



THE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

MASTER OF PUBLIC POLICY CAPSTONE PROJECT

Domestic Violence Shelter Use Patterns in the Prairie Provinces: The Intersectionality and Complexity of Women's Help-Seeking Behaviour

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Executive Summary

Domestic violence shelter access must be addressed within Canada as in 2013, domestic violence incidents accounted for more than a fourth of reported violent crimes and were particularly prevalent in the Prairie Provinces. Research across North America has demonstrated that domestic violence rates decline as resources become more widely available. However, only about 10% of battered women in Canada access shelter services. As a result, systemic barriers must be identified to facilitate women's ability to escape intimate partner violence (IPV). Domestic violence policies must be better informed by women's experiences in order to ensure that policies are properly meeting the needs of IPV victims.

The Healing Journey project was a tri-provincial longitudinal study that took place across Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. Interviews were conducted biannually between 2006 and 2009 with 665 women who had previously experienced IPV, thus constituting a total of seven waves of interviews. Quantitative data analysis consisted of primarily descriptive statistics and cross tabulations, which enabled the impact of several variables on women's shelter use patterns to be analysed. Women's self-reported shelter use was categorized into the respective categories: non-shelter use, and single, low, medium, and high frequency use.

The major themes that emerged from the literature review informed the data analysis process. Several variables were found to influence shelter use, particularly with regards to women's demographics, perceptions, and experiences of abuse. Findings suggest that the impact of the chosen variables on shelter use is much more complex than previous studies have identified. It is evident that intersectionality heavily influences patterns of help-seeking as the decision to leave abuse is driven by women's unique circumstances and experiences of oppression.

Accessibility of income supports, affordable housing, childcare, and employment support greatly reduce women's likelihood of returning to abuse. As a result, the respective policies must be strengthened to ensure that women have the resources to escape domestic violence permanently. Furthermore, policies regarding upstream prevention of abuse play a critical role in addressing domestic violence. By teaching children how to develop healthy relationships, cycles of violence can be broken and future generations can develop the skills to prevent future abuse from occurring. Moving forward, public policies must be developed to address both the causes and consequences of IPV. By strengthening both responsive and preventative domestic violence policies, gender inequality and oppression that lead to IPV can be addressed.

Introduction

Domestic violence shelters play a critical role in breaking the cycle of intimate partner violence (IPV) by providing victims with “a safe, secure environment from violence and [...] the opportunity for long-term life change.”¹ Since IPV victims may lack the means to support themselves, shelters are a necessary resource for women trying to escape violent relationships. However, there is little research identifying shelter use patterns in Canada’s Prairie Provinces and the extent to which such patterns have led to systemic barriers that may prevent women from accessing shelter services. Shelter use patterns must be analysed in order to determine how domestic violence legislation can be improved to address the barriers that women face when leaving abusive relationships.

Victims’ ability to escape domestic violence may be prevented by shelter accessibility challenges, thus increasing the length of time that they remain in violent relationships. Analysing the ability for women to access domestic violence shelters is critical as emergency shelters have the potential to “reduce risk of future IPV, increase housing stability, and improve mental health.”² If women are unable to access the necessary services, they are much more likely to return repeatedly to their abuser and to suffer health problems. Additionally, systemic barriers such as a shortage of rural shelters, shelters that lack culturally sensitive programming, and shelters that do not adequately accommodate diverse health needs can be detrimental towards women’s ability to engage in help-seeking behaviour. If these systemic inequalities persist, the inability for some women to access shelters may intensify the belief that domestic violence is insurmountable. As a result, it is critical that government funding and policies are

properly informed by the experiences of IPV victims, thus aligning government priorities “with the needs of this vulnerable population.”³

Domestic violence shelter access must be addressed within Canada as police data identified that in 2013, domestic violence incidents accounted for more than a fourth of reported violent crimes.⁴ IPV is particularly prevalent across the Prairie Provinces as Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta had the highest police-reported provincial rates of intimate partner violence in 2013.⁵ As a significant number of women are affected by IPV across Western Canada, systemic barriers must be identified to ensure that women can access the proper supportive services.

It has been suggested that “policy is driving the solutions in women’s lives, rather than women’s lives driving policy solutions.”⁶ As a result, domestic violence policies must be better informed by women’s experiences and the systemic barriers that inhibit their ability to access shelters. Policies should address many of the factors and systemic barriers that reduce women’s likelihood of utilizing shelter services, such as ensuring that shelters are accessible in remote areas, reinforcing culturally sensitive programming, and mandating that facilities accommodate diverse mental and physical health needs. Currently, there is a knowledge gap regarding shelter use patterns and accessibility challenges of IPV victims in the Prairie Provinces. By evaluating women’s use of domestic violence shelters, it is possible to identify how policies can more successfully meet IPV victims’ needs, thus reducing the number of women who are trapped in violent relationships.

Background

Canada's first women's shelters opened in 1972, providing support to victims of abuse in British Columbia and Alberta.⁷ The number of domestic violence shelters across Canada has grown substantially since 1972 as there were 627 shelters operating as of April 2014.⁸ Shelters are a critical form of support for women escaping domestic violence as "in 2013/2014, shelters across Canada reported 60,341 admissions of women, representing a rate of 403 admissions per 100,000 women 15 and older."⁹ Domestic violence shelters have been a central part of Canada's response to domestic violence for decades and remain an integral resource for IPV victims.

Research across North America has demonstrated that domestic violence rates decline as resources become more widely available.¹⁰ However, only about 10% of battered women access shelter services in Canada.¹¹ Understanding why that is so is clearly a critically important question. Additionally, as "structural factors including public policy shape the delivery of shelter services,"¹² current initiatives can be improved to better accommodate the needs of IPV victims. By examining existing and proposed policies, it is possible to determine the extent to which current initiatives address domestic violence shelter accessibility.

Existing Domestic Violence Legislation

Currently in Canada, family violence legislation exists in all three Prairie Provinces. Provincial and territorial family violence legislation is intended to "complement protections in the *Criminal Code*" by offering "further protection to victims of family violence."¹³ In Alberta, the *Protection Against Family Violence Act* states that victims of domestic violence should not be prevented from receiving an emergency protection order if they are residing in an emergency

shelter.¹⁴ Similarly, Saskatchewan's *Victims of Domestic Violence Act* identifies that "temporarily residing in an emergency shelter or other safe place" should not impact the implementation of an emergency intervention order to protect victims of interpersonal violence.¹⁵ Furthermore, the Manitoba *Domestic Violence and Stalking Act* indicates that protection orders may be granted to victims of domestic violence, even if they are staying in an emergency shelter.¹⁶ As a result, provincial legislation only establishes that shelter use does not negate the need for legal protection, thus ensuring that accessing shelter services does not inhibit victims' ability to obtain a protection order.

Existing Government Initiatives

In 2013, the Government of Alberta introduced the *Framework to End Family Violence*. Several shortcomings in current service delivery are identified and the need to "improve the provision of basic needs, housing, education and employment supports for victims experiencing family violence" is emphasized.¹⁷ To address this, the Framework indicates that Human Services Alberta must ensure that everyone escaping IPV can access domestic violence shelters.¹⁸ As the province has committed to addressing shelter access barriers, this indicates that the potential to facilitate better access to shelters for all IPV victims exists but is dependent on the approach that is adopted by the government.

In Saskatchewan, the *Action Plan for Saskatchewan Women* was introduced to address domestic violence in 2002. Although the report does not directly identify how shelter access will be addressed, it advises that women experiencing higher rates of domestic violence require additional attention. For instance, it is suggested that services must be delivered holistically, "with particular emphasis on the needs of Aboriginal victims."¹⁹ Additionally, the report

identifies the access barriers that rural victims and young women often face, as shelters primarily exist in urban areas²⁰ and were “established to support older women and/or women with children.”²¹ One of the future actions identified in the report is to “explore steps to be taken to better identify and respond to the legal services and information needs of women.”²² Although the report does not specifically identify how shelter use will be addressed, it implies that shelter policies must be evaluated to ensure that all women can access shelter services.

Finally, Manitoba’s *Multi-Year Domestic Violence Prevention Strategy* was introduced in November of 2012. As Manitoba’s shelters are all provided, owned, and operated by the province (unlike in Saskatchewan and Alberta),²³ the government has more direct control over the internal operations of shelters, thus approaching the issues of domestic violence shelter use differently. Rather than focusing on addressing access to shelters, the Strategy focuses on reducing the number of shelter stays for high-frequency users and providing women leaving shelters with more resources. As the Strategy continues to be implemented, the government will have to further analyse shelter use patterns in order to effectively address resource access for IPV victims.

Existing Shelter Initiatives

The Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters (ACWS) released the second edition of *The Alberta Shelter Directors’ Guide* in 2011 to provide guidelines for shelters across the province with regards to proper practices and legislation that must be followed. Major functions and accountabilities for shelter directors are outlined; however, mention of improving shelter accessibility is limited. The only mention of facilitating shelter use is the focus on core shelter

services in Aboriginal communities²⁴ and on- and off-reserve jurisdictional issues²⁵ to ensure that Aboriginal women can properly access shelter services.

The ACWS documentation also identifies relevant legislation that shelters must abide by; however, none of the Acts identified directly influence the improvement and evaluation of shelter accessibility. Although the *Alberta Human Rights Act* prohibits discrimination against IPV victims,²⁶ this does not require shelters to evaluate structural barriers (i.e. cultural expectations, experiences of violence, and availability of services in rural areas) that may affect women's decisions to access shelter. The *Social Care Facilities Act* produces reports that evaluate women's experiences accessing community services;²⁷ however, shelters are not mandated to adopt the report findings to improve service accessibility.

Manitoba also outlined proper shelter practices in the 2014 release of the *Manitoba Standards Manual for Domestic Violence*. The document identifies victims' right to service, requiring that "shelter services are accessible on a voluntary basis and are free of charge."²⁸ However, there is no mention of standards to ensure that barriers to access are minimized. As a result, the report does not comprehensively address systemic barriers that may prevent women from accessing domestic violence shelters.

Manitoba's Standards Manual identifies standards of practice that shelters must implement, many of which have the potential to increase shelter accessibility. For instance, when clients provide an evaluation of the services they received, regular review of the findings is supposed to occur.²⁹ Although there is no requirement in the Standards Manual that such evaluations are utilized to increase shelter accessibility, this provides the necessary data to do so. Additionally, legislation regarding human rights and the right to service both ensure that

discrimination does not occur and that “shelter services are accessible on a voluntary basis and are free of charge.”³⁰ Although both requirements ensure that women are not prohibited from accessing shelter services across Manitoba, the province should aim to facilitate continuous improvement of shelter accessibility.

Proposed Initiatives

In 2009, the YWCA of Canada proposed recommendations to promote increasing public policy coordination within the Canadian domestic violence shelter network. Three of the recommendations were associated directly with increasing shelter accessibility: to (1) remove barriers to shelter access, (2) “improve access to information for newcomer women,” and (3) support women living in rural parts of Canada.³¹ The report recommended that funding should be increased “to VAW [violence against women] shelters, second-stage housing and longer term housing designed for VAW survivors to ensure both physical and cultural accessibility and cultural competency throughout the sector.”³² The YWCA of Canada report identifies the ways in which domestic violence shelters should become more easily accessible for all women and proposes specific actionable items that the Government of Canada could scale up to address shelter access across Canada.

Summary

Family violence legislation across the Prairie Provinces does not mandate that shelter services must be easily accessible for IPV victims. As a result, the existing government role in addressing systemic barriers to shelter access does not extend past anti-discrimination legislation. Existing shelter policies indicate that the fundamentals to improve shelter accessibility exist; however, more work needs to be done to encourage innovation across the Prairie Provinces. Additionally,

the YWCA of Canada has proposed federal recommendations that target shelter accessibility; however, these recommendations have yet to manifest into legislative changes. Moving forward, coordination must occur across national/subnational governments and shelters in order to ensure that domestic violence service accessibility is addressed properly and comprehensively.

Literature Review

Several studies have examined shelter use patterns and stay/leave decisions of women who have experienced IPV. Many factors have emerged from the literature that impact whether or not women who have been exposed to IPV choose to leave their abuser and if they seek refuge in a domestic violence shelter.

Age

A negative relationship has been established between women's age and shelter use as studies have shown that younger women are more likely to utilize shelter services because they are more likely to experience³³ and report^{34 35} domestic violence. Less frequent shelter use by older women has been linked to (1) the decreased tendency to classify their relationships as abusive³⁶ and (2) the increased likelihood of staying with their abusive partner for an extended period of time.³⁷ Furthermore, it has been suggested that "the lack of access to [medical and disability] supports prevents a greater number of older women from entering the service system."³⁸

Childhood

Women who experienced abuse as a child are reportedly more likely to experience IPV as adults. The 2014 Canadian General Social Survey (GSS) identified that 48% of individuals "who

reported experiencing spousal violence reported having been physically and/or sexually abused as children” as compared to 32% of respondents who did not report experiencing IPV.³⁹ Victimization as an adult was predicted in one study by victimization as a teenager,⁴⁰ and in another by sexual and physical abuse during childhood.⁴¹ Furthermore, it is suggested that women who experienced childhood abuse are more likely to report sexual and physical violence as adults,⁴² in turn increasing their likelihood of accessing shelter services.

Children

Literature examining the impact of children on battered women’s decision making suggests that the decision to leave an abuser can be catalysed by the presence of children.⁴³ For instance, women’s realization that abuse may endanger their children was found to impact victims’ stay/leave decisions,⁴⁴ thus serving as an “impetus to action.”⁴⁵ However, it is also suggested that women may choose to stay with their abuser if they feel that leaving would negatively impact their children’s well-being and safety.⁴⁶ It is evident that women’s stay/leave decisions are largely governed by their perceptions of what is best for their children.

The impact of children on IPV victims’ shelter use patterns is unclear. One study concluded that IPV victims with children were more likely to utilize shelter services.⁴⁷ However, other studies determined that (1) women with two or more children were less likely to repeatedly stay in shelters⁴⁸ and (2) “women with children are more likely to return” to their abuser.⁴⁹ These findings suggest that shelter use in the presence of children is multifaceted and situationally dependent.

Cultural Expectations

Cultural expectations have a significant impact on women's likelihood of leaving IPV, thus affecting victims' shelter use patterns. Religious expectations shape IPV victims' help-seeking behaviour as one study identified that religious ideology can portray "women's roles as wife and homemaker as pivotal to her sense of self-worth."⁵⁰ Consequently, as religious expectations may discourage women from leaving their partner, IPV victims may be less likely to seek refuge in domestic violence shelters. Gendered expectations also decrease women's likelihood of leaving an abusive partner as one study concluded that if the battered woman's role as a caretaker is emphasized, she is more likely to blame herself for the abusive relationship.⁵¹ Reinforced gender roles that define women by their roles as a mother and a wife may encourage victims to remain loyal to their abuser, therefore reducing the likelihood that they will access shelter services.

