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## **A Place to Heal: Intimate Partner Violence Survivors Reflect on Shelter Service Delivery**

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**BACKGROUND:** Research estimates that 1 in 4 women will experience physical violence at the hands of an intimate partner during her lifetime (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2010). There are nearly 1,916 programs and shelters identified nationwide where victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) may receive services (NNEDV, 2014). During time-limited shelter stays, IPV victims have the opportunity to heal and plan for the future in a safe environment. IPV services are philosophically committed to service delivery that helps restore victims' empowerment, as self-determination and agencies are often deeply eroded within abusive relationships. Despite this commitment, shelters may struggle with service delivery models that undermine empowerment through excessive rules and disempowering practices (MOCADSV, 2012). Better understanding IPV victims' challenges within the shelter environment can enhance efforts to strengthen services.

**METHODS:** IPV shelter residents and service providers were engaged in a series of listening projects, which are similar to focus groups. Four listening projects, 2 with shelter residents (n=15) and 2 with staff (n=30), were convened at a local IPV shelter. A semi-structured interview guide utilized open-ended questions to elicit perceptions about services that might promote or impede empowerment. Listening projects lasted between 45 and 75 minutes, were facilitated by the lead researcher, and were digitally recorded then transcribed by the research team. Shelter residents received a \$10 gift certificate for their participation. Verbatim transcripts were thematically coded independently by all members of the research team. Identified themes were then discussed, revised, and consolidated.

**RESULTS:** Three thematic challenges associated within the shelter environment emerged: 1) obtaining basic needs, 2) planning for independence, and 3) living communally. All three challenges can serve as opportunities for client empowerment or disempowerment. Current service delivery strengths and challenges were identified.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Findings support recent IPV literature claims that service delivery quality strongly influences client outcomes. Enhanced staff training, improved processes, and additional resources may be necessary to address clients' basic needs, plans for independence, and communal living situation.

**Keywords:** shelter, intimate partner violence, rules reduction, service delivery