



Literature Review

Safe at Home

Supporting women to remain safely in their own home when leaving a violent relationship



WomanACT
WOMAN ABUSE COUNCIL OF TORONTO

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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 violence against women sector, governments, industry leaders, communities, and survivors, we strive to promote knowledge sharing, build capacity, and generate public discussion to advance women's safety and gender equity. Our research aims to promote public dialogue, transform practice, and shape policy to advance women's safety and gender equity.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Housing, homelessness and violence against women are deeply connected. A lack of access to safe and affordable housing can prevent women from leaving a violent relationship, while women often experience housing instability or homelessness when fleeing violence (Maki, 2017; Tutty, et al., 2008; Woman Abuse Council of Toronto, 2018). Survivors and their families encounter unique barriers to securing and maintaining stable tenancies, such as discrimination by housing providers, stringent eligibility requirements and application processes, and costs associated with accessing housing (Maki, 2017).

Most of the housing options for women fleeing violence have something in common: they place the onus on women to leave home in order to reach safety. This contributes to women's 'hidden' homelessness, where moving between shelters, family or friends' homes, and the violent situation does not meet traditional definitions of homelessness and results in an underestimate of the issue (Maki, 2017; Woman Abuse Council of Toronto, 2018).

The need to leave home also causes profound disruptions to women's and children's lives. It has impacts on employment, childcare and education, social connections, and relocation expenses (Breckenridge, et al., 2015; Murray, 2008; Woman Abuse Council of Toronto, 2018). Difficulties produced by leaving home can compound survivors' economic insecurity and catalyze homelessness or returning to the abusive relationship (Maki, 2017; Murray, 2008).

There is an alternative option for women leaving violence. Policies and programs that prioritize women's independence can enable survivors to stay safely in their home. A combination of legal tools, safety measures, and support services can work to remove the perpetrator from the home and reduce the risk of harm for women and their children (Breckenridge, et al., 2015). These collaborative intervention models are commonly referred to as Safe at Home approaches.

While moving beyond the traditional response to violence against women can seem complex, Safe at Home has been successfully adopted in other countries. However, there has been limited work to date on its application in Canada. A first step in advancing the Safe at Home approach here is to better understand what this model entails and what can be learned from communities that use it.

This literature review aims to synthesize the evidence on supporting women to remain safely in their home when leaving a violent relationship. As part of WomanACT's broader Safe at Home project, this review documents program and policy approaches, evaluation findings, and promising practices that can broaden housing solutions for violence against women. Other key activities of the project include community-based research to capture the housing and safety needs of

survivors and convening stakeholders to identify strategies and opportunities to realize women's right to remain in their own home.

Methodology

Relevant literature was identified through journal databases, Google searching, targeted browsing of organizational and government websites, and non-systematic citation tracing. Keywords were searched in various combinations to reflect three domains: the issue focus (e.g., domestic violence, intimate partner violence, violence against women), the intervention approach (e.g., Safe at Home, remain in home, housing options), and the geographic scope (e.g., Canada, United Kingdom). Information collected from the initial search, such as other terms for the housing approach or specific program names, was then used to expand keywords in future searches.

Publications were considered within the scope of this review if they discussed interventions that enabled women with experiences of intimate partner violence to remain safely in their home or independent accommodation with the perpetrator removed – referred to herein as 'Safe at Home' approaches. The scope was further limited to publications that were: available online; published in English; published between January 2006 and March 2021; and featured approaches or interventions from Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, or the United States. These countries were selected based on their known implementation and evaluation of Safe at Home approaches, and policy and program environments most applicable to the Canadian context.

Forty-nine publications were identified that met these criteria, including scholarly articles, government and research reports, and organizational documents. While these publications allowed for a broad range of evidence to be gathered, this review was not intended to be a comprehensive representation of literature on Safe at Home approaches.

