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Women's experiences in the community after leaving a shelter

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WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN THE COMMUNITY AFTER LEAVING A SHELTER

BY

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Language
- General 0679
- Ancient 0289
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- Modern 0291

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- General 0401
- Classical 0294
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- Medieval 0297
- Modern 0298
- African 0316
- American 0591
- Asian 0305
- Canadian (English) 0352
- Canadian (French) 0355
- English 0593
- Germanic 0311
- Latin American 0312
- Middle Eastern 0315
- Romance 0313
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PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION AND THEOLOGY
Philosophy 0422
Religion
- General 0318
- Biblical Studies 0321
- Clergy 0319
- History of 0320
- Philosophy of 0322

Theology 0469

SOCIAL SCIENCES
American Studies 0323
Anthropology
- Archaeology 0324
- Cultural 0326
- Physical 0327

Business Administration
- General 0310
- Accounting 0272
- Banking 0770
- Management 0454
- Marketing 0338

Canadian Studies 0385
Economics
- General 0501
- Agricultural 0503
- Commerce-Business 0505
- Finance 0508
- History 0509
- Labor 0510
- Theory 0511

Folklore 0358
Geography 0366
Gerontology 0351
History
- General 0578
- Ancient 0579
- Medieval 0581
- Modern 0582
- Black 0328
- African 0331
- Asia, Australia and Oceania 0332
- Canadian 0334
- European 0335
- Latin American 0336
- Middle Eastern 0333
- United States 0337

History of Science 0585
Law 0398
Political Science
- General 0615
- International Law and Relations 0616
- Public Administration 0617

Recreation 0814
Social Work 0452
Sociology
- General 0626
- Criminology and Penology 0627
- Demography 0938
- Ethnic and Racial Studies 0631
- Individual and Family Studies 0628
- Industrial and Labor Relations 0629
- Public and Social Welfare 0630
- Social Structure and Development 0700
- Theory and Methods 0344

Transportation 0709
Urban and Regional Planning 0999
Women's Studies 0453

THE SCIENCES AND ENGINEERING

BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES
Agriculture
- General 0473
- Agronomy 0285
- Animal Culture and Nutrition 0475
- Animal Pathology 0476
- Food Science and Technology 0359
- Forestry and Wildlife 0478
- Plant Culture 0479
- Plant Pathology 0480
- Plant Physiology 0817
- Range Management 0777
- Wood Technology 0746

Biology
- General 0306
- Anatomy 0287
- Biostatistics 0308
- Botany 0309
- Cell 0379
- Ecology 0329
- Entomology 0353
- Genetics 0369
- Limnology 0793
- Microbiology 0410
- Molecular 0307
- Neuroscience 0317
- Oceanography 0416
- Physiology 0433
- Radiation 0821
- Veterinary Science 0778
- Zoology 0472

Biophysics
- General 0786
- Medical 0760

EARTH SCIENCES
Biogeochemistry 0425
Geochemistry 0996
Geodesy 0370
Geology 0372
Geophysics 0373
Hydrology 0388
Mineralogy 0411
Paleobotany 0345
Paleoecology 0426
Paleontology 0418
Paleozoology 0985
Palynology 0427
Physical Geography 0368
Physical Oceanography 0415

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES
Environmental Sciences 0768
Health Sciences
- General 0566
- Audiology 0300
- Chemotherapy 0992
- Dentistry 0567
- Education 0350
- Hospital Management 0769
- Human Development 0758
- Immunology 0982
- Medicine and Surgery 0564
- Mental Health 0347
- Nursing 0569
- Nutrition 0570
- Obstetrics and Gynecology 0380
- Occupational Health and Therapy 0354
- Ophthalmology 0381
- Pathology 0571
- Pharmacology 0419
- Pharmacy 0572
- Physical Therapy 0382
- Public Health 0573
- Radiology 0574
- Recreation 0575
- Speech Pathology 0460
- Toxicology 0383

Home Economics 0386

PHYSICAL SCIENCES
Pure Sciences
Chemistry
- General 0485
- Agricultural 0749
- Analytical 0486
- Biochemistry 0487
- Inorganic 0488
- Nuclear 0738
- Organic 0490
- Pharmaceutical 0491
- Physical 0494
- Polymer 0495
- Radiation 0754

Mathematics 0405
Physics
- General 0605
- Acoustics 0986
- Astronomy and Astrophysics 0606
- Atmospheric Science 0608
- Atomic 0748
- Electronics and Electricity 0607
- Elementary Particles and High Energy 0798
- Fluid and Plasma 0759
- Molecular 0609
- Nuclear 0610
- Optics 0752
- Radiation 0756
- Solid State 0611

Statistics 0463

Applied Sciences
Applied Mechanics 0346
Computer Science 0984
Engineering
- General 0537
- Aerospace 0538
- Agricultural 0539
- Automotive 0540
- Biomedical 0541
- Chemical 0542
- Civil 0543
- Electronics and Electrical 0544
- Heat and Thermodynamics 0348
- Hydraulic 0545
- Industrial 0546
- Marine 0547
- Materials Science 0794
- Mechanical 0548
- Metallurgy 0743
- Mining 0551
- Nuclear 0552
- Packaging 0549
- Petroleum 0765
- Sanitary and Municipal 0554
- System Science 0790

Geotechnology 0428
Operations Research 0796
Plastics Technology 0795
Textile Technology 0994

PSYCHOLOGY
General 0621
Behavioral 0384
Clinical 0622
Developmental 0620
Experimental 0623
Industrial 0624
Personality 0625
Physiological 0989
Psychobiology 0349
Psychometrics 0632
Social 0451

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In loving memory of my sister,

Maureen Massicotte

September 5, 1961 - April 13, 1987

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

The past two decades have been witness to the unveiling of a critical problem which affects the lives of thousands of women in Canadian communities every day: the problem of wife abuse. This veil of secrecy began to lift as women who were suffering abuse disclosed their experiences to other women. As a result, women joined together for purposes of consciousness-raising and mutual support, to educate and lobby various levels of government for assistance and to inform their communities about the problem. In concert with this work came the birth and the growth of the shelter movement. One of the outcomes of this movement has been the development of shelters in every province in Canada.

Shelters provide women and their children with a short term alternative to staying with an abusive partner and in an abusive home environment. They are an important link for many women; a stepping stone from one lived experience to another. Information about these lived experiences has unfolded as women shared their stories through the use of various types of quantitative and qualitative research. A number of issues, such as women's experiences of abuse and the effects of violence on children, have provided a focus for exploration. As these data accumulated, a much broader picture began to develop of women's experiences prior to entering a shelter, their journey through the shelter system, and their

experiences in the community as they begin to re-establish new lives separate from their abusive partners. Parts of this picture, particularly women's pre-shelter experiences, are well documented and provide a clear and in-depth understanding of the issues that coincide with those images and experiences. Other pieces, such as women's shelter and post-shelter experiences, have received less attention and therefore remain indistinct due to insufficient information. The purpose of this study is twofold:

1) to develop a deeper understanding of women's experiences in the community after leaving a shelter, and 2) to understand the impact that women's pre-shelter and shelter experiences have on their efforts to re-establish in the community.

The conceptual framework provides an overview of the literature as it relates to women's pre-shelter, shelter and post-shelter experiences. The first section of the review offers a brief introduction to the problem of wife abuse and includes a definition of the term, details regarding the extent of this problem, and a brief account of the shelter movement in Canada.

The second section provides a summary of the data that exists about women's experiences prior to accessing a shelter. The material in this section has been organized into themes which characterise several of the consequences of wife abuse: social isolation; barriers to/lack of resources; and the impact on women's sense of self.

Since shelters play a pivotal role in the lives of the women in this study, it is also important to understand the concept of sheltering. What purposes do shelters and shelter workers hope to achieve? Given these purposes, what kinds of services or supports can women expect to receive during their stay? What role does a shelter play in women's transition from the shelter to the community? The third section explores these questions through an application of two typologies. The first is a fourfold typology, created by Micheline Beaudry (1985), which captures the complex nature of sheltering. It provides a basis for a discussion of the philosophical differences among shelters and how these differences affect the work that is carried out within any shelter environment. Gary Cameron (1985; 1992) has developed a typology of the functional components of social support. This typology provides a useful framework for examining the kinds of supports that shelters have to offer women.

Many women decide to re-establish in communities separate from their abusive partners. Some studies have been conducted which explore the experiences of women as they begin to put together new lives for themselves and their children. These studies are relatively new, and few. They offer valuable insights and information which are summarized in the fourth section.

The fifth section offers a brief discussion of the term "community" and explores the components which make up this

complex concept. The works of Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), which offer a capacity-oriented approach to the study of community, and Barry Wellman (1983; 1989), who developed the notion of networks as personal communities, provide a basis for the concept of community that is adopted in this study.

This literature review is not meant to be exhaustive in its discussion about the experiences of women who have accessed shelters and re-established in community. Its purpose is to provide a brief overview and summary of the significant themes contained in current research about the lives of women who have experienced abuse at the hands of an intimate partner and consequently left to stay at a shelter, lived in a shelter environment for at least one week and returned to a life as single women and/or parents in their own, or new, community.

Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Wife Abuse and the Growth of Sheltering in Canada.

It has been 21 years since Canada's first shelters for abused women and their children opened in Vancouver and Toronto (Gilman, 1988; MacLeod, 1987). Sheltering has its roots in the women's liberation movement of the 1960's and 1970's. During this time, women came together in their various communities across Canada to form women's drop-in centres, health collectives, and consciousness-raising groups, with the goal of liberating women from many forms of oppression (Gilman, 1988; Ridington, 1977-78b). As women contacted and joined these various groups, they also began to talk about their day-to-day experiences and the extent of violence against women became apparent. This violence was occurring in the place traditionally assumed to be a refuge from the harsh realities of life: the home. The perpetrators of that violence were women's intimate partners.

Research from Statistics Canada (1993) indicates that one-in-six currently married women reported violence by their spouses and one-quarter of all women have experienced violence at the hands of a current or past marital or common-law partner. More than one-in-ten women who reported violence in a current marriage/common-law relationship have at some point felt that their lives were in danger. The violence that women who are married or in common-law relationships experience has

been defined in different ways. For the purpose of this research, this abuse is defined as:

> The loss of dignity, control and safety as well as the feeling of powerlessness and entrapment experienced by women who are the direct victims of ongoing or repeated physical, psychological, economic, sexual and/or verbal violence and who are subject to persistent threats or the witnessing of such violence against their children, other relatives, friends, pets and/or cherished possessions, by their boyfriends, husbands, live-in lovers, ex-husbands or ex-lovers, whether male or female. The term will also be understood to encompass the ramifications of the violence for the woman, her children, her friends and relatives and for society as a whole (MacLeod, 1987, p.16).

Feminist groups began to lobby local and provincial governments for assistance on behalf of women who were being abused. Traditional social services were unable to provide the help that many women wanted: a safe place, away from their partner's violence; time to think and explore options; access to emotional support; and access to legal, financial and housing information and assistance. As a result of this political pressure, some funding became available and shelters began to open across Canada. By 1989, over 300 shelters, safe home networks, satellite houses, safe environments, and multipurpose emergency and transition homes had been established (Health and Welfare Canada, 1989).

Susan Thomas Gilman (1988) and P. Lynn McDonald (1989) provide detailed accounts of the rapid growth and changes in the shelter movement and sheltering in Canada. Several factors are worth noting as sheltering moves into the 1990's:

- Increases in government financial support have resulted in a more secure funding base in exchange for official control (McDonald, 1989).
- There has been an influx of professionals to shelter work at both staff and board levels (MacLeod, 1989).
- The ideology and structure of shelters have shifted from a grassroots to a more conventional social service delivery style (Gilman, 1988; McDonald, 1989).
- The majority of funding is channelled into direct service. Relatively few funds have been targeted for research which evaluates the effects of sheltering, particularly the community education component, and/or the usefulness of shelters in the prevention of wife abuse (McDonald, 1989).
- Little is known about women's experiences after they leave a shelter to re-establish in their communities.

Who Uses Shelters: Women's Pre-shelter Experiences.

The majority of women who are abused by their partners do not use shelters. According to Statistics Canada (1993), only 8% contacted and 6% stayed at a transition house (200,000 women have contacted and 150,000 have stayed at a transition house). Based on the reports of women who have stayed in a shelter, three main themes emerge regarding their experiences prior to entering a shelter. The first theme pertains to women's experience of social isolation. Women frequently

report that they became isolated socially after they entered the relationship with their partners and, in general, identified fewer supportive network members compared to women who were not in an abusive relationship (Alcorn, 1984; Griffin, 1984; Mitchell & Hodson, 1983; Schattmaier, 1987). This social isolation is attributed to several factors. First, there is a definite tendency for wife abuse to increase in severity and frequency over time. The increase in severity and frequency of violent incidents raises the likelihood that women will not receive emotional support from friends, that is, friends may feel uncomfortable or afraid to continue contact (Mitchell & Hodson, 1983; Moos & Mitchell, 1982). The women themselves are frequently terrified to tell others in case word goes back to their partners, the consequence of which is usually further abuse (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; MacLeod, 1987; Pressman, 1984). Another factor which influences women's decisions to refrain from seeking friends and/or neighbours for support is the shame that they feel as a result of the abuse (Hoff, 1990; Pahl, 1985; Pressman, 1984). In addition to losing friends due to the escalation of physical abuse, fear, and shame, women are also frequently and actively discouraged by their partners from maintaining ties with their own social network such as their family members, friends and co-workers (Barnsley, Jacobson, McIntosh, & Wintermute, 1980; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; MacLeod, 1987; Pahl, 1985; Pressman, 1984). As their own supports diminish, women

may compensate by assuming their partners' social network, the result of which acts as a barrier to receiving support since their partners' friends and family members tend to either avoid any discussions about the abuse or minimize its seriousness (Alcorn, 1984; Mitchell & Hodson, 1983). Finally, women who have fewer resources, such as income, education and job skills, are less likely to have entry to nonmarital social roles, roles which permit increased access to information as well as formal and informal contacts (Mitchell & Hodson, 1983). This theme of isolation is consistent with the findings of Statistics Canada (1993). Twenty-two percent of all women who reported violent incidents told no one prior to their conversation with an interviewer.

The second theme centres around the general lack of, or barriers to acquiring, personal resources such as income, education, and job skills. According to MacLeod (1987), "women who stay in shelters tend to have fewer financial options and so are unable to find alternative shelter on their own. As a result, they tend to be the poorer and younger battered women of Canada" (p. 19). This result is confirmed in other studies by Schechter (1982) and Davidson and Jenkins (1989). MacLeod's research, which surveyed 230 shelters across Canada in 1985 also found that: a) only 20% of women worked outside the home for pay, the majority of whom received low wages; b) 75% of the women and children who stayed in transition houses were living in poverty; c) more than two-

thirds could have difficulty finding work due to less formal education; and d) 61% of the women had at least one preschool child, a factor which was frequently reported as a barrier to paid employment due to the shortage of affordable daycare.

In addition to the problems created by poorly paid employment and lack of good quality, affordable daycare, women often cited other work-related difficulties such as absenteeism, poor work performance, and job loss as a result of the abuse. Job security and academic advancement were also threatened by their partners' abusive behaviours. Harassment from partners at women's workplace was a frequent frightening and humiliating problem (Shepard & Pence, 1988).

The third theme which can be drawn from women's accounts of their experiences prior to accessing a shelter involves a decrease in the confidence women have regarding their worth and their abilities. "Thousands of testimonials from...battered women reveal that battering exacts an enormous toll on the woman's acceptance of herself" (Hoff, 1990, p.38). Most women recount ongoing emotional and verbal abuse in addition to the physical assaults, and speak about the pain of this abuse in ways which suggest there is a cumulative effect to the insults, criticisms, accusations, and threats. The longer this abuse continues unchecked by other support systems, such as family, friends, and work associates, the greater the likelihood that women will be unable to perceive or value their strengths and abilities. Hoff (1990) affirms

the value of social support, and suggests that the opportunity to participate in valued social roles, such as a professional occupation, "may provide a buffering effect against traumatic events that affect one's self-esteem negatively" (p. 38). Unfortunately, for the many women who come to shelters, their ability to access social supports has been so limited by their partners' abusive behaviours that they have few channels through which they can receive the informational and emotional support necessary for this effect to occur.

This change in women's sense of self is also attributed to the confusion and loss that women experience as a result of the changes that occur in their relationships with their partners over time. Many women speak of their partners' caring, gentle qualities and the love that has existed between them, a love that lives along with the abuse. As these contradictions, particularly the abuse, become more extreme in their day-to-day lives, the ambivalence and sense of "craziness" that women feel increase and women will often delay asking for help. When they do access support services, many report feeling dissatisfied. There is a tendency for women to be subjected to assessments, given psychiatric labels and made to feel personally responsible for the abuse (Hoff, 1990), the act of which serves to further erode a positive sense of self.

Finally, a theme emerges from women's pre-shelter experiences which is frequently overlooked when women's

stories are incorporated into research studies: women's "strength of spirit, capability, and resiliency." In spite of the tendency for most researchers to bypass these aspects of women's experience, a few studies do allude to their existence. Hoff (1990), for example, has noted that many women, including those who have suffered trauma and loss as children, recall that they generally felt strong and healthy before their current relationship. Women will speak of times when they felt confident and capable, often wondering where this competent person has gone. They also speak of occasions where they have relied upon their courage and instinct in order to stay safe, the same courage and instinct they refer to as the impetus for contacting and coming to a shelter.

It is important to note that the themes presented here are not exhaustive, nor do they accurately describe every woman. While women report many similar pre-shelter experiences, there are also many differences. Women from different cultures, geographical areas, classes, age groups, physical abilities, and sexual orientations all speak of additional barriers, struggles, and strengths. Indeed, the number of women who access shelters and do not correspond to the category of "young (under the age of 34), white, and mother" is growing significantly, particularly in non-metropolitan areas.

The themes presented do indicate, nevertheless, that certain aspects of pre-shelter experiences occur with greater

frequency and this knowledge has particular relevance for women's shelter and post-shelter experiences. For example, many women have been isolated to such an extent that their support networks are severely limited. What impact does a shelter stay have upon women's experience of isolation, their support networks, and their efforts to re-establish in the community? In what ways do women's former relationships and roles help them, or hinder them, during this time of transition? If barriers to the acquisition of resources exist, what strengths and strategies are women employing and who are they enlisting to break down those barriers? How are women's feelings of self-confidence supported and/or eroded by their shelter and post-shelter experiences? These are some of the questions that this exploration of women's pre-shelter, shelter, and post-shelter experiences seeks to answer.

Shelter Services: What Do Shelters Offer Women.

Shelters play a pivotal role in the lives of women who decide to leave and re-establish in their own, or new, community. The concept of sheltering comprises a range of components which includes ideological orientations, organizational structures, service objectives, and service approaches. A comparison of shelters reveals varying degrees of commonality and diversity within any of these components. It is important to examine the similarities and differences which exist among shelters in order to understand the impact

that a woman's shelter experience can have on her transition to, and experience of, community life.

Two frameworks will be used as a basis for discussing the complex nature of sheltering. The first framework is a shelter typology that was developed by Micheline Beaudry (1985). This model will be used to describe the philosophical underpinnings of shelter organizational structures and service delivery. The second framework is a typology of the functional components of social support (Cameron, 1985; 1992) and will be used to discuss the kinds of support women may receive from a shelter, both during and after their stay.

Beaudry (1985) traced the development of women's shelters in Quebec and, from this research, created a fourfold typology. Shelters have been similarly classified by other researchers (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Schechter, 1982), however Beaudry's model shows most clearly the differences among the types. She acknowledges that no shelter is a pure example of any one type: "...the objective of such a typology is to present an overall picture of shelters and to show each type in relation to others, thereby giving us some idea of the parameters of the movement" (p.89).

Two ideological orientations provide the basis for the four shelter types: a "protectionist", or traditional social service, orientation and a "liberationist", or feminist, orientation. The protectionist types adopt an approach in which safety or protection for women is the primary concern.

This approach tends not to be based on any social analysis of women's experience. Within the protectionist orientation, there are two types of shelters, the "pure protectionist" and the "legal protectionist".

Pure Protectionist. This type upholds the traditional family as the basis of society and adheres to the "values, norms and beliefs through which sexual and class domination is perpetuated" (David, 1972, p.156). These shelters are likely to be philanthropic in nature with a moral injunction to help any woman who is in need, including women who have been abused. The structure is hierarchical and decision-making is centralized with the power resting in the hands of a director and the board. Staff tend to be non-professional and provide a traditional role model for women. Staff also maintain a clear distinction between themselves (the helpers) and the women they serve (those who are helped), to the extent that residents are discouraged from participating at all in the running of the shelter. As a result of this formal method of helping, women's potential remains largely untapped (Beaudry, 1985, pp.89-92).

Legal Protectionist. These shelters adopt a more liberal outlook. Women have rights, particularly the right not to be beaten, and staff have the job of educating women about those rights. Staff are usually college or university-trained professionals and non-professionals, who are dedicated to delivering high quality service and have an excellent

knowledge of community resources. These shelters are similar to traditional social service organizations: they rely upon the state for most of their funding; they are often linked with and/or provide referrals to other established social services; their structure is hierarchical; and leadership is in the hands of the director and board, although there is some delegation of responsibilities and a more consultative style of decision-making among staff. Residents participate in some of the day-to-day running of the shelter but are not involved in shelter decision-making. Individual counselling is provided and some support groups, which are facilitated by staff, are available. The focus of both types of support tends to be on the problems of the individual women. As in the pure protectionist, there are distinct boundaries between those who are being helped and those who are helping (Beaudry, 1985, pp.92-94; McDonald, 1989, p.115).

The liberationist types, the "moderate liberationist" and the "radical liberationist", are similar in orientation to socialist feminism and radical feminism, respectively (Jagger & Rothenberg, 1984). These types are based on the premise that violence against women is the outcome of male oppression in a patriarchal society which is characterized by unequal power relationships between men and women. Their approach stresses autonomy for women through processes of collective liberation.

Moderate Liberationist. In addition to the philosophy of

liberationist types in general, the moderate liberationist shelter type also focuses on issues of class. The barriers that poor women face are different from those who have more financial resources. The priority for shelter work is equality. Residents participate in many aspects of the work of the shelter including mutual support, night duty for admission, decision-making (for which they have ultimate control), public education, and pressure group and advocacy activities. Power is distributed horizontally and salaries are equal among professional and nonprofessional staff. Government influence tends to be resisted and kept to a minimum (Beaudry, 1985, pp.94-96).

Radical Liberationist. The goals of this shelter type include autonomy for women through a total restructuring of the patriarchal society. Women are encouraged to become aware of their oppression and gain control and responsibility for their lives. These goals are accomplished through collective consciousness-raising and action which includes a radical critique of the traditional family and women's roles, both within the family and in general, and lobbying government for policy changes. Women in all aspects of the shelter (staff or resident) are encouraged to rely on the resources of the group instead of mainstream or institutional structures such as governments or boards of directors. Leadership is shared on a situational basis. Staff are both professional and non-professional and focus on integrating residents through mutual

learning and sharing of information, expertise and tasks. The shelter is considered to be the residents' home with staff participating in support and resource roles. Power is distributed horizontally and decisions are made on the basis of consensus (Beaudry, 1985, pp.96-102).

Beaudry acknowledges that this typology simplifies shelter realities. She states that "...several factors must be considered, including the origins of shelters, their evolution, the struggles which moved them closer or farther away from a particular orientation, the influences of the boards of directors, changes in personnel, urban or rural settings, and so forth" (p.79). However, it is crucial to examine, at any given time, the philosophical orientation, structures and mandate of a shelter in order to understand how services are delivered. This "how" of service delivery will influence the impact that shelters have on the women who use them, both during their shelter stay and once in the community.

The "what" of shelter services is another component to consider. Cameron's (1985) model of social support provides a useful framework for discussing the variety of services that women can expect from shelters. Cameron (1985) describes social support as a multidimensional construct and outlines several aspects of a functional view of social support:

- Functional components vary regarding their relevance to each problem situation.

- Social support can be provided by different types of helpers under a variety of arrangements.
- Different types of helpers are not substitutable for each other.
- The notion of a preferred way of helping or a preferred type of helper is rejected (pp. 146-147).

This typology has four functional components: concrete support; educational support; emotional support; and social integration. There are two different elements contained within this typology. "Concrete, educational, and emotional supports have been defined as specific benefits received by an individual that are directly relevant to managing problems or to being personally able to take advantage of available supportive relationships. However, social integration support refers to the personal validation and sense of belonging that comes from stable and supportive connectedness. Social integration supports are more directly related to issues of social identity and ongoing psychological well-being than to coping with particular stressful situations" (Cameron, 1985, p.148). Each component will be defined and examples of services, which are reflective of those offered by most shelters in Ontario, will be given.

Concrete Support: "is the provision of material aid such as money, clothing, accommodation, and/or assistance with carrying out everyday tasks" (1992, p.2), such as childcare

and transportation. In general, Ontario shelters offer safe, short term accommodation (2 to 6 weeks) to women and their children. Included in this accommodation are food and basic necessities. Funding for women's stay is based on the per diem model; that is, shelters receive payments for room and board for women who are eligible for welfare.

Shelters also offer other kinds of concrete supports. It is important to note that these supports will vary from shelter to shelter and their provision is dependent upon factors such as community support, space to store items, and number of staff available (paid and unpaid) to provide assistance. Examples of concrete supports which may be provided include: transportation to appointments with lawyers, doctors, police and potential landlords; emergency childcare; and food, clothing, toys, household items and furniture from donations.

Educational Support: "is the provision of information or knowledge, or developing the necessary skills so that the person will be able to cope effectively with specific problems and/or so that the person will be more capable of accessing and benefiting from available supportive relationships" (1992, p.2). Educational support is offered in all shelters and may be obtained through shelter resource materials, one-to-one contact with staff, support groups, house meetings and informal, daily contact. Resource materials generally include information about the causes of wife abuse, the effects of

violence on children, available financial, legal and housing assistance, and community resources such as counselling services, daycare and self-help groups. The opportunity for skills development is accessible in many shelters and is usually accomplished through one-to-one support and support group work. Examples of support group topics may include: parenting, money management, nutrition, self-esteem, and assertiveness. Educational support for children is also available in most shelters. Information sharing and skills development occur through one-to-one and group support on topics such as safe touch, street-proofing, safety after leaving the shelter, self-esteem and dealing with conflict.

Emotional Support: "providing access to intimate relationships which serve to meet the person's need for acceptance, or encouragement and understanding when coping with particular stressful events and the problems of everyday living" (1992, p.2). All shelters offer an environment which is based on communal living. This arrangement brings together women who are experiencing similar difficulties and are therefore able, at various times, to offer one another emotional support that comes from this shared understanding. Discussion of mutual concerns and injustices (consciousness-raising) is fundamental to a feminist concept of emotional support. Opportunities for this kind of dialogue and support occur in varying degrees in shelters through daily interactions between residents and between residents and staff. Staff are usually available 24

hours a day (this depends on the type of shelter) to provide emotional support for women and for children. Many shelters offer specific programs for children, the goals of which include emotional support.

Social Integration: "is the provision of access to positive contacts with members of an enduring social network and/or valued and stable social roles, to foster the person's sense of affiliation and personal validation" (1992, p.2). This component is based on a recognition that social support is a permanent requirement in our lives. Cameron (1985) also points out that relationships which endure over time tend to be governed by norms of reciprocity, that is, they are based upon a perception that the exchanges are roughly equal in value. If exchanges are not equal in value, that is, if one person is continually receiving support without reciprocating, it is likely that a power imbalance will result. The "helper-therapy" principle, which states that those who help, are helped the most (Riessman, 1976), acknowledges the power that exists within the act of giving and therefore supports the notion that relationships based on reciprocity are crucial to our sense of self-worth.

The shelter environment provides opportunities for women to have positive contacts with others. These opportunities are particularly valuable for women who are relocating from other communities and have lost most or all of their support system or who find relationships with their former support

network strained, shattered, unsatisfactory and/or unsafe, and are therefore required to reconstruct their social network. Opportunities for contact may be as formal as structured groups such as a residents' or mothers' support groups or as informal as mealtime conversations and evening card games. There is a greater likelihood that women who stay longer at a shelter will develop friendships that continue after they leave.

Some shelters offer social integration support through follow-up and community outreach programs, even though the majority are not funded to provide this kind of service (MacLeod, 1989). Once again these programs vary from shelter to shelter and, therefore, provide different kinds of links to community life. Some programs utilize the expertise of former residents and offer them the opportunity to participate in valued social roles through the creation of buddy systems, support networks and self-help groups for women who have left the shelter. Other supports include staff-facilitated follow-up groups, day centres for women who want support and counselling regardless of whether or not they have stayed at the shelter, and drop-in groups for informal contact and sharing (MacLeod, 1989).