Education

Education level is an important factor in determining what affects women's decisions to access domestic violence shelters. Education has been found to predict women's self-sufficiency with regards to economic stability.⁵² The relationship between economic instability and shelter use is evident as one study found that "about one third [of women receiving onsite shelter] had less than a high school education compared to about one fifth of women who did not obtain shelter."⁵³ The lack of stability that lower education can cause may lead to increased shelter use as women may lack the financial ability to support themselves upon leaving their abuser.

Additionally, experiences of economic abuse can be detrimental to IPV victims' future financial well-being and stability by preventing them from attending school.⁵⁴ Preventing

women from furthering their education removes their chance to obtain “any level of financial means with which they could establish independence, resourcefulness, and social power.”⁵⁵

This may also lead to increased shelter use as lack of stability may increase women’s dependence on their abuser, thus increasing their likelihood of returning to abuse several times.

Ethnicity/Cultural Background

In Canada, most of the research with regards to IPV and cultural background focuses on the experiences of Aboriginal women. For instance, the 2014 GSS stated that “individuals self-identifying as Aboriginal were more than twice as likely as non-Aboriginal people to report experiencing spousal violence in the previous five years.”⁵⁶ Additionally, British Columbia’s Ministry of Justice reported that Aboriginal women are overrepresented in the IPV population, “accounting for 9.2% of victims while comprising 4.8% of the general population.”⁵⁷ Although Aboriginal women experience higher rates of IPV than the rest of the Canadian population, the 2009 GSS identified that “32% of Aboriginal female spousal violence victims (and 39% of non-Aboriginal female spousal violence victims) contacted some type of formal victim service.”⁵⁸ The lower use of shelters by Aboriginal women is thought to be largely because “smaller reserves and Northern settlements often do not have the means to sustain crisis centres or shelters.”⁵⁹ This is indicative of the systemic barriers that may inhibit Aboriginal women’s ability to access necessary shelter services, particularly in Northern Canada.

It has also been suggested that women who have recently immigrated to Canada are less likely to access shelter as they may be unsure about how to access IPV resources.⁶⁰ The previous experiences of women who have recently immigrated to Canada must be considered

as they “may be fearful about calling authorities of any type, due to previous [...] exploitive experiences in their countries of origin.”⁶¹ Additionally, research has shown that minority women are less likely to exit abuse early on,⁶² which can be attributed to factors such as social isolation, language barriers, and cultural norms. Each of the factors above greatly reduces the likelihood that women will engage in help-seeking behaviour, thus inhibiting them from using shelter services.

Health

Poor mental and physical health have been found to affect shelter use patterns as mental illness,⁶³ trauma,⁶⁴ and injury as a result of abuse⁶⁵ are positively associated with shelter usage. This is largely because women leaving IPV with additional health concerns are in greater need of support.⁶⁶ The relationship between physical health and shelter use is exemplified by one study’s findings that women receiving onsite shelter “were almost 3 times as likely to have some type of disability or special need requiring attention.”⁶⁷ Women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to violence;⁶⁸ however, are less likely to seek shelter services as they are often dependent on their abuser for physical support.⁶⁹

Income

Although IPV affects women across all income levels, access to financial resources significantly impacts the types of services that victims can access.⁷⁰ It is generally understood that there is a negative relationship between income and shelter use as women who have higher incomes are less likely to use shelters as they have other means of housing themselves.⁷¹ It has also been found that although women with lower incomes tend to be in greater need of shelter, they also face the most difficulty accessing the resources.⁷² Furthermore, as “numerous studies have

shown that having limited resources for economic independence is an objective risk factor associated with a greater likelihood of returning to an abusive relationship,”⁷³ this increases the likelihood that women with lower incomes will use shelters repeatedly.

Sources of income impact both victims’ financial stability and the quantity of income they receive, and as a result, affect victims’ shelter use patterns. One study identified that women staying in shelters “were half as likely to be receiving income from employment either as a primary or secondary source and [were] significantly more likely to be receiving some type of income from a public program.”⁷⁴ This demonstrates that some sources of income fail to provide economic stability for victims of IPV, thus increasing both dependence on their abuser and the likelihood that they will return several times to domestic violence shelters.

Living Situation

Living in an urban or rural area has been found to affect help-seeking behaviour and shelter use patterns. It has been suggested that living in a metropolitan area, “perhaps due to easier access to support services and jobs, is positively associated with the likelihood of permanently leaving an abusive relationship.”⁷⁵ Additionally, IPV victims in rural locations are often isolated from social supports and services, thus reducing the likelihood that they will access shelters.⁷⁶

Victims’ living situations significantly impact their help-seeking behaviour as housing stability has been found to predict shelter residence.⁷⁷ The impact of housing instability on women’s ability to escape domestic violence is particularly prominent in Northern Canada⁷⁸ as IPV is associated with housing inadequacy and overcrowding.^{79 80} Additionally, the limited housing options presented to battered women in Northern Canada can lead to reduced shelter and social housing use, thus increasing their long-term exposure to IPV.⁸¹ It is evident that

easily accessible shelters and services must be established in rural and Northern Canada in order to reduce the barriers that currently inhibit women's ability to escape IPV.

Relationship with Abuser and Experiences of Violence

Victims' relationship status with their abuser influence their shelter use patterns as relationship length is negatively associated with the likelihood that victims will leave an abusive situation.⁸² Additionally, it has been found that "married women are more likely to temporarily leave [their abuser] than are cohabiting victims," which demonstrates that long-standing commitment influences victims' stay/leave decisions.⁸³ As a result, women in long-term abusive relationships and married women may feel unable to access shelter services altogether or may repeatedly use shelters as a temporary escape if they return to abuse several times.

Shelter use is also correlated with experiences of violence as the severity of abuse and help-seeking behaviour are closely interwoven. Additionally, women who primarily experienced physical violence were found to be more likely to seek refuge in shelters than women who experienced primarily sexual or emotional abuse.⁸⁴ While research suggests that women who utilize shelter services have been exposed to more severe violence,⁸⁵ there are significant concerns that "the probability of leaving actually *declines* as violence increases" as women recognize that they face the greatest danger when trying to escape.⁸⁶ As women who face the most severe violence experience the greatest barriers to help-seeking, the ability to escape abuse must be facilitated at the earliest signs of violence.

Self-Esteem

Low self-esteem has been found to greatly impact victims' ability to leave an abusive relationship, in turn shaping their shelter use patterns. For instance, one study identified that

women relied on their own personal strength to stay out of their previous violent relationships.⁸⁷ This suggests that women with low self-esteem are more likely to utilize shelters repeatedly as they are more likely to return to abuse several times. Another study indicated that “psychological factors, such as confidence in one’s ability to be independent, may affect a victim’s willingness to leave.”⁸⁸ This suggests that IPV victims with low self-esteem are less likely to access shelters altogether. Existing literature indicates that while women who have low self-esteem are unlikely to access shelters, those who do are likely to use shelters repeatedly.

Sexual Orientation

The 2009 Canadian General Social Survey on Victimization reported that individuals who self-identified “as gay or lesbian were more than twice as likely as heterosexuals to report having experienced spousal violence.”⁸⁹ However, the unique forms of abuse that lesbian women experience, such as the threat to expose their sexual orientation,⁹⁰ “may compel the victim to remain in the abusive relationship because of fears about backlash from family, friends, co-workers, and others.”⁹¹ This suggests that women experiencing context-specific forms of abuse may be less likely to seek refuge in shelter, thus reducing the number of lesbian women who utilize the shelter system.

Social Support

IPV victims’ stay/leave decisions and shelter use patterns are heavily influenced by the level of social support that they have. First and foremost, as knowledge of available resources is increased by being connected within a community, IPV victims with social support are more likely to access domestic violence shelters.⁹² Additionally, women in one study identified that

the presence of social support increased the likelihood that they would consider leaving their abuser. By “recognizing the availability of external support and resources,” women’s perceptions shifted from “feeling trapped and isolated to [...] feeling hopeful for change.”⁹³

Research has demonstrated that access to formal and informal social support increase the likelihood that IPV victims will engage in help-seeking behaviour.⁹⁴ This suggests that informal social support reduces the sense of isolation that incentivizes women to stay with their abuser, thus providing women with the necessary motivation to access shelter services. As research has demonstrated that negative responses from victims’ support networks may further isolate victims,⁹⁵ lack of social support may facilitate high frequency shelter use by leading victims to return repeatedly to abuse. Social support plays a fundamental role in shaping women’s help-seeking behaviour as the presence of informal support increases the likelihood that women will leave their abuser and reduces victims’ chances of returning to abuse.

Overall Themes

The existing literature has demonstrated that the reasons why women use domestic violence shelters are complex and multifaceted. This indicates that all of the factors that shape women’s shelter use patterns and stay/leave decisions are intertwined. Although the impact of demographics, situational factors, and personal characteristics on shelter use will be analysed independently, it is essential to recognize that intersectionality continuously shapes women’s help-seeking behaviour.

Methodology

In order to determine which characteristics impact shelter use amongst women who have experienced IPV, quantitative data from the Healing Journey project was analysed. The Healing Journey project was a tri-provincial longitudinal study that took place across Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. Interviews were conducted biannually between 2006 and 2009 with 665 women who had previously experienced IPV, thus constituting a total of seven waves of interviews. Across the seven waves that each took approximately two hours, the interview questions were read aloud to accommodate the various levels of literacy amongst the participants.

The inclusion criteria required participants to be at least 18 years of age and to have experienced IPV on or previous to January 2002. Additionally, at the time of the interviews, participants could not be in crisis and could not have any severe mental health challenges that might affect their memory or comprehension.

The study relied on convenience sampling by recruiting appropriate participants primarily through partnering community and research organizations. Additionally, media and posters were displayed in community organizations to recruit participants who were not directly in contact with the partnering organizations. In order to account for diversity across victims of IPV, the Healing Journey research team focused on obtaining a sample group with variation across characteristics such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, and education.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical approach that has guided this research is rooted in Standpoint Theory. This sociological perspective suggests that people's knowledge and understanding of the world

around them is influenced by their experiences and position in society.⁹⁶ In relation to IPV, this suggests that women's behaviours are driven by their gendered experiences, unique circumstances, and experiences of abuse and oppression. This approach has been chosen to capture the influence of intersectionality on women's help-seeking behaviour, thus recognizing that many factors affect victims' decisions to use domestic violence shelters.

Method of Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative questions were asked to participants; however, for the purposes of this study, only quantitative data was analysed. The analysis of the data was conducted using SPSS and Excel and primarily focused on descriptive statistics and cross tabulations to determine which factors warrant further analysis. Following the review of existing literature, the variables were chosen based on the factors that previous studies attributed to victims' stay/leave decisions and shelter use patterns.

Validity of this analysis is maintained through the large sample size of 665 respondents. The larger sample size accounts more accurately for the wide variety of IPV victims' experiences and allows a higher confidence level to be maintained throughout data analysis. Additionally, as approximately a third of the respondents resided in each of the participating provinces, the experiences of women in each province were adequately captured.

Limitations

Since a convenience sample was used to recruit participants, the findings do not represent the percentage distribution of shelter users' characteristics. Percentage distributions cannot be scaled up to a population level as the Healing Journey research team focused on recruiting a diverse set of participants to adequately represent minority populations. However, the findings

provide insight into the range of IPV victims' experiences and the ways in which shelter-use patterns are shaped by victims' demographics, situational factors, and personal characteristics.

Findings

The major themes that emerged from the literature review informed the data analysis process. In order to examine shelter use patterns, several variables were presented in the rows of the cross tabulations. Where appropriate, the possible responses for each variable were grouped together to present more meaningful data for analysis. Graphs are included alongside the cross tabulations to demonstrate the distribution of responses across the chosen variables, thus providing insight into the characteristics of respondents. When percentages from the graphs are presented in the analysis, valid percentages are utilized (see appendix I) in order to eliminate missing data from the calculations. Additionally, percentages that are presented from the cross tabulations are based on the highest proportion of users in the given category (horizontal rows) rather than on the greatest number of respondents in each category of shelter use (vertical columns).

Data from two variables examining shelter use patterns were merged together and presented in the columns of the cross tabulations: (1) if women have stayed in a battered women's shelter as an adult and if yes, (2) how many times women have stayed in a battered women's shelter. Shelter use was then grouped into five categories: non-shelter users and single (one use), low (two to four uses), medium (five to seven uses), and high frequency shelter users (eight or more uses). The cross tabulations allow shelter use patterns to be compared to previous research that was detailed in the literature review, thus identifying how shelter use differs in the Prairie Provinces. By identifying systemic barriers and unique shelter

use patterns in the Prairie Provinces, policies can be improved to better meet the needs of IPV victims.

Age

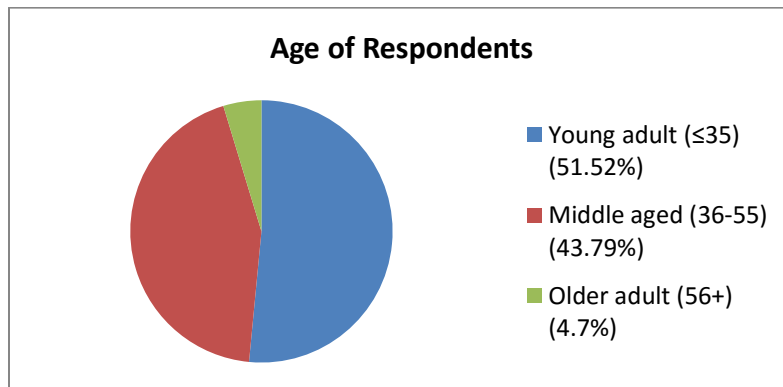


Figure 1. N=660.

Age * Stays in Battered Women's Shelter Cross Tabulation

		Stays in Battered Women's Shelter					Total
		None	Single Use	Low Use (2-4)	Medium Use (5-7)	High Use (8+)	
Age	Young adult (≤35)	102	63	87	21	12	285
	Middle aged (36-55)	112	87	86	17	18	320
	Older adult (56+)	23	13	9	1	2	48
Total		237	163	182	39	32	

The majority of respondents were under the age of 36 (51.52%); however a significant portion of respondents were also between the ages of 36 and 55 (43.79%). When examining shelter use, young women are predominantly non-shelter users (35.79% of women under the age of 36) or low frequency shelter users (30.53%). Young women have the highest percentage of respondents who are low and medium frequency shelter users (30.53% and 7.37%), which suggests that they are likely to access shelter services. Middle-aged and older women are primarily non-shelter users (35% and 47.92%, respectively) and single frequency users (27.19% and 27.08%). Middle-aged women are the group of respondents with the highest proportion of

high frequency shelter users (5.63%), while older women have the highest proportion of non-shelter users (47.92%).

When comparing the findings from the Healing Journey project with previous research, the trends that have emerged are as expected. The literature review indicated that there is a negative relationship between shelter usage and age. This is fairly consistent with the data presented above as young women have the smallest proportion of non-shelter users and the highest percentage of low and medium frequency shelter users. However, while this negative relationship leads to the hypothesis that young women are more likely to report high frequency shelter use, the above data indicates otherwise. As middle-aged women have the highest proportion of high frequency shelter users, other contributing factors (such as the presence of children) must be further examined. These findings, like previously conducted research, suggest that older women's stay/leave decisions are complex. Systemic barriers may affect older women's use of domestic violence shelters in the Prairie Provinces as factors such as health concerns⁹⁷ and long-term commitment to abusive partners⁹⁸ may minimize help-seeking behaviour.

Childhood

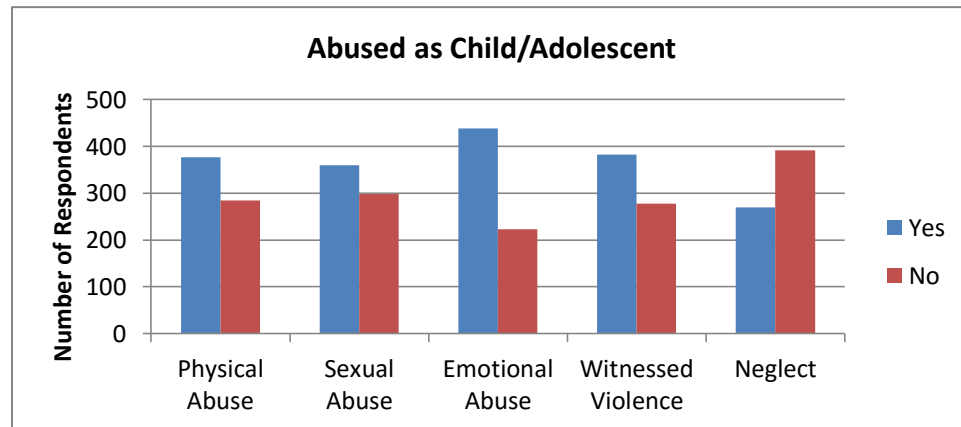


Figure 2. Respondents who experienced physical abuse: N=661; sexual abuse: N=658; emotional abuse: N=661; witnessed violence: N=660; neglect: N=661.

Abuse as Child/Adolescent * Stays in Battered Women's Shelter Cross Tabulation

		Stays in Battered Women's Shelter					Total
		None	Single Use	Low Use (2-4)	Medium Use (5-7)	High Use (8+)	
Physical Abuse	Yes	120	83	118	31	21	373
	No	120	78	65	9	11	283
	Total	240	161	183	40	32	
Sexual Abuse	Yes	113	84	112	25	22	356
	No	125	76	71	15	10	297
	Total	238	160	183	40	32	
Emotional Abuse	Yes	137	99	140	34	25	435
	No	103	62	43	6	7	221
	Total	240	161	183	40	32	
Witnessed Violence	Yes	121	85	117	31	24	378
	No	118	77	65	9	8	277
	Total	239	162	182	40	32	
Neglect	Yes	74	60	88	28	17	267
	No	166	101	95	12	15	389
	Total	240	161	183	40	32	

Emotional abuse was the most common form of childhood abuse experienced by respondents (66.26%). This was closely followed by respondents who witnessed violence (57.88%) and respondents who experienced physical abuse (57.03%). Respondents who experienced physical abuse, sexual abuse, or witnessed violence as a child are primarily non-shelter users (32.17%, 31.74%, and 32.01%, respectively). Additionally, women who experienced emotional abuse or neglect as a child are predominantly low frequency shelter

users (32.18% and 32.96%, respectively). The category with the largest proportion of high frequency shelter users is women who experienced neglect as children (6.37%) and women who witnessed violence have the highest proportion of non-shelter users (32.01%). Furthermore, women who experienced childhood abuse have higher proportions of low, medium, and high frequency shelter users than women who did not experience childhood abuse. This suggests that IPV victims who experienced childhood abuse are more likely to access domestic violence shelters.

Existing literature indicates that women who experienced abuse as children are more likely to experience IPV as adults^{99 100 101} and are more likely to report experiencing violence,¹⁰² which increases their likelihood of accessing shelter services. Similar findings were evident in the analysis of the Healing Journey data as women who experienced abuse as children reported accessing shelters more frequently. Since childhood abuse appears to be positively associated with shelter use, shelter services must ensure that the needs of women with adverse childhood experiences are met. By ensuring that women who experienced childhood abuse receive meaningful and appropriate services, it is possible to reduce the likelihood that women with increased vulnerability will return to abuse repeatedly.

Children

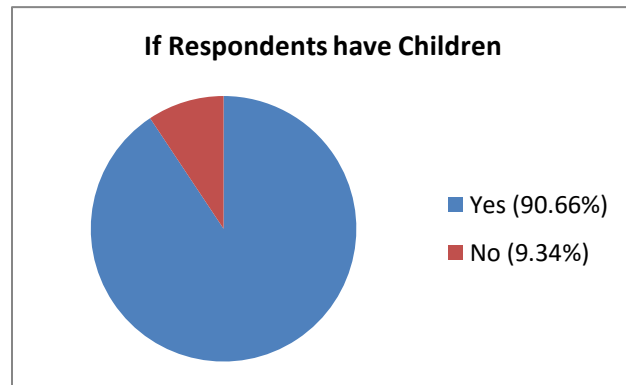


Figure 3. N=664.

Do You Have Children * Stays in Battered Women's Shelter Cross Tabulation

		Stays in Battered Women's Shelter					Total
		None	Single Use	Low Use (2-4)	Medium Use (5-7)	High Use (8+)	
Do You Have Children?	Yes	206	152	168	39	31	596
	No	34	12	14	1	1	62
Total		240	164	182	40	32	

Most respondents are women with children (90.66%), while only 9.34% of respondents reported being childless. For women with children who reported shelter use, low frequency users were the most common (28.19%); however, women with children were predominantly non-shelter users (34.56%). The category of women with the largest percentage of high frequency shelter users is women with children (5.2%), while the majority of non-shelter users are childless (54.84%). In general, a greater proportion of women with children reported accessing shelters than women without children (65.44%, as opposed to 45.16%).

Several studies have demonstrated that the presence of children affects shelter use, often leading women to seek shelter services¹⁰³ in an effort to mitigate the negative impact that abuse has on children.¹⁰⁴ The findings from the Healing Journey project reflect this tendency as significantly more women with children reported using shelter services. In order to reduce the

likelihood that women with children will return repeatedly to their abuser, shelter services must ensure that their needs are adequately met.

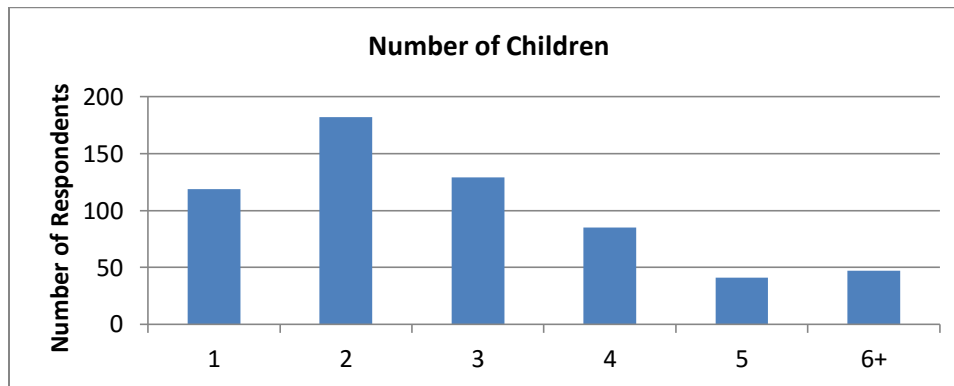


Figure 4. N=618.

Number of Children * Stays in Battered Women's Shelter Cross Tabulation							
		Stays in Battered Women's Shelter					Total
		None	Single Use	Low Use (2-4)	Medium Use (5-7)	High Use (8+)	
Number of Children	1	48	42	23	3	2	118
	2	76	40	44	14	8	182
	3-5	69	66	84	15	17	251
	6+	13	4	18	7	4	46
Total		206	152	169	39	31	

Women most commonly reported having one, two, or three children (19.26%, 29.45%, and 20.87% of respondents, respectively). Women with one or two children are primarily non-shelter users as 40.68% of women with one child and 41.76% of women with two children reported having never used a shelter. However, women with more than two children are predominantly low frequency shelter users as 33.47% of women with three to five children and 39.13% of women with six or more children reported having used a battered women's shelter two to four times. Across all respondents with children, women with two children have the highest proportion of non-shelter users (41.76%). Furthermore, women with six or more children have the highest proportion of high frequency shelter users (8.7%).

Data from the Healing Journey project reflects findings from one study that indicated that “women with children are more likely to return” to their abuser.¹⁰⁵ Repeat shelter use of women with multiple children indicates that women are returning to their abuser several times. However, another study identified that women with two or more children were less likely to repeatedly stay in shelters,¹⁰⁶ which is starkly different from the findings above. Given that women with many children are accessing shelters frequently, it is imperative that shelters are accurately meeting the needs of large families. High frequency shelter use of women with six or more children may be partially due to the inability to access affordable housing that can accommodate large families. As a result, further evaluation is warranted to determine the extent to which the shelter patterns of women with six or more children are driven by the inability to access housing independently of their abuser.

Cultural Expectations

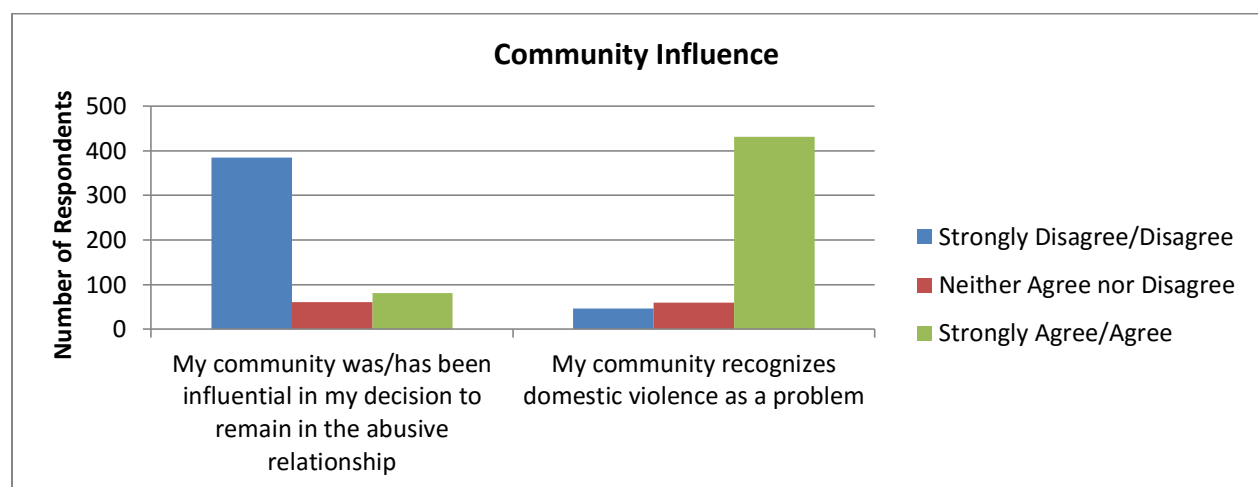


Figure 5. My community was/has been influential in my decision to remain in the abusive relationship: N=527; my community recognizes domestic violence as a problem: N=537.

My Community Was/Has Been in my Decision to Remain in the Abusive Relationship * Stays in Battered Women's Shelter Cross Tabulation

		Stays in Battered Women's Shelter					Total
		None	Single Use	Low Use (2-4)	Medium Use (5-7)	High Use (8+)	
My Community Was/Has Been in my Decision to Remain in the Abusive Relationship	Disagree/Strongly Disagree	126	93	118	24	20	381
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	24	14	15	3	5	61
	Agree/Strongly Agree	29	19	23	7	2	80
Total		179	126	156	34	27	

My Community Recognizes Domestic Violence as a Problem * Stays in Battered Women's Shelter Cross Tabulation

		Stays in Battered Women's Shelter					Total
		None	Single Use	Low Use (2-4)	Medium Use (5-7)	High Use (8+)	
My Community Recognizes Domestic Violence as a Problem	Disagree/Strongly Disagree	16	10	13	4	2	45
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	23	12	19	1	4	59
	Agree/Strongly Agree	145	109	123	29	22	428
Total		184	131	155	34	28	

The impact of community expectations and values on shelter use patterns can be examined as respondents were asked to identify the communities that they associated themselves with, many of which were religious and/or cultural groups. The majority of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that their community was or has been influential in their decision to remain in an abusive relationship (73.06%). Additionally, the majority of women agreed or strongly agreed that their community recognizes domestic violence as a problem (80.45%).

Women who neither agree nor disagree that their community has an influence on their decision to remain in an abusive relationship have the highest percentages of high frequency and non-shelter users (8.2% and 39.34%, respectively). Women who disagree/strongly disagree that their community impacted their decision to remain in an abusive relationship have the highest proportions of single and low frequency shelter users (24.41% and 30.97%).

Furthermore, women who strongly agree or agree that their community influenced their decision to stay have the highest percentage of medium frequency shelter users (8.75%).

With regards to respondents' perception that their community recognizes domestic violence as a problem, women who neither agree nor disagree have the highest proportions of high frequency shelter users (6.78%) and non-shelter users (38.98%). Women who disagree or strongly disagree that their community recognizes domestic violence as a problem have the highest percentage of medium frequency shelter users (8.89%). Additionally, women who agree or strongly agree that their community recognizes domestic violence as a problem have the highest proportion of single frequency shelter users (25.47%).

As discussed in the literature review, the influence of community expectations greatly impacts help-seeking behaviour as exposure to religious¹⁰⁷ and gendered expectations¹⁰⁸ has been found to decrease the likelihood that victims will access domestic violence shelters. This leads to the hypothesis that the categories of women who agreed that their communities impacted their stay/leave decisions and disagreed that their communities recognize domestic violence as a problem are more likely to have disproportionately high percentages of non-shelter users. However, this is not reflected in the results from the Healing Journey project as the category with the greatest proportion of non-shelter users are respondents who "neither agreed nor disagreed" that their communities influenced their stay/leave decisions. As a result, further examination is needed regarding the ways in which these victims' ambivalence influences their help-seeking behaviour.

