DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN FARMING COMMUNITIES: OVERCOMING THE UNIQUE PROBLEMS POSED BY THE RURAL SETTING

Wendy Boka[*]

---

* J.D. candidate, Drake University Law School, Des Moines, Iowa (anticipated 2005); B.A. in Political Science and Spanish, Simpson College, Indianola, Iowa (2002).

I. INTRODUCTION: AN OVERVIEW OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE SCOPE OF THIS NOTE

The term "domestic violence" has been used to describe abuse inflicted by spouses, partners, children, siblings, parents, and other relatives. The term is often used synonymously with the term "domestic abuse," which can encompass child abuse, elder abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, physical abuse, mental abuse, threats, stalking, sexual harassment, and more. Such behavior crosses socio-economic and racial lines, and can occur within the context of many types of relationships. Persons who are dating, living together, have a child with another, are married, civilly committed, broken up, separated, or divorced may be victims of domestic violence. Victims of domestic violence include both men and women.

For purposes of this Note, the terms "domestic violence" and "domestic abuse" will be used interchangeably to define abuse perpetrated by a man against a woman in the course of a non-platonic relationship[1]; accordingly, victims and perpetrators will be referred to as women and men, respectively. This limitation is due to space constraints, and is not intended to suggest that domestic violence committed against men or committed within the context of homosexual relationships is not a serious problem within rural communities.

Nationally, domestic violence is a widespread problem. It is the leading cause of injury to women in America between the ages of fifteen and forty-four,[2] and it is estimated that as many as "[o]ne in three American women will be assaulted by an intimate partner in her lifetime."[3] Domestic violence costs the United States between three and five billion dollars annually, and the cost to American businesses amounts to "$100 billion in lost wages, absenteeism, sick leave utilization, and non-productivity."[4]

When the topic of domestic violence arises, perhaps the most commonly asked question within the general populace is: "Why doesn't she leave?" This question largely reflects both a culture of "every man for himself"-styled victim blaming, as well as a lack of understanding of the issues involved with domestic

---

1. V. MICHAEL MCKENZIE, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN AMERICA 9 (1995) (stating, "statistics indicate that approximately 95 to 98 percent of the victims of spousal battery are women") (citing ANGELA BROWNE, WHEN BATTERED WOMEN KILL (1987); FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION, UNIFORM CRIME REPORTS FOR THE UNITED STATES (1990)).

2. *Id.* at 13.

3. *Id.* (citations omitted).

4. *Id.* at 18 (citing COLORADO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COALITION, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FOR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS (3d ed. 1991)).

violence. Perhaps we should instead ask: "Why is he abusive?" On the other hand, the former question is not irrelevant, as the average victim of domestic violence "leaves a violent relationship and returns to it . . . seven times before leaving for good."[5] However, merely asking, "Why doesn't she leave?" over-simplifies the problem.

The question we should ask instead is: "Why are victims of domestic abuse so frequently unable to successfully leave the abusive relationship?" One study of women who had obtained protective orders against abusive partners revealed that they "tried an average of thirteen different strategies [in efforts to stop the violence], including talking to the abuser about the abuse, consulting family and friends, calling the police, leaving him, and seeking counseling or legal advice."[6] Thus, while the general public wonders why abused women aren't doing something to help themselves out, "the number and variety of strategies tried suggests that battered women continue over time to increase their help seeking rather than to decrease it and become passive."[7]

This question of why it is so difficult for battered women to successfully leave their abusers must be asked, and the answer evaluated in a manner that does not seek to re-victimize or blame the battered woman who remains in an abusive relationship. This Note will explain why victims often do not or cannot leave such a relationship, as well as the problems faced by battered women when they attempt to leave an abusive partner. This Note will also show that, although several of these issues facing battered women are present in both the urban and rural contexts, the hurdles facing rural victims are both higher and more numerous.

After addressing the problems facing rural victims of domestic violence, this Note will propose rural-specific solutions to these problems in the areas of lawmaking, education, funding, law enforcement, advocacy, and legal services.

---

5. Nikki Kallio, *Awareness Is Key to Breaking Cycle of Violence*, WAUSAU DAILY HERALD, Oct. 13, 2002, at 8, *available at* 2002 WL 26776534.

6. Karla Fischer et al., *The Culture of Battering and the Role of Mediation in Domestic Violence Cases,* 46 SMU L. REV. 2117, 2136, *reprinted in* DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LAW: A COMPREHENSIVE OVERVIEW OF CASES AND SOURCES [hereinafter DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LAW] 87, 94 (Nancy K.D. Lemon ed., 1996) (citation omitted).

7. *Id.* (citations omitted).

II. THE PROBLEMS AND ISSUES FACED BY RURAL VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

A. *Dangers Associated with Leaving an Abuser*

Abused women "are most likely to be murdered when attempting to report abuse or to leave an abusive relationship."[8] In one hospital, "73% of the battered women seeking emergency medical services sustained injuries *after* leaving the batterer."[9] A victim of domestic abuse may be "restrained from leaving by violent or coercive means: by being held prisoner in her home, by being threatened with custody suits, by having her savings taken away before she could depart."[10] Batterers overwhelmingly commit this "particular assault on a woman's body and volition that seeks to block her from leaving, retaliate for her departure, or forcibly end the separation."[11]

Often, then, women must choose between tolerating known abuse and risking the increased abuse that so frequently accompanies a split. No information suggests that this "separation assault"[12] is more common or more severe in rural areas than in urban locales, although the impact might be felt more deeply by rural women who do not have the same access to medical attention or immediate safe havens as do their urban counterparts.[13] This type of behavior is not extensively addressed in this Note because it is not germane to the rural emphasis of the Note. However, its importance in the dynamics of abusive relationships cannot be overstated. Fear of retribution is overwhelmingly cited as a reason that women remain in abusive relationships, and this fear should be remembered and

---

8. Barbara J. Hart, *The Legal Road to Freedom, in* BATTERING AND FAMILY THERAPY: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE 13, 16 (Marsali Hansen & Michele Harway eds., 1993), *reprinted in* DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LAW, *supra* note 6, at 36, 37 (citing D. SONKIN ET AL., THE MALE BATTERER: A TREATMENT APPROACH (1985); A. BROWNE, WHEN BATTERED WOMEN KILL (1987)).

9. *Id.* at 37 (citing E. STARK ET AL., WIFE ABUSE IN THE MEDICAL SETTING: AN INTRODUCTION TO HEALTH PERSONNEL (Nat'l Clearinghouse on Domestic Violence, Domestic Violence Monograph Series, No. 7, April 1981)) (emphasis added).

10. Martha R. Mahoney, *Legal Images of Battered Women: Redefining the Issue of Separation*, 90 MICH. L. REV. 1, 63 (1991) (citing LEWIS OKUN, WOMAN ABUSE: FACTS REPLACING MYTHS 69 (1986)).

