

ANROWS

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY

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Landscapes

State of knowledge | July 2015

Seeking help for domestic violence: Exploring rural
women's coping experiences: *State of knowledge paper*

Issue 04 | 2015

ANROWS acknowledgement

This material was produced with funding from the Australian Government and the Australian state and territory governments. Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) gratefully acknowledges the financial and other support it has received from these governments, without which this work would not have been possible. The findings and views reported in this paper are those of the authors and cannot be attributed to the Australian Government, or any Australian state or territory government.

Acknowledgement of Country

ANROWS acknowledges the traditional owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders past, present and future; and we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and knowledge.

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Published by

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited (ANROWS)
PO Box 6322, Alexandria NSW 2015 | www.anrows.org.au | Phone +61 2 8374 4000
ABN 67 162 349 171

Seeking help for domestic violence: Exploring rural women's coping experiences / Sarah Wendt, Donna Chung, Alison Elder, Lia Bryant.

Sydney: ANROWS, c2015.

Pages; 30 cm. (Landscapes : State of Knowledge. Issue 04/2015)

I. Rural women – Crimes against – Australia. II. Rural women – Services for – Australia. III. Abused women – Services for – Australia.
I. Wendt, Sarah. II. Chung, Donna. III. Elder, Alison. IV. Bryant, Lia.

ISSN: 2204-9657 (print) 2204-9665 (online)

ISBN: 978-0-9943199-8-2 (print) 978-0-9943199-9-9 (online)

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Seeking help for domestic violence: Exploring rural women's coping experiences: State of knowledge paper

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Authors' acknowledgement

The University of South Australia gratefully acknowledges the financial and other support it has received from Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) toward this research and, through it, the Australian Government and Australian state and territory governments. The findings and views reported in this paper are those of the authors and cannot be attributed to ANROWS or to the Australian Government, or any Australian state or territory government.

This work is part of the ANROWS Landscapes series. ANROWS Landscapes (State of knowledge papers) are medium length papers that scope current knowledge on an issue related to violence against women and their children. Papers will draw on empirical research, including research produced under ANROWS's research program, and/or practice knowledge.

This report addresses work covered in ANROWS research project 1.3 "Seeking help for domestic violence: exploring rural women's coping experience". Please consult the ANROWS website for more information on this project. In addition to this paper, an ANROWS Horizons and ANROWS Compass will be available at a later stage as part of this project.

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Key terms

Support seeking

Disclose

When a woman makes it known to someone (family, friends, acquaintances) she has experienced domestic and family violence or sexual assault.

Seek help

When a woman asks for help about domestic and family violence or sexual assault from a human service agency or organisation.

Report

When a woman gives an account or statement to a criminal justice agency/(ies) about her experience of domestic and family violence or sexual assault.

Formal support

When a woman receives help from a human service agency or organisation, either government or non-government or both.

Informal support

When a woman receives help from family, friends or acquaintances.

Violence types

Domestic and family violence

Domestic violence refers to acts of violence that occur between people who have, or have had, an intimate relationship. It includes physical and sexual assault, and other forms of domination such as psychological, social, and financial abuse. A central element is coercive control, which is an ongoing pattern of violent and threatening behaviours by one person aimed at controlling their partner through fear. In most cases, the violent behaviour is to exercise power and control over women and their children (Chung & Wendt, 2015).

Indigenous people may use the term “family violence” to describe a wide range of relationships where violence might take place, and to highlight the effects of abuse on the whole family. The term “family violence” is used to recognise the historical context of colonisation, oppression, dispossession, disempowerment, poverty, and cultural, social and geographical dislocation as these affect individuals, families, and entire communities (Cheers et al., 2006).

Throughout the report domestic and family violence will be used together to recognise the different contexts of these definitions. However, it is acknowledged that there is some contention among Indigenous groups as to the preferred term, and there is a shift towards using family violence in some jurisdictions when referring to non-Indigenous experiences because this term acknowledges networks of perpetrators in the family context.

Sexual assault

Sexual assault is the term used in this report to describe all types of sexual offences. This includes rape which is physically forced or coerced penetration of the vulva or anus or mouth, using a penis, other body parts or an object. It also includes any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, against a person using coercion. Sexual assault can occur in any setting including but not limited to home and work (Cook, Gidycz, Koss, & Murphy, 2011; Fileborn, 2011; World Health Organization, 2002).

There is variation in the terminology and definitions used to describe sexual assault between states and territories in Australia. For example, rape, sexual assault, sexual penetration or intercourse without consent can be defined in different ways (Fileborn, 2011). Sexual assault can be a distinct phenomenon as well as an aspect of domestic and family violence (Martin, Taft, & Resick, 2007).

Types of isolation

Geographical isolation

Geographical isolation means persons, groups, or populations separated by physical distance. The Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) defines geographical isolation based on road distance.

Social isolation

Social isolation means a lack of contact with persons, groups, and society because of distance and population sizes. The Australian Geographic Standard Classification (AGSC) measures a centre distance from 'urban' centres and therefore differentiates between Major Cities, Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote locations (Owen & Carrington, 2014).

Service types

Generalist service

A service working across several fields of practice (Pugh & Cheers, 2010) and/or sectors, such as a large non-government organisation.

Specialist service

A service working on one field of practice with a specific client group (Pugh & Cheers, 2010), such as a sexual assault service or women's refuge.

Other definitions

Indigenous

Indigenous is used in this report and refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the first people of Australia.

Minority group

We have followed Pugh and Cheers in using "minority" in a political sense to indicate the position of individuals and groups who may lack effective representation and political power, and whose needs tend to be neglected or ignored (Pugh & Cheers, 2010).

Regional, rural, remote

Regional, rural, and remote are terms commonly used in Australia to refer to large landscapes and small towns that lie outside the major coastal cities (Hogg & Carrington, 2006, p. 6). There are "no agreed-upon definitions or categories of rurality" (Roufeil & Battye, 2008, p. 3). For this report we use Roufeil and Battye's definitions because the terms regional, rural, and remote indicate decreasing populations and accessibility to services. Specifically, "regional" is defined as non-urban centres with a population over 25,000 and with relatively good access to services. "Rural" refers to "non-urban localities of fewer than 25,000 people with reduced accessibility to services, and "remote" refers to communities of fewer than 5000 people with very restricted access to services. In the report we use these terms together to speak broadly about the effects of social and geographical isolation on the ability of women to disclose, report and seek help about domestic and family violence and sexual assault. Like Roufeil and Battye, the authors of this report make distinctions between the three categories when needed.

Executive summary

The purpose of this report is to present research and literature that examines the effects of social and geographical isolation and remoteness on the ability of women to disclose, report, seek help, and receive appropriate interventions following domestic and family violence and/or sexual assault. The first part of the report summarises research findings that explored regional, rural and remote women's experiences of domestic and family violence and sexual assault. The second part of the report draws on literature that describes service provision in regional, rural and remote Australia and summarises the main approaches of service delivery for domestic and family violence and sexual assault. The appendix provides a description of the methodology used to search the literature.

The report shows that there are high reported rates of domestic and family violence in regional, rural and remote areas. In addition, women experience unique structural and cultural barriers that impact on their ability to disclose, report, seek help and receive appropriate services following domestic and family violence and sexual assault. Women living in socially and geographically isolated places often cope with domestic and family violence by themselves for long periods of time. Informal support plays a vital role in women's decisions to seek formal help. Coping and help-seeking is particularly complex and nuanced for different groups of women, particularly Indigenous women, because of the impacts of colonisation and dispossession. In particular, the research about women's experiences of domestic and family violence shows how regional, rural and remote environments shape their experiences of disclosure and seeking help in quite different ways. This report outlines contextual factors that influence domestic and family violence such as living in farming, mining, sea-change/tree-change communities as well as those experiencing environmental disasters and poverty.

Drawing from writing about service provision in social and geographically isolated places, this report provides an overview of the challenges and possibilities to be considered for domestic and family violence and

sexual assault. Dense community networks, distances, dispersed populations, and politically driven funding systems all contribute to the challenge of providing accessible, locally responsive, and ethical services for women experiencing violence and abuse. Furthermore, these diverse contextual factors shape possibilities for service delivery. These factors include operating women's shelters/refuges, providing outreach services, accessing police, legal, and specialist services, and shaping the working conditions of practitioners.

There is limited research on help-seeking activities of regional, rural and remote Australian women when dealing with domestic and family violence, and sexual assault. Women living in isolated locations experience high rates of domestic and family violence, and sexual assault, with possible greater frequency and severity of abuse; yet they live much farther away from available resources and services. Social and geographical isolation are key factors to consider in service provision and understanding coping and help-seeking for regional, rural and remote women. Social isolation can build close-knit communities and shape ideas about gender roles. This context can shape women's feelings of embarrassment and wanting to remain private about violence and abuse, or not seek assistance as showing varying levels of resilience by coping on their own. Geographical isolation creates physical barriers such as long geographical distances and difficulties accessing services. More domestic and family violence resources and interventions targeting isolated women are needed.

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to present research and literature that examines the effects of social and geographical isolation on the ability of women to disclose, report, seek help, and receive appropriate interventions following domestic and family violence and sexual assault.

Regional, rural, and remote are terms commonly used to understand isolation in Australia; however, there is no agreed-upon definitions or categories (Roufeil & Battye, 2008) and no generally accepted standard measure for differentiating urban and rural (Hogg & Carrington, 2006). The Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) was developed by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care in 1999 and this measure “is a geographical instrument based on road distance from a service centre with a population of 5000 or more” (Hogg & Carrington, 2006, p. 60). The Australian Geographic Standard Classification (AGSC) was developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and this measures a centre distance from “urban” centres and therefore differentiates between Major Cities, Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote locations (Owen & Carrington, 2014).

For the purposes of this report, we use the terms regional, rural and remote more broadly to understand social and geographical isolation. These terms depict large landscapes and towns that lie outside the major coastal cities as well as population dispersion and population size (Cheers, Darracott, & Lonne, 2007; Hogg & Carrington, 2006). Specifically, we define “regional” as non-urban centres with a population over 25,000 and with relatively good access to services. “Rural” refers to non-urban localities of fewer than 25,000 people with reduced accessibility to services, and “remote” refers to communities of fewer than 5000 people with very restricted accessibility to services (Roufeil & Battye, 2008, p. 3). The terms are used together throughout the report to speak broadly about the effects of social and geographical isolation on the ability of women to disclose, report and seek help about domestic and family violence and sexual assault. We make distinctions between the three categories when needed.

To understand isolation in the Australian context, some familiarity with the landscape and demography is also important (Carrington & Scott, 2008). Australia has a

history of colonisation and is a vast, sparsely populated continent but is also one of the most urbanised nations of the world (Owen & Carrington, 2014). Thirty percent of people live outside capital cities and 14 percent of people live in settlements of fewer than 1000 people. For Indigenous Australians, 70 percent reside in regional or remote Australia (ABS, 2010). Australia is also thought to have quite a pronounced gender order in regional, rural and remote locations. There are substantially greater numbers of non-Indigenous men compared with the number of non-Indigenous women in remote and very remote areas; whereas there is little gender disparity in the sex ratio of males to females in the Indigenous populations. Furthermore, the presence of highly masculinised industries (primary production and mining) also account for the greater number of men among the non-Indigenous rural and remote populations (Carrington & Scott, 2008; Maidment & Bay, 2012; Owen & Carrington, 2014).

Isolation in Australia is also shaped by cultural meanings and understandings which construct regional, rural and remote communities in particular ways. The image of isolation in Australia is therefore depicted as something that is experienced outside the urban, such as communities battling drought, flood, bushfire and land rights; or only by people living in quiet small idyllic townships, or communities declining and resurging as barren, dusty mining dwellings (Owen & Carrington, 2014).

Spatial circumstances and constructions of isolation can shape domestic and family violence and sexual assault in particular ways. The geographical and social isolation of Australia, and its history and patterns of settlement, shape how Indigenous and non-Indigenous women understand and seek help about interpersonal violence and abuse. The intimacy and density that characterise small populations in isolated places makes it more difficult for victims of violence to disclose, report and seek outside help. The social and cultural ties that are a part of community life also shape understandings of domestic and family violence and sexual assault (Carrington & Scott, 2008). This history and context also sustains an urban-centric model of service provision, which has consequences for the provision of domestic and family violence and sexual assault services in regional, rural and remote locations in Australia (Owen & Carrington, 2014; Pruitt, 2008).

