Safe at Home: Experiences, Barriers, and Access (The SHEBA Project)

Research Report Executive Summary
November 2024

Acknowledgements

More information about this research

This executive summary is drawn from the Research Report of the SHEBA Project.

To access the full Research Report and other resources relating to this project, please visit https://vawc.com.au/the-sheba-project-safe-at-home-experiences-barriers-and-access/ or contact the research team at University of Melbourne:

Associate Professor Kristin Diemer (key contact): k.diemer@unimelb.edu.au
Professor Cathy Humphreys and Ms Jasmin Isobe

November 2024

Suggested citation: Isobe, J., Diemer, K., & Humphreys, C. (2024). *Safe at Home: Experiences, Barriers, and Access (The SHEBA Project): Research Report Executive Summary.* University of Melbourne: Melbourne, Australia.

Executive Summary

Introduction

In Victoria, policies and responses to family and domestic violence have progressed to support victim/survivors to live safely in the home of their choice by creating deterrents for the abuser to breach an intervention order and come to the home. The Universities of Melbourne and New South Wales (NSW), and McAuley Community Services for Women (McAuley) have been progressively building a body of knowledge on the requirements to deliver a comprehensive Safe at Home response for adult and child survivors of family violence in Victoria. The Safe at Home: Experiences, Barriers, and Access (SHEBA) research project was designed to build on this foundational knowledge base and identify gaps related to key mechanisms such as Personal Safety Initiatives (PSI) and use of Flexible Support Packages (FSP). The specific research aims were to hear from women who have used PSIs and staff coordinating the Safe at Home response to better understand:

1. Key components of an effective Safe at Home response

2. Facilitators and barriers to implementing an effective Safe at Home response

3. Evidence of how Safe at Home responses can be adapted to ensure the safety of victim/survivors to accommodate: a) emergency or disaster settings; and b) diverse population groups

4. Gaps in the current Safe at Home service provision for women in Victoria

Methodology

A qualitative research model was designed comprising four sample groups including: 1) victim/survivors with lived experience of PSI and Safe at Home responses; 2) practitioners delivering PSI;3) PSI and FSP Coordinators; and 4) policy workers. All project elements were informed by feminist intersectionality (Grabe, 2020) and using participatory action research methods to mitigate the disadvantage created by interlocking structured discriminations (McKibbin et al, 2015). All elements of the research design and analysis were informed by a panel of Experts by Experience (DVV & UoM, 2020).[1] Preliminary findings were workshopped with WEAVERs to ensure researchers' interpretations were meaningful in honouring the messages shared by women with lived experience, and insights from this discussion were used to inform the discussion and recommendations included in this report.

---

[1] Ethical clearance obtained through the University of Melbourne (Ethics ID: 24921).

Key findings and recommendations

The project identified considerable benefits in the existing programs. Recommendations provided in this report provide opportunities to enhance the response and assist both victim/survivors and program staff with smoother and more timely service navigation and delivery.

Identifying the key components of effective Safe at Home responses was a primary research aim of this project. Twelve key components were identified through synthesis of findings from the evidence review, direct feedback from project participants, and research findings relating to key phases of service access and delivery. A total of 62 recommendations for policy development or service provision have been made across the 12 components. This structured set of recommendations highlight opportunities to strengthen Safe at Home in Victoria and can be found in Section 6.2 of the report.

Each key component is presented in the following pages, with summaries of the overarching 62 recommendations. All recommendations have been written with the intention of fulfilling one of the research project aims of: removing access barriers; strengthening the program; filling service gaps; and improving access for diverse client groups.

Key Component 1	Support towards affordable, secure and stable housing as part of homelessness prevention.
Summary of recommendations	Recognise and resource Safe at Home as a homelessness prevention strategy including: • Expansion of available emergency accommodation • Increase the variety of short- and long-term financial relief mechanisms available to victim/survivors • More strongly link policies for alternative accommodation for the person using violence with Safe at Home aspects supporting victim/survivors.

Key Component 2	A range of accessible specialist family violence services offered over time as part of the response.
Summary of recommendations	Increase multi-sector awareness, knowledge and contributions towards Safe at Home responses. Including health, education and workforce sectors may provide improved long-term outcomes for clients. Increase the length of case support periods to enhance service support bridging short-term priorities and long-term recovery.

Key Component 3	Local partnerships and collaboration providing strong service coordination to address safety risks, stability needs and sustained wellbeing.
Summary of recommendations	Develop models to consistently support victim/survivors to apply for FVIOs and navigate criminal justice processes, including: • Timely access to legal aid support and advice.

Key Component 4	Program responsiveness through streamlined processes and flexibility to adapt service provision.
Summary of recommendations	Increase the number and EFT of PSI and FSP coordinator roles and support mechanisms to reduce administrative burden and streamline program delivery, including: • Develop and fund specialist coordinator and administrative roles; • Ring fence funding to support administrative processes; • Invest in specialist family violence workforce across crisis and non-crisis responses; • Consider funding support for a check-in/review point for victim/survivors following case closures to reduce risk of re-entry into the homelessness system; • Streamline the PSI applications process with specific attention towards minimising approval delays; • Monitor aspects of PSI and Safe at Home that are possible, feasible and effective in disaster and emergency contexts.

