelter directors in the VAW network have been involved in lobbying for better subsidized 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.

Finding housing post emergency shelter has become a significant need for most women who flee abusive partners. Much of the short time she is in the VAW emergency shelter is taken up with finding the resources to meet her basic needs once she leaves the shelter meaning that she has much less time to deal with the multiple additional issues and decisions. No wonder women return to their partners. Shelters could more effectively assist women with finding housing by, for example,

- Developing a housing coordinator position whose major responsibility would be assisting women with housing.
- Training the current VAW shelter staff to be more actively involved with women regarding connecting to resources, housing being a first step.
- Partnering with the local housing agencies and organizations to develop site-specific plans to find more appropriate housing (see Alberta's third stage shelter as one example) and, if not in place already, prioritize abused women on the wait-list for subsidized housing.

Recommendation Five: Review shelter and agency policies for implicit biases or discrimination in accessing services.

How we define a problem can prevent women in need from accessing services. As only one example, one of our interviewees who had separated from her partner because of abuse was turned away from a VAW shelter because the intake worker saw her as "homeless" not "abused". Agency policies have the capacity to prevent numerous women from being seen as eligible for services, especially those most vulnerable, who are at the intersections of issues such as addictions, mental health concerns. These overlapping concerns characterize abused women who are most at risk of becoming homeless.

Shelters might consider broadening mandates or taking more of a harm-reduction approach. Specialized programs such as Peggy's Place in Vancouver, that was developed

for women with mental health disorders and have experienced trauma such as partner abuse, are one possibility, although most likely viable only in large metropolitan areas. Issues such as substance use and mental health problems can create difficulties for shelter staff and other shelter residents, yet these women often have no other place to go and are in dire need. Rather than simply and rotely denying them entry, what else might be offered to them that would allow their entry under certain conditions?

Recommendation Six: Create local resource booklets/pamphlets on housing for women.

Ontario has created a housing resources booklet that two of the Ontario women interviewed mentioned. Many of the 62 women interviewed had little knowledge of where to seek help. One woman was not even aware of the existence of women's shelters.

A resource booklet could guide women through the bureaucracy of filling out forms to access subsidized housing, showing them what they need to document. As mentioned previously, a working group in Ontario both identified the clear steps that abused women needed to take in order to access the special priority given through the Housing Act but also wrote eligibility criteria and provided professionals with a template to write referral letters. They developed a protocol, a "story" that guides women in appropriately gaining access to subsidized housing.

Such a booklet could prove a valuable resource to the hidden homeless, since it could be broadly distributed to women without the need for them to have sought formal services or shelter. This would provide this group that seldom has access to the priority housing list because they skirt the formal system, with the information to access the housing.

Recommendation Seven: Advocate to child protection services for a more humane approach to women and their children who have been or are at risk of homelessness.

Of significant concern is the number of women in our study who lost their children to child welfare authorities.

- Meet with local child protection authorities to review the local practices with respect to homeless mothers and their children. One option for some women would be for child protection staff to provide housing for the mother and finances to feed her and her children, rather than placing the children in foster care. Not only would this promote the family's health, it would be cost effective.
- For women with addictions, apprehensions could well mean they lose any incentive to remain clean and/or sober. We would recommend that addiction treatment include placements in which women could remain with or have access on the premises to their children.
- A Catch 22 exists with respect to women's access to subsidized housing when their children have been taken into care. Once children have been apprehended, child protection services would not return the children until the women had suitable housing. With the frequently long waiting lists for subsidized housing, and the women's limited income for accessing safe and affordable private rentals, this requirement presents a dilemma. Further, in some provinces, women cannot secure subsidized housing that will meet the needs of themselves and their

children when the children are not physically in their care. Thus, it seems sensible that subsidized housing institute policies that will grant women the opportunity to rent a place large enough to accommodate them and their children.

Recommendation Eight: Advocate to emergency homeless shelters to safeguard women clientele.

With a few important exceptions (mostly in large cities), emergency homeless shelters take in both men and women and the facilities do not separate the genders, which has created unsafe environments for women. Even if women merely perceive a risk, she may choose not to use the shelter, which could leave her even more vulnerable to assaults and other dangers.

- Individuals working in the homeless sector often have little understanding of the unique needs of women, particularly those that have been abused by their partners. Shelter professionals are in an excellent position to provide training to improve the sensitivity to these women's needs.
- Emergency homeless shelters should have separate gender dorms or include safety features to protect women.
- More outreach day/street programs for homeless women are needed. These programs could provide support and information about accessing housing.

Research Limitations and Strengths

Any study of such magnitude has both weaknesses and strengths. The following section identifies several of each. Although we were able to access a relatively large number of women for a qualitative study, the fact that the women were from British Columbia to New Brunswick, a large cross-section of Canada, is a strength.

We interviewed women in shelters and other programs. However, research suggests a large proportion of women do not use such services, constituting the hidden homeless. As such, the voices of immigrant women and women who prefer not to use formal services are not represented in the project results. Immigrant women may be dealing with abuse from other family members besides partners so may not identify with the almost exclusive services for intimate partner violence.

As noted in some detail, some questions in the ETHOS scale were not a good fit with our respondents. For example terms such as “unfit” accommodation. For many of the women we spoke to, any accommodation is better than none. “Overcrowding” is also a relative term when facing homelessness. Some Canadian shelters, specifically second stage shelters for abused women, were not included in the categories in the scale. If utilized in future, this measure could be revised to fit the Canadian context and the context of abused women better.

In conclusion, this project has focused on a group of women at the intersections of vulnerability. Abused and homeless women, particularly those of Aboriginal origin or from patriarchal cultures, have experienced some of life's greatest challenges, including being the victims of child and partner abuse for which they bear no responsibility. That they then use substances or develop mental health problems to cope should not be a surprise. The complexities of the issues for women abused by intimate partners who

become homeless are overwhelming and the current institutional response is simply inadequate. We must find ways to more effectively meet the urgent needs of these women to assist them to leave abusive partners and create safe new homes for themselves and their children.

The women interviewed for this study raise compelling questions and present tragic stories. How can we support them in their goals to create safe, adequate and long-term homes for themselves and their children? Continuing this dialogue and sharing their stories is only the first step.

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.

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). Wasylshyn 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 60th 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 Salomon’s (1999) U.S. study of homelessness also had similar findings to those of Gardiner and Cairns.

U.S. researchers, Tessler, Rosenheck, and Gamache (2001) conducted a study exploring the pathways to homelessness, recruiting a total of 7,724 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 with their abusive partners 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).

Comparisons of Homeless and Housed Abused Women: As is abundantly clear, not all abused women become homeless. What factors distinguish abused women who remain housed to those who face different types of homelessness? Studies comparing housed and homeless abused women from the United States reiterate that women who were a victim of intimate partner violence (Pavao, Alvarez, Baumrind, Induni, & Kimerling, 2007) or who had experienced sexual or physical violence across the lifespan (Browne & Bassuk, 1997) were more likely to have difficulty being housed. In their large study of over 300 women from California, Pavao et al. (2007) found that severe spousal abuse in the past year was four times more likely to lead to housing instability than no abuse. Hispanic or African American status were also significant variables in this study. Across a group of 435 homeless and poor housed women as young as 15, Browne and Bassuk (1997) found high levels of childhood physical abuse by a caretaker (63%), childhood sexual abuse (42%) and severe partner abuse (61%).

Low income levels also distinguished housed from non-housed American women (Browne & Bassuk, 1997; Pavao et al., 2007). Further income-related factors such as completion of highschool and employment were significantly different between the two groups (Pavao et al., 2007), similar to the conclusions of Wagner and Perrine (1994), who looked at women in general.

Family variables such as separation or divorce, and the presence of children under the age of 18 were more likely to characterize those experiencing housing instability in the United States (Pavao et al., 2007). Social networks are important, as women possessing better relationship skills were less likely to experience homelessness.

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 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 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 northern Canada 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). Women who were sponsored by their husbands 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 environmental scan was compiled through 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.

This chapter 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 innovative approaches to support abused women's access and ability to remain in subsidized housing. Housing options that are not specific to abused women, including permanent housing through both the public and private sectors, are discussed in Chapter Three.

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. 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.

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.

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 & Efkeman, 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 partners 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 EPOs 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 many Canadian 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 be 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 who 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, 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 instituted 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 governments 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 are not 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 exceptions 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.

Support for Women to Access and Remain in Subsidized Housing

Other strategies for supporting abused women are providing them specialized access into subsidized housing and providing external support once they have moved into these units.

Ontario's Social Housing Reform Act, the *Violence Against Women (VAW) Rent Supplement Housing Program Eligibility Information*, is one example of legislation that provides priority access to social housing applicants whose personal safety, or whose family's safety is at risk because of abuse by an individual with whom they live. However, according to some, this act was not correctly understood by some front line workers and other professionals working with abused women who misinterpreted that the program was only accessible to women using VAW shelters. As such, if women and children fleeing violence could not be housed in a VAW emergency shelter they were not deemed to be eligible for subsidized housing.

Another promising example of facilitating better understanding about the Ontario Social Housing Reform Act was the initiative taken by a working group in Ontario. This group proposed to identify clear steps that abused women had to take in order to access

the special priority given through the Housing Act. The working group was involved in writing eligibility criteria and providing professionals with a tool to write referral letters. A workshop was organized for service providers to disseminate the information.

An innovative pilot project in Calgary, the Family Violence Housing First Case Management Team, was recently funded to meet the service needs of families recently rehoused 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.

Another innovative program for women exiting first or second stage shelters was the Homeless Knowledge Program from Nova Scotia (this pilot project apparently ceased due to lack of funding). The housing retention support workers provided services such as information, individual and group counselling, safety planning, life skills, referrals and advocacy in accessing community resources.

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 chapter 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 suites, 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 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 VAW 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 might 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 Wasylishyn 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 advantage 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. 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: The Women’s Narratives

The interview schedule for use with the women respondents was developed by the Research Advisory team (see Appendix 2) and conducted by the research partners across the country. These interviews were intended to complement the environmental scan of the best practices by asking women who have been abused and homeless to identify their perspectives on preventing homelessness and how best to safely house abused women. The project has clear policy and practice implications, providing best practice models to both VAW and homeless shelters that could more effectively address the needs of their women clients to find safe, affordable and permanent housing.

The women participated in semi-structured interviews of approximately one to two hours in length to discuss their experiences and perspectives to prevent homelessness. The research process was reviewed by the respective university’s ethics review boards to ensure that issues such as informed consent, confidentiality and right to withdraw from the study were addressed. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The RESOLVE Alberta team conducted the data analysis using ATLAS-TI qualitative software and standard social work qualitative methodology including identifying prominent themes and sub-themes (Tutty, Rothery & Grinnell, 1996).

This chapter presents results with respect to the background of the women interviewed for the current project and their experiences of partner abuse, while the next chapter looks at their paths into and experiences of homelessness.

Demographics and Nature of Abuse

Women from seven Canadian provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick) were interviewed with respect to their experiences of partner abuse and homelessness. While 63 women were originally interviewed, one woman had not experienced abuse from a partner but from family members, thus her narrative was not analyzed. As such, this study examines the experiences of 62 participants; all women, although one participant is transgendered, male to female. Sixty of the participants were in heterosexual relationships and two were in same-sex intimate partnerships.

The respondents ranged in age from 17 to 54, with the youngest being an emancipated minor, with an average age of 36.3 years. Table 1 indicates the age ranges of the 62 participants:

Table 1: Age Range of Respondents

Age Ranges	# Interviewees
Under 20	3
21 – 30	16
31- 40	18
41 – 50	18
51 and Over	7
Total	62

Forty-nine of the 62 participants provided information on their ethnic backgrounds (see Table 2).

Table 2: Racial Background of the Respondents

Racial Background	# Interviewees
Aboriginal	19
Inuit	5
Métis	2
Caucasian	17
Southeast Asian (India)	1
Filipino	2
Latino (South American)	2
Caribbean	1
Total	49

Four of the 49 participants who provided information about their racial backgrounds had immigrated to Canada, all as adults. Two of these women had been in Canada for a year or less, and the other two had lived in Canada for over ten years. At the time of the interviews, the 62 participants identified their marital status (see Table 3).

Table 3: Marital Status of Respondents

Marital Status	# Interviewees
Single	27
Separated	16
Divorced	8
Married	4
Common-law	6
Widowed	1
Total	62

While all 62 women experienced homelessness and abuse as adults, the entry into homelessness for about one-quarter of the women (16 participants or 25.8%) began while they were youths (under age 18). These 16 respondents had left their homes and foster homes rather than continue experiencing their guardians' abusive behaviours. For them, homelessness seemed a safer alternative.

Fifty-five of the 62 (88.7%) respondents had children, ranging from one to seven.

Table 4: Number of Children

Number of Children	# Interviewees
No children	7
One child	10
Two children	17
Three children	11
Four children	9
Five children	3
Six children	3
Seven children	2
Total	62

Two women were also raising grandchildren or foster children. At the time of their interviews, four women were pregnant. In addition, two women had experienced the death of a child, although the circumstances of their deaths were not queried.

While the offspring of 12 women were all adults, 43 mothers had minor children. Yet, only a little more than a quarter of these 43 women (27.9% or 12), lived with all of their children. To clarify, the children of 31 women (72.1%) were not all currently residing with their mothers. Eighteen of these 31 women (58%) had none of their minor children still with them.

The reasons that the majority of women were not parenting their children are complex. Child protection services had apprehended the children of seven mothers. Five women had placed their children with relatives to ensure that their offspring were in a safer environment than their mothers could currently provide. Two women who had parented stepchildren for years, commented that they had to leave these children behind when they left their abusive partners. The partners of two women wanted custody of the children and had escalated their abusive behaviour to the point that the women believed that they had to relinquish custody for their personal safety.

Nature of the Partner Abuse

Since partner abuse was a characteristic of recruitment into the study, that all 62 participants had experienced abuse from their intimate partners is a given. However, perhaps one of the most striking aspects of the women's stories is the severity of their partner's abusive behaviour. All of the respondents had been homeless (the second recruitment requirement), which makes them among the most vulnerable populations in Canada with the fewest resources to keep themselves safe.

These women experienced physical abuse, including life threatening incidents in which their partners either threatened to or actually attempted to kill them; emotional, psychological and verbal abuse; sexual abuse, financial abuse, spiritual abuse and stalking.

In the interviews, a number of the women described their partner's abusive behaviour in detail. Fifty-three women commented on their partners' emotional, mental and verbal abuse. They raised concerns about their partners' attempts to control them, the cruel and derogatory, intimidating and threatening remarks that their partners made.

Daily [abuse]. First thing in the morning, I talk too loud. Even to turn on the tap for a drink of water [is] too much noise. I could not run the dishwasher, the washing machine, the vacuum. That all had to be done when he left. My spouse works in the oil field so his time at home is not predictable. When he is home, even to run to the store is touchy. If I go to run to the store, as often as not it will be, "I'll go with you." Always feeling held back. I do all the bookkeeping and the day to day operating of our life from mowing the lawn, the laundry, the grocery shopping, the bill paying. My job is to keep our life running smoothly. The only thing he can cook is microwave popcorn. He cannot make an egg. He cannot get his own drink out of the fridge. I cannot wear my hair in a ponytail. Silly controlling little mannerisms all the time. When he is finished with something he will throw it on the floor. My life really is slavery.

I didn't realize was how bad day-to-day life was. You don't think that abuse is that punch in the shoulder when he walks by, and being called a bitch or a lazy cunt, or told you're not working hard enough, not making enough money. It was very restrictive. He was very controlling over how much time I had with my parents. I had to be home at a certain time. He would phone and ask, "Are you coming home? I'm hungry." So it wasn't always hiding and lying and covering up the bruises. "You're stupid", or "You're looking fat" and "You smell bad, go brush your teeth again." Anything to ridicule and bring you down. A lot of times I'd rather take that punch to the head than being called a dirty whore or a slut or that I can't do anything right. The emotional is so much worse because you start believing it. It takes a lot to change that self-image.

