

Correlations between Outcomes and Services in a Domestic Violence Center

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Introduction

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According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (2015), one in three women experience physical violence from an intimate partner at some point in their lives, one in five women experience severe physical abuse, and one in seven women fear for their own lives or for the lives of someone close to them. Though measures of domestic violence (DV) tend to focus on physical and sexual abuse, psychological abuse is frequently conjointly present. Any form of abuse can be highly detrimental to a person's physical, emotional and social well-being.

Thus, domestic violence shelters can be an excellent resource for victims of abuse. In the United States, there are over 3000 programs that offer some sort of domestic violence service (Domestic Shelters, 2015). Though services such as psychological support, material goods, and legal assistance, play a critical role in many women's ability to leave their abusers and improve their safety, there is a lack of shelter program evaluation; specifically regarding which services play an impactful role in promoting positive outcomes after exiting the shelter program.

Moreover, while some programs are required to assess their services, they may not have time or resources to perform valid and thorough evaluations (Bennett et al., 2004). Program evaluation can provide shelter programs with meaningful feedback about what is working well, what may need improvement, and how to better and more efficiently allocate resources. However, due to constraints on resources and time, some programs are instead evaluated by independent psychological research studies, often conducted by colleges or universities.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify the factors that contribute to positive outcomes for DV survivors, qualitatively and quantitatively, to inform future service provision. This study identified correlations between services and outcomes upon leaving the shelter as well as surveying past clients about their experiences during their previous stay and since leaving the

shelter. This article will use domestic violence (DV) as a general term to encompass the various branches of domestic violence, such as intimate partner violence.

Literature Review

Domestic Violence (DV) and Defining Success within Shelter Programming

Across studies, the clearest positive outcome for a survivor of domestic violence is the safety and livelihood of that individual. Beyond this, measurements of success can include psychological characteristics, such as improvement in mental health, self-efficacy, social support, empowerment, and a positive locus of control (Bennett et al., 2004; Cattaneo & Goodman, 2015; Sullivan & Rumptz, 1994; Goodman et al., 2015). These outcomes may reflect the efficacy of various shelter programs, which can have additional goals for clients such as an increased understanding of DV, feeling supported, improving decision-making skills, safety planning, developing healthy coping mechanisms, and goal-setting (Bennett et al., 2004). The broad and varying definitions of success from study to study limit congruency in informing practice in domestic violence shelters.

Therefore, in an effort to promote congruency this study defined a positive outcome as the individual not returning to their abuser, having adequate food and shelter, and self-reported well-being six-months through three years after exiting the domestic violence shelter program.

Race

Though domestic violence affects people of all demographic variables, societal factors can play a role in survivors' outcomes. Possibly because of the pervasive claim that there is no "typical victim" of DV (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2015), statistics on domestic violence often do not mention racial differences. However, by erasing these

differences, these sources also discredit the additional disadvantages that racial minorities may face in leaving their abusers. Institutional racism can factor into the experiences of victims of color as they attempt to leave their abusers and accumulate the resources to live independently. Coley and Beckett (1988) reviewed research on racial differences in battered women. Though much of the literature indicated that black and white women are victims of DV at similar rates, these researchers suggested that looking at these rates alone does not account for other racial differences in DV survivors. One study found that racial differences appear in the community resources battered women seek (Minnesota Department of Corrections Program for Battered Women, 1982, as cited in Coley & Beckett 1988). Only 7% of black battered women utilized shelter services and 5% sought help from law enforcement, compared to 79% and 83% of white battered women, respectively. Though this study is dated, the current prevalence of police violence against racial minorities could sustain this trend of women of color not seeking police assistance in DV situations. However, there was great difficulty in finding additional current and peer-reviewed sources. A disadvantage in accruing resources could also account for why black women have been found to have significantly longer shelter stays than white women (Sullivan & Rumptz, 1994). Abused women of color were more likely than white women to report needing health care, material goods, and resources for their children, as well as having more financial concerns (Sullivan et al., 1992; Sullivan & Rumptz, 1994). Even after obtaining a protection order, re-abuse rates were three times higher for black women than white women, though there was no significant difference between Latina women and white women (Carlson, Harris, & Holden, 1999). On a positive note, Jones et al. (2005) found that among abused pregnant women, black women had significantly better mental health than white women, which correlated with higher rates of emotional and practical family support. However, this conflicts with research by

Belknap et al. (2009) who did not find significant racial differences in regards to mental health. Nonetheless, Sullivan and Rumptz (1994) concluded that black women exiting DV shelters reported having increased their mental health, social support, and life satisfaction, and had decreased rates of abuse.

Age

Studies have found mixed results for correlations between age and outcome. McFarlane et al. (2014) found that lower age predicts returning to an abuser for women who had lived in a DV shelter. However, this study did not find that age was an outcome predictor for women who had sought a protection order without living in a shelter. Carlson, Harris, and Holden (1999) came to the conclusion that older age predicts reduced rates of reported abuse after obtaining a protection order.

