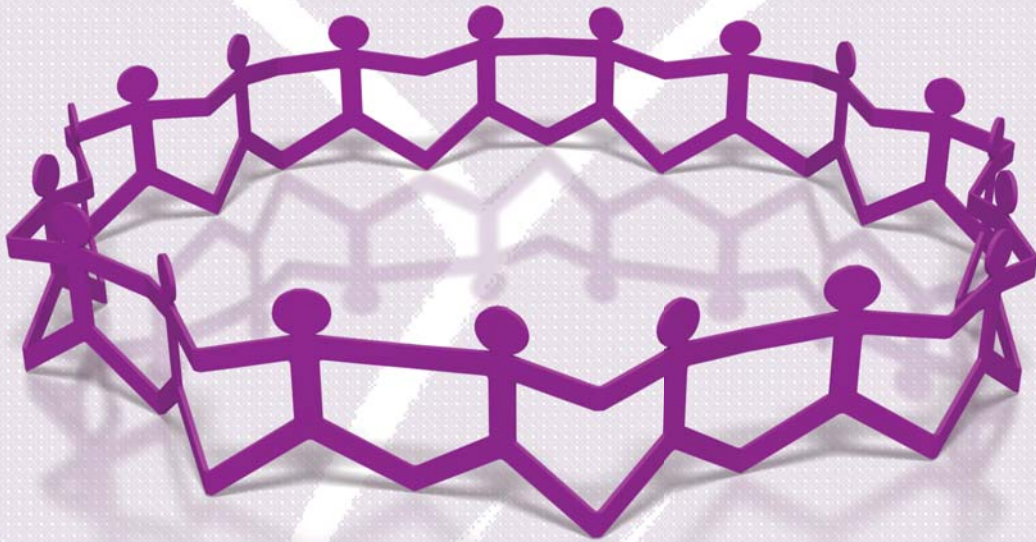


Strength in Numbers

A Ten-Year Trend Analysis
of Women's Shelters in Alberta





INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS)

For as long as there have been women's shelters, there has been a need to demonstrate their life-saving impact to government and community. Women's shelters believe strongly in their accountability to the women and children they serve as well as to their funders and donors. This report, *Strength in Numbers: A Ten-Year Trend Analysis of Women's Shelters in Alberta*, is a testament to both the professionalism and leadership shown by Alberta women's shelter staff. Together, they transformed data collection from paper and pencil— and those yellow, green, blue and peach government forms— to an online database.

This transformation began in 2001 when three Calgary shelters signed on with the Canadian Outcomes Research Institute (CORI) to use the Hull Outcome Monitoring and Evaluation System (HOMES). CORI offered a vision of using data and outcomes to inform practice in a continuous improvement loop both on an individual agency and sector wide basis. This vision resonated with the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS), and in 2002 ACWS started to bring the majority of its member shelters on board. To facilitate data gathering and input, ACWS sought funding from the Muttart Foundation for computers for the shelters and from the National Crime Prevention Centre to implement the database. ACWS also negotiated a tripartite information sharing agreement between the shelters, ACWS and Alberta Children and Youth Services. The agreement was ground-breaking in that ACWS would for the first time play a contributing role in the design of the database and data collection process and have access to its members' aggregate data.

This report, based on ten years of aggregated data collected by Alberta shelters, large and small, investigates what this data shows us about the women and children we serve and about changes in both the shelter populations and shelter practices and services. It is first and foremost a testament to women's courage. It also attests to shelters' domestic violence expertise and their willingness and commitment to do whatever it takes to improve services for women and their children. This commitment includes developing expertise in utilizing data to inform practice and advocacy, most often without the funding required to support and sustain such initiatives.

ACWS wishes to express their thanks and profound gratitude to shelter directors, their boards and the many front-line and administrative staff who contributed to this innovative project, and most importantly to the women whose experiences are reflected here. We are reminded that although Alberta's shelters are diverse in many ways— in location, in the demographic characteristics of the women and children they serve, and in the services they offer— shelters share a common dedication to providing women and children fleeing domestic violence with safe and caring environments. Their commitment to a supportive and collaborative climate makes studies such as this one, which is unique in Canada, possible. We also wish to thank the funder, Prairieaction Foundation, as well as individual donors, whose support contributed to making this study possible.



The results of this ten-year analysis creates a strong foundation for using our strength in numbers to make a difference for women, children, seniors and shelters.

ACWS looks forward to working with our members to use this report to develop recommendations and leverage our collective knowledge to improve services for women and children.

Financial assistance was provided by the Community Action, Research and Education Grants Program (CARE) of the *Prairieaction* Foundation.



ACWS THANKS...

The directors and staff of member organizations that gathered the information discussed in this report. Those organizations are:

Northwest Alberta

- Fairview & District Women's Centre Association
- Grande Prairie Women's Residence Association
- Northwest Alberta Resource Society
- Peace River Regional Women's Shelter Society
- Sucker Creek Emergency Women's Shelter
- Wellspring Family Resource & Crisis Centre Society

Northeast Alberta

- Bigstone Cree Nation Women's Emergency Shelter Society
- Dr. Margaret Savage Crisis Centre Society
- Fort McMurray Family Crisis Society
- Hope Haven Society
- Mikisew Cree First Nation
- Northern Haven Support Society
- St. Paul & District Crisis Association

Central Alberta

- Camrose Women's Shelter Society
- Central Alberta Women's Emergency Shelter Society
- Ermineskin Women's Shelter Society
- Mountain Rose Women's Shelter Association
- Lloydminster Interval Home Society Inc.
- Yellowhead Emergency Shelter for Women Society

Central Alberta - Edmonton and Area

- Edmonton Women's Shelter Ltd.
- Catholic Social Services
- Lurana Shelter Society
- Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton (SAGE)
- Strathcona Shelter Society
- Wings of Providence Society



ACWS THANKS...

Alberta South

- Brooks and District Women's Safe Shelter Society
- Community Crisis Society
- Stoney Tribal Administration
- Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society
- Pincher Creek Women's Emergency Shelter Association
- Region 3 Family Based Care Society
- Safe Haven Women's Shelter Society
- YWCA of Banff
- YWCA Lethbridge and District

Alberta South - Calgary

- Awo Taan Healing Lodge Society
- Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter Association
- Discovery House Family Violence Prevention Society
- Kerby Centre
- Sonshine Community Services
- The Brenda Strafford Society for the Prevention of Domestic Violence
- YWCA of Calgary

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Table of Contents

Section I. Executive Summary	1
1.1 Shelter Admissions.....	1
1.2 Capacity Issues.....	2
1.3 Rural Service Delivery Context.....	2
1.4 Length of Stay in Shelters.....	3
1.5 Increasing Client Complexity.....	3
1.6 Aboriginal Women in Shelters.....	3
1.7 Rising Rates of Unemployment.....	4
1.8 Services Provided.....	4
1.9 Need for Increased and Specialized Children’s Programming.....	4
1.10 Police Involvement.....	5
Section II. Background and Project Purpose	7
2.1 Alberta Shelters.....	8
2.2 Description of the Data in this Report.....	11
2.3 This Report.....	13
Section III. ACWS Aggregated Data Set— Trends in Admissions, Turn-aways and Crisis Calls	16
3.1 Shelter Location and Adult Admissions.....	16
3.2 Shelter Location and Adult Admissions Over Time.....	17
3.3 Shelter Capacity Shortages.....	21
3.4 Crisis Calls.....	24
Section IV. HOMES Data Set— Demographic Trends	28
4.1 Shelter Population Diversity.....	28
4.2 Age.....	32
4.3 Marital Status.....	33
4.4 Dependent Admissions.....	35
4.5 Dependents’ Age.....	37
4.6 Employment Status of Women in Shelter.....	38
Section V. Reasons for Shelter Access and History of Abuse	41
5.1 Types of Admission.....	41
5.2 Abuse Type.....	42
5.3 Primary Abuser.....	44
Section VI. Length of Stay and Shelter Services	47
6.1 Length of Stay in Emergency Shelters.....	47
6.2 Length of Stay in Second-Stage Shelters.....	49
6.3 Services Provided.....	49



Table of Contents

Section VII. Transportation and Distance Travelled	51
7.1 Means of Transportation to the Shelter.....	51
7.2 Distances Travelled.....	53
Section VIII. Police Involvement	55
8.1 Type of Police Involvement.....	56
Section IX. Trends for Aboriginal Population	59
9.1 Admissions.....	59
9.2 Demographic Characteristics of Aboriginal Women.....	61
9.3 Abuse History.....	65
9.4 Shelter Services.....	67
9.5 Transportation and Distance Travelled.....	69
Section X. Overall Summary and Conclusions	71
10.1 Shelter Admissions.....	71
10.2 Capacity Issues.....	72
10.3 Rural Service Delivery Context.....	72
10.4 Length of Stay in Shelters.....	73
10.5 Increasing Client Complexity.....	73
10.6 Aboriginal Women in Shelters.....	73
10.7 Rising Rates of Unemployment.....	74
10.8 Services Provided.....	74
10.9 Need for Increased and Specialized Children’s Programming.....	74
10.10 Police Involvement.....	75
10.11 Directions for Future Research and Analysis.....	76
Appendix A. Organizations Currently Members of ACWS	79
Appendix B. Focus Group Locations and Participating ACWS Members	81

List of Figures

Figure 1. Shelter Availability by Geographic Location.....	10
Figure 2. Number of Adult Admissions by Location.....	16
Figure 3. Proportion of Adult Admissions Recorded by On-Reserve Shelters.....	17
Figure 4. Number of Adult Admissions by Year and Shelter Geographic Location	18
Figure 5. Number of Adult Admissions by Year and Shelter Location Size.....	19
Figure 6. Number of Emergency Shelter Beds in Alberta by Year and Location....	20
Figure 7. Number of Adult Women Turned Away in Edmonton and Calgary by Year and Reason.....	22
Figure 8. Number of Adult Women Turned Away by Year and Reason— Smaller Centres.....	23
Figure 9. Number of Crisis Calls by the Size of Municipality.....	25
Figure 10. Average Length of Crisis Calls by Shelter Location by Year.....	26
Figure 11. Shelter Admissions by Cultural Background and Year.....	30
Figure 12. Cultural Background by Size of Municipality.....	31
Figure 13. Cultural Background by Shelter Location.....	31
Figure 14. Age of Women in Shelters.....	33
Figure 15. Marital Status by Shelter Catchment Area.....	34
Figure 16. Marital Status by Year.....	34
Figure 17. Admissions of Single Women by Year.....	35
Figure 18. Number of Dependents Accompanying Women to Shelters.....	36
Figure 19. Number of Dependents Accompanying Women to Shelters by Year.....	36
Figure 20. Age of Admitted Dependents.....	37
Figure 21. Employment of Women Admitted to Shelters by Year.....	39
Figure 22. Type of Admission by Size of Shelter Catchment Area.....	41
Figure 23. Adult Admissions in Smaller Centres by Type of Admission.....	42
Figure 24. Types of Abuse Reported by Women Accessing Shelters.....	43
Figure 25. Types of Abuse Reported by Year.....	44
Figure 26. Type of Primary Abuser.....	45
Figure 27. Abuser Type by Year.....	46
Figure 28. Number of Days in Shelter by Proportion of Admissions.....	47
Figure 29. Average Length of Stay in Emergency Shelters by Year and Type of Centre.....	48
Figure 30. Services Provided by Shelter.....	49
Figure 31. Transportation to Shelter.....	51
Figure 32. Transportation Method by Centre Size.....	52
Figure 33. Transportation Method by Year.....	53



List of Figures

Figure 34. Distances Travelled to Shelter by the Size of Centre.....	53
Figure 35. Porportion of Admissions Involving Police by Shelter Location and Woman’s Background.....	55
Figure 36. Police Involvement by Year and Background.....	56
Figure 37. Type of Police Involvement.....	56
Figure 38. Type of Police Involvement by Shelter Resident Background.....	57
Figure 39. Proportion of Aboriginal Shelter Admissions by Centre Size.....	60
Figure 40. Location of Shelter Admission for Women who Reside On-Reserve by Year.....	60
Figure 41. Aboriginal Women Using Shelters by Age Range.....	61
Figure 42. Age of Aboriginal Dependents.....	62
Figure 43. Marital Status of Aboriginal Women by Year.....	63
Figure 44. Employment Status of Aboriginal Women by Year.....	64
Figure 45. Type of Admission: Aboriginal Women.....	65
Figure 46. Primary Abuser by Background.....	66
Figure 47. Type of Abuse Reported by Aboriginal Women in Alberta Shelters.....	67
Figure 48. Length of Stay in Emergency Shelters by Aboriginal Women.....	68
Figure 49. Length of Stay in Emergency Shelters Over Time by Aboriginal Women	68
Figure 50. Means of Transportation Used by Aboriginal Women.....	70
Figure 51. Distance Travelled by Aboriginal Women by Year.....	70

SECTION I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study used the recent transition of ACWS and its members from HOMES to a new system as an opportunity to review all shelter data collected on the HOMES system between 2000 and 2010. The analysis of data entered by shelters into HOMES, as well as ACWS aggregated data (including data from all ACWS member shelters), provided a clearer understanding of the characteristics of women served by Alberta's shelters. This understanding can now be used to inform shelter practices, improve care, provide evidence-based information to funders and decision makers and document trends in shelter use across the province. It can also be used to improve future data collection in the shelters.

The ACWS aggregated annual data set used in some components of this trend analysis was based on the annual reports provided by ACWS's members, including 34 emergency shelters (five on First Nations reserves), seven second-stage shelters (including one on a First Nation reserve) and the two seniors' shelters. The analyses that required individually coded data (e.g. cross-group comparisons) used the HOMES data only. This data set included 34 shelters— 32 emergency (two on-reserve) and two second-stage shelters—for a total of 46,571 adult admissions to shelters as well as 34,260 dependent admissions. The data analyses considered the geographical location of shelters (Northwest, Northeast, Central and Southern Alberta), as well as centre size: Edmonton and Calgary¹ (large urban), small cities² and towns/rural locations.³

The initial results of the data analysis were presented and discussed with focus groups that included 62 staff members representing 32 ACWS members around Alberta. These discussions identified additional analyses that could be useful as well as some possible explanations for findings. This final report includes information from the ACWS aggregated data set, the HOMES data set and the staff focus groups.

The following trends and their implications for future practice represent key findings from this study.

1.1 Shelter Admissions

About a third of overall shelter admissions were documented in Edmonton or Calgary (n=20,478 or 33%). Another third occurred in small cities such as Medicine Hat or Grande Prairie (n=18,407 or 29.8%), and the remaining 36% of admissions (n=22,533) were in towns/rural areas such as Brooks or Sucker Creek. The majority of shelters in towns or rural areas (86%) are located in Northern Alberta.

Admissions to shelters in Alberta increased by half or more until 2005/2006, before starting to decrease albeit to levels higher than those found in the first three years. Factors related

¹ Includes Strathcona County

² Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer

³ Fairview, Grande Cache, High Level, Peace River, Sucker Creek, Whitecourt, Wabasca, Cold Lake, Lac La Biche, Fort Chipewyan, St. Paul, Camrose, Hobbema, Lloydminster, Rocky Mountain House, Hinton, Brooks, Strathmore, Pincher Creek, Black Diamond, Taber, Banff

to the increase in admissions in those years include increased shelter funding, growing number of available shelter beds and various public awareness and media campaigns. After 2006 the number of admissions has been gradually decreasing. Particularly in Calgary, Edmonton and Central Alberta this decrease may be associated with the number of beds available in those areas.

While Edmonton and Calgary have over half of the overall population in Alberta, they account for only a third of all provincial admissions. The number of beds has not kept pace with population increases. Shelters can only accept the number of admissions that bed space allows. Since occupancy rates in all emergency shelters in Edmonton and Calgary are high, this finding suggests that additional shelter capacity is needed in both cities.

1.2 Capacity Issues

The number of women turned away from Alberta shelters has decreased since 2000 and about half of turn-away numbers are for reasons other than shelters being full. However, turn-away rates continue to be a significant concern. The impact on the safety of these women and children is severe.

In addition, while immediate abuse may not be the presenting factor for those women who were turned away for other reasons, abuse is a significant contributor to homelessness, addiction and mental health concerns. Moreover, considerable time is expended by shelter staff to provide crisis, advocacy and referral support to the women and children who are turned away.

The trends in the number of turn-aways from 2000 to 2010 likely reflect a combination of factors, including:

- Decreases in 2000-2005 correspond to increases in shelter capacity as a result of federal, provincial, government and community funders' initiatives;
- Increases during 2005-2008: the economic boom years in Alberta;
- Decreases in turn-aways in 2007/2009 due to use of new provincial funding to hire outreach workers, reducing demand on emergency facilities;
- Increases for 2008-2010 reflecting Alberta population growth coupled with slower growth in the number of funded beds, particularly in Calgary and Edmonton; and
- Recent increases reflecting the longer length of stay at some shelters as the complexity of women's needs increase, the economic downturn lengthens and scarce subsidized housing.

1.3 Rural Service Delivery Context

Shelters in smaller Alberta centres must deal with a number of other issues that are unique to their locations. For example, a domestic violence shelter in a small centre may be one of very few services available in its area, resulting in a large variety of service needs that the shelter may not be able to meet. A rural or small centre shelter may experience increased demand for services from women who, in addition to a history of domestic violence,

currently experience other multiple issues such as homelessness, poverty, lack of available housing, or problems with mental health or addictions. The need to accommodate diverse needs places additional pressure on town and rural shelters since staffing and staff training must be more encompassing.

Issues of transportation and distances travelled to shelter illustrate the different nature of service delivery in urban and smaller centres.

1.4 Length of Stay in Shelters

Length of stay in emergency shelters has shown increases in the proportion of women with longer stays and corresponding decreases in the number of short stays. The average length of stay increased from 11 to 13 days. These changes may reflect the increasing complexity of client needs, as well as the economic downturn with its concomitant increase in unemployment and shortages of affordable housing.

However, the fact that more than one third of the shelter population stays in shelter for only one to five days suggests that shelter staff have very little time to assist these women. This pattern is particularly true for abused women without children, abused women who are living with their partners at the time of admission and those who enter shelters for reasons Other than Abuse.

1.5 Increasing Client Complexity

The overall population of Aboriginal women and women of Other Backgrounds (e.g. immigrants, refugees, visible minorities, etc.) using Alberta's shelters rose from 64% of the shelter population in 2003 to about 71% currently. These two groups have lower employment rates and income levels related to lack of employment opportunities, discrimination, and cultural and language barriers. These results reinforce staff-identified needs for appropriate training to best serve women from various cultures and backgrounds.

The results also support shelter workers' observations of increasing client complexity, which results in increased length of stay in shelters. The regions and communities in which they reside are less likely to have sufficient capacity in community resources such as access to affordable housing, child care and mental health or addiction treatment.

Women entering shelters typically report more than one type of abuse, with emotional abuse, physical abuse, financial abuse and verbal abuse being most frequently identified. The data for this report confirm that abuse is multifaceted. The complex combination of abuse types emphasizes the need for a careful and comprehensive assessment of each woman's circumstances to inform shelter services.

1.6 Aboriginal Women in Shelters

Aboriginal women make up more than half of the shelter population (60% overall in 2010, rising from 56% in 2003), and this proportion rises to almost 70% in Alberta's northern

shelters. The information in this report suggests that Aboriginal women using Alberta's shelters come with unique characteristics, experiences and needs when compared to women from Other Backgrounds on a number of important variables. For example, they are younger than the general shelter population, they are more likely to be in a common law relationship, they are more likely to be unemployed, they have more children and they have shorter shelter stays. If shelter services for Aboriginal women are to be effective, they must be responsive to the unique characteristics of Aboriginal women's shelter use as well as the cultural requirements and social needs that diverse groups within the Aboriginal population may bring to shelter.

1.7 Rising Rates of Unemployment

Unemployed women made up an increasing proportion of the shelter population overall, rising from 69% in 2006 to about 75% in 2010. This change has implications for shelter service requirements, increasing the emphasis on assisting women with child care, affordable housing, employment opportunities and other sources of income supports. The increasing number of unemployed women and children living in poverty may also imply a more chronic population since women with mental health or addiction problems have greater difficulty in finding and maintaining employment. Abused women with no regular income may also be more likely than other women to use shelters as a consequence of having fewer resources at their disposal. In addition, employers may not understand the implications that domestic violence may have on the workplace. Adding poverty to the abuse equation is likely to result in women needing either to return to shelters more frequently or to extend their length of stay.

1.8 Services Provided

Information about the scope and types of services provided by shelters is essential to understand what services or a combination of services work for women and children in shelters. Documentation of shelter services also provides a comprehensive view of the work that shelter staff must undertake to support women and children in their care. Identifying a list of core services common to shelters across Alberta and then developing a method to guide consistent and accurate tracking of those services is an important task that Alberta shelters should consider undertaking to better inform funders and the community of the varied and complex work they do.

1.9 Need for Increased and Specialized Children's Programming

Over the period of the study, 35,651 dependents accompanied women to the shelter and accessed shelter services. 48% of those children are aged zero to six years and about 30% are under three years of age; the proportion of preschool children in shelters is increasing. These findings emphasize the importance of programming for children in shelters. Trauma prevention, early assessment and interventions, and informed referrals of women with young children to appropriate community resources following shelter stays are increasingly critical components of shelter services.

They also reflect the growing need for trained child care staff to work with mothers and their children to mitigate the impact of domestic violence on children. Reducing their trauma can substantially improve the likelihood of resilience in neurologic, cognitive and social development. Children's programming, particularly programming focusing on preschool children, is an essential component of shelter service requirements. Implementation of this programming will require increases in specialized staffing, staff training and completed referrals to community support programs when mothers and their children leave the shelters.

Moreover, shelter policies and women's circumstances often result in lower number of older dependent admissions. These older children, although not in shelter, might also need additional services and support that may be best provided through shelter outreach programming.

1.10 Police Involvement

The rate of police involvement with women accessing shelters is a function of multiple factors, including women's own choices about whether and how to involve the police, the nature and severity of the offence, the legislation that is in place guiding the work of the police, the training of new police recruits and the resources available to the police in different geographic areas. Taking all these considerations into account, the information described here identifies some areas where progress has been made (e.g. more charges laid, arrests made and orders enforced, etc.) but also some areas of concern (e.g. decrease in proportion of women informed about assistance and women who were assisted to leave home, etc.).

Of particular concern are the reductions in services that police provide for Aboriginal women (e.g. the police are less likely to provide information to Aboriginal women, to help them leave home, or to provide them with transportation, etc.). It is impossible to know from the available data whether these differences were partially due to the women's own preferences or perceptions. Discussions are needed on a provincial level between ACWS and provincial police representatives, as well as between individual shelters and their relevant police/RCMP detachments to further examine and understand these trends and address any issues of concern.

ACWS may wish to further explore women's experiences with police through further research including data analysis and focus groups.



SECTION II. BACKGROUND AND PROJECT PURPOSE

Alberta's women's shelters have led the country in the development of a knowledge-based approach to service delivery. Particularly important was the ACWS effort to unite members in collecting information on a common online database system to better describe their life-saving work. Until August of 2010, the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS) and most of its members used the HOMES database⁴ to collect data on client access to services. The resulting data were used to inform individual shelters about internal trends, to create an aggregate picture of shelter work in the province on an annual basis and to undertake projects to explore the implementation of promising practices within shelters.

Their data collection was marked with successes. For example, understanding reasons why women returned to their abuser informed the provincial government's move to increase financial support to women leaving abuse. This benefit is now available to women regardless of how many times they leave.⁵ Reports on the numbers of women who were unable to access shelter because the shelter was full resulted in increases in the number of funded beds across the province.⁶ With the data on police response, ACWS encouraged the RCMP to review their response to domestic violence, resulting in a full file review of all cases following a tragic death in Northern Alberta. And lastly, two significant collaborative promising practice projects have been completed that helped inform shelter service delivery.⁷

The recent transition of ACWS and 39 of its 43 member organizations from HOMES to a new system⁸ presented an opportunity to review shelter data collected between the initial use of the HOMES database in 2000 and its final use in 2010.

The experiential knowledge of Canadian shelter workers in the field of domestic violence indicates that trends in abuse rates parallel larger socio-economic trends, such as changes in employment and income or in the availability of affordable housing. However, there is currently no comprehensive research in Canada to substantiate this understanding. The lack of specific data diminishes shelters' ability to anticipate changes in demand for services and undertake timely and proactive preventive work in the community. A lack of understanding of the impact of such trends also limits the development of appropriate, responsive partnerships among stakeholders and the ability to inform provincial policy and funding models.

4 HOMES is Hull Outcome Monitoring and Evaluation System that shelters used to gather their data between 2000 and August of 2010

5 In the period between 2006/2007 fiscal year and February 2012 a total of 15,172 women were helped as a result of the escaping abuse benefit, (Alberta Human Service's e-mail dated March 28, 2012).

6 Based on the information received from Alberta Human Services (February 3rd, 2012)— a total of 134 additional emergency beds were funded from 2005 to 2009.

7 Cairns, K. & Hoffart, I. (2009). Keeping women alive: Assessing their danger. A report prepared for The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. Retrieved from <http://www.acws.ca/documents/KeepingWomenAlive.pdf>; Hoffart, I. (2011). Practical Frameworks for Change. A report prepared for The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. Retrieved from <http://www.acws.ca/documents/PFCFinalEvaluationReport.pdf>.

8 Outcome Tracker is a web-based data management software program that ACWS member organizations chose to replace the discontinued HOMES program. Outcome Tracker was developed and is managed by Vista Share, which was formed in 2001 to serve the data management needs of non-profit organizations across North America.

The analysis of the shelters' 2000-2010 Aggregated and HOMES data is therefore intended to contribute to developing an understanding of how socio-economic trends relate to the use of Alberta's women's shelters.

The purposes of the analysis include:

1. Gaining a better understanding of the characteristics and needs of the women served by Alberta's emergency and second-stage shelters;
2. Informing shelter practice and improving care;
3. Supporting evidence-based requests for funders and decision makers;
4. Documenting trends in shelter use across the province, within geographic areas and within population groups; and
5. Motivating the improvement of data collection to support future initiatives to continuously improve and support services to abused women and their children.

