



# The Ontario Rural Woman Abuse Study (ORWAS): Final Report



RESEARCH REPORT  
THE ONTARIO RURAL  
WOMAN ABUSE STUDY (*ORWAS*)  
FINAL REPORT

rr2000-15e

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**COMMUNITY ABUSE PROGRAM OF RURAL ONTARIO**



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The views expressed herein are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice Canada.



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## **FINAL REPORT**

**I was tired of trying**

**OR WAS until . . .**

**I was sure no one heard my cries,**

**OR WAS until . . .**

**I was beginning to think I was all alone**

**OR WAS until . . .**

**I was feeling bad about talking to people,**

**OR WAS until . . .**

**I was thinking I had no value,**

**OR WAS until . . .**

## **ONTARIO RURAL WOMAN ABUSE STUDY**

**(ORWAS)**

**Prose by Donna Mann**

**(ORWAS -- Grey-Bruce Community Researcher)**



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Women living with violence and abuse -- in urban or rural<sup>1</sup> areas -- often experience and internalise violence and its effects in similar ways. There are differences, however, in the external circumstances of women living in rural areas (and small towns) which can affect their ability to find safety. Historically, responses to the issue of woman abuse have been based primarily on the experiences of urban residents.

In the first federal government *Family Violence Initiative* (1990-1994), a commitment was made to Treasury Board by the Department of Justice Canada to undertake research in the area of domestic violence in rural areas. In 1996, a literature review identified the dearth of materials written about rural women and familial violence (Brookbank, 1996). When the second phase of the *Initiative* was renewed in 1996, the Research and Statistics Division of the Department of Justice Canada made a further commitment to undertake a more detailed research project. In 1997, the literature review was updated and a project backgrounder was prepared which identified research gaps, questions, directions and the need for further in-depth research in this area (Biesenthal and Sproule, 1998). With departmental family violence funding, support from the Senior Advisor of Gender Equality, and some interdepartmental financial support from Health Canada, a more in-depth study was developed on rural women and their experience with family violence. The result was *ORWAS*.

*ORWAS* is a joint initiative of CAPRO (Community Abuse Program of Rural Ontario), a community-based, provincially funded project of the Ontario Farm Women's Network and the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario, and the Department of Justice Canada. *ORWAS* was initiated in the late fall of 1997. The purpose of the project was twofold: First, to obtain a better understanding of the unique challenges confronting rural women experiencing violence; and second, to identify the most appropriate supports and interventions that were effective for rural women living with abuse, with the hope to facilitate constructive community discussion or action around the issue.

Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were employed to provide a thorough and sound analysis. A quantitative analysis of Statistics Canada's 1993 *Violence Against Women Survey* was undertaken to fill the void in statistical information on violence against women in rural Canada (Levett and Johnson, 1998). Community-based qualitative methods were used to provide a more local "deep and narrow" understanding of the issue that a statistical analysis could not capture. Qualitative methods were used to promote a sense of shared ownership of the project whereby the researchers and the participants would become co-participants and would potentially become mobilised into action or work to promote change within their communities (Joyappa and Martin, 1996). The methodology developed for *ORWAS* was further replicated in two rural sites in British Columbia (Jiwani, Moore and Kachuk, 1998). Research reports were completed for each of the six

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<sup>1</sup> There is a large debate within the literature pertaining to the definition of *rural*. For the purposes of this research, the Statistics Canada definition of "not urban" was used. Accordingly, rural territories are outside of urban areas, urban areas having a population of 1,000 or more and a population density of more than 400 persons per square kilometre.

rural communities that took part in the study: Vermilion Bay (Biesenthal and Podovinnikoff, 1998); Cochrane (Kolmeitz-Warman, 1998); Espanola (Nelder, 1998); Glengarry, Stormont and Dundas (Roosendaal, 1998); Grey Bruce Counties (Mann, 1998); and, Oxford County (Golton, 1998). In addition to these reports, an evaluation of the *ORWAS* project was completed (Nelder and Snelling, In Press)

## 2.0 AREAS UNDER STUDY

A unique aspect of *ORWAS* was the partnering of the Department of Justice Canada with CAPRO, a community-based organisation. CAPRO's mandate is to work with people throughout rural Ontario to raise awareness of domestic abuse in their communities. With CAPRO's established community contacts in rural areas across Ontario, six research sites were selected to represent the vastness of Ontario.

### 2.1 Vermilion Bay

Vermilion Bay is one of three communities including Eagle River and Minitaki that form the municipality of Machin in north-western Ontario. With a stable population of approximately 1,200 people, Machin is situated on the north shore of Eagle Lake. Some services are local, however, many are provided by neighbouring communities. The surrounding waters are major resources. Sport and commercial fishing provide a wide range of recreational employment and tourist opportunities. The region's most important resource is the Boreal Forest. It provides its main industry in addition to recreational activities. Additional key employers include a boat factory and a granite quarry. As well, some residents are employed in the next largest community, Dryden. Some farming and cold weather crops are also in operation.

### 2.2 Cochrane

Located in Northern Ontario, the population of Cochrane, Glackmeyer Township (including Clute, Leitch and Blount Townships) and the unorganised townships is estimated at 7,000 to 8,000 people. The majority of residents have French, English or Aboriginal ancestry. A large source of employment for the area had traditionally been Ontario government jobs, however with cutbacks in the late 1990's, many residents who occupied those jobs have chosen to transfer, retire or open a small business. Other primary employers include two local wood mills and a mine. Seasonal employment exists during the tourist season. The town of Cochrane covers 757 hectares. Glackmeyer township encompasses 124 kilometres. It is uncertain how much land lies in the unorganised areas.

### 2.3 Espanola

The town of Espanola has a population of 5,400 people. It is situated on the Spanish River, just one mile south of the TransCanada highway, approximately 100 kilometres west of Sudbury. Espanola is a one-industry town surrounded by lakes and forest. The largest employer is a pulp and paper operation. Many small surrounding communities -- Webbwood, Massey, Mckerrow, and Nairn Centre -- are also sustained by the pulp and paper industry. Espanola is the service and shopping centre of the area, with a range of social and health services, including a hospital, a long term care facility, a public health unit, Victoria Order of Nurses and a mental health clinic. Tourism offers seasonal employment.

## 2.4 Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry

The Eastern Ontario united counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry are located north of the St. Lawrence River, south of Ottawa, in an area locally known as the Ottawa Valley. The population is approximately 56,000 people. The counties are primarily rural and agricultural, with a number of dairy and cash crop farms. Manufacturing plants for the food industry are also large employers. Some residents are employed in the city of Cornwall, located to the far east of the counties. There is fairly high unemployment in the area.

## 2.5 Grey-Bruce County

Central Ontario's Grey-Bruce counties are located on the north side of Georgian Bay and Nottawasaga Bay, and east of Lake Huron. The areas include Queen's Bush, the Bruce Peninsula and Blue Mountain. Grey-Bruce counties are mainly rural and offer a wide range of opportunities for education, services, faith communities, industrial and farming communities, as well as recreation, tourism and the arts. Bruce County includes over 24,000 households with 600 kilometres of county roads. Grey County includes over 31,000 households and approximately 750 kilometres of county roads. Owen Sound is the closest city that offers services and employment opportunities.

## 2.6 Oxford County

Located in the midst of south-western Ontario, Oxford County includes eight area municipalities. Rural Oxford is rich in natural resources, including open-pit limestone quarries, sand and gravel-pit operations. Farming employs 12 per cent of the labour market (6,000 people). The county's very rich soil also offers opportunities for new agri-businesses. Produce includes the mainstays of dairies, hogs, cash crops, poultry and beef, as well as specialities such as tobacco, ginseng, emu, fruits and vegetables. Oxford County has a growing population. From 1981 to 1996, it grew from 81,000 to 97,000. Neighbouring urban communities include Ingersoll, Tillsonburg and Woodstock. Urban employers include industry, transportation and manufacturing.

## 3.0 RESEARCH STRATEGY AND METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Scope

The literature review undertaken by Brookbank (1996) revealed that there was a lack of statistical data, as well as limited original research on family violence in rural areas. In 1998, the project backgrounder (Biesenthal and Sproule, 1998) further reinforced this data gap. The backgrounder, which included an updated literature review, made the following observations pertaining to directions for further research on woman abuse in rural areas:

- That it is important to understand the culture of a particular community by *talking* and *listening* to what people have to say (Edleson and Frank, 1991);
- That there is a the need to rebuild women’s experiences back into the “movement” (Struthers, 1994; Lawrence, 1996);
- That women’s experiences should be used to explain the course of women leaving abusive relationships in rural areas (Merritt-Gray and Wuest, 1995);
- That more culturally sensitive research is needed on domestic violence and policing in rural areas (Websdale, 1995);
- That research in rural areas must address issues around confidentiality and anonymity (Weisheit and Wells, 1996);
- That consideration should be given to the impact of traditional rural values and patriarchal authorities on women seeking assistance (Stark and Flitcraft, 1996); and,
- That there is a need for abused women to be able to establish trusting relationships with persons in the criminal justice, social service and health systems in rural areas.

### 3.2 Research Approach

Building on the initial literature review (Brookbank, 1996) and the project backgrounder (Biesenthal and Sproule, 1998), a program of research was developed by the Department of Justice Canada on violence against women in rural areas that recognised the need for both quantitative and qualitative research. In an effort to address the limited statistical information available on domestic violence in rural areas, a quantitative assessment was required which assessed available Canadian victimisation data. A project was developed with the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada, to undertake a detailed statistical analysis of the 1993 Statistics Canada *Violence Against Women Survey* (N=12,300 interviews) from an urban and rural perspective (Levett and Johnson, 1998). The analysis concluded that *overall*, women living in rural areas reported only a

slightly less amount of abuse in comparison to urban women (26% and 30%, respectively), however, the sample size was often too low to report certain phenomena in rural areas.

While such an analysis provided a much needed national perspective on the extent to which women in urban and rural areas experienced violence, the data alone could not respond to some of the narrower gaps of information that were identified in the literature. In order to address some of these voids, it was clear that a qualitative, community-based research methodology was required to better understand the nature of woman abuse in rural areas and to develop a more comprehensive and informed response to it, from a policy perspective. Given the gendered-nature of the violence, it was felt that such a method required that the research focus on women's experiences, as told by women survivors.

### 3.3 Methodology

Due to time, resource and access constraints, it was not possible to undertake the research in-house. Informed by principles of participatory, collaborative, feminist and community-based research methodologies, the Departmental researchers were committed to an inclusive research methodology. As such, in order for the research to be truly community-based, it was imperative that the research skills came from, or were developed and kept in the community. It became apparent that in order to fulfil these requirements, a community-based partner was needed.

As previously noted, this project was the result of the collaboration between the Department of Justice and CAPRO. In light of CAPRO's mandate and interest in the issue of woman abuse, the partnership was a natural one. CAPRO's contacts in rural communities across Ontario facilitated the identification and recruitment of researchers in each of the six sites. The sites were chosen according to their demographic profile, location and size. The community researchers were selected for their commitment to the issue of domestic violence and were trained by the Department of Justice researchers.

The research team consisted of two Department of Justice principal researchers (who were raised in rural communities), six community researchers, and the CAPRO co-ordinator. Over three 2-3 day workshops, the team collectively developed the research scope, themes<sup>2</sup>, interview guides<sup>3</sup>, and participation criteria for the project, as well as a guide for conducting focus groups<sup>4</sup>.

#### 3.3.1 Research Focus

It was agreed that the initial focus of the research would be the women's experiences. As the women had lived the abuse, they were recognised as the experts and it was therefore imperative that

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix C.

the evidence came directly from them. In an effort to generate a thorough picture, it was decided that perspectives were also needed from community service providers (e.g., police, crown counsel, shelter workers, doctors, case workers); community leaders (e.g., reeves, municipal councillors, clergy); and everyday citizens. It was felt that since the abused women live within their communities and continuously interact with each of these groups, the community context needed to be taken into account.

### 3.3.2 Creating the Research Instruments

The team met to establish the research focus and the instruments that were to be used in the study. As the team felt that the issue of woman abuse needed to be located in a broad framework, they identified eight themes that require further investigation with survivors. These included:

- living with abuse and safety
- children
- financial issues
- community responses
- health and social services
- criminal justice system
- impact of rurality
- recommendations to women in abusive situations

The techniques employed to gather information on these themes included interviews with survivors and focus groups with community members. Minimally, 10 qualitative, in-depth, open-ended interviews (which were recorded on tape) with women survivors were to be held in each site. Criteria for participation included the requirement that all survivors must have terminated their relationships for at least a year. In addition, they could not be engaged in a court case. Open-ended interview guides for survivors were developed with suggested phrasing of questions to assist the interviewer. The interview guide was designed to “meet women where they were at”. They were to be used as tools to guide and facilitate the interview, not strictly to control the data being collected. Consent forms were developed and signed by all survivors who participated.

In an effort to connect the issue of woman abuse to the community, three individual focus groups were to be undertaken with community residents, service providers and community leaders. The community focus group guides were developed around five key questions:

- What does woman abuse mean in your community?
- Why does woman abuse happen?

- What makes it hard for a woman to tell someone she is being abused?
- If she contacted you, your agency or service, what suggestions might you give her?
- How might your community best prevent and respond to woman abuse?

The community researchers conducted all of the interviews and focus groups.

### 3.3.3 Preparing the Team for Fieldwork

The community researchers were trained during two team workshops by the Justice Canada principal researchers. This training included preparation in how to undertake one-on-one interviews and how to facilitate focus groups. The interview guides were developed with direct “step by step” instructions leading up to the interview/focus group, with topic areas to be covered in the interview, tips for phrasing questions, and room to record questions that worked well for the researcher. The researchers tested the interview guide and simultaneously practised their interview techniques with survivors from an Ottawa second stage-housing program. The tool was refined and made ready for the field.

Each community researcher was set up with a confidential private telephone in their home with voice mail. This was to ensure that anyone participating in the study could contact the researchers with any questions. Each researcher was further prepared for the field with “Research Kits”. The kits included:

- letters of interest to be distributed to potential participants which outlined the project;
- a confidential telephone number where the researchers could be contacted or a message could be left;
- telephone numbers for the Department of Justice Canada principal researchers if more information was required;
- assurance of participants’ confidentiality;
- stamped and addressed response cards for potential participants to send researchers with their name, address, numbers, and best time to call;
- consent forms for participants which outlined the nature and duration of the interview, and the assurance that participants did not have to answer any uncomfortable questions, their identities would not be revealed, the interview would be taped, a transcript would be returned to all participants, clarification to the text could be made, and participants had the option to keep the tape;
- information sheets for each focus group which outlined the project, provided a space for the date, time, place, and contact numbers for more information;

- a prepared news release for the local papers; and,
- tape recorders and tapes (to ensure quality control for the transcribers).

