

# RESPONDING TO INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: EXPERIENCES OF SERVICE PROVIDERS IN RURAL AND NORTHERN COMMUNITIES

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# OUTLINE

- **Background.**
- **Methods.**
- **Results.**
  - **Rural Focus Group.**
  - **Northern Focus Group.**
- **Concluding Comments.**
- **Questions?**



**BACKGROUND**

# BACKGROUND

- Intimate partner violence (IPV) is one of the most pervasive forms of gender-based violence.
- Average rate of IPV in Canada is 341 per 100,000.
  - Rate of IPV in Saskatchewan is 765 per 100,000.
- Important to remember:
  - 78% of instances of IPV are not reported to police.



# BACKGROUND

- Unfortunately, few studies have examined the experiences of women living in rural and northern communities across Canada.
- Studies that exist suggest women in rural and northern communities experience higher rates of IPV:
  - Subjected to more severe physical violence.
  - Higher rates of psychological abuse.
  - Increased risk of intimate partner homicide.



# BACKGROUND

- **Substantial barriers to accessing resources and services within rural and northern communities.**
  - Distance to service providers.
  - Lack of transportation.
  - Financial restraints.
  - Limits to confidentiality:
    - Lack of anonymity when accessing services.
    - Community dynamics.



# BACKGROUND

- Due to difficulties conducting research in remote communities, there are few studies describing the unique needs of women living in rural and northern centres.
- Research needs to examine rural and northern context within Canada.
  - Examine the experiences of service providers.
  - Develop a true understanding of the obstacles faced by women attempting to access IPV resources.



# METHOD



# METHOD

## ■ Current study:

- Examined needs of women experiencing IPV in rural and northern communities.
- Unique challenges community service providers face.

## ■ Data collection:

- Two focus groups conducted.
- Active and organic engagement among participants.

- “What do you see as the needs of women coming through your services in regard to IPV?”



# METHOD

- **Focus group:**
  - Knowledge exchange.
  - Stimulate creativity of thought.
- **Experiences of service providers.**
  - Allows for a comprehensive understanding.
  - Further inform quantitative and qualitative research.



# METHOD

- **Qualitative Analysis.**
  - **Narrative Inquiry:**
    - **Knowledge as experience.**
    - **Wisdom of group guides discussion.**
    - **Allows readers to gather their own response.**



**IMPORTANT TO  
REMEMBER**

# IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER

- Findings from the focus group were not verified as accurate or valid; however, the statements provided are thought to be an accurate reflection due to professional knowledge and experience.
- We also acknowledge that service providers in rural and northern regions are often providing the best service possible while faced with increasing demands and limited resources.



# RESULTS FROM RURAL FOCUS GROUP

# RURAL FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

- **Seven participants:**
  - RCMP, Caucasian Male – 1.5 years.
  - RCMP, Caucasian Female – 3.5 years.
  - Social Worker, Caucasian Female.
  - Victim Services, Caucasian Female.
  - Shelter Worker, Caucasian Female.
  - Shelter Worker, Caucasian Female.
  - Shelter Worker, Aboriginal Female.



# CHALLENGES



# RURAL FOCUS GROUP

- **Lack of transportation.**
  - **Shelter Worker:** “And another thing that we see at the shelter is transportation. We get so many people who are so isolated out in rural areas, so how can they access services. It’s always an issue.”
  - **RCMP:** “Transportation is huge for us as well, like huge. We rely on victim services who aren’t able to transport, it’s not in their list of things their supposed to be.”

# RURAL FOCUS GROUP

- **Driver's Licence.**

- **Shelter Worker:** "... Most of our residents do not have a licence. So I mean, that is their barrier right there because they have no driver's licence. So, they are completely isolated when they are on reserves or wherever they're coming from because they don't drive."

# RURAL FOCUS GROUP

- Lack of shelters/second-stage housing.
  - **Family Violence Counsellor:** “We don’t have second stage housing in [rural community]... I was involved with a shelter in northern Manitoba, but we don’t in Saskatchewan.”
  - **Shelter Coordinator:** “Like right now, housing is low income but they’re always full. So, I mean when women do come to the shelter, they do get put on top of the priority list for [rural area] housing. So, if something comes up, well they have an opportunity, they may get it. But, there’s just not enough housing to go around, so I mean it really is defeating for the women.”

# RURAL FOCUS GROUP

- Having to leave community.
  - **Shelter Worker:** “And that’s one of the reasons some of the women, after being apart for two or three months, end up going back. They don’t know anyone other than agency individuals. You know, there isn’t anyone close...”
  - **Victim Services Worker:** “It’s a very lonely life after you have taken that step.”

# RURAL FOCUS GROUP

## ■ Financial Issues.

- **Social Worker:** “Like it’s crazy, ya. Saskatchewan is booming for who? I mean, it just drove the prices of everything up. And I mean, social services, they only allot so much for housing. So, it really is difficult for these women to be able to, to be independent on their own they have so many things against them. Like just the housing issue itself.”