Information presented here can be used to inform policy and practice, however, this review is subject to a few limitations. First, Safe at Home approaches are conceptualized differently across jurisdictions and programs. This limits the ability to compare evaluation findings between publications and may have led to missing relevant publications not captured by the search strategy. Second, some program evaluations of Safe at Home used shorter-term monitoring data as opposed to longer-term outcome measures. This creates a barrier to understanding the broader effectiveness and sustainability of the intervention model. Third, most of the publications in this review refer to interventions in Australia and the United Kingdom. This may impact the generalizability of findings, especially around legislation and service system structures, though the rationale and components of Safe at Home are likely transferable across jurisdictions.

Background

The dominant response to intimate partner violence has long been for women and their children to leave the family home to reach safety. This expectation draws from historical practices in which men were granted legal rights to shared property and finances (Murray, 2008). The criminal justice system has also reinforced the practice of leaving home, where limited action on perpetrators has been a driving force in the women's shelter movement (Murray, 2008).

Under this approach, women's and children's lives have faced significant disruptions as a result of fleeing violence. After leaving an abusive relationship or the shelter system, women often move between precarious housing, homelessness, and their former home due to economic insecurity and a lack of safe and affordable housing (Maki, 2017). Leaving home can disconnect women from their social networks, render employment or support services inaccessible, and produce moving expenses (Breckenridge, et al., 2015; Murray, 2008; Woman Abuse Council of Toronto, 2018). If women are accompanied by their children when fleeing violence, their school routines and social relationships are similarly impacted (Breckenridge, et al., 2015; Murray, 2008). Beyond these practical disruptions, leaving home can deteriorate both women's and children's sense of belonging and self-determination (Murray, 2008; Zufferey, et al., 2016).

To improve housing stability and survivors' agency, there is a growing trend towards interventions that enable women to stay safely in their home (Diemer, et al., 2017). These models – widely known as Safe at Home approaches or sanctuary schemes – are rooted in a right to housing approach, where the survivor rather than the perpetrator is entitled to remain in the family home, free from violence (Diemer, et al., 2017). As part of international human rights law, everyone has the right to safe and adequate housing. This includes protection from forced evictions, also known as the right to secure tenure (Paglione, 2006; Right to Housing Toronto, n.d.). When women experiencing violence are forced to leave home to reach safety, their right to secure tenure is violated (Paglione, 2006). This shift in ideology and practice is a key step forward in holding perpetrators accountable for their violence and limiting the consequences for survivors (Breckenridge, et al., 2015; Crinall, et al., 2014).

It is important to recognize that even when the right to remain in the home is upheld, it must be the survivor's choice to do so. Women should not be encouraged to remain in their home when it is not a suitable or preferred option, nor should they be ineligible for other types of housing supports because their own home is an available accommodation (Jones, et al., 2010; Scottish Government, 2010). Safe at Home is one of many approaches to support women leaving a violent relationship; it does not replace the need for shelters or other temporary housing. Instead, it aims to expand the range of housing options available to meet the diverse needs of survivors.

What are Safe at Home approaches?

Intervention Components

Safe at Home approaches work to remove the perpetrator from the home and reduce the risk of violence for women and their children. They typically involve some combination of five main elements: legal provisions and court orders, risk assessment, home security measures and safety devices, case management and support services for survivors, and perpetrator programs.

LEGAL PROVISIONS

The first step of enabling women to remain in the family home is to remove the perpetrator. Some Safe at Home programs require the perpetrator to already be living outside of the family home prior to program participation, while others offer legal advocacy and supports within the program to facilitate this process. The legal options available for removing the perpetrator and the pathways to access them vary considerably by jurisdiction.

The legal tool most closely aligned with Safe at Home is an exclusion order, a type of civil protection order that temporarily regulates occupancy of a home under family law (Breckenridge, et al., 2015; Dickson, et al., 2010; Jones, et al., 2010). These orders are enacted to either remove the perpetrator from a shared home (where the survivor may or may not be currently residing) or prevent the perpetrator from returning to a shared home that they are otherwise entitled to go back to (Dickson, et al., 2010; Johnson, 2014; Jones, et al., 2010). Safe at Home approaches may encourage the use of other types of protection orders like restraining orders or bail conditions to maximize women's safety (Breckenridge, et al., 2015; Dickson, et al., 2010).