A lot of emotional abuse. Lifting me up and making me feel good about myself and then tearing me down and telling me I'm not a good mother. I should be reported. I need help. "Should you see a psychiatrist?" especially when I didn't agree with what he was saying. If he tried to discipline my daughter and I didn't like it, he would throw in, "You need some help because you're not doing it right."

He would get very possessive. If we didn't get the same job together he didn't want me to work. One time he picked me up and carried me right out of the workplace. Other times he threatened to cut my clothes up. He threatened to kill my cat. He said, "I'll kill something you love."

I was working, but he was very much controlling me. The world was very small for me. I was very scared of him because he was talking nonsense. He scared me a lot, "I will do this if you do that. If you call the police, I'll find you."

He knows he has control here in Canada because I don't have [citizenship].

He was very good to me until... he said that the marriage license means he owns me. I'm there to make him happy. He didn't care about my happiness.

The mental abuse was insane. I wasn't allowed to talk to nobody. I wasn't even allowed to talk to my mother. [I] had to hold it in, because if I told anybody, I got beaten ten times worse. Everybody thinks it's so easy to leave. It's not. You've got to have that so god damned far planned in your head about when he's going to work and you can run. If you can't run, you better hope to God he don't catch you when you do run because it's going be over.

As part of the emotional abuse that they had experienced, 16 respondents raised their partners' jealous behaviour as a concern.

I couldn't talk to anybody. I'd have to walk down the street with my head down. If I was talking to somebody, it's all these people I'd known for years. "Oh I suppose you been doing it with this guy."

After five years, I didn't have friends over anymore. I didn't call them as much, especially if it was a guy. If I was going to school, I'd tell him about a guy that we're studying with that was joking and teasing. All of a sudden it blew up into I was having an affair with this person.

It was pretty bad. I had a friend and he [partner] beat him up just because I talked to this guy.

Nine women also identified their partner's affairs as an aspect of the emotional abuse they experienced.

He was the one that was cheating and he'd accuse me of cheating.

I caught him in bed with my sister.

He was going to date the babysitter. I caught them on the phone. My sister-in-law saw him in the car with the babysitter. They were having oral sex.

I was seven months pregnant and found out he was seeing another girl. I don't know if she was pregnant with his baby or some other guy's but he ended up taking the [baby stuff] over there. I said, "I don't want it, take it." When my daughter was three months, I found out he was with an older woman for money. I'm like, "I'm glad. She can have you because I'd rather just be with my daughter."

Eleven women also mentioned their partner's willingness to damage, destroy or steal their property as another aspect to the men's abusive behaviour. These men not only destroyed telephones in an attempt to prevent the interviewees from getting help, they targeted items that they knew were important to the women. As will be described in more detail later, two men even burned the respondents' homes down.

If I could take you there, I would show you all the walls, the holes from his fists, the cuts in the flooring from him throwing tables or computers.

He ripped the phone out of the wall. He went through three phones in two months. He's thinking I'm going to phone the cops.

He stole my vehicle and left with it for three days.

I was in subsidized housing and he put a two by four through the door, the big slider, at three o'clock in the morning. Cost me \$1,000 to fix.

Sometimes he grabbed my stuff and would just destroy it. Once when we were living in a motel my friend went by the room and he was slicing up my clothes with a knife. It was a good thing I wasn't there because he would probably.... Whatever I have, he destroys. I like wearing nice clothes, looking feminine. He would rip the dress right off me, just destroy it. He's always wearing boots and to terrorize me, he kicked the kitchen cabinet off the wall.

I didn't want to endanger my kids anymore. It was a danger him being there. but it was a danger him leaving. So I was stuck. I didn't know what to do. Finally, he agreed to leave. Where he'd done some crazy, breaking the walls and stuff and I just said, "That's it, you have to leave."

Moreover, 18 women stated that their partners attempted to control them by threatening to throw them out of their homes, or actually forcing them to leave when they didn't do what their partners wanted.

He keeps kicking me out every time he wants things his way.

My ex-husband always said, "You have no other choice. Only me." And, "If you do something, you'll be homeless on the street."

He would kick me out right there. I didn't want to be away from my daughter, but he's always kicking me out, "Get out of my apartment, get out!" He wouldn't kick [the] baby out, only me. He wouldn't let me take my baby, so it would be physical fights.

My ex-partner's been kicking me out once or twice a week. He would be, "If you're not getting the fuck out, I'm going phone the cops to escort you out," because it was his house. So we'd leave. I felt horrible, scared. I kept thinking, "Why did I have to leave my home?" I tried to do so much for him so we wouldn't get kicked out.

I need to be with him right now and put up with his emotional abuse, not his physical, but his emotional, mental because there's nowhere for me to go.

Seventeen respondents described their partners as abusing them sexually.

My body was his body. He raped me and threw me out, so I couldn't go back. I was badly beaten up. I was hospitalized for four days. I couldn't see for two days. Finally, I started to kind of see light, because I was so beaten up.

I was raped a lot when I was with him. I'm still suffering physically, I got booted in the crotch and he ripped me inside and out. I'm still split open down there. I'm scared to let a man touch me because I'm scared that's all they're going to do.

I got thrown into the dishwasher. I ended up with three cracked ribs. I was unconscious in the middle of the kitchen floor. I couldn't breathe, and he wanted to make up [by] having to have sex that night. I lay there crying and in pain. He would force sex on me. I would wake up in the middle of the night, he would be on top of me. If I didn't have sex, he would use his feet and force me off the bed or put a hole in the wall above my head. I've replaced so much drywall in my house; there's still holes in my walls from saying no. Sleeping on the living room couch, sleeping with my children just to avoid... Two weeks after [having a] hysterectomy he was on top of me. He was, "Suck it up, don't be such a fuss." Very manipulative, very mean. It was constant forcing himself on me, I knew it wasn't right, but we were partners. Instead of fighting and saying no and having to sleep on the couch, it's like, "Fine, just hurry up" and then you lay there and cry and you look away and you pretend you're not there.

He raped me because I was trying to get out. He had trapped me in the room and wouldn't let me leave. We were in a basement suite, I was just visiting, and I knew the people upstairs had the TV on, couldn't hear anything. I was screaming and trying to get their attention. He had me trapped in the room. At one point, he threw me against the wall. It was horrible. I was screaming and he put the pillow over my mouth a few times. Several hours of this, trying to figure how to get to the door but he had the door blocked. I couldn't fight back because it made it worse so I tried to be calm, talk to him. Eventually he let me go to the bathroom and when he sat on the bed, I ran upstairs. This was about four in the morning. The

girl was watching TV and I grabbed her [and] said, "Just stay with me. I don't know if he'll come up but I've got to get out of here."

The partners of 22 respondents were financially abusive.

In a relationship, you're supposed to help each other out. Instead he'd be buying booze. If you have a bit of food in the house, he'd sometimes sell the food.

He was gambling. I was working and he was spending the money gambling. Financially he was very abusive. He kept my Visa card, my debit card. He spent \$6,000 in gambling, cash advances. I was scared for my life and for my kids' life because he was crazy. He would stay out for three days gambling, sleeping in his car. He lost his car. He lost his job for gambling. He got fired. We didn't have enough food for my kids because he was spending all the money in the casino. I was the only one working and my cheque would come and he would be out until the morning, the cheque was done. I didn't have money the next day.

Whenever my cheques would come, he would try to take all my money. When I did hide the money he would find it. Then he'd beat me up. [Partner would say] "Why're you hiding the money from us," So I said "It was my money."

It's a lot harder if you're not getting any money to get out from the situation. Especially if he's not allowing you to have a job.

Five women had experienced spiritual abuse from their partners.

He was making fun of me going to church, criticizing and demeaning and making an argument out of God.

He thinks I do my cultural way, like my spiritual way, my Indian way. He thinks that, like, "Oh you're putting medicine on me." Doesn't want me to go to sweats. The reason I go is for prayers, like for my family and me to keep strong. I go sweat and I feel reborn when I come out of the sweat. It gives me strength. I have to keep going. But he cut me off that too.

Forty-four women described having been physically abused.

He was beating me all the time. I was always covered in bruises He started beating me because I wouldn't give him money to buy coke. I felt helpless.

He kept grabbing me. He would rough me up, trying not to leave marks. He says if there's no marks he can't get charged.

We went to work, came home, drank, he would beat me. There were times I went to work with black eyes, I had to wear sunglasses all the time. He seemed to get great pleasure showing people what he'd done to me. Women here [at VAW shelter] say they get beaten but they get hit where nobody could see. With me, it was always my eyes, my face, and my neck would be black and blue because he choked me. I would feel so sore and would still have to go to work. If I didn't go to work he would freak out. There was never remorse.

He ended up breaking my arm. But when I think back, he did a lot of things. He would trip me, or hold me down and yell at me so I couldn't get away.

One time he held me [on the] ninth floor over a balcony.

He'd broken just about every bone in my head, and I couldn't take it.

Child protection said, "It's either him or your kids." I threw him out and got a good beating for it, my nose busted, my lips cut open. my kneecaps broken that night. My back has two disks removed or moved over to the side because of him. I've got a big scar on my head from where he split it open. Had my head shoved through windows that night. Three windows get smashed, my head went through every one of them. These were really thick windows. It was really bad. I was scared to call the cops because it makes him angrier and they're not going protect you as well as you think they are. I didn't call them, cause I was too scared. I remember that beating 'cause it was the worst one.

He threw me out a three-story window and I broke my back in three places. I was in a wheelchair. I couldn't walk. The doctor said I'll never walk again, but I walked on my own. That was another challenge. I've been through a lot.

Two women commented that their partners did not want them to carry pregnancies to term, and assaulted them so severely that they miscarried.

He killed my twins. He booted me in the stomach. He didn't want twins. I said, "I'm all excited. I'm having twins." Knocked me down and stomped on my stomach and kicked me. I lost the babies three days later. I lost one in the flush and it freaked me out because I didn't know what was going on. He says, "If you had a miscarriage keep your fucking mouth shut about who did it." The doctors suspected but they didn't pursue it because I said, "No, no, I just fell down the stairs." It's all I told them. They suspected but they never really pushed it.

In addition, twenty interviewees identified situations in which their partners had threatened to kill them or had tried to kill them. The partners of six women had threatened to kill them and, given the severity of their partners' abusive behaviours, they believed that their partners were capable of following through. Two women disclosed that their partners had beaten them so severely they had not expected to live. Nine women were stabbed by their partners; four had been strangled, two men smothered their partners and two men attempted to shoot them. As already mentioned, one man dangled his partner over a ninth floor balcony, another threw the interviewee out a third story window

He's already threatened to kill me. He's taken a knife to me and told me he was going to kill me in front of our son. He goes, "I'm taking your white trash whore of a mother and I'm going to kill her." Put it right into my gut.

I've been shot at. I've been stabbed. He's uttered threats that he was going to bury me and forget where he put me. The violence escalated so bad that he held a knife to my throat. I was so bloody terrified, I just shut my mouth and that's not like me. Usually, even with the gun and everything, I'm a fighter. But when he was on top of me and had that knife to my throat, I shut up. I just figured all he's got to do is one pull, that's it. He was in a blind rage.

He's never been arrested. I never complained to the police when I was physically... twice when he choked me. We went on a business trip. He push[ed] me down on the bed and was choking [me]. He says, "Before you go to the police,

I'll kill you and take my kids. I'll leave you nothing. My family's powerful. We've got a lot of money. You'll be nowhere. You'll never see the kids."

I came home from work, he was pretty well drunk. I don't even know what the fighting was about. I was going to take a bath and he choked me in the tub underwater. He choked me. I had a cyst on my thyroid, and he choked me so hard that the cyst burst. He was a mean guy. He stabbed me actually, he stabbed me... Even to get a restraining order, he says, "That's just a piece of paper, it doesn't mean anything." He has no respect for the law. He's just nuts. He's always threatened to kill me, hurt me. He says if I call the police or make any more problems he will.

One time he took the shotgun. We have a can and he shot it and left a great big hole in it. He was going to take the next one to me when the gun stuck. Thank God!

The women's partners often continued to behave abusively even after the relationship ended. Twenty-two women were stalked by their partners.

I left him in 07' and haven't taken him back, but I still have problems with him all the time. I file police reports every two weeks: him phoning, emailing, constantly trying to talk to me and he's made threats. He'd gone to jail for all the charges, assault and mischief and other stuff not related to me. Lots of breaches. He went to jail and then got 18 months probation. He just hasn't left me alone.

That is the reality when you have an abusive partner. I don't know [if] it's their mental illness but the only priority is to find you. They don't care what they've got to go through to get to you. He found the [VAW] shelter I was staying at and he came to the office and slashed his wrists. He said, "You took my flesh and blood; here is my flesh and blood." He looked like Charles Manson, he was just wild. When we were in court he threatened the police officer, "You don't scare me with your gun." I had to change lawyers because they were shook up. So it is scary.

We were going out three months (new partner). We used to make love. Little did I know I had a peeping Tom. One day, my ex snapped, "I can't take it anymore. I'm going [to] come there and fuck you bitch and smash your skull to that guy." Out of the blue! I was totally stunned. He had to be looking at us all this time. He'd been using a ladder or a chair to look at us.

I've been trying to break up for the past year and he just kept coming back. One day he climbed in my bedroom window. He bit my ear and dragged me out of my bed by my hair. My son woke up and started yelling and crying. I told him, "Just go back to your room, it's okay." My ex grabbed my son and pushed him [son] into the room and closed the door. Then he grabbed me by the hair and took me into the living room. He asked how come I didn't want to be with him and started calling me a slut and bitch. He went into the kitchen. I grabbed the phone. We have 911 on speed dial so I pushed that. He grabbed the phone, smashed it and ripped the phone line out. Maybe five minutes later the cops showed up and got him in jail. The next day they let him out and he was back at my house. Even a restraining order didn't keep him away. I'd phone the cops and say, "He was

trying to get into my place and threatening me” and they didn’t do anything. They didn’t believe me because he wasn’t there. They didn’t catch him on my property so they couldn’t do anything. It was my word against his.

He’s scary. I believe him when he tells me he’ll kill me. Sometimes I’m afraid to be with my family or friends in case he shows up and then it’s not only me that’s in danger, it’s whoever I was with. I haven’t been able to see my friends and my family for the last two years. My friend’s been through a similar situation, but she’s like just, “call the police.” I don’t know. I called the police once. All they did was give him four months probation. Then I got beaten. He says if I call the police he will... he’s always threatened to kill me, hurt me.

He’s still able to contact me. My friend said to change your phone number. The fear is, if he calls me, I don’t have to see him. If he emails me, I don’t have to see him. If I change my phone number or don’t answer his email, he’ll show up at my work or at my school and I have to deal with him in person, which is very scary. These men are diabolical, compulsive. He went for maybe a month without contacting me at all. But he knows where I work. He has my cell phone number. He’d leave a message on my car threatening me if I didn’t call him. He showed up at my work. My co-workers told him he wasn’t allowed on the premises. He wouldn’t leave. I was in the back, like crapping myself, and he wouldn’t leave. Finally, they said they’d call the police if he didn’t leave. He started yelling and threatening them. Eventually my boss picked up the phone to call the police and he left. Sometimes, he’d follow me; wait around the corner from work and follow me. I always had to watch behind me and check the parking lot. Always be aware that he could be coming. I started my education again and he continued to threaten me and say we needed to get together.

He followed me yesterday in the park with my kids. He kept driving around and around because he knows I’m with somebody new and he wants to start something. He keeps threatening to take my kids. I’m scared every day he’s going break in there [apartment]. So scared every day he’s going to boot that door. He came into my house [before]; booted my door in and started beating on me and [my] mom. I called the cops and they took him. But the cops don’t do hardly anything. They just took [him] to where he was staying. That’s all. They took him to the boat and said, “You got to stay here.” I had to stay with my friend that night because I was too scared to stay in the house. Thank God I did because he broke into my apartment. I’ve got pepper spray now because I’m scared to death that he’s going come at me. I know it’s not legal but I don’t really care.

