“A Place of My Own”

Survivors’ Perspectives on the Safe at Home Housing Model

WomanACT

About WomanACT:

Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT) envisions a world where all women are safe and have access to equal opportunities. We work collaboratively to eradicate violence against women through community mobilization, research, policy, and education.

The organization has been operating as a community-based coalition since 1991 and became a registered charity in 2010. Working closely with the anti-violence against women sector, governments, industry leaders, communities, and survivors, we strive to promote knowledge sharing, build capacity, and generate discussion. Our research aims to promote public dialogue, transform practice, and shape policy to advance women's safety and gender equity.

Acknowledgements:

WomanACT wishes to thank the research participants who generously shared their time, experience, and ideas to support this project and future work on housing options. We also recognize the many community agencies across Ontario who supported the recruitment of research participants. Thank you to Lieran Docherty and Premila Chellapermal for editing support.

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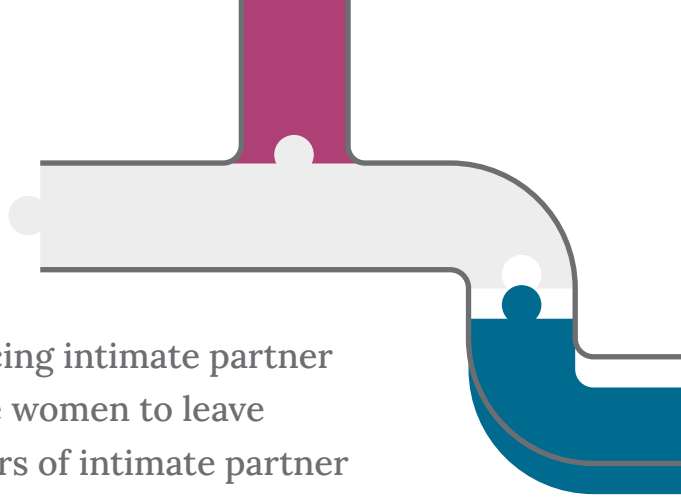
This research has been funded by the Catherine Donnelly Foundation. We thank them for their support of this important project.

Introduction



Most of the housing options for women experiencing intimate partner violence have something in common: they require women to leave home in order to reach safety. As a result, survivors of intimate partner violence routinely face housing instability, homelessness, and significant life disruptions in areas like employment, service access, and social connections. These impacts are intensified by a lack of safe and affordable housing and the economic insecurity that often follows abuse.

The **Safe at Home housing model** – where women fleeing violence are enabled to remain safely in their existing home or move directly to independent housing – aims to address these issues. Using a combination of legal tools, safety measures, and wraparound support services, Safe at Home programs work to remove the perpetrator from the home and reduce the risk of harm for women and their children. They involve a number of core partners working together, such as community agencies, the criminal justice system, housing providers, and child protection services.

The Safe at Home approach upholds women's right to securely remain in their home free from violence. As part of international human rights law, everyone has the right to safe and adequate housing, including the right to secure tenure. When women experiencing violence are forced to leave their home in order to reach safety and/or due to their relationship status, their right to housing is violated. Programs that enable survivors to remain in the shared home without the perpetrator represent a step forward in realizing the right to housing.

Safe at Home housing models have been successfully implemented in many communities, with widespread use in Australia and the United Kingdom. They have been effective in improving women's safety and wellbeing, preventing women's homelessness, and reducing incidents of intimate partner violence. However, there has been limited work to date on offering Safe at Home as a housing option in Canada.

To advance the Safe at Home approach, WomanACT has been conducting research to better understand the policies, programs, and practices that support women to remain in their own home when leaving a violent relationship. We previously completed a literature review[1] on the intervention design, evaluation outcomes, and promising practices of Safe at Home programs in other jurisdictions. This report extends our exploration of Safe at Home by sharing results from primary research with survivors on their housing needs and preferences. Findings from an online survey, interviews, and focus groups are brought together to illustrate survivors' perspectives on existing housing options, the option to remain in their own home, and the supports and measures they would need in place to feel safe and comfortable in independent housing.

[1] Klingbaum, A. (2021). Safe at Home: Supporting women to remain safely in their own home when leaving a violent relationship. Toronto, ON: Woman Abuse Council of Toronto. Retrieved from: https://womanact.ca/publications/safeathomeliteraturereview/

Methods

The primary research conducted under WomanACT's Safe at Home project aimed to address four main research questions:

1. *What housing options did survivors consider and access when leaving a violent relationship?*
2. *What were survivors' experiences with housing after leaving a violent relationship?*
3. *What would be the ideal housing situation when leaving a violent relationship?*
4. *What would survivors need or want in place to feel safe remaining in their existing home or moving directly to independent housing?*

Research participation was open to women and gender-diverse people who: (a) lived in Ontario, (b) had separated from a violent relationship (temporarily or permanently) in the past five years, and (c) had one or both partners leave a shared residence when the relationship ended. Participants were recruited by email outreach through community agencies working with survivors of intimate partner violence in Ontario.

Quantitative and qualitative data was collected through an online survey, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. Across these methods, the Safe at Home housing model was defined as "staying in your shared home without your partner/ex-partner or immediately moving to a new independent home of your choice." Thematic analysis was used to compile, code, and identify key themes emerging from all qualitative data.

The findings of this research are not intended to reflect a comprehensive view of survivors' housing experiences and preferences. Instead, this work collects and communicates some survivors' perspectives in order to inform program and policy development with lived experience and to add to the wider state of knowledge on housing interventions for intimate partner violence.

Survey

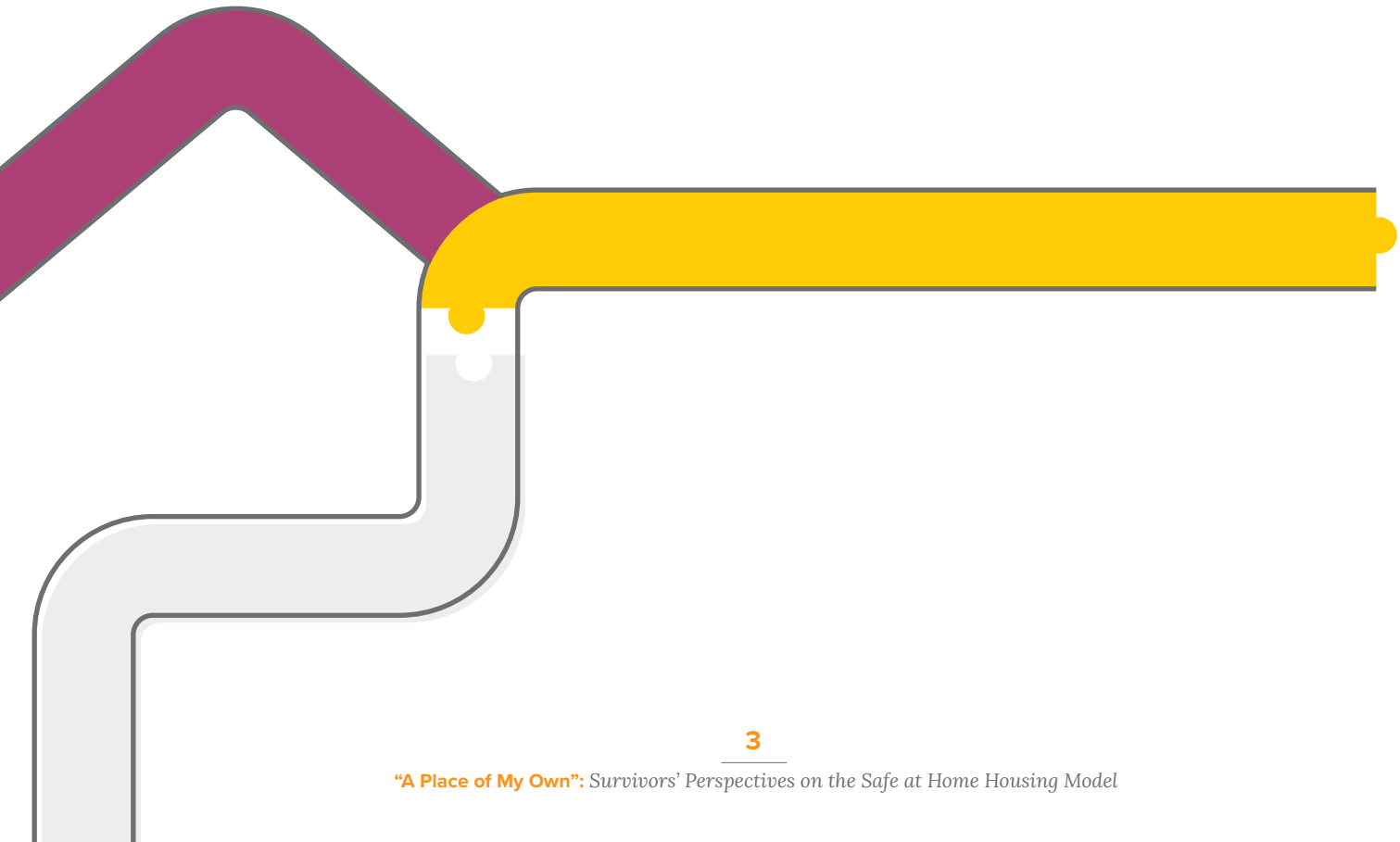
A total of 74 survivors completed the online survey between June and August 2021. The survey collected information about survivors' housing circumstances when living with a partner, the available and accessed housing options at the time they separated from their partner, and their preferences and concerns about different types of housing, including Safe at Home. The survey used a mix of multiple choice, ranking, and open-ended questions.