Other studies have found that a battered woman's age is related to the resources she has in addition to her own needs. Logically, younger women report needing childcare more, while older women need health care (Sullivan et al., 1992). Which could be a reason for women to stay in abusive relationships. Older women report having more institutional support (from medical, psychological, and legal professionals, police, and social service workers and advocates), but age is unrelated to social support from relatives, friends, and coworkers (Belknap et al., 2009). Older women also report poorer mental health than younger women (Belknap et al., 2009).

Education

McFarlane et al. (2014) found differing results in how education predicts outcome. Lower education predicts returning to an abuser for women in DV shelters, but higher education predicts returning to an abuser for women with protection orders who did not live in a shelter. This study did not speculate as to why education level predicted different outcomes for women

utilizing different services. Belknap et al. (2009) found a trend, though it was not statistically significant, that the more educated a woman was, the better her mental health.

Length of Abuse

McFarlane et al. (2014) concluded that the longer the relationship, the more likely a woman will return to her abuser after a shelter stay. This finding conflicted with Carlson, Harris, and Holden (1999), who reported that women who had been in longer relationships (five or more years), were less likely to report re-abuse two years after obtaining a protection order. Specifically, the women who had been in their abusive relationships for one year or less were ten times more likely to report re-abuse than the women whose relationships had lasted at least five years. No conclusive evidence was found explaining the conflict. This lack of research represents a symptom of a larger problem-the lack of shelter evaluation, generally speaking.

Protection Orders

A protection order (PO), also known as a restraining order, can be a valuable resource for a woman attempting to leave her abusive relationship. POs do not necessarily forbid the abuser from being near or contacting the petitioner, but this option is commonly utilized by DV survivors (FindLaw, 2015). POs can legally prohibit the abuser from contacting the petitioner (in person, online, by mail, or by phone) and their family, from engaging in any violent behaviors, and from being near the petitioner, their residence, their job, or their family members. They can also permit contact only under certain conditions such as child visitations, mandate the abuser to move out of the petitioner's residence, and order the abuser to seek therapy (Holt et al., 2002; Carlson, Harris, & Holden, 1999; FindLaw, 2015). States differ on certain provisions, such as a mandatory forfeit of the abuser's firearms, but a PO received in one state is valid in every state

(FindLaw, 2015). Petitioners can seek temporary or permanent protection orders, with the amount of time covered varying by state.

Temporary and permanent POs have been researched widely as to their efficacy in preventing DV. Generally, the research indicates women who obtain permanent POs report lower rates of re-abuse than women who do not. Holt et al. (2002) found that women with a permanent PO (in this case, effective for one year) had an 80% decrease in rates of physical abuse compared to pre-PO rates. Though a temporary PO (effective for two weeks) did not have this significant reduction, it at least did not correlate with an increase in physical abuse, which is a common concern for DV victims. However, obtaining a temporary PO was correlated with a quadrupled risk for experiencing psychological abuse. This study both disproves (for physical abuse) and confirms (for psychological abuse) the fear that many women have in seeking a PO, which is that their abusers will react by increasing abuse. Other research has not found significant outcome differences between women who sought temporary versus permanent POs (Klein, 1996; Harrell & Smith, 1996; as cited in Carlson, Harris, & Holden, 1999).

Other research on POs as a predictor of re-abuse did not differentiate between permanent and temporary orders, instead focusing on their general efficacy in preventing abuse. Carlson, Harris, and Holden (1999) found that two years after obtaining a PO, 23% of women had experienced physical re-abuse, a 45% decrease from before the PO. McFarlane et al. (2014) concluded that POs are more effective than DV shelters in preventing re-abuse, with only 16% of the women with POs returning to their abusers after two years. Logically, longer follow up periods have higher rates of reported physical re-abuse, with studies finding 50% to 60% re-abuse rates in follow-ups from six months to two years (Harrell & Smith, 1996; Morton et al., 1987; Klein, 1996; as cited in Carlson, Harris, & Holden, 1999), and only 20% to 40% re-abuse

rates in follow-ups under six months (Chaudhuri & Daly, 1992; Grau et al., 1985; as cited in Carlson, Harris, & Holden, 1999). Our hypothesis is that women with POs have lower re-abuse rates not only because the abuser faces severe consequences, but also because the women who seek them are more committed to articulating and acting on the violence that occurred in the relationship.

Methodology and Project Aim

The central aim of our research at a small DV Center in an urban setting in Wisconsin was to comprehend the efficacy of services received by in-shelter clients from 2012 to 2014, as reflected in their outcomes. These services included but were not limited to: connection of participants to educational advancement opportunities, distribution of bus tokens, food and clothing donations, support group therapy, restraining orders, and advocacy.

In order to complete this analysis, we examined the services received by DV Center program participants in relation to their exit venues, which is the location that the program participant immediately moved to upon exiting the shelter. For those participants who could be contacted by phone, we also conducted follow-up interviews to better examine their experiences as an in-house client.

