Reflecting On Violence Prevention Programs in Rural Communities: Defining the Six Lenses / Analysis Screens

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This resource is comprised of six lenses or analysis screens designed to enable reflection or, critical feminist evaluation of policies that address violence against women and girls in rural, remote, and socially-isolated communities. They include:

- Violence and Abuse: Naming Abuse and Violence
- Gender and Diversity: Situating Girls’ and Women’s Experiences
- Rural: Living in a Rural, Remote, and Socially-Isolated Community
- Safety: Toward Women and Girls’ Personal and Community Safety
- Intervention: Making a Difference in the Lives of Women and Girls
- Feminist Social Action: Supporting Individual and Social Change

The resource is designed to analyze the variety of rural girls and women’s experiences of violence and abuse in order to develop and reflect on policy responsiveness to local needs. However, these lenses or policy analysis screens are not rigid categories of analysis. Many of the issues raised in the discussion below fit into more than one frame. Nevertheless, each enables us to see how policies, at both the program and government levels, are shaped by knowledge, institutions, and social and structural barriers.

The resource focusses on the effectiveness of violence prevention programs in rural communities because few studies have documented approaches to addressing violence and abuse in the lives of women living in rural communities (Hornosty & Doherty, 2001; Jiwani, 1998; McCrea, 1996; Websdale, 1995). There are fewer studies about violence/abuse in rural girls’ lives (Cameron and Team, 2002). Recent studies have challenged the assumption that while rural women may be more isolated than their urban counterparts, there are few significant differences between the experiences of urban and rural women. In their study of wife abuse and farm and rural communities in New Brunswick, Jennie Hornosty and Deborah Doherty argue that there are significant differences between the experiences of urban and rural women that are grounded in geography. Rural communities have higher levels of unemployment and poverty and fewer resources and services. It is more difficult for women in rural communities to access to health services, counselling, education, training programs, employment, and emergency intervention services than women living in urban centres (Hornosty & Doherty, 2002).

The predominant urban focus in studies of violence against women is, in part, influenced by the demographic composition of Canada. In 2001, 79.4% of Canadians lived in urban areas compared to 20.3% in rural communities (Statistics Canada, 2001). The demographic composition of Atlantic Canada does not conform to national trends. Compared to other Canadian provinces, more people in Atlantic Canada live in rural and remote communities:
New Brunswick (pop. 757,000) 51% live in rural areas, 35% Francophone, Aboriginal – Mi’kmaq and Maliseet primarily (more than 10,000)

Newfoundland and Labrador (pop. 550,000) 58% have rural postal codes. Small Francophone, Mi’kmaq, Inuit, Innu, Metis

Nova Scotia (pop. 941,000). Approximately 50% living in small towns, rural and coastal areas; Black origins – 18,000, Mi’kmaq (predominant) 12,380

Prince Edward Island (pop. 139,000) 62% rural, 8% on farms, 20% French, Aboriginal - Mi’kmaq - 1000. (Communication Canada - Fact Sheets, 2000)

In order to provide effective anti-violence programs for girls and women in Atlantic Canada, policymakers must consider the unique characteristics of rural life, and the specific needs of women and girls who live in rural areas. Neil Websdale uses the concept of “rural patriarchy” to discuss how patriarchal relations are articulated in rural communities, and how these attitudes and beliefs subordinate women living in these settings (Websdale, 1998). Subsequent Canadian studies have adopted this concept (Hornosty & Doherty, 2002; Jiwani, 1998). While the concept of “rural patriarchy” is useful because it identifies shared beliefs and attitudes toward women, it is important to remember that federal and provincial policies also influence local practices. The four Atlantic provinces have different social welfare protocols and anti-violence policies. Thus, while rural and farm women and girls may share some experiences, different provincial practices influence their ability to access resources and services.

Although media and literature have constructed rural communities as places where people share the same values and identities, there are significant social, economic, and cultural differences within rural communities that affect women’s and girls’ day-to-day lives. For example, tense relations between First Nations communities and non-Aboriginal people have drawn clear divisions in many rural communities. The Black Community has deep roots in Nova Scotian rural communities. Discriminatory practices have prevented Black women who experience violence from accessing transition houses and safe houses (Hamilton, 1999).

The resource is based on theories of intersectionality to mediate the tension between commonalities of girls and women’s experiences of violence and the unique social location of individual girls and women. Intersectionality recognizes that a combination of systems of oppression operate together to sustain and reproduce inequality. An intersectional approach recognizes the historical, social, and political contexts in which individuals live. In turn, it recognizes that gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, and age intersect in particular ways to shape girls and women’s experiences of violence and their access to programs and services. A better understanding of the process of marginalization will help activists build coalitions that recognize the specific circumstances of individual women’s and girls’ lives and to confront the various forms of oppression that shape their lives (Crenshaw, 1994; Jiwani, 1998). Theories of intersectionality help researchers to elucidate individual specificities while simultaneously focussing strategies for change at the structural level.

The resource also distinguishes between the experiences of girls and women. Policies need to
consider experiences of violence and abuse over the course of a woman’s life because the problems a woman has are often linked to her childhood experiences, her position within the family, and barriers and possibilities available to her (Berman & Jiwani, 2002; Chesney-Lind & Randall, 1998; Randall & Haskell, 2000). Though connected, it is important to maintain an analytical distinction between the barriers, e.g., access to resources and dependency, that girls and women face.

While the resource adopts a feminist analysis of violence against women, there must be enough flexibility to incorporate women’s and girl’s definitions of violence and abuse and their ideas for change. There may be significant differences between decision makers’ analyses of violence and abuse and that of the women and girls who have experienced it. We need to be particularly attentive to differences in the definition of violence that are based on a girls or a woman’s social location.

Integrating considerations of each of the six analytic lenses into policy development, implementation, and reflection helps decision-makers to unravel the complex relationship between individual experiences of violence and the policy and practice decisions that respond to and affect them. This resource describes each of the six analytic screens.

Violence and Abuse: Naming and Defining Violence and Abuse

Violence against girls and women takes many forms, but all abuse is about control and power. The abuse lens examines different types of violence and abuse and how approaches in rural areas support girls and women in naming the various forms of abuse. It explores the relationship between power relations and violence against women in various contexts and types of relationships. A multifaceted definition of violence supports the development of programs that respond to specific needs. The research of the Policy Circle on Woman Abuse (created by the Family Violence Prevention Division of Health Canada) points to “the need for a multifaceted definition of violence that acknowledges the many different forms that woman abuse can take, that allows for the diversity of perceptions and experiences of people in Canada, and that encompasses a broadly based power analysis” (MacLeod, 1994, p. 26).

