
Domestic Violence Shelters and Minorities: An Assessment of Minority Victims' Needs and the Extent of Minority Involvement as Shelter Staff

Introduction and Study Rationale

Last year staff of the North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCCADV) approached staff of the North Carolina Criminal Justice Analysis Center, of the Governor's Crime Commission, about the possibility of conducting a joint research study regarding the presence of minorities in domestic violence shelters as both victims and shelter staff. The Analysis Center had previously studied minority related criminal justice issues such as: disproportionate minority confinement in the juvenile justice system, and crime and victimization patterns within both the American Indian and Hispanic/Latino communities in North Carolina. Staff of both organizations discussed the issue at length and agreed that a research study would be beneficial and that its results might be a strong catalyst for developing future programs and for shaping policy and legislation in a positive manner in order to better assist minorities who seek the services of domestic violence shelters.

It should be noted at the onset of this report that one unexpected criticism was received regarding the survey itself. Several respondents refused to participate and either mailed the Analysis Center or telephoned staff. Their concern revolved around a perceived implication that the shelters were discriminating on the basis of race and they were quick to note that domestic violence (DV) shelters are colorblind and offer equal services to all. Their concern was given the highest degree of consideration and the GCC researchers and NCCADV staff appreciated their honest and candid comments. The DV shelters are colorblind and should be applauded for this.

However, it should be noted that the research study did not imply either overt or covert discrimination nor was the intent of this study to ferret out such practices. Indeed, the study objectives were completely in

opposite contrast to this concern. All programs should be colorblind in terms of client selection, service provision, and the hiring of personnel. However, once clients have entered a program or staff have been hired, different racial, ethnic and cultural norms should not be ignored, in fact they should be respected and highlighted. Consequently the study objectives were to:

- 1) Examine the nature and extent of minorities in DV shelters as victims, children of victims and service providers;
- 2) To identify any special needs that minority victims and staff have; and
- 3) Identify any existing and innovative programs which target minority victims of domestic violence.

Methods

Survey Instrument

A five page, 33 item survey was compiled which sought to address the issues noted above. Specifically, the survey consisted of four distinct parts. Part one sought to ascertain information about adult victims with questions relating to the racial/ethnic composition of the shelters' current population as well as the racial/ethnic breakdown of shelter service provision during the year 2000. Other questions addressed minority specific programming, plans for possibly starting such programs in the future and any relevant and specific needs, issues or concerns which minority victims of domestic violence may possess.

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Part two addressed the issue of children and childrens' services within the shelters. Again, an emphasis was directed towards existing and future programs and any special needs that minority children who reside in a DV shelter may have. Part three sought to delineate a profile of shelter staff and to ascertain the extent to which staff were fluent in other languages. Part four sought basic information about shelter location and allowed survey respondents to explicate any other thoughts, comments and/or concerns regarding the issue of minorities in DV shelters.

Survey Sample

The survey instrument was mailed to all domestic violence service providers (N=88) as contained on the NCCADV mailing list. Shelter staff were encouraged to participate via an accompanying cover letter from the Executive Director of NCCADV and to contact members of the Analysis Center if they had specific concerns or questions. A second follow-up mailing was conducted in order to improve the survey response rate as well as to increase survey generalizability and validity and to insure equal representation across the state.

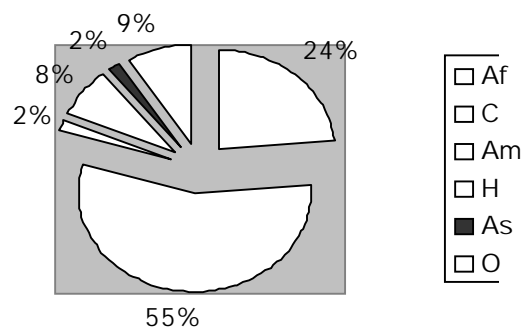
A total of 42, or 47.7 percent, of the shelters responded to the survey and returned completed questionnaires. A cursory review of the shelters' locations indicate a solid distribution of returns based on geographic coverage as well as county population with both eastern and western, and rural and urban counties being represented.

