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THE SAFE SHELTER: FACTORS INFLUENCING DISPOSITION

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THE SAFE SHELTER: FACTORS INFLUENCING DISPOSITION

by

Elizabeth Hamlink Winters

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the
DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING AND GUIDANCE
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
In the Graduate College
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

1986
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This thesis has been approved on the date shown below:

Betty J. Newlon

BETTY J. NEWLON
Associate Professor of Counseling and Guidance

Aug. 11, 1986
Date
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sincere appreciation is expressed to Dr. Betty J. Newlon, thesis director, and to members of the thesis committee, Dr. Oscar Christensen and Dr. Richard Erickson, for their time and support.

Appreciation is also extended to Barbara Damon, director of A.V.A., for keeping such good, complete records, and patiently putting up with all my questions.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine empirically which of the following variables were predictors of disposition after residence at a safe shelter: marital status, presence of children, length of stay at a shelter, hours in counseling, and employment status. The intake form filled out when entering the shelter, the exit summary completed when leaving the shelter, along with information from shelter quarterly reports, for 359 women, provided the data used in the analysis. Demographic data were also obtained to provide a description of the women who use shelters.

A multiple linear regression identified length of stay at a shelter to be the only statistically significant predictor of disposition. The longer a woman stays at a shelter, the less likely she is to return to her abuser. The results suggest that shelters provide services in a manner that will encourage longer residence, and develop intervention programs based on each individual client's needs.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is a major psychological and public health issue in this country. Current figures estimate that as many as 50 percent of all American adult women will be beaten at least once by men with whom they reside. The incidence of repeated beatings for all women may be as high as 30 percent, with a conservative estimate of 12 million wives beaten per year in the U.S. (Pagelow, 1984). Statistically wife abuse yields one of the highest incidence rates of severe violence in this country.

The term wife abuse is used to refer to the violence a woman experiences within the context of a marriage-like situation, whether she is legally married or not. As a wife or a cohabiter, a battered woman has suffered persistent or serious physical assault at the hands of her partner (Pahl, 1985). This abuse may include slapping, pushing, hitting, kicking, choking, and the use of weapons such as knives and guns. Many authorities on domestic violence have broadened this definition to include the mental battering that women have often reported to be more difficult to tolerate than the physical abuse (Walker, 1979). Although men have been
subjected to violence by their wives or partners, the vast majority of domestic violence victims are women. Women may become violent themselves in self defense or as a reaction to the violence they are experiencing. It has been shown that men are consistently more dangerous when they become violent than women, and the physical injuries inflicted are much more severe (Pahl, 1985).

Using population projections by the Pima Association of Governments and incidence rates from two major domestic violence surveys, it is estimated that in Pima County, Arizona approximately 22,086 married couples (16 percent) will experience some acts of violence in 1986 (Southern Arizona Task Force, 1986). This figure does not reflect the violence that may occur between unmarried couples. As many as 7,868 married couples in Pima County will experience severe acts of wife abuse in 1986, directly affecting over 20,000 men, women, and children. In 1985, over 12,000 women in Pima County aged 18 to 69 reportedly suffered some type of physical abuse by a husband or partner, and over 49,000 women reported some type of physical abuse by their husband or partner during their lifetime (Southern Arizona Task Force on Domestic Violence, 1986).

Because of embarrassment, guilt, the inability to safely report the incident, and the frequent lack of protection offered battered women from the police or legal
sources, wife abuse is grossly underreported. Although underreporting can decrease the accuracy of estimated incidence figures, there is no doubt that the extent and prevalence of wife abuse is great (Kwalwasser, 1984; Heintzelman, 1982).

Although wife abuse has existed for hundreds of years, it has only recently been acknowledged as a serious problem (Walker, 1979). The right to domestic privacy and a culture that condones the use of physical force as a means of discipline and control, has kept the issue of wife abuse a well-kept secret. Questions arise as to whether violence against women in their homes is increasing, or whether awareness of the problem is rising. History shows that wife beating is probably as old as the family system itself, and that this practice has been acceptable much longer than the more recent trend of condemning marital violence (Pagelow, 1984; Heintzelman, 1982). With this increased awareness has come a knowledge of the need for services aimed to help the battered woman and her family. Lack of research has become apparent as members of the mental health profession try to develop services to assist victims of domestic violence.

The establishment of emergency shelters has evolved from the recognition of the needs of battered women. These needs became known through requests to hot lines, police,
and other social services by battered women seeking intervention, and a safe place to stay. Safe shelters are defined as those formal residences which are designed to provide safety and shelter for victims of domestic violence and their children. These services are usually provided through state, federal and community funding, local mental health agencies, and women's organizations. This definition does not include the shelter provided by family, friends, or neighbors.

Before shelters, a battered woman's resources consisted of the police, whose primary goal was mediation rather than separation, and mental health facilities who often treated these women as mentally ill (Flemming, 1979). The violence was frequently ignored, and the treatment, based on a medical model, concentrated on the anxiety and depression these women exhibited. Many shelters, since the early 1970s, began operating from a feminist point of view, emphasizing women's quest for equality and rights not to be abused in any relationship.