Changing attitudes about violence and abuse is an important component to ending violence. Indeed, the New Brunswick Attitudinal Survey on Violence Against Women found that 20% of respondents believe it is a woman’s duty to submit to her husband, 31% believe that violence is a private matter that should be handled by the family. In fact, close to one in five believe strongly that violence should be kept behind closed doors (New Brunswick, 2002). The Family Violence on the Farm and in Rural Communities Research Team found that while most people believe that family violence is wrong, there is still a tendency to tolerate abusive behaviour and to remain in abusive relationships. Many women make excuses for the abuse and tend to blame the victim for the violence rather than the perpetrator. Even if a woman does not blame herself for the abuse, she often still offers excuses for her abusive partner, such as childhood experiences and alcohol abuse (Family Violence on the Farm and in Rural Communities Research Team, 1997).
However, not all women who stay in abusive relationships blame themselves. Some who stay do not have the resources to leave, prefer not to break up the family, or normalize the abuse.

Violence in teen relationships is prevalent; almost one-third of girls who participated in a New Brunswick study characterized their dating relationships by physical, sexual, and psychological abuse (Price & Byers and the Dating Violence Research Team, 1999).

While the early anti-violence movement defined violence against women in terms of physical and sexual abuse, the definition has since expanded. Enlarged to include financial, spiritual, emotional, and psychological forms of abuse, current definitions connect individual experiences of intimate violence to the structural violence of sexism, poverty, racism, ableism, heterosexism, and ageism, and to inequality and restrictive opportunities for women and girls. A violence and abuse lens enables us to explore the importance of naming violence and abuse and the connections between power relations and violence against girls and women in various contexts and relationships.

Regardless of how far the work on violence against women and girls has come, it is still difficult to talk about woman abuse and violence against girls and women. Therefore, naming abuse and violence is important because it clarifies what abuse and violence mean and challenges explanations that not only minimize violence and abuse and their effects but also blame the victim.

We need to be particularly attentive to differences in the definition of violence that are based on a girl or a woman’s social location. Defining abuse and violence in the context of girls and women living in rural, remote, and socially-isolated communities enables us to understand how the rural context intersects with a girl or a woman’s particular social location and her experience of violence. While there many common elements among the definitions of abuse, differences in definitions of abuse reflect the need to address the various contexts of girls and women lives.

Identifying commonalities in the experiences of women and girls helps activists to better understand the process of marginalization. However, girls’ experiences of violence are different than women’s because they are legally dependent on them. Therefore, it is important to maintain an analytical distinction between the barriers that girls and women face.

The way that we define abuse and violence against women determines how we design intervention and prevention programs. The tendency to portray women and girls who have experienced violence as victims has been criticized. Viewing women and girls as survivors instead of victims will produce practices and programs that empower women and girls to take control of their own lives.

*Types of Abuse*

*Emotional/Verbal/ Psychological abuse:* The most common form of abuse emotional abuse
manifests itself in many forms, e.g. name-calling, blaming, insults, threats, and coercion. It can also involve threats to family and pets and farm animals. Emotional abuse makes women feel embarrassed, confused, and humiliated. Abusers control victims’ actions by controlling conversations and mobility, screening phone calls, e-mail, and visitors, embarrassing her in public, and preventing her from seeing family and friends.

**Sexual abuse:** The sexual abuse of children has lasting effects over the life of a woman. The effects vary inflicting harm on others, and self-harm. Young women are vulnerable to sexual violence in their dating relationships. Abusive young men use (sexual) violence to control dating partners and resolve disagreements (Price & Byers, 2000). The majority of sexual assaults occur in relationships. Canadian law did not make it illegal for a husband to rape his wife until 1983. This has not ended the sexual assaults within relationships.

**Physical abuse:** The most easily recognized and often reported form of abuse, physical abuse ranges from hitting and punching to murder. Patterns vary from relationship to relationship, but physical abuse often begins during pregnancy. It can also begin during adolescent dating. In fact, research reveals that psychological, physical, and sexual abuse are characteristic of many teen heterosexual dating relationships (ibid). The severity of physical abuse often increases over time.

**Financial abuse:** Abusers often exert power and control over women by making her financially dependent on him. An abuser may withhold money, allot a small sum of money to maintain the household and then blame her for failing to make better use of it, or refuse to allow a woman to make financial decisions. She may be pressured into handing over her paycheques and government subsidies to her abuser.

**Spiritual abuse:** Spiritual abuse involves the erosion of cultural beliefs and practices. At the individual or personal level, it can be expressed as a lack of respect for a woman’s or girl’s expression of her spirituality. At the social level, it can be expressed as a negation of and/or failure to accommodate cultural traditions and values that do not conform to dominant cultural practices.

**Ritual abuse:** Ritual abuse refers to the use of rituals as a means to control, intimidate, or justify abuse. Victims may or may not be members of the abuser’s family. Isolation, deprivation, torture, and repetitive chants and phrases are often used in conjunction with mind-altering drugs. The abuse may involve the masquerading of potentially supportive authority or professionals to ensure that the victim does not reach out for help.

**Institutional abuse:** Institutional abuse involves any institutional practice or procedure that adversely impacts on disadvantaged individuals or groups by burdening them psychologically, mentally, culturally, spiritually, economically, or physically. It may take the form of conventional policies and practices that foster a climate of violence, or policies and practices that appear neutral but result in discriminatory effects (Watkinson & Epp, 1997). Includes sexual harassment, the dismissal or denial of concerns, and the failure to respond to grievances.
Sibling abuse: Sibling abuse is any form of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse inflicted by a child in a family unit on another. It encompasses children who may not be related to each other by blood but through their parents’ relationships/marriages and may or may not live in the home. Sibling abuse may involve physical, emotional, or sexual abuse and acts such as hitting, choking, excessive tickling, name calling, belittling, ridicule, intimidation, and the destruction of personal property.

Abuse can be defined in a “four stages of life” concept\(^1\). If we look at the four stages of life we see the child, adolescent, adult, and elder. Abuse affects women and girls at all stages of life. While the type of abuse may vary at different stages, the impact is felt across the lifespan.

Violence and abuse take many forms and these differ in relation to the social contexts and types of relations in which women and girls live. A multifaceted definition acknowledges individual experiences of physical, sexual, financial, spiritual, emotional, and psychological abuse and violence and how they connect to structural forms of violence including sexism, poverty, racism, ableism, heterosexism, and ageism, and to inequality and constraints against opportunities.

A broad definition provides space to acknowledge various perceptions and experiences while also embracing an analysis of social power. Janice Ristock’s (2002a) work on violence in lesbian relationships challenges any analysis based on universality of experiences, and suggests, instead, an analysis that accounts for the multiplicity of identities and complexities of women’s lives.