Results

Adult Victims

Survey respondents were asked to provide the total number of clients served during the current month of the survey administration by a race/ethnicity and gender breakdown. A total of 731 victims were reported as being involved with the shelters during this month, with the number of clients served ranging from two to 146 during the month. The average number of clients who were served during the month of the survey administration was 17.4. Figure 1 graphically depicts this population by race and ethnicity.¹

Figure 1 DV Shelter Service Recipients by Race/Ethnicity (July 2001)

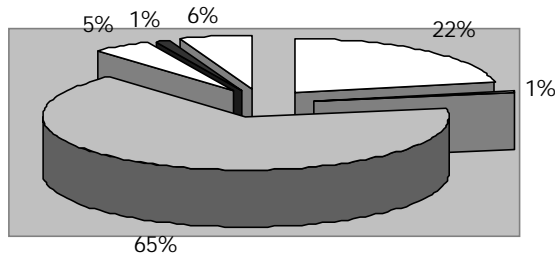


¹ Figure 1 presents the breakdown for women only as this is the largest group served based on gender. A total of 23, or 3.1 percent, of those served during the month were male. Of this number four, or 21 percent, were African-American males with the remaining 19, or 79 percent, of the male victims being Caucasians.

As the figure on page 2 indicates Caucasians and African-Americans constituted the greatest proportion of shelter attendees during the month the survey was administered. With a few exceptions, as a general rule the percentage breakdown for the shelter attendees roughly matches the racial/ethnic composition of North Carolina as identified in the latest 2000 Census. However, Hispanic/Latino DV victims were greatly over represented compared to their numbers in the state's general population. African-Americans were slightly over represented in relation to their membership in the general population.

Data for calendar year 2000 indicate that the 42 shelters who responded to the survey provided services for 5,386 victims of domestic violence. Of this number 5,302, or 98.4 percent, were female and the remaining 84, or 1.6 percent, were male victims. The number of clients served ranged from eight to 730 with the participating shelters serving an average of 138.5 DV victims per year. Figure 2 depicts the racial/ethnic breakdown for the female victims who received services in 2000.

Figure 2 DV Shelter Service Recipients by Race/Ethnicity (2000)



As with the monthly data presented in Figure 1, Caucasian and African-American females were the most frequent groups to receive the services of DV shelters. Hispanic/Latino, other ethnic groups, and Asians and American Indians followed respectively. Comparisons with 2000 Census data indicate an under representation of Caucasian females with African-American and Hispanic/Latino victims being slightly over represented in proportion to their presence in the state's general population. When contrasted with Census figures, the proportion of Asian and American Indian service recipients paralleled their representation across the state.

Survey respondents were queried about any minority specific programs or services that their shelters offered. Only 14, or 34.1 percent, stated that they offered programs or services that were specifically geared towards addressing the needs of minority victims of domestic violence. However, these shelters reported that nearly half (40%) of their clients took advantage of these unique programs and services. The majority of these programs and services were directed toward providing assistance to Hispanic and Latino victims with translation services, Spanish language brochures, and support groups being available for non-English speaking victims. One respondent noted that a support group for African-Americans was available, while another shelter responded that they hired American Indian staff to assist American Indian victims who enter the shelter for assistance.

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Survey respondents were also asked if their respective shelters had plans to develop or offer minority specific programs or services in the future. The respondents were split on this issue with 50 percent responding in the affirmative and 50 percent responding that no such plans existed. Of those shelters which plan to offer future minority specific services or programs, all will revolve around providing assistance to the Hispanic and Latino community. Shelters are planning to offer more written material in Spanish; to hire Spanish speaking staff; and to start Hispanic Outreach programs, some of which will involve collaboration with Hispanic/Latino faith based groups and churches.

The survey also sought to elicit input from DV shelter staff on any special and identifiable needs, services or issues that they thought existed within North Carolina's diverse minority communities. Fifty percent of those surveyed reported that language barriers posed the greatest difficulties for their work and that there was a strong need for more bilingual staff and court advocates as well as interpreters and Spanish written material. Other special needs or issues that minority DV victims often face include: discrimination and prejudices towards them, low income housing and the social problems that are often found there, an inability to obtain credit, the lack of adequate transportation, child care and barriers to obtaining an education and/or a job.

Respondents noted that harassment, violation of restraining orders, or other disturbances which were created by an abuser, were either very rare or rare occurrences at their shelters (88.1%). Staff from seven (11.9%) DV shelters reported that these types of problems occurred often or very often. Shelter staff varied considerably in terms of their perceptions regarding the extent to which these disturbances affected their minority clientele. Minority victims were reported as not being affected at some shelters while other shelters reported that they were affected 100 percent of the time. Despite this wide variance, the

shelters as a whole reported that minority victims were only affected in 13.2 percent of the cases which involve belligerent abusers who trespass on the shelters' property.

