

# Domestic Violence Shelter Policies Across the State of Florida

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SHELTER POLICIES ACROSS  
THE STATE OF FLORIDA

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Social Work  
in the College of Health and Public Affairs  
and in the Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
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Thesis Chair: Dr. Mary Dillon

## **ABSTRACT**

Domestic violence shelters can vary greatly in the services available to victims and their families. The funding shelters receive can impact the shelter's ability to provide specialized services. Since the availability of services might vary from shelter to shelter, victims can have different experiences based on their location. This cross-sectional study contacted representatives from nine shelters in the State of Florida and asked the representatives nine questions about the services which are available at their respective shelter. The findings from this research show that these nine shelters offer a greater number of services than the study expected. However, there is still a need to better fund domestic violence shelters so that these services can be available to every victim, no matter where the victim resides.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my best friend, McGuire, who has always believed in me and pushed me when things get tough. You are my rock. You have provided me with invaluable guidance, motivation, and laughter over the years. I am truly thankful to have you in my life. Things are only impossible until they're not.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	1
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	2
METHODOLOGY .....	9
QUESTION ONE .....	10
Purpose of the Question .....	11
Prediction .....	11
Analysis.....	11
Reflection.....	12
QUESTION TWO .....	13
Purpose of the Question .....	13
Prediction .....	14
Analysis.....	14
Reflection.....	14
QUESTION THREE.....	15
Purpose of the Question .....	16
Prediction .....	16
Analysis.....	16
Reflection.....	16
QUESTION FOUR.....	18
Purpose of the Question .....	19

Prediction .....	19
Analysis.....	20
Reflection .....	20
QUESTION FIVE.....	21
Purpose of the Question .....	21
Prediction .....	22
Analysis.....	22
Reflection .....	23
QUESTION SIX.....	24
Purpose of the Question .....	24
Prediction .....	25
Analysis.....	25
Reflection .....	26
QUESTION SEVEN.....	27
Purpose of the Question .....	27
Prediction .....	28
Analysis.....	28
Reflection .....	29
QUESTION EIGHT.....	30
Purpose of the Question .....	30
Prediction .....	31

Analysis.....	31
Reflection.....	32
QUESTION NINE .....	33
Purpose of the Question.....	33
Prediction .....	34
Analysis.....	34
Reflection.....	34
ADDITIONAL DATA FOR STUDY .....	35
Analysis.....	35
DISCUSSION.....	37
LIMITATIONS OF STUDY .....	39
IMPLICATIONS .....	40
CONCLUSION.....	41
REFERENCES .....	42

## TABLE OF FIGURES

Table 1: Clients Served, Population, and Geographic Area .....	7
Table 2: Male Children .....	10
Table 3: Men Staying at the Shelter .....	13
Table 4: Separate Living Facilities .....	15
Table 5: Forming Intimate Relationships .....	18
Table 6: Undocumented Women .....	21
Table 7: Children with Different Abilities .....	24
Table 8: Those Who Identify as LBG .....	27
Table 9: Those Who Have Transitioned or Are Transitioning .....	30
Table 10: Spiritual Affiliation .....	33
Table 11: Total Number of Male Clients for 2013 - 2014 .....	35

## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this study is to determine any differences and similarities in the policies of domestic violence shelters across the State of Florida. Through this, insight can be gained with regard to how shelter policies and available services are decided. Gathering this information helps determine what services are available to victims whose shelter options may vary depending on what is available in the community. The differences between these organizations might reveal important treatment modalities which could affect the type of care a client receives. For instance, does the shelter's available resources shape how the shelter assists victims? Do the services available impact how social workers and other advocates provide treatment to their clients? Ensuring clients receive the best treatment for their particular situation is crucial in the field of social work, regardless of the organization's policies.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the State of Florida, a number of benchmarks must be met to receive classification as a certified domestic violence shelter. The shelter's geographic location and surrounding demographics play an integral role in shelter certification. A need within the community must be established in order to receive certification from the state. The minimum shelter requirements include:

information and referral services, counseling and case management services, temporary emergency shelter for more than 24 hours, a 24-hour hotline, training for law enforcement personnel, assessment and appropriate referral of resident children, and educational services for community awareness relative to the incidence of domestic violence, the prevention of such violence, and the services available for persons engaged in or subject to domestic violence. (Domestic Violence Centers, 2013, 1c)

Shelter certification is required to receive government funds and the shelter is given 18-months to prove sustainability of operations and establish and maintain local need (Domestic Violence Centers, 2013, 1h). In areas where a shelter currently exists, new agencies must prove there is a need for additional resources. Furthermore, the new organization must explain their efforts to prevent a duplication of services for that particular service area. Any center can be established and certified as long as delineated funding sources exist, whether from private, local, state, or federal agencies. Certification does not ensure government funding; however, certification is required for the organization to receive government funding (Domestic Violence Centers, 2013).

In order to qualify to receive state or federal funds, the shelter must complete additional requirements after receiving certification. Twenty-five percent of the funds for the organization must come from local, municipal, or county sources, and can include funding from public or

private groups. Additionally, in-kind contributions, which include “commodities, transportation, office space, [and] other types of facilities”, can be counted towards the total needed to receive state or federal funds (Domestic Violence Centers, 2013, 6b). In Florida, an annual formula is developed and approved which determines how the allocated funds are distributed to shelters. This formula accounts for factors such as “population, rural characteristics, geographical area, and the incidence of domestic violence” (Domestic Violence Centers, 2013, 7a). The Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence is responsible for distributing grant money to certified domestic violence shelters. The coalition has the option to not fund certain services which are exempt from certification. Provisions regarding the distribution of shelter funding must be included in a contract between the coalition and the certified domestic violence center (Domestic Violence Centers, 2013).