Each community researcher also prepared a list of local contact numbers for emergency services to be distributed to the survivors. As well, all the researchers contacted their nearest shelters to inform them that the study was ongoing in the community. The shelters in all six communities were supportive of the project. Some shelters directly assisted the researchers by providing space to conduct the interviews, suggesting research contacts and participating in the focus groups.

### 3.3.4 The Harvest: Information Data Gathering and Sorting

The community researchers conducted a total of 60 qualitative, in-depth interviews with women survivors of abuse. The interviews lasted between one and three hours. The researchers also hosted three 1 to 2 hour focus groups with community residents, service providers and community leaders. Several researchers also conducted key informant interviews with participants who were unable to attend the community meetings. More than 100 individuals participated in the research study.

Upon completion of the interviews and focus groups, the researchers sent the tapes to Ottawa for transcription. Transcribers typed the content of the tapes and removed any references that could identify the participants. Two copies of each interview transcript were sent back to the researchers - one for their files and one for the survivor/key informant. The researchers distributed the transcripts as well as any requested tapes to the participants. Only a few survivors requested changes to the transcript. Only one copy of the focus group transcripts was sent to the researcher. Due to time constraints, focus group participants did not have the opportunity to comment on the transcript.

Upon completion of the interviews and focus groups, the researchers were brought together again to reflect on the process and collectively analyse the data at a fourth workshop. It became apparent that the process had had a profound impact on the researchers and all persons who had participated. It was decided that participants needed to receive something fairly quickly which reflected their participation as well as the community-specific issues that were captured in each site. As a result, it was collectively decided that each community researcher would prepare a community report based on an in-depth perusal of the interviews and focus group transcripts.

In an effort to build a framework for the community reports, the community researchers were asked to identify common themes that arose from their data. From these themes, a common framework emerged that captured the implications of rurality on woman abuse. In an attempt to provide a product that reflected the knowledge and experience of the participants, the reports were compiled with extensive quotes from the survivors' interviews and focus groups.

Each community researcher prepared a draft community report that was given to the survivors for their reflections and input. Final reports were completed by mid-September 1998 and distributed to all research participants. All participants were informed that a synthesis report that summarised the findings from all six sites would be compiled and distributed.

In December 1998, the researchers participated in the final *ORWAS* workshop to discuss the project's findings, the contents of the synthesis report, to reflect on the research process and to discuss future directions that evolved out of *ORWAS*.<sup>5</sup> The workshop was hosted simultaneously with the *Communities Against Violence* conference organised by CAPRO. Here, the researchers presented the *ORWAS* findings for the first time publicly. In addition, the researchers facilitated a workshop on how to increase awareness about woman abuse utilising rural community assets.

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix D.

## 4.0 FINDINGS: WOMAN ABUSE IN RURAL ONTARIO

Utilising the collective framework developed for the community reports, the following are the key findings of the Ontario Rural Woman Abuse Study.

### 4.1 Community Awareness and Attitudes about Woman Abuse

#### 4.1.1 Meaning of Abuse

Abuse means different things to different people. Participants were asked to define abuse in their own community and surrounding area. Physical, sexual, mental, emotional and financial abuse were all identified.

*“... Abuse is about controlling.”* (Cochrane resident)

*“[Abuse] boils down to two words: power and control ... ”* (Vermilion Bay resident)

#### 4.1.2 Stereotypes

##### Women

Stereotypical roles for men and women can be common in rural communities and can lead women to believe that they must be a ‘good wife’ by avoiding conflict within the family.

*“I bore four children, had the house clean, acted happy all the time, worked forty hours a week, handed over the pay cheque with a smile and never spoke back or refused sex.”* (Oxford County survivor)

*“When something happens, like unemployment, somehow the woman is expected to take the emotional brunt of whatever it is ... take care of the other person’s feelings.”* (Espanola survivor)

##### Men

Typically, men in rural communities were described as patriarchal, conservative or traditional. As well, they were seen as the breadwinner, and, for the most part, ‘the good father.’

*“I do think ... in a rural community you have much more of the old fashioned type attitude where a man is king of his castle and a woman is supposed to do what a woman is supposed to do. I think that is just the nature of the rural lifestyle.”* (Espanola survivor)

### 4.1.3 Stigma

Half of the respondents indicated that there is a stigma associated with being an abused woman which frequently prevents them from disclosing the abuse. This stigma is associated with the negative connotations of being on social assistance and of needing the services of women's shelters. Combined, these stigmas might deter women from seeking help.

*"I think there is still an awful lot of stigma and shame attached to being a victim. You can hear them say, "How can a smart girl like her stay in a situation like that?" (Grey-Bruce service provider)*

*"You have to be very careful who you tell ... because it's a form of gossip and it adds to the injury and adds to the shame." (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry survivor)*

### 4.1.4 Woman Blaming

When asked about how the community viewed domestic violence, many of the participants felt that society blames the woman for her situation.

*"I tried to talk to one of the ladies and she told me, 'You must have done something for him to hit you.' I was so disappointed in her that she would tell me that." (Cochrane survivor)*

*"One respondent revealed that the husbands of women within the farming community no longer allowed their wives to communicate with her because she is perceived as a bad influence." (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry Community Report)*

Women also internalise the blame.

*"... I am still of the opinion that I'm to blame, and they [shelter staff] try to make you see that ... it's not your fault, that it was circumstances maybe ... " (Vermilion Bay survivor)*

*"Because you're ashamed, because you believe it's your fault, that you did something to deserve that." (Grey-Bruce survivor)*

### 4.1.5 Silence and Denial

The most common method of coping with the abuse for almost all of the women was denial. Denial was the community's most common response to the violence as well.

*"If I had to talk about it out loud, that would make it real." (Oxford County survivor)*

*"You know what's happening, but I really didn't want to look at it, because if I looked at it, I had to do something about it, and that was hard, so hard." (Espanola survivor)*

*“She denies what happens just so that she can survive from day to day because it’s near to impossible to live with that kind of fear without protection.”* (Vermilion Bay service provider)

Both the victims and the community members confirmed that there is silence around woman abuse in rural communities.

*“Depending on his social status in the community, it would be really difficult to tell people if he’s got any kind of social standing.”* (Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry service provider)

*“Most people didn’t believe what was going on because my husband was a prominent member of our township.”* (Espanola survivor)

#### 4.1.6 Awareness Paradox

A number of women spoke to the issue of community complicity. Many identified the paradox of their belief that the abuse was a secret, only to find out later that neighbours, ministers and family members had known about the violence all along but had chosen to remain silent. There were a variety of explanations for this awareness paradox, including not wanting to get involved, ‘old fashioned’ attitudes concerning gender roles and the sanctity of the family, and the fear that the woman would not have listened anyway.

*“It’s the old thing of silence and they don’t want to get involved, that’s their problem. And sometimes if you do get involved and nothing is done, you think, what’s the point?”* (Grey Bruce survivor)

*“I think a lot of situations, they just don’t want to stick their nose in. They don’t want to see it. ‘I know she’s getting abused. It’s not my problem. I don’t want to talk about it’.”* (Cochrane survivor)

## 4.2 Women’s Marginalization and Isolation

### Personal Isolation

Abused women often use the term isolation. Along with feeling physically isolated, they often feel excluded from society and on the margins of their community life. Women spoke of the enforced isolation imposed by their husbands. Conditions of rurality such as long distances, lack of transportation, limited services, and rigid, small town social structures further complicate the isolation experienced by rural women.

*“You just feel like you’re totally lost in the middle of nowhere ... that’s probably why they move you there in the first place, because of the isolation factor ... and they can get away with more, and they can control what you do and where you go, if you’re stuck there.”* (Oxford County survivor)

## Shame and Embarrassment

Over half of the women described feelings of shame and embarrassment while they were with the abuser and after they had left him. Many said that the shame and embarrassment kept them in their situations longer, partly because they felt they would be disappointing their families and their children. They blamed themselves for getting into the relationship and then for continuing to stay.

*“One woman told of how it took her more than a year after leaving her abuser to get over feeling that people were laughing at her for being in an abusive relationship.”* (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry Community Report)

*“There is more respect for a woman dealing with death than for a woman who leaves to save her life.”* (Cochrane survivor)

## Gossip

For women living in a rural area or small town, gossip was a serious concern which added to their feelings of isolation and marginalisation. Most of the women stated that they felt that the people in their community judged them.

*“... Everybody knows everybody’s business ... If they don’t, they’ll speculate, and that’s how the rumours start.”* (Cochrane survivor)

*“It’s so hard in a small town. There’s gossip and every family has so much pride, they want to keep their secrets to themselves, and not let anybody else in on what is happening.”* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

## Loneliness

Most of the women described feeling alone at times, with few people to turn to for support. This was the case for women after they left the abuser as well as during the abusive relationship.

*“Yeah, totally alone. And then after a while, you choose to live alone because you don’t want anyone around you when that’s going on. I thought, ‘it’s almost a blessing that I lived where I lived’.”* (Espanola survivor)

*“After we got married, he just alienated me from all of my friends, all of them. I had nobody.”* (Cochrane survivor)

## Low Self Worth

Several survivors spoke about ‘numbing out’ or turning off their feelings as a way of coping with the ongoing abuse. Others talked about either wishing that they could die, or having the sense that they were going to die. Feelings of low self worth were common among the survivors.

*“It’s a lot of little lights and eventually those little lights are shutting off and you’re thinking, ‘if I stay here, that’s how I’ll feel’. A light goes off, you know, another part of you just shuts down. I can’t explain it any other way than it really felt like I was dying, I was going to die.”* (Espanola survivor)

*“You just feel like a pile of shit and you’re no good, no good for anybody, and you rationalise it by saying, ‘well, if I get out of this relationship, who will want me, after I’ve been with this person, who’s going to want me?’.”* (Vermilion Bay survivor)

## **Patriarchy**

Patriarchal familial systems are reinforced as strong rural community ideals. The preservation of the family at all costs was identified as an obstacle to safety for many respondents.

## **Abuser’s Status**

The abuser’s status in the community impacted on the women in several ways. Examples include receiving unsatisfactory results from the police because the police knew the abused woman’s husband; being unable to rent an apartment because the landlord knew the abuser and was told not to rent to his wife; and, the reluctance of the community to believe that the husband was an abuser.

*“In a small town, if a person has a certain reputation or something and you say something the opposite, it’s like it’s BS. ‘That’s not right. I’ve known him all my life.’ Well, you don’t know him until you live with him.”* (Cochrane survivor)

*“One woman stated that other people’s employment was dependent on her husband, therefore they wouldn’t want to believe her. Another pointed out that her husband was highly placed in their church and she didn’t want him to be embarrassed before them.”* (Oxford County Community Report)

## **In-Law Complicity**

Several of the women described how their husband’s family contributed to the abuse. In most sites, women spoke of their in-laws participating in the abuse as well as condoning it.

*“A very dominant mother-in-law augmented much of the abuse one of the women experienced. She also alerted the abuser of the survivor’s whereabouts when she was seen in the small community.”* (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry Community Report)

*“I’m sure if their family was honest they would realise it too because their father-in-law and mother-in-law lived in an abusive situation for many years and I guess they’re accustomed to it.”* (Vermilion Bay survivor)

## Family Support

While family support was a positive experience for some women, many spoke of the difficulties inherent in using family support. Some said that they didn't want to keep burdening their family with their problems while others spoke of family members who condemned them for not leaving the abuser. Again, shame kept some of the women from turning to their families for support. Others felt their families were not capable of helping because they had their own problems.

Despite being identified by many community residents, leaders and some service providers as a safe place for a woman to talk about her abuse, family was not always reported as being the easiest place for abused women to turn to for support. Many of the women said that their families would not support them until they left the situation. Most agreed that once the decision to leave was made, family support was evident. Some reported that the families wouldn't talk about it but did help out financially.

*"... They couldn't stand being around him because all he did was put me down."* (Vermilion Bay survivor)

*"They washed their hands of me. It's like, don't call me your sister any more, don't call me your mother any more if you're going to be with this man."* (Espanola survivor)

## Family Secrets

The silence around abuse originates in the family, where the women and children learn early on to keep the abuse a secret.

*"I can do what I want as long as I don't tell people [about the abuse]."* (Oxford County survivor)

*"Yeah, you learn not to talk. You do not tell anyone what goes on inside the house. You know, you wear this different face when you walk out the door. So that's how I lived my life."* (Espanola survivor)

## "Women's Place"

Rural traditional beliefs about women's place within the family and the community were issues that emerged in the focus groups. Women survivors also explained how they received messages of how a 'lady' is to behave and what a woman's role is in her family. Many women said that expectations of their roles as wife, mother and daughter-in-law were contributing factors in their decision to stay.

*"... Because I grew up in a very rigid, autocratic Catholic home ... women having their place and men having their place. And I came out of it, 'I'm JUST a woman, I'm JUST this, I'm JUST that.' And it took other people to say to me, 'Don't you know how valuable you are?'"* (Cochrane survivor)

*“I became my husband’s hired-hand, cook, mother, and was at his beck and call.”* (Oxford County survivor)

## Lack of Anonymity

Many of the women interviewed discussed concerns of privacy and personal safety related to the lack of anonymity in their communities. Fear of their abusers finding them emerged as a major factor in their feelings of vulnerability. This also affected their decision whether or not to confide in professionals.

*“One survivor who lives in fear that her abuser will find her is afraid to fulfil her dream of opening a business in her community because it would require her to lead a much less anonymous lifestyle.”* (Stormont, Dundas, & Glengarry Community Report)

*“Survivors stated that when a woman is admitted to hospital for treatment, it can again be a threat to her anonymity.”* (Grey-Bruce Community Report)

## Fear

All of the survivors described the intense and constant fear they lived with during and after they left their abusive relationships. Fear often immobilised the abused women and prevented them from making the choices they needed to make. Their fear appeared to have two faces: *“scared to stay”* and *“scared to leave”*. Women noted that they were afraid before they left the relationship, afraid of what they would encounter when they left, and afraid of the abuser’s behaviour after they left. Paradoxically, it was this fear which also motivated them to leave, often when they perceived that their children were being harmed by the violence.

*“Being abused, and being with those who were abusive, was a very safe place to be. I was in it all my life, why wouldn’t it be? Living without abuse was a very scary thought for me. I was more afraid of leaving than I was of being abused.”* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

Many of the women went on to talk about the fear which still haunts their lives. They said that when they were with their husband, at least they could monitor his behaviour and predict when he was going to be violent. Once away from him, they knew they could be in greater danger of losing their lives. A few of the women also said that they were afraid that their husbands would harm themselves if they [the women] left the home.