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\(^1\)The four stages of life concept was developed by Roseanne Sark, PRISM Advisory Committee.
Gender and Diversity: Situating the Lives of Women and Girls

Gender-based analysis considers the impact of systemic discrimination on the lives of women and men. Gender is a relational category of analysis. Status of Women Canada defines gender as the culturally specific set of characteristics that identifies the social behaviour of women and men and the relationship between them. Gender, therefore, refers not simply to women or men, but to the relationship between them, and the way it is socially constructed. Because it is a relational term, gender must include women and men. Like the concepts of class, race, and ethnicity, gender is an analytical tool for understanding social processes (Status of Women, 1996, p. 3).

The goal of gender-based analysis is to prevent the development of policies that simply “add on” women without considering how historic and systemic discrimination shape a woman’s or a girl’s economic and social circumstances. Examining how sexism limits girls and women’s choices is a key goal of feminist research. A gender-based analysis also means the sharing of power in our research, development, and evaluation processes, recognizing power and how relations of power often result in exclusion, calling upon us to challenge it through our programs and services. However, it is important that gender lens analysis does not posit gender-based discrimination as foundational, thus subsuming other forms of oppression within sexism. A gender-based framework that places gender-based oppression in the foreground “adds on” the experience of marginalized women to the normalized experience of white women (Janovicek, 2000).

Feminists recognize violence against women and girls as both an expression of inequality and a perpetuation of it. Framing the problem of violence in gender-specific terms, in other words as violence against women and girls, identifies the gender dynamics and effects of it. A gender sensitive approach not only allows the work of programs and services to remain consistent with women and girls’ realities, but enables them to take into account and work with gender differences in attitudes toward and responses to violence.

Following feminist analysis, a gender and diversity lens recognizes that ending violence against women is a key component of achieving equality for women and girls. However, the lens also acknowledges that more complex analytical tools than gender-based analysis are needed to understand violence against women because poverty limits women’s and girls’ opportunities to leave violent relationships (Janovicek, 2000) and because of the increasing tendency to attribute violence against women to cultural differences (Bannerji, 1999; Razack, 1995).

Situating girls’ and women’s experiences of violence and abuse within the contexts of their lives means that we recognize and work from the knowledge that people live and act from and within different perspectives, realities, and worlds, bringing a variety and uniqueness of realities and perspectives to programs and services. It means that we embrace, in a meaningful way, as many voices and perspectives in our programs and services as possible. It also means that we build our
programs from that knowledge that girls’ and women’s experiences of violence and abuse and healing reflect the contexts of their lives. It means that the needs of young girls, adolescent girls, women, and elderly women are very different. It also means that we acknowledge diversity and respect women and girls social and economic differences. Violence against girls and women, for example, needs to be understood in relation to poverty. Poverty limits women’s and girls’ opportunities to leave violent relationships and because of the increasing tendency to attribute violence against women to cultural differences. In addition, Aboriginal, African-Canadian, Women and Girls Living with Disability, New Immigrant and Refugee, and Lesbian, Bi-sexual, and Transgendered women and girls will continue to suffer disproportionately from violence if anti-violence programs do not simultaneously address the intersection with and long-term negative impact of racism, ableism, homophobia, and colonization and how their programs and services participate in them.

An intersectional approach considers the historical, social, and political context of individual experiences of oppression (OHRC, 2002). What follows is a brief discussion of how the historical and political contexts of certain groups affects women’s and girls’ experiences of violence.

First Nations Women

Violence is pervasive in the lives of First Nations women and girls. Spousal abuse is seven times higher in Aboriginal communities than the national average (Timpson, 1995). It is unlikely that an Aboriginal child will grow up without first-hand experience of violence (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993). Violence takes the form of racist taunts, the denigration of cultural values, sexual assault, sexual abuse, and family violence. Despite the prevalence of violence, there are few culturally-sensitive services and social supports for First Nations women and girls.

Family violence is an issue that is a significant concern in many First Nations communities because of the resolute activism of Aboriginal women. While activists acknowledge that women suffer disproportionately from violence, they insist that gender-based analysis does not adequately explain the prevalence of family violence in First Nations communities because many men who are abusive have experienced physical or institutional violence (Perrault & Proulx, 2000). Family violence is linked to the history of colonization and the legacy of paternalistic government policies and practices designed to assimilate Aboriginal peoples into Canadian society (McGillivray & Comaskey, 1999). Patricia Monture-Okanee (1992) argues that ignoring the relationship between colonization and violence against women is itself a form of violence.

Women’s experience of colonization has been different than men’s because of Section 12 (1)(b) of the Indian Act. This legislation stripped an Aboriginal woman of her status if she married a non-status or white man. Consequently, she lost access to services and resources provided by her band office and her treaty rights. After years of activism, in which Maliseet women of the Tobique Reserve played a key role, Section 12 (1)(b) was removed from the Indian Act (Bear,
1991; Silman, 1997). The intent of Bill C-31(1985) was to remove sex discrimination from the Indian Act. In effect, it has created even more confusing categories of membership and a new social order within Aboriginal communities. Moreover, the Department of Indian Affairs did not allocate more resources to First Nations communities to address the needs of reinstated members (AWAN, 1999).

State intervention in Aboriginal family life has had a devastating impact on First Nations families. In residential schools, Aboriginal children suffered physical and sexual abuse and were taught to be ashamed of their cultural heritage. Many of these children perpetuated abusive relationships in the next generation of children. Inter-generational abuse has undermined not only individual families, but also the cultural reverence of elders (Million, 1999). Officially, the residential school system was phased out in the 1960s, but subsequent child welfare practices were as destructive to families. When provincial governments extended child welfare programmes to reserves, they did not consider the differences between European and Aboriginal values and methods of child-rearing practices. Many social workers did not understand the importance of extended families in Aboriginal communities. Nor were they sensitive to the fact that poverty prevented First Nations families from raising children in a manner that accorded to European values which emphasize material comfort (White & Jacobs, 1992). In the 1960s and 1970s many children were fostered out and raised in white families. The long-term impact of these practices has been a loss of positive parental role models, increased levels of incarceration due to cultural dislocation, and an intense distrust of state-run programmes on the part of Aboriginal women. Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond (1997) argues that child welfare practices have been state-sanctioned cultural genocide of First Nations peoples.

First Nations activists analyze violence against women and girls within the context of colonization. First Nations women argue that an agenda for change based exclusively on equality of opportunity for women is inappropriate for Aboriginal women because it ignores indigenous cultural values (Turpel-Lafond, 1997). Aboriginal women and girls will continue to suffer disproportionately from violence if anti-violence programs do not simultaneously address the long-term negative impact of colonization.

