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Safe and Unsafe Housing for Domestic and Family Violence Survivors: Practitioner Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Safe housing is necessary for women who have left a domestically violent relationship. However, there has been limited attention paid to the meanings of safety beyond refuges and crisis accommodation. This article strengthens the conceptualisation of safe and unsafe housing through a focus on practitioners' definitions. Our analysis draws from focus groups with 30 practitioners across six services in Adelaide, Australia, working with young women to find and retain housing after a violent relationship ended. Practitioners understood safe housing as essential to women's wellbeing but there was less clarity around its meaning. Practitioners focused on unsafe housing across three dimensions: un/safe relationships, un/safe dwellings and un/safe communities.

IMPLICATIONS

- The provision of safe housing to women who have experienced domestic and family violence requires a recognition of its multiple dimensions beyond physical safety.
- Practitioners' difficulty in defining safe housing may minimise their capacity to recognise housing as a "recuperative space" that facilitates women's autonomy after leaving a violent partner.
- Successfully providing safe housing is a process that incorporates elements of being safe and unsafe.

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This article presents practitioners' definitions of safe and unsafe housing when supporting young women (aged 17–25 years) who have left a domestically violent relationship and are living outside of the designated "safe" spaces of refuges. Many women describe finding affordable and safe accommodation as their most significant concern when leaving a violent partner (Braaf & Meyering, 2011). This challenge extends beyond an immediate crisis to the longer-term difficulties of attaining appropriate housing. Thus, the "problem" of domestic and family violence and housing need to be reconceptualised, "from one of leaving, to one of gaining safety" (Baker et al., 2003, p. 776).

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Researchers and practitioners have advocated for a survivor-defined approach to understanding safety. This entails working with women, prioritising the specificity of their perspectives, aims, strengths, strategies, and needs (Davies & Lyon, 2013). A survivor-defined approach emphasises the importance of women's choices and structural inequalities (Goodman et al., 2016; Wood, Clark, et al., 2020). Women's definitions are affirmed as multidimensional, contextualised, and extending beyond the absence of violence (Goodman et al., 2015), highlighting that there can be no "one-size-fits-all path to seeking safety from IPV" (Thomas et al., 2015, p. 171). However, Cattaneo et al. (2021) have noted that funder requirements, institutional logic, socioeconomic structures and day-to-day pressures can limit a survivor-centred approach, regardless of practitioners' commitment to its principles. Practitioners' definitions of safe and unsafe housing are in actuality a factor shaping survivors' housing outcomes. The practice significance of these definitions has not translated into a body of research that centres the meaning of safe housing for those tasked with finding it. This article aims to build knowledge through identifying how practitioners define safe housing for young women who have experienced family and domestic violence.

Domestic and Family Violence and Housing

Domestic and family violence (DFV) creates housing challenges for women. It may cause women to leave into homelessness or accommodation that is inappropriate, unsustainable, or unstable (Flanagan et al., 2019). Finding and retaining housing is rendered more complex by the cumulative impacts of compromised mental and physical health, isolation from support networks, postseparation violence, and co-occurring financial and social abuse (O'Campo et al., 2016). Women may experience multiple moves, struggle to meet the rent, and face eviction (Flanagan et al., 2019). Housing challenges can increase women's vulnerability to violence and render them dependent on violent or exploitative relationships (Cronley et al., 2020).

The Australian housing market intensifies the above challenges. A shortfall in social housing means women may face long waiting lists even when they are a priority group (Flanagan et al., 2019). Private rental is unaffordable and marked by a shortage of accommodation, intense competition, and discrimination against single mothers (Flanagan et al., 2019; Gezinski & Gonzalez-Pons, 2021). Home ownership is typically out-of-reach. These limits exist alongside the pressure on service providers to quickly move women to independent housing (Sullivan et al., 2019).

While differing in the specifics, Australian state and territory policies emphasise collaborative practices across housing, homelessness, and DFV systems with the aim of integrated responses and multiagency collaborations (Laing et al., 2018). In practice, DFV is often treated as primarily a housing issue so that the needs arising from the impacts of that violence may be marginalised or misunderstood. Conversely, when women are supported primarily within the DFV system, services can struggle to secure housing (Flanagan et al., 2019).