Housing law can also play a role in perpetrator removal. Many jurisdictions include intimate partner violence as a breach of a lease agreement and therefore grounds for eviction (Johnson, 2014). In these cases, certain legal provisions can allow for only the perpetrator to be evicted and the lease to be reassigned to the survivor as the sole tenant (Breckenridge, et al., 2015; Johnson, 2014). Housing conditions can also be attached to exclusion or other protection orders, such as lease transfers or authorization to change locks (Johnson, 2014; Jones, et al., 2010).

RISK ASSESSMENT

Once the perpetrator no longer resides in the family home, a risk assessment is carried out to determine if remaining in the home or other independent accommodation is an appropriate option for the survivor. The assessment may evaluate the property features, the proximity to emergency responders, and perpetrator characteristics like their level of violence and new residence location (Breckenridge, et al., 2015; Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010; Jones, et al.,

2010; Shelter UK, 2007). An important component of the risk assessment is to estimate the likelihood of repeated or escalated violence from the perpetrator, where a higher risk case must further emphasize the survivor's informed choice (Breckenridge, et al., 2015; Crinall, et al., 2014).

If the risk assessment concludes that remaining in the home is suitable, the information collected in it can then be used for safety planning on home security and support service needs. In Safe at Home approaches, risk assessment is not only conducted to determine eligibility, but also on an ongoing basis to capture changes in the risk of harm, the effectiveness of safety measures, and women's housing preferences (Breckenridge, et al., 2016; Dore, 2019; Edwards, 2011; Jones, et al., 2010; Wendt, et al., 2019).

HOME SECURITY MEASURES

The most universal element of Safe at Home approaches is the installation of home security measures. These measures are typically comprised of two components: features to physically secure the home against entry and devices that alert for emergency response (Jones, et al., 2010; Prenzler & Fardell, 2017). Security features may include additional locks and bolts, alarm systems, reinforced windows, or security cameras. They can also consist of external modifications to the property like adding lighting and constructing fences or gates that cannot be climbed. In addition to security features, Safe at Home programs may provide women with personal safety devices. These can be pendant alarms or other mobile devices that connect to a call center or automatically send police when activated (Jones, et al., 2010; Prenzler & Fardell, 2017). Importantly, home security measures should be selected on a case-by-case basis to match survivor needs, the property type, and the risk profile (Jones, et al., 2010).

SURVIVOR SUPPORTS

Safe at Home approaches recognize that even when survivors remain in their home with legal and security protections, there is still an ongoing need for support services (Breckenridge, et al., 2016). Accordingly, programs usually involve referrals to agencies that can offer support across a range of domains such as health, legal, finance, counselling, and education (Breckenridge, et al., 2015; Cant, et al., 2013; Crinall, et al., 2014; Jones, et al., 2010). To help women navigate these services and cultivate skills needed for independent living, Safe at Home programs often provide case management (Breckenridge, et al., 2015; Cant, et al., 2013; Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010). The support services component of Safe at Home is intended to operate as a wraparound service model that extends beyond crisis support, so that women can maintain long-term tenancies and safety (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2013; Breckenridge, et al., 2016; Hartwig, 2016).