Education

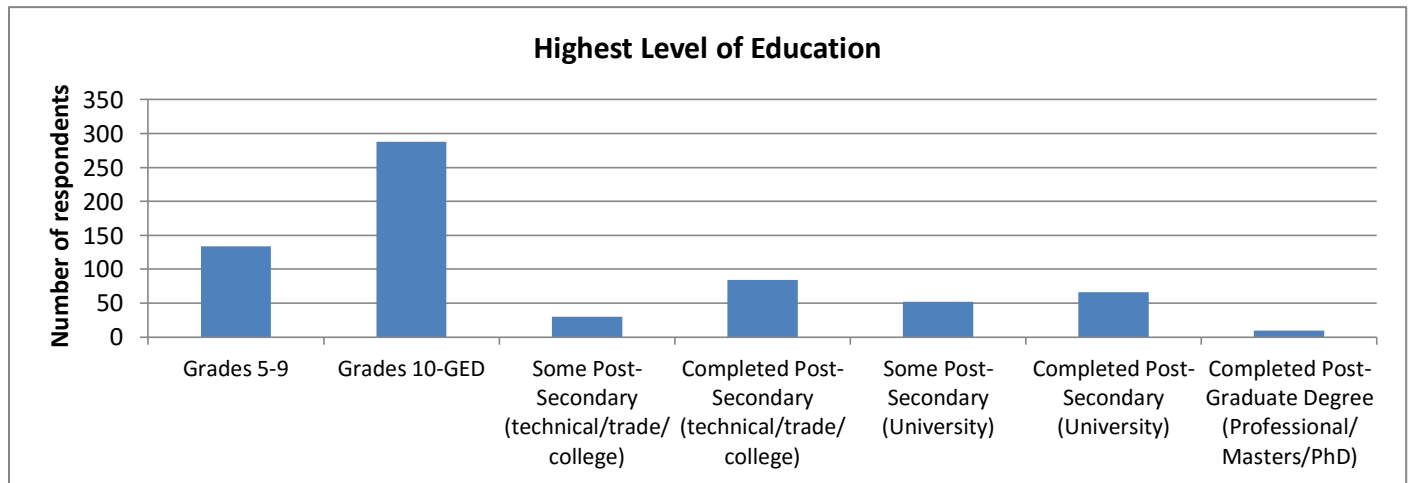


Figure 6. N=664.

Highest Level of Education * Stays in Battered Women's Shelter Cross Tabulation

		Stays in Battered Women's Shelter					Total
		None	Single Use	Low Use (2-4)	Medium Use (5-7)	High use (8+)	
Highest Level of Education	Grades 5-9	37	20	50	13	11	131
	Grade 10-GED	95	72	82	18	18	285
	Some Post-Secondary (technical/trade/college)	11	8	7	3		29
	Completed Post-Secondary (technical/trade/college)	35	23	23	3	1	85
	Some Post-Secondary (University)	26	13	9	3	0	51
	Completed Post-Secondary (University)	30	23	12	2	2	69
	Completed Post-Graduate Degree (Professional/Masters/PhD)	6	4	0	1	0	11
Total		240	163	183	43	32	

Women most commonly reported that their highest level of education ranged between grade 10 and GED (43.37%) and another 20.18% of respondents reported that their education levels ranged between grades 5 and 9. Of respondents who received post-secondary education, completion of a technical program, trade school, or college was most common (12.65%).

The greatest proportion of women with a grade 5-9 education are low frequency shelter users as 38.17% of respondents reported using a shelter two to four times. In comparison, the

remaining categories of respondents are primarily non-shelter users. Respondents with a grade 5-9 education have the highest percentage of high frequency shelter users (8.4%), while women with a post-graduate degree have the largest proportion of non-shelter users (54.55%). As education level increases, the percentage of non-shelter users also increases (apart from a slight decline for women who completed their University education). This indicates that there may be a negative relationship between education and shelter use.

The Healing Journey project findings are consistent with the findings from other studies. For instance, one study indicated that women with lower levels of education compose a significant percentage of shelter users.¹⁰⁹ As abusers may prevent victims of IPV from furthering their education, this increases both victims' financial instability and reliance on domestic violence shelters.¹¹⁰ The data above demonstrates that women with lower levels of education have the highest proportion of high frequency shelter users, thus highlighting the tendency for financial instability to increase shelter use.

Ethnicity/Cultural Background

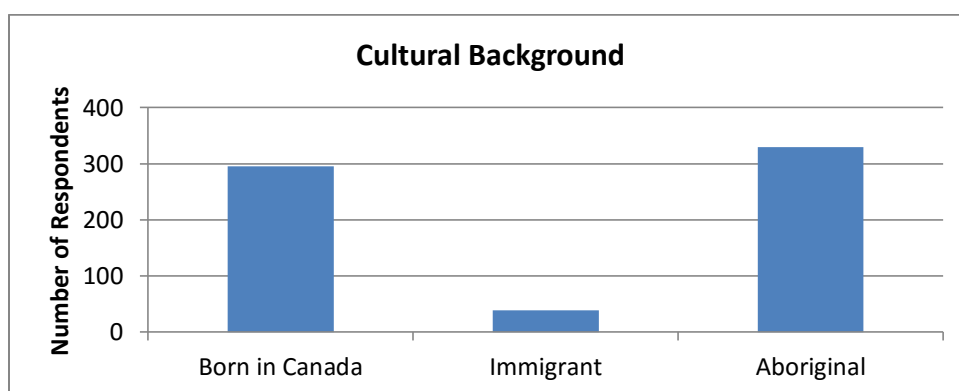


Figure 7. N=663.

Born in Canada, Immigrant, & Aboriginal * Stays in Battered Women's Shelter Cross Tabulation

		Stays in Battered Women's Shelter					Total
		None	Single Use	Low Use (2-4)	Medium Use (5-7)	High Use (8+)	
Born in Canada, Immigrant, & Aboriginal	Born in Canada	116	75	82	9	11	293
	All Immigrants	5	20	13	1	0	39
	Aboriginal	118	69	87	30	21	325
Total		239	164	182	40	32	

Aboriginal women composed the largest proportion of respondents (49.62%), while 44.49% of women were born in Canada and 5.88% of respondents were immigrants. Women born in Canada are primarily non-shelter users (39.59%), while the greatest proportion of Aboriginal women identified that they are non-shelter users (36.31%) and most immigrant women are single frequency shelter users (51.28%). Aboriginal women have the highest proportion of medium and high frequency shelter users (9.23% and 6.46%, respectively) and Canadian-born women have the highest percentage of non-shelter users (39.59%). The stark contrast between Aboriginal, Canadian-born, and immigrant women's shelter use patterns indicates that cultural elements such as norms and expectations, language barriers, and community locations impact women's shelter use patterns.

The findings from the Healing Journey project differ from some of the previous studies on Aboriginal women's shelter use patterns. For instance, one study identified that a smaller proportion of Aboriginal women who experienced IPV utilized formal victim services, as compared to non-Aboriginal victims.¹¹¹ This contradicts the findings from the Healing Journey data that indicated that Aboriginal women have the highest proportions of medium and high frequency shelter use. However, the 2014 GSS reported that Aboriginal women were more likely to report spousal violence,¹¹² which would partially explain why Aboriginal women are higher frequency users, as compared to immigrant and other Canadian-born women. While

previous studies have focused on shelter use in Northern Aboriginal communities, many of which cannot support the necessary programs and facilities,¹¹³ reported shelter use for Aboriginal women may be higher in the Prairie Provinces as shelters may be more easily accessible.

Literature regarding immigrant women's shelter use indicates that they are less likely to access shelters as they (1) may be unaware of how to access IPV resources¹¹⁴ and (2) may have had negative experiences with authority in their country of origin.¹¹⁵ However, the findings from the Healing Journey project indicate otherwise, as 84.62% of immigrant women reported having accessed a shelter between one and four times. Although the literature review suggested that immigrant women are unlikely to be high frequency shelter users, the findings above indicate that immigrant women may be accessing shelters more frequently than other studies have identified.

Although the literature review indicated that both Aboriginal women and immigrant women were likely to be non-shelter users, the above data identifies the opposite. Canadian-born women are the group of respondents with the highest percentage of non-shelter users, while Aboriginal and immigrant women are both more likely to access shelters. Further analysis should be conducted to evaluate whether or not the shelter use patterns of Aboriginal and immigrant respondents can be attributed to systemic inequalities (i.e. difficulty accessing affordable housing or adequate financial resources) that may increase women's dependence on their abusive partner.

Health

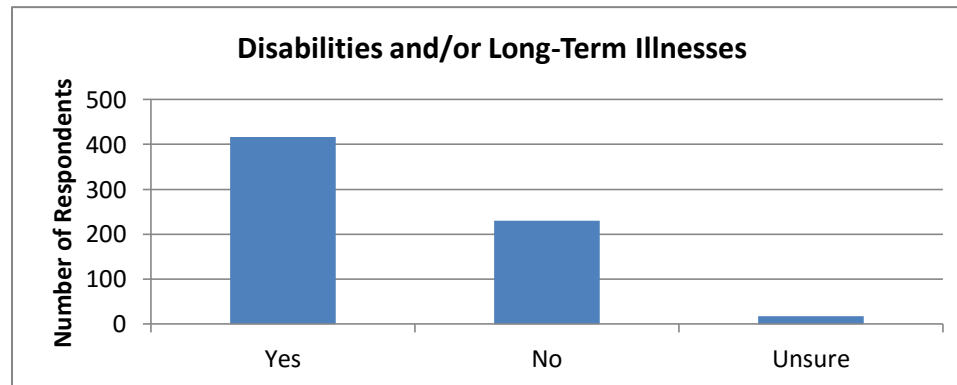


Figure 8. N=665.

Disabilities and/or Long-Term Illnesses * Stays in Battered Women's Shelter Cross Tabulation

		Stays in Battered Women's Shelter					Total
		None	Single Use	Low Use (2-4)	Medium Use (5-7)	High Use (8+)	
Disabilities and/or Long-Term Illnesses	Yes	145	97	120	29	22	413
	No	88	62	60	9	10	229
	Unsure	7	5	3	2	0	17
Total		240	164	183	40	32	

The majority of respondents reported that they had disabilities and/or long-term illnesses (62.71%), while 34.59% of respondents did not and 2.71% were unsure. Women with disabilities/long-term illnesses are predominantly non-shelter users (35.11%); however, they also have the highest proportion of high-frequency shelter users (5.33%). Additionally, women without disabilities and/or long-term illnesses are predominantly non-shelter users (38.43%). Furthermore, women who were unsure if they have disabilities/long-term illnesses have the highest proportion of non-shelter users (41.18%) and medium frequency users (11.76%).

The findings demonstrate that women who were aware of their disabilities and/or long-term illnesses are more likely than other respondents to be high frequency shelter users; however, women who were unsure if they had a disability/long-term illness also have relatively high levels of shelter use. Women with disabilities and/or long-term illnesses and women who

were unsure if they had disabilities and/or long-term illnesses may be vulnerable to repeat stays with their abuser, thus returning to shelters several times.

The findings above have some similarities and differences from the findings presented in the literature review. One study identified that women with disabilities are often overrepresented in the shelter population.¹¹⁶ Women with disabilities also appear to be overrepresented in the shelter population of the Prairie Provinces as the majority of women reported having disabilities and/or long-term illnesses. However, another study suggested that because of reliance on their abuser, women with disabilities are less likely to seek shelter services.¹¹⁷ This differs from the above findings as women with disabilities and/or long-term illnesses have the highest percentage of high-frequency shelter users. It is evident that the shelter use patterns of women with disabilities/long-term illnesses are complex as women may choose to leave their partner several times but may be unable to cope independently, thus leading to frequent shelter use. As a result, it is important to consider shelters' capacities to deal with long-term illnesses and disabilities in order to ensure that current practices are not leading women to return repeatedly to abusive situations.

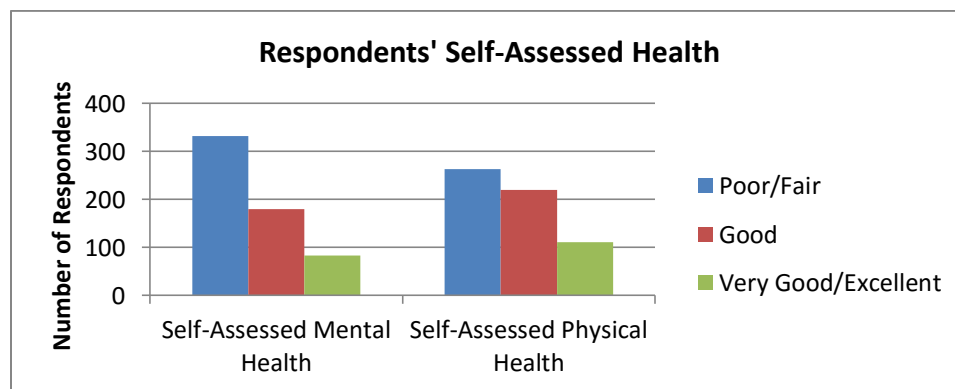


Figure 9. Self-assessed mental health: N=595; Self-assessed physical health: N=594.

Self-Assessed Mental Health * Stays in Battered Women's Shelter Cross Tabulation

		Stays in Battered Women's Shelter					Total
		None	Single Use	Low Use (2-4)	Medium Use (5-7)	High Use (8+)	
Self-Assessed Mental Health	Poor/Fair	129	78	93	14	18	332
	Good	62	51	44	17	5	179
	Very Good/Excellent	32	24	19	2	4	81
Total		223	153	156	33	27	

Self-Assessed Physical Health * Stays in Battered Women's Shelter Cross Tabulation

		Stays in Battered Women's Shelter					Total
		None	Single Use	Low Use (2-4)	Medium Use (5-7)	High Use (8+)	
Self-Assessed Physical Health	Poor/Fair	102	50	81	14	15	262
	Good	83	65	49	12	10	219
	Very Good/Excellent	38	37	26	7	2	110
Total		223	152	156	33	27	

When examining self-assessed health, more respondents had very good/excellent self-assessed physical health (18.69%), as compared to the proportion of respondents with very good/excellent self-assessed mental health (13.95%). Additionally, more respondents reported that they were in good physical health (37.04%) as 30.25% of respondents were in good mental health. Finally, only 44.28% of respondents reported that their physical health was poor/fair, while 55.8% of respondents felt that they had poor/fair mental health. This indicates that while the majority of women were concerned with their mental health, more than half of respondents were satisfied with their physical health.

With regards to mental health, women with poor or fair self-assessed mental health had the highest proportion of high frequency shelter users (5.42%). The category with the highest percentage of non-shelter users is women who reported that their mental health was very good or excellent (39.51%). Additionally, women with good or very good/excellent self-assessed mental health have higher proportions of single frequency shelter users than women with poor/fair self-assessed mental health (28.49% and 29.63%, as opposed to 23.49%). Finally, women with good self-assessed mental health have the highest proportion of medium

frequency shelter users (9.5%). This indicates that women in good mental health use shelters, but are less likely to be high frequency users.

With regards to physical health, the category with the highest percentage of high frequency shelter users is women with poor/fair self-assessed physical health (5.73%). Women with poor/fair self-assessed physical health also have the highest percentage of non-shelter users (38.93%). Furthermore, women who reported that their physical health was either good or very good/excellent have the highest percentages of single frequency shelter use (29.68% and 33.64%). Women in good physical health are using shelters less frequently than women in poor health, which suggests that women who are in poor physical health may be more likely to return to their abuser several times. Consequently, it is important to consider the capacity of shelters to accommodate physical health needs, as lack of appropriate resources may prevent women from escaping abuse permanently.

