

Domestic Violence Shelters: Survivors' Experiences

The National Domestic Violence Shelter Study

Washington Overview

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National Domestic Violence Shelter Study: Washington Overview

In 2007 and 2008, Washington took part in the National Shelter Study, a survey of survivors of domestic violence in eight states who were in shelter between October 2007 and March 2008. This study sampled the experiences of residents of 215 domestic violence shelter programs in eight states: Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Washington. 3,368 survivors participated nationally, and 366 of those survivors were from Washington.

The Washington survivors who participated in the National Shelter Study were very similar to the survivors around the country in many ways, including most demographics, their needs, and their overall rating of the help they received during their time in shelter.

A few differences between Washington survivors and other respondents were found. These include:

- Participating survivors of domestic violence from Washington were more likely to be Hispanic and multiracial than other participating survivors.
- Survivors in Washington were more likely to perceive the shelter space as comfortable and less likely to perceive that the other women in the shelter welcomed them.
- Washington's survivors had higher ratings of two outcomes for children: children feeling more supported and children being able to express their feelings without violence.
- Survivors from Washington had similar outcomes to the national sample, although they were slightly less likely to agree that they could achieve their goals and ask for help after their shelter stay.
- Participating Washington survivors were less likely to experience problems with transportation, finding privacy, time limits and curfew than participating survivors in other states, and more likely to experience problems with conflict with other women, child discipline, and chores.

This overview provides basic results of the study for Washington's survivors only. Findings from the complete study can be obtained from the authors.

Overview of the National Domestic Violence Shelter Study

The National Domestic Violence Shelter Study was designed to meet the following goals:

- 1) Obtain information from a diverse sample of domestic violence survivors about their experiences in residential shelter programs.
- 2) Learn more about what domestic violence survivors want when they come to shelter programs.
- 3) Learn more about the extent to which survivors have had their expectations met during their shelter stay.
- 4) Learn more about survivors' assessment of immediate outcomes associated with their shelter stay.
- 5) Learn more about how survivors' experiences, needs and immediate outcomes vary across demographic and shelter program characteristics.
- 6) Develop recommendations for shelter programs across the country for how they might improve their services.

Shelter residents were asked to complete two brief surveys—one at the time of admission (Shelter 1) and a different one as close as possible to shelter exit (Shelter 2).

Overview of Washington's Participation

A total of **366 survivors** in Washington participated in the National Shelter Study. Of those, 194 submitted a Shelter 1 form when they entered a shelter, 103 submitted a Shelter 2 form when they left shelter, and 69 submitted both Shelter 1 and Shelter 2.

Twenty-nine of Washington's shelters participated, submitting between two and 52 surveys each. Most of the surveys were completed in English, but 11% were completed in Spanish, with additional surveys received in Korean and Vietnamese.

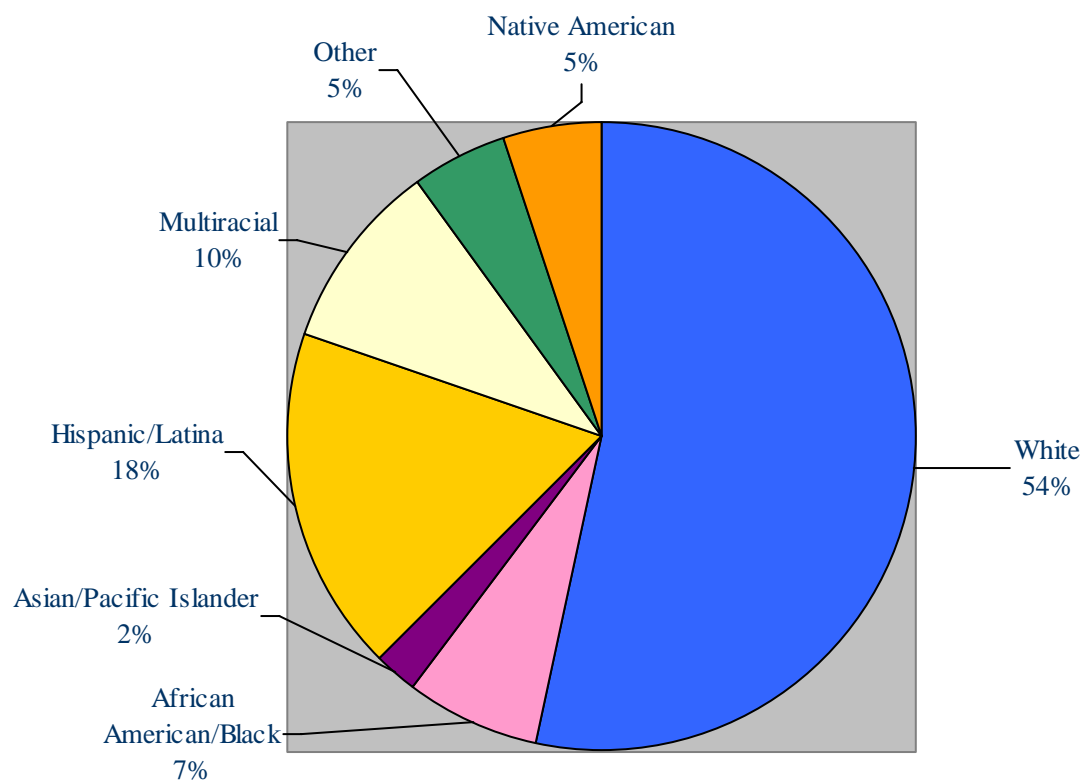
Who Took Part in the National Shelter Study?

Overview of Survivor Participants

The largest group of Washington’s survey respondents were white (54%), and between the ages of 25 and 49 (75%). Of those who answered items relating to children, 30% had just one child and 25% had two children. Eighty- nine percent described their sexual orientation as heterosexual/straight. The level of education completed by the survivors was varied, with 28% having graduated high school or earned a G.E.D. and 34% reporting having completed ‘some college.’ All except one of the survivors who participated in this study from Washington were female.

Figure 1

Racial or Ethnic Background



In their own words, ethnicities of survivors who participated include: African, American, Chinese, “everything,” German, Indian, Irish and Irish American, Italian, Jewish, Latina Basque, Lakota native, Lebanese, Middle Eastern, “mixed,” Nez Perce, Polish immigrant, Tlingkit and Haida/Alaska Native, and White American Indian.

Figure 2

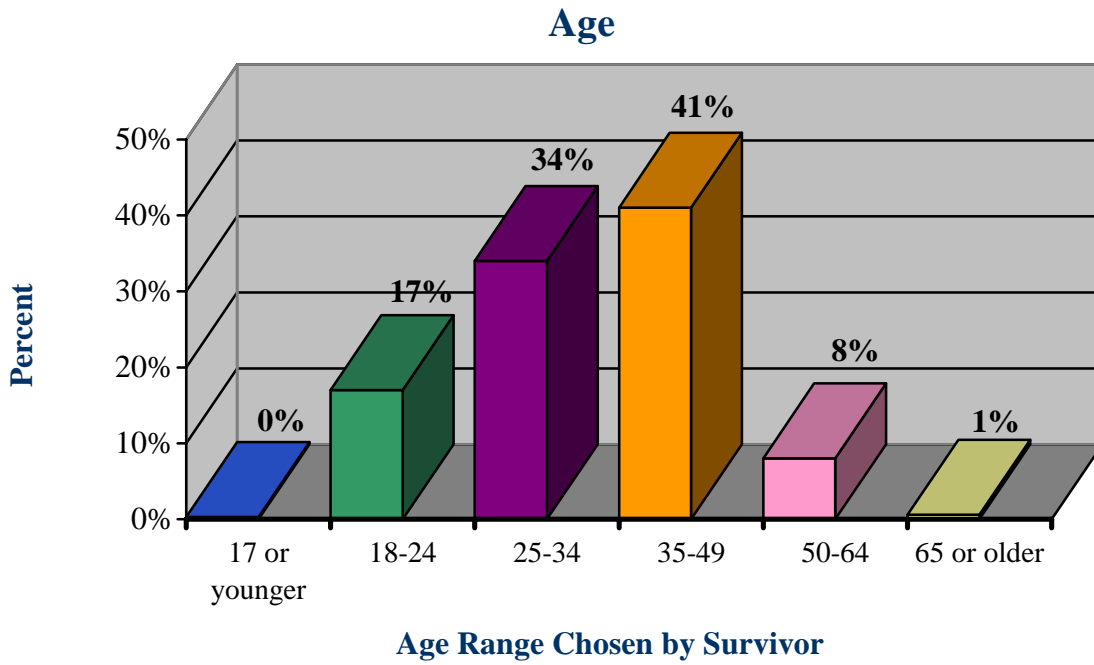


Figure 3

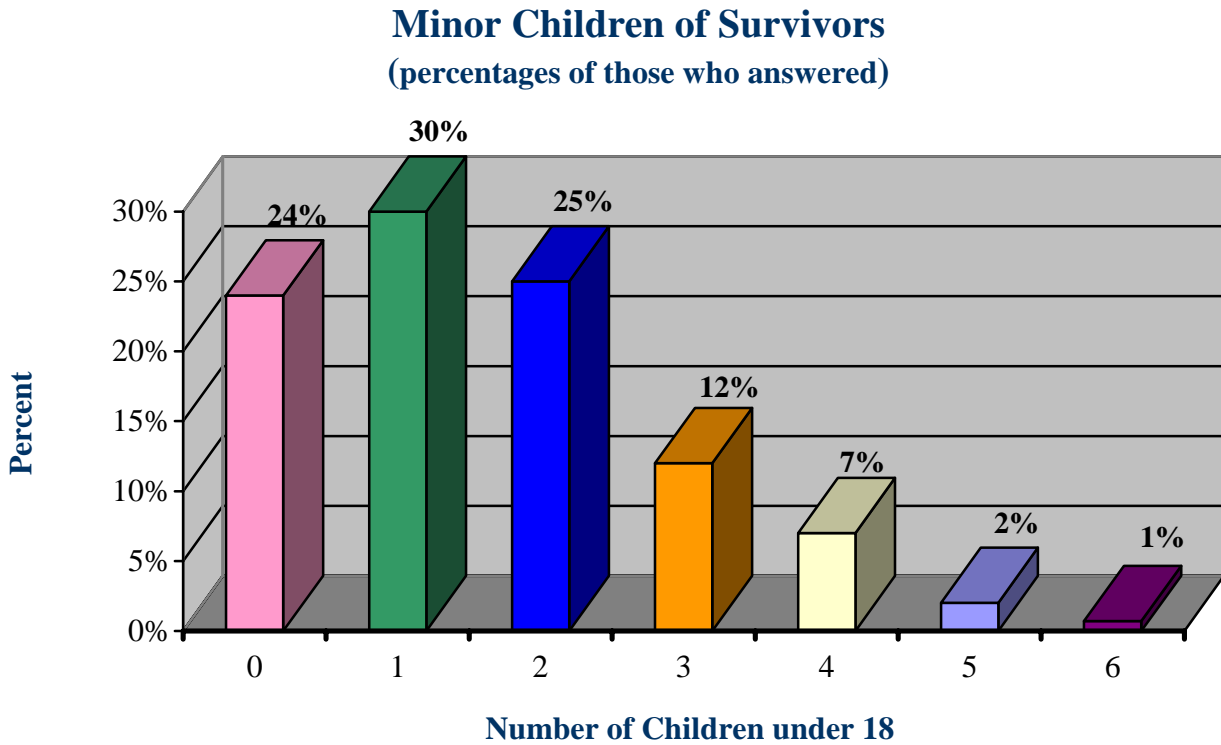
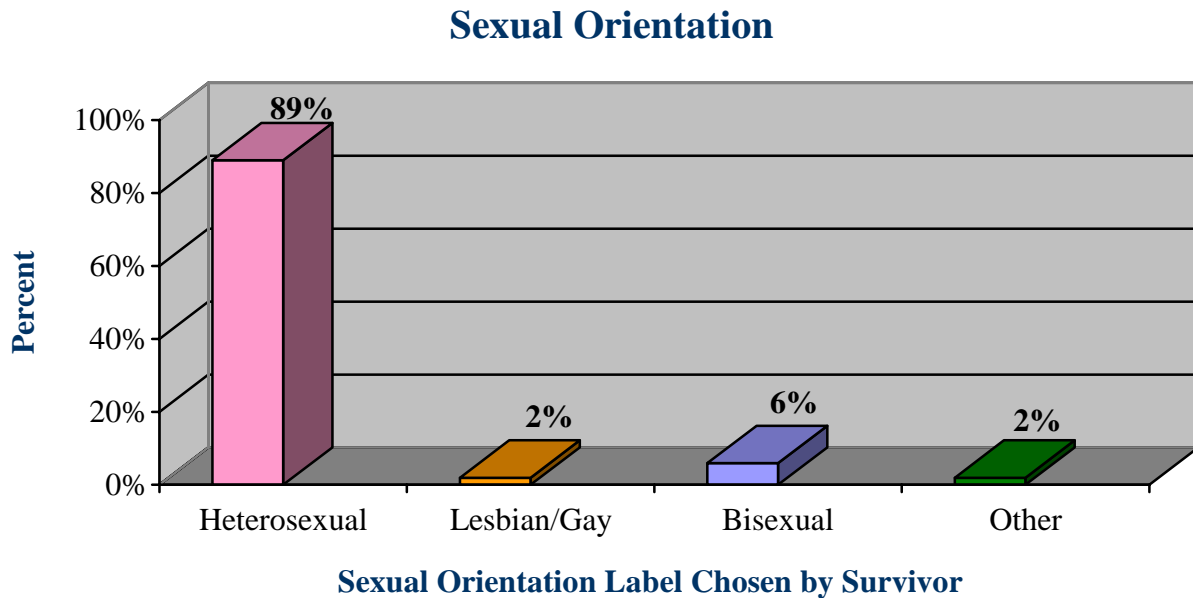