Our central hypothesis was that certain services, particularly restraining orders, would correlate with exit venues. We also hypothesized that demographic variables, such as age and education level, would correlate with exit venues. The general purpose of assessing these past clients was to develop self-assessment methods at the center, including the implementation of follow-up interviews for exited clients, which would ideally lead to better outcomes and improvements in services.

Sample

All participants in this study were cisgender women who had in-shelter stays at a small urban DV center. There were 130 female in-shelter program participant stays from January of 2012 to December of 2014, with an average age of 34.3 years. Although, age distribution was bimodal, with the heaviest concentration between 21 and 31 years and a lighter concentration between 47 and 51 years. There were 55 white participants, 54 black participants, 16 Latina participants, 4 mixed-race participants, and one participant whose race was not identified.

Procedures

Institutional Review Board approval was received by the researchers' college and written or verbal consent was received from each individual. The only instance in which written consent was not received, but verbal consent was received, was during the follow-up phone calls with exited program participants. Most of the data collected for this study came directly from past client files, which are archived at the DV center. Each file contained 91 records of information, such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, age, income, length of abuse, length of time in the area, number of children, and the quantity of services received.

Using STATA Statistical analysis software, we tested all 91 variables for normality and statistical significance. While descriptive statistics were primarily used to analyze the data, statistical significance was also utilized to assess importance. The results we deemed to be significant were if, 1) if the results were statistically significant, 2) if the results were descriptively significant, and 3) if there was an existing body of research that addressed a specific phenomenon.

Qualitative analysis using a short survey was used in conducting the follow-up interviews. In regards to a concrete definition of success during the follow-up portion, our definition was the individual not returning to their abuser, having adequate food and shelter, and

self-reported well-being six-months through three years after exiting the domestic violence shelter.

We attempted to minimize bias and negate measurement error by assigning each exited program participant a numeric identifier and having researchers enter the data who had little to no contact with the past clients. By considering as many variables as possible we attempted to avoid confirmation bias. We attempted to avoid systematic measurement error by not excluding any files for any reason and by using the largest sample size possible. One-hundred thirty was the largest sample size possible when we took into account how record keeping had changed and the study sought to follow-up with participants who had exited the program at least six months prior.

Findings

To reiterate, there were 130 in-shelter program participant stays from 2012-2014. The average length of stay of a program participant at the center was 53 days. Of those program participants, the most common exit venue, or location the participant went to after leaving the shelter was their “own place” of residence (See *Figure 1* in Appendix). Another way to construct this chart was by either “preferred” or “not preferred” exit venue (See *Figure 2* in Appendix). Preferred venues by the center’s staff were: family, own place, friend, and a program with housing. The rest of the exit venues were not preferred. Moreover, as in-shelter program participants were restricted to female and male-to-female individuals, this study will use “she” pronouns.

Restraining Orders

From 2012-2014, fourteen program participants applied for a temporary restraining order, and of these fourteen, eleven applied for a full order of protection, temporary meaning 72 hours

and full can be up to four. The acquisition of a restraining order is strongly positively correlated with a successful outcome. Of the fourteen participants who applied for even a temporary restraining order, not a single participant returned to their abuser. Because this study spanned three years, we can negate the possible impacts of specific staff on this result.

Of the program participants who applied for a restraining order, 36% exited to their own place of residence, 14% exited to a family member, 29% exited to another shelter, and 21% exited to a location unknown to the center's staff. In contrast, of the program participants who did not have a restraining order, 13% exited to their abuser, 28% exited to their own place, 18% exited to a family member, 5% exited to a friend, 7% exited to another shelter, 1% exited to a program (such as career or educational development) that provided housing, 20% exited to an unknown location, 3% exited to jail, and 2% exited to some form of rehabilitation program.

In this study, none of the 14 women who had a PO exited to their abusers, and of the participants that we were able to follow-up with, none of them have had abusive partner in the past three years after exiting the center. However, further research regarding why so few women obtain restraining orders is merited, it could be for a multitude of reasons, such as legal language being a barrier to entry, or not wanting to further aggravate the abuser. However, without further investigation it is difficult to determine why so few women obtain restraining orders.

Education

Of the center's program participants, 42% had a high school diploma or the equivalent, 35% had less than a high school diploma, and 18% of the center's exited program participants had either started, dropped out of, or completed some form of higher education. Level of

education was unknown for 5% of the center's exited program participants because it was not recorded in the participants file, this was usually due to a short stay at the shelter.

