

Isolation

A common form of emotional abuse used by an abuser to control his partner is physical, financial and/or social isolation. Men who control what their partners do, who they see and talk to, what they read, where they go or otherwise limit their partner's involvement with the outside world make it more difficult for their partners to leave the abuse.

Physical Isolation of Rural Communities

In many rural locations, support services are not readily available. This lack of access to services and support can increase vulnerability to abuse as well as compound its effects.¹ A study of 105 former residents of a transition house in Regina, Saskatchewan, indicated that all of the rural women wanted to leave their abusive relationships before they eventually did, and cited lack of resources and geographical isolation as major factors.²

Many factors can contribute to the compounding or severity of the effects of abuse in a rural or isolated setting:

- □ The physical distance between an abused woman's home and support can be difficult to manoeuvre, especially if she doesn't drive, if the family owns only one car or if there is no public transportation system.
- □ In some cases, an incident may be long over by the time help arrives, discouraging women from calling in the future.
- □ When rural residents are owner-operators of small family businesses or farms, reporting abuse, or removing a family member from the home, could lead to financial disaster for the family business.
- □ The relative lack of employment and affordable housing in rural areas makes it less likely that a woman leaving an abusive relationship will be able to stay in her community.
- □ People living in rural communities have close ties with each other. People who could potentially help may know the abuser and therefore may not be "safe" to go to, may not believe a woman, or may defend the abuser.³
- □ In smaller communities, beliefs about the family as being "private" may be quite strong, and as a result, women may try to keep the problem from becoming known.⁴
- □ Widespread use of police scanners in rural communities and a perception that local service providers may "let secrets slip" may keep rural women from seeking help.⁵

"I wasn't allowed to have money, and I wasn't allowed to be on the phone, and I wasn't allowed to have friends, and I wasn't allowed to have transportation.... Even when I went to get the groceries, he'd give me the money, but I had to give him the receipt and the change."

Woman Abuse
and the
PEI Justice System
Research Team
of the
Muriel McQueen
Fergusson Centre
for
Family Violence
Research

The quotes in this document are from PEI women interviewed in 1999 during herStory of woman abuse and the PEI justice system, a project of the Woman Abuse and the PEI Justice System Research Team of the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research.

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"We came to a farm, I knew nothing about farming, he had a wood stove and I'd only seen those in museums up to that point and I was afraid. I was all alone, there was only his family around and they weren't very supportive ..."

Social or Financial Isolation

Women can be isolated without living in a rural area. Her partner may control her activities or relationships to the extent that she is not able to develop a support network of friends. He may control her ability to earn money or develop skills.

A person's vulnerability to abuse can be increased by isolation. Some groups of women are particularly vulnerable to abuse because they are socially or financially isolated by their circumstances. Immigrant women and women who do not speak English as a first language are often prevented from accessing services, which increases isolation. The isolation and economic insecurity suffered by many women with disabilities and older women makes them more dependent on their families and care-givers. Not only does this isolation and dependence place them at greater risk for abuse, it also makes them more afraid of threatening their support system by reaching outside the system for help.

"I found a part time job and he did everything in his power to keep me from taking this job, to the point of expecting and demanding that the person hiring me would ... phone him to see if it's okay, he wanted to have control. He wanted my perspective employer to phone him to say 'is it all right that I hire your wife?'"

"[H]e was going to [an] Apprenticeship Program, so he had to go 6 weeks every year so we would move from place to place and I never really got a chance to know people because we'd only be there for six weeks and then we'd go to his work, wherever he worked, and I gave up work, I had to follow him with his schooling. [As well,] he would put my friends down, you know, "why do you hang around with her, she smokes cigarettes" and all that stuff. So I wasn't able to have friends and I wasn't able to write to friends or do anything."

1. Family Violence: A Fact Sheet from the Department of Justice Canada, <http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/ps/fm/familyvfs.html>
2. Chalmers, L. & Smith, P., *Wife battering: Psychological, social and physical isolation and counteraction strategies*, In Tigar McLaren's (Ed.), *Gender and society: Creating a Canadian women's sociology* (pp. 221-244), Toronto, Copp Clark Pitman, 1988
3. MacLeod, L., **Battered but not beaten...Preventing wife battering in Canada**, Ottawa, Ont, Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1987
4. Chalmer & Smith, 1988; MacLeod, 1987
5. *Helpers Exploring Abuse and Responding (HEAR) Team, Prevention of family violence in rural town, island, and geographically isolated communities: Determining sociocultural influences on the meanings of and responses to woman abuse*. Fredericton, NB: The Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research, 1997