Childrens' Issues

Shelter personnel were asked several questions pertaining to children in general and minority children who witness domestic violence, as well as questions regarding programs and services which target these children. All of the participating shelters do offer living accommodations for the children of their clientele. Shelter staff estimated that on the average, 45 percent of the victims who enter their shelters have children and of this number, roughly half (45%) bring their children to the shelters when they arrive.

Three, or 7.7 percent, of the shelters have programs or services which were specifically designed to serve minority children. These include cultural diversity training programs and materials for younger children and an Hispanic Outreach program. Shelter staff were also queried about any specific needs, services and programs which minority children who are exposed to domestic violence in the home may possess. Most of the respondents noted that the issues that these types of children face are similar and transcend all racial and ethnic boundaries. However, other respondents did identify issues that may have a more profound collective and cumulative impact on minority children and youth. These included: the language barrier, the absence of a positive role model, inadequate health care, discrimination and low self-esteem.

Eleven, or 31.4 percent, of the shelters do have plans to develop programs and services which will be primarily, but not exclusively, targeted to minority children who witness domestic violence and find themselves within the shelter environment. These include English language classes, hiring an Hispanic counselor, and Spanish materials and books.

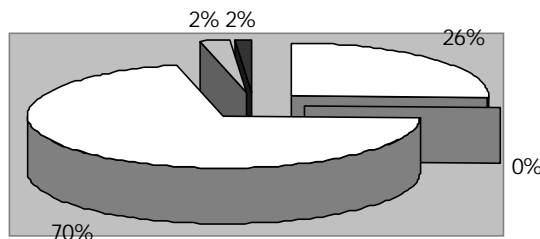
Shelters are planning to offer more written material in Spanish; to hire Spanish speaking staff; and to start Hispanic Outreach programs, some of which will involve collaboration with Hispanic/Latino faith based groups and churches.

Domestic Violence Shelter Staff

Figure 3 depicts the racial/ethnic breakdown of DV shelter personnel. A total of 262 staff positions were identified by the respondents with 70.2 percent (N=184) of the staff being identified as Caucasian, 26 percent (N=68) as African-American, 2.3 percent (N=6) as American Indian, and 1.5 percent (N=4) as Hispanic/Latino. These proportions are roughly equivalent to Census Bureau estimates and those DV shelters that participated in the survey appear to be models for equal opportunity employers. However, none of the shelters had any Asian staff and the Hispanic/Latino staff was

slightly under represented in relation to their numbers as enumerated in the 2000 Census. It should also be noted that the staff composition parallels the clientele racial and ethnic breakdown as depicted in Figure 2 with the exception of the Hispanic/Latino group which had far more victims of domestic violence respective to DV shelter staff personnel.

Figure 3 DV Shelter Staff by Race/Ethnicity



Respondents from 18, or 45 percent, of the surveyed shelters reported they had someone on staff who could speak a foreign language proficiently. A total of 32 different staff members from these 18 DV shelters were proficiently fluent in another language. Spanish was the most common second language with German, Cherokee, French and American Sign Language (ASL) also being

reported. Only two shelters required fluency in a foreign language for the specific job position that these individuals held. Of those persons who were fluent, 75 percent were available or on call on a 24 hour basis for translation assistance.

Numerous comments were provided by the DV shelter staff which emphasized their desire to assist all victims irrespective of race or ethnicity.

Neighborhood Attributes & Additional Comments

The majority of the shelters that responded to the survey were located in rural areas with 24, or 68.6 percent, of the respondents describing the shelter's location in this manner. Six, or 17.1 percent, were located in urban areas followed by four, or 11.4 percent, in suburban locales. The remaining shelter was located in a large metropolitan area. Seven shelters did not specify the type of neighborhood in which their shelter was located.

As part of the survey the respondents were asked: "Do you feel your location has an effect on minority intake, involvement and services?" Six (14.3%) respondents felt that the shelter's location did have an effect on minorities while twice as many felt that shelter location had no impact on minority intake, involvement and services. Numerous comments were provided as demonstrated below:

"Demographics have effect on all of these components for all races."

"Location is very convenient, public transportation."

"We are located in downtown and easily accessible to everyone."

"Yes, we are in one of the larger cities in the state."

