Domestic Violence in Regional Australia
a literature review

A report for the Commonwealth
Department of Transport and Regional
Services under the Partnerships
Against Domestic Violence Programme

Women's Services Network (WESNET)

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Partnerships Against
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Funded by the Commonwealth Government

COMMONWEALTH DEPARTMENT OF
TRANSPORT AND
REGIONAL SERVICES

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

FOREWORD

Australians living in regional areas have long been recognised for their resourcefulness when faced with adversity. It is now time that we drew on this strength to address an issue that has remained hidden. It has been perceived by many that domestic violence is something that doesn't happen in our regional communities.

We know that domestic violence is widespread and complex. It is a major issue affecting the social, emotional, physical and financial wellbeing of many Australians. Its impact is felt by individuals, families and communities. Each year the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments spend hundreds of millions of dollars responding to domestic violence. In regional Australia, domestic violence is often an unspoken problem.

The Federal Government through the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence Initiative has committed $50 million to explore new ways to address and prevent domestic violence. As part of this initiative, the Rural Domestic Violence Programme was established to provide governments and communities with a better understanding of domestic violence in regional Australia. There has been little information about alternative models for addressing domestic violence outside urban areas.

To address the issue of domestic violence in regional areas, we need to know more about its incidence and nature, and also the barriers people face when working to prevent it. While acknowledging that domestic violence exists in our regional homes, the report also demonstrates that regional Australians are developing innovative strategies to raise awareness of domestic violence and reduce the barriers to ending the cycle of violence.

This report is the result of an extensive literature review of research conducted on domestic violence in regional Australia. It shows that a greater proportion of people living in regional Australia are victims of domestic violence compared to people living in urban Australia. By developing better knowledge about this issue, in particular understanding that domestic violence in regional Australia has differences in causal factors and response options, we can start to do more to reduce the negative effects of this problem for all Australians.

The review has also helped to identify some of the strategies that are succeeding in preventing or reducing domestic violence at the community level. Through the Rural Domestic Violence Programme we are providing resources to 17 communities across Australia to strengthen the approaches that are succeeding. These communities will provide us with case studies on how we can better address the gaps in research and responses that this report identifies. A publication of good practice strategies, developed by practitioners working in regional, rural and remote communities will be developed for public dissemination following completion of the case study projects.

The use of violence is not an acceptable behaviour. We must acknowledge that for many people, particularly those in regional areas, seeking help to stop domestic violence is difficult. Through the Rural Domestic Violence Programme, I believe many communities will benefit from new information on how others are succeeding in responding to local domestic violence issues.

I commend this report to you.

JOHN ANDERSON

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1. INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is a serious social issue which not only has profound effects on the individuals and families directly involved but also has a considerable social and economic impact on the Australian community as a whole.

All levels of government and large parts of the non government sector are involved to varying extents in responding to domestic violence; and there is now a substantial body of literature dealing with the issue of violence in intimate relationships.

In August 1999 the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services commissioned the Women's Services Network (WESNET) to undertake a literature review on the issue of domestic violence in regional Australian communities. This project has been funded through *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence*, a Commonwealth Government initiative, working with the States and Territories and with the community to develop better ways of preventing and responding to domestic violence.

This report aims to consolidate and enhance our understanding of domestic violence in regional, rural and remote communities by reviewing existing national and international research on the issue, including some analysis of data from the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (see 2.2 below).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 METHODOLOGY

The review methodology comprised four specific strategies:

- review of existing literature relating to rural and remote domestic violence, including national and state based studies and international research (listed in full in the bibliography at the end of this report;
- review of selected data drawn from the National SAAP Data Collection;
- identification of key themes, issues and gaps; and
- feedback from informants and key stakeholders from both government and non-government sectors. (Attachment A)

2.2 SAAP NDCA DATA

The Commonwealth-State Supported Accommodation Assistance Program funds a range of services throughout Australia to provide support, accommodation and related services to clients who are homeless or who are at risk of homelessness, including women and children experiencing domestic violence. This includes women's refuges or shelters, medium term supported accommodation and outreach services, and telephone crisis services. In 1998/99, SAAP funded some 1,221 non-government, community or local government organisations nationally.

To inform this project, the Department of Transport and Regional Services purchased a number of statistical tables from the SAAP National Data Collection Agency (NDCA) covering the years 1996–97 and 1997–98 for this research. These are discussed later in the report.

2.3 DEFINITIONS

There are a number of ways to define domestic violence. In this report we have used the definition agreed by Heads of Government at the National Domestic Violence Summit convened by the Prime Minister in 1997 which underpins work under *Partnerships*.

Domestic violence is an abuse of power perpetrated mainly (but not only) by men against women in a relationship or after separation. Domestic violence takes a number of forms both physical and psychological. The commonly acknowledged forms of domestic violence are: physical and sexual violence; emotional and social abuse; and economic deprivation.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities prefer to use the term family violence, which:

was defined in a broad manner to encapsulate not only the extended nature of Indigenous families but also the context of a range of forms of violence occurring frequently between kinspeople in Indigenous communities.

(Memmot & Stacy 1999, p.2)

3. MEASURING THE EXTENT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS

This section discusses the prevalence and incidence of domestic violence nationally and in rural and remote communities. Existing data is patchy, with varying degrees of comprehensiveness, but present an important indication of the level and extent of domestic violence in rural and remote areas. The research reveals the following key points.

- Domestic violence is a significant problem within rural and remote communities.
- Where comparable data exists, they indicate that there is a higher reported incidence of domestic violence in rural and remote communities than in metropolitan settings.
- Remote communities experience higher rates of reported domestic violence than rural communities.
- Some particular groups of women within rural and remote communities experience particularly high rates of domestic violence.
- As is the case in metropolitan communities, the overwhelming majority of victims of domestic violence in regional communities are women, with most perpetrators being men.

3.1 THE EXTENT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

3.1.1 NATIONAL DATA – DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Published research around various facets of domestic violence in Australia has increased considerably in the last twenty years. Cross sectoral involvement has resulted in research in many sectors, including welfare, public housing, legal responses and health. However, domestic violence in rural and remote communities has to date been given relatively little attention in Australia.[1]

All available data indicates that the victims of domestic violence are predominantly women, with men being reported as perpetrators in 97% of incidents (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, cited in Coorey 1990c).

A national survey undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 1996 collected benchmark data on the nature and extent of violence against women in Australia. The study indicated that of the 6,300 women surveyed, 7.1% had experienced physical and/or sexual violence in the past 12 months, most frequently in the home. The survey also found that 23% of women who have ever been married or in a de facto relationship had experienced physical violence from a male partner.

As the women's safety survey was designed to produce national estimates of prevalence, it does not support reliable estimates for States and Territories or for rural and remote areas. To gain a picture of incidence in regional communities, it is necessary to examine a range of local or state based studies. Generally these record only reported cases of violence, that is, those that have come to the attention of welfare agencies or police and courts. In examining these figures, it is important to recall that violence between intimate partners is considered to be amongst the most under reported of crimes, part of the "grey figure of crime."[2] *Women's Safety Australia* found that only 4.5% of women who had been physically assaulted and 8.1% who had been sexually assaulted

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[1] Strategic Partners (1999) *Current Perspectives on Domestic Violence: A review of national and international literature.* Canberra p24.

