



**OHIO FAMILY VIOLENCE NEEDS ASSESSMENT:
FOCUS GROUP PROJECT
*JUNE 2008 – SEPTEMBER 2008***

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I. Introduction

Part one of the Ohio Family Violence Needs Assessment focused on direct service providers' opinions of what services/resources are lacking in Ohio for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. They also ranked services they felt were most important for victims to have. The information gained from their responses proved to be quite beneficial; however the picture would be incomplete if victims were not provided with an opportunity to voice their own needs. Therefore, the second half of the Ohio Family Violence Needs Assessment reports on information gained directly from victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

Focus groups were held with different groups of victims across the state of Ohio, beginning in June 2008 and ending in September 2008. The results from the initial survey sent out to service providers presented the framework for which groups were to be targeted for the focus group project. A total of six groups were held for specific populations. These populations were: (1) Immigrant/Refugee victims, (2) Victims from a rural county in Ohio¹, (3) Victims from a medium-sized county in Ohio, (4) Victims from a large county in Ohio, (5) Deaf victims, and (6) Victims from the gay population². Each population represented in the focus group project had an organization that offered to serve as host site for the meeting.³ For offering their time in helping locate victims, and in some cases transporting and providing childcare, as well as providing their facilities for our use; organizations were awarded \$500 grants.

The remainder of the report will be broken down by focus group. Although there are commonalities between all six groups, there are also important differences that need to be explored separately. In the conclusion of this report, commonalities between the groups will be discussed. Also, findings from direct service providers and victims will be tied together; in addition to discussing how the two perspectives diverged on particular services. Finally, recommendations and limitations of this study will be explored.

II. Focus Groups

Focus Group: Immigrant/Refugee Population

Location: Wood County

Date: September 3, 2008

Two female interpreters, who had no affiliation with the host agency, provided interpreting services during the focus group. The two women went through the confidentiality statements and demographic information forms for focus group participants in addition to interpreting the focus group questions and their responses.

¹ Rural counties: Pop. <100,000; Medium counties: Pop. 100,001 – 499,999; Large counties: Pop. >500,000

² The group was scheduled to include Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, and Transgendered victims, however only gay men participated. See page 27 for further information.

³ See Appendix for list of organizations that served as host sites.

Group Demographics

A total of six Latina women participated in the focus group. All of the women immigrated to the United States and were victims of domestic violence. The women were spread fairly evenly between age categories. Two women indicated they were in the 18-24 age range. Two women were also represented in the 25-34 age range. One participant represented each of the following ranges: 35-44 and 45-54.

Table 1—U.S. Citizenship

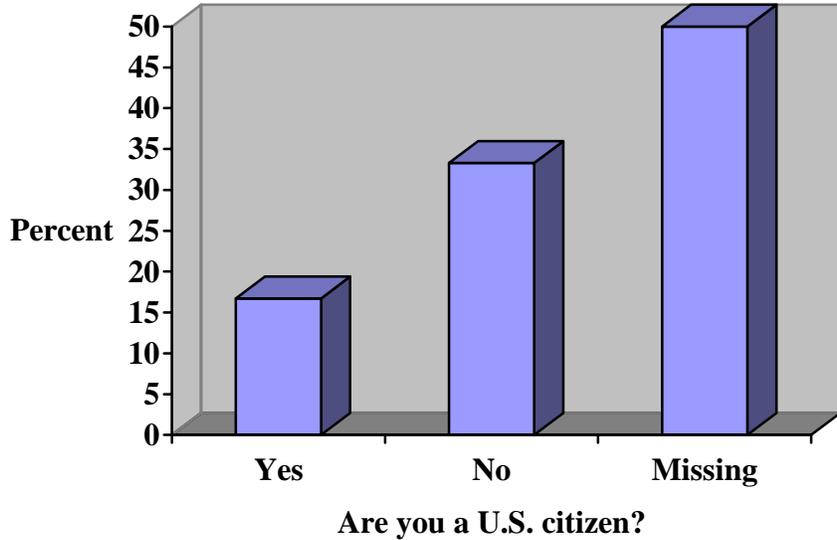
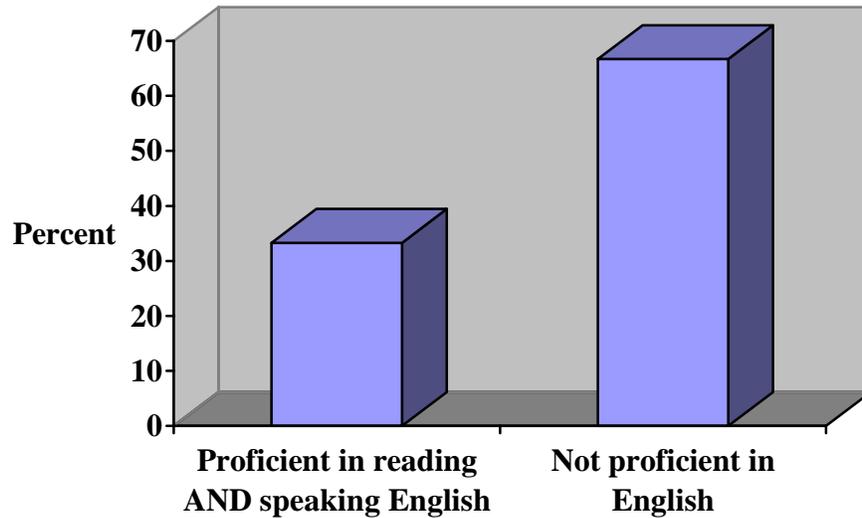


Table 1 shows the numbers of participants who indicated they were U.S. citizens. Half of the focus group participants left this question blank on the questionnaire. Of the three women who answered, only one stated she was a U.S. citizen. During the focus group the women shared that they were not U.S. citizens and then discussed the problems associated with their undocumented status.

In regards to education, 67 percent of the women possessed less than a 12th grade education. One victim had obtained her high school diploma or GED and one completed some college courses. Half of the women left the question regarding their annual income blank. None of the three women who completed the question made more than \$20,000 annually. Two participants indicated they were single and the remaining four were married, divorced, widowed, or partnered. All of the women had at least one child, with one woman indicating she had five.

Four out of the six women were not proficient in English. Table 2 shows that only 33 percent of the women could read and speak English.

Table 2—English Proficiency



The Catholic Church was very meaningful for many of the women. Sixty-seven percent indicated that they were affiliated with a particular religion. The women wrote in that they were affiliated with either the Catholic Church or the Christian church.

In the final open-ended question on the questionnaire, “Is there anything else you wish to say about yourself?” some of the women offered the following information:

- “I would like to go to college so I can prepare for life.”
- “I have been helped and am so thankful for this program” (The victim is referring to the host agency.)

Resources Initially Sought

All of the women who participated in the focus group received services from the host agency. However, they arrived at the host agency in different manners. Some of the women learned about the host agency through family members and friends while others were referred to the host agency by churches. One woman stated when she first arrived in Ohio she looked for help in the telephone book and located the host agency. While at the host agency, the women received help with securing housing, resources for their children, and advocates accompanied them to court.

The women indicated they were initially scared to seek help for various reasons. According to the women, the principle reason they were hesitant to search for help was due to concerns related to their immigration status. They felt calling the police or other entities would create more problems than it would solve. They were ultimately afraid of being separated from their families.

Barriers/Problems Experienced

Undocumented status

As previously stated, only one out of six women who participated in the focus group reported being a U.S. citizen. Almost all the women stated their abuser threatened them and said they could not survive without them. Their abusers would say, “You have no Social Security Number, you NEED me.” Their status and language barriers affected every aspect of the process to locate resources as noted in the following sections.

Police

The majority of the focus group participants had unfavorable opinions of the police. Two women acknowledged they called the police. For one woman, police were not helpful since she made the decision not to press charges because she was “embarrassed and scared.” Given that she decided not to file formal charges, the police officers were not helpful and were reluctant to return when she called them in the future. This woman did not speak English.

For the second woman, who was proficient in English, the police were helpful and her abuser was caught one week after she called. She said, “I wish I would have called the police the first time he hit me and pressed charges on him right away.” When the police arrived, they made it very clear to her that they were there for the domestic violence incident and not immigration issues. She says that hearing this empowered her to call again later when she needed them.