The shelter type is a factor to consider in any discussion pertaining to the kinds of opportunities that exist for women to participate in valued social roles, whether during their stay or after they have established in community.

A shelter that functions in a manner similar to Beaudry's radical feminist type (1985), in which women residents are actively involved in the shelter's ongoing operation, provides more opportunities for this kind of activity than a legal protectionist type which maintains a clear distinction between those who help (staff) and those who are helped (residents/clients). As noted earlier, there has been a definite shift in sheltering, from an informal method of helping based on mutual aid to a more formal, social service, method of helping. What is not known is whether this shift has been beneficial in terms of shelter outcomes.

Shelter Outcomes: Women's Shelter Experiences. Many factors are pertinent to an evaluation of outcomes and are beyond the scope of this study. However two factors are particularly relevant to an understanding of women's post-shelter experiences in the community and include: 1) the extent to which shelter services deal with the kinds of issues that women identify as crucial, and 2) the linkages and connections shelters offer to help women re-establish in the community.

The majority of information that is available about women's shelter experiences in Ontario is filed away in individual shelter documentation in the form of case notes and evaluation forms or similarly filed in university libraries in unpublished theses. Aside from MacLeod's study in 1985, very little recent, systematic research has been conducted in this

area. Most research tends to exist in the form of case studies and is, therefore, difficult to summarize (McDonald, 1989). These studies also neglect to indicate, in any direct way, the shelter type at the time the research was conducted, even though dynamic factors such as shelter philosophy, specific programs and goals, organizational structure, staffing, and availability of community outreach affect both women's shelter experiences and their transition to community. Only one study has been published which explores the impact of the type of shelter on women's experience as it pertains to their transition to community. Pahl (1985) found that women who experienced the shelter as a democratic, nonhierarchical institution and who had "participated in decision making at the refuge and who had shared in the running of the house, were more likely to live independently after leaving the refuge" (p.42). Women reported an increase in their self-confidence as a result of their participation in the shelter. The results of this study confirm the claims made by both Riessman's (1976) helper-therapy principle, that those who help are helped most, and Cameron's (1985) analysis of the benefits of social integration, such as positive feelings of self-worth and affiliation.

In spite of the fact that published data regarding women's experience of shelters can rarely be linked specifically to a shelter type, the information that exists is rich in detail and provides an understanding about what it is

like to live in a shelter (McDonald, 1989). Generally the studies suggest that the majority of women who used shelters appreciated many aspects of their stay, particularly the safety and emotional support they received for themselves and their children (Barnsley et al., 1980; Field & Katryan, 1989; Hoff, 1990; MacLeod, 1987; McDonald, 1989). This time was valued as a chance to think about options for the future without the threat of violence (Schechter, 1982). Many women appreciated the opportunity to be able to talk to others who were in similar situations and spoke of high levels of sharing and feelings of solidarity (Hoff, 1990; Wharton, 1989). Women mentioned the courage they gathered from hearing about the successes and struggles of others (Barnsley et al., 1980; Hoff, 1990). It helped them to understand that other likeable and competent women had been through similar experiences (Barnsley et al., 1980). These connections with other women in similar circumstances contributed to a development of perspective, self-respect and confidence (Barnsley et al., 1980).

Women also reported that they appreciated being listened to and believed (Hoff, 1990), particularly through individual support. The shelter experience was noted as one which helped them to develop a new understanding of themselves, their lives and their strengths as well as an opportunity to rebuild trust (Hoff, 1990; Schechter, 1982). Access to information, particularly information about how to deal with stress and

with children was cited as useful (Hoff, 1990; MacLeod, 1987). Many women said that their children's physical and mental health improved as a result of being in the shelter (Pahl, 1985). They also found the practical help and advice from workers beneficial (Barnsley et al., 1980).

While women shared many positive accounts of their experiences of shelter living, they also reported many frustrations and complaints. As Schechter (1982) points out, "shelters are havens, but they are not utopias. The atmosphere within a house varies, depending on the current group of residents, staff morale and shelter organization" (p.61). The most common complaints were about the overcrowding and lack of privacy (Barnsley, 1980; Field & Katryan, 1989; Hoff, 1990; Schechter, 1982). Many women were required to share bedrooms with several different people due to the unpredictable "coming and going" of roommates. Women regularly mentioned the difficulty of communal living: individual differences frequently arose and were the cause of tension and conflict (Field & Katryan, 1989; Hoff, 1990; Schechter, 1982). Some women thought that the level of security was overdone (Field & Katryan, 1989; Wharton, 1989). Others had problems with what they thought was an unrealistic time limit for their shelter stay. They felt that this limit put too much pressure on them considering the number of decisions they were required to make and the added difficulty of finding adequate housing (Field & Katryan, 1989). Other

conflicts frequently mentioned centred around staff. The Sample Survey and Data Bank Unit (1984), as cited in McDonald (1989), reported that many women felt intimidated or defensive in communications with staff. They were afraid of being judged, especially if they decided to return to their partners (Field & Katryan, 1989). Women also experienced judgement regarding their parenting abilities and felt that their methods of discipline were not respected (Wharton, 1989). Some said that they felt they were not sufficiently acknowledged by staff for their strengths and coping abilities, or for their differences (Field & Katryan, 1989) and many reported that they felt that they were treated like children (Field & Katryan, 1989; Schillinger, 1988). In general, women expressed that there were too many staff-imposed rules regarding curfew, supervision and discipline of children, alcohol, and meeting attendance (Davis, 1988; Schillinger, 1988; Wharton, 1989). There was a consequence for resistance to these rules: "Women can be asked to leave...for violating house rules, not fitting the criteria, not 'keeping up' with expectations, failing to cooperate, being too needy, or being too independent" (Davis, 1988, p.414). In addition to these problematic issues, women also found the constant change, lack of childcare, emotional ups and downs due to the day-to-day worries of court, house hunting and financial problems, incidents of racism and classism, and language barriers difficult to deal with

(Davidson & Jenkins, 1989; Field & Katryan, 1989; Hoff, 1990; Schechter, 1982).

The realities that women encounter, as they struggle to adjust to the many changes that a short-term shelter living arrangement can bring, are best summarized by a resident in the study by Field & Katryan (1989): "There needs to be recognition that battered women require time to put their lives back together. They do not need constant reminders of their identity as an abused woman, but rather, need to focus on their strengths, on getting their lives together and in moving beyond the past" (p.105). This focus on "getting their lives together" is a process that is only just beginning as women leave the shelter to establish a new life in community.

Life in Community: Women's Experiences After Leaving a Shelter.

Depending on which study is quoted, it is estimated that between 43% and 84% of women who access a shelter do not return to their partners (Aguirre, 1985; Alcorn, 1984; Barnsley, 1980; Pahl, 1985). Very few studies exist regarding women's post-shelter experiences. These data, like the data on women's shelter experiences, may be contained in shelter records such as needs assessments, program evaluations, and follow-up program documentation. The studies which have been published are generally descriptive in nature, although some qualitative research has been conducted regarding women's

access to community resources and social supports. In spite of the modest number of published studies, the available literature offers some valuable insights which I have categorized, for the purpose of discussion, as follows: 1) challenges of community living: loneliness, poverty, stigma and fear, 2) stages in separation and integration and 3) experiences with formal and informal supports.

Much of the information contained in any one category will overlap with the other two; the experiences are complex and the details are interrelated. For example, the stigma that women frequently report may stem from the shame they feel about their poverty and/or as result of their interactions with formal and informal support systems.

Challenges of Community Living: Loneliness, Poverty, Stigma and Fear.

Loneliness, poverty, stigma and fear were four of the several categories which were developed from ranking the comments of 31 Toronto area women regarding their various experiences during their transition to community living (Dhillon & Walter, 1993). The loneliness that women experienced during the adjustment to their new lives was described as "extreme, pervasive and debilitating" (Dhillon & Walter, 1993, p.22). As stated earlier, social isolation was a problem for many women prior to entering a shelter. Many find that this problem initially increases after leaving the

shelter. It is difficult to see former friends and family for several reasons: women fear running into their partners; they feel that they are not understood regarding their decision to leave; many women have had to relocate to a new community for safety reasons, leaving old contacts behind; and many find that their former friends don't understand their situation (Alcorn, 1984; Barnsley et al., 1980; Dhillon & Walter, 1993; Field & Katryan, 1989). Loneliness is worsened as a result of diminished financial resources. Women who have an adequate income can afford to get out to meet and/or be with friends and pay for childcare. In a study of 141 former shelter residents, 82% were unemployed and 81% were receiving government assistance (Sullivan, Tan, Basta, Rumptz, and Davidson II, 1992). Employment outside of the home increases the opportunity to meet friends. Schattmaier (1987) found that women who were employed met 73% of their friends through their workplace. Therefore, unemployment contributes to women's isolation as well as their situation of poverty.

The results of the study by Dhillon and Walter (1993) emphasize the pervasive and crippling aspects of women's experience of poverty. Women report that they have little or no furniture, including beds to sleep on. Food is often gone before the next welfare or pay cheque and so is any money for a bus trip to the food bank. Many women say that they feel frustrated and guilty about not being able to provide adequate food, clothing and recreation for their children. Poverty is

one of the main reasons that women, who do return to their partners, cite for doing so (Aguirre, 1985; Schillinger, 1988). There is also a stigma connected to poverty, and many women in the study by Dhillon and Walter (1993) talked about the ways that they had experienced this stigma, such as "being shunned by their friends for having gone to a shelter, being shunned by their families and cultural communities for leaving their partners, and receiving contemptuous treatment from people in social service agencies" (p.14). Most women noted that the price they paid for independence from an abusive partner was dependence upon public assistance (Schillinger, 1988). Women who had no choice but to receive welfare, live in public housing, use a food bank, or who were led by service providers to "perceive of themselves as needing long-term counselling in order to correct weaknesses in their personalities," reported feeling stigmatized (Schillinger, 1988, p.482). Finally, women who called for help due to harassment from their partners reported feeling social prejudice from police (Dhillon & Walter, 1993).

Starting over in the community separate from an abusive partner offers no guarantee that harassment and/or abuse will cease. Sullivan et al. (1992) found that 46% of women who had left their abusive partners experienced further physical abuse and 49% continued to experience psychological abuse. Similarly, McDonald, Chisholm, Peressini and Smillie (1986) found that 42% of women who had permanently separated were

still being harassed by their partners. From their research on intimate femicide in Ontario, Crawford and Gartner (1992) report the following risk characteristics for women in danger of being murdered by their partners which include: women who are separated from their partners; women aged 30 to 44; and women who are not employed outside the home (Crawford & Gartner, 1992). These variables are relevant to many of the women who access shelters. Many women received death threats throughout their relationships, particularly when they spoke about leaving the relationship. These threats were an understandable cause of the fear and vulnerability that women felt after leaving the shelter. This fear was exacerbated for women who lived in large complexes with little community and poorly lit and/or dangerous neighbourhoods, particularly women who were dependent on public transportation (Dhillon & Walter, 1993). Women also cited more personal kinds of fears, such as the fear of not being able to "go it alone" and anxiety about the effects of the separation on the children (Dhillon & Walter, 1993).

Stages in Separation and Integration.

The study by Dhillon and Walter (1993) suggests that there is a pattern or process in the experiences of women who are creating new lives in community. This process takes place over time, is sequential and "encompasses the material and social conditions the women encountered, the actions of others

in relation to the women, and the women's behavioural and emotional responses" (p.23). The amount of time for each stage varied for individual women. The first phase," disconnection," is characterized by feelings of shock and loss regarding the disconnection women experienced when they left the shelter and began living on their own. As the reality of their situation, the loneliness and the poverty began to set in, women experienced a range of feelings such as sadness, grief, doubt and fear. They reported drawing upon three kinds of coping strategies to deal with this new reality: blocking feelings, seeking out support, and focusing on concrete goals. A shift or movement out of this phase was described as a major turning point. Women who were forced to leave their new homes due to assault or threat of abuse, began this process all over again.

The second phase, "the first connection," is marked by a desire for a future and a renewed sense of self. "Social needs, self-awareness and self-sufficiency issues become of prime importance...we see women making tentative steps to a new existence in the community" (p.29). Another significant characteristic of this phase is the development of one or two crucial connections, such as friends, a counsellor, an educational program, and/or a new intimate partner. These connections were important factors in women's reports of increased self-esteem and a "sense that life could be fuller than simple survival" (p.30).

The third phase, "building a life by putting the pieces together," is marked by a sense of resolution, of fullness and balance and of knowing and liking themselves. The authors noted that women who had recently immigrated to Canada experienced these three phases differently and had a much harder time getting connected to the services they needed.

Other studies have reported similar kinds of factors related to women's experiences in community, though not in the same detail or stage format of the Dhillon and Walter (1993) study. These factors will be discussed in the final theme.

Experiences with Formal and Informal Supports/Helpers.

There are several differences between formal and informal helpers and support strategies (Cameron, 1992; Warren, 1981). Formal helpers, such as police, counsellors, welfare caseworkers, and lawyers, typically offer expertise in a given area and employ methods of helping that are limited in terms of range of support, reciprocity, and time commitment (Cameron, 1992). Informal helpers, such as friends, family, peers, and co-workers, can offer support that is diverse, reciprocal, and of longer duration. According to Cameron (1992), it is only informal helpers who can directly promote a feeling of positive social integration. Formal helpers' contributions to social integration can only be indirect, such as facilitating a person's access to ongoing, informal supports/relationships. It is notable that, in shelter work,

the differences between formal and informal helpers have not always been so distinct, nor are they this discrete in shelters whose methods of helping reflect a radical liberationist philosophy. These differences, or lack thereof, are also pertinent to any discussions regarding shelter follow-up supports and/or community outreach supports.

Women's Experiences of Formal Supports.

As a result of interviews with 40 women, Alcorn (1984) reports that service providers played a significant role in women's lives and supplemented their natural helping networks. Even though all 40 women talked about other key relationships from which they received multidimensional support, most women continued their contact with service providers to obtain resource information and help in coping with their readjustment to life in community. Some women found that the only place they could find emotional support after leaving the shelter was from shelter workers, particularly those who described having few, or no, friends and/or relatives (Dhillon & Walter, 1993).

In spite of this reliance upon, or need for, services, the majority of research indicates that women rarely find the kind of help and resources that they need from their community (Barnsley et al., 1980; Dhillon & Walter, 1993; Dobash, Dobash, & Cavanagh, 1985; Field & Katryan, 1989; Gondolf, 1988). Scarcity of support services, long waiting lists, high

fees for services, barriers to accessing services (eg. lack of affordable childcare), and frustration and anger regarding the attitudes of workers are some of the difficulties that women cite. A general lack of sensitivity by service providers is frequently described as one of the factors which acts to undermine women's self-confidence and may contribute to the reluctance some women have about contacting formal services. Sullivan et al. (1992) recognized these difficulties and conducted a study in which the purpose of the intervention was to compel the community to become more responsive to women in the delivery and distribution of limited and/or inaccessible resources. Sullivan et al. (1992) included the following in their definition of resources: employment; housing; legal assistance; finances; education; and support systems. One-half of the 141 women were randomly assigned to receive the services of a trained advocate for 4 to 6 hours per week over a 10 week period. The areas most chosen by women to be working on for change included: obtaining material goods or services (84%); social support (79%); and education (71%). Women who worked with advocates reported being more effective in accessing resources and had higher levels of social support and overall quality of life postintervention. Sullivan et al. (1992) suggest that extensive, short-term advocacy appears to be beneficial to women's adjustment to life in community, and note that, despite further abuse by partners and unhelpful community responses, women are remarkably resilient.

Women's Experiences of Informal Supports.

The importance of informal social supports for women who are in the process of leaving their abusive partners has received some attention by researchers. Young (1982) found that most people prefer to receive assistance from informal sources of support and one study found that women had a 2 to 1 preference for informal supports over formal (Mitchell & Hodson, 1983). A general finding is that women's need for certain kinds of support changed over time as a function of their situation (Alcorn, 1984; Dhillon & Walter, 1993), however two needs remained constant: the need for positive feedback; and the need for social participation (Schattmaier, 1987).

Another notable finding was the importance of the introduction of a key significant figure(s) in a woman's social network during the first few months after leaving the shelter (Alcorn, 1984; Dhillon & Walter, 1993). According to Alcorn (1984), this figure tended to be a female friend who provided multidimensional support and the relationship was reciprocal in nature.

While it is apparent from research that both formal and informal supports play crucial roles in women's transition to the community, it remains unclear which of these supports women experienced as most helpful and under which circumstances. Participants in the Dhillon and Walter (1993) study were asked what would have been most helpful for them as

they were re-establishing in the community and they made the following recommendations:

- recruit staff who are ex-residents for support and to share what it was like
- develop a community centre that is run by ex-residents, one that contains a small food/household furnishings bank
- someone to visit with them
- implement a 24 hour support line
- develop a system that will hold men accountable for support payments
- women of all languages need to be able to have access to services
- education for welfare workers, police, judges, and the community (pp. 59-62).

The underlying message that emerges from these recommendations is that formal supports require considerable improvement if they are to be perceived as helpful by women. Informal supports, such as the much needed social contact which could be provided by a community centre that is run by ex-residents, seem to be preferable to more formal services. Indeed, "the theme of community is as important as the [community] centre in these comments; a place...where they can just be themselves and have a sense of connection to and similarity to others" (p. 63).

What is Community? Why is it Important to this Study?

The concept of "community" is complex, and the task of defining what is meant by the term is a difficult one. Wharf (1992) notes that sociologist George Hillery Jr. (1955) discovered ninety-seven definitions of community in his review of the literature. An examination of the various definitions, however, yields certain similarities. For example, Wharf (1992) defines community as "a network of individuals with common needs and issues...the essential common denominators of a community are a pattern of relationships among people and the existence of needs shared by these individuals" (p. 16). Similarly, Fellin (1987) describes community as "social units with one or more of the following three dimensions: a functional spacial unit meeting sustenance needs; a unit of patterned social interaction; and a symbolic unit of collective identity" (p. 1). Both authors stress the elements of needs, commonalities, and a pattern of relationships.

Wellman, Carrington, and Hall (1983) explored patterns of relationships within communities in their research with thirty-three people from East York, Ontario. Wellman et al. (1983) note the controversies among sociologists with regard to the kinds of changes communities have undergone, and present three structural models, each of which describes the various ways that members of a community obtain and maintain resources: the preindustrial Retained in which members belong to densely knit, solidary groups; the industrial Lost, in

which members make direct use of formal organizations; and postindustrial Unbound, where members make selective use of specialized, diversified, sparsely knit social circles (p.7). Wellman et al. (1983) suggest that, "While one or the other model may predominate in a social system, all three are likely to be present to some extent. Indeed, a single personal community may well be a composite, having both a densely-knit core cluster as well as more sparsely knit ties reaching out to connect with other communities and their resources" (p.7). Wellman et al. (1983) put forth a network conception of community and demonstrate that networks as personal communities do many of the things that communities are supposed to do. They "**provide havens**: a sense of belonging and being helped. Many provide **band-aids**: routine emotional aid and small services that help the respondents cope with the stresses and strains of their situations. A sizeable minority provide **safety nets** that lessen the impact of acute crises and chronic difficulties. A few crucial ties provide **social capital** to change situations (houses, jobs, spouses or to change the world..." (p.37-38). This notion of networks as personal communities provides a useful framework in which to discuss women's experiences of community, and is one of the components of my definition of "community."

John McKnight (1989) offers another distinctive component to the discussion of community which centres around the idea of capacity (or ability). The concept of capacity was

discussed earlier as one of the aspects of women's experiences which is frequently overlooked in research reports, and McKnight's work reclaims this important concept and adds it to our understanding of community. According to McKnight (1989), community is defined as "the social place used by family, friends, neighbours, neighbourhood associations, clubs, civic groups, local churches, ethnic associations, temples, local unions, local government and local media" (p.56). He refers to this social environment as "the informal sector, the unmanaged environment, and the associational sector" (p.56). There are several characteristics of this "community of associations":

- consent is the primary motivation
- associations are interdependent
- people of all capacities and fallibilities are incorporated
- quick responses are possible
- creativity is multiplied rather than channelled
- small face-to-face groups provide individualized relationships
- care is characterized by consent rather than control
- associations and the community that they create are the forum within which citizenship can be expressed" (p.57).

Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) also distinguish between weak and strong communities. Weak communities are those which

"fail... to mobilize the skills, capacities and talents of their residents" (p.13). Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) suggest that communities have come to focus on the deficiencies rather than the strengths of their members. They offer, as an example of this focus, the "needs assessment," which they describe as "basically an effort to count up the emptiness in an individual or a neighbourhood."(p.14) In order to build a strong healthy community, there needs to be a focus on the strengths and abilities of its members. McKnight (1989) suggests that a focus on weaknesses and needs alone creates "clients" rather than citizens, clients who are dependent upon a system of services.

The notion that communities have come to focus on the deficiencies rather than the strengths of their members, is applicable to this discussion about women's pre-shelter, shelter and post-shelter experiences. This "focus on deficiencies" was frequently observed in the literature that comprises this review. As stated earlier, the majority of shelters in Ontario have shifted to a protectionist or social service model (MacLeod, 1989), a model which is based on need rather than capacity. McDonald (1989) has also pointed out that the majority of research funding has been channelled into direct service, and it seems logical to assume that the acquisition of these dollars is dependent upon research that has a need and problem focus. This assumption is confirmed in the preponderance of information, regarding women's pre-

shelter, shelter, and post-shelter experiences, that focuses on the needs, and neediness, of women.

As a result of research and service delivery that is focused on deficiency, a "needy battered woman" paradigm has emerged. Paradigms are prototypes or models which help us to understand or create meaning. Once developed, they act as a set of lenses through which we view the world. One of the consequences of any paradigm is that information which disagrees with it tends to be filtered out (Kuhn, 1970). Thus, data which pertain to women's strengths and abilities have difficulty penetrating the lenses of "needy battered woman." One of the consequences of a "needy battered woman" paradigm, is that women are provided with referrals to more and more services in an effort to "deal with" these needs. As a result, women become connected to a web of community services and assume the disempowering identity of "client," rather than receiving access to the web of resources and social supports offered by the invisible partnership of community (Warren, 1981). Finally, as a direct result of this emphasis on need, little information is available about the abilities, strengths, strategies and social supports - relationships, associations and services - that women utilize to re-establish membership in the community in such a way that they perceive themselves as valued, competent, and capable. This information is important because, as Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) note, strong communities are built on their

members' capabilities.

Strong communities also address the power imbalances and inequities which occur in communities. "The greater the inequities in employment opportunities, health and social service resources, and social status, the less effective and functionally competent the community is with respect to its total population...Good communities support cultural diversity, formal and informal social support systems, stability and orderly change, self-sufficiency, effective government, social cohesion, and the availability and accessibility of services" (Fellin, 1987, p.13). While McKnight (1989) makes a strong argument for a definition of community as a place where people's strengths and capabilities are shared, he fails to address, in any specific manner, the ways in which these inequities and power imbalances might be overcome to permit this kind of sharing. He alludes to the idea that if people feel competent and valued, they are more adequately prepared to fight these injustices. This, however, is speculation, since McKnight's understanding of community does not include an analysis of the power structures that have oppressed various groups of people, particularly women.

Historically, communities, or the informal sector (McKnight, 1989), have not been places of justice and equality for women. Documentation of the many efforts and struggles of the women's movement verifies this fact. The accomplishments of the shelter movement are indicative of the difficult work

that women have undertaken over the last two decades to make their communities more accountable to women, particularly with regard to the issues and needs women have as a result of wife assault. One of the reasons that research on women's pre-shelter, shelter, and post-shelter experiences has maintained such a needs-focus is precisely to correct this lack of accountability through the provision of woman-centred services. However, the research, while crucial because of its power to provide formal justification for these necessary services, has unwittingly aided in the formation of a "needy, battered woman/ client" paradigm. This paradigm does not offer a true, or positive, image of women who have been abused nor does it offer a mirror which reflects back capable, competent community members.

A failure to focus on the notion of capacity, which is as pertinent to the complexity of human experience as the notion of need, has contributed to this incomplete picture. One could argue then, that the concept of need and the concept of capacity are equally relevant and essential to research concerning women's pre-shelter, shelter, and post-shelter experiences.

Summary Discussion.

Several assumptions can be drawn from this literature review of women's pre-shelter, shelter, and post-shelter experiences. The following assumptions underpin the direction

and focus of my exploration:

1) Women who access shelters are more likely to report a diminished personal community as a direct result of the abuse. In addition to the trauma women have experienced, and the isolation and resulting decrease in resources, women also said they had less confidence in themselves.

2) Shelters play a critical role in the lives of women who seek to re-establish in the community after leaving an abusive partner. Shelters vary in structure and philosophical underpinnings, and, according to Beaudry (1985) and Pahl (1985), both of these factors will directly affect service delivery and women's perceptions of services, the ways in which women are linked to the community and, therefore, women's experiences in the community. Little information is available about the effects that women's shelter experiences have with regard to their experiences in the community. Given women's reports of diminished resources, the concepts and typology of social support put forward by Cameron (1985; 1992) offer a useful framework for the exploration and discussion of their pre-shelter, shelter and post-shelter experiences.

3) The task of defining a concept as complex as "community" is a formidable one, however, several common

elements can be extricated from the literature descriptions and definitions which include: needs; commonalities; a pattern of relationships or, as described in the work by Wellman et al.(1983), a personal community; and a sharing of human strengths and capacities (McKnight, 1989).

4) A discrepancy exists in the research about women's pre-shelter, shelter, and post-shelter experiences. While some of the research alludes to women's strengths and capacities, insufficient descriptive documentation exists about these qualities, and the remainder of the inquiries are primarily needs-focused. An understanding about the complexities of leaving an abusive partner and re-establishing in the community requires: a) a comprehensive exploration of women's strengths and the internal and external resources they access and;
b) information about the kinds of resources which women find helpful and useful. Without this information, any solutions developed to assist women with this transition remain short-sighted.

Presentation of the Study. The purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to develop a deeper understanding of women's experiences in the community after leaving a shelter, and 2) to explore the ways in which women's pre-shelter and

shelter experiences affect their efforts to re-establish in the community.

The work of four researchers has contributed to the focus of this study: the model of social support developed by Cameron (1985; 1992); Beaudry's (1985) shelter typology and the assumption that shelter type affects outcomes, that is, women's shelter and post-shelter experiences; the concepts of human and community capacity (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993); and the notion of network ties as personal communities (Wellman et al., 1983; 1989). Based on this focus, the term "women's experiences" is further defined as: the roles and relationships in which women participate, and the resources they access (internal and external, formal and informal) that contribute to a perception of themselves as valued and competent members of their community.

Chapter 3. METHODOLOGY

Introduction. This chapter discusses the methodology used to develop an understanding of women's experiences in the community after leaving a shelter. The research methodology is qualitative in nature, and procedures and techniques from two research orientations were used: ethnography (Fetterman, 1989); and feminist research (Reinharz, 1992). First, a brief overview of ethnography and feminist research is presented, followed by a discussion of the rationale for each approach. Next, the processes for data gathering and analysis are described. Several methods were used to communicate the findings and these are reported in the next section. Subsequently, a discussion is provided regarding the impact that the research process had on some of the participants. Finally, the strengths and limitations of the research are presented.

Ethnographic and Feminist Research Strategies.

Qualitative methods are useful when the focus of research is to develop an understanding of the everyday phenomena from the perspective of the participants in the setting under study (Field & Morse, 1985). Of the many different types of qualitative research, ethnographic and feminist research strategies were selected as those best suited for the purposes of this study. The two research purposes which were specified

in the previous chapter are further delineated below:

1) to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of women who leave an abusive partner, reside in a shelter, and re-establish in the community separate from their partner.
2) to understand the ways in which women's pre-shelter and shelter experiences affect their efforts to re-establish in the community.
3) to learn about the issues and challenges women face in this time of transition.
4) to discover the strategies women use in order to manage the issues and challenges.
5) to understand the roles and relationships, and the resources/supports (internal and external, formal and informal) that women access which contribute to a perception of themselves as valued and capable members of the community.

While some research has been conducted regarding the first two topics, the latter three areas remain largely unexplored. Ethnographic research is particularly useful when the purposes of a study are exploration and understanding. "Ethnography is the art and science of describing a group or culture...The emic perspective - the insider's or native's perspective of reality - is at the heart of most ethnographic

research. The insider's perspective of reality is instrumental to understanding and accurately describing situations and behaviours" (Fetterman, 1989, pp. 11; 30). Fetterman (1989) offers specific data collection methods and techniques which enable both analysis and interpretation of data.