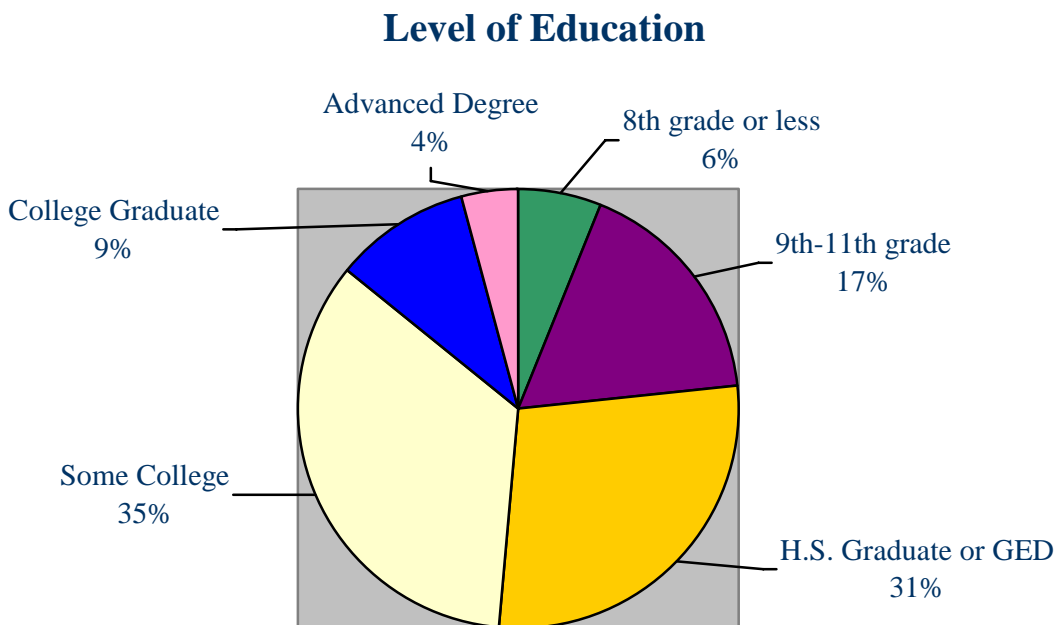
Figure 4



Those who chose “other” sexuality explained their choice in words such as “normal-right now I don’t,” “thinking about going gay,” “undecided,” and the following statement:

Due to the abuse- I have lost my sexual desire and am mostly repulsed by it. I don't identify with my sexual side-I don't have a sexual side anymore-when before it was a large part of my joy and identity even now it simply no longer exists - which makes me pretty sad to know that.

Figure 5



Overview of Program Participants

Washington's programs completed a brief two-page information sheet as part of their participation in the National Shelter Study. In addition, participating coalitions provided Census-based information about the population and demographic characteristics of the counties served by each shelter. The two sets of data, one describing individual program characteristics and the other, programmatic environment, provided information about the context for survivors' shelter experiences.

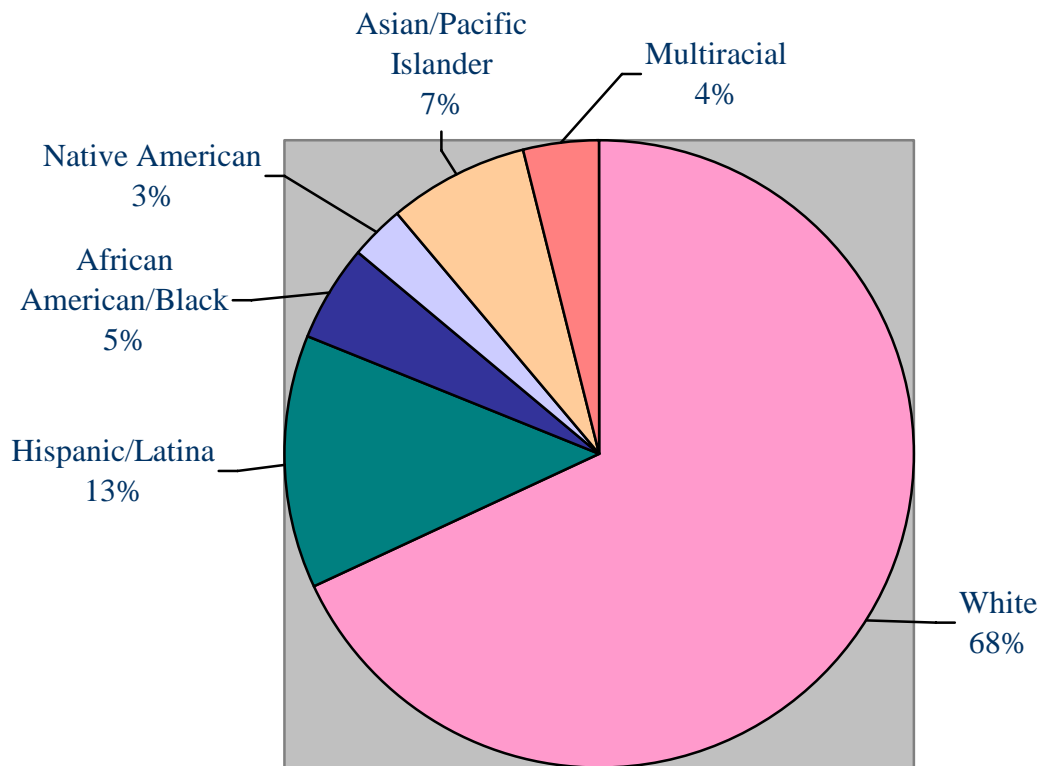
Eighty-five percent (33) of Washington's 43 shelters participated in the shelter study.

Number of staff employed by program

Washington's programs are staffed with a minimum of three staff and a maximum of 25. The median shelter has a staff of nine. Sixty-three percent of shelters have between six and 14 staff members.

Figure 6

Racial or Ethnic Background of Shelter Staff



Number of volunteers per month

All except one program had volunteers who assisted the staff on a monthly basis. The minimum number of volunteers was one and the maximum number was 60, with a median of eight. Half (50%) of programs had between three and ten volunteers per month.

Language capacity

Figure 7

LANGUAGE	% of programs with staff	% of programs with volunteers
American Sign Language	17	12
Korean	4	8
Mandarin Chinese	4	8
Russian	8	4
Spanish	75	33
Vietnamese	4	0
Other languages	63	12

Other foreign languages in which staff are fluent include Cambodian, Filipino, French, Japanese, Nepali, Samoan, and Tagalog. Only one program reported no staff or volunteer capacity in languages other than English.

Total capacity of shelter

Washington's shelters vary in capacity between six and 57 beds, with an average of 18 beds. The median number of residents in the past year was 91 women (up to a maximum of 865) and 57 children (a maximum of 1,242). Seven shelters had hosted men, up to a maximum of eleven in the last year.

Time Limits

The time limits for reporting shelters in Washington vary from 21 to 150 days. Sixty-five percent said their time limits were determined all or in part by the program's policies, 35% by funders, and 33% by other factors. Other factors included the individual's ability to find funding and housing, communication with board members, and individual needs.

Services offered

Of the six services listed in the questionnaire, the average shelter offered five of them (minimum of 3, maximum of 6). Of the nine types of advocacy listed, the average shelter offered eight (minimum of 2, maximum of 9). Figures 8 and 9 show the details.

Figure 8

Shelter Services Offered

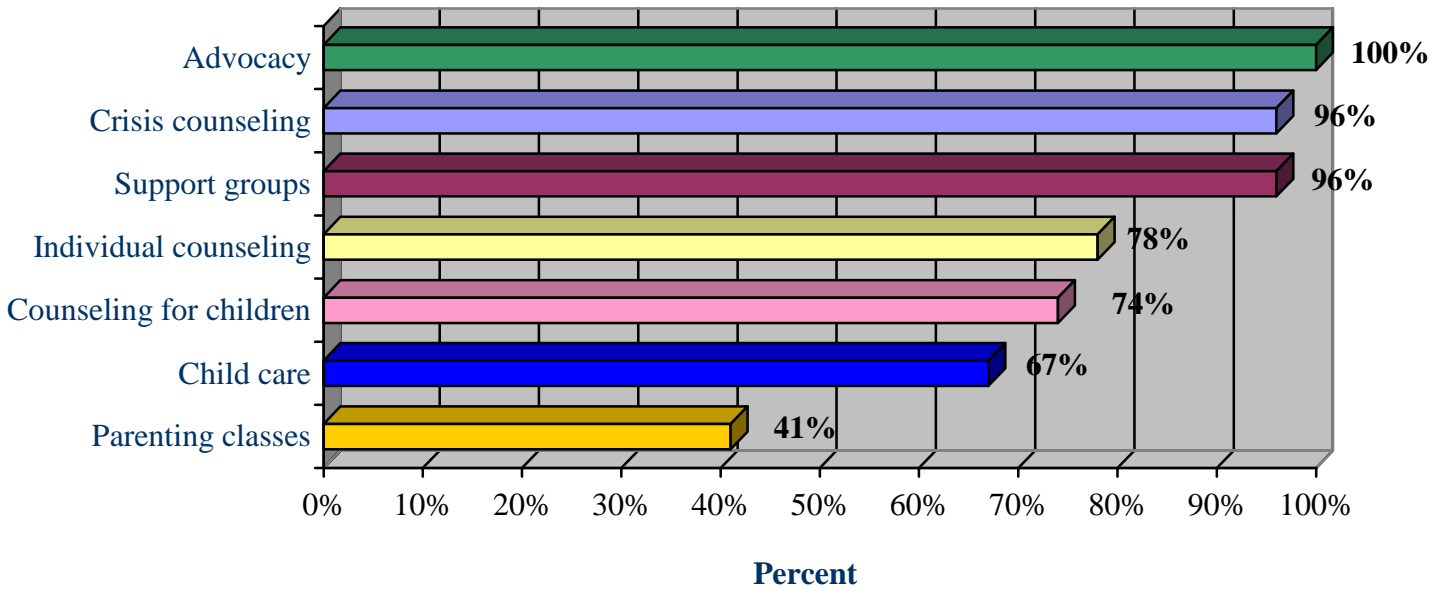
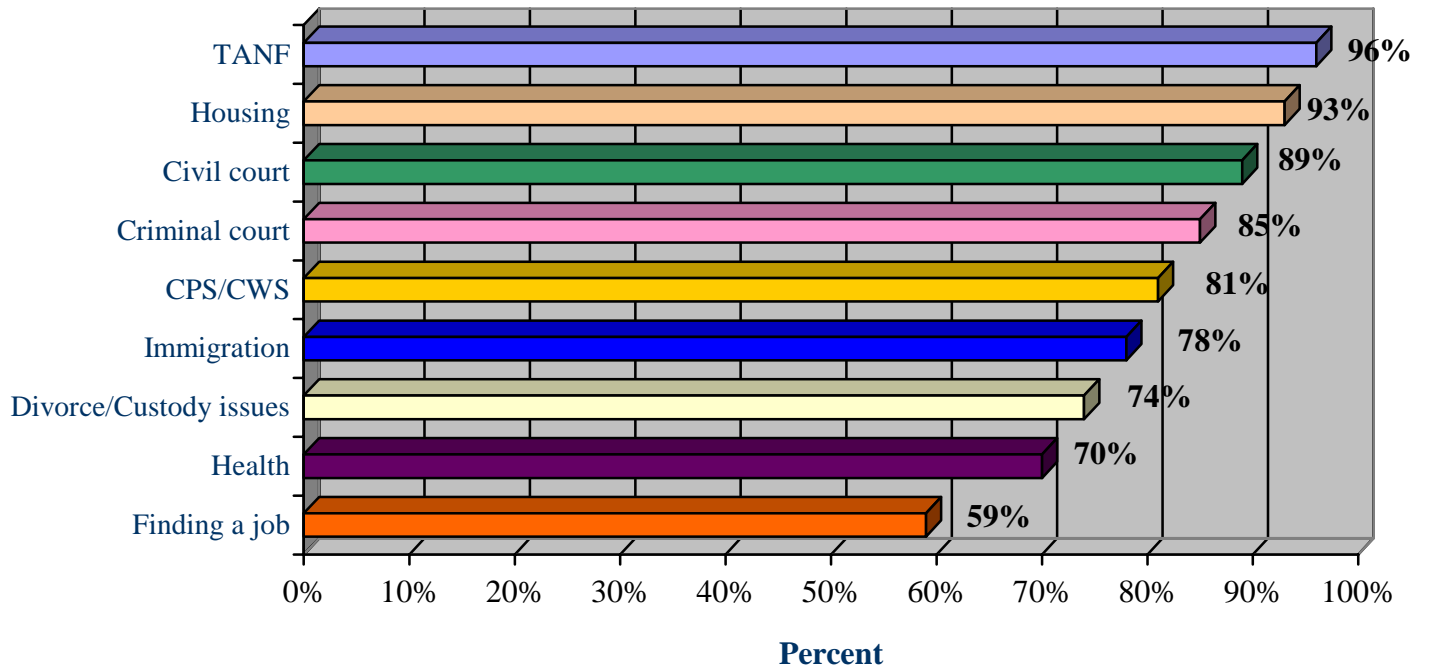


Figure 9

Advocacy Offered at Shelters



Other than those listed, services offered included domestic violence education, homeless prevention, a no contact order class art therapy group, housing, self-sufficiency, supervised visitations, alternative response services, case management, children’s art group, crisis line, goal sessions, kids club, and interpreter services. Advocacy included sexual assault advocacy, assistance in obtaining food, clothing, and gas, substance abuse, and systems advocacy.