11. *Id.* at 54.

12. *See id.* at 65 (proposing that the use of the label "separation assault" would allow the public to better address this phenomena of abusive relationships).

13. *See Domestic Violence Is a Rural Health Issue*, 5 RURAL HEALTH NEWS, Winter 1999, at 1, *available at* http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/ihp/ruralheal/ruralnews1298/DV.html (noting that rural areas make do with fewer medical resources than urban areas).

considered in combination with the other factors more thoroughly addressed in this Note.[14]

B. *Lack of Education and Awareness Regarding Domestic Violence*

In order for any problem to be rectified, it must first be identified as a problem. A recent study of women in China revealed "rural residents accept family violence as a fact of life."[15] Although 47% of the rural village women surveyed "perceived being beaten by their husbands as 'a loss of face,'" a significant 38% "did not think much of it."[16] By comparison, urban women who are "more aware of their rights . . . will not tolerate violations" such as physical abuse.[17] While the numbers would likely be different in America, this study serves to emphasize the impact of the rural setting. Moreover, it demonstrates the importance of knowledge and information; women who are not informed about their rights might not recognize abuse, even when living with it every day.[18] This is especially true when, as is frequently the case, the victim was abused as a child or grew up in a household where her mother was abused.[19]

Even when women recognize and report domestic abuse, other community members may not recognize the abuse as a serious problem.[20] For example, a school superintendent was recently arrested for domestic assault in McIntosh County, Oklahoma, a rural county of fewer than 20,000 people.[21] The seven-member school board gave him a "unanimous vote of confidence," and "[t]he

---

14. *See* Mahoney, *supra* note 10, at 65 (noting that the decision to separate often triggers an increase in violence by the batterer).

15. Jason Leow, *Most Suicide Victims in China Are Women*, THE STRAITS TIMES (Singapore), May 31, 2002, *available at* 2002 WL 21253268.

16. *Id.*

17. *Id.*

18. *See id.*

19. *See* Mark Herman, *Rural Women Struggle Against Isolation and Abuse*, DARTMOUTH ONLINE, Feb. 26, 2003, *at* http://www.thedartmouth.com/article.php?aid=200302260106 (last visited Jan. 26, 2005) ("Many children are raised in dysfunctional families in which violence is normalized. As a result, parents teach the dysfunctional behavior to their children and perpetuate the cycle of violence.").

20. *See* Carol K. Feyen, *Isolated Acts: Domestic Violence in a Rural Community, in* THE HIDDEN AMERICA: SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN RURAL AMERICA FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY 101, 107 (Robert M. Moore III ed., 2001) (explaining that rural victims often find police, judges, and clergy to be unresponsive to domestic abuse).

21. *See School Board Unanimously Backs Official*, THE DAILY OKLAHOMAN, Aug. 22, 2002, at 4A, *available at* 2002 WL 25359887. *See also* BUREAU OF ECON. ANALYSIS, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, MCINTOSH COUNTY MAPSTATS, *in* FEDSTATS, *at* http://www.fedstats.gov/qf/states/40/40091.html (last visited Jan. 26, 2005) (reporting that the 2002 estimated population of McIntosh County was 19,736).

district attorney's office declined to file charges."[22] His wife, who had worked in the superintendent's office, "was transferred to the principal's office by the school board."[23] Such "mental decriminalization of domestic violence" allows men to "perpetrate acts of battery on women with impunity—because the authorities tacitly support, encourage, and reinforce this behavior."[24] In this case, the "authorities" approving of the violence were not only persons in the district attorney's office, but also those overseeing the superintendent's employment.

This dismissive approach to domestic violence in rural areas might exist partly because there is a conception that domestic violence only occurs in urban areas; rural residents often live under a cloud of denial, feeling immune to social problems.[25] In one rural county, "prior to the establishment of the county shelter in 1979, leading officials and other local citizens *including physicians and social workers*, when confronted with battered women's advocates, repeatedly denied the presence of such a problem in their community."[26] In this community, the "[s]tart-up funds for the shelter program initially came from state grants, not local funds."[27] Thus, there is clearly a problem of denial; rural communities often do not want to admit that domestic violence is happening in their own homes.[28] In the county mentioned above, "[t]he attitude that family violence was not a local problem or a community problem remained dominant . . . until the women's shelter was established and a more pro-feminist ideology reshaped the discourse."[29] Interestingly, then, the problem often remains unrecognized until temporary solutions such as shelters and advocacy become a mainstay in the community; thanks to advocates, pieces of the solution to the domestic violence problem literally come to the community before anyone there realizes that there was a problem in the first place.

When educators and advocates make their appearance on the rural scene, then, they are often regarded as intruders into a private, family affair that should be handled informally rather than by formal institutions.[30] The hesitancy of victims to be open and honest about domestic violence is overwhelming.[31] While it

---

22. *School Board Unanimously Backs Official*, *supra* note 21.

23. *Id*.

24. MCKENZIE, *supra* note 1, at 6.

25. *See* Feyen, *supra* note 20, at 108.

26. *Id.* at 109 (emphasis added).

27. *Id.*

28. *See id.* at 108-109 (discussing the problems in rural communities in America with domestic violence).

29. *Id.* at 122.

30. *See id.* at 108-109.

31. *See generally Survey: Victims Keep Quiet*, ABERDEEN AM. NEWS, May 18, 2002, at 1A, *available at* 2002 WL 19709592 (discussing the fears rural women have about disclosing their history of domestic violence).

is commonly known that incidences of domestic violence are drastically underreported, it is still shocking to consider that as few as 1 in 270 domestic assaults are reported.[32] The lack of reporting reflects, in part, "the mistaken belief . . . that since domestic violence occurs in the private domain of intimate relationships, it is . . . less of a crime."[33] This is especially true in rural areas, where there is more pressure to keep the family unit intact, and where there is an "agrarian ideology of self-sufficiency" which often prevents victims from seeking outside help.[34]

Gender roles also factor into abusive relationships. Studies indicate women's identities are formed in the context of social relationships with others. This is especially true for rural women who have traditionally defined self through the nurturing roles of mother and wife."[35] Thus, women who leave an abusive partner often struggle because they define themselves as wives and mothers, and to leave would destroy or dramatically alter this self-identity. In addition, "[m]any women are socialized to believe that they are responsible for making their marriage work. Failure to maintain the marriage equals failure as a woman."[36]

Moreover, rural culture often reinforces "the dominance of men as the cultural norm."[37] Where this occurs, women who leave their abusive partners are frequently "stigmatized and ostracized by family and community members for violating the cultural norms."[38]

C. *Isolation*

Domestic abuse goes beyond individual, distinct incidents of physical battering. Batterers seek to isolate their victims from family and friends so that the abuse will go undiscovered, and so that the victim will not have a readily available support system should she decide to flee.[39] Isolation may be the most

---

32. Frances Patai, *Pornography and Woman Battering: Dynamic Similarities*, *in* THE ABUSIVE PARTNER: AN ANALYSIS OF DOMESTIC BATTERING 91, 94 (Maria Roy ed., 1982) *citing* Suzanne K. Steinmetz, *Wifebeating, Husbandbeating–A Comparison of the Use of Physical Violence Between Spouses to Resolve Marital Fights, in* BATTERED WOMEN 65 (Maria Roy ed., 1977).