As well as a useful framework for data collection and analysis, I also sought methods which would provide direction for conducting research with women. Feminist research is an empirical approach that includes a value orientation which represents "...a struggle against the power, alienation, and manipulation that people experience when they become involved in traditional social science research. Individuals' personal experiences and insights are central..." (Rothe, 1993, p.65). According to Reinharz (1992), feminist research is not a single research method; it embodies a multiplicity of methods. The methodological choices I made were guided by the following feminist research assumptions:

- Feminist research is action and change oriented.
- The construction of knowledge is a political process (Kirby & McKenna, 1989).
- "...There is no one truth, no one authority, no one objective method which leads to the production of pure knowledge..." (Spender, 1985, p.7).
- Feminist research strives to represent human diversity (Reinharz, 1992, p.240).

- Feminist research frequently includes the researcher as a person (Reinharz, 1992, p.240).
- Meaning comes from women's experiences, their perceptions of experiences and life stories (Rothe, 1993).

In addition to the procedures and techniques outlined in ethnographic and feminist research orientations, I also applied procedures for coding, organizing, and analyzing data from qualitative research methods described by Kirby and McKenna (1989), Miles and Huberman (1984) and Strauss and Corbin (1990).

Overview of the Research Design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with women who had left their partners to reside in a shelter for a minimum of two weeks and who, upon the time of the interview, had re-established in the community separate from their partners. Women were asked about their shelter experiences, their experiences with formal and informal supports within the community, their perceptions of what was going well for them and their recommendations for change. Several themes emerged and these were documented. The characteristics of each theme were noted as well as the relationships between them. The themes, their characteristics, possible interpretations, and recommendations were discussed and confirmed with the participants in focus

groups.

Development of the Research Focus. The focus for this research project, in addition to the concepts outlined in the literature review, is a result of many strands of experience, three of which deserve mention. First, my own grief and ensuing efforts to understand the factors related to the death of my sister, who was murdered by her ex-partner eight years ago, have served as a primary source of motivation for this study. Secondly, I have been deeply influenced by the shared thoughts, feelings and stories of women who have resided at the shelter where I was employed for five years, and I wanted to provide an opportunity for these opinions and stories to be voiced. Finally, the interests and reflections of the shelter workers with whom I worked were vital as I narrowed my area of study. I presented ideas about possible research topics at a shelter meeting and the majority of staff expressed an interest in learning more about women's experiences in the community after leaving the shelter. They noted that little information was available on this subject and thought that it would be particularly beneficial in understanding the impact of shelter services on women's transition to community.

Respondents

Recruitment. A purposive sampling procedure was used (Seaberg, 1985) in the selection of research participants. Twelve women were recruited, each of whom had resided at the shelter for a minimum of two weeks and was currently living in the community separate from her abusive partner. Six of the respondents had been out of the shelter for at least one year and the other six participants between three and six months. The purpose of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences. Consequently, recruitment was carried out with the aim to achieve diversity with regard to respondents' personal characteristics such as age, socio-economic background, ethnicity, sexual orientation and parenting status (childless, preschool, young, teenage, grown children, grandmother).

These criteria, as well as the measures that I had developed to ensure the confidentiality of the participants involved, were discussed with the Executive Director and shelter staff and permission was granted to pursue the research. I selected a shelter staff person to carry out the recruiting process. She was provided with a participant recruitment guide (Appendix D) and asked to contact possible participants by phone and give each an overview of the research. Women were told that I would receive only the names and phone numbers of those who had consented to take part in the study. All of the women who were contacted agreed to

participate in the study.

Description of the Research Participants. The twelve women who participated in the study ranged in age from twenty-two to fifty-seven. All of the respondents had at least one child. At the time of the interview, three women were not residing with their children. Their child(ren) were either grown and living on their own or living with a support person other than their ex-partner. Two of the participants had grandchildren.

All of the women had been in a heterosexual relationship. Of the pool of possible participants, none had openly declared a lesbian or bisexual orientation during their shelter stay. One of the participants had immigrated to this community six years ago and indicated that she belonged to an ethnic community. Another participant, who had returned to this Ontario community from her country to marry her partner, did not wish to be identified with any one ethnic group. One other respondent had been a member of a religious community prior to leaving her partner.

For eight of the participants, this was the first time that they had left their partners. Three women had accessed a shelter once before as a result of abuse from this same partner. Three of the respondents had left their own communities to come to the shelter, one came from another province, and two came from nearby rural communities.

Eight of the participants were studying to complete high

school or university qualifications or were involved in a training program to gain additional skills for their field of work. One participant was working full-time and five were employed part-time. Every woman was receiving some form of financial assistance. Mother's allowance was the sole source of income for five of the participants. One received workers' compensation and welfare, another received survivor's benefits and welfare, and four women had their part-time wages deducted from their mothers' allowance. At the time of the interview, two participants were receiving irregular support payments from their partners. One was in the process of applying again for welfare. Three women had been directed by social services to take their partners to court for support payments or risk losing their benefits. Seven of the participants were living in subsidized housing units.

Description of the Shelter. The shelter is located in an Ontario city which has a population of less than 100,000 people. The shelter is one program in an organization which also offers outreach to women and their children in the rural community, and sexual assault services to both city and rural women over the age of sixteen. The organization has evolved from a 24-hour crisis line staffed by volunteers to an agency which employs approximately 50 full and part-time staff. The shelter location is confidential and the building is separate from the main administrative building out of which the other

services operate, with the exception of three offices located in neighbouring rural communities.

The organization fits roughly into the moderate liberationist and legal protectionist typologies which were described earlier in the literature review (Beaudry, 1985). The distinction can be made between the philosophy of service and service delivery; the mission, philosophy of service, and goals tend to be moderate liberationist, while the structure and actual delivery of service is legal protectionist. The structure is hierarchical in nature. The Board of Directors is comprised of professionals within the city and rural communities (there are no former or current service users on the Board). The organization has been without an Executive Director for approximately four months (at the time of interviews) and is undergoing a structural review.

The shelter has space for up to 18 residents. The maximum length of stay is six weeks, although extensions are granted depending on the circumstances. Women access the shelter through 24-hour-a-day crisis lines which ring throughout the main living space of the shelter and are answered by staff and volunteers in offices which are located within the shelter. Offices tend to be situated on the main floor area, although staff also have meeting space in the basement. Several other areas, such as the quiet room and the playroom are staff controlled; that is, women need to ask permission to use the space. There is a washroom designated

for staff use only.

Women who qualify for social assistance (welfare) are given a "client allowance" of $5.00 a day until their social assistance has been processed, which usually takes about three weeks. Women who are already receiving social assistance or who do not qualify at all are required to pay a weekly rate of $50.00 for an individual, and $75.00 for a family. This rate covers food, accommodation, toiletries, and supplies for infants such as diapers and formula. Women are able to charge up to $50.00 for other expenses such as long distance phone calls and cigarettes. There is a clothing donation room which women can access, and other donations from the community (stuffed animals, toys and gifts) are disbursed on various occasions such as birthdays and when women and children leave.

All residents are expected to assist with chores and meal preparation and participate in weekly house meetings. A residents' group is held once a week to discuss topics such as relaxation, self-esteem, and effects of abuse, and women are encouraged to attend. Childcare is provided, by staff, for residents' meetings and in emergencies, if staffing permits. Women are encouraged to ask one another if they require help with childcare and are expected to supervise their young children at all times.

The shelter is staffed 24 hours a day (family support, child support, night support workers, and volunteers), and staff meet with women on an informal basis (staff have access

to all of women's living space except bedrooms) as well as for one-to-one support and information sharing. Staff are available to provide assistance with Ontario and other housing forms and to offer information and referrals for community resources. A worker from social assistance comes to the shelter, usually once a week, and a lawyer will also schedule appointments with women at the shelter. The shelter has a list of language and cultural interpreters for women with limited or no English. The interpreters are available, on a voluntary basis, from both the multicultural centre and the community health centre.

The community does not offer second-stage housing. It does have a housing help centre which assists people who are looking for a place to live, and women are also given top priority for subsidized apartments and townhouses through Ontario Housing. Most women are able to find a place to live within the six weeks, although one bedroom subsidized units are scarce, which makes the housing search difficult for single women. Women who have not found a place by the end of their six weeks, or who have secured a place but are unable to move in for a month or more, are encouraged to find other temporary accommodation. Extensions of more than four weeks are rarely granted.

Once women and their children leave the shelter, there is minimal opportunity for contact or outreach. Those who wish to remain in touch, can do so through a Drop-in which is held

at the shelter once every two weeks for two hours in the evening. Residents are also invited to attend the Drop-in during their shelter stay. The Drop-in has been operating for approximately two years and is run by one staff person, who is also on shift at the time. She is assisted by other staff, who volunteer their time, as well as by volunteers. Drop-in offers women the opportunity to reconnect, socialize, and share information and support as they participate in various activities. Transportation and childcare are provided and children are also able to reconnect, through play, in a space that is separate from the women. Prior to the Drop-in, the shelter operated a follow-up support group for former residents. It was facilitated by two staff and met once a week for eight to ten week sessions. Women arranged their own childcare and transportation. It, as well as a mothers' group, which was organized for residents during their shelter stay, stopped operating due to service delivery issues.

Other than the Drop-in and a Christmas party, women receive little or no support from the shelter. The outreach which the agency offers is for rural areas only. The crisis line is available to ex-residents for crises, which usually means that women can call if they are being abused or if they are feeling suicidal. There is currently a policy in place which states that staff are not permitted to socialize with women who have received service for two years after their leaving date. This policy, therefore, also restricts former

residents from participating in any volunteer capacity for that two year period. Staff generally cite the following reasons for this policy: they are concerned that former residents will become dependent upon them and/or shelter services; they have fears about their personal safety, particularly in small rural communities; and they worry about blurring of personal and professional "boundaries." This policy is contentious and is under review.

Gathering Interview Data

The interviews were semi-structured in approach (Reinharz, 1992). "The use of semi-structured interviews has become the principle means by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives" (Graham, 1984, p.18). The semi-structured approach permits the researcher to select the topics of inquiry while allowing "the data gathering conversation itself to determine how the information is obtained" (Reinharz, 1992, p.281). Although it was important for me to gather information concerning my specific research topic, I was aware that participants would, in all likelihood, have their own ideas about what was important to share. The interview guide (Appendix C) was developed in an effort to balance both requirements. The first questions were developed for the purpose of gathering demographic information. These were followed by five open-ended questions.

Pre-interviews. Prior to the interview, a pre-interview was conducted with each participant to review the research project, answer any questions and sign the consent form (Appendix A). Women were given the option of receiving the research questions at this time, and most requested a verbal outline. Two women decided to wait until the interview. During this time we also negotiated the date and location for the interview.

The pre-interviews lasted approximately one hour. In addition to our discussion of the research, the bulk of the time was spent in "catching up" discussions. Although the recruiter had described in detail who I was, several participants had not been able to attach a face to my name. One woman exclaimed, as she opened her door to greet me, "Oh, it's you! I'm so relieved!" It was also difficult not to start immediately into the interview process. Most women began talking at once about their current situations, and I frequently heard myself asking that they remember those thoughts for the interview.

The Interview Process. Nine of the twelve interviews took place in the participants' homes. Of the three remaining interviews, one was held in a co-operative housing community centre and the other two in the agency office after working hours.

Each interview began with a request for demographic

information such as the participants' age, number of children, and her financial situation. The purpose of starting the interview in this manner - in addition to the provision of important information - was to enable the participants to relax as they engaged in conversation about subjects that were well known to them (Yeandle, 1984). The questions which followed were open-ended in nature and permitted women to discuss that which was most relevant to them about their shelter stay, their transition to community, and their experiences in the community. I developed a series of probes for each question which helped to broaden the extent of my understanding regarding women's thoughts and feelings about their experiences.

The interviews ranged from one to three hours in length. After each interview, I made notes on both the content and process of the meeting. I documented the emerging themes and my own impressions (thoughts and feelings) as well as noting the ways in which I could improve the next interview. The tapes were transcribed, with the average document consisting of approximately 50 pages of text.

Each participant was identified with a code symbol. In order to ensure the confidentiality of the participants when using direct quotes, their code symbol has been changed in each chapter in the Findings section.

Once the tapes were transcribed, I delivered the document to each participant. Women were asked to read through their

transcripts for the purpose of adding and/or clarifying information. On several occasions, I wrote specific requests on a transcript. For example, one participant had said that if it had not been for her child, she would be dead. I asked if she could say more about what she meant by that statement. I also asked women to red circle any passages which, if quoted, might identify them.

Participants contacted me when they had finished reading their transcripts. Five women provided additional information. One woman felt that some of the dialogue had been transcribed inaccurately. I reviewed her tape and made the necessary corrections. Another participant made two additional tapes to add to her original interview. Her second tape was transcribed and incorporated as data. The content of the last tape was a summary of her thoughts and feelings regarding the impact of the interview process. A portion of her feedback is incorporated at the end of the methodology section. Her reflections echo the comments made to me from many of the other participants, the accumulation of which gave way to another insight: the act of reading and reviewing a portion of one's life story has a powerful impact upon the participant.

Data Analysis.

In addition to the quick notes that I made after each interview and the impressions that I recorded in my

"conceptual baggage" journal (Kirby & McKenna, 1989), I read each transcript several times and made notes regarding the themes, patterns and insights that were beginning to emerge. When this process was completed, similar ideas and themes were grouped and given a conceptual code label. My conceptual framework also served as a source for potential code names.

Once conceptual codes were operationalized, I began the coding process with the use of Ethnograph (Seidel, Kjolseth, & Seymour, 1988), a qualitative data analysis package. When this stage was completed, the coded data from all twelve interviews had been sorted into files by code name. Subsequently, the data within each file were reviewed and both the subthemes and the relationships between subthemes were identified and summarized. I also noted, within each summary, data that were unique, markedly dissimilar, or contradictory in nature.

Communication of Findings.

Discussion Groups. Two group discussions were conducted in order to present my preliminary findings and perceptions to the participants. The groups were arranged based on the amount of time that had passed since women had left the shelter. All participants were surveyed about possible times and days, and the dates selected were those that were best for the majority. One group consisted of women who had been out of the shelter for at least one year, and four of six possible

participants attended this session. The other group of participants were those who, at the time of the interviews, had been out of the shelter between three and six months. Three women attended this group discussion. All of the participants signed an oath of confidentiality form (Appendix B). Women who were unable to attend the discussion groups cited illness and unanticipated events as reasons. They were contacted soon after the discussion groups and offered the opportunity to discuss the research findings over the phone.

I had several reasons for reporting back in a group discussion method. First, I wanted to receive feedback and verification from the participants regarding my analysis and the emphasis that I had given to particular themes and subthemes. Secondly, I wanted to clarify thoughts that I had about some of the themes. In many cases, the interview process had not permitted a full discussion of recommendations due to the fact that the request for recommendations was posed at the end of a long interview. Thus, my third reason for the small group discussion was to collect additional recommendations from the participants. Finally, and certainly not least, I wanted to both thank and celebrate with the women as the interview process came to a close. It was my hope that women would find it worthwhile to meet and talk with the other participants, and many of the women described the group discussion as a valuable experience.

Our meetings, which lasted approximately three hours,

were held in the group room of the agency. Women were asked to sign confidentiality forms prior to introductions and I asked for permission to audiotape the discussion/feedback sessions. I explained that I would not be transcribing the tapes verbatim but that they would serve to verify any information I documented from our meeting. I explained that some of the discussion dialogue might be quoted in the final report. Permission to tape was granted by both groups.

Each group began with a discussion of the rationale and methodology for the study. Next, I presented the outstanding themes, which were displayed on flip chart paper, and offered my interpretations. At the end of each theme, I invited feedback. We continued in this manner until all themes were discussed, pausing during the middle of the meeting for a refreshment break. Before closing, women were asked for their recommendations. All suggestions were recorded. The information from both discussion groups was incorporated into the material for the final analysis.

Agency Consultation. Shelter staff were provided with written and verbal updates as the research progressed. A meeting with the Executive Director and the Shelter Coordinator was arranged to discuss the findings and to explore the prospect of an agency consultation.

Impact of the Research Process

Many of the participants commented on the impact that the

research process had upon them. Some said that they were surprised to read that all of the experiences printed on paper were actually theirs. A couple of women admitted some shock and discomfort at how much anger and vengeful thoughts they had voiced. In spite of a feeling of uneasiness over sounding or appearing less than one's best, or the pain that surfaced as difficult passages were read, most women said that they felt positive about what they had expressed in their interview. One participant commented on the time lapse between the interview and the return of her transcript. She felt that some things in her life had changed since then. However, when I questioned her and others about the major themes or ideas that had emerged from their particular interview, and the relevance of those themes to their lives now, they acknowledged that there was little they would modify.

Another outcome of the interview process was the meaning women derived from their involvement in the actual interview and again, later, as they read their transcript. One participant commented in the midst of her interview:

> •...It always surprises me as I talk to someone how my point of view evolves as I am talking. And it is probably fairly important...the more people you can talk to, the more different points of view you can get and work things out...

Several women expressed similar thoughts as we progressed through the interview. They observed that their thoughts and feelings about themselves, about their successes and

struggles, became clearer to them as a result of the interview process. Hindsight became not only a way of perceiving what could have been, but also what was. The interview provided women with the opportunity to review their past with someone who would listen, to explore and analyze a significant time period in their lives and to discern new meaning.

The power of seeing one's life story in printed form was described by a participant who had recorded two additional tapes to augment her first interview. This quote comes from her last tape which she made a few months after the first interviews were conducted:

> •...you came into my life at the most appropriate time because I've been able to talk to you, to tell you about 99 and 3/4 percent of all the bad things that have happened to me over my life...I've always wanted to put this into writing, to be able to convey to the world, 'Hey, this is how badly I've been hurt.'...You put my story onto paper, black and white. It was as if I was telling the story of my life. Now I know this is not a fact, that this is going to be printed into a book and publicized or anything else. But it is the fact that this has been written. And when I read the transcript back, the impact hit me: God, this is the story of my life! The bad parts of my life. I've been able to tell it to somebody and I've got it out. Now somebody else can read what has happened to me. And it fulfilled such a spot in my heart, I can't put it into words. It just makes me feel so good...

It may be that the act of telling and reading one's own story serves as a solitary kind of consciousness raising where women engage in a process of internal dialogue and interpretation. "In consciousness raising new stories are born, and women who hear and tell their stories are inspired to create new life possibilities for themselves and all women"

(Christ, 1980, p. 7).

The printed word endures and serves as a testimony: "this is my life!" Most of the participants asked to keep their transcripts.

Boundaries of the Study

The choices that are made in the selection of a research focus and methodology result in necessary restrictions. My study has several limitations which should be acknowledged.

This study is qualitative and will provide in-depth, rich data regarding women's experiences in an urban community after leaving the shelter of that community. The results can be generalized only to the extent that qualitative data can be; that is, it will produce expressions of life experiences that may benefit women who have had similar experiences (Rothe, 1993).

Repeated interviews that are longitudinal in nature are often preferable and necessary for gathering information about deeply felt experiences and/or life transitions (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). I was unable to conduct repeated interviews due to time and financial constraints.

These constraints also affected my ability to be as collaborative as I would have preferred. Kirby and McKenna (1989) stress that it is essential for researchers "to collaborate with those who may benefit from or who may be affected by your research. The insights and direction they

can give are invaluable" (p.28). Initially I had planned to work with an advisory group of women who met the criteria of my study. I modified this plan and substituted the focus groups for the advisory group. As a result, the social action potential of this research has been greatly diminished.

Finally, although I did seek to interview women from diverse backgrounds, the focus of this study did not permit me to address, in any comprehensive way, the differences in women's experiences as they related to race, culture, social class, age or ability. I would recommend that differences of experience, as they pertain to each category, warrant further, extensive research.

Strengths of the Study

The primary strength of this study is the understandings and insights that emerged with respect to women's post-shelter experiences. Several factors facilitated these outcomes, the first of which involves my own past experiences. I have participated in a research project pertaining to violence against women, lived five years of my life as a single parent, experienced loss, grief and the rebuilding process, and have worked in a shelter for five years. As a result, I was able to bring a range of understanding and sensitivity to this research project.

Secondly, I sought research methods that would afford as much control as possible to the participants. The pre-

interview process allowed trust building to occur prior to the interview. It gave women the opportunity to learn more about me, the study and the research questions which, in turn, helped to alleviate anxiety and encourage openness in the interview process.

Control over the research process was shared and this too created space for vulnerability and straightforwardness. I explained how to shut off the tape recorder and encouraged women to do so at any time. Women received their transcripts and were asked to red circle any passages which they feared might identify or inadvertently harm themselves or others. They were also invited to add information to their transcript and/or clarify existing information as necessary.

Shared control of the research process extended to the findings. Participants were given the opportunity, through discussion groups, to verify, embellish and/or refute my perceptions of the data. This process also served to substantiate the understandings and insights acquired from this research.

Another significant contribution of this study is the identification of changes needed within community systems with respect to women's pre-shelter, shelter, and post-shelter experiences. The study and, more particularly its outcomes and recommendations, will be presented to shelter staff. The recommendations may be used to inform shelter planning, as well as policy and procedure development. Finally, the

insights from this research may provide direction to the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) regarding the role of shelters in assisting women and their children with their transition to the community.

Chapter 4. FINDINGS: WOMEN'S PRE-SHELTER EXPERIENCES

Introduction. The decisions to leave an abusive partner, access a shelter, and re-establish in the community have an enormous impact on the lives of the women and children who do so. The next three chapters provide an account of this impact, as described by twelve women in both individual interviews and two focus groups. Chapter four contains a report of participants' pre-shelter experiences and a discussion of the themes which emerged from their accounts. In chapter five, participants' descriptions of their shelter stay are highlighted. Women talked about shelter practices which were supportive as well as those which they experienced as problematic. These are addressed as they relate to their transition to shelter life and to life in the community. In chapter six, the findings and discussion pertain to participants' experiences in the community after leaving the shelter. The themes and insights which arose from conversations concerning the issues and challenges women encountered during their transition to the community, the strategies they used to manage these challenges and the formal and informal supports which women described as beneficial in the management process are presented in sections three and four. Women identified the aspects of their lives about which they felt positive and hopeful and these are discussed in the last section. In chapter seven, a summary discussion of

women's pre-shelter, shelter, and post-shelter experiences is provided.

Pre-shelter Experiences. Although the focus of my interview was to gather information about women's lives in a community after leaving a shelter, the participants spent a notable amount of interview time talking about their life experiences prior to leaving their partners. It became clearer as the interviews progressed that, regardless of the amount of time that had transpired since leaving the shelter, women continued to feel, and struggle with, the effects of their relationship with their partners. Discussions generally centred on four areas: the abuse that occurred in their relationships; the lack of control women experienced in their daily lives; the effects of these issues on their sense of well-being; and the reasons women cited for leaving their partners.

Emotional, Physical and Sexual Abuse. All of the participants cited incidents of emotional abuse, the majority of which included criticism, blame and embarrassment as well as forced sleep deprivation and fear of violence. The following passages are examples of the kinds of verbal and emotional abuse that participants endured from their partners:

> • I was haemorrhaging. So I said to him...he gets up at a quarter to six to go to work...and he was shouting, 'why wasn't breakfast ready for him and why weren't his overalls ironed?' And I said, 'I cannot get out of bed. I'm feeling ill,' I said. 'Please can you get me a doctor?'...'You stupid woman!' he said. P011

> • he'd be yelling and ranting and raving and the kids would be crying and I'd have to sit up all night listening to him, being told I'm stupid and being threatened and stuff. P007

> • He would love to stand outside the bedroom door...the hall light on so I could see his feet under the crack between the hardwood floor and the door...he would just stand there and turn the knob back and forth. It was a controlling thing...if I was asleep...I couldn't sleep. He wouldn't let me sleep. P001

Approximately half of the twelve participants, in addition to emotional abuse, said that they had been physically abused by their partners and described at least one incident of assault during the course of the interview:

> • Well, when I was pregnant, he threw me down on the ground and he started choking me and I couldn't breathe and I...I've never been choked before and it felt so weird. My eyes were bulging out and...so I know what he is capable of... P002

> •...he grabbed me by the throat and then he beat on me...and one day, I was sitting there watching TV with the boarder, he come barrelling in the damned door, walked right over and smacked me one. And started bitching at me. P010

Two of the participants said that they had been sexually abused during their relationship. One woman stated that she was raped every day. Three other women were frequently bullied or pressured to engage in sexual intercourse with their partners, as one woman noted:

> •...him keeping me up 'til two, three in the morning, screaming and carrying on, trying to...to make me do things I didn't want to...like, trying to make me do it, have sex when I didn't want to. Trying to force me. P005

Women identified their partners' need for control as one of the reasons for the abuse. They spoke again and again of

their lack of control in almost every aspect of their relationship.

Lack of Control. When nine of twelve women talked about the relationship they had with their former partners, the conversation focused mainly on the extent of his control and her lack of it. In addition to the control their partners exercised through physical, emotional and sexual abuse, women identified feeling powerless in other areas of their lives such as, participation in the management of finances, their ability to predict what their partners might do next, their decision-making in parenting, and in their ability to have and/or keep friends.

Half of the participants mentioned their lack of authority regarding finances:

> • He controlled all the money. I was not allowed in eight years to do the grocery shopping. I was not allowed to have any money but what he knew. If I won on a scratch ticket or something , he would have to know exactly what it was and how much I won...last year he started giving me $20.00 every two weeks. Now that $20.00 had to do the laundry, which was costing me $6.00 to $7.00 a week. And anything left over, that was mine. Now if I needed clothing or anything, it was his judgement... P003

One participant remarked that she had to use her $100.00 a month child tax benefit to buy everything she needed for herself and her baby. Another would buy supplies for her baby in advance, only to find that her partner had returned the items to the store in exchange for cash. In some instances, women's struggles around money extended beyond their partners.

One woman said that, within her ethnic community, it was customary for the daughter-in-law to be forced to take low-paying jobs. She was then required to hand her wages over to her partner's family.

Several women mentioned that they were affected by the unpredictability of their partner's behaviour. One woman would give in to an argument because:

> • I get scared, you know, because I don't know what's going to strike him off. P009

Another participant described how this inability to predict permeated her day-to-day living:

> • You woke up in the morning not knowing anything - what was going to happen. I didn't know what time he was coming home at night, whether he was going to be drunk or sober, have a couple of his drunken buddies with him - you didn't know. You would always be on your guard, is what I'm trying to say, because you didn't know what was going to happen. P001

This inability to predict also applied to parenting issues. One woman relayed that she never knew what her partner would do when he got angry with the children. Several participants recounted their lack of control concerning the parenting of their children. One woman described how she was not allowed to help her daughter brush her hair; another was not permitted to take her children with her to church. One participant talked about the many evenings she was compelled to attend to her partner's drunken tirades instead of being able to assist her child with homework. This type of control inevitably affected the relationship that women had with their children, as this participant describes:

> •...(Daughter) was afraid to say anything to me because I wasn't allowed to hold back on any secrets. Anything that was said in the house had to be relayed to him. P009

Relationships with friends and family were also influenced by the control that women's partners exerted. Nine participants said that their ability to have and/or make friendships with other women was affected. In some instances, partners were overt in the methods they used to control women's contact with friends, and refused to let them out of the house, either to visit friends or to participate in activities where friendships could be formed. Some covertly interfered with any friendships that women had or were nurturing, through the use of embarrassing behaviours. Some partners criticized the friends that women had:

> • He wouldn't let me have my own friends. He only wanted friends that he could control or manipulate or else they were no good. P001

> • My husband wouldn't let me have friends. So that's why I never had too many of them. And even those he tried to break up. He didn't like me going over there to see her (former friend). P005

> •...He wouldn't let me go out. If I'd sort of say I'm even going to the shop in the car or taking (child) to the library or to a friend's house, he would suspect that I was going to see a friend. P011

> • I was never able to build any (friendships). You know he was always, "Oh these people are no good, and these people they swear, and these people put thoughts in your head, and I don't want you to associate with them." P009

> • I wasn't allowed to have friends. I'd go to the store and it's supposed to take me ten minutes and I'd take fifteen instead of ten and he's always, you know, he was always there, always questioning everything. And the friends that I was starting to make, he would make it so I would lose them, or he would keep me from them and, I don't know, it was just really hard to keep a friend

around. P002

In some instances the relationship difficulties took up so much time and energy that women were unable to initiate outside contacts:

> • He was very controlling and critical. And rather than sort of pursue the friendships, I tried to do things that would make him less critical and less controlling. Eventually it just became that I never instigated any friendships. And so none formed after that. He would say, "You need friends and you need to get out with other people," but by that time, the relationship occupied so much mental and emotional energy, that there just wasn't anything of me left. P012

One woman who was working outside of the home did have the benefit of friendships within her workplace. However, she too found it difficult to develop friendships outside of that environment:

> •...I had friends from work. I only had one other friend that's in the city because basically I wasn't allowed to have or associate with other people...P007

Several participants mentioned that, in addition to the scarcity of friendships, they had few family members whom they could access as supports. Five women said that they couldn't count on their families for emotional support or practical kinds of assistance, such as help with finances or childcare. Three others, who described their families as supportive, were living great distances apart from them. One woman, who had recently immigrated to Canada to marry her partner, relinquished a well-paying job and her social network to do so. She left her partner shortly after the marriage and therefore had little time to develop a system of supports.