*“The most dangerous time for us is when we initially leave the relationship because we don’t know his state of mind. He can come after us at any moment and we won’t see it coming.”* (Espanola survivor)

*“When you start to get scared to the point where you think, well is he going to come and shoot me someday? ... Or is he going to one day kill the kids to get back at me? ... You hear it often. Husband shoots kids, then shoots wife ... I’m so afraid of that.”* (Cochrane survivor)

## Rural Ethic of Self-Sufficiency

An ethic of self-sufficiency and pride is often used to describe rural communities. This ethic is evident in terms of how survivors wanted to be viewed in the community, as well as in their reluctance to ask for help. For women who live on farms, the farm business is given utmost importance, farm families are expected to work together, and family issues are not allowed to interfere with the business.

*“I didn’t want to advertise the fact that I was weak, that I was a victim. I didn’t want people to know that I was a victim. I was embarrassed by it.”* (Vermilion Bay survivor)

*“... Because the choice was to lose every relationship that she had, because she was going to destroy the farm by leaving and leaving with her equity. She either stays, goes and destroys everything, or leaves poor.”* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

### 4.2.1 Physical / Geographic Isolation

#### Distance

Distance prevents many abused women from obtaining immediate help or services. Many of the women made reference to being alone at night in the country with no houses and no lights around to run to for safety.

*“You just feel like you’re totally lost in the middle of nowhere ... if you run or if it gets really bad, where do you run to? There’s nobody to run to, there’s nobody around.”* (Oxford County survivor)

*“I’ve been in the middle of nowhere, even in Ontario, and still walking three hours to get to the road ... and then when I got to the main highway, it was another kilometre or two to walk to a payphone.”* (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry survivor)

#### Transportation

Access to transportation is often problematic for abused women. It can mean the difference between life and death. The ability of rural women to seek help from services is related to a lack of available transportation. Lack of transportation also affects women’s ability to access jobs or re-training. Many women survivors cannot afford a car, and there is usually no public transportation in rural areas.

*“What happens if you don’t have a vehicle and you have to wait for a taxi? That’s at least an hour. By that time it might be too late. And then the police. They’re just as bad because there’s no police station around here any more ... and the length of time until the response - about an hour, I’d say.”* (Vermilion Bay survivor)

*“If you’re stuck on a farm, or even in small areas, you don’t have a car and you don’t have any way to get to these places to get the help that you need ... you’re stuck.”* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

## Telephones/Party lines/ Scanners

Poor telephone service in rural areas can create more problems for abused women. Some communities have only party lines available, and some women spoke of having no phone at all.

*“Some of them are on party lines. Those are things that really limit you to go for help. Even a 1-800 number doesn’t do you any good if there’s a party line.”* (Cochrane focus group)

*“I had no phone, no car. I was in the middle of nowhere with nowhere to go and no money. And being stuck there in the wintertime with a small child, the isolation is overwhelming.”* (Espanola survivor)

## 4.2.2 Financial Isolation

### Dependence / Control

The majority of the women in the study experienced financial abuse which added to their isolation. The abuser most often held all the financial control, not allowing the woman access to bank accounts or credit cards, often allocating her an ‘allowance’ to run the household, which most said was never enough to cover the bills. Professional women explained that despite working outside the home in a good job, they were required to hand over all of their earnings to their husbands. Financial abuse and dependence was a factor for many women in their inability to leave the abusive relationship.

*“That was one thing I was scared about if I left - I didn’t even know how to pay a bill.”* (Oxford County survivor)

*“He controlled all the money. And I couldn’t do anything, I have no money. Where am I going to go, you know? That’s why I hung on.”* (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry survivor)

### Employment Prospects

Re-entering the paid work force for some women is difficult and sometimes impossible. It is a challenge to find a job in a rural area, particularly in a one-industry town. If a woman has been working in a joint partnership with her husband on the farm and walks away from that arrangement, financial status is difficult to salvage. Focus group members agreed that for most of the women, working on the farm gave them life skills but not marketable job experience. Minimum wage jobs seemed to be all that was available to these abused women, but most agreed that having a job was a great confidence booster.

*“I just need a job, just need a job. That’s all I need to get on my way. I still have quite a few good years to contribute to society.”* (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry survivor)

*“There is a point where you have to begin to believe in yourself before you can begin the process of re-entering the work world.”* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

## Education / Re-Training

Many of the women attempted to access re-training after they left their abuser. In returning to school or re-training, the women encountered a variety of problems. Some found that age restrictions made them ineligible for re-training programs. Others found that information about courses was difficult to find. Some women spoke of going back to high school or to college and the importance of financial support in helping them get back on their feet. Lack of transportation can be a serious obstacle to re-training or re-entering the workforce. Virtually all the women agreed that they would prefer to be employed so that they could get off social assistance.

*“I didn’t qualify for any employment programs ... because I had been out of the workforce for more than three years, I didn’t qualify for any of those programs ... And yet in every way, you’re penalised by the system for being a homemaker.”* (Cochrane survivor)

*“A car is a big issue for here. Even if you want to go do some re-training, you can’t get there ... Because I can get a job in the city, but in town here, it’s hard.”* (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry survivor)

## Information

Information concerning the options for employment or re-training was difficult for some of the women to access. Most of the women stated that they found the shelter to be a good source of information, but most did not use this resource until after they left the abusive relationship. Community residents felt that many women do not know where the shelter is located. Others felt that it was really important for women to know their rights because abuse may be what they have learned to expect in a relationship.

*“Some women believe, especially if their mother has been abused, that this is what marriage is all about.”* (Vermilion Bay community residents)

### 4.2.3 Cultural Isolation

#### Immigrant Women

Cultural issues may impede women from accessing support. The views concerning male dominance in some cultures may keep women from identifying their husband’s behaviour as abusive. Available services are not always culturally sensitive. For a woman for whom English is a second language, knowing where to turn to for help may be especially complicated. One woman spoke of the isolation she felt in being the only non-Francophone in a French-speaking community.

*“In certain cultures it’s acceptable. The male is the head of the family, is the head of the society, and it is probably acceptable that the woman is in her place ... ”* (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry focus group)

## Aboriginal Women

Aboriginal women identified accessing services as a particular concern. Women from northern Ontario have an especially difficult time getting to a shelter, since it means travelling a long way from their community and the culture that is familiar to them. Only a few aboriginal women participated in the *ORWAS* study, but they spoke of the cultural obstacles they faced.

*“Like on the reserve, they don’t even respond because it’s up to the chief and council to call them [police]. I don’t think it should be left up to the chief and council. When a woman is being abused they should be able to get access to that no matter where you live. I don’t care if it’s the reserve or elsewhere.”* (Vermilion Bay survivor)

*“With native people, there’s a certain sense of the family, the circle ... Native people are very spiritual and in the other areas that I tried to get help, there was nothing to do with spirituality at all.”* (Espanola survivor)

## 4.3 Children

### 4.3.1 Custody / Access / Support

Women survivors were asked to discuss their experiences around custody, access and support of the children. Most of the women had custody of the children, although some of their older children, usually sons, had chosen to live with their fathers. The issue of access brought a mixed response. Many women were afraid for their children’s safety when they went for visits with their fathers. Others talked of how the children were caught in the middle and would return home repeating the negative things that their fathers had said about their mothers. Some women wanted their children to be able to maintain a relationship with their father, but worried that there was no way to ensure that the children would not be exposed to further abuse.

Support for the children was rarely satisfactory for the survivors. Many of the women stated that they had to work outside of the home and/or rely on social assistance since they could not get support from their ex-partners. Some women told of how their husbands’ threats against themselves and their children prevented them from asking for financial support.

*“You see, right now, I have not taken his father to court to get custody and support, because as soon as I go ... he’s going to go for visitation.”* (Espanola survivor)

### 4.3.2 Issues Regarding a Violent Ex-Partner

Survivors spoke of their fear of their violent ex-partners, and the difficulties of living in the same small community as their abuser. More than one woman expressed her concern for her children’s safety when they visit their father because of unregistered firearms. Many of the women described

how the violent behaviour of their abusers had significant effects on their children, and of their reluctance to allow the children to be further exposed to such behaviour.

*“What he did to me and to my kids, his kids too, there’s no word for it, how he treated them. He destroyed a lot.”* (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry survivor)

*“Yes, all kinds of threats. And he broke in, I think on three different occasions.”* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

#### 4.3.3 Issues Regarding Decisions to Leave or Stay

Children were often the catalysts for women to stay in the relationship, and they were also the catalysts for them to finally leave. Reasons for staying included, *“so they would be raised by both parents”, “he was a good father”, “they had a family home”, “it wasn’t their fault we didn’t get along”*. Reasons for leaving included, *“I didn’t want them to grow up to be like their father”, “he started to abuse our daughter”, “I couldn’t take it any more”*. (Vermilion Bay survivors). Other women said they left when the children finally agreed to leave. Several women told of how the final straw came when their husbands began abusing the children.

As the children got older, most of the women could see that the situation was worsening and that the children were being affected by what was going on. Many women said that the moment to make the decision to leave came when their children told them it was time to leave.

*“When my eldest son was thirteen years old he came home one day and I was sitting on the floor, crying ... And he looked down at me and he said, ‘How long are you going to live like this?’ That is when I realised that I had to do something.”* (Cochrane survivor)

#### 4.3.4 Effects on the Children who Witness Abuse

*“The kids saw everything. The kids saw him hit me and the kids saw him yell at me and they knew what was going on, you know. My youngest was almost 6 and my oldest was almost 8 and they would stand in front of me and in between me and my husband and tell him to stop and he would just shove them aside.”* (Cochrane survivor)

When asked about any lingering effects on the children of witnessing the abuse, most of the women expressed deep concern. Many had their children in counselling, others spoke of the difficulties they were having with angry and abusive teenagers who still blamed their mothers. Many said their children did not do well in school, and their sons often exhibited many of the same behaviour patterns as their fathers. Several women told of being assaulted by their teenage children. One woman stated that she wished she could have known ten years ago what her children would be like now as a result of her staying in the relationship. They all expressed the hope that the cycle of violence would not continue into the next generation.

*“I grew up in a family where my father stabbed my mother, tried to shoot my mother, beat her unmercifully. That happened on a weekly basis. So the pattern was set in stone for me. That was the way you had relationships.”* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

*“My son would scream all night long ... didn’t want to sleep.”* (Oxford County survivor)

#### 4.4 Reaching Out: Telling and Naming

##### 4.4.1 Naming

Almost all of the women indicated that they had to name the behaviour as abusive before they could leave their relationships. Naming occurred at different stages in the relationships. For some it was after numerous years of marriage, for others it happened earlier. Some women told of living their whole lives in abusive relationships - from childhood to marriage - and only after receiving treatment for addictions were they able to name it as abuse. Several women referred to the time when they first realised that they were being abused as ‘when the light got turned on’. Only a few women stated that they had never named it as abuse until after they were out of it.

*“My idea of an abused women was one where she would be black and blue and in the hospital with broken bones. I knew something was wrong, but I couldn’t say it was abuse until years later. I saw it as a bad marriage, like my parent’s.”* (Espanola survivor)

*“I called my neighbour next door and he said, ‘You’re lucky to be calling me now. Next time you might not be alive to call me.’ That was like someone slapped me in the face and told me to wake up.”* (Espanola survivor)

##### 4.4.2 Friends

Friends were often the first people that women confided in. For some, friends offered support and practical help that helped the women take the final step to leave the relationship. Others found that it was their friends who named the abuse or encouraged them to leave for the sake of the children. For other women, friends made it more difficult to leave, either because they did not believe the woman or because she was too embarrassed to tell them what was happening.

*“I never talked to any of my friends about it. I think mostly I was trying to save face, or pretend everything’s fine for my own sake as much as for theirs.”* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

*“Even if it is your best friend, you know, you might be embarrassed to know that my relationship isn’t as good on the inside as it looks on the outside.”* (Vermilion Bay community residents)

#### 4.4.3 Neighbours

Some of the women interviewed found their neighbours to be a great help when they disclosed that they were being abused. Others had a different experience, finding that their neighbours either didn't want to get involved or else used the information as a source of gossip. Some women said that they were surprised to discover that their neighbours knew all about the abuse before they told them. A few women said that they now draw on their neighbours for protection to help keep watch for their ex-husbands.

*"I finally got up the courage to ask them to please help and they said no, they didn't want to get involved. That was extremely painful for me."* (Espanola survivor)

#### 4.4.4 Family

Although some of the women indicated that they could confide in their families about the abuse they suffered, others did not feel that they got a positive response or support from their families. Women who had grown up in an abusive household found it difficult to go to other family members who had also experienced abuse for support. Community residents in Cochrane indicated that if a woman reaches out to her family for assistance and does not receive support, or is told it is her problem to deal with, she is less likely to put her trust in anybody else to help her.

*"I have always had my family to help me out. I know a lot of women who don't. They have nowhere to go and they don't know what to do. It's scary."* (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry survivor)

*"And my family found out about it when I was so badly beaten there was no disguising that and there was no support there at all. In fact they were very abusive and it was all my fault and it was a very horrible time in my life, it really was."* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

#### 4.4.5 Clergy/Church

Clergy received mixed reviews in terms of how supportive or helpful they were when women would disclose domestic abuse to them. Some women found the church to be a warm, accepting environment and the clergy to be very sympathetic.

*"He wasn't judgmental, he was just there. And he really stressed safety above all."* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

*"I didn't go to the church to get permission, I went to get information and they were there for me."* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

This experience was not shared by all women who approached the church or clergy for support. Many of the focus group members discussed their feelings and/or experiences involving the church.

*“ ... Don’t provoke him and lay down every afternoon and have a nap so you’re rested when he comes home and have a real good meal for him when he comes home.”* (Clergy advice to an Oxford County survivor)

*“If the woman is going to go to her minister, then you’re creating another problem within the church.”* (Focus group participant, Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry)

#### 4.4.6 Medical Personnel

Of the interviewees who had disclosed the abuse to a medical professional, approximately half were satisfied with the response. In some communities, one doctor in particular was identified as being supportive and non-judgmental.

*“I had gone to my doctor and he did listen to me. And he recommended and he helped me. And he didn’t judge me.”* (Vermilion Bay survivor)

*“Doctor told her that the abuse was the result of learned behaviour, not a psychiatric problem.”* (Oxford County Community Report)

For those who did not have positive experiences telling a doctor or nurse about the abuse, the most common reaction was lack of interest or sensitivity. Some women said that the doctor did not seem to know what resources were available for abused women.

*“I tried repeatedly to tell my doctor and I didn’t really get anywhere, but perhaps I wasn’t really telling ... they didn’t look any further than the symptoms.”* (Cochrane survivor)

*“I told my doctor and I didn’t feel supported at all. I was in the hospital with two broken ribs and his response to me was, ‘Well, you’d better do something about it.’ I didn’t know what to do so I went home and did nothing.”* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

Although some survivors saw the medical centre as a safe place to go because *“you could be there for almost any reason”*, others said that they would not access the available medical services for fear of a breach of confidentiality. Several women told of how they had relatives or in-laws who worked at these facilities and did not trust the staff to maintain confidentiality.