Part 1: The extent of domestic and family violence in rural and remote Australia

The question of whether domestic violence is more prevalent in rural and remote areas compared to urban areas is often raised; yet it is difficult to answer for complex reasons. Domestic and family violence and sexual assault are among the most under-reported crimes (Chung, 2013; Mooney, 2000). Indigenous communities also have additional and specific reasons for non-reporting and disclosure which are historically grounded, including fear and distrust of police, the justice system and other government agencies, and cultural considerations and obligations (Willis, 2011, p.3).

Research findings vary according to the research methodology, including elements such as the working definition of domestic violence, sampling frames and whether the study is a population study or a report featuring recorded agency data on domestic and family violence. Studies suggest women living in rural or remote places often experience greater severity of physical abuse, greater frequency of violence, and remain trapped in abusive relationships longer than urban counterparts because they live much further away from available resources (Balogun, Owoaje, & Fawole, 2012; Peek et al., 2011; Wendt & Zannettino, 2015). There is also far greater potential to physically isolate women as a tactic of abuse and prevent escape in rural and remote settings.

Population surveys

There are currently three main Australian surveys which have measured the extent of violence against women at a national level: the ABS Personal Safety Surveys of 2005 and 2012 (ABS, 2006, 2013), and the Australian Longitudinal Study of Women's Health (Mishra et al., 2014). The ABS data uses the categories of capital city and outside capital cities as an indicator of regional, rural and remote location. Data from the 2005 ABS Personal Safety Survey on the prevalence of physical and sexual violence in the 12 months prior to the survey indicate similar rates against women across capital cities and the balance of the states/territories. However, when the prevalence of violence by an intimate partner is measured since the age of 15, both the 2005 and 2012 surveys show women living outside of capital cities report higher rates of such violence. (See Table 1 below).

Table 1 Personal Safety Survey: Females reporting experience of violence by co-habiting partner since the age of 15

Location	Measure	Capital city	Outside of capital city
2005 ¹	%	13	18
2012	%	15	21

In 2012, 21 percent of females living outside capital cities reported experiencing violence from an intimate partner at some time since the age of 15, an increase of three percent from the earlier survey (ABS, 2013).

The Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health, the largest study of its kind in Australia, showed that women from rural and remote areas report high rates of intimate partner violence (Mishra et al., 2014). These trends are consistent with ABS Personal Safety Surveys. Among middle aged women, reported rates were 16

¹ This statistic was sourced from the (ABS, 2006). It was a specifically generated statistic that was not publicly available and quoted in Mitchell, 2011.

percent compared with 14 percent from urban areas (Loxton, Schofield, & Hussain, 2006); with younger women living in rural and remote areas 15-16 percent reported intimate partner violence compared to 12 percent from urban areas (Mishra et al., 2014).

Agency data

A recent study of domestic assaults reported to the police in NSW in 2010 showed that the highest per capita rates of domestic violence were reported from regional, rural, and remote areas. Of the 20 Local Government Areas (LGAs) that had the highest per capita rates of domestic violence in 2010, 19 of these were in rural, regional or remote areas. The highest incidences of domestic assaults (the highest five LGAs of the 20), were reported in remote areas including Bourke, Walgett, Moree Plains, Coonamble and Wentworth (Grech & Burgess, 2011).

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), domestic and family violence remains a leading cause of homelessness for women and children in Australia (AIHW, 2014). In 2013–2014, a total of 84,774 adults and children (33% of all clients) reported the main reason for seeking assistance from specialist homelessness services was domestic and family violence. This was an increase of nine percent from 2012-13, including an increase of 14 percent in the number of children experiencing domestic and family violence. Forty four percent of those seeking support received accommodation. The percentage of Indigenous and non-Indigenous female clients seeking assistance from housing (as a proportion of all clients) due to domestic and family violence was similar with 22 percent Indigenous and 21 percent non-Indigenous.

In relation to regional, rural and remote clients, over one third of clients (38%) who accessed specialist homelessness services were outside of major cities: 22 percent were inner regional, 11 percent were outer regional, and five percent were remote/very remote. In

remote/very remote areas, 87 percent of clients were Indigenous and 70 percent were female. The proportion of clients accessing services due to domestic and family violence was consistent across all locations (major cities 24%, inner regional 23% and outer regional 22%) with the exception of remote/very remote where it was 32 percent (AIHW, 2014). The data from remote/very remote communities suggest a high proportion of Indigenous women accessing homelessness services due to domestic and family violence (Carrington & Scott, 2008). Therefore while the absolute numbers will not be as high as in other regions, the proportion of women indicates a high level of need for domestic and family violence services in these communities.

Part 2: Domestic and family violence in socially and geographically isolated places

In Australia and overseas, research exploring women's experiences of domestic and family violence have identified factors that are different in rural contexts compared to urban living. This body of research has provided valuable insight into structural barriers that keep women trapped in violent relationships; cultural factors that keep intimate partner violence hidden and prevent women from disclosing, seeking help or leaving violent relationships; and insights into how women cope with domestic violence while living in socially and geographically isolated places. In this section sexual assault has a minor focus as most studies in Australia have explored domestic and family violence. However, sexual assault is addressed later in this report as a discrete phenomenon.

Structural barriers

Geographical isolation can prevent women from leaving violent relationships, accessing services, information and resources, and establishing and maintaining supportive networks (Hogg & Carrington, 2006). It can be argued that domestic and family violence in rural areas is structurally an economic, public health, labour, housing and educational issue, and therefore structural solutions to domestic and family violence are needed to alleviate the pressure on women to return to their partners (Websdale & Johnson, 1997). Studies have examined structural barriers that keep rural women trapped in domestic and family violence relationships such as distance, limited access to services, the absence of employment opportunities, financial issues, insufficient housing and the absence of public transportation (Wendt, 2009a).

Complicated financial arrangements, financial insecurity, stress and financial dependency are also common factors affecting women in domestic violence relationships. Incomes on rural properties are spasmodic, with women often having little access to cash, property or assets; and money is mostly controlled by men, or by men's extended families through family trusts. Rural women's and children's labour is essential on rural properties and economic and emotional attachment make it extremely difficult for them to leave (Alston, 1997; Wendt, 2009a). In rural communities women also face limited employment opportunities because occupational choice is limited should they leave. Moreover, seeking out other employment or educational opportunities becomes difficult when balancing the demands and intensity of working long hours in the family business (Alston, 1997). In remote mining communities women often experience isolation, solely caring for children and managing households for long periods of time as a result of shift work and long-distance rostering of work (Iverson & Maguire, 2000).

Research has also recognised that a lack of assistance from police and legal justice systems, or conflict of interest can contribute to women's vulnerability in domestic violence.¹

¹ Part 3 provides greater detail on the role of policing in regional, rural and remote areas in relation to domestic violence reporting.

Cultural factors

Social isolation that exists from living in regional, rural, and remote contexts can also prevent women from seeking assistance, leaving violent relationships, and keeping partner violence hidden. Studies in US, India and Australia have shown social isolation builds close-knit communities; but can also contribute to the minimisation of violence against women by positioning domestic and family violence as a private family issue, and upholding rigid values and beliefs about gender roles (Bhandari, Bullock, Anderson, Danis, & Sharps, 2011; Eastman, Bunch, Williams, & Carawan, 2007; Kaur & Garg, 2010; Wendt, 2009a; Wilson-Williams, Stephenson, Juvekar, & Andes, 2008). Traditional gender roles of male breadwinner and female homemaker can be highly visible in regional, rural, and remote communities, which reinforce male power and control over women's lives, therefore increasing men's ability to abuse women (Eastman et al., 2007; Rawsthorne, 2008; Sudderth, 2006).

Wendt (2009) found several cultural factors that contributed to the silencing of experiences of domestic and family violence in her qualitative South Australian study. Specifically, self-reliance was so valued and upheld in families that to disclose or ask for help about domestic and family violence was perceived as a failure or shameful (Wendt, 2009). Wendt also found that the expectation of marriage lasting forever could be particularly strong in rural contexts due to the dominant and visible influence of religion and church life (Wendt, 2009a; Wendt & Zannettino, 2015). From this perspective, Wendt argued that in addition to addressing structural factors such as education, employment, law and poverty, solutions sit within understandings of the prevailing local cultures of particular places.

However, in understanding local cultures, Wendt and Zannettino (2015) argue against positioning rural women and men as more traditional and conservative than their urban counterparts as this assumes that the rural identity is stable and fixed; a binary entity

associated with urban living, which is positioned as progressive and modern (Wendt & Zannettino, 2015). Such stereotypes can position domestic and family violence as an inherent part of "backward" rural culture (Sandberg, 2013, p. 359) and therefore expected, normal and something that does not occur in urban contexts. Regional, rural and remote communities are exposed to many of the same gendered cultural discourses as the wider community (Little, Panelli, & Kraack, 2005); These assumptions overshadow the nuances and complexities of gender relations and identities in rural contexts (Wendt & Zannettino, 2015).

Another cultural factor that is more likely to impact on women in regional, rural and remote locations is the prevalence of firearms, as gun ownership is higher in rural than urban areas. Rural gun culture and ownership increases women's vulnerability to serious harm and death as a result of domestic and family violence. In a study conducted in the US, it was found that acceptance of guns for hunting and agricultural purposes provides perpetrators with another potential way to intimidate and frighten intimate partners (Hall-Sanchez, 2014). While gun ownership is less common in Australia, George and Harris argue that knowing an abuser has access to a gun evokes fear and powerlessness in complex ways (George & Harris, 2014). Hogg and Carrington also point out that social and geographical isolation needs to be considered in how it shapes high rates of gun ownership and the culture associated with it in Australia (Hogg & Carrington, 2006).

In summary, most research highlights that both structural and cultural factors intersect in complex ways in shaping domestic and family violence experiences in regional, rural, and remote contexts. Local cultures and gender relations, together with fewer economic and social resource alternatives being open to women shape domestic and family violence experiences in socially and geographically isolated places (Sabarwal, Santhya, & Jejeebhoy, 2014; Schuler, Bates, & Islam, 2008; Schuler & Islam, 2008).

Women's coping

Numerous international studies have examined women's coping strategies dealing with domestic and family violence in a rural context. For example, in a Canadian and a US study, researchers found that women are more likely to use placating techniques (keeping the peace, trying to keep the house spotless, waiting on partner) or resistance (fighting back verbally, refusing to do what he said, leaving home for a while, trying to end the relationship), rather than seeking formal or informal support or making safety plans (Davis, Taylor, & Furniss, 2001; Riddell, Ford-Gilboe, & Leipert, 2009). Specifically, in the US, Anderson et al. found women employed various techniques to cope depending on the type of violence. In particular, those women who were subjected to more frequent physical abuse pursued more informal strategies and implemented safety plans; whereas women who were victims of psychological abuse used more "placating strategies" (Anderson, Renner, & Bloom, 2013). It has also been established that rural women's use of information support networks, and their effectiveness, are pivotal in their attempts to leave domestic and family violence (Bosch & Bergen, 2006; Davis et al., 2001).

In other international research, Hayati et al. studied how rural Javanese women cope with domestic and family violence. They found that experiencing chronic violence affects women's personal lives and creates physical, mental, psychosocial and financial impairments (Hayati, Eriksson, Hakimi, Högberg, & Emmelin, 2013). Hayati et al. found that it was common for rural women to cope using what they labelled the "elastic band strategy" (Hayati et al., 2013). This strategy requires a constant stretching, by making efforts to oppose the violence, through spiritual framing, seeking outside support, being assertive or trying to make a positive diversion. However, this stretching was often followed by the woman's withdrawal through submissiveness. Staying silent or ignoring their husband's behaviour was also another strategy the women used. Even though this "elastic band strategy" was a mechanism to survive, Hayati et al. argue that it also prompted conflicting impulses to seek support rather than remaining in the relationship, and contributed to chronic stress experienced by the women.

What is needed in the Australian context is a more nuanced understanding of how social and geographical isolation impacts on help seeking and shapes coping for women experiencing domestic and family violence and sexual assault. In an Australian study of informal support networks of rural women, Davis et al. (2001) found that

there were two main triggers for women to seek help to leave a violent relationship. The first was safety; when they were unable to protect themselves or their children, friends or family. The second trigger was when the violent behavior became public within the small rural communities (Davis et al., 2001). Due to small population sizes where people often know each other, women can fear lack of anonymity and confidentiality when accessing formal support networks. This shapes women's coping in particular ways, and requires further exploration in the Australian context (Ragusa, 2012).