Privately funded, non-profit organizations can receive private funds from virtually anyone, though a majority of these funds come from philanthropic donations. Privately funded, non-profit organizations, such as a domestic violence shelter, provide a number of needed services within the community; however, these shelters adhere to a different set of rules than the government-funded shelters. Private funding allows organizations to provide services based on a variety of factors, including religion and language. Services based on religion or language can cause a separation in the population because of religious beliefs or linguistic abilities. Privately funded, non-profit organizations are allowed to charge a sliding scale fee for services rendered; whereas publicly funded, non-profit organizations are not allowed to charge such a fee (Anheier & Seibel, 1990).

While working with victims of domestic violence, the primary concern is safety. Certified domestic violence shelters enjoy benefits not always available to non-certified shelters, such as location security and legal support. It allows location confidentiality and “legal protections, including staff with privileges to safeguard survivors and their children” (Wick, Apple, Rivers-Cochran, & Massey, 2014, p. 12). In the Central Florida area, which includes Orange, Osceola, and Seminole counties, domestic violence centers do not currently satisfy community needs. Although Seminole County currently satisfies the short-term housing and transitional housing needs for victims in their area, Orange and Osceola counties significantly lack resources in these same areas. Because no such facilities exist, Central Florida needs 30 permanent, supportive housing facilities (Wick, et al., 2014).

National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has issued a number of statements which articulate policy goals and represent their positions on a broad range of public and professional issues. NASW advocates for social services, including domestic violence shelters, to be made accessible to every person regardless of “gender, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, religion, political views, race, and ethnic and national origin” (Anastas & Clark, 2012, p. 318). NASW supports the beliefs that women should have reproductive freedom, safe access to reproductive health services, and accessibility to violence against women services. NASW requires confidentiality from social workers and encourages compliance with federal and state regulations. NASW also extends these encouragements to safely keep information stored electronically. Confidentiality with clients is reported as “a cardinal principle of the social work profession from its earliest years” (Anastas & Clark, 2012, p. 60). To protect the right of refusal to disclose communication between the advocate and a victim with regards to domestic violence,

shelters in the State of Florida must file the names of advocates and volunteers with the coalition (Domestic Violence Centers, 2013, 1g). When it comes to family violence, NASW supports interdisciplinary community efforts, “strengths-based and community-centered models”, adequate funding at the federal and state levels, and “emergency shelters and support services that are culturally sensitive yet do not excuse violence” for any reason (Anastas & Clark, 2012, p. 145). Providing a safe place for victims and creating awareness results in an educated and aware community (Anastas & Clark, 2012). NASW also prescribes to “inclusive, gender-neutral language, non-homophobic, non-heterosexist language in all materials” (Anastas & Clark, 2012, p. 221). Social worker sensitivity to the sexual orientation of a victim is important when helping a client as to not minimize the importance of their sexuality. A client who feels discrimination regarding their sexual orientation might not seek resources for safety (Anastas & Clark, 2012).

According to National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (2010), “one in three women have experienced physical violence by an intimate partner” (p. 39). Domestic violence is highly underreported. “Only 27 percent of women and 13.5 percent of men who were physically assaulted by an intimate partner reported their assault to law enforcement” (United States Department of Justice, 2009, p. 5). Victims may not report domestic violence for a variety of reasons. The United States Department of Justice (2009) found the following:

A 2005 report listed reasons why a victim does not report incidents of abuse as: the belief that the abuse was a private or personal matter (22 percent for females, 39 percent for males), fear of reprisal (12 percent for females, 5 percent for males), a desire to protect the suspect (14 percent for females, 16 percent for males), and a belief that police won’t do anything (8 percent for females and males). (p. 5)

Domestic violence shelter services can provide a safe environment for victims to report. This helps a victim feel that there is someone supporting them. The data provided by domestic violence shelters in Table 1 is not representative of the number of incidents of domestic violence in their area. This is primarily due to the fact the domestic violence is underreported.

**Table 1: Clients Served, Population, and Geographic Area**

<b>Shelter</b>	<b>Residential Clients Served in 2013-2014</b>	<b>Non-Residential Clients Served in 2013-2014</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Geographic Area Served (in square miles)</b>
Domestic Abuse Council	427	148	494,593	1,106
Domestic Abuse Shelter	303	129	73,090	997
Favor House	393	372	448,991	1,680
Martha's House	146	187	39,996	774
Miami-Dade Advocates for Victims	655	1,075	2,496,435	1,945
Peaceful Paths	212	670	291,391	1,407
Refuge House	403	545	429,121	5,492
Salvation Army in Brevard County	225	231	543,376	1,018
Women in Distress	726	2,215	1,748,066	1,209

The shelter in the region with the largest geographic area and the highest population is the shelter that also has the highest combined residential and non-residential clients served. The shelter in the region with the smallest geographic area and the lowest population is the shelter that also has the lowest combined residential and non-residential clients served. The number of clients who receive assistance may or may not be influenced by the surrounding geographic area and population size.

## **METHODOLOGY**

There is limited information available that compares the policies and services of domestic violence shelters in the State of Florida. This study attempted to determine how shelters currently help victims of domestic violence by evaluating the available services. The goal of this study was to identify and understand any differences existing between domestic violence shelters. Based on what was found, a deeper understanding was gained about the challenges social workers face in improving shelter services.

A nine-question survey was created to collect data relevant to this subject. Six of the questions had supplemental follow-ups which were asked based on the initial response. The supplemental questions were designed to gather additional data for this study. The domestic violence shelters were initially contacted via electronic mail to set up a time to administer the questions via phone. If a response was not received, the shelter was contacted via phone and an agency representative was surveyed. The survey took approximately 5 to 10 minutes to administer, depending on the respondent.

The study collected and analyzed cross-sectional, observational data. A cross-sectional design allowed for the evaluation of data at a particular point in time, in this case during the months of February and March 2015 (Yegidis, Weinbach, & Myers, 2012). The study did not substantiate causal relationships due to possible unidentifiable variables which can impact shelter policy. Alternatively, data was compared and contrasted.