#### 4.4.7 Shelter Worker

Shelters played a critical role in helping women gain the confidence required to leave their abusers and to deal with the stress of being in an abusive relationship. Of the women who accessed the services of a shelter, all of them found them to be invaluable. The workers were sensitive and caring, offering counselling, options and information to all the women who came to them. Although the shelter workers were not always the first people the women confided in, they were the people who could offer the most information concerning local resources.

Women interviewed in at least three of the communities either did not know about the local shelter or were not able to access it because of distance. One community had the services of an outreach worker from the shelter who was a valuable resource for many of the women. Some women indicated that they were reluctant to go to the shelter because they felt ashamed.

*“I could talk to her. She’d listen. And she always gave me options. And she was my voice ... [when] I could not get upset with the police or the lawyer or whatever, she did it for me. She took care of it when I couldn’t.”* (Espanola survivor)

*“And the shelter provided that [support] for me, along with the counselling, along with my lawyer who was supportive, along with very strong women who knew what I had gone through and realised that I wasn’t making this up and that I wasn’t crazy.”* (Vermilion Bay survivor)

#### 4.4.8 Police

The police were involved at some point during the abusive relationship of the majority of the women interviewed, although most of the women found it very difficult to phone the police and only did so as a last resort. Whether or not the police were helpful varied from situation to situation and from community to community. Many women indicated that the response depended very much on the individual officer. In small towns with a limited police staff, it seems women quickly get to know which officers can be counted on for help. Several women did note a positive difference when the responding officer was a woman.

*“I wouldn’t seek help from all our police officers we have in this area. It’s pick and choose very carefully. Again, it’s a small town.”* (Vermilion Bay community resident)

*“Quite often women are second-guessed when they try to get help from the police.”* (Vermilion Bay service provider)

#### 4.4.9 Schools

There was a mixed reaction when women were asked if the school was a place to which they could reach out and tell about the abuse. Several of the women said they had confided in their children’s teachers or principals because they were concerned about their children’s safety or ability to cope at school. Schools were not perceived as safe places to talk about abuse by other women. Community residents identified schools as locations where more public education about abuse could occur.

*“I think again, it really depends, you know, there are schools with principals who are really supportive and sensitive and then there are schools where ... Then there are those who say, ‘I’m an educator, I’m not a social worker. I don’t want to deal with this stuff’.”* (Grey-Bruce survivors)

*“Survivor told the principal and he said, ‘Thanks, but I can’t do anything if he shows up’.”* (Oxford County Community Report)

#### 4.4.10 Employers

Employers were often told about the abuse when the women were preparing to leave their partners. Most of the women who told their employers found they were supportive. Several women told of employers who offered practical help in addition to time off work. Some offered financial help and one woman told of her employer calling the shelter, with her permission, to ask them for advice and assistance for her. One woman said her employers “*bailed me out financially*”. (Cochrane survivor)

### 4.5 Accessing Services - General

#### 4.5.1 Lack of Information about Services

Most of the women interviewed indicated that information about available services should be made more accessible. Even though some information is available in the communities, many of the women live in socially or geographically isolated conditions and are less likely to be exposed to such information. Several women made the point that they had no idea where to get help or who to ask for help.

*“I never even knew there was a shelter. I never knew there were places to go.”* (Espanola survivor)

*“I had no idea about shelters. I probably would have gone to a place like that to get some information.”* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

#### 4.5.2 Lack of / Inadequacy of Services

Women and service providers agreed that there are not enough services for victims of abuse. Many of the interviewees felt that the staff of local social and medical services are not properly informed about the issue of abuse nor about other available resources. Community residents and service providers stressed the need for more services to reach a wider group of women. In rural areas, service providers say they have difficulty assisting women because of the very large distances that they have to cover in a limited period of time.

Several services were identified as lacking in the rural areas. Some outreach workers from the shelters, who were formerly available, had been cut due to lack of funding. This was seen as an extremely important service given the impact that distance and lack of transportation have on women living in rural areas. Effective emergency services were another concern of the research participants. Distance, transportation, weather and response time were all identified as barriers to services.

*“For those kinds of programs, there’s no money. But there has to be money. Yes. There should be money. It’s a question of priorities, isn’t it?”* (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry community leaders)

*“We’re maybe dealing with the problem, but we’re not looking at the whole picture because there’s no services. There’s nothing for men.”* (Cochrane community resident)

## 4.6 Criminal Justice System

### 4.6.1 Police

#### Treatment of Women’s Complaints

There were mixed reviews of the police response to women’s complaints. The response seems to vary considerably between communities, between town police forces and the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP), and between individual officers. Some of the older women indicated that the response now is better than it was several years ago. Other women said that they felt the younger officers seem to be more sympathetic to the husbands. There were several who suggested that the police took longer to respond when they were called back to the same residence several times.

*“After calling the OPP on a Sunday afternoon from a rural community she was told it would take two hours for them to respond.”* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

*“Yes, the cop was going on vacation, so he said for me to go and see him the following week when he came back. I said, ‘Well don’t you have to take some pictures of my face’?”* (Espanola survivor)

#### Appropriate or Helpful Behaviour

Although many women described inappropriate behaviours by local police, it was clear that when an officer did respond with sensitivity and caring, it made an impression and received high praise from the women. Several women appreciated the fact that police often try to send female officers to domestic abuse calls. Others mentioned that the officers were most helpful by giving them a card with the shelter phone number on it.

*“[He was] very sympathetic towards a woman and ... very supportive. He will get you all the help you need.”* (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry survivor)

*“And then there was a female officer that was there and she intervened because she obviously felt that the man could not handle the situation, and she calmed me down, so she must have had some experience, or maybe just because of her gender she understood what was going on.”* (Vermilion Bay survivor)

*“OPP patrol car sat at the end of the driveway while she packed her stuff to leave. Officers didn’t have to do anything, but stayed there just in case.”* (Oxford County Community Report)

## Attitudes

The police officer's attitude is of utmost importance. When the officer takes the abuse seriously and shows respect for the woman, many women said it helped them to realise how serious the situation was and to make the decision to leave.

*"You know, if I were a stranger walking down the street and somebody strangled me or something, if it were a stranger, I'm sure that person would be arrested and charged with aggravated assault. But because this man was my partner, oh well, 'just wait till he calms down'. And I feel very angry about it now, because I know it's not just me. I know a lot of women have a similar experience. Somehow, if you're in a relationship with somebody, the violence is okay."* (Oxford County survivor)

*"They were all very nice and caring and they didn't make me feel, even the men, like I was the bad one."* (Cochrane survivor)

## Police as Friends, Relatives or Neighbours

In a rural community, it is not unusual for some of the police officers to be related to or to be friends with the abuser or his family. One woman said her husband was on the same ball team as the officer, another said she and her ex-husband were friends of the police officer. In small towns this can be a serious deterrent to women accessing the help they need.

## Firearms

In rural areas, firearms are available in many homes. Roughly half of the women interviewed stated that their abusive partners had access to guns. Many of them were threatened with a gun and one woman was shot at. Police were often aware that firearms were involved and some women felt this made the police more reluctant to intervene. Women also expressed concern about how easily their partners were able to obtain firearms.

*"The police were afraid to go in because they knew he was a hunter and they knew there were firearms in the house, and they knew he had a temper. Men can get access to an FAC [firearms acquisition certificate] to get a gun even when they shouldn't have one."* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

*"One day he told me I was going to be a hunting accident. We were up in the bush forty miles away, with the two children and the gun and all those bullets."* (Espanola survivor)

## Restraining Orders / Peace Bonds

When asked about the effectiveness of peace bonds or restraining orders, the women responded negatively. They expressed concern that restraining orders could not be put on until there were charges of assault laid, that when peace bonds are signed, there are often no conditions attached, and that restraining orders are generally not enforced by the police in any case. There were no apparent positive experiences with a restraining order or peace bond.

*"A restraining order? Wipe your ass with it!"* (Espanola survivor)

*“Restraining orders are only worth the paper they’re written on. It only takes him one damned shot if he wants to get even.”* (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry survivor)

## Stalking

Stalking is a common experience for survivors of violence, although most referred to it as ‘following’ rather than stalking. Survivors believe that the law does not take stalking seriously enough. Evidence of stalking is hard to prove, but many women stated that their ex-husbands were constantly aware of their whereabouts. Several related stories of how their abuser would leave anonymous signs that they had been in the woman’s house, or of how he would harass them at their workplace.

*“But he followed me and ... he was constantly sitting outside my house, making threats on the phone ... and the police did nothing.”* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

*“He knew exactly where I was at all times. He had people park in front of the place where I used to work.”* (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry survivor)

## Factors Affecting Women’s Decision to Involve Police

There are several factors that determine whether a woman decides to call the police. These include embarrassment about publicly disclosing the abuse and the effects it might have on the children. Other factors at play include the fact that police are not seen to be as reliable as they should be, the long response time in rural areas, the fear of an inappropriate response, and the fear of what will happen to them when their husband finds out that they have called the police.

*“You don’t want everybody to know your dirty laundry, this is private, and my mother never called a cop on my dad.”* (Cochrane survivor)

*“It would take a half hour, forty-five minutes ... So needless to say, I wasn’t about to call the police because I was too scared of what would happen to me.”* (Espanola survivor)

## Women’s Confidence in the Police

Women’s level of confidence in the police varied. Most women reported negative experiences with the police. Some service providers and community residents also expressed a lack of confidence in the ability of the police to respond to abused women. A great deal of concern was expressed over lengthy response times. Positive experiences were usually tied to a specific officer or a specific force. When police responded, listened to the women and did not judge them, the women found their services to be helpful and supportive.

*“OPP has a little bit more knowledge. The town police, they call, they talk to the spouse. I just didn’t feel satisfied with the town police at all.”* (Vermilion Bay survivor)

*“There’s no protection for someone who has left a situation ... and [the women] have absolutely no control over that.”* (Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry focus group)

#### 4.6.2 Court System

Many of the survivors reported a lack of confidence in the court system. Many said the process was not adequately explained to them and they did not know what to expect.

*“I’m really angry with our whole system, our court system, for putting me, for re-victimising me. I don’t know how else to put it. All my middle class values and ethics were totally destroyed when I went through the court system, as a victim being re-victimised.”* (Oxford County survivor)

#### Access to Legal Services

The majority of the women interviewed who used the criminal justice system found access to legal services through the advice and direction of the shelters. Most of the survivors said they had little or no idea about how to access affordable legal advice.

*“I don’t know the process and there’s really not anywhere you can go and say ‘What can I do?’ without having to pay for a lawyer to tell you what to do.”* (Espanola survivor)

*“I don’t know if there are legal services out there to help you ”* (Vermilion Bay survivor)

#### Finding a Lawyer

Some women were referred to a lawyer by a shelter, others found a name in the Yellow Pages, and some used the Dial-a-Lawyer service. Again, women’s lack of information about the legal system put them at a disadvantage.

*“If I hadn’t gone to [shelter], I wouldn’t have been able to get a lawyer because Legal Aid doesn’t cover Family Law any more. You have to get involvement - the shelter can give you a paper for two hours with a lawyer.”* (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry survivor)

*“I’m not exactly sure that the legal services are all that supportive of women that don’t have money.”* (Cochrane survivor)

#### Legal Aid

Very few women reported positive experiences with the Legal Aid system in Ontario. Most were unaware that there is a questionnaire which allows service providers to categorise family law cases involving abuse. Where there is verification of abuse, cases can be given priority status. Many women spoke of being ineligible for Legal Aid because of joint ownership of family property. Other women told of being involved in a custody action when the regulations for Legal Aid changed and their lawyer consequently dropping the case.

*“I had to apply for Legal Aid and Legal Aid was just a joke ... Since you own the house, you have to repay anything you get.”* (Oxford County survivor)

*“The free legal service ... you can talk to them, they’ll listen to you, but that’s as far as it goes. Like how the heck are you supposed to know how to proceed legally?”* (Cochrane survivor)

## What It Costs to have a Lawyer

Many of the women said that they were unable to afford to hire a lawyer. One survivor said that she was caught in the position where she made *“too much money to qualify for Legal Aid but too little to pay for a good lawyer.”* (Oxford county survivor)

*“He wanted cash. And I had no cash.”* (Espanola survivor)

*“Yes, but totally out of reach financially.”* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

## Treatment by Lawyers

Survivors of violence found the legal process confusing and frustrating. Some could not understand why their lawyers took so long to deal with custody and support issues. Some told horror stories of bad legal advice which placed them in greater danger.

*“So here I was ... negotiating a separation agreement for six months while we were under the same roof. It was really awful.”* (Cochrane survivor)

*“The first lawyer I had didn’t do any work for me. He just danced around the issues. It was humiliating. I felt bad enough anyway because I was already on social assistance. But the second lawyer told me, ‘I work for you’. Just that difference made it easier for me.”* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

Several women told of how their husband’s lawyer urged them to appear to be supportive of their husbands when testifying and appearing in court. One women was told to *“butter up her testimony”* (Oxford County survivor), while another said she was told to sit beside her husband in court and he kept his hand on her shoulder throughout the hearing.

## Crown Attorney

Many of the women did not have contact with the crown attorney other than during the hearing, nor did they know that the role of the crown includes interviewing the woman before the hearing. Those who had contact with the crown generally found it to be helpful. It was especially appreciated when the women were included in the decision making. Service providers also expressed their satisfaction when the crown consulted with them.

*“ ... It’s really about working together, I really think that’s the key.”* (Cochrane service provider)

*“And he asked me if I was ever planning on going back, would there be a chance of me ever getting together with my ex-husband, and that would have made a difference with how he dealt with it. And I said to myself afterwards, ‘Why in the hell could that make a difference?’”* (Vermilion Bay survivor)

## Treatment of Women Complainants

The majority of the women were dissatisfied with the treatment they received in court. Many felt humiliated and disbelieved. One woman recounted that the judge took away the restraining order because he said he didn't think "*such a nice young man and his mother could be so horrible.*" (Oxford County survivor) Service providers spoke of women's reluctance to involve the criminal justice system because often "*they have been burned already through the courts and so they don't want to go through that again.*" (Espanola focus group)

*"Everything seems to be on the abuser's side. He's innocent until proven guilty - I was guilty. I had to prove everything. He had to prove nothing."* (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry survivor)

## Court Process and Dispositions

Women described the court process as being very stressful because it was so lengthy. Both focus group members and survivors of abuse commented that it is a procedure that can make a woman feel "*as though she is really going through hell.*" (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry Community Report)

*"The way the legal system looks at it, he didn't try to kill me. But he hurt me, he controlled me and he restrained me and all these things, and supposedly in the legal system these are assaults. But they don't look at those assaults as serious."* (Vermilion Bay survivor)

*"But that's how I was made to feel. I was victimised again on the stand."* (Espanola survivor)

It was particularly frustrating for women who had the experience where criminal charges against the abuser could not be used in custody cases being heard in Family Court.