Job and Family Services

The women acknowledged the information they received from Job and Family Services regarding jobs and other benefits was not very helpful because they did not have “papers⁴.” The women who had children that were born in the United States had some benefits, but still not enough. The women also shared stories of how their benefits were taken away because they were applying for jobs or lived with roommates. They were frustrated because they felt the system was not designed for them to better themselves and succeed in life.

The women in the focus group reported that at Job and Family Services, all Spanish-speaking individuals are required to be assisted by the same woman at the agency because she is the only one who speaks Spanish. They are not permitted to bring family or friends in to interpret for them and interpreters are not provided for them so they can be serviced by other members of the staff.

Housing

Once one of the victims left her abusive husband, she and her children had no place to turn for support. Prior to being referred to the host agency by a woman from the Catholic Church, she and her children lived at a work camp. The women explained this

⁴ The women frequently referred to their undocumented status as not having “papers.”

was a place where families were able to live for free if they worked in the fields. They also had a small section reserved for victims of domestic violence, and this is where she stayed with her children. She described the camps as crowded and dirty. Since she spoke no English she felt isolated without access to resources. With no money and an overall lack of means, staff at the host agency helped her locate resources and provided school supplies for her children.

Another focus group participant also stayed at the camp located in Northwest Ohio. She was provided with some help in her domestic violence situation, but staying at the camp “was stressful because it’s not your own home and there were rats there.” The woman indicated she was tempted to go back to her abuser because the conditions at the camp were so bad, but someone referred her to a domestic violence shelter in the area. It was there that she was able to be connected with an advocate.

She stayed at the shelter for seven months; “it was nice, just like a house.” Even though the shelter was nice compared to the camp, there were no workers who spoke Spanish at the shelter and she felt isolated. She desired to participate in the group sessions, but was unable to communicate effectively. Her experience at the shelter motivated her to learn English. “It’s sad that shelters targeted at mainstream survivors are so much nicer than the ones available for Hispanic women.” She believes since there were no workers who spoke Spanish at the shelter, Hispanic women don’t know that mainstream shelters are even an option—“they haven’t even heard of it at all and they don’t know to call or go to them for help.” The women agreed and acknowledged they love the host agency because all the workers are familiar with their culture and customs, making them feel more comfortable and at ease with opening up about their problems.

Transportation

It is difficult for the women to make it to the host agency and other appointments due to transportation issues. There are no forms of public transportation in Bowling Green, Ohio. There are a few services that will transport individuals to appointments, however there is a roundtrip fee attached and some of the services require the riders to have certain Medicaid coverage. The women relied on the advocates at the host agency and their friends to take them to court dates, medical appointments, and to work.

Employment

The women who were employed without being a legal U.S. citizen explained how difficult it is to make the decision to pick up and move away from their abuser because it would be difficult to obtain another job in a different location. Therefore, women are more inclined to stay in their abusive relationships because they have a job.

Other Issues Specific to this Group

The language barriers experienced by most of the women in the focus group proved to be a significant challenge. One of the women who learned to speak English said, “Many institutions are willing to help, but women must seek them out. However, language is a barrier.” She indicated that some Hispanics are unaware of services such as

welfare assistance because of their language barriers. Some victims become embarrassed when they are unable to effectively communicate with individuals at these agencies.

The language barrier continues beyond seeking social services into the courtroom where these women went to seek justice in their cases against their abusers. When one focus group participant had a court hearing she was told her witnesses were going to be provided an interpreter, but when she arrived at court no interpreter was present. Court staff requested the victim's advocate interpret for her witnesses but the advocate could not because it would be a clear conflict of interest. Court staff then proceeded to call the woman from Job and Family Services who speaks Spanish, but the victim said she had a difficult time interpreting for her witnesses because "[this JFS worker] was not the best Spanish speaker in the first place."

One of the two women who could speak English in the group took classes at Bowling Green State University. Ohio Hispanic Coalition comes to the University and offers English classes. Although she had to pay for these classes, she said it was well worth it because upon completion of the courses she realized that she had rights and learned how to defend herself. She believes that learning the English language is "empowering."

For the women who had not learned English, they emphasized how important it was to have Spanish-speaking counselors available for little or no cost. The women were aware of a few people in the community who provide counseling in Spanish, however all of them charged for their services.

Top Needs

When asked to list their top needs, the women produced very similar responses. All of the women agreed that the following needs were vital to them: (1) Interpreters and Spanish-speaking counselors and (2) Transportation.

Two women who participated believed having employment and educational opportunities were important. When the women referred to education, they were specifically referencing learning how to speak and read English. They felt it was important to be understood so they could receive effective help with their problems: "The more education you have, the more opportunities that are open to you." These women were also quick to say that having interpreters is not the same as being able to speak English themselves and interpreters are not always available when they need them. In emergency situations they need to be able to communicate themselves.

Locating housing and child care were also needs listed by two women. Other needs listed once by women included cash assistance, food, health care, and legal assistance. One woman stated that eventually all of them will be required to show proof they are legal U.S. citizens and she would like help with this process.

Focus Group: Rural county victims
Location: Defiance County
Date: August 11, 2008

Group Demographics

Six women participated in the focus group. Four of the women indicated they were Caucasian, while the two remaining identified themselves as Hispanic and African-American, respectively. The women were generally middle-aged with two women aged 35-44 and three women aged 45-54. One woman fell between the ages of 25-34. Four of the women in the group were U.S. citizens and two women omitted this question.

Two of the women in the focus group earned their Associate's Degree while two additional women completed some college courses. One woman earned her High School Diploma or GED and one woman completed less than the 12th grade. Two women indicated they earned less than \$10,000 annually while three women respectively landed in the following categories: \$10,001-20,000; \$20,001-30,000; and \$30,001-40,000. One woman left this question blank on the questionnaire.

Sixty-six percent of women in the focus group indicated they were divorced. All focus group participants were proficient in English and had at least one child. When asked if they were affiliated with a particular religion, two women said they were, one said she was not, and the remaining three omitted the question. Only one woman filled out the open-ended question, "Is there anything else you wish to say about yourself?" stating, "I have no family they died 13 years ago. I have been under counseling for 20 years."

Resources Initially Sought

When victims were asked to share where they first turned for assistance following their crisis situation, several different answers were provided. First, a few women indicated they found the host agency in the telephone book. A local hospital was listed by one victim in addition to an outpatient alcohol/drug treatment center by another focus group participant. This victim pointed out she initially went to the outpatient treatment center, then left to stay at a local shelter with her daughter. They did not stay long at the shelter because it was "terrible." Finally, one woman who received services from the host agency was acquainted with an advocate currently working at the agency. This provided her direct access to resources and the support she needed.

Barriers/Problems Experienced

Police

The general consensus from the group was that the police were not helpful and most of the women acknowledged they received a bad response from police when they called for assistance.

While one of the victims was at the local police station, officers laughed at her and called her stupid. They told her, "Ma'am, you're really stupid for taking this man

back; you're on a death wish." Another victim with a mental illness stated she believed the police treat individuals who have a mental disability differently. She felt the police were more likely to make incorrect assumptions about individuals with mental disabilities and their situations.

A focus group participant obtained a permanent protection order when she lived in Florida and since moving to Ohio, she has found it difficult for some police officers to honor the order. When she has shown them the order, police officers have given her a difficult time because it was given in Florida and not Ohio. She has told the officers that her order is "good anywhere in the United States."

It was suggested by the focus group participants that police officers take a course on domestic violence. The women did not feel the police officers sympathized with them and were insensitive. One woman said police continually asked her, "Why did you take him back?" She offered the following response: "I barely survive off the money I have. I live on \$35 a month after I pay my bills. If I had him living with me, I could live a little bit better; that's why I kept him."

Housing

Obtaining adequate immediate, intermediate, and long-term housing⁵ was a problem for the women in the focus group. The majority of the women participating in the group had spent time at the local domestic violence shelter. One victim described the shelter as being "like a prison camp." She spent time at the shelter in 1991 and returned years later. She believes the shelter is in better condition now than when she first visited 17 years ago.

Most of the women in the group agreed the shelter was a "horrible place" and some of them acknowledged they left the shelter to return to their abuser. The women stated that although no one at the shelter physically abused them, they suffered through emotional and psychological abuse from staff members who constantly hassled them and seemed insensitive to the victims' situations. One victim never experienced any success when she called the shelter and felt as though, "they are not really there for you." All of the women learned about the shelter through word of mouth because it is the only domestic violence shelter in the area. One victim believed that many people decide not to stay in the shelter because of negative experiences people share via word of mouth.