33. MCKENZIE, *supra* note 1, at 6.

34. Feyen, *supra* note 20, at 122.

35. Linda K. Cummins, *Homelessness Among Rural Women*, *in* THE HIDDEN AMERICA: SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN RURAL AMERICA FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, *supra* note 20, at 57, 61 (citations omitted).

36. NAT'L COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, BARRIERS TO LEAVING A VIOLENT RELATIONSHIP, *at* http://www.ncadv.org/problem/barriers.htm (last visited Jan. 26, 2005).

37. Cummins, *supra* note 35, at 62.

38. *Id.*

39. *See generally* MCKENZIE, *supra* note 1, at 26-45 (detailing the stages of the spousal battery cycle).

important ingredient in the formation and continuation of abusive relationships, as "[t]he literature on domestic violence almost universally mentions isolation as a factor in the severity of violence and in the inability of women to leave abusive relationships."[40] Clearly, this issue is a much more significant problem in rural communities where "[t]here are no neighbors to hear screams and no doors to knock upon for immediate help."[41] The proximity to neighbors directly corresponds to the likelihood of third-party reporting of domestic abuse; where there is nobody close enough to hear or see a violent episode, there is nobody to call the police.[42]

Rural women face isolation in their daily lives that can also prevent them from seeking help between the attacks. In a rural county in Wisconsin, "[t]hirty percent of the victims [surveyed at a domestic violence shelter] reported having no phone. This is in great contrast to the general population, in which it was reported that only four percent were without a phone."[43] Perhaps more significantly, "[f]orty-seven percent of the victims reported having no access to a vehicle," usually because their abusive partner had control of the family's only vehicle.[44] This would mean that, unless fleeing on foot, a woman would only be able to leave when the family vehicle—and her abusive partner—was home.[45]

The lack of transportation options, both private and public, often means that rural women in abusive relationships must seek the help of others in order to leave their partners.[46] As previously discussed, most batterers isolate their victims from family and friends, making this option less viable.[47] In addition, the physical isolation that defines rural areas often makes escape more difficult—in the aforementioned rural Wisconsin county, for example, "[f]orty-five percent of the victims reported no family nearby and thirty-five [percent] reported no supportive neighbors."[48]

---

40. Feyen, *supra* note 20, at 107 (citations omitted).
41. *Id.* at 108.
42. *See id.*
43. *Id.* at 105-106.
44. *Id.* at 106.
45. *See* Andrea Ball, *Amid State Cuts, Rural Areas Fear Worst; 'Intolerable' Losses may Mean Trouble for Counties Already Short on Social Services*, AUSTIN AM.-STATESMAN, July 28, 2003, at B1, *available at* 2003 WL 56773611 (discussing the difficulties faced by a woman who fled on foot from an abusive home in a rural community).
46. *See* Feyen, *supra* note 20, at 106 (noting that approximately twenty percent of rural victims seeking shelter services received transportation from law enforcement).
47. NAT'L COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, *supra* note 36.
48. Feyen, *supra* note 20, at 106.

D. *Lack of Resources*

An overwhelming problem facing victims of domestic violence is the lack of resources available. This lack of resources encompasses not only a lack of domestic violence shelters, but also an insufficiency in educational and job opportunities, housing, health care, legal services, and child care.

1. *Domestic Violence Shelters*

The immediate resource needed by victims is domestic violence shelters. Unfortunately, this is the resource that is most likely to be inaccessible or simply nonexistent in rural areas.[49] While "[n]ationwide, there are four times more shelters for animals than there are for [battered] women,"[50] the scarcity of emergency shelters is particularly apparent in rural areas.[51] As one counselor at a women's resource center in Canada stated, "we are still a rural community and don't have a lot of resources in terms of social justice compared to bigger areas. We have [fewer] followup services."[52]

Rural Texas provides perhaps the most striking example of the lack of domestic violence resources in rural areas. Of the 196 rural counties in Texas, only twenty have a family violence center.[53] One advocate described how, prior to the building of a county shelter, "[o]ne [abused] woman ran four miles in her bare feet . . . in the middle of the night through the woods…at 3 a.m." to the victim's home for help.[54] Despite their scarcity in rural areas, the importance of such services cannot be underestimated. One young, battered woman, who was fortunate enough to live in one of the rural Texas counties with a family violence center, arrived at the shelter with bruises on her face, a broken nose, and a ruptured uterus.[55] She stated, "If it hadn't been for [the shelter] . . . I would have stayed."[56]

---

49. *See, e.g.,* Ball, *supra* note 45 (stating that rural areas have a shortage of services that are prevalent in urban areas).

50. FEMINIST RESEARCH CENTER, FEMINIST MAJORITY FOUNDATION, THE EMPOWERING WOMEN SERIES, No. 3, EMPOWERING WOMEN IN PHILANTHROPY (1991), *at* http://www. feminist.org/research/philanthropy/p_poverty.html (last visited Jan. 26, 2005).

51. *See, e.g.,* Ball, *supra* note 45 (stating that only "[t]wenty of Texas' 196 rural counties have family violence shelters").

52. *Domestic Assaults on the Rise in 'Nice Little Middle Class Villages'*, THE CAN. PRESS, Sept. 15, 2003, *available at* 2003 WL 64038980.