Safety for Domestic and Family Violence Survivors

Given the absence of work on practitioner perspectives, this article is informed by the research on safe housing as defined by DFV survivors. This work shows that safety is

multidimensional, contextual, and socially produced. A location may feel safe for specific women and children in some circumstances and unsafe for other women or in other circumstances (Bowstead, 2019, p. 55). There is a complex relationship between safety and control. Goodman et al. (2022) have pointed to this tension when discussing the secrecy around shelters where rules often define safety only in terms of protection from physical harm. Doing so misses the survivors' own more complex understandings of safety that can include safety from loneliness and new experiences of control (see also Bowstead, 2019; Glenn & Goodman, 2015; Wood, Cook Heffron, et al., 2020).

Taken collectively, the literature indicates three dimensions of housing safety as experienced by women who have left DFV relationships. The first is women's sense of personal safety—of feeling protected from an abuser (Benbow et al., 2019; Fraga Rizo et al., 2022; Zufferey et al., 2016). The second is physical safety, including the type of housing (Benbow et al., 2019; Clough et al., 2014; Fraga Rizo et al., 2022; Hetling et al., 2018; Kirkman et al., 2015; Zufferey et al., 2016), its appropriateness for children (Fraga Rizo et al., 2022), and the neighbourhood in which women are living (Benbow et al., 2019; Clough et al., 2014; Fraga Rizo et al., 2022; Kirkman et al., 2015; Sullivan et al., 2019; Zufferey et al., 2016). Emotional safety and the associated relief from stress and time to think about the future is the third dimension (Fraga Rizo et al., 2022; Hetling et al., 2018; Woodhall-Melnik et al., 2017). Although not capturing practitioner perspectives of safety, existing research suggests the value of being sensitive to safety as multidimensional, contingent, and experienced rather than objectively measured.

Method

This article draws upon qualitative research conducted for a South Australian government department. Data were collected across 2019 and the final report submitted in 2020. The study was approved by the Flinders University Human Research Ethics Committee (Project #8201). The original research aimed to identify patterns in women's needs and service use to inform best practice in service provision to these clients. Authors Natalier (a qualitative sociologist) and Wendt (an academic with extensive DFV practice experience) facilitated focus groups with practitioners and interviewed young women who had experienced DFV and homelessness or housing insecurity. The focus group analysis indicated complexities in practitioners' understandings of safe and unsafe housing, but this was not a focus of the report. This article returns to these initial insights, guided by a new research question: What does safe housing mean for practitioners supporting young women who have experienced DFV and housing instability or homelessness?

Sample and Recruitment

Practitioner focus groups were conducted with a purposive sample of six services. The services were in Adelaide, a southern Australian city on the unceded lands of the Kaurna people. Services were included because young women who had experienced DFV and homelessness were a core client group. Five services provided housing-focused supports to DFV survivors and one provided support for survivors of sexual violence who were also typically survivors of DFV. The activities of this service required

meeting women's housing needs, although they did not directly provide that housing. All practitioners were directly involved in working with young women. Table 1 shows the types of services and number of participants (a total of 30 practitioners).

The first and second authors met with service managers to explain the project. Managers then shared information sheets and consent forms with their staff. Individual practitioners contacted the researchers directly to discuss the project and their participation.

Data Collection

The use of focus groups reflected practitioners' preferences, expressed in initial stakeholder discussions. Focus groups may facilitate the emergence of new ideas as participants respond to others' perspectives (Mendes & Snow, 2014). This benefit is balanced by the possibility that participants may feel constrained in raising different views (Linhorst, 2002). The authors were sensitive to this and sought to manage it by prompting for alternative perspectives; nonetheless, discussions tended to be marked by agreement.

Each focus group lasted between one and two hours. They were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed. Discussions were guided by a schedule that included questions on practitioners' perspectives of women's needs, outreach/engagement strategies and practice models, definitions of safe and unsafe housing and safety and absence of safety more generally, client entry and exit points and movement through service systems, and how each service interacted with service systems. The schedule focused the discussion and open-ended and follow-up questions encouraged participants to offer responses that were meaningful to them.