## QUESTION ONE

Until what age can male children stay in the shelter?

- a. What do you do if a child is older?
- b. Why \_\_\_ years old?

**Table 2: Male Children**

Shelter Name	Response
Domestic Abuse Council	Rooms outside for male children 16+.
Domestic Abuse Shelter	No limit.
Favor House	Depends <b>A)</b> “If [the child is] 18 and they’re still in high school, they are permitted to stay with the non-abusive parent [whether] male [or] female. If they are a dependent and they are going to high school and they are living at home with a non-offending parent, usually mom, they’re welcome to come as a dependent.”
Martha’s House	17 <b>A)</b> If still in high school and with the non-abusive parent, the child can still stay at the shelter. <b>B)</b> This is the last adolescent year.
Miami-Dade Advocates for Victims	15 or older we encourage them to find other places. <b>A)</b> If they cannot find another place, they can make accommodations. <b>B)</b> “Because boys 15, sometimes we have girls in the shelter that are 19, 18, and you know, boys tend to want to flirt and do things. So we have an issue with that. We don’t want any pregnancies.”
Peaceful Paths	No age <b>A)</b> On a case-by-case basis if the mom has an adult child that is dependent.
Refuge House	17, depends on if they have a disability <b>A)</b> “If a child who is over the age of 18 has some type of physical, mental, cognitive disability that alters their state [of mind], then they could possibly enter into shelter as long as they are with an adult that is their caregiver” 18 or 19 but still in high school are not allowed to stay because they are considered an adult male—offers services for adult men.
Salvation Army in Brevard County	No age limit.
Women in Distress	No age limit, reported that she knows other shelters are moving to take these restrictions out.

### Purpose of the Question

Studies showed that the ability to bring your child(ren) to a shelter can play an important role when a victim decides to leave an abuser. This question was designed to collect data about a victim's ability to bring their child(ren) to the shelter.

### Prediction

An age limit may be in place due to (1) the perception that boys become aggressive by a certain age and/or (2) the possibility of creating or attempting to create relationships with younger females in the shelter.

### Analysis

Eight out of the nine shelters have no age limit in place. Some of these shelters make exceptions to those who are over the age of 18. One of the nine shelters encourages children 15 and older to stay elsewhere because this shelter has had experiences where boys around this age begin to flirt with the younger female domestic violence victims. If a victim's child is over the age of 18, shelters might make an exception on a case-by-case basis if the child is in high school and/or is dependent on the non-abusive parent.

To these shelters, the age of the child does not matter as much as the safety of the child. If a child comes from unusual circumstances, the shelters are more likely to show understanding when admitting victims and their children. Favor House stated, "If [the child is] 18 and they're still in high school, they are permitted to stay with the non-abusive parent [whether] male [or] female" (Favor House, personal communication, February 24, 2015). This allows for a child who has a learning disability or who has repeated a grade to find a safe haven at the shelter with the non-abusive parent. Refuge House stated, "If a child who is over the age of 18 has some type of physical, mental, cognitive disability that alters their state [of mind], then they could possibly enter into shelter as long as they are with an adult that is their caregiver" (Refuge House,

personal communication, March 9, 2015). Shelters like these provide hope and sanctuary by protecting the young adult from the abuser. Protecting the young adult from the abuser can provide them with the safety they need to recover.

#### Reflection

The data does not support the prediction that an age limit for a male child is set based on the belief the child is aggressive. No shelters in this research set an age limit based on the beliefs that male children tend to engage in combative behaviors. One shelter set an age limit for a male child based on males of this age attempting to have relations with younger females in the shelter.

## QUESTION TWO

Can men stay at the shelter?

**Table 3: Men Staying at the Shelter**

Shelter Name	Response
Domestic Abuse Council	Yes
Domestic Abuse Shelter	Yes
Favor House	Yes
Martha's House	No, but will provide male victims with a hotel.
Miami-Dade Advocates for Victims	No, but will provide male victims with a hotel.
Peaceful Paths	Yes
Refuge House	Yes
Salvation Army in Brevard County	No, but will provide male victims with a hotel.
Women in Distress	Yes

### Purpose of the Question

This question was designed to identify if males have access to the same resources as their female counterparts. Males have experienced stigmas to which female victims are not subjected. According to Mechem, Shofer, Reinhard, Hornig, & Datner (1999), “some men who were in fact victims may not have reported these incidents out of a sense of embarrassment about admitting that their wife or girlfriend had been beating them up” (p. 790). We live in a society where domestic violence may go unreported because of the way we negatively view males as victims. “Our culture provides no room for a man as a victim. Men are simply not supposed to be victimized. A ‘real man’ is expected to solve any problem and recover from any setback” (White & Schwartz, 2007, p. 66). These types of expectations can make it challenging for a male to

identify himself as a victim and to seek assistance from domestic violence shelters.

#### Prediction

Most of the shelters will not accept male victims of domestic violence.

#### Analysis

All nine shelters report they will accept males into their programs. Of the nine shelters in this study, six of the shelters have places on-site for males to reside. On occasion, these six shelters provide male victims with a hotel room when on-site accommodations are unavailable. Peaceful Paths reports that they might shift rooms and beds around to accommodate males. If the shelter is full, Peaceful Paths might be able to provide the male victim with a hotel stay instead (Peaceful Paths, personal communication, March 3, 2015). The remaining shelters will not house a male victim on-site, but will provide a hotel room to the victim if needed.

#### Reflection

The data contradicts the prediction. Every shelter from which data was collected will accept male victims of domestic violence. The number of shelters that accept males greatly surpasses the expectation. By having domestic violence housing resources available to male victims, shelters can create an environment of acceptance and understanding.