*"What is the connection between family court and criminal court? Because what I am starting to understand is the complete separation of those two courts. So that we can actually have a man charged with assault or uttering a threat of death against a woman and perhaps against his child, while he is getting access, unsupervised access, and contesting custody in family court. And nobody puts that together."* (Grey-Bruce key informant)

## Mandatory Charging

There was general agreement that it is better to have mandatory charging as it takes the pressure off the victim, although some women expressed that they did not know that police were now instructed not to ask the woman if she wanted to press charges.

*"... Now the woman doesn't have that responsibility. Which is good, because I would never do it. I wouldn't lay charges."* (Cochrane survivor)

## Sentences / Outcomes

Outcomes were found to be even more unsatisfactory than the court process. Many of the women expressed the belief that sentences are not severe enough to reflect the pain and suffering caused by

the abusers. Although there were some very serious assaults, the majority of the cases were resolved by probation, suspended sentences or peace bonds. One man convicted of assaulting his wife was fined \$500. (Oxford County Community Report)

*“Eighteen months probation [for shooting at me]. I was mad, very, very, very mad, because it was like I went through all this for nothing.”* (Espanola survivor)

*“Her abusive partner was told to stay away from her and received 30 days in jail for throwing her down a flight of stairs.”* (Cochrane Community Report)

### Support Services, Victims' services

Most women reported that there were no formal support services or victims' services available in their area at the time they were involved with the criminal justice system. Those women who did have support at the time received it from the local shelter. Shelter workers were an important source of strength throughout the process for many women.

*“What victim services? I was offered a cup of coffee and that was it.”* (Oxford County survivor)

One woman talked of her experience with the criminal compensation process.

*“I haven't got a lot of faith in this whole process. They have my address, they're going to ask me questions at a hearing - that's why I wanted documents only. If he's present, the minimum he's going to find out is that I have moved. And if I'm really unlucky, he'll be given an indication of where.”* (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry survivor)

### Need for Information/ Knowledge about Process and System

One of the most commonly heard statements when discussing the women's experiences with the criminal justice system was that they didn't know their rights. Shelters seemed to be the main source of information regarding the criminal justice process and the issue of rights. One woman had used the 800 number which has pre-recorded legal messages about different legal issues. She used the line to gain knowledge about her options.

*“When I finally did get the lawyer, it was helpful to me, because I knew what I wanted and I think, because I had information, and I think that was so important ... If I am informed, then I will be able to proceed in the direction I want.”* (Cochrane survivor)

*“Nobody told me about that. I think if I had known those were my rights, I probably would have, but ... ”* (Espanola survivor)

### Women's Confidence

Women were not confident that the courts can protect women from abusive partners.

*“They can't, when it comes right down to the final thing, if he [husband] wants to harm me, he can, they [courts] can give him an order to keep away, but it doesn't mean he's going to do it -*

*especially if you've got a person who isn't used to obeying, he isn't going to do it.*" (Vermilion Bay survivor)

*"The criminal justice system does not help, it hurts - women don't trust it."* (Oxford County survivor)

## 4.7 Social Services

### Range and Availability of Services

Some of the women interviewed did not know about the existence of services available in their area. Others spoke of seeing pamphlets in doctors' offices and day-care centres or parent resource centres. The biggest deterrent to women making use of these services seemed to be lack of transportation. Although shelters do provide transportation, women who need to access other services are at a disadvantage, according to service providers.

### Social Assistance

Many of the women had to go on social assistance when they left their abusers. Although they generally found that it was not hard to get on social assistance, they were all distressed by having to do so. Many women spoke of the stigma attached to being 'on welfare' and the shame they felt. One woman told of how a landlord was hesitant to rent to her when she mentioned welfare. Several women said that the 'start-up' fund was extremely helpful in getting them back on their feet after they left their relationships. In spite of their reluctance to apply for social assistance, many of the women said that the people were helpful and made the difficult task of requesting funds a little easier.

*"To be on social assistance ... there's that horrible stigma. I know women who will not leave because of it ... "* (Oxford County survivor)

*"It's almost like they don't want to tell you [share information]. It's like, 'You've got enough for free, why are you after more?'"* (Cochrane survivor)

### Children's Aid

Calling the Children's Aid Society for assistance when leaving their abuser was not an option for many of the women because they were afraid that their children would be taken away. In fact, some women reported that this is what happened to them. Other women had more positive experiences with the CAS, finding that they were supportive of the decision to leave. There were mixed reviews concerning the ability of the CAS to protect children from abusive fathers. Service providers discussed the proposed policy change which will encourage mothers to leave abusive situations because witnessing violence has now been identified as a form of child abuse. Although the CAS has more power to force a woman to leave, other agencies do not follow this philosophy as it does not empower a woman to make decisions for herself.

*“And I’ve talked to the Children’s Aid Society about the alcohol and drugs that they are allowed at their Dad’s and nothing got done.”* (Espanola survivor)

### Community Services

With the exception of shelters, very few community services were mentioned. In one community, there is a drop-in centre for women with children. In another community, survivors spoke about group counselling sessions that were available at the local hospital.

*“The counselling was great, wonderful. As far as any other areas of social services, I found that the services were absolutely useless ... there’s absolutely nothing out there for a single mother.”* (Cochrane survivor)

### Role of Shelters

The shelter was identified as the place in their communities where all the women were guaranteed support and understanding. The shelters provided referrals and assistance with accessing legal services, social assistance and housing. They provided counselling and information about abuse, as well as advocacy and court support. Although not all of the communities had a shelter, many of the women made use of a shelter in another community. One community had the services of an outreach worker from the shelter. These programs allow the shelters to continue to function as an important support system for women after they leave their abusers. The shelter provided support to the women that they often did not receive anywhere else.

*“The role they played was that they validated what I was already beginning to believe in my own head, that it was not just a rocky marriage, that it was definitely an abusive relationship.”* (Espanola survivor)

### Information about Shelters

Many of the women survivors indicated that they were not aware of the existence of a shelter and/or had trouble finding the locations when they actively looked for the information. Several women indicated that if they had known about the shelter, they would have left earlier. Some women found out through the Parent Resource Centre or the community cable channel, while others said they came across it in the Yellow Pages. Some community members were also unaware of the existence of a shelter in the area.

*“I don’t even know if there is a shelter in town where you can go. I have no idea.”* (Espanola community member)

### Experience with Shelters

It was common for survivors to state that without the help of the local shelters, they did not know how they would have left their abusers. Shelters were seen by the women as a safe place to share their feelings, to listen and be heard. One community focus group also felt that the shelter was well regarded in the community, as evidenced by the gifts of volunteer time and donations of food and clothing.

*“They also had a counsellor on site as well that I talked to a couple of times. It was good.”* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

*“It’s taken years of therapy and many books and I must commend the shelter ... ”* (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry survivor)

### Access to Shelters

Community residents and service providers expressed their concern that they have trouble getting women to go to the shelters because they are in another community. In addition to the women’s reluctance to leave their community and their children’s school is the fact that few of them have cars or other transportation. Outreach services were identified by many of the women, the service providers, and the community members as a necessary service for the women who would not or could not come to the shelter. One community noted that unfortunately the shelter had to end its outreach program due to funding cuts.

### Emergency / Crisis Response

Service providers discussed the fact that shelters provide toll-free numbers, as well as free transportation to and from the shelter, but that many women are unaware of these services. Although the police provide crisis response, one community found that the volunteer fire department responds more quickly. As stated before, the response of the police is not always helpful.

*“They said to me, ‘Would you like us to take you to the downtown shelter?’ I said, ‘Okay, I’ll gather up the kids’ stuff.’ ‘No, you can’t remove the children; he hasn’t done anything to the children.’ And I said, ‘You expect me to leave my house with these two small children here?’”* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

*“We’re the ones being abused, yet we are the ones expected to uproot ourselves and go to a shelter in another town away from the children’s school and the local resources.”* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

### Lack of Options

Most women felt that there was a definite lack of options for abused women in a small town or rural area in terms of services available to them.

*“And there’s no place to hide in Espanola.”* (Espanola survivor)

### Accessing Services : Implications for Safety

The shelter was the only place identified in the community as a safe place for women to go if they were being abused. Even then, some women felt they were still not completely safe, because in a small community, most people know where the shelter is. If the shelter is too far away from their home, or if transportation isn’t readily available, most women will not make use of the shelter.

## 4.8 Medical, Health and Mental Health Services

### 4.8.1 Range and Availability of Services

Most communities reported having access to a medical clinic and a hospital. Mental health services were less accessible. Most of the communities reported having some counselling services, but northern communities are particularly disadvantaged in that they only had the services of a visiting psychiatrist. Several women spoke of waiting lists for mental health services. One survivor, who had moved from southern Ontario to northern Ontario, remarked on the vast difference in the availability of medical services between the south and the north.

*“One of the biggest problems I see is easy access to psychological services. The program [in place now] where there’s someone who comes into the community once a week always has a tremendous waiting list ... We really do need services right in the community.”* (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry community leader)

### 4.8.2 Medical and Mental Health Care Personnel

The responses of medical and mental health personnel were not viewed favourably by several of the women. Reasons included lack of sensitivity, lack of understanding of the issue and little knowledge of resources. One survivor told of how her doctor had prescribed medication ‘for her nerves’ which left her with an addiction. There were one or two women who reported positive experiences with health care personnel.

*“One woman’s doctor told her partner that ‘he had nothing to worry about. The problem wasn’t with him, it was with his wife’.”* (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry report)

*“Participants reported an empathetic and supportive doctor who they felt comfortable talking to and asking for help.”* (Vermilion Bay Community Report)

### 4.8.3 Medical and Health Centres

Women noted here that even though services may be available in small towns, sometimes they are reluctant to make use of them because of the potential breaches in confidentiality mentioned previously in this report. One woman reported that the counsellor she was referred to was a member of an organization that she was working for, and that the counsellor her husband was referred to held the mortgage on their home. Anonymity is often a problem in rural areas: persons working in the medical or social services are often well known to the abused woman and her family.

### 4.8.4 Mental Health Services

Mental health services were used by many of the women, but reports varied about the level of satisfaction with these services. One problem raised by several of the service providers was that of

mandate. In recent years, the mandate of community mental health agencies has changed and clients who do not have a mental health disorder do not qualify for service. Other service providers expressed their frustration with the lack of services in the community, which leads to long waiting lists.

*“A lot of clients that still need to come sometimes for individual counselling ... more or less, they’re not our mandate, we’re kind of asked to step back.”* (Cochrane service provider)

*“You know, under the guidelines, what we offer in counselling now ... we only have to have six sessions and then we move them on and move someone else in. So under those guidelines, where do you get a chance to get into the abusive history of the woman?”* (Grey-Bruce service provider)

Some women survivors also expressed their dissatisfaction with mental health services.

*“We ended up going into counselling at the mental health clinic here in town ... and in hindsight, I have no use for her [counsellor] whatsoever.”* (Espanola survivor)

*“I took myself off the anti-depressants because I thought, no, I don’t need this. I need to think what I am doing ... not keep taking medication that didn’t make me feel like me.”* (Cochrane survivor)

Others had positive experiences:

*“ ... The counsellor by far was the best. The counselling was very good ... Out of everything I’ve had to go through, I can honestly say that the counselling has been 100% positive and nothing else has come close as far as support.”* (Cochrane survivor)

*“We went to counselling and it was the best counselling that we got. It was operated out of the hospital in a small town.”* (Espanola survivor)

#### 4.8.5 Emergency / Crisis Responses

Emergency response is most often the responsibility of the hospital, although in Vermilion Bay, the local doctor at the clinic handled crisis calls. Most of the women, many service providers, community residents and community leaders spoke positively about the doctor in this community. Several service providers raised inaccurate reporting of abuse as an issue. This can occur when a woman complains of depression or anxiety but does not disclose abuse. It can also occur when the hospital does not properly record the cause of the injuries.

*“ ... And kept in the hospital overnight and they don’t even put that title on it, they put something else on it and they put them in a room by themselves.”* (Grey-Bruce service provider)

#### 4.9 Supportive and Enabling Factors for Women Living with Abuse

Based on the information gathered from the various *ORWAS* participants, the following list identifies many of the needs of women living with abuse in rural areas.

- Having a safety plan.
- Workshops, counselling, support groups, spiritual support to build women's self esteem.
- Easy access to the most needed services in terms of location and transportation.
- Knowing where the shelter is located.
- Supportive friends and family who do not give up on her and who name the abuse.
- An understanding doctor who is aware of other local resources.
- Contacting the shelter for advice and support.
- A job for building confidence and for financial support.
- A toll-free crisis telephone line with a number which is well advertised.
- Having a financial plan and immediate access to finances.
- Police that respond quickly, believe the woman and do not judge her.
- Network of workers to pick women up in the more remote areas.
- Services which respond quickly without asking a lot of questions on the phone.
- Service providers who are educated in abuse issues and do not blame the woman.
- Removing the abuser from the house and not the woman and her children.
- Identifying transportation options before the crisis occurs.
- Professionals (doctor/lawyer/police, etc.) who believe her, name it as abuse, and encourage her to leave.
- A more supportive community which is better educated on all forms of abuse, especially those which are not physical.
- Services for abused women that are more visible and better advertised.

## 5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Interview and focus group participants made insightful recommendations and suggestions for making necessary changes in relation to the handling of cases of woman abuse in rural areas.

### 5.1 Improving Community Responses and Attitudes about Wife Abuse

- All communities agreed that more **public education** is needed on the issue of woman abuse. Several made the point that this education should include forms of abuse other than physical abuse. One community recommended that a person be hired specifically to do awareness / prevention work within the community. (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry report)

*“It’s so public, we need to educate our community around the whole gamut of what constitutes abuse, not just the black eye but the years of wearing down ... ”* (Oxford County survivor)

*“So I think that perhaps a good solution would be if society at large is really informed.”* (Espanola focus group)

- It was suggested that the community needs to make a **public statement** and commitment that woman abuse will not be tolerated. One community recommended that domestic abuse statistics be publicised in the local papers. (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry report)

*“As a community we need to pull together and take a stand, and say, ‘Yes, it [abuse] is happening and, no, we don’t want it, and we won’t put up with it’.”* (Vermilion Bay service provider)

*“If you put up a poster, it says this community thinks about this issue, knows about it and can talk about it. And that will increase women’s ability to speak - to break the silence privately.”* (Grey-Bruce key informant)

- Several communities addressed the problem of **close-mindedness** in their town. There was a general feeling that communities limit women’s options by stigmatising victims of abuse. Residents must become more open-minded.