Consequently, most of the women in this study entered the shelter with few, if any, informal supports. Their connections to a stable social network were minimal or, at best, fragmented, as a result of the barriers to relationship that their partner, and the effects of his abuse, had erected. This lack of connection to any stable network appeared to have ramifications for participants, both within the shelter and during their transition to the community. These consequences will be described and discussed in each of those sections.

Sense of Well-being. All but one woman talked about the toll that the abuse, lack of control, and social isolation exacted with regard to their sense of self, their confidence, and their physical health. Some women spoke of the desperation they felt prior to leaving their partners. One participant said she was contemplating suicide the night before she called the shelter. Another woman stated:

> • If I'd stayed in that house with that man any longer, I'd have either been in (psychiatric institution) or six feet under, one of the two. He would've drove me crazy or I would've killed myself. P001

Other participants described the effects that the abuse and unrelenting fear had on their beliefs about themselves and their world. Some spoke of not knowing who they were any more. One woman said she lost confidence in her ability to cook a meal, another in her ability to think clearly:

> • You lose your confidence when someone's constantly telling you it's you...I didn't feel good enough. I felt that I was bad...deep down there was that knot inside

> that something was very, very wrong. Not any minute of the day did I feel secure.
> P011

> • Like you see, he beat me down mentally, in so far as I had no self-esteem. I was losing my initiative to go on to live. I lost all my will power. I couldn't fight back because he was too in control. And I felt like I was nothing. P003

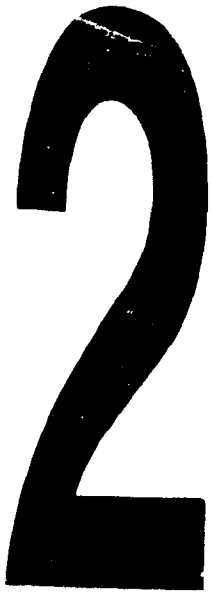
Without a supportive, personal community to counteract the criticism, women began to absorb and form negative beliefs about themselves. As a result, their health was adversely affected. Several participants recounted struggles with anxiety attacks, sleeplessness, fatigue, and sickness:

> • The stress got to the point where I was sick all the time and it wasn't just that I felt, oh, I'm so depressed. Like I was actually sick. I ended up in the hospital. It was with gastritis. And I had, I couldn't go to the bathroom any more, like I'd just shut down. P005

Summary Discussion. Women spent a lengthy portion of the interview talking about their relationships with their former partners, even though it was not my intention to focus on those experiences. Given the relatively short amount of time that had transpired since women had left their partners (three months to two years), it seems logical that they would still be very much affected by their experiences. This focus may also be due to the amount of presence that their partners continued to have in their lives, an influence which will be discussed in chapter six. The issues which did surface coincided with those described in the literature review of women's pre-shelter experiences; women discussed the abuses

that they suffered, the lack of control they felt in many aspects of their lives, and the impact that the abuse and lack of control had on their overall well-being, particularly their self-confidence.

One theme stood out in this section and continued to dominate throughout this study: the lack of connection women had to a broad, stable, and supportive social network. Nine of the participants said that they were either not allowed to have friends and/or they lost friendships as a result of their partners' behaviours. Over half of the participants stated that they could not rely on their families for support for a variety of reasons: relationships were strained, frequently as a result of the abuse; families were geographically distant; and/or families did not want to become involved. The implications of this social isolation were, and for many participants continued to be, formidable. First, as their number of connections diminished, it became increasingly difficult for women to obtain the feedback necessary to counteract the negative images they had absorbed as a result of the abuse. Several women acknowledged the toll that the abuse had exacted on their self-confidence, that is, their ability to perceive themselves as valued, competent and capable human beings. Secondly, women's access to information regarding options and available resources, such as legal and financial, had been restricted. Finally, a diminished personal community meant that women had minimal emotional



support to buffer the traumas, physical and emotional, that they were enduring, and few emotional and concrete supports to assist with the complex tasks involved in leaving their partners and re-establishing in the community.

The task of reconstructing a personal community, finding suitable resources, and gathering accurate information regarding their rights was a struggle that continued for the majority of participants, in varying degrees, as they moved into the shelter and then again to the community. Participants had much to say about the kinds of supports that helped them to feel confident about themselves and their abilities. These insights are explored, and discussed in greater detail in the next two chapters.

Chapter 5. FINDINGS: WOMEN'S SHELTER EXPERIENCES.

One portion of the interview concentrated on participants' experience of their shelter stay in order to achieve a clearer understanding of the role that the shelter played, from participants' perspective, in their efforts to re-establish in the community. This section provides an account of women's thoughts and feelings regarding their shelter stay in which the benefits of shelter supports, the challenges of communal living, and problematic shelter services are discussed. Women's discussions of their shelter stay and their perceptions of its role with regard to their transition to the community culminated in three areas of concern: poverty and the accompanying discrimination and stigma; feelings of abandonment upon leaving the shelter; and lack of preparation for life in the community. These issues are discussed in conjunction with women's pre-shelter experiences, and insights and implications are presented in a summary discussion.

Women's Shelter Stay: The Benefits of Support. All of the participants talked about the benefits of their shelter stay, including two women who felt that the shelter, generally, had little to offer them. The participants' discussions about their shelter experiences tended to focus around three areas: the practical, concrete benefits of shelter living; the

importance of the information acquired about themselves, their rights and resources; and the value of the emotional support they received from both staff and other residents.

Concrete Support. Women spoke about the practical kinds of help and support that they appreciated during their shelter stay. Six participants mentioned the sense of security that they felt:

> •...(the shelter was) what I called my home and my family. They were the only ones I could go to for protection...they were my home and my protection. ABZ1

> •...there's got to be the security...I've been told that I wasn't completely aware of the danger I was in. Probably I wasn't. Just to feel so safe, was so - was the greatest form of relief; to be somewhere where you've got warmth, people to talk to and that you were safe. ABQ6

This sense of safety seemed to be comprised of several parts: the number of people, both staff and residents, around day and night; a building that is made secure through a double door entrance way, an alarm system, and surveillance cameras which are located around the building; and the accessibility of food, clothing, and a clean place to sleep:

> •...One night we were all talking about the food we brought in because we didn't know what to expect. I'd brought in a loaf of bread and some brie cheese and all this stuff because I was expecting rows of cots in the "Y" and stuff like that. And I'm like, "Gee, this is like a hotel, and I'm having a great time. ABK1

Several women talked about the value of having a place to live separate from their partners and the abuse. Shelter residency offered them a brief period of time in which they could engage in a reassessment of their lives and begin to

plan for their futures:

> • The shelter was kind of like a sanctuary where you could meditate and find out, well, who am I? What do I need? How am I going to do it?...and give me some time to do it, even though I had six weeks and had to cram it...where I didn't have to feel his pressure of what I had to do because he said so. ABX3

Women mentioned other kinds of practical support that they received from both staff and from other residents. This participant, who was ill during part of her shelter stay, was able to rely on residents and staff to help her through a difficult time:

> • The shelter, it was a big help for me, I can say...all that I went through and how the shelter people, they took care of me and my kids. And I can say that, even though they are not there for childcare or babysitting, they did that for me. So I think I was a special case. And the residents, they were helpful to me. ABS8

Many participants discussed the various, practical ways in which they helped one another. Some assisted through the provision of childcare, others through accompaniment and transportation to appointments and apartment searches. Women purchased videos and snacks for evening get togethers. Those who liked to cook prepared meals for everyone, including staff. Some participants helped others with moving. A few of the women used the term "community" to describe the shelter environment and this participant recounted the way in which she contributed to this community:

> •...I kind of worked on making people who were first coming in feel comfortable. I guess that is what I designated my role to be, was to make the women feel comfortable...I guess at first I didn't but then someone came in and she was alone and didn't have any children and for at least two or three days nobody talked to her

> and she sat alone. And I'm looking at her and thinking, "She's going to leave if somebody doesn't go up and talk to her." So I started talking to her and I got to try to help her 'cause this isn't right...ABN7

Women's children also benefitted from this mutual support. Two participants described the importance of the help that their daughters received and gave, respectively:

> • The other people there were wonderful. And I think that got through to (daughter). There was one girl who would, at night, she used to stay up late, and pack (daughter's) school lunch. And she had got to an age where, you know, "I can't be bothered with school lunch..." She comes home and says, "You'll never believe what she cooked me! She baked cookies and there was this and there was that." She loved that. ABQ6

> •...She felt safe and she didn't have anybody criticizing her. And in there she felt like she was - she could do things that mattered to people. Because she felt good, she could give back to some of the littler kids. And it just made her feel good about herself. And she's carried that through and even now, when she talks about it, she said she thinks about that as a good period in her life. ABF2

It seems that being able to help in practical and concrete ways generated less tangible effects; that is, both women and their children described situations which indicated that being able to give, as well as to receive, increased their confidence in themselves and their abilities. Women also gave and received another kind of support which they described as a valuable part of their shelter stay: emotional support.

Emotional Support. All of the participants acknowledged the emotional support that they received from both staff and other residents. Some women said that the emotional support from

staff helped them to feel more confident about themselves and the decisions they were making:

> •...so it's having somebody there to listen to you and, actually, I needed somebody to guide me for the first little while because I didn't know what I was doing...it was the shoulders to cry on and the, you know, "you're okay." And it was sincere, like you know, you can tell when somebody's not sincere...I remember thinking it would almost be easier to go back, 'cause then I'd know where he was. And if (the shelter) had not been there I would have gone back, 'cause I couldn't take the stalking. ABF2

> • They kind of reaffirmed my decisions...they're there to talk to and, what do you call it, a sounding board. Just to hear how it might be, and what the consequences might be, what the good things might be, you know? It was, I don't know, just a good outlet. ABX3

Several participants said they appreciated the friendliness, listening ears, and empathy they received from staff. Many women reported that they felt understood and comfortable:

> • The workers, you can talk to them and they all appear to acknowledge what you - it's not appear, it makes you feel like they know what you are talking about. They feel it with you and, although it might not be the best solution or the right answer, just to know that somebody understands what you've been through makes one feel very, very comfortable. ABB9

> • I found almost all of the staff, with the exception of a very few, easy to talk to and it was really friendly and really nice...and everyone was just so supportive, so easy to talk to. That relaxed me. I don't know why, because I have a tendency to keep to myself in a lot of situations and yet in that one I didn't feel any need to have any particular barriers up. I felt it really easy to be myself and I don't know exactly why that was. ABN7

Participants also experienced this friendliness and understanding from other residents. Six participants discussed instances in which they gave, as well as received,

emotional support during the course of their shelter stay:

> •...We were supposed to go to the lawyers or something - I forget the chain of events - but anyway, it was about two or three o'clock in the morning and we were both fed right up with trying to write things down for the lawyers, for the affidavits. And we looked at each other and we were both bawling our heads off. "What are you crying about?" "Probably the same thing you are." "I'm going downstairs." (to a room in the basement of the shelter with several pieces of foam in it, called the foam room) And we were down there a good half hour the two of us, just kicking and heaving and throwing and punching. And then we both looked at each other at the same time and we started to laugh and we knew it was over. ABJ6

> •...We were there for each other. And I felt really good about it because I felt, like you know, a woman said to me, "If it wasn't for you, I'd have left here long ago." Because she felt she could talk to me more than she could the workers or any of the residents. And that makes me feel good that I can help somebody. ABZ1

Several participants mentioned the importance of commonality of experience. When the topic of emotional support was raised, so too, was the subject of a common or shared experience:

> • The other women that were there were - you didn't know them and yet they were friends, because you'd got something in common. Without even talking to them, you know you've got something in common. They understood what you were feeling...They were supporting you in every way, you know, so it wasn't just the workers there. The other people were wonderful. ABQ6

> • I really like being there. I really found it very positive. I liked being surrounded by other women and other mothers in a communal living situation. It got me thinking; why don't other families or mothers live together like that? Because there was always somebody around to talk to...I would say that 50% of them were women who had been in similar situations to me and who were working their way out and trying to deal with it and I could identify and I could talk with them. ABN7

Educational Support. Nine participants mentioned the importance of the information they obtained from shelter workers and other residents during their shelter stay. The information that women found helpful included: the new insights they had regarding their relationship with their partners; information about their legal rights; housing and financial information; knowledge about the kinds of resources for their children; and the opportunities to learn skills and techniques for dealing with an abusive ex-partner or uncooperative service providers:

> •...(shelter staff) they put you in touch with all different kinds of things like for housing, welfare, for babysitting, all kinds of things that you need in order to get started - the food bank. ABS8

> •...there was one problem that I had with my worker with assistance that they helped me deal with because she wasn't very sympathetic of the situation. And they helped me deal with her, otherwise I would have had a very big money problem...they helped me have the courage to say, you know, "Can I speak to your supervisor?"...you can recognize assertiveness in people, and seeing the people that work there, all of them have quite assertive natures and it kind of rubs off on you. ABK1

> •...I was finding out through the grapevine, I guess, of the women that were there...I mean that's how I found out about the Salvation Army, found out about the food bank. ABX3

Benefits of Support: Summary. It seems that elements such as a safe clean place to live, the "give and take" benefits of communal living, the availability of information, the sharing of life experiences, and the emotional support from staff and other residents were key in creating a special atmosphere at the shelter. One woman described this atmosphere as "a group

of people who cared," while another explained it as a "feeling of belonging to a big family." Others, as previously noted, referred to it as a "sense of community" and discussed the ways in which they contributed to "community" during their shelter stay. Women felt positive about their contributions and said they felt good about themselves as a result. This sense of belonging, of feeling part of a family or a community, was a powerful theme. Nine women referred to it during their interview and many participants reported that they keenly felt its absence when they left the shelter.

Women's Shelter Stay: Challenges and Difficulties.

Participants' discussions about the challenges of shelter living tended to focus on two broad areas: the challenges of communal living, and the difficulties women experienced as a result of particular shelter staff and services. Three areas of concern emerged from women's discussions about shelter services in general, particularly in relation to their transition to the community: the impact of poverty and discrimination; the sense of abandonment women felt upon leaving the shelter; and the lack of preparation women received during their shelter stay for the realities of their new life in the community.

Communal Living. Four of the twelve participants talked about the challenges of communal living. These four women were from

the group who had left the shelter three to six months earlier and the challenges they mentioned tended to be consistent with those discussed in the review of the literature. Three women spoke about the difficulties they had with particular residents and two women said that their shelter stay was significantly affected by another resident. One woman said she found the use of inappropriate language and the smoking habits of some residents offensive, particularly when these behaviours occurred around her children:

> •...There would be a few (residents) that would be screaming and swearing, and the smoking - and the kids, they have asthma. And they tried to accommodate the smokers but some of the smokers didn't give a darn. ABX3

She described a situation in which another resident had reported her money stolen, and commented that her own trust had been shaken as a result. Two participants said that they found it hard to be around other women who were feeling dejected, who were having problems finding housing or who wanted to give up and return to their partners. Another described the challenges of cohabitating with many different women:

> • There were also some negatives and part of it had to do with some of the problems that the other women had. I found it difficult to cope with...although it was very supportive in one way, it was also very apt to become petty very quickly and very easily. And with so many vastly different personalities trying to interact...it seemed to me that there was quite a few chaotic situations, and I wondered to myself when I was there if it was like this often or if it just happened to be a particularly chaotic time there at that point. ABN7

One participant said that some residents' problems took

precedence over hers. As a result, she had difficulty getting her emotional needs met and her questions for information answered.

Shelter Services. Ten of twelve participants identified a variety of difficulties they had with respect to shelter services. Two women said that, although they appreciated the safety they felt at the shelter, they found the procedure of reporting to staff, when they were coming or going, restrictive. One woman said her child complained that the shelter felt like a prison:

> •...when you'd go outside, he couldn't go outside the fence. He couldn't go to the park and see his friends. It was very hard for him. ABE0

Of the six participants who had children ages twelve and under, three women found the lack of childcare a problem. They said that they felt frustrated because they had to supervise their children all the time. One woman said it interfered with her ability to get emotional support from staff:

> • I felt that I couldn't talk by myself because the kids were following me everywhere. And I felt that when I wanted to talk to a counsellor on my own, I couldn't do that because they couldn't tell the kids to leave...sometimes I wanted to discuss things and I didn't want to do it in front of the kids...what I would have wanted is to have time, just myself, to be able to talk to somebody. ABE0

Another participant spoke of her frustrations, not only with having to maintain constant supervision, but with the attitude of staff regarding this issue:

> • I had to be constantly around (child), practically holding her hand. Because she wasn't allowed to go anywhere. There was so much stuff for her to get into and I couldn't sit down and relax. Not only was I exhausted because I wasn't getting any sleep...I had to chase her around all over the place and that was hard...There was a certain woman (staff) who was constantly badgering me and a few other women about our kids and if I'd made arrangements with a woman that was in the shelter to watch (child) for a few minutes...And it was like, "I've taken care of it!" And it was always like that, and I didn't like that because it felt kind of demeaning to me, that they would consider that I would be so inconsiderate to just leave her somewhere and just go walking off. Which I wouldn't do, especially since I knew how everybody felt about kids running loose in the first place. ABK1

Four of the participants reported that they had received rude, sarcastic, and inappropriate remarks from some staff and one woman said, on three different occasions during her interview, she felt that staff wanted her to leave:

> • They didn't want me in the shelter no longer than I had already been...they were too much in a hurry to get me out of there...they were bound and determined to get me out of there. ABL5

This participant had been granted a one-week extension and she, along with four other participants, complained that the six- week time frame was too short:

> • I was only in there for seven weeks...well that's not very long. You know, like you gotta try and get yourself together, get yourself a place, get out and that's it. You know, to me I think they should do a hell of a lot more than that...Six weeks. You're not going to recover from something like that in six weeks, I don't care who you are. ABL5

The frustration of a six-week time-limit was compounded by the extension request procedure. Decisions about whether or not an extension will be granted are made at staff meetings and given on a week-to-week basis. Two participants referred

to the anxiety they felt as a result of this process. This participant, who was required to ask for an extension because staff had lost her housing forms, points to the ambiguity of the procedure and her powerlessness in the matter:

> •...Then she (staff) says, "But you'll probably be fine to stay at the shelter for another week, but that's not an absolute." And it's like, am I going to be staying at the shelter for a week or not? ABX3

In addition to the extension process, the six week stay regulation and the need to constantly supervise children, women cited other situations around which they felt they had little or no control:

> • Some (staff) were more understanding where some, they sort of stick by the rules. "You cannot use this washroom. You cannot go upstairs. You cannot do this without your mother in the same room. You cannot open the fridge." Because sometimes the kids, you know, all they wanted was a drink. "No. You're not allowed to open up the fridge. Your mother has to get it for you." (child) is twelve years old, for Pete's sake...with the kids I had to explain to them, "This is their house, their rules, and we have to go by it"...the thing is, we always had to ask permission. ABX3

Of the day-to-day challenges women discussed concerning their shelter stay, three issues in particular were mentioned by at least seven of the participants. The first centred around the growing awareness that many participants had regarding their poverty, their status as a welfare recipient, and the discrimination and stigma which often accompanies both. Women discussed instances of both overt and covert discrimination and described the stigma that they felt as a result. One participant was refused housing by a landlord who discriminated against her as a result of her ethnic background

and her welfare status:

> •...they said people like you on welfare, your best bet is to find a room where you can share with others. Like he announced, "There, down the corner there, are some students and things like that. That's the place where you should go. You know, this is Canada"...and I felt so bad. ABB9

Women also felt the beginnings of this discrimination from some service providers with whom they dealt during their shelter stay, as this participant described of her welfare worker:

> • When I had a problem or I wanted to know something, I could never get a hold of her. I'd leave messages and she'd never return my calls. And she made me feel like a charity case, like I was begging for welfare...it was the way she'd ask the questions. Like she'd say, "Well, how come you left your husband or how come,..." you know. It was just the way she was phrasing it. And then she'd say, "Well, you can have so much money, you know. You can't have that." And she made us feel like we had to beg for..."Well, don't you have a job?" or things like that. And I thought maybe it's just me, you know, I've got so much stress. Maybe I misunderstood it. Maybe I took it the wrong way. But all the women felt like that. ABE0

Several participants commented on their fears about their lack of finances and their accumulating debt to the shelter, fears which increased during the course of their shelter stay. Some women talked about debts over which they felt they had no control, such as one participant who, due to the shelter's confidential location policy, had to pay $10.00 to take a taxi two blocks to a parking lot to be met by her moving helper. Another participant mentioned the several taxi trips she was required to take as a result of a debilitating illness. Some women had large bills owing at the end of their shelter stay:

> •...I mean you want to give up so easy, because it's just mounting with the finances. I mean, they (shelter) only give you so much a week and it doesn't cover the extra needed things. Boy, when you start seeing the dollar signs adding up at the end of the week and they say, "Well, here's your allowance. Now how much are you going to pay us back?"...and I didn't know if I was going to end up being with no money for the last week. And how was I going to pay for all these calls? I was going to end up in debt. ABX3

The second issue, which seven participants raised, was the sense of abandonment that they felt upon leaving the shelter. In spite of the difficulties that some women experienced during their shelter stay, the majority reported a sense of connection and community with other residents and with most of the staff. When women discussed the process of leaving the shelter to move into the community, they said they felt they were "being completely severed," "cut off," or "pushed out." For many, it signified the breaking up of a supportive community. This break up resulted in feelings of deep sadness and loss as well as feelings of fear and frustration about starting all over again. Some of the participants were aware of the two-year, no-contact policy, which seemed to exacerbate their feelings of abandonment:

> • I felt that the minute I stepped out of the shelter, my relationship with the shelter was completely severed. So I felt once again, completely on my own...I felt sad. I felt that I had a connection with a few of the people there. I'm aware of the policy that they are not allowed to socialize with the people in there for two years. When I was in there, I didn't think that it would affect me. (This participant talked about a staff person who she met up with frequently and who suggested, on one occasion, that the two of them get together. The next time the participant saw her, the staff person suggested that she try the Drop-in. The participant described how this felt.)...I kind of realized that this is kind of a nice

way of saying, "I can't associate with you but there is the Drop-in. So I felt that quite a bit. It upset me. ABN7

• While you're in there, there's always somebody around, doesn't matter, day or night...and all of a sudden, you're out on your own and wham! bam! nothing! ABJ6

• I was bawling. I don't want to go. I said, "Don't send me out there." You know, I felt abandoned. I felt like you were pushing me out. ABE0

•...because at the shelter, everything is easier. Life is easier. You know, the food is there, and the people are there, and you are not alone, so you feel comfortable. And no matter, after being at the shelter after two weeks, you feel like this is another home. Everything goes back to normal. So it's - just when you are getting used to everything getting back to normal, then you have to start - restart again...You know, when I left my husband I was very desperate. After a week, especially after staying there six weeks, I was confident...'cause it's like a new home...And then now, when I left there, comes, "Oh, I'm alone again."...it's just so temporary that it doesn't solve the problem - it makes, I don't even know whether it was worse but it makes it more difficult because you got comfortable and then you go back again and then you start again. ABB9

•...It's like a woman having a baby. When that baby is born, that baby is still attached to that mother's body for so many minutes. But once that cord is severed, you're on your own... I know it sounds stupid, but that's exactly how I felt...I was totally cut off. ABZ1

Participants indicated that, for various reasons, they felt unable to access the shelter and this exacerbated their feelings of abandonment. Some explained that, even though they thought that they could if necessary, they were reluctant to call the crisis line for support. One woman said she called the line and was told that her call was not appropriate because she was not being abused or in an abusive situation:

• Oh, I've called them a few times, but when I call the line they tell me that's only for abused women...'cause they asked me, "Is he abusing you then?" and I say, "No,

> like do you mean now? No." Like you know, they won't talk to me so I say to heck with it. So I don't bother any more...Like I'm going to go out and get abused so I can call the line! ABL5

Another woman, who talked about her feelings of desperation, fear and loneliness, believed that these feelings were incongruous with the shelter definition of crisis and, therefore, did not warrant her use of the crisis line. One participant said it was difficult to shift from the face-to-face support and caring of her shelter stay to the impersonal contact that constitutes a crisis line call. Another participant said that when she left the shelter she felt she was supposed to be independent and that calling back on the line to ask for help was difficult; it meant that she was unable to manage. These feelings of abandonment, of being cut off or disconnected, continued as women began their new lives in the community and are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

The third issue, which seven women identified, was the lack of preparation they received for the challenges which lay ahead as they re-established in the community. One woman explained that, during her shelter stay, she was provided with the contacts that were necessary to get back into the community, but, once there, was unsure whom to contact for the day-to-day issues that came up. Another woman described how she felt about the lack of preparation she received for the "reality jolt" of her new life:

> •...You're not prepared...you've got the idea, "Oh look at how strong you are, you've come this far, you're going to your own house. Congratulations, it's a wonderful thing you're doing!" You get out there and you start bawling your head off the first night...everybody says, "Oh that's great, you've come so far." It's a false sense of security...as far as coming out, moving into your own place, dealing with an abusive ex-spouse, the loneliness and whatnot. You're not prepared for it, at least I don't remember being prepared for it. ABJ6

One participant reported that she found it difficult to get the information she needed during her shelter stay due to understaffing at the shelter, residents who monopolized staff time, and the six-week time-limit. As a result, she said she felt very unprepared for her move back into the community. Another participant described the difficulty she had in absorbing the overwhelming amount of information she received during her shelter stay due to the stress of the situation and the number of things she was required to do in a short period of time:

> •...at the time, I know all these people, they'll give you all the papers to read over but you don't have time and you - like the psychological damage is so much that you don't even feel like reading those things...someone should be there to tell them, not to read those books by themselves...Like if someone was telling them, individually, this is what the outer world is, and do you have information about this, and these are the resources where you can go and talk to...so instead of going here and there, they can save a lot of time. ABS8

One participant said that, other than the emotional support, she received very little help with her transition to the community:

> • They really weren't that helpful about settling back in the community. Really. I found nothing. They were good to talk to if you had a problem or (needed someone to) listen to, but as far as giving you ideas and that for

outside, nah. ABL5

Issues and Challenges: Summary. Although the majority of the participants tended to focus on the benefits of their shelter stay, there were several references made to the difficulties both with communal living and with staff and shelter rules. Four women mentioned significant problems with rude staff, lack of support from staff, and the communal living arrangement. Two of these women described disagreements with another resident, the reporting of which tended to dominate much of the description of their shelter stay. Overall, however, the challenges that most women mentioned regarding shelter services tended to focus on their disagreement with, and lack of control over, the various shelter rules and procedures. The lack of childcare, rude and/or sarcastic staff, and the six-week time-frame were discussed by several participants as problematic.

In addition to the challenges mentioned, three issues, poverty, abandonment, and lack of preparation, were raised by several participants with regard to their shelter stay:

Poverty. There was an awareness, and fear, of impending poverty and the stereotypes which make up the identity of a welfare and/or subsidized housing recipient. Several women described the overt and covert, patronizing and discriminatory treatment they endured from service providers and members of the community during the course of their shelter stay.

Abandonment. Seven women reported overwhelming feelings of abandonment upon leaving the shelter, particularly after experiencing the sense of belonging that came from being part of a large family or a small community. It may be that the feeling of abandonment was exacerbated by: a) the lack of connection, which the majority of women described, to a broad, stable social network as noted in the pre-shelter section, b) the inability to connect with staff and residents after leaving the shelter due to the few options available (crisis line only when in crisis and Drop-in once every two weeks), and c) the awareness of a two-year, no-contact policy that intensified the separation between staff and participants and, as one woman noted, locked women into a narrow, "ex-resident" identity for those two years.