Interviews

A total of 12 survivors participated in semi-structured interviews in July and August 2021. Interview participants were recruited through the online survey, where survivors could sign up to participate in future research opportunities after submitting their survey responses. Interviews took place through phone or videoconference and lasted approximately one hour. Survivors were asked about their experiences with housing when leaving a violent relationship, their ideal housing situation, and their perspectives on Safe at Home. Survivors also had the opportunity to share ideas of resources and supports that would enable them to live independently when leaving a violent relationship.

Focus Groups

A total of 9 survivors participated across two focus group discussions in July 2021. As with interviews, focus group participants were recruited through the online survey. Focus groups took place through videoconference and were co-facilitated by a researcher with lived experienced of violence. Survivors were guided through a series of group activities on Safe at Home using a digital interactive whiteboard. The activities had participants share reactions to remaining in their shared home and work as a group to brainstorm the components and design of a Safe at Home housing program in their community.



PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

A total of 74 women with lived experience of intimate partner violence were engaged as research participants.

23–66
Age range

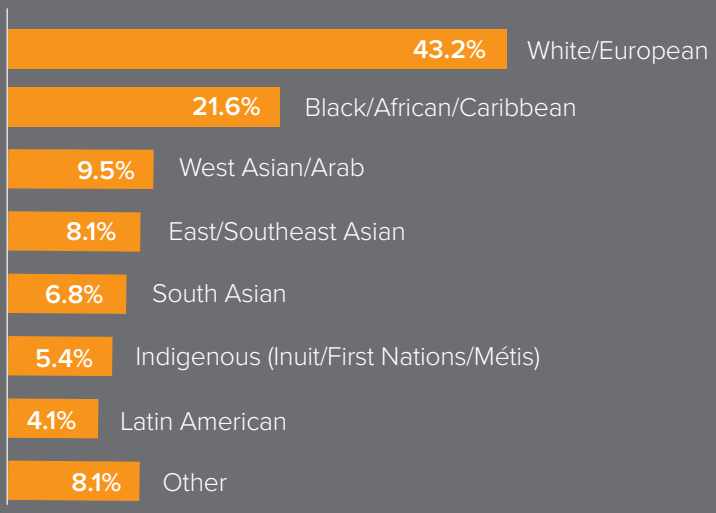
37
Median age

71%
had children

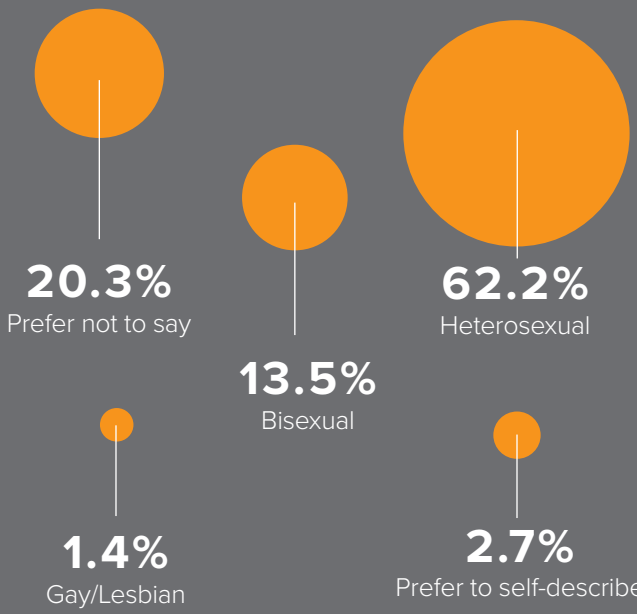
29%
identified as living with a disability

42%
identified as an immigrant or refugee

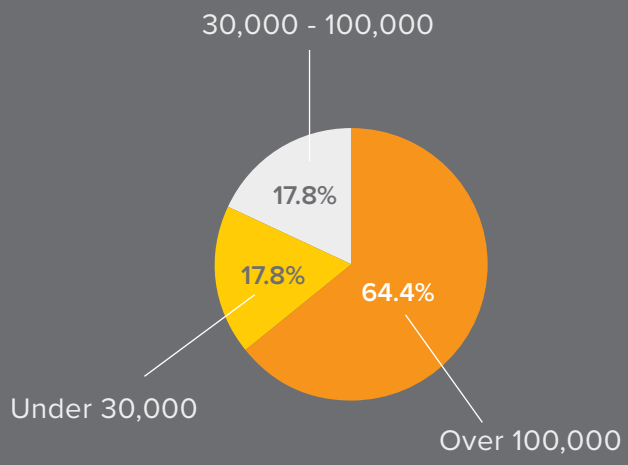
RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY



SEXUAL ORIENTATION



POPULATION OF PARTICIPANTS' COMMUNITY



EMPLOYMENT STATUS AT TIME OF ABUSE

29.2% Employed full-time

22.2% Unemployed

8.3% Student

4.2% Employed on a casual basis

2.8% Self-employed

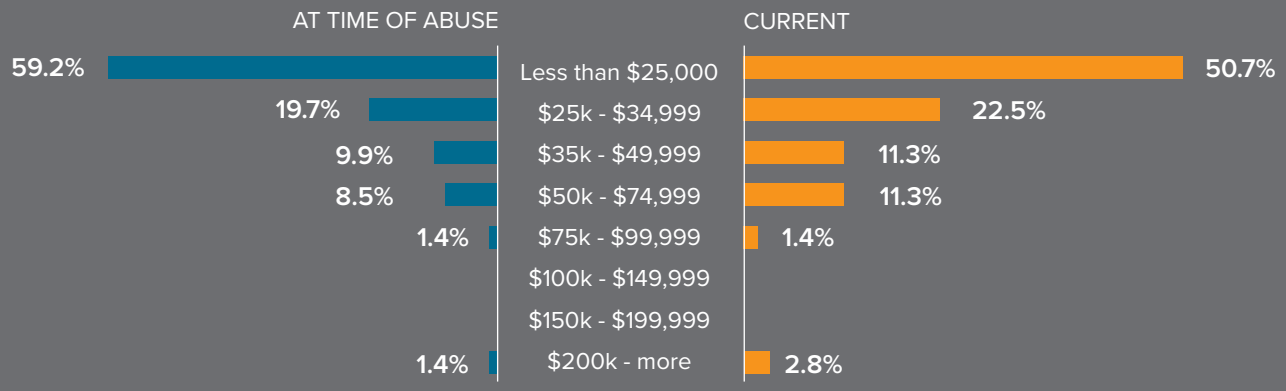
18.1% Employed part-time

11.1% Unable to work

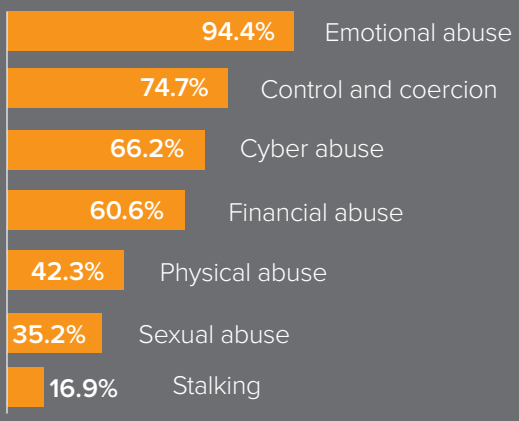
4.2% Other

0% Retired

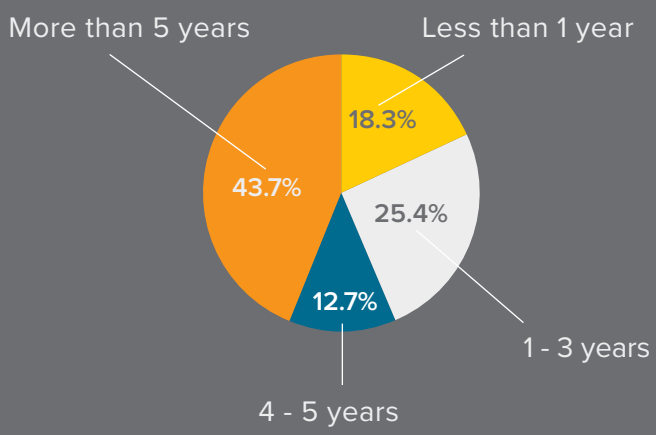
INDIVIDUAL INCOME



EXPERIENCE OF ABUSE



DURATION OF ABUSE



Findings

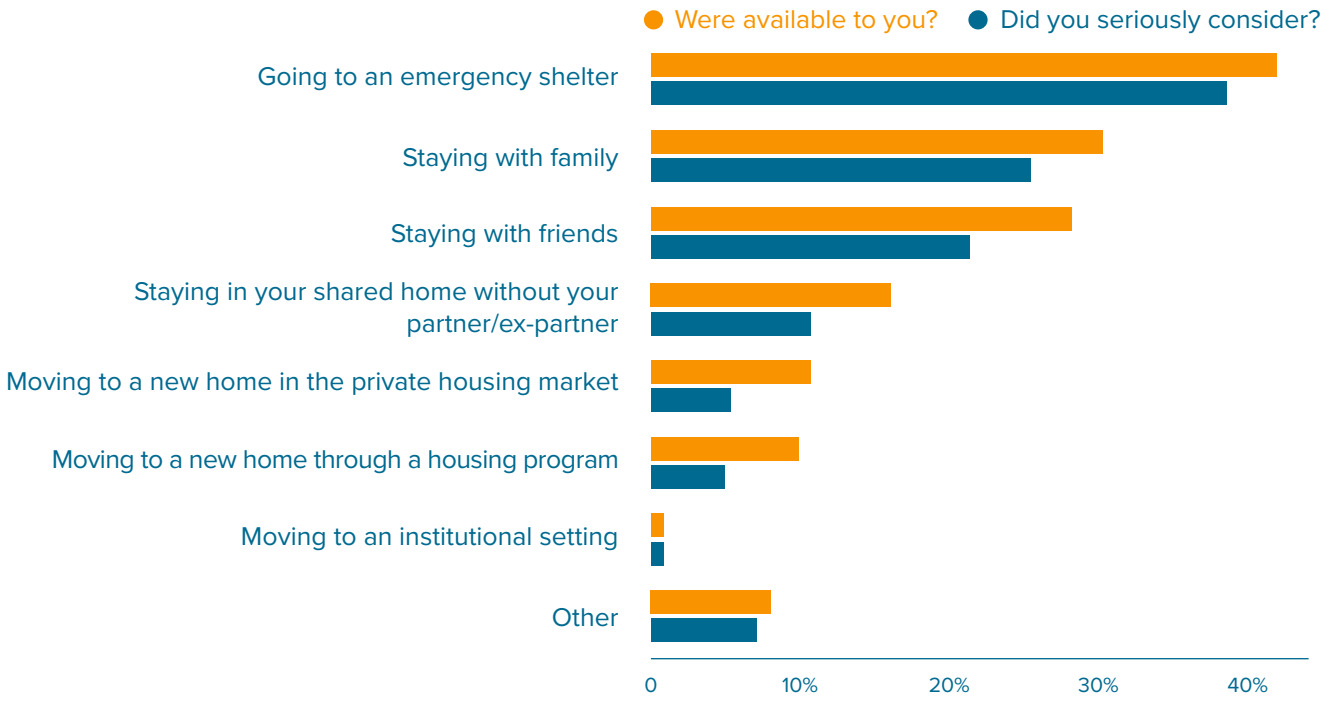
Survivors' Housing Options and Experiences

What does the housing experience look like for women experiencing intimate partner violence?

When sharing a home with their partner, most survivors lived in the private rental market (61%). Some survivors reported living in a home owned by someone in the household (22%), while few lived in social or non-profit housing (8%). Among renters, survivors were almost always represented in the tenancy agreement; 78% were either the sole or joint leaseholder of the shared unit.

Survivors reported that once they began to consider separating from their partner, they found that there were limited housing options available for women fleeing violence. In some cases, the lack of housing options prevented them from leaving their relationship sooner. Survivors reported that emergency shelters, staying with family, and staying with friends were the housing options typically available to them. However, even these most common options were only available to less than half of participants. A small number of survivors reported that staying in their shared home without their partner or moving directly to a new home was available at the time of separation.

When you and your partner/ex-partner separated, which of the following housing options...



Even when certain housing options were available, survivors were not always able to seriously consider them. Factors like program eligibility and wait times, the distance to work, and disability accommodations further limited the options that met survivors' needs. Housing decisions were also informed by the stress and stigma associated with a given housing option. For example, some survivors spoke about not wanting their family or friends to know about the violence or not wanting them to be inconvenienced or unsafe by staying with them.