Experiences of isolation in the context of Australia

Research to date has provided insight into the broader problems and factors that come from living in socially and geographically isolated places; however it is also worth noting that in Australia, specific and unique contexts of living in regional, rural and remote places further shapes experiences of domestic violence.

Rural and remote environments and the social and cultural constructions of place are important sites for understanding domestic and family violence and sexual assault (Little et al., 2005). How rural and remote places are constructed can influence the ways in which women disclose, seek help and report domestic and family violence and sexual assault. It is therefore important to highlight the different constructions of place and how these potentially influence ways in which interpersonal violence and abuse is experienced and understood by Australian women (Little et al., 2005).

Farming

Family farms make up the majority Australia's agricultural industry. The National Farming Federation reported that in 2012, 99 percent of farms were family owned and operated (National Farmers Federation, 2012). These family farms typically have simple legal structures (sole proprietorships or family partnerships) and tend to employ only family labour (McAllister & Geno, 2004).

Wendt found in her study of domestic and family violence in South Australian farming communities that preserving inheritance, property, and family reputation impacted on women's decisions about seeking help and/or leaving their relationships. The possibility of losing property that had been owned by families for multiple generations was frightening for women and hence they often remained in an abusive relationship so that the business could continue to function and eventually be

inherited by the next generation. In Wendt's study she found that:

The difficult decision of future inheritance was often placed in the women's hands, and their families and the community would consider them selfish if they allowed their children to forfeit what they were entitled to. Consequently, inheritance, not abuse, often became the issue of concern when women contemplated leaving relationships. (Wendt, 2009a p. 185)

In regional, rural and remote places where generational family property, farms and businesses feature and reputations are highly valued, these contexts can discourage women from disclosing or seeking help for domestic and family violence (George & Harris, 2014).

Mining

Mining has been, and is a major economic activity in Australia, but there is some instability in this industry as a result of declining resources and international markets. New mines and new surrounding communities are opened and thrive for a while, but close when the mine is depleted or no longer profitable. The uncertainty of the industry impacts on the livelihood of residents, whether they are directly or indirectly involved in mining. Community cohesion may not be strong because of the transience of populations as well as limited employment opportunities for women, little choice about housing, and lack of services. It is this context that shapes barriers for women to seek help about or report domestic and family violence and sexual assault (Lockie, Nancarrow & Sharma, 2011; Mason, 2012). Mason also points to masculine constructions of "mateship" that can dominate mining environments which potentially shapes women's fear and impacts on women's decision to seek help or end a violent relationship (Mason, 2012, p. 120).

Nancarrow et al. conducted a survey with 532 women in mining areas in Central Queensland to examine the nature and prevalence of domestic and family violence (Nancarrow, Lockie, & Sharma, 2009). They concluded that there were high levels of domestic and family violence in the region. They stated:

A range of socio-demographic characteristics were found to be significantly associated with the experience of intimate partner violence, including characteristics that indicate the role of dominant masculine culture. However, and contrary to expectations, mining cultures had no demonstrable association with women's experience of most forms of abuse. (Nancarrow, Lockie S, & Sharma S, 2009, p. 5)

Nancarrow et al. (2011) found significant negative mental health consequences for women experiencing violence and abuse in mining regions in Queensland and a reluctance to seek help compared with the general Queensland population. They highlighted the need for enhanced responses to domestic and family violence by a wider range of mainstream services.

Mining communities in Australia are constructed as having a "hard drinking culture" (Mason, 2012 p. 124), and this may also impact on women's experiences and decisions about seeking help for domestic and family violence and sexual assault. Nancarrow et al. found that the consumption of alcohol and cigarette smoking and the use of other drugs were factors for men and women affected by violence. They found men's use of cannabis was strongly associated as a risk factor for physical abuse (Nancarrow, Lockie, & Sharma, 2009).

It is also important to note, that Indigenous people located in or near mining communities often experience displacement from country and exclusion from the livelihood opportunities offered to non-Indigenous people (Carrington, Hogg, & McIntosh, 2011; Mason, 2012). This exclusion from the economic activity of the mining towns, and issues related to the historical colonisation of the land, potentially influences Indigenous women's decisions whether or not to seek assistance about domestic and family violence from formal supports.

Sea-change, tree-change

The movement widely referred to as "sea-change" or "tree-change" involves people moving from city locations to regional and rural places that offer more affordable housing, as well as geographical and natural amenities like beaches or forests. It is often more affluent people from cities who buy additional properties as somewhere they can stay on weekends and holidays. It also refers to the in-migration of older people for their retirement (Burnley & Murphy, 2004).

However, despite this influx of affluence to regional or coastal places, the context of socio-economic disadvantage and unemployment of local people can sometimes be ignored in these locations (Bay & Jenkins, 2012). Stable employment and education opportunities and improvements in public transport often do not necessarily accompany it. Housing prices rise dramatically as a result and many houses are empty because they are owned for holiday purposes. The diversity of populations living in sea change and tree-

change locations requires a unique understanding. The diverse needs of women when seeking help to cope with domestic violence and sexual violence in sea-change or tree-change communities needs further research. For example, the needs of a young mother living in community housing are different to an older woman living in retirement with her partner, or a wealthier woman commuting and living between the city and beach-side home with her partner (Wendt, 2012; Winterton & Warburton, 2011).

Environmental disasters

It is not uncommon for regional, rural and remote areas in Australia to experience a range of environmental pressures such as drought, fires and floods. Evidence has emerged that women are far more likely to experience violence and sexual assault during or after a disaster (Alston, 2013) and hence this is an area of further study in Australia. Evidence suggests domestic and family violence increases in the aftermath of disasters such as earthquakes, hurricane, and floods (Parkinson & Zara, 2013). Evidence also suggests that non-partner sexual assault increases significantly in the first year after a disaster and then declines (Sety, 2012). Furthermore, studies have shown significant increases in demand for women's shelters, and increases in police call-outs to domestic and family violence incidents after an environmental disaster (Parkinson & Zara, 2013).

In Australia, Parkinson and Zara investigated domestic violence after the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria by interviewing women and workers in two shires. They state "the findings are unmistakeable – domestic violence increased after this disaster" (Parkinson & Zara, 2013, p.30). They discuss the pressures women experienced from family members, friends, police and health professionals to "deny or forgive men's violence" (Parkinson & Zara, 2013, p. 31) when they sought help. Some women gave up as the focus of help was on practical recovery, grief and loss, and sympathy for men who had experienced trauma as a result of fighting the fires or losing their livelihoods to fire (Parkinson & Zara, 2013). Parkinson and Zara also reported that the "risk posed by natural disasters is greater for women in situations of existing domestic violence" (Parkinson & Zara, 2013, p. 31).

Exploring how experiences of a disaster shape disclosure, help seeking and reporting of domestic and family violence and sexual assault is particularly relevant for women living in socially and geographically isolated places. Isolation can be exaggerated by disasters because studies have shown many people do not return

to their communities, communication systems can fail or be infrequent, and loss or weakening of social supports and networks can persist overtime as people recover from trauma (Sety, 2012). This is particularly the case with drought in Australia. Drought is predicted to be experienced more often in Australia and it has significant negative economic impacts, particularly for farming households (Edwards, Gray, & Hunter, 2009). Furthermore, if drought reduces farm output, it has negative effects on job losses for those employed to work on farms. There is also a ripple effect on agriculture-dependent businesses such as machinery, fertiliser, fuel and seed suppliers. Drought impacts on local economies and therefore the livelihood of regional, rural and remote communities. Drought may result in increased rates of people moving away from such communities, diminishing social support networks (Edwards et al., 2009).

Experiences of Indigenous Australians

In Australia, Indigenous people sometimes use the term "family violence" to describe a wide range of relationships where violence might take place, and to highlight the effects of abuse on the whole family. The historical context of colonisation cannot be ignored in understanding family violence because it has caused the erosion of Aboriginal cultural and spiritual identity. This erosion has lasting and ongoing effects for individuals, families and entire communities (Cripps & Davis, 2012). Furthermore, the legacy of dispossession and assimilationist policy, and the Stolen Generations cannot be forgotten in conversations about family violence and service provision because of the deeply painful consequences for Indigenous communities (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Taskforce on Violence, 1999; NSW Department of Health, 2011). The impact of colonisation and later policy contexts on Indigenous communities has been reported and includes: cultural fragmentation and marginalisation, breakdown of kinship systems and networks, and intergenerational anger. It has also shaped resentment, shame, frustration and discrimination and caused poverty, high unemployment, and homelessness. Indigenous communities experience both short and long term trauma and grief and loss because of colonisation (Allan & Kemp, 2011; Hovane & Cox, 2011; Lumby & Farrelly, 2009).

Indigenous writers and researchers have established that due to colonisation, domestic violence in non-Indigenous contexts and family violence in Indigenous contexts cannot be assumed to be the same and

therefore managing and preventing it requires different strategies. In addition, The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Taskforce points out that we cannot assume the same experience for all Indigenous people. Some families were able to escape past difficulties and find ways to heal and recover, and many families and communities are fighting to address the consequences of colonisation. However, at the same time, physical and sexual acts of violence were being perpetrated within families and across communities (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Taskforce on Violence, 1999).

The effect of social and geographical isolation is particularly important for Indigenous women's ability to disclose, report, seek help and receive appropriate interventions because Indigenous communities can be small and tight knit places. Indigenous people talk about "the pressure from, and the notion of loyalty to, familial and community structures", which can serve as disincentives to the disclosure of abuse (George & Harris, 2014, p. 49). Lateral violence is a term being used by Indigenous people to describe networks, family connections and loyalty. Indigenous workers report that lateral violence can impact on Indigenous women's experiences of violence and how they seek help. Lateral violence can create a follow-on effect from an incident of family violence that can directly and indirectly affect everyone within that community. Such impacts may occur only during the experience of family violence, or for years following the cessation of violence. These short and long term impacts of lateral violence have far-reaching implications for service provision (Cripps & McGlade, 2008). It is this layer of complexity that needs to be recognised by policy-makers and service providers for victims of family violence when making decisions and accessing services.

Experiences of minority groups

In highlighting the unique experiences for minority groups living in regional, rural and remote locations in Australia, it is easy to assume that discrimination fuelled by homophobia, racism and sexism is worse in urban areas (Pugh & Cheers, 2010; Wendt, 2009). This untested assumption comes from homogenous constructions of rural places being backward, conservative, and traditional (as previously discussed) or rough, redneck, rugged, and resilient (Sandberg, 2013). Regional, rural, and remote areas have the same sort of problems with discrimination as urban areas but geographically isolated places can be markedly exposing for minority groups (Pugh & Cheers, 2010). Despite this visibility, the experience of living

in geographically isolated places is not inevitably a negative one for minority groups. Pugh and Cheers write from their research in the UK, US, and Australia that local responses to difference are rarely as unified and homogenous as is often thought, and there may be some tacit or covert acceptance that can be extremely supportive for individuals who are otherwise apparently isolated (Pugh & Cheers, 2010). They point out that there is a shortage of research into both the experiences of minority groups living in isolated places and the responses of social services to them which also includes the domestic and family violence and sexual assault field/literature (Pugh & Cheers, 2010).

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) women

Australia is a multicultural country, with a quarter of its population born overseas. However, most migrants who come to Australia settle in capital cities (Carrington & Scott, 2008). Rural populations tend to be more "culturally homogenous" than cities, with less than ten percent born overseas (Carrington & Scott, 2008, p. 644). City populations have up to 40 percent of the population born overseas. Carrington and Scott also remind us that not all rural Australia is mono-cultural because various regions do have long successful histories of chain migration (Carrington & Scott, 2008).

It has been recognised in domestic and family violence research and service provision in Australia that the diverse, unique and particular needs and identities of CALD women are not always recognised, and this includes in regional, rural and remote places (George & Harris, 2014). CALD women face the same structural barriers as non-CALD women living in socially and geographically isolated places such as lack of public transport and expensive private transport; financial insecurity, and lack of awareness of services (George & Harris, 2014; Immigrant Womens Domestic Violence Service, 2006). However, CALD women do experience additional barriers that come from living in regional, rural and remote places. CALD women who may have experienced racism might also be reluctant to seek assistance from mainstream services and domestic and family violence and sexual assault services. Due to social and geographic isolation, CALD women may not be able to access interpreting and language support as readily as found in urban contexts or receive specific services that are cultural sensitive to their needs (Immigrant Womens Domestic Violence Service, 2006, p. 13). Language difficulties and cultural isolation are unique barriers for CALD women seeking assistance more generally about domestic and family violence and

sexual assault (Schaffer, 1999).

