

**Aboriginal Women Fleeing Domestic Violence, Housing and Homelessness
Research Meeting – March 11, 2015**



Authors: Roxanne Felix Mah and Tara Hanson



I. Event Overview

The Inter-agency Council on Homelessness (IAC) and the Government of Alberta IAC identified housing and homelessness issues for **women fleeing domestic violence, with a special interest in Aboriginal women** as a priority under the Housing and Homelessness Research Strategy for Alberta. (<http://humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/housing-and-homelessness-research-strategy.pdf>).

The Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research (The Centre) hosted a meeting on March 11, 2015 in Calgary with stakeholders to discuss the state of the evidence, identify knowledge gaps and opportunities for strategic research investments.

A total of 49 individuals participated from universities (researchers and students), women's shelters (on-reserve and off-reserve), health organizations, family shelters, and community-based organizations in the housing and health sectors. A list of attendees is provided in Appendix A.

The purpose of the meeting was to engage stakeholders in a strategic discussion about research, evaluation, data collection or analysis projects with potential to generate evidence to inform for policy and practice decisions and improve outcomes for this population.

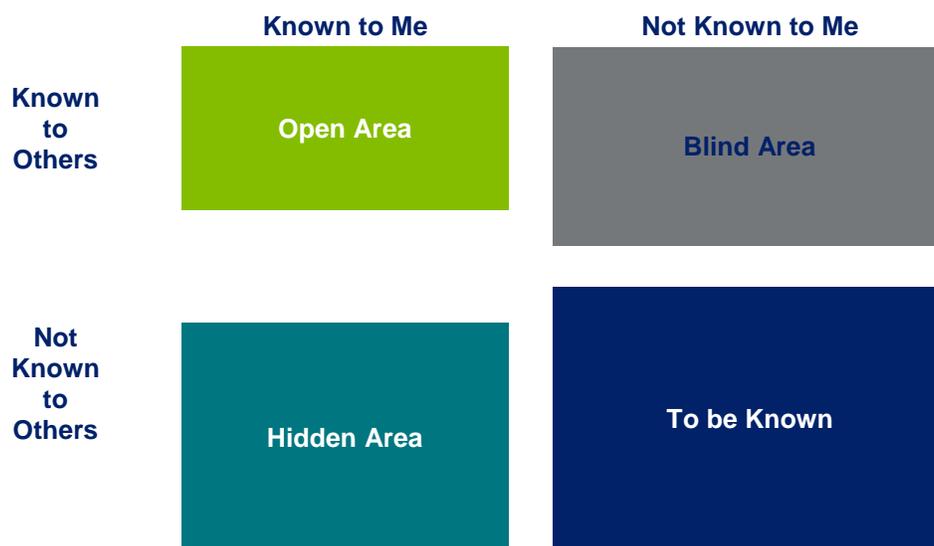
Elder Doreen Spence opened the day's events with a blessing. Tara Hanson, The Centre's Executive Director, Business and Partnership Strategies from The Centre welcomed guests and provided an overview of the day's goals. A series of brief presentations grounded participants in current knowledge and introduced projects underway.

Presenter	Topic
Dr. Carol Adair	Rapid Literature Review on Housing and Homelessness Research related to Aboriginal Women
Kaitlin Lauridsen	Grey Literature Review on Housing and Homelessness Research related to Aboriginal Women
Dr. Lois Gander	Residential Tenancy Issues of Victims of Domestic Violence
Jan Reimer - Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS)	Existing current research initiatives with ACWS and some of their member organizations
Jaime Rodgers – Medicine Hat Community Housing Society	Existing integrated programming between women's emergency shelter, supported second stage shelter & Housing First program for women
Natasha Carvalho – Medicine Hat Women's Shelter	
Linda McLean – Inn from the Cold	Recent analysis of data collected from Inn from the Cold & Children's Cottage Society (Brenda's House) in Calgary

II. What We Heard

A. Morning Discussion – What We Know and Don't Know

Following the presentations, Kate Woodman, with Catalyst Research and Development Inc., introduced participants to the Johari Window, a tool to guide thinking about what we know and what we don't know in the areas of research related to housing and homelessness for women fleeing domestic violence.