*“It’s like on the one hand she gets blasted for staying, you know ... ‘why don’t you leave?’ and on the other hand as soon as she’s out there and has to ask for assistance of any sort, or she tells her story one too many times ... she gets blamed.”* (Oxford County survivor)

*“ ... we’re taught from a very early age to believe that families are safe and happy places. So when a woman comes to you and tells you that her family is unbelievably unsafe and unhappy, the structure of our belief system is to disbelieve her ... Sometimes you disbelieve her to protect yourself.”* (Grey-Bruce key informant)

- The **church** must speak more honestly about woman abuse. It was suggested that the clergy needs to be re-educated about domestic abuse and that churches should offer workshops or seminars structured so that congregations could learn to deal with abusive situations in their midst.

*“When you speak in the church about domestic assault, you say to every woman sitting in that congregation, ‘I’m a person you can talk to privately about these issues because I get it and I’ll believe you’.”* (Grey-Bruce key informant)

- Several communities spoke of the need for community members to have or develop a sense of **individual responsibility** for women who are victims of abuse.

*“The general public should be sensitive to the issue of abuse because there is a significant chance that someday someone could turn to **you** when they are taking their first steps of leaving their abuser.”* (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry report)

*“... why it is so important to get over this feeling [of reluctance] to go and say something. If you see the signs of abuse ... you’d better go and tell this person, because, look, it took me well over fifteen years to decide that my relationship was truly abusive.”* (Espanola survivor)

- A couple of communities recommended that **men become more involved in anti-violence work** to demonstrate to other men that *“this is not just a women’s issue.”* (Oxford County community focus group)
- Every community recommended that **woman abuse education begin in the schools**. Several community members suggested that children should be made aware of woman abuse at an early age. Others suggested that it should become part of the school curriculum.

*“I don’t know if the right word is ‘mandatory’, but they should start it in the schools before kids are even in relationships. So males and females can recognise and watch for the signs.”* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

*“Young and old should develop a zero-tolerance attitude in this community.”* (Oxford County Community Report)

- More effort is required in the **co-ordination of social services**.

*“... Where services are lacking in the area and the co-ordination of services is lacking. There is less understanding among the services, and with the employees of the services. There is no consistency with what resources are offered.”* (Vermilion Bay service providers)

- **Information about services** needs to be more readily available.

*“Having information more available in grocery stores and video shops ... would have helped. Yeah.”* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

*“[a flyer in the newspaper] ... you know, a couple of times a year or something with special numbers on it.”* (Cochrane survivor)

## 5.2 Improving the Criminal Justice System

### 5.2.1 Police Practices

- The most frequent recommendation was **more training for police** in the area of woman abuse. This included mandatory refresher courses and training for all police forces, including small town police.

*“I think they should be educated properly on it, and I also think they should be reprimanded if they say anything snide or sarcastic.”* (Grey-Bruce survivor)

- Police policy should be to consistently **remove the abuser** from the home rather than the women and children.
- Police need to adopt a policy of **zero tolerance of woman abuse**, and then enforce it consistently to earn the trust of the community.
- Whenever possible, **quicker response times** to domestic violence are needed.
- More **female officers** are needed to respond to domestic calls.
- Police should develop a **protocol with other agencies** such as shelters, CAS and hospitals for a more co-ordinated response to abused women.
- Officers should be encouraged to provide women victims with **information about other services** available to them in the area.

### 5.2.2 Consistent Sanctions

- Overwhelmingly, communities requested that the courts **take woman abuse more seriously**. Suggestions included the need for consistent sentences and mandatory counselling for the abuser while he is in custody.

*“Implement zero tolerance, as in drinking and driving. If these abusers did to a stranger what they did to us, the courts would treat it differently. Why does living together make it okay?”* (Espanola survivor)

### 5.2.3 Court Practices

- It was recommended that **someone in the court offices should play a key role** in contacting the woman before the hearing and keeping her informed throughout the process.
- The court process is often long and confusing. If at all possible, the process should be accelerated.
- Participants also recommended that the courts formally **recognise emotional and psychological abuse** as criminal behaviour, and not only identify abuse as physical. Expert witnesses could be called upon to explain the impact that these forms of abuse have on women's lives.

*“And he [the lawyer] says, ‘In court, you’re going to have to just say black and white’ ... Well, abuse is not black and white ... he was saying just make it black and white, make it clear ... but it’s not clear.”* (Vermilion Bay survivor)

- It was identified that repeat male abusers often know that they can breach a probation order. It is therefore important that **probation orders are enforced**, and breaches, including non-attendance at batterers' counselling sessions, be punished.
- **Women's work in the home** needs to be valued and taken into consideration in both custody and property division cases.
- Many survivors recommended that the woman should not be expected to provide her abuser's address when seeking a **restraining order**.

*“They have a warrant out for [abuser's] arrest but it is impossible for you to get a restraining order against him if you don't know where he lives. Now that's ridiculous.”* (Stormont, Dundas, Glengarry survivor)

- One way to improve the criminal justice system, according to several survivors, was to **change the way judges in rural areas view woman abuse**. (Cochrane community report)

### 5.2.4 Custody / Access Decisions

- It was recommended that family courts **take the abuser's behaviour into consideration** when ruling on custody of and access to children. It is important that a record be kept of all abusive incidents.

### 5.2.5 Support for Men

- Communities were unanimous in recommending **batterers' counselling** or some support for abusive men. Service providers, community residents, leaders and survivors identified the importance of treatment programs that are ongoing and mandatory.

*“Make it mandatory ... that the abusers get the help they need so they don’t continue going out abusing other women.”* (Vermilion Bay survivor)

## 5.2.6 Support for Women

Focus group participants recommended that:

- Women need to know their legal rights.
- Women can benefit from the help of a court support worker.
- Women should be able to access Legal Aid to hire a lawyer for custody and support when leaving an abusive partner.

## 5.3 Improving Social Services

- **Information** about shelters must be very public and accessible. The services provided by shelters and how to contact them should be clearly stated.
- **Support groups** for women who leave abusive relationships are vitally important.
- **Outreach counselling** programs are essential services for abused women in rural areas. Communities that do not have them want them and those that do have them say they need more workers.

*“I know the outreach program works because there was such a program before the funding was cut ... The referrals were phenomenal because someone was out in the community coming in contact with the women who had no access to resources and were very isolated.”* (Vermilion Bay service provider)

- **Greater co-ordination** is needed between service providers.

*“And sometimes I look at the structure today and I think there is too much separateness between them all. And sometimes even infighting ... But we are all social structures and if we could join together more, we could make a difference.”* (Grey-Bruce key informant)

*“We need someone in the community to be a lobbyist, to be a facilitator. It’s[currently] no one’s mandate to get anything going.”* (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry focus group)

- Transportation to shelters is a problem for rural women. Financial support for **volunteer drivers** is key.
- **Culturally sensitive programs** for Aboriginal women are important.

- **A shelter is needed in the community.** Safe houses were suggested as an alternative to or in addition to more shelters.
- It was recommended that **victims' services** be widely available so as to provide women at the time of the assault with a worker knowledgeable about abuse issues.
- More **public education** is needed.

*“After every public education session, there would be at least two women who would talk about their daughters, mothers, themselves, sisters and then when you tell them the shelter is available for walk-in counselling they are relieved and grateful because that connection has been made.”*  
(Vermilion Bay service provider)

- **Emergency day care** and parenting support that does not threaten to remove the children of women who ask for help would be of great benefit.
- One community recommended that **mental health services** should be more readily available.

*“We need more people up here to help because when I did call for my intake, well, it took them 6 to 8 months before I actually got my first call. That was really discouraging.”* (Cochrane survivor)

#### 5.4 Improving Medical, Health and Mental Health Services

- All communities agreed that health professionals require **better training** in abuse issues. Such training would ensure that doctors and counsellors help women understand that they are not responsible for their victimisation.
- It was also recommended that services for abused women be improved by providing faster responses, more counselling sessions, shorter waiting periods, and full-time as opposed to part-time mental health services in the community. It was recognised that this would, however, require **more funding** for health and mental health programs. Several nurses who participated in the focus groups indicated that more professional support was required when abused women come to the hospital.
- It was recommended that **doctors** need to be aware of the key role they play in treating an abused woman. They must learn to take the time to explore abuse issues, name the abuse, and make referrals to other helping agencies. Many women said they tried to tell their doctors but the doctor simply prescribed medication for ‘their nerves’.

*“I know we’re in an age where medication seems to be the answer, medicate the problem, but many times I think if just a bit of time was taken to talk out the situation that we wouldn’t need so much medication ... So I think there has to be a return to the doctor being trained to listen and to process what he/she is hearing.”* (Cochrane survivor)

## 5.5 Suggestions for Women Currently Living with Abuse

Research participants were asked to identify suggestions for women who were living with abuse in rural areas. Their suggestions were as follows:

- Identify the behaviour as abusive and then leave the relationship.

*"To get out right away, you know, that would be my first instinct is to tell her that, you know. But I would hold back and, because that person has to find out. I would let her talk and do what my counsellor did, try to guide her into realising and saying the word abuse, this is control, this is abuse."* (Vermilion Bay survivor)

- Call the shelter.
- Make a safety plan.
- Get information about custody before leaving.
- Pack all the personal identification for you and the children before leaving.
- Let others in your community help.

*"Tell her it's perfectly okay to let other people help her, let people at the shelter help you, let other people help you, advocate for you, through going through the legal system, dealing with the police, all the things that normal people don't know about ... to accept social assistance was very humiliating for me but when I think about myself and my children and where I am now, and what a small cost for me to have accepted social assistance for a while ... it's really a small cost to pay ... because you need help from your community."* (Oxford County survivor)

- Try to bring a supportive person with you when you go to apply for social services.
- Don't count on a restraining order.
- Focus on the positives, find your inner strength. You have a lot to gain.

*"Yes. I've gained my freedom, I've gained my self-respect, I've gained the ability to know that I am a person, which my husband had taken away from me. He always controlled everything I said and did. Now I can do that for myself."* (Espanola survivor)

- Don't stay for the sake of the children. Get out of the relationship for their sake.
- Once you leave, keep going and don't look back. Things don't get better.

*"All I know from living in abuse for all my life, that it doesn't change. It gets worse and worse and worse. And you have to make a decision to get out and go get help. You're the one that has to change because you can't change him. It doesn't matter what you do. It's up to the individual. The help is there. You know it's humiliating, it's embarrassing and you think like in a small community*

*what will people think. What'll people think about me if I'm, you know, living in that place or whatever? Well to hell with what people think. Think about yourself and what you want."*  
(Vermilion Bay survivor)

- Get counselling for you and your kids.
- Get a credit card in your name to establish a credit rating.

## 6.0 RESEARCH OUTCOMES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

At the final workshop in December 1998, the researchers met to collectively discuss the key issues identified by the research, the rural-specific findings, the contributions of the research to the area of domestic abuse, and to reflect on the research process and to discuss areas for further research. The following summarises these discussions.

### 6.1 Key Issues

The key issues that emerged from the research were as follows:

- Fear is ongoing - during and after leaving the relationship.
- There is a need for a co-ordinated response to woman abuse at all levels.
- Women need easier access to key information.
- Women experienced frustration with the criminal justice system at all levels.
- Shelters and workers were the lifeline for many women. In rural areas, outreach workers are key because they go to the women.
- Children were ironically often the reason women either left or remained in their abusive relationships.
- There is a need for ongoing public education at the local level that can lead to greater community action and ownership of woman abuse.
- To end abuse, more support is needed for men.
- Women lived with the constant fear and threat of firearms being used against them or their children.

Many of the issues are not unique to women experiencing violence in rural areas, however these issues may be compounded by rural conditions.

### 6.2 Findings: Rural Specific

Six key findings distinguished woman abuse in rural areas from woman abuse generally:

- *Geography* - the physical isolation that women experience due to their location.

- *Rural ethics and character* - women are reluctant to ask for help partly because of traditional values about male and female roles.
- *Community complacency* - many in the community knew about the abuse but few did anything about it. Abuse was often a source of gossip.
- *Limited access to services and information* - distance and lack of transportation limits women's access to services and information.
- *Lack of anonymity* - everyone knows everyone.
- *Safety issues* - delayed response time, distance and location can all affect a woman's safety.

The complexity of rural areas indicates that responses to urban abuse require a rural-specific lens.

### 6.3 Contributions of Research

Empowerment-based research such as *ORWAS* allows for a more inclusive research process that facilitates localised action, builds the local research capacity and enhances the prospects for change. The specific benefits of undertaking research such as the *ORWAS* study were felt to be:

- That it was an inclusive and respectful process.
- That women survivors were the experts and were the voices throughout the research process.
- That community researchers were part of the project design and were involved in the data analysis.
- That the research skills developed for *ORWAS* remained in the communities upon completion of the project.
- That the communities were involved in the focus groups.
- That the community reports enabled timely feedback.
- That the research process facilitated the possibility for localised action.
- That the result of the project is ongoing community responses.
- That the research process and the research findings have facilitated the creation of links between local, provincial, and federal levels of government and have contributed toward ongoing federal government initiatives and policies, such as *Rural Dialogue*.

## 6.4 Areas for Further Research

The *ORWAS* study identified further areas requiring research on woman abuse:

- Access to justice in rural areas.
- Public education - after 20 years of public legal education and information on the issue of woman abuse, education is still identified as inadequate and necessary. The question remains, ‘What are the best information dissemination mediums?’
- Cultural issues - Aboriginal, immigrant and minority women have specialised needs.
- Custody and access issues.
- Questions surrounding accountability. For example, what does accountability mean? What are the appropriate outcomes for someone found guilty of woman abuse?
- The extent of the threatened use of firearms in woman abuse.
- Access to legal aid.
- Utilisation of criminal injuries compensation.
- The ineffectiveness of peace bonds/restraining orders.
- The research process - specifically, what impact did the study have on all those involved: researchers, survivors, and communities?

## 6.5 Dissemination and Communications Plan

The dissemination of information and keeping participants informed were key issues throughout the study. All research participants vetted transcripts, had the option of keeping the interview tape, and received final copies of the community reports. Research findings have been presented in numerous public forums.

- In addition to the CAPRO conference, at the local level, most community researchers have made presentations to local organisations (e.g., Rotary club, Kiwanis, shelter annual meetings, local Women’s Institutes meetings).
- Several researchers were featured in local newspaper articles about the study.
- At the federal level, several presentations on the research were made. In October 1998, the principal researchers, the CAPRO co-ordinator, two community researchers and one of the interviewed survivors made a presentation to policymakers and academics at the federal government conference on social cohesion, entitled “*Policy Research: Creating Links*”.