The ladies felt their county was in "desperate need" of transitional housing. According to them, available resources within their county were not being used to their full potential. There is an empty school building in the community the women felt could be converted into livable space for victims of domestic violence.

Victims also experienced difficulty when trying to secure long-term housing. The women acknowledged how difficult it was to get and remain on the waiting list for HUD housing. One woman stated she had waited four years to get her name on the list for HUD housing. To remain on the waiting list, the women must call into the office every two months to confirm they still need housing. If they fail to call once, their name is removed from the list.

⁵ Time frames are defined as: *Immediate*: within 48 hours, *Intermediate*: 60-180 days, and *Long-term*: 18-24 months.

Everyone believed victims of domestic violence should be moved to the top of the list and there should be “some sort of categories” ranking certain groups higher than others. (The women gave the example of individuals with children being given priority over those without children.) The women also believed that the housing provided should be more affordable.

Court

Most of the women in the focus group viewed court proceedings as intimidating. Those who chose not to take their situations to court stated they were “scared.” One victim said that although her abuser did not live in town, he still threatened her life in addition to her children’s lives if she filed formal charges. Others who were successful in obtaining a protection order against their abuser believed the protection order did not mean anything to anyone. The women who received assistance from the advocates at the host agency were very pleased with the support they received in and out of court.

Employment

Most of the women in the focus group were employed or received financial assistance from other entities. They believed men keep women “financially strapped” so locating and maintaining employment is very important. One woman who spent time at the local domestic violence shelter indicated the shelter was helpful in assisting her locate employment.

Transportation

The women were quick to note that no forms of public transportation exist in Defiance. When asked to clarify, they explained there were no buses, taxi cabs, or other forms of transportation for individuals without their own personal vehicles. When the women needed to attend court dates, work, and medical appointments, they were forced to walk, bike, or have their friends or family transport them. One of the women diagnosed with a mental illness, acknowledged that Maumee Valley Guidance Center provided “very limited” transportation if an individual had a mental illness and had been assigned a case manager.

Other Issues Specific to this Group

All of the women cited issues with jail overcrowding as an important matter. They believed having an overpopulated jail allowed their abusers to serve minimal time before being released to “terrorize” them again. Once their abusers were released, the victims said that they were not notified. Sometimes the advocate at the host agency is notified, but not for three days and as the women noted, “a lot can happen in a span of three days.”

One woman in the focus group indicated she would like to change her Social Security Number (SSN) but experienced difficulty when trying to do so. She was a disabled veteran and funds she received were directly tied to her SSN.

Overall, the women in this focus group emphasized how the lack of services and sensitivity from the general public, police officers, and service providers influenced their decision to take back their abusers. Some of the ladies felt they “had no other place to turn.” According to them, “The cycle of violence needs to be broken and in order to do this funding is needed.” Below is a quote from a victim that summarized the feelings of the women present:

“It’s not just the police, the whole system is broke. If you haven’t been through it, if you haven’t dealt with all these things you can’t figure out how to fix the system. We [victims] know how to fix the system. Everybody has a little different view on how to do it, but if you put all those views together you’ll go, ‘That’s a really good idea; that’s how the system needs to be fixed.’”

Top Needs

All of the women in the focus group agreed that financial support is vital for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Having childcare provided was listed as an important need for three victims. Two women indicated that housing and accessible transportation was important to them. The following needs were listed once:

- Employment
- Legal aid
- Personal support
- Better shelter hotlines
- Health/medial insurance
- “Having police treat domestic violence victims better than they do”
- “Improve communication between counties”
- “Greater support from all agencies in the county with one specific central person”

*Focus Group: **Medium county victims***

*Location: **Columbiana County***

*Date: **August 28, 2008***

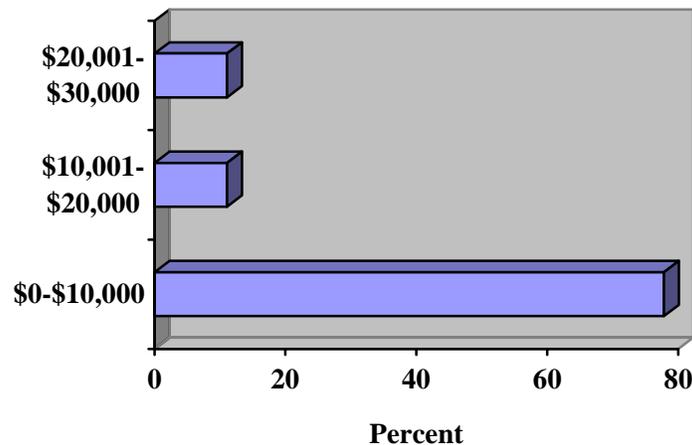
Group Demographics

Nine women participated in the focus group. This group was unique because four of the women who participated were being housed at Eastern Ohio Correction Center (EOCC), a Community Based Correctional Facility for women. A member of the host agency staff leads a group at EOCC with victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The women from EOCC who participated in the focus group were members of the aforementioned group held at EOCC. The women were spread fairly evenly in regards to ages. Three women indicated they were 18-24 and one woman was 25-34. Three were between the ages 35-44 and two women were 45-54. Eight women were

Caucasian with one woman identifying as Hispanic. All of the women participating in the focus group were U.S. citizens.

Five out of nine women had earned their High School Diploma or GED and four women had completed some college courses. Table 3 shows the annual family income breakdown for the focus group participants. Approximately 78 percent of the women earned less than \$10,000 annually. This clearly influenced the needs expressed during the focus group.

Table 3—Annual Family Income



Four women indicated they were single while three were married and two were divorced. Approximately 67 percent of the women had at least one child or were currently pregnant. All of the women were proficient in English. Six women in the group had a particular religious affiliation with one woman indicating she did not. Two women omitted this question. Of the women who reported their religious affiliation the following denominations were listed: Protestant, Methodist, Baptist, Christian, Presbyterian, and Pentecostal Christian.

The following responses were given in the final open-ended question, “Is there anything else you wish to say about yourself?” some of the women offered the following information:

- “Verbal, sexual, and physical abuse” experienced
- “I am currently a resident at EOCC working on my recovery...I am a very calm person who wants all the help and knowledge I can get.”
- “I am a survivor of domestic violence and now work at our local domestic violence shelter. If not for the shelter, I don’t know what I would have done.”
- “Never thought I’d be here.”

Resources Initially Sought

Having such a diverse group of women broadened the scope of places the women turned for assistance. One woman learned about the host agency from pamphlets she came across in her area. Once she connected with the host agency, she worked with an

advocate to gain a protection order against her abuser, with whom she had an abusive relationship with for 12 years.

Another victim explained she turned to the host agency for housing. She stayed at the shelter for one to two months and then moved into transitional housing where she remained for 18 months. Staff helped her meet her goals and she was only required to pay 30 percent of her rent.

One of the women participating in the group from EOCC contacted the police, but then decided to drop the charges. She resided in North Carolina during this time and felt the police there were very helpful. A different woman in the focus group from Ohio gained assistance from the host agency after being referred to the program by a local police officer.

A shelter located in Newark, Ohio was cited as a place one victim turned to for help. She stated, "The shelter helped me feel safe...and helped me feel like I didn't have to stay in my abusive relationship." She was scared to call the police because her abuser "brainwashed" her into believing she would get arrested instead of him because she was on probation.

Finally, a focus group participant shared she went to a crisis center in Belmont for counseling. After she left her abuser, she became homeless and ended up at the Salvation Army where they assisted her in obtaining an apartment. The counseling services provided were based on income, and since she did not have an income at the time, she received free counseling. Also, an advocate working for victims in the East Liverpool area was cited as a resource for one focus group participant.

Barriers/Problems Experienced

Housing

With approximately 78 percent of the women in the focus group earning less than \$10,000 annually, securing housing was a significant problem. The women all agreed that the typical length of stay permitted at shelters, 30 days, was too short. They felt the time should be extended to a minimum of 60 days. One victim wanted to make it clear that she was coming from a "place of need, an honest perspective," and was not trying to abuse the system. The women explained the process to obtain a protection order took time and it was difficult to leave behind everything they knew and start from scratch. "Some women are starting from scratch, with just the clothes off their backs. You need time to readjust and free yourself."