When comparing the findings above to the literature review, many of the patterns that emerged are evident in the Healing Journey cross tabulations. Numerous studies indicated that poor health is associated with increased shelter use, specifically for women dealing with mental illness,¹¹⁸ physical injuries,¹¹⁹ and trauma.¹²⁰ This is generally reflected in the shelter use patterns of women with poor mental and physical health. However, the relationship between health status and shelter use is not strictly linear as women who reported “good” mental health have a higher percentage of medium frequency shelter users than respondents who reported “poor” mental health. This suggests that although poor health increases women’s likelihood of accessing domestic violence shelters frequently, being in good health does not necessarily eliminate the need for shelter services. Alternatively, as repeat shelter use may increase the

likelihood that women may suffer adverse health consequences, it is essential to ensure that women can access proper health care upon entering the shelter system.

Income

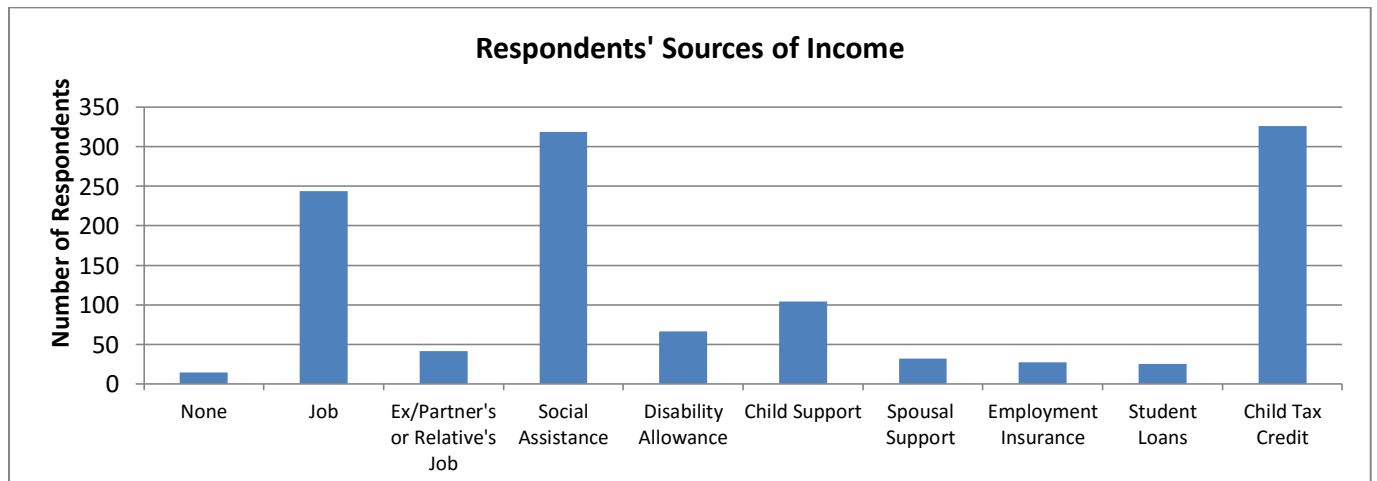


Figure 10. None: N=662; job: N= 661; ex/partner's or relative's job: N=661; Social Assistance: N=661; Disability Allowance: N=661; child support: N=661; spousal support: N=661; Employment Insurance: N=661; student loans: N=661; Child Tax Credit: N=661.

Sources of Income * Stays in Battered Women's Shelter Cross Tabulation

		Stays in Battered Women's Shelter					Total
		None	Single Use	Low Use (2-4)	Medium Use (5-7)	High Use (8+)	
None	Yes	4	4	5	0	1	14
	No	235	160	177	40	31	643
	Total	239	164	182	40	32	
Job	Yes	112	60	51	12	7	242
	No	127	104	130	28	25	414
	Total	239	164	181	40	32	
Ex/Partner's or Relatives Job	Yes	23	8	7	2	1	41
	No	216	156	174	38	31	615
	Total	239	164	181	40	32	
Social Assistance	Yes	86	72	110	25	23	316
	No	153	92	71	15	9	340
	Total	239	164	181	40	32	
Disability Allowance	Yes	21	11	27	4	3	66
	No	218	153	154	36	29	590
	Total	239	164	181	40	32	
Child Support	Yes	43	27	26	5	3	104
	No	196	137	155	35	29	552
	Total	239	164	181	40	32	
Spousal Support	Yes	15	9	5	0	3	32
	No	224	155	176	40	29	624
	Total	239	164	181	40	32	
Employment Insurance	Yes	9	6	10	0	1	26
	No	230	158	171	40	31	630
	Total	239	164	181	40	32	
Student Loans	Yes	15	7	2	1	0	25
	No	224	157	179	39	32	631
	Total	239	164	181	40	32	
Child Tax Credit	Yes	102	91	96	22	13	324
	No	137	73	85	18	19	332
	Total	239	164	181	40	32	

The most commonly reported sources of income for respondents were Child Tax Credits (49.32%), Social Assistance (48.26%), and employment (36.91%). The source of income with the highest percentage of high frequency shelter users is spousal support (9.38%). Additionally, the source of income with the largest proportion of non-shelter users is student loans (60%). Shelter use patterns must be further examined to determine whether or not women receiving student loans do not access shelters out of fear that they will no longer be eligible to receive financial assistance.

The literature review indicated that women who are financially dependent on others are more likely to use shelters repeatedly, as they are more likely to return to an abusive relationship.¹²¹ One study reinforced this by stating that women staying in shelters are less likely to be receiving employment income and are more likely to be “receiving some type of income from a public program.”¹²² However, the findings from the Healing Journey project suggest that financial independence is not the only factor that differentiates shelter use based on sources of income. Based on the findings from the literature review, women with the most financial independence were expected to have the highest proportion of non-shelter users, while those who were financially dependent on other sources of income were expected to demonstrate higher shelter usage. However, women receiving employment income do not have the highest percentage of non-shelter users. Rather, the proportion of high-shelter users receiving income from employment is relatively comparable to women receiving income from an ex, partner, or relative’s job, and women receiving child support. This indicates that factors besides financial independence must be accounted for when examining the impact that sources of income have on shelter use patterns.

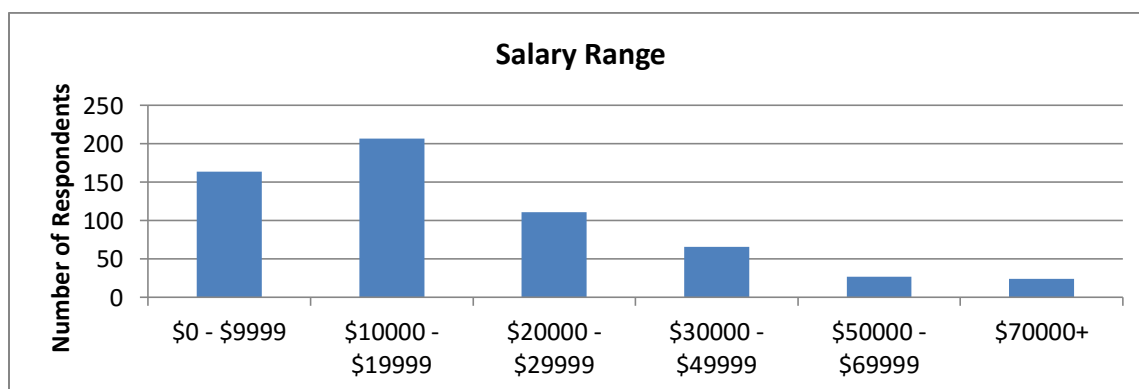


Figure 11. N=599.

Salary Range * Stays in Battered Women's Shelter Cross Tabulation

		Stays in Battered Women's Shelter					Total
		None	Single Use	Low Use (2-4)	Medium Use (5-7)	High Use (8+)	
Salary Range	\$0 - \$9,999	50	29	54	14	14	161
	\$10,000 - \$19,999	62	55	66	14	8	205
	\$20,000 - \$29,999	42	30	28	7	4	111
	\$30,000 - \$49,999	41	11	13	0	1	66
	\$50,000 - \$69,999	11	13	1	0	2	27
	\$70,000+	16	8	0	0	0	24
Total		222	146	162	35	29	

The majority of respondents reported relatively low incomes as 27.38% of respondents reported an income of \$0-\$9,999, 34.56% reported that their income was between \$10,000 and \$19,999, and 18.53% of respondents received an income of \$20,000-\$29,999. Women earning \$0-\$9,999 and \$10,000-\$19,999 are primarily low frequency shelter users (33.54% and 23.2%), while the remaining income brackets are predominantly composed of non-shelter users. The group of respondents who reported an income between \$0 and \$9,999 have the highest proportions of both medium and high frequency shelter users (8.7% and 8.7%). Furthermore, women earning \$70,000 or more have the highest percentage of non-shelter users (66.67%). This indicates that women with lower incomes are more likely to access shelters frequently.

Previous literature indicated that generally, there is a negative relationship between income and shelter use¹²³ as women with lower incomes tend to be in the greatest need of shelters; however, they face the greatest barriers to accessing services.¹²⁴ The findings from the Healing Journey project primarily indicate that there is a negative relationship between income and shelter use as the percentage of non-shelter users increases across income brackets while the percentage of high frequency shelter users decreases. However, the shelter use patterns of women who reported an income between \$50,000 and \$69,999 are not as expected. The percentage of non-shelter users decreases significantly from the previous income bracket (from

62.12% to 40.74%) and there is a similar increase in high frequency shelter use across the same categories (1.52% to 7.41%). This indicates that while women with lower incomes demonstrate high levels of high frequency shelter use, other factors must be accounted for to determine why the shelter patterns of women earning between \$50,000 and \$69,999 are distinct from the trends observed across the remaining income brackets.

Living Situation

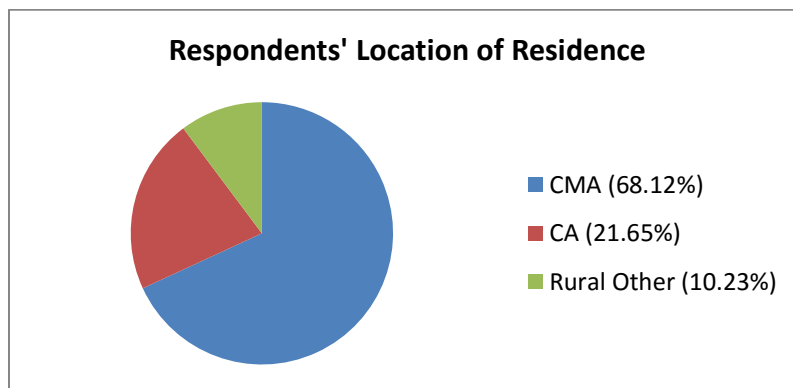


Figure 12. N=665.

Urban, Census Agglomeration, Rural * Stays in Battered Women's Shelter Cross Tabulation

		Stays in Battered Women's Shelter					Total
		None	Single Use	Low Use (2-4)	Medium Use (5-7)	High Use (8+)	
Urban, Census Agglomeration, Rural	CMA	180	110	115	27	17	449
	CA	34	40	47	8	13	142
	Rural Other	26	14	21	5	2	68
Total		240	164	183	40	32	

The majority of respondents reported living in census metropolitan areas (CMAs) (68.12%), while the rest of respondents lived in either census agglomerations (CAs) (21.65%) or rural/other areas (10.23%). Respondents living in CMAs are primarily non-shelter users (40.09%) while women living in CAs are predominantly low frequency shelter users (33.1%). Finally, women living in rural/other areas are primarily non-shelter users (38.24%). Women

living in CAs have the highest proportion of high frequency shelter users (9.15%), while women living in CMAs have the highest proportion of non-shelter users (40.09%).

The literature review indicated that victims living in rural locations are less likely to access shelters as they are often isolated from social supports and services.¹²⁵ This would suggest that women living in rural/other locations are the most likely to report non-shelter use. Additionally, previous literature indicated that the support services in metropolitan areas are more easily accessible,¹²⁶ thus increasing the likelihood that women in CMAs will access shelters. However, the findings from the Healing Journey project are starkly different from the literature review findings as women living in CMAs have the highest proportion of non-shelter users. Further analysis must be conducted to determine whether or not systemic barriers such as lack of affordable housing in CMAs are discouraging women from escaping abuse, thus reducing their likelihood of accessing domestic violence shelters.

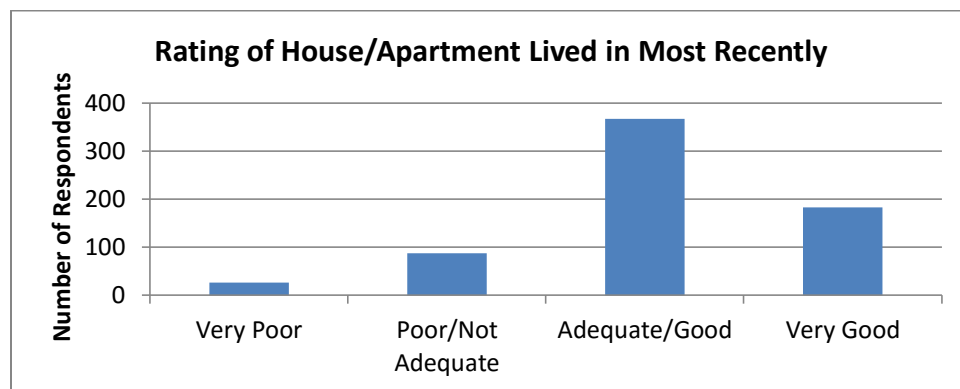


Figure 13. N=664.

Rating of House/Apartment Lived in Most Recently * Stays in Battered Women's Shelter Cross Tabulation

		Stays in Battered Women's Shelter					Total
		None	Single Use	Low Use (2-4)	Medium Use (5-7)	High Use (8+)	
Rating of House/Apartment Lived in Most Recently	Very Poor	13	3	3	3	3	25
	Poor/Not Adequate	29	13	35	1	9	87
	Adequate/Good	117	100	107	26	15	365
	Very Good	81	48	37	10	5	181
Total		240	164	182	40	32	

The majority of respondents reported that their most recent house or apartment was adequate or good (55.27%), alongside a significant number of respondents who reported living in very good recent conditions (27.56%). Women who reported living in very poor conditions have the highest proportions of high frequency users (12%) and non-shelter users (52%). Additionally, women who reported living in poor/not adequate housing conditions have a significantly higher proportion of high frequency shelter users than women who reported living in adequate/good and very good housing (10.34%, as opposed to 4.11% and 2.76%).

The literature review indicated that inadequate housing in Northern Canada greatly impacts women's ability to access shelters and escape IPV.¹²⁷ However, findings from the Healing Journey project suggest that the impact of poor housing on women's shelter use patterns in the Prairie Provinces is highly polarized, as previously discussed. This indicates that the impact of housing instability on women's shelter use may be two-fold: (1) women may be discouraged from leaving abuse in the first place and (2) women who escape abuse may return to their abuser repeatedly, both of which would increase women's long-term exposure to IPV.