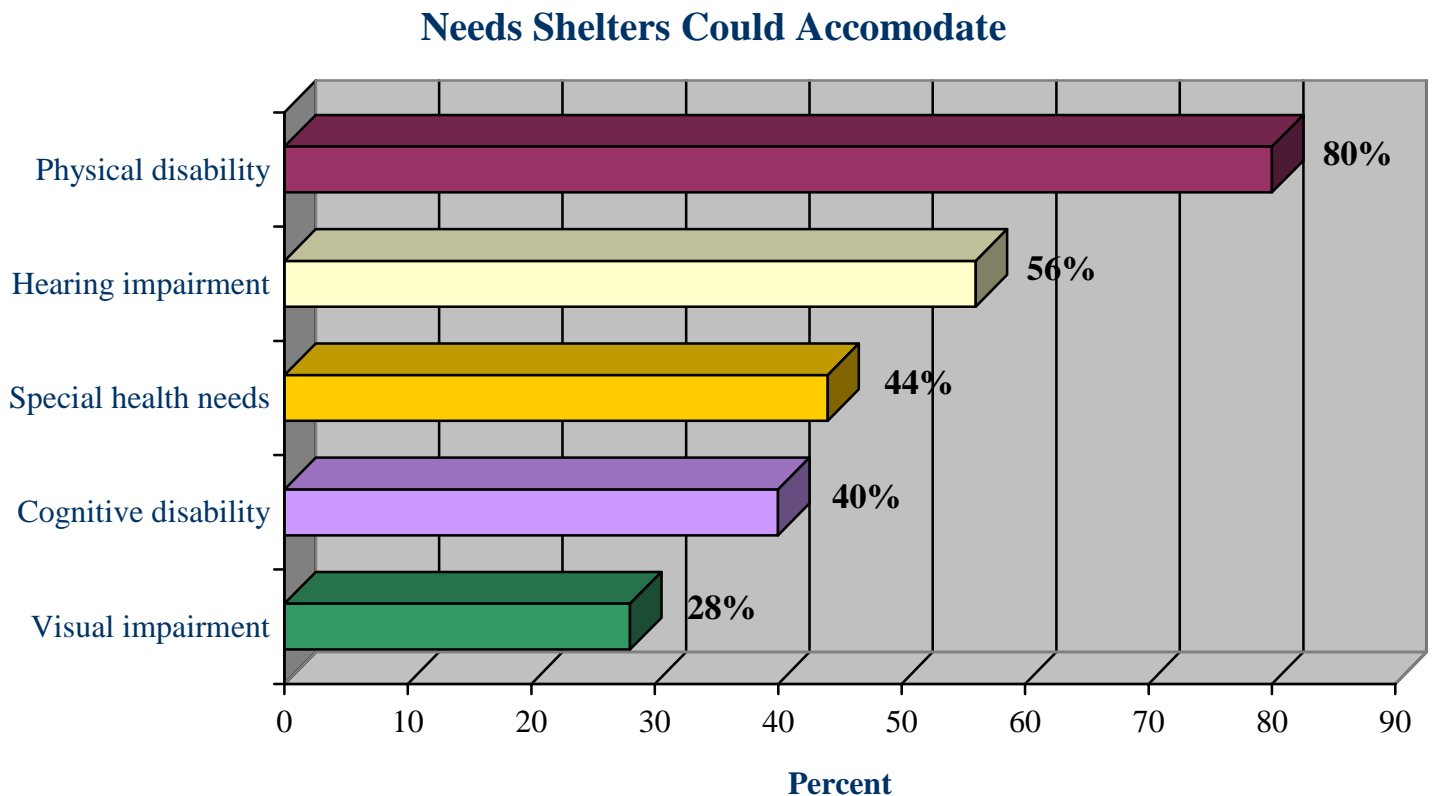
Services for specialized populations included services for Spanish speaking survivors, hiring all-bilingual staff, services for those with chemical dependency, Hispanic outreach, and immigration services.

Disabilities

Shelters were asked about their population of and capacity to serve residents with disabilities. Fifty percent were not sure what percentage of their residents had disabilities. Those that could make a guess chose between 5% and 100% with a median of 10%.

They were asked about their ability to address the needs of survivors with physical disabilities, cognitive disabilities, visual impairment, hearing impairment, and special health needs. Twenty-four percent could accommodate all of these needs; 24% could only accommodate one, and 12% could accommodate none. The average number of needs that could be accommodated by any given shelter was two.

Figure 10



Population information gathered from the Census Bureau

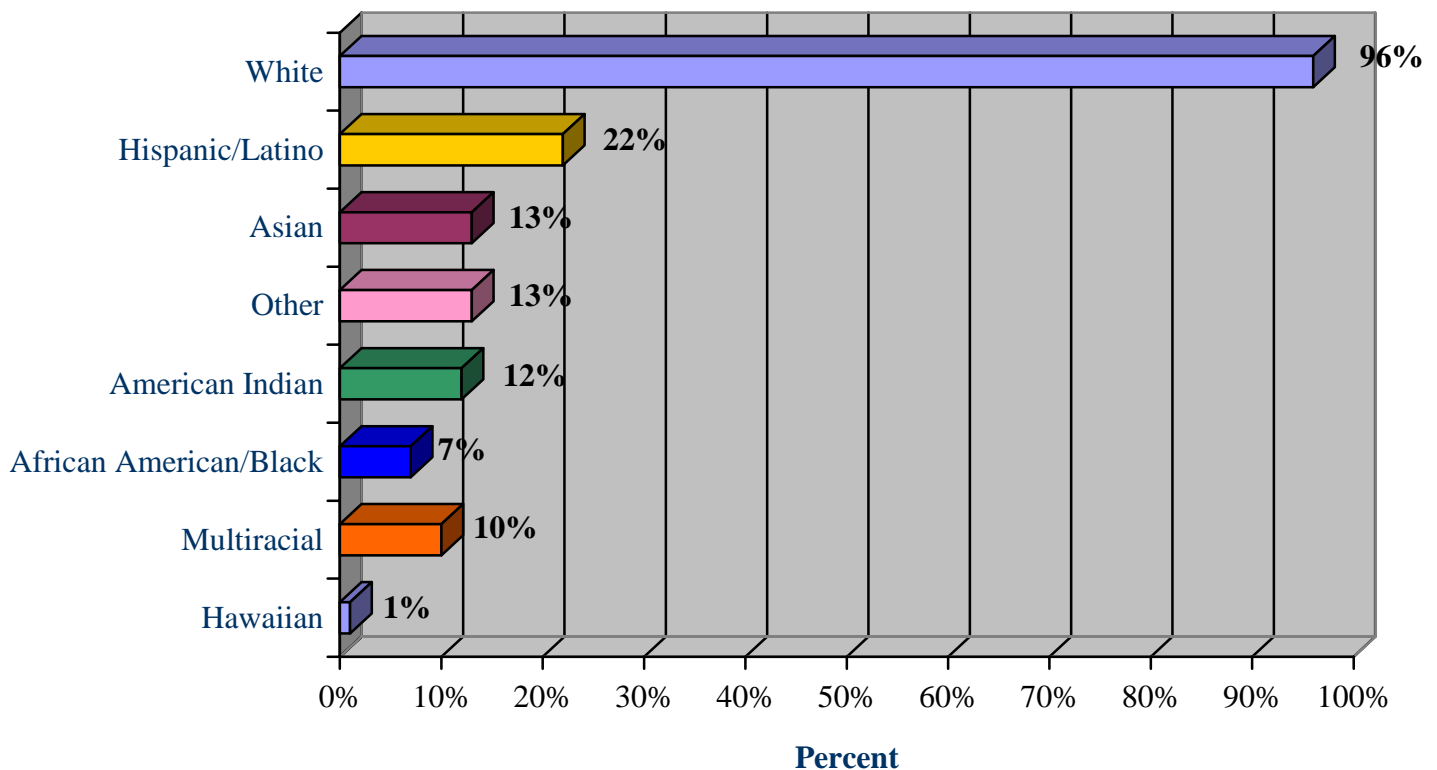
The total population of each shelter's service area had a median of 86,801, with a minimum of 3,824 and a maximum of 1,755,818. The median age of the population in each area was 38, with a minimum of 25 and a maximum of 47.

Overall, the household size in each area averaged 2.44 and the average family size was 3.01. In the median area in this state, 88% had a high school degree or more, with 24% having a bachelor's degree or higher. Approximately 17% of the population in each area had some sort of disability. Eight percent were foreign born, and 11% were non-English speaking. Each area averaged 62% in the labor force, with a median household income of \$43,802, a median family income of \$53,034, and a per capita income of \$22,258. Nine percent of families and 13% of individuals live below the federal poverty line.

The racial/ethnic background of the service areas varied widely. The largest percentage of racial/ethnic groups in an area are as follows:

Figure 11

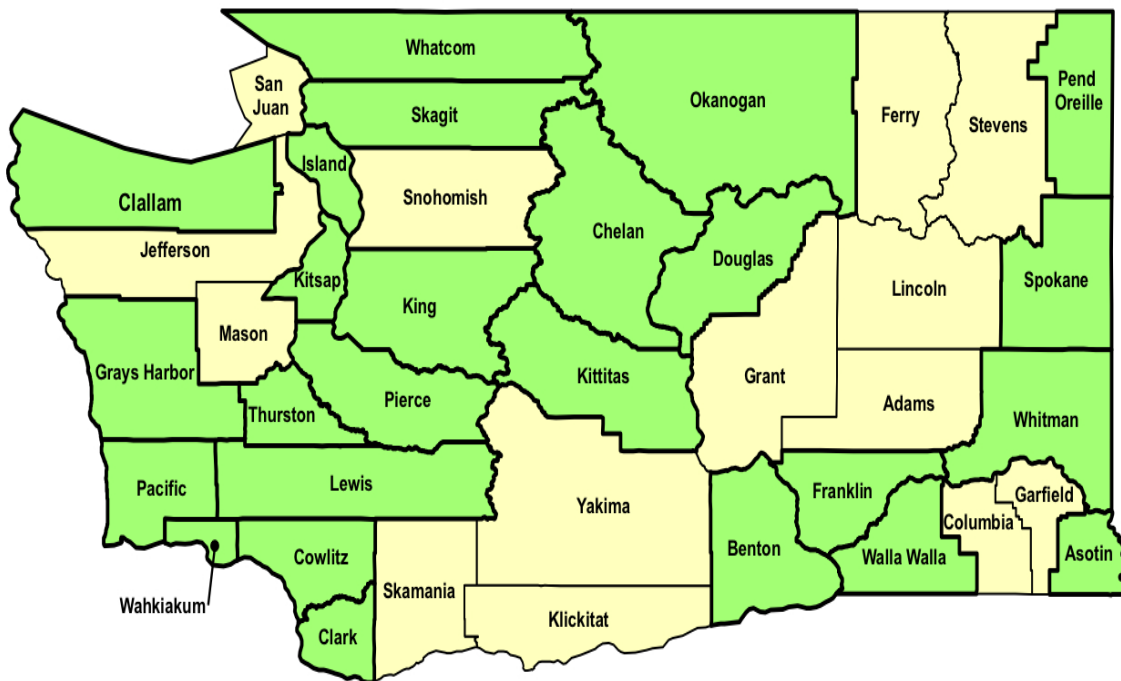
Percentage of Area with Largest Population



The following map shows the area of the state of Washington that was covered by the shelters participating in this study. It is not intended to represent the area of the state that has available domestic violence services.

Figure 12

National Shelter Study Participating Counties in Washington



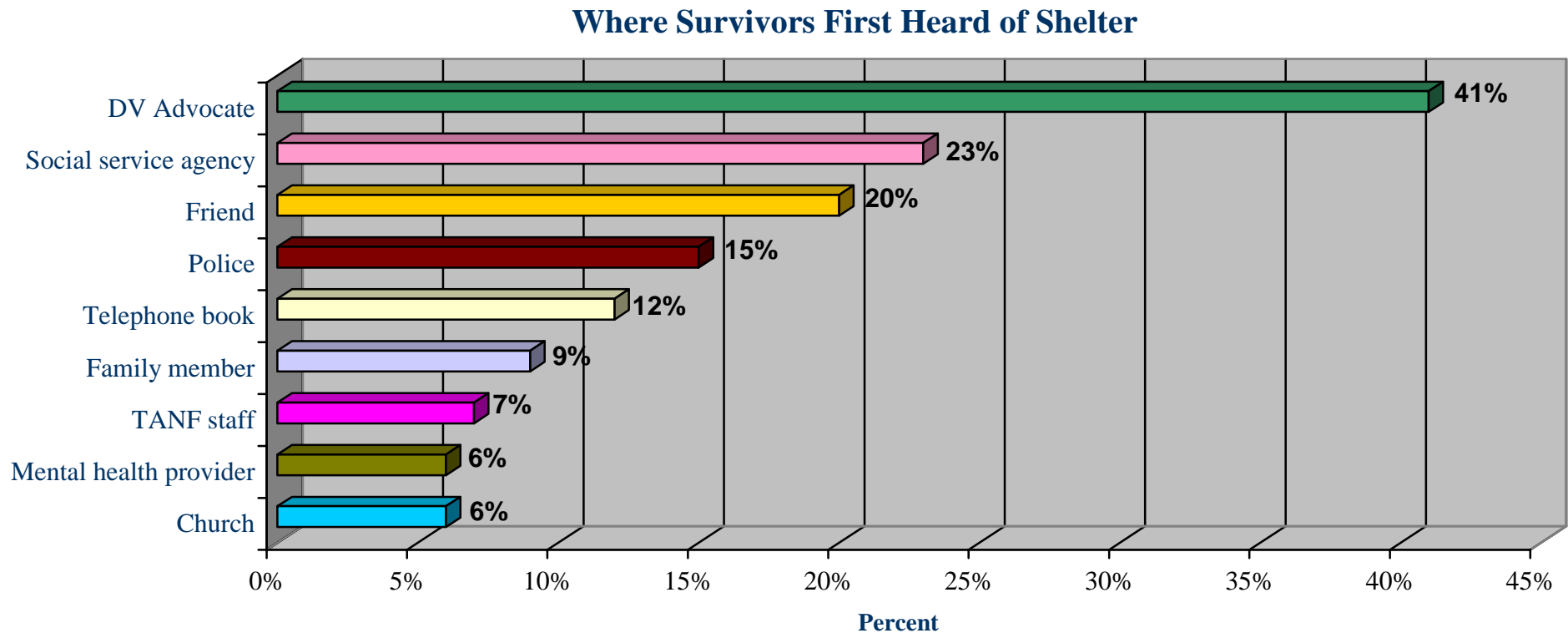
Disclaimer: This map has been produced by Paul J. Bennett MSW of the University of Connecticut using ArcGIS 9.2 by ESRI. Reproduction of this map without permission of its creator is strictly prohibited. The data displayed by this map was obtained from the Washington State Department of Transportation and is open to interpretation.

REPORTS FROM SURVIVORS – Before coming to shelter

Where did survivors first hear of the shelter?

Survivors were asked about their path to shelter: where and when had they heard of the shelter, and if they had ever stayed before, or had concerns about shelter before they came. By far, the most common place for Washington’s survivors to hear of a shelter was from a Domestic Violence advocate (41%). Other common sources included staff of a social service agency (23%), a friend (20%), the police (15%), or a telephone book or directory (12%).

Figure 13

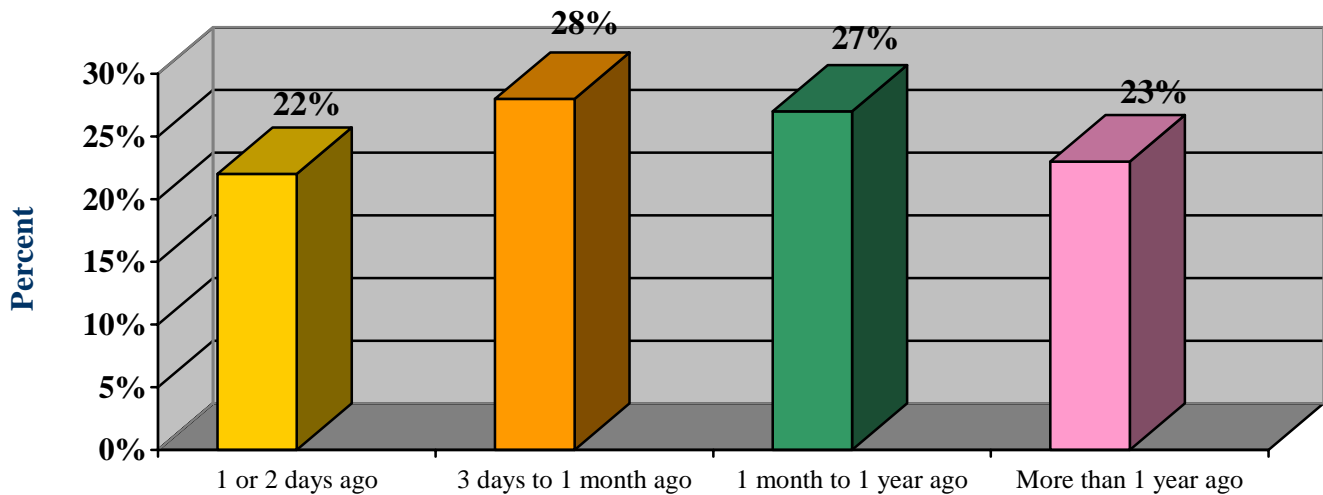


When did survivors first hear of the shelter?

The typical survivor had heard about the shelter within a month of her entry (50%), but a significant number had first heard of the shelter up to a year before (27%) or more than a year before (23%).

Figure 14

Time Frame in Which Survivors First Heard of Shelter

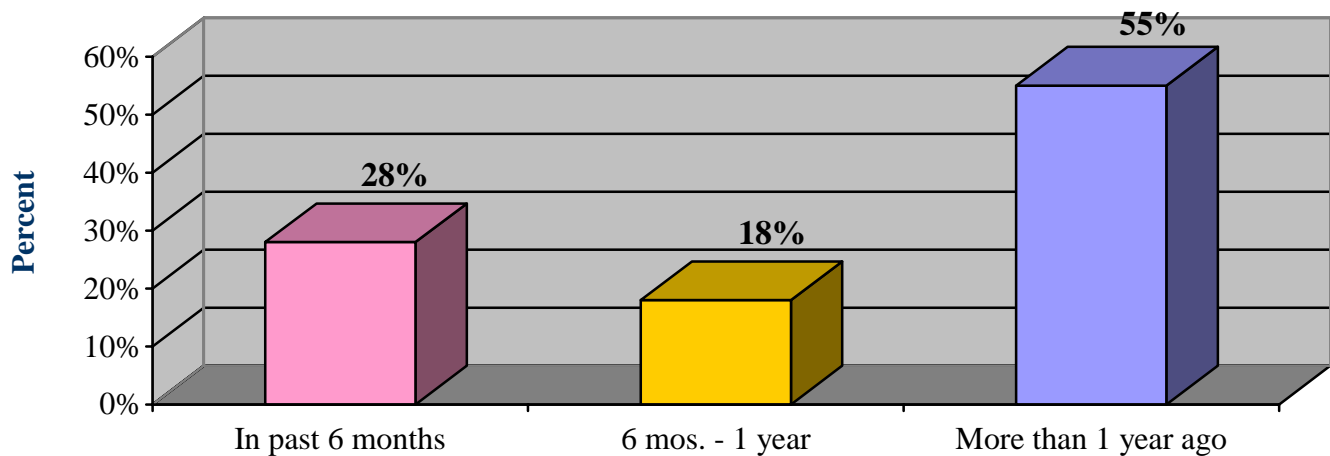


Had survivors stayed in the shelter before?

Twenty-two percent of survivors had stayed in shelter before their current visit. Their previous visits ranged from the past few months to more than a year ago.

Figure 15

How Long Ago Survivor Stayed at Shelter



What did survivors think this shelter would do for them?

Survivors were asked to describe in their own words what they had expected from the shelter. Following are some of the words of the survivors describing their expectations:

Safety

- A safe place to stay and help me transition to living on my own.
- Came here after my husband hurt my son. I didn't know what they could do for me other than keep us safe.
- Freedom with safety.
- Give me a safe stress free place to get away from an abusive situation.
- Help aid me in hiding from my abuser.
- Help me get away from a crazy man.
- Make me safe and save my life.
- Make sure I didn't have to go back.
- Protect me from husband, and outside world or friends.
- Provide a safe place for my unborn child and myself.
- Safety when I got out of the hospital and ran out of couches.

Housing

- Give me a place to sleep out of cold.
- Give me a roof over my head in a place my abuser couldn't find.
- Help find housing and get brand new start.
- Help me get a job and permanent housing!
- Keep me safe and help me find permanent housing.
- Provide a safe shelter for me and daughter, help with getting on housing list.
- Provide a safe temporary shelter and help with possible transitional housing.
- Provide safe housing until violent person moved out, locks changed...

Services

- Advocate services in order to achieve goals to get a job and get housing.
- Get my kids away from an abusive person, help me with the resources to maintain employment and shelter.
- Help me get housing; counseling, work on not being a victim.
- Help me prepare for a new way of living abuse free.
- Help me with a place, food, clothing, and later with a job.
- Help me with the problem that I had and help me with having the custody of my daughter so that I could take my daughter with me to Mexico.
- I decided to come here because I needed someone to listen to me and help me.
- Protect me listen to me support me with current DV issues.
- To help me not feel I did something wrong.
- To provide me assistance, especially the green card.
- Walk me through my legal rights, explain all of my options.

Didn't know

- I didn't think it had more resources.
- I was clueless I thought maybe a place to stay.
- Nothing really.
- That they send immigration on me because I don't have papers.

Concerns about contacting the shelter

There are many reasons survivors may hesitate before deciding to come to a shelter. Of the Washington survivors in this study, 28% had concerns about contacting the shelter.

In their words, those concerns included:

- Because of it being Korean, they are discriminating, they show favoritism.
- Concerned it would be too restrictive to work with and may not look good in custody trial.
- Didn't know if could come back again.
- Embarrassed, unsure of what available.
- Fear of getting hurt, due to past experience of people in position of power using it to cause further damage on my life.
- Fear that he would find me and hurt the other women here.
- I didn't want to make things worse for any in my family.
- I thought I would be allowed to stay for only three days.
- I was afraid they would take my son away.
- I was afraid that if I did come here I would back out of leaving him.
- I wasn't sure if I was ready to leave him.
- In ignorance, thought my son would be less affected if we just went off on a vacation alone.
- People finding out.
- Rejection and discrimination.
- Scared I could be in trouble for not keeping my kids safe and they could get taken away if I told anyone.
- Scared-want to be self sufficient and not have to ask for help to be safe.
- Stereotypes on victims of Domestic Violence.
- That I'd failed at life, love once again.
- That they would say no.
- That they wouldn't treat me good because I am Hispanic.
- Thought it would be cement and cots.

Unsuccessful attempts to come to shelter before

Thirteen percent of the survivors in this study had tried to stay in shelter before, but were unable to do so. The majority had been turned away because there was no room in the shelter. Other reasons included:

- Because my son was hospitalized for pneumonia.
- Can't leave my house.
- I had a child over the age of 13 (boy) so I stayed at hotel.
- I have been waiting a month for an opening.
- I was told that because I wasn't "unsafe", I had to stay somewhere else, which wouldn't take me because they had a 6 month minimum stay. I was "safe" because I had a restraining order, but I still had no where to live and was unemployed.
- Staff said I wasn't a good match. I applied and they said I wasn't going to fit in.

What would you have done if the shelter didn't exist?

Some of the most telling and memorable words from survivors came in answer to this question. In their own words, they said that if the shelter did not exist, they would:

Be dead

- Commit suicide (kill myself).
- Die or be killed.
- Honestly, killed myself.
- I don't know, maybe I be death by now. Thanks for the services.
- I honestly believe his family would have killed me or hurt me badly.
- I would have killed myself and I didn't want to live anymore.
- Maybe not be alive anymore.
- Stay in a cheap motel and kill myself.
- Still be on the street, probably a dead domestic abuse victim.

Be in danger

- Been running scared from place to place hoping he couldn't/wouldn't find me.
- I would have probably kept being in a domestic violence situation until I had enough money to leave.
- I would have had to stay where I was at and make up with the man that hit me. This would have meant being abused again.
- I would have stayed in a bad situation and taught my daughter the wrong way to live.
- I would probably still be in my abusive relationship, feel trapped, no way out.
- Keep on running or depending on how bad running was I would go back.
- My abuser would stalk and kill me!
- Probably stuck it out were I was so my kids had a place to stay.
- Stay with abusive partner and other abusive people in my boyfriends home.

Be homeless

- Be on the streets living under a bridge.
- Been homeless, on the streets or sleeping on the floor at the only other available shelter with about 20 other women and their children.
- Been totally homeless with no opportunity to save to get back on my feet. I would have had to let my children live with their dad.
- I have no imagination that can describe it. I would walk the streets and sleep in a sleeping bag as homeless do.
- I might have been homeless again (have been 5 times before).
- I would be homeless or our family would be split up and my son [would be] on his own.
- Slept in my car and go hungry until payday.
- Slept in my car with my daughter-thank God we have a vehicle for a backup plan.

Other options

- Go to the homeless mission.
- Had to leave town and my job.
- I don't know, I might have tried a friend or motel.
- I would have faked my own death and fled to another country.
- I would have gone to stay with friends but going from house to house and then eventually ended up in a shelter. But not as nice as this one.
- I would have had to make other choices that I really didn't like.
- Keep looking for another until we got in somewhere, otherwise I do not know.
- Look to my grandparents for their financial support to move.
- Looked for another, also-needs to be shelter from women with teen boys.
- Probably go to my brother's house, but it would have caused him problems.
- Try to find temp place out of town with friends but I would lost my custody of my oldest son.

Mental health consequences

- Continue with the destructive relationship. Not be capable of pulling out of depression.
- Cried, lost my children, continued to live in pain and fear
- I was out of resources and I probably would have had a complete emotional mental breakdown. I would have been very cold and wet.
- Probably go crazy or keep taking his abuse.

Don't know

- I don't know I feel like crying thinking about it!
- I don't know. Keep praying.
- I really don't know. I came here pretty lost and confused.
- In reality I don't know but I would have been insecure and in fear.
- Not have a safe place to stay, the other shelters won't let you stay if you are a D.V. survivor because it endangers other residents.