53. Ball, *supra* note 45.

54. *Id.*

55. *Id.*

56. *Id.*

2. *Employment Opportunities*

Although shelters serve the immediate needs of women fleeing abusive partners, other resources are required before the decision to leave can be made permanent because of the obstacles associated with leaving an abusive relationship.[57] While shelters provide numerous services, they are temporary stepping stones on a woman's path to independence and freedom. Many battered women must start from scratch, having left their partner with nothing more than their children and the clothing on their backs.[58] Many such women "have no property that is solely theirs" and some "lack access to cash or bank accounts."[59]

Consequently, a first step for many women is to seek employment. Often, these women will be seeking employment for the first time, as they might have previously stayed home to care for children or their abusers would not previously allow them to maintain jobs.[60] Even when rural women have applicable job skills, a lack of formal training or education frequently prevents them from obtaining gainful employment. A survey of farm women in Wisconsin who had left their batterers revealed that "[e]ach of these women . . . was responsible for the bookkeeping [on the farm]."[61] However, "[a]ll of these farm women who spent their lives working at various jobs on the farm were faced with the dilemma of being officially 'unskilled.'"[62] Finding a job is made even more difficult given that "rural areas have [historically] lagged behind urban areas in wages and economic development" and that, "[t]raditionally, rural economies have lacked diversity and have concentrated on one means of supporting their communities."[63]

When jobs are available, "on average, rural women earn only 50 percent of rural men's wages for comparable work."[64] The extreme economic hardship faced by rural women is aptly demonstrated by recent research comparing the cost of living to average wages earned by rural Kentucky women. "Researchers have estimated cost of living for a single mother with two children in rural Kentucky to be . . . $19,709 per year. In order to meet the minimum budget and pay taxes, this would require an hourly wage of $10.61 . . . [rural] women earned on

---

57. *See* NAT'L COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, *supra* note 36 (stating that women stay due to lack of resources, institutional responses, and traditional ideologies).

58. *See generally* Ball, *supra* note 45 (stating the reasons why women's shelters are needed in rural areas).

59. NAT'L COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, *supra* note 36.

60. *See id.*

61. Feyen, *supra* note 20, at 119.

62. *Id.*

63. Cummins, *supra* note 35, at 59.

64. *Id.* at 86.

average $8.33 per hour."[65] At the end of the year, this leaves them $4,556 short of what would be required in order to raise two children.[66]

3. *Housing*

"A large number of homeless women and children today have fled violent situations, and women often balance the possible harm to the children through inadequate housing with the harm from maintaining the relationship."[67] Rural women face two primary problems when seeking housing in rural areas. First, they tend to make less money than men or their urban counterparts.[68] Second, housing is not readily available in rural areas.[69]

Not only do "[t]he extremely high poverty rates among female-headed families in rural areas make rural women particularly vulnerable to homelessness,"[70] but there is also a lack of adequate housing available in rural areas.[71] This is especially true in the rural Midwest, which is experiencing "rapid population growth as immigrant and migrant workers flock to rural communities in search of stable employment in the meat-packing industry."[72] Such population growth increases the demand for housing and drives up the cost.[73]

4. *Health Care*

"The regionalization of . . . health services has resulted in the creation of very large rural service areas covering many counties."[74] When health care services span several counties, access is difficult due to transportation and schedul-

---

65. Katherine Cason, *Poverty in Rural America*, *in* THE HIDDEN AMERICA: SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN RURAL AMERICA FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, *supra* note 20 at 27, 27.

66. *Id.* (basing figures on a study that sought to determine the cost of living for a single mother with two children in rural Kentucky).

67. Mahoney, *supra* note 10, at 23.

68. *See, e.g.*, Cummins, *supra* note 35, at 86 (discussing the great disparity between the wages of men and women in rural areas).

69. *See id.* at 57 (stating that one of the leading factors in causing homelessness among women is an "inability to secure affordable low income housing…").

70. *Id.* at 59.

71. *Id.* at 57.

72. Rochelle L. Dalla & Shirley L. Baugher, *Immigration and the Rural Midwest*, *in* THE HIDDEN AMERICA: SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN RURAL AMERICA FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, *supra* note 20, at 219, 219.

73. *See id.* at 227 (identifying housing availability as a significant problem in rural meatpacking communities).

74. Susan Murty, *Regionalization and Rural Service Delivery*, *in* THE HIDDEN AMERICA: SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN RURAL AMERICA FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, *supra* note 20, at 199.

ing problems.[75] The effect of this problem cannot be overstated, as, "[w]hen asked about preferred confidants, victims of domestic violence . . . overwhelmingly choose physicians" over clergy and police.[76] Moreover, when a woman seeks medical treatment for her injuries, it is a crucial juncture because she is being exposed to somebody outside the sphere of violence, and may even be at the doctor's office without her abusive partner standing by.

Despite the fact that battered women prefer to address the abuse with a health care provider, research done by the University of South Dakota School of Medicine indicates that only twenty-one percent of victims of domestic violence had actually discussed the issue with a doctor.[77] The discrepancy between rural and urban victims is striking—"[w]hile 16 percent of those answering the survey in larger towns reported physical assaults, just 3 percent did likewise in rural areas."[78] The difference is likely not because there is less physical violence in rural areas, but instead likely reflects that rural women are more reluctant to report domestic abuse.[79]

It is likely that rural women are more hesitant to report abuse to their doctors because of the belief that domestic violence is a private issue, because it seems futile to tell a doctor who is located in another county, or because the doctor personally knows the victim, the abuser, or both.

5. *Law Enforcement*

Intervention of law enforcement officials is common in households of abuse, and is often the first step toward breaking the cycle of violence.[80] In rural areas, "[l]ow population density produces a 'high density of acquaintanceship' in many areas . . . . Local police, who should be called on to intervene in domestic-abuse situations, are often friends of the family."[81] It is not uncommon for the police in small towns and rural areas to be "drinking and high school buddies" with the abuser; one rural victim reports that, "[t]hey took [my husband] aside,

---

75. *See id.* at 204-05 (discussing the lack of access to health services in rural areas due to the distance residents must travel to receive care).

76. *Domestic Violence Is a Rural Health Issue*, *supra* note 13, at 1.

77. *Survey: Victims Keep Quiet*, *supra* note 31.

78. *Id.*

79. *See id.* (explaining how although the rural numbers may appear low, "it is unlikely domestic violence is less prevalent in rural areas of South Dakota.").

80. *See* Feyen, *supra* note 20, at 114.

81. Robert M. Moore, *Introduction, in* THE HIDDEN AMERICA: SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN RURAL AMERICA FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, *supra* note 20, at 13, 16-17.

talked to him and made him promise not to do it again. Then they pressured me not to press charges against him."[82]

All too often, rural police are simply ill-equipped to deal with domestic violence.[83] They are less likely than urban officers to be trained in techniques to be employed at the scene of the violence or to possess "sensitization to the problems victims face when asked to participate in sending their husband or partner to jail."[84] Although victims sometimes object to an arrest, "where police arrest perpetrators of domestic violence rather than separating the couple or mediating between the victim and offender, the arrested perpetrators are significantly less likely to recidivate within six months . . . ."[85]

Even where police officers are sufficiently trained to deal with domestic violence and its attendant problems, "[i]nsufficient staffing in the sheriff's department could lead to situations [in which] the only officer on duty had to respond to an emergency call for assistance at the opposite end of the county."[86] The longer it takes for law enforcement to respond to a call for help, the more time the batterer has to convince his victim to tell the police a story that will not cause him to be arrested, either by promises to change or by threats against her safety or that of her children. Moreover, a longer response time increases the likelihood that the violence will have ceased prior to police intervention, making it more difficult for police to ascertain what has occurred and to respond appropriately.

