

“The politics of place:
Violence against women in rural eastern Ontario”

by

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Abstract

This study examined the intersections of gender-based violence, class and geography in a region of rural eastern Ontario using qualitative methodology and interviews with six women. The study was informed by feminist theory and incorporated aspects of participatory action research. It documented the resiliency of women in surviving abuse and finding safety, while facing the barriers that are often present when living in rural areas. Socio-cultural factors that were shown in the literature to increase women's vulnerability to violence were borne out by government statistics in the study areas, and signal the need for further funding, services and policy changes to address significant socioeconomic inequities that disproportionately affect women in these regions. The findings captured the importance of the counselling relationship to women in crisis, and chronicled ways that rural women's counsellors are indispensable for women's survival within a system that does not adequately protect their human rights.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Violence against women is a global concern, affecting women of every country, every class and group (Amnesty International, 2010). As one of the most pervasive and socially accepted violations of human rights, violence against women “both reflects and reinforces inequities between men and women and compromises the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims” (United Nations Population Fund, 2005). Gender-based violence is widespread in Canada and globally, “at least 1 woman in every 3 has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime. Most often the abuser is a member of her own family” (California Coalition Against Sexual Assault, 2008). While the national spousal homicide rate has been in a state of general decline since the mid-1970’s, “Homicides involving relationships with intimate partners doubled from 11 in 2003 to 22 in 2004. These included homicides committed by current or former boyfriends, girlfriends and extra-marital lovers” (Statistics Canada, 2005). Beattie (2009) noted, “In addition to the 62 spousal homicides, there were 27 homicides committed by a current or former boyfriend/ girlfriend or intimate partner in 2008, 8 more than the previous year.” (p. 13). In 2007, “almost 4 times as many women were killed by a current or former spouse as men” (Statistics Canada, 2009, p. 6).

Women living in rural areas are “disproportionately burdened with poverty and domestic violence in Canada” (Canadian Women's Health Network, 2004). Martz & Bryson Sarauer (1999) indicated that the “urban bias of specialized services for family violence, combined with the centralization of more generalized social service agencies,”

has resulted in serious accessibility problems for rural women when they want to obtain help (ii). The literature suggests that rural women may be at higher risk for violence from intimate partners, family members and acquaintances than urban women—yet their voices are rarely found in research, policy and practice approaches related to violence against women (Canadian Women's Health Network, 2004; Gallup-Black, 2004; Kong, 1994; Riddell, Ford-Gilboe, & Leipert, 2009; Sutherns, McPhedran, & Haworth-Brockman, 2004).

The intersections of oppression and geography on women's experiences of male violence were investigated in this research project—specifically, the experiences of women in dealing with abuse by a male partner in a region of rural eastern Ontario. Informed by feminist, participatory action research, involving face-to-face interviews with six women, this project sought to 1) elicit rural women's agency, experiential knowledge and acts of resistance in response to woman abuse, 2) explore what supports and services rural women find effective and helpful when they are dealing with woman abuse, and 3) identify gaps in services and practices that are in need of change in order to provide effective services for rural women who are experiencing woman abuse.

1.2 Socio-Cultural Context

Violence against women affects women from every class and cultural group, but some women are disproportionately affected. While quantitative statistics are only one source of information, and are not ideal ways to understand social issues, they do identify some factors that may significantly impact the likelihood that woman abuse could occur. Being relatively young, being in a common-law relationship and socio-economic disadvantage have been linked with woman abuse (Johnson, 2006; Rodgers,

1994). Spousal homicide was found to be highest amongst young women, aged 15-24 (Brzozowski & Brazeau, 2008; Statistics Canada, 2009). Individuals in common-law relationships were five times more likely to be victims of intimate partner homicide than those who were married (Statistics Canada, 2005). The reasons underlying the higher incidence of violence in common-law relationships are not well understood; however a study by Brownridge (2004) suggested that the risk will decrease as common-law relationships become as prevalent as married relationships. Similarly, Johnson, Ollus, & Nevala (2008) observed that as common-law unions become increasingly socially acceptable and widespread, particularly in North America and Northern Europe, common-law status “may eventually lose its association with partner violence” (p. 90). They found that the risk of violence with respect to common-law status varied across cultures and may be reflective of cultural values related to co-habitation. Johnson (1998) indicated that men in common-law relationships tend to be younger and may have a less stable income source, while “Married men have a greater stake in conformity and more to lose in terms of reputation and therefore may be more likely to be deterred from abusing their partners by the threat of social disapproval and legal action” (p. 46). The link with woman abuse and socio-economic disadvantage is believed to result from the intersection of class oppression, under capitalism, and sexism, and will be explored in more detail in another section (Hunnicutt, 2009; Johnson, 1996, 2006).

Interlocking oppressions create additional barriers for women who experience classism, racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, and ageism. Aboriginal women experience intimate partner violence at three times the rate of non-Aboriginal women (Johnson, 2006) and “immigrant and refugee women, mail-order brides and domestic

live-in caregivers are especially vulnerable to abusive relationships” (Morris & Sinnott, 2003, p. 5). Immigrant women face discrimination in housing and employment, may be dependent upon their spouse or employer for immigration status and income, and may not have access to culturally relevant services when dealing with abuse (Morris & Sinnott, 2003; Marshall & Vaillancourt, 1993). Racialized women who challenge patriarchy in their communities risk being accused of betrayal and losing their connection with their cultural communities (Razack, 1994). When “the terrain is sexual violence, racism and sexism intersect in particularly nasty ways to produce profound marginalization” (Ibid, p. 897).

Rural areas were found to have a higher proportion of violent crimes committed by family members, and the type of firearm used to commit homicide in rural areas was most commonly a rifle or shotgun (Francisco & Chenier, 2007). While the use of weapons to commit violent crime was found to be more common in urban areas, “the proportion of homicides committed with a firearm was actually slightly higher in rural areas” (Ibid, p.1). In a study involving 100 women participants, Tettero (2008) found that rural women in the Grey/Bruce region of Ontario reported higher rates of having weapons used against them, or being threatened with weapons, than urban women.

Statistics Canada data from the 1993 General Social Survey revealed that rural and urban women were at greater risk for victimization by relatives and acquaintances, than by strangers, and also indicated that rural youth experienced higher levels of personal victimization than urban youth—the rate of victimization was 39% higher for rural students than for students in urban locales (Kong, 1994). In a study involving 526 women in a rural health region of Alberta, Thurston, Patten, & Lagendyk (2006) found

that the young women in their study were at a much higher risk for physical and sexual assault perpetrated by individuals who were known to them, rather than by strangers. In the study, “81% of women who had experienced sexual assault reported the assailant was not a stranger,” concluding that rural women are at much higher risk for assault from those who are known to them (Ibid, p. 265). Gallup-Black (2004) noted that the geography and sparse population in rural areas “facilitates the kind of isolation that supports rural family violence” (p. x).

Obtaining comprehensive statistics on woman abuse in rural areas is complicated by the fact that urban crimes are more likely to be brought to the attention of the police, in addition to problems defining what constitutes rural and urban areas (Kong, 1994). Dragiewicz & DeKeseredy (2008) indicated that “researchers have preferred studies based on a national level, rather than local victimization surveys or other types of small-scale research” (p. 38). There is a lack of quantitative and qualitative research that focuses on women and rural communities. In fact, the number one research priority regarding rural women in general is for research to be done on “anything about rural women in Canada” (Sutherns et al., 2004, p. 6). Women are “largely invisible to researchers and policy makers, and most health research tends to ignore women, or rural realities, or both” (Ibid, p. 6). Research that prioritizes the voices of women who have experienced violence is particularly called for (Jiwani, 1998; Sutherns et al., 2004). This project will use a feminist approach to explore how woman abuse is experienced in a rural context. In keeping with recommendations from the literature, research on these issues will also be informed by aspects of participatory action research.

Chapter 2

Violence and Rural Women in Canada

Most research on woman abuse is devoid of geographical context, or concentrates only on urban communities with little attention to the experiences and needs of rural women (Lanier & Maume, 2009; Sutherns et al., 2004; Websdale, 1995, 1998). Women who live in remote or fly-in communities have received even less notice in the literature. There are few texts that include research about woman abuse in the context of Canadian rural communities, but there are several key reports from various regions across the country that have begun the work of documenting the experience of rural woman abuse in Canada.

Neil Websdale (1995, 1998, 2000; Websdale & Johnson, 1998) has written extensively about his research on woman abuse in rural communities in Kentucky and is frequently cited by most researchers who write on this topic. Recent work by Walter DeKeseredy and Martin Schwartz (2009) focused on the results of their study on separation/divorce sexual assault in rural Ohio. And finally, Sarah Wendt (2009) recently published the results of her research on woman abuse in rural south Australia, indicating that while “local culture in rural places differ between people and places...there are common constructions of rural culture that may provide common threads in explaining and dealing with experiences of domestic violence” (p. 183).

I will begin by reviewing findings from literature that is specific to rural woman abuse in Canada, and then discuss some of the themes that arise—the invisibility of rural women in research, the presence of firearms in rural homes, and socioeconomic and employment issues.

Changing the Landscape: Ending Violence—Achieving Equality constitutes the final report of the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women in 1993—this extensive text includes a section on rural women which is only two pages long, but the information is insightful and remains relevant. Marshall & Vaillancourt (1993) emphasized that rural women are not homogeneous and that aspects of rural culture, combined with sexism, silence women who are being abused, while protecting their abusers. They noted that rates of violence against women are affected when the economy is in crisis, especially when resource-based, industrial and farming sectors are impacted (*Ibid*). And, as noted by many others, geographical isolation makes it more difficult for women to attain safety and independence when they are dealing with abuse.

Fern Martin, who helped establish Lanark County Interval House in the late 1970's, wrote, *A Narrow Doorway*, in 1996. This book is a powerful and comprehensive account of rural women's stories of escape from abuse. The stories offer in-depth, nuanced, qualitative accounts of rural women's experiences, illuminating many of the complex issues and themes which emerge from the literature on rural women and violence. These stories are particularly relevant to this research, as Lanark County is adjacent to one of the areas being studied.

While limited, there are several studies that have researched woman abuse in rural Canada. This research took place in British Columbia, East-Central Saskatchewan, Ontario, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Additionally, Dragiewicz & DeKeseredy (2008) studied the experiences of abused women involved with the Ontario family court system, in several regions of Ontario, including rural areas near Ottawa, Kingston and Lanark County. Riddell et al (2009), from the University of Western

Ontario, examined the strategies that rural women use to deal with woman abuse. Reports on violence against rural women by Tettero (2008) and Kasdorff & Erb (2010) are discussed throughout the paper. Tettero's report focused on the Grey/Bruce region of Ontario, while Kasdorff & Erb examined the impact of rurality on women in the eastern Ontario region served by the Victim/Witness Assistance Program, which includes the study areas.

Jiwani (1998) conducted a study in two rural communities in British Columbia, which involved 61 participants, 20 of whom were women survivors. The study found that rural women experience isolation on two levels—through their geographic isolation from supports and services, and also through the isolation that results from being dominated and controlled by an abusive partner. Indeed, in some cases, it was found that men intentionally moved women to remote locations in order to further isolate them from family and friends. A lack of affordable and reliable transportation increased women's isolation and they faced limited options if they wanted to leave their relationship. Women who did leave faced persistent harassment from abusers.

Rurality was found to contribute to woman abuse in the following ways: isolation, lack of confidentiality and victim blaming by the community (adding yet another layer of isolation), the availability of guns, and the lack of women's shelters in their own communities, resulting in the need to leave their community to attain safety (Jiwani, 1998). Women felt pressured to stay in abusive relationships and not involve outsiders or authorities. The lack of adequate services, trained staff, and effective police responses, in addition to the predominance of traditional, patriarchal values and negative

experiences with the court system were identified as some of the barriers to dealing with abusive relationships in these rural communities (*Ibid*).

Martz & Bryson Sarauer's (1999) study in East-Central Saskatchewan involved interviews with 19 women survivors, and three focus groups (two with survivors and one with service providers). This study found that many women stayed in abusive relationships because they had come to view the abuse as normal, as their fault and because of fear—fear of reprisal from their partners and fear of not being believed. They found a high incidence of intergenerational abuse (90%) and the need for interventions to help child witnesses in order to break the cycle of abuse. Many women were not aware of services that could help them until they left their relationship, only to find that the services could not sufficiently meet their needs.

Martz & Bryson Sarauer (1999) found that urban bias and centralization of services resulted in serious issues in terms of accessibility for rural women and children—"as a result people must either find the resources to travel for these services or forego them" (p. ii). It was recommended that people in rural communities develop rural solutions to deliver services, building on the spirit of cooperation that is often ascribed to rural areas. Recommendations focused on interventions for children, support groups for survivors, counselling for men, specialized training for counsellors in family violence, the establishment of a women's shelter and the development of organizations to serve rural families.

Biesenthal et al's (2000) study of several regions in Ontario sought to "distinguish woman abuse in rural areas from woman abuse generally," recommending that responses to woman abuse in rural communities have a "rural-specific lens" (p. 50).

The areas under study were Vermillion Bay (north-western Ontario); Cochrane (northern Ontario); Espanola (northern Ontario); Stormont, Dundas and Glengary (an area of eastern Ontario known as the Ottawa Valley); Grey-Bruce County (central Ontario) and Oxford County (south-western Ontario). Of these regions, the Ottawa Valley is the closest to the study areas.

The results of the study were that geography/physical isolation, rural ethics and character, community complacency, limited access to services and information, lack of anonymity and safety issues differentiate rural women's experiences from those of urban women. Biesenthal et al (2000) recommended that communities improve their responses to woman abuse and address the problem of stigmatization, while working to improve the justice response. Regarding access to children, it was recommended that the behaviour of the abuser be taken into consideration when making any rulings about custody or visitation. Additional suggestions were that communities provide support for abusive men, improve access to legal advice for women, enhance and improve social services, provide culturally sensitive programs, establish shelters or safe homes in communities, and provide training for medical and mental health services professionals. The report also contains a page of suggestions for women who are currently living with abuse, based on recommendations from their research participants.

Doherty & Hornosty (2008) addressed a gap in research by examining "family violence, firearms, and pet abuse within the rural context where firearms are positively valued" (p. 1). This large-scale study represented the first extensive look at how abused rural women are affected by the presence of firearms in their homes. It aimed to investigate the ways in which abusers use firearms as "instruments of control,

intimidation and abuse” in rural New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island (*Ibid*, p. 14).

Quantitative survey data was collected from 391 women, while qualitative data was obtained from interviews with 11 women survivors and three service providers. An additional 58 people participated in the study through focus groups.

This study found that due to the presence of firearms in rural homes being perceived as normal, people tended to minimize firearm misuse—“including desensitization to firearms abuse in instances where women, children and pets/farm animals are the victims” (*Ibid*, p. 17). Among the participants (women who had recently experienced woman abuse), 70% (or 273 women) had pets/farm animals in their care, and 64% thought that firearms had been used to harm an animal. Doherty & Hornosty (2008) found that women were stigmatized for reporting abuse, and that “social and geographic isolation, poverty, a paucity of social services, inadequate transportation and privacy” were themes that emerged from interviews (*Ibid*, p. 16). Additionally, women mentioned that many guns were unregistered, and that a culture of hunting “fosters a cavalier attitude” which leads to improper storage of firearms and an increased risk for lethal violence (*Ibid*, p. 16). Women reported feeling silenced by the mere presence of guns in their homes, and they (along with service providers and community members) were at times reluctant to make reports to the police due to fear of retaliation. Long police response times, distrust of the police and inaction on the part of the justice system to intervene in cases of firearms misuse were reported by the women. Problems were compounded when abusers also misused alcohol and drugs, threatened suicide and harmed animals. Doherty & Hornosty (2008) found that it was common for women to

postpone leaving violent situations at home because there was no safe place for their animals to go.

Dragiewicz & DeKeseredy's (2008) study of eight regions in Ontario highlighted the need for professionals to understand the degree of risk women experience when they separate or divorce from a partner, and to find ways to decrease this risk within their communities. One of the eight rural regions consisted of Ottawa, Kingston and Lanark County, which is adjacent to one of the study areas. This study obtained quantitative data from 132 women survivors and 98 community advocates, and there were 12 participants from the Ottawa, Kingston and Lanark County region.

Several issues for rural women were identified by the advocates for women who participated in the survey regarding problems experienced with the family court system. Dragiewicz & DeKeseredy (2008) reported that the top issues (by frequency) were difficulties around the distance to access the courts and social services, transportation, isolation, a lack of community supports and resources, economic problems, and fear of a partner's access to firearms.

In examining responses from women survivors, Dragiewicz & DeKeseredy (2008) found that "despite the risk and reality of serious, ongoing violence and abuse following separation, less than half of the survivors in this sample had been able to truly end exposure to their abuser" (p. 28). Additionally, the majority of the women (69.1%) reported "fear about their partner using controlling or abusive behaviour with the children when mothers are not there" (Ibid, p. 29). Many women indicated that their family law case had gone on for more than a year at the time of their participation in the study, with 19% reporting that it had lasted between two to four years, and 10.7%

reporting a time period of more than four years (*Ibid*, p. 29). Over 75% of women survivors reported experiencing problems with custody (85.2%), access (76.9%) and child support (82.1%). And over half of the women also reported encountering problems with restraining orders, the division of property and spousal support (*Ibid*, p. 24). The top three resources that women survivors identified as being most useful to them were paralegals (100%), community service agencies (96.8%) and shelter advocates (94.5%) (*Ibid*, p. 25).

