

# **Meeting the Need: The Adequacy of Missouri's Domestic Violence Shelters**

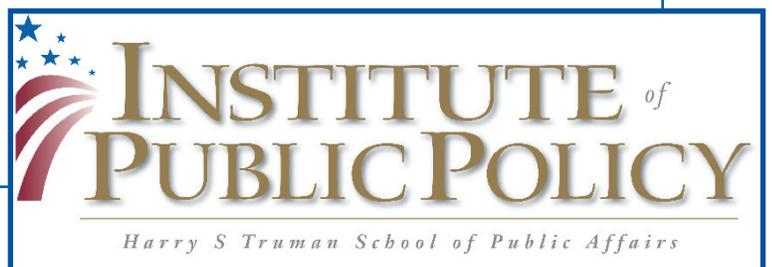
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**Report 6-2006**

May 2006

A publication from:  
Institute of Public Policy  
University of Missouri  
137 Middlebush Hall  
Columbia, MO 65211

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Institute of Public Policy or the Truman School of Public Affairs.



# Meeting the Need: The Adequacy of Missouri's Domestic Violence Shelters

Jenny Jones

The first domestic violence shelters in Missouri opened in the 1970s. Since then, these shelters have provided a safe place for women and their children when an abusive partner threatens their security. However, in 2004, Missouri domestic violence shelters turned away 29% of women and children seeking refuge because the shelters were full. Shelters have turned victims away at about the same rate for the past five years. Additionally, in 2004, the number of domestic violence police reports in Missouri was at a five-year high.<sup>1</sup> The number of adult abuse cases filed in Missouri courts was also higher in 2004 than the previous year.<sup>2</sup> While these cases are on the rise, Missouri shelters continue to turn away victims of domestic violence due to lack of space.

This brief examines the adequacy of domestic violence shelter space in Missouri. The examination finds that some regions consistently do not have enough shelter capacity to meet demand.

## Missouri's Domestic Abuse Shelter Availability

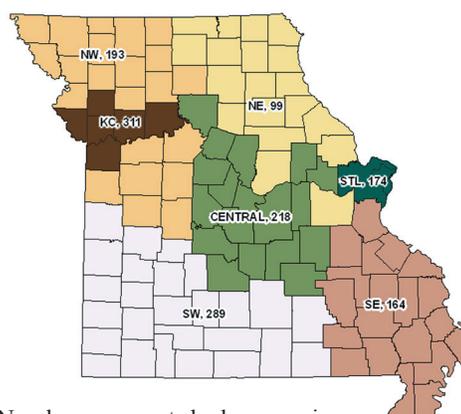
Every year, four to five thousand women and children are turned away from full Missouri domestic violence shelters.<sup>3</sup> When this happens, those seeking refuge are often referred to the nearest shelter with available space. However, the nearest shelter can be dozens of miles away. This complicates matters further for those without access to transportation. Figure 1 illustrates regions defined by the Missouri Coalition Against Domestic Violence (MCADV) and the number of shelter beds operating in each region. Missouri has a total of 54 shelters housing 1,448 beds.

**FIGURE 1**  
MCADV Regions  
Shelter Bed Availability

### Legend

#### MCADV Regions

	CENTRAL		SE
	KC		STL
	NE		SW
	NW		



\*Number represents beds per region

## The Costs and Benefits of Domestic Abuse Shelter Services

Establishing and operating a domestic violence shelter is costly. The average yearly operating cost for a Missouri shelter with 25-30 beds is \$364,354. Large shelters, such as Hope House in Kansas City, which has 90 beds, have operating costs of more than \$1 million, or approximately \$14,600 per bed.<sup>4</sup>

