

# Current Issues

Women's Refuges

by

Jaleen Caples

# Background Paper

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## Foreword

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Rob Brian  
Parliamentary Librarian  
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## The Author

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## Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	What is a women's refuge?	9
3	Statistical Overview	13
4	Current Issues - Policy	17
5	Current Issues - Resources	29
6	Summary	35

Appendix 1: Graphs: Statistical Overview

Appendix 2: Executive Summary Recommendations from **Domestic Violence Policy Review**, Department of Housing Research and Policy Unit, October 1992

Appendix 3: *Reasons for Seeking Priority Housing* from Department of Housing Request for Priority Housing application form

Appendix 4: Tables/figures from *Women in Australia*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, March 1993

***Will it be believed a hundred years hence that such  
a state of things existed?***

*[Louisa Lawson 10 June 1891]*

## 1 Introduction

- (a) Scope of the Paper
- (b) Overview
- (c) What is domestic violence?
- (d) Origins

### (a) Scope of the Paper

This Paper aims to provide a better understanding of women's refuges. It will link definitions of domestic violence to the work of refuges. A brief historical overview, and a demonstration of the relevance of women's refuges to wider social movements and changes, will be made. This Paper will illustrate the types of services offered by women's refuges, and the range of policies which affect their work.

Issues that confront women's refuges in the 1990s will be discussed. These include aspects of: medium and long term housing needs, planning of resources, safety and law enforcement, funding, outreach models of care, and the needs of women in rural areas.

A variety of sources have been used. They are: journal articles, community surveys, government reports, work conducted by Committees, press clippings, and other literature, such as books and pamphlets.

As far as possible, this Paper will rely upon the statistical evidence available. Where there are gaps in statistics, the experience of a number of workers in women's refuges will be used to provide anecdotal evidence.

Thoughts expressed by women with direct experience of domestic violence and refuges are included to provide an additional perspective to the issues under scrutiny.

### (b) Overview

Historically, charitable and church organisations attempted to meet the needs of women and children in violent domestic situations and in need of crisis accommodation. Yet, lack of discussion about domestic violence is said to have contributed to a sense of shame on the part of the victim. The extent of the problem was never truly known.

During the 1960s and 1970s women's rights began to be confronted and widely discussed. Refuges formed part of this movement since they

illustrated the problem facing women and provided a practical solution. The existence of refuges, it has been argued, permitted discussion on an issue hitherto kept secret, and gave an indication of the depth of the problem. The sense of shame and isolation felt by the victim began to dissipate.

Women's increased participation in the workforce has also been credited with increased awareness and response to women's issues. They impacted upon public policy. The experience of women in refuges contributed to this discussion. Information about the needs of women in crisis, previously felt, but unchronicled, began to emerge. This led to discussion and agitation for better responses to meet identified needs.

There are now 59 women's refuges in New South Wales. They are not all alike; they represent a broad spectrum of attitudes to women's issues, but there are two basic viewpoints which tend to characterise debate. The first may be termed a feminist perspective - the idea that the needs of women are linked to wider issues of gender inequality, violence by men against women, and women's rights to social and economic independence.

The second sees the maintenance of the family unit as paramount. Refuges would play a role in the reconciliation of the family. The criminal nature of domestic violence is played down since it is viewed as symptomatic of stresses facing the family.

Women's refuges have most often been associated with the feminist perspective. This view has been criticised for being didactic and making an explicit link between violence and gender, where this connection may not have ordinarily been made by the victim. Yet, this perspective argues that such a process is considered vital to shifting blame away from the victim, and to the recognition that individual suffering is not unique.

Demand for refuges is increasing. Although precise statistics are difficult to obtain, estimates are that approximately 950 people are accommodated each month in women's refuges in this State, with approximately 1150 people being turned away.

Funding for women's refuges is received through the Commonwealth/State Supported Accommodation Assistance program, or SAAP. Some refuges have also been assisted by service organisations such as Lions and Rotary who may provide one off funding for a particular need. Funding for capital works is also provided by the Commonwealth through the Capital Assistance Program or CAP.

While domestic violence continues to be the major reason for entering a refuge, homelessness itself is proving to be an increasingly significant factor. Yet, the accommodation provided by women's refuges is by no means their only function. Legal, medical, financial and emotional counselling are available.

The overall cost to the community of domestic violence in this State has been placed at \$1.5 billion per year, although this does not include the range of services which may seek to address the problem.

Women who are Aboriginal, from a non-English speaking background, and women who live in rural areas have special problems which may require different approaches to their needs. For example, Aboriginal women make up less than 2% of the total number of women, yet they made up 12% of all women accommodated in refuges in Australia on census night in 1991.

There is considerable debate on the interplay between domestic violence and socioeconomic status. This affects the location and resources allocated to refuges, since planning and funding are linked with certain presumptions of need.

The State Review of the SAAP, due for completion in July 1993, will feed into the National Evaluation of the Program, and may provide an opportunity for timely consideration of many of the issues concerning the women's refuge component of the Program which have been defined within this paper.

### (c) What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is clearly different to violence in a public setting. What is so confronting about family violence is that it is not expected to occur since 'our own experiences, values and attitudes about the family and intimate relationships'<sup>1</sup> do not include such images.

The definition given to domestic violence is crucial to an understanding of women's refuges. It also gives expression to the models of care adopted by women's refuges.

Domestic violence is said to include:

- \* 'Physical assault-punching, pulling hair, slapping, biting, kicking, twisting arms, throwing objects at walls. It can result in broken bones, miscarriages, and serious injury.'
- \* 'Sexual abuse-or unwanted sexual contact.'
- \* 'Verbal abuse-derogatory remarks, or threats of physical violence.'
- \* 'Psychological or emotional abuse-this can lead to lower self esteem, for example, telling the partner they are insane or stupid.'

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<sup>1</sup> Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce Family Violence: Everybody's Business Somebody's Life The Federation Press, 1991 p 95.

\* 'Spiritual abuse-is abuse at a deeper level, where the violence may involve cultural shame or humiliation.'

\* 'Economic abuse-control of the finances, preventing participation in economic decisions.'

\* 'Social abuse-constant control of outings and social activities.'<sup>2</sup>

There is no one definition of domestic violence. Definitions may vary between professionals involved, such as social workers, doctors, lawyers, and health workers. This impacts upon statistics collected.<sup>3</sup>

Three major aspects of domestic violence are commonly suggested. Most often these are based upon the workers view of whether physical force and threats were made. To a lesser extent it is based upon whether the victim was frightened, or what assistance or response the worker could offer the client.<sup>4</sup>

Importantly, contact with the police and the judiciary was considered in 'only the more extreme cases...(which were then) defined as crimes.'<sup>5</sup>

While many agree that women are more likely than men to be the victims of domestic violence, some have taken this notion, and traditional concepts of the family, further, to conclude that: 'there is a high correlation between traditional views of women's economic subordination to men and approval of husband's violence against their wives.'<sup>6</sup> Such views are associated with the feminist perspective of domestic violence.

By contrast, other views on domestic violence concentrate on the need for rehabilitation of both the victim and the perpetrator. Both parties are considered to be victims.

Women's refuges will continue to be needed (but) the perpetrators themselves have been victims, of abusive parents, of bitter divorce struggles between their parents, of school playground bullying, of wartime traumas...emphasis should be as much on the cure and rehabilitation as on prevention by deterrence and restraint.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid pp 62-64.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid p 67.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid p 67.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid p 68.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid p 61.

<sup>7</sup> Tapper, Alan *The Family in the Welfare State* Allen and Unwin 1990 p 96-97.

Reconciliation of the family is the main objective of refuges which view domestic violence in this way. Broad social action is not a feature of these refuges.

There is general agreement, however, that domestic violence is stigmatised, and difficult to discuss or disclose.

#### (d) Origins

The need for safe havens for women and children suffering as a result of homelessness and domestic abuse has always been a part of Australia's history. According to Summers (1975), Caroline Chisholm was appalled at the sight of distressed women in Sydney parks and would take them home, until she realised the true extent of their numbers.<sup>8</sup>

Violence against women was prevalent in the colony. Court cases of the time testify to the role of alcohol in causing men's violence; alcohol abuse being considered to be the cause of poverty, not its consequence.<sup>9</sup> Portrayals of violence in the street were consistently given much greater coverage than violence within the home; such a distortion misrepresented, and still obscures, the reality that the home is where most acts of violence occur.<sup>10</sup>

Contemporary law allowed and fostered this attitude, providing that the wife and children were possessions of the husband and father, and that any legal redress sought against him by these parties would not be entertained<sup>11</sup>: 'Man and wife were one person, and that person was the husband.'<sup>12</sup>

Women who left (the marital) home were eligible for charitable relief. There was some housing under church auspices for women and children in Australia who were escaping violent domestic situations, but this was fairly minimal. Most often, women sought work to support themselves,

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<sup>8</sup> Summers, Anne *Damned Whores and God's Police 'The Colonisation of Women in Australia'* Penguin Australia p 300.

<sup>9</sup> Scutt, Jocelyne *Women and the Law* Law Book Co Ltd Australia 1990 p 445. According to the *Medical Journal of Australia*, vol 158 March 15, 1993 p 404, 'Alcohol is also considered to be one of the identifiable factors in approximately 50% of domestic violence incidents'.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid p 446.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid p 446.

<sup>12</sup> Remark accredited to a nineteenth century feminist by Scutt, op cit p 446. According to Jane Woodruff, this situation did not change until 1891. Key-Note Address: *The NSW Domestic Violence Strategic Plan Papers and Proceedings, Local Domestic Violence Committees Conference July 1991* p 6.

despite the significant barriers which they faced.<sup>13</sup>

Protected accommodation for women was first called for by the suffragette movement in Britain and the United States in the late 19th and early 20th century. In Australia, Louisa Lawson, a prominent feminist, and the mother of writer Henry Lawson made similar calls.<sup>14</sup> But from 1920 until the 1970s, there was little action to turn this rhetoric into a reality. In 1971 the first women's refuge was established in Chiswick, London.<sup>15</sup>

In Australia it was not until 1974 when 'Elsie' was established in Glebe, NSW, that the needs of women and children, beyond that of crisis accommodation, began to be addressed and placed in a broad social framework. This maintained that: domestic violence was symptomatic of wider gender inequality. It was most often men who were the perpetrators, and women who were the victims.<sup>16</sup> As such, women's refuges provided a salient interpretation of many of the concerns raised by the women's movement.

In keeping with this rationale, the term 'domestic violence' has been criticised for being a gender neutral term. 'Wife beaters' or 'wife batterers' have been preferred terms by some who regard them as more indicative of the gender specific nature of the act.

Rape crisis centres were also coming into existence around this time. McGregor and Hopkins (1991) attribute the timing of these developments to women's increased participation rates in higher education, increased workforce participation, and the advent of contraception.<sup>17</sup> The femocrats, or feminist bureaucrats, have also been attributed with greater recognition of a range of women's issues, within public policy.

Since this time, women's refuges have been accused of a variety of motives and actions. It is important to provide a comprehensive, practical description of their work to prevent any misconceptions, and to demystify their intentions.

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<sup>13</sup> Scutt op cit p 446.

<sup>14</sup> McGregor and Hopkins *Working for Change: The Movement Against Domestic Violence* Allen and Unwin Sydney 1991 p xiii. This period has often been referred to as the 'first wave of feminism', and primarily focussed upon women getting the vote. (The current wave of feminism has been defined as being as late as the 1980s, although the 1960s witnessed a resurgence, due to the focus on oppressed groups, and demonstrations surrounding the Vietnam War).

<sup>15</sup> The English publication by Erin Pizzey: *Scream Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear* published by Penguin in 1974, provided additional impetus for thinking and instilling action on this issue.

<sup>16</sup> Importantly, going to 'Elsie's' brought to mind the concept of visiting a female friend, rather than an institution. Despite the conditions which it offered which were considered to be sub-standard, it was soon always full.

<sup>17</sup> McGregor and Hopkins op cit p 3.

*I left it until late at night before I came to the refuge so I wouldn't have to meet all those people. When you first meet a group of women, you wonder what its going to be like because you don't know them. But soon everyone starts to help each other, and it's really great. It's great when you realise that everybody's in the same boat and they care about you. You've always got someone to listen to you.*

*[In McGregor and Hopkins op cit p 49]*



## 2 What is a Women's Refuge?

- (a) Appearance
- (b) Goals
- (c) Special needs
- (d) Management

### (a) Appearance

The physical appearance of a women's refuge is deliberately no different from any house in any suburban street. Refuges do not seek to draw attention to themselves in any way; their anonymity being an advantage if someone is wishing to seek out a resident. Likewise, they guard their addresses as far as possible to prevent harassment.