Lack of Preparation. Many women felt inadequately prepared for their new life in the community, a feeling which may have intensified as a result of being suddenly separated from the shelter. There seems to be a distinction between the kind of information women needed in order to make the transition from the shelter to the community and the information they needed once they re-established in the community. The shelter environment had served as a valuable source of information for most participants prior to leaving; however, many women reported that they had a great deal of difficulty locating and accessing information after they had left the shelter.

Pre-shelter and Shelter Experiences: Summary Discussion.

The Trauma of Abuse. The majority of the participants indicated that being able to get away from their abusive partner was a crucial component in the process of addressing the trauma they had suffered. Some women described the shelter as a kind of sanctuary, where they could relax, take the time to think, to plan and to sort out and express their feelings. One of the major aspects of trauma that participants had experienced was fear, and most of the women appreciated the safety elements of the shelter, that is, the secure building and the number of people who were around at any given time, particularly during the evening.

In addition to the time and safety factors, all of the women said that they valued the many opportunities for emotional support that they received from staff and that they exchanged with other residents. This support enabled them to talk about the abuse and, in most instances, express the pain, anger, and grief which accompanied the trauma. Several women said it was during their interactions with staff and residents that they either became aware or rediscovered that they were not the cause of their partners' abusive behaviours; this shift in their beliefs about themselves lessened the guilt which many women described as part of the trauma.

Some women said that the six-week time-frame was much too short to reverse the effects of the trauma in any significant

way. Consequently, it is highly probable that women who leave the shelter are still struggling to manage the effects of trauma and would want continued access to emotional support. The emotional support services of this shelter are essentially unavailable for women once they leave, unless a woman is suicidal or being abused. Other than the bi-weekly Drop-in, which affords some opportunity for mutual aid, women must find other ways of receiving the kind of support that helps alleviate the effects of trauma. Since women have already described a substantial decrease in their support networks, it seems pertinent to question where women will go to receive this support.

Isolation. The majority of participants indicated that they had become socially isolated as a result of their partners' abuse and entered the shelter with a diminished and/or fragmented personal community. The shelter environment offered many opportunities for support, information, and for new relationships to be made. Sharing space with others who were experiencing similar struggles, in a secure building, surrounded by available information and support twenty-four hours a day, provided women with a sense of belonging. Indeed, the majority of women repeatedly acknowledged the emotional and informational support they received from staff, the mutual exchange of supports with other residents, the sense of belonging they felt - to a big family, a new home, a community of women - and the positive feelings they had about

themselves as a result.

As I listened to women's accounts of their pre-shelter isolation, the sense of connection and belonging they felt during their stay, and the abandonment they described upon leaving, it became apparent to me that the majority of the participants were struggling with two crises: a crisis of abuse and a crisis of isolation. Based upon my own experience as a shelter worker, it is my perception that the latter crisis seldom receives the attention it deserves, and the following is offered as a possible explanation.

The shelter operates within a "legal protectionist" (Beaudry, 1985) philosophy of service delivery, which focuses primarily on the crisis of abuse as "the problem" to be solved. Boundaries are established to delineate the extent of the problem and, therefore, the services that can be offered. The "legal protectionist," or social service, shelter then formulates its policies, procedures, and programs around this problem. Problems which occur outside of these boundaries become the domain of other social service agencies. As a result, the singular, albeit crucial, issue of abuse becomes the focus and many limited solutions that ignore and, in some cases, exacerbate the crisis of isolation are put into place.

Three of these limited solutions were criticised by some of the participants. The first is the six-week shelter-stay policy, which, as one participant noted, required her to leave the shelter, even though an apartment was not yet available,

and which separated her from all other shelter supports while she was waiting. According to the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH), the time limit on a woman's stay is an arbitrary one, a decision which is made by each shelter. Based on the reports of most of the women in this study, it seems expedient that this policy receive greater discussion with women who have received service, particularly within the context of the crisis of isolation.

The second criticism that several women offered focused on the lack of preparation that they received for the process of re-establishing in the community. Women said they were not prepared for the isolation and feelings of loneliness, nor were they provided with strategies for managing it. One woman made a connection between the lack of preparation she received and the life experiences of the shelter workers; that is, she believed that most of the shelter workers had not experienced a similar life transition and, as a result, did not have the necessary experiential information to impart. She went on to say that, if her perceptions were wrong and some staff had been through a similar experience, reciprocal self-disclosure would have prepared her for the loneliness and isolation. Self-disclosure by service providers is frequently discouraged within a social service model, a practice which influences the type of information that can be offered. It appears that the lack of preparation women received from the shelter concerning community resources and how to access them and the myriad of

feelings which accompany a major life transition, exacerbated the isolation which so many women had identified as problematic.

A third criticism that participants made of shelter services, and one that is most prominently connected to women's isolation, centres around the abrupt ending of support, a practice which was reinforced by a two-year, no-contact policy, and the lack of any comprehensive outreach or transition assistance. Nine women described their experience of social support as one which went from pre-shelter isolation to the twenty-four hour availability of concrete, emotional, educational, and social integration support (Cameron, 1992) within the shelter. The kind of social support offered during women's shelter stay tended to be deeply appreciated. This support was suddenly dismantled with bi-weekly, two hour Drop-in meetings offered in its place. The absence of support was intensely felt by the participants, the majority of whom experienced overwhelming isolation and loneliness, and which are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. The two-year, no-contact policy, which excluded women from volunteering for the agency, not only intensified this loneliness, but carries with it derisive connotations. One of the messages that this policy sends to former residents is that women who have experienced a crisis are incapable of offering support for a two-year period. This message is not only contradictory, given the variety of support that women

exchanged with one another during their shelter stay, it also serves to undermine the positive feelings of confidence and self-regard that women felt as a result of their participation in valued supportive roles. One of the participants who criticised the policy said that, on the occasions when she met up with staff outside of the shelter, she was treated in a manner that resulted in her feeling stuck in a "client" identity.

From the majority of participants' accounts, it appears that the crisis of isolation, which they experienced prior to entering the shelter, was considerably alleviated by the variety of support they received during their shelter stay, only to return when they left the shelter to re-establish in the community.

Sense of Control. Several participants spoke positively about the emotional and educational support that they received from staff and other residents during their shelter stay, which helped them to feel a greater sense of control with regard to their partners. They particularly valued information that explained their legal rights and helped them handle any verbal abuse and coercion tactics used by their partners as well as general information about wife abuse. Women mentioned that they felt more able to challenge their partners and assert their rights, particularly as a result of the support.

Some women also remarked upon the skills that they acquired during their shelter stay, which helped them to

handle patronizing and/or discriminatory remarks and behaviours from landlords and community service providers, such as police, lawyers, and social assistance workers. One woman said she appreciated the opportunity to practice new skills in a safe place and five women said that they used the skills and strategies after they left the shelter. Participants also indicated that as they felt more in control of their relationship with their ex-partner, they felt an increase in their overall sense of well-being, particularly their confidence.

Sense of Well-being. Most of the participants suggested that, in spite of the number of issues and challenges they had to grapple with during their shelter stay, they generally felt better physically and felt more confident about their abilities to manage. It appears that having access to a variety of social supports had a buffering effect (Cameron, 1992) against the stressful aspects of their lives during that time period. Several women mentioned the many occasions in which they received positive feedback, from staff and other residents, about their abilities and said that this gave them incentive to carry on.

Several participants said that, as their shelter stay was drawing to a close, they began to worry once again, about managing on their own in the community without the supports they had received during their shelter stay. The anticipation of the sudden ending of support, combined with a growing sense

of their poverty, their accumulating debts, and the many strands of unfinished business, such as custody issues, appeared to erode some of the confidence that women were beginning to enjoy. The next chapter expands on the themes of isolation, sense of control and of well-being as women report on the experience of re-establishing in the community.

Chapter 6. FINDINGS: WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN THE COMMUNITY

In this chapter, participants offer accounts of their experiences in the community after leaving the shelter. All of the women reported that they grappled with several issues during the process of re-establishing in the community. Discussions tended to focus on the following areas: the experience of poverty; further abuse from partners; and problems with formal and informal supports. Participants spoke about the impact that these challenges had on their emotions, health, and sense of self-confidence and self-worth.

Women both met and managed the challenges that they encountered and described the strategies that they developed, as well as the supports that they accessed, to do so.

The Experience of Poverty. Nine of twelve participants said that poverty was a constant struggle in their lives. The three other participants relayed financial concerns; however, their discussions did not indicate that poverty was an overwhelming issue. Two of those three women had supportive families who assisted them in ways which benefitted them financially. Two were also working in jobs which they enjoyed and described their employment as both financially and emotionally important to them. For the remainder of the participants, however, poverty was an ongoing source of humiliation, frustration and distress.

The poor conditions under which women and their children were living had several sources. First, the majority of women reported a loss of their material belongings as a result of leaving their partners:

> • I lost everything. My house is gone. Everything is gone. 46SS

> • I know the first time I walked in there (a drop-in centre which provides temporary assistance for those without food or accommodation) for to get some money, after the shelter - to help out. I said, "My God. I had a house, I had a boat, I had a cottage, I had everything and now look where I'm at." 42JJ

One participant immigrated to Canada to marry her partner, a process which cost her a great deal financially, both in terms of the expense of the trip, and in a job loss:

> • I used to have a very good job with a very good position, and now, here I am. I can't even afford to buy my own Tampax. 73DD

Some women gave up the fight for their property due to the cost and/or time involved in legal proceedings, proceedings which allowed no access to their, or their children's, belongings during the process:

> • She (lawyer) helped me to get custody of the kids and after that I didn't hear anything from her. It was a long time - she didn't give me a call and I asked for, like kids' supplies. I had nothing. No kids' clothing and no toys. And she couldn't do anything in that. And she said that all these things are on your divorce. Like separation things? Like if you want things from that house it'll go when you file for divorce. And then I dropped that idea because my kids are growing, you know? They are growing up and I don't need that clothing and those toys...at the time I needed them so badly because my kids were crying...they loved their bears and wanted them. 57TT

Some women lost their belongings because their partners

destroyed them; others gave them up in order to achieve peace of mind. As a result, several women reported that they were starting over with nothing:

> • When I came to this apartment, like for the three of us, we had just only one comforter and one bedsheet and...it was September. Cold days were coming. So the three of us, we were sleeping in that comforter and we had just one single bed from the Salvation Army...the first few months were hard on me. Like I had to go to each and every place and I was crying a lot because I had nothing and I didn't know where to start my life. It's hard when you have nothing to start your life. 57TT

Putting money aside to buy necessary items was almost impossible for many of the participants due to the inadequate income they were receiving either through government assistance, or, in the case of only one woman, support payments:

> • I live on $358.00 a month. $264.77 is worker's compensation. I get a cheque for $94.11 a month from the welfare...That is my rent, my cable, my food. It was mandatory that I take out content insurance on my apartment...that is to do me for food, any luxuries, bare necessities. And I can't make it...I live on less than $4,000.00 - all tolled I make $4,029.00 a year and by the time I'm through, I've got less than $200.00 a month to live on. And you can't live on that. 8SFF

> • My financial situation is very bad...it's just mother's allowance and child tax credit. Rents are high, groceries are high, hydro is high, cable is high, telephone is high and the extra money you have to put out for - the alarms, call display for your telephone. And all that kind of stuff costs money that you don't really have. 46SS

One participant was surviving on money from occasional babysitting and waitressing jobs. She was unable to work in her professional field due to the length of time it took to obtain her landed immigrant status and a work permit. She had been granted welfare but was told by her worker that people

who are on welfare have a more difficult time acquiring landed immigrant status, so she stopped her welfare assistance.

Several participants talked about the struggle to make ends meet, noting that there were just too many "ends" to deal with. Lack of money meant that women were unable to pay for their children to participate in sports and activities. They said that they could not afford to join community groups, attend counselling sessions, or go out for a coffee with a friend, let alone pay for necessities such as shoes and clothing for their children or themselves:

> •...It would be good if you could get out and get into a women's group...there's a lot but there's the dues and the dinner meetings and everything and this costs money and you just haven't got it. And this is what you really need, to get out and get involved with community things. But when it comes down to a fine point, you can't. 46SS

One woman declared personal bankruptcy and another was considering it as a result of the stories her partner had fabricated to the government; that she had reportedly received thousands of dollars in dividends from their business prior to his declaration of bankruptcy. It was not profitable for these two women to work. Revenue Canada would take any earnings they made until the allegations were settled in court. The only participant to receive financial support from her partner talked about the hostile conditions under which the payments were made, conditions which caused her ongoing stress:

> •...He said he was taking a four month leave of absence from work...And then I said to him, "What's going to happen with the support?" And he said to me, "Don't

worry. I put the money aside so you can sit on your ass all winter." 21AA

Participants spoke, throughout their interviews, about the poor circumstances under which they lived and the ripple effects of this poverty. Poverty seemed to be a root from which many other issues, such as discrimination, isolation, and further abuse, grew.

Further Abuse from Partners.

- An abusive man will always be abusive. Just because you've left, he's not going to stop. 46SS

Eight of the twelve participants said that they continued to be subjected to ongoing verbal abuse after leaving their partners and one participant said she was harassed daily, both on the phone and in her home:

- I get scared if he calls drunk and I hang up on him. I don't know whether he will come over here or how drunk he is, so I tend to stay on the phone with him for a certain period of time and let him have some of his say. But I get scared if I hang up right away. He has come over here on a Saturday and he refused to leave and he was saying all the things that he is fond of saying. Just all kinds of insults to me. 51NN

Eight participants reported that they feared further violence from their ex-partners. The inability to predict just what their ex-partners might do next exacerbated this fear:

- It was very scary. I didn't know how he'd react when he found out where I lived and I was scared about that. That scared me the most, about what he'd do. 'Cause, see, he was angry. 21AA

- I remember when I was first living in this house, even though I had the alarm, I remember at night going to bed

and praying, "Get us safe through this night." 62CC

Three women were stalked by their ex-partners after they left the shelter:

> •...he was up on the roof of the garage (watching her home)...he would drive by constantly, call all hours of the day and night...he told me that if I left him again he would destroy me. He told me he would financially destroy me, emotionally destroy me and physically destroy me... 46SS

> • Sometimes he would just show up...there were times when he was sleeping out in the parking lot in his van. And the neighbours would come to me and complain. "Tell your husband to get out of here." And I said, "I couldn't tell him anything when we lived together. You think I can tell him anything now? He's not going to pay attention to you or to me." 27HH

In addition to the stalking, threats, and phone calls, one participant reported that her ex-partner harassed two men whom she had dated:

> •...then we started going out and he found out about it and started following him - started harassing him. It was so bad he ended up having to move...he (ex-partner) was parked out in front of his townhouse all the time. It was just incredible! 46SS

Not all of the harassment that women endured came from their ex-partners. One participant was threatened by those who had the greater amount of power in her family and within her ethnic community, namely, her in-laws:

> •...now these days they are threatening me, like they will kill me or something, you know? That's why I don't want to move from (the community). If I move from here to another place, that would be new for me. Then no one would know me. And this is the only place that people know me...when he (son) used to go to his father's house, they used to tell him so many wrong things just - to kill your mum. Yeah, have a knife, yeah, that's what they were teaching him. He (son) used to tell me all these things, like how to kill your mum and this is what they were teaching him. 57TT

Six participants reported that their ex-partners used their children, particularly around the time of access visits, to harass them. One woman said that her ex-partner would "bad mouth" her to their children, calling her a slut and a whore. Another participant said that her ex-partner would call her whenever he felt like it and demand to see the children. When she refused, he would verbally abuse her. Two men used their children in their efforts to persuade their ex-partners to return to them. Another told his adolescent child the conditions under which he would consider having his ex-partner return to him:

> • He still says that he wouldn't have me without my money and she (daughter) said she finds that impossible, that he can even admit it to her. 14KK

The emotional abuse and harassment did not cease as a result of the passage of time. Half of the eight participants who were grappling with these abuses had been out of the shelter for almost two years. Some women indicated that the abuse had lessened over time. Others, particularly those who were parenting children under eighteen years of age, described it as an ongoing struggle in their lives.

Formal Supports and Informal Network. Participants described a number of issues and challenges that they faced as a result of their experiences with both formal support systems and their informal network. Three formal systems received considerably more attention during the interviews with

participants; welfare, the legal system, and housing. There were three themes which emerged from these discussions: discrimination and stigma; lack of control; and inadequate information regarding resources. The challenges that women mentioned with regard to their informal networks tended to focus on their relationships with family, friends, children, and neighbours. Underlying the challenges that women described were interrelated themes of trust, discrimination and fear of judgement, and loneliness as a result of isolation.

Formal Support Systems. The majority of participants (eleven) talked about the difficulties they had experienced with the formal support systems in the community. The systems most mentioned were welfare, the legal system and the housing authority. Three women expressed frustration with the police. A few women talked about their anger with community agencies and businesses in general; it was difficult to find information about the kinds of resources and services that were available. They felt that there was a lack of awareness by those employed in businesses, such as utility and telephone companies, about the issues that women face when they leave an abusive partner and that there was very little interest in, or commitment to, understanding these issues.

Welfare. The system which received the greatest amount of participants' anger and critical reflection was welfare. All

of the women were receiving some form of financial assistance. In addition to the poor living conditions that women discussed earlier, all but one described incidents in which they felt frustrated, powerless, and/or discriminated against. Six participants spoke at great length about their difficulties with "the system," two of whom compared welfare to an abusive partner:

> • I feel like the system is an abusive partner. You're manipulated, you feel degraded...I've heard people say in this building about the welfare bums, which is a smack in the face. The welfare, it dictates to you, it controls you, and I feel it's manipulating. 89FF

Several participants talked about the lack of control they felt about receiving welfare. Women who had dependent children, or who were unable to work due to a disability, said that they had no choice about receiving assistance; they needed it to survive:

> • As I look at it, the way the welfare system is, you're being beaten down. You haven't got a choice. Do or die...once you leave your home from an abusive situation, you have no choice but to go into the system. Then they control you. You got no choice and therefore you live under their rules, their regulations. 89FF

Some participants talked about their inability to control others' perceptions of them; women commented that society, in general, had negative opinions about welfare recipients and they gave several examples of discriminatory comments and behaviours:

> • Ever since my kids have been five years old they've played sports, baseball, football, hockey, whatever. And you pick up on what people talk about, whether you hear it or not, you know it. People talk. Welfare, housing, again are like less than third world...the bottom of the

> barrel. And you know, he said, "You don't want your kid to hang around with a welfare kid, do you?"...You're treated like a piece of scum, and that's out of your control. And there's nothing you can do to stop it. And you don't deserve it...You don't need that because when you come out of your home, that's what you've been laced with anyway. That is, you're emotionally drained and then to have to come out into the world and try to make it on your own and have people still talking about you the same way as your ex did. 46SS

> •...a lot of people really resent people who are getting assistance...they would sit at noon hour - and it's because they're economists, too, that they're really against welfare of any type. And they would sit and discuss it at noon hour and so I wouldn't let anyone know that I was receiving assistance. 62CC

Several women described incidents with other community service providers in which they received the same kinds of discriminatory treatment. Sometimes the actions were blatantly patronizing and derogatory and obvious to the participant. On other occasions, women said the discrimination was a "felt thing," rather than something they heard or witnessed:

> • I've felt that way (discriminated against) with the counselling centre because they knew that I was on welfare. ...The guy that's the head of the appeal, he says, "I'm Mr. Scrooge. I'm the one who keeps the money tied up. I'm the one who says if it's alright for you to appeal this or not." And I said, "Well, you know, it's either I have to give up on a couple of these sessions or, you know, somehow the pay has to be lowered." And he says, "Well, I don't want to give anybody a free ride. Somebody has to pay for these services." 27HH

> •...you're reminded every few minutes (by her welfare worker) that if you're lying in any way that, you know, this is an official document and if you sign it at the end, and if anything you've said, if there is a falsity, you will be in trouble. 14KK

Several women talked about how it felt to be patronized by service providers, to hear the disparaging comments made

about welfare recipients, and to be vulnerable to the scrutiny of welfare workers and the public alike. A considerable amount of time was given to this issue in the two discussion groups as women added new stories of discrimination and stigma. One spoke of the documents that had to be filled out by her children's school principal and the shame that her children felt when they were handed these forms in class. Another said that she was required to send her son's report cards into the welfare office, in addition to everything else she had to declare:

> •...I had to turn over all my pay slips, everything. Your life is an open book down there. 46SS

One participant described a conversation that occurred in her workplace about welfare recipients. One of her co-workers initiated a discussion about a newly developed birth control injection and thought that women on welfare should be required to receive it, just until they got off the system. In this same discussion, other co-workers said that they could understand why people needed to be on welfare; they were less intelligent than normal people.

While the underlying themes of discrimination and stigma were similar, many of the details of women's stories were strikingly different, particularly the treatment they received from welfare workers. One of the groups of participants puzzled over these incongruities and wondered why, for example, one woman would have to declare her teenager's report card while another was not required to do so, or why one woman

would be told up front about the services she was entitled to and another would have to "go fishing." Participants speculated that discrimination by workers may be related to a recipient's age (women in their early 20's seemed to be more discriminated against than women in their 40's), their socio-economic status and/or the kind of work they were doing (full or part-time work with a recognized employer versus full-time parenting at home), and the personality of the worker. In addition to the insult of overt and covert discrimination, which was added to the injury of inadequate monies received, seven women cited lack of information about entitlement, inconsistency in service provision, and poor co-ordination of services as the most common problems they experienced with social assistance.

Lawyers and the Legal System. Ten of twelve participants had secured a lawyer and were at various stages of involvement in the court/legal process. Five of these women were dealing specifically with custody and support payment disputes. Eight of the ten participants expressed frustration and unhappiness, some with the legal/justice system in general, and some with their lawyer in particular.

Most of the complaints participants levelled against the legal system centred around the months of waiting they were forced to endure, a process over which they said they had no control. Women reported that their ex-partners waited until the last minute to hire a lawyer, which created further

delays. As a result of this wait, and as noted earlier, women often re-established in the community with a meagre number of household items and without the necessary belongings for their children. One woman said that she left the shelter in early October and finally received some of her furniture on Christmas Eve. Prior to that, she and her teenager shared a mattress on the floor and had the use of a kitchen table and chairs. Young children frequently outgrew their belongings, both physically and emotionally, during the long wait for property settlement.

Women also attributed the delays to their own lawyers. Six participants felt that they were treated differently because they were welfare/legal aid recipients and, therefore, not "high paying customers:"

> •...Are they going to work for me for forty-five dollars an hour on legal aid or are they going to work for somebody else making a hundred and five dollars an hour that can pay them? Who are they going to work for first? So your court drags and drags and drags. 46SS

Participants had a variety of other complaints about their lawyers. Two women thought that their solicitors did not believe their stories and they felt judged as a result. Others said that they had great difficulty reaching their lawyers by phone and their calls were often not returned until several days later. Another participant said she felt pressured by her lawyer to take her partner to court, even though it would have been disastrous for the participant's mental health. One woman said she did not receive the

property settlement she deserved due to her lawyer's inexperience. Another participant said she lost her property because she did not have her landed immigrant status and it was questionable whether she would even receive legal aid. In the process, she thought that her lawyer lost interest in her, and by the time her case was picked up, it was too late. Several participants mentioned that they did not think they had the right to dismiss their lawyers and request someone else, particularly since legal aid was covering the costs.

One participant, who spoke of her anger concerning the lack of protection she received from the police, also felt that the hands of the police were tied as a result of an ineffective legal system, a system which she said operated differently for those who could afford it:

> •...Then you call the police and the police come down. "Well, what's he done?" Well at eleven o'clock in the morning I've counted twenty times he's driven past, and that's when I've been looking out the window...and his van is very distinctive...and so you know it's him. And you know what the cop said to me? "Pull your curtains so you don't have to look out the window!" Do you know what they did? Nothing! The day we caught him hanging over the top shelf over there (spying on her from the garage), they did nothing! Stalking is not okay for Anne Murray, Jodie Foster, whoever, but for old plain Jane me that was abused and in and out of the shelter and having a mess, no money, the whole business - I come from the fourth world, forget the third world! I belong in the fourth world! They're not going to do a damn thing! There's a list of complaints downtown as long as your arm about him but they did nothing! I have a valid court order for visitation that is dated...and he violated a court order! They will do nothing. The justice system stinks! 46SS

In most instances, participants described their dealings with the legal/justice system as a process that took far too

long, reaped few benefits, immobilized them with regard to many life decisions, and failed to offer protection from their ex-partners.

Housing. Several participants related experiences with housing that were similar in nature to those that they encountered with welfare. Some described instances during their search for housing in which they were discriminated against. Six women said they felt that they had very little choice about where they settled in the community; the shelter's six-week time-limit and the long waiting lists for subsidized housing created a "high pressure" situation. Participants said that they felt compelled to take the first option that became available, particularly if it was a subsidized unit. Women were rarely encouraged, nor were they assisted, in carrying out thorough searches regarding the various neighbourhoods and the accessibility of resources within the community. As a result, half of the women expressed discontent with their location in the community:

> • This place is out of the way for things...the kids, it's hard for them to get to school. And it's hard to do shopping. And then we have to get into town to go see the doctor, to go to the pharmacy...and it takes up a lot of time for travel. Because you don't have a car and then you have to do so many trips back and forth because you can't carry everything with you. 27HH

Another participant was placed in an area that did not fit with her social needs. She described her frustrations, both with the location of her apartment and with the lack of power she had within the housing system, to negotiate a move:

> • I didn't realize I was going to be stuck in a senior citizens building...I'm not ready for that. I need to get on with my life...I told my daughter about it and she got in touch with the (community) housing and she said, "My mother wants a transfer." They were absolutely shocked. They said, "Well, your mother hasn't even been in there two months."...And they said, "No, you cannot have a transfer and furthermore, you're on a lease for one year." 89FF

In addition to the lack of control that some participants expressed regarding where they located and their ability to move out, one woman described ways in which she felt discriminated against as a result of the many rules and regulations the housing authority exercised:

> •...Their lease was maybe a dozen pages long with all the stipulations of living there and what you're not allowed to do...We're not allowed to hang our laundry over the balcony, but I put a blanket over the balcony for a minute because I had laundry that was drying in the bathroom...like the stuff I can't put in the dryer I hang in the bathroom. But I had stuff in there and I didn't want to leave it on the carpet so I hung it over the balcony. And my phone rang and I talked to someone for two or three minutes and then I went to take the stuff out of the bathroom and the phone rang again and I went to answer it and she said, "This is (name) from *** Housing. I hear you have a blanket on your balcony...It's not allowed." And I said, "Well, I was just going into my bathroom to get some stuff out so I could take it off the balcony." "Well, none the less, it isn't allowed. This is your second offence."...I really do think it is (discrimination due to economic status), because I don't think anybody would have the gall to come up with a twelve page lease to someone who was paying them twelve hundred dollars a month to live somewhere. 95EE

As with welfare, several participants talked about the stigma attached to subsidized housing:

> •...I buy day old meat, I buy day old bread, you know, to keep my son fed. Now, granted I don't live in housing because I refuse to bring my son up that way. But that's my decision...they (shelter) sent me over to a townhouse - even the cockroaches had moved out and I was to clean it and paint it myself before I moved in...Why in hell

> should I have to clean up somebody else's shit?...The superintendent of the project over there told me I had to clean and paint it myself. (A friend) moved in over there. She was only there six months and she took off in the middle of the night - couldn't handle it...it was the pits...the fighting that goes on all the time over there and I think I said before that was where that little guy was murdered...I'm not raising my son like that...I go without so that my son does not have to live like that. 46SS

In some cases, participants appeared to have subscribed to the stereotypes which are directed at subsidized housing complexes and those who occupy them. Other participants who resided in a subsidized dwelling acknowledged that there were problems as well as benefits. In any event, as this participant pointed out, residency in subsidized housing carries with it a "consequence of visibility"; that is, it becomes more difficult to retain any privacy regarding one's economic status, which, in turn, increases one's vulnerability to negative stereotypes.

Informal Supports. The five women who had strong connections with family, friends, co-workers, peers, and/or neighbours spoke very positively about the kinds of support they received from them. Those participants who were struggling to develop a social network, that is, women who had been shunned by their former friends and ethnic communities, and women who did not have a paying job outside of the home or a family who was supportive (or close enough to be of practical support), talked frequently about the isolation they felt. Discussions focused on women's relationships with family, old friends, and

other associates within their community, and the kinds of roadblocks that hindered women from developing a new social network.