# RURAL FOCUS GROUP

- Lack of communication devices.
  - **Shelter Worker:** “So, they’re still left in the dangerous situations because of no transportation. And many many times no way of communicating. Like a lot of women that come off the reserves too, they might have a cell phone but you can only text them. So, they’re going to the health clinic or wherever to use the phone.”
  - **RCMP:** “And then we would run into the issue of communication as well. Like the cell phones, I know 90% of our clientele have the cell phones that won’t accept calls, you can only text.”

# RURAL FOCUS GROUP

- Court system.

- **RCMP:** “Well, just they throw them in with every other case... There’s no privacy, no follow up, there’s no... They just throw them in with the drunk drivers and the people who shoplift or this and that. I think that’s, the focus should be a separate court for domestic violence cases, for privacy, for follow-up.”

# RURAL FOCUS GROUP

- Availability of services.

- **Shelter Coordinator:** “So it needs to branch out. That’s where the issue lies. We need more branching out in the rural communities to get them the help they need through mental health, or whatever. Domestic violence, all those services.”
- **Violence Counsellor:** “I’m the only one with a population of about 22,000. I’m the only one. My caseload has been up to 92. I keep asking the government, I need help here, get somebody part-time to help me...and what they pay me to be a counsellor is, that’s another thing. The wage is just terrible. I’m not even at \$40,000. It’s a crying shame.”



# RURAL FOCUS GROUP

- **Generational violence/normalization of violence**
  - **Social Worker:** “And it starts very very young. A student was talking about how she already smacks around her boyfriend so that he knows he can’t control her. So she said, “I give him black eyes sometimes” and because she felt that was the only way to...he hadn’t even done anything yet she said.”
  - **Shelter Worker:** “So if our little kids I mean... staff have to intervene because they may be slapping mom. Because, obviously they’ve seen that somewhere else, they’ve seen dad do that...so they think it’s normal to do that.”

**SUGGESTIONS**

# RURAL FOCUS GROUP

- Education within the community.
  - **Shelter Worker:** “Change needs to happen. Change especially at the younger generations, typically dealing with kids at school to learn about healthy and unhealthy relationships. I think the earlier we plant the seed... you know we give lots of presentations to the parents but there is also children.”
- Increasing confidentiality for community events.
  - **RCMP:** “How do they go to a domestic violence seminar without their husband being like, “oh, where are you going today”... Like how do we, do we call it cooking and hope the right people show up?”

# RURAL FOCUS GROUP

- Increase safety for IPV survivors.
  - **Victim Services Worker:** “They have [second stage housing] in the Kentucky university. The bottom floor is offices, the second floor is the shelter and crisis counselling, and the third floor is the second stage housing. And then from there then they go to their own apartments.”
- Importance of providing and establishing more support.
  - **Shelter Worker:** “...Bringing together a lot of the ex-residents and their children...so we’re trying to build more support for each other.”

# RURAL FOCUS GROUP

## ■ Networking.

- **RCMP:** “I think our partnerships are working fairly well. We know what resources are available to us. So from our standpoint, like if I have someone who comes in and is in need of help. I know what resources and supports I can reach out to and kind of direct her in different ways.”
- **Family Violence Counsellor:** “I guess I would say the networking is very good. We met once every three months. That’s police that sit on there, and us, and you know, the partnership is, is excellent. They really know what is going on in this area and we pass around information and stuff like that.”

**RESULTS FROM  
NORTHERN FOCUS  
GROUP**

# RECENTLY PUBLISHED!

- Please refer to this paper:

- Wuerch, M. A., Zorn, K. G, Juschka, D., & Hampton, M. R. (in press). Responding to intimate partner violence: Challenges faced among service providers in northern communities. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.



# CONCLUDING COMMENTS



# LIMITATIONS

- **Statements not verified as accurate or valid.**
- **Results may not be generalizable to other rural and northern regions.**
- **Possible fear of disclosing information.**



# CONCLUDING COMMENTS

- **There are many challenges faced in rural and northern communities with regard to accessing IPV services:**
  - Lack of shelters; lack of transportation; financial issues; availability of services; lack of communication devices; having to leave family; normalization of violence.
- **Some suggestions moving forward:**
  - Increasing education within communities, especially for children.
  - Finding creative ways to increase anonymity and confidentiality within geographically diverse regions.
  - Need to focus on providing more support for women who are fleeing violence.
- **Interdisciplinary collaboration needs to continue in order to create safer communities that are free of violence.**

# CONCLUDING COMMENTS

- **Dissemination.**
- **Discussions with community service agencies:**
  - **Unique challenges of geographical diverse areas.**
  - **Inform development and implementation.**



# QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?

Please contact me at  
[wuerch2m@uregina.ca](mailto:wuerch2m@uregina.ca)

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