Relationship with Abuser and Experiences of Violence

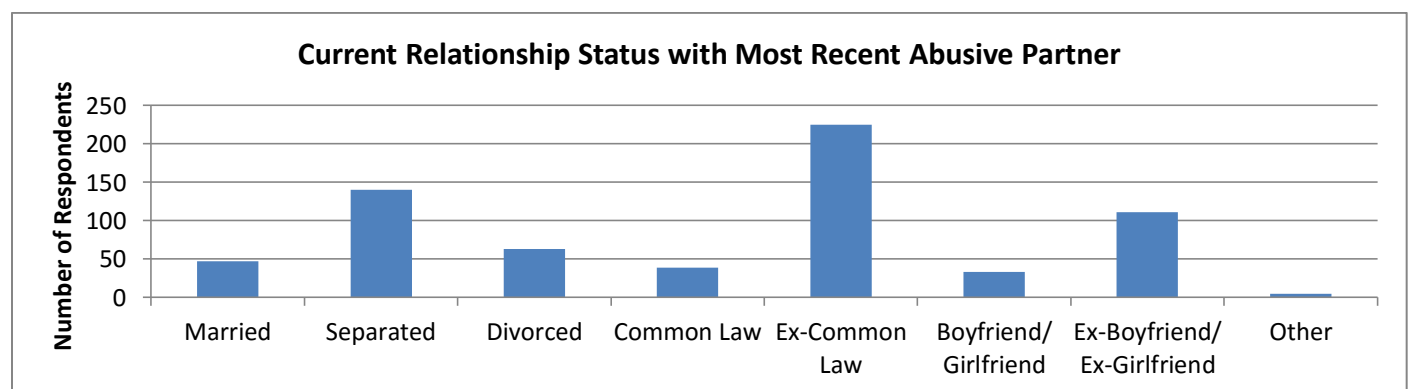


Figure 14. N=663.

Current Relationship Status with Most Recent Abusive Partner * Stays in Battered Women's Shelter Cross Tabulation

		Stays in Battered Women's Shelter					Total
		None	Single Use	Low Use (2-4)	Medium Use (5-7)	High Use (8+)	
Current Relationship Status with Most Recent Abusive Partner	Married	19	15	8	4	1	47
	Separated	47	41	42	7	3	140
	Divorced	20	28	9	2	4	63
	Common Law	17	6	8	5	2	38
	Ex-Common Law	73	42	77	14	14	220
	Boyfriend/Girlfriend	17	4	8	1	3	33
	Ex-Boyfriend/Ex-Girlfriend	44	27	30	6	4	111
	Other	1	1	1	1	1	5
Total		238	164	183	40	32	

The most commonly reported relationship status with respondents' most recent abusive partner was "ex-common law" (33.94%), followed by "separated" (21.12%) and "ex-boyfriend/ex-girlfriend" (16.74%). Divorced women primarily reported single frequency shelter use (44.44%), women with ex-common law partners predominantly reported low frequency shelter use (35%), and the remaining categories of respondents were predominantly composed of non-shelter users. However, there is a uniform distribution of shelter use frequencies across the five women who reported their relationship status as "other." As a result, there is little significance in the shelter use patterns of these women. Excluding respondents who reported "other", the highest proportion of high-frequency shelter users are women who identified that their most recent abusive partner was a boyfriend or girlfriend (9.09%). Furthermore, women who reported that their abuser was their boyfriend or girlfriend have the highest proportion of non-shelter users (51.52%).

Studies have shown that "married women are more likely to temporarily leave [their abuser] than are cohabiting victims."¹²⁸ This would suggest that married women are more likely to exhibit higher frequency shelter use. However, the Healing Journey data indicates that

instead of married women repeatedly utilizing shelters, they are not accessing shelters at all. This indicates that marital values and norms may create barriers that reduce married women's likelihood of escaping abuse even temporarily. Additionally, women whose most recent abuser is a boyfriend or girlfriend have very high proportions of high frequency shelter users and non-shelter users. This suggests that these women are either returning repeatedly to abusive relationships or are not leaving at all. Further analysis should be conducted to determine whether or not being in a current romantic relationship with an abuser (i.e. classifying the abuser as a boyfriend or girlfriend) increases victims' likelihood of returning to their abuser and/or their inability to escape, thus exposing them to ongoing experiences of violence.

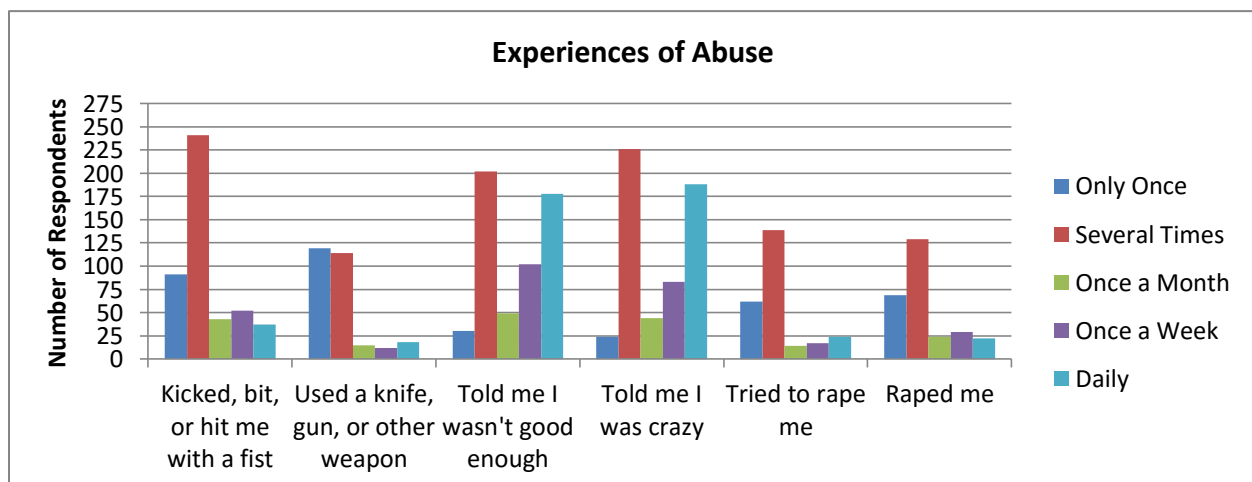


Figure 15. Kicked, bit, or hit me with a fit: N=658; used a knife, gun, or other weapon: N=663; told me I wasn't good enough: N=665; told me I was crazy: N=665; tried to rape me: N=659; raped me: N=660.

Abuse * Stays in Battered Women's Shelter Cross Tabulation

		Stays in Battered Women's Shelter					Total
		None	Single Use	Low Use (2-4)	Medium Use (5-7)	High Use (8+)	
Kicked Me, Bit Me or Hit Me With a Fist	Never	80	59	42	8	4	193
	Only Once	36	22	23	3	7	91
	Several Times	81	48	80	14	13	236
	Once a Month	12	14	13	1	3	43
	Once a Week	14	10	21	4	3	52
	Daily	15	8	3	9	2	37
	Total	238	161	182	39	32	
Used a Knife or Gun or Other Weapon	Never	156	98	98	16	15	383
	Only Once	39	33	32	6	7	117
	Several Times	37	19	38	10	8	112
	Once a Month	2	3	8	2	0	15
	Once a Week	1	6	2	1	2	12
	Daily	4	5	4	5	0	18
	Total	239	164	182	40	32	
Told Me No One Would Ever Want Me	Never	74	45	45	11	6	181
	Only Once	15	7	7	0	2	31
	Several Times	65	49	57	11	13	195
	Once a Month	10	11	7	1	1	30
	Once a Week	18	13	18	4	2	55
	Daily	58	39	49	13	8	167
	Total	240	164	183	40	32	
Told Me I Was Crazy	Never	37	19	33	4	4	97
	Only Once	10	2	9	2	1	24
	Several Times	77	56	64	12	16	225
	Once a Month	17	17	8	1	1	44
	Once a Week	33	26	19	3	2	83
	Daily	66	44	50	18	8	186
	Total	240	164	183	40	32	
Tried to Rape Me	Never	166	103	98	18	15	400
	Only Once	20	12	21	5	3	61
	Several Times	39	35	44	10	9	137
	Once a Month	2	2	6	2	2	14
	Once a Week	5	5	4	1	2	17
	Daily	6	6	7	4	1	24
	Total	238	163	180	40	32	
Raped Me	Never	158	91	102	20	13	384
	Only Once	26	18	17	3	4	68
	Several Times	32	34	45	6	11	128
	Once a Month	8	4	6	3	2	23
	Once a Week	8	11	6	2	2	29
	Daily	7	5	5	5	0	22
	Total	239	163	181	39	32	

The experiences of abuse that were most frequently reported were (1) being kicked, bit, or hit several times (36.63%), (2) being told several times that they were crazy (33.98%), and (3) being told several times that they weren't good enough (30.38%). Women whose partner used a knife, gun, or other weapon once a week have the highest percentage of high frequency users (16.67%). Additionally, women who reported that their partner told them once that no one would ever want them have the highest percentage of non-shelter users (48.39%). When looking only at whether or not women experienced each type of abuse (rather than how frequently each form of abuse occurred), women whose partner had raped them have the highest percentage of high frequency users (7.04%), followed by those whose partner had tried to rape them (6.72%).

The literature review identified that women who utilize shelter services are more likely to have been exposed to more severe violence.¹²⁹ For instance, one study indicated that women who primarily experience physical violence are more likely to access shelters than women who experience primarily sexual or emotional abuse.¹³⁰ However, this was not reflected in the Healing Journey data as women who experienced sexual abuse have the greatest proportion of shelter users. This is evident as 71.54% of women whose partner had tried to rape them and 70% of women who were raped reported accessing shelters at least once. Domestic violence services must focus particularly on providing sexual abuse victims with proper support and assistance in order to reduce the number of times that they return to their abuser.

Self-Esteem

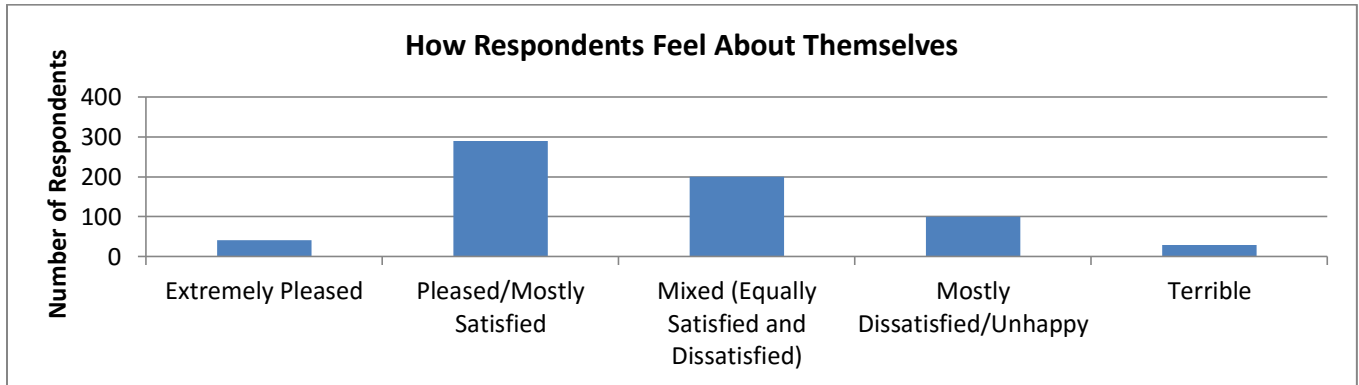


Figure 16. N=660.

How Do You Feel About Yourself * Stays in Battered Women's Shelter Cross Tabulation							
		Stays in Battered Women's Shelter					Total
		None	Single Use	Low Use (2-4)	Medium Use (5-7)	High use (8+)	
How Do You Feel About Yourself?	Extremely Pleased	12	15	9	4	1	41
	Pleased/Mostly Satisfied	102	70	78	26	12	288
	Mixed (Equally Satisfied and Dissatisfied)	77	48	58	3	12	198
	Mostly Dissatisfied/Unhappy	40	21	26	6	6	99
	Terrible	9	7	11	1	1	29
Total		240	161	182	40	32	

When examining respondents' self-esteem, the largest percentage of respondents indicated that they were pleased/mostly satisfied with themselves (43.94%). Women who reported feeling terrible about themselves are primarily low frequency shelter users (37.93%) and women who were extremely pleased are primarily single frequency shelter users (36.59%), while all other groups of respondents are primarily non-shelter users. The category with the highest percentage of high frequency shelter users is women who reported feeling either mixed (6.06%) or mostly dissatisfied/unhappy about themselves (6.06%). Furthermore, women who reported feeling mostly dissatisfied/unhappy with themselves have the highest proportion of non-shelter users (40.40%).

In the literature review, one study identified that women relied on their own personal strength to stay out of their previous violent relationships,¹³¹ while another suggested that “psychological factors, such as confidence in one’s ability to be independent, may affect a victim’s willingness to leave.”¹³² This indicates that although women with low self-esteem are less likely to access shelters, those who do access shelters are more likely to be higher frequency users. The findings from the literature review are partially reflected in the data from the Healing Journey project as the above cross tabulation indicates that women who were mostly dissatisfied or unhappy about themselves have a high proportion of high frequency shelter users. However, while the literature review suggested that women with low self-esteem are most likely to be non-shelter users and high-frequency users, women who reported feeling terrible about themselves are primarily low-frequency users and non-shelter users. Additionally, women who reported feeling extremely pleased or pleased/mostly satisfied about themselves have the highest proportions of medium frequency shelter users (9.76% and 9.03%, respectively). This indicates that there is not a linear relationship between self-esteem and shelter use, but rather that the relationship between the two variables is more complex.

Sexual Orientation

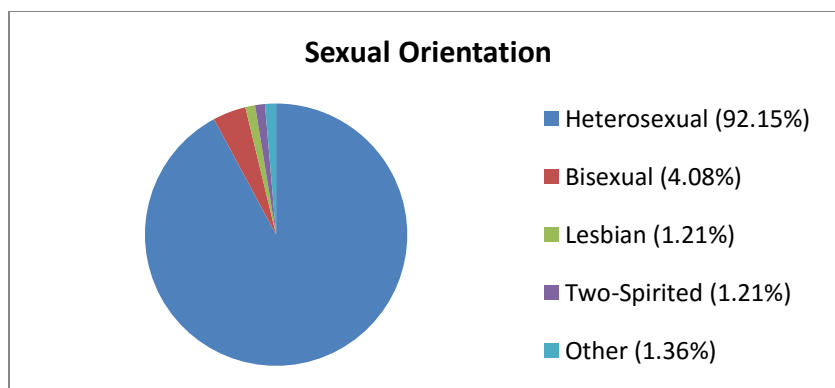


Figure 17. N=662.