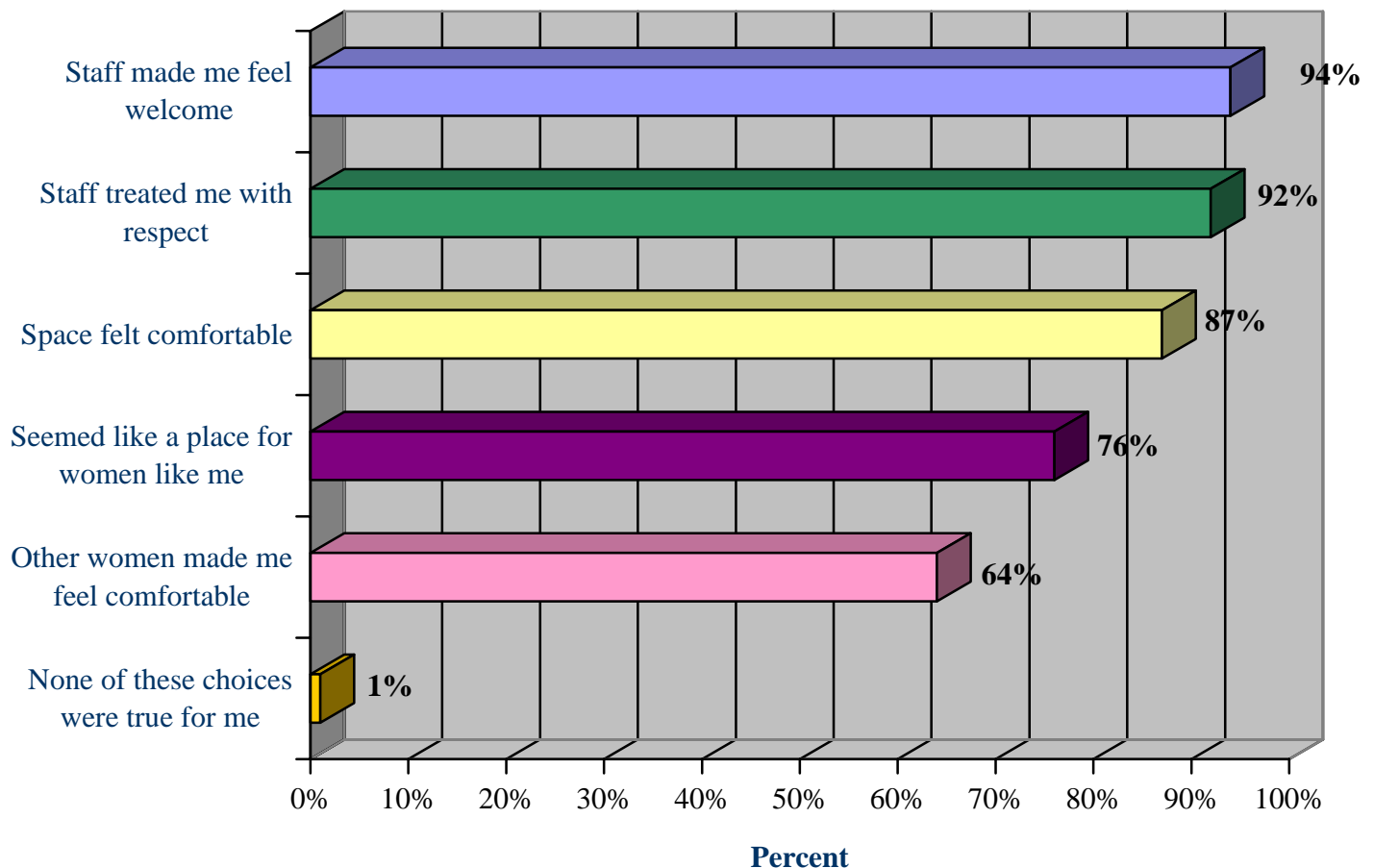
REPORTS FROM SURVIVORS – Arriving at shelter

First Impressions of the shelter

Survivors were asked about their impressions of the shelter upon entry. These first impressions often determine whether women remain in the shelter and help set the tone for their time in shelter. Most women had very positive first impressions of the shelter, with 94% feeling welcomed by staff, and 92% feeling the staff treated them with respect. Only 64% felt the other women made them feel comfortable and 76% that the shelter seemed a place for women like them. A minimal 1% said that none of these options were true for them.

Figure 16

First Impressions of Shelter



Needs in shelter at entry

Survivors were given a list of 38 possible needs they might want to have fulfilled during their time in shelter. These needs ranged from safety for themselves and their children to financial needs, such as housing and help with managing money, to legal assistance, to emotional support and counseling. On entry, each resident chose an average of 16 needs out of the 38 options provided. The top ten needs are shown below, and all 38 are shown in Figure 18 on the following page.

Figure 17

Needs in Shelter at Entry

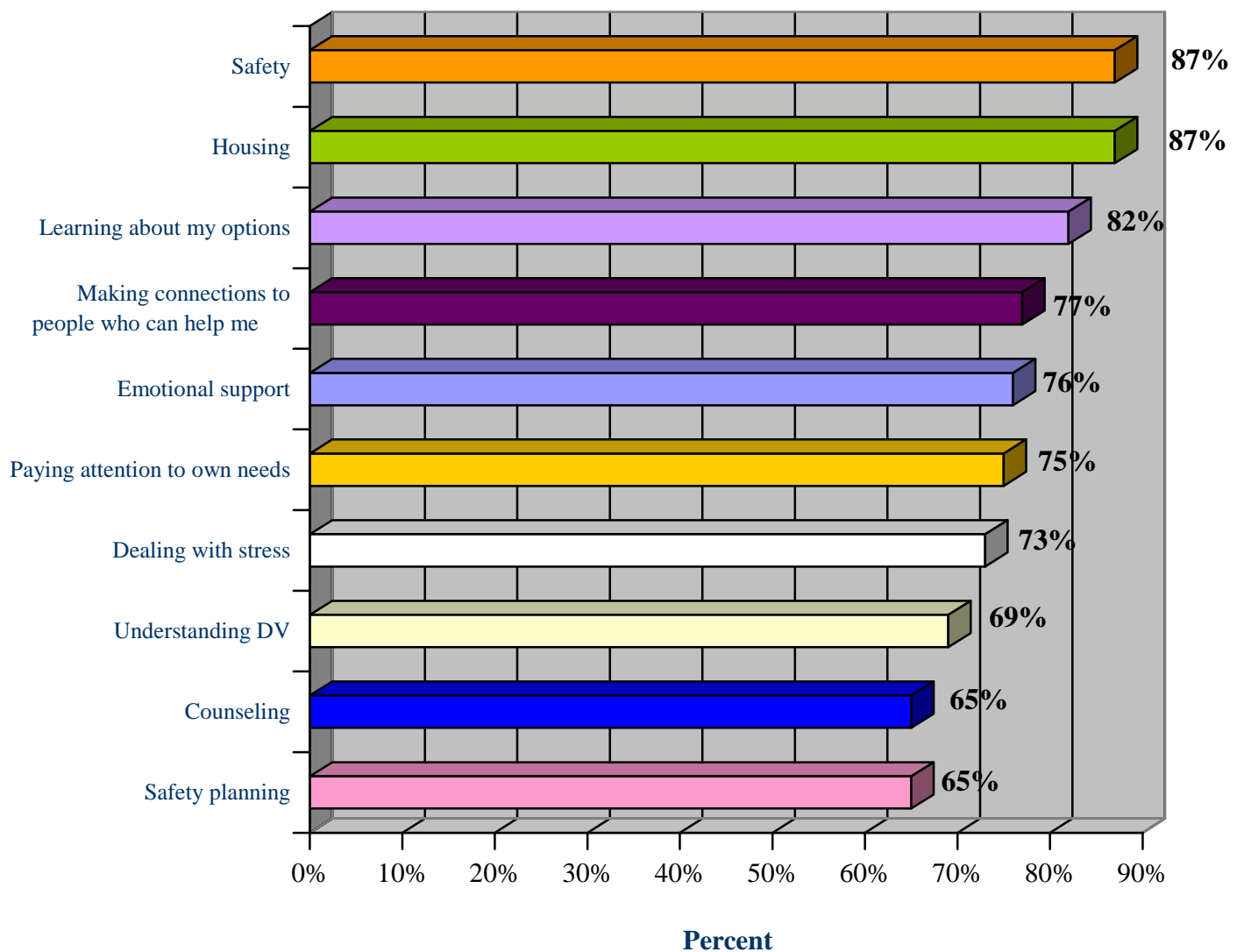


Figure 18

NEED	Percentage who chose
Safety	87
Housing	87
Learning about my options	82
Making connections to people who can help me	77
Emotional support	76
Paying attention to my own needs	75
Dealing with stress	73
Understanding about domestic violence	69
Counseling	65
Safety planning	65
Transportation	54
Safety for my children	53
Support from other women	53
A job/job training	52
Paying attention to my children's needs	50
Leaving my relationship	49
Education/school for myself	49
My health issues	47
Non-TANF benefits	43
Reconnecting with my community	41
Budgeting/managing money	40
Responding to my children when they are upset or causing trouble	32
Counseling for my children	32
Welfare/TANF	31
Education/school for my children	29
Child care	27
My abuse-related injuries	26
Disability-related issues	26
Restraining order	23
Divorce	23
My children's health issues	19
Custody	19
Child protective services	15
Immigration	14
Child welfare system	13
My abuser's arrest	12
My own arrest	4

Items in bold are included in Figure 17

Needs of mothers on entry

Since needs of women with children might be significantly different from women without children, needs on entry of the 76% of respondents who are mothers were analyzed separately. The needs specifically related to mothers are listed below and are shown bolded with all needs in the following chart.

Figure 19

Needs of Mothers at Entry

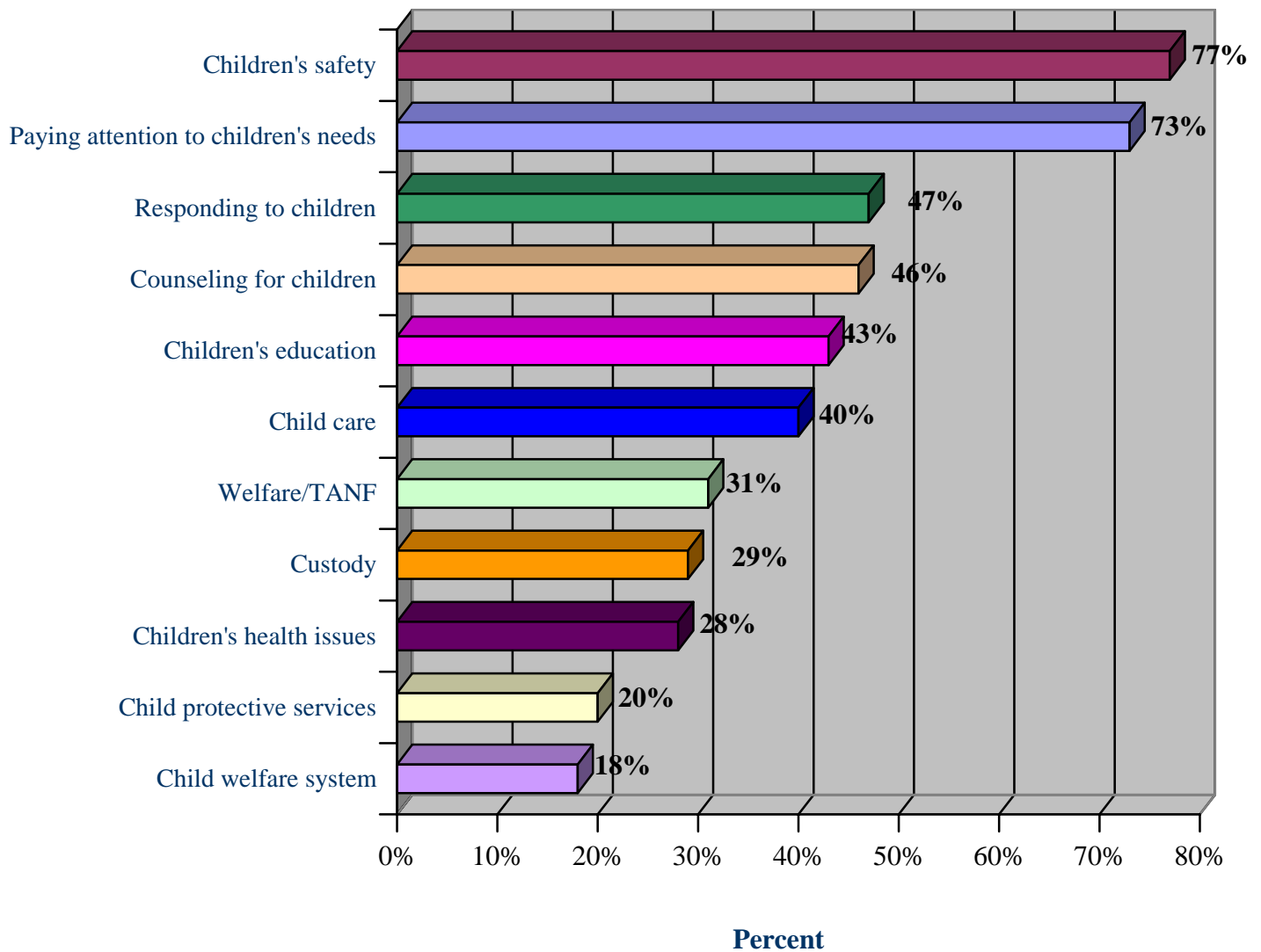


Figure 20

NEED	% of mothers who said YES
Safety	86
Housing	86
Learning about my options	78
Safety for my children	77
Making connections to people who can help me	75
Emotional support	75
Paying attention to my own needs	73
Paying attention to my children's needs	73
Dealing with stress	71
Understanding about domestic violence	64
Counseling	64
Safety planning	61
A job/job training	55
Transportation	52
Education/school for myself	49
Support from other women	48
Responding to my children when they are upset or causing trouble	47
Leaving my relationship	46
Counseling for my children	46
Non-TANF benefits	43
Education/school for my children	43
Child care	40
Reconnecting with my community	39
My health issues	37
Budgeting/managing money	32
Welfare/TANF	31
Custody	29
My children's health issues	28
Divorce	24
Restraining order	22
My abuse-related injuries	20
Disability-related issues	20
Child protective services	20
Child welfare system	18
Immigration	14
My abuser's arrest	8
My own arrest	3

Items in bold are included in Figure 19

What made you feel most comfortable?

Survivors were asked what about the shelter made them feel the most comfortable.