2.1 Alberta Shelters

Alberta's women's shelters support women and their children fleeing abuse by providing a continuum of services ranging from prevention to crisis intervention to follow-up. There are currently 43 organizations in Alberta that operate 50 shelters, distributed across all regions of the province (see figure 1 for map; please see Appendix A for a complete list of ACWS member organizations).

For the purposes of this study, shelter data was analyzed in a number of ways, including geographic location, type and size of municipality.⁹ In some instances, shelters were considered geographically in four groups— Northwest, Northeast, Central and Southern Alberta. At other times, it was more informative to analyze based on centre size.

In some locations— particularly large centres such as Edmonton and Calgary— there may be more than one shelter and more than one type of shelter. Some sheltering organizations may also manage more than one shelter. There are three different types of women's shelters in Alberta, including:

- Emergency Domestic Violence Shelters. These shelters provide short-term, secure, temporary and supportive accommodation in a communal living environment. There are currently 38 emergency shelters in Alberta, including six located on First Nations reserves.
- Second-Stage Domestic Violence Shelters. Second-stage shelters provide secure apartment accommodation for six months or more. There are currently ten second-stage domestic violence shelters in Alberta, half of which are in Edmonton and Calgary. The remainder are either in rural or on-reserve communities. Five organizations offer both emergency and second-stage shelter services.

⁹ Size of municipality included large urban locations (Edmonton and Calgary, with populations of over a million people), small cities (populations of 10,000 people or more) and towns/rural locations (generally fewer than several thousand people).

- Seniors' Shelters. These shelters provide specialized services to seniors experiencing abuse. There are two seniors' shelters in Alberta, one in Edmonton and the other in Calgary.

Most Alberta shelters receive funding from the Alberta Human Services. The Ministry's funds are primarily allocated to staffing. These allocations vary depending on the shelter type and location. For example, of the ten second-stage shelters, only two have ongoing contracts for some of their programs.

Emergency shelters located on First Nations reserves receive limited federal government funding; several also have per diem contracts with the province. Most shelters rely on other funding sources and donations to support the full range of services they provide.

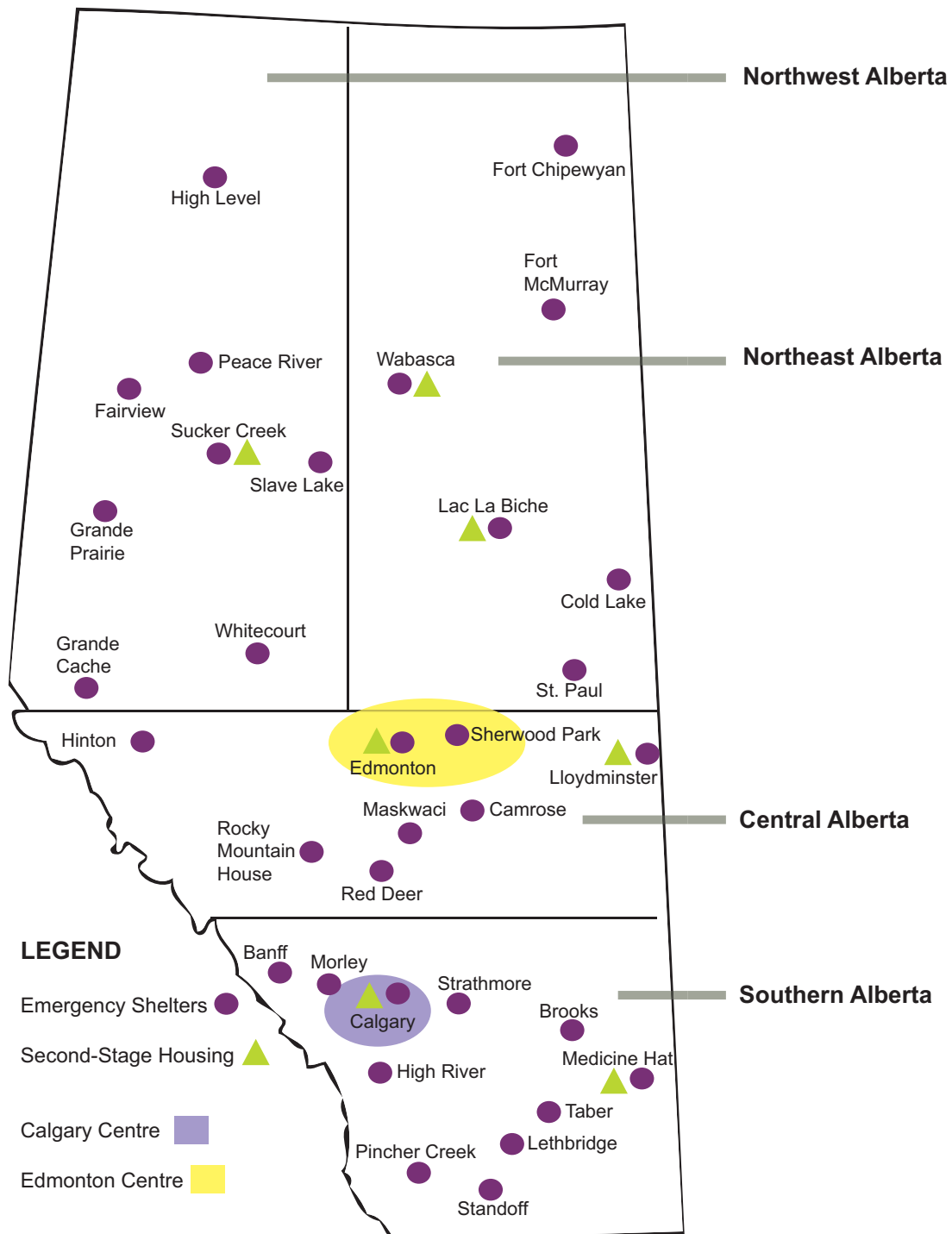


Figure 1. Shelter Availability by Geographic Location.

2.2 Description of the Data in this Report

This report includes the analysis of information from two data sets, described below, as well as input from focus groups with shelter workers who reviewed results.

ACWS Aggregated Annual Data

ACWS's fiscal year data collection includes information from shelters using HOMES as well as information submitted to ACWS by shelters that did not use HOMES. This annual data was aggregated and did not include coded individual data. It included shelter-specific variables such as the total number of admissions of women and children, information about the crisis calls received, and the number of women who were turned away due to lack of capacity. The aggregated annual data was indexed by shelter rather than by individual admissions.

The final aggregated annual data set used in the trend analysis was based on the annual reports provided by 43 Alberta member organizations, including 34 emergency shelters (five on First Nations reserves), seven second-stage shelters (including one on a First Nation reserve)¹⁰ and the two seniors' shelters. The information was collected starting in fiscal year 2000/2001 and concluded in August of 2010. The aggregated annual data set included a total of 58,326 adult admissions and 53,235 dependent admissions.¹¹

HOMES Data

The HOMES data set included only information that was entered into HOMES by shelter staff. An initial review of the HOMES data for 2000–2010 indicated that, for many shelters, routine data entry was not achieved until 2003. The analyses reported here using the HOMES data are therefore limited to 2003–2010. Shelters with data entry rates of less than 50% for a variable were excluded from the analysis of that variable.

Unlike the ACWS Aggregated Annual Data described above, all data entered into HOMES were indexed by individual admission, using anonymous client identification numbers to protect each woman's identity. Each shelter's HOMES file included information about each client, the services they received and their shelter outcomes. Since the data were individual-based rather than aggregated, it was also possible to consider differences across clients on variables such as age or ethnicity, as well as to compare client groups and shelter experiences over time. Data from HOMES could also be analyzed by provincial region, size of the catchment area or shelter type.

¹⁰ The number of second-stage shelters in Alberta has changed over the years. Fort McMurray Family Crisis Society temporarily operated a second-stage shelter during the time frame, and due to lack of funding not all second-stage shelters were able to provide us with detailed usage data.

¹¹ Each time a woman and/or a dependent are admitted to a shelter their admission is recorded as a single admission. Therefore, an individual woman or a child may have had multiple admissions to a particular shelter or different shelters across the province. Their demographic, service and discharge information was gathered for each individual admission. The HOMES program did not have a capacity to aggregate information from multiple admissions for each individual woman and/or child.

The final HOMES data set included 34 Alberta Shelters— 32 emergency and two second-stage shelters. In comparison to the ACWS aggregated annual data, the HOMES data set did not include seniors' shelters, and had information from fewer emergency shelters (32 as compared to 34) and fewer second-stage shelters (two as compared to seven). There were two on-reserve shelters in the HOMES data set as compared to five on-reserve shelters represented in the annual aggregated data set. The HOMES data set included a total of 46,571 adult admissions and 34,260 dependent admissions.

Information from both data sets was downloaded into Excel and then analyzed using SPSS.¹²

Data Analysis Limitations

Both data sets were indexed by number of admissions, rather than number of unique women or children using the shelters. In other words, over the course of the trend analysis period, one particular woman or child may be admitted more than once to a particular shelter or to any shelter in Alberta. Some variables had low response rates. As mentioned previously, any variable where response rates fell below 50% was not included in the analysis, with the result that sample size may vary across different analyses.

Feedback from Shelter Staff

An initial analysis of the data was disseminated to focus groups in seven Alberta locations, to which all member organizations were invited to participate, during May and June of 2011. The purpose of the focus groups was to present information to shelter representatives in each provincial region and to discuss it from the perspective of individual shelter and regional experiences, as well as from an historical perspective. The feedback from these focus groups has been incorporated into the analysis sections of this report.

Sixty-two staff representing 32 women's shelters participated in seven focus groups, which were held in the following locations:

- Grande Prairie (shelters in NW Alberta)
- Lac La Biche (shelters in NE Alberta)
- Edmonton #1 (on-reserve shelters)
- Edmonton #2 (shelters in Edmonton)
- Red Deer (shelters in Central Alberta)
- Calgary (shelters in Calgary)
- Lethbridge (shelters in Alberta South)

For a full list of member organizations participating in the focus groups, please see Appendix B in this report.

¹² Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) is a computer program used for statistical analysis. IBM SPSS is now fully integrated into the IBM Corporation, and is one of the brands under IBM Software Group's Business Analytics Portfolio, together with IBM Cognos.

2.3 This Report

When comparing the two data sets, the ACWS Aggregated Data Set paints a more comprehensive picture of shelter use from the perspective of overall numbers, etc. However, finer analyses are possible with the HOMES Data, which enables group comparisons. The analysis of information from the aggregated annual data set (overall shelter admissions, turn-away numbers and information associated with crisis calls) includes regional and annual comparisons and is provided in Section II of this report. The rest of the report discusses information from the HOMES data set, also integrating annual and regional comparisons, and discussing demographic characteristics of women and children in Alberta shelters, their domestic violence history, services and supports provided by the shelters, as well as information about the transportation women used to get to the shelter and police involvement with assistance to women who accessed the shelters during the study period.

The data analyses included in this report suggest that the experiences and characteristics of Aboriginal women using Alberta's shelters are unique from other groups on a number of important variables. Aboriginal women also make up more than half of the shelter population (55% overall in 2010), and this proportion rises to almost 70% in Alberta's northern shelters. Therefore, a separate section is devoted to analysis of information pertaining specifically to the Aboriginal women and children accessing women's shelters in Alberta. We hope that the findings in this section will assist in improving policies, practices and procedures of member organizations and their partners who work with and support Aboriginal women in our province.



AGGREGATED DATA SET



SECTION III. ACWS AGGREGATED DATA SET— TRENDS IN ADMISSIONS, TURN-AWAYS AND CRISIS CALLS

3.1 Shelter Location and Adult Admissions

About 30% of all Alberta shelters (in the aggregated data set 12 out of 43) are located in Edmonton and Calgary. As shown in Figure 2 (below), about 34% (n= 20, 804) of all admissions are reported by shelters in these two urban centres.¹³ Another third occurred in small cities such as Medicine Hat or Grande Prairie (n=18,407 or 30.2%), and the remaining 36% of admissions (n=21,642) were in towns/rural areas such as Brooks or Sucker Creek. The majority of shelters in towns or rural areas (86%) are located in Northern Alberta.

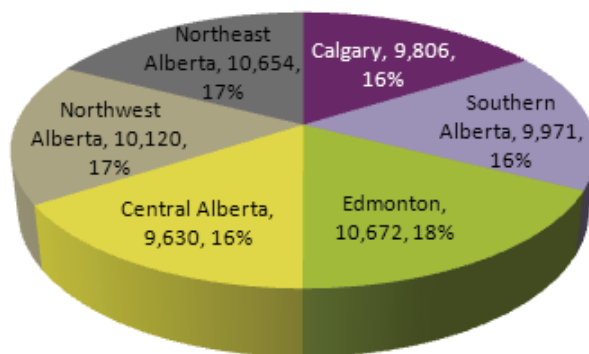


Figure 2. Number of Adult Admissions by Location.

The distribution of shelter admissions across Alberta is disproportionate to its overall population distribution. Between 2000 and 2010, the combined populations of Calgary and Edmonton represented about half of the overall Alberta population.¹⁴ However, admissions to shelters in these two cities accounted for only about a third of all provincial admissions: this is likely a direct result of the number of beds available in these shelters. Since occupancy rates in all emergency shelters in Calgary and Edmonton are high, this finding suggests that additional shelter capacity may be needed in both cities.

While smaller Alberta centres do not experience the same level of demand for service as the larger urban centres do, they must deal with a number of other issues that are unique to their locations. For example, a domestic violence shelter in a small centre may be one of very few services available in its area, creating challenges in the form of needs that the shelter may not be able to meet. A rural or small centre shelter may experience increased demand for services from women who, in addition to a history of domestic violence, experience multiple other issues such as homelessness, poverty, lack of available housing, or problems with mental health or addictions. Larger urban shelters may not be able to admit those women due to lack of capacity or there may be other community resources available to them in urban communities.

¹³ Includes admissions in all shelter types— emergency, second-stage and seniors.

¹⁴ Government of Alberta. Municipal census and population lists 2000-2010. Retrieved May 2012 from http://www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/mc_official_populations.cfm.

The ACWS Aggregated Data Set also contains information from five shelters on First Nations reserves.¹⁵ About 6%, or 3,748, of all admissions to shelters were recorded by these on-reserve shelters. The proportion of provincial admissions within the on-reserve group (see Figure 3 below) ranges from 21% of all on-reserve admissions in Southern Alberta and Northwest Alberta (n=794 and n=781 respectively) to 32% of admissions in Northeast Alberta (n=1,212).

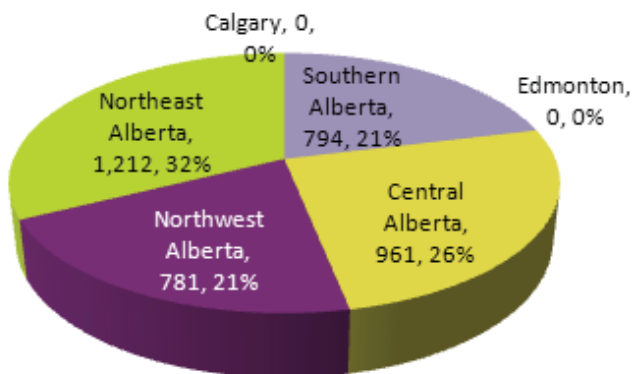


Figure 3. Proportion of All Adult Admissions Recorded by On-Reserve Shelters.

3.2 Shelter Location and Adult Admissions Over Time

Figure 4 on the following page compares the annual trends in adult admissions by geographical area across Alberta. When considered over the ten-year study period, the overall adult shelter admissions showed a gradual increase over the first six fiscal years of the study period. The total number of shelter admission increased from 5,396 in 2000/2001 to 6,844 admissions in 2005/2006, although there was a slight drop in overall admissions in 2004/2005 fiscal year. Thereafter, the total admissions remained fairly stable or decreased, fluctuating between 6,778 in 2006/2007 and 6,092 in 2008/2009 fiscal year.

The overall trend toward increasing numbers of admissions until 2005/2006 followed by decrease in admission numbers was particularly evident for shelters in the Calgary and Edmonton. The number of admissions continued to increase until 2006-2007 year in all other areas and until 2007-2008 in Northeastern Alberta.

¹⁵ Kainai Children Services Corporation became a member at the end of 2010 and is not included in these calculations.

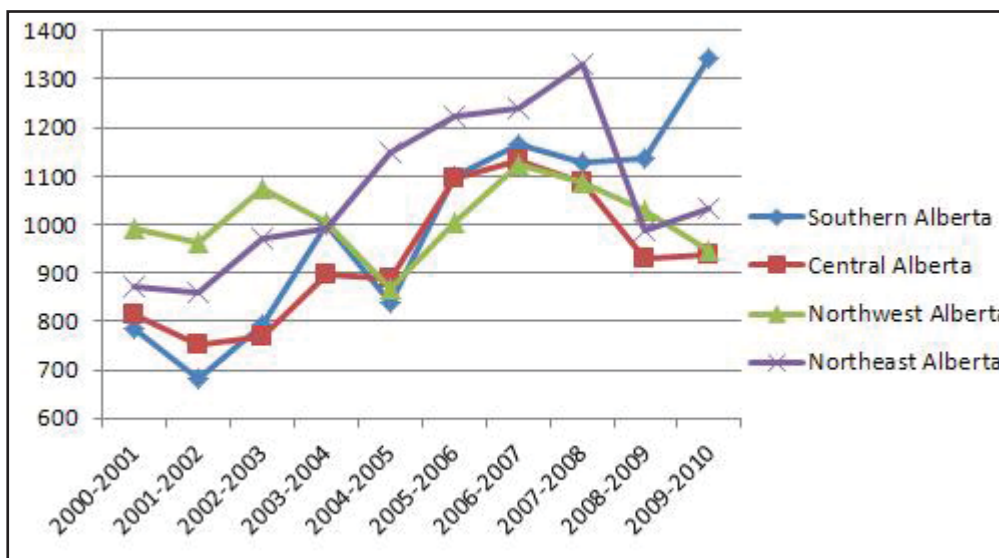
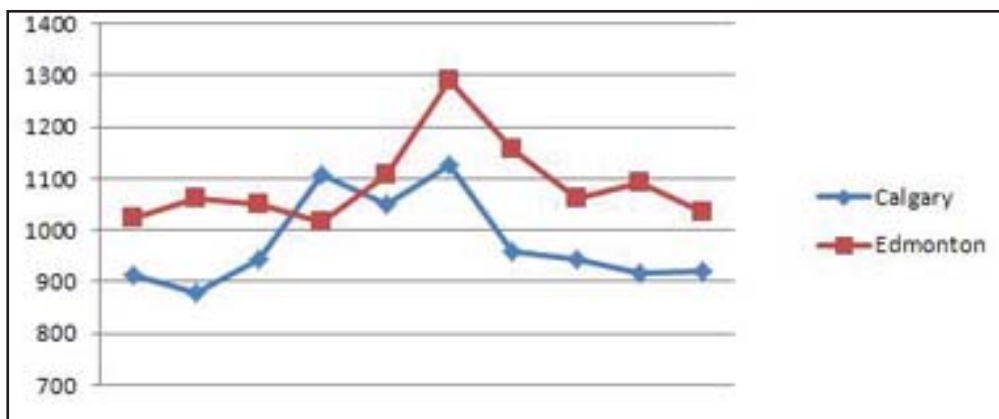
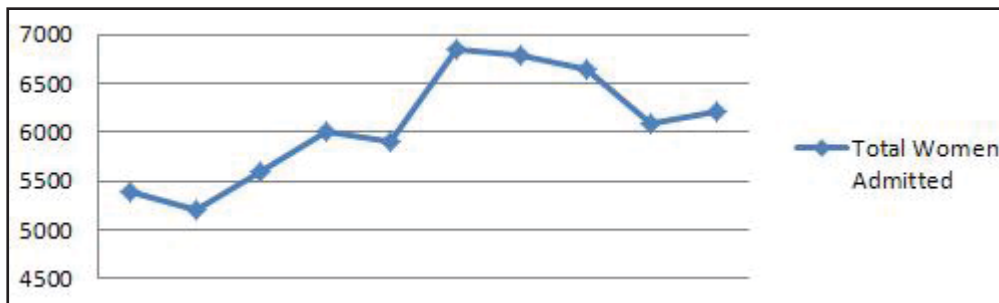


Figure 4. Number of Adult Admissions by Year and Shelter Geographic Location.

When number of admissions was compared across the size of centre (Edmonton and Calgary, small cities, towns and rural areas– see Figure 5 next page), the results produced a similar distribution of admissions over the years, but with some additional trends. While the number of admissions in Edmonton and Calgary increased until 2005/2006 and then decreased or remained stable, the number of admissions in small cities peaked in 2007/2008 fiscal year, and the growth of admissions continued in towns and rural areas, with the

exception of interruptions to this trend in 2001/2002, 2004/2005 and 2008/2009.

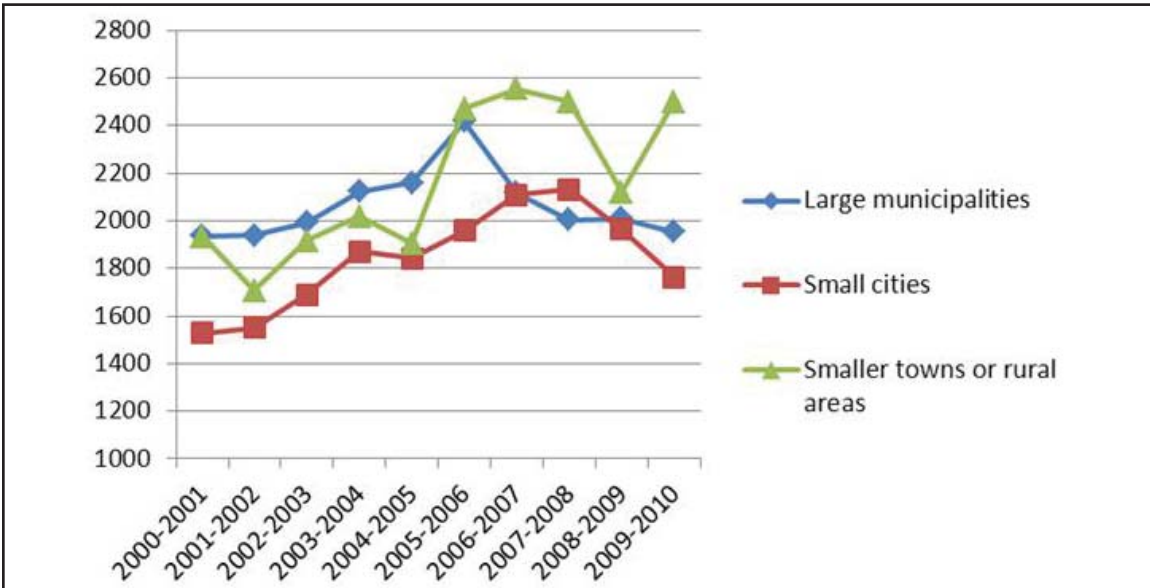


Figure 5. Number of Adult Admissions by Year and Shelter Location Size.¹⁶

Trends in the number of shelter beds available across the province appear to be related to the admission trends.¹⁷ As Figure 6 shows (see next page), since 2002, there has been an overall gradual increase in the number of emergency shelter beds.¹⁸ Those increases were particularly prominent in Southern Alberta (from 82 to 161 beds) and Northwest Alberta (from 102 to 152 beds). By comparison, the number of emergency beds in Central Alberta and in Calgary has not changed substantially, with the exception of some bed increases in Calgary in 2011/2012 fiscal year.

As was noted earlier, there are also currently ten second-stage shelters in Alberta: three in Calgary, two in Edmonton, one each in Southern and Central Alberta and two on-reserve. One second-stage shelter in Northeastern Alberta started operations in the 2010/2011 fiscal year. The number of bedrooms available in those second-stage shelters has not changed substantially in the South, Central Alberta or in Edmonton but has increased in Calgary from 48 bedrooms in 2002 to 77 in 2011/2012.

Figure 6 on the following page refers to all emergency shelter beds— both those that are funded by the provincial government, those that are funded through other sources as well as beds that are not funded. Reasons for gradual decrease in admissions in locations such as Calgary and Central Alberta since 2006 may reflect an interaction between existing shelter capacity, continued demand for shelter services and increasing average length of stay.

¹⁶ One second-stage shelter in Northwestern Alberta started operations in the 2010/2011 fiscal year.
¹⁷ Note that information for some fiscal years was not available at the time of this report.
¹⁸ The figure includes emergency shelter beds— those that are funded by Alberta Human Services, those that are funded from other sources and those that are not funded. According to Human Services, provincial government funded an additional 134 emergency shelter beds between 2005 and 2009.

An analysis comparing changes in all types of beds and bedrooms over time would be important to help understand the trends in shelter funding and how they influence shelter capacity and services.

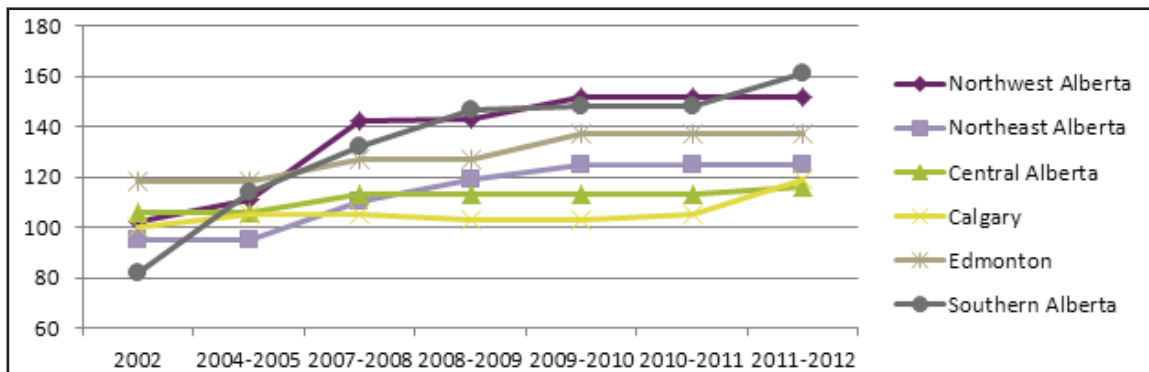


Figure 6. Number of Emergency Shelter Beds in Alberta by Year and Location.