III. SOLUTIONS FOR RURAL VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

A. *Increased Emphasis on Domestic Violence Education*

Although domestic violence is not a problem that can ultimately be "solved" by persons other than the abusive partners, many other actors can work to produce an environment where such behavior is not tolerated and not allowed to thrive. Key to combating domestic violence is to understand the problem. For maximum effectiveness, different actors must be educated in different ways.

---

82. Feyen, *supra* note 20, at 119.

83. *See id.* at 116 (noting the importance of specialized training for police officers to be able to appropriately handle domestic disputes).

84. *Id.* (citations omitted).

85. Hart, *supra* note 8, at 39.

86. Feyen, *supra* note 20, at 115.

1. *Women*

As previously noted, women in rural areas are less likely to recognize domestic violence as a problem or a crime. As such, before the issue can be addressed in rural areas, women must be made aware that what is happening to them is abuse, and also that they have the power to do something about it.

Most domestic violence education comes from domestic violence advocates, whether directly or indirectly.[87] Among other things, organizations and individuals working to combat domestic violence produce and distribute information designed specifically for victims.[88] These materials are sometimes distributed directly, such as to women who come to shelters seeking assistance. These materials are also dispersed through public channels, being placed, for example, in women's restrooms in shopping malls. Finally, materials can be disseminated to other actors within the chain of help, such as physicians, who then pass them along to women in need of assistance. In rural areas, where a woman might not have as much access to public channels of information, or to shelters and advocates directly, the task of educating women lies in the hands of other actors.

As such, creative means must be employed within rural communities in order to make women aware of the options and resources available to them. For example, the National Cosmetology Association currently operates a program called "CUT IT OUT" in about a dozen states.[89] The vice president of the Association noted that customers often confide in their stylists, and said, "[t]here have been situations where clients would talk about their problems and you knew it was abuse. You look back and think, 'I didn't know what to do.'"[90] The "CUT IT OUT" program "trains hair stylists, cosmetologists and salon workers to offer assistance to clients who admit [to being] or appear to be mired in abusive relationships."[91] Program training includes recognition of the signs of abuse, role-playing, and the admonition that cosmetologists are not counselors, and are to refer victims to potentially beneficial services.[92]

In rural areas, educating women about domestic violence and their options when faced with this crime cannot and should not be left solely—or even primarily—to advocates. Doctors, police officers, court personnel, social workers, and prosecutors must be prepared to educate women about these issues. As

---

87. *See*, *e.g.*, NAT'L COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, ABOUT NCADV: MISSION STATEMENT AND PURPOSE, *at* http://www.ncadv.org/about.htm (last visited Jan. 27, 2005).

88. *See id.*

89. Cindi Lash, *Salon Workers Being Enlisted to Combat Abuse*, PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE, July 11, 2004, at C1, *available at* 2004 WL 84794956.

90. *Id.*

91. *Id.*

92. *See id.*

many of these individuals are uninformed about domestic violence themselves, it is up to bar associations, police training academies, medical schools, law schools, and universities to put more of an emphasis on domestic violence as part of standard education and training.[93] Indeed, "[t]he academic community must demonstrate leadership in this area . . . Debates, lectures, academic course work, seminars and conferences can ignite the process of public awareness, and preparatory training for domestic violence and spousal battery interventionists."[94] Ideally, such education and training would include components on the differences and difficulties posed by rural life and the unique facets of farming communities.

In order to bring about change in the training and education received by such actors, it is likely that domestic violence advocates will have to push for such changes. While advocates might be unsuccessful in lobbying for greater funding and facilities in rural areas, they might succeed when lobbying for an increase in mandatory domestic violence training and rural issues training for police officers, emergency medical technicians, and criminal justice and sociology students.

2. *Health Care Providers*

"Physical symptoms such as high blood pressure, ulcers, chronic back pain, chronic fatigue, and tension headaches may manifest as a result of physical abuse or as a result of the stress produced by the other forms of violence."[95] However, "[a]lthough battered women seek medical care frequently, as few as one in [twenty] are correctly identified by the practitioners to whom they turn for help."[96] Clearly, there is an overwhelming need for physicians and other health care workers to be better equipped to identify and handle domestic violence.

"Practitioners need to routinely inquire about domestic violence, provide sensitive and nonpunitive support, address patient safety, document the abuse, provide information about options and resources, and offer referrals."[97] Regarding these duties, a rural setting can be both beneficial and detrimental for health care workers. Some rural physicians view domestic violence screening as futile in light of the scarcity of resources available for those women who indicate that

---

93. *See* MCKENZIE, *supra* note 1, at 143.
94. *Id.* at 143-44.
95. Fischer, *supra* note 6, at 89.
96. Ariella Hyman et al., *Laws Mandating Reporting of Domestic Violence: Do They Promote Patient Well-Being?, in* DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LAW, *supra* note 6, at 727 (citations omitted).
97. *Id.*

they are indeed victims.[98] Further, "health care providers often hesitate to ask these questions because they lack training and information, and they fear the amount of time it may take to respond."[99]

However, "[o]ne advantage rural providers may have . . . is familiarity with their patients."[100] Unlike physicians in urban areas, "rural providers know their patients well, and the patients are familiar with and rely on them. These kinds of relationships can lead to useful interventions."[101] Rural physicians must be trained to take advantage of this relationship with patients in order to identify domestic violence as an issue. Dr. John Nelson, a spokesperson for the American Medical Association's National Coalition of Physicians Against Family Violence, put it this way: "If I can ask a patient questions about the most intimate details of her sex life, I can certainly make clear that she can talk to me about family violence."[102]

Further, rural doctors should not be deterred by the apparent lack of resources. Even if helpful resources are not readily available to a victim in a rural area, discussing domestic violence with patients serves to educate women that such violence is a problem, establishes documentation of abuse, and encourages candor in future medical visits. This documentation "is essential for treatment as well as legal redress of domestic violence episodes. Medical professionals must become aware that they will be summoned into court to testify in . . . domestic violence cases . . . . The interview data gathered during a medical intervention is not only a medical document, but a legal one as well."[103] Also, physicians from virtually any location can provide victims with national hotlines and websites, and can also assist women in devising a safety plan for escape. Finally, discussion of domestic abuse sends the message to abused women that others will in fact listen and will take their needs and concerns seriously; the importance of the discussion of domestic violence, as battered women seek to break out of the cycle of violence, cannot be overstated.

3. *Clergy and the Religious Community*

Many people remain silent on the issue of domestic abuse because they either do not recognize that it is occurring, or they do not feel that it is their place

---

98. *See Domestic Violence Is a Rural Health Issue*, *supra* note 13, at 1 (quoting one physician as saying, "Not screening because you're in a rural area with few resources is a cop-out.").