Sexual Orientation * Stays in Battered Women's Shelter Cross Tabulation

		Stays in Battered Women's Shelter					Total
		None	Single Use	Low Use (2-4)	Medium Use (5-7)	High Use (8+)	
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual	216	151	168	37	32	604
	Bisexual	9	5	11	2	0	27
	Lesbian	3	4	1	0	0	8
	Two-Spirited	4	2	1	1	0	8
	Other	7	0	2	0	0	9
Total		239	162	183	40	32	

The majority of respondents identified as heterosexual (92.15%) and the second largest category of respondents identified as bisexual (4.08%). Heterosexual women, two-spirited women, and women who identified their sexual orientation as “other” were primarily non-shelter users (35.76%, 50%, and 77.78%, respectively). Bisexual women were primarily low frequency shelter users (40.74%), while lesbian women were predominantly single frequency shelter users (50%). Heterosexual women are the only respondents who reported accessing domestic violence shelters eight or more times, with 5.3% having reported high frequency use. Women who identified as two-spirited have the largest proportion of medium frequency shelter users (12.5%) and women who identified their sexual orientation as “other” have the greatest proportion of non-shelter users (77.78%).

The literature review identified that although lesbian women have been found to report disproportionately high levels of IPV,¹³³ they experience unique forms of abuse that may lead them to stay in their abusive relationships,¹³⁴ thus reducing their likelihood of accessing domestic violence shelters. This is reflected in the findings from the Healing Journey project as lesbian respondents did not report medium or high frequency shelter use. However, some bisexual and two-spirited respondents reported medium frequency shelter use. This indicates

that further analysis should be performed to examine the nuances in the shelter-use patterns of bisexual and two-spirited respondents in the Prairie Provinces.

Social Support

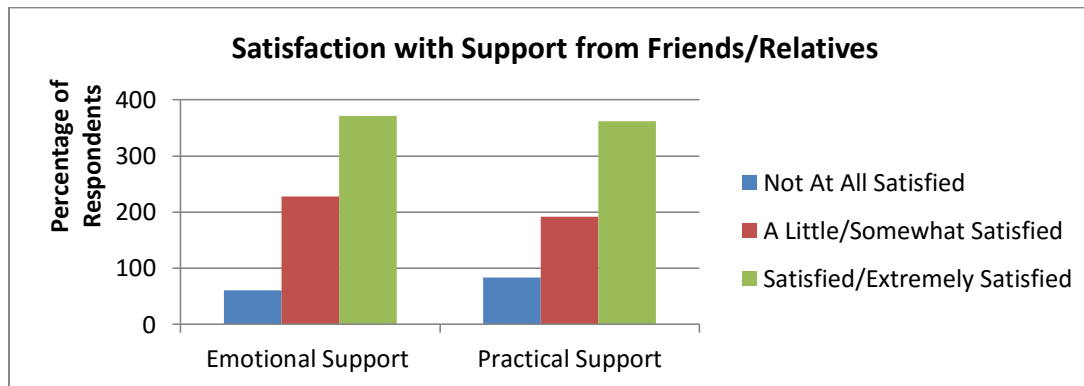


Figure 18. Satisfaction with emotional support from friends/relatives: N=660; satisfaction with practical support from friends/relatives: N=637.

Satisfaction with Emotional Support from Friends/Relatives * Stays in Battered Women's Shelter Cross Tabulation

		Stays in Battered Women's Shelter					Total
		None	Single Use	Low Use (2-4)	Medium Use (5-7)	High use (8+)	
Satisfaction with Emotional Support from Friends/Relatives	Not At All Satisfied	17	14	21	1	8	61
	A Little/Somewhat Satisfied	73	59	68	15	12	227
	Satisfied/Extremely Satisfied	148	91	91	24	12	366
Total		238	164	180	40	32	

Satisfaction with Practical Support from Friends/Relatives * Stays in Battered Women's Shelter Cross Tabulation

		Stays in Battered Women's Shelter					Total
		None	Single Use	Low Use (2-4)	Medium Use (5-7)	High use (8+)	
Satisfaction with Practical Support from Friends/Relatives	Not At All Satisfied	27	22	19	6	7	81
	A Little/Somewhat Satisfied	69	34	63	11	15	192
	Satisfied/Extremely Satisfied	133	95	98	22	10	358
Total		229	151	180	39	32	

The majority of respondents reported that they were satisfied/extremely satisfied with emotional support and practical support from friends and relatives (56.21% and 56.83%, respectively). Furthermore, 13.03% of respondents reported being “not at all satisfied” with

their practical support, while 9.24% of respondents were “not at all satisfied” with their emotional support from family and friends. Women who were satisfied/extremely satisfied with emotional support and practical support have the highest percentages of non-shelter users (40.44% and 37.15%, respectively). However, women who were satisfied/extremely satisfied with emotional support and practical support from friends and relatives also have relatively high levels of medium-frequency shelter use. This is evident as 6.56% of respondents who were satisfied/extremely satisfied with emotional support and 6.15% who were satisfied/extremely satisfied with practical support were medium frequency shelter users (as opposed to 1.64% and 7.14% of respondents who were not at all satisfied). Furthermore, women who were not at all satisfied with emotional support and practical support have the highest percentages of high frequency shelter users (13.11% and 8.64%, respectively).

Findings from existing literature indicate that women who have access to social support are more likely to leave their abuser.¹³⁵ This is maintained by research indicating that a lack of social support may increase high frequency shelter use as victims of IPV without support are more isolated.¹³⁶ The findings from the Healing Journey project reflect similar trends as women who were satisfied/extremely satisfied with their emotional support and practical support have the highest proportions of non-shelter users and those who were not at all satisfied have the highest proportions of high frequency shelter users. However, women who were satisfied/extremely satisfied with support from friends and relatives have relatively high levels of medium frequency shelter use. This suggests that while dissatisfaction with social support increases women’s tendency to access shelters repeatedly, satisfaction with social support does not eliminate women’s need for shelter services.

Key Trends

The following table compares the findings from the Healing Journey project to the literature review. By identifying consistencies and inconsistencies across each variable, the ways in which previous research differs from the experiences of women in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba becomes evident. This emphasizes the geographic and contextual drivers regarding women's help-seeking behaviour and provides insight into how domestic violence shelter access can be improved to better meet the needs of women in the Prairie Provinces.

In general, several trends from the Healing Journey project reflect the findings from the literature review. However, some of the more intricate details of the cross tabulations indicate that the relationships between variables are more complex than previous studies have identified. For instance, cultural expectations, income, living situation, relationship status with the abuser, and experiences of violence all had results that contrasted those presented in the literature review. As a result, the Healing Journey project provides contextually appropriate data that allows systemic barriers regarding shelter access to be identified, thus informing policies to more accurately meet the needs of women in the Prairie Provinces.

Table 1. Summary of Findings

	Literature Review Findings	Consistencies	Inconsistencies
Age	Negative relationship between shelter usage and age	Young women: smallest proportion of non-shelter users, highest proportions of low and medium frequency users	Middle-aged women have the highest proportion of high frequency shelter users
Childhood	Women abused as children are more likely to access shelter services	Women who experienced abuse as children access shelters more frequently	
Children	Inconsistent findings across the literature: (1) Having children increases women's likelihood of using shelters (2) Having children increases women's likelihood of returning to their abuser (3) Women with several children are less likely to repeatedly stay in shelters	(1) More women with children (than women without) reported accessing shelters frequently (2) Repeat shelter use of women with multiple children indicates that women are returning to their abuser several times	(3) Women with many children reported accessing shelters frequently
Cultural Expectations	Religious expectations decrease the likelihood that victims will access domestic violence shelters		Respondents who "neither agreed nor disagreed" that their community was influential have the greatest proportion of non-shelter users
Education	Women with lower levels of education are more likely to be shelter users as they have less financial stability	Women with lower levels of education have the highest proportion of high frequency shelter users	
Ethnicity/Cultural Background	Aboriginal women and immigrant women are most likely to be non-shelter users		Canadian-born women have the highest proportion of non-shelter users; Aboriginal/immigrant women were more likely to access shelters
Health	Women with disabilities are often overrepresented in shelters even though reliance on their abuser decreases their likelihood of accessing shelters	The majority of women reported having a disability or long-term illness	Women with disabilities or long-term illnesses have the highest percentage of high-frequency shelter users
	Poor health is associated with increased shelter use	Women with poor health generally access shelters more	Women with good mental health have a higher percentage of medium frequency shelter users than those with poor mental health
Income	Women who lack financial independence are more likely to use shelters repeatedly	Women receiving employment income are primarily non-shelter users	
	Women staying in shelters are more likely to be receiving income from a public program and are less likely to be receiving income from employment		Women receiving employment income did not have the highest percentage of non-shelter users
Living Situation	Victims in rural locations are less likely to access shelters		Women in CMAs have the highest proportion of non-shelter users
	Inadequate housing (in Northern Canada) impacts victims' ability to access shelters		Women with very poor housing had the greatest proportion of high frequency shelter users
Relationship with Abuser and Experiences of Violence	Married women are more likely to be higher frequency users as they are more likely to return repeatedly to abuse		The greatest proportion of married women do not access shelters at all
	Women who primarily experience physical violence are more likely to access shelters than women who experience primarily sexual or emotional abuse		Women who experienced sexual abuse have the greatest proportion of shelter users
Self-Esteem	Women with low self-esteem are most likely to be non-shelter users and high-frequency users	Women with lower self-esteem have high percentages of high frequency shelter users	Women with higher self-esteem have relatively high proportions of medium frequency shelter users
Sexual Orientation	Lesbian women experience unique forms of abuse, which reduces their likelihood of accessing shelters	Lesbian respondents did not report medium or high frequency shelter use	
Social Support	Women who have social support are more likely to leave their abuser; lack of social support may increase women's likelihood of accessing shelters repeatedly	Women who are satisfied/extremely satisfied with support have the highest percentages of non-shelter users; those not at all satisfied with support have the largest proportions of high frequency shelter users	Women who were satisfied or extremely satisfied with emotional/practical support have relatively high levels of medium frequency shelter use

Conclusion

Future Research

Moving forward, further analysis of the Healing Journey project data should focus on conducting multivariate regressions. The use of control variables will allow the impact of each variable to be isolated, therefore providing a better understanding of the impact that each element has on women's shelter use patterns. Additionally, multivariate analysis will allow crucial variables that affect women's shelter use to be identified and will acknowledge the ways in which intersectionality shapes each woman's help-seeking behaviour. Furthermore, correlations should be conducted to identify the strength of relationships identified in the cross tabulations. Further analysis will deepen the understanding of the many interwoven factors that affect women's stay/leave decisions, thus providing insight into the systemic barriers that impact victims' ability to access domestic violence shelters.

Policy Implications

As shelter policies are reframed to better accommodate the needs of domestic violence victims, an intersectional framework must be adopted to properly account for the multitude of factors that affect victims' help-seeking behaviour. Previous research has suggested that "we must move in the direction of careful assessment and fine tuning of services, evaluating our efforts in light of our emerging understanding of the complex role social context plays."¹³⁷ By acknowledging the intertwining factors that impact women's help-seeking behaviour, effective policies can be developed to accommodate the diverse needs of women escaping IPV. Women's ability to become financially independent, the accessibility of affordable housing, and

the availability of support services such as childcare and employment training all have important policy implications that must be considered.

Women's financial independence greatly impacts their likelihood of returning to their abuser,¹³⁸ thus playing an influential role in shaping their help-seeking behaviour. As a result, existing policies regarding accessibility of financial supports such as Alberta Works and Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) must be examined. Presently, existing regulations may prevent women escaping IPV from being able to access necessary income supports. For instance, AISH eligibility requirements state that "the income and assets of applicants, clients and their cohabiting partners must not exceed the limits allowed under the program."¹³⁹ This is problematic if women are still legally cohabiting with an abuser and as a result, are unable to access appropriate financial support. As many women escaping domestic violence express a lack of financial independence, further action should be taken to address the accessibility of income supports, in turn reducing victims' financial reliance on their abuser.

Additionally, inaccessible and unaffordable services are greatly prohibitive to women's ability to gain independence from their abuser. As a result, "policies that bolster women's income are especially needed, along with job supports such as child care and transportation."¹⁴⁰ By introducing accessible and affordable transportation and childcare services, the number of financial barriers that women are facing can be reduced.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, by facilitating access to employment training and resources, it is possible to increase feelings of empowerment for IPV victims.¹⁴² Improving access to childcare programming, transportation services, and job support allows victims of IPV to develop a sense of self-sufficiency and independence, thus reducing their likelihood of returning to their abuser.

Policies regarding access to affordable housing also significantly impact women's help-seeking behaviour and the number of times that they return to shelters. This is evident as the shortage of affordable housing stock in Canada often forces IPV victims to choose between staying with their abuser and falling into homelessness.¹⁴³ In order to properly accommodate the wide-ranging experiences of women in need of affordable housing, policies must acknowledge the "continued gender, racial and colonial inequities" that have formed systemic barriers to housing access.¹⁴⁴ By improving policies to facilitate the creation of affordable housing stock in Canada, it is possible to reduce the number of women who are unable to access affordable housing, thus reducing women's reliance on their abuser for shelter.

Alongside improving policies to ensure that women can access affordable housing, income support, and resources, upstream prevention of abuse must be integrated into policy changes in order to prevent "initial perpetration and victimization" from occurring in future generations.¹⁴⁵ As childhood exposure to violence increases the likelihood that children may become victims¹⁴⁶ or perpetrators¹⁴⁷ of abuse in later stages of life, young people must be given "the knowledge and skills to develop respectful and healthy relationships throughout their lifetime."¹⁴⁸ Moving forward, education must be a key component of domestic violence prevention in order to break the cycles of violence that lead to abuse.

Further action must be taken to address the systemic inequalities that have led to the perpetration of violence against women, given the "gendered, raced, and classed power relations within intimate relationships."¹⁴⁹ Findings from the Healing Journey project have identified that women's decisions to leave abuse and access shelters are complex. As a result, strategies and policy changes focused on addressing domestic violence must be multifaceted

and must recognize the ways in which intersectionality shapes women's help-seeking behaviour. Furthermore, both responsive and preventative policies must be introduced to address the causes and consequences of domestic violence. By facilitating women's access to domestic violence shelters and resources and by providing future generations with the skills to foster healthy relationships, comprehensive policy solutions can be developed to break ongoing cycles of violence.