The focus group discussions with shelter staff suggested that the upward trend in admission patterns, particularly between 2003 and 2006, were related to several factors that contributed to an increase in shelter funding, allowing some shelters to fund previously unfunded beds and increase staff wages. These factors included:

1. The federal government's funding of emergency shelter capacity and program improvement;
2. The Alberta Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying that took place in 2004. The Roundtable was initiated as a result of the high domestic violence homicide rates in Alberta and, in particular, several domestic violence related homicides that occurred in 2002 and 2003; one homicide case in particular resulted in an inquiry and was accompanied by a media campaign and wide ranging publicity for the issue;
3. ACWS was funded by the provincial government for two years of major advertisement and public awareness campaigns. This funding ended in 2006/2007;
4. The 'oil boom' in Alberta was at its peak in 2004/2005, resulting in population increases, housing access problems and major changes in other provincial socio-economic indicators;
5. The Minister of Children's Services between 2001 and 2004 supported the shelters and was committed to addressing the issue of domestic violence; and,
6. A new 1-800 line was advertised in 2004/2005 and may have encouraged more women to use shelters.

Admissions to shelters in Alberta increased by half or more until 2005/2006 before starting to decrease, albeit to levels higher than those found in the first three years. Factors related to the increase in admissions in those years include increased shelter funding, growing number of available shelter beds as well as various public awareness and media campaigns.

Since 2006, the number of admissions has been gradually decreasing. In Calgary, Edmonton and Central Alberta this decrease may be associated with the number of beds available in those areas. The two cities in particular have about half of the overall population in Alberta, while they account for only a third of all provincial admissions. The disproportionate number of admissions is probably a direct result of the number of beds available in the shelters, as well as the disproportionate growth in the number of beds available across the province. Shelters can only accept the number of admissions that space allows. Since occupancy rates in all emergency shelters in Edmonton and Calgary are high, this finding suggests that additional shelter capacity may be needed in both cities.

3.3 Shelter Capacity Shortages

103,343 women and 108,955 children were recorded as having been turned away by shelters across Alberta in the span of the ten years considered for this study.¹⁹ Over 80% of these women and children were turned away from Edmonton or Calgary shelters. As was noted in the discussion above, the number of shelter spaces available in these two locations is disproportionately lower than would be expected on the basis of provincial population distribution.

48% of these women and children were turned away because shelters were full (i.e. lacked additional funded capacity). The remaining 52% were turned away for reasons related to complex needs that could not be managed in the shelter, an unmet shelter priority established for the shelter, and/or when admission would potentially compromise the safety and security of women currently in residence.

Capacity Shortages in Calgary and Edmonton

As shown in Figure 7 on the following page, the number of women turned away in Calgary and Edmonton differed substantially by year, depending on reason for service refusal. In Alberta's two largest cities, the number of women and children turned away due to lack of capacity decreased very substantially from 2001 through 2005, as the number of funded shelter beds increased. There were temporary increases in this turn-away category in

¹⁹ This number reflects separate requests for admission that shelters were unable to accommodate due to lack of suitable or available space. Turn-aways are counted in the same way as admissions, that is by each admission/turn-away rather than by individual women or children that may request admission multiple times.

2006/2007, corresponding with the economic boom and related population growth and housing shortages in those years. When the economy slowed, however, turn-aways again decreased (2007/2008). Recently, the rate has begun to rise again, from a low of about 2,200 turn-aways in 2007/2008 to just under 4,000 in 2010, suggesting increasing strain on shelter capacity.

In contrast to turn-aways due to capacity limitations, the number of women turned away for other reasons has increased substantially in Calgary and Edmonton, possibly indicating a narrowing of shelter entry criteria as capacity became strained. However, many of these turn-aways may also be the result of a lack of available services in the community, even in Edmonton and Calgary, in the critical areas of mental health and addiction services and housing programs. Note that the turn-away numbers in Edmonton and Calgary may also have been influenced by differences in approaches taken in those two cities with respect to reporting (i.e. counting requests for admission versus number of unique women making those requests— it is not always possible for shelters to determine if women have phoned more than once, or phoned multiple shelters).

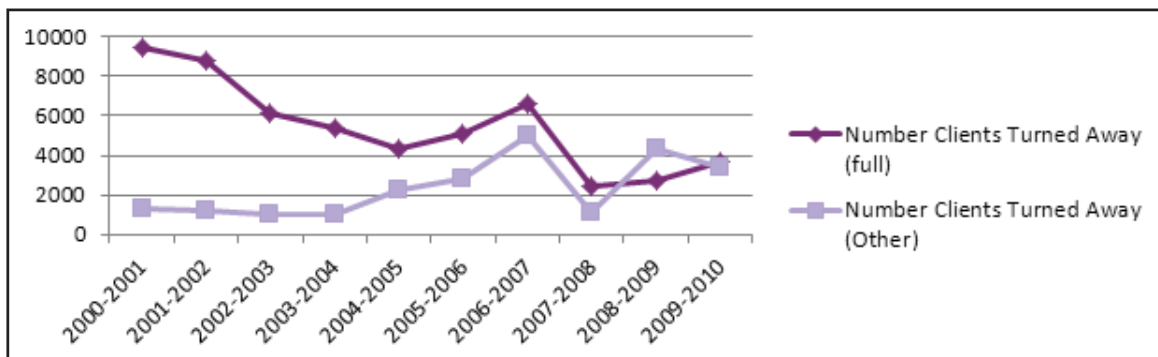


Figure 7. Number of Adult Women Turned Away in Edmonton and Calgary by Year and Reason.

Capacity Shortages in Smaller Locations

Turn-away patterns were also examined separately across geographic areas and location size. This analysis showed that it is the population size in a shelter's service area that makes the difference in the turn-away rates, rather than the location of the shelter within Alberta. As shown in Figure 8 (on the following page), turn-away patterns are substantially different when small cities and towns/rural locations are examined separately from Calgary and Edmonton. In those shelters, the overall turn-away numbers increased steadily over the first eight years (2000-2008) and then dropped substantially in the last two years. The increase in 2006/2007 may again have been a result of economic boom conditions in Alberta. Small cities, particularly in the more recent years, also appear to be more likely to turn-away women for reasons other than the shelter being full and are less likely to be full than the shelters in urban centres.

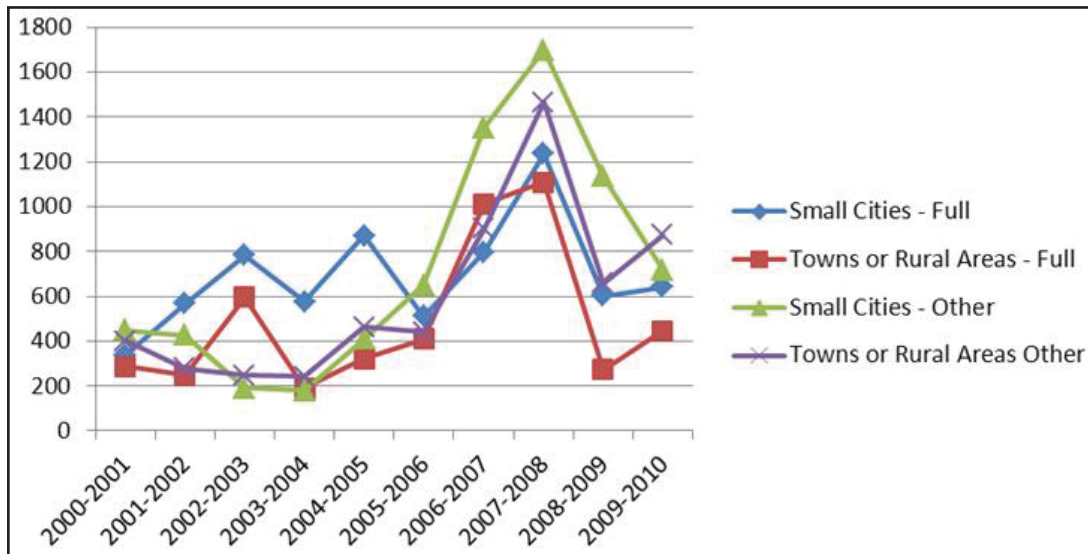


Figure 8. Number of Adult Women Turned Away by Year and Reason— Smaller Centres.

Even though the overall number of women turned away from shelters appears to be decreasing, this issue continues to be a significant concern. Even at current levels, thousands of women and children are still being turned away from shelters due to lack of shelter capacity and/or lack of shelter and community resources to manage more complex problems that often accompany abuse.

Shelters across Alberta continue to be short of space required to accommodate all of the women and children fleeing domestic violence. The impact on the safety of these women and children is probably severe. There are also implications for shelter workers: their workload and their stress levels increase as they have to refuse admission and as they attempt to provide crisis, advocacy and referral support to the women and children who are turned away.

The trends in the number of turn-aways from 2000 to 2010 reflect a combination of factors, including:

- Increases in 2005-2008 likely reflect the impact of the economic boom years in Alberta, since a corresponding drop in turn-aways occurred with the economic downturn;
- Gradually increasing turn-away numbers over the last two years reflect increasing levels of need and a growing shortage of shelter capacity, particularly in Calgary and Edmonton.
- Increases in Other turn-aways possibly reflect a shortage of the necessary capacity in community services that meet the needs of abused women with serious problems related to addictions and/or mental health (e.g. lack of sufficient residential addictions treatment for women, lack of capacity in residential mental health treatment programs, etc.).
- The upward trend may also reflect the increasing length of stay at some shelters as the complexity of women's needs increase as the economic downturn lengthens (e.g. unemployment, increasing poverty and mental health issues, lack of affordable child care, etc.) and availability of safe housing options for women following her shelter stay decreases.
- Decreases in turn-aways due to increases in shelter capacity as a result of federal and provincial government, and community funders' initiatives;
- Decreases in turn-aways due to possible narrowing of shelter admission criteria to ensure that shelter beds are used to accommodate women fleeing abusive relationships at the time of admission;
- Decreases in turn-aways in 2007/2009 may also reflect reduction in demand due to many shelters' use of new provincial funding to hire outreach workers. These staff can support some women in the community, reducing demand on emergency facilities.
- Decreases in turn-aways in 2008 as the number of funded beds increased, allowing some shelters to accommodate more women and children.

3.4 Crisis Calls

Number of Crisis Calls

Over the course of ten years, shelters documented a total of 491,242 crisis calls. Most of those calls were made in Calgary or Edmonton (46%) with the remaining proportions ranging from 11% in Northeast Alberta to 20% in Northwest Alberta. As shown in Figure 9 (on the following page), 37% of calls were taken in towns and rural locations, where shelters often support general crisis issues that may not necessarily be domestic violence related, due to

the lack of other resources in the area.

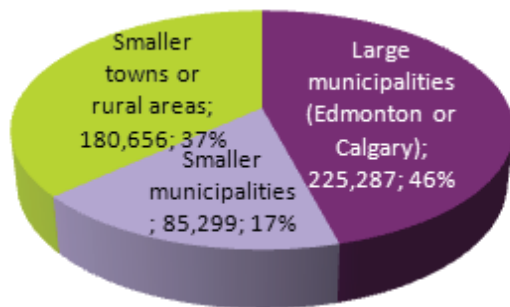


Figure 9. Number of Crisis Calls by the Size of Municipality.

The pattern of crisis calls over the years approximates the patterns associated with the turn-away numbers. As with the turn-away numbers, the number of crisis calls increased between 2006 and 2008, likely as a result of the economic boom in Alberta as well as the work of the Alberta Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying, and then decreased with the onset of recession. These patterns were consistent across shelter location, and follow a similar trend when the geographic locations of shelters were examined. They also show the same recent trend toward increasing turn-away numbers.

Length of Crisis Calls²⁰

Beginning in 2004/2005, a total of 17 shelters documented information about the length of crisis calls. These shelters did not include any towns/rural locations but did include both emergency shelters (n=14) and second-stage (n=3) shelters. As shown in Figure 10 (on the next page), on average the crisis calls in smaller locations were longer, ranging between 19 and 35 minutes per call, while in larger urban locations call length ranged between 13 and 26 minutes.

These differences are likely a result of the different nature of shelter work in these two types of locations. Demand is higher in urban communities for both shelter and crisis support, while rural shelters must manage crisis requests that are not limited to domestic violence admissions with fewer community resources available to them. There do not appear to be any discernible annual trends related to changes in the length of calls. The drop in the length of calls received by smaller centres in 2008/2009 fiscal year corresponds with the drop in the total number of crisis calls received in that year, which is depicted in Figure 10 (on the next page).

20 Note the analysis excludes entries that had ten or fewer crisis calls in a particular year



Figure 10. Average Length of Crisis Calls by Shelter Location by Year.

The number of crisis calls reflects the nature of demand for shelter services in a similar way as the turn-away numbers do. Both the number of crisis calls and the number of turn-aways increase in response to public education initiatives and economic conditions in the province or in particular areas of the province. The fluctuations in the number of calls may also be influenced by the introduction of various crisis lines, which were intended to provide a centralized access point to Alberta shelters (i.e. 1-800 line and the 211 line starting in 2004/2005).

Differences in the length of the crisis calls also highlight differences in the nature of the work of the shelters in larger urban or smaller catchment areas. Demand is higher in urban communities for both shelter and crisis support so the calls are shorter. In contrast, rural shelters manage a more diverse group of crisis calls that include and are not limited to domestic violence issues, making their calls longer.

The remainder of this report presents information derived from the HOMES data set only. Because the information in that data set was indexed by individual admissions, it can be analyzed from multiple perspectives in addition to year and shelter location.



HOMES DATASET



SECTION IV. HOMES DATA SET— DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

The overall HOMES data set (2003-2010) was used to describe the total population of women and their dependents entering 34 shelters (32 emergency shelters and two second-stage shelters), using data from 2003 through 2010. These analyses included examination of demographic characteristics, including age, marital status, ethnicity, employment and income by year to identify any changes over time or by shelter location. The results of these analyses are reported below.

4.1 Shelter Population Diversity

Women using Alberta shelters come from a wide variety of backgrounds as defined by their ethnicity, country of birth, culture, language, age and religion. Their diverse backgrounds impact their experiences and influence the goals they set, as well as the types of shelter services that may be most effective in supporting achievement of these goals.

Information in the HOMES data set that described women's backgrounds was gathered using a variable called "cultural background." Responses entered by shelters to the question of cultural background included a mixture of different types of information. For example, some HOMES data entries reflect ethnicity (e.g. visible minority, Caucasian, European origins, etc.). Other data reflected culture (e.g. Aboriginal, Latin American, Middle Eastern, etc.) and still other data reflected country of birth (e.g. American, Australian, Canadian, etc.). Several hundred different HOMES categories were used by shelters over the years to reflect culture, ethnicity or country of origin— all to answer a single question pertaining to the woman's "cultural background." This mass of information had to be recoded and re-categorized in order to make analysis possible and derive meaning from the "cultural background" variable.

Any such re-categorization of data reduces the diversity of the data. This reduction is always a limitation in statistical analysis, particularly with large data sets such as this one, but is an essential step if the data are to be made useful. In this particular case of the "cultural background" variable, the potential duplication and inconsistency of data entries represented another limitation. Unfortunately, very little other information related to woman's background was available in the HOMES data set and could not be used for analysis (i.e. limited information was recorded under immigration status, country of origin or languages spoken). Therefore, in order to document and describe the trends associated with women's backgrounds, only the information within the "cultural background" variable that included ethnicity, culture and country of birth could be used.

The information within that variable was then reduced, for the purposes of the analysis in this report, to three categories, which are defined as follows:

- Aboriginal – including First Nations, Métis and Inuit women or those who identified themselves as Aboriginal;
- European Origins – including all women who defined themselves as Caucasian, as well as women who identified related backgrounds;

- Other Backgrounds – all women who self-identified as having other cultures, backgrounds or ethnicities.

The categories that were used are not ideal; however they represent the best possible fit with the data that was available in HOMES under the “cultural background” variable. ACWS and members are currently changing the way they now collect this information to ensure that the ethnocultural background of women in shelters can be accurately reflected in order to better meet their needs.

Using this reclassification system, Aboriginal women made up the largest proportion of admissions to Alberta shelters in 2003 (56%). This proportion increased to 60% by 2010 (Figure 11 on the next page), which is almost ten times larger than the overall proportion of Alberta residents who self-identify as Aboriginal, Métis or Inuit (total of 5.8% in Statistics Canada’s 2006 census). Because the Aboriginal proportion of the overall study group is so large, a separate section highlighting Aboriginal women’s utilization of shelter services in Alberta is included later in this report (see Section IX), as well as in the overall data presentation sections.

The large cohort of Aboriginal women in the study is a finding that may be multiply determined, including, for example, the following possibilities:

- Aboriginal women experience a higher frequency of domestic violence than women from other population groups in the province;²¹
- Aboriginal women who experience domestic violence are more likely to use the emergency shelter system than abused women from other population groups in the province;
- As mentioned earlier, data was tracked by the number of admissions and requests for service rather than by “unique” women so the data does not reflect the number of individual women who may have requested and received services several times. We know from previous work that Aboriginal women are more likely to be at higher risk²² and as we see from this analysis they are also more likely to have a shorter stay in shelters.

21 Jodi-Anne Brzozowski, J., Taylor-Butts, A. & Johnson, S. (2006). Victimization and offending among the aboriginal population in Canada. *Juristat*, 26(3) (Cat. No. 85-002-XIE). Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada. Retrieved from <http://publications.gc.ca/collections/Collection-R/Statcan/85-002-XIE/85-002-XIE2006003.pdf>

22 Cairns, K. & Hoffart, I. (2009). Keeping women alive: Assessing their danger. A report prepared for The Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters. Retrieved from <http://www.acws.ca/documents/KeepingWomenAlive.pdf>

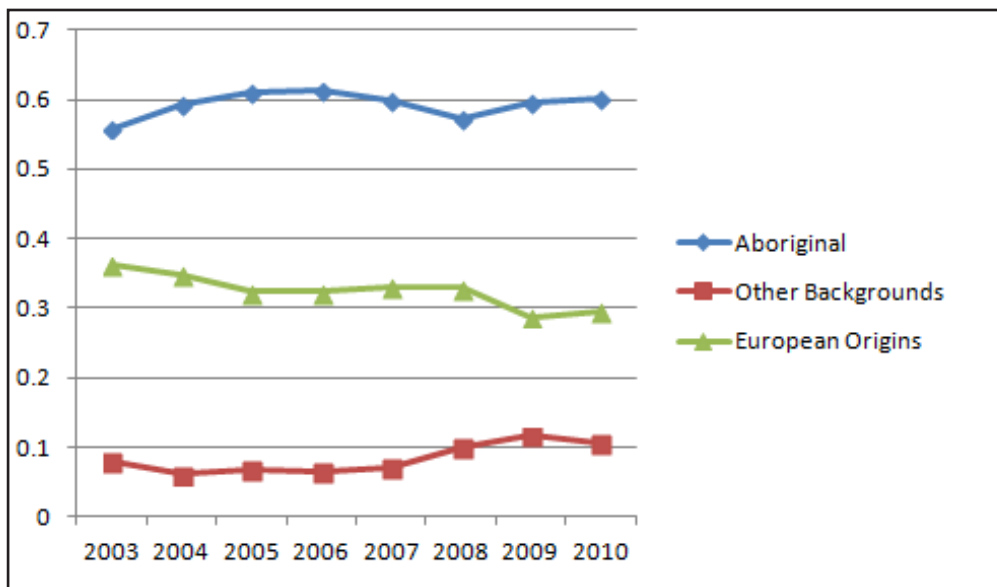


Figure 11. Shelter Admissions by Cultural Background and Year.

The proportion of women with European origins in the overall shelter population has fallen from about 36% in 2003 to its current level of about 30%. Women with backgrounds other than Aboriginal or European made up 8% of the overall shelter population in 2003, and most recently increasing up to about 11%— a proportion similar to the makeup of Alberta’s overall visible minority population, which was 13.9% in 2006. It should also be noted that the proportion of visible minority persons in the population of Calgary and Edmonton had reached about 25% in 2010, which remains higher than 17% of women from Other Backgrounds in Edmonton and Calgary shelters (see Figure 12 on the next page).

Overall, the composition of the shelter population varies substantially when the size of the centre is examined. A larger proportion of Aboriginal women access shelters in towns/rural locations (57% of all women in those shelters) while fewer use shelters in Alberta’s two major cities or in small cities (47% and 52% respectively). Immigration and refugee settlement patterns result in a higher proportion of ‘Other background’ women who are admitted to shelters in Edmonton or Calgary (about 14% of all women in those shelters). Their admission rate in small cities and towns or rural areas is much lower (5% and 3%), than that of either Aboriginal or women with European origins.

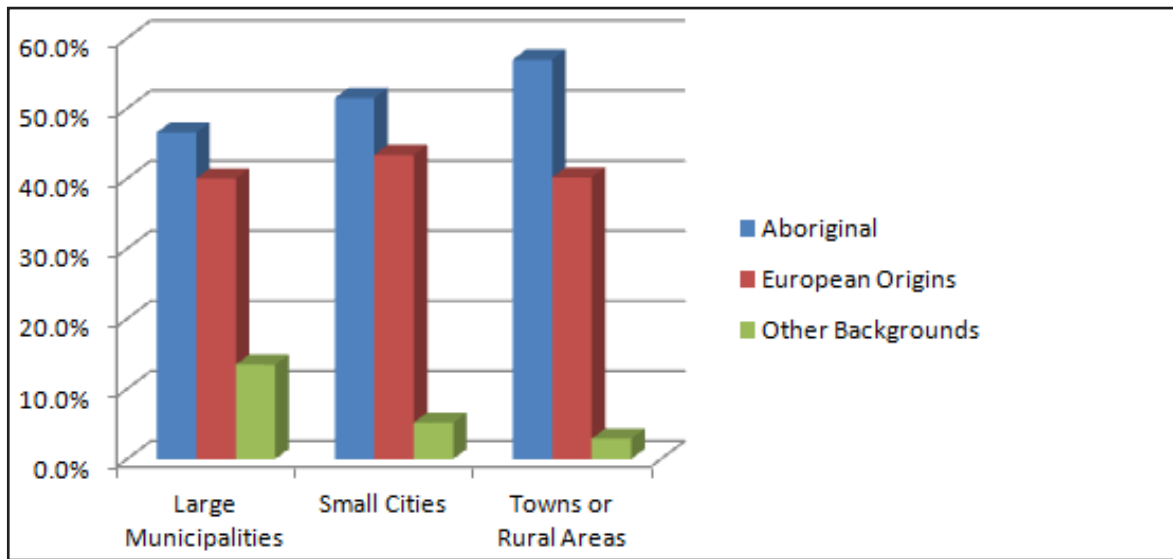


Figure 12. Cultural Background by Size of Municipality.

Further analysis also showed some differences in shelter populations across geographic regions (Figure 13 below). Aboriginal women were more likely to access shelters in Northern Alberta (66% of shelter population as compared to 43% in the South and 45% in Central Alberta), probably due to the larger numbers of reserves and settlements in the North. Conversely, higher proportions of women with 'Other backgrounds' accessed shelters in the South region, which includes major settlement areas such as Brooks and Medicine Hat (13% of South shelter population as compared to 6% in Central Alberta and 3% in the two North regions combined).

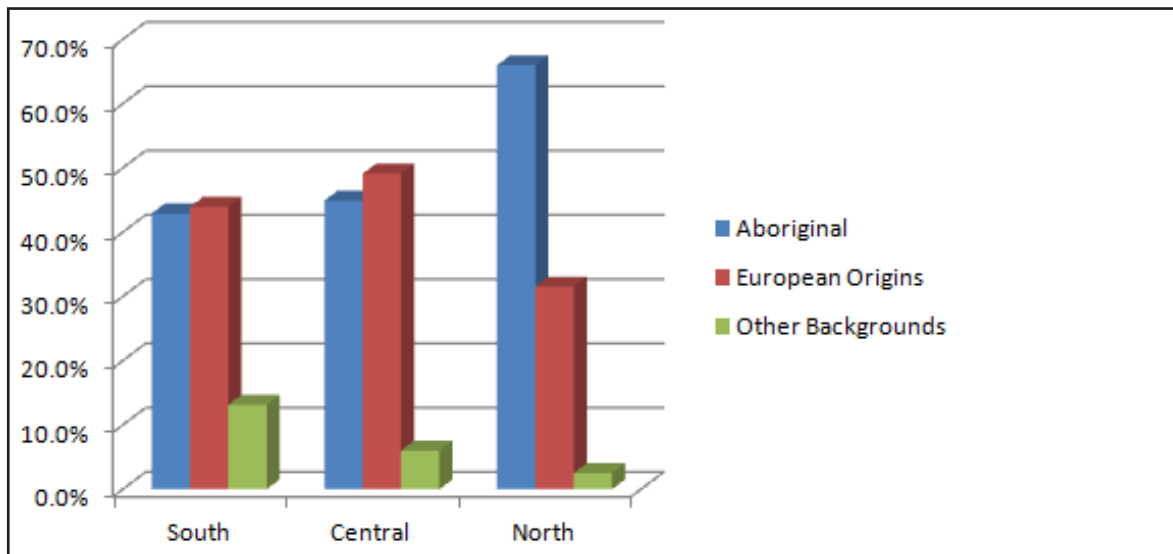


Figure 13. Cultural Background by Shelter Location.

The overall population of Aboriginal women and women of other backgrounds using Alberta's shelters has risen from about 64% of the shelter population in 2003 to about 71% currently, although their distribution by region is uneven— more Aboriginal women use shelters in the two Northern regions and more other women use shelters in the South region.

There are a number of important issues here that require further exploration. For example, there may be lower employment rates and income levels for both groups. Both groups also have greater likelihood of having pre-school children, since their birthrates and family sizes tend to be higher. The regions in which these two groups predominate are less likely to have sufficient capacity in community resources such as mental health treatment or access to safe and affordable housing.