See *Figure 6* in Appendix for correlation of education level and exit venue. Of the 13 program participants who returned to their abuser, 85% of those who returned to their abusers did not have any formal education after high school. Fifteen percent of the program participants who returned to their abuser had at least some college. This might suggest that another aspect was at play, such as financial resources or other resources available due to a higher level of education. |

Length of Abuse and Age

Sixty-seven percent of participants with several days of abuse exited to a preferred location, 53% of individuals with one to twelve months of abuse exited to a preferred location, 31% of individuals with one to five years of abuse exited to a preferred location, 50% of participants with six to nine years of abuse exited to a preferred location, 78% percent of participants with ten years of abuse exited to a preferred location, and 75% of participants with eleven to twenty years of abuse exited to a preferred location. Between one month and nine years of abuse had the highest rates of exiting to a not preferred location. This study found that 31% of participants who had relationships lasting five to nine years exited to their abusers, which was the highest percent of participants returning to abusers.

While participants aged 28-37, had the highest rates of exiting to their abuser, 17%. They also had the highest rates of exiting to independent housing, 37%.

Amongst program participants ages 18-27, only 5% returned to their abuser, and 27% exited to their own place of residence. The program participants followed a curve. Seventeen percent of participants ages 28-37 exited to their abuser and 37% exited to their own place of

residence. Finally, 10% of participants ages 38-65 exited to their abuser, and 20% exited to their own place. However, in regards to preferred/not preferred exit venue, 48% of participants ages 18-27 exited to a preferred venue; 52% of participants ages 28-37 exited to a preferred venue; and, 55% of participants ages 38-65 exited to a preferred venue. The relationship between exit venue, age, and length of abuse is incredibly complex and merits further research.

Custody of the Children

Sixty-one percent of participants had sole custody of their children, 11% did not have custody, 14% had only adult children, 3% had custody of some but not all their children, 11% had custody of their children but did not have them at the center, and 1% had joint custody. Marriage and number of children were not significant outcome predictors in any way, they were also not descriptively significant. |

Of the individuals who had custody of all their children, 10% returned to their abuser, 47% exited to their own place of residence, 8% exited to a family member, 2% exited to a friend, 26% exited to an unknown location, 2% exited to jail, and 2% exited to rehab. Conversely, 9% of individuals who did not have custody of their children returned to their abuser and none exited to their own place of residence.

The relationship between outcomes and custody of the children is significant, statistically and descriptively, and merits more research, especially considering that marital status and number of children were not significant in any way.

Bus Tokens

Bus tokens, particularly the number of tokens received, is significantly correlated with outcome. That does not mean that the other services are not important, but that services such as one-on-ones and support groups are difficult to assess through quantitative measures.

Of the program participants who used more than five bus tokens during their stay, none exited to their abuser. What this variable may suggest is that it is a proxy variable for another more difficult to measure variable. We posit that this variable may be resourcefulness in utilizing existing resources, or being willing to learn to ride the bus, in order to create new opportunities, such as employment or education.

Race/Ethnicity

Though domestic violence affects people of all demographic variables, societal factors can have a large impact on survivors' outcomes. Possibly because of the pervasive claim that there is no "typical victim" of DV (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2015), statistics on domestic violence often do not mention racial differences. |

The average length of shelter stays for participants are nearly identical for white and black women. Of the clients, 55 were white, 54 black, 16 Latina, 4 mixed-race, and one of unidentified race. There were no significant differences between white and black women regarding other demographic characteristics or in outcomes. This lack of difference is important, because previous research consistently indicates that black women are disadvantaged compared to white women in domestic violence shelter settings. Our findings, compared with the previous research on race, could suggest that staff at this particular shelter and that staff themselves are effective in being nondiscriminatory. However, this is something that requires further research to be determined.

We found that in some respects, the black clients actually fare better than white or Latina clients, in terms of abusers and housing situations. Only 4% of black clients exited to their abusers, compared to 11% of white clients and 25% and Latina clients. More black women (39%) exited to their own apartments than white women (24%) and Latina women (25%).

However, while the number of black and white women who attended some college was nearly equal, 9% of white women completed a bachelor's degree while only 3% of black women and 6% of Latina women completed a bachelor's degree. Additionally, six white participants improved their level of education since leaving the center, and five black participants also improved their level of education since leaving the center. For Latina women, it is possible that their apparent disadvantage may be less influenced by race itself than by the difficulty of non-English speakers, which is the case for many Latina clients.

Forty-two percent of the center's participants are white and 42% are black, but according to the US Census Bureau (United States Census Bureau Quickfacts, 2014), 88% of Wisconsin's residents are white, 6.5% are Hispanic or Latino, and 7% are black. The area has a much lower population rate of blacks, yet still has an equal rate of black participants, therefore we speculate that these statistics indicate a more systematic issue that is worth exploring. One possibility may be that services offered may be more easily accessible to certain races, however there are many possible causation factors. Despite the above-mentioned difference there is no significant outcome difference in races, apart from their living situation.

Follow-up: Six-Months to Three Years Later

Of the center's 130 exited program participants, we were only able to reach 13 exited program participants. Only nine consented to participate in the follow-up survey, and not all nine felt comfortable answering every question. The transient lifestyle of domestic violence survivors quickly became apparent, as so many of the participants had changed their phone numbers since exiting the shelter.