A victim in the group expanded upon the need for shelter stays to be extended. To get back on her feet she acknowledged that she would need a place to stay and a job. However, she said it was difficult to focus on working towards these two things when the system puts a time limit on shelter stay. "That's huge. You're trying to still overcome what has happened. You don't want them thinking that you're so unstable that you can't even perform your duties." The length of stay at the shelter forced one woman in the group back to her abuser: "That's why I went back because I didn't have anywhere else to go." The women explained that most waiting lists to find housing take longer than 30 days.

Another issue related to housing brought up during the focus group was safety at shelter facilities. Some women indicated that sometimes they do not feel safe at shelters. They are intended to be “safe houses,” but word of mouth and locations cause problems. “You can’t control what people say, especially in small communities...everyone knows where the shelter is located.”

Police

One woman in the focus group was being stalked by her husband who had recently been released from jail. She repeatedly called the local police department to ask for extra patrol in her area since her neighbors had seen him lurking around her home; however she was told they could not provide additional patrol due to a lack of manpower and resources. She was frustrated and scared because even though she had a protection order against her husband, he was still able to get close to her and her daughter. On one of the occasions the police did come out to her home, they found a bag full of her husband’s clothes and court papers he had left on top of the hill that overlooks her home. The police told the woman they could not arrest her husband because she had no proof he was the person who left the bags on the hill.

Another woman in the group explained how she called the police multiple times and on the last time she called, the police told her, “If I have to come by, I’m taking both of you in [to jail.]”

Other Issues Specific to this Group

EOCC

The women participating in the focus group being housed at EOCC had numerous experiences in common with the other victims in the group. However, they also had distinct differences. They were victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking in addition to being women struggling with drug and alcohol addictions, child custody issues, and other undisclosed circumstances that caused them to be incarcerated.

One of the women from EOCC was serving time for breaking the terms of her custody agreement when she came to Ohio from North Carolina. Her daughter called and informed the woman that her father, the woman’s abuser, was also abusing her. The woman agreed on a plea bargain and is currently receiving help with her drug addiction problems. She wished she would have abandoned the relationship sooner but she did not know where to go “besides calling the cops.”

Prior to ending up at EOCC, another victim became homeless and was raped while sleeping under a bridge. She gave birth to a child from this crime and had difficulty dealing with the circumstances surrounding the baby. With no family and friends to offer support, she attempted to harm the baby and is currently serving time at EOCC.

Cycle of Abuse

The women in this focus group were the only ones in the entire focus group project to discuss and specifically name their experiences as “the cycle of abuse.” All of

the women in the group dwelled on the fact they found themselves in a routine of picking abusive men. One particular woman had gone back to her abuser after leaving 10 times over the past two years. Her abuser had a daughter from a previous marriage and she felt responsible for his daughter who was eight years old. The child's mother reportedly committed suicide, so the victim felt as though she needed to fill the role of her mother. The victim also believed that her abuser somehow killed his former wife and was capable of killing her as well.

Each woman told stories of how their abusers encouraged and ultimately forced them to move quickly at the beginning of each relationship. Some of the women acknowledged moving in with their abuser only days or weeks after meeting them. One victim in particular married her abuser after only 15 days of dating him. The women discussed how when "they're in the situation...in love" they don't see the warning signs. Even though the majority of women not being housed at EOCC had their own jobs, some of them lost homes and cars because their abusers managed all the money that entered the home.

Top Needs

When asked to list their top needs, six women listed counseling and housing as significant. They wanted to take part in long-term counseling, support groups with women in similar situations, as well as general counseling to learn about themselves and ways they could prevent entering future abusive relationships. In regards to housing, the women wanted more housing to be available for homeless domestic violence survivors and an increase in safe places to go. They also believed that more women's shelters should be created.

Improving the quality of police training was listed by four women. They felt police need training to become more sensitive when they respond to domestic violence calls. According to the women, the police also need to arrive quicker when the abuser is present and a protection order has been issued.

Four women also indicated they would like more information and advertising about domestic violence resources available in their community. They also desired informational classes about the warning signs of domestic violence. Along these same lines, two women felt education about domestic violence should be offered in high schools as well as elementary schools. They believed there should be a greater awareness about the warning signs of domestic violence in schools.

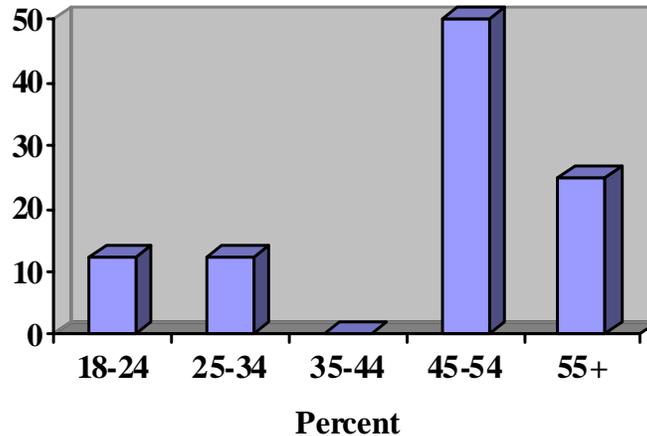
Three women felt the need for stricter laws was important. These women stated the laws need to be more severe on abusers and the sentences abusers receive should be more severe.

Securing employment so that victims would be able to obtain their own residence and assistance with switching jobs for safety reasons were voiced by two women in the group. The following needs were also listed by at least one woman: transportation, financial assistance, and support from family and friends.

Focus Group: Large county victims
Location: Hamilton County
Date: July 30, 2008

Group Demographics

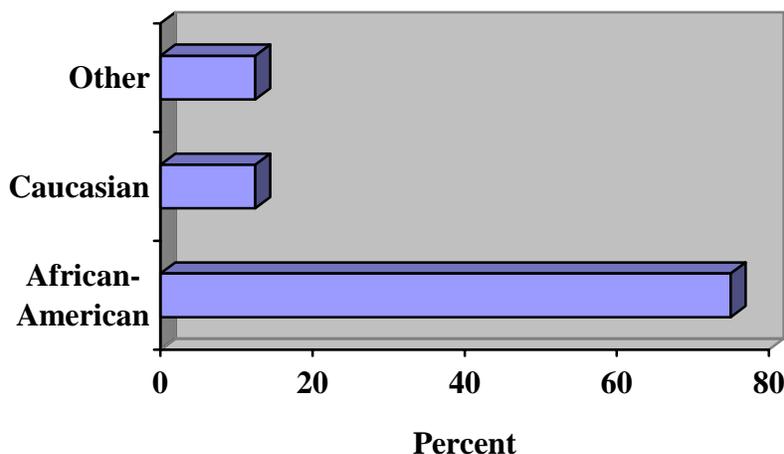
Table 4--Age Range of Participants



Eight women participated in the focus group. The focus group participants were older in age. Table 4 shows that 75 percent of the women were over the age of 44. This focus group contained the largest number of minority, non-Hispanic women. Table 5 illustrates that 75 percent of the women were African-American with one woman self-identifying as Italian-American. All of the women in the group were U.S. citizens.

Four of the women earned their High School Diploma or GED and two had completed some college courses. Only two had completed less than the 12th grade. Sixty-three percent, or five women, earned less than \$10,000 annually. Two women made between \$10,001-\$20,000 and one women in the focus group indicated she had an annual family income exceeding \$50,000.

Table 5--Race of Participant



Five of the women were single, two were divorced, and one was currently married. All eight women had at least one child. Six women were proficient in English with two women omitting the question. When asked about their religious affiliation, three women indicated they were affiliated with a particular religion, while two stated they were not. Three women omitted the question. The women who indicated they did have a religious affiliation were all Baptists.

On the optional open-ended question, “Is there anything else you wish to say about yourself?” two women provided the following responses:

- “Been through a lot, overcame a lot of test and trials in my life.”
- “I would like to start a new beginning. This has been a learning experience.”

Resources Initially Sought

When the women in the focus group made the decision to seek help, they selected various locations and then were referred to the host agency. One woman went to a local hospital and received a referral to the host agency. Another woman went to a local homeless shelter. A non-shelter social service agency was listed as a place one focus group participant turned to for help. Remaining women sought resources in the telephone book and through friends.

Barriers/Problems Experienced

Police

Upon completion of discussing where the women initially went for help, contacting law enforcement had not been mentioned. The group was asked a follow-up question regarding their decision not to contact police. One woman explained that she did not call the police because she did not want to wait until they arrived. For her “it was either leaving or death,” so she chose something quick. Women seemed to be in

agreement with her because they then explained that when the police are called in their neighborhoods, it takes them a long time to arrive.