Notes

1. Donileen R. Loseke, *The Battered Woman and Shelters: The Social Construction of Wife Abuse* (SUNY Press, 1992). Quoted in Brady J. Miller Clevenger and Dominique Roe-Sepowitz, "Shelter Service Utilization of Domestic Violence Victims," *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 19, no. 4 (June 2009): 362.
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Appendix 1 – Descriptive Statistics

Age

Age in 5 year Increments

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	<20	19	2.9	2.9	2.9
	21-25	99	14.9	15	17.9
	26-30	95	14.3	14.4	32.3
	31-35	127	19.1	19.2	51.5
	36-40	115	17.3	17.4	68.9
	41-45	88	13.2	13.3	82.3
	46-50	44	6.6	6.7	88.9
	51-55	42	6.3	6.4	95.3
	56-60	11	1.7	1.7	97
	61-65	8	1.2	1.2	98.2
	66-70	7	1.1	1.1	99.2
	>71	5	0.8	0.8	100
	Total	660	99.2	100	
Missing	missing	5	0.8		
Total		665	100		

Childhood

Abused as Child/Adolescent - Physical Abuse

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	377	56.7	57.0	57.0
	No	284	42.7	43.0	100.0
	Total	661	99.4	100.0	
Missing	Don't Know	1	.2		
	Missing/No Response	3	.5		
	Total	4	.6		
Total		665	100.0		

Abused as Child/Adolescent - Sexual Abuse

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	360	54.1	54.7	54.7
	No	298	44.8	45.3	100
	Total	658	98.9	100	
Missing	Don't Know	4	0.6		
	Missing/No Response	3	0.5		
	Total	7	1.1		
Total		665	100		

Abused as Child/Adolescent - Emotional Abuse

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	438	65.9	66.3	66.3
	No	223	33.5	33.7	100
	Total	661	99.4	100	
Missing	Don't Know	1	0.2		
	Missing/No Response	3	0.5		
	Total	4	0.6		
Total		665	100		

Abused as Child/Adolescent - Witnessed Violence

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	382	57.4	57.9	57.9
	No	278	41.8	42.1	100.0
	Total	660	99.2	100.0	
Missing	Don't Know	2	.3		
	Missing/No Response	3	.5		
	Total	5	.8		
Total		665	100.0		

Abused as Child/Adolescent - Neglect

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	270	40.6	40.8	40.8
	No	391	58.8	59.2	100.0
	Total	661	99.4	100.0	
Missing	Don't Know	1	.2		
	Missing/No Response	3	.5		
	Total	4	.6		
Total		665	100.0		

Children

Do You Have Children?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	602	90.5	90.7	90.7
	No	62	9.3	9.3	100
	Total	664	99.8	100	
Missing	Missing/No Response	1	0.2		
Total		665	100		

Number of Children

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	15	2.3	2.4	2.4
	1	119	17.9	19.3	21.7
	2	182	27.4	29.4	51.1
	3	129	19.4	20.9	72
	4	85	12.8	13.8	85.8
	5	41	6.2	6.6	92.4
	6	20	3	3.2	95.6
	7	15	2.3	2.4	98.1
	8	5	0.8	0.8	98.9
	9	4	0.6	0.6	99.5
	10	1	0.2	0.2	99.7
	11	1	0.2	0.2	99.8
	17	1	0.2	0.2	100
	Total	618	92.9	100	
Missing	Not Applicable	47	7.1		
Total		665	100		

Cultural Expectations

My Community Was/Has Been Influential In My Decision to Remain In the Abusive Relationship

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	228	34.3	43.3	43.3
	Disagree	157	23.6	29.8	73.1
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	61	9.2	11.6	84.6
	Agree	56	8.4	10.6	95.3
	Strongly Agree	25	3.8	4.7	100
	Total	527	79.2	100	
Missing	Not Applicable	119	17.9		
	Missing/No Response	19	2.9		
	Total	138	20.8		
Total		665	100		

My Community Recognizes Domestic Violence as a Problem

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	28	4.2	5.2	5.2
	Disagree	18	2.7	3.4	8.6
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	59	8.9	11.0	19.6
	Agree	211	31.7	39.3	58.8
	Strongly Agree	221	33.2	41.2	100.0
	Total	537	80.8	100.0	
Missing	Not Applicable	108	16.2		
	Don't Know	1	.2		
	Missing/No Response	19	2.9		
	Total	128	19.2		
Total		665	100.0		

Education

Highest Level of Education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Grade 5	4	0.6	0.6	0.6
	Grade 6	11	1.7	1.7	2.3
	Grade 7	24	3.6	3.6	5.9
	Grade 8	32	4.8	4.8	10.7
	Grade 9	63	9.5	9.5	20.2
	Grade 10	76	11.4	11.4	31.6
	Grade 11	73	11	11	42.6
	Grade 12 (High School Diploma)	121	18.2	18.2	60.8
	GED	18	2.7	2.7	63.6
	Some Post- Secondary (technical/trade/college)	30	4.5	4.5	68.1
	Completed Post- Secondary (technical/trade/college)	84	12.6	12.7	80.7
	Some Post- Secondary (University)	52	7.8	7.8	88.6
	Completed Post- Secondary (University)	66	9.9	9.9	98.5
	Completed Post- Graduate Degree (Professional/ Masters/PhD)	10	1.5	1.5	100
	Total	664	99.8	100	
Missing	Missing/No Response	1	0.2		
Total		665	100		

Ethnicity/Cultural Background

Cultural Background

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Born in Canada	295	44.4	44.5	44.5
	All Immigrants	39	5.9	5.9	50.4
	Aboriginal	329	49.5	49.6	100
	Total	663	99.7	100	
Missing	System	2	0.3		
Total		665	100		

Health

Disabilities and/or Long-Term Illnesses

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	417	62.7	62.7	62.7
	No	230	34.6	34.6	97.3
	Unsure	18	2.7	2.7	100
	Total	665	100	100	

Self-Assessed Mental Health

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Poor/Fair	332	49.9	55.8	55.8
	Good	180	27.1	30.3	86.1
	Very Good/Excellent	83	12.5	13.9	100.0
	Total	595	89.5	100.0	
Missing	System	70	10.5		
Total		665	100.0		

Self-Assessed Physical Health

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Poor/Fair	263	39.5	44.3	44.3
	Good	220	33.1	37.0	81.3
	Very Good/Excellent	111	16.7	18.7	100.0
	Total	594	89.3	100.0	
Missing	System	71	10.7		
Total		665	100.0		

Income

Sources of Income – None

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	14	2.1	2.1	2.1
	No	648	97.4	97.9	100
	Total	662	99.5	100	
Missing	Missing/No Response	3	0.5		
Total		665	100		

Sources of Income – Job

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	244	36.7	36.9	36.9
	No	417	62.7	63.1	100
	Total	661	99.4	100	
Missing	Not Applicable	1	0.2		
	Missing/No Response	3	0.5		
	Total	4	0.6		
Total		665	100		

Sources of Income - Ex/Partner's or Relatives Job

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	41	6.2	6.2	6.2
	No	620	93.2	93.8	100
	Total	661	99.4	100	
Missing	Not Applicable	1	0.2		
	Missing/No Response	3	0.5		
	Total	4	0.6		
Total		665	100		

Sources of Income - Social Assistance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	319	48.0	48.3	48.3
	No	342	51.4	51.7	100.0
	Total	661	99.4	100.0	
Missing	Not Applicable	1	.2		
	Missing/No Response	3	.5		
	Total	4	.6		
Total		665	100.0		

Sources of Income - Disability Allowance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	66	9.9	10.0	10.0
	No	595	89.5	90.0	100.0
	Total	661	99.4	100.0	
Missing	Not Applicable	1	.2		
	Missing/No Response	3	.5		
	Total	4	.6		
Total		665	100.0		

Sources of Income - Child Support

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	104	15.6	15.7	15.7
	No	557	83.8	84.3	100.0
	Total	661	99.4	100.0	
Missing	Not Applicable	1	.2		
	Missing/No Response	3	.5		
	Total	4	.6		
Total		665	100.0		

Sources of Income - Spousal Support

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	32	4.8	4.8	4.8
	No	629	94.6	95.2	100.0
	Total	661	99.4	100.0	
Missing	Not Applicable	1	.2		
	Missing/No Response	3	.5		
	Total	4	.6		
Total		665	100.0		

Sources of Income - Employment Insurance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	27	4.1	4.1	4.1
	No	634	95.3	95.9	100.0
	Total	661	99.4	100.0	
Missing	Not Applicable	1	.2		
	Missing/No Response	3	.5		
	Total	4	.6		
Total		665	100.0		

Sources of Income - Student Loans

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	25	3.8	3.8	3.8
	No	636	95.6	96.2	100.0
	Total	661	99.4	100.0	
Missing	Not Applicable	1	.2		
	Missing/No Response	3	.5		
	Total	4	.6		
Total		665	100.0		

Sources of Income - Child Tax Credit

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	326	49.0	49.3	49.3
	No	335	50.4	50.7	100.0
	Total	661	99.4	100.0	
Missing	Not Applicable	1	.2		
	Missing/No Response	3	.5		
	Total	4	.6		
Total		665	100.0		

Salary Range based on Statistics Canada

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	\$0 - \$9,999	164	24.7	27.4	27.4
	\$10,000 - \$19,999	207	31.1	34.6	61.9
	\$20,000 - \$29,999	111	16.7	18.5	80.5
	\$30,000 - \$39,999	46	6.9	7.7	88.1
	\$40,000 - \$49,999	20	3	3.3	91.5
	\$50,000 - \$59,999	14	2.1	2.3	93.8
	\$60,000 - \$69,999	13	2	2.2	96
	\$70,000 - \$79,999	1	0.2	0.2	96.2
	\$80,000 +	23	3.5	3.8	100
	Total	599	90.1	100	
Missing	Not Applicable	2	0.3		
	Don't Know	51	7.7		
	No Response	13	2		
	Total	66	9.9		
Total		665	100		

Living Situation

Urban, Census Agglomeration, Rural

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	CMA	453	68.1	68.1	68.1
	CA	144	21.7	21.7	89.8
	Rural Other	68	10.2	10.2	100
	Total	665	100	100	

Rating of House/Apartment Lived in Most Recently

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Poor	26	3.9	3.9	3.9
	Poor	40	6.0	6.0	9.9
	Not Adequate	48	7.2	7.2	17.2
	Adequate	166	25.0	25.0	42.2
	Good	201	30.2	30.3	72.4
	Very Good	183	27.5	27.6	100.0
	Total	664	99.8	100.0	
Missing	Missing/No Response	1	.2		
Total		665	100.0		

Relationship with Abuser and Experiences of Violence

Current Relationship Status with Most Recent Abusive Partner

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Married	47	7.1	7.1	7.1
	Separated	140	21.1	21.1	28.2
	Divorced	63	9.5	9.5	37.7
	Common-law	39	5.9	5.9	43.6
	Ex-Common Law	225	33.8	33.9	77.5
	Boyfriend/ Girlfriend	33	5	5	82.5
	Ex-Boyfriend/Ex-Girlfriend	111	16.7	16.7	99.2
	Other	5	0.8	0.8	100
	Total	663	99.7	100	
Missing	Don't Know	1	0.2		
	Missing/No Response	1	0.2		
	Total	2	0.3		
Total		665	100		

Kicked Me, Bit Me or Hit Me With a Fist

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	194	29	29.5	29.5
	Only Once	91	14	13.8	43.3
	Several Times	241	36	36.6	79.9
	Once a Month	43	6.5	6.5	86.5
	Once a Week	52	7.8	7.9	94.4
	Daily	37	5.6	5.6	100
	Total	658	99	100	
Missing	Not Applicable	1	0.2		
	Missing/No Response	6	0.9		
	Total	7	1.1		
Total		665	100		

Used a Knife or Gun or Other Weapon

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	385	58	58.1	58.1
	Only Once	119	18	17.9	76
	Several Times	114	17	17.2	93.2
	Once a Month	15	2.3	2.3	95.5
	Once a Week	12	1.8	1.8	97.3
	Daily	18	2.7	2.7	100
	Total	663	100	100	
Missing	Missing/No Response	2	0.3		
Total		665	100		

Told Me I Wasn't Good Enough

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	104	16	15.6	15.6
	Only Once	30	4.5	4.5	20.2
	Several Times	202	30	30.4	50.5
	Once a Month	49	7.4	7.4	57.9
	Once a Week	102	15	15.3	73.2
	Daily	178	27	26.8	100
	Total	665	100	100	

Told Me I Was Crazy

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	100	15	15	15
	Only Once	24	3.6	3.6	18.6
	Several Times	226	34	34	52.6
	Once a Month	44	6.6	6.6	59.2
	Once a Week	83	13	12.5	71.7
	Daily	188	28	28.3	100
	Total	665	100	100	

Tried to Rape Me

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	403	61	61.2	61.2
	Only Once	62	9.3	9.4	70.6
	Several Times	139	21	21.1	91.7
	Once a Month	14	2.1	2.1	93.8
	Once a Week	17	2.6	2.6	96.4
	Daily	24	3.6	3.6	100
	Total	659	99	100	
Missing	Not Applicable	1	0.2		
	Missing/No Response	5	0.8		
	Total	6	0.9		
Total		665	100		

Raped Me

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	387	58	58.6	58.6
	Only Once	69	10	10.5	69.1
	Several Times	129	19	19.5	88.6
	Once a Month	24	3.6	3.6	92.3
	Once a Week	29	4.4	4.4	96.7
	Daily	22	3.3	3.3	100
	Total	660	99	100	
Missing	Missing/No Response	5	0.8		
Total		665	100		

Self-Esteem

In General, How Do You Feel About Yourself?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Extremely Pleased	41	6.2	6.2	6.2
	Pleased	136	20.5	20.5	26.7
	Mostly Satisfied	154	23.2	23.2	49.8
	Mixed (Equally Satisfied and Dissatisfied)	200	30.1	30.1	80.0
	Mostly Dissatisfied	35	5.3	5.3	85.2
	Unhappy	65	9.8	9.8	95.0
	Terrible	29	4.4	4.4	99.4
	Not Applicable	2	.3	.3	99.7
	No Answer/Other Answer	2	.3	.3	100.0
	Total	664	99.8	100.0	
Missing	Missing/No Response	1	.2		
Total		665	100.0		

Sexual Orientation

Sexual Orientation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Heterosexual	610	91.7	92.1	92.1
	Bisexual	27	4.1	4.1	96.2
	Lesbian	8	1.2	1.2	97.4
	Two-Spirit	8	1.2	1.2	98.6
	Other	9	1.4	1.4	100
	Total	662	99.5	100	
Missing	Missing/No Response	3	0.5		
Total		665	100		

Social Support

Satisfaction with Emotional Support from Friends/Relatives

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not at All Satisfied	61	9.2	9.2	9.2
	A Little Satisfied	52	7.8	7.9	17.1
	Somewhat Satisfied	176	26.5	26.7	43.8
	Satisfied	238	35.8	36.1	79.8
	Extremely Satisfied	133	20	20.2	100
	Total	660	99.2	100	
Missing	Not Applicable	3	0.5		
	Missing/No Response	2	0.3		
	Total	5	0.8		
Total		665	100		

Satisfaction with Practical Support from Friends/Relatives

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not at All Satisfied	83	12.5	13	13
	A Little Satisfied	56	8.4	8.8	21.8
	Somewhat Satisfied	136	20.5	21.4	43.2
	Satisfied	240	36.1	37.7	80.8
	Extremely Satisfied	122	18.3	19.2	100
	Total	637	95.8	100	
Missing	Not Applicable	20	3		
	Missing/No Response	8	1.2		
	Total	28	4.2		
Total		665	100		