Most refuges have a restricted entrance, and information will not be provided without the permission of the resident.<sup>18</sup> The house usually has no more than six bedrooms, and there is often some area for children to play. (Children of school age are encouraged to attend the local school.)

Residents usually have to share their room with others, although this may include their children. Facilities such as the kitchen and bathroom are of course, communal. Refuges charge a small contribution, but this is dependent upon ability to pay, and may be waived.<sup>19</sup>

### (b) Goals

Refuges provide more than just crisis accommodation. Their overall objective is to enable women to lead safe and independent lives. In the short term, refuge workers may help to organise medical attention if this is needed, as well as seek protection for the woman against the batterer, through the legal system.<sup>20</sup>

Medium term needs may include assisting women in organising their finances, and this often involves an application to the Department of Social Security. A refuge worker may explore the legal options open to women through the Police, or the local and family courts. They may refer women to other agencies, for example, child and family health. Workers also

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<sup>18</sup> McGregor and Hopkins op cit p 12.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid p 13.

<sup>20</sup> Cowell, Fran, Forum Papers NSW Domestic Violence Strategic Plan 1991 p 80.

provide emotional support through discussions on the cycle of violence, self esteem, relationship breakdown, and fear of the future.<sup>21</sup>

Longer term goals include access to safe and affordable housing, income security, child care, employment and retraining, and independent living.<sup>22</sup> The difficulty in obtaining these goals is considered to have been exacerbated because of increased demand for public housing.

Anecdotal evidence from refuge workers suggests that the average length of stay in refuges has increased from around 4-6 weeks in the 1970s, to a current level of about 3-6 months. Since the overall rate of turn over of women and children in refuges is lower, this may force others to remain in violent domestic situations through lack of any other viable alternatives.

### (c) Special needs

Three refuges in the State specifically cater for the needs of women from non English speaking backgrounds, including one refuge for Muslim women who face cultural mores which require particular sensitivity. There have been calls for more specialist refuges, particularly for Aboriginal women.<sup>23</sup> There is also a recognition that women with a disability, women from rural and isolated areas, and older women, may have special needs that set them apart from others in refuges.

Workers in refuges have to establish extensive networks with a range of support services in the community. Some refuges have outreach and advocacy services attached for women who may not need accommodation, but who may still need to be assisted and supported in the same way as those in the refuge.

### (d) Management

Overall models of care adopted by refuges provide an expression of their wider social aims, and an understanding of the management structure.

Saville (1982) cited three main models of women's refuges:

- (i) church-run organisations that receive government funding and which are generally run by a management committee, and may be answerable to a central church office
- (ii) refuges which see political change as their central role, and are generally run by a

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid p 80.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid p 80.

<sup>23</sup> Greer, Pam 'Domestic Violence in the Aboriginal Community' Local Domestic Violence Committees Conference July 1991 p 84.

collective with a nominal management committee

- (iii) a group which falls somewhere between the first two- they usually have a management committee which is separate to those working in the refuge, and may not be consciously feminist.<sup>24</sup>

#### (i) Casework

Those refuges which fall into the first category operate on a case management approach, viewing the individual as unique. They tend to make a clear distinction between the users and providers of the service. There are clear lines of accountability, and there is usually a hierarchical structure. The objective of these refuges is to assess the needs of the individual, and to work towards reconciliation of the family. This is usually in keeping with the religious values of the organisation.

#### (ii) Collective

There are a few refuges which operate as true collectives in this State. They operate without a hierarchy, and all workers are paid the same amount, regardless of length of time, or experience in the position.

The Collective model of care is reflected in their work with those in the refuge. They do not differentiate between the client and the worker in the refuge. Workers are not 'professionals with superior knowledge', but rather women with similar social restrictions and lack of power. For refuge workers to assume professional superiority would be antithetical to the philosophy of collectivity.

The notion of a Collective has also been criticised for its idealism, and the argument has been advanced that organisations which do not have formal structures still develop informal ones which may be just as pervasive. They have also been accused of being very inward looking, lacking in accountability, and distracted by tensions between employees.<sup>25</sup>

The Collective has been associated with the more radical feminist thought. The need to agitate for broad social action is a feature of these refuges.

#### (iii) Community Based Management

Most refuges fall into the final category, where a community based management committee, comprising interested members of the

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<sup>24</sup> O'Donnell, C and Craney, J Family Violence In Australia Longman Cheshire Melbourne 1982 p 95-96.

<sup>25</sup> McGregor and Hopkins op cit p 24.

community, make decisions regarding the broad priorities of the refuge, manage finances, and deal with any major policy issues. Staff of the refuge then make decisions regarding their own work practices, which do not fall into these categories.

### 3 Statistical overview

- (a) Demand for refuge accommodation
- (b) Refuges - the main prompt?

- (a) Demand for refuge accommodation

Accurate statistics on the numbers of women and children accommodated in women's refuges are hard to determine.<sup>26</sup> Some women and children may go to a refuge more than once over a twelve year period, but their numbers are not known, and there are no reliable indicators of length of stay.<sup>27</sup>

Despite these problems, in 1989 some 2500 people were accommodated in women's refuges in any one day in Australia, with more than half of them being children.<sup>28</sup> In 1991 on census night, there were 1497 women and children escaping domestic violence. (This figure does not include single women and children who may be homeless and similarly accommodated.) Other figures from 1984 cite 31,000 women and children as hiding in women's refuges in that year.<sup>29</sup>

Currently, there are fifty-nine refuges specifically for women in this State. In 1991, 4,093 women and 5,380 children found shelter in these refuges.<sup>30</sup> In the same period, it is estimated that around 50% of applicants were turned away.<sup>31</sup> The direct cost to the State government has been calculated at around \$400 million, although this does not include

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<sup>26</sup> Statistics are based on client episodes rather than client numbers. As a rough guide, 45.8% of the 2,133 client accommodation episodes recorded between April 1987 and March 1988 indicated that the current episode was the first stay in a refuge in the census period.

<sup>27</sup> The Department of Community Services were not able to indicate whether length of stay has been prolonged, but given the increased demand for public housing, and anecdotal evidence from women working in refuges, it appears that stays in refuges have lengthened considerably.

<sup>28</sup> According to the Department of Community Services and Health as quoted in *Working for Change 'The Movement Against Domestic Violence'* Hopkins, A and McGregor, H 1991 p 11.

<sup>29</sup> McGregor and Hopkins op cit p 11.

<sup>30</sup> Browne, Sheila Sydney Morning Herald October 14, 1992.

<sup>31</sup> This has been attributed to a lack of medium term supported accommodation, and longer term public housing. NCOSS News op cit p 12.

a range of other services for victims of such violence.<sup>32</sup>

The recession and increasing unemployment are widely considered to exacerbate violence, and thus place greater pressure on refuges.<sup>33</sup> Between 1 May 1992 and 30 April 1993, there were 9,452 Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders issued.<sup>34</sup>

The Office of the Status of Women estimates that 'one in three female partners is likely to be subjected to domestic violence at some time in her life, and nearly 50% of people know someone who is affected by domestic violence.'<sup>35</sup>

Yet the extent of the problem, it has been argued, has not been matched by community outrage condemning the act. Community attitudes, as suggested by a recent survey,<sup>36</sup> revealed that a third of all people in Australia consider that domestic violence is a private matter to be handled within the family.<sup>37</sup>

Further, one in five people consider that: 'the use of physical force by a man against his wife is acceptable under some circumstances, and that more than one quarter of the population would ignore the situation if they found out that a neighbour beats his wife.'

In another survey conducted by the New South Wales Department of Health it was estimated that one in five attending emergency wards in public hospitals have been assaulted by their partner.<sup>38</sup> The Marriage Guidance Council of Australia have indicated that of the 4,000 couples

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<sup>32</sup> This figure was quoted by the New South Wales Council of Social Service, 'Status of Women's Services and Policies in NSW - Liftout' NCOSS News Vol 19 No 2 March 1992.

<sup>33</sup> The Sun-Herald April 11, 1993.

<sup>34</sup> In the same period there were 8,163 Apprehended Violence Orders issued. This combined to make a total of 17,615 Orders issued. These figures were supplied by the Office of Strategic Services of the New South Wales Police Force.

<sup>35</sup> Office of Status of Women Pamphlet *Domestic Violence Break the Silence* (Statistics from Public Policy Research Centre *Domestic Violence Attitude Survey, 1988*; M A Straus, R J Gelles, S K Steinmetz, *Behind Closed Doors*, 1980; Alison Wallace, *Homicide, The Social Reality*, NSW Bureau of Crime, Statistics and Research, 1986; *Beyond these Walls, Report of the Queensland Domestic Violence Task Force*, 1988).

<sup>36</sup> Conducted by the Public Policy Research Centre in 1988 for the Office of the Status of Women.

<sup>37</sup> Office of the Status of Women *Community Attitudes Towards Domestic Violence in Australia* Social Survey Report Public Policy Research Centre.

<sup>38</sup> The Australian March 8, 1993. In one incident, a woman presented 35 times to a hospital casualty before it was realised that she was being repeatedly assaulted.

counselled, 37% admit to physical violence in their relationship.<sup>38</sup>

#### (b) Refuges - the main prompt?

Reasons cited for entering a women's refuge are manifold, but the overriding initial factor, apart from accommodation, is often described as the need to seek safety.<sup>40</sup> It has been estimated that up to 85% of women are seeking to escape a violent relationship with a male partner.

Economic dependency, sexual abuse, physical disability, mental illness, alcoholism, and the need to provide a safe environment for children, are some of the other major reasons given for entering a refuge. Homelessness itself, is also becoming an increasingly significant factor, and the New South Wales Council of Social Service has estimated that 13% of those in refuges are there mainly for that reason.<sup>41</sup>

Approximately 85% of women in refuges are dependent on either the sole parent, invalid/sickness pension or unemployment benefit for their income. About 3-4% have no income at all, whilst 4-5% receive wages or salary.<sup>42</sup> More than half of all women are accompanied by children, most of whom are 0-4 years. About 30% of other children were between 5 and 9 years.

According to statistics provided by the New South Wales Department of Community Services, 20.3% of women are Aboriginal and 28.6% are from a non English speaking background.<sup>43</sup>

Data from census night in 1991 indicates that 12% of all women in refuges in Australia identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, compared to less than 2% of the total population of women in Australia.<sup>44</sup> In a study conducted in one Aboriginal community in Queensland it was found that 'more women have died as a result of violent

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<sup>39</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 31 October 1993.

<sup>40</sup> Johnson, V 1980 op cit p 3.

<sup>41</sup> NCOSS News Vol 19 No 2 March 1992 p 12.

<sup>42</sup> Department of Community Services *National Census of Supported Accommodation Assistance Program in NSW* (April 1987-March 1988).

<sup>43</sup> Department of Community Services *National Census of Supported Accommodation Assistance Program in NSW* (April 1987-March 1988). There are 114,990 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Australia. They make up 1.5% of all Australian women. 872,000 women in Australia were from a non English speaking country. Australian Bureau of Statistics publication *About Women* using census data from the 1986 census, pp 2 and 14 respectively.

<sup>44</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics *Women in Australia* p 231.

assault than all the Black Deaths in Custody in that State.<sup>46</sup>

Women for whom English was not their main language made up 13% of those accommodated in crisis accommodation on census night in 1991.<sup>46</sup> A recent study conducted by the Australian Institute of Criminology found that marital murders were higher among those from a non English speaking background. This suggests a need for services to relate to women from non English speaking background.<sup>47</sup>

While little comprehensive information is known about the outcome for women upon leaving a refuge, the findings of a recent survey of twenty refuges over a twelve month period suggest that more than one in five residents will return to the same place and same situation.<sup>48</sup> This outcome is estimated to escalate to one in three residents in rural areas.

Behrens (1992) notes that along with physical injury, damage to independence and self esteem have economic consequences.<sup>49</sup> While speculation as to the annual economic costs of domestic violence has been placed at \$1.5 Billion, it is difficult to put a monetary figure on the longer term consequences of such violence, such as psychological damage, and future delinquency.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Thomas, Carol citing Atkinson, Judy (1990) 'Addressing the Concerns of Aboriginal Women' Local Domestic Violence Committees Conference Papers and Proceedings NSW Domestic Violence Committee July 1991 p 86. Atkinson notes that '53% of (Aboriginal) men who have died in prison cells over the last ten years were there because of acts of violence. 9% for homicide, 12% for assault and 32% for crimes of sexual assault'.

<sup>46</sup> ABS op cit p 231.

<sup>47</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 5 May 1993.

<sup>48</sup> These figures were concluded following a survey of twenty refuges by the Refuge Housing Action Group, between 1 July 1989 and 30 June 1990. (1,439 women and 1,989 children were surveyed). Cowell, Fran 'Study of Refuges: Experience Regarding Access to Public Housing' NSW Domestic Violence Strategic Plan Forum Paper No 5, p 80.

<sup>49</sup> Behrens, J 'Domestic Violence and Property Adjustment: A Critique of No Fault Discourse' Australian Journal of Family Law Vol 7 No 1 April 1993 pp 9-28.

<sup>50</sup> New South Wales Women's Co-ordination Unit 'Costs of Domestic Violence' NSW Domestic Violence Strategic Plan Vol 3 p 6.

## 4 Current Issues - Policy

- (a) Public housing
- (b) Needs based planning
- (c) Safety and law enforcement

### (a) Public Housing

The medium and long term housing needs of many women and children from refuges are considered by the Department of Housing. Four areas have been outlined for consideration in this section:

- (i) *the rate of approval for priority housing*
- (ii) *the data collection procedures for domestic violence*
- (iii) *the consistency of administrative procedures*
- (iv) *whether greater knowledge of how the 'system' works affects overall rate of success in gaining public housing*

In October 1992 the Department of Housing conducted a review into the needs of victims of domestic violence. This Review was in response to the New South Wales Domestic Violence Strategic Plan. Among the fifteen recommendations made by the Review, a few remain outstanding. Many of the recommendations relate to procedural change. (See Appendix 2 for the Summary of Recommendations)

### (i) Administrative Procedures

Requests for priority housing are referred directly to the Housing Review Committee which is independent of the Department itself. No culling of the applicants takes place at a Departmental level, but clearly Housing Officers are involved in the interviewing and preparation of such requests. Those who have not been offered priority housing after 28 days are referred to the Committee for further assessment of their circumstances.<sup>51</sup>

Recommendation Two of the Review calls for a more rapid turnaround time for the Housing Review Committee to decide on a priority housing decision, as well as notification in writing of the reason of rejection, if this

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<sup>51</sup> Hansard 4 March 1992.

is the outcome.<sup>62</sup> A policy statement (which encompasses the principles defined in Recommendation One) in the form of a brochure outlining housing assistance for people who are victims of domestic violence has yet to be developed. As the Review states: 'Written information currently available to staff on the provision of housing assistance to domestic violence victims lacks procedural detail.'<sup>63</sup>

Some refuge workers have argued that there is a perception in the minds of a number of officers of the Department of Housing that women requesting public housing who were from refuges were seeking to advance their position on the waiting list for public housing.<sup>64</sup>

The Review noted that: 'It is important that policies and procedures (are set down) which respond appropriately to the severity of the problem.'<sup>65</sup>

(iii) *Rates of approval*

Using the latest statistics available, the overall percentage of approvals for priority housing for women coming from refuges has declined, slightly. In the period between July 1 and December 31, 1992, there were 33,381 applications for public housing, with 9,414 of these requesting priority housing. Of these requests for priority housing, 993 applications were women from refuges, and 388 or 40% were approved.

Nearly one-third of those who sought priority housing in 1990-1992 through the Department were women presently living in women's refuges in this state.<sup>66</sup> In the ten month period between July 1 1991-April 1992, 45% of domestic violence victims were approved for priority housing. The majority, or 65% of victims of domestic violence came from refuges.

In the same ten month period, 78% of people with a disability were approved for priority housing.<sup>67</sup> Analysis of statistics between 1989 and 1992 reiterates this difference between the number of approvals for priority housing for victims of domestic violence, as opposed to the other major group eligible for priority housing- people with disabilities.

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<sup>62</sup> This recommendation has been recently implemented.

<sup>63</sup> Department of Housing op cit p x.

<sup>64</sup> According to the Annual Report of the Department of Housing for the year ending 30 June 1992, there has been a 9% increase in demand for public housing from the previous year, even though the private rental market has remained static.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid p v.

<sup>66</sup> The other major group represented were people with disabilities.

<sup>67</sup> Research and Policy Unit Department of Housing Domestic Violence Policy Review October 1992.

Further, victims of domestic violence who were in refuges were shown to have a higher overall approval rate (56%) for priority housing, than those victims from non-refuge accommodation (33%). Women in rural areas were considered to have more difficulty in gaining public housing due to the lower overall stock available.

The relative success in gaining access to priority housing by women from refuges has been attributed to the 'extensive knowledge of, and experience in dealing with, the issue of domestic violence' acquired by workers in the area.<sup>68</sup> The Department of Housing concluded that:

By-passing the refuge system would then deprive the woman of the kind of supporting evidence that can significantly strengthen her claim for priority housing assistance.<sup>69</sup>

The Department considers that this is at least partly due to the "inability of the 'third parties'..to adequately articulate the degree of risk faced by the victim" along with overall lack of community discussion and awareness of domestic violence.<sup>60</sup>

Although this difficulty is acknowledged, the Department stands by the requirement that domestic violence victims must substantiate their claim of domestic violence by providing evidence from a 'reputable' third party, even though this has been considered by some, to be a major barrier in seeking priority housing. The removal of this requirement, the Department argues would reduce overall equity in priority housing allocation, and prevent appropriate linkage with 'support networks' in the community.<sup>61</sup>

However, difficulties have arisen in a consistent interpretation of evidence provided. The Department concedes that staff have had difficulty in initial assessment, and in determining what constitutes a 'reputable' third party, and in providing equal weight to 'formal' sources such as the Police, Courts, and refuges, as opposed to less formal sources such as friends, relatives and neighbours. (Refer Appendix 1 Figure 2.1)

Consultation between community groups and the Department of Housing has suggested that Apprehended Violence Orders have often been required by Departmental Officers as proof of domestic violence, although this is in fact a breach of departmental policy.

The Review argues that the complexity of obtaining an AVO, and the

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid p 8.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid p 8.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid p 8.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid p 9.

demonstrated under-utilisation of AVOs by women who are Aboriginal or who are from a non English speaking background should be considered by the Department and policy influenced accordingly. The Review cites the example of 'one Aboriginal women's refuge in NSW only two residents have taken court action against their spouse since it was first set up ten years ago.'<sup>62</sup>

The criteria for priority housing has been criticised for being narrow. Workers in refuges have argued, for instance, that there should be a separate category for child sexual abuse, so that it may be grounds, on its own, for priority housing.<sup>63</sup> Presently, 'at risk' includes domestic violence, physical assault, racial harassment and/or verbal threats of violence. (See Appendix 3 for Priority Housing Form)

(iii) *Data Collection*

Statistics regarding victims of domestic violence began being kept separately by the Department of Housing in July 1991. An additional policy shift at this time also meant that all victims of domestic violence, whether they were from refuges or not, were exempt from the usual administrative cull of applicants for housing. (Prior to this time it had only been women from refuges.)

The decision to also exempt non-refuge victims of domestic violence in the administrative cull undertaken by the Department reflected Department of Community Services statistics which placed the turn away rate for accommodation in women's refuges at 58% in the period between July to December 1991.<sup>64</sup>

Despite these changes, the Department of Housing estimate that in the ten month period between 1 July 1991 and April 1992, 9% of non refuge domestic violence applicants and 4% of refuge domestic violence applicants were culled, accidentally. Although this was considered to be a problem, the Department concluded that it was perhaps too soon to gauge the impact of this policy change on approvals for priority housing since:

The seeming invisibility of domestic violence, particularly when compared to the problem of

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid p 10.

<sup>63</sup> Please see appended *Priority Housing* form released by the Department. Criteria used for the determination of priority housing includes: whether the applicant is presently located in Department of Housing accommodation; whether there are stipulations about location and type of dwelling; and whether the situation is life threatening.

<sup>64</sup> Research and Policy Unit Department of Housing Domestic Violence Policy Review October 1992 p 7.

disability, can be said to have contributed to the situation.<sup>65</sup>

(iv) *Changes to eviction?*

Among the other recommendations proposed by the Review were possible amendments to the *Residential Tenancies Act 1987* which would allow for the eviction, from both public and rented housing, of the perpetrators of violence towards a co-tenant.<sup>66</sup>

Currently, Section 68 of the *Residential Tenancies Act 1987* allows the landlord to evict the tenant if there is serious damage to residential premises, or injury to the landlord, landlords agent, or any person adjoining or adjacent to the premises. The Department of Housing Review noted that: 'It would seem incongruous that while tenants who cause nuisance and annoyance to neighbours can be evicted, tenants who cause violence to a co-tenant cannot.'<sup>67</sup>

There is some provision under the *Crimes Act 1900* for a Magistrate to 'restrict', rather than 'evict', the perpetrators of violence under Apprehended Violence Orders.<sup>68</sup> Under Section 562D 2a) the court is to consider: 'the accommodation needs of all relevant parties'. Refuge workers have argued that this provision is rarely exercised in favour of the victim, so as to allow them to remain in the marital/family home.

Some could perceive such a development as an erosion of tenants' rights so that those people who own their dwelling are not subject to the same behavioural scrutiny as renters, or public housing tenants. The landlord, or Department of Housing, would have increased power to evict on the grounds of perpetrated domestic violence. Some discussions have already commenced with the Anti-Discrimination Board on this issue. At time of writing, an Options Paper is being developed for the Minister's consideration.

Further recommendations include the development of stated principles, which would underline the Department of Housing's approach to the assessment of the housing needs of domestic violence victims.

Recommendations made by the Department of Housing which remain outstanding include: the need to rectify the regional differences evident in the level of training made available to housing officers; the development of

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid p 8.

<sup>66</sup> Recommendation 4 Research and Policy Unit Department of Housing Domestic Violence Policy Review October 1992 p vii.

<sup>67</sup> Department of Housing October 1992 op cit.

<sup>68</sup> Section 562D Crimes Act 1900.

a brochure containing a policy statement and an outline of the forms of housing assistance available to domestic violence victims; and, distribution of the Resource Manual on Domestic Violence developed by the Office of the Status of Women to officers of the Department of Housing.

(b) Needs based planning

(i) *Departmental Indicators*

Where refuges are located is dependent on the perceived need of an area. This is based upon a number of factors. The Department of Community Services presently use five indicators of need:

- the proportion of families on a very low income
- the proportion of males aged 18 plus who are married and receiving unemployment benefits
- the proportion of children who are notified for child abuse or neglect
- persons born in non-English speaking countries
- the proportion of the population who are Aboriginal

Until the release of the 1991 Census Data these indicators have been based on the 1986 Census and adjusted for population increases. (Please refer Appendix 4 for further details.) At present, an alternate model is being considered which would also reflect the socioeconomic status of a region, but a decision regarding any change to the current model has not been made at time of writing.

(ii) *Socioeconomic status and violence*

Lower socioeconomic status has most often been associated with the need to seek refuge accommodation. Devery (1991) cites three main reasons for scepticism over the link between socioeconomic status and domestic violence, these being: theoretical perspectives which have informed research; public awareness campaigns which have stressed that domestic violence affects all women; and differing interpretations of class and domestic violence in empirical research.<sup>69</sup>

Using a comparison between incidents of domestic homicide and domestic violence, Devery argues that there is a consistent bias, so that women of lower socioeconomic status are over-represented and may well be more at risk of violence in the home. Devery concludes that 'women who live in areas of low socioeconomic status are seven times more likely to be at risk

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<sup>69</sup> Christopher Devery New South Wales Bureau of Crime and Statistics Domestic Violence: A Regional Analysis 1992.

of domestic homicide than women in areas of high socioeconomic status.<sup>70</sup>

Devery's argument that there is a strong correlation between domestic homicide and rates of Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders, is supported by Wallace (1986) who regards the economic dependence of working class women as creating difficulties for them in extracting themselves from violent situations.<sup>71</sup>

Recent policy statements from the National Committee on Women and Violence, and the New South Wales Domestic Violence Strategic Plan have supported the notion that violence pervades all classes in our society, but women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be more likely to need refuges because of a lack of other viable options. Middle class women, it has been argued, may be more inclined to have greater family support, the ability to seek other accommodation, to talk to the family solicitor, the general practitioner, or psychiatrist.

Importantly, this does not imply 'that men (of higher socio economic standing) have less propensity to perpetrate family violence than men of lower socio economic standing.'<sup>72</sup>

Restructuring of the role of Community Program Officers (CPOs)- those people employed by the Department of Community Services at a regional level to provide surveillance and support to workers providing crisis accommodation, has meant that only a watching brief of services has occurred, and there has not been the opportunity to provide support and development.