Riddell et al (2009) explored the strategies that rural women use to deal with woman abuse, discovering that women's responses depend on the context and that "key features of rural life, such as physical and social isolation, patriarchal attitudes, economic stress, and public visibility, factor heavily in men's domination of women and women's ability to respond to IPV" (p. 151). The authors noted that most researchers focus on issues surrounding the woman's decision to stay or to leave the abusive relationship, but that this "approach fails to recognize that IPV occurs within wider social contexts that influence the strategies that women use to deal with violence (Cavanagh, 2003)" (*Ibid*, p. 136). Some of the strategies that the researchers found were commonly used by rural women to deal with violence were placating the abuser in order to keep the peace, making decisions about whether it was safer to resist or not, and they also tended to strategize by making extensive safety plans. Women were distrustful and skeptical of the legal system, hesitant to access help from professionals, due to a lack of knowledge about available services and because of previous negative experiences with service providers and medical professionals. The researchers noted that rural women were very insightful regarding the impact of rural culture on their lives, and specifically mentioned

patriarchal attitudes and practices that men used in their attempts to dominate and control them (Ibid, 2009).

The literature consistently identified the following factors as being important for understanding woman abuse within the rural context—geographic and social isolation; distance and transportation issues; the scarcity of effective and knowledgeable social services in rural communities to help women; the need for services to help children cope with witnessing abuse and to help men cease their abuse; social stigmatization; financial hardship; the inadequacy of the legal response to woman abuse; the presence and normalization of guns in rural homes; and the prevalence of traditional, patriarchal values (Websdale, 1998). When faced with a lack of community services, rural women who had more social resources relied on friends, family, and when possible, women-centered services (Jiwani, 1998; Martz & Bryson Sarauer, 1999; Riddell et al., 2009). Jiwani (1998) indicated that when women had access to support networks and effective services, they were able to make changes in their lives, but it was necessary for the community to provide a safe place for them to go and to offer social services that women could count on.

Jiwani (1998) noted that there is a need to bring women's voices back to research about woman abuse, to investigate the socio-cultural values that impact rural women and the effects of isolation. These actions are critical for identifying the differences between the rural and urban experiences of woman abuse, and to inform interventions and policies that affect rural women (Jiwani, 1998). Rural women who are experiencing violence in their relationships have different needs than urban women, and research

should strive to identify the services and approaches which are most effective and helpful to them.

2.1 Isolation

Websdale (1998) reported that woman abuse in rural communities has been neglected by researchers because the communities themselves tend to be reluctant to trust outsiders, fewer people have telephones to participate in surveys, there is a myth that the rural context is safer than urban areas, and the fact that quantitative research does not easily capture the distinctive features of rural life. Johnson's 2006 report, "Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends 2006," provided invaluable data and analysis about woman abuse in Canada, however, the author acknowledged that due to the methodology of the survey, rural and marginalized women may be under represented. Johnson (2006) noted that the methodology used for the survey on victimization excluded those people who did not have telephones and those who only had cell phones. She indicated that this exclusion "may under represent certain groups in the population, such as lower income groups, northern people living in traditional communities, rural people, or women living in shelters or on the street as a direct result of violent victimization" (p. 77).

Despite new technologies, many rural areas have experienced little change in terms of improvements to their communication networks. In their report for the Victim/Witness Assistance Program, covering the eastern region of Ontario (including the counties of Lennox & Addington, Frontenac and Hastings), Kasdorff & Erb (2010) stated,

Many rural residents do not have a telephone. If the home is in an isolated area, the cost of installing a phone is prohibitive because the customer must pay for installation of telephone poles in addition to the other usual expenses” (p. 3).

They noted that due to the high cost of land lines, cell phones are often the only affordable option for rural families, and cell networks are “patchy and unreliable” (*Ibid*, p. 3). There were other problems with reliance on cell phones, such as the limited plan options for people on low income, who may have to rely on “pay as you go” or other service plans that may prevent women from accessing support services when they need them (*Ibid*, p. 3). The authors noted that access to the Internet is usually through dial-up, which is both slow and often too expensive (as it involves having a land line), and broadband service is still not available in many rural communities.

Jiwani’s (1998) study in rural British Columbia showed that the majority of women had experienced geographical isolation as a negative factor in their lives. Isolation was experienced by the participants on several levels, such as having to travel long distances to get places, the absence of transportation, or not being able to afford transportation, no access to a telephone and being forcefully isolated by the abuser. Study participants noted how the absence of a telephone acted as an obstacle to communication about their experiences of abuse, and to reaching out for help when they were in crisis.

Given that cell phone reception in rural eastern Ontario is unreliable, many women are left with few options, and if they do manage to get to a telephone, police response times can be lengthy (Kasdorff & Erb, 2010). Longer response times for emergency services and inconsistent cell phone reception in rural areas mean that women who are severely injured in rural communities are less likely to survive. Lengthy

emergency response times may contribute to elevated rates of intimate partner homicides in rural areas (Gallup-Black, 2005; Websdale, 2000).

Multiple layers of isolation and the resulting invisibility of women who are experiencing abuse, lead to difficulties in determining the extent of woman abuse in these regions and consequently, addressing oppression in concrete ways. Additionally, the literature pointed to a greater reluctance in rural communities to involve the police when women have been abused by their partners, which impacts police-reported statistics (Riddell et al., 2009; Websdale, 1998). The lack of access to a telephone, due to poverty, abuse, infrastructure or a remote location, is a significant obstacle to obtaining emergency services, emotional and practical support—and being counted (and therefore visible to policy makers and funders) in large-scale quantitative studies of woman abuse.

2.2 Firearms in Rural Areas and Woman Abuse

Many rural homes contain guns, due to the hunting and farming activities that take place in rural areas. Gonzales & Mandelman (2009) noted that

while most gun owners in Canada do not abuse their partners, when a gun is present in the home, the risk of physical harm, threats and intimidation to family members increases. The great majority of victims of firearm-related domestic violence are women (p. 17).

In their review of studies related to firearm availability and homicide, Hepburn & Hemenway (2004) indicated that three quarters of gun owners owned more than one gun, that “many more men than women owned guns, and [that] ownership was highest in rural areas” (p. 419). Their conclusion stated, “Gun ownership was most strongly associated with homicide at the hand of a family member or intimate acquaintance; guns were not significantly linked to an increased risk of homicide by friends, intruders, or

strangers” (*Ibid*, p. 422). In addition to concluding that homes with firearms had a higher risk for murder, they also observed a gendered and relational nature to these deaths: “The result is consistent with the fact that compared to men, a higher percentage of women are murdered in the home and by an intimate partner (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2002)” (*Ibid*, p. 423).

Gonzales & Mandelman reported that Statistics Canada’s 2008 data on spousal homicide show that “homicide against females was between three and five times higher than the rate against males between 1977 and 2006” (2009, p. 17). The use of firearms in intimate partner violence is higher in rural communities where guns are valued for their uses in hunting and farming (*Ibid*).

The gaps in Canada’s gun control laws became a focus of change after a man murdered 14 female engineering students at l’École Polytechnique on December 6th 1989 simply because they were challenging traditional gender roles (Provost, Rathjen, & Perreault, 2009). The Montreal Massacre highlighted the need to look beyond individual crimes against women and interpretations that place the blame for male violence on the acts of one “madman,” to the inequities and structural problems that allow the assault and murder of women to continue (DeKeseredy & MacLeod, 1997). The gun registry that was developed in the wake of the Montreal Massacre has been commended by police organizations across Canada, as its implementation has resulted in a substantial decline in deaths from firearms, and fewer women being murdered with guns (Provost et al., 2009).

Near the 20th anniversary of the Montreal Massacre, the Conservative government, under Prime Minister Stephen Harper, introduced Bill C-301, which sought

to repeal the long-gun registry. On March 9th 2009, Deputy Director General, and President of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, Steven Chabot, wrote a letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper, urging him and members of the Conservative party not to support Bill C-301. Chabot wrote,

ending the registration of long guns, such as rifles and shotguns (the weapons most often used in domestic homicides and suicides), and by relaxing the current restrictions on handguns, semi-automatic assault and tactical weapons—would seriously compromise a system that is working to the betterment of personal, community and officer safety (2009, p. 2).

While Bill C-301 was “Debated and Dropped” on June 15, 2009, Bill C-391 was another Private Member’s Bill which sought to amend the Criminal Code and Firearms Act, and repeal the long-gun registry (Parliament of Canada, 2009a). By November of 2009, Bill C-391 had passed second reading and was under review by a committee (Parliament of Canada, 2009a, 2009b).

Gonzales & Mandelman (2009) noted that “between 1991 and 2006, the use of shotguns and rifles in homicides declined by 65 per cent... (Statistics Canada, 2008). Should the long gun registry be eliminated, women and children will be among the biggest losers” (p. 18). They believe this decline was a result of stricter gun control laws. New Democrat MP, Thomas Muclair, “presented a letter to the Commons from 15 women’s groups in Quebec, arguing that the firearms registry was still vital to protecting women against violence” (Delacourt, 2009). The Association of Chiefs of Police, researchers and women’s groups agreed that eliminating the long gun registry would have been a step backwards in addressing violence against women, with rural women and children significantly impacted.

After much debate across the country and a close vote in the House of Commons on September 22nd 2010, the long-gun registry survives, yet revisions to the registry are still being debated. The summer of 2010 saw the long-gun registry receive wide support from law enforcement agencies and physicians across Canada, and raised awareness of the importance and historical significance behind what many see as a vital piece of Canadian legislation.

2.3 Socioeconomic Issues and Employment

The literature revealed that the work of rural women in farming and resource-based industries has “largely been hidden from public discussion” and their needs have been assumed to be the same as men in those occupations (Martz, Brueckner, & Mills, 2006, p. vii). Women farmers only started to be counted as farmers in Canadian statistics in 1991—“Overnight, 25 percent of Canadian farmers suddenly became women. They had been there all along; they had just been invisible” (Roppel, Desmarais, & Martz, 2006, p. 29). The lack of childcare options for women in resource-based occupations, such as forestry and agri-food, creates difficulties for women in managing their family life and barriers to attaining the higher wages that come with advancement (Martz et al., 2006).

Roppel et al (2006) discussed the impact that globalization and agricultural restructuring has had on rural women’s lives throughout the world, noting that the shifting burden of responsibility has been “remarkably similar across all regions” (p. 24). In Canada and elsewhere, restructuring has resulted in cutbacks to community social services, an increase in the feminization of poverty, and the transfer of care for ill and elderly family members to the home. Women have been disproportionately impacted by

these changes, and end up doing most of this unpaid work, leaving them with less time for employment, and experiencing increased workloads in both environments (Roppel et al., 2006).

An increase in woman abuse as a result of socioeconomic stress was noted by Roppel et al (2006) as one of the social impacts of agricultural restructuring, in addition to the difficulty in finding any Canada-wide statistics that are rural specific. They point to some of the particular issues and needs of rural women experiencing violence that have already been discussed. Even if farm women who are experiencing abuse have financial resources, their income and livelihood is usually intricately tied to their relationship with their abusive partner. Losing their relationship often also means losing their livelihood as a farmer, their community, animals, assets and the labour they have invested in their property over the years (Kasdorff & Erb, 2010). As a result, women farmers in an abusive relationship are likely to experience significant financial losses when they leave their partners, and this reality may make it more difficult for them to consider leaving (Jennissen, 1992).

As noted earlier, socio-economic disadvantage is one factor that has been linked with higher rates of woman abuse. This was found to be the case both in the 1993 Violence Against Women survey and in the 2004 General Social Survey (Johnson, 1996, 2006). Johnson (1998) found that long-term male unemployment was strongly associated with woman abuse, noting the profound effect unemployment can have on men when their status and identity as breadwinners cannot be realized. Based on the 1993 survey, Rodgers found that “women with household incomes under \$15,000 indicated rates [of wife assault that were] twice the national average” (1994, p. 6). More recently, Johnson

(2006) found that women with a household income of less than \$60,000 experienced rates of spousal assault that were two times higher than women with higher incomes, noting that “It is unclear whether low income is a risk factor, a consequence of violence or a combination of both” (2006, p. 40). Johnson (2006) explained that financial stress in a relationship may make it more likely for woman abuse to occur; that violence may result in separation and a reduction in income due to separation; and that a lack of resources may prevent women from leaving. In the 1993 survey, Johnson (1996) noted that respondents commonly reported that violent incidents usually began as a result of stress from financial problems and unemployment, and indicated that the significance of socioeconomic disadvantage in relation to woman abuse may be due to a combination of low income, age, and being in a common-law relationship.

A report published by the World Health Organization examined intimate partner violence on a global level and the findings were quite similar. The report stated,

A high socioeconomic status has generally been found to offer some protection against the risk of physical violence against an intimate partner, although exceptions do exist (39). Studies from a wide range of settings show that, while physical violence against partners cuts across all socioeconomic groups, women living in poverty are disproportionately affected (12, 19, 49, 78, 79, 81, 92-96) (Heise & Garcia-Moreno, 2002, p. 99).

Heise & Garcia-Moreno (2002) also noted that it is not clear why people living in poverty are at higher risk for violence, whether it is due to socioeconomic disadvantage itself, or other issues that may be associated with poverty.

For some men, living in poverty is likely to generate stress, frustration and a sense of inadequacy for having failed to live up to their culturally expected role of providers (2002, p. 99).

Additionally, Heise & Garcia-Moreno (2002) indicated that financial stress may provide more material for disagreement between partners, and that poverty makes it more

difficult for women to leave abusive relationships. At any rate, the report indicated that “it is probable that poverty acts as a ‘marker’ for a variety of social conditions that combine to increase the risk faced by women (55)” (*Ibid*, p. 99).

Women and men from poor and working class backgrounds must navigate the difficult terrain where gender-based violence and class-based oppression intersect. They may also experience other oppressions, such as racism and ableism, further complicating the power dynamics between themselves, their partners and their respective communities. Speaking out about male violence in these circumstances can be particularly difficult, as it can lead to feeling like a traitor to one’s family, culture or community (Razack, 1994). Financial problems, poverty and other structural factors should not be understood to be causal factors for violence—rather; they are signs of inequality within colonial, capitalist and patriarchal societies. Bryant & Pini (2009) indicated that while rural gender studies has been influential in raising awareness of the invisibility of rural women, it has “largely failed to address the way in which class may also connect with gender to render some women more invisible and disadvantaged” (p. 55).

Chapter 3

Conceptual Framework

I first became involved in grassroots feminist work by becoming a volunteer at a rape crisis centre in the 1980's. In this collectively-run organization, sexual assault was not viewed as an individual problem or pathology, but as a societal problem rooted in patriarchy. Women were considered to be the experts on their own lives. Focusing on women's lived experiences, story-telling, and connecting these to the experiences of other women were viewed as ways to both politicize and empower women.

Feminism has evolved over the decades to incorporate many different perspectives; it had been criticized from within for excluding and silencing some women whose experiences didn't fit well into theories of patriarchy as the sole cause of men's violence against women, for a lack of analysis of white privilege and other power imbalances among women. I believe that rural women have been experiencing this silencing for some time, and it has only been in recent years that their unique stories of surviving violence have begun to be told. It is through the chronicling of lived experiences that we are able to connect our own experiences in a larger context, to name and challenge them. The rural context impacts the experience of woman abuse in ways that can make it much harder for women to find safety, and this becomes even more difficult when women experience multiple oppressions.

The term "violence against women" recognizes the gendered nature of abuse, and the power dynamics between men and women in relationships, families and society. As such, it is a term grounded in feminism, which recognizes the multitude of ways that patriarchy influences the lives of girls, boys, men and women. A feminist framework that

incorporates socio-cultural and structural factors into an analysis of patriarchy recognizes the impact of race, class, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, age and geography on women's lives. Chezia Carraway spoke about the importance of a broad definition of violence for women of colour when she stated, "We must name the violence, or we will not be able to address it" (Jiwani, 2006, p. 3).

While literature that focuses on rural woman abuse represents a relatively recent field of study, much more has been written about the experience of woman abuse in an urban context. The more recent literature, informed by feminist theory, recognizes that women are the experts on their own lives and, as Moe (2009) noted, this type of work fills a gap in the research that has tended to ignore the stories and the lived experiences of the women themselves. Most of the existing qualitative literature on rural woman abuse appears to reflect an approach that values women's voices and experiences. The importance of capturing people's lived experiences was explained by Smith (2007), who stated,

People know a great deal; indeed, in a sense, we are all experts in our everyday lives. Of course, we're not always conscious of all we know because most of the time it doesn't become spoken, but it is available to us in what we do (p. 411).