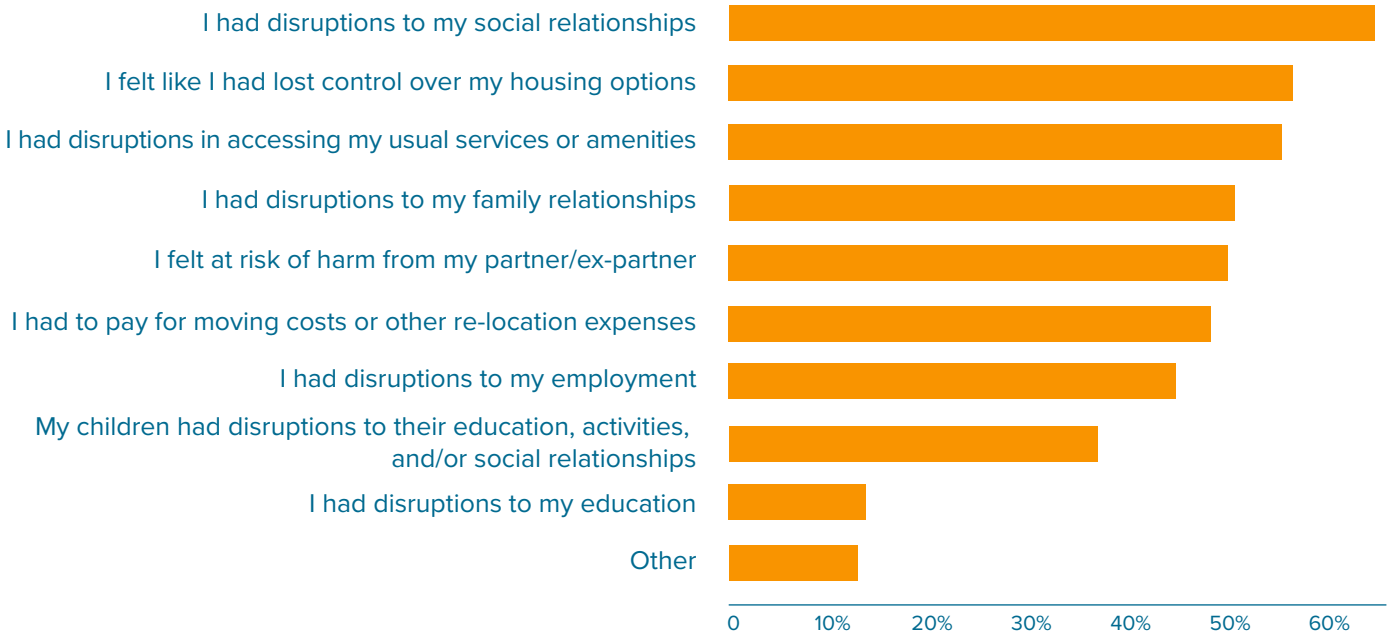
"I was left with two options that didn't work for me and I had to choose the lesser evil, instead of having to think about what would really work for me and what would facilitate healing."

Affordability emerged as a key consideration for accessing housing – and ultimately acted as a barrier for many participants. Survivors often mentioned that their housing search was restricted due to finances. Even the cost of moving expenses alone was prohibitive for some. Survivors faced a range of economic challenges, such as insufficient social assistance rates, financial abuse that affected their credit scores or eligibility for income supports, and the inability to work due to trauma and harassment carrying over into the workplace. These challenges were exacerbated by the broader context of a housing crisis in which rents were becoming less and less affordable.

Survivors did not have one common housing trajectory when leaving a violent relationship. The most prevalent housing experience was where survivors left the shared home and their partners stayed there – reported by 58% of participants. Survivors most often went to an emergency shelter (35%) or stayed with family (22%) or friends (18%) as their initial housing option. Some survivors initially remained in their shared home without their partner (14%), but no participants reported moving to a new home in the private housing market as their first point of housing after separation. Overall, 80% of participants reported first accessing a housing option that involved relocation.

Many participants experienced life disruptions after separating from their partner. At least half of participants reported feeling a loss of control over their housing options, the risk of harm from their partner, and disruptions to their social and family relationships.

When you accessed your first housing option after separating from your partner/ex-partner, which of the following did you experience?



Relocation was a major cause of these life disruptions. Survivors spoke at length about the impacts that forced relocation had on all domains of their life. There were stories about moving too far away to be able to commute into work, feeling isolated and alienated without friends nearby, or not being able to continue receiving services from a consistent provider. Stress and mental health played a key role in these impacts, both as a contributor (e.g., the stress of relocation and the new housing situation led to being unable to work) and an outcome (e.g. losing employment created major financial stress).

"You have kids and there [are] so many things going on, and you're leaving your own home. The assets, the things that you bought. There are emotions that you are sacrificing so much to escape from this abuse. You're leaving everything for the person who was abusive to you."

In one case, a survivor described how her temporary employment was set to be made permanent around the time that she had to relocate to a shelter. She shared the situation with her supervisor and took a few days off work to move, only to return to the permanent position being filled by someone else. In another situation, a survivor with a physical disability was unable to leave her home when she first moved in with family members because of the complexities of moving her paratransit service to the new address. One survivor shared her frustration about having to temporarily give up a volunteer position when she moved to a shelter, because the environment was too noisy to participate in the required virtual meetings.

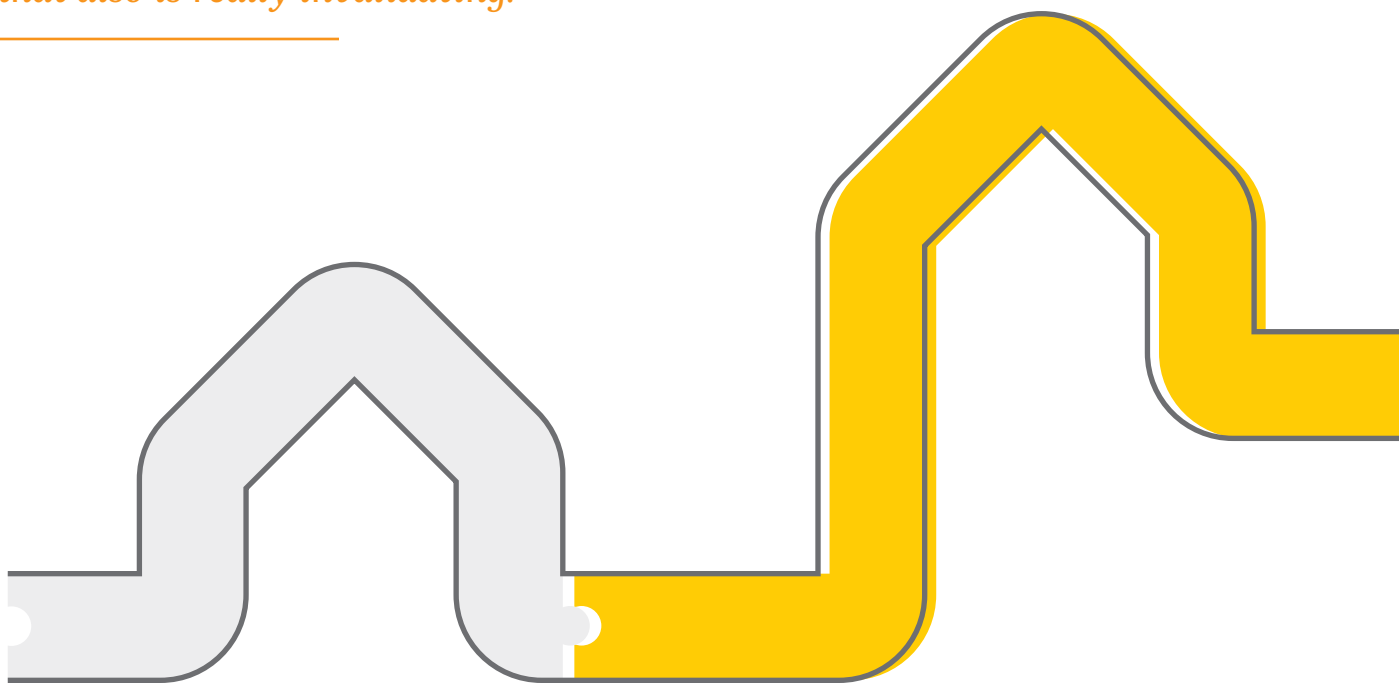
The life disruptions of relocation also applied to children. About half of participants (52%) reported that they were accompanied by their kids when leaving their partner. Survivors expressed that their children lost social relationships, had changes to their childcare or school, and experienced declines in sleep patterns and behaviour.

In addition to life disruptions, some of the housing options that survivors relocated to created other challenges. Shelters were seen as having overly strict and intrusive rules, coupled with poor quality living conditions around noise, privacy, cleanliness, and comfort. Multiple survivors spoke about their discomfort with being exposed to risky behaviour like substance use in shelters, especially when they had their children with them. Staying with family had a different set of concerns. Survivors commonly reported that living with family meant losing their privacy and freedom and being surrounded by tense relationships.

"[The shelter] honestly felt like a really pretty prison. [...] It was so regimented because it was such high-risk, that it was stressful all the time. [...] It was the best experience because those were the places that I felt the safest. But the fact that the law isn't designed to keep me safe and that I have to go to that point in order to be safe, that also is really invalidating."