As a result, it has been argued that there has been little tangible progress in the level of sophistication of needs indicators used in relation to women's refuges.

(iii) *Possible gaps*

Other indicators of need include length of stay. Evidence provided by some refuge workers suggests that stays are becoming increasingly longer, as other housing options are in great demand. While little may be known about those in refuges, and where they go, even less is known about those people who cannot get a place at a refuge, and the outcome of this

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid p 23.

<sup>71</sup> Devery op cit 1992 p 24.

<sup>72</sup> Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce Family Violence: Everybody's Business Somebody's Life The Federation Press 1991 p 112.



shortage for them.<sup>73</sup> One refuge worker estimates that demand is so strong that up to eight families are turned away each week.<sup>74</sup>

We cannot say beyond a shadow of a doubt where these victims end up but (we can) make an educated guess that many would have to remain in the same situation.<sup>75</sup>

As part of the requirements under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (or SAAP)- the funding scheme for women's refuges and other forms of assisted accommodation, a National Steering Committee for the Evaluation of the Program is presently commissioning six consultancies. (Please refer to *Funding* for more further information on this Program.)

Among the papers is one entitled, 'Women and Domestic Violence' which will address client outcomes and the adequacy of the current level of service delivery. Roy Morgan Research have successfully tendered, and will sample 2000 SAAP clients who are women and have been assisted by the program following experiencing domestic violence.

The characteristics, and needs of women, along with any significant factors in the provision of assistance will be sought. The central aim of the Evaluation will be to compare outcomes with the stated purposes of the Program.

The Steering Committee has identified three major gaps in current service delivery, namely: that there is insufficient data collected for non-accommodation services; not enough is known about where people come from, and where they go; and that for people who do not strictly fit the groups defined by the SAAP (eg. those covered under other sub program areas, such as people with a mental illness, people with drug and alcohol problems, veterans etc) but still require assistance, and may use a SAAP funded service.

A State Review of SAAP will be conducted by the New South Wales Department of Community Services and will feed into the National Evaluation. The State Review will focus on individual service delivery and needs indicators rather than the overall impact of the program. It will examine where services are located, whether there is any need for restructuring, and whether there is any room for negotiation.

Yet the existence of refuges has, of itself, highlighted a range of other

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<sup>73</sup> NSW Council of Social Service estimates that up to fifty percent are applicants who cannot find a place in a refuge. Others figures have estimated that the numbers are much higher.

<sup>74</sup> Sun-Herald April 11, 1993 p 12.

<sup>75</sup> Cowell, Fran op cit p 82.

needs for women. Some refuges found that they were housing women who were mentally ill, victims of incest, or were homeless. While the range of problems have not always provided a conducive environment in which to seek support (indeed many refuge workers consider it inappropriate that single women who may be mentally ill are housed with victims of domestic violence) there has been some important flow on affects. In 1983, for example, a refuge successfully sought funding for counselling for victims of incest. Refuges have also highlighted the needs of women in particular geographic regions.

(iv) *Local Initiatives*

Local Domestic Violence Committees began emerging in the mid 1980s, to address local needs, and to promote co-ordination and awareness of domestic violence. Membership may include workers in refuges, Police, representatives from the Department of Housing and the Department of Community Services.

In 1989, a Conference was held and attended by 28 separate Local Domestic Violence Committees. The 1991 Conference was attended by 56 local committees and there was said to be 70 Committees operating at that time in New South Wales.

Increased awareness of the legal provisions relating to domestic violence, investigation and monitoring of the enforcement and effectiveness of the legislation, greater co-ordination, and the recognition of violence as a crime, are important aims of such committees. (Further discussion is found in 'Outreach Models of Care'.)

(c) *Safety and law enforcement*

(i) *Law and gender*

According to Tobin (1991) the language of the law is not the only barrier in seeking equality before the law for women. Social conditioning and societal attitudes pervade the interpretation of the law, and those with responsibility for law enforcement, such as police and the judiciary, may well reinforce these inequalities.<sup>76</sup>

Using a number of cases, Behrens (1992) argues that there is a significant degree of gender bias in family law. She argues that this inequality should be redressed so as to allow for domestic violence to be considered within property settlements. In the case of Fisher (1990) FLC 92-127 allegations of violent attacks were dealt with by Justice Nygh on appeal who

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<sup>76</sup> Recent decisions made by Justices Bollen and Bland regarding sexual assault have been roundly criticised. See Sunday Telegraph 10 May 1993, also Sydney Morning Herald 7 May 1993.

considered that they were not relevant to any determination of the wife's future earning capacity.

In Hack (1980) FLC 90-886 the wife became a quadriplegic as a result of an 'incident' which took place between the two parties. Her Counsel argued that:

the property settlement should be commensurate with the sort of award she may expect to receive in other proceedings...(Yet) Bell J refused to follow this course of action, arguing that there was not 'sufficient evidence' (put before the court) to enable it to decide whether the assault upon the applicant was without justification or whether the respondent had some other form of defence.<sup>77</sup>

According to Behrens, vague references to a history of domestic violence do very little justice to the long term consequences of such acts which should be reflected in property settlements. Further, 'battered women rarely bring civil actions and one of the primary causes may well be the costs.'<sup>78</sup>

Tobin (1992) argues that the Commonwealth *Family Law Act 1975*, while allowing three types of injunctions<sup>79</sup> for victims of domestic violence, is ineffective in protecting wives from harassment and violence from their husbands.<sup>80</sup> 'Where a breach does occur, the onus is on the woman to prove beyond reasonable doubt that such a breach has occurred.' The essentially conciliatory nature of the Act, 'displays a lack of commitment to the criminal nature of family violence'.<sup>81</sup>

(ii) *Special needs groups*

Such views may be particularly pertinent for women who are Aboriginal since they are 'far more likely to suffer violence and death in their own homes and communities than anywhere else and are in fact safer in gaol.'<sup>82</sup> It has been argued that there has been a reluctance on the part of the police to intervene since such violence has been interpreted as a 'cultural difference'. For their part, there has been retaliation by Aboriginal women cite three types of violence which they endure, namely, 'alcoholic

<sup>77</sup> Behrens, J op cit p 18.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid p 21.

<sup>79</sup> Tobin, J op cit pp 857,858.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid p 860.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid p 859.

<sup>82</sup> Bolger, A *Aboriginal Women and Violence* (1991) as cited in Upton, J C R, 'By Violence, By Silence, By Control: The Marginalisation of Aboriginal Women under White and Black Law' *Melbourne University Law Review* Vol 18 No 4 1992 p 872.

violence, traditional violence, and 'bullshit traditional violence'.<sup>83</sup>

Distortions of customary law, or 'bullshit traditional violence' have condoned the violence and resulted in legal inaction.<sup>84</sup> Policy adopted by the Aboriginal Legal Service creates further problems since the service will not act for one Aboriginal against another.<sup>85</sup> According to Greer (1991) only one or two Aboriginal Legal Services (ALS) provide legal help outside their own agencies for victims, with the suggestion that the ALS be re-named the Aboriginal Men's Service.<sup>86</sup>

Atkinson has concluded that: 'assault in the home is the most critical issue Aborigines now face and recently warned that if it persists, Aboriginal culture could be wiped out within twenty years.'<sup>87</sup> By comparison, 'in the broader Australia, there is the sense that domestic violence is now a mainstream issue.'<sup>88</sup>

(iii) *Legislative change*

Changes to legislation governing firearms has highlighted rates of domestic homicide, and in turn measures for preventing the use of such weapons in the home. Of all domestic homicides between 1968 and 1986, 42% used firearms as a murder weapon.<sup>89</sup> Following the Strathfield Massacre, amendments were made to legislation governing firearms. The Joint Select Committee on Gun Law Reform also addressed the needs of people who are victims of domestic violence.

Additional, more stringent search and seizure procedures in the home were instituted following amendments to the Firearms Act 1989. These amendments were considered to be consistent with recommendations of the Joint Select Committee, and the Australian Police Ministers' Council.

During the months of May, June and July of 1992, 4,830 incidents of domestic violence were reported, with a total of 432 firearms seized as a result of the legislation which gave Police greater powers to seize unlicensed or illegally possessed firearms. Yet, some refuge workers have been critical that still more have not been confiscated.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid p 871.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid p 872.

<sup>85</sup> Greer, P op cit p 85.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid p 85.

<sup>87</sup> *The Australian* 15 March 1993.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> The Hon E P Pickering Hansard 17th September 1992 LC p 5913.

Criticism has also been levelled at the co-ordination of rules and regulations regarding domestic violence; they were seen to often work against one another and to be counter-productive. The words of a refuge worker reflect inconsistencies and problems brought about by lack of anonymity in rural areas:

The local cop plays golf with the batterer. The cop thinks the AVO has to be breached before he has to do anything. 'I've told him, the next time he breaches he really is in trouble'.<sup>90</sup>

However, there have been police initiatives to educate the community. In 1992, the Police undertook the campaign entitled 'Stop Violence Day' which provided information to victims on ways in which they can seek help, care and protection.<sup>91</sup> In 1993, there are now 179 domestic violence patrol officers in the State Police Force.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> McFerran, Ludo 'Housing in Bega: A Rural Perspective' Forum Papers The NSW Domestic Violence Strategic Plan July 1991 p 94.

<sup>91</sup> Hon Ann Cohen MP Hansard May 1, 1992 p 3355.

<sup>92</sup> Sun-Herald April 11, 1993.

## 5 Current Issues - Resources

- (a) Funding
- (b) Outreach models of care - alternatives to refuges
- (c) Special needs of rural women

### (a) Funding

Women's refuges operate a 24 hour service, so funding must reflect the labour intensive nature of the work. Funding is used for employing and training staff, payment of rent and rates, purchase of materials, including food, and other consumer goods, power, telephone, children's items and other expenditure.

In addition to the budget allocation, each of the community based organisations manages the financial and capital resources through considerable unpaid labour of management committee members, and other volunteers.

### (i) History

The history of funding for women's refuges has been characterised by shifts in assistance between the Commonwealth and the States.

Under the Community Health Program in 1975, the Federal Government made a commitment to fund all refuges which had begun operating. In New South Wales these seven refuges- namely, Elsie, Blacktown, Marrickville, Betsy, Bonnie, Bringa, and Wagga received federal funds which were then administered by the then New South Wales Health Commission.

From 1975 until 1981, women's refuges had been largely funded by the Commonwealth with varying degrees of assistance from the States. From 1981, funding had moved from the Commonwealth to the States, under general revenue grants. This had resulted in inconsistencies in the level of commitment given to refuges by the various State Governments.

In 1984, the Commonwealth introduced the Women's Emergency Services Program (WESP) in order to provide greater equity across geographic areas for these services for women. The WESP became subsumed under the SAAP Agreement in 1985.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid p 7.

There are now five sub program areas, and aside from women with children who are homeless and/or in crisis as a result of domestic violence, the program covers families- including single parent families; young men; young women; and youth.

*(ii) Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)*

Currently, funding for women's refuges is administered by the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program- or SAAP. This program is a 50/50 cost shared arrangement between the Commonwealth and the States and was introduced in order to prevent confusion and duplication of services for all people who are homeless.<sup>94</sup> The Agreement was first introduced in January 1, 1985 and was to last four years. A second Agreement was signed in July 1989.

The purpose of the Program is defined in the Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1985 as:

the provision by non government organisations or local government, with financial assistance from the Commonwealth and the States, of a range of supported accommodation and related support services, to assist men, women, young people and their dependents who are permanently homeless, or temporarily homeless as a result of crisis, and who need support to move towards independent living, where possible and where appropriate.<sup>95</sup>

The SAAP is administered in New South Wales by the Department of Community Services. Funding for capital facilities comes directly from the Commonwealth under the Capital Assistance Program (CAP). The second SAAP agreement also requires that the Program be evaluated on an ongoing basis, and that a Report be made to the Commonwealth and State Welfare Ministers, twelve months before the expiry of the Agreement. The due date for completion of the current evaluation is July 1993.

Present funding under the SAAP nationally in 1992-1993 is \$160M, and this funds 318 crisis accommodation services. Recurrent funding for the entire program in 1991-92 in this state was \$64M, with approximately \$18M of this funding allocated to women's refuges.<sup>96</sup> Of the total number of services based in New South Wales, 84 are directed towards

<sup>94</sup> Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Review Homes Away From Home. Prepared by Colleen Chesterman for the Commonwealth, State and Territory Welfare Ministers, January 1988 p 7.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid p 10.