New immigrant and refugee women and girls

Immigrating is an incredibly stressful experience that can lead to disruptions in family patterns, roles, and relationships. Sometimes this stress leads to violence, or exacerbates existing abuse. New immigrant and refugee women and children who are abused face unique barriers when seeking safety and justice because their claim to citizenship is most often made through their spouses. Under Canadian immigration policy one family member must act as a sponsor for other family members; in most cases the husband/father acts as the head of the household. Similarly, in applications for refugee status, men are generally the principal applicants and women enter in the spousal category. The social construction of immigrant and refugee women as dependents limits their access to employment and social welfare programs, and consequently their ability to protect themselves from violence (Thobani, 2000).
Women’s access to social services is restricted by sponsorship agreements. Sponsors are responsible for the needs of their families for ten years. There are exceptions in cases of family violence, but the onus is on women to prove abuse. Cultural and religious values and language barriers make it difficult for women to repeat their stories of abuse. Women also fear the censure of their communities. Many women are advised to keep quiet about abuse to prevent increased societal surveillance of their communities (Bannerji, 1999; Flynn & Crawford, 1998).

The immigrant experience in Atlantic Canada is different from more urban areas of Canada because the uneven economic development results in fewer opportunities for work (Ralston, 1999). New immigrants are a small proportion of the population in Atlantic Canada, and most new immigrants in the region are white. Nova Scotia has the greatest ethnic diversity with visible minorities comprising 3.5% of the population. Newfoundland and Labrador is the least diverse with visible minorities comprising only 0.7% of the population. The predominance of new immigrants who are white means that in Atlantic Canada most social structures reflect the values of the dominant culture (Miedema & Wachhotz, 1998; Sharif, et al., 2002). Miedema and Wachhotz’s (1997) study of immigrant women in New Brunswick found that the lack of cultural diversity in social service programming and staff was a significant barrier for immigrant women from racialized minorities who were trying to leave abusive relationships.

**African-Canadian women and girls**

Like new immigrants from racialized cultures, African-Canadian women and girls also experience racism. Their experience of marginalization is significantly different because many African-Canadian communities have deep roots in Maritime Canada. The earliest African-Canadian migrants were the United Empire Loyalists who settled after the American Revolution. Since the late 1940s, the majority of African-Canadian immigrants originated from the West Indies. The community’s history and contributions to Atlantic Canadian society have been forgotten (Henry, 1973).

The family has been a bastion against racism. The importance of family in African-Canadian communities makes it difficult for women and girls to disclose abuse. African-Canadian women in abusive relationships are reluctant to go to transition houses because they do not see themselves represented in the anti-violence outreach and educational material and because few shelter workers are African-Canadian women. Shelters rarely keep in supply personal care products designed for African-Canadian hair and skin. Hence, African-Canadian women feel extremely isolated and disconnected from their community when they stay in shelters. Church-based women’s groups have played a crucial role in breaking the silence about violence against women and in African-Canadian communities. Hence, anti-violence programs must acknowledge the relationship between church, family, and community in African-Canadian women’s and girls’ lives (Hamilton, 1999).

African-Canadian girls face violence in the form of racist taunts and treatment, but school curricula and teachers tend to deny the validity of their experiences of racism. Recently, there has been much
discussion of violence in schools. Some of this violence has been race-based, but school administrators and media rarely analyze the relationship between racism and bullying. Anti-violence programs that target school violence do not integrate anti-racist training (Kelly, 1998; Saunders, 1999).

**Women and girls living with disability**

In 1985, the Disabled Women’s Network (DAWN) estimated that 56% of women with disabilities had experienced physical or sexual violence. A subsequent study in 1989 based on a sample of 245 women living with a disability found that 40% of the respondents had been raped, abused, or assaulted and that 64% had been verbally abused (Ridington, 1989). The rate of sexual assault for girls living with disabilities is four times the national average (Razack, 1994).

The traditional definitions of violence and abuse and frameworks for understanding violence against women do not apply to the experiences of women and girls living with disabilities, and the forms of violence they experience do not fit into criminal definitions of assault (Roeher Institute, 1995). Verbal abuse is more prevalent than physical and sexual violence, and influences their ability to cope with other forms of violence. Many people consider verbal and emotional abuse to be less serious than physical abuse because it does not leave visible bruises and scars. People living with disabilities are surrounded by messages that tell them their lives are not valuable. Women who have been raised believing that their lives are not valuable may not realize that they have the right to live a violence-free life.

The vulnerability to violence and abuse faced by a woman or a girl living with disabilities is linked to her level of dependence on her caretaker. Her vulnerability increases if she is living with multiple disabilities, and those who live with severe disabilities may not have adequate language skills to communicate abuse or the cognitive ability to discern between healthy and abusive relationships. Studies have concluded that there is a relationship between the lack of social support for family caregivers, the family’s struggle with systemic discrimination, and violence against children with disabilities (Ticoll, 1994). Girls living with disabilities are more likely than able-bodied children to be abused because their families cannot cope with the care-giving responsibilities and medical costs. Physical abuse can bring about disabilities or worsen existing disabilities. Research on violence in institutional settings identifies the large number of patients, the intimate physical and emotional contact between caretakers and patients, and the power imbalance between caretaker and patient as reasons for increased vulnerability to violence (Ticoll, 1994). Front line workers have reported that some girls and women have only known violent relationships. Consequently, girls reproduce violent relationships within their peer groups and in group homes (Janovicek, 2001).

Poverty and the high unemployment rates of women living with disabilities also increase their vulnerability. 50% of women living with disabilities are unemployed; 58% of women living with disabilities live on less than $10,000 per year and of those 23% live on less than $5,000 per year (Meister, 1999). Women and girls living with disabilities need better access to the labour market,
increased levels of income support for them and their care-givers, and increased input into
disability-related support services to monitor abuses within the system. A radical change in societal
attitudes toward people with disabilities is necessary in order for programs to be effective in
reducing violence. Increased government support is needed so that front-line workers are not put in
the position where they feel they must prioritize between the needs of able-bodied and disabled
women. However, service-providers must also consider how their attitudes toward women living
with disabilities diminishes women’s and girls’ access to their services (Stevens, 1995).

Lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered women and girls

Homophobia has a profound impact on the day-to-day lives of lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered
women and girls. Homophobic slurs and insults are normalized in our society. Lesbians have been
targets for sexual assault by men who assume that “all they need is a good lay”. Incidents of gay
bashing that lead to death become sensational media stories, and mobilize the l/g/b/t community
and its allies against violence. However, we do not know the extent of homophobic violence
because police do not keep statistics. Nor do we know how many victims do not come forward to
report abuse. We know less about lesbian bashing than we do about gay bashing (Canadian Panel
on Violence against Women, 1993).

