

Understanding domestic violence against young rural women

September 23 2019, by Dan Lander



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

One in four Australian women over the age of 15 years have experienced violence at the hands of an intimate partner, and 92 percent of women who report being assaulted by a male, know the perpetrator.

They're appalling figures, and while public awareness of the problem has improved in recent years, rates of assault remain unacceptably high, particularly in regional areas, with young [women](#) most at risk.

Studies indicate higher proportions of rural women experience intimate partner violence (IPV) than urban women, but to date, most research has investigated abuse in [urban environments](#).

The Australian Alliance for Social Enterprise, based at the University of South Australia, this week releases new research examining the unique challenges facing young IPV victims in country locations.

Conducted in conjunction with Uniting Country SA and led by Dr. Catherine Mackenzie, the study interviewed country women aged 16 to 24 years, along with other women who had experienced intimate partner violence when they were of that age.

"Young country women experience similar types of intimate partner violence to those reported by women in urban environments, including non-physical but deeply traumatizing types of abuse such as [social isolation](#) and internet-based abuse," says Dr. Mackenzie.

"But there tend to be differences stemming from the interplay of environment, culture, prevalence of poverty, access to services and the often tight-knit nature of country communities."

In rural and regional areas, workers in local legal and [social services](#) are likely to know the victim and perpetrator, which can make women hesitant to seek assistance.

"Young women who experienced IPV described not recognizing it at the time, particularly if the violence was not physical, and reported being unsure where to seek support," says Dr. Mackenzie. "They also

expressed concern about potential repercussions of seeking services, for example not being believed or their boyfriend getting in trouble."

The research also suggests abusive behavior damages all aspects of young women's lives, including their digital interactions, with partners commonly controlling social media use and text messaging.

"They're forming relationships in similar ways as young urban women, for example through social media, dating apps and messaging apps," says Dr. Mackenzie. "But new technology was also the most common tool abusers used to control their partners. It's part of a pattern of control that has simply moved along with the communication tools of the time."

The study makes key recommendations for service providers, including the need for greater awareness among youth workers of signs of IPV; development of stronger informal support networks; and improved education, so that young women recognize abusive behavior and understand their support options.

Dr. Mackenzie says the research also emphasizes the need for wider [social change](#). "We need to advocate for a cultural shift across country communities to change attitudes and reduce power imbalances between women and men, which tend to be more prevalent in country areas," she says.

Tracy Holden, Uniting Country SA Executive Manager Services, notes the importance of the research. "It will have a huge impact when working with [young women](#) in country regions," Holden says.

Provided by University of South Australia

Citation: Understanding domestic violence against young rural women (2019, September 23)

retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2019-09-domestic-violence-young-rural-women.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.