Traditional social service agencies lack the resources to deal with many problems a battered woman faces such as immediate housing, welfare assistance, legal aid, child care, medical care, and employment (Bowker & Maurer, 1985; Gelles, 1976). In addition to such a wide range of problems and needs, these services may be necessary at a
time that is incompatible with traditional business hours. The safe shelter, which is designed to offer 24-hour assistance, also provides a much-needed community resource on education of domestic violence issues.

Chiswick Women's Aid Hostel in London, England, founded by Erin Pizzey in 1971, was the first formal attempt known to set up refuge for battered women. Since then, the shelter movement in the U.S. has grown from 12 such shelters in 1975 to over 200 in 1983 and approximately 780 shelters in the U.S. by 1985 (Bowker & Maurer, 1985).

The first shelters were provided by sympathetic, supportive individuals, often workers at women's centers, anti-rape programs, or women in transition groups, rather than the traditional private or public service agencies. These original shelters operated with severely limited resources, little funding, and often little sympathy from the surrounding community, a problem that still plagues many of the shelters today (Flemming, 1979). As safe shelters continue to grow in number and be recognized as an important resources for battered women, there also appears to be an increasing population of women seeking these services. Based on figures of incidence rates of violence and needs defined by reported use, the capacity of formal shelters in the U.S. would have to be increased nearly 15 times in order
to fully meet the demonstrated need for shelter by battered women (Bowher & Maurer, 1985).

In Pima County, the shelters for battered women during the fiscal year of 1984-1985 provided services for over 1,600 women and children. An additional 430 women plus their children were turned away due to lack of space (Southern Arizona Task Force, 1985).

Funding and the ability to remain financially solvent has been one of the most frequent and demanding problems of programs for battered women.

The needs of battered women are great and the ability of the community to respond is often inadequate due to this severe lack of funds (Lynch & Norris, 1978). Since funding for these shelters remains almost entirely within the domain of public, state and federal control, it is necessary to provide research which substantiates the effectiveness of safe shelters.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to increase knowledge about the aspects of a safe shelter experience that may facilitate or impede a battered woman in ending her abusive relationship. This study also examined what pre-existing factors upon entering a shelter may influence or help predict a woman's initial disposition after receiving shelter services. The data obtained for this study provided
descriptive information about who uses a shelter, i.e., age, ethnicity, marital status, and presence of children. Police involvement in the most recent violent episode, and previous attacks were examined on a smaller proportion of the subjects in this study.

**Hypothesis**

The hypothesis examined in this study was that certain factors such as length of stay at the shelter, number of counseling hours (individual and group combined), employment status, relationship to the abuser, and the presence of children can be used to help predict the probability of a woman leaving her abuser upon exiting the shelter.

**Limitations**

There are certain limitations inherent in studying battered women. These limitations must be considered when assessing the value of the information obtained from the research.

The population in this study was women who had sought and found shelter within one of the shelters designed for domestic violence victims in Pima County, Arizona. The motivation to seek shelter may reflect a difference between this population and all women who are abused wives.
Therefore, the results of this study can only be generalized to battered women who use shelters.

Upon contacting a shelter, it must be determined either in person or over the phone if the woman's main presenting problem is domestic violence, rather than an economic crisis, substance abuse, or chronic mental illness. Those women who are assumed to be eligible and most likely to benefit from the shelter services are the women most frequently admitted (Loscke & Berk, 1982). This screening process, which is necessary because of limited space and resources, may again eliminate a certain proportion of battered women, influencing their disposition upon leaving the shelter.

Much of the data collected for this study was based on self report. This type of information gathering is subject to misrepresentation on the part of the woman interviewed, either deliberately or through error in memory.

A consistent lack of follow-up information on women who have stayed at shelters is another limitation of this study. It is often difficult to remain in contact with these women because of frequent moving, staying with friends and family, and a reluctance on their part to admit they may be going back to the abuser. The data for determining the outcomes of a woman's stay at a shelter was gathered upon her exit. There is no guarantee that a woman did not change
her mind at a later date and return to her abuser, or leave him if she returned. Previous studies have shown that the majority of women, when follow-up was made, stayed away from the abuser if they did not return to them immediately after leaving the shelter (Pahl, 1985).

One of the factors examined in this study was the relationship between total time spent in counseling and disposition. One hour minimum of counseling per day was required at the shelter participating in this study. Many women may have received more or less counseling, depending on their circumstances and whether they actively sought out more counseling. This again may reflect differences in individual motivation and may affect the apparent influence between counseling hours and outcome.

Assumptions

A major assumption of this research project was that leaving the abuser after shelter residence was a more successful outcome than returning to the abuser. This is based on previous research on domestic violence, which indicates that the most successful way to stop abuse or to prevent future abuse is for the woman to physically leave the violent relationship (Martin, 1983).

Walker (1979) maintains that success is achieved if the violence is stopped and the individuals are strengthened. The survival of the relationship is secondary.
Couples therapy may be useful treatment, but only after the safety of the women is ensured by physical separation (Flemming, 1979).
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the last fifteen years the safe shelter movement has become an increasingly accepted means of treatment for battered women. Research has shown consistently that shelters are one of the most effective resources available to victims of domestic violence (Bowker & Maurer, 1985; Ferraro, 1983; Flemming, 1983; Loseke & Berke, 1982).