In their own words, that included:

- 24 hour case manager availability.
- Alarm system through the night.
- All the positive support from all advocates.
- Being able to talk; being reassured every day. Self esteem better.
- Being around others so I do not feel so isolated. Being responsible for myself only.
- Case manager and other women in house, my room and the other women.
- Every one was nice and understanding.
- Everything especially being able to have quiet time and then going over my thoughts with staff.
- Freedom of choice.
- Friendly comforting staff. Help me feel I'm not alone, and I did the right thing leaving my abusive marriage.
- Having each other.
- Healthy families, staff, being connected with people who have been through the same things as I have.
- How this shelter is set up like a home, not an institution.
- I was able to be 100% honest about contact with my abuser.
- I wasn't and no staff helped change that but the boss.
- It has made me reconnect with women, myself and recovery.
- It was my Home away from Home. It was safe, quiet, and secure!!
- It's a house, not a "warehouse".
- Just knowing I had somewhere to go.
- Just meeting new people with similar backgrounds.
- Knowing that my problems have been taken seriously.
- Presence of other women who have gone through the same thing- feels supported.
- That abuser couldn't find me- gave me 911 phone helped a lot.
- That I could have time to spend with my daughter alone and learn how to be happy with it.
- That safe place allows you to make choices within guideline.
- The advocates were very helpful and people were friendly.
- The home atmosphere, especially for some reason the dimming lights and relaxed staff, thank you.
- The security of having a place to live and daily bread to eat for my children.
- The staff-especially on weekends and nights/everyone has their heart and soul in their commitment to help survivors who want help.
- The way the staff cared for my family the way that they would want to be treated.
- They treat you like part of a family at the shelter.

REPORTS FROM SURVIVORS – Help received

Time in shelter

Residents stayed in shelter from a minimum of one day to a maximum of 366. The median number of days stayed was 35. Sixteen percent stayed 10 days or less; 44% stayed 30 days or less; 80% stayed 60 days or less. Only four individuals stayed longer than 120 days. These numbers show that the amount of time survivors spend in shelter varies dramatically. A variety of factors cause this variation, including individual decisions by survivors, time limits of individual shelters, availability of housing and other external supports, capacity of family and friends to assist the survivor, and financial capabilities of survivors to find alternate housing.

Needs on exit

When survivors left the shelter, they were asked to respond to the same list of needs they had seen upon entry. While each survivor chose an average of 16 needs upon entry, they chose an average of 18 needs upon exit, an increase of 13%. This increase could have a variety of causes, including a new awareness of potential services, the difference in mindset between the turmoil of entry and what might be a relatively calmer exit, or a survivor's reevaluation of her situation and needs. They were also asked which of their needs had been met, and to what extent. Figures 21 and 22 show the needs survivors reported at exit.

Figure 21

Needs on Exit

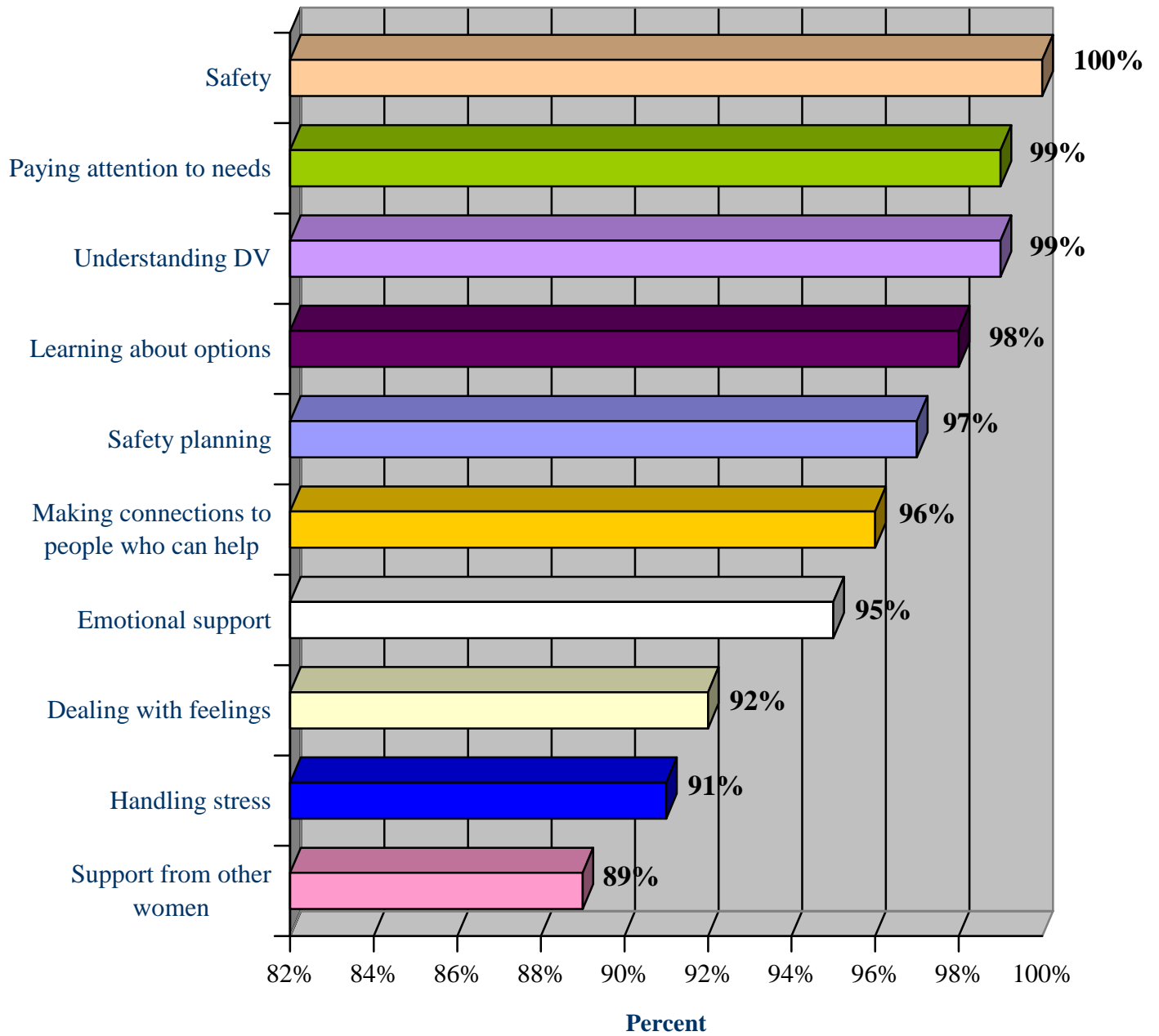


Figure 22

NEED	Percentage who chose
Safety	100
Paying attention to own needs	99
Understanding about domestic violence	99
Learning about options and choices	98
Safety planning	97
Making connections with people who can help me	96
Emotional support	95
Dealing with feelings that upset me	92
Handling stress	91
Support from other women	89
Counseling	82
Transportation	76
Leaving my relationship	76
Housing	76
My own health issues	70
Reconnecting with my community	67
Budgeting/managing money	64
Paying attention to my children's needs	63
Safety for my children	61
Non TANF benefits	60
Connections to my faith community	60
Welfare/TANF	54
Education/school for myself	52
Abuse-related injuries	52
Responding to my children when they are upset or causing trouble	50
Restraining order	44
A job/job training	43
Education/school for my children	42
Counseling for my children	40
Health issues for my children	38
Child protective services	36
Child care	34
Child welfare services	34
Custody	33
Divorce	30
My abuser's arrest	24
Immigration	21
My own arrest	7

Items in bold are included in Figure 21

Of those who wanted help, who got it?

Figure 23

Help Received

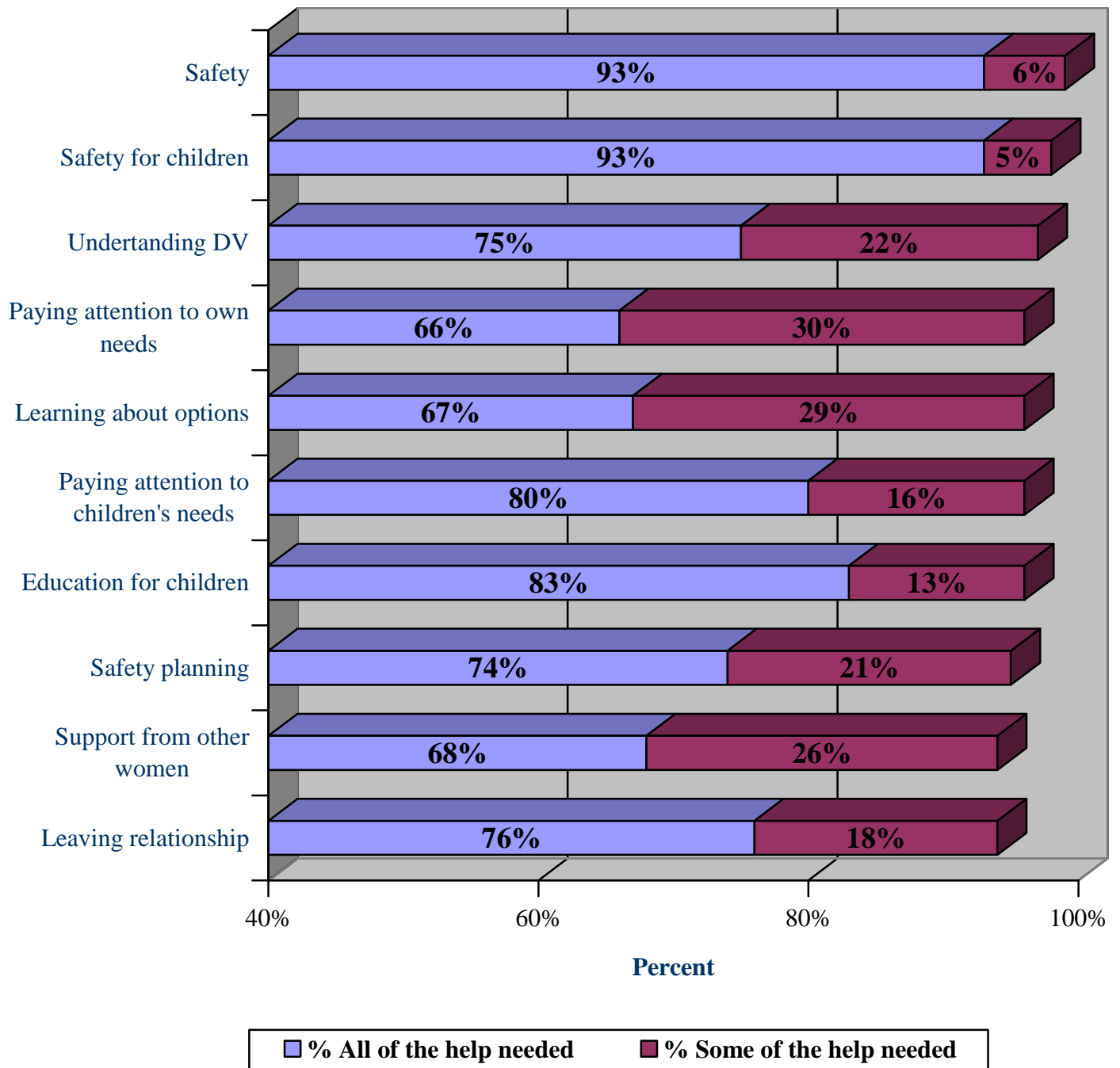


Figure 24

NEED	Got all help needed	Got some help needed	Got all or some help needed
Safety	93	6	99
Safety for my children	93	5	99
Understanding about domestic violence	75	22	97
Paying attention to own needs	66	30	96
Learning about options and choices	67	29	96
Paying attention to my children's needs	80	16	96
Safety planning	74	21	95
Education/school for my children	83	13	95
Support from other women	68	26	94
Leaving my relationship	76	18	94
Responding to my children when they are upset or causing trouble	66	27	93
Health issues for my children	75	18	93
Welfare/TANF	75	17	93
Restraining order	74	18	92
Transportation	73	19	92
Making connections with people who can help me	65	26	91
Emotional support	63	27	91
Housing	67	24	91
Child welfare services	61	29	90
My own arrest	70	20	90
Dealing with feelings that upset me	58	32	89
Counseling	63	26	89
Abuse-related injuries	58	31	89
Child protective services	62	26	89
Reconnecting with my community	59	30	88
Counseling for my children	63	25	88
My own health issues	63	24	87
Immigration	77	10	87
Education/school for myself	57	30	86
Connections to my faith community	58	28	86
Divorce	64	21	86
Non TANF benefits	64	20	84
Child care	69	14	84
My abuser's arrest	67	15	82
Handling stress	50	31	82
Custody	63	15	78
Budgeting/managing money	45	29	73
A job/job training	44	29	73