Data Analysis

Analysis was informed by Braun and Clarke's (2021) outline of thematic analysis. This is a primarily inductive approach, using open coding to translate comments into shorter statements that reflected participants' language and then grouping conceptually similar codes into categories. These were in turn clustered into themes. Initial coding and

Table 1. Services and Participants

Label	Service Focus	Number of Participants
Service 1	Onsite support and accommodation for women who are pregnant or parenting and homeless or at risk of homelessness, and an outreach program for women who have left on-site accommodation	6
Service 2	Onsite support and accommodation for women who are pregnant or parenting and homeless or at risk of homelessness, and an outreach program for women who have left on-site accommodation	5
Service 3	Crisis response, longer-term counselling and outreach for women who have experience sexual assault	4
Service 4	Case management, on-site accommodation and supported accommodation for mothers who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	6
Service 5	Medium-term supported housing for young people at risk of homelessness	4
Service 6	Housing and service support for young people at risk of homelessness	5

higher-order analysis were developed individually and refined collaboratively by Natalier and Wendt. Goudie assisted in writing this article.

Findings

Analysis indicated four themes relating to safe and unsafe housing. The first theme was the importance of safe housing. Three additional themes described safe and unsafe housing in terms of relationships, dwellings, and surroundings. Practitioners' challenges in defining safe housing were evident throughout the discussion, with an emphasis on lack of safety.

The Importance of Safe Housing

Practitioners overwhelmingly described safe housing as central to their work—it was "the biggest thing" (Service 4). Practitioners commented that safe housing was sporadic or absent in women's lives; recent housing crises were seen to be the latest manifestation of longer-term insecurity and trauma. As a practitioner explains, "And often it's a safe environment for the first time, isn't it, and that's what I actually hear with the security, and having their own place, their own place for them and their child." (Service 1). Given women's histories and immediate need, safe housing was understood to be a priority: "You are going to be focused on that and supporting them to have a safe environment to live in and then once you have done that, you might be able to start to look at some other things" (Practitioner 1); and "So, the intention is really to try and create some safety and stability in their lives" (Practitioner 2, Service 3). Practitioners pointed to the two-fold importance of safe housing. They suggested it created a foundation for women to address past challenges:

> They might have been sleeping rough, they might have had [a] transient couple of years like couch surfing, or conflict in their family, dysfunctional relationships—and just providing them that stability just so that they can feel safe and settled so they can establish themselves in the community, like that's a big one. (Service 2)

Safe housing also was important because it offered an opportunity for women to build their futures. The practitioner quoted above continued:

> Once they have that stability, they can, like, settle down and then think about what other things they want in their life … they can, you know, within a safe space work on whatever it is that they identify with. (Service 2)

The above comment suggested that safe housing offered the emotional space women needed to think about their futures. Others pointed to the practical importance of a base from which to seek resources necessary for building a future.

> Being able to fulfil their potential and work towards their goals can really come back to safe housing, because if you are not feeling safe in the space that you are living in, how on earth are you going to get to the psychologist appointment? How on earth are you going to get to your education program? (Service 3)

Despite the stated importance of safe housing, discussion often focused on unsafe housing. Participants typically responded to questions about safe housing with reflections

on its absence, the challenges in achieving it, and how best to manage unsafety. Unsafe housing, not safe housing, was the reference point. The following excerpt illustrates these dynamics.

> Facilitator: How do you create environments that are safer?
>
> Participant 1: It would take a lot of advocacy, and a lot to have changed in the system.
>
> Facilitator: Do you think that there are actually things that can work well for safe housing?
>
> Participant 2: I think we find with all of the services that we work with that obviously everyone has good intentions, but you know with some of the housing services sometimes they are hamstrung by what their mandate is. (Service 3)

The discussion continued on to cover a shortage of appropriate housing, unsafe environments, violent relationships, practitioners in other services misunderstanding trauma and ignoring women's feelings of unsafety, and institutional failings. These are practice challenges shaping many practitioners' work (Theobald et al., 2021). The focus of discussion, even after prompts to consider safety, suggests that these practice challenges may inform an emphasis on unsafety as the key referent in housing DFV survivors. The following sections illustrate this point through the themes of safe and unsafe relationships, dwellings, and surroundings.

Safe and Unsafe Relationships

Practitioners also concentrated on unsafe relationships when discussing housing. For example, when a query about safe housing was answered with the challenges of finding community-based support services, the facilitator returned to the question, answered through a reflection on managing unsafe—potentially or actually violent—relationships.

> Facilitator: I might go back to that question about trying to create safety in housing and what that looks like.
>
> Participant 1: My personal feeling is that because we have quite clear guidelines and expectations, even the clients that really balk at those rules and don't really like [them], my theory is that [those rules] actually make them feel safe.
>
> Participant 2: In here, things are more monitored … It forcibly removes people and removes those choices. (Service 1)

Later, Participant 2 raised the fragility of that safety: "They all feel safe here, but sometimes, I guess, as workers, we feel like it's not as safe as they think it is". Practitioners described how DFV limited women's ability to retain housing.