Seventy-eight percent of exited program participants have had to receive financial support since leaving, either from friends and family or a local nonprofit agency. Several of the former program participants expressed being connected to the W-2 program and food share by the center was extremely beneficial. Regarding exited program participants' current living situations, 55% currently have their own place and 11% live with family. All of the individuals who consented to participate in the survey are on government or other assistance. Thirty-three percent stated that their income covers their needs and 67% stated that their income mostly covers their needs. Sixty-seven percent stated that they have transportation. Seventy-eight percent of participants stated that they have access to adequate resources.

In addressing their current wellbeing, 89% of participants stated that they currently feel safe. However, all of the participants stated that they currently *are* safe. Twenty-two percent of participants who consented to participate in the survey stated that they had at least one abusive partner since leaving. Only 11% stated that they had sought services similar to the center since leaving. Thirty-three percent are currently in a relationship. Forty-four percent stated that they have a healthy support system; 22% stated that they did not, and 33% stated that they “more or less” have a healthy support system. Twenty-two percent of participants stated their mental health was excellent, 33% stated that it was good; 22% stated that it was ‘so-so’, and 11% stated that it was poor. 33% participants considered their physical health to be good, 44% considered it to be ‘so-so,’ and 22% considered it to be poor.

In the final portion of the follow-up interview, we asked participants about their childhood experiences to assess whether these correlated with post-shelter outcomes. Twenty-two percent of participants rated their living situation as excellent growing up, 22% stated that it was good, 22% stated that it was so-so, and 11% stated that it was poor. Terms that defined good

or excellent childhood included enough food and resources as well as parental engagement, time spent with them, etc. Twenty-two percent of participants stated that their parent's relationship was good, 44% stated that it was poor, and 11% stated that there was no relationship. 11% of participants stated that their parents yelled to discipline them; 22% stated that their parents utilized spanking; 22% stated that their parents utilized hitting, 11% stated that their parents utilized belts, and 11% stated that their parents used no discipline. Of the moments that stood out to the exited program participants, 55% mentioned violence directed at them, 11% mentioned violence directed towards someone else, and 11% mentioned positive memories of their parents.

Discussion

All services for domestic violence victims have general goals of maximizing safety and improving quality of life. As hard as it can be for women to leave their abusive relationships, it is often even harder for them to accumulate both the psychological and the material resources needed to regain control of their lives. DV services can play a significant role in helping these women through providing safe shelter, access to food and clothing, offering counseling and advocacy services, building social support, and guiding women towards a stable job and housing. Though all of these services can influence whether a woman has positive outcomes or not, there is a substantial lack of service evaluation. DV shelters often have more imperative matters at hand than conducting research, and not all shelters have staff who are skilled in thoroughly evaluating their services. Moreover, though researchers have developed useful and practical measures to assess shelter efficacy and predict client outcomes, these are not standardized or widely distributed. Center staff are using the results of this study to develop a scale based on the variables that were found to significantly correlate with outcomes. Through our research we can conclude that more collaborations between DV program research would be beneficial to

bettering overall services and assessments, with the goal of providing the highest quality care to survivors of domestic violence.

Limitations

There were several aspects to this study that would have been more suited for qualitative analysis instead of quantitative, specifically in addressing the efficacy and importance of one-on-one counseling and support groups. DV services typically include some form of counseling, whether it is individual sessions, group therapy, or advocacy services. Though the center's survey did not find either individual counseling or group therapy as a statistically significant predictor of outcome, both showed trends of fewer sessions correlating with higher rates of exiting to abusers. Qualitative measures, such as direct interviews with clients, would have been more beneficial in assessing the efficacy of these services.

An inherent limitation of forming conclusions with the support of previous research is the range of methods researchers use, which results in conflicting findings. Some studies surveyed women in shelters, immediately after leaving shelters, years after leaving shelters, only women whose DV cases are in court, and only women with children, among other variables. Without standardized subject groups and procedures, the findings of these studies do not amount to generalizable conclusions. Moreover, we were not able to find previous research for all the variables we measured, such as custody of the children and bus tokens.

Though we measured exit venue as an outcome, this variable does not necessarily predict whether the client will experience further abuse. Other studies have measured re-abuse through cases of reported physical domestic violence, but this leaves out women who do not report their abuse and women who experience other forms of abuse. Moreover, research surrounding

reported DV or women in DV centers may not generalize to the many women who never report their abuse.

Recommendations for Future Research

A positive step forward for all domestic violence related research would be the creation of standardized measurements for all DV centers. Two comprehensive measures already exist, which evaluate both survivor variables and services. The Risk Assessment Tool, developed by McFarlane et al. (2014), identifies risk factors predicting re-abuse with more than 80% efficacy, and the Measure of Victim Empowerment Related to Safety (MOVERS) scale, developed by Goodman et al. (2015), can reliably and validly assess shelter efficacy by surveying clients about goals, safety planning, and perceptions of support. While both are available by request, many shelters are unaware that these measures exist. If these or similar measures were widely used by shelters, not only would they be better able to assess their services, but there would be a much larger and more consistent pool of information about DV to work with.