A report from the Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service identified that CALD women may share similar cultural barriers with non-CALD women to disclosing, seeking help or reporting domestic and family violence and sexual assault (Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service, 2006). The cultural barriers identified included pressure to preserve marriage and family reputations, fear of being disconnected from local communities, and adherence to traditional gender roles. Similar to non-CALD women, research has suggested CALD women's cultural or community networks may prioritise the family structure and actively encourage women to stay with their partners (George & Harris, 2014).

Research has also suggested that some CALD women are more likely to seek information or help about domestic and family violence and sexual assault from people in their social network and cultural group rather than services or criminal justice agencies (George & Harris, 2014). CALD women may be doubly reluctant to formally report domestic and family violence and sexual assault to police because of fear and mistrust of authorities (particularly for refugee women who have come from societies where police have participated in political and cultural persecution) (George & Harris, 2014).

LBTIQ (Lesbian, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer)

In Australia, domestic and family violence in same sex relationships occurs at relatively the same rate as in heterosexual relationships (Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2012). Research has also found that those who identify as transgender and intersex were more likely to experience domestic and family violence (Inner City Legal Service, 2011). Research has identified a number of unique factors associated with domestic and family violence and sexual assault in same sex relationships. The most significant difference for those in same sex relationships is experiencing violence within a misogynistic and homophobic society. The impact of this oppressive cultural context on the individual has often been referred to as "minority stress" (Wendt & Zannettino, 2015) which may be exacerbated when living in a small community (Pugh & Cheers, 2010). For example:

"It may be possible in urban centres to commit wholly to a lifestyle organised around one's sexual identity, or, alternatively, to compartmentalise one's behaviour and social life in ways that minimise the risks of social disapprobation, and the attendant

risks of exploitation or violence, in rural areas these choices are largely absent. Consequently, life in a small community may be marked by social isolation, and the lack of support networks may contribute greatly to the marginalisation and stress suffered by individuals living in rural areas". (Pugh & Cheers, 2010, p. 86-87)

Pugh and Cheers suggest that supportive family and friends offer valuable emotional and practical support for surviving violence and abuse in small communities (Pugh & Cheers, 2010).

Australian research on the effects of social and geographical isolation on the ability of those in same sex relationships to disclose, report, and seek help about domestic and family violence and sexual assault is rare. However, service providers acknowledge that experiences of violence and abuse for those in same sex attracted relationships are compounded by social and geographical isolation, particularly if no-one knows they are in a same sex relationship (ACON, 2011). Furthermore, it is recognised that even if people "are out", it can be difficult to seek help or report violence and abuse because of possible discrimination and homophobic or transphobic attitudes in regional, rural and remote areas. It is also noted that domestic and family violence support services are particularly limited in rural and remote communities and hence accessing specialist services may be near impossible, except by telephone. The absence of professional support can lead to feeling more socially isolated (Inner City Legal Service, 2011).

Women with disabilities

Generally, women with disabilities experience barriers to accessing health, social and justice services, transport, housing, employment, education and social networks (Healy, Humphreys, & Howe, 2013). Women with disabilities in Australia are half as likely to be employed as people without a disability and are more likely to be living in poverty (OECD, 2009 & 2010). The ABS (2011) reported that 700 000 women and girls with a disability live in rural and remote Australia (ABS, 2011). It can be argued from this context that for women with disabilities living in socially and geographically isolated places, the structural barriers to disclosing, seeking help and reporting domestic and family violence and sexual assault are further compounded.

Research has also found that women with disabilities experience a poverty of relationships and social isolation (Wendt & Zannettino, 2015). Social isolation can also be magnified for women with disabilities

living in geographically isolated places. Studies have established that women with disabilities experience high rates of violence and abuse, and experience the same kinds of abuse as other women including physical, sexual, emotional, social and financial abuse. However, it is also noted the experiences of women with disabilities are amplified by disability-specific abuse (Hague, Thiara, & Mullender, 2011; Plummer & Findley, 2012). A perpetrator of abuse can use or exploit a woman's disability to harm (Martin et al., 2006); for example, destroying or withholding needed equipment and/or manipulating medicines. A reliance on the abuser for personal care or transport can amplify fear for women living in geographically isolated places. Research has also established that women with disabilities experience high rates of sexual assault (Plummer & Findley, 2012) because they are more vulnerable to abuse from a range of people including personal care assistants where the categories of "partners" and "carers" can overlap (Nixon, 2009). Reliance on support services, financial poverty and poverty of relationships come together to increase the risk of violence and abuse for women with disabilities. This vulnerability can be compounded when living in isolated places where access to services can be difficult (Powers et al., 2009).

Specialist services for particular disabilities tend to be scarce in regional, rural and remote areas in comparison to urban areas. Several studies have focused on barriers preventing equitable access to services for regional, rural, and remote people with disabilities but this has mainly captured rural people with developmental disabilities, traumatic head injuries, acquired brain injury, and spinal cord injury (Bowles, 2012). This lack of specialist services can create a double disadvantage for women with a disabilities experiencing violence and abuse by a partner or carer particularly if they are reliant on them for transport and travelling long distances to visit specialists (Bowles, 2012). There is no research in the Australian context specifically exploring the effects of social and geographical isolation on the ability of women with disabilities to help seek for domestic and family violence and sexual assault.

Poverty

Low income and poverty play key roles in decision making for women seeking help and wanting to leave violent relationships. Poverty reduces women's options for safe strategies such as moving, separation, or divorce. In Australia, in 2010, the level of poverty was shown to be slightly worse in regional, rural and remote

areas (13.1% "outside capital cities") than in capital cities (12.6%). Specifically:

When housing costs are not taken into account, the city-country figures diverge more widely. Also, with the majority of people outside capital cities being in inner regional areas, the rate of poverty in remote and very remote areas is masked. It may be considerably higher than the general "balance of state" figures suggest. (National Rural Health Alliance Inc & the Australian Council of Social Service, 2013, p. 4)

There are particular characteristics of poverty in regional, rural and remote Australia which include: generally lower incomes as a result of declining employment opportunities; reduced access to services such as health, education and transport; and distance and isolation. It is also important to note that Indigenous people are especially vulnerable to poverty and comprise a significant proportion of the population in rural and remote areas (National Rural Health Alliance Inc and the Australian Council of Social Service, 2013).

In addition, women who have experienced domestic violence have complex economic issues and it disrupts their lives over the short and long term (Mitchell, 2011 p. 28). Domestic violence directly affects women's financial security in key areas of life including debts, bills and banking, accommodation, legal issues, health, transport, migration, employment, social security and child support (Braaf & Barrett, 2011). Despite prior economic circumstances, many women experience financial risk or poverty as a result of domestic violence. For example, preliminary findings from an Australian study that examined the impact of domestic violence on women's housing, employment and mental health found of the 250 rural women surveyed, 117 reported an annual income of less than \$30,000 per year. Even though these are preliminary findings, it can be argued that poverty together with social and geographical isolation can further hinder women's help seeking and coping following domestic violence. Studies in Australia have reported stories from rural women experiencing domestic and family violence; that they have difficulty finding work to support themselves and their children after leaving and can end up relying on social security payments or casual work (Schaffer, 1999; Wendt, 2009). How poverty shapes women's ability to seek help and receive appropriate interventions following domestic and family violence needs further study in regional, rural and remote Australia.

Outside Australia, Farber and Miller-Cribbs reported findings from a life history study among white, low-income, unmarried mothers in rural South Carolina, USA (Farber & Miller-Cribbs, 2014). The study examined the cycles of domestic violence in both childhood and adulthood, which may inhibit women's ability to accumulate human and social capital and therefore compound issues of poverty. Farber and Miller-Cribbs argue that the compounding effect of social and geographical isolation, poverty, and being a single mother impacts on help seeking and coping with domestic violence. They point out that due to the economic instability in their lives, victims of both past and current abuse are over-represented among welfare recipients and have been found to have higher rates of both substance abuse and mental health problems (Farber & Miller-Cribbs, 2014). How poverty intersects with social and geographical isolation and domestic and family violence is a complex area of enquiry and needs further study.

Men's perpetration of domestic and family violence

There is a rich array of research and writing about the complexity of violence and men in rural and remote settings in Australia and the United States. This work raises important themes for consideration when trying to understand men's violence against women in social and geographically isolated places.

The rural gender order

In Australia, Kerry Carrington and colleagues have explored and theorised constructions of rural masculinity in Australia. Carrington and Scott argue that "geography and place have a strong symbolic value in cultural constructions of traditional rural masculinities" (Carrington & Scott, 2008, p. 650). Rural men are visually represented in a limited way. Representations of physical occupations such as farming, forestry or mining, and leisure activities such as hunting, reinforce limited rural masculinities. Rural masculinities are associated with strength, courage, power, hard work and the frontier (Hogg & Carrington, 2006).

Carrington and Scott also argue that male performance is evaluated according to a range of social and cultural measures such as pub-drinking practices and masculine performances at sporting clubs, the union, the council and other civic bodies (Carrington & Scott, 2008). Hogg and Carrington argue that the relationship between masculine identity and rurality has played a role in what they call the formation of the rural gender order (Hogg & Carrington, 2006).

The gender order is visible in terms of employment patterns, division of labour, property inheritance and engagement in public and civic life, which is largely dominated by men (Hogg & Carrington, 2006). The gender order has highly visible practices and within this context, "male violence can become a way of enforcing boundaries between men, exercising power, asserting honour, and re-establishing status" (Carrington & Scott, 2008, p.659). These practices are also a way of contesting women's rise in socio-cultural status and power. Violence is a dominant strategy to articulate masculinity in rural and remote contexts (Carrington & Scott, 2008).

The architecture of rural life

In furthering the argument that geography and place shape masculinities, Carrington et al. conducted research exploring men's violence in both agricultural communities and mining communities in rural Australia (Carrington, McIntosh, Hogg, & Scott, 2013). They found the agricultural communities seemed more troubled by hidden violent harms which were largely privatised and individualised. These include self-harm, suicide, isolation, threats to men's general wellbeing and mental health, and domestic and family violence. These and other forms of violence (including sexual assault and bullying linked to homophobia) are largely unreported and therefore not acknowledged by the wider community. On the other hand, in mining communities, alcohol-fuelled, male-on-male assaults in public places caused considerable anxiety among informants. Carrington et al. offer insights into how geography and place construct masculinities and potentially impact on men's perpetration of violence against women and other men (Carrington et al., 2013). One possible reason for the different pattern in the agricultural communities is the decline of public masculinity, and with this, the increasing isolation of rural men and the increasing propensity to internalise violence (Carrington et al., 2013). High rates of male suicide and secrecy or denial of domestic and family violence can be argued as symptomatic of the internalisation of violence. Carrington et al. conclude that the distinctively different patterns of men's experiences of violence in agricultural communities compared with mining communities illustrate the diversity of different kinds of rurality.

Hogg and Carrington point out that rural landscapes, townships and the social ordering of everyday life are influenced by historical and cultural processes and practices which are bound up in meaning and identity (Hogg & Carrington, 2006). They describe this as

the architecture of rural life. When rural life is based on assumed norms that privilege a particular rural masculinity, they argue, “it should not be surprising that a higher threshold for the tolerance of gendered violence exists... and most of it remain[s] invisible to the outside world” (Hogg & Carrington, 2006 p. 181). The work of Carrington and her colleagues represents a rich research field in the divergent contexts of violence in regional, rural and remote Australia.

Male peer support

Walter DeKeseredy and Schwartz have also examined men’s perpetration of violence in rural and remote contexts in the United States. DeKeseredy and Schwartz explain violence against women in rural contexts as a result of men proving to themselves and others their essential masculinity and heterosexuality. They name this phenomena patriarchal male peer support, that is, it is attachments to male peers and the resources they provide which encourage, legitimate, and hide domestic and family violence and sexual assault (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009). The role of patriarchal dominance and control that is visible in rural contexts is central in this body of work. DeKeseredy and Schwartz argue “societal patriarchy work together with micro level forces such as patriarchal male peer support to influence men to rape/assault their intimate partners” (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009, p. 30). Recently, Hall-Sanchez used the male peer support model in her study of rural men’s perpetration of violence and sexual assault in rural Ohio (Hall-Sanchez, 2014). She found a relationship between rural hunting subculture dynamics and core elements of male peer support (i.e. frequent drinking with male friends, informational support, attachment to abusive peers, and patriarchal masculine identity), and domestic and family violence. She argued that male peer support in hunting subcultures, together with access to weapons, enables domestic and family violence in some rural communities (Hall-Sanchez, 2014).