The following themes emerged from individuals who wrote their thoughts down in the four domains and discussed their contributions through small group discussions.

What We Already Know

These areas of knowledge identified as “known to me” and “known to others” can be considered as areas where there is sufficient research.

- Systemic roots that contribute to domestic violence and housing and homelessness: lack of housing, racism, poverty, residential school impacts, social determinants of health etc.
- Population demographics and numbers of people affected
- Limits of current system (i.e. 28 day limit in shelters, scope of what domestic violence funding covers)
- Gaps in the systems with respect to transitions and system integration

Knowledge to be Expanded or Shared

Participants identified the following areas of knowledge as “known to me” but “not known to others”. These may be areas where research to expand knowledge or existing research findings could be mobilized.

Promising or proven interventions:

- landlord interventions
- financial interventions beyond income support
- flexibility of supports

Interventions that have not worked:

- “work for welfare” in USA (working women went back to benefits to care for their children)

Interventions that we want to learn more about:

- Domestic Violence Courts
- Housing First for women experiencing Domestic Violence (and its differences and similarities to other Housing First models)

Context of Women fleeing Domestic Violence:

- Statistics provided by Inn from the Cold and Brenda’s House, especially on their hotel program (and the accurate depiction of % headed by women)
- The number of legal systems women have to encounter at such a vulnerable time and with little support (Lois Gander’s study)
- Alternate models of practice on reserve involving Elders and leaders
- Limited availability of rental housing, childcare, addiction services for women and families, services that accommodate pets (which can be used by perpetrator to keep victim in abusive situations), on-reserve services, services for pregnant women and family physicians for this population
- Landlord discrimination
- Health care and justice systems “discharge” into homelessness without proper transition

Experiences of Women fleeing Domestic Violence

- A woman in the middle class can be forced into poverty from divorce
- Domestic violence situation can be prolonged or worsened when a woman does not have the means to provide for herself and her children
- Service planning for women can cause anxiety, low self-esteem, and fatigue. They are often just thinking of safety and keeping their children
- Some domestic violence shelters automatically refer aboriginal families to children’s services which dissuades families from leaving abusive environments
- It can take about 6 months for women at a shelter to be comfortable disclosing addictions
- Women from reserves face particular issues of isolation, safety, culture shock and lack of supports or transportation, depending on where they can access services (on reserve or off-reserve)
- Women with chronic illness or disabilities also face particular issues
- There are women who don’t qualify for assistance from federal funding and yet do not qualify for provincial funding

Current need to:

- Recognize impact of poverty – it entrenches people in these systems
- Expand educational and health systems to offer holistic supports as part of prevention
- Share with policymakers the current context
- Recognize culture a healing force, with expanded community capacity in this area

Participants also identified the following areas as “not known to me” but “known to others”. These might also be areas where research can be expanded or existing research findings may be mobilized.

- Application of the HART tools for prevention
- Second stage housing
- Men support groups
- Evaluation, evaluation tools and outcome reports
- Alternative measures
- Medicine Hat – parts of their program that contributes to their success rate, how their success is defined, and how Housing First is defined
- Blackfoot family lodge in Lethbridge

Limited Knowledge

Participants identified the following areas as “not known to me” and “not known to others”. These topics might be areas of knowledge where research may be initiated, expanded or existing research findings may be mobilized.