99. *Id.*

100. *Id.*

101. *Id.*

102. *Id.*

103. MCKENZIE, *supra* note 1, at 137.

to "interfere." Particularly in rural areas, "[n]o one dares to interfere in the intimate relationship between husband and wife, even when the husband's violence and the wife's danger are apparent."[104] In the traditional Christian marriage ceremony, "the minister warns, '[w]hom therefore God has joined together let no man put asunder.' These words stand between the battered wife and any help she may seek."[105] The values of family cohesiveness and religion are often of great importance to those in rural communities. "The rural church tends to be more fundamentalist than its urban counterpart, more literalist in the reading of Biblical texts. Members tend to support the male-dominated family."[106]

While religious influences can prevent ordinary persons from reacting to domestic violence, clergy members are no more helpful to victims. "[T]he typical rural pastor does not know about, and is not trained to deal with, the dynamics of domestic violence nor the issues of power and control [that] surround and shape such a relationship."[107] In one rural community, "[m]any women [whose pastors called to speak to them while they were staying in a shelter] reported that their pastors took the side of their abusive husbands and tried to convince the women to return home."[108] In a particularly egregious example,

One victim . . . had suffered a nervous breakdown due to the extent of her abuse. The minister from her church contacted her *in the hospital* saying he would help the victim's husband gain legal custody of their children if she did not check herself out of the facility and return home. . . . [T]he woman left the facility.[109]

Clergy must be trained to view domestic violence not as a family dispute, but instead as a violent crime. Each assault is no less harmful to a woman than an assault would be coming from a stranger, yet the common response of the rural church to domestic violence is to classify this as a failure within a family rather than as a crime.[110] Although churches are typically opposed to divorce, religious leaders should be trained, at a minimum, to consistently help battered women by providing them with other resources.

In order for clergy to respond appropriately to domestic violence, it is essential that they receive training in pastoral counseling specific to this issue. Advocates can lobby boards of education to include domestic violence training

---

104. Del Martin, *A Letter From a Battered Wife, in* BATTERED WIVES (1981), *reprinted in* DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LAW, *supra* note 6, at 69, 71.

105. *Id.*

106. Feyen, *supra* note 20, at 112.

107. *Id.* at 113.

108. *Id.*

109. *Id.*

110. *See id.* at 112-13 (citing cases in which clergy have pressured women to return to violent marriages).

and sensitivity in divinity courses. Members of the clergy who have not been so trained must affirmatively seek instruction from psychologists and domestic violence advocates, and must be familiar with the network of assistance available to abuse victims. In rural churches, it is particularly important that pastors are knowledgeable about the available resources nationwide and locally. This will assuage the dominant fear of the rural victim: there is nowhere she can turn for help. Only by receiving such education can pastors hope to serve the needs of their congregation.

Rural pastors can do more for victims than simply prepare to discuss resources with those who ask. A rural grant coordinator in Connecticut, for example, encourages pastors to address domestic violence in sermons.[111] She reported that, on average, four women came forward to admit to being abused after each service.[112]

4. *Legal Community*

It is important for judges to be educated on domestic violence issues, including "the harmful effects of gender bias and prejudice in court proceedings and judicial decisions."[113] As an example of how court proceedings and judicial actions may serve as a double-edged sword and accordingly run against the victim, "courts routinely grant mutual orders of protection rather than orders specifically protecting the women."[114]

Many judges see a restraining order as merely a means by which to separate the two partners, and the mutual restraining order is thought to be the device which will best accomplish this goal. As one trial judge commented upon his issuance of a mutual restraining order, "neither party should have anything to do with the other. It's a very simple matter."[115] The judge in this case stated that this goal "will be accomplished by restraining [the victim] from any contact with" her abuser.[116] He granted the mutual restraining order, explaining, "I don't think it's going to be necessary, but I don't see any reason why it hurts anything."[117] This judge failed to consider the effects of mutual restraining orders on victims.

---

111. Jenny Bone Miller, *The Victims Come from all Walks of Life and Have Varied Backgrounds*, NORWICH BULLETIN (CT.), May 3, 2004, at D1, *available at* 2004 WL 65126140.

112. *Id.*

113. MCKENZIE, *supra* note 1, at 112.

114. Mahoney, *supra* note 10, at 76.

115. Deacon v. Landers, 587 N.E.2d 395, 399 (Ohio Ct. App. 1990).

116. *Id.*

117. *Id.*

The adverse effects of mutual restraining orders may not be immediately apparent to many within the legal field, but they cannot be overstated. Often, "[i]f mutual orders are violated, police officers believe they must either arrest both parties or do nothing."[118] In fact, a task force on women in the courts has concluded that "a woman with a mutual order of protection is in a worse position than a woman with no order at all, since the mutual order makes her look equally violent . . . and the husband may not be held responsible if there is another violent incident."[119] Moreover, mutual protective orders fail to recognize protection of the victim as the primary objective; instead, they minimize the seriousness of the situation by signifying "that domestic violence is merely a petty private matter between the two parties, and not the deliberate, brutal attack by one individual which seriously endangers the other."[120] In effect, a mutual restraining order refuses to pick sides, refuses to recognize that a crime has been committed by an aggressor against a victim, and refuses to identify the threat posed to victims of domestic abuse.

It is imperative that judges are educated and trained as to the effect of such actions on victims of domestic violence. Judicial training should emphasize, for example, that the utility of protection orders depends "both on the specificity of the relief ordered and the enforcement practices of the police and the courts."[121] A high degree of specificity within the order not only "makes the offender aware of the specific behavior prohibited," but also "makes it easier for police officers and other judges to determine later whether the [batterer] has violated the order."[122]

In addition to drafting specific restraining orders against batterers, abused women benefit from "protection orders that confront the coercive controls in violence imposed by batterers, afford battered women and children safe housing and economic support, and exact swift and certain penalties for violation of any provision."[123] These factors should be considered by judges when issuing orders that protect battered women.

It is especially important for judges in rural areas to be trained on domestic violence issues for at least two reasons. First, as previously discussed police departments in rural areas are less likely to be trained adequately in handling domestic abuse calls and are more likely to have a personal relationship with

---

118. Mahoney, *supra* note 10, at 76.

119. *Id.*

120. Joan Zorza, *Women Battering: High Costs and the State of the Law,* 28 CLEARINGHOUSE REV. 383, 392 (1994), *reprinted in* DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LAW, *supra* note 6, at 271, 273.

121. Hart, *supra* note 8, at 40.

122. *Id.* (citations omitted).

123. *Id.*

either the abuser or the victim that colors the handling of the situation by rural law enforcement.[124] Second, the legal system may be the only—or at least the most readily accessible—means of assistance for abused women in rural areas. The shortage of other resources for battered women—social services, shelters, support groups, physicians, and therapists, for example—in rural areas makes the role of the justice system even more important to rural victims. At the same time, this shortage makes it even more imperative for those within rural court systems to be educated about the options—both legal and non-legal—available to victims of domestic abuse. These factors make the rural abused woman more reliant upon the legal community for assistance.