Martin (1983), after studying all other options open to battered women, concluded "the creation of shelters designed specifically for battered women is the only direct, immediate, and satisfactory solution to the problem of wife abuse" (p. 197). Martin also states that the need for refuge from further abuse by both the victim and her children should be the primary concern for social service agencies when working with battered women.

Walker (1979) refers to the safe shelter as the "cornerstone" of treatment for battered women. Walker points out that the safe shelter is an essential resource, even if the battered woman has not made the decision to leave her abuser permanently. The availability of a safe environment provides her with an alternative to living with
the violence. This alternative, or safe shelter, may be something she needs to experience several times before making the final break.

In addition to finding the shelter a crucial, immediate intervention, Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) point out that the shelter can be effective in preventing future abuse.

After suffering from a violent attack, a shelter may be the only safe and supportive place a woman and her children can find (Ni Carthy, 1982; Sonkin, 1985). A place to go can be one of the most difficult problems faced by victims of domestic violence, since attacks frequently occur on weekends, late at night or very early in the morning (Gelles, Straus, & Steinmetz, 1980).

**Shelter Usage and Efficacy**

Most battered women will initially seek help from family or friends, when trying to escape the violence in their home (Pahl, 1985). A woman may also seek help from social service agencies, her clergy, or the police. When looking for assistance, Bowker (1984) found that a battered woman's most common source of refuge was her own families. Friends were the second most frequent source of help, with inlaws and neighbors being used significantly less frequently. Safe shelters were used by only 10 percent of the women after the first battering incident, but increased
to 29 percent as the abuse continued and the severity of violence increased. It appears that the longer the violence continues, the more inadequate family and friends became at providing help. It is also at this time that the police are called more frequently to intervene. This turn to a safe shelter may stem from the unique ability of the shelter to provide confidentiality about the location and unconditional availability.

Bowker also found that women who received refuge from family and friends sought this help on more than one occasion. This contrasts to the women who stayed at a safe shelter, where less than one-third returned more than once, and very few returned more than three times. This could be related to the limited capacity of shelters and the success of the services received in stopping the violence (Pahl, 1985).

Bowker points out that when safe shelters were evaluated, 96 percent of women who had stayed in a shelter rated them as fairly successful to very successful in helping to decrease or end the violence. Although women were twice as likely to seek help from police, social services, or counseling agencies, when compared to these other formal service providers, shelters were the ones most often rated very effective. Shelters, with the exception of the clergy, and women's groups were also least likely to be
associated with an immediate increase in violence. Long-term success rates were higher with shelters than with other formal sources of help, but were found to have the least positive short-term effect on the husband. Binney, Harkel, and Nixon (1985) supported the effectiveness of shelters, when they found that women in England rated their shelter experiences as positive and an important step towards achieving independence.

The effectiveness of a shelter can be a very subjective judgment on the part of its residents, and what may be considered success for one woman may not be for another. Critics argue that ratings of shelters by battered women are too subjective and do not reflect an objective reality (Bowker & Maurer, 1985). It has also been pointed out that the shelter environment may encourage the further dependence of a battered woman (Walker, 1979).

Services a Shelter Provides

In order to explain the effectiveness of safe shelters, it is necessary to look at what a shelter provides. Safety is probably the most important service offered by a shelter. In fact, many battered women have reported that living in constant fear of attack, even while sleeping, is one of the most debilitating aspects of their situations (Flemming, 1979). In addition to providing safety, a shelter may assist a woman with her needs for child care,
housing, welfare, legal assistance, employment, and advocacy.

Support and Role Models

During time at a shelter, women can heal both physically and mentally. This time away from the abuser can enable the battered woman to get a clearer, less biased picture of her situation. Options are explored, and support is provided from both staff and residents. The shelter offers an environment where women see other women acting authoritatively, independently, and making decisions. Women entering a shelter are exposed to members of staff and other residents who have successfully ended the violence in their lives (Ridington, 1978). Their previous isolation is ended, and they may begin to take control over their lives again.

This opportunity to learn from role models at the shelter, and identify with other residents, can have a positive effect in stopping the violence. Dalto (1983), when studying disposition after shelter residence, found that women who formed close relationships with other residents were less likely to return to the abuser. Dalto also learned that identification with a shelter role model provided an added impetus to live independently of the abuser.
Counseling

When a battered woman comes to a shelter, it may be the first time she is allowed to share her situation with someone else. The process of developing trust and speaking freely about the abuse she has experienced may take time. Battered women often tend to initially mistrust staff members and co-residents because of their previous isolation and lack of female friends (Ridington, 1978). Counseling, an essential aspect of the shelter experience, provides a non-threatening environment, where a woman can begin to trust others, learn to express feelings, and share experiences.