DeKeseredy et al. argue that male peer support in rural contexts is key to understanding violence against women, and not necessarily economic and social change in rural communities and industries (DeKeseredy, Donnermeyer, Schwartz, Tunnell, & Hall, 2007). They argue such change potentially creates or reinforces new forms of patriarchy and male peer support. The social organisation of male peer support explains widespread acceptances of domestic and family violence and sexual assault. Community norms shaped by male peer support prohibit women from disclosing, seeking help about or reporting violence and abuse (DeKeseredy, Donnermeyer, Schwartz, Tunnell, & Hall, 2007).

Indigenous men

It is important to note that Indigenous men do not feature in dominant constructions of rural masculinity in Australia and are often positioned as the “other” (Hogg & Carrington, 2006). In many rural towns in Australia, Indigenous communities constitute a quite distinct and visible cultural minority. Hogg and Carrington suggest the crisis of Indigenous masculine identity is a possible explanation for high levels of domestic and family violence and the entrenched, multi-dimensional nature of Indigenous poverty in Australia (Hogg & Carrington, 2006). Conflict and violence within the family can be explained as stemming from Indigenous men’s attempt to wrestle back some control over resources and some sense of self-esteem. Indigenous men’s use of violence can be explained as a source of masculine identity; a lack of belonging and status loss; and trauma as a result of broader colonisation (Atkinson, Nelson, & Atkinson, 2010).

Indigenous women have acknowledged this explanation for men’s violence but at the same time have also pointed out that such an explanation needs to be balanced with an awareness of excusing violent behaviour. Furthermore, Indigenous women argue that using violence against partners is not an acceptable coping strategy for past trauma (Cripps & McGlade, 2008; Marchetti, 2010; Price, 2009). Indigenous women also argue that Indigenous law and culture being translated by a non-Indigenous process to understand and respond to Indigenous men’s violence is not helpful and can be dangerous (Watson, 2009). Irene Watson states if Indigenous male violence is understood as an acting out of being denied male power in other spheres, “...it seems counterproductive to embrace constructs that implicitly link the solution to domestic violence to the acquisition of greater male power” (Watson, 2007, p. 107). Instead, she argues that it is Indigenous women who should be “returned to and empowered by the place of their grandmother’s law, which has been silenced as a result of colonisation” (Watson, 2007, p. 107). For writers like Irene Watson, Nicole Watson and Aileen Moreton-Robinson, solutions to family violence will not come from patriarchal Western societies, but from Aboriginal women – who have a connection to land that is not based on a white, anglicised, male conceptualisation of property and ownership but on the strengthening of women’s law, self-determination, cultural sustenance, and political and economic empowerment (Moreton-Robinson, 2005; Watson, 2007; Watson, 2011). In short, the solutions are embedded in cultural practices derived from knowledge that is outside the experience and knowledge of patriarchal whiteness (Moreton-Robinson, 2005).

Sexual assault

Research on regional, rural, and remote women's experiences of sexual assault, and how social and geographical isolation impacts on their decisions to seek help or report, is not extensive. Research has primarily focused on statistics between rural and urban regions or sexual assault has often been included or assumed in the small body of research that has looked at domestic and family violence (Lievore, 2003). It is understandable that sexual assault and domestic and family violence are researched and discussed together because studies have shown sexual assault by a male intimate partner is experienced by approximately 50 percent of women enduring domestic violence (Martin et al., 2007). Furthermore, studies in the US have found that rural separated women experience intimate sexual assault at rates more than three times higher than their urban counterparts (Rennison, DeKeseredy, & Dragiewicz, 2012).

Due to the paucity of research focused on sexual assault in regional, rural and remote Australia, the key themes outlined in this report predominantly come from domestic and family violence research but are applicable and relevant to sexual assault. It is agreed that the sensitivities of fear, violation, shame, and embarrassment that are very much part of sexual assault are compounded by problems of anonymity and confidentiality in small communities. For example, while large regional cities often have access to a range of services and anonymity is assumed to be slightly easier to uphold, women in more isolated rural and remote places rarely have the same degree of choice or invisibility (Lievore, 2003). Indigenous women living in rural and remote areas experience additional barriers that have been outlined in this report including distrust of the criminal justice system, and lack of culturally acceptable resources and staff within police and legal services.

However, at the same time, it is acknowledged that sexual assault is a discrete phenomenon and not only experienced in domestic and family violence contexts. Researchers in the US and Australia have concurred that social and geographical isolation increases the risk of sexual assault (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009; Hall-Sanchez, 2014) as there are more isolated places for assaults to occur and a reduced chance that they will be witnessed. Furthermore, distance, lack of transport, and fewer telephone and internet connections make it difficult for women to report sexual assaults to police. Rural and remote women often rely on informal supports or the local general practitioner as there are fewer professional sexual assault services, and

if those supports are not around or do not respond appropriately, women face more isolation (Keel, Fergus, & Heenan, 2005). In short, geographical isolation inhibits disclosure and reporting, and social isolation leads to a greater chance of people knowing each other, which builds a social climate that fosters more informal control and a tendency to hide personal problems (Lievore, 2003).

Specifically in Australia, the social climate in rural and remote workplaces has been examined to determine if particular work environments impact on women reporting incidences of sexual harassment. Saunders and Easteal found that "one-on-one" harassment and "pack-on-one" harassment were common experiences for women particularly in traditionally defined masculine occupations like agriculture and mining (Saunders & Easteal, 2013). The study also identified barriers for reporting sexual harassment in the workplace, which has resonance to reporting sexual assault. Women reported harassment or assault if they perceived their social environment as empathetic. On the other hand, the study found that if women perceived it was easier to put up with harassment and therefore not draw attention to themselves, they would not report the harassment. Or women felt pressured to fit into the often masculine environments and hence did not report harassment.

The studies conducted by Saunders and Easteal show that the local community context will determine how sensitive issues such as sexual assault are handled (Saunders & Easteal, 2012; 2013). Wall and Stathopoulos spoke with six sexual assault services in regional, rural and remote Australia to explore local contexts and the ways in which managers and workers solved barriers through flexible and innovative approaches (Wall & Stathopoulos, 2012). Some examples of flexibility include workers picking up clients for appointments and operating more informally without the need for structured appointments. Other examples are creating a sense of belonging and welcomeness by adjusting the physical appearance of the service; delivering prevention programs to local schools; and navigating professional boundary roles by building collaboration with other local services. Flexibility has been found to be a critical component for effective service delivery in rural and remote places to both domestic and family violence and sexual assault victims because of the obstacles they face in terms of isolation, local social norms, and limited anonymity (Macy, Rizo, Johns, & Ermentrout, 2013).

Part 3: Service provision in socially and geographically isolated places

As Pugh and Cheers point out “with the exception of statutory or mandated services in child protection and mental health, and small independent sector organisations, stand-alone specialist services tend to be uncommon in rural areas” (Pugh & Cheers, 2010, p. 132). Instead, the literature presents much more about generalist services and practice in rural and remote places. Cheers et al. argue that generalist social care practice has not developed by accident in socially and geographically isolated places but in response to contextual characteristics such as the shortages of services (especially specialist ones), the interconnected nature of community dynamics and rural living, and cultural traditions of making do with ingenuity (Cheers et al., 2007).

Pugh and Cheers define generalist service provision as working across several fields of practice (for example child protection, family violence), and spans several practice methods (e.g. casework, community development) (Pugh & Cheers, 2010). Successful generalist services are more likely when they are embedded in community contexts where practitioners view themselves as part of the comprehensive network of mutuality that binds a community together (Cheers et al., 2007).

Pugh and Cheers define specialist service provision or practice as either a sole focus upon a field of practice, such as mental health, substance dependency, or the use of a particular practice method such as family therapy (Pugh & Cheers, 2010). A specialist service may target a particular client group, whereas a generalist service spans several fields of practice and services a wider range of client groups. Specialist services have established boundaries of what they can and cannot do. In summary, as Pugh and Cheers point out the terms “generalist” and “specialist” do not necessarily have uniform meaning in the literature and can be used quite loosely in different community contexts.

In Australia, each jurisdiction has in place a variety of laws, programs and policies to respond to, and prevent, domestic and family violence and sexual assault. These programs are funded by both state and Commonwealth governments (Mitchell, 2011). Most programs and services are administered through community service/human services and health departments along with police, attorney general and other agencies (Mitchell, 2011). Within this context, domestic and family violence and sexual assault service provision in regional, rural and remote places is diverse. Different communities express social care in different ways depending on local cultures, skills, and resources.

Despite this diversity, common factors have been identified in the literature that need consideration when discussing service provision in regional, rural and remote locations (see Bishop & Schmidt, 2011; Green & Gregory, 2004; Pugh & Cheers, 2010; Roufeil & Battye, 2008). These include:

- difficulties created by local terrain, weather and the absence of public transport for the point of delivery of services;
- higher costs for service providers to deliver services.
- Community pressure on workers to be “all things to all people” with limited resources for health and welfare services;
- workers having limited access to local referral opportunities, limited opportunity to share knowledge with others doing similar work, and formal supervision; though there is variability in this impact as workers are increasingly engaging with other bodies both in person and remotely using technology to share knowledge and skills;
- services are vulnerable to staff absences through illness, difficulties in recruitment and retention of staff, or the withering of any innovations that depend upon the initiative and drive of staff that leave;
- the long time it takes to foster community acceptance for workers;
- workers managing confidentiality and ethical dilemmas that arise from engagement in multiple relationships within their communities;
- social control functions being balanced with social care functions and how they impact on practice and services (child protection for example); and
- tensions arising from being part of the community and challenging local oppressive or unhelpful beliefs.

It should also be noted that the variability of regional, rural and remote contexts, the complex dynamics of these communities across Australia, and the continuing difficulties of Indigenous peoples and other minorities provide a range of specific challenges for those who wish to develop and deliver good services in socially and geographically isolated areas (Pugh & Cheers, 2010). Green and Gregory remind us that there are both similarities and differences between regional, rural and

remote practice (Green & Gregory, 2004). For example, workers often similarly enjoy autonomy and independence and flexibility in their work environment that comes from being isolated, and share concern about a lack of specialist services and maintaining “professional distance” in their work. At the same time, Green and Gregory found that a major difference between regional, rural and remote service provision was a “strong dissatisfaction with organisations and employment conditions expressed by the remote practitioners, and a lack of professional support and networking which was particularly noted in the remote area” (Green & Gregory, 2004, p. 245).

Providing individualised formal social care services to regional, rural and remote communities presents additional challenges to those encountered in urban contexts. Dense, multilayered community networks, geographical distances, dispersed populations, and politically driven funding systems all contribute to the challenge of providing accessible, locally responsive, and ethical services that are congruent with community needs and cultures (Cheers et al., 2007). Practice in rural and remote contexts presents some additional challenges with regards to issues such as recruitment, retention, and education and training (Pugh & Cheers, 2010). For example, much practice takes place in professional isolation such as workers working alone for periods of time, or having only two or three colleagues in their immediate work environment. There can be difficulties and processes involved in adjusting to remote, rural, and Indigenous contexts including unique stresses, high workloads and job demands, poor supervision, poor resources, disempowering cultures and structures, and sometimes unrealistic societal expectations. These factors can contribute to a high turnover of staff (Pugh & Cheers, 2010).

Service delivery

There are a range of common service delivery models operating in regional, rural and remote Australia (Cheers et al., 2007; Pugh & Cheers, 2010; Roufeil & Battye, 2008). This section will consider these models and identify particular strengths and limitations for domestic and family violence and sexual assault service provision. For any of these models to be successful Cheers et al. argue that contextualisation and networking are key themes in the delivery of social services. Domestic and family violence and sexual assault services that gently embed themselves into the community and work from within it rather than being directive and non-consultative are more likely to be successful (Cheers et al., 2007). Similarly, Roufeil and Battye argue that regional, rural and remote communities firstly need strong, broad-based generalist services with robust local links before they can successfully accommodate specialist services (Roufeil & Battye, 2008).