A small scale qualitative study allows for a more in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experiences, in their own words. This approach also more actively resists binary interpretations of the experiences of rural and urban women, recognizing the contextual factors that influence women's lives. Rural women are not homogeneous, and this wide lens informed follow-up questions in interviews and the process of data analysis. It was with this in mind that the interview questions were open-ended and designed to prioritize the voices of women survivors of violence—there was space for

them to define their own experiences. Similarly, Bonisteel & Green (2005) indicated that feminist knowledge is built on the foundation of people's lived experiences, and theory is created through "listening to women's experiences, not as patients or as clients, but as members of a social change movement" (p. 31).

I find radical feminist approaches to therapy, as theorized by writers like Burstow (1992, 2003) and Brown (1994), important for their examination of psychiatry and how the medical system may negatively impact women by pathologizing their rational responses to abuse. Radical feminist theory illustrates how women's oppression intersects with other oppressions, with a particular emphasis on male violence against women (Burstow, 1992). Chronicling women's stories from a radical therapy perspective, as described by Burstow (1992), resists the individual, psychiatric labeling that is often associated with the medical model approach to woman abuse. Instead, it honours the determination of women to survive, and recognizes the structural inequalities that lead to violence.

Rosemary Tong (1989) drew from the work of Alison Jaggar and Paula Rothenberg (1984) in her interpretation of radical feminism. Tong (1989) held that most radical feminists tend to believe that the oppression of women is the most "fundamental form of oppression," that it is widespread, and so deeply rooted that it cannot be eliminated by only removing other oppressions, such as classism (p. 71). Some radical feminists also believe that women's oppression causes the most harm in our society and provides a theoretical model for understanding other oppressions (*Ibid*). Both radical and socialist feminist theories are structural in nature. In radical feminism, the central structure under analysis is patriarchy, while class is highlighted in socialist feminism.

A socialist feminist perspective, which incorporates aspects of several other feminist theories, with an emphasis on an analysis of capitalism, has been helpful for me in terms of understanding how woman abuse might increase when the economy is in crisis. The social conditioning of men, which dictates that they acquire economic power and status within patriarchal society, adds another dimension for understanding links between socioeconomic disadvantage and woman abuse. West & Zimmerman (1987) were influential in the field of gender role theory in developing the idea of “doing gender.” They observed that “Gender is a powerful ideological device, which produces, reproduces, and legitimates the choices and limits that are predicated on sex category” (p. 147). In 1993, Messerschmidt challenged the field of criminology, but also socialist and radical feminist theory in explaining class and race differences in relation to male violence, including domestic violence (Messerschmidt, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) noted that all studies have shown that “men and boys perpetuate more of the conventional crimes—and the more serious of these crimes—than do women and girls” (p. 833). In exploring this association between gender and crime, Messerschmidt (2005) found that masculinity could be accomplished by committing different crimes, and that the choice of particular crimes distinguished “masculinities from each other in different social settings” (p. 198).

Masculinity is socially constructed through relationships, and historically, it has allocated social power among men based on race, sexual orientation and class (Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is defined as “the culturally idealized form of masculinity in a given historical and social setting. It is culturally honored, glorified and extolled situationally” at all levels in our society (Ibid, p. 198).

In many cultures, there is the expectation that men be successful in a career and earn enough money to support a family, and when these expectations are not realized, stress between men and their partners may increase. While the domination of women by men is embedded in patriarchy, the domination of men by other men is an aspect of both patriarchy and capitalist societies in terms of maintaining power. It is these two social forces that are believed to work in tandem to increase the risk of violence against women in times of economic crisis. While men from all socioeconomic groups perpetuate violence against women, Hunnicutt (2009) noted that woman abuse may be more prevalent when men are under especially oppressive labour conditions. Gender theory contends that when faced with limited resources to ‘do gender,’ some men may choose to accomplish masculinity through acts of violence (Messerschmidt, 2005; West & Zimmerman, 1987). The resources to construct masculinity are available to all men in various forms, and social class has an effect on the type of violence against women that is used in achieving masculinity (Johnson, 1996).

Examining links between socioeconomic disadvantage and woman abuse is not without risk, as misinterpretation of data can lead to further stigmatization for poor and working class people—with this in mind, I emphasize that violence against women is found amongst all classes and groups of people around the world. Class status introduces a vulnerability, not a causal factor. Ignoring the ways in which violence may disproportionately affect particular women, in order to avoid the risk of stigmatization, would mean failing to address the interlocking effects of class oppression and patriarchy on woman abuse—and the corresponding need for social change. Discussing woman abuse without a structural analysis of social issues leads to the prioritization of the voices

and needs of those who have the most power in our society, and the invisibility of those with diverse and different needs.

Chapter 4

Methodology

The research methodology is qualitative and informed by feminist theory, while incorporating aspects of participatory action research (Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Morris & Muzychka, 2002). Data collection involved individual, semi-structured interviews and an online survey containing primarily open-ended questions for antiviolence service providers. As a form of feminist praxis, the methodology sought to engage the community by being grounded in the lived experiences of the women participants, and using their knowledge to inform change. Initiating dialogue about our collective responsibility to “act on what is known,” from the context of rural women’s experiences and existing theory, was the goal of this project (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 25).

I grew up in rural eastern Ontario, and over the past 15 years have worked primarily with female survivors of abuse in the study areas, which provided the inspiration and incentive for undertaking this project. The research question arose from conversations with the Director of rural Violence Against Women (VAW) services for northern Lennox & Addington and Frontenac Counties, who spoke about deficits in transportation funding that occur on a yearly basis. This funding shortfall results from government funders using an urban model of service that does not adequately account for the long distances that counsellors must travel to meet with women who are dealing with abuse, and who require transportation to access counselling, women’s shelters, court rooms, lawyer’s offices and medical appointments in cities. The provincial coordinating body for this mobile outreach VAW program is an Advisory Council to the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

Consistent with participatory action research (PAR), I met with Directors/Executive Directors of rural community counselling VAW agencies in the study areas. I remained in contact with the Director of rural VAW services for northern Lennox & Addington and Frontenac Counties, and consulted with her throughout the research process. The Director had extensive knowledge of the context and issues that were being investigated, helped spread the word about the study and provided invaluable feedback. Riddell et all (2009) also consulted with the Directors of women's programs in their study areas, believing it to be "essential from both the philosophical and practical standpoints of doing a 'reality check' on the premises and design of the study as well as the relevance of the findings" (p. 137).

Fine et al (2004) noted that PAR seeks to not only work for a community, but with it, and "represents a stance within qualitative research methods, an epistemology that assumes knowledge is rooted in social relations and most powerful when produced collaboratively through action" (p. 95). PAR recognizes the power of knowledge that is developed from the bottom of social hierarchies and is a process of shared learning and engagement that leads to social change (Ibid). Fine et al (2004) viewed a feminist perspective as an integral part of PAR, contributing "a grounded feminist objectivity" to the process (p. 99). Lastly, PAR involves giving back to the community through "creating a legacy of inquiry, a process of change, and material resources to enable transformation" (Ibid, p. 99).

Morris & Muzychka (2002) noted that it is "important for the interviewer to have a similar background to the participants, and to be well trained to conduct interviews in a caring, non-judgmental and non-directive way" (p. 32). Additionally, they noted that

“PAR supposes researchers are from or are in touch with the community under study” (Ibid, p. 16). The literature emphasized the importance of the researcher having connections to rural life and a commitment to the issue of woman abuse, indicating that those who have worked in the area of rural woman abuse are often more effective at conducting interviews (Biesenthal et al., 2000; Jiwani, 1998). Bonisteel and Green (2005) recommended that “All forms of research conducted in the area of violence against women, quantitative and qualitative, should be led by feminists whose work is closest to the foundational work of the feminist anti-violence sector” (p. 41).

Moe (2009) observed that while findings based on a small qualitative study do not produce findings that can be generalized, this was not the point of her research. Rather, the goal was to obtain a deep and nuanced understanding of each woman’s experience. She indicated that even findings based on small sample, semi-structured interviews are valuable in that they contribute to existing research and inform future directions (2009). Using a feminist approach informed by PAR provides a framework for working with marginalized women in a manner that minimizes, but cannot eliminate, power imbalances between the researcher and participants.

Healy (2001) was critical of PAR, noting that while PAR seemed “consistent with the urgent priorities of social workers who advocate social justice with service users,” PAR may fail to acknowledge the ways in which it obscures power dynamics with discourses of equality, and shared goals for social change (p. 96). However, Fine (2007) argued that doing the difficult work of unpacking privilege is precisely what PAR is supposed to do:

In participatory research, there is an obligation to enter those debates and not write over them. In struggling through the “we” and issues of power and

privilege, there were tough, important, troubling conversations to be had about guilt, blood, pain, oppression, freedom and possibility (p. 617).

This project does not represent true participatory research, as outlined in Morris & Muzychka (2002), because the women were not in control during each stage of the research process, and they were not involved as researchers. The elements of PAR that were incorporated into the methodology relate to the origin of the research question, and the intention to share the research results with the communities involved, for the purpose of social change (Morris & Muzychka, 2002). Although this project was not able to represent a complete feminist PAR process, I hope that it was a meaningful experience for participants, who overwhelmingly expressed their desire to participate in a project that involved passing on experiential knowledge in order to help other women and the counsellors who may work with them.

4.1 Rural Areas Under Study

To my knowledge there are no published, qualitative studies about woman abuse in the northern portions of Lennox and Addington, North Frontenac and Hastings Counties. The VAW program based in Addington Highlands Township also serves North Frontenac Township, and the community demographics there are similar to those of northern Lennox and Addington.

There is no universal definition of “rural” in the literature. Franciso and Chenier (2007) defined rural as an area that does not fit into either the large urban or small urban classifications—a small urban area has at least 1,000 people and a population density of at least 400 people per square kilometre. A large urban area is a census metropolitan area (CMA) with an urban core of at least 100,000 people. Other researchers consider areas

with fewer than 10,000 people to be rural (Status of Women Office, 2009). While under both of these definitions the study areas would be considered rural areas, it is important to recognize that the concept of “rural” is quite broad, encompassing communities which are relatively close to towns and cities and those that may be some distance away. The experience of living in small communities in northern Ontario, for example, versus communities in southern or eastern Ontario, would be quite different—as would living in more remote or fly-in communities where the only way to escape abuse may be to wait for the next plane. Wendt (2009) argued that “we should stop trying to say what rural culture is and start exploring the culture of particular rural communities...[this] acknowledges cultural contexts in which abuse occurs, and the importance of listening to the experiences of abused women” (p. 177).

4.1.1 Study areas

Northern region of Lennox and Addington County: Addington Highlands Township, pop. 2512 (Statistics Canada, 2006b, 2006d)

This is a rural area north of Napanee, Ontario, which includes communities such as Kaladar (at the southernmost boundary—the junction of Highways 7 and 41), Clinton, Northbrook and Denbigh (Appendix A). Denbigh is further north than the other communities—it is almost 115 kilometers north of Napanee, and 60 kilometres north of Kaladar. For the purposes of this study, this region will be referred to as the “eastern study area,” as Centre and North Hastings are on the western border. Part of the Canadian Shield, the landscape is rugged, heavily forested and contains many lakes and rivers. Most community services are accessed in the villages of Northbrook and Cloyne.

While there is a long-term care facility in Northbrook, residents must travel a considerable distance to Napanee, Belleville or Kingston (50 kilometres minimum) to access emergency medical care, hospital services and women's shelters. If they live in Denbigh, they may travel to Renfrew or Bancroft for services, and travel times would be significantly increased during the winter months. The majority of residents do not have a family doctor and the only pharmacy is run by a local physicians' clinic to meet the needs of their own patients (McLeman & Gilbert, 2007). Most of the Addington Highlands area does not have cell phone service, which greatly increases the risk to residents in cases of highway accidents or other emergencies (*Ibid*).

A local community service agency provides a wide range of services for rural residents, including seniors, women, low income families, and people with developmental disabilities. Mental health and addiction services, and children's services are also available. Additionally, this agency offers a rural base for several satellite agencies, whose main offices are in larger centres. Some agencies send a full-time worker to the community, while others provide local services on a part-time basis. The VAW program is under the umbrella of the larger agency, providing a wide range of services for rural women who have experienced violence in the townships of Addington Highlands, North Frontenac and Stone Mills. There is currently no local sexual assault counselling program available, and citizens must travel to larger centres to receive this service.

While there is no college based in the area, college programs are occasionally offered and an adult education program is available. In a township that is 70% Crown

land, the community experiences an influx of cottagers and tourists during the summer months.

McLeman & Gilbert (2007) noted that further developments in the area are unlikely, as the government has not settled an outstanding land claim by the Algonquin First Nation, which affect any waterways flowing into the Mississippi river system. In neighboring North Frontenac Township, the Ardoch Algonquin First Nation and their allies fought to protect their rights to wild rice along the Mississippi River in 1981 and more recently from companies that want to mine uranium in the area (Ardoch Algonquin First Nation, 2007; Lovelace, n.d.).

According to Statistics Canada (2006b), the main occupations in the Addington Highlands community in 2005 were trades, transport and equipment related occupations; sales and service occupations; business, finance and administration occupations; and management occupations. The main industries were construction; other; retail trade; agriculture and other resource-based industries; healthcare and social services; and business services (the last two occupations occurred at the same frequency). Some residents may also access employment by commuting to Napanee, Belleville or Tweed. Of all the townships in Lennox and Addington County, Statistics Canada (2006a) data revealed that Addington Highlands had the highest rate of unemployment (6.8%), and the lowest participation and employment rates. The unemployment rate in North Frontenac was higher, at 8.3%.

The median income for residents of Addington Highlands in 2005 (persons 15 years and older) was \$16,138, and for North Frontenac Township, it was \$19,747. For

comparative purposes, the median income for residents of Ontario in 2005 was \$27,258 and for Canada it was \$25,615 (Statistics Canada, 2006a).

Research (interviews) in this region were conducted at a local rural VAW agency.

Northern region of Hastings County: Town of Bancroft, pop. 3838
(Statistics Canada, 2006c)

Hastings County abuts the western border of Lennox and Addington County. For the purposes of this study, I will refer to the Centre and North Hastings regions as the “western study area.” Located on the Canadian Shield, the Town of Bancroft is approximately 110 kilometres north of Belleville, Ontario, and communities in the area include L’Amable, Birds Creek and Maynooth (Appendix A). Most community services are located in the Town of Bancroft, where there is also a hospital and a college, but women must travel to a city to access women’s shelters. There is a local VAW community counselling agency in the area, and a sexual assault counselling program maintains a local office. Social services typically have their own offices with full-time staff members. The community experiences a significant influx of cottagers and tourists during the summer months. As in Addington Highlands, cell phone coverage in the area is limited, with no cell phone service between Bancroft and the area just north of Highway 7.

The community of Madoc (Centre Hastings) is approximately 70 kilometres south of Bancroft, at the junction of Highways 7 and 62. A VAW program maintains an outreach office in the community, as does a sexual assault counselling program. Both agencies serve the surrounding rural communities.

According to Statistics Canada (2006c), the main occupations in the Town of Bancroft in 2005 were sales and service occupations; business, finance and administration occupations; trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations (these last two occupations occurred at almost the same frequency); and health occupations. Some residents may also access employment by commuting to Belleville or Peterborough.

The median income for residents of the Town of Bancroft in 2005 (persons 15 years and older) was \$20,612, and while this was higher than the median income in Addington Highlands, it is still below the median income for Ontario (\$27, 258) and Canada (\$25, 615) (2006a).

The plan was that research (interviews) in this area would be conducted at a local VAW agency, however there were no participants from this region.

4.1.2 Community demographics

In 2005, the rates of high school education attainment for men in both study areas were between five and six percentage points below the provincial average. Additionally, compared to the provincial figure, a significantly higher proportion of residents in the study areas did not have a postsecondary certificate, diploma or degree (more women than men). Residents in the study areas were more likely to be in a common-law relationship than residents in Ontario as a whole (Statistics Canada, 2006a, 2006b).

The unemployment rate for men in the eastern study area was 1.9 - 4 percentage points above the Ontario rate, however, the Town of Bancroft had an unemployment rate that was significantly lower than the provincial figure (Statistics Canada, 2006b, 2006c,

2006d). In the eastern study area, the unemployment rate for men was 3 - 4 percentage points higher than the provincial rate for women.

The study regions are part of the Central Ontario Economic EI Economic Region where the unemployment rate was 9.9% between April 11 and May 8, 2010, and was 1.7% higher than the national rate (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2010; Statistics Canada, 2010). High unemployment rates reflect the impact of the global recession, which began to impact Canada in October of 2008, and is generally believed to be the worst economic crisis since the Depression (Campbell, 2009).

4.2 Data Collection

Data was collected from women survivors, in the form of semi-structured interviews, from the eastern study area. Interviews were based on the Interview Guide (Appendix B), and were recorded and transcribed. It was my intention to also collect data from women survivors in the western study area, but unfortunately no participants came forward from this area.

Additionally, an online Service Provider Survey (Appendix C) was made available to rural VAW service providers through Survey Monkey. The survey was promoted though email to the Directors of four different agencies, however there were no survey responses. I will explore some possible reasons for the lack of data from service providers and the lack of participants from the western study area in an upcoming section.

4.2.1 The sample

Women Survivors

Six women from the eastern study area participated in the research. Two women were between 50-60 years of age, two were between 30-40 years of age and two participants were between 20-30 years of age. Four of the women had lived in a rural area for their entire lives, and two participants had lived in a rural area for the past 1-3 years. The participants represented diversity in terms of race, ethnic background and social class.