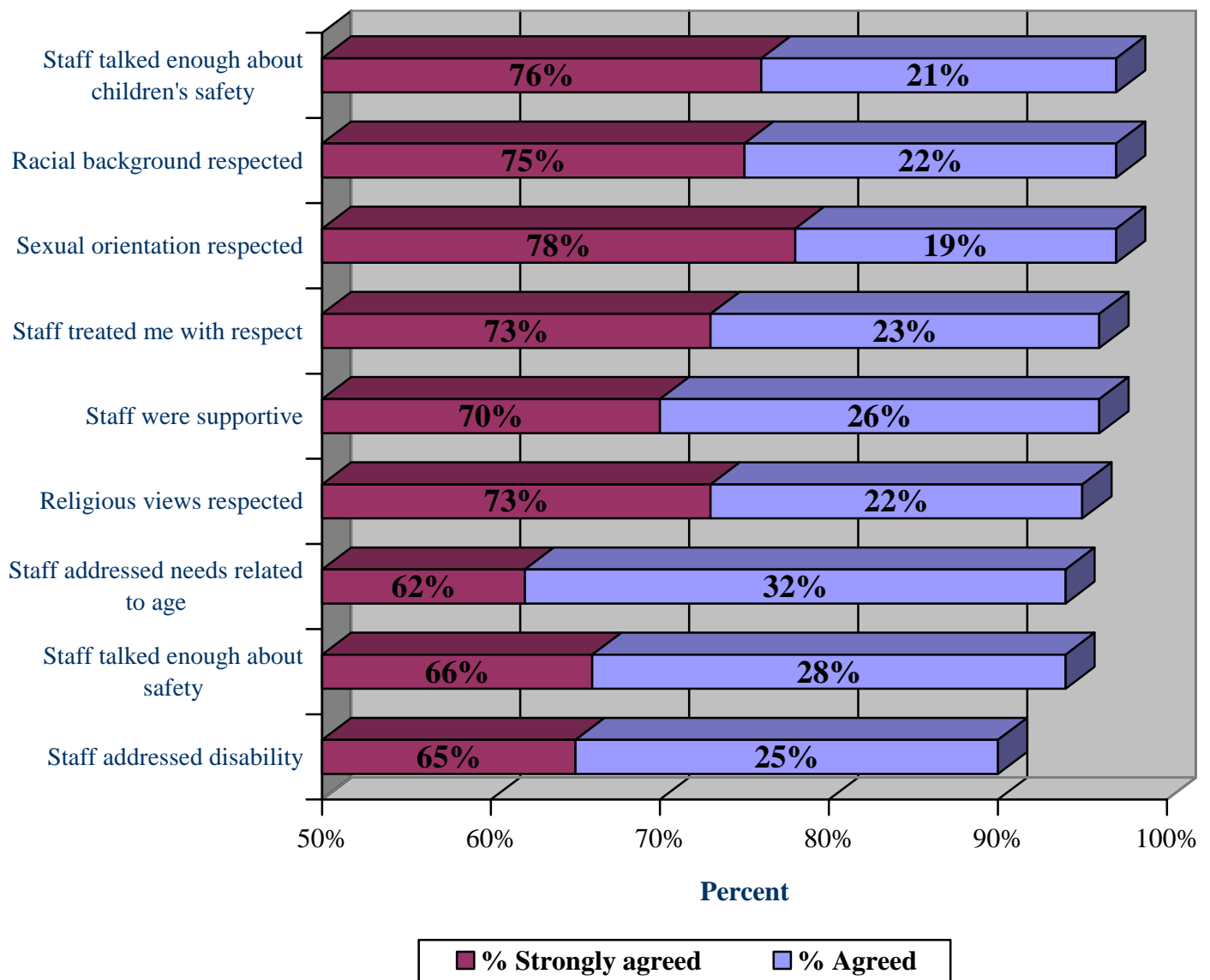
Items in bold are included in Figure 23

Interaction with shelter staff

Survivors were asked a series of questions about their interaction with shelter staff. They were asked the extent to which they agreed with statements such as “Shelter staff treated me with respect” and “Shelter staff spent enough time talking about my safety.” These results were overwhelmingly positive, as seen below, with 97% strongly agreeing or agreeing that staff talked enough about their children’s safety, that their sexual orientation was respected and that their racial background was respected. Ninety-six percent also agreed that shelter staff treated them with respect, and that shelter staff were supportive.

Figure 25

Interaction with Shelter Staff

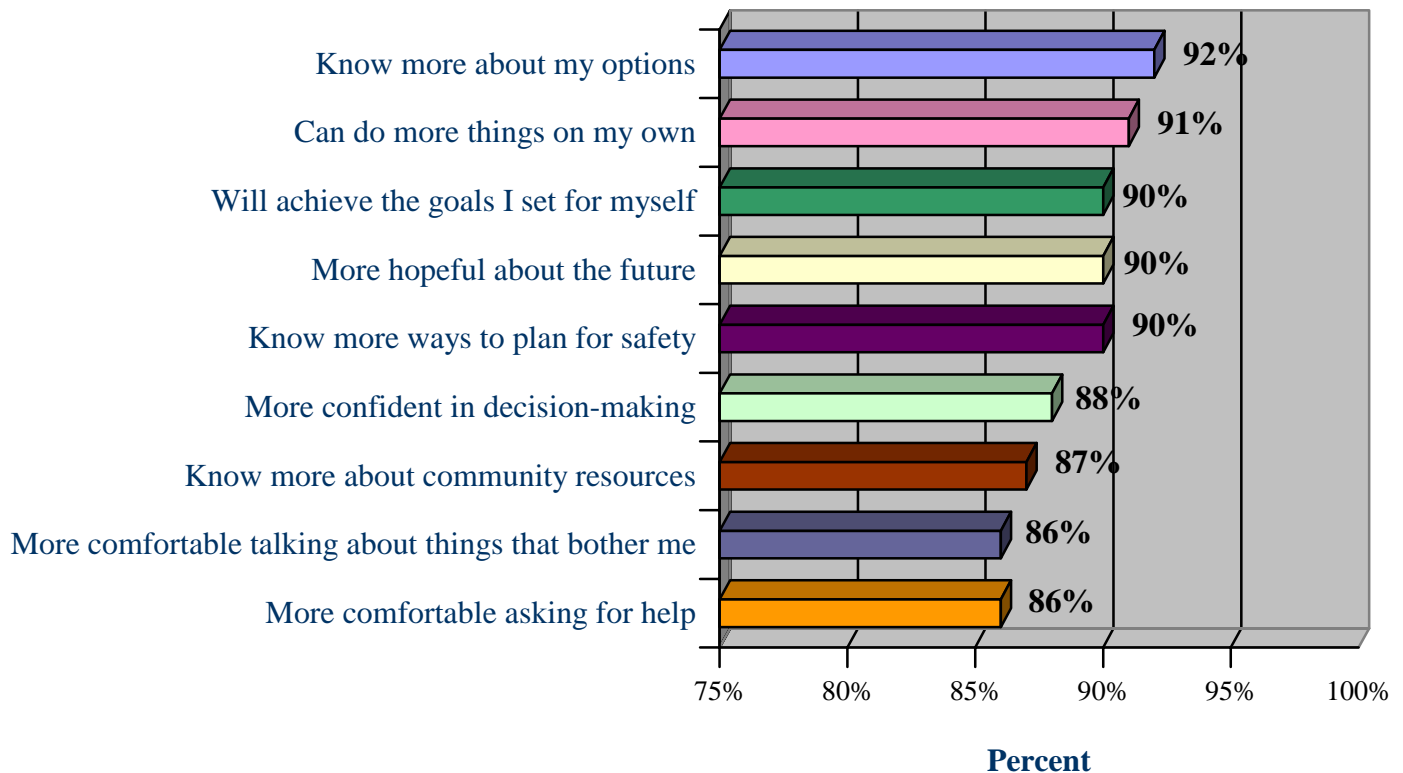


Outcomes

Washington shelter residents provided scores above 85% on nine measures of short-term outcomes from their shelter stay. The highest rating (92%) was found in responses for knowing more about their options. The lowest rating (still 86%) was found for their responses to asking for help and talking about things that bother them.

Figure 26

Outcomes for Survivors



Survivors were asked for any comments about these outcomes. Responses included:

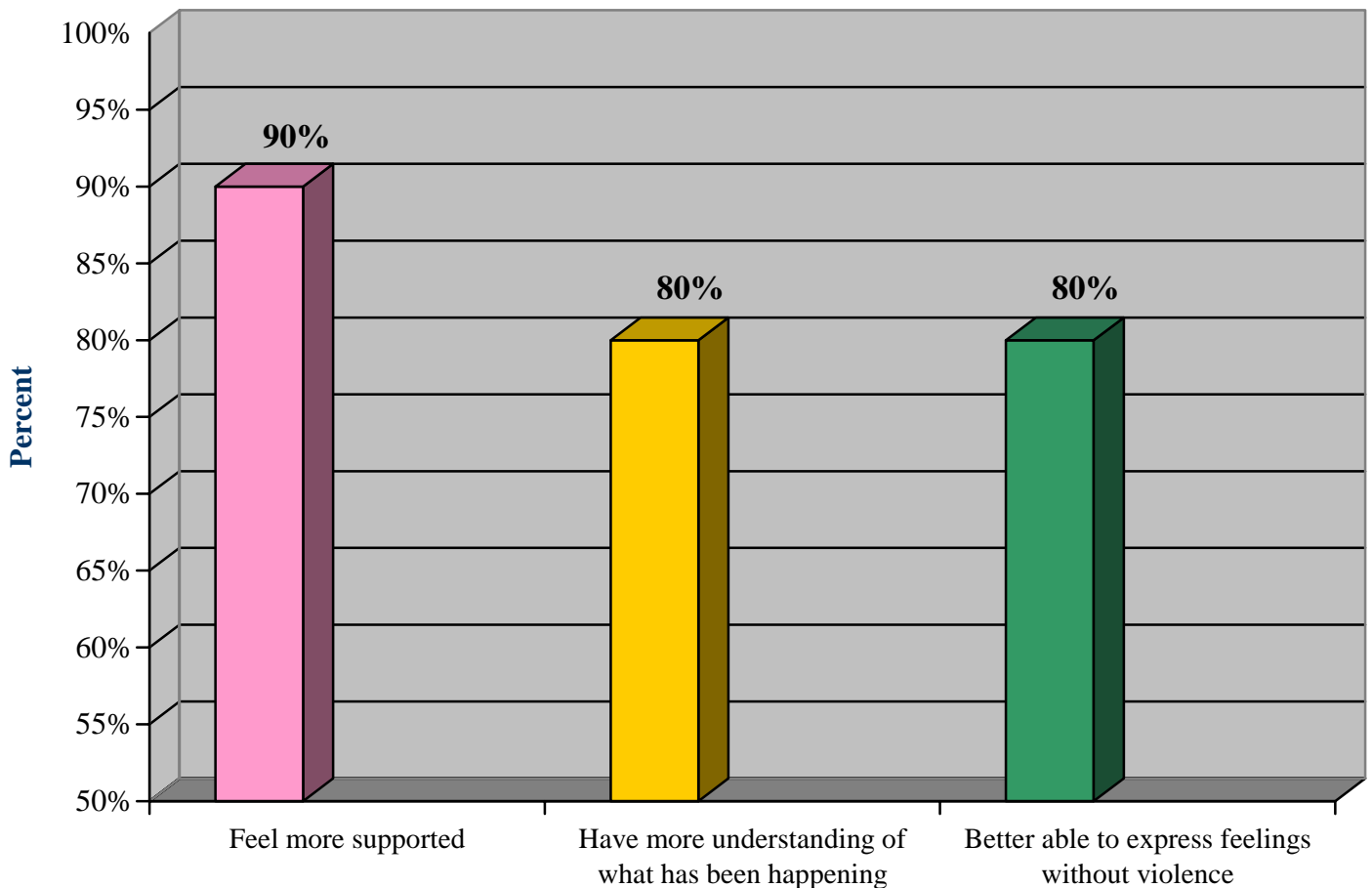
- Because of this shelter I can do more and have done more.
- I am utterly grateful for the opportunity to start my life anew. I feel more confident and very hopeful.
- I am very happy to be starting another life.
- I don't have to be stalked and hide.
- I feel I have become strong enough to move on.
- I have a hard time asking for help or talking to others about my problems.
- I have not reached out yet for other options and resources.
- I learned a lot while I stayed here. I would never leave if I didn't have to.
- I wish there was a sometimes box because that would be more exact.
- I'm a little afraid to trust others and to move back to [former city].
- It would be wonderful if more funding were available to support extra resident "groups" and children's activities.
- Knowing I can come back and not be judged for trying at least once really helps.
- More empowered, not as unsure of what I'm feeling inside.
- Since I've been staying in this shelter I went from slamming dope to clean and sober. Thank you!
- The reason for the no answers was because the shelter didn't make me feel that way, I felt that way before I came here.
- The staff was so nice- I love it here. I'm comfortable with my self now than I was when I came here.
- They helped me not feel bad about leaving and helped me and encouraged me to return to the country I've come from. (I leave tomorrow).
- Truly I was lost overwhelmed and hysterical under my own skin. Now I am walking out anxious to be going home.

Survivors were also asked about the outcomes of the shelter stay for their children. Ninety percent reported their children felt more supported, and 80% reported their children were better able to express their feelings without violence. Related to the outcome “My children have more understanding of what has been happening at home,” with which 80% agreed, many commented that their children were “too young to understand.” Other comments included:

- Because of separation from my abuser as well as my experience with [advocate] I can already see a change in my daughter’s concepts of her personal power and women’s empowerment and her pride in me has grown greatly.
- Children feel happy and safe here.
- Great program for children- need more for special needs.
- More trusting in me to protect them.
- Multi-person supportive and loving environment exceeded anything I could have provided during this time.
- Understands good/bad behavior better.
- Was only here for a few hours late at night.

Figure 27

Outcomes for Children



Problems experienced

In response to direct questions, survivors did report problems while in shelter. Despite their overwhelmingly positive outcomes, survivors commonly indicated they had problems with conflicts with other women in the shelter (44%), time limits (21%), and child discipline (20%). Encouragingly, many of these were resolved in high frequencies—all three of these most common problems were resolved more than half of the time they occurred. The ten most common problems are shown in Figure 28, and all sixteen problems listed in the questionnaire are in Figure 29 in order of their frequency and the frequency with which they were resolved.