Did men recently obtain access to on-site domestic violence services? This population may face challenges when it comes to reporting and seeking help for abuse due to gender stereotypes. Identifying the point in time when domestic violence services for men originated may reveal information about this change in relation to other significant events in history.

### QUESTION THREE

Do men have separate living facilities?

**Table 4: Separate Living Facilities**

Shelter Name	Response
Domestic Abuse Council	Yes, same location, just a different housing entrance.
Domestic Abuse Shelter	Yes, men will have private rooms—they will never share a room with a female victim.
Favor House	Yes, men have a wing with a private bedroom and private bathroom that is close to the intake office.
Martha’s House	Yes, at a hotel.
Miami-Dade Advocates for Victims	Yes, at a hotel.
Peaceful Paths	Yes, will try to shift around some rooms and beds at the shelter but if the shelter is full, then they will provide the male victim with a hotel stay. “We are currently building a new shelter which [will] accommodate and provide more privacy, for everyone...everyone will have their own private space...[in] a families wing and a singles wing.”
Refuge House	Yes, has a cottage for men that is also sometimes used for large families.
Salvation Army in Brevard County	Yes, at a hotel.
Women in Distress	Yes, has a “special population.” This area of the shelter focuses on men and large families, including multigenerational families or other special needs clients.

### Purpose of the Question

This question identified the instances of combined housing facilities for male and female victims during the recovery process. Placing a male victim in a hotel might make it challenging for him to receive services from the shelter. Furthermore, being in a hotel can isolate the victim making it harder for him to be around supportive peers. No research was found that articulates the detriments or benefits of male and female domestic violence victims residing in the same facility.

### Prediction

All of the agencies that accept men on-site will have separate housing facilities for male victims.

### Analysis

Six of the nine shelters reportedly place male victims in private rooms, a separate wing, or a separate building. Three of the shelters provide access to housing at a local hotel instead of on-site housing. Peaceful Paths reports they are “currently building a new shelter which [will] accommodate and provide more privacy, for everyone...everyone will have their own private space...[in] a families wing and a singles wing” (Peaceful Paths, personal communication, March 3, 2015). Women in Distress has what they call a “special population” for “men or...bigger families or...multigenerational families, or anything different” (Women in Distress, personal communication, March 3, 2015). Shelters that allow male victims to reside on-site will separate the males from the females to the best of their ability.

### Reflection

In order to provide more information about communal living between males and females, additional research can evaluate the detriments and benefits during the recovery process. Such a study can explore any effects gender separation would have on the support men can receive from

other victims in the shelter. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to learn if residing at a hotel, as opposed to residing on-site, impacts a male victim's ability to receive services or guidance from the shelter staff.

## QUESTION FOUR

Can new intimate relationships be formed during the stay in the shelter?

**Table 5: Forming Intimate Relationships**

Shelter Name	Response
Domestic Abuse Council	Yes, The residents are free to do what they want. The residents decide what is best for them.
Domestic Abuse Shelter	Yes, “We don’t recommend it...[but] we’re an empowerment-based program.”
Favor House	Yes, “As far as I know, it hasn’t happened. It is not encouraged, and I’ll tell you why. They are in communal living; it’s already stressful circumstances. Are they going to hook up outside of [the] shelter? Probably. Would we encourage it within the confines of the shelter? We probably aren’t going to know about it. But the reality of it is, is that it really wouldn’t be any different than them leaving shelter, going to work, finding a guy that they’re attracted to, and then coming back. The fact is that he doesn’t come with them. We would not discourage it from the standpoint of forbidding it, but to my knowledge it’s never happened. But you know, they don’t tell us stuff like that, so I know I’ve really beat the drum on this one. I have not, to my knowledge, had that occur. But if it does occur, they’re not treated as a couple while they’re in shelter. Because they each have their own scenarios with their abusive partner... We typically try to share with ladies that it may be too soon for them to form any kind of attachments, or whoever is in shelter... What we do have are people forming friendships and moving out together in apartments and all of that. But they’re normally not successful... People come together for a variety of reasons and whether its finances, or whatever it is, and then those things that were not difficult while you were living in communal living or in a residential facility become a bit more stressful when you

	have to deal with it yourself. [Of] the ladies who do share apartments, we do not discourage that. We encourage them to do what they feel they're comfortable with. We encourage people to do what they feel they could be successful doing. It's that kind of an atmosphere."
Martha's House	Yes, We have not had this happen before. Both parties would be allowed to stay but not in the same bedroom.
Miami-Dade Advocates for Victims	Yes, "We are empowerment-based and we are here to help victims of domestic violence, of course other relationships and bonds come from hanging out with other people so we don't discourage and we don't encourage."
Peaceful Paths	Yes, We have not had this happen before. There are no current policies against it.
Refuge House	Yes, "We don't tell people who they can date. Things that are their personal business, we typically try to respect that."
Salvation Army in Brevard County	Yes, "People are adults and they can date whomever they want to date."
Women in Distress	Yes, "It happens. It is not very common, but it has happened in the past and it is just human nature, so...we can't stop that from happening."

#### Purpose of the Question

This question was designed to learn if a victim staying at a shelter is discouraged from forging intimate partnerships. Building independence is crucial when leaving a controlling, abusive relationship. Empowering a victim to make their own decisions can lead them one step closer to autonomy. Although victims of domestic violence are vulnerable, forming a new partnership might provide the victim with hope for a better future.

#### Prediction

About half of the shelters will have restrictions against new relationships and about half of the shelters will not have restrictions against new relationships.

### Analysis

No shelter in this study has a policy against forming a new intimate relationship during a victim's stay in the shelter. All nine respondents are empowerment-based and focus on the victim's strengths in making their own decisions. Although Favor House does not have any policies against new relations, they do not necessarily encourage new relationships to be formed during the stay in the shelter. Favor House provides insight to this issue in their explanation of the reasons why forming new relationships is not recommended. Their agency advises victims that it might be too soon to develop new attachments on top of an already stressful communal living situation. Ultimately, Favor House allows the victim to make their own decisions based on what the victim feels is best for their situation. Empowering victims to make their own choices is likely to aid the recovery process.