The study sought women participants who were no longer in crisis (i.e. who no longer felt that their safety and wellbeing were at risk as a result of their relationship). The research study was publicized through email (See Appendices D and E), fliers were sent to local agencies (to facilitate agency referrals) and posters were displayed in public locations (i.e. laundromats, libraries) in order to allow for participant self-selection. This type of sampling also allowed for the option of snowball sampling, where participants refer other women for interviews.

Five community agencies that serve the study areas were contacted for referrals. Prior to the interviews, I met with the Directors of the local VAW agencies, and I was invited to attend an Interagency Meeting in one of the study areas, which I attended to promote the study.

The promotional poster for recruitment provided three ways for women to contact me to arrange an interview—a Carleton telephone number and extension where they could leave a confidential message; an email address created for the research

project; and (in the western study area) the option to leave their contact information in a locked drop box at the local VAW community counselling agency (Appendix F).

Service Providers

Approximately 10 service providers who work in four rural violence against women programs within the two catchment areas were invited to participate in an online survey, identifying needs and gaps in services for women survivors. I attempted to recruit service providers through an email (Appendix D) sent directly to the Directors of four agencies with a reminder email sent near the study's closing date (Appendix G). The emails included a link to the survey, and requested that Directors inform their rural workers about the study. As noted, this part of the project was unsuccessful and will be discussed further in another section.

4.2.2 Interviews with women survivors

Data for this part of the study was obtained from qualitative, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, with six women who lived within the catchment area for the rural VAW agency based in the eastern study area (See Appendix B for Interview Guide). Semi-structured interviews allowed for women to tell their stories, for the researcher to ask some pre-determined questions and to also probe beyond initial responses to questions (Wendt, 2009). This methodology allows researchers to obtain the more nuanced and in-depth information that results when people are given the space to explore the meaning of their experiences (Wendt, 2009). The Directors of local VAW counselling agencies generously donated office space for interviews. The decision to conduct interviews in agency offices was made in the interest of researcher safety, and

the understanding that meeting in the offices of women's programs opens the door to further resources, if women are seeking ongoing support. A monetary contribution of \$20 and a \$5 gift certificate to Tim Hortons was given to each participant to help cover the costs of transportation and/or childcare, and as an expression of appreciation for their participation in the project (Riddell et al., 2009).

Criteria for the study were that the women were no longer in crisis and had been safe from violence for a period of at least one year. These criteria were featured in similar studies in order to minimize any safety concerns that may arise from participation in the research (Biesenthal et al., 2000; Jiwani, 1998; Martz & Bryson Sarauer, 1999). Additionally, criteria included that women had not been a counselling client of mine in the past. The completion of a face sheet (Appendix H) and consent form (Appendix I) took place with each woman before the interviews began.

With the consent of participants, interviews were recorded and transcribed. I had referral information available for crisis and counselling services, as a precautionary measure, in the event that a participant experienced distress as a result of the interview, or wished to access counselling in the future. I chose a pseudonym for the identity of participants in the research, and identifying information (face sheets, transcripts) was kept in a locked filing cabinet, and on a password protected USB drive. This confidential information was erased and shredded at the completion of the research process.

In exploring potential reasons for the lack of participants from the western study area, the local VAW agency reported finding it difficult to identify women who had been free from violence for the required period of one year, and noted that due to the heat

wave and summer holidays, it was predominantly women in crisis who attended their programs (and who were therefore not eligible to participate in the study).

4.2.3 Survey for service providers

Service providers who work with women in the two study areas were asked for their perspectives on the barriers that rural women experiencing violence encounter, and ideas for social change. I had worked with some of the service providers in the rural areas being investigated in the past, and in order to address the issue of dual relationships, decided to ask the Directors of the agencies to inform their rural VAW workers about the survey, rather than contact them myself. The decision to collect data through an anonymous online survey (Survey Monkey) was made in order to avoid dual relationships and researcher bias. It was believed that an online survey might result in a higher rate of participation from service providers, due to the challenges of finding a meeting time that worked for all rural VAW workers (See Appendix C for survey questions). The majority of the survey questions were open-ended, in order to obtain qualitative data on rural service providers' understanding of the issues and barriers facing the women they assist. Before beginning the survey, participants were asked to review consent and privacy information (Appendix J).

I suspect that in promoting the online survey only by emailing agency Directors, I may have distanced myself too much from the service providers, and that workload may also have been a factor. As one Director of a rural VAW agency noted upon hearing about the survey, many service providers find themselves overwhelmed by requests to complete online surveys, and this may have also contributed to the lack of response. While I sought a way to fulfill ethics requirements regarding dual relationships by using

Survey Monkey, taking the time to make a case for a less distanced method of obtaining data may have resulted in obtaining the insights and perspectives of the women who work most closely with the rural women survivors in this study. Had this research not been part of my thesis, it may have been possible to involve another researcher who did not know the local service providers, and who could have provided them with the option of individual or group meetings. There are much better ways to reach rural service providers than an online survey and under the circumstances, it may have been unrealistic for me to include service providers in the study in the first place. The difficulty in accessing rural service provider voices in this research may also be reflective of the isolation that rural women often face.

4.2.4 Interview process

The interviews were held in private offices at a local community agency in the eastern study area. Half of the participants were provided transportation to the interview location by their VAW counsellor, and half used their own vehicles to drive to the interview site. Two women requested the presence of their counsellor during their interviews, which highlights the importance of VAW counsellors in the lives of women survivors. Women commented on the trust and the quality of the relationship that they had built with their counsellors and how this helped them survive and move forward. In total, I went to the interview location on five occasions for data collection (in one instance, a participant was unwell and had to reschedule).

Before the digital recorder was turned on, participants often began speaking about their experiences and families, bringing out photographs of children and grandchildren to share with me. And at the end, when the recorder was turned off,

women would sometimes further reflect on their stories and what had helped them the most—in these instances, I sometimes asked for permission to make a handwritten note of their experiences. The length of a recorded interview does not include these conversations or time spent completing paperwork, discussing consent and explaining the interview process. While the actual time spent with each participant was usually between 1-2 hours, the approximate length of recorded time typically ranged from 45 – 75 minutes.

I recognized the risks women were taking in coming forward as participants, and hoped to be a worthy chronicler of their stories and experiences. Several participants shared what the interview process was like for them, noting that speaking openly about how they survived the abuse contributed to their ongoing healing, or they indicated that they would like to be contacted again for similar projects, if needed. I think the presence of the participants' VAW counsellors, either in the building or in the interview room, made it much easier for all to differentiate between the roles of researcher and counsellor, and allowed for an increased level of safety for participants. Before the interviews began, VAW counsellors contacted the women they thought might be interested in coming to an interview, explained the study to them, and provided transportation and emotional support throughout. This was asking a lot of counsellors who were already very busy, and this study would not exist without their efforts and commitment to helping rural women who have experienced abuse.

The Letter of Consent (Appendix I) contained information that many participants were already familiar with, especially where it pertained to confidentiality. Some women didn't want to read the form because they'd been asked to sign so many consent and

confidentiality forms through their involvement with services over the years. In these instances, I indicated that while there were some similarities with agency consent forms, there were some important differences when it came to a research study that they needed to be aware of. Alternately, other women read the Letter of Consent carefully, expressing how important it was to them that counsellors (and researchers) abide by the agreements they make with each other.

The discussion of the Letter of Consent was usually followed by a conversation about the level of sharing that was expected during the interview, and women were assured that this was entirely up to them—that they should only share what they felt comfortable talking about, that they could stop the interview or have the digital recorder paused at any time (when it seemed that participants were nervous about whether the digital recorder was truly off, I explained how we could tell that it really was no longer recording). If the participant's counsellor was present for the interview, she also assisted in reassuring women that their decisions about what to share, or whether or not to continue, would be respected.

When a woman's VAW counsellor was present for the interview, she helped participants remember key experiences, and often emphasized the incredible strength and determination the woman had shown in surviving the abuse. Several women had gone through years of court cases, accompanied by their counsellors, and had obviously developed very significant, caring and trusting relationships with them during this time. The need for a counsellor to be present during interviews also speaks to the effects of abuse, and the potential for experiencing the impact of trauma years after the abusive relationship has ended. As is the case for many women who have experienced violence,

including two of the participants, separation does not mean the end of the abuse, rather it can be the beginning of a more institutionalized experience of abuse, enabled by the legal system.

Chapter 5

Data Analysis

“If there’s a message to communities, it’s if you know it’s happening, report it”—Jill

Thematic analysis was used to interpret interview and survey data, and information was coded and classified as themes emerged. I used indigenous categories, as described by Marlow (2005), since “this approach is compatible with the practice skills of building rapport and developing empathy so that the worker can see the world from the client’s point of view” (p. 221). In this approach, questions for participants are designed to elicit the categorical information needed for analysis and the researcher’s task is to facilitate the process of classification and meaning-making throughout the interview.

This method of analysis was chosen based on the characteristics that it shares with a feminist approach to theory and practice, and also because it is considered to be a method that works well for learning about the needs and strengths of communities. Counts, matrices, metaphors and cluster diagrams were also used as strategies to track and visualize the interrelatedness of themes and occurrences (Marlow, 2005). Researcher bias was addressed through reflexive journaling throughout the research process, consultation with my supervisor and agency contacts.

5.1 Limitations

The study has several limitations, such as the small sample size, lack of an urban comparison group and a single referral source. The lack of data for service providers and for women survivors in the western study area is reflective of the difficulty in reaching rural women, academic time constraints and limitations in the study’s design, which may

have prevented some women from participating. While the results of a small qualitative study cannot be generalized, the experiences and stories of the women survivors who participated are reflective of the themes and issues reported by researchers whose studies were of a much larger scale.

5.2 The Women Participants

The accounts of the women participants in this study resonate with the central issues identified in larger studies that were mentioned in the review of the literature. It has been widely reported that isolation, the presence of weapons in the home, the prevalence of more traditional patriarchal values, lack of transportation and community resources, and problems with access to telephones and cell phone service make it more difficult for rural women and their children to get the help they require when experiencing abuse (Websdale, 1998; Jiwani, 1998; Dragiewicz & DeKeseredy, 2008, Martz & Bryson Sarauer, 1999; Biesenthal et al., 2000; Riddell et al., 2009).

One participant spoke of her healing process and the actions she has taken to protect children, after experiencing childhood sexual abuse for many years, perpetrated by a male family member. Like the other participants, her story was remarkable and insightful, but unfortunately cannot be fully integrated into a project focusing only on intimate partner violence. However, as a woman using the same rural services and supports as women who experienced abuse from a male partner, this participant's words, as they relate to guidance for other women, are included in *Sharing knowledge*—“you've got rights.” The following themes apply to the five participants who reported abuse by a male partner. All of the women had left the abusive relationship.

5.3 Income, Education and Family—“He refused to pay child support”

“It was tough because I was trying to take care of [the baby] and work, and trying to pay everything as well, because he wasn’t helping. He refused to pay child support.” Sandy

Participants reported experiencing significant financial difficulties related to leaving the abusive relationship. The reasons for these difficulties included partners refusing to pay child and spousal support, partners stalling the legal process to deny women and children the assets they were entitled to, and being forced to subsist on social assistance to support their children until they were able to get back on their feet. Women juggled employment and childrearing as single parents—but with the added stress of court dates, ongoing emotional abuse, and dealing with the effects of trauma on themselves and their children.

The yearly income for participants was well below any markers for low income, with the majority of women reporting an income between \$10,000 to \$20,000 per year.

Two women reported a family income between \$20,000 to 40,000 per year. Four participants had completed Grade 12 and one had not completed high school.

Participants who worked outside the home earned income through employment in the service industry, housekeeping, and odd jobs. Three women had entered new common-law relationships since leaving their abusive partners and two were single. All participants had children and three women had several children under the age of 16.

As noted earlier, household incomes under \$60,000 per year were associated with rates of woman abuse that were twice as high as the rates of abuse for women with higher incomes (Johnson, 2006). And in 1993, households with incomes under \$15,000 per year had rates of woman abuse that were double the national average (Rodgers,

1994)—the household incomes for the majority of the study participants were well below this threshold once inflation is taken into account. Additionally, women in common-law relationships were found to be five times more likely to die from woman abuse than women who were married (Statistics Canada, 2005).

While the feminization of poverty is evident in the lives of women and children from any geographical region, the socioeconomic and socio-cultural risk factors for increased rates of woman abuse in these regions is a cause for concern. They signal the need for structural changes to increase education and employment opportunities, increase social assistance rates and provide safe housing options to help women and children who are living in poverty escape abuse.

5.4 Experiences of Abuse—“No way could you call the police”

“No way could you call the police. He would have killed me.”—Jill

The participants provided valuable insight into the challenges that women face when they are experiencing abuse in a rural context. Isolation, lack of adequate communication networks and the silence around abuse in rural communities were some of the barriers that women faced. All of the participants reported the experience of emotional, verbal and economic abuse. The last date of abuse for the participants was between one and six years ago, with the average length of time since the last experience of abuse being three years ago. Participants who reported experiencing sexual abuse, also reported enduring physical abuse, which was consistent with the results of the nation-wide Violence Against Women Survey which revealed that most women who were sexual assaulted by their partners also endured physical violence (Johnson, 1996). Websdale (1998) noted that every woman he interviewed reported the experience of emotional abuse, and that

Most reported this form of abuse in tandem with physical or sexual abuse or both. The effectiveness of emotional abuse as a means of controlling women is often enhanced by the rural geo-cultural milieu...Those women who report living in physical isolation talk of the way that isolation amplifies their abuser's ability to control them (p. 14)

The use of threats as a means of control was also reported by two women in the study. Both of the women had been threatened with physical violence, one had been threatened and assaulted with a weapon, and faced the threat of being killed, while both women faced threats related to their children. Jill stated,

He told me that because I was 18, and on welfare, and he was an adult and he worked, that his parents would buy off the judge and I'd never see [my child] again, if I didn't go back.

When Sandy wanted to leave an abusive partner, she had to phone the police in order to ensure that she could take her child with her—"He said he'd never let the baby leave with me...I refused to leave without my child," she stated. Only one participant reported that she had neither been threatened with violence or experienced physical violence as part of the abuse.

All participants were living in the study areas and receiving assistance from the local VAW program. One was receiving help for abuse she experienced while living with a partner in the city. The other four participants had lived in rural areas their entire lives and all four of these women reported that isolation had been used by their male partners to facilitate abuse against them and their children.

Websdale also observed this, noting that "the isolation may be a product of the abuse, as well as a physical setting conducive to abuse (1998, p. 5)." In rural areas, a vehicle is a lifeline to friends, family, community, social services, employment and emergency services—without access to a vehicle in rural areas, women and children are

far more vulnerable. Participants reported numerous attempts to control and isolate them through disabling their vehicles in some manner, either by leaving her vehicle with no gasoline, blocking her vehicle in the driveway so that she couldn't leave, or cancelling her car insurance. Emma recounted a time when she and her child were locked out of the house in winter:

He'd think nothing even of coming in at 2 o'clock in the morning or something and the one night he come in, he was mad, well he was mad—mouthin', I used to call it, it was guilt when they come home and do that—it ended up he locked [my child] out. Then I went to look for [my child] and he locked me out, too, and it was winter.

Jill reported that when she tried to leave after her partner "beat the crap" out of her, "he blocked me in the driveway so I couldn't leave, so we ended up walking in the middle of the night." These and other methods of control were also widely reported in Websdale's study:

Women report that abusers' violence tends to feed off of women's physical isolation and may be all the more effective because of it. Among control tactics used by rural abusers, women mentioned men removing the phone receiver (e.g., when he goes to work) so that she could not contact the outside world by phone; locking the thermostat, especially in winter, as a form of torture; disabling and/or destroying motor vehicles to limit her mobility; closely monitoring the odometer reading on motor vehicles (a simple yet effective form of control due to the lack of alternative means of transportation); driving recklessly in order to intimidate his partner; and discharging firearms in public (e.g., at a battered woman's pet) in a manner that intimidates, scares, or otherwise distresses her (1998, p. 6).

Emma noted that while both she and her husband had vehicles, he told her the brakes were gone on his, and so he had to use her car. She stated,

He'd take my vehicle. I was workin' weekends then and the one Friday he ended up taking my car and I ended up having to get another girl to give me a ride to work...and then he'd bring it back empty.

This interference with a woman's employment is significant, as Websdale noted that since employment represents a social connection for women, many abusers would "emotionally abuse women by undermining their performance in the workplace" (1998, p. 17). It should also be noted that interfering with a woman's employment increases her vulnerability and dependence on the abuser by limiting her access to an income. In some cases, rural women may feel trapped in abusive relationships because leaving means losing her income and livelihood (in cases of a family-run business or farming), or losing the vehicle she uses to travel to employment.

The winter season added another dimension to the abuse. Tracey was forced to haul firewood on her own to heat the family home because her partner refused to help. She also indicated that not having a vehicle and having to walk long distances to get to the nearest town resulted in her being quite vulnerable.

One time I was walkin' and this guy dropped me off the road and he stole my purse...all my credit cards were there...he pretended there was something wrong with the tires.