The Women and Homelessness

This section of the demographics examines the respondent’s experiences of homelessness. To help understand what participants have experienced, it is helpful to know how many times they have experienced homelessness in their lives.

Table 5: Occurrence of Homelessness

Occurrence of Homelessness	# Interviewees
Once	15

Several Experiences	17
Multiple Experiences	15
Total	47

Another way to understand what the participants experienced is to explore the total length of time that they have been homeless, which often adds important context to the number of times having been homeless.

Table 6: Length of Homelessness

Length of Homelessness	# Interviewees
Less than 6 months	16
6 months to less than 1 year	12
1 to 5 years	11
Over 5 years	7
Total	46

At the time of the interviews, the living situation for each woman varied. Unfortunately, the data for this table is not complete: The current living situation is missing for five participants.

Table 7: Women’s Current Living Situation

Current Living Situation	# Interviewees
Violence Against Women Emergency Shelter	21
Violence Against Women Second Stage Shelter	8
Homelessness Transition Accommodation	8
Subsidized Housing	3
Living Rough	3
Youth Group Home	3
Staying with Friends or Family (Insecure Accommodation)	4
Living in a Hotel/Motel	4
Total	54

While the above three tables provide information on how often and how long the women have been homeless, and provides a snapshot of their current situations, to gain a fuller understanding of what forms of homelessness the participants experienced over time, we asked the women to provide more details about how they tried to manage their homelessness.

The European Federation of Organisations (FEANTSA) has developed a typology of homelessness and housing exclusion. The table below portrays the experiences of the 62 respondents according to the FEANTSA typology of homelessness and housing (ETHOS). The study respondent’s experiences are reported in bold under the appropriate Living Situation category.

Table 8: Women's Experiences of Homelessness based on ETHOS 2007

Operational Category		Living Situation		Generic Description	
Roofless	1	People living rough	1.1	Public Space or External Space 29 respondents (46.8%)	Living in the streets or public spaces, without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters
	2	People in emergency accommodation	2.1	Night shelter (for the homeless) 28 respondents (45.2%)	People with no usual place of residence who make use of overnight shelter, low threshold shelter
Houseless	3	People in accommodation for the homeless	3.1	Homeless hostel category not used in study	Where the period of stay is intended to be short term (less than a year).
			3.2	Temporary accommodation category not used in study	
			2.2	Homeless transitional supported accommodation 18 respondents (29%)	
	4	People in Women's Shelter (VAW Shelter)	4.1	Women's shelter accommodation 52 respondents (83.9%)	Women accommodated due to experience of domestic violence and where the period of stay is intended to be short term (less than 1 year)
	5	People in accommodation for immigrants	5.1	Temporary accommodation/reception centres 0 respondents	Immigrants in reception or short term accommodation due to their immigrant status
			5.2	Migrant workers accommodation 0 respondents	
	6	People due to be released from institutions	6.1	Penal institutions	No housing available prior to release
6.2			Medical institutions (including psychiatric hospital)	Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing	
6.1 & 6.2			Penal & medical institutions 10 respondents (16.1%)	No housing identified e.g. by 18 th birthday	
6.3			Children's institutions/homes 4 respondents (0.6%)		
7	People receiving longer-term support due to homelessness	7.1	Residential care for older homeless people 0 respondents	Long stay accommodation with care for formerly homeless people, normally more than one year	
		7.2	Supported accommodation for formerly homeless people category not used in study (see 2.2)		

Operational Category		Living Situation		Generic Description	
Insecure	8	People living in insecure accommodation	8.1	Temporarily with family/friends 44 respondents (71%)	Living in convention housing but not the usual or place of residence due to lack of housing
			8.2	No legal (sub) tenancy category not used in study	Occupation of dwelling with no legal tenancy, illegal occupation of a dwelling
			8.3	Illegal occupation of land category not used in study	Occupation of land with no legal rights
	9	People living under threat of eviction	9.1	Legal orders enforced (rented)	Where orders for eviction are operative
			9.2	Re-possession orders (owned)	Where mortgagor has legal order to re-possess
			9.1 & 9.2	Rented or owned property 8 respondents (12.9%)	
10	People living under threat of violence	10.1	Police recorded incidents 33 respondents (53.2%)	Where police action is taken to ensure place of safety for victims of domestic violence	
Inadequate	11	People living in temporary/ non-conventional structures	11.1	Mobile homes category not used in study	Not intended as a place of usual residence
			11.2	Non-conventional building	Makeshift shelter, shack or shanty
			11.3	Temporary structure	Semi-permanent structure such as a hut or cabin
			11.2 & 11.3	Non-conventional and temporary buildings 12 respondents (19.4%)	
	12	People living in unfit housing	12.1	Occupied dwellings unfit for habitation 13 respondents (20.9%)	Defined as unfit for habitation by nation legislation or building regulations
13	People living in extreme overcrowding	13.1	Highest national norm of overcrowding: 12 respondents (19.4%)	Defined as exceeding national density standard for floor-space or useable rooms	

Comments Regarding the ETHOS Table

The counts in Operational Categories 1 (People Living Rough) and 2 (People in Emergency Homeless Accommodation) are similar. Of the 62 women who participated in this study, almost half indicated that they had lived rough (29 or 46.8%) and another almost half had accessed homeless night shelters (28 or 45.2%). While these two categories report similar numbers, for the most part, different individuals reported both experiences. In other words, the people who are trying to survive on the street are not necessarily the same individuals who are accessing the homeless night shelters.

Violence Against Women is Operational Category 4. Unfortunately, ETHOS only recognizes the violence against women emergency shelters. There is no place in the original typology to report the numbers of women who have accessed second stage shelters. However, in this study 17 of the 62 (27.4%) respondents had accessed the services of VAW second stage accommodation.

The ETHOS definition would allow placement of VAW second stage accommodation under this category since they define the term “short term” stay as anything under a year. This seems somewhat misleading for the Canadian experience. VAW shelters in some provinces count women’s length of stay in days: 21 days in Alberta, 30 days in Saskatchewan and BC. Second stage shelters are considered long-term in Canada, and many have maximum lengths of stay less than a year.

However, placing Violence Against Women as an operational category highlights the intersection between women fleeing abusive partners and homelessness in that 52 (83.9%) of the 62 participants had accessed VAW shelters.

Only four study respondents were newcomers to Canada. However, as indicated on the ETHOS table, Operational Category 5, none of the participants had accessed accommodation specifically for immigrants.

As indicated in Operational Category 6 (People Due to be Released from Institutions), the two sub-categories were combined. In this study, two of the ten respondents did not specify whether they faced homelessness issues when leaving a penal institution or a hospital, thus in this study these two categories have been combined

The other sub-category in this Operational Category is 6.3, which identifies children institutions/homes. As previously mentioned, all but one of the study participants were over the age of 18 at the time of the interview (one participant was an emancipated minor at age 17). However, the children’s institutions that the four women accessed allowed them to stay until their 21st birthday, and one institution allowed women to stay up until age 25.

Operational Category 8 is with respect to people living in insecure accommodation. Next to VAW shelters, it is the resource that women were most likely to access; 44 women or 71% of the respondents stayed with friends or family.

People living Under Threat of Eviction is Operational Category 9. For the purposes of this study, the two sub-categories differentiating between rental or owned property were combined. While eight respondents (12.9%) disclosed losing their homes through legal orders, three participants did not specify whether they were evicted or had faced foreclosure,

Operational Category 10 is defined as people living under threat of violence. However, the Living Situation in this typology is operationalized to only recognize police intervention with regard to intimate partner abuse. While this certainly applied to 33 (53.2%) of the respondents, this definition disregards the myriad of safety risks that abused and homeless women face. Certainly, one could contend that all 62 participants lived under threat of violence since all had fled their abusive partners. However, not every respondent went to the police.

In addition, a number of participants identified additional situations that they believed threatened their personal safety that the ETHOS typology does not address. For example, some women had been sexually assaulted while couch surfing; other women did not feel safe on the street, or in homeless night shelters. The concern with this typology is that it could miss the circumstances and potential dangers for women who are roofless, insecurely or inadequately housed. These issues will be addressed more thoroughly in other sections of this report.

ETHOS Operational Category 11 is defined as people living in temporary/non-conventional structures. The 12 respondents (19.4%) who reported this experience, described living in tents, sheds and cars. Finally, 11 women (17.7%) mentioned that when they were houseless, but had some money, they stayed in low-cost hotels or motels. However, there is no place in the typology to report this information.

Chapter Six: Abused Women's Pathways into Homelessness

The women participating in this study identified three main entering routes into homelessness. Given that partner abuse was a characteristic defining with whom we spoke, it should not be surprising that the most frequently reported factor leading into homelessness was intimate partner violence. However, the sixty-two women experienced different forms of homelessness after they chose to leave or had faced eviction by their abusive partner. As noted previously, the types of homelessness varied from insecure and inadequate accommodation to temporarily living in shelters or on the street. From the participants' perspectives, domestic abuse accentuated their vulnerability in connecting with the support networks that are vital in regaining economic and emotional independency.

A second factor contributing to abused women's homelessness was alcohol and drug abuse. Eighteen¹ women identified their addiction issues as their main reason for becoming homeless. Of the 18, 15 referred to substances as a way to cope with their partner's abuse and, additionally, with other challenges that they endured while being homeless.

A third factor leading to women's homelessness was discharge from an institution. Eight interviewees mentioned that they had no place to stay following their discharge. A range of institutions was reported, including prisons, hospital, and mental health institution.

The following sections present further clarification of the roles that these three factors played in the participants' struggles to secure housing and the women's perspectives on different types of homelessness. The common themes emerged from the qualitative interviews are illustrated with quotes from the women's stories.

Partner Abuse: A Primary Factor in Women's Homelessness

After they had left their abusive partners, the women most often sought temporary shelter through friends, relatives and even strangers. A significant number of women preferred to access shelter programs for abused women and/or homeless persons. However, several women reported lived experiences on the street after they faced eviction from their abusive partner or after they simply chose to leave.

Regardless of the type of homelessness that they experienced, 25 respondents reflected on the impact of domestic violence on their capacity to secure accommodation. The following narratives highlight the social isolation and vulnerability that play an essential role in women ending up homeless.

[I was homeless] because my partner's getting me evicted. He comes home drunk, cops [are] involved and landlord is not liking it, so gives us a 14 day notice to move. My partner has somewhere to go. Well, I had places to go but I felt I overstayed my welcome.

¹ The numbers of interviewees who discuss issues may be different from that reported in the ETHOS table or demographics. Some demographics were obtained from interviewer notes, not the narratives.

Three or four times I've had to sleep in an empty house because of being in an abusive relationship. I'm always in an abusive relationship and having to take off and not know where to go. I didn't know about shelters.

When my ex and I broke up he moved out. He was helping me pay the bills and help with groceries and everything we needed for the kids. When he moved out, I lost half that support. I couldn't afford nine hundred dollars on my own, not raising two babies. So when he left, I had to give up my apartment. I had one of two options, my children left me or I moved in with my mom. So I moved in with my mom. It wasn't a choice I wanted. But I had to do it to keep my kids safe.

Homeless episodes were reported by several women even during the time they were still living with abusive partners. A typical scenario, according to one interviewee, consisted of living in a continuous state of uncertainty, fear of being left out on the street under unsafe circumstances.

The last time he called me names, chased me and locked me out in wintertime, barefooted or socks only. Sometimes he'd throw my boots out, sometimes he wouldn't. I'd go into his car for heat, and even though there was no heat, it was to get out of the cold. Sometimes he would literally come outside and yell at me to get out of his car. Those were the worst feelings. One time I was so devastated by what had happened that I was banging on the windows, on the doors, and I cut myself on the window. That's enough to get some kind of medical attention, but no, he'd just ignore it and cause me to possibly get an infection. I was just done. I could not keep living like that. Now I don't have to worry about being in the snow, crying my eyes out, wondering where I am going to go with no money, no purse.

We got into an argument and he told me "get out." I was like, "What the hell, that's my home, I have nowhere to go." I ended up by the DI [Drop In homeless shelter], sitting around. I didn't speak, I just hung out and then the train [light rail transit] started running. I went back on the train and went home.

I always seem to keep myself packed, always, always keep my private stuff in one place, like my papers. That's how I lived with him, I kept things where I can leave right away because he's always kicking me out and I have to make a run for it. I don't feel like it's my home, so I feel homeless being in that home, I'm saying it's my home, but it's not.

Several interviewees mentioned that their former partner's stalking behaviours seriously interfered with attempts to find themselves stable housing. Eleven participants reported having to move repeatedly from their private rentals. Common reasons consisted of abusive partners identifying the location of women's homes and/or damaging the women's rented property. For these women, the result was eviction and fewer chances to secure another private rental.

I had three places one after another, and my partner would find out somehow and then he'd promise me that he would smarten up and then the same thing over. I got evicted. I'd get another place, he'd try to kick the door down. I got evicted. The last time he started fighting me. I got evicted. I just got tired of forever moving and buying stuff and everything gets thrown out or he sells it.

The first time I was homeless he found out where I lived, I don't know who told him. I didn't, cause I wasn't talking to him. He kept coming there and I knew that I couldn't go to the YWCA [VAW shelter] because he already knew about that place. I knew that he would show up. So I just took my kids and I had a tent and sleeping bags and me and my kids went camping in the bushes.

Moreover, two women had substantial reasons to believe that their former partners actually destroyed their houses following separation. The path that these women were forced to take was extreme housing instability and shelter.

In 2007 someone burnt my house down while I wasn't there. Someone that was mad at me. I think that was my ex. You didn't want to admit though and, after that, I was moving place to place.

I was staying with a friend. I was afraid he was going to come to the place or do something to me because he used to hit me. So I stayed with my friend and came back to my house... I had my kids' Christmas presents and I bought a huge tree. I was staying in a shelter and they donated some furniture to me and it was nice. He put gas all over and set my place on fire and stayed in the house. He was trying to kill himself. [It was] a duplex in a basement suite. The people upstairs smelled the smoke and heard him yelling. So they went inside and dragged him out. At that time I didn't know that he did that to my place.

Addiction and Abuse: Intersecting Factors Leading to Homelessness

Addictions have been identified as a risk factor contributing to homelessness for both men and women. In the current study, 18 women indicated addictions as the central reason for their becoming homeless.

One time I collapsed on the threshold of detox. They didn't have a space. They ended up having to call Safe Ride [transport for inebriated people in Downtown Eastside] to transport me to a [homeless] shelter. So they [detox] found a [homeless] shelter and arranged it because I couldn't have walked three blocks.

When I was very first here in 2004, I didn't know what to do cause my rent was up. My sister was with me and my cousin made sure that we spent all of our money on crack. Well, rent was due, I had nowhere to go, I didn't have any idea so I'm freaking out.

I became an alcoholic. I chose that way of life. I thought, maybe it's the way for me to get out. Now I know it's not but I thought maybe it is an escape. But it is only like that for a while because alcohol does kill you. If not, somebody else will or something will kill you.

I was on the streets most of the time or staying with family or friends. Just moving place to place. I never had a home of my own that long because of my drinking. I was bringing people in and they were breaking my furniture and the house. I got evicted from my first and my second one [house] because of drinking and bringing people in.

Almost all of these participants (15 of 18) referred to substances as a way to cope with the domestic abuse and, later on, with the challenges added by living homeless.

I'm broke right now but before that I used to smoke weed. He drank a lot and when I smoked weed nothing really bothered me. I was numb. I used to drink with him because he would get angry with me if I didn't drink. But I didn't drink like him, I just sipped. There were times when I just didn't care, so drink along with him. He hit me all the time when I was drunk or incapacitated. I'd wake up and have broken arms.