### Reflection

The data did not fully support the prediction. The shelters appear to be focused more on the strength of the individual than the status of the victim's personal affairs. When leaving a controlling relationship, autonomy can help the victim regain their confidence and independence. According to Peterman and Dixon (2003):

When clients solve their own problems, they tend to be much more confident and satisfied with the solutions. In addition, they are better equipped to get out of a similar situation the next time it occurs... Counselors... should attempt to empower them [clients] by providing the necessary resources to promote independence. (p. 45)

Satisfaction with one's choices can play an integral role in rebuilding the victim's confidence.

## QUESTION FIVE

Does this shelter admit undocumented women?

- a. If no, why not?
- b. If yes, does this shelter provide resources for undocumented women receive proper documentation?

**Table 6: Undocumented Women**

Shelter Name	Response
Domestic Abuse Council	Yes <b>A)</b> “will assist them in the process.”
Domestic Abuse Shelter	Yes <b>A)</b> will refer to another agency.
Favor House	Yes <b>A)</b> one of the counselors has been extremely successful in working with the Mexican Consulate in Orlando after their local source was no longer able to help.
Martha’s House	Yes <b>A)</b> will refer to another agency and will make sure the victim is following through with what is needed to apply for documentation.
Miami-Dade Advocates for Victims	Yes <b>A)</b> will refer to another agency.
Peaceful Paths	Yes <b>A)</b> has a partnership with the University of Florida law clinic, called The Source.
Refuge House	Yes <b>A)</b> refers out to partners in the community to assist with the legal aspects.
Salvation Army in Brevard County	Yes <b>A)</b> will refer to another agency.
Women in Distress	Yes <b>A)</b> will refer to legal attorneys in the community.

### Purpose of the Question

This question was designed to identify if undocumented women have access to the same domestic violence resources that documented women can receive. Undocumented women are less likely to report abuse because of the fear of deportation and legal issues (Narayan, 1995). In

some cases, immigrant women are only in the United States because they are married to the abuser. Leaving an abuser makes many of these women fearful of losing their ability to live in the United States (Narayan, 1995). Women with dependent immigration status—who only have citizenship as a result of their current marriage—are “often more economically, psychologically and linguistically dependent on their spouses than wives in general” (Narayan, 1995, p. 106). Immigrant women are more likely to be exposed to abuse based on their spouse dependency (Narayan, 1995). Dependency can be one of the central components to an abusive relationship for undocumented women. Furthermore, “sexism and cultural chauvinism often collaborate to create tremendous resistance to acknowledging the extent of domestic violence within immigrant communities” (Narayan, 1995, p. 105). This type of resistance can discourage immigrant and undocumented women who are victims of domestic violence from seeking assistance.

#### Prediction

All of the shelters will admit undocumented women and will provide access to resources for proper documentation.

#### Analysis

All nine shelters admit undocumented women. Additionally, all of the shelters will provide some type of access to documentation services. Seven of the shelters will refer the woman to an outside agency that specializes with documentation. Two of the shelters partner with outside agencies to provide documentation services on-site. A counselor at Favor House reported success in working with the Mexican Consulate in Orlando, Florida (Favor House, personal communication, February 24, 2015). Favor House states when their local source was no longer able to provide services, their counselor contacted and developed a successful partnership with the Mexican Consulate (Favor House, personal communication, February 24, 2015). The

shelter reports that the Mexican Consulate will pay for any documentation fees and recommends this agency to other shelters that lose their local source. Peaceful Paths has a partnership with the University of Florida law clinic, The Source (Peaceful Paths, personal communication, March 3, 2015). The law clinic gives future lawyers the opportunity to learn about documentation law while at the same time helping victims of domestic violence.

#### Reflection

The data fully supports the prediction. Shelters will help women who may struggle with staying in United States after leaving their abuser. If a shelter is unable to provide documentation resources on-site, the shelter will connect the woman to an outside agency while still allowing her to stay at the shelter. The partnership Favor House established with the Mexican Consulate in Orlando is a valuable resource to other shelters should they lose the ability to utilize their current community resource. Other partnerships, such as the ones established by Favor House and Peaceful Paths, can be of great assistance to immigrant and undocumented women in the shelter. These women will be able to receive services on-site, minimizing the need to go from agency to agency. The accepting and helpful atmospheres these shelters provide have the ability to make undocumented women feel safer when choosing to leave their abuser. Identifying the percentage of undocumented women who know their rights and who know of the available resources could provide valuable data for future advocacy and prevention efforts. Not knowing of their rights or of the resources available can further contribute to the marginalization of undocumented women.

## QUESTION SIX

Do you have service assistance for children with different abilities? (Mental, emotional, etc.)

a. If yes, what kind?

**Table 7: Children with Different Abilities**

Shelter Name	Response
Domestic Abuse Council	No, will refer to another agency.
Domestic Abuse Shelter	No, has counseling for domestic violence related matters but would refer to a therapist for different abilities.
Favor House	No, will refer to another agency. “What we have discovered most often is those children are already receiving services” and we make sure they continue to receive these services.
Martha’s House	No, will refer to another agency.
Miami-Dade Advocates for Victims	No, will refer to another agency.
Peaceful Paths	No, will refer to another agency.
Refuge House	Yes <b>A)</b> Children Counseling Services, all-inclusive, they can diagnose the onset of mental illnesses. The shelter provides individual therapy and group therapy.
Salvation Army in Brevard County	No, will refer to another agency.
Women in Distress	Yes <b>A)</b> Children’s Department with a children’s therapist.