Sandy left with her baby in January, "with basically nothing" in terms of possessions, to live with a family member. As noted earlier, Emma and her children were locked out of their home in winter.

Alice talked about how much more difficult it would have been for her had she been living in a rural area when she left an abusive relationship, in the winter months. She stated, "If you ever had to run away from the abuse, there's nowhere...there's no shelter to run to. Now in the city, you got all kinds of shelters to run to." Alice noted that when she left an abusive relationship, the shelter in the city had no beds available, but they offered her a couch to sleep on. She stated, "Put me on your couch, I don't care, just

get me outa the cold, it's the middle of winter. That's the only thing with the city and the rural areas...The rural area has nothing like that." Some women noted that if they needed to get out of their house because of abuse, they would first have to reach their counsellor and arrange for a ride to a shelter. Alice noted that she would call the police if she needed out immediately.

Escaping from abuse frequently meant that women were out walking with their children, often in inclement or winter weather, late at night, and enduring the fear of being exposed to the elements before they regained entry to their home, or found alternative shelter. While emotional abuse and control may be used against women in urban settings, they are "likely to be more successful in rural regions because of the isolation (Websdale, 1998, p. 6)."

Isolation and distance from emergency services increased the level of danger for Jill, and added to the suffering that Tracey encountered after she accidentally broke her arm. Tracey stated,

Yeah, it was lonely. You couldn't go nowhere...I fell last winter and broke my arm...it took about three hours [for the ambulance] to get there. I was wondering where the hell they were, I was in a lot of pain.

Sandy noted that police response times may depend on whether officers happen to be in the area—fortunately, this was the case for her, and the police arrived at her home within minutes after she called them.

Jill's partner knew exactly how long it would take emergency services to come to her aid if she were to call them, and this information about how isolated they were was used by her partner to reinforce how she could not escape, if he intended to kill her. She stated,

...No way could you call the police. He would have killed me. He told me he'd kill me. He told me if I ever called the police, I'd better call an ambulance with a body bag to go with it. And he made it quite clear, "remember, it takes 45 minutes for them to get here." So, calling the police was a no-no.

This death threat was accompanied by physical abuse one night when Jill's friend came to the door, and her partner mistakenly thought it was the police. The stories of Tracey and Jill illustrate how the length of time between a woman calling for help, and the arrival of emergency medical or police services, is a significant issue in terms of the survival of rural women and children living with violence. Accounts by rural Ontario women in the literature reported similar lengths of time (45 minutes to one hour) for emergency response (Kasdorff & Erb, 2010; Marshall & Vaillancourt, 1993). In a report focusing on the eastern region of Ontario, Kasdorff & Erb stated,

Emergency vehicles such as police, ambulance and fire may take extended periods of time to reach people in rural and remote areas. For victims of violence, a slow response time creates a dangerous situation. Winter road conditions can make travel even lengthier which will create a more dangerous situation (2010, p. 11).

With "no shelter to run to" and a long wait for emergency services, rural women and children are at a considerable disadvantage when they are in crisis.

5.4.1 Community responses to woman abuse

Some of the participants that I interviewed found out about local VAW services through referrals from other agencies, while others discovered them through word of mouth, community or family connections. In the words of one participant: "Word of mouth. Word of mouth. In the country likely the best" (Emma). One woman noted that she "probably would have left a long time before" had she known there was so much support available to her and her kids (Jill). The difficulties that participants encountered

in finding services are reflective of the isolation that rural women living with abuse experience.

Jill perceived a contradiction in her rural community—that while there was little privacy and it was difficult for her to hide the abuse, there was also reluctance on the part of community members to intervene to protect her. Jill stated,

I didn't fight back, so that the kids wouldn't hear me. But they knew. And if there's a message to communities, is if you know it's happening, report it. Because I was surprised...I thought I hid it well. And I was surprised to find out that a lot of people knew it was going on. And I was very hurt that nobody helped me. Like nobody...that's the thing in small communities, everybody's gotta be tight lipped and afraid that if they say something they're going to hurt somebody's feelings or be accused of being nosy. Well, everybody's nosy anyway. So they might as well do something for the good of somebody else. Like, if I knew that so-and-so was being abused, I wouldn't hesitate for a minute to call the police and have that person safe. Like they may hate you for awhile but they're going to thank you in the end.

I think Jill raises an issue that is important for communities, both rural and urban—that we share a collective responsibility to break the silence about woman abuse, and protect women and children from violence, even if this means that someone may experience social fall-out as a result of their involvement. Marshall & Vaillancourt (1993) stated,

The ingredients for a conspiracy of silence are omnipresent in rural communities. Myths about the privacy and sanctity of family life abound. If anything is amiss, close-knit family networks and a high degree of community interdependency close ranks to deny it. (p. 71).

Martz & Bryson Sarauer (1999) also indicated that while many women in their study tried their best to hide the abuse, the experiences of their participants were similar to Jill's in that "after the couple had separated, many people in the community came forward to say they knew" (p. 11). While concerns about how we are perceived are present in any community, Jill suggests that minding your own business, while at the

same time knowing everyone else's, is something that may be more common in rural communities. When potential social interactions are limited to a small circle of people, as is the case in most rural communities, perhaps citizens are less likely to enter into situations that could result in conflict. As Marshall & Vaillancourt (1993) stated, "Violence is a secret; [it is] never discussed because it threatens the webs of relationships which hold rural communities together" (p. 71).

In a report by the World Health Organization, Heise & Garcia-Moreno (2002) noted that a community's response to woman abuse has an overall impact on the level of violence within that community. Those communities that had "community sanctions against partner violence and those where abused women had access to a sanctuary, either in the form of shelters or family support (73)" had the lowest levels of woman abuse (Ibid, p. 99). Community sanctions against woman abuse included the "moral pressure for neighbours to intervene if a woman was beaten," and woman abuse was found to be highest in communities where women's rights and status were in a state of flux (Ibid, p. 99). In communities where the status of women was very low, "violence is not 'needed' to enforce male authority" and "Partner violence is thus usually at its highest at the point where women begin to assume non-traditional roles or enter the workforce" (Ibid, p. 99).

Tolerance for woman abuse throughout the world and community silencing around violence in women's homes makes it difficult for young women to recognize abuse when it is happening to them. While local VAW agencies do have workers who go into the schools to provide education and support, one participant spoke of the continuing need to find new ways to reach girls and young women.

They need to teach it [information about identifying abuse] in schools because girls aren't going to go to a counsellor and say oh well, you know. They need to

see these early warning signs before it gets to...where I lived. Actually you know something, when my ex was sexually abusing me, I didn't know it was sexual abuse until she [VAW Counsellor] told me, later. And that started when I was pregnant, it started when I was 16. And kept going until the end. All those years I still did not know that what he was doing was not okay...he always told me, this isn't sexual abuse, I'm your boyfriend...And actually, it was rape, how I conceived [my child]. But I didn't know until she explained it to me. So stuff like that needs to get into the schools. And young girls need to learn these red flag early warning signs. Somehow. Like when they're teaching sex ed. Teach this too. *Jill*

Jill's words speak of the need for education and change on many levels to address the endemic violence against women in our society. Women not only need access to VAW counsellors who can help them understand their experiences of abuse and learn about their rights, they need their community and educational institutions to take strong stands against the abuse of girls and women, and like the participants in this study, to not give up. In a study that took place in southwestern Ontario between 2004 and 2007, Wolfe et al (2009) found that incorporating lessons about dating violence and healthy relationships into the school curriculum was effective at reducing physical dating violence. This extensive study involved over 1700 boys and girls who were 14 or 15 years of age, from 20 public schools (*Ibid*). Every community that participated in the Ontario Rural Woman Abuse Study, by Biesenthal et al (2000), recommended that education about woman abuse begin at an early age and be integrated into school programs. All communities believed that enhancing community responses and changing attitudes about violence against women were essential to addressing woman abuse (*Ibid*).

Several other recommendations arose from the study by Biesenthal et al (2000) regarding ways to bring about community change. These recommendations included hiring someone to specifically focus on raising awareness of woman abuse and violence prevention in the community, making a public statement that the community will not

tolerate violence against women, and addressing myths about woman abuse through public education initiatives. Participants emphasized that every community member must develop a commitment to helping women who are being abused, and that rural men need to become more involved in violence prevention.

5.4.2 Partner's use of alcohol

Two participants spoke of how much worse the abuse was if their partners were under the influence of alcohol. Jill stated, “You never knew when he was gonna...gonna go. When he was drunk it was worse. I just usually tried to feed him and then go to sleep.” Dobash and Dobash (1998) found that excessive use of alcohol

exacerbates other problems and is also a source of conflict in its own right. The use of household income for drinking, time spent at the pub instead of at home, and the talk and atmosphere of the male group may all contribute to violence (p. 149).

Martz & Bryson Sarauer (1999) found a “strong relationship between alcohol and abuse” (p. 12), however since most people who abuse alcohol do not harm their partners, alcohol is not considered a cause of woman abuse. Rather, abusers may see alcohol abuse as a way to excuse their violence and “justify the fact that they beat their wives” (*Ibid*, p. 13).

Statistic Canada’s (1994) Violence Against Women Survey in 1993 collected data from over 12,000 respondents. The results revealed that when women experienced intimate partner violence, over half (52.1%) of women reported that their partners had been drinking at the time of the abuse (*Ibid*). In her analysis of the 1993 Violence Against Women Survey, Johnson (1996) found that when women were living with or married to a partner who was a heavy drinker, they were five times more likely to be

abused than women who did not live with a heavy drinker. When women had experienced abuse so severe that they required medical attention, they were twice as likely to have reported that the man had been drinking at the time of the assault, compared to women who reported experiencing less serious violence (Ibid). In cultures that view male domination of women and heavy drinking as “acceptable masculine behaviours,” drinking may be used as an excuse for actions that would usually not be tolerated (Ibid, p. 12).

The Canadian parliament amended the Criminal Code in 1995 so that drunkenness could no longer be used as a defence in the majority of cases involving the abuse of women and children (Johnson, 1996). However, the Ontario Women’s Justice Network (2009) reported that the law continues to be challenged, particularly in cases of sexual assault, reflecting the failure of the criminal justice system in responding to serious criminal offences against women and girls.

5.4.3 Pregnancy, being a new mother, children

Two participants also reported that their partner’s abuse began either during their pregnancy, or shortly after the birth of their children. As noted earlier, one of the participants reported that her boyfriend began sexually abusing her when she was pregnant, and that her child had been conceived through rape, at the age of 16. She noted that the sexual abuse continued until she left the relationship, with her partner telling her it wasn’t sexual assault because he was her boyfriend.

Lundgren (1998) wrote about sexual violence perpetrated by men in a small religious group who perceived their cruelty toward their partners as “steps in the paternal upbringing of the not-yet-adult, not-yet-mature woman,” rather than abuse (p. 185). She

articulated an underlying norm among the men who followed a pattern of “strike *and* comfort, protect *and* isolate” (1998, p. 185). The participant’s experience of being told by her boyfriend that it wasn’t abuse because he was her boyfriend illustrates the pervasiveness of this paternalistic and misogynist behaviour.

Another participant noted that the abuse began after she had her baby—her partner became overprotective and demeaning of her skills as a young mother. When she was pregnant, her partner became upset with her because she didn’t want to go places with him, and later, he refused to allow her to leave the home with her baby, resulting in the need to call the police. She stated,

The police came up at one point because I called them. He wouldn’t let me leave the house with the baby. And like I said, he cancelled the insurance on the car and just...hard time, he wanted full custody at that time. He said I couldn’t do anything for her. *Sandy*

Tracey’s partner became angry when she needed to spend money on feeding the children:

I went to spend some money on groceries for the kids, the four kids, and I spent a \$100 and he got mad. And he said – you’re spending that much money on groceries? – and I said you gotta feed four kids, what do you expect? Ten dollars to do all that, yeah right. What you gonna get for \$10? Stupid.

And as is the case for many women, Jill indicated that it was pregnancy and childbirth that marked the beginning of the abuse.

The sexual abuse started when I was pregnant with [my child] and the physical started a few months after [my child] was born. And I actually left when [my child] was [under a year] old, and he threatened me if I didn’t go back, so I went back.

Dobash & Dobash (1998) found that conflict related to children often involved the “amount of time and energy women spend in child care rather than husband care” (p. 148). Martz & Bryson Sarauer (1999) indicated that many women reported an

association between the beginning, or escalation, of abuse with pregnancy or the time after the birth of a child. They stated, “Pregnancy and childbirth represented a loss of control for the husband as he must share the woman’s time and attention with another human being who has bonded more closely to his wife than he has” (Ibid, p. 13). Pregnancy and child birth were found to represent a threat to the partner’s control, and these were also times when women were more vulnerable.

It is common for abusive partners to socially isolate women from their family and friends, to interfere with or restrict their employment opportunities and prevent them from associating with anyone outside of the household. Isolation can be heightened as a result of discrimination or disability, and aspects of the rural context may make it even more difficult for women to live free from abuse. The accomplishments of the women who participated in this study are even more admirable when the context of their survival is fully understood.

5.5 Services—“I wouldn’t have known where to go, what my rights were”

“Because really, I wouldn’t have known where to go, what my rights were...So you need somebody, to say, put you on track.” Emma

“I came here and saw a counsellor and they helped me through everything, with lawyers...She’s been awesome.” Sandy

“[The VAW Counsellor] is excellent, she will help you with anything you need to go through. If you need to go out and get your own place, she’ll help you do that. If you have children, she’d help you with them. She’d help you get back on your feet...She goes right to court with me.” Alice

The study participants overwhelmingly found the services of their local VAW program knowledgeable, helpful, informative, and essential to meeting their needs while dealing with abuse. Hague and Mullender (2005) noted that all studies to date have found that

women's outreach services and shelters are those that best comprehend women's needs, despite "the background of chronic underfunding of these voluntary sector organizations" (2005, p. 151).

It was clear that funding for the local VAW agency that serves the eastern study area did not adequately reflect the needs of women in their community during the 2009-2010 fiscal year—the Director reported that the majority of the VAW program's transportation budget had been spent by the end of December. These funds are predominantly used to provide transportation for women to court and legal appointments—in other words, they are essential for providing rural women with advocacy, accompaniment and access to the judicial system.

Participants noted how vital it was for them to have their counsellors pick them up and accompany them to legal and court appointments. The importance of this reached far beyond addressing the very practical need for transportation in rural areas. Emma stated,

[My counsellor] would drive me to court, which was good cause sometimes...you shouldn't be driving. Cause you got so much, there's so much going on...sometimes there's so many overwhelming things you don't know what to do...Or what your needs [are], or what should you be thinking of. Because, like, a lot of times...I wasn't thinking...even money. I knew I didn't have a lot of money, but I wasn't even thinking of say, supporting myself, or my kids...because you're under so much crap that's going on, you don't think of two months down the road...So you need somebody, to say, put you on track...I know there's days you just want to get under the covers and hide your head, and say, "somebody else deal with it". It aint gonna happen. Or you could just leave...but that aint gonna solve nothing. In the end, no. No, cause [if] they end up with bills, you end up with them too.

Women reported that due to the effects of the abuse they experienced (and in some cases ongoing emotional and financial abuse throughout the lengthy court process), and the upheaval in their lives as a result, they were often unable to think clearly in important

meetings with lawyers that would inevitably result in decisions that affected them and their children many years down the road. Emma reflected on the importance of having a VAW counsellor present to help her direct her anger toward protecting her rights and planning for her future:

Say, you're going to see the lawyer, thinking—which I did—how could he do that to you, what an asshole, for years and years you're together, you're building a home and stuff...when you're going to court or to see a lawyer...that's sometimes what you're thinking, you're not thinking of, "Ok woman, a year down the road, what are you gonna do?" So, yeah, it helps you. It helps you at that time, but it likely helps you later on too. You know, it don't matter how you look at it, you gotta try to deal with it and get on with your life.

When Jill initially began the court process, she wasn't involved with a VAW program, and ended up getting a lawyer that wasn't knowledgeable about women who had experienced abuse. She stated,

I did get screwed over by the lawyer. Very badly. In my custody agreement, he has full visitation, but it's at full discretion. He has to be sober 24 hours prior. Well, how am I supposed to do that? Carry a breath...you know? And for any extra expenses, like medical or dental, I have to call him and ask him for the money...

(Kate: ...So did you end up after that having to contact him and call him?)
No.

(VAW Counsellor: She just did without.)

VAW counsellors played an essential role in helping women who were dealing with a legal system that was not designed with the interests of women and their children in mind. The presence and guidance of their counsellors allowed women to move forward, gain knowledge about their rights, fight for justice for themselves and their children, and consider their future needs. Moving forward was something that participants mentioned was a necessity, even though they may have felt depressed and stuck at the time because of the abuse. The support and knowledge of a VAW counsellor allowed them to tap into their strengths during times of hardship and take the next step forward.

Jill spoke to how important the Children's Aid Society was for her in terms of escaping abuse, noting that she had initially feared their involvement. She stated,

They will help you. Cause I was afraid, you think – Children's Aid, they're going to take my kids away – and that wasn't the case with [CAS worker], she actually became...I grew really fond of her...She really helped me. Actually, if it wasn't for Children's Aid, I don't think I would have ever got away from him.