Before coming to a shelter, a battered woman may have encountered a lack of sympathy and the attitude that she is mentally unstable for enduring the violence. When contacting traditional mental health services, these women have often been diagnosed as paranoid, and suffering from severe personality disorders (Flemming, 1979). Walker (1978) states that these women suffer from situationally imposed emotional problems related to their victimization, and that they do not choose to be battered, but develop behavioral disturbances because of the abuse. Counseling at a shelter operates from the premise that the woman is not crazy, but rather is reacting to her victimization (Walker, 1979).
Counseling may be used to provide an education on domestic violence issues, options can be explored and plans made to facilitate future success when living independently of the abuser. When studying shelter residence and related changes in battered women, Alcorn (1984) found that there was a substantial increase in support systems in the form of advice and information from shelter staff and other social service agencies. As these women learned more about domestic violence issues and their rights under the law, not only did their support networks increase, but their perception of the abuse changed. Alcorn (1984) reports that these changes decreased the likelihood that the woman would return to her abuser or experience further acts of violence.

Counseling at a shelter may also focus on increasing self esteem. Walker (1979) cites very low self esteem to be one of the most common characteristics of a battered woman, which inhibits her ability to leave a violent relationship. This lack of self esteem stems from a sense of failure in the marriage or home, something in which the battered woman places a great importance (Walker, 1979). Since these women frequently have no life outside of the marriage or relationship, perceived failure in this area can be especially devastating (Martin, 1983).

Violence at the hands of a lover can destroy a woman's trust and confidence in her ability to make sound
judgments about others. As a battered woman is constantly put down or beaten by her abuser, she begins to believe she is of less value than he, and reacts with depression or passivity which in turn can make it easier for her to be oppressed (Sanford & Donovan, 1984).

Studies show that people with low self esteem have a greater anticipation of failure and punishment (Cohen, 1954). This sense of low self esteem not only increases the threat one perceives from a powerful figure, but also decreases the ability to cope with threat. As a result, the person with low self esteem becomes more dependent and vulnerable to the source of threat (Cohen, 1954). With battered women, this sense of low self esteem is part of the learned helplessness which keeps them trapped in a violent relationship (Walker, 1979).

Counseling, through self awareness and skills development, has proven to be an effective method for increasing self esteem (Loeffler & Fieldler, 1979). With a counselor's knowledge of domestic violence issues, and their ability to communicate confidence that problems can be resolved positively, a battered woman may see she has strengths and options she may have not recognized before. Counselors must be cautious, as Ball and Wynan (1978) point out, not to be too directive, or the woman may become
passive and shift dependence from her spouse or abuser onto the counselor.

Small Group Therapy

Small group therapy, a frequent part of a woman's counseling experience while at a shelter, has many advantages and has been cited as a very effective treatment for battered women (Flemming, 1979). Recent studies on women and therapy have shown that following participation in groups, such as support groups, consciousness raising groups and encounter groups, women often exhibit an increase in self confidence and self esteem (Birns, Graubert, & Stock, 1982). The small group offers the support and positive feedback which facilitates personal growth and acceptance, a needed characteristic for battered women. When investigating the reasons some battered women lacked the ability to leave a violent relationship, Rousanville and Lifton (1983) learned that the small group, as a therapy, had a positive influence on these women. Rousanville and Lifton felt that battered women were stuck in abusive relationships because of practical and psychological factors which made them unable to act on their own behalf. In their research, the small group was determined to be the best treatment method for increasing independence, self confidence, and alleviating isolation. The small group proved effective in helping a battered woman gain a sense of her own competence, and
recognize that she has a right to expect her own needs to be met.

Lewis (1981), in a comprehensive review of group therapy for battered women, found repeatedly that this modality was an essential treatment. The support, the sharing of experience, and of isolation, problem solving, and skills development could not be matched in any other treatments for battered women. The group atmosphere provides an atmosphere that allows a woman to confront her domestic situation honestly, gain self respect and take new action on her own behalf (Lewis, 1981; Walker, 1979).

Length of Stay

The longer a woman stays at a shelter, the more exposure she has to the therapeutic community, and the greater her chances are of regaining her psychological and physical strength (Bowker, 1984). This in turn can make it easier for her to free herself from the violent relationship, and less likely to return to the shelter in the future (Bowker & Maurer, 1985). Carsenat (1975) learned that battered women who left their abuses after shelter residence had generally stayed at the shelter longer than those who returned. This conclusion was supported by Dalto (1983) in research which determined that the longer a woman stays in a safe shelter, the less likely she is to return to the abuser.
Why She Returns

Past studies on shelter usage have shown that approximately 23 percent to 33 percent of the women who had stayed at shelters intended to return to their abuser at exit (Kwalwasser, 1984; Snyder & Scheer, 1981). Questions concerning why a battered woman stays in an abusive relationship, or why does she return to one, have intrigued mental health professionals for years. Several factors may be contributing to a woman's ability to live independently of her abuser.