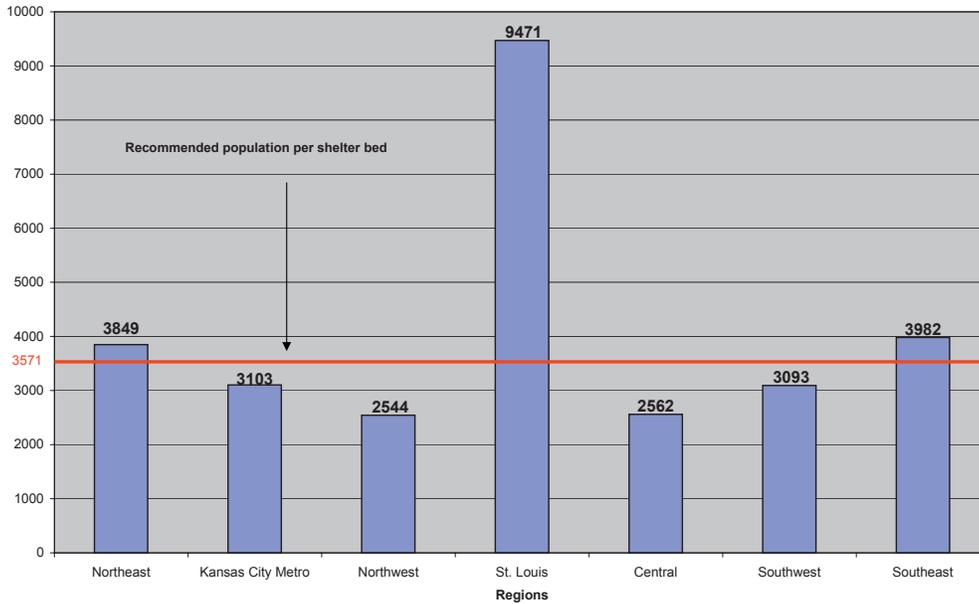
While this may seem expensive, the social benefits of providing these services is substantial. An Arizona study calculated the cost-effectiveness of a battered women's shelter and concluded that the benefits of domestic violence shelters substantially outweigh the costs.<sup>5</sup> For every dollar spent on domestic violence services at least \$4.60 is returned through social benefits. The savings primarily come from helping women avoid violent assaults. Assaults often result in hospitalization and lost wages for the victim and the use of law enforcement and justice system resources.

## ASSESSING THE NEED BY REGION

Despite the cost savings and societal benefits of having adequate shelter space, Missouri lacks these resources in some areas. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in the St. Louis metro area. Shelters in St. Louis have the greatest difficulty when it comes to finding bed space for victims of domestic violence.



**FIGURE 2: Number of residents per shelter by bed region\***



\*3,571 residents per shelter bed or less is ideal. Regions above the red line have inadequate bed space to meet population needs.

**Population and Shelter Bed Space**

The Missouri Coalition Against Domestic Violence divides the state into seven regions: Central, Kansas City metro, Northeast, Northwest, St. Louis metro, Southeast and Southwest. The highest concentration of Missouri residents live in the St. Louis region, which includes St. Louis City, and the counties of St. Louis and St. Charles. While 29% of Missourians live in this region, it has only 12% of the state’s shelter beds. The St. Louis region has the least number of domestic abuse shelter beds per capita in the state. For every bed in the region, there are 9,471 people (see figure 2).

As figure 2 shows, St. Louis has almost three times more residents per bed than other regions. Other regions in the state are in line with a Minnesota study that estimated a county with a population of 50,000 needs about 14 shelter beds to meet demand.<sup>6</sup> This means that one shelter bed can adequately serve 3,571 people. According to this model, the Western and Central sections of the state have adequate bed space and the Eastern side does not (figure 2). For Missouri, this means that most regions are providing adequate or close to adequate bed space for victims of domestic violence while the St. Louis Metro region is underserving its population.

**Victimization in the St. Louis Metro Area**

The National Violence Against Women Survey<sup>7</sup> reported that 1.5% of women are victims of rape or physical assault by an intimate partner during a 12 month period.<sup>8</sup> The 2000 U.S. Census showed approximately 654,000 residents in the St. Louis region were women over the age of 18. According to the national survey, taking 1.5% of this population, about 9,810 St. Louis region women are victimized by domestic violence each year.

**Adult Abuse Cases Filed by Region**

Below (table 1) is a breakdown of the number of shelter beds and adult abuse cases filed in each region.<sup>9</sup> The final column shows the ratio of shelter beds to adult abuse cases filed in each region in Missouri.

The St. Louis region filed more adult abuse cases than any other region in 2004. It also has the highest ratio of shelter beds to cases filed. This is another indicator that St. Louis falls behind the rest of the state when it comes to providing adequate domestic violence shelter capacity for its population.