Tracey also went to Community Living for help, noting that they came to her home and talked with her about her rights.

The women's VAW counsellors usually assisted women in accessing other community services that they required, and aside from the legal system, the participants reported that they were satisfied with the services they accessed. When women were referred, by VAW counsellors, to lawyers who had experience in issues related to woman abuse, their interactions with lawyers was also positive.

The court system represented a service that participants thought needed vast improvements. Some women were still engaged in the court process over five years later as a result of their former spouse's efforts to stall the legal process, and the judge allowed this to go on. In some cases, these delays meant that women and children were denied spousal support and lived in poverty, that abusive men were legally permitted to return to the home until a court order was obtained, and that mothers and their children remained in a state of constant limbo, stress, and at times, fear. While some women are able to complete the court process under these oppressive conditions, and this speaks to their resilience, it does not come without a cost. Several participants continued to require the support of counsellors to deal with the affects of trauma. Jill indicated that she suffers from severe anxiety and panic attacks as a result of the abuse she experienced. Women were not only faced with the task of healing from abuse, and helping their kids heal, they

were expected to do so while living in poverty, often without basic protections that could be enforced by the State. Timely decision-making and a commitment to not allow the abusive partner to undermine the judicial process were practices that were identified as being in need of change by the participants.

Several aspects of the local VAW program were noted by participants as being particularly helpful—the provision of mobile outreach services; the support, guidance and specialized knowledge of their VAW counsellor regarding woman abuse; the VAW counsellor's knowledge about lawyers, the legal process and their legal rights; accompaniment to legal and court appointments; and the co-location of other social service agencies in the same building (such as Ontario Works and children's services) so that it was easier to access the services they required for themselves and their children. The effectiveness and positive regard that women had for the local VAW program should come as no surprise, as Hague and Mullender (2005) stated,

Women's refuge and support organizations are still much better at both service user and more general survivor involvement than other agencies, and remain the voice and representatives of abused women and children overall. These organizations need to be heard, as survivors themselves need to be heard, in order to keep women's services centre stage and to make sure that new services and policy developments are responsive to abused women's real needs and views (p. 153).

5.6 Survival Strategies—“If I could get out with the kids, I’d go”

“Sometimes, if it got too bad, like if I could get out with the kids, I’d go. Or if he was drinking a lot, I’d just leave and go. Just tried to stay quiet and keep the kids quiet. Like, don’t do anything to set him off or piss him off or any of it...but you never knew when you were going to set him off and that was the scary part.” Jill

Martz & Bryson Sarauer (1999) found that the women survivors they interviewed used coping strategies both within their home environments and in their interactions within the community, with family and friends. The very real fear of the abuser's retaliation, shame and the feeling that they would not be believed were some of the reasons why women coped with the abuse in silence. Inside the relationship, women in the study by Martz & Bryson Sarauer (1999) coped by "trying to please their partners in order to reduce the risk, by ignoring the verbal abuse, by detachment from what was happening to them, with counselling and by fighting back" (p. 11).

Participants told me how silence itself was sometimes a survival strategy, as speaking up would often result in further abuse or threats. They spoke of the times where they would stand their ground, such as when Sandy stated, "I don't care how much he puts me down, I was not leaving without [the baby]." And Emma noted that sometimes it was necessary to "get bull headed" in order to survive from day to day, without getting lost in depression. Participants spoke of praying, crying, taking long baths, keeping busy and talking with their counsellors as ways they coped with the emotional impact of what they were going through.

You find the strength because you know you got it. Because nobody's gonna feel sorry for you all the time. Talkin with [VAW Counsellor] and whatever, and talkin with other people and even, like mom always said, "don't feel sorry for yourself because you could go out there and there's somebody out there in worse shape that has less, has nothing, has no family."...I would likely be thankful for what I had before I'd get too down. *Emma*

Emma indicated that her husband's abuse would often be preceded by drinking, and a particular look in his eyes that she associated with his abusive behaviour. When she noticed these signs, Emma would take the kids and leave the house. If she didn't have a car, she and the children would walk. In the warmer months, and when she had a car, she

would take the kids to the beach, or to watch a baseball game. This was one of the ways that she protected herself and her kids from her husband's abuse. Another participant also described how she paid particular attention to her partner's facial expressions, as clues to how much danger she and the children were in.

I knew when he was mad, I believe, I kinda knew just with his facial expression...I'm taking the kids and I'm leaving because he's in one of his moods. Somebody's going to get hurt or something's going to get broke. I'm not going to be here with my children when it happens. And sure enough, I packed up the [kids] and went to a friend's house and came home and all [her most valued possessions] were smashed. *Alice*

In the end, many women in the study by Martz & Bryson Sarauer (1999) realized that no matter what they did, it was never good enough for the abuser, and as Jill noted, despite her best efforts to appease her partner, "you never knew when you were going to set him off and that was the scary part." One of the participants identified the moment when she'd "just had enough," after her partner told her that she didn't deserve to live anymore. She grabbed a kitchen knife and handed it to him.

And god must have been watching because there was a rounded knife and he put it into my stomach. But it didn't cut me because it was rounded...I had no food, I had no diapers, I had no milk, I had no money. *Jill*

The trauma of abuse, a lack of options, financial resources and supports can lead to acts of desperation where women fight back physically, or contemplate ending their own lives. In the study by Martz & Bryson Sarauer (1999) a few women fought back with verbal and physical abuse, and three women reported that they contemplated suicide because they didn't know what else to do.

Coping with the abuser didn't always end when court was over, especially when there were children involved. Deciding how to protect the children, while following the

ruling of the courts in terms of visitation, and balancing the wishes of their children, were issues that women frequently dealt with.

As for right now, he just has pictures of the children. And that's as far as I'm going to allow it to go at the moment. And I was always open with kids to say, ok, usually a monthly basis, it was like, do you want to see your dad? Because I don't want them coming back on me in ten years and say, well you kept me from my dad. You know? And I always asked, do you want to see you dad and I always tried to tell stories about the good times and the bad so that they didn't think oh, he's just this horrible monster. *Jill*

One participant spoke of finding where she did have power in relationship, and using it whenever she could to protect her children.

If he wants to see the kids, then he still needs to do the [Anger Management Program], he still needs to do the [Addictions Program] and prove. And if it does mean going to the police station and having them administer breathalyzer and he fails, you don't see my kids. I'm not exposing them to something that's not necessary. *Jill*

Some participants noted that through the process of getting free from abuse, they found strengths that they didn't know they had, such as the ability to stand up for themselves, or talk about their experiences of abuse in order to help others.

5.7 Sharing Knowledge—“You’ve got rights”

“Never give up. Fight for your rights. You’ve got rights.” Tracey

The tremendous resilience and wisdom of the women who participated in this study was particularly evident in their thoughtful and knowledgeable answers to the question, “If you were going to talk to a woman who was experiencing some of the same things you went though, what would you want to say to her?” (Interview Guide, Appendix B). It was an honour and a privilege to be trusted with the women’s stories of survival in rural Ontario, and ultimately, of freedom and moving on, despite the abuse. Their words in previous sections, and in the following pages, reflect the courage of the participants in

fighting for their rights, protecting their children, and coming forward to share their experiences.

One of the resounding messages that the women wanted to communicate to other women was to not let fear stand in the way of getting help, protecting themselves and their children.

I just want the message to get out – don’t be afraid. Go. Find a safe place, even if you gotta run 50 miles, a 100 miles, just go. There’s lots and lots and lots of help out there. I remember being in it and the only escape I could think of was [the shelter in Kingston]. And that just scared the shit out of me...Because my [family members] were still alive then and I couldn’t imagine my life without [them]. *Jill*

Just because they’re family, doesn’t mean you gotta listen to them, doesn’t mean you gotta put up with it, doesn’t mean nothing. Family’s just a word. Family are the people who care about you and help you move forward. Anyone that’s keeping you back is not family, regardless of if you have the same blood or blood type or personality, it doesn’t matter. *Ellie*

Don’t be so afraid. Your life can change completely for the better. If people think that their kids don’t realize what’s going on, they’re sadly mistaken because I didn’t think that my kids knew because whenever he did do it, I stayed quiet. I didn’t fight back, so that the kids wouldn’t hear me. But they knew. And if there’s a message to communities, is if you know it’s happening, report it. Because I was surprised...I thought I hid it well. And I was surprised to find out that a lot of people knew it was going on. And I was very hurt that nobody helped me. Like nobody...that’s the thing in small communities, everybody’s gotta be tight lipped and afraid that if they say something they’re going to hurt somebody’s feelings or be accused of being nosy. Well, everybody’s nosy anyway. So they might as well do something for the good of somebody else. Like, if I knew that so-and-so was being abused, I wouldn’t hesitate for a minute to call the police and have that person safe. Like they may hate you for awhile but they’re going to thank you in the end. *Jill*

The longer you stay, the more damage it does to your children. *Jill*

Just to be strong. There are people out there that would definitely help. I got the help and I greatly appreciate everything that was done for me. Just to be strong. I know it’s tough at times, but...(Kate: What does that mean to be strong, what does that mean in everyday life when you get up in the morning?). For me is to be strong for myself so I can be strong enough to take care of my kids, to do daily chores around the house, to live life without having to hide from somebody... Don’t be afraid. *Sandy*

Throughout the interviews, women emphasized the importance of not giving up and continuing to move forward during times of hardship.

I may have already said it, but I would basically tell them that everyday could be a struggle, or everyday could be easy, but every day is a new day, you can't live in the past. Which I know as soon as I say that to that person, it's like – you don't know what you're talkin' about – I do know what I'm talkin' about. I have those days where I don't want to get up in the morning, I just want to forget, I don't want to go to sleep because I just want to forget, but I can't forget. You're not going to be able to forget. But you can move forward. *Ellie*

Like for the sake of the interview and anyone else who may be reading this, you gotta keep goin forward. That's my opinion. Just because it doesn't work doesn't mean something else won't work. You can't give up. Don't give up and just keep moving forward. That's what I do. It works for me. *Ellie*

The women wanted to tell others, in similar situations, that there are many community supports available to help them and their children live free from abuse.

If you're scared and you think he might do something or control you so you can't do nothing...there's the [women's shelters in Kingston], and counsellors you can talk to or there's a woman right here...She's excellent, she will help you with anything you need to go through. If you need to go out and get your own place, she'll help you do that. If you have children, she'd help you with them. She'd help you get back on your feet. *Alice*

That there's lots of help out there. That she doesn't have to stay. Cause I always felt like I had nowhere to go. And like I always felt like if I left, he'd hunt me down and kill me. That wasn't the case. And there's lots of people to protect you, so don't be afraid of Children's Aid, they actually are there to help you. And they won't take your kid, as long as you do what they ask you to do. They will help you. Cause I was afraid, you think – Children's Aid, they're going to take my kids away – and that wasn't the case with [CAS Worker], she actually became...I grew really fond of her...Yeah. She really helped me. Actually, if it wasn't for Children's Aid, I don't think I would have got away from him. *Jill*

The child support is still based on 2004. So, that's one thing you can tell future people, make sure you get a good lawyer. *Jill*

The women wanted other women to know about the effects of abuse, and how important it is for them to take care of themselves and learn to trust their own instincts.

What would I tell her? To look after herself. Because you're the one that's gotta walk in your shoes and take the steps and stuff. But I know it's likely a common verse, think positive, and always think that there's good things in life and people make mistakes and don't...if they call you names – verbal abuse – don't take it to heart because sometimes people don't even realize what they're saying. But think of yourself, if you like baths, take long hot baths with nice stuff in it. Soak your feet. Give yourself a foot massage. Relax...Yeah, it's hard. It's easy for me to say that now, but I did do that. I had my hot baths because I didn't want to swear and stuff around [my children] and so I'd get in the bathtub or cry or whatever. You can always do that, put bubbles in, curse, swear, whatever...sing in the bathtub (laughter), get it off your chest and you feel better. *Emma*

Women need to understand there's long term effects to this abuse. I suffer severe panic attacks because of it. I feel like a bag of shit half the time because of it. Because he told me. And like even...I've been with my boyfriend almost six years now and I still look at him and go, "Why are you with me?" *Jill*

You gotta take it one day at a time. You can't think that everybody is gonna harm you, everyone's gonna go after ya. And usually you can tell by the personality if you listen to your gut. If you listen to your gut, you'll be fine, cause 9 times outta 10, there's always that one possibility you could be wrong, but the gut is usually right, you gotta follow the gut. *Ellie*

5.8 Significance and Implications for Social Work Practice and Rural Services

This study has contributed to the growing body of literature about violence against rural women from a feminist perspective. It is unique in that it focused on the experiences of women in a region of eastern Ontario where previous qualitative studies of this nature did not exist and it revealed how poverty places women in some regions at greater risk for violence than others. The study highlighted the importance of the counselling relationship for rural women who have experienced abuse and identified effective practice approaches for working with rural women experiencing violence.

Socialist feminist theories that examine the impact of structural conditions on violence against women were confirmed by this study, and using a feminist conceptual framework, the voices of the women were prioritized. The research confirms and

contributes to structural feminist theories in exploring how class and gender intersect in rural areas to make some women more vulnerable to violence, and illustrates the agency and resiliency of rural women in speaking out about abuse.

The participants' narratives provided first-hand, contextual accounts of their experiences of abuse in the eastern study area, as they explained how they survived and what helped them live free from abuse. They gave voice to the structural needs and concerns that were revealed by comparing local demographic data with indicators of risk for woman abuse. The results suggest a higher risk of woman abuse for women living in the study areas, but particularly for those in the eastern study area, due to higher unemployment rates and an average income that was identified in the literature as placing women at significantly higher risk for woman abuse (Johnson, 1996, 1998, 2006; Rodgers, 1994). Globally, it was found that higher incomes offer a protective factor for women when it comes to violence prevention, and the Government of Canada is currently in violation of its human rights commitment under the United Nations to address inadequate social assistance rates for women and girls (Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action, 2010; Heise & Garcia-Moreno, 2002). Other factors that placed women at increased risk in the study areas included the lack of reliable and affordable communication systems (cell phones, landlines), a lack of women's shelters and other supports nearby, and longer response times for emergency services, which become even lengthier during the winter months.

The findings shed light on not only the unique barriers that rural women in the eastern study areas experienced, but also their tremendous courage and resilience. It has revealed how vital rural VAW counsellors are to helping rural women escape from abuse

and fight for their rights. Kasdorff & Erb (2010) noted that in rural areas of eastern Ontario, “Access to transportation is more of an issue than it ever has been and it has not improved over the years” (p. 5). This study has shown that for survivors of woman abuse, “transportation” is about far more than simply getting from point A to B; transportation is intricately linked with being able to attain safety, access emergency services and the justice system, protect children, and obtain financial support and custody of children through the courts. For many rural women, it is the means through which they access knowledge, guidance and emotional support from their VAW counsellors, enabling them to fight for their rights and move forward, despite the trauma they have endured.

Much of the existing literature on woman abuse has focused on the problems of women, rather than their strengths, and when it does focus on strengths, the research has usually referred to urban women. An emphasis on resilience is an important practice approach because it allows helpers to “highlight and build upon the strategies battered women use to survive” (Humphreys, 2003, p. 148).

I expected to hear stories of strength and survival in the interviews, and while I was searching for these narratives, I was still astonished and filled with admiration at the fearlessness and determination of the participants. In every interview, women told me how important it was to never give up, to find ways to put their lives back together and move forward in the aftermath of physical, emotional, sexual, financial and verbal abuse. Moving forward gave them hope and kept them from feeling immobilized by the depression that so often accompanies violence and oppression. Women were interested in receiving assistance to protect children and themselves from abuse, to access services

that enabled them to fight for their rights, feed their families, and obtain information and support.

In a study of 50 women who had resided in a women's shelter in the San Francisco Bay Area for at least 21 days, Humphreys (2003) found that women who had experienced abuse reported higher levels of resiliency than the comparison groups (Alzheimer's caregivers, female graduate students, post-partum first time mothers, and public housing residents). The author noted that her findings were consistent with both practice experiences with abused women and the related literature. Humphreys (2003) wrote,

In order to survive abuse and safely find their way to a battered women's shelter, participants in this research had to systematically develop a plan, have confidence, determination, energy, and sheer force of will. They had to get information about community shelters, consider all their options, use their previous experience as a source of inner support, and organize many different and sometimes life-threatening factors. Simultaneously these battered women had to keep the proper perspective on self and life...Overall, these findings reinforce our understanding of the strength, determination, and self-reflection necessary to navigate the process of resistance and recovery from abuse (p. 146).

The study by Humphreys (2003) focused on a population of women in a large urban centre. While the quote above captures the myriad of steps that women must go through in order to escape abuse, it does not account for the additional barriers and challenges that rural women must overcome in order to survive and live free from abuse. To effectively highlight and build upon on the strategies that women use to survive abuse, it is necessary to understand the unique context in which they live.

Another practice recommendation comes from a participant who recalled a past experience with a VAW counsellor in another region, who told her that she needed to talk about her abusive ex-partners. Alice stated, "I just wanted to talk about how I could

change my life to get my kids back...I'm trying to get my life straightened. I'm trying to get my own place, I want to get my kids back." Alice reported that she found the type of help she needed from her current VAW counsellor, who focused on her stated needs and what she wanted to work on. Similarly, Jiwani (1998) reported that for participants in her study, the most valued aspect of women's agencies was that they allowed women to make their own decisions without pressuring them in any way.