Kwalwasser (1984), when studying shelter usage and effectiveness, found that the reasons cited most often to explain why women have such great difficulty in freeing themselves from abusive relationships fell into two categories, one internal and the other external. The internal reasons were related to feelings and concerns such as self-concept, emotional ties, social isolation, learned helplessness, and hope that the abuser would change. The external reasons cited were: the problem of having no place to go, possible retaliation by the abuser, financial dependence, and the alleged inadequate response by traditional agencies. After staying at a shelter, Kwalwasser found that the reasons the women returned were related to loneliness, financial problems, and concerns over the effect of separation on the children.
Employment

These results were supported in previous studies by Gelles (1976), who found that a woman's ability to support herself influenced her initial help-seeking behavior and her consequent resolution to the problem. Gelles concludes "the more resources a wife has, the more she is able to support herself and her children, the more she will have a low threshold of violence and call outside agents or agencies to help her" (p. 664). Severity of the violence and childhood experiences with violence were also found to be indications of a woman's tolerance level for abuse.

Economic dependence was noted as a significant predictor of a woman's disposition after shelter residence by Aguirre (1985), when it was determined that probability of wives returning to abusive husbands increased considerably if the husbands were the sole source of income.

Children

Children, an added financial responsibility, can also influence a woman's intent to continue living in a violent home. Gelles (1972), in a study of a random sample of battered women, not just those seeking refuge in a shelter, learned that the presence and number of children to be a significant predictor of whether or not a woman left her husband.
The combined effects of children, lack of financial resources, and the emotional ties of being married, may present an overwhelming obstacle to the already emotionally drained battered woman.

Summary

The review of the literature discussed the growing acceptance of safe shelters as an effective treatment for battered women. Aspects of the safe shelter experience, such as support, role modeling, individual and group counseling, and length of time in residence were all discussed in relation to how they may influence a woman's eventual disposition. Emotional ties, economic dependence, and the presence of children were also examined as factors influencing the probability of returning to the abuser after shelter residence.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

The sample for this study was selected from the population of women who had stayed at AVA, a safe shelter located in Pima County, Arizona. AVA, also known as Assistance for Victims of Abuse, was established in 1981, and provides shelter for domestic violence victims and their families.

The sample included women who had been residents at AVA during the two-year time period of July 1984 through June 1986 for a minimum of at least one day and night. The ages ranged from 18 years to 71, with 18 being the minimum age requirement for shelter usage by adult women. The number of children accompanying these women ranged from none to five, with the average being two, for those who had children.

These women had come into contact with AVA in a variety of ways. Many had contacted the shelter, seeking assistance for themselves. Others were referred by local authorities, Victim Witness, hospital personnel, and other safe shelters. Being admitted to the shelter defined these women as battered women and made them eligible for services.
A smaller portion, 105, of the original 359 women was used to examine the extent of police involvement in current and past abuse. The smaller sample was chosen because of the availability of this information since November 1985.

**Description of Instruments**

When entering the shelter, a woman is interviewed and an intake form is completed (Appendix A). In addition to demographic information, this form records the woman's relationship to her abuser, kinds of abuse, police involvement, ethnicity, previous use of shelter services, and a brief description of the most recent violent incident which brought the woman to the shelter. The intake form is designed to give personnel at the shelter a thorough understanding of a woman's current situation, and to document shelter usage.

The data regarding age, marital status, employment, number of children, police involvement, and ethnicity was initially taken from these forms.

When leaving a shelter, a woman is interviewed and an exit summary is completed on her (Appendix B). This summary documents her termination date, reason for termination, summary of progress while at the shelter, plans after leaving the shelter, and forwarding address. The data
regarding disposition after shelter residence was taken from this form.

Monthly and quarterly reports were used to determine total hours in counseling, and days in shelter for each of the 359 women in the sample. These reports also provided information regarding women turned away due to no space, and contact with victims on the hot line.

Anonymity of the women in this study was maintained by making no references to their names. Statistical information only was gathered from the intake form, exit summary, monthly and quarterly reports. The form on which the data was recorded identified the women only as a number and the year in which they stayed at AVA.

Research Design

This study was designed to determine what factors, if any, may be helpful in predicting a battered woman's disposition after staying at a safe shelter. A discrimination analysis of the data was performed using a test of multiple linear regression. The independent variables that were examined were marital status, presence of children, days in shelter, hours in counseling, and employment status. The dependent variable was the woman's disposition upon leaving the shelter.

Another intention of this study was to provide descriptive information on who uses the shelter. This
included gathering data on age, marital status, ethnicity, and number of children. The percentage of police involvement was gathered on a smaller portion of the original sample.

**Procedure**

The first contact the shelter staff at AVA has with a possible client is on the phone. Since the location of the shelter is confidential, the address is not published, and other agencies making referrals will only give out a phone number. During this initial contact the staff person must determine from the woman if she is in a domestic violence situation, if her needs are immediate, and if shelter services are appropriate. If there is space in the shelter, and the woman is seeking immediate assistance, then a mutually convenient location and time for meeting are arranged. The shelter location is still not given out, except in the case of emergencies, middle of the night crisis, or police-assisted victims. A counselor meets with a woman, and the information for the intake form is gathered.

After the intake, shelter rules and rights are explained, and the woman is assigned to a room. Goals and plans are usually discussed the second day in residence. At this point a woman may need assistance in obtaining an order of protection, AFDC, child care, food stamps, medical care,
clothing, and transportation. Housing options and employment are also explored throughout a woman's residence. Daily plans are encouraged, with time allowed for working on personal issues. Because of the limited maximum time allowed to each woman of twenty-one days, with exceptions made occasionally, it is considered important for a woman to explore as many of her options and resources as possible.

