



## RESEARCH BRIEF

# WORKING WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS

## BUILDING RECOMMENDED PRACTICES FOR WORKING WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS WHO USE OPIOIDS IN RESIDENTIAL SERVICES: A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

### KEY FINDINGS

- *Residential DV shelters have had to change how services are provided to better support survivors with opioid use and protect survivors not using opioids from the influences of substance use.*
- *Shelters would like to have guidance on how to manage the ravages of opioid misuse in a manner that respects all survivors and reflects how these competing needs stretch shelters' limited resources.*
- *Shelter workforce has been significantly impacted by survivor opioid misuse.*
- *Naloxone availability and training varies among shelters due to location (quick response from first responders) and beliefs about the role a DV shelter should have concerning opioid addiction.*
- *DV shelter workers are concerned about providing a safe environment for DV survivors and their children, and have concerns that residential survivors using opioids may be limiting access to non-using survivors and their children.*

### About this Study

The current opioid epidemic has created special challenges for how Ohio's agencies serving domestic violence (DV) survivors in a residential setting address the needs of survivors with and without opioid addiction. Ohio's agencies serving DV survivors in a residential setting currently lack state-wide guidance on better addressing the needs of survivors who struggle with opioid addiction while also providing a safe and healing environment.

Our interdisciplinary research team, in collaboration with the Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN)—the federally recognized statewide coalition of Ohio's 72 DV service providers—has undertaken a needs assessment study to address opioid issues in service provision.

The first component of the project involved conducting eight focus groups with DV agencies' staff ( $n=55$ ) at a state-wide summit hosted by ODVN. Information was obtained regarding challenges DV residential programs face when working with survivors using opioids and the types of support needed to better address opioid issues in service provision.



## WORKING WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS

### About this Study (cont.)

In order to obtain robust data from a diverse sample, the focus groups represented both administration and staff-level employees at DV agencies with locations in urban and rural areas throughout Ohio. The results help with the understanding of the diversity of internal and external challenges faced by shelters when adding the component of opioid addiction to the already complex realities of supporting DV survivors. Community factors, such as resource availability (substance use detox and rehabilitation, proximity to emergency medical services, and mental health services), first responder sentiment toward opioid addiction and DV survivors, funders' attitudes about the role DV shelters should have with supporting survivors who are misusing opioids, and the community capacity for understanding the interplay of opioid addiction and domestic violence greatly impact the DV shelter's ability to serve DV survivors.

### Conclusion

This study provides insight to the additional stressors encountered by DV shelter agencies and employees as a result of the current opioid crisis. Results indicate that shelters need universal guidelines to drive training and services to support DV survivors that accounts for the heightened threat presented by opioid addiction while taking into account that each shelter has unique experiences with DV survivors with opioid addiction and different community perspectives. This research will be used by ODVN to help form state-wide procedural guidelines as well as procedures at the shelter level.



### ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

This project was led by **Dr. Cecilia Mengo** and **Dr. Susan Yoon** (co-PIs). Dr. Mengo is a leader in research examining the persistent social problem of violence against women and its impact on women's health and well-being. Dr. Yoon is recognized as an expert in resiliency research and the impact of child maltreatment on child development trajectories. **Dr. Kathryn Lancaster** (co-I; College of Public Health) is a prominent epidemiologist researching health behavior to understand the engagement in prevention and treatment of substance use and infectious diseases among vulnerable populations. **Dr. Julianna Nemeth** (consultant; College of Public Health) is a principal intervention scientist focused on improving health and reducing disparities for women and children exposed to domestic violence and homelessness. **Karla Shockley McCarthy and Brienne Beaujolais** (research assistants) are PhD students in the social work program and specialize in family systems research and child development, and gender-based violence prevention, respectively. **Fei Pei and Yeliani Valdez** (research assistants) are also PhD students in the social work program specializing in neighborhood influences and community development, and intimate partner violence, respectively. The **Ohio Domestic Violence Network** team—including Rachel Ramirez, Emily Kulow, Cathy Alexander, Shelley Marsh, Sonia Ferencik, and Fallon Kingery—provided expertise concerning the structure, efforts, and challenges faced by Ohio's DV shelter agencies and employees.

### ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The shelter agency employee focus group research represents the first phase of the study to gain understanding of the impact of survivor opioid use on the needs of DV shelter agencies and the manner in which they support DV survivors. In order to comprehensively examine the issue, a second phase will be conducted to provide the perspective of the DV survivor. The second component entails conducting phone interviews with survivors (N=150) to examine prevalence estimates of opioid use of DV survivors in shelters. Overall, findings will aid in the development of program recommendations on addressing the burden of opioid use among DV survivors accessing residential services.

Contact information: [mengo.1@osu.edu](mailto:mengo.1@osu.edu); [yon.538@osu.edu](mailto:yon.538@osu.edu)

### CONTACT US

The Ohio State University  
College of Social Work  
Stillman Hall, 1947 College Rd.  
Columbus, OH 43210-1162  
[csw.osu.edu/research](http://csw.osu.edu/research)  
Phone: 614-292-9229



**THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY**  
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK