

Masters of Applied Health Services Research (MAHSR)



Thesis Defense

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**Wednesday, April 7, 2010, 9:00 a.m.
Lecture Theatre "A", Atlantic Veterinary College**

Thesis Title:

Women in Midlife and Older Experiencing Intimate Partner Violence: Are Battered Women's Shelters in Atlantic Canada Ready to Answer the Call?

ABSTRACT

Researchers have debated whether women in later life who experience intimate partner violence (IPV) are victims of domestic violence or elder abuse. This study operates under the notion that women who experience abuse by their partners are victims of IPV regardless of age. However, it is largely unknown if services for victims of IPV are appropriate across the lifespan. The current study addressed this gap by investigating how stage 1 transition homes in Atlantic Canada are meeting the needs of women in midlife and older. This two-phased study included an online survey with 17 shelter directors and telephone interviews with 8 shelter directors. Results indicated that between 2007-2008, women in midlife and older comprised 28% of those who used stage 1 transition houses. Although survey results suggested that stage 1 transition homes meet the needs of women across the lifespan, the interviews revealed a different picture. Results of the interviews unfolded into three distinct phases within the lives of women in midlife and older: (1) life at home and in the community, (2) living in the shelter, and (3) starting a new life. Directors shared that transition homes often fall short in meeting the needs of this age group in such areas as shelter policies, accessibility, privacy, support and outreach. Transition homes offer safety and security for women across the lifespan, but they do not meet the particular needs of women in midlife and older. However, results of this study indicate that women in midlife and older who experience IPV require education and support surrounding power and control dynamics, which a transition house provides. As such, recommendations for research, policy and practice are described in order to ensure that stage 1 transition homes offer a welcoming, suitable, and supportive environment for women in later life.