One hour of counseling per day is scheduled every morning for each client. Because of understaffing and conflicting appointments, this one-hour minimum is not always met. This was reflected in the wide range of counseling hours recorded for each woman in this study. Four days a week, there are mandatory group meetings for the women in residence. The group counseling hours are required in addition to the individual counseling hours. These groups usually meet at night, last from one to two hours, and cover a variety of topics including: parenting skills, assertiveness training, self esteem, relaxation techniques, and education of domestic violence issues. These groups are facilitated by staff counselors, and the hours of participation are included in each woman's total counseling hours.

Counseling hours and days in shelter were recorded in each woman's file, and at the end of each quarter these figures are totaled and transferred to monthly and quarterly reports.
When leaving a shelter, it is requested that each woman give a twenty-four-hour notice of intent to leave. A counseling session is then appointed for her expected time of departure. It was during the final contact with the client that the exit summary form was completed and disposition recorded. The dispositions are summarized into nine possible categories: (1) Set up own household in new location; (2) Batterer moved out of household, (3) Moved in with relatives or friends; (4) Transferred to another family violence program; (5) Transferred to a non-family violence program; (6) Returned to previously abusive situation (situation resolved); (7) Returned to previously abusive situation (situation unresolved); (8) Left without notifying staff; (9) Asked to leave, destination unknown; and (10) Other.

For purpose of analysis, these categories were divided into two groups. Categories one through five represent those women who did not immediately return to the abuser, and categories six through ten represent those who did return to the abuser. Although the last three dispositions, Left without notifying staff; asked to leave; and other—do not definitively show intent to return, it is assumed that this is the most likely possibility. Only disposition one through five represent a destination that does not include returning to the abuser.
Summary

The methods for this study included gathering information from the sample population, at intake, and at exit from the shelter. This data, combined with the length of stay and hours in counseling for each woman, was then used to determine which factors might influence disposition. Although shelter procedures are similar with all women, there is a difference in subjective experience, depending on a woman's total time after shelter, and her individual needs.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

During the two-year time span of July 1, 1984 to June 30, 1986, AVA provided shelter services to 359 women with 395 children, totaling 754 residents for the two-year time period. The mean reported age of the women seeking shelter was 29 years old, with 21 being the most frequently reported age. These women represented a variety of ethnic backgrounds, including 74 percent Anglo, 14 percent Hispanic, 4 percent Native American, and 1 percent Asian/Pacific. Table 1 presents the percentages and frequencies of marital status, employment, and presence of children for those women in the sample.

These results show that little over 50 percent of the women were married to the abuser, 59 percent had at least one child with them, and only 36 percent were employed.

These women stayed at the shelter an average of 8 days, with a range of 1 to 43 days. The most frequent length of residence was 1 day. The average time spent in counseling was 11 hours, with a minimum of 1 hour to a maximum of 55 hours in counseling. The most frequent length of time in counseling was 2 hours.
Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>359</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of Children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>359</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>359</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data were further analyzed by using a multiple linear regression. The raw scores multiple regression equation was:

\[ y = -.02X_m + .06X_c - .01X_d - .004X_h - .06X_e + .51 \]

The standardized multiple regression equation was:

\[ Z_y = -.02Z_{xm} + .062Z_{xc} - .252Z_{xd} - .092Z_{xh} - .062Z_{xe} \]

The results of the multiple regression are presented in Table 2.

In the standardized multiple regression equation, beta, or the standardized coefficient, tells the importance of each variable in prediction, when the other variables are held constant. Beta equalizes the variables in relation to each other. The greater the beta value for a variable, the more power it has in prediction.

The results of the multiple regression showed that the beta (-.25) of the independent variable days in shelter was a significant predictor of disposition (t(358) = -2.39, p < .02). The negative beta indicates that the more days a woman stays at the shelter, the less likely she is to return to her abuser. The married variable was a nonsignificant predictor of disposition (t(358) = -.40). This was also the case with the variable children (t(358) = 1.17) and employment (t(358) = -1.11). These three variables were all coded
Table 2. Prediction of disposition with independent variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Regression Coefficient</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Married</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Children</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Days</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>-2.38*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Hours</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>-.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Employment</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-1.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .02

Note: Married = the response was married or not married (0,1).
Children = The response was to have children or not have children (0,1).
Days = The response was how many days in shelter (1-43).
Hours = The response was how many hours in counseling (1-55).
Employment = The response was to be employed or not be employed (0,1).
Dependent variable = Disposition, the response was returned to the abuser, or not return to abuser (0,1).
as dichotomous responses, with 0 representing no, and 1 representing yes. This restriction of range, reducing variance, also reduces correlation, making these variables less powerful as predictors. Hours in counseling, a continuous variable, was a nonsignificant predictor of disposition \( t(358) = -.89 \).

The five independent variables in the multiple regression equation to predict disposition resulted in a multiple correlation of .34. This indicated that 12% of the variance in disposition was shared with the five predictor variables.