Family, Old Friends and the Community. Several women talked about the negative effects that leaving their partners had on their relationships with family, old friends, and associations within the community. One woman described how she was alienated from her parents as a result of leaving her partner:

> • My parents have abandoned me. I was in the shelter, twice I went back. I stayed home for eight months, eight months of hell and I called my dad because I needed a co-signer for my townhouse and he told me to go back home where I belonged. Since that day my parents have not spoken to me. They don't even send my son a Christmas card! 46SS

Other participants talked about the judgement and lack of support they felt from former friends and acquaintances:

> • My friends used to say, "How can you ever go to that shelter? You know, it's the last place on the earth that anyone would want to go."...So I have experienced that from all my friends who - whatever you call my friends or acquaintances in Canada who I've told about that. Like they make me feel like it's all my fault. First I should not have gone and anyway that's not a place for any - decent person goes and things like that. Like that's not an action for decent people. 73DD

> • When I was in the shelter she used to call me all the time. And she would say, "I can't wait until you leave the shelter because," she said, "I'd like to see more of you...it's just not the same, you know, I can't just drop in." But she hasn't. She came here once. That hurt. Like, I wish she'd come more. She came to this apartment, she only saw this apartment once. 21AA

In one instance, a participant was shunned by her former friends:

> •...when I was walking, like I had no car or nothing and it was snow time and it was a snow storm. Like no one had enough time to stop for me to look for - like do you need any help or something, you know? They saw me and they just passed by... And even though I am going to my church...they just look at me and just turn their face...They just said they are not going to call, to talk to me any more. I said, " I don't care for that." And they said they are not going to invite me for their parties. I said, "I don't need your parties, too." So they said, "Oh, you'll be cut off from this society." 57TT

Six participants described incidents in which their ex-partners and, in two cases, the ex-partner's family, had maligned them in front of friends, acquaintances and their religious and/or ethnic communities. The majority of the participants had not been permitted close friendships prior to leaving and the ongoing degrading remarks from their ex-partners eroded much of the chance women felt they had to reconnect with their social network:

> •...other than that (the one friendship she had prior to leaving), the people that I knew was - with my partner - I have nothing to do with. Because my husband has turned around and he has classed me and manipulated me and put me down so bad that the times that I did speak to some of these so-called friends, all I've heard was, "How come you're such a bitch?" 89FF

> • People I thought were my friends have abandoned me because (partner) is such a wonderful, sweet, gentle man, full of jokes and laughs. And in the house he was a bastard! But nobody knows that. He told everybody that I left him for another man and so of course, you know, everybody thinks the world of him. 46SS

Several participants indicated that they felt abandoned and betrayed by former friends and spoke of a feeling of loss as a result. Some said that they literally had to start all over again when it came to building a social network, a

process that could be difficult considering the connections that their ex-partners still maintained within the community:

> •...there's the one lady that I know from church, downstairs. And, I didn't really know her, I just kind of knew her to see her. And then we started to getting to talking...and she introduced me to a neighbour down the hall when I first moved in...he (ex-partner) is in the same class (at school) as my neighbour...And I told her (neighbour) yesterday - she sort of said, "Well, I haven't seen you for a while." And I said, "To be honest, it's because you're in the same class as my husband. He is a snoop, and I don't know what to say to you because I don't know if it's going to be passed on to him." 27HH

> •...every time I turn around, somebody seems to be haunting me, at least that's how I feel. And I think I have good judgement on that because I know I have done things and it's got back to me that he has found out...you know, the kids will tell me. I feel like I need to walk with an eye in the back of my head...He knows so many people in (city). He knows, I'll bet you, 75% of the people in (city) because of that stinking business and (a community group). 46SS

One participant said that she felt she no longer belonged to her old circle of friends because she was not part of a couple. Another said that the only friend she had, prior to leaving, had now become friends with her ex-partner:

> • I have one close friend that I could share everything with, but the difficulty there is, she's a neighbour (of her ex-partner) and now she sees him more than she sees me because she feels sorry for him, and they ask him 'round for meals. 14KK

Many women identified the first several months as the time when they most needed people close by; it was the time period that they described as the loneliest and most difficult. Nine women said that they felt disconnected from, or abandoned by, the few previous associations they had and, other than the women residents whom some had met during their

shelter stay, had few friendships to sustain them through these first months. Three participants said that although their families were supportive, they lived too far away to be helpful in the ways that women most needed during this time period. They spoke of needing someone to help with childcare, to talk to, to visit with when they felt lonely, someone to be nurtured by, and who could reassure them when life felt overwhelming. Those participants who had supportive families nearby said that there were limitations to these relationships:

> • My daughter and I, we are so close and like, if I've got a headache or something is wrong with me she worries herself sick. And she'll do anything in her power to help me, but she has the responsibility of three children. And it takes money to run back and forth all the time for her, gas wise. And sometimes there's things I'd like to talk to one of the (shelter) workers about, that I couldn't say to her because I know it's going to depress her. 89FF

The participants who identified that they felt isolated said that they wanted to make new friends and become reconnected with their community, however, they said that this process was not an easy task and discovered that there were obstacles to rebuilding social networks.

Roadblocks to Support and Belonging. Most of the participants said that the task of reconnecting to their community and building a new social network was an arduous process. Women described several roadblocks, all of which are interconnected and can be summarized by the following themes: poverty; lack

of information; the aftermath of change; and fear of judgement, shame, and lack of trust.

Poverty. As reported in previous sections, the topic of poverty permeates the conversations with the majority of participants. Poverty posed a significant threat for women in their day-to-day efforts to survive and provide for themselves and their families, and it was clearly a barrier in the process of becoming reconnected with their community. When one participant was asked what would have helped in her transition to the community she replied:

> • When you walk through the door of the shelter, to be handed a winning lottery ticket...It's money...'Cause again, you can't do anything without it." 46SS

Participants described how poverty prevented them from participating in the very activities that would help them connect with a wider and more stable social network. Women said that they simply could not afford to join or, as two women stated, continue their involvement in community groups. It cost money for transportation to meetings, to pay for childcare, membership fees, food costs, and appropriate clothing.

The tight budgets under which women and their families struggled rarely permitted an evening out with a friend. Even a visit to a coffee shop cost more than many had to spare:

> • I don't have money to even buy a drink. I don't have money to pay for, what you call the charge, like a small contribution...I'm a person who was used already to be doing everything on my own. I feel uncomfortable. So I think it's the finances which is drawing me away from a lot. 73DD

Their impoverished state was often a barrier for women who wanted to return to school or attend training programs. One participant talked about the talent she had for working with teenagers. She said that it had long been a dream of hers to go back to school to pursue this goal. The college that offered the necessary courses was located in another community and she did not have the resources to travel there. Instead she applied, and was accepted, for a computer course that was offered within her own community. Her worries were not over, however:

> • You know, to go to school, it's going to cost me $48.00 a month to ride the stinking bus. That's money I don't have. I don't know where I'm going to get it. Twelve dollars a week for bus tickets now has to come off my grocery list. I don't have it. And I can't get it. And mother's allowance doesn't give you bus tickets. 46SS

Poverty and isolation were interconnected themes in the majority of participants' lives as they strove to re-establish in the community. Some women mentioned that, as a result of their isolation, they did not have the information that they required concerning available resources.

Lack of Information. Seven participants spoke about the problems they had securing accurate information about the kinds of community resources which would ease some of the financial pressures and link both themselves and their children to their neighbourhood and community. This participant referred to the relationship between her isolation, her feelings of loneliness, and the lack of information regarding resources:

> •...it's kind of lonely sometimes. Because there are times that I feel it would be nice to just sit and chat about something, but I don't know who and I don't know how...I haven't really gotten involved yet (in the community). I can't seem to find all the resources at the right time, I guess. I mean I kind of had to dig to find out about (a counselling agency)...You see, I have to, sort of like, search. And it's hit and miss, hit and miss...it just seems like the resources that are out there are not well known enough. And then what they provide is not well known enough. 27HH

One woman talked about the many places she visited, the numerous buses she took and the waiting she did before she finally found someone who could tell her about the groups, associations, and agencies that were available to suit her needs and interests, and how she could begin to access those supports. It appears that information about formal and informal community supports was an important bridge in the journey back into community, a bridge that many women described as difficult and costly to locate.

The Aftermath of Change. The number of transitions that accompanied women as they moved away from their abusive partners, adjusted to communal living in the shelter, and re-established in the community were monumental. This participant summarizes what many women described as the repercussions of these major life transitions:

> • You know, I guess it's a whole 180 degree turn. It's a complete new world. There's a - it's like moving from earth to the moon. You may as well have...Everything, everything has changed. It took me 40 - what, I'm 46 and I've been gone we'll say two years - 44 years to develop the way of life that I had. I was married 21 years. And to have everything change in less than two years? That's hard to deal with. You're not prepared for it...46SS

Women talked about the myriad of changes which had taken

place in their lives since leaving their partners. They described differences in their relationships with their children, extended family and friendships, changes in their living environment and/or church community as well as drastic alterations in their financial status. Many were engaged in custody disputes, property battles, struggles to stay safe and, as one woman described it, "fighting the system." Participants spoke of the new worries they had about their children and their children's responses to the changes, particularly children's post-visitation behaviours. In addition to these transitions, women were "on duty" twenty-four hours a day in their new role as a single parent. Seven participants had the additional double duty of school and/or paid employment.

The act of leaving a partner seemed to create a ripple effect. The various combinations of ripples had an influence on women, an impact which I have labelled as the aftermath of change. This "too much to do, too much to deal with" and accompanying fatigue was another roadblock to rebuilding a social network:

> • I was a member of a (community) committee, but because of the shelter thing and all of the stuff that was going on - like you have to go to the meetings for a year in order to be considered a member. And I couldn't go, so in that case I lost out on something...I mean, I could always go again but I was too exhausted. I was too tired. There was too much stuff going on...95EE

Making connections to community groups, meeting new people, and getting to know the neighbourhood all required

time and energy, which many participants said was difficult to find, particularly during the first several months after leaving the shelter.

Fear, Shame and Lack of Trust. Six participants gave examples in which they held back from situations, particularly during those first, post-shelter months, which might have resulted in new friendships or membership in a community group. Many reported that they did so because of their fear of judgement concerning both the abuse that they had sustained and their association with the shelter, and their own shame about their current status as a welfare recipient, single parent, and/or subsidized housing resident:

> • My friends used to say, "How can you ever go to that shelter?" You know? "It's the last place on the earth that anyone would want to go," and things like that. So then it makes you feel like - and they say it in a derogative way - so that the shelter is like the last resort, when everything is, there's no way, that's where you go...So when you go to the shelter and then you come to the community, when a lot of people know about it, it's very uncomfortable. Because I find that some of my friends too, they felt the same. 73DD

Some said that, as a result of their "differences," they feared that they might not fit or belong. This same participant talked about the fears and discomfort she felt which served as barriers to the development of new friendships:

> • I went for (an) interview skills workshop at the job centre. And I met a girl, we were in the same group and there was a girl of my age...we kind of started talking and becoming friends. "Oh, can you come for cup of coffee?" and things like that. But then, the same thing, you know? I can't push to develop the friendship because then I would have to explain what has happened, what

> position I am, wherever it is. And there is the feeling, like maybe they will reject you because your - have things like that...So then I think it's because of that then, I don't join...Those are the things which limits me. Because if you are a person who is used to being on your own and taking care of yourself and suddenly everything is like that, it's hard. 73DD

More than half of the participants reported that it was hard to trust others, and they said that this difficulty was partially related to the experiences of discrimination and judgement they had endured from others. Some participants also attributed their difficulty with trust to the abuse from their ex-partners and the abandonment and betrayal they felt from their previous relationships:

> • People like my husband make it so hard for me too, to talk any more. Because this is the guy I trusted and told him about me and then it has been used against me. So now it becomes difficult to trust again, you know? So, and I think that's one of the reasons why I don't, I haven't joined a group yet...73DD

> •...I think that what's happened is that the person you trust, and you've built your whole life for the future and all your hopes around, has let you down. And not just let you down; hurt you badly. And the person who should have been your best friend was your worst enemy. So who can you turn to, you know? The bottom has fallen out of your world mentally, all of your support. 14KK

> •...I wasn't able to trust him and now I can't trust her. And then I was feeling, oh, I can't trust my neighbour. If I can't trust her from church, well how can I trust an unknown from down the hall? So it's been kind of shaky. Like, who can you trust? Who can you turn to? Who can you, you know, - find, I don't know, a reliable source? 27HH

The topic of trust surfaced once again when seven women talked about their thoughts regarding intimacy with men in general and, in the case of three participants, their experiences with dating:

> •...and he said, "Can I have your number?" and I said, "No, give me yours. Well it took me a week to call him, but I did. And he said, you know, "Would you like to go out?" And I said, "Well, why don't we meet for coffee." And it was a month, maybe even longer before I would - he didn't even know my last name, he didn't know where I lived, he didn't even know my phone number. I would meet him at the mall and we would go to the show and go have dinner or something and I wouldn't even get in the car! Again, it comes back to trust. 46SS

> • I don't know if I could ever trust a man again. Like I'm always going to be scared that it's going to turn out bad. 21AA

A number of participants said that their difficulty with trust was one of the many hurdles that they had to overcome in order to rebuild their social network. Several women indicated that their desire for closeness, connection, and feelings of belonging was counterbalanced with the necessity to protect themselves, a necessity which may have assumed greater importance as a direct result of their experiences of abuse, discrimination and abandonment.

Managing the Transition.

All of the participants relied upon internal and external resources to manage this period of overwhelming transition in their lives and identified the various kinds of supports which were helpful in this process. Women also developed many strategies to manage the issues and challenges that they confronted. Much of this strategizing emerged from the meaning that women attributed to their experiences, and my interpretations of this "making sense" process are offered. Finally, participants were asked to compare their current

situation with their circumstances just prior to leaving their partners, and to discuss the aspects of their lives about which they felt positive. The outcome of those reflections are presented.

Re-establishing in the Community: What Helped. The participants who said that they had support from family, new friendships, co-workers, and neighbours described it as invaluable to them, particularly during the first few months after leaving the shelter. Seven women, five with families close by and two with families far away, said that they were able to rely on their families for concrete support, such as food, money, furniture, transportation, and childcare:

> • My parents, for the first months they said, "You can save your grocery money. You can eat in our house, you and your kids. So when you save that money, you can buy your household things. So it was kind of a big help for me. I had enough money to buy my house supplies, because I had nothing when I came to this house...no furniture, no utensils, nothing...I didn't get any help (other) than my friends and my family members. 57TT

> • My parents pay for my university...and my father in particular has spent a lot of time here and a lot of time with (child). He comes to take care of (child) when I have classes a lot. 51NN

> • She (mother) bought me my furniture. Like I had no table. I had no microwave. I had nothing, no dishes, nothing. And she bought me everything...And she's helped me. When I moved here, she helped me clean up and put things in order. She's uh - when I was having a rough time there with the money, she'd lend it to me until I'd get my other cheque...So my mum lent it to me and I paid her back when I got paid...So she's been very supportive. Like at the end of the month she wants to come here to babysit. 21AA

Four participants mentioned the concrete help they received from a neighbour, and five women talked about the

practical support they had from a new friend:

> • I have neighbours who are really great and they've heard me - like they can take one look at me and tell that I'm frustrated with (child) and they offer to take him off my hands for an hour or so. 31BB

> •...And I didn't know anything about cars and then my brothers are there. They help me, like how to take care of it...they help me just like brothers, you know, big brothers? If anything goes wrong and then I give them a call and then they look after my things...57TT

In addition to concrete support, participants said that emotional support was critical in those lonely, first few months. Eight participants reported a significant new friendship they had made with whom they exchanged some emotional support. Four of these women said that the friendship was with a woman whom they met during their shelter stay. All eight women mentioned commonality of experience as an important component of this new relationship:

> •...One of the other women, I haven't seen her for maybe six months now, but we were quite close for the first little while. And it was really a good sort of relationship because we'd talk on the phone and we were going through the same sort of things together, you know? She'd have the feelings maybe ahead of me about something, and I'd talk to her about it. "Oh, yeah, I remember going through that," and vice versa. And we'd egg each other on, sort of. "What are you going to do?" And she was taking courses and I was taking courses that I later dropped. But we kind of helped each other. And I had her over at Christmas time...62CC

> •...I have no family here. I have a friend downstairs, like I go over there for coffee and that...'cause she's been through a lot too. Her boyfriend, the one she was going with before, he was abusing her physically. Like he was beating her up and, that's why we can talk...so we can talk and we know how each other feels. 21AA

> •...We (participant and a friend she made from the shelter) used to sit, I tell you, we'd call each other maybe eleven o'clock at night and sit 'til one, one-

thirty on the phone, kids asleep, and we could talk, cry...46SS

•...I have three friends that I have been able to turn to. They have been the biggest godsend that I've had since I left (shelter). From them, I draw strength from them. They give me support...I can depend on them. I can carry on the way I am at this point. I feel it's going to be many, many months yet, yes, but I am going to be able to walk out of this system...because other than my children and my grandchildren, these are the three people that have given me the initiative to go on...and these three people have also come from an abusive relationship which, they understand what I'm going through...it's like they've taken me under their wing. 89FF

•...I've a really good girlfriend that I met through my high school studies and we've been friends for a couple of years now...she's right into women's lib and same attitude as me and it's amazing! We're almost exactly alike the way we think and everything. So she helps me out just by, you know, being my friend...I can tell her anything and I don't have to worry. 31BB

Several participants spoke of the emotional support that they received from these friendships as a kind of lifeline, and some women said that it was through these friends that they began to meet others, enabling them to increase their support network. School and work environments were important connecting places for women, as were activities which involved their children, such as trips to the park, swimming lessons, and parenting groups. Eight women talked about their work and/or school environment as an important part of their lives; some were able to access emotional support from co-workers and others spoke about the positive feedback they received. They described the sense of achievement they enjoyed as a result of their work and commented on the value of the information they received about both their abilities and their importance to

their workplace, information which helped to nurture or maintain confidence and self-worth:

> •...I was really fortunate. And since I had so much support at work, you know, they were there to cry on their shoulder if I needed to. And I tried not to do that because, you know, that's not good either. Although there were, I guess a few days when I did. So, in that way I know I was really, really fortunate. But for the ones who don't have a job, like I did, and the family and friends, it's got to be really, really tough. 62CC

> •...a couple of days at work is just enough to know that you're needed, you're being useful, you're helping to keep yourself...14KK

> •...I feel good just having gone to school, gone through with it and finished it and graduated with the grades that I did...(the administrator of the school told her friend) "Oh, she graduated with honours, she graduated a month early." He was going on and on and on, so it kind of felt good to hear. It was pretty neat. 31BB

> •...when I'm doing my course and everything, and everybody there appreciates me, like how I did with my circumstances, and how I made my house. And they make me feel proud, like I'm wonderful, I'm the number one...And that's the thing I feel I need. 57TT

Regular access to a school and/or work environment offered five women a broader and more stable social network which, in turn, facilitated a sense of belonging or connection to the community. For all of them, this sense of belonging appeared to be comprised of access to a positive social network and a new, or renewed, sense of purpose:

> •...I like doing it (attending school). I don't know how else to put it. And the people. It is a small department, so everybody knows everybody else, really quite a bit. It really is a small department and I feel at home there and I feel comfortable. 51NN

Six participants indicated that their children were important, motivating factors for them during their early

struggles to become re-established in the community:

> •...Well, (son), he's the big reason - and myself, you know. I want something good for myself. But more so for (son). You know, if it wasn't for (him) I don't know where I'd be. I'd still be - I don't know - probably dead. Yeah. 31BB

> •...it was, you know, searching for what would make their lives better...this is what the kids need. I'll look out for them. Because they still have their life to look forward to and build upon and they need a, I don't know, a foundation and security...I want to be there for them and I want to be a good example. 27HH

Participants also talked about the formal support systems that they found helpful as they re-established in the community. The shelter Drop-in was mentioned by seven participants as another lifeline from which they received concrete, emotional and educational support. Drop-in also offered women access to a broad, and relatively stable informal network, and women said that they particularly valued the occasions when the focus of Drop-in concentrated on providing information about community resources, and sharing individual experiences and emotional support:

> •...It's good. It's supportive, like whatever I do, you know, it's kind of like a good friend or a big sister, you know? It's like - you are good and whatever you do, they appreciate me. This is the kind of support I need for my kids. And they get more friends there...It's a kind of - your self-esteem, to keep you up. And that's the more positive thing you need. That's the thing you need in your life? Like if you are down from your own self, you have - you are nothing. So you have to have something to keep you up daily...but the thing is, like now I know, you have to be talking to the real people who can understand your problem. So the Drop-ins were helpful for me in that way. Like when I was talking (about) my financial situation and I want my kids to be active, you know? And these ladies who were experiencing these things, they knew where I can apply and then they told me all these numbers...when I was going to Drop-ins, I made

more of my friends. When I meet them I feel like I'm not the only one who's facing this problem. Like when I see them, they are smiling and they're talking with their friends, it makes me feel good, you know? ... We're not the only one, we can start our life again. And we could be smiling again as we were before. 57TT

•...the Drop-in for ex-residents...it was, we were still keeping in touch and they, you know, they still cared. They still wanted to know how you were doing...31BB

•...I mean, the Drop-in gave you something to look forward to...you look forward to Drop-in as a place you can go, you know, where you feel you are accepted...it's like a team or something like that...73DD

Three women reported that, on the occasions when they were feeling desperate, they found the shelter crisis line a vital support:

• I know in my heart and in my mind when it gets bad I can always pick up that phone twenty-four hours a day. And there's been times they have seen me through some pretty rough times. And I'm so grateful that I've had them to turn to...89FF

•...and I've still called (shelter) a few times (after) I was out, mostly about (child)...because the women in there...seemed to have a really good rapport with (child)...they could relate to (child) where I couldn't and so I would call them for that help...62CC

In spite of the frustration and discontent that most participants expressed regarding welfare, a few women commented on the support that they had received, both from the welfare system in general, and their worker in particular. One participant maintained that, compared to the financial problems she endured when living with her partner, she was much better situated with her part-time job and mother's allowance benefits:

•...Now I have, to me, tons of money compared to what it was before. So I have no worries at all. My bills are

paid, my rent's paid, we have food, clothes - and we can do things. 31BB

Another participant, who had lived in Canada only a few years, said that welfare was the only choice she had for financial help:

> • It was lovely to know that there was something there. Yeah. I mean, it's not something to look forward to but I mean, it's wonderful to know there is welfare. If you're not well enough and you cannot cope, that there is...you haven't got your relatives, well I haven't got relatives or friends who can give me that support...It was like a best friend walking in and just saving it. 14KK

Three participants said that they found their welfare workers supportive and mentioned the characteristics which they appreciated:

> • He was very, very fair. And I thought, I'd always imagined that he would've asked me was I prepared to work more, get more hours and things like that, and why was I claiming welfare sort of thing. But he wasn't. He was very, sort of, not critical at all, you know? Just listened and was very kind and understanding. 14KK

> • Since I've been on family benefits, it's been really good. My worker's really helpful and he takes the time to phone me back. You know, a lot of workers don't phone you back. He phones me back and explains things to me until I understand it or answers any questions that I might have. 31BB

> • I've got a good case worker. She's understanding, very nice...Yeah, she's awfully nice, very understanding and they haven't said a word to me about going back to work, even though (child) is thirteen. But then they know that (child) has a learning disability so probably that's part of it, I don't know, but she's very - really quite good. 46SS

Some of the participants mentioned other helpful formal supports that they had accessed within the community. Two women said that their lawyers advocated on their behalf and

worked with their best interests in mind. Three participants said that they found their children's teachers understanding and very supportive during this time of transition. This participant described the concrete support she received from her child's teachers:

> •...she (teacher) was a nice lady. She gave her own tree (Christmas). Like she had two in her house and she gave me the one. And the librarian, she helped me a lot. She gave me a toy in a box and she said, "You can put this under your tree."...and the principal asked too, she asked me if you need anything else...57TT

Two participants remarked upon the information and advocacy they obtained from an agency which helps people locate affordable housing:

> • This coordinator there is really good. He tries to find housing for people that really need it. And I told him my situation and I got in here right away. 31BB

Another participant said that she and her children benefitted from the services of the police in general, and from the help offered by one officer in particular:

> • There was one officer in particular, one female officer who had dealt with us when we had a problem and (ex-partner) had been over and so on, and so she knew the whole situation. And she was really marvellous, really, really good whereas some of the other, the male officers couldn't, really couldn't put themselves in that position. But she'd come from a broken home and she grew up in a broken home and she just knew all of those things. So she was just really great...And she was there for the (teenage children) too. She talked to (them) and she could empathize with them because she knew what it was like growing up there. It was just a little extra support...62CC

One participant was receiving emotional and educational support from a counsellor and three said that they had received the support of a counsellor in the past. One

participant found the community's multicultural centre a valuable source of information and emotional support:

> • The lady down there, she was good and she told me how I can be connected with other people and she gave me phone numbers. And she showed me the way, how I can get...where I wanted to be in my career. I mentioned to her that I wanted to be able to have my career again and then she told me, "This is how the Canadian society works and you should be knowing how you - how you talk and what your goals are"...and that helped a lot... 57TT

The characteristics of the formal supports and service providers that women identified as helpful tended to centre around themes of practicality, respect, and empathy. It appeared that the experiences women had with a service provider had a strong impact on how they perceived the service in general. In the event that the service had many providers, such as the shelter, for example, women spoke in terms of the "overall support" they felt from the staff. Participants spoke positively about service providers who:

- helped women envision, articulate and achieve goals
- provided opportunities for women to meet others who were in similar circumstances
- linked women with appropriate community resources
- listened without judgement and endeavoured to understand
- used self-disclosure; empathized based on shared experiences
- took the time to explain their services and were open about all of the services women were entitled to receive
- returned phone calls within a reasonable time period

- did not pressure women who were parenting to seek additional work.

In general, with the exception of the shelter Drop-in, women spoke most frequently about informal supports, such as family members, new friends, neighbours, peers and co-workers as those they found most helpful in the process of re-establishing in the community. This support included:

- concrete support (money for rent and food, assistance with childcare and transportation)
- emotional support, especially from those who were undergoing, or had experienced, similar circumstances
- information sharing, including information about available community resources
- positive feedback about women's personal resources, such as parenting skills, determination, and problem-solving abilities.

Several women talked about their work and/or school environment as one of the places where they were most likely to receive positive feedback about themselves, their skills and abilities. This positive feedback helped them to feel valued and more confident.

In addition to the more external kinds of support that participants found helpful, women identified some of the internal resources or personal attributes they accessed in order to manage these major life transitions. Women regularly reflected upon and gave meaning to their many experiences.

Consequently, they developed strategies that they used to help them manage very difficult and painful circumstances.

Making Sense and Management Strategies. On many occasions, particularly during the first several months of women's transition to the community, women described how they were managing in ways that suggested that they were making the best of an intolerable situation. This next section explores some of the ways in which participants managed two of the difficult experiences they confronted: 1) the overt and covert discrimination many women experienced as a result of their status as poor, welfare recipients, subsidized housing residents, and/or single parents; and 2) the feelings of loneliness and disconnection that resulted from their isolation.

Discrimination. As described earlier, most of the participants (eleven of twelve) experienced incidents of both overt and covert discrimination. Patronizing, judgemental, and/or abusive treatment were a source of frustration, rage, and shame for women. Most participants talked about, or made sense of, these situations in ways that signified they had denied, at least on a conscious level, any similarity to the stereotypes and judgements that beset single parents, welfare recipients and housing residents. Women indicated that they believed the stereotypes to be generally unfounded; that is, most people who receive assistance are honest, hard-working

individuals who are grappling with situations predominantly out of their control:

> •...I am not at the bottom of the barrel. I am not fourth world, fourth class citizen, whatever they think. I am not a lazy lout. I am not a drinker...an idea of a social services welfare person says they're all alcoholics who sit back and sit out in the sun in the summertime and drink their beer and it's not true. In reality it's a very small minority, but they're the ones that get the advertising. Advertising isn't the right word, but that's exactly how I feel...it's like you got a hundred kids. One kid's got a switchblade in his pocket. Who do you hear about? The one kid with the switchblade. You don't hear about the 99 good ones...all you hear is about the beer drinking welfare recipients. You don't hear about the other ones who are struggling. 46SS

Although women refused to believe that they resembled the negative images, they admitted that they could not relinquish the feelings of embarrassment and shame which frequently resulted. In order to protect themselves and their children from judgement, prejudice, and abuse, many participants used the following strategies: withholding information; withdrawal from others; resistance to or ceasing involvement with services such as the housing authority or the food bank; lying; and confrontation:

> •...They would sit and discuss it (welfare recipients) at noon hour and so I wouldn't let anyone know that I was receiving assistance...and I've seen it with other people in the complex who are on welfare, the treatment they get as opposed to the treatment I get. They don't know I'm on welfare. 62CC

> •...nobody, nobody knows, you know, really around here...you lie. You have to keep secrets and you lie for self-preservation...as far as anybody knows, I am separated from my husband and he has to support me. And I don't work because as long as (son) is in school, I don't have to. That's all anybody knows around here. And not too many - I don't associate with people. I just don't want to get involved. I don't want people to know

> my life story...secrets add to the stress, the lying adds to the stress...You have to lie about yourself in order to be accepted because if you tell the truth, you're a bum. 46SS

> • And I was in a line up just to get that food and - there was an expiry date on them...this is what you get from the Food Bank. With expiry dates or so, you know? Like the vegetables, some of the goods, you have to sort them out and...I really cried one day. I never ever had to do this thing in my life, you know?...and after fourth or fifth month, I stopped going there. I said, "No more. I'm not going there." 57TT

Although strategies such as withholding, withdrawing, and lying offered women some protection with regard to their sense of self-worth and the self-worth of their children, the protection came at a cost; some women did without the services to which they were entitled, the isolation some women experienced was exacerbated, and the inability to trust others acted as a barrier to the development of close, intimate friendships. Women also said that they did not feel good about themselves as a result of the lies they told.