Figure 28

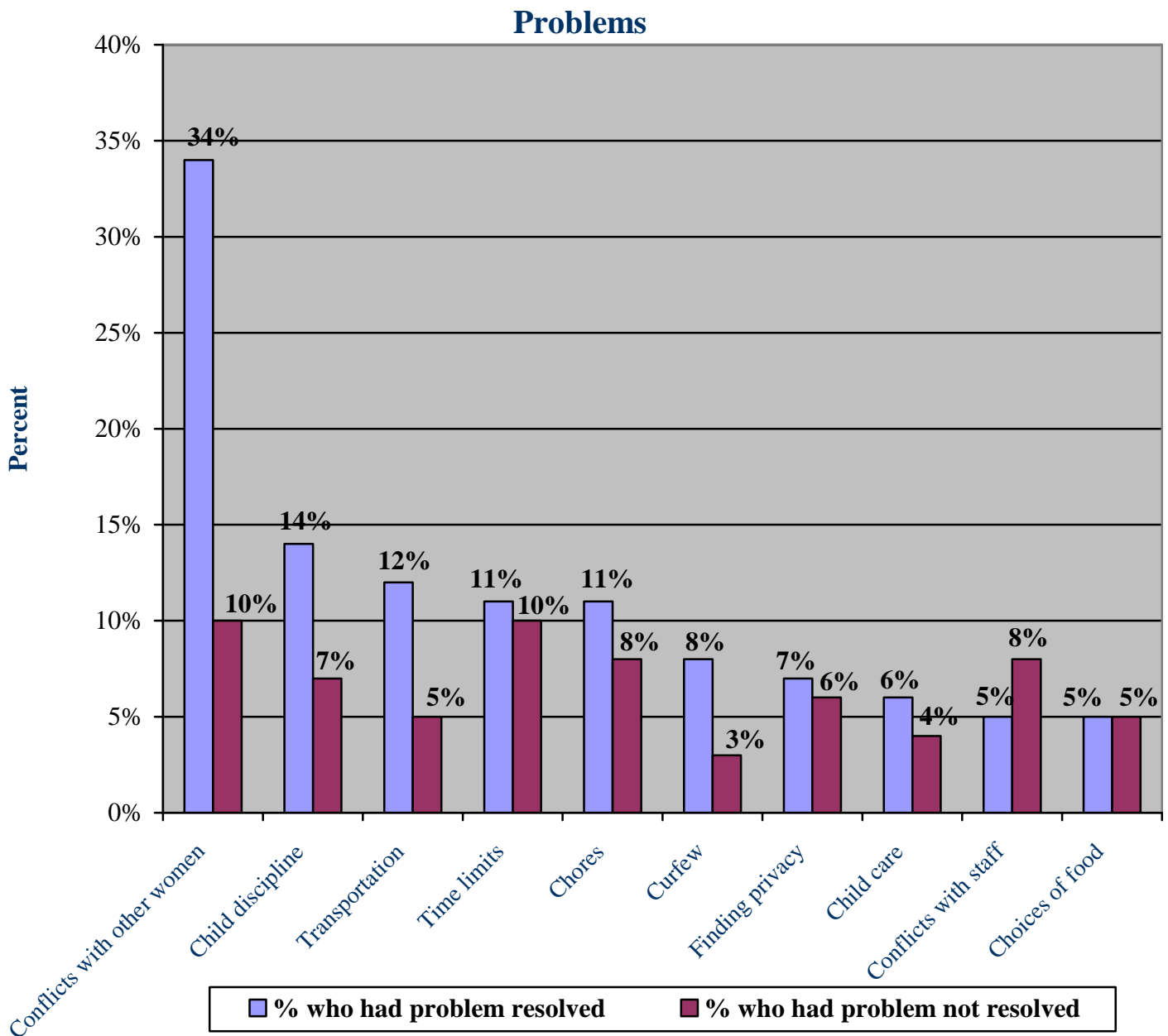


Figure 29

PROBLEMS	% who had problem	% resolved
Conflicts with other women	44	34
Time limits	21	11
Child discipline	20	14
Chores	19	11
Transportation	17	12
Conflicts with staff	14	5
Finding privacy	13	7
Curfew	11	8
Child care	10	6
Choices of food available	10	5
Telephone	9	5
Communication/language	8	5
Contact with partner	7	5
Contact with family	7	5
Lack of respect for customs	7	2
Teen boys	6	4
Going to job/school	6	3
Difficulty getting around shelter	5	3

Items in bold are included in Figure 28

Out of the total of 17 possible problems, the median number was zero. The minimum was zero (28%) and the maximum was 13 (1%: 1 person). Comments about problems in general include:

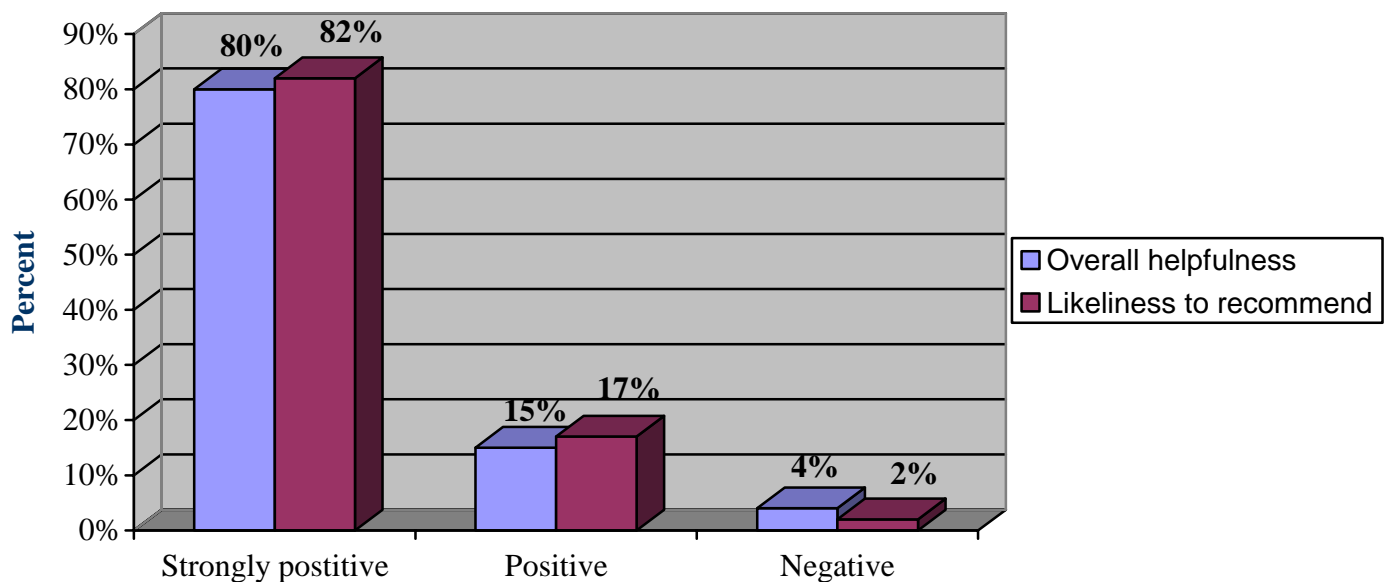
- [re: contact with partner] Some advocates tried to be helpful no matter what; others seemed increasingly judgmental.
- A lot of drug abuse.
- Another child hurting all the other kids.
- [re: communication] ASL signing.
- [re: getting around shelter] bad knees, but need bathroom on floor.
- Boys would come in bath unannounced when you were showering. That gave me more stress.
- Bus pass slow to get.
- [re: conflict with other women] Community living- multiple personalities put in a living situation, some will get along well with others some won't.
- Food allergies.
- Had to keep close on the adult woman making passes at son.
- Had to make work schedule fit difficult not being able to have babysitter come here.
- I couldn't vacuum or take out garbage due to wrist injury. Was resolved, did dishes
- I didn't feel I was living in a non-violent environment.

- I didn't find out until I was there 2 months that I could call for 5 minutes every day long distance.
- I felt two staff members were very unfair.
- I had to work late, but the staff was understanding.
- I just don't like confrontations.
- I misunderstood curfew- I thought it applied only parent NOT children.
- [re: teenage boys] I think age should be raised to 14.
- I thought that 45 days was not quite enough time but if you work at your situation every day you can get it resolved. The availability of housing and money can cause you to need a few more days.
- I wish we had more food.
- In my opinion, parents have been allowed to be neglectful and inconsiderate of the other families.
- It is very hard to be a single woman stuck in a room with 3 other women I think 4 women with the small of space is very hard.
- It seems if my door was closed I was still bothered. It wasn't a problem but women need to respect a closed door sometimes.
- Lack of sleep-noise level in room very disruptive even after discussing it.
- Limited use of phone for long distance because of staff availability.
- Little difficulties nothing that staff wasn't able to solve.
- [re: telephone] Made it hard to call (check on) for places to live-a lot of people don't accept blocked calls.
- No policy seen on stay/end of notice stay.
- Other women's children gave my children problems.
- People were lying about doing chores.
- Privacy and staff in room. Lack of respect and how spoken to at times or a sense they mistrusted you.
- Some alcoholic medications are being abused.
- Some think rules don't apply to them.
- Sometimes I was too tired, but I did my chores anyway.
- Staff is short handed for deaf women and children.
- Staff on phones a lot so couldn't talk to them when we needed to.
- Staff used language that was unclear and when found out what word meant it was offensive to me.
- Telephone ringing at 2AM, 3AM, 4AM all hours of the night.
- [re: privacy] The doors to the rooms don't close.
- Thievery big issue-never addressed!
- There is nowhere you can go for quiet time and space.
- There just never can be totally private space here-it is offered but it is many times full.
- [re: food] they need more meat.
- Very hard to have other child in same room with different upbringing discipline.
- When you questioned a staff about a rule they had made they were breaking that was considered a conflict with staff.

Overall rating of help received

Figure 30

Rating of Help Received



Eighty percent rated the help they got as very helpful and 15% rated the help they got as helpful. Eighty-two percent would strongly recommend a friend come to the shelter. Seventeen percent would recommend a friend come to the shelter. Reasons for these ratings and recommendations included:

Positive

- I am learning with confidence.
- I would not have gained as much emotional strength in such a short time if it were not for my stay here.
- Staff very knowledgeable and sincere.
- They all (staff) had handy any resources I needed to regain my living skills.
- They help push you to do it yourself.
- Without this place I never could have left my husband. I was kept safe.
- Because it's a hope to keep living.
- Because the organization is worried about the person when they need help!
- Being with other abused women helped me realize it's not just me.
- I could write a book and not be able to express all of the benefits.
- I was safe and had a roof over my head and people to talk to that listen.
- It is healthy to get away from abuse.
- It is safe and well managed!
- It was the perfect place for me.

- No better place has ever gave me peace and safety.
- Safety, resources, strength, and a push in the right way.
- She would be safe and able to better her own self.
- She'd get everything she'd need in every way.
- The advocates felt like family.
- They are down to earth people that understand your pain.
- They do what they can to the best of their ability.
- They help me in every way and help me to understand DV and empower me.
- They keep you safe, and give you all the help you need. They care about your needs.
- This is the beginning of empowerment and pride.
- This place has helped me break my cycle completely.
- This place will give her a chance to "think clearly".
- You can really make your on decisions and do something different.

Negative

- It's a very hard decision, you get access to resources people don't even know about otherwise, but life here is difficult.
- I left disrespected by one of the staff.
- The shelter itself and staff were, other residents turned this experience into a traumatic one in a lot of aspects.
- There's always 1 bad apple but overall the staff was wonderful.
- Because some staff don't understand when you're running for your life.
- It's more stressful with the kids running wild and door slamming all the time and women having to share bathroom with big boys.
- Provider for deaf women and children with signing.
- Some women may find communal living hard.

CONCLUSION

Survivors rated their shelter stay quite highly on measures of outcomes, needs met, support from staff, and overall ratings. The open-ended responses add depth to the quantitative measures. It is clear that at least some survivors did not hesitate to be critical in response to these questions. Although some identified significant concerns, the vast majority were positive, and demonstrated some of the myriad ways survivors thought their time in the shelter had been helpful to them.

This study has provided a wealth of information about shelters for people who have experienced domestic violence: the services they offer, the people they serve, and residents' experiences coming to and living in them. The first and clearest implication of this study is that domestic violence shelters remain vital resources in communities; they serve a critical need for people who have experienced abuse. The survivors who go to shelters have limited or no safe, supportive alternatives to their shelter stay. The results also demonstrate that shelters have a wide variety of educational, emotional, psychological, attitudinal and concrete benefits to residents, including changing their perceptions of what they need in order to live safer and more fulfilling lives.

The study indicates that services provided to residents (as well as non-residential program clients) are varied and complex, and offered in response to awareness of needs. These efforts should continue, either through provision of services directly by program staff or through collaboration with well-trained community agencies. Strategies to address survivors' emotional/mental health needs (measured in various ways in this study), physical health issues, housing, educational and economic issues, as well as substance abuse (not measured here, but a theme in qualitative responses) seem particularly important. These were the most prominent needs that were identified and reported as not being *fully* met.

Survivors' concerns about their children were a prominent theme; survivors with children face specific needs throughout the shelter process. Even prior to coming to the shelter, some had hesitated to avail themselves of shelter services because of concerns about the impact on their children. When they arrived, needs related to their children were among the highest of all needs indicated. Although conflicts related to children were one of the most frequent sources of trouble cited by mothers, children's improvements were among their mothers' greatest sources of satisfaction at exit.

The study also shows that many survivors struggle with some shelter rules related to eligibility for admission (such as teenage boys, arrest records, and "safety" assessments), what they must do while they are in residence (such as curfew and chores), and how long they may stay. It may be time for programs to reconsider some of these, or to allow for more consideration of the nuances of individual circumstances.

Finally, further and continued research efforts should be pursued. Researchers on this project received personal letters and heartfelt notes and comments applauding this study. It is vital to obtain more feedback from survivors about these and other services. Shelters clearly provide crucial resources. Much more can be learned to improve them, and thereby the lives of the people they serve.