I used for many years. I'm not anymore. Well, I smoke weed, it kind of numbs everything. [I: That helps?] Yah, cause it doesn't make you think of things, I just ignore things. Sometimes I deal with them when I need to. I used to drink but I don't drink cause I'm pregnant.

I ended up going to detox. They said I needed detox because I was using pretty heavily. All the abuse I went through... I think that's why I keep turning to drugs because I'm still having psychological problems.

Discharge from Institutions

In addition to domestic abuse and addiction, the women identified discharge from institutions as another route to homelessness. The type of institutions women lived ranged from state prison to hospital and mental health institution. Eight interviewees mentioned that they had no place to stay following their discharge.

I had started self-medicating and it got worse and worse and worse. I ended up physically really ill and back in the hospital again. I was on medical EI, stayed in the hospital for about three months. Then, of course, I lost my job, my apartment, everything. I wasn't able to find a place; I was in no shape to afford it or find it. So basically I was couch-surfing.

[I: Have you been homeless on release from an institution?] *Yah, I just got out [of prison] about a month ago. But, being a coke addict, if you knew the right people in jail you have more coke. I've already filled out the form to go into a treatment program. So I'm just waiting to go into treatment.*

Of these eight, one woman had been charged with assaulting her abusive partner. Another woman was incarcerated for manslaughter in the death of her intimate partner.

She [woman brought home by abusive partner] hit me so I hit her back in self defence. They charged me for assault so I had to go to jail. I was sending money for the rent. I had just got a settlement from the government so I sent money for the apartment so that when I would get out I'd have my place. Well he moved out and I went back and didn't have an apartment. I had to stay at the Y [YWCA – transition house for homeless women] again. I couldn't believe it. I was so angry.

About a year ago, I got out of [location's] Institution for Women. I finished doing eight years for manslaughter because of abuse. I was under the influence of alcohol and drugs and my common-law abused me for several years. I accidentally killed him. I had to understand what I'd done so I took a lot of programming while inside. Basically, it would've been me or him, the psychologist said. I feel a lot of remorse so I finished my time and forgave myself. But I didn't want to come back to [city] because of a lot of memories. When I was inside, I lost my mom and my son. The reason I did come back was to relive the

resolve some issues in my life. My oldest daughter [lives] in [other city] and things got too hectic so I came back. I believe everything happens for a reason. So I was homeless and I'm grateful for this place.

The Women's Perspectives on Homelessness

The women commented on their experiences of being homeless in various forms: insecure accommodation, shelter and street. Generally, the participants were united through their experiences of homelessness and partner abuse. However, each woman provided a unique insight into ways of coping with the aftermath of the abuse and their social isolation.

Experiences in Insecure Accommodation: Forty-four women reported that, while they had experienced homelessness at some point in their life, they managed to find temporary housing but of the sort that does not meet the ETHOS housing accommodation standards. The most common form of sub-standard accommodation was "couch surfing", followed by inadequate housing.

Forty-two women fleeing domestic violence disclosed that they had asked friends, relatives and strangers to provide them with a roof over their head. The length of time that the women lived with friends and family varied from days to a number of weeks. While couch surfing, participants reported feeling hopeless and that they did not belong. They were also concerned about exposure to drugs and alcohol, as well as lack of safety.

I was moving place to place. I wasn't happy and I was drinking. Going and staying at night with my uncles, aunties. Wherever there was drinking, I was there. I was sleeping on a couch. It was horrible.

I ended up staying with people from where I used to work. These customers offered me a place, they knew I was expecting. I stayed with them and all of a sudden we had this major argument. I got a distinct feeling they were not happy with me being there anymore. So I called my Kids' First worker and said, "They want me to leave." I had nowhere to go. I can't remember where I went after that.

The few times I didn't have a place to rent of my own, I was staying at friends' houses and family's houses ... At first it was hard because I have children and I wanted better for them. But then, I realized I did need help.

I was living with friends and I had to find a place for us. It took us about a month. That was hard. It was only a one-bedroom, so I slept on the couch and he [son] had the bedroom. I stayed with a friend who had two extra bedrooms but it was way out in the country and hard for my son to get to school.

Seven women reported a number of risks and negative experiences while temporarily residing with acquaintances, such as suicidal thinking, lack of food, inadequate hygiene, exposure to drugs/alcohol and sexual assault.

I just ran out. I only had the clothes on my back. A young girl that used to work under me [who] lived about three blocks from my house. I didn't know where to go, so I would knock on her door and she said, "You can stay here but I don't have money to feed you." I'm like, "That's okay. I just need a place to stay because it's cold outside." So I slept in her house. I didn't eat for four days. I just

stayed outside. I was only allowed in the living room when they weren't home. If they were home they wanted me to stay in the basement. It was a very bad experience. Finally, I was at the end of the rope. I called the Distress Centre, because you get to the point where maybe suicide was an option, so I phoned the Distress Centre and they directed me here.

I had no safe place to go. I fell asleep at some guy's place and I'd wake up and they're touching me. One time I had money, I was gonna go buy crack but I was so tired, I fell asleep. I woke up my pants were off. This guy was gone. I felt him try to touch me when I was sleeping. I don't know what happened.

I did stay with one friend but she was such a drug addict that I would rather be on the street than in that environment. It was horrible. It was crack cocaine and the house was dirty. She had animals, nobody ate. I slept on a dirty mattress, a dirty pillow. I was scared that some guy was gonna come in my room; the door was kicked off. I put the door up best as I could. It was filthy. There was no food. I had to go out and steal my own food cause, of course, there's no money to eat.

Five women described living in overcrowded houses while accepting temporary accommodation through friends and relatives.

I lived with my sister-in-law and her kids. My kid was there and it was overcrowded. I came here because we got into a conflict. Even though you're family, it's too hard emotionally. It's too hard to live with other people.

That's how people are. We get a two bedroom apartment. Then all of a sudden, we've got about twelve, thirteen, fourteen people sleeping on your living room floor, in the hallways. What's going on? Why is there twenty people in a two bedroom apartment? That's another reason I couldn't handle it. We got two kids. They can't even get up in the morning, run around play with their toys or cause you got people sleeping everywhere. So it used to really upset.

Nineteen participants described having experienced inadequate living situations such as staying in unfit housing, vehicles, and improvised tents. The women experiencing unfit housing reported infestation with cockroaches and mice, floods and poor maintenance. Also the respondents that had lived in their vehicle and tent mentioned the fear and mixed feelings they experienced regarding breaking rules in public areas.

There was a horrible building; they have bachelor suites and so many problems with flooding and other things. Everything started going wrong, infestation problems. I lost everything, my dishes, my clothing. I threw everything out, I came here [transition house - homeless] with nothing. It was upsetting. I turned on the light and something ran under the counter. I thought, "What the heck is this" The exterminator said, "Look under your sink. There's all these little holes, anything can travel through the pipes, each floor. If they don't clean properly, then it comes right into your place." I had to start buying Raid, that's the only thing that would kill these things. I can't deal with this anymore, I was sleeping with the lights on for like months.

I ended up staying in my car. I had a really good job and they cut my contract. At the same time, I found out I had a leaky condo and I tried holding onto it and

couldn't. I had to let it go to foreclosure. It was the middle of winter, when the new people took possession of my place, and I ended up in my car for three months. Unless you've been there, you really don't understand what it's like. I couldn't sleep. I didn't know where I was going to eat, where I was going to park my car. In a residential area, you go to turn on the car and the lights come on. The police are coming around 'cause the neighbours think that you're casing the neighbourhood. You go to a park, the police are there and you're not supposed to be. I ended up getting a job. I don't know how I did it, but then they found out I was living in the car and that hurt their image. After my 30 days was up (at the VAW shelter), I ended up back in my car. I couldn't sleep and I felt very unsafe.

Some of the houses were run down. They look nice on the outside, but when you go inside, the flooring, the bathrooms, I wouldn't even let you use the bathroom. I didn't even think people would live in houses like that, but I guess a lot of people [do]. Everything's just gross inside. I wouldn't even let my baby crawl around there. That's how bad some of the houses are.

Two out of the 19 interviewees reported having lived in inadequate accommodation when they were with their abusive partners. At the time of the interview, the women were residing in VAW shelters and had mentioned experiencing homelessness after leaving their abusive partners. Surprisingly, these two women described their homelessness with partners when asked about how living with their partners had impacted their housing situation over the years.

One of his friends has a trailer and he pulled our van and plugged it in. So we didn't technically live with him but we were living in his driveway. He [ex partner] liked ice fishing, so he would be out there for hours and me in the van just cold (laughing). I had to be right beside him, he couldn't leave me.

When I lived with him [ex partner] it was so hard. The house was kind of big for us. He [ex partner] was living in the basement, sleeping there, just used the living room. Because there's the ventilation - the furnaces were so bad, because (landlord) didn't keep the maintenance.

Women's Experiences on the Streets: Twenty-nine women fleeing domestic violence reported living in rough situations once or several times in their life. Eleven women had occasionally lived on the street, spending the day outdoors and sleeping in public buildings or at their abusive partner's homes. Some participants occasionally slept outdoors due to missing the curfew in homeless drop-in shelters.

Sometimes I'd miss Crash Beds [homeless night accommodation] and I'd end up walking around at night and going for coffee wherever was open.

Always in shelters. Sometimes I stayed in the ones that just [let you] sleep. Those are much more difficult cause you're on the street all day long and in the wintertime when it's raining. So it's difficult, the shelters are full. Everything you own you have to carry on your back all day and you can't leave your things there. You have to find places to eat during the day, though there are some good organizations for women for meals at lunchtime. So that's good.

[One night] I didn't have anywhere to go. Basically when you're a single person you don't have places to get. I didn't want to be a burden on anybody.

I lived underneath the stairs in the staffroom... Three of us staying underneath the stairs and we weren't allowed to. But you were able to without anybody noticing. We'd been asking [outreach and health resource centre for sex trade workers] to help us get housing for a long time. We weren't getting anywhere so we were sleeping under the stairs for a whole week. It was, really cold. They [staff] weren't impressed with us being underneath the stairs.

Eighteen women mentioned living outdoors for prolonged periods of time, ranging from weeks to months. Two interviewees had to sleep outdoors with their children, fearing Child Protection apprehension. Other women preferred the street over shelters due to the fact that street experiences were more familiar to them than the shelter environment.

I had one kid and we ended up getting kicked out of an apartment because there was too much screaming and fighting and drinking on his [ex-partner] part. We ended up on the streets. There was nowhere for us to go. It was pretty scary cause I thought I was gonna lose my son. I was living in (street name). Three weeks we stayed from place to place and I knew that wasn't stable for my son.

I lived under the bridge for three months. That's when I started knowing about alcohol, having to live like an alcoholic, under the bridge, no blankets, having to sleep on rock and having to eat wherever you could eat, having to panhandle. Going to different churches, you line up on their front door, where you're gonna be the first one to eat, be first for a good shower. There's lice in your hair. But what could you do? You don't have a place to live.

I was on the street for one summer, walking the street, sitting in the library, VIA Rail, Greyhound, just waiting for nine o'clock to come around so you can go to Crash Beds [emergency beds for homeless]. Just sitting in the park, drinking to forget about our daily issues. Maybe getting picked up by the cops and going to cells. I mean that would get us off the street. So, where am I going to eat? There are church places: you can go there and eat the hospitality meals but that, too, is sometimes never enough. I was panhandling a lot. Didn't make as much as the other guys because they're more experienced. I guess they know what to say. I was pretty much, "Can you spare a dollar for a bite to eat."

I slept outside to stay away from the busy bars, the busy streets of Montreal. I was on the street for maybe two whole weeks sleeping outside. I don't want to be in the shelter. It's too much to face the reality that you are homeless. Makes you unhappy. So I go to see my other homeless friends. That's about it. My life was sad, like a book.

First time I lived on the streets I had no kids. I was living in the parks and I had no money to eat so I'd go to the drop-in soup-lines or where they were handing out sandwiches. There was the Mustard Seed [homeless shelter]. I'd go there and sit around. [Other times] walking around the streets and go to friend's places to warm up until it was late and we had to leave. After that, I started working on the

street to get money for a place to live, for hotel rooms and food. I didn't like doing that, but I had to.

Ten interviewees described both perceived and lived risk of violence on the street. Several women mentioned fearing being targeted due to visible scars from the abuse that they experienced from their partner. Other participants described being robbed and sexually assaulted on the street.

Guys see you walking around with a black eye, then figure they can abuse you too. Or disrespect you. So you've got to be very careful. I tried to stay away from the downtown core but where else can you go? Suburbia, what are you gonna do? Pitch a tent in somebody's backyard? It doesn't work. I didn't want to go downtown cause I was scared I was gonna get raped or somebody's gonna drug me. Or, some guys gonna beat the shit out of me and try and get me to be a prostitute. Because I'm on the street, I'm vulnerable.

It was really hard to sleep. You hear all kinds of stuff, 'cause that's where they go smoke crack. You just don't know. A woman out alone, you're a hooker, that's what they think. Totally, I was terrified; it was really hard to sleep.

I'm not saying that I dress for everybody but you might have on a clean pair of jeans cause, even though you're on the street, sometimes you get some change or you wash your clothes. I did anyways. People see that you're clean, they don't realize that you're in the same boat as they are and they try to beat you up and take your money or the food in your bag or your cigarettes. A couple of times these guys tried to rob me. I didn't have anything but they tried anyways. Some people are quite mean out there.

I don't know who they were. I had nowhere to go. I was dressed as a girl and I was trying to get a ride to a friend's house. But I didn't quite make it. I was raped that night.

Me and my friend ended up going to the park but we would take turns sleeping. A man came up and he was intoxicated and wanted smokes and money. He came up and grabbed our bag so I felt very threatened and uncomfortable. We handed him the cigarettes and he did go away. But it [was a close call] because I sure didn't want myself or my baby or my friend to get hurt.

I got used to sleeping on so many benches, so many parks. Just to protect myself not to start to be a prostitute or sell myself out. I've seen so many violences on the street, so I protect myself and sleep outside in a safe place.

Experiences in Shelter Accommodation

The following sections document women's experiences in various forms of shelters, emergency and transitional housing for homeless individuals and emergency or transitional housing for abused women.

Emergency Shelters for the Homeless: Often women fleeing domestic abuse seek accommodation in homeless shelters. Twenty-five participants reported using homeless shelters at least once, at times after unsuccessful attempts to enter VAW or other accommodation for homeless women. The greatest challenges for women in

homeless shelters were the presence of men in the same dorms and the institutional environment. Also, women felt as though they were treated as “numbers” rather than individual beings.

At Crash Beds [emergency beds for the homeless] (laughing) you had to be up at 6:00 in the morning. You can't get back in until 9:00 but you have to be there an hour early to line up. Your breakfast consists of cereal and eggs and if they don't have any milk, “Well, eat it dry.” Very institutional, very. When I stayed at the Salvation Army [homeless shelter] if you needed to go to the bathroom and you're lining up for a meal, too bad, you're going to have to wait. Whereas these guys, meal time is meal time so if you get into a shelter at 10:00 at night, you're going to have to wait until the next morning, whether you haven't eaten for the past two or three days.

Homeless shelters kick everybody out at 6 in the morning. You come in from 7 at night till 6 in the morning and there's no structure in the day time. I don't see why they can't have the people stay there on contract, like working to find a job or during the day you could stay. I don't understand why you gotta get up at 6 and get out. When they're full, you have to sleep on the mat. When Jack [renovated hotel for homeless – funding ceased] was running, if their mats were full, you could ask if you could share a mat with him [another resident]. If they're desperate enough to have a place to sleep and you're cold... But I don't think you should be put in that position.

I had to sleep on the floor with just a mattress and blanket: men on this side and women on this side. I was so scared I couldn't sleep and they get you up at 5:00 and I didn't know anybody. I didn't know what to do. I was waiting for emergency social services so I went and just stayed there. I was at the library all day because I didn't know what to do. I tried calling all the shelters. I couldn't get in.