Next, another woman affirmed when the police do finally arrive, “they’re more worried about him than they are you.” According to her, the police assume that all women are lying or will not appear in court and the charges will be dropped. Another woman in the group was angry that the police asked her, “Are you going to get back with him?” To her it seemed the same officers reported every time she called and they appeared to “get tired and have a bad attitude” towards her for continuing to call.

A different woman explained that when the police have been called before, instead of coming back out, they tell the victim to leave the house and come back in a few hours. A woman voiced her frustrations with being told this information: “This man tried to kill me and you’re trying to tell me to leave and then go back home.” According to the women, police officers have also told victims to make the man leave. This angered the victims because in most cases, the house/apartment belonged to their abuser.

The women suggested police officers who respond to domestic violence calls need to have and utilize domestic violence training. The women felt the officers needed to be more sensitive to their situations. Numerous women in the group stated they had been told by officers that if they choose to fight back against their abuser, both of them would go to jail. “They really do want someone to go to jail and they don’t care if it’s the man or the woman.” One victim said it feels like “cops are setting them up.”

Court

A consistent theme found throughout all focus groups was victims believing protection orders to be ineffective. Most of the women in this group felt “it was just a piece of paper” and it would not stop their abusers from reaching them if they really desired to. A few women in the group acknowledged some men do abide by the protection orders because they are aware of some abusers who lost their jobs over domestic violence issues and charges. It was suggested that a domestic violence registry be created “just like the one that exists for sex offenders. That way men would think twice about it...put some fear in them.”

Once the women made the decision to file formal charges, they were disappointed and frustrated with the outcomes of their cases. A few women pointed out their abusers only received court fines and probation while serving no jail time.

Counseling

It was clear after listening to the women share their experiences prior to arriving at the host agency and while still there, they had a great need for counseling. One woman, who acknowledged she had a history of child abuse while being in foster care from the age of 3 to 18 years old, stated there were limited opportunities for counseling at the host agency. Group counseling sessions were held one time per week. No groups existed for the women once they left the shelter. The women stated there are Narcotic’s Anonymous and Alcoholic’s Anonymous groups; however they were not aware of any domestic violence support groups. The women explained there were no individual counseling or aftercare programs available at the shelter. When the women did meet with shelter staff,

they were asked how much longer the women believed they would remain at the shelter. The typical length of stay was 30 days, but the women said the shelter would extend their stay under certain circumstances.

Other Issues Specific to this Group

Shelter Safety

The issue of feeling safe while staying at the shelter was a significant issue for all women participating in the focus group. While discussing a different topic, one woman stated she did not feel safe staying at the shelter. When questioned why she did not feel safe, she explained there were women staying in the shelter who had access to landlines and cell phones that were choosing to call their abuser and disclose their location. One woman asked, “So are we really safe? That’s the question.”

The women then shared a story about a woman who had come to the shelter for safety and her location was disclosed to her abuser within hours of her arrival. “She came in at four o’clock in the morning and he knew what room she slept in and what she was wearing, and that was before eight a.m.” Her abuser then called her cell phone and told her he knew where she was. Shelter staff were forced to call a cab to take her out of town. Some of the women were adamant they were going to “protect ourselves anyway we can, even in here because this is not a safe house, it’s a hell house.” Therefore, one woman offered, “If your man came to the gate looking for you, I’d say, ‘Hold on, let me go get her.’ Me and my baby can’t get killed. So yeah, I’m going right to get her.”

Though all of the women in the group agreed safety was an issue, the group was divided on what the women should do about the situation. Some of the women felt they were all victims and should stick together because, “we are all in here for the same reasons...we are all suffering.” But others felt they were being attacked because they chose to call their abusers while in the shelter. Eventually the conversation had to be cut off due to tensions in the room; however it is clear there are internal issues within this shelter that need to be addressed.

African-American Perspective

As previously stated, the Hamilton County focus group provided the largest number of African-Americans in the entire focus group project. A distinct African-American perspective emerged while discussing beliefs and values held by the women during the focus group. A 63 year old African-American woman indicated she believed shelters were for “rich white women” and that her stay at the host agency was the first time she had ever heard of a shelter “being for black women.” She explained she was first assaulted in 1962. At this time she believed shelters were “for white women who wanted to hide and be undercover from their rich husbands and keep a little money on the side.” The host agency houses any female victim regardless of race, however due to the location of the shelter; there are a large number of African-American women who choose to seek refuge at the shelter. This fact seemed to empower the older woman who had lived through more than 30 years of abuse because of her preconceived notions.

Another victim explained she did not believe in saying “thank you” when she leaves the shelter because the workers are getting paid to do a job. However, she does believe in giving back what she took out. She arrived at the shelter in a “bad condition” and ideally she wants to come back and volunteer when she’s in a “good condition.” She explained it was very important for her to give back once she left.

The sense of community and togetherness was very important among the African-American women in the focus group. Some of the women had formed small groups for support and encouragement. It was clear the older women had taken on the role of mother and mentor to some of the younger women in the group. One woman wanted everyone to work together to “protect all women, kids, and stick together to better ourselves.”

Top Needs

Women in the focus group reported most of the widespread needs expressed in the other focus groups as well as producing new needs not previously mentioned. The need for counseling was significant for this group with five out of eight women listing it on their “top needs” list. One woman said “some [women] need it daily.” Others believed they would benefit from having an aftercare program; lasting six months to one year. Women also said they would benefit from weekly visits from a case manager and help with modifying their behavior.

Having a support system in place was important for three women. They wanted more one-on-one support from the community and help with building their self-esteem. One woman wanted to be “free from being scared to live again.” Another woman believed all victims would benefit from receiving a monthly newsletter with words of encouragement from the shelter after they left.

Three women listed housing on their lists. Having better quality housing available was important to these women. Two women wanted more help locating employment so they could secure a source of consistent income. Also, they were interested in receiving job training. They felt this training should go further than simply helping them obtain their GED.

Financial assistance was listed as a top need for one woman. She experienced difficulty with the welfare system because she was not able to buy all the items she needed with the stamps provided. (She listed “pampers” and toilet tissue as examples.) She went on to explain if she chose to sell the food stamps to get other items she needed or accepted money without notifying the welfare agency, she would be charged with welfare fraud and would lose the benefits. She would also like the welfare office to be more conscious of domestic violence victims. She did not feel comfortable going down to the welfare agency with visible bruises. She felt they should make more frequent trips to places like shelters where women and children are residing.

Unlike other groups who yearned for access to public transportation, the women in this group did not like using the buses due to safety concerns. They preferred having access to cars or someone to take them to their court appointments, welfare agency visits, medical appointments, or other meetings instead of waiting for the bus. One woman stated she not only had to look out for her abuser when outside, but his family members as well. According to the women, all of the offices are downtown and their abusers are

aware of this and know the women have no other means of transportation other than the public busing system.

Other needs mentioned by the women included childcare, parenting classes, and having hotlines available “just to talk about what you’re going through.”

Focus Group: Deaf victims

Location: Franklin County

Date: August 19, 2008

Two female interpreters not affiliated with the host agency were present during the focus group⁶. The participants were extremely nervous so an advocate stayed in the room while they filled out the confidentiality agreements and demographic information. The advocate then proceeded to describe the types of questions the women would be asked. The advocate provided them with examples of answers they could provide (Ex: Naming a shelter they may have visited). When the ladies completed their forms, the advocate left the room. It is not believed the advocate’s presence before the group hindered the information received from the women. In fact, the women seemed more comfortable because the advocate was there and explained to them what would be taking place.

Group Demographics

A total of four women participated in the focus group. Due to conflicts in time and privacy of participants, two separate sessions were held. The first session had three women and the final session included one. All of the women were Deaf victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking over the age of 44, with three women indicating they were over the age of 55. All the women were Caucasian. Two of the women reported being U.S. citizens and two women omitted the question.

Two of the women had completed less than the 12th grade while one had earned her High School Diploma/GED and one had earned her Associate’s degree. All of the women earned \$30,000 or less annually. Three of the women were divorced and one indicated she was separated. All four participants had at least one child. When asked to select their English proficiency, three women omitted the question and one woman indicated she was not proficient in English. All four women were affiliated with a religion.