On the other hand, survivors did see a few benefits of these options. Some felt that shelters offered resources they couldn't access elsewhere (e.g., doctor visits, mental health supports, learning opportunities) and that meeting other women in similar situations allowed for peer support. One participant was very happy about relocating to social housing, which provided them with safe and affordable housing they wouldn't have otherwise had access to due to financial barriers.

Regardless of the specific housing option, some survivors appreciated that relocation made it harder for their partner to find them and created a sense of safety. Relocation was also discussed as a positive symbol of survivors ending the abuse, providing them with relief and empowerment. However, survivors still expressed safety concerns following relocation, due to the ongoing risk of harm from their partner, the location of most available housing options in unsafe communities, and a lack of trust in police and justice system accountability.



The Safe at Home Experience

What were survivors' experiences of staying in their shared home without their partner after separating from a violent relationship?

What worked well?

Survivors who stayed in their formerly shared home found it to be less disruptive to their life than relocation would have been. Remaining at home eliminated the detrimental economic impacts of moving and allowed children to maintain their school and social relationships. Survivors underscored that having the option to stay in their own home meant not having to worry about finding other housing or becoming homeless.

"One of the positives in terms of being able to stay in the apartment is that when your life is in shambles after a violent relationship that's sort of impacted your life from a holistic point of view, having to look for an apartment, having to move, it's just like...it's one less thing to worry about."

Feelings of empowerment and control were discussed by survivors as positive aspects of staying in their own home. The sense of stability and familiarity offered by their home was grounding when dealing with trauma and undergoing a challenging separation. Many survivors felt a sense of ownership over their place that was further realized when they were able to keep it as their own. One survivor also shared that staying in the familiar space meant that she had better knowledge for safety planning.

"I am fortunate to still be able to live here. Things could have been a lot worse and then we're out on the street. I would not be able to afford market rent. Where I am going to take the kids? To a one bedroom for all of us?"

Survivors mentioned two strategies they used to improve their experience of staying in their home. One of these was home security measures. Survivors reported changing their locks, installing security cameras, using a personal alarm device, and putting locks on their windows. These measures helped survivors to feel safer should their partner return to the home. The other strategy used by survivors was changing the look of their home, through rearranging furniture or new decor. This helped survivors to limit reminders of the abuse that took place in the space. One survivor was very appreciative of gift cards she received from a non-profit organization to redecorate her apartment and make it feel more comfortable.

"It did feel empowering and like that I felt I was in control of my life. Because this was my home and...I have seen a lot where women have been kicked out of their homes. So I was like, no I'm not leaving my home. This is my home. [...] Just like this is my life..., I don't have to live it on someone else's terms."

"[The security camera] is wonderful, it's amazing. It alerts me with motion. So I'm very happy with that. [...] It alert[s] me if there's anything. I can watch. I can look outside. I don't have to answer my door. I can just look through my [camera]. No monthly costs."

What was missing?

Survivors continued to have safety concerns after their partner left the home. Not only did they fear their partner would return to harm them, but they felt that the overall safety of their building or neighbourhood also put them at risk. Survivors noted that their partner or their partners' family and friends would still frequent the area or their workplace, emphasizing that safety concerns extended outside of the physical home.

"There would have been times where if I had to get my locks changed to ensure my safety and pay $300, it would have been the difference between buying food or being comfortable."

Some of these concerns were intensified by the limited justice system responses that survivors reported when staying in their own home. A couple of survivors felt they could not contact police about safety issues for fear that the situation would be turned around on them. Law enforcement officers were seen as helpful at the point of crisis by one survivor, who was able to access free counselling services, new locks, and a temporary hotel room through police. However, this survivor remarked that after the initial support, there was no opportunity for follow-up. This narrow approach was mirrored in legal options for survivors staying in their own home, where restraining orders were reported to cover insufficient distances around the neighbourhood or insufficient periods of time to provide a sense of ongoing safety.

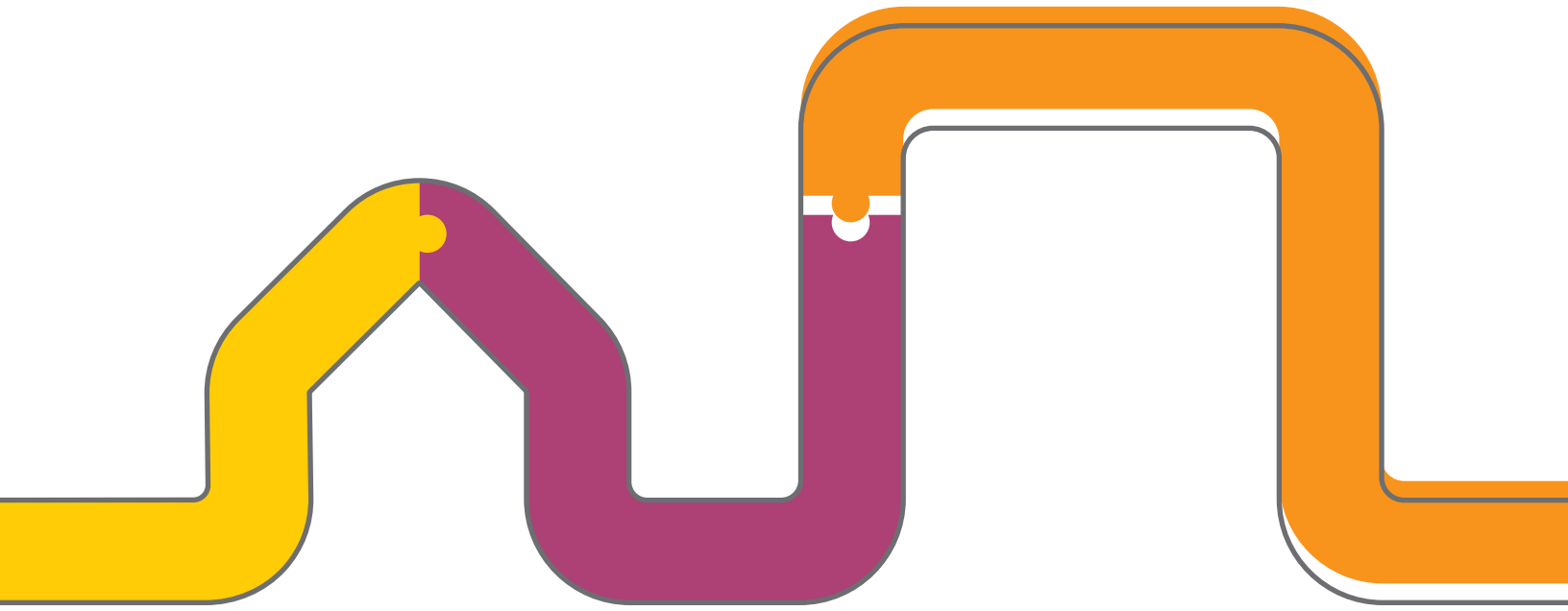
While some survivors improved their feelings of safety through home security measures, others felt that these were unaffordable or insufficient to prevent harm. One survivor shared the stressful experience of paying $300 to change their locks. Another chose to install and monitor their own security cameras because having this done by a security company was well beyond their financial means. Economic security also came up when dealing with tenancy agreements, where survivors experienced conflict around rent payments. Examples of this included private landlords threatening to raise the rent in response to safety

complaints; threats from their partner to expose lease violations that could jeopardize social housing eligibility; and disputes over returning rent deposits after their partner had moved out.

Survivors also felt that other housing options, especially affordable independent housing, were missing from their decision about where to live after separation. Staying in the shared home was not necessarily their first choice; remaining there often reflected the barriers to finding other housing, such as long wait times to access or transfer units in housing programs or being unable to lose their current affordable rent and pay market rent elsewhere.

"In one way it was more comfortable because I had all of my things here. But in other way, very dangerous...to stay here."