According to several women, the lack of flexibility and individualistic approach in accommodations for individuals who are homeless was so overwhelming they declared that they would feel more comfortable on the street.

I have [rings on] all my fingers. If I fell asleep, you get so damned tired you do fall asleep, they'll pull them off your fingers. They'll rob you of whatever you have. You don't get a locker. You sleep on that mat. It scared me to go in there. It's really, really rough. It's the down-and-out that go in those places. I was down-and-out but I still preferred to be on the street.

Despite the described challenging situations, several respondents mentioned that homeless shelters managed to meet some of their needs.

It's good because at least you're in a safe place where there's cameras. People are constantly watching you twenty-four hours. So at least you have somebody to talk to and somebody to help you out from your down.

It wasn't too bad because, the group of girls, it only fits nine, and none of them was really on drugs.

Staff were fairly helpful in helping me get my resume done or to find something that I could do during the day that would keep my mind off things.

Lack of available spots was a problem even in the emergency homeless accommodation. Five interviewees had been refused access to these shelters.

[I was turned away from a homeless shelter] because it was full [...and then] I walked around and kept warm in the bus shack.

In the wintertime, quite a few times, people stand in line at like five to get in at six. So pretty full. Most times I didn't show up until midnight or one in the morning. So I got told it was full most of the time. [So I'd] go back out.

When I became pregnant, I didn't get into the Mission [homeless shelter] because it was full. I even tried to get into Women's Community House [VAW shelter] but it was full. That can be a real barrier. There was one [homeless] shelter and there was always room but I didn't feel safe because it was a real different situation. You are sleeping in a room like a drawing room with a whole bunch of women and that wasn't comfortable for me. Luckily it was summertime and I slept in a park with a close friend of mine. I stayed there for the week until I got to the Mission [homeless shelter].

Transitional Accommodation for the Homeless: Overall, the women preferred transitional housing programs for individuals that are homeless due to the fact that these facilities were specifically designed for women. Twenty-one interviewees had been accommodated in transition houses for homeless women. The participants described both positive characteristics and room for improvement.

In Mary Dover House [transition house for homeless women] they offer, "We can change things if you get your children," and the other shelters were just for single women. I would have had to move somewhere else, whereas here we could make arrangements to move if I chose to bring my children here, so that's why I chose Mary Dover. There was more flexibility and it's still a safe building, I needed to be somewhere safe until court issues, without my ex, with his trial.

The choice was here [transitional housing for women with trauma and mental health issues] or Anderson Lodge [transitional housing for homeless Aboriginal women], that I had thought about going to from the hospital. Anderson Lodge is an Aboriginal home but they are not harm reduction. They have a six month length that you can stay. They try to put you into housing by three months. Six is the absolute longest you can stay. When I first got here, it felt really overwhelming, to try to find a house, like it was too much. So I think I made the right choice in coming here rather than Anderson Lodge, I could go to the ceremonies at Anderson Lodge. I didn't have to live there, so I could do that.

I stayed at the Y for nine months before they found me an apartment, because I didn't feel safe going out on the street again. I used to get my sister to come and do all my shopping. I never left the building for seven months. I was just so afraid he'd be waiting outside.

I'd love a place of my own and feel secure, feel safe, have that sense of comfort, just knowing that there's somebody there 24/7. You can call a number between 10:00 PM and 8:00 in the morning. There are people watching the cameras but

right now that's not good enough for me. This is safe housing right, I mean if it was one level that would be different.

The Native Woman's Shelter [homeless transition house] helped me a lot. It's the only place I really stay at. I've stayed at other places because here was full. I really like the resources. I've come to know the staff really well over the last two years. Five years ago, I stayed here for three months with my kids in-between apartments for about a month. That's how I got to know this place. They've always been helpful, even after you leave, to call to talk to somebody.

That [YWCA Saskatoon, homeless shelter for women] was good. It helps women. But sometimes there's a downfall because you have to have kids. I'm older now. I'm 41, my baby days are over, and it's sad to see single people like me, homeless. They should have more shelters like this like for single people.

The participants were asked for their opinions regarding the length of stay in transitional housing for homeless women. Overall, the women indicated that six months is not long enough, considering all of the steps needed to heal from trauma and regaining independent life skills.

[I: Why can you only be here six months?] I don't understand. Maybe to push you on your feet to get you to feel safety and go on with life. But, somebody like me for thirty-three years and you're gonna push me outside in six months after I've been beaten for that long. No, there is no reasoning. But they check and see how you're doing. Not everybody has to leave in six months. They have special cases.

It depends on the circumstances. I want things to happen faster but I had to deal with a lot and now, instead of working with me from the beginning of the six months to really push housing. "Just relax just take it easy, just heal." but now my time is running out and it's, "You need to get this done." It's so much pressure, it's very scary because you don't know if you're going to succeed and if you fail, you're sleeping on a park bench. That's your alternative.

Emergency Shelters for Abused Women: A high proportion of the interviewed women had resided in VAW shelters after leaving their abusive partners. Fifty women had accessed VAW shelters once or several times in their lives. Overall, the interviewees described both positive and negative aspects of their shelter experiences that impacted their ability to move forward. The women appreciated the accommodation, counselling and support while they questioned some procedures with respect to the intake process and the lack of personalized space.

It was very humbling. I've been independent all my life and having to rely on other people was very difficult. But I was also very grateful because I knew I had to get out of the pattern and I didn't really know how. It was the only place I have been in many years that I felt safe. I knew that he wasn't going to [get in].

By the time I got there, I hadn't slept for three days. I must have looked a wreck and then all this emotional stuff. I got lost on the way, which didn't help. Once I got there, they were so welcoming. You could tell they were trying hard to make me comfortable. The only thing with that place [VAW shelter] as opposed to other ones I stayed at, is they wanted me to tell my story in-depth that night. I know

they've got to hear details and work out a safety plan and sign confidentiality agreements. But I think that should have been left until at least the next day.

I found out my husband had molested my daughter. I was devastated, my daughter was too. She's only five. Being in the Hestia House [VAW shelter] at the time, if I didn't have them I don't know what I would've done. All the girls here helped me through that part. They helped me with my kids. They helped me with my psychological problem and my daughter's psychological problem.

It feels different being in a shelter since I don't have any place to go. I get stuck, and having to follow rules all the time (chuckling) gets frustrating because you have to live with so many people. I'm straight (chuckling) and it's hard for me to know that I'm not drinking anymore. It's frustrating.

Of the 50 women who had discussed their experiences of residing in VAW shelters, 19 reported having been turned away from at least one shelter due to lack of available spots in the facility. After one failure to access VAW shelter, some participants were accepted in the following days or weeks. Others were immediately redirected to homeless shelters, or ended up in insecure forms of accommodation.

One day before Christmas, I called them [VAW shelter] and they don't have space for me. My friend says, "Wait a bit, maybe next month they have space for you and be nice with him [ex-partner]." I waited a little ... one month later.

I phoned here about a month before. I was in hospital. I told them that I don't want to stay [in hospital], cause I know he'll come. They told me to stay at the hospital, "Maybe this isn't the place for you, why don't you go to the Salvation Army [homeless shelter]."

None of them had a room. They were all full, full. Almost everyone of them said, "Call every day." Until one day there's a room.

I had to wait. I can't even remember how long I had to wait to get in there because it was so full. I got put on the waiting list. I think it was a couple of weeks before I actually got in there. I had to stay in my mom's basement until they phoned me and said they had a spot for me.

Three women mentioned having been turned away because of flaws in the shelter screening process. One woman described unsuccessfully trying to demonstrate to crisis counsellors that she had experienced domestic abuse. The other participant described inflexibility in eligibility criteria.

I tried to get into a shelter and it seemed like they brushed me off. They said, "You have to be fleeing abuse," I said, "I am," but they perceived it wrong. They must have thought I'm not serious. I went there twice to tell them, one was too busy. Twice, two different women. I wanted to talk to them, and the other one [said] "You've got to be fleeing abuse." I was mad. I wanted to start crying.

I hit woman's shelters when I could. But a couple [of] times I've slept under trees in the summer time. In the winter I would beat myself up to get in there.

They got the worst of me, I was under a lot of stress and fear and pain and hopelessness, so talking to these strangers on the phone, over a long period of

time, couple of months, trying to sort of an issue or two, they [VAW shelter] didn't see the best of me. Then they [VAW shelter] ended up saying, "You have more problems than we can help with." Because I told them I've had cancer and was dealing with that. That was a big red flag for them. I also told them I had major depression, which is a symptom of cancer.

The length of stay in a VAW shelter is a factor that can influence women's choices in terms of finding permanent affordable housing. Two participants expressed their opinion regarding the length of stay in VAW shelters. One respondent recommended that VAW shelters extend their lengths of stay while another interviewee suggested that the period of stay could be tailored on an individual basis.

[I: Is 21 days enough?] No, I think they need at least 35 days, a little longer because some get the places but then something happens. So it should be longer.

Three weeks [is enough] for some. It's a lot harder for women who have a lot of kids cause they have to find child care and having to tag them along when they have to. It's harder for them.

Transitional Accommodation for Abused Women: Finding access to transitional housing programs for women fleeing abuse is relatively difficult. Only 11 women reported having resided in second stage housing for abused women previously. The following narratives emphasize the safety and comfort that the women appreciated in transition houses for abuse survivors.

I started counselling and I really liked that. That's why I felt safe there [at Brenda Strafford second stage VAW.]

I have all the emotional support I need and safety, security in every way. It taught me how to be aware of my environment. They taught us not to let our spouse, our children know where we are. Trained us, kept us aware, always watch, be observant around your surroundings. This house [VAW second stage] has got cameras and surveillance 24 hours. So if someone does tries to come in, this building is secure. So that makes me feel safe.

I went into a place called Second, for women only. I stayed there for a year. You're allowed a year. But they [second stage staff] let me stay a little longer. It was great. We had counselling there [second stage]. We had, it was a good spot for safety, a lot of safety. Then, it's more or less, get you on your feet. I went into my own place.

The first time I came here I actually cried because how many times do I have to change places. I've been abused for the past 12 years and now it's, like, 35 days there and now I have to come here. But I liked the place and they [second stage VAW transition house] were very friendly. They let me in and it was safe It never happened to me before that I would be [in] one place, then another place, another place. So it's the feelings that you can't control, it just comes out. But after a week I was used to it and I was happy.

I really like it. We're safe. It's pretty high security, which is good. Once a week we meet with the staff, which is really helpful. It's one of my favourite things. We

do group three times a month so I can visit with the other women. I've never really known other women in the same situation so now I do. It's nice.

Four women mentioned having been turned away or had difficulties in accessing second stage housing.

They started up third-stage housing [transitional housing for single abused women 45-65] in a beautiful apartment building decorated by designers. I went there and there was one available. It was perfect: they had a support system and an office and computers and classes. I met with two women, saw the apartment, and thought this is what I need. It's a well rounded program, and three years you stay in an affordable apartment. Finally got a call back and she was angry, agitated on the phone. She said, "You lied to me." I didn't lie. I didn't mention [VAW shelter] because it was such a nightmare. Why am I going to say that the [VAW] house has treated me with discrimination since the beginning? But they'd [VAW shelter] never actually met me. I didn't say that. I did leave it out... So I I couldn't stay at the house [transitional housing for abused women].

I phoned the transition house [second stage transition house] again and I got the feeling that if they could've helped me, they would've, but they had no room.

There should be another Second Stage because you can only hold so many women and it's always a waiting list even if you're coming from a [VAW] shelter. When you go to a women's shelter they automatically put you to the top of the list. When I was at Women's Community House, I went. Three other girls were waiting for Second Stage so I was fourth in line and I was still eighteen months away.

Four women commented on the period of stay in transitional accommodation for abused women. The main theme was that the average stay in this type of accommodation (usually six months to a year) is not enough time to process past trauma, heal, and secure a financially independent life. Moreover, the participants suggested that more consistent support from counsellors was necessary after exiting transitional accommodation, to help them maintain the levels of independence they had managed to achieve.

What would be ideal? You're moving on, you want your freedom but they do have women and children that go into housing for six months to a year and then beyond that. Maybe they should make the programs a bit longer, so that they really get on their feet. Even at a year, once you get out there, you got little kids. To hell with it, your supports are gone. You've still got the support... maybe not as much. As your freedom becomes more, support goes away. Not that you're pushed out. I got a year to fix myself, right? Lengthen the programs, I would say.

If I have a stable home, I could find a job and save money and start thinking ahead. It would be nice to be able to stay in a place for a year or longer.

You can only stay for a year. I think it should be a bit longer, because a year goes by so fast. You're just getting settled in where your lease is up and you've got to move out again.

Past Return to an Abusive Partner

At some point in the past, thirty-two women had moved back to live with partners who had been abusive. From the perspectives of 12 women, these reunions were the only option because of a lack of housing availability.

It was okay for the first (pause) I didn't like the idea of it, but I thought like I had no choice, like where else am I gone go, I have nowhere else to go.

I'm living with my spouse and it's too soon. I still need some healing time. I need to work on trust, need to [deal with] baggage from the past. It all takes time. But at the time I needed him to get myself from being homeless because income is a big thing.

February through July, I was in and out of [homeless] shelters and [VAW] transition houses, in between staying in my car. I ended up going back once because my very first night there, a woman in the next bed OD'd. It was one of these harm-reduction shelters [homeless shelter]. They weren't supposed to be doing drugs, but if they came in high, that's okay. But women were doing drugs and there's kids running around too. Oh, my goodness, what an atmosphere! I did not want to be there and I went back, because I thought, "Where the heck now am I going to go?"

I'm homeless and have been staying with my ex-partner and going back to the reserve. [I: How did you come here [VAW shelter]?] Me and my ex-partner got into an argument last week. I come often back and forth from the reserve and come from Winnipeg and work and pick my assistance up. I bumped into my partner and we got into a fight. I am afraid of him; I don't know when he could explode.

I ended up going back with him because financially I couldn't do it on my own. They [VAW shelter staff] told me I was gonna get on income assistance and I looked at them and said, "I'd never be able to survive with that." It's hard now. It hasn't really changed. I mean, how are you supposed to feed two children?

I couldn't find anywhere to live so I had to stay with my sister. She's got seven kids and I couldn't really stay there. Only stayed a few days and then I had to move back with my ex because I didn't have anywhere else to go. I kept looking for a place. I've moved around for the last few years. I stayed with an uncle and his wife for about a year until I found my own place. But by then my ex was out of jail and found me. I couldn't afford rent on my own plus having to go through programs for my kids. I couldn't get a job. So I more or less moved back with him because I had no other way of getting a place of my own. I'm already starting to think that I'll have to go back to my ex. I don't want to do that. It's either that or live on the street, right? This is how a lot of my friends started working the street - to make ends meet. I don't want to find myself on the street just to make rent.

Another fourteen women had moved back at least once because of their partner's pleas and promises to change.

When we decided to work things out we got back together again. I ended up finding this place [private rental] on my own through the newspaper.

I had to come back for medical reasons at the cancer centre. I set it up with the workers, to stay at the transition home during my stay in. It was all set up and I get there [VAW shelter] and the same woman I got initially said, "You'll never get in here." I am stuck, so I went back to his [partner] place. [I: You stayed in the relationship?] I stayed for another four weeks. I gave an attempt to straighten it out. I fled again, I fled again.

I went to my country for a couple of months. When I came back, he was so different. He was nice, speaking to me like [when] we married. After a month he came slowly back to... I tried everything. I couldn't stay, I couldn't cope.

Three women mentioned both the fact that they had nowhere else to live and were responding to their partner's pleading to reconcile. These narratives also highlight some of the many complexities in disentangling from a long-term intimate partner relationship.

Two and a half years full of abuse. It started okay and then it just geared into abuse. I ended up losing housing again and on the streets in very unsafe situations. Then I got my act together and got away from him because he went to jail. But I ended up in another shelter but then going back to him when he got out. Just in and out of shelters and... not safe.