Based on our own findings, our recommendations for future research at domestic violence centers are creating standardized operational definitions for outcomes, regular and comprehensive staff assessments to be sure that clients' needs are met, and directly collecting feedback from clients on their experiences in the shelter.

Appendix

Figure 1.

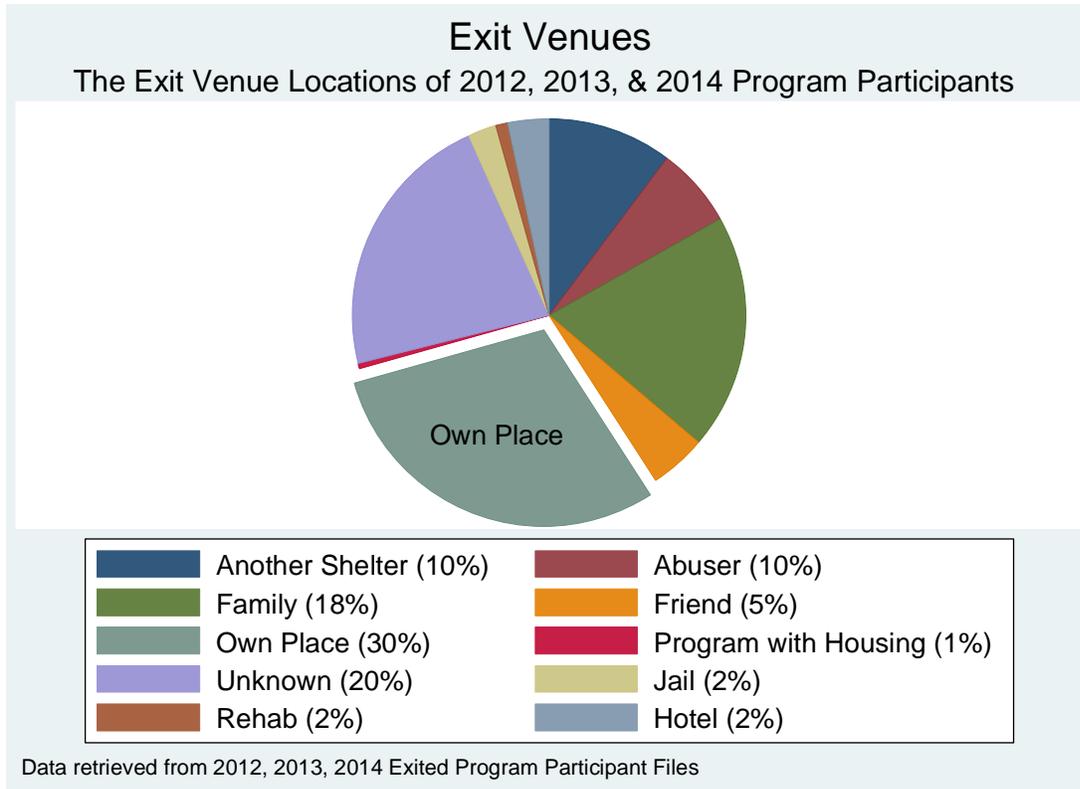


Figure 2.

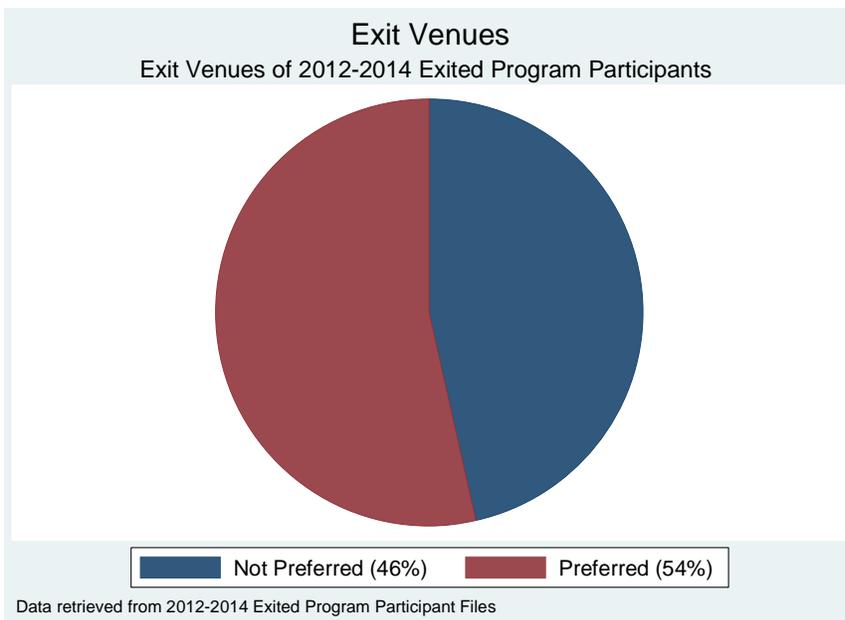


Figure 3.