PERPETRATOR PROGRAMS

Safe at Home approaches may extend housing support and services to perpetrators. While this intervention component is not commonplace among existing programs, it can be an important factor in women's ability to remain safely in the family home (Cant, et al., 2013; Crinall, et al., 2014; Dore, 2019; SafeLives, 2018). When perpetrators are removed but unable to access secure housing elsewhere, they are more likely to try to return to the home or engage in financial abuse around housing costs (SafeLives, 2018; Spinney, 2012). Additionally, when Safe at Home is closely connected to the agencies providing perpetrator programs, it creates the opportunity to monitor perpetrator behaviour and the corresponding safety risks for women and their children (Clarke & Wydall, 2013; Drive, 2020; Hartwig, 2016; Spinney, 2012)

Program offerings for perpetrators usually include emergency and/or transitional housing along with behaviour change interventions, counselling services, or case management (Clarke & Wydall, 2013; Rowan House Society, n.d.; Spinney, 2012; Wendt, et al., 2019). Participation across these services may be voluntary, enforced within court orders, or required in order to access the housing component of the program (Spinney, 2012; Wendt, et al., 2019). Some Safe at Home programs receive referrals for perpetrators rather than survivors, where entry into the program for both parties begins with perpetrator re-housing. When perpetrator supports are offered on a voluntary basis, survivors' access to Safe at Home should not be dependent on perpetrator cooperation.

Intervention Partners

To effectively implement the key components of Safe at Home approaches, close collaboration across multiple sectors is required. Multi-agency partnerships are central to facilitating program referrals, safety planning, crisis response, and wraparound supports. Core partners of Safe at Home include violence against women agencies, the criminal justice system, housing providers, and security providers, while child protection services, fire services, and other community organizations may also be engaged in the program. The role of each partner can be captured through a memorandum of understanding, with planning and decision-making occurring through a program steering committee or table.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AGENCIES

Safe at Home programs are generally situated within violence against women (VAW) agencies. They hold this lead role due to their specialized knowledge of intimate partner violence and related service systems (Jones, et al., 2010; Towns, 2014). VAW agencies often house a Safe at Home program coordinator, who is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the program and the coordination of strategic partnerships with other agencies and sectors (Jones, et al., 2010; Prenzler & Fardell, 2017). Along with these partners, VAW agencies are key players in client intake, risk assessment, safety planning, and service provision.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Both police and courts are active partners in Safe at Home approaches. Police are often the primary source of program referrals, as they can identify potential clients when responding to incidents of domestic violence (Cant, et al., 2013; Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010; Dore, 2019). Depending on local rules and practices, police may be able to immediately remove and exclude the perpetrator from the home when called to an incident, beginning the Safe at Home process (Cant, et al., 2013; Diemer, et al., 2017; Spinney, 2012). Police are involved throughout the intervention by participating in the initial risk assessment, responding to breaches of legal orders and emergency calls on a priority basis, and communicating changes to perpetrator risk over time (Jones, et al., 2010; Towns, 2014). The court system acts as an executor for the legislative aspects of Safe at Home, where it issues protection orders and penalties for breaches and carries out proceedings related to the intimate partner violence (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2013; Cant, et al., 2013).

HOUSING PROVIDERS

Housing providers and landlords in the public, private, and non-profit sectors facilitate the housing conditions that are necessary for Safe at Home approaches. The ability to modify tenancy agreements or install security measures is often at the landlord's discretion (Diemer, et al., 2017; Jones, et al., 2010; Ozga & Henderson, 2019; SafeLives, 2018). Safe at Home partners can work directly with landlords to make these arrangements, as survivors may not wish to disclose their experience in this context (Ozga & Henderson, 2019; Spinney, 2012). Housing providers can proactively support tenant participation in Safe at Home through the development of a policy and protocol for cases of intimate partner violence and allowing survivors and housing subsidies to be transferred to other units (Baker, et al., 2010; Ozga & Henderson, 2019)

SECURITY PROVIDERS

Safe at Home approaches rely on strong partnerships with security providers to supply home security measures and personal safety devices. Security providers can be private companies or embedded within community or government agencies. There may be a single provider who is involved with the Safe at Home program as partner agency or there may be funding within the program that is used to contract security providers on a client-by-client basis (Breckenridge, et al., 2015; Harkin, 2019; Harkin & Fitz-Gibbon, 2017; Jones, et al., 2010). The primary role of security providers is to support the risk assessment and install security measures. Security providers may also be engaged on a more continuous basis for monitoring of safety devices, responding to security breaches, training Safe at Home program staff, and providing upgrades as risk levels and preferences change (Harkin, 2019; Harkin & Fitz-Gibbon, 2017; Prenzler & Fardell, 2017). Security providers must work closely with police to develop an appropriate emergency response strategy (Harkin & Fitz-Gibbon, 2017).