While women did talk about the coping strategies they used to manage emotions, depression and anxiety, they repeatedly spoke of the great value of the assistance they received from their rural VAW counsellors in getting back on their feet after experiencing abuse and fighting for their rights. Lundy & van Wormer (2007) explored how viewing violence against women as a human rights matter, as opposed to a relationship issue, allows social workers to more clearly see the structural and political aspects of people's lives, placing them within the realm of international human rights. Through this lens, social workers and VAW counsellors are able to see the need to address the structural injustices in the lives of the women they work with, while also helping them to access the resources that are available to them (*Ibid*). Feedback from participants suggests that practice approaches with rural women who have experienced abuse should be woman-centred, mobile (i.e. offer transportation and accompaniment), and include a knowledge and skill base related to human rights, the court system and other social services. According to the research, those best equipped to provide these services are VAW programs. The accounts of women survivors in this study attest to how the community-based, rural VAW program that serves the eastern study area is an example of a service that effectively meets their needs, despite the state of chronic

underfunding that is experienced by so many non-profit organizations. The Director noted that when transportation funds are low, court support services must be prioritized, meaning that counsellors may not be able to travel to meet with women in their homes until their funding is renewed.

This study in rural Ontario has documented the resiliency of rural women in not only surviving abuse and finding their way to safety—but doing so while facing the additional challenges that are often inherent to living in a rural area. It has captured how important the counselling relationship is to women in times of crisis, and detailed many of the ways that rural VAW counsellors are indispensable for women's survival within a system that does not adequately support and protect the human rights of women and children. Socio-cultural factors that were shown in the literature to be associated with increased rates of woman abuse were borne out by government statistics in the study areas, and signal the need for further funding, services and policy changes to address significant socioeconomic inequities that disproportionately affect women in these regions. The courageous women who took the time to share the practices and services that helped them survive and escape abuse have provided a map for change, if those in power have the courage to follow it.

5.9 Recommendations

The findings of this research support several policy and practice recommendations for the study areas. The recommendations support an increase in government funding that reflects the actual needs of the rural communities; the use of a feminist practice approach when working with women who have experienced violence; an improved justice response; enhanced communication networks and access to

emergency services; a commitment by community members and institutions to oppose woman abuse; and government action to address the structural conditions that are associated with higher rates of violence against women—such as improving access to education, developing employment opportunities and establishing a minimum rate of social assistance. The following recommendations arose from the central themes in the study, or were direct suggestions from the rural women participants.

1. Increase Funding for Rural VAW Programs: There is a need for further recognition of the specialized, knowledgeable and vital roles that rural VAW agencies and counsellors provide, through the provision of adequate funding for these agencies to meet the transportation needs of women and children in their communities who have experienced abuse. A lack of funding for transportation and accompaniment programs that allow rural women access to the justice system, health and children's services, shelters, and counselling only compounds the problems that rural women face when entering the court process and dealing with the effects of trauma. As DeKeseredy & Schwartz (2009) observed in the United States, "advocates are in short supply in rural areas, and those working there suffer from a lack of funding and are required to travel long distances to help their clients" (p. 108).

A commitment to addressing violence against women in rural areas involves recognizing the unique context of these communities and adjusting funding to meet the actual needs of that community, rather than perpetuating urban hegemony when assessing need. This small-scale research study, and other larger studies revealed that isolation is often used by abusers, particularly in rural areas, in ways that make their

violence more effective at controlling women and children (Jiwani, 1998; Websdale, 1998). Therefore, it is imperative that government funding address the contextual factors women are facing in rural areas. The effectiveness of VAW agencies in assisting women, despite funding deficits, reflects their commitment and expertise at addressing violence against women (Hague & Mullender, 2005). Logan et al (2003) concluded that it is essential to acknowledge the different contexts and experiences of rural victims of abuse, noting that

different services are critical for rural areas. In addition to needing adequate shelter services, rural areas critically need outreach workers who can travel to help women and their children, transportation to health care and other service providers for victims, batterer treatment programs, and interventions for children of these families (p. 91).

In their recommendations, DeKeseredy & Schwartz (2009) noted that the barriers rural women face are largely due to inadequate funding for rural services as compared to services in urban areas. They stated, “As Lewis (2003) discovered in her study of sexual assault in the rural United States, rural advocates need more money to hire more advocates and to train them, and they need more money for community outreach” (Ibid, p. 114).

2. Feminist Approach with Augmented Rural Services: The rural women who participated in this study indicated that the most helpful practice approaches were those that were woman-centered, helped them fight for their rights and get back on their feet, provided mobile services (transportation), court support and were knowledgeable about the legal system and other services that are often accessed by women and children who have experienced abuse. Some women reported that their counsellor was experienced enough to help them with complicated legal documents and procedures. Rural VAW

counsellors helped with safety planning, and assisted women in obtaining help from other service providers, such as the Children's Aid Society and women's shelters. Safety planning in a rural context involves taking into consideration longer emergency response times, and requires innovative and community-specific solutions to the problems many rural women experience when it comes to the need for telephone/cell phone communication and transportation to safety.

Like women in other studies, some participants noted how hard it was to imagine leaving their home communities behind to go to a shelter in the city, as this meant leaving behind family and friends—and for one participant, leaving a vulnerable family member whom she was caring for. A participant in the study by Martz & Bryson Sarauer (1999) stated,

This person has already lost the roof over their head and the floor under their feet. You can't take them away from their supports, you know like their friends, their family, their relatives...most people in these small towns have lived here forever and they grew up here and...their families are here, their relatives are here and you can't be hauling them 200 miles away (p. 28).

A safe shelter close to rural communities, so that children don't have to change schools and women are relatively close to their supports and workplaces, is a crucial element in creating communities that support women in living free from abuse (Jiwani, 1998; Martz & Bryson Sarauer, 1999). The eastern study area is also in need of local counselling services for survivors of sexual assault. The rural women participants in the study by DeKeseredy & Schwartz (2009) recommended the creation of more safe places for women to go, and spoke to the importance of women having access to specialized sexual assault counselling services in their communities.

3. Improve the Justice Response: While transportation, combined with specialized knowledge and support are usually essential for rural women when accessing the family and criminal court systems, there remains a critical need for a justice process that reflects the needs of women and children who have experienced abuse, and may be still at risk, without perpetuating the misogyny that they have already experienced within their homes. In particular, some participants noted that it took years for them to receive spousal and child support payments (and some had never received them), and their portion of assets from the relationship, leaving them to struggle financially to support their children. Additionally, decisions regarding the abuser's access to the family home should be made with the safety of the woman and her children in mind.

Participants in the study by DeKeseredy & Schwartz (2009) suggested that aspects of the criminal justice system need to be reformed, such as the creation of stronger laws against stalking, hiring more female police officers and improvements to make the system more efficient. DeKeseredy & Schwartz (2009) pointed out that changes to the criminal justice system alone are insufficient to address the larger societal problems that motivate men to abuse women, and create barriers for women in finding safety. They suggest that the focus of crime prevention must move "out of the realm of criminal justice and into that of social and economic policy (Walker, 1998)" (Ibid, p. 112).

4. Improve Communication Networks and Emergency Response Times: As in many rural regions, there is a need for improved access to emergency medical and police services in these areas. Rural women and children living with violence, and who are in

need of emergency services as a result of abuse or threats, are at greater risk of serious injury or loss of life due to the time it takes to access medical care and police services (Gallup-Black, 2005; Websdale, 1998).

Even access to contacting emergency services is problematic, as a result of the lack of reliable cell phone coverage in these areas and the cost of land lines (Kasdorff & Erb, 2010; McLeman & Gilbert, 2007). Rural VAW agencies in both study areas noted that these conditions make work dangerous for their staff when meeting with women in their rural homes, or when providing transportation to urban centres.

As Marshall & Vaillancourt (1993) stated, “No woman in Canada should be expected to leave her home in search of safety or access to adequate services (p. 72).” Every community in Canada should have timely and affordable access to the help they require in order to protect women and children—services that recognize and accommodate each community’s unique strengths and challenges in dealing with woman abuse (*Ibid*). DeKeseredy & Schwartz (2009) noted that since public transportation in rural communities is not an option, but travel is vital to women for obtaining safety, support services, employment and child care, the government should provide transportation subsidies for rural residents—as they do for people in urban areas where public transportation is available. Additionally, DeKeseredy & Schwartz (2009) emphasized that “more government money should be used to pay the transportation costs of rural advocates who spend much time on the road in their efforts to save lives” (p. 112).

The further exploration of ideas for change at the community level could lead to additional rural strategies and solutions. For example, holding a community meeting to

obtain information from a variety of perspectives may more completely address the unique needs and concerns of the women participants, and effectively problem-solve regarding the challenges associated with the lack of adequate communication and emergency service infrastructure in rural areas.

5. Break the Silence about Abuse: A strong community response opposing violence against women is essential to protecting women and girls. This study has shown the need for a strong commitment by all community members, both men and women, to helping women who are being abused and to develop community sanctions against woman abuse (Heise & Garcia-Moreno, 2002). There is a pressing need for community institutions that work with children to fully integrate teachings about healthy relationships and dating violence into their curriculums and programs, and for further initiatives to increase community awareness of woman abuse (Biesenthal et al., 2000; Wolfe et al., 2009).

The need to educate men and women to recognize abusive behaviour as unacceptable and inhumane was also emphasized by participants in DeKeseredy & Schwartz's (2009) study. They further noted that education must include information about a person's rights, such as "that sex is not an entitlement in a relationship" (Ibid, p. 103). DeKeseredy & Schwartz (2009) discussed the benefits of community members learning conflict resolution and communication skills, and noted that schools are the ideal places to begin this work. They particularly suggested teaching about race, gender and class in the school curriculum in order to increase empathy amongst students, and providing information about how to recognize healthy and unhealthy relationships (Ibid). Additionally, the authors suggested providing community workshops about how to

intervene if a woman is being abused, and how best to support her (Ibid). DeKeseredy & Schwartz (2009) also noted that in addition to creating supportive spaces for women, communities should also provide opportunities for men to engage and organize to eliminate woman abuse. In Ontario, communities may benefit from the public education campaign by the Ontario Government's Domestic Violence Action Plan, called *Neighbours, Friends and Families*. This campaign provides free training, a community action kit, safety cards, brochures, booklets and other resources designed to "raise awareness of the signs of woman abuse so that those close to an at-risk woman or an abusive man can help" (Ontario Government, 2010).

While the school curriculum and community workshops are important avenues to creating safer communities for women and children, the participants in the study by DeKeseredy & Schwartz (2009) also noted that it is vital to inform rural women who are experiencing violence where they can go for help. To accomplish this, they suggested that information about services and other educational materials, such as pamphlets that list the warning signs for abuse, be left in places where women are most likely to go, such as doctor's offices, hospitals and welfare departments (Ibid). In small communities where anonymity is not possible, leaving information in places such as these, where women are more likely to have a greater degree of privacy, may be more effective. Additionally, advertising in free, local newspapers that are delivered weekly to rural residents is another potential way to reach rural women.

6. Protect the Human Rights of Girls and Women: A symptom of structural inequality and a human rights violation, woman abuse results from oppression, and lack of

education and employment opportunities, and as such, it is imperative that governments take action to help women and girls who are living in poverty (DeKeseredy & MacLeod, 1997; Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2005; Johnson et al., 2008).

While the feminization of poverty is evident in the lives of women and children from any geographical region, the socioeconomic risk factors for increased rates of woman abuse in the study areas is a cause for concern. They indicate the need for structural change to provide more education and employment opportunities, higher social assistance rates, and safe housing options to help women and children who are living in poverty escape abuse.

The fact that violence against women varies in frequency and severity from “country to country, and, even more important, from setting to setting within countries, indicate[s] that there is nothing ‘natural’ or inevitable about it” (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005, p. 22). From urban, to rural, to remote communities, and everywhere in between, there are variations in woman abuse that illustrate how structural inequities and socioeconomic status are linked with higher rates of violence against women. While women from all backgrounds are affected by violence, factors such as racism and ableism dramatically increase women’s vulnerability to abuse. Despite the fact that most societies maintain a patriarchal structure, many men do not engage in gender-based violence, and some have actively worked to eliminate violence against women (Johnson et al., 2008). Men working to end gender-based violence “argue that every man is responsible for helping to make women’s lives safer, and if men are not part of the solution, they are contributing to the problem” (DeKeseredy & MacLeod, 1997, p. 173). Evidence of variations in violence against women throughout the world, and the

presence of non-violent men in our communities suggests that woman abuse is not inevitable, and that action can be taken to avert it (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005; Johnson et al., 2008).

Ending violence against women requires women to have equal rights, and for governments to be willing to change social structures so that they no longer accommodate and promote the violation of women's human rights (Johnson et al., 2008). Under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Canadians have the right to "security of person" (Article 3), to not be "subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" (Article 5) and to be treated equally before the law, "without any discrimination to equal protection from the law" (Article 7) (1948). Canada ratified the United Nations treaty, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), in 1981, and under this treaty, Canada has particular obligations toward rural women, in particular (United Nations, 1981). Article 14 of the treaty states, "Parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy." Further, the document advises that governments must take "all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development" (Ibid). Under this treaty, rural women have the right to have access to adequate health care facilities...to benefit directly from social security programs...to obtain all types of training and education, formal and non-formal...to participate in all community activities...to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self employment...to participate in all community activities... [and] to enjoy adequate living

conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications (*Ibid*).

The literature and the words of the women who participated in this study identify areas where the Canadian government must work to ensure that the human rights of rural women are protected. To date, Canada has still not fulfilled its human rights obligations to establish a minimum standard for social assistance for women and girls living in poverty. Last year, the United Nations

found that the Government of Canada had failed to comply with its human rights commitments under CEDAW and identified two areas in which human rights violations were so pressing that they required immediate action (Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action, 2010, p. 4).

The two areas that the Canadian government failed to take action on were the provision of adequate social assistance rates for women and girls, and addressing the “endemic violence against Aboriginal women and girls” (*Ibid*, p. 4). The committee recognized that poverty is related to women’s equality because of gender-based violence.

Protecting the rights of women and girls also means ensuring that services for survivors and those who perpetrate violence are accessible for all citizens, wherever they may live, and that these services receive adequate funding to do their work. Johnson et al (2008) stated,

the cost of inaction is greater both in economic terms and in terms of human suffering and lost potential...The benefits of reducing violence against women will become apparent over time as the human costs to women and their families, as well as the financial costs of health care and social and criminal justice services are reduced (p. 182).

Similarly, Garcia-Moreno et al (2005) discussed the importance of women knowing what their rights are, improving their access to education and employment opportunities, and ensuring that their legal rights are upheld in family court, regarding the division of assets

and decisions about child custody. They stated, “Improving women’s legal and socioeconomic status is likely to be, in the long term, a key intervention in reducing women’s vulnerability to violence” (*Ibid*, p. 22). Improved access to education and addressing oppressive labour environments for both men and women are essential for reducing violence against women.

5.9.1 Recommendations for further research

Of the six participants in the study, three reported that they were survivors of assaults experienced while they were young women (or they were under the age of 24 at the time of the interview). Thurston et al (2006) concluded that “further research in the area of rural youth violence is well warranted,” and that qualitative, gender-based research is required to better understand the context in which young rural women experience physical and sexual assault (p. 265).

While research is available on violence against women in a rural context, it is limited. There is far less research about the experiences of women living in remote and fly-in areas of Canada. Much work needs to be done to document and understand the unique challenges and barriers that these women encounter when confronted with abuse and violence in their homes and communities, and to discover what practices and services help them survive and live free from abuse.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

Like many rural communities, the study areas were affected by inequities related to isolation, access to education and medical care, unemployment, and the economy; in other words, there were socio-cultural factors that are believed to increase women's vulnerability to intimate partner violence. Given that rural areas were found to have higher rates of violent crimes committed by family members, and that women have higher overall rates of victimization, there was (and remains) a need to look more closely at the issue of rural woman abuse—to understand the different needs that rural communities have when dealing with violence against women.

As we now live in a time marked by “a sharp decrease in institutional and political support...for the promotion and protection of the human rights of women and girls,” both within Canada and internationally, it becomes even more important to advocate for the rights of girls and women who are also marginalized and to recognize the impact of “place” on the lives of women and their families (Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action and Labour Congress, 2010, p. 1). Research that documents the survival strategies and lived experiences of rural women who have experienced abuse is one way to address the invisibility of rural women in research and policy.

Researchers Weis & Fine (2004) offer a hopeful message, indicating how research can make a difference:

As the global economy is realigned and social relations are simultaneously reconfigured, our twin passions—mapping and thereby challenging existing oppression and chronicling and moving with the ways in which ordinary people work to contest such oppression—become paramount. It is our belief that though

injustice abounds, regular people...can do our part to chip away at the edifices of power (p. 154).