I didn't want to break up the family. Feeling like I was going to lose my daughter. I knew because of that history that the courts would probably rule in his favour. That was the main reason. The other reasons I went back were things like having a home. With him, that was the only home that I had ever really known. I met him and moved in with him. We were a family. Even back then, was the financial thing. A lot of bills were in my name because he has owed [phone company] a whole whack of money. A lot of the bills in my name and when I moved out they were still in my name.

Two women described their partners threatening or intimidating them if they did not return to the relationship.

Numerous times I left him, but I was able to stay away for seven months. Before that, I would leave and then within a month we'd be back together. I would be on the bus going to work and he would just get on the bus, he would watch the buses and he would come and sit beside me. I hate making a scene or screaming so I would just go with him. He seemed to know that I would just give up and go.

I did try to leave but he would threaten to take my child from me. It would never last. He'd find me. He'd track me down.

Women's Experiences with Child Protection Intervention

As mentioned in the demographics section, 31 women had at least one of their children taken in governmental care. When asked about child protection authority involvement, 31 women described their experiences. For 28 out of the 31 women, child protection's involvement resulted in their children being placed into foster care either temporarily (from one to six months) or long term (one to three years).

The women identified a variety of circumstances that led to their children being taken away. Twenty women reported child apprehension because of the violence in their

intimate relationships. Eight participants declared that their substance abuse issues resulted in apprehension. One of the eight women pointed out the interplay of substance abuse, mental health and domestic abuse, which led to her children being placed into care. A further four respondents mentioned that their children were apprehended while they were homeless. Two other women stated that their children were taken into care due to hardships associated with the women's struggles to cope with their experiences of past traumas including that of partner abuse and challenges specific to being single mothers.

Child Apprehension due to Intimate Partner Violence: Child protection involvement in situations of domestic violence has become a routine procedure and was not viewed as a surprise by the women interviewed for this study. Twenty women reported that their children were apprehended because of the violence perpetrated by their partners at home.

My kids were taken from me after the assault with the bat. They apprehended them for their protection. I'm in the process of getting them back.

I put my kids in care for three months because I had a hysterectomy. Child Protection ended up taking them for a year because of the abuse. So how are you supposed to get ahead? You try to do something good for your kids because you can't take care of them physically because [of] the surgery. You think they're gonna help and they don't. No wonder half of these women stay where they're at. They're scared if they turn to somebody that they're gonna get consequences. That's the way I felt. That is a horrible feeling. "If I turn to you [Child Protection], you're gonna take my kids."

Additionally, three women mentioned child protection involvement that did not result in apprehension. In these situations, the women emphasized the violence in their intimate relationship, on one hand, and the support received from resources such as outreach counsellor and VAW shelter, on the other hand.

Two days before my son was born, we had a big blow-out. My ex had been arrested and child protection was notified because there was a no-contact order. They weren't around long, but we had a parental service agreement for three months where I was to keep the kids away from my ex-partner. I had to keep in contact with my outreach worker and keep him away. He wasn't allowed near them. After the three months, they were satisfied.

[I: How did Child Protection get involved?] *He was supposed to go to treatment. I was supposed to take them but I got no place, so the shelter opened their heart to me. They welcomed me because of my kids.*

Seven women acknowledged the support that they received from extended family members, following child protection involvement. According to the interviewees, the option of placing their children in the care of other family members prevented potential challenging experiences with the foster care system.

My kids are in CFS [Child and Family Services]. I signed the papers over to my auntie. She had a house in [location]. So they were raised together there.

My son was apprehended, really, from birth. My other two kids, I took care of. I started messing up but by then my mom was looking after them.

I had a broken nose. A couple of days after, my daughter was 2 years old when she [Child and Family Services worker] took her and called my mom and my mom said “Yah”. They gave her to my mom.

Three participants commented on the support that they had received from extended family members even before Child Protection was notified.

Somebody said I was abusing my children but I wasn't. I gave my kids to my parents because it was too much for me because somebody made a bad rumour that I was a misfit mother. I was going to school and doing really well. I was just protecting my child because I don't want other kids to touch her or push her around or sexually touch her. I didn't want my youngest to be hurt, so I was very protective. They thought I was holding my kids too close.

My kids are at my dad's. There was so much abuse that I had to put my son in a safe place. At that time I didn't know about Child Services.

[I: You've gotten kids out of an unsafe situation, stayed with your step-father.] *No one touches my kids. I will not tolerate anybody touching my children.*

Child Apprehension due to Substance Abuse: Seven women mentioned that their addiction issues contributed to their children being apprehended by child protection authorities. More importantly, the participants commented on their own increased vulnerability once their children were taken away. According to these respondents, the loneliness and lack of confidence minimized their motivation to solve their substance abuse issues, which was a condition to regain custody of their children.

They [children] live in [location] now. I started doing too much drugs after social services took my kids, a lot of cocaine and smoking crack. Instead of social services taking my kids permanently, I gave them to a family member.

I lost my baby one time when I was blacked out. I was so drunk, so high; I left my baby with a complete stranger. I paid her and went downtown but I didn't remember her address or her name and phone number. She called the police and they took my baby. I had to work hard for her to come back to me. I lost her two times, the same baby. But I want her back again. I was sober. I went to therapy. I fight for her.

My kids got taken away in '96. I had three. They got taken away because I was drinking. I went through treatment centres. That didn't work because they were making me go, which I didn't want to. I went anyways, came out, and got drunk again. I did have visitations for a while. Then finally stopped them because it was too painful to go and see them like that and always crying for me.

I have four [children] of my own from previous relationship. They're in care right now so I'm trying to get them back. It's tough living with an addict. I wasn't able to clean up or do the things I was supposed to do to get my kids back, so I think it's best that I'm on my own right now.

One participant pointed out the interplay between substance abuse, mental health, and domestic violence issues in child apprehension.

[How did child protection become involved?] *A phone call was made. I was really depressed because of my ex-partner and everything. I was drinking a lot. I took the wrong path for sure. Everybody [said,] "It was this person's fault and this person's fault". I [said] "No, it was my fault. I was the one that chose to make the decision" and as much as I want to blame my ex-partner, I didn't have to make that choice.*

Child Apprehension due to Lack of Shelter: Two women's children were apprehended while they were homeless. The narratives below emphasize the women's unsuccessful efforts to protect their children and keep them away from the child protection system.

He [former partner] found out where I lived. I couldn't go to the Y [YWCA, VAW shelter] because he already knew about that place. So I took my kids and I had a tent and sleeping bags and me and my kids went camping in the bushes. Social Services [Child Protection] found out that I was sleeping with my kids in a tent. They took the kids for a three month temporary [care]. I got so depressed after that, I started doing coke. I was still homeless. I was prostituting to make money so I could get high, have cigarettes and eat. Then I just said, "Give the kids to their auntie." I stayed homeless for a long time on the streets.

I was living with my son in a homeless shelter. I said to the caseworker, "I agree for him [son] to be in the [foster] home for one month because I already had a place. I said "Okay, one month in the foster home until I get our home." I felt bad though. I felt really bad. I'd go visit him once a week and didn't like it because he'd always go away crying so I was sad, he was sad. He came home.

Five women commented that, while their children were placed in care, they had accomplished all of the requirements to regain custody rights except securing adequate accommodation.

She had everything at my place, two bedrooms, two of everything. She's always been well taken care of. My main focus is just getting a place, having everything for my daughter when she comes back.

I haven't found the time to focus on myself. It's been three years and the worker said a minimum of three year to get my kids. I'm pushing myself to try to get the things I need to get done and now it's a matter of finding somewhere to live. That's my problem. I'm gonna have a hard time looking for a place to stay.

I've been looking for housing all over [location]. I have all my applications into all these housing companies because as soon as I get a house, my kids are coming to me. I'd been fighting all these years. They're meant to come back to me. The situation I was in, trying to handle that and be a different person and do the opposite things... I just felt that I was going crazy. I have to be about myself now and the only thing important in my life now is me, my kids, and my mom.

Child Apprehension due to Trauma: Two women reported that child protection workers became involved with them as a result of being placed in care due to hardships associated with past trauma and challenges specific to single mothers.

When I lived at second stage I felt a bit overwhelmed because of getting back into a place. It was just him [son] and I, and he was two. A lot of my past was coming up so he did go into temporary care and luckily that worked out for me. I got a really good worker. He went for a month. I got him back.

I was going to school. My son was going to the elementary school a couple of blocks away. I missed my bus after school because we get out after 3:00. Usually I have enough time to make it home for my son. My son got out of school and I missed my bus and he was waiting outside the building. There's this phone outside the building to call the caretaker. He picked up the phone and the manager of the building answered it, and he's like 'Hello? Mom? Mom? I'm outside!' [Private Rental Company Name] phoned child protection and said that I left my son home alone and there was nobody there for him.

Concerns and Recommendations for Child Protection

While describing their experiences regarding child apprehension, seven interviewees reflected on aspects they would like to see improved with respect to child protection intervention.

The fear of their children being apprehended and placed in foster care was a dominant theme in these participant's comments. One interviewee described her unsuccessful attempts to contact child protection authorities due to alleged abuse that her children experienced in foster care:

It was three months, then six months, then nine months. Then I found out from my visits that my children were being abused in the foster home. My baby was a year and a half and she was being sexually abused. I told the worker but she didn't seem to believe me. It turned out that the lady keeping them was saying that I was the one abusing them during the visits. But I got my daughter, we wrote a statement together and she told me that they were being locked in their room and my daughter was being grabbed by the arms and her arms were marked up. I just wanted to get them out of there. They [child protection] never told me that it was a different policy that I wouldn't see my kids for three years.

Two participants commented on women's fears with respect to child protection intervention. These fears prevented them from further addressing their domestic violence issues with other professionals. One of the two respondents noted that she preferred to rather place herself in extreme risk situations rather than to contact the police.

I've had kids taken away because I had a drug problem. I'm scared to talk to them [child protection] about anything cause I'm scared they're gonna take my kids. They [child protection] need counsellors that aren't gonna judge women and that know what they're going through. If you've never been in a really bad abusive relationship you have no idea what it is.

I'm having trouble trying to get my kids home. I couldn't phone the police because if I made another complaint... I didn't want it to come back on me in getting my kids back. Children's Services put up barriers. They add to the load of things I already had to do to get my kids and I didn't see an option to phone the police again. I waited until I could get into a shelter while he [partner] was

passed out. Then I hid and just stayed in the last bedroom while he was sleeping. I had to keep quiet and they [VAW shelter] finally called me back. I was calling for about eight hours and they finally phoned me back and told me there was a space.

In terms of recommendations, the women criticized what they saw as the lack of an individually tailored approach with respect to the child protection intervention. Also, the participants had expected that the child protection workers would be better trained and make fewer threats to apprehend their children.

They said the only way [community crisis intervention] will give you back your son is if you stay in a shelter. I went to the shelter [VAW]. I only stayed for two nights. They [VAW shelter staff] were confused too. They're like, 'Why are they doing this? It was an honest mistake.' So the worker [child protection] came to the transition house [VAW] and I said, 'I'll make sure someone's there for him [son].' After that, the worker [child protection] is like, 'Okay we'll close it. There's nothing serious here.' They closed the file and I got to go home.

I'm scared to death for the kids. I'm not scared for me because I can take it. I've taken it for almost ten years. I'm more scared for the kids. People gotta do their job [child protection] but don't take the kids from me. That's the only thing that's keeping them [women] sane and thinking, 'this is what I gotta do.' Child protection shouldn't be so aggressive; they step in way too soon. They gotta focus on helping women and not putting them in an awkward situation.

Child protection has their part. A lot of people go against each other over children. That's another danger sign. A woman can end up dead because of her kids. That's why they [child protection] came into my life, to take my kids away. But you see how abuse can be? Before you know it, it's out of control. I'm mad because they allowed me to walk right into that. They didn't pull me aside when I had my first child and say, "Hey miss, let's talk now." They let me walk right into it and then find out all the danger and they knew it. Just tell me I'm in danger and my kids are in danger, that's different. Meanwhile, I walked through seven years.

In order for me to get my kids back, I gotta jump their hoops. Before I can get my kids back, I gotta go through all these programs, and who can work when you got all these programs to do?

I'll need more visits with my kids. It's been a while since I had regular visits because my worker's always out or something's happening with me at home. They range from 11 to 2. Two boys, two girls. I'd like to see them before Christmas. I'm trying to get visits, but my worker's not in right now. I was supposed to meet her today and she cancelled. I should write everything down. A lot of times I went and they didn't show up. I was really disappointed.

Barriers to Accessing Housing

The women were asked about what barriers they had experienced to finding adequate housing. The most commonly noted barrier was finances, including both low incomes and inadequate social assistance (14) and high rental costs (15).

Poverty is often discussed when referring to individuals who are homeless. Yet, women may be on social assistance that still does not cover their basic needs.

Every time I'd try to have my own apartment I couldn't do it, because the money the city was giving to live on... Even though I had my apartment I wouldn't have the food. I'd have to go to every soup kitchen to eat and I tried roommates. My rent was covered but they wouldn't pay their portion. I'd tell them that they'd have to go or I'd have to move out on them because they'd refuse to leave.

It's hard to find a house. That's one of the reasons I'm working. She doesn't give me enough hours and I'm on minimum wage. Social Services made me believe that she was going to help. {Then} she said she can't help me because I make too much. Put my two cheques together in the month I make \$830 and my rent is \$650. It gives me \$150 to live. I have to buy food, pay bills, and I'm a woman. Women need shampoo, other things, right? So it's hard, it really is.

I don't think the government gives enough to families as it is. But people in abusive relationships, there ain't nothing to help them get out. At least I got this and I know I can make it. But when you have to constantly worry about how you're gonna feed your kids and go to food banks...

With respect to inadequate finances, several women mentioned being on a disability allowance or having difficulty working because of disability or health or mental health problems.

I'm on \$500 dollars of medications a month, so I can only stay on assistance. If I was to work I would not have enough money to pay for my medications. I'm on assistance. You only can make \$150 dollars a month extra.

I used to work at Tim Horton's or at Tips, Superstore, housekeeping, jobs like that. Ever since I met him I'm too depressed to work. I depended on him for money and he has nothing.

I'm on ODSP [Ontario Disability Support Program]. I wanted a start up so I could get a place so I wouldn't have to be homeless. They said, "You can't until February of 2009." That was a huge barrier because I couldn't improve myself because I had no extra income to get a place... first and last.

Other women spoke of high rents. The rent amounts varied from location to location, but, in each case, were much higher than the women could afford.

When I tried to flee, I saw so many apartments but, since I moved in with him [partner], the apartments jumped and I couldn't get anything under \$650, \$750 and that was most of my income.

I was hoping they'll pay; I'm not sure whether they pay damage [deposit] for me. That wouldn't be bad. But there's still that guideline of how much you're allowed. And where you gonna get a bachelor suite for \$270.00?

The rent is so high in [location] and I want to go to [other location] so I can get away from the city and my ex because it's just too small and everybody knows everybody. It's hard to find a place as it is and the rent is high. I only get maybe \$410 for rent when rent is at least \$600.

Fourteen women spoke of barriers related to the stigma of being a welfare, recipient, abused women, having children or having been blacklisted because of their

abusive partners' behaviour. Four women mentioned the stigma of being on social assistance interfered in their accessing housing.

I put applications into property management companies. I haven't worked and they ask, how long have you worked? Then I was going to school and that wasn't so good either. They don't want students. They don't want people on welfare cause they're not working class... I'm the other one, so.

We did hunt a lot. But we've been turned down in all of them because we're on welfare and we look too young. No matter how much I explained, they did not want to take any chances. So we end up being homeless.

The stigma of being homeless was mentioned as a barrier to obtaining housing by three women.

Everybody's lumped into one pot. If you are mentally ill, abusing drugs, on the street, maybe afraid to stay inside of a home which you've tried before and it doesn't work and you've got life-skill issues. Because of the severe homeless problem, they're treating people like me as one of them.