How can Safe at Home be implemented?

Safe at Home approaches have been successfully implemented in many jurisdictions. While the goals across programs are similar, there is no universal template or blueprint for what a Safe at Home program looks like. Case study examples can help to understand how these approaches can be realized in practice.

STAYING HOME LEAVING VIOLENCE – NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

Staying Home Leaving Violence is a program that supports women to remain in their home when leaving a violent relationship. Building on the success of a pilot project in 2004, the program is now delivered in over thirty communities in New South Wales, while other similar interventions are common across Australia (Edwards, 2011; Family and Community Services, 2020). The program is funded and supported by the state's Department of Communities and Justice.

Women are directed to the Staying Home Leaving Violence program through a multi-agency referral network that is mobilized when a domestic violence incident is identified (Vulnerable Children & Families Directorate, 2014). Cases are identified through emergency responders, health services, child protection services, or other frontline agencies. The program is open to all women who have separated from the perpetrator and wish to remain in the family home or other independent accommodation of their choice. Priority enrolment is given to women at higher risk of intimate partner violence, including Indigenous women, low-income women, and women with a disability.

The program operates under an intensive case management model that provides flexible services based on the client's needs, without a fixed length of participation (Breckenridge, et al., 2016). Upon referral, each client is assigned a case worker who is employed directly by the program (Vulnerable Children & Families Directorate, 2014). The case worker is first responsible for conducting lethality and comprehensive risk assessments and safety planning. If the client is deemed at very high risk of lethality by remaining in the family home but still wishes to participate in the program, the case worker can support with relocation options that maintain their eligibility. Whether in the family home or another independent accommodation, the case worker then takes the lead in procuring security measures for the home, which include both physical modifications and a mobile alarm device that can alert for emergency response.

Once these short-term steps are complete, the client may wish to continue with longer-term case management (Vulnerable Children & Families Directorate, 2014). For example, the case worker may partner with domestic violence court services to support applications for legal orders. New South Wales uses civil Apprehended Violence Orders, which mandate against abuse from the perpetrator and can contain conditions on contact, access to the shared home, or lock changes for as long as the court

deems necessary (Breckenridge, et al., 2016). The case worker may also facilitate service referrals to agencies across a broad range of legal, financial, housing, and counselling needs.

Depending on the site, the program is delivered through either a lead government agency or VAW organization in collaboration with police, housing providers, and court advocacy services (Vulnerable Children & Families Directorate, 2014). Throughout the program, it is the case worker who acts as the central point of contact for partners. Each program site is guided by a formal partnership agreement and a multi-sector governance body. Program data is required to be reported to the Department of Communities and Justice at regular intervals.

SANCTUARY SCHEME – SHEFFIELD, ENGLAND

The Sheffield sanctuary scheme aims to increase safety for survivors of intimate partner violence who remain in their home with the perpetrator removed. This program is an example of the sanctuary scheme model used across the United Kingdom, which has been in practice since 2002 (Spinney & Blandy, 2011). Sanctuary schemes can vary slightly between communities in terms of eligibility criteria, duration of supports, partner agencies, and funding sources. However, they are promoted widely by the central government and typically funded through local authorities using a mix of funding streams aimed at homelessness prevention.

The sanctuary scheme program is delivered through a partnership between Sheffield City Council and two large social housing providers (Spinney, 2012). Upon referral by police services or VAW agencies, women work with a housing officer to determine the most suitable housing option for their situation. They are eligible to participate in the sanctuary scheme even if they do not have an existing exclusion order against the perpetrator.