Regular people, mostly rural women themselves, have been addressing the problem of violence against women in the northern regions of Lennox & Addington, Frontenac and Hastings Counties for many years. The feminist, community-based, rural initiatives for women in these counties are a testament to the commitment, courage and passion that prevails in rural areas despite the forces of oppression and invisibility that abound. The narratives of the women who participated in this study contain elements of the human rights violations that girls and women experience around the globe, and signal the urgent need for structural change to reduce, and ultimately, prevent violence against women.

Many of the participants had experienced a depth of loss that most of us can only imagine, yet there was incredible resilience exhibited in their stories and actions. When it came to the pain of losing children (through death, or apprehension by the Children's Aid Society), or the discovery that despite the many efforts they had made to protect their children from abuse, their abuser had also abused the kids, it was obvious that their pain was still very close to the surface, even though many years had passed. In the face of significant loss and trauma, and a legal system that often fails to protect women and children, the participants in this study were all moving forward with their lives, with a strong desire to use their knowledge to help other women and children. The women, and the VAW counsellors who support them, were an inspiration to me, and I believe they are emblematic of the wisdom and resilience of rural women when dealing with abuse—they spoke of the need to move forward and not be taken over by depression, to never give up, to stay strong so they could care for their kids, protect those that need

protecting, and do whatever it takes to get free, even if that means travelling many miles to find safety. The participants not only had insightful and valuable information for others, they had followed their own advice by never giving up and fighting for their rights.

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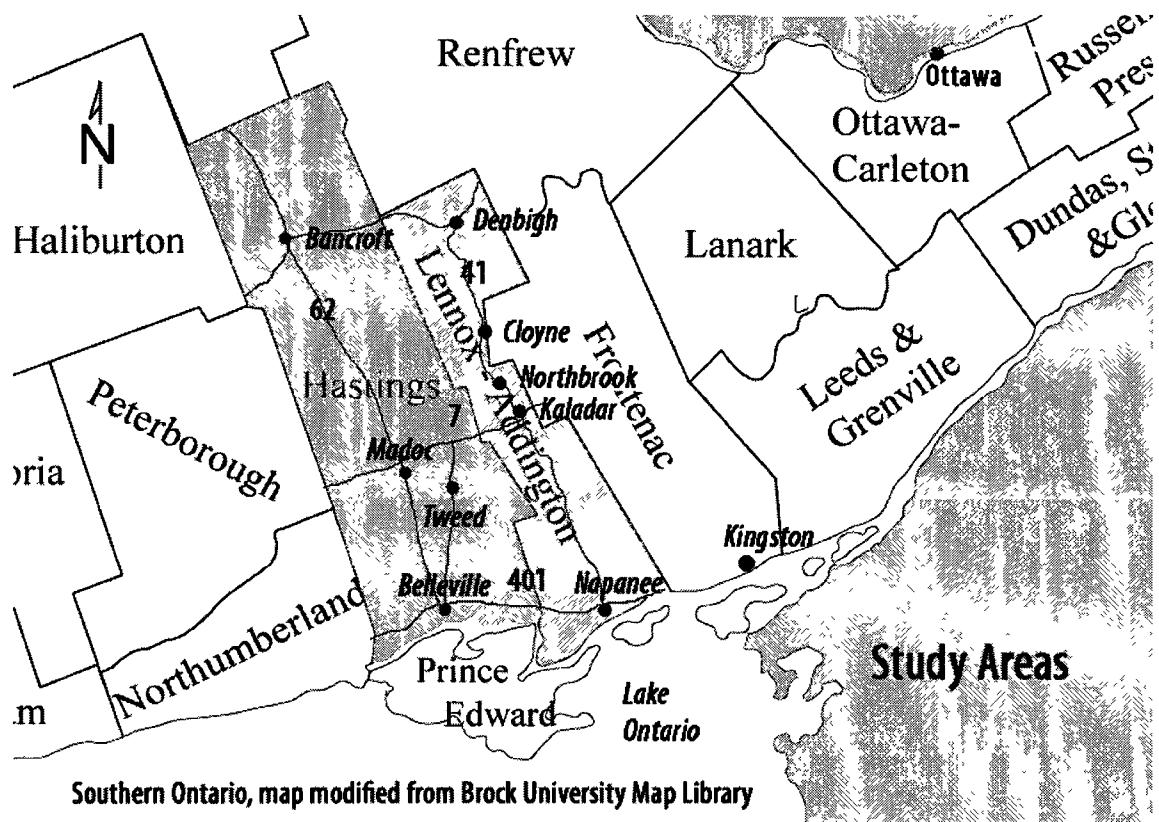
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Appendices

Appendix A: Map of Study Areas



Modified from: St. Catharines [Southern Ontario]. (n.d.) St. Catharines, Ontario: Brock University Map Library. Available: Brock University Map Library Controlled Access. Retrieved from <http://www.brocku.ca/maplibrary/maps/outline/Ontario/sont.pdf>. (Permission to use and modify)

Appendix B: Interview Guide

1. As you know, I've been talking with women in rural communities about their experiences of abuse. I want to hear your story, how you survived and what enabled you to find safety. Maybe you'd like to start by telling me what sort of abuse you experienced.
 - a. How long did the abuse last?
 - b. Were any weapons used?
 - c. Did you ever use the police? If yes:
 - i. How long did it take for them to get there?
 - d. Were you aware of what might have been going on with your partner before abusive incidents would happen?
 - e. When did you first realize that what was happening to you was abusive?
 - f. How did you decide to make changes in your life and the relationship?
 - i. Are there particular moments or events that stand out in your mind?
 - g. How did you do to cope with your situation?
 - h. How were you supported at this time?
 - i. Women often develop strategies to keep themselves safe—was there anything that you did that moved you closer to finding safety?
2. Where are you today? Can you describe what your life is like?
3. Did you know of services and supports that were available for women in your situation?
4. Women often access women's shelters and the legal system when they're dealing with abuse.
 - a. Did you get in touch with any of these services?
5. What kinds of services did you have access to?
 - a. What were your needs?
 - b. What did you use for travel?
6. What services worked best for you?
7. Were there any services that you found weren't helpful? If yes:
 - a. In what ways did the service not meet your needs?
8. Were there any services that were missing from your community? If yes:
 - a. What were they, and how might they have been able to help?
9. What are the particular challenges for women dealing with these kinds of issues in rural areas?
10. How did you manage to make all of these changes, given the barriers you faced?
11. If you were going to talk to a woman who was experiencing some of the same things you went through, what would you want to say to her?
12. Is there anything we haven't discussed that should be raised?

Appendix C: Questions for Service Provider Survey (antiviolence workers)

1. What type of services does your program provide?
2. What is your catchment area?
3. How long have you been working in the field of violence against women?
4. Is there a way that you connect with other workers who also assist rural women? Please explain.
5. How far would you have to travel in a typical month to assist women in rural areas?
6. What are your funding sources?
7. Please comment on how the level of funding impacts your service for women. If it has decreased, what impact has this had?
8. How does funding affect the rural women you work with?
9. In your view, are there barriers for women who are dealing with abuse in intimate relationships in rural areas? If yes, please explain.
10. Are there survival strategies specific to rural women who are dealing with abuse? If yes, what are they?
11. Can you identify any factors that are specific to a rural community when dealing with abuse? If yes, please explain.
12. Are any changes needed in order to best prevent and respond to woman abuse in your community? If yes, what are they?
13. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Text for “Thank you page”:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!

I appreciate you sharing your knowledge and experience in assisting rural women with me, and for participating in this research project.

Sincerely,
Kate Hanton

Appendix D: Letter to Directors of Violence Against Women Agencies



School of Social Work
 1125 Colonel By Drive
 Ottawa, ON Canada K1S 5B6
 Tel: (613) 520-5601
 Fax: (613) 520-7496

[Date & Address of Recipient]

Dear [This letter was sent to Directors of four VAW agencies]

Re: Rural Stories Research Project

I'm writing to request your support in a local research project that will assess the needs of rural women who have experienced violence in intimate relationships, in Addington Highlands and North Hastings. As an agency that provides services within or near these areas, I would greatly appreciate you passing on this email—or the link to the survey for rural service providers—to your staff members who may work with women in North & Centre Hastings, North & Centre Lennox & Addington, and North Frontenac Counties.

The survey may be accessed at: [link]. It will be available online, through Survey Monkey, until July 10, 2010. No names are required to complete the survey and no identifying information will be used in research documentation.

I will also be meeting with women from the two areas for interviews regarding their experiences of woman abuse in a rural context—exploring what helped them survive, what barriers they may have encountered and their ideas for change. To participate in an interview, women must be 18 years of age or older, and have lived free from violence for at least one year (participants will receive \$20.00 in appreciation for their contribution). If you know of women who meet the project's criteria, and might be interested in scheduling an interview in [Addington Highlands or North Hastings], please feel free to give them a copy of the attached flyer with my contact information. Confidentiality will be respected and no names or identifying information will be used in the research documentation.

I'm a student at Carleton University's Master of Social Work Program, and both the results from the survey and interviews will form part of my thesis.

Your help with this research is greatly appreciated and I welcome any questions you may have about this research, the survey or the interviews. I may be contacted at [project's email address], or through confidential voicemail at Carleton University, 613-520-2600, [extension]. Dr. Colleen Lundy, Thesis Supervisor at the Carleton School of Social Work, may be reached at 613-520-2600, extension 4399.

Sincerely,

Kate Hanton

Appendix E: Letter of Information to Other Agencies



School of Social Work
 1125 Colonel By Drive
 Ottawa, ON Canada K1S 5B6
 Tel. (613) 520-5601
 Fax: (613) 520-7496

[Date and Address of Recipient]

Dear [This letter was sent to Directors of three community agencies]

Re: Rural Stories Research Project

I'm writing to request your support in a local research project that will assess the needs of rural women who have experienced violence in intimate relationships, in Addington Highlands and North Hastings. As an agency that provides services within or near these areas, I would greatly appreciate you passing on this email to your staff members who work in the areas, along with the attached flyer, which provides contact information.

I will be meeting with women in [Addington Highlands or North Hastings], regarding their experiences of woman abuse in a rural context—exploring what helped them survive, what barriers they may have encountered and their ideas for change. To participate in an interview, women must be 18 years of age or older, and have lived free from violence for at least one year (participants will receive \$20.00 in appreciation for their contribution). If you know of women who meet the project's criteria, and might be interested in scheduling an interview in [Addington Highlands or North Hastings], please feel free to give them a copy of the attached flyer with my contact information, or contact me to make a referral. Confidentiality will be respected and no names or identifying information will be used in the research documentation.

I'm a student at Carleton University's Master of Social Work Program, and both the results from the survey and interviews will form part of my thesis.

Your help with this research is greatly appreciated and I welcome any questions you may have about this research, the survey or the interviews. I may be contacted at [project's email] or through confidential voicemail at Carleton University, 613-520-2600, [extension]. Dr. Colleen Lundy, Thesis Supervisor, may be reached at 613-520-2600, extension 4399.

Sincerely,

Kate Hanton

Appendix F: Poster

Are you a woman who has experienced abuse within an intimate relationship?



- Are you 18 years of age or older?
 - Have you lived free from abuse for at least 1 year?
 - Were you living in Addington Highlands or North Hastings when this occurred?

What's involved?: 1 – 2 hour interview about your experiences – how you achieved safety in your life, what helped you & what you think could be helpful to other women.

What's in it for you?: \$20.00 in appreciation of your contribution.

How do I find out more?: Email [project's email address] or call the researcher's voicemail at Carleton University - 1-613-520-2600, [ext.], & leave her a message with your name & phone #. You may also leave your name & phone # at [location] in North Hastings.

Your confidentiality will be respected

Appendix G: (Reminder) Letter to Directors of Violence Against Women Agencies

School of Social Work
1125 Colonel By Drive
Ottawa, ON Canada K1S 5B6
Tel. (613) 520-5601
Fax: (613) 520-7496

[Date & Address of Recipient]

Dear [This letter was sent to the Directors of four VAW agencies]

Re: Rural Stories Research Project

This is just a reminder that the survey for rural violence against women service providers will be closing soon—on July 10, 2010. If you haven't already, please let your rural workers in North & Centre Hastings, North & Centre Lennox & Addington, and North Frontenac Counties know about the survey link!

The survey may be accessed at [link]. No names are required to complete the survey and no identifying information will be used in research documentation.

Your help with this project is greatly appreciated! Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about the research or the survey. I may be reached at [project's email address], or through confidential voicemail at Carleton University, 613-520-2600, [extension]. Dr. Colleen Lundy, Thesis Supervisor at the Carleton School of Social Work, may be reached at 613-520-2600, extension 4399.

Sincerely,

Kate Hanton

Appendix H: Face Sheet

(All identifying information will be kept confidential)

Date of Interview: _____

Name: _____

Pseudonym: _____

Phone No.: _____

Age: _____

Location:

Lennox and Addington: _____ North Frontenac:_____

Hastings:_____

No. of Years Lived in Rural Area: _____

Level of Education: _____

Occupation: _____

Income: Under \$10,000 \$10-20,000 \$20-30,000 \$30-40,000 \$40-60,000
 Over \$60,000

Marital Status: _____

Ages of Children (if applicable): _____

Approximate Date of Last Abuse: _____

Appendix I: Letter of Information and Consent Form for Women Survivors



School of Social Work
 1125 Colonel By Drive
 Ottawa, ON Canada K1S 5B6
 Tel: (613) 520-5601
 Fax: (613) 520-7496

Letter of Consent

I, _____, agree to participate in the research study being conducted by Kate Hanton. I have been informed that she is currently in the Masters of Social Work Program at Carleton University and that this study will take the form of her thesis. Further, I am aware that my role will be to provide information on my personal experiences, knowledge, ideas for change and guidance for other women regarding woman abuse in rural areas.

I understand the following:

- My participation in this study is entirely voluntary and I may withdraw at any time. If I wish to completely withdraw from the study, and have my information removed, I must indicate my intent to do so by August 1, 2010 (see contact details below).
- The interview will involve one interview that will last approximately one to two hours. I am not required to answer all of the questions in order to participate.
- The interview will be audio recorded with my permission; however, I may ask that the recorder be turned off at any time.
- We will meet at [location], in North Hastings, or [location], in Addington Highlands, at a mutually convenient date and time.
- The contents of this study may be disseminated or published; however, under no circumstances will my name or identifying characteristics be included in documentation. Following transcription, audio files will be destroyed after the information has been used in the study for which it was intended.
- Upon completion of the interview, I will receive \$20.00 and a \$5.00 gift certificate.
- A report on the findings of the research will be made available through [location] in North Hastings and [location] in Addington Highlands after the study is completed.

Risks and Benefits:

Participating in a study which involves talking about personal experiences can sometimes result in feelings of worry or upset, and concerns about privacy.

If at any time you have questions or concerns about your participation in the study, please feel free to discuss them with me. I can also provide information about supports and services within the community that are here to help you.

The experience and knowledge that you share in this study about how you survived abuse may be helpful to women in similar situations. Your experience and insight is also valuable to community members who want to improve services for women experiencing abuse.

Confidentiality:

I will keep all identifying information confidential throughout the research process and in the study's documentation (this involves the use of a pseudonym and not using identifying details). The only exception is that I am required by law to identify you to the appropriate authorities (Children's Aid Society, police, crisis worker or doctor) if at any time you tell me that

- a child is being abused (this includes witnessing violence), or
- you intend to attempt suicide or endanger the life of someone else.

Contact Information:

You may contact me at 613-520-2600, [extension], [project's email address], or Dr. Colleen Lundy, Thesis Supervisor at the Carleton School of Social work, 613-520-2600, extension 4399, if you have any questions about the research study itself.

This project was reviewed and received clearance by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board. Questions or concerns about your involvement in this study may also be directed to Prof. Antonio Gualtieri, Chair, Carleton University Ethics Board, Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Drive, Ottawa, ON, K1S 5B6, 613-520-2517 (email: ethics@carleton.ca).

I have read the above letter and understand that I am participating in a research project and I voluntarily agree to participate.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Student Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix J: Consent Form for Service Provider Online Survey

Participant Consent

Your participation in the Rural Stories Research Project requires that you read the privacy and consent information below. Kate Hanton is currently enrolled in the Masters of Social Work Program at Carleton University and the survey results will form part of her thesis. This part of the project aims to identify barriers and gaps in services regarding woman abuse in rural areas.

- It is estimated that the survey will take approximately 15 - 20 minutes to complete. Participants will remain anonymous throughout the research project.
- Participation in this study is voluntary. Informed Consent will be assumed to be given upon completion and submission of this survey. Note that you are free to discontinue participation and exit the survey at any time without prejudice, or that you may choose to answer only some questions.
- The contents of this research project may be disseminated or published. Although this is an anonymous survey, if identifying information does appear in responses, they will not be included in the documentation.
- It should be noted that the company that hosts this on-line survey (Survey Monkey) is located in the United States and is therefore subject to US laws including the Patriot Act. The Patriot Act gives the US Government greater access to electronic information including the data stored on this site.
- Feel free to contact Kate Hanton at 613-520-2600, extension 4174 [project's email address], or Dr. Colleen Lundy, Thesis Supervisor, at the Carleton School of Social work, 613-520-2600, extension 4399, if you have any questions about the research study itself.

Yes, I have read and understand the information above. I consent to participate in this survey and wish to proceed.

[Note: "yes" must be checked, or the survey will not progress]