Girls who are questioning their sexual identity receive clear messages that expressions of sexuality
that do not conform to the heterosexual norm are “deviant.” Coming out is difficult and often
dangerous. In urban centres, there are outreach programs that provide queer and questioning youth
with a community to help them cope with homophobia. However, there is a lack of programs for
queer youth in rural areas. Some girls cope by denying their sexual identity or remaining closeted.
Others run away. Queer youth are over-represented in street-involved communities in urban centres
(Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, 2002). Without educational programs to end
homophobia and to support queer youth, girls who are questioning the heterosexual norm are at
risk.

Front-line activists estimate that rates of violence in lesbian relationships are similar to those in
heterosexual relationships (Murray & Welch, 1995). Lesbians rarely speak out against the violence
because they fear that drawing attention to the issue will reinforce negative stereotypes about
lesbian relationships. There are similar patterns in violence in lesbian and heterosexual
relationships, but the heterosexual model of abuse cannot simply be applied to lesbian
relationships. One of the key dilemmas that violent lesbian relationships present is a challenge to
the feminist principle of believing women who disclose intimate violence. This principle is
complicated when the abuser is also a woman. Hence, the model must be expanded to integrate the
dynamics that are specific to lesbian relationships (Eaton, 1994).

Rural: Living in a Rural, Remote, and Socially-Isolated Community

Rural girls and women have unique needs, thus the resources available to girls and women who are
experiencing violence and their access to resources is a concern of policy makers. This lens will
analyze how the lack of resources and infrastructure in at Atlantic Canada constrains women’s and girls’ self-determination. Though there are typically fewer services for women and girls in rural and remote areas, some communities have developed innovative anti-violence programs that incorporate the specific needs of women and girls in their communities. Thus this lens will also examine how rural and remote communities mobilize limited resources to address violence against women and girls. In order to develop and implement anti-violence programs in rural communities it is important to identify the unique barriers women and girls in violent relationships face. However, it is as important to analyze the capacity of rural and remote communities to design and sustain anti-violence initiatives. The lens hopes to better understand what strategies for change are most effective in rural and remote communities in Atlantic Canada so that women and girls are not obliged to choose between their personal safety and staying in their home communities.

A dominant debate in the literature about definitions of “rural” is whether rural areas are determined by geographical or social and cultural characteristics. The Rural/Remote lens adopts a definition of “rural” that integrates the demographic, economic, social, and cultural aspects of rural life.

Geographical determinants

Statistics Canada defines a “rural area” by geographical characteristics. Within this model, rural boundaries are determined by population density, population size, distance from an urban area or distance from an essential service. Statistics Canada identifies six models for national analysis:

- **Census rural** defines a rural area as the population living outside places of 1,000 people or more or as an area outside places with a population density of 400 or more people per square kilometre;
- **Rural and small town** areas refer to populations living in towns or municipalities outside of the commuting zone of urban areas with 10,000 or more people;
- The **OECD** (Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development) defines rural area as a place with less than 150 persons per square kilometre. OECD predominantly rural regions refer to areas where the population lives in a census division with more than 50% of the population living in OECD rural communities;
- the **Beale Code Approach** defines “non-metropolitan regions” as regions with urban settlements with populations of less than 50,000 people and regions with no urban settlements and
- **Rural Postal Codes** are areas serviced by a rural route delivery from a postal station. “0” in the second position in the postal code denotes a rural postal code (Statistics Canada, 2001).

Statistics Canada recommends that “the appropriate definition should be determined by the question being addressed” (Statistics Canada, 2001, 12).

Social and cultural determinants
There are two dominant and conflicting social constructions of rurality; one constructs rural areas as a refuge from the social problems associated with urban areas and the other assumes that rural communities are less sophisticated than urban areas. Both have implications for women and girls experiences of violence.

The “rural idyll” is constructed in opposition to the anomie cities. It constructs rural communities as places that are not fractured by social divisions. The rural idyll assumes that there are lower crime rates, less substance abuse, and lower incidents of race- and class-based tensions. The assumption that rural communities are places where individuals share social and cultural values and support each other in times of trouble restrains analysis of the process of marginalization of social groups constructed as “different” (Watkins, 1997). In order to raise awareness about violence against women in smaller communities, activists have had to debunk the social construction of the rural idyll because many people still deny that women and girls are vulnerable to violence/abuse in small towns.

Alternately, people who live in rural and remote areas are constructed as “hicks” or as “rednecks”. This construction assumes that rural populations are less progressive, less educated, and less tolerant of difference than their urban counterparts. This construction of rurality has historically assumed that social problems in rural communities are inherent to the place itself, and assume that rural experiences do not change from generation to generation (Dunk, 1991; Sangster, 1997). Thus, this construction does not consider how the economies of rural and remote communities and the relationship between hinterland and metropolis influence the social and cultural characteristics of rural areas. Moreover, assuming that change is slower in rural areas occludes activism for change.

The lens adopts a definition of rural that considers demographic, geographic, and social, and cultural determinants. Geographic determinants cannot be ignored because tax bases are determined by population and because services tend to be designed to serve the greatest number of people. Hence, rural areas are under-serviced and few resources are allocated to programs designed to address barriers and problems specific to rural communities. Demographic models for defining rural areas posit “urban” as the norm against which rurality is defined. Moreover, demographic models exclude a community’s self-definition as rural and the indicators that towns and rural areas deem to be important characteristics of rural communities (Jiwani, 1998). Social and cultural determinants focus on the patterns of human interaction that are common in rural areas, which are influenced by the economic conditions and social norms that define rural life. While the research tool seeks to elucidate on specific barriers women and girls face in rural and remote communities, it also acknowledges the fact that many women have chosen to live in smaller communities because they cherish the values associated with rural lifestyles.

While there is no essential rural experience, rural communities share common characteristics that influence a woman’s or a girl’s experience of violence/abuse and her ability to seek assistance. Among them are:

- strong connections among men, particularly among men with influence in the community
• religion plays a strong role in community life
• community life is organized around the heterosexual nuclear family
• denial of family violence
• lack of anonymity and confidentiality
• limited access to social services, health care, counselling and education
• lack of affordable housing
• lack of legal aid and few private legal services
• lack of emergency services and no 911 service in some areas
• few police officers who cover a large jurisdiction
• many rural areas have no public transportation or daycare
• high levels of unemployment and poverty
• seasonal work is common
• limited employment opportunities for women
• lower literacy rates
• greater accessibility to guns (Hornosty & Doherty, 2002; Jiwani, 1998).