[2] L Smith (1989) *Domestic Violence: An Overview of the Literature* London. HMSO.

contacted a crisis service, and only 19% and 15% respectively had reported the violence to the police. Women who had experienced violence by a current partner were least likely to have reported the last incident to the police (p 29).

3.1.2 RATES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE REPORTED BY SAAP SUPPORT PERIODS, BY GENDER AND REGION

In 1997–98, over 42,800 periods of support were provided by SAAP services across Australia. Of these over 40,000 support periods were provided to women and just under 2,800 to men who reported experience of domestic violence as the primary cause for needing support. Support was provided in rural or remote areas for domestic violence related needs for 18,390 of these SAAP support periods. It must be noted that SAAP support periods do not directly correlate to SAAP clients as a client could be the recipient of several support periods during a year.

Table 1: No. of SAAP support periods resulting from domestic violence, Australia 1997–98

	Capital city	Other metropolitan centre	Large rural centre	Other rural area	Remote area	Total
FEMALES SAAP support period	20,622	2,483	4,399	8,667	3,913	40,143
Estimated resident population aged 15+	4,805,904	565,029	441,923	1,402,284	187,546	7,402,686
Domestic violence rate (per 1000 population)	4.29	4.39	9.95	6.18	20.86	5.42
MALES SAAP support period	1,183	255	851	428	132	2,790
Estimated resident population aged 15+	4,609,844	547,879	416,881	1,409,382	223,067	7,207,053
Domestic violence rate (per 1000 population)	0.26	0.47	2.04	0.30	0.59	0.39
TOTAL SAAP support period	21,805	2,738	5,250	9,095	4,045	42,933
Estimated resident population aged 15+	9,415,748	1,112,908	858,804	2,811,666	410,613	14,609,739
Domestic violence rate (per 1000 population)	2.32	2.46	6.11	3.23	9.85	2.94

Notes:

1. 10,332 records in the SAAP data had missing values for gender. These have been assigned a gender according to the known distribution.

2. Estimated resident population figures refer to 30 June 1997 and were derived from ABS population data.

Source: AIHW unpublished data.

SAAP data indicates that the percentage of SAAP DV clients in remote areas who obtain restraining orders (11%) is about half the national average (22%). All other geographic areas displayed similar rates of use of restraining orders by SAAP domestic violence clients (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Prevalence of restraining orders among SAAP domestic violence clients by region, Australia, 1996–97 and 1997–98
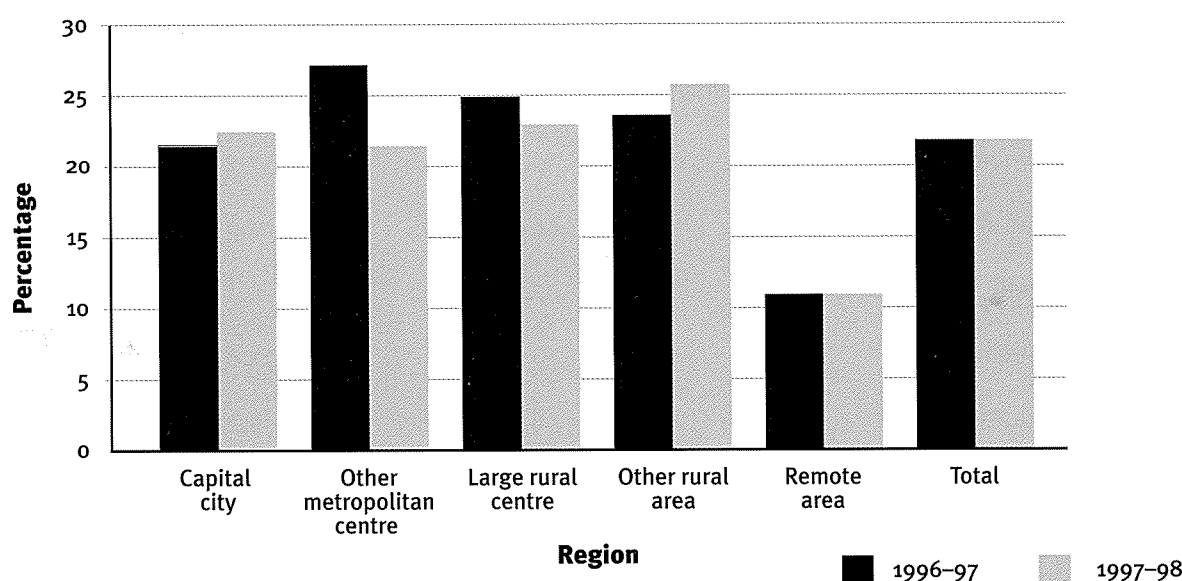
Source: SAAP NDCA

3.1.3 STATE BASED RESEARCH – WESTERN AUSTRALIA AND NSW

A study by the University of Western Australia Crime Research Centre, the Rural Crime and Safety Survey in Western Australia, details crime statistics for that state on a regional basis. It found that women living in rural and remote areas of WA experience higher rates of reported violence than women living in metropolitan regions (table 2). While the violent crime victimisation rate for women in Perth was 10.2 per 1000, most rural and remote regions had significantly higher rates. The study also found that women experienced higher reported victimisation rates than men throughout the nine rural and remote regions as a whole. The Centre observed:

This is in some ways a surprising finding. Almost universally males are victimised in violent crimes more than females—usually in a proportion in the range 60/40 to 53/47. The Metropolitan area distribution accords with this expectation. The Regional pattern of male/female victimisation rates running at 46/54 is thus most striking. This observation is fortified by the fact that age and race crime distribution patterns are standard. (Crime Research Centre 1998, p.8)

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Table 2: Violent Crime Victimisation Rates by Region: 1996 (per 1000)

Region	Sex	
	FEMALES	MALES
Perth	10.2	12.2
Gascoyne	16.4	14.3
Goldfields–Esperance	14.1	12.0
Great Southern	5.8	6.0
Kimberley	25.2	17.7
Mid West	14.0	11.7
Peel	7.7	8.7
Pilbara	20.7	13.6
South West	6.1	5.7
Wheatbelt	8.7	8.1

Source: Crime Research Centre, Rural Crime and Safety Survey in Western Australia, p. 8

Measuring the Extent of Domestic Violence by Ferrante, Morgan, Indermaur & Harding (1996) provides a comprehensive analysis of the extent of domestic violence in Western Australia. It is valuable for its inclusion of comparative data between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. Table 3 provides a breakdown of the results of the analysis of police data on reported domestic violence in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. Measuring the Extent of Domestic Violence by Ferrante, Morgan, Indermaur & Harding (1996) focuses upon criminal assault, which constitutes the more extreme forms of domestic violence.