If remaining in the home is the safe and preferred option, program partners and police officers specialized in domestic violence work to identify appropriate home security upgrades (Spinney, 2012). In Sheffield, these focus on features to physically secure the home against entry, like window alarms or motion-sensing lights. The social housing providers cover the cost of security materials, while the program funding pays for the cost of installation. There is no set limit for the cost of security measures.

Once security measures have been installed, the client is referred to a range of other agencies that are closely connected to the program, such as counselling, health services, and legal support (Spinney, 2012). At this point, involvement in the program itself is considered complete and the external referral partners are responsible for ongoing support.

SAFE AT HOME PILOT PROJECT – CLARESHOLM, ALBERTA, CANADA

Safe at Home is a four-year pilot program that provides perpetrators of intimate partner violence with temporary housing and counselling in order to support women and children to remain safely in the family home (Rowan House Society, n.d.). The program was launched in March 2021 after receiving federal government funding from Women and Gender Equality Canada.

The pilot is being led by Rowan House Society, a VAW agency that provides emergency shelter and support services (Rowan House Society, n.d.). It is located in a rural community to address the additional barriers that the area faces in accessing VAW services. Key partners include local police and community-based service providers. The program is open to men who have been removed or advised to be removed from the family home by the criminal justice system or those who are living independently with a history of intimate partner violence. Referrals can be made by police, service agencies, or the perpetrator directly.

Perpetrators are enrolled in the Safe at Home program for one year. Transitional housing is provided for up to eight weeks, during which men are supported to acquire independent housing or working to return to the family home safely where permitted. The program also provides community-based psychoeducation, group therapy, individual counselling, and case management, lessening in frequency over time.

Women and children also receive referrals to support services. This may include outreach services offered directly by the organization (e.g., safety planning, crisis support, education programs) or referrals to other agencies that offer counselling, court and legal supports, or income and employment supports, among other services (Rowan House Society, n.d.).

What are the benefits of Safe at Home?

Safe at Home approaches have been evaluated in Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. Across programs and jurisdictions, Safe at Home has delivered benefits for both the personal safety and wellbeing of survivors and the economic cost of violence against women.

Common positive outcomes of Safe at Home approaches include:

- **Improved safety, confidence, and wellbeing of women and their children**
(Cant, et al., 2013; Clarke & Wydall, 2013; Edwards, 2011; Hartwig, 2016; Martin & Levine, 2010; Netto, et al., 2009; Prenzler & Fardell, 2017; Scottish Government, 2010; Taylor & Mackay, 2011; Towns, 2014)
- **Fewer life disruptions for women and their children compared to relocation**
(Clarke & Wydall, 2013; Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010; Johnson, 2014; Jones, et al., 2010; Prenzler & Fardell, 2017; Scottish Community Safety Network, 2012; Spinney, 2012; Taylor & Mackay, 2011; Towns, 2014)

- Increased access to services and supports for survivors
(Cant, et al., 2013; Clarke & Wydall, 2013; Scottish Community Safety Network, 2012; Taylor & Mackay, 2011)
- Increased autonomy in housing options and life circumstances for survivors
(Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010; Hartwig, 2016; Taylor & Mackay, 2011)
- Reduced repeat incidents of intimate partner violence
(Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010; Johnson, 2014; Jones, et al., 2010; Martin & Levine, 2010; Prenzler & Fardell, 2017; Towns, 2014)
- Reduced homelessness caused by intimate partner violence
(Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010; Johnson, 2014; Jones, et al., 2010; Scottish Government, 2010)
- Strengthened integration and communication between participating agencies
(Martin & Levine, 2010; Taylor & Mackay, 2011)
- Cost savings for violence against women agencies, housing providers, and the criminal justice system compared to existing crisis response models and housing options
(Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010; Drive, 2020; Jones, et al., 2010; Making Safe Scheme, 2013; Martin & Levine, 2010; Prenzler & Fardell, 2017; Taylor & Mackay, 2011; Scottish Community Safety Network, 2012; Shelter UK, 2007)

What are the challenges of Safe at Home?