Hub and spoke, in-reach and outreach

The hub and spoke is a service model that is based in areas of greatest population density (hub) and provides services out to smaller centres (spokes) (Roufeil & Battye, 2008). For example, domestic and family violence services could be based in a regional town and service a wide geographical area to capture smaller towns and farming/mining properties (Pugh & Cheers, 2010). The central point service (the hub) can provide outreach. They can go to the service user and may have to travel long distances to visit people in their homes. Similarly, the hub can also be an in-reach service where service users travel into the regional centre to access the service (Cheers et al., 2007). In-reach services are often thought to be more appropriate to larger towns and regional centres in densely populated and less remote areas, while outreach services are more accessible to dispersed and remote populations (Cheers et al., 2007). Outreach services can also be provided either through a satellite office in a service town (for example, a domestic and family violence or sexual assault counselling service in a local hospital) or directly to clients on a visiting basis at their home.

Domestic and family violence and sexual assault services in regional, rural and remote areas often lack the time and resources to do outreach work (Keel et al., 2005). Crisis response is often the priority when resources are strained. This often means marginalised groups, especially Indigenous women, women with disabilities, or women from non-English speaking backgrounds, have difficulty finding available services and continue to suffer violence. Without the adequate funding and resources the “accessibility” of services is severely compromised in socially and geographically isolated places. Furthermore, domestic and family violence outreach services in regional, rural and remote locations often lack funding to invest in training or planning to increase the capacity of the service (Keel et al., 2005).

Hub and spoke models can be specialist or generalist. Specialist services are restricted to a particular target group such as victims of sexual assault or domestic violence, whereas generalist services provide a range of services to several target groups. A generalist social worker in a hospital could provide counselling for domestic violence in the morning and be arranging meals on wheels in the afternoon for an elderly person (Cheers et al., 2007). Ongoing, specialist services such as counselling or programs for perpetrators are often expensive and therefore rare (Cheers et al., 2007). Ongoing, generalist arrangements are common in the hub and spoke model, as several services can be co-located, which facilitates coordination and cross-referrals, and reduces overheads.

Hub and spoke models can be highly effective when time is given to frontline staff to get to know and consult with locals, and adequate attention is given to staffing and resourcing (Roufeil & Battye, 2008). Cheers et al. argue that hub and spoke models’ attachment to local, community-owned infrastructures increases the credibility and relevance of specialist services, ultimately improving their use by local people. The hub and spoke model has the potential to strengthen service coordination and is especially useful for integrating visiting specialist services into a community (Cheers et al., 2007).

Visiting services

Visiting services have been developed in Australia because of large geographical service areas and highly dispersed settlement patterns. Domestic and family violence information and counselling, or general relationship counselling that is provided at particular times (e.g. once a month) could be considered a visiting service. Funding models are often based on whether there is sufficient critical mass of total population or people with similar needs in the region (Cheers et al., 2007).

Visiting services need to be accessible and tailored to the context and needs of particular communities (Cheers et al., 2007). Each community has its own unique culture and hence there is no single correct way to provide to a visiting service. Cheers et al. argue that sound service provision comprises a set of processes that allows practitioners to tailor their services to the needs of people in the particular community in a manner that is acceptable to them (Cheers et al., 2007). For visiting services to be successful they need to be flexible, and although this is frequently limited by organisational constraints, it is usually possible to contextualise services to some extent. Flexibility will increase the success of the visiting service in becoming integrated and part of the local service infrastructure. Visiting services work best when they are linked with generalist locally-based services (Cheers et al., 2007).

There are strengths and limitations to visiting services and these can be applied to understanding the potential and usefulness of domestic and family violence and sexual assault specialist visiting services. The greatest strength is that regional, rural, and remote families can potentially receive highly accessible face to face specialised knowledge and skills from domestic and family violence and sexual assault services and receiving this service will have minimal cost to the user. Furthermore, specialist domestic and family violence and sexual assault visiting services are well placed to link people with other services (e.g. housing, legal, finance), and create opportunities for coordination.

However, there are limitations when considering domestic and family violence and sexual assault specialist visiting services. If they are infrequent and unpredictable this can impact on coordination with local services (particularly due to weather/climate conditions of rural/remote Australia). Specialist services require highly efficient communication with local generalist services. Visiting services are very costly per capita to operate and when it comes to interpersonal violence these services cannot respond quickly in

crisis. Low demand for services can jeopardise the sustainability of visiting services. In terms of domestic and family violence and sexual assault this needs to be considered because previous research has documented cultural barriers to disclosing and seeking help. Finally, staff recruitment and retention difficulties is an issue for all visiting services (Cheers et al., 2007).

In summary, a visiting service should be as embedded in the community as much as possible, even though it comes from the outside. This involves working closely with locally-based generalist services as an integral part of the local service network. Networking, involvement of key local people, and intimate knowledge of the community are required (Cheers et al., 2007).

To increase the potential success of a visiting specialist service (for which domestic and family violence and sexual assault can be considered) gaining local information about each community is important. For example, knowing who locally, and regionally, has a particular interest or stake in the provision of social service can help identify relevant stakeholders. Finding out who holds the power over access to the various services and facilities in both the formal and informal care infrastructures can help identify local gatekeepers. Divergent versions of local history or the heritage narratives of various groups can tell services much about the local politics of places, such as different stories from community leaders, Indigenous families, migrant, and low-income families. Various narratives about the nature of the community can be exposed; for example, whether they are resilient, racist, conservative, or strong. Getting to know the community and relationships between groups potentially shows alliances and factions which is vital when introducing a specialist service (Cheers et al., 2007; Wendt, 2009).

In terms of domestic and family violence, proper risk assessment and management are particularly necessary as visiting practitioners service large regions. The pressures of trying to meet outlying areas can take a toll on personal wellbeing and contribute to burnout and high staff turnover in rural and remote positions (Cheers et al., 2007).

Technology based models

Technology based models of service delivery are increasingly being used in rural regions. Geographically dispersed countries like Australia require innovative solutions for counselling services, particularly in rural and remote areas where transport and distance are a barrier (Hand, Chung, & Peters, 2009). For domestic and family violence service provision, these models have the potential to increase the ease of access for service users. These models can span a range of programs delivered by various forms including by telephone, email counselling, chat rooms, and video-conferencing. Furthermore, it opens up space to explore self-help and e-technology support (Roufeil & Battye, 2008).

George and Harris acknowledge the “initiative and ingenuity” of legal services in rural regions using technology, “despite their limited resources” (George & Harris, 2014, p. 62). They point to the potential to address social and geographic isolation by creating “new, borderless, confidential and safe spaces where survivors can obtain assistance” (George & Harris, 2014, p. 62). Furthermore, technology based models potentially add benefits of anonymity and confidentiality in small rural and remote communities.

While the benefits of information communication technology can be great for delivering counselling and legal services to women experiencing domestic and family violence and/or sexual assault in regional, rural, and remote Australia, there are some disadvantages. Some women may not be comfortable or feel able to communicate effectively, particularly if there are language or cultural differences or the woman has a disability (George & Harris, 2014).

The technology space also opens opportunities to facilitate staff professional development and support (Roufeil & Battye, 2008). However, technology based models are dependent on access to cheap and reliable internet services, which can be variable across Australia. Delivery of technology based services requires staff to acquire new skills and support is needed to train workers in this area (Roufeil & Battye, 2008).

Women’s shelters/refuges

The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness between the Commonwealth and state governments funds a wide range of homelessness prevention and family violence programs, including women’s shelters/refuges. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reported that in 2011-12, these services assisted almost 230,000 clients, representing one in 98 Australians (AIHW, 2014). Thirty-four percent of those accessing housing were victims of domestic violence and 78 percent were women. However, the funding for these programs is not ongoing and needs to be renegotiated in each state every one to three years.

The cornerstone of early responses to domestic and family violence in Australia was the establishment of women’s shelters or refuges providing safe emergency accommodation for women and accompanying children. This provision allows women and children time to seek longer term housing (Chung & Wendt, 2015). Even though there are domestic and family violence women’s shelters/refuges in both urban and regional/rural/remote locations throughout Australia, demand often outstrips the availability of emergency accommodation. If shelters/refuges are full, women are referred to motels where it is likely they will receive limited support, or outreach services, while they wait for a housing vacancy (Murray, 2011).

Women’s shelters/refuges provide protection and serve as a hiding place for women and their children. They are often considered a last resort. Women’s shelters/refuges provide a range of services including information and understanding about domestic and family violence and offer a supportive social atmosphere in which women can think about and plan for her future (Jonker, Jansen, Christians, & Wolf, 2014). They help women understand and overcome the fear and anxiety that are a consequence of the violence and abuse. They provide advocacy services, legal counselling and referrals to other services. Residence at a shelter/refuge is limited by time and hence there is concerted effort to provide necessary resources to cope with independent life away from their partner. Principles of empowerment underpin the work of shelters in order to enable women develop skills to function on their own (Haj-Yahia & Cohen, 2009; Jonker et al., 2014).

Women’s shelters/refuges aim to raise women’s collective consciousness and social awareness that domestic and family violence is not related to women’s personal failure in marriage or the intimate partners’ idiosyncratic behaviours or pathology, but the result of broader

social gender inequality. In short, many women-specific services were established in Australia to offer women more relevant and responsive services than gender-neutral organisations provided (Mason, 2007).

Research has documented what women think are particularly important and useful during their stay at a women's shelter/refuge (Jonker et al., 2014). A Dutch study was conducted using concept mapping methodology to determine the most important factors for appropriate care in a women's shelter. The study worked with focus groups, one with 12 clients, one with 12 social workers, and one with 12 other staff members (policy advisers and/or management officials). Staff being caring and treating women with sincerity and honesty, was reported as being key, alongside creating a safe, structured environment, and helping to secure resources. Women also particularly liked having the space to tell their story and to receive a personalised, respectful service. Suggestions for improvement included providing greater visibility of women's services, women's services including employment training, providing more care after shelter exit (outreach), and greater diversity of shelter staff (Jonker et al., 2014).

Women's shelters/refuges in regional, rural and remote Australia

The number of women's shelters/refuges operating in regional, rural and remote Australia is difficult to ascertain. However, Mason argues women's shelters/refuges that have an awareness of gender politics are essential in regional, rural and remote Australia because they are active participants in the continuing struggle to redress gender injustices such as violence against women (Mason, 2007). Workers in women's shelters/refuges are highly specialised and trained in the area of domestic and family violence and sexual assault and they work from empowering approaches ensuring respectful responses. It is this specialised work that opens up personal and collective agency, that is, change can happen both in individual practice with women and at the public and community levels.

The work of shelters/refuges are vital in tackling "sensitive and controversial matters such as violence against women in rural communities, rape and sexual assault, divorce, women's sexuality, the gendered nature of farm inheritance, and women's lack of decision making power in families and rural communities" (Mason, 2007, p. 308). Women's shelters/refuges ensure isolated women have access to services (in-reach or outreach), networking, and collaboration with other women and services. Women's shelters/refuges can

promote their services across large geographical locations using newsletters or websites, they can run public meetings and forums to raise awareness about domestic and family violence and sexual assault, they can provide reading material, opportunities for networking and collaboration with other services such as local hospitals, courts, and police. Women's shelters/refuges are a real example of "making political statements in rural communities, asserting that issues relevant to women that were previously hidden are legitimate areas for work and struggle" (Mason, 2007, p. 309).

Women's shelters/refuges have also been influenced by feminist intersectional perspectives to domestic and family violence and sexual assault. This means we are seeing a shift away from homogenising approaches to domestic and violence service provision from shelters/refuges and are responding to the needs and circumstances of particular groups of women (e.g. CALD women, lesbian women, women with disabilities and Indigenous women). Intersectional perspectives enable shelters/refuges to develop more nuanced and inclusive approaches to understand violence against women (Laing & Humphreys, 2013). For example, in regional, rural and remote Australian mainstream shelters/refuges, Indigenous Liaison Officers may be employed to help build relationships and a rapport with local Indigenous communities. Similarly, some shelters/refuges may be specifically devoted to supporting Indigenous women and their children, recognising the importance of family and kinship in Indigenous communities (Keel et al., 2005).

Working at a women's shelter/refuge in a regional, rural or remote location has its risks. Even though the shelter/refuge is a clear example of carrying the private into the public, (that is domestic and family violence and sexual assault to the public agenda) it carries risks for women who use services and for the women who operate them. This is particularly evident in rural and remote locations where the shelter/refuge can be highly visible. The safety and privacy of service users and staff needs constant attention. For example, the location of the service needs careful consideration because it will often be known. Furthermore, women using the service need to feel confident that their privacy will be protected when entering, leaving and attending the service. Workers are highly visible in the community and this can impact on their privacy and safety (Mason, 2007). Mason argues that these unique challenges for women's shelters/refuges in regional, rural, remote communities need to have the ideological strength that

comes from the shared philosophy of the feminist/women's movement to continue to tackle women's oppression on many fronts (Mason, 2007).