Immigrant/refugee women may also lack social supports that could provide alternate housing options and resources. In any case, these results support shelter workers' observations of increasing client complexity contributing to an increasing length of stay in shelters. These results reinforce staff-identified needs for appropriate training to best serve women from various cultures and backgrounds.

4.2 Age

The average admission age across all shelters was 32.5 years (median 31, range 12–88). The majority of shelter admissions were completed for women age 25 to 40, while women age 24 and under accounted for about one quarter of all admissions. Women age 41 to 59 made up about one-fifth (21%) of the shelter population overall. Admissions of women 60 and older accounted for only about 1% of overall admissions (see Figure 14 on the following page).

The two seniors' shelters in the province were not part of the HOMES data set, contributing to an underestimate of seniors' need for shelter services. Also, it has been demonstrated that older women disproportionately underutilize shelters.²³ We know they are less likely to report violence and abuse to the authorities, less likely to share their experiences with friends and relatives and less likely to seek help from appropriate agencies. This is confirmed by the annual data we receive and by the strong demand for the province's only two specialized services for older adults.

23 Smith, M.J. & Hightower, J. (2005) How to establish specialized refuge and support services for older abused women. BC/Yukon society of transition houses. Retrieved from <http://www.bcsth.ca/sites/default/files/publications/BCSTH%20Publication/Women%27s%20Services/Safe%20Homes%20Manual.pdf>

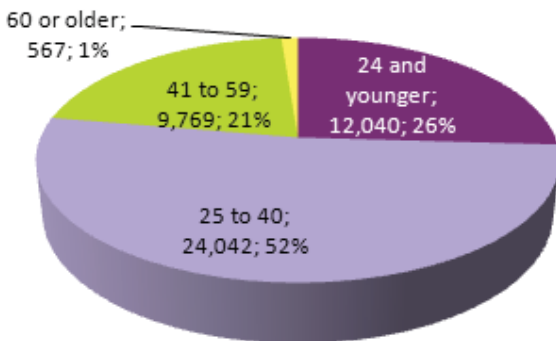


Figure 14. Age of Women in Shelters.

Further analysis showed that Aboriginal women admitted to shelters were more likely to be younger than the overall shelter population. About 29% of Aboriginal women in shelters were 24 years of age or younger as compared to about 20% to 23% of other ethno-cultural groups. Women in towns or rural areas were slightly more likely to be older, with 27% in the 41 years of age or older group as compared to about 22% of women in other locations. There were no major changes in this age distribution over time for either the total population or for sub-groups based on background (Aboriginal, European or Other Backgrounds) or geographical distributions (Northeast, Northwest, Central or South regions).

Women in the 25–40 age group are consistently the most likely to use shelters. This age range corresponds closely to usual child-bearing years. The research in domestic violence indicates that, for many women, abuse often begins while they are pregnant or have pre-school aged children.^{1 2} The age distribution is also a reflection of the shelter underutilization by older women. Only 1% of women admitted to shelters were 60 years of age or older.³

1 Roehl, J., O’Sullivan, C., Webster, D. and Campbell J. Intimate Partner Violence Risk Assessment Validation Study, Final Report. Submitted to the U.S. Department of Justice, March 28, 2005.

2 Metraux, S., & Culhane, D. (1999). Family dynamics, housing, and recurring homelessness among women in New York City Homeless Shelters. *Journal of Family Issues*, 29(3), 371-396.

3 The two seniors’ shelters were not part of the HOMES date set.

4.3 Marital Status

Over the course of the ten-year study, the majority of women admitted to Alberta shelters were either living in common law relationships (43%) or single (31%). The remaining 26% were married. As illustrated in Figure 15 (on the following page), marital status of women using the shelters does vary somewhat by the size of population centre, largely due to differences in cultural background. Larger urban centres have shelter populations that include a larger proportion of women from common law relationships, while towns/rural locations include a larger proportion of single women. Similarly, Central Alberta shelters report a larger common law group and shelters in the North report a larger group of single women. Women

from Aboriginal or European backgrounds were most likely to be either in a common law relationship or single, whereas women with other backgrounds included a higher proportion of those who were currently married or divorced/separated. The latter difference probably reflects Canada's immigration policy which tends to favor family applications and family reunification strategies, where 'family' is defined as legal marriage and children accompanied by legally married parents.

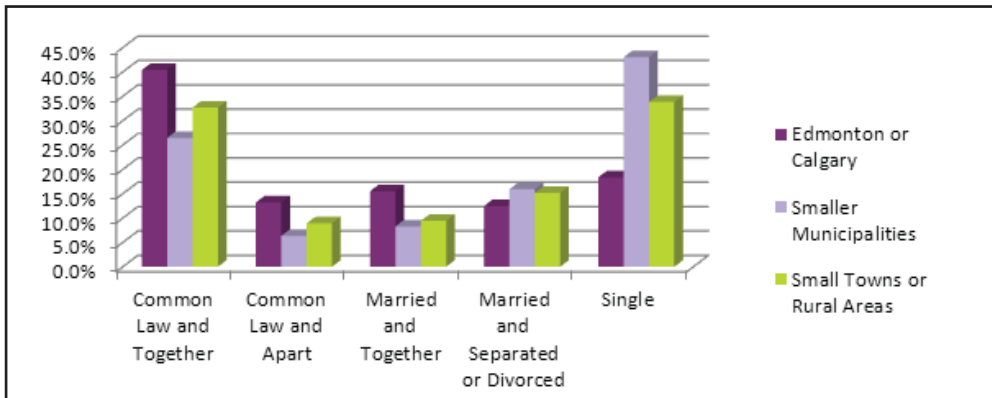


Figure 15. Marital Status by Shelter Catchment Area.

Examination of annual trends in marital status for women using Alberta shelters showed some changes over the study period (Figure 16 below). Specifically, the proportion of women living in common law relationships at the time of shelter admission increased from 29% in 2003 to 36% in 2006 and has been declining slowly to about 32% in 2010. The proportion of women separated from common law partners fell substantially from a high of 16% in 2003 to a low of 5% in 2006, and has increased slightly since then to about 7% in 2010. The proportion of single women using the shelters has increased gradually, from about 29% in 2003 to about 32% in 2010. The proportion of married women who were living with their partner when they came to the shelter decreased from about 14% in 2003 to 11% in 2010 and the married but separated group has increased slightly, from about 12% in 2003 to a high of about 18% in 2010.

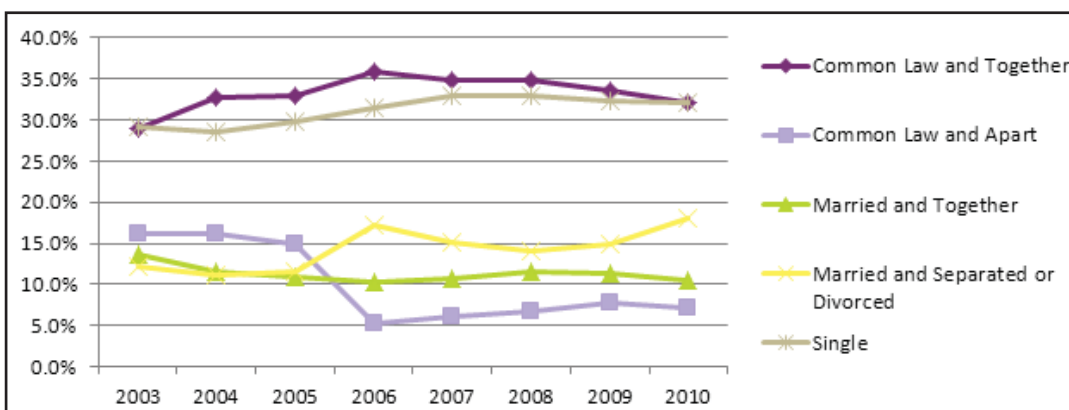


Figure 16. Marital Status by Year.

The trends for those in common law relationships remain the same when the size of the centres that shelters are in are taken into account, but are somewhat different for single women. As shown in Figure 17 (below), the proportion of single women accessing shelters has been decreasing in large urban centres but increasing in towns or rural areas. This trend may be a reflection of the fact that single women are increasingly unable to access urban shelters because of capacity issues.

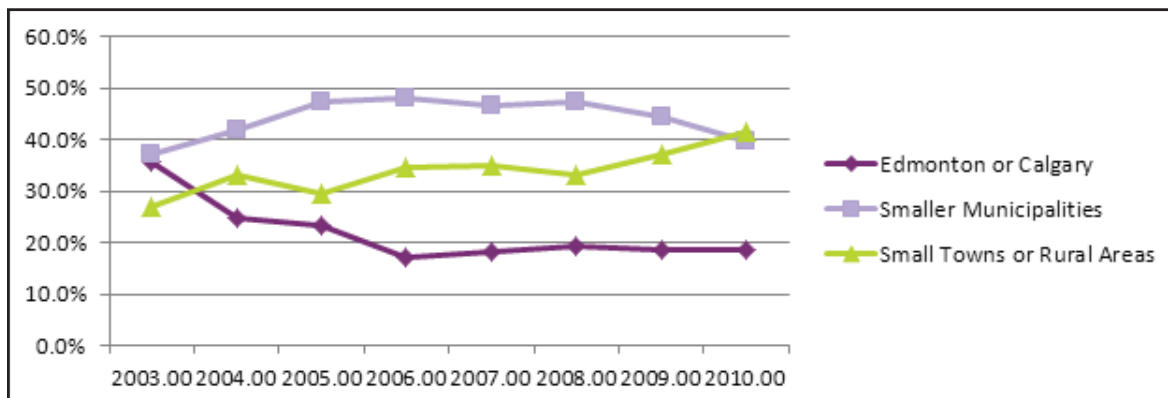


Figure 17. Admissions of Single Women by Year.

Changes in marital status, with more women in common law relationships using the shelters, may be attributed to a number of factors. These include, for example:

- Women choosing to leave abusive relationships at earlier stages;
- An increase in resources available to women, either in terms of housing options or social supports, that make alternative housing possible;
- Increased public awareness efforts that help women recognize abuse in a relationship and take action to leave abusive partners early;
- Improvements in women's social and economic status as a result of increased opportunities for economic independence and affordable housing.

There are also important trends related to the admissions of single women. The number of admissions of single women has been increasing in smaller rural locations but decreasing in large urban centres, largely due to capacity issues that urban shelters experience.

4.4 Dependent Admissions

Women accessing Alberta's shelters reported having a total of 61,173 dependents. Of these dependents, 35,651, or 58%, accompanied women to the shelter and accessed shelter services. Overall, two-thirds of the women who were admitted to shelters were accompanied by dependents. Half of these women were accompanied by either one or two dependents (see Figure 18 on next page), while 15% had three or more dependents accompanying them.

The size of the families admitted to the shelter varied depending on the size of its location (Edmonton and Calgary, small city or town/rural locations). For example, about 85% of women in larger centres were admitted with children as compared to only 55% of women in smaller centres. There were also some differences for different regions. For example, more women in the Central region brought children with them to shelter and they also tended to have more children accompanying them. In comparison, women in the North region were slightly less likely to bring children with them to a shelter possibly due to extended family supports that are more frequent in Aboriginal populations. The number of dependents in shelter is also impacted by the fact that women are less likely, in general, to bring older children with them into shelters and individual shelter policies that sometimes restrict admissions of older boys.

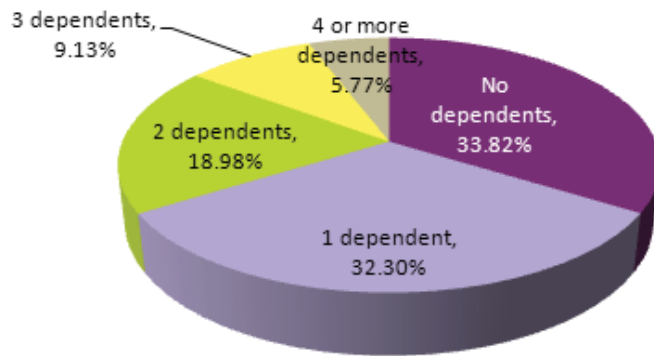


Figure 18. Number of Dependents Accompanying Women to Shelters.

These trends were independent of both the size of the population centre in which the shelter was located and provincial region. However a review by year did show some important trends for this variable. As shown in Figure 19 below, overall, fewer women without dependents accompanying them were admitted to shelters. This rate fell from 42% of women in 2003 to 24% in 2010. More women were admitted with dependents, and the number of dependents admitted with them also increased.

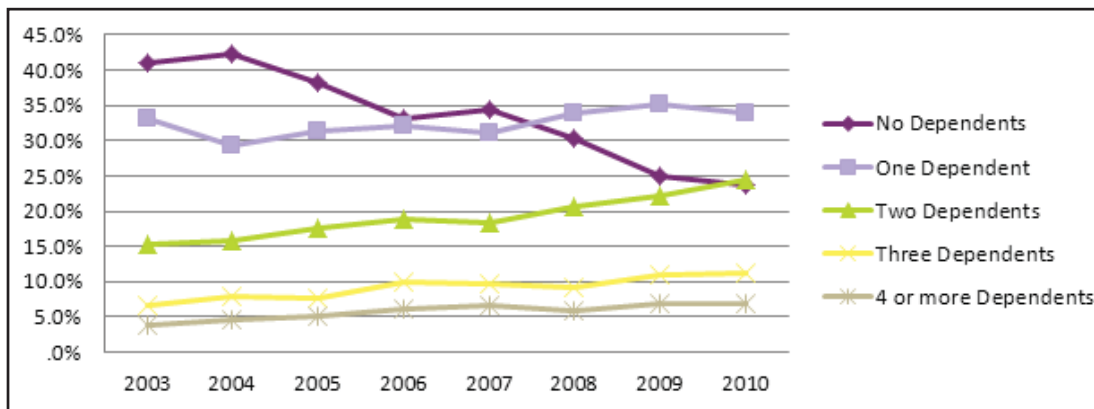


Figure 19. Number of Dependents Accompanying Women to Shelters by Year.

These findings emphasize the importance of programming for children in shelters. They also reflect the growing need for trained child care staff to work with mothers and their children, particularly those aged zero to six years, which make up 48% of children in the shelters (see section 4.5 below). The impact on children’s development when exposed to domestic violence supports the critical need for early intervention for exposed children. Reducing their trauma can substantially improve the likelihood of resilience in neurologic, cognitive and social development.

4.5 Dependents’ Age

Almost half of dependents admitted to shelters with their mothers are preschool age children. About 30% of children in the shelters are under three years of age (Figure 20 below). An annual trend analysis also showed that the youngest group of dependents (age zero to three years) is increasing— from 30% of all dependents in shelters in 2003 to almost 37% in 2010. Again, these data suggest that trauma prevention, early assessment and interventions and informed referrals of women with young children to appropriate resources following shelter stays are critical components of shelter services.

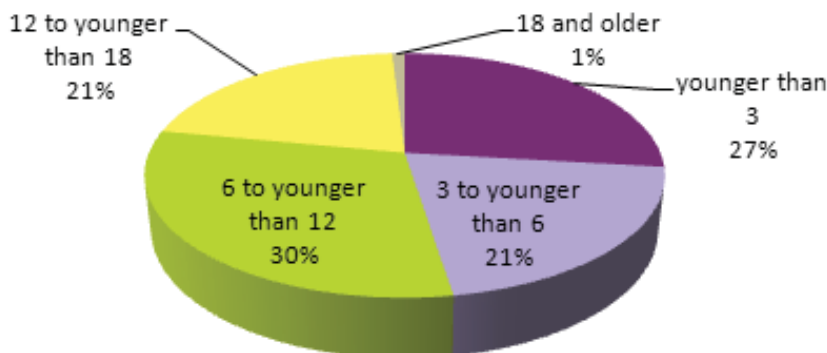


Figure 20. Age of Admitted Dependents.

Research over the last 15 years has amply confirmed that domestic violence has a profound and significant impact on children who are exposed to violence or who experience it. This impact is particularly harmful for preschool children, as the first five years of life are the most vulnerable developmentally, including substantial brain growth and development. The impact of trauma on brain development in the first five years, if untreated, can be devastating and life-long and has very serious social consequences.

Information gathered for this report showed that the overall number of dependent child admissions to shelters exceeds the number of adult female admissions across all regions. The number of admissions of women with children is increasing, as is the proportion of young children admitted with their mothers. These results suggest that children's programming, particularly programming focusing on pre-school children, is an essential component of shelter service requirements. Implementation of this programming may require specialized staffing, staff training and increases in completed referrals to community support programs when mothers and their children leave the shelters.

Moreover, shelter policies and women's circumstances often result in lower number of older dependent admissions. These older children, although not in shelter, might also need additional services and support that may be best provided through shelter outreach programming.

4.6 Employment Status of Women in Shelter

In 2003, 47% of all shelter admissions were unemployed women. However, between 2004 and 2006 shelters corrected some anomalies in the coding of this variable, reducing the number of women's employment status categorized as 'Other' and improving accuracy of employment/unemployment. As a result, the increase in unemployment in 2004-2005 probably corresponds to a decrease in coding some unemployed women as 'Other' (the 'Other' category for this variable should include only women who were retired, students, or were unable to work due to disability; see Figure 21 on next page). Therefore, studying data from the years 2006-2010 is preferred.

From 2006 on, unemployed women made up an increasing proportion of the shelter population overall, rising from 69% in 2006 to about 75% currently. This increase is probably a result of the economic recession, as the proportion of employed women in the shelter population declined from 20% in 2006 to 12% by 2010.

These annual trends in employment remained consistent when compared across geographic region, size of the shelter catchment area and client background. In particular, the increasing proportion of unemployed women in the shelters rose from 73% in 2006 to 80% in 2010 for Aboriginal women, from 62% to 72% for women with European origins and dropped slightly from 61% to 58% for women with Other Backgrounds during the same time period.

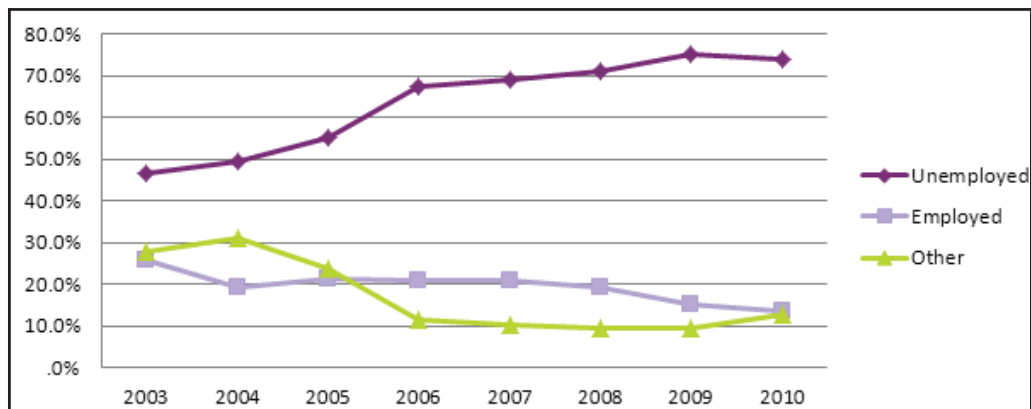


Figure 21. Employment of Women Admitted to Shelters by Year.

Data from the last Alberta recession showed that women were more likely to stay working, while men became unemployed.²⁴ However, women using the shelter system have always had a much higher rate of unemployment than is common in the general population of women. The woman who comes to the shelter is in a relationship where the abuser attempts to control her activities, making it less likely that she will work. Physical injury and traumatization also prevent women from working.²⁵ Those women who have pre-school age children also have challenges managing child care and employment responsibilities. Furthermore, women who are employed prior to shelter admission may be dismissed from their jobs as a result of abuse and associated issues.

In addition women see a significant drop in income once they leave their abuser.²⁶ The proportion of women who are employed while using the shelters declined from a high of 20% in 2006 to a current level of about 12%, again primarily due to the recession and possibly to the difficulties experienced with holding employment while living in a shelter (e.g. child care issues, transportation issues, etc.). Alternatively, employed women, due to the additional resources available to them, may consider other options, which may not be as safe as the shelters. More research is required to understand the context within which employed women make a choice about accessing shelter.

24 Ferraro, V. (2010). Paid work, 2010-2011. Women in Canada: A gender-based statistical report (6th Ed.) (Cat. No. 89-503-x). Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada. Retrieved from http://ywcacanada.ca/data/research_docs/00000186.pdf

25 Walby, S., Allen, J. (March 2004). Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey. Home Office Research Study 276.

26 Lloyd, Susan (Spring 1998) "Domestic Violence and Women's Employment," NU Policy Research, 3:1, <http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/publication/nupr/nuprv03n1/>

The 2010 shelter population includes substantially more women living in poverty than it did in 2006. This change has significant implications for shelter service requirements, increasing the emphasis on assisting women with child care, affordable housing, employment opportunities and other sources of income supports. The increasing number of unemployed women and children living in poverty may also imply a more chronic population, since women with mental health or addiction problems have greater difficulty in finding and maintaining employment.

Abused women with no regular income may also be more likely than other women to use shelters as a consequence of having fewer resources at their disposal. For example, they are unlikely to have funding for child care that would allow them to seek employment, or for independent affordable housing. Adding poverty to the abuse equation is also likely to result in women needing either to return to shelters more frequently or to extend their length of stay.

SECTION V. REASONS FOR SHELTER ACCESS AND HISTORY OF ABUSE

5.1 Types of Admission

Information about types of admission to shelter was important to review because of the differences that may occur between shelters in towns and rural areas as compared to shelters in Edmonton and Calgary. Smaller centres tend to admit more women for reasons Other than Abuse, since community services are more limited in these locations. Overall, 82% of admissions involved abuse. The remaining 18% accessed shelters for other reasons, including, for example, homelessness, sexual assault, or needing accommodation while awaiting hospital admission or other specialized medical or social services. However, it is highly likely that many of women admitted for “Other” reasons also had a history of domestic violence that may have been a cause of their homelessness, poverty, health problems or other concerns.²⁷

As shown in Figure 22 below, the number of other admissions varied depending on the size of the shelter catchment area. Only about 4% of women in large urban shelters were admitted for reasons Other than Abuse, as compared to about 27% admitted for other reasons to all other shelters. The size of the centre where a shelter was located may also explain the regional differences. Women admitted to the Northern shelters for other reasons comprised 33% of all admissions, as compared to 12% and 9% of other admissions in the Southern and Central Alberta regions. The key differences between Edmonton and Calgary, and the rest of the province, are in the size and type of other services or supports available in the community and the resulting need for shelters in some locations to “be all things for all people.” The need to accommodate diverse needs places additional pressure on town and rural shelters since staffing and staff training must be more encompassing. Overall, women in the other admission category, as well as abused women entering a shelter without their children, are more likely to be older (age 41 and older) and single than abused women with children.

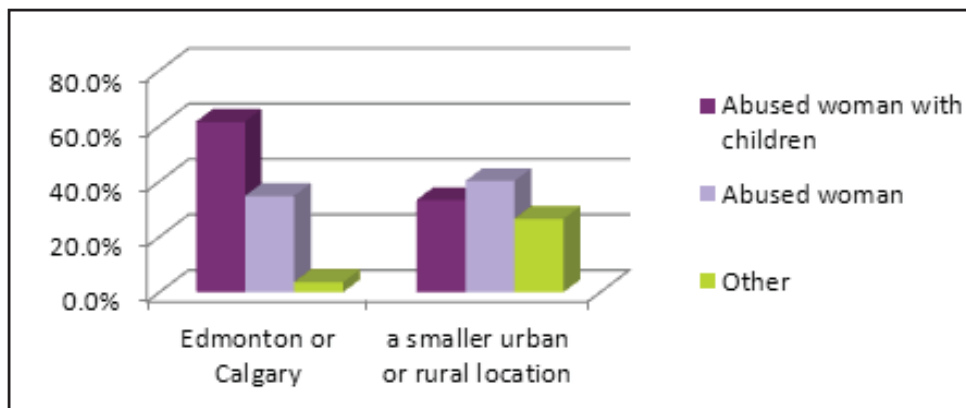


Figure 22. Type of Admission by Size of Shelter Catchment Area.

²⁷ Tutty, L. M., Ogden, C., Giurgiu, B. (and others) (2009). “I Built My House of Hope”: Best Practices to Safely House Abused and Homeless Women. Report prepared for the Homelessness Knowledge Development Program, Homeless Partnering Secretariat, Human Resources and Social Development Canada.

The analysis of annual admissions types did not show substantial differences for location size, regions or for different backgrounds. There were some annual trends specific to admissions in smaller centres, however. As Figure 23 (below) shows, the proportion of “Other” admissions has decreased in smaller centres over time, with an associated increase in admissions of abused women with or without children.

Discussions with shelter staff from smaller centres indicated that the decrease in the other category reflects a change in the way admissions were documented, rather than any change in the nature of the client group. Shelter staff members are now better able to identify instances in which domestic violence is an issue, even if it is not identified as such immediately upon admission.

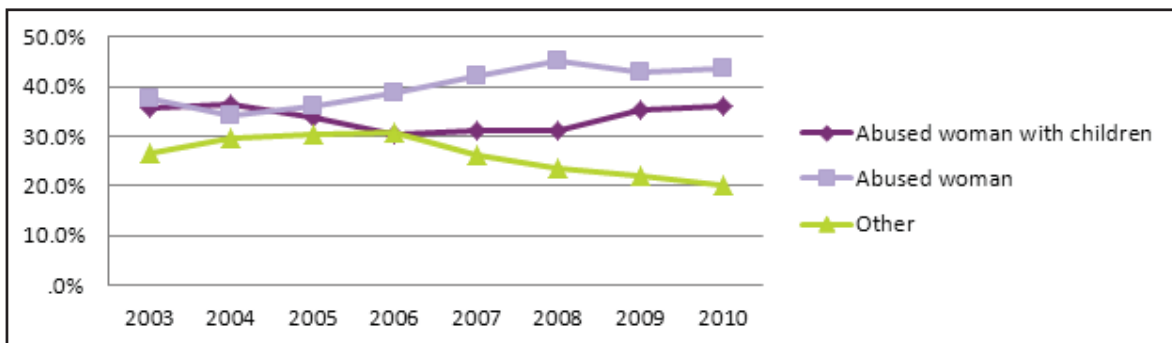


Figure 23. Adult Admissions in Smaller Centres by Type of Admission.