Presentations were also made to the federal Interdepartmental Working Group on Rural Issues and several academic conferences.

Research findings pertaining to Justice Canada issues were directed toward the appropriate policy and research officers. In particular, research findings on the threat of firearms were directed to the Department of Justice Firearms Centre. These findings were built into a research project with urban and rural shelters in Alberta which will look at the use of firearms in domestic violence, including threats. As previously noted, the Department of Justice Canada also contracted with a community-based, action-oriented research centre in British Columbia to implement the *ORWAS* research methodology in two rural B.C. sites. Health Canada and Justice Canada have a joint project currently underway that reviews the impact of *ORWAS* as a community-based research project. This project was initiated and is being led by one of the community researchers.

The research methodology utilised in this study is a contribution to the development of alternative methodologies utilised in empowerment-type research. Its main objective was to start with the experiences of women and provide a space and a voice to a group of women whose involvement in the criminal justice system and other social systems is not well understood, due to their physical location. These same women are often the most personally victimised and simultaneously the most invisible in a movement that is all about violence against women.

The *ORWAS* process enabled some of the gaps in the literature to be addressed.

- Having the researchers located within the communities helped to ensure that the culture of a particular community would be respected and understood.
- By going directly to the women, an effort was made to rebuild women's experiences back into the movement.
- Women's experiences explained the course and challenges of leaving abusive relationships and accessing assistance in rural areas.
- The role that distance plays in accessing safety and delayed response times by police and authorities.
- The lack of anonymity in rural areas and the impact that traditional values and ethics of self-sufficiency impact on women accessing safety.

The nature of the research methodology enabled responses to be located, gathered and contextualised under a rural lens.

Further, *ORWAS* is the first research project that the Research and Statistics Division at the Department of Justice Canada has undertaken with an inclusive qualitative community-based methodology that utilises a gender-based analysis. Policy linkages emerge from three levels:

- First, at the community level, the project was able to facilitate a community process that validated the issue of woman abuse in the six sites. This reinforced the importance of locally

developed strategies, supporting the local shelters, including women in the solutions and the need for an informed community direction about woman abuse.

- Second, at the provincial level, policy links impact most directly on services, e.g., policing, health and social services, education, women's programs, etc.
- Third, from a policy perspective of the Department of Justice Canada, the research findings have enabled a dialogue to begin about woman abuse in rural areas on four levels:
  - ◆ First, the research findings provide immediate information on how criminal justice policies are impacting on women in rural areas, e.g., access to justice, firearms, legal aid, and custody and access issues.
  - ◆ Second, the research reinforces how criminal justice issues are embedded within broader social, political and economic issues and are thus difficult to isolate. As a result, the findings can be fed into a more practical side of public policymaking.
  - ◆ Third, the research findings impact on other departments: Partnering and sharing findings across federal departments (e.g., Health Canada; Agriculture Canada) facilitates informed decision-making and policy development.
  - ◆ Finally, utilising an innovative approach contributed to a broader understanding of woman abuse in rural areas more generally while also anticipating future policy implications and research issues. Overall, sharing the research experience, methodology and findings contributes to the advancement of our understanding as researchers and as social service practitioners.

In conclusion, the research methods that one chooses directly affect and impact upon the nature of one's findings. A more structured method may result in a less flexible or amenable approach as one proceeds. However, implementing a gender-based research plan such as *ORWAS* encourages alternative ways of collecting information. Such a research plan "begins with women's experiences as they see it" and it "meets women where they are at". It is not an easy strategy. It requires significant time, flexibility, energy, commitment, co-ordination, and resources (quality equipment and transcribers). The pay back, however, is an inclusive, respectful process that potentially and ideally can lead to some element of community action and change.



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### **Themes overlap**

#### **Process of finding safety by women survivors of domestic violence:**

- Naming and recognising abuse.
- Coping strategies.
- Defining safety.
- Safe ways and places for women living with violence to talk about what is happening to them.
- Factors influencing women in their decisions to stay or leave an abusive spouse (stigma, financial, fear, extended family, religious beliefs, etc.).
- Supports and interventions (formal and informal) that enabled women to find safety.
- Convenient locations for accessing public information.
- Recommendations to women in similar situations.

#### **Children:**

- Effects on children who witness domestic violence.
- Children who are victims of domestic violence.
- Services and supports required for children.
- Supports required for women with children.

#### **Criminal justice system:**

- Experience with and confidence in the police.
- Experience with and confidence in the court system.
- Contact with the police and the criminal justice system.
- Access to legal services by victims of domestic violence.
- Access to legal information.
- Adequacy of police responses to domestic violence.
- Ability to serve women of different cultural backgrounds.
- Ability of the criminal justice system to help keep women safe.

**Social services:**

- Accessibility.
- Confidence in social services.
- Types of services and interventions identified as most helpful.
- Types of services and interventions identified as not helpful.
- Ongoing resources or supports required for women who have left an abusive relationship.
- Ability to serve women of different cultural backgrounds.
- Adequacy of social services responses.

**Community responses:**

- Reactions of community leaders to subtle or overt disclosure by a woman living with violence.
- Examples of community leadership resulting in action against domestic violence.
- Involving men in anti-violence work.
- Community awareness of domestic violence issues.
- Community recognition that domestic violence occurs in families within that community.
- Communities of minority populations.

**Rurality:**

- Perceptions of rural/urban differences.
- Rural identity.
- Factors specific to a rural setting that (a) place women living with violence at further risk, and (b) can help women living with violence find safety.

**Financial and economic issues:**

- Financial factors affecting women's processes of finding safety.
- Financial factors specifically affecting farm women.
- Need for access to information.



## APPENDIX B

### GUIDE FOR INTERVIEWS WITH SURVIVORS OF WOMAN ABUSE

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#### Step 1: Getting comfortable

Before the interview, be prepared by making sure you have Kleenex handy.

- You have both arrived for the interview, which you are holding in a location where the woman feels comfortable. Before you begin the interview, be sure to take time to:
- Enjoy some small talk, including how the day is going.
- Get coffee or tea for both of you.
- Tell the woman that the interview will last no longer than three hours.
- Find comfortable seating.
- Place your watch where you can monitor the time without being obvious – even better, arrange the seating so that the woman’s back is to a clock that you can see.

**Important:** If you sense that the woman is uneasy, or if you get the impression that this is *not* a good day to do the interview, be sure to ask the woman if it would be better to get together another time. If she says *yes*, reschedule the interview for another day.

#### Step 2: Reviewing the background information

Be sure to review the following information with the woman you are interviewing:

Go over the **project description**, including the fact that:

- The study is a project of the Community Abuse Program of Rural Ontario (CAPRO) and the Department of Justice Canada.
- The study is focussing on women in rural areas and small towns who have been out of abusive relationships for a year or more.
- The research information will be returned to all those who participated, if they want it.

Explain that the study and this interview are **confidential**. Explain that:

- You will keep the woman’s identity secret.
- You will identify the tape only with your name and a number that you will assign to the interview (e.g., “Researcher Jane Smith, Interview #1”).

- The people who will type up the interview from the tapes are professionals. They will remove or change anything that might identify the woman. For example, they will use her first initial instead of her entire name and will do the same with other names and places.
- You will either return the tapes to her or destroy them within three to six months of the interview.
- You will destroy all other documents, such as her consent form, within one year of the interview.
- The only exception to the confidential rule is if the woman discloses information about a child who is 16 or younger and who needs protection from child abuse.

Go over the **consent form**, being sure to:

- Stress the fact that the woman is participating voluntarily.
- Note that the interview can be stopped at any time.

Confirm the **status** of the woman's situation, making sure that:

- The woman is not currently in an abusive relationship.
- She is not a witness in a court case involving past abuse against her.
- She does not anticipate being a witness in a court case involving past abuse against her within the next 12 months.

Answer any questions or concerns about the study that the woman may have.

### Step 3: Setting up the recording equipment

Be sure to set up the tape recorder correctly:

- The recorder has a built-in microphone. Make sure the micro-recorder is on a steady surface and is no more than three feet away from you and the woman you are interviewing.
- Make sure the "voice-activated" switch is turned off.
- Select the slower recording speed of 1.2 centimetres.
- Insert a new tape. Each interview should begin with its own new tape.
- Press the record button.
- Test the equipment by speaking your name and the interview number into the microphone and asking the woman you are interviewing to say "testing". Replay the recorded words to make sure everything is working well.

#### Step 4: Starting the interview

It is time to start the interview. As an example, you could use the following statement to introduce the topic of your discussion and to get things rolling:

*As you know, we are talking to women in rural areas and small towns who have been out of an abusive situation for a year or more. I want to hear your story, especially how you survived abuse and what enabled you to find safety for yourself (and your children). Maybe you'd like to start by telling me about where you are at today.*

#### **Topics**

In this section, we have listed the broad topics we would like you to cover during the interview, as well as suggested phrasing of questions that you might find helpful for getting at the research themes.

<b>Topic Areas</b>	<b><i>Tips: phrasing of questions</i></b>
1. Living with Abuse	
• <u>Naming</u> and recognising “abuse”.	<i>When did you first realise that your husband (or boyfriend) was abusing you? When did you first call it “abuse”?</i>
• <u>Coping</u> (with danger at home, coping at work, with the children, on the farm, with extended family, friends).	
• First time the abuse was <u>talked about to anyone</u> other than abusing spouse.	
• <u>Decision-making</u> around staying or leaving the abusive situation (e.g., financial, housing, fear, community stigma, religious and moral beliefs, etc.).	<i>What kinds of decisions did you have to make about staying or leaving?</i>
• <u>Who</u> was able to help.	<i>What were some of the little things you were able to do that moved you closer to finding safety?</i>
• What was <u>helpful</u> , what was <u>not helpful</u> .	

2. Children	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concerns for children and how they may have influenced decision-making around <u>staying or leaving</u>.</li> </ul>	<i>What kinds of concerns did you have about your children?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Issues related to <u>custody and access and child support</u>.</li> </ul>	How did those concerns affect your decisions about staying or leaving?

3. Financial Issues	
Financial <u>reasons for staying</u> in abusive situation.	Did you have financial reasons for staying?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need for <u>information</u>.</li> </ul>	Did you need information about finances?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Solutions</u> to financial problems.</li> </ul>	How did you overcome the financial problems?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Issues around <u>income and employment</u> (e.g., job security, farm assets, social assistance).</li> </ul>	

4. Community Responses	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experience either suggesting subtly or stating outright to a <u>community leader</u> (e.g., minister, priest or rabbi, reeve, councillor, doctor, elder, chief, business leader) about the abuse.</li> </ul>	<i>Did you ever try to tell someone prominent in the community (e.g., minister, priest or rabbi, reeve, councillor, doctor, elder, chief, business leader), either outright or by hinting that your husband (or boyfriend) was abusing you?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perception of how <u>community views</u> domestic abuse.</li> </ul>	<i>How do you think people in (name of community) look at woman abuse?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Suggestions</u> for improving community responses.</li> </ul>	

5. Health and Social Services	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Accessibility</u>.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Services and interventions that were <u>helpful</u>.</li> </ul>	What made some services particularly helpful?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Services and interventions that were either <u>not helpful</u> and/or <u>made the situation worse</u> (i.e., more dangerous, more difficult to leave).</li> </ul>	<i>Were there any services that were either not helpful or that made things worse for you, by making it more difficult or more dangerous to leave?</i>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Confidence in health services</u> with respect to being able to respond to and help women living with violence.</li> </ul>	<i>Were you confident that the health services were able to help you?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Confidence in social services</u> with respect to being able to respond to and help women living with violence.</li> </ul>	<i>Were you confident that the social services were able to help you?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Recommend changes.</u></li> </ul>	<i>How would you change the system to better respond to the needs of abused women in your area?</i>  <i>If there were one thing you could change, what would it be?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Cultural factors.</u></li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for information: best ways and locations to <u>access information.</u></li> </ul>	<i>How did you get information about what services might be able to help you?</i>

6. Criminal Justice System	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience with the <u>police.</u></li> </ul>	<i>How did the police get involved and what happened?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience with/awareness of <u>victims' services.</u></li> </ul>	<i>Did anyone from "victims' services" try to contact you? What happened? Had you known that victims' services existed?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience with the <u>court system</u> (including <u>crown counsel</u>).</li> </ul>	<i>Did you have to go to court? How were you treated?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attempts to secure <u>legal information and/or services of a lawyer.</u></li> </ul>	<i>Did you ever try to find legal information or hire a lawyer?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for information: best ways and locations to <u>access legal information.</u></li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to the <u>services of a lawyer.</u></li> </ul>	<i>What would you do if you wanted to hire a lawyer?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Confidence in police services</u> with respect to being able to respond to and help women living with violence.</li> </ul>	<i>Are you confident that your local police can help women who are being abused?</i>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Confidence in the court system</u> with respect to being able to respond to and help women living with violence.</li> </ul>	<i>Are you confident that the courts can protect women from abusive partners?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Recommend changes.</u></li> </ul>	<i>How would you change the system to better respond to the needs of abused women in your area?</i>  <i>If there were one thing you could change, what would it be?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Cultural factors.</u></li> </ul>	

7. "Rurality"	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rural <u>identity</u>.</li> </ul>	<i>What do you think is different about living in a rural area (or small town), compared to a city, when a woman is living with abuse?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aspects of rural life that can <u>help</u> a woman living with violence.</li> </ul>	<i>In a rural area, what can help a woman living with violence?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aspects of rural life that <u>worsen</u> the situation of a woman living with violence (e.g., transportation, isolation).</li> </ul>	<i>In a rural area, are there things that can make a situation for a woman living with violence even worse?</i>

8. Other	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Safe ways and places</u> for women living with violence to <u>talk</u> about what is happening to them.</li> </ul>	<i>Is there any safe way for women living with violence to talk about what is happening to them? Are there safe places to talk about the violence?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Recommendations to women</u> in abusive situations.</li> </ul>	<i>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?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Anything else</u> that should be raised?</li> </ul>	<i>Is there anything else we haven't discussed that you think should be raised?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age group (18-25, 26-40, 41-55, 56+).</li> </ul>	<i>Would you mind telling me which of these age groups applies to you (18-25, 26-40, 41-55, 56 or older)?</i>

That is the end of the interview.

### Step 5: Wrapping up the interview

First, please thank the woman for her participation. To wrap up, be sure to ask the woman if she:

- Wants to receive the tapes of the interview.
- Would be willing to look at the typed text of the interview and make comments.
- Would like to be invited in a couple of months to participate in a discussion about the research findings with other women who were interviewed.

Right after you leave, take some time to record on the interview tape or on a separate tape your own reflections and impressions of the interview. For example, you may want to note:

- Any recurring themes you noticed throughout the interview.
- Common themes with previous interviews.
- How the interview went overall.
- Anything else that comes to mind.