Resources Initially Sought

The women wanted to emphasize the differences that exist between the hearing and Deaf communities. When they needed assistance, no one could help because they had no exposure to the concept of domestic violence. “But I had no exposure. The hearing people seem to know everything, but I didn’t know...I just didn’t have enough exposure at all.” One woman explained that she first learned what she was experiencing was abuse

⁶ See Appendix for more information on interpreters.

after seeing a commercial on television about domestic violence. She still wasn't very clear about what it actually meant.

Another woman said she sought help from the "smart Deaf" people in her community. She defined the "smart Deaf" as individuals within the Deaf community who had attended college. A Deaf advocate for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking performed a presentation at the Ohio School for the Deaf and this provided two of the women with information they had previously never been exposed to. After the presentation was complete, the women connected with the advocate and received services.

One of the women indicated she used the help provided by the advocate in addition to her hearing children. Her children helped her while going through the divorce process. It took four times to make the divorce final. "My kids helped me a lot, but I still felt weak."

One woman explained that her family and friends helped her, but at the time she didn't feel like talking to them. "It was almost eight months before it started to get better and I accepted the help people were trying to give me. I was very upset and angry about what had happened." She learned about the Deaf advocate from her friends in the Deaf community.

Barriers/Problems Experienced

Language Barriers

Three of the women felt they were being shortchanged because hearing people have exposure and access to greater amounts of information than the Deaf community. They were afraid to ask for help because they did not want to look stupid and be embarrassed. "Many Deaf are afraid to ask for help, so it varies. Some people are afraid because they feel like it's a stupid question; they're afraid they're going to look stupid if they ask any number of things related to that. They won't ask, they'll just keep their mouths shut."

One of the women spent time at a local shelter. She described it as "a wonderful place with all of these services, however there was no communication." She desired to participate in the support groups, but there was no available way to communicate because the interpreter was not present daily. "Communication was a real problem. So the groups that were benefitting other people weren't benefitting me and I really felt lost. After two or three weeks I had to leave because I wasn't getting what I needed." She explained that when communicating with a hearing individual, using paper and pen was long because she had to sit and write long messages back and forth. This was a frustrating process, so all she did was "eat, sleep, and go to work" while staying at the shelter.

During a break from the focus group, the women took a look around the room, browsing through the educational material available on domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. One woman noticed none of the educational videos contained closed captioning options. She thought this was a prime example of the problem of exposure: hearing individuals are exposed to information of crimes and assaults more so than individuals from the Deaf community.

Police

In general, the women believed the police weren't very helpful because they performed poorly when it came to helping the women understand what was going on. Since they did not understand, they became very frustrated. "The communication was horrible and I didn't understand anything." The police would only ask their abusers questions and not the women because they were Deaf and their abusers were not. "I requested an interpreter and they denied me because they said it would take too long [for one to arrive] and they didn't want to pay for it." In one victim's case, no investigation was completed. However, one victim acknowledged her husband was arrested and placed in jail.

Another woman just "endured it and hid the bruises," until she eventually went to the emergency room and then called the police. The police empathized with her, but told her she should have called a long time ago. She told them she was afraid to call them or to even tell her family. She said, "I was in bad shape." The police arrested her husband and he was convicted. She believed the police were very helpful. "They were very nice and supported me and believed what my husband did was wrong."

Housing

Some of the women in the focus group lived at a place they described as "a retirement home for the Deaf." According to these women, their residence did not offer any activities geared towards helping victims of domestic violence. Also, the local public transportation service stopped running bus service to their area. "There are no rides, so I'm stuck." They were not clear on why the buses had stopped running but were frustrated because they felt they were being isolated from the hearing society. "We had a meeting and a bunch of people came to sign the petitions and we have a lot of smart people, but who would volunteer to fight with COTA [Central Ohio Transit Authority]?"

Other Issues Specific to this Group

The three women who participated in the first session all agreed that education and information needs to be shared with the Deaf community in regards to domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. One woman stated people were asking her for help because they were aware of her situation and that she had received help. However, she was not "well" enough and did not know what to say or to tell them.

It was suggested that lectures and workshops be offered at places familiar to members of the Deaf community. The women suggested having the informational sessions at their residence and the residential Deaf school. They emphasized the education should not be just for adults but also needs to target youth in the Deaf community. They believed programming offered in Deaf schools needs to be available just like they are in hearing schools.

Top Needs

The following needs represent the three women who participated in the first session. The fourth woman, who was questioned separately for privacy reasons, chose not to complete this activity.

All three women listed increased education on domestic violence as one of their top needs. Again, the women emphasized the fact that hearing schools get services and special programs in their schools while Deaf children do not. Deaf women also need to learn about all forms of abuse.

Two women listed counseling on their top needs list. One woman acknowledged she still needed better counseling after four years. "I still don't feel like I'm healed yet, but it's on hold for now because of finances." Another woman wanted a Deaf female counselor because this would make her more comfortable sharing her story and her feelings. "I'm a very private person. I preferred a Deaf woman, not a man, and it was hard to find. I wanted someone I could communicate with easily without an interpreter...it wouldn't have been comfortable with three people in the room."

The need for transportation was important for two of the three victims. They needed access to public transportation in the areas where they lived. Two women also listed better police training as one of their top needs. They felt that police officers, and the entire hearing population in general, need to understand the Deaf culture. However, they were also quick to offer that individuals from the Deaf community need to understand the procedures and what is going on as well. They would like to see interpreters arrive with the police when they call for help.

Two women felt having help to settle divorces was an important need. According to the women, Deaf groups are often exposed and need lots of help. "I didn't know about domestic violence and many Deaf don't know. We don't know that verbal word that was used, it was very different and it's frustrating." Having a 12-Step process to assist them in obtaining a divorce was suggested. The educational process could consist of a series of workshops with all participants being from the Deaf community. The group participants would gain specific knowledge relating to alimony.

Finally, financial assistance was listed by one victim. She wanted to begin collecting donations for the Deaf community so they could begin bringing in speakers to their communities for educational purposes; however she did not know where to look.

*Focus Group: **Gay Victims***

*Location: **Franklin County***

*Date: **June 16, 2008***

In the planning stages, this group was intended to be a mix of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered victims. Due to conflicting schedules of potential focus group participants, two different times were scheduled for their convenience. Each group was scheduled to have a minimum of four participants. However, all of the victims who indicated they would participate in the focus group did not attend. Therefore, the focus group consisted of three gay men. The first session was held with one gay man and the second session was held with two gay men who were partners.

Group Demographics

A total of three men participated in the focus group held in Franklin County. They were between the ages of 35 – 44. All three men were Caucasian and U.S. citizens. One victim had completed high school or earned his GED, one had completed some college courses, and one had earned his bachelor's degree. One victim earned less than \$10,000 annually while another participant earned between \$30,001 and \$40,000. The final male participant earned over \$50,000 annually.

One of the male participants was divorced with one child. The other two victims were partners and had no children. All three men were proficient in English. One had no religious affiliation while two acknowledged they were Agnostic and Christian respectively.

On the final optional open-ended response of the questionnaire, "Is there anything else you wish to say about yourself?" the following responses were offered:

- "I am a gay male that deals with discrimination on a daily basis."
- "Gay—Partnered."
- "Gay male."

Resources Initially Sought

First Session

During the first session, the victim indicated he went to the Health Department a day and a half after the sexual assault occurred. However, while there, he did not receive any referrals. He chose not to call the police following the incident because he was embarrassed and felt he did not have enough concrete evidence.

Since he did not receive assistance from workers at the Health Department, he sought support from friends and family. He was referred to the host agency by friends. He contacted the host agency via e-mail and received a quick response. From there, he was referred to Mt. Carmel Crime and Trauma Program. He planned on utilizing this program and scheduling an appointment soon. He was satisfied with the host agency in addition to the Trauma Program.

Second Session

The second session contained two gay male partnered victims. They were assaulted by their neighbor after they put a rainbow flag on their garage. After the assault, they immediately called the police. They were then taken to OSU hospital. The men were not satisfied with their experience at the hospital because they were required to repeat how their assault occurred to each person who entered the room. While at the hospital, no advocate was called and they felt an overall lack of empathy from hospital staff. However, they did feel the EMS staff treated them well on the way to the hospital.

Barriers/Problems Experienced

First Session

This male participant experienced barriers when he initially was not referred to further treatment once he left the Health Department. He also saw the police as being a barrier due to the stigma attached to being gay. He believed the police would not understand and this would bring more embarrassment to him.