The benefits of Safe at Home approaches position them as a valuable housing option for women leaving violent relationships, but they are not without challenges. Program providers have faced concerns around the strength of legal measures, financial and geographic barriers for women, and the cultural shift needed to implement the program widely.

Some of the key challenges reported in Safe at Home approaches include:

- Difficulty obtaining exclusion orders due to eligibility criteria, application costs, court timelines and reluctance to issue, lack of legal supports, and limited or inconsistent enforcement
(Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2013; Breckenridge, et al., 2015; Breckenridge, et al., 2016; Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010; Dickson, et al., 2010; Dore, 2019; Edwards, 2011; Scottish Women's Aid, 2017; Spinney, 2012; Tutty, et al., 2008)
- Inability of women to independently afford housing costs of remaining in the family home
(Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2013; Breckenridge, et al., 2015; Breckenridge, et al., 2016; Cant, et al., 2013; Johnson, 2014; Zufferey, et al., 2016)
- Complexities in supporting women in rural and remote communities without access to rapid police response
(Edwards, 2011; Hartwig, 2016; Taylor & Mackay, 2011; Towns, 2014)
- Inability to address women's safety outside of the home
(Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010; Edwards, 2011; Scottish Government, 2010; Tutty, et al., 2008)

- Lack of housing options for perpetrators when removed from the home
(Breckenridge, et al., 2015; Drive, 2020; Johnson, 2014; SafeLives, 2018)
- Gaps in understanding about if and how the approach can meet the needs of diverse groups of women, such as women with disabilities, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and Indigenous women
(Breckenridge, et al., 2016; Jones, et al., 2010; Spinney, 2012)
- Limited recognition by government and community organizations that remaining in the home is a core housing option for survivors
(Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2013; Breckenridge, et al., 2015; Breckenridge, et al., 2016; Hartwig, 2016)

What are best practices for Safe at Home?

The context and design of Safe at Home programs can facilitate or impede their effectiveness. Lessons learned from existing Safe at Home approaches offer the following best practices for intervention planning and implementation:



Safe at Home should be considered one of many housing options for women leaving a violent relationship.

There is growing evidence that providing a range of housing options for women fleeing violence can improve their ability to reach and maintain safety (Woman Abuse Council of Toronto, 2018). Safe at Home programs should support women to make informed choices about their housing alongside other options like shelters or transitional housing. Participation in Safe at Home should not impact eligibility for other housing programs and supports, and other housing providers should be connected to Safe at Home programs to provide emergency accommodations if the family home suddenly becomes unsafe (Cant, et al., 2013; Hartwig, 2016; Shelter UK, 2007).



Safe at Home approaches should be upheld by a supportive legislative and policy context.

In order for Safe at Home approaches to be successful, legislation must recognize women's right to remain in their home and the importance of perpetrator accountability (Crinall, et al., 2014). This includes having strong legal options to remove and exclude the perpetrator from the home (Diemer, et al., 2017; Spinney & Blandy, 2011). Within the judicial system, this involves the timely and consistent provision of exclusion and other protection orders with significant penalties for breaches (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2013; Cant, et al., 2013; Crinall, et al., 2014; Tutty, et al., 2008). Among law enforcement, this involves a commitment to remove perpetrators when attending a domestic violence incident where permitted and to investigate and pursue order breaches (Cant, et al., 2013; Diemer, et al., 2017; Spinney & Blandy, 2011; Tutty, et al., 2008).



Safe at Home programs should have a designated coordinator and formalized agreements for collaboration and information sharing practices among partners.

The collaborative service model used in Safe at Home is key facilitator of program effectiveness. In many case studies, a designated Safe at Home coordinator with specialized knowledge on intimate partner violence was considered essential for managing client participation and connecting service partners (Jones, et al., 2010; Prenzler & Fardell, 2017; Scottish Community Safety Network, 2012; Taylor & Mackay, 2011; Towns, 2014). Collaboration among service providers has been best implemented when developing and enforcing clear agreements for partner roles and information sharing (Bega Women's Refuge, 2007; Crinall, et al., 2014; Edwards, 2011; Martin & Levine, 2010).