That's a horrible, horrible situation. It's really hard for people to understand unless you've been there, and how the general public judges you. You must be an addict, you must be... people just don't understand or they turn a blind eye. They don't want to know.

Having children was identified as a barrier to renting by three women.

We struggled a little bit. I had to go like in one place to the next trying to get an apartment. Sometimes people wouldn't accept children.

I had to lie. The last apartment, I told the person... cause all the other places I went to go, my kids were with me. But then I said, I'm gonna give this a try, I had to lie. So when he heard that there weren't kids I got accepted. I don't think it's fair. It's very hard for a single mother to try to find a place with three kids.

I have too many kids. I know they're not allowed to do that. But many people do. So I've been looking for apartments for a while now. It's always something.

Racism was identified as a barrier to accessing housing by two women.

There's lot of stigma. The government doesn't want so-called Indians that drink and sniff and blah, blah, blah, to be in those homes. So are they being marginalized by those people? Or are they marginalized by all the people who ... aspect? A lot of people here are blacklisted on apartment because of one thing or another. They didn't pay their rent or they got kicked out because of fighting or drugs or whatever blah, blah, blah.

They're really hard to get. You have to have good references and they don't want people who drink or do drugs. I got rejected over that. The landlords were pretty straight up with me and told me girls my age with kids that were Aboriginal partied there, wrecked the place, and left. They wrecked it for us that don't do that. It made me very frustrated.

Finally, two women, whose partners had created problems, were themselves affected and prevented from being housed.

He put gas all over and set my place on fire. He was trying to kill himself. So I was under investigation. They thought I did that to my own house! I tried to get a house with [city subsidized housing] but because the fire was still under investigation they wouldn't give me a house.

I have to wait a long time cause I owe the Housing [Authority] money. I didn't pay rent. I didn't know the house was still open. My ex-husband didn't tell me. So they were charging me at the time. I didn't look up my lease cause I thought he closed it when he was there.

Six women complained of looking at or living in accommodations that were infested with bugs or mice, or was simply filthy.

There was a horrible building; problems with flooding and infestation. I lost everything, my dishes, my clothing. I threw everything out. I came here [homeless transition house] basically with nothing. It's okay now [but] it was upsetting. I've never seen a cockroach in my life and this is an old building.

I'd put a blanket on the floor and she [daughter] would lay on the floor watching TV. Out of the corner of my eye, something moved and it was this mouse. I was scared to go and get it. I pulled the blanket. I'm moving her and the mouse isn't biting her or anything. It's just sitting there. The rooming houses in the city, they're just dirty. I don't want a dirty place to live in. Some people would live but not me. With all the bed bugs you see ...

There were mice. Kayden (baby son) was just crawling at the time. One morning a mouse come running in front of my feet and it scared me. I started blocking off the kitchen with boards and he started crawling over it. One day Kayden had mice poop in his hand and I just [said], 'No more.' I didn't want my baby to get sick. Altogether, I killed like nine mice and there was still more. I don't know where they were hiding. I had mousetraps. I couldn't get rid of them. I asked him to get rid of them - the landlord - and he's like, "You can do it."

Sometimes you're desperate to find a place so they have what they call rooming houses. You rent a room there and it's just not what it's supposed to be. The plumbing's old, everything's old. Some of the places I've lived in, all the windows [have] mould. That's not fit for humans. That's not even fit for animals, never mind. That stuff can kill you, if you breathe it in too much.

Housing Resources for Women

The respondents were asked what resources in their area they were aware of to assist them in finding housing. Twelve women mentioned specific agencies or policies in their locale.

It's called My Aunt's [YWCA short term homeless shelter in Regina]. It's opening tomorrow, but it's really temporary. They won't put people out if they don't have a place to stay, but they're hoping people will be out in a week or 10 days.

There is a guidebook. They have all the agency numbers in this booklet. I forget what the booklet is called but you can get this booklet at Rotholme. A list of all of everything from AA to Shelters to Food Banks to hospital numbers. It's got a lot of resources in there. Rotholme is a family shelter. That's where I started with my son. They've helped me. I don't know of any [other] services.

CUPS [Calgary Urban Project] [affordable housing for women and men] is the one that will help you find an apartment of your own.

I'm working with CUPS Rapid Exit [low income rental Calgary], which is supposed to be a good program. They're going to try to help me rent a house.

With the HEP [homeless eviction and prevention] fund in Alberta it's very good. In Toronto they don't have these places like CUPS [Calgary Urban Project] that you can go to for furniture. Women in Need. Alberta is very good, in many ways.

PATHWAYS [permanent housing for homeless people in Alberta] would accept a referral for me. It's for people with mental disorders and I [have] that mental disorder. I'm not sure what it is, maybe it's a change in my body chemicals because I'm pregnant and it's causing me a lot of stress.

I get the sheets from RAY, Resources Assistance for Youth [Winnipeg]; I think that's what they're called. They have their rental pamphlets that they put out every two weeks. And there's that home renters guide.

I go to Day Centers [Montreal] to help me find an apartment. I will see those people who work on the streets, give them a call to see if they have a place for me. It is helpful. [I: What organization most helped you find housing?] The workers on the street and Face à Face [homeless resource centre]

The Mustard Seed [homeless shelter]. They help you shower and they give you phones and food and let you wash your clothes there. That was really helpful.

Strikingly, though, almost the same number, ten women, commented that they knew of no resources or agencies that could assist women to find housing. This was despite the fact that most of the women were interviewed in shelters or agencies. Two women mentioned that churches might assist them in finding housing. A further five women mentioned the need to create new programs and policies.

Oh my. I think there needs to be more places like this where Aboriginal women- Because there's only one here.

I'd like more resources for women in abusive relationships so that they don't have to stay just for a place to live. More places available so that we can get out and we don't feel like it's hopeless and we have nowhere to turn. I feel pretty helpless and it's all because I don't have any choices. I'd just like to see more housing.

There's a lack of women's-only resources for homelessness.

Overcoming Homelessness

The women were asked what had helped them to overcome homelessness (26 responses). Several mentioned the support of shelters and specialized services in assisting

them to get off substances. Most mentioned their struggles and the challenges of their paths out of homelessness.

I had a good life. At one point, I had a good job, even though [husband] was still beating me. I still had a good life and I wasn't using drugs. That's not what I wanted my life to become, using drugs. Showing them that I could stay off the drugs, OK? Mary Dover House [YWCA Calgary], getting into a safe place is number one. Getting clean and then tapping the agencies, doing what you've got to do. It's gotta be true to your heart.

One key ingredient is harm reduction like Peggy's Place [transitional housing for women with mental health issues in Vancouver]. If somebody's fallen off the wagon, they're not bad people. It's a huge struggle. In detox, I saw how difficult it is to come from living on the streets to finding a place where you're comfortable. So that flexibility, you're not booted back on the street again because you messed up. Physically, I got really sick. So the hospital's been a big part of helping and me back on track again. I wanted my own house. I just can't seem to have my own house, my own peace of mind, without somebody coming into my life again. That's why, this time, I have not spoken to this man [partner] since I left.

It's really made me grow. I'm actually stronger. I'm glad I went through it and I hope every other woman can get through too because it is tough. But you have to have hope and you have to talk and there are a lot of places out there.

In a shelter you get kicked out for doing what's normal given your life circumstances, unlike here [transitional housing for women with mental health issues]. There have been times where I didn't come home for three days and I didn't lose my bed. That could never happen in another facility. I don't know if it's the fact that I always had a place to come to, so I didn't need to plunge myself further in the desperation of using 'cause I'd screwed up a situation that was great. Or the fact that I'm pregnant, which has resulted in me staying clean, or a combination of the two. But the acceptance around this being a normal part of my recovery here has been key to me getting to this point.

I changed my life around. I quit the drugs and alcohol. I became independent. I help other people a lot. I've been in really low, ugly places and that's not where I want to go back to. I'm going to keep climbing. I'm not going to let anybody in. Along the way, if I have to push buttons and get people pissed off, I'm going to do it because I'm tired of being pushed around. It was easy to do that while I was on drugs and alcohol but not anymore! It was easy for me to go back into relationships and keep getting beaten up because I didn't care about life, about anybody. All I cared about was drugs and alcohol. I didn't care where I was going to sleep. I'm just not that person anymore. That's what really frustrates me right now at the shelter because they try to put that past on me which is not me anymore. It is me, but it's my past.

Others noted the importance of asking for assistance, however difficult that might be. The support from agency staff, friends and family was critical to a number of women.

Believing that there is a better life, trying to reach for it. Opening myself to help. Asking for help was the biggest step. Asking for help and being willing to take that help in every way. Even if it might be seen wrong and not fit what I'm looking for. But that's the first step, the first thing you need to do.

Opening up and talking to people. I kept everything to myself for so long. Once I started talking, not only people could give me resources that I wasn't aware of, but it helped me clarify things. I talked lots. The first transition house really got me talking. I've realized now, having a support system, how vital it is for everybody. The majority of my life, I've been a rugged individualist. I can handle everything on my own. Now I've realized how important it is to have support, and support doesn't necessarily have to come from family or friends. I'm not close to my family at all, but I've found there is lots of help out there if you reach for it.

Support, having people that I can talk to about my problems and say, "Look, I'm homeless. Can you help me figure out how I can get off the streets and not be homeless? I'd rather have a roof over my head, place where I can cook." But the problem is having people to support you. I find it very hard to trust people. It's hard to figure out who can I talk to to help me with this problem?

Getting over my pride. Having to humble myself and say, "I do have to go here for my survival. I'm gonna have to go to the food bank and stick my nose up and everything's ok. It's all what you make it." [I: Sounds like that was difficult.] It was. But being homeless and on the street, it's not easy.

When I moved up north I stayed with my auntie until I got my own place. But I moved back to the city. So if I go back to my reserve, I know I'm not homeless. I have a place to live.

Support. Knowing that if something goes wrong then I'll have somebody to fall back on instead of, you know if something goes wrong and then I have no choice at all. My mom's basically my only support.

[I: What barriers have you overcome?] *Asking for help. I had a really difficult time when I was growing up asking for help, so that was one of the biggest barriers I've overcome. Trusting people with certain organizations to use the information I give them to the positive rather than the negative.*

Advice to other Abused Women about Housing

A final question asked of the women was, if they had a friend who was being abused, what advice would they give her about finding housing. A total of 56 women answered this question, often with multiple suggestions. The major themes were to leave the relationship, often to go to a women's shelter (32), Suggestions of agencies and services that might be useful for housing (11) and other issues (19) and assist them personally (24).

The largest proportion of responses consisted of advice to go to a woman's shelter.

I would suggest she go to the emergency shelter and then some other transition. The two women I've known that have been in abusive relationships, both just

barely left with their life. One was in the hospital for quite some time and she had three little kids. The other was by herself but she was beaten so badly that she almost didn't survive. That could've been me. So I would support them in finding another place to live, somewhere safe. Not just a hotel. Or [don't] leave and go to your family. They know how to use those people to get at you. So it's gotta be a secure place or else you keep going back. Possibly all your life.

Oh, please! If they are in my situation, just take your kids and go to the [VAW] transition home first. Get rid of your husband. There is help. Nobody should live the way I was living. I strongly would advise call for help. There is help.

I would just tell her to phone one of the shelters. There's a lot of help there with housing.

For starters, get into the shelters and ask, you have to say, "I need help. I'm ready to stand on my own two feet" and you need to [ask yourself] "What are my resources, what are my options." If you don't ask, you won't know. You're scared of asking, scared of the disappointment if someone says there is nothing.

First go to a woman's [VAW] shelter. Talk to counsellors 'cause that's what they're for. Ask them if they can help you find out things. The YWCA woman's [VAW] shelter helped me. If you need to get an order from the police where they can't come near you, they can help with that. They can help you find housing.

I told her this is where you should go and she ended up at Women's Community House [VAW shelter]. I've told other young women that had children that this is the phone number and it is really up to you. I don't want to be pushy but you should really try to get away from him before it's too late. Unfortunately, a few women didn't and one girl lost her baby because of his abuse. That was really tough. But I was still there to let her know there is a safe place if you need it.

I'd probably tell them to go to a shelter. I don't know what's out there for housing. Other than this place, which I actually thought was an emergency shelter. I'd heard the name before and had no idea it was second stage.

Resources connected to housing or various other forms of housing such as safe houses, were mentioned by a relatively small number of women (11). The agencies were often local or provincial but included such services as Calgary Housing, BC Housing, Rehabitat. In Alberta a 311 phone number provides information on a number of resources including housing agencies. Other women mentioned non-VAW shelters

I would say come here [homeless - transition house]. But it's difficult because you have to go through the dorm and you're dealing with a lot of crack addicts, with the lowest socio-economic whatever and if you're not used to that, it's very difficult. Some of them are wonderful people but some of them are (pause).

Advise her where to go like the Mustard Seed [homeless shelter], the DI [Drop In Calgary Homeless], the Alpha House [shelter for alcohol and drug users], It depends on where these people are coming from.

That's where I would direct them. I ran into a couple at the hospital. I had used drugs with both of them. He's managing to stay clean, she is not. She's pregnant.

I referred her here [transitional housing for women with mental health issues], just to get her out of the downtown Eastside and also to St. Elizabeth's [homeless shelter for women] 'cause there's just no hope, she's lost custody of three previous children. I don't know why she feels she could undertake a pregnancy in such adverse circumstances.

If you experience abuse from partners, they should ask for help; it's not too hard and they will get the help and support they needed. And they will get the place that they want, I mean, B.C. Housing, it will be much, much better than living with their partner in that house. They shouldn't live in there.

This girl just moved out [of shelter]. Her boyfriend's not allowed on the property where she's at. I said, "Don't even tell him where you live." I mean all the furniture and bedding and pots and pans were provided for her at no price. I said, "Don't mess it up because you don't want to be at the Sally Ann or the Unity or Crash Beds. You don't want to be homeless again, don't mess it up."

Nineteen women mentioned other services that could be supportive or helpful in other ways besides housing, including day programs such as My Sister's Place for homeless women in London, counselling, parenting programs such as Building Blocks in Vancouver and the Rainbow Resource Centre (support and resource centre for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and two spirit communities). Four women even suggested contacting the police with respect to assistance to get to a shelter or emergency protection orders and two women suggested social services (welfare).

I hope women run. Don't worry about your pets; they can go to the shelter too. A lot of women stay because they're scared he's gonna hurt the pet. The SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) will take them. Do your best; get the hell out of there. There's lots of life left out there, it's great. That's it.

I'd tell her to contact the Elizabeth Fry Society. It depends what kind of abuse. I'd tell her about this place. But she has to phone on her own. And if it was early and she hadn't been drinking I'd tell her to go to sleep at the Siloam Mission [homeless shelter]. And they open up at eight in the morning and you can talk to one of the counsellors there. They could help you out.

Twenty-four women simply noted that they would help her themselves, primarily by giving her support and information about resources. Several speculated that they would offer a friend a place to live.

I would try to help her, of course. It's hard to say because I don't know many resources. If I did know more, I would tell her.

I would tell her my story and tell her, 'You need to get help. Listen to what the person is saying.' Or I would guide or I'll be there for her.

I've said to a few of my friends if they ever need me, give me a call and you can come over to my house. Because I've been there. [I: So paying it forward?] Yes. And I would then bring them here because I wouldn't advise them to go to a shelter. I would bring them here and then they can take them to where they need to go. That's what I would do.

Of these, seven had actually assisted one of their friends, in a number of cases by allowing them to move in with them—“doubling-up” in the homelessness literature vernacular.

I had a girlfriend that was much abused and I took her and her baby and helped her to get back into school. She was younger, so there was a lot more options open to her. [I: You offered your house until she got on her feet?] Yeah. I was in a financial position that I could do that.

My sister, I helped. I took her 4 kids and I had a two bedroom townhouse and I took her. That was overwhelming, because I was just used to me and my son, but I helped her out. A couple of women with kids, I physically helped out. When I realize how many people I helped out (laughing) that way... [I: You offered them your place?] Yeah, one of them had 3 kids, so I let her stay with me too.