These reflections will be helpful when we look at the information as a whole and conduct our analysis.

Finally, be sure to remove the last micro-cassette from the tape recorder. Be sure to label all the tapes you used for the interview right away with the following information:

- Your name.
- The date and time.
- The interview number.





## APPENDIX C

### GUIDE FOR ORGANIZING AND FACILITATING FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

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#### Step 1: Finding your location

- Try to find an accessible and convenient location (e.g., social service agency meeting room, arena meeting room, church hall, municipal building meeting room).
- Reserve a date, time and location well in advance of the focus group. Be sure to include this information on the information sheet that you send to potential participants.

#### Step 2: Advance preparation

- Have your CAPRO pamphlets and newsletters available.
- Ensure you have the equipment you need (e.g., tape recorder, flipchart, name tags, markers, masking tape, stickies).
- Arrange for refreshments or a light lunch.
- Ask a buddy (a CAPRO facilitator?) to come with you to the focus group to help you with certain tasks, such as changing the tape, taking notes, and taping flipcharts.

#### Step 3: Setting up the recording equipment

- Place a new tape in the recorder.
- Test the microphones.
- Test the equipment by stating the date, your name and identifying the focus group. Replay to ensure the distance is adequate and the tape recorder is working well.

#### Step 4: Controlling your time

Look at the number of questions you have to answer and the amount of time you have reserved with your participants. Prepare an agenda to make sure you have enough time to address all the questions. Allow 15 to 30 minutes for preparation and clean up. Two examples:

<b>2 HOUR FOCUS GROUP</b>	<b>3 HOUR FOCUS GROUP</b>
0:00 Introduction and Round table	0:00 Introduction and Round table
0:15 Question 1	0:15 Question 1
0:30 Question 2	0:40 Question 2
0:45 Question 3	1:05 Question 3
1:00 Question 4	1:30 Question 4
1:15 Question 5	1:55 Question 5
1:30 Question 6	2:25 Question 6
1:45 Wrap up and thank you's	2:50 Wrap up and thank you's
2:00 Clean up	3:00 Clean up

Without being too obvious, you may need to keep an eye on the clock.

#### Step 5: Getting comfortable

Take time at the beginning to:

- Prepare a relaxed atmosphere for the site.
- Arrange for comfortable seating.
- Ask everyone to write their first names only on the name tags.
- Make sure you have collected a consent form from each participant.

**Note:** A good moderator moves the flow of conversation around the group. Try not to give your own opinions during the session. Rather, *your* challenge is to get other people to speak.

#### Step 6: Starting the focus group

Introduce yourself. Thank everyone for coming out.

Go over the **project description**, including the fact that:

- The study is a joint research project in six small Ontario communities with the *Community Abuse Program of Rural Ontario* (CAPRO) and the Department of Justice Canada.
- The study is focussing on what woman abuse means to the community and on what services are done well and what could be done better.
- The research information will be returned to all those who participated, *if they want it*.

Explain the **confidentiality** provisions, including that:

- You will be audiotaping the focus group discussion.
- You, as the researcher, will keep each participant's identity confidential. In other words, no one's identity will be recognisable in any research reports, nor will the researcher ever identify or discuss the participation of any one in the discussion group.
- The people who will type up the tapes are professionals who will remove all identifying information from the transcripts.
- You will destroy the tape of the discussion.
- You can only request that all participants honour a commitment not to identify or discuss the participation of anyone in the discussion. However, you, as the researcher, cannot provide guarantees to that effect. Participants may wish to keep that in mind when making their comments, but it is hoped that the discussion will be as open and constructive as possible.
- The *only* exception to your promise of confidentiality is if someone discloses information **about a child 16 or younger who is being abused and who needs protection**.

Go over the **consent form**, being sure to:

- Stress the fact that participation is entirely *voluntary*.
- Assure participants that they are free *to not respond* to any question.

Do a **round table**, asking first names and general information about the participants, such as the agency or service they work for or their position in the community.

The following **ground rules** for discussion should be posted on a piece of flipchart paper:

- One person speaks at a time.
- Participants must listen to others' opinions before stating their own.
- It's okay to disagree.

Ask participants if there are other ground rules they would like to add. Make sure everyone is comfortable with newly proposed ground rules. These may, for example, address smoking, confidentiality, etc.

### Step 7: Asking the questions

In this section, we have listed the six main questions we would like you to cover during the focus group. These main questions will guide the focus group. You may want to have each of the main questions written out on a separate sheet of flipchart paper. Participants can then see the questions easily and one at a time.

We have also listed a number of sub-questions that relate to each main question. Use the sub-questions if the discussion does not touch on them, if you need questions to keep the discussion going, or if you need to refocus the discussion. Try to keep the group focused on their **own community**.

You may want to experiment with the “sticky post-it” exercise, especially for the last question. To use this exercise:

- Distribute stickies to all the focus group participants.
- Ask the question.
- Tell the participants to write down their “gut” responses to the question on a stickie without consulting others.
- Once everyone has written down their answers, have them put their stickies on the flipchart page where you’ve printed the question.
- Open up the discussion.

#### **Question 1: Woman abuse means different things in different places. What does it mean here in (local community)?**

- What does “abuse” mean?
- Are there other types of abuse other than physical abuse?
- Do you know if these other types of abuse are happening here in (local community)?
- Is woman abuse talked about here in (local community)?
- How do people here learn about woman abuse?

(If someone raises the issue of male abuse, reinforce that violence of any kind is unacceptable, thank them for raising the point, remind them that for the purpose of this project you will be discussing woman abuse and that the nature and extent of male abuse should be a separate research project. Indicate that there is an expectation that the next victimisation survey carried out by Statistics Canada will ask men questions about whether they experience domestic abuse.)

**Question 2: Why does woman abuse happen?**

- Have you heard of situations where people thought woman abuse was acceptable? Tell us about them.
- Do women ever provoke abuse? How?

**Question 3: *Community Residents and Leaders.***

**What makes it hard for a woman to tell someone that she is being abused?**

- If a friend or family member were being abused here, to whom do you think she might talk?
- What makes it hard to ask for help?
- Where is a safe place to go for help in this community?

**Question 3: *Service Providers.***

**What makes it hard for a woman to tell someone that she is being abused?**

- What would be a safe place to go for help in this community?
- Where would one *not* go to seek for help?
- What if she has children? Where does she go? Are there services available?
- Are the various social services in the community able to respond to woman abuse?
  - ◆ The health system?
  - ◆ The education system?
  - ◆ The social services?
  - ◆ The criminal justice system? (Includes police, courts, victims' services.)
- Are they able to service women with different cultural backgrounds?
- What are the economic issues associated with finding safety for these women?
- Does transportation play a role?

**Question 4: *Community Residents and Leaders.***

**If you were the one she talked to, what suggestions might you give her?**

- What would prevent a friend or neighbour from leaving her situation?
- In this community, why would a woman choose to stay in an abusive relationship?

**Question 4: *Service Providers.***

**If she contacted your agency/service, what suggestions might you give her?**

- In this community, why would a woman choose to stay in an abusive relationship?
- What types of services are helpful?
- What types of services are not helpful?
- Are there any ongoing resources or support services available?

**Question 5: How might our community best prevent and respond to woman abuse?**

- Can you think of examples of community leadership that:
  - ◆ Resulted in action against woman abuse?
  - ◆ Involved men in anti-violence work?
- Are residents aware that woman abuse occurs in families within the community?
- Are there any factors specific to living in a rural setting that could help us prevent and respond to woman abuse?
- Now what?
  - ◆ What is the one thing that our community could do now to help prevent woman abuse?
  - ◆ What is the one thing that our community could do to respond to woman abuse, in other words, to help women who are being abused now?

**Question 6: Is there anything else that you would like to add?**

**Step 8: Wrapping up the focus group**

First, be sure to thank the focus group members for their participation.

After the focus group is finished, take some time to record on the focus group tape or on a separate tape your own reflections and impressions of the session. Be sure to identify yourself, and to highlight any major themes you think should be included in the analysis.



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**RESEARCHERS' COMMENTARY AND REFLECTIONS**

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***Captured by a community researcher prior to the last ORWAS workshop***

It is our hope that we have accurately reflected the voices of the women who participated in this research. We thank them for trusting us with their stories, and we commend them for their courage. Their strength was inspiring for all of us. We also want to express our thanks to the many community members, leaders and service providers who took the time to give us their thoughtful input on the issue as they see it in their community.

We were overwhelmed by the extent to which fear dominates the lives of women survivors of violence. As we expected, they told us how terrified they were of leaving their abuser, and of how much more terrified they were of staying. But we were unprepared for the fact that many of them, now four or five years after leaving, still find fear to be a daily companion. They have their own houses, jobs, lives, and yet his ghost still haunts them. Some have to live in the same small town, some still have contact because of custody arrangements, and some are still being followed. Does the fear ever end?

The women's pain ambushed us all. Although most of us had prior experience working with the issue of violence against women, we were all struck by how the stories affected us. We experienced some of the effects of secondary trauma with which workers in this field are familiar, such as sadness, sleep disturbance, fear, and anger, to name a few. Did the women who told us their stories suffer from reliving the trauma for the sake of this project? Further research needs to be done to explore the impact of participating in such a study, whether the participant is a researcher or a 'subject'.

At the same time, the collaborative process yielded many rewards for the researchers. Throughout consultation, problem definition, report writing and rewriting, analysis and debate, the process remained respectful of our own experiences and those of the women whose stories we heard. The principal researchers at Justice Canada affirmed and valued each person's contribution equally. Community researchers, in turn, made every effort to involve the women survivors in each stage of the project. Their response to this report will tell us how good a job we have done of reflecting their experiences.

It is clear to us that there is sympathy at the community level for women who are victims of violence. Without exception, community members expressed their concern, but they also spoke of their frustration with the lack of awareness that exists and the lack of action on this issue in the rural communities. Again, we heard the call for more public education about the complex and multifaceted nature of woman abuse. Again, we heard about the ineffectiveness of the criminal justice system in dealing with this issue. Again, we heard about the toll that limited funding has taken on social and health services. It is depressing to realise that violence against women has been a public issue for several decades now and yet there seems to have been so little progress. We hope that this study will result in action at the community and the policy level.





## APPENDIX E

### Community Abuse Program of Rural Ontario (CAPRO)

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The Community Abuse Program for Rural Ontario (CAPRO) started as a not-for-profit project dedicated to addressing rural violence and abuse problems with collaborative, community-based solutions. This was deemed necessary because most of the current policies and programs are often designed using urban models. Donna Lunn, a past-president of the Ontario Farm Women's Network, created CAPRO after initiating a pilot project in East Elgin in 1994. The pilot project promoted community awareness around the issues of rural domestic abuse in order to encourage collaborative community action. This was followed by a “Building Support for Community Action” provincial conference which laid some important foundations for building and strengthening provincial, cross-sectoral relationships that were to become an important component of CAPRO.

CAPRO believes in “Rural Solutions to Rural Concerns” and has been promoting community development and striving for healthier rural communities since 1994. Encouraging rural communities to define abuse within their own context, and identify their barriers as well as their assets and capacities also encourages these communities to take ownership and responsibility of the issue, and design their own solution.

Abuse is abuse, however, the factors which are unique to 'rural' living influence its identification and delivery of support services. Besides the obvious obstacle of a large geographic area with a sparse population which hinders the location of support services, there are many other rural influences. Some of these include, a lack of public transportation, lower household incomes, lack of family care programs, underservicing of medical services, and isolation. The reliance on family for support, and the tight knit community where, perhaps, kinship is strong can at times be either a challenge or an asset.

In an area where health and social services are non-existent or declining and families do not have 'benefit' packages, strong communities are an asset. The high rate of volunteerism and the keen sense of community and caring are valuable. Engaging rural citizens in defining their challenges and assets and having input to create their own programs increases the suitability, the acceptance and the sustainability of them.

CAPRO's objectives are to:

- 1 increase the awareness of abuse and violence to rural residents themselves; and increase the awareness of services available
- 2 increase the sensitivities of rural uniqueness to the service providers to rural communities;
- 3 and to encourage a collaborative community model to prevent further abuse.

Certainly what separates CAPRO from other organizations is the level of participatory research and

the belief in the empowerment of our rural communities. CAPRO has invested in the capacity building of individuals and communities. The program is based on a train-the-trainer process, thereby, leaving transferrable skills in the community. CAPRO has borrowed a concept taken from the Inuktituk language, "Isoomituk"- 'the person who can create the environment to allow wisdom to reveal itself". By inviting all stakeholders to participate, the community holds the knowledge of their needs, challenges, assets and pathways to solutions. CAPRO has played the role of Isoomituk - for we have provided the forum for various service providers, local and provincial, to meet together with community people and other informal service providers for a realistic, holistic awareness of abuse in the rural community.

Five years of local action and research on a province-wide basis has resulted in an increased knowledge of abuse in the rural context. CAPRO has also successfully increased the awareness of abuse within many farm and rural households and organizations, and created partnerships among local, provincial, and federal levels.

Key events in 1998 were designed to draw together the community-based analysis and action and to critically analyze CAPRO's research and experience, resulting in identification of best management practices for successful community action, as well as identification and extraction of recommendations for policy and program development. Two publications resulted.

CAPRO has accomplished a great deal in the past five years:

- over 120 trained group facilitators across the province
- local community action that is sensitive to, and includes, a community's character
- empowerment of local individuals and communities
- Ontario Rural Women's Abuse Study (ORWAS) – partnering with the Department of Justice
- "Communities Against Violence" provincial conference –December 1998, Ontario Police College (Proceedings available in French).
- *Rural Ontario Voices Against Violence: Policy and Program Recommendations* – released publicly in December 1999, these recommendations are targeted to government and others to provide a rural perspective for their policy and program decisions. (available in French)
- *Rural Ontario Voices Against Violence: Workbook for Community Action* – this handbook gives communities a guide for addressing the issue of violence and abuse in their own area, and is a tool for developing solutions that are best for their residents.

## **ADVISORY BOARD, 1999**

Dr. Tony Fuller, Professor, School of Rural Planning & Development, University of Guelph

Ms. Helga McDonald, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs

Ms. Arthena Hecker, President, Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario

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Ms. Mary O'Connor, Foundation for Rural Living

Ms. Sue Mitchell, Rural Abuse Consultant

Ms. Donna Lunn, CAPRO Coordinator

## **CAPRO's PARTNERSHIPS (federal, provincial and local)**

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada  
Department of Justice Canada  
National Population Health Clearing House  
Status of Women Canada

Education Wife Assault  
Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario  
Foundation for Rural Living  
Ontario Farm Women's Network  
Ontario Federation of Agriculture  
Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs  
Ontario Provincial Police  
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