Key Component 5	Receive specific funding for components of the response, indexed to economic and contextual changes over time.
Summary of recommendations	• Review and indexing of FSP and PSI package funding informed by specific contextual analyses; • Exploration of separation of PSI and FSP funding; • Revision and extension of funded monitoring periods for PSI components incurring ongoing costs.

Key Component 6	Clients have a voice in decision-making to ensure that responses are accessible to, informed by, and empowering of diverse victim/survivors.
Summary of recommendations	• Investment and development of accessible and in-language client-facing resources; • Increased victim/survivor voice in decision-making and through review processes for policy; • System and policy authorisations to create and enhance opportunities for victim/survivor agency and expertise informing Safe at Home responses.

Key Component 7	Include children and young people as victim/survivors in their own right, with components to support their safety, wellbeing and recovery.
Summary of recommendations	Training and ongoing development of staff to support children and young people as victim/survivors in their own right when considering Safe at Home. • Develop guidance around PSI and the use of FSPs for young people; • Develop resources to support children in understanding service responses including PSI; • Develop young person peer-support; • Include schools and education settings in risk assessment and management supporting children; • Ensure alignment between child safety responses, family law court decisions, and court orders; • Further research to hear from children directly about their needs and understanding of Safe at Home responses.

Key Component 8	Focus on reducing risk and increasing victim/survivor safety through a suite of integrated responses.
Summary of recommendations	• Inclusion of specifically funded digital safety assessments and audits in PSI; • Support practitioners to respond to technology-facilitated abuse, including signs of mal/spyware, and refer into specialist services; • Consider creation and funding of technology-focused roles within specialist family violence services; • Work with justice to recognise and include technology-facilitated abuse in FVIOs; • Greater attention to coercive control when planning Safe at Home strategies; • Increased investment and provision of legal advice for victim/survivors to retain access to their home; • Training for key technology providers.

Key Component 9	Attend to safety concerns arising from multiple, changing forms of violence used within different family contexts.
Summary of recommendations	• Review and development of PSI and Safe at Home policy responding to adolescent violence in the home. • Increase alternative housing for young people; • Earlier and coordinated interventions to address intersecting issues for young people before a crisis point; • Expand eligibility criteria for PSI to include provisions for homes unknown to people using violence.

Key Component 10	Work alongside interventions with people using violence as part of a holistic response connecting safety and accountability.
Summary of recommendations	Stronger policy attention and practice implementation supporting information sharing across sectors to keep perpetrators in view including: • Targeted policy mechanisms to strengthen criminal justice and statutory responses • Active, family violence-informed policing, including increased numbers and availability of Family Violence Liaison Officers • Work collaboratively to ensure FVIOs applications for non-physical violence are taken seriously and there are consistent responses to all FVIO breaches.

Key Component 11	Provide cultural safety and cultural authority through intersectional service provision supporting diverse needs.
Summary of recommendations	Review of PSI Guidelines considering requirements and centrality of FVIOs and interaction with police and criminal justice systems. • Consider tailored, community-led programs to support Aboriginal victim/survivors, including funding for a dedicated state-wide Aboriginal PSI Coordinator role; • Improve policy to support flexibility in implementation for specific cohorts; • Provide increased resources for multilingual and in-culture services; • Capacity building mainstream services towards enhanced cultural safety and service provision inclusive of culturally specific Safe at Home strategies;

Key Component 12	Informed and improved by iterative data and evidence generation, capacity building and collaborative working.
Summary of recommendations	Update the PSI Guidelines in line with FSP Guidelines including: • Specific consideration of eligibility criteria; • Clarity of roles and responsibilities in delivering PSI; • Minimum standards for technology components including functionality aspects Continue and improve data collection and reporting of FSP and PSI program to inform policy and program development. including establishment of feedback loops among PSI practitioners and coordinators.

Conclusion

This research identifies firstly that the Safe at Home response is a highly valued component of the Victorian Family Violence sector response. It provides important bridging resources for women moving from crisis accommodation to a home in the community. The findings provide critical directions for improvement and modifications ensuring women and children seeking to live safely in the home of their choice are sufficiently protected from family violence, and service providers are sufficiently resourced to respond in a timely way.

References

Grabe, S. (2020). Research methods in the study of intersectionality in psychology: Examples informed by a decade of collaborative work with majority world women's grassroots activism. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11,* Article 494309. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.494309

Domestic Violence Victoria & The University of Melbourne (2020). The Family Violence Experts by Experience Framework: Research Report and Framework 2020.

McKibbin, G., Duncan, R., Hamilton, B., Humphreys, C., & Kellett, C. (2015). The intersectional turn in feminist theory: A response to Carbin and Edenheim (2013). European Journal of Women's Studies, 22(1), 99-103. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506814539445