Shelters in towns and rural locations operate in a context that is substantially different from that of Alberta cities. Demand for shelter services is higher in larger centres, and shelters may sometimes prioritize women fleeing abuse at the time of their admission. In towns and rural locations shelters support women who are fleeing domestic abuse at the time of contact, but also those who have been abused in the past. Many women who are homeless or dealing with other issues such as physical and mental health or addictions have experienced domestic violence at some point in their lives. Their homelessness is often a result of abuse. Challenges in rural service delivery around the lack of community services or supports also result in more “Other” admissions. The availability of safe and subsidized housing is also more limited in small centres, making length of stay necessarily longer.

5.2 Abuse Type²⁸

Women who access shelters have usually experienced multiple different types of abuse. Almost all have experienced emotional abuse (91%) and three-quarters have also experienced physical abuse (Figure 24 on the following page). In addition to these two types of abuse, women also reported having experienced financial, verbal, and sexual abuse as well

28 Note that these analyses excluded women admitted for reasons Other than Abuse.

as property damage, family abuse, stalking, neglect, cultural and spiritual abuse and other forms of abuse as reflected in Figure 24 (below).

Reporting on types of abuse varied somewhat across shelter location or centre size. For example, women in the North were least likely to identify all types of abuse. Their rates of reporting for verbal abuse were 40% as compared to 63% in the South and 53% in the Central Alberta. 65% of women in the North reported physical abuse as compared to 78% in the South and 81% in Central Alberta. Similar results were obtained when the types of reported abuse were compared across shelter size— women accessing shelters in smaller or rural locations were less likely to identify all types of abuse than women using shelters in large urban areas. Some of these results may be due to consistency in how types of abuse were defined across shelters as well as sensitivities associated with questions about sexual abuse or abuse of children.

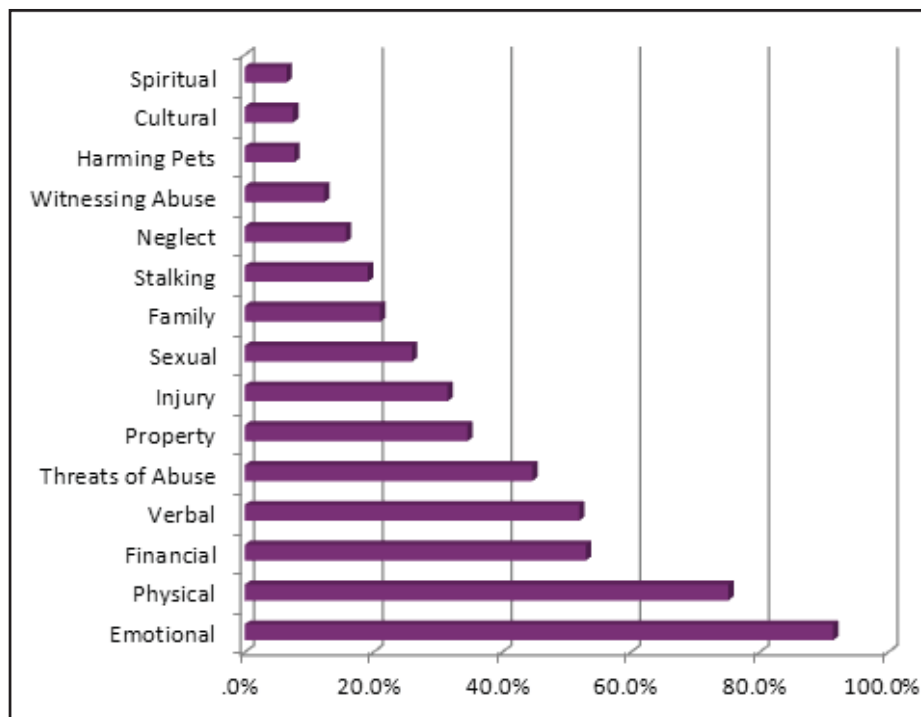


Figure 24. *Types of Abuse Reported by Women Accessing Shelters.*²⁹

Aboriginal women were more likely to report physical abuse (78% as compared to 72%/73% of other groups of women) and to have experienced injury (35% as compared to 30% and 32% of other groups of women). Women from Other Backgrounds (i.e. not Aboriginal or European origins) were more likely to report verbal abuse (63% as compared to 58% and 52% of the other women) and more cultural abuse (16% as compared to 8% and 6%) than other cultural groups were.

²⁹ There were additional types of abuse that occurred in 6% or fewer admissions. Those included instances related to witnessing various forms of abuse.

Figure 25 (below) illustrates the annual trends in the type of abuse reported. As the Figure shows, reports of stalking, threats and verbal abuse have all increased over time. Feedback from shelter staff suggested that, in most cases, these changes are a result of improved procedures for identifying and assessing those types of abuse rather than actual increases in incidence. In particular, staff awareness may have been impacted by the use of the Danger Assessment Tool³⁰ which seeks to assess the impact of different types of abuse on the risk for femicide.

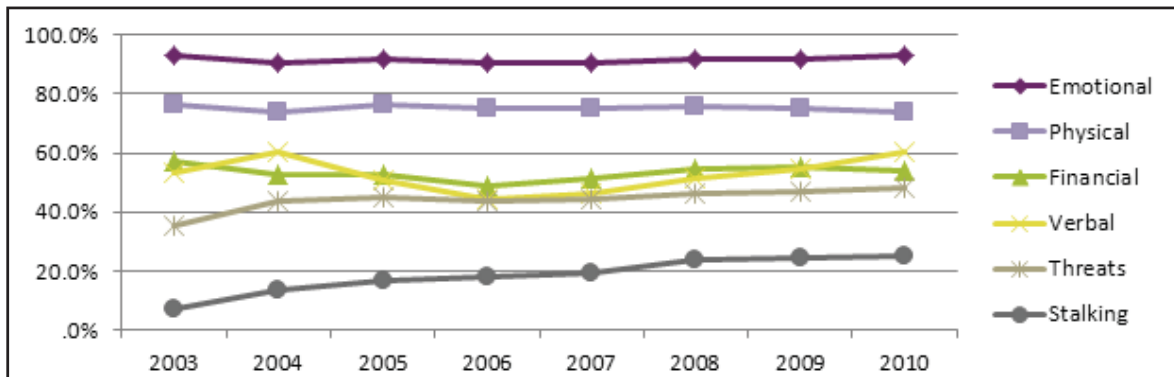


Figure 25. Types of Abuse Reported by Year.

Women entering shelters typically report more than one type of abuse, with emotional abuse, physical abuse, financial abuse and verbal abuse being most frequently identified. The data for this report confirm that abuse is multifaceted. All types of abuse are harmful to women and their children. The complex combination of abuse types emphasizes the need for a careful and comprehensive assessment of each woman's circumstances in order to inform shelter services. More uniform coding of abuse types may also improve shelter's ability to track actual changes in incidence rates and assist in developing specialized interventions.

5.3 Primary Abuser

The overall sample of women using Alberta shelters reported that their primary abusers were common law partners (45%), husbands (17%), a former common law partner (13%), a boyfriend (10%), or someone designated as belonging in the Other category (10%) (Figure 26 on the following page). The latter category included abusers who were friends, roommates, girlfriends, support workers, or employers. The prevalence of abuse in common law relationships is especially apparent and may suggest that women living in this type of relationship are particularly vulnerable. These results may also be a reflection of the fact that common law relationships are the fastest growing family structure in Canada³¹ and that many shelters prioritize women with children over single women due to the demand for shelter services.

30 Cairns, K. & Hoffart, I. (2009). Keeping women alive: Assessing their danger. A report prepared for The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. Retrieved from <http://www.acws.ca/documents/KeepingWomenAlive.pdf>

31 Statistics Canada (2006). Families and Households. 2006 Census of Population. Ottawa, ON.

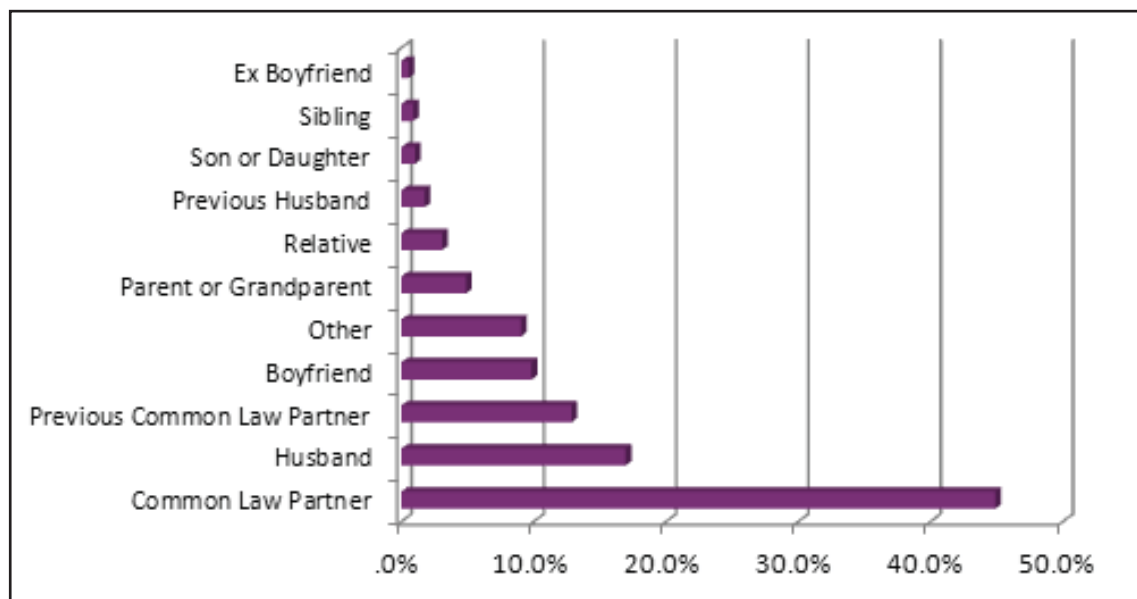


Figure 26. Type of Primary Abuser.

There were regional differences in the identification of the primary abuser. Abuse by a common law partner was more common in the Central Alberta region (55%) and in the North (45%) as compared to the South (35%), which had a higher frequency of abuse by husbands (21% as compared to 16% of Central region admissions and 12% of admissions in the North). However, a primary abuser who was a common law partner remained the most frequent pattern across all regions. The higher rate of abuse by husbands in the South region may reflect the larger population of immigrants/refugees there and their greater likelihood of living in marriages.³²

Women under the age of 24 were more likely than other age groups to report that their abusers were boyfriends, relatives, a parent or grandparent or other abusers. Women over age 60 were more likely to report that abusers were sons or daughters or other relatives (8%).

Aboriginal women across the province reported the highest proportion of abuse from common law partners (50%), as compared to women with European origins (44%) or women from Other Backgrounds (22%). Husbands were perpetrators in only 8% of Aboriginal women’s reports as compared to 20% of reports of women with European origins and 53% of other women’s reports. The difference here is probably related to a higher prevalence of common law relationships among Aboriginal women. In comparison, women with Other Backgrounds were the least likely to be living in common law relationships.

³² The term, “common law relationship” is actually no longer an official type of a relationship in Alberta. Today, under Alberta law, there are “adult interdependent relationships.” This is a more encompassing term that includes the old common law relationship, but also includes multiple other committed relationship types. The main law governing “adult interdependent relationships” is the Adult Interdependent Relationships Act. However, most people continue to use the old term. It may be preferable for ACWS to suggest that shelters change the term used in their data records to conform with current legal usage in Alberta.

As shown in Figure 27 below, the proportion of abusers who were husbands decreased from 22% in 2003 to 15% in 2010— a difference that probably reflects a change in the prevalence of married people in general, rather than any change in actual levels of abuse in marriage. There was also an increase in the proportion of abuse reported that involved a former common law partner (2003: 8% to 2010: 18%).

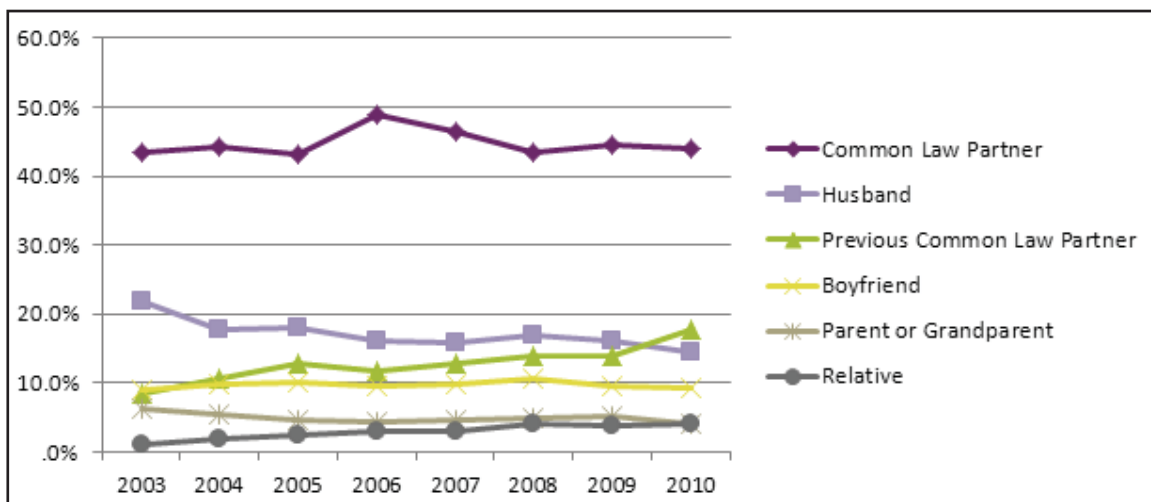


Figure 27. Abuser Type by Year.

The data suggest a trend toward an increasing prevalence in the shelters of common law relationships among women who are abused by a spouse or partner. This trend is more apparent among Aboriginal women using the shelters than among other ethnic groups. Women with backgrounds other than Aboriginal or European are most likely to report abuse by husbands and least likely to live in common law relationships.

SECTION VI. LENGTH OF STAY AND SHELTER SERVICES

Shelters provide safe temporary housing alternatives as well as a number of services, including supports, advocacy and referrals. The length of shelter stays, as well as the types of services that women receive, depend in large part on the goals they wish to achieve while in shelter. Length of stay is considered separately here for emergency and second-stage shelters, since stays in second-stage shelters are intended to be much longer.

6.1 Length of Stay in Emergency Shelters

Over half of the women who use emergency shelters remain for ten days or less, with 41% staying in shelter for five days or less. A further 21% of women remain in shelter for 21 days or longer (see Figure 28 below). Women in the two North regions and in smaller urban or rural locations are more likely than those in other regions and location types to have short shelter stays.

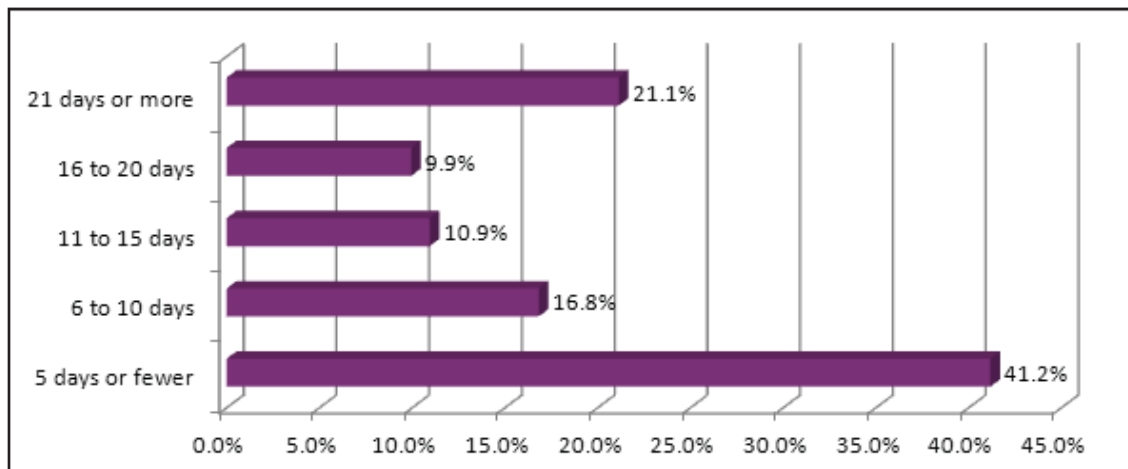


Figure 28. Number of Days in Shelter by Proportion of Admissions

Further analysis identified specific characteristics of the short-stay group. Women staying in the shelter for five days or fewer are more likely to be:

- Admitted for reasons Other than Abuse (55% of Other admissions as compared to 35% of admissions for abused women with children and 47% for abused women without children);
- Admitted without children (52% as compared to 34% of women with children);
- Aboriginal women and women of European origins (42% and 41% respectively as compared to 30% with Other backgrounds); and
- Living with their partners at the time of admission to the shelter (46% of women in common law relationships and 42% of women who were married as compared to 35% of those who are apart from their common law partner or spouse at the time of shelter admission).

The overall annual trend shows a gradual increase in the number of days that women stay in emergency shelters. This increase is independent of the size of centre or its geographic location. Length of stay in women's emergency shelters has increased from 11 to 13 days.

Further analysis also showed that the number of women staying in a shelter for five days or less is decreasing and that more women are staying for 21 days or more. This pattern is particularly evident for the shelters in the North and in the South, as well as in shelters in smaller centres. These trends hold true for women of diverse cultural backgrounds. For example, when length of stay is considered separately for Aboriginal women in provincial emergency shelters, the result shows some increase in longer stays (more than five days), from 14% in 2003 to 20% in 2010, and a corresponding reduction in short stays from 47% in 2003 to 38% in 2010. Women with European origins, as well as women from Other Backgrounds, show a similar pattern.

The focus group participants attributed the increase in the length of stay in emergency shelters, particularly in 2009, to the increasing complexity of admitted women's needs and to the recent global recession which is linked with homelessness, limited resource availability, and increased migration.

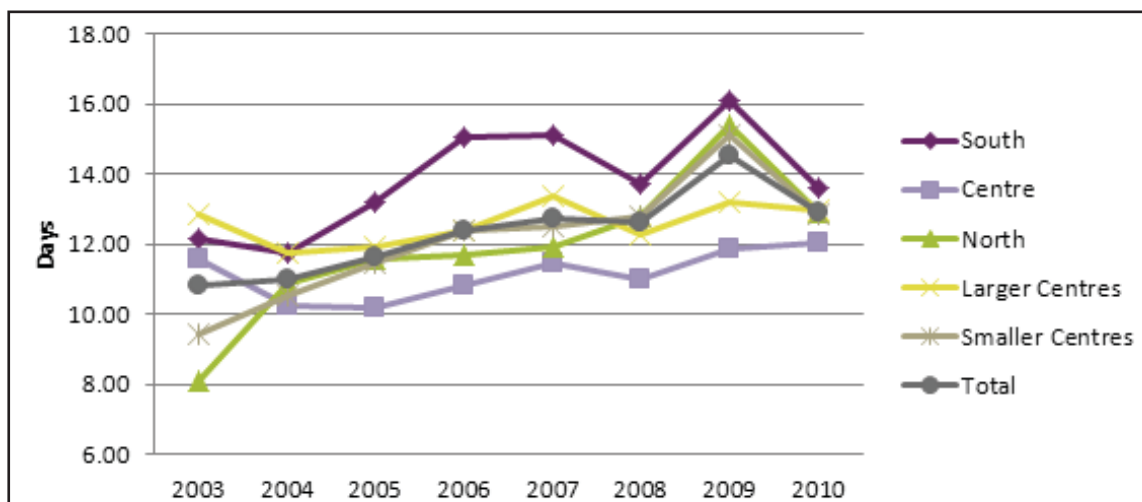


Figure 29. Average Length of Stay in Emergency Shelters by Year and Type of Centre.

Length of stay in emergency shelters has shown some increases in the proportion of women with longer stays and corresponding decreases in short stays. These changes probably reflect the increasing complexity of client needs, the economic downturn with its concomitant increase in unemployment and shortages of affordable housing, as well as increased capacity of shelter workers to assess women's needs.

Overall, the fact that more than one-third of the shelter population stays in a shelter for only one to five days leaves shelter staff with very little time to assist many women. This pattern is particularly true for Aboriginal women and women of European origins, abused women without children, abused women who are living with their partners at the time of admission, and those who enter shelters for reasons Other than Abuse.

6.2 Length of Stay in Second-Stage Shelters

The distribution of length of stay for women in second-stage shelters overall includes stays of less than one month (15%), one to three months (34%), three to six months (31%) and more than six months (21%). These data were also analyzed for annual, regional and demographic trends. However, the trends that were identified may not be representative of all second-stage shelter admissions due to the comparatively low number of admissions recorded. The overall information for second-stage shelters is based on a total of three shelters, whose annual admission ranged from 1 to 64. Any trends would be substantially influenced by changes in the number of available beds, data gathering processes within each shelter and other issues that could impact the length of stay and number of admissions.

6.3 Services Provided

Shelters provide over 30 recorded different types of services to women and children staying in the shelter or through outreach and/or follow-up services. These services include safety planning, counselling, child support, basic needs support (including housing, food and transportation), advocacy, referrals, follow-up and outreach services, as well as services and supports specifically for Aboriginal and immigrant populations. Unfortunately, this service provision was documented for only 32% of admissions. Clearly that number is not representative of the scope of services provided in the shelters (as confirmed in the focus groups with shelter staff) and cannot be used to identify trends in shelter work. In order to ensure that the full scope of shelter services is accurately reflected, ACWS may need to work with shelters to ensure that the current shelter database is being used to keep thorough data records of all shelter services.

The ten most frequently documented services are identified in Figure 30 below. Child care support and emotional support were the most likely services to be documented. There was also some indication in the data that services were less likely to be recorded in cases where women stayed for brief periods of time (one to five days).

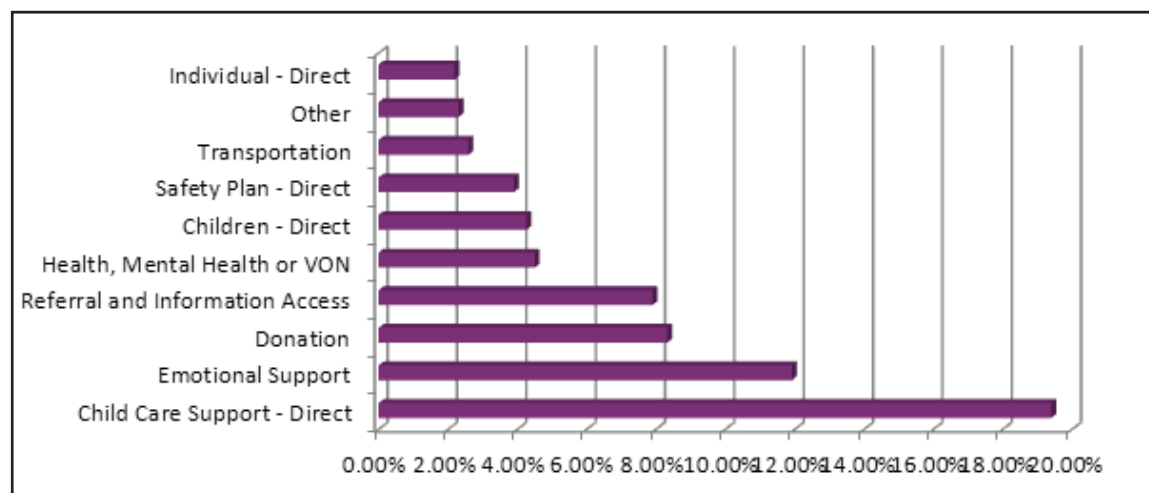


Figure 30. Services Provided by Shelters

Information about the scope and types of services provided by shelters is essential to understand what services or combination of services work for women and children in shelters. Documentation of shelter services also provides a comprehensive view of the work that shelter staff must undertake in order to support women and children in their care. Identifying a list of core services common to shelters across Alberta and then developing a method to guide consistent and accurate tracking of those services is an important task that Alberta shelters should consider undertaking.

SECTION VII. TRANSPORTATION AND DISTANCE TRAVELLED

For many women, the experience of calling and travelling to a shelter can be traumatic. Women must leave behind almost everything familiar and move to a small, unfamiliar place in a communal living environment. The availability of transportation to a shelter, as well as the distance that women must travel can make the experience more or less difficult.

7.1 Means of Transportation to the Shelter

As shown in Figure 31 below, many women— almost 40%— receive transportation support from the shelter itself. In most cases, this support means cab or bus fare and, in some cases, shelters may actually transport women and children to the shelter directly. In about 30% of cases, however, women drive themselves to shelter, and 9% are brought to the shelter by police, victim services or friends and family members. “Other” forms of transport were not detailed, but it is likely that public transit services are the primary means of transport counted here.

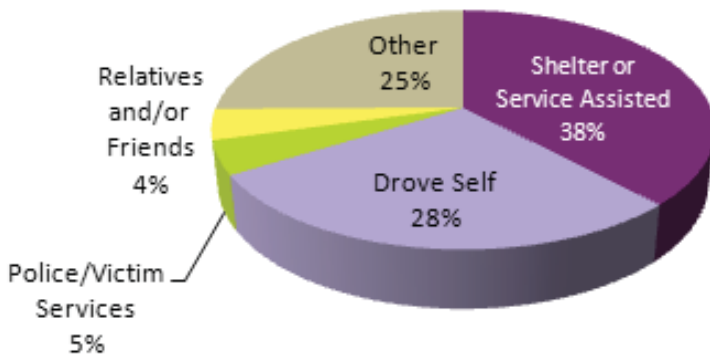


Figure 31. Transportation to Shelter

When considering the size of the centre in which a shelter is located, there are substantial differences in the method of transportation women used. Shelters in Edmonton and Calgary generally have more transportation options available and are also more likely to provide transportation assistance to women seeking admission. These shelters provided transportation assistance in 66% of overall admissions, as compared to 22% of admissions in shelters elsewhere. The reverse is also true— in smaller locations women are more likely to drive themselves to the shelter (36% as compared to 16% in large urban centres). Similar patterns are seen when method of transportation is analyzed by geographic location. Probably because most of the town or rural shelter locations are in the North, women there are more likely to drive themselves to the shelters and less likely to be assisted by the shelter than women in Central or Southern Alberta regions.

Comparison of transportation methods across various demographic characteristics showed that women who were admitted to the shelter because they were abused were more likely to receive shelter support with transportation than women who were admitted for other reasons. 41% of abused women with children and 43% of abused women without children

received transportation assistance as compared to 22% of women admitted for other reasons. Presumably because they had their own means of transportation, women who were employed were more likely to drive themselves to the shelter (45% as compared to 29% of women who were unemployed).

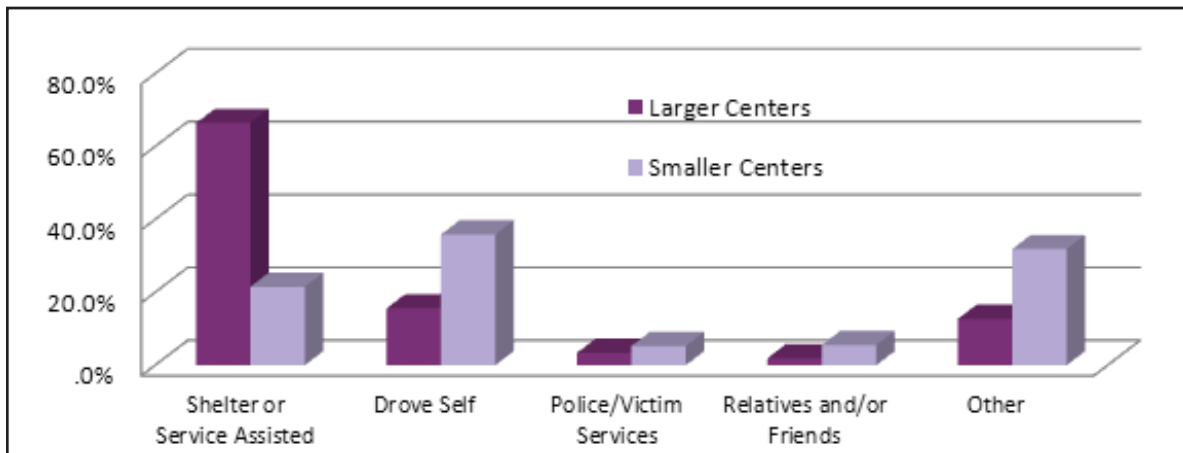


Figure 32. Transportation Method by Centre Size.

As illustrated in Figure 33 (on the following page), transportation methods changed somewhat over the study period. Specifically, women were somewhat less likely over time to receive shelter assistance, or to be driven to a shelter by their relatives or friends. Instead, they were slightly more likely to drive themselves, to receive assistance from police or victim services, or to use other methods of transportation. While the trends associated with increased assistance from police/victim services and decreased support from relatives/friends were consistent in all locations, the trends in Shelter Assistance and Driving Self were primarily a factor in small cities, towns and in rural areas where long distances and limited resources may have played a role. It is important to note here that shelter funding for transportation purposes has not increased over the period of the study, meaning that shelters have to find other sources of funding for client transportation. In addition, changes in insurance requirements and liability concerns have meant that some shelters no longer can afford to operate shelter vehicles.

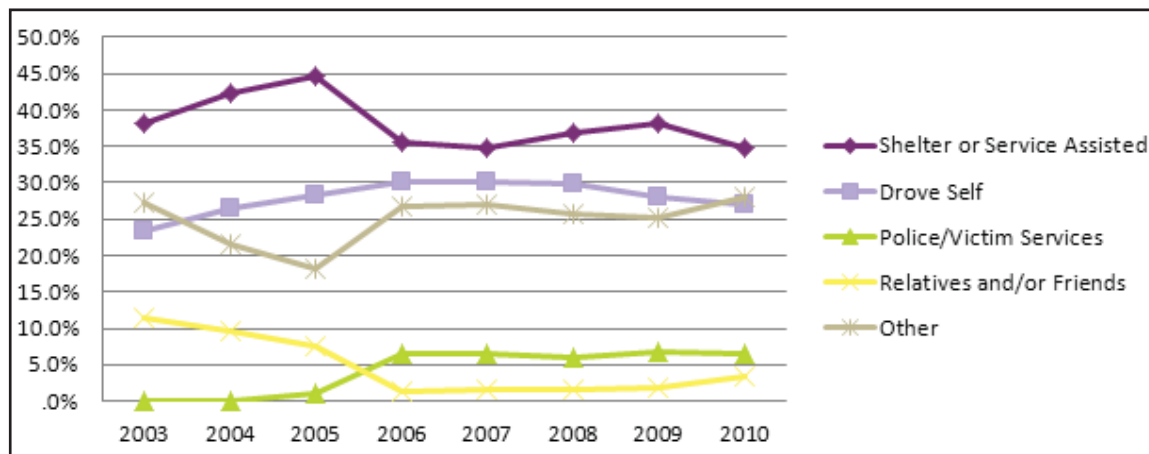


Figure 33. Transportation Method by Year.

7.2 Distances Travelled

Over half of women (54%) travelled distances of less than ten kilometres to come to the shelter. Another 15% travelled between ten and 50 kilometers, and the remaining 31% travelled longer distances. Again, the size of the centre in which the shelter was located played a significant role in the distance that women had to travel.

As is illustrated in Figure 34 below, half of the women who accessed shelters in towns or rural areas travelled longer distances, as compared to 18% of women who travel the same distances in Edmonton and Calgary and 26% in small cities. Because women with Other Backgrounds are more likely to live in urban locations and Aboriginal women are more likely to live in towns or rural centres, women of Other Backgrounds are more likely to travel shorter distances than Aboriginal women do. There were no other noticeable changes in annual trends for distances travelled.

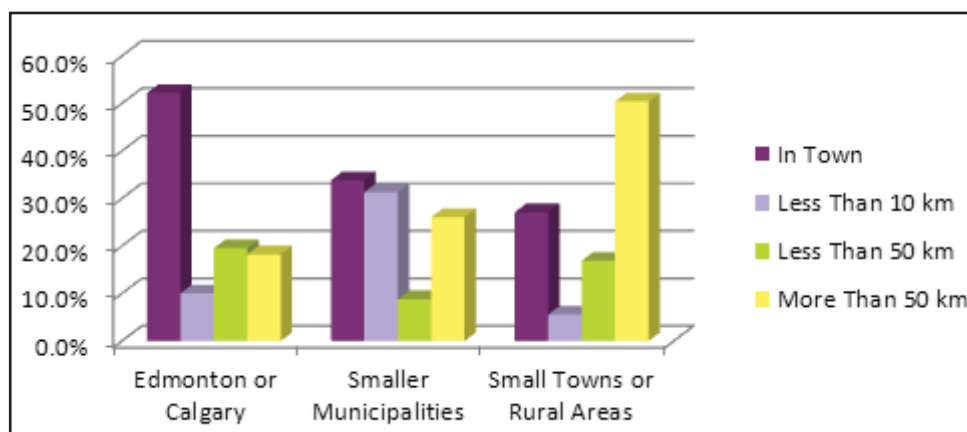


Figure 34. Distances Travelled to Shelter by the Size of Centre

Transportation and Distances Travelled is another area that highlights different natures of service delivery in urban and smaller centres. Shelters in Edmonton and Calgary generally have more transportation options available and are also more likely to provide transportation assistance to women seeking admission. Women who accessed shelters in towns or rural areas travelled longer distances than women who accessed shelters in urban locations. Almost one third of women had to travel more than 50 kms to access shelter. About 40% of abused women needed help with transportation.

The declining and very low levels of transportation assistance received from friends and family is an important trend, as is the increase in travel assistance received from police and victims' services. There may still be significant pressures on women to remain in the home in spite of abuse, making support from relatives less likely. The efforts of Alberta police services over the last five to ten years to revise the procedures they use with domestic calls may be resulting in some shift toward a more supportive process that abused women are willing to use, and possibly increase in police using their Victims Services program to transport women to the shelters.

SECTION VIII. POLICE INVOLVEMENT

Police become involved with women accessing women's shelters when they respond to a domestic call. In the course of their involvement they may attend to an incident, they may provide information, they may provide transportation to the victim, or they may lay charges or make arrests.

Overall, police were involved in about half of all shelter admissions (46.5%). The rate of police involvement varied depending on the size of the centre, geographic location of the shelter and woman's background. As shown in Figure 35 below, the police were least likely to be involved in admissions to shelters in Northern Alberta (39%) and admissions of Aboriginal women (43%) and were most likely to be involved in admissions of women with backgrounds Other than Aboriginal or European origins (53%) or in shelters located in Central Alberta (50.5%).

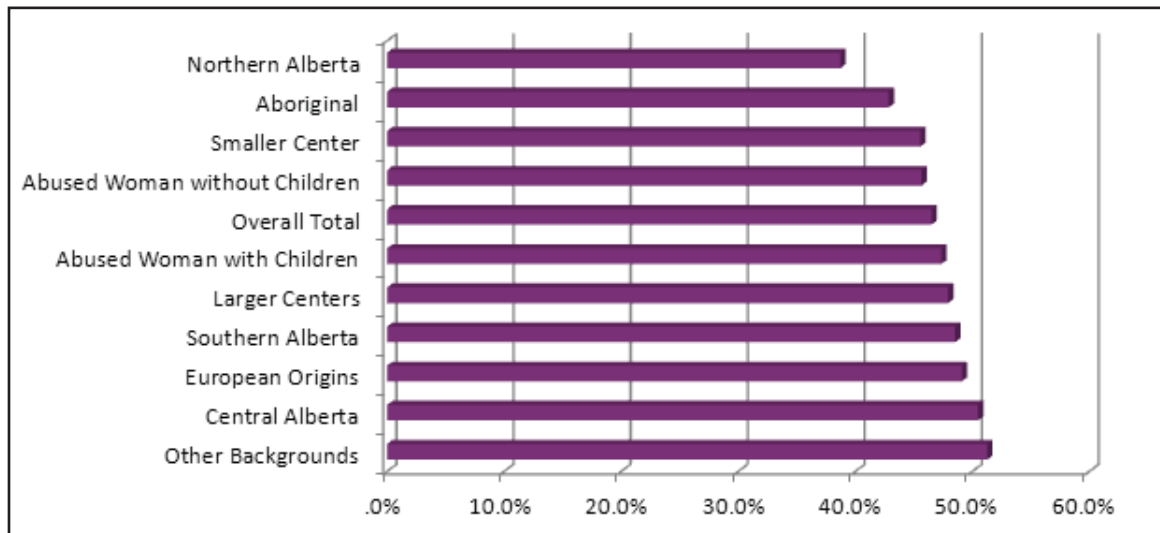


Figure 35. Proportion of Admissions Involving Police by Shelter Location and Woman's Background.

In general, the rate of police involvement has remained fairly stable over the study period, ranging from 47.6% of admissions in 2003 to 46.6% of admissions in 2010 (Figure 36 on the following page). Notably, police involvement decreased between 2006 and 2008 from 48.6% to 43.7% and then increased again between 2009 and 2010 again to pre-2006 levels. The trends depicting police involvement with Aboriginal women are similar to the overall annual trends. Police involvement appears to have largely stayed the same over the study period for women with European origins and women of Other Backgrounds.

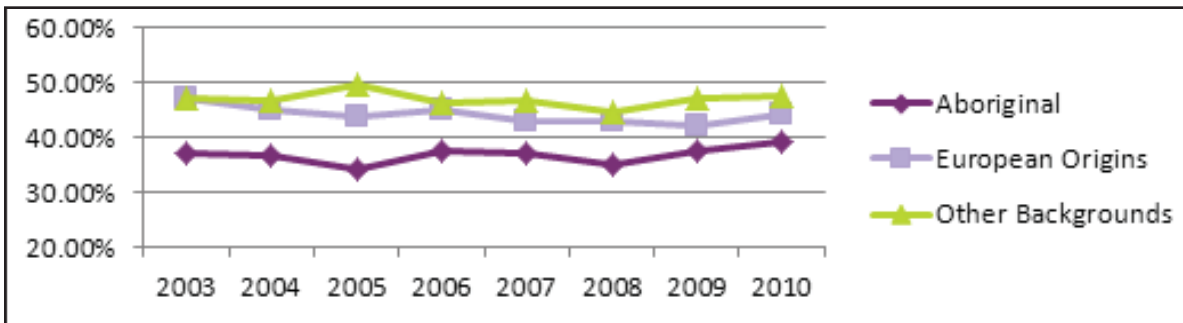


Figure 36. Police Involvement by Year and Background.

8.1 Type of Police Involvement

As shown below in Figure 37, police can be involved with women accessing shelters in multiple ways. Most often, police inform women of the assistance available, such as a shelter (37%) and/or they lay charges (33%). Police are least likely to advise women not to lay charges (2%), or not to respond when their assistance is requested (3%).

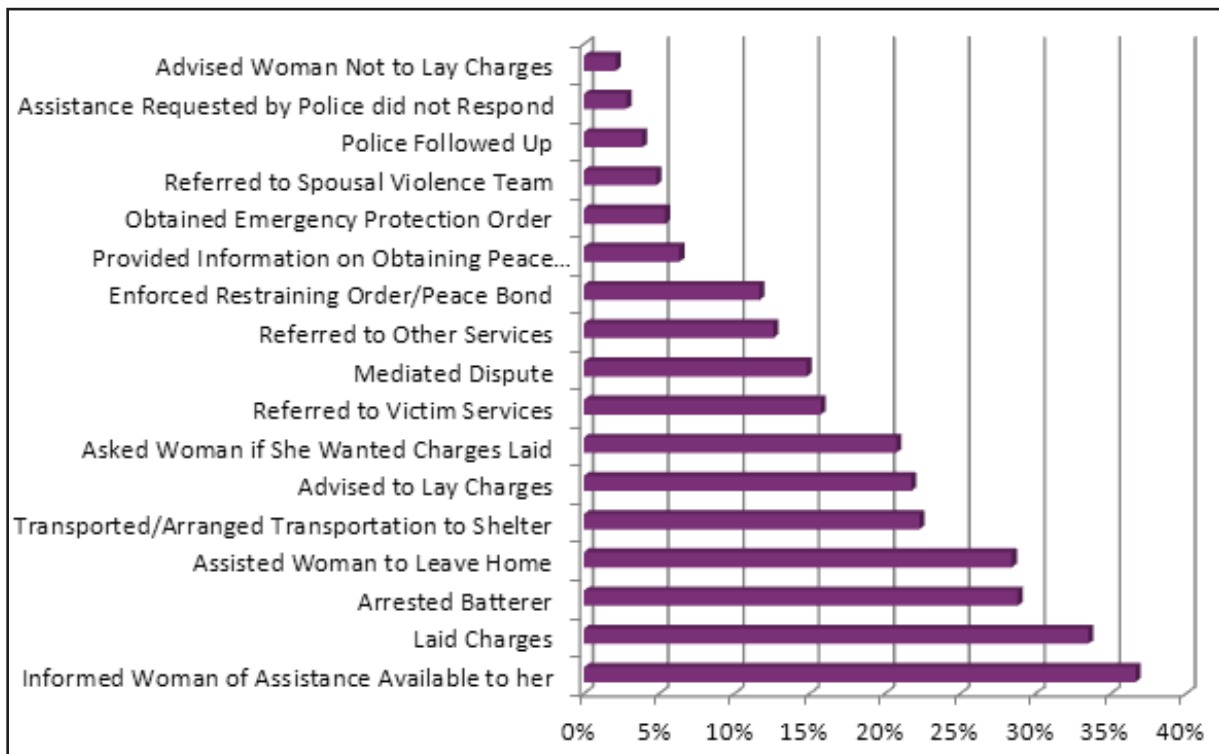


Figure 37. Type of Police Involvement .

Police advised women to lay charges in at least 24% of admissions to shelter where police were involved. In 21% of cases, they also asked women if they wanted to have charges laid— a troublesome finding as these practices are inconsistent with the law if an assault has occurred.

Further analysis shows that the police are more likely to provide advice or have discussions regarding the laying of charges with women who are admitted to shelters in Northern Alberta and with Aboriginal women overall (Figure 38 below). The police were also more likely to arrest the batterer and lay charges in cases involving Aboriginal women. However, they were slightly less likely to transport Aboriginal women to shelter or to arrange their transportation to shelter, assist them to leave home or inform them about assistance that is available to them.

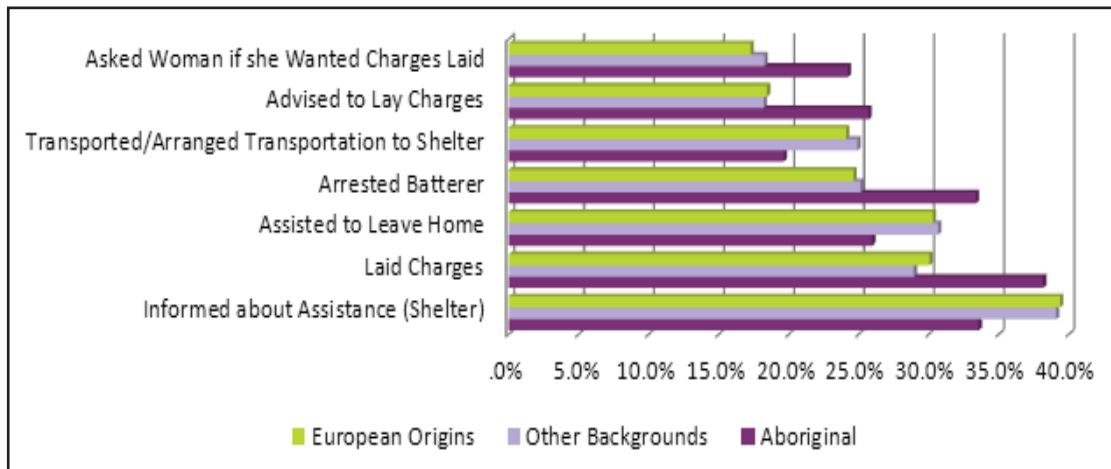


Figure 38. Type of Police Involvement by Shelter Resident Background.

The type of assistance police provide to abused women also changed substantially over the study period. In particular, the police were increasingly likely to:

- Lay charges (from 29.9% of police involved admissions in 2003 to 36.7% of such admissions in 2010);
- Arrest the batterer (from 27.2% in 2003 to 33.1% in 2010);
- Refer women to victim services (from 13.9% to 16.9%);
- Enforce an existing court order (from 10.1% to 14.5%);
- Obtain an EPO (Emergency Protection Order) (from 1.5% to 8%); or
- Follow up (from 0% to 7.2%).

Some other types of police assistance have decreased over the years. Between 2003 and 2010 the police were less likely to:

- Inform women of assistance available to them (from 41.2% in 2003 to 34.7% in 2010);
- Assist women to leave home (from 29.2% to 25%); or
- Mediate a domestic dispute (from 20.8% to 13.2%).

The rate of police involvement with women accessing shelters is a function of multiple factors, including women's own choices about whether and how to involve the police, the nature and severity of the offence, the legislation that is in place guiding the work of the police, the training of new police recruits and the resources available to the police in different geographic areas. Taking all these considerations into account, the information described here identifies some areas where progress has been made (e.g. more charges laid, arrests made and orders enforced, etc.) but also some areas of concern (e.g. decrease in proportion of women informed about assistance and women who were assisted to leave home, etc.).

Of particular concern are the reductions in services that police provide for Aboriginal women (i.e. Police are less likely to provide information to them, to help women leave home or to provide transportation and those results are consistent across geographic regions in Alberta as well as the size of the shelter catchment area). It is impossible to know from the available data whether these differences were partially due to the women's own preferences or perceptions. Some discussions are needed on a provincial level between ACWS and the provincial police representatives as well as between individual shelters and their relevant police/RCMP detachments to further examine and understand these trends and address any issues of concern.

SECTION IX. TRENDS FOR ABORIGINAL POPULATION

The preliminary data analyses included in earlier sections of this report suggest that Aboriginal women using Alberta's shelters come with unique characteristics, experiences and needs when compared to women of all other backgrounds on a number of important variables. Aboriginal women make up more than half of shelter admissions (55% overall in 2010), and this proportion rises to almost 70% in Alberta's northern shelters. Hence, this section of the report considers the HOMES data for Aboriginal women separately from data for total shelter admissions. These analyses are provided in order to ensure that the implications for shelter planning, staffing, staff training and service delivery are considered. To be effective, shelter services must be responsive to the unique characteristics of Aboriginal women's shelter use, as well as the cultural requirements and social needs that diverse groups within the Aboriginal population may bring when accessing shelter services.

The data used for the following analyses are from the HOMES data set, which has a total of 24,091 admissions of Aboriginal women.

9.1 Admissions

Admissions of Aboriginal women in Northern Alberta are proportionally much higher than in other regions of the province. Overall, 46% of shelter admissions of Aboriginal women were in the North regions, as compared to 28% in the South and 26% in Central Alberta. The higher rates in the North are, in part, indicative of a larger Aboriginal population. However, these admission rates are much higher than would be predicted, given that Aboriginal persons make up 38% of the population in the Northwest and from 15% to 21% in locations in the Northeast region.

Overall, the proportion of Aboriginal women's admissions to Alberta shelters rose from 48% of admissions in 2003 to 55% by 2010. When Aboriginal admissions to shelter are compared for Alberta's two largest cities, small cities, towns and rural areas over time, some additional differences in admission rates are apparent (Figure 39 on the following page). There was a decrease in the proportion of Aboriginal admissions in Calgary and Edmonton shelters from about 35% in 2004 to 27% in 2007; the proportion has now stabilized at about 30% over the last three years. Similar trends were also observed in small cities, although the proportion of Aboriginal admissions continued to decrease over the years from 37% in 2003 to 28% in 2010. The increase in the proportion of admissions of Aboriginal women to shelters can be largely attributed to the proportion of Aboriginal admissions in towns or rural areas. Overall, these admissions have grown from 32% in 2003 to 44% in 2009 with a slight drop to 40% in 2010. Most of these town and rural shelters are in the North regions. The proportion of Aboriginal women in Alberta shelters (about 50% overall) is substantially higher than the overall proportion of Aboriginal women in Alberta. According to the Statistics Canada 2006 population census, Aboriginal women represent about 6% of all women who live in Alberta.³³

33 Statistics Canada. 2007. Alberta (Code48) (table). Aboriginal Population Profile. 2006 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 92-594-XWE. Ottawa. Released January 15, 2008. <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-prof/92-594/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed August 13, 2012).

The growth in Calgary and Edmonton since 2007 may reflect the increased movement of Aboriginal people in general from reserves to cities across Alberta. According to Statistics Canada,³⁴ Alberta's urban Aboriginal population is the fastest growing in Canada. However, the movement of Aboriginal persons into the cities from reserves is often circular in character, with some time still spent on-reserves in addition to permanent residence status in cities. This pattern may also contribute to the continued growth of Aboriginal admissions in smaller, rural centres.

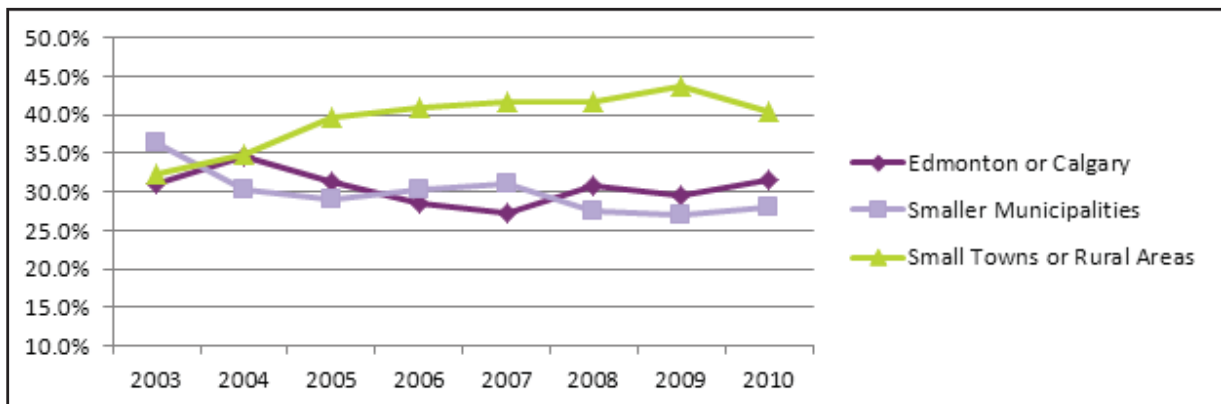


Figure 39. Proportion of Aboriginal Shelter Admissions by Centre Size.

Location of Main Residence

Of the 24,092 Aboriginal women admitted to Alberta shelters from 2003 to 2010, 6,568 (27%) identified their main residence as a First Nations reserve. Figure 40 below considers the proportion of Alberta shelter populations comprised of Aboriginal women whose self-identified primary residence is on-reserve.