> She's there with a DV partner. They're living together, they don't really want to separate, they're arguing a lot, neighbours are complaining a lot, the private rental guy is not going to extend their lease, and so she's at risk, due to the domestic violence, of actually being evicted. (Service 6)

Practitioners noted that housing instability also occurred when the perpetration of DFV breached service rules.

> Practitioner 1: Then what we, unfortunately, see, is they're not wanting to work on the domestic violence. It gets to a point where it's unsafe for us to house them and we have to end their accommodation, or they choose to end their accommodation because they don't want to work on the domestic violence. So, it keeps spinning them back into homelessness.
>
> Practitioner 2: It's different if you're working with a young woman who has identified domestic violence and … if we can work on moving them, you know, moving them from that home to a new home to make it safer again. (Service 3)

Practitioners noted the challenges in encouraging women to reflect on the violence in their lives and its connection to housing.

> Because if they come here because they're homeless but they haven't identified how they've got to being homeless, and often it's from DV … but then they'll let the perpetrator back into their life and don't acknowledge that. It's very hard then, because then it becomes unsafe for them … then they're back into homelessness. (Service 2)

Some practitioners linked women's seeming reluctance to leave violent relationships to the trauma and psychosocial dynamics shaping women's lives. Others believed women did not recognise DFV or accept its presence, counter to the survivor-centred approaches (Goodman et al., 2016): "They're quite okay, a lot of them are quite okay with the way their lives are; they don't necessarily see that there's even such a big problem with the domestic violence and the abuse and things like that" (Service 6). Practitioners also described women's friendships and community connections as unsafe. They were concerned that women's "understanding of safe relationships, and the way that that we understand them, are very different", rendering women "very, very vulnerable" (Service 3). This participant continued:

> In lots of ways we have managed to create some safety and stability and a calmness around where she lives, but she is also really lonely. So, there is that kind of seeking of connection and not knowing how to keep herself safe. (Service 3)

These relationships were understood to be a risk to safe housing and an important focus of change when working with women.

> We do a lot of work around peer influence and relationships because especially if they have slept rough or if they have been couch-surfing, then if people have helped them out [of] that … they feel obligated that when they get a place … they have to help them out and they can quite easily lose control of that situation. (Service 5)

Connections with practitioners were presented as one of the few safe relationships for women, providing protection against the immediate and ongoing impacts of DFV. As one practitioner outlines, "We are just planting a seed like constantly and the biggest part of our role is, like, building that relationship and having that connection with them and being a trusted and reliable person in their life" (Service 2). Such characterisations distinguished between "safe" and "unsafe" relationships and aligned women's safe housing with their connections to service providers.

Unsafe Dwellings

Across the focus groups there was no discussion of what makes a house safe. Practitioners were primarily concerned that available accommodation was damaged, degraded, and

poor quality. Unsafe dwellings included inappropriate housing—for example, houses with stairs became unsafe when women with small children could not purchase child-gates. Such deficiencies placed at risk the physical wellbeing of women and their families.

Dwellings could be emotionally and psychologically unsafe. Practitioners were concerned that physical deficits had the potential to exacerbate past traumas, eroding women's mental health and emotional safety. Practitioners from Service 3 reflected on the experiences of a client who had left a long-term domestically violent relationship and whose window had been smashed by someone unknown. Practitioner 1 said, "She became so distressed and upset and scared about the fact that she was living in this unsecure house, it was cold and led to a lot of different issues." The housing provider did not respond quickly to a request that the window be fixed, so that Practitioner 2 went onto explain "in the meantime, her emotional wellbeing, potentially mental health, unravelling because she was feeling so scared—she missed appointments that you had encouraged her to go to, [and] school".

The lag in repairing the window was partly the result of a government department's refusal to approve tradespeople working at a residence where DFV had been reported even after the abusive partner had left. This exemplified the risk-averse administrative logics contributing to unsafe dwellings. Practitioners also defined unsafe dwellings as sites of abuse. In these accounts, unsafe dwellings were constituted by the relationships lived within them. A practitioner from Service 6 suggested this was particularly common:

> That's probably what I've come up against the most … customers who actually do have the housing but they're, for their safety whether it be in the house and the community or just in the house, they're requiring transfers as well.