### Purpose of the Question

Children who have experienced or witnessed domestic violence are at a higher risk of exhibiting intense emotional and behavioral reactions (Tyndall-Lind, Landreth, & Giordano, 2001). These reactions can be triggered by the added stress of entering a new environment, such as a shelter. Behavior problems are more likely to present in children who have experienced or

witnessed domestic violence when compared to children of the same sociodemographic background who have not experienced or witnessed domestic violence (Tyndall-Lind, Landreth, & Giordano, 2001). To begin addressing these behaviors, therapy with siblings can expedite the therapeutic process.

The high level and increased number of positive emotional and behavioral changes after exposure to intensive sibling group play therapy may be attributed to the fact that these children began the therapeutic process with an existing familial context in which to frame their therapeutic work. This context may expedite the therapeutic process with regard to issues related to family dynamics. (Tyndall-Lind, Landreth, & Giordano, 2001, p. 75)

This question was designed to identify how common it is for shelters to offer services for children who are prone to developing different abilities. Having access to these resources on-site at the shelter can aid the child in the recovery process when leaving an abusive adult.

#### Prediction

Most shelters will provide on-site services for children with varying abilities.

#### Analysis

Seven out of the nine shelters use referrals to outside agencies. One of these seven shelters, Favor House, found that children with these problems are already receiving services elsewhere. Favor House ensures that children in the shelter who are already receiving services keep up with treatment. In instances where services are not currently utilized but might benefit a child, Favor House refers the child to an outside agency. The Domestic Abuse Shelter provides counseling for domestic violence related issues but refers children to a specialized therapist for other issues. Refuge House and Women in Distress offer on-site services for children with

different abilities. By not introducing multiple agencies at the same time, the child can become comfortable and trusting with the shelter since all of the services they need are at one location.

### Reflection

The data does not support the prediction that the majority of the shelters provide on-site services for children with various emotional or behavioral problems. Refuge House, one of the shelters providing services on-site, services eight counties. This shelter's ability to provide such a service for children in the shelter may be associated with the total number of counties served. When combining the information from the 2010 United States Census Bureau, the counties Refuge House serves equate to 5,492 square miles and a population of 429,121 (United States Census Bureau, 2010). These numbers place this eight-county region as number one in square miles and thirteenth in population in the State of Florida. Women in Distress also provides services for children with different abilities. This shelter services the second largest county based on population and the seventh largest county based on total square miles in the State of Florida (United States Census Bureau, 2010).

Does a county's geographic or population size influence the funding available for additional services? This study does not include enough data to conclusively determine if these factors influence funding. Future research is needed to determine how funding may or may not influence the services that are provided. Although only two out of nine shelters in this study provide services for children with different abilities, it would be useful to find out if having these services on-site has any impact on the child's recovery process.

## QUESTION SEVEN

Does this shelter admit individuals who identify as lesbian, bisexual, or gay?

- a. If both partners come to stay, will the second partner be referred to another shelter?

**Table 8: Those Who Identify as LBG**

Shelter Name	Response
Domestic Abuse Council	Yes <b>A)</b> Yes
Domestic Abuse Shelter	Yes <b>A)</b> Yes
Favor House	Yes <b>A)</b> Yes
Martha's House	Yes <b>A)</b> Yes "whichever one is deemed the victim by law enforcement will be the one that will reside in shelter."
Miami-Dade Advocates for Victims	Yes <b>A)</b> Yes
Peaceful Paths	Yes <b>A)</b> Yes, if there is a conflict of interest, they will not be eligible for services through this agency.
Refuge House	Yes <b>A)</b> Yes
Salvation Army in Brevard County	Yes <b>A)</b> Yes, "We would learn more about the situation" to see who is the victim—both would not be allowed.
Women in Distress	Yes <b>A)</b> Yes, "We try to identify who the abuser is."

### Purpose of the Question

The purpose of this question was to see if those who identify as lesbian, bisexual, or gay have access to the same resources as other populations. Due to a fundamental lack of understanding in the community support system, this population is more prone to isolation in situations of domestic violence than other populations. According to Murphy (1995),

When handling same-sex domestic violence cases, police departments and courts, rather than acknowledge or understand that abuse can and does occur between members of the same sex, often believe that a situation of mutual combat is taking place in which the same-sex partners are just fighting. (p. 341)

The belief that same-sex couples are “just fighting” within the criminal justice system has the potential to disenfranchise same-sex couples. Murphy’s (1995) study reported, “victims of same-sex domestic violence often do not have access to the protective services available to victims of abuse in opposite-sex relationships, since few shelters are dedicated to offering sanctuary to victims of same-sex domestic violence” (p. 342). The research on the nine shelters in this study sought to identify if there is a disadvantage to this population based on their sexual orientation. Furthermore, this study attempted to identify if the abuser claims to be a victim, would it place the real victim at risk.

#### Prediction

The results of these questions will be: (1) every shelter will accept this group no matter what their sexual orientation may be, and (2) shelters will refer the abuser who claims to also be a victim to another location.

#### Analysis

All nine shelters in the study admit victims who are lesbian, bisexual, or gay. No shelters allow both partners to stay at the facility. In most cases, the identified victim is allowed to stay. The Salvation Army in Brevard County stated, “We would learn more about the situation” to see who is the victim; both certainly would not be allowed (Salvation Army in Brevard County, personal communication, February 2, 2015). Martha’s House reported, “Whichever one is deemed the victim by law enforcement will be the one that will reside in shelter” (Martha’s

House, personal communication, March 6, 2015). Martha's House also reported that in the past their agency has had two people claim to be the victim from the same relationship.

#### Reflection

The data did support the prediction. According to the data, services exist for those who are lesbian, bisexual, or gay. Regardless of sexual orientation and the other obstacles this population faces, the shelters still protect victims of domestic violence. As evidenced by the enthusiasm in speaking about this issue, the shelters appear to be cognizant of the barriers this population faces, especially when leaving an abusive relationship. Further research would need to be conducted to see if this data is representative of shelters in the State of Florida.