All women and girls who are abused live in isolation, but rural women’s and girls’ isolation is exacerbated by geography and the patterns of rural life. Rural and remote communities are physically isolated. Hence, leaving an abusive relationship is difficult because women are often far from shelters and services, and, therefore less accessible. Because police jurisdictions are large in rural areas, police response times to emergency calls are slower.

The close-knit nature of rural communities, however, exacerbates the socio-cultural and psychological isolation rural women and girls experiences. Women and girls have more physical privacy in rural communities, but less social privacy. Social scrutiny may make women and girls reluctant to access social services. On the other hand, informal support networks may foster interventions to help women and girls leave violent relationships (Weisheit, et al., 1994; Jiwani, 1998).

Farm women have a unique connection to rural communities because their economic well-being depends on the farm. Farm women’s financial resources are invested in the farm and their access to personal resources is mitigated by their spouses who are also their business partners. In many cases, though, women are silent partners in the business, and all of the assets are held by her spouse. The socio-economic organization of farm life is very different from urban living. The farm’s survival is dependent upon cooperation and the labour of women. Farm life is organized in such a manner that a woman’s livelihood, community, animals — all that she values, and which has currency for her — is tied to the family farm which make it more difficult, if not impossible, for a woman to leave (Hornosty & Doherty, 2002; McCrea, 1995).

There are high levels of unemployment and rates of poverty in rural Atlantic Canada. Transportation, telephone, child care, and extra curricular/social activities may be impossible costs. Because of the scarcity of rural employment, especially full-time jobs, many women are economically dependent on husbands, fathers, and children.
Social isolation is a more important factor in rural areas than in urban areas because there are fewer contacts to mainstream society. Some abusers move to rural and remote communities in order to isolate their partners from support systems and families. In some religious communities, women will be reprimanded for defying the teachings of the community. Leaving a violent relationship may also end her connection to her family and community. Girls and women in the same family often have very different experiences because the girls have more connection to the town and mainstream institutions because they attend schools. Girls learn different values at school than they do at home, and family conflict often arises from girls’ exploration of ideas that do not conform to her those of her parents.

Lack of anonymity and social isolation has unique implications for women and girls from marginalized communities. Immigrant and refugee communities are small in rural areas. It is unlikely that the victim will not know the service provider who will provide translation or culturally-sensitive counselling. First Nations women and girls who need counselling must choose between confidentiality and services that are sensitive to Aboriginal people’s distrust of provincial services and programs (Cooper Institute, 2001). It is difficult for women and girls who choose to turn to government-run services to access the programs because relationships between reserves and the non-Aboriginal community are often strained.

The rural lens focusses on the unique needs of women and girls living in rural and remote communities, the resources available to women and girls who are experiencing violence, and the women’s and girls’ access to resources. Focussing on the unique needs of girls and women living in rural communities, the resources available to women and girls who are experiencing violence, and girls and women’s access to them allows us to understand how the lack of resources and infrastructure in Atlantic Canada constrains women’s and girls’ self-determination. Though there are typically fewer services for women and girls in rural and remote areas, some communities have developed innovative anti-violence programs that incorporate the specific needs of women and girls in their communities. Therefore, this lens will also examine how rural and remote communities mobilize limited resources to address violence against women and girls.

This lens explores how organizations adapt government-sponsored anti-violence programs to meet the specific needs of their communities, and asks what resources communities need to do so. The lens hopes to better understand what strategies for change are most effective in rural and remote communities in Atlantic Canada so that women and girls are not obliged to choose between their personal safety and staying in their home communities. It, therefore, validates women’s strong connection to rural life and to their communities (Hornosty & Doherty, 2002).

**Safety: Toward Women and Girls’ Personal and Community Safety**

Safety is a social responsibility. The most effective violence prevention and safety interventions are those which coordinate community resources to support women and girls who are dealing with violence and abuse. The Deleuth Model and the London Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse have produced effective results in supporting women in violent relationships. However, the
effectiveness of the model in other communities depends on a high degree of support from police, victims’ support services, counselling programs, and the criminal justice system. In rural areas, coordinating services is difficult because of the lack of resources, the lack of social services and the larger jurisdictions of police. Moreover, there may not be adequate resources in rural areas to address the specialized needs of particular groups of women. For example, there may not be funds allocated arranging for specialized transportation for women with mobility impairment and to support them in the shelter.

Safety is a paramount concern for women and girls who are in violent relationships, who have been assaulted, or who feel threatened by the potential for violence. The extent to which a girl or a woman feels unsafe or fears violence affects her day-to-day decisions and actions. For example, women choose housing, employment, and education based on their perceptions of their safety. Studies have found that women as a group are more concerned about their safety than men. Their fears are not irrational. Violence against women is about power and control. Abusive partners keep women in fear by monitoring their daily activities and stalking them, often at their place of employment. In her study of women’s and men’s concerns about crime, Elizabeth Stanko (1990) concluded that women’s fear of crime is related to growing up female in a patriarchal society. The 1993 Violence Against Women Survey found that age, living situation, health, income, and direct experience with threats of violence affect a woman’s level of anxiety about violence. 90% of women who reported that they worried about walking alone had also reported at least one incident of sexual harassment. These factors are often inter-related. For example, poverty is tied to single parenthood. Women living in poverty may not have the resources to live in a ‘safe’ neighbourhood, and will have fewer resources to pay for taxis and public transportation. Women who are raising children on their own are responsible not only for their own safety, but also for the safety of their children. The survey found that single mothers were among those who expressed the highest levels of concern about their violence (Johnson, 1996).

Public awareness of anti-violence programs is essential to their success. Getting the message out in rural areas poses unique challenges. The increased levels of social scrutiny in smaller communities makes women who are experiencing violence wary about attending violence awareness seminars or to go to services for abused women (Homosty & Doherty, 2002).

The safety lens examines the ways in which programs and services consider the particular needs of girls and women living in rural and remote communities and what strategies have effectively addressed their isolation. It also examines girls and women’s options and choices for self-determination and examines the risks girls and women take when they disclose violence and abuse.

Feminists have developed services to provide immediate protection for girls and women in crisis and counselling programs to help them deal with the long-term impact of violence and abuse. However, the social stigma attached to violence and abuse makes girls and women reluctant to ask for help. The Violence Against Women Survey asked women what support systems helped them deal with abuse; 1 in 4 women responded that they believed relying on themselves was the most useful strategy. Rather than seeking the social support they needed to take control of their lives,
these women were keeping their experience of violence private and thus remained isolated (Johnson, 1996). While there may be services to provide immediate protection for women and girls in crisis and counselling programs to help them deal with the long-term impact of violence and abuse, girls and may not ask for help because they are embarrassed about the abuse or the assault, family pressure to be silent, fear that response will be ignored, or the riskiness of disclosure and fear that the response will lead to further violence and abuse (Berman, et al., 2002; Hornosty & Doherty, 2002).