He then went on to explain how his past history served as a barrier to him seeking services. He was molested as a child and the person who committed the crime “got off with no consequences.” Knowing this made him feel less inclined to go ahead with calling the police and filing a formal charge because he believed it was useless; the person who sexually assaulted him would not be brought to justice just like the person who abused him as a child.

Second Session

Police

The two victims made the decision to call the police after the assault by their neighbor. They had to call the police twice for them to come out to their residence. Once the police arrived, their neighbor told the police that the dispute was “mutual combat” between men. The police believed the neighbor and he was not taken into custody. The victims explained that they do not feel comfortable around the police because they do not trust them. According to the victims, police do not listen to all parties involved. They felt the police did not take them seriously because “they’re men.”

Court

The victims filed assault charges; however they were not upheld. Instead, their neighbor was charged with ethnic intimidation. Even though their neighbor pled guilty, the men were still required to go through two days of hearings.

The two victims refused to let their neighbor force them out of their home, so they continued to live next door to the person who assaulted them. The neighbor began stalking them, following them to shopping centers and releasing dogs onto their property. Due to this behavior, the victims sought a protection order at the beginning of 2008.

The men stated the legal process was especially difficult for them. They had to continually miss work over the course of a year. The men also experienced difficulty and a high level of unpleasantness during their times of self-disclosure. They were required to recount their assault and ensuing events in a court room full of various people completely unrelated to their court case. “When you go in there, it’s public.”

The victims also felt court security was inadequate. Throughout the court proceedings, they were in the same room with the person who attacked them. “We would completely tense up and feel physically ill when the person who assaulted us just walks in the room.” The victims believe it is imperative that court security be more cognizant of victims’ and offenders’ locations in the court room. The two men suggested court staff be

educated on sensitivity because the men felt embarrassed on numerous occasions while going through the process. The men did acknowledge having an advocate walking them through the court process would have been very helpful; however they were not aware advocates were available until the criminal proceedings were already complete. At this time, they were connected with an advocate.

Top Needs

All three men listed counseling on their list of top needs. One victim made it clear that counseling should be available immediately after the crime as well as later down the road. Training for law enforcement, court staff, and first responders was also a significant need for all victims. According to one victim, the training should cover cultural awareness in addition to hate crimes. Another victim suggested medical awareness training for hospital staff.

Two of the group participants listed a need for advocacy and for improved victim's compensation. To these men, going through the process to obtain compensation was "almost like being re-victimized." There was an abundance of paperwork with an extended wait for an approval decision.

Improved communication between departments and agencies was listed by one victim. He believed having an intake liaison would improve communication and would make victims more aware of what transpires. Also, community awareness and cultural sensitivity were mentioned. Two of the victims shared that acceptance of homosexuality is limited, even in their own neighborhood. Some of their neighbors have been supportive, however others have made comments such as, "Well, you must have known that something was going to happen when you put that flag up."

III. Direct Service Provider Findings Revisited

Though each focus group contained different people from across Ohio, one major theme emerged from all groups regardless of composition or geographic location. There is a lack of information possessed by victims across all groups regarding available services. Victims repeatedly stated they were unclear on where to turn except for calling the police. If they chose not to call the police, they turned to family and friends; and if they did not have that support, they remained in the abusive relationship. Housing, counseling, job placement, legal/court advocacy, and access to interpreters were mentioned time after time by victims as lacking in their communities.

For the most part, according to results from direct service providers, the above mentioned services were available in their communities. Table 6 illustrates direct service providers informed opinions on what services are available in their communities.⁷

⁷ While recruiting participants for the focus group project, victims were not asked to specify the type of crime they were victims of. Program directors only selected participants they knew were victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking. In the Ohio Family Violence Needs Assessment, direct service providers were asked to provide information for each of the aforementioned crimes. Needs of domestic violence victims were used in Table 6 because that particular crime had the greatest number of responses (N=136).

Table 6—Needs of Domestic Violence victims (N=136)

SERVICE	Available in our community and sufficient (%)	Available in our community but not sufficient (%)	Not available in our community (%)
Housing			
<i>Immediate</i>	57.3	34.2	6.8
<i>Intermediate</i>	19.0	55.2	19.8
<i>Long-term</i>	13.0	67.0	8.7
Counseling			
<i>Individual counseling</i>	60.3	34.5	0.0
<i>Support group</i>	64.7	26.7	2.6
Job placement	25.7	60.2	6.2
Legal/court advocacy	63.2	30.7	0.9
Access to interpreters	44.9	35.3	5.3
Dietary needs based on religion or culture	29.0	12.0	9.4
Legal services for immigrant and refugee victims			
<i>Intermediate</i>	17.6	39.8	13.0
<i>Long-term</i>	23.9	35.4	15.9

Victims in the focus groups shared frustrations with long waits to find permanent housing while experiencing pressure to leave shelters after 30 days. Service providers indicated that immediate housing is generally available in their communities with approximately 57 percent responding that housing is available and sufficient for victims in crisis. Once victims learned that shelters were available, they did not experience difficulty entering. The percentages drop from 57 to 19 when service providers are seeking to help victims find intermediate housing. The percentage drops even lower when long-term housing is needed. Housing is a service that service providers and victims both agree needs some improvement.

When asked to list their top needs, many victims named counseling at or near the top of their lists. They were not satisfied with the amount of counseling opportunities available to them. They also wanted a chance to participate in support groups with others in similar situations so they could see they were not alone. If victims were aware of counselors in their communities, they could not afford them because they were on a fixed income and some had no income at all. Approximately sixty percent of direct service providers indicated individual counseling is available and sufficient in their communities. Likewise, almost 65 percent direct service providers agreed that support groups were available and sufficient in their communities.

There appears to be a large disconnect between direct service providers and victims. This can be attributed to a lack of information being shared. The number one way victims learned about services was through word of mouth. In certain communities that may be isolated due to language/cultural barriers, available services will not be utilized because many people within the community are unaware of what is available. This is especially true for victims who needed legal services and access to interpreters. All other remaining services listed in Table 26 were cited as lacking or insufficient by focus group participants. In order to reach a greater number of people in need, service

providers must use new approaches and distribute information about their services to areas and communities they have not targeted in the past.

IV. Recommendations

Though the individuals who participated in the focus group project possessed different backgrounds and experiences, they all expressed a need for expanded counseling services, extended length of shelter stay, and improved responses from law enforcement in their time of need.

Increase focus on counseling

Free counseling should be readily available immediately following the crisis situation in addition to months and years later. During a particular focus group, one victim acknowledged she still needed counseling four years after her crisis situation: “I still don’t feel like I’m healed yet...” Counseling services should increase their focus on helping victims heal. This can be achieved through individual sessions as well as support groups. Service providers acknowledge focusing their attention on holding abusers accountable for their actions. However, an equal or greater amount of attention should be provided to victims in hopes of aiding in their healing and restoration process. Counseling should also be available in varying formats to be inclusive of victims who are Limited-English Proficient or do not speak English at all. This design should extend to victims from the Deaf community as well.

Extend length of stay in shelters

Length of stay in shelters proved to be important for victims. Victims explained they needed more time to process the event and to create a plan of action. Some victims are left without housing, transportation, and a source of income when they enter the shelter. Victims stated they need more than 30 days to get back on their feet and have a sense of confidence in their ability to survive without their abusers. Some victims felt as though shelter staff were pushing them out near the 30 day limit. If victims were not prepared and had no other place to turn, they returned to their abusers due to lack of options. In order to aid in victim recovery, shelter length of stay should be extended.

Police training to increase sensitivity

The need for police sensitivity during emergency calls continues to be a great need for all victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Increased, continuous training for all law enforcement officials is vital. Nearly all focus group participants expressed frustration following their interactions with law enforcement. Officers were accused of being insensitive, accusatory, and unresponsive to victims’ needs. In addition to training on how to deal with domestic violence situations in the field, law enforcement should hold an internal discussion on domestic violence. If officers responding to a domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking crisis situation are

engaging in the same behavior of the abuser, their ability to perform their duties is significantly diminished. Regardless of receptivity within departments and agencies, this conversation needs to be held to address ongoing issues in this regard.

V. Limitations

Though both parts of this report garner large amounts of useful information, the results should not be generalized to all direct service providers or victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking across the state of Ohio. Time constraints as well as a lack of resources did not allow for all desired groups of victims to participate in the focus groups. Based on findings from direct service providers, the following groups proved to be challenging to serve and were not included in the focus group project: Amish, youth/teens, Lesbian, and Somalis. While it may be difficult to gain access into some of the above communities, it will be advantageous to hear how each of the communities view domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Then, a clearer picture will emerge of how service providers can better help victims within these communities.