## QUESTION EIGHT

Does this shelter admit people who are transitioning or who have been through a transition?

a. If no, is there a specific reason why?

**Table 9: Those Who Have Transitioned or Are Transitioning**

Shelter Name	Response
Domestic Abuse Council	Yes, “Anybody can be a victim, anybody can be a survivor.”
Domestic Abuse Shelter	Yes, “As long as they are a victim of domestic violence or sexual assault, absolutely.”
Favor House	Yes
Martha’s House	Yes, We have not had this situation come up yet but we will admit them to the shelter.
Miami-Dade Advocates for Victims	Yes
Peaceful Paths	Yes
Refuge House	Yes, has had a client with a completed transition before. If a client were in the middle of a transition, it would depend on what the individual feels most comfortable identifying with.
Salvation Army in Brevard County	Yes
Women in Distress	Yes

### Purpose of the Question

The purpose of this question was to identify if those who are transitioning or who have transitioned have access to the same resources as non-transgendered persons. Those who have transitioned or are going through a transition often show apprehension in accessing domestic violence services due to concerns about homophobia and transphobia (Bornstein, Fawcett,

Sullivan, Senturia, & Shiu-Thornton, 2006). Furthermore, transgendered persons have reported isolation as a central factor which affects staying in the abusive relationship (Bornstein et al., 2006). Isolation and concerns over resources not being available to them can make transgendered persons less likely to report instances of domestic violence.

#### Prediction

All shelters will admit those who are transitioning or who have been through a transition.

#### Analysis

All shelters in this study accept those who are transitioning or who have been through a transition. The Salvation Army in Brevard County accepts those who have been through a transition or those who are currently going through a male-to-female transition, but will not be able to house someone in the shelter if the victim identifies as a male. The results show an overwhelming support for accepting those who choose to transition. The Domestic Abuse Council states, “anybody can be a victim, anybody can be a survivor” (Domestic Abuse Council, personal communication, February 24, 2015). The Domestic Abuse Shelter states they will accept those who are transitioning or who have transitioned “as long as they are a victim of domestic violence or sexual assault” (Domestic Abuse Shelter, personal communication, February 24, 2015). Refuge House had an experience before with a victim who completed a transition but has not yet had the experience of working with a victim in the middle of a transition. If they were to receive a client who was in the middle of a transition, Refuge House states that they would “see what they [the victim] feel most comfortable with” in terms of identifying their gender (Refuge House, personal communication, March 9, 2015).

### Reflection

The overwhelming support from the shelters with regard to those who have transitioned or who are transitioning is unexpected. Anyone in this situation who is located near these shelters will have domestic violence services available to them. These shelters empower those who choose to make a transition and appear to be aware of the additional barriers this population faces.

## QUESTION NINE

Are you a spiritually affiliated organization?

- a. If yes, do you offer spiritual guidance?
- b. If yes, is the spiritual guidance optional?

**Table 10: Spiritual Affiliation**

Shelter Name	Response
Domestic Abuse Council	No
Domestic Abuse Shelter	No
Favor House	No, “We do encourage people to, if they have a faith, regardless of what it is, that has been taken away from them as part of the abusive pattern of the offender, we encourage them, if they’re comfortable, to reestablish with their faith, whatever that is because many times they find strength there. If we can go back and revisit [this,]... we have found [reestablishing faith to be] helpful.”
Martha’s House	No
Miami-Dade Advocates for Victims	No
Peaceful Paths	No
Refuge House	No
Salvation Army in Brevard County	No, “If someone chooses to participate in a religion, that is certainly not something that would rule them in or out of any part of our program.” This shelter has community partners.
Women in Distress	No, but a lot of community partners.

### Purpose of the Question

This question was designed to identify if spiritual affiliation has any influence on shelter policies.

### Prediction

All of the shelters will not be spiritually affiliated. If a shelter is spiritually affiliated and provides spiritual guidance, spiritual guidance will be required.

### Analysis

Of the nine shelters from which data was collected, no shelter has a spiritual affiliation. Two of the shelters, Salvation Army in Brevard County and Women in Distress, report that they have partners in the community who support the agency's prevention and advocacy efforts.

### Reflection

The data supports the first portion of the prediction. The second portion of the prediction is neither supported nor not supported because there was no data available to determine its validity. Since no shelter in this study is a spiritually affiliated organization or requires spiritual guidance as a part of the recovery process, it allows those who stay at the shelter to heal without external pressure. Favor House identifies a potential strength in reestablishing a victim's faith that was lost during the relationship with the abuser. Religious community partners can help connect women who seek spiritual guidance during the recovery process to religious institutions in their region.

## ADDITIONAL DATA FOR STUDY

**Table 11: Total Number of Male Clients for 2013 - 2014**

Shelter Name	Response
Domestic Abuse Council	2 Residential, 7 Non-Residential
Domestic Abuse Shelter	5 Residential, 4 Non-Residential
Favor House	2 Residential, 4 Non-Residential
Martha's House	0 Residential, 10 Non-Residential
Miami-Dade Advocates for Victims	7 Residential, 46 Non-Residential
Peaceful Paths	2 Residential, 21 Non-Residential
Refuge House	0 Residential, 0 Non-Residential
Salvation Army in Brevard County	0 Residential, 10 Non-Residential
Women in Distress	20 Residential, 66 Non-Residential

### Analysis

In this study, the number of men who went to shelters for services is low in comparison to women. The data for men who are residential are those who stayed either on-site or in a hotel provided by the shelter. The data for men who are non-residential are those who received domestic violence services from the shelter, but did not reside at the shelter or at a hotel provided by the shelter. The data for Miami-Dade Advocates for Victims and Women in Distress are surprising because their numbers greatly exceed the others in this study. Miami-Dade Advocates for Victims is located in Miami-Dade County and Women in Distress is located in Broward County. These counties border one another. The populations for Miami-Dade County and

Broward County are the two highest in Florida with 2,496,435 residents and 1,748,066 residents, respectively (United States Census Bureau, 2010).