<sup>96</sup> Department of Community Services Annual Report 1991-92.

the needs of women needing crisis and medium term accommodation.<sup>97</sup> One third of all SAAP services are located in New South Wales.

Since 1990, further groups of people have been identified as requiring high priority, due to previous problems they have experienced in accessing services. They are: Aboriginal people; people of a non-english speaking background; Youth- especially those who are chronically homeless and young girls at risk; single women, especially with young babies; homeless families; homeless people who are drug dependent; and homeless people with AIDS.

The State Ministerial Advisory Committee on the SAAP was reconvened in May 1992, and importantly provides the Minister with information from those working in the area - as well as those with policy expertise, on ways in which the Program can be improved.

Many refuges are also assisted by service clubs such as Lions and Rotary, and organisations such as the Country Women's Association who may provide additional one-off funding.

*(iii) Industrial award*

The advent of an award for workers in refuges in July 1991 placed considerable pressure on funding, since it required parity and conditions which had hitherto been somewhat neglected. The award was considered to be especially crucial however, in a sector which was seeking to diminish inequitable social conditions for women. Ignoring your own backyard when fighting for greater equality would be nothing less than hypocritical, it was argued. The upshot of the award had significant repercussions, and some refuge workers described the situation initially as chaotic.

It was first felt that the award may lead to a reduction in service for those refuges who could not meet the award with existing funding. Refuges which operate as collectives, where every worker receives the same wage, regardless of whether they have been there one month or ten years, were particularly strained, since there was no award for workers in a collective. Some refuges had already made a decision to pay wages which would be above the award, so these refuges were not greatly effected.

*(iv) Funding structure*

Pending the outcome of both the State Review and the National Evaluation of the SAAP, workers in refuges have expressed concern at any erosion in the overall structure of the current funding program. They are concerned

<sup>97</sup> 28 of these 84 services are medium term accommodation, so that the remaining 56 are for crisis accommodation. Department of Health, Housing and Community services and Department of Community Services statistics.

that moves to devolve responsibility in any way could lead to the inequitable distribution of services across Australia, as has arisen previously. However, problems have been identified in the areas of: improved statistical collection, development of services targeting specific groups of women, and a range of outreach services to support the work of the refuges.

(b) Outreach models of care - alternatives to refuges

(i) *General*

Not all women who are the victims of domestic violence need crisis accommodation. For these women, refuge accommodation may not be needed, but they still may require the same sort of assistance provided to women in refuges.

These women may still need information regarding the options that are available to them, and assistance in dealing with government departments, such as Social Security and Housing.

There is some debate as to whether outreach services for women should be located along with a women's refuge or whether they should be separate for some groups of women.

Some have argued that services located alongside refuges tend to follow-up those women who have been in the refuge, and fail to reach other women whose needs may not extend to accommodation.

Such arguments maintain that there is still a significant stigma attached to refuges, and most women would prefer to go to a Neighbourhood Centre, for example, where an outreach service may be located, rather than a service physically located within, or close to a refuge.

There are some successful models of outreach services for women who are victims of domestic violence, and which may also be more culturally appropriate.

Local Domestic Violence Committees are one example of promoting debate and community education about domestic violence which is pertinent to a particular group of women in an area. The Hornsby Domestic Violence Committee, for example, has developed a support group for older women who are victims of domestic violence (in an area where there a significant percentage of older people).

Similarly, the Ryde Hunters Hill Committee have targeted the Italian community by developing a radio program on an ethnic radio station. According to the then Minister Responsible for Women's Interests, the Hon Virginia Chadwick, 'the importance of Local Domestic Violence

Committees cannot be underestimated'.<sup>98</sup>

(ii) *Special needs groups*

Given the high percentage of women from non English speaking backgrounds who are in refuges, information must be accessible and culturally specific. The Minister cited government initiatives, such as the printing of wallet sized 'Stop Domestic Violence' cards which have been printed in 18 different languages, and contain phone numbers and contacts to people who speak their language, and which are easily accessible in times of crisis.<sup>99</sup>

Mygunya Aboriginal Corporation has established outreach services in the west of the State in Dubbo, Lightning Ridge/Walgett, Bourke and Brewarrina. These services provide accommodation and support, but are importantly staffed and managed by Aboriginal women.

In Albury a community education campaign is being conducted by the Women's Refuge entitled 'Don't Beat Around the Bush'. This involves seminars in a number of country towns in the region which seek to dispel the myths on domestic violence and to inform, and to link women into appropriate services.<sup>100</sup>

There have also been calls for young children to be informed about domestic violence, and to discuss conflict in the home. Dr Dawn Butterworth, a Researcher at Edith Cowan University in Western Australia has prepared a picture story book entitled 'Sometimes Mummy and Daddy Fight' following research which indicated that one in five Australian children come from violent homes.

These initiatives illustrate the range of strategies which may support and influence the work undertaken by women's refuges.

(c) *Special needs of rural women*

Rural women may face problems of isolation in the same way as women from the city, but many common issues are exacerbated by distance, the size and the lack of anonymity in smaller communities, fewer services, and

<sup>98</sup> As contained in her official opening address to the Local Domestic Violence Committees Conference Papers and Proceedings NSW Domestic Violence Committee July 1991 p 4.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid p 4.

<sup>100</sup> This program is being run through a project grant from the National Agenda for Women's Grants Program through the Office of Status of Women.

the larger overall extent of poverty.<sup>101</sup> Lack of resources, transport, supervision and support for workers may result in burn-out, undermining professional expertise and continuity of issues.

Isolation from centralised decision making of government departments may be problematic, since it may fail to recognise the particular problems facing rural communities. The familiarity of the people within the local community, may lead to unequal access to support and assistance.

Housing alternatives for women in rural communities are significantly lower than metropolitan areas. This situation seems to be getting worse rather than better, according to evidence provided in the Bega area. According to one refuge worker, five years ago 100% of priority housing applications were approved. In 1990, this reduced to about one third. In July 1991 there seemed to be less approvals for priority housing than ever before.<sup>102</sup>

Some of the strategies for improving professional support in rural areas include broadening the existing resources available, to include safe places for women through church based accommodation, or host families. It has also been proposed that there be greater networking through such devices as newsletters, and improved inservice and training of rural workers by relevant government agencies.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Lohse, Kate and Cosier, Gwen 'Workshop: Rural and Isolated Women' Local Domestic Violence Committees Conference Papers and Proceedings NSW Domestic Violence Committee July 1991 pp 93-94.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid p 93.

<sup>103</sup> Lohse and Cosier op cit p 95.

## 6 Summary

The recognition that violence against women in the home existed, but was being ignored, provided the original impetus behind the development of women's refuges. Refuges provided a new option for women and their children wishing to escape such domestic situations. Increasingly, refuges highlighted further issues affecting women. Agitation for greater response to meet broader social needs for women became associated with refuges.

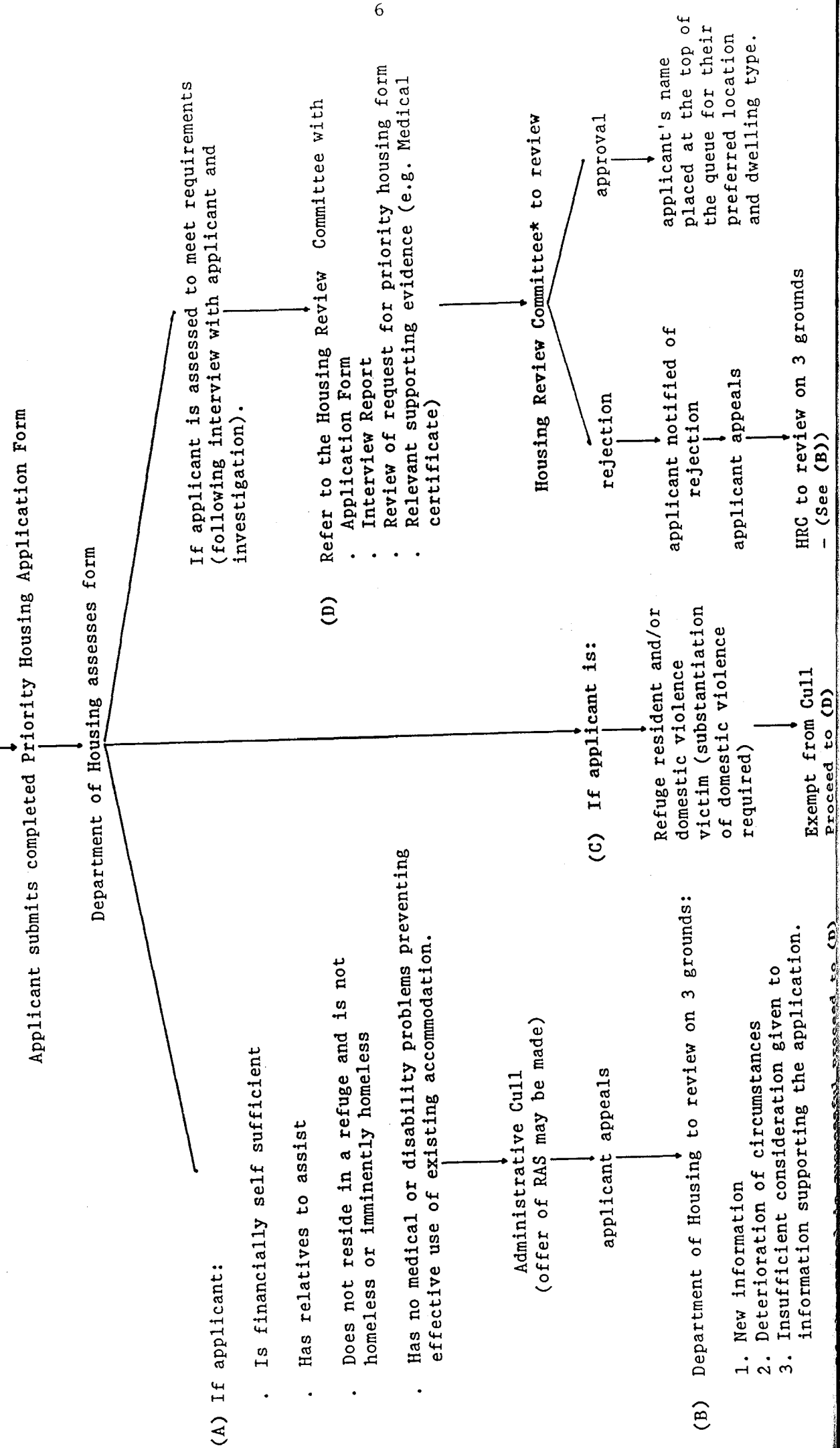
The definition given to domestic violence has characterised different models of care adopted by women's refuges. It is reflected in their style of management, and the work they undertake. It is the difference between broader social action, and concentration on the needs of both the victim and the perpetrator. The best point of intervention, the angle of most need, is under greater scrutiny in times of increased demand and finite resources.

Women's refuges are not the complete answer to domestic violence, nor to the medium to long term housing needs of many women in crisis. Outreach models of care may complement the work of the refuges and provide approaches which may be more relevant to the range of needs in the community.