Table 3: Reported Domestic Violence—Metro/Non-Metro Breakdowns (rate per 100,000 adults)

	Aborigines			Non-Aborigines			Total		
	number	%	rate	Number	%	Rate	Number	%	rate
Perth Metro	116	19.5	1935.3	462	70.4	55.9	578	46.2	69.5
Other	480	80.5	2966.1	194	29.6	66.6	674	53.8	219.1
Total	596	100.0	2687.5	656	100.0	58.7	1252	100.0	109.9

Source: Ferrante et al (1996), Measuring the Extent of Domestic Violence, p.37

The study found that whereas 54% of all reported incidents of domestic violence occurred outside the Perth metropolitan area, only 24% of applications for restraining orders came from these areas p 37 and 81).

In contrast, research undertaken by the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research has found that, on a per capita basis, the highest rates at which domestic violence related Apprehended Violence Orders (AVOs) were issued were in rural areas of the state, as indicated by Table 4.

Table 4: Apprehended Violence Orders granted in 1997 rate per 100,000, statistical division of residence

Statistical division residence of prosecuted person	Domestic		Personal	
	Number	Rate per 100,000 population	Number	Rate per 100,000 population
Sydney:				
Inner Sydney	766	278.0	290	105.2
Eastern Suburbs	432	177.3	110	45.1
St George–Sutherland	918	220.2	158	37.9
Canterbury–Bankstown	552	180.4	118	38.6
Fairfield–Liverpool	1,002	312.5	269	83.9
Outer South Western Sydney	767	350.2	212	96.8
Inner Western Sydney	291	185.8	43	27.5
Central Western Sydney	692	244.5	114	40.3
Outer Western Sydney	761	249.4	289	94.7
Blacktown–Baulkham Hills	967	260.3	335	90.2
Lower Northern Sydney	280	98.9	59	20.8
Hornsby Ku-ring-gai	241	95.6	54	21.4
Northern Beaches	271	120.4	129	57.3
Gosford–Wyong	695	251.6	265	95.9
Hunter	1,909	339.8	930	165.5
Illawarra	1,165	308.9	475	126.0
Richmond–Tweed	634	311.2	415	203.7
Mid-North Coast	956	360.5	635	239.4
Northern	677	382.1	352	198.7
North Western	565	481.2	352	299.8
Central West	638	369.8	295	171.0
South Eastern	501	278.6	321	178.5
Murrumbidgee	455	305.2	310	207.9
Murray	325	293.3	193	174.2
Far West	207	831.5	74	297.3
New South Wales	16,667	265.6	6,797	108.3

Source: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, Domestic Violence in New South Wales, Sydney, 1997

3.1.4 HOMICIDE RATES

A 1999 paper, Femicide: an Overview of Major Findings, reported that of the women murdered in Australia each year, almost 60% were killed by intimate partners, 12% by family members and 16% by friends or acquaintances.[3] In contrast, only 11% of men were killed by intimate partners, 84% of whom were female. In intimate relationships, around 90% of women were killed as a result of "altercations of a domestic nature" and 40% of these were associated with desertion, the ending of a relationship or jealously.[4]

Mouzos' study did not include a comparative analysis of homicide rates in metropolitan and non metropolitan settings. Other researchers have found that whilst there is no difference in overall homicide rates, a significantly higher proportion of overall victims in rural and remote areas are female spouses killed in domestic violence related incidences (Mazza 1996; Coorey 1990c; Ferrante et al 1996).

An earlier NSW study found that 27.4% of spouse homicides occurred in rural areas, a figure disproportionately high for the rural population of that state, which was 11% at the time of the research (Wallace cited in Nolan 1990). International research also indicates a higher proportion of domestic violence related homicides in rural areas. A study from the United States found that from one third to one half of all homicides in rural areas were domestic violence related incidents, with the majority of victims being women (Mulder & Chang 1997, p.1).

3.2 RATE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE EXPERIENCED BY SPECIFIC GROUPS

3.2.1 INDIGENOUS WOMEN

Aboriginal people are significantly over-represented in victimisation statistics. Recent research shows that Aboriginal people are 4.6 times more likely to be victims of violent crime than non-Aboriginal people; three quarters of victims are women (Blagg 2000 p 12)

There is considerable evidence that Indigenous women are much more likely to be victims of domestic violence than non Indigenous women and to sustain more serious injuries.[5]

Research by Ferrante et al (1996) shows that violent behaviour towards spouses represents 35.5% of homicides and 39.5% of serious assaults in Aboriginal communities in Western Australia, compared to 19.8% and 7.5% respectively in non-Aboriginal communities. A recent study of assault cases against Aboriginal women revealed that in 53% of cases, the offender was known to the victim, and in 69% of these cases, the offender was the spouse or partner of the victim (Aboriginal Justice Council, 1999, cited in Blagg 2000).

Weapons were used in 13.3% of reported domestic violence incidents involving women (Ferrante et al 1996, p.36).

Ferrante et al also found that Aboriginal women living in rural and remote areas are one and a half times more likely to be a victim of domestic violence than those living in metropolitan areas and 45 times more likely to be a victim of domestic violence than the non-Aboriginal population (Ferrante et al 1996, p.37). They found that Aboriginal women were "vastly over-represented in the police statistics on domestic violence", accounting for just under half of all victims (p 34).

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[3] Mouzos, J (1999) Femicide: An Overview of Major Findings. Trends and issues in crime and criminal justice No. 124. Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.

[4] Cited in D Bagshaw and D Chung, Women, Men and Domestic Violence, Canberra. p 4.

[5] D Bagshaw and et al, (2000) Reshaping Responses to Domestic Violence, final report. Canberra, p 123.

Domestic violence related homicide data reflects the overall trend in relation to rates of victimisation for Indigenous women. In 1989 the National Committee on Violence found that homicides of Indigenous women comprised 79% of all chargeable homicides in the Northern Territory, even though Indigenous women comprised 11.5% of the total population (NCOV cited in Mow 1992, p.23). Similarly, of all female SAAP domestic violence clients in 1997–98, 21% were Indigenous women (AIHW, unpublished data); this is a significant proportion given that in 1996 Indigenous Australians comprised just over 2% of the total Australian population (ABS Dec 1998 Cat. No 3101.0).

The nature and setting of family violence perpetrated against Indigenous women also varied from those of non-Indigenous women. Indigenous women were frequently assaulted in a camp, settlement or public place such as a street or park. In only 12% of incidents were the victims reported to be alone at the time of the incident (Bolger 1991, p.14).

3.2.2 WOMEN FROM NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING BACKGROUNDS

There has been no comprehensive statistical research into the levels of domestic violence experienced by women from non-English speaking backgrounds at a national or regional level, though some research has been done with specific cultural and language groups.

Women's Safety Australia found that victimisation rates for women who had experienced violence (including, but not only, domestic violence) in the previous 12 months was 4.5% for women born in non-English speaking countries, and 7.9% for Australian born women. Given the nature of the sample it was not possible to analyse accurately experiences of women born in particular countries, or to compare rates for metropolitan/regional locations.

SAAP NDC data shows that in 1997-98 only 14% of all women in SAAP services reporting domestic violence were born in a non-English speaking country (AIHW, unpublished data), which proportion is equivalent to their representation in the Australian population as a whole.