In terms of remote shelters/refuges, it is worth noting that the above issues for workers are compounded because of geographical distance and isolation. A study conducted in remote, northern British Columbia by Bishop and Schmidt argues that remoteness brings challenges that may contribute to vicarious traumatisation (Bishop & Schmidt, 2011). Bishop and Schmidt point out that workers at women's shelters/refuges are highly vulnerable to vicarious traumatisation because of the intensity of the work. They found that in addition to having to cope with traumatic stories, workers faced additional challenges from working in remote places. These challenges included lack of referral opportunities, limited opportunity to debrief and share knowledge with others doing similar work, and experiencing heightened stress around confidentiality and one's own safety. These findings are applicable to remote Australia considering the significant geographical isolation of some communities.

It is important to note that shelters/refuges in regional, rural and remote Australia are influenced by the purchaser/provider service model. The government is generally the purchaser, and the service is delivered by the provider. The purchaser specifies the type, level, target groups and location of the service, usually through a fixed-term contract (Roufeil & Battye, 2008). Concern has been raised about potential shifts away from a specialised gendered analysis of domestic and family violence and sexual assault (Keel et al., 2005). A gendered analysis recognises and centralises coercive control, power, and fear in understanding domestic and family violence. Furthermore, Indigenous women have said they fear that sexual assault and family violence services will not be culturally appropriate if they are subsumed within generalist services (Keel et al., 2005).

Furthermore, domestic and family violence services such as women's shelters/refuges often come from an integrated service model, where low-income women are identified in policy guidelines as a particularly vulnerable group. Criteria for accessing such services are often built around supporting the neediest clientele in urban settings. Owen and Carrington found in their research with service providers in regional, rural and remote areas that such criterion works to the distinct disadvantage of women from farming communities (Owen & Carrington, 2014). Women from wealthy family backgrounds do not necessarily have more

resources to draw on when they leave an abusive relationship. In their study, they found domestic and family violence workers often used their ingenuity to find ways to ensure all women who come to their service received support, regardless of financial capital of their families or abusers. The needs-based funding models for domestic and family violence services, which evaluate income criteria as a basis for prioritising support, fails to address the peculiar situation of cash poor, but capital rich women, which is often the case in farming business (Owen & Carrington, 2014).

"Rural Safe Homes"

When shelters/refuges are available, they often face unique problems remaining viable and effective for the populations that they serve. Governments offering funding often consider shelters/refuges in regional, rural and remote areas not economically viable because of the low numbers of women serviced and the high operating costs (Grama, 2000). One response to the lack of shelter/refuge services in regional, rural and remote areas has been the development of a safe house network which was implemented in the United States. Under a safe-house system, certain houses are designated "safe homes" for domestic and family violence victims and their location remains secret. Victims of domestic and family violence may be provided with referrals to the safe homes by service organisations, court officials, or law enforcement representatives. In Arizona, funds are used primarily to provide services to the rural and remote areas using "Rural Safe Home Networks" and to support the Arizona Coalition to end Sexual and Domestic Violence (ACESDV). However, as Grama points out, one strategic problem of safe houses in regional, rural and remote areas is that due to close community ties and a lack of anonymity, perpetrators often know which homes are the designated safe homes (Grama, 2000). Furthermore, insurance in the event of an accident, assault or other harm to host women needs consideration.

A safety house program that has been used in Australia for children is facing increasing threat of closure due to lack of volunteers. The program has ceased in Queensland and Victoria, and now only Western Australia and the Northern Territory have active safe house programs. The WA program is funded by the state's education department, while NT's program is run by the territory police department.

Housing

Domestic violence is among the primary reasons for women and children's homelessness in Australia and internationally (Baker, Niolon, & Oliphant, 2009; Johnson, Gronda, & Coutts, 2008). For women leaving violent relationships in regional, rural and remote areas, alternate housing is of significant concern. For some women, they will leave their local communities for safety reasons, but also because of limited housing options.

Housing affordability can be a major challenge for women leaving violent relationships. Housing affordability is highly variable between the diverse settlement types around Australia. Mining towns for example have very high rental accommodation as do coastal sea-change and tree change destinations. Indigenous homelands in desert Australia, agricultural based country towns and hinterlands have varying livelihood strategies and therefore housing opportunities (Bay & Jenkins, 2012). While house prices can seem more affordable in some regional and rural places, the overall cost of living including access to public transport, education, child care and health care, combined with fewer employment opportunities and lower pay rates, makes such a move both difficult and costly (Bay & Jenkins, 2012). The lower cost of housing in regional, rural and remote areas can entice women leaving violent relationships to these areas, but these areas often provide limited employment opportunities, have lower levels of access to services and therefore potentially exacerbate poverty (McLachlan, Gilfillan, & Gordon, 2013).

Particular groups of women such as younger women, Indigenous women, and women with a disability or children with a disability can experience further difficulties securing adequate housing after leaving a violent relationship. Furthermore, Indigenous women can have difficulty finding adequate housing that is culturally appropriate and affordable for their extended families. Severe overcrowding and run down houses in remote Indigenous communities are unable to provide privacy and safety (Dannatt, 2015).

The diversity and variability of regional, rural and remote Australia, impacts on the supply of affordable rental housing in these areas. Bay and Jenkins suggest that rental cooperatives could provide long-term secure and affordable housing for vulnerable groups and this has been seen in New South Wales and Victoria (Bay & Jenkins, 2012).

Partnership with informal support

There is evidence that the support networks of regional, rural, remote residents tend to be larger and stronger than those of their urban counterparts, and that regional, rural, and remote people generally prefer to disclose and seek help from close friends and relatives (Pugh & Cheers, 2010). Some writers argue that most "social care and social work" is not undertaken by professionals in rural and remote places but is instead provided informally by family members, friends, neighbours. Writers in rural practice have argued that professional workers should recognise, respect, facilitate and support information systems of care, which have been shown to be particularly important and useful in fields such as ageing and disability in regional, rural and remote places (Bowles, 2012; Pugh & Cheers, 2010).

How informal care and support networks can be better understood and utilised in terms of violence against women has only begun to receive some attention. Research has established that women in abusive partner relationships reach out to informal support networks for assistance in the first instance (Ragusa, 2012). Wendt reported from her interviews with women who had experienced domestic violence in the Barossa Valley, South Australia, that despite a local culture of privacy, women shared stories about disclosing abuse to their immediate family and close intimate friends (Wendt, 2009). They also told stories about being approached discreetly and carefully by other women in their community because they too were experiencing abuse. The women reported they "were testing the water before seeking further help" (Wendt, 2009, p. 104) because they believed the community did not want to acknowledge domestic violence or saw it as a private family matter. Wendt also reported from her interviews with women and human service workers that a connection to informal supports was a major factor in women's decisions to seek further help about domestic violence and whether to leave their abusive relationship.

Due to limited service options, research has aimed to explore effective informal support networks in helping regional, rural and remote women experiencing domestic and family violence. Studies have found that supportive informal networks were particularly useful when they helped women access resources about domestic and family violence to better understand the abuse, and gain greater awareness of services available beyond their local community (Bosch & Bergen, 2006; Davis et al., 2001).

How social services partner with informal care and support networks in regional, rural and remote places requires more research and thought. Providing resources to facilitate informal care and support is one option, for example, facilitating links with local Indigenous community members or women's local social supports and networks (Pugh & Cheers, 2010). However, caution is needed in this approach because research has also found in rural and remote places friends and neighbours often adhere to and enforce non-intervention norms which often causes women to suffer in silence (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009).

Community development approaches

The literature on rural and community development emphasises the importance of local knowledge, arguing that people with long-term interest in their communities are able to positively contribute to sustainable solutions. This includes local ownership of development initiatives through the acknowledgement of the capabilities of local people which are thought to create sustainability of services and approaches (Eversole & Scholfield, 2006). Eversole and Scholfield argue that some researchers question the intent of a shift towards community development platforms and the intent to “empower” the locals, as this may also be a way to shift responsibility and cost onto local communities for social services (Eversole & Scholfield, 2006).

In exploring community development, Cheers et al. points out there are differences between Indigenous and western understandings of community and community development and these need to be noted (Cheers et al., 2007). For example, western approaches to community development tend to be more strategic, structured and linear, replete with visions, goals and objectives, plans and outcomes, whereas Indigenous community development aims at supporting existing community connections. Indigenous community development gravitates towards holistic approaches aimed at supporting balance within communities, which often requires a more integrative approach and nurturing processes to ensure that all aspects of community and place are involved. Cheers et al. states this is one reason why Indigenous community development often appears to move more slowly than western approaches and why it is often facilitated by networks of people and organisations cutting across different fields rather than “led” by a single person, group or agency (which we see in western models) (Cheers et al., 2007).

In Australia, a number of community development approaches to domestic and family violence in socially and geographically isolated places have been documented. For example, Cheers et al. provide the example of Indigenous people in Ceduna, South Australia coming together to talk about family violence in their community (Cheers et al., 2006). They talked about family violence as encompassing many forms of violence, combining with a host of other community issues such as poverty, unemployment, and dispossession. From this perspective, a holistic community development response was used to address the many economic, social and structural issues relating to family violence. They concluded that a whole-community response was required and this involved naming family violence publicly, talking about it, and identifying its individual, family and community ripples.

Wendt shared a story about how a rural community in South Australia strived to work more collaboratively and effectively to respond to domestic and family violence in their local areas (Wendt, 2010). Wendt argued the importance of identifying and talking about barriers as a community, so local agencies and workers are able to visualise and build local practice responses that are relevant and needed. Similarly, Eversole and Schofield's research found that local inter-agency action was valuable when building a sense of community responsibility for responding to domestic and family violence, as workers reported it made their work easier and more effective for clients. Furthermore, they found inter-agency action enabled greater access to information and local knowledge (Eversole & Scholfield, 2006).

Community development in the area of domestic and family violence provides an opportunity for regional, rural and remote areas to build and strengthen communities. Because domestic and family violence brings with it sadness and feelings of being overwhelmed, community development enables communities to empower workers, community members, and women who have experienced violence (Cheers et al., 2007). This has the potential to improve rates of disclosure, reporting and seeking help.

Men's perpetrator programs

The potential of men's perpetrator programs in rural and remote places has been discussed to some extent in the literature in Australia. In these discussions, it is often pointed out that such programs are designed for perpetrators living in metropolitan areas and hence are not necessarily appropriate for men from small rural communities (Jamieson & Wendt, 2008). There is a perception that men from rural and remote communities might not like group discussions because of lack of anonymity and hence communities knowing private business (George & Harris, 2014). Other discussions in the literature point to the perpetrator programs in small rural and remote communities not being viable due to the high cost of providing specialist services in areas involving great geographical distances and low population numbers (Jamieson & Wendt, 2008).

More recently, George and Harris explored men's behaviour change programs in their study of the experiences of and outcomes for women and children who had experienced domestic and family violence in regional and rural Victoria (George & Harris, 2014). They examined women and children's contact and perceptions of government agencies, private and community advocates, and healthcare professionals. A series of in-depth qualitative interviews with 30 women, 19 lawyers, and 24 family violence workers and three magistrates were conducted. George and Harris reported that "workers noted the worth and potential of Men's Behaviour Change Programs" (George & Harris, 2014, p. 126) but some also relayed concern about self-referrals being low and concern about the program's effectiveness in the area. They also stated:

Lawyers, workers and agencies...advocated for further funding and resourcing of Men's Behaviour Change Programs, including providing programs in areas where they are currently unavailable [and] workers felt that expansion of the program could allow for greater consideration of survivors, and increased referrals for survivors. (George & Harris, 2014, p. 126)

In fact, the small population of rural and remote communities may be an advantage in building effective longitudinal evaluations of the impact of men's programs on both women safety and stopping men's violence. For example, Tsey et al. reported on the success of participatory action research over time when collaborating with an Indigenous men's health group, arguing for the importance of monitoring and reinforcing small improvements and significant change in men's personal development and growth (Tsey et al., 2004).

Indigenous family violence services and programs

There are few formal evaluations of Indigenous domestic and family violence programs due to inadequate funds and time allocated for evaluation. However, there are a number of international and Australian evaluations that offer valuable insights for policy-makers and service providers in areas of Indigenous family violence. These insights include building a shared sense of community and responsibility, empowering women, building culturally safe and comfortable spaces to enhance gatherings and conversations. They also include placing women and children's safety as most important, and drawing on cultural strengths and resources (Cram, Pihama, Jenkins, & Karehana, 2002; Health Canada, 1997; Jamieson Hart Graves Consulting, 2002; Memmott, Chambers, Go-Sam, & Thomson, 2006). A 2014 report by the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service in Victoria, which evaluated early intervention and prevention programs, echoed these findings. The report emphasised the importance of a welcoming environment and trust in the service (Karahasan, 2014).