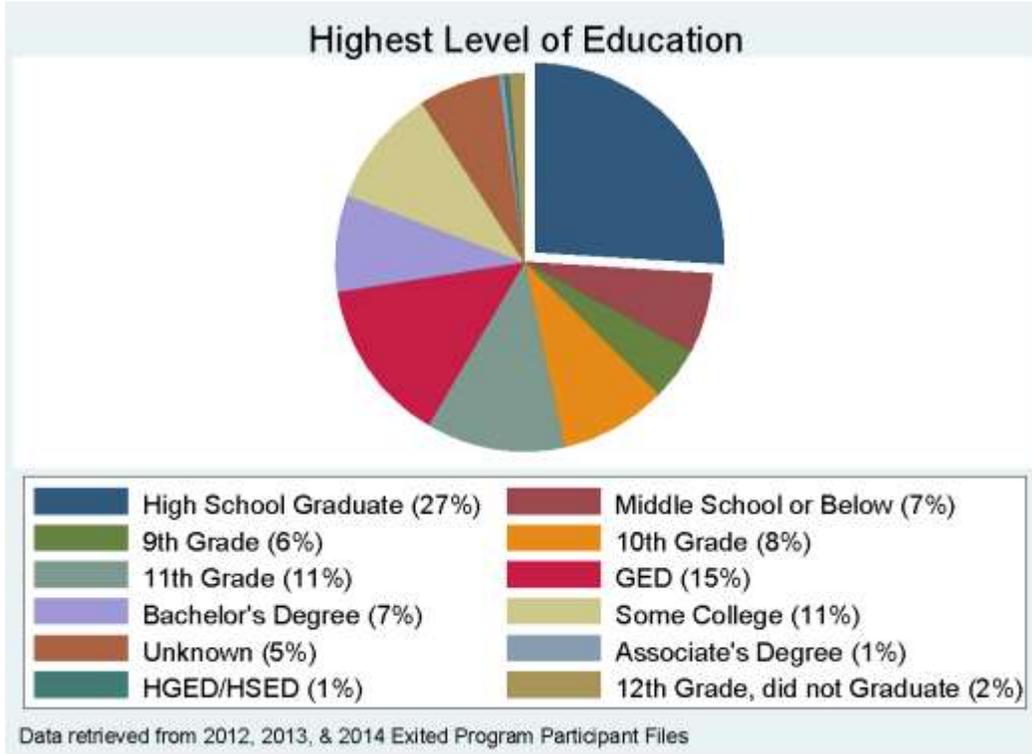


Figure 4.

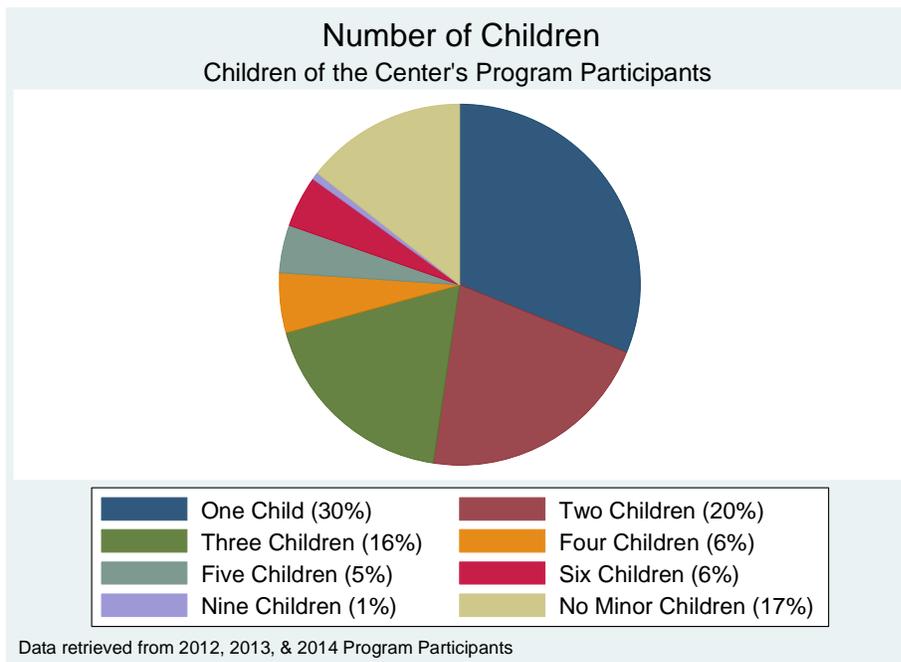


Figure 5.