"I really took care of myself...in the end. It would've have been great, sure, if 'here, here's a security camera for you' and they gave it to me. That would be great. Or 'here's the necklace that you can wear that you press the button and it alerts five people on your phone.' It would have been nice to have those things given to me. Especially at that time when you can't really think too straight. You feel like your life is in danger and it's hard to do day-to-day. [...] It would have been great if that was all just handed over to me. Because it took me some time to do some research...to get what I needed. [...] And in that time I could be dead. It would be nice if things were just more readily accessible to a woman in this situation."



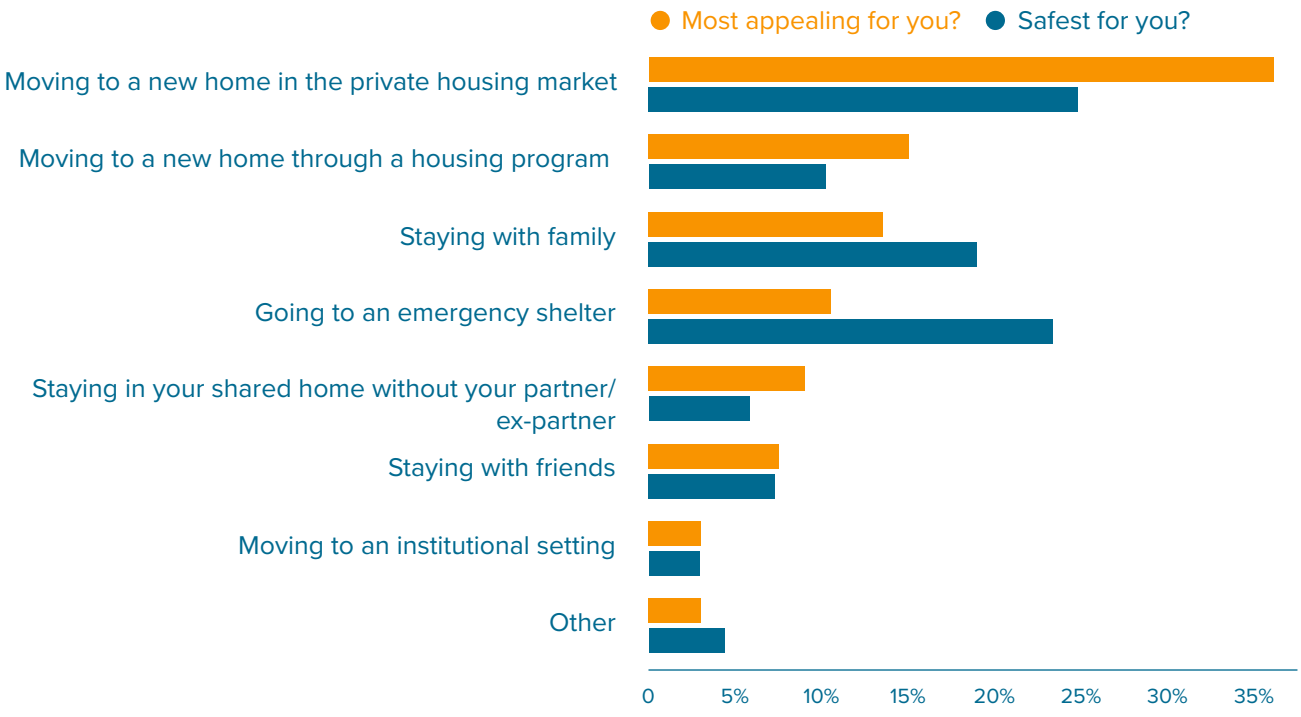
Survivors' Housing Preferences and Perspectives

What do survivors think about the Safe at Home housing option?

Survivors reported that the safest and most appealing housing options at the time of separating from their partner would have been moving to a new home (private market or housing program), going to an emergency shelter, and staying with family. Very few participants felt that staying in their shared home without their partner would have been the safest or most appealing to them. The appeal of moving to a new home (selected by 52% of survey participants) was echoed in interview discussions, where almost all survivors shared that their ideal housing situation at the time of separation would have been to move directly to independent housing.

These preferences aligned with survivors' perceived benefits and concerns about the Safe at Home housing model, where the version of the model that involves staying in the formerly shared home was thought to carry more risk than the version that supports moving to a new home. Concerns specific to remaining in the shared home without their partner included: their partner knowing the location; trauma attached to the space; complications with the tenancy agreement and entitlement to the unit; harm or retaliation for keeping the shared home; and already living in an unsafe area. However, survivors did note that staying in the shared home might uniquely offer housing that was already suited to their needs and close to their existing amenities and connections.

When you and your partner/ex-partner separated, which of the following housing options would have felt...

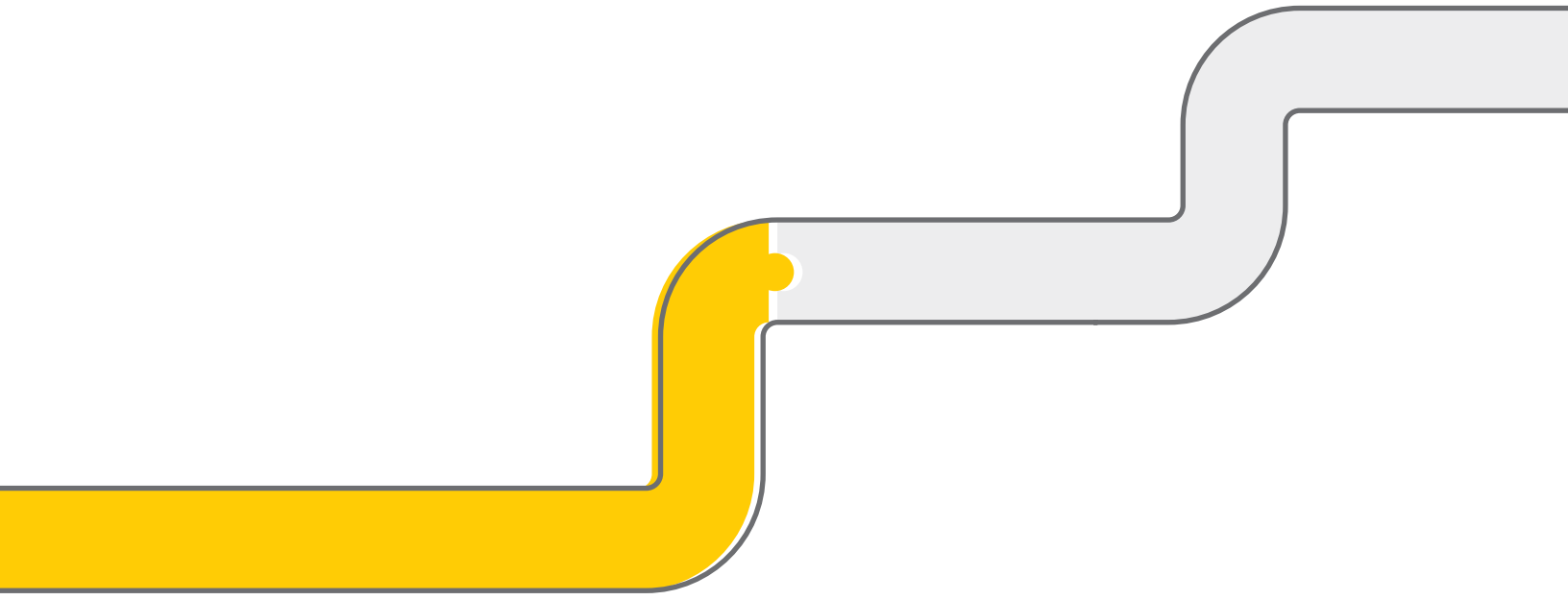


Both versions of Safe at Home (staying in the shared home or immediately moving to a new independent home) were thought to offer similar benefits. Survivors reported that Safe at Home would create a sense of control over their housing circumstances and ownership over their space. Whether staying in their shared home or moving directly to independent housing, this option was associated with feelings of justice, security, stability, and comfort. Safe at Home was also seen as providing tangible improvements and fewer disruptions in many domains of their everyday life (e.g., health, mental health, employment, safety, social relationships, children's behaviour), compared to other housing options they had accessed or considered.