Two women who said that they had confronted others about their biases had been out of the shelter for over two years, had acquired a stable network of friends and reported that they felt much more confident about themselves:

> • I couldn't stand it any longer (listening to derogatory remarks about people on welfare). I said, "I'm a welfare recipient," and their mouths fell open...I think that's why you lie. None of those people knew. So they all know now. But I'm also at a stage where I feel quite confident. 62CC

As a result of the lengthy, animated focus group discussions about discrimination, it became apparent that each participant had struggled with this issue, although it seemed

that few of the participants had been offered opportunities to voice their thoughts and feelings with others who were experiencing similar difficulties. It was after these charged conversations that I was struck by the travesty of isolation which many of the participants had endured, isolation which was exacerbated by the discriminatory behaviour of others. It seems reasonable to assume that if women had had opportunities in the early months of their transition to the community to talk with others who were experiencing similar difficulties, much of the embarrassment, shame and resulting isolation might have been reduced.

Loneliness and Disconnection. Most of the participants said that they had experienced feelings of loneliness and disconnection during the first few months of their transition to the community. These feelings were described as a continuing struggle for seven women, two of whom had been out of the shelter for more than two years. The other five women, who described a sense of belonging as well as several new relationships, appeared to have acquired a stable social network. While the passage of time was certainly one of the contributing factors to this sense of belonging - four of these women had been on their own for at least two years - these participants also stated that they had received various supports from family, friends and/or co-workers after they left their partners and perceived this support as crucial to their adjustment. The participants who frequently reported

situations of isolation and feelings of loneliness, abandonment, and disconnection, described the strategies and the personal attributes that they used to manage these difficulties. One woman said she relied on her faith system as a source of comfort, hope and inspiration:

> •...plus praying helps a bit too...'cause I get down and I pray and I say, "Well, my life's in your hands and I'll go where you say." So that's been happening. I just follow it. So that's what I'm doing to keep on going. 42JJ

Some women drew upon their past experiences with trying times; they had weathered painful situations before and knew they could do it again. Others looked back on situations of abuse that they had endured and used these memories as an impetus to struggle ahead:

> • I ran away from a very, very, very abusive father - stepfather, whenever I say father - to a very, very abusive husband and I didn't want that. I was running away from an abusive situation and ended up in abusive - and because, I have always said, I always say that I'll find a way to get out of this situation. So maybe that's what keeps me going. 73DD

This participant used the form of a mountain-climbing metaphor as a way of measuring how far she had travelled, and as a way of dealing with the trials of the transition:

> •...it's sort of like going from the bottom of the mountain to the top. You don't know the path you're going to take. You don't know how rugged it's going to be. You don't know if you're going to slip and, but it's, you don't know what sort of terrain you're going to travel and what sort of wild animals you're going to come across. But you know that it's the only way to get out of the valley, I guess...I mean there are times that I still feel weak-kneed. But...I feel I have taken a couple of steps forward. Even if I might have taken one step back, I feel like I've gone forward and there's just no way that I'm going to go all the way back...I feel like I've

> gone up a little bit and I look back and I say, "I'm glad I'm out of that pit." 'Cause there's no sun that shines down there and it can be pretty murky down there...and now we've gotten out of that and now we've just got to get up there and take in the view. 27HH

Another woman reflected on her daily achievements as a way of measuring how far she had come since leaving her partner:

> • I think the most important thing to get on your feet is to feel you've achieved something at the end of the day. And, you're one step ahead. You're getting somewhere. And that's hard because financially, you're not. But mentally, you are, hopefully. And most days I think, well, yeah. I have achieved something. 14KK

Most participants mentioned the importance of having some kind of creative involvement, a strategy that helped them to manage the lonely days. Some women said that they involved themselves in projects such as sewing, craft work, and gardening. Tending to children's needs occupied a great deal of their time and energy. Some exercised or went for walks each day. Many women used this period of loneliness as an opportunity to learn more about themselves. They said that they used this time to express emotions and to restore themselves:

> • I beat the shit out of my loveseat, destroyed a pillow. And that's how you cope because you cannot...you cannot let the kids see you're upset. The kids get upset and then all hell breaks loose. So you have to do this on your own. If you start bawling, you go and have a shower. 46SS

> • I'm trying to remain strong, but sometimes it's so hard...I'll go outside. I'll go sit. I'll bawl. I'll cry my head off, just to get it out. I let it out more easily now...like I find I have to let it out. 'Cause before I couldn't let it cut. With my husband I was so tired of crying all the time that I became hard. And I would keep

it all inside and it didn't help. So I find now, if I let it out, it helps. I feel better after. 21AA

•...you need the time to be healing, just to get your mind straight, and to look forward to the future, you know? Build up your self-esteem. 14KK

Ten of twelve participants reported that their inner strength and determination helped them to manage the transition to the community:

• I'm a determined person. If I decide that I'm going to do it, I'm going to do it. It might take a lot of - a long time, sometimes, but I always say, "I will do it." It's just like, I keep saying, "I'll make it, I'll make it." 73DD

• ...you know, now, I've got to go through with it and I've got to be strong. I've got to fight, put it like that. 14KK

•...the only thing that's kept me going is my - two, two things. I've got a half decent sense of humour...and my determination not to let (ex-partner) destroy me like he said he would...maybe there's something, subconsciously, that's inside me, because there are days when I feel like nothing but a snivelling wimp. I will sit on the corner of this couch and bawl my stupid head off. But then I seem to - it's like a roller coaster ride. But then something just seems to pick me up and away I go again; self-preservation, determination. 46SS

Many women reframed this difficult, lonely time as a challenge, an experience, or an adventure, and as an opportunity to dream, plan, and start over again:

• I just seem to make a plan and go through with it...I don't know, I planned on being a success, one day down the road...It's kind of nice starting all over again. Because you can just make it the way you want it...I take everything as a learning experience and I go from there and that makes me stronger, I think. 31BB

• Hey, this is the first day of my life. It's going to change. I am going to have my enjoyment, my happiness in life. 89FF

> •...and I said, "You just remember, you know, the tough times that we're going through and take, take it as an experience, you know, and hopefully make things better." 27HH
>
> • I said I'm going to clean my slate and start her right all over again. So, and that's exactly what I'm going to do...And just get on with my life. 42JJ

Participants who indicated that they were connected to a network of family, friends, and co-workers frequently made reference to the significance of their support. Women who reported that they were still feeling disconnected or separate from the community were more inclined to identify themselves as the person on whom they could most rely:

> •...Just learning to cope - and you are there and you are on your own. And then that starts to really sink in, you know? Whatever's done, I'm the only one that can do it. 14KK
>
> • Myself...yeah, it's mostly been myself. Because I said, you know, I can either sit here and cry about everything or get the hell off my ass and do something about it. So what am I doing? I'm doing something about it. 42JJ

It may be that this belief in self-reliance was another useful strategy for managing the very painful isolation that most women identified as one of the major challenges of re-establishing in the community.

Then and Now: Women's Reflections.

Women were asked to reflect upon and discuss the aspects of their current situations that they thought were going well. The five women who reported solid connections to a broad and stable social network gave immediate responses:

> • Everything. It's like day and night, you know...I can remember one day walking to work after all this was over and thinking - just like a hundred pounds was lifted off my shoulders when I realized, "Hey! I don't have to rush home to somebody and wonder what they're going to be like," you know? I could enjoy so many little things, nothing and everything. It was nice. 62CC
>
> •...And she (sister) told me, if someone looks at you right now...they will say that the whole world is changed for you. And you are on top. 57TT

Some of the women who identified that they felt lonely and were still struggling to become connected to a job, school, and/or new friends said that it was hard to think of anything right away; a great deal of what they were currently experiencing was painful and difficult. However, when participants were asked to reflect upon their current life circumstances and compare them to those prior to leaving their partners, all of the women reported that their current situation was unquestionably better. The pain and suffering that they had previously endured, and the relief that they were feeling now, surfaced immediately. The following responses underscore some of the fear, powerlessness, and loneliness of women's pre-shelter experiences:

> • Well, I'm not scared any more. I don't tremble when I hear the keys in the lock. 31BB
>
> • When I lived over there, I wasn't lonely but I was always scared. Like, I was miserable. So it's pretty well - whether I'm there or here on my own, it's still the same loneliness. But I'm not terrified of (him)...trying to force me, and like, I don't have to be afraid of that any more. I feel better now but the loneliness is still there. It's really hard. 21AA
>
> •...there isn't any of the emotional abuse garbage constantly...it's better for the kids...Being able to have my own friends. Like if I was home there'd be no way

you'd be over here at all, no way at all. 46SS

- This is heaven on earth...In relation to what was going on with my partner and to what I have now, this is heaven on earth...I still have that fear. It's trying to get into my mind, I am in control of this apartment. I can do what I want, when I want, as I want. There's days I have a real problem and - but what I've been able to accomplish since I've come here, I feel like I'm in a different world. It's beautiful. But I've got a long road to tread yet...but perseverance. I'll do it. But, this is where my friends help me out a lot. 89FF

All of the participants mentioned increased control and freedom as aspects of their new life circumstances that they valued tremendously. Women discussed several areas of their lives over which they had more control: their immediate living space; their bodies; their ability to terminate verbal abuse from their ex-partners, particularly during phone calls; and in decision-making regarding friendships, parenting, and financial issues. The following quotes illustrate the extent of freedom and/or control that women were experiencing:

- I can go to the bathroom by myself...I'm not being raped everyday. I can go to the store and I can take half an hour. I can phone somebody. I can go and visit a friend without being bombarded with questions. And I have food, (child) has diapers and he has clothes and he has shoes...There is no comparison!...everything is my choice, whatever goes on. I have money in the bank...I have friends. I don't have him haunting me at work. 31BB

- And it's always nice to say, "There's the door," if he, if I have a problem with him at all...Before he had the upper hand and now I do...if I'm interested in something, I can go do it and I don't have to find out if it's okay with him or find out if it's not okay or whatever. There was that - one of the levels of abuse, you know, was he didn't want me to be around my friends very much at all. He didn't want me to go and leave the house very much. So I get to do that kind of thing when I want now...95EE

- I now have control over my environment...this is a vast improvement...the lack of negativism around me all the

> time. I can live in my environment and do what I want with it and I really like that...I'm really big in having control right now. It is really important for me. For feeling like everything has been out of control for so long...51NN
>
> •...I can handle it as long as he's on the phone...I'm in control because if he says a crooked word, then I just say to him, "Excuse me. You controlled me for eight years; now I'm in control." And I - bang! - I hang up the phone. And that infuriates him but it makes me feel good...I've got certain areas I'm stronger than he is and that's my only defense and I'm going to hang onto it. And I'm going to use it. And this has given me some initiative...I can control him by hanging up on him...I am also controlling my own money which is a big slap in the face to him...I'm in control now. I'll hang up. And this kills him. But I feel I've got these things over him now and that's my power. And I'll use it all the way, because he can't tell me what to do because I signed those papers. So now I'm in control of my own life, not him. 89FF
>
> • I said to him, "If you can't talk to me civil, I'm going to hang up. And when you can talk to me better than this then.." and I do hang up...like I said, "You know, I can hang up on you now because I don't have to listen to you." At home, I had to listen to him because I couldn't shut him off. He didn't have an "off" button. But now I just "shoom!" (hang up). And I do not have to listen to him... 21AA

Perhaps as a result of, but certainly in conjunction with, women's previous experiences of abuse and their new found experiences of greater control and freedom, a new awareness emerged regarding relationships in general and with men in particular. Some women spoke of their contentment with their single status and mentioned their reluctance to become intimately involved with men at this point in time:

> • I remember myself coming home one night and thinking, I have all these problems and I found myself attracted to a certain someone and I thought..."Why do I want another man in my life?" And then I thought, well when I was being raised, you know, you're raised on fairy tales. You grow up and you get married and you live happily ever

after and the man looks after you. All your problems are solved. But that in reality doesn't happen. And so, wake up, you know? No man's going to solve your problems for you...I would be completely content on my own for the rest of my life, if I have to be, rather than have that kind of relationship (with ex-partner), or anything closely resembling that kind of relationship, again. Ideally I'd like to have a nice relationship with somebody but if that doesn't happen for me, I'm quite happy on my own...62CC

•...So I said, "I don't care for marriage now," you know? What I care for is my life and for my kids' life. That's it...I feel like the men are, they are weak from inside. It's the women who are making them strong. Then why, why are we going after them? No way! And then, I don't know why these ideas are coming to my mind, you know? Each day I think, if I can make my house, I can look after my kids. I know it's hard but, like before, he wasn't doing anything...57TT

Other women, who had begun to explore relationships with men, had this to say:

• "God," I said, "This time there's not going to be a man taking me for any more rides...You know, it's - at first I did care (for new boyfriend) and now it's like, everything is coming out now. So I figured to hell with that. I don't need that bullshit. I don't need it at all. And I ain't gonna take it...there is no way, on this God's earth, I'm going to go through that again...42JJ

• Dating's a biggie...ohhh, and it's hell...starting all over again. You feel like you're twelve years old sometimes. But it's a hoot! That is one bright side...I sure don't want to be tied down to anybody. I was tied down 21 years to somebody who told me what to do, expected me to do this and demanded I do that. I don't want it, no. I like the way things are...a highlight or a benefit, yeah, my freedom...46SS

This next participant, in her descriptions of dating experiences, alludes to another positive outcome: a sense of self-respect:

•...I don't take crap from anybody any more. And definitely not from a guy. I've dated about three guys since I've been in (city) and I've dumped all of them because they wanted something before I was willing to

> even think about that. And -well actually I should say that they dumped me, but I didn't really care because I knew they were going to. Because, you know, I told them what I wanted and I said, "Look, I don't want that right now. This is how it's going to be and if you don't like it, get lost!" (laughter) So they got lost. But I'm not going to take any crap, you know? If I'm going to get into a relationship it's going to be a partnership. I'm not going to be treated like scum or a slave or anything...31BB

Other participants reported similar benefits; they acknowledged that although they had relinquished a great deal as a result of leaving, they had also gained in many ways and the sense of dignity and self-respect was one of several important gains:

> •...on the other hand, it gives me more, self-respect of myself. Because I look at it like, if I can make this kind of decision and make these hard adjustments and be able to, to do it, then it makes me feel like, oh, I'm strong enough. And so like, before I left my husband, when I was with my husband before I left, I used to feel bad about myself. Like, why do I have to listen to this? Why do I have to - so it was a bad position but, it wasn't financial. It was mental, like mentally you feel like, what do I have to put up with every time. So you kind of be angry at yourself. Now when I left, I wasn't angry at myself as much. I was more angry at him. And also I was kind of more proud of myself...73DD

Many women mentioned that, as a result of being separate from their partners' physical and emotional abuse, there was less stress and strain. They felt more relaxed and enjoyed better physical and emotional health:

> • You know, it might have been neater and it might have been easier to have stayed and put up with it (ex-partner's abuse) but it wouldn't have been comfortable. It wouldn't have given me peace of mind. I was feeling tormented. I don't feel that as much now...27HH

> •...before it was constantly big. I feel like, I just feel bad. I don't feel good. I feel like I have no energy. I feel like I've been insulted all the way along

and I'm depressed about it. And I'm constantly depressed. But now I get very happy, and I get very angry and I get very, very passionate about things whereas before there wasn't any outlet for passion really...95EE

- As far as health-wise, I'm a lot healthier now than what I was when I was with him...all the time I was sick, when I was with my husband. Losing weight. Very skinny. I wasn't eating that much. Now I eat. I've gained weight, oh, I've gained weight. I don't fit into my clothes. And I've caught maybe two colds that I caught from the kids. And that's it. 21AA

- I feel good physically too, even though I don't get enough sleep and I haven't gotten enough sleep for a long time, I feel generally more energized than I did before when I was with (ex-partner). It was really draining to be under so much stress...it (now) is a totally different kind of stress. It is not an emotional stress. It is just mental or physical, which is something that I can cope with easily compared to what I was going through before. Even the phone calls are minuscule compared to the daily interaction...51NN

Several participants noted that their children were benefitting from the changes too; they were generally less stressed, happier, more confident, and doing better in school. Women said that they felt more in control in their ability to parent; they were able to follow their own instincts and could do so without being undermined:

- (child's) school last year went amazingly well. The teacher couldn't believe it was the same kid from September 'til June. There's no stress. He could come home and sit and do his homework and plug along and if he needed help, I was there for him without having to fight, you know? There was no fight or competition or (father) coming home drunk...46SS

- There's, I don't know, a kind of accomplishment, I guess, because now (child) can go to school and she can make friends. She can listen to music and she can talk about things where before she wasn't allowed. So she's feeling like she can breathe...It's (relationship with children) become a lot more open. Like we can talk about things and not be afraid...(child) didn't want to share any thoughts, but now she will...She'll voice her

feelings now, where before she wouldn't...27HH

> •...like for my kids, they don't have their self-esteem down, you know?...And they feel like - they say proudly, "This is our house and we made it." This is what I want for, in my kids...I thank God I'm here and no longer with them. I feel it's good for me and for my kids too...57TT

In addition, four women reported a closer relationship with their children:

> •...I think we've come a long, long way 'cause the girls have just sort of blossomed. A lot of people have commented on how my girls have really blossomed on their own, become a lot more confident of themselves and they're doing really good...the girls and I have, I think, really, really a strong relationship. We communicate, well at least I think so. (laughter) I may be surprised some day. There may be some things I don't know. But I think we're closer than most others that I see...my girls are, I think wise, too. They know what signs to look for now in their boyfriends. So I think they will probably have better relationships. And (daughter) said to me one day, "Mum, a lot of my friends haven't led the lives we've led. My life is much more interesting...I think we're stronger because of it." So they've learned too. The secret is that it's a peaceful, happy outcome and had I not gotten out of that house, my kids could have been on the street. 62CC

A majority of the participants talked about the time and energy that they had committed to nurturing and/or improving relationships with their children, and most women felt positive about the changes. In addition to positive relationships with children, several participants described the beneficial changes that had occurred in their personal community. They noted an increase in the number of their friendships and that, overall, friendships were closer:

> •...I couldn't believe the friends that I had after I left him! 31BB

> •...friendships are closer, yeah, once you feel you can trust somebody...friendships I had before I guess maybe,

> people that, you know, were picked for me, if you will...yeah, the friendships are totally different. 46SS

Friendships were repeatedly mentioned as one of the positive aspects of women's lives, particularly with reference to their own sense of well-being. As discussed previously, women were able to count on these friendships for a wide range of support, such as financial assistance, emotional support, childcare, and transportation. This participant identified affection as another benefit she received from her new friendships:

> •...the relationship between the girls and I - it's got to now that they are like two of my own kids. I can depend on them 24 hours a day. They're a pillar of strength. They're replacing a lot, I could almost say and be honestly truthful about it, affection. They are giving me that, that I need and that means the world and all to me. I draw a lot of strength from that...it makes me feel good when...whichever one it is, comes and rings my phone to say they're on their way. You know, it's like I've just had an upper. I can feel the energy, a warm feeling, hey, here comes my support. 89FF

Seven women also described the ways in which they, too, were contributing to their personal communities and, from their descriptions, indicated that they felt both proud and positive about their contributions. They discussed the importance of being able to give to others. It gave them the opportunity to express the gratitude that they felt for the help that they had received. It also helped them to feel good about themselves and appeared to be a component in the development of a sense of belonging:

> • I got to know this one woman who, she was my next door neighbour...she was having a really hard time and I made an effort to get to know her...I kind of took her side

> because her son was getting picked on and she was getting the brunt of everything...So I'd talk to her and say,"Hey, you're a great mum and your kid's fine..." so I just boosted her up a bit. I could tell she appreciated it because she came by and got my phone number and I think I'm the only person here that she's bothered to keep in touch with and so that kind of made me feel good, because she was really nice. 31BB

> •...For me, I want to share each and everything with everyone, like how they are doing and - then you feel more like you are living in that area and everyone knows you and you know them and how you care about each other. This is what I want...and this is how life should be, I think. It's not just that you are there and you have everything in your possession and that's it. 57TT

> •...there's another woman in here that I've become quite close friends to. She's sort of adopted me, I guess, like a stepmother. And I've helped her out a little bit. But I've also told her that I think she's smart, you know, 'cause she is...I guess I've given her the same sort of support, in some ways, as I got at (shelter organization). And it has made her feel good about herself. She's going back to school. She feels good about herself... 62CC

> •...when you first leave that place (shelter), you want to volunteer for everything...Actually, what we did do after being turned down at several different places (for volunteering), is we went out and bought groceries and took them down to the (community drop-in centre). We phoned to see what they needed. I just wanted to give something back, you know?...62CC

A sense of belonging was mentioned by five women as a positive aspect of their new life situations. With the exception of one woman, who said that her personal community of family, friends and co-workers had remained strong and relatively intact throughout her transition, these participants had reconstructed a stable, social network and were enjoying the benefits. One woman spoke about the central role she was playing in her housing co-operative, proudly described her school achievements, and reported a sense of

belonging to both her co-operative and to her part-time workplace. Another described her involvement in various community groups, as well as her school and parenting achievements. Three participants mentioned that their location also contributed to this feeling of belonging:

> •...someone told me about the Parent and Tot group in this community neighbourhood so I started going to that and that was good. I do know and recognize some of the mothers who live around here but it now conflicts with one of my classes...I love the neighbourhood and I love where I live. I'm really happy with it. The neighbours are fine...I started to recognize people towards the end of the summer. So I figure within a year I will get to know some people who live around here. But I like them. That neighbour on that side seems like a nice person and these neighbours are friendly. 51NN

As women reflected upon the kinds of things that were going well, the theme of accomplishment frequently surfaced from their conversations. In addition to their roles as parent and provider, and the incredible time and energy involved in carrying out these roles in order to create a new home environment for themselves and their children, several women spoke with pride about their participation in valued social roles such as student, co-worker, neighbour, and friend. They described a sense of achievement that came from obtaining good grades, receiving recognition from peers and supervisors, participating on a board of directors of a co-operative, doing a job well, and supporting a friend. Two women had participated in social action work. One wanted the community to become more aware of the struggles women face; she spoke to a local reporter about her experiences of wife

assault and the inadequate responses which she had received from various community supports. The editor refused to publish her story. Another woman talked about her idea, and the steps she had taken, to organize a support group for residents in her neighbourhood. Although she said that it was too much for her to organize by herself at the time, particularly with her full-time job and parenting commitments, it was a support which she strongly believed would benefit the community:

> •...a lot of them don't know where to go for help and what's available out in the community. I had thought, and had actually took steps, to organize what I thought would be a sort of support group inside of (shelter agency) where we could hold - well there's a meeting room over there and we could have it once a month and I would have - I had arranged, at the time it was (woman) from social services to come in and tell them what was available as far as social services went. There was (neighbourhood group)...who was going to come in and talk to them about programs that they offer and how we could sort of start those kinds of things in here...62CC

Regardless of the amount of time that had passed since they had left their partners, participants said that, overall, they felt positive about the changes they had made in their lives. One woman commented that, as a result of her participation in the research, she became more aware of the positive aspects of her current situation:

> •...it makes a big difference to say it in a way that you realize it. Because sometimes all it takes is for you to have to open your mouth and say it, and think about it, to actually realize how good it is. Even though you think, well, this is miserable and that is miserable but, it really, really is great to be out...and being in this research has helped to know it...95EE

The following quotes offer a summary of women's

reflections about the positive direction that their current situations were taking:

> •...she (friend) says, "Oh, you've changed, like in your thinking and your clothing and everything, you know? You're not the same person now...(prior to relationship with her partner) Like you were full of life and this is how you are now." 57TT
>
> •...There's lots of good stuff and often the bad stuff seems to outweigh the good stuff. But I suppose if you stop and, in retrospect, look back on everything, it's probably fifty-fifty. I can see the light at the end of the tunnel that's green and flashing. 46SS
>
> •...I made the choice to get away. I'm going to go all the way...now we're getting up and we can see some things and feel a little stronger and a little freer and, you know, a kind of self-satisfied - some self-confidence. 27HH
>
> •...I think it's just starting, starting to feel that I made the right decision and - positive thinking and there is something that I can build from this...14KK
>
> •...So I'm, I'm, feeling very happy now. In fact I don't regret any, anything you know? Like I just feel everything is picking up in the right direction. 73DD
>
> •...Everything just seems to be going the right way. I can't explain it and I can't - You know, it just seems that everything is going right. Once in a while I have little bad days, but who ain't, eh? But I find everything is going where I want it to go... 42JJ

Summary. All of the participants in this study spoke of the many challenges that they encountered in the process of leaving their abusive partners. The majority of women began this process with a diminished social network, and factors such as continued isolation, poverty, and discrimination added to their struggles. The strategies that women used to build a new personal community and manage the challenges that they

faced provide a testimony to their strength, creativity, and determination. They offered many insights into this major life transition and shed light upon the kinds of resources which were helpful and those which require change. Their recommendations appear in the next chapter following the summary discussion.

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Chapter 7. SUMMARY DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The participants in this study have provided extensive data concerning the experience of leaving an abusive partner, accessing a shelter and re-establishing in the community. Much of these data serve to inform, in very clear ways, shelter and community practices. There is, however, another layer of understanding which has been shaped by the information from interviews, focus groups and informal conversations with the twelve women in this study, as well as from my own experiences in various aspects of shelter work, and which reveals the systemic issues that have contributed to women's experiences.

Women: Invisible Helpers; Invisible Resources. One important insight that emerged from participants' stories about this period of enormous transition centres around their spirited involvement in the helping process and the wealth of information and expertise that they exchanged with one another. On several occasions, this realization stood in stark contrast to much of the data about women who have been abused, information which not only shapes the image of a help"less", needy, battered woman, but also feeds the culture, and corresponding discourse and practice, of shelter work in particular, and social work in general.

Eight of the women shared experiences which indicated

that they had been actively involved as providers of social support. This support included childcare and transportation assistance, meal preparation, information-sharing concerning housing, the legal system and social assistance, and emotional aid. Women spoke of these experiences in ways which demonstrated that giving help was as important as receiving it, particularly with regard to their feelings of confidence and self-worth. This is not a new concept or an unfounded suggestion; it is a notion that is contained in the helper-therapy principle and supported by principles of empowerment, self-help and mutual aid (Katz, 1984; Reissman, 1976; St-Amand & Clavette, 1992). There is considerable merit associated with the role of helper and yet the kind of help which women were providing to one another, both during their shelter stay and in the community, remains relatively invisible. Indeed, it was only after rereading and studying women's transcripts that I became aware of the extent to which women were involved in helping others, and began to speculate on how it is that their work, their strengths, and abilities are overlooked.

It was after considerable reflection upon my own experiences as a shelter worker, that some of the ways in which women's helping work is rendered invisible became clearer to me. One of the best examples of this process can be found in the discourse of a shelter case management meeting. Here women are spoken about routinely in language which focuses on deficit rather than capacity. Women are

"problems" to be solved, and little consideration is given to their competency and resourcefulness or their ability to be contributors to the work of the shelter. As a result of this mindset, or what I refer to as a professional helper paradigm, rule-based solutions are developed to control the behaviours of the women and children during their stay. This paradigm shrouds the strengths and abilities of women, as well as the substantial helping work that they perform continually during their shelter stay. Consequently, their work receives little recognition or valuing.