## LIST OF FIGURES

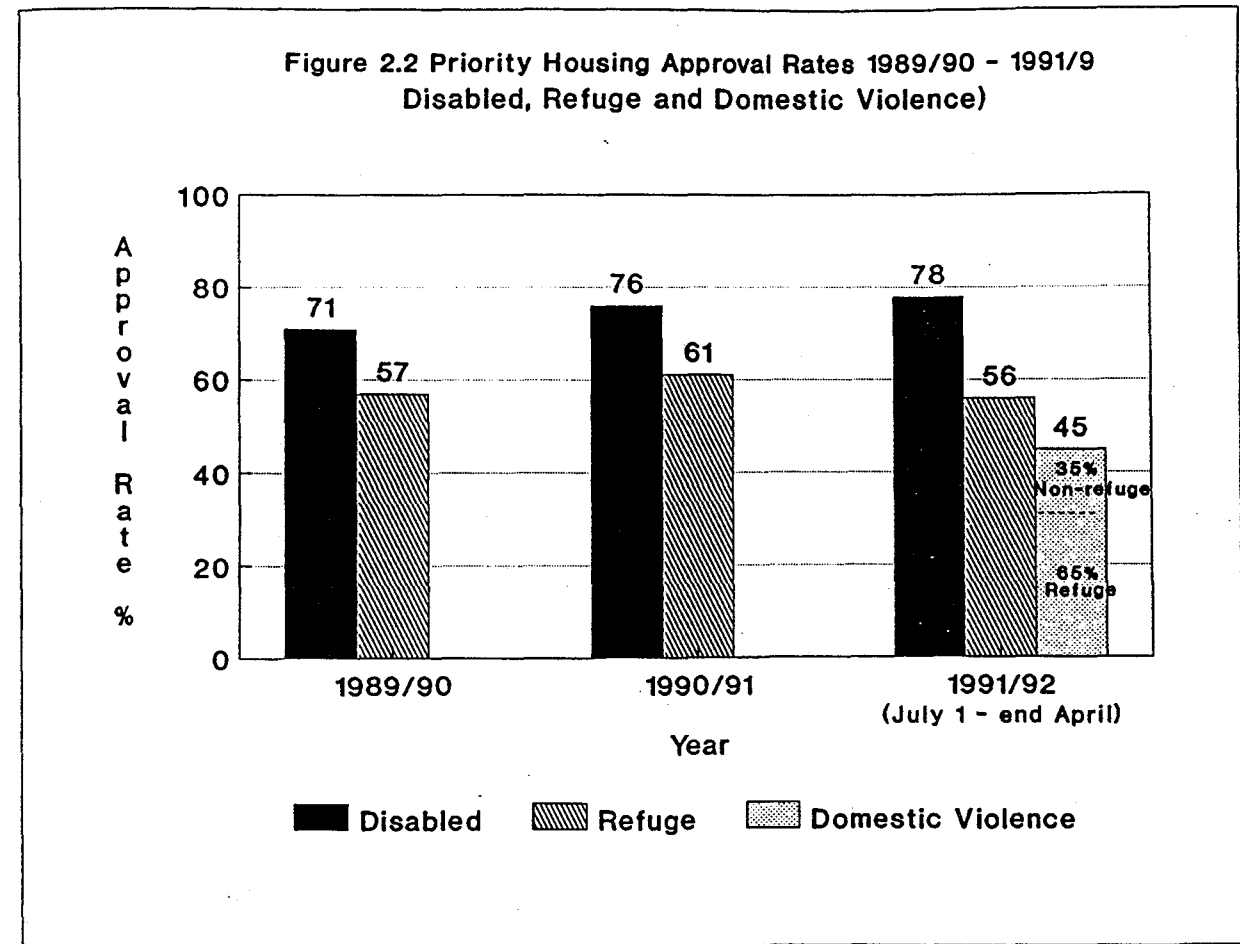
Figure 2.1	Assessment of Priority Housing Applicants	6
Figure 2.2	Priority Housing Approval Rates 89/90 - 91/92 (disabled, refuge and domestic violence)	7
Figure 2.3	Number of Households Allocated Crisis Housing 1982/83 - 1990/91	13
Figure 2.4	Number of Households Assisted with RAS and Annual Budgets 1987/88 - 1990/91	13

Figure 2.1 ASSESSMENT OF PRIORITY HOUSING APPLICANTS



of disabled applicants with definitive outcomes increased from 643 to 810 (26%), while the number of refuge applicants with definitive outcomes decreased from 803 to 762 (5%).

While both of the 'refuge' and 'disabled' groups featured dominantly among those approved for priority housing, it is significant that the 'disabled' category scored the highest approval rates of all. As illustrated in Fig 2.2, there has been a notable difference in the approval rates achieved by these two groups. Over the years, from 1989 to 1992, the refuge group - with domestic violence victims as its major component - has consistently 'under-achieved' in gaining access to priority housing as compared to its disabled counterpart. During July 1991 - April 1992, when domestic violence statistics were kept separately, domestic violence victims as a group had an even lower approval rate: 45% (360) compared to 78% (730) for disabled. Of those domestic violence victims approved for priority housing during this ten-month period, the majority (65% or 234) came from refuge accommodation.



The Impact of the Exemption of the Cull on Domestic Violence Victims

As indicated by fig 2.1, all priority housing applicants except domestic violence victims or those coming from refuges are subject to an administrative cull. The extension of the exemption of the cull from refuge residents to non-refuge domestic violence victims occurred on 1 July 1991. The rationale behind this policy change was that domestic violence victims may often be turned away from a refuge due to overcrowding, though their circumstances may be just as severe as those who are residing in the refuge. This policy change seems justified, given that in the period from July to December 1991 the turn away rate from women's refuges for those within the target group was as high as 58%<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup>Research and Data Analysis Branch; Department of Community Services.



Figure 2.3 Number of Households Allocated Crisis Housing 1982/83 - 1990/91

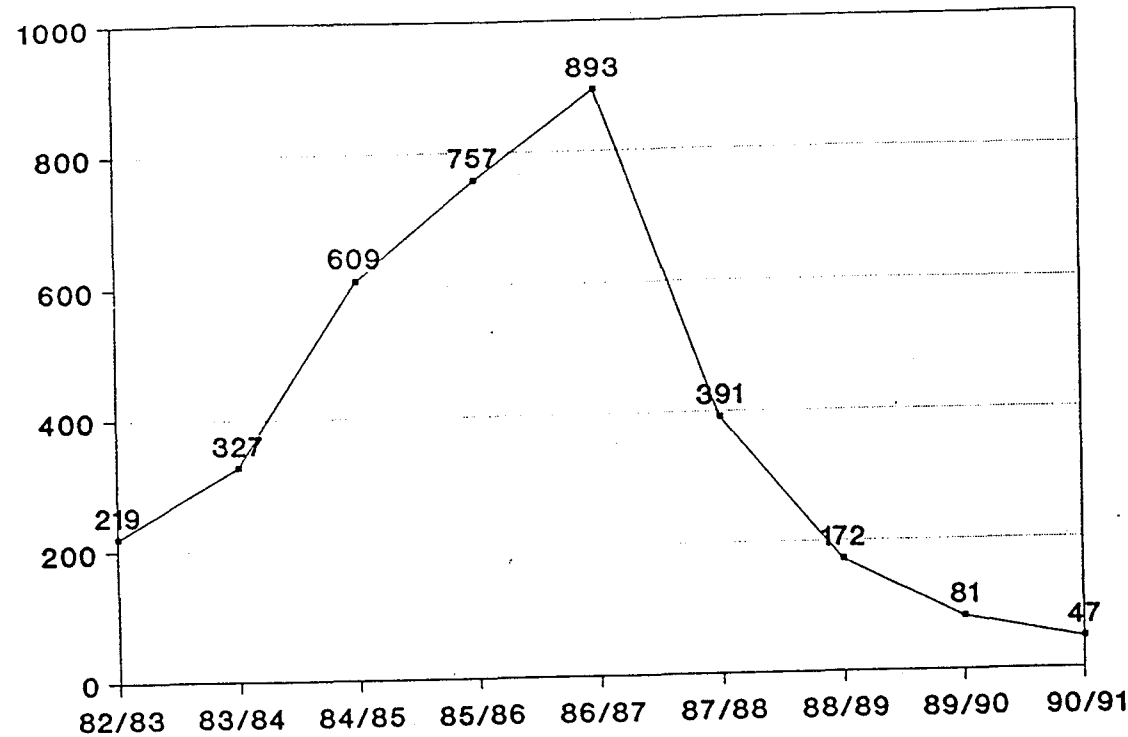
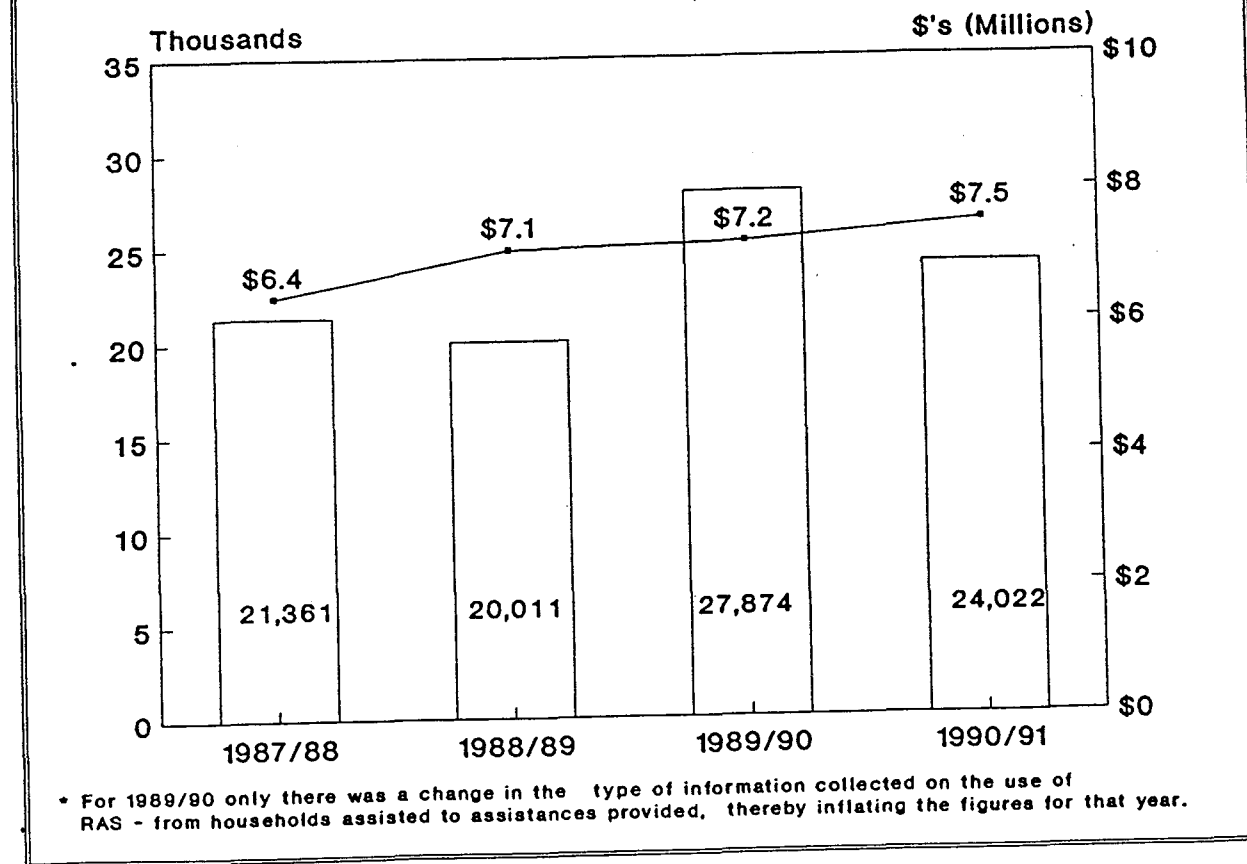


Figure 2.4 Number of Households\* Assisted with RAS and Annual Budgets 1987/88 - 1990/91



**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In 1991, the NSW Domestic Violence Strategic Plan prepared by the NSW Domestic Violence Committee was released. The Plan incorporated recommendations for all relevant Government Departments involved in providing services to domestic violence victims.

During the Strategy's development, the Department began reviewing its policies in relation to the allocation of housing assistance to domestic violence victims. A summary of the major findings and recommendations of the Review are presented below.

**The Inability of some Procedures to Adequately Respond to the Housing Needs of Domestic Violence Victims**

Due to the nature of domestic violence, victims often face sudden and severe homelessness which can result in total destitution. This type of homelessness is not widely understood by the community due to the lack of debate and exposure which the issue of domestic violence has generally received. It is not until recently that domestic violence has attracted Government attention and many policy responses. Despite this level of attention given to this issue, domestic violence is still associated with social stigma and is largely regarded in the wider community as a 'personal' problem. It is therefore important that Government Departments set down policies and procedures which respond appropriately to the severity of the problem. To this end, it is felt that the Department should first develop some guiding principles relating to domestic violence to assist staff in dealing with victims.

