

## People living in regional, rural and remote communities

People living in regional, rural or remote communities may be at greater **risk** of experiencing domestic and family violence [Henstridge et al 2007], may be more vulnerable to its impacts, and may face additional barriers to accessing help due to a range of geographic, economic, cultural and social factors more likely to be present in smaller communities than in larger towns and cities [Wendt et al 2015].

Successive Australian research identifies some of the common factors as [Bagshaw et al 2000]:

- Physical and social isolation
- The close, conservative nature of Australian rural and farming communities, in particular, perceived lack of confidentiality, privacy and anonymity in small communities where news travels quickly through informal networks
- Ready access to firearms and other weapons
- Greater likelihood of victim or perpetrator having a pre-existing relationship with local police, emergency services or other service providers
- Limited or lack of local services, professionals and trained workers to assist victims, children and perpetrators including 24 hour on-call police response, safe and culturally appropriate crisis accommodation, intervention and behaviour remediation programs
- Distance from critical services and limited public transport options
- A sense of shame in extended family and community members knowing about the abuse and the abusive relationship
- Economic and structural decline of some Australian regional, rural and remote communities, and an inadequate social security safety net
- Heightened financial and emotional stress within families due to the effects of drought, fire, flood or poor trading markets. [George & Harris 2014]

These factors vary in degree and combination for each community and for each of the individuals and circumstances involved. A number of these factors may also contribute to the nature and severity of the domestic and family violence, and the extent to which **perpetrator programs** commonly used in urban areas may be inappropriate in regional, rural or remote communities [Jamieson & Wendt 2008]. Research indicates that vulnerability to perpetration in these communities may be due to higher rates of **substance misuse** and unemployment, lower education levels, and poorer **mental** and **physical health** outcomes due to lack of or limited access to essential services [Edwards 2015].

As in urban areas, **women** are overrepresented as victims of domestic and family violence. Research suggests that the prevalence of more conservative and traditional views, norms and gender roles in smaller communities and family farming enterprises may contribute to victims being more vulnerable to the controlling behaviours of their intimate partners, and less likely to seek help and recourse for the violence they experience. For example, a victim who has principally performed domestic and nurturing roles within the family while the intimate partner, the perpetrator, has run the family business and become a prominent member of the local community, may lack any financial independence or the skills necessary for paid employment. A victim in these circumstances may be **reluctant to disclose** the violence or to leave the abusive relationship due to a fear of losing privacy and pride, a perceived pressure related to community expectations of self-reliance and resilience, or a fear of further violence [Wendt et al 2015]. Where financial and property arrangements are seemingly too complex to unravel, the victim may fear poverty and homelessness, or may perceive that the need to preserve the family name and inheritance outweighs a personal need for safety and wellbeing [George & Harris 2014].

Where victims do manage to leave the abusive relationship and find alternative accommodation, but are not able to leave the local community, research reports that victims continue to feel a heightened sense of fear and anxiety knowing that they remain highly visible to the perpetrator and vulnerable to their abusive behaviours [George & Harris 2014].

People from **culturally and linguistically diverse groups** may experience compounded isolation through extreme lack of specialised services, for example **interpreters** [NSW Office for Women's Policy 2008]. Similarly, the effects of rurality and remoteness [Cunneen 2010] may compound vulnerabilities experienced by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**.