Despite feminist research that explains why it is difficult to leave violent relationships, the general assumption is that women could leave if they tried. Hornosty and Doherty (2002) found that when women in rural areas reached out for help, their families advised them that it was their responsibility to stay in the marriage and make it work. Learning to remain silent about violence begins early in life. In their study of sexual harassment and girls, the London Centre for Research on Violence against Women and Girls learned that girls experienced high levels of sexual harassment. Although the girls realized that sexual harassment was wrong, they did not report violence because they feared being labelled a ‘rat’ and consequently isolated from their peer group. Moreover, they did not think that their teachers and other adults would act on the behaviour, making the social cost of isolation too high. Most disturbing was the fact that many teachers, parents, and school administrators who participated in the study did believe that the best response was to ignore the abuse (Berman, et al., 2002).

Visibility of services for lesbian, bisexual and transgendered women is key to addressing violence and abuse. However, there is a paucity of services in rural areas. While in urban areas, some services have developed for lesbian or same-sex domestic violence, there is a lack of programs in rural areas. Further, in smaller areas perhaps one lesbian or feminist may offer services and support (Ristock, 2002b). These individual service providers, though, face many difficulties. Key among these are lack of funding, concerns over confidentiality, and homophobia.

Girls who are living in violent families often learn that violence against women is not socially acceptable at school. Some children try to intervene to protect their mothers from abuse. This action puts them at risk because it angers the abusive parent. Children often do not understand the ramifications of disclosing violence in their home. If a child informs her teacher that she is witnessing abuse, the teacher is under legal obligation to report the abuse because the child is deemed to be at risk of abuse. In Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador teachers must report abuse in their students’ homes if the child is 16 years of age or younger; in Prince Edward Island teachers must report abuse if students are under the age of 18.

Finally, research must consider the safety of women and girls who participate. Women who agree to participate in research projects may wish to do so as a way to contribute to the movement to end violence against women. Some women who agree to participate in interviews and focus groups may consider it a part of their healing process. Nonetheless, talking about violence and abuse opens up painful memories for women. Researchers must be sensitive to the participants, and there must be supports in place to ensure women’s well-being. There are important legal and ethical obligations
for research with girls. If girls disclose violence and abuse, the researcher must be prepared to deal with the disclosure, and direct the girl to the appropriate counselling services. She is also legally obligated to report the violence and abuse. Young women must be informed of this legal obligation before they agree to participate in the project.

Places Where Safety is a Concern for Girls and Women in Rural Communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLACES</th>
<th>CONTRIBUTING FACTORS</th>
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| HOME                    | • Violence in the home  
                         • Unsafe housing  
                         • Family pressure for silence |
| WORK                    | • Harassment  
                         • Inaction upon disclosure  
                         • Climate of downsizing/lack of resources |
| SCHOOL                  | • Ineffective policies  
                         • Fear of alienating or offending boys  
                         • Normalizing of violence in school activities such as sports |
| COMMUNITY               | • Isolation  
                         • Marginalization  
                         • Victim blaming |
| RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY     | • Scriptures  
                         • Reinforced inequities  
                         • Expected conformities |

Intervention: Making a Difference in the Lives of Women and Girls

The construction of gender inequality begins at birth and a woman negotiates different constructions of femininity over the course of her lifetime (Randall & Haskell, 2000). The needs of young girls, adolescent girls, women, and elderly women are very different. Girls and women need different types of intervention at different stages of their lives.

This lens examines family violence programs and practices pertaining to prevention, crisis intervention, and follow-up. The goal is to determine what practices work or do not work in rural areas in Atlantic Canada and to determine why or why not. The lens also seeks to improve programs and practices by recommending changes that would prevent violence and abuse and protect women and girls if they were implemented. In particular, it focuses on whether the program is tailored to
rural and remote communities. This lens seeks to identify whose needs are not being met by existing programs. It also examines woman-centred programs that are meeting women’s and girls’ needs in order to better understand what makes a program effective. Woman-centred programs respect the connection between mother and child, and respect the decisions that women and girls to make about their lives.

A key test of services for women and girls is whether they effect positive change in their lives. Feminist critical analysis of the criminalization of spousal assault demonstrates that there may be a lack of fit between feminist goals and women’s needs. The early legalization of women’s issues were primarily a liberal feminist enterprise. This strategy was based on a normalized experience of white women. It was less effective and desirable for marginalized women whose communities were already over-policed. In retrospect, many feminists now recognize that oversimplifying the issue of woman abuse in order to effect change was not an effective strategy because it did not conform to what battered women wanted (Macleod, 1987). Feminists have learned that justice will not be reached by extending the reach of patriarchal institutions in women’s lives. Substantive equality will only be attained through legal change that addresses multiple forms of oppression and that is based on women’s knowledge (Currie, 1998).

There is a lack of services for girls and young women, especially for girls who are 16 to 18 years old. Most anti-violence initiatives that target this age group are not gender specific. Girls who are in violent families or in violent relationships have few places to turn for help. Studies have found that there is a strong link between youth homelessness and family violence and abuse. Most of these studies have focussed on urban communities, and thus little is known about how poverty and violence affect young women living in rural communities. A recent study on youth homelessness in Antigonish, Nova Scotia found that it is difficult to assess the extent of poverty and homelessness in this age group because their survival strategies make them invisible. Young people who leave violent families tend to stay with a friend’s family, to live outside for brief periods, to drift from one friend’s home to another, or to leave the community. These strategies do not protect young women’s well-being and do not promote their ability to make their own decisions. Poverty diminishes their ability to make positive changes in their lives. If young people work, they tend to make the minimum wage. As dependents, their access to social assistance is restricted (Antigonish Women’s Resource Centre, 2002). Girls need services and counselling designed according to their needs, as well as access to affordable housing, emergency housing for youth, access to education and training, and well-paying jobs.

Feminist Social Action: Making Connections Between Personal Experiences and Social Change

Making connections between personal experiences and social, political, and economic conditions that shape these experiences is critical to understanding the work that must be done to transform the social conditions of abused women and girls’ lives. This lens supports the assertion that when abused women begin to make the connection to their personal experiences and how the world constructs their position they begin to not only question the meanings that shape their lives, but also
create a sense of themselves other than that of a victim. Norma Jean Profitt (2000) found that theorizing about their lives enabled participants in her study to understand the connection between the political and subjective aspects of experiences. The importance of questioning both women’s experiences and the social contexts which gave shape to them and using this knowledge to redefine their relation to the world while discovering ways to work for change was crucial. As Magda Lewis (1993) claims “we are able to uncover the politics of our subordination as we interrogate our experiences for how they delimit what is possible for us” (p. 12). Therefore, supporting women and girls’ empowerment entails both education about violence against women, changing societal attitudes about gender and the family, and providing options for women and girls that allow them to identify the personal changes that they need to make, as well as, the social changes that would need to occur to improve women’s lives and advance their economic and social security (Profitt, 2000).