Peaceful Paths, which serves the counties of Alachua, Bradford, and Union, is the shelter with the third-highest number of men who receive services. This region has a population of 291,391 (United States Census Bureau, 2010). The data alludes to the possibility that the shelters with a higher number of men receiving services might be due to the fact that the shelter has a larger presence in the community. This study recognizes that multiple factors are involved when a specific population, in this case males, report domestic violence. However, the results of this study suggest that increased funding for domestic violence shelters may influence those who report and seek services in their community.

## **DISCUSSION**

Domestic violence shelter policies across the State of Florida vary significantly less than expected. There is limited data available that evaluates shelter policies in the State of Florida on the type of information included in this research.

When starting this study, I did not expect to find shelters that would accept men. It would be interesting for future research to identify why shelters now allow men to stay on-site and when this change occurred. Knowing what catalyzed this change can help with understanding the barriers this particular group faced—and still faces—in some parts of the country. There are shelters that report they allow men to stay on-site and shelters that report they will provide access to a hotel room. It would be beneficial to identify the impact, if any, staying at a hotel has on the overall recovery process. For instance, would the cost of a hotel room limit the average stay for a male victim when compared with a female victim who receives services on-site? Identifying any variations in services for males and females will help with working with male domestic violence victims in the future.

The shelters were incredibly supportive of the victim's right to self-determination. If the victim would like to start a new intimate relationship during their stay in the shelter, the shelters would neither forbid nor encourage such behavior. I believe that this is imperative in redeveloping or developing a person's autonomy. Part of breaking the cycle of violence is gaining control over one's decisions again. Starting a new relationship in the shelter has the potential to provide a victim with hope and optimism.

I was also surprised to find there were a number of community resources for undocumented women. My expectation that all of the shelters would send referrals to other agencies that specialized in documentation was disproved. There were two shelters that work

with documentation agencies in their area to provide services on-site for victims. When a shelter has on-site services, the process can be easier for victims because they do not have to go to another unfamiliar place. On-site services provide the undocumented victim with the safety and comfort of the shelter and the familiarity of working with the shelter staff.

The two shelters that provide service assistance for children with different abilities can guide other shelters in providing the same resources in the future. There is a need to evaluate how these two shelters are handling their budgets in order to learn how other shelters can finance services for these children. This same financial data can be utilized to advocate for additional funding for other shelters that do not yet provide these specialized services.

Though unexpected, the shelters openly accepted those who choose to go through a transition and who are members of the lesbian, bisexual, and gay community. There was an expectation that the shelters would accept those who identify as one of these groups, however the unwavering support was not expected. It appears that the shelters in this study fully understand the barriers that these groups face.

Further research needs to be conducted to identify if there is any connection that can be made between funding and population size and funding and geographic size. If there is a connection between one or both of these, this might explain the differences in services. For example, the two shelters that provide service assistance for children with different abilities are two of the largest counties in both population and size in the State of Florida. If this correlation could be conclusively proven, then the data could be useful in advocating for additional funding for other domestic violence shelters that do not provide these services on-site.

## **LIMITATIONS OF STUDY**

Several unexpected obstacles were encountered during the data collection process.

Contacting the shelters to collect information proved to be more challenging than anticipated.

The first method of contact, via electronic mail, yielded a small number of responses. Only a select few of the email responses provided the option to set up a time for a phone conversation.

Any attempt to set up a phone conversation was met with no response.

Since electronic mail communications appeared to be unsuccessful, phone calls to individual shelters were attempted. Any attempt to speak with a representative from the agency proved to be complicated. Multiple attempts would be made to an agency where the spokesperson was either out of the office or in a meeting.

Although not mentioned in this study, financial resources have the potential to also increase the success of prevention efforts in communities. “Services in the form of shelter, support, education, and legal advocacy may be crucial in determining the success of other community efforts to address domestic violence” (Shepard, 1999, p. 4). Additional financial backing can allow these agencies to increase their education and advocacy resources.

Lastly, the small sample size is not representative of the entire State of Florida. The data collected from this research cannot be used to make large-scale generalizations about the programs and services offered in this state.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

The findings of this research prove that services for domestic violence victims could benefit from better funding. If more funding were available, domestic violence shelters would be capable of providing more resources to the community. These resources include on-site housing for male victims, services on-site for children with different abilities, and services on-site for undocumented women.

In practice, social workers can use the information from this study to identify areas that could benefit from increased awareness and support. Raising awareness and support for domestic violence shelters might result in educating the community on how to identify abuse and the resources available for those who are abused.

Future research should evaluate how domestic violence shelters are funded and how these funds are used. An understanding of the shelter financial breakdown could provide valuable information when petitioning for increased funding at the state and federal levels. Due to the small sample size of this project, additional research is needed to analyze any distinct patterns or themes regarding the services provided by domestic violence shelters.

## **CONCLUSION**

The results of this study exhibit some differences in services provided by domestic violence shelters. This study attempted to gain insight into shelter policy and services by administering a nine-question survey to representatives from domestic violence shelters in the State of Florida. There is overwhelming support for those who come from a variety of backgrounds. Although shelters cannot always provide the on-site services some of these populations need, the services are still available. Nevertheless, increased funding for these agencies would likely help shelters to better provide for their clients.

The results of this study make a strong case for optimism. The shelters interviewed seemed to be represented by people who deeply care. The openness and honesty was largely unexpected and very motivating. Hopefully, the data from this study can provide at least a start to future research that expands upon the knowledge currently available in the field.

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