Research has identified specific reasons why Indigenous people do not access domestic and family violence programs; including fear of repercussions, retaliation and consequences, and cultural and family pressures to maintain family ties. This is particularly the case in small, interconnected and isolated communities where it is difficult to maintain anonymity (Willis, 2011). Research has also shown that Indigenous people experience anxiety when they are compelled to engage with police and welfare agencies, and develop distrust of police, the justice system and other government agencies (Willis, 2011). There is also fear of losing children due to the historical forced removal of children in the context of the Stolen Generations (Cooper & Morris, 2000; Wendt, 2010; Wendt & Baker, 2013).

Policing and legal support

The availability of policing and legal support in regional, rural, and remote contexts, and the way it is practiced play a significant role in a woman's ability to disclose, seek help, and report domestic violence and sexual assault. Research has recognised that rural and remote police work is performed under different constraints to metropolitan police work given that police officers are often isolated and under-resourced themselves, and are more likely to know many people in the community personally (Eastman et al., 2007; Lievore, 2003). This

may result in police officers finding it difficult to maintain a balance between their police work and their personal relationships (Eastman et al., 2007; Hogg & Carrington, 2006).

In Australia, there are three significant research projects that have explored regional, rural and remote women's legal help seeking for domestic and family violence. Firstly, Hogg and Carrington found that where Domestic Violence Liaison Officers existed in country towns, the overall assessment of the local police response to domestic and family violence was generally favourable (Hogg & Carrington, 2006). These officers were based in the community and at the forefront of local initiatives, such as anti-violence campaigns, school based initiatives and other community activities to raise awareness about domestic and family violence. Hogg and Carrington also reported similar challenges to their work that has been outlined generally for service provision and rural and remote practitioners in this report.

A second study by George and Harris explored rural women's experiences of the criminal justice system when seeking help for domestic and family violence (George & Harris, 2014). They report that "survivors and workers alike found specialist police such as the Family Violence Liaison Officers and the Family Violence Unit to be effective" (George & Harris, 2014, p. 66) The women described their positive experiences as:

...sensitive, supportive and skilled; validating their experiences; demystifying criminal justice procedures and processes; providing links and referrals to support services; and comforting and protecting their children. (George & Harris, 2014, p. 66)

However, George and Harris also found that significant numbers of women had negative experiences with police. They described experiences as intimidating, insensitive, and dismissive. They also described incidences of failing to provide information about their case or court proceedings; offering confusing or conflicting advice; and pressuring them to accept undertakings and delaying serving interim orders. They also found women reported police being reluctant to respond to breaches of domestic and family violence intervention orders (George & Harris, 2014).

George and Harris reported that many women had safety concerns when going to court for domestic and family violence matters because of the small size of waiting areas in old buildings, and the high level of

visibility and lack of privacy in small towns (George & Harris, 2014). They found that "many women fear going to court because of the presence of the defendant and his network of family and friends" (George & Harris, 2014, p. 81). The courtroom setting itself and the smaller spaces in rural court buildings created additional fear for the women (George & Harris, 2014, p. 82).

In general, the women and workers in rural Victoria were happy with their legal support (George & Harris, 2014). However, George and Harris pointed out that women often reported difficulties locating accessible and affordable legal advocacy and workers raised concern about how the need in this area significantly exceeded supply. George and Harris warned that potential funding cuts to legal aid, community legal centres, and specialist domestic and family violence legal services will exacerbate unmet legal needs and create pressures on women to consent to family law agreements without receiving appropriate legal advice prior to court (George & Harris, 2014).

A third study in Australia by Ragusa examined regional, rural, and remote women's access to and experience with legal support when experiencing domestic and family violence (Ragusa, 2012). She found four key factors influenced women's legal help-seeking experiences: financial dependence, prior knowledge and experience of court processes, police access and response, and appended violence order access and utility. Specifically, she reported that legal support in the form of form of mediators, lawyers, or courts was not sought by the majority (61%) of women due to the cost, lack of knowledge, and threat of further abuse as well as overall lack of comfort with contacting formal authority figures.

Overall, the women were largely dissatisfied with their court experiences because the court was described as emotionally demanding and ultimately compounded pressure they experienced from domestic and family violence. Ragusa found that apprehended violence orders were reported as the least helpful legal support as they were hard to obtain and largely ineffective (Ragusa, 2012). She also reported that women has more exposure to police more than other legal supports, with police being called by 86 percent of women to assist with emergency issues. Ragusa argues from this finding that police authentication and legitimisation of domestic and family violence as an intolerable criminal activity was pivotal to prompting women to take action. She found that nearly all women preferred receiving domestic

and family violence information initially from police, who were perceived a crucial and the authority figure. Ragusa's findings are significant because they highlight the importance of a positive police response to domestic and family violence crisis events, particularly in rural communities, where responses are perceived as particular esteem, gate-keeping and authority (Ragusa, 2012).

These three studies reinforce the importance of police officers and magistrates in regional, rural and remote contexts having specialised training to respond effectively to domestic and family violence and showing the community that violence against women is unacceptable (George & Harris, 2014; Hogg & Carrington, 2006; Ragusa, 2012). A network of trained domestic and family violence advocates is essential in regional, rural and remote areas, particularly if there is no formal women's shelter/refuge in the immediate area. They are valuable resources to accompany women through all stages of the legal process (Grama, 2000).

Rural standards and rural proofing

Rural social policy frameworks are a powerful influence on practitioners in organisations; and the domestic and family violence service provision options outlined above do not escape the politics (Cheers et al., 2007). For example, economic modelling constructs social care policy services and funding according to economic principles. This assumes that competition between services is the most efficient and cost effective way to provide rural human services. The competitive tendering of women's shelters/refuges is perhaps a result of such market based welfare approaches. Another example is mainstreaming regional, rural and remote needs, that is, viewing social service needs of people as identical to urban communities. On the other hand rural targeting or developmental policies involves providing services and resources that are appropriate to a particular context and aims to build capacity of communities to manage local issues and problems.

Geography and distance need to be considered when exploring the impact of social policy, planning services or allocating funding for programs in regional, rural and remote areas. There is general consensus among rural and remote researchers and practitioners that the urban-centric nature of social policy and service provision is not particularly helpful when transferred to a regional, rural or remote location without adequate thought to contexts and the diversity of needs (Mason, 2007). To avoid this, Pugh and Cheers encourage that all developments in policy and provision are "rural proofed" (Pugh & Cheers, 2010). They advocate for

policy-makers and planners to think about whether there will be any significant impacts due to the regional, rural, or remote location, and to consider what adjustments/compensations might be made to fit circumstances. This approach can be applied to a wide range of policies, services and programs.

Cheers et al. highlight the benefits of community participation and control, community-government partnerships, and holistic, preventative approaches that enable communities to develop services as an expression of their concern for families and wellbeing (Cheers et al., 2007). For programs and services to be implemented effectively, communities require support and participation from a reasonable cross-section of people, plus the support of local and external organisations including local government. They also require support from regional development boards, state and federal government departments and service providers.

Conclusion

When examining the effects of social and geographical isolation and remoteness on women's abilities to disclose, report and seek help following domestic and family violence and sexual assault, assumptions about regional, rural and remote life need to be treated with caution. Homogenising rurality and remoteness ignores the variability of individual experiences, populations, local contexts, and service providers' ingenuity in responding to local needs. Assumptions can also construct isolation and remoteness as negative and oppressive for women, therefore ignoring subjective experiences of isolation and women's connection to places and communities. On the other hand, it is clear from available research that regional, rural and remote landscapes shape domestic and family violence and sexual assault and service provision in unique ways to that of urban localities. These unique factors generally arise from social and geographical isolation. Personal shame and embarrassment has been found to be particularly stark for women living in small populated communities because of the intimacy and density of social-spatial relationships. They fear being the subject of gossip and informal social controls can act as deterrents to women who are thinking about seeking help or reporting violence and abuse. These factors can also give the illusion that domestic and family violence or sexual assault is rare outside metropolitan areas and therefore specialist services are not needed. Similarly, these factors make it difficult for service providers to access women and hence may lead to under-utilisation of domestic and family violence or sexual assault services and under-reporting. Services can therefore be seen as not viable or unnecessary.

However, when women who have experienced domestic and family violence or sexual assault in regional, rural and remote places overcome local cultural inhibitions to disclose, report and seek help, they can face the unique impact of social and geographical isolation again. If they are fortunate enough to have supportive informal networks or a specialist domestic and family violence service located within or around their community, this provides more opportunity for them to access valuable material and emotional support. However, regional, rural and remote women often have limited services or generalist services as a first point of call. If women want to leave or end violent relationships, for many this means having to face the tyranny of distance and travelling long distances alone or with children to seek help. Relocation can be distressing, particularly when children are involved, and/or their families are part of communities.

In summary, there is limited research on help-seeking activities of regional, rural and remote Australian women when dealing with domestic and family violence, and even less on sexual assault. This report has found that social and geographical isolation are important concepts to consider when researching disclosure, help seeking and reporting, and understanding the unique factors for regional, rural and remote women experiencing domestic and family violence and sexual assault. Social and geographical isolation exposes the compounding circumstances that can prevent women from leaving violent relationships, accessing services, information and resources, and establishing and maintaining supportive networks. Furthermore, isolation can amplify the fear and control exerted by the perpetrators of domestic and family violence and sexual assault, and exacerbates social abuse and loneliness for regional, rural and remote women.

Appendix

This section describes the various methods used for searching literature and research for this report. The topic of the “effect of social and geographical isolation on the ability to disclose, report, seek help and receive appropriate intervention following domestic violence and/or sexual assault” covers broad academic and policy terrain.

Key electronic databases used to locate academic literature of relevance included: Academic Search Premier; Australian Bureau of Statistics; EBSCO host electronic journals service; Google Scholar; Humanities & Social Sciences Collection; Informit.

These searches revealed information written nationally and internationally that was relevant to the topic of the report, and the breadth of the disciplines which included: health and social care; feminist/gender studies; rural studies; criminology; housing; economics and Indigenous affairs.

The search for literature and research was conducted within the date range of 2000–2015. This date range was to ensure the most recent literature was used in the report. Some additional material has been included prior to this date range where appropriate.

The following key words were used in the search across the above disciplines:

Intimate Partner Violence OR Domestic Violence OR Family Violence OR Gendered Violence OR Spousal Abuse OR Marital Violence OR Violence against women OR Sexual Assault OR Sexual Violence OR Battered Women.

AND rural and/or remote and/or regional.

Academic literature and research related to service provision in socially and geographically isolated places was searched using key words such as rural OR remote AND service provision OR social work, OR social care, or human services. In addition, specialist searches were conducted for materials using rural AND/OR remote and related to “women’s shelter” OR “women’s refuges” OR “social service provision” OR policing OR “informal support networks” OR “men’s perpetrator programs”

Searches were conducted to find particular literature related to particular communities such as: farming OR mining OR drought OR Indigenous Australians OR Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander OR CALD women OR LGBTIQ OR disability.

Websites of the Federal Government and all State and Territory Governments were searched such as:

1. Dept. of Infrastructure and Regional development
<https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/>
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
<http://www.aihw.gov.au/>
3. The Australian Institute of Family Studies
<https://aifs.gov.au/>
4. Department of Health/rural health
<http://www.health.gov.au/ruralhealth>
5. Department of Human Services:
<http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/themes/rural-and-remote-australians>
6. Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet: Indigenous Affairs
<https://www.dpmc.gov.au/indigenous-affairs>
7. Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet: Safety for Women
<https://www.dpmc.gov.au/office-women/safety-women-0>

Key word searches for these sites included: domestic violence OR family violence OR intimate partner violence OR Aboriginal/Indigenous Family Violence AND rural and/or regional and/or remote.

Specialist agency material and government policy documents were obtained through snowballing from the academic literature using the relevant bibliographic reference material and searching through Google or Google scholar or direct to the source if the relevant information was available. In addition, journals that do not have a specific electronic database presence such as Parity, InTouch, and Women Against Violence (an Australian Feminist Journal) were also searched.

International grey literature or websites were not included in this search primarily to ensure that the focus remained on the rural, regional and remote policy and services in Australia.

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