3.2.3 YOUNG WOMEN

The Women's Safety Survey (ABS 1996) indicated that 19% of women aged 18–24 years had experienced an incidence of violence in the previous 12-month period, compared to 6.8% of women aged 35–44 and 1.2% of women aged 55 years and over (see figure 2). Young women were more at risk from all forms of violence than were older women. Male partner violence represents a significant proportion of this violence.

Figure 2: Women who experienced violence during the last 12 months
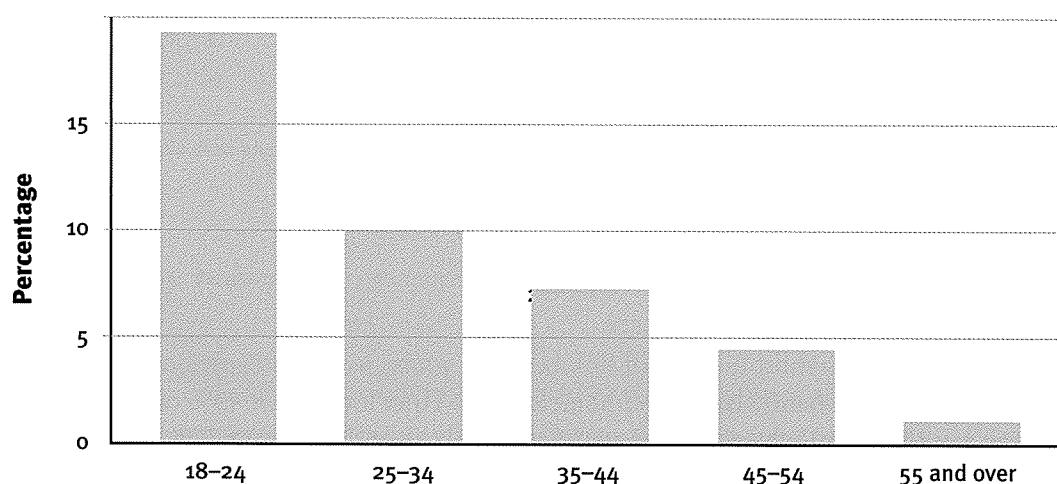
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Women's Safety Survey, 1996

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This is comparable with Canadian research which found that 12% of women aged 18–24 reported an incident of domestic violence, compared with a national average of 3% (Bunge & Levett 1988). Similarly, Australian homicide data shows that young women aged between 21 and 23 are those most likely to be victims of female homicide.

It is not possible to desegregate national data to compare victimisation rates by age across metropolitan/regional locations. It is interesting to note that this trend is not reflected in the SAAP NDC data for metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas (Table 5), which shows the highest proportion of SAAP clients reporting domestic violence to be aged between 25 and 35 years (40.4%).

Table 5: Age and region for SAAP domestic violence clients before support by region, Australia 1997–98 (%)

Age	Metropolitan Area	Non-metropolitan Area	Total	Total Australian Population
Under 15 years	1.2	0.9	1.1	21.3
15–19 years	11.3	10.6	11.1	7.0
20–24 years	15.5	16.6	16.0	7.5
25–29 years	20.6	21.6	21.0	7.9
30–34 years	19.4	19.4	19.4	7.8
35–39 years	13.7	15.0	14.2	8.0
40–44 years	8.4	7.8	8.1	7.5
45–49 years	4.6	3.6	4.2	7.0
50–54 years	2.6	2.2	2.4	6.0
55–59 years	1.0	1.0	1.0	4.7
60–64 years	0.8	0.6	0.7	3.9
65 years and over	0.8	0.8	0.8	11.4
Total	100	100	100	100
Total Number	14,278	9,486	23,764	18,529,112

1. Estimated resident population refers to 30 June 1997 and were derived from ABS population data.

Source: AIHW unpublished data.

However, this apparent discrepancy may be a consequence of the manner in which SAAP data is collected.

The research also establishes a causal link between young women's experiences of domestic violence within the family home and homelessness. Hirst found that 43% of homeless young women left their family home as a result of sexual abuse with a further 37% leaving home as a result of physical abuse (1989, p.31).

Hughes points out that a large degree of domestic violence perpetrated against young women may remain hidden as their options are more limited (1999, p.16). Various types of assistance and long-term options are not readily available to young women because of age-related eligibility criteria (public housing, private rental accommodation, unemployment benefits) or because of an assumption of parental support (income support payments such as the Youth Allowance) (NYCH 1997, p.40).

3.2.4 CHILDREN

There has been no comprehensive data collection or analysis on the extent to which children are exposed, as either victims or witnesses, to domestic violence. Women's Safety Australia found that 46% of women who had experienced violence by a previous partner, and 38% of women experiencing violence from a current partner, said that they had children who had witnessed the violence. This is likely to be an underestimation. The Queensland Domestic Violence Taskforce reported that 90% of children in violent homes had witnessed violence perpetrated against their mothers (1988, p.102).

SAAP data provides a partial picture on the numbers of children accompanying victims of domestic violence within SAAP services. It indicates that most of the children accompanying domestic violence clients were found in metropolitan areas (Table 6). Nevertheless, there were almost 3,000 children of domestic violence clients assisted by SAAP in 1997–98 in remote areas and almost 13,000 children in rural areas. The distribution of children by age did not vary substantially by region.

Table 6: Children of SAAP domestic violence clients by age and region, Australia 1996–97 and 1997–98

	Age of children	Capital city	Other metropolitan centre	Large rural centre	Other rural area	Remote area	Total
1996–97	0–4 years	47.8	47.8	44.9	45.1	46.4	46.7
	5–12 years	41.4	42.4	47.1	44.0	46.8	43.2
	13–15 years	7.9	7.4	6.5	8.7	5.6	7.8
	15–16 years	2.9	2.4	1.5	2.2	1.2	2.4
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Total number	10,831	1,936	2,126	6,428	1,920	23,241
	Average number of children per woman	0.6	0.8	0.5	0.8	0.6	0.6
1997–98	0–4 years	47.9	47.0	46.9	43.8	44.6	46.3
	5–12 years	42.2	42.4	43.6	45.3	46.9	43.6
	13–15 years	7.3	7.5	7.9	8.8	8.0	7.9
	15–16 years	2.5	3.1	1.7	2.1	0.5	2.2
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Total number	16,327	2,508	3,399	9,510	2,919	34,663
	Average number of children per woman	0.8	1.0	0.8	1.1	0.7	0.9

Note: To avoid over-counting the number of accompanying children for those clients having more than one support period, the maximum number of accompanying children among the support periods for the client was counted.

Source: AIHW unpublished data.

A 1988 study by the Office of the Status of Women (OSW) and the Country Women's Association (CWA) found that many women endure violence because of the uncertainty of life alone or the very real poverty and deprivation they and their children face if they leave (OSW & CWA 1988, p.37). It is frequently not until women recognise a negative impact of the violence on their children or perceive that their children are at risk that many women will seek to put an end to the violence by leaving (Keys Young 1998, p.35).