The lack of recognition which women received for their roles as helpers was evident at several points during the interviews and focus groups. Two of those instances are worth noting. The first example centres around the complaints that were made by several women concerning an agency policy that prevents them from becoming volunteer helpers for two years. This policy renders the helping work that women performed during their shelter stay invisible, an act which subsequently serves to devalue this support work. As described earlier, these kinds of policies and practices, which clearly differentiate those who help from those who are helped, are typical of a social service orientation (Beaudry, 1985), a model which was relatively foreign to most shelters in their formation stages. The social service model, which the majority of shelters currently adopt, emerged during the time period when women, who worked in shelters, sought to achieve

stable funding as well as recognition and equitable wages for their work within their communities. The more radical type of shelters, which involve residents and former residents in the work of the shelter, have diminished significantly.

With the exception of research by Jan Pahl (1985), this shift in shelter service delivery occurred without the appropriate research data necessary to substantiate that a social service model produces outcomes that are preferable to more collaborative models of service delivery. Indeed, Pahl (1985) discovered just the opposite, and the majority of the women in this study also gave clear indication of the importance of being on both the giving and receiving side of the helping process. It seems relevant to question why research such as Pahl's (1985) has not been replicated. What would it mean to collaborate with current and former residents in the work of sheltering? From the participants' reports, they were already doing a significant portion of helping work. They were not, however, receiving sufficient recognition for this work. This next example underscores how important it is to validate women's participation as contributors of social support.

I was impressed by an interview that I had with one participant regarding the two-year policy. She said that she was initially upset by the policy but, as a result of feeling overburdened during the course of supporting some friends from work, came to appreciate that the policy would prevent her

from taking on this kind of helping before she was ready. She later went on to describe several instances in which she had provided valuable support to a former shelter resident and to women in her housing complex. She had also made concerted efforts to organize support groups for women in her neighbourhood community. Somehow the supportive help that she had given to others in the community was perceived as different from the kind of support work offered by an agency volunteer, and she appeared to be undervaluing her own abilities to help, particularly when this helping was compared to "shelter work helping." Katz (1984) describes this process in the following way:

> "...Despite Rappaport's insistence on 'collaboration' and Freire's on 'dialogue' between helper and helped, those who have more power can easily become oppressors, or in gentler terms, 'experts.' Even the best intentioned experts can create expectations and structures whereby an initial reliance on their knowledge endures. Those who seek to empower continue to direct the process of empowerment, and those who seek to become empowered continue to look outside of themselves for advice" (p.205).

It seems that the professionalization of sheltering may have increased the power and recognition of the women who are the paid service providers; yet it may have disempowered the women coming to the shelter for refuge. Since one of the goals of most shelters is empowerment, it is relevant to ask if a social service orientation is congruent with this kind of work. A model which fails to acknowledge the abilities and helping work of its service participants, and which

exacerbates their isolation and loneliness with many of its rules, policies and practices, is an approach in need of revision.

What this means practically is that women who access shelters are an enormous resource for the work of shelters both within the shelter and within the community. Ways must be found to consult and collaborate with women who are using, and have used, shelters to increase the benefits of the important work that is accomplished by shelters. Clearly the women in this study had a wealth of experiential information, which, as one woman challenged, was not understood by most shelter workers or other formal service providers.

As I write this report, the Canadian federal government has repealed the Canadian Assistance Plan, a decision which has eliminated common principles and standards and will continue to destroy a wide range of social services (Barlow & Campbell, 1995). The Ontario Provincial government, under the Harris Conservatives, has slashed spending to organizations through several of its ministries, including the Ministry of Community and Social Services. Shelters have not been spared from these cuts, and shelter advocates were told recently that lobbying against the Harris agenda will lead to special audits of shelter services which may result in further cuts to agency dollars (Toronto Star, 1995). It is crucial for women, particularly under such oppressive threats by government, to begin discussions about new ways of doing this important work

so that women will continue to have an alternative to staying with an abusive partner, an alternative which must include both in-shelter and community support.

Women: Visible Helpers; Visible Resources. Drawing upon the information provided by the women in this study and my own experience of shelter work, the following are suggestions for ways of including women who have accessed the shelter. Before the adoption of any recommendation, opportunities for dialogue must be arranged between service providers and those who have resided at the shelter to examine the ways in which women can and/or want to participate. Barriers to participation, such as lack of transportation and childcare, must be eliminated for these recommendations to be achievable:

1. Explain the options for volunteer work within the shelter and offer volunteer training to women when they leave the shelter.

2. Establish a Speakers Bureau using a train-the-trainer format. Several women indicated that they were interested in speaking publicly regarding their experiences, and their involvement would help to raise awareness of women's needs and their abilities, as well as the issues and the challenges that women encounter in their efforts to re-establish in the community. Additionally, it may increase the number of

financial donors.

3. Develop a buddy system, organized and managed independently by a group of former shelter residents. (Women in this study acknowledged that, for various reasons, some women may not want to be connected to the shelter).

4. Create an advisory group consisting of former shelter residents. The group would advise the executive director and shelter coordinator in many of their functions such as strategic and program planning and the development of service evaluation criteria.

5. Encourage women to serve on the Board of Directors; develop a policy which protects spaces for former resident board membership.

6. Organize a working group of former residents, shelter staff and community members to develop a community resource manual. Women who participated in this study thought that a manual was essential for women who were leaving the shelter. They discussed some of the strategies that they used to access resources and felt that a strategy section was a necessary component of any manual.

7. Arrange for women who have accessed shelters to come to share their experiences and expertise with women who are currently residing at the shelter (at house meetings, residents' groups, parenting groups, Drop-ins).

8. Practice capacity instead of deficit planning. Ask women at several points during their shelter stay - individually, in residents' groups, at house meetings - to discuss their strengths and how they might be interested in participating in the work of the shelter (for example, facilitating meetings, minute-taking, childcare provision, meal planning, organizing social evenings and welcoming new women and children who come in). Many of the participants spoke of their anxiety about the debts that they incurred during their shelter stay. It would be worthwhile to explore the kinds of circumstances under which women could receive financial remuneration, and target program dollars to this end. Develop other practices for recognizing the helping work that women and children residents do, such as a recognition/awards night, gift vouchers, and so on.

9. Explore with former shelter residents the feasibility of adapting the Peer Support Worker program, a project which has been operating in Cambridge, Ontario and is supported by the Community Action Program for Children, and funded by Health Canada. In this program, parents have received training to do

outreach work and they offer support to parents and their children (0 to 6 years) in the community. Peer workers receive an honourarium and their childcare and transportation costs are reimbursed.

10. Investigate the possibilities of emotional support practices in which former service users can both give and receive support. Various styles of peer counselling in which members receive the training necessary to exchange counselling support, such as Re-evaluation Counselling (Jackins, 1989), are practical and operate from a basis of equality.

It is important to acknowledge that this list is not exhaustive; it can be expanded and altered through the creation of an environment in which dialogue between women can continue. It is also important, particularly with the current and anticipated cuts to social programs, to find ways in which supports for women who are leaving abusive partners can expand rather than decrease, and which include them in all levels of the planning process.

Isolation, Discrimination and Poverty: The Importance of Social Support.

One of the criticisms frequently made of the shelter movement in general, and of shelters in particular, is that they offer little more than a "bandaid" in the overall problem

of wife abuse (MacLeod, 1989). This kind of criticism is difficult to challenge. The majority of shelter staff acknowledge that there is much more that could be done to support women who are leaving abusive partners. Too much work and too few resources are the responses frequently offered to counteract this criticism. One of the ways of managing the "too much work, too few resources" problem is to redefine the mandate of shelter work, which usually means that the parameters of service delivery constrict. This is certainly one of the factors that has led to a situation in which the work of shelters has become almost exclusively focused on the crisis of the abuse. Arguments that state that shelters cannot be all things to all people, or that shelters need to draw their service line clearly, are common during times of economic restraint. Painful discussions take up hours of staff time in an effort to come to a decision regarding the parameters of shelter service delivery.

Based upon the information shared with me by the majority of the participants in this study, it is obvious that prevention of wife abuse and the amelioration of its trauma must include strategies aimed at the crisis of isolation. Almost all of the participants entered the shelter with an unacceptably small social support network or personal community (Wellman et al., 1983). The shelter was generally able to offer the similar kinds of social support that one would obtain from a personal community - concrete, emotional,

educational, and social integration (Cameron, 1985; 1992). For a brief period of time, the extreme isolation and loneliness that women experienced was reduced. Women were invited into a kind of "pseudo-community," in which intense levels of intimacy, such as the disclosure of traumatic life circumstances, were encouraged. The majority of the women in this study spoke of the value of the depth of sharing, the emotional support from staff, and the exchange of supports with other residents. Women discovered when they left the shelter that only weak bridges - a Drop-in which occurred once every two weeks and a crisis line, the service of which was exclusively for "the crisis of abuse" - had been constructed to assist their transition to the community.

Most of the participants also reported that the abuse did not end and the loneliness, particularly during the first few months after leaving the shelter, was often excruciating. Women identified several roadblocks in the process of reconstructing a personal community. Barriers such as discrimination and poverty reinforced women's isolation and women described the feelings of desperation that resulted. One woman said that, as the Christmas season approached, she almost gave up and returned to her partner. The reason she gave for not returning was that she had left him the year before and knew the consequences of returning. Knowledge of consequences, however, did not ease the pain of her isolation. It was the building of a support network, which included

opportunities to participate in valued social roles, that helped her and the majority of others to manage this major life change.

Only one participant said that, with the exception of custody issues, her transition to the community had been a relatively easy one. She described the variety of support that she received from several members of her personal community, a community that remained relatively intact in spite of her other life changes. She, as well as many other participants, recognized the benefits of support and she went on to explore the possibility of creating a support group in her housing complex. Ultimately, the majority of the participants in this study maintained that having access to social supports was one of the most significant factors in successfully managing the transition to the community. They reported that the amount of transitional support offered by the shelter was minimal, and referred to the sudden absence of support as abandonment or a severing of relationship.

Many shelters do not offer extensive, post-shelter support for women and there are several possible reasons for this. First, the provision of post-shelter support is not a priority and funding is not directed to this end. It has only been in recent years that shelters have received dollars to provide outreach support and these dollars were recently slashed from shelter budgets. The second reason highlights the tendency of shelters to focus on the abuse as the crisis.

Outreach has not been given priority because it does not fall within the mandate of service delivery. Finally, after reflection upon my own discourse throughout the research process, which frequently refers to the shelter as distinct from the community in which it exists, I wondered if the shelter itself was not isolated from the community. If this is true, then it is possible to understand why the links that the shelter provides to the community are negligible. Certainly, given the history of the shelter movement and the frequently adversarial position that many shelter workers assumed in the struggle to gain recognition of the problem of wife abuse, it is also possible to understand the tentative relationships that shelters have experienced with members (individuals and organizations) of their community. It would be worthwhile for the shelter to re-evaluate its role and re-examine both the formal and informal connections and partners it could have within the community. This reassessment process would help to increase the number of connections and social resources available for women and children, resulting in a decrease in isolation and loneliness. The provincial Conservative government has intensified the anguish of women who must rely on welfare by cutting 21.6% of their assistance dollars. It is imperative that shelters take initiative, through collaboration with former residents and other members of the community, to find ways of increasing resources for women and their children and decreasing their poverty and

isolation.

The voices of the women in this study identified isolation as one of the principal challenges that they faced in their transition to the community. The second issue which caused an enormous amount of anger and pain was the discrimination that women endured as a result of their situation as a welfare recipient, a subsidized housing resident, a single parent, and/or an abused woman. They cited discriminatory and/or patronizing treatment from shelter workers, lawyers, doctors, counsellors, social assistance and housing workers, as well as from their own informal network. Women talked about the effects of such treatment; they felt embarrassed, ashamed and angry, and as a result several women said that it was difficult to reach out to or trust others. Rejection, and the possibility of further isolation, was important to circumvent, particularly if their children's dignity was at risk. Consequently, women said that they withdrew, avoided disclosures, or lied about their situations. For some women this exacerbated the loneliness that they were experiencing. One of the outcomes of seeking formal supports was to become further inferiorized. And although all of the women developed their own creative strategies for managing the discrimination, the pain and outrage remained.

Cameron (1989) has identified several of the major principles guiding community development interventions as a perspective for re-examining helping strategies for women who

have been abused. I have extracted some of these principles, which are listed below. They are essential guidelines for the development of strategies to counteract the oppressive and discriminatory treatment that women experienced, and they inform the majority of the recommendations in this section:

- In every actual or potential community of disenfranchised people, there exists untapped potential for leadership and for administering their own affairs. Helping strategies should develop these abilities.
- Collective responses - networks, mutual aid organizations, membership organizations, social action organizations - are essential components of overcoming the inferiorization (Adam, 1978) of a community of people.
- Positions of privilege and power are seldom, if ever, willingly given up. This is as true for professional helpers as for any other group enjoying their relative advantages (Alinsky, 1971; Cameron, 1985).
- When people are the victims of shared injustices and active discrimination, explicit discussion of these issues has to be a fundamental component of the helping process (Adam, 1978; Cameron, 1985; Freire, 1981).
- The concrete circumstances of oppression have to be changed. Oppressors cannot be left unhampered to continue to enjoy their privileges (Adam, 1978; Cameron, 1985; Withorn, 1984). (p.159)

I often reflected upon the amount of time and enthusiasm that was given in both focus groups to a discussion of the discriminatory behaviours and practices of the informal sector and, in particular, formal service providers. This was clearly a formidable issue in women's lives, regardless of the amount of time that had transpired since they had left the shelter. I certainly questioned whether the women in this study had been presented with any post-shelter, collective response opportunities, such as a social action organization or popular education events (Arnold, Burke, James, Martin, & Thomas, 1991), to assist in politicizing - instead of internalizing - the crippling effects of poverty and poorly coordinated, inadequate and/or victim-blaming services (Ryan, 1976). This apparent lack of opportunity may be another indication that a political approach to helping is waning, both among shelter workers (Cameron, 1989), and other professionals who work with women in similar circumstances. It is critical that the practices inherent in a political helping approach be espoused if women who access shelters are to withstand the increasingly vicious stereotyping that is occurring. The Conservative agenda has consistently targeted and labelled people who receive social, unemployment, and childcare assistance as one of the primary causes of the provincial deficit, a practice which has intensified the "anti-welfare recipient" atmosphere.

The majority of the women in this study spoke about a

third, debilitating issue, and one that is intricately connected to the isolation and discrimination that they experienced: poverty. The relative comfort of the social supports which they received during their shelter stay all but disappeared when they left to re-establish in the community. Debts owing as a result of their shelter stay and the financial losses incurred from leaving their partners, combined with inadequate social assistance payments quickly hurled these participants into the throes of poverty:

> "In its most recent study of poverty in Canada, the National Council of Welfare sounded the alarm: in 1993, as the economy emerged from the recession and showed a respectable level of export and job growth, Canada's overall poverty rate climbed sharply; the number of poor Canadians grew by almost half a million, mostly children. One in five Canadian children now live in poverty, 51 percent more than in 1989. And more than 90 percent of single mothers under twenty-five are now poor" (Barlow & Campbell, 1995, p.214).

It is crucial that links to economic resources and social supports be created to assist women in their transition from the shelter to the community. Indeed, women identified that, when they were able to obtain access to these resources, their loneliness diminished and their confidence in themselves increased. One of the community development principles outlined by Cameron (1989) supports this outcome:

> "Lack of access to basic economic and social resources is an important problem for many users of social services. With access to adequate economic and social resources, most people cope adequately with their own problems" (p.159).

How then are these links to be developed?:

1. Re-examine shelter mandate, policies, and procedures to ensure that the crisis of abuse and the crisis of isolation receive equal recognition. Practices which create or exacerbate isolation must be challenged and changed through continual dialogue with women who have resided at the shelter.

2. Develop shelter practices which will result in diminishing isolation; for example, explore the breadth of their current support network with women when they enter the shelter; provide educational resources and group discussions that explain the benefits of social support, and offer group discussions, facilitated by former residents, which teach the strategies of network building.

3. In collaboration with former residents, re-examine and identify positive, supportive community partners (formal and informal groups and organizations) who are willing to help women link and reconnect with the community, such as key helpers in neighbourhood groups, co-operatives, or subsidized housing complexes; contacts from religious or spiritual groups, teachers, principals, and/or contacts from parent-teacher associations; members of social action groups, coalitions, food co-operatives, and so on.

4. Explore the feasibility of satellite housing - residing with families within the community, a resource which still

occurs in some rural communities - as an option for women who are having difficulty securing housing or whose home is not immediately available.

5. In collaboration with the participants and staff, examine the potential for adapting the parent mutual aid organization model (Cameron, 1992) to the shelter Drop-in. A PMAO program is currently running in Cambridge, Ontario and meets three times a week for social support. Ideally, a PMAO is member driven and facilitated and offers opportunities for concrete, emotional, educational, and social integration support.

6. Explore the feasibility of developing a joint funding proposal with other community partners to secure support for outreach. Seven participants requested face-to-face, outreach support from some of the shelter workers.

7. Provide opportunities for women to share their experiences with community groups, the media, the local Provincial Member of Parliament, at board meetings, and so on. Some women said that they wanted to speak out to others but were not given the encouragement or practical assistance to do so. Women also spoke of the benefits that resulted from telling their stories in this research. Consult with former residents to identify the barriers which block them from telling their stories to others and strategize to remove those

barriers.

8. Explore the various political, or transformational, approaches to education and research, such as popular education and participatory research, the content of which is focused on the situation of oppression and potential strategies for social change (Arnold et al., 1991). Incorporate these methods into training sessions, meetings, program planning, and outcomes research.

These recommendations offer several points of entry for both validating and changing a system which had its beginnings as the shelter movement. They are recommendations which arise from the thoughts and hopes of the women in this study as well as from the insights that I have gained as a result of conducting this research. The next section provides a brief summary of my own learning, outlines the implications of the findings and offers suggestions for further research.

Summary of Findings.

When I began this study, I had acquired certain understandings about the experiences of women who leave abusive partners, access shelters and re-establish in the community separate from their partners. These understandings were based upon what I had learned from the literature as well as from many aspects of my own experiences, and particularly from my role as a shelter worker. As I reflected upon what I

understood prior to this research, and what I have learned from the twelve women who shared their experiences with me, several significant impressions emerged. These impressions, or insights, were discussed throughout the course of this report and are summarized as follows:

1) The majority of the women experienced severe isolation both pre-shelter and post-shelter. Shelter work must recognize and address the crisis of isolation in conjunction with the crisis of abuse.

2) Women's stories indicated that social support and, in particular, social integration support (Cameron, 1985; 1992), was critical during this major time of transition. The majority of the women valued the social support that they received during their shelter stay.

3) The majority of the women identified that feelings of abandonment were associated with the act of leaving the shelter. They described a severing of relationship and said that shelter supports diminished significantly, or ended, at this time.

4) The descriptions that women provided of their shelter and post-shelter experiences suggest that there are outcomes to a social service/legal protectionist model of

service delivery that may be counterproductive to the outcomes that sheltering is trying to attain.

5) Women related many experiences of overt and covert discrimination, from both the formal and informal sectors of the community, which were directly related to their poverty and status as welfare recipients, subsidized housing residents and/or single parents.

6) Women said that many of the community supports/resources were inconsistent in service provision, difficult to locate and poorly coordinated.

7) Women's helping work within the shelter and the community tended to be undervalued or overlooked.

8) The wealth of experience, creativity, expertise, and insight that women have regarding this major transition remained largely untapped due to their exclusion from the work of sheltering and, as a result of poverty and discrimination, from the larger community.

Implications of Findings.

The insights from this study provide helpful new knowledge, challenge stereotypes and accepted practices, and suggest areas for further research. First, the findings

indicate that pre-shelter isolation has a profound effect upon women's transition to the community after leaving the shelter, a transition that is made more painful as a result of current shelter practices. I have described this as a "crisis of isolation," because the significance of women's isolation, in the process of leaving an abusive partner, has been lost in the "crisis of abuse" focus that sheltering currently maintains. Women's reports emphasize the relevance of social support, and particularly social integration support (Cameron, 1985; 1992), in the development of strategies to alleviate isolation.

The findings also suggest that a social service, or legal protectionist (Beaudry, 1985) style of service delivery may be counterproductive to the work of sheltering. In this instance, the social service method of service delivery contributed to women's isolation through a two-year, no-contact policy, rendered their helping work invisible, and contributed to the stereotype, or paradigm, of a "needy, battered woman." The information that women provided about their experiences repeatedly challenges this stereotype. The tendency to pathologize women who have been abused has occurred in concert with the professionalization of shelter work, a process which is not only harmful to women's sense of self, but also shifts the focus away from the oppressive situations that they encounter on a daily basis: poverty, minimal opportunities for rebuilding a personal network, poor

coordination of community services, and discriminatory treatment from both the formal and informal sectors of the community.

The findings also challenge our notions about helping, that is, who has the ability to help and under which circumstances, and who receives recognition for helping work. In particular, the results of this study challenge our beliefs about women helping women within the context of shelter work, and reveal the harmful consequences of social relations that support separation, exclusion, and lack of consultation.

Finally, this study provides insights that are informed from a combination of a "strengths" and "need" research perspective. The findings offer a more balanced and complete portrayal of women's experiences. As a result, new information is available about the resources and relationships that women find helpful and problematic in the process of leaving an abusive partner, information that is based upon the expertise, creativity and insights of the women who have experienced this transition.

Directions for Future Research.

There is a need for further research concerning women's shelter and post-shelter experiences within other communities. This study focused on one shelter and one community and the sample size was small. In order to ensure that future research remains relevant and helpful, it should be action-

oriented and participatory in nature.

Other areas of investigation are indicated by the findings of this study. Further research that explores the relationships between types of shelter service delivery and shelter outcomes, such as the study conducted by Pahl (1985), is necessary if we wish to develop a clearer understanding of the role that shelters play in helping women in their decision to leave abusive partners and re-establish in the community.

Several of the participants said that they wished that the shelter had offered some kind of outreach. It would be useful to interview women who have had outreach support to broaden our knowledge of the function of this support in women's transition to the community.

Finally, it is critical to acknowledge that the focus of this study did not permit me to address, in any comprehensive way, the differences in women's experiences as they related to race, culture, social class, age or ability. It is important to carry out further research with women to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which these differences affect their transition to the community.

Conclusions.

The women in this study spoke of the many ways in which the shelter helped them and hindered them in their efforts to re-establish in the community. The information that they shared about their experiences in the community repeatedly

confirmed the importance of having access to concrete, educational, emotional, and social integration support (Cameron, 1985; 1992).

Women also identified, through their similar and different stories, the wealth of experience, expertise, and insight that they had concerning the challenges of re-establishing in the community, the kinds of supports that are respectful and useful, the strategies that help to manage these challenges, and the changes that are needed to make the transition a more positive one. Unfortunately, their expertise has remained largely untapped. One of the reasons for this omission is rooted in the changes which have occurred in sheltering. After two decades, the shelter movement has shifted and become part of the social service system, a process which has erected a barrier between women who access shelters and those who work there. The barrier has been built on the false assumption that the positions of resident and service provider, as they exist within the context of women helping women to escape abuse, are mutually exclusive. It is time to take apart this barrier and acknowledge that the expertise that all women have, regarding the process of leaving an abusive partner and re-establishing in a community, must be shared and recognized on a continual basis, if the goals of ending and minimizing the effects of wife abuse are to become attainable.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

I understand that I am being asked to participate in a research study which is being conducted by **Susan Gadbois** under the supervision of: **Dr. Gary Cameron.** This study is part of a requirement of the Master of Social Work degree for Susan Gadbois and will be on file at Wilfrid Laurier University, Faculty of Social Work.

Susan is currently a part-time shelter worker at Guelph-Wellington Women In Crisis and has been on staff for the past four years. I am aware that I may have had contact with Susan during my shelter stay and that any information I shared during that time is confidential.

The purpose of this study is to better understand women's experiences in community after leaving a shelter. The information collected in this research will be used to promote this understanding.

I realize that I am being asked to participate in an interview which may take approximately one-and-a half to three hours. Susan or a professional typist, also bound by confidentiality, will write up the interview. I will receive a copy of this interview and can add or clarify information. I will be able to identify any part which I feel concerned about being misused. I will also receive a summary of the results. I can give my feedback about the results in either a group discussion or in an individual interview, both of which will take about two to three hours. I will receive $25.00 at the first interview to reimburse me for my time and any costs such as childcare and/or transportation.

I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate in this study without penalty to me. I may also withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I would ordinarily be entitled. I may refuse to answer any question during the course of the interviews.

I have received a list of the resources which are available to me in the event that difficult emotions arise as a result of my participation in this study.

I understand that no one from Guelph-Wellington Women In Crisis or anywhere else will be able to identify me through any publication or discussion. The use of direct quotations will be limited to those that do not disclose my identity.

I understand that my research records will be kept confidential and that no one will have access to them without my written permission.

I understand that, by law, Susan is required to report certain kinds of disclosures. These include disclosures of a threat to harm myself or another person or disclosures of current and/or ongoing child abuse.

I understand that I have a right to have all of my questions answered regarding any part of this research by Susan or her advisor.

I will receive feedback on the overall results of this research before it becomes a final report. I understand that a copy of this study will be available for all of the participants.

If I have any questions about the research, the procedures used, my rights, or any other research related concerns, I may contact Susan at 836-1110 or 836-6831, or her supervisor, Dr. Gary Cameron at the Centre for Social Welfare Studies in Waterloo at 884-1970, Ext.6998.

I acknowledge receiving a copy of this informed consent.

_____ _____

Investigator Participant

Date: _____

APPENDIX B

OATH OF CONFIDENTIALITY

I _____ will not disclose the identity, or any identifying information, of any woman who participates in this focus group.

Signed: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C

FRAMEWORK FOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Introductory statements:
   - review goals/purpose of study
   - reminder that she has a knowledge, perspective and experience that is valuable to understand
2. Review how the information will be handled (confidentiality) and who it is for; review the informed consent; discuss tape recording - explain that she can have the recorder stopped at any time; reinforce that I am asking women to tell me the things that they feel comfortable in sharing and that if, at any time during the interview, she needs to stop to let me know
3. Discuss the time frame of the interview process; summary report; focus group
4. Answer any questions; help participant relax

II. GENERAL INFORMATION

1. How long ago did you move out of the shelter; length of stay
2. Personal information: age; number of children; How would you describe your financial situation? Do you think of yourself as belonging to an ethnic or religious community?

III. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What has been happening in your life since you left the shelter?

   Probes:

   • informal relationships/supports - family, children, friends, ex-partner, co-workers, peers, neighbours, religious affiliation, informal community groups

   • formal relationships/supports - lawyer, social service worker, counsellor, other services (F&CS, housing..)

   • personal - skills, strengths

2. You have talked about some of the difficulties you have experienced and also some of the things that are going well. I would like to focus on what is going well. Describe for me the kinds of things that are going well. Probes: same as question #1; What is it that makes this helpful/work/happen for you?

3. How do the experiences you are having now compare with what was happening before you came into the shelter?

4. Discuss your shelter stay. In what ways has your shelter experience contributed to/not been helpful in your move back into the community?

5. What recommendations would you give to service providers, family, friends, co-workers, who support women who are going through this experience?

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT GUIDE

The following is a guide for the recruitment process.

1. Identify yourself. Explain that a research project is being conducted and that you have been asked to contact women who may be interested in participating.
2. Identify and describe the researcher (Susan Gadbois) and her position within the shelter.
3. Explain the purpose of the study: that Susan is interested in understanding what happens to women after they leave the shelter; that the study is part of the requirement for her Master of Social Work degree. Explain that twelve women are being recruited and discuss the criteria, i.e. women who stayed in the shelter for at least two weeks and who have been living in the community separate from their partners for: three to six months; more than one year.
4. State that participation in the study is completely voluntary and that Susan will receive your (woman's) name only if you agree to participate in the study. Reinforce that only you (the recruiter) will know who has been contacted and who has declined. Stress that future service from Guelph-Wellington Women In Crisis will **not** be affected regardless of her decision.

5. Discuss what her participation will involve: the first interview will take one-and-a-half to three hours; the second interview will take place as part of a group discussion; if she is not comfortable with a group format she can choose to do a second interview (both the group and second individual interview will take from one to three hours). Explain that interviews will be audiotaped.
6. Explain the opportunities for feedback that she will have regarding the transcript and the summary report: she can add information to the interview, clarify information, and identify any parts that she feels sensitive about being misused or that might identify her.
7. Explain that she will receive $25.00 in an effort to reimburse her for her time, childcare and transportation costs.
8. Discuss confidentiality procedures, including the consent form, and her anonymity regarding the final report.
9. Answer any questions. Explain that she can take time to consider this information before making a decision. Ask her for a good time to call her back in order to obtain her decision.