**Recommendation 1**

**The following principles should be adhered to when assessing the housing needs of domestic violence victims.**

1. **The safety of the victim and children are paramount in responding to requests for housing assistance from domestic violence victims. To this end, requests for housing assistance from domestic violence victims are to be dealt with as a matter of utmost urgency.**
2. **The victim's circumstances must always be kept confidential.**
3. **The rights of the victim are considered prior to the rights of the perpetrator.**
4. **The victim's locational preference is to be accommodated whenever possible.**
5. **Staff should provide effective referral and appropriate advice regarding Departmental policy when responding to cases of domestic violence.**
6. **All domestic violence victims are to be dealt with in a sensitive manner.**



Because of the type of homelessness experienced by domestic violence victims, priority housing is a most significant form of housing assistance. In its comparative analysis of access to priority housing by domestic violence victims and other groups, the Review found that domestic violence victims achieved a much lower approval rate (45%) than people with a disability (78%). It is apparent that as one of the 'at risk' situations, domestic violence can be life threatening to the applicant yet is generally not seen as contributing to as significant a housing need as does 'disability'. This finding highlights the problem of the concept of relative need which is so central to the priority housing system. The Review found that this process is fundamentally flawed due to its subjectivity, inability to identify cases involving urgent housing need or deliver prompt assistance to people in life threatening situations. It is therefore recommended:

#### **Recommendation 2**

**That the priority housing system be reviewed by the Research and Policy Unit as a matter of urgency. Because of the urgency of domestic violence victim's circumstances, it is important that temporary measures be introduced to assist staff in assessing priority housing applications from domestic violence victims. The following temporary measures, developed under the above guiding principles are to take effect immediately:**

- 1. One week turnaround time for decisions made by the HRC regarding requests for priority housing from domestic violence victims.**
- 2. Documentation of the circumstances of domestic violence victims and decisions regarding the allocation of priority housing to them is to occur throughout the assessment process. This is particularly important at the initial assessment stage where staff are required to gather information and provide a standard and high quality report to the HRC about the circumstances of the client.**
- 3. The client should be notified in writing of the reason for rejection of priority housing.**

A survey carried out by the Review identified some confusion among staff over the exact treatment of different forms of substantiation of domestic violence currently accepted by the Department. To remove this problem only the more formal sources of substantiation such as the police, the courts and community services should be accepted. This clarification should also assist the victim in gaining knowledge about a variety of assistance available to her and emphasising her rights to appropriate resources. It is therefore recommended that:

#### **Recommendation 3**

**Substantiation of domestic violence should be sought from one of the following**

- Local courts - (Apprehended Violence Order)**
- Community advocates including refuges, migrant centres etc**
- Police**
- Helping profession eg medical, social workers etc**

**If a domestic violence victim cannot substantiate their circumstances through the**

**above formal sources, the case is to be referred to an appropriate senior officer with a minimum 5/6 grading.**

Where the perpetrator and the victim are the Department's tenants and residing in the same dwelling, in the vast majority of cases, when assistance is sought, the Department will rehouse the victim. However, the Review has identified a number of problems associated with rehousing victims of domestic violence. One of the major problems is that the victim and her children can be isolated from their usual support networks. The length of time that the rehousing procedure often takes also tends to exacerbate the instability experienced by the victim at this time.

These difficulties indicate that more appropriate action concerning domestic violence would be to evict the perpetrator who, due to his behaviour, should be seen by the Department as being in breach of the tenancy agreement. Currently, the Residential Tenancies Act allows for the eviction of tenants who cause or intend to cause damage to premises or injury to the landlord, the landlords agent or neighbours. It would seem incongruous that while tenants who cause nuisance and annoyance to neighbours can be evicted, tenants who cause violence to a co-tenant cannot. It is therefore recommended:

#### **Recommendation 4**

**That the Research and Policy Unit, in consultation with Legal Services and the Residential Tenancies Tribunal, investigate the possibility of extending section 68 of the Residential Tenancies Act to incorporate the perpetration of violence towards a co-tenant as grounds for eviction.**

In the interim, to reduce the difficulties experienced by victims in relocating premises and so that the Department is not seen to be condoning the behaviour of the perpetrator, it is felt that as a matter of principle, it is the perpetrator rather than the victim who is to be relocated. Where possible, bedsit accommodation should be used to relocate the perpetrator who would not be allowed to reject an offer of accommodation on the basis of dwelling type or location unless exceptional circumstances (eg. medical conditions or disability) exist. It is recommended:

#### **Recommendation 5**

**When relocation is required in circumstances of domestic violence, the perpetrator is to be relocated (except where such a move is clearly disadvantageous to the Department) and the victim given a choice of whether they wish to remain in the dwelling or move elsewhere. Operations instruction No. 58 in the section relating to relocation for management purposes and the underoccupancy policy should be modified to reflect this. Where the victim wishes to remain in the dwelling or where the perpetrator seeks out the victim after relocation, action is to be taken to ensure the security of the dwelling.**



Written information currently available to staff on the provision of housing assistance to domestic violence victims lacks procedural detail. As well, there is a lack of written material about the complex issues associated with the experience of domestic violence resulting in a limited understanding by staff of the concept of domestic violence. It is important to provide such material to staff to assist them to provide appropriate assistance to domestic violence victims.

One initiative to redress this lack of written material has been developed by the national body Women's Housing Issues Working Party (WHIWP) on which all State and Territory Housing Authorities are represented. Two manuals have been developed, the Resource Manual to be used by staff on the issue of domestic violence and the Procedural Manual outlining procedures for staff to follow when dealing with domestic violence victims. The Review recommends:

#### **Recommendation 10**

**That the Resource Manual developed by the WHIWP and the Office of the Status of Women be issued to all staff and HRC members undertaking the Domestic Violence course conducted by the Department referred to in recommendation 9.**

and:

#### **Recommendation 11**

**That a copy of the Procedural Manual developed by the WHIWP and the Office of the Status of Women be provided to:**

1. HRC members
2. Each Department of Housing office throughout the State
3. Deputy Regional Managers
4. Managers, Housing Operations/Managers, Regional Services
5. Operations Managers
6. Team Leaders - Allocations
7. Estate Management Supervisors
8. Women's Refuges
9. Women's Medium Term Housing
10. Regional Tenants' Councils
11. All local Domestic Violence Committees
12. Migrant Resource Centres
13. Other community groups upon request.

Although the above recommendations go a long way to informing the community about the type of assistance the Department will provide to domestic violence victims, the community has stated on many occasions throughout the consultative process the benefit to them of having a domestic violence contact person within the Department. Such a contact person could provide information about policy and procedures as they relate to the circumstances of individual clients as well as clarifying policy when required. It has been noted by both staff and the community that personal contact is an important means of educating the community

about Department of Housing policy as well as informing the Department about policies and procedures of other Government Departments and community organisations in relation to domestic violence. One important established structure which would facilitate the Department's contact with the community is the local Domestic Violence Committees which have been set up to raise awareness of the issue of domestic violence in the local community and ensure the coordinated provision of services to domestic violence victims. To assist staff and the community to achieve closer coordination of services it is recommended:

#### **Recommendation 12**

**That the duties of Deputy Regional Managers be extended to incorporate the role of Domestic Violence Liaison Officer whose responsibilities will include:**

1. **The Regional contact for the community on all policies and information in relation to domestic violence.**
2. **Represent the Department on their local Domestic Violence Committee and nominate appropriate officers to attend local Domestic Violence Committee meetings throughout their Region.**
3. **Organise a seminar in their Region at least once per year to inform appropriate community organisations, Government Departments and members of the public on the Department's policy in relation to domestic violence.**

#### **Enhanced Data Collection Procedures**

A difficulty faced by the Review team in undertaking this Review has been the lack of available data on housing assistance provided to domestic violence victims. Quality data on domestic violence is considered vital to the effective monitoring of policy implementation and future policy review. The Review recommends that:

#### **Recommendation 13**

**For tracking purposes, any applicant or tenant, including other household members, experiencing domestic violence and seeking assistance from the Department be identified on appropriate computer systems. The types of assistance for which such identification is required include relocation - all categories; priority housing - all appropriate SNAC categories with indication whether or not the victim comes from a refuge; crisis housing; RAS; provisional eligibility and priority home loans.**

**It is also proposed that a new module on the ABC System be created to identify tenants and other household members who choose to remain in the original dwelling after the perpetrator has been relocated.**

**The confidentiality of client information is to be respected at all times.**

**Recommendation 14**

That the importance of efficient data entry procedures be reiterated to staff in appropriate operations instructions.

**The Need to Monitor Policy Implementation**

Given that there are a number of policy changes outlined in this Review to be introduced within a very short period, there is a need to monitor their implementation for evaluative purposes. In each Region the monitoring of policy implementation is to be undertaken by Deputy Regional Managers using the format to be provided by the Research and Policy Unit. 12 months after the release of the Review, the Research and Policy Unit will evaluate policy implementation with input from each Region. It is therefore proposed:

**Recommendation 15**

That the Regions be given responsibility to monitor changes to domestic violence policy using the format to be provided by Research and Policy Unit. The information will then be incorporated into the Research and Policy Unit's evaluation of the effectiveness of these changes.

Appendix 3:

*Reasons for Seeking Priority Housing from Department of Housing Request for Priority Housing application form*

**SECTION 5 - 10 REASONS FOR SEEKING PRIORITY HOUSING**

**CROWDING**

5.1 Is present housing overcrowded?  YES  NO

5.2 How many rooms are there in current housing? (do not include bathrooms and laundries)

**BEDROOMS**

**OTHER**



5.3 How many people live in current housing? (do not include people who are visiting for a few days or weeks)

**HOUSING**

6.1 Is housing of a very poor standard? (For example dangerous or condemned?)  YES  NO

6.2 Are there problems with the present dwelling? \_\_\_\_\_

6.3 Has the agent/landlord been asked to fix these problems?  YES  NO

If no: Why not \_\_\_\_\_

If yes: What has the landlord/agent done to fix these problems? \_\_\_\_\_

7.1 Is current housing insecure? (Indicate below the reasons for insecurity)  YES  NO

7.2 Refuge

7.3 Temporary Accommodation:  Give details: \_\_\_\_\_

7.4 Homeless  Explain: \_\_\_\_\_

7.5 Threatened Eviction

The landlord/agent has threatened eviction.  Notice of Hearing date of Tribunal hearing

Order for Possession / /

"Notice of Termination" Expiry Date / /  Licensee told to leave by head tenant/boarding house proprietor.

Rental Arrears  Is the tenancy threatened because of the arrears \_\_\_\_\_

Length of tenancy \_\_\_\_\_ No. of weeks arrears \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for arrears \_\_\_\_\_

Tenancy history \_\_\_\_\_

**8. DISABILITY/HEALTH**

8.1 Does any person included on this application have a disability or health problem relevant to their application for priority housing.  YES

8.2 if yes:

NAME OF PERSON(S) WITH HEALTH PROBLEM(S)	NAME OF PROBLEM	FREQUENCY OF TREATMENT IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS	MONTH OF LAST TREATMENT

8.3 Explain how the disability or health problem is effected by current housing or current location.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**9. AT RISK AND/OR HARASSMENT**

9.1 Are you or any other person included on this application 'at risk' from another person currently living with or near you? This includes domestic violence, physical assault, racial harassment and/or verbal threats of violence.  YES  NO

9.2 Is this problem too sensitive to disclose on this form? Please indicate  YES

If yes:  
An officer of the Department of Housing will contact you for details of this problem. Please indicate whether you would prefer a male or female officer to contact you.  Male  Female  No preference

If no, please state the problem \_\_\_\_\_

9.3 Is the current living arrangement impossible for other reasons e.g. Separated couple living in same household, tension between members of household, household members having to live at separate locations.  YES

Details of problem \_\_\_\_\_

**10. HOUSING OPTIONS**

10.1 Have you tried to find alternative housing?  YES

If Yes: What steps have you taken to find somewhere else to live \_\_\_\_\_

If No: Why did you not try to find alternative accommodation? \_\_\_\_\_

**I CERTIFY THAT THE INFORMATION I HAVE GIVEN IS TRUE AND CORRECT**

\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT  
DATE / /

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

**Office use only**

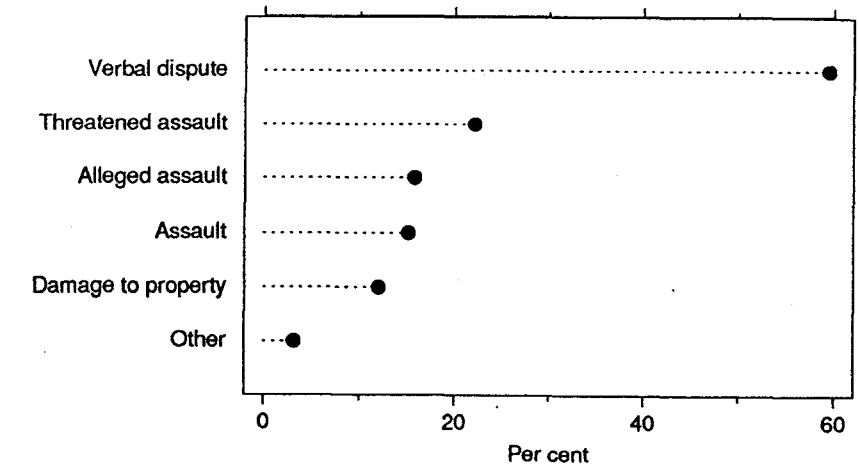
Data Entered: / /

Acknowledgement Issued:

Entitlement Date: / /

Bed Cat: \_\_\_\_\_

**FIGURE 3.11 CALLS FOR POLICE SERVICE IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES: NATURE OF DISPUTE(a), 1988**



(a) Components add to more than 100% as a dispute may be classified to more than category.