3.2.5 OLDER WOMEN

Available research on issues for older people experiencing domestic violence is limited. There are varying estimates of the rates of victimisation experienced by older women. The *Women's Safety Survey* reported that only 1.2% of women aged over 55 years experience violence (ABS 1996). However, research by Kinner & Graycar estimated that '4.6 per cent of older people are victims of physical, sexual or financial abuse, perpetrated mostly by family members and those who are in a duty of care relationship with the victim' (1999, p.1).

Research indicates that violence against older women is often the continuation of domestic violence into old age (Kinner & Graycar 1999, p.4). Canadian research has found that older women continue to be abused and killed by their partners with their vulnerability increasing with frailty and/or dependence on their offending spouse (Bunge & Levett 1988, p.4). Older women in rural and remote areas may experience a high degree of vulnerability as a result of frailty and dependence exacerbated by isolation.

3.2.6 WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

No specific research or information was available regarding women with disabilities living in rural and remote areas who are subjected to domestic violence. However, broader research into domestic violence perpetrated against women with disabilities can provide us with an indication of the level of vulnerability disabled women in rural and remote communities are likely to face.

Available research indicates that domestic violence experienced by women with disabilities is related to the level of dependence, isolation and vulnerability their disability creates (Buchmueller 1995, p.102; Chenoweth 1997, p.24). Vast differences may exist in relation to the type of disability they have and the impact this creates (Skeat 1999, p.17). Dependence on abusive carers and isolation from those who may be able to detect violence or abuse increase the vulnerability of women with disabilities (Buchmueller 1995, p.102). Furthermore, notions of the 'domestic' sphere are different for women with disabilities who may reside in a variety of settings such as 'institutions, group homes, rented and privately owned dwellings in the community' (Buchmueller 1995, p.94).

Their disabilities provide no safeguard against violence occurring and can in fact increase their vulnerability to violence because of their level of dependence on relatives, friends and carers. They are more likely to be involuntarily placed in situations they cannot leave—or worse still do not recognise the violence and are unaware of the options available to them (Buchmueller 1995, p.102).

3.2.7 WOMEN LIVING ON FARMS OR STATIONS

The specific issue of domestic violence experienced by women living on stations or farms has been raised in a number of studies into rural and remote domestic violence (Coorey 1988; Alston 1997; S&S Consultants 1997; Bunge & Levett 1998). The research indicates that women experiencing domestic violence residing on stations or farms face increased vulnerability due to the higher prevalence of firearms and the absence of domestic violence responses to these areas.

Isolation for women on remote stations or farms has also been identified as a significant factor. The research indicates that violence against isolated women goes unseen and unpunished with few options for leaving (Harris 1992, p.36; Coorey 1988, p.143; S&S Consultants, p.49). Access to confidential forms of communication may also be difficult with many homesteads still having access only to party lines or no telephones at all (OSW & CWA 1988, p.19; Harris 1992, p.36).

3.2.8 WOMEN IN MINING COMMUNITIES

Research suggests that women can also face a unique mix of social, economic and political marginalisation and isolation in mining communities.

The low level of amenities for women, the lack of job opportunities and educational opportunities, the uniformly greater differences between male and female policy-making and economic power in mining towns, which arise out of the very structure and ethos of mining, all help to keep women dependent on their environment—which includes their male partners—for their satisfaction and well-being (Sturney 1989, p.59).

The intrinsic characteristics of mining communities may make it difficult for women experiencing domestic violence to seek assistance or end a violent relationship. These include: the lack of cohesiveness of many mining communities, isolation from family and other support networks, limited employment and alternative housing opportunities and an overall lack of appropriate or accessible services. Those services that are provided tend to reflect the needs of male company employees, such as sporting facilities.

3.2.9 EMERGING GROUPS AFFECTED BY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Information from key informants suggests that there are a number of specific groups residing in rural and remote communities who are affected by domestic violence but whose needs and issues are only beginning to emerge. These groups include:

- women partners of defence personnel stationed in rural and remote areas;
- new and emerging groups of immigrant women moving to rural and remote communities such as women from the former Soviet Republic and the former Yugoslavia;
- women living in alternative communities and communes, particularly where excessive drug use and drug production are features of community life;
- lesbian victims of domestic violence in rural and remote communities; and
- Indigenous women living on remote outstations.

4. THE NATURE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

4.1.1 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ISSUES

Figure 3: Population distribution of Australia

Based on statistical local area boundaries.
1 Dot = 1,000 people.
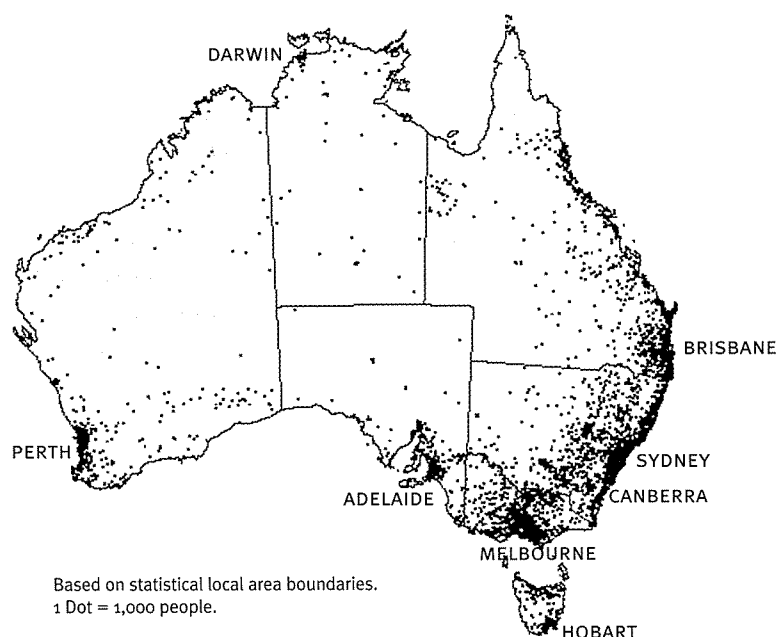
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Regional Population Growth, Australia 1997 (3218.0).

For people affected by domestic violence in regional Australia, there are important structural and cultural issues to be considered.

Only 29% of Australians now live in areas outside of metropolitan settings (ABS population data, 30 June 1997). This compares with 43% of the population residing in rural areas in 1911 (ABS 1999). The population decline in rural areas has been mirrored by the change in economic and social conditions and a rise in poverty and unemployment (Alston 1997; Tom 1994; Gibson et al 1990).

Alston found an economic 'crisis in agriculture' caused by drought and 'market forces' has translated into increased stress on farm families (1997, p.16). She found that, as rural communities declined, essential services were also being removed, with social security provisions inadequate to prevent poverty within affected families (Alston 1997, p.16). Ferrante et al (1996) found that the most highly disadvantaged areas had a rate of reported domestic violence that was nearly six (5.8) times greater than the least disadvantaged areas (Ferrante et al 1996, p.38).