"I could not have lived at [the] same place because there was too much hurt and that [would] keep coming up. I know that place was really best set up for my needs and my kids' needs, but now that I think of it, it was reminding me [of] a lot of things that I didn't really want to think about it."

Survivors showed interest in most of the common components of the Safe at Home housing model. There was widespread interest in legal orders, case management, wraparound support services, and home security measures, with notably less interest in supports for perpetrators. When asked to select the three most important supports to promote safety, the top answers were legal orders to prevent their partner from coming to the home, legal orders to prevent abuse or contact from their partner, and support services.

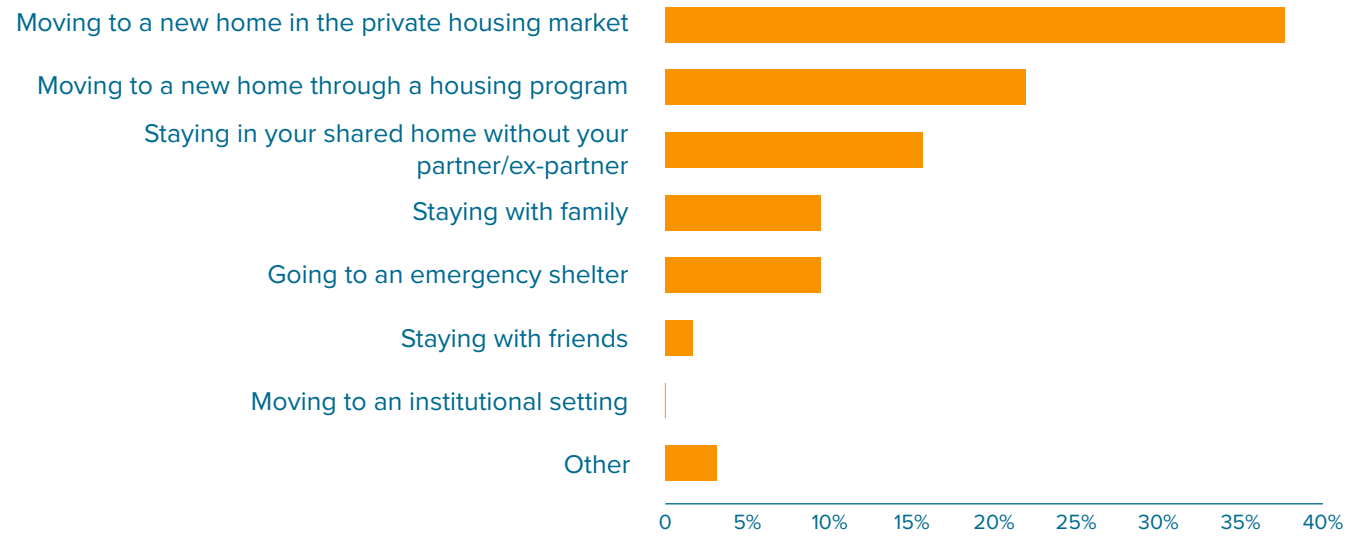
"At least I wouldn't have to worry about basic things like having a roof over my head, and I can start addressing more of the job-related issues and the student loans and everything else. It's like once the housing is in place, it's a little bit easier to feel less overwhelmed and to kind of try and address other stuff."



Which of the following supports would help you feel safe about the Safe at Home option?

Learning about the supports offered by the Safe at Home housing model made this option more attractive to survivors. Compared to earlier rankings on safety and appeal without the supports in mind, the full Safe at Home model strengthened survivors' preference for moving to a new home, and lifted the option to stay in their shared home above going to an emergency shelter or staying with family. With supports in place, 38% of participants reported that moving to a new home in the private market would be their preferred housing option when separating from their partner, 22% preferred moving to a new home through a housing program, and 16% preferred staying in their shared home without their partner. In total, those three potential Safe at Home housing options reflected the preference of 76% of participants. In contrast, less than 10% of participants reported that their preferred option would be a shelter or staying with family or friends.

If all the supports you previously selected could be put in place, which of the following housing options would you most prefer when separating from an abusive partner?



"[Independent housing] would be heaven. I don't think I will be worried about my safety and the kids' safety and constantly find myself thinking in this rollercoaster of trying to figure things out and keep running into roadblocks. It's nice to think about it, but unfortunately we are not there."

Even with supports in place, survivors still had concerns about Safe at Home. The most common concerns were the affordability of housing costs and security features, having access to only short-term supports, and their partner returning to the home and causing harm.

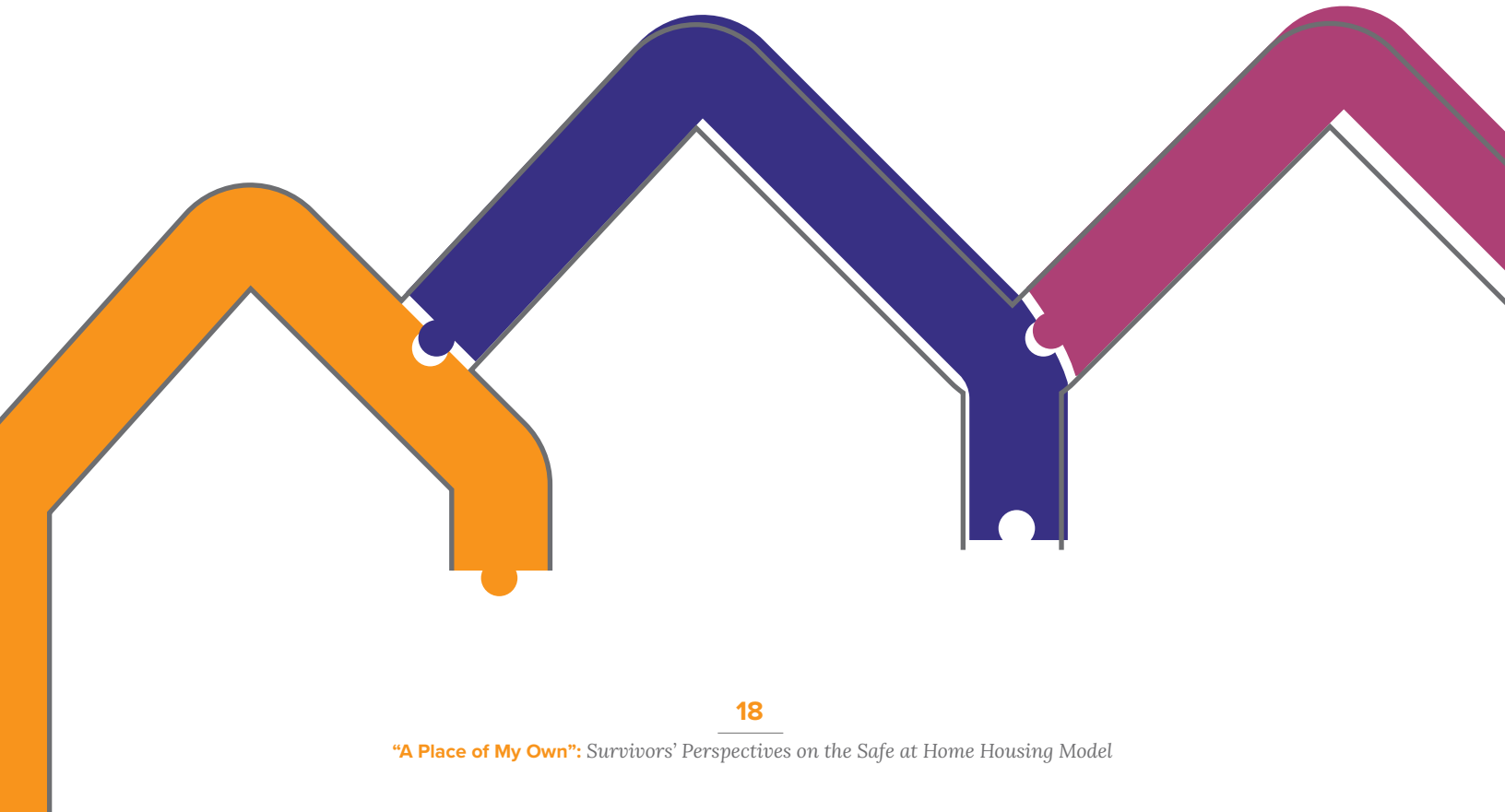
Survivors shared that security features or legal orders would be insufficient to prevent their partner from accessing their home, and that these measures could not offer protection in other locations, like at work or on transportation. Long wait times for emergency responders and limited trust in police only exacerbated these concerns. Overall, survivors were not confident that Safe at Home would be an appropriate housing option for high risk cases of intimate partner violence.