These accounts suggest that a dwelling could be unsafe in different ways: physical, emotional and relational, objective, and contextual.

Unsafe Surroundings

Practitioners described how location could make housing unsafe for women. This was evident when the immediate needs of shelter were more pressing than placing women in a neighbourhood that offered safe social connections: "There is no thought around … the generalised safety of where we are placing young people and the thinking of who is around" (Service 3). In each focus group, participants shared examples of unsafe surroundings compromising housing: bullying, threats of violence, drug use, a culture of partying leading to eviction, violence in the community, and DFV close-by. Thus, a physically safe dwelling could become unsafe because of its location:

> I can think of one where they were living in a walk-up flat and the lock on their door was just like a little latch so it would be very easy to break into that—turn on the door handle and their neighbour was threatening to assault them and sexually assault them. (Service 3)

The participants explained that the housing provider (not participating in the study) did not move the woman because negotiating with difficult neighbours was understood to be a life-skill—a response which, like the response to the broken window above, downplayed risk and trauma.

Participants noted that surroundings could become unsafe because of the impacts of trauma. In a discussion about neighbours' DFV, a practitioner from Service 3 reflected,

"young people, they trigger so easily, so the safety is not just about when we place them in a house. It's also about where the location is and who is surrounding the young person". The practitioner went on to describe organisational responses similar to other responses to unsafe dwellings and surrounds:

> And so often you will see in the system, too, that young people are placed in certain locations and then it's like, "Well they've got a house and they've got to learn how to be independent", but what we sometimes forget is that this nervous system is still triggering … any noise or loud [sound] or what have you.

This practitioner suggested that women's trauma can change the meaning of surroundings from unpleasant to live in to psychologically unsafe.

Loneliness also was discussed as an element of unsafe surroundings. When women were housed away from their social networks (typically defined as unsafe), their social isolation transformed an area.

> I think it's again that loneliness, like they're trying to figure out who they are and where their place is, kind of, in the community, and just that need to have people around them, whether it's friendships or a partner, or someone, but that sense of belonging, I feel like that's their real vulnerability. (Service 1)

> In lots of ways we have managed to create some safety and stability and a calmness around where she lives, but she is also really lonely. So, there is that kind of seeking of connection and not knowing how to keep herself safe. (Service 4)

These discussions continued on to link loneliness to women seeking relationships that were unsafe, which in turn could place women's tenancy at risk.

Discussion

This article aimed to build knowledge through identifying how practitioners define safe housing for young women who have experienced family and domestic violence. Its dedicated focus on practitioner perspectives fills an empirical gap in the literature that has focused on DFV survivors' understandings of safety and safe housing. The existing focus is vital. However, constraints to implementing survivor-defined safety means the literature provides a partial account of the meanings of safe housing in the work of supporting women (Cattaneo et al., 2021); practitioners' understandings will also shape this work.

Reflecting the existing literature on the primary importance of safety (Gezinski & Gonzalez-Pons, 2021; Sullivan et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2015), practitioners were clear that safety—in this study, safe housing—was fundamentally important. Practitioners understood it as a woman's opportunity to step out of past traumas and violence and to imagine and build a future. This understanding echoed Bowstead's (2019, p. 52) description of safe accommodation as "transformative space[s] of meaningful interaction towards achieving safety and autonomy in the wider world". However, practitioner discussions emphasised the absence of safety across three dimensions: unsafe dwellings, unsafe relationships, and unsafe surroundings. Each was defined with reference to young women's past experiences of violence and their social and emotional needs. Dwellings, relationships, and surroundings were mutually inflected. Relationships could build or corrode the safety of a dwelling and the surroundings; surroundings could further

embed unsafe relationships and impact young women's access to a safe dwelling. Offering safe housing was far more complex than attaining shelter.

In practitioners' definitions, "safe" and "unsafe" were not objective, static, and dichotomous states. This reflected Bowstead's (2019) argument that safe and unsafe reflect interactions between people and diverse elements of the contexts they are negotiating. Safe and unsafe housing were not locations, but rather, processes that incorporated elements of safety and lack of safety across relationships, dwellings, and the surrounding community. These were mutually inflected, with unsafe relationships seen as having particular potential to corrode the safety of accommodation and the environment in which it was located; conversely, environments would further embed unsafe relationships. This significance of relationships suggests that they implicitly understand "spaces … [are] not just containers, but … [are] relational places" (Bowstead, 2019, p. 55).