**TABLE 1**

**Ratio of adult abuse cases to shelter beds by region**

Region	# of beds	Adult abuse cases filed	Ratio
Central:	218	4,173	1 to 19
Northwest:	193	3,954	1 to 20
Southwest:	289	7,832	1 to 27
Kansas City:	311	9,418	1 to 30
Northeast:	99	3,370	1 to 34
Southeast:	164	5,605	1 to 34
St Louis:	174	10,228	1 to 59

**POLICY OPTIONS FOR MISSOURI**

*1. Increase the level of state funding for domestic violence shelter service statewide.*

In 2004, 29% of women and children seeking shelter were turned away due to a lack of bed space. While this problem is more prevalent in certain parts of the state, shelters in every region operate at full capacity at some point during the year. Sometimes, a woman seeking shelter is unable to relocate due to school or work obligations. If the shelter in her county is full, she may choose to stay with her batterer because she lacks alternative housing options. Increasing the capacity at each residential shelter in Missouri would allow more battered women to find a safe place to stay locally.

To estimate the cost of this option, consider that the annual operating cost for a shelter with 25-30 beds is \$364,354. Using that estimate, the average annual cost per shelter bed in Missouri is approximately \$14,600. If Missouri were to



add 29% more beds than it has currently<sup>10</sup> this would come to an additional 420 beds and cost \$6,132,000. In addition to operating costs is the construction cost for additional shelters. The estimated cost of building a new 40 resident facility in Wichita, Kansas, is \$1.6 million.<sup>11</sup> If Missouri were to build 10 of these 40 resident shelters, it would cost approximately \$16,000,000 for a total cost of \$22,132,000.

*2. Increase the number of beds available in the St. Louis area by building new domestic abuse shelters or adding to current shelters.*

When it comes to providing safe homes for victims of domestic violence, the St. Louis region is vastly underserved compared to the rest of the state. Having more shelter beds available will increase the safety of battered women in the St. Louis area and make provisions more equitable across the state.

To meet adequacy, St. Louis needs almost three times the number of shelter beds as it has currently. This means an additional 348 beds to make 522 for the area. The additional beds would give St. Louis 3,158 residents per bed, which would meet the Minnesota study's recommendation. Taking the average estimated cost of \$14,600 per shelter bed used in the first alternative, and multiplying that by an additional 348 beds means this option would cost approximately \$5,080,800.

*3. Establish a computer network that tracks the availability of shelter space in Missouri.*

In 1995, Minnesota created the Day One program, a computer system that shows which domestic abuse shelters in the state have vacancies. If a woman seeks refuge at a shelter that is full, the network can immediately locate available beds in other shelters and link the victim to those shelters over the phone.<sup>12</sup> Day One also provides transportation to women who need to travel to a distant shelter. According to Day One, no victim has been turned away from a shelter in the system for a lack of bed space since the program began.

In 2004, Day One services in Minnesota cost \$336,623 in management and operating fees. Missouri has 21% more women over the age of 18 than does Minnesota. To estimate Missouri's cost, 21% of Minnesota's price for Day One was added to the total cost. Missouri's total annual cost would be approximately \$407,300.

## CONCLUSION

A network such as Day One could help battered women in Missouri by finding available shelter space more easily. Providing transportation to shelters with vacancies would also lessen transportation problems for those living in rural areas. This program would be the most efficient way to address the shelter bed shortage problem by making better use of facilities already in place. While a system such as Day One would not solve the problem of domestic violence, it would provide

more options for battered women seeking to end the violence in their lives.

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8. Coleman, Stephen (2001).
9. The Missouri Office of State Courts Administrator (OSCA) categorizes intimate partner violence as "adult abuse" in its statistical data within the broader category of "domestic relations".
10. In 2004, Missouri turned away 29% of women and children who sought shelter because the shelters were at capacity. This figure accounts for Missouri adding 29% more beds than it currently has.
11. In order to estimate the cost of constructing a new domestic violence shelter, this paper refers to a charity in Wichita, Kansas, that estimated the cost of building Harbor House, a new 40 person shelter, to be \$1.6 million. To learn more, refer to Catholic Charities website at <http://www.wkscatholiccharities.org/CapitalCampaign.htm>.
12. Coleman, Stephen (2001).

### Suggested Citation

Jones, Jenny. (2006). Meeting the Need: The Adequacy of Missouri's Domestic Violence Shelters. Report 6-2006. Retrieved [Month Day, Year], from University of Missouri – Columbia, Institute of Public Policy Web site: <http://www.truman.missouri.edu/ipp/Publications>

### Author Biography

Jenny Jones recently graduated from the Harry S Truman School of Public Affairs with a degree in Public Policy and Public Management. She earned her bachelor's degree in Broadcast Journalism from MU. She now works for the City of Kansas City as a Cookingham Management Intern.