Table 3 indicates that the total multiple regression equation with all the predictors included was a significant prediction equation of disposition \( F(5.383) = 9.45, p < .01 \).

Of the 359 women in this study, 228, or 63 percent, indicated that they were not returning to the abuser. Table 4 presents the percentages and frequencies of the self-reported dispositions. The most frequent disposition for those who indicated that they would not return to the abuser was moving in with relatives or friends.

Police involvement was examined on 105 women in the original sample. These results showed that in 55 percent of the most recent violent episode, the police were called. Of this 55 percent, or 58 cases, only 16 percent of the abusers
Table 3. Analysis of variance for the multiple regression.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.69</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>9.45*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residuals</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>72.38</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>82.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .01
Table 4. Self-reported disposition upon exiting shelter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disposition</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Set up own household in new location</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Batterer moved out of household</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Moved in with relatives or friends</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Transferred to another family violence program</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Transferred to non-family violence program</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Returned to previously abusive situation (situation resolved)</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Returned to previously abusive situation (situation unresolved)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Left without notifying staff</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Asked to leave, destination unknown</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>359</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
were arrested. The extent of police involvement before the most recent incident ranged from none to 200 times, with the police being involved 2 times before the most frequent occurrence.

Information gathered from quarterly reports showed that in addition to the 359 women served at the shelter during this time period, another 219 women plus their children were turned away due to no space. Hot lines use recorded 1,850 calls related to domestic violence.

The results of this research project provided descriptive information on the women who stayed at the shelter, and the extent of the services used by these women, i.e., counseling hours, and length of stay. Statistical analysis and results were documented for all five independent variables, and their relationship to the dependent variable, disposition.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The 359 women in this sample, although representative of only one shelter in Pima County, shared many demographic characteristics with samples of battered women in previous studies. The average age of 29, the ethnic groupings, and the average of two children per women with children were very similar to those findings in earlier research project (Bowker & Maurer, 1985; Kwalwasser, 1984). The positive employment status of 36 percent of these women was in the middle range of that found in other studies, which varied from 25 percent to 43 percent. Marriage to the abuser, at 51 percent, was slightly lower than that predicted by previous research.

When looking at the variables individually, the data analysis indicated that the only significant predictor of disposition was length of residence at a shelter. It appears that the more time a woman spends at a shelter, the greater are her chances of leaving the abusive relationship. This conclusion is supported by earlier research, which found that 50 percent of these women who had stayed at a shelter for a week or longer would not return to the abuser.
(Walker, 1979). Of those women who stayed at AVA for a week or longer, 70 percent of them did not return to their abuser upon exit, and 38 percent of these women set up their own households.

The importance of length of stay is not surprising since it is related to so many other aspects of the shelter experience. The longer a woman stays at a shelter, the more time she will have to reconsider options, the more exposure she has to counseling, support, peer groups, and role models. This longer time in shelter can also allow for more effective long-term goal planning. More extensive housing alternatives can be explored, and a more thorough job search can be made, if necessary.

The variable, employment status, was expected to have a higher correlation with disposition. The result reported in this study represents only the relationship between employment and disposition. It did not include the income women may have received through other sources such as AFDC, food stamps, or unemployment. If these other sources had been included as income, there might have been a stronger correlation between financial status of a woman and her disposition.

The five variables together provided a statistically significant prediction equation. These correlations showed that being married, not having children, having a job, and
the greater amount of hours in counseling and days in shelter, combined, influenced disposition in the direction of not returning to the abuser. The only variable which showed unexpected results was marital status. It was expected that being married would strengthen the emotional ties and decrease the likelihood of leaving the abuser.

The intent of 63 percent of this sample to not return to the abuser after shelter residence, corresponds closely with that found by Kwalwasser (1984) of 72 percent and Snyder and Scheer (1981) of 67 percent. Since family and friends are the people battered women turn to most frequently before coming to a shelter, it is not surprising that this was the most frequent disposition upon leaving.

The involvement of the police in over 50 percent of the most recent violent episodes, and the average use of the police twice before, indicates that the police are frequently an initial source of assistance for battered women. Police involvement alone does not guarantee the arrest of the abuser, as shown by the fact that only 16 percent of the abusers were arrested when the police were called.

The need for greater shelter capacity and services is indicated by the large number of calls to the hot line and the fact that so many women and children were turned away due to lack of space.
Implications

It appears that the goal of a shelter to provide a safe refuge for a battered woman and her children is only a part of the services rendered or needed. The immediate needs of safety and confidentiality, although critical to a battered woman in crisis, are not enough to deter her from returning to the abuser. Even though the mean length of stay at this shelter was 8 days, most women who came to the shelter stayed only one day. This brief exposure to the shelter environment is not enough to facilitate the great transition a woman must go through in order to leave her abuser. Recognizing the need for longer shelter residence to help ensure a more positive outcome upon leaving, it becomes necessary to provide services in a manner that will encourage women to stay longer. This could include implementing more flexible shelter goals, and concentrating more attention on each individual client's comfort and minimizing the stress that accompanies a major transition.

Based on the knowledge that certain factors, such as those studied in this project, either individually or combined can influence a woman's eventual disposition, it is important upon admittance to develop an effective intervention program that reflects each client's immediate and long-term needs. For example, extensive job search skills may be emphasized for the unemployed woman, to help
ensure financial independence. Child care options and parenting skills may be explored for the woman with children, and legal referrals made for those seeking custody, separation or divorce. Programs should be designed to assist women on a continuum from immediate to long-term needs.

Although the shelter may perceive success as a woman separating from her abuser, this may not be what the woman sees as success. Ending the relationship for some women is not an option. In light of the fact that so many women do return to the abuser, it is important to provide some kind of follow-up services in addition to sheltering. The shelter, if it cannot provide couples counseling, or individual counseling for the abused, should emphasize appropriate referrals upon exit, with encouragement for follow up by the client. Support groups sponsored by the shelter should be available to former residents, regardless of their intent to return to the abuser.

**Recommendations**

Further areas of study that could modify and extend the findings of the present study are:

1. Design a longitudinal study in which disposition is checked at 6-month intervals after shelter residence to determine the stability of living arrangements for all former residents.
2. Design a study in which all variables examined, i.e., financial dependence, can be put on a continuous scale, avoiding the restriction in range caused by dichotomous variables.

3. Identify what steps a shelter can take to help ensure economic independence of a battered woman.

4. Determine the relationship, if any, between the amount of exposure a woman has to a shelter, either through repeated residence, outreach counseling, or support groups, and the ability of the woman to leave the abuser.

5. Develop a follow-up study to see what effects the shelter experience has on the marital relationship when the woman returns to the abuser.

With limited funding available to shelters, it is important to continue research which can support their existence. By identifying the needs of battered women within the safe shelter context, service providers can design and implement programs that will more effectively meet these needs. Empirically based research can help members of the mental health profession develop viable interventions, and put an end to the violence so many women experience within their homes.
APPENDIX A

INTAKE FORM
| **DOB** / / | **Age** | **Date In** / / / | **Date Out** / / / |
| S.S.# | | | |
| **Outreach** | | | |
| **In Shelter** | | | |
| **Car Plate #** | | | |
| **Type of Car** | | | |

**A.V.A. INTAKE**

1. **Personal Info:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Home Phone</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Work Phone</th>
<th>Zip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referred by</th>
<th>Emergency Contact</th>
<th>Phone</th>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Full-time (35+ hours)</th>
<th>Part-time</th>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Income</th>
<th>Amount $</th>
<th>Medical Concerns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referral needed for medical care?</th>
<th>if yes, referral made to</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Access</th>
<th>Insurance (name of company)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship to batterer</th>
<th>spouse, former spouse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>partner, former partner, parent, child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other (please specify)</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previously received shelter services for DV?</th>
<th>if yes, when/where</th>
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<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous counseling?</th>
<th>if yes, when/where</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client Partner</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Nat. Amer.</th>
<th>Asian/Pac. Islander</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client</th>
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<tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client Partner</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. **Family Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partner's Name</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Zip</th>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment/Occupation</th>
<th>Amount of Income</th>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DOB / /</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>His Car</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children: Names</th>
<th>DOB</th>
<th>School Attending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medical Information on Children (specify which child)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Situation
Client's description of situation

4. Statement of Eligibility:

_________________________________________  ____________________________
Signature                                      Date

5. Check List:
Is woman seeking shelter due to abusive home situation?____
If yes, check all that apply:
  ______ physical abuse
  ______ mental/emotional abuse
  ______ threat of physical abuse
  ______ has not been battered
  ______ sexual abuse
  ______ child abuse by partner
  ______ police called in last incident
  ______ police arrested him in last incident
  ______ how many times was police involved before

Woman left abusive situation:
  ______ within last 24 hours
  ______ within last week
  ______ within last 1-4 weeks
  ______ within last 1-6 months
Woman has left abusive situation in the past ______ Yes ______ No
If yes, number of times ________

Domestic Violence ______ Assault (by stranger) ______
Economic Crisis ______ Child Abuse ______
Displacement ______ Sexual Assault ______
Veterans/Military Personnel ______
Excessive Alcohol Use self______ partner______
Excessive Drug Abuse self______ partner______
Prescription Drug Abuse self______ partner______
Drugs or alcohol used during last incident self______ partner______

6. Primary Client Needs:
   Housing ______ Transportation ______ Income ______
   Medical ______ Legal ______ Counseling ______

Special Needs:
   AFDC ______ WIDP (WIN) ______ WIC ______
   Food Stamps ______ Job Service ______
   Well Baby ______ Day Care ______

7. I have read and understood my rights as an AVA client and the shelter rules.

_________________________________________  ____________________________
Signature                                      Date
APPENDIX B

EXIT SUMMARY
EXIT SUMMARY

I. Termination Date

II. Reason for Termination of the Plan

III. Summary of Client's progress completing goals established at intake into the shelter:

IV. Client's plan after leaving the shelter:

V. Client's forwarding address, phone number, message phone, etc.
REFERENCES


Dalto, C. A. Battered women: Factors influencing whether or not former shelter residents return to the abusive situation. Dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 1983.