Practitioners' discussions threw into relief the tension between "safety from" abuse or homelessness and "*safety to*" pursue autonomy (Lewis et al., 2015). They emphasised *safety from* abusive or exploitative relationships, social isolation, and mental and physical health threat and recognised safe housing offering women *safety to* create a different type of life. However, other safety to possibilities were unrecognised or not encouraged as service practices and practitioners' expectations could promote safety and simultaneously be restrictive and controlling (Bowstead, 2019). Practitioners' comments on surveillance, removing partners and discouraging women from maintaining some friendships reflects this tension: creating safe housing may be understood to necessitate restricting women's autonomy and may be experienced by women as new forms of control by workers and services (Goodman et al., 2022). Practitioners' accounts of women's responses suggest there may be similarities with women living in shelters regarding disappointment, frustration, and loneliness (Glenn & Goodman, 2015; Wood, Cook Heffron, et al., 2020).

There is some alignment between the practitioners' definitions of safe housing and those of women reported in previous research. The importance of understanding personal safety and the implications of a lack of safety (Benbow et al., 2019; Fraga Rizo et al., 2022; Zufferey et al., 2016), as well as accommodation and community safety (Fraga Rizo et al., 2022; Kirkman et al., 2015; Sullivan et al., 2019; Zufferey et al., 2016) were themes across practitioners' discussions. Emotional safety (Fraga Rizo et al., 2022; Hetling et al., 2018; Woodhall-Melnik et al., 2017) was echoed in participants' comments on the importance of housing. Practitioners' reflections also reflect survivors' understandings of the importance, multidimensionality, and contingency of safety; its nonphysical dimensions; the relevance of relationships beyond those of an intimate partner; and challenging equating an absence of physical violence with an end to being unsafe (Bowstead, 2019; Glenn & Goodman, 2015; Goodman et al., 2022; Wood, Cook Heffron, et al., 2020). However, practitioners and women may diverge in how they interpret these dimensions in practice and formulate appropriate responses (Keeling & Van Wormer, 2012). Practitioners' understandings have greater power and institutional legitimacy and will likely be the dominant referent for service definitions of safe housing and responses to unsafe housing, which may reinforce women's sense of disempowerment (Afrouz et al., 2021). They may run counter to survivor-centred practice (Goodman et al., 2015).

Practitioners work within socioeconomic and policy structures (Cronley et al., 2020) and strictly define eligibility, services, and time limits (Cattaneo et al., 2021). Practitioners often were responding to the challenges and crises of individual clients and problem solving in a context of limited resources and structural inequality, a widespread experience (Cattaneo et al., 2021). This work likely contributes to the emphasis on managing unsafe housing rather than providing safe housing and the associated focus on *safety from* not *safety to.* Safe housing matters, but unsafe housing is the pressing challenge of practitioners' daily work.

These experiences are a reminder that Sullivan et al.'s (2019) recommendation that funding arrangements should prioritise the complex work of meeting survivors' needs as a foundation to stable housing sits in tension with many practice contexts (Cattaneo et al., 2021). Sullivan et al. (2019) also have emphasised the need to continually address trauma when working with DFV survivors. The importance of a trauma-informed approach is not always evident in practitioners' accounts of their own and others' practice. This is particularly pertinent in practitioners' assumptions about women's seeming acceptance of DFV and in service provider failings to acknowledge how trauma will inform women's lived experience of safety and its limits or absence.

Limitations

This study was not designed to be generalisable. It drew upon a small sample, in relation to both the services included and the number of focus group participants. The qualitative design prevents us from identifying correlations between definitions of un/safety, types of service, and roles within a service. Additionally, this article acknowledges both the deep experience of practitioners who participated in this study and the potential that their accounts may sometimes diverge from women's own definitions of safe housing.

Conclusion

This research sought practitioners' definitions to further develop a conceptualisation of safe and unsafe housing. Centring practitioners' perspectives reflected their power to shape definitions of and responses to safe and unsafe housing. However, in the focus groups, practitioners' discussions emphasised unsafe housing evident in relationships, dwellings, and the surroundings. This may lead practitioners to minimise housing's capacity to provide a "recuperative space" that is needed for women to achieve wider control, autonomy, freedom, and safety, as they work to provide *safety from*, not *safety to*.

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