Increasing financial stress for farming families has resulted in many women seeking employment outside of the home (Gibson et al 1990, p.22). However, lack of child care options, transport and continuing farm commitments, often combined with high unemployment and a shortage of jobs, makes women's work opportunities limited (Gibson et al 1990, p.22). Hornosty found that there was an increased likelihood of economic dependence on their male partners (1995, p.29).

4.1.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITY VALUES AND ATTITUDES

Rural communities are commonly viewed as conservative, with a strong emphasis on maintenance of traditional family norms. The dominance of a masculine ethos in rural and remote areas has been well documented. Rural culture has been identified as being 'self-reliant, stoic, hard working and masculine' (Wainer 1998, p.81). Researchers point to the mythology of mateship and reinforced patterns of female subservience (Gibson et al 1990, p24). This masculinised image of rural and remote areas has the effect of making women and their contributions invisible (Gibson 1990, p.24).

Women experience greater economic and related dependence as a consequence of a heightened power imbalance with men (Alston 1997, AIHW 1998, Coorey 1988). For example, Gibson et al found that one of the most prominent forms of the continuance of male dominated values was in relation to the farm inheritance practices of many families which see farms passed on primarily to male members of the family and not to females (1990, p.21).

These unequal power relations may be exacerbated for women living in remote areas without access to their own money or transport and for women from non-English speaking backgrounds who face additional linguistic and cultural isolation (Urquhart 1997; Commonwealth Department of Health & Family Services and NSW Department of Community Services 1996; Lawton 1992).

There is a complex interplay of community attitudes and values in rural and remote communities. Positive community values, which on the one hand strengthen rural and remote communities, may also have the unintended effect of allowing domestic violence to occur with little interference or acknowledgment. The concept of family within rural and remote communities is documented in the literature as being an important emotional, supportive and economic structure (Alston 1997; Coorey 1988; Hornosty 1995; Gibson et al 1990).

Women in particular are seen as being responsible for ensuring that the well-being of the family is maintained (Brownless & Stevenson 1994, p.2). Women's individual worth and right to protection or safety are often viewed as secondary considerations by both herself and others (Hornosty 1995; p.29, Lawton 1992, p.32). With such a premium placed on the family, a woman making a disclosure of domestic violence is publicly admitting that the reality of her life has not met community and family expectations (Coorey 1988, p.21). As a result, women who leave their violent partners, thereby breaking up the family unit, may be ostracised or condemned by the wider community (Brownless & Stevenson 1994, p.2).

As well as idealising the family, there is a tendency for rural life to be idealised as free from the types of social problems predominantly associated with life in big cities, including domestic violence (Alston 1997, p.18). Another facet of this issue is the belief that domestic violence is a 'private matter' or 'marital problem', outside the realms of community involvement or concern (Hornosty 1995, p.29; H.A. Rees 1997, p.19; Coorey 1988, pp.98 & 115).

Confidentiality and privacy issues are far more important in small communities than in large population centres.

To some extent, a lack of community support stems from difficulties with many people knowing and socialising with the perpetrator (Coorey 1988, p.85), as well as the enduring perception that domestic violence is a manifestation of marital problems and should remain a 'private matter' (Brownless 1996, p.7). Fear of the perpetrator was another factor (H.A. Rees 1997, p.19). In many cases family expectations also prevented women from gaining assistance (Hornosty 1995, p.29).

Although there were exceptions, we found that, generally, family members either did not want to hear about the abuse, were unwilling to get involved, or blamed the woman for what was happening. In some instances, the women actually felt pressure by their families to remain in the abusive relationship, because it was a woman's duty to look after her husband and children (Hornosty 1995, p.29).

Of course, these factors are not unique to regional communities.

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4.2 FACTORS WHICH INCREASE WOMEN'S VULNERABILITY TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS

There are a number of specific factors in relation to conditions of life in rural and remote areas which can make victims of domestic violence particularly vulnerable.

4.2.1 ISOLATION

Isolation is one of the most prominent features of women's experience of domestic violence in rural and remote areas. Geographic isolation is a reality for many women living outside of metropolitan areas. For women subjected to domestic violence, escape to safety and assistance from family, friends and even police become much more difficult, if not impossible (Mulder & Chang 1997; Coorey 1988; Strategic Partners 1999; Keys Young 1998). Mulder and Chang found that there was a reduced chance that domestic violence in rural and remote areas would be witnessed by others and an increased likelihood that perpetrators could prevent victims from escaping (1997, p.2).

As well as being a geographic reality, isolation frequently becomes another aspect of the abuse to which women are subjected. The literature frequently documented isolation of women by partners as a prominent characteristic of domestic violence, including in rural and remote areas. This includes the use of control (Keys Young 1998, p.29), threats and force (Coorey 1988, p.137) to keep women isolated from family, friends or those that could offer assistance.

Economic isolation was also a common feature of abuse for women in rural and remote areas, arising from more conservative values, traditional gender roles and male control of family finances (Hornosty 1995, p.30). The situation is exacerbated for women on farms where the household money may be tied up with the farm business (Brownless & Stevenson 1994, p.32).

Research by OSW and the CWA found that poor roads, no access to private vehicles and non-existent public transport were issues of significant concern for country women (1988, p. 17). For women experiencing domestic violence, a lack of access to transport means no capacity to escape from abuse (S&S Consultants 1997, p.49). For women living in very remote areas, the issue is even more complicated.

... what faces these remote isolated communities are the basic access to services. On land you can escape somehow by vehicle, bus, train or even by foot. But for many of the victims, especially in the Torres Strait area, you have one community public telephone, you have to travel by dinghy (weather permitting) and your safety is measured against the availability and cost of being transported by plane or helicopter (Fell 1998a, p.112).

Access to adequate telecommunications also increases women's vulnerability in rural and particularly remote areas (Harris 1992, p.36). Several researchers found that many rural and remote women did not have access to telephones (Wainer 1998, p.84; Cummings & Katona 1995, p.50), that telephone services were inadequate with party lines still used in some areas (OSW & CWA 1998, p.19) or that service could not be assured, particularly during wet seasons (Urquhart 1997, p.3).

4.2.2 FIREARMS

Guns are a prominent presence in rural life in a way not equalled in metropolitan settings and this is a factor increasing women's vulnerability (Wainer 1998, p.84; Coorey 1988, p.121). Much of the literature points to the threat or actual use of firearms as a significant reason why women did not risk fleeing or seeking help (Coorey 1988, p.143). Firearms are believed to play an important role in explaining the disproportionate number of domestic violence related homicides in rural and remote areas (Nolan 1990; Mazza 1996; Coorey 1990c).

There is no doubt that guns play a significant role in domestic violence. The firearm is the most commonly used weapon in homicide generally ... Domestic killings occur disproportionately in rural areas and it is believed that this may reflect the high levels of gun ownership in the country. (Nolan, 1990)

4.2.3 Legal Protections

Some domestic violence interventions such as legal responses are not as accessible or as useful in rural or remote areas as in metropolitan areas.

Coorey identified a number of difficulties faced by women in attempting to obtain protection from domestic violence from courts in rural and remote areas, including 'infrequent court hearings, threats to close down court houses in some country locations ... and familiarity with court personnel and police' (1988, p.31).

