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WORD TO THE WISE

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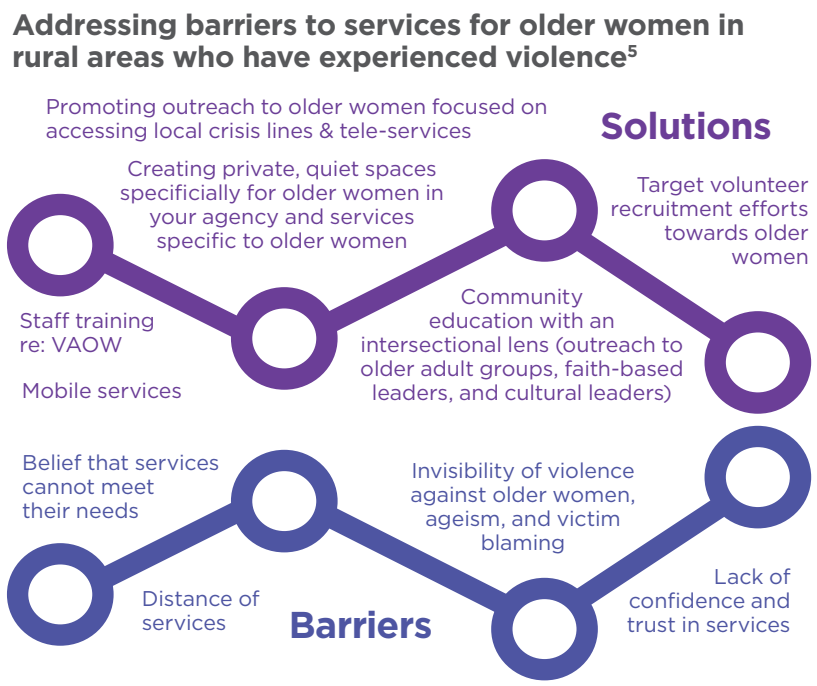
Increased knowledge and support for older women living in rural areas who have experienced violence

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Additional Barriers & Risks for Older Women in Rural Areas

Violence against older women in rural areas takes many forms. It may be perpetrated by partners, ex partners, family members, caregivers, acquaintances, professionals/staff, and other residents of long term care homes and/or retirement homes. In Canada, rates of family violence are higher for older women living in rural areas versus urban.^{1, 2} Research shows that older women often experience additional barriers to seeking help compared to their younger counterparts, including a distrust of systems and authorities, attitudes of acceptance surrounding abuse, and beliefs that the home is private. Many of these barriers are exacerbated for older women living in rural areas who “may face additional personal and familiar pressures to stay” in violent situations and “additional values and expectations preventing women from seeking help, such as the value of self-sufficiency and distrust of state intervention and outsiders offering help.”³

“Women of all ages face barriers to accessing support in rural communities, including social norms, lack of anonymity, lack of transportation, limited services, livestock responsibilities and physical isolation. Many of these factors also increase risk of harm and lethality from abusive partners, family members, neighbours, or acquaintances including access to firearms and isolation.”⁴



RURILITY - MORE THAN A PLACE ON A MAP

Across the literature and research there are considerable variations in what constitutes a rural area. “The treatises of alternative views are numerous and varied. One longstanding debate is whether “rural” is a geographical concept, a location with boundaries on a map, or whether it is a social representation, a community of interest, a culture and way of life..”⁶ Geographical considerations may include factors such as population density, population size, distance from urban areas, distance to essential services, and regional contexts such as labour market dynamics and settlement patterns.⁷



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Isolation - Emotional, Physical and Profound

Women who experience abuse often describe feeling emotionally isolated from friends, family and social supports. “Conditions of rurality such as long distances, lack of transportation, limited services, and rigid small town social structures further complicated the isolation experienced by rural women.”⁸

Limited access to transportation can create barriers to service for older women experiencing abuse (especially those with decreased mobility), as well as increase the risk of harm and ability to access social supports, employment, and training opportunities.

“If you’re stuck on a farm, or even in small areas, you don’t have a car and you don’t have any way to get to these places to get the help that you need ... you’re stuck.”⁹

Housing

Lack of affordable, accessible housing is a significant concern for older women experiencing violence in rural areas. Older women in rural areas are more likely than their urban counterparts to “live in older single-family houses with large yards” which are less accessible than modern homes, more expensive to heat and maintain.”¹⁰ This may increase barriers to living independently safely. Options for housing targeted towards older adults are limited in rural areas, and those which do exist may be located significant distances from other vital services. Research has also highlighted the lack of “First Nations, Métis & Inuit specific housing and culturally relevant support services” across Ontario and the negative impact of lack of affordable, accessible housing on the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health of Indigenous women of all ages.¹¹

Older Marginalized Women in Rural Areas

Marginalized older women, including racialized women, immigrant and refugee older women, Indigenous women, LGBTQ+ and differently abled women have been identified as having diverse, unique needs which are often overlooked in research, policy, and practice in rural areas. These needs must be considered and mitigated with region and culturally specific services, resources, and staff training.

1 Statistics Canada, “Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2013”.

2 There is a lack of research specific to older Ontario women living in rural communities. Research focused on rural areas rarely includes information on women over age 55, and research focused on older adults in rural areas lacks gender-specific data, including the previous reference cited which focused on older adults in general.

3 Allcock, Annelies. “Older women and domestic abuse: ESSS Outline,” (2018).

4 Banman, Victoria. “Domestic Homicide Risk Factors: Rural and Urban considerations.” (2015).

5 For further recommendations specific to IPV and older women, see: Brossoie, Brown, Roberto et al. “Violence Against Rural Older Women: Promoting Community Awareness and Action” (2013). Accessed from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3609035/>

6 Statistics Canada, “Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin.” Vol. 3, No. 3. (2001).

7 Ibid.

8 Department of Justice Canada. “The Ontario Rural Woman Abuse Study, final report.” (2015).

9 Ibid. Survivor from Grey-Bruce, Ontario.

10 Newsletter of the National Advisory Council on Aging, Vol. 9, No. 1.

11 Ontario Native Women’s Association, “Housing, Homelessness and Poverty.” Accessed from: <http://www.onwa.ca/article/housing-homelessness-and-poverty-1264.asp>