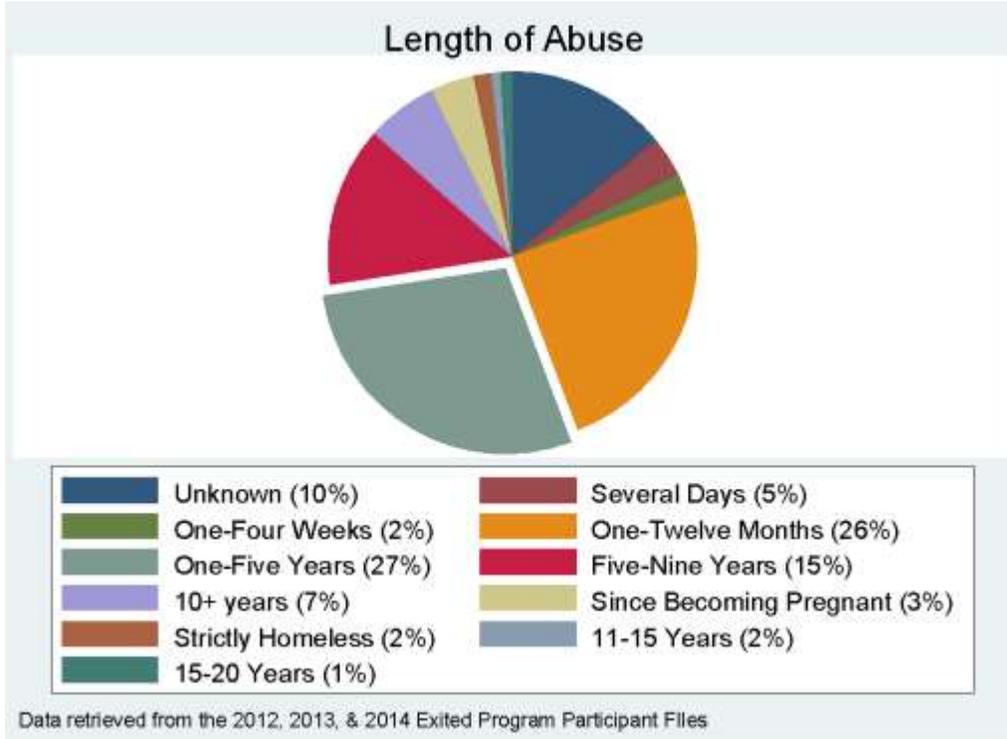
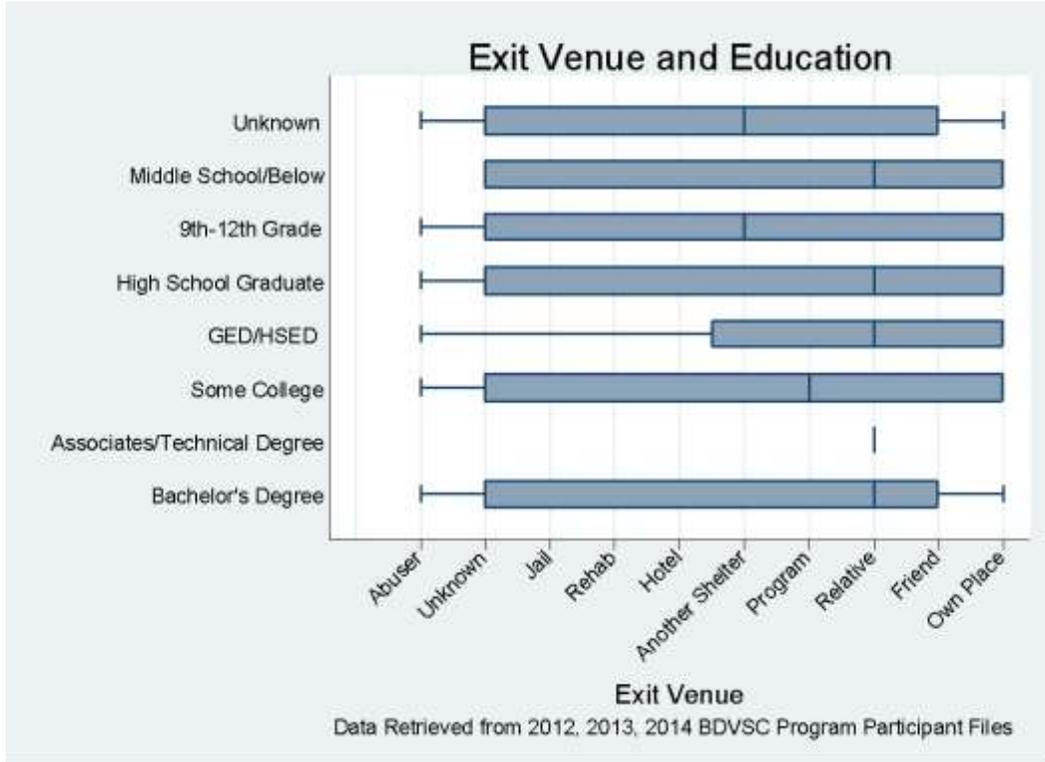


Figure 6.



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