Lovell identified that many women in rural and remote areas had limited or no options regarding legal representation because of absence of legal aid or community lawyers and high costs of private lawyers (1996, p. 47).

Lack of confidentiality also presents a unique set of circumstances for women living in rural and remote areas. Given the stigma attached to domestic violence in rural and remote communities, the public attention often afforded to women seeking legal protections, including write-ups in the local newspaper, is a major deterrent for women (Coorey 1988, p.73).

Confidentiality and privacy are also key issues in working with rural men who are perpetrators of violence.

The appropriateness and effectiveness of the mainstream legal system to either protect Indigenous people or to respond to family violence crimes in Indigenous communities have also been questioned (Atkinson 1990a, 1995a & 1996b; Mow 1992; Sauvé 1996; Bennett 1997).

4.2.4 Police Responses

Police play a crucial role for women in rural and remote areas who are subject to domestic violence because other forms of assistance or protections are often unavailable or inaccessible (Alston 1997, p.19). The prevalence of firearms and, in Indigenous communities, the high usage of other weapons mean that women are frequently in need of protection for themselves and their children (Nolan, 1990).

Under resourcing of small police stations is documented as an important issue. Lovell reports that in many rural and remote areas where a callout is made to a property, sole worker police must first await backup from a neighbouring town, incurring long delays before travelling out to the farm or station (1996, p.47).This situation is exacerbated in communities where there is only a part-time police presence or no police presence at all.

Research also indicates a high level of reluctance on behalf of women in rural and remote areas to seek assistance from the police. They have a lack of faith in police responsiveness, partly due to their geographic isolation, negative experiences with the police in the past, humiliation or shame at exposing problems in their relationship to the community or because police members are friends with their violent partners (Coorey 1988; Nicholson 1998). Indigenous women in particular are reluctant to seek assistance from the police and the mainstream legal system (McPeake 1999b; Atkinson 1996b; Mow 1992; Bolger 1991).

4.2.5 Fear

Fear of further violence and even death, for themselves and/or their children, should they seek assistance or attempt to leave is a significant factor for women experiencing domestic violence wherever they may live.

The literature indicates that women leaving violent relationships are greatly at risk of further and frequently escalating violence. Keys Young found that only one quarter of women interviewed contacted police while living with a violent partner; however, about one third had the need to contact the police after they had left (1998, p.9).

Hornosty's study found that over one quarter of rural women interviewed had been threatened or stalked after they ended the relationship (1995, p.25).

4.2.6 SERVICES

Small communities are unlikely to have specialist domestic violence services. (Wainer 1998, p.84; S&S Consultants 1997, p.32; Keys Young 1998, p.77). The OSW & CWA survey into the accessibility of health and community services for women revealed that women's refuges were the single most inaccessible service type for rural women: only 39.1% of rural women lived within one hour of a women's refuge; 21.6% lived within three hours; but 15% had to travel overnight to reach their nearest refuge (1988, p.32).

Keys Young found that women residing in rural and remote areas frequently were not aware of domestic violence services at all (1998, p.29).

Access to services is also an acute problem for women living in remote mining towns; there are no women's services and frequently few or inadequate general health services (Sturney 1989, pp.24–25). Women on remote farms, stations or outstations face similar difficulties in accessing services (S&S Consultants 1997, p.49).

Specialist services for children are scarce in urban locations, and this situation is worse in rural and remote locations where there may be very few if any services targeted to older women, women from non-English speaking backgrounds, women with disabilities and children (Cupitt 1997, p.28; Immigrant Women's Speakout 1996, p.13; Skeat 1999, p.17).

Nor are interventions commonly used in urban areas necessarily viable or appropriate to some rural locations. Researchers and service providers are aware of the need for models of intervention that are responsive to the conditions of rural and remote areas.

Indigenous women and their children face a number of specific barriers to accessing appropriate police or legal protection or in accessing other services or assistance. These barriers primarily relate to cultural and linguistic differences or incompatibilities as well as a high degree of mistrust based on previous experiences with welfare and legal systems.

4.2.7 FINANCIAL INSECURITY

The difficulties for women leaving violent relationships are exacerbated by a lack of options to ensure the long-term well-being of herself and her children.

Limited independent financial means can deny women access to private rental accommodation and limited public housing in small towns or in the country can make leaving the family home seem a step towards poverty and homelessness for a woman and, perhaps more significantly, for her children (OSW & CWA 1988, p.37).

Having little or no access to money was a barrier to leaving frequently identified in the literature for women residing in rural and remote areas. For farming women this is exacerbated by the nature of farming incomes, which may be spasmodic or infrequent with often little access to cash available (Coorey 1988, p.143).

Women on family farms also face particularly complex financial and legal issues when attempting to separate from their violent partners. This frequently results in their inability to leave with any financial security or control over a considerable family asset (Tom 1994, p.34).

5. RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

The range of responses to domestic violence in rural and remote communities includes both government initiatives and initiatives of communities who have sought to address the problem in their own local area. The available literature makes the following points.

- Basic descriptive material resulting from the review, evaluation and documentation of programs and services is often lacking in rural and remote areas. This has led to many communities 'reinventing the wheel' by working in isolation or not benefiting from knowledge or experience gained elsewhere.

- Many rural and remote communities have developed their own initiatives for responding to domestic violence, predominantly focused on crisis responses.

5.1 MAPPING RESPONSES TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN RURAL & REMOTE AREAS

The literature reveals a number of emerging issues in the development of responses to domestic violence in rural and remote areas. In particular:

- Early intervention and prevention services are the most under-developed forms of service, including pre-marriage counselling programs, relationship counselling and family support services. Prevention work includes work with adolescent boys and juvenile offenders as well as self-esteem and assertiveness programs for young women.

- Despite a considerable expansion of crisis responses to domestic violence in the last ten years, many women still do not have access to appropriate crisis services. (Crisis responses include service providers such as police, hospitals and ambulance services and specific services such as women's refuges, safe houses, shelters and telephone crisis lines.)

- Transitional and recovery responses; longer term and specialist counselling services for survivors of domestic violence; and education programs for perpetrators are not yet wide spread in regional areas.

The literature also points out that:

- Only a minority of women experiencing domestic violence actually seek assistance from domestic violence crisis services or the police (ABS, 1996). Organisations that women appear to be more willing to seek assistance from, or disclose their experiences of violence to include generalist services, family support services, family doctors, other health care professionals and religious institutions.

- As in metropolitan areas, there is a need for improved coordination of responses to domestic violence in rural and remote areas.

- The majority of approaches adopted in rural areas take the shape of inter-agency committees that focus primarily on networking, training and small-scale community education strategies.

- Legal services, such as court assistance and advocacy programs, are not available throughout rural and remote Australia.

- There is an acute shortage of specialist services for children who witness or experience domestic violence.

5.2   GOOD PRACTICE

An inter-locking and at times overlapping matrix of services has developed to address domestic violence, funded through a myriad of programs at all levels of government and non-government sectors. Good practice includes the kinds of approaches outlined below.