Safe at Home programs should provide training for all staff and partners.

All sectors involved in Safe at Home should receive training on intimate partner violence and how to appropriately engage with survivors (Bega Women's Refuge, 2007; Jones, et al., 2010; Ozga & Henderson, 2019; Scottish Community Safety Network, 2012). This is particularly important for police who attend domestic violence incidents and respond to security breaches (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2013). Training may also focus on standardized risk assessment tools and relevant legislation (Cant, et al., 2013; Jones, et al., 2010; Scottish Community Safety Network, 2012; Taylor & Mackay, 2011).



Safe at Home programs should offer wraparound supports that are rapidly implemented, flexible, and not time-limited.

To optimize safety, Safe at Home measures should be provided shortly after referral, with protocols to address immediate risk to survivors while program supports are mobilized, such as emergency housing or interim security features (Hartwig, 2016; Jones, et al., 2010; Martin & Levine, 2010). Supports seem most successful when they offer both practical and emotional assistance across a range of domains (e.g., housing, finances, health, education) and are provided for an unlimited duration of time (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2013; Edwards, 2011; Hartwig, 2016; Jones, et al., 2010; Taylor & Mackay, 2011). Because women's preferences and risk levels change over time, Safe at Home approaches should continually assess clients' situations and remain adaptive in program offerings (Dore, 2019; Edwards, 2011; Jones, et al., 2010; valentine & Breckenridge, 2016).



Safe at Home programs should support women's economic security.

Providing financial support to survivors is an emerging component of Safe at Home programs, with the aim to address the affordability challenges of independent tenancies (Breckenridge, et al., 2015; Crinall, et al., 2014; valentine & Breckenridge, 2016). Some programs have been able to provide clients with flexible funding to add home security measures or cover other urgent housing expenses (Baker, et al., 2010; Breckenridge, et al., 2015; Cant, et al., 2013). This type of support can also address equity concerns around access to sufficient home security measures when other funding for them is limited (Harkin & Fitz-Gibbon, 2017). Beyond direct financial support, Safe at Home programs can work to secure housing benefits for clients or liaise with landlords and

financial institutions to address rent or mortgage payment plans (Baker, et al., 2010; Bega Women's Refuge, 2007). They can also apply indirect approaches like workforce training or financial literacy education (Breckenridge, et al., 2015).



Safe at Home programs should monitor and evaluate long-term effectiveness.

Many Safe at Home programs have recorded client and provider perceptions and short- and medium-term outcomes, but there is still limited high-quality evidence on the approach's ability to prevent homelessness and violence over longer periods of time (Breckenridge, et al., 2016; Prenzler & Fardell, 2017). While this may be rooted in capacity issues, Safe at Home programs should aim to gather long-term evidence about intervention costs, housing stability, legal order breaches, and domestic violence incidents (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010; Jones, et al., 2010).

Conclusion

Safe at Home is a promising approach to advance housing solutions for women leaving violent relationships. It upholds women's right to securely remain in their home free from violence. The Safe at Home intervention model typically includes legal tools, safety measures, and support services that work together to remove the perpetrator from the home and reduce the risk of harm for women and their children. It requires strong collaboration and coordination between VAW agencies, the criminal justice system, housing and security providers, and other government and community organizations.

Safe at Home has been successfully implemented in many communities, with widespread use in Australia and the United Kingdom. It has been effective in improving women's safety and wellbeing, preventing women's homelessness, and reducing incidents of intimate partner violence. The benefits, challenges, and lessons learned in other jurisdictions can be applied to implement Safe at Home in the Canadian context. This would mark valuable progress on holding perpetrators accountable for their violence and expanding survivors' options for safe and stable housing.

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