Understanding how social norms, messages and practices shape how abused women and girls feel about themselves and how they take up oppressive definitions enables them to make critical connections between blaming themselves for the violence, woman blaming, and the devaluation of women (Profitt, 2000). However, this work can be very painful, difficult, and lengthy. Everyday practices, including language, reinforce women’s position of inferiority. Feelings of shame reinforce their decisions to adjust to their environment and remain in abusive relationships. Inger Agger (1994) suggests that these same messages and feelings of “shame, reinforced by power relations, are elements of structural violence embedded in the culture and social structure itself” (Agger, 1994, p. 115). To move beyond the victim perspective, Lewis (1990) suggests, requires that we “examine and question self-consciously the conditions of our own meaning-making and to use it as the place from which to begin to work toward change” (p. 470). In this way we will be more able to create alternative sense of ourselves, communicate with others about what kinds of changes would be growth-oriented, and plan strategies for change at the personal and social levels. Further, politicizing the personal helps women to understand themselves and their lives in ways that bridge the divide between subjectivity and action/healing and change. “The language of healing and the language of political change and solidarity need not be mutually exclusive. Healing can and does take place within the language of solidarity, collective resistance, and social change” (Profitt, 1996, p. 35). This lens supports the work of programs and services that address both structural and subjective feelings of worth and value that characterize women and girls’ experiences of violence and their work to reveal the kinds of power relations that make violence possible. However, women and girls need supportive environments for doing this difficult work. Consciousness raising processes take time and space where sustained engagement can occur. The gains and risks involved require sustained support.

Addressing resistance from girls and boys is a key challenge in the process of raising awareness and promoting individual and social change. The Rural Youth Healthy Relationships Project in Antigonish, Nova Scotia states that they are constantly challenged by resistance to the assertion that women and girls are not empowered by our social structures and that violence is largely male violence. Their research also found that many girls support the notion that feminism is irrelevant and that girls can do whatever they want – they seem to want to hold on to a “safe world view” that allows them to believe this. For the boys who are resistant, they also want to hold on to this view but from a perspective of not wanting to acknowledge their male privilege. For many
boys, the idea of collective responsibility for their part in maintaining a system of inequality translates into feelings of personal guilt which shuts them down. Making this personal/political connection needs to also involve exploring the concepts of privilege and oppression that are based on a range of socially constructed inequalities: sexism, racism, homophobia and heterosexism, classism, ableism and so forth. Making the links across inequalities through a process of intersectionality is important. Still, it is difficult to simultaneously address structural realities that oppress while maintaining individual engagement. When young people are able to see the links between personal and social realities, they are then able to get excited about social change.

Federal and provincial governments now officially acknowledge feminist analysis of violence against women that recognizes that violence/abuse is the result of unequal power and control (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993). Nevertheless, many government-sponsored initiatives do not address the structural roots of unequal power relations. Nor do they effectively analyze how institutional structures sustain and perpetuate inequality. There is a lack of co-ordination between the various institutions and programs offering services to women and girls. When a woman or a girl asks for assistance, she often finds herself trapped in a complex web of bureaucracies that exacerbates her isolation and limits her choices. In order to empower women and girls to live violence-free lives, government policies, institutional protocols, and woman-centred intervention practices must co-ordinate their services. However, the process breaks down when community programs and services are imposed upon and the level of co-ordination is imposed from above. Community-based programs can only successful if they have adequate resources. This lens will ask service providers what measures would facilitate the implementation of programs that promote social and individual change.

Following feminist analysis, the social action lens recognizes that ending violence against women is a key component of achieving equality for women and girls. An intersectional approach that considers the historical, social, and political contexts of individual experiences of oppression combined with a social action component that begins from a position that social and individual change together support women’s knowledge, their empowerment, and social change.

**Concluding Remarks**

Women and girls living in rural and remote communities need women-centred programs and policies to help them cope with the violence in their lives. These programs must be developed in accordance with the specific social, economic, and political context of area in which they live. Interventions must recognize that for many women and girls poverty is among the most significant barrier to leaving violent relationships. In rural and remote communities poverty is exacerbated by the lack of employment opportunities for women and girls.

While rural and remote communities present specific and daunting challenges to women and girls, it would be misleading to argue that life in smaller communities is entirely negative. Many women do not want to leave rural communities because they value the sense of community and the way of life. A strong sense of community can also motivate service providers and community organizations to galvanize against violence, and to develop well-coordinated responses to abuse. It is important to pay close attention to the creative solutions developed at the grassroots level, and to how
communities adapt urban programs to suit their needs.

The PRISM lenses seek to elucidate on the particular needs of women and girls in rural and remote communities in the Atlantic region. It is a preliminary attempt to develop a tool that will elucidate the multi-faceted experiences of violence. It is a reflexive research tool that should not be applied in the same way in all communities. Rather, it should be adapted to suit different circumstances and contexts, and in accordance with the research it produces.
References


Centre for Women’s Health, 2002: 121-152.


1. If policy makers and program developers and evaluators are to be reflexive they must subject themselves to self scrutiny. At the same, reflexivity restrains our desire to make improvements and impose them based on our own perceptions. Reflexivity is a process of becoming aware of our own biases; the outcome is a kind of dialogue between policy and program developers and evaluators and the communities we serve, rather than a single interpretation. Reflexivity is way of collaborating in the work of transforming our practices, how we understand them and the situations in which we practice, the forces that shape and constrain them, and the ways in which our practices are expressed.

2. Critical feminist evaluation refers to the idea that evaluators cannot separate from the experiences, interests, knowledges, values and beliefs that shape how they develop and reflect on their practices. PRISM incorporated the values of reflexivity, contextuality, inclusivity, and responsiveness into our definition of evaluation. A critical feminist evaluation implies a process of questioning how our practices include or exclude the multiple voices of women and girls. It works to attend to the specific conditions and circumstances that are relevant to people’s lives. It implies that evaluators examine forces outside of the lenses to "evaluate" initiatives – questions such as sustainability that are not included but that, nonetheless, impact initiatives. A critical feminist evaluation that is responsive is proactive – it seeks to effect a conversation between as many voices as possible within and across various contexts – embracing difference.
