



# Rural Barriers

Survivors of domestic violence often face significant difficulties in coping with abusive relationships. Women in rural communities encounter certain unique barriers and attitudinal obstacles that compound the barriers faced by survivors of domestic violence. As a result, many survivors may hesitate to seek safety services.

*Research identifies that the following broad themes are often present in rural communities.*

## Economic Environment

- ▶ Long periods of unemployment due to seasonal work.
- ▶ Survivors' access to wages and assets may be limited.
- ▶ There is often a lack of affordable health insurance.
- ▶ There is decreased access to childcare, employment opportunities, and/or advanced education.
- ▶ There are increased rates of poverty due to limited employment opportunities.

## Myths, Attitudes and Belief Systems

- ▶ Social relationships may result in a lack of anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality.
- ▶ Police scanners are commonly used by community residents and provide immediate information on the happenings of neighbors.
- ▶ Smaller communities mean that service providers often personally know the survivor and/or abuser.
- ▶ Cultural values often support traditional gender roles that contribute to male perpetration of domestic violence.
- ▶ Religious beliefs may support male dominance in the family.
- ▶ The belief that domestic violence is a family matter and should remain private.
- ▶ There are often firearms in rural community households.
- ▶ There may be an increased presence of tools that could be used as weapons such as axes, pitchforks, and hay hooks.
- ▶ Survivors may be intimidated by having to travel to the closest urban area for services.
- ▶ Community members may have little tolerance for same sex relationships which creates barriers for survivors who are being abused by their same sex partner.
- ▶ "Good ol' boys" networks exist that serve to reinforce a culture of patriarchy and exclude women and traditionally marginalized populations from community leadership roles.
- ▶ Survivors may be pressured to keep quiet about the abuse so as not to bring "shame" upon families that have multiple generations and long histories of residing in the community.

## Services and Resources

- ▶ Survivors may have limited access to reliable and/or public transportation.
- ▶ Social service agencies may be located in another county or in an urban city outside of the rural community.

- ▶ There is often a lack of healthcare and mental health providers.
- ▶ There are minimal public housing options.
- ▶ There may be a lack of accessible social services for people who are non-English speaking, in same sex relationships, or people living with a disability.
- ▶ Services may not be culturally inclusive of all community members.
- ▶ Court Orders/Injunctions for Protection may be less effective due to slower response times from emergency responders.
- ▶ Swift transport to trauma centers may not be possible due to distance to such centers and uncertain road conditions.

### *Social and Geographic Isolation*

- ▶ There may be large distances between neighbors which makes it more difficult for survivors to get help from them.
- ▶ Unpaved and/or dark roads are common.
- ▶ Cell phone and/or internet reception may be unavailable.
- ▶ Slow response time of emergency responders due to long distances necessary to travel, uncertain road conditions, and fewer staff members covering the rural area.
- ▶ Natural barriers such as mud, cold, sink holes, and bad weather make travel challenging and dangerous.
- ▶ Small communities make hiding from an abuser a challenge.

### Resources:

**Rural Domestic Violence: An Interdisciplinary Model for Rural Practice**, Britt E. Rhodes & Luther College, Contemporary Rural Social Work, Vol. 4, 2012, available at <http://journal.und.edu/crsw/article/view/444>

**Responding to Wife Abuse in Farm and Rural Communities: Searching for Solutions that Work**, Jennie Hornosty & Deborah Doherty, 2002, SIPP Public Policy Paper No. 10, available at <http://www.uregina.ca/sipp/documents/pdf/Regina%20revised%202002.pdf>

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