Specific models of intervention or service

- Case management supports for unlimited amount of time
- Housing First: efficacy of ensuring safety/security of families (DV or not); limitations and benefits; long-term impact on housing success and other outcomes, especially on children; who it works for
- Harm reduction shelters
- Supportive housing for families
- Cultural safety models for agencies and systems
- Empowerment approaches that support community and togetherness, as opposed to supporting in isolation

Rate of movement from domestic violence shelters to homeless shelters

- Legal complexities
- Breaking the cycle of intergenerational violence (2nd and 3rd generations of families using shelters)
- On-reserve issues, or, in parallel, issues in small communities, and their linkages to off-reserve services
- Voices of women who have experienced domestic violence and their lived experiences
- Data integration in support of system integration
- Other vulnerable populations: families that don't come in contact with the system and are avoiding shelters and being visible on the street; those who are disabled; older women who are not showing up in the women's shelters and do not have children
- Residential schools legacy
- Re-traumatization

System relevant issues

- System alignment or integration
- Key community access points
- Models of “no wrong door” to prevent people from needing the shelter system
- Favoured points of intervention
- Policy barriers that contribute to homelessness

B. Afternoon Discussion:

Open table discussions resulted in the generation of a rich source of ideas for research, appropriate methods and processes to consider and outcomes of such research. A summary of these discussions and emerging themes are provided below.

What we want to see as outcomes of research

Participants hope that research can support the following outcomes:

The public is aware of the impact of domestic violence on women and families. Participants would like the public to be aware of the effects of domestic violence on families and the number of children affected, especially the “hidden homeless”.

The general public and the public sector are committed to reducing the negative impact of domestic violence on women and families.

Participants hope that greater knowledge would mobilize the general public and the public sector to provide support and resources for families for healing and healthy attachment.

The programs supporting women and families fleeing domestic violence have human resource capacities (i.e. well-trained and sustainable) that contribute to positive outcomes.

The system serving women and families fleeing domestic violence is aware of its capacity and gaps in order to direct their resources effectively, capitalize on local strengths and mobilize collaboration.

Stakeholders described an integrated system as being accessible, collaborative, safe, responsive, holistic, de-colonized, with a gendered lens.

The system serving women and families fleeing domestic violence has increased capacity and partnerships in place for on-going community-based research.

Research Principles and Approaches

Participants identified some key principles and approaches they would like to see in research conducted in this area:

- A strong consideration for properly supported Participatory Action Research, in order for participants to see the impact of their contribution, contribute to positive change, build community and promote self-confidence.
- Recognition that those experiencing domestic violence have complex lives and research processes need to consider their capacity without exhausting them.
- Recognition of the value of different types of research (quantitative, qualitative, narrative, action oriented)
- If the research is focused on Aboriginal communities, it will need to be led by community members and leaders, with a strong consideration for OCAP principles.
- Research should be collaborative – involve policy-makers, brokers for public policy research (i.e. The Centre, School of Public Policy), media, service providers and clients. The process is vital as stakeholders have had previous experience with research – some positive and some negative. Part of the process could include writing a policy brief.

- While participants agreed much can be learned when data is shared (i.e. between agencies, between sectors), the research process will need to ensure the confidentiality needs of different stakeholders are satisfied. This process will be key to ensuring the data that is being collected will be used to answer a meaningful research question that will generate insight and change.
- Results of research and data should be returned to those who participate. Dissemination needs to be a strong priority.

Research Priorities

The following research questions and queries were suggested as priority areas for investment.

- What are the outcomes of secondary shelters and the impacts on family or parenting functioning?
- How can we scale out or adapt programs that were successful for other contexts - for example, The “Walking the Path” model for Aboriginal women on reserve?
- How is racism related to housing barriers and access to system supports for women, and what legal resources exist to overcome these barriers?
- What are the implications for service and social support, and practices to support women who are fleeing domestic violence on-reserve?
- What are the physical and emotional impacts of domestic violence and homelessness on children and families across the lifespan?
- How do we provide domestic violence services that are consistent, coordinated and accessible? (issues related to service coordination and application of a gender-based lens to services were identified).
- What are the barriers to accessing current services and different models’ effectiveness in overcoming these barriers (i.e. resourcing of advocacy, referral models, and legal supports)? With respect to system issues, there is an opportunity in the current consultations and activities around the reformation of the Family Justice System.
- How does improved accessibility lead to improved outcomes for these individuals?
- There is a complexity of factors that contribute to the issue of domestic violence and homelessness. Research in these areas, and resulting interventions, is an area of interest for many of the participants.
- Evaluate community responses and developing best practices to help women, i.e.: flexibility in resource support, engaging of landlords, the Housing First program in Medicine Hat for women fleeing domestic violence and secondary shelters.
- Generate learning about promising practices derived or adapted from traditional or Aboriginal cultural practices (i.e. restorative justice, access to Elders). There is interest looking at underlying factors related to domestic violence, such as residential schools and racism.