I'd tell her to stay with me. I really would. I just [told] one mom get out of it and she stayed with me for a couple weeks. I called up Rehabitat [subsidized housing] and asked them if they had a two bedroom and they got her a place.

I've done it before when I was on my own with a friend of mine who was in an abusive relationship and I was like, “No you need to get away. You have to get from it.” She moved in with me for three or four months and then she moved back in, well she moved in with her mom because she found out she was pregnant. So now she's living with her mom and she's doing good [sic].

I've tried to help a few people that I met that were decent. One girl ended up sleeping on our couch for two weeks

Need for Housing Programs

A significant issue noted by 12 women was a lack of programs to assist women in finding housing.

I phoned my member of provincial parliament to get some help. I phoned CBC, W5. I phoned so many different places trying to get that this needs to be addressed. [VAW] shelters know that women usually go back 'cause of lack of options. I thought that should be national news. Women go back because there's no choices. I had so many doors slammed in my face.

For me to make enough money to live on my own, I need to be with him and put up with his emotional abuse, his, not physical, but emotional. There's nowhere for me to go. There's nothing here and there's got to be more help for women that need education. They're just gonna keep going back if they don't have it.

There's not enough places for women. Half of them are either in their vehicles or someplace out or staying with a friend because the shelters are full. It's crazy. If there was enough help they would get help. Half of them don't report it because they have nowhere to go. Where are they gonna take their kids? It wrecks everything, it wrecks the kids and kids lose their friends, their home.

There's programs for domestic, people who've been abused and programs for people with addictions, there's programs for people who-are the perpetrators. Link all together because they're all related.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Recommendations

The extent to which women are among the ranks of the homeless has rarely been acknowledged. The stereotype of a homeless person remains a man with mental health or substance abuse issues. 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.

That women were even among the homeless was rarely mentioned in the early research on homelessness, with an estimated 3% of the homeless being women research from the 1950s and 60s (Rossi, 1990, cited in Lehmann, Kass, Drake, & Nichols, 2007). Women now make up a much greater proportion of the homeless population; around one-quarter in recent Canadian city's homeless counts (Tutty, et al., 2009).

Women are even less visible when considering that they often use relative homelessness and insecure accommodation when possible. The faces of women among the homeless are also obscured by research on homeless families, the majority of which represent mothers and children. Young women are described in studies as “youth,” “runaways,” or “prostitutes.”

As noted in comments in a previous report (Tutty, et al., 2007), when a woman leaves an abusive partner, even if she goes to a VAW shelter, she and her children are essentially homeless. Yet, the general public tends to believe that she has found accommodation, forgetting that most Canadian shelters for abused women are limited to offering residence for periods of from three weeks to a month or so.

The environmental scan of programs found few novel programs to safely house abused women and their children for periods of time that acknowledge their children's need for stable living situations and schooling. 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?

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, as previously mentioned, the stereotype of a homeless person as a man obscures the plight of homeless women, as well as their experiences of violence and abuse from intimate partners.

The factors of safety, providing emotional support, the maximum length of stay, quality of the housing and access to housing 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?

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).

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.

Research Limitations and Strengths

Any study of such magnitude has both weaknesses and strengths. The following section identifies several of each. Although we were able to access a relatively large number of women for a qualitative study, the fact that the women were from British Columbia to New Brunswick, a large cross-section of Canada, is a strength.

We interviewed women in shelters and other programs. However, research suggests a large proportion of women do not use such services, constituting the hidden homeless. As such, the voices of immigrant women and women who prefer not to use formal services are not represented in the project results. Immigrant women may be dealing with abuse from other family members besides partners, so may not identify with the almost exclusive services for intimate partner violence.

As noted in some detail, some questions in the ETHOS scale were not a good fit with our respondents. For example terms such as “unfit” accommodation. For many of the women we spoke to, any accommodation is better than none. “Overcrowding” is also a relative term when facing homelessness. Some Canadian shelters, specifically second stage shelters for abused women, were not included in the categories in the scale. If utilized in future, this measure could be revised to fit the Canadian context and the context of abused women better.

In sum, the project gathered information previously not compiled, with respect to Canadian programs and processes to more safely house abused women and their children to prevent them from becoming homeless. Hearing the in-depth narratives of 62 Canadian women who have both been abused by intimate partner and experienced homelessness adds urgency to the need to advocate for these women.

Recommendations

The following set of recommendations includes several from the environmental scan that were confirmed by the women interviewed for this phase of the project.

Recommendation One: Develop additional programs to assist abused and homeless women to find safe, affordable, long-term housing.

Second and third stage housing in both the VAW 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. But 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.

Beyond second stage shelters, one might look at unique programs across Canada that constitute promising models of "third stage" or supported housing: WING's third stage housing program, Peggy's Place etc. 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 indicate the need.

Similarly, the Homeless Knowledge Program from Nova Scotia seemed a good idea. The housing retention support workers provided services such as information, individual and group counselling, safety planning, life skills, referrals and advocacy in accessing community resources. Manitoba also provides support to abused women in its interim housing.

Further, programs to house single women without children are a particular need. Women with children are typically and understandably given priority but this can leave single women in dire circumstances.

Recommendation Two: Support representatives from VAW and Homeless shelters to work together to create new programs and support already-existing initiatives to address issues and services for abused and homeless women.

Currently existing national organizations such as the Canadian Association of Women's Shelters and the National Working Group on Women and Housing, YWCA of Canada and Shelternet, to name a few, are already addressing key aspects of the work that a national network of women's shelters could address, although none holistically address both issues. A national network on abused and homeless women, as proposed in an earlier project (Tutty, et al., 2007), could take the lead in addressing these critical issues for Canada's most vulnerable women. At a local or provincial level, representatives from VAW and homeless shelters could collaborate and conduct cross-training. Ultimately, they share many of the same women as clients.

Recommendation Three: Lengthen the allowable stays in Canadian emergency and second stage shelters.

In Canada, provincial and territorial governments have the responsibility for funding VAW shelters, which overlaps with considerations of the maximum length of residence. Shelters in some provinces have a suggested length of stay of three to four weeks. International and American research clarifies that both emergency and second stage shelter stays are generally longer. According to Melbin, et al. (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, et al., 2003). In both cases, longer stays would allow women to develop more stable plans including a search for more adequate housing. The downside in most urban VAW emergency shelters is that allowing current residents to stay longer would prevent women ready to enter the shelter from being able to do so.

Recommendation Four: Advocate increasing the availability of subsidized housing

Despite the importance of second stage shelters as housing options for abused women, ultimately moving out into the community into safe, affordable, permanent housing is the goal of most shelter residents. 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.

Shelter directors in the VAW network have been involved in lobbying for better subsidized 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.

Finding housing post emergency shelter has become a significant need for most women who flee abusive partners. Much of the short time she is in the VAW emergency shelter is taken up with finding the resources to meet her basic needs once she leaves the shelter meaning that she has much less time to deal with the multiple additional issues and decisions. No wonder women return to their partners. Shelters could more effectively assist women with finding housing by, for example,

- Developing a housing coordinator position whose major responsibility would be assisting women with housing.
- Training the current VAW shelter staff to be more actively involved with women regarding connecting to resources, housing being a first step.
- Partnering with the local housing agencies and organizations to develop site-specific plans to find more appropriate housing (see Alberta's third stage shelter as one example) and, if not in place already, prioritize abused women on the wait-list for subsidized housing.

Recommendation Five: Review shelter and agency policies for implicit biases or discrimination in accessing services.

How we define a problem can prevent women in need from accessing services. As only one example, one of our interviewees who had separated from her partner because of abuse was turned away from a VAW shelter because the intake worker saw her as “homeless” not “abused.” Agency policies have the capacity to prevent numerous women from being seen as eligible for services, especially those most vulnerable, who are at the intersections of issues such as addictions, mental health concerns. These overlapping concerns characterize abused women who are most at risk of becoming homeless.

Shelters might consider broadening mandates or taking more of a harm-reduction approach. Specialized programs such as Peggy’s Place in Vancouver, that was developed for women with mental health disorders and have experienced trauma such as partner abuse, are one possibility, although most likely viable only in large metropolitan areas. Issues such as substance use and mental health problems can create difficulties for shelter staff and other shelter residents, yet these women often have no other place to go and are in dire need. Rather than simply and rotely denying them entry, what else might be offered to them that would allow their entry under certain conditions?

Recommendation Six: Create local resource booklets/pamphlets on housing for women.

Ontario has created a housing resources booklet that two of the Ontario women interviewed mentioned. Many of the 62 women interviewed had little knowledge of where to seek help. One woman was not even aware of the existence of women’s shelters.

A resource booklet could guide women through the bureaucracy of filling out forms to access subsidized housing, showing them what they need to document. As mentioned previously, a working group in Ontario both identified the clear steps that abused women needed to take in order to access the special priority given through the Housing Act but also wrote eligibility criteria and provided professionals with a template to write referral letters. They developed a protocol, a “story” that guides women in appropriately gaining access to subsidized housing.

Such a booklet could prove a valuable resource to the hidden homeless, since it could be broadly distributed to women without the need for them to have sought formal services or shelter. This would provide this group that seldom has access to the priority housing list because they skirt the formal system, with the information to access the housing.

Recommendation Seven: Advocate to child protection services for a more humane approach to women and their children who have been or are at risk of homelessness.

Of significant concern is the number of women in our study who lost their children to child welfare authorities.

- Meet with local child protection authorities to review the local practices with respect to homeless mothers and their children. One option for some women would be for child protection staff to provide housing for the mother and finances to feed her and her children, rather than placing the children in foster care. Not only would this promote the family’s health, it would be cost effective.
- For women with addictions, apprehensions could well mean they lose any incentive to remain clean and/or sober. We would recommend that addiction

treatment include placements in which women could remain with or have access on the premises to their children.

- A Catch 22 exists with respect to women's access to subsidized housing when their children have been taken into care. Once children have been apprehended, child protection services would not return the children until the women had suitable housing. With the frequently long waiting lists for subsidized housing, and the women's limited income for accessing safe and affordable private rentals, this requirement presents a dilemma. Further, in some provinces, women cannot secure subsidized housing that will meet the needs of themselves and their children when the children are not physically in their care. Thus, it seems sensible that subsidized housing institute policies that will grant women the opportunity to rent a place large enough to accommodate them and their children.

Recommendation Eight: Advocate to emergency homeless shelters to safeguard women clientele.

With a few important exceptions (mostly in large cities), emergency homeless shelters take in both men and women and the facilities do not separate the genders, which has created unsafe environments for women. Even if women merely perceive a risk, she may choose not to use the shelter, which could leave her even more vulnerable to assaults and other dangers.

- Individuals working in the homeless sector often have little understanding of the unique needs of women, particularly those that have been abused by their partners. Shelter professionals are in an excellent position to provide training to improve the sensitivity to these women's needs.
- Emergency homeless shelters should have separate gender dorms or include safety features to protect women.
- More outreach day/street programs for homeless women are needed. These programs could provide support and information about accessing housing.

Conclusions

To conclude, this research report is but the initial phase in a developing a more strategy 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.

This project has focused on a group of women at the intersections of vulnerability. Abused and homeless women, particularly those of Aboriginal origin or from patriarchal cultures, have experienced some of life's greatest challenges including being the victims

of child and partner abuse, for which they bear no responsibility. That they then use substances or develop mental health problems to cope, should not be a surprise. The complexities of the issues for women abused by intimate partners who become homeless are overwhelming and the current institutional response is simply inadequate. We must find ways to more effectively meet the urgent needs of these women to assist them to leave abusive partners and create safe new homes for themselves and their children.

The women interviewed for this study raise compelling questions and present tragic stories. How can we support them in their goals to create safe, adequate and long-term homes for themselves and their children? Continuing this dialogue and sharing their stories is only the first step.

Appendix 1: Summary Table of Options for Housing Abused Women

	Safety	Quality of Housing	Emotional Support	Access	Other Issues
Keeping Women in their Home: Emergency Protection orders	--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.
Emergency Shelter	--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.
Second Stage Shelters	--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.
Safe Homes	--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
Interim Shelters	--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.
Third Stage Housing (Alberta)	--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.
Non-DV Shelters	--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.	
Homeless shelters	--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
Homeless shelters for women	--Some security	--residency longer than non-gendered homeless shelters	--some support	--Few in Canada: only in large cities	
Public	--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
Housing	--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.
Private Housing	--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.

Appendix 2: Homelessness and Domestic Violence Interview Guide

RESOLVE Alberta, a research centre at the University of Calgary, has contracted ²to conduct a national environmental scan of the best practices to safely house women who have been abused and homeless.

We are conducting interviews with about 70 to 100 women across Canada who have been both abused by intimate partners and have been homeless for a period of time. The focus of the interviews is to ask for your ideas on preventing homelessness and to get your opinions and suggestions about how to best assist women in similar circumstances.

1. It would be helpful to know a bit about you.
 - How old are you?
 - What's your current marital status?
 - What is your ethnic background? White? Aboriginal? Etc.
 - Do you have any children? Are they living with you?
 - Do you presently have a place to live? (If yes, how long have you been there? How stable is it? If no, where are you staying?)
2. How do you define "homelessness"?
 - How many times in the past year have you been homeless? (Or if you were homeless before this year, how long were you homeless?)
 - What has worked best for you in overcoming homelessness? What barriers have you overcome?
3. What does "safe housing" look like for you?

I'm going to ask a few questions about your abuse experience.

4. How long were you in a relationship with your partner? What types of abuse did you experience? (emotional, physical, sexual, financial, spiritual)
5. How have you dealt with the abuse? Did you turn to anyone for help? (i.e. friends, family?). Did this help? If yes, in what way?
6. Did you contact any agency or service to help you deal with the abuse?

For each service ask: How did you find out about [*name of agency*]?

What did [*name of agency*] do in response? Was this helpful? Not helpful?

Did they refer you to other agencies or services?

7. Were you ever turned away from a VAW shelter? If yes, for what reason? What did you do?

Next, I'm going to ask about your experience of homelessness and your search for housing

8. Tell me about your path to being homeless.

² Funders: Homelessness Knowledge Development Program, of the Homeless Partnering Secretariat, Human Resources and Social Development Canada and the Calgary Poverty Reduction Coalition

9. (If she has children,) Have you had any contact with Child Protection services? How did they become involved? (Because of the abuse? Because you were homeless?) What happened as a result of their involvement?
10. Did you turn to anyone for help with housing? (i.e. friends, family putting you up). Did this help? If yes, in what way? If no, what impact did that have?
11. Did any of the VAW services that you contacted (such as shelters) assist you to find housing? If yes, how helpful was this?
12. Did you contact any agency or service to help you find housing?
 (For each service ask: “How did you find out about [*name of agency*]?”
 What did [*name of agency*] do in response? Was this helpful? Not helpful?
 Did they refer you to other agencies or services?)
13. Who or what organization was the most helpful in assisting you to find housing?
14. Were you ever turned away from a homeless shelter? If yes, for what reason? What did you do?
15. When you were homeless, were you at risk for/or experienced being a victim of violence from others? If yes, who was violent towards you?
16. What is your current housing situation? If you currently have housing, how did you manage it? How stable is it? If it’s not stable, do you have any ideas on where you’ll go or what you’ll do next. If it is permanent, how did you manage that?
17. Do you know of other services or programs in your area that help women and children affected by domestic violence to find safe, adequate and affordable housing? Have you used them? Why or why not?
18. Are there services that aren’t available that could have helped you and your family find safe, affordable and adequate housing? If so, please describe
19. If a friend told you about being abused, what advice would you give her about finding housing in your area?
20. Is there anything else you’d like to add about housing and homelessness for women abused by their intimate partners?

Use the Homelessness checklist: prefacing each “type” of homelessness that she hasn’t described with, “Have you ever...”

Thank you for taking the time to do this interview.

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