It is imperative that those within the legal community are aware that "[t]he most likely predictor of whether a battered woman will permanently separate from her abuser is whether she has the economic resources to survive without him."[125] Due to this stark reality, it is vital that those who play a role in domestic violence situations—judges, attorneys, physicians, social workers, advocates, and police officers, to name a few—are aware of, and consider the possibility that an abused woman is economically dependent on her batterer.

Financial dependence of victims is a greater concern when there are children involved, as batterers are "significantly less likely to pay court-ordered child support than [are] non-batterers, thereby compelling their partners to choose between poverty or reunification."[126] While welfare assistance may be an option for such victims, generally, mothers applying for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families ("TANF") must identify the father of the children and help the welfare department locate him, so that the government can attempt to recoup the money through a child support order.[127] While there is an exception to this requirement for battered women who can show "good cause," many women are unaware of this and are thus needlessly deterred from seeking financial assistance that might enable them to leave their abusers.[128] Those within the legal field who interact with victims of domestic violence have a responsibility to thoroughly understand the effect of domestic violence on public policy and to inform women as to their rights under the law. Victims must be informed about their financial

---

124. *See* Feyen, *supra* note 20, at 119.

125. Hart, *supra* note 8, at 38 (citations omitted).

126. Nancy K. D. Lemon, *Introduction*, *in* DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LAW, *supra* note 6, at 9 (discussing the results of one unpublished divorce study performed in 1986 in Philadelphia) (citations omitted).

127. 42 U.S.C.A. §§ 608(a)(2), (3) (West 2003).

128. Nancy K. D. Lemon, *Introduction*, *in* DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LAW, *supra* note 6, at 17. Lemon writes about the "good cause" exception to the requirements of Aid to Families with Dependant Children ("AFDC"). AFDC's successor, TANF, also contains a "good cause" exception for victims of domestic abuse.

options in order to increase the likelihood that they will be able to successfully separate from their abusers. This is one area in which family law attorneys, prosecutors, victim advocates, and judges should routinely counsel victims of domestic abuse.

Finally, of particular significance are those legal actors within the criminal justice system. The criminal conviction of batterers "can send a message to society that domestic violence is not just a family affair, it is a criminal act, and it will not be tolerated."[129] The decision to arrest and charge batterers is that of the state, not of the victim. "No state statute permits victims or perpetrators to compel or restrain an officer in his decision about arrest."[130] The courts must recognize that "domestic violence is a serious crime against the individual *and* society [and that] . . . [o]rders of protection are orders of the court, not orders of the victims."[131]

A recent case in a small Iowa town made worldwide news when Dixie Shanahan, a longtime victim of domestic violence, shot her abusive husband to death, then left his body in their bedroom for over a year.[132] Her husband Scott "was convicted twice of domestic abuse in 1997. A third conviction would have sent him to prison for up to five years. Judges dropped charges and lifted restraining orders after Dixie Shanahan asked them to."[133] At her first-degree murder trial, Shanahan claimed to have been acting in self-defense, saying he was moving toward the gun he had previously threatened her with.[134] The prosecutor also alluded to her husband's abusive past, telling the jury, "each time law enforcement acted on her complaints, it was Dixie Shanahan who then sought to withdraw the complaints and prevent the legal system from acting against her husband."[135] She was ultimately convicted of second-degree murder, and received a sentence of fifty years in prison, pursuant to Iowa's mandatory sentencing guidelines—a sentence the presiding judge proclaimed to be "legal, but . . . wrong."[136]

---

129. Teri L. Jackson, *Lessons Learned from a Domestic Violence Prosecutor,* PROSECUTOR'S BRIEF, Summer 1990, at 23, *reprinted in* DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LAW , *supra* note 6, at 561, 562.

130. Hart, *supra* note 8, at 41.

131. Illinois v. Townsend, 538 N.E.2d 1297, 1299 (Ill. App. Ct. 1989) (emphasis added).

132. Staci Hupp, *What Defiance Knew*, DES MOINES REG., Nov. 9, 2003, at A1, *available at* 2003 WL 64154423.

133. *Id.*

134. *Id.*

135. David Yepsen, Opinion, *Let Shanahan Case Run Course*, DES MOINES REG., May 16, 2004, at O1, *available at* 2004 WL 74843669.

136. Staci Hupp, *It may Be Legal, but It Is Wrong*, DES MOINES REG., May 11, 2004, at A1, *available at* 2004 WL 74843348.

Women are often reluctant to testify against their abusers because they fear retributive violence. Accordingly, prosecutors should plan to try batterers without the testimony of the victim, relying instead upon medical records, police reports, neighbor or witness accounts, the witnesses signed statement at the time of the assault, and a copy of the 911 call.[137] Had Scott Shanahan's prosecuting attorneys done this, perhaps he would be in jail rather than she.

5. *General Public*

Legal strategies collapse if the consciousness of the community is not aligned against violence, if emergency services and housing are not available to battered women and children, if human service institutions are not cognizant of domestic violence and are not employing strategies to safeguard victims and hold batterers accountable, and if the family and friends of the battered woman and the batterer do not reject violence as an option in intimate relationships and offer support for safety and change. Legal safeguards work best where society embraces practices compatible with the remedies articulated in the law.[138]

To protect women from violence at the hands of their partners, society must send a clear message that domestic abuse is unacceptable. Speaking to the acceptance of domestic violence in our society is the fact that

[B]atterers are usually involved in other social relationships, at work or elsewhere, where they become angry or have conflicts with others that they do not abuse. Their ability to cope with anger in some situations but not at home suggests that conflict and anger are not at the root of domestic violence.[139]

Instead, it is evidence of our society's willingness to accept violence within the home, but not outside those walls. For example, recall the superintendent from rural Oklahoma who was arrested for assaulting his wife, who worked in his office.[140] Imagine if he had assaulted another office worker who *was not* his wife. Assume even that the attack took place in his home, following a personal dispute. Surely the district attorney would have pressed charges. Surely the school board would not have responded with a unanimous vote of support. "Injuries inflicted in domestic violence incidents are as serious as, or more seri-

---

137. Candace J. Heisler, *Evidence and Other Information Sources in Domestic Violence Cases*, *in* DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LAW, *supra* note 6, 563, 563-64.

138. Hart, *supra* note 8, at 44.

139. Fischer, *supra* note 6, at 95.

140. *See School Board Unanimously Backs Official*, *supra* note 21 (offering an account of a situation where a school's superintendent arrested for domestic assault and battery of co-worker wife).

ous than, injuries inflicted in 90% of all violent felonies."[141] Society must recognize that an assault against a spouse is just as reprehensible as an assault against a co-worker, neighbor, or stranger. Treating domestic assaults in any other way implies that relationships carry an attendant right to commit battery.