There were a number of topics that came up in the discussion that are relevant to services provided for those fleeing domestic violence, but not necessarily to housing and homelessness. These topics are captured here and will be shared with other stakeholders in the family violence and child well-being sector. Such topics included:

- Effective programming for children in domestic violence services
- Effective programming for perpetrators
- Sustainability of workers in this sector (i.e. training for self-care, consistent training across the province)
- Intersection of these issues with emergency response (i.e. floods, fires), particularly in First Nations
- Client inclusion and creating safety

III. Next steps

The next steps for this process are to

- Align themes with the Housing and Homelessness Research Strategy for Alberta.
- Identify topics for strategic focus in the appropriate areas of primary research, evaluation, data analysis and knowledge mobilization to maximum impact.
- Consult with experts and stakeholders missing from the dialogue.
- Look for partnership opportunities with individuals and organizations with shared goals and interests.
- Investigate activities of national initiatives (i.e. Sisters in Spirit and Native Women's Association of Canada, Canadian Indigenous Women's Institute) to identify where there may be opportunities for collaboration.

For more information on this initiative, please contact:

Tara Hanson
Executive Director, Business and Partnership Strategies
Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research
601, 9925 - 109 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2J8
PH: 780-408-8730
Fx: 780-944-8637
thanson@research4children.com

Appendix A – List of Attendees

First Name	Last Name	Organization
Carol	Adair	University of Calgary
Paloma	Artega-Juarez	Medicine Hat College/Medicine Hat Community Housing Society
Ashley	Audette	Medicine Hat Community Housing Society
Monique	Auffrey	Discovery House
Brigitte	Baradoy	Discovery House
Meghan	Bell	Calgary Homelessness Foundation
Karen	Benzies	University of Calgary
Dawn	Bousted	Brenda's House
Natasha	Carvalho	Medicine Hat Women's Shelter
Eliana	Clay	Discovery House
Roxanne	Felix-Mah	Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research
Lois	Gander	University of Alberta
Jessica	Garland	Alberta Human Services
Carolyn	Goard	Alberta Council of Women's Shelters
Tara	Hanson	Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research
Rita	Henderson	University of Calgary
Lorraine	Healy	Kainai Women's Wellness Lodge
Larisa	Holmes	Medicine Hat Community Housing Society
Nicole	Jackson	Calgary Homelessness Foundation
Ali	Jadidzadeh	Calgary Homelessness Foundation
Patti	Kilgallon	Children's Cottage
Ron	Kneebone	University of Calgary
Tia	Lesdesma	Youth - Community Member
Linda	McLean	Inn from the Cold
Katrina	Milaney	University of Calgary
Kashif	Mughal	University of Calgary
Rosemary	Mupambwa	Elbow River Healing Lodge
Ann	Phillips	Alberta Health Services
Barbara	Pickering	University of Calgary
Giri	Puligandla	Homeward Trust
Kaylee	Ramage	Student
Jan	Reimer	Alberta Council of Women's Shelters
Jamie	Rogers	Medicine Hat Housing Society
Brenda	Roland	Alberta Health Services

Gayle	Rutherford	University of Calgary
Angela	Scahill	Calgary Homeless Foundation
Samantha	Sexsmith	Student
Sabrina	Song	Alberta Health Services
Doreen	Spence	Aboriginal Women
Natasha	Steinback	Student
Billie	Thurston	University of Calgary
Suzanne	Tough	Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research
Christine	Vandenberghe	Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research
Jeanette	Waegemakers-Schiff	University of Calgary
Christine	Walsh	University of Calgary
Dorothy	Weasel Fat	Kanai First Nations
Tia	Smith	Streetworks/HER Pregnancy Program
Kate	Woodman	Consultant