Nearly all victims who participated in the focus group project were gathered by directors and other staff members of service agencies across Ohio. At some point in time, all participants had received services from the agencies. Therefore, victims in Ohio who have not sought services from agencies are underrepresented in this report.

Finally, a formal Institutional Review Board was not used for this study. However, the Ohio Family Violence Prevention Council served in this capacity. Prior to moving forward with each step of the process, Council members reviewed plans and documents. The Council is composed of a diverse group of individuals from various professions related to domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

VI. Appendix

The focus group project was organized by staff from the Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services, a division of the Ohio Department of Public Safety. Each focus group was facilitated by Monica Ellis, lead researcher on the Ohio Family Violence Needs Assessment. Chrystal Alexander, program director of the Family Violence Prevention Center, was also present during each focus group. Workers/volunteers from the host site, in addition to other advocates the victims may have known, were not permitted to be present during the group. This decision was made to ensure victims felt comfortable sharing experiences about services or resources available to them. Each focus group, excluding the focus group with gay men, included between 4-10 participants. The shortest group lasted 30 minutes with the longest one lasting 2 ½ hours. Interpreters were required for two groups: (1) Deaf victims and the (2) Immigrant/Refugee group.

All documents used for the focus groups were reviewed by the Research Committee, an Advisory Council of the Family Violence Prevention Council, prior to beginning the focus group project. The Research Committee also helped draft open-ended questions to ask victims. A copy of the confidentiality agreement, demographic information questionnaire, as well as the questions asked can be found in subsequent pages.

Focus Group Host Sites

Rural Opportunities, Inc.

Bowling Green, OH
Wood County

Family Justice Center

Defiance, OH
Defiance County

Christina House

Lisbon, OH
Columbiana County

YWCA Battered Women's Shelter

Cincinnati, OH
Hamilton County

Sexual Assault Response Network of Central Ohio

Columbus, OH
Franklin County

Buckeye Region Anti-Violence Organization

Columbus, OH
Franklin County

Interpreting Services

Deaf Services Center, Inc.

Worthington, OH
Franklin County

Mandy's Spanish Interpreting Service

Toledo, OH
Lucas County

Confidentiality Agreement and Release Form

I, _____, agree to participate in the Focus Group Project led by the Ohio Department of Public Safety, Office of Criminal Justice Services (OCJS). As a *facilitator* of the focus group discussion, I understand that all the information shared by myself and other participants is confidential. I agree to keep all information regarding the discussion and the participants confidential.

I understand that the goal of this project is to gather information about and improve service delivery in my area and not to focus on any individual participant or agency.

I understand that the focus group discussion will be tape recorded and that any information that OCJS obtains through my participation will be used to compile a written report which will be released to the public. I understand that my name and the names of any participating individuals or agencies that are discussed will not be released or disseminated in any way. I also understand that particular statements I make as a facilitator in the discussion may be quoted in the written report and released to the public but that my name and the names of any individuals and agencies I discuss will not be used in the report.

By signing below, I hereby agree to maintain the confidentiality of the information that I receive as a facilitator of the focus group discussion.

Signature

Date

Confidentiality Agreement and Release Form

I, _____, agree to participate in the Focus Group Project led by the Ohio Department of Public Safety, Office of Criminal Justice Services (OCJS). As a *participant* in the focus group discussion, I understand that all the information shared by myself and other participants is confidential. I agree to keep all information regarding the discussion and the participants confidential.

I understand that the goal of this project is to gather information about and improve service delivery in my area and not to focus on any individual participant or agency.

I understand that the focus group discussion will be tape recorded and that any information that OCJS obtains through my participation will be used to compile a written report which will be released to the public. I understand that my name and the names of any participating individuals or agencies that are discussed will not be released or disseminated in any way. I also understand that particular statements I make as a participant in the discussion may be quoted in the written report and released to the public but that my name and the names of any individuals and agencies I discuss will not be used in the report.

By signing below, I hereby agree to maintain the confidentiality of the information that I receive as a participant in the focus group discussion.

Signature

Date

Demographic Information

This form is voluntary. We are requesting this information for statistical purposes only and it **WILL NOT** be used to identify your participation in this group in any way. Please do not write your name on this form.

Age: 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55+

Race (please check ALL that apply):

African-American / Black Asian / Asian Pacific American
 Caucasian / White Hispanic / Latina
 Native American I do not feel that these categories apply to me.
I identify as _____.

U.S. Citizenship: Are you a United States citizen? Yes No

Education (highest grade completed):

Less than 12th grade High School Diploma / GED
 Some college Associate's Degree
 Bachelor's Degree Advanced Degree

Annual Family Income (please check only ONE):

\$0 - \$10,000 \$30,001 - \$40,000
 \$10,001 - \$20,000 \$40,001 - \$50,000
 \$20,001 - \$30,000 \$50,001+

Marital Status (please check only ONE):

Married Divorced Single Widowed Partnered

Do you have children: Yes No

If yes, what are their ages? _____

English proficiency (please check only ONE):

- Proficient in reading English
- Proficient in speaking English
- Proficient in reading **AND** speaking English
- Not proficient in English

Please list any religious affiliation you have:

Is there anything else you wish to say about yourself (optional)?

Victim Demographic Information (N=36)

DEMOGRAPHIC INFO	(n)	(%)	DEMOGRAPHIC INFO	(n)	(%)
Age Range			Education		
18-24	6	16.7	Less than 12 th Grade	9	25.0
25-34	5	13.9	HS Diploma/GED	13	36.1
35-44	9	25.0	Some college	10	27.8
45-54	11	30.6	Associate's Degree	3	8.3
55 and over	5	13.9	Bachelor's Degree	1	2.8
Race			Children		
African-American	7	19.4	Yes	31	86.1
Caucasian/White	18	50.0	No	5	13.9
Hispanic/Latina	8	22.2			
Native American	2	5.6			
Other	1	2.8			
Annual Family Income (\$)			Marital Status		
0 – 10,000	17	47.2	Married	6	16.7
10,001 – 20,000	7	19.4	Divorced	13	36.1
20,001 – 30,000	4	11.1	Single	12	33.3
30,001 – 40,000	2	5.6	Widowed	1	2.8
40,001 – 50,000	0	0.0	Partnered	3	8.3
50,001 and over	2	5.6	Other	1	2.8
Missing	4	11.1			
U.S. Citizen			Religious Affiliation		
Yes	27	75.0	Yes	21	58.3
No	2	5.6	None	5	13.9
Missing	7	19.4	Missing	10	27.8
English Proficiency					
Proficient in reading English	2	5.6			
Proficient in reading AND speaking English	24	66.7			
Not proficient in English	5	13.9			
Missing	5	13.9			

Focus Group Questions

(1) When you first decided to seek help, what service did you search for and why did you choose that one first? Was the assistance you received helpful?

Possible follow-up: If you did not go through the criminal justice system or a shelter, where did you go for support?

(2) If you could go back to the time you began looking for help, knowing what you know now, what would you do differently and why?

Possible follow-up: What barriers did you encounter while seeking out services? What are some of your on-going needs?

(3) Earlier this year our office conducted a statewide survey of services providers to see what services they had difficulty providing to domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking survivors. Service providers indicated that they had difficulty helping survivors find and maintain employment. Do you agree with this? What are your experiences with finding and maintaining employment?

We're hoping this will lead to a discussion of other needs such as child care, public transportation, housing, and financial assistance.

(4) Although there are many domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking services that survivors need access to, there are limited resources to fund all these services. I want to get a better idea of what you feel are the services most needed—that is, those that do the most good. In your opinion, what are the top five needs that survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking have? If you have fewer than five, that is fine.

Large Post-it note sheets will be provided for each survivor to come up with their “top needs.”

Now imagine that you have ten stacks of money. You can distribute these stacks in any way you choose to the services you came up with on your sheet of paper. You can equally distribute the stacks among several listed, or you can give most of the stacks to one or a few services. I will give each of you ten sticky dots that represent the ten stacks of money. Put the dots next to the service or services you have chosen.

Focus group participants will then take turns explaining why they selected certain services and rank their importance.

(5) Are there any other issues you wish to discuss?