

fact sheet #4.

# WHAT ARE THE ISSUES FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES?

Even finding them is hard...the gate's padlocked. You park the car, you jump the fence and you walk and hope ... you pass the bulls in the paddock and hope they are not wild and then you come up to the dogs and then you have got to get over another fence to get into the house and then you get greeted with a guy standing there with a gun...

## A rural nurse's description of visiting an isolated property where violence was occurring

Most national data on violence against women does not provide information for specific geographical areas. This makes it difficult to get an accurate picture of violence against women in rural and regional areas. However, evidence suggests that rates of sexual assault and domestic and family violence are just as high as in other areas of Australia<sup>1</sup>.

Some groups of women within rural and remote communities experience particularly high rates of domestic and family violence, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women<sup>2</sup>.

Australia's rural and regional communities are very diverse, yet they often face similar challenges when it comes to addressing and reducing violence against women. Specific issues for rural communities include:

## ISOLATION

Women might have to travel long distances to seek support from friends, family and services. This can be even more difficult in areas without regular public transport.

## LACK OF SERVICES

Some areas do not have specialist domestic and family violence support services, such as counselling and supported crisis accommodation. This means women may have to leave their community to get the help and support they need.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Living in a small community where everyone knows each other can make it difficult to report violence. Especially if the perpetrator is a respected member of the community.

## COMMUNITY ATTITUDES

Sometimes, rural communities can have certain attitudes and beliefs about the roles of men, women and children in society and how they should behave – these can stop women getting help. Sometimes, people might think domestic violence only includes physical violence.

Workers and community leaders in rural and regional areas also face barriers to implementing primary prevention initiatives. These include:

## ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND INFORMATION

Primary violence prevention can be a difficult concept to understand and implement effectively. Workers in rural and regional areas often lack access to the information and skills they need to assist them in preventing violence.

## HIGH DEMAND FOR SERVICES

Domestic and family violence services in rural and regional areas are often very full or busy. When there are so many women seeking help after experiencing violence, workers often don't have time to focus on violence prevention.

## LIMITED FUNDING

Finding funding to implement primary prevention initiatives in smaller communities can be difficult, as it is not always seen as a priority. When lots of organisations and groups are competing for limited funding, it can make it harder to work together.

## SPREAD-OUT COMMUNITIES

Organisations in rural and regional areas often deliver services over a large geographical area, travelling long distances to reach isolated areas. This can make it difficult to get people to participate and engage in violence prevention initiatives.

## 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732)

A free 24 hour national domestic and family violence and sexual assault counselling service for people who have experienced violence, and for workers supporting them.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Criminology, 2003

<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2006



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Which of the issues above apply to your local community? Are there any others that haven't been mentioned?
- 2 How might some of the beliefs and values that are common to rural communities influence violence against women?
- 3 What can rural communities do to overcome some of the challenges to preventing violence against women before it happens?
- 4 Who are the influential people and key decision makers that need to be engaged in your violence prevention work?

## RECOMMENDED READING



**Title** Responding to Sexual Assault in Rural Communities (2004)  
**Author** Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault  
**Link** [www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/pubs/briefing/b3.html](http://www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/pubs/briefing/b3.html)



**Title** Ending Family Violence & Abuse in Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Communities (2006)  
**Author** The Australian Human Rights Commission  
**Link** [www.humanrights.gov.au/social\\_justice/familyviolence](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/social_justice/familyviolence)



**Title** Domestic Violence in Rural Australia (ISBN 9781862877511)  
**Author** Sarah Wendt  
**Link** Purchase through [www.federationpress.com.au](http://www.federationpress.com.au) or ask for it at your local library



**Title** Domestic Violence in Regional Australia: A Literature Review (2000)  
**Author** WESNET  
**Link** [www.wesnet.org.au/documents/literature-reviews](http://www.wesnet.org.au/documents/literature-reviews)

## NOTES

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This is 4 in a series of 15 fact sheets to help communities stop violence against women before it happens. Download the full set at [www.nrwn.org.au](http://www.nrwn.org.au)