When thinking about the Safe at Home option (with your preferred supports in place), which of the following concerns would you worry about?

Survivors also expressed general concerns about living independently; many believed that living alone would create fear, anxiety, and stress, contributing to negative mental health. Survivors faced financial barriers to housing affordability, including losing their employment, issues with their credit score, or relying on unlivable social assistance rates. For some, living on their own also meant worrying about making independent decisions, their children's safety, and whether their partner had access to other housing and supports. Many of these concerns connected to broader issues that survivors would be dealing with as a result of separating from their partner, like court cases, custody arrangements, or trying to access services such as counselling, childcare, and legal support.

"I wouldn't have been able to stay in my house with my children because he was the one paying for it. He would pay the landlord and then not pay the landlord so I would be behind in my rent. If he didn't pay his child support, then I'd be short on rent or food."

Despite these concerns, a large majority of survivors were still interested in having the Safe at Home housing model as option when separating from a violent relationship. Among participants who did not have Safe at Home available to them at the time of separation, 86% reported that they would have wanted it as an option to choose from. For the small group of participants who did have access to Safe at Home, almost all of them selected it when they separated from their partner.



SAFE AT HOME DESIGN IDEAS

What do survivors see as key components of a successful Safe at Home program in their community?

PROGRAM REFERRAL

- Through community outreach (e.g., at church, at school, at work)
- Through a designated program, phone line, and website
- Through campaigns with posters and commercials
- Without strict eligibility criteria or the need to repeatedly disclose experiences

"Just being able to rent a room somewhere central, so that it's easier to get a job, it's easier to commute to work, … and not to be isolated, because it's already isolating to be in a relationship that's really toxic."

HOME LOCATION

- In a central area with amenities and services
- Close to family, work, good schools, and transit
- In a safe neighbourhood with a sense of community
- Far away from partner
- Somewhere clean, quiet, and spacious
- At an unlisted address
- Somewhere with a fresh start

"We know that the [housing] prices aren't going to go down and the salaries aren't going to go up. So I think any type of government subsidy would be amazing so people can leave."

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

- Multiple housing options available immediately
- One case manager to coordinate all needs
- Housing providers and program staff who are trauma-informed and trained on women's issues
- Progressive supports that adapt as independence increases
- Opportunities for program participants to come together for learning and peer support
- Recognition that people do reconcile

"Sometimes there should be no questions asked. I don't need to go into fifteen years or forty years of trauma just because I need a safety camera."

There should be preventative safety orders... Why do I have to wait until I'm black and blue in order to have protection or be believed?"

SECURITY MEASURES

- Button in home to alert an emergency response
- Changing locks or building access cards, and taking keys away from partner
- A list of approved/suggested safety and security equipment
- Neighbours are aware of the situation and help monitor the area
- A new phone number
- Home security alarm system
- A safe place to keep passport and IDs
- Safety lighting outside home
- A security guard or police protection
- Surveillance and doorbell cameras
- Mace, pepper spray, or a weapon
- A secure room in home to hide or escape

JUSTICE SYSTEM RESPONSES

- Partner is automatically relocated when convicted
- Easy access to no contact and restraining orders, especially as a prevention tool before things escalate
- More emphasis on the right to housing
- Partner and their affiliates are in jail
- Long-term rehabilitative services for partner
- Partner is legally required to wear a monitored GPS tracking bracelet
- Stricter consequences for violating a restraining order
- Police officers that are trauma-informed

SERVICES AND RESOURCES

- A 24-hour support line
- Free counselling, including for children and partner
- Employment services for job searching support
- Advocacy support for legal matters, court proceedings, and landlord dealings
- New or rearranged furniture and home decor
- Education on rights and how to advocate
- Self-defence training
- Removal of partner's belongings
- Safety planning
- Financial literacy skills training and help to apply for financial supports
- Crisis response and a crisis housing option if partner shows up

FINANCIAL SUPPORTS

- Emergency funds for general use
- Funds for home security measures
- Funds for new furniture and household items
- Rent subsidies

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

- Affordable rent
- Childcare
- Nutritious groceries and other essential products
- Access to a car
- Internet and phone
- Free university tuition
- Social assistance or other general financial supports

Conclusions & Opportunities

Survivors engaged in this research faced a lack of housing options and often found themselves deciding between going to an emergency shelter and staying with family or friends – a situation in line with the existing knowledge on women's hidden homelessness. The most common housing experience reported was one where survivors left the shared home and their partner remained there, leading to significant life disruptions. Even though moving to a new home in the private market was rated the safest and most appealing option by survivors, very few had this option available to them and no participants reported accessing this option at the time of separation.

Survivors had mixed views on the **Safe at Home housing model**. Staying in their own home or moving directly to independent housing was associated with fewer impacts on their everyday life (in areas like health, employment, safety, relationships, and children's behaviour) and feelings of control, justice, and stability. However, survivors also had concerns about the affordability of independent living, the limited duration of supports, and the ongoing risk of harm from their partner. In designing a Safe at Home program, survivors expressed strong interest in legal orders, case management, wraparound support services, emergency funds, and home security measures. Importantly, survivors' preference for staying in the shared home or moving directly to independent housing increased when they considered having these types of supports in place.

The complexities of survivor perspectives on Safe at Home illustrate why access to a range of housing options is critical for women fleeing violence. Just as there was no universal housing experience or preference for survivors, there is no universal housing solution. While the suitability and design of Safe at Home programs will need to be assessed and adapted on a case-by-case basis, the takeaway message from survivors is clear: the option to remain in their home or move immediately to independent housing should always be on the table.

To make this a reality, current gaps in supports need to be filled. Survivors called for stronger legal consequences for perpetrators, trauma-informed professionals in all agencies they engage with, and a wide array of services including job search

support, financial literacy training, education on legal rights, and court advocacy. At the core of discussions with survivors was affordability – the rising cost of housing, the lack of access to free services, and unlivable incomes whether through employment or social assistance. Individual- and system-level financial barriers were consistently raised as the reason survivors could not access the housing of their choice.

Several sectors must come together to meet the housing and support needs raised by survivors. Community agencies will be key partners in outreach and referral, wraparound service delivery, and program coordination. The justice system and law enforcement will have an important role to play in strengthening perpetrator accountability and the scope and power of legal orders. Housing and security providers will need to collaborate to secure and maintain safe and affordable accommodations for survivors. Connections drawn by survivors between housing options and other social needs like income supplements, childcare, and access to transportation emphasize the responsibility of all levels of government in keeping women safely housed.

The findings of this research point to potential next steps in advancing Safe at Home in Canada. Opportunities for progress involve convening cross-sector organizations at the local level to coordinate service systems; assessing relevant policy and funding contexts; addressing systemic barriers to the right to housing, especially with regard to housing affordability; and shifting societal norms that expect women to leave their homes to reach safety. These actions can ultimately lead to the design, implementation, and evaluation of Safe at Home programs as a core housing option for women fleeing violence. WomanACT's future activities on Safe at Home will continue to move this work forward with the aim of safe and stable housing for all survivors of intimate partner violence.