The general public also must be informed about domestic violence—first, that it is a serious crime; and, also, how to recognize it, what to do in response to it, and how to help those in need of assistance. This can, and often is, done by advocates. Passive education often takes shape by literature placed in public locations or bulletin boards in community centers and town halls. Active education occurs through demonstrations, fundraisers, and displays. There is a national effort, for example, to raise awareness and funds during October each year, as that month is Domestic Violence Awareness Month.[142] This type of advocacy and awareness-raising must be continued, and must not be left to advocates alone.

B. *Bolstering and Bettering Rural Resources*

Overwhelmingly, a major hurdle for rural victims of domestic violence is the lack of resources available that aid in escaping from and putting an end to the abuse. The most obvious solution to this problem is an increase in the resources available to women in rural areas. Taiwan, for example, "requires all city and county governments to set up domestic violence prevention and control centers. The centers provide[] victims with protection, shelter, legal counseling, and other services on a 24-hour basis."[143] Clearly, such a program would prove most beneficial to rural areas, which currently bear a disproportionate burden when resources are scarce. However, providing this type of service to victims of domestic violence would be quite costly, and is not likely to happen until ending violence against women is recognized as a more pressing political and social goal in the United States.

Realizing this, and recognizing that rural abuse victims "are faced with unique barriers to receiving assistance, Congress created the Rural Domestic Violence and Child Victimization Enforcement Grant Program (Rural Pro-

---

141. Hart, *supra* note 8, at 39 (quoting ATTORNEY GENERAL'S FAMILY VIOLENCE TASK FORCE OF PENNSYLVANIA, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: A MODEL PROTOCOL FOR POLICE RESPONSE (1989)).

142. *See* NAT'L COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, *supra* note 87 (stating that the NCADV organizes "promotional and educational materials for October Domestic Violence Awareness Month").

143. S. REP. NO. 108-30, *available at* http://wwwc.house.gov/international_relations/108/86917c.pdf.

gram)."[144] Applicants for this grant "are encouraged to create or enhance partnerships between rural criminal justice agencies and community organizations, health care providers, schools, and businesses in order to promote cultural change and develop practices that enhance the safety of victims and children and hold offenders accountable for violent behavior."[145] Applicants are also required to "enter into a formal memorandum of understanding with at least one nonprofit, nongovernmental domestic violence victim services program."[146] This program correctly recognizes that victims are best served when cooperation exists between different actors and agencies that provide services to those affected by domestic violence.[147]

Another federal program that has proven beneficial to rural areas is Operation Weed and Seed, which is administered through the United States Department of Justice.[148] The four basic elements of this program are: 1) law enforcement; 2) community policing; 3) prevention, intervention, and treatment; and 4) neighborhood restoration.[149] In one rural South Dakota community where the Weed and Seed grant program is in operation, a social advocate remarked, "We have everyone from the community sitting around the table and talking—that's never happened before."[150] The Weed and Seed program "helps provide the equipment and training necessary to educate the public" about matters such as domestic violence.[151] For example, domestic violence advocates in Brown county of South Dakota were able to train police officers and prosecutors about the issues surrounding domestic violence.[152]

Clearly, then, in addition to seeking federal funding to expand rural resources and education, it is vital that those serving rural victims work together. Interaction between agencies and individual actors can go a long way toward eradicating domestic violence. Simply, "[c]ooperation among professionals and service agencies is critical to meeting the challenge [posed by] isolated areas."[153]

---

144. OFFICE ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, U.S. DEP'T OF JUSTICE, RURAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILD VICTIMIZATION ENFORCEMENT GRANT PROGRAM BRIEF, *at* http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo/rural_grant_desc.htm (last visited Jan. 27, 2005).

145. *Id.*

146. *Id.*

147. *See id.*

148. Jera Stone, *Program Making Progress in Brown County: Agencies Working Together in Effort to "Weed and Seed,"* ABERDEEN AM. NEWS, July 4, 2003, at 1B, *available at* 2003 WL 59141875.

149. *Id.*

150. *Id.*

151. *Id.*

152. *Id.*

153. Tom Humphrey, *UT To Help Troubled Children*, THE KNOXVILLE NEWS-SENTINEL, Aug. 1, 2003, at B1, *available at* 2003 WL 57928120.

Cooperation among different parties is especially important where budgets are scarce and resources are stretched thin, because agencies can then share the costs of things such as training, equipment, supplies, administrative support, and direct assistance.[154] When two parties have a common need, the time and money required to accomplish a goal can be divided and more resources can be saved to provide another needed service.[155] For example, victim advocates from the county prosecutor's office and family law attorneys can join forces to conduct training sessions for physicians or police officers. This coordination reduces the time and money spent by each, while providing a more comprehensive program to the trainees.

Finally, state and national actors must consider the importance of the needs of the rural population when implementing and enforcing policies. Too often, laws and procedures are designed with an "urbo-centric" mindset. This can be prevented, or at least substantially minimized, in two ways. First, more rural residents can be brought into the planning process. State and federal agencies and organizations—both governmental and in the private sector—need to actively recruit persons from rural as well as urban areas. Geographical diversity must be considered just as important as racial and gender diversity in forming action groups. Second, within policy-making bodies, an affirmative effort must be made to consider the implications of a policy at each stage as pertaining to rural areas. A concerted effort must be made by legislative bodies, administrative agencies, and nonprofit organizations to think outside the "urban box" when forming strategies for coping with domestic violence.

IV. CONCLUSION

Domestic violence is a prevalent problem among rural and farming communities across America, just as it is a problem in urban areas. The problems that contribute to domestic violence—power and control, physical dominance, social gender roles, economic dependence, isolation, and a lack of support resources—are present in rural society just as in urban society. However, additional barriers affect rural victims of domestic violence. These barriers include geographic isolation, economic structure, social and cultural pressures, and the lack of transportation, child care, housing, sufficient police availability and training, and a support system.

---

154. *See* Ball, *supra* note 45 (noting that "rural health care and social services struggle to remain viable because of inadequate service coordination and funding").

155. *See* Humphrey, *supra* note 153 (indicating how costs will be reduced and behavior improved with the coordination of professionals and social service groups).

Although the rural setting poses challenges in dealing with domestic violence, these challenges are not insurmountable. Increased funding for rural resources, more stringent training requirements for those who deal with victims of domestic abuse, a concerted effort to draft policies which are workable in rural communities, unique lobbying, creative advocacy, and cooperation among agencies and individuals working against domestic violence will help rural communities to better serve victims of abuse and prevent the crime against society that is domestic violence.