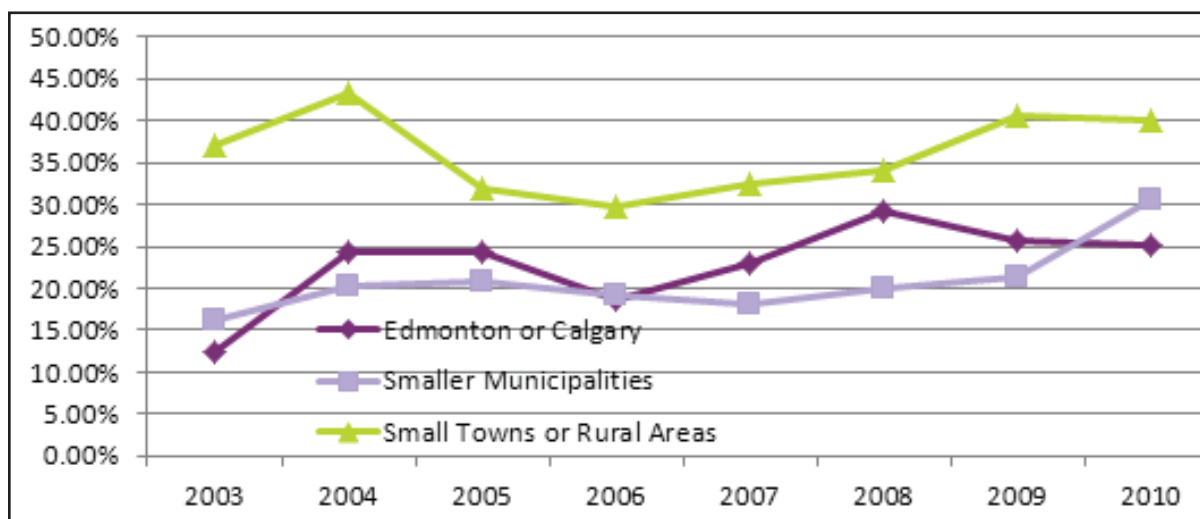


Figure 40. Location of Shelter Admission for Women who Reside On-Reserves by Year.

34 Statistics Canada (2006). Aboriginal Peoples. 2006 Census of Population. Ottawa, ON.

Trends here show increases over time in the number of women with primary on-reserve residence who are using shelters in large and mid-size urban locations. However, while the proportion of admissions in small centres declined from 2005 through 2008, it has returned to previous levels in the last two years. Currently, more women whose primary residence is on-reserve tend to access shelters outside of larger urban centres.

9.2 Demographic Characteristics of Aboriginal Women

Age

Aboriginal women using the shelters include a slightly larger proportion of younger women than the overall sample (29% age 24 and under versus 25% in the overall sample) and a slightly lower proportion of women age 41–59 (18.4% versus 21% in the overall sample). As was previously reported, the average age at admission for the total HOMES sample was 32.5 years (median 31, age range 12–88). When only Aboriginal women are considered, the comparable figures are: average age 31.6 years, median 30 years and range 12 to 81 years.

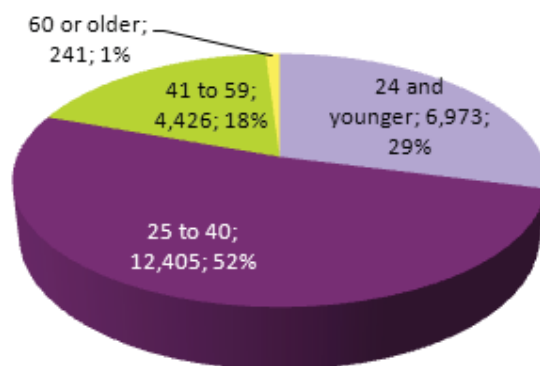


Figure 41. Aboriginal Women Using Shelters by Age Range.

The 24-Years-of-Age-and-Under group includes 258 women and girls age 18 or younger who were identified as primary clients (i.e. they were independent admissions rather than dependent admissions). Even though this is a small number when compared to the overall population, there may be implications related to early intervention and support of this group of young women and girls who often come to the shelters with young children and who do not identify other sources of support.

Life expectancy is lower for Aboriginal women, and their mortality rate is due to the experience of violence that is five times higher for them than that among all other Canadian women.³⁵ Aboriginal individuals of either sex are also overrepresented among Canadian homicide

35 Statistics Canada (2000). Women in Canada: A gender-based statistical report (4th Ed.) (Cat. No. 89-503-XPE1998001). Ottawa, ON.

victims, constituting 16.6% of the total.³⁶ Aboriginal women are also more likely to live in a social environment in which substance abuse and spousal violence are widespread.³⁷

Dependents

About 60% of Aboriginal women entering the shelters were accompanied by dependents—including primarily one (35%), two (29%) or three (19%) children. Figure 42 below shows the age distribution for a total of 8,351 dependents who accessed shelters with Aboriginal women. As with all women accessing shelter services, over half of the dependents were preschool aged children, including 33% who were younger than three and another 23% between three and six years of age.

Less than 1% of dependents were adults age 60 or older. Again, this group appears to be primarily vulnerable seniors who require their daughter’s support. Aboriginal women, especially those in smaller centres and rural areas, are more likely to live close to extended families and have responsibilities that may require them to remain in the home in spite of difficult circumstances there. The presence of dependent adults in the home may also impact length of stay in shelters, which tends to be shorter for Aboriginal women (see Figure 42 below).

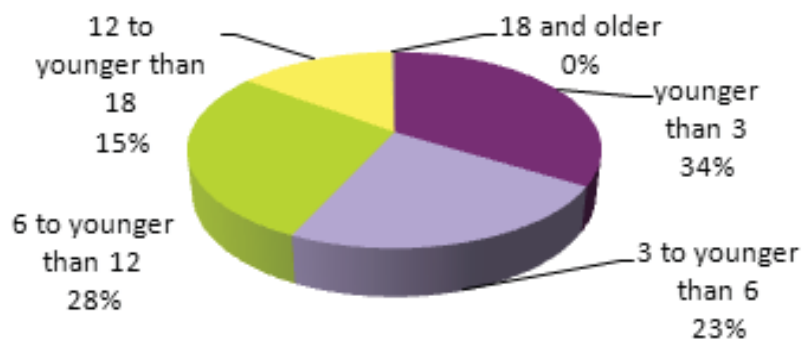


Figure 42. Age of Aboriginal Dependents.

Marital Status

More Aboriginal women using the shelters live in either an intact common law relationship or are separated from a common law partner (49.4%) than is the case for either women of European origins (39%) or those from Other backgrounds (20.5%). They are less likely than other groups in the shelter population to be living in an intact marital relationship (5.2% as compared to 14% of women with European origins and 38% of women from Other Backgrounds). The proportion of women who were separated or divorced is similar across groups with Aboriginal and European origins (between 12% and 17% each), as is the number who are single (about a third of the Aboriginal and European origin groups). By

36 Best, B. n.d. Death by murder. <http://www.benbest.com/lifeext/murder.html>

37 Pauktuutit Inuit Women’s Association. April 2001. The Inuit Women’s Health Issues Workshop. Ottawa: The Association.; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) (1996). Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: Perspectives and Realities, (Vol. 4). Ottawa: The Commission.

comparison to both those groups, women with other backgrounds are more likely to be separated or divorced (23%) and less likely to be single (19%).

As is the case for most other women using the shelters, increasing proportions of Aboriginal women live in intact common law relationships or are single and decreasing proportions live in intact marital relationships or are separated from a common law partner (Figure 43 below).

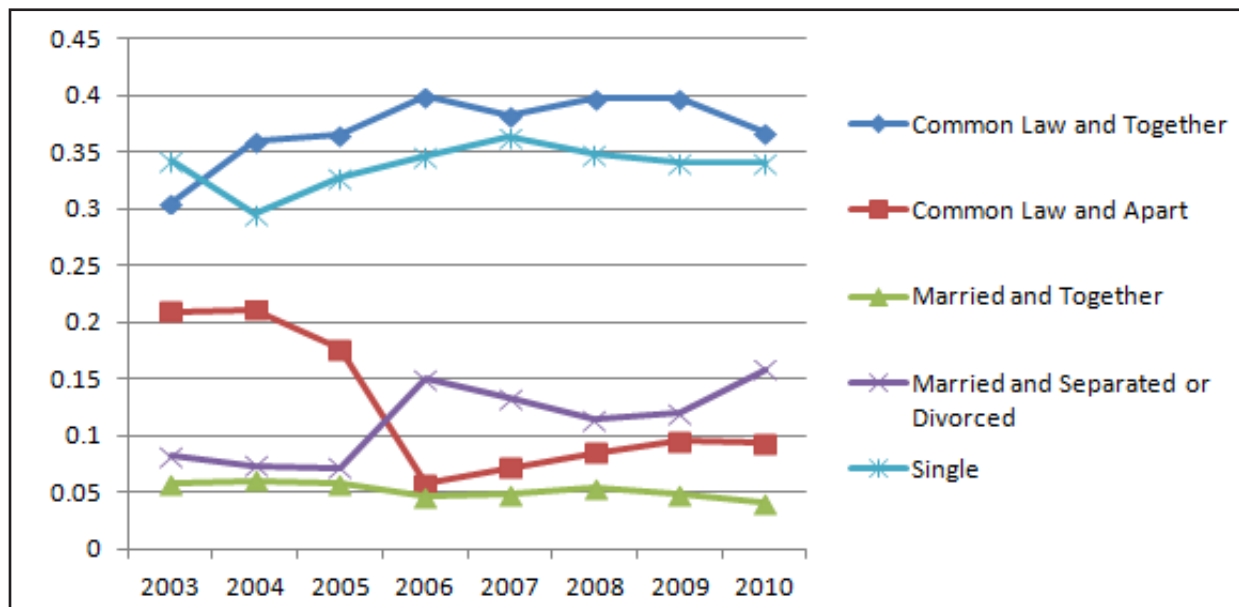


Figure 43. Marital Status of Aboriginal Women by Year.

Employment

The analysis for employment status by cultural background showed a higher proportion of unemployment and, consequently, a lower employment rate among Aboriginal women in the shelters compared to women from Other backgrounds. 72% of Aboriginal women were unemployed at admission as compared with 57% of women with European origins and 61% of those from Other backgrounds. The proportion of unemployed women in the Aboriginal shelter population rose rapidly from a low of 52% in 2003 (compared to an overall population proportion of 47% at that time) to a high of 81% in 2009 (overall rate for total population was 74%). Most of the increase in the unemployed proportion of Aboriginal women occurred between 2005 and 2009. This increase was maintained throughout the economic boom years and has continued through the current recession.

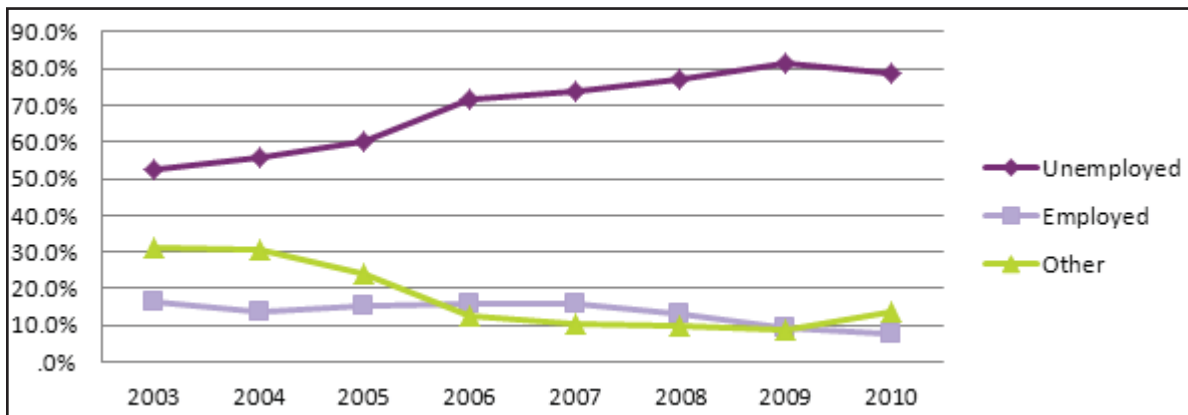


Figure 44. Employment Status of Aboriginal Women by Year.

Similar findings with regards to employment of Aboriginal women have been reported by Statistics Canada:³⁸ Unemployment rates for Aboriginal women were twice as high as those of their non-Aboriginal counterparts. In 2006, 13.5% of Aboriginal women were unemployed, compared with a rate of 6.4% for non-Aboriginal women.

The Statistics Canada study also showed that unemployment rates differed depending on where Aboriginal women lived. Among First Nations women, those living on-reserve experienced the highest unemployment rate (20.6%), while the unemployment rate for First Nations women not living on-reserve was 13.8%. Moreover, when the labour market downturn began between 2008 and 2009, Labour Force Survey (LFS) data revealed that Aboriginal people experienced sharper declines in employment rates than non-Aboriginal people.³⁹

As was indicated earlier in this document, unemployment rates are higher for women who are admitted to shelters in North or Central Alberta, and for women who are admitted in towns or rural areas. Those trends also held for Aboriginal women, as most tend to access shelters in the North or shelters in smaller locations. Unemployed women in the sample include 70% of Aboriginal women who access shelters in the North and Central Alberta regions. About 75% of Aboriginal women who use shelters in towns or rural areas are unemployed.

Partly as a result of the way the population is distributed geographically, the 2010 Aboriginal shelter population included substantially more women living in poverty than it did in 2003.

Employment is more difficult to find in towns and rural areas and in Northern Alberta, since fewer businesses or government employers are located there. Discrimination and lack of

38 O'Donnell, V & Wallace, S. (2011). First Nations, Metis and Inuit Women. Women in Canada: A gender-based statistical report (Cat. No. 89-503-x). Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada.

39 Zietsma, D. (2010). Aboriginal people living off-reserve and the labour market: Estimates from the labour force survey, 2008-2009 (Cat. No. 71-588-XWE, no. 3). Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/71-588-x/71-588-x2011003-eng.pdf>

access to housing are also significant barriers for Aboriginal women wishing to enter the workforce.

This increase in the proportion of the shelter population who are poor and are likely to return to living environments where employment opportunities are scarce has implications for shelter service requirements. An increased emphasis on assisting women with affordable housing, employment opportunities and income supports is necessary. Since Aboriginal women are also likely to stay in shelters briefly, much of this work must be done by referral—raising the issue of access to support services in small and Northern locations.

9.3 Abuse History

Type of Admission

80% of the Aboriginal women admitted to shelters identified abuse as their primary reason for coming to shelter. Of this group, 45% were accompanied by children. In another 21% of admissions, admitted Aboriginal women identified reasons Other than Abuse; again, likely because of the relative lack of other supportive community services in Northern and rural locations. Aboriginal women using shelters were more likely than women with Other Backgrounds to describe “Other” reasons (21% as compared to 17% of women with European origins and 10% of women from Other Backgrounds). These results may also be a reflection of normalization of abuse, particularly when abuse becomes part of a woman’s daily life. Training may be needed to help shelter staff identify presence of abuse in those instances when it becomes normalized.

Figure 45 below illustrates the trends in reasons for shelter access by Aboriginal women. The figures show a decrease in “Other” admissions over time and a consequent increase in admissions of abused Aboriginal women, particularly since 2007. This apparent change may be the result of improved staff knowledge and identification of abuse backgrounds, rather than by actual increases in the proportion of abused women being admitted.

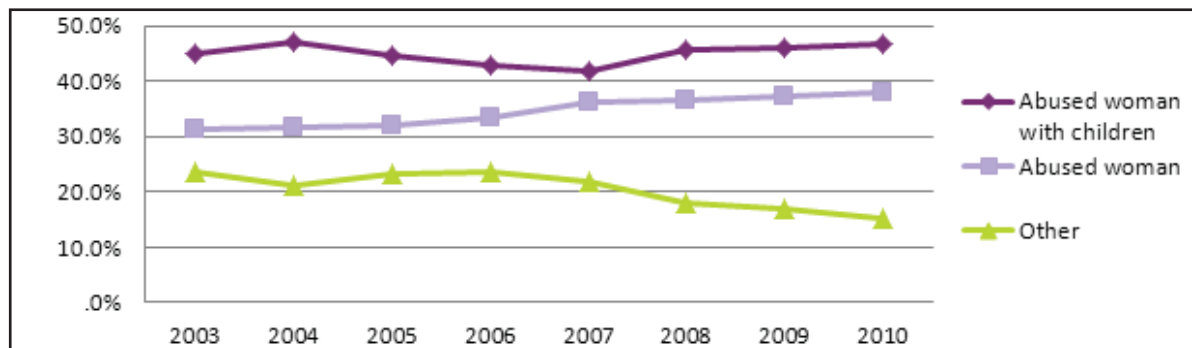


Figure 45. Type of Admission: Aboriginal Women.

Changes in how admission type was documented was an explanation offered by staff focus groups. However, a slightly higher ‘Other’ admission type should be expected in Northern

and town/rural locations since the number, capacity and type of other services or supports available requires shelters there to broaden their mandates to include women who may have an abuse history but who currently require assistance for Other Reasons (e.g. homelessness, sexual assault, etc.). Aboriginal women appear to access shelters with a variety of concerns, many of which may have been a result of abuse and assault.

Primary Abuser

The overall sample of women using Alberta shelters reported that their primary abusers were common law partners (45%), husbands (17%), a former common law partner (13%), a boyfriend (10%), or someone designated as belonging in the Other category (10%). The latter category included abusers who were friends, roommates, girlfriends, support workers, or employers. The prevalence of abuse in common law relationships is particularly clear and may suggest that women living in this type of relationship are particularly vulnerable.

Aboriginal women reported that their abusers were primarily common law partners (49%) or former common law partners (16%), which is substantially higher than the same rates for visible minority (22% and 6%) or women with European origins (43% and 10%). Husbands were perpetrators in only 8% of Aboriginal women’s reports as compared to 52% of visible minority women’s reports and 20% of European women’s reports. The difference here is probably related to a higher prevalence of common law relationships and lower frequency of marriage among Aboriginal women. These distinctions remained stable over the duration of the study.

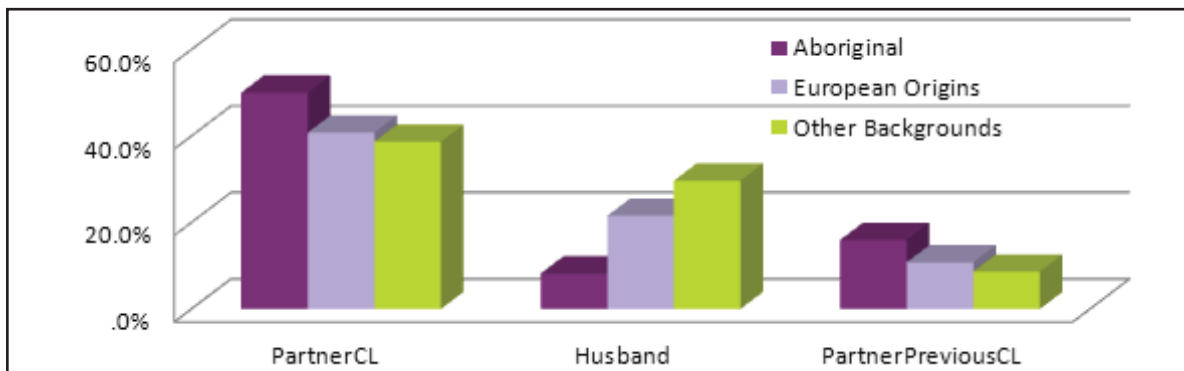


Figure 46. Primary Abuser by Background.

Abuse Type⁴⁰

As was the case in the sample overall, Aboriginal women who access shelters have usually experienced multiple different types of abuse.

⁴⁰ As data was not collected on abuse types for women who were admitted to a shelter in the ‘Other’ category, they were removed from the analyses for abuse type and abuser status.

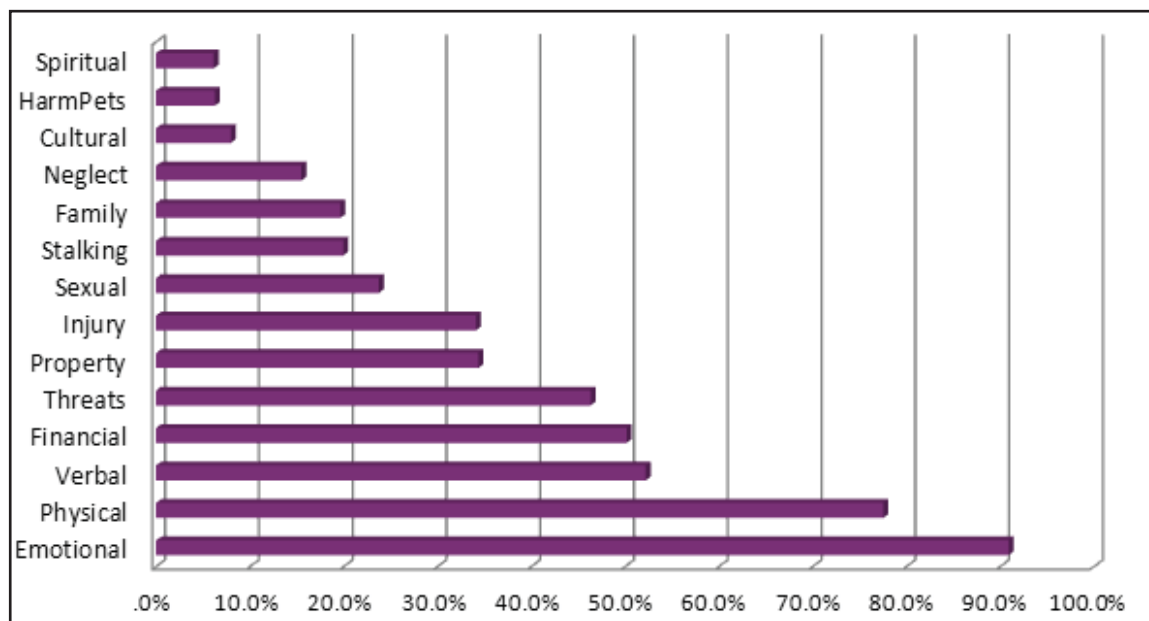


Figure 47. Type of Abuse Reported by Aboriginal Women in Alberta Shelters.

Almost all Aboriginal women in this data set have experienced emotional abuse (91%), and a large majority (78%) have also experienced physical abuse. In addition to these two most prevalent types of abuse, Aboriginal women reported verbal abuse (52%), financial abuse (50%), threats (46%), physical injury (34%), damage to personal property (34%) and sexual abuse (24%).

Analysis of annual trends in the type of abuse reported by Aboriginal women showed a pattern that was very similar to those in the non-Aboriginal population. However, some differences were identified when Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women's reports were compared. In all groups, reports of stalking have increased, but this increase was steeper for Aboriginal women than for other women— from about 7% in 2003 to about 27% in 2010 as compared to 8% to 24% for the other groups. Also, more Aboriginal women have reported physical injury over time, increasing from 23% of women in 2003 to 36% in 2010. By comparison, injury as a component of abuse increased for the women with European origins from 21% to 28% and for Other women from 23% to 28%. One possibility here is that the physical abuse directed at Aboriginal women may be more severe than it is in other population groups.

9.4 Shelter Services

Length of Stay in Emergency Shelters

Length of stay for Aboriginal women using shelters ranged from 1 day to 659 days (total of 23,832 cases reporting), and 812 of them reported stays of 52 days or more. The median for length of stay shows the middle of the range at seven days (i.e. 50% of Aboriginal women had shelter stays of seven days or less). Figure 48 on the next page shows that about 42% of

Aboriginal women remained in shelter for five days or less and only about one in five stays for three weeks or longer. The pattern of relatively short-stays has implications for service planning, particularly since the women using the shelters have increasingly complex needs. Short stays may also lead to a ‘revolving door’ pattern of admissions, since they may not provide sufficient intervention time.

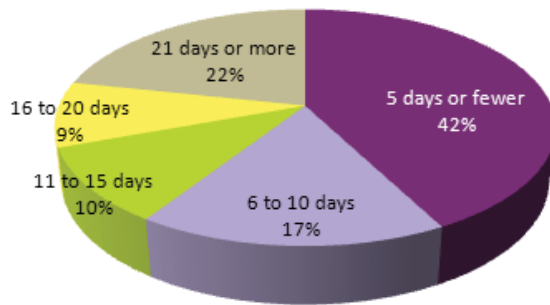


Figure 48. Length of Stay in Emergency Shelters by Aboriginal Women.

Aboriginal women tend to stay in emergency shelters for a slightly shorter period of time than other women. Overall, 42% stayed in shelters for five days or fewer, as compared to 41% of women with European origins and 30% of other women. Also, their median length of stay is slightly lower, at seven days as compared to eight and twelve days for the other two groups. Further analysis of Aboriginal women’s data over time showed a trend toward lengthening stays, as was found for the overall population.

In 2003, the proportion of Aboriginal women who had stays of five days or fewer was 47%. Over time, this proportion showed a continuous, slow decline; reaching 38% by 2010 (see Figure 49 below).

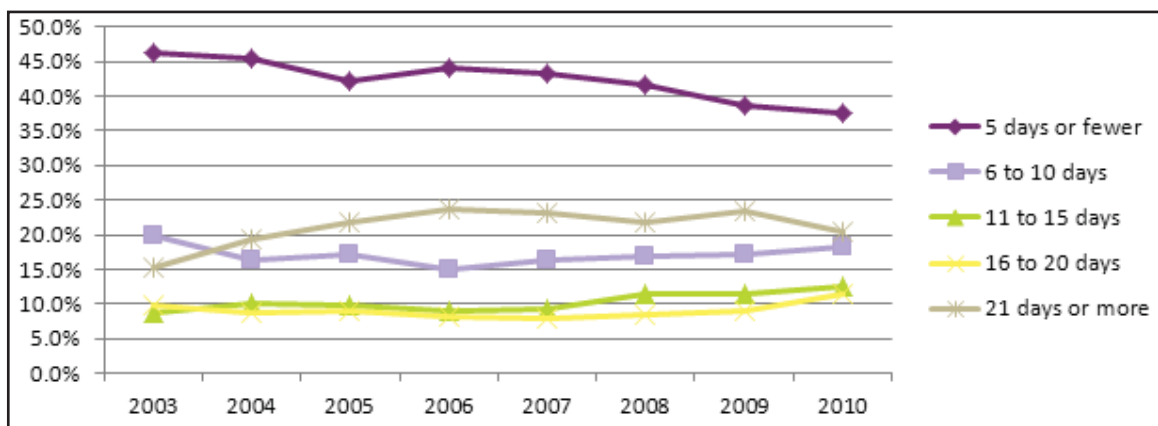


Figure 49. Length of Stay in Emergency Shelters Over Time by Aboriginal Women.