"The location of our shelter is in walking distance to a minority neighborhood."

"No, our statistics are reflective of our community's demographics at this time."

"No, since its location is confidential it has had no effect on minorities."

"Yes, the minority clients know that we understand their ethnic culture and feel that we are a part of the neighborhood."

"Yes, very few minorities here."

"Our shelter is in a transitional multi-ethnic neighborhood which may make it easier for minorities to find/access and may make it more difficult for whites to access (or want to access)."

"No, because no matter what nationality the client is we treat them all equal."

"Yes, our location has made our services more available to minorities in terms of access."

"I do think the isolation of rural communities can restrict available information on services."

"No, I believe cultural ignorance and racism keeps people of color from using our shelter."

Numerous comments were provided by the DV shelter staff which emphasized their desire to assist all victims irrespective of race or ethnicity. Several respondents questioned the purpose of the study and others felt that it was offensive. The following quotes validate this, as well as offer other viewpoints from the DV shelters' staff regarding the issue of minorities in DV shelters.

"I think because we have initiated diversity training from the beginning our agency finds that we often overlook "color"."

"I find this offensive. I thought in year 2001 we would not be focused on reinforcing minority thinking."

"Focus on women as the minority and children the 2nd minority."

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" This survey indicates to us that assumptions are being made that North Carolina agencies are not treating people fairly based on race."

" This agency would have appreciated an explanation for the questions chosen for the survey."

" On August 6th we will employ an African-American woman to work with our community outreach liaison for the next 3-4 months."

" We are concerned with increasing services with minority groups."

" We do have a list of interpreters as well as Board members that speak Spanish."

" Because of funding cuts we have had to cut back on staff and services rather than being able to implement new services."

" We do not discriminate with our services or staffing."

" Shelter manager and shelter aides will be taking Spanish classes."

" In most cases, we respond to any request for survey information that is designed to assist in services for victims. However, this survey was not necessary or appropriate in this case."

" Unfortunately, domestic violence and its affects do not discriminate and our programs, while remaining aware of diversity issues, should not develop discriminatory services."

Recommendations

Based upon the study findings and discussions with NCCADV staff the following recommendations are offered as a means for addressing the issue of minorities in DV shelters.

- Investigate why more than half of the women with children do not bring them to the shelter. Where are their kids? Are they with the abuser, other family members, or do shelter rules prohibit some children from entering?
- Increase awareness about domestic violence services and shelters within the state's Hispanic/Latino communities.
- Actively recruit more minorities for DV shelter positions.
- Encourage the development of more services and programs which address the unique needs of minority victims of domestic violence.
- Remind DV shelter staff that treating every one the same, at the expense of purposely neglecting racial, ethnic and cultural differences, is not always in the best interest of the victim.
- Address the need for culturally sensitive service provision and cultural sensitivity training.
- Increase the number of shelter programs and services for children who witness DV.



SYSTEMSTATS

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The Governor's Crime Commission was established in 1977 by the North Carolina General Assembly under G.S. 143B-479. Its primary duty is "to be the chief advisory body to the Governor and the Secretary of the Department of Crime Control and Public Safety for the development and implementation of criminal justice policy." The Crime Commission is always open to comments and suggestions from the general public as well as criminal justice officials. Please contact us and let us know your thoughts and feelings on the information contained in this publication or on any other criminal justice issue of concern to you.

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Geographic Information Systems for Small and Medium Law Enforcement Jurisdictions (Systemstats)

Dispositional Outcomes of Domestic Violence Ex-Parte and Domestic Violence Protective Orders (Systemstats)

Domestic Violence Shelters and Minorities

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A Process and Impact Evaluation of the North Carolina Communities that Care Initiative

Geographic Information Systems for Small and Medium Law Enforcement Jurisdictions: Strategies and Effective Practices

Perceptions of Crimes Affecting North Carolina's Latino Residents: Results from a Qualitative Crime Prevention Needs Assessment (Systemstats)

National and State School Crime Trends (Systemstats)

Disproportionate Minority Overrepresentation in the Juvenile Justice System

Law Enforcement Tools for Latino Communities

North Carolina Citizens' Perceptions of Crime and Victimization (Systemstats)

Juvenile Day Treatment Centers - Strategies and Effective Practices

Law Enforcement Domestic Violence Units: Handbooks

Some of these reports can also be found on the Governor's Crime Commission website below:

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