Source: Queensland Domestic Violence Task Force (1988) *Beyond These Walls*

- The majority of incidents were verbal disputes (60%). This should not be trivialised as they can range from minor disagreements to extreme emotional violence.
- Assault occurred in 15% of cases and alleged assault in a further 16%.

Rape has a long-term physical and emotional impact on the victim. Its effects include fear and mistrust of men, breakdown in sexual and family relationships, depression, anger, guilt and shame, loss of confidence, fear of being alone, worthlessness and never feeling safe.

There are no reliable statistics on the incidence of rape in Australia. Some information is available, however, on the basis of rapes reported to the police. As part of *The Inquiry into Violence in Public Places* in 1991, a study of 1,366 rapes reported to the Victorian police in 1987-90 was undertaken. The findings included:

- 94% of victims of rape were women and 99% of offenders were men.
- 53% of rapes occurred in a private home.
- 32% of rapes occurred in the victim's home.

## TIMES OF CRISIS

One of the most crucial aspects of women's housing is emergency accommodation in crisis situations. Such situations may come about through criminal activity such as incest, rape or domestic violence, or through separation or divorce, financial problems, disputes with landlords, loss of community or family networks, and other difficulties. Women in such distress need support both in terms of shelter in the short-term and assistance to find suitable accommodation in the long-term.

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) is a national program, sustained jointly by the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments, which supplies funds to community organisations and local governments to provide accommodation and support services to people who are homeless and/or in crisis. SAAP accommodation services include refuges, shelters and half-way houses as well as a range of non-accommodation services such as referral, counselling and advocacy. Most of the services provide for people in one of the 5 main SAAP target groups; youth, women and children escaping domestic violence, families, single men and single women. There is a further multi-target service which provides assistance for people across all target groups.

In 1990, the Department of Health, Housing and Community Services conducted national censuses of SAAP clients. In November, a one-night census collected information on the characteristics of people accommodated in SAAP funded services on that night while a 2-week September census collected information about the utilisation of, and demand for, SAAP accommodation services.

### Type of crisis accommodation

**TABLE 7.9 SAAP CLIENTS AND ACCOMPANYING CHILDREN: TYPE OF ACCOMMODATION SERVICE, 1990**  
(Number)

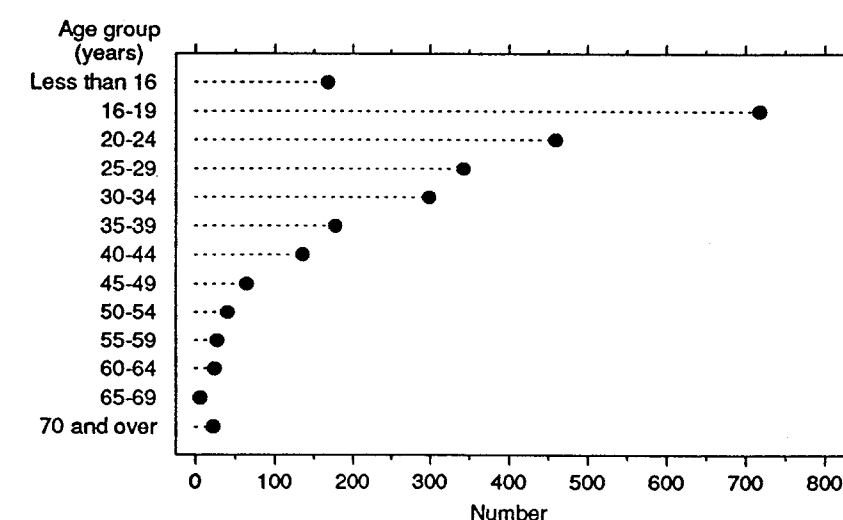
	Clients			Children accompanying		
	Women	Men	Total(a)	Female clients	Male clients	Total clients(a)
Youth	924	971	1,899	180	52	232
Escaping domestic violence	580	1	585	917	—	919
Families	484	251	737	841	31	873
Single women	248	—	248	38	—	38
Single men	—	2,207	2,262	—	7	16
Multi-target	258	698	956	245	13	258
<b>Total(b)</b>	<b>2,540</b>	<b>4,130</b>	<b>6,687</b>	<b>2,228</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>2,336</b>

(a) Includes sex not stated. (b) Includes type of accommodation service not stated.

Source: SAAP: Home for a Night

- 2,540 women (38% of SAAP clients) accompanied by 2,228 children were accommodated on the night of 16 November 1990.
- 36% of the women with 8% of the children accommodated were in accommodation for young people.
- 23% of the women with 41% of the children accommodated were in accommodation for those escaping domestic violence.
- 34% of all women accommodated received the supporting parents benefit as their main source of income. (Source: SAAP: Home for a Night)

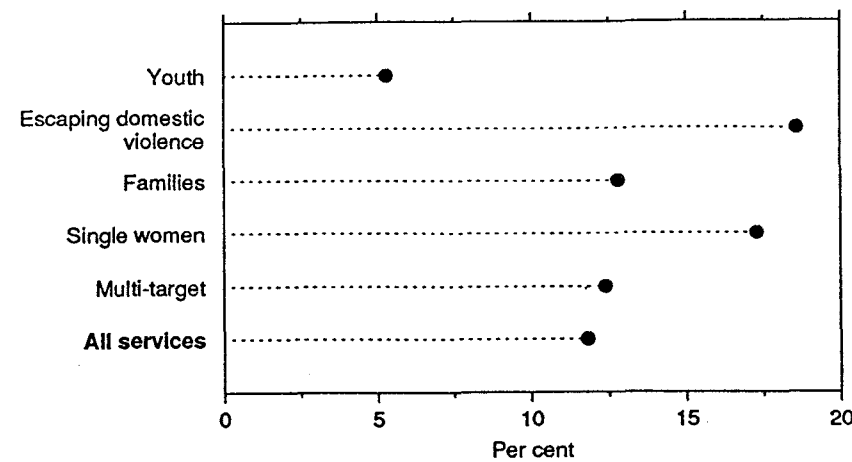
**FIGURE 7.9 SAAP CLIENTS: WOMEN ACCOMMODATED, 1990**



Source: SAAP: Home for a Night

- 54% of women accommodated were under 25 years and 87% were under 40 years.
- 60% of women in youth accommodation were aged between 16 and 19 years and 17% were younger than 16 years.
- 64% of women escaping domestic violence were aged between 20 and 35 years.

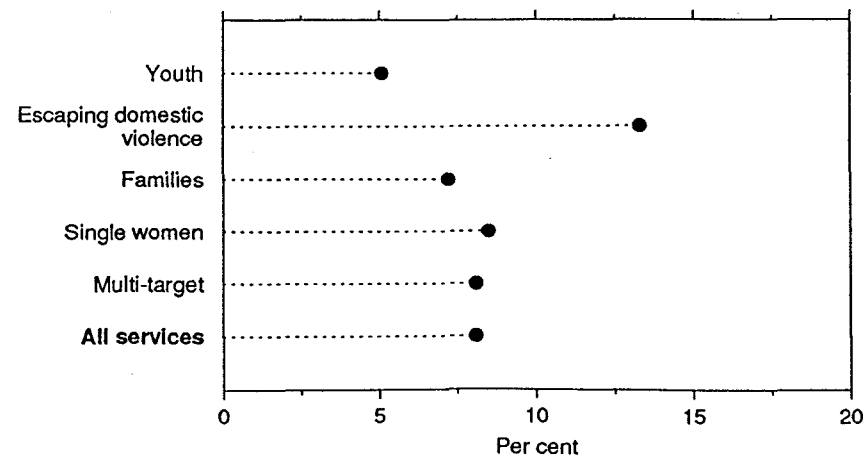
**FIGURE 7.10 SAAP CLIENTS: ABORIGINAL WOMEN AS A PROPORTION OF ALL WOMEN ACCOMMODATED IN EACH SERVICE, 1990**



Source: SAAP: Home for a Night

- 12% of women accommodated identified as Aborigines or Torres Strait Islanders compared to less than 2% of all Australian women.
- The services for women escaping domestic violence and for single women were particularly important for this group with 19% and 13% (respectively) of women accommodated in these services identifying as Aborigines or Torres Strait Islanders.

**FIGURE 7.11 SAAP CLIENTS: WOMEN WHOSE MAIN LANGUAGE IS NOT ENGLISH(a) AS A PROPORTION OF ALL WOMEN ACCOMMODATED IN EACH SERVICE, 1990**



(a) Does not strictly equate to women born in non-English speaking countries.

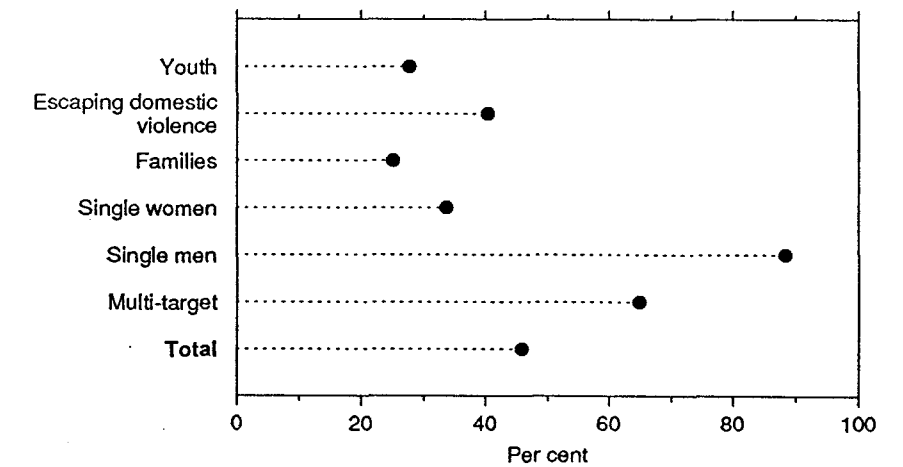
Source: SAAP: Home for a Night

- Women for whom English was not their main language made up 13% of all women accommodated in services for women escaping domestic violence.

**Availability of crisis accommodation**

During the 2-week client census, 11% of those seeking accommodation were new clients.

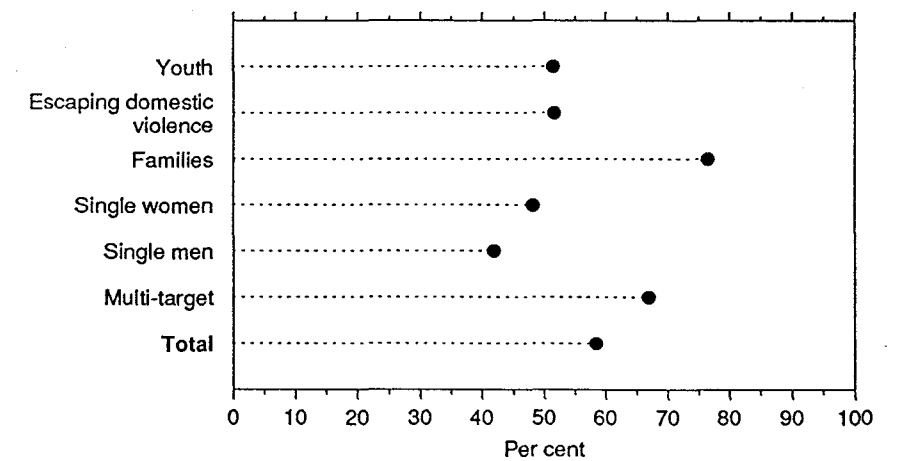
**FIGURE 7.12 SAAP CLIENTS: PROPORTION OF NEW CLIENTS WHO WERE ABLE TO BE ACCOMMODATED, 1990**



Source: SAAP: Two Weeks in September

- 46% of new clients were accommodated.
- 40% or less of those who sought accommodation in the services for families, youth, single women and women escaping domestic violence (the services most commonly used by women) were accommodated.

**FIGURE 7.13 SAAP CLIENTS NOT ACCOMMODATED: PROPORTION NOT ACCOMMODATED BECAUSE ACCOMMODATION WAS FULL, 1990**



Source: SAAP: Two Weeks in September

- Of persons not able to be accommodated, 58% were turned away because the accommodation was full.
- No vacancies accounted for 76% of people unable to be accommodated in services for families.