These changes probably reflect the increasing complexity of women's circumstances as well as the economic downturn, with its concomitant increase in unemployment and shortages of affordable housing. They also place shelters in a difficult position since longer stays, while they are necessary for meaningful interventions with increasingly complex needs also increase the number of women and children who must be turned away due to lack of capacity. Shelter staffing is also an issue since the first week of a woman's stay in the shelter must include completion of multiple tasks, some of them requiring specialized expertise, and there are often insufficient staff members available to make an intensive, short-term response possible. It should also be noted that the decrease in Aboriginal and other women's short stays may also reflect shelter staffs' increasing expertise in engaging women in program planning and service delivery.

9.5 Transportation and Distance Travelled

For many women, the experience of calling and travelling to the shelter can be traumatic. The availability of transportation to a shelter, as well as the distance that women must travel, can make the experience more or less difficult or even impossible. The means of transportation and its availability may be made particularly difficult for Aboriginal women coming to shelters in cities or towns from reserves, settlements or other rural locations.

Means of Transportation to the Shelter

Figure 50 on the following page shows that about 40% of Aboriginal women received assistance to travel to the shelter from either the shelter itself or from another service. About 28% drove themselves to shelter and 24% used other transportation modes such as public transport. Small percentages received transport from police or victim services (about 4%) or from family or friends (5%).

In comparison to other women in the shelters, Aboriginal women were more likely to receive assistance from the shelter than the women with European origins but less likely than the women with Other backgrounds (39% as compared to 34% and 44%). However, Aboriginal women were less likely than either of the other two groups to receive support from either police or victim services (4% as compared to 5% and 8%) but more likely than those groups to receive transportation assistance from relatives or friends (5% as compared to 4% and 2%). Explanations for those differences may include financial considerations, the long distances that some Aboriginal women living in remote locations must navigate, availability of programs such as Victims' Services, trust issues as well as discrimination and stereotyping they encounter when trying to access community services.

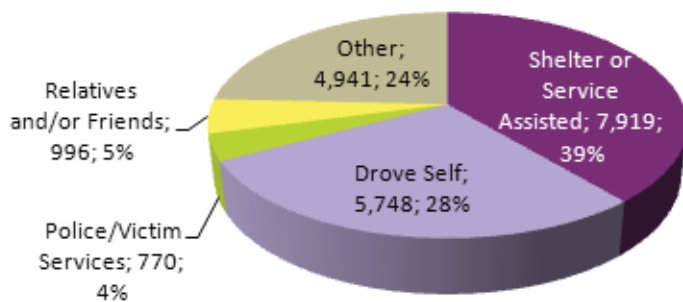


Figure 50. Means of Transportation Used by Aboriginal Women.

Distance Travelled

About a third of Aboriginal women (35%) travelled distances of over 50 kilometers to get to the shelter while another 41% travelled less than ten kilometers. In comparison to women from other backgrounds, Aboriginal women are more likely to travel longer distances. Only 25% of non-Aboriginal women using shelters travelled distances of over 50 kilometers and 59% of them travelled ten kilometers or less. Aboriginal women who travel longer distances tend to live in towns or rural areas. For example, of those who travelled more than 50 kilometers, 54% lived in towns or rural areas.

Figure 51 (below) illustrates the long-term trends in the distances travelled by Aboriginal women. They are increasingly likely to travel longer distances— an increase from 23% to 32% from 2003 to 2010— and less likely to travel shorter distances, at least by comparison to the proportions in 2004. Further analysis showed that the increase in longer distance travelled was particularly true for women with primary residences in towns or rural areas as well as Alberta’s other cities.

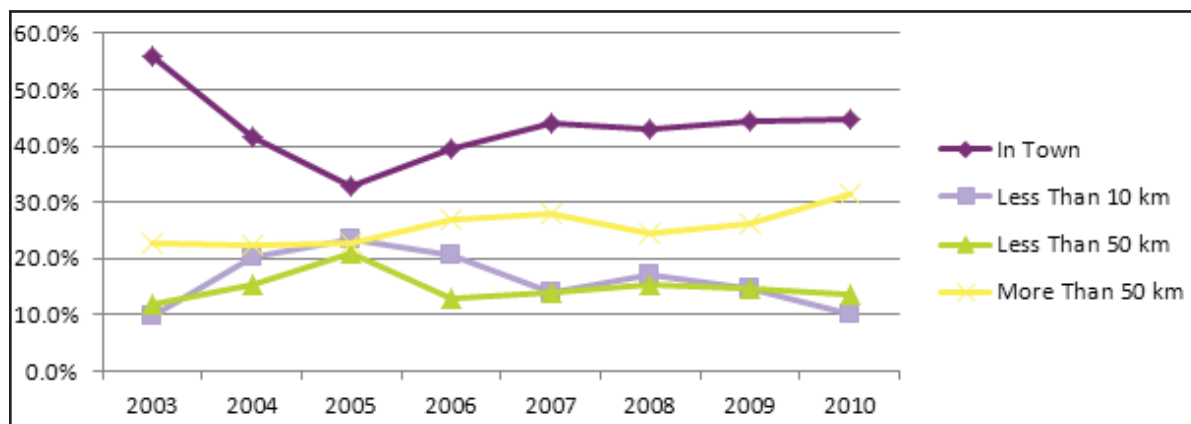


Figure 51. Distance Travelled by Aboriginal Women by Year.

SECTION X. OVERALL SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

This study used the recent transition of ACWS and its members from HOMES to a new system as an opportunity to review all shelter data collected on the HOMES system between 2000 and 2010. The analysis of data entered by shelters into HOMES, as well as ACWS aggregated data (including data from all ACWS member shelters), provided a clearer understanding of the characteristics of women served by Alberta's shelters. This understanding can now be used to inform shelter practices, improve care, provide evidence-based information to funders and decision makers and document trends in shelter use across the province. It can also be used to improve future data collection in the shelters.

The ACWS aggregated annual data set used in some components of this trend analysis was based on the annual reports provided by ACWS's members, including 34 emergency shelters (five on First Nations reserves), seven second-stage shelters (including one on a First Nation reserve) and the two seniors' shelters. The analyses that required individually coded data (i.e. cross-group comparisons) used the HOMES data only. This data set included 34 shelters— 32 emergency (two on-reserve) and two second-stage shelters— for a total of 46,571 adult admissions to shelters as well as 34,260 dependent admissions. The data analyses considered the geographical location of shelters (Northwest, Northeast, Central and Southern Alberta), as well as centre size: Edmonton and Calgary⁴¹ (large urban), small cities⁴² and towns/rural locations.⁴³

The initial results of the data analysis were presented and discussed with focus groups that included 62 staff members representing 32 ACWS members around Alberta. These discussions identified additional analyses that could be useful as well as some possible explanations for findings. This final report includes information from the ACWS aggregated data set, the HOMES data set and the staff focus groups.

The following trends and their implications for future practice represent key findings from this study.

10.1 Shelter Admissions

About a third of overall shelter admissions were documented in Edmonton or Calgary (n=20,478 or 33%). Another third occurred in small cities such as Medicine Hat or Grande Prairie (n=18,407 or 29.8%), and the remaining 36% of admissions (n=22,533) were in towns/rural areas such as Brooks or Sucker Creek. The majority of shelters in towns or rural areas (86%) are located in Northern Alberta.

Admissions to shelters in Alberta increased by half or more until 2005/2006, before starting to decrease albeit to levels higher than those found in the first three years. Factors related

⁴¹ Includes Strathcona County

⁴² Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer.

⁴³ Fairview, Grande Cache, High Level, Peace River, Sucker Creek, Whitecourt, Wabasca, Cold Lake, Lac La Biche, Fort Chipewyan, St. Paul, Camrose, Hobbema, Lloydminster, Rocky Mountain House, Hinton, Brooks, Strathmore, Pincher Creek, Black Diamond, Taber, Banff.

to the increase in admissions in those years include increased shelter funding, growing number of available shelter beds and various public awareness and media campaigns. After 2006 the number of admissions has been gradually decreasing. Particularly in Calgary, Edmonton and Central Alberta this decrease may be associated with the number of beds available in those areas.

While Edmonton and Calgary have over half of the overall population in Alberta, they account for only a third of all provincial admissions. The number of beds has not kept pace with population increases. Shelters can only accept the number of admissions that bed space allows. Since occupancy rates in all emergency shelters in Edmonton and Calgary are high, this finding suggests that additional shelter capacity is needed in both cities.

10.2 Capacity Issues

The number of women turned away from Alberta shelters has decreased since 2000 and about half of turn-away numbers are for reasons other than shelters being full. However, turn-away rates continue to be a significant concern. Their impact on the safety of these women and children is severe.

In addition, while immediate abuse may not be the presenting factor for those women who were turned away for other reasons, abuse is a significant contributor to homelessness, addiction and mental health concerns. Moreover, considerable time is expended by shelter staff to provide crisis, advocacy and referral support to the women and children who are turned away.

The trends in the number of turn-aways from 2000 to 2010 likely reflect a combination of factors, including:

- Decreases in 2000-2005 correspond to increases in shelter capacity as a result of federal, provincial, government and community funders' initiatives;
- Increases during 2005-2008: the economic boom years in Alberta;
- Decreases in turn-aways in 2007/2009 due to use of new provincial funding to hire outreach workers, reducing demand on emergency facilities;
- Increases for 2008-2010 reflecting Alberta population growth coupled with slower growth in the number of funded beds, particularly in Calgary and Edmonton; and
- Recent increases reflecting the longer length of stay at some shelters as the complexity of women's needs increase, the economic downturn lengthens and scarce subsidized housing.

10.3 Rural Service Delivery Context

Shelters in smaller Alberta centres must deal with a number of other issues that are unique to their locations. For example, a domestic violence shelter in a small centre may be one of very few services available in its area, resulting in a large variety of service needs that the shelter may not be able to meet. A rural or small centre shelter may experience increased demand for services from women who, in addition to a history of domestic violence, currently

experience other multiple issues such as homelessness, poverty, lack of available housing, or problems with mental health or addictions. The need to accommodate diverse needs places additional pressure on town and rural shelters since staffing and staff training must be more encompassing.

Issues of transportation and distances travelled to shelter illustrate the different nature of service delivery in urban and smaller centres.

10.4 Length of Stay in Shelters

Length of stay in emergency shelters has shown increases in the proportion of women with longer stays and corresponding decreases in the number of short stays. The average length of stay increased from 11 to 13 days. These changes may reflect the increasing complexity of client needs, as well as the economic downturn with its concomitant increase in unemployment and shortages of affordable housing.

However, the fact that more than one third of the shelter population stays in shelter for only one to five days suggests that shelter staff have very little time to assist these women. This pattern is particularly true for abused women without children, abused women who are living with their partners at the time of admission and those who enter shelters for reasons Other than Abuse.

10.5 Increasing Client Complexity

The overall population of Aboriginal women and women of Other Backgrounds (e.g. immigrants, refugees, visible minorities, etc.) using Alberta's shelters rose from 64% of the shelter population in 2003 to about 71% currently. These two groups have lower employment rates and income levels related to lack of employment opportunities, discrimination, and cultural and language barriers. These results reinforce staff-identified needs for appropriate training to best serve women from various cultures and backgrounds.

The results also support shelter workers' observations of increasing client complexity, which results in increased length of stay in shelters. The regions and communities in which they reside are less likely to have sufficient capacity in community resources such as access to affordable housing, child care and mental health or addiction treatment.

Women entering shelters typically report more than one type of abuse, with emotional abuse, physical abuse, financial abuse and verbal abuse being most frequently identified. The data for this report confirm that abuse is multifaceted. The complex combination of abuse types emphasizes the need for a careful and comprehensive assessment of each woman's circumstances to inform shelter services.

10.6 Aboriginal Women in Shelters

Aboriginal women make up more than half of the shelter population (60% overall in 2010, rising from 56% in 2003), and this proportion rises to almost 70% in Alberta's northern

shelters. The information in this report suggests that Aboriginal women using Alberta's shelters come with unique characteristics, experiences and needs when compared to women from Other Backgrounds on a number of important variables. For example, they are younger than the general shelter population, they are more likely to be in a common law relationship, they are more likely to be unemployed, they have more children and they have shorter shelter stays. If shelter services for Aboriginal women are to be effective, they must be responsive to the unique characteristics of Aboriginal women's shelter use as well as the cultural requirements and social needs that diverse groups within the Aboriginal population may bring to shelter.

10.7 Rising Rates of Unemployment

Unemployed women made up an increasing proportion of the shelter population overall, rising from 69% in 2006 to about 75% in 2010. This change has implications for shelter service requirements, increasing the emphasis on assisting women with child care, affordable housing, employment opportunities and other sources of income supports. The increasing number of unemployed women and children living in poverty may also imply a more chronic population since women with mental health or addiction problems have greater difficulty in finding and maintaining employment. Abused women with no regular income may also be more likely than other women to use shelters as a consequence of having fewer resources at their disposal. In addition, employers may not understand the implications that domestic violence may have on the workplace. Adding poverty to the abuse equation is likely to result in women needing either to return to shelters more frequently or to extend their length of stay.

10.8 Services Provided

Information about the scope and types of services provided by shelters is essential to understand what services or a combination of services work for women and children in shelters. Documentation of shelter services also provides a comprehensive view of the work that shelter staff must undertake to support women and children in their care. Identifying a list of core services common to shelters across Alberta and then developing a method to guide consistent and accurate tracking of those services is an important task that Alberta shelters should consider undertaking to better inform funders and the community of the varied and complex work they do.

10.9 Need for Increased and Specialized Children's Programming

Over the period of the study, 35,651 dependents accompanied women to the shelter and accessed shelter services. 48% of those children are aged zero to six years and about 30% are under three years of age; the proportion of preschool children in shelters is increasing. These findings emphasize the importance of programming for children in shelters. Trauma prevention, early assessment and interventions, and informed referrals of women with young children to appropriate community resources following shelter stays are increasingly critical components of shelter services.

They also reflect the growing need for trained child care staff to work with mothers and their children to mitigate the impact of domestic violence on children. Reducing their trauma can substantially improve the likelihood of resilience in neurologic, cognitive and social development. Children's programming, particularly programming focusing on preschool children, is an essential component of shelter service requirements. Implementation of this programming will require increases in specialized staffing, staff training and completed referrals to community support programs when mothers and their children leave the shelters.

Moreover, shelter policies and women's circumstances often result in lower number of older dependent admissions. These older children, although not in shelter, might also need additional services and support that may be best provided through shelter outreach programming.

10.10 Police Involvement

The rate of police involvement with women accessing shelters is a function of multiple factors, including women's own choices about whether and how to involve the police, the nature and severity of the offence, the legislation that is in place guiding the work of the police, the training of new police recruits and the resources available to the police in different geographic areas. Taking all these considerations into account, the information described here identifies some areas where progress has been made (e.g. more charges laid, arrests made and orders enforced, etc.) but also some areas of concern (e.g. decrease in proportion of women informed about assistance and women who were assisted to leave home, etc.).

Of particular concern are the reductions in services that police provide for Aboriginal women (e.g. the police are less likely to provide information to Aboriginal women, to help them leave home, or to provide them with transportation, etc.). It is impossible to know from the available data whether these differences were partially due to the women's own preferences or perceptions. Discussions are needed on a provincial level between ACWS and provincial police representatives, as well as between individual shelters and their relevant police/RCMP detachments to further examine and understand these trends and address any issues of concern.

ACWS may wish to further explore women's experiences with police through further research including data analysis and focus groups.

The analysis of the shelters' 2000–2010 HOMES data was intended to contribute to developing an understanding of how socio-economic trends are related to the use of Alberta's women's shelters. The analysis also helped gain a better understanding of the characteristics and needs of the women served by Alberta's shelters, inform shelter practice, improve care and document trends in shelter use across the province within geographic areas and within population groups.

The review and analysis of available information also identified questions that require further review and research. Those questions could not be answered in the context of the current study, primarily due to the limitations of the way data was gathered in HOMES data set and because the information was not available as well as the scope of this report. The following list identifies questions and projects that ACWS and its member organizations may consider in their future work together as a research, learning and promising practice collaborative.

10.11 Directions for Future Research and Analysis

Survey Information

Alberta shelters have participated in several projects implementing common assessment and outcome measurement tools across the province. Those tools included the Exit Survey that women complete upon conclusion of their shelter stay that includes reasons why women returned to their abusive partner, the Danger Assessment questionnaire⁴⁴ that is designed to assess the likelihood of lethality or near lethality occurring in a case of intimate partner violence (IPV), and the Domestic Violence Survivor Assessment (DVSA)⁴⁵ that examines the stage of change for personal and relationship issues commonly faced by survivors of IPV in the areas of safety, culture, health, self-strengths and skills.

ACWS and member shelters have completed several studies utilizing the tools referenced above.⁴⁶ These studies gathered information over a period of one or two years yet an extended look is required to understand whether or not women's satisfaction, safety and related needs change over time. Future research, (possibly using the Exit Survey information that was gathered using the HOMES database), will be helpful in understanding these trends.

Sports Events and Annual Patterns

It was the original intention that this study examine the recurring patterns within the calendar year (e.g. Christmas, holidays, special events, changing seasons, etc.), as well as the patterns in shelter admissions associated with large-scale sporting events and related alcohol consumption. The initial review of those patterns uncovered considerable complexities, multiple possible explanations and variations among individual shelters. Further analysis of this information is required before a case can be made identifying clear patterns related to shelter admissions, patterns within the calendar year and sports events.

44 Campbell, J. (1995). The Danger Assessment Tool.

45 Dienemann, J., Campbell, J., Curry, M., & Landenburger, K. (2002). Domestic Violence Survivor Assessment: A tool for counseling women in violent intimate partner relationships. *Patient Education and Counseling Journal*, 46(3), 221–228.

46 Cairns, K. & Hoffart, I. (2009). Keeping women alive: Assessing their danger. A report prepared for The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. Retrieved from <http://www.acws.ca/documents/KeepingWomenAlive.pdf>; Hoffart, I. (2011). Practical frameworks for change. A report prepared for The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. Retrieved from <http://www.acws.ca/documents/PFCFinalEvaluationReport.pdf>

Impact of the Instrumental Needs Funds

The trend analysis discussed in this report illustrated the impact of economic considerations and poverty on women accessing Alberta shelters. Some of the shelters have been able to access funds to support instrumental needs of women and children in their facilities. A study exploring how availability of such funds influences shelter outcomes may help develop promising practices in supporting women and children most impacted by economic considerations.

Special Populations in Sheltering Organizations

The report considered the ethnocultural background of women in shelters, their age, their marital status and many other demographic and background elements in the analysis. However, information in the HOMES data set was not always sufficient to fully describe the experiences and needs of different client groups. More research is needed in the following areas:

- Explore and address specifically the needs of Aboriginal women who were identified as in need in this analysis (e.g. shorter yet more frequent rate of stay, etc.). The large Aboriginal population using women's emergency shelters is not well understood at present. Using the term Aboriginal loses important information on diversity within this group. Additional demographic information should be tracked and collected to improve service, measure progress and identify gaps.
- Older women disproportionately underutilize shelters— they are less likely to report violence and abuse to the authorities, less likely to share their experiences with friends and relatives and less likely to seek help from appropriate agencies. The shelters for seniors were not part of the HOMES data set, resulting in an underestimate of seniors' need for shelter services. Future data collection including those shelters would be important to identify trends in their shelter use and how shelters can best support older women.
- Shelter service provision must also reflect the unique experiences of immigrant and refugee women. However, those experiences and related service implications could not be fully examined in this report due to limitations with how information about ethnocultural background was gathered in HOMES. ACWS and the shelters are currently changing the way they collect this information allowing for a more comprehensive review of the trends associated with the experiences of immigrant and refugee women. That review should minimally focus on the work of the newly established shelter in Edmonton (that specifically serves immigrant and refugee women).
- Shelter policies and women's circumstances often result in lower number of admissions of older children. These older children, although not in shelter, might also need additional services and support and this support may be best provided through shelter outreach programming. Future research projects may help describe the circumstances of those children and develop promising practices to support service provision to them.
- The report showed that the proportion of employed women in the shelter population has been declining. These women, due to the additional resources available to them, may consider other options, which may not be as safe as the shelters. More research may be

required to understand the context within which employed women make a choice with regards to shelter access.

- The number of admissions of single women has been increasing in smaller rural locations but decreasing in large urban centres, largely due to capacity issues that urban shelters experience. More research is needed to determine the best ways to support single women accessing shelters in Alberta.

Second-Stage Shelters

Second-stage housing is considered the next step (after emergency shelters) in a continuum of services created for victims of domestic violence. The purpose of second-stage housing is to provide longer term, safe accommodation and accompanying support services that build the capacity of women and children to participate safely and independently in their community free of domestic violence. Unfortunately, little data about those shelters was available in the HOMES data set— only two of the seven second-stage shelters in Alberta had data that could be incorporated. Future research, focusing specifically on the experiences of women in second-stage shelters, would represent an important contribution and will help inform services for women and children in those shelters.

Understanding Continuum of Services

Each time a woman and/or a dependent are admitted to a shelter their admission is recorded as a single admission. Therefore, an individual woman or a child may have had multiple admissions to a particular shelter or different shelters across the province. The HOMES program did not have a capacity to aggregate information from multiple admissions for each individual woman and/or child or to track the trajectory of service use across different types of shelters and shelter-related programs. A small scale project could develop understanding about how women use different types of sheltering services as well as the length/ combination of different types of services needed to support women in reaching their goals.

APPENDIX A. ORGANIZATIONS CURRENTLY MEMBERS OF ACWS

ACWS Member Organization	City/Town	Alberta Location
EMERGENCY SHELTERS		
Fairview and District Women's Centre Association	Fairview	NW
Grande Cache Transition House	Grande Cache	NW
Grande Prairie Women's Residence Association	Grand Prairie	NW
Northern Haven Support Society	Slave Lake	NW
Northwest Alberta Resource Society	High Level	NW
Peace River Regional Women's Shelter Society	Peace River	NW
Sucker Creek Women's Emergency Shelter*	Enilda	NW
Wellspring Family Resource and Crisis Centre Society	Whitecourt	NW
Bigstone Cree Nation Women's Emergency Shelter Society*	Wabasca	NE
Dr. Margaret Savage Crisis Centre Society	Cold Lake	NE
Fort McMurray Family Crisis Society	Fort McMurray	NE
Hope Haven Society*	Lac La Biche	NE
Mikisew Cree First Nation	Fort Chipewyan	NE
St. Paul and District Crisis Association	St. Paul	NE
Camrose Women's Shelter Society	Camrose	Central
Central Alberta Women's Emergency Shelter Society	Red Deer	Central
Edmonton Women's Shelter Ltd.‡	Edmonton	Central
Ermineskin Women's Shelter Society	Hobbema	Central
Lloydminster Interval Home Society Inc.*	Lloydminster	Central
Lurana Shelter Society	Edmonton	Central
Mountain Rose Women's Shelter Association	Rocky Mountain House	Central
Strathcona Shelter Society	Edmonton/ Sherwood Park	Central
Yellowhead Emergency Shelter for Women Society	Hinton	Central

* Member organizations with both Emergency and Second-stage shelters

‡ Organization operates three emergency shelters including a specialized shelter for immigrant women and children

ACWS Member Organization	City/Town	Alberta Location
EMERGENCY SHELTERS CONTINUED		
Awo Taan Healing Lodge Society	Calgary	South
Brooks and District Women's Safe Shelter Society	Brooks	South
Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter Association	Calgary	South
Community Crisis Society	Strathmore	South
Kainai Children Services Corporation	Standoff	South
Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society*	Medicine Hat	South
Pincher Creek Women's Emergency Shelter Association	Pincher Creek	South
Region 3 Family Based Care Society	Black Diamond	South
Safe Haven Women's Shelter Society	Taber	South
Stoney Tribal Administration	Morley	South
YWCA Lethbridge and District	Lethbridge	South
YWCA of Banff	Banff	South
YWCA of Calgary	Calgary	South
SECOND-STAGE SHELTERS		
Bigstone Cree Nation Women's Emergency Shelter Society*	Wabasca	NE
Hope Haven Society*	Lac La Biche	NE
Sucker Creek Women's Emergency Shelter*	Enilda	NW
Catholic Social Services	Edmonton	Central
Lloydminster Interval Home Society Inc.*	Lloydminster	Central
Wings of Providence Society	Edmonton	Central
The Brenda Strafford Centre for the Prevention of Domestic Violence	Calgary	South
Discovery House Family Violence Prevention Society	Calgary	South
Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society*	Medicine Hat	South
Sonshine Community Services	Calgary	South
SENIORS SHELTERS		
Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton (SAGE)	Edmonton	Central
Kerby Centre	Calgary	South

* Member organizations with both Emergency and Second-stage shelters

‡ Organization operates three emergency shelters including a specialized shelter for immigrant women and children

APPENDIX B FOCUS GROUP LOCATIONS & PARTICIPATING ACWS MEMBERS

Grande Prairie

- Peace River Regional Women's Shelter Society
- Northern Haven Support Society
- Fairview and District Women's Centre Association
- Grande Prairie Women's Residence Association

Edmonton #1

- Ermineskin Women's Shelter Society
- Stoney Tribal Administration
- Bigstone Cree Nation Emergency Women's Shelter
- Sucker Creek Women's Emergency Shelter
- Kainai Children Services Corporation

Edmonton #2

- Lurana Shelter Society
- Wings of Providence Society

Lac La Biche

- Dr. Margaret Savage Crisis Centre Society
- Hope Haven Society
- St. Paul and District Crisis Association
- Yellowhead Emergency Shelter for Women Society

Red Deer

- Central Alberta Women's Emergency Shelter Society
- Mountain Rose Women's Shelter Association
- Yellowhead Emergency Shelter for Women Society
- Camrose Women's Shelter Society

Lethbridge

- Brooks and District Women's Safe Shelter Society
- Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society
- Pincher Creek Women's Emergency Shelter Association
- YWCA Lethbridge and District
- Safe Haven Women's Shelter Society

Calgary

- Awo Taan Healing Lodge Society
- The Brenda Strafford Centre for the Prevention of Domestic Violence
- Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter Association
- Discovery House Family Violence Prevention Society
- Kerby Centre
- Sonshine Community Services
- Community Crisis Society
- YWCA of Calgary

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