5.2.1   EARLY INTERVENTION

- Rural and remote specific training packages have been developed to address non-domestic violence-specific services and organisations such as the police, teachers, doctors, nurses and family support workers. One example is the PREVENT (Promoting Rural Empowerment: Violence Education and National Training) kit produced by the Domestic Violence Regional Service of Southwest Queensland. This kit includes training modules aimed at skills development for detecting and early intervention in domestic violence.

- Strong domestic violence policies within hospitals, police and family support agencies have been combined with training. One example of this approach to the early detection of domestic violence in rural and remote areas is the Adelaide Hills Regional Domestic Violence Board. Its initiatives have included the development of a training workshop for a range of service providers, a shared philosophy regarding causes and impacts of domestic violence and the establishment of information access points through local councils (Lovell, 1996).

- Inter-agency committees which involve a broad range of service providers and which include the development of formal referral protocols between agencies have also been identified as effective elements.

5.2.2   PREVENTION

- Best practice in prevention strategies includes anti-violence work within rural and remote schools, facilitated primarily by local domestic violence services. For example, the Education for Schools Project developed by the North Queensland Domestic Violence Resource Service is a developmental, community education approach which involves taking programs into schools to teach young people about domestic violence and other issues relating to domestic violence such as bullying and date rape.

- Cultural support and healing programs for children and adults exposed to violence in Indigenous communities include the We Al-Li program for healing, sharing and re-creation for individual, spiritual, cultural, physical, emotional and mental well-being (Atkinson 1996a).

- Examples of initiatives aimed at preventing violence against women and children by reducing the excessive consumption of alcohol, include the formation of Women's Grog Councils in the Southern Region of the Northern Territory, which are focused on stopping alcohol running and restricting the availability of alcohol in communities, and the Halls Creek Liquor Accord which is aimed at reducing the sale of alcohol.

5.2.3   CRISIS RESPONSES

Domestic Violence Services

- These initiatives include access to brokerage funds to cover the costs of transportation, relocation, crisis accommodation and re-establishment for women fleeing violence. In rural areas, women's refuges or domestic violence outreach services have access to the Victorian Housing Establishment Fund to purchase emergency accommodation and pay for removalist expenses, private rental bonds, rent in advance or essential household items such as furniture and whitegoods needed for post-crisis re-establishment.

- Services that demonstrate a commitment to providing appropriate services to local Indigenous women have been identified as being effective. For example, Marnja Jarnadu Women's Refuge in Broome has a high proportion of Indigenous service users. This agency has ensured sensitive consultation with Indigenous communities, employed Indigenous workers and provides respite and preventative services for Indigenous women.

Other Services

- Other services include domestic violence training for police, the Royal Flying Doctor Service, visiting nurses and hospital staff, and the establishment of protocols for referral to domestic violence services. Visits by staff of statewide domestic violence crisis services to rural and remote areas, the introduction of crisis payments by Centrelink to assist women fleeing domestic violence and police-initiated domestic violence orders for victims of domestic violence provide other examples.

5.2.4 TRANSITIONAL AND RECOVERY RESPONSES

- Examples here include medium term supported accommodation services based in rural areas, such as the New South Wales Medium Term Women's Housing Program. This program provides transitional supported accommodation for women and children who have experienced domestic violence. It is frequently used in rural areas as an exit point from crisis accommodation services for women not ready to make the full transition to independent living or to meet the gap between crisis accommodation and public housing.
- Domestic violence outreach services have been identified in some rural areas, such as throughout Victoria, as providing an important complement and alternative to crisis and accommodation-based services.
- The Northern Territory Specialist Domestic Violence Counselling Program funds counsellor positions in Darwin, East Arnhem, Katherine, Alice Springs and Barkly.

5.2.5 LEGAL RESPONSES

- Examples of legal services for women escaping domestic violence include locally based domestic violence legal advocacy services aimed at informing women of their legal rights and options, such as the New South Wales Court Support Program which funds court advocacy workers throughout the state.
- Examples of appropriately targeted and locally relevant information on legal rights and options for victims of domestic violence include the information pamphlets produced by the Loddon Campaspe Women's Health Service in rural Victoria on obtaining Intervention Orders.
- Initiatives which aim to increase the responsiveness of the legal system to Indigenous women in remote communities include the SAAP funded Atunypa Wiru Minyma Uwankaraku (Good Protection for All) Cross-Border Domestic Violence Project. This project is auspiced by the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council and has developed a pro-legal response to family violence, which is integrated into an Indigenous community response.

5.2.6 INTEGRATED APPROACHES & COORDINATED RESPONSES

Domestic violence committees and working groups are now operating in many rural and remote areas of Australia. Two models are outlined below.

Dovetail

'Dovetail' is an integrated approach to domestic violence implemented in Townsville and the

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surrounding areas, based on the Duluth and Hamilton models. This model aims to shift the responsibility for domestic violence intervention from the victim to the community. Aspects of this model include an inter-agency approach with aspects such as placing domestic violence firmly in the criminal justice arena, developing victim-driven responses and delivering mandated perpetrator programs (Woodbridge 1998, p.62).

The Rural Community Development Model

This coordinated strategy devised by the South West Queensland Regional Domestic Violence Service places a primary focus on community development in rural and remote areas. It has been well documented and frequently adopted in other areas. It attempts to provide a framework for assisting rural communities to develop an active pattern of community-based, rather than professionalised, responses to domestic violence at a local level. The model has been developed in acknowledgment that funding of specific service responses in all rural and remote communities may not be achieved (Ledger 1998).

- The organisation argues that a service delivery strategy reliant on a professional response would not be feasible given the diversity and geographic size of most rural and remote regions and community wariness of professional responses (Ledger 1998, p.65). It also acknowledges that informal or volunteer responses will inevitably develop in rural and remote communities and therefore adequate training will be required.

5.2.7 COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

- **Rural & Isolated Communities**—*Discussion and Resource Kit* and *Is Domestic Violence Too Close to Home? A Kit for Rural Women*, both produced by OSW provide a solid overview of the nature and incidence of domestic violence in rural and remote areas as well as services and assistance for rural women throughout Australia.
- **The *Let's Lift the Lid* campaign**—in the Albury-Wodonga border regions of New South Wales and Victoria is an example of a more broadly based community education strategy aimed at challenging local community attitudes about domestic violence in a rural area.

6. AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This review identified the following gaps in research relating to domestic violence in rural and remote areas:

- compilation of national data on domestic violence which includes rural and remote indicators;
- documentation, review and evaluation of domestic violence service models and responses in rural and remote areas;
- research into the
  - appropriateness and effectiveness of customary Indigenous responses to family violence;
  - impact of gun reforms on the use of firearms in domestic violence;
  - impact of divorce or separation on family-owned farms; and
  - extent and nature of domestic violence experienced by groups of women in rural and remote communities where information is currently lacking, including women partners of defence personnel, emerging immigrant groups such as women from the former Soviet Republic and the former Yugoslavia, women living in alternative communities, lesbians and Indigenous women living on remote outstations.

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